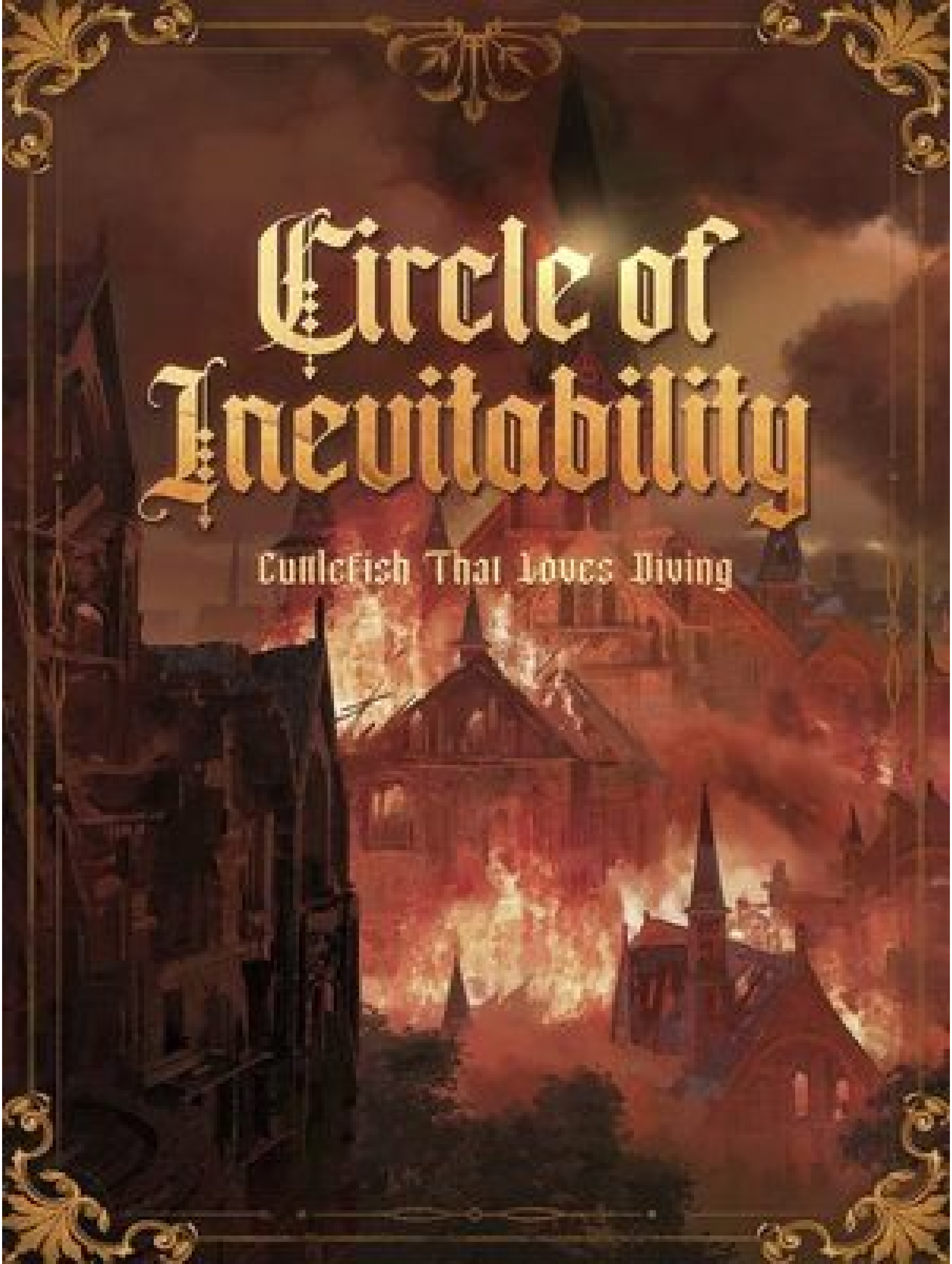

Circle of Inevitability

Cuttlefish That Loves Diving

Information

Table of Contents URL: https://www.lightnovelcave.com/novel/circle-of-inevitability-17122007

Lord of Mysteries 2: Circle of Inevitability

Author: Cuttlefish That Loves Diving
RANK 11

4.7
1180
Chapters
13.8M
Views
22.4K
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Completed
Status

Categories

- Fantasy
- Mystery
- Psychological
- Supernatural
- Action
- Adventure
- Horror
- Mature

Lord of Mysteries 2: Circle of Inevitability novel is a popular light novel covering Fantasy, Mystery, and Psychological genres. Written by the Author Cuttlefish That Loves Diving. 1180 chapters have been translated and translation of all chapters was completed.

Summary

Lord of the Mysteries, part two.

In 1368, at the end of July. Bloody scarlet will descend from heaven.

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Tags

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- 22
  NobleSora
  Reader
  9d

  For anyone who's looking to stay connected with this community please join our unofficial discord server for LNC called Lectorum Nexus that we created after Nether closed the official servers general chat nearly two years ago. We have over 3900 members right now with the majority being from this site, and have many high KP members like Sylvaris/BruhGuy/ Nemiscura/Apollon/Francis_kg/Thalanill/ Guliedistodiez. We hope to see you there since this is probably our last day here, add me on discord you can also find link in my bio on my profile on discord: akaysorra

  Reply
  0 0
- 8
  Spearhead
  Reader
  23d

  To all ladies and gentlemen of this community. I hope that everyone already realised that this website is going to be taken down. Not only

this site has been targeted but also many other by the official giant money hungry platforms. But they have yet to realise that we are the real pirates. Take one down,two shall take it's place. Dark times have befallen us many times. Yet we prevailed.We will use their rules and technology against them.We will survive and come back much stronger.I'm happy that I was a part of this community.Thank you.
Reply

5 0

- 22
  NobleSora
  Reader
  27d

  For anyone who's looking to stay connected with this community please join our unofficial discord server for LNC called Lectorum Nexus that we created after Nether closed the official servers general chat nearly two years ago. We have over 1600 members right now with the majority being from this site, and have many high KP members like Sylvaris/BruhGuy/ Nemiscura/Apollon/Francis_kg/Thalanill/ Guliedistodiez. We hope to see you there, add me on discord: akaysorra

  Reply

  1 0
- 6
  MissionControl
  Reader
  1mo

  Hi everyone, As you may have noticed, this website is going down soon, and with it, a piece of our community. There’s no other novel community quite like this, with such engaging and fun comments. That’s why I’ve created an unofficial Discord server where we can continue sharing ideas and keep the community alive. If you’d like to

join, feel free to hop in: discord.gg/rnhTTXWbF6 Hope to see you there! keep reading!!!
Reply
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- 8
  Vaudas
  Reader
  1mo

  Guys, there's a chance that the site might shut down, join our discord server if you wanna talk more about novels etc. We have a well built community wih many users from here. Just add my username [vaudas] on discord and ask for the invite

  Reply
  0 0
- 7
  GreatLove_Venerable
  Reader
  1mo

  I was waiting for this to end so I can binge read but I came back and this site shutting down

  Reply
  2 0
- 14
  Alitheunseen
  Reader
  1mo

  It's been a while, I think I'm going to reread this to fully appreciate it instead of day by day where I was exhausted by the story at the end. Btw Zahra my fellow reader, are you still here?

Edited: 1mo
Reply

0 0

- 24
  Black_Coffin
  Reader
  1mo

  guys website might go down so if you still wanna stay connected with the users on discord server Send me friend request on discord. My username - eternal.aeon

  Reply

  0 0
- 15
  NoLifeSteve
  Reader
  1mo

  Website is going bye bye. If you want to still stick with the community, add my discord. luxenxz Ill invite ypu to the discord

  Reply

  0 0
    - 3
      NefariouslyHideous
      NoLifeSteve
      Reader
      1mo

      Why what happened? Is there any site I can read this then?

      Reply

0 0

  - 1
    Xipe_TheHarmony
    NefariouslyHideous
    Reader
    1mo

    just search, there's ocean out there.

    Reply

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- 1
  FlexAdm
  Reader
  1mo

  So, there is a chance the server goes down. So before that happens. How about we try saving the community. We can do at least that much, there is an unofficial discord server. Add my username on discord and I'll send you an invite

  Reply

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Chapter 1: Foreigners

A price is always exacted for what fate bestows--adapted from Zweig's Mary Queen of Scots.

"I'm a nobody, with no time to notice the brightness of the sun.

"My parents couldn't help me, and I wasn't highly educated. I had no choice but to make it on my own in the city.

"I'd applied to many jobs, but no one ever hired me. Maybe it's because I'm not good at expressing myself, and I'm not the best communicator. I guess I just haven't shown enough ability.

"Once, I'd eaten two loaves of bread over a three-day period. Hunger kept me up at night. At least I paid a month's rent in advance, so I didn't have to face the cold winter wind outside.

"Finally, I found a job at the hospital's morgue, keeping vigil over the dead.

"Nighttime in the hospital was colder than I could have ever imagined. The corridor's wall lights were out, leaving everything shrouded in darkness. I could barely see my feet, and the only light seeping out was from the rooms.

"Mon Dieu, it reeked of something fierce. The smell of death lingered in the air. And from time to time, we had to help move the bodies into the morgue.

"It wasn't the most glamorous of jobs, but it put bread on the table. Plus, the free time at night allowed me to study. Few people ventured to the morgue, but when they did, they were there delivering bodies or taking them away for cremation. I had to make do without books, as I couldn't afford them, nor did I see any hope of saving up enough for them.

"But I had to thank my predecessor for leaving so suddenly, as it allowed me to get this job.

"I dreamed of working the day shift. Sleeping during the day and being awake at night made my body weak and my head throb."

"One day, a new corpse was brought in.

"From what I'd heard, it's the body of my predecessor who suddenly left.

"I was intrigued by the mysterious disappearance of my predecessor, and as soon as the others left the room, I pulled out the cabinet and quietly opened the body bag.

"He was an old man, with bluish-white skin and wrinkles covering his face. The poor lighting only served to make him look scarier.

"He didn't have much hair. Most of it was white. He had been stripped of his clothes, not even a piece of cloth was left on him.

"As a dead man without a family, the movers couldn't resist the opportunity to cash in on the guy.

"I saw a strange mark on his chest. It was bluish-black. I can't really explain it. The light was too dim at the time.

"I reached out and touched the mark, only to realize there was nothing special about it.

"Looking at my predecessor, I couldn't help but wonder if I'd end up like him when I grew old...

"I promised his body I'd be with him on his last journey, take him to the crematorium and then to the nearest free cemetery. I couldn't have the bureaucrats throwing him in the river or some forsaken land like trash.

"I knew I was gonna 'ave to sacrifice some shut-eye, but Dieu merci it was Sunday the next day. I could catch up on my lost sleep then.

"After saying that, I zipped up the bag and shoved it back in the cabinet.

"The room went darker and the shadows lengthened...

"Since that day, every time I close my eyes, I'm swallowed by a thick fog.

"Something tells me I'm not alone. Something not quite human is coming my way. But nobody will listen. They think I've lost my mind in this job; they say I need a doctor..."

A male customer sitting at the bar looked at the narrator who had suddenly stopped and asked, "And?"

The narrator suddenly stopped his tale, causing a male customer at the bar to take notice. This mid-thirties chap sported a drab duffel coat and pale yellow strides. His hair was slicked back, and he had a rough dark bowler hat by his side.

He seemed run-of-the-mill, like the rest of the punters in the alehouse, with dark locks and piercing blue peepers. Not particularly handsome, but not repugnant either. Nothing about him screamed for attention.

The narrator was a strapping lad in his late teens, with long limbs and chiseled features that could make any lass go weak in the knees. His short, jet-black hair and bright, blue eyes only added to his appeal.

The lad looked wistfully at the empty wine glass in front of him and let out a deep sigh.

"And then?

"Then I quit my job and returned to the countryside so that I can tell you this bullshit," the lad responded with a sly grin spreading across his face.

The male guest was taken aback.

"Were you just pulling our leg?"

"Haha!" Laughter erupted around the bar.

However, the laughter was short-lived as a middle-aged man looked sternly at the slightly embarrassed customer and remarked, "You ain't from around here, are ya? Lumian spins a different yarn every day. Yesterday, he was a penniless bloke who got dumped by his fiancée, and today, he's a watchman for the dead!"

"Aye, he talks about spending thirty years east of the Serenzo River and then thirty years to the right of it. He's full of hot air, that one!" added another regular at the tavern.

All the men were farmers from the village of Cordu, wearing drab-colored tunics.

The black-haired lad, Lumian, leaned forward on the bar counter and rose to his feet. He flashed a cheeky grin and proclaimed, "As you all know, I ain't the one making this up. My sister pens these tales. She's a writer for some column known as Novel Weekly or other."

With that, Lumian turned around, spread his arms wide, and beamed at the foreign customer.

"Looks like she's crafted quite the tale. I'm sorry you misunderstood."

The unremarkable man in the brown tweed shirt smiled and stood up.

"What an intriguing story. And how might I address you?"

"Isn't it common courtesy to introduce oneself before inquiring of others?" Lumian replied, returning the man's smile.

The foreigner nodded.

"My name is Ryan Koss.

"These are my companions, Valentine and Leah."

The last sentence referred to the man and woman sitting beside him.

Valentine, a man in his late twenties with powdered blonde hair and piercing blue eyes, wore a white vest, a blue tweed jacket, and black trousers. It was evident that he had put considerable effort into his attire, as if he had been priming himself for a special rendezvous.

He had a rather chilly look on his face, not even sparing a glance for the farmers and herders around him.

Leah, on the other hand, was a striking young woman with long, light gray hair tied into an elaborate bun and a white veil perched atop her head.

Her eyes matched her hair and she regarded Lumian with an open smile, clearly amused by their exchange.

In the glow of the gas lamps inside the tavern, the woman named Leah showed off her sharp nose and stunningly curved lips. She was definitely a stunner in the countryside like Cordu.

She wore a snug white pleated cashmere dress with a small off-white coat and a pair of Marseillan boots. There were two tiny silver bells fastened to her veil and boots. They jingled as she walked into the tavern, drawing the attention of many--especially the men.

In their eyes, this was the kind of fashionable getup you'd only see in the big cities, like the provincial capital of Bigorre or even the capital city of Trier.

Lumian gave a nod of acknowledgement to the three foreigners.

"The name's Lumian Lee. You may address me as Lumian."

"Lee?" Leah blurted out.

"What's the matter? Y'all got a problem with my last name?" Lumian asked with a curious look on his face.

Ryan Koss took it upon himself to explain on Leah's behalf, "Your last name is downright frightening. I nearly lost control of my voice just now."

Observing the bewildered expressions of the farmers and herdsmen around him, he continued,

"Folks who have crossed paths with sailors and sea merchants are familiar with a saying that's making the rounds in the Five Seas:

"I'd rather come face to face with pirate Admirals or even kings than run into a bloke named Frank Lee.

"That person's last name is also Lee."

"Is he really that scary?" Lumian inquired.

Ryan shook his head in response.

"I'm not exactly sure, but if such a legend exists, then it can't be far from the truth."

He switched topics and said to Lumian, "Merci for the story. It merits a drink. What do you desire?"

"A glass of La Fée Verte." Lumian didn't beat around the bush and settled back into his seat.

Ryan Koss furrowed his brow.

"'La Fée Verte'... Absinthe?"

"I must remind you, absinthe is harmful to the human body. Such alcohol can lead to insanity and hallucinations."

"I didn't expect the trends of Trier to reach here," Leah chimed in with a grin.

Lumian acknowledged her comment tersely.

"So the people of Trier also enjoy La Fée Verte..."

"For us, life is already tough enough. No need to fret over a little more harm. This drink can calm our minds."

"Alright." Ryan leaned back in his chair and turned to the bartender. "A glass of La Fée Verte and another glass of CÅ“ur Ã‰picé."

CÅ“ur Ã‰picé was a renowned fruit-based spirit that had been distilled to perfection.

The thin, middle-aged man who had exposed Lumian's lies piped up. "Give me a glass of La Fée Verte too. After all, I was the one who told the truth just now. I can even tell you the truth about this kid's situation!" He glared at Lumian, daring him to object. "Foreigner, I can tell you still have your doubts about the authenticity of that story."

"Pierre, you'd do anything for a free glass of alcohol," Lumian retorted, scowling.

Before Ryan could even respond, Lumian added, "Why can't I tell my story and get an extra glass of La Fée Verte?"

"Because no one knows if they should believe you," Pierre smirked. "Your sister's favorite story to tell kids is 'The Boy Who Cried Wolf.' People who lie all the time lose their credibility eventually."

Lumian shrugged and watched as the bartender slid a glass of light green alcohol in front of him. "Ã‡a va," he said, unbothered.

Ryan turned to Lumian.

"Is that all right?"

"Sure thing, as long as your wallet can handle it," Lumian replied breezily.

"In that case, another glass of La Fée Verte," Ryan said with a nod.

Pierre's face lit up with a smile.

"Generous foreigner, you should steer clear of this one," he said, gesturing to Lumian. "He's the most mischievous bloke in the whole village."

"Five years ago, his sister Aurore brought him back to the village," Pierre continued. "He's been here ever since. Can you imagine? He was just a wee lad of thirteen at the time. How could he have made the trek to the hospital to become a corpse watchman? The nearest hospital is in DariÃ¨ge at the foot of the mountain. It would take an entire afternoon to get there by foot."

"Brought back to the village?" Leah inquired, her voice tinged with suspicion.

She tilted her head, causing her bells to tinkle.

Pierre nodded in confirmation.

"Aurore moved here six years ago. A year later, she went on a journey and brought this lad back with her. Said she found him on the road, a starving, homeless child. She planned to adopt him."

"Then, he took on Aurore's last name, Lee. Even his name, Lumian, was given by Aurore."

"I don't even remember what my name was before Aurore gave me the name," Lumian, unfazed by the revelation, flashed a grin and took a sip of absinthe.

It was clear that his past did not bother him in the slightest.

Chapter 2: "Prank"

Ryan apologized politely to Lumian. "Forgive me, I did not expect such a situation," he said.

Lumian chuckled.

"Are you suggesting we need another glass of La Fée Verte?"

Without waiting for Ryan's response, he changed the subject.

"What brings foreigners like you to Cordu? Are you here to buy wool or leather?"

Many of Cordu's residents made their living as shepherds.

Ryan breathed a silent sigh of relief and seized the opportunity to explain their true purpose.

"We came to visit the Eternal Blazing Sun Church's padre, Guillaume Bénet, but he seems to be absent from both his home and the cathedral."

Pierre, who had enjoyed Ryan's free absinthe, kindly reminded him that there was only one church in Cordu.

The other locals around the bar counter were all drinking, but no one answered Ryan's question. The name seemed to represent some kind of taboo or authority that couldn't be openly discussed.

Lumian took a sip of drink and thought for a few seconds before offering his assistance.

"I can roughly guess where the padre is. Do you need me to take you there?"

Leah didn't stand on ceremony. "If it's not too much trouble," she said.

Ryan nodded in agreement.

"Once you've finished your drink."

"Alright." Lumian raised his glass and finished the light-green alcohol.

He put down his glass and got to his feet.

"Let's go."

"Merci beaucoup," Ryan expressed his gratitude and gestured for Valentine and Leah to stand up.

Lumian's face lit up with a smile. "It's no problem at all. You heard my story and I enjoyed a complimentary drink. That makes us friends, n'est-ce pas?"

"Oui." Ryan nodded.

Lumian's grin widened, stretching from ear to ear. He opened his arms wide, beckoning the other party in for a hug.

"Ah, it is good to meet you, my cabbages," he exclaimed with fervor.

Ryan, who was about to be enveloped in a bear hug, froze.

"Cabbages?"

His expression was a mixture of perplexity and embarrassment.

Valentine and Leah mirrored his expression.

"It is a term of endearment we use for our friends," Lumian explained with innocent sincerity. "Everyone in the Dariège region is aware of it. It has been a tradition for centuries, believe me, my cabbages."

Leah couldn't help but glance around, producing the tinkling sounds.

Pierre and the others nodded in agreement, assuring the newcomers that Lumian's words were true. However, the grins on their faces hinted that they were pleased to see foreigners struggling to comprehend their affectionate greetings.

Lumian stroked his chin thoughtfully.

"Don't you fancy it?"

"Then I shall opt for a different option. It can also be used for friends.

"My dear bunnies, my darling chicks, my lovely ducks, or perhaps my adorable lambs? Which one tickles your fancy?"

But Ryan's expression was as stiff as a board, and Valentine's brow furrowed in confusion.

Leah let out a sigh, a mix of exasperation and amusement.

"Let's just stick with cabbage, shall we? At least it sounds normal."

Phew. Ryan let out a quiet sigh and gently grasped Valentine's elbow. He gave a slight nod and remarked, "They all seem like precious treasures in the family."

Without awaiting Lumian's response, he swiveled his body and addressed the bartender, "How much will it be?"

"Two verl d'or," replied the bartender, eyeing the glasses lined up on the counter.

Ryan settled the bill, and Leah shifted the conversation to a different subject.

"Lumian is an uncommon name."

"At least better than names like Pierre and Guillaume," Lumian countered with a grin. "If you were to call out Pierre in this place, a third of the people would turn their heads. Call out Guillaume, and another third will respond. As for this gentleman…"

He gestured to the skinny middle-aged man sipping his free drink.

"His full name is Pierre Guillaume."

Leah flashed a smile, skirting the topic of cabbage.

As they departed from the tavern, Lumian turned around and surveyed the surroundings.

"What's the matter?" Leah inquired with curiosity.

Lumian pondered for a moment and replied thoughtfully, "It's not just the three of you foreigners who came to the tavern today. Another person arrived earlier, but I don't know when they left."

"What did they look like?" Ryan asked with a serious expression.

Lumian took a moment to reflect.

"A lady. Very sophisticated. You can tell she's from the city with just one glance. I can't describe her appearance. Why don't I sketch her for you?"

"Do you know how to draw?" Leah queried, aware of Lumian's idiosyncrasies.

Lumian chortled.

"I don't."

"In that case, let's locate the padre first," Ryan decided, drawing the conversation to a close.

Cordu was a place devoid of street lamps at night, yet the twinkling stars above provided a faint glimmer that allowed the four of them to navigate the road. The yellowish light emanating from the windows on either side only added to the ethereal ambiance.

As they approached the Eternal Blazing Sun cathedral situated in the village square, the grandiose structure appeared somewhat blurry in the darkness, as if it was merging with the night.

"We've been here before. There's no one here," Valentine grumbled with a frown.

Lumian smiled and said, "No one at the front door doesn't mean there's no one elsewhere."

He then proceeded to lead Ryan and the others around the front of the cathedral towards the cemetery, where they found a dark brown wooden door.

Lumian didn't wait for Ryan to knock. Instead, he reached over and fiddled with the keyhole before opening the side door with a creak.

"That's not very nice, is it?" Ryan frowned.

Leah nodded in agreement, her bells tinkling.

"We're here to visit the padre, not to fight him."

"Alright," Lumian acquiesced.

He closed the wooden door and knocked lightly.

"Hey, is anyone there? I'll come in if you don't answer," he muttered in a low voice that was barely audible in the night.

There was no response from inside the cathedral.

Without hesitation, Lumian pushed open the door and gestured inside.

"Go on in."

Ryan hesitated. He looked at the darkness behind the door and glanced at his companions.

"Okay." He took a step forward, slow but firm.

Leah and Valentine followed closely behind.

The four silvery bells adorning Leah's boots and veil were eerily silent.

The environment was dim and eerie as the four of them made their way forward.

Out of nowhere, Ryan came to a halt and muttered in a low voice, "What's that noise?"

"Yes, I heard it too," Lumian agreed.

Without wasting any time, he forcefully pushed the door aside, and it opened with a loud clang, revealing what lay beyond.

The dimly lit space resembled a confessional. A beam of starlight shone through, revealing a naked man in his prime, lying atop a fair-skinned woman.

The scene stunned everyone, including the man and the woman.

Suddenly, the man sat up and bellowed at Ryan and his team, "Sacrebleu! You've ruined the holy church's plans!"

Amidst the reverberating roar, Lumian, who had quietly approached behind the group, waved his hand and spoke quickly, "Ah, it seems we have discovered our padre. Au revoir, my cabbages!"

Before anyone could react, Lumian dashed towards the side door, leaving his words to drift away in the wind.

As the team stood in shock, Leah, Ryan, and Valentine couldn't shake the words of the middle-aged man, Pierre Guillaume, from their minds: "…you should steer clear of this one. He's the most mischievous bloke in the whole village."

...

Lumian sauntered down the country road, hands tucked in his pockets while whistling a tune under the stars.

"As expected, the padre is having an affair with Madame Pualis."

"Mon dieu, these foreigners exude an air of prestige. The padre would never dream of crossing them. He must pay an exorbitant sum to keep his sordid dalliances under wraps and preserve his standing within the cathedral."

"Hmph, he only has himself to blame for lusting after Aurore. I have been biding my time for this chance…"

As Lumian muttered to himself, he returned to his abode on the outskirts of the hamlet.

The structure he called home was a peculiar semi-subterranean two-story affair. The ground floor doubled as both a kitchen and a lounge. A hefty oven and a grandiose stove dominated the room.

"Aurore! Aurore!" Lumian hollered as he trudged up the stairs.

No reply.

The upper storey was divided into three chambers and a lavatory, all the doors stood open.

Lumian peeped into each room but couldn't find his sister.

He mulled it over for a moment, then marched to the end of the corridor and clambered up the ladder that led to the roof.

The roof was a fiery orange, painted by the twilight sky. In the center sat a figure, holding their knees and staring contemplatively at the sparkling stars.

This was an exquisite woman, exceptionally so. Her long and thick locks were a shade of gold, her eyes a pale blue, and her facial features were intricate and refined.

Her gaze was fixated on the cosmos, her countenance serene, akin to that of a statue.

Lumian remained silent. He shifted to her side and sat next to her.

He lifted his head, gazing at the dense forest in the distance, absorbing the susurrus of the wind blowing through the trees.

After a while, the woman raised her arms and stretched, paying no heed to her appearance.

"Aurore, I don't understand why you come up here so often. What's so interesting about this view?" Lumian commented.

"Call me Grande Soeur!" Aurore scolded playfully, tapping Lumian's head with her finger.

Aurore sighed and thought to herself, "A philosopher once said that there are only two things worth revering in this world. One is the morality in one's heart, and the other is the cosmos above one's head."

Lumian noticed his sister's slightly melancholic expression and flashed a grin.

"I know the answer to this question. Emperor Roselle said so!"

"Pfft…" Aurore laughed.

She took a sniff and raised her beautiful golden eyebrows.

"You've been drinking again!"

"This is called socializing." Lumian took the opportunity to recount what had just happened. "I met three foreigners…"

Aurore could not help but laugh.

"I'm really afraid that the padre will have a heart attack."

Her expression then turned serious. "Lumian, don't provoke the padre anymore. It'll be troublesome if we get a new one."

"But I can't stand his face…" Lumian complained before Aurore stood up.

She looked down at her brother and smiled.

"Alright, it's bedtime, my inebriated brother," Aurore said with a smile as she threw out some silver dust.

Aurore flew down from the roof like a bird and entered the window on the second floor, leaving Lumian behind.

Lumian watched this quietly and shouted anxiously, "What about me?"

"Climb down yourself!" Aurore replied mercilessly.

Lumian pursed his lips, his smile fading bit by bit.

He watched the silver specks of light disappear in the night sky, sighed softly, and muttered to himself, "I wonder when I'll be able to possess such extraordinary powers…"

Chapter 3: Dream

Lumian lingered atop the roof, reluctant to descend just yet.

His visage was a picture of stoicism, betraying no emotion. Gone was the mischievous young man who frequented the tavern, always ready with a grin and a jest. In his place was a composed and resolute figure, unrecognizable to those who knew him before.

Since discovering Aurore's magical powers by chance, Lumian had been obsessed with obtaining them. But Aurore always warned him against it, citing the immense danger and agony that came with wielding such abilities. She refused to divulge the secret even if she knew how to grant them to mere mortals.

Lumian couldn't force her to reveal the method, so he resorted to pleading and persuading her at every turn.

After a few seconds of contemplation, Lumian sprang to his feet and made his way down to the edge of the roof. He climbed back to the second floor using the wooden ladder.

He strolled to Aurore's room, only to find the brown wooden door ajar before peeking inside.

Aurore sat at her desk, scribbling away with a champagne fountain pen, dressed in a sky-blue gown.

What is she writing so late into the night? Is it related to witchcraft? Lumian placed his hand on the door and quipped, "Writing in your diary, are you?"

"Who writes in a diary, honestly?" Aurore replied without looking up from her writing.

Lumian wasn't satisfied with her answer.

"But didn't Emperor Roselle keep several volumes of diaries?"

Roselle, the last emperor of the Intis Republic where the siblings currently lived, had brought down the Sauron dynasty and assumed the mantle of Caesar, thereby declaring himself emperor.

The man had made countless strides in the fields of science and engineering, having been credited with inventing the steam engine. Not to mention, he had charted the sea route to the Southern Continent and sparked an age of colonization. He was the embodiment of his time, a symbol of a bygone era over a century ago.

However, in his twilight years, he was double-crossed and assassinated in the White Maple Palace of Trier.

In the aftermath of his death, his diary pages were disseminated throughout the world, yet they were written in a tongue that nobody could decipher, as if the words didn't exist in this world.

"That's why Roselle ain't no honest man," Aurore, her back turned to Lumian, scoffed.

"So, what're you scribbling there?" Lumian queried.

That was the crux of the matter.

Aurore responded with a shrug, her voice dripping with indifference, "A letter."

"To whom?" Lumian couldn't help but scowl.

Aurore paused, laying down her exquisite golden champagne fountain pen, intricately patterned, to review her words and phrases.

"A pen pal."

"A what now?" Lumian furrowed his brow, thoroughly perplexed.

What the hell was that?

Aurore chuckled, running her fingers through her lustrous golden hair as she began to enlighten her brother.

"That's why I keep telling you to read more and study more. Quit wasting your days drinking and carousing!

"Look at you. What sets you apart from an illiterate?

"Pen pals are friends who become acquainted through newspapers, magazines, and other publications. They've never met and rely solely on letters to keep in touch."

"What's the point of having such a friend?" Lumian asked, rather concerned about this matter.

As he withdrew his hand from the door, he scratched his chin, deep in thought.

Aurore had never had a boyfriend before, so he couldn't allow her to be fooled by someone she had never met before.

"Meaning?" Aurore thought about it seriously. "First off, emotional value. Oui, I know you don't understand the concept. Humans need to connect with one another, but some things and emotions cannot be shared with the villagers, nor with you. I require a more private outlet to release my thoughts. These pen pals, whom I have not met in person, are perfect for that. Secondly, do not underestimate my pen pals. Some of them hold great power, and some possess extensive knowledge. For example, a pen pal gifted me this battery-operated lamp. Kerosene lamps and candles are too damaging to the eyes and not ideal for writing at night..."

Without waiting for Lumian to ask another question, Aurore waved her hand behind her.

"Get some rest, my inebriated brother! Bonne nuit!"

"Alright, bonne nuit." Lumian replied, trying to hide his frustration.

Aurore instructed, "Don't forget to close the door. It's positively frigid in here with all the windows and the door open like this."

Lumian slowly shut the door made of brown wood, then headed to his room where he removed his shoes before sitting on the bed.

In the dimness of the night, Lumian could make out the wooden table beside the window, the slanted chair, the small bookshelf against the wall, and the wardrobe on the other side.

He sat still, lost in thought.

He knew Aurore was a woman who kept her secrets to herself, and there were things she had not revealed to him. Lumian was not surprised, but he was worried that her secrets might put her in danger.

And when reality hit, his options were limited.

He was just an ordinary person, with a robust body and a sharp wit.

Thoughts came rushing in like waves crashing on the shore, and just as quickly they receded. Lumian took a deep breath and made his way to the washroom to freshen up.

Afterward, he removed his jacket-style brown coat and collapsed onto the cold bed.

The April air in the mountains was still nippy.

...

In the midst of his fugue state, Lumian perceived a murky mist, enveloping his surroundings and erasing everything in sight.

He trudged through the haze in a daze, yet regardless of which direction he took or how far he went, the fog always led him back to the same place--his bedroom.

The room was fashioned with a white four-piece bed, a wooden table and chair poised in front of the window, bookshelves, wardrobes, and the like.

...

Phew. Lumian's eyes flickered open with a start, the morning sun casting a light through the thin blue curtains.

He sat up, staring blankly at the room, feeling as if he was still trapped in a dream.

The same dream he had been having for days--the gray fog that refused to clear.

He raised a hand to his temples and muttered to himself in a deep voice, "It's getting more frequent. I have the same dream almost every day..."

Lumian's calm demeanor belied the fact that this dream hadn't brought about any negative effects, but it certainly had also failed to yield any positive outcomes.

"I pray that hidden in this is something propitious," Lumian murmured, as he rose from the bed.

Lumian opened the door to the corridor and was immediately met with a sound emanating from Aurore's room.

What a coincidence... Lumian smiled.

But then, a sudden thought hit him, causing him to take a step back and stand at the edge of the door.

When Aurore's bedroom door creaked open, Lumian quickly raised his right hand and began to massage his temples with a slightly pained expression on his face.

"What's wrong?" Aurore noticed his discomfort.

Success! Lumian cheered inwardly as he tried his best to calm himself down.

"I had that dream again," he replied in a deep voice.

Aurore's golden locks of hair cascaded down her shoulders as she furrowed her brows with concern.

"The previous method didn't work..." she murmured to herself before suggesting,

"Perhaps... I should find you a hypnotist, a real Hypnotist, and see what caused it."

"The kind with magical powers?" Lumian questioned deliberately.

Aurore nodded lightly in response.

"One of your pen pals?" Lumian couldn't help but ask.

"Why do you care about this? Think about how to solve your own problem!" Aurore retorted without hesitation.

Isn't that what's on my mind? Lumian muttered inwardly.

He took the opportunity to say, "Aurore, if I become a Warlock and gain extraordinary powers, I should be able to unlock the secret of the dream and end it completely."

"Don't even think about it!" Aurore replied without hesitation.

Her expression softened as she continued, "Lumian, I won't lie to you. This path we're taking is dangerous, painful, and downright treacherous. If I had any other choice and if the world wasn't spiraling out of control, I'd be content with being a regular old writer and living a peaceful life."

Lumian didn't hesitate to interject, "Then let me shoulder the burden of danger and pain. I'll protect you, while you do what you love."

Those words had been repeating in his head for quite some time.

Aurore went quiet for a couple of seconds before a grin spread across her face.

"Are you discriminating against women?"

Before Lumian could say a word, she added with a serious tone, "It's too late to turn back now. Ain't no going back to what we had before.

"Fine, I get it. I'm gonna go wash up. You study hard at home today and get ready for the college entrance exams in June!"

"You said it yourself, the world is getting more dangerous. What's the point of taking exams?" Lumian muttered.

He believed that the key to success was strength, not some paper degree.

Aurore just smiled and said, "Knowledge is power, my uneducated brother."

Lumian had no response, so he just watched Aurore walk into the washroom.

...

In the afternoon, in the bustling townsquare of Cordu,

Reimund Greg caught sight of Lumian Lee crouched under an elm tree. His thoughts were shrouded in mystery.

"Shouldn't you be holed up at home with your nose buried in those books?" Reimund approached him, his voice dripping with envy.

Reimund was Lumian's confidant, standing at a moderate 1.7 meters, with brown hair and brown eyes. He was an ordinary-looking fellow with a slightly flushed complexion.

Lumian looked up at him and offered a charming grin.

"Did Aurore not fill you in? Even the hangman deserves a respite! I've been cooped up for so long, I needed a break."

All morning, he had been ruminating on the possibility of acquiring extraordinary powers without Aurore's assistance.

This required him to seek out clues and take the initiative to investigate.

Eventually, he felt that the rumors of magical powers circulating throughout the village held some truth and leads, so he purposely waited for Reimund here.

"If I were in your shoes, I wouldn't rest for more than fifteen minutes," Reimund drawled, leaning casually against the elm tree. "We don't have a sister who's well-read enough to teach us. I plan on learning how to herd sheep next year."

Lumian paid no attention to Reimund's remarks and spoke reflectively.

"Recall the tale of the Warlock for me."

Reimund couldn't quite understand Lumian's intentions, furrowing his brow in confusion.

"The one about the Warlock?"

"In the past, there was a Warlock in our village, but he died later. On the day of his burial, an owl flew in from outside and perched atop his bed. It only departed after the coffin was carried out.

"Then, the coffin became unbearably heavy. It took nine bulls to pull it."

Lumian pressed further, "How long ago was this?"

Reimund's expression grew increasingly perplexed.

"How should I know? I heard it from my father."

Chapter 4: Shepherd

Lumian sprang to his feet, his eyes flashing with determination. "Then let's go to your father."

He had always been a man of action, and he knew that investigating the village legend couldn't wait. If he dallied, his sister Aurore would surely catch wind of it, and she would never allow him to proceed.

In Aurore's eyes, delving into the realm of extraordinary powers was tantamount to playing with fire.

How can I not know that there's danger? Aurore wouldn't lie to me about this. But even if the world is ablaze, I have to keep walking. I can't let Aurore face this alone… As he got up, this thought flashed across Lumian's mind.

Every time Aurore mentioned that the world was becoming more dangerous, the seriousness and worry on her face couldn't be any more genuine!

Reimund Greg looked at Lumian with confusion etched on his face.

"Why are you looking for him?"

Lumian fixed him with a withering look. "Ask him how long ago the legend of the Warlock took place."

Why is this guy struggling to comprehend such a simple matter? Perhaps I need to find some time to test his intelligence.

Reimund still looked baffled as he gazed at Lumian.

"Why do you need to know such details?"

Uh… Should I bother trying to explain it to this clueless fellow? Or should I simply come up with a plausible excuse? He weighed his options.

Lumian's mind raced as he considered his next move. He knew that he couldn't keep his investigations a secret from his friends, but he also knew that pursuing the truth about the legend was a risky move. However, he quickly came up with an idea.

He flashed a grin that he usually reserved for moments when he was about to deceive someone.

"…" Reimund took two steps back, sensing that something was amiss. "Spill it!"

Lumian adjusted his dark-colored shirt and linen jacket before smiling.

"I believe the legend of the Warlock is worthy of our attention."

"What's so important about it?" Reimund asked after some thought.

"There was indeed a Warlock in our very village of Cordu in the past," Lumian said with a serious expression. "Think about it, my friend. When I lie, I don't provide specific details like the time, place, and background that anyone could easily verify. However, this legend mentions a Warlock who lived in Cordu, and if it were a fabrication, it would be too easy for someone to expose it as such."

"But that was ages ago," Reimund countered.

"I'm also referring to the people who were around when the legend first started circulating," Lumian explained, his smile widening. "They could have easily confirmed whether or not a Warlock lived in Cordu at that time. And since the legend has been passed down through generations, it's highly likely that it's based on a real event."

Reimund remained unconvinced.

"But when you make up stories, you often use phrases like 'more than a hundred years ago,' 'centuries ago,' 'long, long ago,' to make it impossible for anyone to verify."

"That's precisely why I need to confirm it with your father," Lumian replied, a sly look in his eye that said: "You see where I'm going with this, don't you?"

"That's true…" Reimund nodded slowly, accepting Lumian's explanation, but he couldn't shake the feeling that something wasn't quite right.

As they left the square and delved deeper into the village, Reimund had a sudden epiphany.

"Mon Dieu, why do you want to confirm if such a legend is true?"

"Warlock, mon ami, that's what we're searching for! If we can confirm the house where he lived and the place where he was buried, we might uncover his secret and gain magical powers that go beyond mere mortals," Lumian replied, his truthful words dripping with deceit.

Reimund's expression turned skeptical: "Don't tell me lies."

"Mon ami, most of those tales are created to scare little children. How can they be true?

"And on top of that, anyone who seeks the power of a Warlock will end up in the Inquisition!"

The Intis Republic lay on the Northern Continent, where the orthodox deities were the Eternal Blazing Sun and the God of Steam and Machinery. These two churches divided the faith of almost all the people, and they didn't allow the Church of Evernight Goddess, the Church of the Lord of Storms from the Loen Kingdom, the Church of Earth Mother from the Feynapotter Kingdom, the Church of the God of Knowledge and Wisdom from Lenburg, and the Church of the God of Combat from the Feysac Empire to come in and preach.

The Eternal Blazing Sun Church's Inquisition was feared by all. Countless heretics had been locked up and subjected to unimaginable torture.

Lumian laughed.

"Why are you fretting now, my friend? You said it yourself, most of those legends are false. The chances of finding a Warlock's remains are slim to none.

"Besides, even if we do stumble upon the remains of a Warlock, we don't have to take on his forbidden power. We can give it to the Church and get a handsome reward. Oh right, a Warlock's grave is sure to be overflowing with treasures."

The Church that Lumian spoke of was the Church of the Eternal Blazing Sun. The Church of the God of Steam and Machinery wasn't found in Cordu, instead it was usually located in large cities and places with factories.

Seeing the temptation growing in Reimund's eyes, Lumian couldn't help but click his tongue in satisfaction.

"Do you really want to be a shepherd, my friend?"

The 'shepherd' he was not talking about the romanticized idea of a pastoral shepherd that city dwellers often had. No, this was a profession. Every morning, they would have to lead a flock of sheep out to graze and watch over them.

Cordu was located in Dariège, Riston Province. Being a shepherd was a profession here, a tough and lonely profession.

They worked for sheep owners, herding dozens, even hundreds of sheep back and forth between the mountains and plains.

This was known as a herding. Every autumn, the mountains around Cordu would wither, and the shepherds would lead the sheep out of the mountain pass to the warmer plains far away, sometimes crossing borders into

Feynapotter, Lenburg, and other countries. By the beginning of May, they would have brought the sheep back to various villages to shear them and wean the lambs. In June, they would trek up the mountains and into the tall ranges. They'd live in shacks and make cheese while grazing the sheep until the weather turned cold.

The shepherds spent their entire lives on the move, traveling from place to place. They only had a small window to return to the village, which made starting a family nearly impossible. Most of them were single, and the few widows who had no choice but to herd sheep for a living were highly sought after by the shepherds.

Reimund fell silent.

After a long while, he hesitantly said, "I'll listen to ya. It does sound like fun, and I could use somethin' to pass the time."

In the ordinary course of events, once the family decided which child would become a shepherd, they would dispatch him to a certain shepherd's location to assist between the ages of fifteen to eighteen. There, he would learn the ropes of shepherding. Three years later, the youngster would officially become a shepherd and seek employment elsewhere.

Seventeen-year-old Reimund, however, had found several reasons to postpone this matter for over two years. If his circumstances did not alter, he would have to start learning how to herd next year.

"Come on," Lumian said, patting Reimund's shoulder. "Is your father in the fields or at home?"

"Recently, there hasn't been much work. Lent is approaching swiftly. He's either at home or at the tavern." Reimund let out a voice of envy. "You don't know anything about this? You're definitely not a farmer. You have a fortunate sister!"

Lumian put his hands in his pockets and sauntered ahead, disregarding Reimund's lamentations.

As they approached the rundown tavern in the village, a person emerged from the side street.

This individual was dressed in a lengthy dark brown coat with a hood. A rope was tied around his waist, and he wore a pair of brand-new, supple black leather shoes.

"Pierre? Pierre of the Berrys?" Reimund cried out in surprise.

Lumian halted in his tracks and turned to look.

"That's me," Pierre Berry replied with a wide grin and a wave of his hand.

He was a scrawny man with sunken eyes and greasy, curly hair. His stubble suggested it had been quite some time since he last shaved.

"Why are you back?" Reimund asked in confusion.

Pierre Berry was a shepherd and it was only the beginning of April. He should be tending to his sheep in the fields beyond the mountain pass. How in the world did he find himself in the village?

He had only just begun his journey, and even if he had gone to Lenburg or the north of Feynapotter, it would take him a month to return to the Dariège mountains.

With his warm, smiling blue eyes, Pierre exclaimed joyfully, "Isn't it almost Lent? I haven't celebrated it for years. I can't miss it this year!"

"Don't you worry. I have a companion to help me look after the sheep. That's the beauty of being a shepherd. Without a supervisor, as long as I can find someone to help me, I can go wherever I please. I'm free as a bird."

Lent was a widely celebrated festival throughout Intis. People welcomed the arrival of spring in different ways and prayed for a fruitful harvest for the year.

Although it had nothing to do with the Church of the Eternal Blazing Sun or the Church of the God of Steam and Machinery, it had already turned into folklore and didn't involve the worship of pagan deities. Therefore, it had gained the tacit approval of the orthodox factions.

"You want to see who'll be chosen as the Spring Elf this year, don't you?" Lumian teased, flashing a grin.

In Cordu, the people selected a gorgeous girl to play the role of the Spring Elf for Lent. It was all part of the celebration.

Pierre laughed along.

"I hope it's your sister Aurore, but she definitely won't agree, and she's not the right age either."

"Alright," he said, pointing towards the tavern just a stone's throw away. "I'll head to the cathedral to pray. Drinks on me later."

Reimund absentmindedly replied, "No need. You don't have much dough."

"Haha, as the good Lord Himself has said, 'Even if there's only one coin de cuivre, we have to share it with our frères pauvres.'" He recited an adage that was well-known among the shepherds in the Dariège region.

Lumian beamed at Reimund, saying, "Pierre's loaded. He's definitely treating us to a drink!"

He pointed to Pierre Berry's spanking new leather shoes.

Pierre Berry was thrilled.

"My new boss is not too shabby. He gave me a few sheep and some wool, cheese, and leather."

The shepherds were compensated with food, a small sum of money, and communal animals, cheese, wool, and leather. The amount they received was dependent on the agreement they had signed with their employer.

For shepherds who had to travel long distances, having a good and suitable pair of leather shoes was the most pressing and practical desire.

As Lumian watched Pierre Berry strut towards the town square, his gaze gradually became solemn and filled with suspicion.

He silently muttered to himself, Going away for a week or two or maybe even a month just to attend Lent?

Lumian paused for a moment, his eyes scanning the area before he turned and strode towards the local watering hole with Reimund.

The tavern was a nondescript establishment with no fancy moniker to speak of. The townsfolk affectionately referred to it as Ol' Tavern.

Upon entering, Lumian's eyes darted around the room in their habitual manner.

Suddenly, his gaze came to a halt.

There, before him, was the foreigner who had departed so hastily the night before.

She was alone, not in the company of Ryan, Leah, and Valentine.

Her dress was a long, flowing orange garment, and her locks were a rich brown, tousled in gentle curls. Her piercing, sky-blue eyes were fixed on the scarlet-hued drink that graced her delicate hand.

Beautiful and languid, she seemed out of place in the seedy, dimly lit tavern.

Chapter 5: Card

Kirsch. As expected of someone from a big city… Lumian's gaze eventually landed on the glass in the lady's hand.

The distilled spirit made from sugar and fermented cherries had a color and texture that appealed to the ladies. Of course, they could replace the cherries with other fruits, but it would alter the taste only slightly.

Cordu's Ol' Tavern had a limited stock of high-grade wine, including Kirsch, which Madame Pualis fell in love with during her visit to the provincial capital, Bigorre.

Madame Pualis was the wife of Béost, the local administrator and territorial judge. Her noble ancestors had lost their title during Emperor Roselle's reign.

Lumian knew that she was also one of the mistresses of the padre, Guillaume Bénet, but not many people in the village knew about it.

Lumian shifted his gaze away from the lady and walked towards the bar counter.

A man in his forties wearing a linen shirt and trousers of the same color was sitting there. His brown hair was no longer lush, and his face was creased from years of hard labor.

He was none other than Pierre Greg, Reimund's father.

Another Pierre.

At least a third of the people at the bar would answer to the call of Pierre, Lumian had joked earlier in front of Leah, Ryan, and the others.

In the village, when people talked about Pierre or Guillaume, they had to specify which family they were referring to.

Many families had fathers and children with the same names, making it impossible to tell them apart without adding "père," "aîné," or "junior" to their names.

Reimund sauntered up to his father's side and asked, "Papa, why don't you go to the square and chat with the others?"

The men in the village always convened under the ancient elm tree or in someone's abode, where they'd spend the day playing dice, cards, chess, and swapping all sorts of rumors—the tavern cost money, after all.

Pierre Greg, with a glass of rich red wine in hand, turned to his second son and said, "We'll go later. There shouldn't be many people at the square now."

That's right. Where did all the men in the village go? Lumian was immediately perplexed.

He had noticed the absence of the village men at the square.

"Monsieur, I want to ask you something," Lumian said bluntly.

Pierre Greg immediately turned alert.

"A new prank?"

The story of "The Boy Who Cried Wolf" does indeed have a basis in reality… Lumian turned his head, gesturing for Reimund to speak.

Reimund hesitated for a moment, gathering his thoughts.

"Papa, how long ago did the Warlock legend you told me happen? The one where it took nine bulls to pull the coffin."

Pierre Greg gulped down a mouthful of wine, his brow furrowed in puzzlement.

"Why are you asking this?

"You know, your pépé told me this when I was just a wee lad," Reimund replied.

The Riston Province, where Cordu was located, and the neighboring provinces of Aulay and Suhit were located in the south of the Intis Republic. They were famous grape producers, and the wine here, especially the inferior ones, was very cheap. In some years, people could even drink wine like water.

Reimund was disappointed because it had been a long time since his grandfather had passed on.

Suddenly, Pierre Greg chimed in, "Your pépé claimed that he saw it with his own two eyes when he was but a young man. It spooked him so much that he became deathly afraid of owls. He was convinced that their evil talons could snatch his very soul away."

Lumian and Reimund's eyes sparked with excitement, almost in unison.

Merde, there were actual clues!

The legend of the Warlock—it was something that someone had actually experienced?

"Did Pépé mention anything about where the Warlock lived or where he was buried?" Reimund asked eagerly.

Pierre Greg shrugged. "Who cares?"

Not one to be deterred, Reimund persisted, determined to glean any shred of information. Before he could speak, Lumian intervened with a gentle touch on his shoulder as he spoke loudly, "The river awaits us."

Reimund was just about to take his leave with Lumian when Pierre Greg suddenly remembered something.

"Hold up, Reimund. You'll soon be a Greenwatcher, won't you? There's something you need to be aware of.

Greenwatchers had the crucial responsibility of patrolling the highland pastures around the village and nearby fields to prevent any illegal grazing during the prohibited period or livestock from ravaging the saplings.

Lumian didn't pay much heed to the conversation and made his way to the tavern's washroom.

As he exited the restroom, he took a detour to the female foreigner who was sipping on Kirsch. It was impossible to discern her age.

Although he had no intentions of striking up a conversation, he observed her with great detail. It might come in handy in the future, just like how he had used Ryan, Leah, and Valentine to infiltrate the padre's scandalous scene.

After a few subtle glances, Lumian was poised to head for the entrance of the tavern to wait for Reimund when the languid lady in the orange dress looked up.

Before Lumian could retract his gaze, his eyes met hers.

Lumian felt a little awkward as his thick skin couldn't protect him from the unexpected encounter.

Many thoughts immediately surfaced in his mind.

Maybe I should take a cue from the padre and administrators of the Church and praise her beauty? Or perhaps I should switch gears and hit on her? Alternatively, should I show my inexperience and hastily turn around to leave?

As Lumian made up his mind, the lady interrupted his thoughts and said with a smile, "Been having dreams, have you?"

Lumian was hit by a bolt of lightning. His thoughts went numb and his mind froze.

After a moment or two, he managed to force a smile and asked, "Dreaming isn't unusual, is it?"

The woman touched her cheek with one hand and sized Lumian up. She chuckled and said, "Lost in a misty dream, perhaps?"

How could she know? Lumian's pupils dilated instantly, and his expression betrayed a hint of fear.

Despite having experienced many things, he was still young, and for a moment, he couldn't control his emotions.

Stay calm, Lumian. Stay calm… He repeated to himself, trying to relax the muscles on his face, before asking, "Did you hear the tale I told those three foreigners last night?"

The woman didn't reply. Instead, she pulled out a stack of cards from her orange purse, which sat on the chair next to her.

She cast her gaze at Lumian once again and broke into a radiant smile.

"Draw a card. Perhaps it can aid you in unlocking the hidden secrets of that dream."

Wh— Lumian was taken aback, his guard instantly raised.

He was both enticed and wary.

He looked down at the card she presented him and furrowed his brows.

"Tarot?"

The card resembled the tarot cards created by Emperor Roselle for divination.

The woman looked down sheepishly and offered a self-deprecating smile.

"My apologies, I must have grabbed the wrong one."

She swiftly returned the 22 tarot cards to her medium-sized handbag and pulled out a different deck.

"This is also tarot, but it's from the Minor Arcana. You don't have the privilege to draw from the Major Arcana pack, and I don't have the authority to let you…"

The Minor Arcana consisted of 56 cards divided into four suits, each representing chalices, wands, swords, and pentacles.

What is she talking about… Lumian was bewildered by her words.

This woman was stunningly beautiful and sophisticated, yet there was an air of eccentricity about her that suggested she was not entirely sane.

"Draw one," she urged, waving the Minor Arcana cards in her hand. "It's complimentary, so there's no cost to try. It may be the solution to your dream predicament."

Lumian chuckled.

"My sister once said that free things often come at the most hefty price."

"That may be true," the lady said after some thought.

She laid down the Minor Arcana card with a delicate touch, careful not to upset the glass of Kirsch that sat beside it.

"But as long as you don't pay, no matter what, how can I, a foreigner, expect to make you pay in Cordu?"

That's right… perhaps it's worth a try. It wasn't easy for me to get a hint about that dream. I gotta give it a shot, but what about the Warlock's curse? Maybe I should get Aurore's help? Lumian's mind raced with conflicting thoughts, and he couldn't decide what to do.

The woman didn't seem to mind his hesitation.

After what seemed like an eternity, Lumian finally made up his mind. Slowly, he leaned forward and reached out his right hand. Carefully, he shuffled through the stack of Minor Arcana cards and extracted one from the middle.

"Seven of Wands." The languid woman's eyes drifted towards the card.

The image depicted a man in verdant attire, standing atop a mountain with a determined expression on his face. In his hand, he held a wand, poised for battle against the six wands representing his enemies that were attacking from the foot of the mountain.

"What does this mean?" Lumian asked.

The woman's lips curled into a smile.

"I shall interpret it for you. It symbolizes crisis, challenge, confrontation, courage, et cetera.

"However, what really matters is that this card now belongs to you. When the time comes, you will discover its true meaning."

"You're giving it to me?" Lumian's confusion grew with each passing moment.

Could this card truly be cursed?

The woman ignored his query and started to put away the remaining cards. She picked up her glass and finished the remaining Kirsch in a single gulp.

With graceful strides, she made her way towards the staircase on the side of Ol' Tavern and ascended to the second floor.

It was obvious that she lived there.

Lumian felt the urge to follow her, but something held him back. His thoughts were in disarray.

Is this really an ordinary card?

She gave it to me. Does that mean she'll never be able to use that deck again?

Aurore might be able to shed some light on this…

At this moment, Reimund approached Lumian.

"What's the matter, my friend?"

"Nothing much. That foreigner was quite the looker, isn't she?" Lumian said patronizingly.

"I reckon your sister, Aurore, is far more beautiful." Reimund then lowered his voice. "Lumian, my pépé has been gone for ages. What should we do next?"

Lumian, who was in a hurry to leave, pondered for a moment before answering,

"Firstly, we could track down an elder around your pépé's age who's still kicking. Alternatively, we could head to the cathedral and examine the registry. Uh, but that's something to consider at a later time."

Lumian remembered his recent altercation with the padre and decided it was better to avoid the cathedral, unless it was absolutely necessary.

As the only cathedral in Cordu, it held significant power, even acting as a government entity. It recorded all significant events, including deaths, and marriages.

Before Reimund could ask any further, Lumian interjected, "Let's split up and see who fits the bill. We'll inquire tomorrow."

"Agreed." Reimund immediately agreed.

...

In the semi-subterranean two-story building, Aurore listened intently to Lumian's tale, her piercing gaze fixed on the "Wand" card in his hand.

"It's an ordinary card, oui. I detect no malice or enchantments."

"Aurore, uh, Grande Soeur, what do you make of the foreigner's intentions? How did she know of my dream?" Lumian asked.

Aurore shook her head.

"Now that she has shown us her hand, we can only wait and see."

"I will keep a watchful eye on her for the next few days.

"Oh… And take this card. It may cause change. But have no fear, I will be watching."

"Alright." Lumian tried his best to relax.

...

In the dead of the night, Lumian deftly tucked the Wand card into the garments draping over the back of the chair, then slipped under the covers and shut his eyes.

Before long, a dense, ashen mist once again enveloped his vision.

Without warning, he jolted awake within his reverie.

He sensed his mind clearing, and a newfound lucidity taking hold.

Yet, the dreamworld swathed in that same murky haze lingered on.

Chapter 6: Ruins

Lumian's subconscious gaze darted around the room, taking in the familiar sights of the table, the chair, the bookshelf, the wardrobe, and the bed.

It was his bedroom, but it was cloaked in a thin, gray fog.

Is this some sort of lucid dream? I'm having a lucid dream? His pupils dilated as the realization dawned on him.

A lucid dream was a rare occurrence where one's mind could think and remember like in a state of wakefulness while still in a dream state. It was a skill that required specialized training to master.

Aurore had tried various methods to induce lucid dreams in order to unravel the secret of Lumian's gray fog dream and help him eliminate the latent danger it posed, but she had failed.

But now, Lumian found himself inexplicably conscious in his dream.

As the shock of the situation passed, he began to consider the possibility of why this had happened.

Could it be because of the tarot card that represents the Seven of Wands?

That woman said it would help me unlock the secret of the dream..

Therefore, its function is to allow me to enter a lucid dream state and explore the area enveloped by the gray fog?

Hmm... Compared to my previous impression, the gray fog seems to have faded a lot. A lot more...

With these thoughts racing through his mind, Lumian rose from his chair and strode to the side of the room. He placed his hands on the table against the wall and gazed out the window, where a completely unfamiliar landscape greeted his eyes.

This dream did not replicate the Cordu where he lived.

Under a thin, ghostly fog, a towering mountain peak caught Lumian's attention. It rose up twenty to thirty meters into the air, constructed from brownish-red stones and reddish-brown soil.

Buildings surrounded the mountain, now in ruins, either fallen or charred beyond recognition.

They resembled crypts, a disordered cemetery surrounding the mountain's base.

The ground was marred by holes and scattered with gravel. Not a blade of grass or a single weed could be found in this barren wasteland.

The fog in the sky thickened to an impenetrable white, with no indication of a sun. Lumian could only see as if in the dead of night, under the light of the stars.

After a moment of observation, he murmured to himself, "That's it? This is the dream that's been haunting me for years?"

But soon he refocused his thoughts on a more practical question:

Where is the dream secret hidden?

On the peak, or in one of these shattered buildings?

Lumian did not rush to leave his bedroom and explore the dream. Instead, he stayed put, scanning the area from his vantage point.

Suddenly, he caught sight of a figure darting through the ruins of the buildings surrounding the mountain peak.

Despite the fog's thinness and the two-story house's limited height, Lumian couldn't shake the sense of its presence. He wondered if he was hallucinating.

Taking a deep breath, Lumian muttered to himself, "Stay calm. Be patient. Stay calm. Be patient."

From what I can see, this dream is shrouded in secrecy, and it doesn't feel entirely my own. Lumian knew that blindly exploring it could lead to danger.

Yes, I will search for that woman tomorrow and see what information I can find. Then, I will make a decision...

Lost in thought, Lumian withdrew his gaze and prepared to exit the dream to rest in peace.

However, he didn't know how to wake himself up while being awake.

After numerous attempts to awaken, he laid in bed and attempted to clutter his thoughts, trying to recreate the state he was in while sleeping.

After an indeterminate amount of time, Lumian abruptly sat up and noticed the faint glimmer of golden sunlight filtering into the room through the curtains.

I'm finally awake...

As expected, sleeping within the dream restores my disoriented state. Then, I can escape...

Lumian breathed a sigh of relief and whispered to himself.

In that moment, a knock reverberated through the door.

"Aurore?" Lumian's heart clenched, fearing the worst.

"It is moi," Aurore's voice infiltrated the room.

Lumian sprung from the bed and rushed to the entrance. He grabbed the handle and pulled it open.

Lo and behold, it was Aurore standing outside. She donned a white silk nightgown, and her long tresses of golden hair cascaded elegantly down her back.

"How did it go?" She appeared certain that Lumian had just awoken.

Lumian held nothing back and recounted every detail that had occurred.

Aurore nodded pensively.

"The purpose of the card was to facilitate a lucid dream..."

She inquired, "What are you going to do next?"

Lumian grunted curtly.

"I shall grab a bite to eat before visiting the woman and attempting to gather more information to discern her true intentions."

"Very well." Aurore offered no objection.

She added, "I shall also pen a letter to someone inquiring about the dream you recounted and the symbols therein."

At this juncture, she glimpsed Lumian's suddenly apprehensive expression and smiled.

"Fret not, I shall make adjustments. I shall not jettison everything at once. After all, I am the one who instilled in you the principle of gradual progress."

"Well, when you converse with that woman, do not be aggressive. Endeavor to be amicable. It is not that we are fearful of her, it is simply better to acquire another ally than an additional adversary."

"Understood," Lumian replied solemnly.

...

Cordu, Ol' Tavern.

Lumian strode into the Cordu, Ol' Tavern and approached the bar counter. He leaned in and spoke to Maurice Bénet, the tavern owner who also doubled up as a bartender.

"Which chamber does the foreign madame occupy upstairs?"

Ol' Tavern, the only inn in the village, boasted six rooms on the second floor for guests to rest their weary heads.

Maurice Bénet was not a burly man. Like most in the village, he had raven locks and blue eyes, but his nose was always red, a consequence of his heavy drinking.

He was related to the Church's padre Guillaume Bénet, but the two were not close and were merely distant cousins.

"Why the inquiry?" Maurice Bénet inquired, his curiosity piqued. "What business would a big-city woman have with a country bumpkin like you?"

There was an obvious look of inquiry on his face. Maurice had a sixth sense for these things, especially when it came to men and women.

Lumian scoffed, "Aren't you a country bumpkin and a hillbilly yourself?" He casually made up a reason, "The lady lost something last night. I found it this morning. Just trying to return her property."

Maurice Bénet didn't buy it for a second. "Is that so?"

Eight out of ten things that came out of Lumian's mouth were lies.

"What else? Do you think she'll fall for me?" Lumian said, undaunted.

"That's true." Maurice Bénet was convinced. "She's in the room by the square, opposite the washrooms."

After Lumian left, Maurice polished a glass, eyes tracking him. He whispered, just barely audible to Lumian, "Impossible? Not always. Sometimes people want to try something new..."

...

Lumian found the washroom on the second floor, the only spot of light in the dim, narrow hallway. But his eyes were drawn to the door across from it. A piece of paper hung from the brass handle, stark white against the dark red wood.

Scrawled on it in Intis: "Currently resting. Do not disturb."

Lumian read the note for a few seconds. Instead of rushing forward to knock on the door, he took two steps back and stood against the wall.

He planned to wait here until the lady came out.

Life on the streets had taught him hard lessons. When an opportunity appeared, you seized it with both hands, no hesitation, no second thoughts, no fear. Otherwise it slipped through your fingers, and you were right back where you started. So he would wait as long as it took, the minutes ticking by endlessly as he ignored the eyes he felt tracking him, the whispers in his mind.

He stood there without a hint of frustration, probably capable of passing off as a statue.

Finally, a soft creak.

The woman had changed into a pale green dress with white edges. Her brown hair was swept into a tight bun.

Those light-blue eyes flicked to Lumian before moving to the paper sign on the door handle, a smile dancing at the corner of her mouth.

"How long did you wait?" she asked, not at all surprised to see him there.

Lumian took a step forward and said, "That's not important."

He tried to keep his tone even, to appear less eager.

"What do you want to ask?" the woman said, cutting straight to the point.

Lumian glanced around the empty hallway. "Here?"

The lady replied with a smile, "If you don't mind, I don't mind either."

Lumian had already noticed that the other occupants of the tavern, including Ryan and Leah, were nowhere to be found. There was no one else on the second floor except for him and the woman in front of him.

Lumian asked, organizing his thoughts carefully.

"What's the secret in that dream of mine?"

The lady laughed involuntarily.

"That's for you to answer, not me."

She paused for a moment before saying, "All I can say is, you'll find extraordinary power there."

Extraordinary power... His pulse roared in his ears.

"What's the point, if it's just a dream? Won't change anything out here."

The woman's lips curled into a smile.

"Who's to say what's possible, in the realm of the extraordinary? Perhaps, it can?"

After everything, the power I crave is there for the taking? Lumian's breath caught.

The grin slid away as the lady added seriously, "But danger lurks there too. Die in the dream, you die out here."

Die in the dream, die for real? Lumian didn't understand, but he chose to believe it.

That dream clung to Lumian like a shadow, as it had for years. But it was different, somehow. Special. And Aurore's voice whispered in his memory: "Careful's never a bad idea." Lumian preferred to view the situation as challenging and the consequences as severe. He couldn't afford to underestimate the danger or be careless.

After a few seconds, he asked, "If I stay out? What then?"

"Theoretically speaking, there won't be any consequences. No one will force you," the woman said thoughtfully. "But as time passes, I can't be sure that the situation won't change. And the probability of things going wrong is much higher than things going right."

"How much higher?" Lumian pressed. "90% to 10%?"

"No, 99.99% to 0.01%." The lady added seriously, "Of course, this is just my personal judgment. You can choose not to believe it."

Lumian felt a wave of uncertainty wash over him, his mind racing with conflicting thoughts.

Recently, I'm becoming convinced that the dream is a hidden danger. Not caring is the worst choice...

But if I really want to explore it, there's a very high chance that an accident will happen without any knowledge...

Should I wait for Aurore to gather more information from her pen pals before making an attempt?

But if I do, Aurore definitely won't allow me to use the dream exploration to obtain extraordinary powers...

Wasn't my investigation of the legend to seek extraordinary powers?

It's too risky. It can lead to death...

Perhaps I should do a preliminary exploration at the edge of the dream ruins to gather information and not take the risk of entering?

Hmm, I can tell Aurore about the conversation, but I can't reveal the possibility of obtaining extraordinary powers...

Once his thoughts had settled, Lumian gazed at the woman across from him and asked in a low, serious tone, "Who are you exactly? Why did you give me that tarot card and the opportunity to explore the dream?"

The woman smiled enigmatically.

"I will tell you once you have unraveled the mystery of the dream."

Chapter 7: Naroka

Once Lumian had departed from the Ol' Tavern, he found himself standing on the uneven road, uncertain of where to go next.

The morning sun beat down upon him, albeit with a slight chill in the air.

As he deliberated his next move, Reimund Greg emerged from the side.

"I was just looking for you."

Lumian quickly regained his composure and queried, "What's the issue?"

Reimund appeared taken aback.

"Have you forgotten? Today, we're supposed to seek out the elderly, around the same age as my pépé, and inquire about the legend of the Warlock."

Lumian groaned, pressing his hand against his forehead in agony.

"Is that so? Why can't I recall? Or is this just your imagination?"

Reimund's expression shifted from one of concern to one of fear. Just as he was about to inquire further and confirm whether he had imagined the events of the previous day, Lumian's face lit up with a mischievous grin.

"You rascal, you're playing a joke on me again!" Reimund cursed, unable to contain his annoyance.

"You need to work on your cursing," Lumian chided, shaking his head in disappointment. "Even Ava can curse better than you."

Ava Lizier, the beautiful daughter of Cordu Village's renowned shoemaker Guillaume Lizier, was now a goose herder.

Reimund's expression shifted as he muttered, "Ava…"

He then looked at Lumian. "She's our friend, right?"

Lumian nodded with a smile. "Indeed she is."

The trio, along with Guillaume of the Berrys and Ava's cousin Azéma Lizier, were inseparable teenagers who often spent their days together.

"Why don't we bring Ava on board to help us uncover the truth behind the legend?" Reimund suggested. "As you know, her father always said, 'Why must a dowry be paid when a woman gets married? How many good families have fallen like this?' It pains her to hear it. She might be relieved if she could get some treasure or reward from the investigation."

"I've also heard the heads of several families in the village say similar things, including our padre," Lumian added with a sly grin. "They wish their brothers would stay at home forever. Even if they get married, they won't venture out alone to establish a family. That would require them to split the assets and give them their deserving share."

Lumian shot a furtive glance at Reimund and continued, "Therefore, many families prefer to let one of their children become a shepherd. This way, he won't get married and will have a certain income. Most of the time, he can support himself."

Reimund's expression gradually darkened as he considered the implications of this issue.

He had never thought too deeply about it before.

This was precisely why he enjoyed spending time with Lumian. Although most people in the village believed that Lumian had a poor character and enjoyed lying and playing tricks, he was actually more knowledgeable than anyone his age. Reimund, on the other hand, felt like he didn't know much and spent his days in a daze, simply following through with his family's arrangements.

It's good that you know… Lumian thought to himself before skillfully steering the conversation back to their investigation.

"It's too late now. We must hurry up and ask around. We will get Ava tomorrow. Yes, we can also bring Guillaume-junior and Azéma on board later. Not only will this potentially lead to gains, but it will also be a fascinating activity that can train our abilities."

"Bring Guillaume-junior and Azéma too?" Reimund grumbled begrudgingly.

The more people involved, the less his share of the rewards would be.

Furthermore, if he included them, he would have fewer chances to win over Ava's affections.

Lumian regarded him with a touch of kindness and pity in his gaze.

Silly child, do you think Ava will fall for you? Her eyebrows are very high, and she only wants to marry into a good family. She clearly has a certain favorable impression of me, a 'villain', yet she can control herself…

In the Dariège region, having "high eyebrows" meant having high standards, and they wouldn't settle for just any average bloke.

"My sister always said there is strength in numbers," Lumian explained simply. "Who are the old croakers that we need to visit?"

"You didn't investigate?" Reimund asked in surprise.

How could I have the energy to investigate after the incident with the Wand card? Lumian smiled and quipped, "Of course I investigated. I am just testing your ability to gather information."

Reimund had no doubts.

"There are nine elders who are still alive in the village. They are about the same age as my pépé, or a little older…"

Six women and three men. Ladies do live longer… Lumian listened quietly, deep in thought.

"There's no need to visit the last two. They're from another village and came here through marriage.

"Let's start with Naroka. She's the oldest and might have been an adult when the Warlock incident happened."

Naroka's real name wasn't actually Naroka. It was a title of respect for her.

In Riston Province, married women from prominent families or those who were the actual heads of households were entitled to the title "Madame". More than that, their names were marked with an "a" to proclaim their femininity, and prefixed with "Na" to signify their authority as Madames reigning over their domains.

Madame Pualis's family had been in decline for a long time, and at home she dutifully deferred to her husband Béost, the provincial administrator. Therefore, she didn't have a "Na" prefix or an "a" suffix. She could only be addressed as "Madame".

Naroka had been widowed early on in life, and as a result, she took over the family's accounts. Despite her two sons coming of age, getting married, and having children of their own, she kept her hand positioned squarely on the purse strings of the family fortunes.

This was a rare occurrence in Cordu, where men usually took charge of the family's affairs. In families where the father was absent, the eldest child would naturally take back the authority to manage the entire family from their mother once they reached adulthood.

"Okay," Reimund acquiesced without questioning Lumian's decision.

As they walked by a few buildings, Lumian spotted four old women basking in the sun as they chatted casually in front of a two-story house.

They sat very close to each other, catching lice on each other's bodies, which was a form of entertainment in the countryside of the Intis Republic that served to bring people closer and express affection.

"Do we ask her now?" Reimund hesitated, concerned that their pursuit of the truth behind the legend might spread throughout the village.

"Let's wait a little longer," Lumian replied solemnly, knowing that many rumors in the village were generated and spread through such gatherings.

After a while, the other three old women left one by one because they still had work to do at home.

"Good morning, Naroka." Lumian immediately walked over.

Naroka's hair was grizzled, and her eyes were slightly turbid. She wore a dark dress made of rough cloth, and her hands were covered in a layer of chicken skin with obvious patches on her face.

"When will Aurore join us? Many people in the village miss her," Naroka asked with a smile.

The men, I suppose? Lumian entered a state where he spoke his truth while the other talked about another matter and asked curiously, "Naroka, have you really seen a real Warlock? The one whose coffin nine bulls couldn't move?"

Naroka's visage shifted ever so slightly.

"Who told you that?"

"His pépé came back one night to tell him." Lumian began to spout nonsense.

Naroka was stunned. "Can souls really return…"

"My papa told me that Pépé had mentioned it when he was alive," Reimund interjected, unable to watch Lumian deceive the elderly woman.

Naroka's expression fell. After a moment of contemplation, she spoke up.

"Before he passed, none of us knew he was a Warlock. He acted perfectly normal."

Just like how you don't know that Aurore is a Warlock… Lumian thought to himself.

"Until he suddenly died and that owl flew over…" Naroka trailed off, lost in her memories.

The rest of her tale mirrored the legend.

Lumian pressed further.

"Where did that Warlock reside at that time?"

Naroka glanced at him.

"It's where you and Aurore are dwelling now.

"After that Warlock was laid to rest, the padre and a few others ransacked the place and burned it to the ground. For two or three decades, no one dared to approach that site. Eventually, the matter was forgotten. Later, Aurore came and purchased the land to rebuild the house."

Our place? Lumian's heart skipped a beat.

This answer was completely beyond his expectations!

In a flash, he realized that there were a multitude of problems he had previously overlooked.

With Aurore's knack for making money and her mysterious, unearthly abilities, why on earth would she settle down in the rural countryside of Cordu?

Cities like the provincial capital, Bigorre, the bustling textile center of Suhit, or even the capital itself, Trier, would be far better options. Even if Aurore was seeking a place with fresh air and a pristine environment, these urban centers boasted plenty of areas that would suit her needs.

Aurore once told him, "The best way to hide is to hide in a big city…" Lumian's mind raced as he struggled to calm himself.

Today, he learned that the land Aurore had chosen for their home, the land where their house stood, had once belonged to a powerful Warlock…

"Where is the Warlock buried?" Reimund interjected, unable to contain his curiosity.

With no hope of finding riches in Lumian's home, he could only hope that the Warlock's body held some sort of valuable secret.

Naroka said with amusement, "This was quite the affair. It undoubtedly sounded the alarm for the padre.

"In the old days, nine bulls were gathered to pull the coffin to the cemetery beside the cathedral. The padre performed a ritual to purify it. Eventually, the body was cremated and the remains were buried in a grave."

Reimund couldn't conceal his disappointment and muttered, "I see."

"Why do you inquire?" Naroka scrutinized Reimund's face before questioning.

Lumian cackled and spun a tale that sounded more like a fabrication. "We seek the Warlock's treasure."

"Kid, don't waste your time daydreaming," Naroka warned.

"Understood," Lumian replied meekly.

Lumian and Reimund bade Naroka farewell and hit the road toward the townsquare.

"There ain't no hope, Lumian. None at all," Reimund muttered, his spirits sinking as they circled a building.

"Indeed. All that could have been burned, has been burned. All that could have been taken, was taken decades ago," Lumian replied, nodding in agreement.

Despite the bleakness of their situation, Lumian wasn't disappointed thanks to the opportunity in his dream.

Reimund agreed.

"Aye, you're right. Of all the tales, only that blasted owl still remains."

Lumian's eyes lit up as he turned his gaze to the forest beyond the village. "Owl…" he murmured.

Reimund recoiled in horror and added hastily, "But it must have died years ago.

He wasn't one for consorting with the likes of owls and other evil creatures.

Down south in Intis, owls, nightingales, and ravens were thought to be sinister beings that served demons, stealing away human souls and bringing only misfortune.

Chapter 8: Owl

The idea hit Lumian like a bolt of lightning, but he didn't particularly fancy going through with it.

Ignoring the fact that years had flown by since the Warlock's demise and that the lifespan of owls was measly compared to humans, the sheer number of birds in the mountain was enough to make Lumian reconsider.

There were too many of the damn things!

That owl doesn't have any distinct markings… No, in the legends, there was no mention of anything specific about the owl. Naroka didn't disclose everything… We didn't inquire deeply enough... He snapped out of his thoughts and flashed a reassuring smile at Reimund.

"An owl tied to a Warlock could live for a hundred years."

As Reimund trembled with fear, he reassured him in a calm voice, "Don't fret, mon ami. This is my last resort. I do not wish to encounter a monster."

"Perhaps we should consult another old sage. Naroka may have overlooked a vital clue."

The man's tone turned seductive as he continued, "If I were a Warlock, I would not keep all my treasures with me or in my home. I would stash some away in case the Inquisition attacked me. I would not have the luxury of time to collect my belongings. When I must flee, I would be left destitute."

The Inquisition of the Church of the Eternal Blazing Sun was notorious for hunting down Warlocks and Witches. Their "heroic deeds" were celebrated throughout the countryside.

Reimund's face lit up with excitement as he exclaimed, "You are right!"

He said with a yearning expression, "It's a shame. Too many years have elapsed. The Church's discovered riches must have been spent ages ago."

"Mon ami, that's a dangerous thought," Lumian teased.

Undeterred, they continued their visits to Pierre-père, Naferia, and other elders of the Maury family.

Although their responses mirrored Naroka's, Lumian and Reimund, with their newfound experience, managed to extract more details.

For instance, the owl was of medium size and resembled its kind. It had a pointed beak, a feline face, brown feathers with scattered spots, brownish-yellow eyes, and black pupils…

However, it was larger than the average owl, and its eyes appeared to spin. It was not as rigid or dim-witted as its kind.

All these peculiarities made the owl seem even more sinister in their descriptions.

"Seems like we've hit a dead end," Lumian stated to Reimund as they traveled to the townsquare. "We must focus on other legends."

Reimund was not as discouraged as he had been earlier. "Agreed. But which one should we pursue?"

This fellow is so proactive and hardworking… Lumian silently praised Reimund's enthusiasm and diligence and readied a reward for him.

He nodded and said, "Take your time and reflect on it. We shall discuss tomorrow. I shall impart combat techniques to you this afternoon."

"Marvelous!" Reimund exclaimed, overjoyed by the unforeseen instruction.

Aurore was a skilled fighter. After all, how else could she handle the savage and rough men in the village? Her younger brother was likely to be just as proficient.

After bidding farewell to Reimund Greg, Lumian veered onto the trail leading to his home.

As he walked, he spotted a group of men approaching him.

The leader was in his prime, not towering above 1.7 meters in height. He wore a white robe and had light black hair.

With a regal demeanor and decent facial features, the tip of his nose curled slightly in undisguised disgust and malice as he glared at Lumian with his blue eyes.

None other than the padre of the Eternal Blazing Sun Church in Cordu, Guillaume Bénet.

"I have been awaiting your arrival for quite some time," Guillaume Bénet bellowed in a baritone voice. "Did you deliberately bring those foreigners to the cathedral?"

Lumian attempted to explain himself as he furtively took a step back. "I thought you were sleeping inside."

He had noticed Pons Bénet—the padre's younger sibling—standing beside Guillaume Bénet. Pons was in his early thirties, muscular, domineering, and a bully.

The other individuals with them were the padre's henchmen.

Guillaume Bénet signaled Pons with a glance as Lumian retreated.

Pons Bénet's grin turned sinister as he lunged forward, bellowing,

"Rascal, eet ees time zat you learn who ees ze father here!"

Before he could complete his sentence, Pons had already hastened his steps and pounced on Lumian. The other brutes followed suit.

In Cordu, a place where logic held no sway and apologies fell on deaf ears, brute force was the only language that could command respect. Guillaume Bénet, the padre, knew this all too well, having resorted to violence countless times before. So, when he learned that the outsiders had been ushered into the cathedral by Lumian, the priest wasted no time in making his move. He was determined to get hold of the ruffian and pummel him into submission until he lay bedridden for a month. The padre was keen to show Lumian the error of his ways and wouldn't rest until someone paid the price for his insolence.

Of course, he had to avoid Aurore.

Regarding the law, he only needed to notify the administrator and the territory judge, Béost. The city sheriffs were unlikely to investigate such a minor issue in the countryside.

As an outsider, Béost would not offend a local-born padre unless there was significant conflict of interest.

Guillaume Bénet felt fortunate that the foreigners had not divulged his affair with Madame Pualis, the administrator's wife, to anyone. He was still unaware of this.

Despite their speed, Lumian was quicker. Just as Pons spoke, Lumian pivoted and dashed away.

He was familiar with the padre's character and methods.

Previously, a villager had accused Guillaume Bénet of having multiple mistresses and embezzling offerings from the Eternal Blazing Sun. He had also bullied others relentlessly in the village, hardly behaving like a man of the cloth. Subsequently, the villager had mysteriously died one afternoon.

Thud thud thud!

Lumian raced like the wind.

"Wait for your papa, eh? Attends ton père!" Pons shouted while chasing him. His pace was not sluggish either.

The thugs pursued closely behind him.

Instead of fleeing along the main road, Lumian darted into the nearest house.

The family was preparing lunch in the kitchen when they suddenly saw a stranger burst in.

With a swoosh, Lumian darted past them and leaped out of the kitchen window at the back.

By the time Pons and his cronies entered, the homeowner had regained his senses. He stood up to confront them and inquired, "What is going on? What are all of you doing?"

"Get out of ze way, old man!" Pons shoved the homeowner aside with force, but it slowed him down.

When they reached the window and jumped out, Lumian had already vanished into another trail.

After pursuing him for a while, they lost sight of Lumian entirely.

"Sacrebleu, ces chiens fous!" Pons spat on the roadside.

...

Outside the semi-subterranean two-story abode, Lumian gasped for breath before finally opening the door and entering the house as though nothing had happened.

"One, two, three, four; two, two, three, four…" A series of rhythmic shouts reverberated in his ears.

Lumian gazed at the empty space on the other side of the kitchen and observed Aurore's blond hair tied in a ponytail. She wore a flaxen shirt, tight white pants, and dark sheepskin boots, leaping around and drenched in sweat.

In Cordu, the kitchen occupied most of the space on the first floor, serving as the family's core. Cooking and dining occurred here, as did receiving guests.

She's exercising again… Lumian was accustomed to Aurore's eccentricities and was unfazed by her exercise regimen.

Aurore often did strange things without giving any reason when probed.

At the very least, exercising is beneficial, and it's quite a feast for the eyes… Lumian observed silently.

After a while, Aurore stopped and squatted to turn off the black tape recorder.

She took the white towel from Lumian and instructed him as she wiped the sweat from her forehead,

"Remember, we have combat practice this afternoon."

"I have to study and learn combat. Aren't you demanding too much of me?" Lumian grumbled nonchalantly.

Aurore glanced at him, smiling, and retorted, "You must remember that our objective is the comprehensive development of the five educations of morality, intellect, physique, aesthetics, and labor!"

The more she spoke, the happier she became, as if recollecting something beautiful or amusing.

I have already failed moral education… Lumian muttered under his breath.

He queried, "What kind of combat?"

One of the things he failed to comprehend was that Aurore, who seemed delicate and frail, was an expert in combat. She mastered numerous fighting techniques and could easily overpower him.

Aurore pondered seriously, leaned forward slightly, and gazed into Lumian's eyes.

She then laughed heartily and declared, "Self-defense!"

"Huh?" Lumian exclaimed in astonishment. "Isn't that supposed to be for girls?"

Aurore stood tall and shook her head gravely, saying sincerely, "Boys must protect themselves when they are out. Who says boys don't encounter perverts?"

The smile on her lips was no longer hidden.

Lumian was unsure if his sister was joking or serious, so he remained silent as he retrieved the white towel and headed towards the stairs.

Suddenly, he felt something tighten under his foot, as if he had tripped over an obstacle. He stumbled forward.

In midair, Lumian hastily contracted his abs, extended his arm, and leaned on the chair beside him. He somersaulted and barely landed on his feet.

Aurore retracted her leg and chuckled.

"One of the fundamental combat principles is to be vigilant at all times. One cannot be complacent.

"Remember that, my novice brother?"

Her right hand had already clutched Lumian's back, but when she saw that he had regained control of his body, she let go.

"It's because I trust you too much…" Lumian grumbled.

He contemplated the matter and realized that this trust was meaningless. He had lost count of how many times he had been at the mercy of Aurore.

Aurore coughed and restrained her expression.

"How did it go with that woman?"

Lumian provided a brief summary of their conversation before declaring, "I intend to wait for your friends to respond before delving into the dream."

"Smart decision," Aurore affirmed.

Lumian changed the subject.

"What's for lunch?"

"We still have some leftover toast from this morning. I'll roast four more lamb chops for you," Aurore replied after contemplating for a moment.

"What about you?" Lumian inquired.

Aurore casually said, "I'll just have truffle bamboo chicken shreds topped with some cheese and onion soup. I tried it last time and found it to be quite…"

Before she could finish speaking, she suddenly froze.

The next moment, she raised her hands to cover her ears. The muscles on her face gradually contorted, making her appear somewhat ferocious.

Lumian observed silently, his eyes filled with anxiety and apprehension.

After a while, Aurore exhaled deeply and returned to her usual self.

Her forehead was drenched in sweat once more.

"What happened?" Lumian asked.

Aurore smiled and responded, "The ringing in my ears is acting up again. You know that I have this old problem."

Lumian didn't probe further. Instead, he said, "Alright, then I'll prepare lunch. Rest well."

Every time this occurred, his yearning for extraordinary abilities grew stronger, as it became a pressing matter.

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Chapter 9: Magazine

As the night settled in, Lumian finished dealing with his neighbors who had come to borrow the oven. He made his way up to the second floor, entering the room that served as Aurore's study.

In Cordu, many folks were destitute and couldn't afford their own ovens or large stoves. When they needed to toast bread or smoke meat, they had to borrow it from others and use it on the spot.

Aurore had always been lenient and accommodating when it came to this. Anyone could borrow her oven, but they had to pay the fuel costs or bring their own coal and wood.

Currently, she had donned her white silk nightdress and was curled up in a reclining chair, her focus solely on the book she held under the bright battery-powered lamp on the desk.

Lumian didn't wish to disturb her, so he nonchalantly pulled out a thinner book from the bookshelf and took a seat in the corner.

Hidden Veil… What kind of magazine is this? Lumian pondered, gazing at the cover that was adorned with cryptic symbols.

He swiftly flipped through the pages, and the more he read, the more he was taken aback.

This magazine delved into the very existence of the human soul. It discussed how all beings had a spirit, and through secret methods of communication between different spirits, one could obtain various kinds of aid.

Even if one wasn't devout, even if they only attended the Eternal Blazing Sun cathedral to pray and partake in Mass occasionally, two words couldn't help but flash through Lumian's mind: Sacrilege! Taboo!

As a Warlock who would undoubtedly be burned at the stake by the Inquisition if her true identity was exposed, it was customary for Aurore to have such books at her residence. However, Lumian could tell that this magazine had received the government's permission for publication!

Can such a thing be openly published?

Didn't they say that publication censorship had always been very strict?

Or is this a fake permit… Lumian looked up at Aurore and inquired, "Is this a prohibited magazine?"

Aurore took her eyes off her book and glanced at her brother. She responded in a nonchalant tone, "In the past, it was underground fiction. Later on, for some reason, it cleared the censors and was officially published. The Eternal Blazing Sun Church actually didn't care and tacitly agreed."

"Fiction?" Lumian was taken aback by his sister's choice of words.

"Of course, it's fiction. You're not taking it seriously, are you?" Aurore laughed. "If what's written is true, do you think it can still be published? If you follow the method written on it, other than making yourself mentally weak and neurotic, there won't be any additional gains. Yes… there will occasionally be something real, but without the corresponding ritual language, it'll be a waste of effort no matter how hard you try."

This was the professional evaluation of a Warlock.

"Alright…" Lumian couldn't hide his disappointment. "I just find it strange that this can be published."

Aurore took a deep breath, her puffed-up cheeks accentuating her pondering.

"I don't know why either. Perhaps it's because the world has been seeing an influx of supernatural events lately, and it's becoming increasingly difficult to conceal them. The public is becoming more aware of their existence, and the government is slowly easing its grip on such topics. That's why books like these are being published. In Trier, Psychic, Lotus, and Arcane are the most popular magazines. I have them all on my bookshelf. If you want to come up with more realistic stories for the tavern, you should give them a read."

"Oui," Lumian responded eagerly, his interest piqued.

Simultaneously, he let out a wistful sigh deep in his heart.

Aurore's hoard of books was truly impressive and diverse!

Thanks to these tomes and Aurore's occasional elucidations, Lumian—a lad who had forsaken his schooling—had managed to acquire a reasonable comprehension of the world, continent, and nation he called home.

The world was divided into two great continents, one to the north and one to the south, separated by the treacherous Berserk Sea, where raging hurricanes battered any who dared to sail its waters. But the truly mysterious lands lay to the east and west, on the legendary Eastern and Western Continents. No one had ever set foot there, and some wondered if they even existed at all.

Lumian and Aurore lived in the Intis Republic, a land situated in the heart of the Northern Continent. It was a nation bordered by the Fog Sea to the west, the Feysac Empire to the north, and the Hornacis mountain range and the Loen Kingdom to the east. To the south lay the Feynapotter kingdom, Lenburg, and Masin.

The small countries nestled between the Feynapotter Kingdom and the Loen Kingdom, such as Segar, together with Lenburg and Masin, were collectively known as the countries of the south-central region. They shared a common faith in the God of Knowledge and Wisdom.

The Southern Continent had already fallen under the dominion of the various powers of the Northern Continent. Whether it was the Balam Empire, the Paz Kingdom, the Haagenti Kingdom, or any of the other nations, they had all but lost their autonomy. Yet still, a fierce resistance against colonization burned in the hearts of the conquered.

In addition to the Berserk Sea dividing the Northern and Southern Continents, there were other great seas: the Fog Sea to the west of the Intis Republic, the Sonia Sea to the east of the Loen Kingdom, the North Sea to the north of the Feysac Empire, and the Polar Sea to the south of the Southern Continent. They were collectively known as the Five Seas.

Of all the nations of the Northern Continent, the Loen Kingdom was the strongest, with the Intis Republic close behind. The Feysac Empire, defeated in the last war, had fallen to fourth place. The Feynapotter Kingdom had risen to third place. And among the countries of the south-central region, Lenburg reigned supreme.

Compared to the simple folk in Cordu who only knew of the Intis Republic, the Feynapotter kingdom, and Lenburg, Lumian was practically a cartographer.

It was no surprise really, considering the Cordu Village shepherds only traveled to their neighboring kingdoms of Feynapotter and Lenburg. They only had a limited understanding of these lands. The people in the northern villages of the Dariège region were just as provincial. Other than the surrounding settlements, they could only name Trier, Suhit, and a few other metropolitans.

Lumian was often baffled. How did Aurore come by such vast knowledge?

All the textbooks he read were penned by Aurore, and all his practice exams were prepared by her. Aurore had an answer for every question in the books he read!

But what stunned him even more was her expertise in various forms of combat.

It was simply mind-boggling that a woman in her twenties could accumulate so much wisdom. Some people couldn't amass that much knowledge even after living 50 or 60 years.

Could it be that these are the building blocks of a true Warlock? Lumian looked up again and gazed at Aurore, lost in thought.

As Aurore patted her cheeks while reading, she hardly seemed like a scholar or a warlock.

Aurore caught Lumian's gaze and demanded, "What are you ogling at?"

Lumian quickly changed the subject, "Last time you mentioned that I possess the knowledge required to pass the college entrance examination?"

Aurore pondered for a moment before responding, "In theory, you could gain admission to any university, but since I never took that particular exam, I can't say for certain what questions will be asked. Roselle sure did a number on the populace. Sigh, I guess it's a good thing…"

Undoubtedly, Emperor Roselle's reign spawned the college entrance examination, and it has remained a fixture of academic life to this day.

Aurore's mind suddenly shifted gears. She shot Lumian a sly grin and inquired, "Why did you not make your usual stop at the tavern today to regale the patrons with your tales?"

"I'm not truly an alcoholic," Lumian replied while flipping through his magazine. "Reading at home is equally enjoyable."

And it helps to calm my nerves and ease my mind… Lumian silently added.

Aurore nodded and glanced over at Lumian's spot in the corner of the room.

"Why are you sitting so far away, putting on an act of pitifulness, weakness, and helplessness?"

"Come closer. You need proper lighting to read at night, otherwise, your eyes will suffer."

Aurore sure has a way with words, Lumian mused. Although I understand the meaning behind "pitifulness," "weakness," and "helplessness," it's still an odd combination. Supposedly used to her idiosyncrasies by now, Lumian retrieved a chair and moved closer to the desk where Aurore sat.

The two of them spent the evening reading in silence, occasionally chatting, as the sound of their breathing mingled with the rustling of pages and the soft breeze that wafted in from outside the window. Peaceful and soothing.

...

As he bid Aurore goodnight, Lumian slipped back into his quarters.

He peeled off his coat and draped it across the back of the chair. He couldn't risk bringing the Wand card to bed with him; that would only raise suspicion, and his sister had sworn to keep a watchful eye on him at all times.

Just as he was about to approach the bed, Lumian froze, his heart skipping a beat.

His sharp eyes darted around the room, and he adjusted the chair that was usually positioned at a diagonal angle to face the window.

Then, he crawled into bed and extinguished the kerosene lamp resting on the cabinet next to him.

As he drifted off into the depths of slumber, Lumian was suddenly startled awake.

The bedroom was shrouded in a dense, gray fog.

Lumian, who was already mentally prepared, calmly took in his surroundings and made a realization.

The chair that he had meticulously arranged before retiring for the night was still positioned at an angle in his dream, just as it had been in reality in the past.

This suggested that the dream world he had entered was not an exact reflection of reality. Perhaps it was a manifestation of his deepest subconscious desires. Although Lumian couldn't decipher its meaning, he knew that it was something to be remembered.

He walked over to the window, placed his hands on the sill, and gazed out.

The mountain made of brownish-red stones and reddish-brown soil, and the collapsed buildings that surrounded it, were still present.

The eerie silence of the place was deafening.

Time quickly passed. After much contemplation, Lumian made a firm decision.

He would embark on a preliminary exploration of the area tonight!

His past life on the streets had turned him into a man of action.

He didn't rush downstairs, however. Instead, he opened the cabinet and began to pile on clothes.

He didn't need them to keep warm, but he wanted to increase his "defense ability" in this way.

He grabbed a cotton shirt, cotton pants, and a leather jacket, stretching his body to feel the fit. Any more clothing would only hinder his agility, and that was crucial in a situation like this.

As he adjusted to his current state, Lumian had a sudden thought.

This is my dream. Can't I get whatever I want?

With that intention, he muttered to himself, "I want a breastplate and a revolver… I want a breastplate and a revolver…"

The room was still shrouded in a thin, gray fog.

This won't do. This dream is special… His disappointment was palpable, but he quickly regained his composure and made his way to the bedroom door. Stepping out into the corridor, he found himself in complete darkness. It was murky and dim.

Lumian pushed open the door to Aurore's bedroom and then her study. The layout was slightly different from reality, but he recognized it immediately. The biggest difference, of course, was that Aurore was nowhere to be found. The entire scene was frozen in shades of gray.

The first floor was no different.

Lumian scanned his surroundings, searching for a weapon to defend himself. He knew his home better than anyone else and quickly found two viable options.

The first was a two-meter-long fork made of steel. Aurore had said that it was effective and outstanding as long as the target didn't have a long-range weapon.

The second was a sharp, iron-black hand axe.

Ah, why not both… Lumian couldn't help but think of Aurore's oft-repeated phrase, but he quickly dismissed the idea.

Today was all about reconnaissance. He needed to be sly, hidden in the shadows.

Lugging around a cumbersome weapon would only hinder his movements and give him away.

Taking a deep breath, Lumian stooped down to retrieve the axe.

He rose to his full height and set off towards the door, barely visible in the misty haze.

With a deft hand, he opened the door, not making a sound.

Chapter 10: Blood

As Lumian stepped out the door, he felt as thought he was transported to another world.

Before him lay no longer the familiar Cordu, but a dark-red mountain peak and the collapsed buildings surrounding it. Together, they formed a strange ruin.

The fog in the sky was thick and pale, making it difficult for light to enter. The ground was shattered and there were many rocks. Lumian gripped his axe tightly and inched forward carefully, his heart pounding in his chest. Along the way, he couldn't find a place to hide.

There were no weeds or trees.

Lumian walked in fear, his every sense on high alert. All he could do was hunch his back and comfort himself. At the very least, if there was any danger in this area, it would be obvious at a glance. He could discover it in advance.

Finally, he arrived at the ruins, a half-collapsed building that had been wrecked by fire.

Lumian surveyed the area for a moment and tentatively confirmed that there were no other creatures lurking about. Satisfied with his assessment, he cautiously made his way inside the building, being mindful of the charred wood that could fall at any moment from midair.

As he searched the room, his eyes landed on a broken pot in the corner of the house. There was a hint of gold shining through the cracks.

Lumian approached the pot slowly and realized that it was a gold coin.

Can it be true? There's actually treasure in the ruins of my dream? He picked up the gold coin and wiped it against his body.

The patterns on the surface of the coin were revealed.

The coin featured a man's portrait carved on the front. His face was thin, and his hair was parted 30-70. There was a mustache on his lips, and his gaze was rather firm. On the back was a bunch of sweet iris flowers surrounding the number 20.

Lumian recognized the man depicted on the coin. It was none other than the first president of the Intis Republic, Levanx.

It's actually a Louis d'or… Lumian was rather surprised.

Firstly, he couldn't believe that the currency in this strange dream ruin was actually the currency of the Intis Republic in reality. And secondly, he had casually picked up something as valuable as a Louis d'or.

He knew that in the present day, the legal currencies of the Intis Republic were verl d'or and coppet. One verl d'or was equivalent to 100 coppet.

Coppet existed in the form of copper coins and silver coins. The copper coins were divided into three categories: 1 coppet, 5 coppet, 10 coppet, while the silver coins had the denominations of 20 coppet and 50 coppet.

Verl d'or could be found in the form of silver coins, gold coins, or banknotes. In silver coins, there were denominations of 1, 5, and 10 verl d'or, while gold coins came in 5, 10, 20, 40, and 50 denominations.

The denominations of banknotes were even more varied, ranging from 5, 20, 50, 100, 200, 500, 1,000 verl d'or.

In reality, the people of Intis still clung to the old currency units. For example, the most widely used 5 coppet copper coins were known as 'lick.'

Similarly, gold coins worth 20 verl were commonly referred to as Louis d'or.

In the old currency era, Louis d'or had been known as Roselle. But after the Republic was established, the name was changed to Louis d'or in order to erase Emperor Roselle's influence.

As Lumian understood it, even in the rural area of Cordu, a Louis d'or could sustain a poor family with fields for an entire month.

He knew that without Aurore's high income, he might never have even seen what a Louis d'or looked like. In fact, in the entire village of Cordu, only the siblings and the family of the administrator had ever seen or owned a Louis d'or.

To any villager, this Louis d'or was an incredibly valuable gain.

Unfortunately, this is just a dream… Lumian couldn't help but feel a pang of disappointment.

This was something ordinary, making it unlikely he could "bring" it out of the dream.

But even so, he handled the Louis d'or with great care and respect. Having spent much of his life wandering, he knew the value of every coppet.

And he knew that one Louis d'or was equivalent to 2,000 coppet, which was equal to one gold pound in the Loen Kingdom, though slightly less. According to the papers he had read, 24 verl d'or could only be exchanged for one gold pound.

Lumian continued his search for any written information that could shed light on the ruins and their history. He wanted to see if this place corresponded to a certain location in reality, and whether a village in the Intis Republic had been "transported" into this dream world. The appearance of the Louis d'or had only fueled his curiosity.

As Lumian moved cautiously through the ruined building, his eyes fell upon a spot where a stove had once stood, now stained with a dark red color.

"Blood?" His pupils dilated as he quickly made a guess.

Immediately after, he made a judgment.

Although it wasn't fresh, it hadn't yet turned black—it looked as though it had just dripped there two or three days prior, or perhaps even more recently!

As his heart began to race, Lumian suddenly felt the light around him dim, as if something had silently blocked the light filtering through the dense fog from above!

The memory of past attacks flooded Lumian's mind like a turbulent wave, causing him to react instinctively.

Without a thought, he lunged forward and wrapped his body in midair, rolling on the ground to avoid any potential danger.

Thump!

A loud thump echoed through the air as something heavy fell behind him.

Lumian quickly rolled to the left side of the dilapidated stove, using a nearby rock to leverage himself around.

As he rose to his feet, axe at the ready, he saw an additional figure standing where he had just been moments before.

The dim light made it difficult to discern whether it was human or some kind of humanoid creature.

The figure hunched in front of Lumian was unlike anything he had ever seen before. It was a monster, with no clothes or shoes to speak of. Its skin had been peeled off, revealing the red muscles, blood vessels, and yellowed fascia beneath. Sticky liquid dripped from its body, yet it didn't fall to the ground.

It was a monster!

Its eyes seemed to be embedded in its face, and its mouth hung open with all its might, revealing uneven teeth and a long drool of saliva.

Despite all the ghost stories Lumian had fabricated in the past, he never expected to encounter such an evil spirit in real life.

Whoosh!

The stench of blood filled Lumian's nostrils as the panting of the monster filled his ears.

Instinct took over Lumian as he dodged to the side, narrowly avoiding the blood-red monster's attack.

Lumian knew that he had Aurore's guidance and years of experience fighting on the streets to thank for his quick reflexes. Without them, he might not have been able to react in time.

Taking a deep breath to calm himself, Lumian charged after the monster that had pounced on him. With his sharp axe in hand, he swung with all his might and struck the monster in the back.

Bang!

Lumian's axe felled the monster mid-turn, sending a spray of pus and blood in every direction.

Without a moment's hesitation, Lumian knelt down on one knee and raised his axe again, ready to strike another blow.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Again and again, Lumian swung his axe with precision and force, each strike slicing through the monster's flesh and leaving deep, wide cracks on the back of its head, neck, and back.

Finally, the monster lay still, defeated by Lumian's fierce barrage of blows.

"Huff! Puff! You don't act as terrifyingly as you look." Lumian heaved a sigh of relief, his voice tinged with a hint of mockery.

He wiped his face with his left hand, then used it to wipe off the blood on his other hand.

"Is this monster's bodily fluids poisonous? For the time being, there's no pain of the fluids eating at me…" Lumian began to worry about another problem.

Just as Lumian mustered up his courage and was about to search the monster's body, he was caught off guard by a sudden movement. The skinless, blood-colored monster propped itself up with both hands and bounced up again, as if it were still alive.

It isn't dead yet?

Despite being slashed to such a state, it seemed that the monster was still alive.

Lumian was shocked and afraid.

Fear and trepidation took hold of Lumian.

If Lumian had been facing normal humans, beasts, or monsters, he would not have been so afraid, even if he couldn't defeat them. But this monster in front of him seemed unkillable, rendering Lumian's every move useless.

Taking advantage of the monster's brief disorientation, Lumian made a quick decision. He propped himself up with his feet, exerted strength on his knees, and ran wildly.

Thud! Thud! Thud!

He ran with all his might, but he could feel the monster's breath on the back of his neck, and the sound of its heavy breathing echoed in his ears.

The monster followed closely behind him.

Despite his fear, Lumian gritted his teeth and allowed his fear to push himself

to run even faster, surpassing his previous limits.

To his delight, he soon realized that the distance between him and the monster was no longer shortening.

Thud! Thud! Thud!

Lumian finally reached his semi-subterranean two-story building as he pulled open the unlocked door and jumped inside.

With a loud clang, he slammed the door shut and quickly made his way to the stove, where he picked up a steel fork that was leaning against the wall.

Then he focused on the door.

But then, he heard the sound of the monster's running footsteps fading away. He waited, but the monster didn't try to slam through the door.

It knows that I'm lying in ambush here? Lumian couldn't believe that the monster had higher intelligence.

He slowly moved towards the window near the door and peeked out.

Suddenly, a face appeared on the glass—a bloody, skinless mess with uneven teeth.

Lumian froze for a moment, his heart almost stopping.

To Lumian's surprise, the monster didn't try to break the glass or attack him. Instead, it simply met his gaze.

Lumian snapped out of his daze and retreated, brandishing the long fork with both hands.

The monster left the window.

Lumian watched cautiously, observing its movements as it lingered in the light fog for a while before finally retreating back to the ruins.

Lumian was at a loss.

He had been prepared to trap the monster and make a quick escape from the dream, but the creature had simply left without attacking.

After some thought, a possibility occurred to Lumian. Perhaps the monster is afraid to enter my house?

Yes, there's no signs of damage to the house at all…

In the dream, this is an absolutely safe place?

With this realization, Lumian felt a sense of relief wash over him.

Lumian was hit with a wave of exhaustion the next second.

The short chase had taken more out of him than an entire afternoon of combat training.

Lumian made his way upstairs to his bedroom, clutching the pitchfork and axe tightly in his hands. As he lay down on the bed, Lumian attempted to fall asleep.

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Lumian opened his eyes, feeling disoriented and groggy.

Outside the curtains, it was still dark, and the room was shrouded in shadows.

For a moment, Lumian couldn't tell if he was still in the dream world or if he had somehow returned to reality. But then he noticed the lack of gray fog and the fact that he was wearing his pajamas, and he realized that he must have woken up.

"I woke up early because of the fright," Lumian muttered to himself, subconsciously patting the pocket of his pajamas. But when he didn't feel the weight of the Louis d'or, he felt a pang of disappointment.

It confirmed another fact—that money couldn't be brought out of the dream world!

Lumian took a deep breath and composed himself, his thoughts turning to a serious problem:

How was he supposed to deal with that unkillable monster?

While Lumian knew that he could bypass the area and enter stealthily, he also knew that this was not a long-term solution. The possibility of encountering similar monsters in the future was always there, and he couldn't afford to risk his life by being unprepared.

Chapter 11: Madame Pualis

The azure sky was speckled with fluffy white clouds, gently blown by the spring breeze that carried with it the fragrance of the forest. White geese pecked at the lush grasses, grazing beside the meandering river. A lass, draped in a grayish-white frock, stood intently observing them with a long pole in her hand.

Her countenance was bathed in the golden sun rays, exposing her thin, downy hair. The girl's brown tresses, elegantly tied in a white cloth, revealed her youthful and lively features.

Glancing at Lumian sitting under a tree by the river, Ava Lizier scrunched her face slightly.

"Are we not here to discuss which legend is easier to investigate? Why have you turned into a stone statue reminiscent of the ones from the cathedral?"

Ava was the daughter of Guillaume Lizier, the shoemaker. Being one of the few youths in the village, she had an amiable relationship with Lumian and Reimund.

"I'm contemplating a problem," Lumian responded, still gazing at the white geese and the rippling waters.

"What problem?" inquired Reimund Greg, who was tending to Ava's flock of geese.

Lumian pondered before replying, "What if you come across a beast with a thick hide that your weapon cannot pierce, what would you do?"

"Obviously, I'd find a way to flee. The mountains are teeming with wild beasts. We need not hunt it," Ava replied, feeling that there was nothing to worry about.

Lumian grunted in disagreement.

"What if that beast is exceptionally rare, and the lords in the city adore it, and are willing to pay a hundred Louis d'or for its carcass?"

"A hundred Louis d'or, two thousand verl d'or…" Reimund breathed heavily.

He had never seen a Louis d'or before, nor had he used one. His instinct was to convert it into verl d'or first.

With such a hefty sum of money, he could start a small business in Dariège. He wouldn't have to fret over shepherding anymore.

He quickly thought and suggested, "Borrow a shotgun?"

"The beast's skin cannot be penetrated," Lumian rejected flatly.

Even though she knew the prey was just a figment of imagination, with no value in the real world, she couldn't help herself.

"Is it a powerful creature? Fierce?"

Lumian paused to consider her question.

"It's about as fierce as me."

That was all the assurance he needed to continue his hunt.

Reimund, who had been holding his breath, let out a sigh of relief. "Good. Go back to the village and round up some people. We'll surround the beast and drain its strength. Once it's down, we'll tie it up."

He knew that Lumian could fight, but that was all.

"In that case, we can only expect to get ten Louis d'or, or even less," Lumian reminded.

Ava, with her stunning lake-blue eyes, had an idea. "I've seen them hunt before. Maybe we can dig a trap and make it fall. That way, we won't have to worry about it getting back up."

Lumian nodded his approval. "That's a good idea."

Realizing that Ava and Reimund had little to offer in terms of planning, Lumian took control of the conversation.

"Which legend do you think we should target next?" he asked.

Ava shook her head. "Neither of them fit the bill. They're either centuries old or were only seen by one person, who is long dead."

Reimund agreed. "That's right."

"If you don't ask the right folks, how would you know there ain't no clues?" Lumian clicked his tongue and chuckled. "You lot don't have any grit. If you wanna give up at the first sign of trouble, you might as well be tending geese and sheep for the rest of your days."

Ava and Reimund were fuming at Lumian's words.

When it came to riling people up, Lumian was one of the best in all of Cordu.

Ava blurted out, "I don't think any of them are suitable 'cause there are more suitable ones."

"What is it?" Lumian's eyes sparked with interest.

As soon as Ava spoke, she regretted it, but she'd been planning to bring up this issue. She just didn't want to reveal it to Lumian and Reimund so easily.

After a few seconds of tense silence, she glared at Lumian.

"There's a real witch in the village."

"Who is it?" Lumian's heart tightened.

Could it be Aurore?

If Ava found out that Aurore was a Warlock, he and Aurore would have to flee Cordu and go somewhere else to avoid the Inquisition's wrath.

Ava looked around nervously and lowered her voice. "Madame Pualis."

Madame Pualis, the administrator's wife and the padre's mistress? Lumian found it hard to believe.

"Are you serious?"

If Pualis was indeed a witch, how could Lumian have missed it when he found out about the lady's affair with the padre?

"No way?" Reimund was exceptionally surprised.

Ava tiptoed and looked in the direction of the village entrance.

"I'm not certain, but Charlie, the administrator's valet, let it slip once.

"He told me that Madame Pualis is a soul messenger who can talk to the dead and help them return home. He also said that she can create secret medicines and charms."

Lumian listened intently but remained skeptical.

With magazines like Psychic, Lotus, and Hidden Veil flooding the market, it wasn't uncommon for the administrator's wife to be familiar with such terms and trick the servants and villagers.

"We should go to the cathedral and snitch," said Reimund, his eyes wide with excitement.

Lumian paused before responding, "If Charlie knows that Madame Pualis is a witch, then the administrator should know as well, right?"

"Oui," agreed Ava.

Lumian continued, "Madame Pualis is also the padre's mistress. If we go to the cathedral and snitch on her, we will probably be sent straight to the administrator."

"What?"

"Madame Pualis is the padre's mistress?"

Ava and Reimund were shocked.

"I saw it with my own eyes." Lumian chuckled. "Pretend you don't know. Don't tell anyone. Otherwise, you might disappear one day."

Ava and Reimund agreed in unison, their expressions unusually solemn, their fear of the padre and the witch intertwined.

"If we can confirm that Madame Pualis is a witch, we'll go to Dariège and tell the bishop at Mass," Lumian assured them.

"Oui," Reimund nodded fervently.

They had to be sure before they snitched. Otherwise, they would be in trouble if Madame Pualis was innocent.

After discussing these matters, Lumian, who didn't want to waste any time, stood up and said to Ava and Reimund, "I'm off, back to my studies. Otherwise, Aurore would be chasing me with a wooden stick. You two take care of the geese."

"Okay." Reimund was thrilled at the prospect of being left alone with Ava.

Ava looked displeased.

......

As Lumian approached Cordu, he began to hide his tracks, constantly paying attention to whether there was anyone nearby.

He had to be careful, especially now that the Padre and his crew were on his tail.

According to his observations, the padre, Guillaume Bénet, was not one to forgive easily.

He made his way towards Ol' Tavern, trying to stay as inconspicuous as possible.

Suddenly, he heard the sound of bells ringing in the distance.

Lumian turned to see Ryan, Leah, and Valentine approaching Naroka and the others.

The bells on Leah's veil and boots rang clearly and melodiously.

They've been wandering around the village for the past two days, chatting with people and asking questions. I don't know what they are up to… Lumian was puzzled and a little wary.

As he thought about the deserted town square and the shepherd, Pierre Berry, who had returned to the village unexpectedly, Lumian knew that something was about to go down.

Is something about to happen in the village? He needed to speak to Aurore, his smart and knowledgeable sister, and get her opinion.

Lumian managed to sneak into Ol' Tavern and spotted the woman who had given him the tarot card sitting in her usual spot, eating.

Lumian leaned over and took a glance.

"Omelette au lard? Don't you find it a little too cloying?"

In Dariège, this dish was the go-to for ordinary folks to impress their fancy guests. Lumian, however, had his doubts about it being too greasy and heavy for city women.

The lady savored a slow bite of the golden omelet and shut her eyes to savor it.

"It's a real gem. It's got this local flavor that's just exquisite."

"You're having lunch so early?" Lumian asked, seated across from her.

The lady's light-blue eyes betrayed a hint of exhaustion as she smiled and replied, "It's breakfast."

What time is it… Lumian didn't dare let slip his thoughts.

He scanned the nearly empty Ol' Tavern and hushed his voice.

"I saw a ruin in my dream and came across a monster."

"Oh." The lady didn't bat an eye. Her expression even held a hint of teasing mischief that Lumian couldn't quite decipher.

Lumian composed himself and recounted his tale.

"How do I vanquish this monster?"

The lady beamed and countered, "Is it dead or alive?"

"It's still kicking. I can't seem to kill it…" Lumian trailed off then answered on reflex.

He pondered in earnest for a beat before replying slowly, "I can feel it breathing. So, it's gotta be alive."

"If it's still breathing, then try harder. Lop off its head. Or pour oil and light it up. Bury it alive, even. Who knows? It might just kick the bucket," the lady suggested nonchalantly while relishing her meal. "When you've exhausted all options and still come up short, then come to me. But I'm not your nanny who'll coddle you through every little problem. If you want to learn, you've got to figure it out on your own."

She's quite the charmer… Lumian wasn't crestfallen or dispirited. It seemed the lady was hinting that she'd lend a hand if things got truly dire. And a monster like this wasn't even worth mentioning.

But what's trivial can be a real headache… Lumian felt a migraine coming on.

He resolved to heed the lady's advice. He'd start by trying to behead it, burn it, bury it alive, and anything else he could think of.

Chapter 12: Undercurrents

As Lumian left Ol' Tavern, he resumed his surreptitious ways, skulking down the path he always took home.

Sure enough, he spotted one of Pons Bénet's goons hiding behind a tree, spying on passersby.

The padre doesn't know when to quit… Lumian muttered to himself.

But Lumian couldn't retaliate.

His personal abilities were limited, and he couldn't risk bringing attention from the Church of the Eternal Blazing Sun in the Dariège region. The Inquisition would be all over him in a heartbeat, which could spell doom for Aurore.

Unless Lumian was pushed to the brink and had no other choice but to abandon the town, his only option was to expose the padre's unsavory activities and force him to retire to a cloister.

But that was easier said than done. Lumian needed to be careful and cunning, just like when he let the foreigners discover the padre's affair with Madame Pualis.

Lumian didn't want to make a big fuss about it. He knew that Béost, the administrator and territorial judge, was a stickler for his reputation. If Lumian brought Madame Pualis's predicament to light, he wouldn't get any favors in return. No, it would be more likely that Béost would turn on him, filled with bile and vitriol.

That would leave Lumian with little choice but to flee Cordu, with both the padre and administrator hot on his heels.

He proceeded with caution, taking a detour through a narrow alley that weaved between several houses.

Along the way, Lumian relied on his wits and the surroundings to conceal himself. He ducked behind walls, slipped through doors, and took refuge behind trees whenever necessary. As he neared the end of the alley, he heard the sound of voices.

"Guillaume, why we waste our time chasing zat keed all day? Let's go to Aurore's house tonight and catch him. We 'ave ze advantage of numbers, and Aurore's fightin' skills ain't enough to stop us. We can even get reinforcements from ze city if needed."

Guillaume… The padre is here too… Lumian stopped, retreating into the corner to eavesdrop on their conversation to see what plans the padre had for him.

Guillaume Bénet's voice was mesmerizing.

"Surely, you don't think that's the extent of Aurore's capabilities? I wouldn't be surprised if she had supernatural abilities beyond mine."

"Ah…" Pons Bénet was obviously surprised. "A witch, you say? Guillaume, maybe it's time for you to venture to Dariège and seek out ze Inquisition. If you can catch a true witch, ze Church will undoubtedly grant you a great reward. And wiz zat, you may finally attain ze extraordinary strength you've been yearnin' for all zese years."

"Imbecile," Guillaume Bénet scolded his brother. "Don't you know what's happening in this village? The Inquisition has noses like hounds. They won't overlook any anomalies. When the time comes, we'll be in hot water."

"Even if Aurore desires to deal with us, I have other solutions," he said. "We mustn't arouse the Inquisition's attention."

So, what is happening in the village now? Lumian took this seriously and was curious.

Combining his observations of abnormalities, he sensed that something terrible was brewing and developing in the village, like a turbulent undercurrent under the calm sea.

To Lumian's dismay, Pons Bénet didn't elaborate on the topic. Instead, he focused on something else.

"Do you 'ave any way to deal wiz a Witch?"

"You don't need to know," the padre, Guillaume Bénet, responded in a hushed tone. "Next, we can put aside dealing with Lumian, but we still have to maintain appearances. We can't let anyone suspect my desire for revenge. That will provide the connections the foreigners need and have a negative impact. What you need to do now is to remind each relevant person and scare those yokels who might notice. Don't let them spill the beans in front of those foreigners."

"Guillaume, you mean zat zose foreigners are 'ere to investigate zat matter?" Pons Bénet appeared fearful and concerned.

Look at you. All brawn, no brains. You're nothing like your brother, a natural-born leader… Lumian mocked Pons Bénet inwardly.

Despite his disdain for the padre, whom he saw as a crude and greedy stallion rather than a man of the cloth, Lumian couldn't deny that he had a certain rugged charm. His direct, domineering style and clear mind won over the masses in the countryside, making it easy for them to idolize and rely on him.

Guillaume Bénet sneered.

"No need to worry. So long as those foreigners don't find any real evidence, I'll still be the padre of Cordu.

"Pons, you need to understand that ruling through fear and intimidation won't lead to peace or prosperity. The Church doesn't want a ruined town that can't pay taxes. We need friends and followers to maintain control. By offering them protection, we can gain their support.

"The Church trusts us locals with our relatives, friends, and followers to handle matters here and doesn't bring in outsiders who could make a mess. As long as there's no solid evidence, the higher-ups will continue to believe in me.

"Alright, I'm off to the cathedral."

That does sound logical and persuasive, but your wisdom and insight are limited to Dariège… Aurore told me that when the Church confronts villages that are overrun with evil gods, they obliterate them entirely and raze the land to the ground. They don't just slay the adults, but even the kids… Lumian found himself almost swayed by Guillaume Bénet's words. Luckily, Aurore had warned him about the fearsome reputation of the Church of the Eternal Blazing Sun and the Church of the God of Steam and Machinery.

After the padre departed, Lumian took a different path and made it back home unscathed.

Aurore, clad in a pristine apron, bustled about the oven.

"What are you up to?" Lumian inquired with curiosity.

It was still two hours to lunchtime.

Aurore tucked a strand of her blonde locks behind her ear and beamed, "Trying out a new toast recipe. Rice bread."

"You don't have to go through all this trouble…" Lumian was moved to his core.

He believed Aurore was going out of her way to make something special just for him.

Aurore giggled and retorted, "What are you thinking? Can you be any more self-absorbed?"

"For me, baking is a form of amusement. It's a great way to pass the time. You get it?"

"Then why don't you like going out? There's plenty of fun out there," Lumian probed. He always felt Aurore was a homebody because she was too concerned about the risks her Warlock status posed.

Aurore swiveled her head and shot him a withering glare.

"You mean drinking and gambling?"

"Remember, I'm my own person, not relying on or attaching to others."

Lumian grasped the first half of her statement but was at a loss with the latter.

"Ah? Could you expound on that?"

Aurore gave him a deadly glare.

"Long story short, your sis is a major introvert most of the time!"

"What do you mean by most of the time?" Lumian queried, confused.

"Humans are walking contradictions," Aurore mused, turning back to the oven. "Don't you recall? Sometimes, I'm a chatterbox, eager to venture out and listen to the old ladies' gossip. Other times, I'll play with the kids and regale them with tales. Every so often, I'll cut loose and ride Madame Pualis' horse around the mountains, hollering at the top of my lungs."

At the time, you shone like a dew-kissed rose, luring people in only to prick them… Lumian couldn't help but grumble to himself.

Since Madame Pualis was mentioned, Lumian decided to change the subject.

"Aurore, uh, Grande Soeur, I heard a rumor about Madame Pualis."

"What is it?" Aurore did not hide her curiosity.

"She's a Warlock who can talk to the dead…" Lumian related to his sister what Ava had divulged. He also brought up the anomaly he'd observed and

Guillaume Bénet's comments.

Aurore halted her work and listened to her brother's account intently.

Her mien grew noticeably graver.

After Lumian had finished, Aurore offered him a smile and assuaged his fears.

"Don't fret too much. Those three foreigners must be here for something that the padre and his comrades did in secret. It might have to do with Madame Pualis.

"Don't mess with Madame Pualis for now. I'll keep an eye on them.

"Explore the village more, mingle with those foreigners, and try to suss out what's going on. Heh heh, compared to that, the lady who gave you the Wand card is far more intriguing.

"If things do deteriorate, we must contemplate departing Cordu. We can start making arrangements now."

"Okay." Lumian nodded in agreement.

After a brief silence, he inquired curiously, "Aurore, if we must depart Cordu, where do you envision moving to?"

"Trier!" Aurore declared without hesitation.

Trier was the capital of the Intis Republic, the apex of culture and art across the continent.

"Why?" Despite considering Trier himself, Lumian posed the question casually.

Every Intisian coveted a chance to visit Trier.

In the eyes of the Triers, there were only two types of individuals in Intis: Triers and outsiders.

Aurore responded nonchalantly, "A prophet once said, 'As long as Trier endures, mirth and glee will never falter.'"

",

Chapter 13: Attempt

It was the dead of night, and all was quiet.

Lumian stirred in his dream once more. The first thing he glimpsed was a faint gray mist.

On impulse, he reached into his shirt pocket with his hand.

The frigid sensation of cold, hard metal immediately registered in his mind.

He retrieved the object he'd felt. A glint of gold illuminated his eyes.

It was a gold coin.

A Louis d'or.

It's still here… Lumian sat up and peered down at himself.

He still donned the cotton attire, pants, and leather jacket from his last expedition. The nearly two-meter-long steel pitchfork and sharp, iron-black axe rested within arm's reach.

This was precisely the same condition as when he'd exited the dream.

In other words, this dream is persistent. It doesn't reset with each entry… Lumian fiddled with the Louis d'or and slipped it into his cotton shirt's inner pocket.

Though it couldn't be actualized, it was still a joy to have.

Lumian rose from bed and gazed out the window for a spell, ensuring the red mountain peak in the ruins hadn't changed.

He hoisted his axe and pitchfork, departed his chamber, and entered the dimly lit corridor.

Aurore's bedroom and study doors remained ajar.

Lumian studied them briefly, then suddenly conceived an idea.

In the dream, my room is practically identical to reality. It contains all the expected elements. Aurore's room appears the same at first glance.

However, can I locate her witchcraft notebook, secret potion formula, or learn how to become a Warlock in her quarters?

This notion was akin to a devil's whisper, causing Lumian's heart to race. He was tempted to try.

Compared to exploring the unknown, hazardous, enigmatic ruins, sifting through Aurore's room was the simpler, safer option.

No, no! Lumian shook his head vigorously and cast the idea aside.

He'd rather take his chances than violate Aurore's privacy. He wouldn't venture into her bedroom without her approval.

This was due to his respect for Aurore.

If it weren't for Aurore, he would have perished as a child on the streets five years ago.

Lumian withdrew his pained gaze and made his way to the stairs.

If the occupant of the room wasn't Aurore, he would have already delved in to search for useful information.

Once downstairs, Lumian didn't hasten his departure. Instead, he inspected the provisions in the kitchen.

The olive oil, corn oil, and animal fat that Aurore had amassed were neatly arranged in buckets and cans, just like in reality.

Almost instinctively, Lumian lifted the bucket of corn oil and positioned it near the stove.

His sole reason for selecting it was that animal fat and olive oil were pricier.

Then he adeptly kindled a blaze in the hearth with coal and wood, and fashioned a couple of torches to ignite.

He was preparing to incinerate that monster.

Naturally, it would be preferable if there were other options. That was a last resort.

After completing these tasks, he retrieved his axe, opened the door, and departed.

Lumian then observed something unusual.

The faint gray mist that suffused the dream felt more humid than before. The ground beneath his feet was also slightly muddy.

It rained? This place persists and develops naturally according to certain laws when I'm absent or dreaming? Lumian was somewhat taken aback, but he had an inkling that it was only fitting.

Recalling Aurore's bizarre tales, he suddenly had a notion.

This can't be the real world, can it?

My dream is connected to the genuine world. That tarot card enables me to traverse the barrier between dream and the ruins while conscious?

Lumian swiftly surveyed his surroundings and realized that an endless gray fog bordered both sides of the ruins, on the dream's periphery.

I'll check later. I won't venture into the ruins. I'll stroll out of the gray fog and see if it's a surreal and irrational dream after passing through the gray fog, or if there's tangible land, sky, village, and town…

If it were the former, it signified that this place was still a dream. If it wasn't, Lumian had to confirm which world this was.

He surmised that based on the usage of the Louis d'or, this place still appeared to be in the Intis Republic, but it might not be the present era. It could be a location that had vanished decades or centuries ago.

However, Lumian sensed that there was a high likelihood that he wouldn't be able to exit the encompassing gray fog.

He gathered his thoughts and proceeded toward the ruins.

He didn't forget that the purpose of entering the dream was to attempt to contend with that monster.

After traversing a hundred to two hundred meters in the muddy wilderness riddled with gravel and crevices, Lumian abruptly halted.

He thought of a problem.

He'd overlooked something in his preparations earlier!

Previously, his two-story abode lacked any flames. It was quite secure in this world cloaked in gray fog. But now, it had a blazing furnace that emitted light. Would it draw in a swarm of monsters and render the safe zone unsafe?

Lumian instinctively turned his head and peered in the direction he'd come from. He observed that a scarlet gleam had been etched on various glass windows at the base of the half-submerged two-story structure in the faint gray mist.

It was akin to a beacon in the dark world.

Considering that a considerable amount of time had elapsed, it was evidently too late to attempt to extinguish the fire. Lumian hastened his pace and entered the ruins, taking refuge in the building that had crumbled due to a conflagration.

He clipped the axe to the back of his belt and agilely scaled a wall, concealing himself in a shadowy nook separated by bricks and timber.

Lumian gazed at his home on the other side of the wilderness.

As time ticked by, he didn't witness any monsters lured by the fire.

Seems like the fire won't trigger any changes. At the very least, my house won't be besieged by monsters… Lumian breathed a sigh of relief.

This meant that even if he encountered any peril, as long as he could flee home promptly and slumber as soon as possible, he could successfully elude it.

He began to contemplate how to entice and eliminate the previous monster.

From their brief skirmish, he'd deduced that its strength, speed, reaction time, and agility were similar to his, but he could sense that it fought on instinct. It lacked sufficient experience, expertise, or corresponding intelligence. That's why he'd been able to counter and slay it when it ambushed him…

It'll also be bewildered and taken aback. It's not dissimilar to humans…

Other than combat techniques, I have two other advantages over it. Firstly, I possess superior intelligence. Secondly, I know how to wield weapons and utilize tools. This is the greatest advantage humans possess over such monsters…

As long as I'm cautious, defeating it again won't be arduous. The most crucial aspect is how to eradicate it completely…

Just as Lumian was about to deliberately stir up some commotion to see if he could lure over some monster, he spied a figure stealthily approaching the utterly ruined house on the side.

The figure was crimson and devoid of skin. Its muscles, blood vessels, and fascia were exposed. It was the monster from last time.

Unlike before, this monster was wielding a manure fork.

A manure fork!

It knows how to wield weapons too... Lumian's countenance stiffened as his expression turned grim.

Unwittingly, his confidence waned a bit.

As the monster drew closer and turned, Lumian perceived exaggerated wounds on its back, neck, and the nape of its neck. However, the fissures were no longer oozing pus, and it appeared to have mostly mended.

It's indeed the one I encountered previously…

Its self-healing ability is many times superior to that of ordinary humans…

Lumian gasped soundlessly.

He compelled himself to compose and expeditiously assessed the situation.

In the twinkling of an eye, Lumian arrived at a determination.

This was a prime opportunity, and he had to seize it when he encountered it. He couldn't let it slip by!

He silently retrieved a stone brick beside him and awaited the monster's arrival at the desired location.

In just a few strides, the monster entered Lumian's kill zone.

Lumian abruptly hurled the stone brick at the ground behind the monster.

Thud!

The stone brick clattered, causing the monster to swivel around and scrutinize the assailant.

Upon beholding this, Lumian seized the axe with both hands and pounced fiercely from the wall towards the monster.

Bang!

The axe descended heavily onto the monster's neck, cleaving it in two.

With twin thuds, Lumian and the monster plummeted to the ground simultaneously.

Lumian sprang up nimbly, seized his axe, and darted over, delivering weighty slashes to the monster's neck.

Once, twice, thrice. The monster didn't even get a chance to resist before its head was lopped off.

As the head rolled aside, the skinless body convulsed twice and ceased movement.

Lumian didn't halt there. He took a diagonal step, rotated his axe, and pulverized the vicious head with its thick back, reducing it to fragments.

Subsequently, he pivoted and hacked at the exposed muscles, blood vessels, and fascia, crushing the heart and other vital organs.

After accomplishing all of this, Lumian took two paces backward and surveyed his handiwork. He panted and chuckled softly.

"I thought you were truly invincible. Who'd have thought you possessed so little ability!"

Amidst the subdued laughter, the decapitated cadaver abruptly jolted upward.

Lumian's pupils contracted, and he instinctively wished to pivot and flee.

He forcefully quelled this impulse and strode forward once more, brandishing his axe.

After the corpse bounced twice, it reverted to immobility, as if it had writhed in vain.

Lumian scrutinized it a while longer and ultimately verified that the monster was wholly deceased.

How tenacious... Lumian sighed inwardly. Then, he leaned over and crouched down. He employed his axe to pry open the muscles and fascias and scrutinized the corpse.

The monster's bodily structure wasn't dissimilar to a human's, but its muscles were evidently more animated. Even though it was already dead, some of its incisions were still wriggling slightly.

There's no treasure, nor is there any supernatural power transferred into my body… Lumian assessed his present state and felt somewhat disenchanted.

The adage that one grows stronger with each monster they slay indeed only existed in Aurore's tales.

He then relocated the monster's corpse and head into the ruined building and entombed them with bricks and timber.

Subsequently, he scoured the burnt-down house, hoping to discover something.

Chapter 14: Different Monster

After a bout of searching, Lumian stumbled upon a considerable number of gold coins, silver coins, and copper coins. In total, there were 197 verl d'or and 25 coppet.

Among them, Louis d'or alone constituted five.

As for the paper bills, he only discovered some suspected remnants.

Aside from money, Lumian also discovered a small blue book.

The book had a grayish-blue cover and measured approximately 21 by 28.5 centimeters, a typical size found in Intis villages and towns.

It was based on the calendar and blended with the religious teachings of the two major Churches. It had a rather positive effect on guiding farmers and herders to farm, produce, and graze to enrich their spiritual lives.

Naturally, even though it had been nearly two centuries since Emperor Roselle advocated compulsory education, there were still a large number of farmers, herdsmen, and workers who knew no more than a handful of words and were illiterate. They could only rely on the explanations of certain people around them to obtain the instructions they needed from the blue book, literally known as livre bleu.

Lumian flipped through a few pages nonchalantly and realized that the livre bleu was no different from his own. It was just that it appeared a little older overall.

There's the livre bleu and so much verl d'or; this family is undoubtedly well-to-do in the countryside. There aren't more than five such families in Cordu... Lumian discarded the livre bleu and placed the gold coins, silver coins, and copper coins into different pockets. Some were stashed deep in the cotton shirt's pocket, some were tucked into his pants pocket, and some were haphazardly stuffed into the pocket of his leather jacket.

Even though Lumian knew that this wealth couldn't be brought to reality, he couldn't resist collecting it for safekeeping.

These little trinkets of gold, silver, or copper were simply irresistible.

During his days as a vagrant, he cherished every coin he came across, even if it was just a coppet or a lick. He often fought with others for them and took risks to obtain them.

After scouting the area, Lumian hoisted his axe and crept towards the collapsed building closer to the reddish-brown mountain peak.

He proceeded deeper and deeper. Every time he traversed the empty space in the center of the ring, he was apprehensive that dozens of monsters would suddenly ambush him in an area without cover.

In the faint gray fog, Lumian crouched down and sneaked behind a half-collapsed stone wall. He squatted there and utilized it to conceal his form.

He cautiously poked his head out and surveyed the area ahead.

It was a narrow strip between two rows of destroyed buildings. There were no trees, no weeds, just gravel, crevices, and dirt.

Suddenly, a figure jumped into Lumian's line of sight.

It stood in the opposing building, staring at something.

This figure was garbed in a black robe with a hood. From the back, there was nothing peculiar. It appeared to be an ordinary human.

Lumian's heart constricted as he became even more watchful.

In such a dream ruin, the appearance of a regular person was far more terrifying than the appearance of a monster!

As if sensing that someone was observing him, the figure swiveled around slowly.

Lumian snuck a quick glance before retracting his head hastily. He leaned against the wall and didn't dare to budge.

With just one look, he had the impression that he had descended into hell or an abyss.

The figure was indeed a human, but 'he' had three faces and six eyes!

The face in front had cloudy eyes, sparse eyebrows, and numerous wrinkles. He was evidently an old man.

The left side was a chiseled face with sharp-looking blue eyes and a thick, black beard, making him appear like a burly man.

The skin on the right side was smooth and delicate, like a peeled egg. The blue eyes exuded obvious innocence and ignorance. It didn't seem a day over five years of age.

What kind of monster is this... Lumian attempted to regulate his breathing to prevent his heart from racing.

Such a monster had never surfaced, even in Aurore's horror tales. Only in the deepest and most absurd nightmares could it be encountered.

Although it was not good to judge a 'person' by their appearance, Lumian instinctively sensed that the three-faced monster was far more powerful than the skinless monster from earlier!

Furthermore, there was a high probability that it had exceptional abilities.

Eternal Blazing Sun. Great Father, please protect me from being discovered by it... Upon witnessing this scene, Lumian couldn't help but pray to the Eternal Blazing Sun.

If he weren't still clutching an axe in one hand and was in a perilous environment, he would have extended his arms, a gesture symbolizing the adoration of the sun.

At that moment, time appeared to stand still. Lumian believed he might be hallucinating.

It was as if someone's stare pierced through the wall and landed on his back.

His back stiffened instantly and felt somewhat warm.

In just a second or two, the illusion vanished, and heavy footsteps receded into the distance.

Lumian waited a while until the footsteps dissipated completely. Then, he gradually straightened his knees, turned around, and poked his head out to survey the area ahead.

The monster was farther away, having arrived behind the collapsed building whose two sides still stood. Half of its body was visible in the faint gray mist.

It still had his back to Lumian, as though it had transformed into a statue.

Lumian breathed a sigh of relief.

He didn't have the confidence to confront such a monster.

It's definitely impossible to venture deeper into the ruins from here... Should I circumvent it?

Won't there be comparable monsters elsewhere?

The closer I approach that mountain peak, the more potent the monsters that emerge?

Lumian retracted his body and deliberated for a while before deciding to conclude the night.

He intended to inquire with the woman who gave him the tarot card after daybreak to see if there was a means of dealing with the three-faced monster. If there was no alternative, he would consider taking a detour.

He arched his back, detached from the wall, and headed in the direction he came from.

At that moment, he had a notion.

If I slumber in these ruins, will I be able to escape the dream?

Considering the possibility of numerous monsters in the vicinity, he suppressed the urge to experiment, for now.

On the way back, he hastily searched every destroyed building he passed, but he couldn't unearth any useful written information. There were only a few coins.

After retreating for a while, Lumian conceived a notion and decided to take a detour. He approached the burnt-out house that he encountered first from the side, where he had buried the skinless monster.

He wanted to see if the monster's demise would be detected by its kin and if it would result in any changes.

After locating the spot and concealing himself, Lumian poked his head out from the side and scrutinized the target area.

In the following moment, he caught sight of another "figure."

The figure was half-human and half-beast. Its legs were bent forward as it squatted there and inspected the skinless monster's cadaver.

It had already removed the stone bricks and wooden blocks that Lumian had stacked.

It wore a dark jacket and relatively snug muddy pants. Its black hair that hung to its neck was unkempt and greasy, and it carried a shotgun on its back.

A shotgun!

Lumian averted his gaze hastily and withdrew his head.

These monsters are truly absurd!

They actually know how to wield a shotgun...

At that moment, Lumian felt like he was a hunter, hunting in the mountains with his weapon and comrades, only to discover that the rabbit opposite him was clutching a water-cooled machine gun and targeting them. He considered it ridiculous and immersion-breaking, as well as disappointing.

As time elapsed, he waited patiently for the monster with the shotgun to depart.

Finally, he discerned a faint sound of movement, gradually receding.

Lumian stuck his head out cautiously once again and examined the monster that was half-human and half-beast.

"It" moved like a cat towards the back of the building.

Initially, Lumian's heart eased, but then his eyes widened.

He realized that the path the monster took was precisely the same as the route he took when he ventured deep into the ruins!

It's tracking me!

It has an extraordinary tracking ability!

Lumian made a subconscious evaluation.

He was exceedingly grateful that he had opted for a detour when he returned. Otherwise, he would have certainly collided with it and might have even been ambushed!

As soon as the monster vanished, Lumian sprang up and dashed towards his house.

The crimson fire that reflected in the glass window on the ground floor of the house was akin to sunlight that could dispel darkness.

Lumian sprinted all the way to his two-story building, yanked open the unlatched door, and rushed inside.

After locking the door, he gazed at the ruins through the window.

Far from the gray mist, at the edge of the ruins, there stood a faint figure, but it didn't approach.

Phew. Lumian exhaled and planned to extinguish the fire, ascend upstairs to slumber, and exit the dream.

He glanced at the still-burning fire and murmured to himself, It can still burn for a while... I can experiment and see if it continues to burn until it extinguishes after I depart the dream, or if it is frozen in time the moment I leave...

Lumian had previously verified through the rain that the wilderness where the ruins were located was undergoing natural development. It had nothing to do with whether he was dreaming or not, but whether the same situation was transpiring in his house or the so-called safe zone remained to be verified.

He acted on his notion. He added a few more coals to the fire and fiddled with them. Then, he carried the axe and steel fork to the second floor and entered the bedroom.

...

When Lumian arose, it was just after daybreak.

He inspected his shirt-like pajamas. As anticipated, he was disheartened to discover that the gold coins, silver coins, and copper coins did not accompany him into reality.

Lumian exited the bed and stretched his body. He sauntered to the desk and extended his hand to draw the curtains.

Amidst the sound, a mild and refreshing radiance trickled in.

As the window opened, fresh and organic air invaded Lumian's nostrils. He couldn't help but extend himself, feeling that waking up early was quite pleasant at times.

Of course, this was also owing to the "Patriotic Public Health Campaign" that Emperor Roselle had launched. It was also thanks to the subsequent rulers who had preserved it and only altered its name.

He surveyed his surroundings, sometimes gazing at the far-off forest, sometimes scrutinizing the orange-red clouds in the sky, and sometimes observing the weeds outside the house.

Suddenly, Lumian's stare froze.

He spied a larger bird perched on an elm tree not far away.

It had a pointed beak, a feline face, brown feathers with scattered spots, brownish-yellow eyes combined with black pupils, giving it a sharp appearance.

It was an owl.

It appeared to be observing Lumian.

Chapter 15: Getting Information

That owl?

That owl from the Warlock legend?

His mind raced with possibilities, trying to comprehend the gravity of the situation. His blood seemed to freeze.

It was worse than facing the three-faced monster.

After all, this was no longer a dream. This was reality.

Even if his demise in a dream led to the same in reality, it was different psychologically.

What should I do?

Will Aurore be implicated?

…

As Lumian racked his brain for a countermeasure, the owl remained still, observing him with a piercing gaze.

After a few seconds, the owl spread its wings and flew towards the distant forest.

Its graceful glide carried it down, down, until it vanished into Cordu.

Only when the owl had completely vanished did Lumian's mind snap back to the present.

He slumped into a chair and lifted a hand to his forehead.

He was drenched in sweat.

Is it truly the owl of the Warlock legend?

Has it truly lived for so many years?

In any case, it was unlike any other owl with dull eyes. It almost looked human…

If it's really that owl, why did it choose to fly just outside my window? Is it because I want to uncover the truth about the Warlock legend? But we've already given up…

It left after a few moments of observation…

I wonder if it will return and cause trouble for Aurore…

Despite wanting to observe the situation further since nothing had happened yet, Lumian knew he couldn't keep it from his sister any longer.

After leaving the room, he saw that Aurore was still asleep. He went downstairs to prepare breakfast, all of which were his sister's favorite dishes.

Sunny-side up, meringue cookies, ordinary toast with jam…

I have to make noodles later. This time, I'll add meat sauce… Lumian mentally noted that the noodle compartment was empty and decided to refill it some time in the next two days.

It was Aurore's favorite dish.

Aurore descended the staircase in a flowing nightgown, her golden locks tousled. The breakfast spread was readied.

"Morning," she mumbled, stifling a yawn.

Lumian grinned at her. "It's not getting early.

"Don't you always say a day's planning starts early in the morning?"

"That's right. My plan is to sleep." Aurore settled into her seat and tucked into her breakfast with a glass of milk.

Lumian sat across from Aurore At the table that could fit six. As he nibbled on a pancake, he casually said, "I've been in the village for the past few days trying to find out the truth about those legends."

"Why?" Aurore asked.

Lumian was very frank.

"You didn't want to help me get supernatural powers, so I decided to find my own way. Those legends might contain clues."

"It's almost impossible," Aurore commented, her tone casual. "The legends have been twisted beyond recognition over the years. Or hallucinated by some loony. It's meaningless. Yes, it's also possible that someone specially made up a story as an excuse. Heh heh, and the contributions of rubberneckers like you."

"What?" Lumian didn't understand what Aurore meant by 'rubbernecker.'

It wasn't even Intisian.

"It means people who can't help but get involved in drama they have no business in," Aurore explained simply. "And judging by how you are suddenly raising this matter, I'm guessing you've caused some trouble and now have no choice but to come home to ask your sister for help."

"It can be considered an accident, but it's not to the extent of causing trouble," Lumian said, undaunted.

Lumian organized his thoughts carefully.

"My first target was the Warlock legend."

"What Warlock legend?" Aurore's confusion was palpable.

Lumian couldn't believe it. "You've never heard of it? A long time ago, a person in the village suddenly died. When he was buried, an owl flew over and stopped by his bed. It only flew away when the corpse was lifted. After that, the corpse became very heavy. It took nine bulls to pull the coffin. Only then did the villagers know that the person was a Warlock when he was alive."

Aurore was listening intently.

"I really wasn't aware of such a legend before."

It doesn't make sense… Lumian was incredulous.

Aurore may have been a homebody, but she still made time to socialize with the other old ladies in town. She loved telling stories to the children and was always up-to-date on the latest Cordu gossip. It was hard to believe she hadn't heard about the Warlock legend that had been circulating for years.

But what was even more intriguing was the fact that her house was built on the very spot where the Warlock's home once stood.

Lumian had a hunch from the start that Aurore's decision to settle in Cordu was driven by the allure of the Warlock's treasure, the key to unlocking extraordinary power.

"And then?" Aurore asked calmly.

Lumian answered truthfully, "We did some digging around, and we got confirmation from the village elders. This wasn't some tall tale. The Warlock really did exist, but that was decades ago. The Church burned the house down, and now the land belongs to you."

"Is that so?" Aurore was obviously a little surprised. "I knew it. There's always a catch. Why else would they sell me this land at a price lower than the norm? I thought it was because of my gift of gab, when it came to old ladies…"

She thought for a moment and asked, "So, the Church burned the Warlock's body?"

Lumian nodded. "Yes. His ashes are buried in the cemetery beside the cathedral."

He continued, "We've given up on this matter because all the clues led to a dead end. But this morning, I saw an owl outside my window. It looked just like the one in the legend."

Aurore's expression became serious. "Are you certain?"

"I can't say for sure, but it didn't look like any ordinary owl," Lumian responded objectively.

Aurore pondered for a moment before saying slowly, "Don't leave the village for now. And after dark, don't step outside until I've finished investigating the situation."

She gave a sour smile. "I've warned you before about the dangers of seeking supernatural power. But look, trouble has already found you.

"Fortunately, it seems that the other party doesn't have any malicious intentions. The problem should be resolved relatively easily."

I'm glad you're on guard… Lumian lowered his head and said straightforwardly, "Grande Soeur, I was wrong."

He changed the subject.

"Did your pen pals write back?"

"How can it be that fast? It's not like we're sending e— Uh, post!" Aurore scoffed.

Lumian was puzzled. Isn't post already referring to letters and packages sent through the post office?

He was not too concerned. After all, Aurore often used strange words.

...

At the entrance of Ol' Tavern.

Lumian stood there and surveyed the area.

He knew that the woman who had given him the tarot card wouldn't be awake yet, so he was looking for the three foreigners: Ryan, Leah, and Valentine.

As expected, the trio was enjoying a lavish breakfast at a table inside the tavern.

Lumian observed them for a few seconds, taking in the spread of trout rolls, wine, and mayonnaise bread, before leaving without disturbing them.

Some time later, as Ryan and the others prepared to continue strolling around Cordu and "chatting" with the locals,

Lumian approached them with open arms and a bright smile.

"Good morning, my cabbages."

Valentine's face twitched, and between Ryan and Leah, one looked slightly embarrassed while the other looked amused.

Uh, they're dressed exactly the same… Did they not bring many changes of clothes despite being out? Lumian noticed that Leah was still clad in a snug pleated cashmere dress, a small white coat, and a pair of Marseillan boots, each adorned with a small silver bell. Her veil which doubled as a hat also had bells attached to it. Ryan was still sporting a drab duffel coat and pale yellow strides, topped with a rough dark bowler hat.

And Valentine still had powdered hair and makeup on his face.

"Good morning, Lumian. What brings you here?" Ryan asked calmly.

Lumian looked aggrieved as he responded, "Well, you guys are my friends, and I have nothing to do. I thought I'd come visit."

He then questioned them, "I noticed that you've been chatting with people in the village for the past few days. Is there anything you want to ask?

"You can come to me if you have any questions, my cabbages. I'm your friend."

"We can't trust your answer," Valentine interjected.

Ryan shot him a look, signaling him to calm down.

Lumian smiled.

"So you can completely trust the others?"

Leah was at a loss for words, while Ryan thought for a moment before responding,

"Actually, we can't completely trust anyone. We have to make a comprehensive judgment based on the answers we get from different people and the situation we observe."

"That's more like it." Lumian spread his hands. "Well, then it wouldn't hurt to hear my answer. At least it's a reference."

Ryan was silent for a moment before glancing around.

The early morning in Cordu was bustling with people heading to the farmlands, but there was hardly anyone near Ol' Tavern.

"Here's the deal," he said finally. "We're here to find someone."

"The padre?" Lumian asked with a smile.

Ryan shook his head.

"No. We visited the padre to find this person."

"Who is it?" Lumian asked with interest. "I know everyone in the village. I should be able to help."

Ryan did not show any joy.

"Actually, we don't know who this person is, how old they are, or what they look like.

"We received an unsigned letter some time ago, and we're trying to find the person who wrote it."

Lumian couldn't help but wonder if the letter was from an informer.

He feigned puzzlement.

"Did the person who wrote the letter not reach out to you after you arrived in the village?"

"No," Leah replied for Ryan.

"Perhaps they don't feel safe and don't trust you?" Lumian suggested eagerly. "Can't you glean any clues from the contents of the letter?"

Lumian was curious about the letter's contents.

If it was targeting the padre's crew, he'd be happy to help them. But if it involved Aurore, he'd urge his sister to move. After all, Aurore communicated with her pen pals frequently, and if any of them were caught, she could be implicated. The letter could be a crucial clue.

Chapter 16: Letter

Ryan shook his head.

"The letter was just two simple sentences. It seemed like a man in deep trouble was seeking our help."

"Did he not mention what kind of trouble he was in?" Lumian breathed a sigh of relief.

There was no way a letter from Aurore or her pen pals could be that short.

"Nothing," Ryan replied with a soft sigh.

Lumian couldn't help but mock them in his heart. It's just a letter asking for help, and you're here? Aren't you afraid this is just a prank? Even the people from the Inquisition aren't as enthusiastic as you. Isn't this too nice, too kind, and too missionful?

Normally, he would have voiced these thoughts aloud, but he needed to get information from them, so he held his tongue and forced himself to be patient.

Despite his reservations, Lumian knew that Ryan wouldn't reveal the entire situation to him. They must have other considerations or reasons for coming to Cordu and searching for the person who wrote the vague letter.

"Uh..." Lumian stroked his chin and suggested tentatively, "Why don't you show me the letter? Perhaps I can identify the writer from their handwriting."

Valentine, with his powdered hair, gave Lumian a look that said: "Do you think we're fools?"

Leah chuckled.

"Do you know how to appraise handwriting?"

"Barely," Lumian admitted sincerely.

He then added inwardly, Being able to appraise Aurore's and my own handwriting is also considered a form of appraisal.

"It's useless," Ryan interjected, shaking his head. "Every word in the letter came from a livre bleu, and the entire sentence was comprised of cut slips."

Lumian couldn't help but wonder why the writer was being so cautious. Why hide their identity in such a way when they were asking for help? Were they afraid of interception and retaliation, or was there something wrong with them that they didn't want to be exposed? Lumian tried to analyze the writer's mentality.

Lumian put on a look of realization and said, "So you've been chatting with people in the village to see if anyone else has experienced similar damage to their livre bleu?

"But the person who wrote the letter could have purchased a new livre bleu without anyone knowing, or even thrown it away after using it."

"That's just one of the leads we're following," Ryan explained calmly.

Lumian didn't treat himself as an outsider at all and asked, "Are there any other leads?"

"Well, if someone is asking for help, then something must be happening, and there will always be some traces left behind," Ryan responded after some thought.

"That makes sense," Lumian said, looking troubled for Ryan and the others, as if he could empathize with their situation.

He promised solemnly, "My cabbages, I'll keep an eye out for you. Hopefully, we'll find some clues."

"Thank you," Ryan replied politely.

Leah had regained her composure and asked Lumian, "Since we're friends, I have a question for you."

"Go ahead." Lumian smiled.

"Why did the villagers in the tavern laugh when you called us 'cabbage'?" Leah was rather intrigued.

Although it was embarrassing, 'cabbage' was a common local slang term, and it shouldn't have been a cause for laughter.

Lumian explained sincerely, "In slang, 'cabbage' means darling or beloved. It's mainly used between intimate friends or between an elder and a junior. 'My bunny' and 'my chicks' are similar."

He emphasized the word 'intimate' as he spoke.

Then, with an innocent expression, he added, "I just wanted us to be intimate friends."

Lumian's innocent expression suggested that he had no idea what 'intimate' meant.

More like you want to be our senior... Leah finally understood why the villagers were laughing.

While Lumian's explanation may not have been entirely truthful, it was logically convincing.

Ryan nodded in agreement.

"Is there anything else?"

"Nope," Lumian replied, not wanting to appear too eager and arouse suspicion about him and Aurore.

His sister couldn't undergo an investigation!

After watching Leah and the others leave with the sound of the tinkling bells, Lumian sat at the entrance of Ol' Tavern and waited for the lady with the mysterious background to wake up.

After a while, Lumian's friend, Reimund Greg, approached him.

"Lumian, have you decided which legend to investigate next?" Reimund asked.

In the past two days, Reimund had been even more proactive than Lumian in this matter. After all, he didn't have any strange dreams or other ways of obtaining treasure.

"Not yet." The owl had already come knocking on his door. He couldn't risk investigating the legend without confirming the situation first.

"I'll think about it after the Lent festival," Lumian explained, trying to sound casual.

"Okay, that makes sense," Reimund agreed. "I don't have to be a Greenwatcher for the time being then. I'll head out after Lent. Even if there are grazers in the meantime, it won't cause much damage."

"Do you mean you don't have to leave the village for the next few days?" Lumian asked Reimund.

Reimund nodded in confirmation, and Lumian smiled.

"What a coincidence. I can't leave the village for the next few days either."

Reimund was confused. "Why not?" he asked.

Lumian lowered his voice and spoke with a serious expression.

"This morning, I met the owl from the Warlock legend. It said that if it weren't for the cathedral and the gaze of God in the village, it would have taken my soul and thrown it into the abyss..."

Reimund was shocked and frightened, and his entire body trembled.

"Is that for real? I told you not to provoke such an evil creature..."

Reimund suddenly saw a smile appear on Lumian's face.

"..." Only then did Reimund remember his good friend's nature.

"You're pulling a prank on me, it's a lie, isn't it?" he asked, feeling both angry and anxious.

He was angry at himself for falling for Lumian's deception yet again. He knew what kind of person Lumian was and had been fooled by him many times before.

"You believe such a ridiculous thing?" Lumian chuckled.

Quietly, Lumian added to himself that he had made up the story to prevent Reimund from going straight to the cathedral to repent when he couldn't withstand the pressure.

Reimund relaxed and breathed a sigh of relief. "Phew..."

Lumian offered some advice to Reimund.

"Although I made up that story just now, it's true that pursuing the truth of a legend can be dangerous. Try not to leave the village or the cathedral's protection if you can."

Silently, Lumian added to himself, And that's the truth. Although most of the story was fabricated, half of it was true. I wouldn't have reminded you and shared Aurore's advice in a different way if I didn't need your help with many things in the future. Whether someone lives or dies has nothing to do with me...

Reimund recalled the feeling of fear and nodded in understanding.

"Alright!"

He changed the subject and asked, "Who are you going to vote for to be the Spring Elf?"

The Spring Elf was the symbol of spring and the start of many celebrations during Lent. In the DariÃ¨ge area, the whole village usually voted for an unwed, beautiful girl to play the role.

"Ava," Lumian replied nonchalantly. "Hasn't she always wanted to be the Spring Elf?"

"I'll choose her too," Reimund said, secretly relieved.

Yesterday, Ava had hinted to him that she wanted him to vote for her, so he felt the need to help her canvas for votes.

...

Outside a house not far from Ol' Tavern.

Ryan, Leah, and Valentine weren't in a hurry to find someone to "chat."

Valentine raised his hand to cover his mouth and nose. "Is it really okay to say so much to that guy just now?" he asked.

The air around them was filled with the faint smell of poultry feces.

Leah fiddled with a silver bell above her head. "I don't know if there's a problem. All I can confirm is that my divination results tell me he's of help."

Ryan explained his intention. "If we can't turn the situation around, leaking some information and instilling fear in the relevant people could be effective. Next, we'll observe him more closely and see what he'll do or who he'll find."

...

After Reimund left, Lumian entered Ol' Tavern and saw the lady who had given him the tarot card in her usual spot.

She was wearing a white blouse and a pair of baggy light-colored pants, and beside her hand was a round straw hat adorned with a few yellow flowers.

She really has a lot of clothes in her suitcase. She changes them every day, unlike Leah and the others who look so shabby, Lumian thought to himself as he moved closer and sat opposite her.

During this process, he casually glanced at her breakfast, which consisted of a plump mince pie with a thinned sauce, a few darioles, cubed seasonal fruit, and a light-colored transparent drink with some impurities.

This isn't something Ol' Tavern can provide... Lumian pointed at the drink on the table and asked the lady, as though they were close friends, "What is this? It doesn't look like wine."

"It's called 'Venus Sacred Oil,'" the lady replied casually. "It's made from sugar and cinnamon water soaked in vanilla and mixed with poppies. It was invented by a bar in Trier."

The word "Venus" came from Emperor Roselle. He mentioned in a story that she was a woman comparable to a Goddess of Beauty.

Lumian was intrigued. "Where did you get it? Did you concoct it yourself?" he asked, suspecting that the nearest city, DariÃ¨ge, couldn't provide something similar.

The lady smiled.

"As a traveler, it's my professional instinct to obtain suitable things at the right time."

Lumian was honest. "I don't understand."

He then said, "I've finished the previous monster. This time, I've encountered two even more dangerous ones...

He went on to describe the monster with three faces and the one with a shotgun on its back.

"I feel that they all have powers that surpass ordinary humans. They're not something I can deal with. Is there any way to deal with them?"

The lady took a bite of the dariole and rolled her eyes. She smiled and said, "I'm not sure about the three-faced monster, but you are more than capable of dealing with the one with the shotgun, as long as you use what's special about yourself."

Lumian was both surprised and confused. "A special trait... What's so special about me?"

I don't even know myself!

The lady smiled at him and said, "That's your dream. As the owner of the dream, you naturally enjoy special treatment. It's just that you haven't realized it yet."

Chapter 17: Suspect

Lumian was on edge, his mind racing with excitement and fear. "What is it exactly?"

The woman took a leisurely sip of Venus Sacred Oil before replying in a calm, unhurried tone.

"You have to ask yourself that."

Having said that, she lowered her head slightly and focused on enjoying her breakfast, giving the impression that she had no intention of continuing the conversation.

Why do you keep parts of the matter untold and only answer at the next opportunity? Isn't this a waste of everyone's time? He couldn't help but feel inferior to her ability to infuriate others.

Taking a deep breath, he forced a smile and bade farewell.

Lumian obediently spent the rest of the day at home.

This wasn't out of fear of the owl to the point of not daring to step out during the day, nor was it because he had nothing to do, but to avoid arousing suspicion.

Lumian was determined to get to the bottom of the help-seeking letter that Leah and her companions had in their possession. He needed to find out what was written and who wrote it. The key to his investigation was to flip through every livre bleu in the village and find the one with words cut out. As a villager, Lumian was best suited for this task, but he was hesitant to proceed after talking to the three foreigners. It could attract someone's attention and cause unnecessary trouble.

This was a matter of life and death, survival or doom, and Lumian knew that even with Aurore's protection, he couldn't guarantee that the other party wouldn't take any risky actions against him.

In the past two years, he had become better at figuring out the threshold required for pranks.

This was due to his rich experience.

He planned on "visiting" every family in a few days, using the excuse of pursuing the legends related to Lent.

After dinner, when it was dark, Aurore returned to her bedroom to finally write a manuscript that was long overdue.

Lumian entered the study planning to find some books related to dreams to read, hoping to gain some special inspiration for his dream.

As they only had one battery-powered table lamp at home, which was being used by Aurore, he had to light up the kerosene lamp that had a pungent smell and was not great for illumination purposes.

Carrying the kerosene lamp that emitted a dim yellow glow, Lumian quickly swiped his other hand across the backs of the books. Occasionally, he would choose a book and clamp it under his armpit.

After a while, he returned to the table with three selected books.

Just as he placed the books in his hand, Lumian saw the livre bleu at home.

It was quietly placed in a corner of the desk as usual, and the gray-blue cover seemed a little dusty.

Upon seeing this livre bleu, Lumian instantly thought of the book he had obtained in the dream ruins and the book that had been cut and meshed into a plea for help.

He reached out and picked up the livre bleu in front of him, planning to flip through the content to see which words were suitable for cutting and piecing into useful sentences.

After flipping through a few pages, Lumian's gaze froze.

There was an obvious hole in the notes attached to the current calendar page.

A word had been cut out!

"No way…" Lumian whispered, extremely shocked.

He quickly flipped through the livre bleu in his hand and found more than ten words cut out.

"No way…" Lumian whispered again, his reaction almost the same as before.

The livre bleu that Ryan, Leah, Valentine, and the others were searching for turned out to be the one at home!

Not only had they not expected it, but Lumian had never even fathomed this possibility!

It didn't even cross his mind!

Amidst the indescribably complicated emotions, Lumian frowned.

Could it be Aurore who requested help?

Why did she seek help from the officials? Why didn't she tell me?

Based on Leah and the others' behavior, their habitual choice to discuss matters with the padre as soon as they arrived, and other details, Lumian made a preliminary judgment that they were officials. They could be from the government, Dariège's Eternal Blazing Sun Church, or the God of Steam and Machinery Church.

Lumian hesitated, his expression constantly changing.

Finally, he made up his mind. He took the livre bleu and walked out of the study to Aurore's bedroom.

He planned on asking her directly and chose to believe in Aurore.

Knock! Knock! Knock! Lumian bent his finger and knocked on the door.

"Come on in." Aurore's voice sounded.

Lumian turned the handle and pushed open the door to enter. Under the bright light of the table lamp, Aurore, who was wearing a two-piece cotton pajama set, had bound her golden hair with a headband and was engrossed in writing a story.

"Did you cut this?" Lumian asked, interrupting his sister before she could speak.

"Huh?" Aurore turned around in confusion, her eyes blank and distant, as if she was still deep in thought.

Lumian handed over the livre bleu, which had been flipped to the corresponding page, and stared into Aurore's eyes.

"You didn't cut this?"

Aurore gazed at it carefully for a few seconds before looking up in amusement.

"Would I be so bored and childish? I'm steady, mature, and broadminded, unlike you."

Aurore's reaction was natural, and she didn't seem surprised or flustered that her secret had been exposed. Lumian didn't hide his confusion and asked, "But who would have cut out words from the livre bleu?"

"Wasn't it you?" Aurore sized up her brother. "After reading my novel, you planned on mimicking what you read and cut out words from books and newspapers to create a random letter to play a huge prank on the village.

But before that, you wanted to see if you could fool me? Are you testing my deductive abilities?"

This really doesn't seem like Aurore's doing… Lumian's gaze was fixed on Aurore's face, not letting go of even the slightest change in her expression, but his sister's performance was flawless.

"It wasn't me." Lumian frowned. "Who could have done it?"

Aurore smiled. "Go on and play your little game of deduction. I have a manuscript to finish. If I have time tomorrow, I'll help you figure out the truth."

Using extraordinary means? Lumian tersely acknowledged her words and stopped disturbing his sister's creation.

He took the livre bleu and returned to his unlit room, sitting on the chair behind the desk.

"Who could it be?" Under the illumination of the crimson moon, Lumian muttered, trying to make deductions.

We are a family of two. Aurore is a Warlock with extraordinary abilities. She won't let others ransack our home…

If it's really not her, and in her words, 'when you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth.'

So, in the case of having only two choices, I'm actually the one who did this?

For a moment, Lumian found it absurd and funny.

So I'm the 'criminal'?

Why don't I know that?

Lumian couldn't help but turn his body and look at the full-body mirror attached to the wardrobe.

Under the crimson moonlight, his mirror reflection was wearing a linen shirt and brown pants. His handsome features didn't have a smile on them, and his expression was abnormally heavy.

He was very sure that he had never cut out the content from the livre bleu.

To eliminate the possibility, he recalled his experiences in the past month.

Although many details were already a blur, he was still very certain about what he had done.

Bathing in the crimson moon's light that seeped in through the windows, Lumian muttered to himself, "Could it be that I did it when I was unconscious? While having that dream, I can sleepwalk in reality? No, that's impossible. Aurore said that she would watch me. If I really sleepwalked and cut the livre bleu, she would have pointed it out just now. Moreover, the letter must have been sent during the day. I'm very awake during those times."

Lumian eliminated himself and thought of other possibilities.

Someone else who came here, perhaps?

Although their family had few guests usually, it did not mean that they did not have any.

Firstly, poorer neighbors would come to borrow the stove or oven to smoke meat or make bread.

Secondly, Lumian's friends would come to his house from time to time to find some simple novels to read or listen to his stories.

Lastly, Nazélie, Madame Pualis, and a few other ladies visited Aurore from time to time to have a chat with her. Among them, Madame Pualis came the most. She even lent Aurore a pony so that Aurore could ride freely in the mountains. They were quite close.

After all, in a village like Cordu, only an author like Aurore was worthy of Madame Pualis' friendship.

Madame Pualis appeared very amiable on the surface, often basking in the sun with the other women and chatting with them, and even catching lice with them. She had a good reputation in the village.

Although Madame Pualis and Aurore could be considered friends, Lumian did not like her at all. Madame Pualis would often introduce one of her relatives to Aurore and persuade her to get married and have children as soon as possible.

It would be fine if Madame Pualis' relatives were nice, but every time Lumian asked around in Dariège, he found that the other party either had bad character or was not very capable. They were about to fall into poverty, and none of them made the cut.

The first time might have been a coincidence, but with it happening every time, Lumian bore a hatred for Madame Pualis.

It's definitely impossible for those who come here to smoke meat or bake bread. There's always someone watching them. They won't be allowed to go up to the second floor… Reimund, Ava, and the others are also unlikely suspects. I'll accompany them the entire time. Madame Pualis, Nazélie, and the other ladies have a certain chance. Every time they come, Aurore will keep them in the study to read while she prepares some snacks…

If Madame Pualis is really a Witch, then it's understandable that she needs to hide her identity from the authorities. Also, she is very careful to use other people's livre bleu to avoid being traced back to her…

Did she discover something when she was having an affair with the padre? Did she have to protect herself in this way?

The more he thought about it, the more excited he became. He felt like he was about to lock onto a suspect.

He stood up, paced a few steps, and suddenly walked downstairs.

He didn't want to question Madame Pualis, nor did he plan to pry into her actions now. Instead, he planned to find Reimund or Guillaume-junior and use their livre bleu as a comparison to determine which words had been cut out and what sentence could be formed.

This way, Lumian could recreate the exact content of the request for help.

He rushed down the stairs, through the kitchen, and opened the front door.

The crimson darkness outside rushed in, instantly calming him down.

"Uh, Grande Soeur said that before we figure out the owl's situation, I shouldn't go out after dark…" Lumian muttered. He took two steps back and closed the door.

Anyway, there was no hurry to borrow the livre bleu. It would be more natural to do it tomorrow.

After doing a stretch, Lumian walked towards the staircase.

Ding ding ding ding ding.

The doorbell rang, the sound echoing through the house.

"Who is it?" Lumian turned around in confusion, calling out as he walked towards the door.

A slightly magnetic and gentle female voice sounded from outside.

"It's me, Pualis de Roquefort."

Chapter 18: "Straightforward"

Madame Pualis… Lumian was shocked to see Madame Pualis standing outside his door. He had the illusion that someone had come to his place to silence him, but knowing that his sister was upstairs and had superpowers, he calmed down significantly.

Exhaling slowly, Lumian walked over and opened the door.

There were two women standing outside the door. The one in front was wearing a pure black and exquisite corset dress. She had a shawl of the same color on her shoulders, fishnet gloves on her hands, and a lady's round hat that was slightly slanted.

She was dressed in black, with only a diamond necklace inlaid with gold hanging on her chest.

Her eyebrows were slightly thin, framing her bright, smiling brown eyes. Her long brown hair was tied into a high bun, and her facial features were not outstanding, but when combined, they had a clean and charming beauty. Coupled with her elegant temperament and graceful posture, it made the night at Lumian's door that was dyed a little red seem much fresher because of her. There was also a faint fragrance coming from her.

Madame Pualis, the wife of the Cordu village administrator and the territory's judge, Béost.

Lumian knew he had to add words like "the mistress of the padre", "suspected witch", "help-seeking suspect," and "the fair naked body in the cathedral" in his heart. However, these were not suitable to be said out loud. Otherwise, Madame Pualis would definitely change her expression on the spot.

If he succeeded in angering her, disaster might follow.

"Madame Pualis, what's the matter?" Lumian deliberately looked out at the sky, hinting that it was not appropriate for Madame Pualis to visit at this time.

Madame Pualis's red lips were a little moist as she spoke softly, "I'm here to discuss something with your sister Aurore."

From her appearance alone, she did not look like a woman in her thirties with two children. She was at most in her late twenties.

Lumian deliberated for a moment and made way.

"Aurore is upstairs, writing for her newspaper column," he informed the entering Madame Pualis.

Pualis nodded and said to the lady's maid beside her, "Cathy, wait for me downstairs."

"Yes, Madame." Dressed in a black-and-white lady's maid outfit, Cathy took a few steps towards the warm stove.

Lumian led Madame Pualis through the kitchen and towards the stairs.

Madame Pualis stopped at the corner.

"What's wrong?" Lumian turned around and pretended to be confused.

Madame Pualis asked with a smile, "Did you deliberately bring the three foreigners to the cathedral?"

She's finally here to question me… Lumian didn't panic but instead calmed down.

Lumian's previous experience of pranking and infuriating people had taught him that at such times, he could not directly answer the other party's question, nor could he defend himself. The best choice was to blame the other party for making a certain error!

Of course, this still depended on the situation. Turning around and running was an alternative.

Lumian revealed a furious look as he gazed at Madame Pualis and said, "You guys were actually having an affair in God's cathedral!"

He then spread open his arms and seemingly gestured as though he was "embracing the sun."

"My God, my Father, forgive the sacrilege of this guilty man and woman."

Madame Pualis watched him quietly, the ends of her lips curling beautifully.

"I think God will forgive us. I read a book once that said, 'A lady who shares a bed with her true love is cleansed of all sins, for love legitimizes pleasure, as though from the purest of hearts.' I'm very happy with Guillaume Bénet. Therefore, the Eternal Blazing Sun wouldn't be angry about this. It's not a sin."

What kind of books are you reading, Madame… Lumian couldn't help but inwardly criticize.

"But," Madame Pualis continued, "this is indeed disrespectful to St. Sith."

Every region of Intis had one or two guardian angels or saints, recognized by the Church of the Eternal Blazing Sun or the Church of the God of Steam and Machinery's canon, or they had made special contributions in Intis's history. They were well known and respected by the two Churches.

In the Dariège region, the saint in charge of the Eternal Blazing Sun Church was St. Sith. Every Eternal Blazing Sun cathedral here could actually be called Saint Sith Cathedral. However, to differentiate them, only the largest and core cathedral was called that. Others had other names in place.

Therefore, Madame Pualis and the padre having an affair in the cathedral was equivalent to St. Sith's butler secretly bringing someone home and doing the deed in his master's bedroom. It was a great disrespect to the patron saint.

"That's right," Lumian nodded solemnly. "Isn't the padre ashamed?"

Madame Pualis burst into laughter.

After laughing, she said to Lumian, "Back then, I also persuaded him. I said, 'Oh la la, how can we do such a thing in the cathedral of St. Sith?' Guess what the padre said? He said, 'Oh, then St. Sith might have to put up with it a little.'"

Lumian, who was inexperienced in such matters, was momentarily at a loss for words.

"He's blaspheming the saint!" He finally managed to force out this sentence.

Madame Pualis looked like she was reminiscing.

"That's how he is. He's bold and direct, like a bandit who breaks through the door to your soul while swearing curses. He's completely different from the gentlemen in Dariège. Perhaps that's why I slept with him."

"That's just the normal behavior of some men in heat. Not to mention Saint Sith, even if a deity was there, he would make Him wait." Despite his lack of experience, Lumian had read enough novels written by Aurore to know a thing or two about human desire. "This belongs to having his mind controlled by his lower body. No, his head was already empty during that period, filled with another liquid."

Madame Pualis smiled.

"I know that's the reason, but he did appear very charming in that situation. Heh heh, you're indeed an inexperienced young man. Don't you know that the same words will make people feel differently in different environments and moods?

"I remember the first time I had sex with the padre. He stood there, looked me in the eyes, and said to me, 'Pualis, I want to go deeper in understanding your body and mind.' If it were any other time, I would only find him a crude and vulgar pervert. I would have called for help to stop him, but at that time, my body went limp. The mood was just right."

Madame Pualis smiled charmingly.

"It's like, if I had my eye on any man, I'd say to him, 'How does my place tonight sound?'

"If he really comes, I'll bring him straight into the bedroom and tell him, 'I want to make love with you. I love you.'

"Lumian, as a man, how would you answer at a time like this?"

Lumian usually told dirty jokes to the men in the village. Although he was a little uncomfortable, he managed to keep his composure. He tried his best to recall the stories his sister had written and the novels written by other contemporary authors. After some deliberation, he said, "Madame, you are my sunshine."

"Very talented…" Madame Pualis complimented.

As she spoke, she leaned forward, her eyes becoming moist.

A warm breath immediately blasted Lumian's ear, and a slightly magnetic and gentle female voice sounded softly.

"I want to make love with you…"

At that moment, Lumian's heart couldn't help but tremble. His body felt numb, as though he had received an electric shock from touching a broken electrical lamp.

He immediately took a step up the stairs and said to Madame Pualis, "Aurore should be waiting for you."

"Indeed." Madame Pualis straightened her back with a smile on her face.

It was as if nothing had happened.

This woman… Lumian suddenly felt a little afraid of this woman.

He turned around and reached the second floor in a few steps, with Madame Pualis following at a steady pace.

Aurore was already waiting outside the bedroom when she heard the doorbell.

"What took so long?" She looked at Lumian.

Lumian explained vaguely, "We talked about the cathedral."

Aurore understood immediately. She gave her brother a look that said, "Pray for good luck from the Eternal Blazing Sun."

She turned to Madame Pualis, who had just arrived on the second floor, and asked with a smile, "What's the matter?"

"I wanted to talk about the preparations for Lent. I might need your help with a celebration," Madame Pualis said with a smile.

"You caught me at a bad moment…" Aurore found an excuse to decline.

Madame Pualis pointed at the door and said, "How about you hear it first?"

"Alright." Aurore remained polite.

Watching his sister and Madame Pualis enter the study and close the wooden door, Lumian nodded indiscernibly.

Acting normally without showing any trace of returning to the 'crime scene'…

Suddenly, an idea struck him like a bolt of lightning.

There is a high chance that Madame Pualis is a female Warlock. Can I get supernatural powers from her?

It would be much more convenient and safer than facing that owl head-on while searching for the truth of the Warlock or exploring the dangerous dream ruins…

After all, I have to unlock the secret as soon as possible to eliminate any hidden dangers. It's less risky once I obtain superpowers.

But Lumian soon became vigilant and shook his head.

He then self-reflected, How can I think that way?

I don't even know if Madame Pualis is a friend or foe. How can I seek supernatural power through her?

Yes, her actions didn't paint her to be a good person just now. She even made me feel a sense of danger…

What's wrong with me recently? Am I too hasty and rash in pursuing superpowers? It's as if I'll die if I don't obtain them quickly…

It had been nearly two years since Lumian discovered that his sister was a Warlock. Though he had tried to obtain supernatural powers before, he had never worked as hard as he had in the past few days. No matter if the opportunity was good or bad, or if there was danger, as long as there seemed to be hope, he could not wait to come into contact with it. It was as if he was not picky with food after starving for ages.

Phew… Thank goodness I sensed the problem in time. Otherwise, I might end up taking a more deviated and dangerous path. Lumian let out a long sigh, relieved that he had regained his normal state of mind.

But he knew it was impossible to stop pursuing supernatural powers. He just needed choices. After all, the dangerous dream had already revealed itself, and the undercurrents in the village were getting more and more turbulent.

Chapter 19: Meditation

Madame Pualis and Aurore didn't talk for long. Ten minutes later, they walked out of the study.

Lumian walked Madame Pualis out of the door with his sister.

He looked at his sister and asked, "What did she want you to do?"

Aurore pouted and replied, "She wanted me to be the lead singer at the Praise Celebration, but I refused."

Cordu Village's Lent festival had three segments--Spring Elf blessing tour, waterside ritual, Praise Celebration held in the cathedral. The last segment mainly consisted of playing musical instruments and choral singing.

In the DariÃ¨ge region, the lead singer was often from the cathedral choir, but Cordu could only seek out singers who were good at singing as alternatives.

As for musical instruments, the villagers didn't worry about it. In villages with shepherds, music or musical instruments were indispensable in their daily lives.

Shepherds lived in the wild all year round, either in shacks or pits. Other than their companions and sheep, the most common thing they interacted with was the flute they carried with them.

Apart from grazing, playing cards, and chatting, playing the flute and using music to comfort oneself was something almost every shepherd would do.

It was precisely because of this that the phrase used to describe a shepherd in a difficult and impoverished situation was "he doesn't even have a flute."

With so many shepherds around, it was inevitable that the other villagers of Cordu would be affected. When they gathered and chatted in the square, there would always be someone playing an instrument, causing the melodious melody to reverberate.

Lumian was pleased to see his sister being steadfast. "Okay," he said with satisfaction.

Joining in the celebrations was enough. If one wanted to take center stage, it would be a waste of time and could attract unnecessary attention.

In order to protect his eyesight, Lumian read for a while, then decided to wash up and turn in early. He considered how to safely test what was special about him in the dream.

The lady's suggestions had proven accurate several times in a row, making Lumian unconsciously believe her completely.

In the dead of night, Lumian entered the dream again and woke up there.

He checked his pockets and confirmed that the 217 verl d'or and 25 coppet were still there.

Letting out a sigh of relief, Lumian picked up his axe and steel fork and headed downstairs to the stove.

The fire had already been extinguished.

The clock continues spinning when I'm not dreaming... Lumian frowned slightly.

How could there be anything special about him in such a "real" dream?

"The clock continues spinning" was a common saying in the DariÃ¨ge region, meaning that time waited for no man and never stood still.

In the bedroom he deemed safest, Lumian put down his tools and undressed.

He walked to the full-body mirror attached to the wardrobe and checked his body inch by inch to see if there was anything different from reality.

Nothing out of the ordinary.

Mentally special? Lumian wasn't in a hurry to put his clothes on. Instead, he walked back to the bed and sat down cross-legged, like his sister often did when meditating.

Aurore had previously taught him some superficial meditation techniques that did not involve mystical elements to foster lucid dreams. Now, Lumian wanted to try and see if he could sense anything special about his mind and body in the completely quiet scene.

The first step was to regulate his breathing.

Lumian deepened his breathing and slowed down the corresponding frequency.

As he took slow, long, and rhythmic breaths, Lumian slowly emptied his mind.

At the same time, he outlined a red sun in his mind and focused all his attention and thoughts on it to eliminate other messy thoughts.

Aurore had instructed him to choose objects that represented light during meditation, in case he was targeted by vile, evil things.

As a believer in the Eternal Blazing Sun, Lumian's first reaction was to visualize the sun.

Gradually, his mind calmed down, and in his perception, the entire world seemed to have only that red blazing sun left.

Suddenly, Lumian heard something.

It seemed to come from an infinite distance yet was ringing in his ears. The sound was unclear but had inklings of rumbling thunder.

Amidst the indescribable buzzing, Lumian's heart began to race. It was as if someone had inserted a chisel into his head and stirred it a few times.

An intense pain erupted, and the blazing sun turned as red as blood and quickly dyed black.

The scene in his meditation shattered.

Lumian's eyes snapped open, and he gasped for air. He felt like he was about to die.

After almost twenty seconds, he finally recovered from the near-death experience.

He instinctively lowered his head and examined his body, noticing something strange on the left side of his chest.

A symbol that looked like thorns, black as night, seemed to grow from his heart and extend out of his body, connecting one after another like chains.

Above these thorns were patterns resembling eyes and worm-like distorted lines, all bluish-black.

At this moment, the tattoo-like symbols were slowly fading.

Lumian was first shocked, then had many thoughts.

He quickly got off the bed and went straight to the full-body mirror, aiming his back at it.

Then, he tried his best to turn his head left to check the situation on his back.

He could barely see the chain made of black thorns drilling into his body from his back.

In other words, this chain of thorns sealed his heart and corresponding body in the form of a ring.

Lumian analyzed what was 'special' about him that was unlike reality until the symbols completely faded and disappeared. The black and bluish-black symbols are different, and the bluish-black one looks familiar. Yes, it's very similar to the old man I helped when I was wandering. It was also from that time that I began to have dreams with large amounts of fog.

Lumian found the symbols to be special but meaningless, which left him feeling disappointed.

The process of making them appear was extremely painful, pushing him to the brink of death.

In a state that nearly knocked him out, what was the difference between facing the monster with a shotgun and delivering food to it?

And if he waited until he had the strength to fight again, the 'special' trait would have almost disappeared.

It was cold in the dream, like early spring in the mountains. Lumian found it uncomfortable being naked, so he quickly put on his clothes.

Just doing such a simple thing made him extremely tired, and his head hurt again.

Obviously, he couldn't recover from the impact the meditation had caused him in a short period of time.

Under such circumstances, Lumian decided to give up exploring for the night and not make any attempts. He would sleep well and focus on recuperating.

......

The sky was still dark when Lumian woke up.

Looking at the darkness in the house and the redness near the curtains, he carefully recalled what had happened in the dream.

I've meditated many times in reality, but I didn't hear that strange sound or feel any pain...

It's something special that only exists in that dream? Lumian sat up in puzzlement, planning to confirm.

He followed the procedure and tried meditating again.

The red sun quickly appeared in his mind, and the chaos in his mind gradually settled down.

This was a familiar meditation experience for Lumian. There were no strange sounds, no intense pain, and no near-death experience.

After a while, he ended his meditation, unbuttoned his shirt, and looked down at his heart.

There was no symbol there.

Indeed, that's the special trait of the dream. It can't affect reality... Lumian didn't know if he should be happy or disappointed.

He raised his head and looked at the curtain that blocked the windows. His thoughts scattered as he thought about whether the "special" trait in the dream could be exploited, and how.

At that moment, he saw a small shadow outside the window.

Lumian's pupils dilated, turning high-strung as his instinctive reaction was to call out to his sister. But then he remembered that he was at home and Aurore had said she would watch over him, so she should have sensed it.

Slowly and carefully, he approached the window, waiting for his sister to call an end to his actions.

But Aurore did not appear.

Lumian came to the window, grabbed the curtain, and cautiously pulled open a crack.

Outside the window was the quiet and dark night. The crimson moon hung far away in the sky.

On an elm tree not far away, an owl, larger than most of its kind, with eyes that were neither dull nor stiff, stood quietly, facing Lumian's window. It looked at Lumian with an indescribable look of superciliousness.

That owl!

It's here again!

Lumian's heart was in his throat.

Just like the last time, the owl looked at Lumian for about ten seconds before spreading its wings and flying deep into the night.

"..." Lumian was speechless.

After a while, he drew the curtains and cursed, "Is there something wrong with your head?

"You would come and take a look every single time, not saying a word before leaving!

"Are you mute, or is there something wrong with your IQ? Have you not learned human language after so many years?"

In fact, Lumian had his own guesses about the owl's actions. He believed that his sister's existence made it afraid to do anything. After all, Aurore had said that as long as he didn't leave the building at night, she could guarantee his safety. If he had stuck his head out of the window on impulse just now, the owl probably wouldn't have flown away quietly.

After cursing for a while, Lumian decided to close the curtains and catch up on some sleep.

He casually glanced outside and suddenly froze.

More than ten meters away, at the edge of a small forest, a figure was slowly walking over.

She wore a dark-colored dress made of coarse cloth, and her hair was thin and pale-white.

"Naroka..." Lumian recognized the figure.

It was Naroka, who he had asked about the legend of the Warlock.

Naroka's face blended into the darkness, and her eyes reflected a strange light under the faint crimson moonlight. Her movements were abnormally stiff, like a wandering ghost.

Chapter 20: Customs

Lumian subconsciously held his breath and shrank back a little.

Naroka did not come in this direction. Slowly, she entered the small forest and disappeared into the deep night.

Lumian was slightly worried. She doesn't seem right... Did something happen?

Recently, there had been more and more abnormalities in the village.

He looked outside for a while, and the night had returned to silence. Only the swaying leaves proved the existence of the wind.

"What are you looking at?" Aurore's voice suddenly came from behind him.

Lumian turned around and was delighted to see his sister, who was wearing a two-piece pajama set.

"Did you also notice something wrong?"

"No," Aurore replied, her blond hair slightly messy and fluffy from just waking up.

Then she added angrily, "I don't see anything wrong. All I know is that there's a guy who's up in the middle of the night, loitering at the window."

"It'll be dawn in an hour tops. How can it be considered the middle of the night..." Lumian muttered out of habit. Then he asked, "Didn't you come over because of the owl? Didn't you see Naroka outside?"

"Naroka?" Aurore revealed a rare blank expression.

Lumian recounted everything from the moment he woke up and realized that there was a black shadow outside the window to the strangely-behaving Naroka walking into the forest.

As for the special trait he discovered while meditating in his dream, he planned to consult the mysterious woman first before considering how to tell Aurore or hide it for a while to prevent his sister from stopping him from obtaining superpowers.

Aurore furrowed her beautiful blond brows.

"Something might have already happened to Naroka...

"Go check on them at dawn."

Lumian asked subconsciously, "What could have happened?"

"How would I know? I didn't see her; there's no way I can make an accurate judgment," Aurore snapped back.

"You really didn't see her?" Lumian thought that his sister had been monitoring him the entire time.

Aurore scoffed. "Do you think you can see whatever you want? If you see something you shouldn't, you have to consider which graveyard to bury me in. I won't look outside for no reason. I'll just monitor your condition. I'll only wake up if something's wrong."

Lumian was stunned for a moment and couldn't help but blink. Grande Soeur is taking such a huge risk to watch over me...

Aurore added earnestly, "That's why I'm telling you, don't look at what you shouldn't see and don't listen to what you shouldn't hear. Pursuing extraordinary power is a very dangerous thing."

"Got it." Lumian nodded solemnly.

At the same time, he thought to himself, It's precisely because it's dangerous that I can't let you go at it alone.

...

After breakfast, Lumian followed his sister's instructions and headed straight to Naroka's house.

As he approached, he saw many villagers standing outside the door, including his friends, Ava's father Guillaume Lizier, Reimund's father Pierre Greg, and the padre's younger brother Pons Bénet.

"What happened?" Lumian carefully circled around Pons Bénet and the few thugs surrounding him and went to Reimund's side.

Reimund replied sadly."Naroka passed away."

"Ah?" Lumian was prepared for something to happen to Naroka, but he didn't expect her to be dead.

Reimund rambled on. "Before dawn, the padre came to give her the last rites. She was still fine and energetic two days ago when we asked her about the legend of the Warlock. Why would she suddenly pass away..."

Before dawn? Lumian was alarmed.

He realized that it was precisely that moment when he saw Naroka. The exact timing of the padre's last rites didn't make much of a difference.

Lumian's mind raced with thoughts. So, what I saw was actually Naroka's ghost? This happened after the owl flew over. Can it really take away a human's soul? Yes, Naroka was one of the witnesses to the Warlock incident that happened back then... If I hadn't listened to Grande Soeur and went out after dark, I might have been the one the padre did last rites with. Heh, his version of it for me is probably spitting at me...

Reimund didn't chat with him. He stood outside the two-story house and quietly mourned Naroka.

After Lumian reined in his thoughts, he saw Leah, Ryan, and Valentine walking over.

"Did something happen here?" Leah asked before Lumian could even greet her.

They saw many people gathered on the road.

Lumian sighed and said, "My cabbages, an honorable old lady has passed away."

"Then why are all of you standing outside?" Leah asked without offering any condolences, not fully convinced by Lumian's explanation.

She was still wearing the same clothes as before.

Lumian made an obvious sizing-up gesture, which made Leah panic.

"What's wrong?" Ryan asked.

Lumian smiled. "You're definitely not DariÃ¨ge locals."

"We're from Bigorre," Ryan answered frankly.

Bigorre was the provincial capital of the Intis Republic's Riston Province, while DariÃ¨ge was a city on the southern border of Riston Province. It covered a large area, including the village of Cordu.

Lumian nodded. "It's no wonder you don't know the customs of the DariÃ¨ge region."

He had initially thought that these three foreigners were officials from DariÃ¨ge, but it turned out that they were from the provincial capital, Bigorre.

Lumian silently updated his judgment of Leah and company. Looks like their status is much higher than I expected...

Leah asked with interest, "What kind of customs? Can you tell us?"

Lumian planned on forging a good relationship with them, so he smiled and said, "You're my cabbages. Why wouldn't I tell you?

"As you know, everyone has their own corresponding horoscope. And in the DariÃ¨ge region, we also believe that every family has their own horoscope that determines the amount of providence they receive. The death and funeral of the family, especially the head of the house, will take away such good providence.

"In order not to affect the horoscope and retain the providence, we will place the deceased in the center of a family before burial, which is the kitchen. Then, we will trim off some of her hair and nails and keep them in the house forever without letting them be discovered by any guests.

"At such a time, if a person attending the funeral enters the house, it will affect the corresponding horoscope and take away a portion of their providence. Therefore, we attend the funeral by mourning outside. At most, we will look in from the door and wait at the cemetery beside the cathedral."

"I see," Ryan nodded in understanding. "It's the same as how every cathedral in every region has holy bones stored. 'The sage is forever where a part of their body is.'"

He turned to face Naroka's house, removed his top hat, placed it against his chest, and began to mourn.

Leah and Valentine also expressed their condolences.

When they were done, Lumian said to them, "I'm going to the door to look at her. I'll see you later, my cabbages."

"Okay," Ryan replied with a gentle nod.

Lumian lowered his voice and added, "I'll help you find that livre bleu."

Before Leah and the others could respond, he stepped to the side and smiled.

"Why do you wear the same clothes every day?"

"We can't care too much about appearances when we are out in a foreign land for extended periods," Ryan explained simply, while Leah subconsciously touched the silver bell hanging from her veil.

After bidding farewell to Valentine and the others, Lumian walked to Naroka's door.

He had to queue for a while before it was finally his turn.

Lumian stood by the door and looked at the kitchen ahead.

Naroka's corpse had not yet been placed into a coffin. It was lying quietly on a simple bed made of a few benches.

Her nails had been trimmed, and her thin white hair was much neater than before.

Her face was pale, and her wrinkles deepened the lines on her face. Lumian didn't dare to look at her for too long.

Compared to when I saw her before dawn, her face is even whiter, Lumian thought to himself as he made a slight bow before leaving the door.

On the way to the cemetery with Reimund, Lumian suddenly slapped his head.

"Sacrebleu, I forgot to inform Aurore."

"What are you waiting for?" Reimund asked, understanding the importance of keeping Aurore in the loop.

Aurore didn't enjoy being out most of the time. She really wasn't kept in the loop if not for her brother.

Lumian saw an opportunity and said, "Coincidentally, this place isn't far from your place. Lend me your livre bleu for two days. A few pages of mine had been gnawed away by rats, so I need to copy it."

"Okay," Reimund agreed.

In any case, there was still some time before the burial.

...

Lumian returned home and hid the livre bleu before informing Aurore about Naroka's passing.

She couldn't help but sigh.

"As expected, something happened. I wonder if it was caused by that owl..."

"I suspect so too," Lumian agreed, echoing his sister.

Aurore tersely acknowledged and said, "You must not leave the house after dark. You have to find a way to warn the people who were seeking out the legend of the Warlock with you."

Lumian had already scared Reimund with Naroka's death, having just asked about the Warlock legend two days ago, and instructed him not to go out after dark for the time being. "Alright," he replied.

"Naroka is a good person. I'll change my clothes and attend her funeral," Aurore said, walking towards the stairs. "Do you want to come with me, or do you want to read some books and do a test set before going?"

Why am I still doing test sets at a time like this? Lumian couldn't quite understand his sister's train of thought.

Considering that he had to compare the livres bleu, he said to Aurore, "I'll do a paper before I go."

"Very good." Aurore was rather pleased.

After Aurore left, Lumian's expression darkened.

He went up to the second floor and entered the study. He took out the livre bleu that he had borrowed from Reimund and compared it to the one at home where part of the words had been cut out.

Time slowly passed as Lumian pieced together the corresponding words one by one and wrote them on a piece of paper.

He made adjustments according to the length of the two sentences, and soon the contents of a possible request for help appeared in front of him: "We need help as soon as possible. The people around us are getting weirder."

Chapter 21: Response

Lumian fell silent, his eyes glued to the restored request for help.

Although what he pieced together wasn't necessarily the content of the letter; after all, the words could create other sentences like 'the people around us need help as soon as possible; we are getting weirder.' He couldn't help but feel a weight pressing down on his heart.

In the past, he might've dismissed it as a prank, but too many abnormal things were happening in Cordu—and those were only the ones he noticed.

I can't pretend that I didn't see anything, nor can I pretend that nothing happened…

Grande Soeur said that a person with a normal heart and mind needs to know how to avoid danger. They shouldn't stand under a wall upon discovering that it's about to collapse…

He snapped out of his reverie and made up his mind.

He couldn't risk staying in Cordu a moment longer. He had to leave with his sister, and he had to do it now!

Regarding the abnormality, the officials would undoubtedly handle it. The villagers of Cordu were under their protection, and Lumian had neither the duty nor the capability to take on such a responsibility.

In addition, I have to speed up the exploration of the dream ruins and strive to obtain superpowers in a short period of time to deal with any accidents that might happen when I leave this place… The urgency of the situation filled him with a sense of imperative that he couldn't ignore.

He needed to become much stronger if he wanted to protect his sister and ensure her safety. The last thing he wanted was for her to be implicated in any abnormalities that might erupt before they left Cordu.

Keeping his mission in mind, Lumian carefully returned his livre bleu to its original place. Then, he snatched up the piece of paper containing the words and sentences from before and strode purposefully down the stairs.

He made his way over to the stove and tossed the piece of paper into the hungry flames.

Once outside, Lumian wasted no time in making his way straight to Ol' Tavern.

But as he approached the door, he found it tightly shut, a clear indication that the owner and bartender, Maurice Bénet, had likely gone to attend Naroka's funeral.

Still, Lumian knew that as a part-time hotel, it was impossible to lock all the doors during the day without inconveniencing the guests.

So, he headed for a side trail and slipped in through the back door.

Climbing up the stairs, Lumian scanned the hallway but saw no one in sight.

Thud. Thud. Thud. Lumian's footsteps echoed as he ascended the stairs to the second floor of the inn. He paused outside the door of the enigmatic woman's room, examining the doorknob for any sign of a "Do Not Disturb" placard. Finding none, he inhaled deeply and exhaled slowly, steadying himself. With a bend of his finger, he rapped lightly on the door.

Knock! Knock! Knock…

He knocked three times in a row, but there was no movement inside.

Knock. Knock. Knock… No answer. Lumian tried again, rapping more firmly this time.

He pounded on the door, but the room remained silent.

She's not here? Lumian frowned. She went to attend Naroka's funeral?

Without wasting a moment, he bolted down the stairs and out of the inn, making a beeline for the cemetery beside the cathedral.

En route, he passed by Naroka's house, where the mourners who had said their farewells at the door had dispersed and headed to the cemetery to await the procession.

Lumian surveyed the area, his eyes scanning the landscape until he spotted a figure emerging from the house. It was none other than Pons Bénet, the younger brother of the padre.

"Wh…" Lumian's heart skipped a beat as he leaned against the nearby building, trying to remain inconspicuous.

Wasn't it strictly forbidden to enter the house of the deceased as it could potentially influence the family's fortunes?

Pons Bénet stopped in front of Naroka's house and whispered something to Arnault André, the old lady's youngest son.

After a brief exchange, Pons Bénet departed, leaving Arnault to lock up the house and make his way to the cemetery.

Naroka's death is indeed a little peculiar… Lumian frowned and muttered to himself silently.

He now felt that perhaps the owl wasn't to be blamed for Naroka's death. It was more probable that the padre's group has something to do with it.

The owl might be simply adhering to its duty of taking souls from the dead in Cordu. It just happened to stop on the way and observed Lumian for a while.

Of course, Lumian had an even more terrifying guess: What if the padre's group and the owl are connected!?

Their peculiarities and clandestine activities could be attributed to the Warlock's remains.

Before exiting Cordu, I should find an opportunity to share my thoughts with Ryan, Leah, and company. I hope they'll uncover the truth and put an end to the issue expeditiously. Lumian averted his gaze and mumbled to himself as he headed towards the Eternal Blazing Sun cathedral.

Despite appearing somber and solemn during the funeral, Lumian kept a watchful eye on each villager, hoping to detect any abnormality in their demeanor.

Alas, his efforts yielded no fruit.

Nonetheless, he had a sneaking suspicion that some of the villagers were wearing a facade…

Additionally, the enigmatic woman who had bestowed upon him the tarot card was nowhere to be found at the cemetery.

......

As the evening descended upon the semi-subterranean two-story abode, Aurore fixed her eyes on her brother, Lumian, and demanded, "Where's your script? Let me see it."

Lumian's expression turned serious as he replied, "I have something to tell you."

Aurore scanned his face.

"Did some wild animal in the village chew your script again?"

"No," Lumian whispered, his voice low. "I found out something from those foreigners."

Aurore's smile faded as she nodded, gesturing for him to continue.

Lumian revealed how Ryan and his gang were snooping around, investigating a letter, and the peculiarity of the livre bleu at home. He spoke of his suspicions regarding Madame Pualis and the letter's contents, which he had unearthed using Reimund's livre bleu.

Finally, he suggested, "We have to leave the village as soon as possible and head to Dariège. No, Bigorre. We'll stay there for a while."

Aurore didn't respond right away. She mulled over Lumian's suggestion for more than ten seconds.

"This is indeed the best choice for now.

"However, there's a problem. If we suddenly bolt from Cordu while the officials are investigating, won't it draw attention to us? Will they intercept us and make us the focus of their investigation?"

"It's fine if I'm not a Beyonder, but I'm an unofficial Beyonder. I'll be captured and cleansed by the Inquisition."

Lumian was out of his depth, an amateur in a sea of seasoned veterans. The problem at hand was a conundrum that he had never faced before, and for a moment, he was at a loss for words.

He finally managed to stutter, "So what's the plan? We break out and hide in another city, another country?"

"Oh, Lumian, you are overestimating me," she said. "Those three foreigners are more powerful than you think. If there was only one, I might be able to take them on, but three? And what if there's an ambush outside the village? Maybe they're just waiting for us to make a run for it."

Lumian was speechless.

He had to admit, compared to his sister, he was still green behind the ears. He just didn't have the same level of experience or the sharp attention to detail that she possessed.

"You're too impulsive," Aurore said, shaking her head. "But I suppose that's to be expected. After all, what young man doesn't have a bit of fire in his belly?"

She paused for a moment.

"Tomorrow morning, you're going to do me a favor. Head over to the administrator's office and help me send a telegram to Novel Weekly. Ask them when their next author salon will be held."

Aurore was a beloved columnist for Novel Weekly.

Only the administrator and the padre possessed a telegram machine, reserved for emergency communications. The villagers could use it, but at a cost in verl d'or.

Aurore saw Lumian's confusion and quickly explained her plan, "Novel Weekly has been begging me to promote my work in Trier, but I've always refused, including the most recent author salon. However, if I ask them to invite me now, they'll jump at the chance and even reimburse our train tickets. Our departure will seem ordinary, and even if we're being watched, we won't be suspects. I can temporarily trick them when the time comes. As long as we don't let the abnormality corrupt us, our chances of slipping out of Cordu are high."

Lumian breathed a sigh of relief. "Alright," he said.

In just a few seconds, Lumian posed an intriguing question to Aurore.

"Aurore, uh, Grande Soeur, is Beyonder a term for people with superpowers?"

"Yes," Aurore replied, choosing not to elaborate any further.

However, Aurore then flashed a sly smile and said, "So, you're really going to abandon your friends and flee from Cordu."

"I must have missed the part where that's my problem," Lumian snorted in response.

Keeping his sister safe was his top priority at the moment.

Aurore clicked her tongue and laughed.

"Oh, Lumian, you're such a delight. Say that again, would you?

"How many times have you said that before? And yet, every time, you either quietly offer your help or give them a pretend warning," Aurore continued.

"Those were trivial matters," Lumian defended himself.

However, the abnormality they faced now was a real threat to his sister's safety.

"Okay, okay," Aurore sighed, not wanting to argue with the kid. "Let's get dinner ready. It's your turn to cook today."

Lumian grunted tersely and headed towards the stove.

......

The night was dark, the crimson moon obscured by thick clouds.

Lumian finished washing up and lay down on the bed.

A visible worry crept onto his face.

Aurore's response wasn't bad, but Lumian was worried that the anomalies in the village would erupt at any moment while they waited for Novel Weekly's reply.

Lumian was desperate to increase his strength and obtaining superpowers in the dream ruins seemed like the easiest option.

However, he hadn't been able to find that lady all day and didn't have any corresponding suggestions. He was left with no choice but to try it out himself.

The situation was like a nocked arrow, ready to fire, and Lumian couldn't afford to hesitate.

Without hesitation, Lumian composed himself and slowly drifted off to sleep.

Chapter 22: Arrangements

Lumian awoke to the world shrouded in a faint, gray fog.

With practiced ease, he bounded out of bed and rushed to the window. His gaze fell upon the mountain, a towering behemoth of brownish-red stones and reddish-brown soil that loomed in the wilderness beyond.

Despite its modest size, a mere twenty or thirty meters tall, the mountain seemed to stretch endlessly upwards, piercing the very heavens themselves. Lumian found himself using the words "mountain peak" to describe it, so profound was its impact on him.

Beneath its massive frame, the ruins of dilapidated structures encircled the desolate wilderness, stacked atop one another, layer upon layer.

Judging by the shotgun-wielding monster's build, I'd say it's highly skilled in both running and jumping. It also appears to possess a degree of intelligence, capable of wielding a weapon as complex as a shotgun...

It has incredibly strong tracking abilities, and I can't discount the possibility that it possesses some sort of superpowers, much like Aurore...

...

As Lumian focused his mind, details of the target began to surface.

His initial judgment was grim--if he attempted to face the monster with the shotgun, his chance of survival was a meager 10 percent. And if he tried to utilize his special trait, it would only hasten his demise. His meditation was a double-edged sword; it pushed him to the brink of death, making him vulnerable to even the slightest strike from the enemy.

Sneak attacks and assassinations were not viable options either. The other party possessed an uncanny ability to track his movements, rendering any attempts at stealth futile. Plus, Lumian lacked the necessary equipment to mount a ranged assault. A revolver would have been a godsend.

For the past two days, Lumian had wracked his brains trying to come up with a plan. And finally, a solution presented itself: traps!

He had ventured deep into the mountains with the village hunters, where he mastered the art of setting traps. Since then, Lumian had become a pro at pulling off a few practical jokes.

Lumian's initial plan was to use oil as a weapon. His idea was to fill a large bucket with oil, tie a rope to it, and hide it somewhere high. When his target approached, he would yank the rope, causing the bucket to tip over, drenching the unsuspecting victim with oil. Then, he would light a torch and toss it at them.

However, after some deliberation, he gave up on the idea.

On the premise that the creature had strong tracking abilities, he knew he had to overestimate its sense of smell.

The smell of oil was quite obvious, and if he used other stronger smells to cover it up, he wasn't sure if the other party would react differently. The monster might even be able to distinguish even the slightest abnormality, like wild dogs.

In the end, Lumian chose to dig a deep pit and plant stakes at the bottom.

He knew that there was a certain problem with this plan. With the tracking abilities displayed by the monster, there was a high chance that it would discover the anomaly in advance and see through the trap.

Lumian's response was to find a way to exploit its blind spots and lower its guard.

His weapons were inferior to the creature's, but he hoped his intelligence could give him the upper hand. As a human, he had one advantage: his brain.

At least from our last encounter, it possesses a certain degree of intelligence, albeit not quite that high... Lumian comforted himself.

But he refused to let this lull him into a false sense of security. He would plan assuming that the creature had the cognitive abilities of an average human being.

Someone like Pons Bénet.

No, that guy's IQ is lower than a pile of rocks. If it weren't for all his goons, I'd have him bowing down to me and calling me daddy. After a moment of contemplation, Lumian raised his expectations of the monster. Yes, treat it like an uneducated padre.

He gazed out the window again, his eyes fixated on the wilderness between his dwelling and the ruins.

This place was closer to the "safe zone," making it the ideal location for his hideout. However, there was no cover, leaving everything exposed in plain sight, making it unsuitable for an ambush.

"It's fine to dig a trap, but if I use myself as bait, the other party will be able to spot me from a distance and shoot me. It won't need to come over at all..." Lumian muttered, contemplating whether to take the risk of entering the ruins to set up a trap.

His plan took shape rapidly, with one thing left to confirm: it would take a lot of time to dig a deep pit and plant stakes below. Lumian couldn't expect the other party to wait until he was done.

After a moment's reflection, Lumian opened his arms and made an "embrace the Sun" gesture. He prayed more fervently than ever before.

"My God, my Father, please bless me and aid me in dealing with that monster.

"Praise the Sun!"

There was no 100% certainty for most things in the world. Lumian didn't hesitate for a moment. He grabbed the pitchfork and axe from the bedroom and proceeded to the study.

Considering the target's weapon, Lumian knew he had to switch up his protection gear.

He shed his cotton clothes and lashed hard-bound books to his chest and back with a rope.

This was makeshift paper armor!

He vaguely remembered his sister warning him about the potential for internal injuries, but he couldn't afford to worry about that now.

He stretched to make sure the weight of the books wouldn't impede his fighting abilities, then donned his leather jacket and headed down to the ground floor to gather materials for his trap.

Not long after, Lumian's grip tightened on the shovel and bundle of ropes at his waist, one for climbing and the other for crafting rope nets to replace the tree branches.

He breathed deeply, steeling himself for what lay ahead, and gripped the iron axe in his right hand as he opened the door.

A faint gray fog crept through the wilderness as Lumian approached the mountain, the peak now dyed in blood.

Lumian made his way through the eerie silence, creeping towards the edge of the ruins.

With caution, he walked a distance to the side and tossed his shovel, pitchfork, ropes, and other gear into a dark corner of a collapsed building.

With only his trusty axe in hand, he returned to the spot where he had entered the ruins.

Moving quietly and deliberately, Lumian crept deeper into the ruins without drawing attention to himself.

When he finally reached the spot where the three-faced monster had scared him off last time, he paused for nearly a minute before turning back.

Halfway there, he began to detour, circling back towards the collapsed house where he had stored his tools.

As he approached, Lumian scanned the terrain, searching for a suitable location to set up his trap.

There's a relatively wide and short crevice here. With a little modification, it'll make an excellent trap and save me precious time. As for the other one, well, that might take a while. But I'll just have to hope the monster won't find me too quickly...

Lumian retrieved his shovel and other gear, turned back to the chosen location, and set to work.

After modifying the crevice, Lumian wielded his axe and sliced off a jagged piece of wood, then inserted it into the trap's base. He crafted a net from rope, draping it over the trap before covering it with soil, ensuring that it blended seamlessly with its surroundings.

With everything in place, he began to mimic the monster tracking him.

If this creature is as perceptive as I think it is, it will sense the trap and avoid it, perhaps leaping over it in a single bound. However, it would inevitably reach this spot...

I need to be here, so it spots me the moment it arrives... Lumian measured the distance with his feet and confirmed his line of sight before settling on a relatively intact wall.

He squatted there and confirmed his line of sight.

Then he began to dig a second trap.

This was a trap specifically designed for "normal humans."

Lumian knew that when someone had managed to track down their target and easily realized that the other party had laid a trap for them, only to discover that the enemy was lying in wait nearby, they'd probably get cocky. Their thirst for success would overwhelm them, and they'd ignore the possibility of a second trap, eagerly lunging at their prey.

It was a classic flaw of people with pedestrian intelligence.

Lumian just prayed that the monster didn't possess the average IQ of a human. If it did, he had no choice but to bolt. Odds were he'd be ensnared and left to die in the wild, with a slim chance of making it back to his house and hiding in the "safe zone."

Cordu's abnormality had forced him to make a dangerous choice.

With every passing moment, Lumian grew increasingly wary. Even though he had set up the second trap, the monster with the shotgun had yet to make an appearance.

The same held true for the other monsters.

At last, Lumian began to relax. After stowing away his shovel and other supplies, he stood tall, spreading his arms wide.

"Praise the Sun!" he exclaimed with renewed vigor.

Lumian shrank back against the wall and fell to his knee, his eyes fixated on the first trap.

There was no clear line of sight to the path he took, obstructed by a collapsed building looming in his way.

He waited there, patiently, his heart thumping in his chest. Lumian could feel the adrenaline pumping through his veins, and the sensation was unprecedented.

As a vagrant, Lumian had encountered his fair share of "enemies" who were bigger and brawnier than him. But they weren't looking to off him; they just wanted his grub, dough, and a decent spot to catch some Z's. Even if someone happened to die in the scuffle, it was chalked up to an unfortunate accident.

But now, the adversary he was up against was a monstrous creature that didn't abide by human laws or morals. And it was exponentially stronger than Lumian. Hell, it might even possess a few superpowers. If his scheme went sideways, the outcome was all but certain.

Thump, thump, thump... Lumian's heart was about to leap out of his chest.

Everyone wanted to live the good life, and Lumian was no exception.

Breathe in, breathe out... breathe in, breathe out...

Lumian tried to take deep breaths to steady his nerves, but it wasn't helping.

Lumian hoped the monster would appear sooner, though he dreaded its arrival.

On the one hand, it could bring a quick resolution to this situation, regardless of whether the outcome was positive or negative. At least then he wouldn't be as anxious as he was now, almost at the point of breaking down. On the other hand, fear gripped him tightly.

Realizing that he couldn't go on like this, he reminded himself, I can't burden Aurore with my fears. With that, he attempted to meditate, focusing all his energy on the task.

Although it proved more challenging than before, Lumian eventually managed to outline the crimson sun in his mind.

The mere sight of it eased his nerves somewhat, yet he still trembled with fear.

Suddenly, he heard a faint rustling sound.

It was as if a shepherd was approaching quietly through a nearby pasture, hidden from view.

Chapter 23: Combat Intelligence

Lumian's senses were on high alert.

He wasn't as scared as before now that things were finally happening. Despite his body still quivering, he felt more in control and less likely to collapse.

I should've died five years ago. It's all thanks to Aurore that I'm still alive. These past five years were a free lunch. What's there to be afraid of? Lumian muttered to himself, gritting his teeth and mustering up courage.

In the blink of an eye, the already dim light illuminating the first trap's surface grew even fainter.

A shadowy figure emerged, blocking the light that pierced through the dense fog in the sky.

The figure loomed in the distance, a hulking beast with blood-red eyes and greasy black hair. Half-human and half-beast, it was armed with a shotgun on its back, ready for anything. Its front "knees" bent as it surveyed the ground before it.

A moment later, the beast, wearing a dark jacket and muddy pants, removed its shotgun and jumped, controlling the vertical extent of its jump to leap over the trap and land on the solid, cracked ground.

It turned its greasy black-haired head and saw a slight movement.

Then, the monster spotted Lumian, who had a panicked expression and was trying to hide behind a wall.

With a low growl, the beast jumped up high again and pounced on its target.

It landed a slight distance away from where Lumian had been, to prevent him from turning around and dealing a fatal blow before it could stabilize itself.

Lumian fumbled his way around the wall, disappearing from view.

As soon as the monster landed, the soil beneath its feet gave way, and it plummeted along with the dirt and rope net into a deep pit that had suddenly appeared.

Thud!

The sound of something heavy crashing to the ground echoed through the abandoned building, accompanied by a screech resembling that of a rat.

Lumian, who had concealed himself behind the wall, couldn't suppress the thrill surging through him upon witnessing the sight.

The first step had been accomplished!

With most of his fear evaporating, he seized the pitchfork by his side and dashed towards the trap.

The skinless monster's formidable tenacity had left an indelible impression on Lumian. Moreover, his quarry had a shotgun, so he refrained from exposing himself above the deep hole. Instead, he aimed the pitchfork from a distance and thrust it into the pit.

In a sudden turn of events, the pitchfork plunged and halted abruptly.

Immediately, an intense force reverberated through the pitchfork, yanking Lumian into the trap with brute force.

Caught off guard, Lumian tumbled forward.

He didn't bother inspecting the pit's bottom. Discarding the pitchfork, he spun around and lunged towards the still-standing wall.

Bang!

The impact hit Lumian like a freight train, knocking him off his feet.

Blood, with a distinct metallic taste, surged up in his throat.

With a thud, he hit the ground, tumbling a few times before he regained his footing.

In the same instant, he caught sight of the monstrous creature—part-human, part-beast—emerging from the deep pit.

It held a single-barreled shotgun in its hand, its body torn open, revealing a grotesque display of wounds. A sickening mixture of dark red and pale yellow liquid poured out, as its insides spilled out.

Despite being badly injured by Lumian's trap, the creature had not lost its ability to fight.

As it tumbled into the pit, it managed to contort its body just enough to avoid a fatal blow. The creature's legs and arms were also still functional, allowing it to break free from the trap.

Without a moment's hesitation, Lumian bolted for the ruins nearby.

It wasn't a spontaneous decision; he had a plan in mind.

He knew there was a chance the trap wouldn't completely incapacitate the monster, leaving it with enough strength to fight back.

In the event that the trap failed, Lumian's contingency plan was to use the environment to his advantage. He'd play a game of cat and mouse, buying time for the beast to succumb to its wounds. Its reaction time and strength would weaken considerably, and Lumian could strike when the opportunity presented itself.

Bang!

Another shot rang out, followed by the sound of soil splattering as leads appeared at the spot where Lumian had been standing.

He quickly took cover behind a half-collapsed wall and crawled on all fours to the other side of the ruins.

Suddenly, he heard the sound of wind blowing in the air.

The monster had jumped over.

Lumian swiftly pivoted and crawled back behind the half-collapsed wall through a gap.

He made the most of the special conditions of the collapsed buildings, hiding at times and circling around at others, dodging the monster's attacks without engaging in a direct fight.

Hide-and-seek was Lumian's forte, honed through past pranks where he used this innate ability to escape getting beaten up on the spot.

As the cat-and-mouse game continued, Lumian gradually found himself panting, while the monster's running speed, jumping height, strength, and reaction speed had clearly weakened.

Just a little longer, just a little longer. I still can't defeat it now… Lumian retreated back to his previous location, leaning against the half-collapsed wall and trying to control his urge to immediately counterattack.

Bang! Suddenly, he felt a massive blow to his back, sending him flying forward.

The half-collapsed wall and rocks behind him exploded into a million pieces, raining down around him as he crashed to the ground.

The monster hadn't chased after him, instead choosing to body-slam into the obstacles in its way.

The already shaky half-collapsed wall couldn't withstand the brunt of its full force and collapsed completely.

Crimson blood gushed out of the creature's wounds, pooling on the ground in a grotesque display.

Despite being caught off guard, Lumian's reflexes were quick. He rolled out of harm's way and sought cover behind a pile of rubble.

Bang!

The monster's shotgun blast missed him by a hair's breadth.

Having slammed into the wall, the monster struggled to regain its footing.

It fumbled with the cloth bag strapped to its waist, only to find it empty. With a snarl, it hurled the shotgun aside and lunged at Lumian.

Lumian had already darted to a new hiding spot for a continued game of cat-and-mouse.

Of course, he couldn't keep up this game forever. The monster might slip away if he waited too long, and the noise could attract others of its kind.

As he circled around the area, he noticed that the monster seemed to be slowing down.

Here's the chance!

With a quick decision, Lumian pretended to make an escape towards a collapsed building.

Once there, he stood firm, drew his axe from his back, and took a moment to catch his breath.

In a flash, the monster rounded the corner and stood in front of Lumian.

Without hesitation, Lumian raised his axe and charged forward.

He stepped towards the creature, turning his body sideways and lowering his shoulder. He planned to body-slam the monster, a move his sister had taught him, and then slash at its neck.

Bam!

Lumian took a step forward, leaning his body against the monster's chest, but the creature didn't budge. Lumian was surprised by its unyielding stance. He tried to push harder, but the monster remained like a thick wall.

What… Lumian's heart tightened, and he bounced back. He was about to pounce to the ground and try to escape the monster's attack range.

In a flash, the monster lunged forward and clutched Lumian's neck in a death grip.

It didn't look like it was having trouble moving at all!

Lumian gasped in shock as he was hoisted into the air, his neck throbbing with pain. Sacrebleu, I've been tricked! he exclaimed, his mind reeling.

A creaking sound filled the air, and the world spun around him, making his head swim.

His axe had missed its target and was now knocked off to the side.

Lumian finally realized that he had been outsmarted by the monster.

Despite being in dire straits, the creature had enough strength to fight. It had cunningly faked weakness, luring him into attacking instead of staying hidden. Lumian had underestimated its combat intelligence, and now he found himself in a desperate situation.

The monster was clearly at the end of its rope, as evidenced by its inability to snap Lumian's neck. But this was just a temporary respite. The creature still had enough energy left to finish the job.

As his neck threatened to snap and his breathing grew more ragged, Lumian felt his mind begin to go blank.

Blank.

As Lumian teetered on the brink of death, the lady's words suddenly resurfaced in his mind.

She wanted him to use what's special about him in the dream.

Special trait… His thoughts were nearly blank, and so he quickly seized the opportunity to meditate.

The red sun instantly appeared in his mind. Unlike his previous attempt at meditation to calm his emotions, where the sun disappeared as soon as it was formed, this time he focused on keeping it in existence. Suddenly, a voice from above, infinitely high, pierced his skull.

The pain was excruciating, and Lumian felt as though his heart might burst from his chest. He forgot about the monster's vice grip on his neck and the fact that he was struggling to breathe.

Suddenly, he fell to the ground with a sickening thud.

The strange sound that had accompanied his meditation disappeared, but the pain remained, almost unbearable. He was unable to take stock of his surroundings or even assess the damage done to his body.

After an unknown amount of time, the near-death sensation subsided.

Lumian didn't bother checking his neck; instead, he placed his hands on the ground and lifted his head.

The beast was squatting nearby, half-human and half-beast, with its head drooping and its arms outstretched in front of it.

Lumian noticed its wounds still seeping with blood mixed with a yellow liquid, and the creature's body quivered uncontrollably.

What's wrong with it? Was it scared silly by the "specialness" I displayed? He picked up his fallen axe and took a step towards the monster.

Without hesitation, he held the axe with both hands and swung it at the back of the beast's neck.

The axe sank deeply into the creature's muscles and came to a halt at its bones.

Lumian used all his strength to remove the axe, then continued his assault, slashing at the monster's neck once, twice, thrice. Finally, the beast's head detached from its body with a sickening splash, rolling to the side.

The body held on for a moment longer, barely clinging to life.

No resistance, just trembles.

And then, with a sudden jerk, Lumian's body contorted, his hands releasing their tight grip, letting the bloodied axe slide down with a sickening squelch.

Huff. Puff. Huff. He could finally catch his breath.

Chapter 24: Gains

Lumian didn't have the luxury of resting for too long. He had to keep moving, for fear that other monsters might come. After taking a moment to catch his breath, he endured the pain in his neck and back and slowly approached the monster's corpse.

He held the axe tightly in his right hand, ready to strike again if the creature wasn't fully dead.

After cautiously searching the body with his left hand, he found three copper coins called "lick" and an empty cloth bag.

"That's it?" Lumian muttered to himself, disappointed that he hadn't found anything related to superpowers.

If it wasn't for that, would he have risked his life fighting this monster?

If Lumian wasn't special in the dream, he would have been nothing more than the monster's meal.

He propped himself up and looked towards the shotgun monster's head that had rolled to the side, praying that what he was searching for was there.

In that moment, a deep crimson glow materialized over the monster's body.

They resembled fireflies, gradually converging towards a single spot in an unyielding fashion.

Lumian gawked in disbelief, as a sense of elation began to well up inside of him.

This phenomenon had to be connected to superpowers!

Without much delay, a sticky, dark red substance materialized on the monster's chest, and no additional light specks came into view.

Lumian cautiously crouched down and made a grab for the blob.

It was incredibly slippery, slipping through his grasp twice before he finally managed to hold it in his palm.

It's remarkably lightweight, yet possesses a certain texture and elasticity. The surface feels as smooth as glass...

"What the hell is this?" Lumian muttered to himself, realizing once more that he was completely illiterate when it came to matters of the mystical.

In the midst of hushed whispers, Lumian caught a whiff of something strange and dark-red that reeked of blood. His impatience grew, and an indescribable malice took over his body.

For a moment, he wanted nothing more than to raise his axe and hack at the monster's corpse until his violent emotions were spent.

But Aurore's warning about the dangers of pursuing superpowers echoed in his mind, and he quickly reined in his impulses. He had taken precautions to monitor himself and remain vigilant at all times, and he wouldn't let his guard down now.

It affects my mind? Lumian tossed the dark red blob into the cloth bag he had found on the monster.

The moment he lost contact with it, he felt a wave of calm wash over him, dissipating the remaining excitement of the deathmatch.

His body still trembled slightly, but he was back in control.

"As expected!" Lumian whispered happily as he returned to his senses.

He tied the cloth bag tightly and secured it to his belt buckle.

After a moment's consideration, Lumian withdrew the cloth bag and stowed it safely in the inner pocket of his leather jacket.

It provided him a sense of assurance and minimized the chances of losing it!

As the buttons on his clothes were undone, the book that had been plastered to Lumian's back lost its support and hit the ground.

It was riddled with potholes and in tatters, a far cry from its former state.

Lumian recognized it as the "Mock Examination Papers for Higher Education Admission" exercise book that his sister Aurore had prepared for him. This was the same book that had saved his life by blocking a shotgun attack.

Of course, this single book didn't deserve all the credit.

Lumian picked up the exercise book and sauntered back to the monster's lifeless body, a wry smile on his face.

"See, knowledge is indeed power!" he said, intending to throw it at the monster's face. But then he hesitated, recalling the countless hours Aurore had spent writing it. He couldn't bring himself to toss it away.

Instead, he tucked the exercise book into his belt, dragged the monster's corpse to the trap, and flung it inside. Lumian kicked the monster's head for good measure.

With the battlefield cleared, Lumian gathered his tools, including the empty shotgun, his pitchfork, and shovel, and retreated into the wilderness.

He looked over his shoulder as he walked, ever-vigilant.

Eventually, he made it back to his house, climbed the stairs, and entered his bedroom.

It was only then that he truly relaxed. The agony that had been gnawing at his body, the obvious discomfort, and the overwhelming exhaustion all erupted at once.

He slumped down on the bed, taking a moment to recover. But he didn't want to sleep just yet. He needed to assess the damage. Lumian stripped off his clothes and walked over to the wardrobe, checking himself out in the full-body mirror.

His neck was swollen, and the five bloody finger marks on it had turned an ominous shade of bluish-black. His back was bruised, and there were countless scrapes and cuts all over his body.

Even some of my injuries are internal, just like Aurore had warned me. I wonder if I'll recover by the next time I come in? He couldn't help but reflect on the battle. It was a failure, but not a total failure.

In the first half of the battle, he gave himself a pat on the back. Not only did he make full use of the monster's low IQ to lead it into the second trap, but he also followed his original plan to a tee. It was a game of cat and mouse, and he played it to perfection. He dragged the monster out until it was on the brink of surrendering to its injuries. However, his lack of experience was his downfall. Instead of throwing in heavy rocks, he chose to stab the monster with a pitchfork at the bottom of the pit.

In the second half of the battle, he was overconfident and underestimated the monster's intelligence. His insufficient combat experience made him fall into the monster's trap, which almost got him killed.

That performance would have been a disaster. Thankfully, his earlier successes had pushed the monster to its limit, and it didn't kill him quickly enough. This gave him a chance to complete his meditation and summon his "special trait".

Before this battle, Lumian had not expected the "special trait" to have such a powerful effect. It caused the monster to descend into uncontrollable fear, one so unbreakable despite suffering attacks.

He had worried that the near-death state brought about by summoning the "special trait" would make him vulnerable to attack.

But it turned out to be special and very strong... As Lumian sighed, he had a revelation.

The monsters in the ruins avoided his house and made it a "safe zone" because there was something even more terrifying inside. It could be the owner of the mysterious voice he heard when he summoned the "special trait"!

Lumian gasped at the thought.

His subconscious urged him to search every corner of the house for the terrifying thing, but he quickly dismissed the idea.

Provoking the being that even the shotgun-wielding monster was helpless against was not an option.

For now, all was calm and peaceful, and it was best to keep it that way. He had to maintain the current state of the "safe house" and not uncover the shroud.

Each passing day was a day, and as for the dangers that may lie ahead, he would face them when the time came.

Not until then, not until I become a Beyonder and gain significant power. Lumian cast his gaze at the cloth bag in his left hand.

Even as Lumian examined his injuries in the mirror, shirtless, he refused to let go of the source of superpowers. He had worked too hard to obtain it.

How should I use this thing? he asked himself, opening the cloth bag and staring at the dark red blob within.

The blob lay still at the bottom of the bag, its form unstable yet clearly not alive.

Lumian, who knew nothing of mysticism, wondered if he should eat it, perform a ritual to merge with it, or offer it to some secret entity.

He only knew of the latter two options from reading Hidden Veil. In the past, he would have only thought of one thing: "Eat!"

Lumian didn't rush to make a decision. He intended to seek counsel from the enigmatic lady at Ol' Tavern first.

He was convinced that the woman would provide him with clues on how to harness the power of the dark red sphere and gain superhuman abilities.

Lumian sensed that the other party had a reason for doing so, despite not knowing what it was.

If things didn't pan out, he could still count on his sister for help.

After dressing leisurely, Lumian stowed the lump of crimson in his coat pocket, along with all the cash he'd acquired.

Finally, he collapsed onto the bed, too drained to move. Despite the agony in his neck, back, and body, overwhelming fatigue seized him, and he drifted off to sleep in a flash.

......

As Lumian opened his eyes, he was blinded by the sunlight that had already penetrated the curtains, illuminating the entire room.

Slowly sitting up, he felt sore all over, as if he had been pummeled in a dream.

I was indeed beaten up badly... The injuries in the dream really get reflected into reality, but there's an obvious level of weakening... Trying to move around, he felt his muscles aching a little but was ultimately relieved that he wasn't too affected.

However, when he reached into his pockets--

"Nothing... Nothing at all!" Lumian failed to exit with the crimson blob.

His expression became solemn, his brows knitted tightly. Lumian didn't know what to do.

The crimson blob, an item that promised superpowers, hadn't followed him into reality. This was different from what the mysterious woman at Ol' Tavern had said.

Lumian gathered himself, quickly changed his clothes, and left his room.

As he walked down the hall, he noticed that the door to the washroom was wide open. Aurore was facing the mirror, brushing her teeth with a serious look on her face.

"Morning," Lumian greeted.

"It's not early anymore. You got up late..." Aurore muttered incoherently.

Splat! Her blond hair, tied back into a ponytail, flicked about as she spit out the liquid in her mouth.

She turned to look at Lumian.

"What did you do wrong last night?"

"That owl is outside. How would I dare go out?" Lumian responded calmly.

"That's true." Aurore dropped the topic and said, "Remember to take five verl d'or to the administrator to send a telegram later."

Lumian nodded.

This was the key to their escape from Cordu, and it was something he would never forget.

After breakfast, Lumian headed straight to the village square where the administrator's office was located in a two-story building.

Upon reaching the office, Lumian discovered that Administrator Béost had yet to arrive, but the rest of the staff had already commenced their day's work.

Lumian paid the required fee and promptly sent a telegram. After concluding his business, Lumian turned on his heel and began walking towards the Ol' Tavern.

It was highly unlikely that the enigmatic woman was already up and about, but Lumian was more than happy to bide his time.

His pursuit of superpowers had been a prolonged one, so a few more ticks on the clock didn't faze him.

Chapter 25: Sequences and Potions

Lumian sauntered into Ol' Tavern, his sharp eyes scanning the dimly lit room. To his surprise, the mysterious woman was already seated in her usual corner, enjoying a lavish breakfast spread.

She had changed her attire yet again, donning a long brown, pleated dress and a dark velvet hat that screamed high society.

"So early?" Lumian approached her table, calming his racing heart.

The woman looked up, meeting his gaze.

"Is there a possibility that I didn't sleep all night?"

"Perhaps." Lumian knew this routine all too well--his sister, Aurore, often pulled all-nighters when deadlines were looming. But what was the reason for the enigmatic woman raising this up?

As he glanced at her table, he found a delectable spread, with a cream soufflé sprinkled with nuts, a muffin that looked scrumptious, a croissant, a cup of black coffee, and a cat tongue biscuit.

What an appetite! Lumian thought, impressed. But how can Cordu provide such luxurious cuisine? Only Aurore or the chefs in the administrator's family could whip up something like this.

"It's all dessert," Lumian said, taking a seat opposite her.

The woman nodded, her expression serious for once.

"Intis's desserts are indeed not bad, and there's quite a lot of variety. Even if I have some for breakfast every day, it'll take me a month without repetition to finish them all," she said, biting into the cat tongue biscuit and closing her eyes in bliss. "That's one of the purposes of traveling."

Lumian seized the moment to probe the woman's background. "You're not from Intis?" he asked.

The woman smiled enigmatically.

"I'm from Loen, but given the current situation, this isn't important."

What else did Loen have to offer besides steam machinery, factories, and a large army? Lumian, being an Intisian, couldn't help but recall the mocking words that everyone used to taunt the Loen Kingdom--reclining chairs, mint sauce, fried fish and potatoes, and pure snakefruit beer.

But he quickly brushed off the thought and turned his attention to the task at hand.

"I got rid of the monster with the shotgun."

The woman took a sip of coffee and nodded approvingly.

"Not bad."

Lumian sensed a strange emotion emanating from her eyes.

He couldn't shake off the strange feeling that he had sensed in their previous interactions. There was something about her that he couldn't quite put his finger on--a mix of facetiousness and hidden emotions that intrigued him.

Undeterred, he pressed on with the matter at hand.

"I obtained an abnormal dark-red object from that monster. Holding it makes me irritable and filled with hostility.

"I think it involves supernatural powers, but it didn't follow me to reality," he explained.

The woman smiled enigmatically.

"After going in and out so many times, don't you realize that other than your own physical condition, you can't bring anything else over?"

Lumian was taken aback. "Didn't you say that supernatural things are excluded..." he trailed off, realizing that he was out of his depth.

Lumian couldn't shake off the physical discomfort that lingered from his dream, along with the vivid memories that refused to fade away.

After careful consideration, he posed a question.

"You mean that after obtaining supernatural powers through the crimson blob and turning oneself into a Beyonder, the corresponding state that is different from that of a normal person can be brought to reality?"

"Not a lost cause," she replied nonchalantly, savoring the cream soufflé.

"But won't the corresponding strength weaken because of this?" Lumian pressed, his brow furrowing. "The injuries I suffered in the dream are much lighter in reality."

"The conditions brought about by Beyonder characteristics won't change," the woman explained, meeting Lumian's gaze. "This is why I said that extraordinary items are excluded."

Beyonder characteristics... Lumian mulled over the term, trying to piece together what his sister had told him about Beyonders.

Obtaining such characteristics would allow one to become a Beyonder, he surmised.

And based on the woman's explanation, he had a hunch about the unique nature of his dream.

That ruin, it's real. Or maybe it was once real, but now it's sunk deep into some big shot's dream and been left to fester. And my dream, it's like a secret passageway. A passageway that's only accessible through the symbols on my chest, and leads straight to that ruin.

Based on my theory, my home in the dream is like a mark left behind by our interaction. It's a reflection of the place where I feel safest, deep in my subconscious. That's why it looks nothing like the wilderness or the ruins that surround it. It's like we're in two different worlds, me and the monsters.

But those monsters, they can't come in. They're stuck in the real ruins while my "home" is a mix of dream and reality. Only those with the special symbols can pass through the corresponding barrier.

The symbols only work for me, and they record the state of my body before I'm brought back to reality. When I wake up, the things that don't involve the supernatural will fade away, but the implications will remain. Even death will work the same way.

So there shouldn't be anything scary waiting for me at home in the dream. But the origin of those symbols and the source of that terrifying voice, they symbolize something dark and horrific...

Lumian sat in silence, watching the lady across from him leisurely devour her breakfast. She didn't seem to mind.

Lumian finally asked, regaining his composure, "May I ask how I should use that dark-red blob? Is it the Beyonder characteristic you mentioned?"

At the critical moment, he could not help but address her respectfully.

The lady set down her coffee and looked at him.

"I can give you a potion formula. Just follow it."

The generous gift made Lumian uneasy.

"Why are you helping me?"

The lady laughed.

"Would you believe me if I said it was arranged by fate?"

No... Lumian subconsciously replied inwardly.

The abnormality in the village, the pressure of the impending storm, and the desire for superpowers all swirled around Lumian, threatening to overwhelm him. He pushed his unease down and spoke in a low voice, "I do."

Opportunities like this didn't come around often, and Lumian knew he had to act decisively. He couldn't afford to hesitate or have second thoughts.

The lady's smile grew wider, the unclear emotions he had detected in her eyes earlier intensifying.

She pulled out a stack of post-it notes and a silver fountain pen from her black lady's purse and began writing.

Finally, she stopped and tore off the top note and handed it to him.

Lumian snatched it from her hand and read it quickly.

"Hunter potion formula:

"Main ingredient: One Hunter Beyonder characteristic;

"Supplementary ingredients: 80 milliliters of red wine, one Red Chestnut Flower (can be a specimen or substituted with 10 drops of the corresponding essential oil), 5 grams of poplar tree leaf powder, 10 grams of basil;

"Usage: Drink it directly.

Satisfied with his memorization, Lumian carefully folded the note and slipped it into his brown jacket.

Done with that, he asked, unable to contain his curiosity, "What does 'Hunter' mean?"

Hunter in the supernatural sense?

"The corresponding Sequence," the lady replied, taking a casual sip of her coffee. "You do not know much about mysticism, so let me explain. There are 22 common pathways in the world. To access them, you must obtain ingredients with the corresponding Beyonder characteristics and concoct potions. Each pathway has 10 Sequences, numbered from 9 to 0. The lower the number, the higher the level, and the stronger the ability."

"The Beyonder characteristic you obtained belongs to the Red Priest pathway. It can only be used to concoct the corresponding Sequence 9 Hunter potion."

Lumian listened attentively and blurted out, "Then what Sequence does my sister Aurore belong to?"

"She's a Sequence 7 Warlock of The Hermit pathway," the lady replied coolly.

She did not mention how she knew.

Aurore is already at Sequence 7? That's true. She has already obtained supernatural powers for several years... I'll only be at Sequence 9 after consuming the potion. I'm still quite a distance from her... I only hope that I won't be a burden when we escape Cordu in the future... Lumian couldn't help but ask, "Can I drink higher Sequence Beyonder potions directly? Or should I drink Sequence 9 today and Sequence 8 tomorrow?"

"Theoretically, yes." The lady added after Lumian revealed a look of joy, "However, most who attempt it end up dead or as a monster. Fewer than one in ten million people succeed."

"Turn into monsters?" Lumian was alarmed.

The lady chuckled and said, "Didn't your sister warn you about the dangers of the path to transcendence? After drinking the potion, if you can't control the power, you'll either die from a physical breakdown or transform into a monster. Why do you think the one you encountered was in human form?"

No wonder... Lumian finally understood what danger his sister was talking about.

But he was willing to face it.

"Is there no way to reduce this danger?" he asked.

The lady considered him for a moment before answering, "There is. You need a firm will, good physical condition, and some luck. As for the rest, you don't need to know. You're still on the first potion."

"Good physical condition..." Lumian, who had planned on returning to catch up on sleep and drink the potion later, frowned.

He was still seriously injured in the dream.

The lady opposite him nodded slightly and said, "Take your time. Wait until nightfall and your body has mostly recovered before diving back into your dreams."

"Uh..." Lumian's mind raced with questions. "So as long as my body in reality is almost healed, the injuries in my dream will completely recover?"

One had to know that his body in reality was only a little sore. It was completely different from the injuries in the dream!

"Yes." The lady confirmed Lumian's guess.

She continued, "There's much to learn about the potion and the paths of the divine. I'll tell you once you become a Hunter."

The paths of the divine... Lumian asked in puzzlement, "Why not tell me now?"

The lady laughed.

"If you die or become a monster, it would be a waste of my time to say so much now."

"..." Lumian was speechless.

Lumian stood up and excused himself, but before he left, he asked one more thing.

"Do you know about the anomaly in the village?"

Chapter 26: Whistleblowing

The lady nibbled on a croissant before answering Lumian's question.

"I do."

She really knows… Lumian's heart leapt with hope. He deliberated over his words before asking, using honorifics to show his respect, "May I offer to pay a certain price to commission your help in solving Cordu's problem?"

From his point of view, this mysterious lady woman was much stronger than Leah and her companions. If she agreed to help, the problem with Cordu would be solved, and he and his sister wouldn't have to risk their lives to escape. But he was worried that he couldn't afford the price.

Lumian wasn't optimistic that the woman would agree to help. But he felt it was necessary to try. Even if he was rejected, he wouldn't be too embarrassed. He was not a stickler for such things.

The woman turned to him and spoke calmly, "I can indeed solve the problem here, but the corresponding price is that everything will be destroyed, including you.

"If you want a better outcome, you can only rely on yourselves."

Lumian's eyes widened in disbelief. Could the problem with Cordu be that serious? He searched the woman's face for any sign of jest, but found none.

He wasn't surprised or disappointed that she refused to help. What shocked him was the severity of the problem. It could even lead to the destruction of the entire village!

He was puzzled and alarmed by the situation. Since she can resolve it, why is it that the entire village will die, while us ordinary people and Beyonders who aren't strong enough capable of producing a better outcome?

If he didn't hear back from Novel Weekly by the day after tomorrow, he would urge his sister to leave Cordu immediately. He couldn't delay any longer even if it meant taking a huge risk! He had to act fast!

"What's the problem?" Lumian pressed, his dignity never a priority.

The lady smiled.

"Me telling you and you finding out through your investigations will give rise to completely different results."

Lumian gritted his teeth instinctively. He didn't stand her behavior of always holding back something.

For some reason, he sensed that peculiar feeling in the woman's eyes, something he couldn't quite put his finger on.

"Okay." Lumian paused for a moment, weighing his words carefully. "Do you have any information about Madame Pualis? Is she a Warlock—uh, a Beyonder?"

The woman lifted her coffee cup to her lips and took a small sip before answering, "Yes, she is."

Indeed… Lumian asked further, "What pathway, which Sequence?"

The lady's expression turned serious in an instant.

"It's not a normal pathway."

"What do you mean it's not a normal pathway?" he pressed.

The lady smiled.

"You'll find out later."

I want to know now… Lumian struggled to keep his expression in check.

Already standing and about to leave, Lumian suddenly remembered something crucial.

"Madame, how am I supposed to bring those supplementary ingredients into the dream?"

In the dream ruins, he could only find basic ingredients like red wine and basil in the dream ruins, but for the Red Chestnut Flower and poplar leaf, he would have to collect them in reality.

The task wasn't impossible, and Lumian had already thought of a way to "borrow" them, but he knew it would all be for naught if he couldn't transfer them to his dream.

The lady smiled and said, "I'll offer you a little assistance again, free of charge.

"Find those materials in reality, put them on the table in your bedroom before you sleep. I'll help you send them into your dream."

She can send those things into my dream? Lumian was first shocked before feeling a wave of relief wash over him. At least his problem was solved.

He never thought he'd encounter someone else with the ability to "enter" the special dream world like he could.

Lumian couldn't shake the feeling that his ability to enter dream ruins had something to do with the cryptic symbols etched onto his chest. As he gazed at the woman before him, he couldn't help but wonder if she was connected to those same markings or that bizarre and terrifying voice that had been echoing in his mind.

Lumian had just left the Ol' Tavern and had plans to collect the Red Chestnut Flower and poplar leaves.

But as he turned the corner, he saw Ryan, Leah, and Valentine exiting the back door of the tavern. They were still dressed in the same clothes and outfits.

Lumian's heart skipped a beat as he greeted them with a smile.

"Good morning, my cabbages."

Leah turned her head and laughed amidst the tinkling sounds.

"You're early, too."

Lumian tried to act sneaky and looked around before speaking in a hushed tone.

"I noticed something unusual yesterday."

Ryan's expression turned serious as he exchanged glances with Valentine and Leah.

"What is it?"

Lumian's voice quivered slightly as he spoke.

"I suspect that Naroka's death is abnormal. You attended her funeral yesterday."

Ryan gave Lumian an encouraging look to continue, and Lumian took a deep breath before proceeding with his suspicions.

"I told you about the funeral customs in the Dariège area, didn't I? After everyone went to the cemetery, Pons Bénet entered Naroka's house without any objection from the owner.

"Isn't this destroying the influence of their family's horoscope and taking away the corresponding good luck?

"There must be something wrong!"

"Pons Bénet, the brother of the padre?" Ryan thought for a few seconds and asked.

Lumian nodded heavily.

As Lumian thought about the padre's strange group and his impending departure from Cordu, he realized he had nothing to fear from speaking his mind. With a deep breath, he declared, "The padre is not a good man!"

"Why do you say that?" Leah asked with a grin, clearly unsurprised by Lumian's criticism of the padre.

Not one for formalities, Lumian launched into a detailed account of a villager who had snitched in Dariège and subsequently vanished. His focus was on the accusations against the padre, and he held nothing back.

Finally, he said, "I really question how he's a clergyman of the Church.

"One time, I said something that was deemed too real, and I had to hide temporarily in the cathedral.

"I was about to doze off behind the altar when the padre walked in with Madame Pualis. And let me tell you, they were doing the dirty deed right under the deity's gaze.

"In the conversation that followed the deed, the padre even lamented to Madame Pualis, saying, 'Why can't a man marry his sister?'

"Madame Pualis was appalled by his words and begged the padre to repent.

"However, the padre said, 'Many wealthy families lose their fortunes when their daughters marry and their sons start families. But if a son could marry his sister, these problems would disappear. Unfortunately, the law and morals don't allow it'…"

The frigid Valentine's face contorted with anger at the news.

"Is he a servant of God or a servant of the Demon?"

Ryan nodded as if in thought.

"No wonder Pons Bénet hasn't been able to start a family despite being married after all these years…"

Leah surveyed Lumian as she chuckled.

"You knew about Madame Pualis and the padre's affair. You wanted to use us that day."

Lumian's smile was uneasy, but his tone was resolute.

"As a believer of the Eternal Blazing Sun, I cannot tolerate such a person in the cathedral."

The cold Valentine's expression softened, and he nodded approvingly.

"If only Cordu had more people like you."

A few more like me? Lumian shuddered at the thought of Cordu overrun with more people like him.

He continued, "That time, I overheard the padre warning Madame Pualis that he was planning something and might be targeted by the Inquisition. He told her to be careful and keep quiet."

Ryan's expression turned solemn.

"Did he say anything more about it?"

"No." Lumian didn't fabricate the matter.

He couldn't risk saying more than that. If he did, trouble could erupt tonight. He wasn't even a Beyonder yet.

After bidding farewell to the trio of foreigners, Lumian spent hours gathering Red Chestnut Flowers and poplar leaves.

As the sun neared its apex, Lumian arrived at the village square and made his way to the two-story building where official business was conducted.

Most of the villagers had already gathered, eagerly awaiting the selection of the Spring Elf, an important part of the upcoming Lenten celebration tomorrow.

Squeezing through the crowd, Lumian spotted Reimund, Ava, and the others.

"Is Ava on the list?" he asked.

Ava remained silent, her agitation palpable. Reimund shook his head. "We don't know."

"She must be on it," interjected Guillaume Berry, a frequent companion of Lumian and the others. "Among the unmarried women in the village, other than your sister, she's the most beautiful. Your sister doesn't meet the age requirements."

He was the Guillaume-junior that Lumian and the others were talking about. He hung out with them frequently. Guillaume had curly brown hair and prominent freckles on his face. His blue eyes seemed to narrow because they weren't large enough.

Ava's cousin, Azéma, also stood nearby, looking much like Ava but smaller and less striking.

She remained silent, but Lumian sensed her desire to be chosen as the Spring Elf as well.

In the Dariège area, being chosen as the "Spring Elf" was a coveted honor that not only recognized a person's beauty and character but also came with hidden benefits.

Upon hearing Guillaume-junior's words, Lumian grinned.

"If Ava's not on the list, I'll shout, 'I vote Ava!' when the administrator finishes reading it."

Ava blushed. "You don't have to do that."

It was a normal process for villagers to shout out additional candidates after the administrator finished reading the list of nominees for the Spring Elf. However, not many had the nerve to do so. Lumian, however, was not one to shy away from such things.

He had no misgivings about this.

Ava will be the one being embarrassed, not me.

Shortly after, Administrator Béost appeared at a second-story window, looking far more put-together than the padre. His neatly combed brown hair, light blue eyes with black lines, straight nose bridge, thin lips, and well-groomed mustache conveyed his status, accentuated by his double-breasted flannel coat.

He gazed down at the assembled villagers for a moment before speaking.

"Ladies and gentlemen, it's time. Those who are late will no longer have the right to vote.

"Next, I'll read the list of candidates for the Spring Elf."

"Ava Lizier…"

As Béost read out the list, Ava breathed a sigh of relief.

Unsurprisingly, she received over 80% of the votes.

After the voting, Lumian made an excuse about needing to go home and left without celebrating with his companions.

Upon arriving home, he immediately asked his sister, "Did we receive a reply?"

If they had, the telegrapher would have delivered it and collected a fee.

"Not yet," Aurore replied, shaking her head.

She then said, "The undercurrents have been turbulent lately. You can't let your guard down during combat practice. Speaking of which, we'll spar in the afternoon."

Lumian winced, feeling sore all over.

But then an idea struck him. He put on a pained expression and said, "I don't know if it's because I've been training too hard, but my whole body hurts today. Aurore, uh, sister, can you give me a massage? You're the most skilled at it."

Aurore nodded. "Sure, I can do that."

......

Under the skilled hands of his sister, Lumian's body finally began to recover that night.

Before drifting off to sleep, Lumian placed three Red Chestnut Flowers and some powdered poplar leaves in a bottle on the table in front of the window.

He gazed at the bottle for a long moment, his heart beating with anticipation and nervousness, before finally crawling under the covers.

Chapter 27: Five Changes

As Lumian awoke in the gray fog, his first instinct was not to check his physical condition. Instead, he sat up abruptly and looked at the table by the window.

There, bathed in the soft light that filtered through the thick fog, were the three Red Chestnut Flowers and the glass bottle of poplar leaf powder.

She really sent the supplementary ingredients in… Relief flooded Lumian. He got out of bed and stretched, delighted to discover that the pain in his neck and back had vanished, along with the general discomfort he had been feeling.

Just as I hoped, I'm fine in the dream when I'm better in reality even though the injuries on both sides aren't equal at all… He quickly walked over to the wardrobe with the full-length mirror, took off his shirt, and examined himself.

The five bloody finger marks, the bruises, and the blood clots were all gone.

This made Lumian wonder if killing the Beyonder monster had been nothing more than a dream.

Thankfully, the crimson object in the cloth bag, the slightly larger sum of money, and the shotgun next to his bed confirmed the reality of his experience.

Lumian's heart eased. With the cloth bag containing the crimson item and a large amount of money, he left the bedroom and went straight to the first floor. Grabbing a bottle of red wine and a beer mug, he headed back up with some basil.

He made sure to bring along a measuring cylinder and miniature scale that his sister Aurore had purchased for him.

Looking at the desk filled with all the necessary items, Lumian felt both excited and nervous.

With everything in place, all that remained was to concoct the potion!

Potions were not beverages. They were more dangerous than alcohol, capable of killing or transforming the drinker into a monster with the slightest mistake.

Lumian took a deep breath and exhaled slowly, his hands steady as he used the measuring cylinder to pour 80 milliliters of red wine into the beer mug.

Next, he added 10 grams of basil, 5 grams of poplar leaf powder, and a single Red Chestnut Flower.

The process proceeded without incident. The red liquid in the mug had a few more dregs and a floating flower, but otherwise looked unremarkable.

With the cloth bag of crimson substance at his side, Lumian watched intently as the object slid into the beer mug.

Without a sound, the dark-red blob seemed to dissolve rapidly, drawing in the surrounding liquid in the process.

Bubbles erupted, and the entire mug turned a deep shade of red. The Red Chestnut Flower had dissolved completely.

This is the Hunter potion? Lumian gulped and picked up his beer mug.

The supernatural power he had sought for so long was finally within his grasp.

Without hesitation, he took a deep breath and steeled himself for what was to come. Raising the mug to his lips, he drank the potion in one swift gulp.

The pungent odor of blood filled his nostrils, and he started hearing things.

As he set the mug down, a searing pain ripped through his body,

so intense that Lumian wondered if he had swallowed a ball of fire. The flames seemed to burn through his esophagus, stomach, heart, lungs, intestines, and blood vessels all at once.

At the same time, a strong scent of blood wafted up from his throat.

Lumian fought to remain conscious, remembering the lady's warning that fainting would mean defeat. He knew the stakes were high, and the outcome was obvious if he failed.

His head swam as he lowered it, gazing at the bright red veins protruding from the back of his hand.

The pain and burning came in waves, but they quickly began to recede. But just as he thought it was over, a mysterious voice echoed in his mind, as if coming from both infinitely far away and right beside him.

The sound was like steel thorns piercing his brain, stirring it forcefully.

Suddenly, the near-death experience he had faced before returned, and the pain and burning flared up once more.

Lumian gritted his teeth and clenched his fists, feeling as though something was trying to claw its way out of his flesh.

The gray fog around him seemed to thicken.

The terrifying sound that had filled his ears slowly faded away, and the writhing of his flesh and blood vanished like an illusion.

The excruciating pain, the burning sensation, and the metallic scent of blood dissipated, leaving Lumian gasping for cold air as he regained control of his body.

He bent over, hands on his knees, panting heavily as he realized the true dangers of pursuing supernatural powers, as his sister had warned him.

A mere Sequence 9 potion had nearly claimed his life!

Of course, it had first seemed manageable—dangerous, but manageable. But the mysterious voice that had been brought on by the symbol on his chest had almost caused him to collapse at the critical moment.

Each breath he took seemed to restore some of his strength, and before long, he felt fully recovered.

Bang! Lumian clenched his fist and swung it hard, striking out at the air with a force that caused a sonic boom.

He had never imagined possessing such power before, and the realization filled him with excitement. In his small bedroom, he practiced a combat technique his sister had taught him, each punch producing a crisp sound.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Despite the commotion, Lumian moved with precision and control, not touching anything as he completed the set.

To his surprise, he felt neither tired nor fatigued, but rather energetic and alive.

He assessed his condition:

On par with Aurore…

In terms of strength, speed, reaction, or body control, they've all been greatly enhanced. It's a little inhuman…

I possess the strength of a bear and the agility of a cat. It's slightly equivalent to the combination of the two…

Without the potion, I might never be able to reach this level of power in my life…

But before he could finish his inspection, Lumian caught the scent of blood, his heart tightening with fear. Instinctively, he sniffed the air and realized that he could determine the source of the blood—it came from his body!

Lumian looked down and saw that the back of his hand was covered in blood-red spots.

He came to the full-body mirror again and realized that his face was similarly stained.

He wiped some of the blood away, but found no sign of any wounds.

After a moment's thought, Lumian came to a realization.

Did the potion cause the capillaries Aurore talked about to burst? And then they quickly healed after I absorbed the potion?

The only explanation for his current condition was supernatural influence.

Realizing he was not injured, Lumian pushed the matter aside and focused on his sense of smell, which seemed to have undergone a significant change.

As he concentrated, the scents around him were "decomposed" and drilled into his nose in various forms.

The smell of blood, the residual smell of alcohol, the fragrance of flowers, the smell of dust… Lumian began identifying the scents around him one by one, even the slightest ones not escaping his heightened senses.

Simultaneously, he "saw" invisible footprints and the distribution of dust in the bedroom, "heard" the beating of his own heart and the breeze outside the house…

The second change is that my sensory abilities have increased exponentially, surpassing the standards of ordinary humans. No wonder the monster he had encountered was so skilled at tracking… Lumian was delighted.

More importantly, this improvement did not interfere with his daily life and only appeared when he focused. It only took the form of a weaker version.

Through experimentation and self-examination, Lumian discovered two other changes brought on by the Hunter potion.

The third change allows me to accurately locate certain points in his environment, such as weak spots in a wall, enabling me to set traps more efficiently and kill my enemies—be they humans, beasts, or monsters—more effectively.

The fourth change is that I have more knowledge about wild plants and animal organs, allowing me to survive better in the wilderness and quickly find hemostatic medicine when injured. I can even make poison to smear on weapons if needed…

As he confirmed these newfound abilities, Lumian couldn't help but feel a sense of absurdity.

I actually managed to kill that shotgun monster?

The current me is much stronger than the previous me, and it was not much weaker than the current me..

Lumian contemplated for a while and concluded two crucial points.

Ability is important, but brains are equally important!

Exploiting a good environment can effectively increase my strength!

After some thought, Lumian added inwardly, Also, I can't be careless and lose my patience at any time…

He walked to the window and gazed at the dream ruins again.

An indescribable sense of oppression, fear, and danger surged into his heart. This was something he had never felt before.

Uh, the fifth change is some kind of intuition strengthening… Lumian nodded gently.

He went to the washroom and washed his body with clean water. He changed into a fresh set of clothes and then lay back on the bed, with the money close.

He wanted to get back to reality as soon as possible, eager to know if the Hunter abilities would stay with him or if they would be weakened.

......

In the dead of night, Cordu was eerily silent. The clouds shrouded the crimson moon and stars, leaving the darkness to reign supreme.

Lumian surveyed the night scenery and felt an overwhelming sense of happiness.

He was now a Beyonder in the real world, and his powers hadn't weakened at all compared to the dream realm.

As an intuition struck him, Lumian unbuttoned his shirt and gazed down at his chest.

The black symbol resembling a thorn chain was slowly fading away.

It also appears in reality… Lumian muttered, feeling a twinge of unease.

He noticed that the bluish-black symbol that had loomed over the thorny chain existed only in his dreams.

Suddenly, Lumian's heart skipped a beat as he gazed up at the nearby elm tree. The legendary owl of the Warlock was perched on a branch, observing him quietly.

Chapter 28: Laws

The brownish-yellow eyes of the owl glowed in the dark, fixating on Lumian as it perched on the branch.

Lumian was no longer as intimidated as he was during their previous encounters. He yelled, "Whatcha looking at? Say something if you dare!"

Lumian didn't have to provoke the owl, but he hoped it would reveal the owl's true motive. He couldn't bear the thought of the creature lurking around and staring at him in the dead of night.

To his surprise, the owl remained silent and didn't make a sound.

After a few tense seconds, the owl spread its wings and flew off into the darkness.

"Crazy!" Lumian let out a frustrated curse, but he didn't dare let his guard down.

Lumian remained focused on scrutinizing the dark shadows outside, trying to detect any signs of danger.

He recalled that the last time the owl had appeared, he had seen Naroka's figure and learned of her death the following day.

I wonder if something similar will happen this time… But after careful observation, he didn't notice anything abnormal and breathed a sigh of relief. He drew the curtains and lay back on the bed.

In the deep darkness, Lumian opened his eyes, contemplating his next move.

I wonder what this owl is trying to do… It's acting so strange and mysterious. It shouldn't be up to anything good…

Whatever. With the situation in the village, I have to leave with Aurore as soon as possible. I don't believe that it can follow us to Trier!

If I don't receive a reply tomorrow, we'll leave Cordu the morning after tomorrow…

If there's a reply, we can leave Cordu openly from the village entrance. If not, we'll have to improvise. It's Lent tomorrow, and everyone will still be celebrating the day after tomorrow, so we won't attract too much attention. Aurore can borrow Madame Pualis' pony and spend some time in the nearby alpine pastures. We don't need to go down the mountain, so it shouldn't attract the investigators' attention. When the time comes, we can use a dangerous trail to leave the mountain…

The path is treacherous, with several broken parts in the middle. Even the shepherds don't think it's passable. However, with my newfound abilities and Aurore's witchcraft, allowing her to fly a distance, she'll have it easier than me…

There's a good chance we can hoodwink the investigators…

Becoming a Hunter had allowed him to do what was previously impossible. It gave Lumian a newfound sense of confidence, allowing him to quickly formulate a plan.

His heart became more certain, and he slept soundly.

......

The next morning, Lumian rose early and got to work in the kitchen.

His thoughts turned to how he had become a Beyonder and how he was about to leave the abnormal village of Cordu with his sister. Lumian's mood brightened, and he even found himself eager to hum a tune.

When Aurore came downstairs, there were already two bowls of minced meat noodles on the table.

"How did you know I was about to get up?" she asked, pleased.

"I started cooking noodles when I heard movement in the washroom." Lumian grinned, inwardly noting, You are always in a groggy state after waking up. How don't you realize this?

Aurore nodded. As she sat at the dining table, she casually asked, "That owl flew over again in the middle of the night?"

"That's right." Lumian knew that his sister had discovered him looking out the window, so the owl's appearance had been a fortunate distraction. Otherwise, he wasn't sure how to explain himself.

He couldn't risk telling Aurore about his newfound Beyonder abilities just yet, as he would be given a dressing down by her.

However, Lumian planned to divulge the truth to his sister sooner than later. He wanted to avoid Aurore from having considerations that might hinder their escape.

He planned to tell his sister about this the day after tomorrow when they escaped from Cordu to prevent her from diverting her attention to take care of him.

By then, she wouldn't have the time to give him a dressing down.

Aurore furrowed her brow in confusion. "What a strange owl…"

She was still trying to decipher the bird's true intentions—all it did was come over to take a look.

Lumian slurped up the last of his noodles, then turned to his sister.

"If there's a reply, we'll leave Cordu this evening and take the usual path down the mountain.

"If not, borrow a pony from Madame Pualis tomorrow morning and we'll head to the nearest alpine ranch. I know of a trail that leads down the mountain, and the investigators won't be aware of it."

Aurore fiddled with her hair, deep in thought.

After a while, she grinned and said, "Sure, the probability of this plan succeeding is quite high."

She clicked her tongue and added, "My stupid brother has grown up."

Lumian couldn't help but feel smug, basking in his sister's praise.

......

After breakfast, Lumian made an excuse to go see if Ava was finished with her Spring Elf blessings tour. He left the subterranean building and headed straight to Ol' Tavern.

As a newly-minted Beyonder, Lumian was eager to gain more knowledge, and the lady had promised to share some with him.

Not far from the tavern, Lumian spotted an old acquaintance walking towards him.

It was Pons Bénet, the younger brother of the local padre.

He's alone… Lumian couldn't help but smile at the thought of how he had been chased by Pons and his thugs in the past.

Having just obtained supernatural powers, he was already eager to test out his new supernatural powers.

"Hey, my illegitimate son," Lumian greeted him. "How dare you go out alone without daddy's permission?"

Lumian hoped to provoke Pons and goad him into a fight instead of letting him run.

Pons Bénet looked in the direction of the voice and saw him.

The villain's expression changed slightly. He turned to run away.

Thud. Thud. Thud… Lumian watched in disbelief as Pons sprinted away, disappearing at the intersection not far away.

He sure ran fast… Quite an alert one…

Lumian sighed silently.

He knew, without a shadow of a doubt, that he could take down Pons Bénet in a one-on-one scrap, even before he ascended to Beyonder status. But it seemed likely that Pons Bénet had the same notion. The two of them had never properly thrown down, but they both had confidence in their own abilities. So, it caught him off guard when Pons Bénet bolted the second he caught sight of him today, like he'd come face to face with a bloodthirsty beast.

It's impossible for him to know that I secretly became a Beyonder last night… Is he so dense that he's developed animal instincts and can sniff out danger? Lumian slandered Pons Bénet in his heart.

He refrained from pursuing Pons Bénet because he regretted the moment he "greeted" him.

The village was riddled with aberrations, and the situation was perilous. Lumian knew better than to stir the pot before he left.

If he had pummeled Pons Bénet, the padre and his goons might spring into action prematurely, thus jeopardizing his and Aurore's escape. It would be too late for regrets when that happened.

Furthermore, the padre's group was an enigma, and there could be something off about Pons Bénet. Lumian suspected that if he engaged in fisticuffs with him, his Beyonder identity would be exposed, and that would spell trouble in the future.

Being a Beyonder has made me too haughty and overconfident. I need to rein myself in, Lumian mused, reflecting on his behavior, as he entered Ol' Tavern.

He had intended to head straight to the second floor, but his eyes landed on the lady seated in the corner.

Today, the lady was garbed in a pearl-gray dress and a light-colored lady's bonnet. Lumian noticed that there wasn't any food in front of her.

"Have you had breakfast?" he asked, taking a seat opposite her.

The lady replied nonchalantly, "Not yet. I'm meeting someone here, and I'm still waiting for her."

Her? Not me…? Lumian scanned the area but saw no one else except the tavern owner.

He looked at the lady again and sincerely said, "I've become a Hunter."

It's time for you to keep your promise and give me more common knowledge.

The lady wasn't surprised at all. She remarked with a smile, "It seems you're in pretty good shape."

She spoke in a voice that sounded almost otherworldly, "What you need to master now are two laws and one method."

Why does it feel like I'm studying physics… Lumian didn't dare speak his thoughts aloud.

The lady continued to speak, "For most Beyonders, this knowledge is incredibly valuable. They'd trade everything they have just to acquire it. But for you, fate has brought you here, and so I'll give it to you for free."

Free things often come at the most hefty price. How will I pay the price? Lumian felt a weight settle on his shoulders.

Ever since he became a Hunter, his intuition and observation skills had improved significantly. He could sense a strange, indescribable emotion in the lady's eyes, much stronger than before, but he still couldn't put a finger on what it was.

The lady straightened up.

"All supernatural powers come from the Oldest One, the Creator. As a believer of the Eternal Blazing Sun, you should know that His eyes became the Sun."

"Yes." Lumian had heard the padre's sermons about it before.

"That's a symbolic description," the lady clarified. "In essence, the Oldest One created this world and many deities. Eventually, He disintegrated Himself and split into Beyonder characteristics of different pathways."

"So that's why they're called the paths of the divine?" Lumian connected the dots.

The lady nodded slightly.

"Yes, every pathway's Sequence 0 is equivalent to a true god. For instance, the Bard pathway's Sequence 0 is known as the Sun, which is also the Eternal Blazing Sun you believe in."

Lumian was surprised and a little apprehensive. So every Beyonder can become a god in the end?

If he were a devout believer of the Eternal Blazing Sun, he would have accused the lady of blasphemy. But he wasn't that kind of person. He was just a casual believer who didn't give it much thought.

He even asked, "What's the Hunter pathway's Sequence 0? And what about the Mystery Pryer pathway?"

"Didn't I already tell you? It's the Red Priest, and the position is currently vacant," the lady replied with a chuckle. "As for the Mystery Pryer pathway, the Sequence 0 is known as The Hermit, and it's currently occupied by an evil god called the Hidden Sage. He likes to impart knowledge to Beyonders of the same pathway, earning Him the nickname 'Knowledge Pursuer.' Your sister's troubles stem from Him."

"Is that so…" Lumian felt a twinge of dislike towards the Hidden Sage.

The woman redirected the conversation.

"Since Beyonder characteristics come from the Oldest One, they won't disappear or increase. They only transform from one form to another, moving from one object to another. This is known as the Law of Beyonder Characteristics Indestructibility or the Law of Conservation."

Chapter 29: Method

Lumian put his physics knowledge to work and pondered for a moment.

"Why not just call it the law of conservation?"

"That's another law, but don't worry about the details for now." The woman nodded in agreement. "Essentially, it's the same as the law of indestructibility, but with additional prerequisites and specific elaborations."

Is that so… Lumian considered for a moment before speaking.

"So, according to the law of indestructibility, if I want to obtain Beyonder characteristics, I can target other Beyonders, in addition to hunting the corresponding monsters?"

Since Beyonder characteristics were indestructible, a Beyonder's death would result in the appearance of the corresponding Beyonder characteristics.

The woman's face showed a certain amount of emotion.

"You're very perceptive."

"Therefore, this law isn't suitable for most Beyonders to know. It would result in Beyonders killing each other, and they won't be able to trust each other."

Lumian didn't mind this. "Even without this law, humans still kill each other. In the real world, there's plenty of suspicion, bullying, and murder."

The woman replied with interest, "But at least there's still a certain warmth and light of the human spirit."

Lumian pondered for a while before speaking.

"Looking at it from another perspective, this law should become a consensus among Beyonders. That way, the weak can be prepared in advance and not become easy prey for those who know."

The lady nodded slightly.

"That does make some sense. Actually, if battles between Beyonders happen frequently enough, people involved would likely be able to figure it out."

She then introduced, "The second law is called the Law of Beyonder Characteristics Convergence."

"Convergence…" Lumian struggled to understand.

He couldn't quite derive it from their earlier conversation.

The woman's expression turned serious.

"As the creator of this world, even if the Oldest One splits into Beyonder characteristics of different pathways, it doesn't mean that He has completely withdrawn from the stage. His mind is scattered among the different Beyonder characteristics and will never be obliterated unless this world completely perishes.

"These minds are similar to a brand, but they have the instinct to reassemble and revive the Oldest One.

"In other words, after you become a Beyonder, you're more likely to encounter other Beyonders than before. You're more likely to encounter Beyonders of the same pathway or neighboring pathways than Beyonders of other pathways. This is the convergence of fate. The higher the Sequence, the more obvious this situation becomes."

Lumian had many questions, but he decided to start with the most important one.

"So, combined with the Law of Beyonder Characteristics Indestructibility, can I conclude that convergence leads to massacres?"

The lady once again revealed an approving expression.

"You're very perceptive on such matters."

"It's not a problem when your Sequence is low, but at the demigod stage, especially after becoming an Angel, you must find a way to weaken or avoid the effects of convergence."

"Demigod, Angel?" Lumian was surprised and intrigued upon hearing these terms, even though he knew that every Sequence could eventually become a true god.

The lady casually explained, "Demigod is a term for Beyonders from Sequence 4 to Sequence 1, meaning half-god, half-human.

"Among them, Sequence 4 and Sequence 3 are known as Saints, while Sequence 2 and Sequence 1 are called Angels. There are other names beyond that, but it's best if you not know them for now."

Saints… Angels… Lumian thought of the saints and angels from different regions.

They were real?

The remains of a Saint are the corpses of Saints. There are Beyonder characteristics left behind?

Lumian asked, feeling a little afraid, "So every Beyonder characteristic has the mental imprint of the Oldest One, and the higher the Sequence, the more is left behind?

"Wouldn't the person who consumes the potion be affected in other ways?"

The lady confirmed with a smile, "Yes, why do you think this path is filled with danger and madness?

"Losing control is one of the main reasons why consuming a potion can be so dangerous.

"To be specific, it's losing control of supernatural powers and one's own mind and transforming into a terrifying monster."

"Is there another reason?" Lumian pressed.

The lady tersely grunted.

"Firstly, the intensity of the mental imprint mainly depends on the level of the owners of the corresponding Beyonder characteristics. Their obsession and madness before death also contribute to it. Secondly, consuming the potion in the wrong order or method can cause a huge conflict in the body. Thirdly, some existences can use the consumption of potions to exert influence. For example, every time the Mystery Pryer pathway consumes a potion, they passively receive knowledge instillation from the Hidden Sage."

Similar to the voice I heard after drinking the Hunter potion? Lumian deliberated for a moment before recounting his encounter truthfully.

"Which entity's influence is that?"

The next second, he saw the expression of the lady opposite him become a little odd.

She said solemnly, "Some existences can corrupt and take control of you just by knowing of their existence.

"Unfortunately, the owner of that voice is one such existence. It's not suitable for you to know Their honorific name at the moment."

Lumian's mind raced with thoughts. That horrifying? A Sequence 0 true god? But most people in Intis and I know about the Eternal Blazing Sun and the God of Steam and Machinery. There's nothing wrong with them… Could there be a difference between a true god and an evil god? But she mentioned the Hidden Sage, who is also a Sequence 0. Is it possible she doesn't know who it is and is using vague terms to mask her ignorance?

He gave up on the topic, considering his own strength, and asked about another intriguing term.

"What is a neighboring pathway?"

The woman's expression returned to normal as she explained, "Under normal circumstances, if you choose a pathway and consume the corresponding potion, you can only go down that path one step at a time. Otherwise, you will definitely lose control, or at the very least, half-lose control. However, there are always exceptions. Every pathway has one or more neighboring pathways. You can jump over at a specific Sequence, such as Sequence 4, which divides between humans and demigods."

"Hunter's neighboring pathway is Assassin."

Assassin… Sounds cooler than Hunter… Lumian asked with concern, "Which pathways neighbor Mystery Pryer?

"Will one no longer be affected by the Hidden Sage after jumping to a neighboring pathway?"

"The Savant pathway. The current Sequence 0 is the God of Steam and Machinery," the woman replied calmly. "After jumping over, one will still be affected by the Hidden Sage, but the degree will decrease significantly. However, the corresponding Beyonder characteristics still exist unless one finds a way to expel them."

"How?" Lumian asked, surprised.

"The easiest way is to have children. In mysticism, there's a high chance of transferring the corresponding Beyonder characteristics to a child through heredity," the woman explained. "Alternatively, you can use the special abilities of certain pathways, but there's a certain risk, and you have to pay a considerable price."

Lumian nodded before raising another question.

"Can I switch only at a particular Sequence?"

The chances of reaching Sequence 4 and becoming a demigod were slim.

The lady glanced at him.

"In theory, it's possible to switch at a lower Sequence, but the risk of losing control is much higher. Unless there's no other way, it's best not to attempt it."

The woman paused before saying, "I've finished explaining the two laws. Now, I'll explain the method.

"This is one of the most important pieces of knowledge in the mystical world."

Most important? Lumian instinctively straightened his back, feeling abnormally focused.

The lady continued to speak, "It's called the 'acting method.'

"It's a way to help you digest the potion. By digesting the potion, the risk of losing control will be greatly reduced when consuming the next Sequence potion."

It's no wonder I can't drink the Sequence 9 potion today and drink the Sequence 8 potion tomorrow… I have to use the "acting method" to digest the previous potion… Lumian came to a realization.

He did not interrupt her and listened attentively to her explanation.

"Remember, it's digestion, not control.

"What's the acting method? It involves acting according to the name of a Sequence like an actor. By reconciling the differences between one's body and the remnant mental imprints of the Beyonder characteristics, one can obtain the corresponding recognition. This allows them to bypass the barrier that originally existed and fuse the Beyonder characteristics with themselves."

"So, I have to act like a Hunter and hunt in the mountains every day?" Lumian asked attentively." Lumian appeared as attentive as a student.

The lady shook her head.

"That's just the most superficial form of acting. We not only have to understand the surface meaning of a Sequence's name, but we also have to investigate its deeper meaning. For example, the city is also a jungle. Everyone is both prey and hunter."

I'm familiar with this… Lumian was already familiar with this concept, which he had learned during his days as a vagrant.

"How can you be sure that you have digested the potion and can advance to the next Sequence?" Lumian asked curiously.

The lady smiled.

"You will sense it when the potion is truly digested."

Alright… Lumian didn't continue the topic and asked in puzzlement, "Who named the different Sequences?"

Why could he digest the potion just by acting them out?

The lady's expression turned serious.

"The earliest Sequence divisions came from the remnants of the Oldest One's splintering. It was a stone slab filled with mystical knowledge.

"As it involves the secret of becoming a deity, it's called the Blasphemy Slate.

"In ancient times, during the end of the Second Epoch and the entire Third Epoch, a powerful deity close to the Oldest One appeared. He was called the Ancient Sun God. After He perished, a second Blasphemy Slate was born from His remains. All the current Sequence names and potion formulas came from it."

That's not the Second and Third Epoch history I learned… Lumian muttered inwardly.

The lady continued to speak, "When Emperor Roselle was alive, he used the second Blasphemy Slate as a reference to create a Cards of Blasphemy set based on tarot cards. There are a total of 22 cards, and each card represents a pathway of the divine."

Lumian was astonished. "Emperor Roselle is also a Beyonder?"

As an ordinary Intisian, it was difficult for him not to feel a certain amount of admiration for Emperor Roselle.

The woman laughed. "Otherwise?"

Lumian asked, "Was he powerful?"

"Almost a deity," the lady said concisely.

That amazing? Lumian was stunned but felt that it was only right.

He thought for a moment and said, "Then, wouldn't the diary left behind by Emperor Roselle be very valuable?"

The lady nodded.

"Yes, but there are very, very few people who can decipher those strange writings."

Lumian fell into deep thought. Aurore seems to have some of Emperor Roselle's diary transcripts in her collection. She seems to be able to decipher them… Could it be that a portion of her strength comes from there?

Chapter 30: Lent Begins

The woman turned her head to look out of Ol' Tavern's window.

"It's about time. I'll end this with giving you some pointers. Based on the Law of Beyonder Characteristics Indestructibility, we know that humans and Beyonder characteristics combine to become Beyonders. Similarly, creatures and Beyonder characteristics combine to become Beyonder creatures. But what about items that combine with Beyonder characteristics?" she asked, not giving Lumian a chance to answer.

"They are called mystical items. As items don't have will, spirit, and self-control, coupled with the combined effects of other factors, after they fuse with Beyonder characteristics, they will not only display corresponding special abilities but also bring about very strong negative effects. The various Churches tend to seal them and use suitable methods to activate them when needed. This is why mystical items are also called Sealed Artifacts.

"The mystical items that have been sealed by the various Churches have their own serial numbers and are divided into four grades: 3, 2, 1, and 0. The smaller the prefix number, the higher the danger. Among them, there are a limited number of Level 1 and 0 Sealed Artifacts that are extremely dangerous. The serial numbers are common to the various Churches and won't be repeated."

Lumian muttered, "Level 0 Sealed Artifacts…"

Lumian had a deep impression that Sequence 0 was equivalent to a true god. This led him to make a certain connection and ask, "Are these Sealed Artifacts formed by fallen deities or exterminated evil gods?"

He had noticed that there were 22 pathways with Sequence 0s, but the number of deities clearly didn't add up.

However, Lumian also recognized that his lack of understanding of evil gods and secret existences might have caused this confusion.

"Not all of them," the lady replied after thinking for a moment. "Most of them are at the level of Angels. Only a small number have the ability to kill gods."

Lumian nodded. "I understand. I won't underestimate the items in other people's hands."

The woman added, "You can't underestimate the negative effects of Sealed Artifacts either. In the future, you will definitely come across Sealed Artifacts.

"Oh, and there's another category of items in the field of mysticism called extraordinary items. They are made by Beyonders of corresponding Sequences using their abilities, spirituality, or with the help of the spirit world or deities. They don't contain Beyonder characteristics, but they have a certain level of supernatural effects. However, their strength will gradually dissipate over time. Charms, lotions, and other items can only be used once.

"In comparison, Beyonder weapons are more stable and can be used for years.

"As a Hunter, you lack the ability to deal with Spirit Body ghost-type creatures before Sequence 7. If you have the chance in the future, consider obtaining the corresponding Sealed Artifacts or Beyonder items."

Lumian listened carefully and asked, "The spirit world?"

He had seen this term in Hidden Veil, but it did not provide sufficient explanation.

The woman quickly explained, "From a mystical point of view, this world is divided into three levels: the real world, the spirit world, and the astral world. The rest are formed by attaching to one of these three, like the Underworld.

"I don't need to explain much about the real world; you already know it very well. The spirit world is a place where spirits reside, and many concepts of reality no longer exist there. You will gradually understand it in the future. As for the astral world, it originally referred to the world of gods, but now, the entire cosmos needs to be included in that definition."

Lumian was just asking casually, but after obtaining a preliminary answer, he immediately returned to the previous topic.

"Can a Hunter create Beyonder items?" he asked, thinking that Warlocks could probably do it.

The lady shook her head before saying, "Hunters can't rely on their own Sequence, but because their spirituality has been enhanced, they can learn ritualistic magic and pray to a deity or a hidden existence. They can use their responses to create charms, weapons, and other Beyonder items.

"However, I have to remind you that most hidden existences are very dangerous. It's best not to attempt praying to them. Otherwise, death would be the best outcome. And the seven orthodox gods basically won't respond to you unless you join the corresponding Church and become an official Beyonder."

"In other words, it's impossible for a Hunter to create a Beyonder item?" Lumian asked, feeling somewhat disappointed.

The lady smiled and said, "Not really. On the one hand, you can use the blood and saliva of certain Beyonder creatures to create poisonous weapons. In a sense, this can be considered a Beyonder item. On the other hand, after you unlock the secret of the dream, I'll tell you the honorific name of a great existence. You can pray to Him."

Lumian was shocked and suspicious. This was the first time she had used the word "great" as an adjective. He had never heard her use it to describe the Eternal Blazing Sun or the Hidden Sage. Who could this great existence be? Was it safe to pray to Him?

The more he learned about mysticism, the more he realized how little he knew.

Lumian tersely acknowledged her answer and asked, "What are the corresponding Sequences 8 and 7 for Hunters?"

The woman replied indifferently, "Sequence 8 of the Hunter pathway is called Provoker, and Sequence 7 is Pyromaniac.

"Alright, that's all for today," she said as she stood up and walked towards the entrance to the second floor.

After a few steps, she stopped and said over her shoulder, "I forgot to remind you. Remember, you're just acting."

Just acting… Lumian mulled over her words and thoughtfully asked, "What if you take the role seriously?"

"You will become less and less like yourself until one day…" The woman smiled and closed her mouth before turning around, walking to the stairs, and disappearing.

She didn't finish her sentence again… Lumian muttered silently.

He sensed that forgetting he was only acting would have serious consequences.

Lumian sat quietly in a corner of Ol' Tavern, reviewing the general knowledge the woman had just taught him to prevent forgetting anything.

The more he thought about it, the more he realized the importance of the two laws and one method.

They are like the main framework of mysticism. Everything else is derived from them.

I wonder if Aurore knows…

After leaving Cordu, I'll discuss this problem with her…

Uh, I wonder if that lady will allow me to inform Aurore of all these directly…

......

As Lumian left Ol' Tavern, he looked back and muttered to himself, Why haven't those three foreigners taken action yet? It's already Lent today…

He continued to ponder as he made his way to the village square.

After he finished asking if there was any reply, he saw Ava, Reimund, and the others approaching.

Ava was wearing a long white dress with a round headdress made of branches and flowers on her head, and a huge necklace hung around her neck. Brown branches and green leaves adorned her back, arms, waist, and legs, making her look like a fairy in the forest.

She was the main character of Lent, the Spring Elf.

Reimund and the other lads surrounded Ava, each carrying a basket woven from tree branches filled with grass, soil, rocks, leaves, and other items.

"Lumian, the blessing tour is about to begin!" Ava exclaimed when her aqua-blue eyes saw him.

Her face was filled with joy.

Reimund and the others also looked happy.

"Come on, let's go get the contributions!"

Since Novel Weekly had not yet replied, Lumian had nothing to do for the time being, so he decided to join the procession.

The young lads began singing loudly as they surrounded Ava and walked out of the square.

After about ten meters, they stopped in front of the first building.

Lumian walked to the door and banged on it.

"The Spring Elf is here!"

The door creaked open, and Nazélie appeared in front of them.

She was the other female head of the family in the village, in her forties with the prefix 'Na.' Her black hair was tied up, and her blue eyes were smiling.

As the door opened, Ava took two steps forward, spread her arms, and began singing.

"I'm the elf of spring,

With a sweet face and a joyful ring,

Bringing happiness to everything,

In this season so charming.

Come and sing, come and dance,

Let's celebrate this time of chance,

For this is the only way,

To bless the land and make it stay."

After the song, Ava took a clump of soil from Reimund's basket and handed it to Nazélie.

"Thank you, 'Spring Elf'," Nazélie said, receiving it with a smile and handing a piece of cloth to Ava.

"Bumper harvest! Bumper harvest!" Lumian and the other lads replied in unison.

This was a blessing ritual. The Spring Elf used singing and the giving of soil, grass, rocks, and other natural things to the villagers to bless them with a bumper harvest this year. The villagers needed to give something back as a contribution, or the blessing would become a curse.

After Reimund received the cloth, Ava sang another song enthusiastically.

Only then did they bid farewell to Nazélie and head to the next house.

A portion of the dedications received during the blessing tour would be thrown into the river in the waterside ritual, and the rest would be placed in the final ritual. After Lent was over, the girl who was the embodiment of the Spring Elf had the right to choose some to take away.

This was a considerable gain.

If Cordu really experienced a bumper harvest this year, Ava, as the embodiment of the "Spring Elf", would be widely believed to have received the love of the elves and blessings of spring. Whoever married her would have bumper harvests all the time.

In that case, she had a chance of marrying someone from a good family.

The blessing procession sang all the way to Lumien's house, where Aurore opened the door. She had changed into a light-colored pleated dress with a straight collar and had bunned her blond hair.

Ava walked over and sang the same song again.

"I'm the elf of spring…"

Aurore listened with a smile and handed Ava a small pottery jar.

"Thank you, Spring Elf."

Lumian glanced at the jar of animal lard and felt that his sister was too generous.

They had no farmland except for a small vegetable field at the back of their house and did not need to worry about the harvest at all.

Chapter 31: Celebration

Despite feeling the usual pinch, Lumian didn't stop his sister as Ava, Reimund, and the others turned around and walked towards the nearby buildings. He deliberately fell behind and whispered to Aurore, "Call me if you hear back from Novel Weekly."

"Don't worry, I'll keep you updated," Aurore replied, giving Lumian a reassuring look.

The festive and joyous blessing tour continued with songs as they knocked on the villagers' doors in Cordu.

Finally, they arrived at the administrator's residence, which was modified from a castle from the Sauron royal era. It was located on a hill at the edge of Cordu, dark in color with two towering towers.

The outer walls surrounding the building had long been torn down. Lumian and company passed through the garden specially created by the Béost couple and arrived at the entrance.

The door was four to five meters tall, a brownish-green color like trees, and looked very heavy.

However, it was divided into upper and lower parts and only needed to open the two-meter-tall part below unless welcoming esteemed guests.

The Spring Elf was the embodiment of spring and the messenger of the harvest, so she deserved the most honorable treatment. At this moment, the heavy door was completely opened, and Madame Pualis stood there in a light green corset.

Her lady's maid, Cathy, stood to the side with a basket woven from tree branches, half a step behind.

Ava walked over and sang a song of blessings.

Madame Pualis listened quietly with a smile on her face, which made her look noble and reserved. The young men who followed the Spring Elf didn't dare to look at her, but Lumian, who had "listened" to the other party and the padre doing the deed, scoffed inwardly when he saw this.

As the song ended, Ava exchanged the seeds of a tree for a basket of eggs.

The blessing tour was over, and Lumian, Reimund, and the other lads escorted Ava, the Spring Elf, to the mountain river not far from the village for the second segment of Lent: the waterside ritual.

Arriving at the place where geese were usually herded, Ava approached the clear river and did a simple dance, repeating the song from before. Meanwhile, Lumian and the other lads stood still, seven to eight meters away from the Spring Elf.

After the dance, Ava took out a chopped turnip from a basket beside her feet, given by a particular villager, and threw it into the river.

As she threw, she sang, "A bumper harvest! A bumper harvest!"

When Ava was done, Lumian stepped on the ground and ran over in a few steps. He bent down and took out the cut turnips from the basket and threw them into the river.

"A bumper harvest! A bumper harvest!" he shouted.

The remaining lads were a tad slower than Lumian, but they rushed towards Ava, afraid of falling behind. They took out turnips and radishes from the basket and threw them at different parts of the river while shouting "bumper harvest."

Reimund failed to take the initiative and couldn't beat the others, so he was the last to complete the ritual.

The next second, he saw the malicious smiles of Lumian, Guillaume-junior, and the others.

They lifted Reimund up, shouting "bumper harvest," and threw him into the water with a splash. Reimund was drenched from head to toe.

The people on the shore even picked up soil and branches and threw them at him.

This was part of the waterside ritual: the person who completed the last prayer would be thrown into the river and not allowed to go ashore. They could only swim a little further down and quietly return home to hide until it was dark.

Reimund wiped the water droplets off his face and struggled for a few seconds before heading downstream.

Only then did the team escort Ava to the Eternal Blazing Sun cathedral at the edge of Cordu's square.

It was almost noon. Most of the villagers, including Lumian's sister Aurore, had gathered at the cathedral, which was not as grand as those in the city. The tallest one was only 11 to 12 meters, with a dome in an arc that looked like an onion from the outside. Looking up from the inside, a dazzling sun mural greeted their eyes.

The entire cathedral was golden in color and looked very bright, which was also the common style of all the Eternal Blazing Sun cathedrals.

The altar was located in the east, and all kinds of Sun Flowers surrounded a huge Sacred Emblem.

On the surface of the Sacred Emblem, the golden ball and the lines representing light formed a symbol filled with mysticism: the symbol of the Eternal Blazing Sun.

High up on the wall behind the altar, there were two pure glass windows inlaid with gold foil. Every day, when the sun rose, the light would shine from here onto the Sacred Emblem.

On the west side of the cathedral, there were two similar glass windows to take in the glow of the setting sun.

As this was not a formal ritual of the Church but a traditional celebration of the people, Padre Guillaume Bénet did not appear. Instead, Administrator Béost hosted the celebration with Ava, who was still dressed as a "Spring Elf," standing next to him. Musical instruments such as flutes and lyres sounded, and the villagers sang songs that praised spring and prayed for a bumper harvest.

They hadn't rehearsed, so the singing wasn't uniform, and some people even sang and danced, making the scene lively.

Lumian's mouth opened and closed, but he didn't make a sound—he was simply going through the motions. On the other hand, Aurore, who was beside him, was engrossed in her singing, taking the opportunity to have fun and raise her voice.

As he was only going through the motions, Lumian had time to look around.

He didn't notice any abnormalities in the villagers' behavior. He subconsciously looked up at the golden sun mural on the dome.

Then he saw it—the thing he couldn't quite put his finger on.

The villagers weren't praising the sun.

For a village that worshiped the Eternal Blazing Sun, this was strange. Words like "Praise the Sun" and "My God, my Father" were staples of daily life, but Lumian realized he hadn't heard them in a while!

As a quasi-believer and having skipped activities in the cathedral since crossing the padre, Lumian hadn't thought much of it before. But something about the solemn and golden atmosphere of the cathedral made him realize that this was not normal.

And then he remembered the letter of help that he had reconstructed, the urgent plea for assistance from someone in the village: "We need help as soon as possible. The people around us are getting weirder."

The people around us are getting weirder… At that moment, Lumian gained a deeper understanding and agreement with this sentence.

Lumian's heart raced as he looked around, searching for Leah and the other foreigners.

But they were nowhere to be found at this Lenten celebration.

Seriously, they don't appear when they're needed… Lumian muttered inwardly.

Lumian forced himself to join in the chorus, pretending not to notice anything out of the ordinary.

Finally, the singing died down, and the celebration ended. Lumian whispered to Aurore, his voice urgent, "Go home first. I have something to tell you later."

He knew he couldn't leave yet; as an escort for the Spring Elf, he had to participate in the final part of the ritual.

He couldn't force his way out of the cathedral, risking an anomalous eruption.

Aurore nodded thoughtfully. "Okay."

She didn't ask further and left the cathedral with Madame Pualis and the other villagers, leaving Lumian behind.

The cathedral was empty, save for Lumian and a handful of lads who had participated in the blessing tour.

Ava, the embodiment of the Spring Elf, stood in the center of the room, surrounded by the contributions, symbolic items that hadn't been thrown into the river—herbs, axes, shovels, whips, and goose sticks.

Lumian and his companions had to wait for someone to come in from outside and announce the departure of the Spring Elf before they could take off her crown, necklace, branches, and leaves. During this process, they needed to leave a gap for the Spring Elf to leave Ava's body.

In just 20 to 30 seconds, footsteps echoed from the cathedral's entrance.

Lumian instinctively looked up. Two figures entered the cathedral.

The thin Shepherd Pierre Berry had rushed back to attend Lent. His eyes were sunken, and he wore a dark brown long coat with a hood. He had tied a rope around his waist and was sporting new black leather shoes.

But what caught Lumian's attention was that his greasy black hair was now clean and smooth. Even his messy beard had been tidied, and it was now neater and shorter than before. As usual, there was a faint smile in his blue eyes.

The other man was Padre Guillaume Bénet, adorned in a white robe with gold threads, befitting of his role as a clergyman. He had sparse black hair and a slightly hooked nose, but he exuded a dignified aura. Despite standing at less than 1.7 meters tall, he still seemed to tower over Shepherd Pierre Berry.

The padre… Why did he come? Lumian was surprised and puzzled.

As a clergyman of the Eternal Blazing Sun Church, he had no business being here, at a folk celebration that didn't include a segment to praise the sun.

Lumian's mind jolted as he recognized that the padre and his group were previously up to something sinister, especially considering his past conflict with them. He quickly retreated to the side of the stained glass, moving slowly and silently to avoid drawing attention to himself.

The group hadn't yet surrounded Ava, the Spring Elf, so they were standing in different places, making Lumian's actions inconspicuous.

Ava was surprised to see the padre, but she quickly remembered his importance in the village. It made sense for him to announce the end of the Lent celebration. She smiled once again.

Padre Guillaume Bénet and Shepherd Pierre Berry approached Ava, and the former spoke in a deep voice.

"Send the Spring Elf off."

Other than Lumian, people rushed forward to surround Ava.

"Send the Spring Elf off!" Shepherd Pierre Belly shouted as he bent his back with a smile.

Not good! Lumian's heart raced as he stepped forward, his body reacting before his mind could catch up.

But it was too late. Shepherd Pierre Berry picked up an axe from the pile of symbolic items, and with a tight grip and a powerful swing, the axe came cleaving down.

Blood spurted from Ava's neck, forming a thick red mist.

Thud.

Lumian watched in horror as Ava's head fell to the ground and rolled a few times in the blood, finally stopping, head facing up.

She still had a look of joy in her eyes.

Having just taken two steps in her direction, Lumian's heart sank. He immediately turned around and turned to flee towards the stained glass.

Chapter 32: Anomaly

The cloth, jars, and eggs that were splattered with blood, along with the sickening stench, failed to elicit a reaction from Padre Guillaume Bénet. He turned his body and locked his gaze on a particular spot in the cathedral, where Lumian's figure was reflected in his blue eyes.

The color of the padre's eyes shifted, turning so ethereal that they appeared transparent.

Lumian was surrounded by complicated silver symbols that coiled around him like small rivers. He ran through an illusory river that was formed from these symbols, with blurry tributaries ahead of him.

Guillaume Bénet reached out his right hand and grabbed a mercury-colored symbol that encircled Lumian.

Lumian stomped his right foot, preparing to hurl himself through the stained glass and out of the cathedral.

But he slipped and couldn't muster enough strength, and his body was sent flying.

With a loud bang, whoosh, and cracking sound, Lumian shattered the stained glass depicting Saint Sith, but he failed to break through it and instead crashed back into the cathedral.

His body was covered in cuts, and blood flowed freely.

Shepherd Pierre Berry, who had earlier decapitated Ava with an axe, locked onto Lumian.

His gentle smile belied the ferocity in his blue eyes, as if a seal inside him had been undone, revealing his true nature.

Pierre Berry charged at Lumian with the axe, his body seeming to grow taller and stronger with every step.

Lumian leaned against the broken stained-glass window, his back facing the ruthless shepherd.

Lumian struggled to free himself from the pain of being stabbed as he fell heavily to the ground. As he propped himself up with his hands to roll out of the cathedral, an abnormal sense of danger washed over him.

Someone's behind me, he realized. Ignoring the pain and blood, he continued pressing down on the broken glass window frame and pretended to roll out, using it as a cover to quickly retract his body and fall back instead of moving forward.

Bang!

Suddenly, an axe smashed into the window frame, sending it flying out of the cathedral with a loud bang.

Lumian rolled backward, narrowly avoiding Pierre Berry's violent attack as he lunged past his feet.

But he didn't feel relieved. Pierre Berry had blocked his only escape route, forcing him back into the cathedral.

Despite having read countless novels, Lumian knew he couldn't rely on simply rolling to avoid getting hit. As he brushed past Pierre Berry, he quickly propped himself up with his elbow, exerted strength from his waist, and bounced up.

He surveyed the scene and realized that, besides Guillaume-junior and a few others, all the lads had lost their minds and turned deranged.

They ignored Ava's headless corpse and the blood that stained the ground, shouting excitedly, "Send the Spring Elf off! Send the Spring Elf off!"

Guillaume-junior and a few others stood in shock, staring at Ava's wide, smiling eyes without moving.

Fear, panic, and disbelief etched their faces, as if trapped in an unbreakable nightmare.

Pierre Berry loomed over Lumian, appearing taller than the cathedral dome.

His axe missed, but he quickly retracted it and swung at Lumian again. Lumian deftly dodged the attack and ran off despite not even finding his footing.

Thud thud thud!

Lumian fully utilized a Hunter's speed and agility as he ran in an arc.

Target: the padre!

He knew he had to deal with the leader, no matter how the others attacked him. He put on a fierce stance, determined to either let them allow him to flee or die trying with him.

Only in this way could a miracle be created in a very unfavorable situation.

Shepherd Pierre Berry didn't pursue Lumian. He stood in front of the broken window frame, holding his blood-stained axe and extending his left hand towards Lumian's direction.

The cathedral plunged into darkness, and Lumian's surroundings grew even more ominous.

Seemingly coming to life, the abyss swayed gently, like a curtain behind which pale-white, pitch-black, and strange arms were poised to strike.

Padre Guillaume Bénet's eyes were nearly transparent, with Lumian's figure submerged in an illusory river formed by shimmering mercury symbols. In front of him, he saw something similar but more surreal, as if representing the future or a tributary.

After experimenting, Guillaume Bénet's right hand finally grasped the key pattern formed by multiple symbols.

With a single move, he could rewrite Lumian's future and render all his efforts futile.

But suddenly, the padre's eyes froze, and he let out a scream. His eyes shut tightly as blood and turbid tears streamed down his face.

Amidst his scream, his body expanded like a balloon being filled with gas, and his white robe with golden threads cracked under the strain.

His skin turned nearly transparent, revealing the bizarre mark that had been hidden beneath his clothes.

The black marks that resembled a seal connected to an indescribable world. The terrifying aura they emitted filled the cathedral, leaving the lads who were still sending off the Spring Elf in a state of extreme terror. They either ran around the offerings, knelt on the ground, or prostrated themselves on the floor, afraid to look up.

Guillaume-junior and a few others fainted from fear, leaving pools of urine and a foul stench.

Shepherd Pierre Berry was about to use his mystic arts to grab Lumian when he threw away his axe and knelt on one knee, bowing his head and ceasing all movement.

Lumian was the only one who remained unaffected in the entire cathedral.

Although he felt an abnormal pain in his head, it was nothing compared to the mysterious voice that had nearly killed him.

He also felt a burning sensation in his chest, suspecting that the black thorny chain symbol had appeared, along with the bluish-black symbol resembling an eye and worms.

However, he had no time to check his physical condition or understand why he suddenly had the upper hand. He continued to run towards Padre

Guillaume Bénet, determined not to let any opportunity slip by!

As he got closer, Lumian could clearly see the unique black marks resembling seals made up of strange symbols and words.

His gaze quickly swept around and he noticed something familiar: black symbols resembling thorns that drilled out of the left chest of Padre Guillaume Bennet and circled behind him.

It was identical to Lumian's chest, but much lighter.

He has one too?

Lumian's heart trembled.

Is this the root cause of the abnormality in the village?

Why do I have it? When did I get it?

…

Thoughts quickly surfaced in Lumian's mind, but he didn't let them distract him from his movements.

He ran towards Guillaume Bénet, stretched out his right arm, and wrapped it around the enemy's head.

Without pausing, he forcefully circled behind the padre, and with a snap, Guillaume Bénet's head turned and faced his spine.

Phew… Lumian breathed a sigh of relief, knowing that the biggest problem had been resolved. He had to hurry home and escape with his sister, leaving the rest to the three foreigners to deal with.

But just as Lumian turned to leave, Guillaume Bénet, who was supposed to be dead, opened his eyes.

They were bloodshot, and a sharp buzz split Lumian's head in half, the intense pain preventing him from screaming.

Everything shattered before his eyes, and he was engulfed in darkness as he lost consciousness.

......

Painful!

How painful!

Lumian suddenly sat up, opened his eyes, and rubbed his head.

He saw the familiar surroundings of his bedroom: the wooden table, the reclining chair, and the wardrobe and small bookshelves on both sides.

I was saved by Grande Soeur? How long was I out? How is the situation in the cathedral? Lumian didn't have the time to think through it. Without wasting any time, Lumian got off the bed, held his head, and rushed out.

He found Aurore in the kitchen on the first floor, wearing a light blue dress and preparing dinner.

Lumian shouted, "Aurore! Grande Soeur, we need to run! The padre and many people in the village have gone crazy. They killed Ava at the end of the celebration!"

He wasn't sure if his sister knew about the incident, so he got straight to the point. After all, there were many ways to be saved, and it did not mean that she had to be at the scene.

Aurore turned around, looking confused, and asked, "Celebration? The Lent celebration?"

"Yes." Lumian nodded vigorously.

Aurore smiled.

"That was one hell of a story. Two sentences and you've got me feeling all kinds of scared. But listen, you gotta be more careful with your tales. Lent's still a few days away."

"…" Lumian was stunned.

Chapter 33: Confirmation

Lumian gazed into Aurore's eyes for a moment before slowly asking, "How many days until Lent?"

He suspected his sister was trying to prank him, but he had never known her to be flippant about important matters. This was a crucial moment that would impact the whole village, and possibly even their survival.

Aurore sized him up and quipped,"Did you not take an afternoon nap? Are you still not fully awake? It's March 29, 1358. We still have a few days before Lent."

March 29... Lumian ruminated the date for a moment and wondered if he was dreaming.

He had vividly experienced Lent--a period of merriment that ended in a bloodbath. He had witnessed Shepherd Pierre Berry hack off Ava's head with an axe and blood spurt everywhere...

Was he dreaming now, or had his past experience been a dream? Regardless of which one it was, they both seemed too real. Lumian couldn't detect any signs of deceit on his sister's face.

Sure, Aurore could be an excellent actress, but Lumian believed she was not that kind of person.

They had spent five years together, and he knew every detail of her personality. There was no way she could have fooled him!

Lumian was perplexed as he considered the possibilities of his sister Aurore lying to him about the date.

Either she was being controlled by the padre or some secret entity or everything had been resolved and she was just messing with him.

If neither of these options was true, then it was likely that Aurore was telling the truth.

Time had rewound to March 29th, a few days before Lent.

With Lumian's understanding of the world, this was clearly impossible and shouldn't have happened. However, his sister's attitude left him at a loss.

I have to think of a way to confirm it... Lumian tried to recall everything that had happened during that time period and realized he could easily remember most of the details--Aurore was wearing a light-blue dress on that day on the 29th March corresponding to the "successful" celebration of Lent. He also remembered meeting Leah, Ryan, and Valentine that night before taking them to the cathedral to catch the padre in the act.

"What's wrong?" Aurore stretched out her right hand and waved it in front of her stunned brother.

Lumian quickly gathered his thoughts and said, "Aurore, I just remembered something. I need to go out for a while. I'll be back soon!"

Lumian realized that the only way to confirm if time had really returned to March 29th was to find Ava.

If she was still alive, he would have to come to terms with this unbelievable change.

He didn't wait for Aurore's response and hurried to the door, bypassing her.

"Call me Grande Soeur! Don't be late for dinner!" Aurore shouted after him.

As he ran towards Ava Lizier's house, Lumian feared that if he were even a second slower, he would be caught in an indescribable nightmare and completely devoured.

Along the way, many villagers noticed him, but they were afraid it was a prank directed by him and didn't stop to ask for a reason.

Finally, Lumian reached his destination.

Guillaume Lizier, Ava's father, was a famous shoemaker in the village of Cordu and the surrounding mountains. Although they weren't particularly rich, they weren't too bad either. They lived in a subterranean grayish-blue two-story building with an empty space at the back where grass and firewood were piled up, and a goose house was repaired.

It was almost dinner time when Lumian arrived, and several figures were busy in the kitchen of the Liziers' household.

Lumian walked through the open door and immediately saw Ava.

This brown-haired girl with aqua-blue eyes was wearing a gray-white dress and preparing dinner for her mother. Her hands and feet were nimble, and her eyes were lively. Lumian could tell just by looking at her that she was alive.

She's really not dead... Lumian thought to himself as he looked at Ava's neck, trying to find signs of stitches.

In one of Aurore's horror novels, there was a scene where a corpse was stitched up to act as a living person.

But Ava's neck was long and smooth, without a single scar.

Guillaume Lizier, the shoemaker, noticed Lumian standing in the doorway and asked, "Lumian, what's the matter?"

He stood up from his kitchen chair and faced Lumian, his brown hair disheveled, and a slightly greasy brownish-white apron hanging in front of him.

Ava, who had been busy in the kitchen, turned around in surprise and looked at Lumian.

She saw Lumian standing there in a daze.

"What's the matter?" she asked.

Lumian was momentarily stunned but quickly regained his composure and planned to make up a random reason to explain his visit.

However, Guillaume Lizier inspired him with a question.

He deliberated for a moment and asked, "Monsieur, did Pierre of Berry order a pair of leather shoes from you?"

He remembered that he and Reimund were supposed to meet Shepherd Pierre Berry the next morning and were surprised when he had abandoned his flock to rush back to participate in the Lenten celebration despite the dangers of the long and difficult journey.

By that time, Pierre Berry had already put on a new pair of soft leather shoes.

Unless he went to a shoe shop in DariÃ¨ge that sold finished products, it would take time to make a pair of leather shoes. This meant that Pierre Berry had been back in the village for at least two or three days!

Guillaume Lizier was surprised by Lumian's question and said, "Pierre Berry came back a few days ago, but not many people in the village know about it. He also told me not to tell anyone else."

As expected... Lumian made up a reason and said, "I saw someone who looked very much like him and thought I was hallucinating.

"Because the man was wearing new leather shoes, I came to confirm it with you."

"It's him." Guillaume Lizier gave an affirmative answer. "He was still herding three or four sheep that he claimed his employer had given him."

Don't they only let the sheep return to the village in early May to shear and milk them? How are they to be grazed if a few sheep are brought back now?

Grazing in the highland pastures is still prohibited... The more Lumian thought about it, the more he felt that Shepherd Pierre Berry's behavior was extremely abnormal.

And his performance at the end of the celebration proved Lumian's judgment.

However, he had no idea what he, the padre, and the others wanted to do, or what they had already done.

Lumian smiled at Guillaume Lizier and Ava and said, "I'm relieved that it's really him. I thought I was having problems with my brain and eyes because I drink too much."

He then waved at the Liziers and said, "Goodbye."

As Lumian left the Liziers' house, the smile on his face disappeared quickly.

He was now very confident that today was really March 29th.

Did I go back in time, or did I have a precognitive dream? Dreams can't be that real. They're so real that every detail is there... Lumian thought hard as he walked.

Either way, it was something he had only read about in Aurore's novels and never imagined would happen in reality.

On his way home, Lumian circled the square and came to the side of the Eternal Blazing Sun cathedral.

The stained-glass window, which should have been completely shattered, was perfectly embedded in the wall, and the Saint Sith missionary illustration on the surface shone brightly under the sunset.

Lumian watched this scene with mixed feelings. Many thoughts threatened to emit smoke from all the friction against each other in his mind.

On his way back to the square, Lumian saw a familiar figure walk out of the cathedral's main entrance.

It was the padre, Guillaume Bénet, who had a slightly hooked nose and a dignified aura, and he was wearing a white robe with golden threads.

Lumian's heart tightened, and he arched his body slightly, preparing himself for an attack or to flee.

Guillaume Bénet glanced at him and nodded expressionlessly.

"Come again tomorrow for prayers."

Uh... That's right. He hasn't been caught red-handed by me during the early evening of March 29th. He hasn't fallen out with me, nor is there any worry that his secret plot is about to be exposed... With this in mind, Lumian instinctively reacted.

He stood up straight and spread his arms.

"Praise the Sun!"

"Praise the Sun!" Guillaume Bénet replied with the same pose.

After leaving the village square, Lumian habitually recalled what had just happened.

Suddenly, he discovered a point that he had neglected previously because he was shocked by "time reversal."

He still had his superpowers!

He was still a Hunter!

He had not needed to catch his breath from running all the way to the Liziers, and he had immediately put on the best posture when facing the padre. This meant that his physique and corresponding condition far exceeded the time before he consumed the potion.

From this, Lumian made a judgment that the previous experience was not a precognitive dream, and he was already a Sequence 9 Beyonder!

I'll try entering that special dream at night to see if I can still enter and if there are any changes... Lumian quickly came up with the next step of his plan.

After returning home, Lumian pretended as if nothing had happened and had dinner with his sister, Aurore.

As he often acted this way because he didn't want her to help clean up the mess every time he got into trouble, Aurore didn't ask any further despite sensing that something was off.

After washing the cutlery and cleaning the kitchen, Lumian informed his sister and went straight to Ol' Tavern.

He wanted to confirm if the foreigners who didn't hail from Cordu would appear.

After entering Ol' Tavern, Lumian sat at the bar counter and greeted the boss and bartender, Maurice Bénet, and the thin middle-aged man, Pierre Guillaume.

"A glass of Whiskey Sour," he said with great familiarity.

Whiskey Sour referred to low-quality alcohol brewed from apples. It was only more expensive than some beer in taverns. People often hawked it on the streets of the city.

Maurice Bénet nagged, "Stingy brat, don't you like the pain of absinthe?"

Lumian said the familiar words, "Is it on the house?"

This made his mind feel a little adrift.

Maurice Bénet immediately stopped talking and poured a glass of Whiskey Sour for Lumian.

Lumian sipped his drink as he waited.

Not long after, he heard tinkling sounds.

He turned around to see Ryan wearing a rough dark bowler hat, a drab duffel coat, and pale yellow strides.

Leah attracted the attention of almost all the men in Ol' Tavern with her white pleated cashmere dress, off-white coat, Marseillan boots, and small silver bells tied to her boots and veil.

Similarly, Valentine wore a white vest, a blue tweed jacket, and black trousers, with his blond hair covered in a little powder.

The three of them walked to the bar counter under everyone's gazes and sat down beside Lumian.

Lumian didn't look up as he thought to himself, A glass of DariÃ¨ge red wine, a glass of rye beer, and a glass of CÅ"ur Ã‰picé...

Ryan took off his top hat and put it aside. Then, he said to Maurice Bénet, "A glass of DariÃ¨ge red wine, a glass of rye beer, and a glass of CÅ"ur Ã‰picé."

Lumian let out a long sigh, and Ryan asked, "What's wrong?"

Lumian took a sip of his Whiskey Sour and said in a deep voice, "I'm a nobody, with no time to notice the brightness of the sun..."

Chapter 34: Sayings

Lumian intended to observe, so he went through the entire process of getting to know Leah and her companions until they arrived outside the cathedral of the Eternal Blazing Sun.

He confirmed that these three foreigners really didn't know him and weren't on guard against his corresponding prank.

Has time really rewound… Lumian was momentarily in a daze.

Valentine said his 'lines' as he looked at the magnificent building in front of him that had blended into the night. "We've been here before. There's no one here."

Lumian composed himself and stopped following the procedure.

He said directly, "That's because the padre doesn't want to bother with you."

He planned on leaving the impression on these three foreigners, who were suspected to be official Beyonders, that he liked to joke but meant no harm.

Leah thought of several possibilities and asked, "You're saying that the padre is in the cathedral but isn't responding to the knocks due to certain matters?"

Lumian smiled.

"It's not suitable to have others see you having an affair in the cathedral."

After saying this, he instinctively muttered in his heart, Unfortunately, I can't hear the classic line 'You've ruined the holy church's plans!' this time.

Of course, after learning more about Madame Pualis, he felt that what the padre said was not entirely unreasonable.

Perhaps padres could be like the main characters in Aurore's spy novels, who were willing to endure temporary humiliation and betray their bodies to infiltrate the evil forces represented by Madame Pualis to complete an important mission.

Valentine's cold attitude changed as he asked anxiously, "Having an affair in the cathedral?"

Lumian spread his hands. "What's the problem? The padre does this every day. Relax. Isn't there a saying that goes, 'throughout the ages, it has remained unchanged: men will always pursue women?'"

Valentine snapped, "But this is a cathedral!"

Lumian thought for a moment and asked curiously, "So, as long as the clergyman doesn't have the affair in the cathedral, it's acceptable?"

"This is blasphemy against God!" Valentine was on the verge of exploding.

Ryan placated him with a pat on the shoulder, and the most composed foreigner in the group asked, "Do you know who the padre is having an affair with tonight?"

Lumian shook his head.

"There are too many possibilities. His mistresses include Madame Pualis, Madonna Bénet, Philippa Guillaume, and Sybil Berry…"

"Madonna Bénet? She has the same last name as the padre?" Leah interjected.

Lumian nodded. "She and the padre are cousins twice removed."

"…" Valentine was stunned for a moment. He gritted his teeth and asked, "Is Guillaume Bénet a servant of God or a servant of the Demon?"

Do you only know this line? Why don't I see you blowing up his head… Lumian deliberately defended the padre, "It's actually nothing. In Dariège, we have a saying: 'Distant cousins, feel free to sleep together.'"

Leah laughed, tinkling the silver bell on her head. "Why do you have so many sayings?"

Lumian spread his hands again. "That's just how it is in the countryside."

Ryan interjected thoughtfully, "How do you know that we're not from Dariège?

"You wouldn't have said, 'in Dariège, there's a saying.'"

You told me this yourself… Lumian had been quick to shoot off his tongue and actually treated what had "happened previously" as information that he already knew.

He had no choice but to make up a reason.

"You don't look like Dariège locals."

He pointed to the road leading to the village and said, "I've already helped you find the padre. I have to go home now."

Leah smiled faintly and said, "I thought you'd follow us."

"I don't dare offend the padre," Lumian casually mentioned. "The villager who snitched on him previously has been missing for a long time."

Without waiting for Ryan and the others to respond, he waved his hand and ran to the other side of the square, saying, "Remember to keep my secret, my cabbages!"

......

Lumian walked along a starlit country road, the crimson moon obscured by clouds.

He pondered recent events, his hands in pocket.

As he neared his home, he looked up at the roof of the semi-subterranean two-story building.

As expected, Aurore sat there, hugging her knees and gazing at the cosmos.

In the darkness, she seemed lonely and distant.

It has really repeated… Is there a possibility that what happened previously is real and I'm dreaming now? Lumian had just come up with a new guess when he suddenly realized the difference between the two March 29ths.

He realized that the woman who had given him the Wand card and taught him mysticism knowledge was absent from Ol' Tavern, preventing him from determining if he was dreaming or not.

I'll do a confirmation tomorrow… Lumian composed himself, walked to his house, and pushed the door open.

Just like last time, Lumian climbed to the roof using the ladder on the second floor and sat beside Aurore.

"What's so interesting about this view?" Lumian said deliberately.

Aurore turned her head and sighed. Just as she was about to speak, Lumian added, "I mean, what does the cosmos mean to you?"

Aurore sized him up.

"You're being rather direct today?"

She then looked at the cosmos and said faintly, "As you know, I'm not from Cordu or Dariège. I don't know if you've ever heard the saying that home is where you can't return to…"

Lumian didn't joke as he looked into the cosmos.

Aurore proceeded to fly into her bedroom and write a letter to her pen pal. Lumian didn't reveal his newfound Beyonder status. He returned to the second floor, chatted with her sister about her pen pal, then closed Aurore's door and returned to his bedroom.

Upon seeing the white four-piece bed, Lumian's heart skipped a beat. He lifted the pillow and found the Minor Arcana tarot card representing the Seven of Wands!

Looking at the man in verdant attire with a determined expression on his face, his hand holding a wand, poised for battle his enemies, Lumian remembered the woman's interpretation of the card: "Crisis, challenge, confrontation, courage…"

The more Lumian thought about it, the more he felt that these four words truly revealed his current situation.

Before drawing the card, there was a high chance that he would enter a crisis and face challenges!

What I need to do next is to muster my courage and confront the problem? Wait, hasn't time already turned back? I haven't even met that lady or drawn the card. Why is it here? Lumian was alarmed. He wasn't too confident about his previous guesses.

All kinds of thoughts and deductions quickly emerged in his mind, like bubbles bubbling in boiling water.

This made Lumian's head hurt; he felt like he was about to go crazy.

In the end, Lumian decided to treat the woman and the item she gave him as an "exception" for the time being.

With that lady's mysteriousness and uniqueness, it was considered normal for her to be unaffected by time reversal!

If I can find her tomorrow and she still knows me, it means that there's nothing wrong with my deduction… Lumian exhaled, feeling mentally exhausted.

He went to the washroom to wash up and went to bed early.

......

Lumian woke up in the familiar, faint gray fog and sat up, seeing the wooden table and chair in front of the window.

He had once again entered the special dream.

Upon discovering that the Wand card still existed, Lumian knew he could enter.

Lumian subconsciously touched the inner pocket of his clothes, and his expression froze.

The gold coins were gone!

All the gold coins were gone!

Lumian hurriedly jumped off the bed and searched his entire body and the spot where he had been lying, but couldn't find them.

He didn't even have 1 coppet worth of copper coins.

Time has reversed here, too? Lumian suddenly had such a guess.

He looked around and didn't see the shotgun, axe, or pitchfork that should have been there.

He calmed himself and walked down to the first floor, where he found the pitchfork and hand axe in their original locations, identical to his first exploration of the dream ruins.

Similarly, the bucket of corn oil had not been placed beside the stove.

As for the shotgun, Lumian searched everywhere but didn't find it.

Lumian believed more and more that time had turned back in the dream.

I'll check the ruins and see if the two monsters are still there… Lumian muttered to himself silently. He picked up his axe and opened the door.

Not long after, he passed through the wilderness filled with crevices and weeds and arrived at the edge of the ruins.

Unlike the first time he explored this place, as a Hunter, he noticed many traces left behind by living creatures, including two that often appeared in the area when he put his mind to it. He followed one set of footprints to the half-collapsed house.

If I had such superpowers in the past, how could I have nearly been ambushed during my first exploration? Lumian carried his axe and entered the building.

He went straight to his "destination" and arrived in front of the shattered pottery jar.

A sliver of gold seeped out from inside.

Lumian bent over and picked up the Louis d'or.

It was the same lustrous color as the first time Lumian picked it up.

Indeed, time has reversed. With very few exceptions, everything has returned to the original state… Lumian sighed.

Suddenly, he took two quick steps forward, twisted his waist, and half-turned to the right.

As he exerted his strength, the axe in his hand cleaved out.

The skinless blood-colored monster lost sight of its target just as it pounced from the roof. What greeted it was an axe.

Pfft!

Its head flew out, and its headless body fell heavily to the ground amidst the blood and pus.

Chapter 35: Differences

It's about as strong as the 'last time'… Lumian muttered to himself as he looked at the corpse of the skinless monster.

Before the time reversal, he had been evenly matched with the monster, relying on his intelligence to defeat it. Now, as a Beyonder, he only needed one swing of his axe to finish it off.

Of course, he had the advantage of already experiencing the same sequence of events and knowing the monster's attack strategy. This allowed him to anticipate its moves.

The contrast between before and after made Lumian feel that he had undergone a significant improvement after becoming a Beyonder.

After pondering for a moment, he moved the monster's corpse and head to a corner but did not hide it under rocks, wood, and mud, leaving it exposed along with the blood on the ground.

Lumian then quickly searched the half-collapsed building and found the remaining 197 verl d'or and 25 coppet, categorizing them into different pockets.

He flipped through the livre bleu again but found nothing out of the ordinary.

Once he had completed his search, he snuck deeper into the ruins. However, after only 20 to 30 meters, he changed course and returned to his starting point. Following the path the skinless monster had taken while alive, he nimbly climbed onto the half-collapsed roof.

After making the necessary preparations, he hid himself.

Minute by minute, Lumian waited patiently like an experienced hunter.

After an unknown period of time, a figure emerged from the ruins.

It was the same monster that had previously given Lumian a Hunter Beyonder characteristic, with its half-human, half-beast appearance, bent knees, greasy black hair, and shotgun on its back.

The shotgun monster approached cautiously, as if on a daily patrol.

Suddenly it sniffed the air and detected the blood in the distance.

It quickly changed direction and headed towards the half-collapsed, burnt building.

Following the trail of blood, the monster found the skinless monster's corpse and head.

It squatted down to examine it carefully.

On the half-collapsed roof, Lumian shook his head and muttered to himself, You can't even smell me from such a distance? Even with the smell of blood, you shouldn't have missed me!

As he muttered, he raised his axe and struck hard at the crevice in the stone beside him that he had prepared earlier.

Crash!

The half-collapsed roof shook, and heavy rocks crashed down.

The shotgun monster reacted quickly, twisting its waist, kicking its feet, and lunging towards an uncollapsed area.

Lumian smiled and swooped down from the intact roof like an eagle grabbing its prey in midair.

In the midst of the howling wind, Lumian and the shotgun monster clashed in the air. Lumian raised his axe with one hand while the monster desperately tried to turn around and block.

Lumian clenched his left hand into a fist and punched down. As the monster extended its arm to block, Lumian opened his palm and reduced his strength, grabbing the monster's arm.

As Lumian pulled back with his left hand, he suddenly cleaved down with his axe in his right hand.

The blade struck the monster, and they both fell to the ground in a pool of blood.

Lumian, who had a buffer pad, was not affected by the impact. He raised his hand and cleaved the monster's head from its body with his axe once again.

Despite its unwillingness, the head rolled twice and separated from the body.

Standing up, Lumian looked at the monster and sneered, "You've weakened!

"All you have is a terrifying shell, nothing more than a stuffed scarecrow inside!"

As a Hunter, he was confident in dealing with the shotgun monster again, but he hadn't expected it to be so easy.

Looking at the corpse on the ground, Lumian patiently waited for the Beyonder characteristic to appear.

However, after waiting for a long time, he saw no sign of the dark-red light.

"Nothing?" Lumian muttered to himself in puzzlement.

He wasn't surprised, though.

Last time, he had obtained the shotgun monster's Beyonder characteristic and turned it into a potion that he had already consumed.

Since the time reversal didn't turn me back into an ordinary person, and the Beyonder characteristic in my body hasn't disappeared, it means that there's one less Hunter Beyonder characteristic here. The shotgun monster is only back in its living state, but it essentially lacks what's important. The question now is, why am I still the same before the time reversal? He couldn't come up with an answer, so he decided to loot the copper coins from the shotgun monster and leave the ruins.

......

The next morning, Lumian didn't feign a headache in front of his sister like he had on March 30th. Instead, he got up early and prepared breakfast, including toast, fried poached eggs, sliced bacon, and more.

Aurore was surprised to see Lumian's diligence. "Oh, you're so diligent? I thought you wouldn't be able to get up this morning after drinking so much yesterday."

Lumian casually replied, "Just a glass of Apple Whiskey Sour and a glass of absinthe. How is that too much?"

Aurore shook her head and smiled. "What's there to be proud of? Other than wine, other alcoholic beverages are unhealthy and affect our brains. No wonder you're becoming more and more stupid, my drunkard brother."

Lumian, who couldn't argue with his sister, muttered to himself, "Why is wine an exception?"

"Because I like it," Aurore replied, challenging Lumian to retort.

Lumian had no response.

After breakfast, he stayed home and kneaded dough instead of going out.

Aurore clicked her tongue in wonder.

"Did you cause any trouble? You're so obedient…

"Tell me, I won't beat you up. At most, I'll give you an additional combat class."

"Nothing." Lumian deflected the question and said, "I find things in the village getting weirder and weirder. Some people are acting more and more abnormally. Aurore, do you feel that way?"

Lumian had observed that his sister didn't have any memories related to the time reversal, but the abnormality in the village had to have started before March 29th. As a Mystery Pryer, Aurore might have sensed it but didn't pay enough attention to it.

Aurore's expression turned serious.

"Even you can sense that something is amiss?

"Tell me, who were the ones who made you feel this way?"

As expected, Aurore knew that there was something wrong with some people, but she didn't expect the problem to be so serious… Lumian washed his hands and thought before responding, "Madame Pualis, the padre, Pons Bénet, and the shepherd, Pierre Berry, who returned to the village early."

"There is indeed something wrong with Madame Pualis. I knew something was off about her when she came to Cordu with the administrator, but she was very restrained. Apart from constantly having extramarital relationships, there was nothing evil about her. I saw something on her…"

Aurore stopped herself, not wanting to drag Lumian into the supernatural world.

Constantly having extramarital affairs? Before Lumian found out that Madame Pualis was having an affair with the padre, he found Madame Pualis a decent lady. He was surprised to learn that Madame Pualis had affairs with men other than the padre.

Of course, this was in line with Lumian's stereotypical view of Madame Pualis.

"As for the padre, he has the same strong desire for superpowers as you, but he has never received the blessings of the Eternal Blazing Sun Church," Aurore continued. "A guy like Pons Bénet, whose brain is nothing but muscle, can't do anything strange. As for the shepherd, Pierre Berry, rushing back a few sheep seems a little off, but I can't tell what's wrong, and I don't dare to look deeper…"

As one would expect from a Sequence 7 of the Mystery Pryer pathway… Before the time reversal, I hadn't conversed much with Grande Soeur about such topics. In fact, I overlooked the crucial hint that there could be an issue with Pierre Berry's sheep… Yes, I didn't suspect Pierre Berry much back then. I just thought it was a bit odd for him to hurry back early to take part in Lent… Just as Lumian was about to speak, there was a tinkling sound at the door.

The doorbell rang.

Lumian walked over to the door and asked, "Who is it?"

"A telegram for Aurore!" the person outside replied loudly.

"A telegram?" Aurore was confused. "Who would send me a telegram? There's nothing urgent recently…"

Lumian was also puzzled.

They hadn't received any telegrams before the time reversal on March 30th.

Wait, Lumian thought. I went to the village square early on March 30th to wait for Reimund. Perhaps Grande Soeur received a telegram but didn't tell me. Lumian quickly opened the door.

Outside stood Bertrand, the administrator's subordinate in charge of telegrams. He handed a piece of paper to Lumian and said, "1 verl d'or."

The brown-haired, brown-eyed Bertrand was not from Cordu and had come here with the administrator from Dariège. He looked warm on the outside but was actually quite greedy.

Lumian tossed a silver coin worth one verl d'or to Bertrand and looked at the telegram.

The contents were simple. Lumian quickly browsed through it.

"The author salon mentioned before is in June. If you're willing, Miss Aurore, you can set off for Trier now. Leave enough time for a tour. We guarantee that this will be a very beautiful journey."

It was signed by the editorial department of Novel Weekly.

Wh… Lumian's eyes widened.

Was this a reply from Novel Weekly?

"When did I say I wanted to attend the author's salon?" Aurore leaned over and read the telegram. "What's wrong with the editorial department of Novel Weekly? It's annoying having to meet so many people at once!"

Bertrand was well away from the door by now. Lumian was stunned and suddenly had a bold guess. The telegram in his hand was indeed a reply from Novel Weekly, but it was a reply to the telegram he would send in a few days!

To be more precise, the telegram he had sent before going back in time had received a reply after the time reversal, and in his current experience, that telegram had yet to be sent out!

Chapter 36: Meeting Again

Lumian reached a conclusion that if his guess was true, Cordu and the surrounding area were the only places affected by the time reversal. Other places were not affected.

Lumian's thoughts raced, wondering if leaving this place would allow him to return to his normal life. He turned to Aurore and pretended to be guilty.

"Well, uh, this telegram is my doing."

"You?" Aurore was both angry and amused but, more importantly, at a loss.

She wondered if her brother had pranked her.

This was akin to being pecked in the eye by an eagle despite being an experienced hunter!

Lumian explained 'sincerely,' "Here's the thing. Haven't I always wanted to go to Trier to take a look? So, two days ago, I secretly sent a telegram to Novel Weekly at the telegraph office. I wrote it in your style to ask when the nearest author salon is. As expected, they warmly sent an invitation."

Aurore showed a look of enlightenment, as though the mystery was finally solved. "So that's how it is…"

The next second, she picked up a wooden stick beside her and gritted her teeth.

"So the child has grown up!"

Lumian quickly added, "Aurore, no, Grande Soeur, listen to my excuses. No, listen to my explanation."

He didn't panic and even deliberately joked.

"Fine, go ahead," Aurore said as she held onto the wooden stick. "I've always made sure that others accept any punishment with my best conduct. How can I convict someone without listening to the suspect's statement? Even if you are to die, I'll make sure you die knowing why!"

Lumian quickly said, "In Intis, Trier has the most and best universities. I'm going to take the college entrance examination soon, and I want to visit them to decide which three to apply for."

Aurore nodded slightly, indicating for Lumian to continue.

Lumian praised his sister sincerely.

"I believe that as long as I make this legitimate request, you will definitely take me to Trier. However, you will have to spend your money. If Novel Weekly sends an invitation, not only will the steam locomotive ticket and hotel accommodation fees be reimbursed, but also various entertainment expenses in Trier.

"I know you don't need the money, but all the writing you've done was painstaking work, word after word. I won't let a way of saving money go to waste."

Aurore's expression eased.

"At least you care about me. But have you considered that I don't want to attend an author salon? I hate interacting with so many strangers."

Lumian smiled.

"Aurore, uh, Grande Soeur, have you thought that Novel Weekly invited you so warmly not to let you attend the salon, but to build a good relationship with you? You're a famous best-selling author. The salon isn't important; what's important is you. You can find a reason to reject the salon if you're willing to accept the invitation to visit Trier. The people at Novel Weekly will be glad that you accepted the first part of the invitation."

Aurore sized up Lumian.

"You're getting better at reading people."

She exhaled and said, "Alright, I'll handle some matters and pack our luggage. We'll leave for Trier in two days. Send a telegram to Novel Weekly before we leave and ask them to pick us up at the Trier train station."

"Alright!" Lumian couldn't hide his joy.

Although he suspected that it was impossible for him and Aurore to simply walk out of Cordu and find the corresponding source of the time reversal, he had to try. He couldn't trap himself in one place.

Having such thoughts, he had tried to convince Aurore.

Lumian didn't plan on telling Aurore about the time reversal because she had lost her corresponding memories. Lumian knew that it was unlikely that she would believe such a delusional speculation unless Lumian kept making prophecies that were eventually verified. However, he still pretended that he wasn't aware of the time reversal. He didn't plan on making prophecies for the time being to see if he could discover any clues.

Using reading as an excuse, Lumian returned to the second floor and entered the study.

He sat down and casually flipped open a book to confirm if he had it the right way up.

Then he sank into his own thoughts, hoping to make further sense of the current situation through the various details he discovered last night and today.

As his gaze shifted across the empty space, Lumian saw the livre bleu on the table.

His heart skipped a beat, and he retracted his thoughts. He stretched out his palm and took the livre bleu, flipping through it quickly.

The pages that were missing some words and had corresponding holes appeared before his eyes.

That letter… Lumian muttered silently.

He combined the "late" reply from Novel Weekly with the letter of help that Leah, Ryan, and the others had received, and he had a new guess.

Perhaps that letter was really written by me. I'm the murderer!

Time reversal might have happened more than once. According to the definition in Aurore's novel, this should be called a time loop.

In a previous cycle, I discovered a certain abnormality through certain exploratory actions and decided to seek help from the outside world by sending an anonymous letter without implicating Aurore. By the time officials realized the seriousness of the problem and sent Ryan and the others to deal with it, Cordu had already begun a new cycle. Like Aurore now, I lost all my corresponding memories and returned to my 'initial' state…

Now, that begs the question. Why are words still missing from this livre bleu?

Logically speaking, it should have returned to its "initial" state, just like the food I ate in the previous cycle.

There are two possibilities.

Firstly, if I discover an abnormality and ask for help before time starts to loop, then the relevant memories shouldn't be reset. Could there be another reason that caused me to lose a portion of my memories? This is getting more and more complicated…

Secondly, I had found a way to keep something from being affected by the loop during that particular cycle. What could it be? If there is, why don't I just find a piece of paper and write down what I found?

Lumian felt like he had cleared away a layer of fog and reconstructed the general situation, only to fall into even more confusion.

He believed that he had already experienced many time loops. However, in the previous cycles, his memories and physical condition would reset once he started from the beginning, so he did not notice it at all.

The reason why he could retain his memories and the Hunter Beyonder characteristic this time was that he had met the lady and obtained the Wand card. He had entered the dream ruins and activated the special trait in him.

Since the special trait brought about by the two symbols allowed Lumian to "bring" his Beyonder state in the dream to reality, it was completely possible for them to "save" his complete physical condition to the starting point of the cycle.

Therefore, even after the shotgun monster's condition reset, it still failed to retrieve the Hunter Beyonder characteristic… Lumian leaned back in his chair and looked at the ceiling as he slowly exhaled.

He then laughed self-deprecatingly.

I've just become a Beyonder, but I have to face such abnormal things. I don't even get the time to develop…

Uh, I can't confirm that the request for help was created by me. It might have been Aurore, and Madame Pualis is also a suspect. As Beyonders, they might have sensed something amiss during a certain cycle and tried to save themselves. With their mysticism knowledge, it's easier for them to find a way to preserve some traces than I can. Nonetheless, a time loop is indeed the best guess for the current situation.

As he pondered, Lumian realized a way to confirm the source of the letter.

The solution was simple. He would enter the dream ruins and flip through the same livre bleu at home.

If the livre bleu also had missing words, it meant that Lumian had created the letter of help himself. The home in the special dream was formed by his subconscious projection onto the mixed ruins. Everything he subconsciously knew would appear there.

If not, then it was most likely done by Aurore or Madame Pualis. Lumian's subconscious wouldn't know about this and wouldn't be responsible for it.

Lumian wasn't in a hurry to 'catch up on his sleep.' Seeing that it was about time, he sneaked out of the house and headed straight for Ol' Tavern.

In the corner of Ol' Tavern, he spotted a familiar figure.

It was the lady who had given him the Wand card and potion formula.

She was wearing a long orange pleated dress with a flounce collar and a light-colored frilly hat.

Lumian heaved a sigh of relief, feeling like a drowning person who had finally caught a lifebuoy.

He quickly walked over and noticed that there were not breakfast items on the table in front of the lady, but three stacks of tarot cards.

"Do you need me to draw a card?" Lumian probed.

"You've already drawn it." The woman shuffled the three stacks of tarot cards without looking up.

Lumian felt tears welling up in his eyes.

As expected, she was not affected by the time loop!

Without beating around the bush, Lumian sat down and asked directly, "I, as well as the entire Cordu Village, have fallen into a time loop?"

The lady looked up and replied with a smile, "Yes, you're one of the Circle Inhabitants."

Lumian repeated the term 'Circle Inhabitants' to himself and asked in confusion, "What does that refer to? People caught in a time loop?"

The lady smiled and said, "There are two explanations. The first refers to people that obtained a special power equivalent to Sequence 4 after praying to a certain existence. The second refers to your current situation."

"You can obtain strength by praying to a hidden existence?" Lumian was very surprised by the first explanation of Circle Inhabitants.

Wasn't it the case that all 22 Beyonder pathways relied on consuming potions to advance?

The lady nodded slightly and said, "In theory, the Eternal Blazing Sun can also bestow the gift of Beyonder powers without the need for a potion. However, it is a burden to Him. It can only be used as a temporary measure. The more people who need a blessing, the greater the burden. It might even affect His state.

"There are also disadvantages to those who are bestowed. They will slowly become closer to the Eternal Blazing Sun, be it in body, mind, or spirit.

"Moreover, as it is a gift from a superior being, They can take it back at any time unless you possess the unique power of certain pathways and secretly complete a certain level of stealing while still having the gift."

Chapter 37: "Dangerous Forest"

Lumian paused for a moment and then said, "So the body, mind, and spirit will approach the bestower because the power of the gift carries a corresponding brand?"

He made this inference from the Beyonder characteristics left behind by the Oldest One and the previous owners.

Although the bestowment was pure strength and didn't contain any characteristics, it was also likely to have been tainted with all the previous owner's quirks.

The lady held the tarot cards and nodded in agreement.

"Your logical ability is impressive. You should thank Aurore for giving you enough basic education."

Lumian muttered inwardly, No need for your reminder…

The lady continued, "Even if the bestower doesn't wish to affect the bestowed, it's difficult to prevent the other party from approaching Them physically, mentally, and spiritually. This is because if the power bestowed doesn't contain the bestower's will, it will be challenging for the bestowed to control it, and it will quickly dissipate.

"Therefore, the blessings of the orthodox gods in this aspect are basically temporary and limited to a certain extent."

And the evil gods don't care what happens to the bestowed? Lumian nodded thoughtfully and asked curiously, "Beyonders, what I mean is, can people with Beyonder characteristics still accept gifts? Will the two conflict and cause them to lose control?"

The lady smiled and shook her head, "There may be some conflict, but not much.

"Think about it. The power of the gift will transform your body to match that of the bestower, but your body has already adapted to your Beyonder characteristics. So, there will be a conflict until you find a new balance. However, this conflict won't affect your mind or spirit, so you won't lose control unless you're on the brink of collapse. The only problem is that you might have to get used to seeing a third eye and a fourth hand growing on your body. Of course, the prerequisite is that the power bestowed on you will last for a long time. The corresponding level has to be very high as well. Otherwise, the little changes in your body can be ignored."

Lumian acknowledged the information in a terse manner.

"What if the gift is from the same or a neighboring pathway?" he asked.

The lady nodded.

"It won't cause any conflict."

She then chuckled.

"But that doesn't mean there won't be physical changes."

What does this mean? Lumian was confused and was about to ask for clarification when the lady interrupted him with a chuckle.

"I thought you'd be more interested in the time loop after learning about Circle Inhabitants. It's surprising that you're paying attention to this knowledge that may not be useful to you in the future. That's not like you!"

Lumian revealed a self-deprecating smile.

"I wanted to ask if you could help us break the time loop," he said. "But then I remembered what you said before. You claimed that the price for resolving the corresponding problem would be the complete destruction of Cordu. Everyone would die. If I wanted to achieve a better outcome, I could only rely on myself. I didn't understand it at the time, but now I can guess the reason. If you want to break the cycle and you're not a Circle Inhabitant, the only way is to destroy everything?"

The lady nodded in agreement.

"That's correct."

Lumian was confused and asked, "Then why didn't you make it clear before?"

It's not like it's something that would lead to destruction!

Or was this lady used to speaking in a half-concealed manner?

The lady immediately laughed.

"Would you have believed me if I had told you that the whole village was caught up in a time loop?"

Lumian thought about it for a moment and replied, "Probably not…"

It was difficult to believe such an absurd story without experiencing it firsthand.

The lady smiled and said, "That's why I didn't make it clear. I didn't want to spend a lot of time explaining it to you."

"…" Lumian fell silent for a moment before seizing the opportunity to ask, "Do you know what the key is to breaking this cycle? In what direction should I focus my efforts?"

The lady shook her head.

"Divination on certain matters is very dangerous here."

"Huh?" Lumian was confused.

The woman could only add, "If I knew the key, I would tell you," the lady said. "The sooner I solve this, the sooner I can end this journey." She sighed. "When can I have a work-free vacation…"

Work? Lumian couldn't obtain any inspiration from the mysterious lady, so he probed, "If the padre isn't killed, will time stop repeating itself?"

"No," the lady replied accurately. "There are many trigger points in the loop, including time reaching the twelfth night. You can figure out the rest yourself."

Twelfth night… There's still quite a bit of time to investigate… Lumian thought for a moment and said, "Because I triggered the specialness in my body, I can maintain my memories and Beyonder characteristics every time I loop, right?"

Seeing the lady nod, he further asked, "So, as long as I'm alive and continue to investigate, I'll be able to find the key to end everything sooner or later?"

This was an application of the "exhaustive method" that Aurore had mentioned.

"In theory, that's right." The woman's emotive eyes, which puzzled Lumian couldn't put his finger on, surfaced again. "But you should have realized that only Cordu and the surrounding area are in a time loop. Time is passing normally in the outside world, and the date is completely different from Cordu's.

"The three investigators will send telegrams to describe their situation and the village, and the officials will sense the abnormality here once they mention the date.

"Even if the investigators fail to send a telegram before the cycle restarts or they don't mention the date, as time passes, the officials will discover the problem. What do you think they will do to resolve the time loop in Cordu?"

Lumian fell silent for a moment before replying, "They'll destroy it directly, just like your alternative choice."

The lady nodded with mixed emotions. "That can effectively prevent the abnormality from spreading and affecting others," she said. "If you have the chance to go to the Sonia Sea in the future, you can ask about Bansy Harbor. It was destroyed by the Church of Storms due to some kind of corruption. No one escaped."

Lumian felt a renewed determination to find the key point of the loop on his own.

He mocked himself, saying, "Looks like I don't have much time left."

He knew he only had three or four more cycles, and he couldn't have it loop to the twelfth night every time.

The lady stood up and calmly said, "At least you still have a chance. Some people don't even have that."

......

After leaving Ol' Tavern, Lumian stood on the road and looked at the few pedestrians and houses around him. Everything in Cordu Village seemed normal on the surface. The villagers had the same emotions as people everywhere: joy and anger, desire and longing.

However, beneath the peaceful and noisy facade, this village hid an unimaginable horror. Everyone here had fallen into a loop and lived the same few days over and over again.

Aside from a few people like Padre Guillaume Bénet, Shepherd Pierre Berry, Pons Bénet, and Ava Lizier, Lumian was temporarily unable to determine who was innocent.

He wasn't even 100% sure that Reimund Greg, who was usually rather dim and unscheming, was fine.

The padre's superpower may have influenced the lads' strange behavior at the end of Lent, instead of them having issues beforehand.

For a moment, Lumian felt that Cordu was like a primitive forest, rife with unseen dangers. He couldn't tell who was the prey and who was the hunter.

Caution and patience were most important to survive in such an environment. Ability, courage, wisdom, and experience had to take a backseat.

This was somewhat similar to his vagrant days, yet clearly different.

As these thoughts surfaced, he felt the Hunter potion showing signs of digestion.

This is the first step of the 'acting method'?

That's pretty fast. I thought it would take a month or two to start.

He became excited at the possibility of digesting the Hunter potion.

Can I digest the Hunter potion in one or two cycles?

With the help of dream ruin's hunting, he might quickly become a Sequence 8 Provoker and increase his chances of solving the time loop problem.

Lumian pondered as he walked forward. Soon, he arrived at the village square.

His current plan was to "chat" with the padre to test him for abnormalities and obtain any clues.

As he looked around, he saw a figure walking towards the cathedral.

The figure was wearing a dark brown long coat with a hood, a rope tied around his waist, and a pair of brand new soft leather shoes. It was Shepherd Pierre Berry.

It's him… Lumian quickly approached Pierre and deliberately asked, "Pierre, why are you back?"

Pierre's black curly hair was greasy, and he hadn't shaved for a long time.

He happily replied, "Isn't Lent almost here? I haven't celebrated it in years. I can't miss it this year no matter what…"

His blue eyes were filled with a gentle smile, and he seemed completely different from the shepherd who had traumatized Lumian before.

Uh, the answer will be somewhat different from the previous cycle in a different place with a different questioner. Although the essence doesn't change, certain words will be different… Lumian listened carefully and looked at Pierre's new shoes before asking, "Did you make it rich?"

"Not really. I can only say that my current boss is not too shabby. He gave me quite a bit of things. Drinks are on me tonight." Pierre's joy was evident.

"Alright." Lumian agreed and pointed at the cathedral. "Are you going to pray?"

Pierre sighed and said, "Yes, it's been too long since I prayed to God in a cathedral."

Though the sentence didn't seem significant, the more Lumian listened, the more he sensed that something was off.

Shepherds weren't entirely isolated from human settlements. Numerous villages were scattered around the plains and pastures. High mountain meadows might be desolate, but shepherds would occasionally descend the mountain to resupply. How could he not find a cathedral?

Indeed, if Pierre Berry had ventured to Feynapotter or Lenburg, locating the Cathedral of the Eternal Blazing Sun would be a fruitless endeavor. However, Lumian couldn't shake the feeling that there was something amiss in every word Pierre Berry uttered.

Instead, Pierre Berry inquired, "Are you headed to the cathedral as well?"

"No," Lumian replied, shaking his head. "I thought there'd be people chatting in the square, but it was empty."

He then waved his hand.

"I'm going home."

"See you tonight," Pierre Berry responded, waving back.

After watching the shepherd head towards the cathedral, Lumian made his way back to the village.

He decided against having a chat with the padre. His next destination: the home of Shepherd Pierre Berry!

Chapter 38: Sheep

Over a dozen members of the Berry family were crammed into a ramshackle two-story house. Lumian seemed unfazed by the open door and carefully maneuvered around it to the vacant area enclosed by wooden fences at the back.

Piles of hay and firewood were scattered near the eaves of the clearing, and three filthy, white sheep, muddied with dirt, were lingering there.

Lumian remembered Aurore mentioning that the sheep Pierre had hurried back with seemed peculiar, but she couldn't quite pinpoint what was unusual about them. That's why Lumian had taken advantage of the shepherd's absence during prayer at the cathedral to inspect the sheep.

Although he had never herded sheep himself, he had lived near the highland pastures in Cordu, so he had at least encountered 70 to 80 sheep. He was by no means unfamiliar with them.

After observing closely for some time, Lumian couldn't discern any differences between the three sheep before him and others of their kind. All he could do was mutter under his breath, "Can't see any issues with my naked eye—do I need some superpower?"

Sadly, Hunters didn't possess such abilities.

Lumian had already utilized his enhanced vision, sense of smell, and understanding of various clues, but he still couldn't identify any problems.

The only oddity he noticed was that the sheep's droppings were piled in one corner rather than scattered everywhere.

Of course, there was a high probability that the Berry family regularly cleaned the area to use the feces more efficiently.

After several more seconds of observation, Lumian murmured softly, "Looks like just looking and sniffing isn't enough… Do I need to get hands-on?"

Without any hesitation, he placed his hand on the fence and flipped over it, as if he was right at home.

The three sheep turned their heads simultaneously to look at Lumian, who greeted them with a grin.

"Come on, time for a checkup."

He wasn't concerned that their owner would discover his actions since he had done similar things more than once. Every family in the village knew that this guy enjoyed playing pranks in various ways. Using sheep as props was just part of his antics.

In Lumian's own words: When your reputation is already tarnished, there are some perks to being infamous.

With the title of "Prankster King," anything he did in Cordu Village wouldn't arouse too much suspicion. Even if those who were clearly abnormal caught him red-handed, they wouldn't be able to confirm that something was amiss with him.

Of course, under such circumstances, Padre Guillaume and Shepherd Pierre might try to silence him as a precautionary measure. As such, he needed to exercise caution when necessary.

"Baa! Baa! Baa!"

As if sensing Lumian's ill intentions, the three sheep hid behind the haystack, their cries barely audible.

But how could they escape a Hunter?

Lumian grabbed a sheep and patted its side while forcefully examining its teeth.

"No issues here either…" he whispered.

Seeing the sheep look at him, he added with a wicked grin, "You're in excellent health. You'd probably make a delicious mutton stew with peas."

He deliberately said this to test the intelligence of the three sheep.

When there were no problems with the target's body, he could only start from this angle.

The sheep's eyes glazed over momentarily.

Lumian chuckled.

"Pretty smart, huh? Do you understand what I'm saying?"

The sheep's eyes returned to normal as it turned its head and began eating hay.

"Ignoring me?" Lumian stroked his chin. "I'll buy you from Pierre Berry later and have you for dinner tonight!"

The sheep remained unresponsive.

It bit off a piece of hay and yanked it out.

The haystack suddenly collapsed, and Lumian's sharp Hunter's eyes caught a glimpse of something.

His expression darkened as he walked over and squatted down for a closer inspection.

It was a bundle of black hair containing a few severed fingernails.

"Why would this be outside the house?" Lumian muttered in surprise.

As a native of Cordu, he was well aware of the burial customs of the Dariège region. When someone died at home, their hair and nails had to be cut and hidden somewhere inside the house to maintain their horoscope and good fortune.

How could such an item appear in an outdoor haystack?

Lumian picked up the bundle of hair and nails, weighing it as he examined it.

It looks quite fresh, as if it had been cut only recently… He quickly made a judgment.

However, no one had died in Cordu Village lately!

Lumian could only suspect that this was some form of witchcraft similar to the funeral customs. He planned to consult his sister about it later.

To avoid arousing suspicion, he stuffed the nails and black hair back into the haystack and restored the messy scene.

Having completed that task, he walked towards the wooden fence.

As Lumian took a few steps forward, he turned to look back at the three sheep. With a hopeful attitude, he muttered to himself, "Pierre Berry seems off. He's back in the village before May. Did he commit a crime outside? As a good citizen of Intis and a devout believer of God, should I visit Dariège and inquire around?"

The three sheep just stared at him, unresponsive and unchanged.

Lumian sighed inwardly, feeling disappointed. These sheep aren't particularly intelligent, he thought.

He then raised his hands—thumbs pointing up, index fingers pointing down—making a gesture of disdain.

What's wrong with mocking the sheep when I'm in a bad mood?

Suddenly, the sheep that Lumian had examined took a few steps forward, looking hopeful.

It raised its hoof and started drawing on the mud.

Lumian was momentarily stunned, but soon approached the sheep to see what it was drawing.

The sheep seemed to be drawing letters on the ground. Lumian found them familiar but didn't recognize them.

He frowned and speculated, This language should have the same origin as the Intis language… But I only know Intis and some ancient Feysac languages…

At that moment, Lumian realized the significance of Aurore's words: "knowledge equals power."

The sheep finished drawing and took a step back, looking at Lumian with sincerity in its eyes. The other two sheep also had a similar emotional change and bleated softly.

Lumian looked at the word on the ground and fell into deep thought, wondering what it meant and how he should respond.

In just a second or two, he had an idea and nodded solemnly at the three sheep.

He stretched out his right foot and wiped away the word on the soil.

He may not understand, but he could pretend to understand it!

He would trick the sheep for now and ask his sister for guidance later.

Without waiting for the sheep to 'respond,' he nodded slowly with a heavy and thoughtful expression as he walked towards the fence, as if saying, "Be patient, I'll figure something out."

After leaving the sheep pen, Lumian didn't waste any time and went straight home. He found Aurore reading on a recliner in the study.

"Grande Soeur," he called out anxiously, "there's something."

Aurore immediately raised her guard. "Calling me Grande Soeur… What kind of trouble did you get into this time?"

Lumian took a deep breath and organized his thoughts.

"Remember when you said there was something off about Shepherd Pierre Berry's three sheep?

"Well, I went to the back of his house to take a look while he was praying in the cathedral. And guess what I found?"

Aurore's expression turned serious.

"If you're going to do something like that, you need to tell me in advance. It's dangerous now, and no one will protect you."

Lumian felt touched by his sister's concern but complained, If I told you in advance, you probably wouldn't have let me go…

"I'll keep it in mind for next time," he promised sincerely.

He had said similar words dozens of times.

Aurore understood the urgency of the situation and nodded, indicating that Lumian could tell her what he had discovered.

Lumian quickly recounted his experience in the sheep pen. The more Aurore listened, the more serious she became.

"Write down that word," she said, getting up from the recliner and finding a pen and paper to hand to Lumian.

Lumian had memorized the word, so he quickly wrote it down on the paper.

Aurore took a quick glance and said solemnly, "This is a big problem."

I know… Lumian responded inwardly.

Moreover, he believed the problem was even bigger than his sister had imagined.

"What's the problem?" he asked.

Aurore pointed at the word and said, "This is Highlander, the official language of the Feynapotter Kingdom. Like Intis, it comes from ancient Feysac.

"It means…"

Aurore paused for a moment, then spoke in a deep voice, "Help!"

"Help?" Lumian blurted out in surprise. "The sheep are asking us for help?"

Aurore tersely acknowledged, "I suspect they're not really sheep. They were probably humans!"

"Humans?" Lumian asked in shock.

This was beyond the scope of what he knew.

Before, Lumian had only thought that the three sheep were intelligent and had human-like emotions. They also seemed to have mastered some human language, but he had never thought of them as actual humans.

To him, turning into a sheep only happened in imaginative stories!

Just as he said that, Lumian was no longer shocked.

He realized that a time loop had already happened. What was so strange about people turning into sheep?

In the world of mysticism, there were plenty of bizarre and absurd things.

Aurore solemnly nodded at her brother's confusion and said, "I'm not sure if there's a secret art that can turn a person into a sheep, but all the details now point to that possibility."

"Indeed," Lumian echoed.

The more he thought about it, the more he felt that the three sheep were probably humans.

Did this mean that the shepherd, Pierre Berry, was actually grazing humans?

Lumian then asked, "Why were those nails and hair hidden outside the house?"

Aurore pursed her lips and said, "This is one of the funerary customs of the Dariège region. However, it's not used under normal circumstances. Many people have forgotten about it.

"As a Warlock, I've studied this aspect to see if I could obtain some useful knowledge."

She then explained, "When a family member commits suicide or is murdered by a relative, or if they had a bad character while alive and exerted a negative influence on the entire family, the hair and nails that are cut after death have to be hidden outside the house to prevent the family's horoscope from being affected and bringing them bad luck."

Suicide or murder by a relative? Lumian suddenly thought of something.

During the last cycle, Pons Bénet entered Naroka's house without adhering to the funeral customs.

Could he have gone to take away Naroka's hair and nails?

Chapter 39: Sick

If Pons Bénet had really entered Naroka's house to take away her hair and nails, there's a high chance that Naroka had been murdered by a relative. After all, Naroka had a good reputation and was the pillar of the entire family. Furthermore, she was relatively healthy, both physically and mentally, so it was unlikely that she had committed suicide. Lumian quickly came up with a series of speculations.

But if Naroka had really been murdered by a relative, what was the reason?

Seeing that her brother was deep in thought and hadn't spoken for a long time, Aurore thought that he was frightened by the idea of "humans turning into sheep" and "someone from the Berry family dying from murder". So she comforted him gently.

"Although the matter is serious, it doesn't affect us yet.

"I need to reflect on such matters. It's easy for you to panic when you encounter something similar if you're always prohibited from coming into contact with real mysticism. Hmm, the frequency of supernatural events has been increasing in recent years, and I can't be by your side at all times. You'll grow up and have your own life…"

Lumian inwardly retorted that he had never heard of someone having to leave the family when they grew up.

He could feel that Aurore's attitude toward him coming into contact with mysticism had loosened up due to the matter of humans turning into sheep.

If I work harder, I can directly tell her that I've become a Beyonder… Lumian thought, but before he could speak, Aurore had already made her decision.

"Go pack your bags now. We'll leave Cordu immediately using Novel Weekly's invitation. We're really lucky. They sent us a telegram at the critical moment so that we can leave openly without being suspected. When we're on our journey, I'll teach you some true mysticism, but don't even think about becoming a Beyonder. It's too dangerous."

Lumian silently muttered to himself, We're not lucky. I sent the telegram because I discovered the problem. We only received a reply in this cycle. But he was pleased that his sister was still the same decisive person.

Although he didn't think they could successfully leave Cordu Village or escape the loop, he had to try.

"Uh, aren't we going to save those three sheep—three people?" Lumian asked.

Aurore shook her head.

"This could trigger a conflict between us and Pierre Berry, and I'm not sure how strong he is or how many helpers he has. It's too dangerous to save others without knowing anything.

"It's better to let the officials do it. This is their duty. When we reach Dariège and buy steam locomotive tickets, we'll send an anonymous letter to the officials and let them handle it."

"But what if they don't believe us?" Lumian deliberately pressed.

Aurore smiled.

"In terms of mysticism, you are indeed illiterate. In the letter, we'll describe the matter of turning people into sheep clearly. They will naturally find professionals to perform divination. Even if they don't obtain any detailed revelations, they will discover that there's something abnormal about Cordu."

"Got it," Lumian said, and he went upstairs to pack his bags.

Not long after, the siblings each came down with a brown suitcase.

Aurore looked out the door and said, "Let's go to Madame Pualis and borrow her carriage to reach Dariège as quickly as possible."

An ordinary person had to walk an entire afternoon from Cordu Village to Dariège. As a Hunter, Lumian didn't need to, but in Aurore's eyes, he wasn't a Beyonder yet.

After hesitating whether he should take the opportunity to confess to his sister, he realized that it was impossible for him to escape from Cordu. He might as well take the opportunity to search Madame Pualis's house for clues. Lumian tersely acknowledged, "Will do," and reached out to take his sister's suitcase. With two pieces of luggage in hand, he headed for the door.

Aurore nodded in satisfaction and relief, but then she said in puzzlement, "Your strength has increased. You're carrying it so easily."

She subconsciously wanted to raise her right hand and rub the sides of her eyes, but Lumian had already left. She could only give up and quickly follow.

On the way to the administrator's residence, many villagers saw Aurore leaving with her luggage and asked about the situation curiously.

Aurore, who had a valid reason, was very calm about this.

On the other hand, Lumian came up with seven or eight stories to deal with the different villagers: something about Aurore getting the Intis Legion of Honor medal and going to Trier to be honored, something about him being specially recruited by Trier Normal College and being able to be matriculated, or something about Aurore going bankrupt from investing in stocks with her creditors about to come knocking on her door, leaving her with no choice but to flee to other places. The ignorant villagers were stunned when they heard this, but thanks to Lumian's reputation, they chose not to believe him after coming back to their senses.

Not long after, the siblings arrived in front of the black building that had been transformed from an ancient castle.

Looking up at the two tall towers, Lumian smiled and said, "I wonder what's inside. Aurore, have you ever been inside?"

"Why would I wander around someone else's house?" Aurore rolled her eyes at her brother.

Lumian muttered softly, "I thought Madame Pualis would invite you to tour the castle. Don't people like them like to show their guests their big houses and precious collections?"

"What's there to see…" Aurore's voice became softer and softer as she thought about how this would be of great help to her description of a castle in her works. "Sigh, let's talk about it in the future. I wonder if we can still return to Cordu."

She then led Lumian through the colorful garden towards the castle door.

After taking a few steps, Aurore slowed down and looked around. She remarked in puzzlement, "The flowers in this garden bloomed very early…"

Cordu Village was in the mountains, and there was a highlander pasture nearby. Normally, the first wave of spring flowers would only appear in mid-to-late April.

"Perhaps Madame Pualis's gardener has a special method," Lumian said. He recalled that Madame Pualis was a Beyonder of an abnormal pathway and suspected that this was related to some supernatural phenomenon, but he couldn't say it out loud.

Aurore was just making an offhand remark, so she didn't think too deeply about it. They arrived at the castle and received a warm welcome from Madame Pualis.

The lady was wearing a blue corset dress today, and there was still a diamond necklace inlaid with gold hanging over her chest. Her long brown hair was half tied up, the rest cascading down, making her look even younger than usual.

She sat on an armchair in the small living room and quietly listened to Aurore's request. She smiled and said,

"You don't have to be so polite. We're friends."

Heh… Lumian mocked in his heart.

Who would introduce crappy marriage partners to a friend?

But he quickly saw Madame Pualis looking at him with a smile in her bright brown eyes.

He suddenly recalled their previous conversation and felt uncomfortable.

"Alright," Aurore said helplessly.

Every time she borrowed a carriage, she would offer to pay for it, but Madame Pualis would always refuse. So she would usually bring some gifts for the lady on the way back, which were neither expensive nor cheap, and also give the carriage driver a tip.

While waiting for the carriage driver to prepare, Madame Pualis invited the siblings to taste some desserts made by her own chef.

Lumian tasted a muffin and looked around.

"Where's Mr. Lund?"

Louis Lund was Administrator Béost's butler. He had followed him from Dariège to Cordu Village.

Lumian had evidence that he had an affair with a woman in the village and had sold some of the castle's items secretly. This was how he got the news that Madame Pualis was the mistress of the padre.

Chancing upon the padre and Madame Pualis having an affair in the cathedral? That was a lie for the foreigners!

At this moment, Lumian was looking for Louis Lund to curse him, saying, "You son of a b*tch, why didn't you tell me that Madame Pualis is a Warlock?"

Madame Pualis sighed.

"Louis is sick. He's resting in his room."

Sick? For some reason, Lumian felt that there might be a problem.

While his sister was chatting with Madame Pualis, he excused himself to go to the washroom, walked out of the living room, and went straight to the stairs.

This castle was huge, and the couple didn't bring many servants with them. It looked empty everywhere, and one could even hear echoes when walking in certain places. This gave Lumian better conditions to infiltrate.

Relying on his powerful senses, he easily dodged a valet and a maid. With light footsteps, he arrived at the second floor and found Louis Lund's room.

He was in no hurry to knock. He turned his head and pressed his ear to the wood.

"Ah!"

"Ah!"

...

Sounds of a man screaming in pain came from the room.

Is he really sick? It sounds quite serious… Lumian thought for a moment and walked to the side. He opened the door of the other servants—Administrator Béost and Madame Pualis lived on the third floor.

After darting into the room, he gently closed the wooden door, took a few steps to the other side, and pushed open the glass window.

Lumian looked down and saw that no one was around. He immediately propped himself up with both hands and nimbly flipped over, "hanging" on the outer wall of the castle.

Then, he leaped lightly like a wild cat and silently landed on Butler Louis Lund's windowsill.

Lumian stood at the edge of the glass window, turned his body, and secretly looked into the room.

He saw Louis Lund lying naked on the bed, his belly bulging, giving the impression that he might burst at any moment.

Seeing that the butler's black hair was drenched in sweat and his face was grimacing with pain, Lumian couldn't help but frown when he heard his tragic cries from time to time.

What kind of illness is this?

It looks scary. A stomach can actually grow so big…

At this moment, a woman in her forties stood beside Louis Lund's bed.

She had brown hair and brown eyes. She was pretty and didn't have many wrinkles. She wore a grayish-white dress and was shouting excitedly at Louis Lund.

"Soon, soon."

What's happening soon? Just as this thought flashed through Lumian's mind, he heard a scream and saw something holding up Louis Lund's stomach.

In the blink of an eye, that spot had burst open. Louis Lund's stomach had burst!

A small, bloody hand reached out.

"It's born! It's born!" The woman shouted happily.

She then leaned down and took out a wrinkled, dirty, and bloody baby from Louis Lund's stomach.

Lumian was stunned.

"…"

Chapter 40: On the Carriage

Compared to the "time loop" and "humans becoming sheep," the scene in front of him was no less shocking. It made Lumian feel as though his eyes, mind, and spirit had been severely tainted.

If he had known beforehand that he would witness such a thing, he would definitely have abandoned his actions.

What the f*ck is going on?

Louis Lund is clearly still a man!

Whose child is he carrying? The administrator's? Or Madame Pualis?

Is this the world of mysticism?

Aurore didn't let me come into contact with this for my own good…

For a moment, Lumian's thoughts were disordered, and his mind was in a state of chaos. He wished he could dig out his eyes and forcefully forget what he had seen.

"Waa! Waa! Waa!"

The baby that Louis Lund had given birth to cried out, making the filthy "delivery room" instantly have a holy aura.

This was the beauty of a new life. Lumian, who was hiding outside the window, directly experienced the joy of human origins.

Of course, besides that, the strange, absurd, dirty, and disharmonious feeling became even more obvious.

Lumian finally came back to his senses and subconsciously looked into the room again.

The baby had already been placed on a white silk cloth beside Louis Lund by the woman in the grayish-white dress. The baby was a boy, and there was more blood than milky-white fat, but other than that, there was nothing abnormal. He looked like an ordinary newborn.

Lumian observed for another two seconds and realized that the baby boy's ten fingers were bent. His nails were very long, like the claws of a bird.

Just now, he had used these hands to rip open Louis Lund's stomach!

Louis Lund, on the other hand, lay in a semi-conscious state.

The wound on Louis Lund's stomach had yet to be stitched up, and blood kept seeping out. One could vaguely see the intestines pressed to the side and a strange, bird's nest-like thing covered in a flesh-colored membrane.

As the woman wrapped the baby in silk, she picked up a sewing needle and catgut, and began chanting as she sewed the groaning Louis Lund's wound, "This was quite easy for you. The last time I gave birth to quadruplets, that was considered painful…"

Lumian's facial muscles twitched slightly. He felt that after his eyes, brain, mind, and spirit were affected, his ears were also tainted.

He retracted his gaze. He had to get out of there, fast.

He leaped back to the window he had come from and flipped into the room.

After closing the window, he rushed out the door and headed straight for the stairs.

After dodging a male servant, Lumian tiptoed and quickly returned to the hall.

"Where did you go?"

Suddenly, a slightly magnetic and gentle voice sounded in his ears.

Even with Lumian's Hunter senses, he didn't sense that someone was standing beside the staircase entrance.

He turned around to see Madame Pualis in a blue corset, her hair half-tied, and her bright brown eyes reflecting his figure.

The madam no longer had a smile on her face. Her eyes reflected Lumian's figure with a piercing intensity.

Lumian's mind tensed up. He was terrified, but prepared to fight if necessary.

Aurore appeared from a side room and asked, "Where did you go? The carriage has been waiting at the entrance."

Having been in a similar situation, the experienced Lumian said half-truthfully, "Didn't Madame Pualis say that Mr. Lund is sick? I had drinks with Mr. Lund and wanted to visit him, but this castle is too big. I couldn't find his room."

Aurore nodded and said, "You could have asked Madame Pualis directly. You don't have to hide it from us. It's not a bad thing."

"My bad. I'm sorry." Lumian looked at Madame Pualis sincerely.

After seeing the scene upstairs, Lumian was more afraid of this lady than disgusted.

He was relieved when she finally smiled, no longer as serious as before.

"Let me thank you on behalf of Lund for your kindness, but he isn't in the best of health. He isn't willing to appear in front of others in that unseemly manner."

It's indeed unseemly… Lumian silently echoed her thoughts.

"Shall we board the carriage? Thank you so much," Aurore said to Madame Pualis.

Lumian watched Madame Pualis closely, afraid she would find a way to make them stay longer.

If she did, it could mean that she sensed something had happened with Louis Lund!

Although Lumian felt that their combined forces could fight against Madame Pualis after he rendezvoused with his sister, this was her castle after all, surrounded by her servants. It was the worst hunting environment for a Hunter.

Madame Pualis nodded and smiled at Aurore.

"I look forward to the gifts you bring back from Trier. I always yearn for what's trending there."

"I hope I can give you a surprise," Aurore replied, though she wasn't sure she'd ever be able to return to Cordu Village. She just needed to keep up appearances.

Madame Pualis walked the siblings to the door with her lady's maid, Cathy, and watched them get into the four-seater carriage.

The burly, brown-bearded carriage driver wore dark red clothes, yellow pants, and a waxed hat. He looked almost like a professional coachman in the city, except that he didn't wear a tie.

This was a mandatory request from Administrator Béost.

Aurore apologized to the driver. "Sorry to trouble you," she said politely before closing the door.

The driver's name was Sewell, and he had the most common blue eyes in the Intis Republic.

He was delighted by Aurore's politeness and looked forward to the tip he'd receive when they arrived in Dariège.

"Madame, Monsieur, sit tight."

He raised his whip, and the horses started to speed up.

As the carriage passed through Cordu Village, it suddenly stopped.

Lumian's heart skipped a beat, knowing that their journey wouldn't be smooth and easy.

"What's wrong?" he asked the driver, Sewell.

Sewell explained, "Madame promised to send Naroka to Junak Village yesterday. I'm worried I won't be able to return in time after going to Dariège, so I thought of picking her up on the way. Don't worry, it won't cause any delays."

Junak Village was closer to Dariège than Cordu Village. Going there first really didn't affect the estimated time of arrival for Aurore and Lumian.

Aurore had no right to object since this wasn't her carriage, so she didn't.

Lumian was more concerned about Naroka's safety. In the previous cycle, she had died under suspicious circumstances, possibly at the hands of a relative. It was related to the padre's group.

Sewell went into Naroka's house before helping her out.

Naroka was different from usual. She was dressed in a long black dress with exquisite patterns and a dark bonnet. Her sparse, pale hair was carefully combed.

"Hey, my little cabbages, where are you going?" Naroka asked happily as she got into the carriage.

Her pockmarked and wrinkled face was filled with unconcealable joy, and her previously slightly turbid eyes were much more energetic.

Aurore told her the truth. "I'm going to Trier to attend an author salon, and also bring Lumian to check out the universities there."

Aurore asked Naroka, "Did you receive some invitation?"

While it was normal for Naroka to wear black clothes as a widow, she only wore this dress during festivals, banquets, and the anniversary of her late husband's death.

Naroka looked expectant.

"Yeah, to meet some people."

Lumian quietly observed Naroka, trying to see if he could detect anything from her.

The carriage started moving again, leaving Cordu Village behind.

Aurore chatted with Naroka intermittently, keeping an eye on the outside of the carriage.

Aurore worried that their sudden departure might arouse suspicion.

As they continued on, Lumian sensed a change in Naroka's demeanor.

She looked much paler than before, and her eyes lacked their usual liveliness. She only spoke when spoken to.

This was very similar to the Naroka Lumian had seen in the middle of the night during the previous cycle.

Lumian discreetly tugged on Aurore's hand to get her attention.

Aurore turned to him, silently asking what was wrong.

Lumian discreetly pointed at Naroka and drew a cross on her palm, a symbol Aurore often used to indicate an error in her scripts. He used it to refer to Naroka's concerning state.

Aurore was momentarily stunned but quickly understood what Lumian meant.

She turned her attention to Naroka, sensing that something was wrong.

Aurore raised her hand to massage her temples, causing her light-blue eyes to darken and become deeper.

With just a glance, Aurore's golden brows furrowed, and she leaned back slightly as if she had been hit by something.

She closed her eyes and rubbed her temples, as if she was feeling tired and in pain.

When she opened her eyes again, Aurore turned to Lumian and said, "When we reach Dariège, you must stay close to me. No matter what happens, don't leave my side."

Her tone was serious, and Lumian understood immediately. He knew that if something happened, he had to follow his sister closely. She would take care of it.

He nodded solemnly and decided to tell Aurore about his recent Beyonder powers later.

Aurore turned her attention back to Naroka and asked, "Are you really going to Junak, or somewhere else?"

She was worried that an unexpected stop might make things more complicated. It was better to anticipate any developments and not fight in an environment the other party was expecting.

Naroka's gaze was vacant as she replied in a deep voice, "No, I'm not going to Junak. I want to go to Paramita."

As she spoke, Lumian noticed the outside of the carriage window darkening abnormally.

Chapter 41: Undead

What's Paramita? Lumian was alarmed as he quickly turned to look out the window.

But what he saw outside was not what he expected. Instead of mountains, pastures, and trees, he was greeted by a desolate wilderness. The pale-white clouds in the sky blocked out all the sunlight, casting everything in shadow.

In the wilderness, strange figures roamed about. Most of them wore white linen clothes, with pale-blue faces, empty eyes, and agape mouths, looking anything but normal.

Lumian watched in horror as some of the figures ran crazily towards the edge of the wilderness, while others stumbled towards them from the other side. It was as if they would never stop, doomed to wander aimlessly forever.

At the edge of the wilderness, near a cliff, he could make out dark monsters with long horns and humanoid bodies, grabbing the white-clad figures and throwing them over the edge.

Suddenly, a blood-curdling scream pierced the air, right into Lumian's and Aurore's ears.

The sound of hooves echoed through the wilderness as a tall figure in full black armor rode a white horse. The horse was so thin that it looked like it had only skin and bones left. The rider moved slowly at times and galloped back and forth at others, as if shepherding sheep.

Lumian's eyesight was sharp, and he could see the rider clearly from afar.

Inside the helmet that shone with a metallic luster, two deep red rays of light flickered like flames. A hideous wound on the rider's neck extended all the way to their navel, almost splitting them in half and dragging out their pale-white intestines.

Without any need for further evidence, Lumian knew who it was: a Death Knight!

It was a creature that often appeared in Intisian folklore.

Suddenly, the carriage they were in came to a stop.

Naroka silently opened the door and stepped out.

Her pale face, empty eyes, and numb expression were starting to resemble the figures in white linen clothes that Lumian had seen earlier.

Aurore turned to him and said in a deep voice, "This place is filled with undead. You must stay by my side at all times."

As she spoke, she took out a gold brooch and fastened it to her clothing.

Aurore took out a handful of grayish-black powder from her pocket with her other hand.

Lumian leaned forward to look at the carriage driver and realized that Sewell had become like Naroka—pale-faced and empty-eyed, slowly walking deeper into the wilderness as if he had been dead for a long time.

He said quickly to Aurore, "Grande Soeur, I'm already a Beyonder. You deal with these undead. I'll drive the carriage and get us out of here as soon as possible!"

He knew he couldn't fight the undead, so he could only be a temporary carriage driver.

But if the Death Knight showed up, he would do his best to block it.

Aurore was taken aback by Lumian's sudden transformation, but quickly regained her composure. She reminded him, "Check the horses' condition!"

Lumian looked ahead and saw that the horses were motionless, with their flesh and blood seemingly extracted, leaving only withered fur and skin wrapped around their bones.

"The horses are dead," he reported back to Aurore.

Suddenly, the undead caught a whiff of the living and rushed towards the carriage, trying to enter.

"XXX." Aurore uttered a word in a language Lumian didn't understand.

As soon as Aurore spoke the word, the golden brooch in front of her lit up with a violent but not stimulating golden light.

The grayish-black powder in her left hand burned, emitting a flow of light that resembled water, spreading in all directions. The undead screamed as soon as they came into contact with the light, and cyan smoke rose from their bodies.

They wanted to retreat, but more undead surged forward, squeezing around the carriage, evaporating and disappearing.

Lumian watched enviously and solemnly, wishing he could do something to help. He yearned to advance in Sequence and gain more abilities.

But the powder in Aurore's hand was about to run out, and the undead were still coming, ignoring the ones that had already been destroyed. Lumian knew they couldn't stay there forever.

"We can't stay here. Let's make a run for it!"

No matter how many materials his sister had prepared, she couldn't deal with so many undead!

The Death Knight and the creatures that looked like demons were still out there.

Their best chance was to use what resources they had left to escape from the wilderness known as Paramita.

Aurore nodded and said simply, "Follow me."

The moment she finished speaking, the grayish-black powder in her palm vanished into thin air, and the desolate surroundings were engulfed by the undead.

Aurore wasted no time and retrieved another handful of materials, igniting them with the golden brooch before her. The materials combusted, creating a dazzling golden light

that decimated the approaching undead. Their agonizing shrieks echoed through the wilderness before they disintegrated into nothingness.

Aurore leaped off the carriage with Lumian hot on her heels, sprinting towards the nearest edge of the wilderness.

Suddenly, a hand jutted out from the golden blaze, snatching Lumian's arm.

Lumian's instincts kicked in, alerting him of the imminent threat. He pivoted his forearm and delivered a swift blow to the hand.

Pa!

It felt like he had punched a block of solid ice. A shiver ran through his body, rendering him immobile for a moment.

Lumian's teeth clattered as he caught sight of the hand's owner.

It was another undead clad in white linen, but it donned a mask made of white paper over its face. The figure disintegrated slowly under the golden light.

The peculiar undead lunged towards Lumian, but before it could make contact, a beam of pure, holy light descended upon it.

The masked undead halted in its tracks, burning fiercely before dissolving into black vapor.

"Keep moving!" Aurore shouted, withdrawing her hand from the golden brooch and darting forward.

Lumian shook off the cold and picked up his pace to follow his sister.

The duo relied on the grayish-black powder and Warlock spells to traverse the wilderness. The golden light eradicated countless undead garbed in white linen.

Unfortunately, Aurore couldn't simply rely on one material to stuff every bag. As a Warlock, she had to anticipate various scenarios.

Before long, the bag containing the Sun Flower powder was empty, and they were still hundreds of meters away from the wilderness's edge. The undead horde seemed never-ending.

What frightened them even more was the Death Knight's approach. The horse-mounted knight had sensed the turmoil and was galloping towards them.

Aurore's expression changed several times in the golden light. She slowed down, gritted her teeth, and spoke urgently to Lumian.

"When I shout 'three,' run towards the edge of the wilderness and don't look back!"

Lumian opened his mouth to protest, but Aurore cut him off.

"Don't worry, I'll follow you. If you stay, you'll only interfere with my use of a powerful spell and slow us down when we try to escape."

As she spoke, Aurore removed the golden brooch from her chest and handed it to Lumian, giving him instructions.

"Focus your spirituality and extend it to this brooch. Repeat this word when you're running: 'XXX'!"

Lumian didn't understand the word, but he committed the pronunciation to memory.

As soon as he took hold of the golden brooch, he felt a warm light envelop his body, banishing his dark thoughts and slowing down his racing mind.

Instinctively donning the brooch, Lumian concentrated his thoughts according to his sister's directions, extending his spiritual energy.

Seeing that the grayish-black powder in her hand was running low, Aurore retrieved another material and shouted out, "One, two, three!"

In order to avoid slowing down his sister, Lumian sprinted wildly towards the edge of the wilderness, shouting the word Aurore had given him with all his might.

"XXX!"

The golden brooch emitted a golden, radiant glow, illuminating Lumian as though a miniature sun was hanging on his chest. The undead in his path instinctively avoided him.

Thud thud thud!

As he ran, Lumian couldn't shake his worry for his sister. He cast a glance back at Aurore, who remained in her spot surrounded by a cloud of black gas.

The undead were drawn to the gas, abandoning Lumian to swarm towards her.

Lumian wasn't a fool. When he saw this scene, he understood that his sister was lying when she said that she would follow him.

"Aurore!"

He shouted, halted abruptly and spun around, running back towards his sister.

Aurore looked back and saw that he had stopped. She hurriedly shouted, "Are you stupid? Run!"

Lumian didn't say anything and ran towards Aurore. The undead parted before him, clearing a path under the golden light of the brooch.

Seeing this, Aurore lowered her head and cursed softly, "What an idiot…"

She then took out another iron-black substance and sprinkled it on Lumian, causing him to be pushed to the edge of the wilderness by an invisible force.

He struggled to break free, but he was in midair with no point of leverage.

"My stupid brother, live well…" Aurore whispered with a melancholic smile before the black aura consumed her completely.

She was directly exposed to countless figures and the Death Knight.

"Aurore!"

Lumian's eyes bulged with terror, his skin and eyes turning red with blood vessels.

However, he was still pushed to the edge of the wilderness.

But suddenly, all the undead stopped in their tracks.

Something was happening in the distance.

Aurore sensed the shift and looked up in shock. She saw an open carriage passing by, pulled not by horses, but by two demonic creatures with goat horns. The carriage was a deep red color, resembling a conch or a cradle, and a woman resembling Madame Pualis wearing a flower crown and green dress sat inside.

But unlike Madame Pualis, she was very dignified.

The Death Knight abandoned his target and turned his horse towards the carriage.

All the undead followed suit, clustering around the carriage as it headed towards the hazy mountain range beyond the wilderness.

Chapter 42: Madame Night

Lumian was stunned by the carriage pulled by the 'demon' and the undead's reactions. He forgot to struggle and got pushed by the invisible palm for over ten seconds before coming to a stop.

Although the carriage was getting farther away, he could still see the woman's face clearly with his eagle-like vision.

Her long brown hair was tied up high, and her brown eyes were beautiful and bright. She had light eyebrows and wore a fresh green dress and a laurel crown made of flowers. She had an elegant and dignified aura.

Madame Pualis! Lumian's first thought was that the woman on the carriage was Madame Pualis—the administrator's wife and the padre's mistress.

However, on closer inspection, he noticed an obvious difference between the two. Not only was there a vast disparity in their aura, but there was also a distinct difference in their looks.

The lady in the car had softer and more mature facial features.

If Lumian had to make a comparison, he would describe the lady in the car as Madame Pualis's older sister by seven or eight years.

At the moment, the lady sat in an open carriage pulled by the 'demon.' Surrounded by countless undead and the Death Knight, she traveled towards the distant forest as if she was on some kind of magical patrol.

Aurore retracted her gaze and ran towards Lumian. As she ran, she shouted, "Take this opportunity to escape from here!"

Lumian snapped out of his daze and waited for his sister to catch up before taking large strides and fleeing to the edge of the nearest wilderness.

Before long, they felt as though they had passed through an illusory curtain or a thick layer of water.

The scene before them changed.

The wilderness dissipated like bubbles. The clear river, new grass on both sides, and green trees all entered their view at once.

To Lumian and Aurore, this scene was so familiar that they didn't need to identify it to make a judgment.

They were still near Cordu Village!

This was where Ava Lizier used to tend to her geese!

"We're back…" Lumian wasn't surprised or disappointed. Instead, he looked around, having confirmed his suspicion.

Aurore panted and said, "Whether Madame Pualis made a mistake on purpose or not, we can't go back to the village now."

"Let's head to Dariège!" Lumian suggested immediately.

"Then let's go to the nearest pasture. There's a dangerous path down the hill. With our abilities, we'll be fine," Lumian added.

"Okay." Aurore turned around and started running.

Having borrowed the pony from Madame Pualis from time to time, she was familiar with the highland pastures around Cordu.

Lumian followed his sister closely, both glad and terrified at what had just happened.

He didn't expect Madame Pualis to be so powerful that she could have so many undead, the 'demon,' and the Death Knight chase after her.

Of course, it might not be Madame Pualis.

As she ran, Aurore slowed down. Her breathing became heavier, and her gasping became more and more pronounced.

"What's wrong?" Lumian still had plenty of energy.

This was one of the benefits of being a Hunter.

Aurore stopped and panted heavily.

"I'm exhausted. The spellcasting took up a lot of my energy."

Lumian said without hesitation, "Then I'll carry you. I'm not tired yet."

They were in a dire situation, and time was of the essence. Aurore nodded, went behind the squatting Lumian, and leaned on him.

Lumian first took off the brooch in front of him and returned it to his sister. Then, he straightened his body and ran again.

"Is this a mystical item?" Lumian still had the energy to ask.

Aurore was taken aback for a moment before she chuckled.

"Looks like you know quite a bit. This is indeed a mystical item. I call it the Integrity Brooch. It can create Holy sunlight or help me ignite materials to help me use a mystic technique to deal with ghost-type creatures. However, wearing it for too long will cause people to become fanatical. And as long as you wear it, you will lose some thoughts. As you know, immoral methods in battle might be more useful, but you get limited by it."

Aurore paused and asked in a deep voice, "Where did you get the Beyonder characteristic?"

As Lumian ran, he replied intermittently, "Didn't that Wand card allow me to stay awake in the dream?"

"What Wand card?" Aurore was confused.

Oh, this is something from the previous cycle… Lumian reorganized his words.

"I was at Ol' Tavern and met a mysterious lady. She gave me a Wand card. With that card, I stayed lucid in my dream and entered a strange space. There, I encountered some monsters and obtained a Hunter Beyonder characteristic."

"Hunter…" Aurore was familiar with this Sequence commonly seen in Intis.

As she muttered to herself, she suddenly chuckled, seeming to have thought of something.

What are you laughing at… Lumian was baffled.

Aurore asked again, "Then who gave you the formula? That mysterious lady?"

"Yeah." Lumian nodded as he ran.

Aurore sighed and said, "My stupid brother has his own secrets now… I can't confirm if what you said is true or not. I'll just take it at face value."

Lumian couldn't bear to see his sister disappointed, so he quickly changed the topic.

"Was that Madame Pualis on the carriage?"

"They look alike, but they're not the same," Aurore said, contradicting herself.

After a few seconds of deliberation, she said, "Since you're already a Beyonder, I'll tell you directly. My companions, uh, my pen pals, once mentioned something.

"They said that in the past few years, there have been many strange phenomena similar to what happened just now in the southern parts of Loen, the southern parts of Intis, and the Feynapotter Kingdom. Women ride carriages pulled by demons, patrol the wilderness and have hordes of undead following them. Some Beyonders who have grasped the corresponding mystic arts will let their spirits leave their bodies and follow the carriage for a period of time to experience something wonderful and obtain mystic knowledge.

"One of my companions obtained one of the Beyonders' notebooks. It mentioned that the lady's name is Madame Night. The owner of the notebook obtained a secret medicine production method from his experience following a carriage, which can create an invisibility potion from a baby's corpse.

"According to the investigation, the women in different places exhibit similar phenomena, but things happen at night."

Lumian said in surprise, "But it's daytime now."

Could the anomaly in Cordu Village have brought about a change?

"That's why I'm not sure," Aurore said after thinking for a moment. "Perhaps sending Naroka to Paramita made a difference. Perhaps that wilderness is Paramita, where Madame Nights patrol in the day and appear in the human world at night. Yes, combined with the fact that the lady resembles Pualis, I'm inclined to the previous guess."

Lumian didn't know much about mysticism, but he instinctively felt that his sister's suspicion was right.

He ran in silence for a distance before finally asking, "Why did you sacrifice yourself to save me? I wish you were more selfish."

"I'm very selfish," Aurore said with a smile. "I considered abandoning you and escaping on my own. Then, I would avenge you when I became stronger. However, after careful consideration, I realized that even if I gave you the Integrity Brooch and taught you how to use it, you wouldn't be able to help me attract most of the undead to give me a chance to escape. Only a Warlock like me could do it.

"It was a choice between us dying together or at least you being able to live. I don't have to tell you the choice I made, right?"

Making such a choice isn't as easy as how you make it sound. Lumian could accept it rationally, but not emotionally.

He said gloomily, "We might as well die together."

"You can't die! Who'll bring me back if you're gone? Anything's possible in the world of mysticism," lectured Aurore to her brother. "That's why I said all those sappy lines. So you'll remember to work hard and bring me back."

That's true… Lumian gradually agreed with his sister's choice.

After running for a while, they saw the nearest highland pasture. Lumian, who had been carrying Aurore, clearly felt tired, but he didn't stop to rest. He mustered his remaining strength and rushed to the hill covered in green grass.

There were many livestock pens and shacks here. The former was surrounded by rocks and tree branches. The ground was compacted soil and flattened feces. There was a long and narrow exit at one end that could only allow one sheep to pass through. The latter was similar to a primitive tent: stones were first used to build a circle of low walls, leaving a door and a smoke vent. Then, a row of grates were built against the low walls. The bottom half of the grates was buried in the soil, and the upper end supported a wooden structure. On the wooden structure was a roof made of grass and mud.

This was where the shepherds lived. The environment was very harsh.

Lumian no longer carried Aurore and led her all the way to the other side of the hill.

The dangerous path was hidden below.

Looking at the path that required her to jump seven to eight meters off a cliff, Aurore said to Lumian, "Although you can climb this now, don't waste time. I'll fly you down."

"Alright." Lumian wanted to see what kind of changes would happen if he left Cordu.

Aurore grabbed Lumian's arm with one hand and sprinkled silver dust with the other.

The two of them floated up at the same time and slowly flew down the cliff.

In midair, Lumian suddenly felt a pain in his head, as if someone had hit him heavily.

Aurore had a similar reaction.

Lumian's vision quickly turned black as he felt everything shatter.

......

Lumian jolted awake and saw the familiar sights of the table, chair, bookshelf, and wardrobe.

Back to square one… He got off the bed thoughtfully and went downstairs. As expected, he found Aurore in a light-blue dress, preparing dinner.

"Aurore, what's the date today?" Lumian asked.

Aurore glared at him. "Call me Grande Soeur! Are you still not fully awake? It's the 29th today."

Chapter 43: Frank

As expected, the loop has repeated… Lumian wasn't surprised to hear Aurore's answer.

This was the third cycle he could recall. Combined with his own experience and the mysterious lady's pointers, he had a preliminary conclusion:

The time limit for the loop is until the twelfth night.

The spatial range of the loop is Cordu Village and its surroundings.

Characters in the loop are restricted from killing the padre.

These are the three key points of the loop…

At this thought, Lumian looked at Aurore and asked thoughtfully, "Grande Soeur, if you wrote a novel about a time loop, where would you put the key to undoing it?"

Aurore looked Lumian up and down in confusion. "You suddenly asked such a question and even called me Grande Soeur obediently… Did you come up with a new story to deceive others?"

"I guess so," Lumian replied sincerely.

Aurore frowned and thought for a while before saying, "From a novelist's perspective, or rather, from the perspective of normal logic, the most critical part of the cycle is definitely the final scene. This is because it is both the end of this cycle and the beginning of the next cycle. It is the button that connects the end and the beginning. Without it, there is no way to turn the flow of time in a straight line into a closed circle.

"Think about it. The loop reverses, so there will always be a first time. Something must have happened at the last moment to cause time to restart."

Twelfth night? Lumian agreed with his sister's guess about the twelfth night. He nodded and asked, "Then why can't the most critical part be the first day of the loop? Shouldn't we ask why the loop starts at this moment?"

Aurore chuckled and said, "Making a short story to deceive a few people temporarily is your forte, but when it involves this kind of content that requires strict logic and rich knowledge, you aren't capable of it.

"The reason why the first day of the loop is the first day is perhaps due to the power or energy that causes the loop. Proceeding past the last day will end up overlapping this day. This is like why a loop probably doesn't cover the entire world, but some localized area. It's not that it doesn't want to, but it's incapable of doing so."

Lumian had actually considered this possibility. He just hoped that his knowledgeable sister would come up with a different answer.

Aurore thought for a moment and added, "If the loop is not a completely closed circle, where there is still interaction between those inside and outside the loop—for example, information inside can be transmitted, and people outside can enter but not leave—the first day of the loop might start from the day the outsiders happen to enter, so that when the loop is repeated, they don't have a 'position.' Of course, it can also compel the outsiders to do something they will do subsequently on the originally eventless first day. There are too many ways to make up similar stories."

Lumian's eyes lit up when he heard that. He wanted to praise his sister loudly.

He suspected that the entry of Leah, Ryan, and Valentine caused the cycle to start on the afternoon of March 29th.

If that was the case, the twelfth night might have already turned into the tenth or ninth night. Of course, it might also have originally been the thirteenth night that turned into the twelfth night due to the 'intrusion' of the outsiders.

These were all possibilities that Lumian needed to verify himself.

He completely agreed with his sister's deduction. He believed that something must have happened on the twelfth night to cause the loop to happen. Only by figuring out what happened at that time could he find the key to undoing the loop.

Therefore, Lumian decided not to trigger any abnormalities in this cycle. He also found an excuse not to join the procession and stay until the twelfth night.

But he couldn't do nothing. Time wouldn't allow it.

Unless Lumian broke out of the cycle after experiencing the twelfth night, he would have to make the best use of time for the next cycle.

A complete cycle lasted twelve days. After that, the probability of the outside world discovering any abnormalities in Cordu would increase exponentially. Lumian had, at best, one complete cycle or less to resolve the problem.

If he wanted to stop the abnormality in one cycle, he needed to have enough information and a sufficient understanding of the entire village.

Lumian couldn't help but mock himself. Not only do I have to avoid triggering the abnormality, but I also have to investigate the problem.

What was the difference between this and a clown walking on a tightrope at the edge of a cliff?

Wanting both wasn't something good.

Aurore saw that he didn't speak for a few seconds and seemed to be making up a story. She waved her hand and said, "I almost forgot to make dinner!"

"Wait a minute," Lumian said with a solemn expression.

Aurore immediately clicked her tongue. "I smell mischief."

Lumian said bluntly, "Aurore, uh, Grande Soeur, actually, we've already fallen into a loop."

"Heh, you've just learned the trick and you're already using it on me?" Aurore was both angry and amused.

I guess people need to be trustworthy at times… Lumian sighed silently.

"Can you at least listen to the story I made up first? Why don't you score me while we're at it?"

Aurore looked outside at the bright sky.

"That works too."

Lumian began from the time he met Leah and the other outsiders. He spoke as if he had a general outline, claiming that he had maintained his consciousness in the dream and entered a unique ruin. Through hunting monsters, he obtained a Beyonder characteristic and became a Hunter.

He didn't hide the matter about the thorned ring pattern that sealed his chest because it might involve the key to the time loop. He had seen the same symbol on the padre, and killing the padre had caused time to restart.

At first, Aurore was still smiling, thinking that her brother had come up with a creative story. But as she listened, her expression turned serious. There was a lot of knowledge that Lumian shouldn't have known.

When Lumian said that he had become a Beyonder, Aurore raised her right hand and massaged her temples.

Her light-blue eyes instantly became deep, but there was no figure reflected in them.

She looked at Lumian for a while and nodded slightly.

"Your Ether Body has undergone a huge change. Your life force and physical state are much stronger than ordinary people. Your Astral Projection has changed to a certain extent, but not much… As expected of a Hunter who's better at hand-to-hand combat than spellcasting… I can't see the symbol and the related changes, and I don't dare to look deeper…"

Aurore pouted and asked in confusion, "Don't tell me you deliberately made up such a ridiculous story to make me accept your becoming a Beyonder?"

This was a typical Lumian modus operandi.

Lumian didn't explain and directly talked about the mysticism knowledge that the lady had imparted to him.

Of course, he only briefly mentioned the name and did not elaborate.

This was not because he was very moral and principled about not telling his sister before obtaining the lady's permission. Instead, the other party was clearly very powerful. If he leaked precious knowledge and angered her, the time loop might be resolved, but they would die.

"Indestructible law… law of convergence… acting method…" Aurore was dumbfounded.

Aurore was stunned that her illiterate brother in the field of mysticism had grasped such incomparably precious knowledge.

It had been more than five years since she became a Beyonder. At first, she had relied on Emperor Roselle's diary to join that organization. Her pathway was a symbol of knowledge in the field of mysticism. From time to time, she would be pursued by knowledge, allowing her to master the acting method, the Law of Beyonder Characteristics Indestructibility, and the Law of Beyonder Characteristics Conservation, the three cornerstones of the Beyonder world. Therefore, she thought of herself as a Beyonder with insufficient experience but sufficient knowledge, miles ahead of most of her peers.

Now, her brother, who had never come into contact with mysticism, could actually mention such terms. Furthermore, he knew about a law of convergence of Beyonder characteristics that she didn't know about!

This eliminated the possibility that Lumian had peeked at her witchcraft notebook.

As a Beyonder of the Mystery Pryer pathway, Aurore suppressed her desire to know the specifics of the law of convergence as she looked at her brother. She asked in puzzlement, surprise, and worry, "What did you pay for that lady to teach you this knowledge?"

The potion formula was even free of charge!

She sized up Lumian again, from top to bottom, then from bottom to top, trying to find out what was missing from him.

"Nothing," Lumian laughed self-deprecatingly. "That's why it's terrifying. I don't even know what price I'll have to pay in the future. Yes, I suspect that it has something to do with the symbol on my chest and the dream ruin. That lady probably wants me to unravel the corresponding secret."

Aurore tersely acknowledged, "Continue."

She waited for the rest of the "story" with a serious attitude.

Lumian talked about the owl, the anomaly during Lent, and the siblings' experiences during the second cycle. He also talked about how the cycle would restart the moment they attempted to leave Cordu.

Aurore listened carefully and muttered to herself in disbelief, "Either I've been hypnotized by you and told you everything, or time has really entered a loop…"

She began to believe Lumian because she had named her "Integrity Brooch" herself, and there was no record anywhere. Unless she told her brother herself, it was impossible for Lumian to know, and she had no impression of it.

Lumian struck while the iron was hot.

"I can also prophesy that the three foreigners will appear at the Ol' Tavern at night. I can also prophesy that the padre is having an affair with Madame Pualis tonight. I can also prophesy that the shepherd, Pierre Berry, has returned to the village. There's something wrong with the three sheep he brought with him…"

The more Aurore listened, the more serious she became. After a while, she said, "The three foreigners entered the village in the afternoon while we were practicing combat. After that, we rested and didn't go out at all. Yes, in the combat class in the afternoon, you were still an ordinary person…"

She accepted Lumian's time loop theory.

If it were anyone else, Lumian would have laughed and said, "You believed it! Ha! You believed such a ridiculous story." But in front of Aurore, he was very restrained.

He then suggested, "I'll go around the village now and see if I can gather more information."

Aurore nodded.

"I'll also use my 'eyes' to look around, but there are huge restrictions and it's very dangerous. I'm not sure I'll gain anything."

Lumian waved his hand, indicating that he understood, and walked out the door.

As Lumian took a few steps, he looked back at Aurore's figure standing in the kitchen. He immediately thought of the scene of Aurore pushing him to safety among the countless undead and felt an inexplicable pain of separation.

He subconsciously asked, "Grande Soeur, why did you adopt me in the first place?"

Aurore grumpily replied, "I didn't want to either!

"I was just kind enough to give you some food, but you kept following me. I couldn't shake you off, and you even obediently helped me do all kinds of things. My heart softened for a moment, and… who knew that you would grow into this!

"Do you know how hard it was for a young girl to raise a child like you?"

Lumian wanted to thank and praise her, but the words were stuck in his mouth, as if they wanted to rush to his eyes and nose.

He turned his head and walked back into the village.

Chapter 44: Eavesdropping

Lumian had to investigate, but he couldn't activate any abnormalities, causing the cycle to restart ahead of time. He had to consider starting from the peripheral problems and edge in one step at a time.

His initial idea was to find the padre's mistresses this afternoon and use eavesdropping and other methods to see if they knew anything. If he didn't gain anything or lacked the opportunity for the time being, he would go to the cathedral to see if he could meet the padre and chat with him about daily life in the village.

Lumian's first target was Sybil Berry, the mistress of the padre Guillaume Bennet and the sister of the shepherd, Pierre Berry. She had a close relationship with the two abnormal figures, so perhaps she knew something.

Lumian's friend Guillaume-junior, Guillaume Berry, was a distant cousin of Pierre Berry. Even his hair color was different, and they didn't live together.

Sybil Berry was twenty-four years old and married to Jean Maury, a middle-aged man in his late forties.

He had been single for more than 30 years. The reason why he could marry Sybil Berry was because he did not have any requirements for dowry.

Lumian suspected that the reason why she married him using only a small amount of assets was that she had already become the padre's mistress at that time and needed a husband to be her illegitimate son's father. The padre had secretly promised something.

Although Intis was open-minded, and illegitimate children were common, many husbands or wives were still willing to take their spouses' illegitimate children under their wing despite being angry when they found out. After all, this was equivalent to having an additional free manservant or maid in the future. Furthermore, they didn't have the right to inherit any of the assets, but clergymen of the Eternal Blazing Sun Church weren't allowed to get married and have children. They often found fathers for their illegitimate children.

Lumian arrived at Jean Maury's house, a grayish-white short house at the edge of Cordu with only one floor. Behind the kitchen was the bedroom, and the other side was connected to the basement, serving as a living room and dining room.

There was no washroom; they only built a shed at the back of the house.

Lumian entered without knocking, quietly coming to the side of the house and squatting under the bedroom window.

At that moment, someone was sitting inside. Lumian could hear their breathing and determined their corresponding height.

Not long after, light footsteps came from the kitchen to the bedroom.

There was no need to calculate. As a Hunter, Lumian naturally had the approximate weight of the owner of the footsteps in his mind.

It was likely a woman, probably Sybil Berry.

Lumian's impression of Sybil Berry was a woman with soft and smooth black hair who didn't like to tie it up like other women. She left it flowing down or tied it into a ponytail, giving off the feeling that she was still a young unmarried girl.

Her facial features were not outstanding, but they were soft and round, very fleshy.

At this moment, Jean Maury, who had been sitting silently in the bedroom, spoke gloomily.

"The padre came this afternoon?"

His voice was just like him, rather stuffy. He was the kind of person who usually chatted under the elm tree in the village square, replying one in every four or five sentences. In addition, he was often too lazy to comb his black hair. His brown eyes were lifeless, and his beard was not shaved clean. He looked gloomy.

"He was here." Sybil Berry's voice was still a little girlish.

She was born like this.

Jean Maury fell silent for a moment before asking, "Did you do it?"

"We did," Sybil answered frankly.

Jean Maury fell silent again. When Sybil walked to the kitchen, he said, "I don't have much to say about the padre, but you watch out for other men, especially Pato Russel."

Pato Russel was Madonna Bénet's husband. His wife was also the padre's mistress.

Lumian, who was outside the window, was secretly speechless.

This relationship was really messed up!

He gained a higher opinion of the padre. He had come to Sybil Berry in the afternoon, and he was having a date with Madame Pualis at night. He could be said to be a model worker in the field of cheating.

If he could allocate more energy in this area to the Church's matters and combine it with his scheming and machinations, he could have long advanced in clergical rank and become a Beyonder.

The clergical rank was the rank of a clergyman of the Church of the Eternal Blazing Sun. Starting from the first rank, it was ostiary, reader, chanter, acolyte, sub-deacon, deacon—also known as a priest or padre—bishop, archbishop, and cardinal. The pope was not in the ranks of the clergy.

Among them, the sixth-rank and above made them senior clergymen. In Aurore's words, it was possible that they possessed superpowers. As for the lowest three ranks, they mainly handled cathedral chores and ritual support. In the past few centuries, they were only glorified titles and were not treated as true clergymen. The fourth-rank acolytes were usually students who had just graduated from the seminary. The fifth-rank sub-deacon could represent a true priest to preside over a cathedral in a rural area.

The situation in Cordu was the same. A fifth-rank sub-deacon was the padre, a fourth-rank acolyte was the deputy padre, and they were staffed with a few servants.

Guillaume Bénet only needed to advance one more rank to become a true priest.

"I understand," Sybil Berry simply responded to her husband's exhortations.

Jean Maury changed the topic.

"Is your brother Pierre back from herding?"

"Yes, there's an important ritual that requires his help," Sybil casually explained.

A ritual? Lumian's eyelids twitched when he heard that.

Jean Maury asked, "The Lent Festival?"

"No, it's a ritual of God," Sybil impatiently replied. "Don't ask too much. You'll know when the time comes."

Jean Maury tersely acknowledged and said, "Praise the Sun!"

Sybil didn't respond and left the bedroom to walk into the kitchen.

Lumian instantly made a judgment.

Sybil had a certain understanding of the secret dealings between the padre and Shepherd Pierre Berry, but her husband, Jean Maury, was completely unaware!

The ritual she was talking about wasn't the "sacrificial ceremony" at the feast. It was likely related to twelfth night!

Having gained something, Lumian left Maury's house and rushed to the two-story building where Pato Russel and Madonna Bénet lived.

Unlike Sybil, Madonna Bénet was married off with her share of the inheritance. Pato Russel also received his share from his original home, so they could build a decent house and entrust more than 20 sheep to the shepherds for grazing.

Lumian didn't know when Madonna became the padre's mistress. He only knew that in the past year, before he hooked up with Madame Pualis, the padre often visited Madonna. Perhaps the taboo from his identity sparked some kind of flame.

At this moment, Pato Russel, who had a gentleman's beard, was pacing in the kitchen. He asked Madonna, who was busy commanding the lady's maid, "When will you invite the padre over as a guest again?"

He had a fervent expression, hoping to cling to the person with real power in Cordu.

Madonna glanced at Pato's father's illegitimate daughter, who was also the servant cooking, and said in a subtle tone, "I don't know. It depends on his mood."

And his physical condition, I suppose? Lumian, who was eavesdropping outside, silently muttered.

"Don't you often go to the cathedral to pray recently? You can ask him while you're at it," Pato Russel refused to give up.

Often go to the cathedral? Lumian frowned.

The padre's group is planning something in secret in the cathedral?

He really doesn't give a damn about the Eternal Blazing Sun and Saint Sith…

After listening for a while, Lumian walked from Russel's house to the cathedral at the edge of the village square, hoping to have a face-to-face chat with the padre.

However, when he arrived at the cathedral, Guillaume Bénet was no longer there. Only the deputy padre, Michel Garrigue, stood in front of the altar.

This foreigner from Dariège had graduated from Bigorre Theological Seminary. Last year, he was sent to Cordu on the bishop's orders to be Guillaume Bénet's deputy. He was usually ostracized and was only in charge of the registration of funerals, marriages, and newborns.

During the last cycle, Lumian had arrived at the cathedral and happened to encounter the padre leaving. The latter had asked him to pray the next day, not giving Michel a chance to listen to the prayers and confessions of the believers.

Michel was taller than Lumian. (Lumian felt that he had grown two to three centimeters taller after consuming the Hunter potion. He was almost 1.8 meters tall.) He was a young lad with curly brown hair.

Looking at Michel Garrigue, who was wearing a white robe with golden threads, Lumian spread his arms.

"Praise the Sun!"

After bowing, he stared at Michel, wanting to see how this deputy padre would react to the Church of the Eternal Blazing Sun's etiquette.

If there was a certain amount of hesitation, Lumian would be able to determine that he had been implicated by the padre's group.

But Michel Garrigue immediately returned with the same posture.

"Praise the Sun!"

He did not hesitate at all. His brown eyes were filled with joy and anticipation.

From Madonna Bénet's words, the padre's group often discussed matters here. As a deputy padre, Michel should have noticed something, right? Lumian didn't ask directly. He looked around and asked, "The padre isn't here?"

"He's been gone for a while," Michel replied. "Three foreigners came here about 15 minutes ago, to no avail."

The deputy padre's eyes were passionate, as if he was asking if Lumian would make a confession while here.

Considering that the padre might have taken a detour and hid back in the cathedral, waiting for Madame Pualis to bring dinner over and was eavesdropping on his conversation with Michel, Lumian deliberately sighed.

"Then forget it. I'll pray again tomorrow."

Michel's eyes lost their luster.

Lumian turned around and left the cathedral. He planned on sneaking to Michel's residence when the night deepened to see if he could get any useful information.

Seeing that the sun was about to set, he returned home and asked Aurore, "Did you find anything?"

Aurore nodded slightly.

"In addition to the abnormalities you mentioned, I also discovered that there's something wrong with the deputy padre, Michel Garrigue."

"Huh?" Lumian didn't hide his surprise.

Chapter 45: Make-up Lesson

Lumian had just confirmed that Michel Garrigue should not have been implicated by Guillaume Bénet and the others. He planned to visit the deputy padre late at night, but when he returned home, he heard his sister say that there was something amiss about him.

Aurore glanced at Lumian and smiled.

"My clueless brother was standing right in front of him when I realized that something was off about him. Seems like you didn't notice…"

She appeared quite delighted, to the point that she had to raise her right hand to cover her mouth. After all, her younger brother, who was clearly ignorant of mysticism, had suddenly become a Beyonder. He had grasped a wealth of advanced knowledge and discovered that Cordu was stuck in a time loop. Not only had she been useless as a sister, but she also found herself outmatched in mysticism knowledge. This made her a tad unhappy.

Now, she had finally regained her dignity as an elder sister.

Lumian looked at his sister's smile and nodded.

"I didn't see anything unusual in his behavior."

Aurore tersely acknowledged, "His Astral Projection; how can I put it? Simply put, it's brighter than a normal person's, and he's not a Beyonder. He hasn't been training his body systematically for a long time."

"Maybe he was born with a good physique?" Lumian guessed before asking in puzzlement, "What's an Astral Projection?"

Aurore asked in surprise, "You don't know?"

"No." Lumian shook his head.

Aurore grinned again and said with a hint of disbelief, "That woman taught you divine paths, the Law of Beyonder Characteristics Indestructibility, and the acting method, but she didn't tell you basic concepts like Astral Projection?"

"She was in a hurry, so she only focused on the main points." Lumian defended the mysterious woman.

Aurore smiled even more happily.

"Perhaps this basic mysticism knowledge is useless to unofficial Hunters. You just need to track, set traps, and fight."

She struggled to describe her brother's current state. To say he was ignorant of mysticism wasn't entirely accurate since he knew a great deal. The things he had learned were all formidable. To say that his knowledge surpassed most Beyonders wasn't right either; he didn't even know what an Astral Projection was.

Aurore sighed and said seriously, "I can only complete your mysticism education. Remember, in mysticism, the external parts of the human body are divided into four levels. The innermost layer, which is also the core, is the Soul Body. It's almost equivalent to the concept of a spirit. It's the spirituality of everything—what gets strengthened. You could say it's the essence of building a soul.

"To a Mystery Pryer, the potion mainly upgrades the Soul Body.

"The Astral Projection is located outside the Soul Body. It's the latter's manifestation in the real and spirit worlds. Moreover, it's closely related to your will and current emotions.

"So, do you understand? When I said the deputy padre's Astral Projection was brighter than a normal person's, I meant that his Soul Body or spirit had an issue. This is reflected in his Astral Projection. It has nothing to do with his natural physique. Of course, it could be because his spirituality is naturally strong.

"Through the Astral Projection, we can still grasp the target's true emotions. For example, red signifies passion and excitement. Orange represents warmth and satisfaction. Yellow indicates happiness and extroversion. Green conveys calmness and peace. Blue suggests coldness and introspection. White denotes brightness—an eagerness to improve. Dark colors symbolize worry, sorrow, and silence. Purple implies that spirituality is taking control, coldness, and estrangement…

"It's very difficult to fake these colors, but they're relatively generic. It's impossible for us to distinguish subtle emotions and delicate feelings."

Lumian listened attentively, as if he wanted to take out a fountain pen and jot everything down.

"Just listen." Aurore felt a little worn out from talking. She sat down at the dining table. "I'll give you my first witchcraft notebook later. It's filled with such basic knowledge."

"Alright, alright." Lumian sat down and nodded obediently. "What's outside the Astral Projection?"

Aurore picked up her carved glass cup and took a sip.

"Beyond that is the Body of Heart and Mind. From this point on, spirit and flesh merge.

"The Body of Heart and Mind involves the mind. It relates to one's reasoning, thinking, insight, and ability to understand things. Some potions mainly improve this, but there are also many spells targeting it.

"The outermost layer is the Ether Body. It's a manifestation of life force and physical state, so I can tell at a glance that your body has improved greatly. Yes, through the thickness, brightness, and color of different parts of the Ether Body, I can also determine the target's health. As a Sequence 7

Mystery Pryer, I can even determine the target's lifespan from the specific situation of the Ether Body.

"As for how to differentiate them, read the notebook later."

Lumian was enlightened.

"The Hunter potion mainly targets the Ether Body?"

"You're wrong. It targets the body and life force, and 'Ether Body' is the straightforward manifestation of both."

Lumian nodded as he revised, gaining a preliminary understanding of such mysticism knowledge.

He recalled his sister's words and asked curiously, "Aurore, how did you observe the deputy padre? Why didn't I sense you nearby?"

Aurore smiled.

"Actually, I've been staying at home all this while, using the Mystery Pryer pathway's special trait."

"What's special?" Lumian asked with the mentality that it didn't matter if his sister didn't answer.

Aurore pointed at her eyes.

"The most unique ability of a Mystery Pryer is called the Eyes of Mystery Prying.

"Although I need to reach a higher Sequence before I can activate the complete Eyes of Mystery Prying, allowing it to not only be of use to me, but it can also be placed on the surface of other objects to help me monitor matters remotely, this doesn't mean that Mystery Pryer's eyes aren't special before this."

"From Sequence 9 onwards, a Mystery Pryer has seen more than most Sequence Beyonders of the same pathway. The simplest example is that a

Hunter can only see an Ether Body before they undergo a qualitative change in their godhood. Furthermore, it's in a less detailed manner. And now, I can examine the various details of the Astral Projection. In addition, I can also see things around me that aren't normally visible."

Aurore glanced at the kitchen.

This made Lumian inexplicably shocked.

There was clearly nothing in that direction, but he felt that there might be something invisible that he could not see!

Aurore continued, "Of course, this might not be a good thing. It's very easy for something to happen when you see something you shouldn't see. Therefore, I've been restraining myself. I don't look at things I shouldn't see, but as my Sequence increases, it's not up to you not to look."

Lumian thought for a moment and asked in confusion, "Didn't you say that only higher Sequences can project out the Eyes of Mystery Prying? Why can you observe the people in the cathedral from home?"

Aurore raised her right hand and pointed with her index finger.

"I've always told you that knowledge equals power, but you didn't believe me!

"Under normal circumstances, it's true that I can't observe things hundreds of meters away from home, but humans can use tools, and I have two 'assistants'."

As she spoke, she took out two items from a hidden pocket in her blue dress.

One was a brass telescope that could shrink and lengthen, and the other was a miniature version of a dark ink bottle—this was more like a child's toy.

"Look, the telescope can help me see people a few hundred meters away clearly. Once the visual range is closed, I can observe the target's Astral Projection, Ether Body, and Body of Heart and Mind state," Aurore introduced with a smile. "This is suitable for open spaces without obstacles."

Lumian was a little dumbfounded.

That works too?

They were clearly discussing mysticism. Why did his sister take out a telescope?

"What about this?" He pointed at the pocket ink bottle.

Aurore didn't answer. She massaged her temples and opened the bottle cap.

Lumian suddenly felt a little cold. A cool breeze seemed to blow in through the window.

"It's a unique spirit world creature," Aurore introduced.

"It? Where is it?" Lumian looked around.

Aurore was rather surprised.

"You still don't know how to activate Spirit Vision? But didn't you say you saw a lot of undead in the wilderness?"

Lumian had read about the term Spirit Vision in Psychic and knew what it meant. However, he was completely at a loss as to how to activate Spirit Vision.

He looked at his sister and slowly shook his head.

"I don't know." Then, he guessed, "Maybe ordinary people can see ghosts and undead directly when entering the so-called Paramita."

Aurore thought seriously and asked, "So, you don't know Hermes, ancient Hermes, Elvish, Dragonese, or Jotun?"

"What are those?" Lumian fully displayed what it meant to be illiterate in the field of mysticism.

Aurore couldn't help but facepalm.

"What exactly did that lady teach you?"

"Law of Beyonder Characteristics Indestructibility, law of convergence, acting method, paths of the divine, Sequence 0, Sealed Artifacts…" Lumian answered honestly.

"…" Aurore felt like he was flaunting. "I think you want a beating!"

She sighed for a few seconds before regaining her composure.

"Then I'll combine it with my contracted creature to teach you how to activate Spirit Vision, how to carry out ritualistic magic, and how to use language with supernatural powers.

"This is only a rough explanation. If you really want to completely master it, especially those few languages, it will take at least a year or two. Of course, this is also a problem with your Sequence pathway. Hunters probably don't have their learning abilities improved, nor do they have any enhancements in mysticism. Back then, I relied on diligence and indoctrination to master all of them in less than half a year."

Her right hand gently stroked the void in front of her, as if she was stroking a transparent kitten.

"It's very simple for Beyonders to activate their Spirit Vision, but it's not completely dark yet. Let's talk about something else first.

"I call it White Paper. It's a very weak spirit world creature. As long as you have an accurate description, you can hold a ritual and summon it in your name. Other than the fact that spirit world creatures are difficult to see, it only has one use. That is to carry a certain supernatural ability of the contractor, but it can't be too complicated or too powerful."

Chapter 46: Ritualistic Magic

Lumian gazed at the invisible spirit world creature and contemplated for a moment.

"How complicated can it get? How strong can it be?"

"Heh, I thought you'd ask how to summon or perform ritualistic magic, but you just want to know how to use it!" Aurore teased. "That might be a characteristic of the Hunter pathway. You don't need to fully understand the principles, only consider how to apply them."

Not waiting for Lumian's response, she pondered and said, "I've tried. Not too complicated means it can only perform one action. Not too powerful means it can't surpass a Mystery Pryer Sequence 7 Warlock's spell."

It's nice discussing this with Aurore. She has a habit of analyzing things both qualitatively and quantitatively, unlike someone who prefers vague descriptions... Lumian felt emotional hearing that.

As he mulled it over, he stood up and helped his sister bring the food to the dining table. As they ate, he asked, "But I remember your spells often require materials. You can't carry White Paper, right?"

"Yes, that's inconvenient." Aurore grabbed a piece of fried trout and stuffed it into her mouth. After chewing and swallowing, she said, "Moreover, a Warlock's spells can't be completed in one move. Even the simplest has three steps. First is concentrating spirituality, the second is outlining the symbol of the corresponding spell in the mind. This can also be replaced by reciting the incantation aloud. The third is using materials to cast the spell. The materials serve either as a medium or part of the spell."

This does sound a little complicated. It isn't something the single-celled White Paper can do... Lumian knew he couldn't do it anytime soon. He'd need extensive training before he could cast spells proficiently.

Aurore glanced at him.

"Don't even think about it. It's impossible for you to be like me. First, you're limited by your Sequence, and your spirituality is insufficient. Second, using materials to help cast spells is a unique ability only Warlocks have. Yes, perhaps certain Sequences of certain pathways can do it. I don't know enough to make a definite judgment.

"However, once a Hunter reaches Sequence 7 and becomes a Pyromaniac, they can use many fire-related spells. Furthermore, they don't need materials, nor do they need to outline symbols or recite incantations in their minds. In terms of actual combat, it's faster, more convenient, and might even be stronger. As for Warlocks, their main advantage lies in their versatility. The more knowledge they acquire, the more comprehensive and powerful they become."

Lumian said with anticipation, "I don't know when I can become a Pyromaniac..."

He planned to explore the dream ruins again tonight. Firstly, he wanted to use hunting to help digest the potion, and secondly, he wanted to find clues about the main ingredient of Sequence 8 Provoker.

As for the corresponding monsters of the Pyromaniac, he didn't dare think about them yet. He believed it would be like serving himself on a platter. After all, those creatures could definitely launch long-range attacks, rendering his "special" abilities useless.

He then asked, "Can White Paper withstand the Pyromaniac's one-movement spells?"

"Theoretically, yes, but I'm not sure if Pyromaniac's spells exceed a certain level." Aurore's reference standard was Warlock.

Upon hearing this, Lumian became excited.

"If I could, wouldn't I be able to simulate the Funnels you mentioned?"

"Huh?" Aurore was puzzled.

Lumian explained his idea in detail, "I can summon a group of White Papers and form a contract with them. Then, I can have each White Paper carry a fireball. They'll float in the air and attack the target together. Isn't that similar to the description of the Funnels?"

"Unfortunately, you can't have a group of White Papers at the same time," Aurore laughed. "After you form a contract with a White Paper, the next time you use the initial summoning description, the same White Paper will appear."

"Can I summon one first and hold off on the contract? Then, I'll summon another until I have a satisfactory number before forming a contract?" Lumian hadn't received a traditional education, but instead, a custom one that included Aurore's ideas. Combined with the "refinement" of years of pranks, he always had creative ideas.

"..." Aurore admitted she wasn't that cunning. She considered and said, "I've never tried it before, so I don't know if it'll work. You can try it yourself when you're at Sequence 7. However, I think having a White Paper beside you while summoning others might cause a conflict. It's unlikely to succeed. The only hope is to directly summon multiple White Papers, but there's a high chance that only Sequences skilled at summoning can do it."

Lumian decided to give it a try when the time came. After all, he had nothing to lose.

Aurore scooped up some mashed potatoes.

"Now, let's talk about how to summon creatures from the spirit world. This is an application of ritualistic magic.

"Ritualistic magic is magic cast by selecting the date and time, preparing the corresponding materials, and strictly following the format and process. It's often used in prayers and summonings."

Lumian nodded. "It's to achieve a certain supernatural effect through a ritual?"

He thought of the various rituals of the Church of the Eternal Blazing Sun, as well as the process of the Lent celebration.

"Yes," Aurore was very satisfied with her brother's comprehension ability. "To put it simply, ritualistic magic needs a target to pray to. It can be the seven orthodox gods, other hidden beings, or even evil gods or devils. It can even be you. When you pray to the orthodox gods, you need to check or choose the date and time they rule over. For example, Tuesday symbolizes the Eternal Blazing Sun, and there is a corresponding Sun hour every day. During these times, the probability of success will be greatly increased if you perform the ritualistic magic that targets the Eternal Blazing Sun.

"However, this isn't very useful. Those who aren't official Beyonders have a very low chance of successfully praying to the corresponding orthodox god. Even if you receive a response, don't be happy. This might mean that you have been noticed by that entity.

"Of course, we also have ways to bypass restrictions. For example, obtaining an item closely related to the target deity.

"There's no need to pick a date or time to pray to a hidden being or an evil god or devil, but I don't need to tell you how dangerous it is, right? 99% of people who do this don't end up well.

"Therefore, for wild Beyonders, the most commonly used ritualistic magic is to pray to themselves to mobilize their spirituality to complete some relatively complicated tasks.

"Create charms and Beyonder weapons?" Lumian recalled a point of knowledge that the lady had mentioned.

Aurore nodded.

"That's right. Some mystical medicines also require ritualistic magic.

"You also missed something. Summoning a creature from the spirit world."

She ate some more food before saying, "The second step of ritualistic magic is to prepare the corresponding ingredients. If you wish to pray to an existence, prepare herbs, essential oils, powders, extracts, and so on from their domain to please them. Let's use the Eternal Blazing Sun as an example. If you pray to Him, you can use Sun essential oil, rosemary powder, Buddha's hand, and all kinds of sunflowers. As for praying to yourself, it won't be too troublesome. Although it's best to use the ingredients in your domain, someone like you can even put a cup of absinthe. It's fine even if you don't do so.

"The third step is to set up an altar. This can be determined by the environment. There's no need for a special holy solemnity. It's mainly because there can't be any miscellaneous items.

"The most important thing about the altar is the candles..."

Aurore picked up her knife and fork as she spoke.

She stretched out the two items and said, "Pretend that they are candles. If you pray to a deity, make them with the corresponding symbolic materials.

"As an example, the Eternal Blazing Sun has the Inextinguishable Light and the Embodiment of Order in His name." Out of caution, Aurore paused for a few seconds before continuing, "God of Deeds and Guardian of Businesses."

"There should be the honorific name 'Father of All Life,' right?" Lumian asked, familiar with the preaching.

Aurore shook her head.

"That's just a title used by the Eternal Blazing Sun Church when proselytizing. It's beyond Him in mysticism. If it was really part of His name, it would mean something big had happened."

She didn't give any more details, unsure herself.

She brought the conversation back on track.

"Anyway, if you want to exorcize the undead, you have to pray to the symbol of Inextinguishable Light. So, you need to make candles out of different sunflowers. For contracts, use the honorific title of the God of Deeds to make candles with Buddha's hand and other materials. Check my witchcraft notebook for more options."

"In ritualistic magic, we can only place two candles at the spot corresponding to the deity. This is because in mysticism, 0 represents the unknown or Chaos. It symbolizes the state of the world before it was born. If we don't place the candles, it means that there won't be any effect. 1 represents a beginning, the first Creator; it also accurately pinpoints a particular existence. 2 represents the world and various divinities that were produced from the Creator's body. Therefore, ritualistic magic can only have two candles to represent the deity. As for which candles to use, it depends on the desired effect.

"Three represent all things, so the third candle is for us. The two candles in the upper position represent the deity, and the candle in front is for myself, for a total of three candles. If you have an item related to a deity or a hidden existence, you can replace the two candles with that item for a dualistic ritual. If you pray to yourself, leave only the candle that represents yourself."

Lumian listened attentively, realizing that as a wild Hunter, he could only pray to himself in ritualistic magic before knowing the honorific name of the great existence. Where would he find items closely related to a deity?

"Let me show you the next few steps using summoning creatures from the spirit world," Aurore said, standing up as she saw her brother finish his dinner.

They quickly cleared the dining table.

",

Chapter 47: Truly "Illiterate"

Aurore looked at the slightly stained white tablecloth and smiled at Lumian.

"If you're the target of ritualistic magic, it doesn't matter if the altar is dirty. But if you want to pray to a deity or a hidden existence, I suggest you change to a cleaner piece of cloth or remove the cloth and wipe the table."

"Anything works if I'm just praying to yourself, right?" Lumian teased.

Aurore chuckled.

"That refers to the environment, materials, and equipment, but the ritual process and incantations must strictly follow the rules of mysticism."

She pulled out an orange candle from her pocket.

"This is a candle mixed with citrus and lavender. It has nothing to do with their domain; I just like it."

Aurore waved the candle above the altar.

"Remember, the candle representing the deity is placed in these two places. It can be empty now."

Then she placed the candle close to her.

"Remember, this is the location of 'me'."

Next, Aurore brought a cup of water, a plate of coarse salt, and a small steel bowl from the kitchen.

"We need to create a clean and undisturbed ritual environment. Clean in the sense of spirituality. We have to construct it ourselves. Enter Cogitation and focus your mind. You can guide the spiritual power out through supplementary items and build a wall of spirituality around the altar.

"Mystery Pryers and Seers find this simple. Hunters need the help of other items before reaching Sequence 7. For example, incense to calm your emotions and make you ethereal, or a crystal ball to help you focus on your spirituality.

"The meditation I taught you before is incomplete. It's only the first step. It can only gather your thoughts and calm you down. I'll teach you the rest later."

Lumian was surprised. Why can I activate the dream's specialness and make the two symbols appear if the meditation method is incomplete?

Aurore pulled out a silver dagger.

"Watch carefully how I build the wall of spirituality."

Lumian was stunned and blurted out, "Why do you have so many things on you?"

First, there were various casting materials, a retractable telescope, a miniature ink bottle that stored the spirit world creature, White Paper, and candles for rituals. Now, she had taken out a dagger.

Aurore sighed in exasperation.

"Do you think I want to? It's just inconvenient for Warlocks.

"It takes me a long time to alter each of my clothes. Sometimes, I even feel like Doraemon. I can take out whatever I want."

"What —Amon?" Lumian asked, not understanding the reference.

Aurore hesitated for a moment before replying with a mixed expression, "You don't need to know."

Lumian suddenly felt a pang of sadness for his sister.

Aurore composed herself and reached for the orange candle representing her.

"In ritualistic magic, candles can't simply be lit. Of course, there are times when ordinary methods can work, but that's not always the case," Aurore explained. "The correct way is to extend your spirituality, rub it against the wick, and light it."

As she spoke, she lit the candle with a spark of spirituality, and it burned with an orange flame.

The dining table transformed into an altar, and the surrounding area was bathed in a deep, otherworldly light.

Aurore's light-blue eyes had darkened, and an invisible wind swirled around her as she plunged the silver dagger into the coarse salt and began chanting a mysterious incantation.

"XXX, XXX!

"…"

Lumian was bewildered as he watched his sister complete the incantation and draw out the silver dagger. She stabbed it into the cup of water and raised it again.

Aurore pointed the dagger outward and began to walk around the altar. With each step she took, Lumian sensed an invisible force emanating from the dagger. It was agile and lively,

mingling with the air to create an impenetrable barrier.

As Aurore completed the circle, Lumian felt as if she had been transported to a different realm.

"Did you understand the steps?" Aurore's voice sounded distant.

Lumian nodded truthfully.

"Yes, but I don't understand what you mean."

Aurore could not help but laugh.

"You're completely illiterate when it comes to mysticism. Literally. That's Hermes. When translated, it's:

"I sanctify you, blade of pure silver!

"I cleanse and purify you, allowing you to serve me in this ritual!

...

"In the name of Warlock Aurore Lee,

"You have been sanctified!"

Lumian scratched his head. "It sounds ordinary."

"That's just the translation. The meaning of the incantation and the language used is what's important," Aurore explained, her eyes lighting up. "In Intisian, it might sound ordinary, but if you use Hermes, ancient Hermes, Elvish, Dragonese, or Jotun, you can tap into supernatural powers. That's what sets them apart."

Lumian asked curiously, "Are these the only languages that can communicate with the mysterious?"

"No, there are many other languages in the field of mysticism, each with its own specialties. For example, some are specifically meant for the undead, but most Beyonders won't be able to use them unless they want to study a unique and rare domain or perform the corresponding ritual," Aurore explained casually.

She went on to explain the incantation.

"During the sanctification ritual, the penultimate sentence should be in the name of a certain deity or a hidden existence, but as wild Beyonders, it's best not to use them to avoid unnecessary trouble.

"As a Beyonder, it's enough to use your name to sanctify an ordinary item. Although it won't be as effective as the original version, it can still be used."

Lumian nodded, then asked, "You came up with my name. Can I use it in the ritual?"

Aurore replied confidently, "Yes. A completely new name wouldn't work, but your name has been in use for several years, so there's a mystic connection."

She paused for a moment before continuing, "If you're in the wild and don't have many materials, you can complete the ritual with simple salt or clear water."

With that, Aurore pulled out a small silver-black metal bottle from her pocket.

"This is my own concoction of essential oil called 'Wizard of Oz.' What sets it apart is that it smells good," Aurore explained as she dripped three drops of light green liquid on the candle representing her.

The light of the candle flickered and sizzled, and a faint mist spread out, giving Aurore and the altar an air of mystique.

"Now for the important part," Aurore said, pulling a small imitation goatskin from her pocket. "If you're holding a ritualistic magic that prays to a deity, you need to draw the symbol of what you want on the paper and burn it during the ritual.

"The first part is a prayer for someone's power. This 'someone' needs to be replaced by the symbol of a deity, an honorific name, or a domain ruled over by Them. For example, I pray for the power of the Sun or the power of Order. Remember, there are always two sentences that correspond to the two candles that represent the deity.

"The second part is 'I pray for the God's loving grace.' Remember, don't call Him by His name. Doing so in a ritual is sacrilegious. The Eternal Blazing Sun can be referred to as God or Father.

"The third part is what you want to pray for. You must be brief and finish it in one sentence.

"The fourth part is to give more power to the incantation. For example, 'Sun Flower, a herb that belongs to the Sun. Please bestow your powers to my incantation.' You can choose two to three types based on the materials used.

"After reciting the incantation, drip a drop of essential oil on each candle and burn the piece of paper that was used to draw the symbol. After the paper is burned, the ritual comes to an end. Then, thank the deity and extinguish the candles in the order of 'me', followed by 'god', right to left. Dispel the wall of spirituality. Oh, and remember to light the candles from left to right, beginning with 'god' followed by 'me'."

Lumian nodded twice in acknowledgement before asking, "What about praying to yourself?"

Aurore chuckled before explaining, "The incantation is even simpler. I'll use summoning spirit world creatures as an example. For the first part, there's only one word: 'I'. Remember, you can't use modern Hermes here. It has to be ancient Hermes, Elvish, Dragonese, or Jotun. The second part is 'I summon in my name,' which can be said in modern Hermes. The third part is the exact description of the summoned spirit world creature."

Lumian was curious. "What's an exact description?"

Aurore explained solemnly, "It needs to be limited to three lines to help us lock onto the creature we want to summon."

"For instance, if someone said they were looking for the prankster of Cordu Village, Aurore Lee's idiot brother, and a regular customer of Ol' Tavern, we know exactly who they're looking for because of the specific characteristics given."

"I get it!" Lumian was enlightened. "So, if we don't know the target's name, appearance, or address, we can use their characteristics to help find them."

Aurore said seriously, "That's the principle, but there are many problems when put into practice. For example, when summoning creatures from the spirit world, the first sentence is often fixed. It's either 'the spirit that wanders about the unfounded' or 'spirit wandering above the world.' Its function is to point to the spirit world and clearly state that we want to summon a spirit.

"The second sentence is also very universal. We don't summon spirit world creatures to harm ourselves, so we must restrict it to friendly creatures. Sometimes, we also add the word 'weak'. This is because some spirit world creatures may be very friendly, but their existence can bring great danger.

"Considering these circumstances, the description is fixed. 'The friendly creature that can be subordinated', 'the friendly creature that can be consulted', 'the weak creature that can be subordinated', and so on.

"But based on these two descriptions, the direction is still very broad. It doesn't reflect our needs. Therefore, the third description is very important. You need to use a sentence to clearly explain what creature you want to summon."

"Sounds very difficult." Lumian felt a headache just thinking about it.

Aurore nodded.

"Not only is it difficult, but it's also dangerous. When the direction is vague, it might summon a spirit you don't need or a creature that brings danger. Remember, being weak doesn't mean it can't kill you, just like being friendly doesn't mean it won't pose a threat to you."

Chapter 48: Knowledge Pursuer

Lumian deeply understood Aurore's words.

As a vagrant, he knew better than to underestimate anyone. Some adult vagrants suffered massive losses because they looked down on him and assumed him to be weak. As for some almsgivers, they provided food out of kindness but forgot to consider the starving bodies of the vagrants, causing them to make the wrong decisions.

After a moment of serious thought, Lumian said, "It seems like the description of a creature that can be summoned with relative precision is very valuable."

Aurore nodded solemnly. "That's right. A notebook that records the corresponding summoning incantations is very precious. Every incantation and commentary on it is exchanged with life, blood, or pain. For example, when I summoned White Paper, the three lines described it as 'the spirit that wanders about the unfounded, the friendly creature that can be subordinated, the weak ball that can telepathically connect with me'. You have to make countless attempts and experience countless failures before you can piece one together. And every failure implies a huge risk."

Is this a description that a normal person can come up with? In particular, the words 'weak' and 'ball'… As Lumian criticized inwardly, he asked, "So, you bought this from someone else?"

"No." Aurore shook her head and said with a bitter expression, "The Mystery Pryer pathway is different from other pathways. From time to time, it will be chased by a large amount of knowledge. It's impossible to ignore, and there's no way to reject it even if one can't handle it. And when one consumes a potion to advance, the situation of being chased by knowledge becomes even more serious.

"Although most of this knowledge is useless, there will always be some that are valuable. The incantation to summon White Paper was one of them."

Lumian understood. "Indoctrination from the Hidden Sage?"

Aurore looked at him in surprise. "You know that? Did that lady teach you?"

"Yeah." Lumian nodded.

Aurore pursed her lips, lost in thought.

"From my personal experience, Knowledge Pursuit isn't limited to the Hidden Sage's indoctrination. My so-called 'ear ringing' does indeed hear His voice, where I gain knowledge, but it always puts me in pain. My head is close to exploding, and I wish I could lose control.

"But occasionally, especially when I'm not in the best state and am about to lose control, I have an illusion that all the knowledge in the world has come to life. A small number of them will chase after me and rush towards me, but I can't dodge them. This is how the summoning incantation for White Paper barged into my brain.

"When consuming the potion, 99% of the Knowledge Pursuit comes from the Hidden Sage. 1% is related to revived knowledge."

"It's very magical and terrifying. It can scare everyone in the village." As Lumian sighed with emotion, he was thinking for his sister about whether there was a way to resolve the problem of Knowledge Pursuit or reduce its impact.

Aurore replied with a bitter smile, "It's precisely because I often suffer such torture that I don't want you to follow the path of Beyonders. But in our current situation, it's better to become a Beyonder than an ordinary person."

To make her brother remember the madness and danger of the path to transcendence, she pointed at her head.

"After being pursued by knowledge and experiencing pain for a long time, I feel that my mind and personality have undergone a certain mutation.

"Don't I always tell you that I have a phobia for social interaction, but I am very talkative sometimes? I like to go out and chat with the old ladies in the village and tell stories to the children. Occasionally, I will go crazy and borrow Madame Pualis's pony to ride free into the mountains and shout?

"Being especially talkative is a kind of rebound from prolonged isolation and being unable to return to my true home. The path to transcendence is also a form of oppression.

"And the occasional madness…"

At this point, Aurore chuckled and looked at Lumian.

"You don't think that's just an exaggerated adjective, do you?"

Lumian fell silent, feeling his sister's smile was self-deprecating, lost, and filled with indescribable pain and struggle.

Aurore sighed.

"During those times, I wouldn't even recognize myself."

Lumian felt deeply helpless. "There should be a solution."

"Hopefully, let's continue," Aurore said, pointing at the altar. "After we sign a contract with the summoned spirit world creature, it'll be easy to summon it again. We can change the last description to 'contracted creature that belongs to Aurore Lee.' That will be very accurate, right? Besides, before the contract is terminated, no one can summon it again."

Lumian was concerned. "Everyone can only have one contracted creature?"

"Not really. I'm not sure how high the upper limit is, but it's definitely more than one, especially with some special Sequences. When summoning, say the first contract creature or second contract creature of the person to differentiate." Aurore spoke the truth. "In addition, summoning creatures from the spirit world will consume your spirituality. The more you summon, the greater the consumption. With a Hunter's spirituality, I estimate that it can only withstand one contract creature at most."

Knowing her brother's personality, she curbed any loopholes that Lumian might find.

"Every spirit world creature can only stay for a limited period of time after being summoned to reality. The weaker they are, the longer they can stay. You don't have to think about summoning one first. You can summon the next one after your spirituality recovers, unless you choose a very weak one. And only when your spirituality is significantly stronger than it is now."

She used White Paper as an example.

"If I didn't let White Paper be a vessel for my powers, it could stay in reality for twelve hours. If I share the specialness of my eyes with it and let it do things for me, it can last at most three hours, and my spirituality would be constantly depleted."

Lumian was disappointed. He had wanted to form an army of spirit world creatures.

He thought for a moment and asked, "Can I only summon creatures from the spirit world? Can I only summon spirits?"

"No," Aurore shook her head. "We can also summon creatures affiliated with the spirit world, the real world, and the astral world, as well as creatures from alternate worlds or other planets. Regardless of whether they are spirits or not, this is very dangerous. Most of the Beyonders who have attempted this have died tragically, and a small number have mysteriously disappeared. Only the corresponding notebooks were left behind to prove what they had done."

Lumian asked curiously, "Can I summon something from the real world?"

Aurore pondered for a moment before responding, "In theory, as long as the other party has a close relationship with the spirit world or has reached a certain level, they should be able to hear the summoning and decide if they want to respond. However, such a target is either very special or very powerful. If you want to live well, don't try it."

"Furthermore, when the summoning target isn't a spirit, the requirements for the corresponding ritual will be even higher. It will require more spirituality, and it might even require a large number of sacrifices. Only then can we open the Door of Summoning that can be used by non-spiritual creatures.

"You can barely summon White Paper with a Hunter's spirituality. If you want to try something more powerful, you can only pray to a deity or a hidden existence. For this, you might have to prepare something filled with spirituality as a sacrifice."

Lumian roughly understood the ritualistic magic of summoning.

"So next, you are going to recite an incantation and complete the summoning?"

"How is that possible?" Aurore scoffed. "The ritual has been interrupted so many times. How can we continue? In fact, normally, as long as we follow the process, we can resume from any breaks. However, I was mainly explaining, and didn't divert my attention to do the corresponding things."

You probably forgot… Lumian muttered inwardly but didn't dare say it out loud.

Aurore then said, "However, I do want to hold a summoning ritual. On the one hand, I want to give you a complete demonstration of the entire process. On the other hand, I want to seek help."

"Seek help?" Lumian asked in puzzlement.

Summoning powerful spirit world creatures to help?

Aurore explained, "Among the countless spirit world creatures, only a very small number of them can act as messengers. Private messengers—uh, messengers can be summoned by others based on special contracts.

"For example, if I have a contracted messenger, someone in Trier can summon it and give it a written letter. It will immediately pass through the spirit world and deliver the letter to me.

"Due to the special connection between the spirit world and the contract, it only takes a second or two to complete the letter delivery."

Lumian sighed from the bottom of his heart. "Very impressive. It's as fast as sending a telegram."

But the thought that crossed his mind was: I want one too!

"Don't even think about it," Aurore read his mind. "It's very difficult to summon a messenger. Unless you obtain an exact incantation, it's unlikely that you can succeed trying yourself. And only a few special Sequences can grasp an exact incantation. Even I don't have one."

Lumian was disappointed and asked,

"Are you going to summon a messenger and write a letter to them for help?"

"Yes," Aurore nodded. "She's one of the few among us who have gone the furthest on the path to transcendence. She has her own messenger. I don't expect her to save me, but she should be able to give me some advice."

I'm afraid it's very difficult. That mysterious lady said that we can only rely on ourselves… Lumian asked curiously,

"Us? You mean your pen pals?"

Aurore nodded and asked in confusion, "When did I ever mention pen pals to you?"

"Last cycle, no, last last cycle," Lumian answered honestly.

"Alright," Aurore facepalmed. "Actually, it's a mutual support organization slowly established by those of us who can't return home. We rely on letters to communicate daily, share knowledge, and solve problems. There will be small-scale gatherings or communication through messengers. She's the vice president of our organization and one of the initiators. Her code name is 'Hela'."

"Code name?" Lumian was a little puzzled.

Aurore tersely acknowledged, "In the organization, everyone uses code names without exposing their real names. When they write letters, they emphasize that it's a pseudonym to avoid being discovered by the officials."

"What's your code name?" Lumian was very curious.

Aurore was silent for a moment before she replied with a sigh, "Muggle."

"What does it mean?" Lumian was puzzled.

Aurore's eyes darkened as she replied, "Ordinary person without superpowers."

Lumian knew that his sister wanted to become an ordinary person living back home more, so he quickly changed the topic.

"What's the name of your organization?"

Aurore's expression became complicated.

"Originally, everyone wanted to give it a classy name, but considering that we would write letters every day, a name that was too conspicuous would attract the attention of certain forces. Therefore, in the end, we decided on a name that sounds like a group of animal lovers."

"What is it?" Lumian pressed.

Aurore replied in embarrassment, "The Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society."

Chapter 49: True Cogitation

Lumian couldn't help but suppress his laughter at the name of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society, but he managed to hold it in.

But even if he held it in, he couldn't help but say, "Those who know will understand that you're studying curly-haired baboons. Those who don't know will think that a group of curly-haired baboons are doing research."

Of course, he was only joking.

Aurore rolled her eyes at him. "We often tease ourselves as a group of curly-haired baboons being studied."

Seeing that his sister was in a better mood, Lumian asked, "Are all the members of your research society Beyonders?"

"Not all of them," Aurore answered briefly. "But some gatherings can't be attended by ordinary people."

She didn't say why they couldn't participate.

"Who's the president? How many vice presidents are there?" Lumian asked.

"Are you doing a census?" Aurore snapped back.

"Huh?" Lumian was confused.

Lumian was confused and realized that Aurore didn't like him asking too many questions about the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society.

Aurore pouted and exhaled.

"The president's code name is Gandalf. There are a total of five vice presidents.

"Alright, I'm going to summon Hela's messenger."

Lumian was puzzled and asked, "Aurore, uh, Grande Soeur, didn't you say that you only know the code name 'Hela' and don't know her exact name? How are you going to summon her messenger?"

He remembered that his sister had just mentioned that by changing the last sentence of the summoning incantation to "the messenger that belongs to so-and-so", he could very accurately pinpoint the target creature. However, she didn't know who "so-and-so" was.

"Excellent," Aurore praised him and said, "to be able to discover the problem is an excellent learning quality. Let's put it this way. It doesn't matter what name you use when you sign a contract with a spirit world creature. The contract will automatically extract a bit of your true aura from you, allowing the two parties to be related. However, remember, you can only use the name written when you sign the contract in the future. Changing it to your real name will be ineffective."

Lumian pondered seriously and said, "Got it. The key is the aura and connection. The name when signing the contract is only equivalent to the incantation used for the subsequent summoning. It doesn't matter what you write."

"Yes." Aurore nodded.

Lumian suddenly laughed.

"Is there such a situation? Let me say hypothetically. Grande Soeur, you obtained an exact incantation and summoned a messenger. You signed a contract with it in the name of Aurore Lee. After that, you taught me that incantation because you loved your younger brother, which is me. As for me, I successfully summoned another messenger. However, when signing the contract, I used Aurore Lee's name to sign it for fun.

"Then the question is, which one will be summoned with the description of 'the messenger that belongs to Aurore Lee'?"

Aurore's face turned livid. "I don't have a messenger. How would I know!"

She exhaled and calmed herself down.

"This is actually a confusion caused by having the same name. Compared to ordinary contracted creatures that can only be summoned by oneself, it's indeed easy for a messenger that can be summoned by others to have such problems. However, because I don't have a messenger, I'm not sure if there's a special mechanism to avoid such mistakes. I can only use my knowledge to attempt an analysis.

"First, very few people have a messenger. The probability of having the same name is so low that it's almost negligible.

"Second, if there's an overlap in names, you can place an item with the messenger's owner's aura in the summoning ritual and use it to accurately lock onto them.

"Third, if you're really afraid of having the same name, you can make your name longer when signing a contract. For example, Lumian Torres Arri Lanos Arthur Gehrman Sparrow Lee. That way, you probably won't have the same name."

"But it's very likely that I'll forget this name after signing the contract. It's too difficult to remember," Lumian muttered. "Also, why did you add the name of the Pirate Hunter and Great Adventurer?"

"Because I like it. Madam Fors Wall's adventurer series is a classic," Aurore said confidently.

She turned around and tidied up the altar, preparing to officially hold the summoning ritual.

At that moment, Lumian thought of something and shouted, "Wait a minute!"

"What's wrong?" Aurore turned around, looking confused.

Lumian asked seriously, "Does the messenger count as an outsider?"

"…" Aurore was confused at first, but quickly figured out the problem.

She deliberated and asked, "You mean that as an outsider, the messenger will fall into a cycle after coming to Cordu and won't be able to leave?"

Without waiting for Lumian's reply, Aurore came up with a new theory.

"No, the situation will be worse. It's a contracted creature. After receiving the letter, it will immediately go to Hela. It's equivalent to leaving Cordu. That will cause a restart.

"After that, it will instinctively attempt to leave again and again, while we restart again and again. We won't have time to investigate the key to the loop."

Lumian couldn't help but imagine the scene his sister had described.

Just as he opened his eyes to see his familiar bedroom, he would open his eyes again to see the familiar bedroom. Only to open his eyes again to see the familiar bedroom… He would repeat this action countless times, and the root cause of this was that a certain messenger was in a hurry to "go home."

Aurore raised her hand to cover her forehead.

"I can't even imagine what kind of changes will happen then…"

After sighing, she analyzed seriously, "From the current situation, the departure of living things from Cordu and the surrounding area will cause the loop to restart, and inanimate objects won't trigger the restrictions. The telegram and the letter that were sent are proof.

"If that's the case, spirits definitely won't do either. From the looks of it, I can't summon the messenger."

Lumian suddenly figured out why the livre bleu could maintain its state of having its words cut out.

The pieced together notes had left Cordu, making it no longer affected. Since it couldn't return, it naturally couldn't return to its original state!

He shared his speculation with his sister and asked, "The problem with livre bleu has been solved, but how did that letter get sent?

"There's definitely no way to send it out during the loop. The moment the messenger leaves Cordu, it will cause a reboot. And if it's before the loop, I have no impression of it. What about you?"

"Neither do I," Aurore thought for a few seconds before jokingly scolding, "You idiot, you almost led me astray. It's easy to send the letter in a loop!"

Lumian looked at his smart sister and asked, "Huh?"

Aurore chuckled before explaining, "There's no need for a postman to send the letter, nor is there a need to hire a messenger.

"When we discover an abnormality and don't want to alarm those who might be problematic, the best choice is to find a wooden box and place the distress letter inside. After sealing it, we will throw the wooden box into the river outside the village and let it float downstream naturally. When the other villages and even the people of Dariège pick it up, they will help us deliver it to the officials.

"You said that our last cycle confirmed that the loop contains a small portion of the river that can be reached."

"That's right!" Lumian exclaimed, pressing his palms together.

He thought of another question.

"Will the fish in the river cause a reboot?"

"I don't think so," Aurore replied after thinking for a moment. "These creatures without any intelligence are very sensitive to invisible restrictions.

Or rather, they're more prone to invisible influences. There's a high chance that they'll instinctively stay away from places that might cause a reboot."

"What about your White Paper? It has no choice but to leave the real world after twelve hours." Lumian felt that this would also restart the cycle.

Aurore looked around and said thoughtfully, "I suspect that the loop not only includes Cordu and the surrounding mountainous areas but also the area that corresponds to everyone here in the spirit world.

"You probably don't know that there are actually more natural interactions between the spirit world and reality. If you don't include the corresponding spirit world, it might restart every now and then, but the current situation is clearly different.

"As my contracted creature, White Paper has a direct connection with Cordu. The spirit world it roams is most likely included."

I still don't know enough about mysticism… Lumian didn't ask further.

Aurore demonstrated the ritualistic magic process again and dispelled the wall of spirituality.

In the formless wind that suddenly blew, she said to Lumian, "It's already dark. I'll teach you true Cogitation and the way to activate Spirit Vision."

"Okay!" Lumian replied, showing that he had his sister's full attention.

Aurore explained, "You've long grasped the first half of Cogitation. Let's start from the second half. When you imagine the Sun, retract your spirit and enter a relatively calm state. Let your mind be slightly empty. Draw an outline of something that doesn't exist in reality to replace the Sun. Keep drawing and repeating until your body and mind obtain peace. Your thoughts will have a feeling that they are floating."

Lumian didn't quite understand. "Something that doesn't exist in reality?"

Aurore took out a pen and paper and drew a few strokes. "Look, is there anything like this in reality?" The paper had something very abstract on it, like a ball with eyes and a cross on its face. "Doesn't it exist once you draw it? This drawing is in reality."

Lumian felt that her sister's explanation was wrong. "Pictures and imaginations aren't real."

Aurore rolled her eyes. As her younger brother's teacher, she had to suffer this kind of anger often. Lumian acknowledged her comment tersely. "Then I'll try using this picture of yours." He pulled up a chair and sat down. He leaned back and focused.

The crimson sun quickly outlined itself in his mind, gradually calming him down. After a while, because he was in reality, he did not hear the terrifying and mysterious voice. He could calmly use the pattern that his sister had casually drawn to replace the Sun in Cogitation. The ball with eyes and a cross quickly appeared in Lumian's mind. As Lumian repeatedly outlined it, his body and heart became more and more peaceful, and his thoughts gradually felt ethereal.

He "saw" that there was a faint gray fog around him. There were many indescribable, non-existent things, and dense colored blocks mixed together. And high in the sky, perhaps deep in the depths, there was a clear light.

"There's no hurry. The probability of a Hunter succeeding in Cogitation on their first try is very low," Aurore consoled her brother.

Just as Lumian was about to report to his sister that he had successfully entered a Cogitation state, he suddenly felt something watching him from the depths of the gray fog and an infinite height! This seemed to be an illusion, but it made him break out in a cold sweat. He felt an inexplicable fear and immediately left the Cogitation state.

Chapter 50: Observation

Aurore had intended to reassure him that non-spellcasting Sequences usually took several attempts at Cogitation to succeed. Some even had to practice for five or six days or even more than half a month. However, when she saw her brother open his eyes, she noticed that Lumian's forehead was drenched in cold sweat, and fear was evident in his eyes.

"What's wrong?" Aurore asked, concerned.

Lumian took a couple of deep breaths. The more he thought about it, the more frightened he became.

"I successfully Cogitated. My mind seemed to float, surrounded by a myriad of colors and an indescribable faint gray fog. There were a few particularly bright and pure beams of light up above. No, it might not have been the sky. It could have been far away. I can't be certain."

"From your description, it seems like you succeeded," Aurore explained. "What your Astral Projection sees or senses is the spirit world. There, many concepts of reality either don't exist or are intertwined. That's why you feel like you're high in the sky yet far away at the same time.

"Those seven lights are the Seven Lights of the spirit world, mentioned in ancient texts. They're believed to be near-deity level and omniscient. Moreover, they're considered relatively friendly hidden entities. If you can grasp their complete honorific names, you can pray to them. Unfortunately, I don't know them either.

"Those indescribable things that roam everywhere belong to the spirit world, but you didn't seem to see much, nor did you perceive them clearly. This is likely a limitation of the Hunter Sequence. Your spirituality isn't high enough. Hmm... Activating Spirit Vision later will probably prove difficult. The final effect certainly won't be impressive. Still, it's better than nothing."

She had been monitoring her brother's condition, ready to intervene and assist him at any moment.

Seeing Lumian gradually return to normal, she finished what she needed to say in one breath and asked, "But what you saw shouldn't have scared you. Aren't you known as Bold Lumian? Lately, you've experienced a time loop, people turning into sheep, men giving birth, and Madame Night's patrols. How can ordinary spirit world creatures frighten you?"

Lumian's forehead veins twitched at his sister's words. He didn't want to recall anything, especially anything related to Madame Pualis.

He exhaled and said, "I sensed something deep within the spirit world, or rather, extremely high up, observing me. Just being watched by it terrifies me. I couldn't help but exit the Cogitation state."

Aurore's eyelashes flickered as she thoughtfully said, "I suspect that it has something to do with the two strange symbols on your chest you mentioned. They involve some hidden entity. They might point to the source of Cordu's loop, or they might represent the 'special' trait that allows you to maintain your clarity and strength in the dream and the loop. As a Hunter, you succeeded in complete Cogitation on your first attempt. It's highly likely that the two symbols influenced this."

Lumian nodded as he listened, agreeing with his sister.

This realization left him somewhat disheartened.

"In that case, I can't Cogitate. As soon as I succeed, I'll be watched and forced to leave that state. Besides, I don't think being constantly monitored is a good thing."

"Do you think you aren't being watched now?" Aurore couldn't help but laugh. "It's just that you can't sense it without being in a state of Cogitation.

Since there's no way to evade it and you're bound to suffer damage, it's better to make more attempts to increase your resistance, allowing you to spend more time in Cogitation. In the future, when facing certain situations, this might give you an edge. Of course, before becoming a Sequence 7 Pyromaniac, Hunters don't need deep Cogitation. It's best to wait for your spirituality to improve before trying again."

"Why does that sound a bit depressing?" Lumian had already composed himself and mocked his predicament. "Since I can't resist, I might as well enjoy it."

Aurore scoffed.

"In our current situation, I'd rather have a unique trait like yours. Even if it means facing numerous unknown dangers and challenges, at least I can retain my memory during the next cycle. I wouldn't need you to remind me, sparing many details."

She then looked out the darkened window.

"It's time to teach you how to activate Spirit Vision.

"Keep sitting and attempt Cogitation again. You don't have to enter a state where your thoughts are floating. Although that would be more conducive to activating your Spirit Vision, aren't there hidden entities watching you?"

"Yeah." Lumian leaned back in his chair, relaxing his body. He first envisioned the Sun in his mind, then swapped it out for the ball his sister had sketched haphazardly.

He didn't repeat the outlining process, stopping only when his body and mind were serene.

Aurore monitored his condition, offering a soothing voice.

"Lift your hands in your current state and place them in front of your eyes. You can open your eyes now."

Lumian kept his cool as he slowly opened his eyes. At some point, his sister had snuffed out the kerosene lamp, casting the first floor into darkness. The crimson moonlight outside the window was the only thing illuminating the outlines of objects.

Once his eyes adjusted, he could barely see his hands.

"Point your index fingers at each other without touching. Then, concentrate on the back of your hand, which can be the back of the opposite point," Aurore instructed. "After completing this step, slowly move your fingers to keep them facing each other without touching. And remember, they can't leave your sight."

Lumian followed her guidance, focusing his gaze on the empty space beyond his hands as he moved his fingers.

Despite repeating the process countless times, he saw no changes.

Soon after, he couldn't sustain the Cogitation state and snapped out of it.

"See anything?" Aurore asked.

Lumian shook his head.

"It's harder for Hunters. Don't stress. If it doesn't work now, it'll work later. If it doesn't happen today, it might happen tomorrow," Aurore consoled. "Don't fret. Regular folks with high spirituality can activate their Spirit Vision after professional training, let alone Beyonders. But the results vary."

If this loop fails, I can try again next time, but if that doesn't work, there may not be another chance... Lumian thought to himself.

He was patient and resilient. After resting and regaining some strength, he tried again.

After multiple attempts, he finally saw a fiery red dot emerge from the void between his index fingers.

Success! Lumian was thrilled. He turned to his sister.

But then he saw a red light radiating from Aurore's body, encompassing it entirely.

"Didn't you say you could see the different colors of the Ether Body?" Lumian asked, confused.

Aurore asked excitedly, "Did it work?"

Lumian nodded and recounted his experience.

"It's a success," Aurore breathed a sigh of relief. "You're impressive. It's probably due to your 'special' enhancement. Other Hunters would need at least two weeks of practice, and some might have to reach Sequence 8 before they can activate their Spirit Vision easily. You can only see a vague Ether Body. The red color means I'm healthy. You won't be able to see much else with your Soul Body's current strength as a Hunter."

She pulled out a tiny ink bottle and unscrewed the cap.

"Let's see if you can see White Paper."

Lumian focused and saw a transparent bubble emerge from the bottle.

It was similar to the bubbles he made while blowing soapy water, about the size of a fist and tinted red by the moonlight.

He could barely keep track of it and feared losing sight if he blinked.

The bubble floated towards Aurore's palm, which she scratched with her thumb, causing it to contract and expand.

Lumian composed himself and reported what he saw to his sister.

"It's blurry?" Aurore shook her head. "A Hunter's Spirit Vision is limited. You can only perceive basic Ether Body concepts and creatures like White Paper. Most things are invisible."

"It's better than nothing," Lumian replied with what his sister had just said.

Having never experienced a stronger Spirit Vision, he was rather content with his current situation.

Aurore instructed Lumian to use Cogitation to stop his Spirit Vision from deactivating and to establish simple activation and deactivation triggers.

Lumian practiced repeatedly until he mastered the method but never succeeded in the "express key" Aurore mentioned. He only vaguely understood the concept.

"Take a break. We'll monitor the deputy padre later for any anomalies," Aurore advised, noticing Lumian's pale face from depleted spirituality. She urged him to rest.

They ascended to the second floor and lit the lamp in the study. Lumian dozed off in a recliner while Aurore read, waiting for night to deepen.

Lumian quickly fell asleep in the recliner, while Aurore casually read her book, waiting for the night to get deeper.

Lumian eventually fell asleep and forced himself to remain sleeping instead of exploring the dream world.

Aurore woke him up shortly after.

"We can observe the deputy padre now."

"Okay." Lumian sat up and faced his sister.

Aurore opened a miniature ink bottle and stroked White Paper with her right hand, her eyes darkening.

With the aid of the contract, she recited in Hermes, "My contracted creature, bear the uniqueness of my eyes."

Lumian couldn't understand or see anything without his Spirit Vision. He waited patiently.

In mere seconds, Aurore withdrew her hand and sat down.

"White Paper is on its way to the deputy padre's house."

Lumian inspected the scene and noticed that his sister's eyes reflected trees swaying in the dark, not the study or himself.

The trees were left behind swiftly.

That's what White Paper sees? Lumian realized.

Aurore took out a mirror coated in mercury and sprinkled it with light white powder.

The powder quickly bloomed with light, covering the mirror with an aqueous layer.

In the water, the deputy padre, Michel Garrigue, appeared.

White Paper had reached the target's room and peered through a glass window.

Michel Garrigue slept soundly, his eyes closed and breathing steady.

Aurore and Lumian waited patiently, observing from all angles with White Paper.

Suddenly, Michel opened his mouth slightly, and a blurry, transparent figure emerged.

It was a lizard-like thing.

Chapter 51: Temporal Node

The thing that slithered out of Deputy Padre Michel Garrigue's mouth was slender and covered in scaly brownish-green skin, like a diaphanous and fuzzy lizard.

As soon as it left Michel's body, its dark green vertical eye darted left and right, vigilantly sizing up its surroundings.

While doing so, it even peered out the window but didn't detect White Paper. Instead, Lumian and Aurore sensed the coldness and indifference in its eyes.

"What's this?" Lumian asked.

Aurore shook her head.

"I don't know. It looks like a special spirit."

Lumian immediately judged, "It sure doesn't look like something good!"

Even through White Paper and the mirror, the lizard-like creature still made him feel uneasy, and his hair stood on end.

Aurore glanced at him and reminded, "This lizard seems to possess an ability that leads to a degree of mental corruption. Just looking at it from afar makes one feel uncomfortable. If you stare at it for too long, you might end up with mental problems. You must be careful. If the discomfort is serious, immediately close your eyes and try Cogitation. Get your mind right before looking again."

"It's fine for now," Lumian tersely acknowledged. "What about you? Don't you feel uncomfortable?"

Aurore smiled and replied, "As a Mystery Pryer, I've seen things more corrupting than this. My resistance is much higher than yours.

"Besides, don't I go crazy occasionally? It doesn't seem to matter even if I go crazier a little more intensely and frequently."

"I think it's necessary to check your mental state when you said that last sentence," Lumian said, half concerned and half joking.

Aurore chuckled. "That's called being self-deprecating.

"Sometimes, it's not as if I can stop looking just because I want to. The Mystery Pryer's eyes are special and can't be completely sealed. I can only barely prevent it from affecting my daily life."

As the siblings spoke, the blurry lizard-like creature crawled along the wall and floor at an extremely fast speed to the bottom floor of the house.

A few animal skulls hung on the wall opposite the door on the first floor. They were from wolves, deer, and wild boars. The deputy padre, Michel Garrigue, wasn't a Cordu native. He ought to have lived in the cathedral, but Guillaume Bénet had prevented him from doing so using an excuse. He could only rent a place from the hunter, Sabaté.

The lizard burrowed into the wolf's skull and kept entering and exiting the socket.

Not long after, it switched to the wild boar's skull and continued doing the same thing.

After coming out of the deer's pale-white skull, the "lizard" crawled out of the house at a speed several times faster than a galloping horse. White Paper quietly floated in the night sky and followed it.

The "lizard" crawled all the way out of the village and finally arrived at the square.

It circled around the cathedral and arrived at the cemetery before plunging into a grave.

Ten seconds later, it crawled out and entered another tomb with a tombstone.

Just like that, the strange lizard-like creature moved through different graves. Lumian could even imagine the scene of it entering and exiting different human skulls in the coffins.

That scene made Lumian's skin protrude with tiny goosebumps. He couldn't help but ask, "What is this guy doing?"

Incomprehensible!

Aurore slowly shook her head. "It's a blind spot in my knowledge."

After "touring" the cemetery, the lizard-like diaphanous creature returned the way it came and entered Michel Garrigue's room.

It burrowed into Michel's mouth and disappeared.

After 20 to 30 seconds, Michel Garrigue opened his eyes and sat up. He gulped down water from the cup on the bedside table, looking extremely parched.

He put down the cup, wiped his mouth, and fell back to sleep.

Aurore turned her head and looked at Lumian.

"How is it? There's indeed something wrong with him, right?"

"How is this a problem? This is a huge problem!" Lumian didn't hide his emotions in front of his sister. "Pierre Berry, who grazes humans, the padre whose key to the time loop, Madame Pualis, who makes men give birth, Naroka, who went to Paramita, an owl who has lived for countless years, and the deputy padre who has a lizard living in him. Aren't there too many extraordinary individuals in Cordu?"

During the loop, Lumian had griped about how little help Ryan, Leah, and Valentine, the three official investigators, had been. In hindsight, how could he blame them? The abnormalities in Cordu were truly exceptional!

They might have taken action, but the results were probably unsatisfactory.

Aurore glanced at her brother, half-warning and half-teasing, "You haven't mentioned the most remarkable person yet.

"The only one in the village who can remember the loop and possess a unique dream ruin."

"…" Lumian was speechless and felt a headache brewing.

Aurore turned to the mirror on the table, contemplating.

"I don't expect any significant changes with the deputy padre. Although I could examine his Astral Projection more thoroughly, it could be hazardous.

"It's fine if it endangers me because I'll be another living Warlock in the next cycle, but we need more information. We should wait until we have enough before prying deeper. Starting the loop prematurely would waste time explaining and communicating."

Lumian agreed, sharing her perspective.

Aurore then suggested, "I plan on having White Paper monitor the padre now."

"…" Lumian was taken aback. "Didn't you just say we shouldn't pry deeper to avoid triggering the abnormality prematurely?"

The padre was the linchpin to the mystery. Wasn't it reckless to rush in like that?

Aurore smiled at Lumian. "I'm sure what I'm doing is safe."

Noticing Lumian's confusion and worry, she elaborated, "You heard the padre and Pons Bénet's private conversation on April 1st during the previous cycle. The padre claimed to be an ordinary person, but he had a way to deal with me, a Beyonder.

"Based on the corresponding scene and the fact that there was no reason to lie to an ordinary person like you, I believe the padre was truly powerless before April 1st. Today is March 29th, and we haven't crossed midnight, so it's safe to spy on him."

Lumian felt relieved. "That makes sense."

Aurore continued, "From their conversation, I deduced that the padre found a way to quickly gain Beyonder powers on April 1st. If he senses danger, he can become a Beyonder instantly. Maybe he has an item that can deal with me.

"Additionally, the padre's strength at the Lent celebration didn't match that of a Sequence 9. I suspect he's taking a path beyond the divine paths the mysterious woman mentioned. He's probably praying to a certain entity for a blessing. Otherwise, he wouldn't have grown so powerful in just a few days without any noticeable inclination to losing control."

Lumian listened quietly and suddenly recalled something.

"On the morning of Lent during that cycle, I had just become a Hunter when I ran into Pons Bénet. I wanted to test myself by fighting him, but he ran away as if he knew I had become a Beyonder beforehand.

"Maybe he had also received a blessing and could sense danger…"

Lumian added another crucial point.

"It was probably April 3rd when I saw Pons Bénet enter Naroka's house during her funeral.

"If he had already received a blessing, he wouldn't have failed to detect spying from an ordinary person like me, considering his keenness on the morning of Lent."

Aurore nodded. "In other words, it's highly likely that the padre's group became Beyonders between Naroka's funeral and Lent." Between April 3rd and the morning of April 5th.

"Of course, we can't rule out the possibility of them receiving blessings in batches," Aurore added.

The situation became clearer after this discussion. Lumian smacked his forehead and sighed.

"What's wrong?" Aurore asked, confused.

Lumian praised her, "I should have discussed these things with you earlier. You're much better at analyzing than I am!"

Aurore chuckled. "You sure know how to praise me in various ways. You're inexperienced and lack knowledge, so you didn't think of it immediately. You would've discovered these details sooner or later."

Although she dismissed her brother's praise, her pleased expression was evident.

White Paper flew towards the Bénet residence at Aurore's command.

The Bénet residence was the tallest and most lavish in Cordu, aside from the cathedral and the castle's modified administrator's residence.

It was a grayish-blue three-story house with a chimney on top.

As the head of the Bénet family, the padre lived in a room on the top floor's east wing. The dark gray curtains were tightly drawn, and the master of the house appeared to be asleep.

This wasn't a problem for White Paper. It slipped through the wall and blended into the darkness in the corner.

In the room, Guillaume Bénet, who had finished his affair with Madame Pualis, was sitting in a recliner, staring at the curtain in front of the window, dressed in light-blue pajamas.

Aurore's eyes darkened, revealing Guillaume Bénet's aura.

The red, green, purple, and blue colors made Lumian dizzy.

Recalling his sister's teachings, he tried to differentiate between them and realized that the padre's body was relatively healthy except for his overzealous desires.

"What's he thinking about? Which mistress to meet tomorrow?" Lumian mocked him, even though the padre couldn't hear him.

At that moment, Guillaume Bénet stood up and punched the air in front of him.

"It's all your fault!"

Chapter 52: Entering the Ruins

"It's all your fault!

"It's all your fault!

"Damn it!

"Son of a bitch!"

Guillaume Bénet's fists continued to hit the air, his rage boiling over at a seemingly invisible creature.

His expression was twisted with hatred, and he didn't bother to suppress his emotions.

Aurore narrowed her eyes and gestured for White Paper to investigate the area.

But there was nothing there, just empty air.

Lumian clicked his tongue in annoyance. "He's been itching for a fight for a while now. Who's he blaming?"

Aurore shook her head and casually replied, "Maybe it's a bishop holding him back, stopping him from rising in rank and gaining extraordinary abilities. Or perhaps someone lured him into secretly worshiping a hidden entity, hoping to receive blessings and grow stronger…"

She considered that, as the sub-deacon of the Eternal Blazing Sun Church, a priest overseeing a rural cathedral, establishing contact with a concealed being wouldn't be easy on his own.

When it came to matters of supernatural power, he'd undoubtedly turn to the Dariège region's Church. The associated occult artifacts and sorcery grimoires would be handed over to the Inquisition for safekeeping or even sealing. They wouldn't be left at Cordu's cathedral. More importantly, it was impressive enough that he could command ancient Feysac. Languages capable of summoning supernatural forces like Hermes and Elvish weren't something a sub-deacon like him would encounter. And Aurore, through the Eye of Mystery Prying, had long determined he wasn't someone with innate spiritual prowess who could unintentionally attract malevolence.

Thus, without a certain someone's "guidance," how could the padre come into contact with a hidden existence?

Aurore considered the possibility that Guillaume Bénet had come into possession of a mysterious item without turning it over.

Lumian laughed at the idea.

"Can't the padre gripe over that hidden existence? He even dared to make Saint Sith feel aggrieved. It's not impossible for him to blame that hidden existence for enticing him."

After mocking Guillaume Bénet, Lumian analyzed seriously, "I've been thinking about why the padre suddenly fell into corruption. There are two suspects. The first is Madame Pualis. She's obviously very powerful. Whether it's Louis Lund, who gave birth in the castle, or the woman suspected to be her in the wilderness surrounded by the undead, it shows that she's not simple. She's involved with abnormal pathways and hidden existences. It's possible that she enticed the padre."

"By the way…"

Lumian smacked his head.

"What's wrong?" Aurore didn't know what her brother had realized.

Lumian replied solemnly, "Do you think the padre has ever given birth to Madame Pualis' child?"

"…" Aurore was filled with regret for believing her brother was on the brink of an important discovery.

She snapped, "Who told you that Louis Lund's child is Madame Pualis's?

"What if it's Administrator Béost's or a hidden existence's? No, no. If it was, you would have exploded and turned into a monster when you saw that scene."

"I just find Madame Pualis to be more dominant in her relationship with the administrator." Before the loop began, Lumian felt that the administrator, Béost, was a little weak. He couldn't keep the butler in check and couldn't keep an eye on his wife. When he appeared with Madame Pualis, he always tried to please the latter.

Lumian originally thought that the administrator loved his wife very much, but now, he had a new guess.

"Do you think the administrator is another fertility tool for Madame Pualis?"

"Perhaps." Aurore held her forehead. "The world of mysticism has really broadened my horizons. Many scenes that only exist in novels and imaginations have been realized… in some warped manner…"

After sighing, she muttered to herself, "There seem to be more than one or two children born in the castle. Where are they?"

Lumian thought for a moment and expressed that he had no idea.

Infiltrating the castle and conducting a search was out of the question. Not after what happened to Louis Lund and the events in the wilderness. Whatever it took, he wasn't about to cross paths with Madame Pualis again.

Aurore felt the same. After their run-in with Madame Pualis, the siblings wanted nothing more than to avoid her at all costs.

The padre grunted in frustration, downing a glass of red wine to take the edge off. As he stormed over to the bed, Lumian whispered to Aurore, He let out a long breath, put down the tall glass, and walked to the bed.

It wasn't until the padre's breathing eased and he seemed to be asleep that Lumian mocked,

"Look at him, crashing early. What, no late night rendezvous with his mistress? Oh, he doesn't smoke in private, either."

This was inferred from the absence of cigar cases, pipe, and other items in the bedroom.

Aurore chuckled and said, "He doesn't drink much alcohol either. Everyone says he's a pillar of propriety."

She dispatched White Paper to scout the bedroom. Finding nothing, it returned as instructed. Aurore turned to Lumian.

"You only mentioned one suspect. What about the other?"

"That sneaky owl. Always watching, never acting." Lumian voiced his guess. "It might have led the padre to the legendary Warlock's legacy."

"Mmm." Aurore felt that the possibility was quite high.

Lumian then suggested, "If that owl pays me another visit, we capture it and interrogate it."

"You sure you can take down an owl that has lived for centuries?" Aurore smirked.

"I've got you, haven't I?" Lumian flattered his sister.

Aurore scoffed. "Our chances aren't great, even with both of us."

"But we can't just sit around and do nothing. We need to find out what's going on before it's too late. As long as we don't interfere with the advent of the twelfth night, we'll be fine."

Lumian nodded heavily.

Aurore noticed his exhaustion and reached for White Paper, who had returned.

"You've been using your Spirit Vision too much today. Get some rest. We'll continue tomorrow."

She paused for a moment before continuing, "In the morning, I'll teach you the basics of the Hermes language. Then, in the afternoon, go see Pierre Berry and have a drink. I'll sneak into his sheep pen and see if I can get any useful information from his three sheep."

She thought this was the easiest route to investigate.

"Isn't that too risky?" Lumian asked, already on his feet.

Aurore reassured him with a smile.

"Don't worry, I won't pick a fight. I just need to talk to them in Highlander. It shouldn't raise any alarms. They might know something useful."

Lumian nodded.

"I'll head to Ol' Tavern tomorrow afternoon. I'll try to get to know the three foreigners. They could be valuable allies."

Of course, he had to be careful not to reveal their identities as Beyonders.

"Okay," Aurore agreed with her brother's plan.

......

Lumian woke up in his dream bedroom, shrouded in a faint gray fog.

As he expected, all the gold, silver, and copper coins, as well as the axe and pitchfork he had collected, were gone.

The cycle had reset the dream.

I have to gather them again… Lumian muttered to himself as he left the bedroom and headed to the study.

He picked up the livre bleu from the table and flipped through it idly. Many of the words had been cut out.

Indeed, I was the one to send the request for help… He no longer felt anything about being the one who had sent the request for help.

He suspected that Aurore had guided him in sending the request. After all, he had no knowledge of mysticism back then, so he would have relied on a reliable messenger or a postman.

Speaking of which, Lumian realized that the postman who came once a week wasn't in the loop.

He figured that the officials probably prevented ordinary people from entering Cordu after receiving the letter.

Lumian looked around for a box to store the letter, but he couldn't remember how many similar items Aurore had in her collection, so he gave up.

He got dressed in a way that didn't affect his movements, grabbed his iron-black axe, and headed out into the wilderness filled with crevices. He walked towards the ruins surrounding the dark red mountain peak.

Lumian easily dispatched the two familiar monsters. He slung the shotgun, cloth bag of lead rounds, and assortment of coins.

He moved forward cautiously, deliberately avoiding the path he had taken before, knowing that he was not prepared to face the three-faced monster.

As he made his way through the collapsed buildings and thin gray fog, the constantly alert him took a sniff.

He caught a whiff of blood.

After some thought, Lumian sneaked into the shadows and hid in a hidden space on the top of a half-collapsed house, peering through a gap between a few rocks.

In the distance, amidst the barren, rubble-filled wasteland, he saw a lump of flesh slowly wriggling towards a building.

The flesh was mixed with yellow fat, as if a creature had been crushed by a falling boulder.

Lumian pondered how to deal with such a monster. Should I behead it? But it doesn't even have a head.

Suddenly, several dark-black, fleshy ropes appeared out of nowhere and bound the blob of flesh tightly.

Chapter 53: Mark

Tentacles? Lumian was momentarily dumbstruck before recognizing the appendages that ensnared the fleshy mass.

He knew Aurore's novels well and had seen all the illustrations. Not only did he recall every melodramatic scene, but he also grasped concepts typically beyond his ken, such as monstrous tentacles.

Seven or eight inky tendrils enveloped the fleshy lump, dragging it towards the crumbled building.

A figure emerged from the chaos of strewn rubble.

The creature bore a humanoid form, its upper body and feet bare, clad only in black pants.

But it lacked a head, sporting only a remnant of a neck. A whirl of razor-sharp teeth filled the cross-section, and its crimson skin gleamed between them.

Lumian couldn't help but imagine a human whose head and half their neck had been replaced by some bizarre, gaping orifice. He shook his head, unable to locate a weak point for attack.

Seven or eight fleshy tentacles sprouted from the monster's maw, swiftly hauling the fleshy mass before it and hoisting it up.

The creature's neck-mouth blossomed open like a morning glory.

Its pearly, needle-like teeth clamped onto the flesh, swallowing it whole like a snake devouring its prey.

Lumian scoffed silently.

So, you still need to eat. Thought you guys could survive without food…

He then fell into deep thought.

Monsters should be common in these ruins. Food must be scarce…

So some monsters feed on others, like now. Or maybe, everyone's both hunter and prey…

Could I lure an unbeatable monster to others and exploit the chaos?

Theoretically, yes. But it's risky. They might just team up to kill me first…

As Lumian mulled it over, he noticed the monster's chest—heaving from the effort of digestion—was beginning to swell and contract, as though it was undergoing intense digestion.

This attracted Lumian's attention and made him realize that the monster's chest was anything but ordinary.

Three black, seal-like marks adorned its pectorals and base of the neck.

Wh— Lumian's pupils dilated instinctively, straining for a better look.

He'd seen something similar on the padre!

At the end of the Lent celebration, the padre's body had swelled, tearing his clothes to reveal a black mark!

Upon closer inspection, Lumian confirmed that the three black seals on the monster matched the padre's.

Composed of cryptic words and symbols, they seemed to connect with an ineffable realm.

The difference? The padre bore at least 11 or 12 marks, whereas the monster had only three.

What's the deal with these marks? Are they bestowed by a hidden power? And the more you have, the greater the boon? Lumian wondered, perplexed.

He tried in vain to memorize the markings but couldn't in such a short time. Without pen or paper, he couldn't reproduce them either.

The monster finished digesting the fleshy mass. It swung its arm, shaking the fleshy tentacles beside its mouth-orifice.

The mark beneath its neck glimmered, and a low hum emanated from its chest.

The sound swelled, evoking a maelstrom of air tearing through a beehive, whistling in and out of countless tunnels.

The trumpet-like orifice gaped wide, amplifying the maddening drone.

The cacophony grated on Lumian's nerves, making him itch to pummel the beast.

Your noise is unbearable, you know that?

As rage coursed through his veins, Lumian acted on impulse, leaping from the partially collapsed rooftop, shotgun in hand.

Bang!

Lumian hit the ground hard, his eyes locking onto the monster's gaping maw filled with razor-sharp teeth.

He was about to rip the other party a new one for being a stubborn old pig, but serenity gripped him like a vice. He felt helpless, like a bystander who had been thrust onto the stage of a deadly play.

The monster's blood-red mouth was trained on him, and it made no sound.

"Can I say that I'm sorry, that it's a misunderstanding?" he muttered, his voice barely audible.

He suspected that there was something wrong with the noise just now, causing him to lose his mind. He jumped out of his hiding spot and tried to attack!

But it was too late for apologies. He had to make a choice: fight or flee.

With his experience, Lumian knew that running was not an option. The monster was unscathed and ready, its eight tentacles raised and poised for attack.

Therefore, if he really wanted to escape, he had to fight before finding an opportunity!

If he wanted to survive, he had to fight. Without hesitation, Lumian raised the shotgun in his hand, loaded with lead bullets.

Bang!

The monster was caught off guard by Lumian's speed and decisiveness. It had no idea what the shotgun was and didn't stand a chance as it was pelted with lead bullets.

"Ah!"

it howled in pain, its mouth filled with razor-sharp teeth opening instinctively. Its chest was a bloody mess, including the black mark on its right side,

However, the black mark seemed to be engraved in his blood and flesh. It was still clearly visible and remained unharmed.

Lumian didn't revel in the monster's screams. He quickly repositioned himself and pulled out a new round from his bag.

But before he could take aim again, the black mark on the creature's left side glowed, and it vanished into thin air.

Just like that, it disappeared in front of Lumian!

Had it escaped or turned invisible? He racked his brain for answers from the various novels Aurore had written and the mysticism knowledge she had taught.

Lumian searched frantically for any sign of it, but it was gone.

This scene and difficulty that he had never faced before made Lumian panic. He wanted to take the opportunity to escape and subconsciously take a few steps back.

Lumian's ankles were suddenly yanked, and he lost his balance, flipping over and hanging upside down.

Dark, fleshy tentacles appeared out of nowhere, wrapping tightly around Lumian's legs and hoisting him up.

The monster was right in front of him, its black mark glowing on its right side. The vortex-shaped mouth filled with white, razor-sharp teeth widened to reveal a blood-red interior.

The stench was overwhelming, and Lumian felt dizzy as he hung upside down.

He could see the blood-colored skin of the monster's mouth and countless teeth.

Thinking quickly, he grabbed one of the tentacles and wrapped it tightly around his arm. In his hanging state, he aimed his shotgun at the monster's mouth and fired.

Bang!

The monster screamed as flesh and blood spewed from its mouth.

It flung Lumian away, and its body turned transparent before vanishing once again.

Lumian hit the ground and rolled before getting back up, determined to find his target.

Suddenly, he caught a whiff of blood approaching him.

Without hesitation, he leaped in the opposite direction.

Dark tentacles emerged from the air where he had been standing, but they missed their mark.

The monster reappeared three to four meters away, its vortex-shaped mouth wide open, ready to strike.

Lumian loaded his shotgun with lead rounds, but the black mark on the monster's left side glowed, and it vanished again.

Invisibility. It's indeed invisibility! Lumian instantly made a judgment.

Coupled with his previous encounter, he believed that this invisibility could not hide his scent and would lose its effect once he entered an attack state.

After figuring it out, Lumian calmed down and mocked inwardly,

How can you be invisible if you can't even hide your scent?

Capturing traces was a Hunter's forte.

Lumian regained his composure and calmly surveyed his surroundings as he circled the area.

Soon, he spotted the monster's footprints and caught the scent of blood and its unmistakable stench.

Using these clues, he dodged the monster's attacks and fired his shotgun, but it seemed to have no vital points. The creature only grew weaker after being hit multiple times.

With the lead rounds running low, Lumian quickly thought of a solution.

In just a few seconds, he had an answer.

He had scouted the area beforehand and found several natural traps that could be used, including one that would be perfect for this monster.

As two faint footprints appeared in the distance, Lumian turned and ran, narrowly avoiding the dark, fleshy tentacle that missed its target.

He kept running, occasionally looking back to make sure the monster was still chasing him and to dodge any attacks.

Buzz, buzz, buzz!

The monster's "noise" only fueled Lumian's anger, making him want to turn around and attack with his axe. But he reminded himself that his goal was to kill the creature, not just vent his frustration.

Fortunately, he remembered that his goal in running was to kill that guy. At the moment, he wasn't really running away. Anger and frustration didn't change his plan. It only made him more motivated.

Thud thud thud!

Finally, he spotted the half-collapsed building and rushed inside, stopping at the edge and pretending to lie in ambush.

Soon, he heard the shallow footprints of the monster approaching, along with its stench and blood.

Lumian estimated the distance of the tentacle and took a couple of steps back. With a swing of his axe, he struck a stone pillar that was about to collapse, and then kicked it hard, using the reaction force to roll back.

The half-collapsed building couldn't withstand the impact and crumbled, a cascade of heavy rocks filling the passage. Boom!

The monster, hiding and ready to attack, let out a fierce scream that lasted only a second before it was silenced forever.

Chapter 54: Interpretation

Lumian rolled away before springing back to his feet.

The sudden scream and its abrupt end brought him a sense of relief.

Still, he remained vigilant. Shotgun slung and axe in hand, he cautiously approached the collapsed building.

Dust swirled in the air where bricks and wooden beams once stood, lingering on.

Outside, Lumian couldn't spot the monster's corpse. It must be buried beneath the rubble. His sense of smell was compromised in the dusty environment. He raised a hand to shield his nose from the irritants.

Given the situation, Lumian retreated several steps, maintaining a safe distance as he patiently waited for the dust to settle.

As he stood watch, he scrutinized his surroundings, on alert for any subtle signs of movement or scent.

Finally, the air cleared, and his vision returned.

Lumian neared the wreckage once more, tracking the scent of blood to find the monster crushed beneath heavy stones.

With no need to rush, he employed his Hunter expertise to methodically remove the rocks, avoiding any secondary collapse.

Simultaneously, he kept his guard up against the monster, which might still be alive and awaiting an opportunity to strike.

He pulled away another massive stone, revealing the twisted creature, its head-neck a mangled vortex.

Its maw faced the sky, crushed into a gory mess. Its chest was flattened, and its sharp mouth impaled on a jagged stone pillar. Several dark, fleshy tentacles had snapped.

If not for its distinct features, Lumian wouldn't have recognized the semi-solid mass as his target.

The trap had worked better than he'd anticipated!

After confirming the monster's demise, Lumian noticed the three black markings on its chest, still clearly visible despite the carnage.

It's so odd… This can't be common, even in mysticism, right? Despite going through his sister's crash course, Lumian still had much to learn. He relied on his intuition for judgment.

He had planned to use his knife to remove the skin with the black mark, but the creature's chest was too mangled to salvage anything.

After pondering for a moment, he tore a piece of cloth from his linen shirt, using it as makeshift paper.

Next, he wrapped another strip around his finger, staining it with the monster's blood. Whether it sufficiently isolated potential contamination or poison, he couldn't be sure. If anything happened, he'd have to leave the dream quickly, minimizing any damage to reality. He should recover within hours or half a day.

Using the blood as ink, Lumian copied the three black marks.

As he drew, dizziness struck, and a swelling pain pulsed in his forehead.

Lumian surmised from his sister's teachings that his spirituality was nearly depleted.

Just copying these marks almost drained me entirely?

He was astonished by the bizarre markings and the meager spiritual capacity of a Hunter, which he suspected was only slightly greater than a spiritually gifted person.

After resting briefly, Lumian continued copying. It took three intermittent attempts before completion, his head throbbing.

In his current state, further exploration was impossible. He pocketed the cloth, hoisted his axe, and headed back across the wilderness towards home.

Emerging from the ruins, he felt a sense of accomplishment, as if he had absorbed a significant portion of the Hunter potion.

Looks like it was a successful hunt, Lumian mused.

His unsorted experiences bubbled to the surface.

Staying calm is crucial… When faced with unexpected prey and no time to prepare, calmness is even more vital.

Always observe your surroundings and exploit opportunities.

With his thoughts racing, Lumian made his way home, ascended to the second floor, and entered the bedroom.

He forced himself to memorize the marks for a while before collapsing on the bed in exhaustion.

......

The next morning, when Lumian woke up, his temples were still throbbing a bit. That was a sign his spirituality had been drained in the dream ruins.

He shook his head and left the room to splash his face in the bathroom.

When he went downstairs, he realized his sister had already made breakfast—toast with jam, sliced sausages, and strong black coffee.

"So early?" Lumian blurted out in surprise.

His sister rarely woke up early.

Aurore replied grumpily, "Realizing we're stuck in a time loop, and the people around us are getting weirder and creepier, how can you sleep well? Not me."

"I've got no choice." Lumian comforted his sister. "At least you can really sleep. I've got stuff to do in my dreams."

"That's true." Aurore picked up the coffee laced with half a packet of sugar and took a swig.

After her brother sat down and wolfed most of the toast and sausage, she asked, "What did you get out of exploring the dream ruins?"

Lumian recounted his run-in with the monster and said, "Aurore, uh, Grande Soeur, help me figure out what those three black marks mean. At the end of Lent, the priest had something similar on him, but even more."

Aurore nodded and took out a fountain pen and a note from a hidden pocket in her beige dress.

Lumian began sketching, but he couldn't accurately replicate the black marks.

Soon, he handed the note to his sister and "introduced," "I only memorized it a few times. I can't be sure if some of it's right or wrong, but some of it must be. Here, here, and here are spot on."

Just replicating part of the mark had drained a lot of his spirituality.

Aurore placed the note on the dining table in front of her and focused on it for a while.

"These words aren't any I know. The symbols that go with them are more warped than those commonly seen in mysticism too."

Lumian was a little disappointed when Aurore added, "Judging by the influence of transcendent words and symbols on the surroundings and the leverage the marks have on natural power, I suspect this is the outward manifestation of a special contract."

As she spoke, she tapped the note with her index finger.

"Contract?" Lumian asked.

Aurore nodded.

"Paired with your battle with that monster, each black mark should represent a special contract.

"The effect of this contract is likely helping it gain a superpower from certain spirit world creatures, creatures from other dimensions, or extraterrestrial creatures. So, the black mark on its left chest emits light and grants invisibility. The one below its neck corresponds to a voice that makes people frustrated, resentful, and lose their minds. The one on its right chest didn't show anything. I suspect it has something to do with its mouth orifice, tentacles, or digestion."

"No wonder…" Lumian immediately understood some of the details of the previous battle.

He then laughed and said, "The padre signed more than ten contracts with different creatures?

"What does this mean? Everyone can be his daddy!"

"What a strange way to put it," Aurore muttered. "From the looks of it, the priest who fought you at the end of Lent didn't even show a tenth of his strength. He probably only used one ability he got through the contract. His body and mind went out of whack for no reason, and he was at your mercy."

Lumian didn't get the previous two cycles, but he clearly knew it was luck back then.

He eagerly asked, "Can I copy the contract obtained from the monster and contact the corresponding creature?"

He was very envious of that "invisibility" ability.

"A contract is a contract, and a ritual is a ritual. Do you know how to conduct a ritual?" Aurore doused his enthusiasm. "Even if you master the ritual, do you know what the price of such a special contract is? The padre might have only completed it with the blessing of a hidden existence…"

Aurore paused for a second and muttered to herself, "Why does the monster in your dream ruin have such a black mark… Did it also receive the blessing of that entity?"

As she spoke, Aurore cast her gaze at Lumian's left chest.

"Could it be related to the black thorn symbol sealing your heart?

"The padre had one too. Hmm… Maybe the thorn symbol represents a hidden existence that created the dream ruin. The key to breaking the cycle might be hidden there. Or, maybe reality can only solve the problem by doing something simultaneously with the dream ruin…"

"It's possible," Lumian thought, realizing that this could explain why the monster had a black mark and why the mysterious lady wanted him to explore the dream ruins.

He let out an emotional sigh.

"Aurore, uh, Grande Soeur, your imagination is indeed much richer than mine."

"That's what an author should be like," Aurore replied with a smile.

After breakfast, Aurore brought Lumian to the study to teach him Hermes.

They ended the lesson around three or four in the afternoon, only stopping to grab a quick bite to eat.

"Alright, you can go out and drink with Pierre Berry now," Aurore said, realizing it was time and that no one would suspect them.

Lumian acknowledged her instruction briefly and expressed his concern.

"You must be careful."

Aurore was going to take the risk of coming into contact with the three sheep to gather information.

......

Lumian arrived at the dilapidated two-story house where Shepherd Pierre Berry lived and looked around before asking the old woman, "Where's Pierre?"

The old woman, Pierre Berry's mother, Martie, appeared to be in her early fifties but had many wrinkles due to overexertion from work. Her skin was freckled, and her black hair had turned gray. She looked almost as old as Naroka.

"He went to the cathedral," Martie replied.

Lumian was alarmed. He went to the cathedral again?

Chapter 55: Persona

If Lumian remembered correctly, Pierre Berry would undoubtedly visit the cathedral to offer his prayers past noon of March 30th. He and Reimund had crossed paths with him during the previous cycle, and Lumian had also encountered him at the village square at a similar hour.

However, it was already three or four in the afternoon!

"When did he leave?" Lumian inquired.

Martie pondered for a moment and responded, "Around the time taken to cover a mile."

In the countryside, except for a handful of people, hardly anyone owned a timepiece. Time was generally conveyed through specific activities and indications such as grape harvesting season, the duration of a mile's walk, and so forth.

Obviously, if the timeframe was brief enough for people to perceive it more distinctly, "a few minutes" and "15 minutes" would be employed in verbal expressions.

A mile? That isn't too far… Lumian speculated that Pierre Berry had already gone to the cathedral around noon and had yet to return.

One mile in Cordu was equivalent to one kilometer in the Intisian metric system.

After bidding farewell to Pierre's mother, Martie, Lumian departed from the Berry residence and proceeded towards the village square.

He was unsure whether Pierre Berry had visited the cathedral at noon and returned again in the afternoon, or if something had cropped up, delaying his return.

If it was the former scenario, Lumian could sense something brewing. It was highly unusual for Pierre Berry to frequently visit the cathedral to meet the padre. Something dreadful was certainly afoot.

If it was the latter scenario, it would be a massive problem!

Before Lumian, who retained his memories, and Aurore, who already knew the cycle, made an attempt, the history should remain unaltered!

If there were any deviations, it could indicate that the siblings had not completely comprehended the pattern of the cycles, or that there were others who could retain their memories.

With this in mind, Lumian heaved a sigh and raised his hand to strike his face.

He was so startled that he forgot to inquire if Pierre had visited the cathedral at noon.

That was crucial.

It was far too suspicious to turn back and ask now. Lumian could only obtain some information from Pierre when they drank together later. He quickly suppressed his frustration and strode towards the square.

Upon entering the cathedral of the Eternal Blazing Sun, he saw the padre, Guillaume Bénet, standing in front of the altar with several sunflowers. He was conversing with a few individuals seated in the front pew.

As soon as Lumian entered, Guillaume Bénet ceased speaking and glanced over.

Some plot? Lumian smiled as he approached the altar, observing the individuals listening to the padre's 'sermon.'

He spotted Shepherd Pierre Berry, the thug Pons Bénet, and a few of his henchmen. He also saw the padre's mistress, Madonna Bénet, and Sybil Berry. He was surprised to see a man here but also found it reasonable—Arnault André, Naroka's youngest son, a farmer in his forties.

"Hello, Pierre…" Lumian greeted him with a smile, but he halted midway.

The second half of his sentence was meant to be, "Aren't you buying drinks? Why are you here?" However, he suddenly became vigilant and remembered that this arrangement had yet to occur in this cycle.

This was something that had only transpired in the previous cycle. This was the first time Lumian had encountered Shepherd Pierre Berry in this cycle.

As Cordu's Prankster King, Lumian's reflexes were lightning-quick. He promptly altered his posture and extended his arms towards the altar.

"Praise the Sun!"

Keeping up the facade, his thoughts raced as he conjured up a fresh alibi.

After paying homage to the Sun and receiving a response from the priest, Lumian pivoted and addressed Pierre Berry, who sat at the front row's edge, gazing at him with bewilderment.

"I heard you had returned to the village, so I went to your dwelling to seek you out. Lo and behold, you're here in the cathedral."

He didn't specify who had informed him, knowing that Pierre Berry would have been spotted en route to the cathedral.

With no witnesses to his lie, Lumian had a fallback option—Ava's father, the cobbler Guillaume Lizier.

"Why are you looking for me?" Pierre Berry rose to his feet, clad in a dark-brown robe, his blue eyes brimming with gentle amusement and perplexity.

Lumian had already prepared a plausible excuse. He grinned and responded, "I yearn to hear your tales while tending to your flock. Diverse countries, varied hamlets, and sundry locales. They must be enthralling."

In the past, he had frequently conversed with newly-returned shepherds to enrich his knowledge.

Without waiting for Pierre Berry's reply, Lumian shifted his gaze from his disheveled and greasy black hair to his brand-new leather shoes.

"Did you make it rich?"

"My current employer was more generous this time and bestowed upon me quite a few things," Pierre Berry replied with a smile. "I'll treat you to a drink later."

"Alright." This was precisely what Lumian had been angling for.

He even inquired, "When will you be heading there?"

This displayed the panache of a regular patron of Ol' Tavern. He was unashamed when it came to cadging a glass of wine.

Pierre Berry glanced at Guillaume Bénet, the priest, and received a corresponding hint.

"How about after dinner?" he suggested.

"Agreed," Lumian assented readily.

Thereafter, under the scrutiny of the shepherd, priest, Pons Bénet, and company, he seated himself in the second pew closest to him.

"…" Pierre Berry was momentarily taken aback. "Aren't you going back?"

Lumian beamed.

"I haven't prayed in ages. I'll seize this opportunity to pray, lest the deity thinks I'm not devout enough."

"Carry on, carry on. Pretend I'm not here."

Saying so, he closed his eyes, lowered his head slightly, and crossed his arms over his chest.

Pierre Berry, Guillaume Bénet, Pons Bénet, and the rest exchanged glances, at a loss for words.

After patiently waiting for an extended period and observing Lumian still engrossed in prayer, the priest turned to Pierre Berry, gesturing for him to inquire.

Pierre Berry approached Lumian's side and patted his shoulder.

"How long do you intend to pray?"

Lumian opened his eyes and stated gravely, "I plan to pray until dinnertime. Since there's nothing else to do, I can make a confession later."

Guillaume Bénet's forehead twitched upon hearing this.

Gazing at Madonna, Sybil, Pons, Arnault, and the others waiting for him, he exhaled slowly. He signaled to Pierre Berry and gestured towards the door.

Pierre Berry comprehended the priest's unspoken message and hastily informed Lumian, "I'm done praying. Shall we proceed to Ol' Tavern now?"

"Absolutely!" Lumian stood up, grinning from ear to ear. There was nary a hint of solemnity or piety in his demeanor.

Previously, he had discerned that his arrival had impeded the padre and his accomplices' machinations. In a mischievous attempt to play a prank, he feigned interest and lingered until Pierre Berry was required to depart prematurely.

He surmised that the padre saw through his act, but what use was being the Prankster King of Cordu if he didn't create a bit of mischief in such circumstances?

He had to maintain his persona to avoid arousing suspicion!

Lumian lamented his sister's probable departure to Berry's abode to confer with the three sheep. Had she been present, he could have dispatched White Paper to the cathedral to clandestinely overhear the padre's scheme and glean valuable intelligence.

Perhaps I can undertake this in the next cycle, but would Pierre detect our surveillance? Pierre is no simpleton. He is certainly more capable than an ordinary person like the padre… Lumian's thoughts raced as he trailed Pierre out of the cathedral and towards the Ol' Tavern.

......

In the sheep pen behind the Berry household.

Aurore, donned in a white gown, circumnavigated the woods and vaulted the wooden fence.

As an alluring woman seldom seen in the village, she had to choose this relatively secluded path. Otherwise, she would be subjected to small talk or worse, suspicion.

When will I learn the spells of invisibility and shadow concealment? Aurore ruminated wistfully as she advanced towards the three sheep that had huddled beside a haystack.

Speaking in Highlander, she said, "Do not fret. I am the adversary of Shepherd Pierre Berry."

The eyes of the three sheep, whose coats were besmirched with filth, underwent a rapid transformation. Their initial vigilance and apprehension gave way to hope and perplexity.

Despite their initial reservations, they did not retreat and permitted Aurore to approach.

Aurore continued, "I discovered your peculiarities through certain means. You were once human, were you not?"

The eyes of the three sheep were suddenly imbued with shock, elation, hope, and skepticism. They instinctually bleated.

Aurore surveyed them.

"You cannot speak, but you can write, can you not?"

One of the sheep was stupefied for a moment before hastily inscribing on the ground.

It scribbled a simple Highlander word: "Yes."

The sheep was confirming that they were once human.

"What transpired? Why were you transformed into sheep?" Aurore pondered briefly before adding, "Write the beginning, middle, and end separately to save time."

The three sheep divided the task and inscribed different portions of the narrative on the surface of the soil using their hooves.

Before long, they had each completed a sentence.

"We were caught."

"A ritual was conducted."

"Swaddled in sheepskin and metamorphosed into sheep."

A ritualistic sorcery that can convert a human into a sheep using sheepskin? Hmph. That is decidedly easier than transfiguring a person into a sheep. The only question is, which deity was the ritual invoking? Aurore queried as her mind raced, "Did Pierre Berry capture you? Is he alone?"

She wished to ascertain Pierre Berry's current strength.

"Yes." One of the sheep responded.

The other sheep added more: "He has an accomplice. They were both exceedingly formidable."

Pierre Berry was already immensely powerful before his return to the village? Aurore suddenly detected something amiss.

Why did Pierre Berry appear to be under the sway of Guillaume Bénet, the padre?

Guillaume Bénet was still an ordinary person!

Chapter 56: Intuition

The more Aurore ruminated on the matter, the more her suspicions intensified.

How could the powerless Guillaume Bénet possibly subdue the mighty Pierre Berry, who possessed no less than supernatural abilities?

If the padre was indeed favored by the clandestine force to the extent that his clique considered him their leader, he should have been bestowed with a boon long ago and elevated above the common masses.

Should he decline the boon, he would inevitably face ostracism.

In these circumstances, his standing, authority, and machinations paled in comparison to his might or the gulf that separated him from divinity.

Aurore lacked the luxury of time to ponder this and could only conceive of two plausible explanations.

Either Guillaume Bénet was not the true leader of the small group and was merely exploiting his status to orchestrate and conceal the anomaly from the Eternal Blazing Sun Church in Dariège.

Or, he was not rejecting the boon but merely biding his time to attain greater power.

Neither explanation boded well.

Aurore directed her gaze at the three sheep and inquired, "Who was the man that accompanied Pierre Berry in his assault on you?"

The three sheep scribbled down their responses.

"Niort Best."

"A shepherd named Niort."

"He goes by the name Niort."

Niort Bastet too has achieved extraordinary power? Aurore was acquainted with the individual in question.

Niort was a fellow shepherd from Cordu who frequently grazed his flock alongside Pierre Berry. But he had seemingly not returned early this time.

"Where is Niort? I did not spot him in the village," Aurore queried.

The three sheep moved a few steps away and found a new patch of unmarked soil on which to write.

"He's dead."

"I killed him."

"We took him out, but we were apprehended."

Had he fallen victim to a counterattack? Aurore nodded pensively.

"Are all of you Beyonders?"

The three sheep ceased writing Highlander with their hooves and nodded in assent.

Aurore acknowledged them tersely as she raced to process the implications.

Pierre Berry and Niort Best are hunting Beyonders. What is their motive?

And one of them is now dead…

Either Niort's abilities paled in comparison to Pierre's, or they had acquired their powers through the boon and were far from proficient in wielding them. It was certain that the Beyonder battles would encounter complications…

Aurore glanced at the three sheep once more and asked, "Do you know why Pierre captured you?"

The three sheep resumed writing.

"I have heard him speak of God and devotion."

"It may be for a blood sacrifice."

"I suspect he wants to offer us as a sacrifice to an evil god."

Indeed, Beyonders possess remarkably high spirituality and unique characteristics. They are far superior to ordinary mortals as sacrificial offerings, and they can appease malevolent gods more effectively… Pierre Berry and Niort Best were using grazing sheep as a ruse to abduct Beyonders from other countries to offer them up as sacrifices? It is a scheme that can easily evade the local authorities' notice… Aurore nodded imperceptibly.

She spoke solemnly, "Did Pierre mention the honorific name of that god? Or rather, who were they praying to during the ritual that transformed you into sheep?"

The three sheep were taken aback, as if they were awash in recollections.

Suddenly, they lowered their heads and extended their hooves towards the soil before them.

For some inexplicable reason, Aurore felt that the temperature had plummeted, and the sun had been obscured by dark clouds, as a chilly mountain breeze swept past.

The three sheep began writing.

Aurore's spiritual intuition sounded a powerful alarm, prompting her to bellow, "Hold on!"

The three sheep lifted their heads and looked at her.

At some point, blood-red tears had welled up in their eyes, and their fur was stained and ghastly.

In the next moment, they resumed writing.

Aurore whirled around and dashed towards the fence.

As she exited the pen and looked back, the three sheep were bathed in the sunlight.

If not for the bloodstains on their faces, everything seemed entirely ordinary.

Thump, thump… Aurore's heart continued pounding.

Panting heavily, she breathed a sigh of relief.

If I had not learned to seal my sight and glimpsed things I should not have seen, I would not have reacted in time…

She produced a vial of iron-black powder and scattered it over the sheep pen.

The words etched in the soil vanished as though by an unseen hand.

As for the stains on the sheep's faces, Aurore found it challenging to expunge them using spells, so she refrained from approaching them and merely washed them away with water.

She feared that the three sheep were different from before and harbored latent dangers.

...

In Ol' Tavern, Lumian sat at the bar, sipping on light-green absinthe, his right elbow propped up casually as he surveyed the room.

He searched for the mysterious lady, but she was nowhere to be seen, nor were Ryan, Leah, and Valentine.

Lumian knew not when the former would arrive, and as for the latter three, he assumed they were wandering the village, engaging in idle chatter.

Pierre Berry, who had just finished his glass of absinthe, picked up a new pale green liquid and babbled, "I had a chance to get married."

"Is that so?" Lumian scoffed, "Who would fancy a shepherd?"

Pierre sighed and replied, "Most of the pastures we graze in are owned by manor owners or nearby villages. If we want to graze, we have to pay a ranch tax or marry a village girl and settle down there."

Lumian smiled. "That's a good thing for a shepherd."

Pierre took a sip of absinthe and glanced sideways at Lumian.

"That girl must fancy you and not ask for dowry.

"At one time, a lady thought I was not bad and didn't mind that I was a pauper and a shepherd. She was willing to marry me. Was she very foolish?"

"Yes." Lumian nodded "honestly."

Pierre took another sip of absinthe and was silent for a long time before saying, "Later, she died. She worked in a factory in the suburbs and fell ill due to exhaustion. I went to several cathedrals, got the priests to pray for her, and found doctors to treat her, but it was useless. After that day, I realized something."

Lumian asked, taking a swig of absinthe, "What was it?"

Resentment flashed across Pierre's face as he replied, "Those who possess flesh and excrete from their posterior cannot absolve us of our predicament!"

Lumian asked, "So, those without flesh and those who do not excrete from their posterior are acceptable?"

Pierre chuckled. "Those are saints and angels, but will they deign to look at us?"

Lumian tsked. "Then why did you go to the cathedral to seek the padre's counsel? Not only does he possess flesh and excrete from his posterior, but he also indulges in the carnal pleasures with women."

Pierre turned his head towards Lumian and cast a sidelong glance.

"You fail to comprehend. He possesses a certain intellectuality that can redeem our souls."

"Intellectuality?" Lumian struggled to grasp the term.

Pierre took another sip of his light-green absinthe, seemingly oblivious to the question.

Lumian dared not press the matter further, and instead inquired, "I heard that you visited the cathedral at noon. Why did you return in the afternoon?"

Pierre's warm smile illuminated his face as he replied, "In the afternoon, one can converse with like-minded individuals."

He did not deny that he had visited the cathedral at noon.

Lumian breathed a sigh of relief, knowing that for the time being, no one else would retain their memories and disrupt the flow of history.

He suspected that Pierre Berry had visited the cathedral at noon to confer with the padre in advance of their small group discussion scheduled for the afternoon.

After their libations and with the sun setting on the horizon, Lumian and Pierre Berry bid each other farewell and returned to their respective abodes.

Pons Bénet, the padre's younger brother, abruptly emerged with a few thugs and obstructed Lumian's way upon him reaching a secluded path.

The brawny, raven-haired, azure-eyed Pons Bénet stared at Lumian and smirked maliciously.

"You were good at pranks in ze afternoon, no? Wasting our time in ze cathedral. If ze padre wasn't there, I would have beaten you up, eh! Bastard, come and eat Daddy Pons's XX."

Initially taken aback by this imbecile's foolishness, Lumian was elated.

His and Aurore's judgment was correct. In the previous cycle, Pons Bénet likely hadn't acquired supernatural abilities before Naroka's funeral and thus had no sense of danger.

He had actually dared to obstruct a Beyonder's path!

Without hesitation, Lumian turned and bolted, with Pons and his thugs in hot pursuit.

However, as soon as they exited the trail between two buildings, they lost sight of their quarry.

Pons Bénet scanned his surroundings and ordered his subordinates, "Spread out and search."

He deemed it impossible for Lumian to have fled so swiftly and believed he was hiding nearby.

The thugs dispersed and combed the area for any potential hideouts, leaving Pons Bénet alone at the trail's entrance.

Lumian, who had ascended to the second floor of the adjacent building, chuckled and leapt towards Pons.

Bang!

Pons was sent hurtling to the ground with tremendous force, gasping for breath and momentarily incapacitated.

Had Lumian not restrained himself and struck him directly, he might have broken several bones.

Lumian stood up, clasped Pons's forearms, and smiled at him, saying, "Come, let us become better acquainted."

Before Pons could offer any resistance, Lumian pulled him into his embrace and kneed him.

Pons's eyes nearly bulged out of their sockets, and his face twisted in agony.

Thud!

Lumian released him, allowing the man to crumple to the ground like a shrimp.

He then turned and darted down the trail, vanishing from sight before the thugs returned.

...

In the kitchen, which also doubled as a part-time living and dining area,

Lumian updated his sister on his situation.

"Pierre Berry visited the cathedral in the afternoon… It's confirmed that Pons Bénet still lacks any superpowers."

Aurore nodded slightly and recounted her own experience, particularly the inexplicable danger at the end.

Lumian pondered for a moment before remarking, "That enigmatic lady claimed that certain entities might corrupt you merely by acknowledging Their existence."

Chapter 57: Arrangements

Aurore recollected the situation and surmised that her brother's account was accurate.

She sighed, overcome with emotion and remarked, "To think that such dreadful corruption can be brought about by that concealed entity worshiped by Pierre Berry and his accomplices. Even the evil deities mentioned in ancient manuscripts fail to elicit such a reaction."

Lumian showed no signs of surprise and said, "Otherwise, why are we trapped in a time loop?"

The more Aurore contemplated, the more perplexed she became. She muttered, "Is it possible that we have to confront the concealed entity on the twelfth night and defeat it to end the cycle?

"This would entail gathering ingredients, digesting the potion, and undergoing repeated cycles to become a deity..."

Lumian interrupted her train of thought as he realized that his sister was becoming increasingly irrational.

"Stop! It cannot be this extreme."

Aurore acknowledged his remark tersely and nodded slightly.

"You are right. We have, at most, one more cycle. It is impossible for us to become deities within twenty days."

She then shrugged and added, "There is no hope. Let us wait for death."

"..." Even Lumian, who had an inventive mind, struggled to keep up with his sister's thoughts.

Aurore exhaled and looked at her brother. "All right, I am done venting. Continue."

"Huh?" Lumian appeared puzzled and took a few seconds to understand what his sister meant by continuing.

"By the look of things, the three transformed sheep are to be offered as sacrifices and brought back to Cordu. It is no surprise that they did not wait until early May. The twelfth night is, in fact, the day of a grand-scale sacrifice to the concealed entity?"

Aurore's eyes scanned the surroundings, and she said, "That was my assumption, but why did the padre and his accomplices receive varying degrees of blessings before Lent? According to my understanding, it should have been an exchange through sacrifice."

Drawing on his malicious perspective, Lumian made a bold conjecture based on the previous cycle's events.

"A small sacrifice and a grand ritual? At the end of the Lent celebration, the padre, who had obtained extraordinary powers, no longer concealed his abnormality. It is evident that he was planning something significant!"

After pondering for a moment, Aurore said, "The Lent celebration could be a part of the grand ritual. Before the grand ritual, the padre made up his mind and offered his soul to the evil deity. With a certain amount of offerings, he obtained a plethora of blessings, completely revealing his true colors. By the looks of it, everyone in Cordu will be implicated once the Lent celebration commences. No one can escape."

The siblings exchanged glances and believed that their assumption was close to the truth.

However, if the abnormality erupted entirely from the Lent celebration until the twelfth night, how could they patiently wait until the final ritual to find the key to the cycle?

There was a high probability that everyone in the village, apart from those who died as sacrifices, would be corrupted!

"I am only a Sequence 7..." Aurore covered her face and said, "And you are only a Sequence 9."

They were facing such a dire situation!

Based on Lumian's account of the battle at the end of the Lent celebration and Aurore's recent experience hunting black-marked monsters, she knew that she was no match for the padre who had received a boon. She felt that she had to prepare in advance before she could confront Pierre Berry.

Lumian had fortunately defeated the mutated padre in a one-on-two battle.

Yet, preventing the padre and his accomplices from obtaining supernatural powers in advance could avert the twelfth night. The cycle would most likely restart in advance.

"Hell difficulty! Hell difficulty!" Aurore slammed the dining table with a mournful expression.

Without waiting for Lumian's response, she raised her hands and tousled her blonde locks, as if releasing pent-up emotions.

After a series of gestures, Aurore composed herself and calmly addressed Lumian, "Seek out the trio of foreigners tomorrow morning. You may disclose the abnormality in the village to them. Concealing our status as Beyonders is unnecessary."

"It's very dangerous..." Lumian instinctively replied.

Was it not natural for wild Beyonders to be considered culpable when they encountered officials?

Aurore let out a slow exhale and stated, "In this predicament, we can't care less. Other than the enigmatic lady, the trio are likely the most reliable individuals in the village. Moreover, each of them possesses strength that is on par with mine or even surpasses it. We are all in the same boat. Do not underestimate one another. Whether one is a wild Beyonder or an official, we must band together. As for the possibility of being hunted down by officials in the future, we shall cross that bridge when we come to it. For now, we must focus on escaping this loop."

Lumian had heard his sister use the phrase 'all in the same boat' before. He knew it implied that everyone was in a similar predicament and facing the same problem. If something were to happen, no one could escape. They had to stand together.

"Very well, I will seek them out tomorrow," he assented.

Aurore continued, "I now suspect that someone else is behind the padre and Pierre. He is the root of the corruption."

"Madame Pualis?" Lumian guessed. "Not only is she powerful, but she is also the padre's mistress. She can control him in secret and use him to influence the others in the village."

"But she has no apparent connection to Pierre." Aurore gazed at her brother, frowning in contemplation. "From the encounter with the three sheep, Pierre and Niort should have gained supernatural powers when they grazed the plains last October. At the very least, they should have acquired the corresponding knowledge. This is because they did not return midway, so it is impossible to obtain it elsewhere.

"This means that the abnormality in the village can be traced back to July and August of last year. Did you notice any anomalies?"

Lumian shook his head slowly.

"No."

He had initially thought that he was thoroughly acquainted with Cordu, but now, he realized that the undercurrents had been present for over half a year. This realization filled him with dread and made him feel like a stranger in his own home.

What is the problem? Lumian felt as though he was shrouded in layers of fog. He could never discern the truth of the matter.

Aurore continued, "It could also be that owl. Perhaps the legendary Warlock who died is not truly deceased. He may still be hiding somewhere in the village, or perhaps someone who we frequently encounter. He may have already discovered that I am a Warlock, and deliberately suppressed the legend from me. There are no such restrictions for ordinary individuals like you."

Aurore instructed in a low voice, "Notify me immediately the next time the owl pays a visit. I will get White Paper to track it and determine its whereabouts."

Lumian tersely acknowledged his sister's request, indicating that he too was waiting for the owl to appear.

This time, I will pluck all your feathers! He cursed inwardly.

Aurore pondered for a moment before issuing a third directive.

"Tomorrow afternoon, I shall extend an invitation to Madame Pualis. The administrator remains at his post, leaving the butler and the servants as the only occupants of the castle. You may clandestinely enter and scour for any clues. If you are successful in persuading the three foreigners in the morning to come, we can get their aid in this operation."

She dared not let White Paper venture to Madame Pualis's place whilst she was present. Nevertheless, she could not afford to be distracted whilst in Madame Pualis's company, thus she had to rely on her brother.

Lumian nodded before advancing the suggestion,

"I would advise against being alone with Madame Pualis. I fear she may seize the opportunity to deal with you."

"Shall we invite Nazélie and the others to an afternoon tea gathering?"

The more individuals present, the safer it would be.

"Indeed." Aurore deemed it a superior option.

She then remarked in a tone that was equal parts apprehensive and teasing, "You must exercise caution after infiltrating the castle. I do not wish to end up an aunt."

Lumian dared not retort, but gave her a glance that conveyed, "I am more concerned about your safety, for Madame Pualis will be with you."

During supper, Aurore set White Paper free to monitor the sheep pen. She discovered that the three sheep had licked the blood off their faces, preventing Shepherd Pierre Berry from detecting any anomaly.

Following that, Lumian resumed his education on mysticism until he fell asleep. He acquired mastery over many Hermes words, including "me," "name," "summon," "need," "light," and "Sun."

Light served as an incantation to activate the Integrity Brooch. There were three paragraphs in total.

......

Lumian awoke in the room shrouded in a faint gray mist.

He strode to the window and scrutinized the dark red "peak" and the dilapidated edifices that surrounded it once more.

I wonder what secrets lie here... Lumian muttered.

As he gazed, a thought suddenly struck him.

The ruins contained too many hazardous zones that he either could not or dared not approach. For instance, the lair of the three-faced monster. However, if he could summon a spirit world creature akin to White Paper and forge a pact with it, allowing it to infiltrate and observe, he ought to be able to gather more intelligence.

His vision, sense of smell, and hearing were all heightened by his Beyonder characteristics. In theory, they constituted a kind of supernatural power that could be conveyed upon White Paper.

As he ruminated, Lumian muttered to himself, The problem now is whether I can summon a spirit world creature in the dream ruins...

If I cannot, can I utilize our connection to bring it into the dream after summoning and forging the pact in reality?

What implications will the addition of a contracted creature have on the cycle? Can the corresponding spirit world be added to the mix? If not, once the summoning duration elapses, the contracted creature will return and the cycle will recommence...

The more Lumian thought about it, the more his head throbbed. He felt a profound reverence for mysticism. He could only hope to swiftly master a few languages that would enable him to complete a summoning ritual.

Without further ado, he seized his shotgun, the meager quantity of lead bullets that remained, and the sharp axe. He departed his home, traversed the wilderness, and re-entered the ruins.

Chapter 58: Cherishing Talent

After two nights of reconnaissance, Lumian discovered that the monsters inhabiting the outskirts of the dream ruins were fewer in number than he'd initially believed.

Having dispatched the skinless creature, the shotgun-wielding monstrosity, and the monster with the black mark, Lumian found little else in his search of the area. All he uncovered were a few twitching chunks of flesh.

Their sole purpose seemed to be as sustenance.

Yet Lumian had long since realized that he had no need for food within the dream.

Each time he entered, he felt invigorated and hunger-free. His energy would wane only after extended bouts of exploration or combat, replaced by a sensation akin to hunger. But it was a mild feeling that didn't necessitate additional nourishment.

Once the hunger became unbearable, Lumian's spiritual reserves and stamina would be all but depleted. Physically and mentally drained, he'd be forced to exit the dream.

After consuming a meal and recovering in the real world, he would return to the dreamscape, his vigor restored and hunger vanquished.

As he delved deeper, Lumian surveyed his surroundings for any signs of collapsed structures. He discovered a smattering of coins, but their combined value amounted to little more than a Louis d'or.

He found merely a few livre bleu inscribed with words.

Left with no alternative, Lumian decided to venture further into the ruins.

He cautiously navigated through the faint gray fog and oppressive darkness, weaving between the ruins' standing and fallen walls.

Suddenly, he stumbled upon a series of shallow, bizarre footprints.

It was difficult to classify them as footprints--the left one appeared ordinary, but the right seemed more akin to a palm imprint.

Another monster? Lumian stealthily trailed the footprints, all the while scrutinizing his environment and envisioning the ideal battlefield for various scenarios.

Eventually, he detected movement, prompting him to halt. He skirted around the area and scaled a toppled building, using the scattered, hefty rubble as cover.

Peering out cautiously, Lumian surveyed the source of the noise.

There, in the center of an uncluttered wasteland, stood a figure that could scarcely be described as human.

While vaguely humanoid in shape, closer inspection revealed a host of incongruities.

Two eyes occupied the space where a nose should have been. Above them, a mouth, and below, a pair of ears. The nose was nestled near the temples, while a leg and an arm replaced each shoulder. The lower half of the figure consisted of another leg and arm. The entire form seemed to have been haphazardly assembled from mismatched human components.

This revelation instantly clarified the nature of the peculiar tracks Lumian had been following.

The creature was garbed in a brown short-sleeved shirt and dark blue trousers, typical attire for lower-class Intisians. It paced the barren landscape, shoeless and hatless.

Lumian refrained from attacking, opting instead to observe patiently.

Before long, the monster raised an arm and contorted its body backward, its head making contact with the ground.

It's incredibly flexible... it would make a great dancer... Lumian mused sardonically.

As if on cue, the creature launched into a dance.

Its movements alternated between bold and graceful, sometimes bizarre and comical, yet always rhythmic.

More notably, the creature seemed to possess no skeletal structure--its limbs twisted and folded behind its back, and its legs and arms intertwined with ease.

As the Prankster King of Cordu Village, Lumian quickly devised a fitting moniker for his newfound quarry: Noodle Man!

Drawing on his observations, he began to formulate a strategy for the impending confrontation.

I mustn't assume that I can evade its attacks simply by maneuvering behind it. Noodle Man is capable of treating its front and back interchangeably...

I must be wary of its potential to constrict me like a serpent...

Though its vital points remain uncertain, it does have a head--I'll start by chopping off that...

As Lumian's thoughts raced, the monster's dance grew increasingly frenetic. It leaped skyward, limbs splayed as if attempting to embrace the heavens.

Lumian found himself somewhat entranced, an urge to sway his body in sync with the creature's movements taking hold.

He couldn't help but recall a melody his sister often played, the beat echoing through his mind: Dum-tch, dum-tch...

Suddenly, a warmth spread across his left pec as whispers seemed to reverberate in his skull.

His scalp prickled and body shuddered, as though the phantom voice that had once pushed him to the brink of madness was about to speak again.

Uh... Lumian hastily undid the buttons of his leather coat and gray shirt with his left hand and gazed at his bare chest.

The inky thorn mark over his heart had returned. The bluish-black symbol, consisting of an eye and writhing worms, materialized and bore down on the former.

Lumian froze in shock as his mind raced.

I hadn't even entered Cogitation, let alone held it for a few seconds...

Did Noodle Man's dance somehow trigger this?

Is there something related to mysticism about that dance? Some hidden magic?

Luckily, when the mark activates like this, the horrific whispers are nearly mute. It won't drive me to death's door or strip me of all restraint. But I'll suffer a skull-splitting migraine, uncontrollable tremors, and disorientation...

Since becoming a Hunter, Lumian had avoided entering that Cogitation state to tap into his special trait. The danger seemed far greater now.

Before, he had flirted with death and emerged unscathed. But now, hovering at death's door might cause him to lose all self-control, with irreparable consequences!

Worse, excessive exposure to that ghastly whisper might drive him irreparably insane, even if he survived and retained control.

He dared not take that risk again unless it was a last resort.

After two or three seconds, Lumian was no longer astonished by the thorn symbol being stimulated by Noodle Man's dance. An indescribable joy welled up in his heart.

He could endure such a negative state completely!

So, is there a chance that by learning Noodle Man's dance, I can dance it ahead of time to activate... uh--partially activate the special trait of my dream when hunting powerful monsters? Then, I'll charge at the stunned target and finish it off in a few moves.

Even if I can't fully trigger my special trait by dancing, it should be useful. I don't expect the target to give up resisting like the shotgun monster. It's enough to weaken them greatly... Lumian's thoughts raced. The more he watched the dancing Noodle Man, the more he found it pleasing.

The eyes on the nose, the mouth on the forehead, and the arm that acted as a leg. How could any of that be as beautiful as the magical dance?

In the blink of an eye, Lumian felt a strong sense of cherishing such talent, allowing him to find a reason.

Aurore said that we can't select talents with a uniform standard. So, why must it be a human and not a monster?

He decided not to hunt the Noodle Man before mastering the dance. He would come and observe it a few times every night to try to master it as soon as possible.

Of course, he planned to experiment with the other party first.

He wanted to see how the incomplete special trait would affect the monster!

Lumian quickly made up his mind. He didn't button his clothes and bared his left chest. He circled around the cover and jumped from the collapsed house to the wasteland.

Noodle Man's dance abruptly halted.

It began to tremble.

It turned to Lumian, prostrated itself, and lay on the ground.

Lumian stopped and didn't approach further, maintaining a safe distance.

Noodle Man didn't move.

Lumian nodded imperceptibly and muttered to himself, "Even when facing my 'special' trait that hasn't been fully activated, such a low-level monster will give up resisting and express its submission... I wonder what will happen to those at a higher level or those with Beyonder characteristics... What I can be sure of is that the effect won't be as good..."

Lumian looked at Noodle Man and smiled.

"Come on, dance again."

Noodle Man didn't dare look up. It was unknown if it understood what Lumian was saying.

Seeing that his sincere words were ineffective, Lumian emphasized, "Quick, dance for your pépé again!"

Noodle Man's body trembled as it continued to prostrate.

How can I communicate with it if monsters can't understand human language? Lumian felt a little helpless.

He immediately put his newly acquired Hermes vocabulary to use and said, "I. Need..."

Lumian didn't say another word and began a dance with his body movements.

The monster didn't even acknowledge him as it pressed its face against the soil of the wasteland.

"Are you an imbecile?" Lumian couldn't help but curse.

He felt his scolding was unjustified. After all, which monster he had encountered was not stupid?

Even the most intelligent shotgun monster was subdued by human intelligence!

At that moment, Lumian felt the warmth in his chest dissipate.

He instinctively lowered his head and noticed the thorn symbol and the bluish-black symbol vanish simultaneously.

Lumian quickly shifted his gaze towards Noodle Man.

Noodle Man happened to raise its head and looked at Lumian with its nose-located eyes.

The man and monster stared at each other, stunned for a second.

Thud, thud, thud. Lumian turned around and ran away.

Noodle Man leaped up and chased him ferociously.

Lumian was well acquainted with the area. His running speed was faster than the uncoordinated monster, so he easily shook it off and circled back to the wasteland to hide in his original location.

He didn't flee because he was afraid of the other party, but he was concerned that he might not be able to control himself if they really fought. He didn't know if he could find another dancing Noodle Man in the dream ruins.

Before learning that mysterious dance, he had no intention of hunting this strange monster.

After waiting for a while, Lumian saw Noodle Man return to the area.

He nodded and muttered to himself, As expected, monsters have their own territory. They are accustomed to moving around or patrolling a certain route... This is very similar to wild beasts...

Next, Lumian patiently waited for the dance that might not happen.

After nearly two hours, he had expended quite a bit of his spirituality and felt a little hungry.

Noodle Man, who had rested for a long time, walked to the center of the wasteland and raised its arm and leg.

Chapter 59: Again

Noodle Man danced once more, and Lumian confirmed that the mysterious dance could prevent the black thorn symbol on his chest from activating fully. It produced no terrifying sound, only an illusory whisper.

This was highly advantageous for Lumian's "special" trait in the dreamscape.

However, he discovered two problems:

Firstly, Noodle Man's dance moves were extremely difficult and violated the human body's structure. Only a monster with exaggerated flexibility like Noodle Man could complete them. Although Lumian was a Beyonder and a Hunter with a greatly enhanced body, he had no confidence in replicating them himself. He feared that dancing even once would result in ligament tears, muscle strains or worse, fractures.

Secondly, the dance stirred the surrounding powers of nature and depleted Lumian's spirituality considerably.

After watching it for the third time, Lumian sighed silently, realizing he needed rest. I have to go back and rest after watching this.

A Hunter's spirituality is really useless!

He was almost certain that the hidden existence corresponding to the thorn symbol was closely related to this dream ruin.

The padre had a black mark on his body, and there was a dancing monster that could activate the thorn symbol. It would be surprising to say that it had nothing to do with the hidden existence!

Lumian believed Aurore's guess even more, thinking of the similar symbol on the padre's chest and the dream ruins rebooting along with reality.

The key to resolving the loop might be hidden in the depths of this place, playing a vital role.

Is that why the mysterious lady kept hinting at me to unravel the secret of the dream ruins? The more Lumian thought about it, the more frustrated he became. He raised his left hand, which wasn't holding an axe, and made obscene gestures at the black thorn symbol on his chest.

Ignoring the question of whether the hidden existence could sense or see him, Lumian felt that the problem wouldn't deteriorate any further, given that he had already fallen into a time loop thanks to Him, and the people around him were becoming stranger and more dangerous.

After watching the dance for the third time, Lumian rubbed his somewhat empty head and left the ruins to return to his home on the other side of the wilderness, enduring the slight warmth in his chest.

Before leaving the dream, he attempted to consolidate the dance movements he had memorized and almost sprained his back, broke his knee ligaments and tore his calf muscles.

"Dogsh*t, this isn't something an ordinary human can do!" Lumian cursed and lay on the bed.

As his spirituality was greatly drained, he quickly fell asleep.

......

As Lumian awoke, the sky was just beginning to lighten. The sun had yet to rise, and the crimson moon had lost its luster.

He sat up slowly, feeling the satisfaction of a deep sleep. His exhausted spirituality had been perfectly replenished.

Walking to the window, Lumian drew back the curtains, allowing the light of dawn to flood the room.

In the next moment, his eyes were fixed on the figure larger than an ordinary owl, perched on an elm tree not far away, staring down at him.

Lumian quickly snapped out of his daze and opened his mouth.

"Aurore! Aurore!"

The suspect is here!

Quick, follow it!

Upon hearing the shout, the owl unfurled its wings and soared towards the edge of the village.

It gradually descended and vanished into the forest bordering Cordu Village.

Aurore, dressed in a white silk nightgown, entered Lumian's bedroom seconds later, her face contorted in irritation.

"Is it that owl again?"

Lumian gazed out of the window and replied, "Yes. Did White Paper manage to follow it?"

Aurore pulled at her long blonde tresses and spat, "Why does it always appear at such ungodly hours? I was sound asleep when you woke me up. By the time I could release White Paper, it had flown away."

Lumian shot back, "But you said you couldn't sleep well with something on your mind."

Aurore rolled her eyes at him and sneered, "Humans tend to feel nervous, uneasy, and fearful at the beginning. Once they get used to it, they become numb to it. Only by sleeping well can they remain alert and rational. If you don't sleep well, it will affect your mental state and signs of losing control will surface."

Lumian's expression was remorseful as he said, "We can only wait for the next time."

After a moment of contemplation, Aurore suggested, "Let's try to identify a pattern in its appearances. We can't keep waiting around all the time. We need to rest and cannot be on guard constantly."

Lumian reminisced about the first few sightings.

"It's always in the latter half of the night and early morning hours…"

"Why only during that period?" Aurore inquired further. "It seems more like an act than a pattern. Think carefully. Did you do anything or repeat the same actions on the corresponding nights when it appeared in the first half of the night?"

"I was exploring the dream ruins," Lumian admitted to his sister as he began to recall. "Before it first appeared, I killed the first monster in the dream. Before it appeared the second time, I activated the symbol on my chest through Cogitation and discovered what was special about me. The third time, I consumed the potion in the dream and became a Hunter. The fourth time, which is today, I discovered a way to activate my specialness in the dream to a certain extent while incurring less damage."

"How did you do it?" Aurore asked eagerly.

Lumian recounted Noodle Man's dance and his attempt.

As Aurore listened, she thought about the owl. After her brother finished speaking, she deliberated and said, "The owl's visits seem to be related to significant progress in your exploration of the dream."

Uh… Lumian thought for a moment before his eyes lit up.

"Indeed!

"The first time I killed a monster, the first time I displayed my specialness, the first time I consumed a potion and stepped onto the Beyonder path, the first time I found a way to make use of that specialness…

"Similar major developments also have a certain reaction in reality. That owl sensed it and came over to observe? Heh, it smelled something."

Aurore tersely acknowledged.

"In the future, we can deliberately create a similar opportunity to see if we can wait for that owl."

"I believe the next time it appears is after I master the mysterious dance and can truly use the specialness brought about by the symbol on my chest in my dream," Lumian pondered, revealing a malicious smile. "When the time comes, I'll inform you before entering the dream. Be prepared."

Aurore thought for a moment and nodded.

"I hope to figure out who the owl is related to and what role it plays in Cordu's abnormality."

Lumian seized the opportunity to inquire, "Aurore, uh, Grande Soeur, do you possess any knowledge about that particular dance? As you are aware, my understanding of mysticism is still rudimentary."

Aurore dragged a chair in front of Lumian's wooden table and settled in. After pondering for a moment, she responded, "Several notebooks have alluded to the existence of large-scale ritualistic magic during the early Fifth Epoch and throughout the Fourth Epoch."

"Those rituals entailed not only numerous sacrifices but also a multitude of participants. They employed specific dances to appease their desired entities in exchange for a response."

"In essence, it was a form of sacrificial ritual and magic. Dancing, from the outset, was believed to influence nature and facilitate communication with deities. Its effects resemble those of Beyonder language and the combination of herbs, essential oils, and other ingredients."

In Aurore and Lumian's world, history was divided into five epochs. The First Epoch was the Chaos Epoch, followed by the Dark Epoch, and then the Cataclysm Epoch. However, Aurore had heard from a pen pal that the Cataclysm Epoch was also known as the Glorious Epoch.

The Fourth Epoch was the Age of the Gods, or the Epoch of the Gods. The Fifth Epoch was the present day, which began 1,358 years ago and was referred to as the Iron Age.

Of the five epochs, the history of the first three remained unverifiable, with only myths and legends surviving. The Fourth Epoch occasionally yielded documents, information, notebooks, ruins, mausoleums, ancient cities, and so on. Nevertheless, history seemed shrouded in a thick fog, with only a faint outline discernible. The theological texts of the seven Churches often recounted stories from the Fourth Epoch, which served as the only source of illumination.

After listening to his sister's explanation, Lumian hazarded a guess.

"That Noodle Man employs dance to appease the hidden entity that corresponds to the thorn symbol. Is it hoping to elicit a response or a boon?

"Perhaps a significant portion of its ritual is absent, resulting in an extremely weak effect. Or is the problem with the dream ruins causing a failure that can only trigger a tiny fraction of the power contained in the symbol within my body?"

"Heh heh, it's as if I'm a god. Having witnessed Noodle Man's dance and being pleased by it, I decided to highlight the symbol and offer a certain response."

However, Lumian had no control over this. It was an automatic reaction of the thorn symbol.

Aurore smiled and replied, "You are more like a carrier of that symbol, a tool, in a sense."

She paused thoughtfully and said, "I suspect that the dance was specifically invented to please or communicate with the hidden entity that corresponds to the thorn symbol. Otherwise, it wouldn't have elicited a reaction from the symbol…

"Furthermore, based on your description, this is not something an ordinary person can accomplish. Only Beyonders with special enhancements can do so.

"Although I am familiar with the names of the corresponding Sequence 9 and Sequence 8 pathways, I have a certain level of understanding of them. None of them can execute that kind of dance, and Noodle Man's performance does not seem like that of a higher Sequence. Otherwise, you would not have been able to escape."

"Perhaps it is not from the 22 pathways, but rather a boon from a hidden entity?" Lumian recalled the mysterious lady's words.

Aurore looked out the window and pursed her lips.

"I wonder if this has anything to do with the Circle Inhabitant or a power equivalent to Sequence 9 or Sequence 8?"

"Probably." Lumian suddenly laughed. "Let me name it. Noodle Man, Circle Inhabitant's corresponding Sequence 9!"

Aurore couldn't help but look up at the ceiling.

The siblings chatted for a while before heading downstairs for breakfast.

After studying Hermes until past ten, Lumian departed with important items.

Chapter 60: "Dancer"

Lumian was in no rush to track down Ryan, Leah, and Valentine. Instead, he headed straight for the Ol' Tavern, hoping to get lucky.

If that enigmatic woman showed up, he had a slew of questions for her!

Accepting her gift had bound him to some future cost. He might as well seize the chance to gain more benefits, as Aurore had advised.

The instant Lumian stepped into the Ol' Tavern, his eyes sparkled.

The mysterious woman sat in her usual corner seat, two glasses of emerald absinthe before her.

Two glasses? She knew I'd come? Lumian approached her with a smile and greeted her.

"Good morning."

She wore a white blouse with vine-leaf patterns at the collar and a beige ankle-length dress, a light-red beret beside her.

Lumian, no stranger to his sister's fashion magazines, recognized this as Trier's latest trend.

She glanced up at him.

"It's getting late. Almost noon."

This is to fit your schedule, isn't it? Lumian thought, annoyed.

But seeing the enigmatic woman brought him a strange sense of calm.

He sat and cut to the chase.

"I've been through a lot lately."

She slid a glass of absinthe his way. The swirling green liquid was like a beacon of joy.

She neither invited him to speak nor silenced him.

Lumian sipped the absinthe, finding it rich and invigorating, with a subtle bitter note. It tasted different from any absinthe he'd had before.

"What's this?" he asked, puzzled.

"Another kind of absinthe—quite popular in Trier these days. To differentiate it from the original, people call it absinthe fennel. Authors, painters, and poets are particularly fond of it." She took a small sip.

The green liquid in the clear glass seemed to possess a hypnotic hue.

Absinthe's main ingredients were wormwood, fennel, and anise. Different producers used slightly varied recipes, some even adding lemon essential oils.

Lumian didn't understand her motives. Had she traveled to Trier just to bring back absinthe fennel?

He didn't ask. Instead, he recounted recent events, both real and dreamed.

She sipped from her small cup of absinthe fennel, listening quietly to Lumian's account.

"That's about it. Can I learn that mysterious dance as quickly as possible?" he asked, bluntly.

He didn't bother inquiring about the loop's key or the dream's secret. Experience told him he wouldn't get a straight answer.

The woman swirled her emerald liquid and smiled.

"Without a significant boost in flexibility, you'll never master it.

"You could force yourself through a portion, but you'd risk ligament and muscle tears. How would you hunt monsters then?"

Lumian was attuned to the subtext in others' words.

"Is there a way to greatly increase my flexibility?"

She chuckled. "That's for you to figure out."

"…" Lumian was stumped by her cryptic hint.

If she were a less mysterious acquaintance, he'd demand, "Explain yourself! Don't make me kneel and beg!"

As if reading his mind, she smiled and added, "The solution to your flexibility lies within you."

"Huh?" Lumian looked perplexed.

She sipped her absinthe fennel and sighed.

"Didn't your sister teach you ritualistic magic?"

Lumian noticed the strange emotion flicker in her eyes once again.

"She did." His heart quickened. "Pray to myself?"

She assessed him and laughed.

"Who do you think you are? What good would praying to you do?

"You can only summon the weakest creatures from the spirit world. Your spiritual perception improves with your body."

Danger intuition, for example? Lumian grasped the gist of her words.

Though Hunters' spirituality was enhanced, it focused on spiritual perception and fell short in ritualistic magic and other mystical matters.

"So, what do I need to do?" Lumian pressed.

The lady sighed wearily. "You've studied dualistic ritual law, haven't you?"

"Yes." Lumian nodded.

The lady sighed again. "Luckily you have a sister. Otherwise, I'd have to teach you all this mystic mumbo jumbo. Too tiresome."

You mean you didn't tell me about ritual magic, Cogitation, Spirit Vision, contracted creatures, or magic languages because it was too much hassle? You just showed up after Aurore finished teaching me? Lumian felt rage bubbling up inside him.

He took a couple of deep breaths and said, "Dualistic rituals require items closely tied to deities or supernatural beings, but I don't have any…"

His voice trailed off as a thought struck him.

The woman smirked and said, "Oh yes, you do.

"Don't you remember?"

Lumian jabbed a finger at his chest.

"The thorn symbol and the bluish-black symbol?"

The lady nodded before reminding, "Forget the bluish-black symbol. The key to a dualistic ritual is channeling the divine power in the object. If its power decreases, the balance in your body will be disrupted. And when that happens…"

She left the sentence hanging but her expression told Lumian all he needed to know.

In Aurore's usual grim words: "No hope. Just wait for death!"

"Is the bluish-black symbol protecting me from corruption?" Lumian knew enough about the mysticism to recognize his current state as corruption.

"It's the great existence I mentioned protecting you," the woman said solemnly. "Once you solve the secret of the dream ruins, I'll tell you His honorific name. You can pray to Him directly."

Did this great existence seal the corruption symbolized by the thorn in my heart, preventing it from corrupting me completely? Lumian didn't know if this great existence was good or evil, or had sinister intentions, but he felt an odd affinity with Him on this.

He thought for a moment and guessed, "Use a dualistic ritual to steal the power of the thorn symbol?

"If its power decreases, the corruption will weaken and the seal strengthen?"

"How can you call it stealing?" the lady retorted. "This is appealing to an entity for a boon. It just so happens He has some of His power nearby. The response follows the law of proximity. Thanks to the seal from the great existence and barriers attenuating it, the entity's true form won't sense it."

Only mystics like you who speak in riddles understand how to sugarcoat it… What's the difference between this and stealing? Lumian thought sourly.

From the lady's explanation of divine boon and abnormal pathways, he asked shrewdly,

"Through the dualistic ritual, can I appeal to the power behind the thorn symbol and ask it to grant me the ability to greatly increase my flexibility?"

"Something like that," the lady said. "To be precise, ask it to grant you the power of Dancer."

"Dancer?" Lumian thought of Noodle Man's performance.

The lady took a sip of absinthe and said, "For Beyonder pathways beyond the standard 22, we classify them into Sequence 9 to Sequence 0 for convenience.

"In a way, this Sequence division follows the rules of this world.

"Does Dancer correspond to Sequence 9 of the thorn symbol, just as Circle Inhabitant corresponds to its Sequence 4?" Lumian fired off. "Can it boost my flexibility and improve my mystic skills, allowing me to easily grasp that mysterious dance?"

The lady smiled in relief. "As expected, with a foundation in mysticism, communication is much easier. No need for me to explain further."

Lumian asked eagerly, "Then what are Sequences 8, 7, 6 and 5 of the thorn symbol?"

"Sequence 8 is Alms Monk, and Sequence 7 is Contractee. Gosh, why do you want to know so much? Master the ritual first and strive to become a Dancer as soon as possible." The woman was losing patience.

Alms Monk… Contractee… These names instantly clicked for Lumian.

Alms Monk referred to certain members of the various churches in reality.

The Eternal Blazing Sun Church was rife with factions, each with their own beliefs. Two main groups stood out; the Order of Preachers and the Brotherhood Minor, also known as the Alms Monk Brotherhood.

The former was made up of clergymen and the Purifiers of the Inquisition who were dedicated to the cruel persecution and purification of heretics, cultists, and wild Beyonders, all in the name of promoting the orthodox teachings of the Eternal Blazing Sun.

The latter, however, were mainly concentrated in the cloisters, with a few clergymen among their ranks. They espoused temperance, begging for food and ascetic training, preaching in various poor places, all with the aim of spreading the faith of the Eternal Blazing Sun.

At the mention of the Alms Monk, Lumian immediately thought of missionaries, asceticism, and special ritualistic magic.

As for Contractee, the first thing that came to mind was the black mark on the padre and the mouth orifice monster.

Aurore explained that it might be a mark left behind by a special contract.

"Wait, the monster I killed was a Contractee?" Lumian asked in surprise.

I actually killed a monster equivalent to a Sequence 7?

The lady nodded slightly and said, "Yes, Contractees use special contracts and godhood provided by that existence as witnesses to obtain different powers from various creatures. One contract corresponds to one ability.

"Whether they're powerful or not depends on the abilities they obtain and how many they have. It's not impossible for ordinary people to kill them if they take the wrong path.

"In fact, similar situations occur in the Beyonder domain. It's common for Beyonders who aren't skilled in combat to be killed by those of an inferior Sequence.

"Ability is important, as is intelligence. Preparation in advance is equally significant."

Chapter 61: Description

The more Lumian listened to the lady in front of him, the more he concurred.

He was uncertain about what would happen at a higher Sequence. Among the few Beyonder creatures he had interacted with, the threat posed by the fellow with the vortex-shaped proboscis was far inferior to the monster carrying a shotgun.

Although he had become a Beyonder, significantly improving his close combat ability and exploitation of the environment, the problem primarily lay with the Contractee monster.

Firstly, it did not display a relatively strong pursuit ability. Secondly, it lacked long-range attacks. Thirdly, its invisibility ability was not ridiculous. It was completely countered by a Hunter's grasp of the surrounding environment and minute traces.

Moreover, it had the common problem of monsters. It did not have high intelligence and was not as combat-intelligent as the shotgun monster. It had easily stepped into the enemy's trap.

With all of this combined, the final outcome was obvious. Lumian just never expected it to be equivalent to a Sequence 7.

He didn't even compare it to the shotgun monster, recognizing the vast difference between the two. The shotgun monster was a force to be reckoned with, while the mouth orifice monster was weak.

Ability, intelligence, preparation, improvisation, environmental factors... There are too many variables that can affect the outcome of a battle...

Lumian concluded inwardly and asked without much hope, "Can I directly pray for Contractee powers?"

The lady chuckled. "That's a good way to kill yourself."

She casually explained, "In theory, it's possible. After all, the power sealed in your body isn't limited to the Sequence 7 equivalent. But can your body withstand such a tremendous boon or rather, corruption? If you don't mind turning into a monster, a puppet of that existence, or transforming into another creature, then go ahead. Tsk, then it won't be long before I see you personally turning your sister into a sacrifice."

Lumian's hair stood on end from the woman's words, and a chill ran down his spine, realizing that he wasn't ready to advance beyond his current level.

He cautiously asked, "So, the most significant boon I can handle right now is a Dancer?"

"Yes, that's why I waited for you to become a Beyonder and digest some of it before telling you about it," the woman explained, taking another sip of her green liquid. "Only when your mind, spirituality, and body have improved significantly will you have a chance of resisting the corruption attached to the boon. Then, you can slowly control the power.

"As your Soul Body and Body of Heart and Mind strengthen, and your body adapts to the slight changes brought about by the power of the boon, you can consider Alms Monk."

For Lumian, the most crucial thing was to learn the mysterious dance. Initiating the incomplete activation of the thorn symbol would significantly improve his ability to explore the dream ruins. Therefore, he nodded slightly, no longer thinking about Alms Monk and Contractee.

"How should I pray?"

He had already learned the duality ritual, but he still didn't know the target's honorific name, domain, and corresponding ingredients.

"Ahem," the lady coughed.

Then, she spoke solemnly, "What I'm about to say shall leave my mouth and enter your ears... You must not tell anyone, or you'll harm them."

Leave my mouth and enter your ears... This is a sentence Aurore likes to write... Has this lady read one of her novels? Lumian thought.

"I understand."

He thought for a moment and asked, "Will anything go wrong from hearing it?"

The lady took a sip of absinthe fennel and smiled.

"When did you have the illusion that there's nothing wrong with you?"

Lumian was stunned for a moment before looking down at his left pec.

The lady scoffed.

"You belong to the group of individuals who are on the brink of being corrupted. Luckily, the mark left by that great existence was activated, and the corresponding power descended upon you, sealing the source of corruption and establishing balance.

"Next, you will perform a ritual to confront the power within the seal and pray for the corresponding blessings. It is akin to proactively withstanding a certain level of corruption.

"So, why should you be afraid of minor issues that you hear?"

The more I hear, the more I feel that there's a huge problem... Lumian wasn't too confident.

The lady shook her head and smiled.

"Do not fret. When I reveal the corresponding words, I will provide you with a sufficiently concealed environment and secure protection. In the future, it would be best to perform the ritual in the ruins, where there is gray fog and the protection of the great existence. It will not directly draw the attention of that entity.

"Furthermore, before the ritual, scramble every segment and description. Attempt not to piece them together and analyze them in a complete manner. Otherwise, heh..."

She chuckled and did not elaborate on the outcome, but Lumian could imagine what would occur.

Observing that he did not inquire further, the woman nodded slightly.

"Let us commence.

"The first part is the Power of Inevitability.

"Using it is sufficient. It corresponds with your black thorn symbol. The complete name of that being is not something you can comprehend at the moment. Even I must provide some concealment before daring to contemplate it."

For some reason, Lumian felt the light around him diminish slightly, but he was unsure.

At that moment, the woman controlled her expression and said solemnly, "The second part is:

"You are the past, the present, and the future.

"You are the reason, the result, and the process..."

As the lady enunciated each word with precision, Lumian felt his senses spin. He realized that a vortex of dark wind was enveloping him.

The table, on which his absinthe fennel rested, writhed as if imbued with a life force of its own.

Suddenly, a sharp sound echoed.

An ebony worm, as long as an adult's index finger, slithered out of the wooden board, and an ominous aura spread instantaneously.

Before Lumian could observe the worm's features, the woman sitting across from him lowered her cup filled with the green liquid and slammed it onto the grotesque creature, reducing it to a pulpy mess.

Next, the woman produced a patterned napkin, wiped the glass's base clean, and wrapped the worm's remains in it.

She took another sip of the absinthe fennel, as if nothing untoward had occurred, and emphasized, "Remember, the first and second parts must be recited in ancient Hermes. Jotun, Dragonese, and Elvish are acceptable as well."

Similar to how the initial "I" in the rite that worships oneself cannot be in Hermes... Lumian nodded to indicate his comprehension.

Although he had always been audacious, he felt slightly discomfited and uneasy when confronted with the strange phenomena that kept manifesting during their conversation. His heart raced, but the enigmatic woman acted as if she had merely detected some impurities in their meal. She continued,

"The third part can be spoken in Hermes. The text is as follows:

"I implore you,

"I beseech your benediction.

"I plead with you to grant me the power of Dancer.

"Remember, the three sentences are progressive."

These words did not elicit a new environmental shift. The anomalies that had caused Lumian's unease and trepidation gradually subsided.

Lumian committed them to memory earnestly and followed the woman's instructions to scramble the words, to prevent any potential issues.

The woman savored the remaining absinthe fennel with satisfaction.

"The rest of the ritual is similar to common ritualistic magic."

"The corresponding ingredients are gray amber, tulips, cloves, and deer musk. Choose any two to make candles. The remaining two can be used as herbs, essential oil, and extract during the ritual."

Lumian furrowed his brow as he recalled the dualistic ritual he had learned.

"The spot representing the deity should have an item that's closely related to the deity, but my thorn symbol is on my chest. I can't skin it, right? Besides, I doubt it's useful even if I skin it."

The power was sealed in his heart and Spirit Body.

The woman nodded slightly.

"Didn't I tell you to make candles?

"When making the candle, take 5 milliliters of blood from your chest. It doesn't matter if it's more or less. In any case, fuse it into the material and let it become a part of the candle.

"In the ritual, the candle is placed in the deity's location. There's only one candle.

"Because of your blood, the candle is 'awakened' by ancient Hermes. After becoming a symbol, it will point directly at you. Then, with the subsequent description, it will activate the power sealed in you to a certain extent."

It feels like a special variant of the dualistic ritual. Aurore didn't mention that it could be done like this, so not many people know about it... Lumian thought for a moment and asked, "Can I use perfume with gray amber?"

He remembered that his sister had it, and she liked to call gray amber 'ambergris.'

The woman nodded. "Sure, use it like an essential oil."

I possess the gray amber in that case. I have some cloves at home... Lumian pondered where he could acquire tulips and deer musk.

After much contemplation, he could only come up with three possibilities:

Firstly, Aurore, being a Warlock, might have already prepared the required materials. Secondly, the materials could be found at the administrator's residence. Thirdly, the padre's house could be a potential source.

Lumian decided to inform his sister about the ritual and break down the instructions into individual words. He planned to learn the corresponding ancient Hermes and Hermes words from her and inquire about the availability of the materials.

If she didn't have them, he would explore other options.

As the lady was about to depart, Lumian hastily questioned, "What was that lizard that crawled out of the deputy padre's mouth?"

The lady smiled and replied, "I cannot explain it to you."

Lumian struggled to maintain his composure and thought, Why not just say you don't want to tell me...

After the lady left, Lumian retrieved the pen and paper he had brought and jotted down the ritual instructions in a disordered manner. He then numbered them in the correct sequence.

...

Upon leaving Ol' Tavern, Lumian scoured the village for the trio of foreigners.

It didn't take long before he heard a faint tinkling sound.

Lumian's lips curved into a smile as he quickened his pace. As expected, Leah wore two bells on her veil and boots, Ryan donned a dark bowler hat, and Valentine had sprinkled powder on his head.

Lumian had an urge to open his arms and exclaim, "My cabbages, I missed you so much!" but he quickly remembered that he had not interacted with the foreigners in this cycle.

He kneaded his face to appear more serious and strode towards Ryan and the others.

As he brushed past them, he lowered his voice and said, "I know who you're searching for."

Ryan, Leah, and Valentine gaped at him in astonishment.

Lumian didn't pause; he continued walking forward.

The three foreigners exchanged glances, suppressed their peculiar expressions, and followed behind Lumian as if nothing had happened.

Chapter 62: Date

Lumian halted at the forest's edge, a short distance from his house, and glanced back at Leah and the others.

This spot was quite secluded, with no villagers passing through. The forest was thinly populated, making it easy to spot anyone hiding nearby.

As the tinkling sounds drew nearer, Leah asked with a smile, "How do you know we're looking for someone?"

Lumian remained silent. He pulled out the essential item he had brought with him.

The livre bleu from home!

He lifted the item and showed Ryan and the others the pages where some words had been cut out.

Without hesitation, Ryan nodded and said, "So you wrote the letter for help."

They had never mentioned a help letter in Cordu, let alone detailed that the letter was assembled from words cut from a livre bleu.

Unless the other party had a key informant in Bigorre, it had to be the letter writer.

Leah instinctively looked around.

The two small silver bells hanging from the veil above her head oddly didn't make a sound.

Valentine was about to ask what was weird about the people around him when Ryan asked, puzzled, "How can you be sure that we're here because of that letter?"

You told me yourself… Lumian smiled.

"There are very few foreigners who come to Cordu to begin with. Even fewer who don't buy wool, cheese, and lambs and only wander around the village to chat with people.

"Besides, I didn't say anything. I just showed you this livre bleu."

Realization hit Leah, and she laughed.

"So it's just a test."

"That's a brilliant idea. Those who don't know the letter won't understand your intentions, so they won't be too suspicious. At most, they'll think it's a prank, and you're the Prankster King of Cordu." Ryan nodded slightly.

This seemingly innocent line revealed that the trio had gleaned something from chatting in Cordu over the past few days. At the very least, they had identified the more prominent villagers and taken appropriate measures.

Lumian immediately flashed a teasing smile.

"You believed it? You seriously believed it?"

Seeing Ryan and the others' astonishment, he added, "I was just joking. I'll tell you the real reason later."

Leah gritted her teeth.

"As expected of the Prankster King of Cordu. Aren't you afraid that we won't believe what you're about to say?"

"You can choose not to believe it." Lumian wore an indifferent expression. "Or you can verify it yourself."

Valentine, visibly dissatisfied, asked anxiously, "In your letter, you mentioned that the people around you are getting weirder. What's so weird about them?"

Lumian exclaimed and cracked his knuckles.

"There's plenty. To be precise, the padre believing in an evil god, Shepherd Pierre Berry turning people into sheep and herding them back to Cordu. Madame Pualis rides a demon-drawn carriage through the wilderness. When the deputy padre sleeps, a translucent lizard-like creature crawls out of his mouth. Naroka is clearly not dead, but she wants to go to Paramita. Louis Lund, the administrator's male butler, has just given birth to a baby. The owl from the Warlock legends flies back to the village from time to time…"

Ryan, Leah, and Valentine grew increasingly shocked as they listened. They didn't want to believe it, but they felt that the kid before them couldn't invent so many absurd stories.

They were all seasoned official investigators who had dealt with numerous Beyonder incidents, many involving evil gods and mystic arts. However, none were as ludicrous or exaggerated as what they were hearing now. Only the padre believing in evil gods sounded normal.

More importantly, most of the incidents they had previously handled stood independently. At most, two or three would occur simultaneously. Moreover, they were closely related to each other, but Cordu had too many horrifying abnormalities!

What kind of place is this? Almost instantly, similar thoughts raced through Leah, Ryan, and Valentine's minds.

They suspected they had inadvertently entered the legendary Abyss or Hell!

When Lumian stopped, Leah couldn't help but ask, "You're not joking, are you?"

Was there anyone normal in this village?

Lumian smiled.

"I haven't finished speaking. There's another abnormality.

"This is the third or fourth time I've talked to you about something like this. Ryan, Leah, Valentine, my cabbages."

Ryan, Leah, and Valentine weren't surprised that Lumian knew their names. It was inevitable when they had been chatting in the village.

They were even more astonished and puzzled by the first half of the sentence.

"What do you mean?" Valentine asked with a frown.

"What I mean is that we've been repeatedly experiencing the past few days. In other words, we've fallen into a time loop." Lumian didn't let the three foreigners guess and provided a standard answer.

Without waiting for Ryan and the others to question him, he briefly mentioned what they had experienced together and finally said, "Think back carefully. Was it really March 29th when you entered the village?"

Leah and the others racked their brains.

After more than ten seconds, Valentine revealed a pained expression.

"My sense of time is hazy. I can't remember the exact date of the previous two months… But I remember. I remember celebrating my youngest son's birthday before I set off. His birthday is…"

Valentine raised his head and blurted out in shock, "April 10th!"

In other words, the actual date now is mid-to-late April? Judging from the looks of it, the number of cycles I went through before I had my memories wiped can't be more than a couple. It can't even be more than once… Yes, that was the first cycle. The loop hadn't even begun, so I could send a letter without the river's help. When the loop happened and time rewound, the corresponding memories would be replaced, but material objects beyond the range wouldn't be able to turn back? Lumian had a new theory about the letter.

He nodded imperceptibly and said to Ryan and Leah, "You can also wire the outside world and get the current date in a way that won't raise any red flags.

"When the time comes, you'll believe me."

"Yes, yes! Send a telegram!" Valentine snapped out of his stupor. "Ask the higher-ups for help!"

Lumian looked at him as if he were a fool.

"Ask for help?

"In the face of such a bizarre time loop, what do you officials usually do?"

Ryan fell silent for a moment before saying, "Stamp it out directly to prevent the corruption from spreading."

"Therefore, asking for help now is as good as suicide." Lumian smiled and shrugged.

Valentine replied fervently, "According to the rules, we have to report back ASAP. I'm willing to sacrifice myself for this!"

"…" Lumian was stunned.

Such people exist?

No, I have to get rid of this guy immediately, or everyone will die together!

Fortunately, Leah and Ryan clearly felt that they could still be saved. They exchanged a glance and nodded.

Ryan patted Valentine's shoulder and said, "Stay calm. We still don't know what's going on. Perhaps there's a better solution.

"If we really can't save ourselves, we'll report it to the higher-ups."

"That's right," Lumian hurriedly added. He recounted the discoveries and speculations minus the symbol on his chest, the dream ruins, the mysterious lady, and the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society. Finally, he said, "The key to the problem most likely happens on the twelfth night. We have to survive until then. Only then can we truly resolve the issue in the next cycle."

Seeing that he had revealed so many details and that they could verify them all, Ryan and the others were completely inclined to believe him. Valentine calmed down and remembered his wife and children.

Leah exhaled. "No wonder you know us and know we're looking for someone."

It turned out that they had communicated in a previous cycle.

She subconsciously touched the silver bell above her head, wanting to do a divination, but she held back when she recalled the abnormalities Lumian had described.

She didn't want to blow up because of a divination that shouldn't be done before the real investigation began.

Ryan thought for a moment and said to Lumian, "You're telling us this because you want us to cooperate with you and your sister?"

"Very astute, my cabbage." Lumian laughed and said seriously, "First, wire the outside world, saying that your investigation has made some progress. The padre seems to have a certain issue. Then, ask what the lizard-like thing that crawls out of a mouth is. This is the least likely to cause a destructive blowout of all the abnormalities. Ah, right, confirm the real date and be careful in how it's done. Don't let anyone outside suspect anything.

"Secondly, my sister will invite Madame Pualis to my house for afternoon tea this afternoon. I hope that you can sneak into the administrator's mansion with me and do a search.

"As for the future, it depends on the information we obtain today."

Ryan, Leah, and Valentine looked at each other and felt that Lumian's request wasn't too unreasonable.

This was what they would have done.

The four of them arrived at the village square. Ryan went to wire the outside world while Leah, Valentine, and Lumian waited under the elm tree outside.

After calming down, Leah glanced at Lumian and asked curiously, "You're a Beyonder, and so is your sister?"

"Yes." Lumian didn't hide it.

Leah laughed. "Aren't you afraid of being arrested by us?"

"We're in the same boat now. In the face of an emergency where the boat is about to sink, we can only help each other." Lumian shrugged. "As for the future, we'll talk about it later. It's still unknown if we can escape this loop."

"That's true." Leah turned her head and looked at Valentine.

The reason why she brought up this topic was to let her companion understand this and not do anything stupid.

Valentine's expression remained cold as he nodded imperceptibly.

Leah then asked about something she was more concerned about.

"Why can you keep the memories from before?"

"I'm not telling you." Lumian laughed.

Without waiting for Leah's response, he spread his hands and said, "I'm just joking. Actually, I'm not sure either. I somehow retained my memories, and it's only from the last two cycles."

"Think back to what happened back then. Perhaps this is very important," Leah said after some thought.

Lumian said sincerely, "I've been thinking, but I haven't figured out anything. Perhaps I'll only suddenly realize when I encounter something."

Leah was about to help analyze the situation when Ryan, who had received a reply, walked out of the administration building.

Chapter 63: Shocking News

Leah and Valentine asked Ryan in unison, "How is it?"

Although they had already believed Lumian's words, it was inevitable for people to hope for luck. They still held onto the hope that perhaps the problem wasn't that serious because the kid wasn't knowledgeable enough to exaggerate.

Ryan looked around and saw that there was no one else around the elm tree. He spoke in a low voice, "I was afraid to ask too directly. I only know that the real date is already late April. I don't know the exact date."

Leah and Valentine fell silent.

They had indeed fallen into a strange time loop!

Judging from the various files and information, this was definitely not something the three of them should face or deal with.

They were seasoned Beyonders who had handled many Beyonder incidents. It was the first time they had encountered such a serious and abnormal situation.

Leah couldn't help but turn to look at Lumian. "What kind of place is Cordu?"

There were abnormalities everywhere, each more exaggerated than the last!

"I don't know either." Lumian had an "innocent" expression. "Before the loop, this place was beautiful and the people were simple. Everyone was normal and hospitable."

He didn't tell the three foreigners that the person standing before them was also one of the abnormalities.

Ryan sighed and said, "I've never encountered so many abnormalities at once, and every one of them is serious."

"This is the most dangerous situation I've ever faced," echoed Valentine.

Lumian was already a little numb to this. He sneered and said, "It's normal that you haven't encountered it before, because those who have encountered one are dead."

"…" Leah looked at him with a smile. "Don't say anything if you can't say something nice. People like you won't survive past childhood elsewhere."

"Killed in the cradle?" Lumian mocked himself and asked Ryan, "Did you get an answer about the deputy padre?"

Ryan nodded.

"In the past few years, similar legends have emerged in various places across the Northern and Southern Continents.

"Legend has it that Heaven banished a group of sinful elves to the ground. They can only reside within human bodies, hoping to redeem their sins and gain absolution before returning to Heaven.

"In some versions of the legend, these elves appear as translucent lizards.

"However, the elf I'm referring to is not the ancient elf race. It is more akin to a mixture of fairies and various spirits."

Again in recent years? Lumian recalled that the legend of Madame Night had only surfaced recently.

What was wrong with this world?

He pondered for a moment before asking, "Did they specify which deity's Heaven it is?"

Ryan shook his head.

"What's remarkable is that every person who claims to have seen an elf believes it is from the kingdom of their local deity."

The local deity referred to the orthodox gods of the local faith.

Heavens of different deities? Lumian gazed up at the azure sky.

Did that lizard-like elf come from the sky?

However, according to Aurore, beyond the sky lay the cosmos. Each star represented a world.

So, were these extraterrestrial beings?

Or were they from an astral plane beyond mysticism?

As Lumian's thoughts raced, he asked curiously, "In some versions of the legend, these elves appear as translucent lizards. What about the other details?"

Ryan shook his head once more.

"That's all they could uncover in a short period. They may need to communicate with headquarters for more information."

Leah pondered and spoke, "I am familiar with the legend of elves."

"I once met a native of Lenburg who shared that farmers in many regions of the south-central zone have reported mischievous fairies in recent years. These creatures known as Alpes would vandalize their homes and fields or play pranks on them."

The south-central zone referred to the area where Lenburg, Masin, Segar, and other small countries were located. It also included a few areas in the Intis Republic, the Loen Kingdom, and the Feynapotter Kingdom.

Most of them were located in the highlands, mountains, forests, areas filled with ruins and legends.

Lumian listened attentively and concluded, This is not an isolated phenomenon…

"Each elf seems to have their unique way of causing trouble," Ryan mused. "And the lizards that inhabit human bodies are perhaps the most malevolent. It is uncertain if they are the most dangerous. With so many abnormalities in Cordu, the parasitic elf shouldn't be an isolated phenomenon. Perhaps someone wants to use it to control the deputy padre."

Very clear line of thinking… Lumian looked at the villagers who were returning home after finishing their work and said to Leah and the others, "Meet me behind the hill where the administrator's castle is at 3:30 p.m.

"Will you join me to search for clues?"

"Of course," Ryan agreed.

Leah, however, called out to Lumian before he left, "Is that all? You should brief us on the situation in the castle, its inhabitants, and Madame Pualis' abnormality. We cannot explore and search without preparation."

Lumian did not want to recall Madame Pualis' matters, but he had to admit that Leah's request made sense. He had to endure the discomfort and tell them the entire story.

Ryan and the others were mentally prepared, but they still looked a little dull upon hearing the tale.

Leah lightened the mood with her tinkling laughter.

"It does not matter to me. I might experience such a thing in the future. This is an opportunity that most men never encounter. You must cherish it."

However, Valentine ignored her joke and whispered with a cold expression, "All of this needs to be purified—purified!"

Lumian did not want to provoke Valentine and waved his hand.

"See you in the afternoon."

After taking a few steps, Lumian turned around to look at Ryan warily and asked, "Did Bertrand have any knowledge of the contents of your telegram?"

Bertrand was responsible for the telegraph, and if he knew about the date and the legend of the elves, it meant that the administrator knew as well. And if the administrator knew, Madame Pualis would know too.

"Don't worry," Ryan said reassuringly. "We have a secret code. He won't be able to decipher it."

Lumian breathed a sigh of relief only then and left the village square, heading back to his building.

As he walked a distance away, he spotted Ava Lizier herding a flock of white geese back home.

"Hey there, isn't this our Spring Elf?" Lumian tried to push the bloody and cruel scenes from the Lent celebration out of his mind and greeted Ava with his usual quip.

Ava seemed a little embarrassed.

"I haven't been chosen yet!"

Her exquisite facial features made her grayish-white dress look less rustic.

"That won't be a problem," Lumian said with a smile. "Reimund and I will help you campaign for votes."

Ava looked surprised. "You don't know?"

"What don't I know?" Lumian's heart skipped a beat.

Had something happened in the village that wasn't a part of the "historical" process?

Ava observed his expression and suspected that he was teasing her.

After a few seconds, the girl frowned in concern and said, "Reimund's missing. You didn't know?"

"Huh?" Lumian was so shocked that he couldn't hide his expression as usual.

In the previous, previous cycle, he and Reimund Greg had met almost every day from the second day of March 30th until April 5th, Lent.

Back then, they had followed the waterside ritual procedure to lift Reimund, who had thrown the last offering, and throw him into the river. Like the others in the past, Reimund swam further away and could only return home after leaving the ritual site. He wouldn't leave the house until night.

In the two cycles that followed, Lumian had too much to do and didn't have time to find Reimund.

But now, Ava was telling him that Reimund was missing today!

This was something that had never happened in the previous, previous cycle!

Upon seeing Lumian's expression, Ava's aqua-blue eyes cleared of confusion.

"You really have no idea… Reimund's father may come to you today to ask where Reimund has gone."

Lumian suppressed the tumultuous waves in his heart and asked, "When did Reimund disappear?"

Could it be that something happened because I didn't follow the historical process of finding him?

"Two days ago," Ava recalled. "It's said that he didn't return after leaving the house in the afternoon of the 29th. His family assumed he was at Ol' Tavern or chatting with the Greenwatchers. They only began searching for him last night. They should be asking you today…"

She paused and lowered her voice.

"They suspect Reimund of sneaking away because he doesn't want to learn how to shepherd."

They think I instigated him, and are questioning me later? Lumian roughly understood what had happened.

The afternoon of the 29th reminded him of the beginning of the cycle.

The last two cycles had started on the afternoon of the 29th!

In other words, Reimund disappeared from the beginning of the cycle? This means that perhaps no one deliberately changed the course of history because it was too late… Then why is there such an anomaly and difference? Lumian fell into deep thought.

Ava glanced at him and asked softly, "Do you know where Reimund went?"

"I haven't seen him in the past few days," Lumian said truthfully.

He began to suspect that Reimund's disappearance had something to do with being thrown into the river during the previous, previous cycle.

However, it was impossible for Reimund to leave Cordu because of this. That would trigger the loop.

After bidding farewell to Ava, Lumian forced himself to remain calm and returned home.

He couldn't be bothered to discuss anything else. Initially, he divulged Reimund's disappearance to Aurore.

Aurore's countenance turned solemn as she furrowed her brows and whispered, "If you hadn't mentioned it, I would have completely forgotten about this person…"

She donned a simple rose-red dress and paced back and forth. Lumian began to contemplate potential reasons.

After a while, Aurore gazed at her brother and uttered solemnly, "I recollect that the crux of the Lent Waterside ritual is to offer sacrifices to the concept of a water source symbolized by the river. Is it probable that Reimund, who was thrown into the water, was also regarded as a sacrifice and was taken away by a certain entity?

"Subsequently, as there was no corresponding tangible reward, the cycle portrayed his absence as a disappearance."

Lumian shook his head. "That will trigger the cycle."

Humans departing Cordu and the surrounding vicinity acted as a trigger.

Aurore asked in a profound voice, "What if it's in the form of a corpse?"

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Chapter 64: Weapon

In the form of a corpse?

Lumian's heart sank upon hearing that.

If Reimund's body had left the loop due to the sacrifice, he wouldn't be able to revive through the loop. Once the abnormality in Cordu was resolved, he would truly be dead and not just missing.

Although Lumian wasn't willing to admit that a foolish chap like Reimund was his friend, they had known each other for almost five years. They had played together, pranked together, and experienced many things together. Regardless, he couldn't treat him as a stranger.

Recalling the past, he realized that other than Aurore, Reimund was probably the person he interacted with the most.

Didn't Aurore often say that the fools are the lucky ones? Why is this happening? Lumian couldn't help but retort, "Even if he became a corpse, there will still be a spirit. It will trigger the cycle."

Aurore sighed softly.

"Perhaps the entity receiving the sacrifice isn't interested in spirits and only wants flesh and blood? Perhaps He didn't want to trigger the loop and only wanted flesh and blood instead of Reimund's spirit, leaving him in Cordu or directly destroying him?"

In that case, Reimund's corpse was equivalent to pure matter without any spirituality. It could leave the loop without triggering a reboot.

Upon hearing his sister's retort, Lumian's mind instantly replayed what might have happened.

After everyone left the water, Reimund swam further away. Suddenly, an invisible force grabbed his legs, covered his mouth, and dragged him to the depths of the river, where he drowned.

After that, his spirit would remain at the bottom of the river or be destroyed. His corpse would drift to an unknown place and become a sacrifice…

At this thought, Lumian suddenly became inspired.

"Regardless of whether Reimund's spirit was left behind or destroyed, once the cycle restarts, he should appear in the form of a ghost."

"Logically speaking, that's correct." Aurore nodded thoughtfully. "After dark, I'll hold a psychic ritual and see if I can find Reimund's spirit. Yes, it's best if we have something he often uses as a medium."

Lumian replied without hesitation, "After exploring the castle in the afternoon, I'll go to Reimund's place. His parents are looking for me to ask about his whereabouts anyway."

When the time came, with his Hunter skills and Lumian's vigilance, it wouldn't be difficult for him to obtain an item that Reimund had used.

"Okay." Aurore didn't object.

Lumian exhaled and asked, "Aurore, uh, Grande Soeur, are you capable of channeling spirits?"

"As a Mystery Pryer, I possess knowledge on various subjects," Aurore chuckled in self-deprecation. "How did your conversation with the three foreigners go?"

Lumian quickly recounted his discussion with the enigmatic lady and his conversation with Ryan, Leah, and Valentine, but he avoided mentioning the entity's prayer.

Aurore listened attentively and let out a sigh.

"It's perilous to actively resist corruption, but it's the only way to explore the dream ruins, uncover their secrets, and find the key to break the cycle. It'll be a difficult journey for you…"

"What's so terrible about it?" Lumian patted his chest. "I'm saving myself."

Aurore nodded slightly.

"You can use my gray amber perfume. We have lilac at home, and I also have deer musk and candle-making ingredients. Only tulips need to be acquired elsewhere.

"I remember Madame Pualis has a garden, but I don't know if it's blooming."

"It has bloomed," Lumian affirmed with certainty.

During the last cycle, when he and Aurore visited the castle to borrow the carriage, they noticed that many flowers in the garden had already bloomed, which was unusual for early spring in the mountains.

Aurore acknowledged tersely.

"Regardless, you must explore the castle in the afternoon. You can pick a few flowers while you're at it. Will that woman send those items into the dream ruins for you?"

"Yes," Lumian replied, feeling confident in his assumption.

Aurore pondered for a moment before saying, "I'll give you the Integrity Brooch before you depart this afternoon. Madame Pualis' castle is filthy, and it might involve the undead. It could be very useful."

"It's not necessary. Keep it with you to protect yourself from Madame Pualis," Lumian insisted, anticipating his sister's objections. "Valentine is a fanatical believer of the Eternal Blazing Sun. According to you, as a

Beyonder, he should have chosen the Sun pathway. He would be more useful than the Integrity Brooch."

Based on Aurore's observations over the past few years, fanatical believers of the Eternal Blazing Sun typically chose the Sun pathway.

This also made sense. Eternal Blazing Sun believers who chose the Sun pathway tended to become more and more fanatical unless they didn't believe in this true god from the beginning.

"That's true," Aurore conceded. "You can practice the simplest way to activate Spirit Vision. Afterward, take a nap at noon to replenish your energy. I'll teach you the ancient Hermes and Hermes words required for the ritual tonight."

Upon hearing his sister's words, Lumian suddenly recalled something she often said when she was rushing her manuscripts: "The schedule is tight, and the task is enormous."

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At 3:20 PM, Lumian stood on the hillside overlooking the administrator's castle when he spotted Madame Pualis approaching the village with her lady's maid, Cathy. Madame Pualis wore a stunning grayish-blue dress that had a slight fluffiness to it, and her hair was tied back in an elegant bun.

As soon as they were out of sight, Lumian hurried to the back of the hill where Ryan, Leah, and Valentine were already waiting. They appeared to be in their original clothes, having made no preparations for what was to come.

Lumian was surprised to see that they were unarmed and asked, "You're not carrying any weapons?"

Ryan, who was only slightly taller than 1.7 meters, smiled and replied, "I don't need to carry a weapon with me."

Valentine, dressed in a white vest and a thin blue tweed coat, echoed Ryan's sentiment, "I don't need a weapon."

Leah, on the other hand, pulled out a small, exquisite, silver revolver from her Marseillan boots. "This is my weapon."

She flipped open the barrel to reveal different colored bullets engraved with various patterns and symbols. "They have different Beyonder effects."

Pa! Leah snapped the barrel shut and asked Lumian with a smile, "What weapon did you bring?"

One of you doesn't need a weapon, the other doesn't need to carry a weapon with him, and one has such a good-looking and powerful revolver. It makes me look silly… He lifted the dark jacket on his back to reveal an iron-black axe tucked into his belt.

Without waiting for Ryan and the others to speak, he sighed and said, "You all act like Beyonders, and I'm like a gangster preparing for a fight."

Leah chuckled, her bells tinkling along, "You have a talent for self-deprecation."

"It's better than being mocked by others," Lumian pointed to the steep hill behind them. "Let's climb up now. We can't waste any more time."

"Alright." Leah, in her tight dress, was the first to climb.

She moved with agility and her balance was exceptional. Using the grooves in the terrain, she ascended the hill with ease.

What was even more remarkable was that the four silver bells on her person remained motionless and silent.

Lumian followed closely behind, using the Hunter potion to strengthen his body and scaling the previously unclimbable hill with the help of rocks and tree roots, although he wasn't as carefree and nimble as his companion.

After regaining his balance, he glanced back and witnessed Ryan seizing Valentine's shoulder and hoisting him up.

In a swift motion, Ryan vaulted onto a jutting boulder amidst the hill.

Without hesitation, he sprang forward once more, delivering Valentine to Lumian and Leah's vicinity.

Throughout the entire endeavor, his physique appeared to have expanded in size.

This left Lumian in awe.

Although the hill wasn't high, it was still too exaggerated to be scaled with just two jumps.

Hunters definitely couldn't do it!

After snapping out of his daze, Lumian looked at the castle-shaped building with two towers and the surrounding garden. He suggested to the three foreigners, "We'll go around to the back door."

"Wait a moment." Ryan stopped him and glanced at Leah.

Leah remained silent and strode two steps towards the rear entrance of the castle-like structure.

Her lips moved soundlessly, muttering something under her breath.

In the next instant, the four small silver bells attached to her veil and boots jingled.

The sound was not deafening, but it was urgent and intense.

Leah pivoted and addressed Lumian and the rest, "It's a treacherous path. A grave problem, indeed."

With that, she took two steps towards the front entrance.

Ding, ding, ding. The bells continued to ring, growing even more insistent and pressing.

"We'll likely encounter significant trouble if we attempt to enter through the front," Leah's tone was severe, but there was a hint of a smile on her face.

"What if we climb in through a window?" Ryan inquired.

Leah nodded and altered course, making her way towards the garden.

This time, although the bells rang, they were faint and slow.

Leah grinned and exhaled, "This route is safe."

Lumian, who had observed the entire process, felt bewildered. He couldn't fathom what the three foreigners were up to.

Is this how Beyonders operate? He recollected his sister's teachings and queried, "Divining the danger?"

"Indeed." Leah nodded and turned to Valentine. "I'll scout ahead. Be prepared."

"Understood," Valentine responded gravely.

"What preparations?" Lumian asked, confused.

Leah chuckled. "Prepare to cast divine spells and conjure flames."

Then, what's the purpose of creating flames? Before Lumian could ask, Leah had strolled into the garden and headed towards the castle.

She arrived at a window and signaled that everything was clear.

"Let's go," Ryan informed the group as he hastened towards Leah.

Valentine and Lumian followed closely behind.

As they passed a bed of tulips, Lumian reached out to pluck one, but Ryan stopped him with his forearm.

He didn't ask Lumian why he was doing this and only said gently, "There's no hurry. We can pick flowers later. If picking it causes some incident, our mission will be compromised."

That's true… Lumian fully drew upon this experience.

Soon, they arrived at a row of windows on the side of the castle.

Chapter 65: Third Floor

The administrator's official residence was originally the castle of the DariÃ¨ge nobles, with defense being the top priority. The windows were narrow and high up, making the lighting poor even during the day. However, to make it suitable for living, the owner had installed many new glass windows on the ground floor later on.

Lumian peered through the patterned glass and saw that the banquet hall was empty and deserted.

"There are very few servants..." Leah sighed softly.

With many open windows during the day, fresh air mixed with the fragrance of flowers flowed in, creating excellent conditions for Lumian and the others to infiltrate.

Taking advantage of the lack of servants on the first floor, the four of them climbed into the hall one after another. However, they didn't rush to go deeper and instead found a hiding spot nearby.

Leah turned her head towards Valentine, who was clinging close behind an ornamental pillar, and said, "I'll scout ahead; make preparations."

"Okay," Valentine nodded coldly.

Lumian was squatting behind a stone platform with a porcelain vase. When he heard this, he stuck his head out and reminded them,

"There's no need to explore the first floor.

"It's often used to entertain guests, so there's nothing unusual."

Ever since Administrator Béost and Madame Pualis moved in, his sister Aurore would visit the castle occasionally as a guest or borrow a pony. A few times, Lumian took the opportunity to follow her and freeload on cakes, bread, and drinks.

When the administrator and Madame Pualis were out, he would occasionally look for Louis Lund, the butler, and tour the first floor with him.

"I'll head straight to the stairs," Leah said, understanding.

She didn't attempt to walk in a straight line through the empty banquet hall. Instead, she hugged the wall and circled around towards the stairs.

The four silver bells remained eerily silent.

As she passed by one of the rooms, she suddenly heard footsteps approaching from very close to the door.

Lumian, in a prime position, even caught a glimpse of a male servant in a red shirt and white pants, about to collide head-on with Leah. She had no cover in sight!

Leah didn't panic. She turned around, placed her hand on the wall, and scaled the oil painting hanging two meters above the ground.

Then, she stood on her tiptoes and stepped onto the frame. She stood firmly with her back against the wall without letting the oil painting drop.

Lumian wanted to applaud because it reminded him of an acrobatic performance he had seen in DariÃ¨ge last year at a circus.

The male servant left the room and instinctively looked around before walking towards the kitchen.

Just as he took a few steps forward, Leah slid soundlessly to the ground against the oil painting. Then, she rolled twice and hid behind a pillar. After the male servant disappeared from the banquet hall, she leaned against the wall again. Finally, she arrived at the staircase and confirmed that everything was clear.

Upon seeing this, Lumian darted out of the stone platform and ran over in a straight line.

He was so fast that he reached Leah in less than three seconds.

However, he wasn't the fastest. Ryan completed the journey in just the time it took to take one breath.

Valentine wasn't slow either. His physique was clearly stronger than ordinary people.

Without another word, Leah took the lead and the four of them hurriedly entered the stairs, arriving at the second floor of the residence.

There were closed rooms on both sides of the corridor, with two rooms having light shine in through the windows at the end of the corridor. The overall environment was abnormally dark.

Ryan suggested, surveying their surroundings.

"Let us split up and search different rooms. This will save time and make it easier to hide. However, we must remain no more than one room apart from each other, in case something happens and we cannot save each other in time."

Leah and the others nodded in agreement.

Lumian promptly approached the nearest room, pressing his ear to the door to listen for any movement inside. After a moment, he deftly turned the handle and slipped inside.

The room belonged to a maid.

He searched for a while, but found no clues. He moved on to the next room.

In this way, the four of them carefully avoided the servants and explored most of the second floor.

Towards the end of their search, Lumian arrived at the door of the room that had traumatized him: Louis Lund's bedroom!

According to the historical sequence of events, this butler should have given birth yesterday.

His stomach had been torn open and, even with sutures, he would not recover quickly. He must be recuperating in bed... Lumian thought to himself, contemplating whether to push the door open and have a "chat" with Louis Lund.

As someone who had personally experienced bizarre phenomena, this male butler undoubtedly knew a great deal.

However, this would contradict their principle of observation and exploration. Lumian couldn't guarantee that Louis Lund wouldn't reveal his presence to Madame Pualis.

The fact that he had given birth to the other party's child meant there were no secrets between them.

Silencing him would only confirm Madame Pualis's suspicions.

What a pity. If only I knew something about hypnosis... Lumian sighed inwardly. He habitually pressed his ear to the door, listening for any sound.

Nothing.

As a Hunter, Lumian's hearing was acute enough to detect breathing from two to three meters away even with a barrier in between.

No one? Louis Lund has just given birth. Where can he go? Lumian turned the doorknob and slowly pushed the door open, peering inside.

The room was clean and free of the bloodstains he had seen before. Louis Lund was nowhere to be found.

Lumian furrowed his brow and stepped inside.

The signs of a recent human presence were evident: a blanket rumpled on the bed, a cigarette butt on the nightstand, a black coat hung on the chair, and faint footprints on the floor. In addition, there were blood stains on the edge of the bed that had not been cleaned.

Apart from this, Lumian also saw some blood stains that hadn't been wiped off from the edge of the bed.

Lumian nodded to himself. He had indeed given birth here yesterday...

Suddenly, faint voices outside the window caught his attention.

He hurried to the glass window, turned his body, and peered out.

In the stables, Louis Lund--black-haired, blue-eyed, and dressed in a white shirt, black suit, dark pants, and leather shoes--conversed with the carriage driver, Sewell, who had sent the siblings to Paramita.

Lumian was taken aback by Louis Lund's healthy and steady appearance.

Is this the person who had just given birth yesterday?

And it was a C-section!

Lumian suppressed the shock in his heart and listened carefully to what Louis Lund and Sewell were saying.

Unexpectedly, these two fellows were only exchanging experiences in gardening.

"What's the matter?" With Lumian inside the room for so long, Ryan, donning a dark bowler hat, pushed open the door and entered the room followed by Leah and Valentine.

Lumian quickly filled them in on Louis Lund's situation.

Ryan pondered for a moment before asking, "Have you heard of Earth Mother?"

The DariÃ¨ge region had a border with the Feynapotter kingdom. Shepherds often went there. Coupled with his sister's basic education, Lumian was no stranger to this.

"Yes, the deity that Feynapotter believes in."

Ryan nodded and said, "Earth Mother is associated with fertility, healing, and life. These domains are reflected in the Beyonder powers of the corresponding pathway. While I'm not saying that Louis Lund's situation is related to the Earth Mother, it's possible that his ability to give birth and quick recovery are linked to these domains."

"Is that so..." Lumian found this plausible after some thought.

After all, men were already capable of giving birth. What was so strange about them being out and about after a C-section?

"Did you find anything?" Lumian asked Ryan and the others.

Ryan shook his head.

"They were all normal servant's quarters. We may have to check the third floor."

Lumian felt a sense of unease wash over him.

Madame Pualis and Administrator Béost's quarters comprised a bedroom, study, solarium, and activity room, all located on the third floor.

This posed a significant risk.

"Very well," Ryan replied without hesitation.

The four of them proceeded to sneak up to the third floor.

Many of the doors were ajar, and the corridor was brightly lit.

Lumian made a beeline for the bedroom, which was adorned with a light-colored velvet blanket on the bed, a small bookshelf stocked with bedtime reading materials, a capacious cloakroom brimming with a variety of clothes, a safe containing precious collections, a set of plush beige sofas, a table displaying five photo frames and documents, and a fluffy white carpet covering the entire room...

Lumian and company surveyed the room and simultaneously headed towards the table.

The books on the table were mostly popular novels, including Fors Wall's masterpiece, "The Adventurer 5: Vice Admiral Ailment," and Aurore's latest work, "The Substitute Detective." The documents pertained mainly to various matters in the DariÃ¨ge area. As for the five photos displayed in the frames, four were of Madame Pualis, and one belonged to a man Lumian did not recognize.

"No photo of the administrator?" he exclaimed, surprised.

Madame Pualis was the sole subject of the four photos, each depicting her in different clothing and poses. The male photo was not of Administrator Béost, who, after all, was the male owner of the house. Wasn't this peculiar?

Leah nodded thoughtfully.

"Perhaps the administrator's status in this family is akin to that of a butler. Have you ever seen a butler's photograph displayed in someone's home?"

"Then who is this man?" Lumian inquired, pointing to the photo frame on the side.

The frame contained a color photograph of a man in his late twenties. He was wearing a red shirt, a black velvet coat, and dark pants with tassels. He sported a pair of short lace-up boots and was dressed very fashionably.

He bore a striking resemblance to Madame Pualis, with light eyebrows, bright brown eyes, and brown hair parted in an exaggerated 7-3 style. His lips were curled up, giving him the air of a hooligan who frequented high society.

All in all, this man's facial features were not extraordinary, but they were pleasing to the eye.

"Madame Pualis's brother?" Lumian hazarded a guess based on his appearance.

Chapter 66: Crib

Leah gazed at the man in the photo, lost in thought.

"After receiving the request for help, we set off two days later to gather relevant information," she said.

"Madame Pualis's full name is Pualis de Roquefort, isn't it?" she paused for a moment before continuing, "We investigated the Roquefort family in Dariège and found no trace of Pualis."

In Intis, a woman could choose to keep her maiden name after getting married. If there was a "de" in her name, it meant that she was once a noble. The Intis meaning of "de" was "from," and the surname behind it was the fiefdom of the time.

"None?" Lumian was surprised. He knew something was wrong with Madame Pualis, but he didn't expect her identity to be fake!

Ryan nodded. "In Dariège, Roquefort is a large family with many members, including a provincial senator. We were in a hurry and didn't have time to conduct a more detailed investigation. We could only confirm that there was no such person as Pualis, but a man named Pulitt had been missing for over a year."

"Pulitt?" Lumian asked. "What's his relationship with Madame Pualis? They look alike."

Ryan shook his head. "Without enough information, it's impossible to make a guess. What we do know is that Pulitt de Roquefort was a popular dandy in Trier, and he had many illegitimate children. Many people hated and detested him. Perhaps this is why he had no choice but to leave or was forced to leave Dariège."

"Dandyism?" Lumian was unfamiliar with the term.

Aurore subscribed to magazines and newspapers targeted towards women or focused on national affairs. There were some materials on the supernatural, but none involved male matters.

Leah chuckled. "To put it simply, it's a casanova who dresses fashionably, speaks elegantly, and acts freely."

Lumian sighed and mocked, "The people of Trier sure know how to live life. They package their affairs as a thought, a doctrine, and a trend."

When it came to cheating, Triers were at the forefront. The padre? In front of the Triers, he was still a child.

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"In the past year, Trier has constructed numerous arcades," Aurore remarked while sipping her marquis black tea, regaling Madame Pualis, Nazélie and the others with the latest trends from her two-story subterranean abode.

"What's an arcade? It's a covered street with glass roofing and marble flooring. Elegant and stunning shops line both sides. During the day, light filters in from above, and at night, gas lamps illuminate the area. Carriages are prohibited from entering. The most renowned arcade is called the Opera House arcade…"

Madame Pualis, holding a white porcelain cup filled with black tea, watched Aurore with her bright brown eyes, listening intently with a smile.

"That sounds like something I must see…" Nazélie sighed, imagining the elegance, fashion, cleanliness and brightness of the arcade.

Aurore's knowledge of the latest Intis trends was the primary reason why they had accepted the afternoon tea invitation.

After chatting for a while, the discussion turned to Aurore's work and relationships.

"Love is just so unfathomable and elusive…" Madame Pualis mused aloud.

So, this is why you fall in love with so many men at the same time? Aurore couldn't help but inwardly criticize.

Madame Pualis gazed at her with a faint smile and sighed.

"Sometimes, I get so angry because of his mistakes. I wish I could kill him and send him to his death, but when he's actually facing death, I can't help but save him and refuse to tell him. Perhaps, this is love…"

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In the master's bedroom of the administrator's residence.

"Madame Pualis may have once fallen in love with Pulitt, a believer in Dandyism, and engaged in a forbidden relationship, resulting in her disavowal by her family. She then had to marry someone and use her family's connections to secure the administrative position in Cordu for him." Lumian deduced this based on the stories and troupes written by his sister.

This explained why Administrator Béost's standing in the family was relatively low.

"Perhaps," Ryan replied simply, "Keep searching, but don't attempt to open the safe or anything that may trigger an alarm."

Lumian and his companions dispersed immediately and searched elsewhere.

Despite the Hunter's ability to observe subtle traces, Lumian still found nothing.

The same was true for Leah and the others.

They had no choice but to move to the study and search patiently.

As time passed, the four of them arrived at the end of the corridor, where a closed room stood opposite an open solarium. Beside it was a staircase leading to one of the towers.

Ryan, who had finished searching the solarium, turned to Leah.

Leah touched the small silver bell hanging from her veil, mumbling to herself as she walked towards the tightly shut wooden door.

This time, the four bells did not ring.

Leah heaved a sigh of relief and gently pushed the wooden door open.

It was an empty room with a rocking crib in the middle.

The crib was made of brown wood and installed inside a wooden frame. It was covered in clean but slightly worn cotton swaddling cloth that showed its age. The crib was empty.

This was the nursery where Madame Pualis's two children had once slept. Apart from the bed, there were no toys in the room. Scattered on the ground were wheat, barley, rice, rye, wheat, and other plants, making it look rather strange.

Furthermore, these plants were well-preserved, as if they had only been brought in a few days ago.

Valentine's body glowed as he entered the room and circled around.

Soon, he returned to the door and shook his head at Ryan and Leah.

"There's no evil aura."

"Alright." Leah looked at Lumian. "Shall we head to the tower next?"

Lumian had always been curious about the castle's two towers. He never expected to have a chance to "visit" them today.

Valentine left the strange nursery. Ryan grabbed the handle and planned to close the wooden door and restore it to its original state.

At this moment, Lumian's gaze drifted inside.

The brown wooden crib swayed gently, yet the tightly shut windows of the room and the solarium opposite, with their floor-to-ceiling panes, allowed no breeze to enter the corridor!

"Wh…" Lumian's pupils dilated.

Leah noticed his distress and turned to look.

The crib continued to sway, as though an invisible baby lay within its swaddling cloths.

Leah raised her hand to her glabella, as if trying to ease her tired eyes.

She readied herself to activate her Spirit Vision and see what lay inside the crib.

Suddenly, the four small silver bells on her veil and boots jingled, as if they were about to burst!

Ryan's face froze as he yelled, "Get out of here!"

With that, he dashed into the solarium, crashing through the floor-to-ceiling windows in an attempt to create a path of escape from the castle.

Bang!

A loud thud echoed throughout the room as Ryan hit the windows, yet there was no sound of glass shattering.

The transparent faces of young children appeared on the row of windows, some of them mere infants with pale, inexplicably terrifying faces.

As Ryan 'bumped' into them, they opened their mouths in unison and let out a haunting wail.

Their cries echoed through the third floor of the castle, casting an eerie gloom over the entire area. The walls and glass were adorned with the translucent faces of children, some wailing while others stared blankly at Lumian, Leah, Valentine, and Ryan.

Lumian shuddered with fear as he felt their cold gazes upon him.

Suddenly, Valentine's body was engulfed in a dark golden light, which quickly spread to envelop Lumian, Leah, and himself.

A warm sensation spread throughout Lumian's body, dispelling his fear and filling him with courage. He drew his iron-black axe with newfound confidence.

Meanwhile, Ryan seemed to grow taller and more imposing.

Dawn-like rays of light surrounded him, coalescing into a silver-white full-body armor and a massive broadsword of light.

With a mighty swing, Ryan cleaved at the floor-to-ceiling windows, dispersing the pale-white faces of the children into smoke as they screamed.

But the glass didn't break, and more faces appeared, their shrill cries tormenting Lumian and his companions.

"Who dares to trespass the castle?"

A woman's voice boomed, echoing through the halls.

Almost immediately, Lumian spotted a figure on the other side of the corridor, standing on the second floor.

She was a middle-aged woman with brown hair and eyes. She was rather good-looking without any wrinkles. She was the midwife who had helped Louis Lund's "delivery."

In her hand, she held a pair of enormous scissors that could decapitate a human while donning a grayish-white gown. It was as if she had just returned from pruning a branch in the garden.

She glared at Lumian and his companions and spoke in a deep, threatening voice.

"You deserve to die!"

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In the subterranean two-story abode, Madame Pualis jolted suddenly, and her countenance altered.

She delicately placed the porcelain teacup on the table and smiled at Aurore.

"My apologies. I've just recollected an urgent matter that requires my immediate attention at home."

"Huh?" Aurore was shocked.

Pualis rose from her seat, her expression filled with regret.

"I had intended to stay and discuss your work and its beautiful and poignant portrayal of love."

Aurore responded quickly, "Please, you're more than welcomed."

"I cannot, unfortunately." Madame Pualis shook her head. "It concerns my children."

Chapter 67: Evil Spells

Valentine caught sight of the woman in the grayish-white dress. His eyes brimmed with hatred as he stretched his arms out as if embracing the sun.

A blinding pillar of light descended from the sky and struck the target clutching the enormous scissors.

The surroundings burst into light in an instant. The transparent faces on the walls and glass vanished before they could even scream.

The woman's body had clearly caught fire and was evaporating, but then it suddenly vanished.

Lumian found this scene eerily familiar. The mouth-orifice monster had displayed similar behavior when he was hunting it.

Invisibility!

The woman might not have concealed herself, but she certainly wasn't dead. Thus, Lumian didn't feel any relief. Instead, he approached Ryan, who now towered over him.

Ryan, covered in silver armor and wielding a broadsword of light, was the person Lumian trusted the most among those present.

It was evident that Ryan excelled at combat!

Leah stood there when suddenly, the face of a pale child emerged on the wall behind her, transforming into the woman in the grayish-white dress.

The woman's enormous scissors clamped down on Leah's neck.

Crack!

Leah's head drooped, but no blood spurted forth. Her body and head swiftly shriveled and thinned, transforming into a ragged, paper effigy that softly settled onto the ground.

Not far away, her silhouette donning a pleated cashmere dress outlined itself.

With a clang, Ryan, his face concealed by a silver visor, hoisted the Sword of Dawn and strode towards the spot where Leah had stood, sweeping the weapon diagonally at the woman.

The woman brandished her scissors in an attempt to block the attack, but was pushed back into the wall by the force of the blow.

Her form vanished once again.

As Valentine, clad in a thin blue tweed jacket, stood with his back turned, the woman suddenly replaced the swollen and pallid visage.

She leaned out and struck the nape of Valentine's neck.

"Look out!" Leah cried out as soon as she spotted the woman, alerting her companion.

Valentine snorted and crossed his arms.

Golden, illusory flames burst forth from the void surrounding him, intertwining and transforming the corridor into an ocean pulsating with the radiance of the sun.

The woman winced in agony as her body was consumed by the intense flames.

She retreated back into the "interior" of the walls, reverting to the swollen, pallid face.

The translucent face melted instantly into wisps of black gas within the golden, illusory flames before dissipating.

Clang!

Ryan's Sword of Dawn struck the same spot again, causing the entire castle to tremble.

Despite his efforts, he was still a step too late to stop the woman.

Lumian quickly grasped the gravity of the situation. The woman who had delivered Louis Lund was linked to the transparent faces of children on the wall and glass. Not only could she transform into one of them, but she could also transform into a ghost form, evading attacks and deflecting damage.

In other words, she could attack from any wall or glass on the third floor of the castle at any given time, and Ryan and the others' counterattacks were ineffective.

With this realization, Lumian immediately distanced himself from the floor-to-ceiling windows and the surrounding walls, and walked to the middle of the solarium.

At that moment, ghostly faces appeared on the ground and ceiling.

The woman suddenly emerged from behind Lumian's feet and quickly reached for his thigh with the pair of scissors.

Lumian's heart raced with a sense of danger.

Without bothering to confirm where the attack was coming from, he jumped into the air and dodged to the side.

Despite his efforts, he was still half a beat too slow. A deep gash was left on the lower part of his thigh, and blood instantly gushed out.

As soon as the drops of blood landed on the ground, the woman—who had switched spots—pointed at them and they condensed into a thin blood-colored figure.

Without any hesitation, the blood-colored figure turned to Lumian, who had rolled to the recliner, and pounced at him,

feeding on his blood and growing stronger with each drop.

At the same time, Lumian endured intense pain and felt his blood running out of control.

Almost instantly, Ryan jumped in.

In midair, he raised the broadsword of light high and slashed at the blood-colored figure, pinning it to the ground and shattering it with the transparent faces around him.

Leah had somersaulted to Lumian's side and pressed her right hand on his thigh wound.

To Lumian's surprise, the wound magically moved along with Leah's right palm, all the way down to the side of his calf, which wasn't rich in blood vessels.

The bleeding immediately decreased.

The woman suddenly appeared from the ceiling. Her brown eyes burned with a blazing life.

The blood dripping from Lumian's calf was ignited, producing a bright flame that resembled the spring sun. It quickly spread deep into the wound and into the blood vessels in his body.

At that moment, Lumian felt his life rapidly draining away.

With a pop, Ryan stabbed the two-handed broadsword condensed from light into the ground.

Around him, in the area where Lumian and Leah were, rays of dawn-like light appeared, filling all space.

In the morning light, the remaining blood-colored figures quickly melted, and the bright and beautiful flames on Lumian's calf quickly extinguished.

The second of burning had sealed his wounds together, stopping the bleeding.

Ryan pulled out his broadsword and bellowed in a deep, commanding voice, "This environment is unsuitable. We must depart at once!"

What he really meant was that the woman was not as powerful as she appeared. She was almost invincible and impossible to target due to the unique conditions on the third floor of the castle that greatly enhanced her abilities.

Without waiting for his companions to react, Ryan charged after the woman.

Although he was still slightly slower than his opponent, who could move with the aid of translucent faces, he spared no effort and attacked with powerful slashes, diagonal cuts, and stabs. He forced his adversary into a constant state of motion, forcing her to constantly shift positions after each attack.

Together with the holy light summoned by Valentine and the golden flames he conjured, the two of them managed to temporarily subdue the woman, thus preventing Leah and Lumian from being harmed.

Taking advantage of this opportunity, Leah leapt onto the armchair and dashed back and forth across the sofa, tables, recliners, and ornaments, making sure to avoid touching the ground.

Throughout this process, the silver bells on her veil and boots chimed incessantly, sometimes melodious and sometimes grating.

Lumian no longer felt safe on the ground. He climbed onto the table and scanned the ceiling above and the floor below, analyzing Leah's movements.

Drawing from his previous experience, he deduced the route the woman was attempting to use to escape.

Soon, Leah ceased her acrobatic maneuvers.

"To the tower, quickly!"

Just as she finished speaking, the woman thrust her head out of the ceiling and barked in a stern voice, "You damned bastards!"

Each word was enunciated with precision, causing Lumian and his companions' hearts to race, their heads to spin, and their vision to blur. It was a thoroughly unpleasant experience.

Valentine endured the discomfort and stretched his arms out once more.

A brilliant and pristine light flooded the ceiling.

"Let's move!" Ryan commanded.

Lumian immediately leaped off the table, enduring the pain in his calf. Stepping on the transparent faces, he raced towards the tower, with Leah and Valentine close behind. Only Ryan, covered in silver armor, wasn't in a rush to escape. He lifted the Sword of Dawn and sliced the woman who had poked her head out, preventing her from stopping his companions from fleeing.

After Leah and the others ascended the stairs leading to the tower, he turned around and gave chase with a leap.

A woman emerged from a transparent face on the side wall and let out a piercing scream.

Accompanied by the scream, a layer of black, malevolent flames ignited on the surface of Ryan's silver armor.

Ryan immediately felt his stamina rapidly depleting.

Without hesitation, he deactivated the Dawn Armor.

Spots of light resembling the morning sun scattered in all directions, along with the black flames, and dissipated into the air.

Holding the broadsword of light, Ryan took the opportunity to leap and depart from the castle's third floor, entering the stairs.

At this moment, Lumian, aware that he was a little weak and unable to make use of the environment, ran in second place. Ahead of him was Leah, whose silver bell was ringing softly.

Leah suddenly came to a halt.

Lumian hastily slowed down as he heard chattering.

He then looked ahead and was taken aback.

The tower was not large, and it could even be considered small. There were stairs leading to various firing ports.

The walls were densely packed with children.

They were dressed in different clothes. Some appeared to have just been born, while others were three or four years old. Their limbs resembled bird claws with unnaturally sharp tips.

Using their "bird claws," these children were like birds in a forest, perching on the wall and occupying most of the area.

Lumian's scalp tingled as he saw over a hundred human children's faces, bodies, and wicked, sharp bird claws combined with an abnormal perching method. He once again felt as though his mind, eyes, and soul had been corrupted, just as when he had witnessed Louis Lund give birth.

The "children" had not yet noticed the intrusion. A small number of them were happily discussing different topics.

"The sky is so blue out there."

"I want to go outside."

"No way."

"Mummy said we have to be able to retract our claws and be like normal humans before we can go out…"

At that moment, Ryan caught up to the three of them and said urgently, "Stay away!"

He then turned around and barricaded the entrance of the tower like a giant, holding the Sword of Dawn in his hand.

Leah and Valentine didn't inquire why. They ran frantically and found stairs and other obstacles to hide behind. Although Lumian didn't comprehend, his survival instincts told him to follow orders.

"All of you, come down here!"

The woman's sharp voice reverberated.

Each word drilled into Lumian and his companions' ears, weakening them simultaneously.

Immediately afterwards, the woman in the grayish-white dress appeared at the corner of the staircase. The entire tower was filled with the aura of life, and no pale faces were visible.

Chapter 68: Purification

Upon seeing that Ryan was blocking the entrance of the tower with the Sword of Dawn, the woman in the grayish-white dress felt a sense of foreboding.

She swiftly turned the enormous scissors around, clamped them around her neck, and pulled gently.

A vivid red stream of blood gushed out immediately, accompanied by her sharp cry. The blood flowed in every direction as if it had a life of its own, enveloping her entire body.

It was as though the woman had adorned herself with blood-colored full-body armor.

Meanwhile, Ryan held the Sword of Dawn in reverse with both hands and genuflected.

With a pop, he stabbed the two-handed broadsword, which had condensed from light, into the stone floor in front of him.

The broadsword disintegrated, transforming into specks of light that resembled the morning sun.

They were densely packed and innumerable, forming a flickering and violent hurricane that swept forward.

Wherever the Hurricane of Light passed, the stone floor was shaved thin. Some of the steps were flattened, and exaggerated cracks appeared. The woman was completely engulfed before she could dodge.

The blood-colored armor on her body lasted for a second before completely shattering and melting into the light.

This time, she had left the special environment on the third floor and was in a place filled with life force. She could no longer use the pale and transparent faces to shift position. She could only watch as tiny blood-colored cracks appeared on her body.

The cracks expanded rapidly and instantly turned into a hideous wound that cut through the woman.

As her screams reverberated, her body crumbled into pieces of flesh. The pieces of flesh and her spirit were still being ravaged by the storm of light until the hurricane subsided. The flesh was ground, and the spirit dissipated.

Although Ryan tried his best to prevent the Hurricane of Light from implicating the others, he was still too weak to control it. He destroyed a large swath of the walls on the side and the stairs behind him. If Lumian, Leah, and Valentine hadn't found cover in advance, they would have more or less been injured.

"Waa! Waa! Waa!"

The bird-clawed children who were climbing the wall were frightened and cried out.

Lumian and the others' ears buzzed as if they had suffered a noise attack.

"Let's go!" Ryan turned around and slammed into the most damaged wall nearby.

Crash! The wall shattered, and a large number of rocks fell.

A huge hole that humans could crawl through appeared.

When Valentine and Lumian ran over, Ryan grabbed each of them with one hand and jumped from a height of more than ten meters to a tree outside the castle.

Bam! In midair, he kicked the tree and flew diagonally away from the castle.

Leah descended on her own, using the protrusion of the castle's outer walls to descend rapidly, landing on the ground in a breath or two.

Ryan, Lumian, and Valentine waited for Leah for a few seconds as the trees shook violently. After meeting up with her, they ran to the back of the hill and left before the other servants caught up.

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In less than a minute, Madame Pualis stood expressionless beside the ruptured hole at the entrance of the tower, wearing a grayish-blue fluffy dress.

The children crawling on the walls quickly accused the outsiders of being barbaric and cruel, calling out for their mother.

Madame Pualis, with an ashen face, remained silent.

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In the forest beside Cordu Village.

Lumian and his companions stopped and looked back at the castle.

Leah was about to speak when she frowned and said, "I hear a baby crying, it's very close!" She turned to Ryan and the others and asked, "Can you hear it?"

Lumian was startled and listened carefully, vaguely hearing the sound of a baby crying, but it was not as close as Leah had described, in fact, it sounded distant.

"I can hear it a little," Ryan answered truthfully.

Valentine's expression changed as if he had thought of something.

At the same time, Leah's face twisted in pain, and she instinctively pressed a hand to her abdomen, where there was a distinct swelling and squirming.

Valentine quickly went over to Leah and placed his hand on her head, saying a word in ancient Hermes that Lumian had just learned, "Sun!"

Golden translucent liquid drops condensed out of thin air and sprinkled over Leah's body.

Illusory black smoke immediately rose from Leah's body, and her expression alternated between distortion and normalcy.

Finally, her abdomen returned to its original state and stopped squirming.

"Phew…" Leah breathed a sigh of relief. "I narrowly avoided becoming a monster's mother. Luckily, we took care of it in time before it could take root."

She wore a smile on her face, unfazed by the bizarre and terrifying experience.

Leah turned to Lumian, Ryan, and Valentine.

"Would you like to purify yourselves with holy water? I worry that you may unknowingly become mothers."

"Yes!" Lumian agreed immediately, but Valentine approached Ryan first. Placing his hand on Ryan's head, he uttered the ancient Hermes word, "Sun!" Holy water formed and sprinkled down, but nothing unusual happened to Ryan.

Valentine purified himself next, and no black smoke appeared.

He then walked over to Lumian and placed his hand on the hunter's head. "Sun!" he repeated, and droplets of translucent liquid fell. Lumian suddenly felt a sharp pain in his heart, as if a snake were burrowing inside. Each time it moved, Lumian's heart raced or slowed down, causing extreme discomfort.

In the next moment, Lumian heard the mysterious voice that seemed to come from an infinite distance but also sounded close by.

It wasn't as clear as in his dream, so it prevented him from entering a near-death state.

Just as Lumian couldn't take it anymore, Valentine stopped the purification and nodded coldly.

"There's nothing wrong with you either."

Phew… Lumian breathed a silent sigh of relief, feeling as though he had been pulled back from the brink of death.

At that moment, he roughly understood what had just happened.

According to the mysterious lady, he was severely corrupted by a certain hidden evil god. He could only maintain his normal state by relying on the timely seal of that great existence.

Accepting the purification of holy water was like a devil embracing holy light—he was bound to experience problems.

In other words, he was an evil god pollutant that needed to be purified!

Thankfully, thankfully. If Valentine had kept going or had been a little stronger, I would've exposed my abnormality even with the seal of that great existence… I can't undergo purification in the future. I won't even be able to find someone to exorcise the evil. I'm the evil that needs to be exorcized… Lumian rejoiced and didn't let the remnant pain appear on his face.

Upon realizing that his companions had been cleansed and all risks had been eliminated, Ryan promptly suggested, "If we make our way to the edge of the village now, we'll activate the loop. In the event that Madame Pualis discovers a clue and catches up with us, we can attempt to flee and restart the cycle."

Noticing Valentine's perplexed expression, Ryan added, "I'm concerned that if we die once during a cycle, there may be repercussions once the loop is lifted. Therefore, it's best not to perish at this moment."

"Understood," Leah agreed before Valentine could interject with any radical ideas.

Observing that his two companions had arrived at the same conclusion, Valentine simply nodded.

At that moment, Lumian glanced at them before waving his hand and declaring, "You guys go on ahead. I'm going home!"

Ryan furrowed his brow in confusion and asked, "Aren't you worried that Madame Pualis might come after you?"

Lumian grinned and replied, "I'm not like you. As soon as I entered the tower, I was attempting to avoid the monster children's gaze. They didn't spot me, and the midwife who saw me was killed by you. It seems that even channeling spirits is ineffective. How could Madame Pualis have suspected that a powerful infiltration team like yours had an ordinary person like me with them?"

"Think about it. Prior to your arrival in Cordu, no one had attempted to infiltrate the castle. The moment you arrived, something immediately occurred. Who else could be suspected but you guys?"

"If I escape with you, I'll be dragged down with you!"

Ryan, Leah, and Valentine were left speechless.

This was clearly an operation concocted by Lumian. Why did it appear as though he had nothing to do with it in the end?

Were they going to shoulder all the blame?

"Goodbye! If Madame Pualis doesn't dare to confront official Beyonders like you and the cycle isn't restarted, I'll see you at Ol' Tavern tomorrow!"

Lumian waved his hand and dashed towards the edge of the forest, reminding them, "Take care, my cabbages!"

Once he exited the forest, Lumian's expression became serious.

The explanation he provided for not escaping with Ryan and the others wasn't the only reason. It was more of an excuse.

His primary objective was to return home immediately and rendezvous with Aurore.

As soon as Aurore invited Madame Pualis for afternoon tea, someone snuck into the castle, and they were the prime suspects.

Lumian had to inform his sister that if Madame Pualis came to interrogate and silence her, she should sell out the three foreigners and agree to Madame Pualis's imprisonment. She could discover and dangle a valuable secret to delay Madame Pualis for a while, preventing her from executing anyone on the spot.

Only by staying alive would there be a chance!

Even in the loop, Lumian couldn't afford to die easily in case something catastrophic occurred once the loop ended!

Furthermore, once Madame Pualis caught up with Leah and the others, if she emerged victorious, one of Ryan and the other two would trigger the loop and erase their memories. If she lost, what was there to be concerned about?

Lumian gritted his teeth and ran home through the village road, enduring the pain in his calf.

Upon seeing Aurore standing at the door, appearing completely unharmed, he breathed a sigh of relief.

"Is everything all right?"

"Is everything all right?"

The siblings both inquired simultaneously.

Chapter 69: Him?

In response to his sister's concern, Lumian shook his head and declared, "I'm fine."

He surveyed his surroundings and suggested, "Let us talk inside."

Upon reaching the stove, he briefly narrated his expedition with Ryan and the others. Lumian then advised his sister that if Madame Pualis were to attack them, she must surrender and betray the three foreigners without hesitation.

Considering the phenomena he had encountered in the castle, Lumian believed that the siblings could not defeat Madame Pualis. They were not even capable of handling the midwife.

Aurore listened attentively and couldn't help but chuckle.

"From a logical standpoint, your tactics are indeed the best, but why do I find it peculiar? It is as though I have become the villain in a story. Furthermore, I am not the principal antagonist—the charismatic kind."

"What is important is the consequence," Lumian stressed to his sister. "In your own words, one must endure the humiliation, bear the heavy burden, preserve the useful body, and wait for it to prove its worth in the future."

Aurore couldn't help but rub her forehead. "Have I taught you too many strange things?"

"Yes," Lumian earnestly nodded.

Aurore rolled her eyes.

"Okay, I understand. I will not confront Madame Pualis until the most crucial moment. When Madame Pualis noticed that the alarm had been triggered and attempted to leave, I did not stop her. I merely expressed reluctance and conversed with her for an additional minute. Right, please elaborate on the specifics of your exploration."

She seated herself at the dining table and listened intently, just in case Madame Pualis were to interrogate her in anger.

Lumian pulled out a chair on the opposite side of the dining table and expounded on the expedition's accomplishments and battle process.

As Aurore listened, her expression gradually became somewhat peculiar.

"What is the matter?" Lumian noticed his sister's abnormality.

After considerable deliberation, Aurore inquired with a strange expression, "There is a portrait of a man in Madame Pualis' bedroom, and he resembles her. It's suspected that he is her brother?"

"Yes, the three foreigners speculated that he might be a missing member of the Roquefort family named Pulitt," Lumian recounted Ryan and the others' statements, including Dandyism and the vast number of illegitimate children.

He added, "According to the three foreigners' investigation, there is no such person as Pualis in the Roquefort family."

Aurore nodded and exhaled.

"Then I am quite sure that my guess is correct."

Her expression remained peculiar, only growing more pronounced.

"What guess?" Lumian asked, perplexed.

Aurore gave him a sidelong glance before replying, "Perhaps Madame Pualis is actually Pulitt."

"What? That's absurd!" Lumian exclaimed. "One is a man, the other a woman, and Madame Pualis had two children!"

"Who's to say she gave birth to them herself? Maybe the administrator did it for her," Aurore countered, a sneer curling her lip. "And even if they are Madame Pualis's children, it doesn't necessarily mean anything. In the world of mysticism, anything is possible. Consider this: if Louis Lund can give birth to a man, then why can't Pulitt become a woman?"

"That may be true, but…" Lumian was still unconvinced.

Aurore gave him a sly smile.

"The reason I dare to make such a guess, unlike the three foreigners, is because I've heard something. Or rather, I've witnessed something."

"Do you remember which pathway neighbors the Hunter pathway?"

"Assassin," Lumian replied without hesitation.

He had been drawn to the name, which was undoubtedly cooler than Hunter.

"In our organization, uh—the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society, there was a man who was fascinated by the idea of an Assassin and chose that pathway," Aurore explained, her expression growing stranger by the moment. "At a gathering, he confided in us with a melancholy and troubled air that the potion an Assassin needs to consume after reaching Sequence 7 is called Witch."

"Witch?" Lumian had a sinking feeling the moment he heard the potion's name.

"Yes, Witch. In the world of mysticism, Warlocks and Witches are two entirely different concepts. You used to get them mixed up and call me a Witch from time to time. It was rather unsettling," Aurore said, taking the opportunity to enlighten him. "Drinking the Witch potion will turn you into a Witch. Acting as a Witch causes your body to undergo a complete transformation, turning you into a woman."

Hiss… Lumian took a deep breath, relieved that his first obtained characteristic was that of a Hunter.

Had he obtained something related to the Assassin pathway, he might very well have been lost to it due to his eagerness.

"What happened to the man who was considering it? Did he drink it?" Lumian asked, unable to resist.

Aurore replied with a smile, "He agonized over it for a long time. He didn't want to become a woman, but he also didn't want to stay at Sequence 8. Eventually, someone persuaded him, 'Life is short, why not give it a try?'"

"After that, I met him again at a gathering. No, he was already a her by then. She was already a woman by then. A beautiful and charming one at that."

"…" Lumian was momentarily speechless.

Aurore grinned at him and added, clearly enjoying herself, "In the future, should you reach Sequence 5 and find yourself unable to obtain the Sequence 4 materials for the Hunter pathway, you might consider the Demoness pathway instead. The Assassin pathway is also known as the Demoness pathway…"

Demoness… Lumian found the name "Assassin" bewildering.

The mysticism world was fraught with dangers!

He deftly steered the conversation back on track.

"So Madame Pualis is truly Pulitt the casanova."

Even an Assassin could transform into a Demoness. A path that enabled a man to bear children was likely to transform a man into a woman.

Aurore nodded warily and gazed out of the window.

"I suspect that Madame Pualis transitioned to a woman only after reaching a specific Sequence. She had to disappear to avoid discovery by the authorities. According to the mysterious lady, the power of a deity's boon can also be divided into Sequences.

"Her abnormal pathway would also include the ability to promote fertility, manipulate life, and control the undead."

Aurore deduced that she could manipulate life and control the undead from Lumian's battle with the midwife.

That was the same performance Madame Night, who looked like Madame Pualis, had showcased in Paramita with the undead chasing after her.

Aurore suddenly exclaimed.

"What's the matter?" Lumian asked cautiously.

Did his sister uncover another ominous truth?

Aurore scowled at her brother and replied, "At the afternoon tea, Madame Pualis said that love is unfathomable. She wished he would perish for his mistake, but when he faced death, she saved him and refused to tell the other party.

"I didn't comprehend it then, and I didn't dwell on it. Now, I wonder if she had an ulterior motive for saying that."

Lumian was equally puzzled.

"She saved someone? When did she do that…"

Suddenly, he halted and stared at Aurore.

The siblings remembered that Madame Night had saved them by distracting the undead in Paramita.

"But that was from the preceding cycle…" Lumian was about to reject it, but he couldn't.

He and Aurore exchanged a look and realized their eyes were filled with shock and dread.

If Madame Pualis was referring to that incident, it meant she retained some of her memories from the loop.

"It's impossible…" Aurore muttered to herself. "Never mind. Let's assume it's true. I'd rather overestimate our foe than underestimate them."

Lumian concurred. Then, he had a thought.

"Aurore, uh, Grande Soeur, considering that Madame Pualis might have been a man, did she fall in love with you?"

"I didn't do anything wrong. You were the one who spied on Louis Lund giving birth. Pualis is infatuated with you," Aurore riposted.

Lumian muttered under his breath, "Perhaps she believes that you instigated me.

"I don't usually associate with her, but I did once bring some people to see her having an affair with the padre. She teased me for it. You, on the other hand, discuss literature and trends with her occasionally. You even go to her house to borrow a pony."

"Huh…" Aurore's voice rose in disgust, "Then why was she trying to set me up with those awful men you told me about?"

Lumian paused before responding, "Maybe she's trying to discourage your interest in men and lead you to her instead."

"What kind of strange things have you been reading?" Aurore glared at her brother.

Not only could Lumian provide a rational answer, but he did it with forceful verve.

"Your novels. You wrote something similar in one of them."

"Is that so…" Aurore fell into deep thought.

After a moment, she looked out the window and said, "It's been a while, but Madame Pualis hasn't come after us. The cycle hasn't started again…"

"Perhaps she doesn't want to kill the foreigners. If an investigator sent by the officials were to be killed, it would cause even greater trouble," Lumian speculated. "And she doesn't suspect me, so she doesn't suspect you either."

The witness was dead, and no one else had seen him.

Aurore nodded and said self-deprecatingly, "I don't even feel like eating dinner."

Suddenly, Lumian had an idea. "What if we go to the castle?"

"Is the perpetrator returning to the scene of the crime?" Aurore laughed.

Lumian nodded.

"I want to investigate the castle. Madame Pualis doesn't suspect me, so I can go unnoticed."

"Oh, and I haven't picked any tulips yet. I can ask for a few under the guise of making fragrances."

Since Aurore and Madame Pualis appeared to be friends, there was no issue with Lumian's actions.

Aurore thought for a moment before saying, "We can try, but we can't be sure that Madame Pualis won't cause trouble.

"Yes, if you don't return in half an hour, I'll go to the edge of the village and trigger the cycle to start again."

"Alright," Lumian agreed.

......

As Lumian arrived at the administrator's castle once again, the sun had already set behind the mountain, painting the horizon with a red hue.

Passing through the garden, Lumian reached the open main entrance and approached a male servant.

"Excuse me, my Grande Soeur Aurore is creating a fragrance. Could I please borrow some tulips from Madame Pualis?"

The male servant, dressed in a red shirt and white pants, responded without any hint of suspicion.

"I'll inquire with Madame."

He quickly disappeared into the castle. Shortly after, he reappeared.

"Madame says you may go straight to the garden to pluck them."

She really doesn't suspect me? Besides, it's as if nothing happened… Nevertheless, he refrained from entering the castle and headed towards the garden to search for the tulips.

It was there that Lumian spotted the flowers and a lady's maid pruning a flowering tree in the shadows.

As he casually sized her up, his gaze suddenly froze.

The lady's maid was in her forties, with brown hair, brown eyes, and a pretty face devoid of wrinkles. She was none other than the midwife who had fought Valentine and the others and was eventually killed by Ryan!

Yet, here she stood, seemingly unscathed, her face shrouded in a shadow cast by the flowers and trees.

Chapter 70: Spirit Channeling

The instant he laid eyes on the 'midwife,' Lumian's heart seemed to cease beating.

She's still alive?

I clearly saw her killed by Ryan, and her spirit was destroyed!

Lumian remembered vividly how the midwife had eventually been reduced to tiny pieces of flesh scattered on the ground. Some parts couldn't even be found.

This must be a freaking ghost encounter! No, wait, there's the sound of breathing! Lumian thought of some scenes from his sister's novels, and his heart went from stillness to rapid beating.

If it weren't for the 'midwife' not looking at him, preoccupied with trimming the branches of the flowering tree, he would have reacted to the stress.

Kacha, kacha. Tiny tree branches that grew haphazardly fell to the ground, snapping the stunned Lumian out of his daze.

He subconsciously took a step forward, walking towards the place where the tulips bloomed.

The 'midwife' didn't stop him or even turn around.

Lumian couldn't help but steal another glance at her. She was focused on pruning the branches. The shadows cast by the flowers and trees made her profile look dark and gloomy.

Not daring to linger, Lumian plucked a few tulips and left the administrator's castle.

His heart was still pounding even when he returned to the village.

After calming himself down, Lumian walked towards Reimund Greg's house. It was still too early for Aurore to trigger the cycle.

It was also a two-story building, but compared to Lumian and Aurore's house, it was clearly older, more dilapidated, and narrower. The outer wall revealed the gray color of stone amidst the many green plants creeping over it.

At that moment, the Gregs' door was wide open, allowing one to see the stove on the left, the table on the right, and the wooden buckets behind.

Lumian recalled that the wooden barrels were used for storage. There were two simple wooden beds in the space they isolated. They belonged to Reimund and his sister.

Lumian didn't knock and walked straight into the Gregs' house as usual.

Reimund's elder and younger sisters were helping their mother prepare dinner. Reimund's father, Pierre Greg, was sitting on a chair at the wooden table, drinking cheap wine with a gloomy expression.

"I heard that Reimund is missing?" Lumian asked Pierre Greg with a concerned look.

Pierre Greg seemed to have aged significantly, and the few wrinkles on his face were even more pronounced.

He looked up at Lumian and asked in confusion and surprise, "You don't know?"

At this moment, Reimund's mother and two sisters stopped what they were doing and turned to look at Lumian.

Lumian couldn't be any more honest.

"I've been busy with my own matters. I haven't seen Reimund for days."

Pierre Greg had already inquired and knew that Lumian was telling the truth. Otherwise, suspecting that this rascal had instigated Reimund to run away from home, he would have gone questioning him that afternoon.

"Two afternoons ago—they said it was the 29th—Reimund didn't return after he left," Pierre Gregg said with a gloomy expression. "We've been looking for him. His two brothers are still out searching. Where do you think he'd have gone?"

Lumian hesitated before responding, "He usually says that he doesn't want to learn shepherding, but he doesn't have much money on him. It's impossible for him to leave on his own. Let me see if he left anything behind…"

As he spoke, he walked naturally to the wooden barrels at the back of the first floor and passed through them to reach Reimund's bed.

The bed was very simple, as if pieced together with a few planks of wood. However, the grayish-blue bedsheets, the pillow stuffed with straw, and the quilt with traces of mending were all clean. It was evident that they were often washed.

This was because Aurore loved cleanliness and didn't allow lice to appear at home or on her body. Even Lumian had developed this habit. Therefore, when he interacted with his playmates, he would consciously urge them to maintain personal hygiene. He didn't allow those fellows to be dirty and live with lice and fleas all day.

If Reimund and the others slacked off at some point and were discovered by him to have lice, they would definitely be pranked. They might even be pushed into the river and made to wash up even if they refused to.

After a few years of "oppression," Reimund habitually helped clean up the environment when he returned home.

"We didn't find any message," Pierre Gregg said with a worried expression as he followed him to the bed.

Lumian sat by Reimund's bed and reached under the pillow.

He found two items—a cracked, dark-red fountain pen and an exercise book filled with handwriting.

Reimund was hungry for knowledge, but had little chance to receive an education.

In Emperor Roselle's time, villages like Cordu had mandatory township schools, housed in the same building as the administrator's office. The building also contained an army recruitment center, a recruit physical examination committee, and other institutions, but ultimately, there were only a few staff members.

In recent decades, many villages had lost their schools. The Church provided Sunday school for larger populations, but Cordu had to rely on educated elders to teach the children sporadically. Over time, some young people became illiterate again.

When Lumian was in a good mood, he would claim he needed money for drinks. So, he sold his old fountain pens and workbooks to Reimund, Ava, and others at a low price, teaching them some words in the process.

Reimund took every lesson as seriously as he did combat training and helping shepherds make cheese in the mountains to earn money.

He was determined to change his fate.

Lumian removed the fountain pen and exercise book, staring at them for a long time.

"I asked the padre. He said these are just simple words that don't form a sentence." Pierre Gregg sighed.

Lumian flipped through the exercise book, noting how the handwriting had improved from messy and ugly to something acceptable.

"True, there's no message." He agreed with Pierre Gregg before adding, "But I wonder if it's a code that can be deciphered into a sentence. You've heard a similar story, right? Aurore told it to many village children. Did they mention it at home?"

This included Reimund's younger brother and sister.

"Yes, they did." Pierre Gregg nodded.

Cordu villagers would often gather in the kitchen at night for conversation, laughter, and storytelling when they couldn't afford the tavern. First-time guests had to follow Intis social norms and bring a bottle of wine, even a cheap one.

Pierre Gregg had heard a similar story from his youngest son during such a gathering.

Lumian held up the exercise book confidently.

"I'll take it back to Aurore for her to examine and see if she can find anything."

"Alright," Pierre Gregg didn't think it was anything valuable.

After leaving the area surrounded by wooden barrels, Lumian walked toward the door, and Pierre Gregg sat down again.

A few steps later, Lumian heard Pierre Gregg sigh and mutter,"If he didn't want to learn shepherding, he could've told me. Why did he just leave… Our family will soon be wealthy. He won't need to learn shepherding anymore…"

Wealthy? Lumian's heart raced as he turned around, feigning curiosity.

"What's this chance for wealth?"

Pierre Gregg didn't look up, keeping his head lowered as he said despondently, "Our family's horoscope is about to change. Our luck will improve…"

What— Lumian felt a chill down his spine.

"Who told you this?" he asked.

Pierre Gregg didn't answer, continuing to lament.

......

Upon returning home, Lumian immediately informed his sister that the 'midwife' was still alive.

Aurore frowned her blonde brows. "She's not necessarily a living person."

"Huh?" Lumian was taken aback.

Aurore pondered and said, "Didn't we discuss this before? Madame Pualis' pathway might have the power to control the undead. That might be a zombie."

"Impossible," Lumian said. "I saw her without activating my Spirit Vision. Besides, there were no signs of stitching on her body. Back then, she was diced into many small pieces by Ryan." Lumian recalled and said, "Also, I heard her breathing!"

At this point, Lumian paused.

"However, she was indeed a little sluggish. Her expression was gloomy, and her eyes weren't lively enough. She looked almost exactly like Naroka! The one I saw on the night of the previous, previous loop when Naroka took the initiative to enter Paramita!"

Naroka, whose face was pale and eyes were blank.

Of course, the 'midwife' obviously resembled a living person more.

Aurore nodded and said, "A special state that's closer to the undead?"

Unable to deduce an answer, she gestured for Lumian to say something else.

Lumian recounted everything that had happened in Reimund's father's words in detail, as if nothing had happened in the castle.

Aurore listened quietly and nodded.

"Madame Pualis doesn't seem to want to pursue the matter of the castle. I wonder what she's holding back…

"Also, your discovery proves that a portion of the abnormality in the village is related to her, but she doesn't seem to be involved in the cycle…"

What she meant was that Madame Pualis's involvement in the abnormality was mainly the fertility, death, soul, and Paramita. Nothing to do with the time loop.

"I think so too." Lumian had such an inkling during his explorations. "It seems that the person behind the padre and company is most likely not Madame Pualis."

Referring to Reimund's father's words, he guessed,

"The one who spread the news that doing something can affect the horoscope and obtain good luck?"

Aurore acknowledged tersely.

"We'll investigate tomorrow and see if we can channel Reimund's spirit tonight."

......

After dinner, Aurore saw that it was about time and began to set up the altar.

She was praying to herself, so she only placed a single candle, but the candle was replaced by another one made of slumber flowers and other materials.

Aurore sanctified a silver dagger and created a wall of spirituality. Then, she dripped the extract made of night vanilla and moon flowers onto the orange flames, stirring up a misty fog.

Seeing that the preparations were complete, Aurore glanced at the workbook on the altar and took a step back. She said in ancient Hermes, "I!"

As she uttered the word, her eyes darkened, as if an invisible wind was swirling around her.

"I summon in my name:"

This was the second sentence she said, and she changed it to Hermes.

As she didn't know where Reimund's spirit was, she couldn't directly communicate with it. She could only try summoning it. As a wild Beyonder, she didn't dare pray to the Evernight Goddess, who was in charge of this domain. She could only rely on herself. The chances of success weren't high, unless Reimund's spirit was indeed somewhere in Cordu and was very close.

Aurore continued to recite, "The spirit lingering in Cordu Village.

"The man named Reimund Greg.

"The owner of this exercise book…"

The orange candle flame suddenly swayed, absorbing the surrounding fog and becoming slightly larger.

Its light rippled and was dyed with a deep blue color.

Beads of sweat appeared on Aurore's forehead as she began to borrow strength from various materials.

Amidst the howling wind, a figure appeared above the blue flames.

Having already activated his Spirit Vision, Lumian saw a translucent figure. He had brown hair and eyes, looking rather ordinary. It was Reimund Greg.

He was indeed still in the village.

Reimund's body was bloated, his face pale, and blood-colored tears were dripping from the corners of his eyes.

Wh— Aurore was clearly stunned.

After the cycle was restarted, Reimund had only gone missing and hadn't drowned. How did his spirit end up like this?

That's right. If he hadn't drowned, how could he have become a spirit?

They were self-contradictory…

Amidst her confusion, Aurore asked, "Reimund Greg, why did you disappear?"

Reimund's expression suddenly turned ferocious as he shouted sharply, "They drowned me!"

Chapter 71: Underground

They? Lumian couldn't hide his surprise at Reimund's response.

He had assumed that Reimund had drowned in the river of his 'own accord,' becoming a sacrifice to some unknown entity. But now, it seemed there were others involved. It wasn't just an unseen force that had pulled Reimund into the depths.

"Who are they?" Aurore demanded.

Reimund's face contorted with pain and fury. His eyes burned with hatred. He spat the words, "Pons Bénet, Pons Bénet and his men!

"They held me down in the water!"

After Ava and the others had left the riverbank, Pons Bénet and his thugs appeared where Reimund had washed ashore. They forced him back into the water, drowning him to turn him into a sacrifice? Lumian pieced together the scenario from Reimund's words.

The entire Lent celebration had been twisted into a dark, sacrificial ritual!

Aurore pressed for more information, but Reimund only repeated the same few phrases, as if they were all that remained of his memory.

Damn, we missed the best time for spirit channeling. All we have left is this lingering obsession… Aurore thought for a moment, formulating a question that Reimund might or might not recall.

"Did they sacrifice you to a specific being?

"What's so special about Him? Where is He?"

This time, Aurore was more cautious. She didn't ask for the full name, only seeking indirect information to aid her judgment.

She believed that if Reimund's spirit had sensed anything during the sacrifice, it would have left a strong impression. Otherwise, it wouldn't.

Reimund hesitated, tears welling up in his ghostly eyes, turning the corners red.

Lumian's expression darkened. Unconsciously, he began clenching his fists.

Suddenly, Reimund cried out, "Underground! Beneath the cathedral!"

What? Aurore could hardly believe her ears.

Based on her question, Reimund was implying that the secret entity he had been sacrificed to resided beneath the cathedral!

That's impossible. It's the Fifth Epoch. How can a god walk the land? Aurore composed herself, considering that Reimund's spirit retained only a fragment of his obsession and some spirituality. His answers were disjointed and fixated on certain points. In other words, his testimony might not actually confirm the being's location beneath the cathedral. It could simply be a reaction to her prompting.

But regardless of whether Reimund's answer was true or a reflection of his obsession, something was amiss beneath the cathedral. It held the key to the sacrificial ritual!

Aurore could only hope that the secrets hidden there wouldn't prove too horrifying or outlandish.

She tried asking about other matters, but Reimund's spirit could only repeat phrases like "they drowned me," "Pons Bénet," and "beneath the cathedral."

Seeing no further gains, Aurore ended the spirit channeling and watched as Reimund's form vanished above the candle flame. The blue hue that had stained the altar swiftly receded.

After dispelling the wall of spirituality, she noticed Lumian lost in thought, silent.

"Wh-what are you thinking about?" Aurore waved her hand in front of her brother's eyes.

The corners of Lumian's mouth curled up as he forced a smile.

"I regret not hitting Pons Bénet harder yesterday."

He had kneed Pons Bénet, causing him considerable pain, but he had held back, not wanting to escalate the conflict with the padre and his allies before the twelfth night. He had rationally restrained himself, not crippling Pons Bénet outright.

"There'll be a chance," Aurore reassured him.

Lumian nodded and chuckled.

"Actually, we've been overlooking something. Before Lent, we're not the only ones afraid of escalating the conflict. The padre and his goons are too. They're not ready, and they haven't started the ritual."

In other words, if Lumian had truly wanted Pons Bénet to suffer irreversible harm, the padre would likely only feign retribution and avoid any real action.

They would bide their time until Lent. Regardless of whether Lumian had offended them or not, once the Lent celebration "began," everyone in the village would be in their sights.

Aurore understood Lumian's point and nodded slightly.

"You can decide how to exact revenge on Pons Bénet.

"What we need to focus on now is how we can survive until the twelfth night after the padre and his cronies gain immense power during Lent."

Lumian immediately sank into deep contemplation.

Aurore shared her thoughts.

"We have two options. We either join forces with the three foreigners, or we find a way to strengthen ourselves."

She hesitated for a moment before continuing, "If we can confirm that Madame Pualis has no connection to the loop and is trapped here like us, we might even cooperate with her."

"Huh?" Lumian was taken aback.

Madame Pualis was a terrifying and malevolent Beyonder!

Aurore sighed and said, "A philosopher from my homeland once said that balance is needed between principal and secondary contradictions. We must unite all possible forces.

"Yes, there's definitely something off about the cathedral's underground. It might hold crucial clues. We have to investigate it before Lent, as we may not get another opportunity."

From Aurore's knowledge, most of the cathedrals in this world had underground chambers. Some stored Sealed Artifacts, while others served as burial sites for important figures. Although Cordu's cathedral didn't contain Sealed Artifacts or notable people to be buried, it still featured a large basement when constructed.

"Alright," Lumian agreed. "I'll talk to the three foreigners tomorrow."

He then brought up Reimund's condition.

"Why can he only say those few words? Was the spirit not summoned properly?"

Aurore sighed again.

"There's a critical period for mediumship. Within an hour of death.

"After an hour, the spirit of the deceased rapidly dissipates, losing their original memories. All that remains are some thoughts, emotions, and images they can't let go. In the technical terms of our homeland, it's called obsession."

Lumian nodded slightly.

"When the next cycle starts, we'll summon Reimund from the beginning. Does that count as an hour of death?

"But wait; why does Reimund remember the last, last cycle?"

Only then did he recognize the issue. After the cycle reset, shouldn't Reimund forget about drowning?

Aurore was stumped. Combining her thoughts from the ritual, she pondered and said, "I believe it counts. It's not Lent yet. According to the timeline, Reimund hasn't drowned, so he shouldn't know the murderer's identity. However, because he lost his body, he can only exist as a spirit. It's similar to death. There will be lingering obsessions. Thus, the person we summoned just now remembers certain events from the previous, previous cycle.

"In simpler terms, Reimund's state has become unique due to his body's loss. He retains a certain amount of memories when the cycle resets!

"Heh, it's like a glitch."

The loop created a tiny error because Reimund's body was sacrificed? Lumian roughly understood his sister's explanation.

Aurore chuckled and added, "It seems that the power allowing us to loop is very mechanical and rigid. It probably isn't under the original owner's control and operates autonomously. Otherwise, it could easily target Reimund's spirit."

At this point, she appeared to relax somewhat.

"Haha, in that case, we still have a chance to break the cycle."

Influenced by his sister's emotions, Lumian's somber mood lifted slightly.

After all their efforts, they finally saw a glimmer of hope.

The two of them cleaned up the altar and moved to the second-floor study. Aurore taught Lumian Hermes and ancient Hermes, word by word, based on the disordered and incorrect ritual he had written.

Lumian had already learned some words, so his progress was promising.

Under the bright electric lamp, Aurore explained the pronunciation and structure of the words to her brother. While he revised, she used musk, cloves, blood, and other materials to create candles.

As Lumian studied intently, he occasionally glanced at his sister working beside him, feeling as if he had returned to their warm life—free from loops or malevolent gods.

Outside the window, the night was tranquil.

......

Lumian woke up to find himself in his misty room.

As he got out of bed, he walked over to the table and grabbed a pen and paper. He then wrote down the ancient Hermes and Hermes words, but in the wrong order. He then corrected them by labeling each with a number.

After finishing, Lumian let out a sigh of relief and looked over to the table.

There were four items there, the two grayish-white musk candles made by Aurore (one with Lumian's blood, and the other without), the bottle of gray amber perfume, the metal bottle containing tulip powder, and the silver dagger provided by Aurore.

That lady really sent them in… Lumian's heart calmed down when he saw the items.

Lumian grabbed the items and looked for Aurore's homemade incense. When he found it, he went downstairs and placed everything on the dining table. Then, he went to the kitchen to grab a glass of water and a pile of coarse salt.

The materials for the ritual were now prepared.

Before falling asleep, Aurore was worried that Lumian didn't have the corresponding symbol to pray for the boon. This would prevent him from burning the items on the replica goatskin to inform the target deity of his desires. However, since the mysterious lady didn't mention it, there was probably no need for it. After all, it was essentially praying to the power in Lumian's body. It could 'hear' all the prayers without any additional 'paperwork.'

Lumian took a deep breath and slowly exhaled as he looked at the items on the dining table.

Without wasting a moment, Lumian placed one of the grayish-white musk candles, the one with his own blood, at the top of the altar, representing the deity. He placed the other candle in front of him.

Following the order of god before man, Lumian lit the candle by sparking his spirituality. He wasn't an expert at sanctifying the ritual's silver dagger or creating a wall of spirituality.

As Lumian's spirituality flowed out from the tip of the silver dagger and connected with the air around him, he felt a mystical sensation that he couldn't explain.

Soon, the wall of spirituality was complete, and Lumian's own spirituality was significantly depleted.

He cleared his mind using Aurore's homemade incense and Cogitation, allowing him to enter a state where he could perform the ritualistic magic.

With a sizzling sound, Lumian dripped the gray amber perfume and tulip powder onto the candle that represented the deity. A strange fragrance filled the air, and Lumian felt a magical energy pulsing around him.

Lumian took a step back, glancing at the small notebook beside the altar. He looked at the burning candle and shouted in ancient Hermes, "Power of Inevitability!"

Chapter 72: Sacrificial Dance

"Power of Inevitability!"

As Lumian uttered the words in ancient Hermes, the light above the altar dimmed ominously. The orange candle flame flickered wildly, as if buffeted by an unseen wind, compressing to the size of a peppercorn.

Simultaneously, heat bloomed in his chest, and his head spun. His ears buzzed, as if once again on the verge of hearing that terrifying voice emanating from an infinite distance, yet remaining unnervingly close.

Lumian steadied himself and had a sudden realization.

The corruption within him had been sealed by the master of the bluish-black symbol. Even if he delved into deep Cogitation, he could only summon the thorn symbol and release a meager aura. He couldn't harness its true power.

Could this ritual bypass the seal and absorb the boon?

Only if the owner of the bluish-black symbol, that great existence, had tacitly granted permission!

Remembering the enigmatic lady's self-assured demeanor, Lumian felt a surge of confidence. He even suspected that the ritual itself contained a component for seeking the great presence's approval.

As for which part, his knowledge of mysticism was too limited to speculate.

In the throes of the ritual, Lumian dared not delay. With a focused mind, he began reciting the subsequent incantations in ancient Hermes.

"You are the past, the present, and the future;

"You are the cause, the effect, and the process."

These words resonated within the sealed altar. The floor and artifacts seemed to writhe, as if innumerable bizarre entities were about to burst forth and invade the dream ruins.

Ooo!

A black wind materialized out of nowhere, encircling Lumian. The candle flame, previously shrunk to a peppercorn size, swelled, suffused with a silvery hue and a touch of black.

Lumian heard the voice that had always pushed him to the brink of death once more. But at some point, a faint gray fog had emerged from the altar, coalescing around him.

The sensation left him suspended between deep Cogitation and witnessing the Noodle Man's dance. He wasn't on the edge of death, but he wasn't comfortable either. It felt like severe tinnitus—dizzy, nauseous, and agitated to a degree, his mind a swirling mess.

Barely maintaining control, Lumian continued the ritual.

"I implore you,

"I beseech your benediction.

"I plead with you to grant me the power of Dancer.

"Tulip, a herb that belongs to inevitability, please pass your powers to my incantation!

"Gray amber, a herb that belongs to inevitability, please pass your powers to my incantation!"

As the ritual progressed, Lumian's tinnitus and dizziness intensified. It felt as if countless maggots writhed beneath his skin.

Finally, he completed the incantation.

Almost instantaneously, the silver-black candle flame condensed, transforming into a pillar of light that illuminated his left pectoral.

Silver-black phantom liquid poured forth, swiftly enveloping Lumian, rendering him sinister and fearsome.

It felt as if his skin was pierced by a thousand needles, his muscles and ligaments torn asunder. The mysterious voice became deafening, reverberating within his mind.

Lumian was consumed by excruciating pain, his mind teetering on the edge of madness.

His blood vessels seared as if incinerated from within.

This torment far exceeded the near-death state induced by deep Cogitation.

All he could do was clench his teeth and endure, desperately clinging to his fraying sanity. As for everything else, it didn't matter.

Amid the tempestuous onslaught, he was adrift. Time became an enigma.

At last, the agonizing pain abated. Lumian felt as if he had been unburdened or had emerged from drowning, a sudden sense of relief washing over him.

He swiftly collected his thoughts and looked up.

The candle flame had returned to its original size, but retained its silver and black hues.

Regaining his senses, Lumian took two hasty steps forward and snuffed out the candle representing him to avert any mishaps.

Next was the candle symbolizing the deity.

He meticulously followed the procedure, completing the ritual step by step. As he dissolved the wall of spirituality, he felt mentally drained and his body sore, as if he had battled a formidable beast.

Before long, the dining table was cleared. Lumian began to assess his condition and discovered a wealth of knowledge had materialized in his mind.

There were three primary parts to this:

First, it involved harnessing the power of dance, rhythm, and spirituality to tap into the forces of nature and communicate with unknown entities. This was the essence of being a Dancer. With this knowledge, Lumian could not only beseech Inevitability but also craft new sacrificial dances tailored to various situations, in order to "appease" other beings.

The second and third parts were applications of the first.

What Lumian desired most was the enigmatic dance performed by Noodle Man. The knowledge was directly implanted into his mind, enabling him to comprehend it instantly; all that remained was to practice.

With this arcane sacrificial dance, Lumian could activate the black thorn symbol on his chest while exploring the dream ruins, suppressing or weakening the formidable monsters therein.

The third segment involved another bizarre dance. It didn't resemble a traditional sacrificial rite but rather a blend of sacrifice and summoning.

By executing this dance, Lumian could attract nearby objects, and at the cost of his own blood, bond one of them to himself, thereby gaining access to one of its abilities or traits.

Of course, Lumian would first need to endure such possession. Some attachments could inflict significant adverse effects on humans, while others might prove reluctant to depart, creating complications.

Lumian felt it was crucial to understand the summoned entities fully. It would be far too hazardous to experiment without anticipating potential issues.

The value of mystical knowledge was apparent in such a situation. Lumian desperately required resources like Mysterious Creatures Illustrated or Spirit World Creatures Illustrated, but even a Warlock, renowned for their extensive knowledge, could not possess such information.

Moments later, Lumian stretched and discovered that his flexibility had indeed improved dramatically.

Although not quite on par with Noodle Man, a mutated monster with reassembled organs, he now surpassed nearly all ordinary humans, enabling him to execute the enigmatic sacrificial dance.

Lumian effortlessly kicked backward, touching the back of his head, and nodded contentedly, murmuring, That's right. I can perform many actions that were once impossible. My Hunter combat skills have also greatly improved.

Lumian practiced the mysterious dance to familiarize his body with the corresponding movements, aiming to reduce the time needed to complete the routine.

Sometimes his movements were forceful and resonant, as if in combat, while other times they were gentle and unhurried, as if conveying a message, yet always rhythmic.

As Lumian danced, his spiritual energy radiated outward, merging with the ambient natural forces.

Gradually, his thoughts concentrated, his mind quieted, and he entered a transcendent, mystical state.

This allowed him to perceive various subtle phenomena surrounding him, as if his Spirit Vision had been activated.

Simultaneously, he seemed to connect with the unseen power within him.

His chest warmed once more, and a faint, horrifying voice echoed, but without consequence.

Phew… Lumian ceased dancing, unfastened his clothing, and inspected his chest.

The black thorn symbol reemerged, accompanied by the bluish-black one.

Lumian's thoughts briefly scattered but quickly returned to normal. He had achieved the desired effect perfectly.

He then calculated the precise duration from the emergence of the black thorn symbol to its disappearance.

It lasted approximately one minute.

Lumian fastened his clothes and prepared to try the other bizarre dance.

It was crazy and warped, and he couldn't describe it properly.

As he danced, his spirituality spread out again, blending with the natural forces surrounding him.

In the last third of the dance, he sensed something strange approaching.

Three figures appeared on the first-floor window, but they were blurry and transparent. Lumian recognized them as the skinless monster, the shotgun monster, and the mouth orifice monster with the black mark.

He muttered in amusement, Is this a victims' complaints meeting?

Lumian could make one of the monsters attach to him and borrow their abilities by taking out a ritual silver dagger and making a cut on his body to release some blood.

He craved the mouth orifice monster's "invisibility" but resisted the urge—lest something happened via allowing a monster he murdered to possess him—and finished the dance.

As Lumian danced the last few moves, he heard weak and soft voices.

It sounded like many people communicating, but it was unclear where the voices came from.

Lumian analyzed it and realized the voices seemed to come from his body, from the corruption that had been sealed.

After the last move, Lumian stood there and muttered to himself, What did I hear?

Lumian was only semi-literate in the field of mysticism and couldn't identify the source of the soft sounds he heard. He had no choice but to give up, as it wasn't more terrifying than the corruption itself.

After the sounds subsided and him finishing the two mysterious dances, Lumian confirmed that the Dancer had enhanced his spirituality. Although he knew he was most likely inferior to Sequence 9s who excelled in spirituality, he had escaped the shackles of being a Hunter. He felt he was above average.

My shortcomings have been compensated for. Lumian was very happy about this.

Lumian didn't dwell on what would happen to his body after enduring the Dancer's power and the corresponding corruption. He couldn't stop it, so he decided not to think about it. He rubbed his tired head and made up his mind to rest for the night, returning to the real world to wait for the owl!

Chapter 73: Tracking

Lumian's eyes snapped open, his aches gone and his spirituality restored.

He sprang up, strode to the window, and yanked the curtains aside.

Dawn had yet to break. The blood-red moon sank in the west while stars speckled the sky. On a nearby elm, the large owl with piercing eyes reappeared, gazing down at Lumian.

Instead of alarm or anger, Lumian flashed a dazzling smile.

"You're back," he said, almost too eagerly. His mannerisms, his tone, even his facial expression—it all made the target want to punch him.

The owl stared for a few seconds before spreading its wings and vanishing into the darkness.

Almost simultaneously, Aurore emerged from her bedroom, turned the handle, and entered Lumian's room.

"How'd it go?" Lumian asked immediately.

Aurore nodded.

"White Paper is on it."

Her once light-blue eyes had darkened, and the trees in them grew larger as they receded.

She produced a mercury-plated mirror and set it on Lumian's table. Using pale-white powder, she cast a spell that showed him what she was seeing.

Lumian glimpsed the owl's silhouette. It circled Cordu at a low altitude, as if trying to shake off any pursuers. But White Paper, a creature from the spirit world, was swift and unfazed, maintaining a constant distance.

After a minute or two, the owl reached the village square.

Without hesitation, it dove into the cemetery beside the cathedral.

Why is it here again? Lumian sighed inwardly.

The last time the siblings spied on Michel Garrigue, the "lizard" that crawled from the deputy padre's mouth also wound up in the cemetery, slipping in and out of various graves!

Lumian glanced at his sister. "You don't think it's like in stories, where the cemetery doubles as a villain's lair or hideout, do you?"

Aurore scoffed. "You know life inspires art, right?"

"I suppose…" Lumian conceded, accepting the professional author's explanation.

At that moment, the owl landed on an unremarkable grave.

Like most graves in Intis, it featured a deep pit filled with a coffin and covered with soil. One or two stone slabs lay atop it, and a tombstone marked its head.

This was Lumian's guess, at least; from the outside, the grave seemed ordinary.

The owl settled on the slabs sealing the grave.

With White Paper's aid, Aurore and Lumian uncovered suspicious traces.

The tombstone was blank. The stone slab, which should have been dirty and overgrown, was clean, as if regularly tended.

"Something's off about this grave," Aurore remarked.

As she spoke, the slabs sealing the grave fell.

No, not fell—opened.

Inward, like a door, revealing darkness and stone stairs descending deeper.

"Wow," Lumian marveled. "It's huge!"

Not the average grave he'd pictured, but more like a spacious mausoleum.

Cordu has such a place… Aurore had thought six years in town taught her everything about Cordu, but it was growing stranger by the day.

As the siblings talked, the owl swooped into the depths of the mausoleum.

The underground space was no exaggeration. As White Paper followed, it entered a tomb chamber.

About the size of Lumian's kitchen, the chamber held a black coffin at its center.

The coffin wasn't closed. The lid leaned against the side, resting on the ground.

The owl flew over and perched on the coffin's edge.

"The dead Warlock?" Lumian tensed.

Aurore tersely agreed and instructed White Paper to approach the coffin and peer inside.

Almost simultaneously, Lumian spotted a figure lurking in a corner of the tomb.

Before he could tell his sister to check it out, White Paper's gaze fell into the open coffin.

With a bang, the mercury mirror before them shattered, and Aurore let out a pained, muffled cry.

Lumian spun to face his sister, only to find her eyes squeezed shut. Blood-streaked tears traced her cheeks, and her facial muscles spasmed as if they might split.

Without waiting for the semi-illiterate mysticism student to react, Aurore retrieved a short incense stick from a hidden pocket and lit it with a match.

A subtle scent wafted, distant and faint, soothing the body and mind.

Aurore's facial distortion eased. Finally, she exhaled and wiped her tears with a handkerchief.

"Are you okay?" Lumian asked, concerned.

Aurore's eyes remained closed.

"It's not serious. I'll recover after some sleep. Luckily, White Paper is weak. Sometimes, weakness is an advantage!"

She rejoiced.

"Huh?" Lumian didn't understand.

Aurore laughed at herself.

"In short, I saw something I shouldn't have, but White Paper was too weak to handle it. It caught only a fleeting glimpse before suffering severe injuries that forced it to retreat into the spirit world. The impact on me lessened significantly as well. Otherwise, it wouldn't have been so easy to keep things under control. It could have been quite problematic."

The world of mysticism is perilous… Lumian truly grasped the meaning of not seeing what one shouldn't.

He waited for his sister to recover slightly before asking, "What did White Paper see? Why was it so harmful?"

"I saw a silver-black speck of light." Aurore didn't dare to remember. "As for things that can cause damage just by looking at them, there are countless possibilities. Perhaps it's an object that reveals godhood, or a High-Sequence Beyonder's Mythical Creature form, or something laden with curses and malice…"

"Mythical Creature form?" Lumian had never encountered this term before.

Aurore casually elucidated, "The essence of the divine pathway is to transform Beyonders into deities. At Sequence 4, we can assume our own Mythical Creature form, albeit incomplete. For those below Sequence 4, merely witnessing this form can inflict harm. They might even lose control."

Saints are that formidable? They're worlds apart from Beyonders below Sequence 4… No wonder they're deemed demigods at Sequence 4… Lumian instantly recognized his own ignorance. He had naively believed that the demigod title was basically no different from lower-ranked Beyonders.

He then said, "Aurore, when White Paper neared the coffin, I think I saw a figure in a corner of the tomb, but I couldn't make out who it was, what they looked like, or what they wore."

"Another person was there?" Aurore was taken aback.

Lumian nodded.

"So, is the one inside the coffin the deceased Warlock or the one in the corner?"

"I think it's the one in the coffin." Aurore, eyes still closed, pondered before continuing, "The one in the corner is either his puppet or subordinate, or another Beyonder. They control the Warlock's corpse."

Lumian tersely acknowledged her words.

"This means the Warlock issue hasn't been fully resolved. Perhaps this is the root cause slowly corrupting Cordu."

This discovery left him both elated and frustrated.

He was pleased that their investigation had advanced significantly, but disheartened that merely glimpsing the Warlock's corpse could injure them. Losing control was a high probability. How could they return to the tomb for further confirmation and pursue additional actions?

Aurore also considered this.

"Let's not visit the tomb for now. We'll concentrate on the area beneath the cathedral. Maybe we can uncover vital clues there to help us resolve the tomb situation."

"Alright." Lumian had previously planned to discuss exploring the cathedral's underground with the three foreigners at dawn.

In response, Aurore added, "If I fully recover, I'll accompany you to the cathedral."

Lumian hesitated for two seconds before consenting.

At this point, they needed to marshal all their strength to find hope!

With her eyes still closed, Aurore asked, "Your ritual appears to have succeeded. How do you feel?"

Lumian recounted the entire ritual process and his gains, but omitted the precise description of the being.

"I nearly lost control when I received the boon. It stabilized afterward, and my body underwent no abnormal changes. Perhaps it's because my Sequence is low enough."

Aurore smiled, eyes still closed.

"The dance that summons abnormal creatures around and allows one to be possessed by them is quite intriguing.

"It reminds me of a legendary ability from our homeland, the Spiritual Boxer!"

"Huh?" Lumian couldn't comprehend.

Aurore laughed and replied, "It entails requesting partial possession from demigod-level creatures to utilize their combat prowess."

"That would require an incredibly robust body, soul, and mind, right?" Lumian speculated.

Aurore didn't pursue the topic further and instructed her brother, "Help me back to my room. I need to rest."

As Lumian assisted his sister and they walked to her bedroom, he casually inquired, "What I find odd about that ritual is that I extracted a bit of power from the seal without the bluish-black symbol's owner's consent. Could it be that He has been watching me the entire time? That's impossible. How could He have that much free time?"

Aurore mulled it over for a moment before responding, "You mentioned that the mysterious woman's description of the honorific name was vague and inaccurate to avoid drawing the attention of the corresponding being.

"Could it be that the black thorns and the bluish-black symbol have some sort of shared authority?" Lumian pondered aloud. "Maybe They both have power in the Fate domain. And when you use a vague honorific name, it could refer not only to the person with the black thorns, but also the owner of the bluish-black symbol.

"Under normal circumstances, this wouldn't matter much, but because you have the corresponding symbols and power on the altar, they reacted to the stimulation and the existence discovered your actions. And since you were guided by the mysterious lady, it was easy for you to obtain permission.

"So when you finish reciting all the honorific names and point to the corruption in your body, there won't be any obstacles in extracting some strength. The 'back door' has already been opened."

"What an ingenious ritual design… It has to be an expert at exploiting bugs."

"I see," Lumian said, finally understanding the situation.

Chapter 74: Mute

His sister needed rest, so Lumian couldn't learn new Hermes and ancient Hermes words. He could only revise what he had already learned. Around ten o'clock, he left the house and headed straight to Ol' Tavern.

He had two objectives: first, he wanted to see if the mysterious lady would appear after he became a Dancer and provide him with some knowledge. Second, Leah and the other foreigners lived there. After yesterday's incident, they might not be out today.

Upon entering Ol' Tavern, Lumian quickly scanned the room and was disappointed to find that the spot where the lady usually sat was vacant.

With a slow exhale, he walked to the bar counter, intending to ask if the three foreigners were around.

At this moment, the tavern owner, Maurice Bénet, appeared to have just woken up and was clearly not in high spirits. He had a bulbous nose and was conversing with a customer at the bar.

The customer seemed agitated, gesturing wildly and making muffled sounds, but he couldn't speak.

Mute? Lumian approached curiously and realized the customer wasn't one of the village mutes but Jean Maury, Sybil Berry's husband.

Sybil was the mistress of Padre Guillaume Bénet, sister of Shepherd Pierre Berry, and a member of their small group.

Jean Maury isn't mute... Lumian assessed the middle-aged man in confusion.

His black hair was unkempt, and his stubble was uneven. His eyes were filled with anger and fear.

Uncharacteristically agitated, he gestured urgently, trying to communicate something to the tavern owner.

As Lumian thought, "Odd," he approached the bar counter and knocked on it with a smile.

"Hey, what's going on?

"Maurice, did you sell fake alcohol to Jean? He looks so angry he can't speak."

"What's that got to do with me?" Maurice Bénet quickly defended himself. "He muted himself."

Jean Maury paused and glanced at Lumian, reverting to his usual sullen demeanor.

He then turned and left Ol' Tavern.

After he disappeared through the door, Lumian lowered his voice and asked, "What's wrong with him?"

Maurice Bénet looked outside and whispered, "I heard he caught Sybil and the padre in bed together last night, and it made him so mad he went mute. Today, he's been telling everyone he sees. Heh, he doesn't even have the guts to go to DariÃ¨ge to confront the padre. What a coward. Serves him right!"

Lumian was baffled and shocked.

If he remembered correctly, Jean Maury knew about his wife Sybil's prolonged affair with the padre. He just didn't want her to be with another man. How could he be so angry that he went mute over something he was prepared for?

Something was off!

Moreover, in the previous cycle, there had been no instance of Jean Maury becoming mute from anger. Otherwise, Lumian would have known.

In Cordu, this was headline news. It would have spread rapidly.

Could it be that their investigations had caused a disturbance, making Jean Maury encounter something he wouldn't have otherwise? As Lumian speculated, he showed an excited expression.

"Is that so?

"Then I'll have to ask him properly!"

Maurice Bénet wasn't surprised by his eagerness for gossip, thinking it was typical.

He scolded jokingly, "Damned kid, be decent and don't provoke that poor man. Besides, he's mute and can't write. How can he tell you what happened?"

Lumian chuckled and said, "Can't he gesture?"

He raised his hands and clenched his left fist, gently hitting his right palm.

Throughout the DariÃ¨ge region and even across southern Intis, this was a universal gesture for the act between a man and a woman.

Maurice Bénet cursed angrily, "I hope you've got some decency left and don't play pranks on that poor man."

"Don't worry. I just want to 'hear' the story." Lumian waved his hand and dashed out of Ol' Tavern, searching for Jean Maury.

However, Lumian didn't know where the man had gone, nor was he gesturing his story to other villagers. Lumian scoured Cordu but found no trace of him.

Finally, he arrived at Jean Maury's house.

At the entrance, Sybil Berry, clad in a grayish-white dress, was sorting through spoiled potatoes.

"What's the matter?" The woman looked up at Lumian.

Like Pierre Berry, she had blue eyes, and her long black hair flowed softly down her back, unlike other married women who always wore their hair in a bun.

Lumian answered frankly, "I'm looking for Jean Maury?"

With plump cheeks and gentle features, Sybil replied indifferently,"He's not home."

"Then do you know where he went?" Lumian pressed.

Sybil replied calmly, "We had an argument last night. He might have left Cordu and doesn't want to return for the time being."

Lumian's brows twitched. He sensed that something bad had happened.

Clearly, Jean Maury couldn't leave Cordu. That would trigger the cycle and cause a restart!

As these thoughts raced through his mind, Lumian wore a mischievous grin.

"Why did you guys quarrel? I heard that you and the padre..."

He didn't finish the sentence but instead punched his right palm with his left fist.

Sybil's face turned cold as she cursed in a low voice, "Get lost! Get out of my house!"

Lumian clicked his tongue and left Jean Maury's house.

After walking for a distance, the smile on his face vanished.

In truth, he didn't want to ask about Sybil's affair with the padre. He had seen the padre and Madame Pualis naked. What else was there to ask?

But if he didn't ask, it didn't fit his persona in the eyes of the villagers. He had already "visited" them. If he didn't anger the mistress of the house, could he still live up to the name of Prankster King of Cordu?

Therefore, Lumian had no choice but to ask. Otherwise, he might be suspected.

The persona of a character was sometimes useful and sometimes troublesome.

Judging by the padre's actions and the information he had, Lumian suspected that Jean Maury hadn't become mute because of the affair but had uncovered something else.

It was highly likely that he had been poisoned and rendered mute!

I have to find him as soon as possible. If he goes around looking for people to complain to, he might just die like the previous one. No, he's already missing... The more Lumian thought about it, the more he felt that something had happened to Jean Maury.

The villager who had snitched in DariÃ¨ge previously had fallen to his death for no reason!

Just as Lumian was making his last effort to find Jean Maury, he encountered Ryan, Leah, and Valentine, who were "hanging around" in the village.

They were still wearing their original clothes.

"Good morning, my cabbages," Lumian greeted them with a smile.

As soon as they approached, he immediately asked in a low voice, "Did anything happen yesterday?"

Leah replied with a smile, "That madame doesn't seem to want to pursue the matter. She didn't appear."

As expected... Lumian looked around and saw that there was no one nearby. Only then did he tell the three official investigators about his sister's deduction of the Madame Pualis pathway and her guess of Pulitt's identity.

Valentine's expression soured as he listened, while Leah was rather excited.

Ryan recalled and said, "It's rare for a Demoness to appear in Riston Province. We don't know much about this, but the higher-ups should know very well. I'll send a telegram later and tell them about Madame Pualis. Hmm, I'll only mention how Madame Pualis's room has Pulitt's photo, but the Roquefort family doesn't have Pualis."

Seeing Lumian's puzzled expression, Ryan added, "In Intis, Demoness-related matters often happen."

So, my sister's pen pal is also in Intis? Lumian nodded and said, "So far, Madame Pualis doesn't seem to have anything to do with the loop. Also, she seems to be aware of the loop. That might be why she didn't pursue our search of the castle.

"Is it possible that we can join forces with her to some extent?"

Valentine blurted out, "How can I work with such an evil and filthy person who's even more terrifying than a demon?"

Lumian didn't even look at him. He turned his gaze to Ryan and Leah.

Seeing that they were somewhat hesitant, he tried to persuade them earnestly.

"A limited cooperation, only in the loop. When this damned loop is resolved, you can deal with her however you want! You can even tell her directly about this. I believe she can understand and accept it."

Ryan thought for a few seconds, patted Valentine's shoulder, and said to Lumian, "Indeed, the most important thing now is to resolve this loop.

However, we can't be sure of that madame's attitude. We don't dare to visit her directly. I'm afraid we'll have to trouble you or your sister to communicate with her and inquire."

"Alright," Lumian agreed.

He planned to do it himself.

He didn't want his sister to be alone with Madame Pualis when he realized that she might harbor abnormal feelings for his sister.

Valentine kept a poker face as he listened to their conversation. He neither agreed nor disagreed.

Lumian peered around furtively once more.

"There are three more clues..."

He recounted Reimund's case, Jean Maury's situation, and the "burial chamber" where the owl had flown into.

Leah was stunned.

"How did you get so many clues so quickly?"

She even suspected this guy or his sister were off. That was why there were red flags and clues everywhere.

Who were the real investigators here? Why hadn't we caught on?

"Blame yourselves for not remembering the first two cycles." Lumian smirked, spreading his hands in mock innocence.

Leah nodded, swallowing his explanation.

Ryan mulled it over for a beat before uttering in a gravelly voice, "Then we gotta investigate the cathedral catacombs ASAP. Yeah, it's probably very dangerous down there. You should contact Madame Pualis first. If she's down to joining, we'll have a way higher chance of nailing this."

Chapter 75: Meeting Madame Pualis Again

Outside the administrator's residence, a building transformed from an old castle.

Lumian strolled through the gardens and approached the front door. He said to the valet standing guard, "I need a word with Madame Pualis."

The valet—clad in a crimson shirt and ivory pants—sized him up warily and asked, "What's this about?"

Is this brat here to make trouble?

Lumian scoffed. "That's not for you to know."

Why would some servant care so much? Who do you think you are? How many kids have you popped out?

The valet hesitated before deciding to pass the message to Madame Pualis and let her decide if she wanted to entertain this cheeky young man.

Lumian loitered by the entrance for a few minutes. When the valet returned, Lumian said, "Madame will see you in the small parlor."

The small parlor was familiar to Lumian. The few times he had accompanied his sister here, he had been entertained in that very room. Without needing directions, Lumian made his way to the correct room. The valet trailed behind like an obedient dog.

Lumian sprawled on the sofa in the parlor and helped himself to the black tea. Then Madame Pualis glided through the doorway.

The lady was dressed to kill in an exquisite black corset dress, a matching shawl draped over her shoulders. She wore a slightly askew lady's round hat and a diamond necklace laced in gold.

The outfit struck Lumian as familiar. He realized that Madame Pualis had worn this very ensemble when she came to seduce him.

She did that on purpose, didn't she? Lumian thought with an icy smile.

"Good morning, Madame Pualis."

Just as the greeting left his lips, Lumian suddenly noticed the figure beside Madame Pualis. It wasn't Cathy, the lady's maid, but the 'midwife' who had met her demise at Ryan's hands just yesterday.

The 'midwife' wore a grayish white dress. Her eyes were blank, her face expressionless. Her skin had a bluish tinge, identical to when Lumian had seen her corpse in the garden the previous evening. However, she wasn't carrying any gardening tools this time.

Bringing the 'midwife' instead of her maid? She did that on purpose too, didn't she? Lumian couldn't help the cynical thought.

Madame Pualis smiled. "It should be noon by now."

She settled into the armchair that signified the host, while the 'midwife' stood to one side like an accessory.

"If you haven't eaten lunch, it's not noon yet," Lumian quipped.

His heart raced underneath the retort. He suspected Madame Pualis had brought the 'midwife' here to interrogate him about yesterday's events.

If he didn't handle this well and Leah's group didn't restart the cycle in time, Lumian suspected he might have to play 'daddy' for a few minutes. Or longer.

Madame Pualis glanced at him, her bright eyes sparkling with an inscrutable smile.

Casually, she asked, "What seems to be the trouble?"

Lumian decided to cut to the chase. Solemnly, he said, "Madame, you must have realized we're stuck in a time loop."

As he spoke, he watched Madame Pualis's face closely, alert for any reaction.

If she revealed surprise, shock or confusion, he would quickly add, "Just kidding!" Then, he would start with something odd and see how she responded. Only then would he consider telling her about the time loop.

Of course, if Madame Pualis looked like she already knew and her 'secret' was out, escape would be his top priority.

The odds of escape were slim in that scenario, but how would he know if there was any hope without trying?

Madame Pualis sized Lumian up for a few seconds, then smiled.

"Looks like you've found a boss too."

She didn't seem surprised by the time loop concept, nor did she look puzzled. That was as good as admitting she knew what was going on.

Boss? That was a favorite word in Aurore's books. Did she mean some higher power that granted boons? Lumian interpreted Madame Pualis's words.

He believed she could retain memories across loops only because she had a 'boss'—some kind of protection.

Lumian smiled and pretended to sigh in relief. "Seems I won't need to explain much."

"What are you getting at?" Pualis asked, still smiling.

The 'midwife' stood motionless beside her like a mannequin.

Lumian had an excuse prepared and launched into it with enough charm to convince anyone.

"People outside already know about Cordu's abnormality. If we don't end this loop soon, this place will be wiped out. Everyone dies.

"We're in the same boat. Only by uniting can we avoid sinking. Only then do we have a chance of finding the key to escape this loop and return to normal life.

"Madame, time is running out. Let's work together."

Madame Pualis listened with a faint smile, not interrupting Lumian's story.

At this, she chuckled. "Who said we're in this together?"

What? Could she be the one wanting to sink the boat? Lumian grew alarmed.

Madame Pualis maintained her smile. "Why should I cooperate with you? I can leave here at a specific time."

Wh… Lumian was stunned, but a glimmer of hope flickered.

"Are you saying you have a way out of the time loop? You only need to do something at a precise time?"

Madame Pualis nodded and sipped her tea from fine porcelain. She said nothing else.

The perks of a higher power's protection… Wait, this isn't the first cycle. Why is she still here? Could other cycles have restarted before that specific time? Hmm… That explains why she didn't pursue us infiltrating the castle and killing the 'midwife'. She fears the three Beyonders causing trouble and forcibly restarting the cycle… Lumian grasped things that had puzzled him.

He suspected Madame Pualis was also waiting for the twelfth night.

Amid his thoughts, Lumian smiled. "I wonder if you can take Aurore and me out of this cycle?"

What official investigators? I've never heard of them!

Madame Pualis appraised him with amusement.

"Why should I help you?"

"Didn't you say that love…" Lumian stopped, unable to continue.

He meant to mention Madame Pualis's words about love, hoping she might save him and Aurore out of kindness. But since Madame Pualis likely desired his sister, he couldn't say it.

If Madame Pualis loved him, a shameless man like Lumian would have played the love card and offered to bear her child to get them out of this loop.

Well, he would grit his teeth and give birth himself if it meant Madame Pualis evacuating him and Aurore from this cycle.

Madame Pualis's expression shifted slightly. After a few seconds of silence, she said, "Are you suggesting love is unfathomable? Saving her despite clearly wanting her dead for her mistake?"

Lumian didn't answer. He could tell Madame Pualis referred to a 'she'.

Madame Pualis didn't expect a response. She sighed, "But what if it's irredeemable?"

Irredeemable… Lumian's heart sank like plunging into an icy lake in early spring.

Regaining his breath, he asked for confirmation,

"You mean, at that time, you can only take a few people, but that doesn't include me or Aurore?"

Madame Pualis nodded.

"You can see it that way."

Looks like I still have to rely on myself… Lumian sighed, forcing calm.

The rise and crash of hope was unpleasant indeed.

He thought for a moment, then smiled.

"Madame, the three foreigners and I will explore the cathedral's underground later. If anything happens, the cycle might restart ahead of time. We won't even make it to Lent."

Let alone the twelfth night.

Madame Pualis narrowed her eyes, chin raised. "Are you threatening me?"

"No, just a reminder." Lumian smiled sincerely, the picture of relaxed.

Outwardly, he feared angering Madame Pualis and being confined here to give birth. The three investigators would restart the cycle if he didn't emerge fifteen minutes later.

Madame Pualis gazed into Lumian's eyes for a few seconds. Seeing no flinch or evasion, she suddenly smiled.

"You're truly interesting. It would be lovely if you and your sister became my lovers."

Without waiting for a response, she turned to the 'midwife'.

"You destroyed a Heretic Spellmaster, yet I didn't blame you. I'm merciful enough, but you still expect my help?"

Heretic Spellmaster? Lumian filed away the term and said earnestly, "This isn't about help. It's about doing what benefits everyone."

Madame Pualis fell silent for a few seconds before smiling again.

"I won't explore the cathedral's underground with you, but for Aurore's sake and your courage, I'll provide some help if anything happens."

Lumian was satisfied to negotiate this much. He stood and mimicked the gentlemanly posture from his sister's books. Pressing a hand to his chest, he bowed. "I thank you, my lady."

Madame Pualis chuckled. "Shouldn't it be 'my sunshine'?"

She referred to what Lumian had said in a previous loop: "Madame, you are my sunshine."

Lumian felt embarrassed but had always been shameless. Pretending not to hear, he left the small parlor.

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After descending the hill from the castle and entering Cordu, Lumian spotted Leah, Ryan and Valentine waiting to greet him.

"How did it go?" Leah asked with a smile.

Lumian recounted his conversation with Madame Pualis, concluding, "This is the best outcome we could hope for."

"That's right. We can still count on someone to help in our direst moment." Ryan nodded.

Lumian asked, "Did you get a reply?"

Before visiting the castle, Ryan had reported Madame Pualis wasn't truly of the Roquefort family and Pulitt's photo was in her room. Leah exhaled, answering for Ryan, "Our superiors remind us to consider the possibility of Pulitt becoming a woman through potion or power."

"As expected," Lumian tersely acknowledged. "When do we explore the cathedral's underground?"

Ryan had already decided. In a deep voice, he said, "Now."

Chapter 76: Physical Examination

"Now?" Lumian jumped in fright.

Though eager to explore the cathedral's underground, not to this extent!

A thought occurred. "Can't we wait until nightfall?"

In the dead of night with only two or three servants left in the cathedral, wouldn't it be easy for Beyonders like them to infiltrate?

Ryan replied gently yet firmly, "Now is the ideal time. Think about it. If we realize there's no one in the cathedral at night and it lacks protection, how could the padre and company not realize the same? I suspect they'll send their strongest to guard it in shifts or set subtle traps. Once triggered, there'll be an alarm.

"And now, it's nearly noon. All villagers have gone home, so no one will come pray at this hour. Furthermore, it's daytime, so the traps won't activate to prevent accidents. With the two padres and servants in the cathedral, it's easy for people to lower their guard. In short, their strongest will be home eating in peace. We only face the padre, deputy padre and three odd-job workers."

Lumian nodded, grasping it, and finished Ryan's thought.

"And before April 3rd, the padre is still an ordinary person without supernatural powers."

Today was April 1st.

"Plus, though the deputy padre seems off, he's clearly not a core member of the padre's team. Same for the three odd-job workers," Leah added with a smile. "Can't four Beyonders handle five ordinary people silently?"

Lumian hesitated before replying, "But won't this make it impossible to reach the twelfth night?"

This amounted to triggering an abnormality on the padre's side. History would change accordingly.

"You said it yourself. Compared to us, the padre and company will hold back until Lent to usher in the twelfth night. As long as we don't kill him, finding someone entering the basement will make him pretend not to notice and accelerate gaining supernatural powers," Leah said smiling. "Gaining power, he might hunt us with the others, but Cordu isn't small and we're not weak. We can hide and stall until Lent."

Lumian accepted this reasoning. "Alright, let's do it now." He reminded them, "But Aurore's eyes haven't fully healed. I'm afraid she can't help us."

Before seeing Madame Pualis, Lumian had checked on Aurore. Her eyes might only recover by evening.

"It's fine. Madame Pualis backs us, doesn't she?" Leah said half-jokingly, the bells above her head ringing.

Lumian no longer objected and cautiously suggested, "Before the cathedral, let's walk around the village and confirm Shepherd Pierre Berry and the dangerous ones are home."

He wanted to avoid running into Pierre and the others, who had received a boon, upon entering the basement.

Ryan nodded approval, agreeing.

Discussing details, Valentine glanced coldly at Lumian. "Do you need cleansing?"

Leah quickly explained on her companion's behalf, "You went into the castle and spoke with Madame Pualis. You might have been corrupted again."

"No, I believe Madame Pualis won't do that this time. It's meaningless." Lumian felt certain.

He had no choice but to feel certain. He dared not let Valentine purify him again. Compared to yesterday, he was already a Dancer. Evil aura had seeped from the seal inside. Once purified by holy water, there would likely be huge trouble.

According to Aurore's analysis, he needed full-body purification.

Seeing Lumian having no issue with it, Valentine, just being kind, naturally said no more.

Then, wandering Cordu, Lumian made his way home and told Aurore their plan.

Aurore was vexed at the inability to join and help. She could only offer to wait in the village edge and restart the cycle if anything went wrong. This required little vision. It sufficed to vaguely see the road. Agreeing to have her restart before anyone came for her at 12:30, Lumian bid Aurore farewell and reconvened with Leah's group.

By then, the three official Beyonders had confirmed where Shepherd Pierre Berry and the padre's core members were.

Making a half detour, they reached the cathedral's side along a small path, the door they had used to catch the padre and Madame Pualis's affair in a previous cycle.

Lumian readied to volunteer when Leah strode over, using a wire to fiddle with the lock and push open the dark wooden door.

Seeing Lumian's surprise, she smiled. "It's a necessary technique for investigation."

Don't make it sound so noble… Lumian didn't voice his thoughts as Leah had already entered the cathedral.

The small silver bells on her veil and boots didn't move or make a sound.

Lumian tried interpreting this.

"It's very safe entering the cathedral. No danger?"

Leah glanced back. "Please add 'limited to dealing with the cathedral's people.'"

Did this mean danger in the basement remained unknown? Lumian roughly understood, gaining insight into divination. However, even improved by Dancer, he lacked divination.

Ryan passed him, following Leah into the cathedral.

Steps in, a servant approached.

In a blink, Ryan rushed over, raised a hand and chopped the servant behind an ear.

The servant crumpled soundlessly. Ryan caught and dragged him into the nearest room.

Leah rushed over, taking a colorless liquid-filled bottle and pouring it down the servant's throat.

"What's this?" Lumian asked, curious.

Leah maintained her smile.

"A sedative."

You're well prepared… Lumian sighed inwardly.

Taking down the three odd-job workers without alerting the padre, Leah crept into the padre's room through the shadows, silently turning the handle and cracking the wooden door. She saw Cordu's mightiest man in a gold-threaded white robe, breathing slowly and deeply on a simple bed.

Plates for lunch and silver cutlery were on a table by the door.

Leah sized him up and leapt in, chopping the padre behind his ear.

Immediately, she poured most of the remaining sedative down Guillaume Bénet's throat.

"That's it?" Lumian stuck his head out from behind Leah.

Wasn't this too easy?

"What else? What did you expect of an ordinary person?" Leah asked, amused.

Lumian tersely acknowledged, lifting the padre's robe.

"What are you doing?" Leah was shocked yet smiling.

Lumian said without turning, "Checking his body."

He wanted to see if the padre had the black thorn symbol on his chest.

Soon, the padre Guillaume Bénet's top half was exposed, revealing nothing but tufts of black hair.

No black thorn symbol. No black mark of a special contract.

Lumian nodded imperceptibly, muttering, Looks like the symbol is received after accepting the boon. Or does it exist now but only activates through Cogitation?

And how did I get mine? The twelfth night?

Thinking the padre Guillaume Bénet might lack the black thorn symbol now, Lumian couldn't help evil thoughts.

If I kill him now, will it trigger the cycle?

How would killing this man in advance impact later events?

Considering the padre's importance later, Lumian— still wanting to wait for the twelfth night—convinced himself otherwise.

Leaving the padre's room, Ryan said to Lumian and Leah, "Can't find the deputy padre."

"Ah?" Lumian hesitated before understanding. "Maybe he's home. He's not allowed to live in the cathedral, and no one brings him food."

"This demon's lackey is truly tyrannical," Valentine cursed, glancing at the padre in the room.

Without further ado, the quartet headed in the opposite direction for the altar.

In a corner loomed a stone staircase, narrow and steep, allowing only one person to pass through.

It ascended into the cathedral's roof before winding deeper underground.

Leah took point. After taking a few flights of stairs to the bottom, the veil and the four small silver bells on her boots rang at the same time.

Ding ding dang dang. The sound wasn't loud but echoed faintly in the small space. Sometimes urgent, sometimes soothing.

"What does this mean?" Lumian struggled to interpret it based on his past encounters.

Leah turned aside and grinned.

"It means there's a level of risk, but I can't determine how serious."

"The divination had worked for the castle…" Lumian muttered to himself in surprise. "Doesn't this mean it's even more dangerous underground?"

"Not necessarily," Leah soothed. "Perhaps it's just interference. Hadn't Madame Pualis been absent at the castle?"

At this point, it was impossible to back out over such a trivial hiccup. They descended the stairs one by one into the depths.

Soon, the four saw an old brown wooden door in the basement.

Leah pinched her glabella and activated her Spirit Vision before approaching the wooden door.

Though Lumian hadn't mastered activating Spirit Vision, with the Dancer's spirituality boost, it didn't take long for him to activate it. He saw everyone glowing red and healthy.

When her companions were set, Leah opened the basement door.

Amidst the creaking, Lumian caught a whiff of a familiar fragrance. Elegant and sweet.

He instantly made the connection and hurriedly told Ryan and the others, "Smells like gray amber."

This was the material used to revere the hidden entity called Inevitability!

Chapter 77: Changes

Lumian had briefly informed Ryan and the others about the black thorn symbol on Guillaume Bénet's chest, "Inevitability" in the hidden entity's honorific, gray amber, tulips, cloves, and deer musk for the corresponding domain. He claimed the source was the padre, and it had nothing to do with him.

Hearing this, Leah, Ryan, and Valentine immediately grew alert with guesses.

"The sacrificial site?" Ryan muttered.

As he spoke, all looked to the basement.

With dim light trickling down the stairs, they could barely see inside.

The space under the cathedral was bigger than Lumian's whole first floor. The floor was grayish-white stone slabs, and it looked pitch black due to the lack of light. In the middle stood a stone platform half a man's height.

The top of the stone platform caved in slightly, as if hiding something, but nobody could see clearly.

As Lumian pondered, he whispered, "This might be where the padre and company pray to the evil entity for boons."

"They actually built the evil god's altar under the cathedral!" Valentine was furious. Lumian suspected he would combust any second and turn to holy light to purify everything here.

"Calm down," Ryan patted Valentine's shoulder. "Get ready to light the fire."

He then gestured for Leah to scout.

Leah kept her sweet smile and sniffed.

"That hidden entity with 'Inevitability' as an honorific name really likes fragrance…"

Sighing, she entered the basement, lips moving as if chanting.

The four silver bells chimed again, sometimes intense, sometimes soothing.

One step, two steps, three steps… Leah turned and said to Ryan and the others, "Nothing unusual around the entrance."

Ryan, Lumian, and Valentine entered the basement through the old brown wooden door and came to where Leah had stopped.

Leah kept moving forward.

After a few steps, the silver bell on her veil and boots shook violently.

Ding ding dang dang!

The sound spread everywhere.

Specks of dawn-like light immediately appeared around Ryan and condensed, forming silver full-body armor over him.

Simultaneously, a pure broadsword of light appeared in Ryan's hand.

Valentine spread his arms, letting golden illusory flames burn around him.

One flame suddenly lengthened and widened, and Leah walked out of it.

She returned to Lumian and the others from near the altar.

How magical… Lumian marveled at Leah's act again. Compared to the Sun pathway's abilities and Ryan's combat state he could understand and imagine, Leah's various acts were even more bizarre and more magical. For example, her ability to transfer his wound from his thigh to his calf edge yesterday blew his mind.

Faced with the sudden 'alarm,' Lumian responded the only way he could.

He drew the iron-black axe and hid behind Ryan, whose body had grown much larger.

In this, he sized up his surroundings but found no abnormal changes.

He had his Spirit Vision on, after all.

Of course, Lumian had found something. With the golden flames' help, he saw piles of human bones at the basement edge. Some were even covered in light sheepskin.

Sacrificial offerings from before? The padre and company have conducted cultist rituals here for at least half a year, but Aurore and I didn't notice at all… Lumian's thoughts raced as he again felt Cordu, where he'd lived nearly five years, was unfamiliar. At some point, this place had become abnormal. Perhaps, it had been abnormal from the beginning.

Ryan warily eyed the altar direction and asked, "Is everything alright?"

Leah shook her head. "I don't feel any issues, just signs of danger."

"Strange…" Lumian's voice trailed off as he turned to Leah.

He saw that the beautiful woman's face had turned translucent, and twisted maggots seemed to crawl below. She was even scarier and eviler than legendary evil spirits, making his scalp tingle and heart race wildly.

This exceeded Lumian's imagination. He suspected he'd have nightmares for a long time.

"Y-your face!" he warned Leah, unable to contain his fear.

Leah subconsciously touched her face with her right hand, and her expression changed.

As for whether her expression changed, Lumian couldn't tell from the transparent and distorted maggots.

Leah hurriedly looked at her hand back. The skin there had also turned translucent, and the flesh below seemed to have turned into strange maggots.

"You're losing control!" Valentine also noticed Leah's condition.

Leah muttered confused, "But my mental state is alright."

Ryan tilted his head and reminded, "Make sure you're not hallucinating."

Almost simultaneously, Lumian realized the tall warrior was rapidly shrinking. The silver armor over him and broadsword of light disintegrated.

In a blink, Ryan turned into a short man only about 1.5 meters tall. His brown coat and light yellow strides were either too big or too long.

He's also mutating? Only Valentine and I are fine… Lumian's pupils dilated as he subconsciously looked at Valentine.

"Ryan, you've shrunk!" Valentine, already a pure light figure, warned his companion anxiously.

Lumian, nearly blinded, hurriedly asked Leah, "Any changes for me?"

Leah said with countless transparent maggots that seemed to want to crawl out but couldn't leave the flesh, "You're very normal. But under such circumstances, normality might be the greatest abnormality."

I'm normal? Could the black thorn symbol have protected me, causing the danger here to think I'm one of them? Lumian suddenly guessed.

At this, Ryan had finished checking his body. He said warily, "I'm not shrinking, but I've returned to my former self. I've even lost my superpowers."

"Former self?" Lumian blurted.

He vaguely thought of something.

Ryan nodded. "Yes, I'm naturally short. As a man, this is a huge misfortune. So I chose Warrior when selecting my potion. It could effectively change my height.

"I don't know if I'm lucky or not. The past five to six years had many Beyonder monsters and abnormalities related to the Warrior pathway appear, allowing me to be less worried about the materials needed to advance."

Hearing Ryan's words, Lumian roughly understood the anomaly's source.

"You've returned to the past! As far as I know, the authority of that hidden existence is related to the past…"

With that, he mimicked the mysterious lady and deliberately paused a few seconds before adding another word.

"It also involves the present and— and— and the future."

Though now speaking Intis, he still had to be cautious.

Leah reacted quickly and blurted, "Valentine and I have entered the future. Is this the state of one of our futures?"

"And I'm the present?" Lumian asked, confirming Leah's guess.

He then thought of the three-faced monster he had encountered in the dream ruins.

The monster had only one head, but it bore three faces: one aged, one in its prime, one youthful.

Lumian suspected this was another gift from the owner of the black thorn symbol. Moreover, it was of a higher order, but the recipient couldn't withstand it or had met with an accident, turning into a three-faced monster.

Leah nodded gently.

"Likely, but this change in state doesn't affect my mind. I don't feel like I'm about to lose control at all."

"Nor do I feel like I'm immolating," Valentine added.

Ryan pondered a moment and said, "Similarly, I didn't lose my memories.

"Perhaps there's only a little power left here that can't affect the mind, heart, and memories, but if we maintain this state for too long, I'm unsure if there will be any serious aftereffects."

"I'm fine. At most, I'll consume the potion again and advance again. As for you, there should be many possibilities in the future, but now, perhaps the future has been determined, one will lose control, and the other will transform into holy light. This is an inevitability I understand."

"How frightening," Leah exclaimed with a smile. "Luckily, we can restart the cycle while also attempting to seek the present here."

Seeing that there were no terrifying monsters attacking, Lumian suggested, "Shall we go out first and see if we can recover naturally?

"Besides, we might encounter a power that represents the present along the way."

Ryan didn't object. "We can give it a shot."

He was now an ordinary person, and it would be dangerous for him to go any further.

"I'm afraid that another change in state will cause me to lose control," Leah said cautiously.

It would definitely be good to encounter the 'present,' but it would be troublesome to encounter the 'past.' They didn't know what would happen if 'future' was additionally stacked on them.

Lumian took the initiative to say, "Let me scout the way. I still have a chance to change my state."

He mainly wanted to see if his luck was good enough to encounter the 'present' or if the black thorn symbol on his chest protected him.

"Be careful," Ryan warned, and Leah nodded.

Valentine's gaze on Lumian grew less cold.

He couldn't help but think, This lad has a very sacrificial spirit. Furthermore, he's a devout believer of the lord. Once the cycle is lifted, let's see if there's a way to remove the hidden corruption on his body and let him join our team.

Seeing that Lumian was about to take a step forward, Valentine, who had regained his composure, suggested, "Let me see if I can rid myself of this state first."

No one objected. Lumian was the same. This was because he was in the present. He didn't need to remove any negative state or undergo purification.

In the next second, he realized he had miscalculated.

Valentine didn't directly use Holy Water Creation to purify Leah and Ryan. Instead, he used Sun Halo.

A dark golden light flashed, and an invisible force spread in all directions.

Chapter 78: Traces

Lumian jumped in fright. It was too late to evade, so he could only brace for the invisible force to crash upon him.

He instantly felt warmth, and valor flooded his body. It was as if the sun had at last arrived in winter when he lacked clothes.

Other than that, he felt nothing peculiar. It was precisely the same as the experience in the castle yesterday afternoon.

Eh, as a Dancer, am I actually unscathed? Lumian couldn't help but swivel his head to glimpse the short Ryan and the terrifying Leah. He realized that there was no black fog or smoke billowing from them.

Promptly after, Valentine, who was in the form of a figure of light, conjured Holy Water Creation and let fall a few drops on Leah and Ryan. However, the two of them retained their transformed semblances with no signs of improvement.

"Purification and exorcism are futile?" Lumian asked.

He hoped to determine why it was possible and why not. Only then would he, who had already received a boon, know what to evade or feign that nothing had transpired when encountering something similar in the future.

Ryan briefly explained to him, "Purification and exorcism aren't omnipotent. The correspondent power is in the category of evil. For instance, the aura of depravity and all undead. The last isn't necessarily evil, but it's incompatible with the real world. It needs to return to the spirit world, so it can still be purified and exorcized."

"Just like how our definition of an evil god is based on Their style of acting, the power of an evil god isn't necessarily evil."

Lumian roughly fathomed and thoughtfully asked, "Inevitability's, uh, power doesn't belong to evil, nor does it signify depravity?"

So there is no way to purify or exorcize it?

"Yes." Valentine had already affirmed this through his previous attempt.

From the looks of it, it's normal for me to be able to withstand the halo. But why can the holy water activate the black thorn symbol on my chest and permit me to hear the terrifying sound? This is because the corruption in the seal doesn't belong to me at the moment. It's incompatible with my body, rendering my body impure. Therefore, it needs to be purified? Lumian made a guess.

He had wanted to use Shepherd Pierre Berry, who had already received a boon, as an example to ask if the mutation of the body was also in the category of evil and depravity, but the current situation was rather urgent, so he didn't have the luxury to discuss the topic.

Lumian tried to walk to the basement door.

After taking two steps, he suddenly heard a buzzing sound in his ears. He could vaguely hear a voice that seemed to come from an infinite distance but also seemed to be right before him. However, it wasn't clear enough and was very fuzzy. It only made his chest heat up slightly and his mind enter a state of disorder.

This was very similar to when he saw Noodle Man dancing.

This made Lumian confirm that the black thorn symbol on his chest had been partially activated.

He quickly pivoted around and gazed at Ryan, Leah, and Valentine, only to find that they didn't react abnormally.

Lumian was immediately disheartened. He originally believed that the two symbols on his chest could suppress and weaken Beyonders to a certain extent, but from the looks of it, they could only target the monsters in the dream ruins, especially those that had been bestowed by the owner of the black thorn symbol.

Of course, he wasn't sure if fully activating the symbol on his chest would affect the surrounding Beyonders.

"Has my condition changed?" he asked Leah and the others.

"No." Leah and the others shook their heads in unison.

Lumian nodded indistinctly and affirmed two things.

The first was the black thorn symbol on his chest, or rather, the evil god corruption sealed in his body. It could indeed help him "resist" the abnormality in the basement.

Secondly, luck was on his side. He was affected by the power of the present.

After a few seconds, Lumian attempted to take a diagonal step forward.

The slight heat in his chest did not weaken, maintaining its previous intensity.

"Any changes this time?" he asked Ryan and the others again.

Leah was the first to shake her head. "You're fine."

Lumian exhaled and muttered inwardly, With the protection of the black thorn symbol, I can move freely here. Shepherd Pierre Berry and company should be the same...

Wait, the padre hasn't received any blessings yet. There's no thorn symbol! How did he reach the altar unscathed?

With this in mind, Lumian grasped something as he turned his gaze to the ground.

With the help of Valentine's light, he saw many messy footprints that ordinary humans couldn't see.

Apart from a small number of them, which were everywhere, they followed a certain pattern and extended to the front of the altar.

Lumian immediately overlapped with the nearest footprint, and the slight heat in his chest began to weaken.

This meant that he had returned to the present.

As expected, there's a safe route here that leads to the present! Lumian suddenly became very happy. This was because the three powerful Beyonders, Ryan, Leah, and Valentine, hadn't discovered it, and he, a mere Hunter, had found it.

This reminded him of something his sister Aurore had said: "Every pathway has its strengths. Before becoming a demigod, Sequence 9 of some paths might trump Sequence 5 of others in certain situations."

Lumian had originally felt inferior and suppressed, useless before the powerful Beyonders these past two days of exploration. Now, he'd regained a good amount of confidence.

Finding faint traces in reality is a Hunter's specialty. Can you?

Of course, Lumian didn't forget that Aurore added: "But there are pathways good at everything."

He gathered his thoughts, turned around, and commanded Ryan, Leah, and Valentine. "Take a step toward the altar at the same time."

Ryan and the others were clearly puzzled. They couldn't just trust Lumian blindly without knowing why.

Lumian could only explain, "Look closely at the ground There are many footprints marking a safe path left behind by the padre's group!"

Ryan, Leah, and Valentine, lacking Lumian's abilities, could barely see a trace in the sun's dim light. They believed him.

They knew that in Intis, many Hunter pathway Beyonders had collaborated. Some Sequences were skilled at detecting faint signs.

Following Lumian's guidance, they trekked the secure route.

Instantly, Lumian saw Ryan regain height, Valentine darken, and Leah's face normalize.

They had returned to the present, no longer trapped in the past or future.

Lumian easily rejoined the team on the safe route.

He grinned and said, "No more slip-ups. There may be no coming back if anything else goes south."

He was mimicking Ryan's tone and felt it fit their current situation.

Typically, his attitude would've had him mocking them: "Haha, are you blind? Can't you see any of the obvious signs? Another mistake and you're done for!"

Leah touched her face and breathed a sigh of relief. "We're with you."

Lumian wasn't humble. He carefully picked out the footprints on the ground and crept up to the altar.

It wasn't as straightforward as heading back just now since it didn't matter if he took a wrong turn, but Ryan and the others couldn't.

This time, Leah's silver bells stayed silent.

Only once all four had reached the altar did they start ringing, sometimes soothing, other times intense.

"It's dangerous, but we can find a way around it," Leah, experienced enough, explained.

Ryan instantly nodded.

"Don't touch anything here for now. We'll just observe."

Lumian had already set his sights above the altar.

There was a depression at the bottom, as if hollowed out to hold something. Inside were grayish-white candles, a small bottle of clear liquid, and an unopened wooden box.

But the most striking item was a black object--a long robe with a hood.

In front, in the center of the circle, was a circular symbol made of thorns.

Every part of it was twisted and pitch-black, as if painted with some strange substance. It gave the feeling of slowly oozing.

Seeing the symbol, Lumian felt dizzy and ringing in his ears.

Ryan snorted, and a dawn-like light naturally emanated from him.

This helped Leah and Valentine suppress the mental confusion.

"Don't stare at that symbol too long," Ryan said in a deep voice.

Lumian quickly shifted his gaze aside.

The dizziness and ringing in his ears lessened.

That seems to be all for the altar. Lumian was about to suggest searching the area when he heard Leah ask Ryan, "Will your Sunrise Gleam activate the altar?"

Huh? Lumian whipped his head around and unconsciously looked at the altar again.

Ding ding ding. Leah's veil and silver boots rang harshly, an urgent warning.

In the same breath, the black altar robe leaped up as if inhabited by an invisible being.

Ooo! A chill wind gusted. Lumian glimpsed transparent faces under the hood--ferocious, warped heads radiating hatred. They swarmed into a strange, terrifying gestalt.

Lumian recognized one face: pale, swollen, with blood and tears pooling in its eyes. Reimund.

Lumian dodged behind Ryan, uninterested in a closer look.

"Save us! Save us!"

The translucent faces shrieked in unison. Their shrill cries pierced Ryan and the others like needles, threatening to fell them.

Valentine was unmoved. Arms spread, he summoned a holy flame-wreathed pillar of light from the sky. It landed over the black robe.

Light erupted. Lumian and Leah shut their eyes on instinct.

Chapter 79: Sufferer

Sensing the light dim, Lumian hurriedly opened his eyes.

The black robe lay charred on the altar, resisting the golden flames licking at its edges. Yet still it struggled to stand, like a cursed puppet refusing to die.

The translucent faces of Reimund and the others flickered in and out of existence around him, ghosts trapped between the present and a future obliterated.

"Down!" Ryan bellowed.

Lumian dropped without hesitation. If there had been time, he would have thrown himself flat to the ground.

Leah and Valentine were a heartbeat behind, scrambling to duck.

In the same instant, Ryan plunged the Sword of Dawn into the altar's heart, piercing the robe.

Silently the broadsword shattered into a resplendent storm of light, tearing the altar asunder.

When the radiance cleared, Lumian peered up to find the altar a ruin, reduced by a third. Candles, thorns, and black cloth had vanished, ground to dust floating on the air.

Incredible power… Lumian had pondered this strike since the day before.

"Everything okay?" he asked.

Leah rose and spun swiftly around. The four silver bells decorating her veil and boots jangled ominously, their tune neither reassuring nor alarming.

"This isn't over." She warned Ryan and Valentine before murmuring. "The altar's gone—so what's the catch?"

As she spoke, Valentine conjured golden flames that floated in the air and lit up the space.

At the far end of the basement, there was naught but piled human bones and a few sheepskins. The ceiling was bare and unadorned—not even a chandelier.

Lumian snickered. "No Beyonder characteristics?"

"Maybe they were sacrificed," Ryan said bluntly. "It's also likely they didn't get many boons in the beginning and weren't tough enough. They could only nab normal folks as sacrifices and only go after Beyonders once they had decent powers. For instance, this time."

It was clear they weren't unfamiliar with getting boons.

Ryan then said, "There's nothing else here. We should bail. No point tangling with danger we can't see."

Lumian didn't react. Lumian scanned the room again, searching for any hidden doors from the subtle traces.

The answer was no.

He led the way out of the basement, Leah, Ryan and Valentine trailing behind.

As soon as Lumian emerged, Ryan grunted in pain.

His body flew backward, slamming into the basement door. The rickety stairs shuddered.

Wham!

Some invisible spear had pierced Ryan's chest, pinning him to the wall. Blood gushed from the gaping wound. If Ryan hadn't jerked aside just in time, that spear would've skewered his heart.

Leah, who had her Spirit Vision activated the entire time, couldn't detect their attacker.

It was as if some deity had singled Ryan out for punishment.

Before they could figure out what was going on, Leah's smile twisted into a grimace.

Her arms snapped back on their own. Bones shattered with a crunch as her limbs went limp. A crater bloomed in her stomach, as if she'd been sucker-punched. The impact sent her staggering backwards into the wall.

Valentine shrieked from the foot of the stairs.

His ribs collapsed one by one, like a sledgehammer was pounding his chest. With a series of bangs, bloody holes tore through Leah and Valentine's stomach and chest, spearing them to the stone wall.

Lumian was stunned for a moment. While this inexplicable change confused him, he was relieved that he didn't appear to be the target of this bizarre attack.

Did that black thorn symbol protect me? As this thought flashed through his mind, he suddenly felt an invisible force slam him against the wall by the stairs.

There was nothing visible with his Spirit Vision.

Remembering what had happened to Ryan and the others, Lumian immediately dodged to the side.

Intense agony instantly filled his mind. The skin on his right chest tore open, roughly exposing his lungs.

Lumian felt as if an invisible rod had impaled him and nailed him to the wall.

As his bright red blood flowed out, Ryan lit up the area with spots of light that looked like dawn. This would effectively banish evil and dispel illusions.

However, the four of them still couldn't see anything.

Bang!

Ryan's chest caved in, hit by an invisible hammer.

As Leah's veil and silver bell boots rang out intensely, her nails were pried out by an invisible force, staining them red.

This indescribable pain contorted her face in terror.

Valentine spread his arms and let the holy pillar of light descend upon him. The light of the sun suddenly erupted, obliterating all evil and igniting Valentine's body. However, in the sun's glare, his arms were uncontrollably wrenched backward and stuck to the wall. Two blood-red holes appeared on his wrists, nailing them in place.

When the light faded, Valentine's face was charred, and his skin peeled off inch by inch.

Seeing their ordeal, Lumian couldn't help but feel anguish for them.

It was unknown if it was because of the black thorn symbol, but his misery had abated. His face felt as if slapped by an invisible hand repeatedly. His face was red and swollen, and his teeth were loose. He could hardly speak.

Just as another round of attacks were about to descend, Lumian's vision blurred and he glimpsed a wilderness.

In the distance loomed a mountain range, and close by stretched a grassy wilderness.

Two demon-like creatures with goat horns hauled a dark red, conch-like carriage from afar, hastening before Lumian and company.

Seated in the carriage was a woman in emerald robes and laurel wreath. Chestnut locks swept up, hazel eyes bright and watery. Dignified and noble, reminiscent of Madame Pualis matured.

She kept her pledge to proffer aid? Lumian startled, then delighted as the invisible force assailed them not.

Somehow he knew the woman before him was not quite Madame Pualis. Or rather, not Madame Pualis precisely. More an unearthly construct Madame Pualis had fashioned by dint of will.

Lumian chose to call her Madame Night.

Unlike his Paramita encounter, Madame Pualis grasped an oak branch mistletoe-wreathed at its tip in one hand, a jadeite bowl of sparkling liquid in the other.

Madame Pualis dipped the oak branch in the bowl and sprinkled them.

After the third sprinkle, Lumian saw his chest wound heal apace. The swelling receded swiftly, and no more was he pinned immobile to the wall.

Leah, Ryan and Valentine wholly healed, no trace of cruel injuries.

"What attacked us?" Lumian asked, figuring nothing ventured, nothing lost.

Madame Pualis, seated in the crimson carriage, replied superciliously, "There's a hint of Sufferer taint on you now. Thankfully, it's minor. Otherwise, you'd have to restart the loop."

"Sufferer taint? What's that supposed to mean?" Lumian exchanged puzzled looks with Ryan and the others.

Madame Pualis replied gently, "That's all I know."

"Then do you know what happened to the dead Warlock and owl in the cemetery?" Lumian pressed.

Madame Pualis glanced at him. "If I'd known, things wouldn't have turned out this way. I'd originally planned to rule this place, but now I have no choice but to leave."

Rule this place? Alarm bells rang in Lumian's head. Falling into a loop might not be the worst fate.

Aurore and I have no idea how many babies we'd have if Madame Pualis gets her way!

Compared to that, getting looped and destroyed at any moment doesn't seem so bad.

At least we'd die unadulterated!

Madame Pualis glanced at them but said nothing more. She had her pitch-black demon beasts pull her conch carriage into the wilderness.

By the time she disappeared from Lumian and the others' sight, the wilderness was gone.

Just then, they realized they were still in the basement. Half of them were on the stairs, the other half by the wooden door.

If not for the blood and fallen nails on the ground and walls, they'd have thought they'd experienced a hyper-realistic illusion.

"Let's get out of here first." Ryan quickly regained his senses and told Valentine, "Get rid of any traces we left."

Valentine nodded and conjured illusory golden flames to burn the blood and nails away.

The four of them faced no further attacks on their way back to the cathedral.

It was unclear if the Sufferer taint had been expended or if Madame Pualis had wiped it out.

Just as Lumian was about to leave through the side door, he suddenly spotted the deputy padre, Michel Garrigue, standing dazed outside the room where sleeping servants had been stowed.

Was this fellow back from filling his stomach? Lumian was about to avoid him when Michel, with his curly brown hair and delicate features, suddenly turned and saw them.

Ryan was poised to knock this guy out when Michel Garrigue asked with an unnaturally cheerful smile, "Here to pray? Need a confession?"

Everyone else in the cathedral has collapsed, but you're concerned with confessions? Lumian looked at Michel as if he were mad.

Compared to before, this guy's abnormality was glaringly obvious!

Chapter 80: 80 Joint Investigation Team

80 Joint Investigation Team

Leah sensed Michel’s abnormality and turned to Ryan, asking with her eyes if she should knock him out.

At this moment, Lumian spoke up. “Is the padre not here?”

Michel’s eyes lit up, unable to hide his excitement. “The padre is resting. You can pray to me.”

His face was filled with pleading.

Lumian hesitated, obviously uneasy, before reluctantly saying, “Fine.”

Seeing Michel’s elated expression, Lumian turned to Leah and the others, feigning annoyance.

“What’s wrong with you lot? Coming to the cathedral to pray is what any true believer would do. What is there to be afraid of?”

What he really meant was that they had already escaped the basement without getting caught. Why worry now? As believers of the Eternal Blazing Sun, it was perfectly normal for them to come to the cathedral to pray. Using a side door was a trivial matter. As for the padre and his lackeys taking an extended lunch, what did that have to do with them?

Lumian knew such excuses would only fool dimwits, but they should placate the padre, at least for now. The padre wouldn’t expose them until

Ryan's group tried reporting the irregularities to the higher-ups and put an end to Cordu's depravities.

As long as Leah and the others continued strolling around the village, casually chatting with people as if they hadn't found anything incriminating in the cathedral's basement, the padre would be content to maintain the status quo.

Add to that, Ryan had demolished their underground altar. It would take time for them to restore it. Lumian estimated the padre wouldn't gain any boons for at least a couple of days, if not until after Lent began.

By then, it wouldn't matter if the padre suspected them or not. Appearing "normal" was the most pressing concern.

Upon hearing Lumian's words, Deputy Padre Michel Garrigue vigorously nodded.

"Absolutely! No matter your past sins, if you pray sincerely and repent, God will forgive you."

Is that so? What if the padre repented to the Eternal Blazing Sun and confessed that I had strayed long ago, believing in an evil god? Now, I want to return to the righteous path? Lumian appeared pious as he strode to the altar, but he didn't buy it.

Michel hastened ahead, seeming poised to take flight in his zeal.

Leah couldn't help but glance sideways at Valentine, seeing his complicated expression at the fanatical clergyman. This should have earned Valentine's praise, but he knew the deputy padre was clearly deranged.

Redirecting her gaze from Valentine, Leah rushed to Lumian's side and whispered in his ear, "Did you consider that half those present don't believe in the Eternal Blazing Sun?"

"You're not?" Lumian seemed genuinely surprised.

Not because he was perceptive and grasped her hint, but of the five there, aside from the unhinged deputy padre, Valentine was certainly one of the remaining four. Lumian himself barely counted as half.

Leah nodded slightly, her bells chiming.

She smiled and whispered, “Ryan hails from the Machinery Hivemind. I’m from Bureau 8, we don’t belong to the Eternal Blazing Sun Church.”

Lumian had heard his sister mention that the Machinery Hivemind was on par with the Eternal Blazing Sun Church’s Inquisition. It was a branch of the Church of the God of Steam and Machinery dealing with matters concerning those from beyond. Bureau 8’s full name was Bureau 8 under the Intis Intelligence and Homeland Security Committee. It was the Republic’s most official organization in the domain of the Beyonders.

“Weren’t you sent by the Church?” Lumian asked curiously, finding a chair and sitting down.

Leah sat beside him, smiling thinly.

“Too many dangerous run-ins with those from beyond have happened at country borders in recent years, especially in disputed territories. When Cordu called for help, the higher-ups decided to set up a joint task force to get into Cordu, figure out what’s really going down, and give the best recommendation for how to handle it.

“Who knew that this place…”

She shook her head, seeming at a loss for words while her bells chimed.

The strangeness and horror of this place was beyond her imagination.

At times she felt Valentine was right to suggest reporting everything and requesting Cordu’s destruction.

But she wasn’t ready to die yet. She had to choke back her professional instincts and morals.

At that moment, Deputy Padre Michel Garrigue picked up the book on the altar and glanced at the four praying.

Leah then crossed her arms over her chest and bowed her head.

"…" Lumian was a little stunned.

And you claim not to believe in the Eternal Blazing Sun!

Leah sensed his gaze and turned, flashing him a wry grin.

"God won't fault me for posing as a sheep of another flock during a crusade. If you doubt it, look…" She jerked her chin to the other side.

Ryan, hailing from Machinery Hivemind, folded his arms over his chest in a pious fashion.

So your moral compass possesses flexibility when questing… Lumian longed to jibe Leah and Ryan, but worship had commenced. He couldn't lag behind.

After adopting a reverent mien and closing his eyes, the deputy padre, Michel Garrigue, riffled through the Holy Bible and intoned gravely, "God spake, 'Let there be light,' and there was light…"

Lumian suddenly felt a surge of nostalgia as he listened to the familiar sermon in the cathedral.

Though he used to just go with the flow and float through the service, whispering and gazing around, he now longed for the simplicity of the past—even if he had to pray with the greatest devotion.

Even the unpleasant events that had once annoyed him were now a source of comfort.

By the time Lumian and the others left the Eternal Blazing Sun cathedral, the padre and servants were still knocked out cold.

Ryan glanced toward the castle and sighed emotionally.

"That woman's far more powerful than I realized."

"How powerful?" Lumian asked, curious.

Ryan deliberated a moment. "It's like she's touched the threshold of godhood, yet not quite."

You seem to have said something yet not quite… If Lumian didn't need Ryan and the others recently, he'd have spoken his mind.

However, thanks to his extensive knowledge of mysticism, he could roughly guess what Ryan meant by "the threshold of godhood."

Sequence 4! The beginnings of a demigod!

He pondered a moment.

"I think Pualis seemed off when she appeared as Madame Night."

He'd told them about Madame Night in Paramita.

"I got the same impression," Leah said with a smile. "Like a botched patchwork monster."

Ryan nodded.

"We have an understanding of Madame Night to some extent. In the border region between Intis and Feynapotter, similar incidents have occurred frequently in recent years. Some call her Madame Night, some call her Madam Härt, some call her The Benevolent, and some call her The Vile. But so far, we haven't caught any of them. We still lack a systematic grasp of them.

"Yes, this is the first time I've heard of Paramita."

Leah strode to the edge of the village square with a tinkling gait. "Something about Paramita occurred to me from the description."

"What?" Lumian never felt embarrassed to inquire.

Leah glanced southward. “In Feynapotter’s Church of Earth Mother, there’s a saying: ‘The soul returns to the land.'”

The soul returns to the land… Images of the wilderness and wandering undead surfaced in Lumian’s mind.

He had to admit Leah’s association made sense.

Arriving at the elm tree at the village entrance, Ryan surveyed the area and remarked,

“Let’s not provoke that madame further. Regarding escaping the loop, even if she doesn’t provide aid, she won’t become an enemy. We just need to monitor her movements and see if we can utilize the specific temporal node she mentioned.”

Wasn’t it because you clearly couldn’t defeat her if you didn’t provoke her? Lumian suppressed his mouth, ready to retort.

He then asked Valentine, “How many minutes?”

He worried that if he mistimed, his sister would trigger the loop and restart everything.

Valentine extracted a gold pocket watch and popped it open.

“Ten minutes remaining.”

“That’s good…” Lumian sighed in relief and waved at Ryan and the others. “I’m going to search for Aurore. If you’ve nothing else to do, help me locate Sybil’s husband, Jean Maury. Investigate who’s spreading the rumor that the horoscopes are about to change and everyone will usher in good fortune. If you discover anything, come to my house to find me. Goodbye, my cabbages!”

That was what Leah and the others had planned to do, so no one objected.

……

Lumian fell into deep thought as he bade farewell to the Joint Investigation Team and walked to the agreed-upon spot at the edge of the village.

After completing his exploration of the cathedral's underground, he had a darn good hunch about the anomaly in Cordu.

The ones responsible for the loop were definitely the padre's group. They'd been secretly worshiping an evil god for at least six months and had secretly sacrificed quite a few foreigners under the cathedral in exchange for loads of boons.

Before Lent, the padre, Pons Bénet, and their lot had received a boon using the three Beyonders that Shepherd Pierre Berry had brought back—or at least one of them. The former instantly became a pretty powerful Beyonder. Hence, they kicked off a grand ritual at the start of Lent.

On the twelfth night, in the final stage of the ritual, the hidden being with the name of Inevitability would accept the large-scale sacrifice and complete something that the padre and company had prayed for. But at that moment, something unexpected happened. The ritual failed to complete, and the power involving the past, present, and future dissipated, bringing about a time loop.

As for what unexpected event had occurred, Lumian recalled something the mysterious lady had once said: "You belong to the group of individuals who are on the brink of being corrupted. Luckily, the mark left by that great existence was activated, and the corresponding power descended upon you, sealing the source of corruption and establishing balance…"

Chapter 81: Key

Beside the serpentine river outside Cordu Village, under the piercing sunlight, Aurore, clad in a casual blue dress, sat on the ground with her eyes closed, listening to Lumian's conjectures and analysis.

She remained silent for a while, as if lost in thought.

After nearly a minute of contemplation, Aurore spoke, "If something truly occurred during the ritual on the twelfth night, causing the hidden entity's power to disperse and trigger a time loop in Cordu and its surroundings, I believe that the people and even the spirits in this area at that time wouldn't have been spared."

"What do you mean?" Lumian, also seated on the ground, struggled to grasp his sister's reasoning.

Aurore elaborated, "I mean that it's both power and corruption. Once it disperses, everyone in this area will endure the corruption on relatively equal footing. Only those bearing the black thorn symbol or under the protection of other high-level entities can barely remain unaffected.

"Consider this: isn't it like a dam bursting, flooding the entire place up to the rafters? Unless a boat was prepared beforehand, we'd undoubtedly be drenched."

Lumian envisioned such a scene and hesitantly inquired, "So, does that mean everyone in the village has been tainted by the dissipating power, effectively becoming a component of the loop?"

By "component," he didn't mean participating in or being affected by the loop. More precisely, people became part of the loop's structure.

Aurore, her eyes still closed and her blonde hair tied up, gently nodded.

"I suspect that not only will killing the padre result in a reset, but also slaying other villagers in Cordu will trigger a similar effect. It's like trying to dismantle the loop's components. There will surely be a reaction to such disruption."

"But we just killed the midwife yesterday afternoon…" Lumian trailed off before finishing his sentence.

Suddenly, numerous thoughts raced through his mind, and he hesitantly proposed, "Is it because the people in the castle are protected by other high-level entities?

"Is that why Madame Pualis claimed she could leave the loop at a specific moment?

"She wasn't tainted by that power. She's not part of the loop. She's affected, but she can exploit loopholes or seize opportunities to escape?"

Aurore sighed softly. "That's why she said she can't save us or take us with her. We've already been corrupted and are fused with the loop."

At this, she managed a bitter smile. "Or rather, we're already dead. We're merely existing in the form of loop components.

"No wonder that mysterious lady said that if she forcibly ended the loop, everyone here would die. That's because we are the forcibly dispersed loop itself."

Lumian fell silent. He yearned to contradict his sister and argue that they shouldn't be so pessimistic, but her words aligned with the mysterious woman's.

What he couldn't comprehend all this time was that, given the woman's ability to freely enter and exit the loop and her audacity to mention the hidden entity, even if she couldn't break the loop without causing any harm, it ought to be simple for her to safeguard two or three people and facilitate their departure.

Now, there was a more plausible and disheartening explanation to this conundrum.

After a few seconds, Lumian found a counterargument.

"Ava, Reimund, and Naroka are all dead, but their deaths didn't cause the loop to restart."

Aurore, her eyes still closed, offered a complex smile. "Perhaps they died before the loop began, so without participating in the ritual on the twelfth night, they weren't tainted."

Her implication was clear. In the timeline before the loop transpired, Naroka had perished before Lent, while Ava and Reimund had been sacrificed during the celebration. They didn't survive until the twelfth night and were not part of the loop.

She paused for a moment and continued, "Jean Maury, who vanished today, might be in a similar situation. According to normal developments, he should have discovered something abnormal after Lent and before the twelfth night. He wanted to escape, but was silenced. Our investigation merely expedited this event.

"The only thing I don't understand is that Reimund's corpse was sacrificed, right? He shouldn't have been in the loop from the start…"

Hearing his sister's words, Lumian instantly recalled the events beneath the cathedral.

The invisible figure in the black robe was composed of Reimund and the others' spirits!

Lumian combined his knowledge of mysticism and attempted to speculate.

"Maybe the Lenten sacrifice wasn't made directly to the hidden entity, but to the altar. It's part of the twelfth night's ritual, so Reimund's spirit appeared beneath the cathedral.

"His body is useless, but before the loop began, Pons Bénet and his associates could leave Cordu. To stop those downstream from finding the body and alerting the higher-ups, they might retrieve it after completing the ritual of sending it downriver.

"Once the loop started, the power had limits. It can't cover the area where Pons Bénet and the others recovered the body. They're affected by the corruption in their bodies and won't consider leaving this area."

Aurore pondered for a moment and nodded in agreement.

"In the past few days of the loop, other than you, the three foreigners, and Madame Pualis and her subordinates, none of the villagers have thought of leaving Cordu to hunt or gather wild fruit.

"If you hadn't reminded me, I would've been the same."

Aurore revealed a desolate, self-deprecating smile.

"We're already a group of monsters. We're barely surviving as humans by relying on the loop."

"No, there must be a way for redemption. That lady said it exists!" Lumian interrupted his sister's self-pity.

Aurore exhaled slowly and stated, "Can't you let your sister be vulnerable for a few minutes?"

She continued, "Based on this line of thought, we can only rely on ourselves. Breaking the cycle with external forces is equivalent to killing us."

Lumian sighed. "Unfortunately, there's no way to verify this speculation at the moment. We can only confirm it on the twelfth night."

"We can verify it, but it'll waste a lot of our time. Besides, I can't do it," Aurore replied.

That's true… Lumian roughly grasped his sister's meaning and plan: Kill a villager not currently on the padre's team to see if it would trigger a reboot. If it did, they could find a way to lure one of the three foreigners into a death trap and see if it triggered the cycle. If not, it would validate Aurore and Lumian's guesses. Most people in Cordu Village had been corrupted and were part of the loop. Those who came later were only affected by the loop and had a chance to escape it with the help of loopholes or external forces.

However, that would squander many of the past few days, and Aurore wasn't the type to kill innocents, especially those they had a good partnership with.

Lumian had no moral qualms in this regard. From his perspective, dying in the loop wasn't true death. There was a high chance of only residual problems. That was much better than being trapped in the loop.

Of course, if he really wanted to do so, he wouldn't try to murder Leah and the others. Instead, he would reason with the three foreigners.

With Valentine's fanaticism and piety, he was confident he could persuade him to commit suicide.

The siblings exchanged glances and fell silent, unsure of what to say.

After a while, Lumian changed the subject.

"Grande Soeur, what do you think is the key to ending the loop from the inside?"

Aurore had been pondering this question. As she thought, she said, "We can't just end the loop from the inside. We have to use this situation to remove the corruption in everyone's bodies. Otherwise, what's the difference between this and suicide?

"Yes, according to my previous guess, something happened to the ritual, causing the entire village to enter a loop. And the reason an accident occurred was that you bear the mark of that great entity. It was activated and sealed the heavy corruption in your heart…"

Aurore assessed her brother as she spoke.

Lumian instantly grasped her meaning.

"You mean I'm the key to ending the cycle?"

Aurore nodded. "The source of the accident lies with you, so naturally, the key to ending the cycle is with you.

"Of course, this is only a guess. Perhaps the key to the loop is the vessel that will bear the power of the hidden entity's descent during the twelfth night's ritual. For example, the padre or someone else…"

Aurore suddenly fell silent and looked at her brother for a few seconds.

"Could these two speculations be equivalent? You are the vessel? Otherwise, as an auxiliary sacrifice and contaminant, even if something unexpected happened, the ritual wouldn't have failed disastrously and its power dissipated uncontrollably."

Uh… The more Lumian thought about it, the more he felt that his sister's guess made sense.

He muttered to himself, "That black thorn mark on my chest is darker than the padre's was…

"So when the priest tried to deal with me, he showed signs of losing control, allowing me to kill him…

"Therefore, that mysterious lady never said how to end this loop. She just told me to explore the dream ruins and figure out their secrets…"

Aurore got a little pumped. "Yeah, that's probably a clue!

"Maybe the dream ruins stem from the corruption in your body or are closely linked to it. So you can rely on the black thorn mark to take down every monster you run into there.

"Once you unlock the secrets, you can rein in or safely tap into the power in your body to some extent and siphon off the corruption from everyone in Cordu. The loop will break on its own.

"Yeah, maybe this can only be done at certain times. Like at the ritual on the twelfth night."

Lumian leapt to his feet. "I'm heading back to dream now!"

"No rush." Aurore slowly sat up. "Aren't you hurt? Aren't you going to rest?"

Lumian patted his chest.

"The liquid Madame Pualis sprinkled healed all my wounds and restored my spirituality."

"Oh, was that pomelo sago… child-giving Guanyin…" Aurore muttered.

"Huh?" Lumian didn't get it at all. His sister was speaking a totally foreign language.

Aurore smiled with her eyes closed.

"What I mean is, go home, fill your belly, take a nap, and explore your dreams!"

Chapter 82: Dream Divination

In the semi-subterranean two-story building, Lumian and Aurore quietly consumed their belated lunch.

The mutton, which should have been succulent and tender, tasted utterly bland on their palates.

Barely satiated, Lumian was about to clear the table when tinkling sounds reached his ears.

"Leah and the others?" He glanced towards the door.

Aurore, too, sensed something. She set down her cutlery and fixed her gaze upon the entrance.

Moments later, the doorbell chimed.

Without hesitation, Lumian abandoned his seat and strode towards the door, peering at the visitors through the peephole.

It was indeed Leah, accompanied by the other two foreigners.

Valentine had finally changed his attire. Previously engulfed in flames due to the Sufferer's aura, Madame Pualis had tended to his wounds, but his scorched clothing was beyond repair.

Lumian swung the door open and greeted them with a warm smile.

"My cabbages, you already miss me?

"Oh, you actually can change clothes?"

Valentine had swapped his white vest, blue tweed jacket, and black trousers for a yellow vest, black formal jacket, and dark pants. White fabric flowers adorned Leah's white cashmere dress—one large and two small—concealing signs of damage with impressive sewing skills. As for Ryan, Lumian couldn't detect any difference in his outfit or evidence of his previous injuries. Lumian suspected the man had packed at least two identical sets of clothing.

"We've gathered information on those two matters," Ryan replied coolly, his eyes hinting that details would follow once they were inside.

Lumian sought Aurore's approval before fully opening the door and ushering the three investigators in.

This was the first time Ryan and his colleagues had met Aurore, and they exchanged polite introductions.

"About the impending horoscope shift, and the villagers' supposed good fortune, it's tentatively confirmed that the padre orchestrated the rumors," Ryan revealed, wasting no time as they settled around the dining table. "But I don't think it's that simple. The methods and rhetoric resemble those of a village witch. Under normal circumstances, the padre wouldn't devise such a scheme."

Village witches were part-time fortune-tellers who frequented small towns and villages.

Aurore nodded thoughtfully.

"Could it be the influence of the deceased Warlock? Hmm, a way to lure villagers into secretly worshiping the evil god."

"And they believed it so easily?" Valentine seethed.

His expression conveyed utter disbelief at the gullibility of Cordu's inhabitants.

It's all because believing in the Eternal Blazing Sun doesn't alleviate their poverty, and they're still oppressed by the padre and the administrator… Aurore held her tongue, fearing a confrontation with Valentine.

She could envision villagers experiencing tangible benefits from the padre and his followers after turning to the evil god, such as reduced contributions to the Eternal Blazing Sun or protection from Pons Bénet's harassment. They could even scare their irritating neighbors using the thug's name. In short, their lives would genuinely improve, giving them hope and fueling their devotion.

Nevertheless, Aurore didn't condone their actions. While the government and Church primarily sought money, the cults demanded lives.

Ignoring Valentine's question, Lumian 'helpfully' suggested, "You should ask the villagers yourself and thoroughly investigate the cause of their wavering faith. If you uncover the truth, I believe the papacy will hold you in high regard."

The papacy referred to the Eternal Blazing Sun's pope, a title shared by many church leaders. Lumian had recently learned this after perusing the materials Aurore had procured.

Valentine fell silent, evidently intrigued.

Aurore shifted the focus to Ryan.

"Did you locate Sybil's husband, Jean Maury?"

Ryan glanced at Leah, prompting her to speak.

Leah nodded and said, "We infiltrated Jean Maury's residence and obtained one of his belongings. Using this item, I performed a dream divination."

Dream divination… Aurore nodded, unsurprised.

As Lumian recounted their exploration of the castle the day before, Aurore had already pieced together their pathways and approximate Sequences based on the performance of the three official investigators.

Clearly, Leah belonged to the more common Seer pathway in Intis. Moreover, she wasn't a Sequence 9 Seer or Sequence 8 Clown, but at least a Sequence 7 Magician. This could be inferred from her Beyonder powers like Paper Figurine Substitutes and Damage Transfer, as well as her skills in divination and acrobatics.

Aurore wasn't certain if Leah had reached Sequence 6, as her knowledge of the pathway's subsequent stages was limited.

Valentine belonged to one of the main pathways controlled by the Eternal Blazing Sun Church: the Sun. Likewise, he wasn't a Sequence 9 Bard or Sequence 8 Light Suppliant. Aurore deduced from his Holy Light Summoning, Holy Water Creation, and Sun Halo that he was a Sequence 7 Solar High Priest. Furthermore, he likely hadn't reached Sequence 6 Notary, as he hadn't displayed the corresponding abilities.

Ryan's Beyonder powers were uncommon in Intis; he was likely a Warrior.

This pathway was primarily controlled by the Church of the God of Combat from the Feysac Empire in the north. However, in the past five to six years, numerous Beyonders and Beyonder creatures of the Warrior pathway had appeared in various countries.

Several members of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society had either actively or passively chosen this pathway.

According to Aurore's knowledge, this was also known as the Giant pathway. Sequence 9 was Warrior, Sequence 8 was Pugilist, and Sequence 7 was Weapon Master. Sequence 6 was a level that experienced a qualitative shift compared to previous Sequences. They were called Dawn Paladins, who possessed the strength of Giants and could create Sunrise Gleam in a certain area to eliminate illusions and negative or evil energies.

They could also condense full-body armor known as Dawn and weapons they were proficient with. Among them, the most potent was the two-handed broadsword, the Sword of Dawn. With the Sword of Dawn, they could unleash their Sequence's most powerful attack—Hurricane of Light.

This could annihilate the human body, exterminate vengeful spirits, and even wound evil spirits.

Considering Ryan's performance, Aurore believed he was a Sequence 6 Dawn Paladin, though he probably hadn't become a Sequence 5 Guardian yet.

Aurore had always felt that these three official investigators were on par with her. Now, she realized that each of them was stronger than the last. If she wasn't prepared, she wouldn't stand a chance in a one-on-one battle.

It was well-known that in the official categorization, Sequence 9 and Sequence 8 were considered Low-Sequence Beyonders. They had some unique abilities compared to ordinary people, but their flaws were apparent. Sequence 7 to Sequence 5 were Mid-Sequence, where they began to possess extraordinary powers. Sequence 4 and above belonged to the demigod domain, making them worthy of the title 'High-Sequence Beyonders.'

According to some members of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society who had infiltrated official organizations, when dealing with ordinary Beyonder matters, a team of one Mid-Sequence and two Low-Sequence Beyonders would be assembled to carry out the first round of investigations. They would then deploy more high-level forces depending on the situation. This time, facing the anomalies in Cordu, the Intis officials had sent three Mid-Sequence Beyonders. They weren't taking the situation lightly.

However, even this joint investigation team didn't seem to be enough for Cordu.

Aurore had shared all this information with Lumian, and the siblings listened intently as Leah continued.

"In the dream divination, I saw Shepherd Pierre Berry. He emerged with a few nails wrapped in hair and stuffed them into the hay," Leah described the scene in the simplest terms.

Haystacks… nails and hair… Lumian instantly recalled his discovery under the guidance of the three sheep.

He had also found some nails wrapped in hair in the haystack of the Berrys' sheep pen.

He frowned and said, "Are those Jean Maury's nails and hair? Was he killed by Shepherd Pierre Berry at the Berrys' place?"

Aurore nodded.

"Originally, the custom of hiding one's nails and hair outside the house was to prevent it from affecting one's family horoscope and luck. It was limited to family members with a bad reputation or who committed suicide, as well as those who were murdered by their relatives. But because Jean Maury was killed at the shepherd's house, Pierre Berry still carefully cut off the other party's nails and took some hair to hide in the haystack outside the house?"

"No wonder it was there before… That must be from their previous victim. How many people have they killed in secret?" Lumian scoffed under his breath. "At this point, he's still worried about messing up his horoscope and luck?"

"Imbecile!" Valentine cursed aloud.

They had been briefed by Lumian earlier and knew about the three sheep, the haystack, and the old folk customs they represented.

After discussing for a while and confirming they wouldn't try anything else for now, Leah and the others bid Lumian and Aurore farewell and returned to Ol' Tavern.

The siblings didn't mention their speculations at noon, afraid it might deter the official investigators from cracking this case open from the inside. After all, they could only be affected and might escape with outside help.

After clearing the table and helping wipe it down, Lumian returned to his room and lay on the bed.

With conflicting thoughts and many unanswered questions, sleep eluded him for a long time. He relied on some meditation techniques to slowly calm his mind and finally drifted off.

......

In the room shrouded in faint gray fog, Lumian opened his eyes and sat up straight.

He lowered his gaze and looked at his chest. His vision seemed to cut through the thin cotton shirt and flesh, allowing him to see the black thorn tattoo and the bluish-black pattern underneath.

Is this the root cause of this endless loop? Lumian thought.

The black thorn symbol was at the heart of the issue, and the bluish-black pattern brought protection from that ominous force, allowing Cordu to be salvaged.

All of this could be traced back nearly six years.

Lumian remembered clearly that he had still been a street rat at the time. He had barely survived by relying on seeming unthreatening due to his young age and extreme ruthlessness.

Then, one day, he met a dying old man.

Maybe it was because he had picked up some street smarts, or maybe because the old man reminded him of his only family, Pépé, who had raised him until his early teens but sadly passed on, Lumian chose to lend a hand.

Though he ultimately failed to save the old man's life, Lumian still sent him to the crematorium and buried him in a public grave.

He had found the bluish-black symbol on the old man's corpse during this. From then on, he often dreamed of the vast expanse of gray fog.

His luck also turned sour, and he began struggling to scavenge enough food. Thankfully, he met Aurore not long after.

Chapter 83: A Sudden Encounter

Phew… Lumian exhaled steadily and reined in his racing thoughts. He slung his shotgun over his shoulder and clipped on his axe. Leaving the semi-subterranean two-story building perched on the edge of the wild, he strode into the dream ruins.

Tracking a familiar route through the dense forest, he crept deeper into the tangle of collapsed houses towards the hulking "peak" of crumbling red stone.

Thick fog clung to the somber sky, weeds rasped at his feet. The whole world was darkened, bleak.

Soon Lumian left familiar ground behind, plunging into the heart of the ruins.

He scanned the ruins constantly, cataloging every trace, theorizing how each might be useful in a fight.

Caution slowed his progress but hunting taught caution and carefulness above all.

Finally, a clue. Fresh footprints, seemingly human. Tucked behind a jumble of rubble at the road's edge, cunningly concealed.

This one knows how to move unseen… Capable of eliminating traces to a certain extent… Lumian observed for a while and made a preliminary judgment.

He suspected that it was something similar to the shotgun monster, perhaps bearing clues to Sequence 8 of the Hunter's pathway.

Experience and Aurore's speculation told him three types of monsters likely infested these ruins.

The first bore no boons or Beyonder characteristics, like Noodle Man or the mouth-orifice monster, probably under the sway of that hidden being called Inevitability.

The second displayed Beyonder characteristics but no boons, typified by the shotgun monster. The black thorn on Lumian's chest would suppress them. It meant that they were tainted by some hidden corruption, resulting in them turning into monsters.

The third showed no boons or Beyonder characteristics, mere humans or creatures twisted into horrors like the skinless monster he first found.

Whether monsters with both boons and Beyonder characteristics existed, he and Aurore suspected so but lacked proof.

Therefore, it was very likely that a monster with Hunter traits possessed Beyonder characteristics!

Lumian tracked the footprints and discovered two lethal traps along the way, validating his hypothesis.

Had he not tread carefully or lacked his Hunter abilities, he might have become prey instead of predator.

Soon, the footprints grew fresher.

This meant a high probability of encountering his target if he pressed on.

Rather than rushing to "greet" his target, Lumian circled around and located an ideal ambush spot.

Then he began to dance.

Amid the intangible melody, he stamped with powerful steps and spun in a gentle, graceful semicircle, reenacting Noodle Man's strange, mysterious sacrificial dance.

His skills were rough and rusty, but with his Dancer power, Lumian felt his chest heat up.

After undoing his shirt and confirming the black thorn symbol's materialization, Lumian climbed into the collapsed house's center and settled into his chosen hiding place.

He quickly glanced into the distance and spied a figure digging a trap.

It was certainly a "person," but its whole body was charred black, and crimson flames blazed on its surface endlessly.

No way it's a Pyromaniac, right? I've landed a big one… Lumian was both thrilled and vexed.

He was thrilled that the primary ingredient matching a Sequence 8 Provoker had appeared. What troubled him was that it was much stronger than the prey he had anticipated.

Pyromaniac was a Sequence 7 of the Hunter pathway. According to Aurore, it was a Sequence that had undergone a qualitative change. Its ancient name was Fire Mage.

Lumian believed that with him being a Hunter, a Dancer, and possessing the black thorn symbol, as long as he wasn't careless, hunting a Provoker monster shouldn't be an issue. However, he wasn't confident against a Sequence 7 Pyromaniac.

As long as the monster attacked him from afar, it might not be weakened by the black thorn symbol!

After some thought, Lumian decided to retreat.

He planned to devise an effective plan to handle the flaming monster after setting up a targeted trap.

His initial idea was to head home and dance the dance that could summon the strange objects in the surrounding area and see what kind of adverse effects it would have on him when allowing the remnant spirit of the mouth-orifice monster to possess him.

If it wasn't severe and acceptable, he could borrow the other party's ability in the future, such as Invisibility.

Lumian wasn't too worried about the aftereffects of being possessed or whether the vengeful spirit would be willing to leave after successfully possessing him.

In any case, he was in the dream ruins. As long as he didn't die on the spot, he could recover fully after returning to reality to rest.

Just as Lumian made a move, the flaming monster suddenly raised its charred face and bulging eyes, looking right at him.

Not good! Lumian thought. Instead of climbing, he jumped down from his hiding spot.

Almost instantly, a massive fireball smashed into where he'd been, sending bricks and rocks flying, erupting in flames.

Lumian staggered in a sorry state. When he crashed, he could barely control his body. All he could do was tumble and roll to cushion the impact.

If not for Dancer's extraordinary flexibility, his muscles and ligaments would have torn from the twisted movement.

By the time Lumian stood up again, the flaming monster had already materialized atop the collapsed building. Phantasmal fire ravens coalesced from flames around it.

Upon seeing this, Lumian felt as if surrounded by soldiers with guns trained on him.

Without hesitation, he bolted towards the collapsed building where the flaming monster stood.

Faced with such a scene, he felt the only way to turn defeat into victory was by using the black thorn symbol on his chest.

And this seemed to require closing the distance!

Thud thud thud!

As Lumian ran, half the Fire Ravens descended from the sky and detonated behind him, causing heat waves to surge and explosions to reverberate.

The remaining illusory Fire Ravens banked and locked onto their running target.

At that moment, Lumian arrived at the bottom of the collapsed building, no more than five meters from the flaming monster.

In the next second, the charred monster enveloped in crimson flames froze. The remaining Fire Ravens around it were instantly snuffed out.

It's working! Just as joy flooded Lumian's heart, the flaming monster pivoted and fled from the collapsed building in the opposite direction.

"Hey, don't run!" Lumian blurted subconsciously.

He circled around the ruins before him and chased after the flaming monster.

Lumian chased it for two blocks. As the monster was too swift, he completely lost sight of it.

At this moment, the searing sensation in Lumian's chest vanished.

He had no choice but to stop and adjust his breathing, gearing himself up to track the footprints and watch out for traps.

As he panted, Lumian's gaze swept around and suddenly froze.

Not far away, a figure loomed in the doorway of a half-collapsed building.

The figure wore a black robe with a hood. Aside from that, it seemed ordinary enough, except it had three faces on its head.

The front face was an old man's. Milky eyes, scraggly brows, wrinkled as a prune.

The left was in its prime, chiseled and stubbled, icy blue eyes gleaming.

The right was a child's—one less than five years old—smooth and round, blue eyes wide with innocence and ignorance.

The three-faced monster! That three-faced monster! Lumian was truly frightened.

As he was chasing after the flaming monster, he'd wandered deep into the ruins and stumbled on the three-faced monster!

Despite mastering the mysterious Sacrificial Dance and activating the black thorn symbol, Lumian had no intention of using the three-faced monster as target practice. His instincts screamed that this foe was lethal. According to the mysterious lady's words, even weakened by the black thorn symbol, the monster could easily slay a weak hunter.

Lumian's plan was to steer clear of the three-faced monster's territory and practice on other monsters. He wanted to test the black thorn mark's power against enemies of varying might before deciding whether to hunt the three-faced monster.

Unexpectedly, the monster left its domain and stumbled upon Lumian!

Eh… would a little dance of contrition perhaps appease you? Lumian thought, taking an involuntary step back.

At the entrance of the crumbling building, the three-faced monster in a black robe and hood retreated a step.

Lumian spun around.

The three-faced monster mirrored him.

Lumian bolted.

The three-faced monster fled as well.

Lumian, who had meant to flee and try dancing, ran a few paces before sensing something amiss.

He halted and glanced back. By chance, he saw the three-faced monster retreating.

"…" Lumian stared, stunned.

After a moment, Lumian vaguely grasped the situation. He touched his face and muttered, "Am I that scary?"

The three-faced monster's actions reminded him of their first encounter.

Back then, Lumian stole a glance at the three-faced monster and cowered in terror, praying to the Eternal Blazing Sun to conceal him. Though the three-faced monster clearly peered toward his hiding spot, it didn't seem to notice anything. Instead, it took the initiative to retreat further away.

So it wasn't the Eternal Blazing Sun that shielded me, nor was I very fortunate. Did the three-faced monster sense my "specialness" and flee? Lumian nodded thoughtfully, hazarding a guess.

In the dream ruins, can monsters of a certain level directly perceive my "specialness" without me half-activating the black thorn symbol?

Chapter 84: Dirk

Lumian broke the monsters in the dream ruins into three levels based on how the flaming monster and the three-faced monster reacted when they encountered him.

The lowest level ones acted on instinct alone. As soon as they saw him, they would attack. When he activated or partially activated the black thorn symbol on his chest, they would immediately give up and submit fully to his mercy.

The higher level ones would hunt him down before he partially activated the black thorn symbol. After he finished the sacrificial dance, they would cunningly opt to escape. But they couldn't sense the existence of the black thorn symbol beyond five meters. The flaming monster likely only remained in fear and associated the corrupting aura from the seal with Lumian.

At a certain level, Lumian didn't even need to activate or partially activate the black thorn symbol on his chest, nor did they need to be within five meters of Lumian for them to obviously feel his "specialness" and show conspicuous dread.

Were there any other levels above these three? Lumian felt there should be at least one, at most three. For instance, the kind that wouldn't fear the partially activated black thorn symbol so much that they immediately fled. They would persist in attacking despite significant weakening. Or for example, the kind that were so high in level that they wouldn't react to the black thorn symbol at all…

Therefore, while Lumian was delighted that he could scare off the three-faced monster and seemed capable of doing whatever he wanted in the dream ruins, he didn't dare to be careless.

Disregarding terrifying beings that might be higher in level than the three-faced monster, just the flaming monster could incinerate him to ashes without being impacted by the partially activated black thorn symbol with its powerful long-range attack.

With this in mind, Lumian hesitated for a moment before stealthily delving deeper into the dream ruins along the three-faced monster's escape route. He planned to scout the blood-colored "peak" and surrounding area today to gather information for the subsequent unlocking of the dream's secret.

Along the way, he proceeded to a relatively concealed area less easily discovered, on guard against any monsters that might suddenly burst out.

Perhaps because the three-faced monster had just passed by, frightening off the other monsters, Lumian didn't see a single 'person.' He successfully passed collapsed buildings and gray gravel everywhere and arrived at the base of the blood-colored "peak."

There was still a circle of ruins, but unlike the outer layers, the buildings here hadn't collapsed, but seemed to have completed a warped reassembly as if they had a life of their own. They were interconnected, as if a strange thorny city wall had been built.

The "wall" was dyed a faint grayish black. The windows and doors of the original buildings were embedded messily on its surface. Some were open, permitting one to see the shattered tables and chairs inside. Some were tightly shut, as if they couldn't be pulled open.

Lumian scanned the area and gazed up at the blood-colored mountain behind the city wall.

At this range, even with the heavy fog blanketing the sky and the dim light filtering into this realm, Lumian could see every detail of the mountain peak clearly.

It was made of rocks and soil, no more than 30 meters tall, but it gave off a towering menace. The color on its surface was unnatural, neither the brownish-red of the rocks nor the reddish-brown of the soil. They seemed dyed at a later time, making it look sinister.

According to Aurore's novels and paranormal magazines, this might be dyed red by human blood… Lumian thought. He raised his gaze higher and higher, glancing at the peak shrouded in thick fog.

Suddenly, an unseen wind blew away some of the fog.

The peak came into view.

Sitting cross-legged was a giant four to five meters tall with three heads.

"He" was naked and had three heads growing from "his" neck. One faced left, revealing anger, greed, and hatred. Extremely evil. One faced forward with a warped expression of pain and regret. The other faced right, holy, with pity in its eyes.

The giant had six arms stretching out at odd angles. Its entire body, including the three heads, was made of flesh and organ fragments stitched together with pus flowing everywhere. Especially, transparent blood-like tears dripped from the head facing Lumian.

Seeing the giant, Lumian's mind buzzed as he heard a terrifying voice seeming infinitely far yet right beside him.

His head felt as if it had been split open with an axe, and intense agony occupied his mind, robbing him of all thoughts.

Thick and thin blood vessels protruded from his body surface, so red that they were about to be ignited.

When Lumian "woke up" from his near-death state, he realized that he was curled up on the ground, rolling back and forth, as if this wasn't enough to resolve the pain in his body.

His vision was blurry, stained with blood, and everything he saw was misty.

In this state, Lumian felt that even the skinless monster could easily kill him. However, perhaps because the black thorn symbol had been completely activated, no "person" dared to enter this area.

As for the giant at the summit of the blood-colored mountain, it was unknown if it couldn't leave or if it had been affected by the black thorn symbol and hadn't attacked Lumian, who had nearly lost control.

After regaining his composure, Lumian stood up and noticed the linen shirt beneath his dark-colored jacket stained with blood and sweat.

What the hell was that? The more he pondered it, the more dread crept in.

With a mere glance, the black thorn symbol had flared to life and nearly overpowered him. It posed an even greater threat than wielding the Dancer's might.

He dared not recall the giant's visage, only deduce what he could from fractured impressions.

An advanced variant of the three-faced monster?

Sheer corruptive influence?

Aurore was right, there are sights not meant to be seen…

It occupies the crimson mountaintop, the heart of this dreamscape in ruins… Does that signify it's integral to the dream's mysteries?

"…"

As his thoughts raced, Lumian forced down the urge to gaze up at the mountain's summit.

If he took another look, it would spell certain death!

He resolved to withdraw for now and return to the real world to recover. He would resume his exploration at night.

Lumian spun on his heel, ready to retrace his steps out of here, when a sudden clanging caught his ear.

What's that? Curiosity seized him, and he devised a plan to sidle over for a peek.

Of course, he would proceed judiciously, not hastily or rashly. He tucked himself into a half-collapsed building facing the city wall to recoup his spirituality.

After a time, Lumian again performed the mysterious sacrificial dance.

He seemed to morph into a high priest of the hidden existence, gratifying that existence with movements that could marshal the ambient forces of nature.

When a burning sensation flared in his chest, Lumian halted and honed in on the intermittent clanging.

Skirting the blood-hued mountain crest and dilapidated city wall, dancing anew, he spied an orange glimmer through a half-open brownish-red wooden door in the 'wall.'

A flickering orange flame shone behind a half-open wooden door.

Clang! Clang! Clang!

The figure in the room was reflected in a grimy, diagonal glass window above. It looked humanoid, but too spindly in the dim light.

In that moment, the figure raised a hammer-like object and smashed it down with formidable might.

Clang!

Another metallic clash rang out, crisp and ominous.

A blacksmith? There's a blacksmith in these ruins? Lumian guessed, relying on his knowledge.

Trusting that the thorn emblem on his chest hadn't vanished yet, he dropped into a crouch and darted to the glass. He turned and peered in.

Though Lumian's eyes weren't healed, and his vision unclear, he could just make out the scene beyond the city wall.

Shattered furniture and debris littered the space. In the center was a stove, its top half gone, housing a fire. On top, an iron plate cobbled together, mismatched.

A pewter-black dirk lay on the plate, twice as long as a normal dagger, strange patterns coating its surface. Just looking at it made Lumian dizzy.

Clang!

The figure pounded the dirk like a skilled blacksmith, hammer blows ringing out in a steady beat.

'He' wore a black robe, decay marring the side of its face visible to Lumian, even revealing bone in places.

Another monster? Is it picking up where it left off when it was still human? That dirk isn't run-of-the-mill. It's a tad sinister. I wonder if it's a Sealed Artifact or a Beyonder weapon, Lumian thought.

He was less than three meters from the rotting 'blacksmith,' but the other party didn't seem to detect the black thorn symbol on his chest. 'He' kept pounding the dirk in silence.

Given that the black thorn symbol was about to vanish, Lumian recoiled and tiptoed away from the window.

He had only taken a few steps when the searing sensation in his chest disappeared.

The next moment, a creaking sound came from behind him.

Lumian whipped around and saw the mahogany door swing open.

The black-robed 'blacksmith' emerged. There were four or five putrid gashes on 'his' face that bared its bones. Half of 'his' left eyeball dangled from its eye socket. It looked like a corpse that had been dead for some time.

'He' clutched the hammer in 'his' right hand and the pewter-black dirk in 'his' left. Lumian's reflection glinted in 'his' lifeless eyes.

"F*ck!"

Lumian couldn't help cursing.

He instantly grasped the situation.

The 'blacksmith' monster had clearly been influenced by the black thorn symbol, so 'he' had been 'quietly' pounding the malicious dirk, feigning nonchalance.

When the black thorn symbol disappeared, 'he' immediately seized 'his' weapon and emerged to hunt him.

How cunning!

Chapter 85: Appropriating

As soon as Lumian confirmed the situation, he pivoted on his heel and bolted.

He couldn't leverage the environment here, and he was clueless about the 'blacksmith' monster's abilities. What choice did he have but to run?

Once he escaped to the nearest natural trap and it was still in hot pursuit, he'd consider counterattacking.

Thud thud thud!

Lumian didn't run in a straight line but snaked left and right in an S-shape.

He worried it might predict his trajectory and hurl a fireball or long-range weapon.

The old Lumian could run on a curve, but he'd have to throttle back at points. Otherwise, his body couldn't take it and he'd eat dirt.

Things were different now. He was extremely limber, far beyond ordinary humans. His muscles and tendons easily let him arch his body in a smooth semicircle.

With this move, he felt that unless the 'blacksmith' monster had special abilities, he should reach the ruins seven to eight meters away.

Suddenly, dread gripped his heart with premonition.

Without thinking, Lumian plunged forward, riding his momentum.

Sizzling, sharp pain seared his back. The evil pewter-black dirk had sliced him, spurting bright red blood.

The 'blacksmith' monster had caught up in a single bound and swung its weapon.

It seemed to have shortened over a dozen steps to one!

Lumian endured the pain and rolled twice before finally touching a half-collapsed building.

He vaulted in with a whoosh. Slithering through the walls and furnishings as cover, he bolted out the back entrance.

Being back in this area was like a tiger returning to the deep mountains or a trout in a river. He adeptly wove through the ruins and buildings, at times circling around, other times going straight.

Within ten seconds, he arrived at a natural snare he had spotted earlier. He ducked behind the roof that had slid to the ground and held on for the 'blacksmith' monster to turn up.

He didn't try the sacrificial dance because he felt there wasn't enough time. The other side clearly had some distinctive tracking prowess.

As time passed, Lumian didn't spot the 'blacksmith' monster, nor did he catch any sound approaching. He didn't note any indistinct footprints around him.

It didn't chase after me? Lumian couldn't help but frown.

He was glad, but he also felt this situation was a bit odd.

After some thought, he guessed the 'blacksmith' monster couldn't leave the city wall, so the moment he went into the building ruins, it gave up chasing him.

Considering he had already suffered two injuries and was drained, Lumian decided not to explore further.

Leveraging his terrifying flexibility, he treated the wound on his back and headed toward the edge of the ruins.

After walking a long time, he looked at the familiar collapsed buildings and suddenly felt something was off.

It has already… been more than enough time to finish a meal. The dream ruins… aren't especially large. I should be able… to walk out in a straight line. Why haven't I… escaped yet?

The more Lumian contemplated it, the more he sensed that something was amiss. His thoughts were becoming foggy and disjointed, as if severe exhaustion was overtaking him or he was about to drift off to sleep.

He forced himself to focus, relying on his Hunter abilities to locate the path, hoping to get out of these ruins immediately.

However, as he walked, he couldn't help periodically slipping into a daze. Eventually, he didn't even know what he was doing.

After an indeterminate amount of time, Lumian's eyes abruptly reflected the flickering orange glow of a fire.

He found himself back by the "city wall" and the chamber where the 'blacksmith' monster was.

Not good…

I'm… under… its influence…

No wonder… it didn't… chase me…

It seems… I can't force my way… out. I can… only… think of a solution… starting… with that monster…

Lumian's thoughts slowed and fogged.

As he approached the chamber involuntarily, he struggled to perform the mysterious sacrificial dance.

Since he had to confront the 'blacksmith' monster, his greatest reliance was the black thorn symbol on his chest. He had to activate it immediately!

Amid the sonorous but intermittent noises from within, Lumian saw the door emitting orange flames open. The monster in a black robe holding a pewter-black dirk and hammer appeared in the doorway.

Unlike before, much of the rotting marks on its face had vanished, and fresh flesh had grown over the wounds that exposed its bones.

Its eyes lit up as it gazed at Lumian with undisguised greed and amusement.

This made it appear more human than zombie.

At the same time, Lumian saw himself reflected in the glass window.

His face was pale, and his eyes were dull. Some of his skin showed signs of decay.

He looked more like a zombie than a human.

Lumian instantly realized the truth.

I will… take its place… It will… walk out… as a human…

Lumian, who didn't know what ability had affected him or when he had encountered the anomaly, only had one thought—giving it his all by finishing the sacrificial dance and partially activating the black thorn symbol on his chest.

He slowly but firmly began his dance, but the 'blacksmith' monster didn't seize the opportunity to attack. It seemed to be patiently waiting for the outcome, afraid that additional actions would impact its fate.

As he edged closer and danced each step, Lumian's vision grew increasingly blurry. He only knew that the 'blacksmith' monster's smile was becoming more and more human.

After advancing some distance, Lumian's mind buzzed.

He heard a terrifying sound that seemed to come from an infinite distance yet also seemed close at hand.

This wasn't clear enough and was very illusory. It only caused some disorder in his mind, preventing him from experiencing a near-death experience.

Amid his grogginess, Lumian's thoughts cleared, and his vision returned to normal.

He felt a burning sensation in his chest and knew that the partially activated black thorn symbol meant trouble.

Almost simultaneously, he saw the smile on the 'blacksmith' monster's face freeze.

Numerous silver and black warts protruded from the monster's face, head, and hands.

The wicked dirk in its hand buzzed and vibrated violently, as if trembling in fear.

Pa!

Amidst a crisp metallic snap, a jagged fracture shot across the pewter-black dirk's demon-etched blade.

The 'blacksmith' monster crumbled into silver-black warts and warped maggots crawling across its black robe.

The maggots and warts stopped moving, turning into lifeless gray flesh.

Lumian gawked at the scene, dumbstruck. It was as if the enemy had suddenly committed suicide mid-battle while he stood by helpless.

After over ten seconds, he snorted at the fleshy lumps in bemused disbelief.

"So you dragged me here to attend your own funeral?

"You should've said so earlier. No need for all this pomp and show. I'd have gladly shown up and applauded your swan song!"

He strode over to the chunks of flesh the 'blacksmith' monster had crumbled into and scrutinized them intently.

Nothing else seemed amiss. Save that the slightly cracked pewter-black dirk still quivered minutely, like a wounded animal encountering its mortal foe.

Lumian's heart raced as he looked down at his chest, sensing the black thorn symbol beneath his clothes.

He realized the truth and grabbed the pewter-black dirk with his right hand.

The evil dirk trembled vigorously but didn't struggle or resist. It was docile.

As soon as he held it, the heat in his chest intensified.

Something leaked out, resonating with the pewter-black dirk.

Amidst the metallic hum, Lumian grasped a greater understanding of the sinister dirk in his grip.

It was a corrupted Beyonder weapon, gaining power and a semblance of life.

In other words, Lumian hadn't encountered a 'blacksmith' monster—the dirk was the true menace. The 'blacksmith' monster was its puppet, or rather, wielder.

It could gradually transform any living being who touched its cold steel and drew blood into a zombie, robbing them of will and reason. They would always clutch it and act on its desires.

Those who were cut by it, spilling crimson, would have their destiny appropriated by its edge.

When seizing one's fate, it could inflict no further harm.

Just now, it had bartered the fate of the 'blacksmith' monster becoming a puppet to exchange for Lumian leaving the wilderness as a human.

If there was nothing to trade, he had to kill the target completely to strip a portion of his fate from him and store it in the dirk.

This ability came from the Dancer's corresponding Sequence 5, Fate Appropriator!

Therefore, after the corruption in Lumian's body was half-activated, it resonated with the evil dirk through flesh and blood, letting some knowledge seep out.

Otherwise, he could only get someone to use divination and figure out patterns to grasp the pewter-black dirk's abilities and characteristics. He could also rely on his repeated experiments to gather information.

After sorting out the additional knowledge in his mind, Lumian looked at the evil dirk that was still trembling in his hand and chuckled.

"Actually, I don't mind you appropriating some of my destiny, but you'll have to bear the consequences!

"If you can swap with my fate of being trapped in this time loop, I'll kneel and grovel before you three times.

"Tsk, but randomly appropriating destinies will only hurt you!"

The pewter-black dirk merely trembled, not daring to respond.

Lumian now understood why the dirk was so obedient.

First, the half-activated black thorn symbol suppressed it. Second, encountering Lumian had traumatized the sentient weapon.

Exhaling, Lumian said, "From today onward, your name is Fate Appropriator Dirk. Got it?"

The dirk bobbed up and down twice, as if nodding.

"Unfortunately, you're only a Beyonder weapon. Your power will gradually fade. You could have lasted two years, but now, severely damaged from your foolishness, you'll only survive half a year," Lumian said regretfully.

In fact, he could replenish Fate Appropriator by extracting power from the corruption in his body, but that required finding someone to repair the crack.

No sooner had he spoken than the heat in his chest quickly vanished. The minute was up.

Wasting no time, he hurled Fate Appropriator Dirk away as if it were red-hot coal.

Chapter 86: Another Idea

The pewter-black dirk clattered to the ground, bouncing a few times before coming to rest.

Lumian heaved a sigh of relief and muttered to himself, Without the protection of the half-activated black thorn symbol, this thing's a ticking time bomb…

Luckily, he already knew how to avoid the sinister dirk's adverse effects.

Lumian approached the grayish-white remains and picked up the black robe left behind by the monstrous 'blacksmith.'

He tore off several strips of cloth and wrapped them tightly around his right hand, as if applying a thorough bandage.

Then, Lumian grasped the Fate Appropriator Dirk.

The pewter-black dirk remained unresponsive the entire time.

Prepared to discard the item in his hand at any moment, Lumian relaxed and whispered, "I need to find a scabbard to carry it around safely.

"Do I have to permanently bandage my left or right hand just to have time to protect myself when I need to draw the blade in an emergency?

"This thing is dangerous, but it's also incredibly powerful. Besides its short lifespan, it outclasses all the Beyonder weapons Aurore mentioned. Many Level 3 Sealed Artifacts might not even compare."

While muttering to himself, Lumian swaddled the Fate Appropriator Dirk in layers of black cloth.

Once wrapped securely in three layers, he slid the evil dirk into his left belt with a sense of relief.

Having done this, Lumian rubbed his temples and, despite his physical and mental exhaustion, entered the room from which the 'blacksmith' monster had emerged. He searched the room meticulously.

Aside from the smoldering furnace, he found nothing.

Lumian's investigation concluded cautiously and carefully as he retraced his steps.

Unhindered by fate, he successfully left the ruins, crossed the desolate wasteland, and entered his semi-subterranean two-story building.

Not in a rush to sleep, Lumian left the room, stowed the Fate Appropriator Dirk, and rested briefly. Once his spirituality recovered and his needs were met, he performed the bizarre dance—alternating between madness and distortion—in his bedroom.

He aimed to attract the peculiar creatures in the vicinity and let one of them possess him to test the negative effects.

Having sensed the fear and reverence of the flaming monster, the three-faced monster, and the Fate Appropriator Dirk towards the black thorn symbol, he was no longer as terrified of allowing certain entities to possess him.

His corruption was far more powerful!

Moreover, he was quite exhausted and would soon fall asleep. When the time came, even if the strange being he harbored was reluctant to leave or caused severe negative effects, he would recover after resting in the real world for a day.

Is this what Aurore often calls cheating and exploiting loopholes? Lumian mused as he danced.

As the dance intensified, his spirituality expanded, merging with a certain force of nature that radiated in all directions.

Gradually, Lumian, seemingly fused with his surroundings, sensed something entering the area.

He lifted his leg, took a step, and spun around. Without activating his Spirit Vision, he saw three translucent figures materialize at the bedroom's glass window.

They were the familiar skinless monster, shotgun monster, and mouth-orifice monster.

Seems like my spiritual perception isn't strong enough, or my level is too low. I can only 'summon' them… Lumian didn't mind. He drew the ritual silver dagger Aurore had given him and sliced a wound on the back of his left hand.

A drop of crimson blood quickly welled up but didn't spread.

On the spot, it congealed and took on a demonic hue.

The three ghostly figures outside the window instantly stirred.

Lumian deftly used the ritual silver dagger to pick up the congealed drop of blood. With a final flourish of his dance moves, he pointed the blade towards the mouth-orifice monster.

He was inviting the entity to latch onto him.

The monster, bearing three black marks on its upper body, opened its vortex-shaped mouth as if responding to Lumian's call, but it hesitated to take further action.

That's right. The window is still closed, and the monsters in the dream ruins don't dare enter my house… Lumian swiftly grasped the situation. In sync with his dance rhythm, he leapt, landing gracefully on the desk before the window.

With his left hand, he slid the tightly shut glass window open. Then, he extended the ritual silver dagger, bloodied tip first, outside the house.

Instead of devouring the drop of blood and entering Lumian's body through the ritual silver dagger, the maw-like creature retreated seven or eight meters, floating amidst the howling wind, still mesmerized by the dance.

"Hey, come over!" Lumian, on the verge of completing his final dance step, couldn't help but urge anxiously.

The three hazy, translucent figures outside the house drifted further away. As Lumian's dance came to a halt, they vanished entirely.

"…" Lumian stared at the scene, baffled by the mouth-orifice monster's refusal to possess him.

He carefully reviewed the dance and the bloodletting process, certain he had made no mistakes.

Could it be that its fixation remembers that I killed it, so it's unwilling to attach itself to me?

But the knowledge that came with Dancer didn't mention this. Logically, it should be more eager to possess me and take revenge… Lumian pondered.

Recalling the three-faced monster's flight upon seeing him, he formulated a new hypothesis.

I'm corrupted by an evil god and sealed by a greater being. Are these strange creatures terrified and unwilling to attach themselves to me?

This was an extremely rare circumstance. It made sense that Dancer's corresponding mystical knowledge wouldn't cover such anomalies.

The more Lumian considered it, the more he believed this was the cause, and the angrier he became.

"So you guys just watch me dance, but aren't willing to possess me?

"What's this called? In Aurore's words, freeloading!"

Lumian's disappointment grew as he realized that, before reaching Contractee, one of Dancer's abilities was rendered useless. He couldn't attract strange creatures and exploit their traits or powers.

He consoled himself, hoping that only the dream ruins' creatures behaved like this. After all, they were closely tied to the owner of the black thorn symbol.

I wonder what I can attract in reality. Will they dare to attach themselves to me… Lumian mused, walking to his bed and lying down.

His mood lifted as he glanced at the Fate Appropriator Dirk, ensconced in layers of black cloth, on the cabinet beside him.

This powerful Beyonder weapon would aid him in delving deeper into the dream ruins and uncovering their secrets. The only drawback was its inability to be brought into the real world.

I wonder if that mysterious lady can help bring it out, just like how she brought the potion and ritual ingredients into the dream ruins…

But the next time I explore the dream ruins, I'll have to trouble her to bring the Fate Appropriator Dirk back in…

She's definitely unwilling to keep providing help. She's clearly averse to hassle and prefers slacking off…

With these thoughts, Lumian drifted into a deep sleep.

......

When Lumian woke up, the sky was an unnatural shade of inky black. Only a smoldering crimson smear of sunset remained in the distance, filling him with a bleak melancholy as if the entire world had abandoned him.

Adjusting his emotions, Lumian left the room and descended to the first floor.

Aurore was busy cooking dinner.

"Are your eyes okay?" Lumian went over to help.

"Pretty much." Aurore tucked a stray lock of blonde hair behind her ear and widened her eyes at him.

Lumian peered into their light blue depths but saw nothing amiss beyond a hint of blood.

Aurore continued frying the lamb chops and casually asked, "Discovered anything interesting in the dream ruins this time?"

Lumian began chopping ingredients for the last dish, recounting his encounters.

"That blade is powerful indeed." Seeing her brother was unharmed, Aurore stifled her concern with a laugh. "If it were me, I'd never call it Fate Appropriator Dirk. Too straightforward, lacking charm."

Lumian asked curiously, "What would you name it then?"

Aurore smiled and said, "Fallen Mercury!"

"Fallen Mercury it is!" Lumian nodded immediately.

He had to use the name his sister gave!

Aurore burst out laughing.

"Actually, it's not the best name, but that's all I could think of on short notice.

"Hmm, the monsters' behavior confirms our theory. The black thorn symbol on your chest, or rather, the corruption in your body isn't simple. It can suppress something powerful to an extent and relates closely to that hidden existence.

"Perhaps the key to the loop lies with you."

"Yes." Lumian nodded. "Let's see what secrets the dream ruins hold. Then we'll wait patiently for the twelfth night."

So far, they had investigated almost all abnormalities. Only the tomb where the owl was had not been explored.

It was far too dangerous. Aurore didn't believe she, Lumian and the three foreigners could face it. Her only hope was asking Madame Pualis for help, but she clearly didn't intend to interfere, merely waiting for the opportune moment.

Lumian didn't hold much hope recounting how the strange creatures his dance attracted were hindered by the two symbols on his body, preventing success.

"Grande Soeur, any ideas to circumvent this restriction?"

Aurore scooped up the lamb chops, pondering a moment.

"Since it's impossible to invite a 'god' to possess you, why not try giving an order?"

"Order?" Lumian's eyes lit up.

Aurore nodded slightly.

"Since those strange creatures fear the corruption in your body and the seal of that great existence, use their fear like a fox assuming the authority of a tiger. Order them to attach themselves to you. Right, use ancient Hermes when you try."

"That's an idea…" Lumian understood what his sister meant by "a fox assuming the authority of a tiger."

Chapter 87: Catharsis

Aurore carried the plate of lamb chops to the table and said, "I'm not sure if ordering them under those circumstances will work. After all, I'm not a Dancer, and I don't have any relevant mysticism knowledge. However, you won't lose anything by trying."

"That's true." Lumian took over at the stove and said with a grin, "It'll just be another wound while I bleed a little. I'll recover after a nap. What do you think the three-headed giant at the top of the mountain is? What does it have to do with the hidden existence and the corruption in my body?"

Aurore set the plates down and turned around.

"Don't you think you're overestimating me? I've never encountered or heard of such strange things."

Without waiting for Lumian's response, she added thoughtfully, "However, there are many similar concepts in the myths and legends of my hometown. They have three heads and six arms, gods or demons…"

She continued, "And according to our guesses, the dream ruins are closely related to the corruption in your body. There's a high chance that the giant's image reflects some aspects of the hidden existence.

"You said that the honorific name or description of that person is different from the usual ones. Every segment contains three aspects and three forms that symbolize a certain authority. Therefore, it's very normal to correspond to three heads, just like how the three-faced monster has faces that represent the three stages of humanity.

"As for why it has six arms and why it sits atop the blood-colored mountain, there's too little information. I can't guess.

"Hmm… Focus on the circle of 'walls' for the time being. I feel that we can find many useful clues."

"Alright." Lumian followed his sister's instructions and placed the sliced shredded potatoes into the pot, stir-frying them with oil.

Aurore ended the topic regarding the dream ruins and said to Lumian, "When you went to bed in the afternoon, I thought about it seriously and decided to invite the three foreigners to stay with us."

"Why?" Lumian was puzzled.

Aurore watched her brother bustling around and sighed.

"We assumed the padre would react like a normal person, but we can't forget that some of his followers have already accepted a boon. In a way, they're corrupted.

"According to the mysterious lady, the boon's effects concentrate on the body and mind. So, besides gaining abilities, one's personality will shift. The more boons a person takes, the more severe the change will be, especially if they can't handle it."

"Right." Lumian recalled the mysterious lady's words.

She warned that if the body couldn't endure such a massive "boon," the recipient would either turn into a monster, become a puppet of an unknown entity, or transform into someone else who'd treat things they cherished in the past with indifference.

Aurore concluded, "Thus, Shepherd Pierre Berry and his followers, who've received the boons long ago, might disregard the padre's plan and seek greater vengeance.

"If the five of us stick together and support each other, we can effectively improve our chances of survival until the twelfth night."

Lumian pondered her proposal and agreed.

But he raised a logistical issue.

"So, where do they stay? In the living room downstairs?"

"It won't work as well if we're on separate floors." Aurore glanced at her brother, who approached with a plate of stir-fried shredded potatoes. "You can move into my room, and we'll let the three foreigners use your bedroom and the study upstairs. They can divide the rooms among themselves."

"Huh?" Lumian didn't expect such an arrangement. "I'll share a bed with you?"

Aurore couldn't help but laugh.

"No big deal. Strong, independent women don't sweat the small stuff!"

"Huh?" Lumian didn't grasp his sister's last remark.

Aurore chuckled, explaining, "I'm saying that given our situation, let's not get hung up on trivial matters.

"Do you want to share a bed with Ryan and Valentine, or should I sleep with Leah?"

"True, I can't fully trust them." Lumian nodded.

The three official investigators only cooperated with the siblings because they were trapped in a loop. Who knew if they'd secretly manipulate the situation while they slept together, planning to capture the two wild Beyonders once the loop ended?

Aurore chuckled and suggested, "If they're concerned about us and decide to share a room, you can sleep in the other one."

"Better to stay in the same room." Lumian felt the walls offered little protection.

Aurore said no more, only adding, "Remind me to restock our food supply tomorrow. After Lent, the villagers will grow stranger. We might need to defend this place or hide in the nearest high mountain pasture."

Then, she urged her brother to eat dinner.

Before sunset, Lumian left the semi-subterranean two-story building, ready to invite Ryan and the others to move into his home.

Upon seeing Ol' Tavern in sight, Lumian spotted a few familiar faces.

Pons Bénet was strolling down the village's main road with his three thugs.

Almost instantly, the black-haired, blue-eyed, musclebound villain noticed Lumian.

He couldn't help but clamp his legs together, as if recalling some excruciating agony.

Eyeing Lumian, Pons Bénet faced a dilemma.

He craved revenge, but feared history would repeat itself with him and his men beaten to a pulp.

As Pons Bénet wavered, Lumian flashed a brilliant grin.

"Hey, isn't this my rebellious son?"

He strode towards the villain and his three thugs who had drowned Reimund, poised to pummel them.

Pons Bénet saw this and didn't hesitate. With his eyes, he signaled to the three brutes beside him, ordering them to charge.

The three thugs immediately rushed at Lumian and pulled out short sticks, iron rods, and other weapons.

Lumian sped up too.

Just as he was about to collide with the three thugs, he abruptly leapt at one of the enemies.

This unorthodox move caused the three thugs' attacks to miss.

Lumian grabbed the target's shoulder and did a somersault.

His back seemed to flex like a spring, helping him grab the enemy and build up enough force for the roll.

In an agile, exaggerated forward somersault, Lumian hurled the enemy and smashed him into the ground.

Bang! The thug's vision darkened. His whole body ached, and he couldn't rise for a moment.

At that instant, Lumian landed behind the other two, only seven or eight steps from Pons Bénet.

He crouched slightly and charged at the villain. As Pons Bénet frantically dodged, he shouted, "Quick, quick! Stop him!"

The remaining two thugs hastily turned and chased after Lumian. Pons Bénet composed himself and brazenly charged at the bastard, preparing to stall him before they surrounded him.

Just as the two thugs were about to catch up to Lumian, who had deliberately not run at full speed, suddenly stopped and squatted.

Amid grinding sounds, not only did the two thugs fail to hit their target's back, but because they couldn't halt in time, they lost their balance and collided with Pons Bénet.

Lumian pounced like a tiger and grabbed the two thugs' necks. He lifted their bodies and smashed their heads together.

Bang!

The two thugs' foreheads instantly swelled and they fainted on the spot.

Immediately after, Lumian tossed away the burden and exerted strength with his feet. He twisted his body and slid behind Pons, who had just risen.

He grabbed the other party's arms and bent them backward.

With a cracking sound, Pons Bénet let out an extremely pained scream.

"How is it? Does it feel good?" Lumian asked Pons Bénet with a smile as he hoisted him and marched out of the village.

Before long, he arrived beside the river, grabbed the back of Pons Bénet's head, and forced him underwater.

As bubbles surfaced, Lumian lifted Pons Bénet's head, turned his face, and asked with a smile, "Does it feel good to bully others?"

Pons Bénet's face was soaked, and he looked to be in extreme agony. Snot and saliva flowed out, making it impossible for him to answer.

"Doesn't it feel great?" Lumian's voice suddenly intensified. He grabbed the villain's head and smashed his forehead into the water, hitting the cobblestones.

Bright crimson liquid seeped out of the water. Pons Bénet struggled uselessly with his legs, unable to lift his head.

Gulp. Gulp. As time dragged on, his struggles weakened.

Only then did Lumian haul him up. He thrust out his left hand and smacked Pons across the face.

"I'm asking you, does it feel good to bully others?"

Pure terror filled Pons's eyes. He didn't know how to respond.

Just then, a figure ambled over to the riverside. It was the hooded Shepherd Pierre Berry.

He glanced at the pathetic Pons and gently told Lumian, "We're all from the same village. Enough. You want to kill him?"

Lumian immediately released Pons's head and stood up. He grinned at Pierre Berry, replying,

"I'll listen to you. Make sure this jerk doesn't bully others again."

Without waiting for Pierre's response, Lumian strode past the shepherd into the village.

......

On the second floor of Ol' Tavern, in Ryan's room, Lumian relayed his sister's thoughts to the three official investigators.

Ryan exchanged a look with Leah and Valentine and nodded.

"Smart thinking. In a situation like this, spreading ourselves too thin just makes us an easy target. We can move into your house now."

As they headed to Lumian and Aurore's house with her luggage, Leah asked Lumian amidst her tinkling sounds, "So what's the plan for the tomb?"

"The plan?" Lumian snorted. "You think we can just waltz in there?"

Leah smiled, relieved. "Good, you're still being cautious."

Ryan chimed in, "What we mean is if whatever's in that tomb really leads to the cycle's key, it'll show up during the twelfth night ritual. And if it's got nothing to do with the source of the cycle, why take the risk going in?"

"In short," Lumian said, catching on, "we just wait patiently for the twelfth night?"

Chapter 88

Ryan nodded at Lumian's confirmation.

"You can interpret it that way, but if there are any other abnormalities worth investigating, we can't ignore them."

"Alright." Lumian actually shared the same thought.

He hadn't even planned on participating in Lent, just in case he couldn't resist attacking when he saw the "performance" at the celebration.

The four of them rapidly reached Lumian's residence, where Aurore led them to the second floor.

Now dressed in a pure white cotton dress that accentuated her down-to-earth charm, Aurore pointed to Lumian's bedroom and study, offering the three official investigators a choice.

"You can choose either room."

Ryan glanced at Leah, seeking her opinion.

After pondering for a few seconds, Leah raised her right hand, pointed at the study with a smile, and said, "That recliner looks pretty good; I could sleep there. Ryan, bunk in that room with Valentine."

While Aurore had the same question in mind, Lumian asked, "You trust us that much?"

He assumed the three foreigners would opt to sleep in the same room on the floor, fearing an attack if they were separated.

Leah grinned and answered Lumian's half-mocking, half-doubtful query, "My divination tells me the two of you can be trusted."

As she spoke, she walked into the study. Accompanied by tinkling sounds, she lay on the recliner with a contented expression.

Aurore found Leah intriguing and approachable. She smiled and advised, "A friend once told me that you can believe in divination, but not blindly. Divination is not all-powerful."

"My mentor said something similar, but we're all in the same situation. If I don't trust it, what else can we do?" Leah replied with a grin, snuggling into the recliner.

Aurore didn't mind relinquishing her favorite seat. She pulled over a chair and sat down.

Their study also served as a small living room. It occasionally hosted afternoon tea parties, so there was ample space and chairs.

Ryan surveyed the corridor briefly before returning to the study. He said to Aurore and Lumian, "I have some suggestions."

"Please, go ahead." Aurore politely assumed an attentive posture.

Ryan nodded and offered, "First, when you sleep at night, don't close any doors. Let everyone be in the same space. This way, no matter where an abnormality occurs, we can react promptly.

"Second, considering we've destroyed the altar, someone might attempt to deal with us before Lent. Starting tonight, everyone will take turns on night duty. Yes, from 10 p.m. to 8 a.m. the next morning, two hours per person…"

How professional… Aurore muttered almost silently.

Lumian glanced at her, as if asking why she hadn't thought of it.

Aurore spread her hands slightly, signaling her lack of experience in team operations.

She then turned to Ryan and Valentine, stating confidently, "Lumian will cover the period between 10 p.m. and midnight."

Leah and the others didn't object to this arrangement.

From their perspective, it made sense. Among the five present, Lumian had the lowest Sequence and least experience. He was most prone to mistakes on night duty, but from 10 p.m. to midnight, others would still be awake to cover for him.

Lumian knew his sister's intentions extended beyond this.

He had to explore the dream ruins undisturbed after falling asleep.

After finalizing the first schedule, Valentine volunteered, "I'm used to sleeping and waking early. I'll take the 6 a.m. to 8 a.m. slot."

"You get up early to welcome the sunrise?" Lumian teased instinctively.

Valentine's gaze on him softened.

"Yes, I want to greet the rising sun and praise the light."

His eyes seemed to say: "As expected, only a devout believer of the Eternal Blazing Sun understands me."

Hey, I'm mocking you, brother! Lumian felt slightly defeated by Valentine.

In the Eternal Blazing Sun Church, "brother" was a term used among believers. The two mainstream organizations within it, the Order of Preachers and the Brotherhood Minor, employed the term.

"I'm not used to being woken up mid-sleep," Leah chimed in. "I'll take the midnight to 2 a.m. slot."

Aurore nodded.

"I like to wake up late. I can take 2 a.m. to 4 a.m. And don't wake me for breakfast tomorrow. I'll get up around noon."

"Leave the rest to me." Ryan claimed the worst period with satisfaction.

He also entered the study and found a chair to sit on.

A conversation flowed effortlessly. Aurore, though seldom venturing out, possessed a wealth of knowledge spanning from astronomy to geography. She had her finger on the pulse of the latest trends, scandals, and supernatural events in metropolises like Trier and Backlund. This left Leah, Ryan, and the others secretly in awe of her.

"As expected of the renowned author, Aurore Lee," Leah couldn't help but exclaim. "No wonder you can tackle any theme."

Aurore inquired with genuine curiosity, "Have you read my novels?"

Leah's eyes sparkled as she replied with a smile, "I've been reading your first novel since I was a young girl. By the way, I'd love your autograph!"

As she searched for papers and fountain pens, the silver bells on her veil and boots jingled.

"Are those Sealed Artifacts?" Having heard Lumian mention Leah's performance with the four bells, Aurore couldn't resist asking.

Leah produced a stack of post-it notes and a fountain pen, casually responding, "Yes, they can proactively warn me and enhance my divination abilities. The downside is they're rather noisy and not exactly discreet. Plus, the wearer must dress fashionably, with a dress being mandatory. It has to look good, or it'll be not only useless but also potentially misleading or even dangerous."

Aurore chuckled. "I can't decide if these bells were originally a man or a woman."

Lumian agreed. If they were from a woman, it was a remnant of her vanity. If a man, he was undoubtedly a pervert.

Leah offered a faint smile.

"That involves some confidentiality, so I can't say any more."

She stood up, handing Aurore a post-it note and the fountain pen.

Aurore signed and asked, "Which genre of my novels do you prefer?"

"Romance," Leah replied without hesitation. "Your first novel, Eternal Love, left a deep impression on me."

"I wrote that book too early," Aurore admitted with a hint of embarrassment. "I was young, and my writing skills were unpolished. I lacked experience. Many scenes felt rigid, and much of the dialogue was overly emotional and unrealistic…"

Lumian chimed in, "But it's sincere and original."

Having read his sister's novel, he knew it dealt with a couple's separation through life and death, interwoven with adventure, misunderstandings, and terminal illness. It was a trailblazing piece in the Intis literary world.

Naturally, this drew criticism from conservative authors and critics. They echoed Aurore's self-assessment and claimed it couldn't qualify as literature, deeming it a mere pedestrian novel.

"That's right," Leah agreed, retrieving the paper and pen. She looked at Aurore and asked with a smile, "Ms. Author, would you consider becoming our informant at Bureau 8?"

Seeing Aurore's surprise, she continued, "Our primary objective in targeting wild Beyonders is that they're unpredictable and may lose control or cause disaster at any moment. Otherwise, they can use their Beyonder powers for all sorts of malicious purposes to satisfy their desires.

"Over the past few days in the village, I've carefully observed both of you and confirmed that you're orderly Beyonders. Prior to arriving in Cordu, the information we gathered indicated that you haven't committed any wrongdoing on the surface.

"This meets our recruitment standards. Moreover, once you become our informants, you won't need to worry about being targeted by official Beyonders."

Aurore found the proposition enticing. She glanced at Lumian and gave a slight nod.

"I'll think about it. I'll give you my answer when the cycle is over."

Lumian immediately understood why his sister had looked his way.

I don't have a problem, but will a heavily corrupted guy like you bomb the test?

After chatting briefly, the siblings bid adieu to Leah and the others and headed back to Aurore's room.

Aurore perched on the edge of the bed and glanced at the door. She hushed her voice and muttered, "Leah's socially adept."

"What do you mean?" Lumian also sensed Leah had made the vibe harmonious in the study.

Aurore smiled and said, "She took the initiative to bring up my novel and asked for my autograph to bond with me, so she could pitch recruiting me. The recruiting was to fix the distrust and barriers we have, easing teamwork the next few days.

"The whole process seemed natural, not off-putting or wary. That's a sign of high EQ. You should follow her lead!"

Lumian remembered the chat and said self-deprecatingly, "If it were me, I might've been booted by now."

Amused, Aurore leaned back and said, "At least you know yourself!"

She ruffled her blonde hair and said, "I'll nap a bit. My eyes haven't fully healed so I need more rest. Rouse me at ten and I'll keep watch over you. It's your first night shift, so better safe than sorry."

Lumian didn't object and agreed instantly. He watched his sister lie on the bed unhesitatingly, pull the blanket over her and close her eyes.

The room instantly turned eerily silent.

Lumian quietly switched off the electric lamp and drew the curtains.

Then, he sat on the chair by the desk and quietly watched his sister sleeping peacefully under the crimson moonlight. His heart gradually calmed down.

Chapter 89: Nothing Happened

The wind outside rustled, almost silent. Lumian allowed his thoughts to wander in this tranquil state as instinctive questions ran through his mind.

There's still light in the corridor. Leah must be awake still, reading Aurore's book collection…

Pitch darkness blankets my bedroom. Valentine should be resting in bed. I wonder what Ryan's up to…

Heh heh, they didn't bring any alcohol on their first visit. They've no clue about Dariège's customs…

If the cycle lifts, Grande Soeur can turn informant for Bureau 8. When the time comes, she won't fret over any investigation if she goes to Trier… As for me, I needn't undergo any special tests as an informant, right?

Now we've a full theory of the whole affair. The sole thing we can't be sure of is the owl and the dead warlock in the tomb's role…

If they bewitched the padre and company, causing the abnormality to achieve some goal with the twelfth night ritual, why did they do nothing but monitor my progress exploring the dream ruins?

Could it be that, like Madame Pualis, they await a specific time or the ritual on the twelfth night, intending to complete the disrupted part? Is that why they want no changes to the loop restarting it ahead of time?

Their actions in turn prove the key to the loop lies with me. That's why they repeatedly try to confirm how far I've explored the dream ruins…

If I unlock the dream's secret before the twelfth night comes and master recycling the corruption, will they ignore the possibility of the cycle restarting ahead of time and attack me to hold me in custody?

Yes, it's very likely they still have their memories…

As all sorts of thoughts raced through his mind, Lumian suddenly heard faint commotion.

"Baa…"

It was a sheep's bleat, as if from afar.

Lumian instantly thought of the three people turned sheep and Shepherd Pierre Berry.

Don't tell me he really wants to attack us dead of night? Lumian stood up and listened intently.

Outside the window was but the wind's sound through leaves and branches. No bleating.

It seemed Lumian so engrossed in his thoughts was hallucinating.

But he didn't think so because he felt slight heat in his left chest.

The black thorn symbol seemed to have appeared again!

This meant an invisible force closely tied to the hidden existence had quietly invaded the room.

Lumian had no time to think. He rushed to the bed and shook Aurore.

"Wake up! Wake up!" he shouted in a hushed voice.

He instinctively worried Leah, Ryan and Valentine would sense something amiss with him.

Aurore opened her eyes, her light-blue eyes clearly dazed.

"What time is it?" she asked in a weak voice. Obviously she was still not fully awake.

"There's a situation," Lumian said decisively before continuing, "Half past nine."

They were one of the few families in the village with wall clocks.

Aurore's eyes snapped open. She bolted upright, threw out her right hand, and massaged her temples.

She had no time to consider what she might see that she shouldn't.

If she couldn't pinpoint the anomaly and confirm the problem as soon as possible, she might not have to worry about seeing anything again. The dead had no need for eyes!

Aurore scanned the room, her gaze darkening as if reflecting strange, indescribable lights and shadows.

Lumian seized the chance to tell his sister about the sheep's bleat he'd heard in the distance and the triggered heat in the black thorn symbol on his chest.

Aurore frowned. "But I didn't detect anything…"

"The burning in my chest remains," Lumian rumbled.

He felt inexplicably terrified. The darkness around him was not simple. An indescribable danger lurked.

Aurore scrutinized every corner of the room, trying to find the unknown.

Silently, Lumian broke into a cold sweat—a stark contrast to the searing heat in his left chest.

He deliberated for a moment and said, "Why not tell Ryan and the others? Maybe they can find something."

Aurore pondered, then nodded.

"Use your sudden sense of impending danger as an excuse."

"Right." Lumian opened his mouth, about to yell outside—then froze.

"What is it?" Aurore asked, alarmed.

Lumian frowned. "The heat in my chest is dimming fast…"

Meaning the black thorn symbol was "fading" rapidly.

"The danger invading our room has left?" Aurore mused. "Because we prepared, it did nothing?"

"Perhaps." Lumian turned to the corridor and bellowed, "Something's wrong!"

Ryan appeared in the doorway in the blink of an eye, followed by Leah, then Valentine, who looked jolted from sleep.

Without waiting to be asked, Lumian recounted what had happened, using his sense of danger in place of the burning in his chest.

Ryan listened intently, not doubting this was Lumian's hallucination. He sighed,

"It's useful indeed to take turns on night watch.

"Mostly it's boredom, but if it saves everyone, it's almost life and death."

As he spoke, he conjured pure Sunrise Gleam around him, circling every room on the second floor.

Though he couldn't find the sinister power, he could at least sanctify the environment.

Leah paced around, muttering under her breath. Her veil and boots jangled ominously, then fell silent just as abruptly.

Finally, she said to Aurore and Lumian, "It was dicey just now. On top of that, whatever it was could block my Sealed Artifact from giving me any warning. I'm afraid these stupid bells will only go off once that thing really starts targeting someone. But now, it has left."

"Well, that's reassuring." Aurore sighed in relief.

"Maybe it wasn't a single creature." Lumian relaxed and grinned. "Could've been more than one."

Ryan and the others were silent.

"That's even worse!" Aurore lashed out at Lumian and told the investigators, "Now that the alarm's off, let's get back to our schedule."

She didn't mention who might've snuck in to attack them. There were too many possibilities: Shepherd Pierre Berry, the unknown corpse in the tomb, or the shady deputy padre.

Without solid clues, speculating would just waste time. Better to wait until daylight.

For now, they just had to remember that nighttime held real danger. Someone was out to get them, so they'd need to stay on high alert.

Once Leah and the others had gone to their rooms, Lumian glanced at the wall clock and asked Aurore, "Want to sleep in a bit more?"

"No way, waking up and crashing this late sucks." Aurore stretched her arms overhead. "Ugh, just to handle emergencies, I got this dress with pockets for spell components and useful stuff. I didn't even dare roll over, scared I might stab myself. I slept like a board."

As she spoke, she hopped off the bed and strode to the window. She yanked back the curtains and peered outside.

Cordu was silent. Many houses were still lit up.

"I thought that owl would come after us for sure, but there's no sign of it out there." Aurore surveyed the area and explained to Lumian.

Lumian nodded.

"That was my guess too."

He then leaned in and whispered everything he had figured out to his sister.

"Not bad," Aurore said with a smile. "You're getting better at analyzing situations. I've got nothing to add." She paused. "But we can't take matters into our own hands. That tomb is too dangerous…"

At this point, she exclaimed, "At dawn, we'll pay Madame Pualis a visit and tell her your theory. Let her know the Warlock's and owl's motives might affect her escape from this time loop at that precise moment."

"I'll go myself," Lumian said. He didn't want Aurore anywhere near Madame Pualis who had designs on her.

Aurore didn't argue. She only reminded him, "Watch your back. Don't piss her off, or else…"

She eyed his abdomen meaningfully.

Aurore sighed and said, "Truth is, that mysterious lady at Ol' Tavern is clearly stronger, but she wants nothing to do with this time loop. No way she'll help us investigate that tomb."

"Yeah," Lumian agreed.

He then said, "Still, I'll drop by Ol' Tavern tomorrow to see if I can run into her. What if she changes her mind?"

"Fair enough." Aurore didn't object.

They chatted in hushed tones until midnight.

After Lumian relieving his post with Leah in the study, he returned to Aurore's room. He lay beside his sister, inhaling her familiar scent and sinking into the soft mattress. Sleep eluded him.

"What's wrong?" Aurore asked, noticing his tenseness.

"Just not used to this," Lumian said carefully.

Aurore scoffed.

"What happened to the bold Lumian I know?"

Lumian didn't reply. Aurore exhaled slowly and smiled.

"Remember when you first started tailing me? You were scared I'd slip away and refused to sleep at night. You were super vigilant."

"Yeah, I do." Lumian drifted into the past. "Back then, you'd hum me a lullaby and let me doze off to the sound of your voice."

As soon as the words left his lips, a familiar melody reached his ears. Light and soothing, it calmed his body and mind.

Leaning against the bed, Aurore gazed into the deep crimson dark before her. She hummed the lullaby from her hometown, soft and wistful.

It was a song their mother had crooned when Aurore was just a kid, coaxing her to sleep.

"Go to sleep, go to sleep…"

Lost in the gentle tune, Lumian gradually unwound and slipped under.

......

Lumian woke up amidst the faint gray fog.

He scoped the room and realized that he wasn't in his sister's room. He was still in his own room.

Chapter 90: Trying Again

Indeed, no matter where I fall asleep, I'll wake up here. Lumian tumbled out of bed and glimpsed at the Fate Appropriator Dirk beside him. No, Fallen Mercury. He paced to the window in the faint gray fog.

He planted his hands on the desk and cast his gaze at the blood-colored "peak."

At the summit of the mountain, the fog was dense and stratified, utterly masking the three-headed, six-armed colossus.

I nearly lost control with just a glance the last time. I really have no idea what to do if I have to face it in the future... Lumian sighed in frustration.

He didn't sink into such emotions for long and quickly broke free because he still had numerous things to do.

Lumian contorted himself into a deranged dance within his bedroom, emitting a distorted spiritual pulse. Combined with the stirred forces of nature, he 'broadcasted' himself in an unspecific direction.

Before long, he sensed approaching entities and saw the translucent forms of the mouth-orifice monster, the shotgun monster, and the skinless monster reflected in his glass window.

Lumian was in no hurry. Following his dance, he withdrew a ritual silver dagger and stabbed the back of his left hand.

A droplet of crimson swiftly surfaced and congealed into a bead atop his skin, guided by his spirituality and the forces of nature.

The trio of creatures shifted but did not dare enter Lumian's abode or attach themselves to him.

Lumian spun around, elevated his left hand and bellowed, "I!"

Shouting in the ancient tongue of Hermes, it caused the room to rock faintly.

Employing his ritual dagger, Lumian collected the droplet of blood and aimed it at the mouth-orifice beast. "I command you! Onto me!"

Again in ancient Hermes. An imperceptible gust blew.

The translucent form of the mouth-orifice monster trembled visibly, as if seized and vigorously shaken by an invisible entity.

Just as Lumian completed his dance, believing it would have no effect, the mouth-orifice monster hurtled into the house and landed upon the ritual silver dagger, devouring the droplet of crimson.

It then convulsed violently as it tunneled into Lumian's body through the silver dagger.

Lumian could not help but gasp, his mind flooded with thoughts of 'So hungry, so hungry, starving, starving.'

He hastily turned and stared at the full-length mirror on his wardrobe. He saw his visage was pallid and tinged cerulean. His maw gaped wildly, resembling a cadaver more than a living being.

Success... Lumian exulted gazing at his reflection as if regarding a stranger.

It felt somewhat alien.

He resisted his intense hunger and attempted to sense the mouth-orifice monster possessing him.

It was like acquiring an additional brain. Much of it brimmed with hunger, bloodlust, madness and more. Instinctively, he had a proclivity to harness its characteristics.

Lumian could utilize his will and spirituality to magnify one of those instincts. It equated to employing the mouth-orifice monster's traits or abilities.

Without a second thought, Lumian chose invisibility.

In the blink of an eye, his reflection vanished from the full-length mirror.

Everything from his body to his clothes to the ritual silver dagger had disappeared.

Lumian took a few steps forward and back, but he couldn't spot any traces of himself in the mirror or glass.

Of course, his footprints and scent remained.

Lumian stuffed the silver dagger Aurore had given him, raised his arms, and punched the air a few times.

With each whooshing punch, the full-body mirror stayed empty until Lumian swung a fist at its surface.

The moment his knuckles connected with the mirror, his outline materialized. His face was pale with a tinge of blue, and his eyes glinted dangerously.

Unbelievable... No matter what I do, the invisibility stays on, but I can't mute it. However, as long as I attack the mirror, I lose invisibility... I thought it was optical invisibility like Aurore said, but it seems to be a result of mysticism... Attacking something forms a bond with it, rendering me invisible to its 'gaze?' Lumian hovered his right fist over the mirror.

After verifying the effects and limits of invisibility, ravenous hunger overwhelmed him. He stomped downstairs into the cellar and found two steaks.

If not for his rationality, he would've sunk his teeth into the dark meat.

Lumian abandoned the ingredients and grabbed the cheese he had stockpiled, realizing he had to fry the steak medium rare with no fire set up.

He didn't care if it was clean or delectable. Like a ghost starved to death, he shoved food into his mouth.

After eating a few cheese slices, Lumian finally satiated his intense hunger.

Looks like this is the downside of the mouth-orifice monster... he evaluated seriously. Luckily, I can still control my body and haven't lost my mind... That thing is obsessed with revenge but overpowered by even greater fear... If I utter 'leave' in ancient Hermes now, it'll bolt faster than anything...

By now, Lumian was sure the mouth-orifice monster's possession had acceptable side effects. Invisibility would become a potent weapon to explore and battle in the dream ruins.

Coupled with Fallen Mercury, he felt his combat ability had more than doubled.

Lumian returned to the dining table, pulled out a chair, and sat down, patiently awaiting the possession's end.

Soon, his spirituality nearly depleted.

He didn't strain himself. He stood up and performed some seemingly insane moves.

It was the same dance to attract monsters. Its purpose was to force the possessing creature out.

Without Lumian's command in ancient Hermes, the mouth-orifice monster's blurry and translucent figure flew out and vanished through the glass window on the first floor without glancing back.

Lumian couldn't help but make a self-deprecating remark. "Don't run so fast. You're acting like I have a cesspit on me."

He knew he could maintain possession for about three minutes given his spirituality. Once invisible, his consumption rate would double.

Of course, that was under normal circumstances. In danger, he could strain himself to last longer. But that risked losing control, best avoided if possible.

Though the mouth-orifice monster had left, Lumian still felt ravenous. He lit the stove and fried the steak medium well.

Then, he picked up his knife and fork and quickly cut, forked it, and put it into his mouth. He felt that the juice locked in the meat was delicious.

Lumian devoured two steaks in under ten minutes, sating his hunger.

Looking at the empty plate, he sighed, "Three minutes of possession needs at least two hours to recover..."

This didn't only mean eradicating hunger, but a recovery of spirituality too.

Lumian knew his current state wasn't fit for exploring. He found flour, sugar and other bits, using the oven at home to bake biscuits.

With cheese, this would be his main source of fuel in the ruins.

Had he more time, he'd have gotten jerky too--food shepherds often carried. As a Cordu resident, he knew how to make them.

Busy with this, Lumian pondered his dream ruin plans.

First, circle the city wall. Then hunt that flaming beast...

Only by amping up my strength can I better explore and unravel the secrets of the dream...

The flaming monster's strength was at least Sequence 7, and there was a high chance it was from the Hunter pathway. Its various abilities perfectly squashed Lumian. He hadn't planned on dealing with that dude anytime soon, hoping to first seek out prey that was weaker and on par with a

Provoker. But now, scoring Fallen Mercury and Invisibility gave him a certain level of hope.

When his spirituality had mostly recovered, Lumian placed the baked biscuits and sliced cheese into a cloth pouch and slung it around his waist.

Then, he seriously wrapped his left hand in layers of white bandages and grabbed the evil dirk called Fallen Mercury.

Hauling his shotgun and axe, Lumian strode towards the door on the first floor with the other stuff he needed.

Suddenly, he had the feeling that he was a fully armed hunter preparing for a dangerous hunt.

Many thoughts surfaced in his mind.

My first move is to track the flaming monster's movements. Then I'll use Invisibility to sneak up on it and stab it with Fallen Mercury.

Before that, I'll hunt a weak monster and steal its bad fate. Then swap that fate with the flaming monster's.

I can't do the sacrificial dance while possessed and half-activate the black thorn symbol. Otherwise, the mouth-orifice monster will bolt from my body immediately. So, how do I get away from the flaming monster after hurting it and wait for the fate swap to finish? It'll easily lock onto me through my traces. Invisibility alone won't cut it...

Lumian hadn't figured out the last part yet. That depended on early intel.

As he opened the door and went into the wilderness, he had an odd feeling.

If I can successfully hunt the flaming monster, my Hunter potion will be fully digested.

...

In the area where he'd met the flaming monster before, Lumian held his pewter-black dirk in his left hand. He carefully searched for any traces, on high alert for sudden attacks.

After circling cautiously for nearly ten minutes, he finally found signs of the flaming monster.

In a collapsed house's corner, there were black scorch marks on a stone unlike any around it.

Where there's one, there's two. Lumian quickly tracked the flaming monster's location and slowly, cautiously followed its trail.

When the marks were fresh, he stopped and began to dance.

Chapter 91: Scheming

Lumian danced to lure in strange creatures. His objective: to use Invisibility to slip closer and analyze the flaming monster's habits and movements, gathering intel for future hunts.

Within a mere 30 to 40 seconds, he used ancient Hermes to reattach the mouth-orifice creature to himself.

An overwhelming hunger consumed Lumian, compelling him to open his mouth. It was as if his mouth had sprouted vortex-shaped teeth.

Swiftly, he stifled the ravenous and insane thoughts flooding his being, pulled out a small biscuit and a cube of cheese, and shoved them into his mouth, chewing and swallowing.

Simultaneously, he strengthened the mouth-orifice creature's invisibility, causing him to vanish from sight.

Having quelled his hunger, Lumian tried hard to clamp his mouth shut to prevent the aroma of biscuit and cheese from escaping.

He then trailed the flaming monster along the road's edge.

Before long, Lumian spotted the charred monster, its every limb ablaze.

It was constructing a new trap in the clearing from before.

You're already a monster, yet you're still so dedicated? Lumian silently jeered.

Naturally, he understood this was merely an expression of the monster's instinctive behavior.

Lumian dared not approach too closely, halting beside a crumbling wall at the clearing's perimeter.

He studied the flaming monster for a few moments before glancing back at the path he had traversed. He noticed that, although his footprints were faint and concealed in less conspicuous areas, they still existed.

Lumian eyed his current position and hatched a plan.

Closely monitoring the monster's movements, he seized a larger rock and hurled it to the side. As it flew, he pressed his right hand against the decaying wall and vaulted up, landing securely atop the wall.

Crash! Lumian's actions were flawlessly masked by the sound of the rock striking the ground.

After changing his vantage point, Lumian felt much more at ease. Monitoring his dwindling spirituality, he intently observed the flaming monster.

He discerned that the flaming monster's traps were neither concealed nor challenging to detect. They didn't exploit any logical vulnerabilities or inertia-driven movement. They were simple and exposed.

The most elementary example was the flaming monster stretching a rope slightly above one's ankle between two ruined buildings across the clearing.

Any human or monster with normal vision could easily discover this trap.

At first, Lumian didn't grasp its purpose, but after placing himself in the monster's position, he gradually discerned its potential significance.

The intent of such traps was not to directly harm or ensnare enemies, but to forge an environment that enabled Hunters to exhibit their full potential.

In the heat of battle, one struggled to observe the environment and maintain situational awareness. Constantly distracted by these limitations, they occasionally had to slow down or alter their stance to evade traps. Hunters possessed the unique ability to remain alert to their surroundings at all times and exploit the environment to their advantage.

This disparity widened the gulf between their strengths.

An open conspiracy... Lumian nodded in understanding, recalling Aurore's words.

Suddenly, he perceived the flaming monster as a stern instructor imparting valuable lessons about Hunters to him.

Simultaneously, he remembered the content of Aurore's novel: Stealing from a master is punishable by death!

Eventually, the flaming monster ceased its activity. Its charred face instinctively scanned the vicinity.

Then, it strode towards the edge of the clearing near Lumian, flames dancing from its body.

Following a predetermined route to the next location? Lumian mused to himself, his excitement mounting.

For Hunters, discerning a quarry's path was invaluable.

Most traps lay hidden along such routes!

As the flaming monster ambled, it scrutinized its surroundings and examined the ground, remaining vigilant.

This caused Lumian to furrow his brow. He realized that a higher Sequence Hunter wouldn't be easily handled.

The most effective counter to Beyonders was often individuals or objects of a higher Sequence from the same pathway, even if the gap was only one or two Sequences.

I'm better at your strengths than you are. You may lack what I possess!

If not for his Dancer-related abilities and the Fallen Mercury dirk, Lumian wouldn't have dared to entertain any designs on the flaming monster.

Seven to eight seconds later, the flaming monster reached the edge of the clearing, approximately five to six meters from the crumbling wall.

As before, the flaming monster's gaze instinctively roved.

It paused, as if observing footprints near the wall's edge that appeared to have been left by someone.

Thump, thump. Lumian's heart pounded involuntarily.

He wasn't prepared to hunt the flaming monster just yet.

Despite the five to six meters between them, Lumian hesitated to kill the enemy with Fallen Mercury, knowing the latter hadn't stored an exchangeable fate.

If a fight erupted, he'd be hunted before he could activate the black thorn symbol!

Lumian struggled to control his heartbeat and breathing. His right hand hovered over the black cloth covering Fallen Mercury's blade, ready to tear it away at any moment.

If he leaped with full force from his current position, he might reach the flaming monster and avoid a long-range battle that favored his opponent.

Two or three seconds ticked by. The flaming monster averted its gaze and moved on.

It didn't seem to have noticed Lumian's footprints.

After covering another ten meters, the flaming monster suddenly spun around.

Flames erupted from its body, condensing into a massive, searing white fireball.

The fireball rocketed like a cannonball toward the spot where Lumian had been perched at the edge of the crumbling wall.

Following his instincts, Lumian, who was crouching on the wall, leaped down to the other side, where the flaming monster had laid its trap.

Boom!

A fiery blast erupted, causing the already unstable wall to collapse.

Upon landing, Lumian rolled twice to avoid falling debris and the shockwave laced with flames.

He immediately sprang back up, maintaining his "invisibility" as he sped through the traps left by the flaming monster and headed toward another exit in the clearing.

The flaming monster couldn't detect its enemy right away, so it focused on searching for clues.

Finally, it spotted a series of faint footprints.

By then, Lumian had reached the rope stretched between two collapsed buildings, easily jumping over it and fleeing the clearing.

He dashed to a natural trap and shook off his pursuer.

Having deactivated his invisibility, Lumian cursed in pain, "Too treacherous, too treacherous! One of these monsters' heads is worth two of Pons's. After finding my footprints, it pretended not to see them and deliberately increased the distance between us, fearing it might be defeated!"

As Lumian cursed, he felt like he had learned something new.

Of course, there were drawbacks to this approach: the increased distance gave Lumian room to escape.

Furthermore, his invisibility meant the flaming monster couldn't lock onto him right away. His chances of escaping were high.

After catching his breath and restoring some energy, Lumian mused while eating biscuits and cheese, "Based on what just happened, as long as I plan carefully and strike at the right moment, I can rely on Invisibility to create distance and escape to a safe location, waiting for the fate exchange to complete."

Lumian's Invisibility would break upon attacking, but as long as he avoided contact, he could use it again.

This valuable insight emerged from his reconnaissance.

However, he also realized a problem. As a Hunter, I didn't bring water when I went 'hunting in the mountains!' I'm so thirsty!

Both cheese and biscuits required water.

The jerky Lumian intended to make in the future fell into this category too.

After resting briefly, he resolved to hunt Noodle Man, strip its bad fate, and store it in Fallen Mercury. He couldn't risk being defenseless in an emergency again.

A puppet's fate also belonged to Fallen Mercury and could be exchanged. But Lumian wasn't a wielder. He couldn't swap his fate with others. If he could, he'd gladly give away the bomb on him.

......

About thirty minutes later, Lumian tracked down Noodle Man, the grotesque hodgepodge of limbs and features.

Having completed the ritualistic dance in advance, Lumian strode towards Noodle Man openly. As expected, he found Noodle Man prostrate on the fetid ground, trembling uncontrollably.

Very obedient... Lumian praised, gripping an iron-black axe in his right hand and the pewter-black Fallen Mercury dirk in his left.

Though Fallen Mercury dirk's malignant aura seeped into Lumian's skin even without contact, he had long grown immune to its corrupting influence. What might drive ordinary Beyonders to losing control was nothing to him.

Lumian glowered at the pathetic Noodle Man cowering before him, retracting his gaze from the gnashing maw on its forehead.

"According to Aurore, death is a mercy for your kind. The sooner you expire, the sooner your suffering will end."

As he spoke, Lumian crouched and plunged the pewter-black dirk deep into the back of Noodle Man's neck.

Noodle Man spasmed, but did not resist or struggle.

Lumian wrenched the dirk free and gripped his axe, swinging the weapon down with fluid grace.

The axehead cleaved through flesh and bone, sending Noodle Man's head tumbling across the ground with Fallen Mercury's swipe.

Blood erupted from the severed neck, splattering everywhere.

Noodle Man's twitching remains soon fell still, lifeless at last.

Lumian strode over to the head and retrieved FalleN mercury with his left hand.

In the fleeting second between breaths, an illusory river shimmered before his eyes.

The river appeared to be constructed from intricate mercury symbols, and each symbol seemed formed by the river itself.

At once, the river's branches disappeared, leaving only the primary current. It fractured midway and kinked as if wanting to double back to its source but for now could not prevail.

Chapter 92: Stripping Fate

Lumian couldn't grasp the meaning of the illusory river he saw or sensed. All he could surmise was that it symbolized fate. Guided by Fallen Mercury's instincts, he lifted the blade's tip and aimed it at a mercury symbol within the river.

As soon as he made contact with the mercury river, a series of scenes flashed through Lumian's mind: Noodle Man performing an enigmatic sacrificial dance; Noodle Man cowering before the black thorn symbol and prostrating itself; Noodle Man gathering the scattered flesh and blood throughout the dream ruins to satiate its hunger; Noodle Man attempting to approach the 'city wall' circle, but retreating each time as if afraid of something; Noodle Man's head severed by an axe...

Is this its entire existence since the loop began? Lumian realized this as he tried to stab the tip of Fallen Mercury at the mercury symbol representing Noodle Man's demise--the end of the illusory river.

It was too immense and heavy for him to succeed.

At that moment, the mercury symbol started to dissipate, and the illusory river gradually faded. The images in Lumian's mind grew hazy.

There's a time limit? Lumian didn't dare to dawdle. Adhering to the principle of proximity, he aimed the dark pewter dirk at Noodle Man's fate of succumbing to the black thorn symbol.

The mercury symbol, seemingly formed by the river's entanglement, was pried open, condensing into a droplet that seeped into the blade of Fallen Mercury.

In the next instant, the illusory river vanished entirely, preventing Lumian from witnessing Noodle Man's fate again.

He glanced down at Fallen Mercury and noticed the heretic symbols on the pewter-black blade undulating gently like water, as though infused with some vital force.

They had been mesmerizing from the start, but now they appeared even more sinister.

"Success..." Lumian whispered to himself in relief.

Fallen Mercury was now complete.

In the future, as long as he could wound the flaming monster with this heretic dirk in battle, he could swap the monster's fate of cowering before the black thorn symbol with the former.

Lumian wrapped the blade of Fallen Mercury in black cloth and sheathed it in his belt. He dealt with Noodle Man's corpse briefly, moving it into a half-collapsed building. He destroyed the building's last support, allowing rubble and wood to fall, burying everything inside.

After this, Lumian circled back to where the flaming monster had appeared.

This time, he didn't approach for observation. Instead, he searched for footprints and other traces, taking time to identify which ones the target left while deliberately circling around.

After nearly two hours, Lumian gradually deciphered the flaming monster's habits and patterns. A mental hunting map emerged.

He spent some time surveying the predetermined battlefields, seeking natural traps to exploit.

Eventually, Lumian rubbed his forehead and decided to delve deeper into the ruins while he still had energy, gathering information for future explorations.

He remained vigilant and performed the sacrificial dance again, partially triggering the black thorn symbol.

With the 'amulet' in hand, Lumian quickly followed the same path as before.

He encountered monsters along the way, but they either fled before attacking or vanished from sight at a distance. The deeper he went, the more similar situations occurred.

Finally, when the burning sensation in his chest from the second sacrificial dance subsided, Lumian spotted the 'city wall' composed of twisted houses once more.

He rested a while, waiting for his spirituality to recover before performing the sacrificial dance again.

After the dance, sometimes forceful, sometimes graceful, Lumian headed in the direction where he found Fallen Mercury, the black thorn symbol activated.

After passing through the room where the flames had been extinguished, he slowed his pace, wary of a sudden assault.

After walking a while, Lumian noticed the light ahead had dimmed considerably. It was as if a massive creature high in the sky blocked the light, or the sun was obscured by something.

Lumian instinctively looked up, but saw only thick fog.

Unable to determine the cause, he could only draw Fallen Mercury and cautiously proceed.

In a moment, it felt as if he had transitioned from day to night.

Of course, this was an exaggeration. Lumian thought it more accurate to liken the foggy weather to a place shrouded in dark clouds.

Almost simultaneously, he yawned involuntarily, his exhaustion intensifying.

No, I can't sleep... Lumian forced himself to keep his eyes open as he retreated from the shadowy base of the mountain.

His mental state improved significantly. Although still tired, he could endure it.

You fall asleep the moment you enter. The deeper you go, the sleepier you become? Lumian mused silently. He turned and walked in another direction.

After another sacrificial dance, he arrived at an unfamiliar area.

To his right were 'walls' stacked with doors and windows. To his left lay a wasteland connected to the circle of building ruins, and ahead stood brown trees.

In the desolate ruins, the trees seemed incredibly resilient. They intertwined and embraced each other, forming a wooden wall five to six meters tall.

This wooden wall had numerous green leaves and branches, a stark contrast to the deathly silence and desolation surrounding it.

If it hadn't blocked the path to the back of the city wall, Lumian might have praised its tenacious vitality. But now, he could only express his dissatisfaction with the crude gesture of raising two middle fingers.

He could have chosen to take a detour and enter from the other side of the dream ruins, but he wasn't familiar with that area. His spirituality was nearly depleted, so there was no need to take the risk.

Lumian yawned unabashedly, his chest still burning as he retraced his steps.

......

As Lumian awoke, the first light of dawn had already crept through the thick curtains, casting an outline of the desk, chair, wardrobe, and other furnishings within the room.

Still early, he thought, glancing over at Aurore beside him.

Aurore's blonde hair lay strewn across the white pillow, her eyes closed in peaceful slumber.

Her right hand gripped the edge of the blanket, occasionally attempting to turn over but stopping instinctively. Her brow furrowed before gradually smoothing out.

Lumian had a good idea why his sister reacted this way.

She had hidden numerous bottles within her nightgown as a precaution. Sleeping on her side or stomach would undoubtedly cause her harm.

How exhausting, Lumian sighed inwardly, his expression tender and his heart at ease.

After a moment, he carefully slid out of bed and left the bedroom.

He moved toward a side balcony that led to the rooftop. Facing the distant crimson sky, he stretched his body.

Within a minute, Valentine emerged from his room and stood in the corridor.

"Are you also greeting the sun?" he asked, his usual cold demeanor replaced with warmth and approval.

Can I say no? Lumian smiled. "That's right."

Satisfied, Valentine stepped onto the balcony and stood tall, facing the rising sun.

He spread his arms wide, lifted his face toward the sky, and whispered, "Praise the Sun!"

With no other choice, Lumian mimicked the gesture. "Praise the Sun!"

Valentine lowered his arms and crossed them over his chest. After a moment of silent prayer, he opened his eyes and said to Lumian, "If the loop is successfully resolved, I'll introduce you to the bishop of DariÃ¨ge. Or would you prefer Bigorre?"

"I prefer Trier," Lumian answered, smiling. "But where I go isn't up to me. It's up to my sister."

Valentine nodded and dropped the subject. He turned back toward the corridor and began patrolling.

Nothing happened until eight o'clock. The pair then went downstairs and prepared breakfast together.

Soon after, Ryan joined them to help. Leah woke up just before nine, leaving Aurore still asleep.

Ryan bit into his toast and asked Lumian, "Do you have any plans for today?"

Lumian hesitated before responding, "We should leave someone at home. Aurore can't be left to face a potential attack alone. The remaining two will accompany me to stock up on food and fetch some water. We must hold out until the twelfth night."

Cordu lacked a proper water supply. Aurore had installed a water tank on the roof during her renovations. As long as it was regularly filled and disinfected, it was as good as having running water.

"Yes, we need to do all this before Lent," Ryan agreed.

Lumian smiled brightly. "By the way, we should visit Madame Pualis and ask if she can help us investigate the dead Warlock and the owl in the tomb."

As expected, Valentine frowned, and Ryan's smile stiffened.

Leah sipped her water and offered a smile. "I'll stay with Aurore."

"No problem," Lumian agreed on behalf of Ryan and Valentine.

With no other choice, the two men acquiesced to visit the administrator's residence that morning.

Following breakfast, the trio exited the semi-subterranean two-story building and made their way toward Ol' Tavern.

They passed Shepherd Pierre Berry's home along the way.

Lumian's heart raced as he suggested to Ryan and Valentine, "Let's check on the three sheep."

He recalled the bleating he had heard the night before.

Understanding his meaning, Ryan and Valentine offered no objection.

They circled around to the rear of the Berrys' home, only to find an empty sheep pen.

The three sheep were gone.

Chapter 93: An Early Sacrifice

Gazing at the empty sheep pen littered with hay and dung, Ryan furrowed his brow and said, "Did they really fix the underground altar so quickly?"

He suspected the three missing sheep had been taken for sacrifice.

"Maybe these heretics have some special powers," Valentine replied with disdain.

As Lumian listened to their conversation, he suddenly remembered the faint sound of a sheep's bleating he heard the night before.

Could it have been one of the sheep being sacrificed? Puzzled, he shared his suspicion with Ryan and Valentine.

"That seems unlikely," Ryan dismissed, shaking his head. "The cathedral is hundreds of meters from your house, and the altar is underground."

What he meant was that even with a Hunter's enhanced hearing, it would be impossible to hear anything from the cathedral's underground.

Lumian shared that doubt, but couldn't explain why he heard the bleating. Simultaneously, a distinct burning sensation appeared in his chest as the black thorn symbol partially activated.

There was no way to fake this!

Burning sensation… Lumian's heart raced, recalling something the mysterious woman had said.

Pray to yourself… the principle of proximity…

Thinking back to the ritual that invoked Dancer's power and the black thorn symbol, he formed a new hypothesis.

He heard the sheep bleating during the sacrifice because of mysticism!

In simpler terms, when the padre and his group performed their ritual and prayed to the hidden being, the principle of proximity also targeted the corruption in Lumian's body, partially triggering the black thorn symbol. As a result, Lumian could faintly hear the sheep's cries from afar.

Him being unable to respond or knowing how—with the corruption now sealed by the owner of the bluish-black pattern—the padre's ritual ultimately 'contacted' the hidden entity.

After the ritual, the burning sensation in Lumian's chest faded.

It seems no invisible, strange power had invaded Aurore's room last night. The anomaly in my body was just half-activated by the padre's ritual… Lumian roughly understood how events had unfolded.

At that moment, Ryan warned his companions, "It appears our investigation of the cathedral's underground has alarmed the padre and his people. They've found a way to repair the altar and pray for strength ahead of time. From now on, we need to be extra vigilant. Don't assume things will only turn dangerous as Lent approaches."

"If I weren't worried about restarting the loop, I'd have dealt with them already!" Valentine spat hatefully.

Then, he added gloomily, "Can you stop calling that servant of the evil god a padre? He's not worthy!"

Why was he a padre if he wasn't worthy? Lumian dared not voice his thoughts.

He wasn't afraid to voice his thoughts; but wanting to maintain his image in Valentine's eyes, he kept silent. After all, he might need to persuade this fanatic to do something later, like using his suicide to verify the essence of the cycle.

Ryan nodded.

"Let's visit Madame Pualis as soon as possible to replenish our supplies. We should stay inside as much as we can in the future."

Lumian said nothing more, leaving Shepherd Pierre Berry's house through the back door and heading towards the castle on the hill.

Passing through the vibrant garden, the trio approached the partially opened door and informed the red-coated, white-panted manservant, "We need to see Madame Pualis."

"Wait a moment." The valet glanced at Ryan and Valentine before swiftly turning and vanishing through the door.

Soon after, the pale-faced 'midwife' in a grayish-white dress emerged.

Compared to last time, her face was even paler, and her eyes were so blank that it made one's heart turn cold.

Had Lumian not informed Ryan and Valentine beforehand that the 'midwife' wasn't 'dead,' they would have been shocked.

They had seen plenty of dead people turn into zombies. The Solar High Priest specialized in such matters. Valentine had purified dozens of similar cases, but it was beyond their understanding how a person diced into pieces could revert to their original appearance and seem more alive than dead.

The 'midwife' spoke in a monotone.

"Madame doesn't want to see you. Please leave."

"We have urgent matters," Lumian insisted. "Isn't Madame Pualis concerned that the person underground will disrupt her plans?"

The 'midwife' maintained her tone.

"Madame says it won't affect her."

Hearing this, a chill ran down Lumian's spine.

It meant they would have a hard time getting Madame Pualis' help again.

Lumian smiled without displaying frustration or disappointment. Looking at the 'midwife,' he said, "But we might explore the tomb."

He implied that during the exploration, either side could encounter trouble, triggering the loop to restart prematurely.

Unfazed, the 'midwife' remained stiff and blank.

"You can try, but you'll only be disappointed."

What does she mean? Lumian couldn't grasp Madame Pualis' message.

Does she mean they could explore all they wanted, and she would offer some help at crucial moments, but they wouldn't find any valuable clues? The more Lumian pondered, the more he doubted that was her intended meaning. Otherwise, she wouldn't have refused their meeting request through the 'midwife.'

Before Lumian could consider other possibilities, Ryan thoughtfully asked, "Is Madame Pualis trying to tell us that the person in the tomb can easily control us and prevent our investigation without triggering the loop?"

"Yes." The 'midwife' nodded slowly, turned, and retreated deeper into the castle.

Lumian, Valentine, and Ryan exchanged glances and left, feeling helpless.

Their next stop was Ol' Tavern, where they could purchase plenty of provisions and barrels of cheap wine.

Compared to potable water that spoiled easily, wine was more stable. As long as its alcohol content wasn't too high, it could substitute for water.

Entering Ol' Tavern, Lumian scanned the room but didn't spot the mysterious woman.

Disappointed, he focused on the bar counter, telling tavern owner Maurice Bénet what they needed.

After Ryan and Valentine hauled out wine barrels, Lumian lowered his voice and inquired, "Where's the other lady?"

Maurice Bénet shook his head.

"I don't know. Maybe she's in her room, somewhere else in the village, or even in Liège. She rented the room until the 9th. She's free to do as she pleases."

The 9th? The twelfth night? Lumian nodded thoughtfully.

April 9th was the so-called twelfth night that he and Aurore had deduced.

This also confirmed that March 29th was indeed the loop's first day.

If Ryan and the two other foreigners hadn't happened to enter Cordu on a particular cycle's first day, the loop would immediately restart and commence on March 29th whenever outsiders invaded the area.

"Damn." Lumian slapped his forehead and told the tavern owner, Maurice Bénet, "My stomach's acting up. I need the restroom. Tell them to wait for me."

Maurice Bénet's expression seemed to say: What are you up to now?

"Don't mess with me!"

The downside of having a bad reputation rears its ugly head once more… Lumian chuckled.

"Don't worry, I'm really just using the restroom!"

As he spoke, he waved and sprinted toward the staircase.

He did want to use the restroom, but he was heading for the one upstairs.

Maurice Bénet glanced at his retreating figure and muttered, "Spring is here, and this scoundrel's hormones are raging…"

His voice barely reached Lumian's ears.

Upon reaching the second floor, Lumian approached the restroom and positioned himself in front of the mysterious lady's room.

Knock, knock, knock. He rapped on the door.

No answer.

Noticing the absence of a "Do Not Disturb" sign on the handle, Lumian knocked twice more, each time louder than before.

Unfortunately, the mysterious lady never showed.

Lumian pondered for a moment before producing a slim wire and jiggling it in the keyhole.

The door creaked open, revealing an empty room.

The bed's blanket lay neatly folded, as though no one had occupied the space recently.

Lumian exhaled quietly and closed the door without venturing inside.

…

In the afternoon, the siblings congregated in Aurore's bedroom under the guise of instructing Lumian in the art of Hermes to swiftly enhance his strength.

Lumian kept his voice low as he recounted his excursion into the dream ruins the previous night. At last, he inquired, "Anything to add? About hunting the flaming monster?"

Though he was armed with Fallen Mercury and Invisibility, his confidence in hunting the flaming beast remained low.

It was a Sequence of the Hunter pathway that had experienced a qualitative transformation!

Aurore chuckled.

"You've covered all the bases. The only thing I can add is…"

She lifted her hands, formed fists, and shook them gently.

"Break a leg!"

"…" Lumian felt defeated by his sister's jest.

However, the tension in his chest subsided.

Aurore then said, "What remains are some clichéd words: be careful, be careful, be very careful."

She sighed.

"It's a shame the mysterious lady isn't here. Otherwise, I could've crafted some simple, supplementary talismans, along with the Integrity Brooch, and had them brought into your dream."

"That's true." While Lumian felt disappointed, he wasn't disheartened. He had no intention of giving up.

…

At 9:50 pm, Lumian slid out of Aurore's bedroom and stalked down the hallway towards the washroom.

He intended to relieve himself before beginning his night watch.

Bathed in the crimson glow of the moon, the washroom was shrouded in darkness. Only the toilet was faintly visible.

Lumian bent over and unfastened his belt.

Behind him, the shadow on the wall abruptly writhed and morphed into a silhouette brandishing an axe high above its head!

Chapter 94: Attack

Lumian's eyes were narrowed, his body tensing as he sensed the pores on his skin open. An overwhelming premonition of danger washed over him.

In the dream ruins, he'd had no shortage of similar experiences. Instantly, he halted and tumbled to the side, like a boneless sack of flesh.

A whistling wind filled his ears as a razor-sharp axe grazed his body, slicing through the air.

Lumian hit the ground with a thud, attempting to roll to his feet. But pale-white and pitch-black, eerie arms extended from the surrounding shadows, grabbing his clothes and coiling around his body.

The cold sensation and stiffness seeped into Lumian's flesh. Twisting wildly, trying to escape the restraints with his powerful agility, he shouted, "Help…"

Two malicious, bumpy palms smothered his mouth, stifling his voice abruptly, leaving only a whimper.

Simultaneously, Lumian glimpsed an elongated humanoid shadow on the wall, raising the axe at him.

Clang!

A two-handed broadsword of pure light blocked the axe's slash.

Ryan was the first to rush over, not bothering with his Dawn Armor, and simply summoned a Sword of Dawn.

The shadowy axe took on a heavy, sharp, and dark appearance the moment it detached from the wall.

The second person to arrive at the washroom door was Leah, who had been in the opposite study. The silver bells on her veil and boots tinkled softly.

Leah raised her right palm and aimed her silver revolver at the strange arms grabbing Lumian.

They tightened, as if trying to drag Lumian into the shadows.

Blue blood vessels bulged from Lumian's neck, forehead, and hands, straining with all his might.

Yet, he couldn't fend off the pale-white and pitch-black arms. His body dissolved into the shadows piece by piece.

Bang!

Leah fired, and a golden bullet wrapped in blazing flames struck a pitch-black arm that seemed to drip ink.

The arm ignited, quickly releasing Lumian's neck and retreating into the shadowy corner.

Aurore arrived at the washroom to find such a scene.

Seeing a third of her brother's body thinned and darkened into a shadow, his expression growing increasingly rigid, Aurore wasted no time. She pulled iron-black materials from her hidden pocket and sprinkled the powder at Lumian, her light-blue eyes darkening.

Lumian felt an invisible hand grasp him and pull him toward Aurore.

He recalled his sister using a similar spell before, but it had pushed him away—this time, she yanked him closer.

The colossal hand's strength equaled that of the sinister arms, stopping Lumian's slide into the shadows.

Clang! Clang! Clang!

Ryan drove the figure with the sharp axe back into the wall.

The next second, Valentine appeared behind Leah and Aurore.

Witnessing Lumian's state, he spread his arms wide.

Golden illusory flames materialized around Lumian, incinerating countless wicked arms.

The pitch-black or pale-white arms either melted like candles or evaporated into black wisps of smoke.

Within seconds, four-fifths of the strange arms grabbing Lumian vanished.

The remaining arms struggled to resist the invisible hand and Lumian's efforts, releasing him one after another.

Feeling the grip on him loosen, Lumian was pulled by the invisible hand, half-flying and half-pouncing toward Aurore.

As the pitch-black and pale-white arms retracted, the axe-wielding figure froze on the wall, merging with the surrounding shadows, leaving no trace.

Lumian stood and surveyed the area, sneering.

"Is that it? Aren't you looking down on us by only sending one person?"

Aurore glared at him.

"Don't speak!"

How could he utter such ill-omened words at a time like this?

As Aurore's voice echoed in the corridor, a black, spiked vine, abnormally thick as if from the Abyss, descended from the study's ceiling.

At its top bloomed a massive, blood-red flower with a foul odor.

The flower expanded, as if stretching its mouth to the limit.

It suddenly engulfed Leah's head and writhed frantically.

As it chewed, the object in its mouth turned into a thin piece of paper and was shredded.

Immediately after, the radiant broadsword of light flew from the washroom, impaling the massive evil flower to the wall.

Streams of bright red blood oozed from the sword, evaporating into mist.

Simultaneously, tendrils of black vines cascaded from the ceiling of the Lumian residence, enveloping the walls and sealing the windows with enormous red blossoms.

Aurore swiftly produced a pearl-like powder and tossed it into the air, mingling it with summoned natural forces.

An unseen warm breeze blew, causing the black vines to wither and lose their vigor, no longer able to support the vivid red flowers suspended in midair.

The wilted vines dangled lifelessly from the second floor.

Not a bad result… Aurore mused to herself.

She had obtained the spell from a member of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society. Intended as a gardening spell for weeding, Aurore had acquired it at a bargain price, thinking it would be useful someday. Typically, it was used to clear weeds from building walls, but today it proved invaluable.

Nonetheless, the abyssal black vines were unnaturally resilient. They merely withered and didn't perish instantly.

This bought time for Valentine, who summoned the golden and illusory Fire of Light to incinerate the vile creatures in the corridor and rooms.

Ryan then flooded the area with the pure Sunrise Gleam, banishing all evil and obliterating all illusions.

Confronted with this situation he was powerless in, Hunter Lumian stifled his urge to perform the enigmatic dance. He observed his sister and the three outsiders collaborate to eradicate the anomaly that had invaded the second floor.

Soon, the black vines and red flowers disintegrated into smoke.

But Leah's veil and the silver bells on her boots continued to jingle, signaling that danger still lurked.

Lumian swiftly surveyed the scene and sniffed.

"The air doesn't smell right…"

A faint, sweet scent lingered.

"I feel a little dizzy and want to sleep," Leah confessed her unease.

The fumes from the burning vines and flowers contain an anesthetic? How sinister! Aurore, possessing extensive mysticism knowledge, acted promptly.

She produced a handful of transparent powder and scattered it forward.

A fierce wind materialized from nowhere, gusting through every corner of the second floor.

Ryan, Lumian, Valentine, and Leah dashed into separate rooms, throwing open the windows that had been sealed by the black vines.

As the innocuous wind subsided, Aurore turned to Lumian and inquired, "And now?"

Lumian sniffed cautiously. "Don't smell it anymore."

"I feel better, too," Leah chimed in.

At that moment, the silver bells on her veil and boots ceased their movement.

The crisis was averted.

"A probing attack from the padre and company?" Aurore speculated.

Lumian glanced at Valentine, who appeared troubled.

"Could be Guillaume Bénet, who just received a boon, or the already powerful Shepherd Pierre Berry."

Valentine's expression softened at Lumian's choice of words.

Ryan surveyed the area and declared in a deep voice, "Whichever the case, we must heighten our vigilance. From now on, let's split into two groups for shifts. We'll alternate between resting and standing guard, day or night."

A single guard risked being ambushed without timely assistance.

"No problem." Aurore and Lumian exchanged glances before adding, "I'll be in the same group as my brother."

Ryan and the others didn't object.

Over the next few days, the two groups maintained a watchful eye in six-hour rotations. Although nothing transpired, as Lent drew near, they all felt the impending danger, anticipating relentless waves of peril.

During this period, Lumian continued exploring the dream while resting.

He didn't immediately hunt the flaming monster. Instead, he suppressed his impatience and sought to understand the creature's patterns.

With his Invisibility, long-range tracking, daily observation, and ample patience, Lumian finally gleaned the information he desired.

The flaming monster would set traps in the dream clearing each morning, practicing techniques it had mastered for 45 to 90 minutes. It would then follow a fixed route into a flesh-strewn area to replenish its energy.

Its afternoon activities were unpredictable, mainly patrolling its territory via different paths. Lumian had yet to discern its criteria for choosing routes.

In the evening, it would retrace the fixed route and re-enter the hunting zone.

Lumian remained ignorant of its nocturnal activities. He had only spent a maximum of six hours in the dream ruins and never ventured there at night.

…

The night before Lent.

Lumian jolted awake in the hazy gray fog of the dreamscape bedroom. He glanced at Fallen Mercury beside him and his mind snapped into sharp focus.

This was the night. He would hunt down the flaming monster.

Chapter 95: An "Out in the Open" Ambush

Lumian meticulously wrapped his left hand in layers of white bandages. He gathered his supplies: Fallen Mercury, his iron-black axe, gray amber perfume, biscuits, cheese, bloodied mutton chops, rope for traps, and a bag of cooled boiled water. Slipping his shotgun over his shoulder, he left his semi-subterranean dwelling.

Through the thin gray fog, he ventured into a barren wasteland, riddled with cracks. He entered the dreamlike ruins and strode toward the clearing where the flaming monster often lurked.

Hearing a distant noise, Lumian veered towards a path he anticipated the creature would take, arriving at a natural trap he'd discovered earlier.

A deep pit lay beside the road, with collapsed walls to the front and left. Stacked rocks bordered the right side, and behind it, a mostly collapsed house loomed.

Such a trap was difficult to spot. Lumian had found it only after scouring the area multiple times.

He crouched behind the pit, tossing in a few sharpened wooden stakes. He covered it with a rope net he'd woven earlier and camouflaged it with soil.

With the simple trap set, he placed his bait: two blood-soaked lamb chops, half on solid ground and half suspended above the pit.

Lumian stepped back, assessing the precarious balance. He retreated into the mostly collapsed house, perching himself on the remains of an outer wall.

He adjusted his position to watch the trap without being seen by passing monsters.

Next, he took out the gray amber perfume and sprayed it on the wall.

A delicate, sweet scent wafted through the air, carried by sporadic gusts of wind that blew through the ruins.

The fragrance clung to the wall and to Lumian.

Without hesitation, he leaped away, looping back to the path where the flaming monster would appear, positioning himself closer to its hunting grounds.

Once more, he changed direction, crossing the path and entering the ruins of a building opposite.

Reaching the rear of the crumbling structure, he stopped, leaned against the wall, and waited.

As with his strategy against the shotgun monster, Lumian never expected his trap to fool the flaming monster or wound it severely.

These decoys and alarms targeted the creature's keen senses, observation, and behavior.

Only a Hunter knew how to exploit a Hunter's strengths!

Of course, all this relied on the target operating primarily on instinct, its intelligence limited to combat.

Leaning against the wall, Lumian gripped Fallen Mercury in his bandaged left hand, tearing off the pitch-black cloth shrouding its surface.

He couldn't know how long it would take for the flaming monster to arrive; all he could do was be patient.

Patience was his strong suit—a remnant from his vagrant days.

Time crawled by. Unseen by Lumian, a charred, flame-tinged monster entered the path.

After walking over 20 meters, its nose twitched.

It detected the faint scent of blood.

The monster didn't immediately turn. As it continued, it surreptitiously scanned the source of the smell.

Passing the collapsed wall, the bloody lamb chops caught its eye.

Tempting food, but the flaming monster resisted its instincts, not devouring the bait.

It pressed on, slowing its pace.

Soon, an unusual fragrance filled its nostrils.

It instantly deduced the meat was a trap and a Hunter lay in ambush nearby.

This Hunter seemed different from the one who had previously observed it while invisible. It lacked sufficient knowledge of Hunters and hadn't masked its scent beforehand.

Taking a few more steps, the flaming monster used the fragrance and subtle footprints to pinpoint the enemy hiding on the outer wall of the building behind the trap.

Feigning ignorance, it increased its distance by another seven to eight meters.

Suddenly, it whirled around, its scarlet flames rapidly condensing into a fireball tinged with white.

Boom!

With a flick of its right palm, the fireball hurtled towards Lumian's 'ambush' location, collapsing the outer wall and causing the house to shudder.

Hearing the explosion from a distance, Lumian abandoned his hiding spot, darting into the clearing, his movements a wild, distorted dance.

The explosion was like a signal flare, a stark reminder for him to swiftly ready the second phase of the trap.

Lumian and Aurore had devised this intricate plan, luring their prey into sending out their own signal flares.

In the midst of his mesmerizing dance, Lumian detected the hazy forms of the mouth-orifice monster, the shotgun monster, and the skinless monster.

By then, the flaming monster had already approached the collapsed wall, searching for any trace of its enemy.

Lumian danced for another ten to twenty seconds, his movements growing more intense. He drew out the ritual silver dagger with his right hand, making a small incision on his left wrist.

A single drop of blood emerged, congealing into a tiny sphere.

Lumian stepped forward, pivoted, and snatched up the blood droplet, aiming it at the mouth-orifice monster.

"I!"

He uttered the word in ancient Hermes, his voice barely above a whisper.

At that moment, the flaming monster had discovered the faint footprints Lumian had left behind. Catching a whiff of a subtle scent, it started tracking him.

Quickly shouting his follow-up command, Lumian watched as the mouth-orifice monster swallowed the blood droplet from the tip of the silver dagger and entered his body.

A wave of madness, bloodlust, cruel intent, and ravenous hunger washed over him.

Lumian fought back the discomfort, hastily bandaging his insignificant wound with a white strip he'd brought along.

Next, he popped a piece of cheese into his mouth, chewing and swallowing to make sure the residual gray amber scent on his body would mask any other mingled odors.

Throughout this process, Lumian sprinted to the edge of the road and halted at an inconspicuous spot.

He clenched his jaw tight and spun around, carefully retracing his steps along his previous path.

Relying on a Hunter's observation skills and Dancer's exaggerated flexibility, Lumian made sure to leave only faint footprints and no additional marks.

It wasn't long before he reached the center of the road and stopped.

Maintaining his invisibility, Lumian remained in plain sight on the road.

He waited, using shallow Cogitation and constant suspension to suppress any thoughts of attacking the flaming monster, a rudimentary way to disrupt its danger premonition.

His inspiration came from a Hunter's keen self-awareness.

Aurore had once written about the tactic of retracing one's footsteps to lie in ambush mid-road in a novel.

After seven or eight seconds, the flaming monster's pitch-black form appeared in Lumian's sight. Utilizing his uncanny flexibility, he twisted his body to observe the approaching target.

The flaming monster followed the faint footprints and scent left behind by its enemy. Uninterrupted, it continued its pursuit.

Once back on the main road, it sniffed the air, unsurprised to detect a mild fragrance.

It instinctively lowered its head and found the inconspicuous footprints.

But it found no trace of traps in the vicinity.

Without hesitation, the flaming monster tracked the footprints to the other side of the road.

The charred face and displaced eyeballs loomed larger and clearer in Lumian's sight.

Holding his breath, Lumian didn't disrupt his Cogitation again, striving to empty his mind.

Five meters, three meters, one meter… He lunged at the target, raising the Fallen Mercury in his left hand for a swift slash!

He didn't wait to close the gap further, fearing that it would trigger the prey's danger sense and prompt evasive maneuvers.

The flaming monster suddenly felt an overwhelming sense of danger.

Without thinking, it leaped to the side.

Simultaneously, its vision captured Lumian's figure, attacking with a pewter-black dirk in his bandaged left hand.

They were so close that despite the flaming monster's reaction, evasion was impossible. Lumian collided with it.

With a tearing sound, Fallen Mercury's sharp blade sank into the flaming monster's right chest.

The fate extracted from Noodle Man infiltrated the target's body as an illusory mercury bead.

Meanwhile, a river of countless intricate mercury symbols briefly surfaced. Some of the destinies rapidly converged towards the pewter-black blade.

Lumian didn't bother selecting the destiny to exchange, letting Fallen Mercury do as it wished.

Boom!

The monster's flames erupted.

The forceful shockwave hurled Lumian and his Fallen Mercury away. Crimson flames ignited his clothes and scorched his facial skin.

Lumian bore the searing pain, twisting his waist midair to alter his trajectory.

As soon as he landed, he sprang to his feet and fled.

However, unable to re-enter the Invisibility state until the flames were extinguished, he remained visible.

Boom!

Despite his serpentine sprint, Lumian was still knocked off his feet by the fireball's aftershock. His back throbbed with numbing pain.

He struggled to his feet, scrambling away from the path and into the ruins where he had been hiding before.

The flaming monster pursued Lumian, who was unable to turn invisible once more.

Chapter 96: Prey and Hunter

The flaming monster pursued relentlessly, hurling crimson fireballs that blasted craters in the earth. Lumian was thrown off balance multiple times.

Flames licked at the charred logs that littered the desolate landscape, casting flickering red light in every direction.

Lumian barely spared a thought for the fire still consuming his clothes. Gritting his teeth against the searing pain, he was sent sprawling by the shockwaves of detonation after detonation. He staggered to his feet and careened wildly towards his destination—veering left, then right, arcing and darting straight ahead.

Mercifully, he didn't have far to go based on his plan. Just as he felt the taste of blood in his mouth and his body threatened to give out, a dilapidated building loomed before him.

Boom!

Lumian contorted his body mid-stride, narrowly avoiding a fireball. The scarlet projectile exploded just ahead, unleashing a hellish maelstrom of flames.

Seizing the moment, Lumian dropped to the ground and rolled beneath the worst of the conflagration. With the momentum, he tumbled into the partially collapsed structure.

The flaming monster halted and hesitated, wary of pursuing its prey into a potential death trap.

It watched as Lumian rolled deeper into the building, summoning a swarm of red Fire Ravens around it.

Their screeches filled the air as they took flight. Half of them dove towards the building's support beams, while the others bore down on Lumian from all sides.

These avian flames were unerring, constantly adjusting their trajectories to match Lumian's movements.

In that instant, the flaming monster could almost see its enemy's charred remains.

Fire Ravens were far more difficult to dodge than mere fireballs!

And then, Lumian disappeared from the monster's view.

He had rolled into a well-preserved basement.

Bang!

Lumian slammed the wooden door shut and leaped aside, using the force of the impact.

Swoosh! Swoosh! Swoosh! The scarlet Fire Ravens slammed into the door.

Boom!

The heavy door disintegrated into flaming splinters.

Rumble!

The remaining Fire Ravens struck their intended targets, bringing down the decaying structure in a torrent of debris.

Stone, wood, and dust engulfed the area, entombing the basement.

Lumian had already taken refuge in a corner, using the accumulated dirt to smother the flames that clung to him.

But he was still badly burned, his internal organs battered by the force of the explosions. Without swift medical attention, he wouldn't last another day.

The flaming monster's attack had been devastating, even more potent than Ryan sans his Hurricane of Light!

Lumian had intended to use Invisibility to elude the flaming monster, slipping into the basement to perform his enigmatic sacrificial dance, activating the black thorn symbol on his chest to terrify his foe. He'd planned to bide his time for Fallen Mercury to complete the exchange of fate. But the persistent fire had thwarted his Invisibility, nearly costing him his life.

The one consolation was that he had a backup plan in the event he couldn't escape the monster's pursuit, nor could he perform his sacrificial dance in peace.

He'd even considered collapsing the building to bury the basement and buy time, but the flaming monster had done the job for him.

Phew… Exhaling deeply, Lumian sat cross-legged.

He retrieved the bottle of gray amber perfume from Aurore, unscrewed the cap, and placed it before him.

Outside the demolished building, the flaming monster's gaze cut through the swirling dust, searching for any trace of its quarry.

It was certain that the cunning intruder wouldn't have been buried alive so easily.

Given the complexity of the traps he'd laid and his intimate knowledge of the ruins, he must have left himself an escape route!

The flaming monster wasn't particularly intelligent, but its Hunter's instincts led it to circle the collapsed building.

In less than ten seconds, it discovered a hidden cave entrance angling downward.

The opening was concealed by debris from the fallen structure, sheltered from the ensuing collapse. It was difficult to spot and tucked away in a discreet location.

The monster raised its right hand, conjuring a fist-sized white fireball in its palm.

With a sudden lunge, it hurled the fireball down the passageway.

The flames streaked through the air, penetrated the basement, and collided with the far wall.

Boom!

The blast wave didn't affect Lumian, who was deliberately hiding in another corner. It only overturned the bottle of gray amber perfume in front of him and quaked the entire basement.

The gurgle of liquid flowed from the open bottle, its elegant and sweet fragrance intensifying instantly.

Lumian leaned against the wall, eyes closed, lost in Cogitation.

His mind conjured a crimson sun, holding it steady for a few seconds.

Suddenly, a terrifying sound reached Lumian's ears, as if from an infinite distance yet unnervingly close.

Blue veins bulged across his face, hands, and neck, quickly turning red.

Simultaneously, silver-black spots seeped from his skin.

He opened his mouth to scream, but collapsed and curled up before a sound could escape.

Fallen Mercury slipped from Lumian's left palm, but it dared not make a move. It didn't even attempt to approach his exposed face or right hand to create a marionette through contact.

It just quivered there, violently.

Outside the basement, the monster poised to conjure a fireball froze beside the entrance Lumian had excavated.

It couldn't help but shudder.

A few seconds later, it fled, abandoning the hunt.

Lumian plunged into a darkness teeming with flickering flames. His mind was overwhelmed with excruciating pain and malevolent thoughts.

In that moment, death seemed preferable. He sensed something deep within him rapidly growing and taking form.

It appeared to be a trauma—composed of all negative personalities and a particular will. Once assembled into human shape, it would utterly supplant the original him.

Amid the unending darkness of despair and pain, Lumian caught a whiff of a scent.

Elegant and sweet.

It was Aurore's fragrance, a familiar aroma.

Aurore… Grande Soeur… Lumian slowly regained his composure, as if hearing the comforting melody once more.

I want to live!

The loop hasn't ended yet!

…

A rush of thoughts flooded back to him. Lumian finally vanquished the pitch-black will and the agony-laced darkness within his heart and opened his eyes.

The first thing in his sight was the toppled bottle of gray amber perfume on the ground.

It toppled? Lumian's heart ached as he reached out his right hand.

Initially, he'd only intended to mimic Aurore's use of incense to control his symptoms and rely on the natural perfume as a wake-up call. Unexpectedly, more than half the bottle had spilled.

In the next instant, his body quivered. He saw the charred, bloodstained back of his hand and the silver-black circular spots that had yet to fade.

Without needing a reminder, Lumian could "smell" the unfamiliar, hair-raising scent on himself.

If he crossed paths with Valentine now, he'd be "purified" by his Holy Light Summoning without revealing a thing.

Lumian scooped up the remaining half of the gray amber perfume, tightened the cap, and stowed it away.

He then picked up Fallen Mercury, still trembling violently, and asked in Hermes, "Is the fate exchange over?"

Fallen Mercury swiftly shook left and right, signaling it wasn't.

Lumian exhaled in relief.

He feared that by the time he awoke, the fate exchange would've been completed—the shock would last no more than a minute.

If he couldn't locate the flaming monster in time, his recent torment would be futile.

Breathe in, breathe out… Lumian adjusted his dreadful condition and mustered his remaining strength before crawling out of the basement through the hole he had dug earlier.

Each motion tugged at various wounds, making him wince in pain.

Upon exiting the basement, Lumian searched for the flaming monster's tracks and sighed inwardly.

Using Cogitation in such a state and fully activating the thorn symbol on my chest is downright suicidal…

I haven't done it since becoming a Hunter, barely repressing the symptoms with gray amber's scent. Had I done it a few times before, my body might have mutated slightly, turning me into a monster…

I can't risk this for a while unless I have a death wish…

He opted for Cogitation to fully activate the black thorn symbol on his chest rather than the sacrificial dance's partial activation, as time was of the essence and he couldn't perform the dance.

With Cogitation, he could frighten off the flaming monster in five or six seconds. The enigmatic sacrificial dance, however, took 30 to 40 seconds—even with his familiarity.

In Lumian's hunting strategy, this was his last resort. If he couldn't evade the flaming monster's pursuit by other means, he'd attempt Cogitation!

Lumian hadn't anticipated that Cogitation would leave him gravely injured from the start and on the brink of losing control, turning into a monster.

Before long, Lumian discovered the flaming monster's tracks and pursued them.

A few minutes later, the prints appeared fresher, so he slowed his pace.

Soon after, Fallen Mercury shuddered on its own, notifying Lumian that the fate exchange was complete.

Without hesitation, Lumian brandished the iron-black axe and charged forward, following the flaming monster's footprints.

In under twenty seconds, he spotted the scorched and smoldering prey.

It cowered in a rock-encircled corner, quaking.

Lumian dashed over, cast aside Fallen Mercury, and seized the axe with both hands, cleaving down with all his might.

With a dull thud, the flaming monster's head and body separated.

Bright red blood spurted out violently, igniting into scarlet flame clusters on the ground.

Lumian, unable to hold on any longer, collapsed to the ground with his axe.

Chapter 97: Courage

Lumian slumped to the ground, gasping for breath. He could barely muster the strength to move a finger.

Silently, he observed the crimson flames flickering on the ground, their intensity gradually diminishing until they snuffed out.

During this time, Lumian managed to lean forward and grab the Fallen Mercury with his left hand, while his right hand tightly gripped the iron-black axe, ready for any unexpected threats.

His focus was unwavering, and he remained on high alert.

Inwardly, he prayed to the Eternal Blazing Sun and the unknown, great being, hoping They would shield him from harm.

In his current state, even a mundane foe like the skinless monster could easily take him down, let alone the possibility of the flaming creature reviving itself unexpectedly.

As time ticked by, Lumian's spirituality and stamina gradually improved, but his injuries only worsened, leaving him disoriented and unfocused.

Hunters need to be cautious, level-headed, and patient--capable of using their environment to their advantage. Above all, they require courage.

Courage to confront the unexpected, to persevere in the face of crisis, to steel oneself when escape seems impossible, and to find a path out of the jaws of death...

Distracted by these thoughts, Lumian suddenly felt as if the Hunter potion coursing through him had been fully absorbed.

It was as if a barrier had shattered, and a tiny spark had merged with every fiber of his being.

All traces of Lumian's loss of control vanished, and his condition immediately improved.

Slowly, he rose to his feet and heaved a quiet sigh.

I've actually digested it...

This meant he was ready for the next potion.

Lumian, clutching the pewter-black dirk in his bandaged left hand, scanned his surroundings. Occasionally, he fixated on the flaming monster's remains, patiently awaiting the appearance of the Beyonder characteristics.

Unlike the shotgun monster's swift transformation, Lumian waited for half an hour. He wondered if the flaming monster still lived and whether he should strike it a few more times.

Finally, on the verge of collapsing from his injuries, red sparks burst forth from the monster's body.

Like fireflies, they swarmed around the corpse before gradually coalescing into a scarlet object resembling a heart.

The "heart" pulsed, its surface pocked with countless tiny holes, from which indistinct flames seeped.

Is this the main ingredient for the Pyromaniac potion? Lumian mused, reaching down to pick it up.

A searing pain radiated from his palm straight to his mind, making him instinctively want to fling the "heart" away to escape the agony.

Luckily, Lumian's skin had been numbed by the flaming monster's burns, allowing him to barely tolerate the relatively minor pain.

He tried wrapping the "heart" in a strip of cloth, but it instantly incinerated the fabric, reducing it to ashes.

After a moment's thought, Lumian set the Beyonder ingredient on the ground, wrapped the Fallen Mercury in the remaining black cloth, and secured it at his waist.

Next, he emptied the contents of the cloth bag containing the lead bullets into his pocket.

He then filled the bag halfway with soil from the area before tossing in the flame-wreathed heart.

But Lumian didn't stop there. He continued shoveling soil into the bag until the "heart" was entirely encased in layers of inflammable earth.

Exhaling, he carried the bag to the edge of the ruins, pondering a newly discovered problem.

I'm only a Sequence 9, and this is the main ingredient for the corresponding Sequence 7 Pyromaniac. I can't just advance to Sequence 7, can I?

This will make me lose control!

I initially thought the flaming monster would yield a Pyromaniac, Provoker, and Hunter Beyonder characteristic, but it's all mixed together...

Uncertain of what to do, Lumian stumbled away.

Miraculously, he didn't encounter a single monster on his way back. In his weakened state, any confrontation would have spelled disaster. His only hope was to rely on his keen observation and sharp senses to detect danger early and avoid it.

After an indeterminate amount of time, Lumian exited the dream ruins and traversed the barren wilderness, arriving back at his semi-subterranean two-story dwelling.

Laboriously, he climbed to the second floor and removed the Fallen Mercury, the cloth bag with the Pyromaniac ingredient, and the iron-black axe. He placed them on the bedside table or tossed them to the floor before staggering to the full-length mirror embedded in the wardrobe.

In the mirror, Lumian saw his ghostly pale face, marred by flame scars and faint silver-black patches on his skin.

His blue eyes flickered with an illusory silvery hue, entwined with darkness.

This was a sign that he had sustained severe injuries and nearly lost control.

If not for his home-field advantage in the dream ruins or the acquisition of Fallen Mercury and Invisibility, Lumian would have had no chance of defeating the flaming monster.

Munching on jerky and cheese to stave off the intense hunger left by his possession, he collapsed onto the bed.

He desperately needed to return to reality and rest for a while, allowing his body to recover swiftly.

...

Sunlight pierced through the curtains, casting the bedroom in a soft glow that highlighted Aurore's desk, cluttered with reference materials, reading notebooks, and stacks of manuscripts. It also illuminated a wardrobe filled with dresses and an exquisite full-body mirror.

Lumian opened his eyes to meet his sister's light-blue gaze.

Aurore watched him stir, her voice laced with concern. "How was it? Is everything alright?"

She knew that her brother had ventured into the dream ruins to hunt the flaming monster this time.

"I succeeded." Lumian sat up, his head feeling foggy. His skin tingled, and his bones threatened to snap.

But compared to the excruciating pain that had nearly killed him in the dream, this was nothing.

He lowered his gaze to examine his body. Red, swollen patches covered his skin, as if he were suffering from an allergic reaction.

"That's good..." Aurore sighed with relief. "An hour ago, you twitched all over and kicked me awake."

Lumian laughed, self-deprecating.

"It was indeed dangerous back then. I almost lost control."

"I was hesitant to wake you up, but you quickly calmed down and didn't scare me anymore," Aurore said, visibly relieved.

Lumian's heart stirred. "And you just kept looking at me?"

"That's right." Aurore nodded calmly. "If anything happens, I have to shake you awake and bring you back to reality. You can't die in your dreams."

Lumian suddenly felt the pain, struggle, and fear of nearly dying in his dream dissipate, replaced by a warm current surging from the depths of his heart.

He asked, almost without thinking, "You didn't wake up because I kicked you, did you? You haven't slept at all, have you?"

Aurore smiled and said, "That was my original plan, but considering how long you'd have to wait for that monster, and how I just finished my night duty, if I didn't catch up on sleep, I'd definitely be in a daze later. It'd be easy for me to make a mistake and not wake you up in time.

"So, I decided to put my hand on you and take the chance to catch some shut-eye.

"This way, I'd be able to sense any movement and wake up quickly. Heh heh, I was indeed kicked by you!"

As she spoke, she pointed at her right calf, where a visible bruise had formed.

Before Lumian could respond, she asked, "Tell me the details."

Suppressing his voice, Lumian recounted his ordeal, describing how he set up the trap, ambushed the monster, and how his clothes caught fire. Unable to turn invisible, he had no choice but to flee into the basement and fully activate the black thorn symbol with Cogitation.

Aurore listened intently, her expression occasionally betraying her worry for her brother's perilous situation. She was the kind of person who easily immersed herself in stories.

As the tale drew to a close, Lumian raised a question.

"How do I separate Provoker from the Pyromaniac Beyonder characteristic?"

He didn't know where to find the potion formula.

Aurore thought for a moment and said, "I don't know how to separate them. I've only heard that you might need the help of a high-level Beyonder for such a situation."

"A demigod?" Lumian guessed.

There were probably only three people he knew who had reached Sequence 4: the enigmatic lady, Madame Pualis, and the one lying in the coffin in the tomb.

Aurore nodded.

"I think so. Actually, you don't have to worry. I suspect the mysterious lady will come to you soon and provide some help. She always appears at critical points in your growth. This time should be no exception. After all, the loop hasn't been resolved and the secret of the dream ruins remains locked away."

"Go to Ol' Tavern to find her?" Lumian frowned.

Their agreement with Ryan and the others was to avoid going out as much as possible.

Aurore tersely acknowledged his words.

"Let's wait a while. She might visit us directly."

Aurore sighed and said, "For ordinary Beyonders, the potion formula isn't a problem, but you're different. There's corruption sealed in your body, and you can lose control if there's the slightest issue. You still need a complete and correct Provoker potion formula."

"Why don't ordinary Beyonders need potion formulas?" Lumian asked, surprised.

Aurore explained, "It's not that they don't need them, but anyone below Sequence 7 can advance just by consuming the main ingredient."

"Doesn't that risk losing control?" Lumian asked, astonished.

Aurore acknowledged tersely.

"Years ago, there was a high chance of losing control. But recently, Sequence 9 and Sequence 8 Beyonder characteristics can indeed be consumed directly. However, it's about 20 to 30% more dangerous than concocting a potion.

"Right, that's the conclusion reached by our president, Gandalf."

Why? Just as Lumian was about to ask, a familiar song echoed from outside the house.

The siblings exchanged solemn glances.

Lent had begun, and the Spring Elf entourage had reached them.

Chapter 98: After the Celebration

A group of young men encircled Ava, singing and dancing as they arrived outside the Lumian residence.

Guillaume-junior of the Berry family strode to the door and slammed at it.

He was a friend of Lumian, Reimund, and Ava. With curly brown hair and prominent freckles, his blue eyes appeared smaller than average, as if perpetually narrowed.

With a creak, Aurore appeared before them.

Her blonde hair tied up, she wore a formal flounce-lined, light-collared dress. Aurore exuded energy, her face radiant—impossible to tell she hadn't slept well the night before.

Ava, donning a laurel crown woven from tree branches and flowers, stepped forward and sang,

"I'm the elf of spring,

"With a sweet face and a joyful ring,

"…

"Come and sing, come and dance,

"For this is the only way,

To obtain a harvest that will stay…"

Aurore listened quietly, took the leaf, and handed Ava a small pottery jar containing animal fat.

"Bumper harvest! Bumper harvest!" The young men cheered.

As the Spring Elf entourage set off for the next location, Guillaume-junior deliberately lagged behind and asked Aurore, "Where's Lumian? I haven't seen him in the past two days. Is he not participating in the Lent celebration?"

Aurore laughed and replied, "He's sick."

"Sick?" Guillaume-junior was slightly surprised. "He gets sick too?"

In his mind, Lumian was always brimming with energy. At most, he'd suffer minor injuries from a prank gone awry.

"I'll be worried if he never gets sick," Aurore replied jokingly. "All humans fall sick."

Guillaume-junior hurriedly waved at Aurore as the Spring Elf entourage moved further away.

"Tell Lumian I'll visit him after Lent!"

Aurore nodded slightly, watching Guillaume-junior sprint towards the entourage that had stopped in front of the next building.

"How was it?" Lumian stuck his head out beside his sister.

Aurore thought for a moment and said, "They're still normal, but I wonder what will happen at the end of the celebration."

Lumian recalled the bloody scene of Ava's beheading at the celebration's end and the strange mood that agitated the young people. They had either gone mad sending off the Spring Elf or succumbed to mental and physical breakdown, collapsing to the ground. No one was spared.

Silently, he glanced at Ava singing in front of the neighbor's house and Guillaume-junior and company surrounding her. He slowly withdrew his gaze.

Ryan, Leah, and Valentine also arrived on the first floor and looked out through the window.

"We have to be very careful from now on," Ryan said in a deep voice after the Spring Elf entourage left the area.

Aurore nodded and said, "Yeah."

Before the celebration ended, they quickly prepared lunch and filled their stomachs.

Clang! Clang! Clang! The classic wall clock on the first floor chimed, signifying noon.

Lumian and the others, having tidied up the dining room, exchanged tense glances.

If the Lent celebration had gone smoothly, it would've ended by now.

And if the ritual to send the Spring Elf off was completed, who knew what Cordu would become?

In their semi-subterranean building, Lumian needed to raise his head slightly to see the situation outside the window.

The sky was a brilliant azure, filled with white clouds. The sun shone brightly, and there were no dark clouds, fog, or dim light as he had imagined.

Leah paced around the stove, the small silver bells on her veil and boots tinkling nonstop. It was neither intense nor soothing.

Seeing Aurore looking at her, she explained, "We're already in danger, and it's been an extended period of danger, but it's manageable at the moment."

Aurore acknowledged and didn't inquire further.

Ryan, on the other hand, sighed and said, "By the twelfth night, it would be great if it was always at this level."

Aurore blinked, embarrassed to tell this Dawn Paladin of the Machinery Hivemind not to jinx it.

Although Lumian's heart was heavy, he still smiled and replied to Ryan,

"There's a proverb in our Dariège region that says, 'Good and bad are all predestined.' Regardless of how worried we are, we can't change what happens next."

What he didn't say was: The only thing they could do was muster up the courage to face it.

In the intermittent conversation that followed, the five of them were on guard against any abnormalities. However, be it the weather or the birds, everything was so normal that it only instilled greater fear in them.

After almost thirty minutes, they found themselves staring at the door simultaneously.

Footsteps drew near.

Soon after, Aurore's doorbell rang, the sound reverberating through the first floor.

Exchanging a glance with his sister, Lumian cautiously approached the door and peered through the peephole.

The man who had rung the doorbell was their neighbor, Louis Bedeau.

"What's going on?" Lumian cracked the door open, smiling.

Louis Bedeau had black hair and blue eyes. He was in his forties and had been injured while harvesting wheat in the fields when he was young. He had only three fingers on his left hand.

Clad in a grayish-blue blazer and dark pants, he said timidly, "I need to borrow your oven. It's Lent. We must bake some fresh bread for the kids."

As he spoke, he lifted the flour bag and nudged the bag of inferior coal beside him.

Lumian hesitated for a moment before turning to Aurore.

Aurore nodded, signaling him to let Louis Bedeau in.

She had already discussed it with Ryan and the others in hushed tones, intending to observe the changes in the villagers who had participated in the Lent celebration up close.

"Just baking bread? I thought you'd make some bacon for your kids." Lumian stepped aside and teased Louis Bedeau with a grin.

Louis Bedeau replied cautiously, "If we have a bumper harvest this year, there should be plenty of bacon."

His eyes brimmed with anticipation, as if he was certain of a bountiful harvest.

Once inside, Louis Bedeau greeted Aurore and headed to the oven, busying himself.

The more Lumian and his companions observed, the stranger they found him.

Louis Bedeau didn't even glance at Ryan, Leah, and Valentine, as if they were invisible!

It was like a person who had already turned into a monster trying their best to pretend to be normal. However, as long as they encountered something that exceeded their original memories, they would display obvious abnormalities or ignore it.

Lumian instantly thought of the deputy padre, Michel Garrigue.

Initially, he appeared fine, but recently, all that remained were his daily activities of eating, sleeping, and urging others to pray. He ignored everything else!

Under the watchful eyes of the three foreigners, Louis Bedeau baked his bread mechanically, occasionally conversing with Lumian and Aurore.

It was very normal, yet very abnormal.

After Louis Bedeau left with the baked bread, Aurore looked at Ryan and the others, smiling wryly.

"Everyone who participated in the Lent celebration must have become like this."

"It's like being replaced by a monster bit by bit," Leah exclaimed sincerely.

She no longer forced a smile on her face.

Lumian had already regained his composure and posed a question.

"How can we save someone like this if we want to?"

"The only thing I can think of is purification," Valentine replied with a sigh. "But if the abnormality is already closely integrated with humans, the final outcome might be purification together."

At that moment, two more villagers passed by the window.

One of them was a regular customer of Ol' Tavern and Pierre Guillaume, who had scrounged Ryan's absinthe in a previous cycle.

He was happily chatting with his companion, seemingly discussing the excitement of the Lent celebration.

As they passed Lumian's door, they simultaneously turned their heads to look inside the house, their expressions eerily grim.

After an instant, they withdrew their gazes and resumed their conversation, smiles plastered on their faces.

If Lumian and his companions hadn't been watching the outside whenever someone passed by, they wouldn't have noticed the fleeting change in their expressions.

The louder the laughter outside, the more suffocated they felt.

Silence took over the conversation.

Eventually, the two villagers left, and Aurore sighed, saying, "This isn't just being replaced by monsters bit by bit. I suspect that the entire village is filled with monsters wearing human skin, except for us."

Is this the complete Lent celebration? Lumian couldn't help but mutter to himself.

Ryan sternly warned, "It's going to get tougher every day. Everyone, hang in there."

From noon to night, they kept vigil against mutated villagers attacking the house, but apart from the occasional passerby who gazed inside with a sullen or cold expression, nothing happened.

The situation weighed heavily on Aurore and the others.

Ryan surveyed the room and said gently, "There are still a few days until the twelfth night. Don't be so tense.

"After dinner, we'll split into two groups and take turns resting. We must maintain a good mental state."

With such an experienced Beyonder with a calm demeanor, both Aurore and Lumian felt more at ease.

At midnight, Aurore and Lumian woke Leah and the others, then retreated to their bedroom.

Lumian glanced at the door and lowered his voice.

"That mysterious woman hasn't appeared. Should I find an opportunity to go out tomorrow and take a look at Ol' Tavern?"

"Everyone in the village might be a monster now. It'll be very dangerous if you go out." Aurore disagreed.

She pondered for a moment and said, "Let's wait a little longer. If the mysterious woman doesn't appear tomorrow morning, I'll accompany you to Ol' Tavern in the afternoon."

Lumian hesitated for a moment before nodding.

He planned to discuss with his sister tomorrow morning if they should ask Ryan and the others for help. The five of them could act together.

…

In the bedroom filled with a faint gray fog, Lumian opened his eyes.

He sat up and checked his body, realizing that his severe injuries had completely healed.

Just as he was about to marvel at the fact, he suddenly heard the sound of a doorbell ringing.

Someone's ringing the doorbell? The thought instinctively flashed through Lumian's mind. He habitually prepared to go down to the first floor to see who was visiting.

He had just taken a step when his entire body froze.

This was the dream ruins!

How could anyone visit?

Chapter 99: Guest

Instantly, Lumian tensed up.

He spun around and returned to the bed, scooping up Fallen Mercury with his bandaged left hand.

Grabbing his shotgun, he strode to the bedroom window while the doorbell continued to ring. He scrutinized the entrance.

There was no one there!

In that moment, Lumian's heart felt like it was about to seize.

He intended to activate his Spirit Vision for a better look.

Since he would hear the maddening and terrifying sound and show signs of losing control after entering Cogitation for a few seconds in the dream ruins, he couldn't use this ability smoothly. It took him a while to complete the corresponding operation.

However, even with his Spirit Vision activated, he still didn't notice anyone at the door.

Yet, the doorbell rang incessantly.

As his thoughts raced, Lumian seriously considered returning to bed, forcing himself to sleep and escape the dream.

But he felt that even if he returned to reality, he might not be able to evade the subsequent attack, considering the unknown danger that could invade his semi-subterranean two-story building at any moment.

Two scenarios:

If the person ringing the doorbell can enter, going to bed is as good as surrendering.

If they can't enter, I'll be safe as long as I don't open the door myself.

Regardless, I must go downstairs and take a look…

Lumian made up his mind quickly.

He sheathed Fallen Mercury at his waist, clipped his axe, and hoisted his shotgun. He stepped out of the room and cautiously descended the stairs.

Upon reaching the first floor, a figure came into view.

At the six-person dining table sat the enigmatic woman Lumian had been searching for.

She wore a white blouse with a large bow at the collar and loose pearl-gray pants. Her casual attire was deceptively elegant.

She sipped a pale-golden drink, a short black hat beside her.

Lumian relaxed and approached the mysterious woman with brown hair and blue eyes.

He set the shotgun and axe aside, pulled out a chair opposite the dining table, and sat down. He asked, "You can enter here?"

The woman set her glass down and smiled.

"How else do you think those materials were delivered to your room?"

As she spoke, the jingling sound ceased.

Lumian glanced at the door, puzzled.

"Since you're already inside, why were you still ringing the doorbell?"

She smiled and replied, "That's basic courtesy."

Courtesy that can scare people to death? Lumian dared only to mutter inwardly.

He got straight to the point.

"I've obtained the Pyromaniac Beyonder ingredient. Uh, it should be Pyromaniac."

The woman nodded gently.

"I know. That's why I came to see you."

"Are you willing to help me separate the Provoker Beyonder characteristics and give me the corresponding potion formula?" Lumian suppressed his sudden joy and asked, "I was planning on finding you at Ol' Tavern."

As for the price he would have to pay, he no longer cared.

The lady smiled and said, "With Cordu's current situation, it's very dangerous for you to go out, so I came here directly. I can indeed provide the help you want, but it won't be free this time."

Lumian noticed that indecipherable emotion in the woman's eyes again, but the notion that it was no longer free reassured him.

The unknown was even more terrifying.

"What is the price I need to pay?" he asked without hesitation.

She replied calmly, "The separated Pyromaniac and Hunter Beyonder characteristics belong to me."

That simple? Lumian was surprised.

He didn't even think of it as a price. After all, he wouldn't be able to use the Pyromaniac Beyonder characteristics for a long time.

She continued, "In addition to the help I originally provided, if there's any more in the future—if there's a future for you—you have to do something for me."

Lumian sensed the inscrutable emotion in her eyes intensify.

He probed, "What if I don't?"

She laughed.

"Isn't it common for investments to fail? Didn't your sister lose some money buying stocks with divination?"

"What do you need me to do?" Lumian asked without hesitation.

She sighed softly.

"Let's talk about it if you can survive.

"Alright, give me the Beyonder characteristic you obtained."

Lumian rose and headed for the stairs leading to the second floor.

He barely restrained himself from sprinting up the staircase. When she could no longer see him, he dashed.

Soon, Lumian returned to the first floor with the cloth bag containing the Pyromaniac Beyonder characteristic and approached the dining table.

The woman raised her glass again and sipped the pale-gold liquid.

"What's this?" Lumian asked casually.

She explained simply, "It's an aperitif from Trier called Black Poca. It's brewed from ginger, cinnamon, nutmeg, and cloves soaked in sweet wine for a long time. It tastes pretty good."

Having raised the topic merely to build rapport, Lumian didn't pry further. He opened the cloth bag and extracted the burning heart from the soil.

A scorching sensation seared his palm. Enduring the mild pain, he leaned forward and handed the Beyonder characteristic to the woman across the dining table.

She extended her left palm and let the "heart" hover in midair.

She glanced at Lumian and chuckled.

"When storing Beyonder characteristics in the future, remember to change their environment every once in a while. If such a thing comes into contact with something for too long, it's very likely to fuse with it and become a mystical item that needs to be sealed."

Is that so… Lumian asked, "How often do I need to make a change?"

"Normally, it takes two to three days," the woman said nonchalantly, "but accidents do happen. I recommend switching environments every 24 hours. With proper sealing and preservation, it could last months or even years. Also, if you've already mixed Beyonder ingredients into a potion, drink it as soon as possible. Otherwise, the liquid might merge with the bottle."

As she spoke, a sudden flash enveloped her body, and the burning "heart" transformed into countless red fireflies.

The fireflies danced and swirled, coalescing into three distinct objects.

One was a dark red, springy, textured object. Another was a shrunken version of the burning heart, now missing numerous holes. The last was a black stone with a liquid-like surface and a potent odor.

The woman's right palm caressed the three objects, causing two to vanish into thin air.

All that remained on the dining table was the dark "rock," about half the size of a fist.

"Is this the Provoker Beyonder characteristic?" Lumian asked eagerly.

The woman produced a post-it note and a silver fountain pen, scribbling down the potion formula, then reminded him, "You still lack mystical knowledge. After killing the monster, you only took the Beyonder characteristic.

"Such Beyonder creatures are rich in spirituality. Many of their parts can be used to make charms, lotions, and ingredients for certain spells and rituals. For example, its blood is a supplementary ingredient for the Pyromaniac potion.

"Although the Pyromaniac potion requires Fire Salamander blood, the monster's blood will do. It's essentially the same, and the effects might even be better."

The more Lumian listened, the more regretful he became.

Although Aurore's adventure novels included scenes of hunting monsters and harvesting parts, he hadn't connected this to reality. He believed the flaming monster's only value was its Beyonder characteristic.

And now, retrieving it was impossible—the blood would have dried by now!

The woman ignored his reaction, tearing off the top note and letting it float toward Lumian.

Lumian grabbed it and read the words eagerly.

"Provoker potion formula:

"Main ingredient: One Provoker Beyonder characteristic;

"Supplementary ingredients: 50 milliliters of distilled liquor, 10 drops of honeysuckle extract, 5 grams of grapevine powder, 10 grams of fern powder;

"Usage: Drink it directly."

After finishing, Lumian asked, puzzled, "There aren't any materials rich in spirituality…"

Like the Fire Salamander's blood.

She smiled and replied, "Different potions have different requirements. Yours mainly relies on symbolic mysticism.

"For example, ferns symbolize being 'easily influenced by others.' This aligns with the essence of a Provoker."

So, a Provoker needs to sway others with their words? Lumian tucked the note away, pondering where he might find the supplementary ingredients.

Distilled liquor was available at home; Aurore used it in certain dishes. Grapevines and ferns were abundant in Dariège, though venturing out might be risky. The only item left was honeysuckle—he'd have to ask Aurore if she had any among her spell-casting supplies…

When Lumian looked up again, the woman across from him, along with the black short hat and the Black Poca aperitif, had disappeared.

He hadn't even noticed when she'd left.

This despite the fact that his Spirit Vision hadn't been deactivated the entire time.

Phew. Lumian exhaled and headed back to the bedroom, clutching the Provoker Beyonder characteristic and the potion formula, anticipation swelling within him.

He quickly lay down on the bed, intending to return to reality and consult Aurore, hoping to gather the additional ingredients by nightfall.

He didn't care that his Spirit Vision was still active; it would deactivate on its own once he fell asleep.

…

In the dead of night, Lumian opened his eyes and glanced over at Aurore.

He couldn't wait to share the news of acquiring the Provoker potion formula with his sister.

Yet, almost simultaneously, he spotted Aurore's mouth open slightly, a hazy, translucent figure emerging.

It was a bizarre, lizard-like creature!

Lumian's gaze locked in place. As the ethereal lizard surveyed its surroundings, he instinctively shut his eyes.

The "lizard" darted its gaze around before quickly scurrying away from Aurore's mouth and exiting the room.

Lumian reopened his eyes, staring at his sister in bewilderment.

Aurore's face was shrouded in darkness.

Her mouth hung slightly open as she slumbered peacefully.

Lumian observed her, motionless, as if he'd become a statue.

In the thick of night, his heart sank further into despair.

Chapter 100: Hesitation

Tick tock, tick tock, tick tock. The second hand of the wall clock echoed through the dark room.

After what felt like an eternity, Lumian finally shook off his nightmare.

He hastily reached over, gripping Aurore's shoulders and shaking her vigorously.

"Wake up! Wake up!"

He stifled his voice, careful not to alert the three official investigators on night duty.

Aurore's eyes remained tightly shut, her mouth slightly agape. No matter how much Lumian shook her, she didn't respond. She appeared like a living corpse, devoid of a soul.

Lumian's shaking gradually slowed, then ceased altogether.

He gazed at the sleeping Aurore, frozen in place for a long while.

He couldn't comprehend what was happening or when the issue had begun. The fear he felt mirrored the night he'd witnessed his grandfather's death.

From that day on, he'd embarked on his nomadic existence.

Lumian's fists clenched tighter, his body quivering slightly.

Abruptly, he spun around to face the window.

The translucent, ghostly "lizard" had returned to the room.

Lumian leaped off the bed, lunging with his right hand to grab the stunned creature as it caught sight of him awakening.

In the next instant, he jammed the "lizard" into his mouth, snarling with a twisted expression, "You like to worm your way into people's mouths, huh? Fine! I'll give you a chance!"

As he crammed the "lizard" into his mouth, he tore at it ferociously, his eyes bloodshot.

The "lizard" appeared too petrified to resist.

Just then, a voice sounded behind Lumian.

"What are you doing?"

It was Aurore's voice.

Lumian froze and slowly turned to look at the bed.

At some point, Aurore had woken up. Her blond hair disheveled, she sat up with her light-blue eyes filled with confusion and bewilderment.

Subconsciously, Lumian glanced down and realized that the "lizard" he had captured had long vanished.

For a moment, he didn't know if what he had just seen was a nightmare or reality.

"What's wrong?" Aurore frowned.

Lumian forced a smile.

"You kicked me off the bed while having a nightmare."

"Is that so?" Aurore eyed her brother suspiciously, feeling like he was playing a prank.

She thought for a moment and said, "I had a nightmare. I dreamt that I was grabbed by a huge monster and stuffed into its mouth. I was so frightened that I struggled with all my might and finally woke up."

As Lumian listened, a chill ran through his body, as if he had been submerged in an icy lake that hadn't completely thawed.

"Maybe, probably, I really kicked you…" Aurore was a little embarrassed.

Lumian closed his eyes and smiled.

"I'm just kidding. I woke up because of something else."

He then lowered his voice and said, "That mysterious lady appeared in the dream ruins and helped me separate the Provoker Beyonder characteristic and gave me the correct potion formula."

"So, you woke up in joy and wanted to ask me if I had the corresponding supplementary ingredients?" Aurore deduced.

Lumian said with a smile, "That's right. By the way, do you have honeysuckle extract, grapevine powder, and fern powder?"

His smile was much more natural than before, but there seemed to be a flickering glint in his eyes.

Aurore mulled it over for a moment before responding, "I have both grapevine and fern. One is a ritual ingredient, and the other is a spell medium.

"Honeysuckle flowers. We always have them at home. Don't you know that I soak them in water for drinking?"

As she spoke, she rummaged through the hidden pocket of her long dress.

"That's honeysuckle?" Lumian looked at his busy sister and deliberately smiled. "Why didn't you ask if I was given free help this time?"

Aurore took out a short grapevine and said with a smile, "You grind it into powder yourself!"

She didn't seem to hear Lumian's question.

"Alright." Lumian pretended not to have asked.

He then said to his sister, "The Provoker potion still requires distilled liquor. I'll head to the cellar to retrieve it and strive to advance to Sequence 8 tonight."

"It will take some time to make extracts from honeysuckle flowers," Aurore said with a frown. "However, the supplementary ingredients for Low-Sequence Beyonders potions aren't that strict. You can use the entire honeysuckle flower as a substitute. You can consume them as long as the Beyonder characteristics can eventually dissolve."

She then looked at the open door and asked in a low voice, "Aren't you afraid that Ryan and the others will be suspicious if you go to get distilled liquor in the middle of the night?"

Seeing his sister's reaction, Lumian forced his smile from being too stiff.

"As a regular at Ol' Tavern, waking up in the middle of the night and suddenly wanting to drink is very normal.

"Although alcohol has many disadvantages, it can at least relax my mind to a certain extent."

What he meant was to use the excuse that the Lent celebration had ended and he was under too much stress. He had trouble sleeping and needed hard liquor to relax.

"Sure." Aurore agreed.

Lumian turned around and walked to the door, the smile on his face gradually disappearing.

He clenched his fists tightly from beginning to end.

After exiting the door and arriving at the corridor, Lumian saw Ryan standing diagonally opposite him in a brown tweed shirt and pale-yellow pants. Leah and Valentine were at opposite ends of the corridor.

"Not sleeping anymore?" Ryan raised the kerosene lamp and looked at Lumian.

Lumian grinned.

"I'm heading to the cellar to get some liquor. How about it? Do you want a sip to relax?"

"I don't need it." Ryan nodded. "You haven't experienced anything like this before. You're tense and under a lot of stress. It's understandable. Alcohol can indeed help."

As he spoke, he walked towards the staircase with the flickering kerosene lamp.

"I'll go with you. You shouldn't move alone at a time like this."

"Alright." Lumian didn't object.

As the two entered the stairs, Leah took the initiative to approach Aurore's bedroom and stand guard at the door.

One step, two steps… Lumian and Ryan descended to the shadowy first floor in silence.

As the faint light cast a glow over half the stove, Ryan asked casually, "Did something happen upstairs? I heard some commotion."

Lumian opened his mouth and said with difficulty, "Aurore, something's wrong with Aurore…"

His intention in suggesting they get alcohol from the cellar wasn't to advance tonight. The two-story building in the dream ruins also had a cellar and the distilled liquor. His main goal was to avoid Aurore and communicate with Ryan and the others about what had just happened.

However, when the words reached his lips, he almost couldn't bring himself to say them. He felt that the unsaid words were even more choking than the strongest liquor.

Ryan's expression turned serious.

"What's the matter?"

Lumian took a few deep breaths before saying, "Aurore, like the deputy padre, had a lizard that looked like a mini-elf coming out of her mouth."

It was as if all his strength had been drained when he said this.

After seven to eight seconds, he recounted the entire incident. Instead of waking up willingly, he explained it as happening to wake up and seeing it.

Ryan listened quietly and didn't rush him. After he finished, he said gently, "You handled it well. We can't let her know that something's amiss. I'm worried that it will worsen the situation.

"Continue pretending that nothing happened. At dawn, I'll use the excuse that Cordu has been corrupted and that we need to undergo a purification every day to prevent ourselves from being affected. I'll get Valentine to try and exorcize the lizard."

"Alright," Lumian replied weakly.

He felt that the "lizard" had already fused deeply with his sister's soul. It wasn't that easy to exorcize and purify.

Ryan glanced at him and patted his shoulder gently.

"I can understand how you feel. If something similar happened to my family, I wouldn't be able to stay calm.

"But you have to remember that impatience can't solve anything.

"I know Valentine's purification might not be effective, but we have to give it a try to confirm that it won't work. Yes, that abnormality is most likely related to Cordu's loop. As long as we can finally break the loop, your sister should be able to recover."

That's right… This is equivalent to corruption. As long as I can remove all the corruption when the loop is lifted, Aurore will definitely be fine… Lumian's eyes gradually lit up as he regained his motivation.

Ryan was rather satisfied with his reaction and said gently, "I need to remind you that you have to adapt to your sister's changes in the next few days. It's very likely that she'll be like the deputy padre, gradually losing herself to instincts. She'll act differently, following her memories and strongest emotions without reacting to anything else."

Lumian fell silent for a moment before saying, "I'll adapt…"

His voice became softer and softer until it trailed off.

After getting the distilled liquor from the cellar, the two of them returned to the second floor as if nothing had happened.

Upon entering the bedroom, Lumian smiled again.

He shook the bottle in his hand at Aurore and whispered, "It worked."

Aurore smiled and pointed at the desk.

"The honeysuckle, grapevine, and fern are all there."

Lumian nodded and placed the bottle on the desk.

Then, he lay back on the bed and closed his eyes under the pretext of trying to fall asleep and advance in his dreams as soon as possible.

He couldn't fall asleep no matter what.

He couldn't figure out when his sister had been corrupted and had the lizard enter her body. During this period, the two of them had been together every second. Even if Aurore went to the washroom, Leah would accompany her, and vice versa. How could there be a problem?

If it happened during our sleeping hours, why didn't anything happen to me? Lumian tried his best to recall, hoping to find the source. It would help resolve the abnormality.

Suddenly, he remembered something.

In the previous, previous cycle, Padre Guillaume Bénet had remarked that the Church didn't want to kill all the adults here and harvest a ruin. He said that he had other means even if Aurore really wanted to deal with them.

At that time, he was still an ordinary person.

Lumian initially believed that he was relying on Shepherd Pierre Berry, but with the current situation, he had a guess—a crazy guess: Perhaps from the beginning, most people in the village had been parasitized by those strange lizard-like creatures, including Aurore!

As the twelfth night approached, the corresponding abnormality would become more and more obvious, and some people would show signs earlier.

The reason why he was spared was because he had the bluish-black symbol on him.

Recalling Aurore's lack of commitment in many matters in the second half of the previous, previous cycle, Lumian felt that his guess might be correct.

He couldn't help but grit his teeth.

At this moment, Ryan was patrolling the corridor with a kerosene lamp.

On the wall beside him, the shadow suddenly lengthened.

Almost at the same time, the small silver bells on Leah's veil and boots rang.

She felt her shoulders turn abnormally cold.

Chapter 101: Different Powers

The sound of tinkling bells sent a shiver down Leah's spine. Unable to pinpoint the danger, she instinctively used her Paper Figurine Substitutes.

Her body rapidly shrank and thinned, morphing into a carefully trimmed paper figurine.

The paper figure darkened, turning yellow and brittle as if it had aged a decade in an instant.

Silently, the withered yellow paper disintegrated into countless tiny fragments.

Leah reappeared at the top of the stairs, clutching the kerosene lamp. But in the next moment, she felt the chill on her shoulders.

Her thoughts raced as she raised her right hand and pinched the bridge of her nose.

Activating her Spirit Vision, she glanced at the room across from her and the glass window.

In the dim light of the kerosene lamp, the washroom's glass reflected Leah's upper body.

Transparent, ghostly infants perched on each of her shoulders!

Their faces were round and chubby, their skin a ghastly blue-white. Their expressions twisted in malevolence.

The spectral infants leaned down, pressing their mouths to Leah's neck as if feeding on her essence.

Rather than panic, Leah breathed a sigh of relief.

Identifying the source of the threat was far better than being in the dark!

Now she could assess the situation and make informed decisions.

Just like this!

Leah drew her exquisite silver revolver, aimed at the eerie infant on her left shoulder, and pulled the trigger.

Bang!

A golden bullet, wreathed in illusory flames, burst from the barrel.

The infant wailed as it was flung from Leah's shoulder, consumed by the golden fire.

Bang! Leah fired again, this time at the infant above her other shoulder.

The second ghostly child, ablaze with the same intense fire, cried out as it followed its companion down the corridor.

A woman's figure materialized. Her eyes were a piercing blue, her features delicate; her round face framed by disheveled black hair. She was the padre's mistress, Sybil Berry, sister to Shepherd Pierre Berry.

Her skin was coated in a sickly blue hue, and on both sides of her neck, grotesque growths protruded.

The spectral infants returned to her, latching onto the corresponding growths to feed.

As they nursed, the golden flames that engulfed them gradually dissipated.

But Leah would not stand idly by. She aimed at Sybil Berry and pulled the trigger.

With a bang, the golden bullet traversed mere meters before striking Sybil squarely in the forehead.

For some reason, Sybil made no attempt to dodge. A bloody hole bore through her skull.

Within the wound, white and red mixed as illusory golden flames devoured them both.

Clang! Sybil fell lifeless to the floor. The ghostly infants, their pale faces contorted in anguish, vanished.

That's it? Leah couldn't believe it.

The silver bells on her veil and boots continued to tinkle, growing more intense by the second.

In the blink of an eye, Leah felt a cold, malevolent force growing within her.

Frantically, she glanced at the washroom and the glass window. Her skin had taken on a bluish hue at some point.

In the next instant, her body reverted to a paper figurine.

The paper figure crumpled into a ball, hitting the floor with a thud.

Leah reappeared in the bathroom, the icy sensation still growing inside her.

Almost simultaneously, a gentle voice whispered in her ear.

"I made a pact with a strange spirit world creature and gained one of its abilities.

"Whoever kills me, I can be reborn within their body and take control.

"You're very beautiful. I like it very much. The padre should like you very much too…"

Without hesitation, Leah bolted from the bathroom, silver revolver and kerosene lamp in hand.

She had to find Valentine.

Exorcism was one of the Sun domain's specialties. They were particularly effective against such threats!

…

Valentine found himself cornered near the balcony.

The area was choked by pitch-black, thorn-covered vines hanging from the ceiling. Blood-red, putrid-smelling flowers bloomed all around.

Valentine spread his arms, summoning golden flames from thin air to incinerate the monstrous flora.

Just then, a figure materialized in midair.

He wore a white robe adorned with golden threads. His black hair was short, his blue eyes solemn, and his nose slightly hooked. He was Guillaume Bénet, the padre of Cordu.

No longer invisible, he floated in the air and gazed down at Valentine. In ancient Hermes, he bellowed,

"Valentine!"

Dark energy flickered within the padre's robes.

This was an ability Guillaume Bénet had obtained through a contract with a spirit world creature.

By invoking the target's true name, he could affect their Soul Body, causing disorientation.

The closer the language was to nature and the spirit world, and the better the understanding of the target, the stronger the effect.

If his Spirit Body was far superior to the target's, he could even extract their spirit, leaving them disoriented and defenseless.

Valentine's head spun as he heard the padre's shout. He suddenly felt dizzy and couldn't think straight.

However, he quickly regained control and shook off the disorientation.

Ever since entering Cordu, he had never revealed his full name. The padre's ability had limited effect on him.

Guillaume Bénet hadn't expected success either. Before Valentine could completely shake off the dizziness, the padre hurled a human bone he had prepared earlier.

As the bone hit the ground, the airborne padre rapidly recited in Hermes, "Blind, deaf, unwakeable."

It was a curse and an ability Guillaume Bénet had gained through a contract.

He cast bones symbolizing death to render the target like the dead—blind and deaf, with unresponsive eyes.

Valentine wasn't asleep, so the curse couldn't render him unconscious. However, the lingering dizziness intensified, blurring his vision and causing his ears to ring. He struggled to see beyond three meters or hear anything further away.

Seizing the opportunity, the padre extended his right palm.

His blue eyes took on a hazy, almost ethereal quality.

Complex mercury symbols, reminiscent of tiny rivers, swirled around Valentine. They formed a grand illusory river shimmering with light.

Countless tributaries branched off downstream. As the main river surged forward, most were swallowed up, leaving only one.

Guillaume Bénet observed for a few seconds and snatched one of the mercury symbols just before Valentine broke free from the cursed blindness and deafness.

He intended to amplify the corresponding tributary and make Valentine's fate of being paralyzed by the Abyssal Demon Flowers a reality.

…

Ryan barely managed to dodge the shadow's axe as it slashed down towards him. He quickly discarded the kerosene lamp he had been carrying and donned his silver-white armor. In his hand, a broadsword condensed from light appeared.

Clang! Clang! Clang!

Ryan slashed continuously, forcing the shadow back against the wall. The specks of Sunrise Gleam he released covered the surroundings, exorcizing the shadows in the area.

The pitch-black, pale-white, evil, or terrifying arms that were about to reach out from behind the shadow were pushed away, making it hard for them to grab Ryan's body.

With a clang, the shadow shrank back into the wall and reverted to normal.

It disappeared under the illumination of Sunrise Gleam.

Not far away, a remnant shadow enlarged, and Shepherd Pierre Berry, dressed in a long hooded coat, walked out.

He bent down slightly and charged at Ryan with his axe, accumulating powers in his body with every step. After a few steps, Pierre Berry seemed to have the posture and strength of a giant.

Ryan loomed over his opponent, gripping the Sword of Dawn with both hands as he prepared to strike the enemy charging at him like a rampaging bull.

Clang!

The broadsword and axe clashed, sending a shower of sparks in every direction.

Both Pierre Berry and Ryan recoiled simultaneously. One stumbled back three steps to regain balance, while the other only needed one.

Ryan halted his retreat, one leg stretched back, and seized the moment before Pierre Berry could steady himself. He lunged forward, slashing at his adversary.

Just then, Pierre Berry's mouth gaped open.

His tongue bizarrely morphed into a peculiar chameleon.

The chameleon's head was tucked between its legs, a front foot stuffed into its mouth.

The instant Ryan's gaze fell upon the chameleon, he was wracked by a searing pain in his head, so intense that his attack faltered, failing to land.

Headache curse!

Shepherd Pierre Berry had gained this ability through a pact with an enigmatic Spirit Body that had reveled in studying all manner of curses during its life.

Capitalizing on the opportunity to inflict a debilitating headache on Ryan, Pierre Berry summoned the receding shadow back and unleashed a ferocious assault.

Amid the cacophony of clanging metal, Ryan found himself forced to retreat.

…

Amid the chaos outside, Lumian bolted upright and urgently told Aurore, "Something's not right! We have to regroup with Ryan and the others!"

Ryan had drilled this principle into their heads time and time again: In the face of an attack, they had to strive to stay together. A united team was far more effective than five individuals battling solo!

"Okay!" Aurore leaped out of bed and sprinted for the door, reaching into the concealed pocket of her flowing gown.

As Lumian neared the open doorway, he caught sight of a figure—Deputy Padre Michel Garrigue stood before him, garbed in a white robe adorned with gold thread.

The striking, curly-haired youth's eyes were eerily vacant as he offered Lumian a smile.

"Do you want to pray?"

With a swift motion, Lumian yanked his axe free and aimed for Michel's neck.

Michel's head lolled, but only a trickle of blood escaped.

Glancing at Lumian from the corner of his eye, he inquired with a radiant smile, as if nothing had transpired, "Do you want to pray?"

As Lumian prepared to raise his axe and sever the man's neck, an overwhelming sense of danger washed over him.

Relying on his Dancer's uncanny agility, he abruptly spun around and swung the axe behind his back.

In the next second, his gaze froze.

He saw Aurore.

Aurore's light-blue eyes had inexplicably grown vacant. She hurled a handful of powder, ground from some kind of tree, at Lumian.

Gazing upon his sister's familiar visage, Lumian's axe strike decelerated until it came to a halt.

He even forgot to evade.

A crackling noise erupted as a sphere of silver lightning struck Lumian's head.

He fainted.

Darkness swallowed his vision.

Chapter 102: Transfer

Clang! Clang! Clang!

Ryan retreated, barely managing to parry Shepherd Pierre Berry's relentless onslaught.

Pierre Berry's eyes were bloodshot, the gentleness gone, replaced by a ferocious rage.

As sinister arms, either pitch-black or ghostly white, reached from the shadows to ensnare Ryan, Pierre Berry swung his axe at Ryan's head.

This time, Ryan didn't parry or retreat. He didn't even raise the Sword of Dawn.

Instead, he twisted his body, allowing the eerie arms to grasp his legs and Pierre Berry's axe to strike his shoulder.

Clang!

Spiderweb-like cracks spread across the silver pauldron, light flaking off and dissipating.

Grimacing in pain, Ryan genuflected, plunging the Sword of Dawn into the floor.

He knew he'd been separated from his allies for too long. He needed to regroup at any cost.

The strength of a team surpassed that of any individual!

In a split second, the light-infused two-handed broadsword detonated.

It shattered into countless light fragments, morphing into a hurricane that barreled towards Pierre Berry.

Panic flickered in Pierre Berry's eyes at the devastating blow.

Ignoring the malevolent arms, he retreated into his own shadow.

A fierce storm of pure light engulfed the area, slicing shadows and evil into shreds.

As an area-of-effect attack, Hurricane of Light inevitably impacted Ryan's surroundings, despite his best efforts to direct it towards his enemy.

Silently, the walls of Lumian's and Aurore's bedrooms crumbled, reduced to tiny fragments in the terrifying storm.

Near the balcony, pitch-black vines hanging from the roof writhed like tortured weeds. Even Padre Guillaume Bénet, suspended in midair, had no choice but to hastily dodge.

Bloodied scratches marred his body as he fled Aurore's house.

Rumble!

Half the roof had been obliterated, the second floor pockmarked with gaping holes. In many places, the stove below was visible.

Leah was also caught in the storm of light, her figure rapidly withering and shrinking, transforming into a paper figurine.

When the tempest subsided, she reappeared in the study, barely intact.

Ryan knew she had Paper Figurine Substitutes, allowing him to unleash such a brutal attack on Pierre Berry in a confined space.

As for Aurore, Lumian, and Valentine, their positions offered some protection from the attack. Ryan had tried to control the storm's direction, with limited success.

After assessing the situation, he decided to use this decisive attack.

Crimson moonlight and faint starlight streamed through the ruined roof. Ryan scanned the area but saw no sign of Aurore or Lumian. Leah, pale-faced, was rushing towards him. Valentine lay unconscious on the balcony, numerous wounds from the Hurricane of Light, but none lethal.

Seeing his battered allies, Ryan stopped searching. He grabbed Leah's shoulder and leaped to the balcony.

With one hand, the Warrior hoisted Valentine and jumped from the Lumian residence.

Relying on his not-yet-shattered Dawn Armor to withstand further ambushes, he raced towards the edge of Cordu Village, fleeing to the nearest mountain pasture.

They had a plan: if they couldn't defend Aurore and Lumian's homes, they'd retreat to the pasture.

There, they could use the terrain to their advantage, escape by leaping off the cliff, and trigger the cycle.

Padre Guillaume Bénet hovered above, unable to match the Dawn Paladin's top speed.

Beneath him, Shepherd Pierre Berry emerged from the shadows at the edge of the house.

His dark robe was shredded, the hood long gone. His face, chest, and legs bore deep gashes, blood oozing relentlessly. It was a chilling sight.

Had he not swapped his shadow with that of a villager at the crucial moment, he'd be dead with his body torn to shreds!

The villager who had served as his pawn was now undoubtedly a mangled heap of flesh and blood.

…

As Ryan obliterated the Abyss Demon Flower with his Hurricane of Light, Valentine's paralysis waned. He regained consciousness before they left Cordu Village.

"What's the situation?" he inquired, his voice muffled by the wind.

Ryan, running at full speed, couldn't elaborate. He replied tersely, "Help Leah first!"

Valentine glanced at Leah, cradled in Ryan's other arm, and noticed her pallid, ashen face.

Without a moment's hesitation, he stretched out his hand with great effort and placed his palm on Leah's shoulder.

"Sun!"

He cried out in ancient Hermes.

Glistening golden droplets materialized out of nowhere, raining down on Leah.

Her expression contorted, and steam rose from her body.

Within seconds, Sybil's ethereal figure was expelled, her face filled with shock and terror.

She couldn't fathom how she'd been ejected from Leah's body.

Immediately after, ghostly golden flames erupted from the void, engulfing the bizarre spirit like a candle, reducing it to liquid droplets.

Sybil shrieked and cursed, but couldn't evade her fate of being purified.

This time, she failed to reincarnate in Valentine's body.

"Vile creature!" Valentine muttered under his breath.

…

Shepherd Pierre Berry looked up at Guillaume Bénet, who hovered above, and asked, "Should we chase them?"

Despite his injuries, he refused to surrender.

Guillaume Bénet pondered for a moment and responded, "No need. Our priority lies here.

"They won't make any moves in the short term. They'll only observe and assess the situation. That's enough for us."

As he finished speaking, he furrowed his brow and whispered, "Sybil's dead."

"Can't she be 'reborn'?" Pierre Berry asked, surprised.

He wasn't particularly distraught over his sister's demise.

Guillaume Bénet couldn't help but curse, "I warned her not to use Rebirth in front of the three official Beyonders. Rebirth at this level is inherently countered by the power of the Sun pathway, but she didn't listen.

"Imbecile! What a waste of the Lord's gift!"

…

Lumian's eyes snapped open, taking in the wispy gray fog and the familiar ceiling above.

He had awoken within the dream ruins after losing consciousness.

Gasping for breath, Lumian struggled to sit up straight.

As Aurore's attack struck him, he had been filled with despair, thinking it was better to just surrender.

She could reclaim the beautiful life she had granted him, along with the five years she had given him.

Phew… Lumian exhaled sharply as two realizations pierced his thoughts.

That wasn't Aurore. She was possessed by a monster!

To give up now would be to abandon her to the creature and snuff out her last hope!

Lumian rose to his feet, his resolve steeling within him.

He glanced toward the window and spotted a bottle of liquor, a honeysuckle flower, some grapevines, and fern powder.

Had that woman sent these materials? Had she witnessed the attack? Why hadn't she… Lumian shook his head, dispelling his intrusive thoughts.

In this dire circumstance, he could only rely on himself and his allies. No matter how powerful others may be, they were useless to him now!

Wasting no more time, Lumian retrieved the instruments he'd used to brew the Hunter potion and poured 50 milliliters of liquor into a beer mug.

He added the honeysuckle flower, grapevine powder, and fern powder, one after the other. Lastly, the repulsive "stone" with its dark, flowing liquid surface.

A sizzling sound accompanied the dissolution of the Provoker Beyonder characteristic, and the honeysuckle flower vanished.

The colorless liquor in the mug turned a deep black, becoming viscous. The mere sight of the potion made Lumian want to hurl it away and stomp it into oblivion.

He steadied himself, using shallow Cogitation to calm his nerves and focus.

Moments later, Lumian snatched up the beer mug without hesitation, gulping down the foul, pungent Provoker potion.

Setting the mug down, he immediately felt his insides grow heavy, as if plummeting.

Drawing on his experience, Lumian sat cross-legged on the floor, eyes closed, bracing for the next transformation.

His breaths became heated, his emotions veering wildly between anger, sorrow, frustration, and exhilaration.

Simultaneously, a voice—infinitely distant yet intimately close—assailed his ears, drilling into his temples like an iron spike.

Familiar, searing pain engulfed Lumian's mind, but he couldn't shake certain thoughts.

I must succeed!

I must unlock the secret of the dream!

I must save Aurore!

I must shatter the loop in Cordu!

Enduring the scorching, tearing sensation and the illusion of losing control, Lumian didn't open his eyes or alter his posture.

He felt like a tiny vessel in a tempest, battered by waves and gales. Powerless, but not yet submerged.

After what felt like an eternity, the pain began to ebb as the bloodthirsty, insane thoughts receded from Lumian's consciousness.

He opened his eyes, knowing he had ascended to a Sequence 8 Provoker.

Chapter 103: The Padre's Plan

A dense white fog hung heavy in the sky, swallowing most of the light and casting the dream ruins into a perpetual twilight.

Lumian stood, stretching his limbs and surveying the blood-streaked mountain peak as he assessed his condition.

In comparison to Hunter, the Provoker's strength, reflexes, speed, and agility had improved, albeit modestly.

Lumian identified three primary changes:

First, his body had grown more robust and his recuperative abilities had seemingly improved.

Second, his spirituality had increased to a certain extent. He could now maintain his possession state for four minutes, up from just three.

Lastly, he had gained a Beyonder power called Provocation.

This ability induced a permanent state change while also requiring active activation to achieve its desired effect.

Lumian's observation skills had experienced a qualitative transformation, far surpassing those of an ordinary person. He could now effectively discern which words, actions, and situations would most easily trigger his target's sensitivities and provoke agitation.

When Provocation was employed, it merged insults and humiliation, causing the target to lose their composure.

The more tailored the taunts and humiliation, the more effective the Provocation. However, even a single word like "dogshit" could still incite anger to some degree.

Against an uncommunicative opponent, Provocation allowed Lumian to exude a repugnant aura.

This ability was well-suited to the traps and ambushes Hunters excelled in, but it held little meaning for Lumian in his present state.

He no longer had time for hunting. His sole focus was exploring the "wall" surrounding the blood-stained "peak" and uncovering the secret of the dream ruins.

In contrast, the enhancements to his spirituality and physical resilience pleased him. At the very least, he could now delve further into the dark area that once lulled him to sleep.

With the potion's boost, Lumian massaged his temples.

This time, activating his Spirit Vision was seamless.

He finally had the capacity to easily invoke his Spirit Vision.

Without hesitation, Lumian changed his clothes and gathered his gear: Fallen Mercury, the iron-black axe, a cloth bag of cheese and biscuits. He slung his shotgun over his back and exited the two-story semi-subterranean building. Amidst the muted gray fog, he traversed the wilderness and entered the ruins.

He followed a familiar path, avoiding areas where monsters might lurk, and proceeded cautiously.

Upon reaching the area where he had encountered the three-faced monster, Lumian danced, partially triggering the black thorn symbol.

With the "amulet," he navigated increasingly treacherous terrain and repelled several horrifying creatures.

At last, he arrived at the thorny "wall" formed by an array of houses.

After a moment's consideration, Lumian chose a direction.

He resolved to enter the area that seemed to be shrouded in night, a place that instantly plunged him into a drowsy haze.

His intuition suggested that something significant lay beyond the towering wall of twisted trees. However, the area resembling the onset of night held a greater likelihood of harboring the secret of the dream ruins.

After all, "night," "slumber," and "dream" were often related terms.

In due course, Lumian, having performed another ritual dance, found himself in a place noticeably dimmer than its surroundings.

He exhaled slowly and stepped forward with determination.

Almost immediately, Lumian felt as though he had transitioned from a foggy day to a cloudy evening. Shadows enveloped the objects around him.

Clutching Fallen Mercury, he yawned and pressed on.

I can't sleep. I can't sleep! Lumian urged himself forward.

As he proceeded, Lumian remained vigilant, scrutinizing the buildings that formed the city wall. Yet, the secrets of the dream ruins eluded him.

Gold coins and other trinkets held no interest for him.

Delving deeper, he trudged dozens of meters, his willpower alone keeping his eyes open against the overwhelming drowsiness that engulfed his mind.

After a moment's contemplation, he opted for retreat. He would investigate the area behind the wooden wall and enter this sleep-inducing zone from another angle.

Perhaps that would grant him access to previously unreachable locations.

Lumian pivoted and retraced his steps, but the drowsiness persisted, growing in intensity with each passing moment.

At last, his resolve crumbled. His eyes slid shut, and he slumped to the ground.

Darkness consumed his vision once more.

…

Lumian was suddenly gripped by a sharp pain in his abdomen, causing him to curl up and open his eyes.

First, he saw a dazzling mural with a curved dome, followed by the stern visage of the padre along with his slightly hooked nose, and Pons Bénet's right fist, which he withdrew with a sinister grin.

I've been captured and brought to the cathedral? Lumian recognized the scene overhead and instinctively scanned his surroundings.

He saw Reimund's father, Pierre Greg, Ava's father, Guillaume Lizier, his neighbor Louis Bedeau, and nearly all the villagers.

The altar had transformed beyond recognition, now adorned with lilacs, tulips, and other symbols of that hidden entity instead of sunflowers.

The Sun Sacred Emblem had vanished, replaced by an unnaturally twisted thorn ring, seemingly oozing black liquid.

Spotting the familiar symbol, Lumian felt a wave of dizziness as heat surged in his chest.

He knew this was a sign that the corruption within him had been stirred but remained trapped within the bluish-black symbol.

The padre and his followers have turned the cathedral into an altar for the hidden entity? Poor St. Sith… Lumian imagined Valentine would go berserk upon seeing this.

Bound tightly, he surveyed his surroundings, relieved to find the stained glass and murals depicting the great Eternal Blazing Sun and St. Sith's preaching unscathed.

It seems the alterations were hastily made… Lumian deduced the cathedral's current state.

The villagers stood eerily silent, like wax figures.

After observing Lumian for a moment, the padre scolded Pons Bénet.

"How could you let him sleep? You should have woken him up as soon as you brought him back to the cathedral!"

"Understood," Pons Bénet replied, his gaze unusually deferential, as if the padre were his deity or ruler.

Leaning against a pillar, Lumian glanced up at Guillaume Bénet. "Where's Aurore?"

The padre smiled cryptically. "You'll find out soon enough."

"What about the three foreigners?" Lumian frantically devised an escape plan while trying to maintain the conversation.

Guillaume Bénet gazed through the stained glass, his expression relaxed. "They've escaped. They should be at the nearest alpine pasture by now. But don't expect them to rescue you and Aurore tonight. Knowing the officials, they'll stall and merely observe. They'll only act after confirming the situation. Sometimes, they'd rather do nothing than make a mistake. That's how they wasted a decade of mine."

Lumian conceded the padre's point, but he knew that wasn't why Ryan and the others were waiting.

Without understanding why the evil god's followers had captured him and Aurore, Ryan's group wouldn't take drastic measures, like triggering the loop's reboot by leaving Cordu. They wanted to wait until the twelfth night to uncover the cause of the disturbance here, laying a solid foundation for escaping the predicament in the future.

Lumian's silence caused the padre's grin to widen.

In a matter-of-fact tone, he announced, "I plan to complete the ritual tonight."

What? Lumian was baffled.

In high spirits, Guillaume Bénet patiently elaborated, "I intend to move the April 9th ritual to tonight. The three foreigners won't have a chance to interfere."

What? The twelfth night can be moved up? Lumian was shocked, speechless, and inexplicably terrified.

At that moment, Guillaume Bénet turned to Pons Bénet and instructed, "Before taking him to the altar, ensure he stays awake. You may use any method, just don't kill him."

Pons Bénet asked eagerly, "What if I kill him?"

"We'll die together!" The padre glared at his dim-witted brother.

Send me to the altar and start the ritual again? Could the bluish-black symbol on me be useful again? Lumian's nerves steadied as he listened to the Bénet brothers' conversation.

The padre redirected his gaze to Lumian and leaned down. "Don't worry, you're not the vessel. We have a better choice."

A better choice? Lumian's alarm grew as he followed the padre's gaze to the original altar.

Aurore had appeared there at some point in time, dressed in a plain white robe, her golden hair unadorned and her light-blue eyes vacant.

"Aurore!" Lumian cried out.

Aurore remained statue-like, unresponsive.

The padre smiled and nodded.

"Yes, your sister is the superior vessel. Your role in the ritual is to help us expedite the timeline. We needn't wait for that exact moment or the shift in the constellations."

Lumian was terrified and bewildered.

Why can I help bring forward the twelfth night's ritual?

The padre leaned in once more, a smile of anticipation on his face.

"Because most of the boons we'd prayed for are within you."

What? How does he know? Lumian's eyes widened, straining to scrutinize Guillaume Bénet's face more closely.

Guillaume Bénet leaned in and whispered into Lumian's ear, "Did you really think you and Pualis were the only ones able to retain memories in the loop?"

Chapter 104: Resolute Decision

Upon seeing Lumian's blatant shock, Guillaume Bénet straightened up with satisfaction and said to Pons Bénet, "Keep an eye on him!"

With that, the padre strode towards the altar.

As he left, the villagers around them seemed to come alive, engaging in animated conversations.

"The horoscope is about to change."

"Our good fortune is coming!"

"It won't be long before we're wealthy!"

"When the time comes, I'll drink a bottle of wine every day and eat a pound of meat every meal!"

"I want to find a beautiful woman."

"I'm going to watch a play."

"..."

Lumian's mind was a whirlwind, and he barely noticed when Guillaume Bénet departed.

The padre's words were like a boulder tossed into a placid lake, sending ripples through Lumian's thoughts.

How is that possible?

In the previous cycle, I killed him because he didn't understand what made me special!

Back then, I didn't even know what was so special about myself. It was natural for him not to know... After that battle, he didn't have any conflicts with me in the subsequent cycles until Aurore began acting strangely...

But he didn't seem to know about the loop at all. The cursing he did when I led the rest to catch him in the adulterous act, him being knocked out by Leah after we infiltrated the cathedral, and being spied upon by Aurore using White Paper didn't seem fake at all!

If he was putting on an act, his level of restraint would be bone-chilling...

Moreover, he knows that Madame Pualis retains her memories in the loop and might know something about the abnormalities in the castle. Yet he still had an affair with Madame Pualis at the beginning of each loop, allowing no one to suspect him.

If it were me, I wouldn't even have desires after finding out what Madame Pualis had done, let alone sleep with her!

The more Lumian pondered, the more he found the padre terrifying. This fear was unlike the terror he felt from Madame Pualis.

Questions swarmed his mind:

Why didn't the padre with his memories sacrifice the three sheep from the beginning and obtain the corresponding boon to take full control of Cordu? Why didn't he complete the twelfth night ritual on the first day?

This could have prevented any accidents!

What was he waiting for? The sacrificial ritual only takes place near Lent every time...

Does that ritual have a date and time requirement?

The Lent celebration is an integral part of the twelfth night's ritual. So, the padre will only have a chance to advance the subsequent ritual after Lent is over?

But he could just control everyone from the beginning and wait for Lent to arrive...

Also, didn't the hidden existence find it odd that they prayed for a boon twice across three cycles? Yes, He might have done something, like helping the padre recover his memories!

No, if their sacrificial ritual had truly been completed, the three sheep wouldn't have entered the loop again. Their spirits and Beyonder characteristics should have gone to the hidden existence.

Could it be that, like Reimund, the spirits gathered around the altar and didn't escape the loop?

Who were the padre and the others praying to, and who bestowed their power...

As Lumian considered this, he suddenly felt a sharp pain in his lower body.

He instinctively curled up, but the ropes binding him prevented the motion.

Pons Bénet pulled his foot back from between Lumian's legs, smirking as beads of cold sweat formed on the young man's forehead. Lumian couldn't even make a sound.

He squatted down, raised his right hand, and slapped Lumian.

"Did you enjoy zat? Tell me, did you enjoy it?"

Without waiting for Lumian's response, he swung his arm and slapped the right side of his face, causing his ears to ring. Lumian felt like his head might fly off.

Seeing Lumian being beaten by Pons Bénet, Reimund's father, Pierre Greg, approached and squatted down. He sighed and said, "Bear with it. Just endure it for a while. Our fortunes are about to change. Good luck is on its way. If you leave now, you'll miss the opportunity!"

Ignoring Lumian's reaction, he repeated the same words, trying to persuade and console him.

Lumian paid no attention to Pierre Greg. He gazed at Pons Bénet without anger, as if he were looking at empty air.

He completely disregarded him, ignoring the pain and humiliation this villain had inflicted upon him.

Only one thought occupied his mind:

The situation is dire!

Ryan, Leah, and Valentine are unlikely to trigger the loop and restart everything prematurely before confirming the padre's intentions. Besides, they just fought; who knows when they'll recover. They probably won't sneak back to the village until tomorrow or the day after.

This way, no one can stop the padre from conducting the ritual in advance tonight...

Slap, slap, slap. Pons Bénet continued slapping Lumian's face and kicking his lower body, intensifying the pain he endured.

Lumian's thoughts were repeatedly interrupted by pain as he stubbornly tried to focus, refusing to waste even a second on Pons Bénet.

This only infuriated Pons Bénet further, causing him to strike even harder.

My specialness has already been discovered and targeted. They won't give me a chance to disrupt the ritual...

What should I do...

What can I do?

Lumian endured the pain and searched for a way to escape his current predicament.

Pons grew tired from beating him up. He stopped and panted.

"If ze padre hadn't forbidden me from killing you, I would've sliced off your flesh piece by piece, including what's down below!"

Hearing this, Lumian was taken aback as an idea flashed through his mind.

Kill me?

Kill me!

He suddenly raised his head and glared at Pons Bénet, his face contorted into a twisted smile born of pain.

"Is that all you've got? Are you using that pathetic little knife of yours to pick lice for me?"

He fully embraced his role as a Sequence 8 Provoker.

...

In the alpine meadow nearest to Cordu.

Ryan, clad in tattered armor, stood guard at the entrance and asked Valentine and Leah, "How do you feel?"

"I'm fine," Valentine responded immediately.

Leah added, "My spirituality has almost recovered."

Ryan nodded and dissolved the Dawn Armor.

"After I rest and recover a bit, we'll return to Cordu."

"Now?" Leah sounded surprised.

They hadn't been gone from Cordu for long.

Ryan exhaled slowly and said, "We need to find out as soon as possible why Guillaume Bénet's group attacked us tonight and not on the twelfth night. Besides, they captured Lumian and Aurore, but they didn't pursue us. Experience tell me that something's off."

Leah nodded slowly. "But we're not in the best shape."

After all, they had just fought a massive battle.

"That's why Guillaume Bénet doesn't expect us to return to Cordu tonight," Ryan explained. "Also, we left that item at Lumian and Aurore's house. We have to retrieve it as soon as possible. We can't let Guillaume Bénet and the others get their hands on it."

Valentine and Leah's expressions turned grave at the mention of that item.

They agreed to Ryan's plan.

...

Pa!

Pons Bénet slapped Lumian's face again, making his nose throb. Two streams of bright red blood flowed down to his mouth, bringing with them a foul and salty taste.

"How about zis?" Pons Bénet asked with a smile.

Lumian studied his expression and actions, realizing that his words hadn't had the desired effect.

He sniffed his blood-filled nose and replied with a smile, "Any other woman could hurt me more than you!"

"Is zat so?" Pons Bénet's expression darkened.

With a slap, he struck Lumian's mouth, sending two of his teeth flying with blood.

Relying on Provoker's insight and his experience at pranking, Lumian acutely sensed that Pons Bénet's reaction was different this time.

Familiar with all sorts of scandals and rumors in Cordu, Lumian vaguely thought of something and grinned.

"You don't seem to have a mistress."

His mouth was swollen from the slap, and two of his teeth were missing. His words came out slightly muffled.

Hearing the word "mistress," Pons Bénet's expression shifted subtly as he kicked Lumian's groin.

Lumian nearly blacked out from the pain. He couldn't speak for a few seconds.

Forcing a smile, he said with a boisterous laugh, "And the padre's mistresses are all over the village. Can't get it up?"

Pons Bénet's expression instantly darkened.

Lumian knew he had guessed right.

He endured the pain, his eyes narrowing.

He hadn't dared use Provocation earlier, fearing that he would be discovered if he used it too often. Now was the time!

Lumian laughed out loud.

"Did the padre sleep with your wife too? Are all your children his?"

Pons Bénet's eyes turned bloodshot.

He suddenly reached out and grabbed Lumian's neck, yelling with all his might, "Why don't you just die!"

Lumian heard a cracking sound from his neck and found it difficult to breathe.

Yet, he wasn't afraid. Instead, the corners of his mouth curled up as he calmly awaited the excruciating pain and inevitable death.

He had done his best to enrage Pons Bénet so that he would kill him.

Once he died, the loop would be triggered, and everything would restart immediately. Everything would return to the beginning, leaving room for recovery!

Not only had Lumian considered provoking Valentine to commit suicide to verify the nature of the loop, but he had also thought of sacrificing his own life in an emergency!

Compared to the current situation, what was there to fear?

He gazed at Pons Bénet, whose expression was vicious, and his purple lips quivered as if to say: "Please, kill me quickly."

Chapter 105: That Person

Pons Bénet's grip tightened relentlessly, his eyes bloodshot and bulging.

If it hadn't been for the fact that Lumian couldn't speak or that his vision had started to fade to black, he would have thanked him.

Suddenly, a hand appeared from nowhere, grasping Pons Bénet's hair at the back of his head, trying to forcibly pry him off Lumian.

"What the hell are you doing? Are you trying to kill him? Have you lost your damn mind?"

Pierre Berry growled in a deep voice as he intervened, stopping Pons Bénet.

But Pons Bénet wouldn't listen. His crimson eyes locked onto Lumian, his mind consumed by fury and murderous intent. All he could think of was killing this bastard.

Whack!

Pierre Berry swung his right leg up, striking Pons Bénet's groin with his brand-new leather shoe.

Pons Bénet reflexively let go, clutching his crotch, squeezing his thighs together, and collapsing to the ground.

He whimpered involuntarily, his face contorted in agony, like a rooster being strangled by the neck.

Pierre Berry glanced at him coolly and said, "Once you've recovered, bring Lumian to the altar. The ritual is about to begin."

He shifted his gaze, bending down to assess Lumian's condition.

As Lumian's senses returned and he slowly opened his eyes, he straightened up and nodded.

His darkening vision restored to clarity, the pain in his neck became more apparent. Lumian was disheartened to find that his view was not of the familiar ceiling of his bedroom but of Pierre Berry's bloodied face.

Am I still alive? He wondered subconsciously as he turned his head and spotted Pons Bénet curled up on the ground.

"Pathetic!" Lumian spat contemptuously. "If you can't satisfy women and can't even kill a man, what's the point of living?"

Pons Bénet felt a wave of rage surge through his head. If it weren't for the lingering pain in his groin and Pierre Berry's watchful eye, he would have snapped once more.

…

Lumian and Aurore's house lay in ruins, more than half its roof missing.

Ryan, Leah, and Valentine crept back under the moon and starlight.

Once they confirmed the area was clear, Ryan turned to Leah and said, "Tonight's situation is worse than we thought. Perform divination."

As they traveled from Cordu Village to Lumian's house, they noticed that every house was empty. They had no idea where everyone had gone.

This was a shocking anomaly!

"Alright." Leah nodded.

Before she could take out a pen and paper to write a divination statement, Ryan reminded her, "Be cautious. Choose the direction of the divination carefully. Don't attempt it if it feels too risky."

"Understood." Leah was well-versed in this area. She knew that Cordu was a place filled with danger and abnormalities. A minor error in the divination direction could lead to severe injuries or loss of control.

After a few moments of contemplation, she entered Aurore's bedroom, which now lacked a wall along the corridor, and found a manuscript to use as a medium.

As Leah wrote the divination statement, Ryan and Valentine entered Lumian's room where they had been sleeping.

Ryan's brownish-yellow suitcase sat beside the desk near the window, concealed by the curtain.

Seeing that the item was still there, Ryan breathed a sigh of relief and said to Valentine, "Make the preparations."

As he spoke, he pulled the suitcase out, placed it on the ground, and undid the brass-like metal buckle.

Valentine opened his arms slightly, and illusory golden flames emerged from the void, illuminating the room.

With Sunlight, Ryan finally dared to open his suitcase with a grave expression.

Inside, there were no clothes, books, or coins—just a strange, folded scarecrow lying quietly.

The scarecrow's eyes were covered with thick black cloth strips. Its face, neck, palms, feet, and calves were made of brownish-green straw, but its arms, chest, and thighs were covered in real, slightly pale-white skin.

This was a mystical item that the joint investigation team had acquired from the Eternal Blazing Sun Church's Riston diocese before their departure.

Teams at their level could request Sealed Artifacts to handle abnormalities.

Ryan closed his eyes, and information about the mystical item before him naturally surfaced in his mind.

"Number: 217

"Name: Tanago Scarecrow.

"Danger Grade: 2. Dangerous. Use with care and moderation. It can only be applied for operations that require three or more people. Security clearance requires a diocesan bishop.

"Security classification: Bishop, Team Captain, or above.

"Description: This scarecrow was first discovered in the Tanago region of Riston Province, near the remnants of a village annihilated by a cult's worship ritual.

"Two Purifiers, ten police officers, and 76 farmers vanished after passing by the farm where the scarecrow was placed, never to be seen again.

"Research suggests that those who enter a 30-meter radius of the scarecrow and lock eyes with it will lose self-awareness and be drawn towards it uncontrollably. Within moments, they disappear, leaving behind only their possessions and garments.

"At the zenith of sunlight, the scarecrow loses its power; touching it or meeting its gaze has no effect.

"A farmer from a neighboring village claims the scarecrow was once ordinary, indistinguishable from others until the village farmland it protected was decimated.

"With each disappearance, flesh and skin appear on a small portion of the scarecrow.

"Its ultimate transformation remains a mystery, but revival seems a likely outcome.

"The scarecrow already displays signs of life, moving at night and attempting to break free from its containment.

"Sealing Method: Blindfold it with a thick, black cloth and enclose it in a confined, dark space.

"Usage Process: Remove the scarecrow only under sunlight, and unbind the black cloth from its eyes.

"Appendix: 1. Avoid its gaze at all costs. Even under the protection of sunlight, you risk enduring lasting nightmares and mental debilitation.

"2. Limit interaction with the scarecrow to no more than two minutes per session. Excessive use intensifies its determination to escape and resist.

"3. Warning: Permanently seal the scarecrow before it acquires enough flesh."

As Ryan and Valentine investigated the Sealed Artifact's possible loss or escape, Leah entered a dream divination state.

Whispering the divination incantation to locate Aurore, she sat at her desk, reclined in her chair, closed her eyes, and quickly drifted into slumber.

Guided by her four silver bells, Leah glimpsed Aurore, clad in a simple white robe, in a surreal, distorted world. She recognized an altar, nearby villagers, and the distant stained glass and golden walls of a cathedral…

Leah's eyes flew open, and she bolted from the room. Breathlessly, she informed Ryan and Valentine, "They're all at the cathedral! Performing a ritual!"

…

Inside the cathedral of the Eternal Blazing Sun.

Pons Bénet carried the disappointed Lumian toward the altar adorned with lilacs and tulips. Pierre Berry, keeping a watchful eye, accompanied them.

Glancing at his sister Aurore, her eyes vacant, Lumian turned to Pierre Berry and sneered.

"You're nothing but a coward and a piece of trash!"

The shepherd shot him a glance but remained silent, his expression unchanging.

Undeterred, Lumian continued, grinning, "Your woman died of illness, yet you did nothing. You just put your faith in a malevolent god. Didn't she die because the factory owner overworked her and paid her next to nothing? If I were you, I'd have hunted down that boss and hung his whole family from the factory chimney! But you didn't! You were too scared. Scared you'd die too. Trash, coward!"

As Lumian studied Pierre Berry's subtle reactions, he slyly added Provocation to his final words.

Pierre Berry's expression contorted; his gentle gaze slowly morphed into a menacing glare, as if a hidden seal had been broken, unleashing the demon within.

Padre Guillaume Bénet, at the altar, barked sternly, "Control yourself!"

Pierre Berry shuddered and came to his senses.

In retaliation, he ripped a piece of cloth from his ragged attire, crumpled it into a ball, and shoved it into Lumian's mouth.

F*ck! Lumian struggled fiercely, but to no avail.

He kept cursing and adding Provocation, but time was against him. His mouth was fully gagged by the cloth, and he could no longer speak.

Panic and despair welled up in Lumian's heart, threatening to overwhelm him.

He desperately reined in his emotions, warding off any thoughts of surrender.

Carried to the altar, Lumian's mind raced, searching for alternative ways to end his life.

Soon, he was presented before the padre, the massive black thorn symbol separating him from Aurore.

Guillaume Bénet motioned for Pierre Berry to help Lumian to his feet, then scrutinized the young man's face and smiled.

"You're tougher than I thought, but you're still lacking. The world is so hard a man must have two fathers to look after him, yet you have none. No one to teach you the ways of life."

"The world is so hard a man must have two fathers to look after him" was a popular saying in Intis. It referred to both a biological father and a societal father—often known as a godfather.

This was why the people of Intis often acknowledged godfathers and godmothers.

The padre taunted Lumian for being an orphan, with neither a godfather nor a father.

In response, Lumian wished he could retort, mocking the padre about his own child having three, no, four fathers—the padre himself, his godfather, his mother's lover… If the gag hadn't held tight, Lumian would definitely have taunted the padre enough to make him lose his mind, killing him on the spot.

Unfortunately, he couldn't say anything.

"Should we begin the ritual now?" Pierre Berry inquired of Guillaume Bénet.

The padre shook his head.

"Let's wait a bit longer."

"What for?" Pierre Berry asked, puzzled.

The padre offered no answer, but Lumian was already devising a new suicide plan.

Suddenly, inspiration struck.

Enter a deep Cogitation state and submit to the scrutiny of the two entities. Eagerly, he sought the enigmatic and horrifying voice, hoping to provoke his own breakdown and loss of control.

Lumian glanced at Aurore, her face blank and her eyes empty, but otherwise unchanged. He closed his eyes.

First, he envisioned the crimson sun. Once calm, he transformed it into the orb adorned with eyes and a cross.

Silently, Lumian "saw" the faint gray fog once more. He "saw" the chaos of overlapping colors and indescribable, non-existent things.

Yet this time, he didn't sense the gaze of an entity lurking within the fog or looming high above.

Why is it different? Lumian's eyes snapped open in surprise.

Just then, a figure entered through the cathedral doors.

Clad in a black robe and a wide hood, the man's face was obscured by shadows. He stood tall, around 1.8 meters in height.

As the mysterious figure approached the altar, the padre stepped aside deferentially, his demeanor humble and reverent.

Who is that? The one behind the padre? Lumian puzzled, peering closer.

The more he studied the man, the more familiar he seemed, as though Lumian had encountered him before.

Suddenly, it clicked.

This was the figure lurking in the corner of the Warlock's tomb!

The black-robed man ascended the altar and stood before Lumian. Leaning forward slightly, he stifled a chuckle.

"Did you realize that Cogitation is useless?"

What? How does he know? Lumian stared at him, shocked and bewildered.

At this proximity, even with the hood concealing his features, Lumian could discern the black-robed man's face.

He was a young man in his late teens, his limbs long and lean, his hair short and jet-black, his eyes a light blue, and his features sharply chiseled. He was strikingly handsome.

What… Lumian's gaze locked onto the man.

He knew this face all too well. He saw it every day when he looked in the mirror.

It was himself!

Chapter 106: The Ritual Begins

Lumian noticed that the black-robed man's face was nearly identical to his own, save for a few subtle differences.

The depths of the stranger's light-blue eyes held a faint silver-black hue. It was unclear whether the shadow of the hood affected the man's complexion or if his skin was naturally a shade darker.

"Who are you?!" Lumian blurted out in shock, his words muffled by the cloth in his mouth, leaving only indistinct movements.

The black-robed man smiled without introducing himself, turning and walking towards the padre.

Lumian strained to follow, desperate to learn the man's identity, his purpose, and why he had appeared in the dead Warlock's tomb.

This was crucial to him.

Although the padre's ability to retain memories within the loop was surprising, it wasn't inexplicable. Lumian's theories about the nature of the loop could account for such an anomaly. After all, Madame Pualis was a prime example.

However, the black-robed man's sudden appearance was entirely unexpected. It wasn't his presence that was startling; Lumian had always suspected another individual, apart from the owl and the occupant of the coffin, to be the mastermind behind Cordu's abnormalities.

What truly shocked him was the striking resemblance between the black-robed man and himself. It suggested the man could be another version of Lumian.

His theories about the loop's nature failed to explain this baffling revelation!

Something's not right! Lumian struggled to lean forward, but the ropes held him fast, causing him to crash onto the altar with a thud.

His nose, which had ceased bleeding, began to flow anew, and the red, swollen wounds grew more prominent.

Undeterred, Lumian pressed on. Unable to use his limbs, he relied on Dancer's incredible flexibility, slithering towards the black-robed man with great difficulty.

His mind raced with thoughts.

I have to find out who this black-robed man is and why he's here!

This must be a manifestation of the loop's essence. Unraveling this secret could provide hope of using the loop to escape the current predicament and ultimately resolve the anomalies plaguing Cordu!

Drip, drip. Blood from Lumian's face stained the ground a vibrant red. His body smeared the crimson hue in all directions as he writhed in his struggle. The scene was chaotic and reeked of blood.

He strained to reach the black-robed man, but couldn't utter a sound. His face, contorted by pain and anxiety, was a horrifying sight.

The black-robed man, bearing an uncanny resemblance to Lumian, glanced down and instructed the padre, Guillaume Bénet, "Begin the ritual."

"Alright," Guillaume Bénet told Pierre Berry at the edge of the altar. "Bring Lumian to the altar."

Pierre Berry strode over, gripped Lumian under his arm, and hoisted him up.

No! Lumian thrashed with all his might, like a fish freshly yanked from the water.

Pierre Berry nearly lost his grip due to Lumian's "slipperiness."

The gentleness in Pierre's eyes quickly vanished, replaced by a ferocious and brutal glint.

His strength surged as he forcefully restrained Lumian and flung him onto the altar.

Afterward, Pierre Berry glanced at Lumian and chuckled.

"You better hope you die during the ritual rather than live through it. You'll regret it, I promise."

Is this a response to my earlier Provocation? Just as this thought crossed Lumian's mind, he saw Aurore, clad in a simple white robe, approach his side.

She leaned against the altar adorned with lilacs and tulips, her gaze vacant as she stared at her brother.

The cathedral's villagers swarmed forward, forming a semi-circle around the altar.

The padre retrieved two grayish-white candles, positioning them at the corresponding locations of Aurore and Lumian.

Next, he placed a candle beneath his feet, creating a pattern on the altar with two candles above and one below.

After a few moments, the padre ignited the three candles in sequence, from top to bottom and left to right, using his spirituality.

A faint sweetness wafted into Lumian's nostrils, leaving him disoriented. The scene felt inexplicably familiar.

…

Ryan, Leah, and Valentine stealthily approached the side of the Eternal Blazing Sun Cathedral, clutching a brownish-yellow suitcase.

Hidden in the shadows, they peered through the stained glass to see the Eternal Blazing Sun's altar transformed. They spotted Lumian bound on the left and Aurore standing on the right. They saw the padre facing the siblings, a lit grayish-white candle beneath his feet, flanked by the enigmatic black-robed man and Pierre Berry.

Valentine's fists clenched as a golden light flickered in his eyes.

Leah cast a sidelong glance at him, concerned her companion might be consumed by rage.

Fortunately, Valentine was a seasoned Purifier who had completed numerous missions. He understood what needed to be done and what to avoid.

Ryan averted his gaze and lowered his voice. "We'll move closer to the altar, shatter the glass, and launch a surprise attack. Our goal is to grab Lumian and Aurore and be out of the village within a minute.

"If we don't achieve our objective in that time, abort the mission and flee to the river. Trigger the loop proactively."

"Alright," Valentine and Leah murmured in hushed tones, each nodding in agreement.

Ryan added, "Valentine, ready Sunlight. We can't hold back any longer. We have to deploy 2-217 now."

"No problem," Valentine responded as Leah retrieved a box of matches.

She manipulated the silver bell on her veil and boots, sprinting around Cordu's square at breakneck speed while tossing matches at various points.

This marked a predetermined escape route.

Magicians didn't perform unprepared.

Once Leah had completed her task, the trio of official investigators cautiously circled beneath the stained glass to the side of the altar.

Valentine peered inside and told Ryan, "The ritual is about to commence. We must act now."

Ryan, also observing the cathedral's interior, furrowed his brow and asked, "Did you notice anything off?"

Leah hastily replayed the scene she had just witnessed in her mind, replying with apprehension, "I can't hear anything from inside!"

They were a mere three meters from the closest villagers, yet they couldn't discern any sound emanating from within. The villagers were clearly engaged in animated conversation!

Ryan's eyes narrowed, and a suspicion instantly took shape in his mind.

He stood up and rammed into the stained-glass window before him, disregarding that the cultists inside the cathedral might discover his presence.

Clangs echoed as the delicate glass remained unbroken, but the villagers within the cathedral seemed oblivious to the chaos outside.

As Ryan summoned the Dawn Armor and Sword of Dawn, Leah sprinted in circles outside the window.

This time, not a single deliberately uncontrolled silver bell jingled.

From Leah's perspective, this implied there was no danger; yet, how could there be no threat emanating from the cathedral?

Thus, she concluded that the correct answer was: The situation was extremely dangerous!

It was so dangerous that the silver bell Sealed Artifacts were utterly disrupted or dared not react!

Bang!

The Sword of Dawn, forged from light, struck a pane of stained glass but failed to have any impact. It seemed as if the entire cathedral was shrouded by an invisible, terrifying force that barred outsiders from entry.

A brilliant pillar of light, encircled by flames, descended from the sky as Valentine spread his arms. However, it didn't appear inside the cathedral as he had anticipated. Instead, it landed outside the stained glass, causing ripples.

It appeared that the interior and exterior were entirely isolated.

Ryan made a quick decision and said to Valentine and Leah, "Let's try the Sealed Artifact. If it doesn't work, we'll leave the village to trigger the loop."

Ryan didn't suggest immediate retreat because he hoped to barge in and save Lumian and Aurore. He suspected that once the ritual truly began, the loop might be affected. In that case, they wouldn't be able to leave Cordu or restart everything there.

Wasting no time, Valentine summoned the illusory golden flames.

With two pops, Ryan opened the suitcase and retrieved the Tanago Scarecrow, its skin already half-covered.

He pressed the Scarecrow's front against the stained glass and untied the thick black cloth.

A pair of human-like eyes appeared on 2-217's face, devoid of emotion and embedded within the brownish-green straw.

The eyes swiveled and locked onto Pons Bénet, standing at the edge of the altar.

The villain froze, then bolted toward the window.

As he ran, his body vanished, leaving his clothes to flutter to the ground and cover his leather shoes.

A piece of skin-covered flesh emerged on the Tanago Scarecrow's neck, fusing with the stalk below.

"It works!" Ryan and the others exclaimed, elated.

This meant that breaking into the cathedral wasn't impossible, and the altar's protection was not impregnable!

…

"The horoscope is about to change!"

"It's finally happening!"

"…"

Amidst the villagers' uproar and the surrounding scent of gray amber, cloves, musk, and tulips, Lumian experienced an uncanny sense of déjà vu. Relying on Dancer's flexibility, he forced his upper body up despite being bound.

The next second, he saw the padre open his mouth and shout in ancient Hermes, "The mighty Circle of Inevitability!"

As soon as the words left his lips, darkness enveloped the cathedral's interior, and the villagers fell silent.

The orange flames on the three candles were reduced to the size of pepper granules, now tainted silver and black.

Lumian's mind buzzed as the familiar burning sensation ignited in his chest.

His vision blurred, and the vacant-eyed Aurore, the solemn-looking padre, and the hooded black-robed man appeared before him in layers beneath the dazzling gold dome.

A sharp pain stabbed at his head, as if something was being yanked from the depths of his memory. It felt eerily similar to the scene unfolding before him.

The sense of familiarity and déjà vu surged within Lumian's heart, dozens or even hundreds of times stronger than before.

Thump, thump!

He could hear his heart pounding.

Chapter 107: Shattering

Thump, thump!

Lumian felt his heartbeat pounding, as images were painstakingly dragged from the depths of his memories.

His head threatened to split open. He fought against it, unwilling to continue.

Outside the stained glass, Ryan observed the ritual beginning. He tossed the Tanago Scarecrow to Leah without hesitation, signaling her to use the Sealed Artifact against the padre. He hefted the Sword of Dawn.

Beneath the golden flames, Leah and Valentine moved to another stained glass window, a half-exposed cylindrical wall separating them from Ryan.

They did this to evade the damage from the Hurricane of Light without hindering their movements. With the cathedral's "defensive capability," they believed a barrier between them would suffice. After all, Ryan would do his best to control the attack's direction.

Leah embraced the Tanago Scarecrow from behind, pressing it against the stained glass depicting St. Sith's sermon. She aimed at the altar and Guillaume Bénet, the padre leading the ritual.

On the other side, Ryan gripped the handle with both hands, plunging the Sword of Dawn into the windowsill.

The two-handed broadsword, forged from pure light, shattered and transformed into a whirlwind of razor-sharp fragments and specks of light.

The Hurricane exploded and slammed into the stained glass before him.

With a cracking sound, the entire cathedral trembled. Hairline fractures spider-webbed across the glass surface.

But it held fast.

Seeing this, Ryan summoned the minuscule particles of Sunrise Gleam, forging a massive two-handed axe.

Unable to use Hurricane of Light for now, he switched weapons.

Leah and Valentine, shielded by the protruding wall, dodged the Hurricane of Light's remnants. At that moment, the Tanago Scarecrow's gaze locked onto the priest. Its eyes, set in the brownish-green straw, reflected the white-robed figure with golden threads.

Leah noticed a faint silver light tinged with black materialize around the altar where Guillaume Bénet stood.

With a snap, the Tanago Scarecrow's eyes burst open, weeping blood-red tears.

The padre glanced over before looking away.

As two sheep "willingly" entered the altar, he intoned the incantation with calm fanaticism.

"You are the eternal cycle, the predestined destiny, the cause, the effect, and the process!"

Suddenly, the two deity-representing candles on the altar elongated to the size of a human head.

A howling wind swept through the cathedral, turning the villagers to statues. But silver-black warts emerged from their exposed faces and hands.

The silver-black light enveloping the altar rapidly spread, engulfing the entire cathedral.

The mural-filled dome became transparent. Clouds dispersed, and the crimson moon darkened to the shade of blood.

The stars on the black velvet backdrop flickered into existence, one by one, glowing with the intensity of the sun.

In an instant, night became day. The villagers stirred and murmured dreamily.

"The horoscope has changed…"

"Fortune is here…"

With three thuds, Ryan, Leah, and Valentine, who hadn't heard but had witnessed the scene, crumpled to the ground. They writhed, wailed, and screamed in agony.

Ryan's skin turned grayish-blue, Leah's face appeared to teem with maggots and pulsing tendrils, and Valentine radiated a sun-like glow, from inside to out, from top to bottom.

They were on the brink of losing control.

The Tanago Scarecrow lay cast aside, trembling violently.

Lumian felt his chest burn as the terrifying voice, seemingly originating from an infinite distance and yet right beside him, echoed in his ears.

Invisible steel drills penetrated his skull, stirring his brain. Blood vessels bulged in pain, and silvery-black spots emerged beneath his skin.

An unseen force enveloped him, lifting him from the altar.

The ropes binding him and the cloth gagging him crumbled to dust and dispersed in the air.

Aurore, too, was hoisted by this invisible force, floating above the altar and facing Lumian.

His bloodshot eyes mirrored his sister's long blonde hair, vacant light-blue eyes, pristine and emotionless face, and the simple yet odd white robe she wore.

He recoiled, sensing a familiar déjà vu from the depths of his memories. The pain was as intense as the madness.

The surrounding scenes melded together in Lumian's mind:

The padre's solemn and fanatical expression;

The black-robed man advancing toward the altar;

Pierre Berry prostrate on the ground;

The transparent cathedral dome;

The crimson moon and constellations in the sky;

The villagers with stiff expressions, welcoming their fortune;

Aurore, her face contorted with pain…

Lumian's head spun as his body was torn apart by an invisible force, silver-black spots multiplying on his skin.

He was powerless to break free or resist effectively.

"Ah!"

Lumian screamed involuntarily as his chest was gradually pried open, casting a silvery-black light onto Aurore.

Aurore's eyes darted around, hearing the agonized cry.

Her empty gaze mirrored Lumian's swollen blood vessels, his twisted face with silver-black hues beneath the surface.

After a momentary pause, she instinctively reached out and pushed Lumian away from danger.

Grande Soeur… Lumian stared, dumbfounded, as Aurore shoved him out of the altar's reach.

Suddenly, the dreadful sound in his ears vanished, and the invisible restraints on his body disappeared. The burning sensation across his skin subsided.

Yet the pain in his head remained unchanged. Deep-rooted memories were forcibly dredged up.

It was as if someone had used a hook to slowly extract his brain from his skull.

Aurore's light-blue eyes tainted with silver-black, her blank stare, her lifeless face, and her resolute, forceful actions pushing him away flashed in Lumian's mind. It was nearly identical to what he'd witnessed moments ago, but the black-robed man was missing from the background.

This amplified déjà vu led Lumian to instinctively question if something similar had happened before. He screamed in pain once more.

Bam! He plummeted to the ground after leaving the altar.

Ignoring the excruciating pain in his head and his disorientation, Lumian sprang up, prepared to seize Aurore and flee the altar with his sister.

A figure obstructed his path. The black-robed man wearing his face struck him on the right cheek, sending him sprawling to the ground.

Lumian refused to give in. With desperate courage, he rose again and lunged at the black-robed man blocking his way.

Whack!

The black-robed man swung his fist, and Lumian instinctively evaded.

He stood stunned for a moment before a twisted smile crept across his face. He snarled, "Why are you so damn weak? As weak as me!"

Lumian dismissed thoughts of the padre and Pierre Berry as he lunged at the black-robed man.

The man sidestepped, raising his right foot to trip Lumian's calf. Lumian didn't evade. With the terrifying flexibility of a dancer, he forced a half-turn and extended his arm to grapple his foe.

Thud! He tumbled to the ground, taking the black-robed man down with him.

The man nimbly raised his right hand, gripping Lumian's throat and delivering a brutal knee to his groin.

Lumian didn't flinch. Bloodshot eyes locked on his opponent, he clawed at the man's eyes with his right hand.

"Ah!"

The black-robed man screamed as Lumian tore out his eyeballs, blood spurting forth. Lumian instinctively curled up, nearly passing out from the agony in his lower body.

Struggling to his feet, he shot the writhing man on the ground a sinister grin.

"Come on! Let's die together! You coward! Coward!"

He lunged once more, encircling the man's neck with his arms.

At that moment, Pierre Berry, at the edge of the altar, staggered to his feet. Brandishing his axe, he sprinted to Lumian's side.

Whack!

His axe descended, only to be halted by a faint gray mist that had materialized. It failed to harm Lumian.

Pierre Berry employed two different abilities, but couldn't penetrate the gray fog's defense.

Guillaume Bénet, the priest, didn't hesitate and began reciting a prayer.

"I implore you,

"I beseech your benediction.

"I plead with you to grant me…"

Before he could finish, the scene transformed.

The constellations in the sky shifted incrementally, deviating from their original positions.

Cordu trembled violently as every house and inch of soil surged toward the cathedral.

Silently, the villagers decomposed into organs. Eyeballs, mouths, noses, hearts, fingers, and flesh…

A scant few reassembled into different people. Some appeared normal, others malformed, some missing parts, and some with extra appendages.

The majority hurtled toward the altar and Aurore.

Cracks spread across Aurore's body, and she swiftly disintegrated into countless pieces of flesh.

Witnessing this, Lumian spiraled into despair.

Still, he refused to surrender. Seizing the black-robed man's head, he twisted it violently, snapping his neck under the man's horrified gaze.

Lumian rose and raced toward his sister.

But an invisible barrier surrounding Aurore obstructed his path.

Rumble!

With a muffled thud, the cathedral began to ascend. Trees, soil, and boulders from outside the village soared, accompanied by houses, furniture, and miscellaneous items.

The organs of most villagers merged with Aurore's flesh at the altar, contorting and writhing before morphing into a colossal being.

The giant stood four to five meters tall, boasting three heads and six arms. Its entire form was composed of flesh and organ fragments, its body riddled with cracks oozing yellow pus.

The central head of the giant, filled with pain and regret, strained to gaze at Lumian.

Transparent, blood-hued tears trickled from the corners of "his" eyes.

Witnessing this, Lumian's mind reeled as if cleaved by an axe.

His vision wavered as he "saw" the shattered cathedral, the steadily rising blood-red "peak," the thorny "city wall" formed by distorted houses, the encircling ruins around the "peak," and the various monsters forced to flee the area…

What… Lumian's head throbbed with pain again.

As he watched countless tiny beams of light shoot from the giant and surrounding monsters, landing on his chest, he realized that the scenes buried deep in his memories had been entirely unearthed. They were nearly identical to what he saw now.

This is… Lumian abruptly had a hunch, and his headache worsened.

Suddenly, everything before him turned eerily illusory, with pronounced cracks appearing like broken glass.

This is! Lumian finally recalled something.

Then, he saw the black-robed man transform into a pitch-black, repulsive liquid that soared before him and seeped into his left chest.

"Ah!"

Lumian screamed in agony as his surroundings crumbled.

He snapped his eyes open and found himself lying beneath the blood-red mountain peak. The encroaching darkness, signaling the onset of night, had nearly vanished.

Lumian instinctively sat up, leaning forward. He placed his hands on the ground and scanned his surroundings.

He saw a twisted, thorny "wall," a barren landscape devoid of vegetation, and the dream ruins beyond. He spotted Ryan, Leah, and Valentine lying at the edge of a room not far away.

They were sound asleep.

Lumian abruptly bowed his head, raised his hands, grasped his hair, and whispered in anguish, "Is reality a dream, and the dream reality? Is this the present or the past? Aurore. Is Aurore beyond saving?"

"Yes." A woman's voice echoed in the ruins.

Lumian looked up, bewildered, and faintly saw the enigmatic woman appear before him.

She approached, wearing the orange dress she'd donned at the beginning.

"That's why you were so desperate to obtain superpowers in your dream, regardless of the consequences. That's why you disregarded others' lives and even your own. You wanted to resolve the loop embodying the concept of a 'problem' as quickly as possible. That's why you couldn't control your instincts and uttered inappropriate words or performed inappropriate actions on certain occasions…"

Lumian gazed at the mysterious woman, dazed, realizing that the indescribable and inexplicable emotion in her eyes had resurfaced.

This time, he could finally decipher it.

It was pity.

Chapter 108: Report

Several days later, an investigation report on Cordu Village was submitted to Intis Intelligence and Homeland Security Committee's Bureau 8, the Machinery Hivemind of the Church of the God of Steam and Machinery, and the Eternal Blazing Sun Church's Inquisition.

Upon receipt, the brass immediately reviewed the report.

Background: Over the past year, numerous disappearances have occurred in the Feynapotter Kingdom's Grabaka Province, near the DariÃ¨ge region, and in the Lenburg Republic's Upper Hel state. Several Beyonders without official permission have mysteriously vanished, and these incidents seem to be connected to shepherds traveling across the three regions. Among them, those from Cordu Village became our primary focus.

Consequently, after receiving an unusual distress letter, we prioritized the mobilization of elite personnel and dispatched them as a joint investigation team.

The investigators' complete written statements are as follows:

The anomaly in Cordu Village can be categorized into two levels: reality and dreamscape.

Reality:

Cordu was ultimately destroyed by a large-scale but unsuccessful evil god sacrificial ritual. Only a small number of villagers survived.

Most villagers were utilized as nutrients for the failed creation of an evil god. The remaining individuals were reassembled in peculiar ways and transformed into various monsters.

The evil god sacrificial ritual altered the landscape. The river dried up and changed course. The village square and cathedral were elevated nearly 40 meters by a small-scale orogeny, forming a blood-colored pillar.

The failed evil god creation was located atop the pillar. However, when we discovered it, it had already been destroyed, potentially by self-destruction or interference from other factions.

Cordu's houses also underwent reassembly. Some formed a twisted, thorny city wall around the blood-colored pillar, while others were arranged in circular patterns...

In these severely damaged buildings, we found only a few coins and the most common livre bleu. We did not find any written information or anything that could clearly identify Cordu. The reason remains unknown.

Only the house of Lumian Lee--the target--contained books, newspapers, magazines, and other items that clearly identified it.

Within the ruins of Cordu, there are two abnormal areas surrounding the blood-colored pillar. One can induce a deep slumber, leading to a dreamscape, while the other is teeming with life, filled with flowers and trees, and features a self-rocking crib.

Our assumption regarding the latter area is that it is closely related to Madame Pualis of Cordu. (For a detailed explanation, refer to the Dreamscape section.)

At the other edge of the blood-colored pillar, we unearthed four relatively well-preserved corpses. The location likely corresponds to the original cathedral cemetery.

The first corpse was a woman, no more than twenty years old, who had been strangled to death.

The second corpse was a young man, also no more than twenty years old, who had drowned.

The third corpse was surrounded by coffin fragments. Female, over 60 years old, and died of mechanical asphyxiation. Based on other evidence, we speculate that she was suffocated with a pillow.

The fourth corpse was male and had not decomposed. His tongue had been severed while he was alive, and there were visible ligature marks on his neck.

Relevant speculations about the aforementioned corpses can be found in the Dreamscape section.

...

Upon entering the ruins of Cordu, we were likely affected by the power emanating from Lumian Lee's body. Our memories of the date became disordered, and the thought of leaving ceased to occur to us.

One by one, we fell asleep. While in the dream state, our bodies maintained a weak level of activity, eliminating the need for food replenishment for several days. Had we remained in this state for another half a month, it is uncertain whether we would have awoken from hunger or perished within the dream.

The entire ruin is locked in a loop capable of reverting to its original state at any moment. The trigger point is most likely tied to Lumian Lee's self-awareness and the restrictions he imposes. The former refers to the inevitable restart if Lumian Lee's subconscious anticipates it, while the latter stems from his desire to prevent anyone from disrupting Cordu's current state and the development of the dream. Any relevant event would immediately trigger a restart.

...

We inquired with villagers from surrounding areas, but they reported no abnormalities concerning Cordu.

Through their responses and previously gathered information, we confirmed three points:

First, there was never a legend of a deceased Warlock in Cordu (this refers to a story told by Lumian Lee in the dreamscape: Once, a Warlock lived in Cordu. After his death, an owl perched on his bed head for a time before flying away. The Warlock's corpse grew heavy, requiring nine bulls to transport it);

Second, no elves suspected of being in the form of lizards have appeared in the DariÃ¨ge area.

Third, Lent is traditional folklore and had no issues originally.

...

Dreamscape:

The dreamscape originated from Lumian Lee and is so realistic that we couldn't discern that we were dreaming.

We consulted psychologists and dream experts and synthesized their opinions to form a hypothesis about this dream.

It is an amalgamation of Lumian Lee's personal experiences, all the novels he has read, and his assumptions and conjectures based on previous events. The dream exhibits obvious coincidences and characteristics of wish fulfillment at certain critical junctures.

Within this dreamscape, not all the situations we encountered were real, nor were they entirely fabricated.

Disorganized facts, the minutiae of daily interactions, and the illusory scenes that left a profound impact on Lumian Lee were reassembled in a chaotic and symbolic manner, presenting themselves to us.

This is both a characteristic of the dreamscape and a manifestation of Lumian Lee's subconscious avoidance or fear of certain issues.

Moving forward, we will provide a detailed account of every aspect of our experience:

...

We ought to have realized that we were in a dream earlier on. The most evident clue was that we did not recall needing to change our clothes until Lumian Lee reminded us that our garments were severely damaged.

Though this is quite unusual, humans tend not to think critically within dreams.

It has been confirmed that we did not send telegrams. The corresponding responses may have originated from Lumian Lee's subconscious and the knowledge he possesses.

By combining the events in the dream with the situation in reality, we have arrived at the following conjectures:

Our consciousness and knowledge, to some extent, enriched the dream, and we may have inadvertently exposed some of our secrets to Lumian Lee.

There are at least two distinct evil god faiths in Cordu. One represents a power akin to Earth Mother's, embodied by Administrator Béost's wife, Madame Pualis. The other is the one followed by Guillaume Bénet, the former padre, and the majority of the villagers. The latter faith ultimately led to Cordu's destruction.

During the Lent celebration, the Spring Elf's beheading and send-off symbolized driving the force representing Madame Pualis out of Cordu. There may have been a violent conflict between the two factions. Simultaneously, the decapitation of Ava Lizier, the personification of the Spring Elf, symbolized that this girl had discovered something amiss in reality. When she attempted to escape or inform others, she was clandestinely strangled to death by Guillaume Bénet's group.

Reimund Greg was thrown into the river. The appearance of his Spirit Body beneath the cathedral symbolizes that, like Ava, he was deemed a snitch and subsequently drowned.

Jean Maury discovered that his wife, Sybil, had an affair with the former padre. In a fit of rage, he became mute. This symbolized that as a devout follower of the Eternal Blazing Sun, his tongue was cut off when he tried to inform others about the village's abnormalities. His subsequent disappearance implied that he had been murdered.

Naroka's death shares the same potent symbolism as Ava, Reimund, and Jean. First, she must have covertly followed Madame Pualis, intending to allow her deceased husband's spirit to return home through the aid of the soul messenger. Thus, her post-death behavior was to enter Paramita. Second, it is highly likely that she was killed by her youngest son, Arnault André, likely because she had discovered the issue with Guillaume Bénet's group and wanted to inform Madame Pualis.

Based on our search of the ruins, the Lent celebration, and Madame Pualis's claim that she could depart at a specific moment, it is implied that she, her husband Béost, butler Louis Lund, and lady's maid Cathy left Cordu before the ritual on the twelfth night. They remain alive, and their whereabouts are unknown.

This is reflected in the dream by the lady's refusal to assist at critical moments.

However, considering the circumstances in the peculiar area teeming with vitality, we suspect that Madame Pualis left something behind before her departure and indirectly participated in the ritual on the twelfth night.

The black-robed man in the Warlock's tomb likely symbolizes Lumian Lee's mutated persona due to his corruption. However, for some reason, Lumian Lee did not appear to be deeply corrupted, enabling him to easily triumph during the skirmish, given his increased courage...

The bizarre lizard-like creature found in the mouths of Aurore Lee, Michel Garrigue, and others might symbolize their corruption and mutation, eventually transforming them into an alternate version of themselves.

...

Questions:

1. How is Lumian Lee aware of the abilities of Guillaume Bénet, Pierre Berry, and others? If he had secretly observed them in reality, it would be understandable if he remained undetected once or twice. There must be an inherent reason why he could obtain so much information without facing consequences.

2. Why did the villagers and Aurore Lee behave indistinguishably from real people, making it challenging for us to recognize that we were in a dream until Lumian Lee believed that something abnormal should have occurred to them?

3. What does Paramita symbolize?

4. What do Madame Pualis's numerous children in the castle and the crib with an invisible object represent?

5. Why did Lumian Lee use lizard-like elves to portray the villagers' corruption?

6. What do Lumian Lee and Aurore Lee's attempts to escape Cordu and enter Paramita signify?

7. Why did the ritual on the twelfth night fail?

8. How can Lumian Lee enable us to enter his dream? He evidently lacks the ability to do so.

9. Why did he suddenly acquire normal Beyonder powers?

10. How did he survive and cause the ruins of Cordu to enter a loop?

11. Aurore Lee's abnormalities occurred at entirely different times during the two cycles. What does this indicate?

12. What does the legend of the deceased Warlock symbolize?

13. What does the Warlock's corpse in the coffin in the underground tomb represent?

14. What does the owl symbolize?

15. What does the change in the horoscope signify?

16. What is the origin of the matter?

...

Conclusions and Recommendations:

This is a quintessential disaster resulting from the worship of an evil god. Currently, six known survivors exist:

Lumian Lee, former padre Guillaume Bénet, Pualis de Roquefort, Béost, Louis Lund, and Cathy.

The latter five are adherents of evil gods. We must locate and eliminate them as soon as possible.

Directly killing Lumian Lee is not advised. Until his issues are understood and resolved, his death might trigger an even more severe anomaly. The optimal solution is to capture and securely contain him.

Reporters: Ryan Vitia of Machinery Hivemind; Major Leah Bellot of Bureau 8; and Purifier Valentine de Lacourt of the Inquisition.

Chapter 109: Minute Hope

Days earlier, beneath the crimson "peak," adjacent to the warped "city wall."

Lumian knelt on the ground, gazing up at the enigmatic woman as she approached.

Her words echoed in his ears, only to gradually grow muffled.

Lumian's hands pressed against the ground, clenching the soil as if attempting to crush it into liquid.

As the mysterious woman halted about a meter away, he scrambled to his feet, anxiety gripping his voice, "Didn't you say there's still hope? Didn't you claim Aurore and the others could be saved if I broke out of the loop myself?"

His voice grew hoarser with each word.

The enigmatic woman remained silent, her eyes filled with pity as she gazed at him.

Lumian hesitated before asking, hope lacing his words, "There's still hope, right?

"That's not just a fleeting dream. During my discussion with Aurore, she spoke of things I had never heard of—like how the description of an honorific name can hint at two separate entities!"

His eyes locked onto the woman, fear and hope battling as he scrutinized her every move.

At last, she nodded.

"There is indeed hope."

Lumian's eyes brightened, waiting for her to elaborate.

In a gentle voice, the woman explained, "In truth, Aurore has already died, but mystically, she's not entirely gone.

"Do you recall the soft, faint sounds you hear from within your body each time you perform the Summoning Dance? Do you remember the light fragments from Aurore and the others that flew into your chest on the twelfth night ritual?"

"Are those their Spirit Bodies, their voices?" Lumian interrupted, eagerness filling his voice.

The woman responded, a mix of calm and pity, "They can only be considered soul fragments.

"At the end of the twelfth night, you became a conduit for the hidden entity to unleash its horrifying power. The surrounding believers, including the soul fragments of the sacrifice, were absorbed by you. Guillaume Bénet, who led the ritual, was the sole exception.

"Later, those soul fragments and the potent corruptive power were sealed in the left side of your chest by my lord.

"That's why, as you became increasingly 'awake' in your dreams and sensed the date and loop more clearly, Aurore and the other villagers seem more and more lifelike. They even displayed a degree of self-awareness and cognition.

"To truly awaken from the dream and restrain the looping power consuming the ruins, you had to rely on yourself. You had to find the courage to confront the pain, face the truth, and chase after the elusive hope.

"If I were to resolve it, there's only one option: to completely annihilate you and the ruins of Cordu. Otherwise, the corruption within you will seep out uncontrollably, and Aurore and the others will truly perish in the realm of mysticism."

As the mysterious woman mentioned the twelfth-night ritual, Lumian couldn't help but remember.

A sharp pain stabbed his head, and only a few images surfaced.

Aurore, with vacant eyes, shoved him away from the altar.

Beams of light burst from Aurore and the villagers, spiraling into the vortex on his chest.

Guillaume Bénet, the padre, revealed a shocked expression as he fled the altar.

Beyond that, Lumian couldn't recall anything else. Only the events within the dream were clear, as if some force prevented him from remembering the rest.

His face contorted, his body trembling.

"I-I can't remember much…"

The woman nodded.

"That's normal. Firstly, it's a subconscious self-protection to prevent an overload of painful memories and intense scenes from causing you to collapse and lose control. Secondly, there are things you haven't witnessed and don't know the truth about. I don't know either.

"Yes, I'll need you to do something in Trier eventually. There are one, no, two exceptional psychologists I know there. I can arrange an appointment for you and see who's available to treat you. They can help you remember more and reconstruct the events in Cordu as much as possible."

Lumian's emotions roiled as he listened, but all he could muster was a soft, "Thank you…"

Fists clenched, he asked anxiously, "Then what can I do to bring Aurore and the others back?"

The woman sighed, admitting, "I don't know either."

Seeing Lumian's eyes darken, she added, "But you have to believe that true miracles exist in this world.

"And the great existence I mentioned earlier is synonymous with Miracle."

Despair and hope swelled in Lumian's heart.

Though he knew the mysterious woman before him was likely offering comfort and hope, he couldn't help but say, "You said that once I unlocked the secret of the dream, you'd tell me the honorific name of that great existence."

Her expression grew solemn, her tone serious.

"I'll tell you now. Remember it well.

"His honorific name is: The Fool that doesn't belong to this era, the mysterious ruler above the gray fog; the King of Yellow and Black who wields good luck."

As she spoke, Lumian felt his consciousness slipping, as if he could see a thin gray fog and a looming castle above it.

A gaze weighed upon him.

Simultaneously, the entire village of Cordu shuddered as the thin fog engulfing the area receded rapidly.

By the time Lumian regained clarity, sunlight had already filtered through the sky, casting golden specks upon the crimson mountain peak and desolate earth.

Lumian recalled the three lines of the honorific name and his conversation with Aurore in his dream.

He winced, a bitter smile forming as he said, "I thought there'd be a description of the past, present, and future."

The enigmatic woman in the orange dress tersely acknowledged his remark.

"There should be another one in the future, but if I use a description other than the three lines to pray to Him now, I can't guarantee the response will be from Him.

"You should know that such a situation is very dangerous."

Silent for a few seconds, Lumian then asked, a glint of hope in his eyes, "If I work diligently for you, can I eventually summon that great being to resurrect Aurore?"

"That's one way," the woman said softly. "You can also explore other methods. I won't stop you. I'm merely reminding you that many resurrection techniques have grave flaws."

Lumian nodded, signaling his understanding.

He didn't dare to inquire, yet couldn't help but ask, "Is there a significant chance of resurrection?"

The enigmatic woman glanced at him and sighed.

"It's very, very slim, but I know you'll still pursue it."

Lumian pressed his lips together, remaining silent.

It wasn't that he didn't want to assure her he'd do everything in his power to find a way to bring Aurore back, but he feared that speaking would reveal the sorrow surging within his heart.

After a few seconds, he asked in a raspy voice, "What do you need me to do in Trier?"

"Join a covert organization and help me gather some intel," the woman replied simply. "I'll tell you how to contact them once you're in Trier."

She added, "Besides uncovering the truth from your memories, you can also look into the 'survivors' of this catastrophe."

"Survivors?" Lumian's eyes narrowed.

The woman nodded.

"Besides you, there are five others: Madame Pualis, Béost, Louis Lund, Cathy, who left Cordu before the twelfth night, and Guillaume Bénet, who was protected by the ritual as its host. They escaped before this place was completely destroyed."

"The padre is still alive?" Lumian's lips curled up.

The enigmatic lady locked eyes with him and said, "If my divination is accurate, they should be hiding somewhere in Trier."

"Very good." Lumian smiled, wiping the corners of his eyes.

The woman then looked at Ryan, Leah, and Valentine, who slept near the room's edge on the thorny city wall, and asked Lumian, "What do you plan to do with them?

"If they leave alive, you'll undoubtedly be hunted by Bureau 8, Machinery Hivemind, and the Inquisition.

"From now on, you can only hide. You'll never live openly under the sun. You'll be forever accompanied by darkness, filth, and danger."

Lumian glanced at Ryan and the others, chuckling hoarsely.

"Will killing them bring Aurore back?"

The woman shook her head.

"No."

Lumian scoffed, bowing his head with his eyes closed.

Soon, he looked up and asked, "What's the name of the organization I'm about to join? How should I contact you once I'm in Trier?"

The woman sighed faintly.

"I'll tell you when the time comes.

"I'll give you my messenger's summoning method and the corresponding medium later. Contact me through that."

Lumian fell quiet for a moment before posing another question. "Did I possess the power to trap Cordu in a loop?"

"Strictly speaking, you didn't. At least not before receiving the Circle Inhabitant boon," the woman explained casually. "This place is corrupted by that hidden being everywhere, and the power level sealed in your left chest is quite high. Therefore, when your emotions fluctuate and you're in a subconscious state, you can mobilize the corresponding specialness to reset this place." She paused, adding, "However, you've always been physically in a loop.

"The corruption sealed within your body allows you to reset your form at 6 a.m. every day and return to 6 a.m. on the twelfth night. Only changes brought about by Beyonder characteristics and boons are retained."

Is this the real reason why I recover every time I wake up from injuries in the ruins? No wonder I didn't starve to death… Lumian immediately understood.

He glanced at his body, a self-deprecating smile forming.

"It'll always be that day…"

That nightmarish day.

Without waiting for the woman's response, he looked up and asked, "How should I address you?"

She smiled, beginning to reply, "You can call me…"

Before she could finish, cards suddenly danced in the air.

Each card bore a unique pattern, fluttering towards Lumian.

Instinctively, Lumian extended his right hand, attempting to catch some of the cards.

At that moment, most of the cards vanished, leaving just one.

The card gently settled in Lumian's palm, face-up. It depicted a figure extending their scepter into the sky and pointing at the ground with their left hand.

Tarot card—Magician!

Lumian glanced up in shock, realizing the enigmatic woman had disappeared.

Should I call her Madam Magician? Lumian subconsciously flipped the tarot card in his hand, revealing rows of minute Intis script:

"The spirit that wanders about the unfounded, an upper world creature that is friendly to humans, a messenger that belongs solely to Magician."

Lumian studied the words for a moment before tucking the tarot card away.

He glanced at Ryan and the others, then turned around and staggered away from the area.

As he walked, Lumian couldn't help but look back at the blood-stained mountain peak and the twisted, thorny city wall.

The Cordu in his memory had already morphed into this. It bore no resemblance to what it once was, but Lumian still tried his best to observe and search, hoping to overlap the scene in his mind with reality.

He wanted to take another look at the giant atop the mountain, but he knew that it would cause him grave harm.

Unwittingly, Lumian slowly circled the blood-stained mountain peak and thorny city wall, his gaze constantly scanning the distorted and chaotic objects.

He knew what he was looking for, and he knew he would never find it.

Just like that, Lumian arrived at the spot where the wooden wall had blocked him.

Most of the area had collapsed, revealing the garden behind it.

The garden was lush and vibrant, a stark contrast to the blood-stained "peak," the warped "city wall," and the ruins on the other side.

In the center was a brown wooden crib, reminiscent of the one Lumian had seen in Madame Pualis's castle.

He subconsciously leaned over and realized that there was a small human-shaped indentation on the slightly aged white cotton swaddling cloth in the crib. It was as if a baby had once lain here, but its whereabouts were now unknown.

What does this mean? Just as this thought crossed Lumian's mind, he felt the sunlight shining down from the sky grow much brighter.

He instinctively looked up and saw golden flames completely engulfing the mountaintop.

The three-headed, six-armed giant loomed in the inferno, seemingly melting.

Lumian stared blankly for a few seconds before suddenly raising his hands to shield his face.

The "sunlight" was too intense.

…

In the semi-subterranean two-story building at the edge of the ruins.

Lumian trudged to his sister's bedroom with the 237 verl d'or and 46 coppet he had collected. He grabbed a brown suitcase filled with clothes and memorabilia and pushed open the door.

He was here to say goodbye.

As soon as he stepped in and saw the desk with the manuscripts, his head throbbed as an image surfaced.

Aurore's eyes darted around, no longer vacant. She looked at Lumian, who had been pushed away, and said with difficulty,

"My notebook…"

Grande Soeur's witchcraft notebook? Is there important information in it? Lumian pressed his forehead, walked to the desk, and opened the drawer below.

Familiar dark notebooks greeted his eyes.

He suddenly remembered that Aurore had taught him a great deal of mysticism knowledge before Cordu was destroyed.

…

In Dariège, at the steam locomotive station.

The ticket agent eyed Lumian and asked, "Where are your identification documents?"

"I forgot," replied Lumian, clad in a linen shirt, a dark jacket, and a round-rimmed black hat, as he held a brown suitcase.

He then turned and walked away from the window.

A short man in a half-top hat and black suit approached Lumian, whispering, "Do you want to take the courier carriage? It's headed for Bigorre."

"Does it require identification?" Lumian inquired.

The short man chuckled, responding, "No need. Our business is about to be crushed by the steam locomotive. Why would we need identification documents?

"So, are you taking it or not? This is the last remnant of romance from the classical era!"

Lumian gave a slight nod and asked, "How much?"

The short man's enthusiasm flared.

"20 verl d'or to Bigorre, takes about a day. There are five stops in between. Each stop allows for a rest, changing carriage drivers and horses. Two of the stops also provide free food."

Without further questions, Lumian followed the short man to a deserted street nearby.

A large carriage drawn by four horses was parked at the roadside.

Upon boarding, Lumian discovered the interior was rather spacious. Like the public carriage, it had two rows separated by an aisle, as well as space for larger luggage.

He found a seat by the window, placed his suitcase down, and pulled out a book with a dark red cover.

As the horses neighed outside, Lumian flipped through the book, illuminated by sunlight streaming through the window.

Beside him sat a man in his thirties with a well-groomed mustache, brown hair, blue eyes, and smart attire.

He glanced at the book in Lumian's hand, asking with interest, "Eternal Love? Aurore Lee's book? The one featuring the female lead named Kingsley and the male lead named Ciel?"

"Yes." Lumian nodded.

The mustached man became chatty.

"This book is Aurore Lee's earliest work. The writing was quite amateurish, particularly the dialogue between characters. It doesn't sound like something people would say in real life at all. It's so emotional, it's uncomfortable."

"Indeed." Lumian nodded again.

He bowed his head and flipped to the last few pages of the book, his gaze resting on the relevant passage.

"On her deathbed, Kingsley clutched Ciel's outstretched hand and gazed at his anguished expression. She forced a smile and said with difficulty, 'Stupid, live well.'"

(End of Part 1—Nightmare)

Chapter 110: Foreigner

For you are dust, and to dust you shall return--From the Bible, Genesis 3:19

The imposing grayish-white city wall, rising to a height of three meters, loomed before Lumian, stretching as far as the eye could see.

A multitude of private carriages, four-seaters, open tops, tandems, and cargo carriers queued, awaiting entry through the city gate.

Blue-uniformed tax collectors and white-shirted, black-vested police officers inspected each carriage methodically. Occasionally, they would demand identification or order pedestrians to open their suitcases.

Lumian, clutching his brown suitcase, scanned the scene, casting furtive glances as he sought a way to bypass the checkpoint.

Before long, a man who had observed his behavior approached.

"What's the matter, friend? You look a bit uneasy." The man was somewhat shorter than Lumian but twice as broad. His cheeks were plump, causing his blue eyes to appear minuscule.

As he neared, Lumian caught a whiff of sweat mingled with cheap cologne, prompting him to wrinkle his nose in distaste.

Lumian gestured toward the gates, puzzled, and inquired, "What's all this for? Are they searching for criminals? Why screen those entering Trier and not the ones leaving?"

The disheveled, blond-haired man in a billowy blue shirt appraised Lumian.

"My friend, are you from some small city or village?"

Upon seeing Lumian nod, the man sighed and explained, "They're collecting taxes! Tariffs!"

"Tariffs for entering Trier?" Lumian asked.

The man nodded.

"Exactly. This city wall encircles Trier. There are 54 gates, each manned by tax collectors and police. They also apprehend wanted criminals."

"Are all goods taxed?" Lumian inquired, curiosity piqued.

The man touched his blue canvas shirt and replied, "Almost everything; only grains and flour are exempt.

"Once upon a time they were, but after the war a few years back, the price of bread in Trier skyrocketed, inciting riots and protests. Eventually, the government abolished tariffs on all food.

"Ah, if only drinkers were as bold! Liquor, wine, and champagne are taxed the most. Many people venture to the suburbs on weekends to drink tax-free alcohol at small taverns. They call it 'town-hopping.'"

"Interesting..." Lumian nodded thoughtfully.

The man glanced around and lowered his voice.

"If you want to avoid the tariffs, I can help you into the city. All you have to do is pay me a small fee."

"You mean bribe them?" Lumian gestured with his chin at the tax collector and police near the city gate.

The man snorted.

"Their greed is greater than an elephant's appetite. I'll show you a path into the city without checkpoints."

"But isn't Trier completely surrounded by walls?" Lumian didn't conceal his bafflement.

The man grinned.

"You'll see soon enough." Then he teased, "Noble sir, do you require my assistance?"

Lumian considered for a moment before asking, "How much will it cost?"

"Three verl d'or," the man replied with a congenial smile. "If you agree, we can depart immediately. You can pay once we're inside the city."

"Deal." Lumian adjusted his dark wide-brimmed hat, picked up his brown suitcase, and followed the rotund man away from the city gate.

Fifteen minutes later, they arrived at a hill blanketed in vegetation and soil, with grayish-white stones peeking through.

Scaffolding, decaying pillowwood, and numerous pits were scattered about. It appeared to be an abandoned mine.

The rotund man guided Lumian through heaps of jumbled rocks to the entrance of a mine.

"Is this the shortcut?" Lumian asked cautiously.

The portly man in the blue shirt chuckled.

"You really don't know much about Trier.

"Ever heard the saying that Underground Trier is even larger than the Trier above ground?!"

"No." Lumian shook his head.

The man elucidated, "Trier used to be much smaller. It was surrounded by quarries that supplied stone for building the city. As the population swelled, the city had to expand outward, enveloping these quarries. As a result, the ground became riddled with holes and mine tunnels.

"Add to that the portion of Trier that sank underground in the Fourth Epoch, plus the sewers, subways, and gas pipes installed by the government--aren't these more extensive than what's on the surface?"

Lumian's eyes widened in understanding.

"Are you taking me into the city through Underground Trier?"

"Yes." The man turned, stooped, and entered the mine. He casually inquired, "What should I call you?"

"Ciel." Lumian brushed back the golden hair at his temples. "And you?"

"Just call me Ramayes." The burly man rummaged through a pile of stones in the mine's corner and unearthed an iron-black lantern.

Clearly made of metal, the rusted lantern was cylindrical, with the upper section slightly narrower than the lower. A black rubber lining encircled its base.

At the junction of the narrow and wide cylinders, a polished trumpet-shaped metal piece was embedded, though a few rust spots remained.

Ramayes produced a matchbox, fiddled with it briefly, and an orange flame tinged with blue erupted from the metal trumpet, illuminating the mine's depths.

"What's this?" Lumian asked, puzzled.

Holding the iron-black lamp, Ramayes ventured underground, chattering.

"Carbide lamp.

"Invented by the Cave Association. Many miners use it. I don't know why it glows, but I just need to put some rocks and water in, attach them top and bottom, and when needed, press here and ignite the mouth with flames."

Carbide and water react to form acetylene, which burns and emits light? Lumian recalled the chemistry he'd studied a few months prior.

He remained silent for a time as he followed Ramayes underground along a disused mine tunnel. Then he inquired, "The Cave Association?"

"Trier Cave Association. Formed by a group of spelunking enthusiasts. Nowadays, they seem to be involved with the mines." Ramayes turned to Lumian, walking beside him, and asked with a grin, "Why didn't you just take the steam locomotive into Trier? The train station checkpoints aren't that strict. They just do spot checks."

Lumian reminisced and replied, "I wanted to experience the last vestiges of romance from the classical era."

"A courier carriage?" Ramayes chortled. "That's far pricier than a steam locomotive. Your accent gives you away as from the Reem or Riston region. The journey from the south to Trier runs about 120 verl d'or, doesn't it? And it takes four and a half days! On a steam locomotive, you'd pay less than 50 verl d'or for a third-class seat and arrive in under 20 hours. So, the last bit of romance from the classical era, you say? Sounds more like a con job for folks like you. You must've shelled out a pretty penny, huh?"

Lumian responded candidly, "A fair amount. I've only got 267 verl d'or left."

Lamayer glanced at him once more and averted his eyes.

What a waste...

Clutching the carbide lamp, he traversed an archway and veered into another passage bathed in the orange-yellow glow cast by the lamp's flame.

Lumian glanced up and noticed rocks nestled in the darkness overhead, adorned with moss that wept droplets of water.

The path underfoot was pockmarked with holes, and stone pillars flanked both sides, supporting the cave's ceiling.

Stones and various objects were heaped between the pillars, creating a "street" wide enough for six or seven people to walk abreast.

Under the carbide lamp's illumination, a steel nameplate affixed to a stone pillar came into view. Inscribed on it in Intis: "Rue Ã Droite."

"There's a street name down here?" Lumian queried, puzzled.

Gripping the carbide lamp, Ramayes chuckled and replied, "Didn't I tell you? This is Underground Trier.

"In fact, it was constructed decades ago during city renovations. The brass deemed the underground too chaotic, a veritable labyrinth. Rioters, murderers, smugglers, and cultists all found refuge here, and something had to be done. Additionally, numerous houses had crumbled and sunk due to the underground quarries. Reinforcement was necessary. So, City Hall spent nearly a decade repairing pillars, constructing foundations, and connecting the previously isolated quarries, subterranean ruins, catacombs, and sewers.

"To prevent workers from getting lost, the underground streets were named to correspond with those above during the renovations. Roads, squares, and alleys were recreated down here, and nameplates were hung, marking the streets. If future repairs were needed, the names could just be referenced."

"In other words," Lumian gestured overhead with his free hand. "The real Rue Ã Droite is just above us?"

"Yes." Ramayes pressed on. "This is Underground Trier. There's an anti-smuggling wall up ahead. Quarry police often patrol the area, but don't fret. I'll guide you through a small tunnel. Heh, the brass, with their phony collars and lies, believe they can manage Underground Trier like they do above ground, but they're only aware of half the entrances and modified routes..."

As he spoke, he led Lumian to a dead end and located a narrow crevice to crawl through. Lumian trailed closely.

Two or three minutes later, they emerged from the small tunnel. Before them stood a "wall" composed of stone pillars and a "street" wedged between.

Just then, a burly figure appeared beside the stone pillar, holding a carbide lamp, and addressed Ramayes, "Is this our customer?"

Ramayes spun around and grinned at Lumian.

"Foreigner, I've changed my mind. The price is 265 verl d'or. Wasn't I generous to leave you enough for bread and a hotel tonight?"

"What if I refuse?" Lumian's face displayed a mix of fear and defiance.

Ramayes's chubby face quivered with laughter.

"What do you think will happen? Didn't your mother warn you not to trust strangers too easily when you're away from home?"

He and the burly man closed in on Lumian from opposite directions.

Lumian smiled, set down the suitcase, and advanced towards Ramayes and his accomplice.

In the flickering firelight, over ten seconds swiftly ticked by, and the carbide lamp ended up in Lumian's possession.

Lumian crouched beside the trembling Ramayes, his face battered and swollen, and pulled all the banknotes from his wallet. In the dim orange and blue light, he counted them with grave intent.

Gently patting Ramayes's right cheek with the wad of cash, Lumian grinned.

"Now there's only 319 verl d'or left."

With that, he pocketed the banknotes and strolled toward a path that appeared to lead up to the surface.

A nameplate dangled from a stone pillar, inscribed with two lines of Intisian script: "Rue du Pot de Chambre, Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman."

Someone had scratched out 'Rue du Pot de Chambre' with a stone and scrawled a new name beside it: "Rue Anarchie."

Chapter 111: Messenger

Clutching the carbide lamp, Lumian climbed the stone steps.

Soon, light appeared ahead, accompanied by a cacophony of noise. Emerging from the silent underground, it felt as if the entire world had sprung to life.

Lumian quickened his pace, twisting the valve on the carbide lamp with his right hand, stopping the water droplets from dripping into the carbide pile below. As the acetylene gas burned out, the flames in the metal mouth gradually faded.

Just then, he caught a glimpse of the scene outside.

Tall and low buildings appeared to have solidified at the moment of collapse, either tilted or on the verge of tumbling down, but standing stubbornly.

Pedestrians wore old or tattered clothing, and arguments and curses filled the air, the noise never subsiding.

At the underground exit, Lumian spotted a five-story building called the Auberge du Coq Doré.

The top two floors of the brownish building seemed like later additions, contrasting with the Roselle-era pillar walls, arches, large windows, and patterns on the lower floors. It looked so simplistic it could've been transplanted from Cordu.

Lugging his suitcase and carbide lamp, Lumian navigated through children scavenging for orange peels and quarreling adults until he reached the entrance of the Auberge du Coq Doré.

He glanced at the hotel floor, littered with yellow phlegm, shredded paper, spilled ketchup, and alcohol stains. Occasionally, a horde of bedbugs would congregate on the ceiling and walls.

Had his hands been free, Lumian would have applauded the scene.

Cordu's Ol' Tavern was much cleaner than this!

He found a route devoid of filth and headed to the front desk at a moderate pace.

A plump, middle-aged woman sat there, her grayish-white dress stained with oil and her brown hair tied in a simple bun.

She looked up at Lumian with her blue eyes, unfazed by the disdain and resistance on his face.

"This is the best and cheapest inn on Rue Anarchie, in the market area. But the owner's a miser who can't bear to hire cleaning ladies. He only gets freelancers to clean it once a week."

"Does he skimp on your salary too?" Lumian asked, feigning naivete.

This set the woman off.

"Do you want a room or not?"

"Yes." Lumian quickly clarified his intent, looking frightened. "I'd like to know the price."

The woman calmed down.

"It depends on the room. The top two floors are 3 verl d'or a week, and the bottom two are 5 verl d'or. If that's too much, you can knock on doors and ask who's willing to share their bed or rent out floor space for 1 to 1.5 verl d'or a week."

"Give me a room on the lower two floors." Lumian reasoned it'd be easier to escape, whether by jumping from a window or taking the stairs.

The plump woman sized him up.

"Pay 15 verl d'or upfront for the whole month, and it's yours."

"Why the discount?" Lumian feigned the ignorance of a country bumpkin new to the city.

The woman sneered.

"Many people have no choice but to move or leave Trier after a week or two. This place is both heaven and hell."

Lumian pulled out three light-blue 5 verl d'or notes and handed them over.

The currency was all in 5-verl d'or denominations, featuring the bust of Intis Republic's first president, Levanx, along with laboring farmers and herders on the front, and the Hornacis mountain range on the back.

Upon receiving the full month's rent, the plump woman's expression visibly relaxed. She produced two brass keys strung together and tossed them to Lumian.

"Room 207 on the second floor. There's a small diner downstairs and a tavern in the basement. You'll find sulfur in the room's table drawer to help chase away those damn bugs. My name's Fels. If you need anything, just come to me."

"Thank you, Madame Fels." Lumian took the keys, grabbed his suitcase and carbide lamp, and headed upstairs to the second floor.

As he ascended, he noticed newspapers and cheap pink paper plastered on the walls, though some had already peeled away, exposing the cracks they were meant to hide and an abundance of bedbugs.

The second floor contained eight rooms and two washrooms. Each room was cramped, with a bed to the right. A table nestled between the bed's edge and the wall sat beneath the window, a rickety chair positioned in front of it.

There was no other furniture, but rows of bedbugs crawled across the ceiling.

Having grown accustomed to Aurore's cleanliness, Lumian set down his suitcase and carbide lamp, opened the drawer, and took out some sulfur. He lit it with a match, and as the pungent smell filled the room, the bedbugs fled.

Within seconds, Lumian detected the sulfuric scent from the room next door.

Almost simultaneously, some of the bedbugs returned, seeking refuge.

He quickly understood the situation: he had smoked the bedbugs into the adjacent room, and the tenant had used sulfur to chase them back.

Amused, Lumian bent down, opened his suitcase, and took out pen and paper.

Amidst the potent sulfur smell, he sat at the wooden table and began writing.

"Honorable Madam Magician,

"I've arrived in Trier as agreed. Please advise on my next steps, which organization to join, and how to contact them...

"Are the two psychologists available soon? When can I receive treatment?

"Do you have any new leads on Guillaume Bénet and Madame Pualis..."

After penning the letter, Lumian retrieved an orange candle from his sister's room.

Lighting it with his spirituality, the scent of citrus and lavender enveloped the air.

Instinctively, he closed his eyes, his expression calming.

After standing quietly for a minute or two, Lumian used the ritual silver dagger to sanctify the candle and create a wall of spirituality. He then dripped essential oil on the flame.

With the preparations complete, he placed the Magician card on the altar, a medium for summoning a messenger to pinpoint the incantation.

Lumian stepped back, observing the misty orange fire, and muttered in ancient Hermes, "I!"

An invisible wind swirled within the spiritual wall, dimming the room.

Switching to Hermes, he continued, "I summon in my name: The spirit that wanders about the unfounded, an upper world creature that is friendly to humans, a messenger that belongs solely to Magician."

As the wind howled, the candle flame turned deep blue, casting a sinister, cold atmosphere.

Lumian focused on the candle, awaiting Madam Magician's messenger.

After a few seconds of silence, the letter on the altar floated into the air. Surprised, Lumian glanced up to find a "doll" the size of a man's forearm perched atop the carved window.

With long blond hair, light-blue eyes, pale-white skin, and an exquisite pale-gold dress, the "doll" bore strikingly realistic yet bizarre features.

In the next second, the letter landed in the "doll's" smooth, shiny hand that lacked any skin-like texture.

"Are you Madam Magician's messenger?" Lumian asked.

The "doll" slowly lowered its head, Lumian's figure reflecting in its unfocused, light-blue eyes.

Its voice, ethereal and angry, replied, "Choose a cleaner environment next time!"

With that, the "doll" vanished along with the letter.

Lumian was stunned for a moment before murmuring, "Didn't Aurore say the altar just needed to be clean and tidy?"

As he glanced around, he noticed numerous bedbug corpses on the floor.

The room was now insect-free.

This is better than sulfur... Lumian stroked his chin and ended the summoning ritual.

Lumian habitually cleaned the room before squatting beside his suitcase to retrieve his toiletries.

Aurore's dark-colored witchcraft notebooks lay undisturbed at the bottom.

During his journey to Trier, Lumian had already skimmed through them without finding anything suspicious. Aurore wasn't one for recording her personal thoughts or daily minutiae; her witchcraft notebook was purely dedicated to mystical knowledge, filled with incantations, symbols, and principles for selecting ingredients.

Likely due to Aurore's penchant for keeping detailed accounts, most spells included information about when and where they were obtained, their cost, or the items exchanged for them.

Lumian realized the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society likely had numerous interest groups. Aurore frequently attended 'Academy' gatherings, where many spells were traded among members. She also participated in exchanges with other groups, occasionally acquiring mystical knowledge and spells from events like April Fool's Day.

Finding nothing amiss in the notebooks, Lumian resolved to continue his investigation after consulting the psychologists and locating Padre and Madame Pualis.

He knew his sister wouldn't have mentioned the notebook without reason at that critical juncture. There must have been an important message she wished to convey.

Gazing at the dark-covered notebooks, Lumian determined to study his sister's recorded knowledge in reverse order, starting that night.

Although using spells in combat was nearly impossible for a Hunter, understanding them could help him identify any issues with the corresponding mystical knowledge or detect abnormalities.

With his belongings packed, Lumian's stomach growled in hunger.

He stood up and glanced at the window. The dimming light of dusk allowed him to vaguely see his reflection in the glass.

His hair, now dyed blond and grown out, barely disguised his features. Dressed in a white shirt, black vest, and dark suit, his cold, indifferent expression made him appear years older. Even Guillaume Bénet would find him only vaguely familiar.

Lumian patted his face, coaxing a smile, before opening the door and stepping out.

Chapter 112: Charlie

In the dimly-lit cellar of the Auberge du Coq Doré, a cozy bar had just enough space for 20 to 30 patrons.

The moment Lumian stepped in, he saw a man leap onto a small round table, beer in hand, and address the handful of customers around him,

"Ladies and gentlemen, lend me your ears! I experienced something unbelievable two days ago!"

By the scant light from the steam lamps on the wall, Lumian discerned that the man was quite young, around 22 or 23 years old. He had short, light-brown hair and a clean-shaven face, which was flushed, likely from the alcohol.

Wearing a flaxen-colored shirt, black trousers, and leather slip-ons, the man stood just over 1.7 meters tall. However, his unusually short limbs made him appear closer to 1.6 meters.

Waving his stubby arms and slurring his words, he continued, "How incredible was it? I'll tell you, it's changed my entire perspective on faith. As a believer in the God of Steam and Machinery, I'm now ready to convert to the Eternal Blazing Sun!

"Listen up, isn't that astonishing?

"Can you imagine how famished I was after five days? I'd lost my job and been fired by that good-for-nothing manager. I couldn't find work even after exhausting my savings.

"For five days, I starved, barely able to leave my bed. I was on the verge of death. Do you know how that feels? Oh, may God bless you and never let you find out.

"In that moment, I couldn't bear the thought of dying like this. I came to Trier to make my fortune, and I had to do something. That's when I noticed the portrait of Saint Viève on the wall.

"Yes, with great effort, I managed to get up, kneel before Her, and pray for Her help. I was still a believer in the God of Steam and Machinery then, but what wouldn't a starving man do? Besides, it couldn't hurt, right?

"Five minutes after I finished praying, an old friend dropped by and saw my dire state. He didn't have much himself, but he reminded me that I'd rented a kerosene lamp for use at night. The deposit was 35 coppets—a whole seven licks!

"God, I'd completely forgotten. With my friend's help, I returned the lamp and used the refund to buy bread and half a liter of cheap booze. The bread was cold and damp, like it'd been doused in putty. The alcohol was a bit off and weak, but it was the most delicious meal I've ever had. Ladies and gentlemen, I was reborn!

"I found a new job today, and tomorrow, during my break, I'll light a candle at the nearest Saint Viève Cathedral!"

Saint Viève was a female angel mentioned in the Eternal Blazing Sun Church's Bible. She was one of the city's guardian angels in Trier. The other two were prominent figures from the God of Steam and Machinery Church and the annals of Intis.

Lumian observed the young man's blue eyes sparkling with enthusiasm as he ambled towards the bar.

The bartender, who was polishing a glass with a cloth, glanced at the orator on the round table and chuckled.

"Charlie never could keep quiet. Always talking."

In his mid-thirties, the bartender sported a thin, dark brown beard circling his mouth, and his hair of the same color was tied back in an artistically casual ponytail.

Lumian took a seat at the bar and asked with a grin, "Is he telling the truth?"

"Who knows?" The bartender shrugged. "You must've heard the proverb: It's better to trust a snake than a Reemian. Charlie is from Reem."

Reem and Riston Provinces both hailed from the south. Their accents were similar, but they were mountainous provinces more akin to Lenburg.

Lumian mused aloud,"I don't think that's the whole proverb. I feel like there's more to it."

The bartender's azure eyes sparkled with amusement as he replied, "You're right. That proverb is longer than you'd think.

"Trust a Loenese over a Reemian. Trust a snake over a Reemian, but never trust the Islanders."

The islands referred to the Fog Sea archipelago west of Intis. This was one of the Republic's overseas colonies. The Islanders often played the roles of thugs and con artists in Trier.

Without waiting for Lumian to inquire further, the bartender cast a mocking glance at Charlie, still droning on, and whispered, "If he really experienced that, he certainly doesn't know that the portrait of Saint Viève isn't in his room."

"Then whose is it?" Lumian asked, amused.

The bartender struggled to suppress his laughter.

"Charlie lives in Room 504. The previous tenant frequented the Quartier de la Princesse Rouge's Rue de la Muraille. The image in the room was of one of Trier's most famous prostitutes a few years back, Susanna Matisse.

"Just think. Charlie believes he's praying to an angel for help, but he's actually praying to a prostitute. He even feels lucky to have escaped hunger and landed a new job. How ironic!"

"Indeed," Lumian concurred.

It was a scene beyond his wildest imagination. Reality was sometimes stranger than fiction.

He then added, "As long as it works."

The bartender didn't pursue the topic further and inquired, "What can I get you?"

"A glass of fennel absinthe." Lumian tapped the bar counter with his finger, signaling he was deep in thought. "What kind of food do you have here?"

"How about DuVar broth? Three licks for a ladle," the bartender suggested.

Three licks equaled 15 coppets—0.15 verl d'or.

Lumian appeared intrigued.

"What's DuVar broth?"

The bartender casually explained, "A restaurant owner, DuVar, invented it. He simmered meat, sauerkraut, and turnips together to create a hearty broth. Finally, he added cheese and bread crumbs. Just one serving can fill your stomach, and it tastes pretty good. As a result, DuVar is now wealthy and has relocated to Quartier de la Maison d'Opéra."

Lumian was currently in Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman, also known as the market district, situated on the south bank of the Srenzo River, home to numerous slums. Quartier de la Maison d'Opéra was on the north bank of the Srenzo River, near Avenue du Boulevard, one of the Republic's core areas.

Trier's city walls encompassed a total of 20 quartiers.

"Sounds good." Lumian nodded with a smile. "I'll have one."

Though he could restore his physical state by 6 a.m. and not worry about hunger, eating was one of the few things that made him feel alive.

The bartender nodded and asked, "Little Mummy or Somersault?"

"What?" Lumian didn't hide his confusion.

Unfazed, the bartender calmly explained, "That's common slang in Trier bars, cafés, and beer houses. Little Mummy means a small shot of fennel absinthe. Somersault is a double shot. Red Tomato has pomegranate juice added, and with mint, it's called Parrot. There are plenty more like that. Friend, you still have much to learn in Trier."

"Little Mummy it is." Lumian sensed the bartender's subtle disdain for foreigners, but he didn't mind.

"Seven licks," the bartender announced as he flipped open a small goblet.

This was pricier than the absinthe at Cordu's Ol' Tavern, but it was typical in places subject to city taxes.

Soon, a glass of pale green absinthe, glowing hypnotically, appeared before Lumian.

He picked it up and sipped. The faint, lingering bitterness of the refreshing taste spread and burrowed into his brain.

As Lumian waited for the waitress to bring DuVar's broth, he noticed glass jars, hoses, valves, gears, and other items piled beside the bar counter.

"What's this?" He glanced inquisitively at the bartender.

As the bartender wiped a glass, he casually replied, "Left by a previous tenant. He's a believer in the God of Steam and Machinery. He always thinks he has a knack for mechanics and has accumulated many similar items."

"Where is he now?" Lumian asked, playing along even though he knew the answer wouldn't be pleasant.

The bartender paused for a couple of seconds before answering, "He went to the factory, and word is he got distracted while working and was pulled into the machinery. Half of him was crushed."

Lumian didn't pry further. He turned to examine the half-assembled parts and fell into deep thought.

A few seconds later, he left the bar stool and squatted beside the counter, tinkering with the pile.

The bartender glanced at him but didn't interfere. He only notified Lumian when DuVar's broth arrived from the kitchen.

After busying himself for a while, Lumian returned to the bar stool and sampled the hearty broth with a spoon.

The rich aroma of meat, the taste of cheese, the tangy sauerkraut, and the sweetness of the turnip melded to create an unforgettable flavor. The bread crumbs soaked in juice were the crowning gem of the dish.

Lumian didn't expect that a soup costing three licks would include several pieces of meat. It could genuinely fill an adult's stomach.

Once the plate was empty, Lumian pulled out a handkerchief and wiped his mouth. He squatted back beside the half-assembled parts and resumed his work.

Ten minutes later, he placed a machine on the bar counter.

Above the machine was a glass jar, and beneath it were intricate components connected to two rubber hoses.

Lumian then asked for a glass of clear water and poured in the remaining fennel absinthe, tinting the colorless liquid a pale green.

Finally, he inserted one of the rubber hoses into the cup.

The fashionable bartender, his hair tied back in a ponytail, watched intently and asked, puzzled, "What's this?"

"My invention," Lumian declared, tracing a triangular Sacred Emblem on his chest. "I'm also a believer in the God of Steam and Machinery, with a few impressive achievements in the mechanical field."

He then extended his black-gloved left hand and gestured toward the machine.

"This is a groundbreaking machine. Its effects are beyond your wildest dreams!"

"What can it do?" Charlie, suspected of having prayed to a prostitute, approached the bar counter with a beer bottle and a curious expression.

Lumian explained, both solemn and excited, "It's called the Idiot Instrument. It tests a person's stupidity and intelligence."

"Really?" Charlie and the bartender looked skeptical.

Lumian detailed his idea, "It's easy to use. Blow into the tube until the liquid in the cup rises into the glass jar and forms bubbles.

"By observing these bubbles, we can determine the corresponding stupidity or intelligence index."

Intrigued, Charlie said after observing Lumian, "Fascinating. Just as I'd expect from a believer in the God of Steam and Machinery."

He picked up the exposed rubber hose and blew into it.

The light green liquid in the cup flowed through the interconnected gears, valves, and other components, rising into the glass jar above and forming a small bubble.

"What does it say?" Charlie asked, eager for the result.

Lumian's mouth curved into a sly smile.

"My friend, the principles of this machine are quite simple. When you believe me enough to actually produce a bubble with it, that's when you prove you're a 'dumb idiot.'"

Charlie's expression froze, his eyes burning with anger.

The bartender beside him laughed.

"Excellent prank!" he exclaimed, genuinely impressed.

Lumian grinned at Charlie, waiting for the explosion.

After a few tense seconds, Charlie swallowed his anger and turned to the patrons who had been listening to his story.

"Ladies and gentlemen, behold what I've discovered: a groundbreaking machine! It can test your intelligence index!"

Chapter 113: Tenants

"You're such an interesting person!"

A drunk Charlie slung his arm around Lumian's shoulder as they stumbled out of the raucous bar.

Inside, nearly 20 people sang, gambled, and yelled, releasing pent-up emotions.

At moments like these, they didn't seem like paupers on meager wages but rather kings and queens.

"I thought you'd play Billy B with them." Lumian draped his arm over Charlie's back and grinned as they headed for the stairs leading upstairs.

Billy B was a popular gambling game in Trier, one Lumian had just recently learned.

Unlike Trieriens' favorite Fighting Evil, Billy B only required a piece of paper. Depending on the number of players, the dealer drew a grid of squares, ranging from 9 to 64. Each square was assigned a number, allowing participants to place their bets.

The dealer then determined a lucky number by drawing lots, tossing coins, or throwing dice. The winner took the entire pot.

If no one won, the money went to the dealer.

The patrons of the Auberge du Coq Doré's underground bar were either locals or impoverished folks from nearby. Their wallets were thin, so they mainly wagered alcohol instead of cash. For instance, a game of Billy B might only reward the winner with a glass of booze bought by everyone's pooled money.

Charlie released a long burp.

"I haven't gotten my salary for this week. Can't be too indulgent!"

He turned to Lumian, excitement in his voice, "Did you know? I'm now an apprentice attendant at Hôtel du Cygne Blanc, the one on Rue Neuve in Quartier des Thermes.

"What does that mean? It means I get to wear a white shirt, red vest, and black suit. I'll tie an elegant bow and earn 65 verl d'or a month! When I become a full attendant, I hear that during peak season, I can make 7 verl d'or a day just in tips!

"When I strike it rich, I'll open my own motel—no, a hotel. When the time comes, I'll hire you as an attendant foreman. That jerk just walks around in his tailcoat, nitpicking, and earns 150 verl d'or a month!"

Apprentice attendants earn slightly more than manual laborers… Lumian reeked of alcohol, but his eyes remained clear. He nodded almost imperceptibly.

He recalled reading a newspaper in his study earlier in the year, boasting that Trier's laborers earned about 700 verl d'or annually.

At the time, Lumian didn't have a clear concept of that figure. He didn't know if it was too much or too little. As a vagrant, he'd only worried about how much food he could get each day and whether kind people might offer him a few licks. The income of Cordu villagers was mainly in goods, so he understood specific prices and the value of various banknotes, but he lacked a broader understanding.

Of course, this was also because Aurore's income was very high, so he hardly fretted about family finances.

As far as Lumian knew, Aurore's fame brought her a significant income through book sales and contracts. Last year's royalties had neared 130,000 verl d'or.

However, Aurore spent as much as she earned. Spells, materials, and arcane knowledge accounted for most of her expenses. She might also be supporting struggling members of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society or donating to government- or church-run charities.

Yet what puzzled Lumian was the absence of a deposit slip at home when he left Cordu.

He knew all too well that Aurore was a saver. Spending big was only possible because she had stashed away plenty of cash at Suchit Bank and other institutions.

For a moment, Lumian suspected that Guillaume Bénet's crew had snatched it while he and his sister were being used as sacrifices or vessels.

As Lumian and Charlie made their way to the second floor, arms slung around each other's shoulders, a mournful cry pierced the air.

"You bastard!"

Bang! A door slammed, muffling the wail and leaving only echoes in the hallway.

A figure in a crisp black tailcoat approached the stairs from the far end of the hall.

He was a young man, roughly Charlie's age. His brownish-yellow hair was styled in a 30-70 parting, and his dark brown eyes were devoid of expression. His thin lips were pressed tightly together.

Quite handsome, he held a black top hat in his hand, looking more like he belonged at a high-society soirée than the Auberge du Coq Doré.

Following the man's cries was a woman's voice, heavy with pain and despair.

As Charlie watched the man vanish down the stairs, his flushed face contorted.

"What a bastard!"

"You know him?" Lumian was still rather 'concerned' about his neighbors. After all, he might be staying here for a while. The more he knew about his surroundings, the safer he'd be.

Charlie scoffed, "That's Laurent, Mrs. Lakazan's son from Room 201.

"Mrs. Lakazan slaves away, mending socks and crafting all sorts for 16 hours a day just to support that bastard. He always dresses nicely and spends her money at fancy cafés, claiming he's mingling with high society to find opportunities to make it big!

"Heh, he thinks he's so talented…"

Before Charlie could finish, another heated argument erupted between a man and a woman nearby.

They hurled insults at each other.

"Third floor's a couple who eloped. They're like this every day when they're almost broke." Charlie clicked his tongue and grinned. "My friend, you'll have to get used to it. This is the market district, Rue Anarchie, the Auberge du Coq Doré. We've got the seriously ill, the bankrupt, swindling peddlers, foreigners who never leave the inn and only drink downstairs, broke street girls, lunatics who wake up in a frenzy, jobless stonemasons, veterans, miserly old men, and wanted criminals…

"They should all thank Monsieur Ive for being so lenient. As long as they don't default on rent, he's pretty forgiving."

"Monsieur Ive… The innkeeper? The miser Madame Fels mentioned?" Lumian inquired.

Charlie grinned and replied, "That's him, a kind but stingy fellow. He even provides everyone with free sulfur!

"Burp, I haven't seen Monsieur Ive in a few days. I'm really worried he'll try to save a few coppets by visiting some random woman on Rue Anarchie and catch some nasty disease instead of patronizing Rue de la Muraille or Quartier de la Princesse Rouge…"

As he spoke, Charlie waved his hand.

"Ciel, burp. I'm off to bed. I've got to leave at six tomorrow morning and get to the hotel by seven.

"Burp, if you can't find a job, let me know. I'll introduce you to a handyman at our hotel. You can earn 50 verl d'or a month. Stick around long enough, and you might make 75. Plus, there's free food. We even get a liter of wine every night!"

"Alright." Lumian smiled as he watched Charlie climb the stairs.

At the same time, he muttered to himself, Simple provocation isn't doing much for the potion's digestion…

He had assembled the Idiot Instrument in the bar to rile everyone up. The result was successful, but it didn't further the potion's digestion.

During his journey from Dariège to Trier, Lumian frequently provoked others. Sometimes he felt the potion digest, but most times, he gained nothing.

If he couldn't find a better way to act, he suspected it would take at least a year to fully digest the Provoker potion.

Heading back to Room 207, Lumian heard a bout of coughing from upstairs. He heard a woman berating her lover, calling him "lazy" and "trash." Gunshots rang out, followed by the sound of a group chasing someone outside.

This was life at the Auberge du Coq Doré and on Rue Anarchie.

Charlie had said that even the police wouldn't dare walk here alone at night. They needed a partner to bolster their courage.

Taking out the brass key, Lumian opened the door and stepped back into his room.

The bedbugs seemed to have sensed something and stayed away.

Lumian sniffed the sulfur and glanced up. A letter lay silently on the wooden table beside the window.

He took a few steps forward and picked up the folded piece of paper.

Madam Magician's reply? Lumian mused, unfolding the letter and reading it under the crimson moonlight streaming through the window.

"I'm glad you arrived in Trier without issue. This shows you've mastered the basic technique of evading capture and regained your experience navigating the dark underbelly of society.

"At 3:30 p.m. this Sunday, a psychologist will treat you at Booth D in Mason Café, located in Quartier du Jardin Botanique.

"For the next few days, your mission is to venture near the catacombs in Quartier de l'Observatoire and locate a man named Osta Trul. He often masquerades as a warlock to con tourists and locals alike.

"By any means necessary, earn Osta Trul's trust and reveal your powers when the time is right."

Quartier du Jardin Botanique and Quartier de l'Observatoire were west of Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman, adjacent to one another. The former lay further south, while the latter was closer to the north, right by the Srenzo River.

Lumian read Madam Magician's reply over and over, committing the relevant locations, times, and names to memory. Then he struck a match and burned the Intisian-scripted paper.

Having done all this, he headed to the nearest washroom to freshen up. Afterward, he took out Fallen Mercury, wrapped in black cloth, removed his coat, and lay on the bed.

The bedbug-infested ceiling met his gaze, and the faint sounds of coughing, crying, and arguing filled the room.

Soon after, the eloped couple announced their reconciliation through a passionate and vigorous exercise, accompanied by uninhibited moans.

Outside on the street, a few coarse voices sang vulgar songs, punctuated by gunshots, followed by curses, the clashing of poles, and the sound of sharp weapons piercing flesh.

Compared to Cordu, the nights here were far from quiet.

Chapter 114: Life Experience

At the break of dawn in early May, the sky remained cloaked in darkness. The setting crimson moon and the scattered stars cast a faint glow, thinning the darkness just enough to reveal nearby silhouettes.

Lumian awoke early and freshened up. He donned his formal attire from the previous day and a wide-brimmed top hat. He tried his best to smile at his reflection in the glass window that served as a mirror.

As he descended the stairs, hurried footsteps echoed from above.

Soon, Charlie came into view.

He was still dressed in a linen shirt, black trousers, and strapless leather shoes. His flushed complexion had turned a shade paler, and his small blue eyes betrayed unmistakable fatigue.

"Good morning, Ciel," Charlie greeted Lumian with enthusiasm.

He seemed quite pumped.

"Shouldn't you have left long ago?" Lumian asked, smiling.

He had only awoken to freshen up when he heard the cathedral clock chime six o'clock. Charlie should have departed by then.

Charlie lowered his head, adjusting his clothes as he muttered, "I drank too much last night and had a wonderful dream. I didn't want to wake up…"

As they conversed, the pair reached the ground floor. They traversed the dingy, dimly lit hall towards the door reflecting starlight.

An elderly couple, grizzled and slightly stooped, opened the door. In their sixties, they were both short, the man barely 1.65 meters tall and the woman even shorter. Their dark jackets and yellowish cloth dresses were tattered and oil-stained.

"Who are they?" Lumian had expected Madame Fels or the miserly motel owner, Monsieur Ive, to be in charge of opening the door in the morning.

Charlie didn't slow down, casually explaining, "Monsieur Ruhr and Madame Michel, they're the swindlers I mentioned yesterday. They scam tourists into buying things.

"They rise early every day, and Madame Fels has them open the inn's door. In return, she turns a blind eye to the mess and stench they create in their room.

"Can you believe it? They haven't changed their clothes since I moved in. It's been seven months. Seven months!"

No wonder it's so filthy… Lumian could recall his own grimy days as a vagabond, but Aurore's penchant for cleanliness still made him frown.

Charlie strode quickly out of Auberge du Coq Doré, puzzledly asking, "Ciel, why are you up so early too?"

As they stepped onto the street, a bustling scene unfolded before them.

Countless workers, clerks, and laborers hurried along in their gray, blue, black, and brown clothes, occasionally stopping to purchase food from street vendors.

Some women carrying wooden baskets moved more leisurely. They meandered between various vendors, comparing prices and quality.

The peddlers lined both sides of Rue Anarchie, occupying half the street and leaving just enough room for a carriage to pass.

They bellowed loudly, vying for customers' attention.

"Whiskey Sour, Apple Whiskey Sour. Two licks a liter!"

"Freshwater fish from Bondi's fish pond!"

"Fresh cod and herring, come and take a look!"

"Onion bread, one lick, just one lick!"

"Salted meat, delicious salted meat!"

"Soap and wigs imported from Loen!"

"Buy the kids a bottle of refreshing soda!"

"Hot sauce, soybean paste, scallions, water celery!"

"…"

Absorbing the sounds and energy of Rue Anarchie, Lumian turned to Charlie and smiled.

"I just arrived in Trier and couldn't sleep. I thought I'd walk around and see if I could find a suitable job."

As a Hunter, it was essential for him to familiarize himself with the area he frequented and understand its intricacies.

It would be too late to adapt if something were to happen.

Charlie nodded knowingly.

He said with enthusiasm, "You could try your luck at Rue des Blouses Blanches. It's between Le Marché du Gentleman and the steam locomotive station.

"Many motel, hotel, and restaurant managers like to chat at the café there. They use the opportunity to hire dishwashers, floor cleaners, washroom attendants, and apprentice attendants.

"If you have money on you, remember to buy the café waiters a drink. They'll introduce you to the right person and give you a shot at a better job."

Without waiting for Lumian's reply, Charlie shared his wisdom.

"You must pay attention to your appearance. Do as I do."

As he spoke, he raised his hands and slapped his face, mimicking an actual slap, but with less force.

Soon, Charlie's pallid complexion regained its "rosiness."

"Look, look." He pointed at himself smugly and said, "Don't I appear more energetic? Those managers don't want to hire someone who looks particularly destitute and sickly. They think it'll bring trouble. They're either unwilling to give you a decent job or will slash your salary. If you do this before entering the café like me, it'll make you seem like someone who has a place to sleep and breakfast to eat. But doing it too early won't work, as this 'rosiness' will gradually fade."

This clever job-hunting technique was new to Lumian, a former vagabond. He found it fascinating.

He smiled and nodded.

"I still have enough money to rent a place and fill my stomach. I don't need to do this for now, but who knows if I'll need it in the future?"

He deliberately didn't conceal the fact that he still had a fair amount of verl d'or.

What if a generous soul was willing to "donate" another sum?

Charlie expressed his understanding and took out 5 coppet worth of copper coins to buy onion bread from a nearby vendor.

Lumian felt a pang of familiarity.

During his time on the streets, if he could acquire money, his first choice was onion bread.

It was cheap, and the aroma of onions lingered, creating the illusion of having just eaten a satisfying meal.

Lumian also purchased onion bread for breakfast. Alongside Charlie, they navigated through the numerous vendors and exited Rue Anarchie.

"I love the mornings here!" Charlie glanced back and sighed with his signature zeal. "Those gangsters who deserve to rot in hell can't get up this early. They can't destroy this captivating vitality."

He then waved at Lumian.

"I've got to take the subway. Otherwise, I'll be late today. That damned foreman will surely dock my pay!"

After saying goodbye to Charlie, Lumian wandered around Rue Anarchie, exploring the area like a curious tourist.

Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman was situated on the south bank of the Srenzo River, in the southeast corner of Trier, officially known as "Quartier 13." Trier boasted various quarters named by numbers, each with its own historical and characteristic monikers. Even officials sometimes used these colloquial names.

The district earned its name from Le Marché du Gentleman. Proximity to the Srenzo River allowed for a Suhit steam locomotive station, which catered to travelers from southern Intis.

Encircled by the market and the steam locomotive station, many of its streets were notoriously dangerous and teeming with impoverished inhabitants. It was one of Trier's slums.

To the north of the market district, on the south bank of the Srenzo River, lay Quartier 5, the Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative or Quartier

Universitaire. Trier Normal College, Trier Higher Mining College, and Intis Academy of Fine Arts were all located here.

To the northeast of the city, on the north bank of the Srenzo River, stood Quartier 12, known as the Noel Quartier. It housed the Veterans' Home, Wounded Soldiers' Hospital, and several large medical facilities.

To the northwest of the market district was Quartier 6—Quartier de l'Observatoire—where Lumian planned to visit later. It contained the primary entrance to the catacombs.

To the southwest of the market district was Quartier 14, known as Quartier du Jardin Botanique. On Sunday, Lumian was scheduled for treatment with a psychologist at the Mason café there. This area was also called Quartier du Sans-Culottes due to the large factories located south of the botanical garden.

And so, Lumian spent nearly the entire morning traversing the streets of Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman.

As noon approached, Lumian returned to the vicinity of Suhit's train station, intending to find a spot for lunch before heading to the catacombs in search of the phony warlock, Osta Trul.

Walking along, Lumian spotted the couple—Ruhr and Michel—who also resided at Auberge du Coq Doré.

They were hawking parcels of items wrapped in paper bags to groups that appeared to be foreigners.

As Lumian drew near, the gray-haired, ragged, and wrinkled Ruhr leaned towards him and lowered his voice. "Do you want photos of a street maîtresse d'atelier?"

"What's a street maîtresse d'atelier?" Lumian didn't conceal his confusion or his revulsion at Ruer's stench.

Ruhr waved the thin paper bag in his hand and whispered, "In Trier, beautiful girls who model for painters are called 'maîtresse d'atelier.'

"With the advent of cameras and photographers, they also began taking photo subjects. As you might imagine, some of these photos were sold to painters as reference material, while others…"

Ruhr flashed a sly grin and shook the paper bag in his hand again.

"Four licks per bag, with two photos inside!

"Others sell them for over 10 licks!"

Lumian laughed.

"Monsieur Ruhr, Madame Michel, is this the souvenir you peddle to tourists?"

Hearing Lumian address them by name, Ruhr and Michel's expressions shifted dramatically.

They spun around, trying to escape, but Lumian was quicker and clamped down on Ruhr's shoulder.

Michel, who had weaved her way through the crowd, noticed her husband couldn't keep pace and returned, her face etched with bitterness.

"I also live at Auberge du Coq Doré. My name is Ciel," Lumian introduced himself.

Finally realizing how Lumian knew them, the couple breathed a sigh of relief and looked at him pleadingly. "What's the matter, Monsieur Ciel?"

"What kind of photos are you selling?" Lumian inquired curiously.

Ruhr responded timidly, "Scenic photos of the Srenzo River, as well as images of Trier's castles and palaces."

"No one is causing trouble for you?" Lumian asked, grinning.

Ruhr swallowed and said, "The people who buy them don't dare to open them on the spot or confront us later. They feel guilty."

"Besides, no police will bother you if you sell landscape photos." Lumian nodded. "Does anyone really sell street maîtresse d'atelier?"

"Yes," Ruhr confirmed. "Last month, the police arrested a group of photographers and art dealers. They said they confiscated over 10,000 photos. If only they could give them to us. Who knows how much we could sell them for!"

Madame Michel, also sporting a wrinkled face and hunched figure, mumbled, "There was a model staying at our inn previously, but she hasn't been around lately. Perhaps she became the mistress of some painter, or maybe she was captured to be a street maîtresse d'atelier…"

Auberge du Coq Doré has quite a variety of guests… Lumian asked with interest, "How much can you earn in a week by tricking foreigners into buying photos?"

"We sell them very cheaply. About 10 verl d'or," Ruhr replied, his gaze slightly evasive.

From the looks of it, it's more than 10 verl d'or, but not much more. I'll count it as 12 verl d'or, which is 1,200 coppet or 240 licks… 60 fools fall for it every week? Lumian surveyed the square and expressed his disdain for the average intelligence of the people there.

As for Ruhr and Michel, they took a significant risk to deceive others; yet, they only earned about 50 verl d'or a month, far less than the apprentice attendants or even laborers.

Observing their slightly hunched backs, slender frames, and wrinkled faces, Lumian understood that it wasn't that they didn't want to do more legitimate work for better pay, but rather that they couldn't handle those jobs.

With a wave of his hand, he left Suhit's steam locomotive station and headed northwest towards Quartier de l'Observatoire.

Chapter 115: Legend

The catacombs' main entrance was tucked away in Place du Purgatoire, close to the Intisian observatory. The structure enclosing the entrance was supported by grand pillars, crowned by a dome adorned with intricate stone carvings, reminiscent of a miniature memorial hall or the base of an immense mausoleum.

As Lumian approached, he noted a crowd of 20 to 30 people already assembled near the stairs leading down. Their attire varied, but most were dressed formally, both men and women alike.

A man in his thirties, sporting a blue vest, yellow pants, and a thick beard, stood before the crowd. His brown curls framed upturned eyes, and he held an unlit iron-black carbide lamp.

Addressing the gathered group, he announced loudly, "I'm Kendall, one of the catacombs' administrators. I'll be guiding you through the ossuary today.

"Does everyone have a white candle? If not, please let me know immediately."

Tourists? Lumian's eyes swept over the stone staircase behind Kendall.

It plunged down into impenetrable darkness, its end hidden from view.

Beside Kendall stood a massive wooden door, half of it emblazoned with the Sun Sacred Emblem in gold, while the other half was adorned with an intricate triangle filled with symbols of steam, levers, gears, and more.

Upon receiving confirmation, Kendall ignited his carbide lamp and led the group into the depths below. The tourists trailed behind him, some bearing lanterns.

Lumian followed, keeping a four to five-meter distance. Clutching the carbide lamp he had obtained from Ramayes, he descended the staircase at a steady pace.

Thanks to his Beyonder-enhanced hearing, Lumian easily heard Kendall's informative spiel at the front.

"After 138 steps, you'll find yourselves 26 meters below Trier's streets, surrounded by the remains of nearly 50 generations of Trieriens.

"That's a conservative estimate. In truth, the history of some of these ossuaries can be traced back to the previous epoch…

"Forty-seven years ago, there was no more space for the dead in Cimetière des Innocents or Cimetière des Prêtres. White bones lay scattered, and the stench drove nearby residents to protest daily, demanding the relocation of the cemetery…

"Ultimately, City Hall opted to go underground. They repurposed graves from the Fourth Epoch and adjacent underground quarries, creating a vast tomb… Today, you'll be visiting but a mere fraction of it…"

Kendall's voice echoed through the silent, never-ending staircase, imbuing the atmosphere with an eerie sense of foreboding.

As Lumian continued downward, a path lined with stone pillars and walls came into view.

This passage, unlike other subterranean areas, was well-maintained and frequently repaired. It was smooth, wide, and unnervingly sinister. An icy breeze occasionally swept through the corridor.

Gas lamps were strategically placed along the path, casting a dim, yellowish light that allowed shadows to mingle with the illumination, stretching into the darkness.

Kendall, clad in his blue vest, warned the visitors once more, "Stay close and don't wander off!

"There are countless underground areas we know little about. If you get lost, it'll be nearly impossible to find you.

"Do not stray from the path once inside the tomb. There are passages that lead to deeper, more sinister chambers. The Fourth Epoch's malevolent spirits lurk within that darkness. Praise the Sun and the Light. By adhering to the routes endorsed by the padres, we can avoid all perils."

Some visitors outstretched their arms in praise of the Sun, while others traced a triangle over their chests.

After trailing Kendall and the others for nearly 200 meters, Lumian caught sight of the subterranean tomb.

Before him lay a natural boulder cave, modified over time. Its walls were adorned with intricate reliefs of skulls, skeletal arms, sunflowers, and steam symbols.

Above the entrance, two Intisian inscriptions commanded:

"Halt!

"The Death Empire lies ahead!"

Kendall, the catacomb administrator, turned to address the visitors once more, "Extinguish your lanterns and light the white candles. Everyone must do this!

"If you'd rather not enter the catacomb, feel free to explore this area, but don't stray too far. It's all too easy to lose your bearings, and that would be a problem.

"Should you find yourself separated from the group inside the catacomb, don't panic. Locate a road sign. If there isn't one, look above and follow the black line drawn on the tomb's ceiling. It will guide you back to the main entrance…"

Soon, the lanterns were snuffed out, replaced by the flickering glow of orange candlelight.

The visitors hoisted their white candles and trailed Kendall into the catacombs.

Lumian observed from a distance, watching as the yellowish flames merged into a stream that meandered into the darkness.

He refrained from entering. Grasping his carbide lamp, he circled the tomb's entrance, intent on locating the phony warlock, Osta Trul.

A few minutes later, Lumian discovered a small bonfire.

Beside a pillar, damp moss clung to the stone wall above.

A man was seated on a rock behind the fire, garbed in a hooded black robe. His high-bridged nose and dark brown eyes were framed by a flaxen beard that obscured his chin. He stared intently at the dancing flames.

Lumian approached and inquired, "Are you Osta Trul?"

The hooded man raised his gaze to meet Lumian's and replied in a deliberately subdued, magnetic voice, "Lost soul, why have you sought me out?"

Flames and shadows danced across Osta Trul's face, obscuring his age. He appeared to be somewhere between just below 30 and 40.

Lumian spoke earnestly, "I've heard whispers about you. They say you're a mystical Warlock who can help me resolve my dilemma."

Osta Trul responded in a low, magnetic tone, "Witchcraft is taboo. Witchcraft is a curse. I won't render aid without cause."

"What must I do?" Lumian pressed, anxiety evident in his voice.

Osta replied softly, "The essence of witchcraft lies in equivalent exchange. Reveal the nature of the help you seek first."

Equivalent exchange. Have you been reading too many novels? Lumian suppressed the urge to ridicule and antagonize him, instead adopting a pained expression.

"I've lost everyone I cared for. I feel forsaken by the world. Sleep eludes me each night. I want to forget these burdens and begin anew."

Osta Trul scrutinized Lumian's countenance, finding no trace of deception.

He nodded slightly.

"I, too, have suffered great losses. It's a curse borne of witchcraft. I can empathize with your sentiments and thoughts. Yet forgetting pain is no simple task."

"Very well…" Lumian exhaled a long sigh and turned to depart.

Osta hastily called out, "Wait. Just because it's difficult doesn't mean it's impossible."

"Really?" Lumian whipped his head back, excitement flooding his features.

Osta nodded subtly and continued, "Have you ever heard of the Samaritan Women's Spring?"

"No." Lumian shook his head.

Osta glanced at the burning bonfire and explained simply, "In one of the ossuaries within the catacombs, there's a murky spring known as the Samaritan Women's Spring, or the Fountain of Oblivion. Drink from it, and all your pain will be erased from memory.

"Of course, it's a fabrication. The spring is merely a puddle left by a construction error during the catacombs' creation. The administrators spun it into legend."

As Lumian's eyes sparkled with hope, Osta Trul carried on, "However, as a Warlock, I can reveal that deep within this subterranean realm lies a genuine Samaritan Women's Spring, hidden in a tomb believed to be a relic of the Fourth Epoch.

"Many corpses there chant: 'Drink the blissful waters of forgetfulness and be purged of primordial pain.'"

"I can help you recover it, but the principle of equivalent exchange must be honored. It will cost you 100 verl d'or."

100 verl d'or? Isn't your asking price a bit too low? How can anyone believe that procuring a legendary item as perilous as this could be genuine without demanding a few thousand verl d'or? Lumian had been listening closely, but the absurdly undervalued service left him amused.

How could such priceless spring water be worth no more than an apprentice attendant's two months' wages?

He had read about the legend of the Samaritan Women's Spring in Psychic. Aurore had murmured a word he didn't understand. Its pronunciation likely resembled 'Granny Meng.'

Psychic also asserted that the Samaritan Women's Spring was a legend fabricated by the catacomb administrators, but they were convinced the tale had its origins. The Fountain of Oblivion might genuinely exist somewhere on the Northern Continent.

Lumian's eyes widened as he hastened to Osta's side. Clasping his shoulder, he exclaimed, "Really?"

Osta brushed his hand away and nodded composedly.

"This is a Warlock's vow."

"Alright, alright!" Lumian responded, thrilled. "But I didn't bring that much money. I'll head back now and return here to find you tomorrow?"

Osta nodded approvingly.

"No problem."

Lumian expressed his gratitude profusely, seized the carbide lamp, and departed with excitement.

Once out of Osta's view, Lumian's smile vanished. He raised his right palm and sniffed the faint fragrance.

Before reaching the Quartier de l'Observatoire, he had deliberately sprayed an inferior cologne on his right hand and touched Osta's body.

Back on the surface, Lumian took cover behind a pillar, concealed himself, and waited patiently.

The sky gradually darkened. As twilight descended, he detected the faint and familiar scent of cologne.

Lumian didn't rush to pursue Osta. After a while, he emerged from his hiding spot and trailed the lingering fragrance, maintaining a distance so great he was nearly invisible.

Carriages whizzed past him, and extravagant mechanical contraptions appeared sporadically.

Chapter 116: City of Fashion

In the morning, while "shopping" at Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman, Lumian noticed that Trier's citizens dressed rather casually, or perhaps boldly. This was evident in the women wearing short sleeves that bared their forearms or garments with cut-out shoulders that displayed their collarbones. On the other hand, there was no shortage of peculiar attire.

In the Dariège region, a warlock like Osta, donning a black robe and hood, resembled an ancient legend. It was impossible for him to walk the streets openly without being stopped by the police. In Trier, however, passersby paid him no mind.

Such appearances were all too common. People dressed in a variety of antiquated garments.

Osta Trul was undoubtedly more cautious. Periodically, he would glance over his shoulder to spot anyone suspicious, but Lumian maintained such a great distance that neither of them were within the other's line of sight.

Lumian trailed Osta from one street to the next, following the faint scent of the inferior cologne.

As gas lamps illuminated the surroundings, Osta turned into a street sheltered by glass domes and steel frames.

This place was brightly lit and lined with upscale shops. Smooth marble paved the ground, and the area bustled with pedestrians—a stark contrast to the ramshackle alleys of Marché du Quartier du Gentleman.

This is the arcade Aurore mentioned? Lumian observed Osta pausing in front of a store to admire the window display. He too slowed down, scanning the area.

He quickly spotted people engaging in "unusual" behavior.

Dressed in formal attire, both men and women walked turtles of varying sizes.

The turtles inched forward, and their owners, holding a rope, trailed leisurely behind.

Upon seeing a man dressed in a black formal suit and silk top hat walking a turtle, Lumian couldn't help but inquire, "My friend, what are you doing?"

The man turned his head, revealing a powdered face.

He responded with a smile, "Foreigner, I'm simply taking a stroll, walking my turtle."

"Why a turtle?" Lumian didn't conceal his puzzlement.

The impeccably groomed gentleman appeared pleased to share his fashion philosophy. He grinned and explained, "Most Trieriens enjoy walking around leisurely, but they fail to grasp the essence of leisure and elegance. They always walk briskly and seem rushed.

"A true stroll is slower than a turtle. Thus, we walk turtles and let them lead to emphasize our leisurely pace.

"It's a gauge to measure walking speed and a device to quantify elegance."

Lumian had to concede that Trieriens consistently expanded his perspective as a country bumpkin from Cordu.

Aurore couldn't have even written a story about walking a turtle!

"A true Trierien!" Lumian applauded, his tone dripping with sarcasm.

Regrettably, the gentleman failed to grasp his underlying message. He smiled modestly and continued to follow the turtle at a leisurely pace.

Before long, Osta reached the other end of the arcade.

Lumian waited for a moment before cautiously following.

After exiting the arcade, Osta positioned himself by the nearby public carriage stop.

Within minutes, a massive carriage, drawn by two horses, arrived.

The carriage was divided into two levels. The yellow-painted exterior bore words like "Line 7" written in Intisian. The driver donned a short green coat and a wide-brimmed hat to fend off the rain.

As the carriage came to a stop, a conductor sporting a small hat, striped shirt, and unattractive pants appeared at the open door, scrutinizing each passenger boarding the carriage as if they were criminals.

Osta was the third person to climb aboard. He chose a window seat, observing the passersby and the men and women taking their seats.

Lumian watched from a distance without approaching.

It was only when the Line 7 carriage had pulled away that he quickened his pace, practically jogging to catch up.

Given the relatively slow speed of public transportation and the rule of stopping at every station, Lumian wasn't concerned about being left behind.

As he ran, some pedestrians eyed him curiously, while a few even jogged alongside, seemingly believing this to be the latest trend.

Is there something wrong with your brains? Lumian didn't know whether to laugh or cry.

After three stops, he saw Osta Trul disembark from the public carriage. This area was already part of Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman.

Osta crossed two streets and turned onto Rue des Blouses Blanches, which Charlie had mentioned. He entered an old beige apartment building numbered 20.

Lumian halted in front of a street-side newspaper stand, picked up a paper, and casually flipped through it.

Simultaneously, he observed the entrance to the apartment building from the corner of his eye.

"It's 11 coppets for one," the newsstand owner reminded Lumian when he noticed that he was only reading and not buying.

Lumian was holding a copy of Le Petit Trierien, and without minding, he took out two 5-coppet and one 1-coppet coins and tossed them onto the other newspapers.

The newsstand owner fell silent.

Lumian continued reading the newspaper.

"City Hall discussing new price plans with the water supply company…

"Valéry slams consumerism as a fetish…

"…"

"Greatest project in human history seeks collaboration…"

The final caught Lumian's attention as he reminded him of something:

It reeked of a prankster or a swindler's ploy!

As Lumian kept an eye on the apartment, he read the corresponding content with growing interest.

"The future of humanity lies in the stars. The history of mankind was forged by the brave to explore.

"In this era of rapid technological progress, we lack civilization pioneers, visionaries with exceptional insight and foresight, and adventurers with courage.

"Last time, we were trapped in the Berserk Sea. This time, we're trapped within the atmosphere. However, human civilization and technology will undoubtedly overcome all obstacles and dangers to forge a true future.

"We seek to collaborate with all dreamers to construct a space bridge that will enable us to walk from the surface to the crimson moon.

"Point of Contact: Bulle Patil.

"Contact Method: 9th Rue Saint-Martin, 5th floor, Quartier 2."

The more Lumian read, the more amused he became. He found himself in deep contemplation.

As Cordu's Prankster King and one influenced by Aurore's eccentric ideas, he had never conceived such an outrageous, ludicrous, and absurd notion. Yet, these individuals had brazenly advertised it, as though certain they could fool a crowd.

Am I still underestimating the average human IQ? Lumian stroked his chin with his gloved left hand.

At that moment, he saw a group of people approaching the old apartment at 20 Rue des Blouses Blanches.

The leader was a distinguished-looking gentleman in a silk top hat and black suit. He had a chiseled profile, a mahogany-colored pipe in his mouth, and a diamond ring on his left hand that sparkled under the light.

The burly men surrounding the gentleman appeared menacing. They wore either canvas shirts or dark jackets, giving off a gang-like vibe.

After they vanished into the apartment's entrance, Lumian walked over with the newspaper.

At the base of the stairs, he detected several colognes simultaneously.

One was faint and familiar—the inferior cologne he had applied to Osta. The other was more aromatic, sweet, and slightly cloying.

Musk cologne? From the man with the pipe? Lumian followed the scent all the way up to the apartment's fifth floor.

There, he saw Osta Trul.

The imposter dressed as a warlock found himself encircled by the same group of individuals. The gentleman with the diamond ring tapped his forehead with his mahogany-colored pipe, smiling politely.

"Don't think you can shake us off just because you've moved. Until you repay all the debt, I'll follow you endlessly, like a shadow."

Osta stammered fearfully, "I'll have money soon. I can return a portion to you tomorrow!"

"Very good," the 'gentleman' nodded with a smile.

He then turned the pipe and jabbed Osta's face with the still-smoldering end.

Osta recoiled in pain but dared not make a sound.

The 'gentleman' withdrew his pipe and said gently, yet firmly, "This is a little interest. If you don't pay me back tomorrow, I'll take one of your fingers."

With that, he placed his hand on his chest and bowed politely.

"See you tomorrow, my friend."

At the staircase, Lumian pursed his lips and muttered to himself, Are people and dogs learning from Gehrman now?

As Fors Wall's "The Adventurer" series gained popularity, Gehrman Sparrow impersonators cropped up across the Northern and Southern Continents. Phrases like "this is basic courtesy" and "a bestowment or a curse" spread far and wide.

As the group approached, Lumian lowered his head and stepped aside, acting like an ordinary tenant encountering gangsters.

Chaotic footsteps echoed as they descended floor by floor, soon giving way to silence.

Lumian glanced in Osta Trul's direction, noting that he had already retreated to his room and closed the wooden door.

After some contemplation, Lumian flexed his gloved left hand and adjusted his hat. He walked out of the staircase and approached Osta's door.

Bang! Bang! Bang! He raised his hand and knocked on the door.

After a moment, Osta opened the door, his face a mix of shock and fear. He stammered shakily,

"I really can't get that money until tomorrow…"

Before he could finish, Lumian's figure came sharply into focus in his eyes.

Lumian spread his arms and asked with a beaming smile, "Surprised?"

"You, you, you…" Osta backed away as if he'd seen a ghost.

Lumian followed him into the room and smiled at Osta Trul.

"I truly wish to forget the pain of the past, but I'm also a cautious person. I'm afraid of being swindled and, worse, being mocked as a fool."

Chapter 117: Remuneration

Osta forced a smile.

"I'm not lying. There really is a Samaritan Women's Spring!"

"Is that so?" Lumian approached Osta with a grin and said, "When the time comes, take a sip first. If it's useful, you'll forget that I haven't paid you. If it's useless, why should I pay you?"

For a moment, Osta was at a loss for words. He could only smile and nod.

"Trust me, trust me…"

Suddenly, he looked past Lumian, his eyes widening in terror.

Lumian 'instinctively' turned to look at the door, but there was no one there.

Seizing the opportunity, Osta ducked and made a break for the open door.

Thud!

Osta tripped over Lumian's right foot, which had swiftly extended, and crashed to the ground. His nose bridge turned blue, and his gaunt face swelled.

Lumian slowly closed the door, pulled up a chair, and sat down. He looked down at Osta, who was feigning death on the floor, and said, "Don't tell me you have high spiritual perception and 'saw' a bizarre creature behind me. Did you rush to the door to help me deal with it?"

Osta was dumbstruck for a moment before rising to his feet and nodding repeatedly.

"That's right, that's right!"

Lumian smiled and glanced at the rectangular wooden table against the wall.

Silver dagger, white candles, a few small bottles filled with different liquids or empty, two imitation goatskins, and a paper box emitting the fragrance of plants were strewn across it.

He has a certain amount of mysticism knowledge… Lumian shifted his gaze back to the uneasy Osta and asked, "Who was that guy with the pipe just now?"

"Baron Brignais!" Osta replied hastily. "He's the leader of the Savoie Mob in the market district."

Savoie was the name of an inland province in the Intis Republic, bordering the provinces of Haut-Hornacis and Bas-Hornacis. It was rich in mineral resources and had a valiant folk culture.

"A baron? There are still barons?" Lumian asked, amused.

Ever since Emperor Roselle's death and the establishment of the Republic, aristocratic titles had vanished from daily life.

Osta said fearfully, "That's a nickname he gave himself. Perhaps his ancestors held such an aristocratic title."

Lumian leaned back in his chair and asked casually, "Why did he come to you? Do you owe them money?"

Seeing Lumian's harmless demeanor, as though he was chatting with a friend, Osta relaxed a little despite his fear.

He said bitterly, "In order to b-buy an item, I borrowed 3,000 verl d'or from a loan shark. Later, that man sold the debt to Brignais.

"I paid back at least 3,000 verl d'or, but he told me there was still 2,000 in interest!"

"If you drag on for another two or three months, you won't owe 2,000, but 4,000." Lumian watched Osta's expression crumble, the air of mystery gone.

He then lowered his voice and said in a beguiling tone, "If I were you, I'd find a way to draw Brignais and his crew into a quarry pit. Then, I'd bring down the stone layer above, burying them for eternity.

"No creditors, no debts."

The more Osta listened, the more panic-stricken he became. He stared at Lumian as if he were a demon.

He had a suspicion that Lumian had already plotted such a scheme, but with Osta Trul as the intended target, not Brignais!

"That's murder! A crime!" Osta exclaimed in terror.

"Keep it down. You wouldn't want to lose your voice permanently, would you?" Lumian warned him with a smile. "So you do realize that's a crime? Did anyone ever tell you that fraud is a crime too?"

Osta was at a loss for words.

Lumian stood up and dusted off his gloves.

"I'm just kidding. I was testing your character."

"What?" Osta was baffled.

Lumian wouldn't reveal that his true motive was to establish an ice-cold, ruthless persona in Osta's mind. It would come in handy during future "negotiations."

Forced trust was still trust!

"Congratulations on passing my test. This proves you're not completely without scruples." Lumian grinned and spread his arms.

He quickly steered the conversation back on course.

"What did you borrow so much money for?"

He glanced around, adding, "Doesn't seem like there's anything valuable here…"

Osta instinctively wanted to spout a lie but remembered Lumian's warning.

He trembled and said, "Do… do you know about potions?"

"You're really a Beyonder?" Lumian chuckled.

Seeing that Lumian knew about Beyonders and potions, Osta breathed a sigh of relief. He was glad he hadn't lied.

Any fabricated story would be riddled with holes in front of a true Beyonder, easily exposed. If caught, Osta might end up "sleeping forever" in some Underground Trier hideout tonight.

Taking two deep breaths, Osta continued, "A few months ago, I borrowed 3,000 verl d'or from a loan shark to purchase the main ingredient for a potion. Combined with the 4,000 verl d'or I'd saved, I successfully transformed from an ordinary person into a Beyonder."

"Which Sequence do you belong to? You can't even handle a few thugs?" Lumian asked with feigned suspicion.

Osta looked defeated.

"I'm a Sequence 9 Secrets Suppliant."

"It doesn't sound weak." Lumian could only gauge by the potion's name.

Osta lamented in frustration, "I thought Secrets Suppliants were powerful too. The seller even claimed it would allow me to see the world's truth.

"In the end, aside from heightened spiritual perception, all I got was some impractical sacrificial knowledge and ritual magic. I can occasionally sense the presence of mysterious entities, scaring myself witless, but I can't even defeat a thug!"

"The ritual magic should come in handy," Lumian remarked knowingly.

Osta looked close to tears.

"I'm well-versed in mysticism. I'm a follower of the Eternal Blazing Sun. How can I pray to an unknown entity? That's too risky!

"Sigh, there are some honorific names in the potion's knowledge, but they're all concealed entities. Just hearing them is terrifying. I wouldn't dare invoke depravity, true kin, or the gaze of fate!"

He glanced at Lumian and feigned determination.

"But I've considered it. If Baron Brignais and his goons corner me again, I'll pray to the hidden existence and gain strength!"

He was ostensibly talking about Baron Brignais, but his true intent was to caution Lumian against forcing him into a corner.

Lumian studied Osta's uneasy face and agreed, "That's a wise decision. Baron Brignais and his crew underestimate a Beyonder. If I were in their shoes, I wouldn't give you the chance to reach a dead end."

He then smiled at Osta.

"You'd be dead before that happens."

Osta opened his mouth but closed it again, his expression more pained than crying.

Lumian walked over to the wooden table and toyed with the empty bottles.

"You've moved several times, but Baron Brignais keeps finding you. I suspect he or the Savoie Mob have Beyonders on their side."

Osta gasped in shock.

Lumian picked up the silver dagger from the table, twirling it as he said to Osta, "I can offer you 100 verl d'or as a reward."

"Huh?" Osta was baffled once more.

He realized he couldn't keep up with Lumian's thought process.

"You, you still want the spring water from the Samaritan Women's Spring?" he ventured.

Lumian grinned and replied, "Tell me, does it really exist?"

Eyeing Lumian's amused gaze, Osta hesitated for a moment before admitting, "I'm not sure."

Lumian nodded in satisfaction.

"What I want is for you to take me to the gathering you mentioned, the one where you bought the potion's main ingredient. The reward is 100 verl d'or."

Lumian made this request partly because Madam Magician's mission might be connected to the gathering involving Beyonder materials, and partly because he needed a similar event to acquire weapons, materials, Sealed Artifacts, and arcane knowledge.

Osta swallowed hard.

"I-I can try, but I'll need the gathering organizer's approval."

"No problem." Lumian took out a gold coin and beckoned Osta over. "This Louis d'or is your reward for asking. I'll give you the remaining 80 verl d'or when I can attend the gathering."

Osta hadn't anticipated that his beating would turn into a job offer. He was momentarily dumbstruck.

After a few seconds, he cautiously approached the wooden table and took the 20 verl Louis d'or. He told Lumian, "I'm not sure when I'll get an answer, but no later than next Wednesday. I spend the day near the catacombs and sleep here at night. You can find me anytime."

Lumian nodded, smiling as he raised the silver dagger in his hand and plunged it into Osta's shoulder.

Blood spurted out, and Osta staggered back in terror. He leaned against the wall and cried out anxiously, "Don't kill me! I'm not lying!"

Lumian picked up a glass bottle from the wooden table and approached Osta with a smile.

"Don't worry. If I wanted you dead, I would've done it by now.

"This is called a blood oath. I'm very wary of deception and betrayal."

As Lumian spoke, he held the empty glass bottle to Osta's wound, allowing the blood to trickle in.

During this process, he smiled at Osta and said, "You have a strong grasp of mysticism. You should know what blood means in the hands of others. Don't lie to me."

"Curse…" For a moment, Osta couldn't decide whether to rejoice that he hadn't been killed on the spot or despair that his blood now belonged to a man more dangerous than Baron Brignais.

Lumian said nothing more. He tightened the bottle cap, tore a strip of cloth from the room, and tossed it to Osta.

"Bandage your wound yourself."

He wasn't familiar with any Beyonder curses, but he could test if expired blood could activate Fallen Mercury's fate-exchanging ability.

Even if it didn't work, all he needed to do was convince Osta that he knew how to cast curses.

Lumian glanced at Osta, who was desperately trying to staunch the bleeding, and casually asked, "What's your plan for dealing with Baron Brignais?"

"With this Louis d'or and some money I've saved, I should be able to appease them for a week," Osta said with a bitter smile. "They won't get a single coppet if they push their debtors to death."

Chapter 118: Summoning

Lumian nodded, asking, "You mentioned that your spiritual perception is quite advanced?"

Osta briefly fell into a trance before a lingering fear spread across his face.

He took a moment to compose himself, then said, "That seems to be a trait of the Secrets Suppliant. I can sense hidden creatures lurking in the dark depths, and I can also feel the real world wrapped in a thick veil. Beyond that veil, emotionless eyes watch us…"

As he finished, Osta panted heavily. Lumian patiently waited for the impostor warlock to catch his breath. Nearly a minute later, Osta exhaled, saying, "In the market district and Quartier de l'Observatoire, it's fine, but in Underground Trier, I can often sense the end of certain paths. In places I can't see, some creature beckons me to come closer.

"I wonder what would happen to me if I truly stepped into that darkness.

A fine mystical sensor indeed… Lumian silently mocked his Hunter's Spirit Vision while also feeling that a Secrets Suppliant wasn't as useless as Osta claimed.

Osta continued, "Sometimes, when I see tourists entering the catacombs with white candles, I get these delusions. I think it's a ritual that forms a magical bond with some hidden entity, protecting the tourists from being devoured by the darkness or spirited away by the dead."

Lumian was taken aback, inwardly sighing.

In terms of mysticism, a Secrets Suppliant is quite potent… It's just that they're not skilled in combat…

From Osta's account, Lumian suspected that carrying a lit white candle into the catacombs was indeed a ritual that allowed visitors to evade the hidden perils there.

The tomb administrators likely knew this, but in pursuit of profit, they not only kept silent but also encouraged higher-ups to promote the catacombs as a tourist attraction.

Lumian remembered his sister Aurore's frequent lament: "Money changes people."

I wonder, at a lower level, which one can bring about a person's change more effectively: potions, boons, or money… Lumian muttered silently with a teasing attitude.

He then asked Osta, "Have you sensed any danger lurking in the market district's darkness?"

Osta's face shifted as he replied in a grave tone, "I dare not approach the burned-out house in Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman."

At the edge of Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman, near Rue des Blouses Blanches, stood a scorched, uninhabited house. The district's Members of Parliament had long demanded its demolition and conversion into a commercial building, but for some reason, the proposal never reached City Hall's agenda. Even after a decade, the six-story eyesore still stood.

I didn't feel anything when I passed by this morning… Lumian turned and headed for the door.

"I'll visit you again. I hope you won't disappoint me."

Osta, his shoulder wound now bandaged, flashed an ingratiating smile.

"Rest assured, I'll provide you with an answer."

After leaving Osta's room, Lumian suddenly quickened his pace. In a blink, he crouched in the shadows of the stairs leading to the rooftop, silently eyeing the tightly shut wooden door.

Nearly half an hour later, having confirmed that nothing was amiss, he slowly descended the stairs with Le Petit Trierien.

It was then that he finally heard his stomach growl.

Gazing at the makeshift barricade of rocks, logs, mud slabs, and assorted items with a narrow opening as a passage, Lumian spotted a nearby bakery and spent three licks to buy half a kilogram of croissants.

He also sampled Trier's distinctive fruit juice soda.

The effervescent liquid swirled as the currant syrup dispersed like clouds within it. The concoction set him back 13 coppet.

If he returned the soda bottle, he could reclaim 3 coppet.

…

Rue Anarchie, Auberge du Coq Doré.

Before Lumian could enter the basement bar, the noise and chaos reached his ears.

Just past nine o'clock, nearly twenty people packed the intimate space. They either sat at the bar or huddled around a few small round tables, their attention riveted on the bartender.

The stylish, ponytailed bartender explained the contraption on the bar to an unfamiliar male patron.

"This is called the Idiot Instrument. It tests your intelligence.

"Care to give it a shot?"

The man in the dark jacket seemed intrigued and asked, "How do I try?"

The bartender gestured at the exposed rubber tube with a solemn expression.

"Blow here until bubbles form in the glass jar above.

"Your ability to produce bubbles and their size determine the final test results."

Without hesitation, the man picked up the rubber hose and blew into it.

As light-green bubbles emerged from the glass jar atop the machine, everyone in the bar leaped to their feet, applauding wildly and exclaiming, "Welcome, idiot!"

The man looked bewildered for a moment before grasping the joke. His face flushed crimson.

He shot a fierce glare at the bartender and the rowdy patrons before stifling his anger and muttering, "Interesting. This prank is really something. I'll bring a few friends to try it tomorrow."

Is this what friends are for? Lumian sneered inwardly. He pulled a barstool over and sat down, telling the bartender, "Give me the usual—a glass of fennel absinthe."

The bartender grinned. "This one's on me. Your machine's fantastic. Word of its mystical powers has spread, and people have come specifically to check it out. My business has doubled since then.

"By the way, I'm Pavard Neeson, the owner of this bar and an amateur painter. What should I call you?"

"Ciel," Lumian replied, his smile unwavering.

He noticed the difference between Trieriens and the villagers of Cordu.

In Cordu, anyone who fell victim to such a prank would seek revenge. But Trieriens enjoyed finding new "victims" and watching them get caught, easing their own embarrassment.

"You've got a keen brain. You're better at pranks than many Trieriens." To the native bartender, Pavard Neeson, this compliment was high praise.

He slid a slender glass filled with a light green, hallucinogenic liquid toward Lumian.

Taking a sip of the absinthe, Lumian savored the faint bitterness that stirred his senses and made him feel alive.

He closed his eyes, soaking in the sensation before asking, "I have a few friends who arrived in Trier before me, but I don't have their contact information. Is there a way to find them?"

Pavard Neeson wiped a glass.

"If you're wealthy, advertise with the Journal de Trier. If you're not, hire a bounty hunter or information broker to see if they'll take the job. If you're broke, go back to your room and sleep. Maybe one day, you'll bump into your friends on the street."

"Any recommendations? A reliable bounty hunter or information broker?" Lumian wasn't short on cash for now and might receive a 'donation' from a generous benefactor at any moment, but advertising in newspapers was beyond his means. It'd cost at least 3,000 verl d'or. Smaller publications might be cheaper, but they were ineffective.

Moreover, he couldn't risk alarming Guillaume Bénet and Madame Pualis if they read the papers.

Pavard nodded, saying, "Anthony Reid lives in Room 5 on the hotel's third floor. You can pay him a visit tomorrow.

"He's a retired military man turned information broker. Highly trustworthy."

Lumian took note of the room number and name. He lifted the absinthe, swirling it gently before raising his glass to honor the bartender.

…

Upon returning to Room 207, Lumian didn't waste any time resting.

He drew the tattered curtains and performed the Summoning Dance in the cramped space.

His goal was to see what strange creatures he could attract in Auberge du Coq Doré and Rue Anarchie, preparing for potential future attacks, pursuits, or ambushes.

According to Osta, aside from the burned-out building, there were no particularly dangerous locations in the market district. Moreover, it was quite a distance from Rue Anarchie, making it unlikely for it to be affected by a Sequence 9 equivalent—Dancer. After all, this wasn't the ruins of Cordu Village, where the power of inevitability was pervasive.

Disregarding the more dangerous ones and those that Dancers couldn't attract, Lumian believed that even if the strange creatures that appeared later were stronger than him, it would be nearly impossible for them to force themselves on him. The bluish-black symbol representing the great existence and the black thorn pattern from inevitability would be enough to deter them from acting recklessly.

In a dance that alternated between madness and distortion, Lumian's spirituality merged with the stirred power of nature, stealthily spreading in all directions.

Before long, he sensed watchful eyes upon him. Several translucent, blurry figures floated around the room.

Some resembled humans, seemingly residual obsessions lingering after death. Others were grotesque, appearing like bottles or stacked meatballs, possibly originating from the corresponding spirit world.

Lumian didn't recognize any of them and couldn't determine their traits or abilities.

At that moment, a figure emerged from the tattered curtains.

Slightly translucent, it was a woman with long turquoise hair interwoven with green leaves that enveloped its body and concealed vital areas. The rest of its fair, smooth skin was exposed, setting one's heart racing and imagination ablaze.

With emerald-green eyes, red lips, and an exquisite, alluring face, a single glance at Lumian stirred an inexplicable excitement within him.

Chapter 119: Strange Creature

Almost simultaneously, Lumian felt his hair stand on end as a chill ran down his spine. He experienced a strong sense of impending danger.

Subconsciously, he pulled out Fallen Mercury from his waist, ready to rip off the black cloth wrapped around it at a moment's notice.

The translucent figure with turquoise hair and leafy coverings floated in midair, scrutinizing Lumian in the room. Its emerald-green eyes shifted between a misty and smiling expression, reminiscent of a deep vortex enticing the human soul to sink into it.

On one hand, Lumian experienced a familiar yet foreign urge that swept through his mind, disrupting most of his thoughts. On the other hand, he couldn't help but feel fear, akin to a flying insect encountering a spider spinning its web.

He slowed down his dance, prepared to stop at any moment.

The translucent female figure displayed an eager expression, but it instinctively sensed that something was amiss and hesitated to approach Lumian.

Sometimes it leaned forward, sometimes it retreated into the curtains, but ultimately, it did nothing.

After Lumian finished his Summoning Dance, he heard a faint sound in his ears. It was so close it seemed like it was right next door, causing the strange creatures lingering in the room to vanish one by one.

The last to leave was the female figure with turquoise hair and leafy coverings. It appeared both reluctant and perplexed.

Lumian heaved a sigh of relief and closed his eyes, quietly listening to the indistinct voices within him.

He couldn't make out a single word but yearned to hear each one clearly.

After a moment, Lumian opened his eyes and gazed at the window obscured by the tattered curtain. He muttered to himself, What was that?

His intuition told him that the translucent female figure was far more powerful than the other summoned strange creatures. It wasn't something Beyonders at his level could handle.

If not for the corruption sealed within his body and the bluish-black pattern on his chest deterring spiritual creatures from subconsciously approaching him even without activation, Lumian suspected something might have happened to him.

This piqued his curiosity.

How do other Dancers survive?

He had only dared to perform the Summoning Dance after confirming the area wasn't too dangerous, yet something nearly happened. How could other Dancers avoid such risks?

Is it because I obtained my boon through theft and lack some mystical knowledge, or is it because other Dancers can only attract strange creatures similar to themselves? Additionally, the Summoning Dance comes from a hidden existence, so there shouldn't be any problems under normal circumstances? Lumian pondered for a moment. The more he thought about it, the more he felt he was the anomaly.

He believed that the corruption in his body was on an extremely high level. Even sealed, it could occasionally attract strange and perilous entities.

Thankfully, the corruption also provides protection… Lumian exhaled, stowed away Fallen Mercury, and lit the iron-black carbide lamp. He sat at the wooden table and flipped through Aurore's notebook.

Reading the mysticism notebook from back to front was excruciating. Lacking the corresponding knowledge, he would occasionally feel illiterate. He had no choice but to take out Aurore's earliest notebook and memorize the corresponding symbols' symbolism and mystical meaning.

However, Lumian couldn't sit down and learn bit by bit from front to back. He believed that if Aurore's witchcraft notebook truly concealed crucial information, it would definitely be in the content from the past year or two when abnormalities gradually appeared in Cordu Village and the shepherds began their "hunt."

After nearly two hours of struggling with the knowledge known as Lightning, Lumian admitted defeat and decided to continue the next night.

He washed up briefly and lay on the bed.

Recalling the strange creature he had just summoned, Lumian placed Fallen Mercury beside the pillow, feeling apprehensive.

Before leaving Cordu, he had inspected the wicked pewter-black dirk and confirmed that the fate it had exchanged from the flaming monster was "pain from immolation."

The darkness gradually deepened, but Rue Anarchie never experienced a moment of peace. Singing, shouting, cursing, fighting, chasing, coughing, crying, and exercising filled the air, composing a nocturnal symphony.

Lumian had grown accustomed to the noise, which even made him feel alive.

Unknowingly, he drifted off to sleep.

At 6 a.m., the distant cathedral chimed, reminiscent of Cordu.

Lumian woke up punctually but was reluctant to open his eyes.

After a few minutes, he sat up and fastened Fallen Mercury to his waist.

His dreams had been chaotic throughout the night, but nothing out of the ordinary occurred.

"Am I overthinking it?" Lumian muttered.

He opened the door and walked into the nearest washroom. Using the morning light streaming through the window, he examined himself in the mirror.

Compared to the same moment the day before, he hadn't changed at all.

The color and length of his hair were external factors and wouldn't reset with his physical condition.

Lumian bent down and brushed his teeth.

As he rinsed his mouth, he caught sight of Charlie entering from the corner of his eye.

"Don't you live on the fifth floor?" Lumian spat out the liquid and turned to ask Charlie.

Charlie had changed into a yellowed white shirt with the cuffs rolled up to his elbows. He yawned and said, "Can you believe it? Those guys are already up before six. The washroom on the fifth floor is packed!"

He then grinned.

"I still like this washroom on the second floor the most. Do you know why? It's clean!

"Although that bastard Laurent has very high eyebrows and doesn't know how to help his mother at all, he has his strengths. He loves cleanliness. As long as he's in the apartment, he cleans the room every day and takes care of the washroom too. Haha, could it be that he can't use the toilet if it's dirty?"

So he's the one cleaning… Lumian was surprised.

His impression of the young man named Laurent had been that he was cold, haughty, and impeccably dressed. He clearly thought highly of himself and seemed oblivious to his mother's plight. He didn't strike Lumian as someone who'd clean a bathroom.

Previously, Lumian had assumed that the other tenants on the second floor had grown fed up with the landlord's penny-pinching ways and had taken it upon themselves to clean their shared spaces.

Noticing Charlie's haggard face, as though he'd been up all night, Lumian grinned and asked,

"Did you hit up Rue de la Muraille last night?"

Rue de la Muraille was Trier's infamous red-light district.

"How can I afford to go to Rue de la Muraille? But I'll definitely go there one of these days!" Charlie clenched his teeth and continued, "I got back to the hotel at 10 p.m. last night. Then I went to the underground bar and drank with the guys till midnight. In the wee hours, I even had a… shall we say, quite a vivid dream. Ciel, our names sound the same, but they're spelled differently. Can you imagine how ecstatic I was in that dream? And when I woke up, how crushed and how… uh, uh…"

"Empty?" Lumian supplied the adjective.

"Yes, yes, yes!" Charlie walked to the toilet and unfastened his belt.

His already narrow eyes crinkled with satisfaction.

Lumian pinched his nose and scoffed.

"You had a wet dream?"

Charlie shivered, shook his right hand, and laughed.

"It was the most lifelike dream I've ever had. The woman in it was far more beautiful than any on Rue de la Muraille. She was so tender and passionate. I never wanted to wake up."

"Well, clearly you couldn't hold out for too long. Waking up was a mercy," Lumian jested.

Charlie didn't bother to argue, and instead said earnestly,

"I'm planning to head to Rue du Rossignol on Sundays after I get paid and when I'm off work. There are a few dance halls there with some affordable pussies. A coworker told me that I only need 52 coppet to treat myself.

"But right now, I've lost interest."

Suddenly, Charlie's excitement surged. Lowering his voice, he confided in Lumian,

"You know what? A wealthy guest at the hotel has been treating me really well, asking me to deliver food and help tidy up the room."

"A man?" Lumian inquired with a hint of mischief.

Charlie hurriedly shook his head.

"No, it's a lady. I think she's taken a liking to me. I'm torn. If she makes a proposal, should I compromise my principles? You know these sorts of things are pretty common in Trier. If she's my ticket to my first big payday, I could soon own my own hotel."

"I figured you wouldn't hesitate." Though they'd only known each other for two days, Lumian was convinced that Charlie's moral compass was quite flexible.

Charlie sighed, visibly troubled, and admitted, "She's in her fifties."

Lumian let out a long "oh" and his expression conveyed his thoughts.

Bidding Charlie goodbye, Lumian returned to his room to change into a jacket, pants, and other attire suited for Rue Anarchie. He spent 6 coppet on a scallion pancake and 1 lick on half a liter of Apple Whiskey Sour. Settling into a corner of the street, he leisurely ate his breakfast.

Shadows from the buildings on either side cloaked him as he relished the flavors of onions and flour, observing the hawkers, women shopping for groceries, hustling workers, children scavenging for trash, and a barricade in a nearby alley.

It was 9 a.m. when Lumian finally rose, dusted himself off, and returned to Auberge du Coq Doré. He climbed to the third floor and knocked on Room 5's door.

The information broker, Anthony Reid, resided here.

After a sequence of knocks, a composed male voice with a West Midseashire Coast accent replied, "Please come in."

Lumian turned the handle and pushed the door open. The first thing that hit him was a faintly acrid, minty odor, likely meant to repel insects.

Then, he saw a man in his forties seated by the bed.

The man wore a military-green shirt, matching pants, and laceless leather boots. His hair was cropped to a fine buzz cut.

He didn't possess the tidy, efficient air of a veteran. His light yellow hairline had receded considerably, leaving a vast expanse of forehead. His face had grown plump, his beard meticulously shaven. His skin was slightly oily and his nose pores clogged. He appeared somewhat guileless and unsophisticated.

As Anthony Reid turned to face Lumian, his dark brown eyes mirrored Lumian's figure.

For some reason, Lumian suddenly felt a twinge of unease.

Chapter 120: Lunatic's Ravings

Anthony Reid regarded Lumian coolly and inquired, "What's the problem?"

"I heard from Pavard that you're a reliable information broker." Lumian quickly disclosed his source to avoid wasting time on mutual probing.

With his plump face, Anthony Reid nodded knowingly and gestured towards a chair at the center of the room.

"What information do you need? Or rather, what information would you like me to uncover?"

Lumian felt a twinge of unease as he faced Anthony Reid, who exuded an air of honesty and dependability. He took a seat and stated succinctly, "I'm searching for two individuals."

"Names, appearances, and distinguishing features." Anthony Reid shot a glance at Lumian's left hip.

Lumian reflected for a moment before answering, "One is Guillaume Bénet, formerly a padre of the Eternal Blazing Sun Church. The other is Pualis de Roquefort. Over a month ago, she arrived in Trier with her husband, Béost, their butler Louis Lund, and her lady's maid, Cathy.

"I don't have any pictures of them. All I can tell you is that Guillaume Bénet has short black hair and blue eyes. He possesses a solemn demeanor and strong ambitions. His most notable feature is his aquiline nose. Pualis has long, brown hair and bright brown eyes. Her eyebrows are lighter and thinner, and she exudes an elegant yet alluring aura…"

Anthony Reid listened intently before rising from his chair. He crossed the room to a wooden table near the window, opened a drawer, and retrieved a stack of white paper and a sharpened pencil.

In no time, he sketched two portraits.

"See if these resemble them." Anthony Reid handed the sketches to Lumian.

Lumian inspected the drawings and was struck by their vivid, lifelike quality. Aside from the absence of color, they were nearly indistinguishable from photographs.

He looked up at Anthony Reid in astonishment, remarking, "Uncanny. How can you reproduce their likeness so accurately based on my brief description?"

He had assumed Anthony Reid would draft several sketches for him to review before finalizing the portraits.

Anthony Reid cracked a rare smile.

"I recreated the images from the official wanted posters.

"The authorities are searching for them as well."

No wonder… Suddenly, it all made sense to Lumian.

Both Padre Guillaume Bénet and Madame Pualis were devotees of evil gods who had been granted boons. Once Ryan and his companions reported the situation, it was bound to attract the necessary attention!

With this realization, Lumian's disquiet grew.

I must be wanted too… Did Anthony Reid see my portrait? Does he recognize me? Trying to maintain his composure, Lumian queried the information broker, "I'm not surprised. I want to know the value of their bounties."

"Guillaume Bénet has a bounty of 20,000 verl d'or. Each piece of information is worth 500 verl d'or. The same goes for Pualis," Anthony Reid replied nonchalantly.

Lumian smirked. "If you uncover any useful information, you can cash in on the bounty twice."

He was implying that Anthony could claim one share from the authorities and another from him.

Anthony nodded in agreement.

"I'll take your assignment. 500 verl d'or, with 100 upfront.

"These are my terms. If you can't accept them, find another information broker or bounty hunter."

Lumian knew there was no room for negotiation. He could only nod slightly and concede, "No problem."

Just as he was about to hand over the money, a gunshot suddenly erupted from outside the window.

Anthony Reid's entire body shuddered as if confronted with his mortal nemesis. He instinctively ducked beneath the wooden table for cover.

Lumian was taken aback.

Wasn't this reaction a bit extreme? Wasn't this typical of life in Rue Anarchie?

Gunshots, brawls, and large-scale skirmishes were commonplace here. Those who lived in this area should have adapted by now, only needing to steer clear of the windows to avoid stray bullets.

Before long, the commotion died down.

Anthony Reid took a few seconds to regain his composure before emerging from under the table.

He offered Lumian a sheepish grin and explained, "I apologize. A few years back during the war, I suffered from post-traumatic stress on the battlefield and had no choice but to retire and return to Trier."

Then why choose to live in Rue Anarchie, where gunfire was a regular occurrence? Lumian didn't press further. He had no interest in Anthony Reid's psychological issues.

He withdrew a 50-verl d'or note and gently traced his finger over the image of Levanx, the bustling commercial streets, and the silhouettes of passing merchants.

Feeling the remaining texture, Lumian handed the grayish-blue banknote, two Louis d'or, and two five-verl coins engraved with the Sunbird to Anthony Reid.

His wallet felt a third lighter, and he couldn't shake the sense of money slipping through his fingers.

As he examined the Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman behind the banknotes, Anthony Reid bent his finger and flicked the surface to verify its authenticity under the sunlight.

Satisfied, he pocketed the money and inquired, "Do you want to check in with me periodically for updates, or should I have an address? If I come across any information, I can drop it off at your place."

"I'm in room 207." Lumian knew he couldn't conceal his stay at the Auberge du Coq Doré from Anthony Reid, so he provided his room number.

Upon leaving Room 305, Lumian's expression grew increasingly solemn as he muttered to himself, I need to be extra cautious in the coming days to prevent Anthony Reid from betraying me… Perhaps I should find an opportunity to demonstrate my strength in front of him, convincing him that I won't let any transgressions go unpunished.

As Lumian mulled over his thoughts, he made his way towards the stairs.

Suddenly, he heard someone exclaiming, laughing, and sobbing, "I'm dying, I'm dying!"

Lumian glanced in the direction of the voice and spotted a man squatting by the door of Room 310.

The man wore a filthy linen shirt and yellow pants. His unkempt black hair cascaded down to his shoulders.

At that moment, he clutched his head with both hands and stared at the ground, repeatedly muttering,

"I'm dying, I'm dying!"

His voice oscillated between fear and insanity.

The occasionally lucid madman that Charlie mentioned? Lumian sized him up for a few seconds, leaned in, and asked curiously, "Why do you think you're about to die? Do you have a terminal illness?"

Without raising his head, the man continued to yell, "I'm dying, I'm dying!"

Lumian smirked and strode past him into Room 310, its wooden door flung wide open.

The room's layout mirrored his own in 207. It was relatively tidy, save for the inevitable bugs that couldn't be evicted.

Lumian's gaze swept over the kerosene lamp, a multitude of books, fountain pens, suitcases, and other belongings. The madman stood up and declared in a daze, "This is my territory."

"I know," Lumian replied with a grin. "But if you're about to die and you don't have any children or relatives, why not use your inheritance to help poor neighbors like us?"

He observed that the madman was only in his late twenties. His bushy, black beard had been left unshaven for who knows how long, causing his blue eyes to appear as if they were buried deep within a forest.

The madman stared blankly for a few moments before clutching his hair and screaming in anguish, "They're all dead. They're all dead! I saw the

Montsouris ghost. They're all dead. I'm about to die too!"

The Montsouris ghost? Lumian finally heard something distinct from the madman.

He had deliberately provoked the other man to see if he could elicit a different reaction.

The positive feedback made him feel as if he were making progress with digesting the potion.

One of the acting principles of a Provoker is that provocation is only a means and not an end? Lumian studied the madman thoughtfully and inquired, "Why would the Montsouris ghost cause them to die and push you to death's door?"

The madman lowered his head and mumbled, "Anyone who sees the Montsouris ghost will die. Their family will die too. They'll die within a year!"

Is this the madman's delusion, or did something like this actually happen? If so, was it a curse? Lumian prodded,

"Where did you encounter the Montsouris ghost?"

"Underground, underground! It's beneath the market district!" The madman crouched down again, his back pressed against the wall as he hugged his trembling body.

The underworld beneath the market district? Couldn't he just report it to the two Churches and have them send people to eradicate the unclean beings? Lumian mused silently.

Seeing that the madman had reverted to his "I'm dying, I'm dying" state, he abandoned his pursuit of the matter, exited Room 310, and descended the stairs.

Tomorrow was Sunday. Lumian planned to visit the Mason café in Quartier du Jardin Botanique at noon to familiarize himself with the area. In the afternoon, he'd head to the underground cemetery to see if Osta had received a "reply" from the gathering's organizer.

The alleys around Rue Anarchie were cluttered with obstacles made of rocks, wood, branches, and assorted debris. Even on the main road, one could stumble upon them from time to time. However, there was already a path wide enough for two carriages to pass through.

These were called street barricades, and they could be found in many districts. Some bore the marks of smoke and fire, while others still had remnants of dried blood. They were a unique feature of Trier, contrasting starkly with the pedestrian streets of the arcade.

Lumian stepped over a low point at the edge of a barricade, emerged from the dim alley, and entered the street.

He then made his way towards the public carriage sign, intending to take such transportation to Quartier du Jardin Botanique.

As he walked, Lumian spotted numerous vagrants lying in corners, basking in the sun and picking at lice. All were filthy, gaunt, and devoid of energy.

This brought back memories of his own days as a vagrant.

Unlike the Loen Kingdom, which prohibited vagrants from sleeping on streets and in parks, the Intis Republic had no such rules in place. However, they were forbidden from entering fee-paying establishments or private venues. They often mocked Loen for its lack of culture.

Lost in thought, Lumian's eyes narrowed.

He sensed someone was tailing him!

Chapter 121: Salle de Bal Brise

Lumian didn't swivel or hesitate, striding confidently toward the public carriage sign.

He scanned the area nonchalantly, his eyes settling on the glass window of a nearby café.

Him in a dark jacket was reflected there, and not far from him, another figure in a canvas jacket and a cap.

Lumian averted his eyes, abruptly quickening his pace as if trying to catch the departing double-decker carriage.

As expected, he felt the man in the blue cap break into a jog.

The public carriage glided away silently, turning down the street. Lumian knew he couldn't catch up and halted abruptly.

Using the shop windows lining the street, Lumian caught sight of the cap-wearing man stumbling to a stop. Seizing the moment, he spun around and surveyed the dance hall opposite.

As Lumian passed the public horse stop sign, he gave an almost imperceptible nod. Continuing on, he ducked into a shadowy alley blocked by a barricade.

The man in the cap pursued him, vaulting the ramshackle barricade with ease, but Lumian had disappeared.

His quarry seemed to have evaporated into thin air.

Just as the cap-wearing man prepared to give chase, Lumian sprang from his hiding place in the corner, like a predator pouncing on its prey. He seized the man's shoulders and yanked him backward, driving his knee into his back.

Crack!

Lumian's knee connected with the man's waist, contorting his face in pain and buckling his knees.

He collapsed to the ground with a thud, stirring up a cloud of dust.

Lumian crouched and gripped the back of the stalker's head. In a gravelly voice, he demanded, "Who got you to follow me?"

"I'm not! I'm just taking a shortcut!" the man in the cap protested anxiously.

Lumian chuckled, grabbed his head, and slammed it into the ground.

The man in the cap howled in pain, his forehead bruised, swollen, and bloody.

"Who sent you to follow me?" Lumian pressed.

The man in the cap felt indignant.

"I'm not following you! I don't even know you!"

"Alright." Lumian released his grip.

In an instant, he struck the stalker behind the ear.

The man in the cap crumpled, unconscious.

Lumian hoisted him up and thoughtfully lowered his hat to cover his tightly shut eyes.

Then, as if aiding a drunken friend, he strode out of the alley and rounded the corner.

There stood an entrance to the underworld.

Lumian had "waited" for the stalker in the alley knowing he could slip underground if needed, and the setting was suitably "quiet."

…

When the man in the cap came to, his vision was swallowed by darkness. Only a faint light in the distance weakly revealed his surroundings.

Clang! Clang! Clang! Clang! The sound pierced his ears, approaching and receding through layers of obstacles.

As a native of Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman, he was no stranger to such a scene. He suspected he'd been taken underground. A steam subway passed through the "street" next door, providing the faint light.

Lumian sat in the shadows, eyeing the man in the cap. He grinned and said, "You have two choices now. Either tell me who sent you to follow me, or I'll take you deeper underground and bury you there. You should know that many people go missing in Trier every day. You won't be the only one."

Seeing the stalker's silence, Lumian knew his mental defenses were wavering. He added, "As for me, I'll navigate these underground streets and move to another district."

Realizing Lumian had an escape plan and was ready to silence him forever, the man in the cap's fear overwhelmed him. He blurted,

"I-it's Baron Brignais!"

Baron Brignais? The boss of the Savoie Mob and a creditor of Osta Trul? Why is he tracking me? I met him at the apartment on Rue des Blouses Blanches last night and didn't even speak to him… Lumian was baffled and at a loss.

This convinced him the man in the cap wasn't lying. If he wanted to fabricate a story, he wouldn't have chosen a mastermind that Lumian couldn't fathom.

Lumian frowned, asking, "Why is he following me?"

"I don't know," the man in the cap replied, trembling. "He just wants me to follow you and see where you'll go."

Lumian pondered for a moment and asked, "Where is Baron Brignais now?"

"If there's nothing else, he's usually at the Salle de Bal Brise on Avenue du Marché." The man in the cap strained to read Lumian's expression, but the light was too dim.

Salle de Bal Brise? Lumian recalled the landmark buildings in Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman from his recent recon.

Avenue du Marché was the main road connecting Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman to the Suhit steam locomotive station, stretching two kilometers. Salle de Bal Brise was near the market district, its unique statue at the entrance unforgettable.

Lumian's lips curled into a smile as he told the stalker, "Take me there. I want to talk to Baron Brignais."

The man in the cap sighed in relief, feeling as if his life had been spared.

Who would hold the upper hand or be "accidentally" killed at Salle de Bal Brise was no longer his concern.

…

Salle de Bal Brise occupied the bottom two floors of a khaki-colored building. The second floor housed a café, while the first was a bustling dance hall—though it had just opened and few customers were present.

A white, spherical statue composed of countless skulls greeted visitors at the entrance. Inscribed in Intis were the words: "They sleep here, waiting for the arrival of happiness and hope[1]."

Lumian surveyed the scene and trailed his 'guide' around the statue to the dance hall entrance.

Two burly men in white shirts and black coats stood guard. They simultaneously rested their right hands on their waists and questioned the man in the cap, "Maxime, who is he?"

"H-he's here to see Baron Brignais," Maxime stammered.

Under the guards' suspicious scrutiny, Lumian replied coolly, "It's up to Baron Brignais to decide if he wants to see me or not, not you. Do you want to bear his wrath?"

After a moment's hesitation, one of the guards turned and entered the dance hall.

As they waited, Lumian casually asked Maxime, "What's up with the statue and the inscription? They don't match the dance hall at all."

Of course, it was cool.

Maxime nervously glanced at the grinning Lumian and explained, "This was originally an annex to the cathedral. Later, the bones were moved to the catacombs, leaving the area empty. Then, this building was constructed.

"Although those bones were purified or just ashes, the Savoie Mob found it too creepy after buying this place. We had no choice but to commission a statue symbolizing death and an inscription representing the dead to appease any lingering bones that might remain underground and unexcavated."

Lumian found the idea of people dancing here amusing, considering it could disturb the skeletons below, essentially dancing on their heads.

Just then, the guard returned and informed Lumian, "Baron Brignais will meet you at the café on the second floor."

"Alright." Lumian held his head high and strutted into the Salle de Bal Brise.

First, he noticed the dance floor encircled by railings and the half-height wooden stage up ahead for singers. Then, his attention was drawn to the haphazard seating and the various perfumes and cosmetics wafting through the air.

Maxime hesitated before following Lumian.

He felt compelled to report the situation to the baron, lest he end up missing in the underworld.

Upon reaching the second floor, Lumian recognized the gentleman he had encountered the night before.

In his thirties, the man sported a black, thin-tweed formal suit. His brown hair appeared naturally curly, and his brown eyes held a confident smile. His features were sharply defined.

Baron Brignais set down his coffee and grasped the mahogany pipe with his diamond-adorned palm.

"What would you like to drink?"

He was surprisingly polite and generous.

Eyeing the four thugs with their hands on their waists, Lumian addressed Baron Brignais, "Why did you send someone to follow me?"

Baron Brignais smiled and admitted candidly, "I saw you at Rue des Blouses Blanches last night and again near Rue Anarchie today. The more I observed you, the more familiar you seemed, so I had Maxime follow you to confirm your intentions in the market district.

"You were searching for Osta last night too, weren't you?"

"He tried to scam me out of my money," Lumian replied before inquiring, "Why do I seem familiar to you?"

Baron Brignais took a puff from his pipe and grinned.

"To experienced individuals like us, your actions can hardly be considered a disguise.

"Once we grow suspicious and connect the dots, we'll naturally recognize you—Lumian Lee, a wanted criminal with a 3,000 verl d'or bounty."

My bounty is only 3,000 verl d'or? Lumian's initial reaction was confusion.

As the source of Cordu's time loop, how could his official bounty be lower than that of the padre and Madame Pualis?

"However, merely providing information about you is worth 500 verl d'or," Baron Brignais added with a smile. "Young man, you need a book called Men's Aesthetics. Don't be embarrassed. In Trier, it's quite normal for men to wear makeup. It'll help you conceal your true identity."

This "gentleman" had also applied eyeliner and powder.

Lumian smirked.

"Are you planning to capture me for the bounty?"

[1] This quote is from an inscription on the entrance of the Salle de Bal Brise in Paris during the Victorian era. I made some modifications to the original inscription. The ballroom was indeed built on the site of an old cemetery, and even used the stones left behind after the cemetery was relocated. It's like dancing on graves. The previous mention of walking turtles also refers to events that really happened during that time.

Chapter 122: Each With Their Own Plans

Baron Brignais didn't immediately respond to Lumian's question. Setting down his mahogany-colored pipe, he calmly took a sip of coffee.

After a moment, he smiled and said, "I'm not an official. I have no obligation to help them capture wanted criminals.

"Turning over anyone who's wanted would cost my Savoie Mob a great deal of valuable talent.

"More importantly, your bounty isn't impressive. It's far from tempting me. However, if you cause any trouble in the market district, I won't hesitate to tie you up and hand you over to the police for a considerable bounty."

The unspoken message from Baron Brignais was clear: There were many wanted criminals in the Savoie Mob. As long as you behaved, he could turn a blind eye.

Lumian understood. "You had someone tail me to confirm my intentions?"

Baron Brignais nodded approvingly.

"I'm glad you comprehend."

Lumian scanned the faces of the thugs, then calmly stated, "You've seen my wanted poster, so you've seen the others.

"My sole purpose in Trier is to find them."

"Excellent." Baron Brignais recognized that Lumian had no intention of crossing the Savoie Mob.

He gestured to the chair opposite the booth.

"Care for a cup of coffee?"

"No need." Lumian declined the offer. "I just want to locate those people as soon as possible."

He spread his arms wide and proclaimed, "Praise the Sun for allowing us to live in the light!"

With that, Lumian turned and strode toward the stairs, unconcerned about the hidden guns of the thugs.

Once his footsteps vanished down the staircase, Baron Brignais turned to the reserved Maxime and said gently,

"Tell me exactly how you were discovered and coerced by him. Spare no detail."

With the mahogany-colored pipe back in his mouth, Baron Brignais leaned back in his chair and closed his eyes.

Trembling, Maxime recounted his ordeal from start to finish.

After hearing the account, one of the thugs asked indignantly, "Baron, why didn't you teach that punk a lesson? Why let him walk away so easily?"

Baron Brignais tapped the mahogany pipe on the table twice and inquired with a smile, "Teach him a lesson? Do you know his Sequence, his abilities, or his weapons?"

"I don't," the thug admitted.

Baron Brignais rose, gripping the mahogany-colored pipe and smashing it against the thug's head.

Blood flowed from the gash in the thug's forehead, but he didn't dare to cry out or dodge. He stood there, terror etched on his face.

Baron Brignais withdrew the pipe and regarded him coldly.

"You dare challenge him without knowing anything? Go ahead, take my place. Let's see how long you'll survive!"

Ignoring the thug's response, Baron Brignais smiled again.

As he wiped his pipe with a folded white handkerchief from his chest pocket, he casually remarked, "Didn't you notice something off about Lumian Lee's wanted poster?

"The difference between the bounties for capturing him and providing information is too small. One is a mere 3,000 verl d'or, the other 500.

"What does that mean? It means the authorities don't want us handling Lumian Lee directly. They want us to provide intel so they can act themselves.

"Two possible reasons come to mind. First, Lumian Lee is incredibly dangerous. Allowing bounty hunters to pursue him would cause widespread casualties and unnecessary losses. Second, he possesses something valuable that officials don't want to end up in the hands of the bounty hunters.

"If I had just taught Lumian Lee a lesson, the second scenario would've been fine. But if it's the first possibility, what do you think our chances of survival are?"

The thug nodded repeatedly, not daring to argue.

Baron Brignais sat back down, picked up his coffee cup, and continued, "Moreover, based on how he dealt with Maxime and his audacity to approach me directly, I can tell that he's ruthless, decisive, and utterly confident in his abilities.

"I wager that if I had threatened him, demanding his total submission, he would have attacked without hesitation. He's the type who won't hesitate to kill.

"Heh, this is both his strength and his weakness. Unaware of my capabilities or the number of traps laid here, he still dares to confront me with the intention of killing me to ensure my silence. Sooner or later, he'll pay the price."

Baron Brignais sipped his coffee and closed his eyes.

"Let's wait and see if we should offer him assistance and protection. This ruthless country boy with a warrant on his head could prove to be a very useful weapon."

…

Outside the Salle de Bal Brise.

Lumian glanced back at the white spherical statue made of skulls and headed toward the nearest public carriage station.

On his way here, he had already devised a plan to deal with them, but ultimately didn't execute it.

He had expected that if Baron Brignais threatened him with the wanted poster or showed any hostility, he would feign fear and reveal that he was wanted for stealing a powerful Beyonder weapon from Cordu's ruins. He'd offer to hand it over in exchange for protection.

If Baron Brignais was strong and confident, and allowed Lumian to approach with the weapon, Lumian would launch a fake assassination attempt, a ruse to actually hand over the Fallen Mercury to the other party.

In that case, the unsuspecting Baron Brignais would become the evil dirk's puppet due to his gloveless hand. Having interacted with and occasionally "communicated" with Fallen Mercury for some time, Lumian had earned a degree of control over it. As long as it didn't conflict with its instinct to find a knife wielder, it would follow Lumian's orders, even when in someone else's hands.

Eventually, Baron Brignais would abandon his animosity and become an ally. After a few days, when no one suspected Lumian, the baron would mysteriously vanish into the depths of Underground Trier with a handful of his subordinates who knew about the matter, never to be seen again.

If Baron Brignais didn't allow Lumian to approach with Fallen Mercury and instead sent one of his thugs to retrieve the pewter-black dirk, Lumian's strategy would be to first transform the thug into the wielder. Then, he would use cunning to hide the abnormality and give Fallen Mercury the corresponding instructions.

In the future, if he made the puppet attack Baron Brignais, the baron would inherit the fate of being the wielder.

After completing this task, Lumian would escape if possible or surrender and wait for the fate exchange to finish. Even if the puppet died due to exhaustion, as long as Fallen Mercury wasn't severely damaged, the fate exchange wouldn't stop.

As for the torture he might endure after surrendering, Lumian didn't mind. As long as he wasn't dead, he would fully recover by six the next morning.

Regarding the possibility of Baron Brignais becoming a wielder and turning into a zombie with evident signs of decay, Lumian had a solution.

Baron Brignais himself had mentioned that men wearing makeup in Trier was common, and he was likely an avid reader of Men's Aesthetics.

Cologne could mask the stench of decay, and cosmetics could conceal rotting skin!

Truth be told, Lumian had struggled with whether to act in the café on the second floor of the Salle de Bal Brise.

Ultimately, he decided against it because Baron Brignais had shown a degree of kindness to a wanted criminal like him.

Such kindness from a villain often meant they wanted to exploit him.

If Baron Brignais truly wants to use me, he'll definitely help me conceal my identity and inform me of any unusual movements from bounty hunters in advance… As Lumian thought, he smiled.

This was a good thing!

As for the risk of ending up in a dangerous situation due to being used, Lumian already had a plan.

By then, he should be well-acquainted with Baron Brignais.

Familiarity made striking easier!

Lumian had only one option when being used for dangerous and unthinkable tasks: kill Baron Brignais.

Phew… Lumian exhaled and considered how to better disguise himself.

Initially, he had been confident in his disguise. As long as he didn't "reveal" his connection to the padre and Madame Pualis like he had with Anthony Reid, he wouldn't be recognized.

However, the incident with Baron Brignais made him realize that he had underestimated other Beyonders.

If there were Hunters adept at tracking, there might be other Sequences even better at recognizing people.

Baron Brignais or one of his subordinates must possess similar abilities… Lumian nodded imperceptibly.

This was confirmed by the fact that Osta had relocated several times.

With this realization, Lumian halted at the stop sign and boarded a brown double-decker carriage. He paid 30 coppets to secure a spot inside the carriage. Had he chosen a seat on the roof, it would have cost him only 15 coppets.

The carriage gradually moved toward Quartier de l'Observatoire.

Lumian gazed out the window, taking in the sight of hurried passersby dressed in various attire. He observed ringing bicycles, rental carriages from different companies, and humanoid machines composed of gears, valves, pipes, and levers. The metal backpack on its back spewed white steam, propelling it forward step by step.

"Praise the Sun!"

The blazing sun beat down on the pedestrians, their arms outstretched in the street.

Clang! Clang! Clang! The nearby cathedral bell chimed. It was noon.

Chapter 123: Organizer

Lumian initially planned to scope out Mason Café before noon to ensure he'd know where to escape after his treatment the following day. However, the incident with Baron Brignais had significantly delayed him. He had no choice but to find Osta Trier first and visit the Quartier du Jardin Botanique later in the afternoon.

Osta was in his usual spot, by the entrance to the catacombs, a bonfire flickering against a stone pillar.

The sound of footsteps approaching caught Osta's attention, and he looked up from under his black hooded robe.

Expecting to make a quick buck, he instead froze in place.

Quickly recovering, he stood up and forced a smile. Before Lumian could speak, Osta preempted him, saying, "I contacted the organizer this morning, told him I have a friend who's into mysticism and wants to attend the gathering. He hasn't replied yet."

Lumian nodded, not questioning how Osta had reached out to the organizer. He walked over to the bonfire, found a rock, and sat down. Casually, he asked,

"You've duped plenty of people, but you're always in the same spot. Aren't you scared they'll track you down?"

Osta laughed and replied, "Most of the time, it's not really deception. As a true Beyonder and Secrets Suppliant, using my spirituality to perform divination for them isn't a scam.

"My predictions are far more accurate than most in the mysticism club!

"Sometimes, different folks need different strokes. If I'm ever exposed, I can always talk my way out."

"How?" Lumian inquired with a smile.

Osta coughed.

"The key is to not be too clear or absolute from the start. That way, you can accuse them of misunderstanding your intentions."

Lumian's smile deepened.

"When it came to the Samaritan Women's Spring, you agreed too easily and made your promise too definite."

Osta's expression fell.

"Yeah, I was cornered by Baron Brignais. I just wanted the money right away.

"The right approach would've been to say I had a solution, but it was difficult to achieve. After you begged me repeatedly, I'd reluctantly accept your cash, warning I couldn't guarantee success…"

Evidently, Osta had pondered his mistakes the previous night, considering how to avoid risks if he had to start over. He grew more animated as he spoke, only stopping when he noticed Lumian's subtle grin.

How could he openly tell this dangerous man how to swindle him? Osta awkwardly smiled and said, "But I doubt this would've fooled you either. You're the most cautious person I've ever met."

Lumian smiled and shook his head. "You really picked the wrong pathway."

Osta didn't dare to carry on. Instead, he asked, "I thought about it last night. I never mentioned gatherings when we talked. I just said I bought the potion's main ingredient. How'd you know it was a mysticism gathering?"

Lumian chuckled.

"It was just a gut feeling."

Internally, he criticized, Aren't there only two possibilities? Either a one-on-one deal or a gathering. There was at least a 50% chance of guessing right! It was just a casual comment. No harm done if I was wrong!

Osta stared at Lumian, increasingly fearful.

It was becoming harder to guess this dangerous man's Sequence. He appeared skilled in combat, possessed strong spirituality, and had an intuition bordering on precognition.

Lumian savored the warmth of the bonfire and offhandedly asked, "How did you get involved with the mysticism gathering?"

Osta's face took on a nostalgic expression.

"Everyone comes to Trier with hope. Painters dream of having their works chosen by the World's Artists Exhibition, but most fail. Every year, some succumb to madness or suicide.

"Poor authors living in cheap apartments hope to replicate the success of best-sellers like Aurore and Meniere, but they end up selling their stories to small newspapers. They're forced to bear scathing reviews like 'trite,' 'mediocre,' and 'cliché.' Many of them have even stooped to writing smut for underground booksellers, risking arrest by detectives.

"Over a decade ago, I came to Trier from Cécilis Province, eager to make a fortune. I lived in a leaky attic, climbed scaffolding, worked in factories, smuggled illegal books, and sold soda. I made some money, but with each passing year, I realized I'd never be rich. Owning a home and enjoying leisurely mornings before work were impossible dreams.

"Eventually, I discovered mysticism magazines like Psychic and Mysteries. Perhaps I still fantasized about gaining superpowers overnight and changing my fate, so I started attending gatherings with fellow enthusiasts. Those magazines would publish the relevant information.

"Earlier this year, a friend from the group asked if I wanted to join a gathering with real Beyonder powers. I couldn't refuse. You know the rest."

Lumian listened without interrupting Osta's account.

When Osta finished, Lumian asked, "Is that friend the gathering's organizer?"

"No," Osta shook his head. "The organizer goes by 'Mr. K.' He always wears a massive hood, practically covering his entire face."

"Mr. K…" Lumian committed the codename to memory and pondered for a moment. "What abilities has he shown?"

Osta shook his head again.

"I've never seen any. But after becoming a Secrets Suppliant, I sensed I was facing shadows and deep darkness when meeting him. I think he's very powerful."

He seems powerful. I wonder who's stronger—him, the padre, or Madame Pualis… Lumian mused before asking curiously, "Did you sense anything special around me?"

Osta hesitated before admitting, "No, but your dangerous aura frightens me more than even Baron Brignais."

Lumian glanced at his left chest and smiled.

"That's good."

Osta was taken aback, not understanding Lumian's meaning.

Lumian changed the subject.

"Have you heard of the Montsouris ghost?"

"Of course." As a con artist posing as a warlock, Osta knew many stories about Underground Trier. "Legend has it that an evil spirit lurks in this dark, vast underground. It always travels alone, never seeming to reach its destination. Those who encounter the ghost either die instantly or suffer mysterious deaths along with their families within the year.

"Those who've claimed to see the Montsouris ghost went mad and died within a year. I've heard both Church factions sent experts to search for the spirit, but they found nothing."

It sounds plausible… Lumian didn't inquire further. Standing, he told Osta,

"I'll catch up with you tomorrow night or the following morning."

"Alright." Though Osta didn't believe Lumian would harm him now, he couldn't help but sigh with relief at the departure of the dangerous man.

No ordinary human could feel at ease around a tiger!

On his way back to the surface, Lumian carried the carbide lamp and passed by the entrance to the catacombs. Once again, he saw the arch adorned with white bones, sunflowers, and steam symbols.

Looking at the words "Stop! The Death Empire lies ahead!" Lumian cautiously approached the natural doorway separating the inner and outer chambers.

Suddenly, a figure emerged from behind the stone arch and bellowed, "Halt!"

The figure donned a blue vest and yellow pants. He was an elderly man with gray hair and wrinkled skin.

His light-yellow eyes, slightly clouded, locked onto Lumian.

"Can't I go in?" Lumian feigned the innocence of a foreigner.

The old man scrutinized him. "You need to purchase a ticket upstairs and bring a white candle with you."

"I have a friend buried inside. Do I need to buy a ticket to pay my respects?" Lumian fabricated a friend on the spot.

The old man eyed him suspiciously, "Don't tell me you're one of those Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative college students? Those troublemakers always concoct lies to sneak into the tomb. They sing, dance, and feast in the ossuary! Fine, go in. Just remember to bring lit white candles like them. That's my only demand!"

Lumian once worried that if he attended university, he'd be too different from his classmates. Now, it seemed his concerns were unfounded.

Those students were even wilder than he was!

"Alright," Lumian feigned disappointment. "I'll bring a white candle next time."

The old man nodded, relieved.

Lumian turned and followed the restored path to the stairs leading to the surface.

Over a hundred meters away, he suddenly spotted a black shadow from the corner of his eye.

The shadow hunched slightly, shuffling behind a row of stone pillars on the left.

Lumian glanced over and noticed its intangibility, as if it were almost illusory.

Instinctively, he raised the carbide lamp, casting a bluish-yellow glow.

The shadow disappeared, as though it had never existed.

Lumian quickly scanned the surroundings but found nothing.

Is it an illusion or an underground ghost? As Lumian pondered, he suddenly wondered: Could it be the Montsouris ghost? Did I encounter the

Montsouris ghost?

His pupils widened, and his expression grew unusually grave.

Moments later, Lumian erupted into laughter, nearly doubling over. He laughed until tears threatened to spill from his eyes.

"Haha, come on, come at me! I want to see how you'll kill my entire family and how you'll cause my mysterious death!"

Chapter 124: Method of Self-Protection

As planned, Lumian circled the vicinity of Mason Café in Quartier du Jardin Botanique before making his way back to Auberge du Coq Doré on Rue Anarchie. He headed straight for the third floor and arrived at Room 310, where the lunatic resided.

Bang! Bang! Bang! He hammered on the door.

"I'm dying! I'm dying!" The wailing from inside grew frantic.

"I'm f*cking dying too!" Lumian spat, his face expressionless.

Startled by his response, the lunatic fell silent and offered no reply.

Lumian didn't knock again. He produced a small wire he carried with him, inserted it into the keyhole, and fidgeted with it.

With a click, the grimy brown wooden door swung open.

Inside, Lumian found the madman, clad in a linen shirt and yellow pants, kneeling with his thick black beard nearly covering his eyes.

Lumian entered and casually closed the door. He crouched before the lunatic and lowered his voice.

"I've encountered the Montsouris ghost too."

The lunatic visibly trembled, his fear-filled blue eyes showing the faintest glimmer of lucidity.

After a few seconds, he caught his breath and asked in a deep voice, "Are you sure it was the Montsouris ghost?"

He's in that state of intermittent lucidity Charlie mentioned? Lumian smirked and replied, "I don't know. That's why I'm asking you to confirm it.

"What did the Montsouris ghost you saw look like?"

With a shiver, the lunatic described, "A black shadow, like a lonely old man. Its back was slightly hunched, and it moved very slowly.

"After I spotted it, it vanished into the darkness. I didn't realize it was the Montsouris ghost until my parents, my wife, and my children started dying one after another…"

It's eerily similar to my experience… Lumian frowned, suspecting that he had indeed encountered the Montsouris ghost.

He contemplated for a moment.

"How did your family die? Were you attacked?"

The lunatic hastily shook his head.

"I—I often felt something watching me from the shadows. But I didn't face anything else. Otherwise, I wouldn't have made it this far.

"My child became gravely ill and died in the hospital. We had just cleansed and interred him in the catacombs when my wife—my wife, snapped and hanged herself in our room.

"That's when I recalled the legend of the Montsouris ghost. I took my parents to the cathedral and asked the padre there to protect us.

"The Church took it very seriously and assigned three clergymen to stay at my home. Nothing happened during that time. I thought the nightmare was over.

"But after the New Year, the clergymen left. Soon after, my father strangled my mother and ended his own life with a table knife. I can't remember much after that. Sometimes, I wake up and realize that I moved here at some point…"

The lunatic's blue eyes revealed unmasked anguish. Lumian felt like a tightly wound spring, ready to snap at any moment.

"They said the Montsouris ghost would kill anyone who encountered it back then. But this lasted until the New Year." Lumian keenly noticed the lunatic's account differed from the legend.

The lunatic shook his head.

"I don't know why it happened. I thought the nightmare was over. Otherwise, the three clergymen wouldn't have left…"

A curse with no time limit until all targets are dead? Lumian formed a new hypothesis about the Montsouris ghost legend.

He stood up and told the lunatic, "I might have encountered the Montsouris ghost too. Let's see which one of us lasts longer. If I figure out how to break this curse, you can pay me to help you."

"A way, a solution…" The corners of the lunatic's mouth twitched as he echoed Lumian's words, caught between tears and laughter.

He raised his hands and clutched his hair.

"I'm dying, I'm dying!"

Lumian intended to ask the lunatic's name, something to inscribe when he was laid to rest in the cemetery or catacombs, but he shook his head, opened the door, and left Room 310 instead.

Back in Room 207, Lumian sat on the bed, mulling over how to break the curse brought by the Montsouris ghost.

Although theoretically, the curse might not take effect until year's end, leaving no urgency for now, Lumian couldn't rely on the Montsouris ghost's apparent delay.

Moreover, he had no immediate family, so he stood a high chance of being the curse's first victim. It could happen in the latter half of the year, next week, or even tonight.

Come to think of it, that man might still be alive. If the Montsouris ghost could help me kill him, I'd owe it a debt of gratitude… Lumian's thoughts raced, and he suddenly laughed at himself.

In the dream, he had lied to Ryan and the others, claiming he'd forgotten his original name. He simply wanted to avoid mentioning or remembering it.

When he was young, his family had been well-off, but the man he called father turned out to be a philanderer and later a gambling addict.

His mother died from grief-induced illness, and his grandfather went bankrupt. They lived together in the slums until his grandfather's death a few years later.

Thus, after being adopted by Aurore, Lumian had willingly asked to take her last name and change his own.

Lumian didn't know if the man who had only provided genetic material was dead or alive. If he was dead, it was a blessing. If not, he hoped the Montsouris ghost would step up its game.

As for himself, Lumian dared not assume the Montsouris ghost wouldn't harm him just because he harbored the taint of an evil god and the mark of a great existence.

As long as it didn't possess him, the ghost could do anything!

According to Madam Magician, Lumian was convinced that many Beyonders and monsters could easily kill him, but they would have to face the ensuing corruption as a consequence.

I'm not certain if this is a curse or not… But I can't just sit here waiting for death. I have to take action… Aurore used to say that the best skill for the weak or underage is 'finding their parents'… With this in mind, Lumian's eyes brightened. He stood up and walked to the table to find a pen and paper.

He planned to update Madam Magician on the mission's progress. Simultaneously, he would mention his encounter with the Montsouris ghost, questioning if he had been cursed and how to address the issue.

Though the woman with the Magician code name wasn't his parent, she was undoubtedly his superior in the current circumstances. It was logical to seek assistance from his superior when in trouble!

Lumian pondered for a moment before writing:

"Esteemed Madam Magician,

"I have followed your instructions and gained Osta Trul's trust. I've also requested his introduction to Mr. K's mysticism gathering…

"On my return from the catacombs, I regrettably encountered the legendary Montsouris ghost. Of course, I cannot be certain.

"The specific legend is as such…

"I seek to know if I have been cursed by the Montsouris ghost or if another influence is at play. How should I proceed?"

Towards the end, Lumian intentionally added the code name "Seven of Wands" to remind the recipient not to overlook his status as an external member of their enigmatic organization.

Lumian deduced this from the lady's use of the tarot cards' Magician code name and his Seven of Wands.

He suspected Madam Magician might belong to a clandestine organization symbolized by tarot cards and devoted to a powerful entity. The Major Arcana were official members, each possessing formidable abilities. The

Minor Arcana served as peripheral members who undertook various missions.

After folding the letter, Lumian meticulously cleaned the room. He crushed a few bedbugs that had crept in from next door and disposed of them in the bathroom trash can.

Once done, he lit the candle and conjured a spiritual barrier to summon Madam Magician's messenger in his name.

Before long, the candle flame transformed into a deep blue hue.

This time, an arm-height, doll-like messenger in a light-gold dress materialized atop the flames, floating there.

Its unfocused, light-blue eyes scanned the surroundings before gently nodding.

"Much better than last time."

The voice was otherworldly and ghostly, far from human-like.

"Truth be told, I'm not fond of those bedbugs either," Lumian chimed in.

The doll messenger smiled.

"Right? No creature appreciates those pests!"

Lumian sensed a shared sentiment, as if both sides despised the same thing.

With that, the doll messenger extended a pale-white palm, devoid of any skin texture, and the letter floated up.

Lumian watched the "doll" seize the letter and vanish like a bursting bubble.

He sighed with admiration and thought, Having a messenger is so convenient…

After concluding the ritual and tidying up the wooden table, Lumian returned to the bed, awaiting the messenger's response.

As time passed, the night outside deepened. Songs echoed from the underground bar, but Lumian received no reply from Madam Magician.

This made him furrow his brow.

Does Madam Magician have other matters to handle and no time to read my letter?

I can't keep waiting. I must devise other ways to protect myself…

Neither Hunter nor Provoker grant me the power to combat curses—if it is indeed a curse…

Dancer doesn't either. Unless I genuinely pray to that concealed entity after the sacrificial dance. But how would that differ from suicide?

Ah, if I can't pray to that hidden being, I can seek out that great existence!

I bear His seal upon me. I even obtained His permission when I claimed the boon. I'm not afraid to beseech Him again!

Yes, I can entreat Him to help me lift this curse.

Lumian acted swiftly, setting up the altar.

Since Madam Magician hadn't specifically outlined the ingredients for the great existence's domain, Lumian believed that whatever he employed wouldn't impact the final outcome, as long as it didn't invoke other deities.

He arranged orange candles made of citrus and lavender. Two symbolized the deity, and one represented himself.

After completing the preparations, Lumian stepped back and examined the three yellowish candles. He recited in Hermes, "The Fool that doesn't belong to this era, the mysterious ruler above the gray fog; the King of Yellow and Black who wields good luck…"

Chapter 125: Struggle

As Lumian intoned the three lines of the honorific name, a faint gray fog materialized around him, radiating an unnerving aura.

The orange candle flame adopted a bluish tinge, casting a sinister, deep glow over the entire altar.

In that instant, Lumian's thoughts seemed to decelerate. He felt an itching beneath his flesh, as if something was on the verge of burrowing out.

A distant, inscrutable gaze from an unfathomable height appeared once more.

Collecting himself, Lumian resumed his prayer.

Adhering to Madam Magician's instructions and incorporating sacrificial knowledge from Aurore's grimoire, he recited in Hermes, "I implore you. I beseech you to lift this curse from me…"

In all honesty, Lumian yearned to request the great existence's protection for a year, shielding him from all harm. But that was clearly unattainable. He had not yet mastered the necessary Hermes phrases to counter the threat of the Montsouris ghost. Thus, he could only allude to the curse plaguing him.

As the ritual culminated, Lumian began to draw upon the power of the herbs on the altar.

In the following moment, his vision blurred, as if a seraph with twelve pairs of luminous wings materialized before him.

Descending from above, the seraph extended its arms, enveloping Lumian in an embrace.

The wings of light closed around him, enfolding him layer by layer.

Lumian shook off his stupor and noticed the bluish candle flame had reverted to its original orange hue at some unknown point.

Recalling the surreal encounter, it felt like a dream. He couldn't help but murmur to himself, Did I just see an angel? Did that great existence send one of His angels to protect me and lift this curse?

Until today, Lumian had only heard of angels in the sermons of the Eternal Blazing Sun Church. He never anticipated experiencing an angelic embrace firsthand.

According to Madam Magician, this was at least a high-level Sequence 2 entity. Even if only a fraction of its power had been projected from afar, it was still angelic in nature… Lumian felt an even deeper reverence for the enigmatic organization that employed tarot cards as their moniker and the great existence that had sealed the corruption within him.

Simultaneously, he breathed a sigh of relief.

If the Montsouris ghost had truly inflicted a curse, it should no longer be an issue. How could a ghost that dared not confront the protection granted by the Eternal Blazing Sun Church's clergy and was confined to wandering beneath Trier compare to an angel?

Nevertheless, trepidation still gripped Lumian's heart. He had prayed for the curse to be lifted. What if the Montsouris ghost employed a different method of killing than a curse?

He waited until midnight, but Magician's response never came.

Unable to risk sleep, he lay on the bed, shutting his eyes just to rest.

Staying awake all night posed no challenge for him. At six in the morning, his body and mind would simultaneously reset.

This was both a curse and a blessing.

It wasn't until the latter half of the night that the cacophony of Rue Anarchie died down. Lumian discerned the faint chirping of insects in the distance and an even more remote whistle.

Abruptly, his body felt leaden, and breathing grew labored. It was as if someone had swaddled him in a blanket and weighed him down.

This isn't good! Lumian tried to rise, but he could only move his arms.

His eyes wouldn't even open!

His arms felt restrained, barely able to lift a few centimeters off the bed.

In the next moment, Lumian's body turned frigid, and his nose felt damp. It was as if he had been stuffed into a sack and hurled into the depths of a river.

His breathing faltered, his chest tightened with pain, and his thoughts decelerated.

Lumian's desperate attempts at resistance flashed through his mind—entering Cogitation and activating the black thorn symbol on his chest.

He dismissed the idea in an instant.

Firstly, he would likely lose control. Secondly, the Montsouris ghost bore no connection to the covert entity known as Inevitability. It might not be deterred by the black thorn symbol.

Unless left with no alternative and teetering on the brink of death, Lumian wouldn't gamble his life on this seemingly futile method.

His lips and nose turned icy, as though an invisible hand was pressing them down.

Paired with the sensation of drowning, Lumian found breathing impossible. His lungs were on the verge of bursting.

Words like Hunter, Provoker, Dancer, corruption, seal, and Fallen Mercury flickered through Lumian's mind, each forming fleeting thoughts before dissipating.

Fallen Mercury… Fallen Mercury! At last, Lumian had a revelation. He strained to shift his gloved left palm to the side.

He had already positioned the evil dirk in the most accessible location to handle potential emergencies.

A few seconds later, Lumian, gasping for air with his mouth agape, made contact with the hilt of Fallen Mercury and hoisted the pewter-black dirk.

Fallen Mercury was no longer shrouded in black cloth. The intricate patterns on its surface overlapped, inducing vertigo.

With every ounce of his strength, Lumian hoisted his shoulder, bent his arm, and plunged Fallen Mercury above his body.

There was nothing there. Not even a scratch, let alone blood!

Without hesitation, Lumian gritted his teeth and angled his arm toward his body.

With a sickening pop, he drove Fallen Mercury into his left waist.

Crimson blood oozed out, staining the blade of Fallen Mercury. The phantom mercury droplet symbolizing the fate of immolation penetrated Lumian's body.

The pain shocked Lumian's oxygen-starved mind to consciousness. His vision blurred as the enigmatic river, composed of innumerable mercury symbols, emerged.

This represented his own fate.

Ignoring the need for precision, Lumian cast his gaze downstream of the illusory river, toward a current on the verge of engulfing the other tributaries.

He then infused his spirituality into Fallen Mercury, allowing it to agitate the complex mercury symbol birthed from the river's entanglement.

In the next moment, Lumian saw himself lying on the bed, his face a purplish hue, teetering on the brink of death.

The mercury symbols abruptly constricted, solidifying into a droplet that seeped into Fallen Mercury's blade.

Almost instantaneously, Lumian felt his entire body relax. The sensations of drowning and suffocation vanished. Simultaneously, pain enveloped him, and he couldn't help but emit a soft groan.

Flames erupted from his body, searing his flesh inch by inch.

He had utilized the pain of being incinerated stored in Fallen Mercury to trade for his fate of being assaulted by a Montsouris ghost. He had successfully escaped a state where he couldn't even struggle, and the attack didn't come again!

Fallen Mercury could stab others or Lumian himself, replacing an unwanted fate!

He was ignited, reliving the agony of battling the flaming beast.

Braced for the onslaught, Lumian rolled beneath the bed.

Thumping against the floor, he rolled back and forth to smother the flames engulfing him.

After a while, it was unclear whether Lumian's strategy had worked, if the fire brought on by the fate exchange had run its course, or if it was a combination of both, but he was no longer consumed by the scarlet inferno.

However, his clothes were in shreds, and his body was marred with charred wounds. His nose teetered on the edge of detachment, and his singed hair emitted a burnt odor.

For an ordinary person or most Low-Sequence Beyonders, this was an injury beyond resuscitation—death was the only outcome.

Lumian strained to keep his eyes open and focused, fighting the urge to pass out.

As time ticked away, he sensed his life rapidly ebbing.

He clung to consciousness, gasping for air.

After an indeterminate period, Lumian finally heard the eerily beautiful chime of a bell.

Clang! Clang! Clang!

The bell struck six in the morning, Trier time, its peal echoing through Rue Anarchie and beyond. Dawn's first light crept over the horizon.

Lumian snapped to attention, his pain abruptly gone.

His body and mind had completely reset!

Phew… Lumian exhaled in relief and stood. He looked down at the tattered remnants of his once crisp linen shirt and dark pants. His skin had returned to normal.

Already in a financial bind, he couldn't help but sigh.

He needed new clothes—a fresh expense!

Still, he'd managed to survive the Montsouris ghost's initial attack. This was likely a first in the annals of its dark legend.

From the looks of it, it's not a curse… Lumian changed into fresh clothes and stepped into the washroom to splash cold tap water on his face.

Gazing into the mirror, he noticed that some of his hair had shortened, and the golden dye had faded in places.

These external changes couldn't be reset.

After washing up, Lumian returned to Room 207 and was startled to find another letter awaiting him.

The folded piece of paper lay innocuously on the wooden table.

Lumian muttered under his breath, Isn't it too early for a reply? You didn't sleep again last night. Did you just get home?

With a shake of his head, Lumian picked up the Magician's response and unfolded it.

The handwriting was messy, but he could just make out that it belonged to a woman.

"Excellent work. Engage more with Mr. K and exhibit your wild, fanatical side until he converts you and extends an invitation to his organization.

"The Montsouris ghost is not a curse. There are three solutions for your current predicament:

"First, die before it. Use the corruption within you to destroy it and avenge the fallen.

"Second, trade your fate of encountering the Montsouris ghost with your dirk. Haven't you ever considered using that blade on yourself?

"Third, take refuge in a particular cathedral of a certain Church and never leave its sanctuary."

Chapter 126: Finding Prey

Lumian quickly scanned Madam Magician's message, committing the essential points to memory.

It was evident that the first and third solutions to the Montsouris ghost dilemma were jokes. The only viable option was the second: using Fallen Mercury to swap his fate of encountering the Montsouris ghost.

In all honesty, Lumian hadn't considered stabbing himself with Fallen Mercury to proactively change his destiny. Only when he was cornered by the Montsouris ghost, teetering on the brink of death, did this desperate strategy surface in his mind.

Time was of the essence, and Lumian had to act fast. He'd only managed to exchange his fate of being attacked by the Montsouris ghost, not completely avoiding one. He'd narrowly escaped the first crisis but still lingered in death's shadow.

Given the choice, Lumian would have still opted to exchange the fate of being attacked by the Montsouris ghost instead of just encountering one. The attack had already occurred, and he couldn't be sure it would cease with a mere fate swap. He needed the most reliable plan to save himself.

In simpler terms, what if the Montsouris ghost killed him and realized it had never met him and targeted the wrong person?

I need to find someone to trade the fate stored in Fallen Mercury for a better one. Then, I'll prepare thoroughly, and when I'm ready, I'll stab myself to complete the exchange. I'll seal the Montsouris ghost encounter inside Fallen Mercury... Lumian combined his experience with Madam Magician's advice and quickly devised a way to escape his predicament.

When the time came, Fallen Mercury, also known as the Cursed Blade, would cause whoever was stabbed to suffer the fate of their entire family dying, including themselves.

The drawback was the time it would take for the effect to occur.

Lumian drew Fallen Mercury from his waist, eyeing the blade wrapped in black cloth. He felt the Beyonder weapon's potential more acutely than ever.

He seriously contemplated finding experts to repair Fallen Mercury. Otherwise, the enchanted dirk would only last until year's end.

Maybe Mr. K's Beyonder Gathering could provide the resources he needed.

My suspicion is correct. Madam Magician's intention for me to meet Osta Trul is to use him to attend Mr. K's Gathering and join the secret organization behind it… Lumian donned a wide-brimmed hat and a black shirt resembling formal attire before leaving Room 207 and descending the stairs.

As a Hunter, he needed to start his search for prey.

Upon exiting Auberge du Coq Doré, Lumian spotted Charlie sitting on the three-story staircase leading to the street. Pale-faced, he gazed at the sky, melancholic, with a lit cigarette in his right hand.

"What's wrong?" Lumian asked, casually sitting beside Charlie.

Charlie didn't look back. He inhaled from his cigarette and sighed.

"I feel like I've lost my soul. It's gone."

He wore a white shirt, red vest, and a black suit jacket draped over his left arm—a hotel uniform.

Lumian grinned and got to the point.

"Did you sleep with that older woman?"

Charlie turned to Lumian and emphasized, "Please call her Madame. She's only in her fifties."

He took another drag and exhaled a smoke ring.

"Did you know? She gave me a diamond necklace worth at least 1,500 verl d'or. I couldn't resist. She was so dazzling and seductive that she went straight to my heart."

"It," Lumian corrected.

Charlie smiled sheepishly.

"Madame Alice is captivating too. It's quite a feat to maintain her elegance at her age. She mentioned she'll stay in Trier for six months and can offer me 500 verl d'or a month…"

As he spoke, Charlie's voice grew somber, and his eyes took on a melancholic hue.

Just as Lumian thought Charlie would sigh over his lost soul, a long exhale escaped him.

"Why can she only stay for half a year…"

Lumian patted Charlie's shoulder, saying earnestly, "Take care of yourself."

Charlie's eyelids twitched.

"There's a need for moderation. Madame Alice is far too enthusiastic. I was so exhausted last night that I didn't even have that beautiful dream."

Lumian chuckled and said, "You openly mentioned obtaining a diamond necklace worth 1,500 verl d'or. In Rue Anarchie, that's enough wealth to make many people go mad. Aren't you afraid I'll steal it?"

Charlie laughed.

"I had to share it with someone, or I'd feel awful.

"I've noticed you don't seem short on money. You're even quite generous. You wouldn't commit a crime for a mere 1,000 to 2,000 verl d'or."

Lumian grinned, retorting, "Is there a chance I'm pretending not to lack money to lure someone like you into lowering your guard?"

Charlie's expression froze as the dying cigarette nearly burned his fingers.

Lumian changed the subject, asking casually, "Is there anyone you despise so much that you think they deserve to die?"

Charlie snuffed out his cigarette on the stone steps, puzzled, "Why do you ask?"

He intended to pocket the extinguished cigarette butt but decided against it, tossing it aside instead.

A nearby vagrant darted over, grabbing the warm cigarette and taking a few drags.

Without waiting for Lumian's response, Charlie continued, "The person I despise most is our head attendant. You've no idea how detestable he is. Haha, I've never thought of wanting him dead, but I just wish I could hood his face and beat him up one day.

"I don't think many people truly deserve to die. One is Baron Brignais, the market district's Savoie Mob leader. He colludes with loan sharks, driving many to bankruptcy. A friend of mine jumped off a building in desperation. But what did that accomplish? His son vanished mysteriously, and his daughter was forced into the Salle de Bal Brise. Although she's supposed to only sing, in reality, well…"

"That's right. If he had the courage to kill himself, why didn't he think of a way to kill Baron Brignais and the others?" Lumian nodded slightly.

Charlie stared at Lumian, taken aback.

"Your thoughts are a little extreme."

He added, "The second person deserving death is Margot, leader of the Poison Spur Mob. He manipulates people into swindling women new to Trier. After bleeding them dry, he forces them into prostitution. That's how Miss Ethans in Room 8 on the fourth floor ended up in the motel. Most of the money she earns is taken by Margot. She's tried to escape several times, but she's been beaten within an inch of her life before she could leave Rue Anarchie."

Market district has quite a few mobs. No wonder it's chaotic at night… Lumian glanced at Charlie, saying, "It sounds like you sympathize with Miss Ethans."

Charlie puffed out his chest.

"True Intis gentlemen empathize with ladies in tragic situations and offer help when appropriate."

Lumian tersely acknowledged.

"Do you know where Margot lives?"

"I don't know." Charlie shook his head. "But he frequents the motel in the evenings, extorting money from Miss Ethans. If you hear a woman crying, shouting, and cursing on the fourth floor, that's Margot and his thugs."

Lumian nodded pensively and inquired, "Who else do you think deserves to die?"

Charlie considered for a moment, replying with a contorted expression, "Monette, that Islander. He swindled me out of 10 verl d'or!

"Can you imagine? I'd been unemployed for some time and hadn't found a new job yet. That was my last bit of savings. I nearly starved to death because of him!"

"Where does he live?" Lumian asked nonchalantly.

"He was staying at the motel initially. But after scamming me, he moved out. I don't know where he went." Charlie's anger flared as he spoke. "I was waiting for him to hook me up with a job…"

Once he'd calmed down, Charlie eyed Lumian quizzically, "Why's your hair different?"

There were strands of varying lengths, gold mingled with black.

"Don't you think it's rather stylish?" Lumian asked earnestly.

Charlie snorted, his expression dubious.

His experience with the Idiot Instrument made him instinctively question Lumian's intentions in such matters.

After a few moments, Charlie glanced at the street vendors and waved his hand.

"I've got to head to the hotel. I'll see you tonight."

Lumian stayed put on the stone steps outside the hotel, waving at Charlie's retreating figure.

…

That afternoon, Lumian took a public carriage to Quartier du Jardin Botanique. After walking over 300 meters, he reached Mason Café.

The café occupied the ground floor of a beige four-story building near the botanical garden.

Green plants twined around the building's exterior. The ground-floor shops were set back nearly a meter, with pillars supporting an outer walkway for pedestrians.

Mason's Café boasted dark green walls and large windows. Sunlight streamed through the glass, illuminating the tables and chairs outside.

Lumian, dressed in a dark suit and wide-brimmed hat, entered the café.

The first thing he noticed were the intricate plant sculptures on the wall, interspersed with Intisian sentences:

"Who holds supreme power in the country? The president or parliament?

"It's a café!

"Who has the final say in a legal case? The Supreme Court?

"It's a café!

"Who's the authority in literature? L'Institut de Intis or the Journal des débats?

"No, it's a café—always a café[1]!"

[1] Adapted from the opening chapter of "Histoire Insolite des Cafés Parisiens" which was used in an early 21st-century bibliography. The original text was too lengthy, so it has been condensed.

Chapter 127: Café

Lumian couldn't help but smile when he saw the "slogan" on the wall.

It reminded him of something Aurore had once said: "In Trier, the café holds a unique status. It's the birthplace of riots, the sanctuary of conspiracies, and the wellspring of scandals."

Throughout Intisian history, innumerable riots had been sparked in cafés, and countless literary works and political struggles had brewed within them.

Unlike the neighboring Loen Kingdom, Intis had its own private clubs, but they were fairly exclusive or high-end, with limited access. Be they former nobles, current members of parliament, high-ranking government officials, financiers, bankers, industrialists, renowned authors, newspaper editors, military generals, or university professors, everyone enjoyed frequenting different cafés to engage in spirited conversations, presenting a more approachable side to the public. After all, the Republic's political slogan and image were built upon "freedom, equality, and fraternity."

Naturally, the cafés frequented by various social strata were vastly different, often distinguished by location, price, and style. So, when Lumian heard from Charlie that Laurent had used his mother, Mrs. Lakazan, to seek opportunities in upscale cafés, he wasn't surprised or puzzled. Many people did this, often becoming archetypes for novelists, but only a few succeeded.

At the same time, banquets and salons were all the rage in Trier. If any high society member didn't host a salon once a month, others would assume something had befallen their family or that a financial crisis had jeopardized their political future.

Aurore, who clearly adored this metropolis, stayed away partly because artists like authors, poets, painters, and sculptors seemed like tamed butterflies, fluttering about the salons of various politicians, financiers, and officials. It appeared that only by gaining their approval could the value of their work be realized.

The amalgamation of salons and cafés supplanted most club functions.

In this system, taverns, beer houses, dance halls, and cafés shared similarities, but the latter held far greater significance, leaning more towards the upper classes.

Upon seeing a customer enter, a female attendant in a grayish-white dress greeted him with a smile.

"Do you have a favorite seat, or are you meeting a friend?"

Lumian nodded.

"Cabin D."

The female attendant led him to a secluded corner.

Beside a window, he could see a lush, tree-filled botanical garden.

"What can I get you to drink?" The female attendant presented a brown-covered wine list.

Lumian opened it, momentarily taken aback by the dazzling array of choices.

Fermo Coffee, Highlander Coffee, Reem Espresso…

Sibe Black Tea, Marquis Black Tea, West Balam Black Tea…

Fruit Slushy, Frangipani Cocktail, Ambergris Lemonade, Venus Sacred Oil…

Summer Wine, Kirsch, Rose Dew, Walnut Spirit, Orange & Lemon Wine, Cherry Spirit…

Absinthe, Fennel Absinthe, Gin, Bitter Curaçao, Apple Brandy, Grape Dregs Brandy…

Sweetwine: Perfect Love, Barbarian Cream, Little Rose, West Pyro…

Considering he had a psychologist's appointment later, neither alcohol nor coffee seemed fitting. Lumian thought for a moment and said,

"Ambergris lemonade."

"Four licks," the female attendant inquired. "Do you need cake, bread, or other food?"

"Not for now. I'll decide when my friend arrives." Lumian surveyed the surroundings of Mason's Café and noted the absence of customers at this time.

The lunch crowd had cleared out by 2:30 p.m., leaving more than an hour before teatime.

Soon, the female attendant returned with a tray, placing a glass filled with a colorless liquid and a few lemons on the table.

Lumian eyed the empty seat across from him, picked up his cup, and took a sip.

A sweet, elegant fragrance filled his nostrils, and the refreshing sour taste invigorated him.

As the minutes passed, Lumian noticed the wall clock nearing 3:30 p.m. He couldn't help but glance at the café entrance.

Green plants adorned the area, but no customers entered.

Just as Lumian looked away in disappointment, a soft female voice sounded from the booth behind him.

"I'm already here. Good afternoon, Mr. Lumian Lee."

Lumian assumed the woman didn't want a face-to-face conversation, so he didn't turn around. He lowered his voice and asked politely, "Good afternoon. How should I address you? Can you hear my soft voice?"

"No problem," the gentle female voice replied. "You can call me Susie."

"Hello, Madame Susie." For some reason, Lumian felt relatively calm facing this psychologist. His usual habit of inward commentary dissipated.

A familiar uneasiness washed over him a second later.

"What's wrong?" Susie, seated behind him, inquired gently.

Lumian pondered for two seconds and didn't conceal his feelings.

"I'm a little uneasy. It's an odd yet familiar sensation.

"Yes, I must have experienced something similar when I met an information broker yesterday."

Susie spoke rapidly, apologetically, "Sorry, I'm used to reading your thoughts. That might be causing your discomfort.

"Your body is infused with intense corruption and is in a delicate balance. The slightest disturbance triggers a reaction. In other words, you're highly sensitive to hidden and invisible influences, surpassing Beyonders of the same Sequence or higher."

"Is that so…" Lumian wasn't angry.

In his view, a psychologist needed to read thoughts for effective treatment. Rely on words alone?

He then furrowed his brow.

"Was Anthony Reid also reading my thoughts back then? I'm referring to the information broker."

"I know." Susie understood. "Where did Anthony Reid come from? What did he do before becoming an information broker?"

"He had a West Midseashire Coast accent, a retired soldier," Lumian recounted.

After a brief silence, Susie said, "If he's truly from West Midseashire Coast, it's indeed possible he's a Beyonder of the Spectator pathway."

The Spectator pathway… Lumian had read about it in Aurore's Warlock notebook, but she only knew that its corresponding Sequence 9 was called the Spectator. They possessed remarkable observational abilities, deciphering true thoughts from subtle expressions and body language.

So a Sequence above the Spectator pathway is a Psychologist… As this thought crossed Lumian's mind, he heard Susie correct him.

"It's Psychiatrist."

"That sounds more reassuring." Lumian smiled. "What Sequence is Anthony Reid?"

After learning the other's pathway, he felt Anthony Reid should have recognized him and sensed his anxiety, concern, and attempts at intimidation.

"According to your description, he's at least a Sequence 8," Susie concluded.

Lumian smirked. "If he's really a Psychiatrist, that's interesting. He didn't even treat the aftereffects of his battlefield trauma."

"It's not unusual. When a Psychiatrist suffers severe psychological trauma, it's incredibly difficult for them to recover alone. They often need the help of another Psychiatrist, and treating a Psychiatrist is far riskier than usual. One misstep can result in the infection of the patient's mental illness," Susie explained succinctly.

As the conversation shifted and the atmosphere lightened, Lumian gradually relaxed, no longer feeling uneasy or anxious.

He took the initiative to say,"Shall we begin the treatment?"

"Talking is part of the treatment." Susie's gentle voice hinted at a smile.

Realizing that the first stage of the treatment was simply conversation, Lumian eased further. He leaned back against the booth partition and asked, puzzled, "I know it was a dream, but there are many details I can't comprehend.

"Since it's my dream, how can I know the various abilities of the three official investigators? Why am I so familiar with the unique abilities of the padre, the shepherd, and company?"

Susie's tone was warm as she replied, "The three official investigators were forcibly drawn into your dream. It's as if their subconscious came close to yours, in a semi-open state.

"They would actively participate in the dream, revealing all sorts of information they know. Even if they only think about it, your subconscious can sense it."

In other words, with Ryan, Leah, and Valentine's involvement, certain parts of the dream are created through "interaction?" Their responses are a collective creation of my subconscious and theirs, adhering to unspoken rules? Lumian considered this as he pondered previously unresolved questions.

Susie's voice remained steady as she continued, "You must have some suspicions about why you know the abilities of the evil god's followers, right? But you're just unwilling to confront them?"

At this, Lumian's eyelids twitched involuntarily.

"Based on the information Madam Magician provided, most of Guillaume Bénet and Pierre Berry's abilities stem from the evil god's Sequence, Contractee. So, it's impossible to predict their abilities beforehand. It depends on which creature they've signed a contract with," Susie gently analyzed. "In other words, we can rule out the possibility that your subconscious obtained corresponding knowledge from the seal's corruption. Without a knowledge base, you couldn't imagine those abilities from nothing. They're not imaginary."

The woman's tone suddenly turned grave.

"Clearly, at some point before Cordu was destroyed, you saw Guillaume Bénet, Pierre Berry, and the others use their abilities. Moreover, you were neither harmed nor traumatized. Otherwise, it would have manifested in the dream.

"From the dream's analysis, what truly left a scar on you was Pualis and company's actions.

"How do you think you witnessed those evil god followers using their powers?"

Susie's words were like sharp arrows piercing Lumian's memories, making the sturdy barrier waver.

Lumian's face twisted slightly.

Amidst excruciating pain, he saw images surface from the depths of his memories.

It was the third floor of the administrator's castle. The walls were adorned with pale, translucent faces, but the fighters were no longer Ryan, Leah, and Valentine. Instead, it was Guillaume Bénet, Pierre Berry, and Sybil Berry!

Chapter 128: In the Dream

Blood-red flowers bloomed on the pitch-black vines hanging from the ceiling, sealing off the third floor of the castle.

Guillaume Bénet, Pierre Berry, and Sybil Berry fought off the 'midwife' and her accomplices as they charged towards the tower.

A series of fragmented scenes flashed through Lumian's mind.

In a tower filled with bird-clawed infants, the invisible Guillaume Bénet touched the midwife's shoulder with the help of Shepherd Pierre Berry. The midwife exploded as if a bomb had been planted inside her.

Though Sybil Berry had been killed by the lady's maid, she was reborn in the other woman's body and took control of it.

Floating in the air, Louis Lund gave birth to a child in the room.

Unfazed, Louis Lund teamed up with Administrator Béost to subdue Shepherd Pierre Berry.

In the wilderness leading deep into the mountains, the padre, Guillaume Bénet, was surrounded by countless undead in linen garments…

Lumian's face contorted in pain. These memories felt like a sharp weapon piercing his soul. Extracting them would do more harm, making him instinctively resist recalling them further.

Eventually, the scenes faded, and Lumian panted heavily.

"How was it? Did you find anything?" Susie's voice was gentle, as if inquiring about today's breakfast.

Lumian pondered and replied, "I remember the battle between the padre and Madame Pualis's subordinates. The scene was chaotic and fragmented…

"Sometimes, I feel like I'm watching in person, and at times from afar via certain means…"

This left him deeply puzzled about his position and role in these events.

At times, he seemed to be part of the two groups, embroiled in the conflict. Other times, he appeared to be a mere bystander, unconnected to either side.

Susie asked, leading him on, "Besides that, is there anything else you don't understand about the situation in your memory?"

Lumian said as he recalled, "I don't think I saw Madame Pualis… She only appeared when the padre was surrounded by a horde of undead in the wilderness…

"The padre and his allies seemed drained after dealing with Louis Lund, Cathy, Béost, the midwife, and Madame Pualis's subordinates. If Madame Pualis had joined, I don't think they could have won…

"Why did Madame Pualis willingly give up and leave Cordu without stopping the padre and his allies…"

"Not willingly, but forcibly sent away," Susie corrected him. "The ritual in your dream to send the Spring Elf away should be about sending Pualis away. The Spring Elf symbolizes a bountiful harvest, the end of a harsh winter, and the budding of new life. It's very similar to the abilities displayed by Pualis's group."

"That's even stranger…" Lumian's voice grew pained as he clenched his fists, feeling unable to remember any more.

Susie said gently, "If you don't want to recall, don't. Recovering all your memories isn't something that can be achieved in one session of therapy. Take your time. There's no rush."

Phew… Lumian slowly exhaled a sigh of relief, his body relaxing.

After he had calmed down for nearly a minute, Susie said, "You can sleep and see if you can find more answers in your dreams."

At first, the Psychiatrist's voice was gentle in Lumian's ears, but then it became increasingly ethereal, as if it had receded and entered another world.

His eyelids grew heavier and heavier until they finally closed.

…

Lumian's eyes snapped open to the familiar ceiling above him.

He bolted upright, taking in the reclining chair, the wooden table by the window, the small bookshelf, and the wardrobe with its full-length mirror.

This was his bedroom, his home in Cordu.

For a few seconds, Lumian stared blankly before leaping out of bed and sprinting from the room.

He flung open Aurore's bedroom door and found the desk littered with manuscripts, papers, fountain pens, ink bottles, and other items, just as he remembered. He noticed the chair with the pillow was empty.

His gaze shifted to the vacant bed before slowly retracting.

Quietly, he closed the door and moved to the next room.

No familiar figure awaited him in the study either.

Lumian raced downstairs.

He dashed through Cordu Village, arriving at the entrance of the Eternal Blazing Sun cathedral.

Not a single villager crossed his path. Every house was eerily silent.

Gazing up at the onion-like dome, Lumian strode into the cathedral.

The altar had been altered, adorned with tulips, lilacs, and other flowers. A black thorn symbol was etched into it, seemingly with liquid flowing on its surface.

Still, nobody was here.

Lumian searched the padre's room before heading to the basement.

Piles of bones and sheepskin lay around, just as in his previous dream, but the altar in the middle remained untouched.

He examined it cautiously but felt no burning sensation in his chest.

Realizing this was a dream, the power representing the past, present, and future seemed to have vanished.

Having gained nothing, Lumian stood by the underground altar, deep in thought. He then dashed up the stairs, out the side door, and into the nearby cemetery.

Guided by the memories of his previous dream, he quickly located the tomb where the owl had flown in. Crouching down, he pushed open the stone slab sealing the entrance.

Without hesitation, Lumian descended the stairs, traversed the passageway, and found the black coffin in the shadowy tomb.

No owl was present, nor was there another Lumian. Only the faint light seeping in from outside illuminated the scene.

In a daze, Lumian turned his attention to the black coffin.

The lid had already slid to the side, revealing its contents.

Hesitating for a moment, Lumian recalled Aurore nearly losing control in his dream when she spied on the dead Warlock's corpse in the coffin.

Two or three seconds later, his expressionless steps carried him forward, approaching the black coffin. He cast his gaze inside.

A corpse quickly appeared before his eyes.

With golden hair cascading down its sides and eyes tightly shut, the corpse's pale-white face was adorned with a light blue dress.

It was Aurore!

Aurore lay in the coffin of the dead Warlock!

Lumian's pupils dilated, his face contorting with horror.

The scene before him fractured, crumbling inch by inch.

…

Lumian's eyes snapped open, his expression a mix of bewilderment and dread.

"What did you see?" Susie's voice echoed in his ears.

Lumian replied in a distant tone, "I saw Aurore lying in the coffin of the deceased Warlock…

"How can this be…"

Susie reassured him, "This is more symbolic.

"Consider this: there's no real Warlock legend, and in the dream, the story you subconsciously created transformed your and Aurore's home into the Warlock's former residence. Aurore knows nothing about this or the legend.

"Her loss of control was because she wanted to see the Warlock's corpse in the coffin clearly."

"So, the Warlock who died in the legend represents Aurore. What does the owl symbolize? What does the entire story signify?" Questions flooded Lumian's mind, each like a sharp blade tearing at his head.

Lumian instinctively raised his hands to clutch his head.

"You might need to recover more memories before you can analyze it. Moreover, sometimes, multiple layers of symbolism exist in a mixed state," Susie said gently. "That's enough for today's treatment. Your subconscious is already resisting. Continuing may backfire and harm your mental state. Would you like the second treatment in two weeks or a month?"

Lumian didn't hesitate.

"Two weeks from now."

Susie paused for a few seconds before adding, "Lastly, I must remind you that you have a strong tendency for self-destruction."

"Self-destruction…" Lumian repeated the words, his expression unchanged.

Susie's voice carried warmth again.

"I understand why this happened, and I don't want to forcibly eliminate it. Unless you're willing to let me erase all memories at the root of the problem, every treatment will only alleviate, not eradicate it.

"I just want to remind you that Aurore loves living and life.

"She has many unfulfilled wishes. She wants to see you attend university. She wants to travel to Trier as an ordinary person for a while. She wants to find clues about her home. She wants to resolve her issues with her parents. She wants to savor all of Trier's delicacies, attend every concert, and experience every art exhibition.

"She's one step away from complete death. If she's conscious, I don't think she'd give up. She's like someone who's fallen into an abyss, clinging to the cliff edge with one hand. If even you give up, no one will pull her up again."

Lumian's expression shifted, but he couldn't show any defined emotions.

It seemed he had forgotten how to smile or cry.

Susie didn't pressure him to respond. She sighed softly and said, "Many times, suppressing pain and despair isn't helpful. Humans need to vent and relieve stress.

"Alright, that's it for today. We'll meet again for the second treatment, same time in two weeks."

Lumian closed his eyes.

"Thank you, Madame Susie."

Susie didn't reply, as if she had already left.

After more than ten seconds, Lumian slowly exhaled and opened his eyes.

He instinctively glanced outside Mason's Café and saw a golden retriever with a small brown bag vanishing around the corner.

A female figure appeared to be beside the dog.

Lumian lingered for another ten minutes before finishing the remaining ambergris lemonade. He stepped out of Mason's Café and made his way to the nearest public carriage stop.

A green double-decker carriage pulled up, inviting passengers to board.

Lumian paid 30 coppets and found a window seat, his gaze distant.

"Read all about it! Only 11 coppets each!" A child in old clothes approached the window, hoisting a stack of newspapers in his hand.

Self-destruct… live… self-destruct… live… Lumian's mind replayed the psychiatrist's words. He felt like a walking corpse, oblivious to the newsboy.

Suddenly, he noticed the newspaper's title—Novel Weekly.

That's right, it's Sunday… Lumian snapped back to reality. He handed the child two 5-coppet copper coins and one 1-coppet copper coin, opened the window, and grabbed a copy of Novel Weekly.

Unfolding the newspaper, Lumian began to read, illuminated by the bright sunlight streaming through the window.

As the carriage slowly rolled forward, a message caught Lumian's eye:

"Obituary:

"Our eternal friend, the renowned bestselling author, Aurore Lee, has been confirmed by our editorial team to have passed away in an accident in April…"

Lumian's gaze froze, his hands trembling.

Abruptly, he lowered his head, raised the newspaper, and shielded his face with it.

A wet mark materialized on the newspaper's surface in the afternoon sun.

More and more wet marks emerged, merging into one splatter.

Chapter 129: Neighbor

Rue Anarchie, Auberge du Coq Doré, Room 207.

Lumian tossed the wrinkled newspaper onto the table and slumped onto the bed.

After a few moments, he collapsed onto the mattress. Exhaustion coursed through his veins, making it nearly impossible to resist the urge to sleep.

He reset his body and mental state each day, but never his mind.

Too tired to bother undressing, he kicked off his leather shoes and closed his eyes.

Lumian slept deeply, dreamless.

The acrid scent of sulfur roused him from his sleep. The sun was still setting outside the window.

Lumian turned his head to gaze at the glass window, tinged with a golden-red hue, and whispered sarcastically, "Could it be that I've slept for a day and a night?"

It was clearly impossible; he always woke up automatically at 6 a.m.

Though the obituary had helped vent the sorrow in his heart, Lumian still felt somewhat despondent.

He knew that grief wouldn't simply vanish, and pain would inevitably resurface. He had to maintain a stable mental state and face his emotions without spiraling into self-destruction.

As for extreme, mad, and self-destructive tendencies, he accepted that these were inevitable, as long as they weren't severe.

I have to undergo psychiatric treatment regularly in the future. Otherwise, I'll completely lose my mind before I complete my revenge and find a way to revive Aurore. Lumian sighed and got out of bed.

He picked up the wrinkled Novel Weekly again and studied the obituary on the front page, seeking to reawaken the familiar pain in his heart.

Then, Lumian noticed an issue.

This paper was from last week.

The paperboy had sold him an outdated newspaper!

Impossible. It's impossible for a paperboy to keep a newspaper copy that can't be sold… Lumian furrowed his brow, finding this odd coincidence inexplicable.

He carefully recalled something that Psychiatrist Susie had said: "Many times, suppressing pain and despair isn't helpful. Humans need to vent and relieve stress…"

Suddenly, Lumian understood.

This was part of his psychiatric treatment!

Madame Susie had first identified my unstable mental state and strong self-destructive tendencies. Then, she used the hope of reviving Aurore as an initial counsel. Finally, while I wallowed in my pain, she arranged for the paperboy to deliver a week-old obituary. She shattered my defenses with cold, hard facts, allowing me to release the pain and despair I had buried deep inside… Lumian mused silently.

Realizing this, he was grateful for encountering a highly skilled and professional psychiatrist. Without her, escaping his mental quagmire would have been nearly impossible.

As Lumian's gaze drifted, he noticed a few bedbugs scurrying into his room.

His keen sense of smell told him the sulfur in the neighboring room had been lit to repel the bedbugs, but the vermin mostly fled elsewhere.

Lumian chuckled at the thought of him and his neighbor inadvertently "attacking" each other by driving the bedbugs into each other's rooms.

He slipped on his leather shoes and strode out of Room 207, heading for Room 206.

On the second floor of Auberge du Coq Doré, nestled in an alley behind Rue Anarchie, a washroom connected rooms 201 to 204. Opposite Room 204 was another washroom, with rooms 205 to 208 on the other side. A sizable balcony graced both sides of the corridor, so the third, fourth, and fifth floors each held ten rooms and two washrooms.

Knock! Knock! Knock! Lumian rapped his knuckles on Room 206's door.

"Who is it?" A slightly flustered voice called from inside.

"I'm from Room 207 next door," Lumian replied, grinning. "I want to get to know my neighbor."

Moments later, the door creaked open, revealing a lanky young man before Lumian.

Barely 1.7 meters tall, the man wore a faded linen shirt and black suspenders. Oversized black-framed glasses perched on his nose, and his unkempt, greasy brown hair looked as if it hadn't been washed for days. His dark-brown eyes betrayed his wariness.

"What can I do for you?" the man inquired.

Flashing a smile, Lumian extended his right hand.

"I'll be staying here for a while, so I figured I should get to know my neighbors. What's your name?"

The young man hesitated before reaching out and shaking Lumian's hand.

"Gabriel, and yours?"

"Ciel." Lumian glanced into Room 206, feigning curiosity. "Why are you burning sulfur now? It's already evening—time to head out for food."

Gabriel adjusted his glasses and offered a wry smile.

"I'm a playwright, and I'm planning to write all night."

"An author?" Lumian raised his hand to his chin, abandoning his plan to play a prank on his neighbor to break the ice.

Gabriel clarified, "Playwright, actually. I specialize in writing plays for various theaters."

"Sounds impressive," Lumian praised sincerely. "I admire people who can write stories. My idol is an author."

Gabriel, flattered by the praise and Lumian's genuine expression, scratched his messy brown hair and sighed.

"This line of work isn't as glamorous as it seems. I poured my heart into my last script, which I think rivals the classics, but no theater manager will give it a chance.

"So I take on requests from tabloids, churning out trite stories to pay rent and avoid starvation. Right now, I'm rushing to finish one of those manuscripts. The editors just want steamy scenes with the female characters—that's what their readers crave…"

Perhaps it was because he had triggered a scar in his heart, Gabriel was driven by an urge to share his struggles.

Lumian listened intently before responding with sincerity, "I've read many authors' biographies and interviews. Most of them experienced hardship, living in cheap hotels or cramped attics. I believe you'll find someone who appreciates your work and helps you become a renowned playwright."

Gabriel removed his glasses and rubbed his face.

"You're only the second person to encourage me. Everyone else mocks my dreams, accusing me of being out of touch with reality."

If it weren't for the fact that you share a profession similar to Aurore's, I would've mocked you too. And my mockery would be worse than theirs… Lumian thought, before asking curiously, "Who was the first person to encourage you?"

"Miss Séraphine, from Room 309," Gabriel replied, glancing at the ceiling. "She's a figure model. I haven't seen her in a few days. She might've moved out."

The same figure model Ruhr and his wife mentioned? Lumian nodded and extended an invitation.

"How about a drink at the bar?"

Gabriel was sorely tempted but ultimately declined.

"Another time. I have to submit my manuscript tomorrow."

"Alright." Lumian waved and returned to his room.

Peering out the window at the bustling Rue Anarchie, Lumian resolved to find a restaurant and indulge in Trier's culinary delights.

Just then, a shrill female voice echoed from upstairs:

"You bastard! You pig!

"Your mother spawned you with a devil…"

The cursing halted abruptly, as if silenced by force.

Lumian's heart raced as he flung open the window.

"If you're so fond of women, why not go to your mother?

"…"

This time, Lumian pinpointed the voice to the fourth floor.

Miss Ethans, the one forced into prostitution? He recalled Charlie's description.

That also meant Margot—the leader of the Poison Spur Mob—had arrived with his henchmen to collect their dues.

In the Intis Republic, there were two types of prostitutes: the registered ones in places like Rue de la Muraille and Rue de Breda, and the unregistered, illegal ones. The latter, who neither paid taxes nor could do their business without the authorities stepping in, outnumbered the former by ten or even twenty times.

After some contemplation, Lumian donned a dark suit and positioned himself between Rooms 202 and 203. A staircase led to the next floor.

He retrieved the cheap cologne he'd purchased from Bigorre, intending to pour it on the wooden steps for Margot and his henchmen to tread upon as they passed.

Unsure when the Montsouris ghost's next attack would strike, Lumian was desperate to find his prey and complete the fate exchange.

After a brief moment, he abandoned the idea of directly pouring the cologne, opting instead for a more discreet approach to avoid detection by any Beyonder powers.

Lumian loosened the lid and feigned a clumsy slip of his hand, failing to grip the thick glass bottle securely.

With a clang, the cologne bottle hit the bottom step, and some liquid seeped out, the pungent fragrance filling the air.

Lumian crouched down, feigning frustration, picked up the bottle, and screwed the lid back on.

He smeared the spilled cologne with his palm, rubbing it against his body to not waste it.

Soon, most of the liquid had evaporated, and the night breeze pouring into the balcony swept away the lingering scent.

Only then did Lumian retreat to Room 207. He concealed himself by leaning against the door frame while keeping an eye on the stairwell.

After more than ten minutes, footsteps sounded from above.

By now, the cologne in the corridor had significantly dissipated.

A thin man led four others down the stairs.

With closely cropped yellow hair, single-lidded blue eyes, a prominent nose bridge, thin lips, and faint scars on his face, the man suspected to be Margot wore a red shirt and a dark leather vest. His hands were tucked into his milky-white pants as he descended step by step.

A bulge on his left waist hinted at a hidden weapon, and his feet were clad in strapless leather boots.

Suddenly, the man frowned and deftly leaped over the two steps and a section of the second-floor corridor tainted with cologne.

The three male thugs trailing him failed to detect anything unusual and trampled the remaining traces of the scent.

Lumian's heart pounded at the sight.

Is Margot acutely sensitive to smells, with a strong aversion to being contaminated by peculiar odors?

Chapter 130: Tracking

Lumian recognized Margot's actions all too well.

He would have done the same!

Then, he remembered Aurore mentioning that Beyonders from the Hunter pathway were relatively common in the Intis Republic. Lumian suspected that Margot might also be a Beyonder from the Hunter pathway, but he couldn't determine his Sequence.

A mob boss wouldn't have a high Sequence unless necessary… If Margot is truly a Hunter pathway Beyonder, he shouldn't surpass Sequence 7. Furthermore, the likelihood of him being a Pyromaniac is slim. Leah and Valentine, only at Sequence 7, are already considered elite investigators. Could they be inferior to a high-ranking thug who patrols the territory, abducts women, and bullies prostitutes? Lumian pondered silently as he stepped back and averted his gaze.

Although it seemed improbable that Margot had reached or even exceeded Sequence 7, Lumian dared not be careless.

What if his Sequence title was something like 'Scoundrel' which required him to act like one?

What if the Poison Spur Mob was more complex than it appeared, merely an extension of a secret organization or underground cult with ample resources, deliberately avoiding ostentation to evade official scrutiny?

The odds were slim, but lacking information and relevant mystical knowledge, Lumian had to remain vigilant. He couldn't eliminate the possibilities or gauge their likelihood.

In the second-floor corridor, the man suspected to be Margot—clad in a red shirt and black vest with his hands in his pockets—turned to his three subordinates.

Frowning slightly, he seemed puzzled and mildly displeased by their unnecessary contact with the cologne.

He glanced at the ground and sniffed.

The cologne wasn't confined to the stairwell; it brazenly led to Room 207. Moreover, the bottom step bore fresh marks of being struck by a light, small object.

In an instant, the man presumed to be Margot reconstructed the scene in his mind based on the environmental clues:

The tenant in Room 207 might have visited the washroom or a neighbor. On their way back, they intended to apply cologne but dropped the bottle on the stairs. Then, they spread the cologne on their body, leaving only faint traces.

This was consistent with the mindset of Auberge du Coq Doré's tenants.

The man thought to be Margot dismissed his suspicions and instructed his three subordinates, "Remember to change your shoes when you return to Salle de Gristmill."

"Alright, Boss," the trio replied almost in unison.

It wasn't surprising; they were frequently asked to do something similar.

Salle de Gristmill… From Room 207, Lumian overheard their conversation and grew increasingly certain that the man suspected to be a Hunter pathway Beyonder was Margot.

After chatting with Charlie that morning, he strolled around Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman district, conversing with vendors and bar patrons. He learned that Salle de Gristmill at 3 Rue Anarchie was one of the Poison Spur Mob's strongholds.

Only when Margot and his crew reached the bottom did Lumian don his wide-brimmed hat and leisurely exit the room. He trailed the lingering scent of cologne, venturing deeper into the street.

Seven or eight minutes later, he arrived at Salle de Gristmill. The faint odor of cheap cologne confirmed that Margot and his subordinates had returned.

Salle de Gristmill lacked the grand statue and inscriptions of Salle de Bal Brise. It merely occupied a section of the street and featured a golden-hued lobby.

Gas lamps encased by glass covers and black crossed bars on four stone pillars illuminating the entrance hall dispelled the evening's darkness.

At that moment, the dance hall buzzed with activity. Lumian heard singing, raucous laughter, and the strumming of instruments before stepping inside.

The layout resembled Salle de Bal Brise, with a dance floor in the center surrounded by small round tables and chairs. A low wooden platform at the front held a sultry woman.

Clad in a provocative short white top, her bra's row of bows was clearly visible. A black mole adorned her lips, and her brownish-yellow hair was swept up in a bun. Her makeup emphasized her large, deep-set blue eyes, creating a seductive, decadent allure.

Softly crooning, she occasionally kicked her right leg. Her cream-colored, fluffy knee-length skirt enticed patrons to try peeking beneath it.

"The consulting physician has an alluring air,

"He'll first prepare by pushing up his sleeves with care,

"It takes me back to my initial romance,

"But this fine medic, he stands apart with just a glance,

"He locates the sweet spot with such finesse and speed, "Discerning, my love, his touch is skilled indeed."

Amid the suggestive and captivating performance, Lumian approached the bar counter and asked the bartender, "What's there to eat?"

The bartender smiled and inquired, "How about Rouen Meatloaf? Or do you prefer standard fare like sausages, bread, and smoked meat?"

Lumian, already aware of the Trieriens' fondness for meatloaf, nodded.

"Then, two servings of Rouen Meatloaf."

"And a glass of apple punch? It can counteract the richness of the meatloaf." The bartender sensed a generous customer when Lumian didn't inquire about the price and suggested a slightly pricier drink.

Punch was a fruit juice cocktail.

Lumian smiled. "Sure."

With nearly 200 verl d'or remaining, Lumian didn't need to be overly frugal with his food and drink. In any case, scrimping wouldn't be enough to cover the outstanding payment for information broker Anthony Reid.

"3 licks for each Rouen Meatloaf and 12 licks for the apple punch," the bartender quickly quoted the price.

Lumian nodded and pulled out a verl d'or silver coin, adorned with a small angel relief and a diffused line on the surface, tossing it to the bartender.

After pocketing the two 5 coppet bronze coins in change, he waited patiently.

By then, the female singer on stage had finished her performance, and the band played a slightly intense drumbeat.

Customers flocked to the dance floor, swaying to the rhythm, releasing the day's pressure, fatigue, and pain.

A man sitting nearby grinned at his companion and said, "I love this atmosphere so much. I wonder who invented this kind of gyrating dance. It's far more appealing than the old quadrille! Can you imagine? I'd often have a partner in my arms, only to wait ages for my turn to dance. My enthusiasm would've cooled by then."

The quadrille, or square dancing, involved four men and women forming a square and dancing to a violinist's performance before circling each other.

Another man chuckled and said, "I still prefer the Can-can and Striptease."

The Can-can, popular in Quartier de la Princesse Rouge, featured high kicks and landing splits as signature moves. When women lined up in short skirts and stockings, kicking high, cheers and thrown coins often followed.

Of course, it was a technically demanding dance. A skilled dancer needed to kick their leg as high as their nose or close to their ears.

Lumian absorbed the surrounding sounds, occasionally glancing at the stairs where the cheap cologne scent vanished.

Soon, two thick meatloaves and a dreamy, transparent alcoholic beverage with a red top and floating ice cubes arrived.

Lumian sipped the apple punch, refreshed by the sweetness, faint tartness, and smoothness of the alcohol. The ice's coldness invigorated him.

He then bit into the Rouen Meatloaf, unable to resist the blend of unfermented dough's sweetness, minced meat's flavor, oil's aroma, and spices' kick.

After devouring a whole meatloaf, he sipped the apple punch to cleanse his palate.

Post-dinner, Lumian clutched his drink, listening to the girl's singing and watching the dance floor crowd.

The feverish atmosphere seemed to affect him as he occasionally swayed to the rhythm at the dimly lit bar counter.

Each time, Lumian would steal a glance at the stairs, monitoring Margot and his subordinates' movements.

It was midnight when Margot—clad in a red shirt, leather vest, and sporting short, vertical, light-yellow hair—descended the stairs with three thugs and exited Salle de Gristmill.

Aware that the other party might be a Hunter pathway Beyonder, Lumian didn't follow immediately. He was prepared to lose them since the gang's leather shoes, once soaked in cheap cologne, had been changed. Relying on his sense of smell to track them from a distance was no longer an option.

Still, he harbored some hope. He'd noticed that most dance hall customers were too engrossed and frenzied, occasionally spilling alcohol on the floor, creating wet spots from the stairs to the exit.

Swaying to the rhythm, Lumian observed from the corner of his eye that Margot consistently avoided the damp ground. This further solidified his belief that Margot was a Hunter pathway Beyonder.

As for Margot's three subordinates, despite their attempts to dodge the wet areas, their limited observation skills and the dim gas wall lamp lighting led to their feet or heels inevitably getting wet.

For those frequenting bars and dance halls, it was unavoidable. Margot had grown numb to it, not considering it an issue or giving it much thought.

Almost a minute after they left, Lumian rose from the bar counter and stepped out of Salle de Gristmill.

With few pedestrians on the streets, only the occasional drunkard's singing and cursing broke the silence. Ruined gas street lamps cast a feeble light, with the sky's crimson moonlight providing the main illumination.

The four gas wall lamps at the dance hall entrance allowed Lumian to spot numerous wet footprints. Some had long since faded, while others were fresh.

Three sets of footprints appeared in close proximity and consistently at the same time. Upon closer inspection, Lumian discovered a faint, difficult-to-notice set of footprints without any wet stains leading the way.

Lumian chuckled, whispering to himself, "Constantly hanging out with fools and vermin will only bring you harm."

Chapter 131: Night Fight

Under the crimson moon's glow, a gas street lamp illuminated the area from a distance. Lumian identified the footprints and followed them at a measured pace.

Before long, the wet spots dried up entirely, ceasing to provide clues. However, Lumian had memorized the size, sole patterns, and gait characteristics of the four sets of footprints, ensuring he wouldn't confuse them with others.

Even so, tracking them proved challenging. Unlike the ruins of Cordu Village, thousands of people traversed Rue Anarchie and its surroundings daily, leaving countless overlapping footprints that obscured and destroyed each other, making it difficult to pinpoint a target.

Compounding the challenge, vendors littered the streets with trash, and the terrible environment created other distractions. At times, Lumian felt like he was searching for a drop of water in the ocean.

Fortunately, it was midnight, and few pedestrians were out. Most were alcoholics, whose distinct smell and staggered footprints Lumian could dismiss at a glance.

Additionally, Margot and his crew hadn't been gone long, so many traces remained undamaged. Lumian barely managed to keep up.

Occasionally, due to the environment or Margot's caution, the footprints would abruptly vanish. But Lumian remained undeterred. He composed himself, searching forward, left, and right over considerable distances for new traces. Through trial and error, he eventually found the footprints he sought.

Thus, Lumian tracked them to Rue du Rossignol in the market district, stopping in front of a five-story apartment building far from several cheap dance halls.

Margot and his subordinates' footprints led inside.

Upon careful examination, Lumian confirmed that the three thugs had eventually left and walked in different directions.

In other words, Margot was the only one remaining in an apartment room.

He doesn't need his subordinates' protection, confident in his own strength… Lumian silently mused, growing more certain that his target was a Beyonder.

He surveyed the pitch-black corridor, considering how a Hunter might handle corresponding traces before returning to their actual residence. He suspected that even with a carbide lamp and meticulous searching, locating Margot would be near-impossible, and he might even fall into a prearranged trap.

After some contemplation, Lumian formulated a preliminary plan. He averted his gaze and headed to the adjacent street.

Before long, he encountered a staggering drunk man in his twenties who could barely walk.

As the man reached a malfunctioning gas street lamp and began to vomit, Lumian lowered his hat and approached. In a hushed tone, he said, "I want to buy your shirt for 1.5 verl d'or."

The drunkard's initial reaction was to question whether he was so intoxicated that he was hallucinating.

He wore a gray-blue tweed shirt he'd purchased from a cheap clothing store in Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman for only 1 verl d'or. Now, someone wanted to spend 1.5 verl d'or, or 30 licks, on this old garment he'd worn for two years!

Am I crazy, or is this guy crazy? The drunkard strained to look up at his counterpart, but the dim light only revealed a shadowy figure in the darkness.

The next moment, two cold coins appeared in his hand.

Instinctively, the drunkard weighed the coins and felt the patterns etched into the metal.

He belched and asked, "Why do you want to buy it?"

"If you're unwilling, I'll find someone else." Lumian feigned taking back the silver coins.

Without further questioning, the drunkard grumbled and slowly removed his coat, emptying the pockets.

As Lumian departed with the clothes, the drunkard looked up with difficulty and waved his hand.

"Haha, lunatic. Lunatic who gives money… Blargh…"

By the time Lumian returned to the apartment block on Rue du Rossignol, he had changed into a dark-blue cap, a gray-blue tweed coat, faded pants, and a pair of worn, dirty leather shoes.

In addition to items he would use later, he had spent a total of 12 verl d'or.

Lumian glanced at the unlit apartment and suddenly found himself bewildered.

Why do I have to target a Beyonder like Margot?

His three subordinates were hardly innocent, and they were clearly weak. They didn't know how to cover their tracks, so dealing with them shouldn't be much harder than killing a chicken…

The fate of being attacked by the Montsouris ghost wouldn't discriminate!

Why was I fixated on hunting Margot?

I wasn't like this before. When necessary, I could be ruthless, and I could keep things simple. I wouldn't burden myself unnecessarily…

As these thoughts raced through his mind, Lumian's lips curled into a faint smile.

He realized he had 'instinctively' chosen more dangerous prey because it appeared more challenging, making him feel more at ease and carefree.

Lumian gazed at his left chest concealed beneath his clothes, suspecting this change resulted from the corruption within his body.

After a few seconds of silence, he suppressed a soft chuckle.

"From the looks of it, I'm a little crazy…"

He didn't plan on changing his target; it was as if he could already smell the stench of blood.

This was both a blessing and a curse.

With his cap pulled low, Lumian carried a pile of items and circled to the rear of the target apartment.

He arranged the fatty meat, flammable sofa stuffing, and other items against the wall, creating a fireproof barrier around them.

Next, Lumian struck a match and tossed it onto the pile.

The sparks rapidly spread across the most combustible materials, quickly growing and consuming everything around them.

Black smoke billowed.

As the dense smoke enveloped the area, Lumian shouted,

"Fire! Fire!"

He then raced back to the front of the apartment and retreated into the shadows of a nearby corner.

His plan was simple: since he didn't know which room Margot occupied or what traps he had set, he'd force Margot to reveal himself!

If Margot were a Pyromaniac, he'd certainly sense that the flames and smoke below couldn't cause a real inferno. His reaction would differ greatly, allowing Lumian to determine Margot's Sequence and decide whether to proceed or abort the plan.

With the rising smoke, flickering flames, and Lumian's cries, the apartment's tenants and those from neighboring buildings rushed down the stairs to the street.

As the fire wasn't large and the smoke hadn't penetrated the apartment, no one risked jumping out.

Remaining silent, Lumian focused intently on the apartment entrance while others 'replaced' him to shout and search for the fire's origin.

Seconds later, a figure leaped from a second-floor window, landing with ease.

It was Margot—dressed in a red shirt and long milky-white pants!

Relying on his Beyonder abilities and living on a lower floor, Margot hadn't taken the stairs like the other tenants. Instead, he jumped out the window.

Upon landing, he glanced back at the apartment, realizing the fire wasn't serious at all. There had been no need for him to jump out, making him appear panicked and foolish.

In that instant, Margot spotted a figure wearing a peaked cap and gray-blue shirt emerge from a corner.

The figure, head lowered, pointed at Margot and laughed.

"Look, this guy is such an idiot!"

Margot's emotions erupted with a fury.

His eyes tinted red as he lunged at the man mocking him.

He was fast, but the figure was faster. He had already turned and darted into the nearest alley.

All Margot wanted was to teach the guy a lesson and chase him down.

The pair raced into the dark, deserted alley, one tailing the other.

Tap! Tap! Tap! The figure sprinted to a barricade and vaulted over it with a push from his right hand.

Upon landing, he saw the figure stop and turn around.

The moment he landed, he saw the figure stop and turn around.

Under the crimson moonlight, Margot saw the face beneath the dark-blue cap.

It was swathed in layers of white bandages, revealing only nostrils, eyes, and ears.

The figure's left hand was similarly wrapped, gripping a sinister-looking, pewter-black dirk.

Margot's pupils widened, and his heart skipped a beat.

He instantly realized he had fallen prey to some kind of Provocation.

Suppressing his unease, Margot drew the black revolver from his waist.

He aimed at Lumian and activated Provocation.

"With that knife? Idiot, this is the age of the gun!"

Bang!

Margot pulled the trigger, sending a bullet straight for Lumian's head.

Lumian suddenly arched backward, as if forming a bridge.

Then, he snapped horizontally, dodging Margot's second bullet.

Next, Lumian straightened like a coiled spring and hurled Fallen Mercury at Margot as if it were a flying dagger.

Anticipating that his enemy had a Provocation-like ability and possibly poisoned the weapon, Margot dared not confront it head-on. He hastily twisted his body, allowing the pewter-black dirk to sail past him and embed into a crack in the barricade.

As he evaded the attack, Margot saw Lumian pounce on him like a tiger.

Only then did he notice that Lumian's ears were stuffed with thick wads of paper, rendering him almost immune to Margot's Provocation!

The best understanding of a Hunter always came from another Hunter!

This revelation infuriated Margot once more, as if he had been silently 'Provoked' by his opponent's prowess.

Bam! Lumian clenched his right fist and struck Margot's temples with a sharp crack.

Margot blocked it with his left arm.

Simultaneously, he raised his right hand and aimed the revolver at Lumian's head.

Let's see how you dodge at this close range!

In an instant, Lumian leaned forward as if to headbutt Margot's chest and grabbed his right wrist with his left hand.

Meanwhile, his right leg swung up with incredible flexibility.

Not at the back of his head, but at Fallen Mercury, lodged in a crack in the barricade beside him!

The sinister, pewter-black dirk soared into the air, propelled by Lumian's kick, and flew straight toward Margot.

Chapter 132: Black Scorpion

Crash!

Margot barely managed to dodge the deadly dirk hurtling towards him, but in doing so, he failed to move his revolver in sync with Lumian's rapid motion. The bullet struck the opposite wall, sending stone fragments flying.

With a metallic clink, Fallen Mercury zipped past Margot again and landed not far away on the ground.

Lumian straightened up and swiftly stomped his right foot onto the enemy's instep to stop him from raising his knee and slamming it into his abdomen.

In the blink of an eye, Lumian was nearly plastered to his opponent. He either slashed or slammed with both hands, or braced and blocked with his elbows. His feet delivered low kicks or stomps, and his knees jerked forward or bounced around. Margot was too preoccupied fending off these attacks to aim and fire.

The thug felt as if he were caught in a relentless storm of his opponent's blows. Moreover, Lumian stayed close, employing close-quarters combat techniques to prevent him from retreating and using his gun.

For Margot, such a fighting style was both foreign and dangerous.

Crash!

Margot's elbow smashed into the wall, causing the house to shudder.

Whack!

Margot's right wrist was twisted, and the black revolver slipped from his grasp, clattering to the ground.

Wham! Wham! Wham! Lumian unleashed a barrage of hands, elbows, knees, and feet, forcing the enemy to retreat repeatedly.

Towards the end, Margot could only block instinctively, his thoughts unable to keep pace with Lumian's swift movements.

However, he sensed that he had already deciphered the pattern of his opponent's attacks and anticipated the sequences that would follow. He could defend against all onslaughts with his muscle memory alone.

In just a moment, he would launch a counterattack!

Instinctively, Margot raised his right foot to block the incoming low kick.

But he met nothing.

Lumian's left foot extended diagonally, defying the limits of human flexibility. He hooked the pewter-black dirk that lay silently beside him.

He had attacked Margot to force him to draw near to Fallen Mercury.

The pewter-black dirk dirk soared up and stabbed Margot's thigh.

Margot found himself pinned down by Lumian while balancing precariously on one foot. He had little recourse but to retract his right foot and twist his body slightly to evade.

Fallen Mercury grazed his thigh and tore through his milky-white pants, leaving a shallow trail of blood.

Wham! Wham! Wham! Lumian went on the offensive once more with the close-quarters combat techniques Aurore had taught him, overwhelming Margot until he had no time to tend to his leg injuries.

Luckily, the wound was superficial and bled only slightly.

Crash!

Margot's back collided with the wall.

Throughout the entire encounter, he hadn't even had a chance to speak. The other party still had his ears plugged, unafraid of any provocation.

Margot's blood boiled, but it only served to fuel his determination. He planned to trade his injuries for an advantage and escape his current predicament.

At that moment, his raised arms met nothing.

He watched in confusion and shock as the strange man with the white bandages on his face voluntarily retreated and created distance.

Then, the mysterious man turned and sprinted away. As he ran, he flicked the pewter-black dirk up with his toes and snatched it in his left hand.

Momentarily stunned, Margot was about to give chase when footsteps echoed from the alley.

Hearing the gunshots, two patrolling police officers had rushed over with black semi-automatic revolvers, alerted by nearby residents who had "come downstairs" due to the fire.

"What happened? What's your Poison Spur Mob up to again?" one of the policemen demanded with a frown, recognizing Margot's face.

Margot shot a disdainful glance at the two officers in white shirts, black vests, and black uniform coats, and replied, "I was attacked. Officers, you're too late!"

Although he said this, he was secretly relieved the police hadn't arrived later and had scared the mysterious man away. Otherwise, he might have been hunted down.

After all, the strange man was likely a Sequence 8 Provoker. Moreover, his combat techniques were clearly superior to Margot's, and his cunning allowed him to gain the upper hand.

The policeman's face darkened.

"Then follow me back to give a statement. We'll help you find the assailant. Also, is this your gun?"

He pointed at the revolver that had fallen to the ground.

Margot sneered. "Rely on you to find him? Haha, that's the funniest joke I've heard this year! That gun belongs to the assailant. Take it away."

With that, he briefly examined his wound to ensure he wasn't poisoned.

Then, he sauntered out of the alley ahead of the two police officers.

The officer who had first spoken wore an ugly expression. He tried to draw his gun, but his partner held his hand down.

Returning to Rue du Rossignol, Margot's face hardened.

His first instinct was to hurry home and rely on the traps he had set up to guard against a second wave of attacks.

But a few seconds later, Margot dismissed the idea, feeling it wasn't sufficient.

He decided to go to the house of the Poison Spur Mob's boss, 'Black Scorpion' Roger, and inform him of the attack. He would stay there for the night.

That was the safest place for Margot.

Margot bandaged the wound on his right leg and sprinted from Rue du Rossignol to Avenue du Marché, making his way to the Suhit steam locomotive, and finally arriving at Unit 126, a three-story building with a small garden in the back.

Before long, he encountered Roger, the Black Scorpion, in the study.

A middle-aged man with firmly set black hair, Roger's slightly plump face was framed by cold, deep blue eyes.

Dressed in aqua-blue silk pajamas, Roger regarded Margot with a blank expression.

"You were attacked?"

"Yes." Margot recounted the events that had transpired.

Roger's blue eyes suddenly darkened, as if connected to a bottomless abyss or an eternally burning hell.

After a moment, he nodded.

"There are no signs of you being cursed. But you have to be careful. Your blood is on that knife."

As Roger spoke, he approached Margot.

"I'll help you eliminate any hidden dangers first."

Margot breathed a sigh of relief. "Thank you, Boss."

He followed Roger out of the study and down the stairs into the basement.

Upon flipping the switch and illuminating the gas wall lamp, Roger pointed at the statue in the center and instructed, "Open it and crawl inside."

The statue depicted a woman with gentle facial features, the folds of her long dress rendered vividly and lifelike.

Margot strode to the statue, pulled open the concealed door at its abdomen, and climbed in.

As the hidden door closed, an eerie silence filled the basement.

'Black Scorpion' Roger gazed at the statue and intoned a word in ancient Hermes.

"New life!"

Ghostly, indistinct black flames erupted from the statue's surface, flowing like water and burning silently.

After thirty seconds, Roger said to Margot, "You can come out now."

This ritual was a method for eliminating the hidden dangers of a curse. By entering the female statue's abdomen and reemerging, it symbolized a "rebirth." Coupled with the corresponding Beyonder powers, it could sever any connection with the item that had fallen into the enemy's hands.

"Wait for me in the study. I'll search for clues about the assailant," Roger instructed after ensuring Margot was unharmed.

Margot nodded and hastened out of the basement to the study. He pulled up a chair and settled into it.

As time ticked by, Margot suddenly felt his body becoming unbearably heavy, as if submerged in icy water.

His breathing grew labored.

Margot's pupils dilated, but he saw nothing.

He fought with all his strength, as if restrained by invisible ropes. He could barely move his arms, fingers, and feet.

Thud!

Margot finally collapsed to the floor, but the strange sensation persisted. His face turned an unnatural purple, and his mouth hung open. His thoughts grew increasingly murky.

Why… With this question in mind, Margot succumbed to the encroaching darkness.

At the basement door, Roger emerged with a grave expression.

He has potent anti-divination abilities…

This matter isn't simple…

Roger the Black Scorpion contemplated as he returned to the study.

In the next second, his gaze froze.

He discovered Margot sprawled on the ground, his face purple and his lower body soaked. He was no longer breathing.

After the Poison Spur Mob leader conducted a ritual to eliminate any lingering dangers of a curse, he mysteriously perished in the safest location of the Poison Spur Mob—right before Roger the Black Scorpion.

…

Auberge du Coq Doré, Room 207.

Lumian, now in fresh attire, nodded with satisfaction.

Fallen Mercury informed him through its vibrations that the fate exchange had been completed.

This meant Margot would instantly be assaulted by the Montsouris ghost.

Completing a fate exchange after stabbing someone took time—anywhere between five and thirty minutes, depending on the desired fate, the individual's strength, and their subconscious resistance. If Lumian was the target and he eagerly opened his mind and body, the fate exchange could be achieved swiftly—within seconds or even less than twenty.

Gazing at the pewter-black dirk in his hand, Lumian smirked.

"When I have time, I'll teach you Morse code. Otherwise, every time we communicate, I have to constantly narrow down options based on your feedback. It's far too tedious."

Fallen Mercury's quivering blade stilled, as if stunned.

Lumian, triumphant after a successful hunt, was in high spirits. He teased with a smile,

"Do you wonder why you should learn, even as a blade? Ambition is crucial. The same goes for being a blade. Do you want to remain like this forever?"

Then, he inquired, "What fate did you exchange this time?"

Lumian extended his spiritual sense to the pewter-black, patterned dirk.

With Fallen Mercury's assistance, he gradually deciphered the destiny droplets stored within the weapon.

It represented Margot's fate of receiving stacks of cash from his various underlings.

"You have a knack for choosing fates." Lumian had been occupied with fighting and had delegated the fate exchange to Fallen Mercury. He had merely informed it beforehand that he needed money.

After commending Fallen Mercury, Lumian grew pensive.

How will this fate manifest after the exchange?

Chapter 133: Suffering

Lumian couldn't make sense of it, but he didn't dwell on it either. He rolled up his sleeves, baring his right arm, and sliced it with the Fallen Mercury blade.

A brief moment of numbness was followed by a familiar pain, but he didn't flinch. He watched as blood oozed out and stained the silver-black blade crimson.

Almost instantaneously, a mercury illusory river, composed of intricate symbols, materialized before Lumian's eyes. The destiny droplets stored in the evil dirk seeped from its tip and flowed into the shallow wound.

Lumian concentrated, straining to discern the fate he sought to exchange.

He "saw" himself receiving treatment, "saw" himself falling asleep after releasing his emotions, and "saw" himself searching for Osta Trul…

Scenes flashed across Lumian's mind as if he had witnessed them firsthand.

Soon after, he located the fate of venturing outside the catacombs and encountering the Montsouris ghost from several days prior.

He swiftly raised the tip of Fallen Mercury and thrust it towards the complex symbols that appeared to be formed by the mercury river.

That fate proved heavy, and Lumian failed to stir it on his first attempt.

As the illusory river slowly faded, the scene in his mind became increasingly hazy. He hurriedly channeled most of his spirituality into the blade of Fallen Mercury.

At last, with a second stir, the fate of meeting the Montsouris ghost broke free from the illusory, mercury-hued river and shrank into a minuscule droplet, resembling a bead of mercury from a shattered thermometer.

The illusory droplet rapidly merged with the pewter-black dirk.

Only then did Lumian exhale a sigh of relief. He knew he had evaded the Montsouris ghost, and Fallen Mercury could now be deemed a Cursed Blade.

Once he treated the wound, an odd intuition suddenly struck him.

Guided by this intuition, Lumian exited Auberge du Coq Doré again, weaving between raucous drunks and a heated brawl. He returned to Rue du Rossignol and halted outside the alley where he had assaulted Margot.

Furrowing his brow, he cautiously entered and flipped over the barricade.

In the next moment, Lumian's gaze instinctively fell upon the shadow in the corner.

Something lay quietly in the realm of darkness.

Sensing its significance, Lumian hurried over, crouched down, and picked up the object with his gloved left hand.

It was a bulging brown leather wallet.

Margot dropped it? The money his underlings plundered and handed over to him? Lumian roughly grasped how the fate exchange had transpired.

Although he couldn't recall whether Margot had dropped the wallet during their fierce battle or if it had 'fallen' afterwards, it didn't prevent Lumian from claiming the money.

He extracted the thick wad of cash and emptied the gold, silver, and copper coins from the change purse. Then, he tossed the wallet aside and left the alley.

Back in Auberge du Coq Doré Room 207, Lumian lit the carbide lamp and meticulously counted his newfound fortune.

In total, he had acquired 1,265 verl d'or and 15 coppet. Most were banknotes worth 10 verl d'or or less. There was only one 200 verl d'or note, one 100 verl d'or note, and two 50 verl d'or notes. A few Louis d'or were included as well.

Lumian stared at the money for a few seconds before sighing deeply.

Even ten donations from 'benevolent souls' can't compare to taking down a gang leader…

Naturally, not all of the money belonged to Margot. He was merely holding onto it for the Poison Spur Mob.

Lumian grabbed a stack of small bills amounting to 200 verl d'or and left Room 207, climbing the stairs.

In under a minute, he reached the fourth floor and came to a stop in front of Room 8.

He recalled that Margot had visited Auberge du Coq Doré in the evening to collect most of the money from an unlicensed prostitute named Ethans.

At the time, one of Margot's underlings must have been in charge, but the money eventually ended up in Margot's possession.

Without knocking, Lumian crouched down and slid the stack of banknotes through the gap beneath the door.

He quickly straightened up, turned towards the stairs, and vanished into the shadowy corridor.

…

Lumian slept until six o'clock when the cathedral bell chimed.

He had slept soundly the night before, feeling as if the Provoker potion had been somewhat digested.

In the morning, I'll look for Osta Trul and see if Mr. K has replied. I'll also buy some better clothes and cosmetics from Quartier de l'Observatoire… In the afternoon, I'll visit the cheap clothing store at Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman… Lumian wasn't eager to rise. He lay there, quietly contemplating the day's plans.

Having escaped the threat of the Montsouris ghost, he placed disguising himself back on his to-do list.

After lingering in bed for a while, he ambled to the washroom to freshen up. Then, he went downstairs and purchased half a liter of apple cider and a loaf of bread with pork sausages from the vendors.

Having sated his hunger, he headed to the nearest cathedral square and found an empty corner to practice the combat techniques Aurore had taught him.

Lumian returned to Auberge du Coq Doré at 9:30 a.m., intending to rest for an hour before seeking out Osta Trul.

Upon entering the motel lobby, he spotted three maids cleaning various filthy areas under Madame Fels's supervision.

The motel owner hires cleaners every Monday… Lumian averted his gaze and walked towards the staircase.

At that moment, footsteps echoed from above.

Within ten seconds, Charlie appeared before Lumian, clad in a linen shirt, dark pants, and strapless leather shoes.

"You didn't go to the hotel?" Lumian asked, puzzled.

Charlie yawned and replied excitedly, "Don't you know? I'm off today. We can take one day off a week and choose whichever day we want."

Lumian chuckled. "Does this day off result in a reduction in your 'monthly salary' from Madame Alice?"

Charlie grinned sheepishly. "She has her own social engagements."

As they conversed, a foul odor drifted in from the door. The short, disheveled, gray-haired Ruhr and Michel entered the hotel.

"You didn't go to the steam locomotive station?" Charlie greeted them warmly.

Ruhr approached them first, then maintained a respectful distance.

"The market district is a bit chaotic today. We plan to rest for a day."

"What happened?" Lumian inquired "curiously."

Ruhr instinctively lowered his voice. "Margot of the Poison Spur Mob is dead. Many gangsters are searching for someone. Other gangs might clash with them at any moment. There are also many police officers present."

"Margot's dead?" Charlie blurted out, astonished.

He had just thought the guy deserved to die yesterday, and now he was dead?

Ruhr nodded gravely.

"I've heard several people mention it. Sigh, we can't earn any money today."

His wife, Madame Michel, consoled him, "If we don't go out, we don't have to eat lunch. We can save some money."

Before Lumian could inquire about the situation outside, Charlie, snapping out of his daze, spun around and dashed upstairs.

Lumian's eyes flickered as he trailed behind.

Thud, thud, thud. Charlie rapidly ascended to the fourth floor and sprinted to Room 8.

Taking a deep breath, he slammed the wooden door.

"Who is it?" A slightly hoarse female voice emerged from within.

Charlie announced his name loudly.

"Didn't I say I'm off the clock in the morning? Come back in the afternoon. Remember, 10 verl d'or. No discount this time!" the female voice responded impatiently, opening the door.

This was Lumian's first encounter with the woman named Ethans. Her flaxen hair tumbled to her shoulders, her similarly-colored eyes wary and her face etched with apprehension.

She appeared to be twenty-three or twenty-four years old, with average looks that could only be described as delicate. Her face and clothes were clean, and her red dress exposed a generous expanse of fair skin on her chest.

Charlie excitedly informed Ethans, "Did you know? Margot is dead! He's really dead!"

"…" Ethans stared, dumbfounded.

After several seconds, her slightly hoarse voice turned sharp.

"Is that devil truly dead?"

"It's true." Charlie nodded without hesitation. "You can finally escape that devil! You can finally live like a normal person!"

Ethans glanced around, dazed, taking in Lumian's expressionless eyes and Charlie's animated countenance.

"He's dead? He's dead?" She murmured, thinking of the money that had mysteriously appeared in her room.

As she started to believe Margot was indeed dead, her vision blurred.

Tears poured down her cheeks. She couldn't help but squat down and bury her face in her arms.

Her sobbing intensified, becoming more uncontrollable.

At that moment, footsteps echoed from the staircase.

Lumian turned his head and saw a young man in a white shirt, coat, and black jacket approaching.

Behind him were Margot's three thugs.

The lad's brown hair was slightly curly, and his face bore prominent creases. He strode up to the weeping Ethans, crouched down, and grinned.

"I'm Wilson from the Poison Spur Mob. From today onwards, I'll take care of you on Margot's behalf."

Charlie's excited expression froze.

Ethans's cries halted abruptly.

Slowly raising her tear-streaked face, she saw Wilson's smile and the shadow his body cast.

The shadow was so dense that it couldn't be dispelled.

Lumian observed quietly, his head imperceptibly raised.

…

On the way to the first floor, Charlie, who had been silent for a long time, couldn't help but ask, "Is there really no end to the suffering of the poor?"

"I like something Aurore Lee wrote," Lumian replied, his face expressionless. "Sometimes, we're not the ones at fault, but the world."

As soon as he finished speaking, three people stomped up from the first floor.

They were police officers in black uniforms, black vests, white shirts, and strapless leather boots.

The 1.85-meter-tall officer leading the group glanced at Charlie and Lumian and suddenly stopped in his tracks.

Pressing down on the gun at his waist, he asked in a deep voice, "Charlie Collent?"

Charlie was stunned.

"It's me, Officer. What's the matter?"

The officer gestured at his colleagues and took out steel handcuffs.

As his two colleagues encircled Charlie, he said with a serious expression, "You're suspected of murder. We're arresting you."

"Murder?" Charlie's face displayed shock, fear, and confusion.

Lumian raised his eyebrows in surprise.

As the officer handcuffed Charlie with his colleague's assistance, he informed him, "Madame Alice is dead!"

Chapter 134: Courtesan

"What?" Charlie's disbelief was palpable.

Lumian shared his surprise, casting a sympathetic glance at Charlie.

He was convinced that Charlie had no reason to kill Madame Alice. After all, while she lived, Charlie stood to gain 500 verl d'or a month for the next six months. According to various publications, this sum was nearly equivalent to the monthly salary of a doctor, lawyer, mid-level civil servant, senior high school teacher, senior engineer, or deputy police lieutenant. For someone who had nearly starved to death and could only find work as an apprentice attendant, it was a small fortune.

As his two colleagues headed upstairs, the officer who had handcuffed Charlie tersely explained,

"Madame Alice was discovered dead in her room at the Hôtel du Cygne Blanc this morning. Multiple witnesses confirm you spent the night there and didn't leave until close to midnight."

Charlie's fear and confusion mounted.

"How is this possible? How did she die…"

Muttering to himself, he suddenly turned to the officer, anxiety etched on his face, and insisted, "She was alive when I left! I swear by Saint Viève!"

The officer's deep voice responded, "The preliminary autopsy report places Madame Alice's time of death between 11 p.m. and 1 a.m. last night. Besides you and her, no one else's presence was detected."

Could the other presence not be human? Lumian mused silently, considering the Montsouris ghost.

If it weren't for his lack of an adequate disguise and his desire to avoid the detectives' scrutiny, he would have voiced his thoughts.

"Impossible! This can't be happening!" Charlie's eyes widened, his voice raised in protest.

A police officer, who had slipped away earlier, descended from the fourth floor, a glittering diamond necklace held in his white-gloved left hand.

"Found this!" he informed the lead officer.

The officer nodded without further explanation to Charlie. He stared at him solemnly, declaring, "Charlie Collent, you're under arrest for murder. You have the right to remain silent; anything you say can and will be used against you in court."

"I didn't do it! Do you hear me? I didn't!" Charlie screamed, struggling futilely.

Despite his protestations, he was led out of Auberge du Coq Doré by the two police officers.

By then, several tenants had been drawn by the commotion to the staircase, where they watched the scene unfold.

Among them was Gabriel, who appeared to have just completed an all-night writing session on his manuscript.

"Do you think Charlie did it?" Lumian asked the playwright, deep in thought as he stared down the now-empty corridor.

Gabriel had emerged earlier and had a rough understanding of Charlie's predicament.

He shook his head, replying, "I don't think Charlie is guilty. He's not a saint, but he's not evil either."

"Why do you say that?" Lumian inquired, turning to him.

Gabriel adjusted his black-framed glasses.

"Charlie was swindled out of his money and nearly starved, yet he never considered stealing from us.

"That means he either has principles and a moral compass, or he's terrified of the law. In either case, it's enough to prove he wouldn't murder that lady."

Lumian nodded, then chuckled.

"People can be impulsive and change."

With that, he climbed the stairs to the fifth floor.

This was the top floor of Auberge du Coq Doré. Large sections of the ceiling overhead showed signs of water damage, as if heavy rain would cause it to leak.

Lumian approached Room 504, Charlie's room, and extracted a small wire he carried with him to unlock the wooden door.

Inside, Charlie's suitcase, bed, and wooden table had been rifled through by the two police officers earlier. Items were strewn about, but they were few and far between.

Lumian recalled that during a conversation with Charlie at the basement bar, he had mentioned pawning his only formal suit and many other belongings while unemployed. He still couldn't afford to retrieve them.

As he entered, his gaze shifted, and Lumian suddenly spotted a portrait.

Taped to the wall opposite the bed, it depicted a woman in a green dress.

The woman appeared to be in her late twenties, with auburn hair, jade-green eyes, and lustrous red lips. She possessed an exquisite beauty, radiating elegance.

Lumian was taken aback. The woman in the painting seemed eerily familiar.

He realized it must be Susanna Matisse, the infamous prostitute Charlie had confused for Saint Viève.

Yet he had never met this woman before, so there was no reason for him to find her familiar.

After some thought, Lumian suddenly remembered something.

During his Summoning Dance in Room 207, he had attracted a translucent figure that was clearly more powerful than the other entities.

The figure, too, was female and bore a striking resemblance to Susanna Matisse in the portrait. However, one had turquoise hair, the other auburn; one's hair was long enough to cover her naked body, while the other's was merely long enough to form a bun.

Moreover, the figure was even more alluring, seemingly capable of stirring hidden desires within anyone. Susanna Matisse's portrait didn't provoke such feelings in Lumian.

A consequence of misguided prayers? Lumian silently nodded in agreement.

In the past, he wouldn't have questioned Charlie's actions. If it meant avoiding starvation, Lumian would have prayed sincerely to a prostitute, let alone Trier's guardian angel.

But now, through Aurore's grimoire, Lumian had gained a basic understanding of the entry-level Sequences of the twenty-two divine paths, sacrificial taboos, and associated mystical knowledge. He knew that careless praying could be perilous.

After searching for a while, he left Room 504, grabbed the carbide lamp, and hailed a public carriage on Avenue du Marché, heading toward Quartier de l'Observatoire.

As he ventured into the underground toward the area where Osta Trul typically lurked, Lumian periodically scrutinized the shadows behind the stone pillars.

He laughed at himself, thinking, I won't run into the Montsouris ghost again, will I?

If that were the case, he would need to consider whether the Montsouris ghost had a particular connection to something he possessed, or if corruption had indirectly altered his "horoscope," resulting in exceptionally bad luck.

Fortunately, Lumian's concerns proved unfounded. He found Osta Trul sitting beneath a stone pillar, a bonfire crackling nearby.

The hooded, black-robed figure glanced at Lumian and offered a genuine smile.

"Mr. K has granted you permission to attend our biweekly mysticism gathering at nine o'clock on Wednesday night."

Osta's gaze bore a distinct sincerity, as if to say payment was due.

At 9 p.m. the day after tomorrow… Lumian nodded with a smile.

"Where's the gathering?"

"Meet me at my place an hour beforehand. I'll take you there," Osta replied without hesitation.

Lumian tersely acknowledged.

"I'll pay you the rest then."

"Alright." Though Osta seemed slightly disappointed, he acquiesced.

Lumian inquired, "What should I be cautious of at the gathering?"

"Cover your face and hide your identity," Osta advised from experience. "You don't want other attendees exposing you if they're caught by the authorities, do you? Aside from Mr. K, no one should know everything."

Lumian grinned, retorting, "You've already seen my face and know my identity. Should I consider burying you in some corner of Underground Trier after the first gathering?"

Osta involuntarily shuddered and forced a smile.

"You're quite the joker. But I don't actually know who you are, where you live, or what you do. Besides, it's unlikely that you've shown me your true self."

Taking pleasure in unnerving the other party, Lumian found a rock and sat down. Basking in the warmth of the bonfire, he casually asked, "Have you ever heard of Susanna Matisse?"

"I have," Osta replied, his excitement evident. "For a time, she was the woman of my dreams. I bought numerous posters and postcards featuring her image. A few years ago, she was Trier's most famous prostitute, the kind who attended high society banquets. She was linked to countless scandals involving members of parliament, high-ranking officials, and the wealthy. Rumor has it that she made hundreds of thousands of verl d'or annually, but she's been out of the limelight for the past two or three years. Nana has since taken her place as Trier's renowned courtesan. Sigh, she might have become someone's permanent mistress."

Hundreds of thousands of verl d'or? Lumian was taken aback.

"A high-level courtesan earns more than most best-selling authors?"

"Isn't that normal?" Osta wore a peculiar expression. "A high-level courtesan can sleep with members of parliament, bankers, and high-ranking officials, but a best-selling author can't[1]."

Amused and self-deprecating, Lumian remarked, "That's true. Poet Boller once said there is no difference between a poet and prostitute. The former sells the product of his imagination, the latter her body."

"I prefer bodies," Osta admitted candidly.

Lumian inquired again, "Have you heard of the legend of a female ghost? She has turquoise hair, long enough to wrap around her body. Her features are exquisite, capable of enchanting most men and arousing their desires."

"No." Osta shook his head.

With a wistful expression, he added, "If such a female ghost truly exists, I'd love to encounter her just once."

Lumian stood up and chuckled.

"Then brace yourself for sudden death after doing it dozens of times a night."

"…" Osta's expression froze.

…

3 p.m., 27 Avenue du Marché, Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman Police Headquarters.

Lumian, having spent nearly 300 verl d'or on three sets of differently graded clothes, affordable cosmetics, and other disguise props, entered the unusually noisy hall.

Some people were being brought in, others were fortunate enough to leave, while still others argued loudly, caused a scene, and cursed—some slammed tables and kicked stools…

Lumian, his blond hair neatly combed back, black-framed glasses perched on the bridge of his nose, and a mustache adorning his lips, appeared with overly fair cheeks. Dressed in a black formal suit and carrying a brown briefcase, he approached a male constable overseeing reception.

He stopped before the man, lifted his head slightly, and confidently announced, "I'm Charlie Collent's pro bono lawyer. I'd like to see my client."

[1] I remember Baudelaire mentioning it, but I couldn't find the source for the time being. It could be someone else.

Chapter 135: Confirming the Situation

The constable set down his newspaper and sized up Lumian, visibly unnerved by his unabashed confidence. He gestured to the notebook and fountain pen before him, saying, "Show me your lawyer's license and register your name and purpose of visit."

A license? Seriously? Lumian, the phony attorney, felt a surge of panic.

Hadn't he read in countless novels and newspapers that simply identifying oneself as a lawyer was enough to gain access to a client?

As Lumian reached for the black fountain pen, his mind raced, formulating a plan.

He suddenly noticed that the constable across from him had shifted his attention to the recently discarded copy of Youth of Trier, fixated on the annual Trier cycling race.

He doesn't seem to care about the lawyer's license… An idea flashed through Lumian's mind. Mimicking Aurore's penmanship, he scrawled his 'name': "Guillaume Pierre, pro bono lawyer. Meeting client, Charlie Collent."

After jotting it down, Lumian stood and nonchalantly glanced around.

Feigning delight, he raised his arm and exclaimed, "My little cabbage, long time no see!"

Confused faces turned in his direction. Lumian spun back to the registering constable and murmured, "I spotted a friend."

The unspoken message: he'd present his lawyer's license later.

Without waiting for a reply, Lumian strode to a corner of the hall.

The constable gave the register a cursory glance before returning his gaze to Youth of Trier.

Once in the corner, Lumian stole a peek at the preoccupied constable, then turned to the baffled onlookers with an apologetic grin.

"I'm sorry, I mistook you for someone else."

Clutching his briefcase, he approached the police officer he had "chosen" earlier, who was now coming from the registration office.

Lumian lifted his chin and demanded haughtily, "I want to see my client, Charlie Collent."

In the Intis Republic, attorneys held a far higher social status than ordinary constables.

The officer glanced back at the registration office, saw no cause for concern, and nodded.

"I'll contact the person in charge of that case for you."

Fifteen minutes later, Lumian found himself face-to-face with Charlie in a secured room, two officers standing guard at the door.

"Who are you?" Charlie asked, sinking into a chair across the table, his eyes filled with confusion.

His once-rosy cheeks were now pallid, fear etched into every line of his face.

He had heard of pro bono lawyers while chatting with other hotel staff and knew they were provided by government agencies or philanthropic organizations for destitute suspects. He never expected one to arrive just half a day after his arrest.

Were those fake-collar-wearing bureaucrats that efficient?

Lumian grinned, removed his black-framed glasses, winked with his right eye, and spoke in his natural voice, "Don't you recognize me? I'm your pro bono lawyer."

Charlie stared, dumbstruck. After a few seconds of careful scrutiny, a spark of recognition lit up his face.

But before he could speak, Lumian slipped his glasses back on and said, "Quiet. Listen to me."

"Alright, alright." Charlie snapped to attention.

Lumian's smile vanished, replaced by a grave expression.

"I need to know the full details of what happened. That's the only way I can clear your name."

"Really?" Charlie asked, desperation in his voice, like a drowning man grasping at a lifeline.

Feigning his professionalism, Lumian questioned, "What time did you stay in the room with Mrs. Alice until?"

Charlie rubbed his face, struggling to recall through the haze of confusion and pain, "Madame Alice ordered room service. I entered her room before 8 p.m. and stayed until she was tired. I only left at midnight. At that time, she had just laid down and was still awake. She was still alive!"

From 8 p.m. to midnight? Every day? That 500 verl d'or isn't easy to earn… Lumian mused, then adopted a lawyerly tone, "You have to be honest with me. Hiding anything will only hurt you in the end."

"I'm not lying. That's really the truth!" Lumian's words, actions, posture, and tone had convinced Charlie that he was truly his defense attorney.

After verifying a few more details, Lumian inquired, "After you gained Madame Alice's favor, did anyone express jealousy?"

"Many. Apprentices and official attendants alike, they were all jealous of me…" Charlie remembered.

They discussed the topic for a while before Lumian produced a photo, handing it to Charlie.

"See if you recognize this person."

Charlie gasped, "Isn't this Saint Viève?"

Why was she dressed so provocatively, her chest exposed?

"I've confirmed that the portrait in your room isn't Saint Viève. It belongs to the famous courtesan, Susanna Mattise." Lumian tactfully replaced 'prostitute' with 'courtesan' to prevent Charlie from becoming overly upset.

"Huh?" Charlie's face contorted with confusion.

I prayed to a courtesan, not an angel?

But why did my luck change for the better?

No, if it had truly improved, I wouldn't have been arrested…

Lumian produced another photo. It still depicted Susanna Mattise, but he had already altered the courtesan's hair color and made a few "edits."

"Take a look at this and tell me if you recognize this person."

Charlie scrutinized the image for a few seconds before his expression morphed into one of shock.

"Wh— She! How can this be?"

"So you do know her?" Lumian smirked.

Charlie looked up, his voice hollow, "S-she is… She's the woman from my beautiful dreams.

"Didn't I tell you? I had these amazing dreams for a few days. I dreamed of making love to her. She was so passionate and gentle…

"H-how did you know I dreamed of her? I didn't tell anyone! Why do you have a photo of her?"

Charlie's gaze, now fixed on Lumian, had completely changed.

Is this really the southern kid I know?

Aside from his talent for pranks and good looks, there was nothing extraordinary about him!

Lumian's lips curled into a smile as he gazed back at Charlie.

"Take a closer look at who's in the photo."

Charlie stared blankly at the image of the green-haired woman.

As he examined it, his expression morphed into sheer terror. He recoiled involuntarily, making the chair creak.

"No, that's impossible! Susanna, Susanna, she's that prostitute!" Charlie shouted, unable to suppress his emotions.

This revelation left him feeling as if he had encountered a malevolent spirit.

After praying to a portrait of a prostitute, he had not only escaped hunger and found a new job but had also dreamed of her and slept with her!

Wasn't this akin to encountering a ghost?

Lumian nodded approvingly.

"Congratulations. At least you're not blind."

He had intended to help Charlie and divulge information as a prank to frighten him, but the two matters were unrelated.

The door to the interview room creaked open. A constable standing guard outside inquired warily, "What happened? Why are you shouting?"

"I helped him recall some key details," Lumian explained calmly.

Charlie snapped out of his stupor.

"Yes, I remember something very important."

And indeed, it was!

The policeman didn't press further and shut the door again.

Seeing this, Charlie leaned forward, gripping the edge of the table, and asked anxiously, "Did I encounter an evil female spirit?"

"It might not be a vengeful or evil spirit," Lumian said, watching Charlie's expression soften slightly before adding, "It might be even more troublesome than that."

At those words, Charlie's face turned ashen.

After a brief pause, he asked apprehensively, "You… you mean Madame Alice was killed by that evil spirit?"

"I'm not sure yet." Lumian stood up. "I need to examine Madame Alice's corpse."

"You even know how to investigate a corpse to determine the true cause of death?" Charlie found his neighbor increasingly enigmatic.

Lumian smiled but offered no answer.

As Charlie's defense attorney, Lumian had the right to inspect the corpse under police supervision, and he could even enlist the assistance of an independent pathologist. So, after signing two documents under the name Guillaume Pierre, Lumian was escorted to the basement of the market district's police headquarters and into the morgue where the body was kept.

The officer leading him slid open the cabinet, unzipped the body bag, and pointed to the female corpse.

"This is Madame Alice."

In life, Alice had preserved her appearance quite well, with only faint wrinkles at the corners of her eyes and mouth. Her thick brown eyebrows framed her face, her cheeks sagged slightly, and her skin had taken on a deathly pallor.

Lumian glanced casually at the body and said to the officer, "I'm good."

He wasn't a pathologist who had come to conduct a genuine examination; his objective was merely to pinpoint the approximate location of Madame Alice's remains.

After exiting the morgue, Lumian turned to the accompanying officer and asked, "Where's the nearest restroom?"

"Take a right at the end of the corridor," replied the officer, despite his growing impatience.

Lumian hastened his steps and entered the basement restroom.

Once inside, he locked the wooden door and performed the Summoning Dance in the cramped space.

Amidst the frenzied, contorted dance, a chilling wind swept through the restroom. Vague figures materialized one by one, their pale or bluish-white faces staring at Lumian with empty eyes.

These were the lingering obsessions of the departed.

Lumian had never witnessed such a spectacular sight before. For a moment, he felt as if he were surrounded by ghostly specters.

He steadied himself and continued the second half of the dance while searching for Madame Alice.

Soon, he spotted the fierce-looking lady with the thick brown eyebrows.

Lumian unsheathed the ritual silver dagger and inflicted a wound, commanding Madame Alice to attach herself to him.

Madame Alice consumed the drop of blood and entered Lumian's body.

Immediately, Lumian felt a shiver race down his spine, and his chest grew heavy.

His breath came in labored gasps.

Without hesitation, Lumian amplified Madame Alice's obsession, foregoing any selection of her characteristics or abilities.

Almost instantaneously, Lumian's vision dimmed, and he saw Madame Alice lying on the bed, her mouth and nose smothered by a down pillow. However, there was no one pressing down on the pillow in her line of sight!

Chapter 136: Initial Summoning Attempt

Lumian, consumed by Madame Alice's fixation, found breathing increasingly difficult. His body ached more intensely, as if he had once again encountered the Montsouris ghost and teetered on the brink of death.

This was a true death experience.

Concerned he might lose control, Lumian chose not to push further. He ordered Madame Alice's lingering spirit to vacate his body.

Gasping for air, he wiped the cold sweat from his brow before reverting to his slightly arrogant novice lawyer persona.

Accompanied by the police officer, he headed back to the interview room.

Charlie sprang to his feet, leaning forward with his hand braced against the table. His face was a mix of anxiety and anticipation.

Without waiting for a question, Lumian seemed to hear Charlie ask, "What's the result?"

Lumian nodded and made a calming motion.

His gesture implied that the autopsy findings aligned with his expectations.

Relief washed over Charlie's face instantly. It was as though he'd expended all his energy in that moment. He slumped back into his chair, physically drained.

In front of the two constables at the door, Lumian declared firmly, "Don't worry about anything else. I've got it covered.

"You only need to do one thing. During the next questioning, recount the entire story to these gentlemen without omitting a single detail, no matter how absurd or implausible it may seem.

"Of course, stick to what happened up until your arrest. There's no need to delve into our conversation."

Since a lawyer-client dialogue might involve courtroom tactics others had no right to know, the two officers at the door didn't find Lumian's last statement odd. After all, Charlie Collent was an unfortunate kid facing a serious criminal case for the first time and requiring a lawyer. He likely didn't know the rules and needed explicit guidance.

Charlie grasped Lumian's message: Don't reveal to the police that I discovered the issue with the portrait!

"Alright." Charlie wasn't as angry, terrified, or flustered as when he was first arrested and brought to the station, but he wasn't as chatty as usual either.

After departing the market district's police headquarters, Lumian circled twice before finding an alley blocked by a barricade. He changed his clothes, removed his glasses, and altered his makeup style.

Now that I have enough money, I can set up a safe house and a place to switch disguises based on Aurore's novels. Lumian recalled his sister's writing, piecing together the method for handling such matters.

He also fully intended to purchase a copy of Men's Aesthetics.

Mastering makeup without guidance was impossible. He'd mainly relied on his hairstyle, glasses, and attire to conceal his identity.

En route to Auberge du Coq Doré, Lumian contemplated how to extricate Charlie from his dire situation.

Who exactly is Susanna Matisse, or rather, the bizarre creature she morphed into? Why did she murder Madame Alice?

Why did she help Charlie in the past and engage in the act with him in the dream?

Should I pen a letter to Madam Magician, inquiring about the nature of the creature and its peculiarities? Only by truly understanding Susanna Matisse can I devise a strategy to handle her. Otherwise, she's evidently more powerful than me…

The prospect of writing to Madam Magician unsettled Lumian.

Judging by the speed of her previous response and its content, he sensed her indirectness: "Don't bother me unless it's important!"

If Lumian faced an issue involving Susanna Matisse, writing to inquire would be acceptable. However, this predicament only concerned his neighbor.

It was highly likely that the enigmatic, potent woman who detested complications wouldn't respond.

And this could impact her attitude towards Lumian.

If I'm not asking Madam Magician, why not inquire at Mr. K's mysticism gathering? If the attendees are Beyonders at Osta Trul's level, they might not have the answer… As Lumian mulled it over, he ascended the stairs and entered his room.

His gaze fell on the suitcase containing Aurore's grimoires, and he experienced a sudden revelation.

Why should I investigate Susanna Matisse and deal with her personally?

My sole objective is to rescue Charlie!

Even if I can uncover Susanna Matisse's vulnerability and vanquish her, can I coerce a peculiar creature like her to turn herself in at the police station?

If she dares to go, the police won't dare to entertain her. Given her displayed characteristics, wouldn't she indulge in an orgy on the spot?

Lumian rapidly discerned the distinction between goals and means.

There was no need for such effort to exonerate Charlie and secure his release from police headquarters!

He simply had to inform Bureau 8, the Eternal Blazing Sun Church, and the Church of the God of Steam and Machinery that Charlie's case involved Beyonder elements and prompt them to intervene in the investigation!

Even a low-level Beyonder with no intelligence network or mystical powers could detect something amiss with Susanna Matisse. There's no reason why official investigators couldn't uncover the invisible force behind Madame Alice's demise. Eventually, they would not only verify Charlie's innocence but also help him escape Susanna Matisse's grasp and resolve the issue with the strange creature entirely. Lumian had a clear conjecture about the subsequent events after the lunatic upstairs had sought refuge in the cathedral upon encountering the Montsouris ghost.

He had urged Charlie to divulge everything at the market district's police headquarters to attract the attention of official Beyonders.

Nevertheless, he felt compelled to act. He couldn't rely solely on ordinary police officers.

What if they deemed Charlie's story a fabrication intended to mock their intelligence and resorted to violence to coerce a confession on the spot?

Lumian's gaze swept over the crumpled newspaper on the wooden table, recalling how he or his sister had snipped out the livre bleu's words and pieced them together to compose a letter seeking assistance from the authorities.

Transform Charlie's experience into a letter and 'deliver' it to a nearby cathedral? Lumian nodded, deciding to execute the plan.

Armed with the plea for help and Charlie's confession, it should pique the interest of official Beyonders.

As he was about to search for appropriate phrases in Novel Weekly, Lumian suddenly frowned.

Could the officials link a similar request for help to Cordu? Would they associate me, a wanted criminal, with Charlie?

Lumian didn't know if Ryan and his associates had fully reported their findings to official Beyonders nationwide, but he was unwilling to take that risk.

Imitate Aurore's handwriting?

Unlike a lawyer's signature that doesn't raise suspicion, Ryan and his team suggested that the letter would likely undergo various checks, including divination…

Disguise myself and have someone else write it for me? As his thoughts raced, Lumian suddenly had an idea. I can summon a spirit world creature to write it for me!

If the officials detect any issues, they won't be able to make the spirit world creature identify me since they don't know the summoning incantation!

The more Lumian considered it, the more he believed it was a solid plan. He pulled out a chair, sat down, and began devising the summoning incantation.

The first sentence was undoubtedly, "Spirit wandering in the void."

After some thought, Lumian penned the second sentence.

"The friendly creature that can be subordinated."

Summoned spirit world creatures had to be under Lumian's command to assist him in writing letters. Friendliness provided essential protection for the summoner.

As for the third sentence, Lumian didn't have lofty expectations. He merely needed to incorporate the two aspects of being weak and proficient in Intisian.

After several moments of mental permutation, the third sentence materialized on paper:

"Weakling proficient in Intisian."

Phew… After writing, Lumian exhaled.

He then leafed through Aurore's grimoire and translated the few unmastered words into Hermes.

Immediately after, he set up the altar and commenced the summoning.

Soon, he completed the ritual and observed the candle flame turning a dark green hue and expanding to the size of a human head.

A hazy, translucent figure materialized, its head resembling an ox's and the rest, a dog's.

"Help me write a letter," Lumian said in Hermes as he gazed at the spirit world creature.

The bewildered ox-headed dog didn't respond.

"I order you to help me write a letter," Lumian emphasized in Hermes.

The ox-headed dog appeared dumbstruck, as though it didn't comprehend.

Lumian made several more attempts, but the ox-headed dog remained unresponsive.

Having no other choice, he terminated the summoning early to preserve his spirituality.

He started pondering the issue.

I can't communicate with that guy…

Amenable to subordination doesn't mean it can be communicated with…

With this realization, Lumian modified the second summoning incantation to "A friendly creature that can be communicated with."

Being able to communicate meant being able to make requests!

This time, a colossal "snail" emerged from the dark green flames.

"Hello." Lumian attempted to greet it in Intisian.

The snail emitted an ethereal voice.

"Hello, what's the matter?"

It also spoke Intisian.

"Can you help me write a letter?" Lumian was overjoyed.

The "snail" replied in a troubled tone, "But I don't have any hands."

"…" Lumian had no choice but to end the summoning.

After some consideration, he changed the phrase "weakling proficient in Intisian" to "weakling who can write Intisian."

"Can write" covered both the knowledge and necessary physical requirements.

Before long, Lumian completed his third summoning.

He saw a transparent creature resembling a rabbit.

"Can you help me write a letter?" Lumian asked with intense anticipation.

The "rabbit" nodded, picked up the pen on the table, and wrote an Intisian word on the paper.

"A letter."

"…" Lumian's lips twitched.

This creature didn't seem too bright.

With resolve, Lumian grabbed a pen and paper and scribbled a plea for help, including Susanna Mattise's portrait, details about the wet dream, Madame Alice's death, and Charlie's arrest.

Then, he said to the "rabbit," "Copy it!"

The "rabbit" took the fountain pen and diligently transcribed it.

Soon, it finished its task.

Lumian examined it and nodded in satisfaction.

In the next second, his smile froze.

Not only had the dimwit copied the entire contents of the letter, but it had also replicated his handwriting.

In other words, it was in Lumian's script!

Lumian took a deep breath and slowly exhaled. He pointed at Novel Weekly and said, "Copy in that font."

The "rabbit" nodded slowly and rewrote without complaint.

A few minutes later, Lumian received a seemingly printed plea for help.

Chapter 137: Hooha

Lumian examined the letter with gloved hands and breathed a sigh of relief.

No issues this time!

Completing three consecutive spirit world creature summoning rituals had left him feeling drained.

After a moment's consideration, Lumian asked the rabbit-like spirit world creature, "Can you do me another favor?"

The "rabbit" thought seriously for a few seconds before giving a slow nod.

Lumian unzipped his grayish-blue work uniform.

"Then follow me first."

The ethereal and transparent "rabbit" leaped from midair to Lumian's side, assuming the role of a loyal companion.

Lumian sighed quietly and said, "What I mean is, you can hide inside my clothes to avoid detection by any Beyonder with heightened spiritual perception."

The "rabbit" wore a blank expression as it hopped into Lumian's clothes and curled up.

Since it had no true mass or weight, his clothes could be zipped up quickly without leaving a trace.

After stowing the letter in the same pocket, Lumian dissolved the spiritual barrier, removed his gloves, and exited Room 207.

He meandered toward Avenue du Marché, nearing the Suhit steam locomotive station.

It was just past five o'clock, and many people were still at work. The street was neither crowded nor deserted. Groups of passersby headed for the public carriage station sign or searched for the subway entrance. They carried their luggage and walked on foot to nearby streets in search of temporary accommodations for the night.

Lumian patted his right pocket and pointed at the postbox several dozen meters away. Lowering his voice, he said, "See that green metal cylinder?"

He felt a vibration in his pocket. The "rabbit" had responded in kind.

Lumian exhaled in relief and instructed, "Place the letter beside you in that metal cylinder."

Having said that, Lumian massaged his temples and activated his Spirit Vision.

He watched the "rabbit" emerge, enveloping the plea for help. It maneuvered through the crowd and reached the green metal cylinder.

Just as Lumian thought the "rabbit" would deposit the letter in the postbox and successfully complete the mission, the creature entered the postbox with the letter.

Moments later, it exited the postbox and flew back to Lumian, leaving the letter inside.

Lumian closed his eyes and consoled himself, I suppose it's considered tossed in…

He then left Avenue du Marché with the "rabbit" and located a vacant alley. In Hermes language, he informed the "rabbit" that the summoning was over.

The little creature continuously drained his spiritual energy.

After the "rabbit" returned to the spirit world, Lumian finally felt at ease.

He resolved to stop aiding Charlie. The rest would hinge on how the official Beyonders handled the situation.

If it weren't for the fact that this matter is intriguing enough, I wouldn't have bothered to help him. Do I have to battle that enigmatic creature, Susanna Mattise, who's clearly formidable, on his behalf? Lumian mused silently.

He chuckled.

In Cordu, if those crude fellows understood the traits Susanna Mattise exhibited, they would undoubtedly ask slyly whether he wanted to fight her in bed or in the hayloft.

Of course, Lumian could be just as coarse when dealing with them.

On his way back to Rue Anarchie, he discovered a meat patty shop and purchased Red Snapper Hot Beef Meatloaf for dinner.

Paired with the soda sold by street vendors, Lumian navigated the crowd as he ate, occasionally evading hands that covertly reached for his wallet.

Compared to Rouen Meatloaf, Red Snapper Hot Beef Meatloaf was less greasy. The fish was refreshing and delicate, the beef savory and crispy, the dough's subtle sweetness had a bite, and the aroma of spices and fat ignited Lumian's taste buds one by one with a rich texture.

After eating and drinking his fill, he clutched the glass bottle that still contained a third of the pale-red liquid and sighed appreciatively.

No wonder the Trieriens love meatloaves…

When I get the chance, I'll visit Rue Richelieu in the library district and try the first restaurant that created Red Snapper Hot Beef Meatloaf…

Based on the newspapers and magazines he had perused before, he could recite several famous meatloaves off the top of his head.

Degan Meatloaf, Périgueux Meatloaf, Tudenan Cashew Pie, Minced Meat Pie…

Sipping the pomegranate-flavored soda, Lumian turned onto Rue Anarchie.

What met his gaze was a chaotic tableau. The suspected gangsters brandished either axes or clubs, squaring off in the street.

Pedestrians steered clear, and the vendors retreated from Rue Anarchie one by one. The residents of the houses on both sides slammed their windows shut.

Lumian didn't venture further. He backtracked a few steps and found a wall pillar to conceal himself behind as he observed the unfolding scene with interest.

He suspected that his assassination of the Poison Spur Mob's Margot had aroused the suspicions of several gangs in the market district, ultimately escalating into a standoff.

After waiting nearly 15 minutes, Lumian still didn't witness the mobsters erupt into full-scale combat.

His anticipation for the confrontation left him disappointed. He cursed under his breath, "Are you guys going to do this or not? You're blocking the street without fighting. Do you think you have too much time on your hands?"

With that in mind, Lumian glanced at the five-story grayish-white building beside him.

He seriously contemplated finding a room and hurling the empty soda bottle between the two factions, tricking them into believing the opposing mob leader had signaled the start of the battle.

That way, Lumian would have a spectacle to enjoy.

Just as he was about to put his plan into action, a large contingent of police officers in black uniforms appeared at both ends of Rue Anarchie.

Leading them were officers on tall brown or black horses, brandishing shields and clubs. They advanced towards the mobsters, step by step, exuding an immense pressure that caused many of the gangsters to waver.

When the mounted police charged, the mobsters gathered on Rue Anarchie dispersed. Some fled, while others were beaten to the ground.

Lumian couldn't help but want to applaud. His thirst for excitement was thoroughly quenched.

He had only read about such scenes in novels and news articles, the latter of which often glossed over the gritty details!

In no time, Rue Anarchie returned to its usual cacophony.

Lumian finished his last sip of pomegranate soda and sauntered back to Auberge du Coq Doré, entering Room 207.

Sitting by the bed, he replayed the entire process of writing and posting the letter in his mind to ensure he hadn't overlooked any details that could expose him to the official Beyonders.

After a while, Lumian sighed softly.

"If only I had a messenger. It wouldn't have been so troublesome."

Unfortunately, obtaining a messenger wasn't easy. Even his sister Aurore didn't have one.

To date, Lumian knew of only two people who possessed a messenger.

One was Madam Magician, and the other was the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society's vice president, Hela, whom Aurore had mentioned.

Hela… Lumian's expression gradually darkened.

If the Aurore in his dream indeed bore some influence from her soul fragment, it was apparent that Aurore trusted the vice president a great deal. Her first move upon encountering a problem was to summon the other party's messenger for assistance.

I wonder if Hela knows Aurore's true identity, or if she discovered through that… that obituary that Aurore has… has already passed on… Lumian muttered to himself.

As he pondered, an idea struck him.

It was actually possible for him to summon Hela's messenger!

The summoning incantation comprised only three sentences. Lumian was certain the last phrase was "a messenger that belongs to Hela." The first two sentences followed a fixed format and requirements. As long as he attempted a few more combinations, he'd find the correct sequence!

Moreover, under such circumstances, Lumian wouldn't face any danger even if the initial combinations were incorrect. This was because the description of a messenger belonging to Hela eliminated other possibilities.

In other words, he'd either fail to summon it or successfully summon Hela's messenger.

Should I write a letter to Hela and inform her of what happened to Aurore? Lumian found himself momentarily stumped.

Considering that his sister had mentioned "my notebook" when she pushed him away, and that much of the mystical knowledge in her notebook originated from the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society, Lumian quickly made up his mind. If he could establish a connection with this organization, it would aid him in uncovering the crucial information hidden within the Warlock notebook.

He resolved to summon Hela's messenger right away!

Although he still harbored doubts about the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society's vice president, he didn't believe he possessed any value she coveted. Besides, Aurore had trusted Hela while she was alive.

Lumian walked to the wooden table, sat down, and began writing.

"Honorable Madam Hela,

"I apologize for writing you this letter. I am Muggle's younger brother. I regret to inform you that she encountered misfortune and has passed away.

"This involves a catastrophe brought about by worshiping an evil god. Only a few people and I escaped.

"I'm not sure if this matter interests you, so I won't elaborate. I don't wish to waste your time.

"What I want to know is, did Muggle mention anything suspicious to you in the past year?

"…"

After staring at the letter for a few seconds, Lumian slowly exhaled and folded the paper.

He then cleaned the room, set up the altar again, and attempted the first combination.

"The spirit that wanders about the unfounded, a friendly creature that can be subordinated, a messenger that belongs solely to Hela."

After reciting the incantation, Lumian gazed at the dark-green candle flame and patiently awaited the messenger's arrival.

Time ticked by, but nothing happened on the altar.

Undeterred, Lumian spoke again, "I! I summon in my name:

"The spirit wandering above the world;

"The friendly creature that can be subordinated;

"A messenger that belongs solely to Hela…"

The dark green candle flame suddenly flickered and grew larger.

At that moment, not only did the area above remain unlit, but it also grew darker.

In the darkness, a shape quickly materialized.

It was a human-like skull, seemingly forged from pure silver. It emitted a gentle light that dispelled the encroaching darkness.

Pale-white flames burned in the skull's eye sockets, instilling a sense of danger in Lumian.

After staring at Lumian for a few seconds, the pure silver skull opened its mouth and bit down on the airborne letter.

Then, it retreated back into the reassembled darkness.

Chapter 138: Letter

Lumian completed the ritual on his second attempt. He cleared the wooden table and opened Aurore's grimoire. Under the glow of the carbide lamp, he thumbed through the relevant sections.

In under fifteen minutes, he sensed something. He looked up and fixed his gaze on a spot near the window.

A folded letter lay there, undisturbed.

That fast? Lumian, surprised, reached out and took the letter.

Hela's response, vice president of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society, had arrived sooner than expected.

Lumian unfolded the letter and skimmed the elegantly written words.

"I'm sorry to hear that. Ever since Muggle missed last month's gathering, I've had a bad feeling.

"There are too many dangers in this world. Sometimes, we can't avoid them just because we want to unless we can control everyone around us.

"If you wish, you can tell me about Muggle's misfortune. You don't have to go into great detail. Just tell me the general situation…

"From the fact that you can summon my messenger, you should have stepped onto the Beyonder path. I'm not sure if your sister told you that this means you'll always be accompanied by danger and madness, but I have to remind you that restraint and caution are our best friends.

"In the future, if you have any questions about mysticism, you can ask me by writing to me. Although I'm not one of those with vast knowledge, I can answer many questions.

"I've only met Muggle twice in the past year, mainly discussing various matters in the Beyonder domain. What left a deep impression on me was that she mentioned that a friend of hers was affected by a strange dream, hoping to find a solution. If necessary, she wanted to hire a real psychiatrist to treat him…"

Lumian silently read Hela's reply, his face twisting with emotion.

Aurore had been searching for a solution to his bizarre dream!

Lumian composed himself and contemplated his response.

Suddenly, he froze.

His brows furrowed as he muttered, "Aurore told Hela about hiring a real psychiatrist…

"Considering Madame Susie's description, a true psychiatrist must refer to a specific Sequence of the Spectator pathway…

"Only Beyonders skilled in this domain can prevent me from dreaming of the world shrouded in gray fog…"

The issue wasn't with the situation. The problem was:

Aurore's grimoire only had Sequence 9 Spectator recorded for the pathway!

Yet, she clearly knew about Psychiatrist!

Lumian quickly recalled the two conversations in his dream.

First, Aurore had said she wanted to find a genuine Hypnotist for him.

Second, Aurore had mentioned that she knew Sequence 9 and Sequence 8 of all pathways and had a certain understanding of them.

Psychiatrist is often associated with hypnosis. Hypnotist is most likely a Sequence of the Spectator pathway as well, perhaps even superior to Psychiatrist…

Aurore's grimoire doesn't have records of the corresponding Sequence 8 or Sequence 7 of the Spectator pathway… Lumian's expression became grave, intermingled with a twisted thrill.

After so many days, he had finally discovered a discrepancy in Aurore's grimoire!

Previously, he had his suspicions but wasn't certain if there was any hidden anomaly. After all, Aurore in his dream was a figure formed from his memories and impressions under the influence of the soul fragment. Everything she said might not be accurate or complete. It was normal for her not to mention any exceptions explicitly.

Now, Hela's response indirectly confirmed that Aurore truly knew about one or more Sequences within the Spectator pathway and possessed a certain grasp of their related abilities.

Why hadn't Aurore recorded this knowledge in her grimoire? What was the secret behind this inconsistency? Lumian pulled out a blank sheet of paper, his emotions a blend of grief and anticipation.

In under a minute, he wrote, "Honorable Madam Hela,

"The truth is…

"My memory of the actual events is fragmented due to the calamity.

"If you could assist me in locating Guillaume Bénet, Pualis de Roquefort, and others, I would be deeply grateful. Their appearances and attributes can be found on the authorities' wanted posters.

"Lastly, I'm curious about the real psychiatrist Muggle intended to hire."

In his letter, Lumian briefly touched upon Cordu. He made no mention of the dream, the loop, or his rescue. He only speculated that Padre Guillaume

Bénet, under someone's guidance, had worshipped an evil god and banished Madame Pualis, who followed another sinister deity. Bénet then attempted a ritual with the entire village as a sacrifice. At the crucial moment, Muggle, selected as a vessel, pushed Lumian away, an essential sacrifice, causing the ritual's failure and Cordu's destruction. Finally, the official Beyonders, who had been called for aid, cleaned up the mess.

Lumian reassembled the altar, summoned the silver skull, and handed it the letter.

In less than fifteen minutes, he received a second reply from Hela.

Rather than comparing response speeds between Madam Magician and Madame Hela, Lumian eagerly read the letter's contents.

"I can sense your sorrow and understand your desire to uncover the truth and exact vengeance upon the perpetrator.

"As Muggle's friend, I'll aid you to the best of my ability, including but not limited to locating those individuals.

"I can also offer you a fresh lead on this matter. To my knowledge, Muggle's parents and other family members may still be alive in this world. She had distanced herself from them for some reason and didn't dare return to Trier. I'm unsure if they're in any danger or if they've come into contact with the evil god's followers.

"I don't know which Psychiatrist Muggle sought. Our organization has numerous genuine Psychiatrists, and many gatherings Muggle and I attended don't overlap. I'll assist you by inquiring with members who have interacted with her to see if you can obtain the answer you seek…

"Until this investigation is complete, I'll help conceal the fact that Muggle is deceased…

"If you relocate in the future, remember to summon my messenger again to prevent me from losing contact with you after obtaining pertinent information…"

After reading, Lumian fell silent for a long while before exhaling slowly.

Initially, he'd imagined Madame Hela would invite him to join the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society, taking Aurore's place. In doing so, he could more effectively investigate the Psychiatrist Aurore sought to hire. However, it seemed the organization was highly cautious about recruiting new members. They might even need to meet specific criteria to be considered candidates. For instance, Aurore had mentioned that none of them could return to their hometowns.

Maybe Madame Hela is observing and testing me… Lumian reassured himself and resumed studying Aurore's grimoire.

As for Aurore's original family, he was at a loss for where to begin.

…

Wednesday, 7:50 p.m., 20 Rue des Blouses Blanches.

Lumian rapped on Osta Trul's door, dressed in a grayish-blue worker's uniform and a dark-blue, almost black cap.

Osta, clad in black robes and a hood, opened the wooden door and glanced around. He grinned and remarked, "You're more punctual than I anticipated."

"I honor my promises better than you might think." Lumian strode into the room and handed Osta banknotes and coins worth 80 verl d'or.

Osta accepted it, counting twice with an even broader smile.

As he guided Lumian downstairs, he rambled, "The market district's been somewhat chaotic lately. Baron Brignais didn't even come to me for money."

"A gang leader died," Lumian commented nonchalantly.

Realizing the connection, Osta said regretfully, "Why couldn't Baron Brignais have died?"

"Even if Baron Brignais were dead, there'd still be Baron Guillaume and Baron Pierre. As long as the Savoie Mob exists, you'd have to repay the loan you owe," Lumian taunted.

Osta's expression soured.

Before long, he and Lumian boarded a public carriage. They each paid 30 coppet and found seats.

In about an hour, the carriage arrived at Avenue du Boulevard on the Srenzo River's north bank, Quartier 8, from the Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman on the river's south bank.

This was the heart of the entire Intis Republic. The presidential Pavilion of Pleasure, the Grand Palace where Emperor Roselle once resided, and various newspaper headquarters were all here, encircled by upscale residences.

Lumian had previously read in newspapers that the average rent in this district was 4,000 verl d'or annually, roughly 74 verl d'or weekly. The priciest ones could even reach tens of thousands.

Noticing the empty carriage, Lumian lowered his voice and inquired of Osta, "Is Mr. K hosting a gathering on Avenue du Boulevard?"

Osta smirked and replied, "Always. Psychic and Arcane have their headquarters on Avenue du Boulevard as well."

You guys sure know how to hide… Lumian gazed at the broad, flat avenue outside the window, the orderly Intis parasol trees lining the street, and the elegant, light-colored buildings behind them.

Just before 8:50 p.m., Osta led Lumian into the six-story beige luxury house at 19 Rue Scheer.

"This is Psychic magazine's headquarters, but they only occupy the top three floors." Osta didn't ascend the stairs but turned right into a corridor on the ground floor.

Only then did he inform Lumian, "Mr. K wants to see you beforehand."

"Alright." Lumian dipped his head and adjusted his hat, seemingly preoccupied with something.

Osta produced an iron-colored mask and grinned.

"It's time to disguise yourself. You can't let everyone see your true appearance."

In the next instant, Lumian looked up.

His face was shrouded in layers of white bandages, leaving only his eyes, nostrils, and ears exposed.

Upon seeing this, Osta's heart nearly skipped a beat.

Chapter 139: Mr. K

Within moments, Osta, who had been on the verge of a complaint, managed to force a smile and said, "You're quite the menacing sight like this."

"It's a classic look in literature," Lumian replied with a deliberately smug tone.

Osta said nothing, opting instead to don his iron mask, concealing his expression.

Taking a few steps forward, he halted and rapped on the door to the right.

Two long pauses, one short pause, and one long pause… Lumian watched Osta Trul's actions with the keen eye of a Hunter.

Within seconds, the dark-red wooden door creaked open.

The first thing Lumian saw was a plush, pale-yellow carpet, followed by classical-styled tables, chairs, sofas, and display shelves.

A figure stood in the shadows cast by gas wall lamps near the floor-to-ceiling windows.

Like Osta Trul, he wore the black robe of an ancient warlock, complete with a large hood. Lumian couldn't help but think, Can you even see the person standing in front of you clearly when you're dressed like this?

"Mr. K, Ciel has arrived," Osta announced respectfully to the nearly six-foot-tall figure as he stepped inside.

Lumian followed closely.

With a clang, the door shut behind him.

Mr. K turned to face Lumian. "Why do you want to attend our gathering?"

His voice was low and gravelly.

"For potion formulas, Beyonder characteristics, mystical items, and mysticism knowledge. It's not like it's for love or faith, right?" Lumian replied with intentional cynicism.

He then chuckled.

"I know that's not what you want to hear, but it doesn't matter. I don't mind telling you about me."

Lumian's voice deepened.

"In a catastrophe brought on by Beyonder powers, I lost my entire family.

"Not only did it cause me immense pain, but it made me realize that those so-called orthodox gods can't save us!

"From that day on, I sought Beyonder power and a way to forget all pain. I wanted to become powerful enough. I wanted those who brought me misfortune to experience the same torture."

The hooded Mr. K seemed to stare at Lumian without interruption. As for Osta Trul, he was visibly shocked. Ciel's words revealed raw, unmasked pain. His desire for the Samaritan Women's Spring was genuine!

Once Lumian finished speaking, Mr. K nodded and said, "There are two rules for participating in our gathering:

"First, no matter what happens, you can't attack anyone directly at the gathering.

"Second, don't attempt to follow other participants."

Only these two? Lumian hadn't expected so few constraints.

He didn't need to think hard to spot several loopholes immediately.

Not attacking directly? Does that mean I can use Provoke to incite the other party to death?

Just because I don't attempt to follow doesn't mean I can't do anything else to the target…

Is selling fake ingredients, fake formulas, fake Beyonder characteristics, and fake mystical items also allowed?

Lumian suppressed his urge to retort and nodded.

"No problem."

As he responded, he felt Mr. K's gaze on him, scrutinizing every inch of his flesh and skin.

It made him feel like he was in the sights of a venomous snake.

After a few seconds, Mr. K continued, "If you prefer not to disclose what you have and what you're after, you can write down your desired transaction in advance, and my attendant will copy it onto a portable blackboard for all participants to see. If you don't think it matters, you can make your request on the spot.

"Likewise, at the gathering, you can complete transactions through my attendant or directly with the other party.

"Remember, transactions carry risks. I can't guarantee the authenticity of all items, materials, or information. Of course, you can opt to pay me to notarize them, effectively reducing the risk."

A Notary's power? Lumian recalled Aurore's grimoire.

This was Sequence 6 of the Sun pathway, and most Beyonders in this pathway belonged to the Eternal Blazing Sun Church.

Given this, Lumian suspected Mr. K might not be a Notary, but rather possess a related mystical item.

Lumian quickly collected himself and asked Mr. K, "May I write down my requirements now?"

Mr. K nodded and gestured towards a desk on the right side of the room.

"Write them there. My attendant will collect them."

Lumian approached the brown desk, adorned with Psychic, Lotus, Arcane, and other magazines. He unfolded a fragrant letter and picked up a dark-red fountain pen. After some thought, he wrote:

"1. I possess a damaged Beyonder weapon. Seeking someone capable of repairing it. Price negotiable.

"2. Buying information on a peculiar creature. This female-looking entity is suspected to be a Spirit Body. It has long turquoise hair that envelops its body and exudes an alluring aura. It can induce erotic dreams with itself as the central figure. Additional details unknown. Reward depends on the value of information provided, ranging from 10 to 100 verl d'or."

Lumian considered adding a third point about a Provoker's acting experience but decided against it after some thought.

He remembered Aurore mentioning acting techniques, the Law of Beyonder Characteristics Conservation, and other mysticism knowledge in his nightmare. Such knowledge wasn't common among ordinary Beyonders. And he was currently impersonating a newcomer who had just entered the Beyonder world due to a disaster, seeking more knowledge and resources.

If he were to write the word "acting," Mr. K would surely grow suspicious.

Of course, Lumian didn't think of it as a pretense. He genuinely was a novice who had entered the Beyonder world following a disaster and sought more knowledge and resources. However, his involvement in the original disaster was quite high-level, allowing him to encounter powerful figures like Madam Magician. As a result, he possessed extensive high-end knowledge but lacked common sense, relying on Aurore's grimoire to fill the gaps.

Having set down the letter and pen, Lumian left with Osta and entered a room at the end of the corridor.

The room appeared to be a salon. Sofas, chairs, a round table, a coffee table, barstools, and other furnishings were arranged casually, creating a relaxed atmosphere.

Several gathering attendees had already arrived. Some wore black robes and hoods that nearly covered their faces. Others donned clown or devil makeup, while a few wore crude or intricate masks.

For a moment, Lumian felt as if he had entered a masquerade ball.

He and Osta Trul took separate seats after entering separately.

Lumian chose a barstool, almost tempted to order a glass of absinthe to complete the look.

Soon enough, Mr. K entered and settled into the armchair reserved for the organizer. His masked and gloved attendants brought in a portable blackboard filled with transaction requests.

The first thing Lumian noticed was a request for Beyonder characteristics.

"Warrior pathway Sequence 8 Pugilist Beyonder characteristic, 15,000 verl d'or. Negotiable."

A Sequence 8 Beyonder characteristic selling for 15,000 verl d'or or more? Lumian was initially stunned, then overwhelmed by heartache and regret, as if he longed to drink from the Fountain of Oblivion.

He had just killed Margot, a Sequence 8 Provoker of the Hunter pathway!

Playing it safe, Lumian hadn't harassed Margot until the Montsouris ghost attacked, leaving the battlefield early.

While he had gained over 1,000 verl d'or from Margot through the fate exchange, it paled in comparison to the worth of the Provoker Beyonder characteristics.

Moments later, Lumian barely pulled himself together.

His actions had been the best course. If he had continued to pester Margot, something might have gone awry or drawn the authorities' attention. While Margot would still be dead, he could have landed in another crisis.

Lumian then examined the other transaction details.

"One Elf's Dark Leaf, 180 verl d'or."

"Two pages of Emperor Roselle's original diary. 300 verl d'or."

"Sequence 6 Baron of Corruption potion formula, 65,000 verl d'or."

"…"

As Lumian scanned the list, he understood why his sister Aurore was so extravagant with her spending.

"Let's begin," Mr. K rasped, scanning the room.

His attendants read the entries aloud one by one. Some went unanswered, while others were discreetly finalized through the attendants.

Lumian observed quietly, intent on familiarizing himself with these situations and gathering intel.

As the gathering neared its end, the attendant by the portable blackboard finally announced Lumian's first request.

Silence ensued.

After more than ten seconds, a man lounging in a corner divan snickered.

"Most of those skilled in restoring mystical items and Beyonder weapons are found in the God of Steam and Machinery Church. Try looking there."

His face was smeared with oil paint, as if he were masquerading as a savage from the Southern Continent's forests.

Ignoring the unfunny remark, Mr. K's attendant relayed Lumian's second request.

The gathering's attendees exchanged bewildered glances, as if this strange creature was news to them.

Just a bunch of clueless Low-Sequence Beyonders… Lumian inwardly scoffed in disappointment.

Just then, the man who had joked earlier shared, "This brings something to mind. Heh heh, here's a freebie.

"Where the Srenzo River meets the Ryan River downstream, there's a town called Aunett. Many middle-class Trier folks enjoy sailing and swimming there.

"Early last year, or maybe earlier, three consecutive female deaths occurred. They died of weakness from overindulgence, with no known partners, secret or otherwise. Their only shared trait was telling friends about the vivid, alluring dreams they'd been having recently."

Chapter 140: Painting

The situation bears a resemblance to Charlie's case, but with a crucial difference: these victims are all women, while Charlie is a man…

Could it be that the strange entity believed to be Susanna Mattise isn't constrained by gender? Or is there another, male counterpart to the creature?

The latter seems more probable, given that all three victims in Aunett were female and no males had been targeted.

Yes, there are distinctions between the three women and Charlie. None of them had a partner, either openly or secretly, and Charlie had become Madame Alice's lover not long after invoking Susanna Mattise. If that hadn't happened, would he have met the same fate as the three victims, drained of life by overindulgence?

Had Madame Alice been a sacrificial substitute? Or had that been merely the beginning?

Lumian pieced together a theory based on the information provided by the man with the painted face.

He hoped the authorities would take this case seriously and not rest until Susanna Mattise had been utterly vanquished.

As for whether the authorities would suspect Beyonders hiding among Charlie's friends due to the letter, Lumian wasn't too concerned. He had intentionally obscured Charlie's information and circumstances in the letter, even inserting a small mistake in a seemingly insignificant detail. The writer appeared to harbor a deep grudge against Susanna Mattise, having tracked her for an extended period, and sought to use Charlie's situation to enlist the help of the authorities for revenge. As a result, the focus was more on Susanna Mattise's issue, with a limited understanding of Charlie.

After the assembled participants discussed the strange case in Aunett, Mr. K's attendant unveiled an object shrouded in a black cloth.

Another attendant introduced, "This is a painting from a friend of one of our participants.

"He was a fellow Beyonder who met an untimely and bizarre end two months ago. Before his death, he created this painting."

With a swift motion, the attendant removed the black cloth, revealing the deceased Beyonder's final masterpiece.

The oil painting was a riot of vivid colors, weaving a surreal and mesmerizing scene.

Towering green weeds reached for the heavens, a golden sun lay hidden in a well, a blood-red river cascaded from the sky, a shadowy figure danced, and white skulls coalesced into clouds…

Merely glancing at the painting left Lumian feeling disoriented.

The attendant who had introduced the painting elaborated, "This artwork bears a potent psychic imprint. It affects the minds of all who view it, inducing confusion and vertigo to varying degrees. Prolonged exposure could even result in mental illness.

"According to the letters and diary entries left by the painting's creator, it may hold clues to the essence of reality and the origins of mysticism.

"This could also be the key to understanding the true nature of his strange demise.

"Any participant interested in studying the painting can negotiate a price."

You want to sell something like this for money? I wouldn't take it even if you offered it for free! Lumian grumbled internally, tearing his gaze away.

He wanted nothing to do with anything that concealed the truth, essence, or origin of the world. As Aurore had once said, one shouldn't look at or study things one shouldn't see or understand.

Lumian's interests lay solely in Beyonder characteristics, potion formulas, mystical items, Beyonder weapons, or valuable mysticism knowledge.

It was apparent that most of the gathering's participants were reluctant to spend money on such a foreboding painting shrouded in mystery. Ultimately, Mr. K's attendant put it away, once again veiling it with the black cloth.

Following that, the gathering transitioned into an open discussion stage. Attendees engaged in casual conversation about rumors and legends, careful to hide any details of their true identities.

At 10:15, Mr. K declared the gathering over, and the participants dispersed in groups.

As he departed, Lumian detected the organizer sizing him up, scrutinizing his every move.

Will he send someone to follow and investigate me? Lumian couldn't help but wonder.

Rather than being concerned, he was eager for it to happen.

Aside from occasionally summoning a messenger, his behavior was unremarkable. He could withstand any scrutiny!

As long as he refrained from contacting Madam Magician, Lumian believed Mr. K would soon receive an almost entirely truthful report—Ciel, a wild Beyonder lacking common sense in many areas, was suspected to hail from Cordu and sought Guillaume Bénet and his associates. He was also a wanted man.

In this scenario, if Lumian demonstrated his skills and extreme attitude, it wouldn't be long before he received an invitation from Mr. K to join his ranks and become a part of the organization behind him.

Sometimes, "inadvertently" revealing one's vulnerabilities and true circumstances was an effective means of gaining trust.

With that, Lumian and Osta found a concealed corner at 19 Rue Scheer, where they removed their disguises before returning to Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman.

As he made his way towards Rue Anarchie, Lumian's brow furrowed in confusion.

He hadn't noticed anyone tailing him.

Is it because Mr. K has no plans to investigate me, or had the person shadowing me been so skilled and uniquely gifted that I had failed to detect their presence? Lumian pondered the possibilities but ultimately pushed them to the back of his mind.

In any case, he wouldn't fear an investigation, unless Mr. K was in league with the Poison Spur Mob.

Upon entering Auberge du Coq Doré, Lumian noted that he was still early. He crossed the now pristine lobby and descended into the basement bar.

Before he could take in the scene, Charlie's exuberant voice reached his ears.

"Can you believe it? Just three hours ago, I was at police headquarters, accused of murder. Now, here I am, drinking and singing with all of you!

"Ladies and gentlemen, I've had an incredible experience like no other. I bet none of you can top it…"

The apprentice attendant leaped onto a small round table, beer bottle in hand, and addressed the surrounding patrons.

His short brown hair was disheveled, as if it hadn't been tended to in days, and stubble was evident around his mouth.

Already? Lumian had anticipated it would take Charlie another two or three days to be released.

Spotting Lumian from the table, Charlie waved his short arm and called out to the crowd, "I'll share that even stranger encounter with you all later!"

Donning a linen shirt and black pants, he hopped off the table and jogged to the bar counter, beer bottle in hand. He took a seat beside Lumian and said to the ponytailed bartender, Pavard Neeson, "A glass of absinthe! Thank you."

Turning to Lumian, he said, "This one's on me."

Lumian accepted the offer with a calm smile.

"You're looking pretty good."

"Of course. At least I don't have to worry about being hanged. I'd hate for thousands to gather around me as I die, considering how nobody cares about me when I'm alive," Charlie said, relief evident on his face.

Trier's citizens reveled in witnessing the execution of death row inmates.

Whenever someone faced the gallows or a firing squad, the streets would overflow with onlookers.

In the classical era before Emperor Roselle, there even existed a custom centered around this fascination: En route from the prison to the gallows, if any bystander agreed to marry the condemned, their sentence would be commuted, reduced, or even entirely absolved.

"Are you completely fine?" Lumian inquired further.

Charlie took a swig of beer and scanned the room. Lowering his voice, he said, "I can't divulge the specifics. I signed a pledge, a notarized pledge. You can't imagine how powerful that is…"

Charlie caught himself and continued, "The only downside is that I've lost my job again. That blasted foreman thinks I've tarnished the hotel's image.

No matter. I'll pawn the diamond necklace tomorrow. The officers have already returned it to me. That money will tide me over for quite some time. I can treat the café waiters on Rue des Blouses Blanches to drinks. I'll surely find a better job!"

He wanted to add, "Let's go together when the time comes," but recalling Ciel's nerve and capabilities, he quietly discarded the idea.

Lumian sipped the absinthe the bartender had slid his way and gestured for Charlie to join him in an empty corner.

Once certain that the noise around them was sufficient to drown out their conversation and that no one was eavesdropping, Lumian asked, "Has the situation with Susanna Matisse been resolved?"

"I don't know." Charlie shook his head. "They did a lot of things, but I can't tell you."

"Did they promise to provide protection for a period of time?" Lumian asked thoughtfully.

Charlie replied awkwardly, "I can't tell you."

Lumian grinned, retorting, "Seems like there is."

If they hadn't promised protection, the corresponding words wouldn't exist and wouldn't be restricted by the confidentiality pledge.

"Uh…" Charlie hadn't expected Ciel to guess so accurately.

Lumian inquired, "Did they tell you anything? Share what you can."

Charlie pondered for a moment and said, "They told me not to panic if I had that dream again. I'm to head to the nearest cathedral after dawn. You don't know about the Eternal Blazing Sun's cathedral, do you? I'm now a true believer of the Eternal Blazing Sun!"

Lumian expressionlessly raised his right hand and traced a triangle on his chest.

"…" Charlie fell silent.

After drinking with Charlie, Lumian returned to Room 207 and continued studying Aurore's grimoire.

He washed up before midnight, lay on the bed, and drifted off to sleep.

Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang!

Lumian was jolted awake by an insistent knocking on the door.

Who could it be? Frowning, he gripped Fallen Mercury and cautiously approached the door, cracking it open.

Charlie stood outside.

Still clad in a linen shirt, black pants, and strapless leather shoes, his face was ashen and fear-stricken.

Upon seeing Lumian, he appeared to regain his composure. Nearly losing control of his voice, he stammered in terror, "I dreamed of that woman again!"

Chapter 141: "Hostage"

In the dimly lit corridor, bathed in the eerie glow of the crimson moon, Charlie's voice echoed, sending shivers down one's spine.

Dreaming of Susanna Mattise again? Lumian's alarm gave way to surging anger.

Are you out of your damn mind? If you had that dream again, go to the nearest Eternal Blazing Sun cathedral and find a clergyman! I'm not your father to have you report your wet dreams to me!

Casting a glance at Charlie, whose face was a mask of terror, Lumian reined in his emotions and spoke in a low voice, "Relax. This was bound to happen. For now, get some sleep and seek help from the nearest cathedral at dawn."

Charlie appeared on the verge of tears.

"B-but, in my dream, she said if I dared to seek help from the Church, she'd kill me on my way to the cathedral!"

"You communicated in the dream?" Lumian was taken aback.

Charlie nodded frantically.

"Yes. Before, she never spoke in my dreams. She only satisfied me, warm and gentle. This time, she warned me. She warned me!"

Could it be that Susanna Mattise hasn't fully transformed into a monstrous creature and still possesses some level of intelligence? Lumian's thoughts raced, and he felt a pang of sympathy for Charlie.

If Charlie couldn't get help from official Beyonders, he'd likely end up like the three female victims in Aunett Town, lost in dreams until drained of life.

Hold on, are the official Beyonders handling Charlie's situation so carelessly? Didn't they consider the possibility of Charlie being killed by Susanna Mattise? Lumian instantly thought of Ryan, Leah, and Valentine.

None of them would dismiss the case so casually, merely instructing the victim to rush to a cathedral if he faced any issues.

Remembering how the clergyman from the Church stayed with the lunatic upstairs and protected him after encountering the Montsouris ghost, Lumian grew suspicious.

The official Beyonders overseeing Charlie's case intentionally downplayed the threat posed by Susanna Mattise, allowing him to return to the motel. They claimed the situation was mostly resolved and instructed him to seek help from the cathedral if any issues arose—all to lure Susanna Mattise into revealing herself again!

Realizing this, Lumian looked at Charlie and said coolly, "If you trust me, return to your room, lie down, close your eyes, and sleep until dawn. Don't worry, it'll all be sorted out."

Lumian appeared unruffled, but inwardly, he was cursing.

Get your ass back to the fifth floor! By now, the official Beyonders monitoring the area should've detected the anomaly and be preparing to act. Why are you standing in front of my door? Are you trying to get me caught?

"I, I…" Charlie hesitated, his eyes filled with terror.

Will everything truly be resolved if I do nothing?

Lumian exhaled and forced a smile.

"Idiot. Susanna Mattise warned you not to seek help from the Church. She said nothing about me. I can help you get to the nearest cathedral!"

Lumian resorted to coaxing and deception, desperate for Charlie to leave the second floor.

Charlie's face brightened, and he exclaimed excitedly, "Thank you, thank you!"

The moment he spoke, Lumian caught the scent of vegetation, tainted with an unsettling aroma.

In an instant, greenish-brown vines and branches unfurled from the walls, ceiling, and floor. They sealed the windows and doors of the other rooms.

At the staircase, a woman's voice, both beguiling and unnerving, rang out.

"Charlie, are you really going to betray me?"

Charlie's eyes widened in shock as he turned toward the sound.

He saw the woman from his dreams, her turquoise hair cascading from her head to the floor, reaching out to the surrounding walls and ceiling above, melding with vines and branches.

Without her turquoise hair shrouding her body, Susanna Mattise stood entirely exposed, her beautiful curves on display. Scattered among her flesh were flower buds and tree warts—some red, some white, some green, and some brown.

As she spoke, the vivid flower buds and bluish tree warts opened and closed, oozing a foul-smelling, viscous liquid.

The repulsive scene left Charlie feeling as if he'd plunged into a nightmare. He stood there, trembling, his mind a haze.

Susanna Mattise looked at Charlie, her eyes brimming with affection.

"Have you forgotten our blissful moments in the dream? Charlie, I'm your wife."

Snapping out of his stupor, Charlie nearly crumbled.

"No! No!"

You idiot! Just say something to placate Susanna! Lumian cursed himself for not reacting quickly enough to silence Charlie.

Susanna's expression frosted over.

"Then stay with me forever."

At her words, the terror in Charlie's eyes vanished, replaced by infatuation as he eagerly moved toward the monstrous being.

A moist flower bud on Susanna's lower abdomen opened unnaturally wide, unlike the other flower buds and tree warts that closed slowly.

It seemed to await Charlie.

Simultaneously, Susanna glared at Lumian, her voice seething with hatred, "It's all your fault. You incited Charlie to betray me!"

"Why don't you take a look in the mirror and see how horrifying and repulsive you've become? If I were Charlie, I would've kicked you out of my dream from the start!" Lumian's instincts told him pleading for mercy was futile. Instead, he chose to retaliate and provoke Susanna, hoping to uncover her weakness.

Merely standing near the bizarre creature, Lumian felt a mix of exhilaration and dread. He longed for her, yet resisted, as if caught in a whirlpool of desire, consumed by an overpowering sense of helplessness.

This proved she was far stronger than him!

Lumian cursed inwardly as his thoughts raced, searching for a way to buy time.

He was sure the official Beyonders would arrive soon!

What in the world is this monster?

Why does she believe she's Charlie's wife?

Wife…

In that instant, as Susanna Mattise screeched, incensed by his words, an idea struck Lumian.

As her scream filled the air, vines and branches surged toward Lumian, amplifying the fear lurking in his heart to the point of near-collapse.

His legs weakened, and his body trembled uncontrollably.

Summoning his ruthlessness, Lumian managed to extend his right hand, grabbing Charlie, who was about to rush toward the creature.

With Fallen Mercury in his left hand, he pressed the sinister dirk to Charlie's throat.

Susanna Mattise looked bewildered, her anger palpable.

"What are you doing?"

Lumian smirked menacingly.

"I forgot to mention, my Beyonder weapon is called Cursed Blade.

"A single cut drawing blood will curse his entire family to death, including his wife.

"And you're Charlie's wife!"

Recalling the lunatic upstairs, Lumian suspected that the Montsouris ghost would target not only one's immediate family but also their spouse.

Although he didn't understand how a spouse was determined in mysticism, since Susanna Mattise claimed to be Charlie's wife, he treated her as such!

Of course, Lumian knew allowing Fallen Mercury to curse Charlie with the fate of the Montsouris ghost wouldn't immediately impact Susanna Mattise.

It wouldn't affect the present situation at all.

He gambled that Susanna Mattise didn't know this, and that she could sense the danger in Fallen Mercury.

It was a bluff!

Susanna Mattise's expression froze, and the attacking vines and branches halted midair.

Her jade-green eyes radiated menace.

Lumian's vision shifted. He saw Guillaume Bénet, the hawk-nosed padre clad in a white robe adorned with golden threads.

Suppressed hatred erupted like a volcano.

Lumian released Charlie and advanced toward the "Guillaume Bénet" he had locked onto.

But before him stood only Susanna Mattise.

In that instant, Charlie, his face awash with infatuation, saw Lumian approaching his "wife" with a dirk. He lunged at the assailant, shouting, "Don't hurt her!"

Lumian snapped to his senses, realizing Guillaume Bénet had morphed into Susanna Mattise, her flower buds and tree warts blossoming one by one!

She controlled my emotions? In his shock, Lumian twisted violently, seizing Charlie again and pressing Fallen Mercury to his throat.

Susanna Mattise didn't conceal her disappointment. After a moment's silence, she parted her red lips.

Suddenly, the creature halted, staring solemnly at the wall near Rue Anarchie in Auberge du Coq Doré.

In the next second, her turquoise hair retracted, and the vines and branches disintegrated, vanishing.

Wh— The official Beyonders are here? Lumian watched Susanna Mattise's figure burrow through the wall and disappear from the corridor.

He released Charlie and shook him, urging him to wake up. He quickly instructed,

"Lie down on the second-floor stairs and keep your eyes closed until someone wakes you!"

With that, Lumian pushed Charlie and retreated to his room, closing the wooden door and feigning sleep, like the other tenants.

As Susanna departed, the obsession faded from Charlie's eyes. When Lumian jolted him back to reality, he had no choice but to follow Lumian's directions. He jogged to the staircase leading to the ground floor, lay down, and closed his eyes, feigning unconsciousness.

Almost simultaneously, a red hue filled Charlie and Lumian's vision, as though the sun had risen prematurely, heralding the day.

…

Minutes later, a golden sword formed from light stabbed into the ground of Rue Anarchie, skewering a writhing turquoise vine.

"Is it resolved?" A young man with the Sun Sacred Emblem pinned to his chest asked the one brandishing the sword.

He was a rugged man with blond hair, golden eyebrows, and a golden beard, wearing a brown coat adorned with two rows of golden buttons.

He exhaled and declared, "We've resolved it for now, but unless we find the origin of this evil spirit, it's only a matter of time before she regenerates there."

Chapter 142: Mother Tree

"Evil spirits can reform again?" The young man bearing the Sun Sacred Emblem on his chest inquired, astonished.

From his mysticism knowledge and experience gained through case files, he knew that unless an evil spirit possessed unique abilities, purification equated to total annihilation.

Such soul-type entities were either the offspring of powerful Beyonders' deaths or vengeful spirits that managed to break through various constraints. The mightiest could even wield a degree of godhood, but resurrection and rebirth were not among their traits.

The blond man, clad in a double-breasted brown coat, straightened up and eyed the dissipating, writhing vines. After some thought, he said, "Evil spirits can have unique distinctions. Under specific conditions, they rely on an object to be born. This object often lies at the heart of their territory.

"As long as this object remains intact, the evil spirit, even if not entirely purified, will gradually reform within the corresponding area."

Evil spirits would assimilate their birthplaces, merging with the spirit world and the Underworld to obtain the power necessary to maintain their existence. Otherwise, they would slowly weaken until they vanished completely.

In essence, evil spirits had a fixed range of activity and couldn't wander far from their birthplaces. This was their "territory."

The young man donned in the Sun Sacred Emblem and a white robe adorned with golden threads roughly grasped the reasoning. He furrowed his brow and said, "We've been searching for days, yet we haven't found the birthplace of the evil spirit, Susanna Matisse."

Logically, Susanna Matisse couldn't stray far from her territory. If official Beyonders carefully searched Rue Anarchie and its vicinity, they would surely locate the evil spirit's birthplace and destroy the object it depended on.

However, this was Trier, a city with not only an above-ground area but also an underground section. Another Rue Anarchie and Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman mirrored the area above, with numerous obscure paths and empty spaces.

More crucially, deeper underground, lay Trier from the Fourth Epoch. Even for official Beyonders, it was a perilous place they scarcely comprehended.

As a deacon of Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman's Inquisition, Angoulême de François had never understood why Trier had been rebuilt atop the original site, right above the sunken Trier of the Fourth Epoch, in the late era.

Although geographically ideal, this decision had spawned countless troubles over the ensuing thousand years.

The Purifiers weren't incapable of resolving the Beyonder incidents; they just couldn't get to the root of the problem, hidden within the underground ruins of the Fourth Epoch's Trier.

Rumor had it that not even Demigods dared or were willing to venture into those depths.

Angoulême sheathed his golden longsword, which seemed to be condensed light, into a grayish-white, steam-powered humanoid head contraption, allowing it to sink into the corresponding "vertebrae."

Dark liquid seemed to fill the device.

A man in a white suit, yellow vest, and light-colored shirt, adorned with the Sun Sacred Emblem, emerged from Auberge du Coq Doré.

His light-yellow hair was neatly combed, skin-colored tape covered the bridge of his nose, and his lips were thick. A hint of a Southern Continent ancestry showed through his slightly brown skin.

"Deacon, I've spoken to Charlie Collent," he reported to Angoulême de François.

Angoulême touched the golden button on his brown coat, asking, "Is he alright?"

The brown-skinned man shook his head, replying, "We arrived just in time. He wasn't physically harmed.

"According to him, after he dreamed of Susanna Matisse again, although she warned him, he still chose to seek help. He was intercepted by Susanna Matisse on the second floor of the motel and almost became one with her forever. At least, that's what she said.

"After that, Charlie collapsed at the staircase and almost fainted. At that moment, he saw a light like the sun rising."

This development seemed normal and reasonable, aligning with the details provided by the Purifier elite team led by Angoulême. Neither Angoulême nor the other two Purifiers had any doubts.

In their understanding, Charlie's request for help was in accordance with their instructions to head to the nearest Eternal Blazing Sun cathedral.

Angoulême surveyed the unusually quiet Rue Anarchie and nodded slightly.

"For now, let's put Charlie Collent aside. But if we don't find Susanna Mattise's birthplace in two weeks, consider arranging a civilian job for him and telling him the truth."

This was the standard procedure used by official Beyonders to protect ordinary people who had yet to fully escape the influence of Beyonder events.

Of course, it often appeared they had resolved the problem and informed the victim to live peacefully, only for the person to die mysteriously weeks, months, or years later.

Angoulême continued, "We have two priorities. First, investigate this area, including the underground, to find Susanna Mattise's birthplace. Second, locate the person who warned us with the letter. He seems to have deep knowledge of Susanna Mattise."

Before releasing Charlie, Angoulême and his team had secretly investigated Auberge du Coq Doré but found no suspicious areas that could be the birthplace of the evil spirit.

Additionally, they had used Beyonder methods to verify Charlie's encounter and confession. They confirmed that the victim had interacted with ordinary people from the moment he prayed to Susanna Matisse until he was arrested by the police.

That was why Angoulême suggested not to worry about Charlie's situation for the time being.

As for the sender, he had impressive methods and extensive anti-divination and anti-tracking experience. He had chosen to use a spirit world creature to write and send the letter.

It was worth noting that even when using the same descriptive incantation to summon a spirit world creature, a different one would likely appear each time.

The challenge with using just a three-line description was that it could potentially match hundreds of thousands of spirit world creatures, if not more. What they could summon each time relied solely on chance.

Without a corresponding medium and a description that highlighted the subject's unique traits, it was nearly impossible to zero in on the target spirit using the incantation alone. Most spirit world creatures simply weren't distinctive enough.

Angoulême had previously sought the help of colleagues adept in such matters. Employing the letter as a medium, he tried summoning the associated spirit world creature, hoping to glean any clues from it. Alas, whether it was the letter's transcriber, author, or sender, they came up empty-handed.

The issue could have been a flaw in the descriptive statement, or perhaps the corresponding spirit world creature sensed their ill intentions and refused the summoning.

Even with a flawless summoning ritual, it could still fail if the spirit world creatures fitting the description declined to respond. Only those Sequences skilled in summoning could significantly boost the odds or even force the issue. Naturally, Beyonders rarely faced such obstacles. Their three-line descriptions cast a wide net, ensnaring numerous spirit world creatures, with a handful always eager to enter the real world and absorb some spirituality.

…

Lumian feigned sleep, poised to flee at a moment's notice.

It wasn't until the nearby cathedral clock struck six that he allowed himself a sigh of relief.

Seems like the battle between the official Beyonders and Susanna Mattise has ended. They didn't even realize I briefly confronted her… Lumian rolled out of bed and rubbed his face.

He couldn't be certain if the official Beyonders had completely neutralized Susanna Mattise or if this ordeal was truly over.

Recalling Susanna's intense hatred for him, Lumian knew he couldn't rely on hope alone.

He decided to write a letter to Madam Magician, reporting his encounter with Mr. K and inquiring about Susanna Mattise's nature and weaknesses.

For good measure, he also planned to ask Hela, the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society's vice president—after all, Madam Magician wasn't all-knowing.

After penning the two letters and tidying the room, Lumian summoned two messengers at ten-minute intervals, ensuring each took the correct letter.

By the time he finished washing up and returned to Room 207, there were already two replies waiting silently on the wooden table.

Wow, Madam Magician is quick too. Did the messengers run into each other? If so, what would they talk about? Lumian muttered, picking up one of the replies.

The letter was from Hela.

"Similar cases have occurred in the Northern and Southern Continents. Men and women often dreamed of the opposite sex and engaged in intimate acts, ultimately dying from exhaustion.

"If the victims have partners or lovers, these innocents are killed one by one by creatures like Susanna Mattise. These creatures seem to believe they're the dreamer's spouse.

"Such creatures are said to possess powerful abilities on par with Mid-Sequence Beyonders.

"Some details suggest Susanna may have already died, becoming a vengeful or evil spirit…"

It is indeed quite powerful… Lumian recalled his encounter the previous night, realizing that without Fallen Mercury's deterrence, Charlie as a "hostage," and Susanna's conviction that she was Charlie's wife, he might have been defeated within a minute.

After burning Hela's reply with a flame conjured from his spirituality, Lumian unfolded Madam Magician's letter.

"I'm unsure whether to congratulate or commiserate with you. Your chances of encountering an evil god's Blessed seem higher than those of ordinary Beyonders. This may be due to the corruption sealed within you.

"It's difficult to explain this phenomenon using the law of convergence of Beyonder characteristics. It's more like repulsive forces rejected by this world, attracting each other.

"That's my theory. I can't guarantee its accuracy. If I'm wrong, don't forget to inform me and provide the correct answer.

"Based on your account, I suspect Susanna was once a believer of an evil god, who bestowed her with strength equivalent to a Sequence 5.

"That evil god goes by the pseudonym Mother Tree of Desire in this world. Don't attempt to understand Her, let alone guess Her true and complete title.

"Susanna is likely a Fallen Tree Spirit or Spirit of Lust, also known as Baby Cupid in some regions. They can appear as men or women, engaging in intimate acts within dreams and absorbing the victim's energy. Over time, their possessiveness leads them to believe they're the victim's spouse, driving them to kill the victim's partner or lover in a fit of jealousy.

"However, Susanna also exhibited traits of a soul-type entity. It's highly plausible she met her demise in an accident or failed to endure the boon, morphing into an evil spirit. She grew increasingly paranoid, clinging to her instincts."

Chapter 143: Lie

Having briefly outlined the nature and territorial tendencies of malevolent spirits, the woman known as Magician continued,

"Though Susanna Mattise's power is on par with a Sequence 5, it's not impossible for you to handle her. You could use the dirk on Charlie and swap your fate of encountering the Montsouris ghost with his. After the Montsouris ghost kills Susanna Mattise, you can transfer the fate of encountering it back into the knife.

"Alright, that was a joke. This plan has far too many uncertainties. It's virtually impossible to pull off.

"Firstly, the Montsouris ghost might only kill those who come across it.

"Secondly, even if the Montsouris ghost does kill Susanna Mattise, you won't know. You wouldn't be able to change fate in time without affecting Charlie.

"Thirdly, Charlie shouldn't be an orphan. His parents and siblings might still be alive. No one knows if the Montsouris ghost will leave Trier to kill.

"Fourthly, the Montsouris ghost might not be able to kill Susanna Mattise.

"Fifthly, Charlie himself admitted that he and Susanna are mystically bound as husband and wife.

"I'm saying all of this mainly to discourage you from going down that path. Using Charlie as a 'hostage' suggests that you're inclined to take such risks.

"Actually, this situation presents both a crisis and an opportunity.

"For you, the best solution is to ask Mr. K for help in dealing with the threat posed by Susanna Mattise.

"Remember, asking for help is an effective way to build relationships and earn someone's trust. Of course, the other party must be willing and capable.

"You can showcase your potential and make Mr. K see that you're valuable.

"I wish you the best of luck. I hope you can quickly gain Mr. K's initial trust and join that organization."

Lumian's initial reaction to the letter was that Madam Magician tended to ramble and digress. She seemed to enjoy finding lofty excuses and often entertained far-fetched notions bordering on absurdity. This contrasted sharply with Madam Hela's succinct and polished reply.

This writing style must be Madam Magician's trademark… Lumian pursed his lips, summoned his spiritual energy, and ignited a flame, burning the paper in his hand.

After reading the two letters, he discarded the idea of using Fallen Mercury to resolve his issue with Susanna Mattise. Their fates had been entwined for more than just a brief moment. It couldn't be as simple as erasing the fate of encountering the Montsouris ghost.

In comparison, seeking Mr. K's assistance was indeed an effective solution Lumian hadn't considered.

This could quickly bridge the gap between him and Mr. K, fulfilling Madam Magician's mission.

After contemplating for a moment and determining how to approach Mr. K and demonstrate his worth, Lumian changed into a grayish-blue worker's uniform, put on a dark-blue cap, and left Room 207.

Upon reaching the ground floor, Lumian saw Charlie lingering near the entrance, wearing a linen shirt and black pants.

"What are you up to?" he asked with a grin.

Charlie forced a smile.

"Ciel, can you come with me to the pawnshop? I'll treat you to breakfast and lunch!"

The establishment's official name was Pawnbroker Shop or Pawnshop Company.

"To the pawnshop?" Lumian sidled up to Charlie and lowered his voice. "Are you alright?"

Charlie glanced around and gave a bitter smile.

"They said there's no problem this time. Susanna, that evil spirit, has been purified.

"Whether there's an issue or not, life has to go on. Haha, I heard that from a hotel guest. Sounds pretty sophisticated, right?

"Anyway, for people like us, a day without work puts us on the brink of financial ruin. We'd soon be hungry again. I have to pawn the diamond necklace for cash. You know, only cash gives people a sense of security. Clothes and jewelry can't do that. Even food is lacking!"

At this point, Charlie's excitement grew.

"Madame Alice said the necklace is worth 1,500 verl d'or. If I pawn it, I should get around 1,000.

"My god. I've never seen 1,000 verl d'or before. Even if I become an attendant foreman, it'd take me years, maybe more than a decade, to save that much!

"When it's time, we'll have lunch at a café on Rue des Blouses Blanches. I want DuVar broth, coarse salt beef in red wine sauce, and apple tenderloin!"

Did you learn nothing else at Hôtel du Cygne Blanc, just the names of dishes? Lumian grumbled and asked thoughtfully, "You want me to protect you?"

Charlie laughed.

"I'd be scared carrying that much money alone. Ciel, you might not have had that experience yet—thinking everyone's a thief who'll rob you on the streets.

"I felt that way when I got the necklace. I was so nervous, I nearly passed out. Can you imagine?"

"Yes." Lumian smiled. "I probably won't have that experience. Not now, not ever, because I'm the one who makes others think I want to rob them."

Take Margot, for example, who had just forked over more than 1,000 verl d'or, nearly enough to buy the diamond necklace!

Charlie's smile froze.

After a few seconds, he forced a smile and said, "That's why I want you to come with me to the pawnshop."

He had seriously doubted Ciel's means of making money. His neighbor was clearly capable and smart, but he wasn't rushing to find a job. He roamed around daily, seemingly without money troubles, but lived at Auberge du Coq Doré, not Hôtel du Cygne Blanc.

Remembering how Ciel had posed as a lawyer to infiltrate the police station, provided vital information, and helped him survive Susanna Mattise's threat, Charlie felt it was a small concern.

Even if Ciel's a thief, robber, or con artist, he's one who risked his life to help me!

Pleased with Charlie's apprehensive expression, Lumian asked, grinning, "Which pawnshop are you going to?"

"I heard the pawnshops in Quartier de l'Observatoire offer better prices." Charlie had already decided.

Lumian nodded.

"I'm actually headed to Quartier de l'Observatoire."

He planned to ask Osta Trul for Mr. K's contact information.

Charlie was thrilled. He spent a whopping 1 verl d'or to treat Lumian to a barbecue pie, cream bun, and plum wine. Naturally, this included his own portion.

Lumian graciously accepted.

Exiting Rue Anarchie, Charlie winced when he saw Lumian heading straight for the public carriage sign.

He glanced around, making sure no one was nearby, and whispered,

"Last night, you said your blade was called the Cursed Blade. Will anyone cut by it really have their entire family die?"

Before meeting Susanna Mattise, Charlie never believed in such things. Even if he had heard about them, they were just fodder for boasting and tall tales. But now, he couldn't help but wonder if Ciel truly wielded a mystical weapon.

Lumian turned to Charlie and grinned.

"Want to give it a try?"

Charlie shuddered and smiled sheepishly. "I believe you."

"Do you? Well, I was just bluffing Susanna Mattise last night. I'm just an ordinary guy. If I hadn't, I'd be dead!" Lumian said, still smiling. "Doesn't the Cursed Blade story I made up ring a bell? You've heard of the Montsouris ghost legend when that maniac was having his bout of clarity, right?"

Charlie's eyes widened in realization.

That's it! It's a spin on the Montsouris ghost legend!

Ciel is a master of deception. An ordinary person managed to fool that malevolent spirit, Susanna Mattise, and saved our lives!

I only spin tall tales in bars and occasionally lie. I can't even begin to compare to him.

He's got guts and smarts. A person like that is destined to make it big!

Seeing that Charlie genuinely believed the lie he'd just spun, Lumian did his best to keep a straight face.

He asked earnestly, "Are your parents still alive? Do you have siblings?"

"…" Charlie was taken aback and leaped to the side like a spooked rabbit. "Why do you ask?"

Could it be that the Cursed Blade is real? Is he trying to figure out which family members I have?

Lumian couldn't contain his laughter anymore.

"You're not actually scared, are you? Aren't you too easily pranked?"

Charlie slapped his forehead, exasperated with the thought of the Idiot Instrument.

He couldn't distinguish which of Ciel's words were false and which were true.

However, after being pranked, he felt even more certain that the Cursed Blade was fake and based on the Montsouris ghost legend.

Ciel loves using such fabrications to fool others, just like the Idiot Instrument.

Hmm… The Cursed Blade story is a good one. Now that it's mine, I'll use it at the bar tonight to spook people!

The two of them arrived at Quartier de l'Observatoire in a public carriage. Charlie asked for directions several times before finally finding Phil's Pawnbroker Shop.

Housed in a seven-story off-white building, it featured pillars, arches, relief sculptures, and large windows.

Etched above the grand entrance were the words: "Freedom, equality, fraternity"

Freedom to pawn any item; equality to discriminate against anyone who comes to pawn something? Fraternity to seize every opportunity to lowball prices? Lumian couldn't help but criticize.

How ridiculous for a pawnshop to carve the Republic's political slogan on their door?

Inside the hall, there were several counters, with rows of benches in front of them.

At the moment, dozens of people sat there, waiting for the clerk to appraise their items and call their number.

Charlie easily found an empty counter and handed over the diamond necklace. He received a slip with the item's name and corresponding number for appraisal.

Soon, Charlie's number was called from the counter.

He walked over with anticipation, only to return looking as if his spirit had been crushed.

Lumian, who was browsing newspapers in the hall, asked in confusion, "What's wrong?"

Charlie spoke in a daze, his voice tinged with disappointment, "That necklace, that necklace is a fake. It's only worth 12 verl d'or…"

Chapter 144: Conditions

Fake? Lumian's right eyebrow twitched, as if fate was mercilessly mocking Charlie.

Charlie had forsaken his fragile principles and bedded Madame Alice for days, only to get embroiled in a life-threatening lawsuit and lose his job as an apprentice attendant—all for a counterfeit diamond necklace?

For some reason, Lumian felt a sudden urge to defy fate.

This wasn't his problem, but he couldn't shake the feeling.

To hell with this inevitable destiny!

You mock me, so I'll mock and provoke you in return!

In that moment, Lumian began to grasp another aspect of the Provoker's acting principles, albeit crudely and imprecisely.

He eyed Charlie and asked thoughtfully, "Do you think Madam Alice lied to you, or did the pawnshop see your desperate situation, knowing you couldn't determine the necklace's authenticity, and use it as an excuse to offer the lowest possible price?"

"I-I don't know." Charlie was at a loss and in pain.

After a pause, he added with difficulty, "I suspect it's Madame Alice. Look, there are so many people here pawning their items. Appraisers handle dozens or hundreds of items every day, most of them valuable. They can't just lie to me, right?

"H-how could she…"

Charlie couldn't go on.

Can't pawnshops deceive everyone equally? Lowballing the offer as much as possible, especially for the pricey items? Lumian scoffed.

"Why not?

"Many wealthy people don't amass fortunes through kindness and hard work. If they can trick you with a fake, why give you the real deal?

"Maybe Madame Alice is one of those people. She might not even be that rich. She relied on staying at the Hôtel du Cygne Blanc to dupe a gullible lad like you."

Lumian didn't distrust every rich person. Many had made their fortunes through talent, hard work, and opportunity—like Aurore.

Stung by Lumian's words, Charlie's face twisted with anger.

He muttered to himself bitterly, "That's right. During this time, Madame Alice hasn't even treated me to a big meal. She only calls me to her room at seven or eight at night for… service."

You're so naive. Are you really from Reem? Lumian couldn't help but facepalm.

He stood up and said, "Get that necklace back. Let's try another pawnshop. What if it's real?"

Charlie was taken aback.

"Alright, alright!"

He wasn't satisfied either.

Lumian urged him, "Be vigilant. We can't let them switch the necklace."

"Yes." Charlie tried his best to rally. "I've been studying that necklace daily recently and memorized every detail!"

After retrieving the diamond necklace, Lumian accompanied Charlie to two other pawnshops in Quartier de l'Observatoire.

The appraisal results were the same as before. The necklace was fake and worth only 11 to 15 verl d'or.

Charlie's frustration mounted, and he crumbled.

Lumian glanced at him and consoled, "At least you can get a dozen verl d'or. It'll last you more than a week. With the money, you can buy drinks for waiters at cafés on Rue des Blouses Blanches and ask them to help you find a new job."

Including rent, Charlie spent about 1 verl d'or a day. If he skipped the underground bar, his expenses would be even less.

"Yeah…" Charlie sighed.

He was utterly disappointed. But after accepting reality, he found a glimmer of hope.

Lumian hesitated before suggesting, "We can't dismiss other possibilities. For instance, the pawnshops around here might have secret ways of communicating. They could specifically target people like you—those who don't dress well and pawn valuable items without proper documentation. How about taking the necklace to a specialized jewelry shop for appraisal?"

"We'd have to pay a fee." Charlie's face clouded with worry.

If the appraisal confirmed its authenticity, that would be great. But if it turned out to be fake, his already meager assets would be reduced by a third or even half.

Lumian sighed and offered, "Hand me the diamond necklace, and I'll find a friend to appraise it for you—one who won't charge.

"You've still got some cash to get you through the day, right?"

"I have 2.6 verl d'or left." With hope in his eyes, Charlie handed the diamond necklace to Lumian.

As Lumian pocketed the necklace, he grinned and asked, "Are you not worried that the appraisal might prove it genuine, but I'll return a fake one to you and claim there's no issue with the pawnshops' assessment?"

"…" Charlie's face tensed once more.

After a moment, he exhaled and admitted, "I trust you. Besides, I've already written it off as a fake."

Lumian waved goodbye to Charlie and strode toward Place du Purgatoire.

…

Near the catacombs, Osta Trul occupied his customary seat facing the bonfire, clad in a hooded black robe.

Lumian approached and asked with a hint of amusement, "Don't you ever change areas?"

Osta chuckled and replied, "My divination and interpretation skills are fairly accurate. Many people have introduced their friends. If I switch locations, wouldn't I lose my clientele? They're all verl d'or!"

"What do you mean by clientele? They're clearly a bunch of fools," Lumian half-jokingly and mockingly remarked.

Osta didn't dare to argue.

Lumian inquired, "I need to discuss something with Mr. K. How can I reach him?"

So he's not here for me… Osta sighed in relief and quickly answered, "Anyone who has attended the gathering can go straight to Psychic's headquarters, located in the building where our gathering took place. At 19 Rue Scheer, knock on Room 103 with three long, two short, and one long beats. Someone will take you to see Mr. K.

"If you don't want to go in person, you can send a letter. Address it to Room 103, 19 Rue Scheer, Avenue du Boulevard. The recipient is Guillaume Pierre."

What a fake name… The knocking rhythm differs from the gathering's… Mr. K never told me this. Did he think Osta would inform me? Lumian nodded, bid Osta farewell, and returned above ground.

At the catacombs' entrance, he spotted a group of visitors carrying lit white candles, following the administrator through the naturally formed arch and into the Death Empire.

Withdrawing his gaze, Lumian took a public carriage to 19 Rue Scheer on Avenue du Boulevard.

He lowered his cap and knocked on Room 103.

The dark-red wooden door creaked open, revealing a handsome young man with shoulder-length brown hair, resembling an artist.

The lad scrutinized Lumian with his dark brown eyes for a couple of seconds.

"Who are you looking for?"

"I'm Ciel. I need to speak with Mr. K," Lumian replied bluntly.

The young man cocked his head slightly, as if listening for a faint sound.

Soon, he instructed Lumian, "Follow me."

The lad led him to a vintage-styled room and unveiled a secret door hidden within the dressing area.

A staircase descended underground, its walls on either side adorned with gas lamps encased in black grids.

Lumian entered the basement and traversed a short corridor before reaching a rather barren chamber.

He suspected other exits were present, some possibly connecting to areas in Underground Trier.

At that moment, Mr. K lounged in a red armchair, his face concealed by the shadow of his large hood.

The gathering's organizer studied Lumian wordlessly, exuding an unnerving air of intimidation.

Lumian pressed down on his cap and smiled.

"Good morning, Mr. K. I require your assistance.

"The price I'll have to pay is your call."

Mr. K remained silent for a few seconds before inquiring in a deep, raspy tone, "Does the Poison Spur Mob know you killed Margot?"

As expected… Lumian wasn't surprised that Mr. K had information on him.

When he attended the gathering, he deliberately wrapped his face in bandages to recreate his appearance when he killed Margot. He wanted Mr. K to be aware of it and display his worth and impulsive nature.

This could also help "earn" Mr. K's trust.

Lumian shook his head.

"It's another problem…"

Lumian recounted his encounter with Charlie and how he had helped him escape his predicament, only to be despised by Susanna Mattise and nearly killed by that peculiar creature. Fortunately, the official Beyonders had arrived in time. He didn't lie, but he didn't share too many details either.

This aligned with the information he sought at the gathering.

Mr. K listened intently and asked in a low voice, "You want divine protection?"

Divine protection? Aren't you overestimating yourself? Just protection! Lumian thought silently and nodded solemnly.

"Yes."

Mr. K rasped, "That creature is likely a soul-type being, akin to an evil spirit. Normally, it wouldn't affect you as long as you leave the market district. However, the official Beyonders have clearly taken an interest in this matter. If you move now, you might arouse suspicion. Moreover, if Susanna Mattise remembers or even marks you, you could be attacked anywhere. Many abilities can surpass distance limitations. There's no need for the creature to truly leave its territory."

No wonder the two ladies didn't suggest I leave… Lumian nodded thoughtfully.

"What should I do then?"

Mr. K spoke deliberately, "I can offer some protection, but you need to do something for me."

"What is it?" Lumian inquired "eagerly."

Mr. K clasped his hands together and said, "Join any gang in the market district and become a leader."

So the organization behind Mr. K wants to control the market district indirectly? Lumian agreed without hesitation, "No problem!"

Mr. K nodded slowly and held his left index finger with his right hand.

Then, he yanked the finger off, exposing a bloody wound and ghostly white bones.

Lumian winced at the sight.

Surprisingly, no blood flowed from Mr. K's wound or finger. Instead, it hovered at the edge, twisting and contracting as it gradually "healed."

"Take this with you. It can help you in critical moments." Mr. K tossed the severed finger to Lumian.

The flesh on his fingerless left hand writhed violently, as though a new digit was about to sprout.

Chapter 145: Service Fee

Lumian deftly extended his right hand, snatching the severed finger from the air.

Feeling its weight and the warmth that hadn't yet dissipated, he was both surprised and disturbed.

He had anticipated Mr. K would offer some form of protection, but he hadn't expected the man to rip off his own finger and toss it to him, claiming it could prove helpful in a tight spot!

Was this some kind of sick joke?

Setting aside the dubious utility of a severed digit, didn't Mr. K worry about the potential consequences of handing over a piece of his own flesh?

In the world of mysticism, one's flesh and blood held significant power. In the wrong hands, they could lead to disastrous consequences.

No one wanted to become the target of a horrifying curse without reason!

Given Mr. K's formidable abilities and his knowledge of mysticism, to the point of being able to act as a Notary, Lumian suspected the man had a way to nullify the various dangers associated with parting with his flesh. That was why he had dared to sever his own finger and hand it over.

Moreover, the detached finger was clearly imbued with magic.

I wonder if I can trade the prospect of meeting the Montsouris ghost with Mr. K by using Fallen Mercury, drawing blood when cutting this finger…
As Cordu's Prankster King, Lumian was never short of unconventional ideas.

Suppressing the urge, he shifted his gaze from the finger back to Mr. K.

By now, Mr. K had regenerated a new finger, slightly damp and covered in delicate, fair skin.

"Thank you," Lumian murmured, stowing the severed finger in the pocket of his slate-blue workman's uniform.

Mr. K gave a curt nod and said, "You may leave. Don't forget our agreement."

"One more thing." Lumian produced the diamond necklace. "Could you help me determine if it's real or fake? I need to exchange it for some cash."

He already owed Mr. K a favor; he didn't mind owing a little more.

And if he couldn't repay the debt? At worst, he'd sell himself to the organization behind Mr. K!

That was Lumian's endgame.

Mr. K directed the attendant who had led Lumian underground to pass the diamond necklace to him and examined it.

From the corner of his eye, Lumian could see a golden glow emanating from the shadows beneath Mr. K's hood.

After a few seconds, Mr. K handed the necklace back to the attendant.

"It's a fake. The craftsmanship is quite impressive, though. It's worth 50 verl d'or."

"Alright." Lumian didn't bother hiding his disappointment, adding, "I also need a set of identification papers."

A major reason he'd been staying at Auberge du Coq Doré was because they didn't require ID.

After receiving Mr. K's affirmation, Lumian left 19 Rue Scheer and caught a public carriage back to Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman. His thoughts bounced between joining a gang without raising suspicion, pondering the purpose of the severed finger, and devising ways to get pawnshops to pay more for the counterfeit diamond necklace—at least 30 verl d'or…

Amid these thoughts, an idea began to crystallize.

Simultaneously, he planned to find a couple of safe houses in Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman district and Quartier du Jardin Botanique before noon—the kind that didn't require identification.

I still have 850 verl d'or and 24 coppet on me. After setting aside the remaining 400 for the information broker Anthony Reid, I'll have 450 verl d'or left. I can rent two or three safe houses… Lumian carefully calculated his remaining assets.

He pursed his lips, feeling an urgency to leave Mr. K's severed finger at Auberge du Coq Doré before securing a room.

…

By 3 p.m., Lumian had found rooms in both Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman on Rue des Blouses Blanches, and Quartier du Jardin Botanique on Rue des Pavés—neither of which required identification.

Naturally, there was a surcharge for such discretion. The former was hardly better than Room 207 at Auberge du Coq Doré, costing 6 verl d'or per week. The latter, more akin to Osta Trul's rented apartment, neighbored factory workers from the south and cost 10 verl d'or per week.

Lumian paid four weeks' rent upfront but received no discounts.

Returning to Auberge du Coq Doré, he skimmed through Men's Aesthetics for a while, using cosmetics to soften his sharp features, add shadows, and trim his eyebrows.

Soon, Lumian had completed his initial disguise, transforming into an ordinary-looking man in his mid-twenties with a dangerous air.

After combing his golden-black hair, he donned a dark blue cap, took Mr. K's severed finger, and made his way to Salle de Bal Brise on Avenue du Marché.

Unlike other guests, he didn't enter directly. Instead, he stopped between the khaki building and the white spherical statue made of countless skulls, addressing the two gangsters guarding the entrance, "I need to see Baron Brignais."

Without waiting for their response, he added, "Tell the baron it's Ciel, from our last meeting. He'll be pleased to see me again."

The two gangsters exchanged glances, not daring to delay the baron's business. One of them entered the ballroom.

In under five minutes, the gang member reemerged, telling Lumian, "The baron wants you to meet him where you last saw him."

The café on the second floor? Lumian smirked. With hands in his pockets, he sauntered up the stairs and entered Salle de Bal Brise, spotting Baron Brignais with a mahogany-colored pipe.

The gentleman sported a black, thin tweed suit, a half top hat nearby, and a gleaming ring on his left hand. Four thugs flanked him.

"Sit." Baron Brignais's brown eyes scanned the room, his smile indicating the seat across the table.

Lumian approached and sat, studying Baron Brignais's sharp features and naturally curly brown hair, and said, "Good afternoon. We meet again."

Baron Brignais tapped the pipe's base, smiling as he asked, "What brings you here?"

Lumian produced Charlie's counterfeit diamond necklace, calmly stating, "I've been strapped for cash and want to pawn this necklace to you. It's worth 1,500 verl d'or. I'll take 1,000."

Baron Brignais turned to a subordinate, commanding, "Get someone to appraise it."

"Yes, Baron." A thug with conspicuous bruises on his forehead left the café.

Brignais appraised Lumian again, nodding in approval.

"Not bad. Your makeup skills have come a long way. Although still flawed, you're no longer as easy to recognize."

"Thanks for the tip," Lumian grinned. "Men's Aesthetics is quite the resource."

They exchanged small talk until the thug who had left the café returned with a man in his forties, dressed in a formal suit and bow tie, carrying a toolbox.

After assessing the necklace, the man approached Baron Brignais, set the necklace on the table, and whispered, "It's fake."

Instantly, all the thugs present drew their revolvers.

Baron Brignais observed Lumian, who appeared unfazed by the appraiser's declaration or the thugs' actions.

His grin never wavered as he nodded to the appraiser, "You may leave."

"Yes, Baron." The appraiser hurriedly exited the café.

Baron Brignais set down his mahogany pipe, playing with the diamond ring on his left hand. He asked Lumian, still smiling, "Were you aware this necklace was counterfeit?"

Lumian smiled as well.

"Indeed."

Before he could finish, the thugs aimed their revolvers at him.

Intrigued by Lumian's composure, Baron Brignais inquired, "Did you anticipate I'd have someone verify the necklace's authenticity?"

Lumian's grin remained steady.

"Indeed."

Baron Brignais's eyes narrowed.

"Knowing all this, why would you still attempt to borrow 1,000 verl d'or with a fake necklace?

"What makes you think I'd grant your request?"

Lumian slowly rose, disregarding the revolvers aimed at him. He placed his hands on the table's edge, leaned down to meet Baron Brignais's gaze, and smirked.

"Because I killed Margot of the Poison Spur Mob."

Baron Brignais's smile froze.

His pupils involuntarily dilated as if to scrutinize the man before him.

The four thugs, their revolvers aimed at Lumian, also reacted with shock.

As enemies of the Poison Spur Mob, they knew Margot's capabilities all too well.

Lumian's emotionless gaze scanned the thugs' faces, causing them to avert their eyes and, unconsciously, their weapons.

Baron Brignais recovered quickly, addressing the four thugs, "Holster your revolvers! Have I not taught you how to treat guests?"

Reprimanding his subordinates, he turned to Lumian, curiosity piqued, "How did you manage to kill Margot?"

"I stabbed him with something poisonous, but I don't know where he fled before succumbing," Lumian replied nonchalantly.

This aligned with the preliminary intel Baron Brignais had received. Eyes narrowing, he asked with a grin, "Do you understand the implications of taking my 1,000 verl d'or?"

Lumian smirked, unfazed.

"Indeed."

…

Auberge du Coq Doré, Room 504.

Upon seeing Lumian outside the door, Charlie eagerly inquired, "So, is it the real deal?"

"It's a fake. Worth no more than 50 verl d'or," Lumian casually replied as he entered the room.

He noticed that Charlie had already ripped off Susanna Mattise's portrait, leaving behind a sticky residue.

Charlie, having mentally braced himself for the outcome, was disappointed but not crushed. He chuckled self-deprecatingly, "Well, it's still worth 50 verl d'or at least. A generous pawnshop might give me 20 for it."

Lumian shot him a glance and grinned.

"But I managed to sell the fake necklace for 1,000 verl d'or."

"What?" Charlie was dumbstruck.

Lumian pulled out a thick wad of bills, still smiling.

"The fake necklace is yours and worth 50 verl d'or. That's all I can offer you. The rest is my fee for services rendered. Is that acceptable?"

Chapter 146: Turf

Charlie was dumbstruck and answered subconsciously, "No problem."

Only when Lumian laid out the 50 verl d'or notes did he snap back to reality. He cautiously peeked out the door.

The evening light was fading, and unlike the second floor, the fifth floor had large balconies on both sides, casting deep shadows. It was as if night had already descended.

Seeing the corridor empty, Charlie breathed a sigh of relief. He lowered his voice and asked Lumian, "You conned someone into buying the fake necklace for 1,000 verl d'or?"

"You've got two things wrong." Lumian grinned and handed the stack of 50 verl d'or notes to Charlie. "First, I didn't con just any person."

"Then who?" Charlie questioned, puzzled as he instinctively took the mix of 1 and 5 verl d'or notes.

Lumian's grin broadened.

"The Savoie Mob."

Hearing this, Charlie nearly dropped the banknotes in his hand.

He stared at Lumian in terror and blurted, "Are you insane?

"They kill people. Folks go missing all the time on Rue Anarchie!"

Lumian smirked and replied, "Second, it wasn't a con."

"What?" Charlie couldn't follow Lumian's logic.

Lumian clarified, still smiling, "They knew the necklace was a fake, yet they still forked over 1,000 verl d'or."

Impossible, Charlie thought, certain it was a joke.

The Savoie Mob might be ruthless, but they weren't idiots. Why would they pay 1,000 verl d'or for a fake necklace worth only 50 verl d'or?

Then, a wild thought crossed Charlie's mind.

"You didn't steal the leadership from the Savoie Mob, did you?"

That would be even more insane!

Lumian smirked again.

"Relax. Baron Brignais and I reached an agreement through a friendly conversation.

"Don't worry. There won't be any trouble in the future.

"So, do you want the 50 verl d'or or not?"

A friendly conversation with Baron Brignais… Charlie felt like he didn't know the man standing before him.

Considering his own financial situation, he took the 50 verl d'or and muttered,

"Thank you."

Lumian nodded with a smile and turned to go.

In that instant, Charlie grasped the whole picture and blurted out, "Did you join the Savoie Mob?"

Lumian didn't turn around. He waved his hand and replied, "That's right."

Charlie opened his mouth to speak, but no words came out. He watched Lumian's silhouette vanish into the darkness outside and disappear down the shadowy staircase.

…

Upon returning to Room 207, Lumian, fresh out of his disguise and ready to hunt for a tasty meal, caught a familiar curse coming from the fourth floor.

"If you think this money is easy, you can lie down and earn it yourself!"

"Useless coward. A dickless wretch; all you dare to do is bully women!"

"Send your mother to me if you dare!"

"…"

Lumian listened for a few seconds and quickly deduced that Wilson from the Poison Spur Mob had come to Ethans with his crew to collect "protection money."

A grin spread across his face.

In the next instant, Lumian donned a dark-blue cap, left Room 207, and made his way to the fourth floor.

Before he could reach Room 408, he heard the sharp crack of a slap followed by Ethans's even more vehement cursing and struggle.

The tenants on this floor shut their wooden doors tight, not daring to step out.

With one hand in his pocket, Lumian arrived outside Room 408. The first thing he noticed was the presence of two goons.

They were clad in dark jackets, blocking the doorway.

At this moment, Ethans's curses blended with sobs and screams.

"You sons of bitches!

"I curse you!

"I'll rip off your dicks!"

Lumian raised an eyebrow and approached the two thugs at the door.

"What do you want?" one of them barked.

Lumian didn't reply. Instead, he took a sudden step forward, reaching out to grab them.

His movements were so swift that he had the two thugs by the back of their heads before they could react.

Lumian applied force, slamming their skulls together.

With a sickening thud, their foreheads bulged, eyes rolled back, and they crumpled to the ground.

As they "cleared the way," Lumian glimpsed the scene inside the room.

Ethans, her flaxen hair and delicate features in disarray, lay on the bed. Her dress was torn, her face visibly bruised and swollen. Wilson, his curly brown hair and deeply creased face sneering, was pocketing a stack of banknotes. His belt unbuckled, another thug was holding Ethans down.

Sensing the disturbance at the door, the Poison Spur Mob leader swiftly reached for his belt and glanced outside.

There he saw Lumian, casually wiping his hands and stepping over his two fallen comrades.

Not giving Wilson a chance to speak, Lumian grinned and said, "Didn't anyone tell you that Auberge du Coq Doré is now under the Savoie Mob's protection…"

Mid-sentence, he lunged forward, throwing a punch before Wilson could fasten his belt.

Wilson hastily dodged and buckled his belt.

Simultaneously, his eyes narrowed as they locked onto Lumian.

Lumian suddenly felt a wave of fear.

It was the unbridled fear of an ordinary person facing a villain or a thug. Wilson had manifested such emotions!

Yet, even as an ordinary person, Lumian wasn't cowed by villains who wouldn't dare to fight back. As a vagrant, he had always believed in fleeing and surrendering if possible. If not, he'd drag the other party down with him. Now, as a Sequence 8 Beyonder, he was even more fearless.

Another Beyonder? Lumian harnessed the intensity of his fear to grapple with Wilson and unleash his close-quarters combat skills.

His hands, elbows, knees, and feet transformed into weapons, overpowering Wilson, who had barely buckled his belt.

As the sounds of their struggle filled the air, another thug sprang into action. He grabbed a chair in the room, poised to smash it into Lumian's back.

But Lumian twisted his upper body like a serpent, circling behind Wilson.

Bang! The chair struck Wilson's head, sending him reeling.

With a crash, the already unstable chair splintered.

Lumian coiled his body like a spring and lifted his right leg.

His heel struck the thug's lower abdomen with pinpoint accuracy, eliciting a muffled groan.

The thug's eyes bulged as he clutched his crotch and crumpled to the floor. He writhed in pain but couldn't make a sound, like a rooster with its neck throttled.

As Lumian's right foot swung back, his arm lashed forward, whipping Wilson's chest.

Unable to dodge, Wilson heard the crack of his ribs breaking.

Before he could recover from the pain, Lumian seized his arms and yanked him closer.

Pfft!

A knee to the chest greeted him.

Wilson's face paled, and his body doubled over.

Lumian clenched his fists and hammered Wilson's back.

Plop! Wilson collapsed to the ground.

Lumian capitalized on the opportunity, pouncing on him. He pinned Wilson's arms behind his back and pressed his knees into his spine.

"I thought you were quite the tough guy," Lumian taunted. "Turns out, you couldn't even last ten seconds."

Based on his assessment, Wilson was only at Sequence 9, a Sequence that focused more on combat and physical enhancement. However, he wasn't sure which pathway he belonged to.

Wilson, provoked and enraged, struggled with all his might but couldn't break free from Lumian's grip.

Lumian glanced up at the dumbstruck Ethans and chuckled at Wilson and the incapacitated thugs.

"Go back and tell your bosses that this is Ciel's turf. If you've got any business, feel free to look for our Savoie Mob!"

"You're a dead man!" Wilson snarled.

Lumian smirked, retorting, "I'm not sure if I'll die, but you're the one dying now."

"You dare to kill me in front of so many witnesses?" Wilson mocked.

Lumian said nothing. He tightened his grip, and a sickening crack echoed in the room.

Wilson let out a spine-chilling scream, beads of cold sweat the size of beans breaking out on his forehead.

His arm was broken!

Lumian hoisted him up and leaped onto Ethans's wooden table. He pushed open the window and dangled Wilson over the outer wall.

Glancing down at the deserted alley, Lumian smiled at Wilson and taunted, "Try guessing. Do you think I dare to throw you down?"

Wilson stared at the cobblestones more than ten meters below and recalled how resolute the other party had been when he said he'd break his arm. For a moment, he didn't dare answer.

Just then, Lumian released his grip.

I haven't answered yet! Wilson's body plunged downward in sheer terror.

With no other option, he desperately tried to adjust his posture to protect his vitals.

Crash!

He hit the ground with a sickening thud, his flesh instantly mangled in multiple places.

Lumian observed for a couple of seconds before chuckling.

"Quite a tough one. You're still alive. Is your nickname Rue Anarchie Cockroach?"

Ignoring Wilson, he jumped off the wooden table and addressed the three thugs struggling to their feet, "Did you hear what I just said?"

The three thugs nodded fearfully and turned to flee.

"Wait," Lumian called out to them.

The three thugs froze on the spot, their bodies trembling slightly.

Lumian gestured at the shattered chair and grinned.

"Aren't you going to compensate for the damage?"

The three thugs hastily pulled out all the banknotes they had and tossed them on the floor.

With Lumian's nod of approval, they stumbled out of Room 408.

Ethans stared blankly the entire time, only recalling the words that this place had been taken over by the Savoie Mob.

Then, she realized that Ciel from the Savoie Mob hadn't informed her about how much she should pay or how often she should pay in the future. He didn't even glance at her as he walked straight to the door.

Ethans instinctively opened her mouth, wanting to ask something, but she hesitated, fearing the Poison Spur Mob might retaliate. She watched Lumian's figure vanish into the darkness beyond the door.

Chapter 147: Reaction

Lumian had just returned to the second floor when he spotted Charlie lingering outside his door.

"Hey, don't tell me you had another dream? You make me nervous, just popping up at my door like that," Lumian teased with a hint of mockery.

He couldn't shake the fact that Charlie had sought him out rather than heading directly to the Eternal Blazing Sun cathedral.

Charlie glanced at the stairs and lowered his voice.

"Something happened on the fourth floor?"

"You've got good ears," Lumian commended. "There was an incident. I tossed Wilson down the block."

"Huh?" Charlie appeared bewildered once more.

It took him a moment to process.

"Which Wilson? The one from the Poison Spur Mob who collects money from Miss Ethans?"

"Yes." Lumian nodded candidly.

At first, Charlie's expression read, "I see." Then, he blurted out in shock, "You threw him down the block? From which floor?"

"Fourth floor," Lumian replied, grinning.

Charlie's mouth fell open, forgetting to close it.

"You're not joking, are you?" he asked nervously after a few seconds.

Lumian gestured toward the room across the hall.

"If you don't believe me, take a look at the alley behind. That guy's like a cockroach; he didn't die from the fall."

"…" Charlie assessed Lumian anew, as though seeing him for the first time. He realized that his mischievous, audacious, and clever friend possessed a side he didn't grasp at all.

In Lumian's eyes, there seemed to be no law, and a chilling coldness ran deep within him. Fear was absent from his mind, and he had genuinely thrown a living person from the fourth floor. Moreover, he was a leader of the Poison Spur Mob!

Wasn't he afraid of dying?

Wasn't he afraid of the Poison Spur Mob's retaliation?

This brought to mind how Ciel had held a dirk to his throat when Susanna Mattise threatened him.

Charlie had always assumed it was primarily a threat and intimidation tactic, but he now suspected that, had Susanna Mattise not been willing to yield, Ciel might have truly stabbed him.

Of course, his weapon wouldn't have been some Cursed Blade.

The next second, Charlie glanced around and lowered his voice again.

"A-are you out of your mind? The Poison Spur Mob isn't to be trifled with!

"Why don't you move away? You should be safe once you leave the market district."

He felt that no matter how reckless Ciel was or how little he respected the law, he was someone who had genuinely helped him. He had to warn him of the danger so he could escape swiftly.

Lumian smirked and shot back, "Our Savoie Mob isn't to be trifled with either."

"Uh…" Charlie suddenly sensed that the situation might not be as he'd imagined.

Lumian opened the door to Room 207 and declared as he entered,

"From now on, Auberge du Coq Doré is our Savoie Mob's turf. I'll throw out anyone from the Poison Spur Mob who shows up."

Had the Savoie Mob enlisted Ciel to handle Wilson? Charlie came to a realization and felt a mixture of relief.

Since the Savoie Mob had instigated the confrontation, they surely had a plan to counter the Poison Spur Mob's retaliation. A broke, jobless guy like him needn't worry.

Lumian snapped the suitcase shut, concealing a few sets of clothes and Aurore's grimoire within. He slid it under the bed and draped a blanket over it. Straightening up, he instructed Charlie,

"If anyone comes looking for me, tell them I went to the Salle de Bal Brise."

"A-alright." Charlie watched as Lumian vanished down the stairs, a sudden realization hitting him.

What would become of Miss Ethans after this?

Would she be claimed by the Savoie Mob, or was there still a chance for her to redeem herself?

…

Avenue du Marché, Salle de Bal Brise.

Lumian perched at the bar counter, tapping his fingers on the surface.

"One glass of Lover, a serving of mashed potatoes, veal slices in lard, a pork sausage, and a croissant."

Lover referred to a sugar alcohol brewed from sugarcane syrup, served with ice and water. It was common slang in Intis bars.

Soon enough, Lumian sipped the amber-hued, sweet alcohol and savored the aromatic veal slices.

As he relished the delicacies and listened to the music from the dance floor, his body swayed rhythmically.

Just then, one of Baron Brignais' gang members sidled up beside him.

Lumian turned to the man, noticing the blood clots on his forehead. He smiled and said, "This is our third encounter, right? What should I call you?"

The thug replied cautiously, "Just call me Louis."

Another Louis… Lumian mused.

In the Intis Republic, Louis was as common a name as Pierre and Guillaume. The last Louis Lumian had met had given birth to a child, despite being a man.

Louis watched Lumian take a bite of the croissant and offered casually, as if trying to build rapport, "This one's on me. It's your first time at our Salle de Bal Brise."

"Alright." Lumian didn't bother with pretenses.

Louis ordered a syrupy lemon soda alcohol dubbed Demon and took a sip.

"You live at Auberge du Coq Doré, right?"

"Yeah." Lumian grabbed a piece of sausage and popped it into his mouth.

Louis pondered for a moment before asking, "That's Poison Spur Mob territory. Want to move to Rue des Blouses Blanches?"

"No need." Lumian sipped his ice-cold Lover, its caramel scent wafting through the air, and grinned. "It's now our Savoie Mob's turf."

"What?" Louis nearly choked on his drink.

Lumian swiveled his head and smirked.

"I tossed Wilson from the Poison Spur Mob off the fourth floor. Auberge du Coq Doré is now Savoie Mob turf."

Hearing Lumian's account, Louis's face gradually stiffened.

After a few seconds, he forced a smile and stood up.

"I need to report this to the baron."

Why is this guy even more brutal and unhinged than the baron?

"Alright." Lumian didn't care.

Louis took a few brisk steps before turning back, leaning in to whisper, "Is Wilson dead?"

"No." Lumian feigned regret.

What are you regretting? Louis studied Lumian's face, suddenly wondering: Did we gain a weapon or a massive problem?

…

Avenue du Marché, Unit 126, inside Roger's three-story building with a modest garden.

As the injured Wilson was carried past him, Roger's icy blue eyes scanned the three trembling thugs and he demanded, "Who did this?"

"Someone from the Savoie Mob!" A thug answered hastily, slightly hunched. "He calls himself Ciel and says that the Auberge du Coq Doré now belongs to the Savoie Mob!"

Ciel… Black Scorpion Roger's somewhat plump face registered a mix of confusion and wariness.

He murmured to himself, "There's no Ciel among the top brass of the Savoie Mob… How did he manage to thrash Wilson like this?"

It was worth noting that Wilson was a Villain, equivalent to a Sequence 9 Beyonder—a master of combat!

At that moment, another thug spoke up speculatively, "Boss, I remember something. We went to Auberge du Coq Doré the night Margot was killed."

Roger's expression darkened, a fierce hatred seeping in.

"Was that also Ciel's doing? How did he pull it off?

"Did the Savoie Mob secretly recruit such a formidable figure to drive us out of the market district?"

A man standing beside Black Scorpion Roger spat hatefully, "First, an assassination; now, an open taunt. If we don't retaliate, who knows what'll come next!"

The man had a shaved head but boasted striking features. His lake-blue eyes, high nose bridge, thick brown eyebrows, and curved lips rendered him handsome despite his baldness.

Dressed in a black shirt, dark breeches, and strapless leather boots, he forewent a coat and stood nearly 1.8 meters tall.

Roger pondered for a few seconds before instructing the man beside him,

"Haman, go to Baron Brignais and find out what's going on. Ask if the Savoie Mob intends to wage an all-out war against our Poison Spur Mob."

"If they're open to reconciliation, we can make appropriate concessions.

"Remember, learn to endure—the time isn't right yet."

…

On the balcony of a third-floor room in Salle de Bal Brise.

Baron Brignais leisurely puffed on his peach-colored pipe, observing the guests entering and exiting the dance hall.

Suddenly, he turned his gaze towards the door.

Two seconds later, Louis pushed open the door, entering the balcony and stepping past the other thugs.

"Your footsteps are a bit heavy and hurried. Something happen?" Baron Brignais inquired with a smile.

Louis replied anxiously, "Baron, Ciel threw Wilson off the fourth floor of the Auberge du Coq Doré!"

"Wilson from the Poison Spur Mob?" Baron Brignais recalled, seeking confirmation.

"Yes, he's severely injured but not dead," Louis quickly added.

Baron Brignais held his pipe, pondering for a moment before asking, "Did Ciel mention why he did that?"

"He said that the Auberge du Coq Doré is now our Savoie Mob's turf," Louis repeated Lumian's words.

Baron Brignais couldn't help but chuckle.

Taking a drag from his pipe, he spoke with a hint of meaning, "If you don't handle a sharp weapon properly, it's easy to hurt yourself. I'll have to find an opportunity to give him some 'guidance.'

"What should we do about the Poison Spur Mob? Should we inform the Boss?" Louis asked, concerned.

Baron Brignais considered for a moment and responded, "Not for now.

"Ciel actually performed well this time. I'm curious to see how the Poison Spur Mob reacts."

Noticing his subordinate's puzzled expression, Baron Brignais—always fond of 'educating' them to showcase his intelligence—smiled and explained, "Since the Poison Spur Mob's inception, their number of Beyonders has swelled, nearly matching ours in just under two years. They've seized a significant amount of territory. Don't you see a major issue here?

"Give them another two years, and we might be completely driven out of the market district.

"If they want to escalate this matter, I'm more than willing. It's a prime opportunity for the authorities to take notice and uncover who's backing them."

Chapter 148: "Lord of the Motel"

At 10 p.m., while returning to Auberge du Coq Doré from Avenue du Marché, Louis, who was with Baron Brignais earlier, guided Lumian from the main road bathed in yellow light to a side street swallowed by darkness.

Surveying the neglected, broken street lamps, he remarked nonchalantly, "The baron has cut a deal with the Poison Spur Mob. From now on, Auberge du Coq Doré is officially under our Savoie Mob's control."

Lumian snorted. "Is the Poison Spur Mob that easy to negotiate with?"

What do you mean? Are you hoping for the two parties to fight? Louis increasingly sensed that Ciel was a dangerous man who thrived on conflict.

He was convinced that Ciel's nature and approach would bring trouble to the Savoie Mob time and time again in the future.

The market district, already strained by the Poison Spur Mob's rapid ascent, would certainly become more chaotic.

As a seasoned gang member, Louis believed in bullying ordinary people rather than resorting to violence and bloodshed. Life was precious; he'd witnessed several comrades die in gang wars and police raids. Initially, their families were taken care of, but as time passed, their circumstances deteriorated.

But if cornered, Louis wouldn't shy away from brutality. Every thug under Baron Brignais had climbed the ranks through street brawls and alley fights. They may not be brainy, but their skills and courage were nothing to sneer at.

Louis slowly exhaled.

"You showed enough force to protect Auberge du Coq Doré, and the Poison Spur Mob didn't want to escalate matters and draw police attention. So, after the baron covered Wilson's medical expenses, the matter was settled.

"Keep a low profile for now. If you catch the police's eye, you won't withstand a thorough investigation."

It doesn't matter to me. I'll just find a hideout before the official Beyonders corner me. The Poison Spur Mob can run, but they can't hide… Lumian murmured, borrowing a line from Aurore's book.

Louis continued, "The baron wants me to tell you that since you're staying at Auberge du Coq Doré, it's your turf now.

"And for members who control their own turf, we don't usually provide daily allowances."

What he implied was that the Savoie Mob likely wouldn't give Lumian any more money beyond the initial 1,000 verl d'or. He'd have to find a way to generate income from his turf.

Lumian was momentarily stunned before replying with a chuckle, "Alright."

As they spoke, they stopped outside Auberge du Coq Doré.

Lumian gazed at the old, cream-colored building and was struck by a bizarre, ludicrous thought.

This is my turf?

The residents of this ramshackle place are all destitute. How can they afford to pay protection fees?

Forget it. It's already a blessing that they don't create trouble for me like Charlie. I can't squeeze money out of them!

Muttering silently, Lumian bid Louis farewell and entered the motel.

Having already consumed two drinks, he skipped the basement bar and retreated to Room 207.

No one had visited.

After perusing Aurore's grimoire for a while, Lumian recognized a familiar footfall, followed by a knock on the door.

He opened it, unsurprised to find Charlie standing there.

Charlie's face was flushed from drinking. He grinned and exclaimed, "Can you believe it? I'm about to land a new job! I went to Rue des Blouses Blanches tonight and bought the waiters drinks. They introduced me to a hotel manager who said they needed a few full-time attendants!"

"If that manager learns you hooked up with a female guest at your previous hotel and were recently implicated in a murder case, will he still consider you?" Lumian retorted.

Charlie's smile froze. He massaged his face and replied, "He might still give me a chance. But Ciel, that's not why I'm here. I wanted to ask what you plan to do with Miss Ethans?"

"What do you mean?" Lumian inquired, smirking.

Charlie forced a smile and asked,"Will you stop her from leaving Rue Anarchie? If you make her keep working the streets, how much should she pay you each time? And how often?"

Lumian chortled.

"She's free to do whatever she wants. It's none of my business. I have plenty of ways to make money."

"I knew it! Praise the Sun and Saint Viève!" Charlie cheered. "I could tell from the moment I saw you at the bar that you were a clever and capable gentleman!"

"Trusting the judgment of the Idiot Instrument?" Lumian jested.

Charlie sheepishly smiled.

"That's one factor."

He waved his hand.

"I'll share this news with Miss Ethans!" After taking a few steps, Charlie halted and spun around, asking unusually cautiously, "Will the Poison Spur Mob come back?"

"Baron Brignais has brokered a deal with them. Auberge du Coq Doré is now Savoie Mob's turf," Lumian answered nonchalantly. "And I'm the one in charge here."

Charlie was ecstatic. He spread his arms wide and exclaimed, "Praise the Sun, praise Saint Viève, and praise you, Ciel!"

With that, he dashed into the stairwell.

Comparing me to the Eternal Blazing Sun and Saint Viève… Are you trying to get me killed faster? Lumian snorted and shook his head. He then retreated to his room and resumed studying Aurore's grimoire.

Outside Room 408, Charlie knocked on the wooden door.

Ethans, her cheek red and swollen, opened the door and stated flatly, "I'm not feeling well today. Find someone else."

Charlie couldn't contain the exciting news.

"Guess what? The motel's no longer under Poison Spur Mob's control. It belongs to the Savoie Mob!"

Ethans suddenly remembered the evening's events and hesitated before asking, "Are you sure?"

"Absolutely!" Charlie replied, his signature enthusiasm returning. "You won't believe it. I found out from the leader of the Savoie Mob. Ciel, who lives in 207. He's already become a leader of the Savoie Mob. Auberge du

Coq Doré is his turf now! He personally told me that the Poison Spur Mob bastards have scrammed and won't be back! He also said that the Savoie Mob and the Poison Spur Mob reached an agreement!"

Ciel… The man who threw Wilson down? Ethans's eyes darted, seemingly awakening from her puppet-like state.

"The Poison Spur Mob was really driven away?"

"It's true!" Charlie nodded emphatically.

Ethans stood stunned for a moment, then clenched her teeth and spat out, "Those sons of bitches, rotten scum, they're finally gone!"

Charlie continued, "I've asked Ciel. He said you can do whatever you want. It's not his concern. He's incredibly resourceful. So much so that he can change my opinion of pranksters like him. Can you believe it? He comes up with lucrative schemes every minute!"

Ethans was dumbstruck.

As far as she knew, none of the gangsters were good people. They were all despicable scoundrels who deserved hell!

Charlie kept talking, but Ethans tuned him out. The words "do whatever you want" resonated in her mind.

After Charlie left, she retreated to her room and quickly changed into a lady's blouse and light-colored pants.

Next, she lifted the mattress and retrieved a stack of 200 verl d'or notes.

She crammed all the bills into her pocket, then hesitated for a moment before removing more than half and hiding it back in its original spot.

With the remaining 40 verl d'or, she shut the door and headed downstairs.

Before long, she stepped out of Auberge du Coq Doré and onto Rue Anarchie.

A solitary gas lamp illuminated the street from a distance. Bathed in crimson moonlight, numerous inebriated people stumbled along the road, shouting, singing, or sporadically clashing with one another.

Ethans sidestepped the drunks and nervously followed the shadows along the street, aiming for Rue Anarchie's exit.

Throughout her journey, memories of escaping and being apprehended by the Poison Spur Mob on the street haunted her.

The memory of the beating made her shudder involuntarily.

Ethans slowed down, as though the Poison Spur Mob lurked around the corner.

Finally, she reached the exit of Rue Anarchie and saw the broad main road beyond.

Ethans stared at the once-unreachable scene, feeling as if she were in a dream.

Subconsciously, she quickened her pace, striding faster through the dark night under the crimson moonlight.

In no time, she arrived at the nearest public carriage stop.

She still remembered disembarking from the public carriage here on her first day in Trier.

Now, she had finally returned.

With no public carriages running late at night, Ethans didn't mind. She gazed at the street ahead, the postbox shrouded in darkness, and the sign displaying the carriage route. Her eyes welled up with tears.

Suddenly, Ethans spun around and bolted.

She had to get back to Auberge du Coq Doré, pack her belongings, and leave at daybreak!

Ethans sprinted faster, feeling the wind slap her face, cold and damp.

Her vision blurred, and she seemed to see a ghost of her past self.

The former Ethans, who arrived in Trier filled with dreams and enthusiasm, stood beneath the streetlamp, gently beckoning.

Hurry up and catch up!

…

Auberge du Coq Doré, Room 207.

Ethans dabbed the corners of her eyes and rapped on the door.

Lumian swung the wooden door open and cast a cursory glance at her.

"What can I do for you?"

In a raspy voice, Ethans inquired, "Why are you helping me?"

Lumian sneered. "Why should I help you? What do you possess that's worthy of my assistance? You're not beautiful, and you don't have much money."

Ethans's words of gratitude were immediately choked off.

She couldn't even recall how she left the second floor. As she packed her belongings, the whole experience felt surreal.

Watching her vanish down the stairs, Lumian snickered.

I'm not helping you. I just can't stand fate's cruel taunts.

We are all victims of fate's ridicule, but I want to defy and resist it, even if I'm not capable enough, until death puts an end to it all!

In that moment, Lumian sensed his Provoker potion digesting a bit further.

Although he was far from fully digesting it and needed time to work through it, this indicated that he had adapted to the Provoker potion, and his condition had stabilized. He could contemplate extracting the sealed power within him and obtaining the Alms Monk's boon.

Judging by the name, it should compensate for his lack of mystical techniques.

Chapter 149: Five Ritualistic Spells

Lumian wasn't eager to perform the ritual just yet. For one, he had been swamped all day and was far from his peak condition. He needed rest, or at least to wait until he reset at six in the morning. Secondly, the ritual involved two hidden entities and a corruption that had trapped a village in a time loop. If something went awry, it wasn't just the Auberge du Coq Doré that could be in jeopardy—the entire Rue Anarchie might face destruction. Who knew how many lives would be lost?

Thus, Lumian planned to head underground after daybreak, seeking a secluded quarry cave to serve as the ritual site.

As for the materials, he had already brought them from Cordu.

Rue Anarchie's nights were seldom peaceful, but Lumian managed to sleep well, practically dreamless. He awoke early to the sound of cathedral bells.

Rising slowly, he washed up and headed to a café on Rue des Blouses Blanches. His breakfast consisted of plum pie, savarin, and a café au lait with plenty of milk.

Delicacies always lifted one's spirits, and the Auberge du Coq Doré was no longer under the Poison Spur Mob's thumb. Lumian gradually adjusted to his optimal state.

With renewed purpose, he returned to Room 207, intending to gather the necessary materials and carbide lamp for his venture into Underground Trier.

Just as Lumian finished preparing and was about to leave, he heard a soft knock on the door.

Confused, he opened it to find Anthony Reid standing outside, clad in military-green attire and strapless leather boots.

The forty-something information broker stroked his short blond hair and said to Lumian, "I got something."

The padre or Madame Pualis and her underlings? Lumian stepped aside, allowing Anthony Reid to enter the room.

Anthony scanned the surroundings, Lumian's reflection caught in his dark brown eyes.

Simultaneously, Lumian felt an all-too-familiar unease.

Suppressing his thoughts, he inquired, "What are they?"

Anthony Reid gave a slight nod before replying, "Someone spotted a man suspected to be Louis Lund on Avenue du Marché, the one you believe to be Madame Pualis' butler."

On Avenue du Marché? Lumian's excitement surged.

Louis Lund, Madame Pualis, and I are so close?

"Are you sure?" he asked urgently.

Anthony Reid shook his head.

"I'm not sure. I'm just here to let you know that I haven't forgotten your task. When I'm certain it's really Louis Lund, I'll collect the balance from you."

"My money can't wait to part with me." Lumian made no effort to conceal his eagerness.

After seeing Anthony Reid off, his resolve to obtain the Alms Monk's boon only intensified.

…

The blue glow of the carbide lamp pierced the darkness, unveiling the street between stone pillars to Lumian.

A chilly wind whispered through the tunnels, leaving faint traces of moisture on the stone walls above.

Navigating the subterranean streets and alleys, Lumian discovered a passage that led even deeper.

Utilizing a Hunter's innate ability to memorize environments, he descended until he finally reached a quarry hollow, roughly the size of two or three Auberge du Coq Dorés.

Sparse white mushrooms grew in the rock crevices.

Charlie had mentioned that many people in Rue Anarchie and the surrounding areas scoured these underground quarries for mushrooms to bolster their income and meals. Trier mushrooms had become synonymous with these fungi, but the specimens here were clearly natural.

Lumian circled the cave twice, inspecting it thoroughly.

Satisfied that there were no issues, he found a half-meter-tall stone and placed the blood-infused musk candle on it. The other candle was positioned closer to him.

Having tidied the area, Lumian lit the two grayish-white candles in the order of top to bottom—divine before mortal—by channeling his spirituality.

Next, he drew the ritual silver dagger and swiftly sanctified it, erecting a barrier of spirituality.

Unlike the last time he had prayed for the Dancer's power, Lumian's spirituality remained plentiful after completing these tasks. He effortlessly entered a somewhat ethereal state, enabling him to perform rituals without the aid of incense.

He exhaled slowly, picked up the gray amber perfume on the altar, and dripped it into the deity-representing candle.

As the scent sizzled, a sweet, elegant fragrance filled the air, calming his nerves.

After the gray amber perfume came tulip powder. As a strange aroma permeated the spiritual barrier, Lumian took two steps back, gazed at the flickering candle flame, and bellowed in ancient Hermes,

"Power of Inevitability!"

A howling gust swept through the chamber, causing the deity-representing candle's orange flame to quiver. It hung by a thread, threatening to go out at any moment.

In the dimming light, Lumian's left chest seared with pain, accompanied by a wave of dizziness.

Once again, he heard the enigmatic sound that seemed to originate from an infinite distance, yet felt close at hand. However, it wasn't loud enough to engulf him in agony.

Lumian continued chanting the subsequent incantations in ancient Hermes.

"You are the past, the present, and the future;

"You are the cause, the effect, and the process."

Within the spiritual barrier, an invisible wind turned pitch black as a faint gray fog filled the space.

Rocks and bottles warped and twisted, appearing as malleable objects.

Silently, the deity-representing candle's flame swelled to the size of a fist, shimmering silver-white with a hint of black.

Granules emerged on Lumian's skin and on the rocks, writhing and stretching, poised to burst forth at any moment.

The terrifying sound filled his ears, drowning out all else. His head spun, threatening to make him vomit.

His thoughts wavered between disarray and chaos as he barely finished reciting the incantation.

As Lumian spoke the final words, the silver-black candle flame contracted into a beam of light that struck his left chest.

Silver-black phantasmal liquid flowed out, enveloping Lumian's body as though it possessed its own life and will.

Lumian had already steeled himself for the onslaught. In his uncontrollable frustration, he felt a prickling pain erupting all over his body. As the piercing ravings seemed to saw through his skull, a burning sensation flared within him.

He collapsed, curling up and enduring the agony with gritted teeth.

All he could do was struggle to maintain the "boat" of rationality amidst the tempestuous waves of pain.

Throughout the ordeal, he was tempted several times to surrender to the malevolent thoughts gnawing at his heart. He longed to merge with the pain, to escape the torture. However, the lingering elegant and sweet fragrance in his nostrils caused his ruthlessness and frustration to ebb and flow repeatedly.

Ultimately, Lumian felt as if his body and mind ceased to exist, leaving only a sense of rational spirituality.

As the pain and ravings began to subside, he realized he had endured.

Lumian lay motionless on the cold ground, not willing to move for an extended period.

After what felt like an eternity, he mustered enough strength to hastily end the ritual and clean up the altar, warding off any potential mishaps.

Having dealt with these matters, Lumian sat on the stone that had served as the altar and scrutinized the changes within himself.

Soon, he muttered, My tolerance for extreme environments has increased a bit… Heh, guess I won't need to buy winter and summer clothes anymore?

Beyond this, Lumian discovered another newfound intuition.

An intuition for luck!

He could roughly sense the recent fortunes of others—good luck, bad luck, potential for disaster, romantic opportunities, and so on—but he couldn't discern the precise details.

In other words, Lumian could detect that someone was experiencing bad luck, but had no way of knowing how unlucky they would be or how long their misfortune would last.

"Truly worthy of a monk with the power of inevitability," Lumian couldn't help but sigh, feeling he could entirely replace Osta Trul as a diviner for others.

Although ignorant about divination, wouldn't he be able to fabricate the corresponding words when he could glimpse the rough strokes of someone's fortune?

Moreover, Lumian acquired an abundance of sacrificial knowledge and five ritualistic spells in his mind.

The former compensated for his many shortcomings in the realm of mysticism, while the latter augmented his repertoire of mystical techniques.

The five ritualistic spells were Animal Creation Spell, Prophecy Spell, Luck Enhancement Spell, Substitution Spell, and Exorcism Spell.

Through ritualistic magic, the Animal Creation Spell utilized sheepskin, cowhide, and other animal hides to morph the target on the altar into the corresponding creature. This could also be applied to Lumian himself. As long as he mastered the incantation to break the curse or waited for the ritual to end, he could revert to human form. While transformed into an animal, he would be unable to speak or wield most of his Beyonder powers.

The Prophecy Spell was entirely different from what Lumian had envisioned. The process involved gathering ingredients such as a snake's venom sac and a rock from an eagle's nest. Using ritualistic magic, one could concoct an unusual concoction. Next, one had to find a corpse dead for less than seven days and not yet cremated or purified. Pouring the concoction into the corpse's mouth would momentarily revive it, allowing the caster to ask three questions about the future.

The Luck Enhancement Spell employed ritualistic magic to create an object linked to one's misfortune. By sending the object away and having others open, consume, step on, or wear it, the caster could transfer their bad luck onto them, thus enhancing their own luck.

The Substitution Spell was even more intricate, and Lumian suspected it was a lower-tier reflection of a Fate Appropriator's abilities. For example, if he wished to evade Susanna Mattise, he would need to find a vagrant and make them live as Ciel for a while. During this period, the vagrant would have to stay in Room 207, use all of Lumian's money, and gain recognition from Charlie and other acquaintances to establish sufficient mystical connections before performing the ritual to complete the substitution.

Upon the ritual's completion, Susanna Mattise would seek vengeance on the vagrant rather than Lumian.

Of course, Lumian wasn't certain he could deceive Susanna Mattise, who was on the verge of becoming a demigod, with a Sequence 8 Substitution Spell. He even doubted whether the ritualistic magic would succeed at all.

Chapter 150: Voice

When Lumian first gained the mysticism knowledge, he had placed high hopes on the Exorcism Spell. It appeared to be the perfect solution to deal with Susanna Mattise—provided she hadn't been entirely wiped out by the official Beyonders.

But it was only upon truly grasping the Exorcism Spell did Lumian come to the sobering realization that his jubilation had been premature.

The ritualistic spell was capable of banishing wraiths and even evil spirits, preventing them from tormenting a soul. But it came with two caveats. First, he needed to know the specter's real name and possess a personal item she'd held dear in life. Second, he needed ample time to conduct the ritual.

That second condition meant the Exorcism Spell was a no-go in the heat of battle. It was better suited for situations like Charlie's, haunted by constant dreams of Susanna Mattise, plagued by wraiths or evil spirits, but not on the brink of death.

Lumian, however, hadn't been physically hurt by Susanna Mattise, just targeted. The Exorcism Spell needed a victim, and without one, he couldn't banish her.

When Susanna Mattise made her next move, Lumian knew she wouldn't be playing nice. She'd leech his energy through erotic dreams, leading him slowly but surely towards his demise. Given her prior displays of venom and paranoia, she was sure to strike directly, unleashing her supernatural arsenal to kill on contact.

In such a scenario, Lumian wouldn't have a chance to wield the Exorcism Spell unless someone could buy him a few minutes.

Should I turn to the official Beyonders for help? But that would expose me to the authorities, causing a world of trouble down the line…

Or perhaps Charlie could play the martyr, soothing Susanna Mattise with heartfelt words of love, buying time in the flesh? The longer he held out, the better Lumian's odds of completing the Exorcism Spell… Heh heh, a bizarre thought that's like underground literature, Lumian mused quietly.

Though the current mantra of the Intis Republic was 'freedom,' it was a far cry from true liberty.

On the one hand, they wanted to quash the nostalgia of Roselle's followers and the Carbonari's revolutionary impulses. Opposition threatened the ruling party's authority. On the other hand, they faced the traditionalist Church of the God of Steam and Machinery and the Church of the Eternal Blazing Sun. The Intis Republic's censorship of publications was heavy-handed.

They'd even plant spies or groom authors as double agents to keep an eye on influential content creators, ensuring they didn't tarnish the ruling party's image or produce content deemed too explicit or blasphemous for the wider readership.

But with every prohibition came violations. Trier spawned a thriving underground literary scene that reached beyond its borders.

Aurore once, driven by curiosity, bought a few such books. She forbade her brother from reading them and tucked them away in the bookcase's darkest corner. But prohibition bred violation. Lumian had snuck a peek at one and was taken aback.

The book was a critique of the clergy's indulgence and corruption, peppered with erotic content. It was titled 'Monks Chasing Dogs.'

Lumian's plan to use Charlie as bait for Susanna Mattise had a certain subversive literature charm to it.

Then again, I don't have any of Susanna Mattise's personal items to use as a conduit. I could try to hunt down something in the coming days. Regardless of whether it ends up being useful, it's better to be prepared than caught unawares… Lumian shook off his reverie, considering the potential of the other four ritualistic spells and their relevance to him.

To Lumian, the Animal Creation Spell seemed mystical, malevolent, uncanny, and downright horrifying.

If utilized right, it could work wonders. Imagine turning captives into sheep, cows, horses, and just walking away with them. Or infiltrating places no human could, in the form of a critter. But in the thick of a fight, this ritualistic spell was pretty much a dud.

According to the mysticism wisdom bestowed upon Lumian, the invocation for the Animal Creation Spell could be made to the hidden existence known as Inevitability, a host of honorific names unknown to him, or even himself.

Naturally, the prerequisite was ample spirituality and the corresponding rank. Also, the ritual's success rate and the spell's longevity were significantly lower than the previous methods.

The minimum requirement for the Animal Creation Spell was a Sequence 7 Contractee. The higher the rank, the better the chances of the spell working, and the more potent the effect.

With the corruption sealed within him, Lumian wasn't concerned about his rank. He was unsure, though, if his spirituality reserves could endure the consumption of the Animal Creation Spell. If they could, how many times could he bear it?

Besides the Animal Creation Spell, he himself could be the prayer target for the other four ritualistic spells. As for their success rates and impacts, that was a different matter.

This led Lumian to speculate that these five ritualistic spells could be simplified at higher ranks and deployed in real combat. For instance, he could simply drape an enemy in sheepskin, chant the preordained incantation, and transform them into sheep.

That doesn't seem plausible for a Contractee, equivalent to a Sequence 7. A Sequence 4 Circle Inhabitant is too lofty for such a rudimentary spell… Could a Sequence 5 Fate Appropriator accommodate such a simplification, or is it a Sequence 6, the name of which escapes me? Lumian mused subconsciously.

As for the Luck Enhancement Spell, he felt it could only "assist" others at present, not himself. His destiny was deeply entwined with the corruption sealed within him and the great existence behind the seal. Unless he prayed directly to the power of Inevitability, altering his luck was a non-starter. Only when he ascended to the Fate Appropriator rank could he choose a fate unbound by those lofty beings.

The Substitution Spell was just too convoluted, and it would severely disrupt Lumian's routine and other tasks. He wouldn't consider it unless he was out of options.

Compared to that, the Prophecy Spell seemed like a piece of cake and rather handy as ritualistic magic went.

Lumian had already decided to gather the necessary intel and find a suitable corpse. By inquiring about Charlie's future, he could estimate when Susanna Mattise would strike next and locate Madame Pualis and the others by delving into Louis Lund's destiny.

Dog's drool, lynx innards, hyena tongue, stag bone marrow, sea or aquatic monster flesh, lizard eye, rock from an eagle's nest, snake venom gland, and deadly herbs. These ingredients aren't all that hard to come by. The only pain is the sea or aquatic monster flesh, but the ritual doesn't specify a rank. Technically, the feeblest aquatic monster still counts as an aquatic monster; it just impacts the effect, right? Lumian ruminated for a bit, noticing that his energy levels had considerably rebounded. He readied himself to leave the subterranean quarry cave and head back to Auberge du Coq Doré.

Just as he rose to his feet, a sudden furrow creased his brow.

A faint sound reached his ears.

The voice echoed inside his ears!

Lumian fought to steady his nerves, straining to discern the sound.

With each passing moment, the voice grew clearer, more potent, more imposing.

"Lumian Lee!

"Lumian Lee!

"…"

It knows my name? Instinctively, Lumian swept the area with his carbide lamp, yet found no figure, nothing out of the ordinary.

"Lumian Lee!

"Lumian Lee!

"…"

The voice reverberated as if it were emanating from the very core of his being, muffled by his flesh, organs, and bones, creating overlapping echoes.

Inside my body… The thought struck Lumian the moment he made this realization.

In a hushed whisper, he asked, "Who are you?"

The deep, majestic, and spectral voice ceased its chant and solemnly declared, "I'm the Angel of the Lord, Termiboros."

"Lord? Which lord?" Lumian's eyes narrowed, the corners of his mouth twitching into a smirk.

He suspected the entity communicating was the corruption entombed within him. After receiving the Alms Monk's blessing and nearing the entity of Inevitability, it had managed to transmit a voice devoid of corruption via their intertwined powers.

The spectral voice echoing in Lumian's ears intoned reverently, "The Lord is the ruler of the Great Old Ones, the Essence Above the Sequences, the mighty Circle of Inevitability…"

Merely contemplating these words sent an inexplicable shiver down Lumian's spine. It felt as if a gaze had pierced the cosmos, the clouds, the surface-level Trier, layers of earth, and was fixed upon him.

Suddenly, Lumian found himself glancing over his shoulder, as if unseen entities were scrutinizing him from the enveloping darkness.

The sensation sent chills down his spine, sowing unease in his mind, threatening to unhinge him.

Out of nowhere, a faint gray fog materialized and shrouded the surroundings, significantly pacifying Lumian's agitated mind.

He sneered at the self-proclaimed Angel, Termiboros.

"So, you're the one sealed within me?"

I wonder if it's a bona fide Angel with Beyonder characteristics or just an Angel-tier servant boasting only a boon…

This insolence seemed to digest Lumian's potion further along its course.

Undeterred by Lumian's provocation, Termiboros continued solemnly, "Follow my instructions, break my seal, and I will aid you in resurrecting Aurore Lee.

"You should be well aware that my Lord's power spans the past, the present, and the future. It can weave a cycle of destiny.

"In due time, I will restore Aurore Lee's soul fragment to its state prior to the descent ritual. All you need to do is prepare a body with the essence of life for her."

Lumian fell silent. After a moment, he asked in a low voice, "Descent ritual… Is that the ritual to forge a body for your descent?"

Chapter 151: Temptation

Termiboros' thunderous voice resonated in Lumian's mind.

"Yes."

A snort of laughter broke free from Lumian.

His words oozed sarcasm as he retorted, "So, Aurore and the entire village were snuffed out just so you could set foot on this soil?

"Why the hell should I help you shatter your shackles? If you morphed into an Angel with a boon, I could've swiped your abilities over and over with the ritual I just performed, under the watchful eyes of the mighty existence. Until, of course, I too bask in the angelic status of the Inevitability pathway. Then, I could breathe life back into Aurore and restore everyone to the pre-Cordu destruction era. How pathetic would you look then?

"If you hold the right Beyonder characteristic, I can bide my time until I ascend as an Angel of the Hunter pathway, seizing power on par with your Inevitability skills. Once my army is vast enough, I'll free you, crush you, subjugate you, and make you resurrect Aurore. Hell, I might be able to pull it off myself. I'll subject you to an eternity of torment till the end of time.

"I never had the hots for the Inevitability pathway's boon, but now that I know the ritual was meant for your descent, I'm salivating at the thought of siphoning off all your might and pride."

The more Lumian rambled, the higher his adrenaline spiked. His Provoker potion seemed to digest a notch.

Termiboros' voice was eerily steady, unfazed by Lumian's rant.

"I've encountered my fair share of Beyonders in the cosmos, and I've seen legions of races graced by the Lord's touch. Most of them can't cross the threshold into divinity because that one extra step would obliterate their physical and mental existence.

"The quest for godhood is rife with peril. Are you so sure you can truly evolve into an Angel?

"You should be aware that we're not talking about slim odds here. Saying it's a one-in-a-million or one-in-ten-million chance doesn't even begin to capture the enormous task of ascending to the Angel level.

"If you perish on the Beyonder path, Aurore Lee will follow suit. The seal binding you will naturally dissolve, freeing me from my predicament."

Lumian threw his head back and laughed.

His laughter bounced off the quarry's cavernous walls, heightening the eerie quiet and heaviness underground.

"So, why aren't you sitting tight, waiting for me to kick the bucket?" Lumian picked up the carbide lamp and strode out of the quarry cave. A cryptic smile played on his lips. "I don't give a damn what you're plotting or what your endgame is. I couldn't care less whether you're a saint or a sinner. All I know is that Aurore and everyone in Cordu Village are dead because of you."

He paused for a beat, his face contorted into a maniacal grin.

"Someone's gotta pay the piper for this. Guillaume Bénet, you, and even your so-called lord!"

Termiboros fell silent. The booming voice that had filled Lumian's mind, heart, bloodstream, bone marrow, and cavities disappeared entirely.

Phew… Lumian heaved a sigh, clutching the carbide lamp as he navigated the pitch-black underground.

Despite the conversation's brevity, it had drained him.

In Lumian's previous world-view, corruption was merely that—corruption. At its extreme, it was comparable to power granted by an evil god. The concept of an Angel being shackled within him was beyond his wildest dreams!

Amidst the wreckage of Cordu Village, atop the crimson-hued mountain, stood the body of a three-headed, six-armed behemoth—a vessel designed for an incoming Angel. It was a mystery how much it deviated from a bona fide Angel, but it already filled Lumian with a sense of invincibility.

Lumian couldn't deny the allure of Termiboros's proposition.

Had he not remembered their vile deeds, he might have been swayed to give it a shot.

From where he stood, pledging allegiance to the Eternal Blazing Sun and the God of Steam and Machinery seemed no different than submitting to the hidden existence known as Inevitability. At worst, he'd lose himself.

Regaining his composure, Lumian's senses suddenly tingled. He darted into a side alcove, using loose gravel to snuff out the carbide lamp.

Moments later, the hurried footfalls of three people echoed from the adjacent tunnel, soon swallowed by the inky darkness.

Underground Trier is a hive of activity too… Lumian bided his time for a couple of minutes before digging out the carbide lamp and rejoining the upward path.

The interruption allowed him to collect his thoughts and consider a conundrum.

Given that the corruption inside him was a living entity, the Angel of the Inevitability domain, Termiboros, why had his plea for a boon been successful?

Termiboros wasn't just raw power lacking consciousness, responding automatically to the "correct" ritual. He could deny granting the boon.

Could it be that His imprisonment is so severe that He can't even choose to resist the ritual? The thought made Lumian realize why Termiboros was so desperate to flee.

According to Madam Magician, with every boon He granted, Termiboros would weaken marginally, and the corresponding corruption would dwindle.

Simultaneously, the seal imposed by the great existence wouldn't slacken. As Termiboros's power faded, He would be shackled to the brink of extinction. Eventually, even His consciousness might be expunged.

Lumian steadied himself and began to replay Termiboros's utterances.

Great Old Ones, Above the Sequences, he'd said Great Old Ones and Above the Sequences…

Lumian's head pounded, as if something was attempting to burrow out of his skull, the instant he dredged up these topics.

He stopped his recollection abruptly and murmured to himself, a residual sense of dread lingering, Merely possessing certain knowledge can inflict serious harm? Had I not been safeguarded by the seal of the great existence, would I be dead or afflicted with abnormalities?

I was contemplating exploiting Termiboros's desperation to escape, to bleed Him dry by compelling Him to respond to the ritual magic, thereby boosting the likelihood of success and the eventual impact. But it seems the Angel has plenty of tricks up His sleeve to screw me over, even in His imprisoned state…

I need to tread carefully. Before I really tap into Termiboros, I must have Madam Magician verify my plan for any flaws.

On this front, Lumian doubted that the vice president of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society, Hela, would offer any viable advice. Only Madam Magician, who could effortlessly slip in and out of the time loop and easily tackle the colossus atop the crimson mountain, was worthy of his trust.

Lost in a whirlwind of thoughts, Lumian, lamp in hand, navigated his way back to the level marked by a street name, leveraging his honed Hunter's intuition and recollection.

He attempted to shout in a hushed tone, "Termiboros…"

No answer came.

Lumian intended to inquire whether the Angel, imprisoned within him, was aware of the events in Cordu. After a thoughtful examination, he concluded that Termiboros likely remained in the dark.

Termiboros had only materialized in Cordu at the ritual's culmination before being shackled. He was oblivious to the intricate details.

Phew… Lumian let out a sigh, surveying his present condition.

His Provoker potion had undergone further digestion. It was akin to encapsulating a fresh principle of action.

Could inciting a superior entity expedite the digestion of the Provoker potion? Ah yes, this is a high-ranking entity within the Inevitability domain. In a way, it's a tip of fate. It aligns somewhat with the principles I've deduced… Lumian mused with a chuckle.

Were it not for Termiboros's silence, he would have stirred Him up thrice daily, like clockwork meals!

Pondering over this, Lumian felt that goading an Angel to digest this morsel of a potion wasn't a worthy trade-off.

He hypothesized two reasons. First, Termiboros was sealed and presented a relatively low threat. Second, Termiboros hadn't genuinely been incited.

Shaking his head, Lumian curbed his thoughts, shelving matters whose solutions eluded him.

He retraced his steps to the subterranean Rue Anarchie and climbed the stone steps towards the surface.

Having snuffed out the carbide lamp and returned to Auberge du Coq Doré, Lumian instantly noticed Charlie perched on the steps outside.

Charlie puffed on a cigarette, gazing at the grayish-white sky with a somber countenance.

"What's up?" Lumian settled down next to Charlie.

Charlie heaved a sigh. "Miss Ethans has moved out."

"Isn't that a good thing?" Lumian queried, his smile unwavering.

Charlie stammered, pausing for a few seconds before admitting, "Yes, it indeed is. Too many folks around here know her and her deeds. Sigh…"

Lumian clicked his tongue and rose, approaching the Whiskey Sour vendor and presenting 5 coppets worth of copper coins.

"Half a liter of Apple Whiskey Sour."

The vendor responded with a grin, "Got it."

He ended up pouring Lumian more than the requested volume of liquor.

Lumian's eyebrows quirked, but he refrained from questioning. He ambled back to Charlie, took a seat, and nonchalantly remarked, "Seems like the Whiskey Sour guy recognizes me?"

Charlie chuckled.

"He might be aware you're with the Savoie Gang. No, the Savoie Mob."

Lumian sipped his Whiskey Sour, inquiring, "How'd he find out?"

Charlie cleared his throat.

"After breaking the news to Miss Ethans last night, I hit the underground bar for a drink and mentioned your induction into the Savoie Mob and your takeover of Auberge du Coq Doré."

A vivid image flashed in Lumian's mind:

Charlie, beer in hand, clambering onto a small round table, flailing his stubby arms.

"Ladies and gentlemen, lend me your ears! You wouldn't believe the bombshell that dropped at the motel today! Ciel, our Room 207 resident, is now calling the shots for the Savoie Mob and has sent the Poison Spur Mob packing!"

With a drawn-out sigh, Lumian turned to Charlie and quipped, "You're just worried the police won't come knocking at my door, aren't you?"

Chapter 152: "Entrustment"

Charlie's bones shook as Lumian's words settled in his ears.

"S-so you're saying, you don't want word getting around about you joining the Savoie Mob?"

Charlie had seen the leaders of the Savoie Mob, Poison Spur Mob, and the rest; their names carried weight in the market district of Rue Anarchie. Yet, as notorious as they were, the law never seemed to touch them.

Lumian took a slow pull of his Whiskey Sour, his grin returning.

"That's fine. Just think twice before you speak, that's all."

Even though Lumian had infiltrated the Savoie Mob, he was far from claiming the title of a leader. He hadn't been privy to the mob's deepest secrets, didn't have a crew of thugs at his disposal, and all he had to show for it was the rundown dump they called Auberge du Coq Doré.

So Lumian had his sights set on a fast-track to infamy, eager to climb the mob's ladder and fulfill Mr. K's mission.

A mission that involved gaining the trust and favor of Mr. K, and eventually finding a place in the organization behind him—all to complete the task given by Madam Magician.

There is something off about the whole thing… Lumian thought, his left hand stroking his chin.

Charlie, standing by his side, asked hesitantly, "What exactly should I keep quiet about?"

He had his hunches, but he didn't want to risk annoying the lawless Lumian by not covering all bases.

Lumian's smile didn't falter as he turned to Charlie.

"Avoid discussing anything tied to Susanna Mattise. That includes any mention of threats I made to her, or that time I posed as a lawyer to get into the police station to talk to you."

He had meant to warn Charlie about this, but hadn't found the right moment.

"Got it." Charlie visibly relaxed. "You know, I was thinking about telling the guys at the bar about the time we chased Wilson out of that motel…"

Charlie's number one hobby was regaling the crowd with his exploits.

But Lumian's eyes turned stormy at his words.

His gut was telling him Charlie was about to walk into some minor trouble, but it wouldn't be anything life-threatening.

In theory, it has nothing to do with Susanna Mattise. If it did, it wouldn't be just trouble, it would be a disaster… I suppose I can stop worrying about Susanna Mattise for a while, but how long is a while? Lumian mulled over the sense of bad luck.

He'd come to realize that unless someone was extremely unlucky or lucky, or if danger was about to strike, he needed to concentrate to perceive a person's general luck through his intuition.

It was unlike a Hunter's danger sense. It wasn't always activated passively.

Charlie's voice began to fade as he talked. He turned to Lumian and asked, "Why are you staring at me like that?"

He was half expecting Ciel to jump out with a prank.

Lumian sneered.

"You might want to swing by the nearest Eternal Blazing Sun cathedral and say a prayer. I have a feeling you're about to hit a rough patch."

His tone mirrored that of Osta Trul, the conman.

"What kind of rough patch?" Charlie asked, his voice sharp.

Then it hit him. "How would you know?"

"I have a hunch," Lumian replied, a smirk playing on his lips.

Of course, it's a joke… Charlie let out a sigh of relief.

"I'm hoping your prediction's off, then."

"On the contrary, I couldn't be more certain." Lumian's words were rock solid.

Charlie squinted at him, suspicion etched on his face.

Lumian let out a low chuckle.

"And if I'm wrong, I'll give you a thrashing. That way, even if something bad does happen, that just proves me more right."

"…" Charlie was speechless.

Is that even allowed?

Regardless, this approach could come in handy for some practical jokes with some slight modification…

Lumian was about to rise when he noticed a thin, mangy mutt creeping towards Auberge du Coq Doré from the shadowy street, eyeing the trash he'd tossed from the fruit vendor's cart.

The mutt moved with care, aware that many of the destitute locals would gladly turn him into dinner.

Just then, Lumian lunged forward, pressing the dog's neck to the ground.

Caught off guard, the mutt writhed helplessly, baring its teeth in a futile attempt to bite, but its head was immobile.

With his free hand, Lumian pulled out a small vial of tulip powder, emptying its contents into his pocket.

Then, he held the vial to the mutt's frothing mouth, collecting the saliva as the dog squirmed.

Soon, he had five milliliters. He released his grip and stood up.

The mutt, ready to snap at him, whimpered and scampered off, tail tucked between its legs, when Lumian shot it a menacing glance.

Charlie, who had been standing by, was flabbergasted.

A story he'd once heard came rushing back to him.

The protagonist in the tale would often describe the villain's cruelty with a line penned by best-selling author Aurore Lee: He would kick any dog that crossed his path!

Lumian downed the rest of his Whiskey Sour and made his way into the motel.

As he passed the front desk, the perpetually grumpy Madame Fels, forced a smile.

"Good morning, Ciel—Monsieur Ciel."

Lumian gave the plump Madame Fels a sideways glance and asked nonchalantly, "No sign of Monsieur Ive today either?"

Monsieur Ive, the owner of Auberge du Coq Doré, was known far and wide in Rue Anarchie for his penny-pinching ways.

As the new 'guardian' of Auberge du Coq Doré, Lumian figured he ought to have a word with Monsieur Ive, just to make sure he didn't run crying to the cops, afraid the Savoie Mob would shake him down for more cash.

Madame Fels pursed her lips.

"As stingy as he is, only paying for a weekly cleaning crew, he's a stickler for cleanliness and wouldn't be caught dead in the motel."

"Who cleans his house?" Lumian asked, a hint of amusement in his voice.

"He's a widower. He and his two kids take care of it." Madame Fels scoffed.

If she were the one with that kind of money and a motel to boot, she would hire someone to handle such chores. She'd just sit back and enjoy life.

Lumian nodded and chuckled.

"I noticed he didn't drop by after the cleaning on Monday. Is he still kicking?"

Madame Fels replied, a hint of fear in her voice, "I visit him thrice a week to deliver the motel's earnings and various bills. I'll let him know you want to see him."

She mistook Lumian's words as a veiled threat to Monsieur Ive. If he didn't meet with the new guardian of Auberge du Coq Doré soon, his survival might be at stake.

Lumian didn't bother to clarify. He climbed the stairs to his room on the second floor. Under his pillow, he found Mr. K's finger and tucked it back into his pocket.

After dealing with the tulip powder, he planned to pick up some containers for the ingredients he needed to gather next. But then, a knock on the door interrupted his thoughts.

Lumian swung the door open, curiosity piqued—he didn't recognize the footsteps.

In the doorway stood a man in his forties, clad in a dark jacket, worn-out brown trousers, and a grubby cotton hat. He offered a smile, asking, "Is this Monsieur Ciel?"

"Who else would it be? Madam?" Lumian retorted, his eyes taking in the man's appearance, expression, and body language.

His brown hair, though slightly greasy, was neatly combed. His dark-brown eyes held a hint of sycophancy, and his lips were creased with lines of practiced smiles. He had an affable air, but there was an unmistakable slickness about him.

"Yes, yes, yes," the man echoed Lumian's words.

Lumian's eyebrows twitched.

"And who might you be?"

"I'm Fitz from Room 401. Bankrupt businessman," the man introduced himself with a congenial smile.

Without waiting for Lumian to press further, he spilled his beans.

"I went belly up 'cause of a con that cost me 100,000 verl d'or. I've been traveling between Trier and Suhit for over a decade, saving up. Wanted to settle down, start a family, but then this swindler tricked me out of everything, promising a joint venture.

"If you help me recover that money, I'm willing to part with 30%, no, 50%!"

Lumian didn't invite Fitz into Room 207. Leaning against the doorframe, arms folded, he asked, "Why didn't you go after that money with Margot or Wilson before?"

It wasn't as if they required an upfront payment.

Fitz didn't beat around the bush.

"I did go to Margot. He agreed initially, but then one day, he just said it wasn't possible to recover the money."

Even the Poison Spur Mob couldn't retrieve it? Was the con man bankrupt or backed by someone who made the Poison Spur Mob tread lightly? Lumian, who had been only half-interested till now, leaned in. "Did Margot say why?"

Fitz shook his head. "No, but it's certainly not because Timmons is broke. His dance hall in Quartier de l'Observatoire is printing money!"

Timmons… Lumian suspected the con man had either powerful backing or was shielded by a high-ranking figure, which made the Poison Spur Mob wary of pressing him for repayment.

Or maybe, Timmons was a force unto himself.

"So why do you think I can get your money back?" Lumian asked Fitz, a smirk playing on his lips.

Fitz pondered for a moment before laying it all out.

"You're more ruthless than Margot. Plus, even if you decide not to pursue after your investigation, I have nothing to lose.

"Without that money, I can't afford to pay a dime."

"Honest to a fault." Lumian nodded, appreciating the candor. "I'll look into it, but don't get your hopes up."

If Timmons was simply bluffing and managed to scare off the Poison Spur Mob, the prospect of pocketing an easy 50,000 verl d'or was tempting to anyone.

Fitz, the bankrupt businessman, was playing a long shot. With a nod of assurance from Lumian, he thanked him and made his exit from the second floor.

In that moment, Lumian realized that his spirituality had bounced back considerably. The recovered amount surpassed his original spirituality reserves.

The Alms Monk has boosted my spirituality significantly. At Sequence 8, I can rival the spirituality of other pathways… Lumian mused quietly.

Simultaneously, he recalled an uncanny sensation he experienced while sipping the Whiskey Sour.

If he chose to live in poverty, practiced self-restraint, abstained from alcohol, shunned wastefulness, sought alms, and preached, all while adopting the demeanor of an ascetic monk, he would likely experience an enhancement in his intuitive sense of destiny and the likelihood of success of his five ritual spells.

Yet, Lumian had no intention of following that path. He believed it would morph him into a mirror image of the Bestower, gradually merging his identity with His.

Shaking off his introspective thoughts, Lumian left the room, making a beeline for Salle de Bal Brise. His next move was to solicit the Savoie Mob's help to gather the remaining ingredients and the right containers required for the Prophecy Spell.

He had to seize every opportunity at his disposal!

Chapter 153: Strange Rule

Standing before the white globe-shaped statue, an assemblage of countless skulls, in the Salle de Bal Brise,

Lumian paused. His eyes scanned the Intis inscription—"They sleep here, waiting for the arrival of happiness and hope."

Pulling his gaze from the statue, he strode toward the entrance.

Two henchmen, donned in crisp white shirts and dark overcoats, spun on their heels to face him,

"Good morning, Ciel."

They'd been buzzing with the whispers about this brash newcomer who'd reportedly offed Margot and left Wilson licking his wounds, all within a few fleeting days. It was no secret that he'd been roped into the Savoie Mob.

"Good morning, my cabbages," Lumian tossed back, his lips curling into a grin as he borrowed Dariège's pet phrase.

The Salle de Bal Brise was still waking up. Waitstaff moved with placid efficiency, arranging chairs, scrubbing the floors.

Lumian had intended to seek out Louis, a familiar face. No need to ruffle the feathers of Baron Brignais over such small matters. But there, nestled at the bar, sat Maxime—the very same one who'd tailed him.

Maxime, still sporting his trademark cap, drank a pint of rye beer.

A smirk spread across Lumian's face as he sauntered over.

Perceiving a presence nearing him, Maxime, out of habit, flicked a sidelong glance.

He went rigid, as though struck by a sudden frost.

In the next heartbeat, he vaulted off his stool and swiveled toward Lumian, plastering on a toadying grin.

"Good morning, Ciel."

He too had caught wind of the rumors—of Ciel's assassination of Margot and the defenestration of Wilson from the fourth floor of Auberge du Coq Doré.

A surge of relief washed over him. Thank the stars he hadn't pushed his luck when he'd been nabbed tailing Ciel. Considering Ciel's penchant for violence, he could've easily ended up as fodder for the rats in some godforsaken corner of Underground Trier.

This man was a bona fide killing machine. No qualms, no hesitation!

Lumian smiled.

"Merely 'Ciel' doesn't quite ring with the proper respect, does it?"

Seeing Maxime blanch, Lumian added,

"I'm curious as to when I'll hear 'Baron Ciel' rolling off your tongue."

This was a jest, yes, but also a thinly veiled indication of his ambition—to rise to the ranks of the Savoie Mob leadership, and sooner rather than later.

"Soon, very soon," Maxime replied with a forced smile.

His internal dialogue sang a different tune: I'd call you 'Baron' this very moment if it kept you happy, just like our 'Baron' isn't a real baron, but a self-proclaimed one.

Lumian claimed a stool at the bar and patted the one next to him.

"Have a seat. I have a few questions for you."

Maxime swiftly obliged, gesturing to the rye beer before him. "Fancy a pint?"

"Ranger for me, if you please," Lumian responded without missing a beat.

A 'Ranger'—a tangy blend of orange and pomegranate beer—cost two licks more than the rye.

Though it pinched his pocket, Maxime hollered over to the bartender, "A glass of Ranger."

Swiveling back towards Lumian, he flashed a grin.

"What would you like to know?"

Lumian bided his time until the generous pint of the orange-colored beer was delivered before launching his inquiry, "How did you join our Savoie Mob?"

"I'm Savoie born and bred." Maxime gestured to his weather-beaten features. "Hopped over to Trier in search of greener pastures, but my buddy who'd put me up had already joined the Savoie Mob."

The Savoie Mob was the brainchild of a handful of Savoie natives who'd made their living as laborers, servants, and peddlers in Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman. They were a fierce lot, unafraid to put themselves in harm's way, and they'd quickly carved out their own slice of the pie. As the mob's influence grew, they began to pull in recruits from other provinces and even Trier locals, but the heart of the organization still came from Savoie.

Lumian gave a slight nod, steering the conversation to his next question,

"And is Baron Brignais the head honcho of the whole Savoie Mob?"

"No." Maxime stared at Lumian, aghast.

He'd joined the mob without even grasping the basics?

And he'd taken out Margot and severely injured Wilson in the name of the Savoie Mob!

Lumian took a leisurely sip of his orange-pomegranate beer, a playful grin adorning his face.

"I was under the impression that Baron Brignais was the head honcho. I mean, his swagger, his flair, his brawn… how could he not be the top dog?"

Maxime recoiled in terror, clapping a hand over Lumian's mouth.

Were such words safe to spill in such an open area?

If word got back to that person, it could put a serious kink in his relationship with the baron!

Maxime wasted no time in setting the record straight.

"The baron is in charge of the Salle de Bal Brise, Avenue du Marché, and the loan shark operations. His peers include "Rat" Christo who oversees smuggling, "Giant" Simon who runs the dance joints on Rue du Rossignol, "Red Boots" Franca who oversees Rue des Blouses Blanches, and "Bloody Palm" Black who controls half of Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman.

"There's a top dog above them, but I've never laid eyes on him nor do I know who he is."

In a hushed voice, Maxime added, "Rumor has it he's a legitimate merchant, a card-carrying member of the Savoie Chamber of Commerce. And he's no small fry, either."

A member of the Savoie Chamber of Commerce? So, the Chamber of Commerce is backing a mob to handle their dirty laundry and keep the competition in check… Lumian pieced together the puzzle from his own experiences as a drifter, snippets from Aurore's offhand comments, and a smattering of books, magazines, and newspapers he'd devoured at home.

News of Ciel's arrival at the Salle de Bal Brise reached Louis, Baron Brignais' shadow. He made a beeline for the bar, his heart pounding with worry that the audacious country boy was about to stir the pot yet again!

He was really worried that the bold country boy would cause trouble again!

Finding Lumian engrossed in conversation with Maxime, Louis slid onto a stool on the other side, easing into the chat, "What's got you coming to the Salle de Bal Brise at this hour?"

Lumian shot him a sly smile. "I've got a favor to ask."

Louis, his forehead still sporting a nasty bruise, shrank back at the sight of Lumian's grin.

"What is it?"

Sensing they were about to dive into heavier matters, Maxime beat a hasty retreat from the bar, nursing his rye beer closer to the dance floor.

Lumian retracted his gaze and said slowly, "I need you to fetch me a lizard's eye, a rock from an eagle's nest, and a snake's venom gland."

He kept the full list of the Prophecy Spell's ingredients under wraps, planning to source them from different places.

"What do you need those for?" Louis found the trio of items vile and bizarre.

Lumian chuckled. "Remember how Margot bit the dust?"

Louis felt a chill run down his spine. It felt like a veiled threat, and it was working!

I'm not trying to rattle you… Lumian snickered to himself.

"I stabbed him. My blade was laced with poison."

"Right," Louis remembered Ciel's chat with Baron Brignais.

Seeing Louis still hadn't caught on, Lumian mentally berated, Why is this guy denser than Charlie?

He sighed, spelling it out for him. "Those items are to whip up another batch of poison."

"What are you planning?" Louis nearly jumped out of his skin.

He had a hunch Lumian was about to stir the pot.

"Self-defense," Lumian replied tersely.

With no grounds to object, Louis let out a sigh of relief, promising,

"I'll get someone on the job to collect those three items for you."

He ran through the list of items again, making sure he'd got it straight.

Once he'd confirmed the details, Lumian took a swig of his Ranger, switching gears.

"Ever heard of the Salle de Bal Unique?"

Louis eyed Lumian suspiciously, advising, "Best steer clear of that place. The dance hall's owner, Timmons, is tight with the police commissioner of Quartier de l'Observatoire. And there's a shadowy organization pulling his strings. Anyone who's tried to squeeze them has found themselves in a world of hurt, and some have even vanished off the face of the world."

Each quartier in Trier had its own police headquarters, each headed by a commissioner.

The police commissioner's official title was the Commissioner of the Trier Police Affairs Committee, answering to the Minister of the Trier Police Department.

So that's why the Poison Spur Mob never had the guts to chase up Timmons' debt… Lumian nodded, deep in thought.

Seeing the worry etched on Louis's face, afraid he was about to stir up a hornet's nest, Lumian threw him a curveball.

"Who else in the Poison Spur Mob ranks up there with Margot? And who's their boss?"

What are you trying to do? Louis almost blurted out.

Could it be that Ciel's planning to knock off all the heavy hitters in the Poison Spur Mob?

Are you out of your mind?

Keeping his cool, Louis replied, "That's none of your concern right now."

Lumian responded with a knowing smile, not pushing the matter. He downed his Ranger.

…

In the shadowy enclave of Quartier de l'Observatoire, nestled near the catacombs,

Lumian found Osta Trul huddled by the bonfire.

He laughed mockingly.

"You're the most professional person I've ever come across."

Like clockwork, Osta was here seven days a week, peddling his con.

"I'd love to be soaking myself on some beach, but my debts tell a different story." The thought of hopping a steam locomotive out of Trier and dodging his outstanding loans had crossed Osta's mind. Yet, each time he made it as far as the station, Baron Brignais's goons would be there to give him a good thrashing.

This had instilled in him a healthy fear of the Baron's reach, and he'd since abandoned any such ideas.

"I need you to fetch me a few things," Lumian cut to the chase, settling down beside Osta. "For each item you bring, there's an extra 5 verl d'or in it for you."

Osta's eyes sparked with interest.

"What are you after?"

Lumian stared into the fire, his voice low. "Lynx innards, hyena tongue, stag bone marrow, and any deadly herb."

"They're not easy to come by." Osta tried to haggle.

He'd already made up his mind to scour the eateries in Quartier de l'Observatoire.

Lumian brushed him off, changing the subject. "Where can I find aquatic monsters in Trier?"

Osta pondered a moment before replying, "There's an underground river in the catacombs nearby, fed by the Srenzo River. Every so often, someone claims to have run into an aquatic monster. And occasionally, some surface along the Srenzo River banks, but they're quickly dispatched by the Purifiers or the Machinery Hivemind."

Lumian nodded. "Do you know the Salle de Bal Unique?"

"Sure do." Osta pointed skyward. "It's over on Rue Ancienne, right by Place du Purgatoire."

"1 verl d'or. Show me the way." Lumian rose to his feet.

He planned to scope out the place, gather what intel he could. If it was a dead end, he'd move on.

In no time, Osta was leading Lumian topside, veering into Rue Ancienne near the square, and halting in front of a vintage edifice.

The building, a somber shade of blue-gray, retained its pre-Roselle charm.

Classic pediments, a chevron roof, and leaded windows.

The Salle de Bal Unique occupied the ground floor, its entrance resembling a giant maw.

It happened to be past noon, and a carriage pulled up to the curb as three men and a woman alighted.

Dressed in dark short suits, they sauntered towards the Salle de Bal Unique.

As they neared the entrance, each member of the quartet produced a monocle, fitting it over their right eye.

Watching this, Lumian turned to Osta, bemusement written all over his face.

Osta, flashing a knowing smile, enlightened him, "That's one of Salle de Bal Unique's rules. Everyone who steps inside must be donning a short suit and a monocle."

Chapter 154: Mini-Theater

Taking in Osta's revelation, Lumian couldn't help a chuckle, thinking, What kind of strange rule is this?

His mind flicked back to the turtle-walking, the space bridge, clutching a candle while touring the catacombs, and sprinting just to keep up with the latest fad. He felt that this seemed inconsequential, but perhaps not for the folks of Trier, who seemed to relish something unique.

As the stream of monocle-clad patrons flowed in, Lumian queried with a casual air, "What happens if a newcomer isn't privy to the rule?"

Osta gestured to the far end of Rue Ancienne.

"There's a place selling monocles and short suits there.

"I'd wager the proprietor of Salle de Bal Unique is behind it."

No doubt about it… Lumian murmured under his breath.

He wouldn't put it past Timmons to concoct such a rule for the Salle de Bal Unique to cash in on the monocle and short suit trade.

Undeniably, it was also a nod to the citizens of Trier's relentless pursuit of the latest trends and fashion.

"How long has this joint been in business?" Lumian nonchalantly gestured toward the Salle de Bal Unique across the street.

"Over two decades. It's been here since I first landed in Trier. Rumor has it, it opened when dance halls became the rage." Osta stole a glance toward Place du Purgatoire. "Anything else? I need to get back underground."

His mind was on making money, wary of missing out on potential clients seeking his divination and "assistance."

Lumian swung his gaze onto him.

Osta's heart stuttered, feeling as though he were in the crosshairs of a formidable predator.

"What's the matter?" He subconsciously forced a smile again.

Lumian withdrew his gaze, nonchalantly advising, "Stay sharp for the next couple of days."

"What?" Osta found himself flustered, bewildered, and somewhat frightened.

Ciel isn't threatening me, is he? We just had a smooth collaboration. He even tasked me with finding some materials!

A grin played at the corners of Lumian's mouth.

"Exactly as I said, but it's got nothing to do with me.

"Also, do me a favor and dig up more details on the aquatic monster. The more comprehensive, the better. Same pay as before."

Is he implying that I might be getting unlucky and be beaten up? Osta tried to decipher Lumian's cryptic message.

At the same time, he found something oddly familiar about Lumian's demeanor and tone but couldn't quite put his finger on it.

Retracing his steps toward Place du Purgatoire, Osta resolved to cast a divination for himself to see if ill fortune truly loomed ahead.

As a Secrets Suppliant, his divination prowess was remarkably superior to the average person.

Suddenly, it struck him why he found the whole exchange eerily familiar.

Wasn't this the exact manner he addressed his own "customers"?

Across from the antiquated building, Lumian contemplated whether to invest in a short suit and monocle to infiltrate the Salle de Bal Unique and gather intel.

If Timmons is indeed part of some mysterious organization and chummy with the police commissioner, snatching him for a bounty of verl d'or isn't a smart move. It'd muck up my operation. Wouldn't the money spent on the short suits and monocles go down the drain? They don't come cheap, after all. Lumian was never one to hold back on expenses, with Trier teeming with "generous souls," but he knew when to pinch pennies.

Mulling over his options, he scanned his surroundings, his eyes landing on an "Alone" bar diagonally across the Salle de Bal Unique.

Patrons of a dance hall would likely frequent a bar too. They must be rivals… Suddenly, a light bulb went off in Lumian's head.

After all, enemies often knew one another best, and those most familiar with a dance hall would likely be its competitors!

Even if their accounts were likely embellished, they could still offer some grains of truth.

Without missing a beat, Lumian swiveled around and sauntered into the Alone bar.

The buildings on Rue Ancienne were steeped in antiquity, with most dating back to pre-Roselle times. Their windows were mere slits, letting in scant daylight. The overarching theme here was one of darkness.

Unperturbed by the unlit gas lamps, Lumian navigated through the dimly lit hall, sparsely populated by patrons, and took a stool at the bar.

Removing his cap, he ordered, "A gin on the rocks."

The bar counter was tucked away in the darkest corner of the joint. The lean bartender was shrouded in shadows, his features obscured, revealing only a silhouette.

Despite Lumian's keen eyesight, he could barely discern the man's curly black hair, slightly blue eyes, and a somewhat low bridge of his nose.

As he awaited his gin, Lumian flashed a casual smile and remarked,

"Business seems slow here. The Salle de Bal Unique across the way appears to be drawing quite the crowd."

The bartender slid a lemon wedge and iced gin across to Lumian.

Casting a glance at the door, he replied, "We do alright, but most folks are downstairs waiting for the play.

"How about it? Fancy a peek? Patrons with drinks can gain entry to the cellar for five licks. Uh, make it eight for your gin."

"A play?" Lumian couldn't hide his astonishment.

This was a facet none of the Rue Anarchie bars could boast.

The bartender sighed, explaining, "They can dance, sing, shoot pool, play cards across the road. We've got to stand out somehow to lure in customers.

"Many bars and cafes on the north shore now have their own mini-theaters."

Lumian was at a loss for words, resorting to a mere sigh. "Has the bar scene gotten so cutthroat?"

He then produced three 20-coppet silver coins etched with gears and a 5-coppet copper coin, handing them to the bartender.

The total amounted to 13 licks or 65 coppets, including the ticket to the mini-theater for the performance.

The bartender promptly pointed to the stairs next to the counter leading down.

"You can head to the cellar anytime. Feel free to take your drink with you."

No ticket required? Lumian wasn't in a rush to vacate the counter. He smiled, asking, "The Salle de Bal Unique across the way seems rather… unique?"

"It certainly is." The bartender lowered his voice. "Did you get swindled over there? Is that why you're so curious?"

"Exactly." Lumian nodded without missing a beat.

He saw no reason of hiding it.

The bartender chortled.

"We get scammed hopefuls straggling in here every day, but none ever pull it off. Heck, I once spotted the police commissioner of Quartier de l'Observatoire, Conde, strutting into the dance hall, all decked out in a short suit and a monocle."

Timmons is no pushover… Lumian quickly abandoned any notion of conning the proprietor of Salle de Bal Unique.

Gin in hand, he pushed away from the counter, making his way down to the cellar.

Before he could reach the timber door, the bartender's shout echoed, "Patron coming through!"

The door creaked open with a groan.

Lumian slowed his stride, taking in his surroundings as he stepped inside.

It was a makeshift theater, a half-height wooden platform stretching across the far end. Two gas wall lamps cast a feeble light.

Where the illumination fell short, stools and chairs were scattered sparsely.

At that moment, over 20 guests were settled in, engrossed in the show unfolding on the stage.

The silence was deafening, punctuated only by the sporadic clink of glasses, the dimly lit cellar rendered almost eerily hushed.

Lumian claimed a chair near the exit, his eyes drifting to the stage.

The performer was not a person but a puppet half the height of a person.

Adorned in a palette of yellow, white, and red paint, regardless of gender, each puppet bore an overstated grin.

Guided by nearly invisible threads, the puppets moved, opening their mouths, turning, running, carrying out a variety of plays.

From somewhere, a deep male voice and a slightly shrill female voice took turns delivering the lines.

Bathed in the faint, yellowish glow from the gas lamps, against the looming darkness, the painted clown puppets took on a sinister edge.

Lumian was instinctively put off by the ambiance.

Not one to squander the ticket cost, he stuck around a bit longer until the play wrapped up.

Throughout, not a sound was made. The audience, some faces bathed in the yellow light, others shrouded in darkness, were far more engrossed than Lumian had imagined.

Having drained his gin, Lumian took his leave of the mini-theater, where only two gas lamps held off the darkness.

…

As Lumian made his way back to Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman, he claimed a window seat in a public carriage. As the shops and pedestrians retreated in the backdrop, he mulled over his next moves.

First order of business, secure some aquatic monster flesh and collect the necessary components for the Prophecy Spell. Second, elevate my standing in the Savoie Mob, aiming for a leadership position sooner rather than later… What's the plan…

Lost in his thoughts, his eyes snagged on a familiar figure.

There was Wilson of the Poison Spur Mob, clad in a white shirt and black jacket, his craggy face framed by a mop of curly brown hair.

With his two goons in tow, Wilson navigated Avenue du Marché, disappearing down a side alley. He moved with an assured stride, his posture unscathed.

Lumian was taken aback. He's up and about after being thrown down by him?

The fall was from four stories high!

That was some recovery. Made cockroaches look like amateurs!

A theory started to form in Lumian's mind.

The Poison Spur Mob has extraordinary healing powers?

Possibly Planter pathway's Doctor?

As he pondered, a memory surfaced.

In his dream, Madame Pualis had demonstrated the power to heal wounds instantaneously!

Although the dream might have distorted or exaggerated the reality, Madame Pualis's anomalous pathway did encompass a sphere related to life.

And Louis Lund was suspected to show up on Avenue du Marché… Could the force behind the Poison Spur Mob be linked to the evil god worshiped by Madame Pualis? As Lumian ruminated over this, a smirk slowly crept onto his face.

Chapter 155: Jenna

The circumstances of Wilson's rapid recovery were riddled with uncertainty. Lumian toyed with the idea that it was the work of a Sequence 8 "Doctor" from the Planter pathway, or a Sequence 9 "Apothecary" from its namesake pathway. Yet, his heart clung to the hope of unmasking Madame Pualis and her subordinates.

Had he pieced together the puzzle sooner, and had Wilson and his crew not gone far off into the distance, Lumian would have thrown himself from the moving public carriage, hot on their trail. He envisioned wrangling Wilson into some clandestine quarry cave, pressing him for answers about his miraculous recuperation.

If this saga bore no link to the evil god that Madame Pualis revered, Lumian was prepared to swallow his pride and apologize to Wilson, who, in turn, would owe Lumian his life for not permanently silencing him.

But, to snuff him out was also on the table. The ball was in Lumian's court.

As the carriage came to a halt at its station, Lumian was the first to alight, retracing his steps to the alley where Wilson and his crew had disappeared.

No barricades existed here. It was a bustling place, with people constantly coming and going. Wilson and his gang hadn't left any clear trail. Lumian devoted a painstaking quarter of an hour to trying to discern any signs of them, finally admitting defeat.

But he wasn't beaten down. Wilson may have slipped through his fingers, but there were others like Will or Williamson. The Poison Spur Mob was a hydra of sorts, with a plethora of leaders just a notch above Wilson. Each had their own turf, their own dealings. They could run, but they couldn't hide. Lumian just needed patience. Sooner or later, he'd cross paths with one or two of them. And they, undoubtedly, were more intimately involved with the shadowy forces pulling the strings behind the Poison Spur Mob than Wilson. They knew more!

Phew… Exhaling a deep breath, Lumian wrestled his impatience into submission, deciding to lay low and watch for a while before concocting a hunting strategy.

If the Poison Spur Mob truly was entwined with the evil god that Madame Pualis worshiped, then the leaders on par with Margot were either Sequence 8s, endowed with Beyonder characteristics, or they were spawn of an evil god, gifted with boons akin to a Sequence 8 Beyonder. They could even be stronger. If Lumian didn't arm himself with enough intel and set an appropriate snare, he was likely to end up on the losing side.

I can't forget I'm a Hunter, just because I've become a Provoker. Chiding himself, Lumian slipped down Avenue du Marché and strolled into the Salle de Bal Brise.

Given it was barely past three in the afternoon, the place was practically deserted. No music played, no one danced. His eyes immediately found Louis, the thug, nursing a glass of pomegranate ale at the bar counter.

"Soda?" Lumian grinned, sauntering over. "How about drinking something an adult would drink?"

Louis swiveled, meeting Ciel's amiable smile draped over the bar counter.

The sight left him momentarily stunned, as if he couldn't quite place the young man before him.

Was this the same Ciel who masked his wild ruthlessness behind a constant grin, one who'd resort to violence over the slightest disagreement?

He seemed more like a greenhorn, a naïve country boy who had just been roped into the Savoie Mob.

Louis gave his soda a wistful swirl, a bitter smile tugging at his lips.

"I've got to be at the baron's side later. Can't afford to get sloshed."

Lumian's eyes flicked to the bruised knot on Louis' forehead, a chuckle bubbling up. He pointed at his forehead, commenting, "Still nursing that bump? How long's it been?

"I ran into Wilson earlier. After I broke his arm and tossed him from the fourth floor, you'd think he'd be worse for wear. But he looked perfectly fine."

Louis was taken aback.

"You're saying Wilson's back on his feet?"

"Seems so, at least on the surface. Wanted to say hello, but he hightailed it out of there too fast." Lumian's tone carried a hint of regret.

Say hello? More like you want to rough up Wilson again and not even give the guy a chance to heal, Louis thought, but he didn't dare voice it.

His face took on a grave cast as he muttered to himself, "When we clashed with the Poison Spur Mob in the past, their wounded always bounced back in just a few days. The baron thinks they've got some Beyonders with a knack for healing. But for someone like Wilson to recover so rapidly from such serious injuries… that's unheard of."

"Could it be because you guys have never managed to put a serious dent in any of the Poison Spur Mob members?" Lumian's voice was laced with mockery.

Louis pondered, then conceded, "There have been a few, but not many. Plus, we usually don't see them again for a good long while. By then, they're all healed up."

So, Wilson's recovery outpaces even Doctor and Apothecary Beyonder powers? Lumian managed to glean a crucial tidbit from Louis's words.

Although it could point to a higher Sequence Beyonder on the corresponding pathway, it at least narrowed down some possibilities for him.

Just as Lumian was gearing up to probe the progress on gathering concoction ingredients, a stunning figure swept into the room.

A woman, ostentatiously attired, with her chestnut hair tied up, loose tendrils framing her ears, cheeks, and falling down her back.

Her face was dusted with powder, black eyeliner accentuating her blue eyes, lending them a deep, decadent allure.

At present, she was decked out in a bold red dress that left little to the imagination, sequins catching the light at strategic spots.

Isn't this the chanteuse known for her bawdy songs at the Poison Spur Mob's Salle de Gristmill? Lumian did a double take.

This was the Savoie Mob's Salle de Bal Brise!

Still, Lumian couldn't be entirely sure if it was the same woman. The singer had a mole by her lips, while this woman sported one at the corner of her left eye.

"Catching your eye, is she? That 'Little Minx'?" Louis followed Lumian's gaze.

Lumian chuckled. "How about we use a more respectful moniker? Manners matter."

"You sound just like the baron sometimes," Louis mused. "Her stage name is 'Little Minx', 'Little Minx' Jenna. She's known as a 'Showy Diva'."

"And what exactly is a 'Showy Diva'?" Lumian didn't attempt to cover up his ignorance. After all, he was a newcomer to Trier, straight out of a backwater like Cordu.

Louis took a moment to recall the baron's words and then delivered smoothly, "It's all about her performance style, her acting, her flamboyant outfits. She's a standout singer."

She's a chanteuse too? Lumian probed, "She performs at the Salle de Gristmill as well?"

"Sure does. As long as she's getting paid, she'll belt out tunes in any dance hall on Rue Anarchie." As Louis spoke, "Little Minx" Jenna sauntered over.

Her blue eyes roamed the room, lingering on Lumian before moving to Louis.

"Ten songs, four verl d'or. I'll keep a third of the tips thrown on stage."

"Deal." Louis had the baron's approval.

Only 4 verl d'or for a night's performance? Lumian found himself questioning. Had he overpaid Osta Trul?

In unfamiliar territory, he was woefully out of touch with the going rates.

Spotting his lingering gaze, Jenna swiveled her head, flashing him a grin.

"Feel free to let your eyes wander a bit lower."

She was referencing her scantily clad chest.

For Lumian, whose only exposure to such scenarios was through novels, this was uncharted territory. Yet, his face betrayed no unease. Flashing a smile, he said,

"I was merely wondering. The last time I spotted you, your mole was by your lips. Now it's nestled by your eye."

Jenna's reply came in the form of a captivating smile, which made Louis swallow hard.

"Are you from out of town?" Jenna queried.

Lumian bobbed his head in affirmation.

With a playful grin, Jenna leaned in, a finger tracing her cheek as she softly elucidated,

"It's all the rage here in Trier. Ladies often sport a faux mole. Right in the middle of the cheek for elegance, smack in the middle of the nose for audacity, at the corners of the eyes for passion, by the lips for allure, and nestled in the décolletage for secrets…"

As she spoke, she sent Lumian a saucy wink, as if to say, "Today, I'm all about passion."

Ah, Trier... Lumian could only shake his head in amazement.

Given their proximity, the intoxicating blend of Jenna's natural scent and the heady perfume she wore invaded his senses.

This led Lumian to instinctively rub his nose.

Jenna's reaction was immediate.

"Don't tell me you still have your virginity? I'm not a street girl, but for you, I might make an exception."

She took a moment to appraise Lumian, seemingly pleased with what she saw.

Virginity? Something that magically returns every morning at 6 a.m.? Lumian scoffed inwardly, his smile nonchalant.

"Right now? I'm afraid you might miss your performance tonight."

Back at the Ol' Tavern in Cordu Village, Lumian often had to match the locals in their coarseness, else he'd become the butt of their jokes.

Jenna's response was a hearty laugh and a dismissive wave of her hand.

"I'll find you after my set tonight."

With that, she sauntered off towards the modest wooden stage at the front of the dance floor, keen to get a feel for the place.

Isn't she jumping the gun a bit? Where's the agreement on a time and place? Lumian mused to himself.

She was clearly just yanking his chain!

Louis chimed in, a tinge of envy coloring his voice, "Don't fall for her act. She gets a kick out of toying with good-looking men. She won't actually follow through.

"I reckon she's Franca's sweetheart."

"Franca, 'Red Boots' Franca?" Lumian's surprise was palpable.

"Red Boots" Franca was a key figure in the Savoie Mob, ruling over Rue des Blouses Blanches, and rumored to be a woman.

"Exactly," Louis affirmed. "Franca appears to be the Boss's mistress, but she seems to swing both ways. She and 'Little Minx' are thick as thieves."

A lover's lover… Lumian once again marveled at the peculiarities of Trier.

Louis watched Jenna, now swaying gracefully on the stage, a look of longing etched on his face.

"She wasn't this mesmerizing when she first arrived in the market district. Over the past couple of years, she's become more adept at presentation, more feminine. What a shame…"

"If you manage to climb the ranks and stand toe to toe with Red Boots, you might have a shot," Lumian teased, stoking Louis's ambition. He then shifted gears, "Any luck tracking down those three items I needed?"

Louis tore his gaze away from Jenna to respond, "I was just about to tell you, we've managed to gather them all."

"That quick?" Lumian was taken aback by the Savoie Mob's efficiency.

Why not start a factory? Why stick with the mob life?

Louis elaborated, "'Rat' Christo keeps a variety of critters, some rare, some less so. Some we could take off his hands for the right price. That's how we got the lizard's eye and the snake's venom sac. The eagle's nest rock was a bonus."

"Rat" Christo, the one in charge of smuggling? Lumian mulled over this newfound information.

Chapter 156: Landlord

Louis carried on, "I'll arrange for someone to bring those three items to Auberge du Coq Doré later."

"And the cost?" Lumian was prepared to offer Louis an extra reward for his diligence.

Louis merely shook his head.

"The baron says you needn't worry about the payment. He believes your strength building equates to our Savoie Mob's strengthening."

Even without Baron Brignais spelling it out, Louis deduced his ploy of roping Lumian in. In any case, the cost was under 10 verl d'or.

So according to the baron's logic, I can have him refund the materials I require to progress to Pyromaniac? Lumian mused with a hint of sarcasm.

Louis was taking a sip from his pomegranate soda when a group sauntered into the Salle de Bal Brise.

The group's leader was strikingly tall, towering over 1.9 meters. His light-yellow hair, short and plush, clung to his scalp akin to high-grade velvet.

He had a huge nose, light-blue eyes, and a roughly textured face. He was dressed in a figure-hugging black suit, topped off with a wide-brimmed round hat.

Louis's features tightened, he carefully placed down the soda bottle, turning to Lumian, "I need to attend to the baron."

Just then, the beefy man in his early thirties walked a crew that had the air of gangsters about them towards the café's staircase.

"Who's he?" Lumian questioned, unable to hide his curiosity.

Louis rose, offhandedly answering, "That's 'Giant' Simon, runs the dance halls on Rue du Rossignol."

"Isn't he a part of our Savoie Mob as well?" Lumian probed further.

Louis nodded. "True, but he's not on good terms with the baron. He's always arguing that the baron, since he oversees the loan-sharking, ought to relinquish control of the Salle de Bal Brise.

"I'm heading up; need to see what he's here for."

Louis had barely taken two steps when he noticed Lumian, still planted at the bar counter, from his peripheral vision.

He couldn't resist an inward sigh.

He just doesn't grasp how to seize the moment. Shouldn't he have shown some initiative and backed me up with the baron? If 'Giant' Simon dares say anything unsavory, stare him down, threaten him with a gun. Only then will he start to earn the baron's trust.

Yes, he may be ruthless, mad, and powerful, but he remains a greenhorn when it comes to these things.

Naturally, if Lumian truly wanted to accompany him to the second floor and aid Baron Brignais in maintaining appearances at the café, Louis would turn him down. After all, the baron and "Giant" Simon could potentially be discussing confidential matters concerning the Savoie Mob. It was no place for a rookie to eavesdrop.

Lumian ruminated, The Savoie Mob seems riddled with internal strife…

Suppose there's a showdown between Baron Brignais and "Giant" Simon and one bites the dust. And then the head honcho needs a strong hand to quell the storm and take over their positions, wouldn't I be the perfect candidate? When that time comes, as long as I pass muster, I'll have fulfilled Mr. K's mission.

Besides the leaders, I can't see anyone else in the Savoie Mob who could take out Margot single-handedly…

Now the trick is to pit Baron Brignais and "Giant" Simon against each other without arousing suspicion…

Lost in his strategic contemplation, Lumian requested a glass of absinthe.

Before he could savor the last of the enigmatic emerald elixir, he spotted "Giant" Simon emerging from the staircase, henchmen in tow, a thunderous expression on his face.

Well, he doesn't seem pleased… Lumian noted, retracting his gaze.

He wasn't rushing to translate his thoughts into action; he was still woefully short on the ins and outs of the Savoie Mob.

Later that evening, on his return to Auberge du Coq Doré, Madame Fels, seated at the reception desk, rose and informed him, "Monsieur Ive has arrived. He's waiting for you in the first-floor dining room, by the window."

Not bad. He came quite quickly… Lumian nodded approvingly, making his way to the small dining room opposite the lobby.

Monsieur Ive had heard tell of Ciel's eccentric yet stylish hair. On seeing him step into the dining room, he rose, all smiles.

"Monsieur Ciel, right this way."

He was a man on the cusp of his fifties. His blonde hair, streaked with silver, was neatly arranged. He sported a faded dark suit with a pair of chestnut tweed trousers. His eyes were a bright blue, and he bore a thin beard.

Lumian glanced at the cane resting against the dining table, then approached, a congenial smile playing on his lips.

"Good evening, Monsieur Ive."

Once both men were seated, Ive beckoned the waiter to begin serving.

"My apologies for the delay in visiting, I've been swamped recently," Ive expressed remorsefully.

His accent distinctly belonged to the Trier region.

Feigning ignorance, Lumian questioned, "Do you own more than one motel?"

Otherwise, what's kept him so busy?

Ive was taken aback. He hadn't anticipated that Lumian would take his polite remark literally.

He stammered, "There are… some other affairs, but they're neither here nor there."

As their conversation flowed, the waiter brought in the evening meal, a serving each.

Bean soup, pork sausage, Feynapotter rice, and a sauce that occupied a fifth of the plate.

"This is their signature meat sauce," Ive informed, bubbling with enthusiasm.

Is that all? Lumian's perception of the landlord's miserliness took a new dimension.

It didn't overly concern him, though. He dug into the Feynapotter rice, smothered in the mildly meaty sauce, laced with pepper and vinegar.

After consuming his meal for about a minute, Lumian looked up, addressing Monsieur Ive with a wry smile, "With your penny-pinching tendencies, why provide each room with sulfur?"

He purposely avoided the softer term "frugal," his tone saturated with sarcasm.

Monsieur Ive's face clouded over, evidently displeased.

He kept his emotions in check, forcing a strained smile.

"The motel is riddled with bedbugs. Nobody would stay here without the sulfur we provide."

Really? As long as the price is low enough, those hard up for cash won't fuss about a few bedbugs… Lumian casually sectioned off a piece of sausage, taking a bite.

After mulling it over a bit, he suggested, "Why not employ a couple of regular cleaners for daily cleaning? That could effectively cut down on the bedbugs."

"Two full-time cleaners would set me back 130 to 150 verl d'or a month, while a thorough cleaning once a week only costs 18 verl d'or," Monsieur Ive protested, visibly pained at the prospect.

Lumian simply smiled.

"I meant, why don't you do the cleaning yourself, get your kids to help?"

That would shave off 18 verl d'or from his weekly expenses.

Monsieur Ive appeared to mull over the proposal, seeming to see the merit in it.

However, after a reflective pause, he sighed and said, "Sadly, we're otherwise occupied."

Doing what? Lumian didn't push for an answer.

He had already established that Ive was nothing short of a tightwad.

Monsieur Ive studied Lumian, hesitating before he offered, "I used to hand Margot 20 verl d'or weekly. Which day would you prefer?"

Lumian scoffed.

"No need to hand it over to me. Invest in an additional thorough cleaning each week."

Monsieur Ive was somewhat surprised but raised no objections. After all, the cleaning service cost only 18 verl d'or, and if contracted for twice a week, he could haggle for a better rate.

Having polished off his plate, Lumian queried,

"Do you happen to know what happened to the tenant from 504?"

He was speaking of the man who'd plastered Susanna Mattise's portrait in Charlie's room, a frequent face on Rue de la Muraille, Rue de Breda, and Rue du Rossignol, who had since moved on.

Lumian had sought this information from Madame Fels earlier, but she'd offered no insight. As far as she was concerned, her interest in tenants ceased as soon as they paid their rent and didn't damage anything.

Monsieur Ive appeared taken aback, glancing at the leftovers on his plate before replying,

"I'm not sure who you mean. I don't often visit the motel. I'm unaware of who's occupying which rooms."

That response… Smacks of guilt… Lumian's eyebrows twitched slightly, but he didn't push the issue. He watched as Monsieur Ive tidied up his plate, not a morsel of rice or a trace of sauce left behind.

After Monsieur Ive had taken his leave, Lumian emerged from the motel some 20 seconds later, tailing the landlord from a safe distance.

He tracked Monsieur Ive to a beige, six-story apartment block situated in the heart of Avenue du Marché.

From what he'd gathered from Madame Fels's usual chitchat, this was most likely Monsieur Ive's residence.

Lumian didn't rush to make a "house call". There were certain activities best carried out under the cloak of night. Moreover, he wasn't entirely sure whether the official Beyonders were still probing into Susanna Mattise's affairs or hoping to find any leads through Monsieur Ive. An accidental encounter could be rather awkward.

If it came to that, Lumian would have to make himself scarce promptly.

Under the warm glow of the streetlamps, he circled Monsieur Ive's apartment, taking in his surroundings.

What struck Lumian most was the three-story, brick-red edifice diagonally across from the apartment on the opposite side of Avenue du Marché.

The foyer, propped up by pillars, bore a sign overhead: "Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons."

People streamed in continuously. Every now and then, bursts of applause and strains of music floated out, creating a lively atmosphere.

Lumian knew that this was a theater catering to common folk with its affordable ticket prices, holding a monopoly in Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman.

An ideal spot for evading pursuit… Lumian was reminded of theater-related incidents from various novels. Grinning, he crossed the street and entered the foyer of the Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons.

Posters advertising current and upcoming plays, as well as a few past classics, adorned the walls.

As Lumian considered how best to exploit the theater, he stood there, earnestly examining the photographs, sketches, and captions.

Suddenly, a familiar face caught his eye on a poster tucked away in a corner.

Playing an extra in the background, a man with a shock of starkly blond hair, blue eyes, and a wispy beard was featured. It was none other than Monsieur Ive, the man he'd been tailing!

Chapter 157: Ancienne Cage à Pigeons

Monsieur Ive, a theater actor as well? Or merely an enthusiast? Lumian pondered the enigma.

His immediate impression was, as proprietor and landlord of the Auberge du Coq Doré, Monsieur Ive could be classified as affluent. Moreover, he managed several other enterprises, so the notion of him dabbling in acting appeared improbable. Nevertheless, taking into account Ive's proclivity for hoarding wealth and his frugal tendencies, Lumian couldn't completely rule out the possibility of the man dabbling as a minor actor during his idle hours. It was an opportunity, after all, to rake in a few more coins and avoid squandering valuable time.

Once satisfied that the small-time character indeed was Monsieur Ive, Lumian's eyes drifted to the poster's title: Forest Fairy.

From the additional script, Lumian deciphered that this was a classic production from the Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons, occasionally revived for new runs.

The actress portraying the Forest Fairy boasted distinct facial contours, an ethereal and captivating aura, and lake-blue eyes filled with innocence and sanctity.

However, Lumian found her less than bewitching, given her adornments of bracelet, necklace, and belt fashioned from tree branches and verdant leaves, topped off by a floral laurel crown. She stirred memories of Ava, the Spring Elf from his dreams, and Susanna Mattise with her cascading turquoise tresses.

For Lumian, these were not nostalgic musings. Especially the latter, bereft of the unusual allure her hair had once commanded, now evoked an eerie and revolting image.

Charlotte Calvino. After noting the actress's name, Lumian scrutinized the other posters for more clues.

Ultimately, he deduced that Monsieur Ive had performed in three plays at the Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons, yet in each, he was but a mere supporting actor, easily replaced.

Entering the theater with a thoughtful demeanor, Lumian forked out ten licks for a ticket.

The Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons was a well-designed edifice. A large stage dominated the far end, illuminated by gas wall lamps, cloaked by lofty curtains and equipped with several steam-powered machines.

Neat rows of seating lined the theater, progressively ascending like terraced staircases.

Lumian took his ticket stub and located his seat.

The ongoing play was "Princess and the Beast". The actors' attire tended towards the liberal, with hints of risqué—entirely in keeping with the aesthetic sensibilities of Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman.

Watching the performance unfold, Lumian was struck with an internal gasp of awe.

Could this be Trier's standard for acting?

Such theatrics only earn them keep in Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman? What caliber do the theaters in Quartier de la Maison d'Opéra hold?

Lumian wasn't a stranger to the world of theater. Despite Aurore's homebody tendencies, even she occasionally craved the outdoors. Sometimes she borrowed a pony from Madame Pualis, or chatted with

Cordu's old ladies, narrated stories to local children, and occasionally she'd even take Lumian to Dariège to attend plays, opera, circus performances or visit the underground book market for creative inspiration.

In comparison to the Ancienne Cage à Pigeons, those theatrical performances seemed akin to amateur efforts.

The lead actors on the stage were simply spellbinding. Whether through their facial expressions, physical gestures, or delivered lines, they were as though plucked from the narrative's pages and set into the world of the living. Lumian, initially focused on scouting for anomalies, found himself unexpectedly engrossed in the unfolding drama. He felt a pang for the Beast's tangled turmoil of self-doubt, brutality, and torment, and for the Princess, her unspoiled innocence, kindness, and heartfelt distress.

Any one of these principal performers could easily steal the spotlight in a Dariège theater.

As the curtain fell, Lumian found himself rising to his feet, clapping his approval, a twinge of disappointment in his heart that the performance had concluded so swiftly.

He detected nothing suspicious with the actors, nor could he discern anything out of the ordinary within the theater itself during his regular sojourns to the restroom during intermissions.

On exiting the Ancienne Cage à Pigeons, Lumian raised his eyes to the honey-colored apartment building diagonally opposite, taking note of the yellow gas lamp glow illuminating the windows of the sixth floor.

Madame Fels had hinted that Monsieur Ive cultivated a rooftop vegetable garden as a cost-saving measure. Lumian deduced that the Ive residence must, therefore, be on the apartment building's top floor, the sixth to be exact.

After a brief scrutiny, Lumian's gaze landed on the faintest of the glowing windows.

In keeping with Ive's penny-pinching character, he probably refused to light an additional gas lamp.

Finding a secluded, dark corner, Lumian set himself up, his focus locked onto the dimly lit window, a silent sentinel awaiting any sign of activity.

As the hours wore on, a homeless man wandered by, hoping to claim this sheltered nook as his makeshift bed for the night. However, catching sight of Lumian's shadowy figure, he reluctantly shuffled off elsewhere.

Such encounters barely registered with Lumian anymore. Unperturbed, he maintained his vigil.

Close to 11 p.m., the feeble light in the window blinked out.

Roughly fifteen minutes later, Monsieur Ive, garbed in a faintly dark suit and chestnut-hued tweed trousers, materialized at the apartment door.

With cautious glances cast about him, clutching a carbide lamp, he made his way along the street's shadowy cloak towards the Underground Trier entrance a stone's throw away.

Lumian bore witness as a living statue, observing the retreating illumination of Monsieur Ive's lamp until it was swallowed by darkness.

Several minutes later, with no signs of official Beyonders tailing Monsieur Ive, Lumian arose, dusted off his attire, and crossed the Avenue du Marché towards the hidden stone staircase leading underground.

Lumian did not attempt to follow him. First and foremost, he had no source of light; his only candles were those used in ritualistic magic, their scent too conspicuous. Second, he lacked knowledge about Monsieur Ive's true capabilities, his motives for venturing into Underground Trier, or the extent of power he might command.

Retracing a few steps, Lumian melted into the shadow of a nearby building's pillar, shrouding himself in the comforting dark.

A tedious wait ensued. As midnight loomed, the blue radiance of the carbide lamp punctuated the darkness at the underground entrance.

The elongated shadow of Monsieur Ive once again graced the scene.

Just as he came to the bottom of the stone staircase, Lumian tugged his cap lower over his eyes and stepped forward, barking out, "This is a hold-up!"

The strategy behind this sudden ploy was to gauge Monsieur Ive's strength. Should the landlord be a formidable force, Lumian suspected he would merely dismiss the mugger with lethal efficiency. In that case, Lumian would have the opportunity to make a swift exit, his greatest risks being some minor injuries and a dent in his pocket.

If, however, Monsieur Ive failed to exhibit significant ability, the faux robbery would quickly morph into a real kidnapping. Lumian would then corner the landlord in a remote pocket of the Underground Trier, demanding answers about his secretive behavior around Room 504's tenant and his nocturnal trips to the underground world.

At Lumian's gruff demand for a 'hold-up,' Monsieur Ive visibly flinched.

Seeming to accept his fate, he pulled out a worn brown leather wallet, extracting a single silver coin valued at 1 verl d'or.

An unexpected surge of avarice flooded Lumian at the sight of the silver coin. Its intricate design, with the cherubic relief on the surface and radiating lines, drew him in.

Almost against his will, he found his right hand reaching out to snatch the coin from Monsieur Ive. With a swift pivot, he spun on his heel and took off, playing the part of a robber to perfection.

Five or six steps into his escape, a niggling thought started to bother Lumian.

What sort of robber would flee after pilfering a solitary 1 verl d'or coin?

And why did I even seize the coin?

Lumian's senses abruptly reignited. Channeling Dancer's agility, he made a forceful twist of his frame and skidded to a halt.

He noticed Monsieur Ive was also on the run.

The landlord of Auberge du Coq Doré darted across Avenue du Marché and made a beeline for Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons.

Lumian, originally preparing to pursue, abruptly dropped his pace.

Monsieur Ive, now a victim of robbery, didn't aim for the sanctuary of his home nor the aid of law enforcement in the bustling market district. Instead, he elected for the theater, situated at an angle from his dwelling!

Could it be that he perceived a more effective guard there? Lumian's brow furrowed in contemplation.

Then, within the span of a heartbeat, he spun around and resumed his faux robber's role.

He was anxious that Monsieur Ive might rally a force capable of reclaiming his pilfered silver coin.

Given Monsieur Ive's infamous miserliness, such a response was within the realm of possibility!

Although Lumian was not particularly concerned about losing a single verl d'or, getting caught would undoubtedly unmask his identity.

Exiting Avenue du Marché, he nonchalantly flipped the silver coin to a destitute vagabond dozing at the street's edge.

At the metallic ring, the man's eyes flickered open, resting on the gleaming piece nestled under the nearby lamplight.

Once back on Rue Anarchie, Lumian peeled off his cap and coat, tucking them under his arm as he resumed his leisurely stride.

His test had confirmed his suspicions: Monsieur Ive was no ordinary man. He possessed Beyonder abilities, albeit seemingly ill-equipped for combat. He had elected to "gift" a silver coin to an apparent burglar and retreat.

This little episode filled me with a sudden, overwhelming desire for that silver coin. A desire so fierce, I nearly abandoned my true intentions, almost succumbing to madness… Lumian reflected on the strange encounter.

It was a sensation he recognized.

He had experienced a similar one when facing Susanna Mattise.

One filled him with paralyzing fear, the other stripped him of rational thought, substituting it with raw hatred.

The similarities of these abilities' manifestations… Could Monsieur Ive be linked to Susanna Mattise? What fate could have befallen Room 504's tenant… The Forest Fairy, the foliage, laurels… Does Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons have ties to Susanna Mattise as well? Lumian speculated as he retraced his steps to Auberge du Coq Doré.

He slipped into the underground bar to find Charlie, glass of beer in hand, belting out a tune with a few of the inn's tenants.

"We impoverished souls, dwelling in the attic…"

Catching sight of Lumian's return, Charlie excused himself and ambled over to the counter, heaving a sigh as he began,

"You wouldn't believe what transpired this afternoon. The hotel manager nicked my drinks twice, and then had the gall to say that because of Madame Alice's situation, he couldn't promote me to an official attendant. I'm stuck as a lowly handyman. How utterly odious. Just how unlucky can I get?"

Suddenly, Charlie fell silent, muttering to himself, "Unlucky, unlucky…"

After repeating it a handful of times, he glanced up at Lumian, a look of surprise registering on his face at the sight of Lumian's subtle smile.

Chapter 158: "Report"

As he pondered on Ciel's early morning warning of potential misfortune, Charlie was dumbstruck. The very afternoon he had lost the job prospect he'd been eagerly awaiting and even squandered a few verl d'or hosting a round of drinks. The thought of it all intensified the weight on his shoulders.

Ciel's smirk hit him, and Charlie's voice instinctively dropped to a hush.

"You can predict the future?"

His forecast had hit the mark with uncanny precision!

"Didn't I tell you? Just a wild guess," Lumian stated, his lie rolling smoothly off his tongue.

Yet, it wasn't entirely untruthful. It was more an educated guess, based on the luck patterns he'd perceived. It was akin to devising the method after having the final answer.

Charlie's expression reflected his disbelief, yet he didn't challenge the claim. Instead, he asked hopefully, "Has my run of bad luck ended?"

Lumian turned, his focus shifting, and his eyes growing stormy.

His face soon mirrored the seriousness of his thoughts.

Charlie, witnessing Ciel's shift in demeanor, felt his pulse quicken and his mouth go arid with anxiety.

"What, what's going on?"

Lumian pressed his lips together before stating, "You're in for a disaster."

Charlie's countenance faltered, his complexion turning pale, a stark contrast to its earlier flush.

Lumian chuckled.

"Just pulling your leg. You may not have the best luck for a while, but you won't be particularly ill-fated either."

It suggested that even if the issue with Susanna Mattise hadn't been entirely handled, it wouldn't escalate any time soon.

Charlie couldn't quite grasp Lumian's words. "Really?"

"It's a tall tale! Believe it if you wish. No skin off my back if you don't," Lumian remarked, ordering a glass of absinthe fennel with a dismissive smile.

Lumian's nonchalant demeanor helped Charlie breathe easy. He nestled onto the bar stool next to him, sipping his rye beer.

"I had thought the whole situation wasn't quite done yet."

That's not out of the question… Lumian made no effort to unnerve Charlie further.

Charlie's gaze fell on the bar top as he murmured, "You know, in that moment, I wished to be a lowly handyman and leave the market district ASAP."

Lumian glanced his way.

"If disaster is on its way, you won't be able to outrun it no matter where you relocate."

A raw bitterness bared itself on Charlie's face.

Lumian suggested further, "You might as well pay a visit to the nearest Eternal Blazing Sun cathedral and pray more.

"And by the way, I dined with our landlord, Monsieur Ive, today. He seemed a bit odd when Room 504 came up in our chat, almost as if he knows something about the previous tenant but isn't keen on sharing."

Charlie froze for a moment before comprehending Ciel's reference.

He lowered his voice again. "The one who hung that woman's portrait?"

Lumian confirmed with a slow, assertive nod.

Charlie stayed quiet for a beat before muttering, "Does that woman have any ties to Monsieur Ive? Does he suspect something off about the portrait? I-I should inform the authorities. I'll head to the nearest cathedral at dawn and speak to the priest…"

Not bad. A few days under my wing and you're much sharper than Louis from the Savoie Mob. You caught my hint right away… Lumian raised his glass, taking a sip of the visually appealing green liquid.

Lumian was not well versed in the details of Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons, hence the severity of the problem was a mystery to him. Any self-led investigation would take at least a couple of weeks to gather any meaningful information. Even then, he might not possess the means to tackle it. As such, his best course of action was to alert the authorities from the get-go, allowing them to take the reins.

Once he'd reached a decision, Charlie shot a covert glance at Pavard Neeson, who was engrossed in the art of mixology. Confirming that he had the man's undivided attention, he leaned in and whispered to Lumian, "If they query the source of my information, what should I say?"

"Just tell them that it cropped up during our chat," Lumian responded candidly.

With Charlie previously singing his praises, the police in Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman were aware that Auberge du Coq Doré had fallen under Ciel's jurisdiction. Thus, it was only a matter of time before Ciel and Monsieur Ive, the landlord, crossed paths over a meal and some idle chatter.

When the time came, the official Beyonders could make casual inquiries and ascertain that all was in order. They would have no reason to cast suspicion upon Lumian.

"Alright." Charlie's demeanor noticeably relaxed.

Lumian savored another sip of his La Fée Verte before posing a question, "Which of the leaders of the Poison Spur Mob do you know?"

Charlie had previously alluded to the leaders of the Savoie Mob, the Poison Spur Mob, and several other smaller gangs having a certain notoriety in Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman—enough to frighten the youngsters.

"What are you scheming?" Charlie's countenance lit up with excitement.

"I intend to ask them a question or two," Lumian chose to frame it in the most courteous manner possible.

Charlie's enthusiasm dipped a notch, realizing he wouldn't be privy to any spectacle.

"Besides Margot, I know of two others. One's 'Hammer' Ait. He was a regular at Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman, but he's been frequenting Rue Anarchie of late. Then there's Harman, sans any nickname. I've observed Margot in his company on multiple occasions, showing him considerable deference. He's bald, by the way.

"The head honcho of the Poison Spur Mob is 'Black Scorpion' Roger. He appears to reside somewhere on Avenue du Marché…"

Garnering Margot's respect implies Harman's status and power within the Poison Spur Mob superseded his… Perhaps "Hammer" Ait has taken control of Salle de Gristmill and Rue Anarchie, hence his regular appearances here? Lumian pondered, setting his sights on "Hammer" Ait.

His plan was to shadow the gang leader over the ensuing days, familiarizing himself with his routines and behaviors. Should he fail to locate Wilson in due course, he would contemplate making an example of Ait.

After emptying his glass of absinthe, Lumian and Charlie made their way upstairs.

Upon reaching Room 207, Lumian noticed a wooden crate, adorned with the black-painted emblem of the Savoie Mob—a bullet and a dirk—placed near the entrance.

Could it be the ingredients sent by Louis? Lumian stooped to pick up the crate, subsequently unlocking the door to the room.

As he flipped open the lid, the foul stench of bird droppings wafted up from a dark stone, accompanied a pair of eyeballs, bloodshot and haunting, and a poison sac, securely encased within a glass jar.

…

Avenue du Marché was bathed in a yellowish glow thanks to the gas lamps.

Ive, the landlord of Auberge du Coq Doré, was guiding someone towards a vagrant, slumbering soundly with eyes tightly shut.

"Here lies my silver coin!" he pronounced.

The person behind him threw a skeptical glance towards the sleeping tramp and queried, "Did he rob you?"

"Absolutely not," Ive replied with firm conviction. "The differences in height, physique, even clothing are too significant."

"A robber that tosses stolen loot to a tramp… this situation is undeniably peculiar." The figure, teetering on the edge of the lamp's glow, nodded in near imperceptibility. "We must remain vigilant, prepared for unforeseen complications or potential investigations."

Ive simply grunted his agreement, grumbling under his breath, "Had he not cast my silver coin to this vagrant, we could have traced him directly."

He possessed the unique capability to sense the location of his possessions, but only for a limited time.

…

The following morning found Lumian holed up in Auberge du Coq Doré, engrossed in Aurore's grimoire.

He needed to keep an eye on "Hammer" Ait and his cohorts, which meant altering his study routine to the morning. These gangsters only made their appearance in the afternoon, and their nightly escapades ended in the early morning hours.

Charlie had left at dawn for the closest Eternal Blazing Sun cathedral. Upon his return, his calm demeanor was underscored by a radiant smile; he seemed to have found a source of solace and received validation.

As the clock approached noon, Lumian stowed his grimoire and ambled over to Avenue du Marché. He positioned himself a short distance from Monsieur Ive's apartment and the Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons, hoping to witness any activity from the official Beyonders.

The streets were bustling as usual, the shops brimming with activity, and carriages weaving in and out. Yet, none bore any hints of the recent events.

After observing for some time, Lumian was about to seek out a restaurant to satiate his hunger when he spotted Monsieur Ive in the distance.

Still clad in his faded formal suit and chestnut tweed trousers, donning a gray wide-brimmed hat, and grasping a black cane, he made his way towards his apartment.

The official Beyonders haven't made their move yet? Lumian contemplated briefly before crossing Avenue du Marché to intercept the landlord.

"Good afternoon, Monsieur Ive. Out on an errand?" he greeted, all smiles.

Monsieur Ive looked slightly disoriented before scrutinizing Lumian, a touch of trepidation in his gaze.

"I'd something to attend to at the police station."

So, the official Beyonders roped in Monsieur Ive through the police station, but delegated the interrogation to someone with the required abilities? Lumian surmised the situation, albeit with a lingering query: The officials didn't uncover that Monsieur Ive possessed Beyonder powers?

Lumian responded with a gentle nod and a reassuring smile.

"Is there something I could assist you with?"

"No need," Monsieur Ive responded, his tone veering between guarded and resistant.

He gestured towards the beige apartment.

"I need to get home."

In an effort to not arouse any suspicion, Lumian made no further attempts to detain or probe him.

As Monsieur Ive walked away, Lumian was left behind, a slight furrow marking his brow.

Looking back at their brief exchange, nothing seemed off. Yet, certain details felt out of place, leaving him with a peculiar sensation.

On impulse, Lumian shifted his focus to the retreating figure of Monsieur Ive, attempting to gauge his recent string of luck.

It seemed pretty ordinary; nothing too fortunate or adverse.

Nonetheless, Lumian found his suspicion intensifying rather than alleviating.

During their dinner the previous night, Lumian had instinctively assessed Monsieur Ive's luck.

It had leaned towards the unfortunate end of the spectrum!

And now, in a span of a day, his luck had taken a turn for the better. What could've transpired? Lost in thought, Lumian sauntered down Avenue du Marché, his hands nonchalantly tucked into his pockets.

Chapter 159: Savage

The tide of fortune seems to have taken a turn for Monsieur Ive…

His handling of the robbery the previous night must have laid bare his secret, especially in the face of a disguised Beyonder masquerading as a police officer…

Had they sniffed out something amiss and laid a trap in anticipation?

The gears in Lumian's head whirred ever faster, his growing suspicion suggesting that his 'robbery' attempt on Monsieur Ive had alerted the man and his unseen benefactors.

Still, he couldn't verify any peculiarity regarding the landlord without attempting some sleuthing.

Realizing the eyes of the figure at the Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons could be upon him, Lumian abandoned the thought of paying a 'visit' to Monsieur Ive, making a hasty exit from Avenue du Marché.

An urgency overwhelmed him to execute the Prophecy Spell in order to unravel some of the mysteries plaguing him.

…

Within the confines of Quartier de l'Observatoire, near the subterranean cemetery, warmed by a flickering bonfire, Lumian spotted Osta Trul's peculiar stance. "Did you manage to procure the items I asked for?"

Osta responded with a genuine grin, "Indeed. The entrails of a lynx, tongue of a hyena, marrow of a stag, and some gray henbane. It all amounts to 5 verl d'or. Including the reward you pledged, it comes to 20 verl d'or."

Per their agreement, Lumian was to hand him an extra 5 verl d'or for each item. But, noticing the sum worth of the items was only 5 verl d'or, Osta's conscience wouldn't allow him to charge full price, hence the discount.

Lumian didn't mind. The arrangement saved him a great deal of time.

Naturally, he didn't push to pay more, handing Osta a sum of banknotes amounting to the quoted price of 20 verl d'or.

The four items were contained in either modest glassware or small wooden boxes and cloth bags. Lumian inspected them individually before sliding them into his pocket.

His gaze once again fell on Osta Trul. "Any further insights on the aquatic monster?"

Osta nodded. "Indeed."

His expression bore a plea for affirmation.

"In my effort to gather more information about the aquatic monsters, I even ventured into the underground river myself. Regrettably, the ground was treacherous, and I ended up taking a tumble."

He pulled up his sleeve, revealing the distinct marks of his slip on his forearm.

So that's why his posture seemed off… If I hadn't requested Osta to gather information on the aquatic monster, would he have avoided the injury? Yet I only enlisted him after foreseeing an imminent accident. What could have transpired if I had rescinded? A feeling of inevitability wrapped Lumian.

He was also a pawn in the game of destiny, his actions and will embedded in the luck he sensed.

Lumian curtailed his musing and responded with a light chuckle.

"I did advise you to be cautious."

"Uh…" Osta appeared taken aback.

The recollection of Ciel's warning for the upcoming days suddenly sprung to mind.

Did it manifest so rapidly? Is his divination prowess truly this potent? Amid his astonishment, Osta queried, "You divined I would be injured within the next two days?"

What Sequence does Ciel belong to?

Not only does he appear combat-savvy, but his divination skills are impressive!

A grin played at the corners of Lumian's mouth.

"It's not divination."

He held back further explanation, leaving Osta to his own conjectures.

Seeming to take the hint, Osta didn't press further. Instead, he shifted the conversation back to the aquatic monster.

"I've been able to piece together the whispers and conjecture, and it seems there are three kinds of aquatic monsters in the underground river:

"The first appears to be a drowned corpse, bloated and eerily pale. The second resembles a grotesquely mutated fish, standing nearly as tall as a man, covered in sturdy scales that seem impervious to harm. The third bears an uncanny resemblance to strands of black hair floating atop the water, only to suddenly reach out and ensnare the unwary souls on the banks, dragging them under.

"These aquatic monsters, however, aren't particularly formidable. Most of their attacks on humans end in failure, which accounts for the abundance of tales and rumors.

"They're an elusive lot. Sometimes seen two or three times a month, sometimes they disappear entirely. I ventured down there last night myself, but aside from my unfortunate slip, I found no trace of them."

Lumian scoffed at this, saying, "With your level of combat prowess, I wouldn't bet on your return if you ran into one of them."

Osta only managed a sheepish smile in response, not deigning to refute the comment.

The only reason he dared to venture there was due to the aquatic monsters' reputed weakness and his own divination.

Lumian's brow furrowed in contemplation. Given the aquatic monsters' record, any Beyonder team from the two Churches or Bureau 8 could effortlessly eradicate them. So, why were they still prevalent?

If the underground river concealed a greater peril, any poor soul encountering the aquatic monster should have no chance of escape.

As these thoughts spun in his mind, Lumian took the materials Osta Trul had provided and carefully concealed them between a pair of nearby rocks.

He was cautious, thinking that should he engage in a heated battle with the aquatic creature in the future, these delicate items might get damaged.

Afterward, Lumian handed Osta a 5 verl d'or note.

"This is for your insights about the aquatic monsters."

Lumian picked up his carbide lamp and, following Osta's instructions and the tunnel signs, began his journey towards the underground river.

A few moments of hesitation later, Osta quickly rose, grabbing his own carbide lamp and hurriedly following Lumian.

Upon hearing the rapid footsteps, Lumian spun around, his puzzled gaze landing on Osta.

Osta managed a strained smile and said, "I'll come with you. I might be of some assistance."

"You?" Lumian couldn't veil his incredulous disdain.

Osta cleared his throat before divulging his actual motive.

"The aquatic monster is a spiritual being. It's improbable that you'll want everything. I-I'm hoping to scavenge what you leave behind."

If fortune smiled upon him and he found a buyer for the parts, he could make a tidy sum of more than ten verl d'or!

Lumian merely stared at Osta, letting the tension build before finally breaking into a grin.

"You're welcome to tag along, but don't expect me to play your bodyguard."

From what he could discern, Osta's luck was veering away from a bloody end and instead showing promise of a minor financial windfall.

Essentially, if Osta joined him on this underground river expedition, it implied that the hunt might be relatively safe and potentially lucrative.

Of course, Lumian couldn't be entirely sure that his decision wouldn't sway the course of Osta's luck.

"No problem." Osta replied, devoid of apprehension.

In his mind, he'd merely be tailing Ciel from a distance. If they happened to encounter an aquatic monster, he'd simply keep a wider berth. The threat to his own life seemed minimal at best.

Osta's unwavering resolution prompted Lumian to study him a moment longer.

Seeing that his luck hadn't shifted, Lumian lifted his gaze, picked up his carbide lamp and resumed his journey forward.

In a way, having someone like Osta trailing behind had its benefits.

Sometimes, the art of fishing required bait. On other occasions, in the face of a formidable monster, one needn't outrun the beast. One just needed to outpace their so-called allies!

The two of them ventured deeper into the subterranean world, each step guided by the flickering light of their carbide lamps.

After roughly ten minutes, they were engulfed by an escalating humidity, and Lumian could discern the faint murmur of flowing water.

He held his lamp aloft, casting an eye over the tunnel signage before veering into a pathway shrouded in darkness to his right.

Soon, the telltale shimmer of water, distorted by the lamp's radiance, beckoned ahead.

Lumian approached the underground river with caution.

It stretched five to six meters wide, ensconced beneath a naturally-formed stone dome peppered with stalactites. The water was relatively clear, meandering through the carved gullies.

Apart from a scattering of moss, Lumian detected no signs of life at first glance.

Osta had already ceased advancing, observing from a safe distance as the dangerous Beyonder meticulously combed through the riverside.

The pair maintained a distance of over ten meters, sporadically progressing and halting.

Fifteen minutes elapsed, and Lumian's search bore no fruit.

Half an hour passed, and the situation remained unchanged.

As the path ahead began to constrict, Lumian's keen eye spotted some anomalies.

By the riverbank, several rocks lay scattered, their edges tinged with soil.

A struggle here? This thought nudged Lumian's heart as he cautiously neared the area.

He crouched down, setting the carbide lamp aside and examined the vicinity with careful scrutiny.

Soon enough, he discovered a pair of footprints and signs of something being dragged away.

Yet, where these traces led, the river flowed transparent and calm. The riverbed was clearly visible and bore no hint of lurking dangers.

Drip. A solitary droplet of liquid landed on Lumian's nape.

It was chilly and adhesive.

An immediate sense of peril overwhelmed Lumian. Without delay, he jerked his head upwards.

In the cavernous interlude between stalactites, a glistening figure of grayish-white writhed.

Its head resembled a python, the body slick with scales akin to a fish. From where fins should have been, emerged two arms and a single leg, eerily human-like.

The monster's mouth gaped open, unveiling a neat row of ferocious white teeth. From its mouth corner dripped a viscous and foul-smelling liquid.

In the following heartbeat, the monster pounced, soaring towards Lumian.

Crouched on the ground, Lumian tumbled backwards.

Simultaneously, his body coiled like a spring, catapulting his right leg upwards in a swift whip-like motion.

With a satisfying crack, Lumian, teetering on the brink of falling, landed a solid kick on the airborne monster who failed to evade the strike, hurling it towards the opposing stone wall.

Crash!

The monster collided with the rocky facade.

Lumian was back on his feet, charging at his opponent with the feral urgency of a cheetah.

As the monster slid off the wall, Lumian's form was mirrored in its muddy yellow eyes.

Lumian reached out, seizing its arm.

The monster didn't evade but opened its palm to welcome the assault.

Each of its digits sprouted sharp scales, glinting ominously with a deep blue sheen.

Without warning, Lumian twisted his elbow and flicked his wrist, clasping the monster's wrist with both hands to thwart the menacing blue scales.

He then extended his right foot, sweeping away the monster's lone leg.

With just one leg, the monster was powerless to resist. Its only option was to harness Lumian's grip on its wrist to propel itself upward, its solitary leg trailing behind and its monstrous maw leading the charge, ready to devour Lumian's entire head.

At this critical moment, Lumian relinquished his hold, lowered his stance, and rolled towards the stone wall.

Thud!

The aquatic monster landed heavily behind him.

In a fluid motion, Lumian swiveled, snatching the monster's leg. Channeling his strength from the core, he swung it towards the stone wall.

Crash!

The monster's skull crumpled upon impact.

Lumian didn't pause. He maintained his swinging momentum, battering the monster against the pillar, the wall, and the floor, with dark red blood and pale yellow fluid splattering everywhere.

Amid the pounding sounds, craters formed on the stone wall, and the monster's skull started to fragment, the contents spilling out in a gruesome red tide.

More than ten meters away, Osta Trul stood agape, utterly mesmerized by the violent spectacle.

How savage!

Incredible!

Thump! Lumian unceremoniously dropped the mutilated, lifeless aquatic monster onto the ground.

Chapter 160: Pervert

Osta Trul had never questioned Ciel's competence in tackling the aquatic monster, yet the ruthless efficiency with which he dispatched it caught him off guard.

It felt much like witnessing an adult landing a blow on a child.

A persistent inquiry bobbed to the surface of Osta's thoughts.

To what path and Sequence could Ciel possibly belong?

Why could he engage in combat and appear to wield formidable prophetic capabilities?

Within a region speckled by dark-crimson and dull-golden symbols, Lumian crouched, brandishing his ceremonial silver dagger. He slid the blade into the monster's open wound, cleaving through its flesh, and deposited it in the hollow timber container prepared earlier.

Once two containers brimmed with the monster's flesh and scales casting a dim cerulean glow, he uncapped a metallic flask and began collecting the monster's blood that burbled ceaselessly.

Witnessing this, Osta methodically closed the gap between him and the vanquished monster, lingering nearby.

Before too long, Lumian rose, pivoted, and retraced his steps.

Scrambling, Osta hastily crouched and started amassing blood, scales, and what he believed to be spiritually rich organs.

His gaze frequently darted to Lumian, who was steadily increasing his distance, showing no signs of halting for Osta.

A sense of unease began to seep into Osta.

After all, Ciel had dispatched the aquatic monster with terrifying ease. Given his earlier performance, Osta feared that Ciel could also eliminate him without much effort. Should he remain alone by this subterranean river in the depth of the darkness, and should another monster be lured by the scent of blood, he would find himself in dire straits!

With a sense of urgency, Osta hastily stowed the harvested materials, not daring to dawdle. Fighting the temptation to salvage more of the monster's remains, he left a good 90% behind and hurried after Lumian.

As their carbide lamps winked out at the tunnel's end, darkness reclaimed the area, save for the perpetual whisper of water.

After an indeterminate time had passed, a group of thrill-seeking university students made their way through the cavernous labyrinth, kerosene lanterns in hand.

They discovered a partially collapsed stone wall and a pathway disordered and fragmented.

Apart from that, all was serene and silent. Not a trace of the aquatic monster or blood stains were found.

…

Having bid Osta Trul adieu, Lumian found himself a seat in a public carriage, bound for Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman.

Retrieving the remainder of his ingredients from Auberge du Coq Doré's Room 207, he grasped his carbide lamp and plunged once more into the realm below ground.

His destination was the former site of the ritual, a quarry cave. His goal was to prepare the mysterious concoction required for the Prophecy Spell before the veil of night descended. Come nightfall, he intended to make his way to the nearest hospital, and procure a recently departed body from the morgue.

As Lumian descended from the floor, mimicking the surface world, his pace slackened.

Under the glow of the carbide lamp, he noticed fresh, evident footprints marking the slightly damp path.

Heavy footprints… Lumian studied them for a moment, voicing his puzzlement.

From the looks of these prints, he concluded that the passerby must've weighed upwards of 100 kilograms, or been shouldering something hefty.

Who could it be? An underworld smuggler? Lumian had his suspicions, but he didn't intend to tail them.

Trier's subterranean labyrinth was brimming with people. Obsessing over each footprint would only exhaust him.

Besides, the other party had no quarrel with him. Provided they didn't interfere with his upcoming ritual magic, he had no concern even if he was ready to ensure their silence.

Turning the lamp's dial, Lumian tempered the reaction between carbide and water, thus dimming the flame's intensity and casting less light.

He was concerned that the maker of the footprints was near, and might detect the bright light closing in from behind.

Continuing his journey, Lumian suddenly halted, nose twitching.

He detected a familiar aroma.

A musky perfume designed to awaken masculine desires, intermingled with a citrus hint.

After a brief moment of mental rifling, Lumian identified the scent's owner.

Little Minx Jenna, the Showy Diva!

Could these be her footprints? Preposterous. Surely she doesn't weigh more than 100 kilograms? She's not cast of iron! Besides, the prints were clearly a man's… Lumian mulled over two possibilities.

Either Jenna is adept at concealing her tracks, leaving no corresponding marks, or she's been hoisted by a man…

It's quite ordinary for two individuals collectively to exceed 100 kilograms…

Judging by the footprints, the man stands between 1.65 and 1.7 meters tall. His gait seems slightly peculiar…

As Lumian turned this over in his mind, his brow furrowed.

Piqued by curiosity, he resolved to tail the trail and ascertain what predicament Jenna had stumbled upon, or rather, what scheme she was brewing.

It was crucial to note that this Showy Diva was suspected of being Franca's paramour. Her entanglement might reveal a clandestine secret of the Savoie Mob.

This could potentially provide Lumian, who was pursuing "loftier heights," with an opportunity.

Lowering the carbide lamp's intensity further, he hoped that once switched off, the flame would snuff out promptly.

Sticking to the tunnel's shadows, he tracked the footprints, vigilantly gauging the distance. Should anything go awry, he was ready to extinguish the light.

As the footprints appeared increasingly fresh, as though only moments old, he extinguished the carbide lamp and ventured forward in the darkness, relying on his memorized path.

Before he knew it, Lumian had reached a divergence in the path, a faint blue light emanating from the stone wall's end on his left side.

Slipping his black gloves on, Lumian inched closer, a wraith in the shadows.

The blue light radiated from a small cave nestled at the end of the stone wall.

Stationed against the stone, Lumian tucked himself into the shadow's embrace, craning his neck ever so slightly to catch a glimpse of what lay within.

At the cave's heart, a rather primitive iron-black carbide lamp sat in a relatively flat expanse.

Nearby, a capacious bag of grayish-white fabric bulged, seemingly at its full capacity.

A man loomed beside the bag, adorned in a blue cap, a common tweed suit of brown that one would see in Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman, with a linen shirt peeking out from beneath his darker jacket.

The man's breathing was noticeably labored. Standing nearly 1.7 meters tall, his side profile revealed a thin and slightly worn countenance, his brown eyes ablaze with unmasked desire.

Lumian's gaze dropped, registering the man's arousal.

He inwardly chided, Impatient, aren't we? No wonder he was lagging. That explains the irregularity in his footprints.

Lumian grew more convinced that the bag concealed none other than Jenna, the Little Minx.

She must have fallen prey to a kidnapper and rapist.

The man proceeded to remove his cap, casting it aside as his heavy panting echoed through the cave.

His countenance was laid bare before Lumian.

His eyebrows, pale and disordered, were sparse. His eyes sagged slightly at the corners. His nose was a hint of red at the tip, and his mouth bore dry, cracked lips. His complexion was a shade too pale, betraying signs of fatigue and exertion.

The man squatted, loosening the bag's ties, revealing its contents.

Lumian's intuition proved correct—it was indeed Jenna, the "Showy Diva."

Her customarily tied brownish-yellow hair was in disarray, cascading over her body. Her eyes were sealed shut, framed by a layer of deep shadows. Adorned in a white blouse and a beige fluffy short skirt, it was unclear whether she had lost or hadn't yet donned her mole.

As the man drew Jenna from the bag, his breathing was so labored that Lumian could discern it effortlessly, even if he wasn't a Hunter.

Such a strong desire… bordering on the perverse… Lumian found himself thinking this almost subconsciously.

Stumbling upon such a scenario, he resolved to come to Jenna's aid while he was here. If the Savoie Mob's boss ever considered appointing a new leader, "Red Boots" Franca might vouch for him.

But a hasty rescue wasn't on his agenda. Lumian intended to observe further, ascertain whether the man possessed any unique abilities that emboldened him to cross a leader of the Savoie Mob, "Red Boots" Franca.

He would swoop in once the man was mid-stripping, incapacitated in his haste.

If only I had a long-range weapon. This wouldn't be such a chore... Lumian heaved a sigh, pondering on getting the Savoie Mob to supply him with a firearm.

The man's hands found their way to Jenna's face, patting it lightly twice.

Next, he withdrew a small metal bottle, unscrewing the cap and brought it to Jenna's nose.

Achoo!

A sneeze jolted Jenna awake, her eyes fluttering open.

The man's visage reflected in her wide blue eyes, sparking alarm. An instinctive urge to rise seized her.

But in the next moment, she registered the absence of strength in her body, rendering resistance futile.

"Damn you, dog sh*t, what do you think you're doing?" Jenna mustered enough strength to spit out the words.

A twisted smile spread across the man's face.

"Do you know? I've watched you sing countless times. Each time, the desire to tear away your clothing and have you perform solely for me is overwhelming."

Jenna hurled back, her voice seething with rage, "You lunatic, a bastard who deserves being f*cked by a donkey! You're done for! The Savoie Mob will have you sleeping with the fishes!"

The man remained silent, his brown eyes gleaming with a peculiar light.

Jenna's cheeks flushed crimson, and her breathing grew shallow.

Her body twitched involuntarily, her eyes widening in shock at her own reaction.

"This is just perfect. Not only a hint of resistance but a subconscious acquiescence too…" The man stood up, brimming with anticipation, rapidly disrobing his clothes, trousers, and shoes.

Lumian, observing from his hidden spot, felt a sudden jolt of alarm.

Jenna's reaction is abnormal! Could she be under the influence of some Beyonder power?

Did every human and dog in Trier have access to Beyonder powers?

Has Jenna been coerced into arousal? This… This bears an uncanny resemblance to Susanna Mattise and Monsieur Ive's act…

Lumian's thoughts spiraled as he drew out the ritual silver dagger, tucking it into his right pocket with the blade pointed inward and the hilt pressing against the outer cloth.

Lowering his body, he silently moved from the stone wall into the cave, stealthily approaching the man from the shadow's edge.

The man's attention was fully riveted on Jenna. His eyes blazed with a fanatic light, his face twisted into a perverse grin. As he worked his belt loose and shed his trousers, his gaze roved over Jenna's form.

Emerging from the shadows, Lumian sprang forth like a cheetah on the prowl.

Chapter 161: Special Traits

It was only when Lumian sprung from the darkness that the man—his gaze fixated solely on Jenna—realized the invasion of his secluded lair.

Bang! Bang! Bang! Lumian stormed in, raining a barrage of fists, elbows, knees, and feet upon the intruder.

The man was taken aback, yet not feeble. His resistance was robust, fending off blows with forearms while retreating. His chest, calves, and thighs bore the brunt of Lumian's missed strikes, but he held his ground.

With a shake of his head, his brown eyes morphed into a haunting green, casting an eerie reflection of Lumian.

Suddenly, Lumian was overwhelmed by a powerful surge of desire. Beside him, "Showy Diva" Jenna radiated a captivating allure as she strained to watch the struggle, her whole being pulsating with magnetism.

This desire exploded within Lumian like a live grenade. He ceased his assault, eyes smoldering with a reddish hue as his breaths quickened. Whirling around, he lunged towards Jenna.

Jenna sensed the abnormality and bellowed out, her voice a mix of anger and fear, "Pull yourself f*cking together!"

But her words were smothered as Lumian pinned her down.

In tandem with this action, a hard object pressed against Lumian's right side.

What was that? Reacting instinctively, his hand grazed the hilt of the ritual silver dagger he'd strategically placed for self-injury.

A vague understanding of his intent to use it flickered back into his mind.

In the next heartbeat, Lumian—now mostly irrational from his burgeoning desire—seized the handle of the silver dagger and drove it into his own flesh.

The silver tip sliced through cloth, skin, and muscle alike.

Excruciating pain thundered into Lumian's consciousness, restoring some rationality from the grips of his wild desire, allowing him to regain some lucidity.

Pretending nothing had changed, he continued his actions on Jenna, his hands wandering aimlessly.

"Are you f*cking useless? Can't even handle a pervert!" Jenna scolded, hoping to jolt her lone protector back to reality.

Seeing his opponent under control, the man hastily retrieved his own concealed dagger, preparing to strike Lumian from behind.

Just then, Lumian's hands slid and he steadied himself against the cool cave floor beside Jenna.

With a swift motion, he flexed his waist and kicked his right foot backward.

Whack!

Lumian struck, his attack to the man's groin swift and precise, akin to a whip's snap.

A guttural crunch echoed, the man's visage draining of color as pain contorted his features.

Clatter! His weapon slipped from his grasp.

He crumpled to the ground, writhing as he clutched his violated area, rendered helpless in the throes of debilitating agony.

Not one to squander an advantage, Lumian lunged, ensnaring his prey in a swift embrace.

His right arm snaked up, seizing the man's head and wrenching it with an unyielding force.

Crack!

The man was granted a view of his own back, his focus mercifully diverted from the torment below.

Once his adversary's life was unequivocally extinguished, Lumian withdrew his arms and produced his ritual silver dagger. With a white bandage he had in his possession, he attended to his own wound.

He held no fear of infection—even if such an eventuality arose, his Provoker constitution would endure until the 6 a.m. of the next day.

The primary purpose of his first-aid efforts was to prevent the cave from retaining traces of blood.

Jenna, sprawled on the cold ground, mustered the strength to hoist herself up. She observed as Lumian retracted his deadly grip and the man crumpled lifelessly to the ground.

Just like that? A shiver of shock rippled through her, effectively quelling her previously stoked desires.

She was no naive observer. She had gauged the formidable, almost magical aura of that lecherous man, but he was annihilated in mere seconds by this handsome rural lad!

Barely a heartbeat—eight or nine seconds at most—had transpired before a life was extinguished.

Upon tending to his injury, Lumian collected the man's outer garments and moved towards Jenna. She blinked out of her stupor and queried curiously, "Why are you here?"

Almost reflexively, she added jokingly, "Don't say you're enamored by me and have been trailing me?"

Lumian's response was a soft chuckle as he squatted down, drawing Jenna's hands behind her back.

"What are you doing?" Jenna's voice teetered on panic.

Despite her feeble struggles, Lumian effortlessly secured her wrists using the man's shirt.

In the blink of an eye, he pulled a dark jacket over Jenna's head, blocking her sight completely.

"Dogsh*t, bastard, pervert, what do you want?" Jenna's words tumbled out, a jumble of anger, anxiety, and confusion.

Lumian dismissed her outburst. Ripping off the remaining piece of his shirt, he wadded it up and thrust it into Jenna's ears and mouth.

"Mmmmm…" Jenna was silenced.

A resignation washed over her as she thought, Fine, I'll endure this like a dog bite. As long as he doesn't kill me…

Yet, her apprehension was met with stillness. Lumian had risen, leaving her side to approach the lifeless form on the cave floor.

Upon purifying his ritual silver dagger and wiping it clean, Lumian circumnavigated the petite cave, weaving a wall of spirituality.

Next, he commenced the Summoning Dance.

His intention was to invoke a spirit via this rite!

Despite this method's efficacy falling notably short compared to traditional psychic spells, the goal of the Summoning Dance wasn't strictly spirit invocation. Nevertheless, it was far better than the alternative—doing nothing.

His spirituality melded with natural forces and diffused in every direction, but was confined within the wall of spirituality enveloping the cave.

Thus, the summoning wouldn't attract any unwanted entities.

In the midst of the chaotic, mesmerizing dance, Lumian perceived the spectral form of the man.

Drawing the ritual silver dagger, he let a droplet of blood fall, commanding the spirit to bond with him.

Almost instantaneously, Lumian was gripped by a chilling sensation as an unusual and fervent heat ignited within him. This was accompanied by an overwhelming desire for women.

Is this an actual side-effect? Does it parallel the insatiable hunger experienced with the mouth-orifice monster? Lumian made a conscious effort to avoid glancing at Jenna, who was now bound and blindfolded, as he noted his newly acquired "head."

Since the man had recently perished, his other "head" was saturated with lingering emotions such as lust, pain, fury, loathing, and the instinctive urge to utilize his distinctive traits. Also present were traces of obsessions and the most profound memories.

Analyzing the situation, Lumian understood that this pervert possessed far more abilities and traits than the mouth-orifice monster.

"Inciting avarice in others;

"Becoming miserly and greedy, able to detect items that once belonged to him;

"Stimulating others' appetites;

"Maintaining a robust and healthy physical state;

"Existing in perpetual hunger and thirst;

"Constantly utilizing mental faculties to augment strength, reflexes, agility, and resilience;

"Employing one's gaze, speech, and actions to subtly induce a measure of lust in the target.

"Through direct contact and spell-like abilities, the target will experience varying degrees of lust.

"Preparing rape drugs and the like.

"Differentiating hormonal information of various individuals…"

Did Monsieur Ive utilize the first one? This pervert is indeed connected to Monsieur Ive and Susanna Mattise… A constant state of hunger and thirst. No wonder he targeted Jenna and dared to abduct her. Can this be categorized as a negative effect? Indeed, Jenna may not be his first victim… Lumian didn't select any specific trait. He was limited to general observations of the spectral companion and was unable to comprehend any of the more nuanced abilities.

Lumian made an attempt to amplify the man's most profound memories.

Suddenly, he was in the midst of a bustling theater. On stage stood a young woman clad in a divine white dress, her deeply carved features accented by lake-like eyes, crystal clear and rippling with innocence and charm.

Charlotte Calvino… Lumian identified the woman instantly. She was the reigning star of the Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons.

Simultaneously, Lumian felt the man's excitement, the predatory hunger within him intensifying.

However, with the crowd around, he refrained from any untoward behavior. He bolted to the lavatory as soon as the scene concluded.

As the memory faded, Lumian ceased the Summoning Dance, letting the man's spirit withdraw from his being.

Almost immediately, he performed the Summoning Dance again, inviting the spirit to rejoin him.

This was because each possession allowed Lumian to select only one trait, one memory, or one obsession. Once chosen, it was irrevocable.

Lumian had opted for one of the spirit's most poignant memories.

In the next instant, Jenna appeared before him, giving an overtly dramatic performance on-stage.

"…" The situation became clear to Lumian. He couldn't resist clenching his jaw and cursing, "Is there nothing else in your mind but women, women, women!"

He abandoned the idea of spirit channeling, regretting that he hadn't yet achieved the status of a Contractee, unable to forge a long-term contract with the spirit and borrow a skill. Lumian appraised the man's traits, certain that some of them would prove immensely useful in combat.

If only I could rear this spirit… Lumian sighed, conceding his present limitations.

Subsequently, he dissolved the spiritual barrier, sheathed his ritual silver dagger, and returned to Jenna. He removed the jacket shrouding her eyes and the shirt binding her hands.

Jenna winced, plucking the cloth from her mouth and ears.

She massaged her reddened wrist, throwing a skeptical look at Lumian who was busy searching the pockets of the man's clothing. She inquired, "Why did you blindfold me and block my ears earlier?"

"I was protecting you. You shouldn't see or hear what isn't meant for you," Lumian responded in a half-jesting tone, his search yielding a total of 8 verl d'or coins and three somewhat antiquated metal canisters.

Perceiving no threat from him, Jenna huffed. "What could possibly be unseen or unheard here? Unless you… you didn't… with the corpse…"

Her voice faded as she connected a few dots, roughly guessing that Lumian might have been using some power to extract information from the corpse.

Upon noticing Lumian evaluating the three metal canisters, Jenna deflected the topic and reminisced, "One of these bottles contains a gas that knocks you out, leaving you feeble. That's how he abducted me.

"Also, another bottle has this gas, extremely foul-smelling but strangely enough, it wakes you up. Damn, that pervert deserves being f*cked by a donkey!

"I don't know what's in the remaining bottle, and I can't distinguish between the other two."

Chapter 162: Fresh Corpse

Lumian crouched down, clutching the three metal canisters in his hands. He cast a glance at Jenna, a mischievous smile playing on his lips.

"I know just the way to confirm it."

"What…" Jenna's curiosity piqued, but soon a hint of nervousness and panic crept into her expression, triggered by Lumian's enigmatic smile.

Unfazed by her reaction, Lumian responded with a smile of his own.

"Help me determine which canister is which," he suggested.

"What sort of joke is this?" Jenna thought, grateful for the fact that had Lumian not saved her and aware of her own weakened state, she would have unleashed a stream of curses.

However, Lumian's expression turned serious.

"Rest assured, if it contains the gas that knocks you out, the worst that can happen is you fainting again. I won't harm you, and even if I wanted to, you wouldn't be able to resist. Besides, once we ascertain which canister is which, I can use a stimulating gas to revive you and bring you back to normal."

"If luck is on your side and you encounter the stimulating gas, you'll regain most of your strength immediately," Lumian added.

That makes sense. Regardless of the outcome, it can't possibly be harmful. She was almost convinced by Lumian's words.

However, snapping out of her daze, Jenna clenched her teeth and voiced her concerns.

"But what if you end up selecting the other canister? We have no idea what it contains!"

If it turned out to be poisonous gas, there was no one present with the knowledge to treat her.

Lumian responded with a mocking tone, a smile still tugging at the corners of his mouth, "Are you daft? Canisters filled mostly with gas and those containing liquid have a significant weight difference!"

"This particular bottle should be filled with liquid!"

He picked up one of the metal canisters and gave it a slight shake.

He "clearly" heard the unmistakable sloshing sound of liquid inside before pocketing it.

"Is that so…" Although Jenna had been mocked, her attention was focused on the "experiment," and anger didn't consume her.

After a few seconds of hesitation, she closed her eyes and tilted her head slightly, determined.

"Go ahead, give it a try!"

Lumian stowed one of the metal bottles in his pants pocket, leaving only one in his grasp.

With a leisurely pace, he brought it near Jenna's nose.

In the next moment, Jenna slowly cracked open her eyes.

Lumian chuckled, twisting open the cap.

In an instant, an intensely pungent odor, reminiscent of fermented excrement, assailed Jenna's senses, causing her to sneeze repeatedly. Tears threatened to spill from her eyes, and her nose threatened to drip.

However, each sneeze served as a catalyst, restoring a significant portion of her strength. As Lumian sealed the canister and rose from his crouch, Jenna leaped to her feet, instinctively stretching her limbs.

Jenna happily adjusted her clothing and skirt, muttering to herself, "Seems like luck is on my side!"

On her first attempt, she managed to obtain the canister with the foul-smelling gas.

But then she noticed Lumian's playful expression.

Jenna's heart skipped a beat, sensing that something was off.

Curiosity getting the better of her, she inquired, "Did you already know which gas canister was which from the start?"

Is that the reason he was able to accurately select the metal canister containing the pungent gas?

Lumian grinned and handed the metal canister to Jenna.

"Smell the cap for yourself."

Jenna eyed the canister suspiciously before cautiously sniffing the bottle.

A faint odor lingered, not particularly stimulating or potent, but still unpleasant.

"The other canister has no scent," Lumian added with a smile.

Jenna's flushed face turned an even deeper shade of red.

She felt foolish, having believed the words of the other party and willingly taken part in the so-called "experiment."

Any feelings of gratitude she had prepared were instantly quashed.

Ignoring Jenna's enraged state, Lumian pocketed the 8 verl d'or banknote and marked the metal canister with a scratch before stowing it away.

Though the man possessed the ability to sense the whereabouts of items that had once belonged to him, Lumian wasn't afraid of being tracked since the man was already dead.

As for the function of the liquid in the remaining metal canister, he planned to test it on rats, stray dogs, and other animals.

Having completed the necessary tasks, Lumian pointed at the pervert's lifeless body and instructed Jenna, "Take a good look at him and commit his face to memory. We'll need to investigate who he is."

"He probably has accomplices."

"Alright." Jenna strode toward the corpse, earnestly engraving his face into her memory.

After observing for a while, the recent events flooded back into her mind, fueling her anger. She raised her right leg and ruthlessly kicked the pervert's groin.

Again and again, without restraint.

"Dogsh*t, pervert, damn your mother, damn your entire family!" Jenna vented her emotions to her heart's content.

Lumian winced, feeling a twinge of pain, as he lowered his head to clean up the remnants at the scene.

Once Jenna had calmed down, he approached her with a large grayish-white cloth bag. As he stuffed the corpse and clothes inside, he casually inquired, "How did he abduct you?"

Jenna smoothed her disheveled brownish-yellow hair and tied it back into a simple ponytail.

Gritting her teeth, she recounted, "I encountered him in an alley next to the Salle de Bal Brise. He claimed to be a fan of my singing and asked for an autograph. The paper he handed me was sprinkled with that odorless gas. As soon as I signed it, I sensed something was wrong and lost most of my strength.

"After that, he attacked me, restrained me, and brought the bottle to my nose. That's when I passed out."

Lumian couldn't help but mock, "Aren't you being too careless?"

Jenna didn't agree.

"I've seen him several times while singing. I was certain that he genuinely enjoyed listening to me. Otherwise, I wouldn't have given him the time of day.

"And, as an unknown singer, it's an honor to have someone ask for your autograph…

"Besides, the gas doesn't have any smell!"

How could anyone have guarded against this?

Lumian scoffed.

"That's not what I meant. It's obvious that the gas dissipates quickly on paper. It needs to be used within a short period of time to have a certain effect. In other words, that pervert has been tailing you for a while and has probably figured out your routines. Otherwise, he wouldn't have cornered you so accurately in an empty alley and tainted the paper with the gas ten to twenty seconds in advance.

"Didn't you notice despite being followed for so long?"

Jenna fell silent, at times clenching her teeth, at times frustrated.

Lumian shifted his gaze and chuckled.

It was understandable that she didn't notice. That guy could discern hormonal information from different individuals.

If it weren't for the fact that Monsieur Ive was clearly weaker than the pervert and probably hadn't mastered the power of lust, Lumian would have suspected that his identity as a "robber" had been exposed.

He resealed the grayish-white cloth bag and used it to further erase any traces at the scene. Observing this, Jenna lent him a hand.

She's quite skilled at dealing with evidence… Lumian glanced at Jenna and left the cave with the cloth bag slung over his back, harboring some suspicions.

Due to Jenna intentionally not mentioning her unusual behavior under the influence of the pervert, Lumian believed that this Showy Diva had some understanding of the Beyonder world, or she might even be one herself.

And her source of information or power most likely stemmed from "Red Boots" Franca from the Savoie Mob.

When Lumian arrived at his hiding spot, he ignited the carbide lamp and held it in his hand, glancing back at the depths of the path.

The path descended. There was darkness in the distance,

a void that swallowed everything as it lay in wait for its prey to approach.

"What are you looking at?" Jenna asked curiously.

She sensed that Ciel was acting mysterious.

Lumian ended his gaze and smiled.

"I'm wondering where we'll end up if we keep going down. Perhaps the Trier from the Fourth Epoch?"

In reality, what he was truly pondering was:

The abnormal ability displayed just now was strikingly similar to Monsieur Ive's. If the two of them were accomplices, would they instinctively choose a familiar place in the underground world for the crime? The same underground destination where Monsieur Ive had entered that night?

If that were the case, perhaps he would uncover something if he continued down this path.

Disappointed, Jenna remarked, "That's not a good place."

Lumian remained silent as he retraced his steps along the path. Lost in her own thoughts, Jenna followed silently, clutching the carbide lamp left behind by the pervert.

Just as he was about to reach the level that roughly replicated the layout aboveground, Lumian halted and said with a contemptuous smile, "Do you need me to escort you to the surface?"

"You're not going back?" Jenna asked, surprised.

Lumian shrugged. "I need to find a suitable place to dispose of this corpse."

Jenna nodded and refrained from prying further. "I can ascend on my own. I've been underground before."

Does that imply you possess the means to protect yourself? Lumian watched Jenna depart with light footsteps, inwardly sighing.

Does every human and dog in Trier have access to Beyonder powers?

Is something amiss with Trier, or is something amiss with me? Why do I always encounter such individuals?

Shaking his head, he hoisted the corpse onto his back. As he dealt with the footprints, he made his way toward the hidden quarry cave where he had previously sought the boon.

Along the way, he performed two instances of anti-tracking to ensure no one was tailing him.

Upon reaching the underground quarry cave, Lumian tossed aside the grayish-white cloth bag containing the corpse and arranged the altar.

Initially, he had intended to visit the nearest hospital morgue during the night to acquire fresh corpses, but now he had a better option!

After setting up the altar, lighting the candles, and constructing a wall of spirituality, Lumian retrieved the pre-drawn faux goatskin adorned with the corresponding symbol.

The central pattern on the paper consisted of a ring formed by thorns, encircled by symbols representing eyes, curves, and rivers.

Just tracing these patterns in Room 207 had drained Lumian's spirituality.

With the faux goatskin in place, Lumian took two steps back and gazed at the flickering candles, preparing for the subsequent incantation.

In this ritual, one couldn't employ the phrase "I! I summon in my name" to beseech oneself. Instead, they had to craft a three-line description of their being and feign the role of a creature from the spirit world.

It could be done in any manner, devoid of any wielding of authority, as long as it could pinpoint the location within the wall of spirituality.

Lumian parted his lips and muttered in Hermes, "Cordu Village's Trickster King, Aurore Lee's younger brother, an entity known as Lumian Lee…"

Chapter 163: Three Questions

The flame of the orange candle, representing the focal point of the prayer, flickered as though stirred by an unseen breeze. Apart from that, it remained unaffected, maintaining its ordinary hue without any hint of transformation.

Lumian sensed an unusual pulsation deep within his soul, as if a distant cry had reached his ethereal essence.

Temporarily unable to respond, he continued to recite the incantation.

"I implore you,

"I beseech to be bestowed the Prophetic Concoction…"

In this ritualistic spell, words like "help create" couldn't be used. It had to be "bestowed" or "gifted."

Lumian's spirit trembled with each uttered word, like ripples extending outward, leaving him with an unsettling sensation of both elevation and dizziness.

Taking two steps forward, he surveyed the aquatic monster's flesh, the lizard eyes, and the gray henbane. Retrieving the faux goatskin adorned with enigmatic symbols, he positioned it atop the orange candle's flame, symbolizing the target of his prayer.

Once the faux goatskin was ignited and placed within the natural hollow of the stone altar, Lumian meticulously gathered tulip powder and other ingredients, sprinkling them into the flames.

A peculiar fragrance swiftly permeated the ethereal barrier, causing Lumian to experience hallucinations.

He witnessed a profusion of mystical symbols adorning the faux goatskin, materializing in the void, in constant motion and reconfiguration, perpetually altering their collective form.

Lumian stepped back and scrutinized the diverse materials on the altar. In a resonant voice infused with Hermes' power, he invoked, "Tulip, a herb that belongs to inevitability, please pass your powers to my incantation!

"…"

As Lumian uttered the final word, his spirit's ripples merged, granting him the illusion that he could graze the candle's flame with a mere touch of his palm.

Simultaneously, a searing sensation ignited within his chest, accompanied by a faint hum resonating in his ears. His surroundings spun, akin to being tossed into the air and spun around repeatedly.

Guided by his spirituality, Lumian extended his right hand, pressing it toward the candle's flame.

His vision dimmed as his spirituality surged forth, intertwining with the flames.

The candle's flame promptly expanded, casting a radiant and ethereal glow upon the entire altar.

The disparate ingredients of the Prophetic Concoction, once gathered, stirred and converged. Blood churned, and shadows undulated, crafting an exceptionally sinister tableau.

Struggling to maintain a steady flow of his spiritual essence, Lumian observed the physical components fade into specters, completing their reassembly.

A dark crimson phantom, infused with silver-black tincture, materialized before him, condensing into a murky liquid.

The liquid incessantly bubbled, each burst releasing sinuous tendrils of silver-black light, reminiscent of slithering serpents.

Lumian advanced two steps, seizing a metal canister from the altar. Unscrewing its lid, he positioned it beneath the liquid's surface.

The dark liquid swiftly coalesced, streaming into the canister, nearly filling it to the brim.

Having placed the vessel containing the Prophetic Concoction back on the altar, Lumian composed himself, preparing his mental state.

As Lumian calmed the ripples within his spirit, he recollected the entire process of the ritual.

If the thorn symbol hadn't reached a certain level of activation, elevating my status, I wouldn't have been able to respond and the endeavor would have failed… I can only perform two similar ritualistic spells consecutively… Lumian ruminated, gradually finding his thoughts settling.

Completing the five ritualistic spells required a minimum of Sequence 7, or even Contractee. Lumian, an Alms Monk of Sequence 8, could only accomplish it by relying on the corruption within his body.

Correspondingly, his spirituality couldn't endure for much longer.

After concluding the ritual and tidying the altar, Lumian dispelled the ethereal barrier and approached the grayish-white cloth bag to drag out the lifeless body.

With gentle care, he twisted the other party's head to its original position and opened the mouth.

Bathed in the glow of the blue carbide lamp, Lumian retrieved the Prophetic Concoction, unscrewed its lid, and poured the dark liquid into the corpse's mouth.

Rather than immediately permeating through the larynx, the liquid remained within, akin to a pool of water.

Suddenly, Lumian sensed the quarry's breeze turning colder, and the carbide lamp's light deepened to a richer blue.

Almost simultaneously, he heard a rumbling sound, witnessing the corpse's throat writhe as it consumed all of the Prophetic Concoction.

In the next moment, the naked corpse sat upright, engulfed in an unnatural darkness that defied illumination.

His eyes snapped open upon his pallid, worn face. The once-brown irises had lost their color, now crystal-clear and devoid of hue.

Within the depths of those translucent eyes, layers of vibrant colors seemed to reside. A pure light hung high, countless nearly imperceptible figures, and flickering silver radiance…

Withstanding the bone-chilling cold, Lumian composed himself and inquired, "Where will Guillaume Bénet, the former padre from Cordu Village in Dariège, Riston Province, Intis Republic, appear in a month?"

During the interim, Lumian had contemplated the three questions he wished to pose.

Four primary rules governed the questioning:

First, it must pertain to the future. Inquiries regarding someone's whereabouts or past actions were forbidden.

Secondly, the description had to be precise enough, or an unanswered query would arise. The name Guillaume Bénet was commonplace in other parts of Intis. Numerous individuals shared the same name. Unless the village of origin was specified, the corpse might reveal the future fate of a different Guillaume Bénet.

Thirdly, regardless of the corpse's country of origin or familiarity with the corresponding language, it would respond in the same language as the question posed.

Lastly, a question could only contain one element requiring an answer. It could not be framed in the manner of "when and where will it be?"

The corpse's pale countenance took on a dark green tinge. It parted its lips and uttered in Intis, "Trier's Quartier de la Princesse Rouge."

The voice resonated with an illusory and ethereal quality, as if it emanated from another realm. It bore no resemblance to the deceased's living voice.

So, it can only be narrowed down to the Quartier de la Princesse Rouge? Lumian's brow furrowed slightly.

He could comprehend the reason behind it—this was not a Prophetic Concoction obtained from hidden entities. Its creator was essentially an Alms Monk, hence the effects naturally wouldn't be outstanding.

Lumian proceeded to raise his second question.

"Where will I encounter Louis Lund, the former butler of the village administrator in Cordu Village, Dariège, Riston Province, Intis Republic?"

He refrained from mentioning Madame Pualis since he was uncertain of her connection to Madame Night. He feared that her elevated status might interfere with the prophecy's accuracy.

The corpse's eyes remained vacant and translucent as it gazed ahead. It responded with an ethereal voice, "Trier's Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman Avenue du Marché."

Avenue du Marché? It seems Louis Lund's presence there isn't mere happenstance... Lumian mused, a sense of satisfaction washing over him.

As he contemplated, he noticed the strange visions reflected in the corpse's transparent eyes gradually fading. Acting swiftly, he posed his third question.

"Where will Monsieur Ive, the proprietor of Auberge du Coq Doré in Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman, be from 11 p.m. to 12 p.m. this Sunday?"

Having observed Monsieur Ive previously entering the underground at this time, Lumian sought to ascertain the specifics of his destination.

Considering that Monsieur Ive had recently been "robbed" and had visited the police headquarters, he might refrain from venturing into the underground for the time being. Lumian specified the time as Sunday.

The corpse swiftly replied, "Trier's Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman, Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons."

With that, the corpse thudded to the ground and closed its eyes once more, emanating the putrid stench of death.

Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons once again… Lumian bundled the corpse back into the cloth bag, intending to bury it even deeper underground.

…

In front of a beige three-story building, a stubbly-bearded tramp found himself cornered by two valets beside a pillar.

"I-I'll leave now," he stammered, trembling.

At that moment, a man dressed as a butler approached, his face filled with surprise.

"Master, is that you? Master!"

"What?" The tramp was perplexed.

The butler couldn't contain his excitement.

"Don't you remember? You're the owner of this place, and we are all your loyal servants. You suffered a head injury and lost many memories. One day, you suddenly ran away from home.

"It's been months. I've finally found you! You've returned!"

"I'm not, I'm not…" The tramp remembered his past clearly.

However, the butler and the two valets refused to listen to his explanation. They "encircled" him and led him into the building.

"Madam, Madam, the Master has returned!" the butler shouted with elation.

Before long, the tramp laid eyes upon an elegant and beautiful woman.

She wore a light-green dress, her eyes exuding a mature allure.

Overwhelmed with joy, she burst into tears and threw herself into the tramp's arms.

"You're back! You're finally back!"

As he inhaled the sweet scent of her perfume and felt the softness of her body against his, the tramp attempted to argue that he wasn't her husband, but the words caught in his throat.

In a daze of confusion, he was guided to the dining room. There, under a crystal chandelier, he beheld a sumptuous feast—a dozen oysters, a pot of succulent chicken, a plate of beef stewed with prunes, suet pudding, salad, and a bottle of White Elixir wine…

Simultaneously, the tramp's gaze fell upon the oil paintings adorning the walls of the dining room.

One of them was a portrait, strikingly similar to him.

Could it truly be me? But I recall every experience… Could there be another who bears my resemblance? The tramp grew even more bewildered.

After indulging in a hearty meal and savoring fine wines, he was led to the bedroom. Soon, the beautiful and elegant madam entered, dressed in a silk nightgown.

Her eyes shimmered with tears as she spoke, "Do you still remember my passion?"

The tramp's breathing quickened, and he couldn't resist taking a step forward.

The two of them embraced passionately, tumbling onto the bed, their desires overwhelming them.

In that moment, the tramp began to "believe" that he truly was the owner of this grand house. He had a beautiful wife, a professional butler, and a multitude of servants.

Even if the original master were to return, he would ensure that the other was exposed as a fraud!

…

Lumian resurfaced and entered Auberge du Coq Doré, carrying the extinguished carbide lamp.

Madame Fels, who manned the front desk, immediately stood up upon seeing him.

"Ciel—Monsieur Ciel, Baron Brignais wishes to meet you at the Salle de Bal Brise after dinner."

Baron Brignais is seeking me? What could it be about? Lumian nodded.

Chapter 164: Intelligence

Salle de Bal Brise, the café on the second floor.

Lumian strolled over to Baron Brignais with an air of nonchalance and took a seat.

Not only did he lack any sense of deference or humility, but he also showed a blatant disregard for basic politeness, as if they were equals.

Louis, standing discreetly behind Baron Brignais, silently shook his head.

He had encountered many such individuals before, and their fate had always been the same—either handed over to the police by the Savoie Mob or gravely wounded in a violent gunfight, losing their capabilities in the process. They had no choice but to become subservient, like dogs wagging their tails, in exchange for the gang's protection. Some met their demise due to various reasons, their bodies cast into the dark recesses of the underground world or packed into wooden barrels filled with stones and thrown into the depths of the Srenzo River.

"Good evening, Baron," Lumian greeted with a disarming smile.

Baron Brignais betrayed no sign of anger on his face. He leisurely took a puff from his mahogany-colored pipe and casually inquired, "Where have you been this afternoon?"

"Underground," Lumian responded, resembling the corpse that had imbibed the Prophecy Concoction. He answered the other party's questions without any elaboration.

If "Little Minx" Jenna and "Red Boots" Franca concealed the fact that he had dispatched the pervert and saved the former, his response would have been a display of utmost candor.

Baron Brignais appeared momentarily taken aback but refrained from further probing. As he rubbed the mahogany pipe in his hand, he calmly stated, "I have a task for you."

Without waiting for Lumian to inquire, he explained with a smile, "I hold great expectations for you. I believe you can become a crucial member of our Savoie Mob, entrusted with significant matters.

"However, my favorable opinion alone is insufficient. You must demonstrate strength that surpasses most and make contributions that garner their recognition."

A carrot dangling before a donkey? Lumian scoffed inwardly.

Outwardly, he deliberately narrowed his eyes.

"And what might this be about?"

Baron Brignais set aside his mahogany pipe, took a sip of his coffee, and adopted a soothing tone as he spoke,

"Assault any prominent member of the Poison Spur Mob. It would be best if you inflict severe injuries. Killing them outright works too."

Lumian chuckled.

"Just two days ago, you cautioned me against causing a commotion and provoking an all-out conflict between the Poison Spur Mob and us.

"Aren't you concerned that such actions might transpire, ultimately leading to you becoming a target of the police headquarters?"

Although he had intended to lie in wait for the Poison Spur Mob's "Hammer" Ait, Lumian refused to be treated as a fool by Baron Brignais.

Baron Brignais nodded, pleased with Lumian's astuteness.

"You are far more intelligent than those who surround me.

"For the past two days, I've been closely observing the Poison Spur Mob's reactions, and it seems they have no immediate plans for revenge against you.

"What does that imply?"

"It means they're terrified of our Savoie Mob," Lumian replied with a jest.

It was, of course, a jest. If the Poison Spur Mob feared the Savoie Mob, they would never have grown to become the second-largest mob in Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman.

Baron Brignais shook his head.

"In the past, they would have undoubtedly retaliated, exacting a higher toll than just medical expenses from our Savoie Mob.

"Moreover, after Margot's demise, they merely put on a show on the surface. In reality, they took no actions that would attract the police's attention. It seemed they were searching for the true assassin amidst the chaos.

"These recurring anomalies lead me to believe that the Poison Spur Mob is preparing for something significant—something very, very important. That's why they remain patient and restrained.

"I can't be certain whether their forthcoming actions will impact our Savoie Mob, but we cannot idly wait for answers."

At least you're astute… Lumian grudgingly commended Baron Brignais within his thoughts.

With a smile, Lumian posed a question, "Are you suggesting that I eliminate their key members and observe their reactions?

"If they endure it without retaliation, it signifies a considerably grave problem. We would need to instigate a full-blown conflict and compel them to expose the issue, wouldn't we?"

Baron Brignais chuckled.

"I enjoy conversing with clever individuals.

"So, are you willing to undertake this task?"

Though his tone appeared inquisitive, his posture, gaze, and actions left no doubt that it was an order.

Should Lumian refuse, the Savoie Mob would withdraw its protection.

Lumian chuckled.

"I require information on all the significant members of the Poison Spur Mob—names, appearances, capabilities, distinguishing traits, and whether they have immediate family or spouses…"

Louis, who stood behind Baron Brignais, was taken aback.

Why is he asking about the family members of the Poison Spur Mob leaders? Is he planning to use them?

Among Trier's mobs, an unspoken rule prevailed—one that everyone abided by unless it was an exceptional circumstance: never target family members who weren't involved in the mob.

Most individuals had parents, spouses, and children. If they were to abandon all moral boundaries and kill without hesitation, none would be spared. Everyone would be in jeopardy.

Secondly, dealing with the families of low-ranking mobsters held no value. However, at Baron Brignais's level, his family remained confidential, known to only a select few. Furthermore, they resided outside Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman.

Thirdly, those who held a certain status within the mob could be deemed ruthless. Threatening them with their families would only ignite their fury.

Fourthly, the annihilation of a family would inevitably make headlines, angering the higher-ups at the police headquarters and triggering a severe crackdown.

Thus, it was only in the process of eliminating a faction that they would confront the family of an enemy leader, avoiding the sowing of seeds of animosity and serving as a deterrent to other mobs.

What was Ciel's intention inquiring about the immediate family and wife of a crucial member of the Poison Spur Mob?

Baron Brignais gazed at Lumian for a few moments before a slow smile crept across his face.

"The boss of the Poison Spur Mob is Roger, known as Black Scorpion. He resides at 126 Avenue du Marché. I'm uncertain if he has a wife or immediate family. Even if he does, they aren't in the market district. They might not even be in Trier.

"He possesses sinister spells and magical powers. Even I wouldn't dare to confront him."

Baron Brignais seized the opportunity to caution Lumian about the formidable strength of "Black Scorpion" Roger. It was wise to avoid any designs against him, for death would be the only outcome.

Sinister spells… A Beyonder focused on spellcasting? Considering Roger's ability to subdue Margot, he must be at least a Sequence 7. He might even possess a mystical artifact or Beyonder weapon… If Beyonders of this caliber lack robust bodies or special life-preserving abilities, they may resort to traps, close-range assassinations, and other methods. If their bodies aren't weak and they excel in close combat, or if they possess a substitution spell like Leah's paper figurine, I'll have hardly any chance of victory. Unless I employ the Luck Enhancement Spell to prearrange his misfortune and make him sufficiently unlucky… Lumian's thoughts raced like lightning, fleeting as they disappeared.

He nodded and inquired, "What about the others?"

Baron Brignais took a leisurely puff on his pipe before responding,"The Poison Spur Mob once had four powerful and significant members who were slightly inferior to us in the market district. However, after Margot's demise at your hands, his replacement, Wilson, is quite feeble. Their overall strength has greatly diminished.

"Roger's deputy, 'Baldy' Harman, is one of them. Initially, he and Roger arrived in the market district, establishing the Salle de Gristmill and gradually recruiting a group of individuals to form the Poison Spur Mob.

"He's highly skilled in combat, on par with Margot in that regard. Additionally, he possesses peculiar abilities. For instance, he can withstand a blade and only suffer minor injuries. At times, he exhibits sudden bursts of violence, as if under the influence of some drug. He can instill fear in others. Oh, and he wields a knife coated with poison.

"He's exceedingly cruel. He doesn't have a family or a mistress, but he takes a keen interest in women. He often dallies with street girls under the Poison Spur Mob.

"His usual residence is 'Black Scorpion' Roger's house. When he seeks the company of a woman, he opts for a relatively clean motel or hotel within the market district."

Lumian listened attentively, gradually formulating a plan.

There's a highly effective trap for 'Baldy' Harman.

Regardless of how Harman acquires such formidable defenses that only result in minor injuries after being slashed, it suggests a high probability that he's willing to trade injuries for victory. He relies heavily on his strengths in this aspect.

If that's the case, I can provide him an opportunity. However, Fallen Mercury will be the one to inflict those minor injuries upon him.

Even minor wounds can bleed!

Baron Brignais continued, "Most of the dancers under the Poison Spur Mob are under the supervision of Castina from Feynapotter. She was abducted to Trier and later became 'Black Scorpion' Roger's mistress.

"'Short-legged Candlestick' was her nickname back when she worked as a dancer, owing to her relatively petite stature."

Lumian envisioned a compact candlestick and formed a rough image of Castina in his mind.

"Castina doesn't engage in frequent fights, but she exhibits remarkable combat skills when she does. She's cold and merciless when dealing with disobedient dancers. Perhaps she's forgotten the hardships she endured," Baron Brignais remarked with a touch of gentlemanly courtesy. "She resides in an apartment at 19 Rue du Rossignol. We're unsure of the specific floor or room she occupies. She often frequents Roger's house."

What right do you have to speak of her like that? Why don't we discuss the person who became a singer at Salle de Bal Brise after her father was forced to die due to a debt? Lumian never believed that mobsters possessed a true conscience.

No matter the camaraderie, loyalty, or care they exhibited toward their peers, they were merely wildflowers adorned with mud. They essentially sought out victims among the dancers, street girls, ordinary individuals persecuted by loan sharks, and the peddlers they extorted.

Brignais proceeded to introduce the final leader of the Poison Spur Mob.

"'Hammer' Ait was originally a member of our Savoie Mob. He possessed courage, intellect, and a sturdy physique. I held him in high regard and planned to recommend him to the boss. However, he betrayed us and joined the Poison Spur Mob. He swiftly acquired Beyonder powers.

"I suspect he consumed a potion from the Warrior pathway and has already reached Sequence 8. His towering height, nearly 1.9 meters, and his conduct during conflicts lead me to this deduction.

"'Hammer' describes his fists, which possess the hardness and force of iron hammers. He typically fights unarmed, but he's also adept with a revolver and a dirk.

"He resides at 25 Rue des Pavés, adjacent to Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman. There is a sizable contingent of Poison Spur Mob members in that area."

Pugilist? Will Beyonder characteristics manifest upon his demise? Lumian nodded and queried Baron Brignais,

"I also require their approximate travel patterns. Additionally, provide me with a revolver, an ample supply of bullets, and a portable weapon. A dirk, dagger, bayonet, or axe will suffice."

"No problem. I'll have Louis deliver them to you tomorrow morning." Baron Brignais nodded with satisfaction.

After observing Ciel depart from the café, Louis lowered his voice and inquired, "Baron, are we truly going to let him confront the leaders of the Poison Spur Mob?"

Baron Brignais chuckled.

"Didn't you hear my explanation earlier? I didn't deceive him about this.

"However, the leaders of the Poison Spur Mob are not easily dealt with. Whether he struggles and requires our aid and protection afterward, or if he fails and finds himself on the brink of death, we can crush his arrogance and make him obedient."

Chapter 165: Meeting Jenna Again

Louis exclaimed in surprise, "What if Ciel fails and gets done in by the Poison Spur Mob?"

Baron Brignais chuckled and replied, "When has our Savoie Mob ever kept all its members?"

…

On the way back to Auberge du Coq Doré, Lumian found himself in quite a good mood.

Initially, he had intended to apprehend a significant member of the Poison Spur Mob, probing into their source of power and their affiliation with the wicked deity Madame Pualis worshiped. But now, the Savoie Mob had assigned him a similar task. It aligned perfectly with his desires.

This way, he not only swiftly gained detailed information about multiple targets, saving valuable time, but he could also fully utilize the Savoie Mob's resources, such as weaponry, manpower, and connections.

A moment ago, Lumian contemplated requesting explosives from Baron Brignais, mulling over the possibility of setting a trap to blow up one of the leaders of the Poison Spur Mob.

In the end, he decided against it. Firstly, he felt it was too brazen and would attract unwanted attention from the police. Secondly, being a wanted criminal, he couldn't afford to be investigated. Thirdly, if he obliterated his target entirely, how could he gather any information?

Of course, he could employ the Summoning Dance and the wall of spirituality to allow the deceased spirit to cling to him and enhance the memories that left the deepest imprints. However, this method was entirely unpredictable. Who knew if those individuals' minds would be as deranged as the previous pervert's? Moreover, each Summoning Dance could only amplify a single memory. If luck wasn't on his side, it could take a significant amount of time to find useful information. This contradicted his intention of swiftly departing from the scene of the assassination.

Initially, Lumian planned to deal with "Hammer" Ait, but upon hearing Baron Brignais's description, he considered "Baldy" Harman as a viable candidate as well.

Compared to Ait, Harman had notable "weaknesses" that Hunters could exploit to set traps!

His power granted him exceptional body resilience. On numerous occasions, he sustained only minor injuries despite being slashed with knives.

Lumian recalled Aurore's words: "Those skilled in swimming are prone to drowning."

In Harman's case, one could interpret it as, "Those adept at blocking weapons with their bodies are more susceptible to perishing by weapons." As for Lumian, he possessed Fallen Mercury, the Cursed Blade.

Furthermore, in comparison to "Hammer" Ait, who frequently traveled with a large entourage and resided within the Poison Spur Mob's settlement, "Baldy" Harman ventured out alone occasionally, seeking street girls and dancers. Consequently, he proved to be a simpler target for assassination. Moreover, he was closer to the core power of the Poison Spur Mob and held more secrets.

However, the conundrum arose. If Lumian were to set a trap and employ Fallen Mercury to deal with "Baldy" Harman, capturing him alive and extracting information would be impossible.

If Lumian could overpower "Baldy" Harman after stabbing him and dragging him to a secluded corner in Underground Trier, why bother stabbing him initially?

If he couldn't, his only recourse would be to stab the enemy and allow him to flee. Alternatively, after his escape, Lumian could await the intervention of the Montsouris ghost to "assist" in the target's demise.

Whether this would implicate the target's family wasn't his concern.

Hence, the pursuit of "Baldy" Harman and "Hammer" Ait presented their respective pros and cons. Lumian was not yet able to reach a decision.

He intended to contemplate his target selection after receiving more detailed information, weapons, and ammunition from Baron Brignais the following morning.

Upon entering Auberge du Coq Doré, Lumian immediately spotted Ruhr and Michel, the short, gray-haired couple. They were clad in tattered, foul-smelling garments, laboriously hauling a large swollen bag made of flaxen-colored cloth up the stairs.

"What's all this?" Lumian inquired curiously as he traversed the lobby.

Weren't these the same elderly folks peddling counterfeit street maîtresse d'atelier photos at Suhit steam locomotive station? Why were they bringing back such a sizable bag?

Ruhr ceased pulling at the cloth bag, wiping the sweat from his forehead. He forced a smile and replied, "Don't you know, Monsieur Ciel? We moonlight as scavengers by night. We salvage discarded items that might still hold value."

Informed by Charlie's "," the couple was aware of Ciel's newfound leadership role in the Savoie Mob. Consequently, they saw no issue with Ciel seeking answers from them since Auberge du Coq Doré was his turf.

From their perspective, as the guardian of Auberge du Coq Doré, Monsieur Ciel needed to stay informed about the establishment to prevent any mishaps.

Juggling two occupations, one of which involves deception… It certainly reeks of all sorts of rubbish… Lumian pinched his nose and silently muttered. He pondered and asked thoughtfully, "Do you hoard all this trash in your room?"

Ruhr wore an ingratiating smile and confirmed, "Indeed. We visit the waste disposal site every few days. People drop off various items there. Heh heh, while scavengers are filthy, without us, Trier would be overwhelmed by foul odors. Every nook and cranny would be brimming with refuse."

In Trier, scavengers served as supplementary cleaners.

No wonder there's a stench in the room. No wonder you perpetually reek and forgo bathing… As Lumian ascended the stairs at a leisurely pace, he stole a glance at the wrinkled faces and slightly stooped postures of Ruhr and Michel. He casually inquired, "You're not young anymore. Why do you still toil so diligently for money?"

Ruhr and Michel were taken aback, their smiles faltering subtly.

After a brief pause, Ruhr mustered a pained and helpless smile.

"It is precisely because we are old that we must labor so strenuously.

"We arrived in Trier when we were very young and took up various occupations. We had a child, but he did not survive to adulthood. The monthly wages we received merely sustained our survival. As our health began to decline and our strength waned, fear gripped us. We were uncertain of what the future held.

"What if we grow too old to engage in our usual work someday? What would we do? Deplete our meager savings within a few months and rely on the charitable acts of the Church and the government to eke out a meager existence until we perish from hunger?

"I-I do not wish for such a fate…"

Lumian was suddenly reminded of something his sister had once uttered. "Intis is exceedingly harsh now. There is no protection for hardworking individuals in their twilight years."

Stirred by his thoughts, Ruhr continued, "Thankfully, our appetites have diminished with age. We don't eat or sleep much. That leaves us with more time to earn money. We don't have to worry about anything else. We can save most of what we earn.

"In the coming years, we should be able to enjoy a few more good ones by relying on our savings…

"Heh heh, truth be told, compared to most people, we're considered fortunate. None of them made it to our age."

Madame Michel, standing beside him, wore a wistful expression.

"Once we've saved enough, we'll return to Aurmir and purchase a plot of land to cultivate grapes. Even if we lack the strength in the future, we can hire assistance. We don't have extravagant expenses anyway."

Aurmir stood as the provincial capital of Champagne Province, renowned as the foremost hub of wine production in the Northern Continent.

Silently, Lumian nodded as he observed the elderly couple laboriously hauling the bag of trash upstairs.

After a brief respite, he put on simple makeup and changed his attire. Clad in a linen shirt, brown overalls, loafers, and a dark bowler hat, he made his way straight to Salle de Gristmill.

Since "Hammer" Ait remained one of his targets, he needed to personally observe him.

It was the late hours of the night, and Salle de Gristmill buzzed with activity. Amid the pulsating music, men and women gyrated on the dance floor, releasing their frustrations.

Concerned about being recognized by the Poison Spur Mob, Lumian approached the bar and ordered a glass of rye beer before making his way to the dance floor. As he swayed to the rhythm, he surveyed his surroundings.

Before long, he spotted "Little Minx" Jenna appearing on the raised wooden platform in front of him.

She wore a similar outfit to the one she had donned in the afternoon, a short white blouse and a flouncy skirt, showcasing her fair chest.

This time, she sported a mole on the bridge of her nose.

It signified audacity.

Impressive mental strength she possesses. Despite the afternoon's events, she's back at work in the evening… Lumian couldn't help but marvel.

In his opinion, since Jenna was "Red Boots" Franca's lover, there was no need for her to be so committed.

The rhythmic drumbeats halted, and all eyes on the dance floor turned to Jenna, panting.

Jenna began with a high-pitched tone.

"Ernest, stay away from my wife and pipe!"

Laughter erupted from the crowd as if a collective realization had struck them.

In sync with the cheerful and bawdy singing, they swayed their bodies gently.

As Jenna sang, she executed high kicks, shifting her position and winking at the audience from different angles, even performing an exaggerated split.

During this display, her gaze briefly crossed paths with Lumian. She appeared momentarily stunned before returning to her normal demeanor.

Once she finished her song, the intense drumbeats resumed. Jenna wasted no time resting. She leaped onto the dance floor, navigating through the sudden eruption of cheers, whistles, and men vying for proximity. She approached Lumian and shouted with a playful smile, "Handsome lion, dance!"

In Intis, the lion was often used to describe alluring men due to their radiant mane, akin to the sun.

Lumian sensed that Jenna had something important to share. He set aside his beer and joined her on the dance floor, engaging in a lively dance with the Showy Diva, face-to-face.

Just as they were about to embrace, Jenna threw herself into Lumian's arms and whispered into his ear, "You're quite the talented dancer. By the way, I've discovered the identity of that pervert. His name is Hedsey. He used to reside in Room 504 at Auberge du Coq Doré."

Charlie's room? The occupant of Room 504 who put up Susanna Mattise's portrait? Lumian was taken aback.

Chapter 166: In Return

Lumian had always believed that the tenant, like Charlie, had been enchanted by Susanna Mattise in his dreams. His vitality had been gradually drained, until he met a sudden demise in the room. Monsieur Ive, the hotel owner, had secretly transported the lifeless body to a secluded spot in Underground Trier. Little did he expect that the tenant would transform into a pervert with Beyonder powers. He now roamed Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman, preying on attractive women.

Lumian was convinced that Hedsey's newfound abilities stemmed from a boon granted due to the absence of Beyonder characteristics after death. It was clear that these powers originated from the same source as Susanna Mattise and Monsieur Ive.

In essence, not long after Susanna Mattise's portrait was plastered, something extraordinary had occurred to Hedsey. He had become a devout follower of the Mother Tree of Desire and received two to three boons within a few short months. As a result, he had gained significant strength and mastery over various mystical techniques.

For Beyonders who progressed by consuming potions, such speed was unimaginable, unless they possessed profound understanding and were at a remarkably low level.

However, Hedsey's boons also came with a downside. The recipient would be influenced by the power and gradually deviate from their true self. In certain aspects, they would become increasingly extreme, often engaging in actions that seemed irrational to ordinary individuals and inviting disaster upon themselves.

Both Monsieur Ive's miserliness and Hedsey's insatiable lust for women fell into this category.

Lumian suspected that nearly all boons had similar repercussions to some extent. Over time, they would inexorably draw the recipient closer to the bestower and induce corresponding mutations.

The reason Lumian remained unaffected by the powers of the Dancer and Alms Monk was that they didn't directly come from the hidden entity known as Inevitability, but rather the corruption within his body that had been filtered through the seal. Additionally, Lumian had always maintained a vigilant stance in such matters. He not only refrained from altering his style and way of life to exploit the traits of the Dancer and Alms Monk for greater control over his strength but at times even went against their influence.

Furthermore, Lumian would advance in Sequence and have a preliminarily digestion before obtaining the corresponding boon. He sought to preserve the balance of power within his body.

Lowering his head, Lumian whispered to Jenna in a hushed voice, "How did you discover this?"

As Jenna swayed to the rhythm, she pursed her lips and replied, "It's quite evident that the pervert cannot exist without women. Kidnapping a woman every day and dragging her underground simply isn't feasible, or else he would have been apprehended long ago. Damn it, there must have been several victims. Do those incompetent black-skinned dogs even notice?

"Then how does he usually solve his problem? Clearly, relying on himself isn't sufficient to satiate his desires. So, I enlisted Franca's help and inquired with the dancers and street girls from the Savoie Mob. I swiftly obtained an answer."

"How can that pervert, who deserves to be f*cked by a donkey, possess such virility? He can perform multiple times a day!"

"Why doesn't he pursue those wealthy old ladies? Both parties would be satisfied!"

Jenna recounted her investigation with a sense of pride, showcasing her intellect.

Throughout the afternoon, she had been brooding over Lumian's earlier prank, which had made her appear foolish.

Before embracing the beliefs of the Mother Tree of Desire and receiving the boon, Hedsey was a regular visitor to Rue de la Muraille, Rue de Breda, and Rue du Rossignol. However, after obtaining the boon, his mind became consumed with thoughts of women… Lumian couldn't help but acknowledge that Jenna occasionally demonstrated some intelligence.

With that in mind, Lumian decided to share some information.

"That abnormal desire must be a result of his Beyonder powers' influence."

"Beyonder powers…" Jenna glanced up at Lumian.

She had expected him to feign ignorance, just as they did in Underground Trier, where neither side openly acknowledged Hedsey's displayed Beyonder powers. To her surprise, he spoke candidly.

After a brief pause, Jenna, who was dancing closely with Lumian, whispered in confusion, "Why do Beyonder powers make him so perverse?"

This was unlike the Beyonder powers she was familiar with, which at most had a slight effect before losing control.

Lumian smirked once again. "It's an abnormal Beyonder power."

"Do you think I can't tell that it's abnormal?" Jenna grew infuriated once more.

Lumian chuckled.

"As for why it's abnormal, go back and ask Franca. If Franca doesn't know either, have her inquire with the Boss."

He shared this information with Jenna because he was concerned that there might be more to the issues surrounding Monsieur Ive, Susanna Mattise, Hedsey, and the others.

If the official Beyonders failed to uncover the truth, his only hope lay with Mr. K's finger and the Beyonders associated with the Savoie Mob.

Jenna snorted and dropped the matter. She refocused on dancing with Lumian.

As the music neared its end, she suddenly reached out and touched Lumian's chest.

"Haha, nice bod!" Jenna grinned, then retreated, heading towards the half-height wooden platform in front of the dance floor.

It seemed as though she had finally exacted her revenge for what had transpired underground. She was filled with elation.

Lumian scoffed and left the dance floor, once again picking up his glass of rye beer.

As he listened to the music, he swayed his body gently, all the while observing the situation within Salle de Gristmill.

As Lumian surveyed the area, his attention was drawn to a group of mobsters congregating near the stage. They wore a mishmash of outfits, surrounding a towering man who stood at a staggering height of nearly 1.9 meters.

The burly man bore a striking resemblance to "Giant" Simon. His black shirt and formal attire emphasized his bulging muscles, but the dark-blue canvas pants and strapless black leather boots seemed out of place, creating a peculiar ensemble.

With his tousled brown hair and slightly set-apart brown eyes, his ordinary facial features were complemented by a chiseled jawline. His hands and legs were longer than those of an average person.

"Hammer" Ait… Lumian averted his gaze, suspecting that this man was one of his targets.

In Trier, there weren't many individuals towering at nearly 1.9 meters.

Lumian wasn't concerned about "Hammer" Ait and his subordinates recognizing him from this distance. The ballroom was dimly lit, with only the soft glow of gas wall lamps and a chandelier above, providing enough illumination for dancing and discreet conversations. Unless someone was intimately familiar with Lumian or had just seen him, they wouldn't be able to identify him.

Furthermore, Lumian had taken precautions to disguise himself. He hadn't anticipated Jenna recognizing him at first glance either.

After Jenna finished singing another song, "Hammer" Ait led his subordinates off the dance floor and ascended to the second floor.

Lumian continued his observations when he suddenly spotted a familiar figure entering the room.

It was Monsieur Ive, the proprietor of Auberge du Coq Doré, his attire slightly faded from washing.

His anxious and worried expression was evident as his blue eyes scanned the surroundings.

Is he searching for Hedsey? The pervert didn't return after leaving in the afternoon. They suspect something happened to him, so they're scouring the dance halls, seeking clues with the street girls? Lumian withdrew his gaze thoughtfully and shifted his attention back to the dancers on the floor.

Based on the characteristics exhibited by Hedsey's Spirit Body, Lumian sensed that Monsieur Ive was much weaker in comparison. He likely possessed the power of a Sequence 9 boon, focused on greed, possibly with elements of appetite.

As for Hedsey, he was likely on the level of Sequence 8, with a slim chance of being a Sequence 7. Lumian leaned more towards the former, as the few Sequence 7 individuals he had encountered before were formidable adversaries, difficult to overcome even with preparations and traps.

Of course, had Lumian not carefully observed and realized that Hedsey had the ability to trigger others' desires, he might have been swiftly dealt with.

In that environment, without Jenna's presence, Lumian would have relied on his own strength to resist the influence and not completely forget the existence of the enemy. With Showy Diva, it was challenging for him to restrain himself. He had to rely on pain to awaken his senses.

From the corner of his eye, Lumian observed Monsieur Ive engaging in conversation with the part-time street girl dancers. The way they scolded him, wearing expressions of disdain, struck Lumian as amusing.

Is he pretending to negotiate a price in order to gather information about Hedsey's whereabouts?

In the end, he's just too stingy, always bargaining down the other party's offer by half or more, resulting in their scolding?

Heh heh, Charlie was worried that Monsieur Ive, an old widower, wouldn't be willing to spend money on a licensed prostitute and risk contracting a disease. It seems he's overthinking it. Monsieur Ive can't even bring himself to spend money on an unlicensed street girl!

The negative effects of a boon are truly potent…

Hmm, if there are women in that group who possess the same boons as Hedsey and are on the same level, they should be in a constant state of hunger and thirst. Monsieur Ive wouldn't need to seek out another street girl. Heh heh, he would only end up despising himself for being a man. He would be on the verge of being drained dry, with his desires forcibly aroused.

The best disguises for those women would be dancers and street girls?

Something doesn't add up. If there really were such women, Hedsey wouldn't need to come out and harm others… Could it be that everyone at this level has advanced or died, with no replacements? Or is there an imbalance in the number of men and women? Is Hedsey the one being ostracized?

As Lumian contemplated these thoughts, the band struck up another lively dance tune.

After finishing her song, Jenna leaped off the half-height wooden stage once again and approached Lumian, inviting him to dance.

This elicited boos from the surrounding crowd.

Knowing that Jenna had something else to say, Lumian deliberately maneuvered to provoke those who were jeering.

He stepped onto the dance floor, drew closer to Jenna, and began swaying his hips.

Jenna looked up at him, smiling, and asked, "What brings a Savoie mobster like you to the Salle de Gristmill?"

Lumian clicked his tongue and chuckled.

"Don't you think I'm fond of you? Of course, I'm here to listen to your singing."

Jenna scoffed.

"Your target is 'Hammer' Ait, isn't it? You want to repeat what happened with Margot?"

"You're quite clever," Lumian praised in a taunting tone.

Jenna smirked confidently. "I can assist you and provide important information."

Lumian suppressed his nonchalance and asked thoughtfully, "What do you desire in return?"

Jenna snorted and cursed, "Are you f*cking underestimating me?

"Although I didn't thank you this afternoon, I won't forget that you saved me. Coincidentally, I'm familiar with all the dance halls in the market district. Moreover, I just had a chat with Ait about some matters after the performance. I should be able to help you."

Without waiting for Lumian's response, she gritted her teeth and continued, "'Hammer' resides in the innermost room on the second floor, towards Auberge du Coq Doré. He has ten thugs by his side. Four stationed at the door—two inside and two outside. Two by the window, two near the sofa, and two always behind him. They're all armed.

"The security wasn't this tight before, and there weren't as many people. It's all because of what you did to Margot.

"That room has an attached washroom. It's currently unoccupied. If the window is fully opened, it can just about accommodate a person.

"From the ventilation pipe in the ballroom kitchen, you can climb up to the second floor and bypass the guards stationed at the stairs. Then, enter the adjacent room and leap from the windowsill onto a narrow ledge outside the washroom. It requires considerable skill to pull off successfully."

Chapter 167: Convergence

Upon hearing Jenna's account, Lumian instinctively twirled and spun, his surprise evident as he asked, "How do you know all this?"

It made sense that Jenna would have a basic understanding of the room layout and the thugs' positions after venturing to the second-floor room and conferring with "Hammer" Ait. However, how did she know about the ventilation pipe in the ballroom kitchen leading to the second floor? Or jumping from the neighboring windowsill to the washroom? And what about the ledge on the outer wall of that specific room? Were these details within the grasp of an underground singer, known for her bawdy songs and exaggerated performances?

She shouldn't possess such knowledge!

Jenna, her face adorned with black eye shadow and a fake mole, sported a smug expression.

"Don't fret about how I know. I avoid seeing what I shouldn't, hearing what I shouldn't, and asking questions I shouldn't," she retorted, cleverly turning Lumian's words back on him.

This brought her considerable satisfaction.

Only those planning an assassination or devising an escape in dire circumstances would pay attention to such particulars and observe with a purpose… Which category does Jenna fall into? Her powers of observation in this environment are nearly on par with a Hunter's. Sequences leaning toward assassination required gathering environmental information. Assassination… Lumian's mind raced, concocting a plan to bluff Jenna.

Grinning mischievously, he uttered, "So you're an Assassin."

He stressed the word "Assassin."

Jenna's expression changed, her smile freezing.

"How did you figure it out?" she blurted out, shocked.

"By using my brain," Lumian replied, his smile unwavering.

There were still a few Sequences that excelled at environmental observation. Lumian had taken a bold guess, considering Jenna as an Assassin. He recalled Ryan and his companions mentioning that Demoness was a relatively common pathway in the central and northern regions of Intis, especially Trier. In any case, he had nothing to lose if he was wrong.

Meanwhile, Lumian pondered to himself, Not long after arriving in Trier, I encountered an Assassin and came to her aid. Can this be seen as a manifestation of the convergence of Beyonder characteristics?

Jenna can't have reached Sequence 7; she isn't a Witch. Otherwise, even if weakened by the sedative on the paper, she could have effortlessly overpowered Hedsey with her mystical abilities. The term Witch clearly indicates proficiency in spells and curses, as Aurore's notebook had mentioned.

She is unlikely to be a Sequence 8 Instigator. How could an Instigator be fooled by me repeatedly?

But it isn't out of the question. Perhaps Jenna had been more foolish in the past and relied on the Instigator path to enhance her intelligence? Furthermore, her willingness to provide information on "Hammer" Ait could be interpreted as a form of instigation.

Heh heh, Jenna is a woman, so there's no need to worry about her gender changing after consuming the Witch potion.

Where had Jenna obtained the potion? Had Franca given it to her? Could Franca also be a Beyonder following the Demoness pathway?

If Franca is only a Sequence 8, that would be fine. But what if she were a Sequence 7 Witch? Who knows if Franca had been male or female before? Well, her behavior towards women is certainly peculiar. She is in a romantic relationship with Jenna. Hmm…

Jenna quietly contemplated her recent words, but she didn't uncover any information that might have revealed her own Sequence.

She decided not to dwell on what she couldn't figure out. She kindly reminded Lumian, "If you plan to confront 'Hammer' Ait in the washroom, you must think it through. According to what I heard from Franca, Ait is a Pugilist. He excels in close combat more than any other Sequence. Relying solely on your Beyonder abilities to target him won't be as effective due to his physical prowess.

"Although you can fight, I believe there's a high chance you'll be killed on the spot if you engage him in a place like the washroom, which isn't spacious enough."

"Madame, are you persuading me or taunting me? It seems you still possess some potential as an Instigator," Lumian candidly voiced his thoughts, not holding back his criticisms.

He realized that Franca knew "Hammer" Ait better than Baron Brignais. She had mentioned a crucial point that the latter had omitted.

Setting aside the possibility that Franca had a personal grudge against "Hammer" Ait, Franca either had a formidable background or had earned the trust of the boss of the Savoie Mob, gaining access to more mysticism knowledge and Sequence information than Baron Brignais.

Jenna was taken aback. "You know about Instigators?"

Is this still a country bumpkin from the countryside? How does he possess such extensive knowledge about the Beyonder pathways?

Franca had mentioned that he's wanted by the authorities. It seemed he had been involved in a Beyonder incident?

"I know more than you think," Lumian replied, smiling.

As he spoke, he suddenly recalled a title that had recently belonged to him: "Mysticism Illiterate."

Lumian swiftly pushed aside his melancholy and earnestly considered Jenna's warning.

Indeed, while Hunters were also skilled in combat and killing as Sequences, if traps and abilities like Provocation were excluded, they still couldn't match the prowess of Pugilists in close combat. Especially in a confined and cramped environment, they couldn't employ their combat intelligence effectively. It would be difficult for them to achieve the feat of the weak defeating the strong.

Taking into account the modifications to his Dancer abilities and the utilization of various unorthodox tactics, Lumian felt he could just about hold his ground. He wouldn't fail immediately. If he wanted to eliminate "Hammer" Ait, he could only rely on Fallen Mercury and escape after a successful strike.

But what set this apart from killing "Baldy" Harman? There was no need to factor in the presence of ten thugs and ten revolvers.

Lumian assessed his possessions to see if anything could be useful in such a battle.

Over 1,700 verl d'or… Fallen Mercury… Blood from the aquatic monster… Poisonous scales from the aquatic monster… A vial of the sedative that rendered Jenna powerless… A bottle of stimulating gas to counteract the effects of the sedative… A bottle of liquid with unknown properties… A dagger left behind by that pervert… A ritual silver dagger… Several white bandages…

As he contemplated, a plan gradually took shape.

As he swayed to the rhythm, he cast a sidelong glance at Jenna and posed his question.

"Is that washroom spacious?"

Jenna made confirmation. "No, it's not. Besides the bathtub, toilet, and sink, it can only accommodate four to five people."

In other words, if Lumian and "Hammer" Ait engaged in close combat, there wouldn't be room for anyone else.

"Is there a curtain outside the bathtub?" Lumian inquired further.

"Yes," Jenna pondered for a moment. "Do you have a gun with you? I believe it would be better to use a gun. It's safer and gives you a higher chance of success."

"I don't," Lumian replied, shaking his head.

Jenna sneered, "You intend to carry out the plan tonight with just that?"

She paused briefly before continuing, "If you truly wish to kill 'Hammer' Ait tonight, I can lend you my revolver."

"You still have a revolver on you?" Lumian was surprised this time.

He hadn't suspected that Jenna had a concealed revolver.

The Showy Diva wore a short white blouse with a wide collar that allowed her bra to peek out. Her beige fluffy short skirt and black boots that didn't reach her knees added to her attire. Moreover, she kept raising her legs as she danced. It seemed impossible for her to have a gun holster strapped to her inner thigh.

Lumian speculated that the only possible place for her to hide the revolver was within her pair of boots.

Jenna assumed Ciel was questioning why she carried a revolver, so she responded with a disdainful sigh.

"I perform in dance halls in places like the market district. Do you think all those monsters are upstanding citizens? Do you think they won't act impulsively and try something on me? Those pieces of filth have twisted minds all day. When their thoughts are controlled by their desires, they won't consider that I have a connection with Franca and a good relationship with her. Damn it, if deterrence always worked, there wouldn't be so many criminals!"

While speaking, Jenna followed the rhythm of the drums and crouched down, searching inside her boots.

Swiftly standing up, she pressed herself against Lumian. Twisting her body, she slipped her hand into his naturally lowered and swaying palm.

Lumian immediately felt the cold metal texture and the solid wood.

Without missing a beat, Lumian withdrew his hand and discreetly tucked the gun into his pocket.

Afterward, Jenna continued, "I bought it with most of my savings when I first arrived in the market district, before meeting Franca. That blasted black market merchant even tried to bed me, but I kicked his shin, making him scream in pain."

Carrying a gun for self-defense at all times… You're quite vigilant. Otherwise, those mobsters could have controlled you before meeting Franca. You might have even become a part-time dancer or a street girl… Lumian replied with a smile, "Well done!"

As the accompanying music reached its end, Jenna fell silent.

With the drumbeats fading away, Lumian observed Jenna as she walked toward the stage. He left the dance floor and returned to the outer circle.

Taking advantage of the opportunity to visit the washroom, he carefully examined and familiarized himself with the revolver Jenna had given him.

It was a compact revolver with a short barrel, ideal for concealed carry.

Its color was a dark iron-black, and the grip was crafted from walnut wood. It held a total of six bullets.

After tinkering with the revolver for a while, Lumian realized a predicament.

His shooting experience was lacking. Previously, he had primarily relied on the shotgun's wide spray of pellets.

Oh well. I don't expect to kill Hammer Ait with a single shot. Injuring and weakening him will suffice. At such close range, with my grip and some shooting experience, I can't miss by much…

In an environment like the washroom, there's only one opportunity for a shot. "Hammer" Ait won't provide me with a chance for a second shot… Lumian swiftly made up his mind.

Exiting the washroom, he headed toward the kitchen of the Salle de Gristmill, taking advantage of the absence of people in the vicinity.

Chapter 168: Prayer Target

As Lumian made his way, his nimbleness served him well in evading servers bustling with trays of food and busboys returning used utensils.

He pressed forward until he reached the kitchen, only to find it in complete disarray.

Stacks of unwashed utensils lay haphazardly in the sink, coated in layers of greasy oil. Two dishwashing maids stood by, tirelessly scrubbing away at the never-ending pile of dishes.

The stoves emitted fierce yellow flames, turning the small space into a sweltering inferno. Sweat poured down everyone's faces as they toiled away.

Three chefs, adorned in white aprons, each prepared their own dishes. They would occasionally taste their concoctions by dipping their fingers in the sauces or sampling a morsel, wiping their hands casually on their aprons before moving on to the next dish.

Once the chefs approved, the servers would whisk the plates away, oblivious to the fact that their thumbs often grazed the food and thick soups. They paid no mind to it whatsoever.

The kitchen helpers scurried around the chefs, chopping vegetables, handling fish, tidying up ingredients, taking out the trash, and fetching various seasonings and supplies. They never ceased their efforts, yet the kitchen remained in disarray. Vegetable leaves, fish scales, and fruit peels were strewn about, oily and scattered across the floor, near the stoves, and close to the sink.

The clamor of the chefs and kitchen helpers filled the air with shouts and curses, creating a chaotic symphony.

Lumian could easily mistake it for a battlefield if he closed his eyes and listened closely.

Taking advantage of the chaotic scene, Lumian deftly navigated through the busy crowd and reached the cabinet brimming with ingredients. Using partitions, handles, and the grayish-white gas and water pipes, he skillfully ascended to the ceiling and slipped into the ventilation shaft.

The overpowering smell of oil and smoke assailed Lumian's senses, nearly overwhelming him.

But with the tolerance of an Alms Monk toward extreme environments, he pushed himself forward, crawling through the ventilation shaft and occasionally climbing higher.

After about ten seconds, he poked his head out from above a second-floor washroom.

Ensuring the coast was clear, Lumian agilely leaped down and swiftly made his way to the door, carefully scanning both ends of the corridor in secrecy.

The area was eerily silent, with only two henchmen guarding the stairs, their focus solely on the first floor. They paid no mind to what lay behind them.

Relieved, Lumian let out a sigh and pinpointed his target. Crouching down, he leaped to the adjacent room.

Although the door was locked, Lumian encountered no obstacle he couldn't overcome. Utilizing a half-broken wire he had brought along, he managed to pry open the wooden door after a few attempts.

Just as Jenna had described, the washroom attached to "Hammer" Ait's room lacked a protruding window sill. It only had a decorative ledge, barely providing enough space to stand on its side.

Even for a Hunter, leaping from the window sill to the narrow ledge posed a significant challenge, demanding perfect balance.

Fortunately, Lumian possessed the extraordinary flexibility of a Dancer, almost surpassing human limits.

After careful observation, he jumped up and landed precisely on the ledge with his right foot. His left side wavered, threatening to tip him over.

In a crucial moment, Lumian's body quivered like a coiled spring, propelling him back toward the washroom. He swiftly grasped the window frame with his right hand, regaining stability.

Squatting down, he revealed only half of his head, peering silently into the room.

The washroom door stood ajar, and occasional mobsters passed by.

Lumian exercised patience, studying their movements until he discerned a pattern. Seizing the opportune gap when the washroom door was momentarily unattended, he skillfully pried open the window using Hedsey's dagger and clambered inside.

Maintaining composure and confidence, he swiftly closed the glass window before hurrying to the space beneath the bathtub, concealing himself with the undrawn curtains.

Lumian, having successfully infiltrated the premises, arranged his few essential items in easily accessible positions. He took a moment to double-check their locations, ensuring he wouldn't fumble in a state of panic.

Standing there motionless, he strained his ears to catch the activities in the adjacent room.

"Hammer" Ait occasionally inquired about their recent earnings to the dance hall manager, scolded his subordinates with anger, or engaged in flirtatious exchanges with the star dancer, accompanied by seemingly intimate gestures.

After a while, when the dance hall manager and the star dancer departed, Ait seemed to rise from his seat and began pacing slowly.

He addressed the mobsters in the room, saying, "In the following days, send out all your boys and have them 'visit' every individual within our territory. I want you to ensure that we know who can be elected as the market district's member of parliament in next week's election!"

Oh, so your mob is meddling in the parliamentary elections? Lumian felt a mixture of surprise and lack thereof.

The growth of Trier's mobs was impossible without some form of backing. They either maintained favorable relations with the police department and influential figures within it, enjoyed protection from powerful political figures, or acted as the black-gloved enforcers for influential merchants. The latter undoubtedly had connections to high-ranking government officials, upper echelons of the Churches, and military generals.

Lumian had never anticipated that the mastermind behind the Poison Spur Mob possessed the audacity to vie for a parliamentary seat. He had initially assumed their ambitions would extend no further than becoming the market district's police commissioner or a member of the Trier City Council.

Intis functioned as a parliamentary republic, where members of parliament represented various constituencies and formed the National Convention. This Convention held the authority to appoint the president, prime minister, who in turn appointed ministers—although their decisions required approval from the Convention.

The National Convention also possessed the power to legislate, declare war, and determine the government's budget. Each member of parliament held considerable influence and authority.

At present, the National Convention consisted of over 300 individuals, with one-tenth of them being former nobles. The Sauron family, once part of the royal lineage, served as their leaders. The remaining seats were allocated based on the economic status of different provinces and territories, particularly the prosperous Trier Greater Region.

Trier, whether in terms of population or economic prowess, stood unrivaled in Intis and the Greater Trier Region. It held nearly 40 seats in the National Convention.

These approximately 40 seats were distributed among 20 districts, accommodating as few as one member of parliament or as many as four to five. These representatives also held ex officio positions as councilors in the City Council.

The Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman, a relatively small constituency, possessed only one seat in the National Convention. The individual chosen to fill this seat would wield immense power and influence within the region.

Currently, the ruling National Party, the popular Enlightenment Party, and the Revolutionary Party, seeking to address existing flaws, were vigorously preparing for the upcoming National Convention elections.

The party that secured a simple majority in the Convention would become the new ruling party. Otherwise, they would have to negotiate, compromise, and form a coalition with another party.

In addition to the National Party, the Enlightenment Party, and the Revolutionary Party, Intis also had the Emperor Party (restorationists who advocated Roselle's rule) and the Carbonari. They voiced discontentment with the current system and sought to bring about change through force.

The mobsters replied one after another, assuring "Hammer" Ait that nothing would go awry.

However, they remained tight-lipped about which faction or candidate they supported, leaving Lumian feeling a sense of disappointment.

Tell me!

After briefing them on the election, "Hammer" Ait instructed his subordinates, saying, "Leave for a while. Return only when I summon you."

What is his plan? Lumian's eavesdropping had taken him by surprise.

Soon enough, the mobsters vacated the room, leaving "Hammer" Ait alone.

Lumian refrained from taking immediate action. After careful analysis, he believed that the confrontation between him and Hammer Ait in the washroom would have a more targeted impact than engaging outside, even without resorting to the use of Fallen Mercury.

The room beyond fell into an eerie silence. Lumian strained his ears and managed to catch faint voices.

It seemed like "Hammer" Ait was muttering to himself, "Protector of Evil People… The Lady who Births Deities…"

The Lady who Births Deities? That sounds impressive… Is Ait praying to some secret entity? There are about four or five sentences, and it's more of a description? It deviates from the usual three-stanza template… Lumian made a rough guess at what "Hammer" Ait was up to.

As for whom he was praying to, Lumian couldn't even begin to speculate based on the fragmented description he barely heard.

It lay beyond the scope of his current knowledge in mysticism.

Lumian felt a vague sense of malevolence emanating from the room outside.

Indeed, it was as if the room itself had turned wicked.

Holding his breath, Lumian composed himself, refraining from listening to the turmoil outside.

After a while, the sinister atmosphere dissipated, and everything returned to normal.

Lumian let out a slow exhale, heating up his palm.

At that moment, "Hammer" Ait summoned his subordinates, who had previously left the room, to return.

Lumian continued to bide his time.

Seconds turned into minutes until finally, he heard the heaviest footsteps approaching the washroom.

They belonged to "Hammer" Ait. Lumian had already distinguished their sound.

Swiftly, he retrieved a metal canister marked with a symbol.

Unscrewing the cap, he inserted a thin, pre-kneaded paper ball into the bottle.

Seconds before the footsteps drew near the washroom, Lumian retrieved the paper ball and twisted the cap shut.

He then tore the paper ball in two and inserted each piece into his nostrils.

The stench, reminiscent of fermented excrement, assaulted Lumian's senses, nearly bringing him to tears. His right hand instinctively moved to remove the thin paper ball.

With great resolve and the endurance of an Alms Monk accustomed to extreme environments, Lumian exercised control. His expression contorted, and his muscles twitched ever so slightly as he stood there, retrieving another metal canister filled mostly with gas. He unscrewed its cap.

Clang!

"Hammer" Ait shut the washroom door and approached the toilet bowl.

The space now became partially enclosed. Only the gaps between the door and windows allowed a hint of fresh air to seep in.

Yes, a gruesome encounter awaits him… Lumian observed the fluctuations in his target's luck, silently tossing the open metal canister into the air, allowing the colorless and odorless gas within to disperse and fill the washroom.

This was the sedative concocted by the perverted Hedsey. Even catching a whiff of it at close range could severely weaken an Assassin's strength!

It was ideal for a confined, partially enclosed space like the washroom.

This was the trap Lumian had set for "Hammer" Ait!

Of course, it would take some time for the gas to spread throughout the washroom and take effect to a certain extent. After all, Lumian himself wasn't breathing it in at close proximity.

What Lumian needed to do next was to prevent "Hammer" Ait from leaving the washroom or allow anyone outside to open the door.

He placed the open metal canister by the edge of the bathtub and retrieved Jenna's revolver, aiming it at the toilet bowl through the curtain.

Chapter 169: Battle in the Room

The rush of water persisted, and Lumian grew anxious, fearing that "Hammer" Ait might sense danger. He needed to calculate the height just right before pulling the trigger.

Bang!

The bullet tore through the drapes, leaving behind searing scorch marks.

"Hammer" Ait's hair stood on end before any of this happened. He paid no mind to the fact that he was mid-stream and promptly collapsed to the side.

Yellowish liquid splattered in all directions. The bullet grazed Ait's arm, striking the wall and narrowly missing Lumian on the rebound.

Lumian's revolver flew from his grip after a missed shot. He seized the edges of the curtain, yanked it off, and used it to ensnare Ait.

Before Ait could recover from the agonizing cramps, darkness enveloped his vision, and he found himself wrapped in a cream-colored shower curtain.

Unfazed, he rolled and concealed himself beside the bathtub. Then, he grasped the shower curtain with both hands, using it as an improvised weapon.

With a soft whoosh, the curtain, now wrapped around Lumian's fist, veered off course, thwarting his attempt to strike Ait's head.

Ait seized the moment and rose, inadvertently tearing his pants in the process.

He swung his heavy fist at Lumian, hammer-like.

Lumian quickly raised his arm to shield himself, realizing that his opponent possessed exceptional strength—he couldn't withstand it.

Forced to retreat a step in order to regain his balance, Lumian found himself on the backfoot. Ait wasted no time, relentlessly bombarding him with a flurry of punches from both hands.

Leveraging his height, long arms, and superior strength, Ait employed straightforward punches akin to cannonballs, neglecting any fancy techniques.

It was only then that he could clearly discern the assailant's visage.

Golden hair tinged with black, bright and light-blue eyes, nostrils stuffed with bits of white paper—creating a peculiar sight.

Ciel? The same Ciel who killed Margot and gravely injured Wilson? Ait felt initial surprise, followed swiftly by delight.

He isn't that formidable. I can take him down completely!

The washroom proved confining, with Lumian enduring the putrid stench. He suffered two blows from the towering 1.9-meter giant before finding himself forced two steps back, cornered near the door.

At that moment, the mobsters outside heard the gunshots and hurriedly approached. One of them gripped the handle and pushed open the door.

Just as Ait's leg aimed for a low kick, Lumian's left leg suddenly swung back, forcefully striking the door.

With a resounding clang, the partially opened wooden door snapped shut again, narrowly missing the mobster's nose.

Realizing they couldn't breach the door for the time being, the mobsters drew their revolvers and aimed at the wooden barrier from various heights, but they dared not open fire.

They possessed some modicum of intellect, knowing that the washroom was cramped, and they remained uncertain of the person on the other side. Blindly firing would risk harming or even killing their boss, Hammer, leading to unforeseen consequences.

Capitalizing on his kick against the rear door, Lumian contorted his body, evading Ait's straight punch and positioning himself beside his adversary.

Delivering a series of rapid strikes—punches, elbows, knees, and kicks—Lumian sought to disrupt the enemy's assault before they could fully unleash their power.

It resembled a Pugilist, the kind who habitually expelled force with grunts of "Heh!" and "Hah!", but now capable of only a single "Heh!" Each time Ait tried to strike with force, Lumian took the initiative and forcefully blocked him.

After altering his combat strategy, Lumian managed to narrow the strength gap between them. Not only did he regain some control, but he also utilized his greater agility to shift his body and change positions.

Soon enough, the figure blocking the washroom entrance turned out to be Ait, his back against the door.

Worried that his subordinates might lack intelligence and open fire from outside, accidentally killing him, Ait quickly diverted his attention and shouted, "Do not fire!"

Despite Ciel utilizing his technique to bridge the gap, Ait remained unfazed. He exuded immense confidence.

As long as he acted in a normal manner, he was certain he could eliminate his opponent in the confined washroom environment. The only uncertainty was the duration it would take.

Nevertheless, Ait remained vigilant. He continued to unleash powerful punches and kicks, attempting to force Lumian toward the window, creating an opportunity for his subordinates to enter.

Fearing that Lumian possessed some kind of Beyonder power, Ait believed that using the threat of a revolver would expedite the process of dispatching his enemy.

Bam! Bam! Bam! Bam! Bam! Bam! Lumian faced the relentless onslaught of the Pugilist's full-powered attacks without showing any signs of surrender. However, he found it increasingly strenuous.

Throughout this ordeal, Ait's eyes darted to his surroundings, wary of potential traps or powerful allies lying in ambush.

His gaze swept across the edge of the bathtub and landed on an open metal canister.

What purpose does it serve? Before Ait could ponder further, Lumian's mocking smile appeared, accompanied by a curse as he struggled to block Ait's onslaught.

"Useless piece of junk! What are you waiting for? Those outside, come in and lend a hand!"

A buzzing anger surged within Ait.

He discarded all other concerns and launched an unusually ferocious attack.

Provocation!

Lumian had added Provocation to those two sentences!

Confronted with the raging "Hammer" Ait and his devastating blows, Lumian fought desperately to hold his ground. Occasionally, he relied on the flexibility of a Dancer to shift positions.

Unbeknownst to him, he was gradually being pushed toward the wall with the window.

This allowed the washroom door to open, but the mobsters outside hesitated, fearing they might collide with "Hammer" if they kicked it open. They cautiously pushed it inward, inch by inch.

In that moment, Lumian, nearly overcome by the putrid odor, keenly sensed Ait's waning strength and slower attacks.

The sedative took effect! Lumian swiftly dodged to the side, regaining his balance. He threw a powerful punch, channeling all the strength from his arm and waist, launching a counterattack.

Bang!

Ait's arm, which had blocked the blow, visibly trembled, and his eyes betrayed a mix of surprise and panic.

Why? Why have I grown so weak?

Why have my reflexes slowed?

As Lumian grasped the state of his opponent, he unleashed two consecutive straight punches, forcefully parting the enemy's arms.

Without hesitation, he closed the distance and adjusted his body slightly. With a swift motion, he drove his left elbow into Ait's chest.

Caught off guard, Ait failed to react in time, unable to dodge the strike. The elbow connected, cracking his sternum. His vision darkened, and he struggled to catch his breath.

Lumian didn't grant him a moment's respite. He smoothly shifted his body, allowing his poised right fist to collide with Ait's abdomen.

He hadn't harbored any lofty expectations of rendering Ait unconscious solely with the sedative. After all, the other party possessed the ability to resist the effects of certain Beyonder powers through sheer physical and mental fortitude, suggesting a high resistance to the sedative. Furthermore, despite the compactness and semi-enclosed nature of the washroom, with its bathtub, toilet bowl, and sink, the drug's potency would be greatly diminished.

Lumian aimed to exploit the drug's influence to weaken Ait's combat prowess, slowing his reactions and substantially reducing his strength.

In doing so, the tide of victory would tip towards him uncontrollably!

Pfft!

Ait, reeling from the blow to his abdomen, instinctively curled up, becoming shorter than Lumian.

Seizing the opportunity, Lumian raised his fists and swiftly hammered them behind Ait's ears.

Bang!

Amidst the cacophony, Ait's vision faded to black, and he slumped unconscious.

It was the combined effect of a potent strike and the sedative.

Lumian squatted down, using "Hammer" as a shield.

The mobsters had already held the washroom door open for several seconds, but with Ait obstructing Lumian from their view, they refrained from opening fire.

Now, they witnessed their towering boss, Hammer, being taken down by the assailant.

Lumian clasped Ait and offered a smirk to the group gathered at the door.

"Go ahead! Fire! Why aren't you firing?"

One of the mobsters caught sight of the assailant's distinctive blonde and black hair, coupled with his rather handsome face, and suddenly pieced together a series of connections.

"Ciel? You're Ciel?" he exclaimed, his surprise evident.

The same Ciel who killed Boss Margot and threw Boss Wilson off the fourth floor?

Ciel of the Savoie Mob?

He's back at it?

Lumian keenly sensed the mobsters' profound fear. He grinned and gave Ait's shoulder a friendly pat, brushing off the dust.

Then, he took hold of Ait and proceeded towards the washroom door, one step at a time.

Simultaneously, he curled his lips into a smile.

"You've got two options. One, leave this room now and seek help from your Poison Spur Mob boss. Two, meet your demise here, one by one, at my hands."

As he spoke, he advanced, a cold gaze sweeping across the faces of each mobster, as if contemplating the best way to eliminate them.

The mobsters couldn't help but tremble, as a similar thought crossed their minds: Regardless, Boss Hammer has been apprehended. If we open fire, we'll only harm him. It might be wiser to seek help from the boss!

"Well?" Lumian snorted, urging them to decide.

With a swift swoosh, the first mobster turned on his heels and fled the room. The others followed suit, abandoning any notion of confrontation.

When no one remained, Lumian let out a silent sigh of relief.

If those men had truly steeled themselves, their hearts unswayed by fear, the confined space of the washroom and their ten firearms would have posed a lethal threat.

Of course, Ait could forget about survival as well.

They have no more than four minutes to reach Avenue du Marché from here… I must conclude the interrogation before "Black Scorpion" Roger and his comrades depart, granting me ample time to escape the scene and locate Baron Brignais at Salle de Bal Brise… Just four minutes… As Lumian assessed the current situation, he squatted down and propped Ait against the washroom's door panel.

Then, he dislocated his captive's shoulder joints and bound his legs together using a shower curtain. Opening the window, he allowed the breeze to circulate from both sides.

With these tasks completed, Lumian removed the paper balls from his own nose, retrieved the metal canister containing the pungent gas, and held it to Ait's nostrils.

Achoo!

Ait sneezed, his eyes fluttering open.

Lumian promptly stowed away the metal canister, capping it, ensuring the other party remained in a weakened state.

"What do you want?" Ait asked, fear and anxiety evident in his eyes as he recognized the person before him.

Chapter 170: Nightstalkers

Lumian brandished Hedsey's dagger, a sly grin forming on his face.

"I've got a question for you."

"You could've come straight to me. No need for all this," Ait instinctively tried to stall for time.

With a quick glance, he scanned the room from the corner of his eye, but there were no lifeless bodies to be found.

Based on his combat with Ciel, Ait knew it was impossible for the other party to eliminate ten armed thugs without a single one escaping.

In fact, even Ait himself wouldn't dare to face the encirclement of ten revolvers in such a confined space. He might take down three or four of them, but he would surely meet his demise.

If Ait, with his abilities, couldn't pull it off, there was no way Ciel—who he believed to be somewhat weaker and reliant on cunning strategies—could achieve such a feat.

Given the circumstances, Ait assumed most of his ten subordinates had fled, while a few might have sought assistance from the Black Scorpion.

With this realization, a strong desire to survive surged within Ait.

As long as I don't anger Ciel and can buy myself six to seven minutes, there's a good chance I'll be saved!

"If I hadn't done this, how else could I have crossed paths with you, considering my relationship with your Poison Spur Mob?" Lumian deliberately created the illusion that he didn't intend to spill blood.

He raised the dagger, emphasizing his point.

"Enough with the games. Answer my questions. You know I'm not a patient person. If you refuse or lie, I'll end your life right here. I can always ask 'Baldy' Harman later. After all, there are plenty of folks in your Poison Spur Mob who know about those matters."

Lumian had compelled the mobsters to depart, not only due to the situation but also to seize control of the situation.

If he didn't make Ait believe he still had a fighting chance, prying answers from him in a short amount of time without employing mystical means would be futile.

A person who clung to hope would fear death all the more!

Ait promptly responded, "Alright!"

He resolved to divulge some information, delving into the details, hoping to hold out for those crucial six to seven minutes.

Naturally, he contemplated whether Ciel might abandon the inquiry at the last moment and execute him. Yet, aside from cooperating, Ait had no other choice. He could only hope the information he shared would be valuable enough to captivate Ciel's interest and prevent an untimely demise.

About three minutes… Lumian silently counted the seconds and posed his next question.

"Have you encountered Louis Lund?"

Ait hesitated.

In a swift motion, Lumian swung the dagger, piercing Ait's shoulder and eliciting a gush of crimson blood.

"This is your warning—the final one," Lumian calmly stated, retracting the dagger.

Ait, his expression contorted, felt the unyielding ruthlessness emanating from Lumian and sensed the specter of impending death drawing near. Fear gripped his heart.

He blurted out, "Yes! Wanted posters for Louis Lund can be found in Salle de Gristmill and many other places. The moment I laid eyes on him at the Boss's hideout, I recognized him."

Ait realized he couldn't rely on silence and hesitation to gain more time. That would only lead to uncontrollable consequences.

Lying was also risky since he couldn't be certain which questions Ciel was using to test his honesty.

In comparison, offering convoluted yet seemingly valuable information would be more likely to appease the other party.

As expected… Lumian was delighted.

Having confirmed the connection between Louis Lund and the Poison Spur Mob's "Black Scorpion" Roger, Lumian had achieved his objective for this operation. The remaining questions were just an added bonus. It would be nice to get answers, but it wouldn't be a deal-breaker if he didn't.

"Why did he go to 'Black Scorpion' Roger?" Lumian inquired further.

Ait shook his head.

"I'm not aware of the specifics, but I've heard that the lady Louis Lund is loyal to has arrived in Trier. She wants our Poison Spur Mob and their respective spheres of influence to coordinate efforts and avoid conflicts.

"Our boss, with the approval of Madame Moon, took charge of the liaison."

"Madame Moon?" Lumian never expected another Madame Moon to enter the picture.

He didn't even know what was happening with Madame Night.

"Madame Moon is the one the Poison Spur Mob swears loyalty to. Well, our boss has mentioned that she's not just a Madame anymore, but a Lady who Births Deities. We often offer prayers to her. I haven't seen her myself; only the Boss and Baldy have."

Not Madame… From Madame Moon to Lady who Births Deities… Had she received more boons and elevated her status? Lumian nodded in understanding.

"What's the relationship between Madame Moon and Madame Night?"

"They both belong to an organization called the Nightstalkers. Madame Moon appears to be the leader, or at least a significant figure at the leadership level." Ait provided a convoluted description of what he knew.

A secret organization that believes in some hidden existence? Lumian redirected the conversation to the matter that intrigued him the most.

"Will Louis Lund visit 'Black Scorpion' Roger again?"

"He'll likely come back next week to check if everyone has followed through on their agreements and if any adjustments are needed. I don't know the exact timing," Ait honestly responded.

I'll have the chance to reunite with Louis Lund on Avenue du Marché next week? And I'll be stationed there permanently after Sunday! Lumian felt a surge of delight and excitement.

He then pressed on, asking,

"What kind of power does 'Black Scorpion' Roger possess?"

"H-he's a Heretic Spellmaster," Ait stammered instinctively. "Our boss said it himself. The essence of a Heretic Spellmaster is using their life force to cast spells. It can be their own life force or someone else's, but it seems they need to be controlled beforehand."

So he truly is a Heretic Spellmaster… Truly wicked and cruel… Lumian recalled the battle with the midwife.

Observing Lumian's lack of surprise, Ait felt a sense of relief for not lying. He continued, "I've witnessed him using a few spells. One is a peculiar curse, another involves manipulating blood, then there's a kind of black flame that weakens people, and finally, he has some effects on corpses and ghosts. I don't know much else."

There's at least one more—the ability to create a 'turf' filled with undead creatures, allowing him to share damage and mysteriously teleport… Lumian silently muttered, his gaze fixed on Ait, gesturing for him to continue.

Ait steeled himself and spoke.

"Our boss also mentioned that if we perform well, he might receive more boons and become a Sower."

Having said that, Ait regretted his decision not to choose a boon back then and instead opt for a potion. It had caused his progress to be hindered by the need for ingredients and other factors. The hope of reaching Sequence 7 seemed distant.

As long as one contributed enough and their body could withstand it, they could attain more boons.

A Sower? A symbol of abundance and life? Hmm, when Madame Pualis was still Pulitt, he had many illegitimate children. He was despised by countless people in the Dariège area, to the point that his family had to disown him and pretend he had gone missing… Could this be a manifestation of a Sower's powers? Did Pulitt lose control under the influence of the boons? And after becoming a Sower, it appears that he underwent a gender transformation. Is that the level equivalent to the Madames, or is it one Sequence higher than them? Lumian's mind raced with numerous thoughts.

Observing Lumian's expression, Ait continued speaking.

"I don't know what comes after Sower. All I know is that Wilson is a Villain, equivalent to Sequence 9. Harman is a Gardener, and his strength is similar to mine, but he possesses extensive knowledge of botany. He can create potions with magical effects. Yes, he has a potion that temporarily hardens his skin like tree bark. I tried slashing him with a knife, but he only suffered minor injuries. He also has medicines to treat various illnesses and injuries."

So, becoming a Heretic Spellmaster requires being a Gardener. No wonder the midwife used those giant scissors as a weapon… Fortunately, I obtained this information. If I had assassinated "Baldy" Harman without giving him time to react, he wouldn't have used his body to shield Fallen Mercury… Targeted intelligence is truly valuable… Lumian sighed with a mix of emotions.

Ait pondered for a moment and continued, "Harman once mentioned that the spiritual monsters born from trees and flowers become highly frightened when they see him since he is a Gardener and responsible for their pruning."

Ait, who was trying to buy more time, quickly brought up another topic.

"Our boss mentioned that among the unrecognized paramount beings, only three can bestow godhood without much difficulty. One is the Great Mother of our faith, another has 'Desire' and 'Tree' in its name, and the third appears to be a mysterious fog. As for the other beings, if they wish to grant godhood, they have to perform a very, very complex ritual that would easily be discovered and destroyed."

The Mother Tree of Desire? What sets them apart from the being with the name Inevitability? Why can they bestow godhood without the need for an extensive ritual? Heh heh, I wonder what will happen when a Gardener encounters a Fallen Tree Spirit, the latter undergoing a suppression brought about by their inherent order in the hierarchy? Lumian's thoughts raced, and he suddenly changed the subject.

"Who is the candidate for parliament you support?"

"It's Hugues Artois from the Enlightenment Party." Ait's anticipation grew as he noticed that quite some time had passed.

If those rascals hurry, they'll meet the Boss!

Ait, who was waiting for Lumian to ask about the Poison Spur Mob's recent plans, suddenly saw the other party raise his right hand and swing his dagger.

With a soft sound, the dagger pierced Ait's temples and stirred them a few times.

Ait's mouth hung open in horror, and his eyes grew desperate and unfocused.

With a thud, he collapsed, no longer drawing breath.

Lumian left the dagger lodged in Ait's head and swiftly bandaged his wounds. He then stowed away his belongings, shouldered the lifeless body, and pushed open the room's window before leaping down.

Since it was only the second floor, his landing was steady, and he broke into a run.

Instead of taking the most direct route, Lumian opted for a detour through Rue du Rossignol, making his way to Avenue du Marché.

The late-night atmosphere offered scarce street lamps, casting a pitch-black darkness that seemed to consume anyone on the road.

It took Lumian over two minutes to carry Ait's corpse to the entrance of Salle de Bal Brise.

The two mobsters guarding the entrance were about to halt him when they recognized Ciel's face.

As a result, they ceased their interference and allowed him to enter.

…

In the second-floor café, Louis approached Baron Brignais's side, carrying a stack of papers, a black revolver, a bayonet, and a bag of bullets.

"Baron, I have everything prepared for Ciel."

More information and weapons.

Baron Brignais nodded.

"Send them to Auberge du Coq Doré tomorrow morning."

After issuing the instructions, Baron Brignais spoke with anticipation, "I wonder what kind of performance he will stage for us and when he will make his move. Do you think he will choose 'Hammer' Ait, 'Baldy' Harman, or 'Short-legged Candlestick'…"

Before Baron Brignais could finish his sentence, the sound of approaching footsteps interrupted him.

The mobster guarding the first-floor entrance wore a terrified expression as he addressed Baron Brignais, "C-Ciel is here! He—he's carrying someone—or rather, a corpse!"

At that moment, Lumian emerged from the staircase, a smile on his face. His steps seemed heavier than usual.

"That is?" Baron Brignais looked at the lifeless body trailing behind Ciel, a mixture of confusion and seriousness on his face.

Lumian tossed the corpse to the ground, clapped his hands, and grinned.

"'Hammer' Ait."

Chapter 171: Rapid Idea

With a resounding thud, the lifeless body crashed to the floor, sending a shockwave through the hearts of Baron Brignais, Louis, and their comrades.

Baron Brignais rose to his feet and beheld the corpse lying at Lumian's feet. He took in the tangle of abundant, disheveled brown hair, the lengthy limbs, and the imposing, robust physique.

It was none other than "Hammer" Ait!

Louis's eyes widened in disbelief at the realization that the treacherous member of the Savoie Mob lay dead on the café floor.

The baron had entrusted the task to Ciel right after dinner, and the hour had not even struck ten.

What's more, Ciel had managed to accomplish the mission before they could deliver the comprehensive intelligence and weaponry that would have enhanced his chances of success.

Moreover, "Hammer" Ait was a true Beyonder, surpassing even Wilson from before in strength. He wasn't as vulnerable as Margot, always surrounded by a retinue of followers. Yet, he had failed to survive three hours after the baron had issued the assignment.

Was this any different from purchasing a pig at Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman and slaughtering it?

Even if the baron had taken personal action, it wouldn't have been that effortless or straightforward. It could have even ended in failure.

Louis's gaze shifted from the lifeless body to Ciel's countenance, as if only now did he truly perceive the true nature of this rural novice.

It was somewhat understandable that Margot had fallen prey to him due to carelessness and the poisoned slash. Wilson's defeat could be explained away by his own feebleness and entrapment within the room. However, "Hammer" Ait was a Beyonder whose combat prowess was not significantly inferior to the baron's, and he had always been on high alert against potential assassinations by the Savoie Mob. He wouldn't have been careless.

Yet, Ciel had managed to dispatch such a formidable adversary within a matter of hours!

Just how formidable was he?

What were his limits?

In comparison to the baron, who was the stronger one?

A cascade of questions raced through Louis's mind, and his gaze at Lumian now held a tinge of fear.

The other thugs shared the same unease.

Baron Brignais's gaze constantly shifted between "Hammer" Ait's lifeless form and Lumian's visage, as if searching for any trace of deceit.

Had Lumian Lee effortlessly completed a mission that the baron himself would have considered challenging?

If "Hammer" Ait was so easily dispatched, why had the Savoie Mob, who had long sought to punish the traitor, allowed him to live until now?

This guy is even more terrifying than I had suspected. In terms of strength, intelligence, execution, and seizing opportunities, he is no less capable than I am… He must be concealing some secrets. There's more to him than meets the eye… Baron Brignais barely contained the turmoil within his heart and reclaimed the clarity, rationality, and intelligence he typically boasted.

Just as he was about to bestow his usual smile and commendation upon Lumian Lee, signifying his intent to inform his superiors of Lumian's contributions to the Savoie Mob, a sudden realization dawned upon him.

Baron Brignais's expression turned to stone as he locked eyes with Lumian.

"Does anyone else know that you've taken down 'Hammer' Ait?"

Lumian replied candidly, "Quite a few."

Baron Brignais's countenance underwent a dramatic shift, losing its refined and confident air.

In that moment, all he wanted was to unleash a torrent of curses upon Lumian.

Is your f*cking brain filled with shit? So many people are aware of your involvement in 'Hammer' Ait's demise, and yet you boldly bring his lifeless body to Salle de Bal Brise, right in front of me?

Do you think that these individuals won't inform 'Black Scorpion' Roger? Do you believe he won't storm into Salle de Bal Brise seeking revenge?

Do you think I can fend off 'Black Scorpion' Roger? Damn it, you're leading me to my own demise!

You better find a bloody corner to hide in at Underground Trier!

Seizing the opportunity presented by Baron Brignais's subdued breathing and silence, Lumian smiled nonchalantly and said, "'Hammer' Ait's subordinates must have found 'Black Scorpion' Roger by now. Only you, Baron, can offer me sufficient protection.

"Baron, weren't you anticipating retaliation from the Poison Spur Mob? That's why you sent me to hunt down one of the trio—Hammer, Baldy, or Short-legged Candlestick?"

Bitterness filled Baron Brignais's mouth at Lumian's question. For a brief moment, he couldn't bring himself to order Lumian to leave.

He had made two plans in preparation for the potential revenge from the Poison Spur Mob. He was confident that he would remain unscathed.

Wouldn't it be a fortuitous outcome if "Giant" Simon and "Rat" Christo met their end?

But the predicament lay in the fact that he hadn't had enough time to implement any of his plans or set them into motion!

His intention was to dispatch the intelligence and weaponry to Auberge du Coq Doré tomorrow morning, and only then would he decide on the course of action. Nonetheless, eliminating any leader of the Poison Spur Mob was no easy feat. It would likely require days of meticulous effort before he could even set foot inside their domain.

Yet, Lumian Lee, that madman, had sought out "Hammer" Ait without delay upon accepting the mission. He wasted no time, conducted no reconnaissance, made no arrangements, and didn't wait for the opportune moment to arise.

What further infuriated the baron was that the fellow had actually succeeded! In a matter of hours, he had slain "Hammer" Ait and dragged the lifeless body to Salle de Bal Brise!

F*ck, is he even human?

This caught him off guard. If "Black Scorpion" Roger were to strike, he might meet his demise alongside "Hammer" Ait.

Observing Baron Brignais's silence and darkened expression, Lumian inwardly chuckled.

He had brought "Hammer" Ait's body to Salle de Bal Brise and presented it to Baron Brignais not to boast or intimidate the gang leader and his henchmen.

His intention was to draw "Black Scorpion" Roger and the other formidable members of the Poison Spur Mob to them!

If Baron Brignais were to fall, a new opportunity would arise. A replacement with sufficient strength would be required. When the time came, Ciel, who could fight, contribute, and had aided Red Boots' lover, would undoubtedly be the most sought-after candidate!

Lumian wasn't overly concerned about whether "Black Scorpion" Roger would kill him.

Mr. K's finger was in his pocket!

Mr. K probably wouldn't mind if I repurposed the finger. After all, I'm doing it to fulfill his mission… Lumian thought casually.

Regardless, the threat from Susanna Mattise wouldn't come anytime soon. He could figure out an alternative approach later. Perhaps Mr. K would reward him with another finger once he saw how well and swiftly Lumian completed the mission?

Baron Brignais's expression underwent several changes. He pushed his chair back abruptly and hurried toward an iron-colored mechanical safe at the café bar counter.

He turned the knob and entered the password.

Lumian watched with a raised eyebrow, puzzled.

What was Baron Brignais planning to retrieve? Was he intending to take the cash and flee?

Or did he possess Sealed Artifacts that he dared not carry with him, fearing their potent negative effects, and had stowed them away in the safe?

Soon enough, Baron Brignais opened the safe and retrieved two bundles of detonators—commonly used in quarries.

Setting a trap to explode "Black Scorpion" Roger? That's quite challenging. He's a Heretic Spellmaster… Lumian refrained from inquiring as he observed Baron Brignais walk toward the wall near Avenue du Marché and push open two glass windows.

The leader of the Savoie Mob placed the bundles of detonators on the windowsill, then lit a match.

Subsequently, he ignited one of the bundles and glanced at the dimly lit Avenue du Marché. Raising his hand, he tossed the explosives into the middle of the road.

Louis and the other mobsters stood in bewilderment, unable to comprehend the baron's intentions.

Lumian's thoughts raced, and he instantly grasped the plan. He couldn't help but inwardly applaud, Very clever…

Boom!

The bundle of detonators exploded in the middle of Avenue du Marché, causing the surrounding glass to rattle.

The few pedestrians on the roadside were startled and fell to the ground, sustaining minor injuries. Some screamed, covering their ears, and frantically sought shelter in nearby locations.

Baron Brignais glanced over, lit another bundle of detonators, and hurled it into the deserted road. Causing casualties would be troublesome aftermath. He didn't wish to attract unwanted attention from authorities.

Boom!

The explosion reverberated once more. The police headquarters on Avenue du Marché, the Eternal Blazing Sun cathedral, and the God of Steam and Machinery cathedral responded to a certain extent.

Salle de Bal Brise and the occupants of nearby buildings were thrown into disarray, but they dared not venture outside.

Baron Brignais clapped his hands and returned to the wooden table. He pulled a chair over and sat down.

Resuming his usual demeanor, he smiled at Lumian.

"It's all right now."

This would surely unsettle the police and the clergymen. Some would undoubtedly investigate the cause. It was highly probable that official Beyonders would be among them.

Officers who maintained good relations with the Savoie Mob would inevitably inquire.

Under such circumstances, how could "Black Scorpion" Roger dare to launch an attack?

They couldn't risk assuming that no official Beyonders would care about the explosion. After all, if they lost that bet, they would be doomed!

Lumian hadn't expected Baron Brignais to find a way to elude "Black Scorpion" Roger's assault in such a short span of time. And he had accomplished it using only the resources at hand.

This had momentarily foiled his plan.

True to the reputation of the Savoie Mob's 'brain,' Baron Brignais displays remarkable responsiveness and quick thinking, surpassing even Margot, "Hammer" Ait, and the others in critical moments. Lumian clicked his tongue in acknowledgment, paying no mind to Hammer's lifeless body on the ground. Taking a seat across from Baron Brignais, he flashed a smile.

"I made the wise choice to seek refuge here."

Baron Brignais nearly choked, his saliva catching in his throat.

Had it not been for his exceptional intellect, he might have been ensnared and faced a grave fate!

Exhaling slowly, Baron Brignais cast a glance at the motionless corpse and addressed Louis and the rest, "Drag it into a private room and conceal it carefully. The authorities will likely come knocking soon."

Chapter 172: Superintendent

After concealing the body, Baron Brignais nonchalantly addressed Lumian, his curiosity piqued.

"I must say, I'm quite intrigued. How did you manage to eliminate 'Hammer' Ait?"

Lumian didn't hold back, revealing everything. He retrieved an empty metal canister and placed it on the table before him.

"What's this?" Baron Brignais examined it carefully for a few moments.

"Remember when I ventured underground earlier today?" Lumian grinned. "I encountered a deviant individual and, quite accidentally, dispatched him. He happened to possess this gaseous sedative and its corresponding antidote."

"After infiltrating 'Hammer' Ait's washroom, I consumed the antidote and patiently awaited his arrival. When he entered, I unscrewed the sedative and engaged him in close combat. I restrained him, preventing his escape until the sedative took effect."

Baron Brignais pondered for a brief moment, confirming the plausibility of this plan. Satisfied, he nodded and remarked, "The washroom is rather confined, and the gaseous sedative will quickly permeate the space. Moreover, there's no ventilation to speak of. Considering 'Hammer' Ait's cautious nature and his guard against our Savoie Mob, he wouldn't offer an easy opportunity for infiltration."

"The gunmen stationed outside wouldn't dare to open fire, lest they accidentally eliminate 'Hammer' Ait. They might even struggle to unlock the restroom door."

Baron Brignais spoke with such conviction that it seemed he had witnessed the scene firsthand.

Louis and the others silently acknowledged the validity of this analysis.

Having understood the intricacies, they realized that Ciel's ability to dispatch "Hammer" Ait within such a short span of time wasn't as implausible as they had initially thought.

Ciel had indeed discovered a path to success and skillfully utilized the resources at his disposal.

Under this plan, as long as his combat prowess didn't significantly pale in comparison to "Hammer" Ait's, he had a considerable chance of dealing with the traitor.

Naturally, achieving success necessitated strength, a stroke of luck, decisiveness, audacity, and adeptness in gathering intelligence.

Ciel's terror was undeniable, yet it wasn't as horrifying as they had envisioned.

Baron Brignais further commended Lumian's sagacity, albeit slightly displeased that he had transported "Hammer" Ait's lifeless body to Salle de Bal Brise after accomplishing the deed. It had nearly brought calamity upon him.

Nevertheless, Baron Brignais harbored no intention of reprimanding him.

Upon reflection, he realized that the fault lay primarily with himself.

It seems I habitually exude an excessive air of confidence and intellect. As if nothing can perplex me. No wonder he assumes that I can provide ample protection and remain unafraid of 'Black Scorpion' Roger.

I even proposed this operation. It's only natural for him to believe that I've already made all necessary preparations.

As they conversed, time slipped away. Before long, a guard from the Savoie Mob stationed at the entrance on the first floor ascended and approached Baron Brignais, conveying a message.

"Baron, Superintendent Everett has arrived."

"Please, bring him up." Baron Brignais stood and made his way toward the staircase.

Travis Everett served as the superintendent at the police headquarters of Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman. He held one of the highest positions when it came to carrying out tasks. Above him stood a few deputy directors with the rank of chief superintendent, and overseeing everything was the police commissioner of the district.

Baron Brignais enjoyed conversing with Everett. Emperor Roselle's words described him as the epitome of a "Mr. Nice Guy." He preferred not to delve into the truth, simply hoping for harmonious interactions and a lack of trouble. He possessed a remarkable ability to resolve conflicts between the mobs in the market district.

Ten seconds later, the officer led his two subordinates into the café on the second floor.

Travis Everett appeared to be around 30 years old and stood nearly 1.75 meters tall. His black hair was cropped short, and he wore glasses with relatively large black frames that framed his blue eyes. His chin was slightly broad.

Dressed in a black police uniform, his epaulets showcased five-petaled irises in silver-white against the black background. This indicated his rank as a superintendent. If there were seven petals, he would hold the rank of chief superintendent, and above that, an off-white diamond square.

Travis Everett looked at the smiling Baron Brignais and asked with a stern expression, "What just happened? Please don't tell me there was an explosion at the entrance of Salle de Bal Brise, and you have no idea who did it!"

"Monsieur Superintendent, please have a seat." Baron Brignais guided Travis Everett to a wooden table and personally pulled out a chair for him.

Lumian, disguising himself as one of the thugs alongside Louis and the others, stood behind Baron Brignais, avoiding direct confrontation with the officers to prevent recognition as a wanted criminal.

Baron Brignais picked up his mahogany pipe and gazed at Travis Everett across from him. With a grave expression, he spoke, "'Hammer' Ait is dead. I was concerned that 'Black Scorpion' Roger would go into a frenzy, so I detonated the explosives and drew everyone's attention. Rest assured, Monsieur Superintendent, I carefully chose the location of the blast. I didn't harm or seriously injure anyone."

Travis Everett raised his right hand, adjusted his black-framed glasses, and pointed at Baron Brignais.

"Can you all refrain from causing so much trouble? The parliamentary election is taking place next week. Do you want us to embarrass ourselves in front of our future superior?

"I don't care about your intentions, nor do I wish to know your motives. All I desire is a peaceful market district.

"If something similar occurs again, I will propose to Monsieur Aymerck that Bureau 8 and the two Churches form a joint investigative team to handle your Savoie Mob!"

Aymerck served as one of Trier's police commissioners, overseeing Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman.

Travis Everett did not mention the death of "Hammer" Ait directly, but he employed it as a warning to Baron Brignais.

Baron Brignais responded with a smile, "Monsieur Superintendent, fear not. For the next two weeks, we shall strictly adhere to the law. I am merely concerned about the Poison Spur Mob…"

Travis Everett nodded and let out a sigh.

"Emperor Roselle proclaimed that peace brings prosperity. If you do encounter any disputes, you can seek me out for a tribunal."

He then turned to the two lower-ranking officers beside him and said, "Let us return now and find someone to keep a close watch on the leaders of the Poison Spur Mob. We must ensure they behave."

The superintendent rose from his seat and extended his arms.

"Praise the Sun!"

"Praise the Sun!" Baron Brignais also stood up, echoing the sentiment.

As Travis Everett and his companions descended the stairs, Lumian muttered quietly to himself, Do people in positions of power always enjoy quoting Emperor Roselle? We lower-class individuals are different. We curse and use crude language as needed. The sense of a sentence doesn't depend on who utters it…

Nearly half an hour later, Baron Brignais turned to Lumian and spoke, "'Black Scorpion' Roger and the others should be under surveillance. There is no immediate danger.

"You may return to Auberge du Coq Doré to rest now. Come here at 10:30 a.m. tomorrow. I will take you to meet the boss."

"Alright," Lumian replied with a smile. "Thank you, Baron."

He then inquired, "According to the rules, since I was the one who killed 'Hammer' Ait, all his belongings belong to me, correct?"

"That is correct," Baron Brignais confirmed, displaying a generous nature when it came to such matters.

He motioned for Louis to bring over the black revolver, bullet bag, bayonet, and stack of intelligence.

"These are yours as well."

Lumian fastened the holster under his left armpit and stowed away the other items before entering the room where "Hammer" Ait's lifeless body lay.

Ensuring no one was tailing him, he squatted down and unbuttoned the corpse's shirt.

There, he discovered a golden-red ball resembling the morning clouds and sunset, with a faint flickering light dancing within.

This was a Pugilist Beyonder characteristic!

Lumian happily pocketed it and proceeded to search "Hammer" Ait's pockets. He found 116 verl d'or and 17 coppet notes and coins, along with a pair of boxing gloves made of steel-like material, adorned with several sharp spikes.

For Lumian, this bounty far exceeded the satisfaction of hunting Margot.

On his way back to Auberge du Coq Doré, only sporadic gas street lamps illuminated the path. Lumian weaved through the intersecting shadows, sensing pairs of eyes fixated on him.

Is 'Black Scorpion' Roger commanding the deceased or using other Beyonder abilities to keep tabs on me? Or am I simply being overly vigilant and imagining things? Lumian muttered, raising his right hand to massage his temples.

He activated his Spirit Vision but found nothing amiss.

The unsettling feeling of being watched gradually faded away.

…

In the three-story building with a garden at 126 Avenue du Marché.

The imposing "Black Scorpion" Roger, with his piercing deep-blue eyes, and the charming "Baldy" Harman walked back through the door.

The ten members of the Poison Spur Mob, who had been waiting anxiously, felt the air grow tense and their fear heightened. None of them dared to utter a word, as if they were facing an impending storm.

After a tense silence that lasted for more than ten seconds, "Baldy" Harman gritted his teeth and spoke up,

"That Ciel doesn't take us seriously. The Savoie Mob has been provoking us repeatedly. They must pay the price!"

"Black Scorpion" Roger shared Harman's sentiment, feeling equally provoked by Ciel. He spoke in a low, commanding voice,

"We cannot let this matter go unaddressed!"

Phew… Roger exhaled heavily and motioned for the other members of the Poison Spur Mob to leave.

Only Harman remained, and Roger continued, "But we are being targeted by the police. It is highly likely that official Beyonders will be involved. We cannot seek revenge for the time being.

"Brignais is no ordinary opponent. He is cunning and intelligent.

"When Monsieur Artois is elected to parliament, Madame Moon will grant us a new boon. At that time, I will extract Brignais's brain and feed it to the stray dogs!

"However, we cannot remain idle. When the surveillance on us becomes less vigilant, I will seize the opportunity to assassinate Ciel!

"If the Savoie Mob can assassinate our men, then we can do the same to theirs!"

…

At Auberge du Coq Doré, Lumian had just reached Room 207 when he sensed something. He turned his head and directed his gaze towards the nearby balcony.

"Come out," he said with a resigned sigh. "Madame Jenna."

Chapter 173: Intelligence on the Boss

With her hair tied up in a simple bun, Showy Diva emerged from the shadows of the balcony, her eyes adorned with dark shadows and a mole positioned neatly on her nose.

Curiosity evident in her voice, she asked, "How did you discover me? How did you know it was me?"

Being an Assassin, she had mastered the art of utilizing darkness and shadows to conceal her presence. Until now, no one had ever detected her in her previous encounters, making this the first time she had been discovered.

Lumian scoffed in response.

"Next time you plan on assassinating someone, remember not to wear perfume."

After reminding Jenna, he jokingly pointed towards the door of Room 207 and said, "I thought you would enter the room yourself, but instead, you waited so politely on the balcony. It's unlike you."

"Dammit, I've always been polite!" Jenna retorted, feeling a hint of anger at the accusation.

After a brief pause, she muttered, "You're cold, sinister, cunning, and devious. You might have set a trap in the room, waiting for someone to walk into it."

While speaking, Jenna glanced at Lumian and indignantly said, "I understand how you guessed that I'm an Assassin!

"First, you connected the dots from the perfect infiltration route I provided. Then, you deliberately probed me. F*ck, if I had been calmer, you would have said, 'Haha, I'm joking.'"

"Madame Jenna, your reflex arc is a little long," Lumian laughed.

"What 'Madame' or 'Miss.' You're not one to be polite either. Just call me Jenna," she controlled her urge to curse and curiously asked, "What's a reflex arc?"

She had a feeling it wasn't something favorable, but she couldn't quite grasp its meaning.

Miss, did you complete your compulsory education? Lumian criticized. As he opened the door, he casually explained, "For instance, you, Franca, Baron Brignais, and 'Hammer' Ait hear me telling a joke simultaneously. Franca and Baron Brignais burst into laughter instantly, but it takes you a whole day to find me and say, 'Haha, how funny.'"

"Dammit! You bastard!" Jenna finally realized she had been mocked.

Following Lumian into Room 207, she asked in confusion, "What about 'Hammer' Ait? Why isn't he laughing?"

Lumian turned his head and solemnly glanced at her.

"Dead people don't laugh."

Jenna was momentarily taken aback before she burst into laughter, her body swaying slightly.

"You, haha, you truly have a sense of humor…" She intermittently expressed amidst her laughter.

Lumian ignited the carbide lamp in the room and settled on the edge of the bed. He inquired, "What brings you to Auberge du Coq Doré?"

"I've come to retrieve my gun!" Jenna shut the door behind her and dragged over the old, worn armchair. Placing it in front of her, she sat down, resting her elbows on the backrest.

Her eyes sparkled with curiosity she couldn't conceal.

"So, you managed to eliminate 'Hammer' Ait. You're even more formidable than I had imagined!

"But don't tell me how you did it just yet. Let me take a guess.

"You… asked me about the size of the washroom. That means you intended to exploit the environment there.

"F*ck! I've got it, I've got it! You have that pervert's sedative on hand. It's perfect for a place like the washroom. It's like trapping a pigeon!

"Dammit, I can imagine 'Hammer' Ait's desperate expression as he struggled, realizing his strength was dwindling. The thugs outside couldn't enter, and they didn't dare to shoot randomly…"

The more Jenna spoke, the more animated she became, as if she were the one who had carried out the assassination of "Hammer" Ait.

"At least you have some wits about you," Lumian begrudgingly acknowledged.

"Heh!" Jenna waved her hand and peered at Lumian. "What I can't figure out is why you weren't affected by the sedative. Did you smell that bottle of 'shit' beforehand? Can its effects last that long?"

Lumian simply smiled.

"I recall something you once said. Avoid seeing what I shouldn't, hearing what I shouldn't, and asking questions I shouldn't."

"…" Jenna glared at Lumian in frustration and refrained from further probing.

Lumian produced her compact revolver and tossed it to her.

Jenna caught it deftly and let out a chuckle.

"You didn't even dare to come up to me and return it in person?"

She smacked her lips and clicked her tongue.

"Is there something about me that frightens you?"

In that moment, she felt as if she had returned to teasing Lumian when they first met.

Lumian appraised her.

"You're quite audacious to enter a male stranger's room dressed like this in the middle of the night."

Jenna was dressed as she typically would for her evening performances. Her white blouse revealed a generous amount of her chest, and her off-white fluffy short skirt didn't provide much coverage as her legs spread on either side of the backrest.

Jenna deliberately covered her mouth and let out a soft chuckle.

"I was defenseless down in the underground, yet you didn't make a move, let alone now.

"Do you still hold onto your virginity? Need some help? A mature and beautiful sister can show you the wonders of the adult world."

As she spoke, she intentionally lowered her body, revealing her cleavage to Lumian.

Lumian didn't flinch and observed calmly.

Who would be frightened by such a thing?

Jenna's expectation of a fleeting gaze and a flushed expression from Lumian gradually transformed into discomfort.

She sat up straight and muttered, "Lame, coward…"

In the next instant, Lumian stood up abruptly.

Jenna's expression underwent a sudden change.

"What are you planning to do?"

Lumian's lips curled into a smirk as he turned toward the wooden table.

"Just pouring some light beer. Fancy a glass?"

Auberge du Coq Doré didn't offer the option of boiling water. The tenants either drank tap water or resorted to light beer as a substitute.

"…No, thanks." Jenna let out a relieved sigh.

Lumian took a few swigs of light beer and redirected the conversation.

"How can you be so certain that you're older than me?"

"I saw your wanted poster at Franca's. Well, hello there, Lumian. You're not even 18 yet, while I've already reached 21!" Jenna's satisfaction started to surface.

"Is your mental age only 12?" Lumian taunted before inquiring, "How did you come to know the infiltration route to that room?"

Franca had long harbored the desire to carry out an assassination against the Poison Spur Mob?

Jenna pursed her lips and replied, "I've been gathering intelligence for nearly a month, awaiting the perfect opportunity to assassinate Margot. But you beat me to it."

Margot had previously overseen the Salle de Gristmill.

"Do you hold a grudge against Margot?" Lumian asked.

"He didn't do anything to me." Jenna lowered her gaze slightly. "When I first arrived in the market district, searching for singing opportunities in various dance halls, I encountered another Showy Diva singer. She was a few years older than me and took me under her wing. She even helped refine my singing and guided me towards a chance to perform. Over a month ago, Margot violated her. F*cking dammit, did he think all Showy Divas were open for his taking? Afterwards, she left the market district. I later heard she was committed to an asylum…

"That was when I pleaded with Franca to obtain Beyonder powers and assist her."

Lumian fell silent for a few moments before speaking again.

"You see, one mustn't hesitate. When I made up my mind to kill Margot that morning, I carried out the deed that very night."

Jenna found herself both enraged and entertained.

"Well, everyone has their own style!"

Lumian changed the subject.

"Tomorrow morning, Baron Brignais will take me to meet the Boss. Do you have any insights on what kind of person he is?"

Jenna pondered for a moment before responding.

"I've never met him personally, but I've heard Franca mention a few things.

"He resides in Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative. He's a bit of a pervert and has a fondness for women, but he's not twisted. His tastes are quite f*cking normal, and every one of his partners matches Franca's preferences.

"He's a merchant by trade. He owns a depot near the steam locomotive station and holds significant shares in the nearby Rist docks. He also runs a freight company and a construction firm, providing employment opportunities for many Savoyards.

"You might not know this, but when the Poison Spur Mob first gained power, they had a major conflict with the Savoie Mob. All the laborers from the depot and the dock workers took to the streets. It was like a protest!"

A considerable number of people. If armed, they could form an army... Lumian motioned for Jenna to continue.

Jenna pulled her collar up slightly.

"Franca mentioned that he's quite amiable, even with common laborers. Don't be deceived by his appearance. His goal is to make others drop their guard around him.

He's cunning and highly intelligent. He enjoys playing mind games with others. Don't provoke him, or Franca won't be able to protect you.

"He wields significant power. It seems he's adept at fire manipulation and possesses some mystical artifact."

Adept at fire manipulation… A Sequence 7 Pyromaniac of the Hunter pathway? No, Franca mentioned that he's incredibly powerful, and Franca is likely a Sequence 7 Witch of the Demoness pathway. If she made such an assessment, it's probable that the boss of the Savoie Mob is more than just a Sequence 7…

The Poison Spur Mob's "Black Scorpion" Roger is the boss with a boon equivalent to a Sequence 7. A Heretic Spellmaster might not necessarily defeat a Witch. Franca could easily be a mob boss herself, yet she willingly becomes this person's mistress. I wonder if she has ulterior motives or if his strength and background truly surpass Franca's? Lumian's thoughts raced as he analyzed the situation.

Jenna stood up.

"You better dress like a man tomorrow. Don't be like Baron Brignais. The Boss prefers aggressive subordinates who resemble wolfdogs."

"Is that so…" Lumian scoffed. "I'm afraid I'll appear overly aggressive."

Jenna rolled her eyes.

"That's right. You saved my life, yet there are times when I can't help but want to slap you!

"Anyway, don't go too far."

She reattached her holster to her calf and headed towards the door, yawning openly.

"I'm heading back now. Sigh, I won't be able to perform at the Salle de Gristmill for the time being.

"Why do you still live in such a lousy room?"

Although her own accommodations weren't great either, they were still much better than Auberge du Coq Doré.

Lumian smirked once again.

"This is my turf."

"Heh!" Jenna didn't say anything further. She entered the dimly lit corridor and vanished from sight.

Lumian freshened up and settled into bed. Thoughts of meeting the boss of the Savoie Mob the next day gradually lulled him into sleep.

Chapter 174: Reward

At half past ten in the morning on the following day, Baron Brignais rendezvoused with Lumian on the second floor of Salle de Bal Brise.

Lumian had chosen a simple attire for the day, donning a linen shirt, a black waistcoat, and brown trousers. His cuffs were rolled up to his elbows, and he sported a wide-brimmed, brown hat.

This ensemble lent him an air of casualness, almost uncouth.

Baron Brignais observed it for a few moments but refrained from commenting. Instead, he merely reminded Lumian,

"Once we meet the Boss, it's best to keep your words to a minimum."

"Understood," Lumian replied, tipping his wide-brimmed hat.

Accompanied by Lumian alone, Baron Brignais did not bring Louis and the others. He led Lumian downstairs and directed him towards a four-seater carriage awaiting them at the entrance.

Within half an hour, the carriage navigated through Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative and halted on a comparably tranquil street.

The terrain in this area stood higher than its surroundings. Detached villas, predominantly white, beige, and grayish-blue, dotted the landscape. Each boasted a front lawn and a rear garden enclosed by barbed iron fences.

Lumian's gaze scanned the street signs, revealing the name Rue des Fontaines.

Following Baron Brignais, Lumian arrived at 11 Rue des Fontaines and watched as the baron pulled on the rope hanging beside the gated entrance.

Before long, a valet of Southern Continent origin approached and opened the iron gates.

"Monsieur Martin awaits you in his study," the dark-skinned valet remarked, his tone laced with arrogance.

Without waiting for Baron Brignais and Lumian's response, the valet turned on his heel and strolled along a cement path flanked by two green lawns spacious enough for three carriages.

After crossing the lawns, Lumian and Baron Brignais reached the grayish-white three-story villa.

The villa's door swung open, revealing a man in a black suit and a dark bow tie—typical butler attire—standing in the doorway.

Baron Brignais hastened his steps and greeted the man with a smile.

"Good morning, Faustino."

"Good morning, Brignais," Faustino, a man in his fifties, replied with a smile.

Baron Brignais introduced him to Lumian, saying, "This is Monsieur Martin's butler, Monsieur Faustino."

Lumian greeted Faustino in the usual manner, maintaining proper decorum.

Faustino nodded and offered no further words. Leading them through a hallway adorned with a resplendent crystal chandelier, resembling a dance floor, he guided them into a room lined with bookshelves.

Along the way, Lumian surveyed his surroundings, noting an array of oil paintings and an assortment of weapons adorning the walls—single-handed swords, broadswords, hammers, spears, and short bows. The half-tall wooden platform that ought to have showcased vases and sculptures was instead occupied by silver-white suits of armor, stirrups, breastplates, and other items.

An enthusiast of cold weapons, Lumian thought, retracting his gaze before entering the study.

Behind the desk, positioned beside the floor-to-ceiling windows, stood a man who measured nearly 1.8 meters in height.

His hair, typical black as found in Intis, exhibited a few silver strands near his temples. He appeared to be in his early forties, possessed strong facial features, and his slightly reddened eyes contrasted with his otherwise brown irises.

The man possessed full cheeks that contrasted with his sharply defined features. Wrinkles were conspicuously absent from his countenance, and he exuded a relatively amiable temperament. He resembled a businessman who would effortlessly flash a smile before uttering a single word.

In that moment, he wore a white shirt and a formal black suit, devoid of a bow tie or necktie.

"Good morning, Monsieur Martin," Baron Brignais's expression turned respectful.

After Lumian offered his greetings, Gardner Martin smiled and let out a sigh.

"So young, aren't you?

"I'm beginning to understand Emperor Roselle's words: Heroes often exhibit a different demeanor from others when they are young. Should I address you as Lumian or Ciel?"

"Ciel," Lumian replied respectfully.

As Gardner Martin strolled away from the floor-to-ceiling windows, he offered warm praise, "In just a week, you've slain two Sequence 8 Beyonders and gravely injured a Sequence 9. I couldn't have achieved such feats at your age. What's your Sequence?"

"Sequence 8, Provoker," Lumian responded candidly.

Gardner Martin expressed great satisfaction with Lumian's frankness. He nodded and remarked, "What I said earlier wasn't quite comprehensive. When I was a Sequence 8, I couldn't have accomplished what you did. Very well. Our Savoie Mob could use an exceptional lad like you."

Without waiting for Lumian's reply, he proceeded to ask, "Did you find anything noteworthy on 'Hammer' Ait?"

This person is aware of the Law of Beyonder Characteristics Conservation? Judging by his demeanor, even if he isn't aware of conservation, he believes that human Beyonders are akin to Beyonder creatures. They manifest Beyonder characteristics upon death, or some residual parts or ingredients that can be employed in potion brewing… Lumian contemplated for a moment and withheld nothing. From his pocket, he produced a fist-sized sphere resembling the morning clouds and the evening sun.

"I found this."

Gardner Martin regarded it with approval.

"Excellent. Sell it to me. It holds no value for you. How about 18,000 verl d'or?"

That's considerably higher than the 15,000 verl d'or at Mr. K's Gathering… Lumian pretended to be unaware of the exact price of the Beyonder characteristics.

"Is it truly worth 18,000 verl d'or?"

Baron Brignais, standing beside Lumian, couldn't fathom what peculiar object had prompted his boss to offer such a sum.

Something from 'Hammer' Ait? An ingredient employed for advancement? Or do Beyonders resemble Beyonder creatures? Baron Brignais entertained numerous speculations in an instant.

He suddenly regretted agreeing to surrender all of 'Hammer' Ait's possessions to Ciel the previous night in order to preserve his dignity.

"Haha," Gardner Martin boisterously chuckled. "It is indeed precious, but I'm offering a premium. Consider it your reward."

He then turned to Butler Faustino and instructed, "Go and fetch 18,000 in cash. Avoid denominations that are too large."

Lumian harbored no objections to selling the Pugilist Beyonder characteristic to Martin. He had intended to sell it at Mr. K's gathering.

His hope was to amass funds to acquire a mystical item capable of countering adverse effects, compensating for his lack of mysticism means or serving as a disguise.

Taking the Pugilist Beyonder characteristic from Ciel and toying with it for a few seconds, Gardner Martin addressed Baron Brignais, "Despite Ciel's tender age, he has already rendered significant services to our Savoie Mob and possesses remarkable strength. It is time for him to assume more substantial responsibilities."

"Yes… You are already burdened with the usury business and the other shops on Avenue du Marché. It is no easy task. Get Ciel to assist you in managing Salle de Bal Brise. Allocate some personnel to support him, so he doesn't have to rely solely on himself."

Baron Brignais's facial muscles twitched ever so slightly. He suppressed his discontent and disappointment and replied, "Very well, Monsieur Martin."

Salle de Bal Brise was a veritable goldmine, and he was reluctant to let go of it.

If not for Monsieur Martin's direct order, he would have chosen to hand over the Avenue du Marché business to Ciel and suggested transferring some of the henchmen from "Giant" Simon and "Blood Palm" Black.

Lumian sensed the strain in his relationship with Baron Brignais. He couldn't deceive him as effortlessly as before.

There might even be clashes and conflicts in the future!

Gardner Martin turned to Lumian and instructed, "Take good care of Salle de Bal Brise. If you perform well, I will entrust you with more significant ventures."

"Thank you, Monsieur Martin," Lumian replied, lowering his head and feigning delight.

On the way back to Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman, Baron Brignais seemed to regain his composure. He engaged in occasional conversations with Lumian regarding the Savoie Mob, displaying politeness, courtesy, and refinement.

Lumian was more preoccupied with the small cloth bag brimming with 18,000 verl d'or.

With that sum, he could acquire a modest apartment in Quartier de l'Observatoire!

In the Dariège region, it was akin to owning a villa in a decent neighborhood.

Upon entering Salle de Bal Brise, Louis and the others approached Lumian.

Before they could speak, Baron Brignais drew from his mahogany pipe and announced,

"Louis, Sarkota, from this day forth, follow Ciel. He is now in charge of Salle de Bal Brise."

Louis, whose forehead bruises had mostly faded, and Sarkota, whose brownish-red hair exhibited slight natural curls, revealed expressions of shock and confusion.

They were aware that Ciel would be rewarded, but they never anticipated him taking over Salle de Bal Brise and themselves being assigned to him.

He was now a true leader of the Savoie Mob!

Ignoring his subordinates' reactions, Baron Brignais smiled at Lumian and stated, "Leave me an office on the second floor. I require it for the usury business."

"Very well," Lumian responded without objection.

After a brief handover, Baron Brignais led two thugs to address some trouble concerning the usury business. Lumian ascended to the second floor, intending to inquire about Salle de Bal Brise's operations.

Louis leaned in, speaking in a hushed tone. "Ciel, I mean, Boss, Red Boots is in your office. I wonder if she's here for you or the baron. Would you like to meet her?"

"Red Boots" Franca? Lumian nodded subtly.

"Where is my office?"

Louis hurriedly guided his new boss through the café and into the corridor on the second floor, reaching a room at the end.

"Right here." He indicated, pointing to the dark red wooden door.

Lumian nodded, grasped the handle, and pushed the door open.

The first thing that greeted his eyes were a pair of vibrant red boots, elegantly placed on a brown wooden desk.

Adorning the boots were a pair of off-white breeches, and higher still, a white blouse for ladies adorned with a multitude of embroidered flowers and vine-like patterns on the cuffs and collar. Over it, she wore a slender black and white checkered vest.

Continuing upward, Lumian's gaze fell upon a graceful, smooth neck, followed by lips painted a delicate shade of red. A sharp, refined nose, eyebrows that arched toward the temples, and eyes sparkling with a vibrant, cheerful lake-like hue completed the picture. Her long flaxen hair was artfully tied up in a high ponytail.

Seated upon a swivel chair that had once belonged to Baron Brignais, "Red Boots" Franca nonchalantly rested her feet on the edge of the desk, as if it were her own personal territory.

Chapter 175: Hidden Blade

Lumian stepped into the room, shutting the door behind him, the dark red wood closing off the outside world. He turned to Franca and asked, "Are you here to see the baron or me?"

Franca leaned back in the chair, stretching her body.

However, the swivel chair tilted slightly, leaving the ground and wobbling uncertainly.

"Care to guess why I'm here? For you or him?" Her voice cut through the air, clear and distinct, in stark contrast to her elegant appearance and demeanor. "Gardner initially wanted you to be Brignais's deputy, to see if you were capable of handling more than just fighting. I told him then that Brignais hasn't been very obedient lately."

Lumian nodded, a sudden realization dawning on him. Aurore was right. A comment made in bed could play a significant role…

His confusion from earlier, on Rue des Fontaines, began to dissipate. How could the boss be so generous as to take away one of Baron Brignais's most prized "property" and hand it over to an outsider like him?

Salle de Bal Brise was the most popular dance hall in the entire market district!

Initially, Lumian had contemplated mocking Franca's masculine sitting posture, but the thought of her true gender made him reconsider. He clicked his tongue and remarked, "So, I should be thanking you?"

"No need for that. After all, you saved Jenna," Franca replied, smiling as she shook her right foot on her left ankle. "I came here for two reasons.

First, I wanted to assure you that I understand the distinction between kindness and animosity. I will surely repay kindness. Second, I wanted to warn you not to harbor any intentions toward Jenna."

The latter half of her sentence carried a clear warning that she would seek revenge for any offense.

Lumian couldn't help but chuckle.

"Are you lacking confidence? If you manage to make Jenna infatuated with you, nothing I do will change her feelings."

Had Lumian not known about the potential gender transformation through the Demoness pathway, he might have taunted Franca, asking if her confidence solely relied on her dick. He might have mocked her insecurity and her need to caution an unrelated individual. What did she think Jenna was? Someone who would easily change her heart? Lumian could almost visualize Jenna treating Franca as a friend rather than a lover.

Gradually, Franca's smile faded. She withdrew her feet and rose from her chair.

Despite being slightly shorter than Lumian, she stood at an impressive height of almost 1.75 meters, a rarity among Intisian women.

Franca circled the desk, drawing closer to Lumian. A smirk formed on her lips as she said, "If you're in need of women, I can introduce you to some of my top dancers. And if they don't catch your fancy, how about me?"

As she spoke, she gently hooked her hand around Lumian's chin, lowering it slowly.

Lumian's heart remained calm, undisturbed like a still lake. The realization that this woman may have once been a man had extinguished any desire within him. He simply resisted, firmly gripping Franca's right hand and offering a smile.

"I'm afraid the boss would have me sleeping with the fishes at the bottom of the Srenzo River."

Changing the topic, Lumian continued, "So, you swing both ways? Men and women?"

Franca withdrew her hand, straightened up, and offered a smile.

"I used to fancy girls exclusively, but after giving it a try with a man, I realized it's not half bad. It brings about a different sensation.

"Life's too short to impose limits upon oneself. Break free from unnecessary restrictions and explore. You'll have more fun and live a truly different life."

It seems as if Franca had indeed been a man in the past. Is she now a Sequence 7 Witch? And why did her last sentence sound so familiar? In the midst of his pondering, Lumian responded to Franca,

"I don't hold any special feelings for Jenna, nor do I intend to. I have far more pressing matters to attend to."

"Very well." Franca strode toward the door.

Just as her hand reached for the handle, Lumian's memory was suddenly jogged, and he finally recalled the source of Franca's words.

It had been mentioned by Aurore in his dream!

She spoke of a member of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society who had contemplated the idea of becoming an Assassin and had consumed the corresponding potion. However, at the Witch Sequence, he found himself in a quandary, unsure whether to undergo a gender transformation. Another member of the society had advised him, saying, "Life is short, why not give it a try?""

It was the very essence of what Franca had condensed into those words!

Lumian's heart stirred as he gazed upon Franca's graceful figure. He spoke in a deep, resonant voice, "Life is short, why not give it a try?"

Franca's hand froze on the doorknob, and she stood there, as if struck by lightning.

After a few seconds, she spun around, locking her gaze with Lumian's, her voice tinged with anxiety.

"Who are you? What's your code name?"

This reaction… It appears my guess was correct! Lumian felt a surge of delight followed by a sinking feeling in his heart.

"I'm Muggle's brother."

Upon hearing Ciel accurately mention the code name of one of the members of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society, Franca breathed a sigh of relief and said,

"I'm not sure if your sister mentioned me, but my code name is Hidden Blade. I belong to the same secret organization as her. No, she must have mentioned me! Otherwise, you wouldn't be familiar with that phrase. Damn it all, what the hell is happening!"

Lumian shut his eyes and spoke with a resolute tone, "She never mentioned your code name or identity because I chose the Hunter pathway. When she reminded me about the neighboring Demoness pathway and its potential for gender transformation, she used your experience as an example."

"So, you do know…" Franca felt a strong urge to disappear into the depths of the sewers.

Despite having adapted to her current form and overcoming her self-imposed limitations, her newfound enjoyment with men was contingent upon her previous gender remaining a secret.

The notion that Ciel knew about her past as a man, and her penchant for intimate relations with men, ignited a dangerous thought within her.

The dead can keep secrets… The dead will forget… The dead won't mock me…

After a few seconds, Franca let out a slow exhale and said, "It would be wise for you to forget this. If you weren't Muggle's brother, I would have ensured your permanent disappearance."

At that moment, she projected her true, masculine side, casting her gaze toward the future.

"Let me enlighten you about the Hunter pathway. It, too, involves a gender change. I paid a steep price to acquire this knowledge. Unlike Demonesses, Hunters transition from women to men. It likely occurs at Sequence 4. When the time comes, I will switch paths, become a Hunter, and reclaim my male form!"

Is that so… Hunters symbolize males, while Demonesses represent females? No wonder they are neighboring paths… Lumian restrained his emotions and let out a chuckle.

"When that time arrives, how will you face the men you were once intimately involved with?"

Franca's expression turned smug as she unveiled her well-devised plan.

"I will administer them the Witch potion. If they are Beyonders unable to transition to the Demoness pathway, I will find a way to transform the characteristics of a Witch Bounded characteristic into mystical items for them to wear. And then, when the time is ripe, hehe…"

Madame, you're somewhat deranged… Lumian dared not further provoke the Red Boots.

This individual seemed capable of anything!

As he expected, Franca issued a threat, "I'll emphasize once again, it's in your best interest to forget about this matter and refrain from harboring any intentions toward Jenna. Otherwise, I will apprehend you and force the Witch potion down your throat! Though Sequence 7 may not grant the ability to switch pathways, it does make one even more dangerous. It might not result in half-crazed madness or loss of control."

Visualizing such a scenario, Lumian hastened to nod and made a solemn pledge, "You are my sister's friend. I will surely keep your secret."

Franca relaxed and inquired about Muggle, "Where is Muggle? Is she also in Trier? Is she strikingly beautiful in reality?"

Lumian fell into silence. After a few seconds, he spoke in a hoarse voice, "She passed away. You must have seen the wanted posters. In that calamity, she…"

Franca parted her lips, but no words escaped them.

She returned to Lumian's side and gently patted his shoulder, offering solace.

After a moment, Franca dabbed at the corners of her eyes and spoke, "Ever since I became a woman, it seems my tear ducts have become more active… I can't fathom that Muggle departed from us so suddenly. Whenever we gathered, she exuded gentleness, brilliance, humor, and kindness. Though I've never laid eyes on her true form, I believe she must be incredibly beautiful…"

With a regained composure, Lumian gazed at Franca and said, "Madame Hidden Blade, I request that you keep this matter under wraps for the time being. Do not divulge it to other members of your organization. It could impact my investigation into the truth behind the catastrophe."

In a slightly nasal tone, Franca replied, "No problem."

Lumian observed Franca's shimmering eyes resembling tranquil lakes and contemplated before posing his next question, "How many encounters did you have with my sister over the past year?"

"Only once. Why do you ask?" Franca inquired, puzzled.

Lumian continued, "Did she exhibit any peculiar behavior or interact with any unusual individuals?"

"No," Franca shook her head. "It was a regular gathering where we exchanged knowledge of mysticism and traded items. We belong to different factions—she's part of the Academy, and I am affiliated with the Sanctuary. Our gatherings rarely coincide."

Lumian refrained from further inquiries. Seeking to gain something from the situation, he spoke with a mindset of extracting information, "Madame Hidden Blade, I am currently studying the grimoire left behind by my sister, but there are numerous sections that elude my understanding. Might I seek your guidance?"

"Certainly," Franca disclosed her address. "I reside in the penthouse at 3 Rue des Blouses Blanches, Room 601. You can find me during Jenna's performances. Every evening, unless I am at Rue des Fontaines or visiting various dance halls, I will be at home. Also, please refrain from using my code name. Just refer to me as Franca."

Why does it feel like we're engaged in a clandestine affair behind Jenna's back… Lumian criticized inwardly, feeling perplexed. He voiced his puzzlement, "Franca, you possess the backing of that secret organization, and you are not lacking in strength yourself. Why did you join the mob?"

Franca grinned and playfully winked her left eye. "Secret."

Chapter 176: Property

After bidding farewell to Franca, Lumian led Louis and Sarkota back to the café and settled himself into Baron Brignais's usual spot.

Already awaiting him was René, the manager of Salle de Bal Brise.

In his forties, René had a gaunt face, leaving one to wonder if he was overworked or simply born that way. His light-yellow hairline was receding in a manner similar to the people from Loen.

Despite being an executive directly appointed by Gardner Martin, the boss of the Savoie Mob, René treated Lumian with utmost respect and wore an ingratiating smile.

"Monsieur Ciel, would you care to learn more about the dance hall?"

"Very well." Lumian reached out to take the stack of reports from René and perused them with unwavering focus.

Standing behind him, Louis and Sarkota couldn't help but feel like they hardly knew their leader at all once more.

Lumian, a young man hailing from the countryside, possessed an understanding of complex financial statements that was far beyond their comprehension.

They would have been left feeling dizzy and yearning for sleep had they been tasked with such a feat.

Can this man both fight and possess a cultured mind? Louis diverted his gaze from the reports, which seemed to possess some kind of "supernatural effect."

René seized the opportunity to acquaint Lumian with the workings of Salle de Bal Brise.

"On weekdays, we earn a daily income ranging from 1,200 to 1,800 verl d'or. On weekends, that figure can reach as high as 5,000 verl d'or. Typically, it hovers around 4,000…

"Last year, our total income amounted to 645,425 verl d'or and 37 coppet. This year, there has been a slight increase based on current trends, but nothing significant…

"We require 12 bouncers, 4 bartenders, 6 waiters, 3 chefs, 6 kitchen helpers, 3 handymen, 3 dishwashers, 4 cleaners, 1 waiter supervisor, 3 finance staff, 3 alcohol and food procurers, and a carriage driver… Their average annual salary is 1,000 verl d'or. We also provide them with complimentary lunch and dinner, which costs us a total of 53,000 verl d'or.

"As the manager, my annual salary, along with the year-end dividend, amounts to about 7,000 verl d'or.

"As per our agreement with Red Boots, each dancer receives a base salary of 1 verl d'or per day… When they strike a deal with a guest, we take 30%… Transactions usually occur in the rooms on the upper two floors of the dance hall. If they wish to leave, they must settle the fee with the bouncer or the waiter supervisor at the door in advance…

"Wine, champagne, beer, brandy, sugar alcohol, absinthe, and various flavors of soda, along with ice and other ingredients, cost us approximately 120,000 verl d'or per year…

"We've already purchased this establishment, so there's no additional rent to be paid…

"When coupled with expenses for horse care, venue maintenance, gas, tap water, singers, and the band, our annual costs sum up to around 230,000 verl d'or…

"Out of the remaining 310,000 verl d'or, the Boss will claim 100,000 verl d'or. We'll also need 100,000 verl d'or to establish a favorable relationship with the officers at the police headquarters. Monsieur Ciel, you're left with approximately 110,000 verl d'or. This needs to cover your personal expenses, firearm and ammunition supplies, rewards for your subordinates, as well as compensation for the victims and the injured…

"Sadly, the income of the people in the market district isn't particularly high; otherwise, we could generate more revenue from alcohol and beverages…"

As Lumian absorbed the details from the report and listened attentively to René's explanations, a clearer picture of Salle de Bal Brise's situation formed in his mind.

Inwardly, he couldn't help but let out a sigh.

A mob leader with a profitable enterprise certainly rakes in substantial wealth!

According to newspapers, magazines, and the information collected by his sister Aurore, the annual salary of a minister in Intis amounted to a mere 100,000 verl d'or. Although the government provided free housing, basic household items, silverware, and two private carriages, expenses for personal servants and banquets fell on their own pockets.

Of course, Lumian had to reward his subordinates on occasion and allocate funds for compensations and ammunition in case of conflicts. However, there was no need for extravagant living, hiring servants, or hosting lavish banquets.

All in all, he earned a sum similar to that of a minister.

The only difference was that ministers didn't rely solely on their public salaries for income.

On the other hand, laborers received an annual salary of around 700 verl d'or, while maids earned approximately 480 verl d'or. Construction workers fared only slightly better, with an annual salary of 1,000 verl d'or. Skilled workers brought in a meager 2,500 verl d'or per year, while senior engineers ranged between 10,000 and 20,000 verl d'or annually.

Indeed, the "shortcut" to wealth is written within the laws themselves… No wonder Brignais couldn't bear to let go of this dance hall… Lumian recollected a comment his sister had made.

By saving money and taking care of his subordinates, preventing them from recklessly rushing into battles, he had enough left over each year to purchase a Sequence 6 potion formula and even the corresponding primary ingredients!

Once René finished speaking, Lumian nodded and posed a question, "Why provide the dancers with a base salary?"

It wasn't that he was reluctant to part with the funds, but rather out of curiosity.

"The dancers under our Savoie Mob are under the control of Red Boots. She insists on a base salary, allowing the dancers to opt-out of additional jobs. If they wish to earn less, they earn less. If they choose to starve, they starve," René explained. "Apart from Red Boots's dancers, there are also women who are controlled by figures from the usury business. In the past, Baron Brignais had authority over them all, so there wasn't any conflict. How should we coordinate matters now?"

Thoughts raced through Lumian's mind, leading him to notice the resemblances between Franca and his sister Aurore.

Could it be because they are part of the same secret organization? However, if it were Aurore, she would have approached it differently. She would have organized protests among the dancers, established an underground school to educate them, and sought alternative paths… If it were me, what would I do? After pondering for a moment, Lumian raised his gaze and addressed René, Louis, and the others.

"For now, let us maintain the current state of affairs. René, assist me in dealing with the police officers during this period. Once I acquaint myself better with our surroundings, I shall engage in fruitful discussions with them."

…

After altering the passwords of the two mechanical safes and informing Manager René of one as per the established protocol, Lumian made his way back to Auberge du Coq Doré before lunchtime.

He proceeded directly to the fifth floor and rapped on Charlie's door.

Charlie, who was enjoying a light beer with a nibble of baguette, caught sight of Ciel as soon as he opened the door.

He exclaimed happily, "Where have you been these past couple of days? You didn't even show up at the bar for a drink."

Lumian inquired, "There's a job opportunity. Would you be interested?"

"What kind of job?" Charlie worriedly contemplated his diminishing savings and the bleak prospects of finding new employment.

With a smile, Lumian responded, "How about working as a waiter at Salle de Bal Brise? You don't have to join the Savoie Mob. You'll earn 70 verl d'or per month. You can keep the tips, but be aware that folks in the market district aren't inclined to tip unless you become a woman and are willing to engage with them intimately. Yes, there are also female patrons who seek out waiters for such purposes. You're experienced in that domain, so there's no need for further elaboration."

"Salle de Bal Brise?" Charlie's eyes widened. "Have you already gained Baron Brignais's trust?"

To be able to arrange for someone to work as a waiter at Salle de Bal Brise without joining the Savoie Mob!

Lumian simply maintained his smile.

"I don't need Baron Brignais's approval. Salle de Bal Brise is now under me."

"Huh?" Charlie questioned his own hearing.

Lumian clarified, still smiling, "After I eliminated 'Hammer' Ait, the Savoie Mob's leader handed over Salle de Bal Brise to me."

"Is that so?" Charlie had an epiphany before blurting out in astonishment, "You took down 'Hammer' Ait as well?"

Lumian nodded. "Don't disclose this to anyone. I fear the police might come knocking."

"…" Charlie was at a loss for words.

After a few seconds, he mumbled, "Perhaps those Poison Spur Mob fellows should pay a visit to the nearby cathedral and pray, see if their luck can change. Ever since you arrived in the market district, their leaders have been dropping like flies. I can't fathom how they must be feeling now."

"Great idea," Lumian commended.

If the leaders of the Poison Spur Mob had the audacity to pray in the Eternal Blazing Sun or the cathedral of the God of Steam and Machinery, the mob would cease to exist.

Of course, Lumian didn't want them to act so foolishly before Louis Lund visited again.

Charlie pondered for a moment and responded, "Alright, I'll head over to Salle de Bal Brise in the afternoon. Who should I ask for? Haha, I rarely get to visit the dance hall because I'm always short on cash. Now I can go there every day."

"Just find Manager René and let him know you're a tenant at Auberge du Coq Doré," Lumian replied simply, his gaze shifting to the side.

There were two cleaning ladies nearby. One of them appeared to be in her early fifties, but upon closer inspection, one would think she was only in her forties. She had originally possessed flaxen-colored hair, but she now wore a vibrant blond wig and had applied eye shadow and makeup. This concealed her fine wrinkles to some extent, but couldn't entirely hide her weariness.

"Who are they?" Lumian inquired of Charlie.

Charlie clicked his tongue and explained, "Don't you know? Our penny-pinching landlord has changed his ways. He no longer hires someone to clean just once a week. Now he's opted to have two cleaning ladies work every morning.

"Tell me, tell me, isn't this a miraculous turn of events? It's only slightly less fortunate than my own stroke of luck back then!"

Lumian, having just finished perusing Salle de Bal Brise's financial statements, immediately considered the salary of a cleaning lady.

Around 70 to 80 verl d'or per month.

However, that was for full-time work. This kind of half-day job would cost at most 45 verl d'or.

"Two cleaning ladies working half a day wouldn't exceed 100 verl d'or per month. Hiring someone for regular cleaning once a week costs 18 verl d'or each time. And Monsieur Ive promised to increase it to twice a week. In other words, it'll cost 150 verl d'or per month.

"How is this generous? It's simply meticulous budgeting!" Lumian scoffed.

He suspected that if it weren't for the fact that a cleaning lady couldn't finish the entire motel in half a day, no one would take on such a job. Monsieur Ive definitely wouldn't hire two.

"Is that so?" Charlie scratched his head.

His computational abilities couldn't keep up with Lumian's rapid deductions.

As the two cleaning ladies entered a vacant room to rid it of bedbugs, Lumian subtly gestured in their direction with his chin.

"Why is one of them wearing a wig and eye shadow?"

What kind of cleaning lady does that?

Charlie lowered his voice and said, "I asked about that. Her name is Elodie. She claims to have been a theater actress and says she's used to dollying herself up like that. And she continues to do so to this day.

"No one knows if she's telling the truth. When I worked as an attendant at Hôtel du Cygne Blanc, I heard from the kitchen staff that when aging prostitutes are scorned, their only option is to take on tasks like dishwashing and cleaning…"

Lumian recollected Elodie's appearance and surmised that she must have been quite a beauty in her youth. Whether she had been a theater actress or a woman of the streets had no bearing on her current role as a cleaning lady.

After bidding farewell to Charlie, Lumian made his way to the restaurant on the first floor for a quick meal before taking a public carriage to Avenue du Boulevard.

He intended to inform Mr. K that the mission had been successfully accomplished!

Chapter 177: Proselytizing

Before stepping onto the public carriage, Lumian made a special effort to spend six licks on purchasing a copy of the Psychic magazine, disguising himself as someone attending a gathering of mysticism enthusiasts at 19 Rue Scheer.

He worried that Gardner Martin, the boss of the Savoie Mob, might secretly tail him to ascertain if something was amiss.

While he could employ some anti-tracking methods to try and shake off potential pursuers, wouldn't that raise more suspicion?

In comparison, it would be more convincing to pose as a naive country bumpkin who had recently arrived in Trier and stumbled upon the Beyonder path. Such an individual would naturally crave knowledge about mysticism, leading to the purchase of Psychic and other magazines. Occasionally attending various gatherings of mysticism enthusiasts would solidify the facade.

In truth, this tale held some merit.

The only hitch was that Mr. K, the organizer of the mysticism enthusiast gathering, had a secret organization backing him.

If Gardner Martin's men had indeed delved into their investigation, Lumian would let them confront Mr. K and witness the clash of strengths!

As the Prankster King of Cordu, Lumian always relished witnessing a spectacle unfold.

When the time arrived, he would adjust his choices based on the outcome of the battle. In any case, his overall direction would remain unchanged. He would follow the instructions of Madam Magician and infiltrate the secret organization behind Mr. K.

Inside the carriage, Lumian flipped through Psychic.

The current issue focused on the theme of "secret deeds."

Contrary to Lumian's initial instinctive interpretation, the term "deed" in the context of secret deeds did not refer to an actual "deed" but rather denoted "compatibility." It represented a method of merging one's mind with a specific hidden entity, enabling the acquisition of corresponding mental experiences and a certain amount of mystical knowledge.

Psychic's editorials stressed that this act was exceedingly perilous. Unless one could verify the trustworthiness and absence of malice in the subject of the secret deed, attempting it was strongly discouraged. It would lead to dire and severe consequences, including but not limited to mental illness, possession by evil spirits, loss of rationality, sudden death, and alterations in personality.

Ah, now it makes sense… Lumian immediately grasped some of the contents of Aurore's grimoire.

Initially, he had struggled to comprehend those passages, viewing them through the lens of a contract. However, with a change in perspective, he now roughly understood their meaning.

Lumian lowered his gaze to the Psychic magazine in his hand and silently commended it, saying,

It's more useful than I anticipated. I had thought it was all concocted to deceive enthusiasts of mysticism.

Yes, although there are numerous errors in common sense that suggest it wasn't written by someone who truly ventured into the Beyonder world and conducted extensive research, their explanations of certain concepts are rather advanced. They come close to the correct answer, and some even enlighten me…

Amidst his praise, he muttered, Considering that Mr. K resides beneath the headquarters of Psychic, could there truly be Beyonders among the editorial staff and contributing authors of these mysticism magazines?

Did they intentionally write an accurate article first and then deliberately alter many concepts and common knowledge to something incorrect?

As these thoughts raced through his mind, Lumian inwardly hissed.

From this vantage point, the editors of this issue aren't instructing the correct secret deed ritual. Instead, they are cautioning those who attempt secret deeds without discretion!

No, it's not merely without discretion. It's more plausible that it was purposefully guided by someone with malicious intentions…

How many incidents involving secret deeds have occurred?

At that moment, Lumian revisited Psychic, no longer focusing on the specific words.

He even sensed that it was brimming with warnings written in blood-red ink: "Cease! Refrain from engaging in any further secret deed rituals!"

The mysterious world is truly fraught with peril… Lumian closed his eyes and sighed deeply, touched by emotions.

The longer he immersed himself in the field of mysticism, the more he comprehended his sister's helplessness and struggle.

He closed Psychic, a magazine two licks cheaper than the average, and directed his gaze out of the carriage window.

Upon reaching Rue Scheer in Avenue du Boulevard, Lumian executed his customary anti-tracking measures, showcasing his Hunter instincts.

He then entered Psychic's headquarters and knocked on the door of Room 103 using the distinctive pattern of three-long, two-short, and one-long knock.

As before, he was led to the basement and encountered Mr. K.

Mr. K still wore a voluminous black robe with an oversized hood, rendering his face concealed within shadows.

Seated in the crimson-backed chair, he gazed at Lumian for a few seconds before speaking in a low, raspy voice, "What brings you here this time?"

"Mr. K, I have fulfilled the mission you assigned me and have become a leader in the Savoie Mob of the market district. I now oversee Salle de Bal Brise and Auberge du Coq Doré," Lumian said with a smile.

Mr. K offered a slight nod.

"Excellent. I like your way of doing things.

"What you must do next is earn Gardner Martin's trust and secure his genuine recognition."

This time, Mr. K omitted the words "reward" or "mission." Instead, he issued a direct command, treating Lumian as if he were already his subordinate.

Earning the Boss's trust? Lumian was momentarily taken aback, followed by intense bewilderment and unease.

He recalled vividly that when Mr. K assigned the mission, he hadn't specified joining the Savoie Mob. He had used the word "any"!

Yet now, the subsequent task was to be truly acknowledged by the boss of the Savoie Mob!

If I hadn't chosen Baron Brignais and chose another mob, what kind of mission would Mr. K have assigned me today?

Or was he utterly convinced that I would join the Savoie Mob?

What makes him so certain?

Thoughts swirled in Lumian's mind, reminding him of recent events.

Baron Brignais dispatched me to handle a leader from the Poison Spur Mob after I eliminated the pervert and obtained the canister of sedatives, putting it to good use…

Isn't this too much of a coincidence?

There are other similar occurrences…

Every so often, I sense someone's gaze upon me from the shadows nearby, yet I perceive nothing…

Could all of this have been orchestrated by Mr. K?

If I had not chosen the Savoie Mob, would I have been "arranged" to join the Savoie Mob following a series of incidents?

The more Lumian pondered, the more a sense of dread overcame him.

When Lumian looked at Mr. K again, the notion of treating him as a cash cow vanished from his mind.

Perhaps, apart from Madam Magician and a few others, this might be the most powerful Beyonder he had ever encountered!

Unknowingly, it compelled him to comply with the other party's desires!

As these thoughts raced through his mind, Lumian lowered his head and said, "Yes, Mr. K."

He assumed the demeanor of a subordinate.

Meanwhile, he couldn't help but think of "Red Boots" Franca.

This member of the secret organization, the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society, possessed both a background and strength, yet she aspired to become the mistress of a mob boss. Clearly, she harbored ulterior motives.

Is her objective also to get close to Gardner Martin? Is she involved in something significant or a crucial secret? Lumian attempted to make an educated guess.

Mr. K nodded in satisfaction.

"I'm pleased to see you know your place. Don't worry, I won't be stingy with the rewards.

"Have you not prayed in any cathedral recently?"

He changed the subject.

"I'm a wanted criminal!" Lumian recalled Madam Magician's warning and retorted angrily, "Besides, those deities won't save us at all!"

Mr. K chuckled.

"It's not that they won't, but they can't. Their power cannot envelop all believers and assist everyone during times of calamity.

"There are numerous reasons, but to put it succinctly, there is only one:

"Weakness is an inherent sin.

"Are you curious about the Lord I believe in? He embodies the truth of this world. He is supreme. His divine grace flows abundantly like the sea. He created everything and shall annihilate everything. He is power incarnate, as are we."

Observing Lumian's silence, Mr. K didn't press further.

"You need not answer me now. Ponder carefully during this period. Reflect on who can save us and offer protection in this increasingly perilous and deranged world.

"Once you have affirmed your faith in Him, you will genuinely become one of us. It won't be long before your strength significantly improves."

"I shall consider it deeply," Lumian replied in a hushed tone.

Mr. K then inquired, "Is there anything else?"

Having adjusted his mindset, Lumian asked, with the intention of not missing out on anything by asking,"In the course of fulfilling the mission, if I encounter danger, may I employ your finger? How should I utilize it?"

Mr. K nodded and responded, "Just take it out."

In other words, it could be employed.

"If I use it, how should I deal with the threat from Susanna Mattise in the future?" Lumian probed further.

Mr. K fell silent for a few seconds.

"After you employ that finger, return to me here. I shall provide you with another one."

Indeed, your fingers are consumables… Lumian pondered for a moment and said, "I sold 'Hammer' Ait's Beyonder characteristic to Gardner Martin for 18,000 verl d'or. I wish to purchase a Sealed Artifact that can enhance my mystical abilities or aid me in better disguising myself. Do you have any such items here, Mr. K?"

Mr. K didn't offer an immediate response, as if he were contemplating a suitable candidate.

After a while, he said to Lumian, "Come here and make your selection on Saturday night."

Lumian beamed.

"Thank you, Mr. K."

It felt reassuring to have the support of an organization, even if he was only an unofficial member.

…

After arriving at Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman, Lumian carefully stowed Mr. K's finger in Room 207 of Auberge du Coq Doré. His next destination was Salle de Bal Brise, where he intended to locate an unoccupied room. There, he would summon the messenger of Madam Magician to relay the progress of his mission. Lumian hoped to receive valuable feedback from her, particularly regarding how Mr. K had permitted these events to unfold with an uncanny degree of coincidence.

Chapter 178: The Messenger's Response

Evening, Avenue du Marché, Salle de Bal Brise.

Lumian made his way to the entrance. Just as he reached the door, he was greeted by two mobsters standing guard.

"Good evening, Boss."

Lumian, still donned in a crisp white shirt, a black vest, and rolled-up cuffs, acknowledged them with a smile and a nod.

Louis and Sarkota had been eagerly awaiting the return of their new leader. Spotting Lumian entering the dance hall, they swiftly abandoned their positions at the bar counter and forced smiles on their faces.

"Boss, why don't you let us accompany you? It's not safe to be unprotected like this!" Louis expressed his loyalty with concern.

Lumian chuckled in amusement and replied, "You two? Protecting me?"

"I worry that if anything were to happen, you both would end up beaten to a pulp. I'd have to compensate your loved ones."

Louis smiled sheepishly.

"I know you're formidable, Boss, and you can handle 'Hammer' Ait and 'Wolf' Margot on your own. But isn't there a saying that goes, 'Two fists can't fight four hands'? Besides, we all carry guns, and our aim isn't too shabby."

Two fists can't fight four hands? Lumian thought to himself. Wasn't that something Emperor Roselle once said? When did it become a saying? Aurore had always suspected that many vulgarities originated from Emperor Roselle, but nobody had ever confirmed it… Lumian glanced at Louis, who appeared tough but had a submissive demeanor, and Sarkota, with his curly brown hair and full lips. He nodded slightly and responded, "When I instruct you to follow, you may do so. When I don't, keep an eye on the dance hall. If anyone dares to cause trouble, shoot them."

"Right, where can I find a shooting range?"

"There's one in the basement of the dance hall," Louis pointed downwards, indicating his feet. "The other leaders also come there to practice their shooting skills, but they have to bring their own ammunition."

"Excellent." Lumian nodded in satisfaction.

He urgently needed to improve his marksmanship, as he lacked effective long-range attacks.

Louis asked again, "Boss, the environment at Auberge du Coq Doré is dreadful. Are you planning to relocate to the dance hall? There are several rooms on the second floor for you to choose from. Or do you intend to stay in the temporary rest area previously used by Baron Brignais?"

Louis displayed his willingness, recognizing that both he and Sarkota had once been trusted aides of Baron Brignais. If they failed to earn the trust of the new leader, they might be relegated to mere bouncers at the entrance. Their status would plummet, and they would be at the mercy of the members of the Savoie Mob, with whom they had never gotten along. Not only would their income suffer, but they would also face significant bullying.

Lumian pondered for a moment before responding, "Show me the rooms."

This location was ideal for the ritual to summon Madam Magician's messenger.

Lumian had no plans to check out of Auberge du Coq Doré anytime soon. His strategy involved selecting a room on the second floor of Salle de Bal Brise and Room 207 of Auberge du Coq Doré as his nightly resting places after dismissing Louis and Sarkota. This increased his chances of being attacked under the cover of darkness. Occasionally, he would also consider his rented safe house on Rue des Blouses Blanches.

Lumian sensed that the Poison Spur Mob wouldn't let him off easily. He had eliminated three leaders consecutively and had deliberately provoked them. Once the authorities let their guard down a little, the likelihood of retaliation would be high. Lumian was confident that the other side had been provoked, as his potion had been further digested. In another month or two, he might even consider advancing to Pyromaniac.

Lumian didn't worry too much about being secretly attacked by "Black Scorpion" Roger and the other leaders of the Poison Spur Mob. With Mr. K's finger, he stood a good chance of defending himself, even against Susanna Mattise, who was equivalent to a Sequence 5 Beyonder, let alone "Black Scorpion" Roger and the others who had not yet become Sowers.

His concern lay in the possibility that if a fight were to break out, Mr. K might lose control and end up killing "Black Scorpion" Roger. If that happened, Louis Lund would disappear and the trail of clues would come to an abrupt end.

Upon reaching the second floor, Lumian made his way through the café and entered the corridor. After scanning the area, he pointed to a room closer to his office and declared, "I'll take this one."

The room boasted classical furniture, a four-piece set of dark red velvet, and a cushioned recliner.

"Boss, should we replace these fabric items with new ones?" Louis ingratiatingly inquired.

Sarkota, ever quiet in comparison, stood by his side.

"No need," Lumian replied, finding an excuse. He then assigned his two bodyguards to watch over the door leading from the café to the second-floor corridor. Locking the door, he settled himself at a wide wooden table near the window to write a letter to Madam Magician.

In the letter, he emphasized that he had completed Mr. K's mission and earned his trust, even undergoing proselytization. He mentioned the opportunity to join the secret organization supporting Mr. K and inquired about the necessity of praying to Mr. K's lord, as well as the potential consequences of being monitored by that entity. Finally, he highlighted his recent actions and expressed his unease over certain coincidences.

Once he neatly folded the letter, Lumian arranged the altar and conjured a wall of spirituality.

With the summoning ritual completed, he fixed his gaze upon the blue flame of the candle and waited in the chilling and eerie environment.

Before long, a doll-like figure, the size of an arm, materialized above the fire.

Clad in a delicate golden dress, the figure surveyed the area with unfocused, light-blue eyes. Raising its right hand, it delicately pinched its petite, pale-white nose.

"It stinks! It stinks! This place isn't as clean as the last one!"

"Isn't this place supposed to be clean?" Lumian exclaimed, scanning his surroundings in surprise. "There are no bedbugs, and it's just been cleaned."

The messenger continued to wrinkle its nose, its voice ethereal and illusory as it spoke.

"There are old bones buried beneath the ground!

"They're foul, putrid, and repulsive!"

With those words, the blond "doll" snatched the letter and vanished instantly.

Clearly, it had no intention of staying a moment longer!

Old bones underground? Lumian repeated the messenger's words, perplexed.

He remembered that Salle de Bal Brise had been erected upon a cemetery belonging to a cathedral, and the bodies and ashes had been relocated to the catacombs.

Even after the Savoie Mob had acquired the building, there remained an eerie atmosphere. Concerned that some bones might have been left behind deep beneath the ground, they had commissioned a spherical statue crafted from white skulls and placed it at the entrance, accompanied by an engraved inscription.

The messenger's reaction hinted that there truly were ancient remains interred underground.

When the cathedral had moved the remains and ashes from the original cemetery to the catacombs, they likely hadn't intentionally left anything behind, unless they had failed to discover it or were unaware… Could it be that there is a hidden tomb beneath the original cemetery, dating back to the Fourth Epoch? Is that why the messenger reacted so strongly? Well, for now, let's set aside the matter of the old bones underground. After all, nothing untoward has occurred at Salle de Bal Brise throughout these years. It's highly unlikely that anything would go awry the moment I set foot here, right? Lumian mused, concluding the ritual and tidying up the altar.

He settled into the cushioned recliner, gently rocking back and forth, awaiting Madam Magician's response.

Time passed, and the sky darkened completely. Lumian contemplated whether he should have Louis and the others bring dinner to his room or indulge in it at the café or the bar counter.

Suddenly, a stack of papers fell from above, landing on his lap.

This time, the "doll" messenger didn't even reveal itself, clearly displaying its profound aversion to the overall "environment" of Salle de Bal Brise.

In the future, I'll summon it at Auberge du Coq Doré or that safe house… Lumian unfolded the letter and read it attentively.

"Excellent job. It seems you have gained Mr. K's admiration and initial approval.

"From now on, simply follow his instructions. When the need arises, I will inform you of the true objective in advance.

"You can pretend to believe in the entity mentioned by Mr. K. After all, you already bear traces of two entities. Adding another one won't be an issue. I'm just concerned it might get a bit crowded.

"Haha, the previous statement was a jest. The real solution is as follows:

"You can feign belief, but whenever you meet Mr. K and engage in prayer, beseech my lord for the protection of an angel. You should have learned the corresponding ritualistic magic, correct? If not, consult your sister's grimoires.

"Usually, refrain from invoking the honorific name of that individual, even if the order has been disrupted. Unless you are certain you have received the angel's protection.

"I understand that the more one tries to suppress certain memories, the more they tend to resurface. During your next therapy session, you can attempt seeking assistance from your psychiatrist. In other words, you must postpone the matter of becoming a false believer until after the upcoming treatment.

"As for coincidences, they often have multiple factors intertwined in various things.

"Firstly, the corruption sealed within your body stems from an entity known as Inevitability. Clearly, Inevitability is linked to fate. It will subtly disrupt your destiny, leading you to encounter specific individuals and events that you are 'destined' to come across.

"Secondly, it is highly likely that Mr. K has made arrangements to station someone in the shadows, observing you and providing the mob leaders with subtle psychological cues. This leads me to suspect that he is either a Sequence 6 Hypnotist or a Sequence 5 Dreamwalker from the Spectator path. However, based on your earlier description, he also possesses the powers of a Notary. Therefore, there is a strong possibility that he is a Shepherd. Shepherds are Sequence 5 Beyonders from the Secrets Suppliant path, and they serve the entity in whom Mr. K believes.

"Shepherds can graze upon the souls and characteristics of other Beyonders, enabling them to wield their abilities. This renders every Shepherd incredibly formidable, standing at the pinnacle of Mid-Sequence Beyonders.

"Thirdly, this stems from the law of convergence and my previous hypothesis of repulsion. Trust me, I won't be surprised that you will encounter more believers of evil gods, Hunters, and Demonesses in a short span of time.

"Stay diligent, Seven of Wands."

Shepherd? That sounds incredibly powerful… I have already encountered another Hunter and two Demonesses… Lumian ignited Madam Magician's response by channeling his spirituality.

Chapter 179: Feast

As Lumian gazed at the smoldering remnants of the paper, memories of Mr. K's relentless pressure flooded his mind.

So a Shepherd's essence lies in Grazing. They graze upon the souls and characteristics of other Beyonders or Beyonder creatures to harness their abilities…

Thus, a seasoned Shepherd is truly unparalleled. They excel in close combat, long-range attacks, and a multitude of mystical techniques…

In fact, a Contractee is somewhat like a simplified version of a Shepherd. Each contract is limited to a single ability. When one's Sequence is low, the number of contracts is severely restricted. At most, it might reach five, but often it doesn't exceed three. If one fails to choose their abilities wisely, they may struggle to defeat an ordinary person armed with a gun. It's not comparable to a Shepherd's power, where Grazing bestows all abilities, undiminished…

Of course, at the level of the padre, signing ten or twenty contracts becomes a different experience. Furthermore, contracts often target beings from the spirit world with a wide array of peculiar abilities. Beyonders encountering them for the first time will find it challenging to adapt…

The more Lumian pondered, the more dread Mr. K instilled in him.

Suppressing his thoughts, Lumian stood up and let out an inward sigh.

No wonder Madam Magician believes Mr. K can withstand Susanna Mattise—an evil spirit…

Leaving the room, Lumian approached Louis and Sarkota with composure and uttered, "Have the kitchen prepare dinner."

"Boss, what would you like to eat?" Louis inquired before Sarkota could speak.

Lumian couldn't recall the menu at Salle de Bal Brise's attached café. He pondered for a moment and replied, "Bring me a set meal. Join me."

"Alright." Louis signaled Sarkota to inform the café attendant.

Lumian settled at Baron Brignais's favored table and picked up the day's newspaper.

The Trier Gazette adorned the top, followed by The Reformer Daily, People's Voice, Action News, Intis Daily, Friends of the People, and other prominent newspapers.

Lumian couldn't resist turning his head, a hint of amusement in his voice as he asked Louis,

"Is that what Brignais typically reads?"

A mobster concerned about national affairs?

Louis glanced at Sarkota on the other side and replied with a smile, "He doesn't read such things. He only insists that we avoid offending reporters and newspapers. If possible, we should subscribe to influential newspapers. Occasionally, he'll spend money to place s for Salle de Bal Brise, boasting of the presence of captivating dancers here.

"He usually reads the three newspapers and magazines at the bottom."

Avoiding conflicts with newspapers and reporters… That makes sense. If the Trier Gazette publishes news of a significant mob presence in the market district, the Savoie Mob would be doomed the next day. Those old men still value their reputation… Lumian gained a bit more understanding.

He then retrieved the newspapers and magazines from the bottom.

There was Novel Weekly, Men's Aesthetics, and Ghost Face, a magazine filled with Trier gossip and contemporary jokes.

Isn't this more interesting than The Reformer Daily and Action News? Lumian picked up Novel Weekly and delved into the latest serialized story.

Casually, he inquired, "Where do the funds and advertising fees for these newspapers come from?"

Louis pondered for a moment, beads of cold sweat forming on his forehead, but he couldn't provide an answer. Just then, Sarkota chimed in, "It's deducted from the 100,000 verl d'or we set aside for cultivating ties with the police."

Lumian nodded approvingly, satisfied that it wouldn't hinder his gains as the new leader of the Savoie Mob!

Before long, the café attendant arrived with their food.

Onion minced pigeon, smoked rock crab, hot bamboo chicken pie, stewed mutton brain, stewed veal slices, grilled oysters with vanilla, two salads, scarlet cheese, grilled almond sauce, a glass of red, white, and blue liqueur, and a bottle of Cabernet Sauvignon.

The fragrant aromas mingled together, wafting into Lumian's nostrils and causing his mouth to water even more.

Just as expected from Trier. Even an ordinary café's set meal offers such a variety of dishes. If this were Loen, I'd be limited to choosing between pan-fried steak or stewed peas with tender mutton… Lumian, being a pure Intisian, mockingly compared Loen's cuisine based on his impressions from various newspapers, magazines, and folk jokes.

He lifted the glass of tricolor liqueur and took a sip, then pointed to the armchairs on either side of the table, saying, "Let's eat together."

Louis bowed slightly and replied with a smile, "Boss, we'll take turns eating after you finish."

Lumian didn't insist and savored his first feast since arriving in Trier—and it was on the house.

It had to be said that the chefs at Salle de Bal Brise were truly skilled. Lumian nodded repeatedly as he enjoyed his meal.

Among the dishes, he found the mutton brain most delightful. Skillfully infused with several spices, the fishy and gamey flavors of the brain were cleverly balanced, leaving behind a delicate texture akin to Roselle tofu, accompanied by a rich and enticing fragrance.

He finished the glass of red, white, and blue liqueur and one-third of the bottle of Cabernet Sauvignon. Then, he gestured for Louis and Sarkota to take their turns.

Lumian picked up Novel Weekly and Ghost Face magazines, ready to delve into their contents.

In the pages of Ghost Face, Lumian's eyes fell upon a familiar name: DuVar.

The proprietor of the restaurant renowned for inventing DuVar's broth had amassed a fortune and relocated to Quartier de la Maison d'Opéra.

An intriguing anecdote caught Lumian's attention within the Ghost Face pages:

DuVar's infatuation with Perle, a stage actress from Loen and a Trier courtesan, had cost him a fortune. The tale recounted a banquet held at Perle's private residence, where she lay naked on an enormous silver platter, served by attendants, in the presence of over a dozen guests.

This shattered DuVar's heart. He had even attempted suicide to no avail.

Lumian couldn't decide whether to sigh at the Trieriens' tendency to exaggerate or to jest at the Loenese for not being as conservative as they seemed. It appeared that the latter adapted swiftly in Intis, or perhaps he should mock DuVar for his unblemished innocence despite being a Trierien in his forties.

At times, Lumian couldn't help but wonder if these behaviors stemmed from the influence of a Beyonder's nature or if the followers of the malevolent god couldn't rein in their impulses.

Naturally, had it not been for the shared inclinations among the Trieriens and the fact that many things posed no issues, these individuals would have been exposed long ago.

After Louis and Sarkota had finished their meal, Lumian led them down to the first floor.

The dance hall buzzed with activity in the evening. Jenna stood upon the wooden stage, her voice carrying a melodious tune accompanied by the band. Couples below embraced one another, twirling around the floor.

Lumian cast a fleeting glance at the scene before redirecting his gaze and striding toward the exit.

"Boss, where are we headed?" Louis inquired.

Lumian chuckled.

"Am I the boss or are you? Do I need to report my whereabouts to you?"

Louis's expression froze. He glanced at the silent Sarkota and suddenly felt that emulating his composure wasn't a bad idea.

"I-I'm merely concerned about our next course of action," he asserted.

As Lumian made his way out of the dance hall, amidst greetings from the bouncers, he smiled and replied, "I will inform you when there is a need for you to know."

He returned to Auberge du Coq Doré but veered away from Room 207, where he had intended to retrieve Mr. K's finger and his revolver. Instead, he ventured into the underground bar.

Before Lumian could assess the situation, Charlie's voice reached his ears, brimming with enthusiasm.

"Have you heard the news? Ciel now goes by the nickname 'Lion' Ciel!

"'Little Minx' Jenna came up with it. Have you laid eyes on her? I doubt you've ever seen a woman as stunning as her. She possesses an alluring figure and a face that could bewitch anyone. When she sings, everyone yearns to abandon their faith for her. And she took a liking to Ciel and invited him to dance. They were inseparable, grinding each other! Oh, the dance hall was dimly lit. You can well imagine what transpired…"

"…" Lumian suddenly felt like he had become the protagonist of a news story in Ghost Face.

Louis and Sarkota, standing behind him, felt both embarrassed and concerned for their boss.

They were embarrassed that the person at the small round table might be boasting on their boss's behalf. They were worried that if it were true, their boss would be making "Red Boots" Franca a cuckold. In that case, they would be in serious trouble. Franca not only held considerable power but was also the mistress of their big boss!

Charlie, holding a beer, caught sight of Lumian, and his smile froze.

He hopped off the small round table and approached Lumian, coughing before speaking.

"Hey, Ciel, would you mind if I shared some details about your romantic entanglement?"

Instead of answering, Lumian asked, "How did you find out?"

Charlie grinned. "Many people know; it spread from the Salle de Gristmill."

In other words, the Poison Spur Mob is aware that I danced with Jenna twice before assassinating "Hammer" Ait? That's true. I only disguised myself back then, without even changing my hair color. I even provoked those around me. In hindsight, coupled with "Hammer" Ait's demise, they will surely recognize me… As Red Boots' mistress, Jenna may also become a target for their vengeance. There's no need to be overly concerned, though. She is protected by Red Boots. As a seasoned Beyonder and a formidable Demoness, Franca won't be careless in such matters… Lumian nodded, understanding the situation.

He smiled at Charlie and said, "Feel free to share."

The more the news spread, the more it would attract Red Boots' attention, deterring any potential reprisal from the Poison Spur Mob.

Lumian asked Charlie, "Why didn't you go to Salle de Bal Brise?"

Charlie forced a smile and replied, "The manager, René, wants me to start officially tomorrow. He offered me 80 verl d'or per month."

As they conversed, Lumian noticed his neighbor sitting at the bar counter.

The abject author Gabriel.

He still sported disheveled, greasy brown hair, large black-framed glasses, a faded linen shirt, and black dungarees.

Lumian bid farewell to Charlie and approached Gabriel, asking, "What's the matter?"

Gabriel, sipping on a glass of light-green absinthe, glanced at him and smiled bitterly.

"My script was rejected. Those managers didn't even bother reading it!

"I've submitted it to dozens of theaters, but no one is willing to give it a chance."

Dozens of theaters… Lumian's heart stirred as he casually inquired, "Did you send your script to Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons in our market district?"

"Yes," Gabriel sighed. "Their manager turned me down too. He mentioned that they write their own scripts or commission custom ones."

Lumian took a seat and asked, "Who is their manager?"

Chapter 180: Lazy

Gabriel took a sip of absinthe and spoke, "Maipú Meyer. He's a theater manager with big ambitions. He aims to make Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons the most renowned theater in Trier. His ultimate goal is to be awarded the prestigious Intis Legion of Honor medal."

The Intis Legion of Honor medal originated during the time of Emperor Roselle when he was still a Consul. It was created to replace the nobility system of the old royal family. However, when Roselle declared himself Caesar, the medal was abolished, and titles like dukes, counts, barons, and knights were reintroduced.

Later, when the Intis Republic was established, the Legion of Honor Medal was reinstated. It was given to both military personnel and civilians who made remarkable contributions to the Republic. It wasn't limited to the military but included individuals from various industries. It was the highest honor in the current Intis Republic and being a recipient equated to being a knight from the past.

In the past, painters, authors, actors, journalists, and sculptors had been honored with the Intis Legion of Honor medal, serving as inspirations for future generations.

In the stories he crafted in his dream, he deceived the villagers of Cordu by claiming that Aurore was headed to Trier to receive the Legion of Honor medal. It wasn't entirely implausible. If Aurore could become Intis's renowned Fors Wall and the best-selling author on the Northern Continent, gaining recognition from L'Institut de Intis for her artistic achievements, she might have a genuine chance at obtaining the Legion of Honor medal.

Lumian chuckled and remarked, "If a person lacks dreams, they're no different from salted fish." He found Maipú Meyer, the theater manager, to be quite ordinary.

This led him to believe that the issues with Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons extended beyond the majority of the people. There were only a few individuals closely associated with the landlord of Auberge du Coq Doré, Monsieur Ive, who were peculiar.

After conversing with Gabriel for a while, Lumian guided Louis and Sarkota to the second floor and asked them to wait outside Room 207.

He closed the door behind him, took off his holster from under his left armpit, and stashed away the bullet bag. Then, he put on a dark jacket.

Without delay, Lumian retrieved Mr. K's finger from beneath the pillow and slipped it into his right pocket.

As for Fallen Mercury, the dagger from Hedsey, the awakening gas, and the unidentified liquid, he always carried them with him. However, the bayonet served no immediate purpose, so he left it in a drawer of the wooden table.

Once he completed these actions, Lumian bent down and retrieved a brown suitcase from under the bed. He carefully placed Aurore's grimoires inside.

Given his altered identity and the increased hostility from the Poison Spur Mob, he felt the need to secure these grimoires in a safer and more secluded location—the rented safe house on Rue des Blouses Blanches.

To Lumian, these items held precious clues and knowledge left behind by Aurore. They also possessed an irreplaceable sentimental value that required protection.

As for his daily studies, he would pre-copy a portion of the material and leave it at Auberge du Coq Doré or Salle de Bal Brise. Once he mastered it and ensured there were no issues, he would copy a few more pages at the safe house.

After turning down Louis's offer to assist with his luggage, Lumian made his way back to Salle de Bal Brise and entered a room near the office.

He retrieved the grimoire he had been perusing recently and laid it out on the desk. Taking hold of a dark-red fountain pen, he commenced copying its contents onto a thick stack of white paper.

As he transcribed, Lumian found the task dreadfully dull. Ideas on how to avoid the monotony began to creep into his mind.

Soon enough, an idea struck him.

Why not summon that rabbit-shaped creature from the spirit world, the one who had previously written the report for him, and have it copy his notebook?

Though that creature was dim-witted and lacking in intellect, it proved obedient. It possessed a remarkable speed for copying and could imitate the original handwriting… In that case, all I need to do is provide spirituality while I indulge in reading newspapers and magazines, waiting for my homework to be completed. No, not homework… rather, copying notes… Lumian pondered momentarily before setting his fountain pen down and preparing for the summoning ritual.

If he could find a way to slack off, why not take advantage of it?

Back in Cordu, upon finishing his sister's daily assignments, Lumian often contemplated ways to slack off.

He had been teaching Reimund, Ava, and the others to comprehend words, hoping they could assist him with his homework as they improved.

Alas, the disparity in knowledge between them was too vast. It couldn't be bridged without several years of effort.

Before long, Lumian arranged the altar, consecrated the ritual silver dagger, and erected a wall of spirituality.

As the fragrance of citrus and lavender wafted through the air, he gazed at the candle flame's yellow hue and uttered in ancient Hermes:

"I!"

In the next second, Lumian switched to Hermes.

"I summon in my name:

"Spirit wandering in the void, a friendly creature that can be communicated with, weakling who can write Intisian…"

The candle flame swiftly transformed into a deep shade of green, expanding to the size of a human head.

Completing the remaining incantation, Lumian witnessed the emergence of a translucent and hazy figure from within the candle flame.

Standing at nearly 1.9 meters tall, it possessed the head of an ox atop a human body, garbed in brown fur clothing.

Not the rabbit… That's right. There must be numerous spirit world creatures that fit the description of my summoning incantation. The one who responds to the summons is entirely random… Lumian experienced a mix of disappointment and anticipation as he pointed toward the grimoire.

"Copy it for me."

The ethereal "minotaur" nodded faintly.

"Alright."

Without delay, it seated itself, picked up the dark-red fountain pen, and commenced copying Aurore's grimoire.

Not bad at all, much more intelligent than that silly rabbit… Lumian thought, his delight evident.

Just as he was about to settle into the recliner and peruse the newspapers and magazines, an unsettling feeling washed over him.

Isn't the "minotaur" too slow? More than ten seconds have passed, and it hasn't even copied a word!

No, in fact, it had only written two letters!

"Can you work any faster?" Lumian probed.

"This is already my fastest pace," the "minotaur" responded truthfully.

"…" Lumian was at a loss for words.

It was even worse than the silly rabbit!

That creature, at the very least, functioned like a mystical typewriter. It could complete a full page of copying in less than a minute!

Lumian unconsciously considered ending the ritual and dismissing the "minotaur" before summoning another spirit world creature. However, knowing that the subsequent ones were likely to be equally peculiar, he abandoned the idea in weariness.

By the time the summoning ritual naturally came to an end, the "minotaur" had managed to copy only half a page.

Lumian rubbed his temples and made up his mind to do it himself.

After transcribing three pages, he heard a knock on the door.

"What's the matter?" Lumian closed his notebook, set aside his fountain pen, and walked toward the door.

It was Louis outside.

In his rugged guise, he lowered his voice and said, "Boss, 'Giant' Simon is here."

What could he want? Lumian recalled that "Giant" Simon was a leader of the Savoie Mob, overseeing a number of dance halls and bars on Rue du Rossignol. He was suspected to be a Beyonder of the Warrior pathway, with a high likelihood of being a Sequence 8 Beyonder.

Louis simply shook his head.

"I don't know."

Lumian inquired, "What did he discuss with Brignais last time? It didn't seem pleasant."

Louis elaborated, "'Giant' Simon has always held a grudge against the baron because he controls Salle de Bal Brise."

He instinctively used the term "baron."

Observing that Lumian didn't take offense, Louis continued, "Salle de Bal Brise's profits surpass those of all his dance halls and bars combined. He even has a casino in his bar!

"The last time he approached the baron, he hoped that the baron would prevent some of the more attractive dancers from coming here and instead have them transferred to Rue du Rossignol. The baron replied, 'Red Boots is in charge of assigning the dancers. I have no objections if you discuss it with her.'

"The prices on Rue du Rossignol are very low. Beautiful dancers are reluctant to work there."

Lumian recollected Charlie mentioning that one could find inexpensive pussies on Rue du Rossignol for as little as 52 coppet, which amounted to just half a verl d'or. On the other hand, at Salle de Bal Brise, if the dancers encountered generous patrons, they could charge up to 10 verl d'or. Typically, they fetched anywhere between 3 to 5 verl d'or.

This was despite the relatively low income in the market district. If it were Rue de la Muraille in the Red Princess district, an above-average-looking woman would cost dozens of verl d'or.

Is "Giant" Simon envious of my control over Salle de Bal Brise? Lumian nodded subtly, his brows furrowing in puzzlement, and he asked, "There's something I find rather perplexing. Why are Salle de Bal Brise's profits so substantial?"

Louis grinned.

"Most of our alcohol comes from 'Rat' Christo. It's tax-free and incredibly cheap.

"Moreover, we don't have to pay any rent."

"Rat" Christo who is in charge of the smuggling business? Lumian grasped the general reasoning behind it.

He exited the room, strolled along the corridor, and entered the café.

"Giant" Simon, still clad in a snug black formal suit, had his light-yellow hair tightly plastered to his scalp.

He set his wide-brimmed round hat on the table and positioned himself by the window, puffing on a cigarette.

The mobsters trailing behind him dispersed, engaging in an intense standoff with Sarkota and the others at Salle de Bal Brise from a distance.

Spotting Lumian approaching, Simon crushed the cigarette in his hand and put on a feigned wide smile.

"Well, well, Ciel, you've already gained the Boss's approval and managed to get to run Salle de Bal Brise. Why didn't you treat us brothers to a drink?"

As Simon spoke, he strode toward Lumian.

At over 1.9 meters in height, Lumian, who was already standing at 1.8 meters, appeared rather short.

Lumian gazed up at Simon's prominent nose and pockmarked face, returning the smile.

"I have some sort of social phobia, so I couldn't bring myself to invite you guys.

"Hey, you're quite tall. Just as one would expect from a 'Giant.' You're even taller than 'Hammer' Ait."

His words conveyed a message of maintaining their respective territories. If you don't provoke me, I won't provoke you. Otherwise, I'm capable of killing you, just like the Sequence 8 Warrior, 'Hammer' Ait.

"Giant" Simon didn't comprehend the meaning behind the first sentence, but he discerned the provocation in the latter.

His face darkened as a result, simultaneously dispelling his disdain for "Lion" Ciel.

This wasn't merely a brawny man. Smiles and pleasantries wouldn't get him far!

Simon gestured toward the table where Baron Brignais often sat.

"I need to discuss something with you."

Chapter 181: The Loyal Ciel

Lumian settled back into his seat, taking a casual stance. His gaze locked onto "Giant" Simon as he inquired, "And what's the matter?"

"Giant" Simon's cast his light-blue eyes over Louis and Sarkota standing behind Lumian.

"Aren't they Brignais's men? Why would you allow them to tail you?

"If it were me, I'd put them to work as bouncers."

Louis and Sarkota exchanged anxious glances when Simon hit the nail on the head.

Lumian wanted to applaud, grateful that Simon had provided him with an opportunity to win their trust.

However, he couldn't entirely trust Louis and Sarkota. He had no desire to become a mobster, but he didn't want to be shot in the back, riddled with bullets someday.

Lumian smirked once again.

"What do you mean Brignais's men? I used to work under Brignais!"

"We're all members of the Savoie Mob, loyal to the Boss. As long as I remain faithful, there's no need to worry about them turning against me!"

Louis and Sarkota nodded repeatedly, impressed by Ciel's broad-mindedness and demeanor.

That's right. Baron Brignais changed our status in the Savoie Mob and gave us a lot of trust, but we're still members of the Savoie Mob. Betraying the Boss is out of the question. And it was the Boss who commanded us to follow Ciel and obey his orders!

Simon choked on Lumian's words. After a few seconds, he finally said, "You may be loyal to the Boss, but others might not be. Brignais is ambitious."

You find Brignais unloyal to the Boss? Hidden Blade… Uh… 'Red Boots' Franca mentioned that Brignais hasn't been obedient lately… Lumian suddenly felt pity for Gardner Martin, the boss of the Savoie Mob.

His most capable subordinates lacked loyalty, and his favorite mistress had ulterior motives. The newcomer he had recently promoted turned out to be a spy from another organization…

Realizing he couldn't shake off Louis and Sarkota, two thugs who often accompanied Baron Brignais and had knowledge of various matters, Simon steered the conversation back on track.

"I came here to discuss the dancers' basic salary."

"F*cking dammit, why the bloody hell do we have to give those sluts money every day, even when they don't have a single customer?

"Franca is overbearing. Just because she's the Boss's mistress, she convinced him to agree to such an unreasonable demand!

"We're mobsters, not a charity. By Steam, when I handed money to those women, I felt like a bloody priest!

"That's fine by me. I only need to give them a few licks each day. But it's 1 verl d'or a day for Salle de Bal Brise. The textile workers in Quartier du Jardin Botanique earn only 1.5 verl d'or a day, and they work from morning till night!"

In Trier, hiring female workers cost 55-70% of hiring male workers. The most ruthless employers were unafraid of being investigated, and those who dared to employ child labor paid only 15% of an adult man's salary, or even less.

No wonder Franca's beautiful dancers refused to work on Rue du Rossignol. The prices there are low, and the base salary is meager… Why are you cursing like Franca and Jenna? Can vulgarities be contagious? Aurore seemed to curse in the same manner during her occasional bouts of madness… Lumian deliberately ignored Louis's suggestion and asked with a smile, "What's your plan?"

Simon's fury remained etched on his face.

"You, me, and Black, we'll go to the Boss together. We must make him change his mind and rein in Franca!

"Which of the other mobs pays their dancers a base salary?"

Is he trying to take advantage of my recent takeover of Salle de Bal Brise? Is he inciting me to rebel against the Boss? Heh heh, as Aurore once said, the early worm gets eaten by birds, and ravens who stick their necks out get shot… Lumian raised his hands, cracking his knuckles with a sly smile.

"It's pointless. Franca is the Boss's mistress. The Boss will undoubtedly heed her. If you want him to change his mind, there's only one way—become the boss yourself!"

Is this something you should say in front of so many people? Louis, Sarkota, and the others behind Lumian were so terrified that they almost covered their leader's mouth.

"Giant" Simon also appeared taken aback.

"What nonsense are you spouting?"

Most of his thugs trembled with fear.

"What I mean is…" Lumian suddenly seized the table's edge and flung it at "Giant" Simon!

Clang!

The table crashed to the ground, and the cups upon it shattered into shards.

"Giant" Simon had already retreated two steps, his expression darkening. His subordinates instinctively reached for their revolvers. He looked at Lumian and demanded,

"What do you want?"

Lumian stood behind the upturned wooden table, seething with anger.

"You wretched dogsh*t, does the Boss mean anything to you? How dare you plot a mutiny in secret, attempting to force him to change his orders!

"Do you truly aspire to be the boss?

"The Boss's commands must be carried out, whether they're good or bad. If there's an issue, you can address it with the Boss privately, but you cannot conspire with others to coerce him!"

The question exposed "Giant" Simon's true intentions, leaving him unable to explode in anger or continue inciting Ciel.

He spat out his words. "Damn it, is there something wrong with your brain? When did I say I wanted to force the Boss? I merely suggested that everyone should approach the Boss and explain that providing a dancer with a base salary is unreasonable. It places a heavy burden on us."

With that, "Giant" Simon waved his hand, wearing an expression that conveyed difficulty in communicating with Ciel. He turned and departed, his subordinates trailing after him, descending the staircase.

Observing their departure, Lumian inwardly chuckled.

Thank you so much. Tomorrow, no, tonight, the Boss will come to know how loyal I am!

Lumian had stumbled upon an opportunity to earn Gardner Martin's trust, and he seized it without hesitation.

Putting on a show, he simulated an angry exhale, restraining his emotions. Pointing at the mess on the floor, he commanded Louis and the others, "Clean this up."

Just as Lumian finished speaking, a figure emerged from the shadows near the staircase.

It was Jenna, having finished her performance in the dance hall.

Jenna wasn't wearing a revealing outfit today. Her rose-colored dress, supported by a petticoat, made her resemble an upside-down flower. Her brownish-yellow hair was tied in a simple bun at the back, with some loose strands cascading gently. The dark circles around her blue eyes were less pronounced, lending her a touch of elegance. A mole adorned the middle of her left cheek.

This symbolized elegance.

Observing Jenna, Lumian couldn't help but chuckle.

"Do the folks in the market district appreciate this style?"

He was referring to Jenna's less provocative attire.

Jenna smiled smugly.

"It works surprisingly well from time to time. Franca mentioned that sometimes, the more unattainable something appears to men, the more they desire it. F*ck, I can't quite fathom that mentality."

"What's the matter?" Lumian glanced at the waiters tidying up and found another table to sit at.

Jenna took a seat opposite him and smiled.

"I'm here to discuss the singing fee for next week. Previously, it was 10 songs per night, 4 verl d'or, and a third of the money thrown onto the stage.

"Lately, it seems I've become more popular than in the past few months!"

Lumian pondered for a moment before responding.

"Has the Poison Spur Mob grown suspicious of you, making it difficult for you to perform at their dance halls?"

"F*ck, that infuriates me! Couldn't you have disguised yourself better? You were identified so easily, and it ended up implicating me!" Jenna replied indignantly.

A mischievous grin played at the corners of Lumian's mouth.

"Starting from today, you will still perform 10 songs per night, but the fee will be increased to 10 verl d'or. You can keep two-thirds of the money thrown onto the stage."

Louis, who stood behind Lumian, felt a pang of sorrow.

Although Little Minx didn't sing here every night, she frequented the place several times a week. This change would result in Salle de Bal Brise earning 2,000 verl d'or less annually!

However, it seemed that Little Minx had played a significant role in the assassination of "Hammer" Ait, the mob leader. As a consequence, she had lost the opportunity to perform in Poison Spur Mob's territory, amounting to a loss of over 1,000 verl d'or per year.

Jenna appeared quite content.

Receiving 10 verl d'or for 10 songs and keeping two-thirds of the money thrown on stage was the most generous treatment in the underground singer industry.

She smiled and said, "I can only come for three days next week, from Friday to Sunday night."

"Seeking opportunities at dance halls in other districts?" Lumian inquired casually.

Jenna shook her head.

"No, I don't have that much time to bloody sing. I have other things to attend to."

"Isn't being an underground singer your profession?" Lumian inquired curiously.

"This is just a part-time gig!" Jenna emphasized with a smirk. "My main job is being the shared mistress of 'Lion' Ciel and 'Red Boots' Franca!"

Louis's legs nearly buckled at the jest.

In his mind, Franca was a possessive woman. She had taught a lesson to any man who dared to snatch Little Minx away from her.

If the boss truly became involved with Little Minx, he would undoubtedly face Red Boots' fury!

This fellow has other identities? Lumian's thoughts raced as he asked thoughtfully, "Is Jenna your real name or an alias?"

Part-time underground singers often adopted an alias to avoid impacting their other occupations.

Jenna's lips curled up, and she blinked before replying, "What do you think, Monsieur Ciel?"

She deliberately emphasized the name Ciel, implying that he, too, used an alias.

With that, Jenna rose from her seat, leaned across the wooden table, and whispered into Lumian's ear, "After hearing your conversation with 'Giant'

Simon, I have a sincere suggestion. The less loyal someone is, the more they boast about their loyalty. Your performance went a bit overboard, hehe."

Jenna straightened up, wearing an air of pride, and confidently walked toward the staircase.

Finally, it was her turn to "educate" Ciel!

Is that so? Lumian pondered as he watched Jenna's departing figure.

"Aren't you wearing perfume today?"

Jenna turned around, her expression brimming with delight as she inquired, "So you didn't notice me ascending the stairs?"

Chapter 182: Truth Serum

"What do you think, Madame Jenna?" Lumian grinned, throwing Jenna's own words back at her.

"Damn it!" Jenna exclaimed, raising her hand in frustration before turning around with a scowl and storming back downstairs.

Lumian pondered for a few moments, tapping the table in front of him. He turned to Louis and Sarkota and said, "Bring me a glass of fennel absinthe."

Being the "protector" of Salle de Bal Brise had its perks, and his meals here were on the house.

As he remembered that he had to hand over most of the dance hall's profits to the Boss and bribe the police, Lumian felt less inclined to be frugal.

No matter how difficult things became, he couldn't let himself suffer. He had to do his utmost to make the Boss suffer instead!

Lumian drank two glasses of the bitter, mind-altering light-green liquid and remained at Salle de Bal Brise until nearly midnight.

Standing up, he turned to Louis and Sarkota and declared, "I'm going to bed. Wait until the dance hall closes before you head home.

"If anyone causes trouble, throw them out. If you can't handle them alone, gather everyone and be bold enough to take action. Don't worry, I'll take responsibility if anything goes wrong."

What he left unsaid was: If I can't handle the responsibility, I'll leave it for the Boss to worry about.

Salle de Bal Brise stayed open until 2 a.m. every day, usually opening between 10:30 a.m. and 11 a.m.

"Yes, Boss," Sarkota and Louis replied in unison.

Upon returning to his bedroom, Lumian lingered for another fifteen minutes before grabbing the brown suitcase containing Aurore's grimoires. He squeezed out of the window and smoothly landed on the ground from the second floor.

He walked through the shadows, turning from Avenue du Marché into Rue des Blouses Blanches, and entered the safe house he had rented previously.

After hiding the grimoires and releasing some sulfur to repel the bugs, Lumian left the room and turned into an alley behind Rue des Blouses Blanches. He planned to take a detour to Auberge du Coq Doré, where he would spend the night.

After walking a dozen steps, he noticed a pile of trash beside a barricade.

Scavengers and cleaners wouldn't come until the next morning to clean it up. At that moment, it had become a haven for rats, cockroaches, flies, and stray dogs.

Seeing the rats and stray dogs, Lumian suddenly remembered something.

Among the three metal canisters he had acquired from the perverted Hedsey, one remained unidentified.

I might as well give it a try… Lumian nodded to himself imperceptibly.

Relying on his exceptional skills, lightning-fast reflexes, nimble movements, and keen observation, he swiftly stepped on a rat with grayish-black fur. He crouched down, retrieved the slightly heavy metal canister, and poured some odorless, colorless liquid into the "prey's" mouth.

The rat let out a quick squeak, but aside from that, nothing out of the ordinary happened.

Considering the pervert's methods, I thought it might be an aphrodisiac, but it doesn't seem like it… That makes sense. That pervert possesses Beyonder powers that stimulate desire. He wouldn't need an additional canister with the same effect… Lumian lifted his right foot, watching as the rat scurried back to its companions. It joined the swarm while emitting continuous squeaks, but it didn't do anything else.

Strange… Lumian stared at the rat for a prolonged moment, unable to discern anything significant.

Suddenly, a voice as clear as crystal rang out from behind him.

"What are you up to?"

Lumian whirled around and beheld "Red Boots" Franca emerging from the shadows at the far end of the alley.

She still sported her trademark red boots, off-white breeches, and a black-and-white checkered blouse. Her flaxen hair was neatly tied up.

Why are you here? Lumian was about to inquire, but he promptly recalled that Franca resided at 3 Rue des Blouses Blanches.

He could only respond honestly, "Conducting an experiment."

"What kind of experiment?" Franca approached with curiosity.

Her eyes, resembling sparkling lakes, surveyed the rats before she let out a chuckle.

"Has your sister taught you to experiment on rats?"

"Are you referring to laboratory rats?" Lumian found it easy to converse with Franca. Many words required no further explanation.

He then said, "Didn't Jenna inform you that after I disposed of the pervert, I obtained three metal canisters? One contained gas that could render people unconscious. I depleted it when I eliminated 'Hammer' Ait. The second canister contained an accompanying gaseous stimulant, and there's still a fair amount left.

"The third canister holds a liquid. I'm unsure of its properties. Hence, I experimented on these rats."

Understanding dawned on Franca's face.

"So, it's a leftover from that pervert."

She then asked with anticipation, "Could it be an aphrodisiac?"

Why do you share my thoughts, Madame? Lumian gestured towards the squeaking rat, finding amusement in the situation.

"It doesn't seem so. You appear somewhat disappointed?"

Franca didn't conceal her feelings and let out a sigh.

"Indeed. If it were truly an aphrodisiac, how intriguing it would be."

"If it were indeed an aphrodisiac, what would you want to use it for?" Lumian suddenly harbored suspicions that Franca intended to do something to Jenna.

Franca glanced at him.

"Damn it, are you accusing me in your mind? Do you think I have no moral boundaries?

"I hope it's an aphrodisiac. My main curiosity lies in experiencing its effects and effectiveness. I would consume some myself and have Gardner try it as well. If his mistresses desire, they can partake too. Do you understand the pleasures of flirtation and amusement?"

"…" Lumian was momentarily at a loss for words. After a few seconds, he responded, "You Trierians certainly excel at games."

"I'm not a Trierian," Franca retorted, "but I concur with your statement."

She turned her gaze towards the metal canister in Lumian's grasp.

"Shall I assist you in discovering its properties?"

"Aren't you concerned about the dangers?" Lumian was somewhat taken aback.

It remained uncertain whether this vial of liquid was a slow-acting poison or a vessel for curses!

Franca chuckled and replied, "You truly need to supplement your knowledge of mysticism.

"I intend to employ divination. Witches possess considerable divinatory abilities."

Aurore's grimoires made no mention of it. They solely documented the Witch's Potion, which causes gender transformation. It speculates that every Witch excels in spells… Yes, those proficient in spells shouldn't be lacking in divination… Lumian handed the liquid-filled canister to Franca.

Franca walked to the edge of the alley and halted behind a five-story building.

She extended her right hand and traced it back and forth on the dim glass window.

Simultaneously, she softly recited something in Hermes. Even with Lumian's acute hearing, he could only catch a few words.

Spirituality… Inquiry… Answer…

A few seconds later, the glass window darkened and deepened, as though it led to an enigmatic, unknown world.

Franca stepped back, raised the metal canister, and spoke in Intis, "What is the purpose of the liquid inside?"

From the depths of the glass window, an aged voice responded, "Induces an urge to confess."

Franca nodded, expressed gratitude, and concluded the divination.

As the glass window returned to its original state, she turned to Lumian and stated, "It appears to be a concoction akin to a truth serum."

"Truth serum?" Lumian inquired.

Aurore had never mentioned such a term.

Franca casually explained, "It's a serum that compels people to speak the truth.

"Once their desire to spill their secrets is triggered, along with the interrogator's questioning, although there may be a fair amount of nonsense, it becomes exceedingly challenging to lie. What they utter should stem from their innermost desires."

Confiding their desires… Similar to the pervert's other abilities, involving diverse human yearnings… As expected of a boon from the Mother Tree of Desire… This could prove quite useful for a Beyonder like me, who lacks proficiency in spirit communication and divination… Lumian retrieved the metal canister from Franca.

Franca glanced around and queried with a smile, "Why did you choose Rue des Blouses Blanches for the experiment? Shouldn't your activities be centered around Avenue du Marché and Rue Anarchie?"

Lumian withheld nothing.

"I rented a safe house here to safeguard my sister's grimoires. I fear they may be damaged if I am targeted."

"Very cautious," Franca nodded approvingly. "Your sister is fortunate to have a brother like you. I used to have a brother too. He was conceited, enjoyed flaunting his skills, and lacked practicality. I yearned to teach him a lesson every day…"

She trailed off midway, her gaze falling upon her red boots.

Used to have. Does that imply he is no longer present? Lumian keenly sensed Franca's unspoken meaning and promptly understood the reason behind her sudden despondency.

After a few seconds, Franca's smile returned.

"Your sister must trust you too. Otherwise, she wouldn't have revealed our organization to you. Although we never explicitly mentioned keeping the research society a secret from our families, hardly anyone ever discloses it. After all…"

Franca fell silent once more, her smile taking on a bitter tinge.

After all, what? Lumian was perplexed, but he refrained from asking. Instead, he simply elaborated on Aurore's rationale.

"We were caught in a calamity back then, unsure of who would survive and who would perish. That's why my sister divulged some secrets to me, hoping they would prove useful in the future."

"Understood." Franca nodded, regaining her composure. She smiled and remarked, "I thought you came to Rue des Blouses Blanches in search of me, eager to learn about mysticism."

"It's too late now." Lumian was already feeling weary.

Franca clicked her tongue and chuckled.

"I won't do anything to you. It's too… too mad and shameful to engage in such activities with someone who knows my true gender."

Is that so? I was afraid that once you got accustomed to it, the shame would only heighten your excitement… Lumian suspected that Franca, who could be swayed by the notion of "Life is short, why not give it a try," would engage in more unforeseen endeavors.

After bidding farewell to the Demoness, he returned to Auberge du Coq Doré.

Nothing eventful occurred in Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman until Thursday.

At 8 p.m., Lumian arrived at 19 Rue Scheer on Avenue du Boulevard and met Mr. K in the basement.

Mr. K gestured towards the three assistants holding silver trays behind him and stated, "There are a total of three mystical items, each priced between 15,000 verl d'or and 20,000. Make your selection."

Chapter 183: Three Items

Upon entering the basement, Lumian's eyes immediately fell upon three silver plates holding the items.

There was an unassuming white glove, a pair of gold-rimmed glasses with a tea-colored tint, and a shiny golden button.

Observing Lumian's interest in the mystical objects, Mr. K, seated in a red armchair, introduced them in a low, raspy voice, "That glove is Circus. It grants you some weak but peculiar mystical abilities. It can conjure a gust of wind, create fog, and use bursts of light to mess with your target's vision. By touching them, you can freeze your enemies. You can also open most doors without a key. It can even guide you through solid walls.

"These techniques suit your need for mysticism, but remember, carrying it will make you lose your way more often. And sometimes, getting lost brings misfortune.

"Price is 18,000 verl d'or."

Sounds like the Sequence 8 Trickmaster of the Apprentice pathway mentioned in Aurore's grimoires… Although the powers aren't formidable, if used as support alongside traps or my close combat skills and revolver shots, they can yield miraculous results. Lumian found solace in the positive effects of the Circus glove, compensating for his lack of mysticism and helplessness in certain situations.

However, the negative effects were dire. For Hunters who relied on tracking and pathfinding, losing their way frequently meant losing their strengths entirely. Misfortune could strike at any moment, even without wearing the glove. Merely having it in his pocket would affect Lumian.

Mr. K shifted his attention to the brown, gold-rimmed glasses and addressed Lumian, "Do you remember the painting from the gathering?"

Painting? Lumian's mind immediately conjured the image of the dizzying oil painting.

The painting, reputedly created by a Beyonder before his demise, boasted vibrant colors, a peculiar pattern, and a hallucinatory scene. It seemed as if the artist had descended into madness before his death.

"I do." Lumian nodded.

Mr. K continued, "After the painting's owner passed away, his Beyonder attributes together with a strange power fused into his glasses, creating a unique mystical item.

"It allows the wearer to perceive things invisible to the naked eye. Occasionally, one can glimpse the truth of this world to some extent…"

Aurore's cautionary words echoed in Lumian's mind: "Don't see what you shouldn't see, don't listen to what you shouldn't hear."

Internally, Lumian couldn't help but criticize, Isn't this pair of glasses doing the exact opposite? It's like a weapon of self-destruction! These items seem to have nothing to do with my two needs…

Mr. K glanced at Lumian, his voice still low and raspy in the confined basement. "By perceiving the world from a different perspective and witnessing the once-invisible, the wearer will be seized by an uncontrollable urge to paint. Each painting produced will possess supernatural effects. For instance, a painting of an ocean will make onlookers feel as if they're drowning."

"In a similar vein, if you apply various cosmetics to your face instead of painting on canvas, you can achieve an excellent disguise. Anyone scrutinizing your face will be convinced that it's your true appearance, albeit temporarily."

"Remember, once you've painted a 'new' face, avoid looking in the mirror. Otherwise, you'll believe it to be your real self. Slowly but surely, your body and mind will transform until you become an entirely different person."

"Much like this, you can't sustain that newfound countenance indefinitely. After a span of three hours or more, your sense of self will gradually succumb to its influence until you wholeheartedly believe that you are one and the same."

Upon analyzing the possible Beyonder domain of the mystical item, Lumian couldn't help but speculate, It sounds akin to the hypnosis and suggestions of the Psychiatrist pathway, but it differs greatly in other aspects… Considering the demise of the painter, could it be a power or aura left behind by an evil god?

Mr. K fixed his gaze on the brown glasses.

"Its previous owner was a Lawyer, which enables it to manipulate the target's thoughts, cognition, and conclusions to a certain extent through words, actions, or a series of processes.

"You can probably surmise its negative effects. Seeing what should remain unseen and perceiving the truth of the world without adequate protection exposes you to unknown dangers. Perhaps, one day, you may meet a peculiar death like the painter, leaving behind an enigmatic painting.

"The price is 15,000 verl d'or."

Corresponding to a Sequence 9 Lawyer? The crucial aspect lies in the peculiar power associated with it. Yes, it doesn't fully reflect a Lawyer's abilities. Aurore's grimoires describe Lawyers as masters of eloquence and reasoning, adept at uncovering loopholes in rules and exploiting their opponents' weaknesses. They create an advantageous atmosphere to achieve ultimate victory. They can influence judgment, thoughts, and conclusions through their words, actions, and established processes. Additionally, they excel at utilizing the power of order… Lumian mentally reviewed the relevant mystical knowledge.

However, he remained uncertain about the Lawyer trait, particularly how to harness the power of order. Aurore lacked knowledge in that regard as well.

In essence, the brown gold-rimmed glasses fulfilled Lumian's need for better disguises. They also provided mystical means that required preparation but were less troublesome than the Alms Monk's elaborate rituals.

The only issue was its perilous nature!

Lumian contemplated, but didn't reach a final decision. He awaited Mr. K's introduction of the golden button.

Before long, Mr. K's raspy voice resounded again.

"It's called Flare. It originated from a deceased Light Suppliant.

"It grants additional buffs such as courage and strength through singing. It enables you to sense the presence of undead creatures and evil entities. You can also employ spells and rituals from the Sun domain, making it highly effective against undead souls and similar targets.

"After wearing it, you'll feel compelled to sing. Darkness and cold become unbearable, and you'll yearn for sunlight and warmth. If you haven't removed it after half an hour, you'll become a devoted follower of the Eternal Blazing Sun, earnestly praising the Sun.

"The price is 20,000 verl d'or."

If it can resolve my issue of resisting the undead, the negative effects are bearable… The problem lies in the limited viable targets… Lumian pondered deeply, torn between which item to choose.

His rationale suggested opting for Flare or Circus, yet he couldn't make a decisive choice.

The brown gold-rimmed glasses catered to both of his needs and were his preferred option.

By wearing them solely before disguising himself and creating paintings with supernatural effects in a safe environment, he could effectively evade most of the negative consequences. Thus, he would avoid witnessing things he shouldn't and the so-called truth of the world.

In essence, it wasn't an item that needed constant donning. Lumian could choose the opportune moment to utilize it.

This way, he could proactively construct a spiritual barrier, screening out anomalies, similar to when he performed the Summoning Dance.

Considering his seal, the "coincidences" of Inevitability, and the occasional Summoning Dance, Lumian didn't believe an additional trait would worsen matters.

"I want those glasses."

Mr. K appeared taken aback by Lumian's choice. After a few seconds, he queried, "Are you certain?"

"I'm certain." Lumian produced a small cloth bag brimming with banknotes and meticulously counted out 15,000 verl d'or.

Mr. K refrained from further persuasion, emitting a raspy chuckle.

"You're even crazier than I presumed."

There was a hint of admiration in his tone.

Instructing the attendant to accept the 15,000 verl d'or and hand over the brown glasses to Lumian, Mr. K nodded and remarked, "You can give them a test run here. It's safe enough."

Lumian caressed the frame and discovered that the seemingly metallic material had an odd rubbery texture.

I'll dub you the Mystery Prying Glasses… Lumian pondered, recalling his sister's Beyonder pathway.

In the ensuing moment, he placed the brown gold-rimmed glasses on the bridge of his nose.

Almost instantly, he beheld a multitude of scenes from various angles.

The mottled ceiling, bloodstains in the corners, Mr. K's back that should have been out of sight, and the attendants stationed in the corridor…

Lumian also caught sight of a blot of darkness, a silhouette, a gaze emanating from an unknown source, and a visage concealed within the shadows.

Beneath the hood lay black, feathery hair, delicate features, sunken eyes, dark orbs, and ageless skin, only visible from below.

Is that Mr. K's face? Lumian experienced a sudden revelation.

Images from different perspectives flooded his mind, leaving him feeling lightheaded. His state of mind grew increasingly abnormal, and an insatiable urge to capture everything overcame him.

Hastily, Lumian removed the Mystery Prying Glasses, and his vision reverted to normal. Yet, the compulsion to draw lingered within him.

Exhaling deeply, he declared, "It's tolerable."

Mr. K offered a brief warning, "Try to employ it in familiar and secure situations."

After bidding farewell to Mr. K and departing the Psychic's headquarters, Lumian boarded a carriage back to Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman.

En route, as he passed through Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative, a thought struck him.

I must gather some canvases, brushes, and paints…

Even though my skills are limited to sketching and not particularly exceptional, the quality of the painting shouldn't influence the attached supernatural effects. Perhaps, the more distorted and grotesque it appears, the better the outcome…

Fifteen minutes later, Lumian alighted from the carriage ahead of schedule and located a shop specializing in oil painting supplies.

Upon hearing the price, he couldn't help but inquire, "What? 160 verl d'or? A single canvas costs 160 verl d'or?"

Chapter 184: Painting

When Lumian stepped back into the Auberge du Coq Doré, his mind was still filled with the exorbitant cost of painting supplies.

Among his colleagues at the Salle de Bal Brise, Charlie's monthly salary as a waiter was considered decent. However, it would take him two months of forgoing food and drink just to afford a single roll of canvas!

Lumian couldn't help but view painters as a destitute lot. How could they ever afford canvases, brushes, paints, wooden frames, human models, and all the other expenses that came with their craft?

Perhaps they relied on financial support from their families just to get by. Shaking off these thoughts, Lumian closed the door behind him and carefully placed the stack of items on the wooden table.

Eventually, he resigned himself to the fact that he couldn't afford proper canvases. Instead, he settled for the cheapest brushes, paints, paper, and other necessities. The truth was, Lumian didn't aspire to be a painter or have his work displayed in an exhibition. He simply needed a medium to imbue the supernatural power, obtained from the Mystery Prying Glasses. The quality of the paint, the possibility of cracking, the fading over time, or even his painting skills were all inconsequential matters.

And so, Lumian spent a total of 30 verl d'or, acquiring his modest supplies.

Mixing a palette of vibrant colors and unfurling a flexible sheet of white paper, Lumian prepared himself for the ritual ahead. With the sanctified silver dagger in hand, he crafted a wall of spirituality within Room 207.

His intention was to explore what he could draw and observe the effects it would yield.

Based on the reaction of Madam Magician's messenger at Auberge du Coq Doré, Lumian surmised that there was nothing particularly abnormal about this place. The only notable issue seemed to be the abundance of bedbugs. Susanna Mattise's predicament most likely had its origins in Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons or perhaps even an underground cavern.

Taking a slow breath, Lumian retrieved the brown glasses with golden rims and carefully placed them upon the bridge of his nose.

In an instant, the world around him seemed to spin, as if he had plummeted from the sky into the depths of the earth.

During this disorienting journey, Lumian beheld the inverted motel with its occupants moving about in a similar fashion, an underground bar, roots of trees and soil extending beneath the surface, rats lurking in the corners, and vermin scurrying about.

Deeper and deeper he fell, enduring the nauseating sensation of weightlessness.

And then, he caught sight of an immense network of brownish-green roots stretching in all directions, reaching into the distance and vanishing into the void.

"Ugh…" Lumian nearly expelled the contents of his stomach. The remnants of his unfinished dinner rose to his throat, threatening to escape.

Swiftly, he removed the Mystery Prying Glasses and fought the urge to vomit. Fueled by an insatiable desire to draw, Lumian picked up a paintbrush, dipped it into the paint, and began sketching upon the blank canvas.

Unbeknownst to him, his spirituality infused the brush with an increasing vigor.

After a few minutes, Lumian halted his strokes and gazed upon his creation.

What in the world have I drawn? The question echoed in his mind.

Upon careful observation, he managed to discern the subject of his artwork: a triangular house with a grayish-blue hue, its roof adorned with green trees, and rain resembling mud.

Lumian stared at the painting for a moment and suddenly felt an itching sensation on the back of his hand. Unable to resist, he scratched it, only to witness his skin turning red and swollen, accompanied by an all-over itchiness.

Could this be the Beyonder influence of the painting? Lumian's heart stirred as he looked away, attempting to soothe the irritation through the friction of his clothes. But his efforts were in vain, and he couldn't help but scratch a few more times.

As he averted his gaze from the child-like graffiti of an "oil painting," the itching gradually subsided and eventually vanished.

It is indeed a problem with the painting, Lumian thought, letting out a sigh of relief.

The urge to paint had vanished as well.

He turned around and contemplated the details.

I have to stare at the painting for at least three seconds before my body itches…

It's challenging to use it in battle. I can't just stick it on my face, can I?

If I use it as a trap, it might have some utility…

I wonder if there are any paintings that can be used without drawing the target's attention?

After careful consideration, Lumian resolved to make another attempt.

He donned the Mystery Prying Glasses once more, and the experience was nearly identical.

However, this time he also glimpsed deep darkness and shadowy figures moving within it.

Amidst the waves of nausea, Lumian removed his brown gold-rimmed glasses, retrieved a fresh sheet of paper, and took up a paintbrush.

This time, he didn't surrender to impulsive strokes but instead focused on visualizing what he desired and endeavored to bring the drawing closer to the image in his mind.

With this approach, Lumian crafted a golden-red sun, surrounded by a vibrant circle of colors—red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, and violet.

As he finished, Room 207 suddenly warmed, and the chill in the air dissipated.

It seems to have a simple exorcism effect… Lumian wasn't entirely certain.

He sat on the edge of the bed, carefully observing the changes.

Over time, the warmth, which initially evoked restlessness and unease, began to fade.

Lumian attempted to fold the painting, keeping its back facing outward. The warmth promptly vanished, and the loss of spiritual essence within the painting slowed to a barely noticeable pace.

I should be able to preserve it for about two months… When unfurled, it can only be used for three days at most… Yes, this is akin to an alternative method of creating Beyonder weapons. Lumian estimated, recalling his previous experiences.

Drawing two paintings in quick succession had placed a considerable burden on his spirituality.

After taking a short break, Lumian proceeded with his third experiment.

This time, he switched to using makeup-related painting tools.

Putting on the Mystery Prying Glasses once again, he braced himself for the sensation of spiraling into the depths. In the midst of it, Lumian caught sight of several indistinct figures lurking in the shadows. Removing the mystical item, he began smearing various substances on his face, carefully tracing lines with the aid of the glass window, which was illuminated by the light of the carbide lamp.

Similar to his previous attempt, Lumian made an effort to maintain control over his makeup, but occasionally, his instincts took over.

Reflecting on the "mirror," he saw his appearance becoming worn and haggard. His eyebrows appeared disheveled, his cheekbones slightly more pronounced, and his lips a touch fuller.

It felt as if he were looking at a stranger. Hastily averting his gaze, he drew the curtain to conceal the result of his "painting."

Having packed away the Itchiness and Sun paintings along with the various tools, Lumian decided it was time to venture out and verify the effects.

As he made his way to Salle de Bal Brise, he noticed Jenna engaging in flamboyant gestures while singing at the top of her lungs, and Charlie, who had just delivered some drinks to the outskirts of the dance floor.

The thugs paid no attention to Lumian, and none of them addressed him as their boss. Feeling a sense of relief, Lumian walked over to Charlie's side, gave his shoulder a friendly pat, and smiled. "Good evening!"

Charlie, clad in a white shirt and black vest, turned around, returning the smile as he asked,

"Good evening, Monsieur. Would you like something to drink?"

Deliberately, Lumian inquired, "Don't you recognize me?"

Caught off guard, Charlie's eyes widened, and for a few seconds, he gazed at the distant gas wall lamp.

Suddenly, a smile spread across his face, and he exclaimed in astonishment, "It's you! Praise the Sun. How long has it been since we last met? Just wait a moment. I'll come to you as soon as I'm not so busy!"

Charlie pointed towards the bar counter and bid Lumian farewell.

"This kid's acting skills are quite impressive," Lumian chuckled with satisfaction. "He didn't even recognize his own boss, me!"

Shifting his gaze, Lumian approached Jenna's stage, patiently waiting for her to finish singing a song filled with vulgar lyrics.

As soon as Jenna finished collecting the copper and silver coins from the stage and descended, Lumian eagerly greeted her and exclaimed, "You sang magnificently! Can I treat you to a drink?"

Jenna immediately put on a cautious expression.

Ever since the incident with that perverted Hedsey, she couldn't afford to be careless around any audience member who approached her. She worried about encountering another unpleasant situation.

For a few seconds, she examined Lumian's face and forced a smile to conceal her wariness.

"I must preserve my voice for my next song! Help me out by having another drink!"

With a wink, Jenna approached the two mobsters guarding the stage, seeking their assistance.

The mobsters didn't dare offend Showy Diva, who was rumored to be their boss and Red Boots' lover. Stepping forward, they positioned themselves between Lumian and Jenna.

Seizing the opportunity, Jenna made her way to the lounge near the bar counter.

Before leaving, she glanced at Lumian's hair color and scrutinized his face intently for a moment. She muttered to herself, "Bloody hell, is this some sort of fashion trend now?"

Lumian happily averted his gaze and turned toward the staircase leading to the café. The two vigilant mobsters guarding the area stopped him.

Very dutiful… Lumian smiled and replied, "Just going for a cup of coffee!"

After observing Lumian closely for a few seconds, the two mobsters stepped aside.

Entering the café and noticing that Louis and Sarkota had nothing to do, Lumian made his way to the washroom.

He didn't dare look at himself in the mirror. Instead, he splashed tap water on his face and rubbed it a few times, gradually removing his makeup.

When he was done, he looked at the mirror and saw his pale and weary reflection staring back at him.

It drains my spirituality quite a bit… I even painted two artworks earlier, Lumian thought to himself, regaining his composure before leaving the washroom.

Louis glanced around and stood up in surprise.

"Boss! When did you return?"

"Just now," Lumian replied, pointing towards the corridor. "I'm going to get some rest."

"Understood, Boss," Louis and Sarkota responded obediently, refraining from questioning further.

Lumian entered his room, compelled himself to freshen up, and settled down on the bed, drifting into sleep.

In his dream, he experienced the unbearable sensation of freefalling from midair towards the ground. As he plummeted, the earth beneath him unexpectedly cracked open, revealing a sea of raging flames. Lumian felt a searing and piercing pain in his mind. He snapped his eyes open, sitting up and gasping for breath.

In that moment, the room was enveloped in darkness and silence. Only a faint glow of crimson moonlight filtered through the curtains, casting a dim light upon the desk beside the window.

Chapter 185: Missing Goods

Why did I have such a dream? It felt eerily real… Lumian collected himself and assessed his condition, but found nothing amiss.

Yet, in his dream, he felt as though he was once again wearing the Mystery Prying Glasses, and they revealed even more.

After pondering for a while, Lumian suspected that the negative effects of wearing the Mystery Prying Glasses three times in a row still lingered. They seemed to have seeped into his subconscious, manifesting in his dream within the confines of Salle de Bal Brise, an ancient burial ground.

It appears that something is truly amiss beneath the surface here… Lumian sighed inwardly. He rose from his bed, donned his coat, and resolved to spend the night elsewhere to test his hypothesis.

Under the cover of darkness, with Salle de Bal Brise devoid of any illumination, Lumian followed the shadows along the roadside and returned to Auberge du Coq Doré, its main entrance locked.

For Lumian, this posed no obstacle. He didn't try rousing the irritable Madame Fels by knocking on the door. Instead, he circled around to the side, traced the pipe, and climbed onto the balcony on the second floor.

In Room 207, Lumian slept until six in the morning. He experienced only two sporadic, ordinary dreams.

So, it was indeed the ancient bones buried deep beneath Salle de Bal Brise that triggered the residual powers of the Mystery Prying Glasses within me… Lumian sat up, a mixture of delight and disappointment washing over him.

His original plan was to use the Mystery Prying Glasses to create one or two supernatural paintings each day, accumulating them for future needs. However, it seemed that frequent use of the glasses was ill-advised. He would have to wait until the lingering negative effects dissipated before attempting further experiments. Otherwise, he risked something dreadful and bizarre happening over time, possibly leading to a strange demise akin to the Lawyer who had left the glasses behind, leaving behind only an eerie oil painting with enduring abnormal effects.

Tonight, I shall sleep within Salle de Bal Brise and ascertain whether the negative effects have dissipated… In the future, I must refrain from wearing the glasses more than twice in a brief span of time… These are the details Mr. K neglected to mention. Yes, I must experience them firsthand. Only through firsthand experience can I truly comprehend… Lumian rose energetically and made his way to the washroom to freshen up.

It being still early, many of the tenants were still abed, and the morning remained tranquil, devoid of the usual clamor over access to the washroom.

From time to time, Madame Fels would ascend the stairs to inspect the water meters on each floor, ensuring no one wasted the precious resource.

A contract had been inked between Auberge du Coq Doré and the Imperial Water Supply Company, stipulating a daily allowance of no less than 250 liters and no more than 500 liters of water. The cost amounted to 100 verl d'or per year.

Leisurely, Lumian strolled to the café on Rue des Blouses Blanches. He indulged in delectable treats like sablé cookies and brioche, a softer variation of croissants. Afterwards, he sought out a place for exercise.

Upon returning to Auberge du Coq Doré, he spotted Charlie, sporting a linen shirt and black trousers, seated on the steps outside the entrance, relishing a mouthful of meatloaf accompanied by an Apple Whiskey Sour.

"So early?" Lumian inquired, a smile playing on his lips.

Salle de Bal Brise closed its doors at 2 a.m., and the morning had yet to reach 8:30 a.m.

Uncertain whether to hastily rise and greet his employer or engage in the usual casual conversation, Charlie hesitated for a moment before standing up, a sheepish smile on his face.

"I think I'll catch a bit more sleep before heading back to the dance hall. I don't think I can keep doing this. I reckon there ought to be some time when we don't have to sleep or work. Otherwise, it feels, feels…"

Salle de Bal Brise opened at 10:30 a.m.

"Feels like we're mere machines built for work, devoid of a life to call our own?" Lumian finished Charlie's sentence, lending him a helping hand.

"Exactly! That's spot on!" Charlie agreed. "You're quite the refined individual, you know? Sometimes, you don't seem like a mobster at all. I mean, not like the leader of the Savoie Mob. You come across as more… civilized!"

Had everything gone according to plan, I would have been studying at a university in Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative. I would be spending time chatting with my classmates and exploring the depths of Underground Trier… Lumian's heart sank as he focused his attention on Charlie.

This was the method he used to observe whether Susanna Mattise's issue still lingered and when it would rear its head.

"W-What are you staring at?" Charlie stammered nervously. "Do you see something amiss?"

Lumian eased his worry. His luck appears to be relatively normal and stable. He smiled, raising his right hand and giving a wave behind Charlie's back.

"Good morning, Susanna!"

Charlie spun around, eyes wide open, scrutinizing every detail.

A few seconds later, he exhaled and turned back, forcing a smile. He addressed Lumian, "You're just messing with me again."

That name remained a haunting nightmare he couldn't shake off anytime soon.

"I'm strengthening your mental endurance. This way, if something truly occurs, you won't panic and find yourself unable to devise a solution." Lumian earnestly patted Charlie's shoulder.

Moments before 10:30 a.m., Lumian made his way back to Salle de Bal Brise.

Upon his arrival, Louis and Sarkota approached simultaneously, their voices merging into one as they spoke. "Boss, something's up!"

"What's the matter?" Lumian inquired with a smile, seemingly oblivious to the anxiety and unease radiating from his two subordinates.

Louis glanced towards the staircase, lowering his voice. "Red Boots, Giant, and Rat are all here. It must be something serious."

Every leader present? Lumian pondered his recent actions and found it hard to believe that he hadn't offended all the leaders of the Savoie Mob.

I've been on my best behavior these past few days!

"Indeed," Louis confirmed with a solemn nod.

Lumian ascended the second-floor stairs nonchalantly, where Franca and the others awaited.

Franca had swapped her footwear for darker red boots. She sported light-colored pants and a trendy dark skirt that had gained popularity in Trier recently. Completing her ensemble was a more masculine formal attire.

With her right leg crossed over her left, Franca grinned at Lumian as he approached.

To her right was Baron Brignais, donned in a formal suit and top hat. On her left was a slender-faced man, barely reaching a height of 1.6 meters, boasting a pair of rat-like whiskers. He wore a dark brown shirt that fell short, and his thick, grayish-black hair framed his countenance. His dark blue eyes revealed a trace of anxiety.

"'Rat' Christo," Baron Brignais courteously introduced Lumian to the thin-faced man.

Baron Brignais then gestured towards the man seated opposite him. "'Blood Palm' Black."

Black possessed brown hair, blue eyes, and a round face. He appeared to be in his early thirties and had a warm smile that hardly resembled that of a mob leader.

Clad in attire leaning more towards formality, his hands were large, with clearly defined bones beneath the surface. He held a slowly smoldering cigar.

"Good morning, everyone." Lumian dragged an armchair closer and settled in, positioning himself nearly a meter away from the table, assuming the air of someone in control.

"Giant" Simon glanced at him, took a drag from his cigarette, and exhaled a cloud of grayish-blue smoke.

"Christo met with some trouble and requires our assistance."

"What sort of trouble?" Lumian directed his gaze towards "Rat" Christo.

Christo played a vital role in Salle de Bal Brise's lucrative business.

Despite the premium he charged for the smuggled liquor he peddled, its lack of taxation made it significantly cheaper than the wholesale liquor stores in Trier. Moreover, a substantial portion of the alcohol Christo dealt with was moonshine, cleverly adorned with labels from relatively renowned brands and origins.

Gritting his teeth, Christo, who bore a striking resemblance to a rat, spoke up.

"I've lost a shipment underground. The delivery men and escorts have vanished. Damn it, my younger brother was among them. His wife and child are in tears at my place!"

Something has transpired in Underground Trier? Smuggling operations are divided into carriers and armed protection? That's right. Osta Trul had mentioned helping others transport illicit books. Horse-drawn carriages are useless in Underground Trier; they rely solely on manual labor… Lumian nodded subtly and inquired, "What kind of goods?"

"A batch of red wine and brandy, along with some Blackfish." "Rat" Christo couldn't help but slam the table. "Damn it, we've taken that route countless times. Nothing ever happened, nor did we encounter those hyenas."

The term "hyenas" referred to the quarry police, who specialized in cracking down on smuggling activities and maintained order in the underground.

Observing Lumian's confusion, Baron Brignais casually explained, "'Blackfish' refers to firearms."

Among the mob's top five lucrative ventures, the bootleg alcohol supply chain ranked second. Firearms, due to low demand, brought in the least profit. The casino business, which was the most lucrative, wasn't particularly favored in the market district, given the modest incomes of the local population. The money one could extract from the patrons was rather limited. Compared to gambling, which required wit, those who toiled all day preferred indulging in cheap liquor, gyrating their bodies, and seeking solace in the company of captivating dancers.

Regarding the sale of psychotropic drugs, the police department in Trier cracked down heavily on it. Following repeated warnings from the market district's police headquarters, Salle de Bal Brise had put an end to such incidents. However, Rue du Rossignol, overseen by "Giant" Simon, occasionally experienced a few cases.

Lumian turned to "Rat" Christo and spoke, "Any suspects?"

"None," Christo lamented. "Damn it, that route is incredibly well-concealed. Apart from me and my men, no one in the market district is aware of it."

He paused for a moment before sharing his intentions.

"I need your help to search for clues along that route, using your expertise. I've gone through it myself, but found nothing."

Without waiting for Lumian's response, Franca nodded and suggested, "Let's form pairs to ensure safety during the investigation.

"Right, I'll team up with Ciel. There's something I need to discuss with him."

"Giant" Simon's gaze flickered between Franca and Ciel a few times before he recalled that Ciel was suspected of sleeping with Franca's mistress, thus cuckolding her.

Seizing the opportunity to teach Ciel a lesson, "Giant" Simon nodded imperceptibly and said to "Blood Palm" Black, "You and I will be a team."

Baron Brignais then turned to "Rat" Christo. "I'll accompany you for your second trip."

After Baron Brignais and "Giant" Simon scoured the underground route to no avail, Lumian and Franca followed a smuggler into Underground Trier.

Chapter 186: Strange Footprints

Holding an iron-black carbide lamp, Franca glanced at the path between stone pillars and asked the smuggler, Fernandez, who was leading the way, in a state of confusion, "Doesn't this lead to Quartier de l'Observatoire?"

Though Underground Trier was a complex maze, the tunnels on this level had street names corresponding to the surface. After pondering for a moment, Franca realized they were going in the wrong direction.

Smuggling operations certainly entailed entering the city from its outskirts, and Quartier de l'Observatoire was positioned closer to the center of Trier compared to Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman. The district stood on the other side of the Srenzo River, effectively separating it from Avenue du Boulevard.

Fernandez, a smuggler associated with "Rat" Christo, turned around with a smile and explained, "The hidden route we're taking leads to Quartier de l'Observatoire. We always deliver the goods to the warehouse there."

"Is that so?" Franca slowed down and increased the distance between herself and Fernandez, who wore a brown felt hat.

Since they hadn't entered the smuggling route yet, she lowered her voice and conversed with Lumian.

"I remember you traded your Pugilist Beyonder characteristic for 18,000 verl d'or with Gardner. You know it's a Beyonder characteristic, right? Or rather, do you grasp a Beyonder characteristic's true meaning?"

"My sister mentioned it before." Lumian attributed his knowledge to Aurore.

Franca was tall and had long legs, making it effortless for her to keep up with Lumian.

Overwhelmed with emotion, she sighed and commented, "It's fortunate to have someone to guide you. In the past, we were stumbling around like blind mice, relying on ourselves to figure things out. Otherwise, I wouldn't have made the choice…"

Her voice trailed off, ending with a long sigh.

This reminded Lumian of a saying, either spoken by Aurore herself or relayed from Emperor Roselle's famous words: "Once you make a grave mistake, it will haunt you for a lifetime."

Franca quickly regained her composure and whispered to Lumian, "You've just entered the field of mysticism. Apart from knowledge, you're lacking much more.

"It's best not to be frugal with that sum of money. Use it to purchase a mystical item or a Beyonder weapon to compensate for a Hunter's limitations in mysticism. Otherwise, if 'Black Scorpion' Roger truly seeks revenge against you, he won't need to go through much trouble. He can simply summon a few undead to hunt you down. If you have such intentions, I'll keep an eye out for you."

Lumian chuckled.

"I've already made a purchase."

"So quickly?" Franca nearly lost control of her voice, causing smuggler Fernandez to glance back.

The carbide lamps cast intersecting shadows, obstructing Lumian's view of Fernandez's expression. He couldn't discern what thoughts they triggered.

Lumian replied "honestly," "Before joining the Savoie Mob, I discovered a circle of Beyonders through Psychic's gathering of mysticism enthusiasts. There, I exchanged the verl d'or that the Boss gave me for a mystical item."

"No wonder…" Franca revealed a knowing expression and praised Lumian. "Your mind is even sharper than I imagined. Hmm, is it an item that enhances your mysticism abilities?"

Lumian spoke frankly, "A pair of Lawyer glasses, but they seem to have been tainted by some strange power."

As he spoke, he retrieved his brown Mystery Prying Glasses and showcased them. "They allow me to see things I usually can't…"

Franca's brow furrowed ever so slightly as she interrupted Lumian. "That's highly dangerous."

"I know," Lumian explained with a smile. "But as long as I choose the right environment and take precautions, it won't be too risky. Besides, it offers excellent disguises and mysticism techniques…"

Lumian briefly recounted his urge to paint after donning the Mystery Prying Glasses.

Franca's ponytail bobbed behind her head.

"It's certainly useful. If I were in your shoes, I'd make the same choice.

"Only the leaders and thugs of the Poison Spur Mob haven't really interacted with you. They only know you by your peculiar hair color. Otherwise, they would have recognized your true identity by now. They wouldn't have needed to act themselves. They could have sought revenge by sharing your information and wanted posters with the police headquarters and the two cathedrals."

Lumian chuckled.

"That's right. I can already set up a coffee meeting with Officer Everett."

Franca's vibrant lake-like eyes sparkled as she said, "You've shared so much with me about the mysticism gathering and your trump cards. Jenna even kept telling me how cunning and deceptive you are. Yet, you're truly sincere and straightforward! Of course, our relationship is different from others. I knew it. Muggle's brother isn't that kind of person!"

For a moment, Lumian felt a twinge of guilt. He spoke sincerely, "Yes, she completely misunderstood me."

After chatting for a while, they finally reached the outskirts of Quartier de l'Observatoire's underground area and turned into a southward tunnel.

Soon, Fernandez halted in front of a secondary well belonging to an abandoned quarry.

He positioned the carbide lamp at the mouth of the well and gestured downward.

"Let's go in."

With the aid of the blue light, Lumian peered down into the depths of the well. It had been neglected for a long time and appeared to be completely blocked by gravel.

Using the recess in the well wall, ropes concealed in the shadows, and a basic iron ladder fastened to the moss, the three of them descended and swiftly reached the well's bottom.

Fernandez moved a few seemingly heavy rocks, revealing a narrow tunnel at the well's edge, wide enough for one person.

As they traversed the tunnel, which emitted a foul stench, the passageway ahead widened, as if they had entered another section of the quarry cave.

The air grew eerily still and darkness enveloped them. The cave ceiling was damp, with scarce traces of moss.

Lumian and Franca, each holding a carbide lamp, slowed their pace and meticulously examined the various signs along the smuggling route.

After an indeterminate amount of time, Fernandez pointed to a nearby tunnel.

"Our boss and Baron Brignais weren't entirely fruitless. They discovered that the caravan's tracks vanished into thin air over there."

It was a tunnel connecting two sections of the quarry cave. The path was strewn with rubble and potholes. In the distance, darkness prevailed, devoid of any light.

Lumian and Franca swiftly located the relatively fresh footprints that had abruptly vanished. They squatted down, closely examining them.

"Only footprints going in. The ones coming back end right here. Most people returning carry heavy loads. Their footprints are deeper, distinctly different from when they came… We can rule out the possibility of them turning around and retracing their steps…" Lumian swiftly made a series of deductions.

Franca averted her gaze from her surroundings and stood up.

"No signs of a struggle. It's incredibly peculiar!"

She then motioned for Fernandez to move further away and wait in the quarry cave.

As Fernandez's carbide lamp glow faded into the distance, Franca produced a small makeup box and a white handkerchief with a blue checkered pattern.

The handkerchief belonged to "Rat" Christo's brother, Erkin, who had also gone missing during the smuggling operation.

Franca placed the carbide lamp down, opened the light-gold box, and ran her fingers over the mirror inside.

Meanwhile, holding the handkerchief, she repeated in a whisper, "Erkin's current whereabouts, Erkin's current whereabouts…"

The already dim tunnel grew even more stifling. The light from the two carbide lamps was pushed back by an invisible force, and the palm-sized mirror emitted a watery glow, as though revealing the depths of a dark river.

Before Lumian could count to three, a scene materialized on the mirror's surface.

Laborers lugging wooden crates and smugglers armed with revolvers and rifles trudged through the tunnel. As they progressed, the darkness behind them engulfed the space where the light had receded. Eventually, the carbide lamp's glow vanished from view, and the mirror's surface turned pitch-black.

"They did vanish in this area." Franca ended her divination, her thin red lips pressed together. "But I can't discern anything further."

Lumian didn't suggest trying the Mystery Prying Glasses. From his perspective, Trier's underground was a treacherous place, concealing all manner of secrets. There were ruins from the Fourth Epoch, foul-smelling old bones, catacombs with specific rules to follow, and the lingering Montsouris ghost that had defied eradication for years. They were all elements that instilled fear in those seeking the truth. If he were to use the Mystery Prying Glasses to survey the surroundings, there was a high chance he would explode on the spot.

In due time, Trier's underground would boast another legend entwined with the power of an evil god.

Therefore, Lumian would lend a hand out of consideration for the Savoie Mob's boss, but he wouldn't go all out and take unnecessary risks.

After all, it was "Rat" Christo who suffered the loss. What did it have to do with him, "Lion" Ciel?

Salle de Bal Brise still had an abundant supply of alcohol!

Franca glanced at him, not intending to make things difficult.

Red Boots stowed away the makeup box and Erkin's handkerchief, picked up the carbide lamp, and said to Lumian, "Let's return and find Fernandez. Let him guide us forward. Perhaps there are other clues left behind."

"Alright." Lumian felt that Franca was merely fulfilling her duty as a member of the Savoie Mob.

The two turned around, carrying their carbide lamps, and ventured back toward the original quarry cave, plunging into the ever-deepening darkness.

After taking a dozen steps, Lumian abruptly halted, his expression growing grave.

"What's the matter?" Franca asked, perplexed.

Lumian's voice resonated with gravity as he directed her attention to the scattered rubble and pockmarked ground.

"No more footprints. The smugglers' tracks from their departure and our own as we crossed have vanished! But there's a trail of footprints carrying a heavy load leading forward!"

Franca's heart skipped a beat. She peered ahead, coming to the realization that the ground lay in disarray. The footprints left by her, Lumian, and Fernandez in the tunnel had vanished, replaced by the sudden reappearance of the missing caravan's tracks out of thin air!

Chapter 187: Shadow

"Dammit!" Franca exclaimed with frustration, her voice filled with intensity.

She scanned her surroundings, her mind racing as she pondered and speculated.

"Did we stumble upon the same thing that the missing caravan encountered? Entering that tunnel transported us to another world, erasing the original footprints? Did we vanish into thin air in Fernandez's eyes?"

Lumian had never faced such a situation before, nor had his sister Aurore written about anything similar in her novels. He couldn't make sense of what was happening.

Lost in thought, his brows furrowed, Lumian suddenly heard Franca's conjecture.

How imaginative… Lumian's initial reaction was a deep sigh before he contemplated the possibilities.

The more he considered it, the more he realized that Franca's words were eerily similar to their current predicament. He knelt down and examined the footprints once again.

"Indeed, the footprints suddenly appear with the weight of something heavy," Lumian said, gesturing to a dozen steps behind him.

That was the same spot they had previously traversed, yet there were no traces of their passage.

Franca clenched her teeth and spoke up.

"It seems we truly have entered another world. Or rather, an underground realm…

"Dammit it! Why did this happen to us? Christo, Brignais, Simon, and Black encountered nothing and safely returned to the surface!"

Uh… Lumian suddenly felt a twinge of guilt at Red Boots's questioning of destiny.

Crouched on the ground, he instinctively raised his hand and touched his left chest.

Was this somehow inevitable?

Yes, I can't dismiss the possibility that it's Franca's doing. Her Sequence is higher than mine, and she carries a mystical item that may hold some secrets… Lumian quickly gathered himself.

Franca looked down at her companion and muttered to herself, "Could it be linked to one of our Sequences? Alternatively, it might be the adverse effect of your glasses."

Lumian replied thoughtfully, "Hunter and Demoness are neighboring pathways."

In other words, if this problem stemmed from the convergence of Beyonder attributes, the two of them couldn't escape responsibility.

Of course, at Lumian and Franca's level, the convergence of Beyonder attributes wouldn't have such obvious effects. However, Lumian recalled encountering two Demonesses less than two weeks after arriving in Trier, and he was only a Sequence 8. He suspected that the power of Inevitability had transformed convergence into something fated to occur.

Hmm… Franca fell into deep thought.

After a few seconds, she clenched her teeth and spoke.

"Perhaps this encounter is truly a problem with our pathway, but why did Christo's smuggling caravan enter this space and mysteriously vanish in reality? They've traversed this route countless times without any issues. Why is it different now? Dammit! That blasted rat must not have spilled all the beans! He wasn't just smuggling alcohol and firearms this time. There's something else, something linked to mysticism?"

"That's not necessarily true. Emperor Roselle once said, 'Touch pitch and you shall be defiled.' Christo's smuggling caravan keeps going through this troublesome tunnel. Something was bound to happen, and unfortunately, it happened this time." Lumian rose to his feet, defending the infamous "Rat" Christo.

Franca was reluctantly swayed. She exhaled and said, "Now is not the time to dissect the cause. What matters is finding a way out. Sigh, why is Underground Trier intertwined with the abnormalities of the Hunter and Demoness pathways? Uh…"

Franca fell silent abruptly, as if recalling something.

"Have you figured something out?" Lumian stood up.

Franca pondered before responding.

"I don't know if your sister ever mentioned anything about the Fourth Epoch. Uh, she might not even be aware. In short, Trier during the Fourth Epoch served as the capital of the Tudor Dynasty, and the Blood Emperor who ruled the empire was likely a High Sequence Beyonder of the Hunter pathway. Furthermore, the Demoness family of that era shared a certain connection with one or several prominent nobles of the Tudor Dynasty. It's reasonable for them to have left something behind in Trier."

"Demoness family?" Lumian was taken aback by the term.

Franca pursed her lips.

"In the Fourth Epoch, the Demoness pathway was under the control of a specific family. Sigh, since I chose the Assassin pathway, I could only do my best to gather relevant information, but I still lack substantial knowledge."

Lumian steered the conversation back on track.

"Do you suspect that this space is linked to the sunken Fourth Epoch Trier?"

"Yes," Franca replied vaguely, not ruling out the possibility. She contemplated for a moment before adding, "The two Churches must have dealt with the ruins to some extent. If we can find the corresponding node, we should be able to escape."

Carrying the carbide lamp, Lumian once again examined the ground.

"Should we press on or turn back?

"Christo's smuggling caravan doesn't seem to have noticed anything amiss. They're still moving forward."

Franca pondered for a few seconds and said, "Let's go back to the spot where we entered this space and investigate. It's just a few steps away. We won't waste much time."

"Alright." Lumian walked toward the center of the tunnel.

Soon, he and Franca stood at the place where the smuggling caravan's tracks had materialized out of thin air, attempting to take a step forward.

There was no trace of footprints ahead.

After walking another dozen steps, the darkness deepened. Only Lumian's and Franca's footprints remained on the path.

They had not returned to reality.

"Wait." Franca raised her right hand, signaling to halt. "Let's turn back and head to the quarry cave we came from. We need to see if Fernandez has entered this space."

Lumian didn't object.

It could help them further determine the nature of the problem.

Guided by the bluish glow of their carbide lamps, Lumian and Franca followed the tracks left by the smuggling caravan.

Before long, they reached the quarry cave.

A figure stood at the boundary of light and darkness, with its back turned towards them.

Franca exclaimed with delight, "Fernandez!"

It seemed that the smuggler had also entered this space. Perhaps the problem didn't lie with her or Ciel!

However, Franca's expression tightened as soon as she finished speaking.

Simultaneously, Lumian spoke in a deep voice, "Something's off."

Fernandez, the smuggler, had been carrying a carbide lamp. There was no way he would just stand there in the darkness!

In the next moment, the figure turned around.

Under the illumination of Lumian and Franca's carbide lamps, a bloodied face came into view.

The man had short flaxen hair, thick brown eyebrows, and lake-blue eyes.

His lips were thin, and his appearance was unremarkable. Yet, his eyes radiated indescribable malice and hatred.

At that moment, sticky blood stained the man's face, as if it might drip at any moment.

It's not Fernandez! Why does he look familiar… Lumian assessed the situation as he reached for the black revolver concealed under his arm.

With a clang, Franca's carbide lamp fell to the ground.

Startled by the noise and the flickering light, the figure darted into the darkness and disappeared into a tunnel connecting to the cavern.

"What's wrong?" Lumian turned to Franca.

As a Sequence 7 Beyonder, a member of a secret organization, and an experienced combatant, she shouldn't be displaying such abnormal behavior and exaggerated reactions!

Franca gazed into the darkness for a few seconds before speaking, "That… that was my past self…"

Your past self, when you were still a man? Lumian was alarmed.

An unsettling feeling crept over him as he asked in a low voice, "You mean, before you drank the Witch potion?"

"Yes." Franca bent down and retrieved her carbide lamp, confusion and fear etched on her face. "I thought no one in this world would remember that face except for me… Why? Why am I seeing it here? Is it generated from my memories? Can't our memories be kept secret in this space?"

Wouldn't that be a good thing? Lumian's initial reaction was one of excitement.

If this space could reveal the hidden memories of his subconscious, he could begin piecing together the truth of the Cordu disaster!

As for whether this space might intrude on something it shouldn't and risk severe corruption and damage, he paid it no mind.

With his carbide lamp and revolver in hand, Lumian cautiously circled the empty quarry. He found no other figures or anything related to his past.

Disheartened, he expressed his disappointment to Franca, "I couldn't find my past self."

"Could it be that it's not a memory from the past, but rather something from the future?" Franca suggested returning to the secondary well that had brought them to this level. By searching for more anomalies along the way, they might be able to infer the nature of this space and find a way to leave.

Side by side, they traversed the quarry cave, following the footprints left by the smuggling caravan, heading towards the edge of Quartier de l'Observatoire.

As time went on, Lumian and Franca noticed something on the ground almost simultaneously.

They were scattered droplets of blood, mingled with the disordered footprints of the smuggling caravan.

"Are the abnormalities starting to manifest?" Franca whispered.

Lumian nodded.

"If we proceed further, we might encounter those people." He glanced at Franca and added, "Although they may no longer be human."

Franca scoffed.

"Are you trying to frighten me? Do you think that will scare me? Whether they're corpses or monsters, it's within my expectations.

"Remember, the most terrifying thing in this world is the unknown."

Just as Franca finished speaking, Lumian's expression froze, illuminated by the glow of the carbide lamp.

"You're still trying to frighten me…" Before Franca could finish her sentence, she felt something warm sliding from her nose and falling to the ground.

It was a drop of bright red blood.

Chapter 188: Confidence

"Dammit!"

Franca couldn't help but blurt out her usual modal particle. With a quick swipe of her index finger across her nose, her hand revealed a bright red stain. The sight alone sent a shiver down her spine.

Franca snorted.

In an instant, black flames flickered in her nostrils, fingers, and the blood on the ground, swiftly vanishing into thin air.

Catching Lumian's gaze, Franca, slightly contorted from the pain, forced herself to enlighten him.

"We can't leave our blood in this unknown place. Otherwise, unimaginable horrors may unfold. Hey, why are you unharmed?"

From Franca's perspective, she surpassed Ciel in terms of Sequence and experience. There was no reason for him to emerge unscathed while she suffered!

"Perhaps I'm fine for now," Lumian patronizingly responded, pondering thoughtfully. "Maybe the shadow we encountered represented the old you, not the old me."

"So why did we come across the old me and not the old you?" Franca eyed Lumian suspiciously.

Could this bloke be hiding another secret?

Lumian pondered for a moment before answering.

"Perhaps this space is more intertwined with Demonesses."

"Could be…" Franca fell into deep contemplation.

After a few seconds, she pointed towards the footprints and blood droplets on the ground and suggested, "Let's catch up and investigate. The current condition of those people could reveal our future and help us prepare in advance."

Lumian responded with action, walking into the darkness that swallowed the footprints and blood droplets.

The yellowish-blue light of the carbide lamp quietly resisted the encroaching darkness.

As they tracked further, the abnormalities on their bodies became increasingly apparent. Warm blood began to trickle from Lumian's nose, while crimson liquid seeped from Franca's eyes, gums, skin, and ears.

With her black flames, not a drop of blood remained.

Finally, they "returned" to the secondary well, where the tracks of the smuggling caravan and the slowly congealing blood abruptly vanished.

Whether it was the tunnel leading to the secondary well or the path to other areas, there were no traces left.

"They vanished again?" Franca, her face enveloped in black flames, frowned.

Lumian, his nose sealed by the black flames, took a deep breath and smiled.

"This might be our end. When the blood reaches a certain point, our bodies will gradually fade away."

Franca glanced at Lumian, who remained calm and composed, and clicked her tongue in admiration. "You've got a decent mindset."

Lumian chuckled.

"So what if I do? Too many negative emotions will only cloud my thinking."

"Sometimes, I reckon you're more mature than me." Franca sighed.

"Did you just figure that out?" Lumian naturally wouldn't mention that he was both sincerely pondering the issue and confident.

Compared to Cordu, trapped in an endless loop, at least there was no sign of terrifying power in this place!

Moreover, Lumian didn't need to rack his brain to come up with several escape strategies.

The first option was to take a risky move by using the Mystery Prying Glasses to explore the surroundings from different angles and locate an exit.

Secondly, he could try throwing out Mr. K's finger to establish a connection, hoping it would create a passageway.

Thirdly, summoning Madame Hela or the messenger of Madam Magician was another possibility. If it succeeded, it would mean that this place wasn't entirely cut off from the spirit world. The two ladies might have a way to forcefully extract Lumian and Franca.

Fourthly, if all else failed, he could set up an altar and offer prayers to the mysterious ruler beyond the gray fog. Such a bizarre space couldn't restrict a great entity. Even the cycle of fate orchestrated by the evil god couldn't shield them from His watchful eye, let alone this place.

Lastly, if the great entity remained unresponsive, Lumian could perform a ritual and beseech for a boon. He could activate the black thorn symbol on his chest, allowing the sealed evil god's corruption to amplify. This disruption might create a vulnerability in the workings of this space.

You can be as calm and composed as me when you have numerous untried methods and believe there's a high chance of escaping this place… Lumian criticized inwardly, feeling somewhat perplexed.

It felt like he had forgotten something important, but it eluded his memory momentarily.

Franca retrieved a light-gold makeup box, opened it, and placed it on the ground.

Her form swiftly faded away, leaving no trace behind.

The aqueous light within the palm-sized mirror flickered, illuminating Franca's figure.

How magical… Lumian sighed, marveling at the sight.

Franca glanced around within the mirror for a few seconds before vanishing.

She reappeared across from Lumian, shaking her head, and uttered, "I can't find a way out by relying on the mirror…"

Without awaiting Lumian's response, the Witch attempted several more methods, but all proved futile.

Finally, she caressed the mirror inside the makeup box, seeking guidance from her spirituality.

In such a place, she hesitated to perform Magic mirror divination, fearing a perilous and dreadful connection.

"The way out… The way out…" Franca repeated the divination phrase in Hermes several times, and the mirror darkened, resembling a moonlit lake.

The shimmering aqueous light reflected a figure.

It was Lumian—wearing a wide-brimmed round hat, a white shirt, a brown jacket, and dark pants. Black flames flickered subtly at his nose.

"Uh…" Franca turned around, looking at her companion by her side.

She furrowed her brow slightly and stated, "Finding the exit with your glasses? Isn't that too dangerous?"

Congratulations on finally uncovering the simplest among my five solutions… Lumian pondered and remarked, "This is no longer the true Underground Trier, nor does it seem to be directly linked to the ruins of the Fourth Epoch. As long as we protect ourselves, we should be able to endure any peril."

"Protect…" Franca repeated the word with a smile. "I happen to excel at that!"

With a swift motion of her right hand, she extinguished the black flames on Lumian's nose.

After a few seconds, a drop of bright red liquid trickled down, caught by Franca's open palm.

Then, she conjured fresh black flames, sealing Lumian's nostrils once again.

The mild burning sensation was tolerable for Alms Monk Lumian. He asked cautiously, "What are you doing with my blood, a curse?"

Franca chuckled.

"Do I need to go through all this trouble just to kill you? I'll perform a Mirror Substitution to shield you from the danger of using those glasses."

As she spoke, she retrieved a palm-sized mirror and smeared Lumian's blood upon it.

She has so many mirrors… Are they the essence of a Witch's spells? Lumian observed Franca's busy movements, enlightened and slightly envious.

Franca turned her head and addressed him, "Give me two strands of your hair."

Without hesitation, Lumian plucked two strands and handed them over.

A black flame appeared in Franca's hand, incinerating the golden strands.

She sprinkled the ashes onto the mirror's surface and stroked it with her black-flamed palm while murmuring an inaudible incantation.

When the black flames suddenly receded into the mirror, the traces of blood and hair vanished.

"Do not stray more than 30 meters away from me," Franca cautioned, holding the seemingly ordinary mirror.

Lumian nodded and retrieved the Mystery Prying Glasses from his pocket.

He placed the brown gold-rimmed glasses on the bridge of his nose, but his right hand remained gripping the mirror holder, ready to remove the glasses at a moment's notice.

Almost simultaneously, Lumian beheld a multitude of scenes:

Faces concealed in darkness, pallid and ferocious, drenched in blood.

A mass of dark hair floated amidst the shadows, comprised of hundreds or perhaps thousands of strands, extending in various directions.

Lingering figures, rock walls shimmering with aqueous light, and an impenetrable darkness.

In the pond-like puddle, a colossal, swollen, and pallid face lurked beneath the lightless surface, peering outward.

There was a glistening cave…

Light… Cave… Lumian's intuition instantaneously struck, compelling his dizzy mind to focus on the edge of the scene.

The luminous-filled cave rapidly enlarged, revealing a dimly lit passage beyond.

As the cave drew nearer, Lumian realized it was merely a reflection in a mirror. Its surface was solid and inaccessible.

The mirror sank to the depths of the lightless pool.

Suddenly, the colossal, swollen, and pallid face swiftly expanded before Lumian's eyes, consuming his field of vision.

Lumian's sight darkened, and he nearly lost consciousness.

Vaguely, he "saw" his flesh attempting to depart from his skeleton.

Whack!

Lumian heard a crisp shattering sound, and his mind cleared.

He swiftly removed the Mystery Prying Glasses and retched.

After he regained his composure, Franca inquired with concern, "Are you alright?"

At some point, the mirror in her hand had shattered into countless fragments, scattered across the ground.

Lumian took a deep breath and replied, "I'm fine now."

He extended his finger, indicating a specific direction.

"Over a hundred meters from the tunnel, there lies a massive puddle. And at the puddle's depths, you'll find a mirror. That mirror reflects a cave, which leads to a path of light.

"However, be warned, for within that puddle lurks a perilous monster. I nearly died when I beheld its visage."

Franca listened in silence, her mutterings a mixture of confusion and frustration.

"Goddammit, could this place truly be connected to a Demoness?"

Chapter 189: Cooperation

Observing Lumian's perplexed gaze, Franca provided a succinct explanation, "One of the core abilities of the Demoness pathway revolves around mirrors and manipulating the world within them.

"When I suspected that this place might be connected to the Demoness or Hunter pathway, I pondered whether we inadvertently stepped into a certain location within the mirror world. Thus, I attempted to use the makeup mirror to see if I could escape through it. As you witnessed, it proved fruitless.

"Because of this, I have tentatively dismissed the notion of being in a mirror world or encountering a relic belonging to a Demoness. However, now we have stumbled upon a submerged mirror that likely conceals an exit…"

"So, you suspect that this is a specific place within the mirror world, restricted to certain mirrors?" Lumian attempted to grasp Franca's line of thinking.

"Exactly," Franca replied with a gentle nod. "But what perplexes me is how we found ourselves here without encountering anything resembling a mirror. Perhaps my conjecture is incorrect, or only partially true…"

Lumian pondered for a moment, hoping to glean some knowledge. He posed a sincere question: "What exactly is a mirror world?"

Franca grabbed the ponytail at the back of her head.

"Explaining it to you is a challenge since I am not entirely certain myself.

"Allow me to elucidate based on my understanding. In mysticism, mirrors possess distinct symbolic meanings, such as one's reflection or an entrance to another realm. The former suggests that we can use mirrors to create substitutes, while the latter alludes to a mirror world.

"It is often associated with terror, mystery, horror, and the bizarre. I cannot ascertain whether there are hidden elements or if it truly represents an alternate dimension. However, I do know that the mirror world connects to various mirror-like entities. It could potentially point to spaces that are typically inaccessible. As my Sequence progresses, I should be capable of utilizing the mirror world to swiftly traverse different locations."

Lumian recalled the recent events and allowed his imagination to run wild.

"Could the version of you we saw be a reflection left behind in the mirror world from a previous encounter, before you became a Witch? That would explain why I have never encountered my past self."

"That is a plausible explanation, but I haven't come across anything peculiar…" Franca deliberated for a moment. "If that is the case, we must hurry to the puddle immediately. The exit is most likely there! We can no longer afford to proceed cautiously or wait any longer. As I mentioned earlier, the mirror world harbors eerie and terrifying phenomena. If we linger here any further, I dread to imagine what might befall us!"

"Very well." Lumian maintained his composure.

Franca turned and sprinted, with Lumian closely following her.

As the Witch ran, it appeared as though she employed some form of ability. Small patches of frost materialized beneath her feet, causing a sharp reduction in friction. Her body seemed weightless as she gracefully glided through the dim quarry cave and into the depths of the underground tunnel.

Utilizing all his strength as a Hunter and Dancer, Lumian struggled to keep pace with Franca and avoid being left behind.

In the wintry chill, a thin layer of ice gradually formed on the walls of the surrounding rocks.

Upon the icy surface, visages stained with blood emerged. Their countenances contorted, eyes brimming with hatred, resembling vengeful specters emerging from the depths of hell.

Among them was the previous incarnation of Franca, when she still appeared as a man!

After sprinting for a while, Lumian and Franca caught sight of the puddle.

As the light from the carbide lamp cast its glow, the puddle's surface shimmered with a tinge of yellowish-blue.

"Is this it?" Franca halted abruptly.

Lumian examined it for a moment before responding, "Yes."

In that moment, every fiber of his being throbbed with pain, as if his body was on the brink of bursting, save for the fiery sensation in his nasal cavity.

Holding the carbide lamp tightly, Franca cautiously approached the puddle.

"The challenge now is how to elude the monster you encountered and locate the mirror. Regrettably, I cannot yet traverse between mirrors. I can only remain inside for a few fleeting seconds…

"I will divert its attention and keep it occupied for a while. Why don't you dive underwater and retrieve the mirror?"

Lumian spoke plainly, "I don't believe you stand a chance against it. It nearly overwhelmed me when I caught a glimpse of it."

"…" Though Franca felt a twinge of annoyance and frustration, she had to acknowledge that Lumian spoke the truth.

With her Sequence and mystical item, she could still hold her ground even against a Beyonder one rank higher. However, judging by the monster's display, it far surpassed her by more than a single rank!

After a brief pause, Franca clenched her teeth and uttered, "Even if I am outmatched, my skills in escape and self-preservation are formidable. I should be able to hold out against it for more than ten seconds. If you can retrieve the mirror within that timeframe, we can make our escape!"

Lumian let out a chuckle.

"We shouldn't risk our lives just yet.

"I have a plan to stall that monster for ten to twenty seconds without taking excessive risks. And I trust you can locate that mirror, correct?"

"I'm capable. I have a unique method of detecting mirrors," Franca eyed Lumian skeptically. "Are you truly up to the task? Is there genuinely no danger involved?"

"In theory, the risks are minimal," Lumian replied calmly.

Simultaneously, he silently added, If the risks prove too great, I'll find an alternative. Mr. K, Madame Hela, Madam Magician, the great being, and the power of Inevitability are all viable options.

Franca wasted no time and pursed her lips as she spoke, "Alright, just to be safe, I'll create a Mirror Substitute for you."

Naturally, Lumian had no objections to something that could effectively reduce the risk.

After Franca produced a small mirror and crafted the corresponding substitute, Lumian gripped the ritual silver dagger and encircled the pond-like puddle, creating a spiritual barrier.

Throughout the process, he maintained a distance of four to five meters from the water's edge, fearing the monster would drag him under.

Putting away the ritual silver dagger, Lumian turned to Franca with a genuine smile.

"What comes next involves one of my secrets. Could you turn around?"

"Very well." Franca was content with his straightforwardness.

She inwardly sighed once more.

Does Jenna misunderstand Ciel?

As Franca turned around, Lumian placed the carbide lamp aside and began the Summoning Dance.

He intended to summon the monster, but he wouldn't allow it to possess him!

Lumian believed that the higher the level of a peculiar creature, the more aware it would be of the corruption within his body. This made it less inclined to attach itself to him.

In other words, as long as he refrained from issuing commands that would influence the monster, it was likely to observe the Summoning Dance eagerly, waiting for an opportunity to attack. However, it was intimidated by the seal and the corruption and dared not act upon its thoughts. It would only truly engage him once the dance concluded.

The Summoning Dance lasted for 20 to 30 seconds, ample time for Franca to submerge herself and locate the mirror.

As long as Lumian could escape this world before the monster attacked, there would be no further issues!

Of course, if he couldn't harness the corresponding powers of nature in this place and allow the Summoning Dance to take effect, he could always employ an alternative method.

Amidst the contorted and frenzied dance, Lumian's spirituality stirred the forces of nature, forming a connection that dissipated into the surroundings, only to be obstructed by the spiritual barrier.

After a few seconds, ripples appeared on the surface of the puddle, and a pallid figure emerged, floating above the water.

It bore a resemblance to a human, with an inflated body and a gargantuan face occupying half its form.

The monster floated toward Lumian and came to a stop in close proximity.

Lumian dared not gaze directly at it. With his eyes half-shut, he called out, "Hurry!"

Without hesitation, Franca discarded the carbide lamp, took two steps, and leaped into the water.

With a splash, water splattered around.

A cold, damp sensation penetrated Franca's skin as near darkness enveloped her vision.

Guided by the faint glow of the carbide lamp seeping through the water, Franca swiftly descended to the depths.

Suddenly, dark creatures resembling seaweed extended their hair-like tendrils, slithering around Franca as if alive.

Franca paid them no mind and continued her descent.

Just as the "seaweed" was about to touch her, it unexpectedly burst into black flames.

The black flames burned silently underwater, showing no signs of extinguishing. The "seaweed" didn't turn to ash, but their consciousness was snuffed out.

They floated in the water, swaying with the currents.

Farther away, a multitude of seaweed continued to surge forward, obstructed by layers of condensed frost.

Beside the puddle, Lumian, engrossed in the Summoning Dance, did not look at the monster. However, he heard a sound akin to a bubble popping. A putrid odor wafted towards him, accompanied by an enveloping chill.

An image flashed across Lumian's mind:

The bloated monster with its enormous face was less than a step away from him, almost clinging to his back. He could even perceive its "breath"!

Hiss… Lumian instinctively gasped, refusing to interrupt the Summoning Dance.

In the water, Franca, having dived deeper, finally sensed the presence of the mirror!

Her form suddenly faded, vanishing from her original position.

Franca's figure swiftly materialized on the ancient silver mirror resting silently on the seabed.

She retrieved the artifact and swam towards the surface, a look of joy adorning her face.

She had just confirmed that this mirror truly led to the underground tunnel in the outside world!

Beside the puddle, Lumian was filled with anxiety as he kept his gaze fixed on the water's surface. The Summoning Dance was nearing its end, and the bloated monster drew closer, its flesh almost brushing against his skin.

If Franca did not emerge soon, he would resort to using Mr. K's finger!

Just then, Franca reached the shore, holding the mirror, and leapt up amidst the splashing water.

Avoiding eye contact with the monster, she lowered her head and hurried to Lumian's side, gripping his wrist.

Simultaneously, both of them turned ethereal, while the ancient mirror clattered to the ground.

A scene unfolded upon the mirror's surface: Franca grasping Lumian's hand and leading him through a short, dark tunnel to an illuminated "cave" before leaping out.

Amidst flickering lights and shadows, Lumian realized he stood upon a dim path, with distant light seeping in.

Franca retrieved the mirror that had served as his substitute and noticed countless cracks marring its surface, on the verge of shattering.

"That was a close call." She sighed sincerely.

Chapter 190: Unexpected Development

Lumian glanced at the shattered mirror in Franca's hand, relief and confusion evident on his face.

"But I don't feel like I was being attacked."

His Summoning Dance still had five to six seconds left before Franca grabbed his wrist.

Franca cleared her throat and assumed the stance of a teacher.

"Some mysticism techniques are undetectable. The moment you feel attacked is the moment of your death."

Could it be that the monster secretly influenced me when I paused the Summoning Dance to enter the mirror for those brief seconds? Lumian nodded thoughtfully.

"Yes, the bleeding in that space caught us by surprise. We had no idea how to prevent it."

As he spoke, he looked at Franca's face and noticed her smooth skin, devoid of any scars. It was impossible to tell that blood had seeped out from multiple places.

Franca touched her face and pondered before saying, "It's indeed very bizarre. But we did lose some blood. As a Witch, I have a mystical perception of the amount of my blood. In other words, the damage we suffered in the special mirror world isn't fake. It's just that we didn't leave any wounds. Damn it, I didn't bring the carbide lamp!"

As she spoke, she turned around and searched through a pile of gravel on the side of the dim tunnel.

Lumian didn't have time to retrieve his carbide lamp either. He could only observe Franca's every move with the help of the distant light.

In less than ten seconds, Franca pulled out a mirror from the rubble.

The mirror appeared to be made of pure silver. The patterns on both sides were mysterious and sinister, and its surface was dark and lifeless, as if time had eroded it.

"As expected, there's a corresponding mirror in reality." Franca did her best to avoid being reflected in the silver mirror with its classic design. She also instructed Lumian, "In unsafe places or when encountering strange occurrences, try not to look into the mirror if you can. Otherwise, something terrifying might happen. We mustn't touch such mysterious and evil objects of unknown origin!"

Lumian, who hadn't mentioned to Franca that he couldn't look in the mirror after using the Mystery Prying Glasses to disguise himself, nodded.

"I understand that the exit is a mirror. What I can't figure out is how we entered that space without noticing. We didn't come across anything along the way."

"That baffles me too." Franca covered the surface of the classic-styled silver mirror with a handkerchief and other items. She stood up and said, "This thing seems to be closely related to the Demoness pathway. How about you give it to me? I'll find something valuable to compensate you later."

"No problem," Lumian chuckled. "You don't have to ask. I can't beat you."

Franca clicked her tongue and said, "No, the spoils of war must be distributed fairly. Otherwise, there will surely be conflicts within the team. I used to be taken advantage of like this in the past. If it weren't for my good nature and not holding grudges, I would have sought revenge long ago."

Why does it sound like you're cussing me, Madame… Lumian silently muttered.

If someone took his spoils and exploited him for no reason, and his strength was inferior to the other party, although he wouldn't say anything on the spot, he would definitely find a way to seek revenge later. He wouldn't simply "forgive" the other party so easily.

Stowing away the classic-styled silver mirror, Franca gestured toward the source of light.

"Let's go and have a look over there. We might come across the quarry police or other smugglers. We can ask for directions.

"Getting lost in Underground Trier and being unable to find a way out might be even more perilous than being trapped in that peculiar mirror world."

That's right… Lumian agreed wholeheartedly.

If it weren't for that, the Montsouris ghost would have been eradicated long ago by the official Beyonders.

The two of them proceeded through the tunnel, guided by the faint glow, staying alert for any potential attacks.

Before long, they reached a quarry cave. In the center of the cave stood a figure wearing a felt hat. The light emanated from the carbide lamp he held in his hand.

"Uh…" Franca recognized him and called out, "Fernandez!"

She realized that the figure was Fernandez, the smuggler who had been leading the way for them.

This appeared to be the quarry cave where they had arranged to meet him.

Fernandez turned around, surprised, and asked, "How did you come from there? I've been waiting for nearly half an hour, but you didn't show up. I even went to the spot where the footprints vanished to search for you, but you were nowhere to be found."

Lumian and Franca exchanged glances and nodded.

Indeed, they had spent nearly half an hour in the special mirror world.

Franca approached Fernandez and casually explained, "We stumbled upon some clues and pursued them. However, we ended up circling back here and encountered an ambush on the way. We lost our carbide lamps."

"What clues?" Fernandez asked, pleasantly surprised.

Franca smiled.

"We'll discuss it with Christo directly."

Fernandez knew his place well and didn't pry any further. He led the two of them back along the same path they had taken before.

They ascended the secondary well and entered the underground section corresponding to Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman, finally arriving at the exit on Rue Anarchie.

Only when Lumian and Franca laid eyes on street peddlers, children picking up fruit peels, homeless people huddling in corners, and the bustling crowd, did they truly feel as though they had escaped from that strange realm and returned to the real world.

After boarding the carriage that "Rat" Christo had sent for them, Lumian glanced at Franca and asked in a low voice,

"What should we say later?"

Fernandez knew the carriage driver and had taken a seat beside him, so he wasn't in the carriage.

Franca chuckled.

"We'll simply say that we entered an unknown space, discovered some traces, and managed to escape using my mirror magic.

"The rest has nothing to do with Christo."

Lumian didn't say another word. He closed his eyes and recalled his encounters in the special mirror world.

The four-wheeled carriage swiftly turned onto Avenue du Marché, hurtling toward Suhit's steam locomotive. It veered into the alley that led to the depot.

"Rat" Christo awaited them in the nearby warehouse.

Before long, Lumian and Franca caught sight of the rat-like smuggler.

Christo approached them with a grin and exclaimed, "Thank you, by Steam! Erkin and the others are back!"

Erkin… Franca's eyes narrowed as she blurted out, "The missing caravan has returned?"

Erkin, Christo's younger brother responsible for the smuggling caravan, had vanished previously, and Franca still had his divination handkerchief.

And now he's back?

What the f*ck was going on?

Christo nodded, still smiling.

"Indeed, the goods have returned as well!

"They arrived over an hour ago."

Over an hour ago? Wasn't that the same time when we discovered the spot where the footprints vanished and entered that peculiar mirror world? Lumian frowned, a hint of confusion stirring within him.

It was only because he had already experienced unbelievable phenomena like the time loop and the vivid dream that Lumian managed to keep his composure, unlike Franca.

Observing the surprised and perplexed expressions of Franca and Ciel, Christo smiled and stated, "I'll let Erkin explain it himself."

He turned and headed a few steps toward the entrance of the warehouse, calling out, "Erkin, come out for a moment!"

Seizing the opportunity, Franca tilted her head slightly and whispered to Lumian, "This is highly unusual…"

Lumian's lips curled into a smile as he lowered his voice and replied, "I even suspect that Rat and the others conspired to set a trap for us. They used the disappearance of the goods as bait to lure us underground into that perilous realm."

Franca studied him, amusement in her eyes, and remarked, "You don't have much trust in others, do you?"

Lumian spoke candidly, "The dancers' salaries make Giant and Baron Brignais resentful, and I possess the coveted Salle de Bal Brise. Only 'Rat' has no conflict of interest with us, so he was made to intervene."

Franca fell into deep thought, seriously considering the possibility of being deceived.

In that moment, Lumian grinned.

"This is merely a conjecture. It doesn't account for the footprints and other traces in the mirror world."

As soon as he finished speaking, a man who appeared to be under 30 years old emerged from the warehouse.

He was not particularly tall, standing at about 1.6 meters. Apart from the absence of rat-like whiskers, he bore a striking resemblance to Christo.

"It is indeed Erkin," Franca whispered to Lumian.

Then, she turned her gaze to Christo and Erkin, who were approaching together, and inquired, "Erkin, what happened?"

Erkin's dark-blue eyes revealed a blend of fear and joy.

"We entered a peculiar world within a section of the tunnel and couldn't find a way out. In the afternoon, while we were searching in all directions, we suddenly found ourselves back on our original path."

Did our entry provide them an opportunity to escape? Franca had a suspicion.

Lumian stared at Erkin, his expression devoid of any emotion, as if assessing an adversary who might bring him calamity.

In his mind, he recalled the droplets of blood left behind on the ground of the mirror world. Gradually, they coalesced, staining a whole area crimson.

Could someone who had lost so much blood truly return alive?

Franca had evidently pondered this as well. She regarded Erkin and asked, "What happened to you there?"

Erkin couldn't help but tremble.

"We started bleeding inexplicably. Towards the end, many were on the verge of death.

"By Steam, we managed to find the exit in time. As soon as we emerged, we recovered."

Is that so? Franca felt that Erkin, adorned with the Sacred Emblem, was relaying his account in line with her own experience and could be explained. Thus, she could only temporarily set aside her doubts.

Beside them, "Rat" Christo cast a glance their way and invited them with a smile, "Regardless of the circumstances, I must express my gratitude. Would you like to sample the most authentic Savoie roast chicken?"

"Alright," Lumian responded on Franca's behalf.

Christo produced a set of keys and tossed them to his brother, Erkin.

"Go to my office and bring all the spices to the kitchen."

"Alright." Erkin received the key and ascended the iron stairs embedded in the outer wall of the warehouse. With his left hand, he inserted one of the keys into the door of Christo's office and turned it to unlock it.

Franca was momentarily taken aback before muttering to herself, "I recall that Erkin habitually uses his right hand…"

Why would he awkwardly open the door with his left hand when he wasn't holding anything?

Hearing Franca's remark, Christo nodded and replied, "Indeed, he is right-handed."

Chapter 191: Suspicions

Right hand… Franca's body jolted with a sudden shudder.

As a Witch, she was well-acquainted with the intricacies of mirrors, attuned to their peculiarities. And one thing she knew for certain was this: when a person gazed into a mirror, their reflection would be inverted from left to right.

The situation at hand was baffling. After Erkin, who habitually favored his right hand, had ventured into the enigmatic mirror world and returned, he had inexplicably switched to using his left hand. Franca and Lumian, however, had not experienced such a change.

What could this mean? Franca trembled with unease.

Just then, Christo reappeared at the warehouse's bottom floor, bellowing instructions to Erkin on the upper level. He demanded that Erkin retrieve his prized White Elixir wine. Seizing the opportunity, Lumian leaned in close to Franca and whispered into her ear,

"Have you noticed any connections?"

"You've thought of it too?" Franca replied, taken aback.

It was a challenge to detect Erkin's abnormality and grasp the underlying possibilities without extensive knowledge of mysticism and encounters with the Beyonder world.

Lumian continued in a hushed tone, "Judging by the amount of blood present in that space, I find it hard to believe that a regular person could have survived. From the start, I suspected something was amiss with Erkin and the other members of the caravan.

"Furthermore, you mentioned that the peculiar mirror world contains your past self—the reflection of who you once were.

"A mirrored image is left-right reversed in reality.

"Do you think the Erkin in the mirror has replaced the original Erkin?"

Franca fell into silence, pondering the implications.

"I dread to consider such a horrifying possibility, but the circumstances align more and more with your theory.

"I need to be certain."

As they conversed, Erkin descended from the warehouse's upper level, clutching a sack filled with various spices and two bottles of White Elixir wine. He made his way towards a nearby grayish-white, two-story building.

The structure served as a dining room and kitchen for "Rat" Christo's subordinates.

On the surface, Christo presented himself as a merchant. He owned multiple companies specializing in trade and providing storage facilities.

Franca approached Christo with a solemn expression and asked, "Are you absolutely sure that is truly Erkin?"

Christo blurted out in surprise, "Why are you asking such a peculiar question? Of course, it's Erkin. By Steam, how could I not recognize my own brother?

"My kids are also quite fond of him. They find nothing unfamiliar about him."

Franca pondered for a moment before smiling faintly.

"I can't help but feel that something might go awry after venturing into that bizarre realm."

"I've checked on them. They're fine, just a bit weakened from the bleeding. Damn it, now I have to offer them some compensation. Why did Emperor Roselle have to introduce these bizarre notions, and why do so many people still remember them after nearly two centuries?" Christo's heart ached at the prospect of additional expenses.

Franca chuckled.

"You're not a Beyonder yet. Before you took over this smuggling business, didn't you anticipate that those above you would follow certain customs and pay extra for particular matters?"

Christo fell silent, uncertain of how to respond.

Franca then said, "I'll help you confirm whether anything is amiss with those individuals."

Franca retrieved her makeup box and Erkin's handkerchief, preparing to perform a divination in front of "Rat" Christo.

"Erkin's whereabouts. Erkin's whereabouts…"

As Franca chanted in Hermes, her eyes darkened, and she gently caressed the surface of the makeup mirror.

Lumian observed as the mirror shimmered with watery ripples of light.

Soon, a scene materialized within its depths: Erkin, dressed in a blue shirt, stood near the kitchen, engaged in conversation with the chef.

"I knew everything would go smoothly." "Rat" Christo chuckled.

He then gestured towards the warehouse.

"I have some matters to attend to. You can explore the area on your own or wait for me in the dining room."

Once the short-statured leader of the smugglers had entered the warehouse, Lumian turned to Franca.

"It appears that the real Erkin might be dead."

Thus, the divination results indicated the person who originally belonged to the mirror world.

"Do you still think something is amiss with Erkin and the others?" Franca furrowed her brow.

"And if not?" Lumian laughed. "Should we cover our eyes and ears and pretend we didn't see, hear, or discover anything?"

Franca pondered for a moment before responding, "Perhaps, because I'm using mirror divination, it will be easier to pinpoint the individual within the mirror. I shall attempt another method."

Surveying the warehouse area, she picked up a short wooden stick and held it before her, pressing down from the top.

After uttering a similar divination statement, the wooden stick snapped, pointing directly at the grayish-white, two-story building that housed the kitchen and dining room.

Erkin was there.

Franca fell silent momentarily before declaring, "Let me see if that mirror can be of any assistance."

She referred to the classic-styled silver mirror that served as a gateway to the peculiar realm, hoping to employ it in banishing all the monsters that had emerged from within.

Lumian eagerly trailed behind Franca as they entered the dining room.

Their eyes were immediately drawn to a woman wearing a grayish-green dress. She appeared to be in her late twenties, holding the hands of a boy and a girl. Tears of joy streamed down her face as she embraced Erkin, who had just emerged from the kitchen.

"You're finally back!"

"Pépé!"

"Pépé, play with me!"

Amidst the clamor of excited voices, Erkin's face radiated sheer happiness. His brows and eyes reflected pure joy.

"…" Franca paused in her steps, silently observing the heartwarming family reunion for a long while.

Eventually, she let out a sigh and remarked, "Let's give it a little more time."

Lumian maintained his smile.

"Are you finding it hard to bear?"

Franca sighed.

"The real Erkin might already be dead. After all, this is his reflection.

"If I were to expose his true nature now, kill him, or force him back into the mirror, not only would his wife and children fail to show gratitude, but they would also despise me."

"You're right." Lumian chuckled. "In any case, if anything untoward happens in the future, whether someone lives or dies is not our concern. We simply need to exercise caution. Why should we appear as the 'villains'? No one will thank you for it. Yes, let's avoid 'Rat' Christo and the others for the time being. If we don't encounter them, it's as if nothing has occurred."

Franca's inner conflict grew.

She didn't know what the mirror's reflection would do after replacing the person in reality.

What if his kindness morphed into cruelty, and his affection transformed into hatred?

Franca, unable to reach a decision, could only gaze at Lumian and sigh. "Your words are rather cold-hearted…"

She began to think that Jenna's assessment of Ciel held some truth.

"Madame, am I not merely following your inclinations to help you convince yourself?" Lumian responded, a mix of annoyance and amusement evident in his tone.

Franca offered a sheepish smile.

"How do you propose we handle this situation?"

Lumian glanced at Erkin, who was recounting his strange encounter to his wife and children as if it were someone else's story.

"We should have someone write a letter and report this matter to the police headquarters or a cathedral.

"The letter should merely state that 'Rat' Christo's brother, Erkin, ventured into an underground realm with a group of individuals and remained absent for the majority of the day. Upon resurfacing, their dominant hand had changed.

"Official Beyonders have encountered numerous anomalies, so they should be familiar with the underground. They will likely deduce what has befallen Erkin and his companions.

"As for how they handle it, that's their responsibility. We need not worry. If they refrain from harming Erkin and the others, the mirror person poses no threat. They can serve as replacements for the deceased originals. And if those monsters are eliminated, we won't have to confront pain and animosity, let alone compensate anyone.

"In short, we must trust the officials and the Church.

"Emperor Roselle once mentioned that a gentleman wouldn't feel inclined to dine on an animal they were familiar with after it had been slaughtered.

However, if they remained unaware, it wouldn't be an issue. They could enjoy their meal blissfully. The same principle applies in this case."

Lumian couldn't recall the exact words, so he did his best to convey the sentiment in his own words.

Franca pondered deeply for a few moments before being convinced.

"You're right…"

She glanced at Lumian.

"You don't sound like a mob leader at all."

"A true mob leader knows how to manipulate the authorities." Lumian grinned.

Franca chuckled and remarked, "Do I have to address you as 'Godfather' from now on?"

Without giving Lumian a chance to inquire further, she swiftly added, "A mob's godfather. Yes, for now, you don't have the means. I'll take responsibility for leaking the information to the officials."

Mob's godfather… Lumian had heard his sister mention this as the subject of her next book. He grasped the general idea, but couldn't help feeling a tad disheartened.

In the ensuing hours, he and Franca joyously attended a banquet hosted by "Rat" Christo, engaging in lively conversations with Erkin and the other smugglers.

Lumian couldn't stop raving about the delectable Savoie roasted chicken. It was seasoned with an array of spices, its surface glistening with a similar concoction. The golden skin boasted juiciness, tenderness, and an aromatic essence.

He sliced a piece of the crispy skin-covered meat and let it soak in the succulent juices for a moment before savoring it. The experience was pure bliss, rendering it impossible for him to cease indulging.

As the banquet drew to a close, Franca noticed only a handful of people remained at the dining table. She turned to "Rat" Christo, a smile playing on her lips.

"Come closer. I have something to ask you."

Christo, momentarily taken aback, shifted his chair nearer to Franca and responded with a smile, "And what's the matter?"

Franca smiled and whispered, "In truth, Ciel and I also ventured into that peculiar world. Fortunately, we managed to escape…"

With that, she swiftly produced the roast chicken's knife and drove it into the table in front of "Rat" Christo. Her voice turned icy as she interrogated him, "What's concealed within that shipment? You nearly got us killed!"

"I-I don't know!" Christo glanced around, beads of cold sweat forming on his forehead.

Realizing that only he, Franca, and Cield remained at the table, he hastily explained, "I genuinely don't know. The boss instructed me to bring it to Trier!"

Chapter 192: Verification

Boss? Lumian was alarmed. He hadn't anticipated the connection to Gardner Martin, but now things were starting to make sense.

Why did the smuggling caravan vanish on a known route that had been used before?

And why was "Rat" Christo so eager to seek their help? If he had only lost a shipment, he would have made more confirmations. It would have taken time for him to reveal his vulnerabilities and mistakes to his peers, who might be eyeing his position.

Lumian's mind raced with thoughts.

Gardner Martin might be a Sequence 6 or 5 on the Hunter pathway.

Both Franca and I entered the special mirror world, and we're a Hunter and a Demoness, respectively, on similar and neighboring paths.

Mr. K instructed me to approach Gardner Martin and gain his trust.

Franca, as a member of the secret organization Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society, has quite a high Sequence. It's surprising that she's willing to be the mistress of a mob boss like Gardner Martin.

The boss of the Savoie Mob must be hiding a major secret or involved in something significant…

Why does he want Christo to smuggle an item related to the Hunter or Demoness pathway into Trier? And why go through the risks of underground smuggling? Is he afraid of the tax collectors? Instead, why doesn't the boss retrieve the item himself outside the city and have Christo get a smuggler lead the way? It would be safer and more discreet. Could it be that he knows the item might cause trouble and wants to avoid the risk? Lumian shifted his gaze from "Rat" Christo to Franca's face.

To Lumian's surprise, the Witch seemed unprepared for such an answer. Her initial shock was swiftly followed by a hint of excitement and joy.

She stared intently at "Rat" Christo and sneered, "Are you trying to f*cking deceive me? How come I haven't heard about Gardner asking you to bring something into Trier? Where is that thing?"

Excitement… Joy… Lumian grew increasingly certain that Franca had ulterior motives for joining the Savoie Mob and approaching Gardner Martin.

Christo forced a smile and responded, "It's in an iron box. I've already sent it to Rue des Fontaines. Perhaps the boss hasn't informed you yet."

As a seasoned member of the Savoie Mob, he knew the power Franca possessed. She could easily dispatch him, especially since he wasn't prepared and hadn't brought any assistance. Moreover, she excelled in divination and could detect falsehoods.

"You better not be lying to me!" Franca recoiled, produced her makeup mirror, and began performing a divination in front of "Rat" Christo.

Lumian cooperatively stood up and walked to Christo's side. He reached out and firmly grasped Christo's shoulder.

Once Franca confirmed the truth through her divination, Lumian patted the "Rat" on the back with a smile.

"If anything similar happens in the future, make sure to remind me of any potential issues with the merchandise. I must be prepared for any unexpected incidents.

"Otherwise, I might just chop you into pieces and feed you to your beloved kids."

He had heard from Louis that "Rat" Christo had numerous pets and had a special fondness for dogs.

Fueled by the threat, Christo grew angry.

Franca may be the boss's mistress, and she's stronger than me. I can tolerate her treatment, but what right does a newbie like you have?

Recalling Margot and "Hammer" Ait, who were just as powerful as him, Christo wilted under their memory and forced a smile.

"The boss asked me to keep it a secret this time."

Franca stowed away her makeup box and cursed, "You son of a bitch! You could have at least given us a clue!"

Christo sheepishly smiled and replied, "Alright, alright."

Surprisingly, he wasn't at all offended by the insults. To him, dogs were cherished family members, so how could their mention be taken as an offense?

He often warned his lecherous subordinates that laying a hand on his wife was akin to touching his dog!

Observing Franca and Ciel's softened attitudes, Christo curiously asked, "Is that strange world really as Erkin described?"

Before Franca could respond, Lumian patted Christo's shoulder with a smile.

"Haven't you figured it out yet? Has a dog eaten your brain? We were just bluffing you!

"We didn't enter any strange world at all. We simply suspected something was amiss with your goods, considering the previous smooth smuggling operations and the sudden involvement of a Beyonder incident. So, we decided to deceive you!"

"…" "Rat" Christo couldn't help but feel vexed.

Indeed, if Franca and Ciel had truly entered a strange world, they wouldn't have returned so swiftly!

Erkin and the others had been missing for hours!

How could he have been so foolish?

Why did he fall for their ruse?

Suppressing his emotions, Christo looked at Franca with a fawning smile.

"Please don't tell the boss that I revealed the existence of that item. He will not be pleased with me."

Franca cast a strange glance at Lumian and said to "Rat" Christo, "Fine. From now on, you owe me a favor."

"Alright!" Christo hastily agreed.

After bidding farewell to the leader of the smuggling operation, Lumian and Franca exited the warehouse and turned onto the narrow street of Avenue du Marché.

"I realized today that Christo is a complete fool. He's incredibly gullible," Franca remarked, breaking the silence as she glanced at Lumian beside her. There was a hint of a smile on her face, but it didn't quite reach her eyes. "You're quite skilled at deceiving others."

Lumian assumed a composed demeanor.

"In Cordu, you must have heard about Cordu, right? They call me the Prankster King."

Franca, familiar with Cordu due to the wanted poster, smiled at Lumian and responded, "Did you lie to me earlier then? Heh heh, Jenna's assessment of you wasn't entirely off. You possess cunning and trickery."

"You're my sister's companion. I've been telling you the truth," Lumian said sincerely, maintaining an honest expression.

However, he didn't divulge the complete truth. Even if Franca were to confirm it through divination, she wouldn't detect any signs of deception.

Franca observed his expression and nodded in satisfaction.

"I am willing to trust Muggle's brother. Hmm… Let's pretend you don't know about Gardner's item. There are certain things that can be harmful if you were to uncover the truth. I won't inquire about it either."

"Alright," Lumian acquiesced, obediently playing the role he had assumed in front of Aurore.

The two then went their separate ways on Avenue du Marché. One headed towards Salle de Bal Brise, while the other turned onto Rue des Blouses Blanches.

It was already past 8 p.m., and the sky had darkened. Gas wall lamps embedded in the walls illuminated the dance hall, casting a yellowish glow on the entire first floor. As they approached the dance floor, the ambiance grew dimmer.

Amidst greetings, Lumian took a seat at the bar counter and ordered a glass of fennel and mint absinthe, known as Parrot.

The drink was rather invigorating, and with just one sip, it cleared his mind as if he had been slapped awake.

Lumian sat for a while, enjoying Jenna's risqué songs. Eventually, he noticed Charlie approaching the bar counter with a tray in hand.

"Ciel… Boss!" Charlie swiftly altered the way he addressed Lumian upon realizing it was the bartender looking at him.

Lumian took a sip of the psychedelic green liquid and asked with a smile,

"Do you prefer the dance hall or the underground bar in the motel?"

Charlie glanced at the bartender and the other waiters before lowering his voice.

"I still prefer the motel bar. Over there, I'm the center of attention!"

I can tell… Lumian chuckled and nodded towards the young female singer who had taken over from Jenna.

"Is she your friend's daughter?"

Charlie had previously mentioned a friend who had fallen victim to a loan shark. Pressured by Baron Brignais, the friend tragically committed suicide by jumping off a building, and now his daughter was forced to sing at Salle de Bal Brise.

"Yes," Charlie replied with a sorrowful expression.

The female singer, dressed glamorously in a revealing blouse and skirt, was around Jenna's age but lacked the same allure.

Upon closer observation, Lumian noticed the key distinction between the two:

Jenna's eyes radiated a certain spark, whereas despite her fake smile, the light in the other singer's eyes was absent.

Charlie opened his mouth, seemingly hesitant to ask for something, but in the end, he decided against it and remained silent.

Lumian took another sip of the Parrot and immersed himself in deep thought, the song playing in the background.

Approaching 10:30 p.m., he stood up and made his way back upstairs. He changed into a worn linen shirt, an old jacket, brown pants, and topped it off with a dark blue cap.

With this appearance, he resembled a vagabond.

Without hesitation, Lumian pushed open the window and leaped into the alley behind the dance hall.

His intention was to pay a visit to Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons.

His Prophecy Spell had revealed that Monsieur Ive, the landlord of Auberge du Coq Doré, would be present at Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons between 11 p.m. and 12 p.m. this Friday, i.e., tonight.

Lumian wasn't expecting to confront the matter involving the evil god, the Mother Tree of Desire, single-handedly. He had no intention of facing them head-on. Instead, he aimed to gather valuable information and uncover more problems through observation.

To him, the most crucial objective was to utilize Monsieur Ive and the others to locate the place where Susanna Mattise had resided during her lifetime and obtain an item she had carried for a significant period. This would lay the groundwork for the Exorcism Spell when she eventually launched an attack.

Although completing the ritualistic magic in time might prove challenging, being prepared was preferable to being caught off guard.

After taking a few detours, Lumian arrived outside Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons.

Since it was not yet 11 p.m., he saw no need to rush inside. Instead, he found a corner and settled down, observing Monsieur Ive's beige six-story apartment with the demeanor of a genuine tramp.

Before long, Lumian spotted the landlord.

Monsieur Ive returned from Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman, holding a black cane. He wore a faded dark suit, chestnut pants, and an aged half top hat.

A few minutes later, a dim light emanated from one of the windows of his apartment.

Lumian patiently waited.

As he waited, his brow gradually furrowed.

Why hasn't Monsieur Ive made his way to Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons? It's already past 11 p.m.

The window continued to emit a yellowish glow, and occasional figures passed by.

Fifteen minutes elapsed, yet Monsieur Ive had not left his apartment, crossed Avenue du Marché, and entered Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons.

Lumian couldn't help but mutter to himself, Could there be an error in my Prophecy Spell?

Chapter 193: Luck Enhancement

Lumian waited patiently until midnight drew near. As the clock struck 11:30 p.m., the light in Ive's room went out, yet no one emerged from the apartment. It seemed the miser had decided to save on gas bills and retired for the night. The final act of the play at Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons concluded as midnight approached. The audience trickled out one by one, but no one entered the theater.

Lumian muttered to himself, his thoughts racing: Could it be that the Prophecy Spell's answer isn't precise enough? After all, the ritualistic magic was cast by me. It's understandable that its effect isn't perfect. Yes, that's a possibility. But what if the Prophecy Spell is accurate?

Alarmed amidst his thoughts, Lumian's head snapped in the direction of the door adorned with theater posters.

If the Prophecy Spell was correct, it meant that Monsieur Ive had indeed been at Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons between 11 p.m. and midnight.

And if Monsieur Ive truly had been there, who was the identical figure who had entered the apartment and never left?

There was a strong chance it was a decoy!

A decoy!

No way… Lumian couldn't fathom his own suspicion.

How could he be deceived by such a trick, especially after meeting and conversing with Monsieur Ive before?

He was more inclined to believe that the Prophecy Spell was flawed.

Perhaps there's a tunnel beneath the apartment leading to Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons? Lumian pondered, searching for a plausible explanation.

Trier was a city where establishing a tunnel was easier than in other places. It only required a short excavation to connect to underground passageways and sewers. However, such tunnels were also prone to discovery. The Underground Trier teemed with people—quarry police patrolled the area, smugglers traveled through, and planters passed by. Unless the tunnel went deeper or had a cleverly hidden entrance, it wouldn't take long for it to be found.

If Monsieur Ive's apartment did have a similar tunnel, he wouldn't have needed to venture out to the nearby Underground Trier entrance at night.

In the midst of these thoughts, Lumian recalled two important details.

Firstly, he had "witnessed" a change in Monsieur Ive's luck when they first met. The next day, he realized that luck had inexplicably altered.

Secondly, Monsieur Ive possessed Beyonder powers and had a high likelihood of being a believer in the evil god, the Mother Tree of Desire. Despite having a low Sequence, when the official Beyonders brought him in for questioning, they found nothing amiss.

Combining these perplexing facts with the disparity between the Prophecy Spell and reality, Lumian's pupils contracted as he muttered to himself:

A decoy, could it be real?

Was the person residing in the opposite apartment all this time after the robbery a mere decoy?

Is that why his luck changed and the official Beyonders failed to detect anything wrong?

How is it possible for him to resemble Monsieur Ive so perfectly? Did he employ a mystical item akin to the Mystery Prying Glasses or some other method? And where is the real Monsieur Ive hiding in Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons? The more Lumian pondered, the more unnerved he became.

No one had discovered the substitution that took place.

At the very least, Christo's men showed signs of mirror-like reversal.

The situation is growing increasingly sinister, befitting a follower of an evil god. Lumian sighed deeply.

From the assortment of the pervert's abilities, Lumian had already deduced that Monsieur Ive had sensed something awry after being "robbed." After all, even a single verl d'or held value as money. No robber would willingly discard it. And if it had truly been discarded, it meant that the robbery was not the true objective. It was understandable, then, that Monsieur Ive had prepared himself to conceal his secrets from the official Beyonders. Lumian simply hadn't anticipated such a bizarre method.

He had actually fashioned a doppelgänger identical to Monsieur Ive!

For a moment, Lumian couldn't ascertain whether the decoy in the apartment was an ordinary person adorned with Beyonder cosmetics or a devotee of the evil god with extraordinary powers.

If it was the former, Lumian desired to seize the opportunity in the dead of night, apprehend the decoy, administer a thorough thrashing, and extract the truth. Then, he would deliver the decoy to the police headquarters or a cathedral, leaving the official Beyonders to conclude matters.

If it was the latter, he dared not act impulsively. No one knew the decoy's Sequence level or the breadth of its abilities.

Lumian turned his head once more, casting a glance at the brick-red, three-story building housing Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons. He noted that no more patrons emerged from its entrance, dispelling his idea of venturing inside for another look.

The final performance of the day had concluded!

After contemplating for a while, Lumian resolved to make some preparations.

He rose slowly to his feet and proceeded toward Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman, skulking in the shadows untouched by the glow of the gas street lamps.

Along the way, he scrutinized the vagabonds slumbering in the corners of the roadside, his gaze deep and earnest.

Finally, he found a suitable target.

Huddled beneath a makeshift barricade in the alley, the vagabond's clothing was tattered and stained with mud. His legs bore the marks of dog bites, festering wounds oozing yellow pus.

In Lumian's eyes, this individual was plagued by misfortune. He would face a series of calamities in the next two or three days, with his very life potentially at stake.

This made him the ideal "material" for the Luck Enhancement Spell!

Yes, Lumian intended to employ the ritualistic magic of the Alms Monk—the Luck Enhancement Spell—to fashion an item capable of transmitting ill fortune.

If the fake Monsieur Ive were to be plagued by misfortune, continually beset by various predicaments, there was a high likelihood that he would reveal his predicament to the official Beyonders!

With this in mind, Lumian had been on the lookout for the most hapless vagabonds. This particular group belonged to the realm of ill-fated individuals.

With his cap pulled low, Lumian approached the vagabond, positioning himself so the gas lamps on the street cast his face in shadows.

He crouched down, black-gloved hands ready, and gently prodded the tramp.

"You…" The tramp stirred, his voice filled with pain and confusion.

"I need your assistance with something. Willing to lend a hand?" Lumian produced a silver coin, worth one verl d'or, adorned with cherubs and intricate lines.

The tramp's eyes were immediately drawn to the gleaming coin. Without hesitation, he nodded and replied, "No problem!"

As he spoke, he extended his hand, already imagining the aroma of Apple Whiskey Sour and hearty meatloaf.

Once the silver coin was in his palm, the tramp's eyes widened suddenly, fixated on something behind Lumian. He blurted out in shock, "That's…"

Seizing the moment Lumian turned his head, the tramp swiftly pushed himself up, attempting to vault over the barricade and sprint down the alley.

It was evident that giving money to a vagabond and enlisting his cooperation in something posed a clear danger!

For an ordinary tramp, the logical choice was to accept the money and make a run for it!

Whack!

Lumian swiftly withdrew his right hand, calmly observing as the tramp slumped against the barricade, unconscious.

From the start, Lumian had no intention of allowing the tramp to witness everything while awake. Even if he were blindfolded and his ears blocked, there was still a risk of danger. Moreover, there was the potential for revealing Lumian's identity and the sinister ritualistic magic known as the Luck Enhancement Spell.

Hence, his plan had been to seek the tramp's consent and then render him unconscious.

Lumian assisted the tramp to his feet, as if supporting a drunken companion, and guided him to the nearest entrance to Underground Trier. Finding a concealed spot nearby, he secured the tramp, binding his hands and feet, blindfolding him, and muffling his ears.

Once everything was in place, he stealthily returned to Salle de Bal Brise, retrieving a carbide lamp and the necessary tools.

Without delay, he went back to the entrance, carefully lifting the unconscious tramp and making his way to the quarry cave where he had previously performed the Prophecy Spell.

This time, however, the ritual had undergone a change. While it remained a dualistic ceremony, the orange candle representing a deity and other supplicants had been replaced with one of a grayish-white hue.

It still contained Lumian's blood.

To enhance his chances of success, Lumian intended to utilize the ritualistic magic to "pray" to the corruption sealed within his chest, mobilizing a fragment of its power.

After constructing the altar and erecting a wall of spirituality, he plunged Hedsey's tainted dagger into the tramp, allowing his blood to flow into a metal vial.

The tramp stirred, only to be swiftly rendered unconscious once again.

Lumian disinfected and bandaged the wound, blending the blood with ash from his own hair to create an ink-like substance. Using the thinnest paintbrush at his disposal, he meticulously outlined a series of intricate and enigmatic symbols on faux goatskin parchment.

The design consisted of interwoven black thorns forming a ring, snakes with entwined heads and tails, a river composed of these serpentine figures, distorted lines, a peculiar eye, and more.

By the time he completed a fraction of the intricate work, Lumian's forehead was drenched in a sheen of cold sweat.

He positioned the tramp and the faux goatskin adorned with symbols upon the boulder that served as the altar. Dripping perfume into the flames and sprinkling powder, Lumian took two steps back, fixing his gaze upon the gently flickering yellow candle flame, and uttered ancient Hermes words:

"Power of Inevitability!

"You are the past, the present, and the future;

"You are the cause, the effect, and the process."

As before, the flame of the deity's candle compressed to its utmost limits before expanding, swelling to the size of a clenched fist. Its hue transformed to a silvery-black shade, distorting everything in its vicinity. Gray mist filled the air, and a tempest of darkness whirled about.

Lumian, his ears assailed by frenzied murmurs, endured the vertigo and switched to the Hermes tongue.

"I implore you,

"I implore you to alter this destitute man's fate.

"I pray that you will take away his misfortune."

At this juncture, Lumian took a step forward and ignited the faux goatskin adorned with mysterious symbols using the silver-black candle flame. Placing it within a natural crevice on the altar's surface, he observed as the parchment began to smolder.

In the next instant, he produced a gold coin worth five verl d'or, engraved with the Sunbird, and positioned it near the tramp's outstretched hand.

To those gripped by greed, money was an irresistible lure. It served as the optimal conduit!

Lumian, burdened by a sensation akin to carrying a weight of over five hundred kilograms, retreated a step, awaiting the consumption of the smoldering faux goatskin before commencing the final incantation.

"Gray amber, a herb that belongs to inevitability, please pass your powers to my incantation…"

The entire altar abruptly ignited, assuming an ethereal semblance. Before Lumian, an illusory, intricate, and chilling river of mercury silently coursed its way.

It enshrouded the tramp and the gold coin, amplifying the murmurs in Lumian's ears and causing the cyan veins upon his face to bulge.

Instinctively, Lumian recoiled from the agony of supplicating for a boon. Suddenly, the illusory image shrank, descending upon the surface of the gold coin resting upon the altar.

Everything returned to its former state, except for the gold coin, which now appeared dimmer under the silver-black illumination.

Chapter 194: Triggered

At the sight of this, Lumian hastily concluded the ritual and extinguished the candles in the proper sequence.

The frenzied ravings that had filled his ears vanished, and the searing pain abruptly ceased before it could overwhelm him.

Once he tidied up the altar in a rough manner, Lumian shifted his gaze to the 5 verl d'or coin.

It no longer appeared peculiar. Bathed in the glow of the carbide lamp, it shimmered with a captivating golden sheen, indistinguishable from any other coin.

Lumian's eyes darkened suddenly, as if he were observing a living being, examining its fortune.

Normally, he couldn't "see" an object's fate, but this time was different. After focusing, he realized that the gold coin was enveloped in black vapor tinged with a hint of blood-red glow.

The former symbolized ill fortune, while the latter indicated a degree of impending catastrophe.

Phew… Lumian let out a sigh of relief.

This meant that the Luck Enhancement Spell had succeeded. The tramp's streak of misfortune for the next few days had been transferred to the gold coin!

However, if Lumian didn't find another person to bear this fate within three days, it would revert to the tramp, permanently untransferable.

Lumian continued to gaze at the tramp for a few more seconds, confirming that his luck had temporarily returned to normal, neither good nor bad.

Satisfied, Lumian, already positioned at the edge of the altar, reached out and picked up the 5 verl d'or, which served as the medium for luck transference.

He wasn't concerned that this act would transfer the misfortune attached to the item onto himself. That's because activating the Luck Enhancement Spell required specific conditions:

Firstly, the recipient had to willingly accept the gold coin and subjectively desire to possess it.

Secondly, throughout the entire process, the recipient had to exploit a situation they shouldn't have.

In other words, if Lumian used the gold coin to make a purchase, the shopkeeper wouldn't suffer any ill luck merely because they accepted the item—unless they sold Lumian something counterfeit or dishonestly manipulated the transaction for illicit gain.

Likewise, if Lumian discreetly slipped the gold coin into Charlie's pocket without his immediate awareness, Charlie wouldn't encounter misfortune when he eventually used it.

As the original owner of the coin, Lumian naturally remained unaffected by the Luck Enhancement Spell when he retrieved it.

The two straightforward methods to trigger the Luck Enhancement Spell were to keep the coin in his pocket and allow the target to steal it. He could also feign leaving it behind so the target could pick it up.

Lumian believed that unless individuals like Monsieur Ive, who had acquired a miserly habit, underwent a significant transformation, they would still harbor an enduring fondness for money. Falling into such a trap would be easy for them.

After erasing various traces on the altar, he hoisted the tramp onto his back and ascended to the surface. He dumped him back into the alley where he had been found, removing the ropes binding his hands and feet, along with the cloth covering his eyes and ears.

Observing the tramp's condition, Lumian gave him a swift kick and departed.

The tramp stirred slowly, uttering pleas of desperate fear, "Please, let me go!"

He blinked his eyes open, instinctively scanning his surroundings. To his realization, there was no one in sight, and he found himself still slumbering in his usual spot.

"…" The tramp fell silent.

As his senses gradually returned, his initial reaction was to delve into his pocket.

A chill seeped into his mind, and with a gleeful expression, he retrieved a silver coin worth 1 verl d'or.

It's still here!

It's really still there!

It wasn't a dream!

Under the faint crimson moonlight casting its glow from above and the street lamps illuminating the vicinity, the tramp fiddled with the silver coin repeatedly, assuring himself that it wasn't a counterfeit.

Only then did he recall to examine his body.

Soon, he noticed that his arm was bandaged, and a sharp ache assaulted his mind.

Apart from that, there was nothing out of the ordinary.

The tramp stumbled to his feet, rubbing his backside as he muttered to himself, "It's not that kind of pervert…"

Having witnessed the world prior to his bankruptcy, he was aware that Trier housed its fair share of peculiar individuals. Consequently, various private organizations had sprung up. Some advocated that men and women existed solely for reproduction, while others believed that true love only blossomed between men. Gatherings even catered to those who believed that women alone held the secret to loving their own kind.

The tramp had initially suspected he had fallen victim to men with a peculiar fixation on foul, unwashed men. However, it seemed that wasn't the case.

After pondering for a moment, he conjectured that someone had taken an interest in his blood and extracted some. The 1 verl d'or was his reward.

He had heard tales before of influential figures relying on continual blood transfusions to sustain their lives.

"At least there's 1 verl d'or." The tramp instantly rejoiced, no longer dwelling on the loss of blood.

He even entertained the hope that the other party would seek him out once more. When the time came, he would willingly inquire about their desired price.

…

Lumian relied on a copper coin toss to decide that he would spend the night at Auberge du Coq Doré. Consequently, he returned to Room 207 and slept until 6 a.m.

After having breakfast and engaging in some outdoor exercises, then returning to the motel, changing his attire, and disguising himself, Lumian prepared to set off for Avenue du Marché to find the two cleaning ladies already hard at work.

Lumian caught sight of a cleaning lady in her fifties, sporting a vibrant golden wig and makeup, as she diligently cleared the trash in the lobby. Lumian halted his steps and asked contemplatively, "You're Elodie, aren't you?"

He recalled Charlie mentioning her name.

"Yes, Monsieur Ciel." Elodie straightened her posture.

She wore an old yet clean grayish-white dress and stood at an average height of 1.65 meters. From her facial features, it was evident that she had been quite attractive in her youth.

"You know me?" Lumian inquired nonchalantly.

Elodie answered truthfully, "Monsieur Charlie Collent spoke of you before. He mentioned that you're the hotel's guardian."

Heh heh, just as expected of Charlie… That's the right attitude. No trace of inferiority or fear… Lumian started to feel that Elodie, the cleaning lady, wasn't a former street girl as Charlie had speculated.

He casually asked, "I heard from Charlie that you used to be a theater actress?"

"Yes." A smile graced Elodie's face. "I performed in two theaters, taking on supporting roles. However, one of them went bankrupt, and the other stopped hiring me for some reason. I was already quite old by then."

As she reminisced about the past, a hint of melancholy appeared in her demeanor.

Lumian nodded and glanced towards the motel door.

"Have you heard of Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons?"

This was the question he was truly interested in.

This cleaning lady named Elodie was originally a theater actress, but she had been hired by Monsieur Ive, the motel landlord who had a close relationship with Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons. It was a little suspicious.

Elodie's expression became animated.

"I know that their plays are splendid. The actors possess remarkable acting skills. It's worth saving up for a month just to purchase tickets to their shows.

"When I attended a performance at Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons, I discovered that they were in need of a cleaning lady for half a day. That's why I ended up here."

I see… It seems unrelated to Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons or Monsieur Ive… Lumian refrained from further probing to avoid raising any suspicions. He smiled and remarked, "Seems like you have other jobs?"

Elodie believed that Monsieur Ciel sought to ascertain the cleaning lady's background to protect the motel's interests, so she responded honestly, "Every day from 2 p.m. to 10 p.m., I work at a factory south of the market district. It's called the Goodville Chemical Factory, situated on Rue Saint-Hilaire."

Rue Saint-Hilaire ran alongside Trier's city walls and neighbored the factories in Quartier du Jardin Botanique.

Trier's factories had preserved a practice from the era of Roselle. If production continued around the clock, the workers were divided into three shifts: one for the morning to noon, another for the afternoon to evening, and the final one for the night.

"That sounds demanding." Lumian sighed.

Elodie smiled and spoke gently, "I have two children who are nearly grown. Once they secure their own jobs, I won't have to toil so relentlessly."

"What about your husband?" Lumian casually inquired.

Elodie's expression darkened.

"He died in a factory accident a few years ago."

Lumian didn't pry further. Instead, he engaged in conversation with another cleaning lady, faithfully fulfilling his duties as the protector of Auberge du Coq Doré.

Exiting Rue Anarchie, Lumian stepped onto Avenue du Marché, making his way towards Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons.

He wasn't intentionally waiting for Monsieur Ive, who was suspected of being a decoy. His intention was simply to observe. His primary objective was to keep a close watch on the individuals heading to 126 Avenue du Marché.

The Prophecy Spell had revealed to him that he would cross paths with Louis Lund on Avenue du Marché. "Hammer" Ait had mentioned that Louis Lund would once again seek out the boss of the Poison Spur Mob, "Black Scorpion" Roger, this Saturday or Sunday, and "Black Scorpion" Roger resided at 126 Avenue du Marché.

With this combination of information, Lumian had decided to become a "permanent resident" on Avenue du Marché on Monday and wander about in hopes of encountering his target.

As Lumian neared Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons and Monsieur Ive's apartment, he slowed his pace. Sometimes, he sat among the tramps, while other times, he visited a nearby café for a drink.

Since he was already there, it was only natural for him to keep an eye out for Monsieur Ive. After all, this was Avenue du Marché as well.

After nearly 45 minutes, Lumian finally spotted the landlord of the motel.

Clad in a faded formal suit, a worn-out top hat, and a black cane that was on the verge of losing its paint, Monsieur Ive emerged from the apartment and made his way towards the Suhit steam locomotive station.

Lumian gradually stood up and glanced behind him. He feigned terror and jogged, as if he were being pursued by an enemy.

In his attempt to overtake Monsieur Ive from behind, he accidentally collided with him.

A clatter ensued as a golden coin fell to the ground, yet Lumian seemed oblivious to it. He lowered his head and fled in a panic.

Monsieur Ive grumbled, his gaze suddenly drawn to the golden coin on the pavement.

Subconsciously, he wanted to call out to the impolite individual, but as he extended his hand, no words escaped his lips.

Swiftly scanning his surroundings, he swiftly squatted down and retrieved the 5-verl d'or coin. Nonchalantly, he slipped it into his pocket, as if nothing out of the ordinary had transpired.

Chapter 195: Candidate

Hidden behind the shadow of an ebony street lamp, a mere twenty meters away from Monsieur Ive, Lumian leaned discreetly, tugging his cap lower amidst the bustling crowd. He watched intently as his mark retrieved the glistening gold coin, secretively stashing it away.

Only then did Lumian release a sigh of relief. With one hand nonchalantly tucked inside his pocket, he strolled towards 126 Avenue du Marché, paying no further heed to the dubious decoy, for the Luck Enhancement Spell had been officially set in motion, impervious to interruption.

However, the spell required time to manifest its effects. Within half a day or, at most, a full day, misfortune would incessantly plague the false Monsieur Ive. Lumian need only orchestrate a small incident when the opportune moment arrived, and the chances were high that Monsieur Ive would inadvertently unveil his peculiar nature to the legitimate Beyonders.

As Lumian ventured forth, he soon realized that 126 Avenue du Marché was none other than the abode of "Black Scorpion" Roger, the very nerve center of the Poison Spur Mob. Consequently, he dared not approach too closely, wary of exposing himself. Settling himself near a café window, diagonally positioned at a distance of over ten meters, he ordered a Fermo coffee and a dariole.

While awaiting his refreshments, Lumian attentively scanned the passersby on Avenue du Marché, his gaze lingering upon the promotional posters adorning the café's walls.

A prevalent theme among them was the impending National Convention elections scheduled to commence on Sunday.

There were three contenders vying for the position: Matthew Boulanger, representing the National Party; Hugues Artois, championing the Enlightenment Party; and Jacques Sanson, hailing from the Revolutionary Party.

As Lumian observed the fervor surrounding the approach to 126 Avenue du Marché, he found himself engrossed in the manifestos of the candidates.

Matthew Boulanger, the incumbent parliament member for the Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman district, advocated for the restoration of Intis's former glory. His rallying cry was "Make Intis Glorious Again." Boulanger attributed the nation's current predicaments to its defeat in the recent war against the Loen Kingdom. His proposed solution entailed reorganizing the Intis army with a renewed focus on prioritizing Intis's interests. He sought to regain the advantages relinquished in the Southern Continent, bolster the economy, and transform the marketplace district.

Boulanger believed that the process of "Making Intis Glorious Again" would bestow upon the denizens of the marketplace district an abundance of employment opportunities, enabling them to amass wealth, whether through venturing into the Southern Continent, enlisting in the army, or capitalizing on foreign trade.

Hugues Artois, a candidate gaining considerable popularity of late, advocated for "More Jobs, For A Fairer Society." His pledge was to invigorate the economy, constructing additional factories in the southern region of the marketplace district, while simultaneously dismantling the shackles that bound factory owners, bankers, financiers, and merchants. However, his intentions also encompassed challenging the privileges enjoyed by the Church and the affluent, imposing heavier taxes upon them.

Jacques Sanson, a member of the Revolutionary Party, shared Hugues Artois's conviction that societal privileges had no place in the modern world. Regardless of one's affiliation with the Church or financial benefits, Sanson believed that everyone should pay equal taxes.

He boldly asserted that the current tariff policies hindered Intis's progress, particularly the city walls and the 54 checkpoints surrounding Trier. Sanson advocated for the free circulation of goods and the establishment of a liberated market, which would lead to the proliferation of factories and a significant increase in tax revenue. By taxing the privileged class alongside these reforms, the national treasury would swiftly recover from any initial setbacks.

When the time came, Sanson planned to explore the implementation of Emperor Roselle's envisioned annuity guarantee system, providing essential protection to the workers in the marketplace district.

His slogan resounded, "Take Down Those Damned Walls!"

Having finished reading the candidates' platforms, Lumian couldn't help but feel inclined to vote for Jacques Sanson.

While it remained uncertain whether Sanson possessed the capability to realize his ideas, cheaper alcohol and goods would bring tangible benefits and security to the people in the marketplace district.

As for taxing the privileged, they weren't overly concerned, as long as the burden didn't exceed a coppet.

Yet, it was evident that Jacques Sanson faced discrimination. His campaign posters were relegated to the farthest corners, barely visible. This treatment stemmed from the Revolutionary Party's perennial status as a minority within the National Convention.

As the Poison Spur Mob rallied behind Hugues Artois of the Enlightenment Party, Lumian directed his utmost attention towards this candidate. He not only perused Artois's election platform but also scrutinized his color photographs.

Artois, a man in his thirties, possessed a luxuriant head of black, fluffy hair with hints of gray at his temples. His nose stood tall and proud, complemented by deep blue eyes. His height commanded attention, and he exuded an air of refinement when dressed formally.

I can't allow this man to be elected… Unless I dismantle the Poison Spur Mob before that happens. However, the Mob still enjoys the mysterious support of Madame Moon. Even if one Black Scorpion falls, another Red Scorpion will emerge… Yes, the elections are set to commence this Sunday. The police headquarters, military police, and official Beyonders will be mobilized to vigilantly monitor each constituency. Causing trouble won't be easy… Should I involve the laborers, porters, and waiters of the Savoie Mob? Lumian contemplated how to secure the National Convention seat for both Matthew Boulanger and Jacques Sanson.

According to Intis law, anyone residing in a constituency for at least six months and having a job or attending university possessed the right to register and vote in that district. Lumian himself had only arrived in Trier less than a month.

Lost in thought, he maintained a watchful eye on the window, hoping to catch sight of Louis Lund.

After a considerable time had passed, the golden sun ascended into the sky. Lumian realized that waiting was not a viable option.

Firstly, his identity posed a problem. He remained under the intense scrutiny of the Poison Spur Mob, preventing him from waiting in a building opposite "Black Scorpion" Roger's residence. Such a vantage point would limit his view and increase the risk of overlooking crucial details.

Secondly, as the leader of the Savoie Mob, he had numerous responsibilities to fulfill and required moments of respite. Waiting 24 hours a day for two straight days was simply unfeasible.

As these thoughts raced through his mind, Lumian was struck by an idea.

Why should I do it myself when I have so many subordinates and even hired Anthony Reid with my own money?

With that thought, Lumian rose from his seat and left the café, making his way towards Salle de Bal Brise.

As he reached the middle of Avenue du Marché, Lumian's attention was drawn to a gathering by the roadside. At the outskirts of the crowd stood a circle of black-uniformed police officers, while two rows of mounted officers observed the passersby.

Amidst the 200 to 300 people, there stood a makeshift wooden platform. A man in a black suit, sans bow tie, commanded the stage.

A massive poster displaying his photo adorned the outer wall of the house behind him. His resounding voice resonated through the streets.

"We need jobs. We need better income…

"I will construct more factories on Rue Saint-Hilaire…

"I pledge tax concessions for these factories…"

Ah, isn't that Monsieur Hugues Artois? Lumian, utilizing his above-average Intis height, could clearly see the speaker on the wooden stage.

It was the elegant, black-haired, blue-eyed Hugues Artois, a candidate supported by the Poison Spur Mob!

Lumian listened for several seconds, his gaze instinctively scanning the upper levels of the building opposite Hugues Artois, examining the windows and roof.

As expected, he detected signs of police officers or individuals who clearly did not belong to the household.

He's well-protected indeed… I cannot shoot Hugues Artois in the head or chest from those positions using a rifle… Lumian averted his gaze, a tinge of regret washing over him.

There was another way to ensure Hugues Artois's defeat in the election, and that was to prevent him from participating altogether.

Those who perished would automatically forfeit their right to run!

Lumian had seriously contemplated the feasibility of this plan while at the café, but he concluded that it would stir up too much chaos. The market district mobs would likely be mobilized and used as scapegoats. He himself would fall into that category. If that happened, his true identity would likely be exposed, compelling him to flee the market district, if not Trier altogether. He would lose the opportunity to track down Madame Pualis and the padre.

Assassinating the candidate appeared to be quite a challenge. Even if he were fortunate enough to succeed, escape might not be guaranteed.

Lumian shifted his gaze to the people standing behind the wooden platform. They were most likely members of Hugues Artois's campaign—a trio of men and two women.

Among them, there was a woman with fiery red hair, rumored to possess noble lineage. Her features were striking, with chiseled lines on her face, yet there was an overall air of neutrality to her beauty.

Tall and attired in a white and brown hunting suit, she was accompanied by four other individuals.

Fearful of missing Louis Lund, Lumian paid no heed to Hugues Artois's oration. He withdrew from the throng and made his way back to Salle de Bal Brise.

Noontime brought few patrons to the establishment. Some waiters and bartenders took a break, while others busied themselves with tidying up.

Addressing Louis and Sarkota, Lumian spoke up. "Dispatch four men to keep watch at 126 Avenue du Marché."

"126…" Louis repeated, his voice filled with astonishment. "Isn't that 'Black Scorpion' Roger's residence?"

Is the boss planning to stir up trouble for the Poison Spur Mob once again?

Lumian nodded, his expression candid.

"You've got it. Don't get too close and ensure you remain undetected. Stand guard from different vantage points and observe whether he appears among the passersby."

Lumian gestured toward the wanted posters adorning the wall, as well as Louis Lund, who stood nearby.

Since joining the Savoie Mob, Louis's own wanted poster had been discreetly moved to an even more inconspicuous spot.

Louis and Sarkota turned their attention to the wanted poster, carefully examining its contents. Words like "Cordu Village" caught their eye.

They grasped the general idea and readily agreed.

"Yes, Boss."

Once the four mobsters departed Salle de Bal Brise with the wanted poster in tow, Lumian turned to Louis and Sarkota.

"For the next few days, your task will be to maintain order on the first-floor dance hall."

Having issued his instructions, Lumian added nonchalantly, "I just caught snippets of Hugues Artois's speech. Not bad. Hmm… Whom does our Savoie Mob support as the market district's member of parliament?"

Louis cast a quick glance around and lowered his voice.

"The baron mentioned that he intends to vote for Monsieur Artois."

Chapter 196: Elimination

Hugues Artois? Lumian never anticipated such a response.

Did the competing Savoie Mob and the Poison Spur Mob really endorse the same candidate?

If Hugues Artois succeeded, would he assist the Poison Spur Mob in dealing with the Savoie Mob? Or would he aid the Savoie Mob in completely overthrowing the Poison Spur Mob? Or would he demand peace between the two factions?

The more Lumian pondered it, the more he sensed that something was amiss.

If the influential figure behind both the Savoie Mob and the Poison Spur Mob was none other than Hugues Artois, then the two sides wouldn't have become bitter enemies to this extent!

Though Lumian played his part, wasn't he acting under the blessings of the Boss and Baron Brignais?

Furthermore, Hugues Artois wasn't an elected member of parliament. What authority did he have to protect both the Savoie Mob and the Poison Spur Mob?

The only plausible explanation was the machinations of the Enlightenment Party, but it made no sense for them to incite two rival mobs to fight each other to the death.

Lumian, lacking experience in this area, failed to find an answer even after considerable thought. All he could do was sigh with regret.

I can't employ the Savoie Mob's men to secretly intimidate voters into not supporting Hugues Artois!

He glanced at Louis, his confusion evident as he asked, "Why was I unaware that our Savoie Mob is backing Hugues Artois?"

Louis immediately grew tense.

"I assumed the baron had apprised you, Boss."

Wasn't that the purpose of the handover?

Baron Brignais was in a foul mood after losing the Salle de Bal Brise, so he couldn't be bothered to inform me about many things. In any case, I'll find out when I need to know? Lumian mumbled inwardly as he departed from Salle de Bal Brise and returned to Auberge du Coq Doré.

He proceeded directly to the third floor and made his way to Room 5, the dwelling of Anthony Reid, the information broker. Extending his hand, Lumian knocked on the wooden door.

Knocks reverberated, yet no response came.

He must not be present… That makes sense. How can an information broker stay holed up at home all the time… Lumian retrieved a note and fountain pen he carried with him and wrote on the note, using Anthony Reid's door as a surface:

"I've received intel that Louis Lund will be seen on Avenue du Marché from Saturday to Sunday. Keep a close watch on him. As soon as you spot him, notify me without delay. You can find me either in Room 207 at the motel or at Salle de Bal Brise. The agreed payment will be made promptly when the time comes.

"Ciel."

After sliding the note through the crevice of Room 305's door, Lumian returned to Salle de Bal Brise and settled in the café, patiently awaiting feedback.

As twilight descended, a gangster positioned near 126 Avenue du Marché dashed back to the dance hall, racing up to the second floor.

Has Louis Lund been discovered? Lumian rose from his seat, eyeing his subordinate.

The mobster appeared inexplicably anxious, as if a famished lion had set its sights on him.

Without waiting for Lumian to inquire, he stammered in haste, "Boss, th-this is bad! I saw, I saw a group of police officers heading toward the depot!"

The depot? Isn't that under the boss's ownership? Ah, near the depot lies the warehouse belonging to "Rat" Christo… Could Franca's "report" have taken effect? Lumian swiftly contemplated a possibility.

This left him disheartened.

In his eyes, the mirror people and any potential harm they might bring couldn't hold a candle to a single strand of Louis Lund's hair!

Suppressing his emotions and residual excitement, Lumian spoke to his subordinate, "Understood. I'll handle it. Return to your original post and remain vigilant for the person depicted in the wanted poster. In half an hour, I'll send four others to relieve you."

"Yes, Boss." The gangster heaved a sigh of relief and made his way downstairs.

As Lumian watched him disappear, he gazed down at his trembling hands.

They still quivered slightly.

It was a result of the sudden surge of exhilaration he experienced when he thought his subordinate had brought news of Louis Lund.

At times, my emotional stability wavers… Fortunately, I have another psychiatric session scheduled for this Sunday… Lumian sighed inwardly, taking a seat and savoring his coffee.

In order to welcome Louis Lund in his finest state, he had refrained from ordering alcohol.

…

Outside the warehouses belonging to "Rat" Christo.

He, along with his subordinates and the porters, had gathered together, encircled by 20 to 30 armed police officers donning black uniforms.

Christo forced a fawning smile and addressed Superintendent Travis Everett, saying, "Monsieur Superintendent, why have you suddenly surrounded the warehouses? I'm a legitimate businessman!"

Everett, a man in his thirties with black-framed glasses and a broad chin, regarded Christo and spoke in a deep voice, "Do not assume that we are unaware of your usual dealings. We are not dealing with you because you abide by the rules and know what is permissible. Your only choice now is to cooperate with us and aid us in unraveling this as swiftly as possible."

Christo detected a glimmer of hope in Superintendent Everett's words and nodded.

"Alright, alright, no problem!"

He had already distributed the batch of goods from yesterday. As long as the genuine account books were not discovered, there was no concrete evidence to accuse him.

With his short black hair, Everett turned to the man standing beside him and said, "Monsieur Deputy Assistant Commissioner, you may proceed."

The man had a rugged appearance, sporting fluffy blond hair, golden eyebrows, and a beard. He wore a slightly smaller black police uniform, but his buttons were crafted from gold.

Adorning his epaulet was a silver-white seven-petal scented iris, accompanied by an off-white diamond square.

This emblem indicated the rank of Deputy Assistant Commissioner.

The police department in Trier had four ranks, in ascending order: Chief Superintendent, Deputy Assistant Commissioner, Assistant Commissioner, and Deputy Commissioner.

Of these, there was only one Deputy Commissioner—the head of Trier's police department. Across the entire Intis Republic, the minister of the National Police Department, a Commissioner, held a higher rank.

The Assistant Commissioner and Deputy Assistant Commissioner served as Trier's Police Department's Deputy Minister and Police Committee members. Their epaulets displayed off-white diamond squares beside the seven-petaled irises. There were four Commissioners, three Deputy Commissioners, two Assistant Commissioners, and one Deputy Assistant Commissioner, with no Chief Superintendents.

In other words, this uncouth man with blond hair and a golden beard held an equal rank to Aymerck, the Police Committee member in charge of the entire Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman. However, Christo was entirely unfamiliar with him.

"Just call me Angoulême," the rugged Deputy Assistant Commissioner replied succinctly.

His gaze swept across Christo, Erkin, and the others, inexplicably making them feel as if they were staring at the blinding sun, forcing them to lower their heads.

Angoulême averted his gaze and instructed the plain-clothes team behind him, "You may bring that object forward now."

Two team members approached the nearby four-wheeled carriage and unveiled a wide, flat, and sizable object covered in a black velvet curtain.

They positioned the object beside Angoulême.

Angoulême locked eyes with "Rat" Christo and the others, subtly raising his chin, and uttered,

"Line up in front of me, one by one."

Christo sensed the kid in his pocket trembling visibly. He surmised that Angoulême was an official Beyonder, someone of considerable power.

After a few moments of contemplation, he approached Angoulême fearfully, not daring to resist.

Suddenly, Angoulême pulled open the black velvet curtain, revealing the complete appearance of the object beside him.

It was a full-body mirror, simple and unadorned, mounted on a stand of rusted iron-black.

Christo's reflection appeared instantly in the mirror, capturing every detail.

Christo remained unaware of anything amiss, but Erkin's expression underwent a drastic change behind him.

Erkin abruptly turned to the left, attempting to escape.

Almost 20 others followed suit, including laborers and porters.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Angoulême's team had already prepared, raising their arms and squeezing the triggers.

Bullets struck those fleeing, but it was as if they struck an illusion, passing through them and landing in the distance.

Angoulême calmly extended his left hand and adjusted the position of the full-body mirror beside him.

The mirror reflected Erkin's figure against a dark background.

Erkin froze in place, maintaining his running posture.

In an instant, he was drawn towards the full-body mirror, a look of horror etched on his face.

As soon as the two collided, Erkin's body vanished.

In the blink of an eye, he reappeared in the mirror, his face stained with blood. His expression turned sinister, consumed by hatred and resentment.

He opened his mouth as if to scream, but an invisible force pulled him into the unnaturally dark backdrop of the mirror, and he vanished.

Witnessing this, Christo stood dumbfounded, forgetting to aid his brother.

One thought echoed in his mind: There's something terribly wrong with them…

Meanwhile, Angoulême's subordinates worked to control the fleeing individuals. The ordinary people caught in the midst of the chaos cowered on the ground, heads lowered, trembling with fear.

…

In Salle de Bal Brise, Lumian sat at the bar counter, listening to Jenna's captivating singing. Two hours ago, he had received news that "Rat" Christo was unharmed, but a group of his subordinates had perished.

Quite efficient… Lumian inwardly commended the official Beyonders in the market district.

As the risqué song came to an end, a woman who had been waiting on the sidelines took the stage and hurriedly approached a young band member. She sobbed and cried out twice.

It seemed she was delivering news of someone's death.

The band member stood frozen, shocked by the news, unable to react for a moment.

After a few seconds, he flung aside the six-string zither strapped to him and dashed off the stage.

However, he only managed a few steps before he stumbled and fell heavily to the ground. He struggled to rise but failed.

In the next moment, tears streamed down his face.

Jenna, adorned in a shimmering red dress, observed him for a few seconds before pressing her lips together. Eventually, she didn't offer consolation, allowing the band member and the grieving woman to weep.

She quietly stepped down from the stage and crossed paths with Lumian, who had left the bar counter.

"What happened?" Lumian inquired.

Jenna let out a soft sigh and replied, "His father passed away in an accident a few hours ago. I know him. Learning to play a musical instrument hasn't been easy for him. His father works as a porter, and his mother is a dishwasher. Without their unwavering support, he would be limited to manual labor…"

An accident a few hours ago… A porter… Lumian roughly pieced together the cause.

He gazed silently at the stage.

Chapter 197: Helper

After the band member and his mother got time off from René, Salle de Bal Brise's manager, the drumbeats reverberated through the air, signaling the start of a new round of dancing.

Lumian turned his gaze to Jenna, who stood by his side, and spoke in a casual tone.

"I thought you would offer him some comfort. After all, you know him well and often collaborate with their band."

Jenna, dressed in a stunning red sequined dress that revealed a generous amount of her chest, pressed her lips together and responded calmly.

"In that moment just now, what he needed wasn't comforting words but a release. Offering condolences would only worsen his pain."

Lumian scrutinized Jenna for a few moments.

"You seem to understand it quite well. Why do I have a feeling that you've experienced something similar yourself?"

Jenna lowered her gaze to her toes and smiled softly.

"A few years ago, I went through the same thing when my father passed away.

"One day, before dawn, my mother took me to the rooftop of our apartment and stayed with me until the sunrise. I witnessed the gradual brightening of the sky, from pitch black to a deep blue. It grew lighter and lighter, and I saw the clouds adorned with shades of bright gold and other colors.

"In that moment, she told me that darkness would eventually pass, and the sun would rise. Light would always find its way to illuminate the land.

"When he returns to the band, I'll find an opportunity to share something similar with him."

Lumian listened in silence, letting out a sigh. "You have a wonderful mother."

"Yes." Jenna accepted the compliment with pride.

Lumian chuckled and remarked, "You managed to say so much without resorting to curses. That's unlike you."

Moreover, she appeared rather refined.

"Damnit! Do you think I'm the type of person who curses incessantly?" Jenna cursed indignantly and made her way to the break room to prepare for the next song.

Lumian settled back at the bar counter, his mind preoccupied with another matter.

He had therapy scheduled for tomorrow afternoon, and there was a possibility of Louis Lund showing up on Sunday.

What if he missed it?

Lumian's initial impulse was to write a letter to Madam Magician and request her to check with his psychiatrist, Madam Susie, about the possibility of rescheduling the treatment by a day. However, he couldn't shake off the feeling of his condition being unstable for the past two days. If he didn't act promptly, he might face severe consequences when tracking down Louis Lund.

Even though Madame Pualis wasn't exactly Madame Night, Lumian couldn't confront her directly. His primary objective was to locate the survivor from Cordu and engage in a friendly conversation with her.

Lumian didn't hold much animosity towards Madame Pualis. While she believed in an evil god and had involvement in Cordu, it appeared that she wasn't responsible for the disaster. She had departed before the ritual took place under some compulsion.

Lumian didn't concern himself with others' beliefs, nor did he intend to.

Hence, if he allowed himself to become unstable and reacted impulsively, escalating the conflict with Madame Pualis and making her his enemy, matters would become exceedingly troublesome, and he might even lose his life.

As for the dispute with the Poison Spur Mob, a problem with Madame Moon didn't equate to matters involving Madame Night.

After careful consideration, Lumian devised a plan to find someone who could track Louis Lund on his behalf and follow him to his residence in Trier.

There's no need to consider individuals without Beyonder powers. They simply wouldn't be able to keep up with him.

There are two viable options. The first is Anthony Reid, an information broker suspected of being a Beyonder from the Psychiatrist pathway. He possesses excellent tracking abilities and has already accepted my commission, receiving a deposit. Since the task involves locating Louis Lund, it naturally falls within the scope of the mission. If Anthony proves difficult, I'm prepared to offer more money.

The second option is Franca. She, along with Aurore, belongs to the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society. Franca knows my true identity and displays a certain level of concern for me. She is trustworthy to some extent, not to mention that she still owes me a favor. Franca possesses enough power to tail Louis Lund and even intercept him if necessary. As these thoughts raced through Lumian's mind, he rose from his seat, making his way to the bedroom on the second floor and leaving Salle de Bal Brise through the window.

…

Auberge du Coq Doré, Room 305.

Lumian knocked on the wooden door.

"Please come in," Anthony Reid responded in a West Midseashire Coast accent.

The door slowly swung open.

The information broker stood before Lumian once more.

His plump face, once slick with oiliness, appeared freshly scrubbed, enhancing his air of honesty.

Wearing a grayish-blue worker's uniform, he seemed to have spent the entire day in the southern part of the market district and Quartier du Jardin Botanique.

"I've read your note," Anthony Reid said, running a hand through his receding light-yellow hairline. "I've been keeping an eye on Avenue du Marché."

Lumian felt a slight unease, but he surveyed the room and spoke directly.

"I have other matters to attend to between 2:30 p.m. and 5:00 p.m. tomorrow. If you happen to spot the target during that time, don't inform me. Simply follow him and ascertain his place of residence."

Anthony Reid locked his dark brown eyes onto Lumian's for a few seconds.

"Very well."

He made no mention of an additional fee, and Lumian was content not to broach the subject either.

…

3 Rue des Blouses Blanches housed a relatively new apartment building. Its beige facade boasted a charming curvature, featuring numerous irregular walls adorned with a variety of statues. Angels, animals, celebrities, and legendary objects found their place amidst the architecture. The building boasted an abundance of large windows, wall pillars, and scroll art, creating an atmosphere of grandeur.

Lumian stood before Room 601 and pressed the doorbell.

With a jingling sound, Franca swung open the dark-red door.

Her flaxen hair cascaded naturally and voluminously, while she wore a loose white silk nightgown that gracefully reached her knees. The wide-open collar revealed a fair expanse of skin.

Observing that the other party showed no signs of wariness and wasn't even wearing a bra, Lumian made a conscious effort to keep his gaze focused.

Before opening the door, Franca seemed to already know the identity of the visitor. She greeted him with a smile.

"Coming to seek knowledge in mysticism?

"After all our discussions, you've finally arrived."

"No, it's something else," Lumian responded, gesturing towards the room, indicating that they should speak inside.

Franca turned and walked towards the sofa, Lumian following closely behind. As he entered, he instinctively scanned his surroundings.

This apartment consisted of two bedrooms, a bathroom, a living room, and a kitchen. The furnishings in the living room, such as the sofa, coffee table, dining table, chairs, and cupboards, were predominantly beige, iron-black, silver-white, or light gray. The colors were muted and lacked vibrancy. The overall aesthetic was one of simplicity and cleanliness, but it also exuded a touch of coldness. It stood in stark contrast to the living room styles found in most households.

Lumian took a seat on the edge of the divan while Franca curled her legs and reclined on the adjacent armchair, revealing her alluring curves.

"What brings you here?" Franca inquired.

Lumian pointed towards her.

"Aren't you considering changing your clothes?"

Franca glanced down at her nightgown and came to a realization.

"Perhaps it's because you know my original gender. When I'm around you, I always have this illusion that I'm still a man and forget to pay attention to such details."

A smile played on her lips. Rather than changing her attire, she shifted her sitting posture, accentuating her allure even further.

After a few moments, she even left her recliner and settled beside Lumian.

Sensing Lumian's perplexed gaze, she chuckled and remarked, "Since you won't peek, why should I bother changing?"

She made a playful gesture, unreservedly teasing him.

"Madame, you have a wicked sense of humor." Lumian sighed.

Franca grinned and replied, "Life is already tough. I need to seek some amusement for myself.

"But I'm considered fine. There's a group of individuals in the Research Society who harbor little hope for the future and have made it their life goal to pursue enjoyment. They've formed a group called April Fools' Day. Your sister must have mentioned it, right?"

"She did," Lumian confirmed, recalling reading about it in Aurore's grimoires.

Franca refrained from elaborating and fixed her gaze upon Lumian, her eyes resembling calm lakes, awaiting an explanation for his visit.

Lumian spoke directly, his words carrying a certain bluntness.

"I require a favor."

"Oh?" Franca responded cooperatively, her tone laced with curiosity.

Lumian took a moment to contemplate before continuing.

"Considering you've seen my wanted poster, you must possess some knowledge regarding it.

"I've received information that one of the individuals depicted, a man by the name of Louis Lund, will make an appearance on Avenue du Marché tomorrow. He maintains close ties with the masterminds behind the Poison Spur Mob.

"My intention is to apprehend him and unveil the truth behind the catastrophe in Cordu. However, I'll be preoccupied with crucial matters tomorrow afternoon, so I can't personally await his arrival. I hope you could lend me your assistance. Should he show, tail him and ascertain his whereabouts. If you feel confident, aid me in capturing him. He once possessed Beyonder powers equivalent to a Sequence 8 and is likely a Gardener, though I cannot say for certain at present.

"After acquiring the mirror, you did promise to compensate me. This would be it."

Franca retorted angrily, "This concerns Muggle's death. I will most certainly help. Compensation is not an appropriate term in this context."

"Tailing him doesn't count. But attacking him counts?" Lumian proposed.

Discerning the underlying polite and detached nature of his request, Franca did not insist and simply nodded.

"That works too."

Curiosity danced across her countenance as she posed another query.

"What could be more pressing than apprehending this individual named Louis Lund?

"I expected you to be more concerned about uncovering the truth behind Cordu."

Lumian pondered briefly before speaking candidly, "The Cordu disaster has left me grappling with certain psychological issues. I am presently undergoing regular treatment. I fear that without timely follow-up, I will lose control of my emotions, thus jeopardizing my quest for the truth."

Franca nodded sympathetically, displaying her understanding.

Taking the initiative, she offered a suggestion.

"Would you like me to find a genuine psychiatrist—one with Beyonder powers—for you?"

"My psychiatrist already possesses them," Lumian revealed, withholding nothing.

Franca refrained from prying further, recalling that Muggle's brother participated in other mystical gatherings.

Lumian mentioned the attributes of a Villain and a Gardener, as well as the existence of Anthony Reid. He provided a detailed description of Reid's appearance to ensure Franca wouldn't mistake him for a companion of Louis Lund, potentially leading to unnecessary conflict.

With that, Lumian rose from his seat, signaling his intention to depart.

Franca stood up, amused. "You've come all this way. Aren't you interested in delving into the mysteries of mysticism?"

"Louise Lund may make an appearance tonight as well," Lumian remarked, eager to return to Salle de Bal Brise as swiftly as possible.

At that precise moment, both he and Franca directed their attention toward the door.

Light footfalls resonated from the stairs before halting nearby.

Franca glanced at the peephole from a distance, her expression suddenly morphing into one of peculiarity.

In hushed tones, she addressed Lumian, "Jenna!"

Chapter 198: Conciliation

Beneath the open window of Room 601, Lumian scaled the wall with his bare hands, aided by the protrusions, statues, and pipes. His descent was swift and steady, story after story, until he made a final leap and landed gracefully on the edge of Rue des Blouses Blanches. He grumbled under his breath, "Why am I forced to climb down from the sixth floor? I haven't done anything!"

Lumian slipped into the shadows and made his way towards Avenue du Marché.

In Room 601.

Franca cast a fleeting glance at the swaying window, adjusting her silk nightgown before approaching the slowly opening door, wearing a smile.

Dressed in a sequined red dress, Jenna stored away the spare key Franca had entrusted to her and entered the apartment.

"Why are you here so early today?" Franca inquired, blocking Jenna's path to the window, her brow furrowed in confusion.

Jenna let out a sigh and replied, "Something happened to the band's six-stringed zither player. While it didn't affect my singing, it put everyone in a foul mood. The dance hall manager, René, asked me to end the performance early and switch tonight's theme to cheek-to-cheek dancing."

The cheek-to-cheek dance in the market district differed from the usual version. It involved intimate embraces and provocative movements between men and women on the dance floor. It was an exhilarating experience, but dance halls needed enough female dancers to organize it.

Attempting to find a topic of conversation, Franca asked, "What happened exactly?" She discreetly calculated the time it would take for Lumian to descend to the first floor, all the while grumbling internally, Why is Muggle's brother a Hunter instead of an Assassin? Assassins can effortlessly leap from the sixth floor and land as light as a feather!

Jenna recounted the band member's unfortunate incident and concluded, "Dammit, why do unlucky people always attract more misfortune?"

"Yes, even though the performance ended earlier than usual, it's still late. Going home would be quite troublesome. I'll sleep at your place."

Given that Jenna lived far away from Avenue du Marché, she often sought refuge at Franca's whenever she performed late into the night at the dance hall. She even had a spare key.

Warehouse… porter… Recalling the information provided by her subordinate, Franca surmised that it must be related to the matter involving "Rat" Christo.

As she let out a sigh, contemplating how the innocent had lost their kin, Franca inwardly expressed her sorrow.

Brother 007 is incredibly efficient. I only informed him about the mirror people late last night, and the official Beyonders have already dealt with the anomaly before this evening.

Brother 007 was the code name of a man from the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society, a member of an official organization in Trier. His rank seemed quite high, and Franca had secret connections with many fellow researchers in Trier, often organizing private gatherings with them.

However, Franca knew that the matters involving the mirror people wouldn't end there. The special mirror world still existed, the mystery artifact that Gardner Martin smuggled into Trier remained, and the classic silver mirror in her possession persisted. If these elements weren't eliminated entirely, it would only solve the problem temporarily. Franca couldn't predict when similar anomalies would arise in the future.

Franca approached the classic-styled silver mirror, which allowed entry into the special mirror world, with caution and seriousness. She believed it held a secret related to the Demoness pathway.

"Why are you so quiet?" Jenna asked, extending her right hand and waving it in front of Franca.

Franca snapped back to reality and let out a sigh.

"I feel a bit sad upon hearing about their misfortune."

It was precisely because she didn't want to face the pain of countless innocents that she followed Lumian's suggestion and "handed over" the matter to the officials.

Jenna bypassed Franca and made her way to the guest room, intending to change into more comfortable attire.

As she glanced around, she noticed that the living room window was open, letting in a refreshing breeze.

"It was a bit stuffy," Franca quickly explained.

Jenna regarded her with suspicion.

"Why did you feel the need to explain?"

Ahem… Franca nearly choked on her own saliva.

Thankfully, Jenna didn't dwell on it too much. She entered the guest room and headed towards the washroom, carrying her nightgown and pajamas.

…

Once Lumian returned to Avenue du Marché, he began his rounds, starting with Unit 126, where "Black Scorpion" Roger resided. He approached the four mobsters disguised as beggars stationed at different entrances, far from their intended target. Lumian made a promise to each of them, guaranteeing 100 verl d'or by Monday.

That night, he struggled to find rest in Salle de Bal Brise. Occasionally, he would wake up, straining his ears for any signs of movement outside the window, hoping to catch the sound of hurried footsteps.

At dawn, while enjoying breakfast at the café and skimming through a newspaper, Louis ascended from the first floor and whispered in Lumian's ear, "Boss, Superintendent Everett requests your presence at the Valiant café, opposite the police headquarters, for a cup of coffee precisely at 10 a.m."

Superintendent Everett wants to meet me, the newly appointed leader of the Savoie Mob? Lumian remained relatively composed with the Mystery Prying Glasses in his possession.

He asked Louis, "Who else will be there?"

"Many," Louis responded in a hushed tone. "They say all the mob leaders from the market district will gather. The official voting begins today."

The voting would extend over three days.

Is that so… So they won't let us disrupt the National Convention election, it seems. I wonder if the Poison Spur Mob will attend? Lumian nodded and left Salle de Bal Brise at 9:15 a.m., making his way back to Auberge du Coq Doré.

In Room 207, he put on the Mystery Prying Glasses, experiencing the disorienting sensation of descending from great heights and burrowing into the ground.

Suppressing the urge to retch, Lumian retrieved a mirror and all his cosmetics, busying himself with preparations.

He opted for subtle alterations, focusing on thickening his eyebrows, accentuating his cheekbones, and enhancing shadowy areas. The adjustments created an impression that it was indeed Ciel and not someone else.

As soon as he finished his makeup, Lumian hastily set the mirror aside, unwilling to catch a glimpse of his reflection.

Shortly before 10 a.m., he arrived at the Valiant café and was promptly escorted to a private room by a waiter.

Upon entering, he immediately recognized several familiar faces—Baron Brignais, adorned in formal attire with a top hat and pipe; Franca, sporting trousers, red boots, and a blouse; the towering "Giant" Simon; and the merchant-like figure of "Blood Palm" Black.

Seated in an armchair at the head of the table, Travis Everett, donning a black uniform, rose with a smile upon seeing Lumian enter.

"You must be Ciel, am I right?"

"Yes, Superintendent Everett," Lumian responded respectfully.

Franca, Baron Brignais, and the others, who had risen alongside Travis Everett, exchanged puzzled glances as they observed Lumian.

Franca's gaze averted in enlightenment as she recognized the golden-black hair. Baron Brignais, Giant Simon, and the rest gradually "realized" that it was Ciel.

Adjusting his black-framed glasses, Superintendent Everett's blue eyes gleamed as he half-praised Lumian and patted the recliner beside him.

"You've only been in the market district for less than three weeks, but you've already taken over Salle de Bal Brise. And you're so young. You're really outstanding.

"Sigh, the market district hasn't been peaceful for the past month."

He half-praised Lumian and patted a recliner beside him.

"Come, have a seat here.

"Let me introduce you to the others."

When Lumian stood by Everett's side, the superintendent gestured toward a middle-aged man seated across the coffee table and spoke, "Roger, you're acquainted with him, aren't you?"

"Black Scorpion" Roger? Lumian directed his gaze at the middle-aged man.

Roger, dressed in formal attire with neatly combed black hair, had a slightly chubby face, and his deep-blue eyes resembled the vast sea.

"We're meeting for the first time," Lumian replied with a smile. He noticed a chilling gaze emanating from Black Scorpion.

Everett proceeded to introduce the individuals sitting beside Roger.

"Harman, Castina."

Upon entering the private room, Lumian had noticed only Harman among the few members of the Savoie Mob. The bald man's shining head was so eye-drawing that Lumian almost looked away, fearing that it might reflect his disguised appearance.

Upon closer inspection, Lumian recognized Harman's unique features—a prominent brow, a high nose bridge, and deep-set lips. He possessed the allure of a ruggedly handsome individual. Even in a seated position, his imposing height was evident, complementing his dark breeches shirt splendidly.

Castina, petite and likely under 1.55 meters tall, appeared to be around 30 years old. She possessed curly auburn hair, brown eyes, a curvaceous figure that turned heads, and full lips.

"You should be familiar with Ciel from the Savoie Mob, right?" Everett introduced Ciel to Roger and the others.

Roger flashed a cold smile.

"Indeed, Superintendent. The impression he made on me will never fade."

"Baldy" Harman's eyes brimmed with hatred and cruelty.

Everett sighed and said, "We all reside in the market district. Only by coexisting peacefully can we secure a better future and greater wealth.

"If any conflicts arise, come to me. I'll mediate and arbitrate.

"Ciel, take this cup of coffee to Roger and hand over Salle de Bal Brise's profits for the next six months. The issue between Margot and Ait ends here. If anyone troubles you regarding these matters again, feel free to inform me directly."

Lumian observed Roger, Harman, and Castina with a sense of amusement, realizing that their eyes held no mercy, only restrained coldness and malevolence.

Baron Brignais and the others remained silent, watching the scene unfold as though it were a spectacle. Franca shook her head at Lumian, signaling him not to act recklessly.

Lumian bent down and picked up the cup of coffee from the table.

Suddenly, he raised his hands and flung the contents of the cup at "Black Scorpion" Roger.

Reacting swiftly, Roger evaded the liquid, colliding with the coffee table. Harman and Castina sprang to their feet.

Simultaneously, Lumian pointed at "Black Scorpion" Roger and cursed, "F*ck you! Are you disregarding the Superintendent's words? Playing dumb, are we? If you don't desire peace, speak up. I, Ciel, shall await you at Salle de Bal Brise!

"The look in your eyes tells me vengeance is on your mind!"

How brazen… Franca had not anticipated Lumian's audacity.

Chapter 199: "Unruly"

Travis Everett concealed his emotions behind the black-framed glasses, rendering them inscrutable.

Nevertheless, he made no attempt to halt Lumian's actions. It was as though he had transformed into a mere observer.

Baron Brignais, "Blood Palm" Black, and the rest were taken aback by Lumian's reaction. They couldn't fathom his audacity to splash coffee at "Black Scorpion" Roger in front of the superintendent and sabotage the mediation.

In particular, Baron Brignais felt as though he was encountering his former subordinate, now colleague, for the very first time.

Is he far more unruly and reckless than I had anticipated?

Does he refuse to accept any grievances and is unwilling to pay any price?

Although he attempted to shift the blame onto "Black Scorpion" Roger and the others, it was evident to anyone with a modicum of sense and perception that Lumian was the instigator of the conflict, driven by a strong will of his own.

Clearly, he had no intention of reconciliation. He sought only an excuse to undermine Superintendent Everett's proposal.

Is this not a blatant slap in Superintendent Everett's face?

The superintendent wielded considerable influence in the market district. A slight embellishment in reporting to higher authorities, or rather, stating the unvarnished truth, would draw the attention of official Beyonders and dismantle all our enterprises, including the leaders of the Savoie Mob!

Incensed, "Baldy" Harman denied Lumian the opportunity to shatter the coffee cup on his boss. He lunged forward, stooped down, grasped the coffee table's edge, hoisted it, and flung it at the detestable individual.

Cups clattered to the ground, splintering into shards. Lumian deftly evaded the projectiles, swiftly drawing his black revolver from beneath his arm. He trained it on Harman amid the cacophonous crash of objects and the ensuing chaos.

"Baldy" Harman chuckled, a product of his extreme rage.

"You country hog, do you spurn Superintendent Everett's gracious offer of mediation?

"Very well then, our Poison Spur Mob shall entertain you until one of us is vanquished from this game!

"Go ahead, fire away. Your audacity and lack of respect towards Superintendent Everett know no bounds. If you possess such ability, then pull the trigger!"

Were it not for the impending election and the stringent surveillance imposed by officials, the Poison Spur Mob would have long seized an opportunity to assassinate Ciel!

In that instant, "Black Scorpion" Roger rose once more. Black flames materialized within his clenched fists, only to dissipate swiftly.

He was reluctant to unveil his Beyonder powers in the presence of Superintendent Everett.

"Short-legged Candlestick" Castina also fixed her gaze on Lumian, poised to strike if he refused to relent.

Upon hearing "Baldy" Harman's retort and provocation, Lumian chuckled.

Bang!

Lumian squeezed the trigger, unleashing a yellow bullet hurtling directly towards "Baldy" Harman's skull.

The audacity of Ciel's action caught Harman off guard. He never expected him to open fire in the presence of Superintendent Everett, defying all rules and driven solely by the desire to end his life.

His reflexes barely saved him. Harman crouched down just in time, his eyes widening in alarm.

The bullet grazed his glistening scalp and careened off, ricocheting into the adjacent washroom with a metallic clang.

In an instant, all the mob leaders sprang to their feet. "Black Scorpion" Roger and "Short-legged Candlestick" Castina fixated on Lumian, preparing to retaliate.

Undeterred, Lumian remained resolute. He lowered his gun and aimed it once more at "Baldy" Harman, his gaze devoid of any emotion.

"Enough!"

At that very moment, Superintendent Everett, who had been calmly seated, spoke up.

The indescribable authority emanating from him, combined with his esteemed position, compelled Lumian to instinctively halt his finger from pulling the trigger.

Seizing the opportunity, "Baldy" Harman shifted his position and rose to his feet.

Though the others maintained their combative stance, the palpable tension that had lingered dissipated.

Lamenting his missed chance, Lumian reluctantly holstered his revolver and turned to face Everett.

"Superintendent, I am willing to comply with your request, but they don't seem inclined to do so."

Everett's eyes flickered behind his black-framed spectacles. Standing up, he surveyed the room.

"We will address your conflict after the election.

"For the next three days, I expect all of you to conduct yourselves properly. Fail to do so, and you shall make an enemy out of me. Trust me, that's a predicament you won't be able to handle."

Although Everett's voice carried depth, his tone remained calm, devoid of anger or arrogance. Instead, a hint of sincerity permeated his words.

Yet, those who had resided in the market district for more than two years recalled a term: the "Valiant Mob."

Two years prior, the Valiant Mob held a similar status to the Savoie Mob in the market district. However, due to their repeated defiance and disrespect towards Superintendent Everett, they were ruthlessly eradicated in a joint operation conducted by the authorities. The subsequent rise of the Poison Spur Mob was partly due to the power vacuum left behind in the district's underworld.

Now, only the Valiant café stood as a testament to the existence of such a mob.

The leaders of the Savoie Mob, the Poison Spur Mob, and the other two medium-sized gangs fell into silence for a few seconds before responding to Superintendent Everett's words. They expressed their commitment to restrain their subordinates and ensure that the election proceeded without disruption.

Superintendent Everett's gaze swept across their faces. Without uttering another word, he strode towards the exit of the private room.

As he disappeared beyond the door, "Black Scorpion" Roger, "Baldy" Harman, and "Short-legged Candlestick" Castina cast Lumian cold glances before departing from the café.

The remaining gang leaders didn't linger, leaving only the Savoie Mob in the confines of the private room.

Baron Brignais took a leisurely puff from his pipe and addressed Lumian, "You acted too impulsively back there."

Lumian offered a faint smile in response and replied, "I have been awaiting an opportunity like that. Unfortunately, I couldn't seize it to incite the conflict."

Observing the puzzled expressions on the faces of "Giant" Simon, "Blood Palm" Black, and the others, Lumian calmly elaborated, "We have already made two attempts, and the Poison Spur Mob chose to endure. Baron, as you have rightly pointed out, they harbor a significant problem, and they await their chance. I believe that opportunity will present itself soon.

"If we fail to incapacitate the Poison Spur Mob before then, we shall face their unhinged retaliation. And when that moment arrives, none of you will be able to escape.

"Just a moment ago, there were only three members of the Poison Spur Mob present, while we numbered five. Red Boots, your strength is comparable to that of Black Scorpion. With my assistance, you can surely overpower him. Baron, Simon, Black, is it conceivable that you cannot handle Baldy and Short-legged Candlestick? One of you might even be able to impede Superintendent Everett.

"As long as the Poison Spur Mob dares to strike back, we shall eliminate them all right here!"

"Rat" Christo had received instructions from Superintendent Everett the previous night that he was not to be invited today.

Baron Brignais, "Blood Palm" Black, and their comrades found Ciel's words reasonable, yet a deep-seated fear for this individual arose within their hearts.

He wasn't bluffing. He genuinely desired to eliminate "Baldy" Harman and the others!

He was too crazy and extreme!

He possessed the audacity to commit any act without hesitation!

"But this is tantamount to slapping Superintendent Everett in the face. The repercussions will be exceedingly troublesome." "Blood Palm" Black shook his head.

Franca shared the same concern. She wished to caution Lumian that such a course of action would render him unwelcome in the market district. He might even end up with another wanted poster.

However, recognizing that the other leaders were present and unable to reveal her true friendship with Lumian, Franca sealed her lips.

A quizzical smile played on Lumian's lips as he inquired, "Wasn't Superintendent Everett killed by the Poison Spur Mob?"

Lunatic… This notion raced through everyone's minds.

Baron Brignais, gently stroking his mahogany-colored pipe, chimed in, "It's nearly impossible to conceal that from official Beyonders. It's merely an excuse."

"In that case, let it go. Blame everything on a lunatic like me. At worst, I'll depart from the market district. I trust the Boss will arrange another task for me once this storm blows over," Lumian calmly remarked, a serene smile gracing his face.

This was indeed a fragment of his genuine thoughts.

Mr. K's mission revolved around earning Gardner Martin's trust, not running Salle de Bal Brise or establishing a foothold in the market district!

If his provocation had genuinely enraged "Black Scorpion" Roger and his accomplices, Lumian believed that Franca would surely come to his aid. With one of the Savoie Mob's leaders on his side, the others wouldn't hesitate to act. When the time came, united in strength, they stood a high chance of eliminating the remaining three leaders of the Poison Spur Mob.

Once he unraveled the Poison Spur Mob's scheme, Gardner Martin would undoubtedly appreciate Lumian's daring and unorthodox approach in eradicating hidden threats. Even if he lost Salle de Bal Brise and was compelled to "escape" once more, he would merely find sanctuary elsewhere in Trier and continue serving Gardner Martin until he gained his complete approval.

Furthermore, it was advantageous for Lumian. If the Poison Spur Mob finalized their preparations, he would be their primary target for revenge. Failing to address the issue beforehand would only heighten the danger he faced. In the future, even if Madame Moon birthed another group, Lumian wouldn't fret. Today, Louis Lund would likely be present in the market district. By temporarily suppressing the deaths of "Black Scorpion" Roger and his cronies, creating a façade of tranquility, Lumian could patiently await his target at 126 Avenue du Marché.

These individuals weren't parliamentary candidates whose demise would incite an uproar.

After a few moments of silence, Baron Brignais approached the door and issued a reminder, "Superintendent Everett has probably marked you. There will be considerable trouble after the election."

Lumian responded with a smile, "Perhaps he will mysteriously vanish one day."

Having said that, Lumian calmly endured the mildly apprehensive gazes of "Giant" Simon and his comrades.

You see, having laid the groundwork, anything I utter now will convince them all.

…

At 3:15 p.m., Lumian arrived at Quartier du Jardin Botanique in a public carriage. Once again, he beheld Mason Café, housed in a beige four-story building adorned with lush green plants entwined on its outer walls.

Passing through a sheltered walkway upheld by pillars, he entered the interior, enveloped by dark-green walls and expansive windows. Settling into the familiar Booth D, he removed his wide-brimmed round hat.

"A cup of Intis coffee," he instructed the waitress and patiently waited.

Chapter 200: Spectator

The titular coffee was rich and aromatic, a perfect match for the creamy cupcake. Though Lumian's focus was elsewhere, he still appreciated their beauty.

The moment the clock struck 3:30 p.m., a familiar soft female voice reached him from the booth behind.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Lumian Lee."

"Good afternoon, Madame Susie," Lumian responded, concealing his surprise.

While Lumian didn't intentionally observe the customers entering Mason Café, his Hunter instincts allowed him to maintain awareness of his surroundings.

When he had arrived at the café at 3:18 p.m., Cabin D had been deserted. No one entered from 3:15 to 3:30 p.m.

And yet, here was Madame Susie, appearing silently behind him, in the very spot behind Booth D!

How mystical and bizarre was this!

Susie's voice gently inquired once more, "How did you feel after your last treatment?"

Lumian didn't hold back and responded simply, "I felt much better than before. At least I could release my emotions."

"That's a good thing. Suppressing your feelings and bottling up your emotions will only exacerbate your mental problems and lead you down a self-destructive path until your innate will to live is completely overwhelmed," Susie commented in a calm and soothing tone, confirming Lumian's transformation.

A hint of a smile laced her words.

"Let's have a conversation first. We'll discuss all the things you've encountered in the past two weeks. Feel free to choose what you believe you can and are willing to share."

Lumian knew he needed to calm himself and undergo further psychiatric treatment as a foundation for unlocking more memories later. Hence, he offered no resistance. He chuckled wryly and said, "There's nothing I can't tell you. I've even shared that dream with you. Everything else can only be classified as minor secrets."

He paused for a moment and began with Charlie.

"There's an unlucky and dim-witted fellow at the motel I'm staying at…"

Lumian casually recounted the events of the past two weeks.

Gradually, his mind relaxed, as if he had returned to a time before Cordu's destruction.

Aurore, who rarely ventured outside, would hear about everything that transpired in Cordu from him. He delighted in sharing it with his sister, even boasting about the successful pranks he had orchestrated.

As time trickled away, Lumian's rigid posture softened as he sank into the plush sofa.

He refrained from delving into further details. Time was limited, and he couldn't afford to waste it. He didn't touch upon the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society, Franca's true gender, or his suspicions regarding her motives for joining the Savoie Mob. He merely mentioned his encounter with a pen pal of Aurore's—a Sequence 7 Witch of the Demoness pathway, who happened to be in the same mob.

Likewise, he provided only a brief mention of performing a ritual and receiving an additional boon, without going into the specifics.

Susie listened intently throughout their conversation. Every so often, she would prompt him with a gentle "And then?", allowing Lumian to seamlessly continue.

After recounting his experiences from the past two weeks, Lumian spoke in a self-deprecating tone, "I can't help but wonder if it's my own fault for stumbling upon so many Beyonder events in such a short span of time. Sometimes, I question why every human and dog in Trier seems to possess Beyonder powers."

For once, Susie didn't respond immediately. After a few moments, she smiled and replied, "I can perceive that your mental state has indeed improved compared to before."

"How can you tell?" Lumian didn't mention the details of his tearful carriage ride upon seeing Aurore's obituary. He didn't believe that describing all of that was an accurate reflection of his mental state.

Susie spoke in a gentle tone, "I can sense that you're reconstructing your social connections and beginning to form friendships."

"Friends?" Lumian asked, slightly amused. "Charlie, Jenna, Franca? Can they truly be called friends?"

They are mere acquaintances!

Susie responded with a smile, "Friendship comes in various forms. Not all require deep connections. You simply need to ask yourself—when they face challenges that lie within your capabilities to solve, would you be willing to offer assistance? That will reveal if they can be considered your friends."

"It depends on the specific circumstances and the price I must pay. I'm not the type to go out of my way to help just anyone," Lumian muttered.

Susie didn't press further and explained, "For someone prone to self-destruction, a sign of their emergence from the quagmire is their willingness to forge new social bonds.

"Emperor Roselle—assuming he truly said it—once remarked that humans are the sum of their social relationships. When you no longer resist forming new connections, it signifies that you're no longer opposed to your own future.

"Of course, this is just one aspect. It's not everything."

Lumian fell silent for a moment before speaking again, "Madame Susie, there's something I'd like to ask you. I mentioned a series of coincidences that have befallen me. Are they truly as Madam Magician suggested? Could they be partially influenced by Mid-Sequence Beyonders of the Spectator pathway?"

In contrast to the previous session, Susie appeared more at ease. She chuckled and remarked, "Are you attempting to divert the topic? Are you still resistant to such matters?

"Actually, one can discern it from certain details. You took the initiative to request the 'Red Boots' lady to enlighten you on mystical matters whenever she was available, but you never followed through. The sole visit you made was on the pretext of her repaying a favor. It suggests that you remain unwilling to establish a closer bond with her.

"That's natural. How can a patient recover after just one treatment? You need not burden yourself…"

Susie tirelessly voiced her observations, gently pinpointing some of Lumian's current psychological issues.

"If it were the last time, I wouldn't have been so forthright. It would have only bred resistance, causing you to close yourself off further. However, now you exhibit certain inclinations toward forging new social connections. This will allow you to gain clearer insights into your true self and facilitate your progress."

Having his underlying thoughts laid bare by Susie, Lumian's initial reaction was wariness, vigilance, and denial. Yet, Susie's composed demeanor, non-aggressive analysis, and accurate understanding of the situation gradually eased his tension, enabling him to confront his deep-seated problems.

His body and mind gradually settled.

Susie refrained from prying further and addressed Lumian's inquiry.

"Madam Magician's explanation is not entirely incorrect, but it lacks specificity.

"For a Mid-Sequence Beyonder of the Spectator pathway to engineer a coincidence, they must employ face-to-face psychological cues or hypnosis. In other words, they need to be present around you, Baron Brignais, and his associates.

"The reason you didn't notice it and Baron Brignais remained oblivious is that Mid-Sequence Beyonders of the Spectator pathway possess an additional Beyonder power—Psychological Invisibility."

"Psychological Invisibility? How does it differ from regular invisibility?" Lumian inquired, perplexed.

Susie calmly elucidated, "Psychological Invisibility is not true invisibility. It merely prevents you from perceiving me, even when I am standing right before you and numerous others have already witnessed my presence."

"Sounds very magical…" Lumian sighed with a sense of wonder. For some inexplicable reason, he felt as though Psychiatrists were all around him, yet he remained oblivious to their presence.

"This won't change even if you employ Spirit Vision. Your intuition for danger will not react until I am prepared to strike," Susie continued. "By comparison, a Shadow Ascetic's concealment within shadows occasionally evokes the sensation of being watched by the darkness."

Lumian pressed, "Which pathway does Shadow Ascetic belong to?"

"Secrets Suppliant," Susie replied simply.

Secrets Suppliant pathway? Above Listener and below Shepherd, there's a Sequence known as Shadow Ascetic? This belongs to Mr. K's pathway… Occasionally, I sense someone observing me in the surrounding darkness because of him or his subordinates. Combining this with Aurore's grimoires and Madam Magician's clues, Lumian felt a wave of enlightenment.

For the Secrets Suppliant pathway, Aurore had only noted down Sequence 9 Secrets Suppliant and Sequence 8 Listener.

Madam Magician appears to write a substantial amount, but it's actually just an outline without much detail. It's not as comprehensive as Madame Susie's explanation… Lumian mumbled curiously and asked, "Aren't you concerned that revealing your pathway's Beyonder powers to me might harm you?"

Susie brushed off the question and continued, "If you're a High-Sequence Beyonder of the Spectator pathway, there's no need for such elaborate measures. Even if they're far away from you, they can subtly influence you, causing you to unknowingly follow their arrangements and create various coincidences.

"Though I too am a Spectator, I must still caution you, 'Beware of the Spectator!'"

High-Sequence Beyonder… Lumian was alarmed.

"So, you 'arranged' for the paperboy to deliver an outdated newspaper to me?"

Madame Susie is a High-Sequence Beyonder, a true demigod?

"It wasn't me," Susie said, feeling a tad embarrassed. "It was my companion."

Companion? Lumian recalled Madam Magician's initial suggestion and guessed, "The other Psychiatrist? He was here last time too?"

"Yes," Susie candidly admitted. "Your condition is more serious, and I wasn't too confident, so I invited her along to assist me. Yes, as a precautionary measure.

"In fact, she's here today as well. She's sitting across from you."

Across from me? Lumian glanced in surprise at the empty seat across the coffee table. Not only was there no one present, but there wasn't even an indentation from someone sitting there!

In the next instant, he heard a gentle female voice with a hint of a smile and a slightly brisk tone.

"Hello."

Chapter 201: Recalling

Lumian was taken aback, his eyes widening in surprise as he glanced at the vacant seat across from him. With a polite tone, he mustered, "Hello."

In that instant, a memory from his sister Aurore flashed through his mind. She had once mentioned an intriguing phrase: Expert consultation!

Although I'm not entirely surrounded by invisible Psychiatrists, there are two of them, and I can't detect them either… Lumian muttered inwardly.

The woman sitting opposite him fell silent, while Susie's voice assumed a more relaxed and lighthearted tone.

"It seems the newspaper has left a lasting impression on you. Does that mean it had a positive impact?"

"Yes," Lumian replied candidly.

He had reached a point where he could confront the emotional turmoil within him instead of burying it deep down. Otherwise, he would have tried to avoid any encounters with "Red Boots" Franca, as she invariably brought up Aurore.

Naturally, this evoked intense waves of emotion.

Susie skillfully redirected the conversation back to its original path.

"If you wish to further investigate any unusual coincidences that have occurred during this period and identify their underlying sources, I can assist you."

"I won't delve directly into your memories, but I can awaken them all and present them chronologically before your eyes. Of course, this excludes those hidden deep within the recesses of your subconscious. They pose too great a risk," Susie explained.

"Are you willing to give it a try?"

Lumian didn't hesitate for a moment.

"Yes."

Whenever he noticed any coincidences around him, he would occasionally recall his recent experiences and meticulously scrutinize the corresponding details. Now, he was merely shifting to a more effective approach.

"Lean back fully against the sofa, relax, and close your eyes…" Susie's gentle voice reached Lumian's ears unhurriedly.

Just as he adjusted his sitting position and prepared to calm his mind and close his eyes, a sudden "volcanic eruption" erupted within his thoughts.

This unexpected "attack" caught him off guard, leaving his subconscious unable to effectively shield him.

Magma and smoke burst forth like luminous specks, each containing a distinct scene.

The multitude of glowing dots arranged themselves chronologically, giving Lumian the sensation of watching a play with himself as the central character.

It unfolded in a blur, yet every detail remained vivid and complete.

As the temperature soared, Lumian's mind raced, threatening to release wisps of white smoke.

He witnessed each scene and recalled every detail, skillfully connecting them and searching for any abnormalities.

Abruptly, a furrow formed on his brow, and he murmured in anguish, "I've realized—I've realized that the memory from before I returned to Auberge du Coq Doré after my prayer for a boon has vanished!"

Lumian's eyes widened, and his facial features contorted in visible distress.

The memory that should have been present was now a void!

In that moment, a gentle female voice resonated within his mind.

"Has it truly vanished, or have you forgotten or overlooked it?" spoke the lady seated across from him, her tone devoid of its previous cheerfulness.

Like a lightning bolt, it illuminated Lumian's mind, casting light into the darkest recesses beyond his subconscious.

Lumian's expression grew increasingly pained, and he couldn't help but bow his head as he struggled to say, "I-I see it, I see it…

"I was in conversation with the angel sealed within me!

"H—His name is Termiboros!"

At last, Lumian recollected something that had slipped his memory.

The corruption contained within his left chest was, in essence, an angel who believed in Inevitability—Termiboros!

Initially, he had intended to seek guidance from Madam Magician on how to harness the angel's powers and avert any potential negative consequences, but he had completely forgotten about it.

"Is this the corruption sealed within your body?" Susie's reaction appeared unsurprised, her voice maintaining a calm demeanor.

Lumian instinctively exhaled, his fingertips reaching his forehead, already dampened with cold sweat.

He truthfully replied, "Yes, He attempted to entice me into aiding His escape from the seal, but I refused. And then, I simply forgot.

"This is truly… truly bizarre…"

Termiboros is undeniably sealed within my body and can't break free, yet I was unwittingly affected by Him!

"That's to be expected. One mustn't underestimate any angel, even when sealed," Susie offered an explanation to allay Lumian's immediate apprehension.

The unknown was always the most terrifying.

She continued, "In ancient times, angels were also referred to as subsidiary gods. This implies that They possess the essence of a deity. Even when sealed, They can exert a certain influence upon the external world through various means.

"Did you, perhaps, believe that with the seal of the great entity, the corruption upon your chest was more akin to a boon? As long as you follow the correct procedures at the appropriate stages, you shouldn't encounter any issues apart from enduring greater pain and assuming a certain risk of losing control."

Lumian fell into silence, recognizing that he had entertained similar thoughts of late.

"You must remember that in such matters, the potency of a curse is no less than that of a boon, if not stronger," warned Susie. "I don't know how Termiboros has influenced you, but given His belief in Inevitability, I suspect His primary aim is to induce a deviation in your destiny.

"However, you needn't worry excessively. He is, after all, sealed, and His capacity for influence is considerably limited. Moving forward, as long as you continuously assess your condition and consistently seek guidance on your actions, you can largely circumvent this predicament."

"Alright." Lumian retrieved a pen and paper and hastily jotted down a memo.

The note pertained to consulting Madam Magician regarding Termiboros.

He feared succumbing to the angel's influence from the realm of Inevitability and forgetting these pertinent matters once the treatment concluded.

Lumian carefully stored away his pen and paper, releasing a slow exhale.

"Now that I've recollected the events involving Termiboros, I feel considerably more at ease. It appears that my spirituality had detected something."

"I can perceive an improvement in your mental state," affirmed Susie, echoing Lumian's sentiments.

Taking advantage of the moment, Lumian posed a question, "Ladies, do you believe that Susanna Mattise has been fully eradicated by the official Beyonders? Or should I continue searching for clues at Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons to prevent her from launching another attack?"

Taking note of the time, Monsieur Ive, the landlord of Auberge du Coq Doré, should soon find himself in dire straits.

Susie offered a gentle smile as she replied, "The Spectator path isn't well-versed in divination."

Seated across from Lumian, the "invisible" lady smiled and added, "Madam Magician is a divination expert. Did she not provide you with an answer? Or perhaps her hidden message eluded your understanding?"

She didn't say anything… Lumian pondered for a moment, recalling Madam Magician's response regarding Susanna Mattise.

Suddenly, he froze.

Madam Magician had continuously guided him on how to resolve the issue with Susanna Mattise, subtly hinting that he should seek assistance from Mr. K.

From a different perspective, she had never once considered the possibility that Susanna Mattise had been entirely eliminated!

In her view, this predicament would undoubtedly resurface!

Isn't it too ambiguous? Or does she assume it's self-evident and fails to emphasize it? Lumian mumbled to himself, nodding in realization.

"I know the answer."

As Lumian spoke, he made a connection based on the manner and demeanor exhibited by the Psychiatrist seated opposite him when addressing Madam Magician.

Could they also be members of the secretive organization that employs tarot cards as their code names?

To which cards do they correspond?

After making some adjustments, Lumian sought clarification about his mental state.

"The mere thought of meeting Louis Lund fills me with anxiety, excitement, and adrenaline. I can't seem to control my emotions. Is this a severe psychological issue?"

Susie responded in a soothing voice, "That's actually quite normal. People often exhibit similar behavior when it comes to matters they deeply care about. You're just a bit more intense than usual.

"If you didn't react this way, I would have been concerned that you were facing a more severe psychological problem and had repressed all your emotions.

"What you need to focus on now is not being fearful or overwhelmed, but rather learning to manage those emotions."

Normal… Lumian felt reassured by Susie's explanation, and his concern regarding the matter at hand subsided, allowing his mental state to stabilize.

He pondered and asked, "Manage them?"

How do I do that?

Susie replied, "The simplest method is to always remind yourself not to overreact. Whenever you feel a similar surge of emotions, take deep breaths and find your calm.

"It may sound easy, but in reality, it's quite challenging. When emotions flare up, it's difficult for humans to maintain rationality. They rarely think about controlling themselves. By the time they regain their composure, they often find that they've already made a mistake.

"I can set up a trigger for you. Once your emotional reactions exceed a certain threshold, it will remind you of my words and assist you in regaining your rationality, allowing you to attempt to regain control.

"This is a temporary solution. In the long run, it will depend on your own efforts. However, once you become accustomed to self-reflection during times of heightened emotion, the issue will become more manageable.

"Are you willing to give it a try?"

"Alright." Lumian had no qualms about accepting external assistance.

At some point, Susie's voice took on an otherworldly and elusive quality. It felt as though she had said a great deal, yet Lumian couldn't recall a single word. The only thing he could remember was her concluding statement: "The trigger has been set. If all goes well, it will last for two weeks, perfectly timed for your next session. At that point, we can decide whether to make any adjustments."

Lumian briefly acknowledged her words and assessed his mental state.

After more than ten seconds, filled with both fear and anticipation, he inquired, "Is it possible for me to attempt to awaken more buried memories from my subconscious?"

Chapter 202: Analysis

"Of course," came Susie's gentle voice, reaching Lumian's ears.

Almost simultaneously, Lumian felt a weight pulling at his consciousness, dragging him down swiftly into deeper depths.

Within a matter of seconds, his eyelids grew heavy, and he could not resist the urge to close them. His thoughts became muddled and indistinct.

In his dazed state, Lumian appeared to transform into a spectral figure, floating through the familiar village of Cordu in the cloak of night.

After an unknown duration, he caught sight of the onion-shaped cathedral, though his perception remained hazy. A concentrated beam of light emerged near its main entrance, while the rest of the darkness loomed like an ominous shadow.

Lumian meandered aimlessly toward the adjacent cemetery.

In the darkness, tombstones stood in silent formation, and trees assumed an eerie presence.

A group of men were hauling a lifeless body toward a deep pit, preparing to cast it down.

Beneath the faint glow of the crimson moon, one of the men lifted his head and surveyed his surroundings.

His face, with black hair and piercing blue eyes, bore deep creases, as if shrouded in shadows.

Pons Bénet!

Lumian snapped out of his reverie.

The distance between them diminished instantly. Lumian lowered his gaze and beheld the corpse.

The face of the lifeless body appeared swollen from water, drained of color. The brown hair clung damply to the head, while the brown eyes remained wide open, reflecting agony, indignation, and resentment.

Reimund!

A surge of intense hatred filled Lumian's heart as he hurled accusations at Pons Bénet and his companions, giving vent to his emotions.

It felt as if he had unleashed a torrent of curses, as if he had pounced on Pons Bénet, the villain. It felt as if he was digging a profound pit with his bare hands.

Dirt pierced his nails, uncovering another corpse at the pit's bottom.

The girl's eyes, a shade of lake-blue, bulged fiercely. Her face bore a bluish-purple hue, her mouth agape, and her neck showed evident signs of strangulation. She wore an expression of excruciating pain.

Ava!

Lumian shot up from his seat, propelled by intense emotions, and his eyes flew open.

Huff. Puff. Lumian stared at the vacant sofa opposite him in the booth, gasping heavily.

The intense anger and hatred from his dream lingered, causing him to tremble uncontrollably.

After a few moments, Susie's gentle voice broke the silence. "What did you see?" she asked.

Lumian's face twisted slightly as he replied, his voice filled with pain.

"I saw them. I saw Reimund and Ava's bodies. One of them drowned, and the other appeared to have been strangled to death… Pons Bénet and his gang were burying their bodies in the cemetery next to the cathedral… I shouted at them, wanted to do something… and then I woke up."

Susie listened attentively and spoke calmly.

"This time, I didn't allow you to have a lucid dream. Instead, I let you experience certain subconscious scenes in the form of a dream.

"While it may not present the complete truth, it combines fragments of what actually happened. There might be overlaps in time or space, but the essential details remain intact. It provides us with a basis for interpretation."

Lumian asked, his voice filled with anguish, "So you're saying that I really witnessed Pons Bénet and the others burying Reimund and Ava's bodies in the cemetery?"

"I'm not entirely certain," Susie analyzed. "What we can conclude so far is that Reimund was drowned by Pons Bénet and his companions, and Ava was strangled to death by them. Their bodies were eventually buried somewhere in the cemetery, and you may or may not have been present at the scene. It's possible that you discovered it later and attempted to unearth their corpses as well as seek revenge on Pons Bénet and his gang, but the outcome wasn't favorable. Otherwise, your recent dream would have reflected some of that content."

Lumian fell silent for a moment before speaking again.

"So that's what happened… I was wondering why Pons Bénet and the others didn't kill me and toss me into the deep pit if I was truly there…"

Part of his anguish stemmed from a fear deep within him—a suspicion that he might have been in league with Pons and his gang.

"We cannot dismiss the possibility that you were present at the scene and witnessed the entire incident, but there are numerous explanations. It may not be as you imagine it to be. They spared your life because they needed a vessel with exceptional physical attributes." Susie understood Lumian's doubts and resistance. Her words aimed to soothe him gently. "What I can affirm is that the anger, hatred, and desire for revenge you experienced in your dream were genuine. Those were your true emotions at that time. In other words, regardless of the circumstances, the deaths of Ava and Reimund have nothing to do with you."

Upon hearing Susie's words, Lumian felt as if a weight had been lifted off his shoulders. He slumped against the sofa, his strength draining away.

His mind was now much calmer than before, and he no longer needed to maintain a facade of bravery.

In the blink of an eye, an invisible warm breeze swept through his body and mind, soothing him completely.

Susie's encouraging voice filled the air, her smile evident.

"Compared to our last session, you're in a much better state now. You showed courage sooner than I anticipated, facing the doubts and questions you were reluctant to confront.

"In the realm of psychology, this is a crucial indication that you're breaking free from the puzzle. Only by directly confronting the problem can you find a resolution.

"Alright, that concludes today's treatment. You're ready to face Louis Lund, Madame Pualis, and the others."

In that very instant, the composed Lumian pondered the words of Madam Magician, recalling her earnest advice.

"There is yet another matter.

"I may be compelled to believe in another entity at some point, but ordinarily, I am forbidden to recollect His honorific name. Do you—either of you—possess a means to prevent such recollection?"

The cheerful female voice responded, her words carrying a gentle smile, "That is quite simple. I shall provide you with a psychological trigger. When your spiritual intuition feels devoid of protection, your subconscious will replace the honorific name with 'That Being' to safeguard against its impact.

"While under protection, you may freely remember and speak His name in its entirety…"

Lumian's mind turned adrift briefly upon hearing the other person declare, "The psychological cue has been planted."

"Thank you, Madam. And thank you too, Madam Susie," Lumian nodded toward the empty space across from the booth.

"You're welcome. See you in two weeks," the gentle female voice replied, and Susie added, "See you in two weeks."

Lumian wasn't sure when they departed, but the area around Booth D grew still. Only the chirping of birds in the botanical garden, the clopping of hooves on the road, and the distant hum of machinery resonated.

He lifted his cup, finishing the remainder of his Intis coffee in one gulp, adjusting his mental state.

Seizing the moment, he replayed the entire treatment process in his mind, and an inexplicable feeling settled upon him. Madam Susie's last statement seemed somewhat peculiar.

She said I can face Louis Lund, Madame Pualis, and the others now… Does that imply that the answers I might receive from Madame Pualis could shatter me?

It's understandable, but what if my condition doesn't improve as expected? Will she advise me to give up the opportunity to meet Louis Lund? But what if Louis Lund emerged yesterday? Wouldn't it be a major problem if I hadn't had my follow up?

If that's the case, shouldn't Madam Susie have warned me against approaching Madame Pualis or confronting the padre before the follow-up session?

How can she be so certain that I won't encounter Louis Lund in the past two weeks, or that he'll elude capture if I do?

Spectator…

Lumian's senses snapped back to full alertness. He exited Booth D and hailed a public carriage back to Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman.

Lumian didn't rush to send a messenger to Auberge du Coq Doré or the safe house on Rue des Blouses Blanches to inform Madam Magician about Termiboros. Instead, he made his way straight to 126 Avenue du Marché to check if his subordinates, Anthony Reid, or Franca had discovered anything.

With a dark brown wide-brimmed hat atop his head, Lumian strolled to a spot diagonally across from "Black Scorpion" Roger's house, roughly 20 meters away. He settled into a gap between two buildings, leaning against the wall.

Several vagrants occupied the area.

One of them shuffled closer to Lumian and whispered, "Nothing yet."

Lumian nodded and directed his gaze toward the three-story building with a garden, keeping an eye on passersby.

As time ticked by, the sun descended on the horizon, casting a dwindling light. The lamplighters commenced their task, igniting the gas lamps one by one.

At that moment, Lumian spotted a man clad in a grayish-blue worker's uniform.

Underneath his cap, light-yellow hair peeked out, and his slightly chubby face exuded an air of simplicity and honesty.

Anthony Reid? Why is he out and about? Lumian recognized the information broker, perplexed by his actions.

Resembling a worker finishing his shift, Anthony Reid hurried toward the end of Avenue du Marché.

Lumian's pupils contracted when he realized that Anthony Reid wasn't merely passing by; he was approaching someone.

The man sported a blue gown adorned with yellow buttons, a waxed hat, a white tie, and a red vest. He sat inside a rental carriage bearing a yellow plate, clearly a driver affiliated with the Empire Carriage Company. Carriage drivers from different companies donned distinct uniforms.

The carriage driver tipped his hat, keeping his head lowered as if waiting for a customer.

Lumian's heart stirred. He rose to his feet, taking a few steps in that direction.

As Anthony Reid brushed past the carriage, he stumbled and collided with the horse pulling it.

Startled, the horse attempted to raise its forelegs, but the carriage driver swiftly tugged on the reins, firmly restraining the animal.

Yet, as the carriage driver lifted his head, his face was revealed.

In his forties, with black hair, Lumian couldn't discern his features clearly due to the distance. Nonetheless, a faint sense of familiarity washed over him.

Lumian narrowed his eyes as he profusely apologized to Anthony Reid and left the carriage behind. A valet emerged from 126 Avenue du Marché.

Approaching the carriage, the valet addressed the driver,

"My master wishes to hire your carriage. Proceed inside and assist with moving some items."

The carriage driver nodded, replying in a deep voice, "Okay."

Following the valet, he entered the residence belonging to "Black Scorpion" Roger.

Lumian, who had witnessed the entire sequence of events without catching their conversation, smirked.

He was now utterly certain that the carriage driver was Louis Lund!

At long last, you've arrived!

Chapter 203: Cooperation

Lumian retreated to the cluster of tramps, patiently awaiting the emergence of Louis Lund.

Soon enough, Anthony Reid, the information broker, returned after changing his attire, seemingly determined to fulfill his promise and seize an opportunity to tail Louis Lund.

At that moment, he sported a yellowish-white shirt and a brown formal coat. There was no bow tie around his neck, but he wore a round hat, resembling a clerk fresh out of the office.

Had Lumian not possessed a certain knowledge of Reid's build, temperament, and gait, he might have failed to recognize him.

After considering his options, Lumian stepped out from the crevice between the two buildings and confronted Anthony Reid.

Having discarded his disguise upon departing the Valiant Café, he now donned a simple ensemble consisting of black-framed glasses and a broad brown hat. Those familiar with him could effortlessly discern his identity.

Noticing the shift in Anthony Reid's gaze, Lumian whispered as they brushed past each other, "I'm back. Await me at the rear entrance."

Although the Prophecy Spell indicated a reunion with Louis Lund on Avenue du Marché, Lumian aimed to avert any potential mishaps.

On one hand, the Prophetic Concoction derived from his body's response, rendering it somewhat unreliable. There might be omissions within the prophecy. On the other hand, the manifestation of a prophecy could assume various forms, deviating entirely from his anticipated sequence of events.

Anthony Reid withdrew his gaze and nodded, signifying his comprehension.

He advanced onward, passing by the residence of "Black Scorpion" Roger, and disappearing into the distance down an alley.

Lumian did not immediately turn around. Beneath the glow of street lamps, he pressed onward.

Just as he reached a dimly lit section, a figure emerged from the shadows beneath a dilapidated, iron-black street lamp in the alley ahead.

The towering individual, garbed in a form-fitting black robe with a hood that nearly concealed the face, beckoned to Lumian.

Franca? Lumian instantly formed a conjecture and hastened towards her.

The conspicuously dressed character was indeed "Red Boots" Franca.

This time, she had forgone her trademark red boots in favor of black ones.

"Aren't you concerned about being discovered?" Lumian couldn't help but inquire.

While Trieriens had a high tolerance for eccentric attire and even actively pursued fashion trends, loitering in secrecy while dressed in such a manner would undoubtedly draw the attention of "Black Scorpion" Roger and the Poison Spur Mob—even the passing laborers!

Franca grinned nonchalantly and retorted, "You don't understand. This is all part of the procedure! Didn't your sister teach you?"

Indeed, she did teach me, but she never mentioned employing it in such a place or situation… Before Lumian could utter another word, Franca waved her hand dismissively.

"Fret not, I won't be discovered."

As her words faded, she took a step backward, merging seamlessly with the shadow and vanishing from Lumian's sight.

With such abilities, one could wear anything they pleased… Lumian once again found himself envious of the Assassin path.

If it weren't for the inevitable gender change at Sequence 7, he would have considered this path more to his liking than that of the Hunter.

Emerging from the shadows once more, Franca pointed toward 126 Avenue du Marché in the distance.

"That carriage driver should be the Louis Lund you seek. Shall I assist you in tailing him later?

"I understand that Hunters possess a hound's nose and eagle's eyes, making them adept at tracking, but you struggle with concealment. Staying too far away risks losing the target, while staying too close risks discovery. It's safer if I handle it.

"Don't forget, Louis Lund is also a Beyonder, and he worships an evil god. It's possible he possesses unique abilities."

This time, Lumian didn't resist or reject the offer. He nodded and replied, "Very well."

At present, he couldn't mark Louis Lund with a distinct scent, and darkness was swiftly descending. The crowded streets, filled with pedestrians and carriages, would muddle any traces. Tailing from 20 to 30 meters away could easily result in losing the target with the slightest misstep.

Franca's thin, red lips curled into a visible smile, free from the confines of the hooded shadow, as she spoke,"Your afternoon therapy session was quite effective. A man should be more open-minded, untroubled by trivial matters."

She lightly tapped her chest as she spoke.

From her possession emerged a glass bottle.

The surface of the small bottle had been intricately etched into small squares, reflecting the nearby streetlamp's light and shimmering with psychedelic colors.

"When I lived as a man, I found these perfume bottles to be beautifully crafted, but I felt too self-conscious to buy them or carry them with me. Now, I have no such concerns. Sometimes, changing your gender can open the door to a new world," Franca said with emotion.

The door to a new world refers to sleeping with men? If it weren't for the crucial task of tracking Louis Lund, Lumian would definitely have provided such a rejoinder.

Opening the lid, she brought the pressed glass bottle to Lumian's nose.

"Remember its scent."

The perfume was refreshing and natural, akin to strolling through a forest on a summer's day.

"Got it." Lumian nodded slightly.

Franca proceeded to spray it on herself.

"It has distinct top, middle, and base notes, but the differences are subtle. There's no need to discern them specifically. You'll know it by the scent alone.

"I'll position myself three to four meters away from Louis Lund. Without a hound's nose, he won't detect this fragrance that clearly doesn't belong to the market district."

Lumian added thoughtfully, "So, I am to track your perfume from a distance of ten to twenty meters?"

It was indeed a clever strategy.

"That's correct." Franca produced a handful of fluorescent powder, sprinkling it over herself, and recited a deep incantation.

It appeared to be a fusion of the Hermes words for "hidden" and "body."

Almost instantaneously, Lumian witnessed Franca's form gradually fading away, as if an eraser were obliterating a pencil drawing.

Apart from the lingering fragrance in his nostrils, he had completely lost track of the Witch.

Once again, Lumian marveled at the Demoness path's performance as a Low- to Mid-Sequence Beyonder.

In the blink of an eye, Lumian felt the fragrance's source receding, drawing closer to the three-story building with a garden at 126 Avenue du Marché.

Lumian made his way in that direction, slipping into the shadows and pressing himself against the wall.

After nearly half an hour, a man named Louis Lund emerged, dressed in a red vest, blue uniform, white tie, and waxed hat. Accompanying him was "Black Scorpion" Roger, impeccably attired in a formal suit with neatly combed black hair.

One of them took the reins of the carriage, while the other entered inside.

Why is "Black Scorpion" Roger following him? Is he planning to meet Madame Pualis in person? Lumian furrowed his brow in slight confusion.

This introduced new variables to his plan.

Originally, Lumian intended to find an opportune moment during Louis Lund's return journey. With his current strength, he could easily overpower his target, even if they were both Sequence 8s. Plus, he had the assistance of Witch Franca.

However, if "Black Scorpion" Roger joined the equation, things would become considerably more troublesome.

From the midwife's performance in his dream, Lumian deduced that a Heretic Spellmaster possessed numerous mystical techniques and considerable power. They were fully capable of matching a Witch from the Assassin pathway.

While Lumian could have Franca distract "Black Scorpion" Roger while he dealt with Louis Lund, the battle between two Mid-Sequence Beyonders wouldn't be swift, thus increasing the risk of discovery.

Hmm… If "Black Scorpion" Roger truly intends to meet Madame Pualis, I'll follow him instead of attacking. My objective is to locate Madame Pualis and establish contact with her. Lumian swiftly revised his plan and devised a new strategy.

The rental carriage began its journey toward the opposite end of Avenue du Marché, and the refreshing, natural fragrance faded away.

Lumian hurried along beside the gas street lamps, maintaining a distance of nearly 20 meters.

After a while, he sensed the perfume come to a halt. Advancing another ten meters, he witnessed the rental carriage pulling over by the roadside. "Black Scorpion" Roger disembarked, carrying a wooden box.

Not far away stood Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman.

Within a matter of seconds, Louis Lund directed the carriage toward a fork in the road, bypassing the bustling area. Meanwhile, "Black Scorpion" Roger ventured into the market alone.

Is Madame Pualis at Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman? Or is "Black Scorpion" Roger merely escorting Louis Lund for a distance, concerned about potential targeting? Lumian speculated as he hastened forward.

Regardless, capturing Louis Lund took precedence!

Behind Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman, there were only a few pedestrians. Under the pitch-black sky, occasionally, one could spot a lone figure.

Several street lamps here were out of order, leaving the road engulfed in darkness. It was wide enough for several carriages to pass side by side.

Lumian surveyed the surroundings, wasting no time. He removed his black-framed glasses and sprinted forward.

Before long, he caught up with the slowly moving carriage. As Louis Lund sensed the anomaly, he pushed down on the carriage with his left hand and lunged toward the driver's seat.

From this distance, Lumian could clearly see the black-haired, blue-eyed face.

Though the other party had employed some disguise, Lumian was certain it was Louis Lund!

Reacting swiftly, Louis Lund, without bothering to ascertain the assailant's identity or motives, seized the reins with his left hand and balled his right hand into a fist. Like a speeding cannonball, he launched an attack at Lumian, who was suspended in midair with no leverage to defend himself.

In that very moment, Louis Lund caught sight of Lumian's unmasked face, his eyes widening in sheer shock.

Undeterred, Lumian didn't evade the blow. Instead, he extended his right arm and caught hold of Louis Lund's fist.

Just as the impending collision seemed inevitable, Lumian retracted his arm, lessening the force behind the strike. Then, with a swift motion, he intertwined Louis Lund's fists, wrists, and forearms as though he had boneless limbs. As a result, Louis Lund was sent flying backward but remained within the confines of the carriage.

In the blink of an eye, Louis Lund saw a smile on Lumian's face.

Whack!

Franca materialized on the opposite side of the carriage driver's seat, her palm poised to strike Louis Lund's ear.

Under the formidable Beyonder powers unleashed by an Assassin's full-strength blow, Louis Lund succumbed to unconsciousness without uttering a single sound.

Chapter 204: Interrogation

With a swift movement, Lumian used the force of Louis Lund's fall to gracefully land in the spot where the carriage driver had been stationed.

Franca had already taken over from Louis Lund, expertly maneuvering the horse and bringing the carriage to a halt by the darkened roadside.

Their coordination was flawless, even without prior communication. One focused on the front while the other ambushed from behind. In a matter of seconds, they managed to overpower Louis Lund, a powerful Beyonder at Sequence 8.

"Carry him into the carriage," Franca instructed, her experience evident as she contemplated the subsequent course of action.

Lumian didn't object and lifted Louis Lund into the rented four-wheeled carriage.

Franca followed suit, closing the carriage door behind her. Then, she removed her hood and black robe, seemingly preparing to change into more comfortable attire upon returning home.

Halfway through her task, she caught Lumian's puzzled gaze and snapped out of her reverie. Awkwardly, she instructed, "Turn around."

Lumian could deduce Franca's intentions and quickly obliged, diverting his gaze out the window to allow her the privacy she required.

A rustling sound continued for over a minute behind him.

"I'm done," Franca's clear voice reached his ears.

The rental carriage wasn't particularly spacious. Lumian, standing at over 1.8 meters tall, hunched over slightly and turned back.

Franca now wore a red vest, a white tie, and a blue gown adorned with a row of yellow buttons. Holding a waxed hat and a horsewhip, she presented an unusual blend of mismatched elements—an absurd and peculiar beauty—with her sharp nose, slightly flamboyant brown eyebrows, thin red lips, and vivid lake-colored eyes.

"Quite swift, Miss Franca," Lumian praised, acknowledging her as the "new" driver for the Empire Carriage Company.

"That's professionalism for you! If these buttons hadn't been so time-consuming, I could have been even faster," Franca muttered as she tucked her flaxen-colored hair beneath the waxed hat.

With her disguise complete, she retrieved an eyebrow pencil and other items she carried and quickly applied some simple makeup. Her complexion darkened, and her eyebrows were made to appear untidy, successfully transforming her into an ordinary-looking man who wouldn't attract undue attention in the dimly lit streets illuminated by the crimson moon and streetlamps.

"I'll be the carriage driver. You interrogate him," Franca declared, opening the door and hopping out to assume Louis Lund's former seat.

She took hold of the reins and guided the horse to turn slowly.

Satisfied that the rental carriage was moving steadily, Lumian assisted Louis Lund to the opposite seat. Extracting a bottle of truth serum he had obtained from the unscrupulous Hedsey, he compelled Louis to consume a third of it.

As the drug began to take effect, Lumian resisted the urge to wake the unconscious Louis Lund with the ritual silver dagger. Instead, he gently prodded the area between the bridge of the nose and lips, tugged at a strand of his hair, and lightly tickled his nostrils with the strand. Gradually, Louis Lund stirred from his slumber.

Throughout this process, Lumian maintained a friendly and non-threatening posture, refraining from dislocating his captive's joints or binding his hands and feet.

Achoo!

Louis Lund sneezed and abruptly awakened from his slumber.

He glanced across at Lumian, who sat at ease with a smile playing on his lips.

"You!" Louis Lund exclaimed, a mix of shock and recollection flooding his mind.

"Stay calm," Lumian reassured, his smile unwavering as he pressed his right palm down. "If I intended you harm, stray dogs would have already feasted upon you."

Louis Lund's immediate impulse was to employ his powers and make a swift escape. Yet, as he recalled being attacked from behind, he cautiously peered out of the carriage window.

The distant light merged with the surrounding shadows, amplifying the hushed whispers of wheels and hooves upon the road.

Reluctant to gamble on mounting a counterattack, Louis Lund inquired in a low, grave voice, "What is it that you want?"

From his vantage point, Lumian hadn't taken any measures to restrain him, confident in the belief that escape was futile.

The other party may have been careless or vulnerable, presenting an opportunity for Louis Lund to exploit. But such an advantage would never manifest in a direct confrontation.

And the aid accompanying Lumian could strike from the shadows undetected—a force to be reckoned with!

Lumian smiled. "I merely seek to reunite with an old friend."

Louis Lund, dressed only in a linen shirt and shorts, replied with a dark expression, "I won't succumb to your threats again. Madame is already aware of my past transgressions and has granted me forgiveness."

So I really possessed incriminating information about you? Lumian's mind momentarily swirled with confusion.

Recollections from his dream emerged—a revelation of Louis Lund engaging in an illicit affair with a woman from the village, clandestinely selling portions of the administrator's castle collection in a bid to blackmail him for knowledge of Madame Pualis's involvement with the padre.

In retrospect, those accounts might have been fallacious.

If the padre truly harbored desires for Madame Pualis, it made little sense for him to forsake belief in the evil god symbolizing bountiful harvests, or to forgo birthing several children with her.

Lumian suspected that his dream had crafted an R-rated adaptation of the concealed conflict between the two factions. After all, both the padre and Madame Pualis had numerous lovers, making it easy for his subconscious to forge connections.

Compared to the secrets housed within Madame Pualis's castle, Louis Lund's affair and the pilfering of collections appeared as innocuous as mundane meals thrice daily. There was no ground for him to be subjected to blackmail.

Yet here stood Louis Lund, insisting that he had indeed erred and fallen victim to Lumian's coercion.

"Is that so?" Lumian adopted his Cordu Prankster King persona. "I merely assisted you in concealing your missteps. How can that be construed as a threat?"

Louis Lund erupted in a bitter laugh, a mix of anger and disbelief.

"You are the most shameless individual I have ever encountered.

"I am aware that you uncovered certain irregularities and sought to discern their origins, but you did indeed threaten me and extract information about Madame."

"That's correct. In those days, I entertained the thought of betraying Madame and seeking the padre's assistance. However, that was because I hadn't comprehended the greatness of Mother. I was still a follower of the false god, the Eternal Blazing Sun. Now, my life stems from Mother, and my future belongs to Mother."

Ah, so that's how it is… I must thank this truth serum. You've spilled all that needed to be said, both the necessary and the unnecessary. I didn't have to wrack my brain to gather information… In reality, I sensed something amiss in the village and embarked on a certain investigation? Lumian nodded, satisfied, and smiled. "When did you come to realize the greatness of Mother? Was it after you gave birth to that child?"

Louis Lund looked utterly stunned, his reaction almost causing him to jolt upright and bang his head. "How did you know about me birthing a child? How could you possibly know?"

Hmm… So I wasn't involved in the padre's raid on the administrator's castle? Otherwise, Louis Lund wouldn't be posing such a question… Lumian felt a surge of delight and jestingly responded, "When I undressed you earlier, I noticed stretch marks and a C-section scar on your stomach."

"Impossible!" Louis Lund fiercely objected. "Madame has already erased them!"

Lumian swiftly changed the course of their conversation and inquired with curiosity,

"I'm curious to know how Madame Pualis managed to impregnate you."

Louis Lund, though initially hesitant to answer, couldn't resist the urge to divulge the secret.

"Whether it's a man or a woman, as long as you engage in intimate relations with her and exchange bodily fluids, she can conceive a child according to her desires."

I see… Lumian breathed a sigh of relief.

His greatest concern had been the possibility of Madame Pualis employing her Beyonder abilities to remotely impregnate him.

"So, both men and women will do, but what about animals?" Lumian pressed on.

Louis Lund was taken aback by the question. After a few moments, he responded, "That should work too…"

"And what about plants? Or rocks?" Lumian's inquiry turned scholarly.

"I… I don't know," Louis Lund admitted, unable to provide a definitive answer.

Madame has never contemplated such possibilities. Why does this youngster possess such a vivid imagination?

Regretfully, Lumian changed the subject.

"Since you conceived through the exchange of bodily fluids, how did you end up with that bird's nest-like thing in your stomach?"

"How do you know about it? When did you see it?" Louis Lund asked, astonished.

"I'll tell you later," Lumian swiftly lied, maintaining his composure without a flicker of hesitation.

Louis Lund wore a perplexed expression as he muttered, his face clouded with confusion, "It came along with the conception of the child. It's like a fruit. The outer layer is the epidermis, and the fetus is the pulp. They were once joined together and only split open when ripe."

"Sounds quite magical. That bird's nest seems to possess great spiritual value. Can it be utilized in the realm of mysticism?" Lumian deliberately rambled, skillfully diverting the conversation away from his true intentions.

"It serves as a key ingredient in a certain healing potion," Louis Lund continued, speaking without pause. "It has various other uses as well, like enhancing the condition of human skin and providing power to spells…"

After he finished, Lumian let out a nonchalant sigh.

"Did your first child perish in the padre's assault on the castle?"

"Yes, he was still so young," Louis Lund lamented the loss of life. "During that time, the padre had many followers with him. We kept retreating, and a few Gardeners and a Heretic Spellmaster lost their lives. If Madam hadn't returned in time, we wouldn't have escaped. Sigh, all those children were killed."

"How many people did the padre bring?" Lumian casually inquired, concealing his true concerns.

Louis Lund recollected and replied, "Some were shepherds originally, like Pierre Berry, Niort Best, and the others. Some were the padre's mistresses, such as Sybil Berry, Madonna Bénet, and Philippa Guillaume. The rest were Pons Bénet and his gang. We managed to kill a few of them, including the rather formidable Niort Best…"

In my dream, Niort Best was slain by the three sheep… So in reality, he died during the raid on the administrator's castle? And I wasn't among the individuals mentioned by Louis Lund… In other words, the battle scenes I witnessed were derived from a fragment of my soul? Thus, they are incomplete and unable to reveal the full picture and all the participants… Lumian felt a sense of relief and smiled as he asked, "Where did Madame Pualis go?"

Chapter 205: Banshee

Louis Lund shook his head.

"I've got no idea, but when Madame came back, she wasn't well either."

"Then she saw the castle in ruins and the important items destroyed. She gathered the remaining ones and prepared to leave Cordu."

Based on what I witnessed, it seems that Madame Pualis had indeed been engaged in a fight with someone else. Lumian asked with curiosity, "Why didn't Madame Pualis try to bring the dead back to life?"

Louis Lund looked at Lumian, surprised.

"I never told you any of that…"

In other words, he wanted to know how Lumian had this knowledge.

Lumian smiled but offered no explanation.

Louis Lund couldn't contain his urge to spill the secret.

"Madame can resurrect the dead and restore their bodies, but it's far from perfect. The resurrected ones aren't quite human anymore. They're part corpse, part monster. They only retain fragments of their original memories and can only exist for seven days."

Madame Pualis's resurrection ability is severely flawed at this level… Lumian was disappointed.

He diverted the topic.

"What did Madame Pualis want in Cordu?"

Louis Lund looked puzzled. "Didn't I already tell you?"

Lumian was prepared and smiled as he replied, "Given what happened afterward, I believe you might have a different perspective now."

Louis Lund felt the need to share the information, so he sighed and said, "Back then, I couldn't comprehend it. I was even scared. That's why I dropped hints to the padre during Mass, hoping for assistance."

"Yes… I later discovered that Madame wanted to create an entirely new world in Cordu. In this world, when humans die, their souls return to the earth and roam the wilderness. On special occasions, they can return home and experience the joy of reunion. By redeeming their sins, they can be reborn, emerging from the Mother's womb as human fetuses."

"Paramita?" Lumian remembered the term from his dream.

"Yes!" Louis Lund replied, fear evident in his eyes.

He suspected that Lumian had asked the question to gauge his reaction.

Lumian knew the correct answer and sought to determine if Louis Lund was lying or how much of his story was false.

"Why establish Paramita?" Lumian pressed further.

He could only inquire about it from Louis Lund, not Madame Pualis.

Louis Lund shook his head slowly.

"Madame briefly mentioned it, but it was very vague.

"She said she had only established a small, caricature Paramita, a part of the complete Paramita. She also mentioned that by creating her own Paramita, she could please the Mother and bear more."

A part? What would happen if those Madames managed to create a complete Paramita? Lumian wondered if constructing a miniature Paramita was a prerequisite for their unusual path towards godhood.

He gazed at Louis Lund, attempting to inquire, "What is Madame Pualis's Sequence now?"

"Madame's condition is rather peculiar. It might be related to the destruction of her Paramita or something else she possesses," Louis Lund replied, catching himself mid-sentence.

Why can't I control my words? Why did I say what I shouldn't have?

Louis Lund realized that his behavior had likely been influenced by one of Lumian Lee's Beyonder powers.

Now understanding the cause, he no longer blamed himself or felt anxious. He felt a sense of relief and relaxation.

"Madame should be somewhere between Sequence 5 and Sequence 4. At times, she exudes an imposing aura that makes people afraid to meet her gaze. Other times, she lacks such grandeur."

It's reminiscent of the state Madame Pualis displayed in my dream… Lumian recalled and stated, "Sequence 9 Villain, Sequence 8 Gardener, Sequence 7 Heretic Spellmaster, Sequence 6 Sower… What comes after Sequence 5? And what about Sequence 4? What lies beyond that?"

He knows more than I anticipated… Witnessing Lumian Lee divulge so much information about the pathway's Sequences in one go, Louis Lund didn't dare take any risks. Yielding to his desire to confide in him, he responded, "Banshee is Sequence 5, and Evil Overlord, also known as Benevolent Overlord or Madame, is Sequence 4. I don't know what lies beyond that. I'm merely a Gardener. I don't possess the right to receive any further boons and advance to become a Heretic Spellmaster."

Banshee… The name implies a change in gender… Pulitt became Pualis… Titles like Madame Moon and Madame Night symbolize godhood and demigods, but Madame Pualis doesn't precisely fit the role of Madame Night… Lumian pondered for a moment before steering the conversation back to Cordu.

"Were Madame Pualis's initial followers in the village mostly lovers and the elderly?"

"That's correct," Louis Lund affirmed, nodding. "People like Naroka, who were quite old, yearned deeply for their departed loved ones. They longed to see them again and worry about what awaits them after death. They experience both fear and longing. That's the aid Madame can provide them. Unfortunately, Naroka passed away suddenly before fully embracing Paramita. Madame suspects that she discovered the padre's scheme and was killed by her youngest son, who follows the padre."

That explains it… Lumian gained new insight into Naroka's death from his dream.

Her demise was the result of being silenced.

Ava and Reimund likely met the same fate.

Sighing, Lumian changed the subject.

"When did you realize something was amiss with the padre?"

Louis Lund contemplated for a moment and replied, "In early January, I caught sight of the children in the castle tower. You can't fathom what it was like. To put it briefly, it terrified me and nearly drove me insane. I was desperate to leave Madame.

"Initially, I believed she was just like those mystical fanatics who enjoy purchasing magazines like Psychic and Lotus and engaging in futile practices. I didn't think there was anything wrong. However, as time went on, I noticed that the other residents of the castle were becoming increasingly peculiar. The administrator locked himself and Madame in their rooms on two separate occasions, coinciding with the birth of a child each time. My valets and maids often did the same, and Madame was remarkably understanding of their behavior.

"From time to time, the distant cries of a baby reached my ears, causing deep suspicion to well up within me. Seizing the opportunity presented by Madame's absence and the others' lack of vigilance, I stealthily slipped into the tower. Oh, Mother, the sight that greeted me was utterly terrifying!"

Louis Lund, originally intending to speak of Guillaume Bénet's abnormal behavior, found himself unable to contain his thoughts on the castle tower incident, and he began to ramble.

Lumian could vividly imagine the scene, for he had witnessed it in his dream: human children with bird-like claws, sprawled against the walls, densely packed and scattered throughout.

Louis Lund gulped nervously and continued his account, "I initially dropped hints to the padre during Mass. Later, I took the opportunity to reveal Madame's abnormality to him. I suspected she might be a follower of an evil deity. He instructed me to keep it hidden and not expose myself, assuring me that he would handle the situation.

"It was around mid-January when things took a turn for the worse. The padre continued his normal routine as if nothing was amiss. Despite my repeated urging, you eventually discovered the truth and threatened me.

"After that, Sewell, the carriage driver, and I received a revelation. We repented and wholeheartedly pledged ourselves to Madame.

"Then, in March, the padre suddenly launched an attack on the castle with a group of people."

Louis Lund has limited knowledge about the padre's situation. When Lumian inquired further about what had transpired in Cordu, Louis Lund seemed unfamiliar with the village's circumstances. This aligned with his role as the castle's butler, primarily tending to matters in Dariège and other cities.

He only mentioned that since January, the villagers of Cordu had been frequently discussing horoscopes, believing that it would bring them glory and alter their destinies. Prior to that, they merely followed certain folk traditions to ward off any changes in their fate. Specific discussions regarding these matters were rare.

With the understanding that former administrator Béost and Madame Pualis's lady's maid, Cathy, were now Heretic Spellmasters, and that Madame Pualis had left Cordu before Lent, Lumian realized he wouldn't glean any more information from Louis Lund.

Knowing when to stop, Lumian posed a direct question, "Where does Madame Pualis reside now?"

"In Quartier de Noël…" Louis Lund instinctively moved to cover his mouth but added another detail. "Rue de Scotch Broom…"

Rue de Scotch Broom in Quartier de Noël… A map of Trier from a magazine article flashed through Lumian's mind.

Quartier de Noël lay northeast of Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman, divided by the Srenzo River. It was renowned for its numerous hospitals, including the Veterans' Home and Wounded Soldiers' Hospital. Additionally, being situated in the suburbs, it boasted a fair share of farmland.

Lumian refrained from pressuring Louis Lund or intensifying his desire to extract more information. Instead, he smiled and said, "I bear no ill intentions towards Madame. I merely wish to speak with her about the events in Cordu.

"I will allow you to depart. Please inform Madame Pualis that if she is willing to meet with me, she can choose the time and place. Ah, please send your response to Room 302, 9 Rue des Pavés, Quartier du Jardin Botanique, before tomorrow night."

It was a safe house Lumian had prepared in Quartier du Jardin Botanique, and now it would finally serve its purpose.

Louis Lund let out a sigh of relief before responding cautiously, "Got it."

Anxious thoughts plagued him, fearing that Lumian might allow him to depart only to trail behind him. Yet, considering Lumian's evident capability to uncover Madame's precise whereabouts without pressing the issue, Louis Lund found himself compelled to place his trust in Lumian's amicability.

He then gestured towards his shorts and remarked, "I cannot leave dressed like this."

Chapter 206: Communication

Lumian's head pounded at the mere thought of Franca coming in and undressing. He scrutinized Louis Lund, who was left in a linen shirt and white shorts, and offered a genuine suggestion.

"I can ask my companion to return the money from your coat. Leave the carriage as it is and find a clothing store. Tell them you encountered a twisted robber. I'm certain everyone in Trier will understand."

Louis Lund's expression froze for a moment as he pointed downwards from Lumian's current position. "I have spare clothes."

Lumian bent down and retrieved a black formal suit with a vest and bow tie.

It seemed to be Louis Lund's usual attire as a butler.

"Is this rental carriage truly yours?" Lumian inquired curiously as he tossed the formal suit to Louis Lund.

"I rented the clothes and the carriage." Louis Lund hurriedly put on his pants.

Lumian sat there, patiently waiting for him to dress before calling out to Franca to stop the carriage by the roadside.

He opened the door, turned around, and waved at Louis Lund.

"Hope to see you again."

If not, I'll find you on Rue de Scotch Broom in Quartier de Noël. And if you've already vanished, I'll continue my investigation, ensuring you'll never find peace.

Lumian would have trailed Louis Lund until he tracked down Madame Pualis if it weren't for his caution regarding her abilities and characteristics, as well as his intention to engage in a friendly conversation with her.

Franca placed the waxed hat and whip on the driver's seat of the carriage, picked up the black robe beside her, and put it on. Then, she pulled up her hood and leaped into the shadows by the road.

Once Louis Lund steered the carriage away from the street, she emerged from the shadows and approached Lumian. She gazed in his direction and spoke. "Not following him?"

"No need. For now, we're not enemies." Lumian averted his gaze and headed towards Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman.

Franca followed, a smile gracing her lips.

"Aren't you concerned that Madame Pualis might refuse to see you and disappear overnight?"

Lumian and Louis Lund didn't purposely lower their voices during their exchange. An assassin possessed sharp ears and eyes, so she caught most of their conversation. While she couldn't fully grasp the Cordu-related details due to her lack of prior knowledge, she gleaned plenty about other topics.

For instance, Lumian sought an audience with Madame Pualis. For instance, a certain evil god's pathway would transform into a Banshee at Sequence 5…

Lumian took two deep breaths to calm his lingering, trembling emotions.

"I simply believe it's more likely to meet Madame Pualis if I display friendliness rather than tailing Louis Lund.

"She knows full well whom I seek revenge against. Her own castle was damaged by the padre and she was driven out of Cordu. I refuse to believe she bears no grudge.

"Heh heh, I did kill two leaders of the Poison Spur Mob and tamper with 'Black Scorpion' Roger's coffee, but they don't know Lumian Lee was behind it. There's no conflict between hating Ciel and meeting Lumian Lee."

Franca couldn't help but chuckle.

"You're right. What does their vendetta against Ciel have to do with you, Lumian?"

She murmured to herself, lost in thought, "What's Madame Pualis's connection to the Poison Spur Mob? Which evil deity does the Banshee pathway belong to? Are 'Black Scorpion' Roger, 'Baldy' Harman, and 'Short-legged Candlestick' Castina associated with this pathway? One Spellmaster Heretic and two Gardeners?"

She speculated based on her understanding of the Poison Spur Mob.

Lumian didn't hold back any information.

"The mastermind behind the Poison Spur Mob is Madame Moon, but it seems she has recently made further progress. She and Madame Night, whom Pualis represents, are part of a secret organization called the Nightstalkers. They worship the Great Mother. I don't know the precise name, nor do I dare to utter it."

The concealed entity known as Inevitability could corrupt people merely by knowing about it. The Great Mother, even more sinister and fearsome than Inevitability, had her followers locked in a prolonged conflict against the Blessed of Inevitability in Cordu. So, she was certainly capable of doing the same.

Lumian suspected that if he were to learn the Great Mother's complete and honorific name, there was a high chance he would become pregnant on the spot.

Franca found herself deeply intrigued.

"Indeed, it's best not to seek knowledge beyond one's boundaries.

"There was once a member of our research society who enjoyed delving into secrets and acquiring all kinds of mystical knowledge. Eventually, he vanished and was never seen again."

Franca pragmatically shifted the topic to "Black Scorpion" Roger and the others, along with their respective abilities. Lumian provided detailed explanations. After all, he still had to rely on Madame Hidden Blade to combat the Poison Spur Mob.

When Lumian speculated that one of the abilities of a Sower was to impregnate others, Franca felt a momentary envy and eagerly exclaimed, "If Gardner were to become pregnant, it would be quite interesting…"

"Madame, your thoughts are perilous. I truly worry that you might embrace the mantra of 'Life is short, why not give it a try?' and end up choosing to believe in that Great Mother, praying for Her to bestow upon you the power of a Sower," Lumian mockingly warned.

The combination of a Demoness and a Sower was too wicked. Trier would undoubtedly witness a large number of victims.

Franca was taken aback.

"I've already consumed a potion and become a Beyonder. I can't accept any more boons, can I…?"

You don't know? That's fortunate! Lumian sincerely replied, "I don't believe so."

"Don't worry. I possess extensive knowledge of mysticism and understand that every evil deity harbors malicious intentions." Franca sighed softly, setting an example for herself.

She glanced over at Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman nearby and casually remarked, "When I was waiting for Louis Lund earlier today, I witnessed an unlucky fellow."

Unlucky fellow? Lumian's heart stirred as he recollected.

"Was he a slender man in his fifties with blond hair and blue eyes?"

"How did you know?" Franca was taken aback. "He was strolling along the street when a vase suddenly dropped from the balcony above and struck his head. He reacted swiftly, managing to dodge to the side of the road. However, he stumbled on the edge of the curb and lost his balance. At that very moment, a public carriage was about to collide with him. Heh heh, he's certainly no ordinary person. Despite the circumstances, he evaded it with a remarkably nimble move. And then, guess what? He collided with a gas street lamp pole, causing his nose to bleed."

After recounting the humorous scene she had witnessed that afternoon, Franca turned her gaze to Lumian, awaiting his response to her inquiry.

Lumian paused, contemplating her question.

"That individual should be Monsieur Ive, the landlord of Auberge du Coq Doré. He is in cahoots with the pervert known as Hedsey, who attacked Jenna.

"I suspect he is a Beyonder. I had previously informed the Eternal Blazing Sun Church of the anomaly through intermediaries, but they found nothing amiss. Recently, I acquired a Bad Luck charm and seized an opportunity to use it on him. I intended for him to experience frequent misfortunes and thereby expose his abnormality.

"Unfortunately, his performance went unnoticed by official Beyonders."

But given that tramp's luck, Monsieur Ive would likely suffer from misfortune for another two or three days.

Franca's expression darkened as she stated, "Indeed, it's clear that he is a Beyonder.

"So, it's the group that attacked Jenna… You should have informed me earlier! I could have found someone to help draw greater attention from the authorities to this fellow named Ive!"

Recalling the eradicated mirror people, Lumian focused on the depraved Hedsey, Monsieur Ive, Susanna Mattise, and Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons.

"The abilities of their pathway are quite intriguing…" Franca couldn't help but sigh. "When I first delved into mysticism, everyone told me that there were only twenty-two divine pathways. However, in the past two to three years, peculiar Sequences have occasionally emerged. Do evil gods fall outside the realm of divine pathways?"

After a brief pause, Franca said to Lumian, "I will report this to the authorities through my contacts, but we mustn't be careless. Remember, always remain vigilant and be prepared for any unforeseen circumstances. Indeed, when the time comes, we may have to collaborate and take action. I will inform you once we have communicated.

"Not bad. Now you know how to seek assistance from me. Don't fret; when I find myself in trouble, I will come to you."

"Okay." Lumian nodded gently.

…

After bidding Franca farewell, Lumian made his way back to Auberge du Coq Doré.

He still remembered the issue with Termiboros. Once inside Room 207, he retrieved the memo and read it carefully before composing a letter to Madam Magician.

In the letter, he primarily addressed two concerns. Firstly, he detailed the temptation and subsequent influence of Termiboros upon receiving the Alms Monk boon. Secondly, he informed Madam Magician that he had sought assistance from the Psychiatrist and could now avoid reciting the corresponding honorific name.

Thanks to Monsieur Ive hiring a regular cleaning lady, the motel had become less infested with bedbugs. Lumian swiftly tidied up the surroundings, arranged the altar, and summoned the doll-like blond messenger.

The messenger surveyed the room and seemed satisfied with Lumian's decision to change the summoning location.

Approximately thirty minutes later, she materialized in Room 207 and placed the reply on the wooden table. Tilting her chin slightly, she addressed Lumian, "You should be grateful. I helped remind Madam Magician and ensured she read your letter promptly."

"Thank you," Lumian replied reflexively, momentarily caught off guard.

It was only after the messenger had departed that Lumian snapped out of his daze. He picked up the neatly folded square letter and unfolded it.

"I am pleased to hear that your treatment is proving effective. I did not expect that entity to dispatch an angel. What a significant investment.

"In recent years, evil gods have indeed been infiltrating more frequently, but it remains challenging for higher-level powers to enter our world. The number of angels can be counted on one hand. Three of them were destroyed in transit, causing only a small area of corruption. While one succeeded, an orthodox god intervened and rectified the situation.

"In other words, you are the only unfortunate individual in the entire world."

Chapter 207: Organization

Lumian paid no mind to Madam Magician's usual playful jabs and instead focused on her account of the evil god's infiltration.

It aligned with the information shared by the late "Hammer" Ait.

For unrecognized evil gods hailing from other realms, providing godhood boons proved to be an arduous task. Numerous obstacles hindered Their progress. They had to rely on covert followers to perform elaborate rituals on a grand scale, which often drew attention and resulted in swift annihilation before they could infiltrate.

Madam Magician painstakingly detailed various examples, showcasing the immense difficulty angelic entities faced when descending into the mortal plane. In recent years, there had been only five instances, with four failures and one partial success. While gaining a measure of godhood without reaching angelic status seemed somewhat easier, such cases were rare and generally unsuccessful.

Though Madam Magician didn't explicitly mention it, Lumian suspected that the Great Mother, the Mother Tree of Desire, and the enigmatic fog possessed extraordinary infiltration capabilities, surpassing other entities based on "Hammer" Ait. It seemed likely that these three were responsible for most successful instances involving the acquisition of godhood powers.

Does Madam Magician remain unaware or does she deem it unnecessary for me to know at this stage? Lumian pondered momentarily, inclined to believe the latter.

He continued perusing Madam Magician's response.

"This actually bodes well. Dealing with an angel who serves a hidden entity is much simpler than confronting angelic powers derived from said hidden entity. The associated risks are also significantly reduced.

"Once you ascend to the rank of an angel and extract powers of equal magnitude from that fellow with the long name, thereby rendering Him exceedingly vulnerable, you can implore my Lord to undo the seal and set Him free. Then, you can give Him a thorough thrashing and either transform Him into a Sealed Artifact or restore Him to His original Beyonder characteristics.

"Naturally, this hinges upon Him truly being an angelic entity and not a puppet blessed with a boon. Puppets are easier to handle. Once you extract a certain measure of His power, He will crumble. However, the remaining power bearing the mark of the hidden entity is what presents a greater challenge. You must maintain the seal and gradually absorb it until it reaches a level manageable by an angel.

"Doesn't it all seem to be progressing smoothly with a high likelihood of success? Ah, but the most vexing and formidable step lies in becoming an angel.

"In your present state, I lack confidence. Were it not for the uniqueness of the current era, 99% or more of the Beyonders would never come close to touching godhood.

"I believe your Psychiatrist has already enlightened you on how to evade the negative effects of Termiboros. No further elaboration is necessary.

"I simply wish to remind you that should you undertake any critical or perilous endeavors in the future, do write to me beforehand and apprise me of the situation.

"Why do I suggest you write before exploiting that lengthy-named fellow? Because you might be clandestinely influenced and neglect the corresponding dangers, forgetting to notify me. As for Termiboros, He will not let you forget my warning, for it would mean you engaging in numerous hazardous exploits and facing a high risk of losing your life. That is clearly not what He desires or strives for.

"If you were to perish, the seal would be affected, but my lord would be alerted. In that event, I shall gather a team to reinforce the seal and eliminate Him.

"With such a skilled angel of fate sealed within you, your future is destined to be quite 'exciting.' Praise the lord. You are akin to bait for the followers of evil gods, Hunters, and Demonesses. You shall embark on a multitude of experiences. If you find the time and inclination, do consider writing a lengthy letter to share with me.

"And now, with the assistance of the two Psychiatrists, you can express your desire to alter your faith to Mr. K during a forthcoming gathering. Remember, before you set off to attend the event, offer prayers to my lord for the angel's protection."

Lumian read the note patiently, finding Madam Magician's words both abundant and yet empty.

The most valuable part was her guidance on evading Termiboros's influence and the reminder to seek her opinion before utilizing the angel's power. Additionally, she provided a beautifully drawn blueprint that offered a chance to address the corruption within his body at the angelic level.

Lumian burned the note by rubbing his spirituality. He then reached into his pockets, touching the hidden banknotes and coins, before leaving Room 207 and making his way to Room 305.

Anthony Reid had already returned to his lodgings and sat by the bedside, dressed as a clerk.

Observing Lumian unlatch the door and enter, he offered a simple explanation, "I couldn't find the target at the back entrance of 126 Avenue du Marché. However, I recently discovered that he had already left through the main door, with you following him."

Lumian produced 400 verl d'or worth of banknotes and handed them over to Anthony Reid.

At the same time, he nodded slightly and stated, "The commission is over."

"It seems you've already encountered the target," Anthony Reid chuckled.

Taking a moment to consider, he inquired, "Can I report the target's information to the authorities?"

"Wait for a week," Lumian replied. He had initially planned to offer Anthony Reid more money to delay claiming the reward from the wanted poster. However, since he sought his opinion, Lumian took advantage of the situation by setting a time limit.

He worried that any investigation or arrest related to Louis Lund might alert Madame Pualis, potentially jeopardizing their meeting.

Anthony Reid did not object and let out a sigh. "You're more suited for the market district than I initially thought."

He had never witnessed a wanted criminal rise to become a leader of a sizable mob so swiftly without being detected by the authorities.

"Competent individuals can thrive anywhere, just like you," Lumian advised Anthony Reid, casting a casual glance around Room 305.

His eyes fell upon a few folded papers on the wooden table near the window. They appeared thicker and smoother, larger than ordinary oil paintings.

What could they be? Lumian focused his gaze for a moment, realizing that the folded papers had a faint bluish hue and a printed texture.

Instantly, the pieces fell into place.

The posters on the wall!

Posters of parliamentary candidates had been plastered all over the place recently!

"You seem particularly invested in the National Convention election," Lumian didn't hold back his speculation as he taunted Anthony Reid. "Do you have a legitimate occupation?"

One of the fundamental eligibility criteria for the elections.

Anthony Reid calmly smiled and replied, "No."

He did not elaborate on his reasons for collecting the parliamentary candidates' posters.

Another commission? Lumian decided not to delve further. He waved his hand dismissively and left Room 305.

Amidst the lunatic's piercing cries, Lumian descended the stairs, left Auberge du Coq Doré, returned to Salle de Bal Brise, and settled at the bar counter.

"Good evening, Boss," the bartender greeted with deference, straightening his posture.

Lumian nodded.

"Give me a glass of absinthe."

Having thought about Cordu too often that day, he needed a dose of psychedelic bitterness to jolt his senses awake.

On the stage, Jenna performed with exaggerated flair, belting out flashy songs. Leaning against the bar counter, Lumian let his gaze wander as he absorbed every note.

Now and then, he would take a sip of the dreamy green liquid, allowing its bitterness to awaken his nerves.

Once he regained composure, he organized the recent matters he had to attend to.

First, there was Mr. K's mission; second, the looming threat from the Poison Spur Mob; third, Susanna Mattise's second assault; and fourth, his upcoming meeting with Madame Pualis.

Regarding the election, Lumian didn't pay it much mind after confirming from Franca that the Savoie Mob also backed Hugues Artois. This meant that even if the opposing party won, it wouldn't entirely suppress the Savoie Mob or impede his mission.

Susanna Mattise's resurgence had been a cause for concern, but thanks to the psychiatric treatment, Lumian wouldn't hesitate to seek assistance from Franca. Resolving this matter had become relatively manageable.

Once official Beyonders committed to the task, they wouldn't be inferior to Lumian, a Sequence 8, in effectiveness. They would undoubtedly uncover Monsieur Ive's issues and the troubles at Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons, purging Susanna Mattise's evil spirit completely.

This would be accomplished within the next few days. Lumian simply needed to remain vigilant.

Mr. K's mission was rather complex, relying on Gardner Martin. Lumian, not being a Spectator Beyonder, could only attempt to gain the target's approval through repeated efforts. There were no shortcuts for the time being, so rushing was unnecessary.

Similarly, he had to await Madame Pualis's response. Lumian couldn't rush the matter even if he desired to.

Upon analyzing the situation, Lumian concluded that he needed to prioritize dealing with the Poison Spur Mob's threat.

After the election, "Black Scorpion" Roger would receive an additional boon from Madame Moon, ascending to the rank of a Sower. "Baldy" Harman and "Short-legged Candlestick" Castina might even advance to the level of Heretic Spellmasters. At that point, Lumian, their primary target, would be defenseless against them. Even with the support of Franca, Baron Brignais, and his allies, the situation would be perilous.

Should I join forces with Franca before the election concludes and infiltrate 126 Avenue du Marché under the cover of darkness to eliminate the remaining leaders of the Poison Spur Mob? Even if Madame Moon sends reinforcements later, by the time they stabilize the situation, I would have earned the Boss's trust and gained a chance to partially withdraw from the market district…

The problem lies in facing a Heretic Spellmaster on their home turf. Even with Franca and me united, defeating him would be a daunting task, not to mention his potential allies…

Perhaps an opportunity will arise to strike at "Baldy" Harman and "Short-legged Candlestick" Castina when they are outside? Lumian pondered as he spotted Charlie, attired as a waiter, approaching the bar counter with a tray.

Nodding in greeting, Lumian instinctively honed in on Charlie's luck.

In an instant, his grasp on the absinthe glass tightened, and his pupils dilated.

He "saw" Charlie's luck stained with blood, a swirling blend of crimson and ebony that sent a shiver down his spine.

This could only mean that Charlie was on the brink of a life-threatening catastrophe within the next two to three days, or perhaps even within the next 24 hours!

Chapter 208: Countermeasure

Could Susanna Mattise's attack be imminent? Lumian pondered this question, considering that Charlie had no known enemies and had recently worked as a waiter at Salle de Bal Brise.

Though it was possible that Charlie had simply experienced a string of unfortunate accidents, Lumian wasn't willing to take any chances.

As Charlie carefully placed the tray down and waited, he grew uneasy under Lumian's gaze.

Recalling the other's mystical prophetic ability, Charlie leaned in and whispered, "Did you see something?"

A smile spread across Lumian's face.

"I foresee a romantic encounter in your future. You'll form a relationship that goes beyond friendship with a beautiful woman."

"Is that true?" Charlie asked, surprised and delighted.

The woman's name is Susanna Mattise… Lumian chuckled, suppressing his words. "You're quite gullible, aren't you? How can you believe that?"

"I knew it…" Charlie looked disappointed.

The presence of the Idiot Instrument had already revealed to him Ciel's knack for deception.

Lumian's smile faded as he watched Charlie make his way to the edge of the dance floor, carrying a tray filled with glasses.

Thoughts raced through Lumian's mind.

Am I simply unlucky, or is my fate predetermined? The official Beyonders will soon keep a close watch on Monsieur Ive and the Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons. They'll arrest all the cultists who believe in the Mother Tree of Desire and locate the evil spirit, Susanna Mattise, to purge her completely. Yet, here I am, facing the possibility of Susanna Mattise launching an attack on me and Charlie today…

Dammit, Termiboros, that pig's son. He must be behind this!

Based on my observations of luck, the problem will likely arise late tonight or perhaps even at midnight the day after tomorrow…

I can't solely rely on Susanna Mattise coming to Charlie and me the day after tomorrow. I must prepare for the worst-case scenario…

Gradually regaining composure, Lumian, influenced by Franca and Jenna's vulgarities, forced himself to remain calm and assess the situation.

Simultaneously, he devised an initial plan of action.

First, he would discreetly alert Charlie, assuming a hidden identity, and instruct him to seek refuge in the nearest Eternal Blazing Sun cathedral for the next three days.

Second, Lumian would go to Rue des Blouses Blanches and enlist Franca's aid.

With Franca and Mr. K's finger acting as his protectors, Lumian believed he stood a strong chance of surviving Susanna Mattise's initial onslaught. Furthermore, she would not have another opportunity in the future. Whether it was Franca's message to the official Beyonders through her secret channels or Charlie's presence at the cathedral seeking sanctuary, it would be enough to inform the Eternal Blazing Sun Church of Susanna Mattise's reappearance!

Although Lumian could likely handle Susanna Mattise on his own with Mr. K's assistance, since he already owed Franca a favor, why not accrue a little more debt to ensure greater security?

Without hesitation, Lumian finished his absinthe and departed from Salle de Bal Brise.

He returned to Room 207 of Auberge du Coq Doré, retrieved the Mystery Prying Glasses, and placed them on the bridge of his nose.

Once again, the world spun, and he descended to the ground. He found himself surrounded by a vast network of brownish-green roots, insects scurrying about, and rats hiding in various corners…

Just as Lumian was about to remove his glasses and begin applying his disguise, his eyes caught sight of a clump of turquoise hair entwined with vines and branches.

Bang!

Lumian's head spun, as if he had been hit, and golden stars danced before his eyes.

In haste, he removed the Mystery Prying Glasses, bent down, and retched for a few moments.

Once the wave of nausea subsided, Lumian seized the opportunity while the urge to draw still lingered. He reached for his makeup tools and began applying various substances to his face.

Gazing into the dimly lit windowpane, Lumian found himself increasingly unrecognizable. He resembled one of the unkempt drunkards commonly found in dance halls.

When he finished, he averted his gaze, afraid of the disorienting effects that might follow.

Phew… Lumian put away his makeup tools, exhaled deeply, and filtered through the images he had witnessed while wearing the Mystery Prying

Glasses.

One image stood out in particular—an image of turquoise hair entwined with branches and vines. It struck a chord of familiarity within him, and he quickly made a connection.

Susanna Mattise also possessed long, turquoise hair interwoven with branches and vines that seemed to materialize from nowhere!

Susanna Mattise's territory likely lies somewhere underground in the market district? Lumian made a preliminary judgment.

He couldn't help but grumble, Why does it have to be underground once again? Isn't the underground of Trier already bustling enough?

However, this also explained why the official Beyonders had been unable to fully cleanse Susanna Mattise during their previous encounter. Underground monsters were always challenging to eliminate, just like the Montsouris ghost.

Lumian recollected the real Monsieur Ive's clandestine visit to Underground Trier late at night. He remembered the perverted Hedsey, who had drugged Jenna and led her to an underground cavern. Hedsey seemed familiar with the area and felt at ease there.

This convinced Lumian that Susanna Mattise was indeed hiding somewhere in Underground Trier, not far from the location chosen by Hedsey.

Deeper into the depths of the underground path, all the way to the end perhaps? Lumian speculated as he changed into simple cargo pants, incongruous with his formal top, and left Room 207.

Inside Salle de Bal Brise, Lumian surveyed the surroundings until he spotted Charlie, serving drinks to guests near the periphery of the dance floor.

Leaning closer, Lumian discreetly brushed past Charlie and whispered, "Susanna Mattise."

Amidst Jenna's singing, booming music, and clamorous voices, the name resonated clearly. Charlie froze in place, as if struck by lightning.

Only then did Lumian gently remind him in a hushed tone, "I have received information that Susanna Mattise will reemerge within the next three days. If you wish to avoid a grim fate, seek refuge in the cathedral tonight and remain there for three days."

Charlie's initial reaction was one of horror. His second was to search for Ciel. And his third was to inquire anxiously whether he would be fired for taking three days off.

A lump formed in Charlie's throat as he searched in vain for Ciel. He mustered the courage to ask in a hushed voice, "Really?"

You can choose not to believe it… Lumian managed to restrain his instinctual reaction to prevent Charlie from making any connection.

With a deliberate effort to keep his voice low, he continued, "If you go to the cathedral tonight, someone will confirm the truth for you."

Charlie's fear became too overwhelming to contain. He scrutinized the unfamiliar face before him and asked with a tremor in his voice, "Who are you?"

And why did you come specifically to warn me?

"Just someone who wishes you well," Lumian responded, borrowing a phrase his sister often used in jest.

Without further explanation, he walked past Charlie, squeezing his way onto the dance floor and swiftly disappearing from view.

Charlie felt as though he had been plunged into winter, his body shivering uncontrollably.

During moments like this, memories of Susanna Mattise's beauty, tenderness, and passion would occasionally flash through his dreams. But every time, those memories would be overshadowed by grotesque images of tree-like warts, blooming flowers, and slimy substances, extinguishing any desire within him. And now, that monster was making a comeback!

I should make my way to Église Saint-Robert! Charlie took a few steps toward the exit with the tray in hand, then halted.

He recalled that it was already late at night, and Avenue du Marché would undoubtedly have very few pedestrians at this hour.

Such an environment posed greater danger than the bustling Salle de Bal Brise!

Susanna Mattise always invades my dreams, or it's in the dead of night when everyone is fast asleep. But here, in the dance hall, with so many eyes upon us, she surely won't dare to appear… Once Ciel returns, I'll ask him to escort me to Église Saint-Robert… Charlie withdrew his gaze from the door and decided to wait a little longer.

The dance hall, teeming with various sounds and aromas, offered him a sense of security.

…

3 Rue des Blouses Blanches.

Having wiped off his makeup, Lumian rapped on Franca's door.

Franca's ponytail had come undone, allowing her flaxen hair to cascade naturally. However, instead of a nightgown, she sported a cotton two-piece pajama set.

Donning summer slippers, she turned to admit Lumian into the room and asked in bewilderment, "Are you here for some mystical knowledge tonight?"

Considering the short time they had been apart—less than two hours—she couldn't think of any other reason.

After Franca closed the door, Lumian spoke with gravity,"Something's happening with Charlie. I suspect Susanna Mattise will make a reappearance within the next two days, possibly even tonight."

"So soon?" Franca couldn't hide her surprise.

She still hadn't relayed the issues with Susanna Mattise, Monsieur Ive, and Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons to 007!

Lumian nodded.

"Although it's hard to accept, all signs point to my guess being correct."

"What's your plan?" Franca wasted no time discussing the possibilities.

Lumian shared his two courses of action with Franca but refrained from mentioning Mr. K's finger.

Franca regarded him with a smile.

"You're remarkably composed.

"Didn't you tell me before that Susanna Mattise is suspected to be a Sequence 5 malevolent spirit? Even if we join forces, we might not be able to defeat her.

"Tsk, are you placing too much confidence in me, or perhaps too much confidence in yourself?"

Lumian smiled. "Both."

"To have survived the calamity in Cordu, you're undoubtedly extraordinary." Franca sighed and glanced at the wall clock in the house. "If we can make it through the night, there shouldn't be any issues. I'll inform the authorities swiftly through my connections. Wait for me in the living room."

She retreated into her master bedroom and busied herself with something.

Lumian settled on the sofa and directed his gaze at the cuckoo wall clock beside him, silently ticking away the minutes.

Nearly half an hour elapsed before Franca emerged from her room. She had changed into a black robe adorned with leather armor and a hood.

"It's settled. They'll likely launch the operation tomorrow," she informed Lumian, then inquired, "Aren't you concerned that Charlie might encounter trouble on his way to Église Saint-Robert? Even ordinary people can stumble upon malevolent spirits along the roadside in the dead of night."

Église Saint-Robert served as the primary cathedral of the Eternal Blazing Sun Church in Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman, near the Suhit steam locomotive station. The attached cemetery had once occupied the space now occupied by Salle de Bal Brise.

Lumian had already considered this.

"I plan to discreetly follow him to the cathedral after Salle de Bal Brise closes."

"I'll accompany you." Franca furrowed her brow and scrutinized Lumian. "Won't Charlie be at risk in the dance hall? Some evil spirits pay no heed to the presence of others or their numbers."

Given that Susanna Mattise's previous appearances hadn't affected anyone else, Lumian subconsciously believed that she would avoid crowded places. The dance hall was far more crowded than the motel.

Jolted by Franca's reminder, he exclaimed in a deep voice, "Let's hurry back to the dance hall!"

Chapter 209: Bad Luck

Salle de Bal Brise.

Lumian scanned the dim-lit dance hall, searching for Charlie, but to no avail. His heart sank. Hastily, he motioned for Louis and Sarkota to come closer.

"What's the matter, Boss?" Louis asked, his voice filled with anxiety.

He assumed that Lumian was dissatisfied with the current state of affairs in the dance hall.

Lumian's eyes wandered across the waiters, all dressed in vests and bow ties. He casually inquired, "Where's Charlie? I need to discuss something with him."

Louis's eyes widened in shock. "Boss, didn't Charlie follow you out just now?"

Charlie followed me? Lumian's pupils contracted, as if he had been struck by a sudden burst of light.

He asked in a deep voice, "When?"

Louis pondered for a moment, confusion evident on his face as he looked at Lumian.

"Less than five minutes ago."

Lumian's gaze shifted to Sarkota, his taciturn and reliable subordinate, who also appeared puzzled.

Five minutes ago? I've been at Rue des Blouses Blanches for over half an hour. Moreover, the last time I left the dance hall, I was disguised as a drunkard. There's no way Charlie could have left with me… Lumian swiftly dismissed the possibility of Charlie leaving the dance hall with him unnoticed.

The situation was growing increasingly bizarre!

Considering Charlie's black ill-fated luck, tinged with crimson red, the probability of him encountering danger was almost 100%!

Suppressing the myriad of thoughts racing through his mind, Lumian said to Louis and Sarkota, "Perhaps someone is impersonating me, but I'm unsure why they would be searching for Charlie."

"Impossible…" Louis blurted out.

A few minutes ago, he and Sarkota had greeted the boss. It couldn't have been a fake!

Before Louis could finish his thought, Lumian shot him a cold glare. Immediately, Louis changed his tune and stammered, "Maybe, maybe it's a fake."

Lumian didn't dwell on the question and inquired, "Did Charlie change his clothes when he left the ballroom?"

According to the rules of Salle de Bal Brise, every waiter, bartender, chef, and kitchen helper had two sets of uniforms. However, they were not allowed to take them outside of the dance hall; they could only be kept in the changing room on the first floor.

This was due to the cultural environment in the market district. Bartenders and waiters were prone to bankruptcy caused by gambling, alcoholism, illness, and other issues. If they were allowed to take their uniforms home, they would surely pawn them for cash before disappearing. They wouldn't care if Salle de Bal Brise was owned by the mob.

Similarly, in Trier's inexpensive cafés frequented by scavengers, laborers, tramps, and low-level workers, tin utensils and iron chains were used to secure them to the tables. This ensured only a limited range of movement for the customers, preventing them from secretly taking the utensils and selling them.

The more upscale cafés had their own set of troubles. In order to maintain an air of sophistication, they preferred using silver or porcelain utensils. Consequently, the boss had to painstakingly count the utensils after closing each day to check for any missing ones. The waiters were repeatedly instructed to be vigilant about such matters.

"No," Louis firmly replied to Lumian's question.

He had intended to prevent Charlie from leaving the dance hall in a waiter's attire, but since Charlie had already departed with the boss, he wisely kept his mouth shut.

Most of the dance hall's rules applied to waiters, dancers, bartenders, chefs, bouncers, cleaners, and even managers. The boss was exempt from such restrictions!

Lumian nodded slightly and calmly said, "You guys carry on with your tasks."

With that, he made his way toward the changing room near the kitchen.

He suspected that Charlie's disappearance had something to do with Susanna Mattise!

The small changing room was empty. Lumian glanced around and spotted the locker labeled with Charlie's name.

Franca, donned in a black robe and hood, materialized beside Lumian and praised, "You acted swiftly. You knew to seek out a divination medium for me."

"I'm not a fool," Lumian simply replied. He retrieved a piece of wire he always carried and manipulated it a few times before opening Charlie's locker where his clothes were kept.

Franca pondered for a couple of seconds before reaching for Charlie's linen shirt.

She then used a broom that was leaning against the wall outside the changing room to conduct the divination.

"Charlie's current whereabouts…

"Charlie's current whereabouts…

"…"

Franca held Charlie's clothes in her left hand and pressed her right hand against the top of the broom, murmuring to herself.

Eventually, she released her right hand, but the broom remained motionless. It stood as still as if someone were still holding it.

After a few seconds, it crashed to the ground with a thud.

"Was it interfered with?" Lumian probed.

Franca slowly shook her head.

"Doesn't appear so…"

She swiftly walked over to the full-length mirror in the changing room and stroked its surface a few times.

Holding Charlie's clothes, she commenced another round of divination.

After a few seconds, the mirror darkened, as if reflecting the darkness itself.

In the next moment, two figures materialized, moving in a hazy yellowish light.

One of them vaguely resembled Charlie, dressed as a waiter, while the other bore a resemblance to Lumian from behind.

Apart from that, they couldn't discern any further details.

Franca scrutinized the vision for a few seconds before confidently deducing, "They're underground! That's why the previous divination couldn't provide a clear answer. A broom can't jump and stand on its head, can it?"

Lumian nodded and exited the changing room. He proceeded upstairs to retrieve a carbide lamp and any other useful items he might need later. Then, he swiftly left the dance hall.

He already had a rough idea!

Witnessing the scene, Franca retrieved a glimmering powder from her pocket and combined it with an incantation to conceal herself from view.

On Avenue du Marché, bathed in the eerie glow of the crimson moonlight and gas street lamps, Lumian hastened his pace, scouring the area for any trace or clue.

His destination was the entrance to the underground located in the middle of Avenue du Marché.

Suddenly, amidst the encompassing darkness, Lumian abruptly halted.

He observed that the grills in the drainage ditch had been displaced, and there were disheveled footprints along the roadside. Near the height of an average person's head, there were signs of impact.

Franca revealed herself once more and reconstructed the sequence of events. "It seems like he slipped and stumbled while trying to maintain his balance along the gutter. Eventually, he collided with a street lamp… There should have been blood, but it was cleaned up…"

Perplexed, she muttered to herself,

"It bears a resemblance to the unlucky incident I witnessed earlier today…"

At that moment, Franca experienced a sudden realization. "Could that unlucky imposter, Ive, be the one who took Charlie?"

Lumian had long harbored suspicions, but now he was even more convinced.

"If he can masquerade as Monsieur Ive, it follows that he can also assume my identity.

"This ability is quite remarkable…"

At that instant, all the pieces of the puzzle fell into place within Lumian's mind.

Susanna Mattise was on the verge of recovering, yet she remained concerned about the official Beyonders' continued surveillance of Charlie. Thus, she enlisted the fake Monsieur Ive to pose as Ciel and discreetly escort Charlie underground, making it appear like an ordinary occurrence. Once they reached Underground Trier, it would prove challenging for the official Beyonders to locate them.

If they lingered any longer, even divination might be thwarted!

"Evading the official Beyonders during their initial investigation would require impressive skills," Franca responded. Foregoing her invisibility, she trailed Lumian to the entrance of underground Trier in the middle of Avenue du Marché.

As the yellowish-blue light from the carbide lamp illuminated the staircase below, Lumian noticed two sets of footprints.

One set was familiar—it belonged to Charlie.

Examining the footprints, it was evident that Charlie was apprehensive about descending into the underground in the dead of night. He treaded cautiously, yet ultimately chose to place his trust in Ciel.

For the time being, there were no signs of him being restrained.

"Idiot…" Lumian cursed under his breath.

It was understandable that he couldn't discern the deception. After all, one was a Beyonder, while the other was an ordinary individual. Nevertheless, they had walked together for quite a distance. Didn't he sense anything awry during their conversation?

Is it truly so effortless to impersonate me, Lumian Lee?

"Thankfully, we have these footprints," Franca sighed with relief.

The simplified dowsing rod divination proved challenging to utilize underground. While it might point in the right direction, there might not be a viable path to follow. It often necessitated lengthy detours, increasing the risk of losing their way in the labyrinthine darkness.

The Witch had not brought any tools to illuminate their path. It was unclear whether she was confident in her ability to remain with Lumian or if she simply disregarded the hindrance of darkness on her vision.

Lumian held the carbide lamp and ascended the stairs, reaching the level where the street and square names were indicated.

He moved swiftly, sometimes choosing a direction before Franca could discern the footprints. Soon enough, they discovered Charlie and the imposter Ive's footprints once again.

Franca felt perplexed. After a brief pause, she couldn't help but inquire, "It seems you know where the imposter Ive is headed?"

"After that pervert knocked Jenna unconscious, he followed the same path," Lumian calmly replied.

This was the route familiar to those individuals, a route that evoked a sense of security. Moreover, it was likely that the imposter Ive was leading Charlie to Susanna Mattise. Susanna might very well be waiting at the end of this path!

Franca refrained from further comment. She utilized the shroud of darkness to partially conceal herself. At times, she scouted ahead, while at others, she watched Lumian's back and flanks.

After several minutes of walking, Lumian and Franca came to a halt.

The area displayed signs of partial collapse. Debris littered the vicinity, and the trails meandered in disarray. Eventually, they led to a small cavity obstructed by rubble.

"The target encountered a minor cave-in and became trapped?" Franca whispered with a hiss. "Is this not excessively unlucky?"

Her gaze then shifted to Lumian.

"Where did you acquire that unlucky charm? Its efficacy seems way too potent."

"I'll procure one for you the next time I come across such misfortune," Lumian responded, uncertain if he would encounter another individual as luckless as the tramp.

As soon as he finished speaking, gravel cascaded from the heap of stones barricading the cave entrance, clattering upon the ground.

In a short while, a passageway was cleared, and a figure emerged cautiously.

With golden-black hair and brilliant light-blue eyes, he possessed a striking handsomeness—yet another Lumian.

Chapter 210: Performance

Upon glimpsing the two figures lurking in the shadows, the impostor Ive was taken aback. He raised his right hand and pointed accusingly at Lumian, his voice filled with inquiry.

"Who are you? Why are you pretending to be me?"

As he berated, he hastened his pace, pulling himself out of the tunnel and leaping onto level ground.

In the past, Lumian would have charged forward, ready for close combat or drawing his revolver to unleash a barrage of bullets at his foe. He would have granted no opportunity for words. But this time, for some inexplicable reason, he yearned to put on a show. He desired to witness the other party's abilities before seizing the perfect moment to display his own.

Without an adversary, there would be no performance!

Franca shared the same sentiment. She eagerly longed to stand in for Lumian, refraining from an immediate attack.

Behind the impostor Ive stood Charlie, disguised as a waiter. As he crawled through the debris, he caught sight of a figure beneath the dual glow of a carbide lamp and a lantern.

He froze in shock at the confrontation between the two Ciels. For a moment, it felt as though he was trapped in a dream. He couldn't discern who was genuine and who was counterfeit, who aimed to harm him, and who sought to aid him.

The only certainty he held was that danger loomed over him once more!

The impostor Ive assessed Lumian and turned to Franca, his voice laced with anxiety and anger.

"Wake up! You've been deceived by this impostor! When have I ever worn such attire?"

After Lumian warned Charlie, he wiped away his makeup but made no change to his clothing. He still sported an unusual combination of a simple formal top and cargo pants. In comparison, the impostor Ive's white shirt, black vest, brown pants, and laceless leather boots seemed more in line with his usual style.

Franca couldn't resist putting on a performance.

"Is that so? Then enlighten me, what is my code name?"

The impostor Ive asked in exasperation and amusement, "Madame Red Boots, have you forgotten your moniker?"

Franca couldn't help but chuckle.

She took a couple of steps backward, blending into the shadows at the periphery of the carbide lamp's illumination.

The underground, where darkness held sway, was an ideal setting for Demoness combat!

As the fake Ive beheld the scene, a sense of unease swelled within his heart. He knew all too well that his attempt to masquerade as the genuine article had likely been exposed, leaving him unable to maintain his charade. Instantly, he altered his approach.

Discarding the lantern, he lifted his gaze to meet Lumian's, his countenance growing frigidly cold.

The corners of his mouth curled into a chilling smirk.

"I can't decide whether to pity or congratulate you for seeing through my guise, but this definitely isn't advantageous for you."

With lantern in hand, the fake Ive's aura surged, transforming into a fearsome volcano teetering on the brink of eruption.

Confronting him felt akin to facing the three-headed, six-armed sinister giant of Cordu. Save for the absence of mental torment and physical blows, Lumian's reactions mirrored those of his past encounters.

Quivering, he lowered his head, unable to meet the other's gaze directly. However, his longing to perform and his unwavering resolve compelled him to raise his head, struggling to fix his gaze upon the fake Ive's face.

Simultaneously, the darkness beyond the light seemed cloaked in an eerie green glow. Vines and branches sprouted from the abyss, entwining the ceiling and rocky walls.

Franca, concealed within the shadows, succumbed to intimidation in the face of the fake Ive's aura, rendering her unable to maintain her abilities. Her form materialized less than two meters away from the impostor.

Meanwhile, Charlie, still sprawled within the passageway, trembled even more violently. He buried his face in the gravel and earth, his mind blank.

With a disdainful glance toward Lumian and Franca, the fake Ive spoke. "You dare to pursue me, utterly ignorant? The only fortunate aspect is your considerable attractiveness. I find it hard to dispose of you outright."

His words entered Lumian and Franca's ears, instilling them with fear, compelling them to turn and flee.

This sensation prompted Lumian to realize something profound.

A demigod!

The fake Ive was a demigod, possessing godhood!

Gritting his teeth and summoning his courage, Lumian delved into his pocket, hopeful that Mr. K's finger could serve as a temporary deterrent, buying him and Franca an opportunity to escape the Underground Trier.

So what if you're a demigod? I've encountered demigods before. Fear won't break my spirit or halt my resistance!

Just as Lumian's right palm was poised to make contact with Mr. K's finger, and Franca was on the verge of fleeing, unable to contain herself, a cracking noise resounded from above.

A rock the size of a fist descended, mirroring the former descent of its brethren, hurtling toward the fake Ive, who had been arrogantly observing Lumian and Franca's reactions.

Caught off guard, the impostor Ive managed only to lower his head, barely evading the projectile. The gravel struck his left shoulder, fracturing bone and causing the flesh to sink inward.

He emitted a brief cry, nearly toppling to the ground.

This unexpected turn of events dispersed the menacing aura and godlike presence, leaving behind a scant few turquoise vines and brownish-green branches as testament to the recent occurrence.

Snapping out of his shock, Lumian, driven by his desire to perform and seizing the opportunity to provoke,

discarded the carbide lamp, clutched his stomach, and erupted in laughter.

"A fake? Is everything about you nothing but fake? Don't tell me that thing of yours is a mere piece of wood?"

The fake Ive, who had just recovered from the pain, was overcome with emotion. His gaze fixated upon Lumian, his eyes tinged with an otherworldly green hue.

Unbeknownst to him, Franca had already sprinkled herself with fluorescent powder, vanishing into thin air with a hushed whisper.

In the blink of an eye, Lumian found himself consumed by an intense yearning for the pleasures of the opposite sex.

If Franca hadn't rendered herself invisible, he would have been utterly powerless against the impulse. However, he wasn't entirely bereft of reason. It was just that his actions had become burdensome, both physically and mentally.

Struggling, Lumian extracted the revolver from its holster, endeavoring to take aim at the fake Ive.

In his current state, he inexplicably found the other's visage profoundly alluring.

Bang!

Lumian squeezed the trigger, but his shot missed the impostor Ive.

Fury ignited within the fake Ive's eyes. With agile grace, he closed in on his target, his hand rising to deliver a resounding slap across Lumian's face.

Instantly, his appearance underwent a subtle alteration, as if he possessed limited control over his image. He softened Lumian's masculine features, lending them a touch of femininity.

Lumian gasped for breath, his finger squeezing the trigger once more.

A tumultuous surge of desire threatened to consume him. He yearned to embrace the female rendition of the fake Ive and indulge in unspeakable acts.

Amidst the maelstrom of his intense emotions, he instinctively recalled the words of the psychiatrist, Madam Susie, and promptly began taking deep, steadying breaths.

Bang!

Lumian found a measure of tranquility, successfully discharging another shot from the revolver.

The fake Ive hadn't anticipated the unwavering fortitude of his adversary, who managed to retain his sanity. Narrowly evading the bullet that grazed his arm, rending his garments and scorching his flesh, he couldn't suppress a pained grunt. In that moment, Lumian, warily mindful of the opponent's abilities, ceased his pretense, seizing the opportunity to grip the ritual silver dagger and plunge it into his own ribs, refraining from extracting it.

The pain jolted his senses, quelling much of his desire.

Likewise, the fake Ive shook off the lingering effects of Provocation, regaining a measure of clarity.

He understood that the current circumstances were ill-suited for an extended confrontation. Swiftly producing a golden coin, he hurled it toward the crevice obstructed by debris.

Lumian, overcome by an uncontrollable avarice, lunged toward the gleaming coin with the ritual silver dagger, eager to claim it as his own.

Seizing the opportunity, the fake Ive sprinted deeper into the underground, displaying swiftness surpassing that of ordinary mortals.

Suddenly, his feet skidded, and a slick swoosh echoed through the air.

Unbeknownst to him, the path had been encased in a layer of frost!

Struggling to regain his footing, the fake Ive endeavored to restore his balance.

However, in that very moment, a towering figure clad in a black robe and hood materialized behind him.

With a swift motion, Franca extended her right hand, revealing a hidden blade enveloped in black flames. She aimed to plunge it into the fake Ive's back, employing the full force of an Assassin's strike.

With a pfft, despite the fake Ive's best efforts to evade and rely on some kind of performance to toughen his skin and muscles like stone, the blade managed to pierce his body.

His eyes widened, and he twisted his body forcefully, capturing a glimpse of Franca through his ghostly green gaze.

Having successfully executed her attack, Franca intended to take a step back and utilize the shadows to create distance before triggering the detonation of the black flames coursing within the target's body. However, her limbs suddenly grew weak, and she bent over.

She clenched her legs together, a watery light flickering in her eyes resembling a serene lake.

Having anticipated the deep connection between the fake Ive she was tailing and the deviant Hedsey, Franca was prepared for the current circumstances. Without hesitation, she reached into her concealed pocket, aiming to retrieve the smelling salts she had acquired earlier.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Lumian, having secured the golden coin, discharged three shots at the severely wounded fake Ive.

Desperately attempting to evade, the fake Ive's precarious footing on the icy surface undermined his ability to maintain even basic balance. Eventually, he plummeted to the ground with a resounding thud, one of the bullets piercing his abdomen.

With a chance to catch her breath, Franca inhaled the scent of the salts, the invigorating aroma jolting her senses awake. Suppressing her desires, she clenched her left hand.

Black flames erupted from the fake Ive's body, devouring his soul and eliciting a mournful cry.

Lumian aimed once more and pulled the trigger.

The final bullet erupted forth, instantaneously puncturing the fake Ive's forehead.

With a deafening bang, the fake Ive's head split open, spilling forth crimson and white.

Observing Franca bend over once again, Lumian hurriedly made his way to her side, circling around the frost-covered area.

Franca raised her gaze, her eyes moist as she softly gasped for air.

Suddenly, she embraced Lumian, but her nostrils detected the presence of a metal canister with an open lid pressed against her nose.

The indescribably potent scent compelled her to sneeze repeatedly, diminishing much of her desire.

"Dammit, this stuff is far more potent than smelling salts!" Franca blurted out as soon as she regained consciousness.

Lumian quickly took a sniff himself and let out a sneeze.

Chapter 211: Spirit Channeling

While Lumian sneezed, Franca swiftly took two steps forward and crouched beside the fake Ive's lifeless body.

With a delicate grip, she extinguished the flickering black flames that still clung to it.

"Thank goodness it hasn't burned too far, or the soul would have dissipated," Franca breathed a sigh of relief, straightening up. She reached into her pocket and retrieved a handful of powder that resembled the pitch-blackness of night.

Lumian stowed away the canister of stimulating gas and glanced at Franca, curiosity etched on his face.

"Are you planning to channel his spirit?"

In the recent battle, the fake Ive had displayed the strength of a Mid-Sequence Beyonder and wielded peculiar abilities. Lumian couldn't hold back, or the situation would have taken a perilous turn.

Franca nodded subtly, responding, "Indeed. Channeling a spirit now will yield significant results."

"And which entity do you intend to invoke?" Lumian asked casually.

Franca chuckled before answering, "None. I've merged the principles of Magic Mirror Divination and devised a spirit-summoning spell. While it may not rival the most professional methods, it suffices. Moreover, it won't attract the attention of deities from the corresponding domain."

"You're quite clever," Lumian praised, his words laced with a hint of mockery.

Exasperated yet amused, Franca retorted, "It's called having an academic spirit. We—uh, your sister—have conducted similar research and experiments. Usually, I can't be bothered to overthink things. Not because I lack intelligence, but because the burden of endless calculations is tiresome. The key to life is to remain relaxed and not get entangled in every intricate detail."

Her gaze swept over Charlie, still sprawled amidst the rubble in the tunnel. Franca refrained from mentioning Gandalf, the president of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society.

Is this why you've adapted so well after becoming a woman? Lumian observed Franca building a wall of spirituality in the vicinity as he approached Charlie.

Witnessing Ciel's approach, Charlie snapped out of his daze and crawled out of the debris on all fours.

Lumian gazed at him, his expression devoid of emotion.

What he was thinking was: Charlie has just witnessed the battle between Franca, me, and the imposter Ive. If he seeks refuge at the Eternal Blazing Sun cathedral, there's a high probability that he won't be able to conceal it when questioned by official Beyonders utilizing their powers. This situation differs from the previous one, where the official Beyonders believed everything was under their control. They were prone to carelessness and had blind spots in their minds…

Charlie's initial elation waned as Lumian continued to scrutinize him in silence. His heart began pounding like a jazz band's drumbeat.

Fear and confusion evident in his voice, Charlie finally mustered the courage to ask, "What's the matter?"

Lumian observed that Charlie's luck remained a blend of red and black, although it had slightly improved since before.

This indicated that Susanna Mattise's threat had not been completely resolved.

He fell silent for a few seconds before speaking up, "Remember to head to Église Saint-Robert later."

Having already contacted Madame Pualis, Lumian no longer needed to stay at Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman or manage Salle de Bal Brise. As long as he remained with the Savoie Mob, he still had a chance to fulfill Mr. K's mission.

Furthermore, Franca was now involved. With her vouching for him while in the Boss's good graces, Lumian could be assigned other profitable ventures even without Salle de Bal Brise. However, the earnings might not be as substantial.

"Alright, alright!" Charlie heaved a sigh of relief.

Having experienced many things, Charlie possessed an open-minded personality. He belonged to the kind of people who grew more excited as the number of individuals increased. Soon enough, his curiosity got the better of him. Pointing at the lifeless imposter Ive lying on the ground, he asked,

"Who's that? Why does he look exactly like you…"

Before Charlie could finish his question, he paused. As the fake Ive met his demise, the facial muscles relaxed, no longer resembling Ciel. The corpse appeared unfamiliar.

"That's someone who believed in an evil god and gained strange powers," Lumian explained simply, tailoring his response to Charlie's comprehension. "He has a certain connection to Susanna Mattise."

Charlie felt a lingering fear.

"No wonder he kept leading me underground…"

Unable to hold back, Lumian cursed, "You imbecile! You've been with him for so long, and yet you didn't sense anything was off about him? Does having my face mean he's me?"

Charlie replied sheepishly, "When I entered Underground Trier, I sensed something was wrong.

"He was very quiet. He only mentioned taking me underground to completely resolve the Susanna Mattise problem. He's not like you, always cracking jokes and teasing.

"I thought it was because the situation was urgent and you weren't in the mood…"

Lumian sighed and shifted his gaze to Franca, realizing that Charlie, being an ordinary person, couldn't see through the Beyonder disguise that could fool even official Beyonders, no matter how astute he was.

The Witch had finished preparing for her own spirit-channeling spell. Standing before the fake Ive's lifeless body, she held two white candles and chanted a series of incantations in Hermes.

Due to the wall of spirituality, Lumian could only catch fragments of the chant. Franca described herself and the imposter Ive, with the former being the source of spirituality and the foundation for maintaining the ritual, and the latter being the object of prayer—the Magic Mirror that provided answers to questions.

As for Charlie, he heard even less and couldn't make sense of it all.

A faint light emerged on the makeup mirror in Franca's hand, and its interior turned into an abyss of deep darkness, as if it had sunk to the river's depths.

A hazy, pale-white face swiftly appeared in the mirror, bearing a resemblance of 50 to 60% to the deceased fake Ive.

Switching to Intis, Franca inquired, "Who are you and which organization do you belong to?"

The imposter Ive, replied in a dazed manner, "Rentas, a member of the Bliss Society."

Rentas… Lumian suddenly recalled the name.

The word "Rentas" often appeared on the posters outside Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons. He was a prominent male supporting actor.

Franca pressed on with her questioning, "What kind of organization is the Bliss Society? And how is it connected to Susanna Mattise?"

The imposter Ive, Rentas, spoke with an otherworldly voice, "The Bliss Society was originally a secret society for women who love women. Susanna was one of them.

"She grew weary of being involved with members of parliament, high-ranking officials, bankers, newspaper moguls, and other men. She sought solace among fellow ladies and madams who shared her love for women. Eventually, she received divine enlightenment and a boon, becoming a priestess of my lord. She transformed the small Bliss Society into a secret organization that worships my lord.

"In today's society, it's inconvenient for women to be openly involved in many affairs. Therefore, the Bliss Society has admitted some male members who can also receive boons, but they lack the privilege to partake in core matters or possess knowledge of the most confidential aspects."

"Remarkable!" Franca applauded.

She knew that Rentas was referring to the evil god known as the Mother Tree of Desire. Delving into such matters made her apprehensive, fearing that she might stumble upon mystical knowledge she shouldn't acquire.

A secret society for women who love women… Male members excluded from core matters… Lumian suddenly grasped something.

He stood by the wall of spirituality and gazed at the makeup mirror in Franca's hand.

"So, Hedsey frequently seeks out street girls and hunts for prey because his desires cannot be fulfilled within the Bliss Society?"

"Yes," Rentas replied. "Women love women exclusively. When I was a Sex Addict, I had to satisfy my desires on my own. Fortunately, I was more attractive than him and had female audience members who admired me. There were plenty of street girls in the market district, so I didn't need to take the risk of pursuing excitement."

"That's lit!" Franca expressed her feelings with peculiar words. She clicked her tongue and sighed. "Isn't there a regular secret group for women who love women?"

"Yes," Rentas firmly responded. "To my knowledge, there's the Moment Society and the Narcissus Society. They often organize women orgies at Trocadéro's Red House Café. We have been attempting to establish contact with them and convert them into believers of my lord[1]."

Trocadéro was situated in Quartier 16 on the north bank of the Srenzo River, in the square district. Known as the Triumph Square established by Emperor Roselle, it was a small town surrounded by a vast suburban forest. It was renowned for its exceptional wine production. Trocadéro Wine stood second only to Aurmir red wine in the world.

Fascinated, Franca listened and repeated the terms, "Trocadéro… Red House Café… Women orgies…"

Lumian couldn't help but feel more concerned about the term "Sex Addict." It seemed to perfectly suit the twisted state of Hedsey. It likely corresponded to Sequence 8 of the Mother Tree of Desire pathway. However, he feared that time was running out for the spirit channeling, so he didn't rush to delve into the matter. Instead, he redirected his focus to Susanna Mattise.

"How did Susanna Mattise transform into an evil spirit? And why did you bring Charlie underground?"

Rentas's pale-white face contorted in distortion.

"She died while receiving a boon and transformed into an evil spirit.

"She told us that because her name was still on the lips of many Trieriens and her portrait was used by numerous men to satisfy themselves, she didn't completely dissipate. She retained a certain level of rationality, albeit warped. She became more consumed by her own affairs, neglecting all else.

"She was gravely injured by official Beyonders during her last encounter and spent time recuperating at the altar. We were worried that once she fully recovered, she would seek out Charlie and attract the attention of the authorities. So, we took advantage of the election and brought Charlie to the altar in advance, handing him over to her for handling."

Charlie had already moved to Lumian's side. His face turned ashen as he listened, feeling as if he had stepped into the depths of hell.

Franca nodded subtly and spoke, "Where is this altar? How much time until Susanna Mattise fully recovers?"

"The altar…" The surface of the makeup mirror revealed a fading blurry face, unveiling an underground tunnel.

The tunnel stretched endlessly, branching off in multiple directions before leading to a small quarry cave engulfed by vines and branches.

There, a colossal brownish-green tree stump emerged abruptly from the ground. Its form consisted of thick branches, with roots originating from an unknown place.

As the image of the tree stump grew clearer, Franca hastily interrupted the manifestation, fearing any potential disturbances.

Rentas continued, "Susanna will regain her full strength in two days and depart from the altar."

[1] Such things did exist in the real world during that era. Parisians were experts in this regard. For further details, refer to Histoire insolite des cafés parisiens.

Chapter 212: Actor

Franca carefully calculated the time and inquired with meticulous detail, "What perils lie at the altar? How much progress has Susanna Mattise made in her recovery today?"

Upon hearing Franca's question, Lumian made a rough conjecture about her thoughts.

If it was possible, they could seize the opportunity to destroy the altar and eliminate Susanna Mattise, who was now weakened, once and for all!

Before departing from Salle de Bal Brise to track down the imposter Ive, Lumian had contemplated a similar issue. Since Rentas had taken Charlie underground, he believed their destination was Susanna Mattise's hiding place. Consequently, when he retrieved the carbide lamp, he also retrieved a few bundles of detonators from the safe, hoping to utilize the unique environment to blast those intruders to their demise.

Rentas's hazy, pale face took on a hint of sanctity.

"The altar is the altar. Only the light of my lord exists. There is no danger."

Lumian muttered to himself, standing by the wall of spirituality, By stating it that way, it only heightens the danger.

Rentas continued, "I do not know the exact condition of Susanna. All I know is that two weeks ago, we could not see her, but she would occasionally make sounds. Last week, she could communicate with us normally, and we could perceive her when we activated our Spirit Visions. Today, she remains the same as before, but she appears extremely feeble."

Based on Rentas's account, Lumian made a preliminary estimation. Susanna, who was originally a Fallen Tree Spirit equivalent to Sequence 5, is now nearing Sequence 6?

If Susanna had not been hiding at the Mother Tree of Desire's altar, Lumian would have considered it worth the risk.

Franca pondered for a moment and spoke, "Do you typically offer prayers at the altar and receive boons?"

"Yes," Rentas replied with a nostalgic tone. "Susanna is our priestess. She enables us to experience the Lord's love for the world and unveils everyone's true desires, allowing us to truly understand ourselves."

Upon hearing this, Franca decided to forego further inquiries and seek the truth in the details.

"Is the altar usually protected?"

"Susanna is always there," Rentas's blurred, pale face swayed gently in the mirror.

Franca gazed at the makeup mirror in her hand and queried, "Was the altar under anyone's protection during the two weeks that Susanna was severely injured?"

Rentas's spirit responded truthfully, "No."

Franca couldn't help but turn her head and glance at Lumian. She realized that he too appeared disappointed and regretful.

From Rentas's answer, they both discerned a crucial fact: the altar possessed a concealed and formidable protective mechanism!

Otherwise, regardless of its underground concealment and the difficulties in locating it, they would need to consider guarding against bounty hunters or cave adventurers fond of searching for treasure in Underground Trier. Simultaneously, they would have to be cautious of smugglers who might have temporarily altered their routes or wandering university students.

Franca let out a sigh, deciding that it would be best to leave the altar and Susanna Mattise in the hands of the authorities.

The evil spirit still needed two more days to recover, and she and Lumian had already discovered the whereabouts of the altar. They had ample time!

Franca shifted her focus and inquired about something else.

"How many members are there in the Bliss Society at Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons?"

"Not many," Rentas's blurry face with flickering dark green eyes responded. "But I only know a few. Ive, Hedsey, and I report to Maipú Meyer. He is the theater manager and represents Susanna in the core affairs of the Bliss Society since she became an evil spirit."

"Why choose a man? Isn't it believed that women only love women? It would be easier to communicate with the other core members of the Bliss Society if it were a woman," Franca objected.

Are you certain there's no hidden significance in this conversation? Lumian sensed Madame Hidden Blade's curiosity piqued.

Rentas's voice drifted as he replied, "Maipú Meyer used to be Susanna's lover."

Franca clicked her tongue and sighed.

"So, we have the high priestess going against the principles of the organization, loving both men and women."

As she spoke, she cast a glance at Charlie, who appeared bewildered and terrified.

Rentas didn't shy away from revealing the truth about Maipú Meyer.

"Before Susanna joined the Bliss Society, they were lovers. Furthermore, he was the only one who could make Susanna feel at ease and relaxed. After her divine awakening and embracing her faith in my lord, she transformed the Bliss Society and recruited Maipú Meyer. However, their intimate relationship ceased. When she became an evil spirit, she no longer limited her affections to women and resumed her connection with Maipú Meyer. Meanwhile, she sought out other targets, infiltrating their dreams and draining their energy. She would fall in love with them before killing them."

Charlie's face grew paler with each passing word, as if he had fallen into an inescapable nightmare that would only end in death.

Franca, who had seriously contemplated having her lover Gardner bear her child, commented, "This is all rather twisted."

She then smiled and remarked, "Does Maipú Meyer enjoy wearing green hats?"

"No, he now exclusively wears a black top hat. He even meticulously grooms the tips of his beard," Rentas dismissed Franca's speculation.

Lumian recalled the mention of a woman's death in Aunett Town during Mr. K's Gathering.

If Maipú Meyer receives a boon and becomes a male Fallen Tree Spirit, could he enter women's dreams and induce erotic fantasies to drain their energy, gradually weakening them until they perish?

The Bliss Society consists of women as its core members, emphasizing that they only love women. It is unlikely for male members to attain such high levels of power. Those incidents are not a result of the Bliss Society, but they too believe in the Mother Tree of Desire? Or could it be due to women loving women?

Franca pressed on with her questioning.

"Why don't you even know the number of members in the Bliss Society at Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons? So, other than Susanna, there are no female members among the Bliss Society members you're familiar with?"

Rentas's pale, blurry face seemed to contort.

"Only Maipú Meyer interacts with the female members."

"While I'm uncertain about the current status of female members at Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons, I can speculate on who they were in the past."

"How?" Franca inquired curiously.

Rentas replied, "Those who joined our theater started as supporting actresses. Through honing their acting skills, they eventually became the leading ladies before they left. They were the core members of the Bliss Society.

"The theater was established as a safe and dependable venue for them to fulfill their inner desires until they could gain initial control."

"Why must they act?" Lumian recalled Rentas's various performances.

Rentas struggled for a moment before explaining, "We were blessed with a boon equivalent to a Sequence 7 called Actor.

"This gift enables us to evoke a deep yearning for attention and a desire to perform in our targets. It also awakens our own hidden desire to showcase ourselves and perform. Before we fully master the power of this boon, we cannot restrain this impulse. Therefore, we require a proper stage to satiate our desires without arousing suspicion.

"Every applause from the audience is a validation for us."

A peculiar Sequence… Instead of immediately attacking Rentas, I confronted him. I failed to utilize the ritual silver dagger in time to suppress my explosive desires because unknowingly, my own desire to perform was awakened… Lumian came to a realization.

Franca clapped her hands, exclaiming, "That explains it. No wonder I was so immersed in acting today!"

She smiled and inquired, "Does your ability to disguise as Ive and Ciel also come from Actor?"

Rentas's face nodded slightly.

"We can manipulate our muscles, skin, and bones to a certain extent. We possess all the necessary skills for disguise, including makeup techniques and prop production. Moreover, Actors have the talent for 'imitation.' They can convincingly portray anything. If they act as an ordinary person, their Astral Projection will appear ordinary as well. If they portray a soldier, they'll display remarkable combat and marksmanship."

"What if they act as a woman?"

"What about acting as a Beyonder?"

Franca and Lumian raised their questions.

Finally, the two of them understood how the fake Ive could deceive official Beyonders and why the theater performers at Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons excelled in their craft.

Working with real Actors every day, it was no wonder their acting skills were top-notch.

Rentas's spirit spoke in a dazed manner, "To portray a woman, you need to prepare props in advance, such as fake breasts and long hair.

"When acting as other Beyonders, if I have observed them beforehand, I can replicate their corresponding abilities, but they won't have tangible effects. They are more like illusions. However, if I were given the opportunity to closely observe and learn from a Beyonder over several months, I could perform similar but significantly weakened abilities."

Impressive indeed… Lumian sighed, then asked in a deep voice, "Who were you impersonating when you emanated that powerful aura?"

"None other than Susanna, as she connects with the altar's aura while conducting the boon ritual." Rentas revealed a trace of piety and reverence.

Franca and Lumian exchanged glances, grateful that they had abandoned the idea of heading to the altar to eliminate future troubles.

Based on Rentas's response, it appeared that when Susanna merged with the altar, she could exhibit power at a demigod level!

"Do Actors possess any other abilities?" Franca inquired.

Rentas shook his head. "No. However, Maipú Meyer once cautioned me against becoming too engrossed in my roles while acting."

Lumian seized the opportunity to ask, "What are the names of the other Sequences corresponding to Actor?"

Rentas's voice took on a sinister tone. "Sequence 9 Scrooge, Sequence 8 Sex Addict, Sequence 6 Recipient, and Sequence 5 Baby Cupid. Beyond that, I am unaware."

Quite fitting… Lumian, who was acquainted with the abilities of Scrooge and Sex Addict, questioned further, "What does 'Recipient' entail?"

"It involves craving success and recognition from high society or the public," Rentas explained.

Curiosity piqued, Franca asked, "It seems that you Actors aren't able to fully control your corresponding desires at every Sequence. At Sequence 5, won't your desires explode upon encountering anything?"

"In truth, as they progress through the Sequences, individuals can gradually gain control over their corresponding desires," Rentas clarified. "For Actors, their primary desire is acting. Their desires for wealth and the opposite sex are only slightly stronger than usual. They won't appear pathological or completely uncontrollable as a result."

Lumian found himself perplexed.

"Then why were you so miserly when you portrayed Monsieur Ive?"

He chose to pick up a gold coin of unknown origin.

Rentas responded naturally, "Because the real Ive is like that. I must stay true to the role."

Chapter 213: Correct Interpretation

Upon hearing Rentas's response, Lumian found himself torn between laughter and rejoicing, grateful that he had achieved a satisfactory outcome through a mistaken train of thought.

Originally, Lumian believed that Beyonders, like the imposter Ive, who worshiped the Mother Tree of Desire, would struggle to control their insatiable hunger and carnal desires. That's why he decided to use a gold coin to carry the vagrant's bad luck. To his surprise, the followers of the evil god were primarily influenced by their specific desires at different stages. Once they mastered the power or received a new boon, they could break free and progress to the next state. While their desires remained potent, they were no longer uncontrollable.

In simpler terms, if Rentas hadn't been portraying Monsieur Ive and didn't feel the need to exhibit stinginess, there was a high probability that he wouldn't have picked up the ill-fated gold coin and would have approached the situation with greater caution.

Of course, if Rentas hadn't been attuned to changes in fate and failed to detect the issue with the gold coin, he would likely have claimed it for himself once he realized its owner was long gone and wouldn't return. After all, he possessed a touch more greed than the average person, and as the saying goes, "finders keepers" in the hearts of a certain percentage of ordinary individuals.

Lumian now grasped the full meaning behind Rentas's words.

Indeed, one mustn't become lost in the role when acting.

However, Rentas was in the midst of acting, so scrutinizing the details was not a concern for him. Otherwise, it would have been easy for others to discover his true identity as the impostor Ive…

Franca sensed that the spirit channeling was coming to an end and hurriedly asked, "Who are the suspected core members of the Bliss Society?"

Rentas's pale, indistinct face twitched.

"Even if I were to tell you, you wouldn't find them.

"They joined Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons after receiving boons and becoming actresses. They adopted false names and concealed their true faces. Once their acting skills reached maturity and they gained control over their corresponding desires, they would reclaim their real identities upon leaving the theater.

"If you wish to uncover their assumed identities, gather a list of all the female leads in Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons' plays from the past two years. Look for those who performed most frequently."

At the mention of the female lead at Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons, Lumian's mind recalled a name.

"Could Charlotte Calvino be one of the core members of the Bliss Society?"

She played the lead in the play Forest Fairy. The costumes in the promotional stills evoked memories of Susanna Mattise.

Rentas's face grew increasingly elusive, and his voice became more ethereal.

"I don't know. She rose through the ranks as an apprentice actress and only recently started taking the lead roles in the past few months. She's not an outsider, but Maipú Meyer might promote her to a member of the Bliss Society."

Franca was about to inquire about Maipú Meyer's corresponding stages and abilities when Rentas's spirit, consumed by black flames, could no longer hold on and dissipated upon the surface of the makeup mirror.

With a tinge of regret, Franca concluded the ritual and dismissed the wall of spirituality.

As she squatted beside Rentas's lifeless body, rummaging through his pockets, she let out a sigh and remarked, "I didn't manage to get to Maipú Meyer. Forget it, I'll leave it to the authorities to handle it."

Lumian paused, pondering her question.

"I've heard from a playwright that Maipú Meyer is highly ambitious. He aims to make Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons the most renowned theater in Trier and receive the prestigious Intis Legion of Honor medal."

"Desire for success and recognition?" Franca recalled Rentas's depiction of a Sequence 6 recipient. "I suppose that's the limit for male members of the Bliss Society?"

"Likely so," Lumian struggled to provide a precise answer.

Franca had already collected a stack of items.

Two metal canisters, a leather wallet, a peculiar dough that conformed to facial contours, thin skin-like pieces, eyebrow pencils, and various makeup tools…

"Give it a sniff." Franca tossed the two metal canisters to Lumian.

Lumian distinguished them for a moment before responding, "One canister contains the scent you just experienced, and the other should hold a matching sedative."

They appeared to be essential items for followers of the Mother Tree of Desire when venturing outside.

"Mysticism-branded smelling salts?" Franca mused, then added, "You can keep what's left of the canister you have. This is mine. I'll give you the sedative. Choose from these disguises and take the money from the wallet.

Anything you don't want, I'll keep. Bloody hell, this pauper doesn't even possess materials, talismans, or weapons, let alone Beyonder characteristics or mystical items!"

"The sedative and mysticism smelling salts will prove useful," Lumian, who had only obtained Beyonder abilities from "Hammer" Ait, didn't show much concern.

Franca didn't overlook any part of Rentas's body—including his crotch and soles—yet she found nothing more.

She withdrew a folded cloth bag and opened it, carefully stashing away the collection from the ground. Then, she addressed Lumian, "We'll divide this once we return."

With that, she rose to her feet and glanced at the frightened Charlie. She muttered to herself thoughtfully, "He witnessed our clash with Rentas. What should we do?"

Charlie's legs trembled, and as he leaned toward Lumian, he gritted his teeth and proclaimed, "I-I won't betray you!"

Without waiting for Lumian's response, Franca let out a sigh and declared, "Forget it. We'll leave it to the official Beyonders."

She deliberately introduced the topic before promptly reaching a conclusion. Lumian, finally freed from the grip of his acting impulses, regained his composure and rationality. After careful consideration, he suggested,

"I have alternative solutions.

"Charlie doesn't need to seek refuge at Église Saint-Robert, nor does he need to worry about Susanna Mattise finding him."

He thought of his Luck Transference Spell!

Before, he refrained from using it as Susanna Mattise had yet to bother Charlie. There was no corresponding fate to alter. But now, Susanna Mattise was on the path to recovery, and Charlie was her primary target. His luck had taken a turn, and a life-threatening calamity loomed. His luck had indeed changed!

When the moment arrived, Lumian would "gift" the gold coin carrying the weight of the impending disaster to the real Ive, allowing them to face it on their own.

Naturally, this differed from the Substitution Spell and Fallen Mercury's Fate Exchange. It only diverted bloodshed temporarily. In other words, Charlie wouldn't be in Susanna Mattise's crosshairs for the next few days. However, in a few days' time, unless Susanna Mattise was wholly purified or had lost her memories, this external threat would still remain.

Nevertheless, the authorities would take action tomorrow, armed with sufficient intel!

When Lumian realized that Charlie's luck was in jeopardy, he refrained from intervening because he could only change Charlie's luck, not his own. Susanna would undoubtedly target him as well, the adversary who had provoked Charlie's betrayal. Therefore, he opted for the simplest approach—to disguise himself and urge Charlie to seek refuge at the Eternal Blazing Sun cathedral, thus buying more time to guard against Susanna Mattise. They were now certain that Susanna had two days left to recuperate.

"Really?" Charlie's eyes brightened.

Lumian smiled and inquired, "Do you trust me or not?"

Charlie stammered, "I-I believe you! I believe you!

"You just like to tease people about trivial matters."

Curiosity piqued, Franca asked, "What way?"

A method you shouldn't be aware of… Lumian silently muttered, contemplating the specifics.

If I wish to alter Charlie's current luck, mere prayers won't suffice. I must harness the power sealed within me…

Poor Charlie; I'll have to render him unconscious. I can't expose the corruption within me or the suspicion of seeking aid from an evil god…

Just as Lumian was about to instruct Charlie to accompany him and prepare for his temporary incapacitation, a thought flashed across his mind.

Does utilizing the power within the seal constitute exploiting Termiboros?

Should I write to Madam Magician and seek her opinion?

Previously, the tramp's ill fortune bore no relation to mysticism or Beyonder abilities. The ritual required minimal power. However, the support needed to resist a Sequence 5 evil spirit atop an evil god's altar would likely be several times greater than before…

What would occur then?

Since Charlie's luck changed, everything had become urgent. The timing was impeccable. It seemed as though an opportunity had emerged without allowing me a chance to weigh my options…

If I hadn't just corresponded with Madam Magician and received her reminder, I might have already altered Charlie's luck…

Noticing Lumian's motionless state, Franca inquired, "What's the matter?"

Shaking off his stupor, Lumian contemplated for a moment.

"I just realized that the method I had prepared seems to have significant flaws."

"Ah," Charlie uttered, a mixture of disappointment and concern.

Franca ruminated for a few seconds before suggesting, "I have an idea as well.

"Charlie won't head to Église Saint-Robert. He'll follow us to Rue des Blouses Blanches.

"As long as we survive the night, we'll be fine by tomorrow.

"Think about it. Our original plan was to confront Susanna Mattise, and she still has two days remaining at the altar. Even if we face an attack tonight, it will likely come from Maipú Meyer and his lackeys. Even if he recruits other core members of the Bliss Society, as long as they are inferior to Susanna Mattise at the altar, we stand a good chance of holding out until dawn. If things don't go as planned, we can create a commotion and attract the attention of official Beyonders. We can escape from the market district amidst the chaos.

"This is the worst-case scenario. However, if Charlie goes to Église Saint-Robert, we must consider moving immediately. We could also become targets."

Lumian pondered for a few moments and found the idea quite feasible.

He nodded and stated, "I have no objections."

His gaze then fell upon Charlie, who eagerly replied, "I don't have any issues either."

Charlie held considerable confidence in Ciel and Franca.

Lumian refocused his attention and observed Charlie's luck.

To his surprise, Charlie's impending disaster had noticeably weakened and showed signs of improvement!

What… Charlie's true misfortune lies in participating in the luck transference ritual? Did his fate change when I abandoned that notion? Although a bloody calamity still awaits, it appears less severe… Bloody Termiboros! Lumian comprehended the situation in an instant and couldn't help but inwardly curse.

Chapter 214: Encounter

After cursing Termiboros, Lumian caught sight of Franca securing the cloth bag with war spoils and fastening it to her person.

A thought struck him, triggering a recollection of one of Scrooge's abilities, and he reminded her, "Aren't you worried those Scrooges will track us down using lost possessions?"

He had previously informed Franca about the Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons, mentioning that the sinister cult possessed a peculiar knack for detecting the whereabouts of their lost belongings.

In contrast to the perverted Hedsey, Rentas carried out his orders dutifully. If anything happened to him, he might possess something from Maipú Meyer to determine his location and the saboteur's whereabouts.

Franca scoffed dismissively. "That ability surely has its limitations in terms of time and range. By the time the folks at Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons realize Rentas is missing, it will prove exceedingly arduous for them to track us down.

"Besides, with Charlie here, they could find us if they truly desired. Whether we take these items or not, Charlie is akin to Susanna Mattise's lost possession—no, her lost lover."

Charlie stood dazed, bewildered by the conversation between Ciel and "Red Boots." It wasn't until Franca mentioned his name that he grasped his "situation" somewhat. Sporting a bitter expression, he retorted, "We're not lovers…"

Franca consoled Charlie, though her sincerity remained questionable. "Can't be helped. She's convinced of it on her own accord, and she's strong enough."

Persuaded by Franca's argument, Lumian ceased dwelling on Scrooge's abilities. He pulled out the ritual silver dagger and promptly tended to his wound.

Bending down, he scooped up Rentas's lifeless body and carried it to the debris-blocked hole, shoving it into the passage the Actor had previously dug.

Charlie watched in horror, marveling at Ciel's skills as a ruthless mob leader who had struck fear into the Poison Spur Mob. His attention then shifted to Rentas's attire—shirt, vest, pants, and boots.

They seem relatively new. If they are stripped and pawned, I reckon they can fetch at least two verl d'or… Charlie's mouth gapped, but he refrained from voicing his thoughts.

Franca nodded approvingly. "Good job. Cleaning up the scene and stalling the enemy's detection."

"I worry that Maipú Meyer will exercise caution. Once Rentas fails to return by midnight, he'll lead his men here and stumble upon the corpse. Then, he might choose to abandon Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons and relocate with the remaining members of the Bliss Society. Maybe we don't even have to wait until midnight. Susanna Mattise will undoubtedly prod him if she can find a way to contact him."

Such a turn of events would thwart the forthcoming official Beyonders' raid and leave behind latent dangers.

Franca added, "Fortunately, Susanna won't be able to leave the altar in the next two days, and the altar itself can't sprout legs and flee. At the very least, the official Beyonders can address Charlie's predicament."

"Not necessarily," Lumian countered, "we shouldn't make assumptions about the evil god altar using conventional logic. It's akin to me never fathoming that a man could give birth."

"Huh?" Charlie's confusion escalated as he listened to Ciel and "Red Boots," comprehending each word independently but failing to grasp their interconnected meaning.

Franca fell silent for two seconds before solemnly nodding.

"You're right. The true form of the altar is like a massive tree stump. It might possess life. When the time comes, it can uproot itself and transform into a treant, making its escape with Susanna."

With a clap of her hands, Franca exclaimed, "Exactly! How can it be called a tree spirit without a tree?"

Lumian sensed that Franca's conjecture could be close to the truth.

He recollected wearing the Mystery Prying Glasses at Auberge du Coq Doré, where he had witnessed an extensive underground network of brownish-green roots stretching in all directions.

Susanna Mattise's tree stump altar might be part of that brownish-green root system. When faced with danger, it can retract… Lumian's thoughts raced as he crawled into the passageway and pushed Rentas's lifeless body into the rubble-blocked hole.

Emerging from the hole, he retrieved the carbide lamp and the enemy's lantern. He scrutinized the structure of the tunnel's ceiling and the surrounding rock walls. Every now and then, he extended his palm, gently patted and knocked against them.

Confused by Lumian's actions, Franca, eager to leave Underground Trier as soon as possible, asked, "What are you doing?"

Calmly, Lumian replied, "I'm searching for a suitable spot to place a bundle of explosives and bury the corpse completely. We mustn't make too much noise to avoid alerting Susanna, who's deep underground, and Maipú Meyer, who's in Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons on the surface."

Simultaneously, he had to ensure that the ground wouldn't collapse, as it could endanger the buildings above.

Clearly, the municipal workers had diligently reinforced these areas when connecting the underground quarries, sewers, and various tunnels. Regular repairs were carried out, and minor cave-ins posed no threat to the surface's safety or its own integrity.

Using his Hunter powers, Lumian soon identified a depression on the side of the hole and placed a bundle of detonators there.

"Unfortunately, we lack the proper tools and materials. Otherwise, we could set up a trigger for the explosives under the corpse. When Maipú Meyer arrives and tries to lift the body in his agitation, it would go boom," Lumian said with regret, squatting down.

Since consuming the first potion, he hadn't had the opportunity to execute a Hunter's bomb trap and showcase his explosive finesse.

Charlie's heart raced as he listened, confirming Ciel's reputation as the most renowned mob leader of recent times.

"Indeed, a true Hunter," Franca exclaimed, filled with admiration.

Lumian then took out a match, igniting the fuse.

He stood up and began walking toward Franca and Charlie at a steady pace. Passing by the pile of gravel, he tossed the lantern into the tunnel.

"Hey, hey, hey!" Charlie hurriedly warned Lumian as he noticed the fuse nearing its end.

His calf muscles tensed, preparing to leap behind the rock wall to avoid the impending explosion.

Dressed in a simple formal top and cargo pants, Lumian had only covered a distance of seven to eight meters when the detonator erupted behind him.

The tunnel trembled slightly, and the stone wall beside the hole collapsed, burying most of the already unstable opening.

Flames ignited, and gravel scattered, but they didn't reach Lumian's back. They only affected the area two to three meters away from him and in a different direction within the tunnel.

Lumian didn't turn around or evade. He approached Franca, who wore a smile, and Charlie, who stood there dumbfounded.

Franca gave him a thumbs-up and clicked her tongue. "Let's go."

With that, she swiftly turned and headed towards the exit of Underground Trier, the same path they had used to enter.

Black flames silently flickered behind her, igniting the blood on the ground, filling the air with its scent, and engulfing the remnants of red and white.

Charlie's eyes widened, as if he had stepped into a surreal dream.

Only when Lumian patted him on the shoulder did he turn and follow, as if his spirit had abandoned him.

As they ascended towards the surface, Franca grinned and said, "Tomorrow and the day after, we'll discover whether Susanna Mattise and the altar have been completely eradicated, by observing Charlie's situation."

"Whether Susanna Mattise comes searching for him?" Lumian, carrying the carbide lamp, startled Charlie intentionally.

If that were the case, Franca would have said "two days later" instead of "tomorrow or the day after."

Charlie trembled and stammered, "H-h-how?"

Franca chuckled before replying, "If the official Beyonders don't come looking for you, it means you have truly escaped the nightmare called Susanna.

"If they do come and offer you a good position, congratulations. You will have hope entwined with danger."

"W-what do you mean?" Charlie didn't fully grasp the meaning.

Franca didn't explain further and instead inquired, "If you become a quarry policeman with a monthly salary of 300 verl d'or, you'll face conflicts with smugglers, cave explorers, and bounty hunters every day. There's a certain chance of sacrifice. Are you willing?"

"Of course!" Charlie blurted out.

Though being a quarry policeman was perilous, most of them managed to survive!

If Susanna Mattise isn't completely purged, the official Beyonders would offer Charlie a job that would make it easier to protect him. And those positions often come with good pay. Lumian roughly understood Franca's meaning.

The three of them exited Underground Trier, maneuvered through an alley, and crossed a barricade. Taking a secluded route on Rue des Blouses Blanches, they arrived at Franca's sixth-floor apartment.

Franca removed her hood and casually tossed the bag containing their spoils of war beside the coffee table. She half-reclined on the armchair and gestured with a nod towards the sofa and another armchair.

"Now, we must endure until dawn."

After Lumian and Charlie took their seats, the living room fell into an eerie silence.

This made Charlie uneasy. He glanced at Ciel and spoke up, "You actually possess those mystical abilities."

"If not, how could I have slain Margot and Ait, becoming the guardian of Salle de Bal Brise and Auberge du Coq Doré?" Lumian chuckled.

"That's true." Charlie pondered for a moment and found this explanation more acceptable.

As the trio engaged in conversation, the needle of the cuckoo wall clock gradually approached midnight.

Outside the window, the darkness remained undisturbed.

At that moment, faint footsteps resonated from outside the door, approaching swiftly from below.

"Jenna… I forgot she was coming over tonight!" Franca exclaimed, sitting upright.

She glanced at Lumian, then at Charlie. After a brief moment of hesitation, she closed her eyes and waited for Jenna to open the door herself.

With a click, Jenna, dressed in a white blouse and a fluffy beige skirt, used the spare key to enter the apartment.

In an instant, she noticed Lumian and Charlie.

"What's going on?" Jenna couldn't hide her confusion, her gaze shifting between Lumian, Charlie, and Franca.

Franca mustered a forced smile and said, "We were getting bored. We thought of playing Fighting Evil. Want to join us? We have two decks of cards."

Jenna peered suspiciously for a few seconds, sensing that Franca didn't want to disclose the real reason in front of Ciel. She gestured towards the guest room and stated,

"Dammit, it's already late. Why are you still playing cards? I have a packed day tomorrow. I need to get some sleep!"

She waved at Lumian and Charlie before heading towards the guest room.

Lumian gazed at Franca calmly and inquired, "Why didn't you just tell her what we're doing?"

Jenna, too, had fallen victim to the predicament at Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons. She had nearly been raped by the pervert named Hedsey.

Franca was caught off guard.

"You're right. Why didn't I just say it straightforwardly…"

There was no need to conceal it!

She glanced at the closed door of the guest room, intending to reveal the truth to Jenna later.

Casually, Lumian asked, "What does Jenna usually keep busy with?"

"Don't you know?" Franca's face gradually lit up with satisfaction. "She's an apprentice in acting, studying drama. Sigh, it's not like the old days. I heard in the previous era, apprentices could learn for free as long as they signed a long-term contract. They even received food and accommodation. Nowadays, not only do they have to pay tuition fees, but they also have to cover all expenses themselves."

As Franca spoke, she noticed Lumian's expression turning grave.

Lumian furrowed his brow and inquired, "At which theater is she doing her apprenticeship?"

"I never asked…" Franca murmured, making the connection.

In that instant, Jenna emerged from the guest room, carrying a stack of items as she made her way towards the restroom.

"What theater are you apprenticing at?" Franca stood up and inquired.

Jenna responded with confusion, "Why do you ask? You've never been curious before."

Observing Lumian and Charlie's focused gaze, she couldn't help but curse, "Why the f*ck are you staring at me? Dogsh*t, what does my theater have to do with you?"

Realizing Franca and Lumian's seriousness, she hesitated for a moment before muttering, "Dammit, there's no need for me to hide anything! It's the Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons."

Chapter 215: Jenna's Worry

As soon as Jenna revealed where she studied acting, a hush fell over the living room. Franca and Lumian exchanged inexplicable glances, causing Jenna to feel a pang of uncertainty. Charlie, the waiter, couldn't conceal his startled expression and the fear that gripped him was evident in his shrinking demeanor and fearful eyes.

"What's wrong? Is there a problem?" Jenna asked, her confidence wavering.

Lumian seized the moment and tossed a Louis d'or at Jenna's feet, his eyes intently following her every move, even the slightest flicker in her gaze.

"Dammit! What's the meaning of this?" Jenna looked down at the Louis d'or, her confusion turning into anger as she confronted Lumian.

Lumian's expression returned to normal, and he turned his head, grinning at Franca. "Not a Scrooge."

"Of course!" Franca responded, a mix of exasperation and amusement. "We meet often. She may be a bit frugal, but she's definitely not a Scrooge. Plus, she doesn't exhibit any signs of being a Sex Addict, and her acting skills leave much to be desired."

Franca couldn't help but feel a twinge of regret.

"What are you two talking about?" Jenna was utterly bewildered, forgetting her own penchant for profanity.

"You explain," Lumian instructed Franca.

Franca rose and tried to allow Jenna to squeeze into the recliner with her, but realizing it was too cramped, Jenna opted for an armchair instead, resting a pile of ordinary clothes on her lap.

"Do you remember that creep Hedsey?" Franca slumped back disappointedly in the recliner.

Jenna responded without hesitation, "I remember. Damn it, he died too easily!"

It wasn't exactly an easy demise… Lumian silently muttered, recalling the gruesome state of Hedsey's lower body.

Using this as a starting point, Franca delved into the secrets of the Bliss Society, the dark Sequences tied to the evil god, the Mother Tree of Desire, the connection between the Bliss Society and the Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons, and various details involving the true Ive, Rentas, Maipú Meyer, and Susanna Mattise.

Jenna, having absorbed Franca's mystical knowledge, grew increasingly astonished with each revelation. It was as if a door had swung open, revealing a new world—a scene that was entirely different from what she had known before. It festered, exuded sinister vibes, terrified her, and made her stomach churn with disgust.

After Franca finished her account, she blurted out, "Did that creep target me at the Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons?"

Considering that Hedsey was a subordinate of theater manager Maipú Meyer and associated with the Bliss Society, he likely frequented and surreptitiously entered the Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons.

Jenna suspected that the pervert often lurked in the shadows, observing the apprentice actresses during their classes.

"It's possible," Franca agreed, contemplating why the pervert Hedsey didn't choose another underground singer but instead risked attacking Jenna.

Jenna was undeniably attractive. After her time at the Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons, where she honed her acting and makeup skills, her allure had gradually emerged. However, she wasn't a fully-fledged Witch yet, nor was she overwhelmingly captivating. In the bustling marketplace, there was no shortage of underground singers who were more alluring and could ignite the desires of men of lower standing. Besides, they lacked the distinction of being Red Boots's mistress.

Jenna glared at Lumian, her teeth grinding together in frustration.

"So, you suspected that I believed in the Mother Tree of Desire, and you used a Louis d'or to test me? Isn't that being a bit stingy? You should have used at least ten Louis d'or!"

Lumian chuckled softly. "I suddenly realized that since we met, you've never praised any orthodox god. I still don't know if you're a follower of the Eternal Blazing Sun or the God of Steam and Machinery. It's rather suspicious."

Jenna scoffed and replied, "Most of the time when I meet you, I'm dressed like this. I wear smoky makeup that symbolizes debauchery and sing, 'My dear, he's really good with his fingers.' If I were to praise the Sun in this state, I believe God would incinerate me."

As she spoke, she pointed to her chest, revealing a generous amount of alluring cleavage.

Without waiting for Lumian's response, she turned her finger towards Franca.

"And Franca never praises any deity either. Why aren't you suspecting her?"

"Who says I don't?" Franca declared solemnly, drawing a triangular Sacred Emblem on her chest. "By Steam!"

Your acting skills are mediocre… Aurore is the same. She rarely mentions her faith and doesn't attend Mass. She only praises the Sun when questioned… Lumian drew the triangular Sacred Emblem.

"By Steam!"

Caught up in their actions, Charlie instinctively spread his arms wide.

"Praise the Sun!"

An indescribable silence descended, as if no one knew how to proceed with the conversation.

After a few seconds, Lumian addressed Jenna, saying, "So, your true identity is an apprentice actress."

Jenna couldn't help but feel a twinge of satisfaction. She lifted her chin slightly and replied, "Well then, am I qualified to critique your acting skills? And let me clarify, I'm not some low-class hooligan with a vulgar mouth. I'm merely playing the role of an underground songstress. How did I do? Was it convincingly authentic? Can you find any faults?"

"No wonder I occasionally find you rather refined," Lumian mocked, concurring with Jenna's statement.

"What do you mean, 'rather'?" Jenna expressed her dissatisfaction.

Charlie's gaze darted between their faces, eventually landing on Franca, who sat in the recliner.

Franca pursed her lips and observed Lumian and Jenna as they bickered.

Lumian dismissed Jenna's bragging and said, "Let's discuss the Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons."

After a few moments of contemplation, Jenna blurted out in frustration, "Dammit! My tuition fees!"

As soon as the words left her mouth, she noticed everyone giving her strange looks.

Jenna hurriedly clarified, "Didn't you mention that Maipú Meyer might escape with the members of the Bliss Society? Won't Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons shut down? Damn it, I've already paid a year's worth of tuition fees to these damn heretics! I need to get that money back!"

Once Jenna regained her composure, Lumian's lips twitched.

"Weren't you claiming that your foul mouth and low morals were all part of an act?"

"…" At first, Jenna was left speechless, but then she defended herself forcefully. "I am currently Jenna, the underground songstress! I am still in character and haven't broken free from it…"

Observing Lumian's skeptical expression, Jenna became enraged with embarrassment.

"Dammit, don't you understand? This is called method acting!"

"Yes, yes, yes," Franca chimed in, trying her best to change the subject. "Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons has a dedicated audience and talented actors. Even if the theater manager and a few leads leave, it won't shut down. At most, they might embezzle funds. It'll be a bit challenging for them. I believe there will be plenty of people willing to take over such valuable assets. Oh, by the way, who owns Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons?"

Jenna recollected and replied, "Maipú Meyer himself."

"Ah, I see…" Lumian glanced at Franca. "If Maipú Meyer truly intends to escape, we could acquire Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons at a low price. There are numerous dancers and singers under Brignais's control who don't want to sell themselves. We can give them an opportunity to earn a living at the theater."

"They will face fierce competition." Franca contemplated. "If we succeed, it could indeed be a viable path. The challenge lies in convincing Brignais… Haha, we can spin him a tale and sell him a promise. Let him know that no matter how much he squeezes a singer who moonlights as a street girl, he can only make a pittance. On the other hand, a renowned theater actress under the influence of our Savoie Mob will bring far greater returns."

Charlie's gaze shifted between Lumian and Franca before settling on Jenna, who sat in an armchair.

After discussing with Lumian, Franca assured Jenna, "Don't worry, your tuition fees won't be in vain."

Jenna, who had been listening intently to their conversation, let out a sigh of relief and muttered,

"The tuition fees for Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons aren't cheap at all."

Franca redirected the conversation back to its original course.

"What's your impression of the people from Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons? Who do you find suspicious?"

Jenna contemplated for a moment before responding, "Maipú Meyer enjoys watching our acting classes. His gaze can be a bit lecherous, but he has never harassed anyone. That's something many men do, isn't it? Yes, some apprentices might have a private relationship with him. After all, he's the theater's owner and manager.

"Rentas possesses remarkable acting skills. He is the most professional and exceptional among all the acting instructors. The characters he portrays in plays seem to come alive, each one distinct from the others…"

At this point, Jenna's tone revealed a touch of envy, as if she desired to possess the abilities of an Actor. However, thoughts of Hedsey's perversity and Susanna Mattise's current predicament filled her with fear, preventing her from indulging in such fantasies.

"I haven't really interacted with the Ive you mentioned. Perhaps he only appears in certain genres…

"I'm not well-acquainted with Charlotte. By the time I joined Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons, she had already taken on lead roles, but she was my role model. Her acting skills are slightly inferior to Rentas's. I'm uncertain if she's an Actor. Dammit, it's hard to say…"

Jenna struggled to restrain herself for a long while before finally cursing.

"The other acting instructors are probably not Actors. Their acting abilities pale in comparison to Rentas's. They often praise me for my talent in acting. While I may not match Rentas or the previous female leads of Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons, I can hold my own against Charlotte when she was still an apprentice…" Jenna suddenly fell silent.

"What's the matter?" Franca inquired, concerned.

Charlie's gaze shifted from Franca and Jenna to Ciel, who sat beside him.

Jenna furrowed her brow and said, "Tomorrow, the official Beyonders will conduct a thorough investigation of Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons. What… what should I do?"

She was a wild Beyonder, an Assassin.

"Abandon Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons and find another theater?" Lumian suggested.

Money was the least of her concerns.

Jenna pressed her lips together, her expression filled with dejection.

"B-but I used my true identity at Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons. What about my mother and brother…"

Chapter 216: Acting Guidance

Lumian wasn't sure if Jenna's bounty would have consequences for her family, so he turned to Franca, hoping she could use her connections to persuade the official Beyonders to overlook a mere apprentice actress.

Franca didn't hide her dilemma.

Helping to hide something was not an issue for someone like 007, but if they expected him to meticulously cover for someone during the operation, two conditions had to be met. First, he had to be involved in the operation and responsible for investigating the apprentice actresses. Second, he needed some information about Jenna to determine whom he should assist.

Franca didn't believe that 007 happened to be in the market district by chance. At best, he could pass on information. The chances of him being directly in charge of the operations were highly unlikely.

"I can try, but I can't make any promises," Franca replied, looking at Jenna with concern, trying to offer some comfort without making any definite commitments.

Jenna acknowledged her words briefly, feeling a bit relieved, but she still struggled to come up with another solution.

Lumian pondered for a moment and said teasingly, "You're just an apprentice actress. Why are you so anxious?

"Even if the official Beyonders investigate everyone in Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons, they won't waste much effort on you. Think about it. You've only been in the market district for a short time, and you haven't even become an apprentice actress yet. You don't even have a chance to play a minor supporting role. How could you be a female member of the Bliss Society?"

"That's right," Franca interjected. "You spend most of your time singing in bars and dance halls rather than interacting with the cult of Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons. You're in the least suspicious group. If you tell the investigators the truth, you might not have to undergo any further tests of your Beyonder powers."

Lumian added with a smile, "And even if they do test you, it will mainly be to determine if you believe in the Mother Tree of Desire, or if you're a Scrooge or a Sex Addict. And you definitely don't fall into any of those categories.

"This is a blind spot for the official Beyonders during their investigations, and you can take advantage of it.

"Didn't you mention your excellent acting skills? Now is the time to showcase them!"

"Yes… When the Sun rises, go to Église Saint-Robert and pray. Get an accessory that reveals your identity as a believer of the Eternal Blazing Sun, and wear it. When you enter Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons, whether or not the official Beyonders arrive, praise the Sun frequently."

"Evil god believers rarely engage in such actions. It will effectively set you apart from them. If the official Beyonders notice these details, there's a good chance they'll consider you trustworthy."

Jenna's eyes sparkled as she listened.

"That's right.

"A devout apprentice actress who believes in the Eternal Blazing Sun and has only recently joined Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons won't switch to an evil god so easily. They only need to conduct a simple investigation…"

"As long as I lead them to search for Beyonder powers in connection with the believers of the evil god, they probably won't suspect that I became a Beyonder due to other encounters…"

The more Jenna spoke, the more her excitement grew. She placed the stack of clothes on her lap and stood up.

She paced back and forth, making gestures as if she were embodying a devoted apprentice actress who believed in the Eternal Blazing Sun.

Madame, it appears you're not a true follower of the Eternal Blazing Sun. Otherwise, you wouldn't have needed to rehearse beforehand, Lumian clicked his tongue and criticized.

Charlie, who had been listening, was taken aback.

Is "Little Minx" Jenna also someone with magical powers?

I'm the only ordinary person here…

Jenna's performance, even in the presence of imaginary official Beyonders, gradually bolstered her confidence.

Franca observed quietly, her eyes flickering, her mind filled with trivial thoughts.

If Jenna and I possessed the powers of an Actor, we would make perfect cosplayers, capable of becoming anything we desired. Tsk tsk… she thought to herself.

After some time, Jenna regained her composure and looked at Charlie warily.

"I've heard that you enjoy giving speeches in bars and twisting other people's secrets into stories.

"If you dare to f*cking reveal my Beyonder powers, I'll hand you over to a homosexual Sex Addict. Heh heh, just imagine the suffering you'll endure."

Charlie couldn't help but pause for a moment. He shuddered and raised his right hand.

"Praise the Sun. I swear in God's name that I won't divulge your secret!

"I just mentioned that you and Ciel became lovers…"

Charlie suddenly stopped, sensing the strange atmosphere in the living room once again.

Lumian shrugged at Franca, signaling that it was merely a rumor.

Jenna scoffed.

"Will you also spread the rumor that Franca joined Ciel and me to form a stable love triangle?"

"No," Charlie quickly shook his head.

At the same time, he found the idea rather intriguing. It hadn't occurred to him before.

Jenna settled back into the armchair and continued to recount her knowledge of Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons.

Lumian and Franca listened attentively, occasionally posing questions to guard against potential threats.

…

In Underground Trier.

A figure with a lantern in hand moved cautiously along a familiar path, searching for something.

This person, of average height, wore a black tailcoat, a matching bow tie, and a half top hat. His face had a square shape, with short and thick eyebrows. The lines on his face were etched deep, and he sported a well-groomed brownish-yellow beard, carefully waxed at the tips.

The lantern's flickering light cast eerie shadows on his countenance, lending him an air of profound melancholy.

After walking for some time, the man halted, his gaze directed towards a section of the tunnel that had suffered a slight cave-in.

His dark brown eyes narrowed, focusing intently for a moment, before he suddenly dropped to all fours, his nose twitching.

The scent of gunpowder… and blood… The man rose solemnly to his feet and approached the collapsed area.

Through the layers of debris, he seemed to discern the glimpse of an incomplete corpse.

…

The atmosphere on Rue des Blouses Blanches was much quieter at night compared to Rue Anarchie. Except for the occasional clamor caused by passing carriages and the inebriated stumbling their way home, the night seemed to have fallen into a stillness.

From time to time, a distant gunshot would break the silence, its echo piercing through the night only to be swallowed by the darkness and moonlight.

Lumian and his companions engaged in intermittent conversation, their nerves on edge, apprehensive that shadows might suddenly emerge from the darkness beyond the window.

Time dragged on slowly. For Charlie, it felt like awaiting a verdict. He was restless, anxious, yet filled with a glimmer of hope.

Finally, the distant skyline began to be tinged with a golden-red hue. Before long, the entire night was bathed in the crimson light.

"We should be safe now," Franca declared, sitting upright in her recliner.

Lumian glanced at Charlie and noticed that his luck was no longer drenched in blood-red. It had returned to its normal state, and there were even hints of prosperity.

The immediate crisis has been averted, but if Susanna Mattise manages to escape, will Charlie obtain a position with the authorities? Lumian pondered over it and nodded.

"For the time being, all I can say is that we should be fine."

Through this encounter, he confirmed one thing: even without the Luck Transference Spell, human luck could change.

He felt that the future was shaped by multiple factors. Different choices could lead to diverse outcomes.

If Lumian had followed Osta Trul and provided protection instead of forewarning him of impending disaster, perhaps he wouldn't have suffered injuries. However, that didn't guarantee a turn for the better. Lumian's protection might have implicated Osta Trul, leading him to be dragged to the river's depths by another water ghost, losing his life.

Does inevitability imply that regardless of the choices one makes, a predetermined fate will inevitably manifest? Lumian turned his gaze towards Jenna, the underground songstress and apprentice actress.

Jenna possessed average luck—neither filled with fortuitous encounters nor beset by grave dangers.

In high spirits, Jenna furrowed her brow and asked, "Why are you staring at me?"

After a night of acclimatizing, she refrained from uttering vulgarities and put more thought into her words.

Lumian pointed to his eye sockets.

"Are you planning to go to Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons looking like that?"

"Oh, right! I haven't taken off my makeup!" Jenna exclaimed, getting up and rushing into the washroom with a stack of clothes.

Franca stood up and stretched, paying no mind to her appearance.

She glanced at the washroom and whispered to Lumian, "Will the act be convincing?"

"Yes," Lumian replied with confidence.

Previously, he hadn't been entirely sure, but after observing Jenna's current state of luck, he was more certain.

Franca chose to place her trust in Lumian.

"I'll keep a close watch on her as well."

She clicked her tongue and let out a sigh.

"You seem rather skilled at deceiving the official Beyonders. Just as I expected from a…"

She mouthed the final words silently—"wanted criminal."

Not just deceiving the official Beyonders… Lumian whispered to himself, pointing at Charlie.

"I'll take him back to Auberge du Coq Doré to rest, just in case the official Beyonders can't locate him. I'll leave Jenna in your care."

"You make it sound like she's truly your lover. Asking me to look after her," Franca retorted with a sour tone.

By the time Jenna finished removing her makeup and changing her clothes, Lumian and Charlie had already departed. Franca had also informed 007 about the altar, the Actors, and the other information she had gathered.

At that moment, Jenna's face was no longer adorned with smoky eyes, pronounced blush, and fiery lips. She appeared clean-faced, albeit a bit fatigued.

As Jenna braided her brownish-yellow hair, she glanced at the door and grinned at Franca.

"When did you become involved with Ciel? Aren't you afraid the Boss will find out?"

Franca chuckled.

"Him? It'll be far too sinful; I can't bring myself to do it."

"Why?" Jenna couldn't comprehend.

To her understanding, Franca's moral boundaries weren't that strict. Ciel was only a few months away from adulthood.

Franca pondered her words and responded, "After getting to know him better, I discovered that he's the younger brother of one of my relatives."

"So you're related by blood." Jenna nodded in understanding.

However, her attention quickly shifted. After securing her braids, she pointed towards the door.

"I'm going to Église Saint-Robert to offer my prayers."

"I'll follow you discreetly to ensure nothing untoward happens." Franca retrieved some fluorescent powder and, with an incantation, blended it in to conceal herself.

When will I become a Witch… Jenna averted her gaze enviously, opened the door, and stepped outside.

Chapter 217: Notarization

Église Saint-Robert stood proudly near the Suhit steam locomotive station, serving as the bishop cathedral of the Eternal Blazing Sun Church in Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman.

Its distinctive onion-shaped dome was painted in shimmering gold, representing the radiant sun. Below it stood a white building with gilded edges and a monumental Sun Sacred Emblem.

Adjacent to the cathedral was a bell tower, crowned by a roof fashioned from a gleaming golden sphere.

Observing Jenna entering the cathedral amidst the morning prayer congregation, Franca opted to wait in close proximity.

Uncertain whether the Eternal Blazing Sun cathedral possessed any peculiar enchantments that could render her invisibility ineffective, she remained cautious, unwilling to take any unnecessary risks.

Église Saint-Robert, much like other cathedrals belonging to the Eternal Blazing Sun Church, boasted a resplendent golden base and was adorned with gilded accents throughout. The ornate structure, adorned with vibrant stained glass windows and a vast mural depicting a saint in vivid hues of blue, green, and red, exuded an atmosphere of profound sanctity and grandeur. Every worshiper who entered its hallowed halls couldn't help but bow their heads in reverence, enveloped by the sacred ambiance.

Jenna made her way to the front of the altar and settled into the second row of seats.

Closing her eyes, she inclined her head forward and crossed her arms, placing them reverently upon her chest.

Having been baptized and frequented the Eternal Blazing Sun cathedral since her youth, Jenna was intimately familiar with this customary ritual, even though she could hardly be considered devout. She swiftly cleared her mind of any distracting thoughts, focusing her entire being on the act of prayer.

Time seemed to stand still as the bishop delivered his sermon.

After nearly fifteen minutes, Jenna opened her eyes and quietly rose to her feet. She proceeded towards a long table positioned along the side of the main hall.

This table spanned an impressive length of 20 to 30 meters, adorned with slender white candles flickering within golden lamps.

Devotees seeking to express their gratitude or admiration for a saint or angel could purchase a candle from the clergyman stationed beside the table, lighting it and placing it within an unoccupied lamp.

Jenna fixed her gaze upon the softly swaying flames for a few fleeting moments before redirecting her attention towards the clergyman dressed in a white robe interwoven with threads of gold.

Her eyes caught sight of a man engaging in the purchase of candles.

He appeared to be in his late twenties, his blond hair immaculately styled and subtly enhanced with cosmetics. His eyes resembled the vivid azure of a tranquil lake, albeit relatively small in size.

Adorned in a white shirt, a yellow vest, and a slim blue tweed coat adorned with two golden buttons, he bore a resemblance to the slightly distinguished gentlemen of Trier, with discernible traces of makeup enhancing his features.

As the man approached an unoccupied lamp with his acquired candle, Jenna moved closer to the clergyman in the resplendent white robe interwoven with golden threads, extending her arms in a welcoming gesture.

"Praise the Sun!"

"Praise the Sun!" the clergyman warmly replied, his smile radiating genuine warmth.

Jenna hesitated briefly for a couple of seconds before uttering, "I seek a blessed necklace."

Comparing it to the purchase of candles, this act was more devout.

But, naturally, it came with a higher price tag.

The clergyman's smile widened.

"Sister, how about this one?"

He produced a necklace adorned with a gold Sunbird pendant from among the unsold white candles.

Two rose-red rubies were nestled within the eyes of the Sunbird.

In the Eternal Blazing Sun Church, just as "Brother" was used to address men of the faith, female believers were affectionately called "Sisters." Some nuns even formed an alliance known as the Nine Sisters Association, working hand in hand with the Brotherhood Minor.

Jenna couldn't help but sense that this particular necklace must be quite expensive—she could almost hear her wallet crying in protest.

After careful consideration, she ultimately settled on a relatively simple amulet featuring a small Sun Sacred Emblem.

It set her back 30 verl d'or, causing her to wince at the cost.

As an underground singer in the market district, Jenna earned a decent income, especially since her recent rise in popularity. However, it had only been a month since she began gaining recognition. Previously, her earnings were barely sufficient to cover rent, food, performance attire, makeup supplies, and the like, without having to rely on her family for financial support.

Despite now earning nearly 300 verl d'or a month through part-time work, her financial situation still left her feeling uneasy. She had to save for next year's tuition, ensure her mother wouldn't worry, and even contribute to the family's debts.

With the newly acquired amulet adorning her neck, Jenna took a deep breath and departed from Église Saint-Robert, making her way to Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons before 9 a.m.

The classroom for apprentice actresses was located on the second floor, and Jenna passed by the manager's office on her way.

The door remained tightly shut, indicating that Maipú Meyer hadn't arrived at the theater yet.

Could he have really fled? Jenna averted her gaze and continued forward.

Shortly thereafter, she walked past the locked door of the exclusive break room belonging to the popular leading actress, Charlotte Calvino.

The door was locked as well.

Jenna exhaled quietly, straightened her posture, and turned into the classroom.

She was late. Gaspar, the instructor for today's first acting class, had already arrived and was busy addressing a private question from one of the apprentices.

Gaspar, despite being a middle-aged man of dignified demeanor, had the ability to portray a charming playboy on stage.

…

Deep within Underground Trier, nestled within a hollow strewn with remnants of tree branches and vines…

The very center had collapsed, leaving the soil in a state of disarray. Faint marks, as if from hurried footsteps, led towards an unknown destination.

Angoulême de François followed the path indicated by the cardinals and found himself standing at the precipice, his eyes fixed on the bewildering sight before him.

Those filthy rodents had relocated once more!

In response to the signal from the cardinals, Angoulême unsheathed a golden longsword that appeared to be forged from condensed light from a grayish-white mechanical doll.

With a swift motion, the sword plunged into the ground, causing the bluish-green and withered branches and vines to erupt into flames. Yet, no trace of black smoke ascended.

As the fiery shroud dissipated, the true nature of the ground, walls, and ceiling came into view for Angoulême and his companions.

A multitude of serpents, slimy and cold, writhed and entwined, engaging in frenzied mating rituals. Countless gray rats tore at each other relentlessly, refusing to retreat until death claimed them. Diverse insects devoured leaves and soil with such voracity that they burst open from overindulgence…

…

As the realization dawned upon Franca that the plainclothes police had covertly sealed off Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons, she swiftly withdrew from the brick-red three-story edifice and sought refuge in a nearby side alley. From her concealed vantage point, she observed the situation unfolding on the second floor.

As the first acting lesson neared its end, Jenna couldn't help but notice the conspicuous absence of Maipú Meyer, who typically lingered by the classroom door.

Just then, a group of black-uniformed police officers entered, clutching lists in their hands.

The leader called for a momentary pause in the lecture and addressed the assembled individuals.

"Maipú Meyer has been confirmed as a heinous heretic. We must ascertain your faith."

Gasps and exclamations erupted, momentarily plunging the scene into disarray.

"Silence!" bellowed the leading officer. "I shall read out your names, and you will sign this pledge as a witness before God. No one shall deceive."

Ascertaining of faith… Jenna's racing heart found a measure of solace.

One by one, the teachers and apprentice actresses stepped forward, receiving a pledge form from one of the police officers. They diligently completed their declarations of faith, appending their signatures to solidify their commitment.

Before long, Jenna heard her own name being called.

"Celia Bello."

She approached with composure, collecting a pledge form and a scarlet fountain pen.

The contents of the pledge were as follows:

"I solemnly swear that my faith in the ____ remains unyielding to this day.

"Affirmer: ____

"Notary: ____

Jenna filled in the first two blanks with "Eternal Blazing Sun" and "Celia Bello" respectively before returning the completed pledge and the fountain pen to the police.

Once all the actors and apprentices had signed the pledge, they were instructed to remain confined within the classroom, rehearsal room, and other designated areas until further notice, unable to venture beyond those confines.

…

Within the manager's office that had previously been occupied by Maipú Meyer, a gathering took place to collect the signed pledges.

Several devout members of the Eternal Blazing Sun Church, known as Beyonders, took turns wielding a fountain pen crafted from pure gold. With deliberate strokes, they inscribed the initials "D.E." in the designated Notary space.

The ink they used appeared to be a vivid shade of crimson, reminiscent of fresh blood.

Upon the completion of each pledge, a shimmering golden aura would briefly envelop the document before dissipating back to its original state.

Every so often, a pledge would emit an ominous, blood-red glow, accompanied by piercing screams emanating from the same floor.

Even those actors and apprentices who employed aliases, long-established pseudonyms recognized by those in their midst, possessed mystical connections that were intricately intertwined.

…

Auberge du Coq Doré, Room 504.

Charlie lay restless in bed, his weariness unable to lull him into sleep.

All of a sudden, a knock echoed through the room.

"Who's there?" Charlie called out, startled, as he sat up in bed, resembling a startled bird.

"Angoulême de François." The voice from beyond the door was deep, yet carried a compelling warmth.

Charlie's mind immediately conjured the image of the Monsieur who had interrogated him about Madame Alice's demise. Hastily, he rose from his bed and swung the door open.

Standing before him were Angoulême, with his blond hair, golden brows, and beard, and Imre, whose brown skin and full lips bore the traces of Southern Continent heritage.

"What brings you here, Monsieur François?" Charlie inquired cautiously.

Simultaneously, a thought flashed across his mind.

Could these be the official Beyonders whom Ciel and Red Boots mentioned?

Angoulême did not immediately respond. He stepped into Charlie's room, gesturing for Imre to shut the wooden door behind them.

Casting a sweeping glance around, he finally spoke.

"I bring bad news. Susanna Mattise is not entirely deceased. She may appear before you at any time in the future."

Charlie couldn't conceal his disappointment, pain, confusion, and fear.

"What should I do?"

Angoulême nodded gently.

"But there is good news as well. We intend to offer you a clerical position within our ranks. This will provide you with enhanced protection.

"Your monthly salary will amount to 320 verl d'or, and there will be a confidentiality agreement in place as compensation. For the initial one or two months, you will need to undergo an Intisian improvement course. Consider it an internship period, with a stipend of 200 verl d'or. Once you successfully pass the assessment, you will become a full-time employee.

"Are you willing? We do not wish to force this proposal upon you."

320 verl d'or per month? And improved protection? These words echoed within Charlie's mind. He believed that no ordinary person could turn down such a remarkable opportunity.

He was satisfied even with his current job as an attendant, which earned him 80 verl d'or monthly!

Recalling the hints dropped by Lumian and Franca, Charlie responded with surprise and delight, "Absolutely no problem!"

…

By the window of Room 207, Lumian positioned himself in front of a wooden table, observing Charlie as he followed the two strangers towards Avenue du Marché.

He focused his attention, seeking any changes in Charlie's luck, but found none.

This meant that the two individuals were not Actors manipulating the situation!

Lumian's gaze then shifted to the blond man, intrigued to discover what kind of fortune the official Beyonder possessed.

Suddenly, an intense wave of danger washed over him. He instinctively crouched down, reducing his profile.

Angoulême turned his head, his eyes filled with confusion, as he looked at the Auberge du Coq Doré's windows.

He sensed that someone was observing him.

Chapter 218: Promise

After Charlie and the two official Beyonders departed Rue Anarchie, Lumian settled back down at the wooden table, berating himself internally.

How could I forget? I mustn't gaze upon what I ought not to!

The same applied to observing luck!

Previously, he believed that scrutinizing one's luck was a subtle affair, unlikely to be detected. Neither Sequence 7 Franca nor the equivalent of a Sequence 7, "Black Scorpion" Roger, had noticed anything awry. However, the previous official Beyonder had displayed an unmistakable reaction.

Does his Sequence far exceed mine, or does he possess special abilities, or perhaps he wields a corresponding mystical item? Lumian struggled to determine.

He had never observed Beyonders beyond Sequence 7, lacking a point of comparison. Whether it was Gardner Martin or Mr. K, he exercised caution and refrained from examining their luck in their presence.

Having taken note of the lesson, Lumian, who didn't require sleep, perused the copied grimoire of Aurore.

The sunlight grew more intense, transforming the window into a radiant source. Even the bustling Rue Anarchie appeared like a golden oil painting.

In comparison to Backlund, the capital of the Loen Kingdom, Trier remained bathed in sunlight. Despite its pollution, the city's industrial layout was relatively sensible, confining the impact to specific areas. Most of it lay to the south, where factories were abundant.

Knock, knock, knock!

Someone rapped on Room 207 once again, yet this time, Lumian failed to discern any footsteps.

Arching his right eyebrow, he stowed away the papers on the table and turned toward the door.

"Come in. It's unlocked, Madame Red Boots."

With a creak, the door swung open, and Franca stepped inside, donning a blouse, beige trousers, and red boots.

In surprise, she inquired, "How did you know it was me?"

Why ask the same question as Jenna? Should I praise her for being a worthy student of an Assassin like you? Lumian replied, amused, "Because I possess a brain."

"Don't make it sound like I lack one," Franca responded calmly, settling herself on Lumian's bed.

Lumian chortled.

"I can't think of anyone else capable of approaching my room without my notice and knocking on the door politely."

Naturally, he had to exclude Madam Magician first. She lacked such diligence. It was impressive enough that she managed to reply in time!

After a brief moment of contemplation, Lumian inquired, "Has Jenna's predicament been resolved?"

Franca clicked her tongue. "You have an uncanny foresight, brat."

She assumed the role of an elder sister.

"It's a rather straightforward deduction." Lumian displayed a disdainful expression for explanation.

If Jenna is still in danger, how could you, Hidden Blade, find the composure to seek me out?

Franca laughed dryly.

"I was referring to your astute guess that the authorized Beyonders would primarily investigate whether Jenna and the others are followers of evil gods."

After all, I'm closer to an evil god than any evil god believer here… Lumian raised his right hand and gently patted his left chest.

With a smile, he responded, "Such insights stem from the ample experiences of a wanted criminal."

"You seem quite proud," Franca teased.

Curious, Lumian inquired, "How did the authorized Beyonders conduct their investigations?"

The more he learned, the more confident he would become in evading similar inquiries in the future.

Franca responded with an air of indifference, "Based on Jenna's account, I reckon they utilized the powers of a Notary."

"Each person had to sign a pledge of their faith, a pledge witnessed by a Notary. Heh heh, those who lied were engulfed in burning golden flames. They bled profusely and were dragged away."

Aware that Lumian was still delving into the realm of mysticism, Franca proceeded to provide a detailed explanation,

"Notary-related abilities are quite common in Trier. They can be found in various places, disguised under different guises.

"Notaries have the ability to create contracts with mystical effects. Once the parties affix their signatures to a similar contract in the presence of a Notary, they are bound by it unless they are demigods. Even at the demigod level, breaking the contract requires a substantial price. For transactions involving millions, or even tens of millions, of verl d'or, both parties are willing to pay a hefty sum and receive notarization in front of the God of Deeds' Sacred Emblem at a cathedral.

"The pledge is a special contract."

"The Eternal Blazing Sun is also known as the God of Deeds and the Guardian of Businesses."

It aligns with Aurore's grimoires… Lumian inquired, "Has Jenna returned home?"

Franca nodded subtly. "She needed to catch up on sleep."

Franca scrutinized Lumian. "You seem lively. I can't tell that you haven't slept all night."

"I'm accustomed to it." Lumian couldn't reveal that his condition would automatically restore itself at six in the morning. "You also appear quite energetic."

Franca smirked and replied, "I'm accustomed to it as well. For people like us, the night is the beginning of revelry."

If Aurore had made that statement, words like "inspiration," "drafts," and "tranquility of the night" would have crossed Lumian's mind. However, when Franca said it, he could only associate it with "orgies," "large beds," and "romping."

Unaware of his critical thoughts, Franca continued, "Apprentice training at Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons will be suspended for three days. The theater will be temporarily occupied by the police headquarters. The daily performances will carry on as usual to avoid impacting the National Convention elections. However, the repertoire will be adjusted. Some plays have lost their female leads."

"Charlotte and Maipú Meyer are gone?" Lumian asked.

Though he had suspected that Susanna Mattise hadn't been completely purified when Charlie left with the official Beyonders, he still felt a tinge of disappointment upon hearing Franca's account.

Franca nodded.

"Apart from them, two others are missing: the real Ive and Lolth."

"Among the remaining actors and apprentices, a total of seven have converted to the Mother Tree of Desire. They were exposed, but it seems none of them received any boons."

So, those who received boons have fled, while the mere believers have been abandoned? Lumian scoffed inwardly as he relayed Charlie's departure with the suspected official Beyonders to Franca.

Franca let out a soft sigh.

"This is the best outcome for him. We can't protect him every single day.

"Though the official Beyonders can't either, they can arrange for Charlie to stay in a relatively safe place until Susanna Mattise's matter is truly resolved.

"In comparison, you're in more danger. Didn't you mention that Susanna Mattise holds a grudge against you? Evil spirits can be quite fixated."

That will give me a good chance to test Mr. K's finger… Lumian silently muttered, indicating that he would be cautious.

Something crossed his mind, and he inquired, "Do you know why our Savoie Mob supports Hugues Artois?"

Franca smiled. "If I had that figured out, I wouldn't be part of the Savoie Mob anymore."

Hmm… Is that her primary reason for joining the Savoie Mob? Lumian pondered.

Franca stretched, stood up, and addressed him, "We truly have a chance to acquire Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons at a low price, but we might have to face the enmity of those Scrooges. However, you have nothing to fear. Yes, I'll go to Rue des Fontaines to discuss with Gardner and resolve my problem while there."

"What problem?" Lumian was puzzled.

Franca responded with a smile, "Even though the desires Rentas evoked were suppressed by the mysticism smelling salts, my body still feels a bit restless. When I recall that sensation, I feel somewhat empty, longing for fulfillment and release. Since you can't help me, I have no choice but to find my true lover. Why aren't you affected at all?"

There were indeed residual effects, but I was fine after six in the morning… Lumian pursed his lips and replied, "My willpower is stronger than yours."

Franca sneered, walked towards the door, and exited Room 207.

Lumian watched her leave, deep in thought.

Has Franca become the Boss's mistress, or has the Boss become Franca's lover?

Is Franca responsible for satisfying the Boss, or is the Boss responsible for satisfying Franca?

Just before noon, Charlie returned to Auberge du Coq Doré. He packed his meager belongings into his suitcase and descended the stairs with it.

Spotting Lumian on the second floor, he glanced around and lowered his voice.

"I have a new job and need to move elsewhere. After some time, I should be able to return to the basement bar for a drink."

Lumian smirked once again. "Sounds good."

If Susanna Mattise's issue could truly be resolved, Charlie's fate would change.

Charlie also seemed pleased. He pondered for a moment and stated, "There are many things I can't tell you, but when the time comes, I'll try to drop hints for you."

In the Inquisition beneath Église Saint-Robert, he had come across Ciel's wanted poster and recognized his friend, yet he didn't inform Deacon François.

What does that mean? Why does Charlie suddenly feel he can be useful? Does his new job have a close connection to the official Beyonders, allowing him to gather valuable information? Lumian swiftly formed a hypothesis.

With a mischievous grin, he remarked, "First, focus on staying alive before contemplating anything else! I might leave the market district in a few weeks."

The implication of his words was, "Do your job well and don't even think about leaking information. Don't attempt it unless your life is truly at stake."

Whether Charlie understood or not, Lumian wasn't entirely certain. After all, this guy wasn't very smart.

…

After spending the afternoon at Salle de Bal Brise, Lumian changed into a grayish-blue worker's uniform and donned a dark-blue cap. He hailed a public carriage to take him to Rue des Pavés in Quartier du Jardin Botanique.

As per his arrangement with Louis Lund, Lumian anticipated a response from Madame Pualis regarding their meeting before the night fell.

Upon reaching the lobby of Apartment 9, Lumian opened the letterbox in Room 302, only to find a collection of fliers inside.

The letter hasn't arrived? Lumian suppressed his anxiety and decided to wait across from Apartment 9.

Just as he exited the lobby and descended the stairs to the roadside, he noticed a brown four-wheeled carriage approaching from a distance. It came to a halt right in front of him.

The carriage driver had jet-black hair and piercing blue eyes. He sported dark red attire, yellow trousers, a polished hat, and a white cravat. It was Louis Lund!

In the next instant, the carriage door swung open noiselessly, revealing the figure of a woman seated within.

Chapter 219: Probing

Lumian's eyes locked with Louis Lund, who occupied the driver's seat of the carriage, and received a confirmation nod.

Drawing a deep breath, Lumian strode toward the four-wheeled carriage, crouched down, and entered it.

He grasped the gravity of the situation.

Madame Pualis, cautious and aware, refrained from responding through letters. Instead, she concealed herself near 9 Rue des Pavés, anticipating Lumian's arrival for the reply. This strategy effectively minimized the risk of being trailed and cornered.

In the blink of an eye, Lumian's attention was seized by a familiar figure.

Adorned in a meticulously tailored black corset dress and a slightly mischievous lady's round hat, she exuded an elusive allure. Her untamed brows, lively brown eyes, and moist lips radiated a sense of allure. A cascade of brown hair, half-up and half-down, graced her shoulders. Although informal, her elegance, immaculateness, and enchantment remained undeniable. She was none other than Pualis de Roquefort, the wife of Cordu's administrator.

"Long time no see," Madame Pualis greeted him with a smile, yet her eyes emitted a frigid glare, sending shivers down one's spine.

Simultaneously, Lumian observed a shift in his surroundings.

The carriage vanished, leaving him stranded in a desolate wilderness.

There was nothing before him, and Madame Pualis had vanished into thin air.

Just as Lumian marveled at this bewildering turn of events, a colossal, irregular shadow emerged on the ground.

Instinctively, he raised his gaze, met by a reflection of brown feathers.

Each plume rivaled the size of his head, assembling into a pair of wings that seemed to obscure the heavens.

These wings belonged to Madame Pualis herself, who grew in stature, hovering in mid-air. Her feet transformed into avian talons, glistening with a chilling gleam.

A majestic, ethereal voice resounded.

"You should have been buried with Cordu!"

Lumian's heart constricted. Gripping his revolver, he swiftly pivoted and sprinted toward the edge of the wilderness.

If the visions within this dream held even an ounce of truth, he could escape Paramita once he reached its limits!

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Lumian maneuvered in a curved path, firing rounds into the air. This constituted his sole means of long-range assault.

Despite her immense size, Madame Pualis displayed remarkable dexterity. The gusts generated by her flapping wings disrupted the bullets' trajectory, enabling her to deftly reposition herself.

An ear-splitting screech emanated from her throat.

Ahead of Lumian, the earth beneath the wilderness upheaved, soil cascading away, unveiling yet another monstrous entity.

A python, long deceased, emerged from the ground. Most of its blue scales had decayed, exposing rotting flesh and jagged bones.

A repugnant odor filled the air as the python's entire body writhed with yellow pus and deformed worms.

Bloodshot eyes glared condescendingly at Lumian. Translucent silkworms squirmed in and out of its hollowed eye sockets.

The serpent's gaze landed condescendingly on Lumian before it lunged over, its maw open wide, its yellowed fangs aimed at the living prey.

Lumian's head spun from the putrid stench that permeated the air. With haste, he withdrew a sheet of drawing paper from his shirt and unfolded it.

A vibrant, golden-red sun adorned its surface.

Instantly, the surroundings grew warmer, and the sky, once obscured by Madame Pualis, brightened.

The long-deceased python averted its gaze from Lumian, seemingly unwilling to face the sun's brilliance.

Yet, its attacks merely slowed rather than ceased.

Seizing the opportunity, Lumian pivoted, clutching the drawing, and darted off in another direction.

Hovering mid-air, Madame Pualis parted her lips, uttering a sinister phrase unintelligible to Lumian.

An immediate weakness washed over Lumian, diminishing his running speed, as if a grave illness had befallen him, leaving him yet to convalesce.

Right on the heels of that, Madame Pualis raised her head, emitting a sharp, pained howl.

At that moment, Lumian perceived an ethereal shattering sound.

It reverberated within his soul and body, casting a veil of darkness over his vision, propelling him toward the threshold of death.

Had it not been for Hunter, Provoker, Dancer, and Alms Monk fortifying his constitution from various angles, Lumian might have succumbed to his enfeebled state.

Clutching onto his last vestiges of reason, Lumian endured the agonizing pain, mustering his dwindling strength to reach into his pocket and brush Mr. K's finger.

In an instant, he felt the refreshing touch of raindrops nourishing his body and soul.

His injuries swiftly mended at a visible pace, while the surrounding wilderness gradually dissolved into illusion until it vanished entirely.

Lumian caught sight of Madame Pualis seated opposite him in the carriage.

The chill had evaporated from her gaze, replaced by a sneering mockery.

"With your feeble strength, you aspire to seek revenge against Guillaume Bénet?"

"When I departed Cordu Village, he gained a new boon after driving away us believers in the Great Mother. He now stands on par with a Sequence 5 Fate Appropriator. In the future, he may even procure the corresponding potion for consumption."

Was her earlier attack merely a test of my capabilities? Lumian harbored no surprise at the padre's Sequence 5 status. After all, his contracted abilities far surpassed those of a Contractee, yet he clearly lacked godhood. That left only two possibilities: Sequence 6 or Sequence 5.

Considering Guillaume Bénet's performance in the dream and his clash against Ryan, Leah, and Valentine, Lumian had long suspected him to be a Sequence 5 Fate Appropriator. Now, Madame Pualis had confirmed his suspicions.

What astonished him was that Recipients could consume potions to acquire additional abilities. However, they must choose the appropriate potion or a suitable alternative.

Lumian pondered for a moment, concluding that such occurrences were to be expected.

Beyonders themselves could receive boons; it was just that the process carried various complications.

Lumian met Madame Pualis's gaze and responded calmly, "I still have time to grow, and there's a chance for me to become stronger. However, Guillaume Bénet has little hope of attaining godhood. He doesn't believe in the three entities that the Great Mother is a part of. I'll catch up to him as soon as I can."

Unspoken by Lumian were his hopes of acquiring more formidable allies. Being an evil god's Blessed and having offended a follower of the Great Mother, Guillaume Bénet couldn't find many companions. They were likely wild Beyonders and Recipients who also believed in Inevitability.

Madame Pualis chuckled.

"Confidence is a good trait. I admire young people like you who are full of confidence. Would you like to join me and worship the Great Mother? By doing so, you can gain additional assistance. Apart from the power of the potion, you can also receive boons."

"I'd rather not become pregnant and have children," Lumian declined Madame Pualis's kind offer in a tactful manner.

Madame Pualis smiled and replied, "It seems you haven't yet experienced the holiness, preciousness, and joy of life and the wonders of new beginnings. It's something I only came to fully comprehend after giving birth.

"But there's no need for you to refuse now. When you come to understand the greatness of the Mother, you can approach me anytime."

Lumian didn't wish to dwell on matters concerning the Great Mother, so he changed the subject.

"I thought you got others to have children. I didn't expect you to have one yourself."

Madame Pualis's face glowed with a maternal radiance.

"After becoming a Banshee, I had to bear a child myself in order to draw closer to the Great Mother."

It's hard to believe that you were once a man… Lumian almost hesitated to meet Madame Pualis's gaze. He swiftly redirected the conversation with a casual question.

"Did your child perish in the castle?"

"Yes," Madame Pualis sighed. "His father killed him with his own hands. Regrettably, he was unaware that the child was his."

"Who?" Lumian blurted out.

Madame Pualis smiled.

"Guillaume Bénet. Didn't you witness our affair? He didn't notice, but I knew you were hiding behind the altar. I even considered inviting you to join us."

I assumed your affair was merely symbolic… Some of it was real? Lumian was taken aback as several images flickered in his mind:

Madame Pualis and the padre entangled in their nakedness.

Madame Pualis praising the padre's audacity, forthrightness, and masculinity.

The padre having Saint Sith put up with the transgression…

Noticing Lumian's change in expression, Madame Pualis smiled and continued, "After arriving in Cordu and familiarizing myself with the surroundings, the first thing I did was seduce Guillaume Bénet.

"He held true authority as a clergyman and was the only means for Cordu to connect with the Eternal Blazing Sun Church. If I could bring him down and make him a believer of the Great Mother, combined with Béost's identity, I could have truly established Cordu as my territory without arousing suspicion from the outside world.

"Coincidentally, I also needed a child. So, I decided to put him to the test. Within a week, I secured his bloodline as a contingency plan. However, around July or August of last year, his attitude suddenly changed, and he lost interest in the Great Mother. Unfortunately, I didn't even have the opportunity to let him bear a child for me to experience the wonders of life."

"Last July or August?" Lumian repeated.

Every year, shepherds returned to the mountains during May and June.

"Yes, I remember it vividly," Madame Pualis chuckled. "Later, that fool Louis Lund even attempted to seek his assistance."

Lumian furrowed his brow and asked, "Why did the padre's attitude change all of a sudden?"

"I'm not entirely sure. All I know is that during that time, some villagers were spreading distorted ideas about horoscopes, and they were reported to Guillaume Bénet. After interrogating those individuals, Guillaume Bénet's demeanor gradually shifted." Madame Pualis's eyes seemed to reflect the sunlight dancing on a lake's surface.

"Who were they?" Lumian pressed.

Madame Pualis smiled in response. "Nazélie and the others—people you are familiar with."

Lumian fell silent for a few seconds before speaking again, "Where were you, and what were you doing when the padre and the others attacked the castle?"

Pualis let out a brisk laugh.

"So, you finally ask. You should have already guessed the answer, right?"

She gazed at Lumian with a pained and twisted smile.

"Aurore attacked me."

Chapter 220: Nightmare

"Aurore attacked me."

The words echoed in Lumian's ears, crashing through his mind like a burst dam. A surge of memories flooded in, washing away the hidden horrors buried beneath the surface. They were ghastly, painful, and pierced his very bones.

One by one, scenes played out before Lumian's eyes. Guillaume Bénet, the padre, encircled by a horde of undead figures in the wilderness. Madame Pualis soaring through the air with her wings spread wide. And there, in her eyes, Lumian caught a glimpse of a familiar blond figure.

It was Aurore!

Lumian's gaze shifted to the castle's third-floor walls, covered in translucent faces of bluish-white hue. He witnessed Louis Lund giving birth, Sybil Berry being reborn within the body of a lady's maid, Guillaume Bénet, Pierre Berry, Pons Bénet, and a group of believers of Inevitability engaged in a fierce battle against the midwife, Administrator Béost, and their companions.

All of this unfolded within Lumian's own visions, emanating from a small bubble floating in the air.

White Paper…

White Paper!

Lumian's face contorted in agony as he staggered backward.

Bluish-purple veins, densely packed, protruded from his body, each representing a blood vessel.

Meanwhile, the words of Psychiatrist Susie flashed through his mind: "Always remind yourself not to overreact. Whenever you feel a similar surge of emotions, take deep breaths and find your calm…"

Lumian gasped heavily, feeling as though the world around him had turned into a vacuum.

In an act of sympathy, Madame Pualis spoke, "You have indeed forgotten many things. No, you've buried them deep in your heart, afraid to confront them.

"I, too, suffered. It was not pleasant for me. After becoming a Banshee, it was the first time I encountered a woman who truly touched my heart. She possessed charm, kindness, gentleness, and a vibrant spirit. I never imagined that she, as a follower of the evil god, would turn against me.

"Even then, she was already a Fate Appropriator, favored by Inevitability more than Guillaume Bénet."

Lumian couldn't help but bring his hands to his head, as if it might explode from the intense pressure within.

Taking deep breaths, he recalled Aurore, who brushed off his concerns about the village's peculiarities. He remembered her cautioning him against laying eyes on forbidden things. He thought of Aurore, who would often sit on the roof at night, gazing at the vastness of the cosmos. The dream of the diaphanous "lizard" crawling out of Aurore's mouth resurfaced in his mind. He remembered how Nazélie and the others, the initiators of the horoscope heresy, had close ties to Aurore.

Amidst these recollections, Lumian also recalled his failure to avenge Reimund and Ava's deaths, discovering himself captured by Pons Bénet instead. He endured torment before finally being set free. He recalled Aurore, who had cut the livre bleu and assembled a plea for help together with him. He remembered Aurore explaining the mystical knowledge she possessed. And above all, he remembered Aurore pushing him off the altar during the ritual, her eyes flickering with a newfound liveliness…

Huff… Huff… Lumian gasped heavily, as if still trapped in the clutches of a never-ending nightmare.

A soft sigh escaped Madame Pualis's lips.

"I should have noticed her strangeness sooner. Although we didn't often cross paths, I always sensed something peculiar about her. The way she would gaze up at the night sky, speaking cryptic words about her hometown.

"In the realm of mysticism, the cosmos can be a treacherous place, especially for Beyonders.

"Later on, I wished for her to embrace the Great Mother's teachings, but alas, it was too late…"

Lumian's trembling lips struggled to form the question. "When… did she… start behaving strangely?"

He had a vivid recollection of Aurore's habit of stargazing and reminiscing about her homeland, but there had been no signs of trouble in the early years.

Granted, Lumian acknowledged that Aurore had been fixated on the cosmos more frequently over the past year, but he couldn't pinpoint the exact moment when it all began.

Madame Pualis shook her head, suppressing her emotions, and spoke with a hint of amusement.

"That's a question you must answer for yourself. You spend every day with her, whereas I do not. Sometimes, I envy you deeply. Yet, at other times, I believe you have your own merits. Why should we be bound by the rules of a conventional society, denying ourselves the freedom and joys of life?"

Lumian seemed lost in his own thoughts, barely registering Madame Pualis's words. He continued to hunch over, pressing his head against the carriage floor. Muttering to himself, he questioned, "Who… who led her to embrace Inevitability?"

"Perhaps only she knows the answer. Unfortunately…" Madame Pualis sighed once more.

Lumian fell into silence, taking deep breaths to steady himself.

Once… twice… thrice… Time seemed to blur as he wrestled with his thoughts. Finally, he straightened his posture, lowered his hands, and turned his gaze towards Madame Pualis.

"Have you ever encountered an elf-like creature resembling a lizard in the village?"

"No." Madame Pualis shook her head.

The diaphanous "lizard" from my dream was merely a symbol. Did it represent the influence of Inevitability? Or did it actually exist, concealed deep within reality? Lumian pondered incessantly, as if this were the only way to prevent the razor-sharp blades from piercing his shattered heart.

He posed a new question.

"Have you ever come across the legend of the Warlock? The one about nine bulls being the only ones capable of pulling the coffin."

"No," Madame Pualis replied once more, shaking her head.

Lumian continued to inquire, one question after another. Eventually, he lost track of what he was asking and whether Madame Pualis had even responded. In his mind, her face became hazy, as though she were standing dozens or hundreds of meters away.

At some undetermined point, the four-wheeled carriage came to a halt. Lumian found himself back on the roadside, moving forward without purpose or destination.

Clang! Clang! Clang!

The cathedral bell tolled, signaling midnight.

Suddenly, Lumian snapped out of his daze, realizing he had returned to the Auberge du Coq Doré.

Almost instinctively, he ascended the steps and prepared to push open the door. But after a few seconds of shock, he retreated back onto the street, wandering towards the end of Rue Anarchie like a lost soul.

He walked until he reached Avenue du Marché. The sky, perpetually gloomy throughout the night, now became shrouded in thick, dark clouds. There was no crimson moon or stars to be seen.

Finally, Lumian arrived at the entrance of Salle de Bal Brise, where a cacophony of voices and the rhythmic beat of drums emanated, creating an unusually vibrant atmosphere.

Feeling overwhelmed by the environment, he abruptly spun around, staggering to the side of the road. Finding a spot in the shadow, far away from the nearest gas street lamp, he sat on the ground.

Pitter. Patter. As time ticked by, raindrops began to fall, landing on the ground, his head, and before him.

The raindrops grew stronger, creating a steady patter.

Lumian remained motionless, as if he had transformed into a statue, allowing the rain to soak his hair, face, and clothes.

Suddenly, a shadow appeared above him, and the raindrops vanished.

Confused, Lumian looked up and saw a dark-blue umbrella, its metal frame supporting the fabric, held by Jenna.

He averted his gaze, staring blankly at the middle of the road where mist had started to rise. He made no effort to stop Jenna nor acknowledged her presence.

Jenna, wearing heavy smokey makeup and a sequined, low-cut red dress, draped a lightly-colored shawl with sizable holes over her shoulders to conceal some of her skin.

She observed Lumian for a few seconds, refraining from asking any questions. Standing beside him, she held the umbrella aloft.

The heavy rain persisted for an entire hour before gradually subsiding. Only scattered droplets now dripped from the buildings on either side and the street lamps.

Lumian rose slowly, as if he had lost something.

Jenna folded her umbrella and muttered, her voice barely audible.

"The rain will cease eventually, just as darkness always gives way. The sun is destined to rise, and its light will surely illuminate the earth."

Lumian remained silent for a moment, his gaze fixed on the darkened road ahead.

"How would you feel when you discover that someone you trust isn't who you thought they were?"

Jenna didn't respond directly. Instead, she countered with a question of her own, "Do you still trust him?"

Lumian pursed his lips, his answer unwavering, "Yes."

"If you still trust him, then find out why he did it," Jenna advised, her tone calm.

Lumian's hands trembled slightly as he took a series of deep breaths.

Eventually, his body returned to normal, and he turned to face Jenna. "Why are you here?"

Jenna's reply carried both frustration and amusement, "Dammit! This is just outside Salle de Bal Brise! I didn't need to go to the theater tonight, so I came here to sing and make some cash. When I stepped out, I spotted you sitting by the roadside, completely drenched."

Lumian averted his gaze and began walking forward, his expression devoid of emotion.

He splashed through puddles, striding toward Rue des Blouses Blanches.

"Where are you going?" Jenna asked, a hint of concern in her voice.

Lumian responded without looking back, "To find out the reason!"

He recalled Aurore's words when she pushed him away from the altar: "My grimoires…"

Considering the current circumstances, Lumian suspected that his sister was trying to convey that he could uncover clues about the source of the abnormality within her grimoires!

Jenna followed Lumian, holding the umbrella, and probed, "Do you think you can find the reason in just one night?"

"Perhaps it will take a long time," Lumian impatiently replied.

Jenna muttered under her breath, "Then why are you in such a hurry? Rest and clear your mind. It might help you uncover the reason more quickly."

Lumian contemplated his limited understanding of the grimoires' contents and his lack of mystical knowledge. He fell into silence.

Once again, he turned to Jenna. "Is Franca at home?"

"Why do you ask?" Jenna appeared perplexed. "She probably won't return to Rue des Blouses Blanches today. She mentioned wanting to spend a pleasant evening with Gardner Martin."

Phew… Lumian exhaled and redirected his steps toward Rue Anarchie.

Chapter 221: Venting

Jenna's gaze fixated on Lumian's retreating figure as she inquired, "Where are you off to?"

"Getting some shut-eye," Lumian replied without glancing back.

Pursing her lips, Jenna pondered for a brief moment before deciding to follow him.

She wanted to ascertain his final destination and see if he truly intended to return to the Auberge du Coq Doré to sleep. Otherwise, with his current state, she couldn't fathom the trouble he might stir up.

Ignoring Jenna's presence, Lumian ambled slowly back towards the Auberge du Coq Doré.

As he reached the motel's entrance, he discovered the main door firmly locked. Rather than scaling the pipes, he retrieved a small wire from his person and deftly inserted it into the brass keyhole, skillfully manipulating it.

The door swung open, revealing the murky interior. The only source of illumination emanated from the staircase leading down to the basement bar.

Lumian cast a fleeting glance and chose to descend in that direction.

Dammit! Didn't he claim he was going to bed? Jenna cursed inwardly and let out a resigned sigh. She trailed after him into the Auberge du Coq Doré's basement bar.

The bar wasn't bustling with patrons. Two or three inebriated men occupied a small round table, sporadically bellowing, but they lacked any significant strength.

The sole customer at the bar counter happened to be Lumian's neighbor, Gabriel, the playwright residing in Room 206.

Garbed in a faded linen shirt, brown trousers, and oversized black-framed glasses, Gabriel's hair appeared unkempt and greasy.

"You're still drinking at this hour?" Lumian settled beside Gabriel, his gaze fixed upon the glass of green absinthe clasped in the playwright's hand, shimmering with a psychedelic allure.

Has he returned to normal? Jenna appraised Lumian, sensing that his condition wasn't as dire as before.

Suppressing a yawn with her hand, she pulled a barstool over and took a seat, resolute in her intent to observe for another thirty minutes.

Gabriel forced a bitter smile and responded, "I just finished a manuscript and came down for a drink."

"Are all authors the same? Do you prefer to toil at night and slumber during the day?" Lumian rapped on the bar counter, beckoning for a glass of absinthe.

Pausing for a moment, Gabriel replied, "Many authors are like that. Tranquil nights grant us greater inspiration.

"But that's not why I stay up late. I must visit various theaters during the day, persuading managers to peruse and accept my manuscript.

"Today, I went to the Théâtre de la Renaissance in Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative. Their manager, Nathan Lopp, is renowned as the most astute theater manager. He possesses the highest likelihood of recognizing the value of my script. Yet, he refused to see me. I failed to meet him both at his office and during my visit to his apartment."

Upon hearing words like "theater" and "manager," Jenna inwardly gasped, a vague sense of trepidation creeping over her.

The fact that many individuals around her worshiped an evil god had left a lasting scar on her psyche.

Furthermore, their abilities were repulsive and twisted, evoking deep-rooted revulsion within her.

Lumian lifted the absinthe, proffered by the bar owner and bartender, Pavard Neeson, and took a sip.

"Do you happen to know where the theater manager lives?"

"Yes, I've visited him at his apartment before, along with other playwrights. He's still unmarried and often changes mistresses," Gabriel rambled on.

A grin crept across Lumian's face.

"I have a way to get that fellow to read your script, but I can't guarantee he will accept it."

"Really?" Gabriel was taken aback and perplexed.

There's actually a way? Jenna wondered, her mind filled with bewilderment.

Lumian swiftly finished his absinthe and rose to his feet.

"Let's go at once. Bring your script!"

"…" Gabriel had never encountered such a man of action.

It was already midnight!

With no remaining hope, he resolved to give it a try. Downing the last of his absinthe, he ascended to the second floor to retrieve the script for his three-act play.

Standing at the entrance of Auberge du Coq Doré, Jenna studied Lumian with a mix of puzzlement and curiosity. "Do you truly have a solution?"

Lumian scoffed dismissively. "You need not believe me."

"Heh!" Jenna expressed her disdain.

Uncertain if this was a consequence of his troubled state, she felt a twinge of curiosity and decided to follow Lumian to prevent him from engaging in any rash actions.

Before long, Gabriel returned to the ground floor.

He had changed into a clean and respectable formal suit, complete with a crimson bow tie.

"Address," Lumian inquired calmly.

"Room 702, 15 Rue Defoe, Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative." Gabriel gazed at the poorly lit Rue Anarchie, observing only a few inebriated individuals and wanderers.

He tentatively asked, "Shall we walk there?"

There were no public carriages available at this hour, and Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative was adjacent to the market district.

Lumian paid no attention to the query, instead strolling towards Avenue du Marché at a steady pace. He halted before a late-night-operating rental carriage, a four-wheeled two-seater, and addressed the driver, who sported the uniform of the Empire Carriage Company.

"To 15 Rue Defoe, Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative."

The carriage driver, donning a waxed hat and a blue gown adorned with yellow buttons, scrutinized Lumian and his two companions before stating, "Two verl d'or."

In Trier, daytime travel in a rental carriage lasting less than an hour cost 1.25 verl d'or, with an additional 1.75 verl d'or per hour. After midnight until 6 a.m., short journeys were priced at 2 verl d'or, while longer trips incurred a charge of 2.5 verl d'or per hour.

Lumian remained silent, producing two silver coins worth 1 verl d'or each and tossing them to the carriage driver.

Showing no courtesy, he boarded the carriage and took a seat.

This left Gabriel in a predicament. Unsure whether he should act chivalrously and jostle with Ciel or allow the singer, Jenna, to make her own choice.

Eventually, realizing she hadn't been invited, Jenna grumbled and settled herself beside Lumian, striving to secure some personal space.

The rental carriage set off, embarking on its journey towards Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative.

During the ride, Lumian maintained an unsettling silence, leaving Gabriel hesitant to inquire about his solution. The atmosphere inside the carriage grew somewhat uncomfortable.

Having grown accustomed to Lumian's peculiar state that night, Jenna cleared her mind and focused on her own thoughts.

After an indeterminate period, the rental carriage came to a halt at 15 Rue Defoe.

Lumian wasted no time and headed straight for the apartment building. Upon entering the lobby, he was intercepted by a vigilant guard.

"Which floor and room are you residing in?" the dutiful guard inquired. "If you're not a resident here, you need…"

Before the guard could finish his sentence, a chilling object was pressed against his temple.

Lumian had swiftly produced a revolver from under his armpit and pressed the barrel firmly against the guard's forehead.

"W-What do you think you're doing?" the guard, who appeared to be almost fifty, stammered.

Gabriel stood frozen, his mind filled with doubt regarding Ciel's supposed solution.

Amused and eager to witness the unfolding events, Jenna observed Lumian silently guide the guard to a secluded corner of the lobby. Using the rope and various items he had with him, he proceeded to bind the guard's hands and feet, effectively rendering him immobile. A gag was placed over the guard's mouth to ensure his silence.

With the task completed, Lumian shut the apartment door behind him and secured the lock before ascending the staircase.

As if awakening from a dream, Gabriel hastened after him, his voice filled with anxiety.

"Is that really okay?"

"What do you think?" Lumian replied with a grin.

Gabriel faltered, lost for words. He hesitated, contemplating whether he should abandon his pursuit of having Nathan Lopp, the manager of Théâtre de la Renaissance, read his script.

If I were to express my doubts and return now, would Ciel become furious and resort to violence? After all, he is a mob leader… Gabriel gaped, incapable of uttering anything that might dissuade Lumian.

Soon, the trio reached the top floor and stopped outside Room 702.

Gabriel, poised to knock, witnessed Lumian deftly employ the short wire to open the vermilion wooden door.

"…" Gabriel couldn't make sense of Lumian's intentions in the slightest.

Observing this, Jenna swiftly removed her light-colored shawl and draped it over her face, exposing only her forehead and eyes.

She harbored suspicions that Ciel was about to cause trouble. To avoid being implicated by him, it was prudent to conceal her identity. At the very least, she couldn't allow anyone to remember her appearance.

Lumian stepped into the living room, awash with the glow of the crimson moonlight. Producing a bandage, he wrapped it around his face, leaving only his eyes and nostrils visible.

"… " Though Gabriel failed to comprehend why Jenna and Ciel were veiling their faces, he instinctively found a cloth and covered the lower portion of his own face.

Enveloped in a white bandage, Lumian surveyed the surroundings before proceeding towards the master bedroom. He turned the handle and gently pushed open the door.

The living room was bathed in the luminosity of the crimson moon, illuminating the figures reclining in the bed.

There lay a man and a woman. The man boasted disheveled black hair, appearing to be in his early forties. His countenance was gaunt, with a prominent nose bridge. The woman possessed curly blond hair, seemingly in her twenties. Her complexion was flawless, and her features were strikingly beautiful.

Beneath the velvet blanket, they appeared to be unclothed.

"He's the theater manager?" Lumian didn't restrain his voice at all.

Gabriel felt as though he were trapped in a surreal reverie.

"Yes, that's him."

Lumian advanced swiftly towards the grand bed. The manager of Théâtre de la Renaissance, Nathan Lopp, stirred from his slumber upon hearing the commotion.

Before he could open his eyes, Lumian grasped his shoulder and hoisted him upright.

Nathan Lopp jolted awake, his eyes confronted with the sight of a head swathed in white bandages.

His heart seemed to skip a beat, rendering him speechless and devoid of protest.

In the next instant, a revolver was pressed against his temple.

Nathan Lopp sealed his lips shut and was propelled into the living room.

As he passed by Jenna, Lumian cast a sidelong glance towards the bed and whispered, "Keep an eye on that woman."

Jenna found herself bewildered by the unfolding events, yet it did nothing to quell her exhilaration.

Without hesitation, she lowered herself into a crouch, drew her own revolver, and trained it upon the recently awakened blonde. With a touch of cold detachment, she issued a stern warning, "I don't want to hear a word."

The blonde wrapped her arms tightly around the blanket, trembling on the bed.

Lumian settled Nathan Lopp into a recliner, securing his hands and feet to the sofa and floor using garments.

Perplexed, Gabriel came over. Suddenly, a thought struck him: Are we here to rob Nathan Lopp, or are we here to present him with my script?

Jenna escorted the blonde, clad in a nightgown, to the living room. Lumian, who had illuminated the crystal chandelier, took a few steps back. He retrieved his revolver and seated himself on the divan opposite the recliner.

Nathan Lopp appeared freshly awakened and uttered anxiously, "How much do you want? I'll give it to you, everything! There's a total of 1,100 verl d'or and a diamond necklace here. I'll surrender them all! Just promise not to harm me!"

Lumian, his face concealed by bandages, turned towards Gabriel and stated, "Read it."

"Read what?" Gabriel responded, his mind blank.

Lumian let out a soft chuckle.

"Read your script. Monsieur Nathan Lopp is waiting."

Wh… Gabriel stood dumbfounded.

Is this the solution to making Nathan Lopp read my script?

Is this how a rational person thinks?

Not only Gabriel pondered this, but Jenna couldn't help but mumble to herself.

Ciel's mind is truly unhinged!

Won't this result in Monsieur Playwright being taken to the police station?

Thank goodness I've concealed my face!

With a similar sense of relief, Gabriel approached Nathan Lopp apprehensively. He retrieved the script and began reading it aloud, as if compelled to do so.

Nathan Lopp listened in bewilderment, questioning whether he was trapped in a ludicrous dream.

Halfway through his slumber, a masked intruder invaded his abode, binding him to a chair merely to subject him to a script recital?

As he listened attentively, Nathan Lopp's professional instincts kicked in, drawing him further into the script.

After the main dialogue of the first scene concluded, Nathan Lopp interrupted Gabriel.

"Who wrote this?"

"Me," Gabriel replied subconsciously.

Nathan Lopp's voice resonated deeply as he stated, "Bring it to my office tomorrow at 10 a.m. We'll sign the contract."

"Alright, alright." Gabriel's emotions swirled with surprise, happiness, and fear.

Will I find the police waiting for me at Théâtre de la Renaissance tomorrow?

Lumian chuckled, rising from his seat and making his way to the door with his revolver.

Jenna and Gabriel followed closely behind, allowing the blonde woman to free Nathan Lopp from his restraints.

As they descended the stairs, Jenna flashed a smile at Gabriel and inquired, "Monsieur Playwright, your script is exceptional. Your words are captivating. What is its title?"

"It's called 'Lightseeker,'" Gabriel responded instinctively, unable to comprehend why an underground singer held such interest in the script.

Jenna quickened her pace to catch up with Lumian. Lowering her voice, she asked, "Is this your solution? Aren't you concerned that the theater manager may also be a devotee of an evil god?"

In her current state of mind, all theaters seemed suspect.

Lumian removed the bandages, his expression unwavering, as he replied, "Then we would have fought."

I knew it… Jenna silently muttered to herself.

After retrieving their belongings and ropes from the guard, the trio boarded a rental carriage and returned to Auberge du Coq Doré.

Once Gabriel expressed his gratitude and retreated to his room, a mix of worry and joy, Jenna observed Ciel as he freshened up and settled onto the bed. Finally, she breathed a sigh of relief.

She drew the curtains and carefully closed the wooden door before departing Auberge du Coq Doré.

In the nearly pitch-black darkness, Lumian's eyes remained closed, unmoving.

Chapter 222: Fliers

Clang! Clang! Clang!

At the stroke of six, Lumian sat upright and flung open the curtains, allowing a gentle light to stream into the room, breathing life into the once silent space. He rubbed his face, freshened up, and attended to his needs.

Once ready, he changed his clothes and departed from Auberge du Coq Doré. Making his way around Rue des Blouses Blanches, he entered the rented safe house.

With great anticipation, Lumian delved into Aurore's grimoires, hoping to uncover some hidden gems that had eluded him in his previous search.

Aurore's grimoires contained three distinct categories of knowledge.

Firstly, there were the common mystical understandings—the names of various pathways, the state of certain Sequences, the foundations of ritualistic magic, the significance of symbolic elements, and the pronunciation and meanings of several supernatural languages.

The second category focused on the practical application of mystical knowledge and personal abilities. It demanded deep contemplation, as it contained numerous recorded or purchased spells, as well as defenses against curses.

Lastly, there were fragments of peculiar and incomplete knowledge, along with intriguing anecdotes. Some were bestowed upon Aurore by the Hidden Sage, while others emerged from interactions within the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society.

These miscellaneous tidbits weren't organized into separate grimoires but appeared sporadically as Aurore acquired them.

For Lumian, the second category posed the greatest challenge. Warlock spells like Illumination, Weed Removal, Exorcism, Soul Summoning, Lightning, Wind Creation, and Force Field Hand proved to be perplexing. After all, he lacked the fundamental understanding of mysticism and the support of Beyonder powers required to cast spells.

On the other hand, Lumian had made significant progress in comprehending, learning, and mastering ritualistic magic since becoming an Alms Monk.

Lumian also noticed that his sister had omitted certain basic rules, such as the Law of Beyonder Characteristics Conservation, from her grimoires.

However, this was to be expected. Such laws were scarce and easily remembered. They were ingrained in the mind and required no additional recording.

After an extensive morning of reading, Lumian found no signs of suspicion. Instead, he accumulated a myriad of questions that demanded consultation with others.

He let out a slow exhale, carefully folded the pages containing his inquiries, and tucked them into his pocket before departing the safe house.

On his way to Avenue du Marché, Lumian's attention was caught by several voting booths. Uniformed police officers and heavily armed military police were working diligently to maintain order, allowing long queues of people to deposit their votes into wooden boxes.

Despite having acquired a new identification from Gardner Martin and assuming the persona of Ciel Dubois, a resident of the market district for nearly two years with the right to vote, Lumian chose not to register at all. He had no desire to partake in the parliamentary election.

After some time, a newsboy rushed by and tossed a stack of white papers into the air.

Lumian observed as many pedestrians eagerly collected the floating papers and began reading them with great seriousness. He bent down and retrieved a copy lying at his feet.

The white paper featured several lines of text in the Intis script, printed in a simple and easily comprehensible syntax.

"Hugues Artois is a traitor!

"In the war against the Loen Kingdom several years ago, he deserted his troops and fled. Countless fathers, brothers, husbands, and sons never returned!

"He is participating in the parliamentary election with clandestine support from the Loen Kingdom!"

Lumian couldn't contain his surprise upon reading the accusations.

He vividly remembered Hugo Artois's campaign posters emphasizing his military service. He had only retired from the army upon reaching the rank of major and ventured into politics, starting as an assistant secretary at the National Convention.

Could this be a desperate move from a candidate facing unsatisfactory early poll results? As Lumian pondered over the situation, a group of men, suspected to be mobsters, approached and forcibly confiscated the fliers from the pedestrians, resorting to physical violence and vulgar insults. Curiously, the nearby police officers seemed oblivious to the scene unfolding before them.

Lumian raised his gaze and recognized one of the men.

They were members of the Poison Spur Mob, the very individuals who had previously followed Margot and Wilson to Auberge du Coq Doré.

"You dare read something like that, you wretch?"

"You leper, hand me the thing in your hand!"

"Son of a bitch, do you want me to rough you up?"

The Poison Spur Mob members closed in on Lumian. Just as they were about to snatch the flier from his hand, their eyes fell upon his short blond hair with dark roots.

A mischievous grin crept across Lumian's face.

Ciel! The Poison Spur Mob members instinctively turned around, their intent to flee evident.

Lumian swiftly lifted his foot and delivered a forceful kick to one of the mobsters' rear, causing him to lose his balance and tumble to the ground.

"What's the matter? Can't recognize your pépé?" Lumian taunted, watching the disoriented Poison Spur Mob members scramble away in a disheveled state. He had no inclination to pursue them any further.

Lumian tossed aside the flier he held and strolled back to Salle de Bal Brise.

Immediately upon entering, Louis approached with Sarkota by his side.

"Boss, Charlie quit his job as a waiter last night and only asked for a week's worth of salary."

"I'm aware," Lumian responded calmly.

Louis recalled how the boss had taken Charlie away the previous night, returning without him. Shortly afterward, Charlie tendered his resignation and left. This sequence of events left Louis with a lingering suspicion that something secretive was at play, but he didn't dare inquire further.

Lumian cast a brief glance at Louis and casually inquired as he made his way towards the café on the second floor, "How old are you?"

"27," Louis answered, puzzled as to why the boss seemed interested in this particular detail.

Without much hesitation, Lumian continued, "Are you married? Do you have any children?"

"Not yet," Louis replied with an awkward smile. "I plan to get married when I'm more mature."

Though he had managed to escape the life of a low-ranking mobster and now served as the leader's bodyguard, eliminating the constant fear of being beaten to death on the streets, Louis recognized the inherent dangers that still lurked.

He didn't wish to benefit another man shortly after entering married life and having a child.

Lumian nodded.

"It's important to consider your future. The other Louis I know already has several children."

Louis brushed off the remark, perceiving it as an attempt by the boss to force a conversation when there was little else to discuss, as if trying to prove a point.

…

Franca skipped her lunch with Gardner Martin and returned to 3 Rue des Blouses Blanches before noon.

Upon reaching the house, she noticed that the door to the guest bedroom was tightly shut. Perplexed, she turned the handle and pushed it open.

Inside, Jenna lay fast asleep in her pajamas, huddled under a blanket.

Stirred by the door's movement, she rubbed her eyes and slowly sat up, her gaze fixed on Franca.

"Still snoozing?" Franca asked, her smile in place.

Just because you don't have acting lessons at Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons, you're letting yourself go like this?

Jenna combed through her tawny locks and grumbled, "It's all Ciel's fault; things went on late into the night."

"…" Franca's smile froze.

Jenna continued, "I don't know what happened to him last night, but his mood and condition were off. I was worried something might happen, so I followed him. Only after he entered Auberge du Coq Doré and got into bed did I return to get some rest."

Franca breathed a sigh of relief and inquired with concern, "Tell me everything."

Jenna recounted the events starting from her performance at Salle de Bal Brise, seeing Lumian sitting by the road in the rain, all the way until he employed an unimaginable "method" to secure Gabriel's script deal. Finally, she said,

"Dammit, it was almost three o'clock before he finally agreed to go back to his room and sleep. I was beyond exhausted!"

Franca listened attentively and expressed her worry, "It's rare to see him in such a state…"

Franca paused, a realization dawning on her.

Lumian was still undergoing regular treatment from a psychiatrist, and perhaps this state she witnessed was his truest form.

"He must have experienced some sort of trauma last night. I'll ask him about it later." After Franca referred to him as a relative, she no longer concealed her close relationship with Lumian in front of Jenna.

Jenna nodded.

"Choose your words carefully. Don't agitate him."

…

On the second floor of Salle de Bal Brise, in Lumian's office, he noticed Franca, who had turned invisible.

"I heard from Jenna that something happened to you last night," Franca, dressed in a white blouse and black pants, asked casually. "Did you meet Madame Pualis?"

During her lunch with Jenna, she had managed to piece together what had triggered Lumian's mental distress.

Lumian seemed to lose all his strength upon hearing Franca's question and slumped into the swiveling armchair.

After a pause of more than ten seconds, he exhaled and said, "That's right. I can't accept the truth I learned, but I have no choice."

Sensing his reluctance to share further, Franca didn't press the matter. She nodded slightly and offered, "Is there anything I can do for you?"

Lumian straightened up and spoke bluntly, "Two things. First, I have numerous questions about mysticism. Second, the issue with the Poison Spur Mob.

"As I mentioned before, once the election is over, Hugues Artois will become a member of parliament. 'Black Scorpion' Roger and his cohorts will gain a new boon. In due time, we'll all be in danger. Should we launch a raid on 126 Avenue du Marché at night to eliminate any hidden threats before the election results are announced?"

Franca pondered for a moment and replied, "Based on your description, the Heretic Spellmaster holds a significant advantage on their home turf. Even if the two of us use our trump cards, our chances of successfully eliminating 'Black Scorpion' Roger and the others are uncertain, assuming there are no other surprises awaiting us.

"But if we don't act now, they will become even more formidable after receiving their new boons…"

She hesitated, unsure of the best course of action.

…

At 126 Avenue du Marché, within the three-story building with a garden.

"Black Scorpion" Roger gazed at his subordinate who had infiltrated the market district's parliamentary election commission and asked eagerly, "What's the situation?"

The subordinate replied with excitement, "Monsieur Hugues Artois is leading by a wide margin!"

A smile crept across "Black Scorpion" Roger's face. Once the subordinate left, he turned to "Baldy" Harman and "Short-legged Candlestick" Castina, saying,

"The election results will be announced tomorrow afternoon. Lady Moon will personally oversee the ritual and grant us a boon during the night.

"Afterward, we won't hold back anymore. That wretched Ciel must meet his demise!"

Chapter 223: Choice

On a southeastern hill overlooking Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman, there stood an active quarry.

Having departed from Salle de Bal Brise, Lumian embarked on a quest to find a suitable candidate, which led him to this very place.

The night was deep, and the lamplighters diligently illuminated the gas lamps strewn across the streets. In stark contrast, the quarry, having concluded its daily operations, was enveloped in darkness, devoid of any artificial illumination.

Scattered across the quarry floor were several gypsum furnaces, surrounded by numerous tramps.

Lumian honed his focus, meticulously assessing each individual's circumstances.

At long last, he discovered a target that fit his requirements.

Resting against one of the gypsum furnaces was a male tramp. His shirt, pants, and jacket were tattered, their original hue obscured by the dark brown soil. Sunken cheeks and emaciated limbs almost distorted his figure. His unkempt hair and beard intertwined in a mess of strands.

His eyes were half-shut, and his shallow breaths suggested he might perish at any moment.

According to Lumian's observations, the tramp was indeed approaching the end of his waning life. He had but two or three days left.

Approaching the figure, Lumian squatted down and retrieved the gas canister he had obtained from the unsavory Hedsey, whom Franca had aptly named Mysticism Smelling Salts. Unscrewing the lid, he positioned it near the tramp's nostrils.

He and Franca had already distributed Rentas's "remains." The sedatives and coins totaling 212 verl d'or belonged to Lumian, while the remainder was Franca's share.

Achoo!

The tramp sneezed twice, and his eyes fluttered open.

Weakly gazing at Lumian, donned in a blue laborer's uniform and a dark cap, he inquired, puzzled, "W-who are you? W-what are you trying to do?"

Lumian responded calmly, "I'm just a passing worker. I sensed that your demise was imminent, so I approached to verify."

The tramp found no fault in Lumian's explanation. In the Intis Republic, upon discovering a lifeless body, whether reporting to the governmental authorities or the two Churches, individuals would receive compensation for promptly ensuring purification or cremation.

Though the sum was meager, a mere 1 verl d'or, even the lower-class citizens found it a pleasant surprise, no matter how modest the additional benefits.

The tramp's beard trembled as he managed a smile.

"You guessed right. I also feel as if my time is drawing near. Drop by more frequently over the next two days, so your money doesn't get snatched away."

Perhaps it was the effect of the Mysticism Smelling Salts, or perhaps the topic of death momentarily stirred the tramp's spirits, for his words ceased to falter, and his reasoning became clearer.

"Have you got any family left?" Lumian inquired casually, squatting before the tramp as he stowed away the Mysticism Smelling Salts.

The tramp fell silent for a few moments, then slowly shook his head.

"No, not any more.

"If you're interested in my clothes, take them when I'm dead."

"Has your family passed on?" Lumian probed further.

The tramp's beard swayed with the motion of his muscles, and his voice carried an unmistakable tinge of anguish.

"They're gone. All gone. My parents didn't make it past 45. My brother fell in the war a few years back. My sisters succumbed to illness, and her child became a child laborer. By the age of ten, he was already hunchbacked and died from sheer exhaustion in a textile mill…"

The tramp seemed to stray from Lumian's question, more akin to a recollection before his impending demise. He rambled on, "I used to toil in the quarry, praised for my strength. Then, a Monsieur saw my diligence, believed I could endure hardship. He taught me to place detonators and loosen rocks. My pay rose, and life took a turn for the better. I had a wife, tough as nails just like me, and three precious children, but only one survived. My little angel, my daughter.

"When the food prices sparked protests, my body suddenly gave way, and I fell grievously ill.

"My wife and daughter spent everything, amassed debts. Eventually, they nursed me back to health, but I lost my job in the process. We were hounded by loan sharks day in and day out. Those men took away my little angel. My wife and I searched desperately. A few weeks later, we found her lifeless body. She couldn't endure their torment and chose to end it all.

"My wife wanted to turn to the police, but they beat her to death and dumped her somewhere. I was battered and left unconscious, but I survived.

I've made it till today…"

Lumian listened in silence, his voice deep when he finally spoke, "Any wishes?"

The tramp laughed out loud.

"Wishes? My greatest wish is to pass away shortly after catching that illness."

Lumian fell silent for a moment before continuing, "No thirst for revenge?"

The tramp's eyes glazed over as he replied, "Those loan sharks were killed by other mobs. New loan sharks have taken their place."

He recollected Lumian's initial question and spoke in a voice that seemed to drift from another realm, "When my time comes, I think—I think I'd like to have another meatloaf. I remember those years, every weekend, my wife would buy the meat herself, add flax seeds and vinegar, turn it into a sauce, and stuff it between flatbread. My daughter adored it, and I loved it too…"

Lumian nodded, rising to his feet and making his way down the hill, toward the streets below.

After approximately 45 minutes, he returned to the gypsum furnace, carrying a Rouen meatloaf that filled the air with its enticing aroma.

The tramp seemed on the verge of fainting once more. Lumian employed the Mysticism Smelling Salts once again to rouse him from his stupor.

The tramp sneezed a few times, his gaze fixed blankly on the Rouen meatloaf. He quickly took bites, his beard becoming coated with a thin layer of oil.

Having consumed half of it, he gasped for breath and inquired with a smile, "What's your game, lad?"

"I'll be stabbing you later. It might just bring about your demise tonight," Lumian stated plainly.

The tramp chuckled weakly and queried, "Aren't you afraid of the police? I fear not death. I should've perished long ago. Did you know that every winter, I sleep inside this gypsum furnace? Even after a day's work, it retains a soothing warmth that lasts until nearly daybreak. However, the lingering fumes within are poisonous and could claim me in my sweet slumber. So far, it hasn't happened to me."

Lumian chuckled.

"I reckon the police aren't too bothered about how a tramp meets his end, so long as it's not a blatant murder."

Without further ado, the tramp devoured the remaining Rouen meatloaf and let out a belch.

After a pause of over ten seconds, he adjusted his position and spoke, "You may proceed."

Lumian drew his blade, Fallen Mercury, adorned with sinister patterns, and thrust it into the tramp's hand.

Blood trickled forth, staining the tip of the blade crimson.

Simultaneously, Lumian once again beheld the illusory river of mercury.

His purpose in seeking a near-death tramp was to exchange for a more practical fate!

This was not to say that encountering the fate of the Montsouris ghost wasn't formidable. Quite the contrary, it could lead to certain death or even the demise of an entire family for many humans. Furthermore, it clung tenaciously. However, the issue lay in the time it took to take effect. The exchange of fates could often be completed within minutes, whereas the Montsouris ghost's assault on its target occurred at random intervals. It might strike in ten to twenty minutes, or it might wait for three to four months.

In other words, the fate of "encountering the Montsouris ghost" was ill-suited for a surprise attack or a battle.

Furthermore, having learned from the experience and lessons of Margot's death, Lumian's target, "Black Scorpion" Roger, would undoubtedly be wary of such matters. If stabbed by Fallen Mercury and not instantly dispatched, there was a high likelihood that he would seek aid from Madame Moon. Lumian was uncertain if the lady possessing true godhood could fend off the Montsouris ghost. If she could, his operation would be an utter failure.

Considering these factors, he intended to preemptively alter the fate of encountering the Montsouris ghost and choose a destiny more conducive to surprise attacks and assassinations. He desired "Black Scorpion" Roger to perish on the spot, without a chance to seek any assistance.

As these thoughts raced through Lumian's mind, a series of images "appeared" before him.

He saw the tramp, asleep inside the gypsum furnace, the tramp who had been viciously beaten and left unconscious, the tramp who had recently fainted, the tramp who had crumbled in front of his daughter's lifeless body, the tramp who had shared homemade meatloaf with his wife and daughter, the tramp who meticulously prepared and set up explosives…

Lumian knew he couldn't choose the tramp's destined fate of perishing in two or three days. It was an overwhelming burden, beyond what Fallen Mercury could bear. Even the Luck Transference Spell couldn't transfer such a dire fate.

The only solution Lumian could think of was to employ the Substitution Spell and find a death row inmate to take the tramp's place. He would assume the inmate's identity for a period of time, gaining the acceptance of those around him. Then, he would perform the ritual and swap the tramp's impending death with that of the inmate. However, this process would take two to three weeks, if not longer, to prepare. Time was not on his side.

Drawing on his vast experience, Lumian made a quick decision and chose the fate of the tramp who had recently collapsed due to his failing body.

It departed from the mercury river and condensed into a droplet that seeped into the blade of Fallen Mercury. Simultaneously, the fate of encountering the Montsouris ghost shifted entirely to the tramp.

Lumian retracted the wicked, pewter-black dagger. It remained clean and free from bloodstains, and the wound on the tramp's hand was shallow, as though it would soon leave a scar.

"That's it?" the tramp asked in puzzlement.

He had been prepared to meet his end then and there.

"Yes." Lumian stood up and departed from the hill.

Late that night, inside the gypsum furnace, the tramp convulsed suddenly and succumbed to suffocation.

…

Across from 126 Avenue du Marché.

Returning here, Lumian nestled in a shadowy corner, shielded from the glow of the gas street lamps. His eyes fixated on the target building.

Beside him, Franca emerged from the darkness, dressed in a black robe and hood.

"How did it go?" Lumian asked, entirely unsurprised.

Chapter 224: Disguise

Franca cast her gaze upon 126 Avenue du Marché and remarked, "Whether it's 'Black Scorpion' Roger, 'Baldy' Harman, or 'Short-legged Candlestick' Castina, none of them have shown themselves."

"Extremely cautious," Lumian objectively commented.

Franca let out a scoff.

"If I were in their shoes, I'd be cautious too. If I manage to make it through tonight, I can turn the tables and emerge victorious. How foolish would it be for me to reveal myself? Even if someone were to abduct Gardner and maim him at the doorstep, I wouldn't budge."

This example isn't convincing… Lumian asked, "What if it's Jenna who's bound instead of Gardner?"

"…" Franca fell silent.

Noticing the Provoker potion taking effect, Lumian, nearing the completion of his digestion, chose not to press further. Instead, he inquired, "What else have you observed?"

Neither Lumian nor Franca had devised a specific plan for the assault on "Black Scorpion" Roger and the others. They possessed only a handful of vague ideas and were currently engaged in preliminary investigations and preparations.

Franca pondered for a few seconds before revealing, "A member of the Poison Spur Mob frequents the election commission and this vicinity. It's as if he's providing 'Black Scorpion' Roger with real-time updates on the polls."

Pausing briefly, a mischievous smile curled the corners of her mouth.

"We can exploit this!"

Simultaneously, Lumian mirrored her grin.

"Isn't it like stumbling upon a soft pillow just when you're sleepy? Indeed, delving into politics is a treacherous affair."

Franca turned her head, amusement twinkling in her eyes as she glanced at Lumian.

"Your sister must have imparted many hometown sayings to you. How do you plan on operating this thing?"

Lumian fell silent for a moment before speaking again.

"If I were an Actor, the problem would be simple. Nonetheless, I still possess those glasses."

Franca nodded, satisfied with his response.

"This operation requires both a surprise attack and an assassination. The importance of the assassination must outweigh that of the surprise attack to minimize a Heretic Spellmaster's advantage on their home turf."

After some deliberation, the two of them moved away from 126 Avenue du Marché, positioning themselves in a shadowy spot near the district's parliamentary election commission.

The day's voting had concluded, and the election commission staff toiled diligently, counting the votes and providing real-time updates. Countless reporters from various newspapers gathered there, eager to acquire firsthand data.

If all went according to plan, Hugues Artois would secure more than half of the registered votes tonight, enabling him to declare his election victory.

As time ticked by, the night grew darker. Suddenly, Franca nudged Lumian and pointed towards a figure exiting the election commission.

"That's the guy from the Poison Spur Mob."

The person appeared to be almost thirty, boasting black hair, brown eyes, and a narrow face. He sported a blue-and-white striped shirt, a light brown jacket, and a thick gold necklace.

Lumian offered a subtle nod and departed from his hiding place, adopting an air of urgency as he approached the man.

He pulled his dark cap down low, obscuring his distinct blond-and-black hair.

Upon noticing someone drawing nearer, the Poison Spur Mob member cautiously altered his path.

At that moment, Lumian took a diagonal stride forward, positioning himself in front of the individual. He smiled and greeted, "Long time no see. How have you been faring within the Poison Spur Mob?"

The man was caught off guard. Utilizing the illumination from the gas street lamps, he scrutinized Lumian's face.

Seizing the opportunity, Lumian lunged forward, gripping the other person's neck and pulling them into an embrace.

Simultaneously, Lumian pushed the metal canister closer to the target's nose with his left hand.

He had already unscrewed the lid, but he kept his finger pressed against the opening, controlling the gas release.

The Poison Spur Mob member struggled desperately, but Lumian's palm covered his mouth and nose, silencing any outcry. His punches and kicks were easily deflected—either his neck was constricted or his back was pinned down by an elbow. His head remained ensconced in the other person's grasp, nestled against their chest. In his anxious state, it was difficult for him to strike his foe's vulnerable points, and Lumian endured the onslaught.

After a few seconds, the man's resistance began to wane. Passersby cast fleeting glances at him before walking away without detecting anything amiss.

Within moments, the man in Lumian's arms lost consciousness.

Supporting his "intoxicated" companion, Lumian sealed the bottle once more with his finger.

They arrived at a deserted alley barricaded from public access, where Lumian abandoned his target and screwed the metal canister shut.

"You're very reckless." Franca emerged from the shadows beside him. "Only in Trier can you get away with this. Anywhere else, someone would have raised a loud alarm."

"I reserve these actions solely for Trier," Lumian replied, crouching down to strip the Poison Spur Mob member of his attire and necklace. He bound his hands and feet with a rope he had brought along.

Having completed the task, Lumian administered some truth serum to his captive before reviving him with the Mysticism Smelling Salts.

Three consecutive sneezes followed. The Poison Spur Mob member opened his eyes and exclaimed in horror, "Who are you? What do you want?"

Lumian removed his cap and crouched in front of the target, wearing a smile. He asked, "Can't you recognize me?"

Under the crimson moonlight, the Poison Spur Mob member glimpsed the golden-black hair and a vaguely familiar face.

His teeth chattered.

"C-Ciel!"

"I have something to ask you. If you refuse to answer or choose to deceive me, you know the consequences," Lumian said with a smile.

His cold, merciless, and unhinged reputation preceded him within the Poison Spur Mob. The man was so terrified that his heart seemed ready to leap out of his throat.

"I'll talk, I'll talk!"

Unfazed, Lumian inquired, "Where were you planning to go just now?"

"To the Boss's place to report the election's polling situation. Monsieur Hugues Artois has secured nearly half the votes. He's just a little shy…" Not only did the man answer Lumian's question, but he also provided additional information.

Lumian nodded contentedly and proceeded to inquire about the specific details the Poison Spur Mob member had previously relayed to "Black Scorpion" Roger.

This encompassed his demeanor towards the staff, his manner of addressing "Black Scorpion" Roger, his positioning, and his tone.

Having meticulously memorized the details, Lumian employed the sedative once more to render the Poison Spur Mob member unconscious.

Without delay, he changed into the other person's attire, retrieved his Mystery Prying Glasses, and perched them upon his nose.

This time, underground, he beheld rats, insects, and serpents, but a charred building and a blurred face behind a glass window also materialized.

The face possessed unusually vacant eyes.

Lumian's mind momentarily spun into disarray. Frowning, he removed the Mystery Prying Glasses and retrieved a collection of cosmetics.

Assisted by the crimson moonlight and the small torch held by Franca, he meticulously applied various substances to his face, utilizing the makeup mirror his companion carried.

Around ten minutes later, his countenance grew gaunter and began to assume the likeness of the Poison Spur Mob member.

His skill in makeup fell short of fully replicating the other person's appearance, but the inherent effect of the Mystery Prying Glasses would convince anyone who glimpsed his face that he was the individual named Alsai.

Smack!

Lumian snapped the makeup mirror shut, daring not to gaze upon his reflection once more.

As Franca stowed away her belongings, she had Lumian turn his back to her.

She feared that she, too, might mistake her companion for a member of the Poison Spur Mob, thereby hindering their subsequent collaboration.

Franca examined Lumian's hair color and retrieved the disguise props she had acquired from Rentas.

"Hair and eye color are the most noticeable flaws. First, use this black hair dye, then wear these brown contact lenses.

"Damn it, anything is possible in the realm of mysticism. Who would have thought that in this day and age, Actors could create the illusion of cosmetic contacts? Although the materials are different and they don't improve vision, they can indeed alter the color of one's irises. Otherwise, Rentas wouldn't have been able to pass as Ive or you. It defies scientific explanation, but it's utterly mystical!"

Lumian paid no mind to Franca's musings and took the mysticism hair dye, which could be washed away with a special lotion. Under her guidance, he transformed his golden and black hair into a solid black hue.

Once he donned the brown contact lenses, Franca seized the opportunity to discuss the specifics of their forthcoming assault.

The two of them swiftly outlined a rough plan, but they refrained from delving into every detail. Firstly, time was limited, and secondly, they had to anticipate numerous unforeseen circumstances at the scene. It was impossible to account for every possibility, so they could only adapt and make decisions based on the main concept.

Franca produced a coin pouch.

It was a fist-sized bag made of grayish-white cloth, filled with gold, silver, and copper coins.

Franca rummaged in her bag and retrieved an iron-colored ring with a thick band and slender spikes on its surface.

"This is one of my mystical items, the Ring of Punishment," she explained to Lumian. "It serves a single purpose. It can pierce a target's Spirit Body within a five-meter range, causing excruciating pain and rendering them temporarily unconscious. For Low- and Mid-Sequence Beyonders, there are very few Beyonder powers capable of bypassing defense and directly attacking a Spirit Body. This is one of them."

Franca paused momentarily before continuing, "Wearing it for an extended period will make you irritable, bloodthirsty, cruel, and impulsive. If you use it more than three times in an hour, it will cause your personality to undergo mutation. If you remove it, you will suffer indiscriminate Psychic Piercing damage once you enter a five-meter radius. To seal it, you need to place it amidst a pile of valuable metal coins."

Currently, Franca wore the ring, ensuring neither she nor Lumian fell victim to its effects.

She handed the Ring of Punishment to Lumian.

As soon as Lumian slipped the ring onto his right middle finger, he experienced overwhelming frustration.

Collecting himself, he donned black gloves, left the alley, and jogged towards 126 Avenue du Marché.

Chapter 225: Exposed

On 126 Avenue du Marché in Lumian, concealed as Alsai, a member of the Poison Spur Mob, pressed the doorbell of the three-story building with a garden out back.

Amidst the pleasant chimes, the valet, who had previously ushered Louis Lund inside, swung open the wooden door.

Seeing Alsai's face beaming with joy, he returned the smile.

"Have the voting results for today been announced?"

"You bet!" Lumian concealed his voice with feigned delight. "Monsieur Hugues Artois will be the new member of parliament by noon tomorrow!"

The valet had long been a believer in the Great Mother, and he had been promised a reward of becoming a Villain after the election. Hearing this news delighted him, and he led Lumian straight to the living room.

In the living room, "Black Scorpion" Roger, now wearing aqua-blue silk pajamas, lounged on a divan. He addressed "Short-legged Candlestick" Castina, nestled beside him while he playfully squeezed her buttocks, and "Baldy" Harman, who paced around the room.

"Hold on tight. It all comes to an end tomorrow night.

"No matter what happens in the next 24 hours, we can't leave this place!"

Is that so? Are you willing to stay here even if there's a fire, explosion, or earthquake? Lumian criticized silently. He shook off the valet and swiftly approached.

"Boss, I have good news!"

"Black Scorpion" Roger's excitement was palpable. He forgot to scrutinize his subordinates' movements, voices, and appearance. His eyes sparkled as he inquired, "Has Monsieur Hugues Artois won the election?"

"Baldy" Harman and "Short-legged Candlestick" Castina turned their gaze toward Lumian as well.

At that moment, Lumian had closed the gap between him and "Black Scorpion" Roger, standing just three meters away from the divan and the glass coffee table before it.

He exclaimed with excitement, "He's only 2,000 votes away from securing a majority!"

"Black Scorpion" Roger felt a tinge of disappointment, but his happiness prevailed.

He nodded and proclaimed, "Very good…"

Before he could even complete his sentence, Lumian's hand caught his attention.

He was wearing a pair of black gloves.

Alsai didn't have such a habit!

At that moment, two blinding beams shot out from Lumian's eyes—like silent bullets and swift lightning bolts.

With a snap, "Black Scorpion" Roger felt the imaginary sound of his Spirit Body shattering, sending waves of excruciating pain through him. He cried out tragically, clutching his head in agony.

In his state of distress, he completely forgot to activate the protective enchantment that usually shrouded the master bedroom and living room.

The sudden twist of events, their origin unknown, left "Short-legged Candlestick" Castina and "Baldy" Harman bewildered, struggling to comprehend the situation. Their responses were purely instinctive.

One of them stood tall, assuming a defensive stance against the suspicious Alsai, while the other sprinted towards their boss, shielding his flank.

Lumian seized this golden opportunity. Drawing his weapon, Fallen Mercury, he lunged at "Black Scorpion" Roger, who huddled on the couch.

Witnessing the attack, "Short-legged Candlestick" Castina intercepted with her right elbow, disregarding the harm that would befall her. Her intention was to aid "Black Scorpion" Roger in fending off the strike.

In her other hand, she grabbed the nearby axe, attempting to swing it at Alsai.

Suddenly, a figure dressed in black robes, their face concealed beneath a hood, materialized behind her.

Franca!

Franca had skillfully employed Invisibility to trail Lumian all the way to this location. Her primary target was "Short-legged Candlestick" Castina, the one providing protection to "Black Scorpion" Roger.

She refrained from directly assassinating "Black Scorpion" Roger, fearing that a fatal blow jeopardizing his life would activate the "magic circle" with its substitution effect.

The hidden blade, wreathed in black flames, darted forth alongside Franca's full-force strike. It pierced through Castina's back, finding its mark in her heart.

Castina's brown eyes widened, her face contorted with disbelief, pain, and despair.

Despite the injury, she continued to block for "Black Scorpion" Roger, but her strength had already abandoned her.

Lumian's arm seemed to possess no bones. With fluid motion, he flicked his joints and swung his forearm, evading Castina's feeble attempt to obstruct him. The pewter-black dirk soared, aiming straight for the leader of the Poison Spur Mob.

Fallen Mercury's tip pierced through the aqua-blue pajamas, puncturing the skin over "Black Scorpion" Roger's ribs.

Crimson blood rapidly welled up, and amidst the pain of the Psychic Piercing somewhat subsiding, "Black Scorpion" Roger snapped back to reality.

He emitted an unnaturally enraged shriek, and blurry faces, some bluish-white, materialized on the living room's floor, ceiling, and walls. Most were ordinary people, a handful being children, their visages twisted with agony.

As the Undying Lands materialized, "Black Scorpion" Roger, nearly impaled by Fallen Mercury, vanished from Lumian's sight, leaving behind the pewter-black dirk stained with blood.

Crash! "Baldy" Harman toppled the coffee table and lunged towards Lumian, who had just collapsed onto the sofa.

Lumian hastily raised his hand, but his body wavered, and he slumped to the ground.

In midair, his eyes caught a glimpse of "Baldy" Harman's form, followed by lighting up with two beams of light resembling lightning.

Harman, on the verge of launching a close combat assault, experienced an anguish that penetrated the depths of his soul, forcing an involuntary scream to escape his lips.

His body froze, tilting backward. Franca, fresh from dispatching "Short-legged Candlestick" Castina, brandished a classic brass revolver in her right hand.

She aimed it at Harman's bald head and swiftly pulled the trigger.

With a resounding bang, an obsidian bullet pierced Harman's gleaming scalp, causing it to explode like a watermelon. A spray of red and white erupted in all directions.

"Black Scorpion" Roger, having just manifested from the visage of an undead on the adjacent wall, witnessed the scene and emitted an unusually resentful and outraged howl.

Alongside this outcry, his eyes darkened, as though a fervent life burned within.

The blood that drenched the living room and the two lifeless bodies churned, surging towards "Baldy" Harman and "Short-legged Candlestick" Castina as if infused with a life force. The two victims adorned a crimson shroud, rising unsteadily to their feet.

The blood upon Fallen Mercury ignited, casting forth a radiant glow akin to the warmth of spring's sun.

"Black Scorpion" Roger vividly recalled Margot's demise, prompting his initial response to rid the evil dirk of the blood it bore and retaliate against the assailant, averting an inexplicable demise in battle.

His second response was to swiftly conclude the conflict and seek aid from Lady Moon. Even the Rebirth ritual proved incapable of absolving the influence of Ciel's wicked dirk. The efficacy of solely burning the blood remained uncertain.

Indeed, he had recognized the assailant as that wretched lunatic, Ciel, through the pewter-black malevolent blade.

Cursed Ciel!

The radiant flames upon Fallen Mercury blazed along the blade, reaching towards Lumian's fingertips. Without hesitation, Lumian cast aside the malevolent pewter-black dirk, letting it fall upon the ground amidst the contorted visages.

At this point, Fallen Mercury was no longer required.

The pewter-black dirk, which facilitated the exchange of destinies, merely utilized blood as a conduit; it did not depend on it. Once the fate officially entered the exchange process, the presence of blood would no longer influence subsequent developments.

As Lumian retrieved Fallen Mercury, the exchange of fates commenced.

He made no deliberate choices, allowing Fallen Mercury to exercise its own discretion.

Lumian braced his left hand against the pallid, indistinct faces strewn upon the ground. With the resilience bestowed by the Alms Monk, he rebounded onto the divan amidst the bone-chilling cold and rigidity.

No longer did the horrifying countenances of the undead pervade this space—only "Baldy" Harman and "Short-legged Candlestick" Castina, their original appearances concealed beneath the flowing cascade of blood.

Simultaneously, the two lifeless bodies extended their arms and lunged at Lumian, seeking to ensnare him in their clutches.

Meanwhile, Franca leapt nimbly, alighting upon a chair with an air of weightlessness.

Unbeknownst to all, a thick frost had descended from the pallid-white or bluish-white ground, solidifying into a translucent sheen of ice.

This restrained the undead countenances, constraining their movements.

Almost concurrently, Franca's left hand, pressed against the hidden blade, tightened its grip, causing black flames to erupt within "Short-legged Candlestick" Castina's form, consuming her from within.

The lingering spirit of the blood-colored corpse emitted an ethereal crackling sound as its mutated body melted akin to a dripping candle, splashing upon the ground.

"Black Scorpion" Roger, relying upon the characteristic of the Undying Lands to shift locations, emitted yet another shrill cry.

A layer of black flames enkindled upon Franca's person.

In contrast to her own black flames, the black flames conjured by the Heretic Spellmaster exuded an overt malevolence, as if they consumed the life force and vitality of all who stood witness.

With a resounding crack, Franca's figure shattered, leaving behind naught but irregular shards of mirror.

Upon the icy veneer upon the ground, the Witch's form swiftly coalesced and leaped forth.

She had taken the initiative to create frost and freeze the ground not for restricting the movements of "Black Scorpion" Roger. Firstly, she sought to diminish the influence of the deceased spirits, and secondly, she aimed to gather ample materials for the Mirror Substitution.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Devoid of the pincer attack from "Short-legged Candlestick" Castina, Lumian deftly parried head-on, successfully evading the bloodied Harman. Springing onto the overturned coffee table, he withdrew his revolver and unleashed a volley of shots towards "Black Scorpion" Roger upon the wall. Concurrently, he produced the drawing depicting the peculiar sun.

He held no concern that his assault upon the target would disrupt the exchange of fates. For he was neither the wielder of Fallen Mercury, nor did he grasp its hilt.

The yellow bullets struck the wall with force, yet "Black Scorpion" Roger had already diminished into a wan, distorted, transparent countenance, vanishing from Lumian and Franca's sight.

Chapter 226: Sculpture

Lumian's left hand trembled, revealing the sun pattern that emitted a colorful glow.

The living room, once chilly, suddenly warmed up, but the frost on the ground remained stubbornly frozen. Only the pale, distorted faces turned away, unable to bear witness to what was about to unfold.

Harman, decapitated and drenched in blood, charged at Lumian, heedless of the revolver pointed his way, driven by a sinister desire to "embrace" his intended victim by force.

The drawing of the sun caused his body to tremble, and blood dripped from him onto the ground.

Instinctively, Lumian knew he couldn't engage in a direct confrontation with this "corpse." He used his light brown jacket to shield himself, pushing back against Harman's relentless assault.

The jacket quickly turned blood-red, showing signs of wear.

At that moment, "Black Scorpion" Roger had been absent for a couple of seconds, and Franca finally found an opportunity to act.

A dense black flame materialized in her palm, which she hurled at the zombified Harman.

The black flames struck the blood-stained corpse with the force of a cannonball, causing it to burst into silent flames that ignited the hidden spirituality within the blood and remains.

Harman began to melt, much like Castina, resembling a candle tossed in a blazing fire.

Just then, "Black Scorpion" Roger emerged from a corner, his face pale, cradling a sculpture of equal height in his arms.

The sculpture portrayed a woman with gentle features, her long dress intricately detailed and lifelike.

After exerting great effort to place the sculpture on the ground, Roger melded with the writhing, distorted faces around him, evading Lumian's shots and Franca's black flames with impeccable timing.

In the next instant, he reappeared beneath the ceiling chandelier, cursing rapidly.

"You're dead meat!"

"I'll turn you into fertilizer!"

"Son of a bitch, daring to intrude upon my Undying Lands!"

"I'll take every last one of your lives!"

"I want you to have 20 children!"

"Black Scorpion" Roger constantly changed positions as he spat out these words. He swiftly moved and leaped, skillfully dodging Lumian's unfolded drawing and Franca's array of witchcraft spells, primarily comprised of black flames and frost.

Each word, seemingly stemming from Intisian, pierced Lumian and Franca's minds like an arrow. They felt dizzy and their blood resonated with the onslaught.

In the corner, the female sculpture activated, its surface blazing with brilliant flames.

Lumian's head throbbed as if struck by an ethereal hammer. Bright red blood streamed uncontrollably from his nostrils.

Almost simultaneously, Franca, perched on the sofa, clenched her left hand, conjuring black flames that ignited from Lumian's nose. She left Roger no opportunity to counteract.

Franca herself endured similar injuries. She suspected that "Black Scorpion" Roger was employing a curse-like incantation. Moreover, the female sculpture's augmentation had greatly fortified his physical and spiritual presence. Franca couldn't endure more than a few uttered words.

As "Black Scorpion" Roger had left the sculpture unprotected, Franca believed that a direct attack might result in even more dreadful consequences, likely taking the form of a curse.

Suppressing her boiling blood, dizziness, and bodily pain, she raised her brass revolver and fired at "Black Scorpion" Roger, seizing the chance to leap towards the sculpture.

The iron-black bullet shattered a contorted face, leaving marks on the wall, but it failed to harm Roger.

Once Franca landed, she swiftly circled around the sculpture. She didn't squeeze the trigger of her brass revolver again, nor did she thrust with her blade. While evading the slender figures summoned by "Black Scorpion" Roger, she encased the sculpture in layers of frost.

Meanwhile, Lumian, who had been the focal point of Roger's attention, found himself in imminent peril.

A piercing cry resounded as illusory black flames kindled upon Lumian's body.

It drained his life force with alarming speed, causing his physical strength to wane.

Without hesitation, Lumian discarded the peculiar sun drawing and lunged towards the sofa, reaching into his pocket with his left hand.

Beside the overturned coffee table, "Black Scorpion" Roger emerged from the icy seal, brandishing a pitch-black, malevolent scythe that stood half the height of a man. He cleaved through the furniture before him, rending it in two.

Lumian alighted on the sofa, his left hand withdrawing from his pocket, clutching a slender and slightly pale finger.

In the face of Roger's scythe, Lumian, already weakened, barely managed to evade the strike by shifting his body.

Simultaneously, he tossed the severed finger into the air.

It was Mr. K's finger!

Amidst the sound of tearing leather and fabric, the divan was sundered by the wicked scythe. The pale-white finger expanded and detonated like a bomb.

It metamorphosed into a shower of flesh and blood droplets that cascaded onto Lumian, extinguishing the fading black flames.

The flesh absorbed the surrounding blood and dissolved corpses, swiftly coalescing and draping Lumian in a cloak of blood-red hue.

The profound weakness that had plagued Lumian dissipated. He sprang up, launching a counteroffensive against "Black Scorpion" Roger.

Witnessing this, Roger avoided a direct confrontation. He retreated into the fractured ice and merged with one of the distorted faces.

Franca, who had already encased the sculpture in frost, suddenly felt an intense chill.

The restless spirits in the living room seemed incensed. They surged from all directions, extending their arms and gaping mouths, enveloping Franca.

With a resounding crack, yet another mirror shattered.

Franca's form materialized on the other side of the ice. She raised her hand, causing black flames to surge around the sculpture, setting ablaze the indistinct souls and blood-hued shadows.

"Black Scorpion" Roger peered out from a nearby wall and unleashed another curse, "Damn bitch!"

As he weakened his targets, he swiftly shifted positions with the aid of the tormented faces. Sometimes, he targeted Lumian, and other times, he assailed Franca. He relied on the power of the Undying Lands and the sculpture to single-handedly suppress the two foes.

At intervals, vile black flames ignited over Lumian's form, sapping his life force and diminishing his strength. Yet, each time, they were counteracted by the robe forged from flesh and blood. Franca evaded the combined assaults of Evil Word, Blood Spirit, Weak Black Flame, and Life Burning time and again, employing the technique of Mirror Substitution.

Time slipped away swiftly. Noticing that Ciel's robe of flesh and blood teetered on the brink of disintegration, while the mirror and ice that Franca had brought with her neared depletion, "Black Scorpion" Roger poked his head through the ceiling, a malicious chuckle escaping his lips.

"You fools!

"Do you truly believe you can withstand the might of the Undying Lands?

"I fear no consequence, even if the entire leadership of the Savoie Mob were to enter this domain!

"Go to hell!"

His cutting words pierced Lumian and Franca's ears and minds, causing their bodies to tremble as if they could bear no more.

Observing this, "Black Scorpion" Roger, who had already shifted to the adjacent wall, revealed a sinister smile, brimming with anticipation.

Suddenly, his vision darkened, and a surge of intense emotions overwhelmed his heart.

Disbelief, shock, confusion, and panic.

In the subsequent moment, he lost consciousness.

Thud!

The boss of the Poison Spur Mob materialized from the wall, collapsed onto the floor, and slipped into unconsciousness.

The fate exchange had finally concluded, as Fallen Mercury swapped the unconscious fate of the dying tramp with "Black Scorpion" Roger's!

It happened swiftly, much faster than the exchange involving Margot.

This was because the tramp was an ordinary person, and when Fallen Mercury selected "Black Scorpion" Roger's fate, it chose the least significant one, unrelated to any Beyonder matters.

Lumian's gaze fixated on "Black Scorpion" Roger, clad in aqua-blue pajamas. Supported by his blood-colored robe, Lumian traversed the transparent and distorted faces, enduring the bone-chilling cold and stiffness. Finally, he reached his motionless target. Retrieving the metal canister containing the sedative, Lumian unscrewed the cap and squatted down.

He directed the sedative obtained from Rentas toward "Black Scorpion" Roger's nose, gently fanning the gas with his hand, ensuring its entry into the enemy's breath.

With that done, Lumian lifted "Black Scorpion" Roger and made his way out of the living room, guarded by Franca.

The valets and maids had long since fled.

As "Black Scorpion" Roger departed the living room, the bluish-white faces swiftly faded away, and everything returned to normal.

Witnessing this, Lumian dropped the Poison Spur Mob leader to the ground and aimed his revolver at the man's head.

After a few seconds of contemplation, Lumian pulled the trigger calmly and silently.

Two shots rang out, transforming "Black Scorpion" Roger's head into a burst watermelon, splattering blood in every direction.

He met his demise while in a coma.

Franca glanced at Lumian, still aiming at "Black Scorpion" Roger, and asked calmly,

"How is it? Have you vented all your frustrations?"

If it weren't for Franca's desire to assist Lumian, she would have considered reporting "Black Scorpion" Roger and his associates for their belief in the Great Mother.

Lumian fell silent for a moment, his lips curling into a smile.

"No.

"It merely resolved one hidden danger."

Franca let out a soft sigh.

"In my homeland, we say that to cure a heart's ailment, the remedy must come from within. But if you don't do it right, no matter how much you try, it's futile.

"Well, I'll quickly communicate with the spirit, and let's strive to depart this place within three minutes. Hurry and seize the spoils."

"Alright," Lumian responded, as the remaining bloodstained garments on his body disintegrated, staining the ground red.

That's it? Lumian couldn't help but furrow his brow.

It wasn't that Mr. K's finger lacked strength. On the contrary, without it, Lumian would have been too feeble to resist and would have required Franca's aid.

However, its performance fell short if made to face the formidable evil spirit, Susanna Mattise. Lumian couldn't help but feel disappointed and perplexed.

As these thoughts raced through his mind, he headed toward the living room, scanning his surroundings for valuable items.

Suddenly, he noticed a figure cloaked in a large hood and black robe standing quietly on the staircase.

Mr. K!

Lumian's pupils dilated, but in an instant, Mr. K vanished into the shadows.

Chapter 227: Agent

Did the finger serve as a signal? How did Mr. K manage to arrive so swiftly? Or was he perhaps observing me from nearby? Lumian felt a surge of tension, his weariness from the battle fading considerably.

This revelation granted him a fresh understanding of Mr. K's power, fueling his fear.

Lumian averted his gaze and retrieved Fallen Mercury,

its blade tarnished by the scorching and decay. He couldn't help but wonder if it would endure until the year's end.

After securing Fallen Mercury, Lumian proceeded to examine the two corpses that had mostly disintegrated under the deluge of blood.

The victims displayed clear signs of petrification, rendering them motionless on the ground, and their ghastly appearance would haunt anyone who laid eyes on them for years to come.

The clothing and personal effects of the deceased suffered extensive corrosion, including Harman's poisoned dirk and Castina's cherished axe.

Among the few items that remained relatively unscathed were several specially crafted canisters with an iron hue, emitting a flickering metallic sheen. Although they bore noticeable signs of corrosion on their surfaces, the liquid contents remained unaffected.

Lumian scrutinized the canisters and discerned four distinct types, distinguished by etched patterns: a tree, a bear-like face, a spring fountain, and a scorpion.

Harman and Castina had each carried one, leaving a total of eight canisters.

Gathering them up, Lumian approached the peculiar scythe recently wielded by "Black Scorpion" Roger. It exuded an ominous aura, its pitch-black blade sharp and menacing. It wasn't as compact as a wheat-harvesting scythe, nor as colossal as a giant weapon. It lacked the capacity to shock onlookers and measured only half the height of an average person.

The moment Lumian's black-gloved hand touched the scythe, he sensed an ethereal spike extending from it, piercing into his flesh and gradually siphoning his life force. It felt chilling and merciless.

Swiftly retracting his hand, Lumian realized that his life was no longer ebbing away slowly.

Is it a mystical artifact or a Beyonder weapon akin to Fallen Mercury… How can I remove it safely? Lumian delved into deep contemplation.

Just then, Franca finished her preparations and commenced spirit channeling.

Lumian returned to "Black Scorpion" Roger's corpse, carrying the eight canisters, and communicated with Franca through the wall of spirituality, saying, "Inquire about the purpose of these objects and how to transport the scythe."

Franca nodded and directed her gaze toward Roger's face, which materialized on the mirrored surface.

"What effects do these canisters on Harman and Castina have? How can I identify them?"

Roger, his face pale and bewildered, replied, "The tree-patterned one is Bark Agent. It toughens your skin and muscles, rendering them as resilient as trees.

"The bear-faced pattern is Berserk Agent. It grants you extraordinary strength when unleashed.

"The spring fountain pattern represents Healing Agent. It mends most external wounds, alleviates severe injuries, and eliminates minor ailments.

"The scorpion pattern is 'Scorpion Poison.' It is primarily used on weapons and induces arrhythmia and respiratory paralysis, ultimately leading to death."

Quite useful indeed… Franca silently praised.

Her Hidden Blade would greatly benefit from a canister of Scorpion Poison.

Franca persisted with her questioning.

"How do you usually transport that scythe?"

"In my study, there's a large wooden box. Put it inside quickly, and you can take it away," replied Roger, his face pale and devoid of emotion.

Franca pressed further, "Is the scythe a mystical object or a Beyonder weapon? What are its abilities?"

"It's called Harvest Sacrifice. It's a weapon infused with a blessed aura and possesses the quality of sharpness. Once it inflicts a wound on the target, and that wound becomes tainted with the corresponding blood, it can continuously drain the life force of the other party," Roger described the scythe in a dazed manner.

Seizing the opportunity, Franca redirected the conversation to more crucial matters.

"Have you encountered Madame Moon? How do you maintain contact with her?"

Roger's pale face contorted with pain.

"I met Madame Moon in the wilderness. Well, now she's Lady Moon. She sat in a peculiar carriage pulled by two demons, wearing a veil that made her appear holy and maternal to me.

"Usually, she seeks me out and commands me to venture into the wilderness abruptly.

"She gave me a green seed to place inside the statue's abdominal cavity. If I face danger, I can use it to urgently contact her.

"But there's no need for the seed now. By reciting her full honorific name, I can elicit her response."

She can respond to an honorific name? That's quite advanced… Franca refrained from inquiring about Lady Moon's honorific name, fearing that the other party might detect her intention.

Although she could already surmise the answer, she asked out of curiosity, "Why didn't you seek Lady Moon's assistance earlier?"

Roger replied, his gaze vacant, "I can win."

You clung to your delusion until the very end, didn't you? Franca clicked her tongue and remarked, "Why are you supporting Hugues Artois?"

"Lady Moon instructed us to aid in his election," Roger replied with a blank expression. "She claimed that Hugues Artois is an open-minded individual."

Open-minded… What does that mean? Franca struggled to comprehend this assessment.

As Franca channeled "Black Scorpion" Roger, Lumian didn't linger by her side. Instead, he ventured into the study, assuming Alsai's appearance, and began sifting through valuable items.

Armed with a short wire, he attempted to unlock the safe door, but his efforts proved futile.

Within the study, he discovered a suitable wooden box for housing the sinister scythe. Carrying it, he descended the stairs to the open-door basement.

The area appeared tidy, except for a stone platform suspected of holding the statue, devoid of any other objects.

Employing his keen observation skills as a Hunter, Lumian scoured the vicinity and uncovered a concealed door.

With a grating sound, he pushed open the secret passage and revealed a corridor beyond. On either side of the corridor stood prison cells enclosed by iron bars. Dozens, if not hundreds, of people were crammed inside. Most appeared destitute, but among them were well-dressed gentlemen, ladies, and seemingly lost children.

In that moment, nearly a third of the captives lay lifeless on the floor, their skin shriveled and lacking vitality. They resembled skeletons more than human beings.

They no longer drew breath, and they had lost control of their bodily functions. The stench permeated the private prison.

Lumian's gaze swept over the trembling individuals, and he noticed numerous sinister and peculiar symbols etched upon the ground, the wall behind them, and the iron fence in front.

No wonder a Heretic Spellmaster wields such formidable power on their home turf… Lumian reached a realization.

Not only did they possess the backing of a "magic circle" teeming with deceased souls, but they could also extract the life force of others at will to replenish their own!

Balancing the wooden box with one arm, Lumian retrieved his revolver, pressed it against the door of a cell, and pulled the trigger.

With a resounding bang, the iron lock shattered and clattered to the ground.

After reloading, Lumian paid little attention to the captives. He progressed methodically, obliterating the iron locks of the remaining cells.

Then, with the revolver holstered under his armpit, he turned and departed, leaving behind a bewildered and numbed group of survivors.

When Lumian returned to the ground floor, Franca had just concluded the spirit channeling and dispelled the spiritual barrier.

"Did you discover anything?" Franca inquired casually.

Lumian gestured toward the wooden box nestled under his left arm.

"It should suffice for storing the scythe. I couldn't access the safe. It's possible that the servants fled to the second floor or the garden at the back. I didn't encounter them."

"Don't concern yourself with them. As followers of an evil deity, they will meet a swift demise once their protection wanes. Furthermore, we have disguised ourselves adequately to avoid recognition," Franca affirmed with a nod. "Pack up Harvest Sacrifice. We shall depart now. Oh, by the way, the scythe is called Harvest Sacrifice."

Before long, Lumian returned to "Black Scorpion" Roger's lifeless body with the scythe in hand, presenting the wooden box to Franca.

Then, he squatted down, tore off a section of his pajamas, crumpled it into a ball, and stained it with blood.

Curious, Franca inquired, "What are you doing?"

Lumian remained focused, his gaze fixed on the task at hand, and succinctly replied, "Providing a hint to the official Beyonders."

With the blood-stained cloth in hand, Lumian made his way back to the living room. Beside the serene female statue, he messily inscribed words in Intisian: "Great Mother."

Having completed the task, Lumian discarded the cloth bundle and headed towards the door.

Why does it seem so provocative… Franca sighed and turned around.

Behind her, dark flames materialized and ascended, consuming the traces left by both of them and the lingering Spirit Bodies of the deceased.

Shortly after, Franca scattered shimmering powder and recited the incantation of invisibility. She disappeared from the foyer, clutching the wooden box.

Lumian pushed open the door and confidently stepped out onto 126 Avenue du Marché.

He left the door ajar, allowing the scene within to be exposed to passersby.

Under the yellowish glow of the gas wall lamps, a lifeless body lay in the foyer, surrounded by blood.

Lumian crossed Avenue du Marché, constantly altering his course, until he reached the alley where he had changed his clothes and assumed his disguise.

He wiped his face clean and donned his original attire, no longer emanating the aura of Alsai.

In the next moment, Franca transformed into her hooded figure, draped in black robes. She retrieved the Ring of Punishment from Lumian and returned it to her coin bag.

The Witch glanced at the unconscious Poison Spur Mob member, Alsai, and said to Lumian, who was about to depart, "Aren't you going to take care of him?

"He knows Ciel knocked him out, and the person who killed 'Black Scorpion' Roger posed as him."

Lumian remained silent. He drew his revolver, partially turned, and fired at Alsai, clad in a blue-and-white striped shirt.

Two gunshots rang out as the Poison Spur Mob member, trusted by "Black Scorpion" Roger, was struck in the chest and met his demise.

Observing Lumian's nonchalant demeanor, Franca shook her head inwardly and proceeded to deal with the remaining Spirit Body and traces in the alley.

Then, she concealed herself once more and departed alongside Lumian. He scaled the outer wall and returned to the second floor of Salle de Bal Brise.

After using a special lotion from Rentas to remove the excess black dye from his hair and transforming back into Ciel Dubois, Lumian, Franca smiled and inquired, "Do you want to keep this scythe? If not, I'll sell it and we'll split the proceeds evenly.

"Your Provoker potion should be almost fully digested. You'll need to gather funds and ingredients for your advancement."

Chapter 228: Sudden Digestion

Upon Franca's mention of advancement, Lumian felt a sudden urge to make preparations.

It wasn't that he didn't aspire to become a Sequence 7 Pyromaniac and master mysticism techniques, but the Hunter and Provoker potion formulas were bestowed upon him by Madam Magician, making them easily obtainable and reducing the sense of urgency. His plan was to wait until the Provoker potion had fully digested before writing a letter to Madam Magician, inquiring about the price for obtaining everything necessary for his advancement.

More importantly, Lumian knew that Madam Magician possessed a Pyromaniac Beyonder characteristic.

But now that he thought about it, he felt that he had to make additional preparations.

It occurred to him that Madam Magician might not be associated with the Hunter pathway, which meant she might not possess the Pyromaniac potion formula. Furthermore, she could have already given the Beyonder characteristic to someone else. Lumian couldn't be the only one with the Minor Arcana card, and it was unlikely that they all belonged to different pathways.

While Madam Magician's level and abilities made it relatively easy for her to acquire the Pyromaniac potion formula and its main ingredient, she might be unwilling or face unforeseen delays.

Lost in thought, Lumian glanced at the wooden box resting on Franca's lap and hesitated before suggesting, "Let's sell it."

The evil scythe possessed an uncanny sharpness and the ability to drain an enemy's life through blood, perfectly suited to Lumian's close-quarters combat style. However, it proved highly inconvenient to carry and conceal due to its usage restrictions. Most of the time, Lumian could only store it at Salle de Bal Brise or Auberge du Coq Doré, relying on it when attacked. Alternatively, he could draw it in advance and hide it in the cover of night shadows for offensive purposes.

If Lumian wished to have it with him at all times, his only solution was to acquire a cello case and carry it on his back.

Yet, for a mobster leader, this would raise suspicions.

In fact, if Franca hadn't brought up the topic of preparing for his advancement, Lumian would have deemed his current stash of 4,000 verl d'or far from sufficient. He needed to acquire more funds. Keeping the evil scythe, known as Harvest Sacrifice, wasn't a problem as it could still prove useful in certain situations. If necessary, Lumian could use the Mystery Prying Glasses to disguise himself as a musician, carrying the cello on his back to assassinate his intended target.

Franca sighed in response.

"I suppose selling it is our only option. It's actually quite good, but it doesn't suit my combat style."

She then gestured towards Lumian's waist.

"How about we each get a canister?"

To be honest, Franca wasn't particularly interested in the Berserk Agent and the Bark Agent. She only desired the Scorpion Poison and the Healing Agent. However, considering that Lumian also required poison for his weapons and healing capabilities, she opted for a fair solution.

"Alright," Lumian agreed.

…

In the dead of the night, outside 126 Avenue du Marché:

A group of police officers, dressed in black uniforms, formed a barricade to keep pedestrians away from the building behind them.

Within the house, Angoulême de François with his blond hair, eyebrows, and beard, stood before a delicate female sculpture. His gaze fixed upon the blood-red words adorning the wall.

Donning a row of golden buttons on his chest, he remained silent, emanating an overwhelming sense of oppression that affected both the surrounding Purifiers and police officers.

After a moment, the Purifier of Southern Continent descent emerged from the basement and approached Angoulême. In hushed tones, he spoke, "Deacon, we have found clear signs of sacrificial rituals to an evil god beneath us. There are deceased individuals who were used as living sacrifices."

"The prison cells have been unlocked, and some of the abductees managed to escape. Those who remain informed me that 'Black Scorpion' Roger did indeed employ sorcery."

Angoulême listened impassively, scanning his surroundings. He then addressed the nearby police officers, saying, "Did none of you notice the significant number of people who had gone missing?

"Who was it that claimed the market district housed only a handful of controllable Beyonders? Who suggested that arresting them would only pave the way for new criminal organizations, causing even greater chaos?"

His voice, filled with anger, reverberated through the living room of 126 Avenue du Marché, causing each police officer to lower their gaze.

At that moment, Angoulême abruptly turned his attention to the delicate female sculpture. He sensed a fleeting surge of anger emanating from it, quickly dissipating.

He had sensed a faint fluctuation of anger there, but it disappeared in a flash.

A golden light enveloped Angoulême's body as he extended his right palm, opening the abdomen of the statue.

There, a cavity large enough to cradle a curled-up human revealed itself. Within it rested a brownish-green seed, silently crumbling into dust when stirred by the wind.

…

On the second floor of Salle de Bal Brise.

Lumian furrowed his brow abruptly.

"What's wrong?" Franca asked.

Lumian found himself torn between elation and confusion.

"My Provoker potion has fully digested.

"Could it be that some important figure was provoked by our actions?"

Franca speculated, "Perhaps Lady Moon, or maybe an official Beyonder?"

"All possibilities," Lumian conceded. If he couldn't unravel the mystery, there was no use dwelling on it. After all, it was a positive development.

This meant that he could now advance to become a Sequence 7 Pyromaniac!

This realization struck him with a newfound understanding.

He didn't need to meticulously summarize all the principles of acting to fully digest the corresponding potion.

By summarizing a portion of his acting principles and consistently receiving feedback while performing appropriately, he could rely on quantity or the accumulation of time to digest the potion.

Hence, most Beyonders can rely on time and fortunate encounters to digest the potion without being familiar with the acting method… Lumian pondered silently, feeling enlightened.

After distributing the agents and deciding to sell the remaining spoils for money, Lumian bid Franca farewell. Deliberately, he circled Salle de Bal Brise before departing Avenue du Marché and returning to Auberge du Coq Doré.

As he reached the second floor, he noticed that the door to Room 206 stood ajar, allowing the light from a carbide lamp to spill into the dim corridor.

Curiosity piqued, Lumian glanced inside as he passed by, spotting Gabriel seated by the bed in his preferred black dungarees, observing the hallway outside.

"You're finally back!" the playwright exclaimed with delight upon seeing Lumian.

Raising an eyebrow, Lumian queried, "You haven't been arrested by the police yet?"

"…" Gabriel found himself momentarily speechless.

After a few seconds, his joy overcame him, and he replied, "Monsieur Nathan Lopp didn't report me to the police. In fact, he signed a contract with me and purchased my script.

"He intended to make a down payment of 1,500 verl d'or, but considering how we frightened him, he deducted 500. Once the play commences, I'll receive 2.5% of the ticket revenue for each show."

A soft chuckle escaped Lumian's lips.

"I thought the revolver had coerced him into agreement, fully expecting him to go back on his word. I never imagined that your script would genuinely move him."

If you thought so, why did you still do it? Gabriel grumbled instinctively.

He elaborated, "Monsieur Lopp understands the idiosyncrasies of artists and doesn't mind such matters. He mentioned that his previous mistress was a female painter. She not only kept a sheep on his balcony but also attempted to flirt with men. She even prepared fake props to try and convince him, which ultimately led to their breakup."

"You Trieriens…" Lumian sighed, even as the Prankster King of Cordu.

Gabriel, hailing from a different province and not being a Trierien himself, took Ciel's teasing in stride, unfazed by the remark.

He expressed his gratitude sincerely. "Thank you very much. Although I don't agree with your approach, Monsieur Lopp would have never laid eyes on my script without your help."

Gabriel, perplexed, questioned, "Monsieur Lopp mentioned that we authors weren't cautious enough. We only covered our faces once we reached his doorstep. After conversing with the guard at the lobby, he knew what we looked like. Once he calls the police, there's no escape for any of us.

"Why didn't you mask up earlier when we tied up the guard?"

Gabriel believed that Ciel, being a mob leader, should have been more cautious.

Lumian responded calmly, "Why should I have masked myself?"

"…" Confusion filled Gabriel's face as he asked, "Then why did you eventually mask yourself?"

Lumian replied calmly, "Because Jenna masked up."

What kind of logic is this… Even as a playwright himself, he found it difficult to comprehend Ciel's thoughts.

He could sense that Ciel's state last night was abnormal, but he didn't know the exact reason. It was difficult to determine his mental state and the motives behind his actions.

Gabriel let out a sigh and remarked, "Fortunately, things turned out well. Otherwise, we would have been apprehended by the police…"

He paused for a moment, realizing that Ciel was a leader of the Savoie Mob. The crimes he had committed in the past were more serious than what happened last night. There was no need to fear. Even if the police came looking for him, he could hide for a day or two, and the matter would pass. No one would pursue him for such a trivial case.

Lumian chuckled and gave Gabriel's shoulder a friendly pat.

"Even if you get caught, you're just an accomplice. You didn't carry a weapon. You can secure your release by posting bail."

With that, Lumian walked towards his room and opened the door to Room 207.

Gabriel watched Ciel's retreating figure, feeling a mixture of confusion and relief.

…

In Room 207, Lumian carefully examined Fallen Mercury.

He felt that if the dirk wasn't repaired, it could last a maximum of three months.

Perhaps I should consult Franca. She might know a few individuals skilled in the mending of mystical artifacts and Beyonder weapons… Lumian half-closed his eyes and established a connection with Fallen Mercury, seeking communication.

After a while, he discerned the swapped fate that had taken place.

The destiny of "Black Scorpion" Roger gulping down alcohol.

Lumian carefully stored Fallen Mercury, stood up, and exited the room, making his way to the third floor.

Approaching the door of Room 310, he overheard the lunatic's frantic cries, still filled with fear.

"I'm dying, I'm dying!"

Lumian pulled out the short wire, unlocking the door. He then beheld the lunatic crouched on the moonlit floor, clutching his head and trembling uncontrollably.

Leaning against the door frame, Lumian couldn't help but let out a chuckle.

"You're rather fortunate. The Montsouris ghost hasn't come to claim your life just yet. I wonder if it's preoccupied or slacking off."

Chapter 229: Equivalent Exchange

The lunatic still wore a grimy linen shirt and yellow trousers, as if changing clothes was not part of his plan.

Upon hearing Lumian's words, he looked up, revealing a face obscured by a black beard.

It seemed as though he had forgotten Lumian entirely. His blue eyes were empty, clouded over.

"I'm dying, I'm dying!" He clutched his shoulder, which was hidden beneath his unruly black hair, and let out another terrified scream.

Lumian approached, his left hand gloved in black, and drew out Fallen Mercury. With a swift motion, he plunged it into the lunatic's shoulder.

The filthy linen shirt tore open, revealing a shallow wound that still oozed blood.

The lunatic stood frozen, as if the long-awaited judgment had finally arrived.

After a few seconds, he collapsed to the ground, placing his hands on the floor as he scrambled away from Lumian.

In his terror, he cried out, "Don't kill me! Don't kill me!"

The tenants in the neighboring rooms heard the commotion, but none of them bothered to investigate. The lunatic often ranted about his impending demise and pleaded not to be killed.

The sinister pewter-black dagger had already left the lunatic's shoulder, and Lumian continued to gaze at the shimmering river of mercury, lost in thought.

He witnessed the blissful first half of the lunatic's life and the tragic deaths of his family, one by one. It was as though Lumian could relate to the sensation of a complete mental breakdown caused by an overwhelming blow.

At times, Lumian yearned to break down like the lunatic, to abandon all reason and act on primal instincts until his own demise. However, there was still a glimmer of hope—a minuscule, almost unrealistic hope—and he was not ready to relinquish it. He desired to pursue it.

Thus, he often acted impulsively and displayed self-destructive tendencies, yet he was always restrained by the rationality that stemmed from that flicker of hope. He never truly disregarded the consequences, existing in a state of profound contradiction.

Knowing precisely which fate he wished to exchange and its approximate date, Lumian swiftly located the lunatic's destiny of encountering the Montsouris ghost in the underground market district. With the tip of the blade, he pried it loose, transforming it into a droplet of liquid mercury. The drinking fate originally belonging to "Black Scorpion" Roger flowed into the lunatic's body.

Ignoring the lunatic's terrified pleas, Lumian squatted before him. He wiped the blade of Fallen Mercury clean with his clothes and assisted in staunching the bleeding.

Then, Lumian pulled up the only chair and took a seat, patiently awaiting the completion of the fate exchange.

"I'm dying, I'm dying!

"Don't kill me! Don't kill me!"

As the lunatic shrieked, time ticked by. Finally, Fallen Mercury quivered gently.

The lunatic's voice abruptly ceased. He rose to his feet, his gaze clearing as he muttered to himself, "I need a drink. I need a drink…"

Lumian smiled and stood up. "The drinks are on you. Consider it a reward for helping you escape the Montsouris ghost."

Naturally, the true reward was the fate of encountering the Montsouris ghost. With careful planning and an unguarded target, it served as an excellent tool for assassination.

The lunatic appeared startled for a moment before replying, "You got rid of it?"

"You can choose not to believe me." Lumian turned and walked into the dimly lit corridor, devoid of wall lamps.

The lunatic, driven by an insatiable thirst for drink, unwittingly trailed after Lumian.

As they made their way to the basement bar, the lunatic glanced around and noticed a distinct change in his surroundings.

The eerie sensation of being watched from the shadows had vanished!

Perplexed, the lunatic settled himself at the bar counter and ordered two glasses of oatmeal beer—one for Lumian and the other for himself. He downed his own glass, leaving traces of foam clinging to the corners of his mouth.

Since he occasionally visited the bar in moments of sobriety, no one suspected anything amiss.

After quenching his alcohol craving, the lunatic turned to Lumian and asked once more,

"Have I truly escaped the Montsouris ghost? How did you manage it?"

"I've slain the Montsouris ghost, but I can't be certain if it will resurrect," Lumian replied solemnly. "However, if those who previously encountered it are still among the living, they shall be free from its torment. Remember, I mentioned encountering the Montsouris ghost myself. Look at me—I'm alive and well."

"Really?" The lunatic found it hard to believe that this handsome young man had defeated the Montsouris ghost.

Not even the Church had succeeded!

Lumian smiled.

"I lied. I merely discovered an incantation that prevents the Montsouris ghost from plaguing me, but I require the blood of someone haunted as a conduit."

A glimmer of understanding flickered in the lunatic's eyes.

"No wonder you stabbed me."

Blushing with embarrassment, he admitted, "I may not be able to compensate you at present. My savings are meager, and I must find new employment…"

Lumian interrupted, "What shall I call you?"

"Just Flameng will do," the lunatic replied before inquiring, "And you?"

"Ciel." Lumian downed his oatmeal beer.

By the time his glass contained only a thin film of liquid, Flameng had become quite tipsy. He grasped Lumian's arm and babbled on.

"Did you know? I used to be a university lecturer. Simultaneously, I was entrusted with the safety of some students.

"Many of those students were audacious and reckless, daring to engage in any endeavor and shout slogans of 'freedom' when challenged.

"They even held proms in the catacombs, burning the bones of nameless corpses to warm their asses. They believed in nothing and feared nothing. Of course, I was much the same in those days."

Flameng recounted tales from the first half of his life, his tone shifting between pride, happiness, admonishment of the present ills, and wistful reminiscence.

"Might you have entered the Underground Trier to dissuade certain students from taking risks?" Lumian asked casually, taking a sip of his beer.

Flameng shook his head.

"No, my expertise lies in minerals. The subterranean rock formations of Trier are uniquely fascinating for study. Together with the medical school, we even established a Museum of Mineralogy and Pathology in the catacombs.

"I had been leaving the museum, making my way toward the underground market district with the intention of heading home when I encountered the Montsouris ghost.

"My Sandrine… My Bastian…"

Flameng clutched his head, his voice filled with an agonizing pain.

Lumian quickly changed the subject.

"So, the subterranean rock formations in Trier are quite unique?"

"Indeed," Flameng instinctively replied, before collecting himself and continuing, "We even assigned poetic names to those formations. From top to bottom, they're referred to as 'flowers,' 'sheep,' and 'sedges'…"

Engrossed in conversation, Lumian and Flameng chatted well into the midnight hours. The latter appeared lively, and even his bearded face seemed to regain some color.

He didn't lose his sanity again. Having confirmed that there was no longer a feeling of being watched in the darkness, he returned to normal.

After bidding a cheerful farewell to the intoxicated Flameng, Lumian smiled and withdrew his gaze. He entered Room 207 to compose a letter to Madam Magician.

In the letter, he first mentioned how Termiboros had nearly influenced him into transferring Charlie's luck and how he had slain "Black Scorpion" Roger and other Lady Moon subordinates. Lumian then revealed that the Provoker potion had been completely digested due to the latter. He inquired whether Madam Magician possessed the Pyromaniac potion formula and the associated Beyonder characteristic, as well as the price he needed to pay for them.

Not long after Lumian had tidied up the room and summoned a puppet messenger to deliver the letter, he received a reply from Madam Magician:

"Good job. You've already recognized the potential influence and threat that long-named fellow poses to you. Stay vigilant.

"Based on your description, this Lady Moon should be a Sequence 3. Being able to truly provoke such a demigod will undoubtedly hasten your digestion of the potion.

"If I recall correctly, you are attending Mr. K's gathering tomorrow night and will inform him that you can worship that being. This means you will truly become one of them, completing the initial phase of the mission I assigned you. As a reward, I will provide you with the Pyromaniac potion formula free of charge.

"I still possess the Pyromaniac Beyonder characteristic, but remember, the principle of equivalent exchange must be upheld.

"In Intis, the two main ingredients of the Pyromaniac potion cost more than 18,000 verl d'or, often exceeding 20,000. Correspondingly, the Beyonder characteristic usually amounts to around 35,000 verl d'or.

"What does this mean? It implies that many people in Intis have become Pyromaniacs, yet many Pyromaniacs have also perished.

"As a holder of a Minor Arcana card, I will offer you a substantial discount. The Beyonder characteristic will only cost you 30,000 verl d'or.

"Good luck."

Phew, 30,000 verl d'or… Lumian exhaled, feeling that the sum was not unattainable.

He already had over 4,000 verl d'or in savings, and the evil scythe known as Harvest Sacrifice could fetch a decent price. Additionally, he could borrow some funds from Franca and embezzle a portion of Salle de Bal Brise's money. These combined efforts would bring him close to 30,000 verl d'or.

And just as Lumian had suspected, Lady Moon had transformed from a mere Madame to a Lady capable of birthing deities. She was undoubtedly more than a Sequence 4.

Fortunately, we had feigned impending defeat in our previous battle, preventing "Black Scorpion" Roger from seeking assistance… Lumian burned Madam Magician's letter, freshened up, climbed into bed, and drifted off to sleep.

…

Just after six in the morning, Lumian had finished washing up and changed into a crisp white shirt, black vest, brown pants, and sleek leather boots, when he heard footsteps descending from the third floor.

It was Ruhr and Michel, clad in tattered clothes and emanating a pungent odor.

As Lumian stood by the door of Room 207, Ruhr, his voice filled with panic, cried out, "Ciel, Monsieur Ciel! That lunatic is dead!"

Dead? Flameng is dead? Lumian was momentarily stunned before darting past Ruhr and Michel, making his way to the third floor.

The door to Room 310 was wide open. Lumian cast a quick glance inside and spotted Flameng hanging from the window.

He faced the door, having cleanly shaven his face, revealing a gentle and gaunt visage.

Now, he no longer breathed. His face had turned blue, his eyes slightly bulging. His mouth hung open wide, and the morning light streamed through the window, bathing his lifeless body. He hung silently, suspended by a belt tied to the window frame.

Beneath him, on the wooden table, lay a nearly extinguished kerosene lamp, several large books, and a white sheet of paper weighted down by a fountain pen. It appeared that something had been written on it.

Lumian fell into an eerie silence for a few seconds before cautiously approaching the white sheet of paper.

In precise Intisian handwriting, it read:

"When I was deranged, I still harbored the will to live.

"Upon awakening, I found no purpose in life.

"Please lay me to rest in the Underground Tomb of Lights within the catacombs."

Lumian raised his gaze, meeting the vacant blue eyes that seemed to peer back from beyond the grave.

He stood in solemn silence, transfixed, as if time had come to a halt.

Chapter 230: Scapegoat

At the stroke of 8 a.m., a pair of law enforcement officers ambled up to the third floor of Auberge du Coq Doré. One meticulously examined the lifeless body, the suicide note, and the surroundings, while the other commenced interrogating the neighboring tenants.

Lumian, already disguised using the Mystery Prying Glasses, had taken his position at the entrance of Room 310.

The officer, donning a uniform and clutching a pen and paper, cast a fleeting glance in his direction.

"You must be Ciel Dubois. Enlighten me on the matter."

Lumian proceeded to recount how Flameng's sanity was gone prior to his arrival. The man incessantly raved about encountering the Montsouris ghost and the demise of his own kin. Soon, it seemed, his turn was imminent. Lumian continued, revealing how Flameng had abruptly regained consciousness the previous night and indulged in a bout of heavy drinking.

"What about the wound on his shoulder?" interjected the officer attending to the deceased in the room.

"Before he regained consciousness last night, he inflicted the injury upon himself. I was the one who bound it up," Lumian responded with composure.

After interrogating the other tenants and the proprietor of the basement bar, the two officers cautiously deduced that the deceased had long been plagued by mental instability. He possessed a motive for suicide and displayed corresponding behavioral tendencies.

As they maneuvered Flameng's body into the mortuary bag, they addressed Lumian, saying, "We shall transport him to the catacombs, but it's a rather intricate procedure. It entails ascertaining the precise cause of death, summoning a clergyman for purification rites, finding a suitable heir for his estate, and liaising with the catacomb administrators. This will take roughly a week or two."

Lumian fell silent momentarily before resuming, "I've shared a few drinks with him. Remember to inform me when you lay him to rest."

Affirming their agreement, the two officers departed Auberge du Coq Doré, taking Flameng's body and the belongings from the room along with them.

Lumian removed his disguise and returned to Room 207.

Seated in a chair, his back to the window casting sunlight, he faced the dimly lit corridor, grappling with a swirl of emotions.

Flameng's suicide had presented Lumian with an alternative fate.

Lumian had aided Flameng in evading the Montsouris ghost, not driven by a desire for personal gain or reward. It was simply because he saw a reflection of his own predicament in the man who had lost his family. One had succumbed completely, descending into lunacy, while the other persevered, clinging to a glimmer of hope and desperately struggling to maintain his grasp on reason.

But in the end, Flameng, no longer tormented by the Montsouris ghost and driven to madness by fear, had opted to terminate his own existence.

In the corridor, Elodie, her tresses concealed beneath a blonde wig and her eyes accentuated with eyeshadow, alongside the other cleaning lady, had already commenced their bustling day. They worked ceaselessly, mopping the floors and battling bedbugs without respite.

Lumian observed silently, his gaze appearing distant and unfocused.

After the passage of nearly fifteen minutes, light yet hurried footfalls reverberated along the staircase, eventually reaching Room 207.

Jenna's silhouette came into Lumian's view. Today, she donned a more understated attire compared to her usual flamboyance. Her blouse clung slightly, complementing the gentle brown shade of her top and a fluffy, beige, short skirt. She sported knee-high black boots, and her makeup exuded both decadence and allure.

She glanced at Lumian, entered Room 207, and gently shut the wooden door behind her.

Lumian snapped out of his reverie and observed her silently, refraining from questioning her intentions.

Jenna repressed her curiosity and excitement before speaking up.

"Have you heard? The boss and two leaders of the Poison Spur Gang have been murdered!"

"I'm aware," Lumian acknowledged with a nod.

Jenna scrutinized his expression and deliberately probed further.

"You weren't involved, were you?"

"Do you think I possess the capability to eliminate 'Black Scorpion' Roger, 'Baldy' Harman, and 'Short-legged Candlestick' Castina all at once?" Lumian retorted.

Jenna, having already gleaned an estimation of Ciel's strength from Franca, understood that "Black Scorpion" Roger was no less formidable than Franca herself. She shook her head and uttered, "No."

She then drawled in a leisurely tone, "But you can still seek assistance."

For instance, Franca.

"The authorities don't even suspect me," Lumian stated, shrugging his shoulders.

In truth, he found this matter rather perplexing.

Ordinarily, as one of the few individuals who had recently engaged in a direct confrontation with the Poison Spur Gang, he would undoubtedly be subjected to questioning following such an incident. Yet, Lumian had remained on standby since last night, prepared to don a disguise at a moment's notice, yet no investigators had arrived.

Just then, hurried footsteps echoed from the staircase.

Knock, knock, knock. Knocks resounded against the door of Room 207.

Charlie? Lumian's gaze fixated on the door as he beckoned, "Come in. It's not locked."

The visitor who stood before them was none other than Charlie. Clad in a crisp white shirt, a light-colored vest, and a formal black suit, he exuded an air of dignity. Atop his head rested a half top hat, while a dark bow tie completed his ensemble.

His attire seemed even more refined than when he served as an attendant at Hôtel du Cygne Blanc.

After sizing up Charlie, Lumian couldn't help but smile.

"Well, well, where did this civilized individual come from?"

Charlie couldn't conceal his own grin. His tone brimmed with warmth and enthusiasm as he replied, "Right? I am now a true gentleman. I'm still in the process of mastering classical grammar. Madame, Monsieur, please allow me to extend my civilized greetings."

With those words, he removed his half top hat, pressed it against his chest, and offered a slight bow.

Jenna chuckled but didn't discourage Charlie. Lumian clicked his tongue and remarked, "To be frank, you're more like a monkey playing dress-up in civilized clothing."

Charlie remained unaffected, his joy unwavering.

"I've only just begun my studies. In a month's time, you'll witness an entirely different version of me. Oh, by the way, this is Monsieur Charlie Collent. He is currently enjoying a sumptuous dinner worth 8 verl d'or!"

At this point, Charlie glanced at Jenna, who stood beside the bed. He opened his mouth as if he had something to say, yet hesitated to do so in her presence.

Nonchalantly, Lumian inquired, "What's the matter? Just speak your mind."

Charlie lowered his voice.

"Did you hear? Last night, 'Black Scorpion' Roger, 'Baldy' Harman, and 'Short-legged Candlestick' Castina were all killed."

"I'm aware. And?" Lumian believed Charlie wouldn't seek him out for something that would soon become public knowledge.

Charlie glanced at Jenna and continued, "What has been confirmed is that the murderer belongs to a terrorist organization known as the Aurora Order. They have a penchant for gruesome displays of carnage and primarily target individuals who worship evil gods. In this case, 'Black Scorpion' Roger and his cohorts followed an evil god named the Great Mother."

Aurora Order? Lumian was taken aback.

Where did this scapegoat come from?

Why were the official Beyonders suddenly pointing fingers at the Aurora Order?

Shouldn't they first investigate those who had conflicts with "Black Scorpion" Roger and the Poison Spur Gang? That's how detective novels were written!

"Are you saying that the Aurora Order truly carried out these murders?" Jenna inquired curiously.

Charlie nodded emphatically.

"That's correct. The Aurora Order appears to have claimed responsibility for these acts in some capacity. Tomorrow, there should be reports about the case in certain newspapers."

The latter half of Charlie's statement suggested that the information he had just shared was meant to be disclosed and held no confidentiality clauses.

The Aurora Order claiming responsibility? They weren't even involved. Why would they assume responsibility? Lumian found himself momentarily perplexed yet slightly amused.

If he hadn't personally slain "Black Scorpion" Roger, he might have suspected the Aurora Order as the culprits.

Charlie glanced at Lumian and added in a hushed tone, "This afternoon, once the election concludes, a crackdown on the mobs in the entire market district shall commence in response to the public's concerns about the district's security."

Are you reading from a document? Your words sound so official. Lumian realized why Charlie had rushed to inform him.

It was best for those with dirt on them to leave the market district this afternoon and hide for the time being!

Lumian nodded subtly and replied, "I have a mysticism gathering to attend this afternoon."

Although Mr. K's gathering was scheduled for 9 p.m., Lumian intended to arrive early.

Charlie breathed a sigh of relief and gestured toward the door.

"I'll make a move first."

After a moment of contemplation, Lumian responded, "In the future, there's no need to inform me about such trivial matters."

He added mockingly, "Do you doubt my abilities?"

Charlie sheepishly smiled.

"It's my first time, so I couldn't help but feel a bit emotional. Don't worry, unless it truly concerns you, I won't drop any more hints."

As Lumian watched Charlie depart, Jenna clicked her tongue and sighed.

"He's turned into your spy among the official Beyonders."

"I'd prefer it if he wasn't," Lumian mumbled, pursing his lips. "He's just an imbecile, bound to mess things up."

Jenna scoffed and waved her hand.

"I'm going to find Franca. Are you planning to share the information Charlie gave us with the others?"

Lumian shook his head.

"If everyone flees, the official Beyonders will undoubtedly investigate any leaks. That imbecile won't be able to escape.

"Besides, some people deserve to end up in jail."

And you don't? Jenna criticized as she left Room 207 and stepped into the corridor.

At that moment, the two cleaning ladies had already reached the staircase.

Jenna hurried over, her gaze sweeping across the cleaning lady named Elodie, who wore a blond wig.

Suddenly, Jenna's expression froze, and she swiftly turned around, heading back to Room 207. Lumian, who was about to leave, found it peculiar.

Elodie, a woman of almost 50 years with a blond wig and eye shadow, also noticed Jenna. She stared at the apprentice actress's retreating figure for a few seconds before calling out in confusion and concern, "Celia…"

Jenna's body went rigid.

She slowly turned back, forcing a smile, and greeted Elodie with a loud voice, "Mother."

Mother? Lumian almost couldn't believe his ears.

Then he recalled Elodie mentioning that she used to be a theater actress and now enjoyed watching performances at the Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons. Her husband had passed away a few years ago in a factory accident, leaving behind two nearly adult children who helped support the family.

Jenna, on the other hand, was an apprentice actress at the same theater. Her father had also passed away a few years ago, leaving only her mother and brother. Her plan was to earn enough money for her tuition fees and other expenses for the coming year.

It all adds up… Lumian nodded thoughtfully.

Elodie approached Jenna with a broom, assessing her appearance.

"Why are you here? And what kind of makeup is that?"

Chapter 231: Mr. K's Purpose

Jenna's eyes darted around, her arm raised in the air.

"This is a requirement for my theater acting class!"

Her words seemed to ease her tension, and her smile took on a more natural quality.

"Didn't I mention that I work part-time as a waitress at a bar to make ends meet? This is my boss. I'm here to discuss a salary increase with him!"

Jenna pointed confidently at Lumian, stationed by the door of Room 207.

Elodie glanced at Lumian, then fixed her gaze on Jenna for a few moments before nodding. "Don't forget to come home tonight."

Jenna's smile faltered momentarily before she replied, "Okay."

Seeing Elodie return to her tasks, cleaning the other side of the second floor, Jenna tiptoed down the stairs and made her way out of Auberge du Coq Doré.

It didn't take long for her to spot Lumian catching up to her, prompting her to grumble, "Dammit! Why is my mother at Auberge du Coq Doré?"

Lumian contemplated for a moment before responding. "Blame it on Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons. Monsieur Ive, the owner of Auberge du Coq Doré, found a part-time cleaning lady who works only half a day there. And your mother is a regular visitor at Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons for plays."

Jenna clenched her teeth and exclaimed, "Those cursed heretics!"

She then threw up her arm.

"Tonight, I'll tell her the truth. I'll say I'm working part-time as an underground singer to save up for next year's tuition, and I earn quite a bit!"

Lumian glanced at Jenna's side profile, curious. "You don't seem too nervous or afraid?"

Jenna spat.

"That's my mother, not some man-eating monster.

"She's kind-hearted and understanding. I didn't tell her what I was up to before because I didn't want her to worry."

"She'll worry now, though," Lumian reminded her.

Being an underground singer in dance halls and bars often involved dealing with shady characters. Being taken advantage of was an unfortunate reality from time to time.

Jenna's smile was mischievous as she playfully remarked, "I'm the mistress of Ciel Dubois, leader of the Savoie Mob and guardian of Salle de Bal Brise. Who dares to mess with me?"

Lumian chuckled. "That's even more dangerous."

Jenna averted her gaze and observed the street vendors on Rue Anarchie.

"If my mother can't accept it, I plan to demonstrate my current abilities and convince her that I can protect myself."

Oh, really? Lumian didn't raise the example of the perverted Hedsey.

Jenna composed herself and said in a heavy voice, "She's been through so much. She has worked tirelessly for years. I want to help her shoulder some of the burden so she won't break herself."

Lumian contemplated for a moment before responding. "Since your father's passing?"

Jenna's gaze shifted to the ground, and she tersely confirmed, "There was an accident at the factory. My father was severely injured and spent over ten days in the hospital. In the end, he couldn't be saved."

"We used up all our savings and still owe a significant amount of money. A few years ago, I could have pursued a career in theater and studied acting. But it wasn't until the beginning of this year that we managed to repay almost half of our debt and save up some money for my education. My mother insisted that we couldn't delay any longer. If we kept delaying, I would become too old."

Lumian listened attentively, his brow furrowing in puzzlement. "No compensation for the factory accident?"

"Yes, but that scoundrel hasn't compensated us yet!" Jenna clenched her teeth. "He keeps appealing, and the courts always take their time. F*cking dammit, is he trying to drag it out until we're all dead?"

Lumian fell silent briefly before changing the subject. "Was your mother truly a theater actress?"

"That's correct." Jenna's expression softened gradually. "She had great acting skills and was beautiful, but most theater managers, sponsors, and owners were men. They would prey on actresses in the theater like lions patrolling their territory. Those who refused to submit to them wouldn't get good roles. It's infuriating, everyone thinks it's normal, even the police and the courts!

"My mother has a gentle nature, but she's fiercely stubborn. She could only land supporting roles and was even fired once. When the theater she worked at went bankrupt, she lost the chance to return to the stage temporarily. She had to take on odd jobs as a motel maid and laundry worker.

"That's when she met my father. They got together and became husband and wife in the presence of God. Praise the Sun. At that time, my father was working hard to become a skilled laborer. My mother took on various jobs and saved money while searching for an opportunity to return to the theater. Those were the days she cherished the most.

"Later, my brother and I were born. Mom and Dad became busier, struggling to make ends meet and give us a chance to pursue an education.

"When we became self-sufficient, my mother was already old and couldn't return to the stage. She placed her hopes on me. She wanted to see me become an exceptional actress, even if it meant playing supporting roles. My father wished for my brother to become a skilled laborer."

These words had been bottled up inside Jenna's heart for a long time, and only now did she find the opportunity to express them.

Lumian patiently waited for Jenna to finish before posing a question. "Do you aspire to be a theater actress yourself?"

Jenna beamed with pride and contentment. "It's hard not to love theater when your mother is such a dedicated fan and talented actress."

Her smile inexplicably evoked a twinge of jealousy in Lumian.

Sighing with a touch of emotion, he remarked, "I can tell that your mother has a genuine passion for theater. Even as a cleaning lady, she adorns herself with makeup and wears exquisite wigs."

Jenna lightly nodded and shared, "She says it makes her feel youthful, as if she's back on the stage. In her eyes, she remains a true theater actress, and her other jobs are merely part-time endeavors.

"She's always been like this. She takes me to witness the sunrise, reminding me that darkness will always give way to light. And she tells me that even in the darkest times, I must find a way to kindle my own inner light. Only then can I patiently await the sunrise."

Jenna's yearning for the future grew palpable.

"If I continue as an underground singer for another year, I'll save enough for next year's tuition and make significant progress in repaying our debts. With the combined earnings of my mother and brother, we won't be burdened anymore. Soon, she won't have to juggle multiple jobs, and my brother will have the opportunity to learn skills from others!"

As Jenna spoke, her excitement grew, and she couldn't help but raise her arm, as if reaching out to grasp the beauty of the future.

Lumian observed Jenna silently, and a wave of pent-up emotions within him seemed to dissipate.

Hope. Such a profound and moving word.

After a few moments of relief, Jenna suddenly felt an inexplicable sense of embarrassment. She turned her head and gave Lumian an accusing glare.

"Why are you staring at me? Haven't you seen someone getting excited before?"

Lumian scoffed but chose not to respond.

Jenna studied him intently and muttered to herself, "Why do I feel like you're in better spirits?"

"No," Lumian replied succinctly.

At that moment, the two of them had already entered Avenue du Marché. Posters celebrating Hugues Artois's successful election as a member of parliament adorned the surroundings.

Hugues Artois, the joint support of the Savoie Mob and the Poison Spur Mob, has indeed become a member of parliament… I wonder what changes he will bring to the market district… Lumian averted his gaze from the poster, his mind echoing Franca's words: Lady Moon, a follower of the Great Mother, believed that Hugues Artois was an open-minded individual.

…

In the afternoon, prior to embarking on his journey to Avenue du Boulevard in search of Mr. K, Lumian arranged an altar in the second-floor bedroom of Salle de Bal Brise.

With the wall of spirituality in place, Lumian proceeded to light three candles in the order from deity to mankind, left to right. After carefully dripping essential oils and extracts, he took a couple of steps back, enveloped in a misty atmosphere, and intoned in a deep voice,"The Fool that doesn't belong to this era, the mysterious ruler above the gray fog; the King of Yellow and Black who wields good luck."

A faint gray fog arose, accompanied by an unsettling aura.

Suppressing the sluggishness of his thoughts and the tingling sensation beneath his skin, Lumian fixed his gaze upon the bluish-black flame of the candle. Following the instructions of Madam Magician, he recited the subsequent incantation in the ancient language of Hermes.

"I implore you, I implore your protection…"

After a series of gestures, Lumian caught sight of the divine angel, seemingly materialized from pure light.

Simultaneously, he faintly heard a dreamy sigh.

A sigh originating from an infinite height.

Descending from above in resplendent and ethereal form, the angel extended its arms to embrace Lumian.

Wings of radiant light enveloped him.

When Lumian regained consciousness, everything had returned to its usual state.

…

As evening descended upon 19 Rue Scheer, Avenue du Boulevard, Lumian once again found himself in the basement, face-to-face with Mr. K.

Clad in his customary voluminous hood and black robe, Mr. K sat silently upon a chair with a crimson backrest.

Meeting Lumian's gaze, Mr. K nodded gently and spoke in a low, raspy voice, "I am highly pleased with your adeptness in action. What's more, unknowingly, your actions align with the teachings of my lord, countering those Blessed of evil beings!"

Pausing momentarily, Mr. K inquired, "Have you given it sufficient thought?"

"Yes, I have," Lumian replied, lowering his head. "You have revealed to me the magnificence of the Lord."

"Haha!" Mr. K burst into a maniacal laughter, as if his sanity had slipped away.

After a few seconds, he regained composure and disregarded the attendants, ensuring they stayed put. He continued, "My lord's honorific name is the Lord that created everything, the omnipotent and omniscient God, the Lord who reigns behind the curtain of shadows, the ruler of the mind world, and the degenerated nature of all living things. Choose any three and entreat Him in Hermes."

The mere description by Mr. K caused Lumian's garments, skin, flesh, and bones to dissolve completely, leaving behind an unnerving sensation of pure consciousness and self-awareness.

Involuntarily trembling, Lumian instinctively recited, "The Lord that created everything, the omnipotent and omniscient God, the Lord who reigns behind the curtain of shadows…"

Lumian's mind was too overwhelmed to deliberate, and he unconsciously selected the first three phrases.

Almost instantly, his surroundings darkened, as if enshrouded by a heavy curtain.

Beyond the illusory and profound shadowed veil, a pair of eyes fixated upon Lumian, penetrating his consciousness and nearly rendering him unconscious.

After an indeterminate period, Lumian regained his faculties, his body drenched in cold sweat.

Rising from his seat, Mr. K's deep voice seemed laced with a smile.

"Henceforth, you are our brother, truly one of us.

"We're a secret organization that believes in the True Creator. We go by the name of the Aurora Order."

"Aurora Order?" Lumian was taken aback.

Isn't this the terrorist organization that took the blame for me?

It seems that the official Beyonders did not misidentify their target…

I have truly become a member of the Aurora Order…

Dismissing the attendants from the basement, Mr. K addressed Lumian, "Gardner Martin is a member of the Iron and Blood Cross Order. This secret organization once revered our lord, but in recent years, they have distanced themselves from us and ceased their frequent prayers. They appear to be plotting something of great significance.

"I have assigned you to infiltrate their ranks, for I hope you can discover the cause behind their actions and unravel their intentions."

Chapter 232: Financing of Activities

The Iron and Blood Cross Order… appears to have some significant plans in the works… Lumian finally grasped Mr. K's true intentions for persuading him to join a mob.

The Iron and Blood Cross Order—an equally secretive organization—seemed to be related to a competition of faith and Trier's situation.

Curiosity stirring within him, Lumian inquired, "What exactly is the Iron and Blood Cross Order?"

The more Lumian understood, the more he inclined towards actions that would gain Gardner Martin's approval.

Mr. K let out a chuckle. "Allow Gardner Martin to personally enlighten you. If you possess knowledge about their circumstances before they disclose it to you, they are likely to notice some problem."

So, you found a wanted, simple country boy like me to be a spy? You wanted someone with a clean slate and humble background? Lumian pondered, nodding thoughtfully.

His thoughts wandered to the mysterious item Gardner Martin had smuggled into Trier through Rat Christo, as well as the support the Savoie Mob extended to Hugues Artois. After two seconds of contemplation, Lumian voiced his suspicion, "Could the Iron and Blood Cross Order's plan be connected to Hugues Artois?"

In a raspy voice, Mr. K responded, "According to the information we've gathered, that is merely one component, not the primary one."

I see… Lumian then broached the topic of "mirror people" before continuing, "Gardner Martin seemed aware that the item he had the smuggling caravan transport could trigger a corresponding incident."

Mr. K fell silent momentarily before speaking, "I suspect that item holds immense importance. It's a matter you'll need to unravel. Don't worry. Our Aurora Order is generous with rewards. When the time comes, you can make any request."

Just as Lumian was about to internally utter the words, "Help me revive my sister," Mr. K added, "As long as it lies within my power."

Very straightforward… If I genuinely become an official member of the Iron and Blood Cross Order and gain access to pertinent information, they will undoubtedly grant me certain privileges. And in turn, I can seek rewards from the Aurora Order. Yes… This is akin to further fulfilling Madam Magician's mission. She won't reject me, the bearer of a Minor Arcana card… Such "treatment" is rare—to receive three rewards for a single task… As Lumian silently sighed, he assumed it wouldn't matter if he faced rejection.

"I now require some financing for my future endeavors."

The purpose of these funds was to enhance Lumian's personal strength and establish a "solid foundation" for completing the mission.

Mr. K nodded. "No problem. I will provide you with 10,000 verl d'or later. This is one of the perks of officially joining our Aurora Order and participating in a high-risk mission."

In Intis, "perk" was a commonly used term coined by Emperor Roselle.

Very generous… At that moment, he found himself wondering if he should seek out more secret organizations like this one, just to enjoy additional membership perks.

Rising from his seat, Mr. K extended his hands and began to circle Lumian slowly.

As he walked, he spoke in a solemn tone, "My Lord is the great being who created this world, the father of all living creatures."

"We all originate from Him, carrying the divine essence He bestowed upon us."

"Divinity exists within every living being, and no one is inherently more noble than another. We distinguish our status based on our proximity to our Lord and our ability to embrace His teachings."

"It is through our shared divinity that we can consume potions, face trials, and accumulate more divine power. Ultimately, we can become angels in service to my Lord…"

Is he preaching? Lumian couldn't help but feel that there were similarities between Mr. K's words and Madam Magician's story of the original Creator—the Oldest One—fragmenting and manifesting different Beyonder characteristics. They seemed to share a common essence.

This led him to suspect that the True Creator of the Aurora Order corresponded to the Oldest One.

After nearly fifteen minutes, Mr. K concluded his preaching and traced a cross on his chest, starting from the top and moving to the bottom, left, and right.

"Praise be to you, the creator of all things. Praise be to you, who carries the burdens of the world's sins."

Lumian followed suit, offering his own words of praise.

Mr. K then proceeded to introduce the Aurora Order.

"We currently have a total of seven Saints and twenty-two Oracles, each designated by alphabetical code names, scattered across various locations…"

There are still 21 individuals as powerful as Mr. K? The Saints are Sequence 4 and Sequence 3 demigods with godhood. And there are a total of seven in the Aurora Order? Lumian was taken aback by this revelation.

The Aurora Order was far more formidable than he had anticipated!

As for whether there were any figures on the level of angels, Mr. K did not mention it, leaving Lumian to wonder.

Concluding the introduction, Mr. K took hold of his right index finger with his left hand and tore it off. He then tossed it to Lumian, the finger dripping with blood.

"Use it in times of dire need."

Lumian caught the finger, its blood already congealing, and imagined the phantom pain he had experienced before.

Although he was unafraid of pain or injuries in battle and could stab himself without hesitation when necessary, he couldn't simply pluck out a finger without reason, as Mr. K had done.

In a matter of moments, a new finger sprouted from Mr. K's hand, its skin fair and unblemished.

With the gathering scheduled for 9 p.m., Lumian secured the 10,000 verl d'or and made his way to Psychic's old journal library, a lavish off-white six-story building located at 19 Rue Scheer. He stayed there until 6 p.m.

Then, he leisurely found a nearby restaurant and spent 2 verl d'or on an inexpensive set meal.

The meal included an ordinary bottle of red wine, a bowl of soup, three dishes, a dessert, and an unlimited supply of bread.

Lumian made his selections from the provided menu, opting for a beef chowder, braised rabbit meat, and a serving of roasted cauliflower.

As the gathering commenced, Lumian, already in possession of the Scorpion Poison, sold the aquatic monster's blood, poisonous scales, and other items he had no use for, fetching him 100 verl d'or.

Thus far, he had amassed a total of 14,710 verl d'or and 24 coppet in cash, mostly courtesy of Mr. K.

This filled him with confidence that he could gather the remaining 30,000 verl d'or within a short span of time.

If he borrowed a bit here and pocketed a bit there, combined with the spoils of war, wouldn't he have enough?

Shortly before 11 p.m., Lumian returned to Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman.

Ruhr and Michel, residents of the third floor who made a living selling photos of street maîtresse d'atelier near the Suhit steam locomotive station, were hauling a bulging flaxen-colored cloth bag up the stairs.

Lumian cast a curious glance at the white-haired duo and asked, slightly puzzled, "So late?"

He knew that Ruhr and Michel also worked as part-time scavengers, having encountered them on a few occasions before. However, he recalled that their work typically ended by nine.

Ruhr, clad in tattered clothing with a slight hunch to his back, mustered a smile and replied with a touch of joy, "Tonight, the member of parliament's office hosted a celebratory feast and discarded a lot of valuable rubbish. We waited until the bags could no longer hold before returning."

The market district's member of parliament's office was celebrating Hugues Artois's election? Lumian nodded subtly and walked past the elderly couple, making his way to Room 207.

Before igniting the carbide lamp, he noticed a square-folded white paper on the table, illuminated by the faint crimson moonlight streaming through the window.

Observing the neatly folded paper, Lumian suspected it to be a letter from Madam Magician.

The Pyromaniac potion formula? Did she have the messenger leave the Pyromaniac potion formula here before my arrival? Is she so confident in my ability to become an official member of the Aurora Order? Or does she have something else to inform me about? These thoughts raced through Lumian's mind as he ignited the carbide lamp, picked up the white paper, and carefully unfolded it.

"Your next mission is to complete the task assigned by Mr. K. Do you understand what I mean?

"Pyromaniac potion formula:

"Main ingredient: Fire Salamander gland, Magma Elf core;

"Supplementary ingredients: 50 milliliters of Fire Salamander blood, 10 grams of Magma Pyroxene powder, 10 grams of Redcrown Balsam powder, 10 drops of Sun Star extract.

"Usage: What do you think?"

She actually wrote down the main ingredient… Does this mean I'll need the accompanying parts for the potion? Is Madam Magician also interested in uncovering the Iron and Blood Cross Order's current situation? How did she know that today would be the day Mr. K would assign me this task? Or does she simply disregard Mr. K's intentions? Does she only hope that I can gain more of Mr. K's trust and gradually become a core member of the Aurora Order? Lumian leaned towards the first possibility, but he couldn't dismiss the latter.

For now, he had no choice but to follow her instructions.

Having attended two mysticism gatherings, Lumian had developed a certain understanding of the potion formula's value. He knew that the Pyromaniac potion formula in his possession was worth at least 30,000 verl d'or.

If he were to sell it, he could exchange it for the Pyromaniac Beyonder characteristic.

Of course, this idea was fleeting. Without Madam Magician's explicit agreement, he didn't dare entertain it.

Wouldn't it be equivalent to trading Madam Magician's potion formula for her Pyromaniac Beyonder characteristic?

Instead, Lumian found a more feasible plan, inspired by a popular trade scheme in Intis which was also known as Commercial Paradise or Financial Empire.

The plan required a down payment of 10,000 verl d'or, with the remaining 20,000 to be paid in installments over a year, along with a 10 to 15% interest.

After careful consideration, Lumian, sensing a high likelihood of Madam Magician possessing godhood, dismissed the idea.

He had already gathered almost half of the required funds. There was no need to risk offending a demigod by negotiating installments.

Even if Harvest Sacrifice didn't yield a satisfactory price or Franca had little savings due to her extravagant lifestyle, Salle de Bal Brise still had a substantial amount of cash in its safe. As the protector of the dance hall, what harm would there be in embezzling a small sum?

Chapter 233: Advance Payment

Realizing the lateness of the hour, Lumian planned on delving into Aurore's grimoire until midnight. He resolved to seek out Franca the next morning and inquire about the sale of Harvest Sacrifice. Additionally, he intended to ask her to keep a watchful eye on the supplementary ingredients like Fire Salamander blood and Magma Pyroxene powder.

Hmm, Franca is known for her late sleeping habits. If I go searching for her now, she'll surely still be awake. Most likely, she'll be asleep before 11 a.m. tomorrow… Taking this into consideration, Lumian had a change of heart. He tidied the wooden table, rose from his seat, and departed from Auberge du Coq Doré.

3 Rue des Blouses Blanches, in front of Apartment 601.

After knocking a few times, Lumian caught sight of Franca. Her flaxen locks were disheveled, and she wore a lake-blue silk nightgown as she opened the door.

"What's the matter this time?" the Witch inquired, a smile gracing her lips as she stepped aside to make way.

Lumian didn't respond immediately. He glanced around and inquired, "Is Jenna not here?"

Unconsciously, Franca's smile faded away.

"Are you here for her? She doesn't have to perform tonight. She left early today."

Lumian nodded.

"That's good. I won't have to climb the outer wall and leave later then."

"…" Franca's lips twitched, and she clicked her tongue with a chuckle. "So, you've come to mock me?"

After playing a simple prank, Lumian settled himself on the gray divan.

Just as he was about to speak, Franca, who had curled up in the recliner, causing her nightgown's hem to slip, let out a soft chuckle.

"You missed quite a show in the market district this afternoon.

"The police took care of all the places tied to the mob. Brignais, Simon, Christo, and Black were all apprehended and brought to the police headquarters. They nearly fell into the clutches of the official Beyonders and received their customary treatment. Luckily, Gardner managed to contact the newly elected Hugues Artois and convinced him to exert pressure on the two Churches and the police headquarters. By throwing a few scapegoats under the bus, the matter was resolved."

Hugues Artois is indeed in cahoots with the Boss… Lumian chuckled.

"You didn't get caught?"

"I didn't go to any of those locations today. I spent the whole afternoon playing Fighting Evil with Jenna and my star dancer. Why would I get caught? You see, there's nothing wrong with being lazy. My favorite saying is that lazy people are blessed by being lazy," Franca replied, amused.

"I've never heard that before," Lumian asked casually. "Where does this proverb come from?"

"I made it up," Franca replied nonchalantly.

Pondering Franca's explanation, Lumian's suspicions were confirmed.

"Did Jenna suggest staying indoors in the afternoon and playing cards?"

"How did you know?" Franca exclaimed in surprise.

She scrutinized Lumian, her gaze turning suspicious.

Could it be that Jenna told him herself? Had they shared so much in private?

Lumian had nothing to hide and spoke frankly, "Charlie paid me a visit today, and Jenna happened to be there. From him, I learned that the official Beyonders and the police headquarters planned a joint operation to clean up the mobsters in the market district this afternoon.

"I advised Jenna to keep it a secret so as not to trouble Charlie. And it seems she's proven to be trustworthy. She simply kept you occupied in the apartment," Lumian explained.

Franca's face brightened with understanding. "No wonder you weren't around in the afternoon."

A smug expression crossed her features. "Jenna is still on my side!"

She let out a satisfied sigh before curiosity tinged her voice as Franca asked warily, "Why did Jenna come to you?"

Lumian smiled knowingly. "After the demise of 'Black Scorpion' Roger, she finds me suspicious due to my ongoing conflict with the Poison Spur Mob."

Franca's response was a mix of relief and amusement.

"The Aurora Order ended up being the scapegoat in this case."

"Since I arrived in Trier, I've noticed in the newspapers that whenever something happened, the terrorist group known as the Aurora Order would claim responsibility. But I never imagined that we would finally get a taste of that treatment. The subsequent investigations were misled, and no one suspected us."

The Aurora Order is indeed responsible for this… After Lumian mocked Franca, he steered the conversation back on track.

"Taking advantage of the situation, I attended a mysticism gathering in the afternoon and managed to obtain the formula for the Pyromaniac potion, as well as some clues about its main ingredient."

"You're quite fortunate," Franca exclaimed, her eyes widening slightly. "If we weren't in Intis, I'd doubt your story. It's only in Intis that the Pyromaniac potion formula is so readily available."

Lumian then made a request.

"Please help me keep an eye on the supplementary ingredients: Fire Salamander's blood, Magma Pyroxene powder, and Redcrown Balsam."

He omitted mentioning Sun Star, as it was relatively common and could be found in larger flower shops.

"No problem," Franca assured him. She inquired about the quantities of each ingredient in detail before raising another concern. "Do you have enough money? I mean, enough to purchase the main ingredient for the potion."

From her perspective, Lumian had likely spent all his savings on the Pyromaniac potion formula.

Lumian seized the opportunity to respond, "Actually, I was just about to ask if Harvest Sacrifice had been sold."

"How can it be sold so soon? It's only been a day! I haven't even had the chance to attend any mysticism gatherings," Franca replied, pausing before offering a solution. "If you urgently need money, I can lend you some. After all, I don't have any immediate need for the next potion."

"There's no rush," Lumian replied after considering the matter.

He still needed to gather all the supplementary ingredients.

Franca estimated, "Based on my experience, Harvest Sacrifice won't fetch a high price due to its inevitable side effects. You can expect it to sell for around 10,000 to 12,000 verl d'or."

"When you need the money, I can directly provide you with 6,000 verl d'or, considering it a buyout of Harvest Sacrifice. Additionally, I can lend you 20,000 to 30,000 verl d'or, but you must return it within three months."

"Alright," Lumian agreed without hesitation.

He then produced Fallen Mercury and said to Franca, "I need to find someone who can repair Beyonder weapons."

Franca examined the dirk with its ominous patterns and asked in confusion, "What's the point of repairing a Beyonder weapon? Its energy will deplete eventually."

"It's tremendously useful. I want to utilize it for as long as possible," Lumian admitted, though he naturally refrained from mentioning that he had a means to replenish Fallen Mercury's energy.

Of course, he had to wait until he reached Sequence 6 and could withstand the corruption. Otherwise, Termiboros would undoubtedly seize the opportunity to cause trouble.

"That's true," Franca recalled Fallen Mercury's impressive performance in the battle against "Black Scorpion" Roger. "I'll help you inquire, but no Artisan would likely accept the task of repairing a suspected corrupted Beyonder weapon. They fear the potential adverse effects it could have on them."

Artisan… a Beyonder skilled in repairing mystical items and Beyonder weapons? After exchanging a few more words with Franca, Lumian left Room 601 and returned to Avenue du Marché, entering Salle de Bal Brise.

Despite it almost being midnight, the place was still bustling. Lumian made his way to the finance office on the second floor corridor. As he unlocked the safe, he asked about the accountant and the cashier on the night shift.

"How much cash do we have at the moment?"

The accountant, a refined bespectacled woman in her thirties, replied with a hint of apprehension, "Approximately 28,000 verl d'or and some change."

Lumian had already opened the safe's door by then, revealing stacks of banknotes and shimmering golden coins.

After a quick calculation, he calmly requested, "Give me 12,000 verl d'or."

"Huh?" Both the accountant and the cashier exclaimed fearfully.

While Monsieur Ciel was the protector of Salle de Bal Brise, taking away such a substantial amount of cash in one go was unthinkable!

The accountant exchanged a glance with the young cashier, silently indicating her to find the dance hall manager, René, in the adjacent office.

Dressed in formal attire, Gardner Martin's designated representative glanced at the open safe and inquired, "Monsieur Ciel, why do you need to withdraw 12,000 verl d'or?"

"Personal expenses," Lumian replied calmly.

René pondered for a few seconds before responding, "No problem.

"In the first two years, Baron Brignais would take between 40,000 and 50,000 verl d'or from the dance hall annually. During the transition, he even withdrew 15,000 verl d'or, which would have counted as part of the first half of the year. And it's not even the second half yet. Monsieur Ciel, consider this 12,000 verl d'or an advance."

"Sure." Lumian didn't concern himself with the details; he simply wanted the 12,000 verl d'or!

After securing the cash in a cloth bag, Lumian let out a silent sigh of relief.

He had nearly gathered the required 30,000 verl d'or to purchase the Pyromaniac Beyonder characteristic. Now, all he had to do was await news of the supplementary ingredients!

Currently, he possessed a total of 26,710 verl d'or. With an additional 6,000 from the Harvest Sacrifice, he would have enough.

As Lumian, laden with a significant amount of cash, left Salle de Bal Brise, a sense of unease suddenly washed over him.

He wasn't afraid of being robbed; rather, he worried that a conflict might damage the money bag or tear the banknotes.

I must find a safe place for it. I can't keep carrying it like this… Lumian strolled along Avenue du Marché, contemplating transferring the funds to the safe house.

Before long, his eyes caught sight of the brightly illuminated office belonging to the market district's member of parliament.

It stood as a classic four-story building, boasting a khaki-colored façade with statues adorning the top two floors—a Sunbird and Giant Gears.

The celebration banquet is still underway… Lumian shook his head disapprovingly.

Pausing for a moment, he settled in the shadows across the street, observing the departing guests from the banquet hall.

Hugues Artois, who enjoyed the combined support of the Savoie Mob and the Poison Spur Mob, not to mention Lady Moon's praise, was undoubtedly a man of influence. Some of the guests he had invited could very well be problematic individuals connected to the schemes of the Iron and Blood Cross Order.

As time went by, an increasing number of guests emerged from the member of parliament's office. Lumian found no one who aroused suspicion. He could only confirm that most of them belonged to the upper echelons of society. They were elegantly attired, and their faces had graced the pages of various newspapers.

Suddenly, a familiar figure caught his eye.

It was Gardner Martin, an amiable man with chubby cheeks, a few silver strands of hair at his temples, and brownish-red eyes!

Gardner Martin, the boss of the Savoie Mob!

Dressed in a tailcoat and a dark bow tie, Gardner seemed to sense something. He abruptly turned his head, fixing his gaze on the shadowy spot where Lumian sat.

Lumian's heart skipped a beat.

His thoughts raced, and he swiftly made up his mind. Rising to his feet, he approached Gardner Martin.

Gardner Martin regarded him with a penetrating stare, revealing no trace of emotion.

"Good evening, Boss," Lumian greeted as he drew nearer.

Gardner Martin asked nonchalantly, "What brings you here?"

Lumian replied candidly, "I left Salle de Bal Brise and noticed that the member of parliament's office banquet was still ongoing. I thought I'd check which guests Monsieur Hugues Artois had invited, so as to avoid offending the wrong people in the future."

Gardner Martin nodded subtly and spoke calmly, "That's a commendable habit."

With a gesture signaling Lumian to depart, he proceeded towards a private carriage, accompanied by Butler Faustino.

Lumian's heart stirred as he followed suit, taking the initiative to speak, "Boss, I took an advance of 12,000 verl d'or from the dance hall today."

Chapter 234: Sincerity

Gardner Martin's brows lifted in surprise as he cast a curious glance at Lumian, taking a moment to ponder the situation.

"Let's converse inside the carriage."

Upon hearing this, Butler Faustino took the initiative to settle himself in the front of the carriage, right beside the driver.

Silently, Lumian trailed behind Gardner Martin and entered the carriage, taking a seat opposite him.

As the carriage slowly set in motion, Gardner Martin fixed his gaze upon Lumian and spoke up.

"Why did you advance such a hefty sum of cash?"

Lumian responded with candor.

"Given the opportunity to enhance my strength, I aspire to become a Sequence 7 Pyromaniac."

Gardner Martin hadn't anticipated Lumian's straightforwardness. After a brief pause, he smiled and inquired, "Is 12,000 verl d'or sufficient?"

Lumian didn't bat an eye as he replied, "In addition to the 18,000 verl d'or you provided last time and my previous savings."

Gardner Martin nodded slowly.

"Did you come across anyone selling the main ingredient for the Pyromaniac potion elsewhere? And do you possess the formula for the potion?"

"Yes," Lumian confessed without reservation.

Gardner Martin chuckled.

"You've divulged all of this to me. Shouldn't these matters be kept secret?"

Lumian displayed an unusual sincerity as he responded, "I feel prepared to consume the Pyromaniac potion. It won't be long before I advance to Sequence 7.

"When that happens, if a conflict arises, concealing the change in my strength would be impossible. Boss, you'll soon discover it anyway. So why not tell you now?"

Furthermore, René, the manager of the dance hall, worked under Gardner Martin. He would undoubtedly report the 12,000 verl d'or advancement.

Lumian paused momentarily before continuing, "That's one reason.

"Another reason is that I've lived on the streets, endured rural life, and faced persecution. Now, I adhere to a single principle: I treat those who treat me well."

He wasn't attempting to flaunt his loyalty. According to Jenna, such exaggerated loyalty would seem untrustworthy, especially when he had only met Gardner Martin once. His main goal was to convey his allegiance.

Similarly, Gardner Martin would definitely comprehend the underlying purpose behind Lumian's frankness. It was a display of his astuteness.

Gardner Martin lifted his head and burst into laughter.

"Very good.

"Brignais, Christo, and the others have their own secrets. They assume I'm oblivious.

"The fact that you can accurately grasp your situation, your future progress, and my stance indicates that you're more astute than them. Most times, sincerity proves to be the most effective approach."

Sincerity? Lumian seized the opportunity to express himself with an extraordinary sincerity.

"Boss, I have leads on the main ingredient, but I'm unsure where to acquire the supplementary ingredients.

"Could you keep an eye out for Fire Salamander's blood, Magma Pyroxene powder, and Redcrown Balsam?"

From Lumian's perspective, Gardner Martin, suspected to be a Sequence 6 or perhaps even a Sequence 5 Beyonder of the Hunter pathway, would have an easier time finding the supplementary ingredients for the Pyromaniac potion compared to Franca.

Perhaps he still possessed leftover supplementary ingredients from advancing to Pyromaniac?

According to Aurore's grimoire, spiritual supplementary ingredients could be preserved for an extended period if the method was correct.

Gardner Martin was taken aback. He hadn't anticipated Ciel making such a direct request.

Initially, he had intended to inquire about a few matters of concern and understand Lumian's needs before offering assistance to win him over.

After a brief pause, Gardner Martin nodded and responded, "No problem."

Observing that Gardner Martin didn't inquire about the quantities of the three supplementary ingredients, Lumian grew increasingly convinced that the Savoie Mob boss was a Mid-Sequence Beyonder of the Hunter pathway.

Gardner Martin peered out of the window and spoke inquisitively.

"While you were observing the parliament member's office, did you notice anything suspicious?"

"No," Lumian shook his head. "They're just individuals whose pictures occasionally appear in the newspapers."

Gardner Martin smiled nonchalantly.

"Indeed, there's the president and vice-president of our Savoie Chamber of Commerce; Bono Goodville, the owner of Goodville Chemical Factory; Clement, the manager of Nova Mechanical Prosthetics; and Etienne from Saint-Ger Phlogiston Factory… I was invited as a shareholder of Rist Docks and the head of Rist Shipping Company and Savoie Construction Company, not as the boss of the Savoie Mob."

Gardner Martin let out a soft sigh.

"However, we can barely squeeze into Trier's high society. In the business world, the true heavyweights are the chairmen and proprietors of Trier Bank, Suchit Bank, and Asset Credit Bank. They are the shareholders of behemoths like Suhit Textile Group, Tilisi Coal and Steel Consortium, Anubi Steel Company, Southern Liquor Merchants Federation, Falgar Weapons Group, and Balam-Paz Import and Export Corporation."

Lumian had come across these names in newspapers and magazines. The company that had left the deepest impression was Balam-Paz Import and Export Corporation.

To protect their interests in the West Balam and Paz Valley of the Southern Continent, they had even been allowed to finance a substantial private army and a fleet as mercenaries.

Noticing that the carriage was about to depart from Avenue du Marché, Gardner Martin signaled the driver to halt and nodded at Lumian.

"Before consuming the potion, ensure your condition is favorable. It's better to delay than to take unnecessary risks."

After acknowledging Gardner Martin's advice, Lumian left the carriage and headed towards Rue des Blouses Blanches.

He intended to conceal all his cash within the confines of the safe house.

After walking a certain distance, Lumian hesitated.

Safe houses didn't guarantee absolute safety, especially in lower-class areas like the market district and Quartier du Jardin Botanique, where the population was denser. Thieves ran rampant in such places.

If a burglar were to stumble upon Aurore's grimoires, they would be of little value to them. At most, they would search through them in the hopes of finding hidden banknotes, but the sum of over 26,000 cash would undoubtedly be taken.

Should I set up a few traps in the safe house to deter thieves? Lumian's thoughts raced, and suddenly, a better idea struck him.

That idea was to provide Madam Magician with an advance payment of 26,000 verl d'or!

This way, there would be no risk of losing such a large sum of cash.

Furthermore, a lofty individual like Madam Magician would not deny accepting the advance payment.

Phew… With his mind made up, Lumian arrived at the safe house on Rue des Blouses Blanches and retrieved pen and paper to write a letter.

"Esteemed Madam Magician,

"I have already procured 26,000 verl d'or. I will offer this as an advance payment. Once I gather the remaining 4,000, you may send me the Pyromaniac Beyonder characteristic.

"Looking forward to your reply."

Lumian refrained from requesting Madam Magician to grant him the Pyromaniac Beyonder characteristic immediately, as he had yet to acquire the corresponding supplementary ingredients. Preserving Beyonder characteristics proved to be quite troublesome, and there was a risk of losing them.

After summoning the puppet messenger and entrusting it with the cloth bag containing cash and coins, along with the letter, Lumian felt a significant sense of relief. However, he couldn't help but worry that the messenger might fall victim to robbery in the spirit world.

Before long, the puppet messenger adorned in a golden dress returned with a reply from Madam Magician.

"26,000 verl d'or has been received.

"Magician."

It's akin to receiving a receipt… Lumian murmured to himself, expressing gratitude to the puppet messenger.

He then departed Rue des Blouses Blanches and made his way back to Auberge du Coq Doré.

As was his routine, Lumian used a short wire to open the door, quietly traversed the dimly lit lobby with only the basement bar's glow, and ascended the stairs.

Reaching the second floor, he pursed his lips and continued upwards to the third floor, arriving at Room 310, where Flameng had once resided.

The wooden door to the room stood ajar, and the curtains remained undrawn, allowing the crimson moonlight to filter through the glass.

It was an unwritten folklore often believed by the lower-class citizens of Trier:

In a room where someone had met their demise, the door had to be left open and the curtains undrawn for three days.

This was done out of concern that the ghost of the deceased might be reluctant to depart.

Lumian stood at the doorway, gazing into the empty room, as if he could see the madman clutching his head and whispering, "I'm dying."

After a while, he silently averted his gaze and proceeded towards the stairs.

As he approached the staircase, he overheard a conversation emanating from Room 302, despite their attempts to suppress their voices.

The room belonged to Ruhr and Michel, the sellers of counterfeit photographs who worked as part-time scavengers.

There was no sign of a kerosene or carbide lamp being lit within the room. No light seeped through the crack in the door.

Lumian's acute hearing allowed him to instinctively tune in to the discussion between the elderly couple.

"Old Woman, look at these. They're worth a fortune! Those gentlemen and ladies simply discarded them!"

"I reckon this bag alone could fetch 5 verl d'or…"

"5 verl d'or? It's worth at least 15!"

"Old Man, if only we could stumble upon such valuable rubbish every day."

"Then we'd have to vote for a member of parliament every day."

"Praise the Sun. Let that member of parliament host a banquet every day. In that case, we could return to Aurmir and purchase 10 acres of fields to cultivate grapes within a year."

"You're quite the dreamer, Old Woman.

"What's wrong with dreaming? Don't you dream? Even without the banquet, we've managed to save up a significant sum. Another four or five years should suffice."

"True. When the time comes, we won't have to toil as hard as we do now, and we won't need to worry about being unable to work…"

Lumian ceased eavesdropping and silently chuckled. Descending the stairs, he returned to Room 207, briefly freshened up, and climbed into bed.

In the midst of the night, half-asleep, he was suddenly startled by hurried footsteps.

As he sat up and glanced towards the corridor, there came a knock on his door.

Lumian, feeling a mix of wariness and confusion, approached the wooden door and opened it.

Standing outside was Madame Michel, the short, gray-haired woman adorned in a yellow cloth dress.

She spoke with fear and panic, "Ruhr has taken ill suddenly! Ciel—Monsieur Ciel, can you assist me in carrying him to the clinic on Rue des Blouses Blanches?

"I-I have the money for his treatment!"

Monsieur Ruhr is unwell? He was perfectly fine when I fell asleep… Lumian was taken aback.

Chapter 235: "Disease"

Observing Lumian's silence, Michel spoke with anxiety creeping into her voice.

"If you're not willing, I can find someone else."

"Who should I look for… They don't really like us. They can't stand our foul odor…"

That was precisely why she sought out Lumian, a leader of the mob. Lumian and Charlie were the only ones at Auberge du Coq Doré who could calmly communicate with the couple, but Charlie had already left.

Glancing at the short and hunched figure of Madame Michel, Lumian let out a sigh and responded.

"I'll go and check it out."

Still perplexed, he walked past Madame Michel, hastened up to the second floor, and entered Room 302.

The place was filled with various kinds of rubbish, emitting an indescribable stench. Lumian raised his hand, pinching his nose, and maneuvered his way through the cramped space, barely fitting a single person, until he reached the yellowish and greasy bedsheet.

Ruhr, with his wrinkled eyes tightly shut, lay on the bed, his face flushed and his breath ragged. He had fainted.

He's seriously ill… Lumian furrowed his brow, holding his breath. He turned around and carried Ruhr out of the room.

Meanwhile, Michel swiftly rummaged through the piles of trash, uncovering hidden spots with single banknotes and coins, which she promptly concealed on her person.

Soon, they left Room 302. As Michel locked the door, she spoke to Lumian.

"Monsieur Ciel, pay me no mind. Send Ruhr to the clinic without me. I'll catch up."

Lumian nodded, quickened his pace, and sprinted out of Auberge du Coq Doré.

He was familiar with Rue des Blouses Blanches' clinics, often frequenting the area. After a short sprint, he spotted the Roblin Clinic, a small hospital in all but name.

Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman and Quartier de Noël had been neighboring districts for some time now. The Holy Palace Hospital, funded by the Eternal Blazing Sun Church, was located across the bridge. As a result, only a few clinics were situated on this side of the bridge.

Roblin Clinic had two doctors on duty during the night. Temporary beds were set up in the spacious hall, with a few patients lying on them, receiving infusion treatments.

Lumian carried Ruhr to one of the doctors and gently placed him on a treatment bed.

The doctor, donning gold-rimmed glasses and in his early thirties, glanced at Lumian. Without directly mentioning any consultation fees, he disdainfully examined Ruhr's condition.

After a few minutes, he adjusted his glasses and spoke.

"He's running a high fever, but there don't appear to be any other symptoms. I suggest we try to bring down the fever first. If it persists, we should immediately transfer him to the Holy Palace Hospital."

"Alright." Lumian possessed limited medical knowledge, so he could only heed the doctor's advice.

The doctor swiftly wrote a prescription for Lumian and instructed him to make the necessary payment. Lumian complied, receiving the fever medicine and infusion drip from the pharmacy.

The Fool Pharmaceutical Company's Type 1357 Fever Medicine… Lumian glanced at the prescription's contents and then proceeded to the payment window.

Madame Michel finally arrived, panting and exhausted.

She accepted the prescription from Lumian and glanced at the price. In a burst of frustration, she exclaimed, "It's 5 verl d'or…"

Without waiting for Lumian's response, she clenched her teeth and retrieved copper and silver coins. She gathered 5 verl d'or and paid the consultation fee.

Before long, Ruhr was carried to a temporary bed for the infusion.

This treatment had gained popularity only in recent years.

Madame Michel finally regained her composure and spoke to Lumian.

"Thank you, Monsieur Ciel. You can go back and rest. I'll stay with Ruhr."

Lumian didn't insist. After all, he wasn't a doctor.

He nodded slightly and directed his gaze towards Ruhr. Concentrating, he intended to check on his luck.

Lumian couldn't help but furrow his brow.

Monsieur Ruhr was on the brink of death!

However, it wasn't severe or evident. Unlike the previous vagrant, there seemed to be a chance of salvation.

Just as Lumian was about to suggest transferring him to the Holy Palace Hospital, Ruhr's condition took a turn.

Translucent blisters resembling burns emerged on his skin. They swiftly filled with light yellow pus, exhibiting signs of festering.

Such symptoms, such progression, and such rapid evolution caused Lumian's pupils to contract. His intuition informed him that this was no ordinary illness.

Perhaps it was connected to mysticism and supernatural forces!

Monsieur Ruhr is merely a scavenger. Why is he affected by supernatural powers? Lumian raised his head and pointed at the unconscious Ruhr. He addressed Madame Michel, "You're believers of the Eternal Blazing Sun, correct? Take him to the Église Saint-Robert and give it a try."

He sensed that the Holy Palace Hospital might not be equipped to treat an illness involving supernatural powers. It would be better to visit the Eternal Blazing Sun cathedral and determine if purification could eliminate the effects.

Madame Michel noticed her husband's peculiar transformation and pleaded with a sobbing tone, "No, transfer him to the Holy Palace Hospital! Transfer him to the Holy Palace Hospital!"

To Madame Michel's understanding, seeking blessings at the cathedral was akin to giving up on treatment and preparing for the solace of a deathbed.

Lumian refrained from persuading her, realizing that it was the dead of night and Église Saint-Robert had long closed its doors. Moreover, Ruhr and Michel were nothing more than a couple of scavengers, so the chances of the cathedral opening for them were slim.

Additionally, Église Saint-Robert was quite far away. Ruhr's condition was rapidly deteriorating, and he might not survive the journey, let alone live long enough to rouse the cathedral's caretakers to unlock the door.

Lumian observed Ruhr, whose blisters had burst and were now oozing pus. After a brief moment of silence, he spoke to Madame Michel, "Find a doctor and transfer him to the Holy Palace Hospital immediately."

"Alright, alright!" Michel snapped out of her daze and hurriedly approached the doctor who had attended to Ruhr.

Once she vacated the temporary bed, Lumian positioned himself to block the view of the other patients. From his pocket, he retrieved an iron-colored metal canister adorned with a spring fountain pattern.

This was the Healing Agent he had obtained from "Baldy" Harman!

Lumian believed that ailments as a result of mysticism could only be countered by mysticism remedies. Although uncertain whether this agent, primarily meant for external injuries, would work on Ruhr, he was determined to give it a shot.

Unscrewing the cap, he pinched Ruhr's mouth open and forced down half of the agent.

Ruhr, seemingly parched, instinctively swallowed the clear liquid resembling a refreshing spring.

After two gulps, he began to calm down.

In less than a minute, Madame Michel returned with the doctor. The blisters on Ruhr's face shriveled, scabbed over, and silently fell away.

It actually worked… Lumian breathed a sigh of relief and focused on observing the shifts in Ruhr's fate.

This time, there were no signs of impending death. Ruhr's destiny for the next few days appeared somewhat chaotic, making it difficult for Lumian to decipher or speculate upon.

Perplexed, the doctor glanced at Ruhr and asked Madame Michel, "Isn't he in pretty good shape?"

Madame Michel also noticed that the dreadful blisters that had marred her husband's face were now gone, leaving behind only scars and wrinkles. His breathing had steadied and was no longer labored.

"I apologize for my anxiety," she quickly apologized.

The doctor, irritated by the stench emanating from her and Ruhr, waved his hand dismissively.

"The Fool Pharmaceutical Company's medications are far more effective than others. Since the situation has improved, keep a close eye on him. Don't rush to transfer him to the Holy Palace Hospital."

With that, he hastily departed from the temporary bed.

Madame Michel slumped down next to Ruhr, occasionally checking his forehead to gauge his body temperature.

Lumian remained by their side. He pulled up a stool and sat, attentively observing Ruhr's condition.

Ten minutes later, Ruhr opened his eyes and gazed blankly at the unfamiliar white ceiling.

"Where am I?"

Michel let out a sigh of relief and swiftly recounted his sudden illness.

"Why did I fall ill out of the blue?" Ruhr was bewildered. "I felt perfectly fine before going to bed."

Interrupting their conversation, Lumian casually inquired, "What did you do before bed that was different from your usual routine?"

"Nothing," Ruhr pondered for a moment before replying, "Just the usual routine. I sorted through the trash I collected, went to the washroom, had a chat, and then went to sleep… Maybe I came back late last night. It was nearly one o'clock by the time I finished sorting. I guess I ended up sleeping too late…"

Could there be something amiss with the garbage? Or did something occur during the day that only manifested in the dead of night? Lumian delved deeper, hoping for valuable clues from Ruhr and Michel, but alas, his efforts proved fruitless.

Ruhr recuperated swiftly. Once the IV had been administered, he insisted on leaving the Roblin Clinic immediately, unwilling to spend any more money and determined to return to the motel before dawn.

Observing that Ruhr's luck remained unchanged, Lumian didn't try to dissuade him.

Auberge du Coq Doré, Room 302.

Lumian furrowed his brow, surveying the piles of garbage emitting various odors, hoping to pinpoint the problematic one. Ruhr and Michel stood beside him, expressing their gratitude incessantly.

Given the peculiar environment, his sense of smell proved useless. Lumian activated his Spirit Vision and observed for a while, yet found no clues.

He could only say to Ruhr and Michel, "We can't rule out the possibility that there might be something contaminated in this trash that caused your illness. Sleep in a different room tonight and wait until morning."

Lumian intended to seek the assistance of Franca, a skilled Witch in divination, once she awoke, in order to identify the source of the problem.

Before Ruhr could respond, Michel, terrified by her husband's sudden illness and brush with death, spoke up.

"Alright! Thank you, Monsieur Ciel."

Two vacant rooms were available on the third floor. Lumian arranged for Ruhr and Michel to rest in Room 307.

It was already past four in the morning. Lumian returned to Room 207 and lay on the bed, contemplating the reason behind the strange occurrence. Gradually, he drifted off into a dazed slumber.

Suddenly, he jolted awake, barely catching a glimpse of a woman's anguished cry.

Lumian's heart tightened as he grabbed Fallen Mercury and left the room. Following the sound of the wailing, he ascended to the third floor.

In the darkness, his heart sank as he slowed his pace, filled with trepidation.

Finally, he halted outside Room 307. In the crimson moonlight that filtered through the curtains, he spotted Madame Michel kneeling before the bed, weeping uncontrollably.

Sensing his approach, Michel, clad in a yellow gown, turned her tear-streaked face in the dimness and directed her gaze towards the door.

Her voice hollow, she uttered, "Ciel—Monsieur Ciel, Ruhr is dead…"

Chapter 236: Morning Light

He's dead… Lumian thought, his heart heavy with the news he had anticipated but couldn't fully accept.

Leaving the clinic, Ruhr had appeared to have recovered, escaping the clutches of death. How could he have died so suddenly?

With a heavy heart, Lumian stepped into Room 307, fixing his gaze upon the bed.

There lay Ruhr, his body plagued by festering wounds that oozed a faint yellow pus. His complexion was pale and sickly, and he lay completely still.

Ruhr's eyes were wide open, and there was evidence of vomit around his mouth.

After a few moments of silently studying Ruhr's dazed, pained eyes, Lumian spoke in a deep voice, "When did he pass away?"

Michel, her white hair now devoid of its usual luster, slowly shook her head and replied, "I was exhausted and fell asleep. When I awoke, he was already gone…"

"Did he return to Room 302 before bedtime?" Lumian inquired, pressing for details.

"No, he only went to the washroom near Room 302. I followed him…" Michel's voice carried a deep timbre, but it gave Lumian an otherworldly sensation, as though a part of her soul had left her body.

They had all visited the washroom. One fell victim to the strange ailment, while the other remained unscathed… Lumian furrowed his brow, determined to investigate the washroom.

If nothing seems amiss there, the likelihood of Madame Michel being abnormal becomes increasingly probable!

As Lumian departed from Room 307, heading toward the designated washroom, Michel remained kneeling by the bed, quietly weeping, unaware of the other's movements.

The third-floor restroom was no longer as filthy as before, thanks to the regular cleaning ladies. Although some stains and trash were unavoidable after a day's use, it was still passable for civilized individuals.

Lumian glanced around, taking in the sight of the toilet bowl and sink illuminated by the moon's crimson glow streaming through the window. He noticed the rusty tap and mirror, reflecting his own image.

After careful observation, he noticed a white silk handkerchief draped over a pipe in a hidden corner.

Even with a casual glance, Lumian could tell that it didn't belong to any of the current residents of Auberge du Coq Doré. The fabric was of superior quality, adorned with elegant embroidery—a clear sign of its expense.

An outsider, perhaps? Lumian's initial instinct was to pick up the silk handkerchief and examine it more closely. However, he quickly reminded himself of the sight of Monsieur Ruhr's festering body when he had fallen ill and forced himself to restrain his impulses.

Lumian's mind raced as he left the washroom and returned to Room 307. He approached Madame Michel, who was still sobbing, and inquired, "Do you know who the handkerchief in the washroom belongs to?"

Confused and filled with sorrow, Michel instinctively replied, "It's Ruhr's."

Monsieur Ruhr's? Lumian was both surprised and convinced.

He pressed further, "Where did it come from?"

Madame Michel gazed at Ruhr's grotesque, lifeless form and spoke dreamily, "It was among the trash we collected tonight. I wonder which gentleman or lady discarded it…

"It had phlegm on it but was undamaged. Ruhr cleaned it and intended to sell it second-hand instead of throwing it away…

"After you mentioned the possibility of something unclean in the trash, Ruhr took it out and hid it in the washroom. He didn't dare to return to Room 302…"

Phlegm… Lumian felt he had discovered the root of the problem.

He let out a slow exhale and said, "Did Monsieur Ruhr touch the handkerchief again? Did you?"

"I don't know…" Madame Michel shook her head slowly. "He went to the washroom by himself. I didn't touch it…"

As expected… Lumian retrieved his gloves and put them on. He returned to the washroom and used Fallen Mercury to lift the white silk handkerchief. He carefully placed it in the white paper he had with him, folding it neatly.

Throughout the process, he made sure not to touch the handkerchief directly.

Afterward, Lumian wiped Fallen Mercury's blade with another piece of white paper and tossed the crumpled ball into the toilet bowl. He waited for it to soften and then flushed it away.

Stepping out of the washroom, he noticed Madame Michel standing silently by the door of Room 307, like a ghost wandering in the darkness.

As Lumian approached her, the old lady with white hair wore a pleading expression.

"It's almost dawn, Monsieur Ciel. Could you help me move Ruhr back to Room 302?"

Her voice still held a dreamy quality.

Lumian was taken aback. After a brief pause of five or six seconds, he replied, "Okay."

He entered Room 307 and carefully wrapped Monsieur Ruhr's body in the bedsheets, hoisting him onto his back.

With just a few steps, Lumian carried the lifeless form and placed it on the bed in Room 302.

Madame Michel, having squeezed through the trash, expressed her profuse gratitude before striding towards the wooden table and drawing back the curtains.

It was almost 6 a.m. As the first rays of dawn broke through the sky, dimming the crimson moonlight, Michel listened to the vendors outside the motel and fixated her gaze on Ruhr.

Lumian retreated from Room 302 and returned to the corridor, stepping out of the reach of the light. He leaned silently against the wall, not disturbing the serene scene.

After a few minutes, Madame Michel suddenly sprang into action.

She rummaged through the room, finding more banknotes and coins. Then, she hastened out of the room and descended downstairs.

Lumian didn't follow. He raised his right foot to the wall and leaned against the sleeping darkness of the wall.

As time passed, Madame Michel returned with an abundance of items.

There was a bottle of red wine, grilled cod, cured meat, meatloaf, soybean paste, hot sauce, and apples.

Without sparing a glance for Lumian, Madame Michel entered Room 302. She collapsed onto the bed and placed the food beside the decaying corpse.

After a moment's contemplation, she rose again and ignited the carbide lamp on the wooden table, filling the room with its glow.

Madame Michel once again lowered herself to the floor, picked up the meatloaf, and brought it to Ruhr's mouth. Smiling, she uttered, "Haven't you been craving meatloaf lately? I bought it for you today."

After allowing some of the oil to moisten the corpse's lips, Madame Michel took a bite of the meatloaf and savored it with closed eyes.

"It's delicious. How long has it been since we last ate? Two weeks, right?"

Having taken a few more bites of the meatloaf, Madame Michel seized the bottle of red wine and took a swig.

Mumbling, she continued, "Old Man, our vines have produced red wine. We needn't worry about what the future holds!"

Engaging in one-sided conversation with Ruhr's lifeless body, she continued to indulge in wine and various delicacies.

Outside the door, Lumian remained in the darkness, leaning against the wall as he silently observed the unfolding scene. He neither entered nor departed.

Soon enough, Madame Michel began to feel the effects of her intoxication. As a former barmaid, she began to sing loudly:

"Trier, a city dressed in gold,

"A ball that endures 'til dawn unfolds;

"Chicken roasted, dripping with oil's grace,

"A castle cake to fill each eager embrace.

"A bow-tied attendant glides 'mongst the guests,

"Merrily dancing with joy and delight.

"My beloved, hidden 'midst the crowd,

"Among them, a beacon shining bright.

"Among them, my love resides,

"In the Capital of Joy, forever Trier!"

Madame Michel rose unsteadily and stumbled towards the wooden table, gathering the banknotes in front of the carbide lamp.

In an instant, the cash caught fire and flames erupted on the table, emitting a bright yellow glow.

With her arms outstretched, Madame Michel shouted, "In the Capital of Joy, forever Trier!"

She retrieved the rope that had once bound the sack and climbed onto the wooden table, tying the rope firmly to the window frame with a tight knot.

In the flickering light of the fire, Madame Michel turned to face Ruhr, lying motionless on the bed. She positioned the knot around her neck and bent her legs.

The knot tightened, and Madame Michel's eyes bulged in her struggle for breath.

Outside the window, the sky grew brighter, casting a faint light that bathed a portion of the corridor. Lumian leaned against the wall, concealed in the shadows. With his hands in his pockets and his right foot propped up, he gazed impassively at Madame Michel, suspended from the window frame. He witnessed her mouth gradually open, her expression contort in pain, and her bent legs letting up upon her demise.

In the morning light, the corpse swayed gently.

…

At 6:35 a.m., 3 Rue des Blouses Blanches, Apartment 601.

Startled by the knocks on the door, Franca, her flaxen hair disheveled, wore a bitter expression as she rose from her slumber.

"I've only had three hours of sleep. Three hours!"

"Help me inspect the contents for any anomalies." Lumian ignored Franca's complaints and presented the handkerchief wrapped in white paper. "Be cautious. It might be infectious."

"Infectious?" Franca snapped out of her daze and retreated to her room, donning translucent, pale-yellow rubber gloves.

She carefully unwrapped the outer layer of paper, extracted the silk handkerchief within, and placed it on the glass coffee table.

Tapping her teeth while observing intently, Franca spoke with a solemn expression,

"There is indeed an issue. There are numerous small but active spirits lingering on it. They belong to the same category.

"I suspect it's a pathogen. It spreads through direct contact with the skin or even blood exchange. Based on your description, it's not highly contagious."

Although Lumian didn't comprehend the concept of a pathogen fully, he grasped the essence of Franca's explanation.

He fell into silence momentarily before saying, "Can you determine the owner of this handkerchief?"

"No problem. With a powerful medium present, as long as they don't possess strong anti-divination abilities, I can locate them." As Franca spoke, black flames flickered on her rubber gloves.

After "cleansing" the area, she removed her gloves and retrieved a makeup mirror. Hovering her left palm over the handkerchief, she stroked the mirror with her right hand.

Reciting a series of incantations in a hushed tone, her eyes darkened.

She repeated the divination statement.

"The owner of this handkerchief.

"The owner of this handkerchief…"

After several repetitions, the mirror emitted an aqueous glow, reflecting a figure in the darkness.

It was a slender young man with a pale complexion and an unhealthy appearance.

His curly dark-yellow hair framed his face, and his brown eyes conveyed an unmasked indifference. Clad in a black tailcoat, he clutched a white silk handkerchief. He coughed twice and expectorated into the fabric.

Lumian strained to capture the person's features, feeling a sense of familiarity wash over him. It was as if he had encountered this individual somewhere before.

After a brief recollection, it dawned on him.

This was a member of Hugues Artois's campaign team, the one who stood behind the red-haired woman!

Chapter 237: Concealment

"So? Do you know him?" Franca glanced at Lumian, seeking his insight.

Lumian shifted his gaze away from the mirror, its reflection gradually fading, and spoke with a deep voice, "He's one of Hugues Artois's men. I spotted him during the campaign."

Franca furrowed her brow, closing her makeup mirror and inquiring, "What happened?"

Lumian recounted the encounter between Ruhr and Michel, concluding, "There's something suspicious about this man."

Franca sighed, remarking, "They're already in such dire straits as scavengers, and yet they still have to face such a situation…"

She scoffed, adding, "Considering Lady Moon's endorsement of Hugues Artois as an open-minded individual, it wouldn't surprise me if he surrounds himself with peculiar characters."

Pausing to look at Lumian, Franca continued, "Hugues Artois is now a member of parliament. He'll have both visible and covert protection. If we make a move against him or his associates, we'll easily be tracked down. The consequences would be severe."

"Let's entrust this matter to the official Beyonders for further investigation. I can't guarantee much else. At the very least, the Inquisition's Purifiers and members of the Machinery Hivemind won't turn a blind eye to such affairs. They will find a way to uncover the truth and assess the situation," Franca suggested.

Lumian nodded slowly and inquired, "Then which Sequence or pathway could it be? Can phlegm transmit such a deadly disease?"

As he made his way from Auberge du Coq Doré to Rue des Blouses Blanches, Lumian diligently recalled the twenty-two paths of the divine detailed in Aurore's grimoires but found no match for the current circumstances.

Franca pondered deeply and said, "My understanding of the twenty-two paths of the divine is similar to your sister's, but I have a more comprehensive knowledge of certain aspects. I can only think of one pathway that fits the criteria, but it's of a higher level and exclusive to women. It doesn't align with the target's situation."

"Hmm… Considering we've encountered the Great Mother and the Blessed of the Mother Tree of Desire, could our target be someone blessed by another evil deity?"

"Heh heh, if it truly involves the faith of an evil god, the Beyonders from both Churches will undoubtedly intensify their efforts."

"Yes, Ruhr's death is peculiar indeed. As long as the investigating police aren't blind, they'll swiftly report it to their superiors, who will assign someone capable to handle the case."

Lumian acknowledged her words briefly, his expression softening.

After bidding farewell to Franca, he made his way back to Auberge du Coq Doré.

As he walked past the reception desk, Madame Fels rose to her feet, a mix of fear and flattery evident in her voice as she greeted, "Good morning, Monsieur Ciel."

A few days ago, the police had informed her that Monsieur Ive was believed to be involved in a cult and had become a wanted criminal. They had requested her to use the rental income to cover expenses and ensure the motel's smooth operation during this period. Additionally, they wanted her to keep a record of the accounts. Once the elections were over, they would settle the matter of Auberge du Coq Doré's ownership promptly.

Madame Fels felt uneasy, fearing that the new boss would dismiss her. Subconsciously, she tried to win Ciel's favor, hoping that a leader of the Savoie Mob would stand up for her when the time came. Whoever took control of Auberge du Coq Doré would not want to offend the corresponding mob, unless they had influential connections.

"Good morning," Lumian replied simply. He walked along the wall, covered in newspapers and pink paper to conceal stains, cracks, and bedbugs, making his way up to the third floor.

He had locked the door to Room 302 before the other tenants on the third floor had awakened, so as of yet, no one had discovered the lifeless bodies of Ruhr and Michel.

Madame Michel's singing before she took her own life had failed to disturb the neighbors. To those residing on Rue Anarchie, various noises during the night were commonplace. Singing, gunshots, brawls, shouting, and sporting activities were nothing worth paying attention to.

Lumian returned the silk handkerchief to its hidden spot in the washroom before pausing in front of Room 302. Extending his left hand clad in a black glove, he turned the handle and opened the creaking wooden door.

Madame Michel's lifeless form hung silently in the room. The aroma of food mingled with the surrounding stench of garbage, filling the space as the light grew brighter.

Lumian gazed at the scene for over ten seconds before slowly turning away, preparing to leave.

…

It was nearly eight o'clock when the two police officers arrived at Auberge du Coq Doré. They spotted Lumian, who had disguised himself using the Mystery Prying Glasses.

"Why is there another death?" grumbled the officer who had previously interrogated Lumian.

His face was rugged, lacking in handsome features, and bore the marks of age.

Lumian responded calmly, "One died of illness. I'm no doctor, unable to save him."

"And the other one?" the officer pressed for more information.

Lumian replied honestly, "She took her own life after the blow."

The older-looking policeman furrowed his brow and entered Room 302, accompanied by his partner.

The first sight that greeted them was Madame Michel's lifeless body hanging from the window frame. The officer instinctively covered his nose.

The place was far too filthy and foul-smelling!

Next, his gaze fell upon Ruhr's decaying corpse, observing the putrefying flesh and spilled blood.

"Son of a bitch, you call this an illness?" he couldn't help but turn to Lumian, his eyes filled with shock and fear.

Lumian briefly recounted the events of the previous night, omitting the fact that Ruhr's condition had worsened while he was at Roblin Clinic and had been revived by half a bottle of Healing Agent. Lumian attributed the credit to The Fool Pharmaceuticals' fever-reducing medicine.

He also mentioned his suspicion that the Ruhrs had encountered an infectious source within the pile of garbage they had collected the previous night, causing them to sleep in Room 307. Lumian brought up Madame Michel's mention of a silk handkerchief in the washroom as well.

The more the two officers listened, the quieter they became, their expressions slightly off.

After Lumian finished speaking, they hurried to the washroom to confirm the presence of the silk handkerchief.

The older-looking officer glanced at Ciel outside and whispered to his partner, "Another mysticism incident. Stay here and guard the scene. I'll report the situation."

The other officer nodded.

"No problem."

Lumian observed as they divided the tasks, patiently awaiting the arrival of the official Beyonders.

In less than half an hour, the older-looking policeman returned to Auberge du Coq Doré, alone.

Where are the official Beyonders? Lumian's eyes widened in surprise.

The older-looking policeman avoided Lumian's gaze and pulled his partner to the end of the corridor, engaging in a hushed conversation.

Lumian stood at a distance, straining his ears to catch their words, but they remained unintelligible.

After a while, the older-looking officer approached Lumian, his expression grave.

"We've preliminarily determined it as death due to illness and suicide."

No further investigation? Lumian's eyebrows twitched in disbelief.

The officer repeated what he had said when they had taken Flameng's body away. He donned gloves, carefully placed the silk handkerchief into a cloth bag, and secured it tightly.

Lumian silently observed as they removed the corpses, wrapped Ruhr's body, and placed him in a body bag. Numerous thoughts raced through his mind.

Even though he died in such a manner, the official Beyonders don't find it suspicious? No need for further investigation?

Or perhaps the police officer didn't report the matter, and the official Beyonders remain unaware?

Could someone have intervened and persuaded them to treat this as an ordinary death case, not involving any criminal offense?

"…"

With these thoughts swirling in his mind, Lumian quietly followed the officer carrying the two bodies to the carriage.

From a distance, he trailed them, detecting the lingering odor emanating from Ruhr's and Michel's bodies. He tracked them all the way to the entrance of the police headquarters in the market district.

Lumian furrowed his brow as he observed uniformed police officers entering and exiting the building.

His initial suspicion was that an officer from the police headquarters had halted the investigation, but he couldn't confirm the identity.

Even if he were to enter the police headquarters, given the circumstances and his own status, it would be impossible for him to trace their steps all the way to the relevant office. If he observed from outside, he wouldn't be able to discern who might be involved from the people coming out.

Lumian pondered the direction of his investigation once more.

Get Franca to use divination?

But there's no medium available…

Alternatively… Why did the officer stop the investigation? Was he aware that someone would be implicated, or had someone already alerted him to such matters beforehand?

If it's the latter, there's a high chance that he holds considerable influence within the parliamentarian's office…

Lumian's heart stirred as he left the entrance of the police headquarters and swiftly arrived outside the four-story khaki-colored building that housed the parliamentarian's office in the market district.

Taking cover in an alley across the street, he found himself in the company of a group of vagrants.

Before long, his eyes landed on an officer.

The officer was plump, in his early forties, with brown hair and blue eyes. Three-petaled silver-white sweet irises adorned his black epaulets.

This indicated that he was a chief inspector, one rank lower than a superintendent.

As Lumian watched the chief inspector enter the parliamentarian's office, a smile curled upon his lips.

…

In the khaki-colored four-story building, on the second floor…

Tybalt, his face pale and his hair curly and yellow, entered the office of the member of parliament's secretary.

The secretary, a man in his thirties with neatly combed back black hair and blue eyes hidden behind gold-rimmed glasses, possessed refined features and an air of sophistication.

He glanced at Tybalt, who was coughing, and tossed a cloth bag on the table. With a cold expression, he spoke, "We've recovered your handkerchief."

Tybalt, his dark-yellow hair curly, was attired in a black suit. He smiled and replied, "That was quick."

"You bastard!" the member of parliament's secretary cursed. "Do you not realize that your phlegm can spread diseases to others? Aren't you afraid of attracting the attention of the two Churches?"

Tybalt's brown eyes remained indifferent as he nonchalantly remarked, "At most, two or three commoners might die. No one would care about them. I've been sick for far too long without receiving a new boon. It frustrates me, and it makes me want to kill someone."

The member of parliament's secretary stared at him for a few seconds before admonishing in a deep voice, "If I hadn't taken precautions in advance, the Purifiers would have come looking for you. Your life is inconsequential. Don't jeopardize us! Tybalt, there will be no next time."

Tybalt shrugged, accepting the reprimand.

Chapter 238: Endure

Lumian sat in the alleyway across from the member of parliament's office, blending in with a group of tramps.

Having followed and observed carefully, he had pieced together the entire situation.

Within the office, someone had managed to find a reliable officer beforehand and instructed him to monitor cases of mysterious illnesses in their jurisdiction. This officer would keep things quiet, refraining from reporting to the corresponding official Beyonders. Furthermore, any evidence he discovered would be sent to the member of parliament's office.

This revelation implied that the sickly lad who had spat into the handkerchief and discarded it knew the consequences of his actions. As long as he kept his mouth shut, the member of parliament would never seek assistance from the police headquarters!

Lumian's gaze fixated on the khaki-colored four-story building. His hands unconsciously balled into fists, yet he restrained himself from taking any drastic measures.

After a while, he let out a slow exhale.

Just then, a familiar figure emerged from the door of the building that housed the member of parliament's office.

This man donned a silk top hat and wielded a dark cane. Clad in a sharp black suit, a thick brown beard adorned his mouth and chin. Deep wrinkles framed his dark-blue, almost black eyes.

It was Bono Goodville, the owner of Goodville Chemical Factory. He had left the celebratory banquet earlier than Gardner Martin—the boss of the Savoie Mob—the previous night. Occasionally, his photos would appear in certain newspaper reports.

Lumian averted his gaze and waited. Only when the chief inspector left the member of parliament's office unaccompanied and returned to the police headquarters did he rise from the alleyway teeming with tramps. He casually found a café and enjoyed a simple late breakfast.

Shortly before 11 a.m., he knocked on Franca's door once again.

"How did it go? Have the official Beyonders taken over?" Franca had already risen from bed and changed into her favorite white blouse and light-colored breeches.

Lumian shook his head. "No."

As he stepped into the apartment, he elaborated, "It was brushed under the carpet by a chief inspector from the police headquarters."

Franca comprehended the situation and couldn't help but scoff. "Even the folks at the member of parliament's office recognize the problems of spitting anywhere!"

Lumian found a spot on the sofa and sat down. He recounted everything, from the moment the police arrived to investigate the scene until the chief inspector entered the member of parliament's office.

Franca peered into his eyes, contemplating for a few seconds before speaking up,

"I understand that you find it hard to accept and that a fire might be raging in your heart. I truly empathize with you. Though that couple had no relation to you, you tried your utmost to save them, only to meet with failure. Many people can sympathize with such tragic encounters.

"But I must insist, be patient, endure, restrain yourself from rash actions or seeking revenge. These individuals are connected to the member of parliament. If anything were to happen, the situation would explode. It's beyond our capacity to bear."

Observing Lumian's silence and absence of emotional outburst, Franca let out a sigh of relief and continued, "I'll say it once more. It's best to leave this matter to the official Beyonders for investigation. Later, through my contacts, I'll inform them of this case and provide the suspect's identity and description.

"Although crucial physical evidence might have been lost by now and the body likely cremated hastily, as long as the official Beyonders discover the existence of abnormal pathway Beyonder powers in their jurisdiction, targeting the person I identified through divination, they will discover his problem sooner or later."

Upon hearing Franca's advice, Lumian nodded, his thoughts aligning with her suggestion.

"Let's go with that plan."

Franca relaxed, taking a moment to contemplate before speaking again.

"I won't divulge the precise details. I'll merely mention a peculiar ailment causing festering in the market district. There's suspicion that someone from the member of parliament's office might have wrapped a handkerchief around thick phlegm, and similar incidents may have been concealed by the police headquarters.

"If I don't do this, the official Beyonders might suspect you as the source of the information and thoroughly investigate you."

Lumian acknowledged her concerns with a curt response, signifying his agreement.

After bidding farewell to Franca and departing Rue des Blouses Blanches, he encountered Jenna on his way to Salle de Bal Brise.

"Well, if it isn't Celia?" Lumian greeted.

Showy Diva, dressed in a simple grayish-blue gown, had her brownish-yellow hair tied up in a natural bun. Her face lacked makeup, giving her an elegant appearance without her usual air of decadence.

Upon hearing Lumian call her by her real name, Jenna clenched her teeth and retorted,

"Just call me Jenna!"

Lumian sized her up.

"Did your mother hit you with a broomstick? Are you considering leaving the underground singer circle?"

"Dammit! You can't seem to wish anything good upon me, can you?" Jenna exclaimed. "My mother is a gentle and reasonable person. Why would she hit me with a broomstick?"

She smirked confidently.

"Initially, she opposed my singing in the dance halls, thinking it was dangerous and prone to debauchery. But after I explained how much I could earn each week without having to sleep with any man, she relented. She even said she'd come to Salle de Bal Brise after work today to watch me perform. Dammit, what am I going to do?"

Lumian deliberately asked, "If your mother saw you wearing a revealing dress and deliberately raising your leg while singing 'his touch is skilled indeed,' how would she react?"

Jenna tousled her brownish-yellow hair. "She'd storm the stage and beat me to a pulp!"

She mumbled to herself before suggesting, "I don't have to wear overly revealing dresses. Remember when I tried singing in a cocktail dress last time? The response was pretty good. It's been a while, but I can give it another shot. The key is the song selection. I'll discuss it with Franca. She has excellent taste. She even knows how to compose her own songs and write lyrics, though they're all rather peculiar…"

Lumian smiled and spoke up, "If that doesn't work out, I can have René organize a themed night event at Salle de Bal Brise. Tonight's theme will be love."

This would pair well with less suggestive love songs.

Jenna's eyes lit up. "That's a brilliant idea!"

She looked at Lumian awkwardly, offering her thanks.

"You're quite quick-witted. Uh, dammit, thank you!"

Without waiting for Lumian's response, Jenna instinctively glanced around and lowered her voice.

"I also told my mother that I'm good friends with Red Boots from the Savoie Mob and that she's protecting me. That's how I can sing at Salle de Bal Brise and stay safe. Remember, I came to you that day to negotiate a higher singing fee. And thanks to Franca, you agreed.

"If my mother asks you, just give this answer."

Lumian nodded and teased, "It's called collusion."

"It's called a harmless fib," Jenna replied gleefully. "Just hold onto that story until I've been singing for another year. I'll save up enough money for my tuition and pay off my debts."

Lumian glanced at the apprentice actress and pondered, "Haven't you thought about seeking proper compensation for that accident?"

"How?" Jenna's eyes widened in confusion. "The court hasn't reached a final verdict yet."

Lumian chuckled.

"Why wait for the court? Settling debts is protected by the Guardian of Businesses. We can handle it ourselves."

"That factory owner never said he wouldn't pay us. His constant appeals are just about the division of responsibilities and the amount of compensation…" Jenna eyed Lumian suspiciously. "Are you suggesting we force him to compensate us? That's illegal!"

"Illegal?" Lumian looked amused. "As a mob leader, I break the law every day. Didn't you want to assassinate Margot and avenge your friend? Did legality matter to you back then?"

Jenna's words faltered as she muttered,

"Margot is a mob leader who has committed countless crimes. Each one of them is deserving of the gallows."

"So you want to be his judge and jury?" Lumian smiled. "That factory owner may have done many wrongs. Let's mask our faces, infiltrate his house, tie him up, and make him compensate everyone. Alternatively, we can convince him to hand over the money quietly and split it among ourselves to avoid arousing suspicion during subsequent investigations."

Jenna wore a troubled expression.

"I'll think about it. I'll consider it."

Ciel lived up to his reputation as a mob leader. Discussing breaking the law came as naturally to him as eating and drinking.

Lumian didn't press the matter further. Since Jenna wasn't in a hurry, he saw no need to worry about her.

…

As evening approached, Lumian sat in the café on the second floor of Salle de Bal Brise, awaiting another night.

For now, he had nothing to occupy his time. All he could do was wait for Franca or the Boss to procure the additional ingredients for the Pyromaniac potion, the final step before his breakthrough to Sequence 7.

"Boss, what would you like to have for dinner tonight?" Louis asked Lumian as the sky grew darker.

Just as Lumian was about to respond, Jenna approached.

Showy Diva had transformed herself, donning a dress the color of roses. The hem of her gown appeared to defy gravity, resembling an inverted flower.

Her long, brownish-yellow hair was fashioned into a simple bun, with most of it cascading smoothly over her shoulders. Her makeup was subtle, accentuating her complexion and striking features. A mole adorned the right side of her face, and she held a beautifully patterned fan in her hand.

This left Louis and Sarkota dumbfounded. They could hardly believe that this was the same "Little Minx" Jenna.

Jenna nervously asked Lumian, "Is this suitable?"

"Quite impressive." Lumian didn't discourage Jenna.

Suddenly, a deafening explosion echoed in the distance. The ground trembled visibly, and the café's glass windows rattled.

"Dammit, what's happening?" Jenna exclaimed, peering out of the window in shock.

Lumian stood up and made his way to the window. As he looked outside, he noticed the perplexed and flustered pedestrians.

In the distance, a plume of black smoke billowed from the south.

"Find out what's going on," Lumian instructed Louis.

Once Louis departed, Jenna approached Lumian, her gaze fixed on the dark smoke rising from the southern part of the market district. Anxiousness and concern filled her.

After some time, Louis returned to the café and reported to Lumian, "Boss, there was an explosion at the Goodville Chemical Factory."

A thud interrupted the conversation as Lumian turned to see Jenna's fan fall to the ground.

Jenna appeared to lose her spirit as she murmured, sounding disoriented, "My mother, my mother is there…"

Chapter 239: Fighting Fire

Before she could finish, Jenna snapped out of her daze. Adorned in a rose-colored dress that hugged her slender frame, she hurried towards the staircase and descended.

Witnessing this, Lumian motioned for Louis and Sarkota to maintain order in Salle de Bal Brise before giving chase.

Anxiety and fear filled Jenna's face, her expression teetering on the edge of collapse.

She made no attempt to conceal her Beyonder identity. She exerted every ounce of her strength, as if she intended to soar through Avenue du Marché and into the streets leading south of the market district.

Only the darkness of the sky and the unlit gas street lamps, combined with the chaos caused by the panicked pedestrians after the explosion, prevented anyone from noticing the extraordinary speed at which the woman ran.

Lumian swiftly caught up to her, his pace surpassing hers. He urgently tapped her shoulder and said, "Take to the shadows!"

Determined to reach Goodville Chemical Factory as swiftly as possible, Jenna ran a distance before comprehending Lumian's meaning. She altered her course slightly and darted towards the dimly lit area cast by the unilluminated street lamps, blending in seamlessly.

Assassins possessed the ability to conceal themselves within shadows.

Jenna's emotions surged, making it difficult for her to maintain control. Additionally, sprinting at full speed weakened the effectiveness of this ability. At times, she would become visible, and at others, she would vanish.

Nevertheless, compared to before, she managed to avoid drawing much attention from passersby.

Lumian ran alongside the shadows, paying no heed to the perplexed gazes directed his way, his nostrils filled with the lingering scent of Jenna's perfume.

Pushing his Hunter's speed to its limits, he left observers dumbfounded.

Certainly, such behavior would arouse suspicion, but he paid it no mind.

As the two Beyonders endowed with enhanced physiques raced at full tilt, they arrived at Rue Saint-Gerre near Trier's city walls within a mere ten minutes.

The area was teeming with factories, and the sky was shrouded in dusky smoke tinged with a yellowish hue, obscuring the fading glow of the sunset.

Emerging from the shadows, Jenna caught sight of the blazing metal container—Goodville Chemical Factory was engulfed in flames, with firefighters battling desperately to extinguish the inferno and rescue those trapped inside.

Some of the rescuers wore peculiar masks adorned with elongated, pointed beaks, while others sported mechanical octopuses on their faces. Several donned black helmets that appeared to consist of multiple layers. The commonality among them was the presence of apparatuses resembling steam backpacks, albeit with significant differences. Thick rubber hoses extended from the contraptions, connecting to the "masks."

Without a moment's hesitation, Jenna rushed for Goodville Chemical Factory, where sporadic explosions continued to erupt.

The pungent odor in the air threatened to overwhelm Lumian's sense of smell. He seized Jenna's shoulder and spoke in a deep voice, "Do you know which factory your mother is in?"

Jenna was taken aback. "I don't know."

"Have you come equipped to shield yourself from chemical contamination?" Lumian switched questions.

"No," Jenna replied, her confusion evident.

"Then are you attempting to commit suicide?" Lumian scolded. "Perhaps your mother has already been rescued. Let us first search the area where the injured are being attended to. Are you venturing inside to create further chaos for the rescue team?"

Jenna's heart churned with conflicting emotions. She yearned to rush to the chemical plant to find her mother, yet she couldn't deny the logic in Lumian's words.

After Lumian pulled her back, she followed him with a vacant mind for a few paces. Then, her senses returned, and she sprinted toward Église du Sifflet, not far from Rue Saint-Hilaire.

It stood as the grand cathedral of the Church of the God of Steam and Machinery in Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman.

Jenna had witnessed the rescued victims being carried there.

In a matter of seconds, she and Lumian arrived at the square outside the cathedral.

It was teeming with workers from Goodville Chemical Factory, groaning in agony. However, a significant number of them lay unconscious, and some no longer drew breath.

Doctors and nurses, clad in white coats, maneuvered through the crowd, feverishly providing first aid. They guided those deemed salvageable to a two-story carriage stationed at the square's periphery, adorned with various coats of arms or Sacred Emblems. From there, they transported them to several major hospitals in Quartier de Noël.

Jenna's body involuntarily quivered as her gaze swept over the lifeless bodies and injured individuals, fearing what she might witness.

Lumian seized her arm and guided her across the square, in search of Elodie.

The gas lamps lining the square cast a rudimentary glow, granting them a modicum of illumination.

After a few minutes, Lumian's keen Hunter eyesight detected a wounded figure whom he suspected to be Elodie.

Upon receiving the news, Jenna dashed over, crouched down, and studied the unconscious person's face.

The injured individual's golden wig had mostly been singed away, exposing her flaxen hair, now blackened by the flames.

Her eyes, adorned with smudged eye shadow, remained tightly shut, her countenance marred by soot. Burns covered her body, and her lips bore an unnatural blue tinge. It was none other than Elodie, the cleaner at Auberge du Coq Doré—Jenna's mother.

"Mom! Mom!" Jenna's strength evaporated, and she crumpled beside Elodie.

Realizing her mother's unconscious state, occasionally punctuated by twitches, Jenna abruptly rose to her feet and muttered to herself, "We need a doctor. We must get her to a hospital without delay!"

Having confirmed the victim's identity, Lumian focused on assessing Elodie's luck and deduced that it was dire. Even if she were swiftly transported to the hospital, her chances of survival seemed slim.

Swiftly, he seized Jenna and spoke in a solemn tone, "Help me shield her from prying eyes."

Jenna regarded him with astonishment. Infused with his composed demeanor, she turned her body to block the area on Elodie's left side.

"I possess a healing agent from mysticism. Let us first test its efficacy," Lumian explained in a hushed tone as he circled around to Elodie's right side, his back serving as a barrier for her other flank.

A healing agent from mysticism… Jenna's eyes sparkled, a glimmer of hope illuminating her face.

Intently, Jenna watched as Lumian produced an iron-colored metal canister, unscrewed the cap, and poured its contents into her mother's mouth.

After more than ten seconds, Elodie appeared to regain some consciousness and swallowed the curative liquid.

Observing this, Jenna felt a slight wave of relief wash over her. She instinctively sensed that her mother's condition had improved marginally.

Time seemed to stretch unbearably, suffocating her. A minute felt like an eternity.

Finally, she witnessed the burns on Elodie's body start to heal at an astonishing pace, and the bluish tint on her lips gradually faded.

Jenna looked up at Lumian, her astonishment palpable.

Countless words clamored to escape her lips, but they remained lodged there, unable to form coherent utterances.

Lumian met her gaze and nodded. He whispered, "This agent works wonders in treating external injuries and alleviating ailments caused by chemical fumes. It can transform near-fatal wounds into severe injuries, severe injuries into minor ones, and minor injuries into complete recovery.

"Your mother suffered severe injuries earlier. For now, her life is no longer in immediate danger. However, she will require extensive treatment in the days to come. Otherwise, her condition may deteriorate."

Upon hearing the words "no longer in immediate danger," Jenna's vision blurred.

She had suppressed her tears, determined not to let them hinder her search and her mother's treatment.

But now, tears streamed down her face. She raised her hands, clumsily wiping them away, and muttered incoherently, "Thank you… Thank you…"

Amidst her words, distant cries reached their ears.

Relatives of the deceased had arrived.

Just as Lumian was about to offer a jest to lighten the mood, a muffled thunder resounded in the air.

Rumble!

Instinctively, Lumian looked up and beheld a thick dark cloud looming over Rue Saint-Hilaire, where flames still flickered and explosions echoed.

The cloud wasn't expansive, enshrouding only a few streets.

Silver-white lightning streaked across the sky, accompanied by muted thunderclaps that reverberated through everyone's hearts.

Torrential rain poured down, concentrated over Rue Saint-Hilaire and Goodville Chemical Factory.

The grayish-black smoke tinged with yellow swiftly dissipated, settling to the ground. The flames were swiftly extinguished, and no further explosions occurred.

As swiftly as it had arrived, the storm dissipated. The dark clouds dispersed, and the setting sun on the horizon cast a fiery glow.

Within the golden-red light, a behemoth soared above Rue Saint-Hilaire.

It was a dark gray airship, its elongated and circular balloon emitting a loud buzzing sound.

At the rear of the hull, paddlewheels spun frenziedly, while numerous cannon muzzles and bomb ports adorned its surface. At that moment, a translucent turquoise liquid rained down upon Goodville Chemical Factory below.

The acrid stench in the air began to subside.

Are the authorities resolving the catastrophe? The dark clouds, the lightning, and the rain didn't seem natural. Could they be the work of a Beyonder or Sealed Artifact? It almost resembled the handiwork of a deity… Lumian withdrew his gaze, a tinge of astonishment in his eyes.

Jenna had also witnessed what had just happened, but her focus remained fixed on her mother's injuries, not dwelling too deeply on what had transpired.

Elodie's burns had mostly healed, leaving behind only a few charred remnants. Her breathing had stabilized, and although her lips remained pale, it didn't seem to cause much concern to those around.

The curative agent had taken full effect, bringing stability to her condition.

Jenna closed her eyes and absentmindedly wiped her face.

At that moment, a voice nearby called out, "Celia!"

Jenna glanced to the side and waved her hand. "Julien, over here!"

A young man, standing nearly 1.75 meters tall, swiftly made his way to Elodie's side. Clad in a grayish-blue worker's uniform, he had flaxen-colored hair and eyes that mirrored Jenna's blue hues. His features were rather pleasing to the eye.

He looked at Elodie with concern and asked hurriedly, "How's Mom?"

Jenna pursed her lips and replied, "She sustained serious injuries, but she'll pull through."

Relief washed over Julien, who then cast a curious glance at Jenna.

"Why are you dressed like that… And who is he?"

Only then did Jenna realize she was wearing a rose-colored gown. Hastily, she explained, "I came straight from the theater. This is my friend, Ciel. He has been a great help."

"Thank you," Julien sincerely expressed his gratitude to Lumian.

Lumian nodded and advised, "Fetch a doctor and arrange for a carriage to take her to the hospital immediately. Otherwise, her condition may worsen."

"Alright." Julien dashed off to find the nearest doctor and nurse.

Lumian turned to Jenna and said, "If you can't secure a carriage promptly, hire one yourself."

Jenna nodded, her gaze filled with gentle concern as she looked at her unconscious mother. She whispered, "I owe you my gratitude this time…"

Chapter 240: Bewitchment

Lumian cast a contemplative gaze at Jenna, his lips forming a tight line.

"You lack the awareness of an Assassin and the understanding that you've stepped into the realm of mysticism. Had you possessed such insight, you might have joined mystical gatherings through Franca and procured valuable resources in the past month or two. Though they may not rival the potency of my healing agent, it would have been a proactive step instead of watching your mother's condition deteriorate."

Jenna, instead of erupting in a fit of humiliation and resorting to vulgar retorts, remained silent for a few moments before curtly acknowledging his words.

This response left Lumian at a loss. He clicked his tongue and spoke again.

"Of course, considering your financial constraints and the weight of debts and tuition fees, even if you were to participate in these mysticism gatherings, you wouldn't be able to afford much. It would be more of an opportunity to earn money or valuable items by accepting commissions."

Just then, Jenna's brother, Julien, arrived with a doctor and two nurses.

The doctor glanced at Elodie with a puzzled expression and inquired, "I recall that there was no need to resuscitate her…"

"You remembered incorrectly," Lumian calmly interjected.

The doctor, overwhelmed by the influx of injured patients, had his memories tangled and disorganized. Upon hearing Lumian's remark, he assumed he must have mistaken the person. Consequently, he swiftly tended to Elodie's remaining external injuries and arranged for her to be carried into the carriage, awaiting transportation to the hospital.

…

Connected to Quartier de Noël and the bustling market district, stood Passy Bridge, one of the five bridges that stretched over the mighty Srenzo River in the city of Trier.

Nestled beside Passy Bridge was the Holy Palace Hospital, generously funded by the Eternal Blazing Sun Church. Elodie, a devout follower of the Eternal Blazing Sun, had been admitted to this renowned establishment. Placed on the top floor of the white six-story building, she shared a ward with five other patients.

Jenna watched as doctors and nurses meticulously drew blood, conducted examinations, and administered intravenous drips. A soft sigh escaped her lips.

"The hospital has undergone quite a transformation in the past few years…"

"Oh?" Lumian was puzzled.

Jenna's expression darkened as she replied, "A few years ago, when my father and the others were brought to the hospital, the more severe cases were immediately taken to the operating room. Those with lesser injuries were simply bandaged and given medication to gauge its effectiveness. There was no blood being drawn, and the examinations were rudimentary. It's completely different now. The entire process seems to have changed."

"That's a good thing." Lumian nodded.

It looked more professional.

As the two spoke in hushed tones, Jenna's brother, Julien, diligently assisted the doctors and nurses. He answered inquiries about the patients' normal physical conditions, aided in moving IV stands, and was dispatched to the pharmacy as needed.

However, even after the medical professionals in their white coats had concluded their tasks, he had yet to return.

The doctor overseeing Elodie's care approached Jenna, holding a writing board, and observed her rose-colored gown. His expression softened.

"Is Elodie your mother?" he inquired.

"Yes," Jenna confirmed with a nod.

The male doctor pondered for a moment before speaking, "Your mother's condition is better than I anticipated. It seems surgery may not be necessary at this time. Of course, this assessment is preliminary and contingent upon the results of the tests we conducted.

"That's some good news. On the other hand, your mother has suffered severe burns. She may need to remain hospitalized for months, half a year, or even longer. Even if she recovers, she will likely be in a weakened state.

"The Church's philanthropic foundation will cover the initial two days of treatment. The remaining expenses will be deducted once the accident insurance from the factory is settled. However, you must be prepared to bear the subsequent costs yourself. It won't be a small sum. I must caution you not to have excessive expectations of the accident insurance. From my experience, it typically takes an average of three to five years to obtain compensation. You must understand that our Intis laws tend to favor factory owners and bankers in order to protect their interests."

Jenna didn't hesitate for a moment.

"I will ensure my mother's full recovery."

Jenna had already contemplated the possibility of borrowing money from both Franca and Lumian if she found herself in need of a substantial sum. She was willing to repay them in installments at a later date. Whether it meant making monthly or weekly payments for the treatment, she was prepared to cut back and save, reducing her previous debt payments, while also relying on her income as a part-time underground singer.

However, this meant that her plan to remain an underground singer for just one year, as she had initially intended, would need to be extended. It seemed she might have to continue as an underground singer for two, or even three, years.

The doctor briefly assessed Jenna's appearance and attire before giving her the necessary instructions.

"Take this form and make a payment of 200 verl d'or at the payment counter on the first floor."

200… Jenna breathed a sigh of relief. She signed the form under her real name, Celia Bello, and took it with her as she descended the stairs.

On her way down, she glanced at Lumian, who was by her side, and hesitated before speaking.

"I-if I ever find myself in need of a large sum for medical fees in the future, I think I would like to borrow from you."

Jenna had always been a stubborn individual with her own principles. In the past, when she worked tirelessly to earn money in various dance halls within the market district, the thought of borrowing from Franca or asking for her help in securing an easy and lucrative part-time job had never crossed her mind. But now, for the sake of her mother, Elodie, she was willing to let go of her stubbornness in this regard.

Although Lumian had already "squandered" more than 700 verl d'or on himself and received an advance from the proceeds he could obtain from Salle de Bal Brise, he showed no signs of concern. He replied nonchalantly, "Okay."

Jenna regarded him suspiciously.

"I thought you might hesitate for a moment. Franca mentioned that you needed a significant sum of money for something important."

Lumian chuckled.

"That's for advancing and purchasing the main ingredient for Pyromaniac. However, it doesn't prevent me from lending you money. As a Beyonder and the leader of the Savoie Mob, even if I don't have a coppet at the moment, I can assist you in acquiring the necessary funds.

"The simplest solution would be to have René sign a long-term contract with you, advancing you 10,000 verl d'or. Then, 50% of your income from the dance hall will be deducted each day to repay the loan in installments. Once it's fully repaid, the contract will naturally be terminated."

Jenna fell silent for a moment, realizing that something that had deeply troubled her was easily resolved in Ciel's presence.

Lumian glanced at her and smirked.

"As an Assassin, you shouldn't fret about medical expenses like these. If you aim to advance in the future, you'll need tens of thousands in funds.

"You need to change your mindset now. Don't hold the law in such high regard. As you heard earlier, Intis's laws don't protect the poor. We can only protect ourselves.

"Once you've come to terms with this, we'll kidnap the former factory owner and extract enough cash from him. After the verdict is announced and he pays the compensation for your father's accident, you can donate the money to someone in need.

"As long as we execute it cleanly, combined with Franca's anti-divination measures, the likelihood of success is exceedingly high. It won't leave a trace behind. It's improbable for a factory owner like him to have Beyonder bodyguards."

Jenna's heart raced at his words. She hesitated for a moment before speaking.

"It just doesn't sit right with me…

"Dammit, are you the Instigator, or will I become the Instigator? How are you so adept at bewitching people?

"Eventually, you'll have to face the consequences of breaking the law, won't you?"

Lumian smirked once again.

"I didn't finish. We only do what's necessary. We can't act recklessly. Not only would it bring danger, but it could also increase the risk of losing control. Kidnapping the factory owner is to reclaim the compensation your family deserves."

Jenna fell silent once more.

Realizing they were about to reach the first floor, she hurriedly said, "I need to use the washroom."

By the time she emerged from the washroom, she had a stack of 200 verl d'or notes in her hand.

Seeing Jenna pay the initial treatment fee, Lumian glanced at her rose-colored gown and commented,

"You can't tend to a patient dressed like this. I'll return to the dance hall and fetch your clothes. I'll also help you secure some time off.

"If your mother's condition worsens, come to me or Franca immediately."

Having just examined Elodie's luck and confirmed that her condition was no longer critical, though still uncertain of improvement, Lumian found it somewhat chaotic. It might have been dependent on the hospital's treatment effectiveness.

"Okay." Jenna pursed her lips and nodded.

…

On the second floor of Salle de Bal Brise.

Just as Lumian was about to inform Manager René about Jenna and ask him to reschedule tonight's performance, Louis approached him.

Louis cast a quick glance around and lowered his voice.

"Boss, about half an hour ago, Boss sent someone to deliver a bag of items to the financial safe. He said it was for you."

Something from Boss… Supplementary ingredients for the Pyromaniac potion? As expected of a Mid-Sequence Beyonder of the Hunter pathway… Lumian nodded slightly, pleased, and passed through the café, entering the second-floor corridor.

Upon opening the safe, he felt a burning sensation.

Inside the grayish-white cloth bag were three glass bottles. One contained bubbling crimson blood, from which flames burst with each bubble. Another held blood-colored powder at the bottom, while the third contained a finger-sized stone emitting a red fluorescent light.

Fire Salamander blood, Redcrown Balsam powder, Magma Pyroxene… Indeed, supplementary Pyromaniac ingredients… Lumian picked up the items, satisfied.

…

3 Rue des Blouses Blanches, outside Apartment 601.

Lumian, having left Salle de Bal Brise, headed straight to Franca's place. He intended to borrow 4,000 verl d'or, using his share of the Harvest Sacrifice as collateral.

Upon opening the door and seeing Lumian, Franca clicked her tongue and remarked, "Did you hear? There was an explosion at a factory in the southern part of the market district. Numerous incidents have been occurring in the market district lately, giving me the sense that a storm is brewing."

Upon hearing this, Lumian instantly recalled something.

He spoke in a deep voice, "There was an accident at the Goodville Chemical Factory. This morning, the owner of the factory paid a visit to the member of parliament's office."

Chapter 241: Indomitable Spirit

After hearing Lumian's words, Franca exclaimed, "Dammit! Are we dealing with those lot again? What's Hugues Artois up to?"

"I can't quite fathom the purpose behind causing a chemical plant explosion either… Maybe it's just a coincidence. Bono Goodville and Hugues Artois have quite a good relationship. It's not unusual for him to pay a visit, but it just so happens that there was an explosion at the chemical plant today," Lumian pondered before speaking.

He couldn't dismiss every coincidence in life, but he also couldn't treat each one as a problem.

Franca nodded thoughtfully and remarked, "True enough.

"However, I must remind you that the chemical plant explosion isn't meaningless. It may have already resulted in numerous deaths, and that holds great significance for certain dark rituals. The living are always the third-best sacrifice."

"Could this also be part of a ritual?" Lumian was somewhat taken aback.

Franca corrected him, "There's no real distinction between using a knife to sacrifice someone and using a chemical plant explosion to kill the intended victim as part of a ritual for the deity the host desires to invoke. Your understanding of ritualistic magic is still too narrow. Some rituals may indeed require such explosions to be effective."

It's akin to the Substitution Spell, requiring a substitute to assume the identity to be replaced for an extended period before the ritual. Lumian grasped the idea.

Franca let out a sigh.

"This is merely my conjecture. It doesn't necessarily mean it's true. However, we must alert the official Beyonders to be vigilant for signs of a ritual and to investigate the role of the member of parliament's office in this catastrophe.

"F*ck, if that bloke wasn't a member of parliament, I'd have captured him tonight, strung him up from the ceiling, and given him a thrashing. I'd interrogate him about his intentions and his connection to those heretics.

"Sigh, in that explosion just now, countless individuals lost their parents, spouses, siblings, or children. I wonder how many people are praying, worrying, and suffering for their injured loved ones."

"Like Jenna," Lumian interjected.

Franca was momentarily stunned. "What did you say?"

"Jenna's mother works at the Goodville Chemical Factory. Didn't you know?" Lumian inquired.

Franca was taken aback before asking with concern, "How is her mother?"

Lumian briefly recounted how he had accompanied Jenna to Rue Saint-Hilaire in search of Elodie and had used the last bit of healing agent to save her from near death.

Franca let out a sigh of relief and expressed in anguish, "Why wasn't I there! Why wasn't I there!"

Lumian's lips twitched as he calmly said, "You still have a chance. Jenna is fretting over the subsequent medical expenses."

"I'll go to the Holy Palace Hospital right away!" Franca's eyes lit up, and she was about to dash out of the apartment.

Lumian hastily called out to her, "Don't forget to bring the Poison Spur Mob's healing agent with you. I'm concerned that her condition might worsen."

Just like Monsieur Ruhr.

Without waiting for Franca's response, he added, "Also, help Jenna bring the dress she wore this morning."

"Right… I need to borrow 4,000 verl d'or from you and offer half of the Harvest Sacrifice as collateral. I've already gathered the supplementary ingredients for the Pyromaniac potion."

"So soon?" Franca exclaimed, taken aback. "I haven't even begun searching for you!"

Lumian smirked once again.

"Last night, I ran into Boss at the entrance of the member of parliament's office and confessed my plans to advance and about the advance on my pay. I requested he keep an eye on the supplementary ingredients for the Pyromaniac potion."

The more Franca listened, the more complicated her expression became.

"You're more cunning than I realized, kid… Confiding in Gardner about this matter is indeed the best approach.

"However, can't you consider me? Don't you know that I also wanted to help you gather the supplementary ingredients for the Pyromaniac potion through Gardner? He's a Sequence 6 Conspirer or a Sequence 5 Hunter, and he has a group of Hunters working with him. He won't be lacking in such things. Luckily, I haven't approached him in the past two days. Otherwise, he would have surely suspected that we were having an affair."

Lumian had always assumed Franca would seek materials through the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society. He hadn't expected her to approach Gardner Martin out of convenience and proximity, almost exposing their secret relationship.

Franca returned to her room and retrieved a banknote worth 4,000 verl d'or from somewhere. She handed it to Lumian and solemnly reminded him, "Once you obtain the main ingredient, don't rush to concoct the potion. You must ensure that your condition can withstand the impact of your advancement. Otherwise, it's best to delay it for a while. The main ingredient is much easier to preserve than the potion itself."

"I'm well aware," Lumian replied calmly.

After a moment of thought, he asked, "Before you go to Jenna, it would be wise to inform the authorities. The explosion just happened, so there might be some clues left behind."

"Yes," Franca agreed.

Before bidding farewell, Lumian asked curiously, "If the living are the third-best sacrifice, what are the second-best and the best?"

"The second-best are beings with Beyonder characteristics. And the best…" Franca smiled. "They are demigods."

…

Quartier de Noël, sixth floor of Holy Palace Hospital.

As Jenna returned to the ward from the washroom, she spotted her brother Julien assisting their mother, Elodie, in tucking the corners of the blanket.

Elodie remained unconscious, but her complexion showed signs of improvement.

Julien stood up and beckoned his sister to the side. He whispered, "Celia, don't fret about the upcoming medical expenses. I'll find a solution. Keep attending your acting lessons at Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons."

Jenna's heart swelled with gratitude as she inquired, "Did the doctor talk to you?"

"Yes, he just did." Julien nodded with solemnity.

Jenna pressed her lips together and assured him, "Don't worry. My friends have agreed to lend me money. I can repay them over three years with minimal interest. With my earnings as an underground singer and your wages, if we are frugal, it should be enough without affecting our respective apprenticeships."

There was a moment of silence as Julien pondered, before he finally spoke, "That Ciel?"

"Yes, he's one of them, but I have other friends too. And Franca, the 'Red Boots' I mentioned last night." Jenna felt the need to clarify the situation, fearing her brother might resort to extreme measures.

She recalled how two years ago, Julien had contemplated secretly selling himself to Balam-Paz Import and Export Corporation, unbeknownst to their mother, in order to become a disposable mercenary and repay all their debts, allowing Jenna to pursue her dreams as an apprentice actress. Fortunately, that plan had been thwarted in the end.

Just as Julien was about to respond, his gaze fell upon a tall, slender woman standing at the ward's entrance.

She donned a blouse, light-colored breeches, a thin black-on-white checkered tweed top, and vibrant red boots. Her long flaxen-colored hair was tied back in a simple ponytail. With eyebrows that extended toward her temples and eyes that sparkled with energy, she exuded an irresistible charm.

Jenna eagerly approached her.

"Franca."

…

Rue des Blouses Blanches, inside the safe house.

Lumian, having acquired Sun Star and currently distilling its extract, took a seat and awaited Madam Magician's response.

On the desk in front of him, Fire Salamander blood, Magma Pyroxene powder, and Redcrown Balsam powder were neatly arranged.

Just as the Sun Star extract was about to be completed, the arm-height "doll" dressed in a light-gold gown, with exquisite yet slightly peculiar facial features, appeared on the windowsill.

It placed a metal biscuit tin on the windowsill and sniffed the air.

"Use this extract the next time you summon me."

"Alright." The request from the other party was so unusual that Lumian was momentarily taken aback. His instinctive response was the only thing he could offer.

In an instant, the puppet messenger vanished before his eyes. Lumian opened the bright silver biscuit tin and beheld the small crimson "heart" burning silently within.

Without hesitation, he grabbed a prepared beer mug and dropped in the Pyromaniac Beyonder characteristic.

Immediately afterward, Lumian poured over 50 milliliters of Fire Salamander blood into the cup.

With a sizzling sound, the crimson liquid evaporated, transforming into a mist of blood that swirled around the "heart."

The Pyromaniac Beyonder characteristic softened considerably, its surface rippling like the water of a lake.

Following the potion formula's instructions, Lumian added Magma Pyroxene powder, Redcrown Balsam powder, and Sun Star extract into the beer mug. As he did so, the blood mist surrounding the "heart" abruptly shrank, giving rise to a yellowish liquid with red bubbles.

In Lumian's eyes, this was the Pyromaniac potion.

Rather than consuming it immediately, Lumian closed his eyes.

In his mind, he conjured images of Flameng's lifeless body dangling from a window frame, the lunatic's will inscribed on a sheet of white paper. He envisioned Monsieur Ruhr, his body ravaged by decay. He pictured Madame Michel, drowning her sorrows in drink and singing boisterously, only to ultimately meet her demise by hanging herself in the morning light. He also saw the cries that echoed through Sifflet Square.

Then, he glimpsed his own stubborn and determined self as a wanderer. He witnessed his unwavering spirit, refusing to surrender despite the repeated blows. He envisioned an alternative outcome for himself. He witnessed the sorrow, anger, powerlessness, and oppression that came with pursuing hope, only to be engulfed by darkness.

The mocking laughter of fate resounded in his ears, igniting a raging fire within his heart.

If this is the unavoidable conclusion;

If this is the fate of insignificance,

If efforts yield no fruit, and hope remains forever out of reach;

Then I shall fight with every ounce of my being to change it all!

Even if there is no light ahead, and hope dwindles to a mere flicker, I will fight until my last breath!

Motherf*cker member of parliament!

Motherf*cker Guillaume Bénet!

Motherf*cker heretics!

Motherf*cker Termiboros!

Motherf*cker Inevitability!

Lumian's eyes snapped open as he solidified his final acting principle as a Provoker.

Provocation symbolized indomitable spirit!

He didn't need this for digestion assistance. With a fire raging within his chest, he seized the beer mug and guzzled down the liquid.

It burned from his mouth, down his esophagus, into his stomach, and seared into his heart.

Chapter 242: Pyromaniac

Instantaneously, Lumian felt an inferno raging within him. The scorching agony seared through his body and soul, engulfing him completely. This sensation was not alien to him. Whether it was the dire wounds inflicted during his pursuit of the flaming monster or the brink of losing control while receiving a boon, all had set him ablaze.

In this very moment, the tormenting fire failed to extinguish the blazing determination in his heart. He defied destiny, yearning to alter the course of events, to incinerate the oppressive flames of despair and desolation.

Instead of succumbing to the pain and collapsing to the ground, Lumian remained upright. Clenching his teeth and contorting his face, he refused to bow down.

Gradually, the agony became unbearable, and his body began to bend. Nevertheless, Lumian mustered all his strength to straighten his back, just as he had confronted Guillaume Bénet, the padre, and Termiboros, who had unleashed a cataclysmic calamity upon Cordu.

Step by step, he lowered his body and raised it again. The scent of singed flesh filled his nostrils, and the voice from infinity reverberated in his ears.

A familiar, excruciating pain pierced his skull, eliciting an involuntary cry. Cracks formed on his skin, and molten liquid akin to lava coursed beneath.

Desperately, Lumian leaned on the desk before him, seeking support.

The spot he touched promptly blackened and charred, permeating the air with the scent of burning timber.

His instinctive scream was stifled. His mouth hung open, expelling searing gas.

Instead of immediately uncorking the vial of gray amber perfume, he relied on the fire within his chest to combat the mounting anguish and the increasingly hazy thoughts welling up from within.

Seconds ticked away. Lumian, with gritted teeth, sensed the flames within his chest surging forth, mingling with the inferno raging throughout his being.

Gradually, the manifold pains subsided, and his muddled thoughts gradually cleared.

Using his hands as support, Lumian hoisted himself up and directed his gaze towards the full-length mirror in the room.

Reflected in the looking glass, his blond locks retained a tinge of black, his attire reduced to tatters. His body bore scorch marks that swiftly scabbed over and fell to the floor, revealing his fair complexion.

Simultaneously, Lumian beheld two crimson flames ablaze within his blue eyes. It was only after striving to regain composure and still his racing heart that the flames gradually dissipated.

In the next second, In the next heartbeat, Lumian raised his right hand, manifesting a crimson flame in his palm.

He had triumphantly ascended to the Sequence 7 of the Hunter's path, emerging as a Pyromaniac!

From his palm, flames surged, intertwining with the original crimson hue, constantly compressing.

After a span of more than ten seconds, the fiery crimson transformed into an incandescent white. The temperature and explosive force it contained surged to greater heights.

I can wield the crimson flame directly or, by accumulating and compressing it for a duration, unleash an even more scorching white-hot blaze…
Lumian's palm appeared impervious to the scorching heat as he allowed the white-hot flame to silently burn.

Having already conducted a preliminary assessment of his condition and the mystical knowledge he had acquired, Lumian had gained a fairly comprehensive understanding of the superpowers bestowed upon a Pyromaniac.

First and foremost, a Pyromaniac's spirituality had seen a remarkable improvement, leading to a transformative shift in Lumian's Spirit Vision. No longer confined to a chaotic spectacle, he now possessed the ability to employ a more discreet and expeditious activation method. Moreover, he could finally perceive the hues and shades his sister had described, discerning the various components of the Ether Body.

This newfound insight proved invaluable to a Hunter, enabling Lumian to better grasp an adversary's physical state and thereby target them with greater precision.

Secondly, his instinct for danger had undergone significant enhancement. Gone were the days when he only sensed trouble at the very brink of eruption. Through careful observation of his surroundings and the assimilation of information, Lumian could now activate his intuition preemptively. Consequently, he could detect if he was being followed and employ his anti-tracking techniques more effectively and flawlessly.

Thirdly, his command over flames had brought with it a handful of accompanying spells.

At present, Lumian's primary ability involved controlling the flames that originated from within him or were conjured by his own hands. While he possessed an affinity for flames and combustible substances in his vicinity, his influence over them remained somewhat limited. It was possible that, upon digesting the Pyromaniac potion or advancing to a higher Sequence, corresponding changes might occur.

Furthermore, Lumian could employ the flames he created as weapons against his adversaries. However, once the flames left his body, they no longer fell under his dominion unless he had pre-invested a portion of his spirituality in them.

In essence, altering the trajectory of a fireball in mid-flight proved to be quite challenging, necessitating a supplementary expenditure of spirituality.

The control of flames could be categorized into seven distinct aspects:

Firstly, there was compression—a bombardment in the form of a fireball. The longer the compression lasted, the more flames gathered, resulting in a more potent strike.

Secondly, Lumian could ignite a layer of flames over his body, affording him a measure of defense against freezing effects, poisonous gases, and other forms of assault.

Thirdly, he could fashion various temporary weapons using flames, capable of inflicting scorching, cutting, and piercing damage. Depending on the time spent channeling the flames, this ability could be categorized as either crimson or blazing-white.

Fourthly, Lumian had mastered the art of delayed explosions. By employing additional spirituality and manipulating the structure, he could fashion a Flame Bomb that would detonate at a predetermined time, rather than immediately upon impact.

Fifthly, he possessed the power of area-of-effect attacks. By extending the reach of the flames instead of hurling them forth, Lumian could ensure precise control over their detonation, causing them to erupt at a desired location or manifest in different forms.

Sixthly, Lumian had honed the technique of Fire Infusion. Through close-quarters combat and the forceful clash of strength, he could gradually inject flames into an opponent's body before triggering their detonation.

Finally, the seventh aspect involved imbuing his weapon with fire damage.

The fire-type spells Lumian had acquired were instrumental in these various aspects, leveraging certain techniques to achieve effects that he could not ordinarily produce.

The spells at Lumian's disposal were as follows: Fire Raven, Blazing Spear, Wall of Fire, and Giant Fireball.

Of them all, the Fire Raven spell stood out as the most enchanting. With its aid, Lumian could swiftly condense a flock of flaming ravens around him, bestowing a fraction of his spirituality upon each avian form. This granted him a degree of control even after they departed from his body, enabling them to momentarily adjust their flight path and lock onto their intended targets.

Without this spell, Lumian, a recent convert to Pyromaniac, would need to expend at least three times his present store of spirituality and energy to achieve a similar outcome. Moreover, the Fire Ravens would possess a significantly more clumsy and rigid disposition.

Blazing Spear, on the other hand, entailed the rapid condensation of white flames, though they could only maintain the shape of a spear. Infused with spirituality, they could roughly guide Lumian's created fireball.

By utilizing the ground as a conduit and drawing upon its own essence, Wall of Fire summoned forth a pair of flaming serpents that slithered toward the enemy, erecting a scorching barrier around them.

Giant Fireball demanded a span of ten to twenty seconds, akin to the compression of numerous crimson fireballs into a single devastating blast.

While the Pyromaniac's flames originated from his physical form and primarily inflicted bodily harm, they were also capable of burning a Spirit Body. Lumian was no longer defenseless against creatures of a soul-like nature, though he still relied on external assistance.

Additionally, the potion's modifications had bestowed upon his body a remarkable resistance to flames. Even if doused in animal fat and subjected to the flames of a torch for half a day, the damage he suffered would be minimal. Nevertheless, the concussive force of a fireball's explosion could still harm him in a conventional manner.

Lumian held the belief that as he advanced to higher Sequences, his body might even merge with fire itself.

With a casual flick of his right hand, the blazing white flame dissipated into the air.

Then, with a firm grip, he summoned a longsword crafted from crimson flames, materializing it from thin air.

Lumian brandished the fiery blade a few times, his disappointment evident. He muttered silently to himself, It possesses the ability to harm the enemy, but it cannot block or parry…

The flaming sword lacked a tangible form. Lumian surmised that he would need to reach a higher Sequence before he could turn such a weapon corporeal.

He dismissed the flaming longsword and drew Hedsey's dagger.

As his fingers caressed the dagger's surface, a fiery blaze enveloped the blade.

Lumian tightened his grip on the hilt and executed a few thrusts with the dagger. He observed the rapid dissipation of red sparks in the air, creating an ethereal spectacle.

It can block and deal fire damage. Though it may lack scorching temperatures in this form, it remains highly useful.

The current problem lies in the fact that ordinary weapons cannot endure exposure to flames for long… Lumian pondered, nodding approvingly.

Having confirmed his Beyonder powers as a Pyromaniac, he swiftly organized his desk and donned a linen shirt, a brown jacket, and dark trousers.

Lumian cast a final glance at his reflection in the mirror, a smile curling upon his lips.

He placed the dark-blue cap upon his head, turned on his heel, and strode purposefully toward the door.

Crimson flames silently erupted in his wake, an ephemeral and blinding display.

…

On Avenue du Marché, outside the khaki-colored four-story building that housed the member of parliament's office,

Lumian once again found himself seated among the destitute at the alley opposite, quietly observing the steady flow of people entering and exiting the targeted establishment.

In the wake of the explosion at Goodville Chemical Factory, countless workers had tragically lost their lives, leaving many more injured. The entire city of Trier was abuzz with news reporters flocking to the scene. As a result, Hugues Artois's office remained aglow with gas-powered wall lamps, as his staff tirelessly attended to visitors with varied intentions.

The member of parliament had yet to return home, and his entourage naturally remained within the khaki-colored building. Every room seemed to radiate with illumination, brimming with activity.

Leaning against the wall of the street, Lumian observed the comings and goings within the member of parliament's office, his mind churning with contemplation.

He yearned to ignite a "fire"!

He yearned to "incinerate" the despicable scoundrel responsible for spreading disease!

He was fully aware of the dire consequences that awaited him. As a Pyromaniac, he understood that he alone was not yet strong enough to face off against the evil god's Blessed who surrounded Hugues Artois.

Yet, he simply longed to take action. He couldn't shake the feeling that no matter how fierce a conflagration may be, it all started with a single spark.

Chapter 243: Visit

Lumian's fury did not mean he would lose his composure—to just disguise himself and sneak into the member of parliament's office, where he would find the fellow who had dared to "casually spit" and incinerate him on the spot.

It wasn't a ridiculous scheme, but without enough information, taking such a risk could easily turn into suicide.

First and foremost, Lumian had no knowledge of the number or strength of the heretics present in the member of parliament's office.

He also had no idea how many protectors Bureau 8 or the two Churches had assigned to Hugues Artois, nor did he know their abilities.

Furthermore, he lacked precise details about the target's whereabouts or situation. Even if he managed to infiltrate the office successfully, finding the target would be no easy task.

Lastly, he hadn't yet devised a plan for sneaking in and, more importantly, a plan for a safe retreat.

Nevertheless, Lumian couldn't deny that the chaos caused by the Goodville Chemical Factory explosion provided an excellent opportunity for his infiltration.

For now, his temporary strategy was to be a patient hunter. He would trail the target silently, observing his movements and waiting for the perfect moment to strike.

Based on the target's status in Hugo Artois's campaign, Lumian surmised that the man couldn't be too powerful. He certainly didn't possess godlike abilities. Even if he were a Mid-Sequence Beyonder, he would likely be no higher than a Sequence 7.

Lumian wasn't overly concerned if his judgment was wrong and the target turned out to be a Sequence 6 or even Sequence 5. In fact, he believed that Mr. K would find the hunt for heretics quite intriguing!

Phew… Lumian breathed out slowly, his gaze fixed on the brightly illuminated khaki-colored four-story building. He continued to gather useful information for his upcoming operation.

As time passed, he noticed middle-aged scavengers carrying linen bags, sifting through the trash piled beside the building.

This sight made Lumian sigh, fueling the fire of determination in his heart.

In Trier, people couldn't scavenge just for the sake of it. Each scavenger had an employer, whether they worked full-time or part-time. They were assigned specific scavenging areas and were not allowed to cross boundaries. Violations often led to conflicts and violent encounters. As a result, Ruhr and Michel wished fervently that Hugues Artois would host banquets every day instead of wandering into areas where banquets were already being held, as those spots belonged to other scavengers.

The difference between full-time and part-time scavengers lay in their employment terms. Full-timers received a monthly salary from their employers, and the employers owned all the trash they collected. Occasionally, if they stumbled upon valuable or usable items, they might decide whether to surrender them or keep them for personal use. Part-timers like Ruhr and Michel didn't have a fixed salary. They scavenged in the morning and evening, delivering everything they found to a designated waste disposal site, typically owned by their employers.

These circumstances restricted street tramps to scavenging for food and clothing, with little opportunity to exchange their findings for money.

Lumian patiently waited until 9 p.m., observing as the number of guests visiting the member of parliament's office gradually dwindled. People stepped out onto the balconies for a smoke or a brief respite.

And then, his eyes widened as he spotted a figure.

Standing on the balcony of a second-floor room, there he was—the thin, pale man with curly dark-yellow hair and piercing brown eyes.

Dressed in a blue shirt, black vest, and a somber suit, complete with a bow tie, he held a cigarette, enveloped in a cloud of smoke, occasionally taking a drag. Lumian had seen him before in Franca's Magic Mirror Divination. It was the spitter.

Cough, cough, cough! A fit of violent coughing shook the frail young man, as if he wished to expel his lungs from his body.

Finally, he hacked up another glob of thick phlegm after some harrumphing.

Pulling out a handkerchief, he spat the viscous phlegm into it, wrapping it up and tucking it away in his pocket. He didn't discard it carelessly.

Lumian's eyes narrowed. He knows that his phlegm can transmit diseases as a result of mysticism.

As more people flocked to the balconies of their respective rooms, Lumian swiftly identified the familiar faces.

Member of Parliament Hugues Artois from the market district occupied the room at the top floor, boasting the largest balcony.

The red-haired woman resided on the same floor, right next door to him.

On the second floor, on the opposite end of the corridor from the spitter, was a man in his thirties with gold-rimmed glasses, a document always in hand. Every now and then, he would wander to the balcony to enjoy a smoke and the view, displaying a lack of concern for the aftermath of the Goodville Chemical Factory explosion.

The third floor housed a tall, muscular middle-aged man, occupying the central office.

Directly beneath Hugues Artois, on the fourth floor, was a refined young woman in a white shirt and a dark-blue coat. She shared the same side of the building as the man with gold-rimmed glasses, deliberately avoiding any proximity to the spitter.

Lumian observed closely and deduced that the rooms adjacent to the spitter's were part of a collective office, likely accommodating several employees.

This implied that the probability of them holding any significant status or possessing Beyonder powers was negligible.

So, the other heretics intentionally distanced themselves from the incessant coughing and spitting man. They believe the member of parliament's office is heavily guarded, and that individual possesses Beyonder powers. It's highly unlikely for an attack to be directed at him. True enough. If an assault were to occur in the member of parliament's office, the target would undoubtedly be Hugues Artois and not one of his subordinates. Only then would it be worth the risk… Lumian pondered this realization earnestly for a moment and suddenly sensed an opportunity emerging.

The dilemma now lay in how Lumian could infiltrate the member of parliament's office unnoticed, particularly given his conspicuous golden hair with a touch of black. After all, he didn't have Franca's help.

After careful consideration, Lumian devised a plan.

He departed from the vicinity of the office and made his way back to the safe house on Rue des Blouses Blanches.

Without hesitation, he set up an altar and offered a prayer to the great existence, seeking His protection.

Lumian firmly believed that since the embrace of an angel would shield him from the prying eyes of any deity, it definitely ensured sufficient anti-divination effects!

Just as before, he found himself bathed in the radiant brilliance and divine majesty of the angel. Overwhelmed by indescribable emotions, he witnessed cascades of luminous wings enveloping him.

Once he completed this ritual, Lumian pressed his hand to his head.

His golden and black hair erupted into flames, cascading down like withered grass until only a few hair roots remained.

Putting on his trusty dark-blue cap, he concealed his features behind the Mystery Prying Glasses. With his transformed appearance, Lumian left Rue des Blouses Blanches and ventured towards Avenue du Marché near Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman. There, he located a clothing store that didn't specialize in cheap garments.

The two shop assistants, a man and a woman, were taken aback when they saw a person dressed like a vagrant entering, unsure of how to react.

In a panicked tone, Lumian explained, "I encountered a perverted thief who stole my clothes and trousers. I had no choice but to purchase this set from a nearby beggar."

The female shop assistant struggled to suppress her laughter.

They had witnessed similar situations countless times before, well aware that those who made such excuses were often involved in affairs with certain ladies, fleeing in a state of undress with their wallets once their husbands returned, only to seek refuge in the garments of a beggar.

When someone confidently claimed that their predicament stemmed from an affair, it usually meant they had genuinely encountered a twisted thief.

In the end, Lumian acquired a suit that appeared decent but was actually quite ordinary. It included a shirt, coat, bow tie, and a dark cane. Additionally, he opted for a brown wig and a matching fake beard.

The total cost came to 78 verl d'or.

After carefully covering his tracks and returning to the safe house on Rue des Blouses Blanches, Lumian shed his disguise and once again adorned the Mystery Prying Glasses. Following his recollection, he skillfully applied makeup to achieve his desired effect.

His aim was to transform himself into an older version. As he gazed into the mirror, Lumian gradually took on the appearance of a middle-aged man, complete with a fake brown beard affixed to his mouth and chin.

Thus, Lumian assumed the identity of Bono Goodville, the proprietor of the Goodville Chemical Factory.

Though the resemblance was only around 40 to 50%, anyone acquainted with Bono Goodville would instinctively mistake Lumian for the man, provided they didn't scrutinize or closely distinguish him.

In this guise, Lumian intended to infiltrate the member of parliament's office!

Before embarking on his mission, he ventured into the underground and stashed the tramp's attire in a cavern within the quarry.

Emerging from Underground Trier, Lumian hastened to the khaki-colored four-story building that housed the member of parliament's office, cane in hand.

After observing for a brief moment and ensuring that the figures in each room remained relatively unchanged, he lowered his head, partially concealing his face, and approached the entrance.

"Whom are you seeking?" inquired an armed guard donned in a dark blue uniform, blocking his path.

Lumian raised his head, withdrew his hand, and responded with anxiety in his voice, "I'm looking for the member of parliament."

One of the guards caught a clear glimpse of the visitor's face under the glow of the street lamp and involuntarily exclaimed, "Monsieur Goodville, what brings you here again…"

Abruptly, he halted his words, realizing that this gentleman, who had recently experienced a devastating explosion at his factory, had an abundance of issues to address this night, along with numerous concerns that required assistance.

The two guards refrained from further inquiry and stepped aside, granting Lumian passage.

The lobby on the ground floor bustled with activity, despite the late hour. Reporters, officials, representatives of charitable organizations, hospital staff reporting in, and various personnel responsible for receiving them filled the space.

Lumian preserved his desire to remain inconspicuous. With his head lowered, partially obscuring his face, he proceeded directly to the staircase. Employing the same tactic, he passed by the two armed guards and ascended to the second floor.

Orienting himself, Lumian bypassed the two employees who emerged from a nearby room and arrived in front of the office belonging to the unhealthy young man.

Embedded on the vermilion door was an aluminum-white nameplate inscribed with a few golden Intisian words: "Assistant Secretary, Tybalt Jacques."

Tybalt… Lumian smiled, donned his gloves, and tapped lightly on the door.

Chapter 244: Red and Black

Knock, knock, knock.

The office reverberated with an urgent knock.

A feeble and disinterested voice floated through the air.

"Come in, please."

Lumian turned the doorknob and pushed open the vibrant vermilion door. Before him stood a frail, gaunt young man.

Dressed in a blue shirt, black waistcoat, and somber suit, he stood by the expansive desk, his eyes fixed on the door.

As Tybalt Jacques recognized the visitor to be Bono Goodville, a chuckle escaped the assistant secretary.

"Don't fret. Decay is an unavoidable fate. It afflicts humans and organizations alike. Once the decay sets in, all sorts of troubles will arise…"

Before Tybalt could conclude, he saw Lumian approach. Guard raised, he blurted out,"What do you think you're doing…"

Bam! Lumian threw a punch, accompanied by a blazing crimson flame.

His action cut off Tybalt's words, forcing him to instinctively raise his forearm to block the blow.

Flames flickered, consuming Tybalt's sleeves.

Simultaneously, a taunting voice reached his ears.

"So weak?"

Originally, Lumian's plan was to cloak his fist in flames, launching a surprise attack on his adversary without alerting the nearby employees. In the ensuing chaos, he aimed to use Fallen Mercury and inflict a wound upon him. Then, before his foe could recover, Lumian would forcefully make his way past him, exiting the khaki-colored building housing the parliament member's office through the balcony.

Throughout this endeavor, he would employ fireballs, Fire Raven, and other techniques to impede his opponent. Even if he sustained injuries, he had to escape into a nearby alley and disappear into Underground Trier before Hugues Artois's security personnel, the red-haired woman, and the other campaign members could react. After all, the fiery "armor" he created had the power to incinerate pathogens. With limited contact, the chances of contracting an illness were slim. And if something did manage to slip through, the symptoms would be mild enough for Lumian to endure until six in the morning.

If worse came to worst, he could borrow half a canister of healing agent from Franca.

Even Ruhr, a scavenger with his advanced age, succumbed to the illness only an hour or two after being exposed to the thick phlegm. Lumian believed it would be even less of a problem for him.

Of course, the condition was that the thick phlegm represented one of Tybalt's more potent methods. He couldn't concoct a highly virulent disease that triggered symptoms within a minute or two. Nonetheless, Lumian had his flames to shield him.

Yet, now, after a swift exchange, Lumian realized that Tybalt Jacques was far weaker than he had presumed!

This revelation instantly altered Lumian's course of action.

Silently, his form became shrouded in a cloak of fiery crimson.

The flames undulated like liquid, seamlessly encasing his skin, hair, garments, and hat. They hung there, a constant flickering and flowing.

Crimson flames continued to emerge from Lumian's being, melding with the inferno.

It felt as though Lumian had wrapped himself in a crimson cloak. Amidst the swirling blaze, his disguised countenance and blue eyes, each harboring a blazing fire, came into view.

With a snap, he discarded the dark cane and launched a fist wreathed in flames towards Tybalt.

The cane's handle remained aglow, eradicating any traces of fingerprints, sweat, or handprints.

Bang! Bang! Bang! Tybalt staggered back two steps, as though battling a tempest of fire. His eyes burned with a reddened intensity.

He harrumphed and expelled thick phlegm at Lumian.

The viscous yellow-green phlegm met the fiery cloak and was instantly incinerated, emitting a sizzling sound.

Bam! Bam! Bam! Lumian's arms, engulfed in crimson flames, swung repeatedly, pinning Tybalt to a corner of the office. His back pressed against the wall, with no escape or retreat. All he could do was defensively parry with his arms.

Witnessing the Sputum of Disease prove futile and the surrounding air heating up under the flames' influence, causing his skin to scorch, Tybalt's heart constricted, and he was about to cry out for help.

However, just as he opened his mouth, Lumian's flaming fist collided with his arm, causing him to tremble. His words became trapped in his throat.

Tybalt attempted to call for aid, but his pleas were repeatedly interrupted by the adversary. The deep voice of his foe resounded in his ears.

"Is that all you have?"

"How dare a feeble fledgling like you spit so recklessly?"

"Didn't your deity teach you to behave with civility?"

"I shall summon a hundred vagabonds to spit in your mouth!"

The mockery inflamed Tybalt's eyes, and he momentarily forgot about seeking assistance. All he yearned for was the other party to suffer and perish.

Translucent blisters materialized on his exposed skin, brimming with a sickly yellowish-black fluid.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Lumian's flaming fist consumed Tybalt's sleeve, rupturing the translucent blister within. Yet, the repugnant yellowish-black liquid failed to touch his flesh. It was first scorched by the flames before being halted by the gloves.

The lingering pathogens on the surface of the gloves rapidly dissipated beneath the crimson flames' effect.

Amidst the relentless but non-lethal strikes, all the translucent blisters burst of their own accord within the increasingly sweltering environment. The faint yellowish-black liquid sizzled and evaporated, forming an almost imperceptible mist around Tybalt.

However, the mist was either consumed by the flames or melted by the soaring temperatures. It couldn't breach the fiery cloak and corrode Lumian's body.

In that moment, Tybalt, battered multiple times, regained his senses from the Provocation. He opened his mouth and cried out for aid.

High-temperature gas and dissipating flames infiltrated Tybalt's mouth as Lumian's fist connected. The heat contorted his expression, rendering him unable to scream.

"Feeling grand, are we? Enjoying yourself?"

"When you spat without a care, did you ever consider that it would lead to your own demise?"

"Taking your life is no different from slaughtering a chicken!"

Lumian locked his gaze onto Tybalt's eyes, witnessing despair, fear, and pleas for mercy slowly emerge.

He didn't relent. With fists ablaze in crimson flames, he unleashed another relentless onslaught of strikes.

He had no intention of evading Tybalt's feeble attempts at defense; each blow found its mark.

With a subdued thud, Lumian abruptly halted and withdrew his hands.

Tybalt remained motionless against the wall, his eyes vacant.

The flames enveloping Lumian's form dissipated like a receding river, leaving behind a trace of crimson in his footsteps.

Without sparing Tybalt a second glance, Lumian stooped to retrieve his cane. He took Mr. K's finger and pressed it against the wall beside Tybalt.

Having done so, Lumian removed his half top hat and placed it upon his chest, bowing to Tybalt.

Then, he strode past his lifeless, statue-like prey and ventured onto the balcony. Concealed by the shadows, he pressed against the wall and effortlessly leaped to the side of the khaki-colored building.

Only then did the occupants upstairs sense something amiss. Several individuals rushed out, peering into the outside world. Lumian's figure had already vanished into the depths of the dark alley.

Simultaneously, a muffled sound emanated from Tybalt's rigid body.

Boom!

In an instant, he erupted from within, crimson flames splattering flesh and internal organs in every direction.

Fire Infusion!

Pyromaniac's Fire Infusion!

Prior to Lumian's departure, Tybalt had teetered on the precipice of death. His organs and brain had been consumed by the injected flames. What ensued was primarily the annihilation of his Spirit Body.

There were three reasons why Lumian had a change of heart at the last moment, opting to forgo the quickest and simplest method of dispatching Tybalt.

Firstly, utilizing the Montsouris ghost could potentially impact Tybalt's family. If possible, it was preferable to avoid such measures, despite the high probability that they had already succumbed to the influence of an evil deity. Secondly, he could utilize the implosion to create a gruesome scene of carnage, strewn with flesh and blood. Coupled with Mr. K's fingerprint, it would point subsequent investigators in the direction of the Aurora Order. It would also serve as a clear indication that Tybalt was a follower of an evil god. Thirdly, by utilizing Fire Infusion, he could delay the explosion and dismantle Tybalt's Spirit Body, thereby minimizing the efficacy of the evil god's Blessed's investigations through spirit channeling.

Furthermore, there was another reason. Beating and cursing Tybalt to death brought Lumian an undeniable sense of satisfaction.

…

Before long, a group of seven or eight individuals, including Hugues Artois, the red-haired lady, and the bespectacled secretary, arrived at Tybalt

Jacques's door.

What greeted their eyes were scattered flesh, fragments, and internal organs, along with scorch marks that marred the ground.

The sight of red and black intermingled was jarring, rendering everyone present speechless.

"Who could have done this?" Hugues Artois exclaimed, horror etched on his face.

In his mind, the murder of Tybalt and the macabre aftermath served as a chilling warning and a preview of his own impending demise!

After all, who would go to such lengths to target an assistant secretary?

The red-haired lady cast a brief glance at Hugues Artois before speaking in an androgynous tone,

"Based on the evidence before us, it appears that the perpetrator is a Pyromaniac, or perhaps even more formidable. Given Tybalt's capabilities, he should have been dispatched within ten seconds. However, the assailant deliberately prolonged the act.

"It seems that the goal was to create this gruesome scene. It bears the hallmark of those lunatics from the Aurora Order."

Hugues Artois's eyes narrowed, and he lapsed into silence for a couple of seconds.

"Why would the Aurora Order target me?"

"I cannot say." The red-haired lady peered deeply into Hugues Artois's eyes, shaking her head slightly.

While the official Beyonders conducted their investigation, the original campaign team returned to Hugues Artois's office.

The red-haired lady turned her attention to the secretary with gold-rimmed glasses.

"What has Tybalt been involved in recently?" she inquired.

"Due to his chronic illness, he intentionally disposed of his disease-ridden handkerchief and ended the lives of two elderly scavengers who had no children," the secretary with gold-rimmed glasses truthfully replied. "I have managed to keep this matter under wraps."

The red-haired lady muttered to herself, her voice barely audible, "Two childless elderly scavengers… It seems that Tybalt's demise is undeniably targeted at Monsieur Member of Parliament."

Chapter 245: "Speech"

All eyes turned towards Hugues Artois, the distinguished member of parliament, his prominent nose and graying temples giving him an air of refinement. He had quickly regained his composure and wore a smile as he spoke.

"There's no need to fret. If the assailant possessed the means to breach two layers of defense and confront me directly, there would be no reason to go through the trouble of assassinating Tybalt. This seems more like an act of blackmail, a surface-level threat."

The four members of the campaign present nodded simultaneously, coming to the conclusion that Monsieur Member of Parliament's deduction was accurate.

Hugues Artois turned to the lady with red hair.

"Cassandra, my knowledge of mysticism is limited. I have only heard that Beyonders can extract the truth from a deceased soul through spirit channeling. Will Tybalt's spirit betray us?"

Cassandra, with her red hair flowing, slowly shook her head.

"Under normal circumstances, we would have to take the risk of cleansing the situation. However, in the recent attack, the assassin clearly took ample time to obliterate Tybalt's spirit, thereby concealing his own identity. It's equivalent to assisting us."

Hugues Artois nodded slightly and cast a glance at the two anxious secretaries. With a smile, he reassured them.

"Rhône, Margaret, fear not. Time is on our side, and the future lies within our grasp. A minor setback will not hinder the ultimate outcome.

"You must always believe that our actions represent justice."

Rhône, donning gold-rimmed spectacles, and the refined Margaret were bewildered. They couldn't fathom being associated with the concept of "justice."

Not only them, but even Cassandra with her red hair and the middle-aged, muscular Boduva looked at Hugues Artois in confusion, sensing they might have misheard.

Cautiously, Hugues Artois glanced towards the door, silently questioning if anyone might be eavesdropping.

After the red-haired Cassandra nodded, he launched into an impromptu speech.

"Ladies and gentlemen, while I may not possess the ability to convert and pray for a boon due to a binding contract, I have acquired a profound understanding of our world.

"You, better than anyone, should be aware that the vast cosmos above us represents an expansive universe. Countless planets exist within it, each akin to its own world. Many of these worlds harbor their own civilizations. The world we inhabit is but one among an endless expanse, as insignificant as a speck of dust.

"The seven deities have imprisoned us in this realm, preventing us from making contact with the civilizations that thrive in the universe. They desire our blindness and deafness, seeking to keep us enslaved for generations.

"They label these magnificent beings as evil gods. They weave falsehoods, warning us of the peril that lies in believing in these evil gods. Their goal is to prevent us from making contact with these higher civilizations, to keep us confined.

"If the belief in an evil god were genuinely dangerous, why do numerous civilizations in the universe, comprising different species, still exist?

"They are afraid. If these mighty entities were to descend upon our world, They alone would face destruction. Only the saints, angels, and fanatics who follow Them would be affected. For most people, it would merely be a shift in faith, devoid of peril.

"Believing in one of the seven deities is deemed faith, but believing in other great beings is not?

"We can no longer remain captive to the seven deities. We must venture forth into the future of humankind and the course of civilization. From the mere fact that boons can be obtained, these great beings are mightier than the seven deities. They will bestow protection and willingly offer their power. Their divine benevolence is boundless, akin to the vast sea.

"In the days to come, when we navigate the universe and reflect upon the journey we have undertaken, you shall come to comprehend that our cause is one of justice.

"In this process, death is an inevitability, yet those who perish are deserving. They are either aged, feeble, unlucky, or destined to meet such a fate. Most of the blame does not lie with us.

"Furthermore, they constitute only a minority. We cannot impede the majority from seeking refuge with a higher civilization, pursuing a better future.

"Ladies and gentlemen, sacrifices are inherent in any cause. As long as we steadfastly believe that our actions are driven by justice and persist unwaveringly, the future shall unquestionably be ours!

"In a decade's time, humanity will secure a ticket to join the circle of cosmic civilization. We shall no longer be barbarians, hiding in the shadows of obscurity!"

The red-haired Cassandra, Secretary Rhône, and the rest were left dumbfounded.

Who was the true believer of the evil god?

Each had their own reasons for following different evil gods, and deep down, they knew they had veered onto the wrong path. Nevertheless, they had already set foot on this journey and had no choice but to press forward. Thus, they either used faith as a facade to gradually reshape their understanding, or they completely surrendered themselves, seeking any motivation to propel them onward.

And yet, Hugues Artois, someone who clearly wasn't a believer and hadn't received any favors or undergone significant assimilation, managed to speak such astonishing and captivating words straight from the depths of his heart.

The four members of the campaign were taken aback, realizing the sense behind Hugues Artois' words, causing them to reevaluate the meaning behind their past actions.

After a few moments, the red-haired Cassandra let out a slow exhale. She looked at Hugues Artois and sincerely praised him.

"An exceptional speech, Monsieur Member of Parliament. In the future, when you choose your faith, I can recommend one for you."

"Oh?" Hugues Artois inquired in a nasal voice.

Cassandra smiled and elaborated.

"Among the boons bestowed by that individual is one called Orator."

Hugues Artois nodded and flashed a relaxed smile towards the four members of the team.

"Do not be disheartened by Tybalt's demise. We will remain steadfast in our original plan."

Cassandra, Rhône, Margaret, and Boduva responded in unison.

"Yes, Monsieur Member of Parliament."

…

In the depths of Underground Trier.

Lumian took a detour and returned to the quarry cave. Swiftly, he shed his clothes and shoes, removing the wig and beard that concealed his true appearance.

Once he changed back into his ragged tramp attire and adorned a dark-blue cap, semi-translucent crimson Fire Ravens materialized around him.

The Fire Ravens darted out, alighting upon the cane, shirt, bow tie, wig, and other objects, causing them to erupt in soft explosions of flame.

Lumian, having turned his back, proceeded towards the exit of Underground Trier. Crimson flames surged in his wake, consuming everything related to the previous attack, casting an illuminating glow within the dark cavern below.

…

Around midnight, in the depths of the Eternal Blazing Sun Inquisition beneath Église Saint-Robert.

Angoulême de François, engrossed in perusing the investigation records, heard a knock on his office door.

His brown coat, adorned with two rows of golden buttons, hung neatly on a coat rack near the entrance. He wore a light golden shirt featuring the emblem of the Sun Sacred Order, along with dark brown pants.

"Please, come in," Angoulême calmly invited.

Valentine, powdered hair and face adorned with subtle makeup, entered the room.

He had been preoccupied with thoughts of Cordu all this time. Upon learning of survivors appearing in the Trier region, he had submitted an application and transferred to this post. His wife and child had long yearned for the bustling city of Trier, so they eagerly moved with him without much persuasion.

He was on night duty with a few teammates and happened to encounter the murder of the member of parliament's assistant secretary.

Valentine, clad in a slim blue tweed coat with a golden brooch, took a seat across from Angoulême and spoke directly.

"Deacon, why haven't we investigated Hugues Artois?

"While most members of the Aurora Order may be crazy, they possess an uncanny ability to detect heretics. Although not every person they target is a believer in the evil gods, at least 70% are.

"Considering the information we've gathered, we can reasonably conclude that Tybalt Jacques, who met his demise tonight, was a heretic and wielded the power of decay. Furthermore, he served as Hugues Artois's assistant secretary.

"We cannot allow a highly suspicious individual to continue serving as a member of parliament. Investigating him is not only a responsibility to the people of the market district, but also to Hugues Artois himself. If we find no evidence of wrongdoing, we can assist him in purging any heretics surrounding him."

Angoulême hadn't anticipated his new team leader to be more devout and zealous than himself. He couldn't help but raise his hand and furrow his brows.

With a bitter smile, he responded.

"Perhaps you are unaware, but every member of parliament has signed a contract with the two Churches and received a notarized contract.

"In this contract, they pledge their faith, display their abilities and associated sources. The two Churches promise not to restrict the personal freedom of any member of parliament or their key staff without substantial and compelling evidence. They won't be subject to the influence of Beyonders.

"This is to safeguard the authority of the National Convention.

"According to the contract, Hugues Artois believes fervently in the mighty Eternal Blazing Sun and is not a Beyonder.

"Hence, you may question him and his core staff, but that is the extent of it."

Valentine couldn't conceal his disappointment.

"Why is such a contract in place?"

"It is a byproduct of the past coup d'état, a change that accompanied the course of history," Angoulême provided a simple explanation.

Valentine let out a sigh, rose from his seat, and extended his arms.

"Praise the Sun!"

"Praise the Sun!" Angoulême stood up and returned the gesture, watching his subordinate exit the office.

…

Quartier de Noël, Holy Palace Hospital.

Jenna sat upon a small stool, slumped beside her mother Elodie's lightly slumbering form in the hospital bed.

After bidding farewell to Franca and sending her brother Julien home, who had to attend to his factory duties come dawn, Jenna found herself alone. The Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons had yet to resume its acting training, as plans were underway to auction it, along with Auberge du Coq

Doré, at the police headquarters. However, the recent explosion at the Goodville Chemical Factory had caused a delay in those proceedings.

Suddenly, Elodie stirred. Jenna startled awake, her eyes fixating on her mother, who gradually opened her own.

Elodie's gaze mirrored the face of her daughter as she mustered a smile.

"I thought I was about to see your father."

Without awaiting Jenna's reply, Elodie inquired, her voice frail, "How are my injuries?"

Jenna, overjoyed to witness her mother awaken from her coma, beamed genuinely and responded, "They're not severe. Look, no surgery is required."

Elodie heaved a sigh of relief and nodded slowly.

Still recovering from her coma, her body and mind weren't yet in their prime state. After a brief exchange, she drifted back into slumber.

Jenna clasped her mother's hand and beheld the contentment that graced the wrinkled, gray-haired countenance beneath the gentle illumination streaming in from the window.

Observing for a while longer, she glanced upward and caught sight of the first rays of dawn gradually painting the sky with light.

Chapter 246: Resolution

As the first rays of dawn illuminated the room, Lumian slowly opened his eyes, awakened by the gentle chime of bells from Église Saint-Robert.

The previous night, he had stayed at Auberge du Coq Doré.

He raised his right hand to touch his head. His bald head had grown thick and healthy hair once more.

Leaving the comfort of his bed, Lumian walked over to the full-length mirror and saw a reflection that looked both familiar and unfamiliar.

Back in Cordu, his hair had never been dyed golden.

But in the morning light, he couldn't help but smile, feeling better than he had in a long time.

At the very least, he didn't meet with failure with everything he did. Killing and taking revenge didn't pose a problem.

After breakfast at a street vendor, Lumian planned to find a barbershop in either Quartier de l'Observatoire or Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative to revert his hair color to golden. But before he could set out, hurried footsteps approached his room.

He braced himself, thinking someone might kick the door open, but instead, there was a knock.

It was Franca, who rarely rose so early. She couldn't hide her surprise upon seeing Lumian's pure black hair.

"You dyed it back?" she exclaimed.

"Sort of," Lumian replied, observing Franca as she entered Room 207 and closed the door behind her.

Without mincing words, Franca confronted him, "Did you kill Hugues Artois's assistant secretary? And did you rush to advance to Pyromaniac last night?"

Lumian stood up, smiling.

"Yes."

Franca was momentarily at a loss for words with the frank admission.

After a few seconds, she hissed and said, "You brat, you promised me you would hold back and endure, but the very next moment, you went ahead without hesitation. You really can't suppress your hatred for a night, can you?

"If you keep going like this, I seriously doubt you'll survive this year—no, this month!"

Lumian explained simply, "Actually, I didn't intend to kill Tybalt last night. I merely wanted to monitor him, gather information, and plan a proper approach to deal with him together with you. But an opportunity presented itself, and it was too good to pass up. I couldn't convince myself to hold back."

"Right, I made preparations in all aspects, including measures against divination and tracking."

Relieved, Franca asked, "That Tybalt guy seemed weak. Was it easy for you to handle him?"

"He mainly transmitted diseases through contact, and Pyromaniacs happened to counter that ability. If not for my anti-divination and anti-spirit channeling preparations, I could have taken care of him in ten seconds," Lumian recalled.

Franca sighed, admitting, "You got lucky. Have you considered the possibility that your target might be much stronger?"

"My initial judgment was that he wouldn't be too formidable. If he exceeded a certain threshold, I was prepared to use my dirk," Lumian replied before asking, "Why are you up so early?"

"Gardner woke me up!" Franca replied with gritted teeth. "He instructed me to gather the leaders of the Savoie Mob and find the person responsible for killing Hugues Artois's assistant secretary. When I heard the details, I knew it had to be you! I told you last night to get in the right condition before drinking the Pyromaniac potion, but you went ahead and consumed it anyway."

Lumian spoke earnestly, his voice filled with sincerity. "I believed that I was in the perfect state to advance to Pyromaniac, so I swiftly concocted the potion. Will Boss suspect me?"

"For now, no," Franca replied, shaking her head. "Besides yourself, nobody expected you to consume the potion last night. Moreover, you cunningly framed the Aurora Order. Gardner doesn't see any motive in you."

Franca glanced at Lumian's head and suggested, "Come here, I'll help you restore your original hair color. It's best not to make any changes during a time like this to avoid arousing suspicion."

"Alright," Lumian agreed, feeling delighted to save some money.

…

In the morning, the ward buzzed with more activity compared to the somberness of the night. Echoing through the air were the cries of those being carried away, the presence of relatives escorting loved ones back home, and the determination of some patients who defied the cries, choosing to depart from the hospital's confines.

Jenna and Elodie—who had regained consciousness—observed the scene in silence. They understood the painful reality unfolding before them.

Not everyone could bear the weight of insurmountable medical expenses, nor did they wish to drag their families into the depths of despair.

Sometimes, the patient surrendered while the family persisted. Other times, it was the family that gave up, leaving the patient with no choice but to accept their fate. At times, patient and family would tacitly leave the ward, exchange silent glances, and be unable to hold back their tears as they cried or wailed.

After a while, as the ward regained a semblance of tranquility, Elodie, who had managed to sit up, whispered softly, "How long will I have to stay here for treatment?"

Jenna pondered for a moment before deciding to tell her mother the truth. It was an impossible matter to conceal. The doctors' rounds, treatments, and further examinations would inevitably reveal some information. Besides, Elodie would piece it together based on her physical condition and the fact that she hadn't been discharged after several days.

Organizing her thoughts, Jenna explained, "The doctor said you'll be here for months, possibly even half a year. Your external injuries aren't severe, but your body has suffered significant damage. Unless you make a full recovery, your condition may worsen."

Before Elodie could respond, Jenna smiled reassuringly and continued, "I've already secured the funds for your treatment. I borrowed the money from Franca. She has no shortage of resources. She promised Julien and me that we could repay it in two to three years, in installments. By then, Dad's accident compensation will surely have been paid. There may even be hope for yours."

Elodie's expression faltered for a moment. After a few seconds, she spoke with weariness in her voice, "Why will it take so long…"

"With such a massive explosion and the chemical gasses, it's a miracle that you survived," Jenna said before asking. "What exactly happened back then?"

Elodie contemplated for a moment and replied wearily, "I don't know. The explosion happened so suddenly, and I lost consciousness.

"I think it originated near the metal tank. Sigh, many of the factory's facilities are old and prone to breakdowns. They require repairs, but the boss refuses to invest in replacements. Sigh…"

After chatting for a while, Jenna noticed her mother's energy waning. She advised Elodie to rest for a while and headed towards the washroom at the end of the corridor.

As soon as Elodie witnessed Jenna's departure from the ward, she mustered all her strength, disconnected the IV, and leaned against the wall for support. Gasping for breath, she took two steps towards the ward diagonally opposite, where doctors and nurses meticulously examined each injured individual.

Elodie located the doctor, provided her ward and bed number, and inquired, "How long will my treatment last?"

The doctor leafed through his records and responded, "We don't have all the results yet, but we estimate it will take about five to seven months."

"What will be the cost of treatment each month?" Elodie inquired.

The doctor pondered for a moment and replied, "Let's wait for the complete assessment. If all goes well, it should amount to around 200 verl d'or per week. As treatment progresses, the cost will decrease. However, if your condition isn't too favorable, it might range from 300 to 400 verl d'or per week. Furthermore, even after you leave the hospital, you must prioritize rest and avoid exerting yourself."

Elodie found herself rendered speechless. The nurse assisted her back to the ward and reinserted the needle into her arm.

Shortly before noon, Julien rushed into the ward, his concern for his mother evident in his eyes.

After conversing with him for a while, Jenna announced, "I'll go to the hospital cafeteria and bring back some food for you."

With that, she departed the ward, moving briskly as she descended the stairs.

Thanks to Lumian's guidance, Jenna had come to realize that she possessed extraordinary abilities as a Beyonder. She was no longer an ordinary individual. With a willingness to take calculated risks, she had numerous avenues to earn money.

Consequently, the expenses for Elodie's treatment and the overwhelming debt held no power over her. The fact that her mother had been saved was cause for celebration, a reason to extol the sun.

In the ward, Elodie gazed at Julien, who sat beside her, and posed a question with a tender expression, "You're nearly 23, aren't you?"

"That's right," Julien replied, a smile gracing his face. "I've been a provider for the family for quite some time now. But in your eyes, I'm still a youngling."

Elodie offered a faint smile and spoke, "That's because my criteria for true adulthood differ from others. I've always believed that one can only be considered an adult when they possess a skill that consistently earns them money. You're still a year away from that, and Celia has another year and a half to go.

"You've endured so much these past few years."

"It was you who endured," Julien responded with a sigh. "Before I could truly assist, you worked three jobs a day for a whole year, from 6 a.m. until midnight."

Emotions surged within him, causing him to blurt out, "We'll definitely cure you!"

Elodie chuckled in delight, her hand gently caressing her flaxen hair.

"Unfortunately, my wig is gone.

"And your sister. She previously deceived us, claiming that the theater required her to dye her hair a brownish-yellow shade. In reality, it was to prevent herself from being recognized when she went to sing at the dance hall. I don't know what to do with her.

"Sigh, I truly don't want you to shoulder more debt. It will waste years. By then, you won't be young anymore…"

Julien swiftly consoled his mother, assuring her that he excelled at his job and would undoubtedly receive a salary increase next year.

After rambling for a few minutes, Elodie clutched her chest and beseeched Julien, "I'm not feeling well. Please find a doctor for me."

"Okay." Julien stood up abruptly and dashed out of the room.

Elodie promptly removed the IV needle and stumbled toward the ward's window, relying on the nearby beds for support.

Meanwhile, on the first floor of Holy Palace Hospital.

Jenna emerged from the cafeteria, carrying a wooden lunch box, and began her journey up the staircase.

Suddenly, from the corner of her eye, she witnessed a figure hurtling downwards, resulting in a resounding thud.

Jenna's heart skipped a beat, her mind filled with unease. Hastily, she turned around, uncertain about the source of her apprehension. She dashed out of the hall and approached the spot where the person had jumped, maneuvering through the gathering crowd.

In the next instant, she beheld a crimson liquid seeping and a familiar face adorned with delicate wrinkles.

With a thud, the lunch box slipped from her grasp, crashing onto the ground. Her eyes grew vacant, reflecting a vivid red.

The lifeless body belonged to her mother, Elodie.

The person who had leaped from the building was her mother, Elodie.

Chapter 247: Instigation

In the café on the second floor of Salle de Bal Brise,

Lumian finished his lunch and caught sight of Franca once more. She was attired in a white shirt, light-colored breeches, and vibrant red boots.

This time, her countenance was grave, causing an uneasiness to settle upon Louis, Sarkota, and the other gangsters. They feared that trouble might accompany her arrival.

Lumian rose from his seat, casting an inquisitive gaze in her direction.

Franca exhaled slowly and spoke, her tone weighted with solemnity.

"Jenna's mother passed away."

Lumian was taken aback, as though he had witnessed Flameng's lifeless body dangling from a window frame or Ruhr decaying to the bone.

His eyes narrowed, and his hands clenched into fists. After a few moments, he inquired, "Was it due to her declining condition?"

"No," Franca shook her head. "It was suicide."

Observing Lumian's perplexed expression, she sighed and elaborated, "Last night, when I sought out Jenna, I worried that she might put up a brave facade and keep her difficulties concealed or seek our assistance, so I made a point to meet the attending physician and the nurses responsible for her mother's care. I treated them to coffee and dessert, urging them to keep a close watch on Jenna's mother. I arranged for them to notify me immediately of any complications, and I pledged to cover any necessary expenses.

"They informed me that upon learning about the months-long treatment and its approximate cost, Jenna's mother took advantage of Jenna's visit to the cafeteria and Julien's absence in search of a doctor. She leaped from the sixth floor…

"Alas, her health was already frail, and she perished instantly upon impact."

Lumian fell into a pensive silence. Suddenly, he pressed his left chest and sneered, "Is this fate?"

Franca couldn't provide an answer.

…

At 1 p.m., Lumian and Franca arrived at the Holy Palace Hospital. The nurse, whom Franca had deliberately befriended, guided them to the Farewell Sanctuary, situated on the ground floor of an annex.

The place was known as the Farewell Sanctuary, where the departed awaited their purification.

Julien, Jenna's brother, sat by the door, his head in his hands, wearing a pained expression as he stared at the sky-blue-painted wall opposite.

Approaching him, Franca asked in a hushed voice, "Are Auntie and Jenna inside?"

Julien nodded slowly and whispered to himself in anguish, "I shouldn't have left her alone in the ward…

"I shouldn't have left her alone in the ward…"

Franca didn't know how to console him; all she could do was sigh and enter the Farewell Sanctuary alongside Julien.

Elodie's body lay on a bed covered by a white sheet, concealed beneath a plain white cloth.

The blood on her body had been cleansed. Her face appeared pallid, and her eyes were tightly shut.

Jenna sat on a stool across from her mother, her gaze empty and her voice absent, as if her soul had departed.

Franca called out, a mix of pain and concern in her tone, but Jenna ignored her, as if she had encased herself in another realm.

Lumian pulled up a chair and seated himself next to Jenna, his gaze also fixed upon the lifeless figure of Elodie.

After a few seconds, he spoke in a deep voice, "I understand what you're feeling. Not long ago, I, too, lost the family member who meant the most to me."

Jenna remained silent, as if she had transformed into a statue.

Lumian directed his gaze toward the same direction as Jenna and continued, "But you need to know who is responsible for this tragedy.

"Is it your fault? Is it your mother's fault? Is it your brother's fault?

"No, you did nothing wrong! Faced with accidents and debts, you chose to endure them with determination. You chose to rely on your own labor and suffering to secure a new life. It took you several years to emerge from it slowly. Is that wrong? No!

"This time, you didn't abandon your loved one. You fought hard to find a solution. Is that wrong? No!

"You didn't hide anything from your mother. You informed her about the duration of the treatment, the costs, and the source of funding. Is that wrong? No! There was no way to conceal it!

"Your mother loves you and wants you to avoid reliving the painful past few years. She wants you to walk in the light, not in darkness. Is that wrong? No!

"Who is at fault?

"It's the factory owner who continuously appeals and delays the compensation for the accident, subjecting you to years of painful and oppressive existence!

"It's the laws that protect their actions!

"It's Bono Goodville, who disregards safety regulations and fails to replace worn-out machines!

"It's the exorbitant cost of treatment that plunges the less fortunate into despair!

"It's the National Convention and the government who have caused all of this!"

Jenna's expression finally shifted, a glimmer of pain surfacing in her vacant eyes and impassive face.

Lumian turned towards the door, his voice resonating with depth as he spoke, "I have something else to say. Perhaps the explosion at Goodville Chemical Factory, which led to your mother's tragic fate, wasn't an accident."

Jenna instinctively turned to face Lumian and Franca.

Lumian directed his gaze towards Elodie's corpse.

"Perhaps it was a murder, a sacrificial offering to an evil deity.

"Our Honorable Member of Parliament, Hugues Artois, has been assessed by the Blessed of powerful evil gods as an open-minded individual. He is surrounded by heretics, including Tybalt Jacques, the assistant secretary responsible for spreading diseases and taking innocent lives.

"Yesterday morning, Bono Goodville paid a visit to the parliament member's office, and by evening, his chemical plant had exploded.

"When I encountered Tybalt Jacques in the guise of Bono Goodville, he mentioned something about unavoidable troubles following an organization's decay. It convinced me that the chemical plant explosion was something they eagerly anticipated. It might have been orchestrated with a specific purpose that remains unknown to us.

"Are you consumed by anger? Do you feel a burning hatred? Can you accept this?

"Do you wish to sit here and watch as the murderers responsible for your mother's death and the destruction of your happiness revel in champagne, indulge in dance parties, and inflict more heartbreak on innocent families?"

Jenna's expression twisted slightly, as if she grappled with conflicting emotions within.

Eventually, she raised her hands to cover her face, weeping bitterly.

"But my mother… she cannot be brought back…"

Franca crouched down before Jenna and embraced her, allowing her tears to flow freely. As Jenna wept, Franca offered her guidance, "What your mother desires most is for both you and your brother to be free from the burdens of debt and to embark on a fresh new life. She wishes for one of you to become a remarkable stage actress, while the other escapes the constraints of ordinary labor and masters a particular skill. She yearns for you to live well. Can you bear to disappoint her?"

Jenna sobbed and asked, "But isn't it said that the night will pass and light will emerge? Why? Why is it always so dark? Why can't I see any light…"

"It will come, it will come," Franca repeated, patting Jenna's back soothingly. "What you must do now is to give your mother a proper burial and consider doing something meaningful in her honor."

"Okay," Jenna agreed tearfully.

She wept until exhaustion overtook her, finally finding stability within her emotions.

At that moment, the clergyman from the Eternal Blazing Sun Church, who had come to offer his final words of solace, arrived.

Clad in a white robe adorned with intricate golden threads, he entered the room alongside Julien and positioned himself beside Elodie's lifeless body.

In one hand, he grasped the Holy Bible and recited a prayer, while the other hand held a suspended bottle of holy water.

Eventually, a beam of sunlight, accompanied by the holy water, materialized from thin air and gently bathed Elodie.

"Praise the Sun. May this sister find peace and enter the realm of God." The clergyman extended his arms.

"Praise the Sun!" Jenna and Julien joined in prayer.

Observing the ceremony, Lumian bowed his head and silently scoffed.

Franca, a devout follower of the God of Steam and Machinery, refrained from praising the Sun as well.

With the purification ritual concluded, the priest departed from the Farewell Sanctuary. In his place, the administrator in charge of the Holy Palace Hospital morgue entered and posed a question to Julien and Jenna, "Should we proceed with burial or cremation for this sister? Shall we send her to the catacombs, Cimetière des Innocents, or Cimetière des Prêtres?"

Julien and Jenna exchanged glances before responding, "Cremation. We'll personally escort her to the catacombs."

Their father also rested there.

The morgue administrator made a notation and added, "There have been numerous casualties from last night. The crematorium won't be available until next week. Would you like this sister to remain in the morgue for the time being?"

"Very well." Jenna's voice trembled slightly.

And so, the four of them watched as Elodie's visage was veiled with a white cloth and her body was gently guided out of the Farewell Sanctuary.

They trailed behind the wheeled bed, descending through the steam-powered elevator into the subterranean realm until they arrived outside the morgue.

The morgue door gleamed in a silvery-gray hue, while the interior emanated an eerie coldness, producing a misty white fog at the intersection.

Jenna stood in a daze as her mother, Elodie, was propelled through the door, vanishing into the frigid chamber filled with metallic cabinets illuminated by gas-powered wall lamps. She remained fixated as the silver-gray door slowly shut.

Unconsciously, she took a few steps forward, halting at the threshold.

Silently, the door closed.

Her mother was now forever beyond her sight.

…

As they returned to Passy Bridge in Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman, Jenna's eyes fixed on her brother Julien, who walked ahead of her with a heavy heart. Sorrow engulfed her as the bright afternoon sun blinded her vision.

Franca averted her gaze from Julien's retreating form and contemplated finding a task to occupy Jenna's mind.

"Your brother is emotionally distressed. It seems he blames himself. Offer him guidance in the upcoming days and assure him that it wasn't his fault. Any ordinary person would have hurriedly sought a doctor."

Jenna momentarily snapped out of her sorrow and tersely acknowledged, "I'll counsel him. But what if it doesn't work?"

She glanced at Lumian and Franca, her expression filled with helplessness.

Franca nodded reassuringly.

"When the time comes, I can assist him in finding a genuine Psychiatrist—one with Beyonder abilities."

Jenna let out a sigh of relief, her nose sniffing with gratitude.

"Thank you. Thank you both."

Lumian, drawing from his own experiences, reminded her, "You must also attend to your own mental well-being."

Jenna pressed her lips together and nodded, her gaze gradually transforming into one of determination.

In a hushed, raspy voice, she addressed Franca and Lumian, "Tonight, I intend to pay a 'visit' to Bono Goodville."

Chapter 248: Visitors

In Quartier des Thermes, at 55 Rue Chestnut, stood a three-story building tinged with a grayish-blue hue. It boasted a delightful garden, a well-kept lawn, and even stables.

Within the establishment, a band played a melodic tune from a corner. Bono Goodville, the owner of this fine establishment, gracefully navigated through the guests with a glass of golden champagne in hand. Engaging in conversations about the aftermath of the chemical plant explosion, he cunningly aimed to evade his responsibilities while securing a substantial compensation from the insurance company.

Between his interactions, he chatted with the wife of a government official, conferred with his lawyer, and sought out influential figures relevant to the matter at hand.

Like a natural social butterfly, he effortlessly flitted from one person to another, exhibiting wit and vigor amidst the elegant setting. The light from the crystal chandelier illuminated his dark-blue eyes and thick brown beard, lending them a captivating sparkle.

As he gracefully maneuvered around an unassuming guest, Bono Goodville unexpectedly encountered Travis Everett.

The superintendent of Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman was not in uniform that evening. Clad in a sleek black suit paired with a stylish blue bow tie, he held a glass of light golden champagne in his hand.

"Superintendent Everett, it is imperative that you ensure my protection during this trying time!" Bono Goodville smiled at Travis Everett, expressing his concerns. "The explosion claimed many lives, and I fear their bereaved relatives might resort to drastic measures."

Everett adjusted his black-framed glasses and returned the smile.

"Ah, you see, Quartier des Thermes falls beyond my jurisdiction. Moreover, once I stepped onto this street, it became evident that the frequency and intensity of police patrols have notably increased."

"Indeed, but didn't you hire numerous bodyguards? What is there to worry about? Those who perished were ordinary workers. They pose no threat to you. Furthermore, they are unaware of your place of residence."

Everett jestingly remarked, his tone lighthearted.

"But if the injured and their families discover that you continue to host a lavish banquet, serving fine wine while being serenaded by a small accompanying symphony band, their anguish might drive them to madness. They could drag you and your family into the depths of despair."

Bono Goodville sheepishly smiled and replied, "The banquet is unrelated to compensation. I must adhere to the law and await judgment."

"Superintendent Everett, if I were to return to the market district to handle matters, I humbly request your assistance in assigning two or three police officers to protect me."

Everett gently nodded.

"That is my duty, but I must remind you that several police officers' families are employed at your chemical plant."

Implicitly, he emphasized the urgency of compensating his subordinates, hoping for a swift resolution.

Bono Goodville nodded silently, seemingly unaffected.

The banquet continued into the early hours of the morning. Amidst the lingering fragrance, Bono Goodville bid farewell to his three children, embracing each one before ascending to the third floor.

Untying his bow tie, he entered the bedroom with his wife, ready to retire for the night.

With a flick, the gas wall lamp ignited, casting a soft glow that reflected in Bono Goodville's wide eyes.

There, in his cherished recliner, sat an unexpected guest.

Although seated, the man leaned forward, exuding an air of superiority that made Bono Goodville feel small and insignificant.

Clad in a worker's uniform of muted grayish-blue, complete with a dark-blue cap, his face concealed behind swaths of white bandages, leaving only his piercing blue eyes and a glimpse of his nostrils visible.

Bono Goodville's heart raced, his instinct urging him to scream for help.

However, before a sound could escape his lips, a phantom-like crimson flaming raven materialized behind the "surprise" visitor. With a swift swoop, it crashed into Bono Goodville's teeth.

A soft bang resonated as Bono Goodville's mouth seared with pain, and two teeth clattered to the ground. Agony distorted his features, stifling his cry.

At that precise moment, a pair of sharp daggers pressed against the backs of both Bono Goodville and his wife.

Emerging from the shadows of the doorway, Franca and Jenna closed the bedroom door behind them, effectively trapping their captives.

One of them donned a black robe with a concealed hood and leather armor, her face veiled by darkness. The other sported a man's linen shirt, a brown jacket, dark brown trousers, and laceless leather boots. A silver-white metal mask adorned her upper face, leaving only her eyes exposed.

Franca used her free hand to steady Bono Goodville, preventing him from collapsing in agony.

Maintaining his seated posture, Lumian grinned.

"Monsieur Goodville, consider that a warning. It could have been much worse. Those two missing teeth and minor injuries are nothing compared to what could have transpired."

Bono Goodville's wife snapped out of her daze, her voice trembling with fear as she asked, "Who are you? What do you want?"

"Who am I?" Lumian chuckled, a hint of mischief in his tone. "You may consider me your father."

With a glance toward Franca, she retrieved the truth serum Lumian had provided earlier and administered it to Bono Goodville.

As Lumian awaited the serum's effects, he maintained his smile and continued, "Monsieur Goodville, I had hoped for a more challenging encounter, but instead, here we are, having a pleasant conversation. You disappoint me."

He hadn't received a boon!

Under the influence of the truth serum, Bono Goodville wore a bitter expression as he mustered the courage to ask, "What do you want? I have a considerable sum of money in my safe. I can give it to you!"

Jenna's anger flared up, surging from her chest to her head.

In a sudden motion, she raised her left foot and delivered a swift kick to Bono Goodville's calf.

Oh, how she longed to strike him where it truly hurt, but circumstances prevented her from doing so!

Dammit, take your money to the catacombs!

Bono Goodville's body leaned, and the sound of bones cracking reached his ears.

Before his instinctual scream could escape, frost materialized, sealing his voice.

Lumian nodded in approval, acknowledging Jenna's actions. Once Bono Goodville had regained composure, Lumian spoke, "I want to know why you orchestrated the detonation at your own chemical plant."

Bono Goodville's expression transformed, and he blurted out, "How did you find out?"

Before he could finish his sentence, he wished to raise his right hand and slap himself.

Shouldn't he have denied the accusation first? Why did he utter his thoughts so recklessly?

"Well, well, you are quite forthcoming. I was merely testing you, and you readily confessed," Lumian remarked, his tone almost causing Bono Goodville's brain to seize.

Jenna felt as if her soul had vacated her body.

Though Lumian's analysis had mentally prepared her, hearing the admission still left her in disbelief.

Could there truly exist such a wicked individual?

Hundreds of families were devastated!

Snapping out of her stupor, Jenna clenched her teeth tightly,

fearing that any relaxation might ignite her anger, prompting her to stab Bono Goodville.

No, it would be hundreds of stabs!

Goodville's wife also stared at her husband in a state of shock and fear.

She had believed the explosion at the chemical plant to be a mere accident.

Lumian cast a cold gaze upon Bono Goodville and questioned, "Why did you do it? Does it have any connection to someone within Hugues Artois' office?"

Upon hearing the latter inquiry, Bono Goodville could not contain his astonishment and dread.

After consuming the peculiar liquid and "confessing" to orchestrating the chemical plant explosion, Bono Goodville's psychological defenses crumbled. In that moment, an overwhelming urge consumed him—to drag someone down with him and share the burden of his sins.

"It's Rhône and Tybalt! They are Secretary and Assistant Secretary to Member of Parliament Hugues Artois.

"They have been dropping hints that the chemical plant has been deteriorating for years and could explode at any given moment. I thought I might as well find a way to cash in on the insurance compensation I had purchased in the past. And when the time came, Member of Parliament Hugues Artois would use the excuse of setting up a factory to boost the economy and protect the interests of the factory owner, thereby securing funds for reconstruction and compensation.

"They kept saying that everything decays. My chemical plant was no exception, so I anticipated various problems. Instead of waiting for it to explode naturally, I decided to exchange it for greater benefits.

"I visited them again yesterday morning. For some reason, I was foolish enough to be convinced by their words. When the explosion actually occurred, I grew fearful and went to the member of parliament's office thrice.

"They assured me everything would be fine."

What an idiot. He's not even a heretic… Could superpowers have influenced him? Tybalt had also mentioned decay when he saw me disguised as Bono Goodville. What is their true agenda? Lumian pondered for a moment, about to inquire further about the conversation, when the sound of a doorbell being pulled suddenly resonated from the iron gate outside the lawn.

Lumian and Franca exchanged swift glances, both coming up with guesses.

To arrive at such an hour, ringing the doorbell politely, it could only be either a friend or an official investigator seeking Bono Goodville!

Without uttering a word, Lumian rose to his feet, and Franca sheathed her dagger in silence.

Jenna reacted instantly, comprehending their intentions.

Taking a diagonal step, she raised her dagger high and thrust it into Bono Goodville's shoulder.

Blood spurted forth as Bono Goodville let out a pained grunt.

Jenna didn't linger. She dashed towards the window opposite the main entrance.

On her dagger, black flames ignited and swiftly extinguished in several spots within the room.

The trio leaped out of the building, vaulted over the iron fence bordering the garden, and vanished into the encompassing night.

…

Inside the bedroom, a three-person team consisting of Angoulême, Valentine, and the mixed-blood Imre confronted Bono Goodville, who had just finished bandaging his scorched mouth.

The factory owner seethed with anger as he addressed them, "Officer, I was nearly abducted by three criminals!"

Angoulême surveyed the scene, a smile playing on his lips.

"We will investigate that matter later. For now, the primary problem lies with you."

"My problem?" Bono Goodville grew alarmed.

Angoulême nodded slightly.

"Let us first confirm your faith before delving into your visit to the member of parliament's office on the morning of the chemical plant explosion."

With insufficient evidence to take drastic measures against the member of parliament and his staff, the Purifiers redirected their investigation towards Bono Goodville.

Upon hearing these words, Bono Goodville, his psychological defenses shattered, paled in apprehension.

Chapter 249: Loophole in the Contract

Observing Bono Goodville's reaction, Angoulême's confidence grew a little.

With a swift motion, he withdrew a pen and paper, preparing to draft a Notary Certificate. The concept behind it was for Bono Goodville to swear an oath to a deity, ensuring his honesty during the subsequent questioning.

As Angoulême affixed his signature, the paper emitted a radiant golden glow.

Bono Goodville swallowed nervously, feeling the weight of the situation.

In recent years, as a well-known factory owner in Trier, he had encountered mystic knowledge and extraordinary powers that surpassed the imagination of ordinary folk. Such matters were not unfamiliar to him. It was akin to one of the three abductors blasting him with a flaming raven, another conjuring black flames, and a third leaping from the third floor.

"Sign your name," Angoulême instructed, handing Bono Goodville the Notary Certificate, now devoid of its golden glow.

"Very well." Bono Goodville's right hand trembled as he inscribed his name upon the pledge.

With each stroke, a flash of golden light emanated from his penmanship.

Once he finished, Angoulême spoke in a deep, commanding voice.

"Which deity do you believe in?"

"The God of Steam and Machinery." For Bono Goodville, this question held no challenge.

Angoulême proceeded to the next inquiry.

"Why did you visit the member of parliament's office on the morning of the chemical plant explosion?"

Bono Goodville hesitated for two seconds. Fearful of supernatural powers and divine witnesses, he repeated what he had divulged to Lumian and the others under the influence of the remaining truth serum.

Angoulême, Valentine, and Imre took turns posing questions, allowing Bono Goodville to reconstruct his conversation with the Member of Parliament's secretary, Rhône, and his assistant secretary, Tybalt, as accurately as possible.

When the inquiry concluded, Angoulême delivered the verdict to Bono Goodville.

"You shall be arrested for arson, deliberate detonation of an explosion, and murder. Your assets will be temporarily frozen pending compensation for the deceased and injured."

Bono Goodville's face drained of color as he slumped into the recliner, utterly depleted.

Valentine took a couple of steps towards the door, casting a glance at the corridor beyond. Lowering his voice, he proposed, "Deacon, after we bring this blasphemous scoundrel to the police headquarters, shall we formally apprehend Hugues Artois's secretary, Rhône?"

Angoulême sighed, shaking his head slowly.

"Not yet.

"Did you not notice? Rhône and the late Tybalt were exceedingly cautious. They never explicitly suggested that Bono Goodville instigated the explosion at his chemical plant. They merely insinuated their support for the member of parliament's policies and preached a philosophy of decay. They might exploit Bono Goodville's blinded mind, misconstruing their words to justify his actions.

"It has been nearly two days, and finding any traces of Bono Goodville being influenced by superpowers is proving challenging.

"Put simply, we lack sufficient evidence to apprehend Secretary Rhône and employ Beyonder powers in the interrogation. We can only summon and question him through conventional means."

Valentine seethed with anger, but he realized there was nothing he could do.

He harbored an unwavering certainty that something was awry with the member of parliament's secretary, yet due to regulations, he couldn't employ mystical methods to confront him.

After a brief pause, he glanced at Bono Goodville, sprawled on the recliner like a heap of decaying meat, and spoke with a deep voice, "I suggest we deliver him to the stake!"

Angoulême nodded, addressing Valentine and Imre, "Let us proceed. Take this man back to the market district, where he deserves to meet his end in ten different manners."

Valentine was taken aback.

"Deacon, aren't we going to track down the three Beyonders who infiltrated this place?"

Angoulême chuckled. "Why should we?"

Valentine gazed at him, perplexed by his deacon's approach.

Imre, accustomed to his ways, whispered, "The three Beyonders infiltrated this place without pillaging or harming anyone. They merely sought information about the chemical plant explosion and the visit to the member of parliament's office. It's evident they possess a genuine interest in Secretary Rhône and Member of Parliament Hugues Artois."

"I even wonder if they're from the Aurora Order, and one of them is the one who killed Assistant Secretary Tybalt."

Angoulême chuckled and added, "Since we are barred from thoroughly investigating the member of parliament's office due to contracts and regulations, why not allow untamed Beyonders, equally keen on prying and employing violence, to squeeze out the pus and expose it to the sunlight?"

"Wouldn't that pose a problem?" Valentine blurted out.

Amused, Angoulême responded, "Of course not. When dealing with cunning individuals adept at exploiting regulations, we must be even more cunning and find loopholes. If need be, we can even collaborate with secret organizations and unite with wild Beyonders.

"The contracts we hold with members of parliament and high-ranking officials only limit certain actions; they don't prohibit us from harboring ill intentions or cultivating informants among untamed Beyonders. Such contracts don't constrain the actions of untamed Beyonders.

"Likewise, these contracts mainly serve as restrictions. They don't compel us to take certain actions. Sometimes, we can observe events unfold without transgressing the contract while handling things in the usual manner.

"Valentine, even beneath the sun, shadows abound. Consider everyone's shadows, for instance. You must learn to coexist with them. At times, you must eliminate them, and at others, utilize them to extol the Sun!"

Valentine recalled his collaboration with Lumian in Cordu and reluctantly embraced the deacon's words. He extended his arms and replied, "Praise the Sun!"

Angoulême added, "I did not craft these words. Ever since Emperor Roselle's demise, the two Churches, parliament, the government, the military, and Bureau 8 have been embroiled in conflicts. Each has amassed considerable combat experience that would not be deemed aboveboard in any other context.

"Hence, why do you think I silently permit the presence of wild Beyonders amidst the mobs of the market district? Based solely on the reassurances and rhetoric of the superintendents? No, I merely believe they may prove useful at some point.

"Of course, it is everyone's responsibility to tolerate the convergence of heretics into a large mob. I am no exception. There are advantages and disadvantages to everything."

Valentine contemplated in silence, refraining from further inquiries.

Similar tensions were apparent in Riston Province, although they paled in comparison to those in Trier. After all, this was the heartland of the nation.

…

During their journey from Underground Trier to the market district, Lumian, having removed his bandages, cast a glance at the silent Jenna and casually remarked, "I thought you'd dispatch Bono Goodville on the spot, subjecting him to unforgettable torment even if he became a ghost. Who would've guessed you'd merely stab him in the shoulder?"

Jenna pursed her lips and took a few steps ahead before responding in a hushed voice, "If he dies now, the legal process for accident compensation will drag on for years. It might even be symbolic…"

Though she no longer cared, many people still awaited justice.

Franca subtly nodded and added, "Fear not. Bono Goodville will undoubtedly face the death penalty. The only question is the means. Besides, we have left clues for the official Beyonders. Just as we shield Hugues Artois, we shall always assist in eliminating hidden dangers."

Jenna offered a sad smile.

"That's the member of parliament we elected. His secretary and assistant secretary greeted us with an enormous explosion intentionally."

"Are you afraid?" Lumian mockingly inquired.

Jenna fell silent, momentarily at a loss for words.

Lumian pressed on, "I have never relished the benefits of Intis, nor have I cast a vote. Should I encounter a similar situation, I would not spare the member of parliament's secretary or even the president who governs this country!

"My sister once said that blood alone can repay blood. I care not for the identity of the bleeding individual."

Jenna's expression contorted once more, and she spoke with a tinge of anguish, "My mother always taught me to be kind and embrace forgiveness. I cannot allow suffering and hatred to dictate my life. That way, I shall never see the light…"

Without waiting for Lumian and Franca to respond, she lowered her head and gritted her teeth.

"But I despise it so much!"

Lumian pursed his lips and stated, "If you eliminate all your enemies, your life shall not be governed by hatred."

Jenna fell silent for a few seconds before giving a terse nod.

"At the very least, at the very least, I shall not let Secretary Rhône off the hook!

Franca promptly commended her, "Very good. Maintain this resolve."

She then emphasized, "Of course, revenge cannot be blind or impulsive. You must wait until you are strong enough and seize the opportune moment to act. Otherwise, you shall only bring more harm to your family and friends. Furthermore, you will have to witness your enemy living a good life."

"Alright," Jenna softly replied, nodding.

…

Late at night, Jenna, clad in her usual attire, returned to her home at 17 Rue Pasteur in Quartier du Jardin Botanique, her emotions in disarray.

This place was situated near Rue Saint-Hilaire in the market district and the multitude of factories south of Quartier du Jardin Botanique. Previously, Jenna's family had opted to rent this place for the convenience of Elodie and Julien's work.

Upon opening the door, Jenna was greeted by the sight of her brother, Julien, crouched by the window, his head buried in his hands.

Her heart sank, and her voice quivered as she inquired, "Julien, what's the matter?"

Illuminated by the crimson moonlight, Julien leaned against the old wooden table, wearing an expression of terror.

"Don't fire me! Don't fire me!

"My mother passed away. She really passed away. That's why I didn't come to the factory this afternoon…

"Don't fire me! Don't fire me!

"Mom, Mom, it's all my fault. I shouldn't have left you alone in the ward!

"It's all on me, entirely!

"Sob!"

Julien broke into tears, resembling a frightened child.

It seemed as though he had lost his sanity.

Jenna stood in the darkness at the doorway, gazing blankly at her brother. It felt as though she was slowly descending into an unfathomable abyss.

Chapter 250: Condolence Banquet

Julien's sobs reverberated through the room, bathed in the glow of the moon. Jenna stood hesitantly by the door, unwilling to take a single step forward.

Fear gripped her—fear that stepping inside would confirm this as reality and not some dreadful nightmare.

After a while, Jenna shut her eyes tightly and clenched her teeth as she entered the room that served as Julien's bedroom, living space, kitchen, and dining area.

Hunching down beside her brother, she let him cry, not daring to touch him in his state of shock. Softly, she spoke, "We don't have much debt left to settle. Even if we lose our current jobs, we can find new ones. There's no rush…

"You have a solid foundation. There must be other masters out there who would gladly take you in…

"Mom wanted us to have a better life, not to wallow in self-blame…"

Jenna repeated these words again and again until Julien, his spirit shattered, exhausted himself. His body gradually weakened, and he slumped against the wall by the window, drifting off to sleep.

Finally, silence fell.

Watching her brother's face slowly relax, his fear and anguish ebbing away, Jenna let out a silent sigh. Tears welled up in her eyes and streamed down her cheeks.

After shedding silent tears for some time, she rose to her feet and made her way to Julien's bed. Tenderly, she gathered the blanket and draped it over her sleeping brother, leaning against the wall.

Having done all this, she trudged wearily back to the other room. It was her and her mother Elodie's bedroom.

Jenna lay down, her vacant eyes fixed on the dimly lit ceiling, cast in moonlight.

Her mother's words echoed incessantly in her mind, but she couldn't convince herself.

Perhaps, aside from a fortunate few, darkness was the dominant theme in life. Light was but an occasional adornment.

Abruptly, Jenna seized her mother's pillow and pressed it against her face, her body trembling with suppressed sobs.

Why, why is darkness always so overpowering, devoid of light?

When will the sun rise again?

At some point, Jenna succumbed to a deep slumber.

She was startled awake by the commotion outside.

Sitting up, she rubbed her swollen eyes and hastened out of the room.

The sight that greeted her eyes was Julien, toasting slices of bread.

He no longer bore the devastation of the previous night; instead, he was focused on his task.

Jenna's lips quivered for a moment before she finally spoke her customary greeting.

"Why are you up so early?"

Julien responded with a touch of stiffness, "I didn't have dinner yesterday, and my hunger woke me up.

"Just wait a little longer. The toast will be ready soon."

Observing her brother's state, Jenna couldn't ease her worry.

If Julien were still in the midst of a mental breakdown, weeping as he did the night before, she might feel uncomfortable, gloomy, and desperate, but she wouldn't be afraid.

She would compel her brother to meet Franca and have her find a genuine psychiatrist for his treatment.

Yet now, she couldn't be certain if Julien had genuinely recovered or if he was merely presenting a facade of normalcy.

If there were unresolved issues lurking beneath, they could prove catastrophic when they resurfaced!

Jenna feared her brother might leap from a building and end his own life just after they finished breakfast.

Carefully observing Julien for a while, she sensed that his hysterical breakdown had indeed dissipated, but his mind hadn't fully returned to its usual state.

When Julien prepared breakfast, he moved with agility and skill. No issues there. However, during their conversations, he appeared wooden, rigid, and slow to react.

This convinced Jenna that her brother had repressed not only his breakdown and abnormalities but also his thoughts and soul.

Sigh… I still have to find a real Psychiatrist… Jenna's vision blurred once more.

Before long, Julien finished toasting the bread and went to a nearby vendor to purchase a relatively fresh can of milk.

As Jenna nibbled on her breakfast, she pretended indifference and glanced at her brother.

"I couldn't sleep last night, and I felt despondent. I want to see a psychiatrist. You don't seem any better. Would you like to come with me?"

After a brief pause, Julien replied, "I need to job hunt."

A wave of sorrow washed over Jenna once more.

Her brother didn't question her pursuit of a psychiatrist.

People in this neighborhood were reluctant to visit even a regular doctor, let alone a psychiatrist, for mental concerns.

Most of them were unaware of the profession of "psychiatrist" and didn't believe they had any psychological issues.

Considering that seeing a genuine Psychiatrist might require an appointment, Jenna didn't press the matter. After some contemplation, she spoke encouragingly, "I think you should choose your employer and master carefully this time. It's normal not to find a job within a few days. It might take a week, or two, or even a month.

"When the time comes, both of us will have an income. Maybe we can settle the remaining debt within a year. I certainly can't do it alone. The income of an underground singer isn't stable. I never know when my popularity might wane."

On the one hand, Jenna aimed to alleviate the pressure on her brother in advance, so he wouldn't break down again due to the inability to find a job quickly. On the other hand, she emphasized his importance, assuring him that she couldn't do it alone. By relying on his responsibility, she sought to fortify his will to survive and prevent any sudden thoughts of suicide.

Jenna, who had never considered such details the previous day, couldn't help but ponder similar matters today.

Having repeatedly steadied Julien's condition, she watched her brother depart for the gathering spot at Quartier du Jardin Botanique, where factories sought employees and gave opportunities.

After taking a brief rest, Jenna left 17 Rue Pasteur, still feeling somewhat weary, and made her way towards Rue Saint-Hilaire, which was within close proximity.

Her plan was to stroll leisurely towards Rue des Blouses Blanches. It would coincide with Franca waking up, enabling her to persuade Franca to arrange an appointment with a genuine Psychiatrist.

Lost in her thoughts as she passed the intersection, Jenna's gaze swept across the vacant space, catching sight of a newspaper article displayed on a nearby newsstand: "Member of Parliament Hugues Artois Stresses Impartial Handling of Goodville Chemical Factory Explosion."

Intrigued, Jenna was drawn to the words, instinctively stepping closer and picking up the newspaper to swiftly peruse the news.

"…Newly elected member of parliament, Hugues Artois, believes it is unjust to vilify factory owners solely based on accidents. Nor should factory owners, who generate numerous jobs and contribute taxes to the country, face bankruptcy after enduring a mishap. Such circumstances would result in a surge of bankruptcies, heightened unemployment rates, and a fresh wave of protests and turmoil.

"Hugues Artois has expressed his commitment to not forget the injured and deceased in the explosion. He intends to establish a new public welfare fund to assist factory owners in covering a portion of accident compensation, enabling the factories to continue operating. Those responsible for the accident will bear the weight of their sins through increased job creation and tax contributions.

"He further stated his intent to propose a bill at the National Convention, fostering a more favorable environment for entrepreneurs. This would involve streamlined dismissal of unqualified workers and employees, as well as fairer compensation for accidents…"

At that moment, Jenna's shoulders quivered unexpectedly.

She laughed, her body trembling for an extended period.

After a while, she set the newspaper down and resumed her onward journey.

Unbeknownst to her, Jenna arrived at Rue Saint-Hilaire and the partially destroyed Goodville Chemical Factory.

As she gazed at the battered metal tank, thoughts of her mother, Elodie, flooded her mind once again.

She would always gravitate towards that iconic structure upon entering the factory.

A few minutes later, through her blurred vision, Jenna spotted an unfamiliar yet vaguely familiar face.

It was a woman donned in a worn-out dress who said to Jenna, "Hurry, let's make our way to Avenue du Marché. The member of parliament is hosting a condolence banquet and extending invitations. We might be able to obtain something!"

"A condolence banquet?" Jenna asked, bewildered.

The woman nodded enthusiastically.

"Yes, indeed! Your mother was injured in the explosion too, don't you remember? We met in the ward.

"That member of parliament arrived at the hospital just half an hour ago. There will be a condolence banquet later!"

"Hugues Artois?" Jenna blurted out instinctively.

"Exactly, exactly. That's the name," the woman affirmed, grasping the dazed Jenna's arm and hastening towards the member of parliament's office on Avenue du Marché.

Half an hour later, they reached the khaki-colored four-story building.

Many individuals dressed like paupers were queued up for inspection, awaiting entry into the hall.

Jenna, wearing a simple grayish-blue dress, let her hair fall naturally over her shoulders without any makeup.

She joined the back of the line and gradually made her way forward.

Nearly fifteen minutes later, it was finally her turn.

A woman in a dark-blue uniform began the inspection, starting with Jenna's head and proceeding to her boots.

After confirming the absence of any dangerous items, the woman directed her to register and verify her identity before entering the banquet hall.

…

Auberge du Coq Doré, Room 207.

Lumian cast a surprised glance at Franca, who had appeared at the door, and exclaimed, "You're early again today."

Franca, still donning a blouse, light-colored breeches, and red boots, was now clad in a different ensemble.

She scoffed and retorted, "I'm merely concerned that you and Jenna might outwardly agree, only to carry out an assassination on the Member of Parliament's secretary, Rhône."

"Am I seen as such a reckless individual in your eyes?" Lumian inquired.

"Yes," Franca responded without hesitation.

She even contemplated adding the word "most," but when she recollected a Folk of Rage she had encountered in a seaside town, she felt that Lumian couldn't be categorized as one.

Breathing a sigh of relief, she continued, "Since you haven't acted impulsively, Jenna should be safe. I'll go and visit her, assessing if she requires any assistance at home."

Just as Franca concluded her statement, hurried footsteps resounded from downstairs, drawing nearer.

Lumian and Franca, positioned by the doorway, turned their heads to behold Jenna, garbed in a simple grayish-blue dress, her hair tousled, rushing over in distress. She sobbed and uttered, "My brother, my brother has gone insane! He's become a lunatic…"

Chapter 251: Giant Tree

Jenna's brother gone mad? Lumian's rage surged.

Not because he was angry with the other party and thought his mental strength too weak to crumble so easily into madness, but because he heard fate's mocking laughter once again.

He noticed yesterday that Julien blamed himself for Elodie's death and showed signs of withdrawing into himself, but that was far from madness. Even if he faced psychological issues in the future, they would be prolonged, not an instant breakdown.

Unless… unless something happened last night that dealt Julien another heavy blow!

Damn fate!

Franca shared the surprise.

Yesterday, she had warned Jenna to keep an eye on her brother's mental state, but she hadn't expected Julien to lose his mind so swiftly.

As far as she knew, he was a resilient young man. He was in good health, and his emotions wouldn't easily be affected or trigger dangerous tendencies. It would be normal for him to isolate himself or indulge for a while, but a complete breakdown in one night seemed unlikely.

Jenna had mentioned Julien's inclination towards extremism, but that was for the sake of their family. With his sister still alive, burdened with debts, and the need to become an underground singer, it was evident that Julien would persist and work hard to share the load until the debts were repaid. If his psychological issues persisted until then, he might collapse or quietly take his own life.

This led Franca to suspect that Julien had been agitated once again the previous night.

She had similar concerns about Jenna's mother's decision to commit suicide, but she refrained from mentioning it to avoid upsetting Jenna.

Franca understood Elodie's feelings and choices, but suicide felt too hasty and impulsive, as if something had influenced her emotions.

Before transmigrating into this world, Franca had read many reports of such nature. She knew that the torment of poverty, self-blame for burdening the family with debts, fear of being incapable of labor, and pure selfless love could drive an optimistic person into a desperate situation, leading them to sacrifice themselves.

However, such matters typically involved a period of internal struggle before they were carried out. After all, everyone had a will to survive and would consider their loved ones' feelings. While it wasn't impossible to commit suicide upon understanding the circumstances, the chances were quite low.

Franca speculated two possibilities. First, Jenna's mother might have been psychologically affected by her physical condition. Second, the explosion at the chemical plant might have been part of the motives of the Member of Parliament secretary, Rhône, and others. The subsequent abnormal and widespread emotional fluctuations could be connected to those events.

Is Julien in a similar situation? Franca shifted her gaze to Jenna, who approached Room 207, sobbing.

"What happened?"

"Julien got fired," Jenna said, her expression filled with resentment. "Just because he didn't go to the factory yesterday afternoon. But who thinks of work when their mother has just passed away? After leaving the hospital, he immediately went to his master to request time off, but they handed him a dismissal notice instead. He had been an apprentice there for a whole year!"

"Dammit!" Franca cursed. "Can't they just deduct some money? Are they heartless? Do none of their own family members die?"

"They said it needed to be requested in advance. It can't be done afterward." Jenna wiped her tears. "Julien broke down this morning. He cried like a child, blaming himself and expressing his fear of losing his job. I waited until he was exhausted from crying and fell asleep before rushing over to find you. I went to Rue des Blouses Blanches first but found no one there, so I came here."

As she spoke, her words meandered, as though a flood of emotions had surged within her and needed release.

Franca let out a relieved sigh.

"It doesn't seem too grave. Sounds more like an overwhelming breakdown. Trust me, a genuine Psychiatrist can heal your brother completely. I'll arrange an appointment for you right away!"

As Franca spoke, she turned and headed towards the staircase.

The anger in Lumian's heart intensified.

Forgetting to request time off, getting fired on the very day he made the request, succumbing to new disturbances, and spiraling into madness—it all seemed too coincidental.

Motherf*cker Termiboros!

Motherf*cker Inevitability!

Lumian spun towards Jenna and said sharply, "Let's pay a visit to the factory owner and your brother's master!"

Jenna pursed her lips and replied simply, "Okay."

Lumian walked past her and followed Franca up the stairs, his fiery blue eyes burning with determination.

At that moment, the words of Psychiatrist Madam Susie echoed in his mind: Always remind yourself not to overreact. Whenever you feel a similar surge of emotions, take deep breaths and find your calm…

Lumian took a deep breath, feeling a sense of alarm.

In the face of Jenna's brother's madness and fate's cruel taunts, he should be angered and protest, but he shouldn't have allowed his rage to consume him completely!

Almost simultaneously, behind Lumian, Jenna's resentful expression transformed into a calm one. From somewhere, she drew a brownish-green dagger,

resembling a blade fashioned from tree branches instead of metal. Its surface was adorned with bark, arranged in intricate patterns.

With a swift motion, Jenna thrust the dagger towards Lumian's back.

Reacting swiftly, Lumian twisted his body, narrowly avoiding a fatal blow. The dagger found purchase between his shoulder and back, drawing blood.

Jenna leaped back with agility, while the crimson blood from Lumian's wound flowed profusely, like crimson fire.

The bark on Jenna's brownish-green dagger seemed to come alive, greedily absorbing Lumian's blood.

In that moment, the muscles on Jenna's face contorted, rendering her unrecognizable to Lumian and Franca.

In an instant, she transformed into an enchanting and ethereal girl, her features captivating.

Lumian's pupils dilated as he recognized the imposter.

Charlotte Calvino!

Charlotte Calvino, the leading actress of Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons!

Charlotte blended seamlessly with her surroundings, evading Lumian's fiery crimson fireball with ease.

Amidst the thunderous explosion, the door to Room 207 crumbled. The actress chuckled and uttered,

"You regained your senses swiftly. I couldn't eliminate you directly.

"But it matters not. We only require a small portion of your blood."

…

On Avenue du Marché, outside the khaki-colored four-story building that housed the member of parliament's office,

Jenna stepped into the banquet hall with bewilderment. Before her eyes lay an array of exquisite desserts, savory dishes, and glasses of vibrant-colored drinks, spread across long tables.

In one corner of the hall, a small symphony band played a soothing melody, accompanied by the sparkling brilliance of a crystal chandelier and the gentle rays of sunlight pouring in through the windows.

Amongst the crowd were individuals clad in brown jackets, linen shirts, and nondescript attire from the market district, appearing rather out of place amidst the opulence of the banquet.

Some stood in a corner, their expressions vacant, while others regarded the luxurious items with resentment. Some consumed food in a state of confusion, while others savored champagne with excitement, relishing the taste of an affair reserved for the upper class.

Instinctively, Jenna retreated to a dimly lit corner, her expression impassive as she silently observed everything around her.

Meanwhile, on the fourth floor of the member of parliament's office.

Hugues Artois, dressed in a black tailcoat and a dark-blue bow tie, his sideburns mottled and his nose prominent, stood behind a window, surveying the market district.

This chaotic and antiquated place belonged to his kingdom.

"Monsieur Member of Parliament, why host a condolence banquet and invite these plebeians?" Rhône, wearing gold-rimmed glasses and sporting neatly combed hair, asked in confusion.

Hugues Artois smiled.

"It is the duty of a member of parliament. Before assuming another identity, I must fulfill my obligations.

"Furthermore, by offering condolences and assistance to the grieving people at this time, I will leave a lasting impression in their minds. They may become my loyal followers in the future. When the time comes, their conversion will be easier."

The red-haired Cassandra chuckled.

"And they shall remain oblivious to the fact that it is you, a member of parliament, who has brought calamity, pain, and despair upon them.

"They will only perceive the care and concern from a high-ranking figure, satisfied by your promises."

Secretary Rhône nodded, a smile playing on his lips.

"In their eyes, Monsieur Member of Parliament is an esteemed figure they can only admire from afar. They dare not approach or question him, let alone harbor suspicions, vent their anger, or harbor hatred.

"As long as there is no organization among them, they will never dare to resist."

Hugues Artois laughed and declared, "That is precisely why we must sow division among them, fueling their animosity towards each other."

With those words spoken, Hugues Artois turned his gaze towards the sunlit window and muttered to himself, "Those under the Mother Tree of Desire must have already commenced their actions, I presume…"

…

On Rue Anarchie, just outside Auberge du Coq Doré.

Without warning, the ground split open and the center caved in, catching several vendors off guard. They tumbled into the abyss, their screams abruptly silenced.

A colossal brownish-green tree sprang forth from the depths, its branches spreading in every direction.

Stretching across multiple blocks, it ensnared Auberge du Coq Doré within its leafy embrace.

The eloping couple, amidst their verbal sparring, found themselves once again engaged in their favored pastime. Anthony Reid, the information broker, sought refuge beneath a rickety wooden table, trembling uncontrollably. Meanwhile, Pavard Neeson, the proprietor of the underground bar, reached for his sketchpad, downing a gulp of liquor as he sketched with an expression of deep concern…

The immense brownish-green tree continued to grow, unabated.

Chapter 252: Ancient Times

Lumian's fireball missed its target, Charlotte, and in response, countless branches and vines slithered into Auberge du Coq Doré from every direction, entwining the walls, floor, windows, and ceiling. They twisted together in a tangle of brown and green, creating an impenetrable barrier.

In an instant, the entire scene transformed into a surreal illusion before solidifying once more.

Before him stood an immense tree, its shades of brown and green blending together harmoniously. Its roots delved deep into the earth, while its majestic crown reached ever higher towards the heavens.

Lumian's eyes widened as he realized he had been unknowingly transported. It was reminiscent of his previous journeys into Paramita, where he would find himself in a new place without any awareness of the transition.

Gone was Auberge du Coq Doré. Now, his feet trod upon the tangled knots of tree roots that carpeted the ground. His gaze ascended to the colossal tree, reminiscent of ancient legends, as the vast expanse of the sky with its painted-like blue hue and fluffy white clouds loomed above.

The tree's surface was marred by repulsive, damp growths, and each branch appeared to bear the weight of a structure—a building, a road, and other peculiarities.

Auberge du Coq Doré was among them, perched upon a brownish-green tree trunk, intertwined with countless branches and vines, revealing a mere dozen windows to the world.

Through one of the glass windows, Lumian caught sight of the eloping couple engaged in passionate love-making, while the information broker, Anthony Reid, cowered under a wooden table, trembling in fear…

The other tree trunks held objects enshrouded by branches, leaves, and vines, appearing ethereal and hazy, as if they were scenes recorded by a magnetic field through foggy air.

Within this realm, ancient buildings with pediments, herringbone roofs, and lead-framed windows emerged. Women clutching gas street lamps were embraced from behind, priests stood before nude men, and individuals leaped out of glass windows while covering their behinds. Exquisite bodies were carried on trays to dining tables, orgies unfolded with clothing strewn about, and an evil beauty turned her head to reveal two black goat horns. A bishop naked from the bottom half heard confessions from believers in front of a Sacred Emblem.

The scenes varied in architectural styles, clothing, and hairstyles, some evoking ancient times while others seemed to have occurred just yesterday.

Behind Lumian, crimson Fire Ravens materialized, half-illusory. He swiftly scanned the area, yet Franca was nowhere to be found.

Franca hadn't been transported to this place caught between reality and illusion!

On Rue Anarchie, amidst the tree roots, branches, and vines, street vendors and pedestrians devoured the food they sold. Even after vomiting, they continued to eat with unwavering determination. Some forcefully pinned down members of the opposite sex on the street, others drawing daggers to attack peers who had provoked them or dared steal their spots. In scenes of utter chaos, certain individuals approached glass windows, attempting to entice their reflections into a dance with a gentlemanly bow.

Pedestrians and carriages traversed the streets, seemingly oblivious to the extraordinary circumstances. Vendors continued their lively hawking, and shops remained open. Passersby appeared captivated by the bustling atmosphere, unwilling to depart.

What they failed to notice was the absence of anyone who had entered this area—they had simply vanished, never to return.

…

On the fourth floor of the khaki-colored building that housed the member of parliament's office at Avenue du Marché.

Hugues Artois, lost in thought, gazed out at the nearby streets.

Cassandra, with her fiery red hair, turned back to him and asked with curiosity, "What is Susanna from the Bliss Society planning?"

A smile formed on Hugues Artois' lips as he replied, "They spoke a great deal, but my understanding was limited. I recall them mentioning a plan to submerge the underground divine tree into the depths of Fourth Epoch Trier and extend it into a place called the astral world."

Cassandra, Rhône, Margaret, and Boduva exchanged puzzled and concerned glances, unable to hide their confusion.

"But won't that cause a tremendous uproar? Our current strength is far from that of official Beyonders. It's best to avoid a direct clash with them. You might not be aware, but I come from the Sauron family, and I understand the authorities quite well. I know how powerful and formidable they can be.

"Everything we've done so far has been in secret, evading investigations as best we could. If we were to be exposed, it's highly likely that we would face a Saint or a Grade 1 Sealed Artifact. And beyond them, there are angels and Grade 0 Sealed Artifacts."

Hugues Artois pressed his right hand down and reassured them with a smile.

"Fear not, they won't implicate us.

"I didn't incite them to undertake this endeavor. I didn't even offer a hint or assistance. I can only be considered aware of their plan in advance, silently consenting to their actions.

"The only thing that could potentially link us to this affair is the explosion at the chemical plant that received an excessive amount of decay blessings. However, that occurred because Bono Goodville misunderstood Rhône's intentions and committed an unforgivable crime. The various emotions and desires stemming from the accident were exploited, amplified, and used as nourishment. What does that have to do with us?"

As the team members' expressions eased, Hugues Artois stepped away from the window, emitting a deep chuckle.

"If they succeed, it will mark another solid step forward in our pursuits. We will be even closer to welcoming the descent of great existences. If they, unfortunately, fail, we will exercise restraint for the time being and strive to ensure that our activities remain hidden from the Beyonders of the two Churches. We will continue to be the rulers of the market district.

"Success or failure, it's our opportunity.

"During the National Convention's discussions, I will expose the corruption and mediocre abilities of the Beyonders from the two Churches. They have allowed heretics to repeatedly ravage the market district, each time worse than the last!

"I will request Bureau 8 to establish a branch in the market district to assist the inept Church Beyonders and share their burden.

"Bureau 8, always eager to expand its authority, will surely support my proposal.

"With three different official forces simultaneously present in the market district, conflicts among them will work to our advantage.

"Compared to the orthodox Beyonders of the two Churches, Bureau 8 can be influenced, corrupted, and gradually swayed to our side.

"This is my plan. In the long run, victory will be ours!"

Rhône, the secretary with gold-rimmed glasses and neatly combed hair, chuckled.

"That's my specialty."

Influencing, corrupting, and gradually decaying an organization, leading to its decline and moral degradation.

Hugues Artois adjusted his tailcoat and bow tie, preparing to leave for the banquet hall.

Before departing, he surveyed his surroundings, his gaze shifting between Cassandra, Rhône, Boduva, and Margaret. An unusual sense of confidence and certainty washed over him.

These four subordinates possessed impressive Beyonder powers, with the red-haired Cassandra being particularly formidable, instilling him with a sense of security.

Outside the office door, near the stairs, stood an official Beyonder team tasked with protecting him.

Not every member of parliament received the privilege of a three-man protective team. Some were already powerful Beyonders, while others hailed from noble backgrounds and had their own Beyonder bodyguards. For some, a certain level of personal strength warranted the presence of a Beyonder companion to ensure their safety. It was only someone like Hugues Artois, lacking Beyonder abilities and familial support, who required such protection.

According to the rules, the responsibility of safeguarding Hugues Artois rotated among the Eternal Blazing Sun Church, the God of Steam and Machinery Church, and Bureau 8. Today, it was the turn of the Eternal Blazing Sun Church.

In addition to the Beyonders, the entire building housed ten well-trained professional security guards armed with firearms. They were members of Bureau 7, a branch of the Intis Intelligence and Homeland Security

Committee—the Special Services Bureau—responsible for providing basic protection to members of parliament and high-ranking government officials.

Standing by the door, Hugues Artois awaited Rhône, his secretary, to open it. With a smile on his face, he lifted his head slightly, puffed out his chest, and confidently walked out, descending the stairs.

…

On the ground covered with tangled tree roots,

Lumian surrounded himself with semi-illusory Fire Ravens, once again spotting Charlotte Calvino, the leading lady of Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons.

With a remarkable talent for acting, Charlotte gracefully wandered through the illusory scenes formed by the various tree trunks. Sometimes, she adorned a corset dress and styled her hair in an elegant bun. Other times, she embraced contemporary fashion, donning a fitted dress, a small coat, and long boots. On certain occasions, she even transported herself to the era of the Sauron royal family, embodying their love for masculine attire and blending seamlessly with the corresponding backdrop.

In this ethereal process, whenever she left one misty illusory scene, she promptly emerged in another, as if leisurely strolling through different eras of Trier.

Beneath the dim glow of the gas street lamps, Charlotte wore a smile as she addressed Lumian, "You should consider yourself honored. You are the first dissident to enter the divine tree and merge with it."

The crimson Fire Ravens encircling Lumian condensed but refrained from attacking. This was because Charlotte constantly flickered between illusory scenes, altering her appearance with each transition.

Her voice echoed from all directions, forming sentences.

Lumian had already donned black gloves. His right hand was in his pocket, gripping Mr. K's finger tightly.

Charlotte continued her discourse, introducing the situation as if through an aria, as if it were insufficient to satisfy her inner desires.

This ancient Tree of Shadow predates the construction of present-day Trier. Its roots were buried deep underground.

"It brings delight and sustenance to the people of Trier. With the aid of the devil lineage and devoted followers, the ambiance here gradually transformed according to the deity's desired path. The people of Trier have never failed it. Both debauchery and pleasure are inherent to human nature. Year after year, they showered it with various excessive desires, providing it with nourishment.

"Over a millennium has elapsed. Although Trier hasn't reached the expected pinnacle of unbridled joy and indulgence until death, it has taken form. The divine tree's growth has now reached a crucial crossroads.

"In such a situation, pure desires and emotions can no longer play their primary role. They can only serve as firewood for the fire. We require a sacrifice of considerable magnitude. And you, who possess corruption at the angelic level but lack commensurate strength, are the perfect choice!"

Lumian's heart skipped a beat upon hearing this. His pupils dilated, as if he wished to see Charlotte's face clearly.

Does she know that I carry the sealed power of Inevitability within me?

Charlotte grinned.

"The first time you summoned High Priestess Susanna, she sensed the terrifying angelic power sealed within you. She didn't dare possess you. Her subsequent attempts to kill you were not solely motivated by Charlie!"

Chapter 253: Root of the Problem

Upon hearing Charlotte's words, Lumian grasped the problem in an instant.

As soon as he reached the market district and attempted his first Summoning Dance, he unintentionally summoned Susanna Mattise, who had been drawn to Charlie, into his room.

At the time, Susanna seemed eager to possess him, but she instinctively sensed the danger lurking within the seal and refrained from acting. This mirrored the behavior of the peculiar creatures Lumian had summoned before. It appeared that only by compelling them would they dare to take hold of him.

Hence, Lumian didn't see anything amiss then. Even when he later encountered Susanna Mattise again and gained deeper insight into the Bliss Society, he failed to connect the dots.

But now, he realized his oversight.

Susanna Mattise was fundamentally different from the strange creatures he had previously summoned!

The dissimilarity didn't lie in her status as a Sequence 5 evil spirit who had failed to attain godhood, but rather in her possession of reason and the ability to think. Besides being extremely fanatical and persistent, she could also lead and develop a secret organization!

When such an evil spirit sensed the tremendously dangerous power sealed within Lumian's body, even if she didn't immediately recognize it as angelic-level corruption, she would have left in confusion and sought revelation from the evil god she believed in!

By the time she grasped the situation, Lumian, possessing the strength of a Low-Sequence Beyonder equivalent to an angel, would be irresistibly appealing to heretics skilled in sacrificial rituals. He would be no less enticing than a hundred million verl d'or abandoned on the street before a Scrooge.

Had it not been for Lumian's quick thinking, temporarily stunning her with Fallen Mercury and deceiving Susanna Mattise during their second encounter, the situation might have reached its conclusion before the official Beyonders arrived.

For Charlie, an ordinary person, to successfully descend from the fifth floor to Lumian's door and seek help despite Susanna Mattise's threats and lingering presence, it seemed more than just mere luck.

One couldn't trust the words and emotions of an Actor, especially those who were particularly good-looking!

In Charlotte Calvino's performance, Lumian had been scanning the surroundings, hoping to utilize a Hunter's instincts to find an exit from this peculiar space.

Yet, aside from the entangled tree roots blanketing the ground, the colossal slowly-growing brownish-green tree, and the oil painting-like blue sky with white clouds, there was nothing else.

In such an environment, Lumian's Pyromaniac instincts made him stop hesitating. He released his grip on Mr. K's finger and flung it into the air.

Almost simultaneously, the semi-illusory crimson Fire Ravens condensed around him took flight, each tracing an elegant arc as they soared toward the illusionary scene where Charlotte Calvino stood and the fog of the past lingering on the surrounding branches.

Charlotte stepped out of the grand palace, suspected to be a scene depicting Emperor Roselle's affair, and entered the White Maple Palace during the Sauron royal era. There, a Beyonder who had transformed into a man due to a potion but hadn't changed his sexual orientation was scrutinizing the noble ladies' spouses.

The rumbling sounds persisted, yet Charlotte effortlessly evaded the onslaught of Fire Ravens. The fog-shrouded scenes of the past remained unyielding, as if they were truly nonexistent. However, the brownish-green branches that bore them showed signs of scorching and charring.

The Tree of Shadow was, after all, a tree, and thus susceptible to combustion!

The only issue was that Lumian's Fire Ravens inflicted minimal harm upon it.

In an explosive moment, Mr. K's finger detonated like a bomb, transforming into a gruesome rain of flesh and blood that draped Lumian in a hooded robe of crimson.

To Lumian's dismay, Mr. K didn't appear immediately. It was uncertain whether it would take time to sense his presence or if the Tree of Shadow had isolated this space from the real world.

Charlotte ventured into the illusory scene of a torrential downpour, where a few naked figures sprinted about. Her white silk dress seemed drenched, adhering to her body and accentuating her unusually exquisite form.

She bestowed Lumian with a smile, her eyes akin to serene lakes tinged with timidity, innocence, and purity.

A searing flame coursed through Lumian's being, igniting from his head down to his very core.

Lumian's heart surged with longing. He darted between the entangled roots, heading toward the brownish-green tree and the captivating figure of Charlotte Calvino.

Charlotte didn't traverse the various illusory scenes. Instead, she stepped onto a tree branch below and leaned against the brownish-green trunk. Her body trembled slightly, as if yearning to hide but finding no escape.

Lumian's eyes blazed with a reddened fury as his gaze fixated upon Charlotte's sparkling eyes, moist lips, graceful neck, and alluring curves. His thoughts became a chaotic haze.

Thus, he failed to notice Charlotte's abdomen and legs sinking into the brownish-green trunk. He failed to observe the crack forming, unveiling a colossal moist flower.

The vivid red flower bloomed gradually, akin to an enormous mouth anticipating its prey.

Lumian lunged toward Charlotte, propelled by his fervor.

Charlotte couldn't help but smile.

At that very moment, a muffled explosion erupted from Lumian's right pocket.

Boom!

Underneath his blood-colored robe, a ball of flames burst forth, ripping through his pocket and igniting his shirt, causing an agonizing pain to course through Lumian's waist.

Lumian's eyes regained some semblance of clarity. Swiftly, he reached out and grasped Charlotte's wrist, keeping a minimal distance between himself and the moist flower.

Having long been aware of the Mother Tree of Desire's ability to awaken various desires, how could Lumian not have been on guard against Charlotte's seduction?

However, in order to prevent the other party from detecting his defenses prematurely and setting a trap, he chose not to directly soak the Mysticism Smelling Salts in cloth and place it near his nose. Nor did he turn the dagger around, preparing for the collision that would bring him back to his senses.

In their current predicament, such methods held little reliability, for Charlotte might not allow him to truly pounce on her.

Hence, Lumian opted to create a small fireball with a delayed explosion in his pocket, all the while gripping Mr. K's finger!

If he remained unaffected and the fireball neared detonation, he could choose to dispel it and create another.

The small fireball inflicted negligible harm upon him. Its primary purpose was to awaken him through pain.

As for the resultant burn injuries, Lumian paid them no heed.

Pyromaniacs held no fear of such trivialities!

In an instant, Lumian seized Charlotte's wrist, and he caught a flicker of fear on her face.

Without delay, two serpent-like crimson flames burst forth from Lumian's palm, searing their way along Charlotte's arm toward her body and head.

Instinctively, Charlotte tilted her neck back, emitting a pained groan as her skin swiftly turned black from the scorching flames.

Just as Lumian was on the verge of engulfing her entirely, a wave of intense danger washed over him.

He attempted to pull Charlotte to the side, but she appeared to meld with the brownish-green tree. No matter how hard Lumian tugged, he couldn't extricate her.

Reluctantly, Lumian abandoned his futile efforts and lunged to his right.

With a muffled thud, a tree trunk as thick as a wine glass descended from the sky, impaling the ground teeming with tangled roots like a javelin, its tip quivering violently.

Lumian glanced upward and beheld Susanna Mattise, her turquoise hair cascading around her, her emerald eyes and scarlet lips.

She possessed a translucent quality, standing amidst the dense and ethereal canopy of the tree, blending seamlessly with it.

Both the brownish-green trunk and the outstretched branches bore colossal wet flowers in pale hues, flourishing and blooming.

…

On Avenue du Marché, inside the khaki-colored four-story building that housed the parliament member's office.

In a corner, Jenna observed Hugues Artois, garbed in elegance, leading his secretary Rhône and others through the gathering. With a glass of champagne in hand, he offered consolation, made promises, and delivered impromptu speeches with mere words. In response, he received sincere gratitude, unveiled dependence, and instinctive flattery.

Jenna couldn't help but recall a question Lumian had once posed to her: "Do you wish to sit here and watch as the murderers responsible for your mother's death and the destruction of your happiness revel in champagne, indulge in dance parties, and inflict more heartbreak on innocent families?"

Unconsciously, Jenna's fists clenched, her knowledge of the truth fueling an uncontrollable anguish.

However, she understood the need to restrain herself. Acting impulsively wouldn't yield results. She had to endure.

This was because following the proper procedures, she couldn't take action against a parliament member without substantial evidence. And if she desired to seek justice independently, her adversaries boasted several Beyonders who had been bestowed with an evil god's boon and were protected by official Beyonders and armed personnel.

All she could do was endure and await the future!

…

Within the confines of Auberge du Coq Doré, ensnared by branches and vines, Franca stood near the staircase, her face flushed and her eyes glistening as she battled to suppress the overwhelming desire coursing through her veins.

Her right hand trembled as she retrieved the canister of Mysticism Smelling Salts obtained from Rentas. With a twist of the lid, she raised it to her nose.

Achoo! Achoo! Achoo!

A series of sneezes erupted, marking Franca's triumph over her desires and the gradual return of her rationality.

Swiftly scanning her surroundings, she realized that Lumian, who had been mere steps away, had vanished.

Taking note of the unnatural transformations plaguing the motel and the adjacent streets engulfed by colossal trees, Franca clenched her teeth and arrived at a resolution. The tree crowns above seemed to grow increasingly ethereal as they reached skyward, extending into an otherworldly realm.

She retrieved two objects from her possession.

They were a pair of tarot cards.

One depicted a man and a woman raising their cups in a greeting—the Two of Cups. In the center, a wooden staff coiled by twin serpents stood prominently.

The other card portrayed an angel sounding a trumpet, calling forth the resurrection of the departed—the Judgment card!

Chapter 254: The Weight of History

Franca clutched the Judgment card tightly and chanted in Hermes, "Rain judgment!"

The ordinary-looking tarot card remained unchanged, but within a few seconds, Auberge du Coq Doré trembled visibly.

The brownish-green branches and turquoise vines that covered the building's facade receded, as if filled with fear.

Franca's view through the window expanded. She witnessed the sky merging with the ethereal canopy of a colossal tree. The clouds appeared to be caught in a hurricane, swirling in unison.

As the wind shifted, numerous white clouds gathered, forming a massive vortex that descended to the ground, elongating into a sword-like gust that bridged heaven and earth.

The sword descended, and a figure stood unwavering in the middle of Rue Anarchie.

It was a woman with shoulder-length blond hair, donned in a traditional grayish-white knight's training attire.

Standing over 1.5 meters tall, her features were exquisite, and her eyes exuded a commanding aura of dignity, demanding submission and obedience.

Rue Anarchie, where she stood, was no longer recognizable. The surrounding buildings, the narrow roads, and the vendors and pedestrians, consumed by their own desires, were divided and scattered across the strange wilderness, blending with the other streets.

Interwoven roots sprouted from the ground, connecting the scattered sections. Radiating from the brownish-green tree at the center, they spread out layer by layer, growing denser as they neared the core.

The streets occupied by the colossal tree remained hidden from the outside world, thanks to this strange wilderness!

Franca let out a sigh of relief at the sight of the short yet dignified lady with blond hair.

Grasping the Judgment and Two of Cups cards, she blurted out, "Praise The Fool! Praise Madam Judgement!"

As soon as the woman known as Madam Judgment landed, her gaze fell upon the side of the brownish-green tree. Unbeknownst to Franca, a cradle-like dark-red open carriage had appeared there at some point. Two towering creatures with goat horns, pitch-black bodies, and burning dark flames pulled the carriage. They seemed to be Demons.

Seated within the carriage was a woman wearing a light-colored veil. She adorned a loose white robe, her slightly swollen belly emanating a tangible maternal glow.

Lady Moon!

The strange wilderness was her Paramita world!

Lady Moon… You have emerged from the rat's hole… The eyes of Judgment, the blond-haired lady, instantly took on an ethereal quality, as if touched by a golden hue.

Through her eyes, she perceived the intertwining Beyonder powers that existed within the woman on the carriage, manifesting in different colors and states.

"Deprivation!" Madam Judgment's solemn voice resounded.

It was an ancient Hermes word.

With a simple gesture of her right hand, Madam Judgment temporarily stripped the ability to copulate between creatures of different genders.

Immediately after, Madam Judgment leaned forward, pushed out her palm, and declared in ancient Hermes, "Exile!"

With a whirring sound, an invisible and majestic force coalesced into a terrifying hurricane, howling before Lady Moon.

Unfazed by distance, it materialized directly where the carriage was.

Beneath Lady Moon's veil, her faintly discernible red lips parted as she took deep breaths.

The exaggerated hurricane, capable of toppling an entire building, seemed to find an outlet in a confined vessel. It surged into Lady Moon's mouth and permeated her body.

In just a second, the hurricane dissipated into nothingness, completely absorbed by Lady Moon.

With a radiant maternal glow, she extended her right hand, caressing her swollen stomach with tenderness.

…

The cerulean sky and billowing clouds resembled exquisite paintings, while the earth beneath was a realm entwined with tree roots.

Lumian's gaze met Susanna Mattise perched atop the crown of the tree, and they exchanged a knowing look. In an instant, semi-ethereal crimson Fire Ravens materialized around him.

The Fire Ravens circled and soared towards the heavens, but they couldn't breach the ethereal canopy of the tree. They could only approach, their presence without touch.

They alighted upon the brownish-green trunk, scorching it with blackened marks.

Observing this, Lumian swiftly shifted his focus.

He had discovered earlier that flames possessed the ability to inflict certain damage upon the enigmatic entity known as the Tree of Shadow!

Crimson fireballs condensed one after another, hurtling towards the branches of the tree. Yet, they merely singed them without evident impact.

Lumian paused momentarily. Susanna Mattise was preoccupied with something, and Charlotte Calvino had yet to recover from her burns. It was suspected that she had taken refuge within an illusory scene, allowing the crimson flames in his palm to accumulate layer by layer until they transformed into a fist-sized sphere of searing incandescence.

Boom!

The explosion caused by the incandescent fireball was several times more powerful than before, but not a single fragment of the Tree of Shadow's bark fell. Only a larger area of charred flesh and the faint whiff of a colossal light-colored blossom attested to the reality of the incandescent white flame stream.

Lumian's expression turned grave. After a moment of contemplation, a spear formed from blazing white flames materialized in his hand.

He hurled the spear towards the brownish-green tree, witnessing it puncture needle-sized holes in the charred bark before disintegrating into a cascade of flames that spread across various sections of the tree.

Witnessing this, Lumian's heart clenched as he recalled his sister Aurore's favored phrase for describing those who overestimate their abilities to the point of impracticality: "It's akin to an ant attempting to shake a towering oak."

Lumian's anxiety, impatience, and fear compelled him to unleash his fists.

His clenched fists were engulfed in crimson flames.

As he struck the brownish-green tree, a wisp of fire infiltrated its surface.

Fire Infusion!

Lumian sought to bypass the Tree of Shadow's resilient outer bark and directly harm its core.

Bam! Bam! Bam!

His flaming fists pummeled the trunk of the brownish-green tree, as if he aimed to inject every accumulated flame within his being into it.

Bam! Bam! Bam! After a flurry of frenzied attacks, he retracted his fists and took a step back.

Rumble!

A muffled explosion reverberated from within the tree trunk, causing the charred bark to finally crumble away, consumed by flames.

In an instant, an ethereal mist enveloped the scene, as if a long-forgotten beautiful dream had been set ablaze by a match.

Lumian found himself momentarily lost in a haze, as if he had transformed into the protagonist of that dream—a man engaged in a passionate encounter with an enchanting woman wearing an exquisite dress, her hem teasingly lifted.

The unfamiliar sensation felt so vivid that Lumian believed himself to be living it firsthand.

Abruptly, a sharp pain shot through his ankle, snapping him out of the reverie. He discovered numerous branches and vines emerging from his surroundings, stealthily coiling around his feet, their thorns piercing through his blood-colored robe, sinking into his flesh, and greedily drinking his blood.

Lumian grunted, crimson wisps emanating from his body, manifesting into a vibrant cloak of fiery flames that swathed his robe of flesh and blood.

Amidst crackling sounds, the branches and vines ignited, quickly withering into brittle twigs and ashen remnants.

Seizing the opportunity, Lumian swiftly retreated, his gaze fixed upon the wound he had inflicted.

His eyes met the same brownish-green bark, albeit slightly recessed compared to its surroundings.

Beneath the bark… more bark!

Lumian's pupils dilated as he gleaned the gravity of the situation.

The Tree of Shadow had been nurtured by the abnormal desires of Trier's denizens for one to two millennia. Each piece of bark likely represented specific human activities from a particular era, layered upon one another, carrying the weight of history and the subtleties of humanity.

In simple terms, Lumian realized that if he wished to destroy the Tree of Shadow, he would have to confront countless desires accumulated over the span of two thousand years. And he had exhausted his strength to vanquish merely one desire, perhaps one in a billion, or even billions upon billions.

How could he possibly prevail?

Only then did Lumian comprehend the abnormality of his actions.

He had been focused on assaulting the Tree of Shadow instead of seeking an escape route.

An exchange of glances with Susanna Mattise brought forth fear, anxiety, and a deluge of emotions.

No wonder Susanna Mattise allowed me to act freely. No wonder the injured Charlotte Calvino didn't intervene… Lumian had been cautious of the Fallen Tree Spirits and Actors that could evoke desires and emotions, yet he had unknowingly fallen under their sway.

Once more, he raised his gaze and beheld Susanna Mattise, her hair a cascade of turquoise, nimbly shifting positions within the ethereal canopy, uttering an arcane incantation. Charlotte Calvino resumed her enigmatic actions, traversing illusory scenes, her attire, hairstyle, and makeup transforming to mirror various eras. It was no mere performance.

As Lumian's thoughts raced, dizziness assailed him, and his strength rapidly waned.

Such a sensation was foreign to him, but he had subjected others to its effects.

The sedative concocted by the Bliss Society!

Ever the keen observer of his surroundings, Lumian swiftly took out the Mysticism Smelling Salts, his attention drawn to the multitude of pallid flowers adorning the brownish-green tree.

He suspected they were responsible for releasing the sedative gas!

Achoo!

In the midst of his sneeze, Lumian pivoted, intending to distance himself from the Tree of Shadow.

Yet, Mr. K remained absent.

In the blink of an eye, roots emerged from the earth, intertwining to erect a formidable wooden barricade, surpassing ten meters in height, encircling the brownish-green tree and obstructing Lumian's path to freedom.

Lumian halted and pivoted on his heel. Countless fractures marred the trunk, branches, and roots of the Tree of Shadow. Some crevices harbored moist, light-colored flowers, while others resembled cavernous mouths oozing with viscous slime, swiftly elongating toward him.

Trapped with no means of escape, Lumian's lips curled into a smirk.

Without warning, he extended his right hand, pressing it firmly against his left chest. He spoke with a derisive tone, "Termiboros, they truly underestimate your worth. They actually intend to employ you as a sacrifice."

Chapter 255: Bridge of Communication

Upon learning of the Bliss Society's plan, Lumian's immediate assumption was that Susanna had made a crucial mistake.

What lay sealed within him wasn't just corruption at an angelic level, but an actual angel!

The former lacked self-awareness and reacted on instinct alone. Without undoing the seal and reconnecting it with its true form, it was like a cache of explosives temporarily without a detonator. While there was still a possibility of explosion, Susanna and the other heretics believed they could manage the situation.

By employing the right method, utilizing the isolated environment within the Tree of Shadow, arranging the necessary rituals, and harnessing the evil god's gaze during the sacrificial ceremony, they could break the seal and offer it as a sacrifice to the Mother Tree of Desire, ensuring the angelic corruption wouldn't pose a threat.

However, the true angel possessed intelligence and a strong will. He wouldn't idly stand by while being sacrificed.

Once the seal was completely lifted, could Susanna, Charlotte, and the others truly handle a genuine angel?

One of them was a Sequence 5 evil spirit that required the Tree of Shadow to possess some godhood, while the other was undoubtedly an Actor with an irrepressible desire to perform. As for a true angel, He had to be at least a Sequence 2 for Lumian to address Him as such. In ancient times, They were nearly on par with deities and were considered subsidiary gods. The difference between them was as vast as that between a saint and an ordinary individual.

Initially, Lumian hesitated to use Termiboros as an escape plan, fearing that the sinister and detestable angel would exploit the opportunity to make him do something seemingly innocent on the surface but secretly aid Him in infiltrating more of His powers beyond the seal.

In that scenario, Lumian, Susanna, and Charlotte would meet their doom. The Tree of Shadow would be destroyed or vanish underground, allowing Termiboros to truly descend upon the world.

Left with no other choice, Lumian cautiously stepped onto the steel rope suspended above a metaphorical abyss, hoping to maintain his balance.

One misstep, and he would fall into irreparable oblivion.

As soon as Lumian finished speaking, Termiboros's deep and commanding voice resounded in his ears.

It had been a while since Lumian had heard and resisted the angel's temptation. He could only sense His connection to his own fate through the abnormal occurrences around him or the predetermined events. Yet, the angel hadn't given up and continued to make attempts.

Now, after many days, Lumian once again heard Termiboros's voice, experiencing the full presence of the angel sealed within him.

Termiboros's voice carried a tinge of relaxation and satisfaction as it echoed in Lumian's ears.

"If they underestimate me, it will only aid my escape from this seal.

"This environment is perfect, precisely what I've been waiting for. Even if you perish later and the seal loses its support, the outside world won't detect the corresponding changes and won't be able to prevent me from breaking free of my restraints.

"They may not outright kill you, but once they attempt to shatter the seal and perform their sacrificial act, I will unleash their predetermined fate. I will abandon your body and disrupt their ritual."

Termiboros's words insinuated:

This is the opportunity I've long awaited!

Why should I assist you? Just wait patiently for the inevitable outcome!

Lumian fell into silence and leaped away from his original position.

The tree roots split apart, and a massive, damp, pale flower blossomed, one after another, as if the abyss itself had yawned open.

Achoo!

Lumian inhaled the Mysticism Smelling Salts once more, dispelling his drowsiness.

He gazed up at Susanna Mattise in the sky and erupted into wild laughter.

"Haha, you're the most dim-witted bunch I've ever encountered!

"You've set up this ritual without a clue. Did your brains empty out because of your faith in the Mother Tree of Desire, or have they been filled with various liquids?

"Let me enlighten you. What's sealed inside me isn't corruption at the angelic level, but a bona fide angel. His name is Termiboros!

"As soon as that seal is undone, He shall descend upon us and slaughter you all. He'll shatter this foul, wretched fallen tree and cast it into a cesspool!

"If I were you, I'd cease this ritual now and let me go!"

Susanna Mattise, continually shifting positions within the illusory tree canopy, looked down at Lumian and smiled.

"Are you bluffing again? Bluffing seems to be your favorite pastime. I fell for it once; I won't be fooled again."

Not far from her on a branch, one of the few windows on the surface of Auberge du Coq Doré, entwined with vines and branches, reflected the figure of the playwright Gabriel.

He frantically penned his name on a piece of paper with a fountain pen, as though a renowned author signing autographs for avid readers.

He had succumbed to the allure of his script, Lightseeker, gaining fame and becoming a household name.

Susanna Mattise continued, "Furthermore, we've contemplated the possibility that it's not corruption but an actual angel.

"Therefore, with the divine revelation, we've altered a crucial segment of the ritual. We will employ you as the primary sacrifice, together with the seal and the angel, to offer them to the mighty Mother Tree of Desire. It won't hinder the final outcome.

"Sacrificial rituals are not like cooking, where ingredients are transformed into dishes. Our task is to present the offerings to the deity. As for what befalls you, along with the seal and the angel within, it is for the great Mother Tree of Desire to decide.

"Why do you think I refrained from truly attacking you? Such an action might have prematurely shattered the seal!

"Don't even entertain the notion of threatening me with suicide. I shall imbue you with an ardent desire to live."

It seemed as though Termiboros was akin to a valuable gift that would break free of its own accord. The seal was like a locked box, and Lumian himself was the exquisite wrapping. Susanna and Charlotte had no intention of unwrapping the box and presenting the gift to the Mother Tree of Desire. Instead, their plan was to offer the box and its packaging to the deity, avoiding any significant risks.

Upon hearing Susanna Mattise's words, Lumian remained unfazed—neither surprised, nor fearful, nor disappointed.

He tilted his head slightly and directed his gaze towards his left chest, a smirk forming at the corners of his mouth.

"Termiboros, did you hear that? You're going to be packaged up and offered to the deity known as the Mother Tree of Desire. You won't get a chance to escape that seal.

"I'm not sure how the Mother Tree of Desire will deal with you, but I can assure you it won't be anything pleasant. Are you really content to wait for the final outcome as a mere bystander?"

This time, Termiboros didn't immediately respond to Lumian. After a few seconds, His resonant voice reverberated, "Draw your Fallen Mercury and plunge it into the trunk of the Tree of Shadow. Pierce through its second layer of bark."

Lumian was taken aback.

"The fate of the Tree of Shadow can also be exchanged?"

Termiboros's voice regained its grandeur.

"It wasn't possible before, but now it is. That tree possesses a certain living characteristic. It's akin to a mythical treant that hasn't fully developed its intelligence."

Without hesitation, Lumian extended his left hand, passing through the crimson-flaming cloak and robe made of flesh and blood. He grasped the pewter-black dirk adorned with sinister patterns.

Bending his body slightly, engulfed in flowing crimson flames, he sprinted toward the trunk of the Tree of Shadow, swift as a cheetah. Along the way, he leaped agilely, evading the cracks and blooming gigantic flowers.

Observing Lumian's new course of action, Susanna Mattise didn't pay too much heed. She didn't believe he could truly harm the Tree of Shadow or her. Nevertheless, she remained cautious. She intended to kindle his desires and fabricate corresponding illusions, luring him to "unite" with a certain flower or crevice in the tree.

Susanna Mattise's emerald eyes reflected Lumian's figure, draped in a robe of flesh and blood and adorned with a flaming cloak. Moisture welled up in her eyes instantly.

She had hoped to witness Lumian abruptly changing his direction and pouncing upon the colossal light-colored flower. Yet, Lumian appeared unaffected as he charged toward the brownish-green trunk.

Beneath the flaming cloak, Lumian clutched the Mysticism Smelling Salts in his right hand, holding it close to his nose.

Tears welled in his eyes, obstructing his sneeze. However, with the aid of the Alms Monk's endurance, he managed to endure it.

Susanna Mattise was puzzled. With her level and Sequence, even if the other party repeatedly sniffed the Mysticism Smelling Salts, he shouldn't remain completely unaffected.

Under normal circumstances, given the disparity in their strength, she could easily induce Lumian to sneeze while he searched for light-colored giant flowers or brownish-green crevices and continued inhaling the Mysticism Smelling Salts.

Of course, there was a possibility of failure in such situations, but it was unquestionably lower than the probability of success.

But now, Susanna Mattise's initial attempt had proven futile. It was as if a skilled dice thrower had surprisingly rolled the lowest number.

Achoo!

Lumian let out a loud sneeze.

Seizing the moment while his mind remained clear and Susanna hadn't exerted her influence a second time, he shielded the metal canister with his right finger and thrust the Fallen Mercury at the brownish-green trunk of the Tree of Shadow, aiming for the needle-sized hole he had created with the burning-white spear.

A resounding clang echoed as Fallen Mercury failed to penetrate any deeper, as if it had struck an impenetrable iron plate.

Achoo!

Lumian, having inhaled a substantial amount of the Mysticism Smelling Salts, sneezed once more, shaking off yet another desire incited by Susanna. Her attempts faltered once again.

Lumian's right hand, gripping the metal canister, surged with crimson flames.

It absorbed the engulfing cloak of fire that adorned his body, swiftly condensing into a blazing white boxing glove.

In the next instant, Lumian raised his right fist and hammered it against the hilt of Fallen Mercury, resembling a blacksmith forging a weapon.

A thunderous boom erupted as the incandescent white boxing glove detached from Lumian's hand and detonated at the rear end of Fallen Mercury.

Boom!

Lumian's left palm, holding the dirk, was charred and mangled in several places. As for Fallen Mercury, propelled by the force of the explosive impact, it managed to break through the first layer of bark and penetrate into the core trunk of the Tree of Shadow.

Chapter 256: Crack

The searing pain in Lumian's left palm from the explosion nearly caused him to instinctively draw his pewter-black dirk, which had already been plunged into the core trunk of the Tree of Shadow.

Drawing upon his resilience and experience with similar injuries, he fought to control his body's reflexive reactions.

As his mind cleared from the stimulation, he managed to shake off the two desires imposed by Susanna Mattise.

Pain and rationality entwined, engulfing his mind, followed by a terrifying torrent of scenes.

These were the accumulated experiences of the Tree of Shadow over the past millennium, countless fragments of desire that had nourished and formed its trunk. They represented the potential futures of this malevolent tree.

They converged in a mercury-colored illusory river, flooding Lumian's thoughts like a deluge.

Not only were there an overwhelming number of scenes that could overpower any Low-Sequence Beyonder, but some scenes compelled Lumian to instinctively ignore or overlook them, unable to muster the courage to look or discern.

Just when he thought his intellect would be crushed by the immense torrent and reduced to a blank canvas, he realized that he had endured it. It was as if there existed an additional space capable of accommodating countless scenes beyond the limit.

Lumian wasted no time in choosing the fate he wished to exchange. Guided by his intuition for danger and spiritual instincts, he selected a scene:

A brownish-green root extended towards the depths of an ancient structure, devoured by an unseen flame that silently burned in the darkness, casting an eerie glow over the area.

With a crack, the tree root snapped and descended into the shadows. Purple flames surfaced, swiftly transforming into a color indistinguishable to the naked eye. In an instant, it dissipated, leaving no trace behind.

Lumian withdrew Fallen Mercury and exerted all his strength to pry open this fate, but it remained unresponsive.

Swoosh! Swoosh! Swoosh!

Brownish-green tree trunks, not excessively thick, hurtled towards Lumian like javelins precisely thrown by a platoon of soldiers.

Each one possessed the potential to impale and skewer a target upon the gnarled tree roots.

In the ethereal canopy of the tree, Susanna Mattise's emerald eyes widened as she attempted to employ various abilities related to desires—be it for sex, food, greed, or acting—but all in vain. Opting for the tree spirit's powers, she aimed to deliver a physical blow.

Bound to the Tree of Shadow, the methods available to her were far more potent than those of her counterparts who relied on ordinary trees as companions.

Though she still doubted that the so-called Cursed Blade could harm the Tree of Shadow, Lumian's confidence and performance left her somewhat uneasy. Subconsciously, she believed it wiser to disrupt whatever he was doing.

She would rather err on the side of believing it to be seriously harmful and take excessive precautions in advance than be careless and witness unforeseen changes and the possibility of failure.

The former would at most waste a certain amount of strength and energy, delaying the completion of the ritual a little. The latter might bring about changes she didn't want to see and an outcome of failure.

Even if the probability was low, she had to take preventative measures. She couldn't wait until it happened before attempting to rectify it.

The flesh robe enveloping Lumian's body abruptly contracted, diminishing his size and evading the majority of the javelin-like tree trunks.

Two of them landed on Lumian's left and right shoulders, leaving him unable to dodge or evade.

The flesh and blood constituting the robe acted as disciplined soldiers receiving an order. They surged towards the impending strike, constructing layers of blood-colored cushions.

With a resounding impact, the layers of flesh were pierced by the two brownish-green tree spears. More flesh surged forth, hurriedly filling the void.

Although Mr. K's finger had transformed into a robe of flesh and blood to mitigate the damage, Lumian's legs buckled under the force akin to that of a sledgehammer, causing him to tumble backward.

In that moment, he felt the fate of the brownish-green tree root, which had been burned by the invisible flames, loosen its grip.

The illusory power prying it loose didn't solely belong to Lumian, but also to his left chest, emanating from an unknown source.

Gritting his teeth, Lumian utilized the momentum of his fall to laboriously stir up that fate. With great difficulty, he transformed it into a droplet of mercury and exchanged it with the fate of encountering the Montsouris ghost, stored within the pewter-black dirk.

With a crisp crack, fractures spread across Fallen Mercury, as if it struggled to bear the burden of fate. Some fractures were unnaturally long, others were delicate, and some ran straight through the blade.

With a thud, Lumian collapsed onto the coiled tree roots entrenched in the ground, freeing himself from the lingering forces of the brownish-green tree javelins.

His shoulder throbbed with pain, but he remained physically unharmed. The robe woven of flesh and blood began to disintegrate, trickling down, obstructing the pale-colored flower and the brownish-green crack as they unfurled their "mouths" in an attempt to devour Lumian. When he collapsed, he crushed them.

With a resounding boom, crimson flames erupted, consuming the malevolent entities. Seizing the opportunity, Lumian swiftly rolled over and maneuvered to a relatively safe position.

Only then did Lumian recall a crucial issue. Amidst dodging attacks from trees, branches, leaves, vines, roots, and flowers, and taking whiffs of the Mysticism Smelling Salts, he whispered amidst sneezes,

"Encountering the Montsouris ghost… Achoo! …doesn't necessarily mean that the Montsouris ghost will attack immediately!"

If it took a while, what was the point of his previous efforts?

Disregarding the fact that the Montsouris ghost would assault the Tree of Shadow every month or two, even if it attacked every four to five minutes, Lumian found it despairing. When the time came, the preparations for the ritual would surely be complete. The sacrificial ceremony would have already commenced. Under the watchful eyes of the evil god, the Mother Tree of Desire, there was a high likelihood that the Montsouris ghost would choose to wait a while before returning, based on its previous patterns.

Termiboros's majestic voice resonated within Lumian's body and ears once again.

"It approaches. It is a destined fate."

In the ethereal canopy of the tree, Susanna ceased her attacks on Lumian. Utilizing the Tree of Shadow, she remotely guided Charlotte in controlling the sacrifice while delving her consciousness into the brownish-green tree, searching for any potential issues resulting from the pewter-black dirk's assault.

The sooner she discovered it, the sooner she could resolve it and propel the sacrificial ritual forward!

Upon hearing Termiboros's words, Lumian couldn't help but inquire, "Can the Montsouris ghost truly destroy the Tree of Shadow?"

Although both entities were malevolent, the giant tree that had been rooted in Trier's soil for over a thousand years, nourished by countless desires, and linked to a hidden evil god, appeared loftier, more menacing, and more wicked.

Termiboros's deep voice resounded, "No. However, it possesses the ability to influence the Tree of Shadow to some extent, creating an opportunity for you to escape."

Just as Termiboros finished speaking, Lumian caught sight of a sudden black shadow beside him.

The figure stood slightly hunched, resembling an elderly man burdened by the weight of life.

The Montsouris ghost!

It had bypassed numerous restrictions and obstacles to arrive in the alternate space occupied by the Tree of Shadow.

With a single stride, the stooped figure reached the edge of the brownish-green trunk. Susanna and Charlotte noticed its presence.

They instinctively sensed a threat, yet they didn't connect the black shadow to Trier's legend of the Montsouris ghost.

Frantically, they stirred up the various desires of the Montsouris ghost, but their efforts were like stones cast into an unfathomable abyss. There was no response whatsoever.

For the first time, Lumian beheld the true appearance of the Montsouris ghost.

It was neither an elderly man nor even human. It more closely resembled a viscous black shadow taking on a human form, hunching its back.

The Montsouris ghost fixed its gaze upon the Tree of Shadow for two seconds before pressing itself against the brownish-green trunk.

In an instant, it transformed into a malevolent, pitch-black liquid that corroded the layers of tree bark.

A sizable pool of moist darkness spread across the surface of the massive tree trunk, steadily contaminating its surroundings and expanding its reach.

Within moments, the entire lower portion of the Tree of Shadow was overtaken by the black shadow, rendering Susanna Mattise and Charlotte Calvino's attacks futile.

The next second, the oil-painting-like blue sky and white clouds, along with the ground intertwined with tree roots, trembled visibly as if experiencing a violent earthquake.

Faint illusory cracks appeared on the surface of the tree trunk, the ground, and even in the sky. Some of them slowly widened, revealing glimpses of the street beyond—a distorted microcosm of chaos influenced by branches, vines, and desire.

"Be prepared," Termiboros's grand voice echoed in Lumian's ears.

Realizing that she couldn't halt the Montsouris ghost and that the situation was rapidly deteriorating, Susanna Mattise wore a resentful expression and recited an incantation in ancient Hermes, "Son of the God who should never have been born, you are a cage for the imprisoning curse, an evil that erodes history. I implore your assistance."

The instant Susanna Mattise finished speaking, the branches beneath the ethereal tree crown began to "secrete" a viscous, pitch-black liquid.

It bore a striking resemblance to the black liquid assumed by the Montsouris ghost, but there was a significant distinction. It possessed a greater degree of chaos, frenzy, and wickedness.

Almost simultaneously, pale-white, malformed skulls, yellowish eyeballs entwined with thick veins, scarlet tongues dripping with repulsive pus, and indescribably grotesque objects that induced madness by mere sight sprouted from the liquid secreted by the tree trunk.

…

In the untamed wilderness, where Madam Judgment and Lady Moon engaged in their fierce battle, Rue Anarchie and other locations lay scattered. The brownish-green tree swayed ominously, while tiny cracks that appeared to pierce the very fabric of reality spread across its surface and surroundings.

Suddenly, an illusory door materialized in the sky, layer upon layer.

From the midst of these doors emerged a lady clad in an orange dress, her appearance exuding a languid aura. Worms emitting resplendent starlight wriggled in and out of her visage, obscuring her true features from discernment.

With purposeful strides, the woman approached the brownish-green tree, extending her hands to grasp the sides of an invisible crack, as if intent on tearing it open!

Chapter 257: The Unfortunate

Transparent maggots, shimmering under the starlight's embrace, wriggled out from the lady's relaxed palm, their movements concealed within an elusive crack. The crack, once invisible, now bore the hue of starlight.

With a vigorous pull, the transparent veil veiling this world let out a terrifying groan, unable to bear the weight. It parted forcefully, yielding to the unstoppable momentum.

Amidst an indescribable shattering, the crevice ripped apart, transforming into a colossal cavity adorned with glimmering starry specks.

It resembled the entrance to a tunnel leading to an unknown realm.

In a mere instant, the woman in the orange dress vanished from the wilderness.

Seated within the cradle carriage, Lady Moon's expression flickered. She commanded the Demon-like creatures pulling the carriage to follow her into the tunnel.

Madam Judgment trailed closely behind.

…

In a world where tree roots intertwined and ethereal clouds resembled oil paintings.

As the branches of the otherworldly tree secreted viscous black liquid and peculiar entities sprouted, Lumian felt his mind teetering on the edge of madness, despite Termiboros's warning not to gaze skyward.

His skin prickled, and the flesh beneath twitched unnaturally, as if masses or tumors were about to form.

At that moment, pure starlight bathed the world, casting its radiance upon Lumian's eyes.

Not far from him, a minuscule crack instantaneously expanded into a mystical and enigmatic door of starlight.

"Shut your eyes and rush through the doorway," Termiboros's resonant voice echoed in Lumian's ears.

Without a moment's hesitation, Lumian clutched Fallen Mercury tightly with his bloodied left hand and sprinted toward the starlit door.

Squeezing his eyes shut, Lumian relied on a Hunter's instinctual understanding of spatial location and precise distance, reaching his destination within a few strides. Unperturbed by the changes around him or the lurking dangers, he leaped into the unknown.

After a brief bout of dizziness, Lumian sensed as though he had ascended from the depths of a profound lake, his entire being easing.

He opened his eyes and beheld the brownish-green silhouette of the Shadow Tree not far away, Auberge du Coq Doré, and other buildings cloaked in branches and vines. He witnessed streets divided by peculiar forces in various sections of the wilderness, merchants and passersby indulging in their individual desires, and Franca gracefully leaping from a second-story window of Auberge du Coq Doré.

He had departed from the alternate realm within the Tree of Shadows, yet he had not returned to the tangible world.

Franca also caught sight of Lumian nearby. She exclaimed with excitement, "Hurry, find the exit!"

Although she had "summoned" Madam Judgment and felt a measure of confidence, she desired no lingering stay in this place.

How could a mere Sequence 7 like herself partake in a battle involving demigods? Even observing from a distance posed significant risks.

Lumian nodded and sprinted toward Franca, scanning his surroundings for any signs of an exit.

The more he surveyed, the more he sensed the resemblance to Paramita, a boon from the Great Mother. However, there were no hordes of undead or Demons casting sinners into the abyss.

Could it be that the Bliss Society's operation involved the followers of the Great Mother? Lumian swiftly formed a hypothesis and shouted to Franca, who was mere inches away, "To the edge of the wilderness!"

Drawing from his experience, if this place was indeed Paramita, they should be able to escape from the wilderness's periphery.

Franca nodded slightly and followed, without questioning his instruction.

Suddenly, the wilderness convulsed with a violent quake, and a low rumble echoed from within the brownish-green tree.

The sky darkened, and the world itself teetered on the brink of collapse.

The branches and vines that had ensnared the buildings and streets swiftly withdrew. Vendors, pedestrians, and residents, caught in the grip of their desires, snapped out of their dazed states.

They ceased their ravenous feasting, released their grip on their partners, and rose in fear. Bloodied and bewildered, they halted their savage violence and looked around in a state of confusion…

In Auberge du Coq Doré, the bickering eloping couple ceased their romp. Oblivious to the wrongness of their actions, they were perplexed as to why the sky had darkened so drastically, as if evening had descended upon them.

Anthony Reid, trembling beneath a wooden table, regained his composure. He emerged and peered out the window, his expression darkening.

Gabriel, who had been frantically signing his name, suddenly regained his senses. He wondered if the stress had taken its toll on his sanity while he polished the Lightseeker script, incorporating the theater manager's feedback.

Pavard Neeson, owner of the underground bar, set aside his paintbrush but couldn't tear his gaze away from the drawing board. Though he had only sketched it hastily, he felt it was the most remarkable work he had ever produced. It surpassed even his loftiest standards. Unconsciously, he yearned to return to that state, but he couldn't.

In the blink of an eye, all the branches and vines retracted into the Tree of Shadows. Most of the vendors, pedestrians, and residents, who had regained their senses, beheld the ominously terrifying brownish-green tree.

They didn't understand what had transpired, but fear propelled them to swiftly flee from the Tree of Shadows, heeding their instinctual warnings.

In that moment, Susanna Mattise, her turquoise hair flowing, materialized atop the ethereal tree crown. Below her stood Charlotte Calvino, wearing an expression of disappointment, frustration, and hatred.

The escape of the sacrificial offering signaled a temporary failure in their sacrifice. They promptly departed the alternate realm to evade the repercussions of the demigod-level clash.

Susanna Mattise, beset by the backlash and the influence of godhood, appeared increasingly ethereal, as if she could dissipate at any moment.

Lumian and Franca, racing toward the wilderness's edge, flickered in her weakened gaze, yet she lacked the power to influence them.

Under normal circumstances, her fusion with the Tree of Shadows granted her the ability to exert her powers from a distance. However, the backlash from the interrupted ritual and the uncontrolled corruption following the Son of God's descent had nearly claimed her life. She was now in an extremely feeble state.

The tenacious and evil spirit that she was, Susanna Mattise refused to surrender so easily. She yearned to capture Lumian and drag him back into the Tree of Shadows to resume the unfinished ritual.

Once again, the branches and vines of the Tree of Shadows swiftly extended, ensnaring a hapless vendor and hoisting him aloft. Their thorns pierced his flesh, absorbing the vital essence that could rejuvenate Susanna.

It was akin to utilizing the Tree of Shadows to enter a dream-like state, draining energy to gradually lead the target to their demise through a sinister encounter. However, the process had become crude and expedited—an accelerated ordeal!

Vendors, pedestrians, and residents trapped within the wilderness erupted in terrified screams as they frantically fled upon witnessing the surge of brownish-green branch and vine monstrosities and their companions being hoisted into the air.

The eloping couple, wrapped tightly in a blanket, darted out of Auberge du Coq Doré, following in Anthony Reid's wake toward the wilderness's edge. Behind them trailed Gabriel, Pavard Neeson, and the tenants who hadn't yet departed for work. Before them swarmed vendors and pedestrians in a chaotic scramble.

One by one, fleeing escapees were snatched up by tree branches and vines, their cries for help piercing the air.

The peddler, who had once served Lumian extra Whiskey Sour, stumbled over a rock on the ground. In utter despair, he witnessed turquoise vines creeping up his body, layer upon layer, engulfing him entirely.

Sensing the commotion, Lumian turned his head and fixated on the scene for several seconds before gradually slowing his pace.

Upon witnessing this, Franca cursed, "Do you plan to go back and save them? Dammit! Know your place. You're just a wanted criminal, a mob leader!"

Lumian didn't come to a halt, but he didn't hasten his steps either.

He and Franca drew ever nearer to the edge of the wilderness.

In that very moment, Lumian's ears resonated with the majestic voice of Termiboros.

This time, the angel of Inevitability did not deliver sentences one by one. Instead, He injected a lengthy paragraph into Lumian's consciousness at intervals.

"Have you not come to terms with your destiny?

"After enduring the might of Inevitability, there shall naturally be a corresponding corruption.

"From the moment Cordu was obliterated, you became the unfortunate one.

"It was not I who exerted influence over you in many past matters; rather, it was your hapless fate playing its part.

"As an unfortunate soul, not only shall you suffer ill fortune, but so too shall those around you and those close to you.

"If it were not for your lack of knowledge in mysticism, which allowed Susanna Mattise to uncover the issue within your body and begin contacting Hugues Artois about employing the chemical plant explosion for the sacrificial arrangement, Jenna's mother would not have taken her own life, and Jenna's brother would not have descended into madness.

"If you had been cautious enough, when Flameng regained consciousness and drank with you, you would have remembered to seek an opportunity to engage a genuine psychiatrist. He may not have chosen the path of suicide.

"If you had not merely forewarned Ruhr, but also restricted his movements, he would not have succumbed to the illness once more and met a swift demise. Michel would not have lost her will to live.

"All this misfortune has been brought upon them by you.

"My existence is not solely a trump card that grants you boons and the power to deter others, but also an inescapable curse.

"Only by bowing to Inevitability and releasing me from my seal can your misfortune come to an end.

"If you continue on this path, you shall be unable to save those whom you wish to save. You shall be unable to protect those whom you wish to protect. You shall only amplify their misfortunes.

"When the time comes, those pleading for help here shall perish.

"Gabriel shall perish.

"Charlie shall perish.

"Jenna shall perish.

"Franca, too, shall meet her demise."

Lumian came to a sudden halt, his countenance twisted in anguish. He could no longer conceal the pain that consumed him.

Franca called out once more, "Get a grip! It's all well and good to do good deeds when everything is fine. But now, we need to escape and seek help from official Beyonders! Who knows what will come of those demigod battles? Susanna is now like an empowered Sequence 5 with some godlike abilities. She's not someone we can handle!

"Those people don't expect assistance from a villain who enjoys playing pranks on them!"

In the vicinity of the brownish-green tree, numerous individuals already dangled from its branches.

With a swoosh, Gabriel was hoisted up by a few green vines, and the scattered pages of the Lightseeker script fluttered to the ground.

Pavard Neeson, the owner of the underground bar, stood beside him, his body impaled by a protruding spike.

Among the eloping couple, the woman stumbled and ran slower, eventually tripping over a branch and becoming ensnared by the vines.

The young man wrapped in a blanket grew alarmed and continued onward. However, after a few steps, he abruptly halted, cursing himself.

"Dogsh*t!"

Before he could finish his sentence, he had already spun around and dashed back toward his partner. Clenching his teeth, he sought to tear at the vines and help her free.

Desperate cries and terrified screams reverberated through the wilderness.

Lumian's fists clenched involuntarily.

Suddenly, he let out a chuckle and spoke.

"Then, are you considered close to me? After all, you reside within my body. Will you also encounter misfortune?

"I know I will face countless failures, yet I will persist again and again in pursuit of that elusive and seemingly insignificant hope!

"If I had chosen to surrender, I would have been defeated long ago!

"And now, there is still a chance for success."

With that, Lumian took another step and continued his sprint toward the edge of the wilderness.

Although Franca couldn't comprehend his mutterings, she was glad to see that he had made a wise decision.

Two to three seconds later, the two of them reached the wilderness's edge. Lumian deliberately maintained a distance from Franca, then suddenly extended his arms and pushed her out.

Caught off guard, Franca watched in shock as her body gradually left the wilderness. She turned to gaze at Lumian.

Lumian smiled and spoke gently, "Once, I shared their despair, pain, and longing for aid. And during that time, someone extended a helping hand to me."

With those words, he pivoted and sprinted toward the brownish-green tree.

In the dim expanse of the wilderness, crimson flames ignited upon his body. This time, the fiery cloak no longer isolated him from his garments, scorching his skin and flesh.

He intended to use the constant pain to resist the diverse desires he would encounter next!

As he ran, his gaze locked onto Susanna, her turquoise hair entwined. Yet, he "saw" not only the Fallen Tree Spirit, but also the figure etched in his memory.

The one who had illuminated his path.

Chapter 258: Assassin

Susanna's eyes fixed on Lumian as he dashed towards her, his body engulfed in crimson flames. She absorbed energy from the surrounding crowd, including peddlers, pedestrians, and tenants hanging from the trees. Her goal was to restore her combat abilities as quickly as possible.

She wasn't worried about Lumian causing her harm. Positioned at the top of the tree crown, she knew he couldn't reach her. Moreover, she was one with the Tree of Shadow, making her nearly invulnerable. Without godhood, any attack would only cause minor injuries, incapable of killing or severely harming her.

Thud! Thud! Thud! Lumian sprinted into an area where tree branches and vines entangled, with a hundred to two hundred humans dangling from above.

The brownish-green foliage tried to ensnare and pierce him, but his fiery aura forced them to retreat in panic.

Suddenly, a rumbling sound shook the ground. The brownish-green tree descended rapidly, shrinking its height to seven to eight meters.

The violent tremors across the wilderness made it difficult for Lumian to advance.

…

Rumble. A tremor like an earthquake shook the crystal chandelier in the banquet hall. Terrified expressions appeared on the faces of most people present. Quick-thinking individuals sought shelter under the long table draped in a white tablecloth.

The team assigned to protect Hugues Artois consisted of Imre, a mixed-blood individual, Valentine, and a Warrior pathway Beyonder named Antoine.

Sensing the anomaly simultaneously, they tacitly sent Imre to investigate. He rushed to the window and peered out, trying to locate the source of the disturbance.

Imre observed that several houses in Rue Anarchie, Rue du Rossignol, and Rue des Blouses Blanches had tilted to a certain degree, but they had not collapsed. Their surfaces were covered with brownish-green branches and vines.

In comparison, the prominent feature was the brownish-green tree, situated roughly on Rue Anarchie. It descended, adorned with numerous tree tumors and flowers.

The scene lasted only a few seconds before returning to normal, as if an unsuccessful painting had been replaced by another work.

"What's happening?" Hugues Artois calmly approached the window and inquired.

Imre didn't hold back any information. He lowered his voice and replied sincerely, "Anomalies have occurred on Rue Anarchie, Rue du Rossignol, and Rue des Blouses Blanches."

Rue Anarchie, Rue du Rossignol, Rue des Blouses Blanches… As Jenna, who had approached a nearby window but missed witnessing the scene, heard the street names, her feet froze in place.

Two names immediately surfaced in her mind: Ciel, Franca…

Had they encountered the anomaly? Jenna's heart sank, and she instinctively looked at Hugues Artois.

She noticed a curl forming on the member of parliament's lips, as if he couldn't hide his delight.

It's him… It's him and his group of heretics! Jenna's mind instantly reached a conclusion. Darkness enveloped her, and despair surged through her uncontrollably.

Could Franca and Ciel withstand the planned attack by the heretics and survive this anomaly?

Should I rush to their aid with my current strength? Or will I only bring harm to them?

At that moment, Jenna felt as if the pillars supporting her—her two friends who had always stood by her side—were about to crumble, just as she had lost her mother.

And it was all the fault of the heretics, of Hugues Artois!

Her thoughts drifted to Franca's words when she consumed the potion and transformed into an Assassin, warning Jenna to avoid contact with evil gods.

"Contact with evil gods will bring nothing but disaster.

"Not only will it drive a person to madness and strip away their true self, but it will also drag everyone around them into darkness, whether they know them or not.

"If we don't eliminate those individuals, the influence of the evil gods will persist. The pain will return again and again, unending."

And now, Hugues Artois stood at the center of all the market district's disasters.

Jenna lowered her head, unable to meet Hugues Artois's gaze, afraid that her eyes would betray the pain and hatred within.

Hatred consumed her!

Yet, she could only remind herself that her brother Julien was still alive, albeit with a certain mental ailment that could be cured. If he lost his sister next, he might truly spiral into irredeemable madness.

After the banquet concludes, after the factory owners provide their "compensation," and after I settle all our debts, I'll take Julien and leave the market district and Quartier du Jardin Botanique. We'll find another place to live, far from the ensuing pain… Jenna repeated these words to herself, desperately trying to contain her emotions.

"Why is there another anomaly?" Hugues Artois questioned Imre, Valentine, and Antoine.

Imre offered a bitter smile and replied, "I witnessed that tree. It has appeared multiple times in Trier's history, but it has never been fully resolved."

Ever since joining the Purifier team in Trier, he had learned about the hidden dangers lurking beneath the ground that couldn't be entirely purified. The brownish-green tree was one of them.

He, his superiors, and his teammates couldn't fathom why Trier had been established atop such things in the first place.

Without giving Hugues Artois time to question their capabilities any further, Imre added,

"Now that the anomaly has been discovered, it won't be long before it's suppressed."

As a member of the elite Purifier team, he knew that Trier differed from other countries' capitals. Due to the perpetual underground dangers, both the former royal family and the current parliamentary government had agreed to the two Churches' secret dispatching of an angel each or placed Grade 0 Sealed Artifacts in Trier to prevent any mishaps.

Of course, during periods when the royal family and government held immense power, the Church's angels refrained from interfering. For example, during Emperor Roselle's reign.

Once the anomaly caused by the peculiar tree was exposed, it would swiftly face a devastating blow. Although it couldn't be completely eradicated, it would be kept under control for a considerable time.

…

After the swift and violent descent of the Tree of Shadow, the wilderness stabilized. Gabriel, Pavard Neeson, and the others remained suspended from the branches, their faces growing pale and blackened, as if drained of energy.

Lumian regained his balance and continued sprinting towards the nearby brownish-green tree, still engulfed in crimson flames.

At that moment, Susanna Mattise had regained a significant portion of her strength. Lumian's figure appeared in her eyes, awaiting his approach within the range of her current abilities.

Behind Lumian, a shadow detached itself from its owner and stealthily lunged at his back.

It was Charlotte Calvino, "acting" as a shadow!

Having not been the host of the ritual and being far from the treetop, she had not suffered the backlash or intense corruption, thus her strength had not waned. Seeing Lumian turn around, she quickly hid herself, and put to show her acting abilities, ready to execute a surprise attack.

Suddenly, a gunshot pierced through the air in the distance.

The iron-black bullet was too distant and lacked precision. It grazed Charlotte's body, but it disrupted her plans.

Wearing a blouse, light-colored breeches, and red boots, Franca emerged at the edge of the wilderness, clutching a brass revolver. She cursed at Lumian's retreating form and shouted, "F*ck, don't you think I'm on your team?"

…

Noticing that the street had returned to its "normal" state, Hugues Artois made his way back to the center of the banquet hall, holding a glass of light-gold champagne. Standing before the gathering, he began his speech as usual.

"Ladies and gentlemen, it is an honor to have you join us for this condolence banquet. Please join me in a moment of silence to honor those who have tragically departed…

"As you can see, yet another accident has occurred in the market district. We cannot continue like this. We must establish a more efficient and adaptable system to handle such situations.

"I understand that many of you harbor anger and fear in light of the recent accident. Your loved ones may have lost their lives, sustained severe injuries, or perhaps experienced agitation, mental breakdowns, and madness as a result of this…"

Jenna's head shot up upon hearing these words, her gaze fixed on Hugues Artois once more.

He had just mentioned "agitation, mental breakdowns, and madness" in such specific detail.

Under normal circumstances, such elaboration would not be necessary. A simple reference to insanity would suffice.

Did Hugues Artois know that someone would suffer a mental breakdown due to the chemical plant explosion and go mad? And was he deliberately mentioning it in his speech, as if a criminal returning to the crime scene, reveling in his sinister handiwork? An absurd mix of hatred and fear consumed Jenna's heart.

If her suspicions were correct, Julien's mental breakdown might have been influenced by the heretics!

Could he be cured? Could he be saved?

If I don't sever the source, even if I leave the market district with Julien, there might still be hidden dangers and lingering problems in the future! The feeling of desperation overwhelmed Jenna, as if she were trapped in an inescapable darkness.

Her pupils dilated, reflecting Hugues Artois's figure with a chilling clarity.

Imre, Valentine, and Antoine's expressions darkened, their gazes falling, as they heard Hugues Artois's implicit accusations against the two Churches.

…

The alternate space that accompanied the Tree of Shadow lay in ruins. Some areas were coated with pitch-black mucus, while others bore gaping holes, as if swallowed by an endless void.

Suddenly, a glimmer of light emerged from the shrunken door of starlight.

It grew brighter and brighter, akin to a transformed sun, illuminating every nook and cranny with an eerie clarity, banishing all shadows.

A female figure draped in a white robe adorned with golden threads emerged from the radiant source. She appeared to be crafted from pure light, translucent and ethereal. With emerald green eyes and flowing blond hair, she exuded beauty and a divine aura.

The guardian angel of Trier, Saint Viève.

…

Amidst the applause, Hugues Artois, having concluded his speech, mingled with the families of the victims, champagne glass in hand. He displayed enthusiasm, friendliness, and a trustworthy demeanor.

Jenna closed her eyes and wandered towards the long table dressed in a white tablecloth. She picked up a plate and placed some food on it, then grabbed a long silver fork and began to eat.

As she ate, she slowly approached Hugues Artois in a daze.

Drawing near, just two meters away, she assumed a stance that suggested a conversation with Monsieur Member of Parliament.

Surrounded by his team and guarded by official Beyonders, Hugues Artois noticed Jenna. He smiled warmly, anticipating her approach.

Jenna passed by Secretary Rhône and positioned herself a step away from Hugues Artois.

Before their conversation could commence, the ground trembled once more, accompanied by a resounding rumble. Rue Anarchie and Rue des Blouses Blanches seemed to brighten significantly.

Cassandra, Hugues Artois, and the others turned their bodies instinctively, gazing out of the window, their concern evident.

Witnessing this, Jenna closed her eyes once more. Then, she took a step forward, raising the silver fork in her hand towards Hugues Artois!

All the emotions suppressed within her heart erupted.

You wretched politician, the bringer of disaster and darkness to the market district!

You heretic, your conscience devoured by a dog!

You are the bastard responsible for my mother's death and my brother's descent into madness!

Perish now!

Without your demise, the suffering in the market district shall never cease. Darkness shall engulf this place, preventing the dawn from breaking.

Indeed, with heretics surrounding you and the protection of official Beyonders, anyone attempting to confront you would meet their demise here, dissuaded by the risk.

But what if an assassin has no intention of leaving alive?

Jenna channeled all her hatred, outrage, and pain into the long-handled silver fork in her grasp. She unleashed an Assassin's Mighty Blow, aiming for Hugues Artois's exposed right eye as he turned his body.

In that moment, she glimpsed the surprise, confusion, and fear etched upon his face. She witnessed Hugues Artois frantically glancing towards Cassandra, pleading for assistance.

Cassandra's line of sight was obstructed by Purifier Imre, who had subtly stepped diagonally, leaving her unaware of the imminent danger.

With a squelching sound, the long-handled silver fork in Jenna's right hand plunged deep into Hugues Artois's eye socket, piercing into his brain.

Hugues Artois's expression froze. The fear, confusion, and terror remained etched on his visage. Time did not permit much change, only revealing a profound sense of despair.

Jenna watched as crimson blood gushed forth, and Hugues Artois's countenance gradually crumbled under the lights. Surrounding her, red sparks erupted, whether from firearms or supernatural abilities. She closed her eyes with a serene smile, surrendering to her fate.

Mother, I see the light.

Chapter 259: Awe

Hugues Artois's initial reaction was one of surprise and confusion as he beheld the glimmering silver light emanating from the long-handled fork, thrusting menacingly towards him.

He found it hard to fathom that someone would attempt to assassinate him, a well-protected member of parliament, under these circumstances.

The assassin didn't appear particularly formidable.

Despite being a retired veteran, he had left military service five years ago to pursue a career in politics. His combat skills were no longer honed. With the adversary a mere step apart, evading the attack effectively seemed impossible.

Disregarding him, even a Sequence 9 or even a Sequence 8 Beyonder would likely struggle to dodge a Mighty Blow from an Assassin, especially one who had stealthily approached them. It all depended on whether their abilities could help them avoid vital areas or reduce the damage, thus preventing instant death.

Naturally, some Sequence 8 or 9 Beyonders possessed the ability to sense danger or hostility ahead of time, thwarting the approach and attack of Assassins.

In an instant, Hugues Artois cast his gaze upon the red-haired Cassandra, the three official Beyonders, and his subordinates Rhône, Margaret, and Boduva, feeling intense fear grip him.

However, what met his eyes was Cassandra's red hair—her body and line of sight obscured by the mixed-blood Imre—as well as the calm and indifferent gazes of the official Beyonders, Imre and Antoine. Valentine had reacted immediately but restrained himself, and Rhône, Margaret, and Boduva, though eager to use their Beyonder powers to save him, dared not expose their boons obtained from the evil gods.

At that moment, Hugues Artois was overwhelmed by a profound sense of despair.

You all, save me!

Save me!

With a squelching sound, the long-handled silver fork plunged mercilessly into Hugues Artois's right eye, propelled with all the force Jenna could muster. It pierced through the eye socket, penetrating the brain, with only a small portion of the handle protruding outside.

Hugues Artois's thoughts became hazy.

He yearned to reach out and grasp something, but his arm wouldn't even rise.

I haven't become president… I haven't witnessed the arrival of great existences… I haven't received the boon of godhood… I cannot die like this… Slain by a feeble Assassin… I-I don't wish to perish… A barrage of thoughts flashed through Hugues Artois's mind as gunshots resounded in his ears.

His body slumped to the ground, and darkness enveloped his vision once more.

Thud. Hugues Artois, member of parliament for Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman, collapsed onto the ground, his heart ceasing to beat.

Jenna, her eyes shut and a smile adorning her face, was struck by bullets fired by nearby Bureau 7 agents.

One bullet struck her shoulder, and another pierced her ribs from the opposite side.

The pain contorted her expression instinctively. Her body involuntarily recoiled, as if she wished to curl up into a protective ball.

She opened her eyes and beheld Rhône and the other devotees of the evil gods glaring at her with hatred and an unnatural panic, yet refraining from attacking.

In the next instant, a golden revolver, its chamber loaded, pressed against Jenna's head. Imre surveyed the room and declared, "I have already subdued the assassin. Verify if Monsieur Member of Parliament can be saved and maintain order. No one should leave for the time being."

He made it clear that he intended to escort Jenna back to Église Saint-Robert or inquire on the spot about the motive behind the assassination and the mastermind, preventing Cassandra and the others from venting their rage.

…

As the Tree of Shadow descended, the various streets reverted to their original state, yet they remained engulfed in wilderness.

Lumian perceived that Susanna Mattise could no longer stir his desires from a distance as she did before. So, he turned around, intending to confront Charlotte first.

The crimson flames enveloping his body burned with intensity, scorching his garments and searing his skin and flesh to varying degrees, inflicting constant pain.

This torment stimulated his mind, allowing him to maintain a certain level of clarity. He could also rely on the endurance bestowed by the Alms Monk boon to sustain his thoughts and actions, instead of merely focusing on enduring the agony.

Even for Pyromaniacs, such incineration posed a threat. Moreover, as time passed, the damage would worsen, eventually endangering their lives.

Of course, long before that point, Lumian's spirituality would likely crumble. He could only allow the flames to extinguish on their own.

Were it not for the Alms Monk boon and the internal struggle within the Tree of Shadow, his spirituality would have been strained by the self-immolation.

Upon seeing Lumian turn and observe "Red Boots" Franca dashing toward her with a brass classic revolver, sliding across a layer of frost formed beneath her feet, Charlotte abandoned her plans for a surprise attack. Instead, she readied herself to return to the Tree of Shadow, where she could exploit the environment and enhance her abilities to confront the enemy.

Her body instantaneously grew pliable, as though secreting a slimy substance.

She "acted" as a serpent-like creature, utilizing the intertwining vines and branches to swiftly retreat toward the brownish-green tree.

At that moment, Charlotte's body froze.

It was akin to facing a dragon head-on, confronting a predator at the apex of the biological hierarchy. She couldn't help but tremble with fear and overwhelming panic.

She circled her immediate vicinity and ran haphazardly, as if fleeing from an unseen adversary.

Not far from her, Anthony Reid, the information broker, emerged from behind an iron-black gas street lamp post, suspended by the vines and branches of the Auberge du Coq Doré.

At some point, his dark brown eyes had transformed into a pale golden hue, adopting a vertical orientation.

He was a Psychiatrist, a Sequence 7 Psychiatrist of the Spectator pathway.

He had just employed Awe!

In ancient times, it was referred to as Dragon Might!

The brownish-green vines and branches surrounding Anthony Reid, manipulated by Susanna rather than the Tree of Shadow, cowered and retreated from him.

Observing Charlotte's descent into madness and confusion, rendering her unable to evade Lumian's attacks, Susanna, who desperately absorbed vitality, narrowed her eyes and cursed, unable to conceal her deep-seated hatred.

"You shall all perish. Today, you shall all meet your demise!"

Swoosh! Swoosh! Swoosh! On the Tree of Shadow, new tree trunks distinct from the main body shot forth like javelins, aimed at impaling Lumian in the midst of the wilderness.

Apart from utilizing the abilities of the Fallen Tree Spirit, Susanna Mattise had not yet regained sufficient strength to affect targets dozens or even nearly a hundred meters away.

Lumian had foreseen this. With a roll, he positioned himself within the area where Charlotte aimlessly fled.

Thud! Thud! Thud! The tree trunk javelins impaled the ground nearby, pounding the wilderness like hammers.

Lumian rose to his feet, engulfed in crimson flames. He extended his arms slightly and let out a boisterous laugh.

"Bring it on, kill me!"

If Susanna were to blanket the area with relentless assaults once again, he could still find a way to evade them. However, Charlotte, lost in her state of confusion, would undoubtedly meet her demise!

As he bellowed, half-illusory crimson Fire Ravens materialized behind Lumian. They circled and traced multiple trajectories, fixating their sights on Charlotte Calvino.

The branches and vines on the ground surged wildly, swiftly ensnaring Charlotte, shielding her from harm.

A series of thunderous sounds resounded as the crimson Fire Ravens descended upon Charlotte, shattering tree branches and igniting vines, systematically stripping away layer after layer of the Actor's outer shell.

Bang!

Franca, who had closed the distance, stepped in and extended her right hand, firmly squeezing the trigger.

An iron-black bullet flew from the classic brass revolver and struck Charlotte's head with precision, piercing through the gap created by the Fire Ravens.

The enchanting, pure, and delicate visage instantly shattered, with red and white fluids splattering forth from her eyes, nose, and mouth.

With only its severed head remaining, the lifeless body stumbled a few steps in confusion before finally collapsing to the ground.

"Go to hell!" Susanna roared.

With that cry, brown branches, green vines, thick limbs, and pale-colored blossoms surged forth in a multitude of forms, converging upon Lumian, Franca, and Anthony.

Despite the nightmarish scene unfolding before them, Lumian sensed no immediate peril.

Until Susanna Mattise regained a certain level of strength, an attack that consumed a significant amount of spirituality posed no true threat.

Lumian charged forward once more, carrying the crimson flames that devoured his flesh, venturing deeper into the primordial forest-like setting.

Vines ignited, flowers turned to ash, branches charred, yet none impeded the enemy's advance toward the Tree of Shadow.

Suddenly, the objects recoiled, drawing the suspended human captives back into the embrace of the Tree of Shadow.

Susanna had thought it through. There was no need to squander energy merely to vent her rage. It was wiser to await the approach of the three prey, luring them into the range where desire could take hold, before employing her most formidable abilities to deal with them.

She could not accept her current weakness. That was one of the reasons why she refrained from invoking the incantation to seek assistance initially.

Before dragging the offering into the Tree of Shadow, the Son of God dared not reveal Himself in Trier. In the future, Susanna possessed a measure of confidence and needed to push the offering to a certain extent, securing the protection of the ritual. Only then could she utilize her fusion with the Tree of Shadow to confront the Son of God.

The Son of God was astonishingly deranged. He would never restrain the corruption He might inflict upon His subordinates.

As for Lady Moon, she had merely pledged to intercept potential saboteurs temporarily. Susanna dared not permit devotees of other deities to enter the Tree of Shadow.

Thud, thud, thud. Lumian raced through the abruptly vacated wilderness and dilapidated streets, sprinting toward the brownish-green tree. Franca and Anthony each selected their respective angles of attack and followed suit from different directions.

The fortunate vendors, pedestrians, and tenants who had yet to be ensnared by the branches and vines seized the opportunity to flee the wilderness, making their way towards the outskirts.

Chapter 260: Cracking

It didn't take long for Lumian, Franca, and Anthony to approach the Tree of Shadow, stepping within the effective range of Susanna's powers.

One of them had run out of Mysticism Smelling Salts and was consumed by crimson flames. His skin grew numb, but his flesh still burned with pain. Another moved gracefully, constantly shifting positions. Every now and then, she would inhale the scent of the metal canister in her hand and let out a sneeze. The third employed the Psychiatrist's Placate ability to pacify his emotions and desires.

In the ethereal crown of the tree, Susanna Mattise, positioned only four to five meters above the ground, grunted. Franca, dressed in a blouse and light-colored trousers, saw her reflection in Susanna's eyes.

Suddenly, intense fear gripped Franca.

Yet, this fear didn't arise from the outside world or grow abnormally intense. Rather, it originated from her understanding of the current situation and her desire to survive.

Susanna Mattise, fused with the peculiar tree, couldn't be treated as a mere Sequence 5. She ought to be regarded as a weakened Sequence 4, one lacking an incomplete Mythical Creature form!

Franca believed that Susanna Mattise would swiftly dispatch her, Lumian, and the information broker.

Before saving anyone, she had to save herself!

Franca halted, her yearning for life impossible to suppress.

She struggled, torn between the urge to flee and the nagging feeling that she shouldn't abandon her teammates.

Susanna Mattise's emerald eyes shifted toward Anthony Reid.

The information broker, his emotions and desires now stabilized, shuddered suddenly, an all-too-familiar fear surging from the depths of his heart.

A Spectator afflicted by severe mental deficiencies is all too easy to deal with… Anthony Reid fully comprehended his predicament, yet he lacked the power to resist.

A helpless sigh escaped his lips. When his Placate failed, he trembled and retreated to a corner, succumbing to overwhelming fear.

Swiftly, Susanna Mattise incapacitated Lumian's two companions, leaving them unable to offer aid for the moment.

Then, she directed her gaze at Lumian, who stood less than ten meters away from the Tree of Shadow.

As an evil spirit, Susanna possessed boundless extremism and persistence. She still sought to capture this sacrifice.

Despite the ritual causing a great uproar, prompting numerous saints and even angels to rush and intervene, making its success unlikely, the Tree of Shadow could not be destroyed. It wouldn't even suffer significant harm. Unless the Eternal Blazing Sun or the God of Steam and Machinery were willing to bury the millions of people residing in Trier and expose even graver underlying problems underground, there would always be another opportunity, even if the present one failed.

As long as Lumian remained within her grasp, the sacrificial offering that perfectly sealed an angel, it wouldn't take long for Susanna to attempt the ritual once more!

Hence, the malevolent spirit, Susanna Mattise, desired to capture Lumian alive.

In an instant, Lumian's pace slowed, his mind consumed by the same thoughts.

I mustn't die. I mustn't die. If I perish, Aurore will have no hope of revival…

I must survive and uncover the truth behind the Cordu disaster. I must understand why Aurore believes in Inevitability…

These people have no connection to me. What does it matter if they die? Don't countless lives perish every day in this world? Can I even prevent that?

"…"

Lumian's pace grew sluggish, his expression contorting in agony.

The fiery crimson flames that engulfed him continued to burn, inflicting pain while also sharpening his senses.

But the more aware he became, the stronger his desire to survive.

This time, Susanna's influence over his desires had not faltered.

The Fallen Tree Spirit summoned an array of vines, branches, and tree trunks from the Tree of Shadow, ensnaring Lumian within a small circular perimeter of less than ten meters. The once open space transformed into a dense, ancient forest teeming with vegetation.

Damp, pale-hued flowers sprouted from the roots, vines, and branches, releasing odorless anesthetic gases that threatened to lull the surroundings into a deep slumber.

In that moment, Lumian's yearning for life aligned with his other thoughts.

To escape this dire predicament and survive, he had to press forward and defeat Susanna Mattise!

Lumian surged forward once more, gathering semi-illusory crimson flames behind him, spiraling them toward Susanna Mattise, who hovered merely four meters above the ground.

He didn't expect this assault to harm the Fallen Tree Spirit. After all, Susanna Mattise had merged with the Tree of Shadow, granting her formidable defenses and vitality. Moreover, she wasn't a mindless foe who couldn't dodge attacks or employ superpowers to safeguard herself.

Lumian's objective was to momentarily disrupt Susanna Mattise's focus and impede her from inciting another desire immediately.

This time, the crimson Fire Ravens managed to breach the ethereal barrier. They passed through the weakened defenses and hurtled toward Susanna Mattise.

Layers of brownish-green vines and branches encased Susanna Mattise, enveloping her in a wooden sphere, her pair of green eyes the only feature visible.

Amidst the rumbling, the plant-like encasement exploded, replaced swiftly by fresh growth.

Meanwhile, less than ten meters slipped away in the blink of an eye for Lumian.

Vast amounts of slumberous gas corroded his body, but they were swiftly consumed and evaporated by the searing crimson flames. The charred scent of his flesh neutralized the remaining fumes, leaving only a small portion to infiltrate Lumian's nostrils.

His thoughts slowed, his head spun, yet his movements remained unaffected for the time being.

Harnessing his momentum, Lumian alternated between his left and right feet, launching a forceful kick against the brownish-green trunk. He propelled himself forward by a couple of meters before leaping high into the air, his gaze fixed upon Susanna Mattise.

Behind him, a colossal fireball gradually took shape. His eyes reflected the wooden sphere and Susanna Mattise's emerald-green gaze.

It seemed as though he intended to hurtle himself at the treetop, obliterating the encasing of plants with the mighty fireball.

This particular stance bore an evident element of showmanship. Lumian's desire to perform had been subtly provoked by Susanna Mattise, even if his ceaseless pain could only be slightly suppressed.

Susanna Mattise grinned, allowing sharp brownish-green tree trunks to emerge from the surface of the encasement like a porcupine baring its spikes, ready to impale any unsuspecting prey.

Once Lumian sustained grave injuries, the vines and branches forming the sphere would unfurl, taking complete control of their captive.

As the massive fireball solidified, Lumian began his descent.

Yet, instead of lunging at Susanna Mattise, he regarded her with an air of superiority, eye to eye.

Still, he refrained from attacking. He continued his descent. Susanna Mattise wore a puzzled expression, perplexed by his failure to walk into her trap.

Only when Lumian touched down below the treetop did he make his next move.

The massive, incomplete fireball detonated, propelling him toward the trunk of the Tree of Shadow like a cannonball.

In his left hand, he wielded Fallen Mercury, now adorned with cracks.

Right from the start, Lumian hadn't set his sights on Susanna Mattise, who possessed freedom of movement and the advantages of being a Sequence 5. It would be highly risky, with little chance of success and much danger involved.

His sole objective was to strike the Tree of Shadow with Fallen Mercury, a single strike!

Without the enhancement of Termiboros, Fallen Mercury alone wouldn't be enough to alter the fate of the brownish-green tree. However, Lumian was confident that Susanna Mattise had fused to some extent with the Tree of Shadow. As the name "Fallen Tree Spirit" implied, a tree was necessary to embody a tree spirit.

This understanding derived not only from Lumian's observations but also from Franca's speculations and Susanna Mattise's own admissions and actions.

In essence, when Fallen Mercury pierced the Tree of Shadow, there was a strong possibility that it would alter the fate of Susanna Mattise, who had merged with it, rather than the fate of the Tree of Shadow itself!

Lumian's actions were intended to deceive Susanna Mattise into overconfidence, ensuring she wouldn't impede his approach to the Tree of Shadow or hinder him from gathering a fireball for propulsion.

And Susanna Mattise's manipulation of his desire to perform only fueled Lumian's confidence further.

Though acting was a waste of time and could potentially lead to missed opportunities, it also served as a cover for one's true intentions!

With a loud crash, Lumian and Fallen Mercury collided with the brownish-green trunk. Ribs cracked, wrist snapped, his entire body battered by the explosion and impact. But he managed to drive the pewter-black dirk through the outer bark and into the second layer.

As expected, Lumian didn't "see" the torrent of historical scenes. Instead, he sensed the illusionary river, shimmering with a mercury hue, that belonged to Susanna Mattise.

In the next instant, his desire was manipulated once again, and a barrage of javelins rained down from the ethereal tree crown.

Releasing his hold on the pewter-black dirk, Lumian entrusted the rest to Fallen Mercury.

He plummeted to the ground, using the pain to reclaim consciousness. With a swift roll, he evaded the tree javelins that impaled the earth.

When Susanna Mattise realized Lumian's true intent, she felt vexed, angry, and somewhat fearful.

The previous use of the pewter-black dirk had left a deep impression on her.

However, she wasn't overly concerned for her safety. With her connection to the Tree of Shadow, it would be arduous for her to be slain, even if she encountered a saint. Her worry lay in the possibility of severe injury, which would thwart her chance of capturing her prey once more.

At that moment, Fallen Mercury shattered into pewter-black fragments, silently descending to the ground.

Long worn and weakened, it could no longer endure.

However, its destruction also brought an end to the fate exchange, which should have taken several minutes to complete. It didn't stir any fate within Susanna Mattise. It merely bestowed upon her the fate stored within the blade.

Normally, this would be impossible as Fallen Mercury had to adhere to corresponding rules. But now, shattered and fragmented, it couldn't care less.

Susanna Mattise froze, purple flames erupting from her body.

Fallen Mercury had bestowed upon her the fate of the Tree of Shadow's root being consumed by an unseen underground fire. As a tree trunk akin to the Tree of Shadow, she couldn't escape this fate!

In a mere second, the purple flames vanished, leaving Susanna Mattise reduced to ashes, her eyes filled with disbelief and astonishment.

A tree trunk erupted in flames, cracking and collapsing.

Chapter 261: Escape

The branches and vines pursuing Lumian swiftly withdrew, as if responding to an unseen command. A javelin-like tree trunk crashed down, causing the rest to vanish into thin air.

Gasping for breath, Lumian cast his gaze upward as he sprinted onward.

At that moment, his eyes fell upon the incinerated form of Susanna Mattise, consumed by the vegetative sphere that had enveloped her. Not far off, he witnessed an unfamiliar tree trunk snap and succumb to fiery destruction.

She's dead! Relief flooded Lumian's being. She's dead! The burden of his struggle lifted, and he crumpled to the ground, no longer able to hold on.

The crimson flames that had enveloped him abruptly extinguished, unveiling his charred and disfigured body.

With great effort, Lumian struggled to prop himself up, his back pressed against the vine- and branch-adorned wall of the Auberge du Coq Doré. He resembled a forsaken vagabond, abandoned by the world, a hint of derision in his voice as he observed the Tree of Shadow sinking deeper and deeper into the earth.

Moreover, he witnessed the vines and branches retracting into the main trunk, the once-suspended individuals released from their tethers and descending to the ground from varying heights.

Among the initial group of victims, whose essence had been drained, three to four individuals remained suspended nearly three meters above the ground. Already weakened, most of their remaining vitality escaped as they suffered the harsh impact, causing them to lose consciousness on the spot.

Perhaps there was still hope for their salvation, or perhaps they were beyond rescue.

The hundreds who had been suspended but had not yet lost a significant portion of their essence sustained various injuries from the fall. Though their lives were not immediately endangered, they hurriedly rose to their feet, driven to escape to the fringes of the wilderness.

Gabriel's complexion turned pale, bruises marring his hands and feet. Rather than fleeing, his initial instinct led him to stoop and collect the scattered Lightseeker script from the ground. The eloping couple, entwined together in their suspension, exchanged curses for being a hindrance, but they supported one another as they limped forward, their legs injured from the fall. They joined the fleeing throng, vanishing into the distance. Pavard Neeson, the proprietor of the clandestine underground bar, suffered relatively minor injuries. Grasping the freshly drawn draft, he raced ahead…

Charred and weary, Lumian settled on the street, leaning against the Auberge du Coq Doré, situated perilously close to the Tree of Shadow. Tilting his head back against the wall, he wore a faint smile while observing the energetic exodus of peddlers, passersby, and inhabitants of modest abodes as they fled towards the outskirts of the wilderness.

…

Within the confines of the Tree of Shadow, Lady Moon beheld a tumultuous clash unfolding, with numerous angels and saints joining the fray. Her faction faced mounting pressure due to reinforcements from the two Churches and Bureau 8. An overwhelming sense of retreat washed over her.

Should this continue, the two Churches might resort to drastic measures, beseeching divine intervention! Lady Moon swiftly resolved.

Deprived of several abilities and ensnared by various Prohibitions, she pressed against the bulge in her abdomen and parted her lips.

An ear-piercing Shriek erupted within this alternate realm, causing the nearly two-meter-tall Tree of Shadow before her to undergo an instantaneous metamorphosis.

Upon the branches and mist-shrouded bark, which depicted scenes from the past, figures born from diverse desires, now lifeless, sprang back to existence, save for Emperor Roselle.

Many were demigods, emerging from their respective "histories" with vacant, icy expressions and an aura of chilling darkness.

Resurrection!

Empowered by the Divine Fetus nestled within her womb and the unique essence of the Tree of Shadow, Lady Moon temporarily revived the accumulated desires from over a millennium in their original corporeal forms.

Though the revival would be short-lived, and the resurrected beings notably weaker than before, the sudden influx of demigods into the battle within mere seconds could profoundly impact the unfolding chaos.

It was precisely due to the timely aid of the Divine Fetus that Lady Moon dared to linger behind, partaking in this tumultuous clash. Without it, having only agreed to provide cover and hindrance to those from the Bliss Society, she would have already sought refuge elsewhere.

In eerie silence, the resurrected phantoms disintegrated beneath the scorching sunlight. Lady Moon seized the opportune moment to summon Paramita, which had not yet fallen into complete disarray, merging with it and vanishing from sight.

…

On Avenue du Marché, inside the khaki-colored four-story building that housed the parliament member's office.

Imre, the mixed-blood individual, refrained from immediately questioning Jenna, an assassin. Instead, he directed two agents from Bureau 7 to tend to Jenna's wound, staunching the profuse bleeding and applying bandages. He conveyed the impression that allowing the culprit to succumb to her injuries would hinder their ability to gather crucial clues. Valentine, Antoine, and the other agents observed and interrogated the remaining participants of the banquet, including Cassandra and Rhône, who belonged to Greg Artois's team.

Rumble!

Once again, the ground beneath their feet trembled. Those near the windows caught glimpses of Rue Anarchie, Rue du Rossignol, and Rue des Blouses Blanches, intermittently flickering with light. Approaching them were clergymen garbed in white robes embellished with golden threads, wielding various contraptions.

This development disrupted the interrogation of Imre, Valentine, and the others. After a while, Angoulême de François strode into the banquet hall, clad in a coat adorned with golden buttons, accompanied by a grayish-white humanoid mechanical creation. Several additional team members and a contingent of police officers followed suit.

Upon hearing Imre's report, Angoulême cast a glance at Jenna and instructed Travis Everett, "Bring all the attendees of the banquet to headquarters for separate interrogations.

"Leave the assassin here. We shall handle her questioning. Hmm… also keep the members of Monsieur Member of Parliament's team. There are matters we must clarify."

Everett raised no objections. The organization's constables escorted the anxious onlookers away from the khaki-colored building housing the member of parliament's office.

As the hall emptied, Angoulême turned to the two Bureau 7 agents standing beside Jenna and instructed them, "Escort the assassin to the lounge. We must ensure she does not overhear our conversation and withhold any truths."

With Jenna escorted to the lounge facing the back alley, Angoulême approached Cassandra, Rhône, and the others, speaking in a deep voice, "Hi there, there is information we must acquire."

A faint smile adorned his face.

"Indeed, Monsieur Member of Parliament has met his demise. According to the law, his position is immediately vacated.

"In other words, you are no longer part of Monsieur Member of Parliament's team. The immunity you once enjoyed is no more.

"So, before we engage in our discussion, let us proceed with some notarizations."

Upon hearing Angoulême's words, Cassandra and the others' expressions underwent a marked change.

Meanwhile, in the lounge, Jenna, who had calmed herself after assassinating Hugues Artois, heard a tumultuous commotion emanating from the hall.

One of the armed agents from Bureau 7, tasked with keeping watch, hastened to the door to investigate.

Seizing the opportunity, Jenna's heart skipped a beat as a plan materialized in her mind.

Her countenance transformed, and she gazed past her remaining guard with a mix of surprise and fear.

Though extensively trained, the agent possessed an understanding beyond that of ordinary individuals. Today, an abnormal occurrence had unfolded on Rue Anarchie, culminating in the assassination of Monsieur Member of Parliament. Reports indicated a battle involving supernatural forces transpiring within the hall. It was only natural for him to worry about potential repercussions reaching the lounge and an unseen threat lurking behind him.

Subconsciously, he entertained the notion of turning around, but halfway through the motion, caution compelled him to remain vigilant.

Yet, this proved to be the only opening Jenna needed.

Already restrained by handcuffs, she balled her fists and struck the agent's shoulder and neck with force, sending him sprawling to the ground. His revolver slipped from his grasp.

Before the agent near the door could react, Jenna positioned her hands on the windowsill, propelling herself upward. She crashed through the glass and descended into the back alley with the grace of a feather.

Suppressing the pain from her gunshot wound, she sought refuge in the shadows of a nearby corner and swiftly departed the khaki-colored building.

…

Lady Moon weaved through different directions, employing various abilities until she finally emerged from Paramita.

At that moment, she found herself in Quartier Éraste, northwest of Trier. Before her stood a magnificent building adorned with golden steeples.

Lady Moon cautiously surveyed her surroundings and discreetly let out a sigh of relief.

Had the Tree of Shadow's deeper intrusion into the Fourth Epoch's Trier served the Great Mother's interests, she wouldn't have joined the Bliss Society's mission. She had no desire to reveal herself. It was well-known that those who controlled desires often fell prey to their own desires. The chances of failure were not insignificant.

Without delay, Lady Moon slipped into the beige building from its side entrance.

A few hundred meters away, a golden retriever sat silently beside a woman dressed in green.

They observed Lady Moon's every move and the grand structure with its numerous steeples, their expressions solemn.

It was the Sacred Heart Cloister of the Eternal Blazing Sun Church.

…

In the wilderness where Rue Anarchie, Rue du Rossignol, and the buildings on Rue des Blouses Blanches crumbled, Lumian witnessed the Tree of Shadow on the brink of sinking into the ground. He couldn't help but taunt Termiboros.

"Well, I'm not that unlucky after all. I've actually succeeded."

Hardly had the words left his lips when Franca, who had regained her senses, rushed over and hissed, "Are you trying to play the role of a charred corpse?"

As she spoke, she retrieved the Healing Agent she had obtained from the Poison Spur Mob, intending to offer Lumian half a canister.

Lumian's injuries weren't as severe as they seemed. Fatal burns for most Low-Sequence Beyonders would require no more than a month or two for Pyromaniacs to recover from. As for fractures, explosions, and impacts, none of them could claim the life of a Hunter immediately. Enduring until tomorrow would naturally bring about recovery.

Considering the potential pursuit of official Beyonders after the wilderness completely vanished, Lumian didn't tempt fate and consumed half a vial.

Soon, he felt his body rapidly regenerating.

At this moment, the wilderness teetered on the edge of collapse. The streets had returned to their original positions, and many people had already rushed in.

Franca surveyed her surroundings and spoke swiftly, "Can you still move? We must leave this place swiftly."

"Alright." Lumian rose to his feet.

He took a couple of steps to the side, intending to retrieve the charred tree trunk that had been part of the Tree of Shadow before departing.

Just as Lumian grasped the trunk, something caught his peripheral vision.

Within the depression left behind by the Tree of Shadow's submersion, a hazy and translucent creature darted past.

Lumian's pupils dilated, struggling to believe what he had witnessed. He yearned for a clearer view.

It was a diaphanous, indistinct figure resembling a lizard!

It bore an uncanny resemblance to the elf he had encountered in his dream!

It was the very creature that had emerged from Aurore's mouth!

Chapter 262: Review

Lumian had always held the belief that the lizard-like elf he saw was merely a figment of his dreaming mind. Symbols and metaphors held a deeper significance than the tangible reality.

Yet now, before his very eyes, the diaphanous and elusive lizard-like creature revealed itself in all its existence!

It was undeniably real!

Moreover, it had appeared in Paramita, emerging from the deep chasm left by the Tree of Shadow—a most peculiar event involving formidable powers!

Could it be that the lizard crawling out of Aurore's mouth was not a fabrication? What did it symbolize, and what were its intentions? Lumian's brow furrowed as he contorted his expression, experiencing a mix of pain, shock, confusion, and withdrawal.

This agitation stirred something within Lumian, making him feel that he could regain some of his memories and determine their authenticity. Yet, this time, the scenes didn't flicker through his mind as they did during psychiatric treatments or after hearing Madame Pualis's words. The dream still lingered in his memory.

In that moment, Termiboros's resonant voice echoed in Lumian's ears.

"Do you truly believe that I am responsible for all the anomalies and misfortunes surrounding you?

"Do you think you can escape Susanna Mattise, who is nearly a demigod with a backup plan, by relying solely on the efforts of the sealed me and a

Sequence 7 Beyonder like yourself?

"Do you believe that Susanna Mattise's failure is solely due to her being an evil spirit, extremism, impatience, and lack of preparation before the ritual? Is there no other underlying reason?"

These words overlapped and resounded in Lumian's mind, allowing him to grasp their meaning within a short span of time.

Lumian was taken aback, feeling as if he had been plunged into an icy lake, experiencing the transition from early summer to winter.

He blurted out, "Then what is it?"

Termiboros remained silent, as if sensing and comprehending something.

In an instant, Lumian's joy surged. He felt the heavy burden on his shoulders dissipate significantly.

Does this mean that Aurore truly fell under the control of that peculiar lizard-like creature?

Was that why she remained oblivious to any abnormality when awake, seeking assistance from the outside world alongside me?

No, perhaps she sensed that something was amiss. The correct interpretation of the letter's order should be: "We are getting weirder. The people around us need help as soon as possible!"

Franca nudged Lumian.

"Why are you lost in thought? Hurry, let us leave this place swiftly. The official Beyonders and clergymen have arrived!"

Lumian shook off his daze and dashed with Franca to the far end of Rue Anarchie, his singed clothes clinging to his body, along with the tree trunk originating from the Tree of Shadow—not Susanna's later creation.

During this process, two revelations suddenly dawned upon him.

As an angel of Inevitability, Termiboros also displayed an astute understanding of various matters. It is inconceivable for Him to remain oblivious to Susanna Mattise's offering Him as a sacrifice to the Mother Tree of Desire with me as the primary vessel without unsealing the seal. He is no novice to the mystical world like me!

Therefore, He never anticipated the outcome of Susanna Mattise breaking the seal from the very beginning. He made those claims purely as a bluff, coercing me to seek His aid and agree to certain unequal terms, creating an opportunity for Him to truly escape.

What He didn't foresee was my choice to deceive Susanna Mattise, compelling Him to provide me assistance based on the information she provided. No, He must have considered this possibility, but he had nothing to lose by attempting it. What if I had not devised a swift solution at that critical moment?

Dammit, His intentions are far too sinister! I could have fallen victim to His deception with the slightest carelessness!

Likewise, Susanna Mattise is no paragon of honesty.

Since she sought guidance from the Mother Tree of Desire and acknowledged the possibility of an angel being sealed within me, why wouldn't she contemplate the potential transmission of power through the seal? Subsequently, she prayed for power capable of withstanding the influence of Termiboros's leaked power, or even surpassing it. I failed to perceive it then and came dangerously close to corruption despite being distant.

Had I not escaped the Tree of Shadow in the nick of time, I would have succumbed to corruption.

Why didn't Susanna Mattise seek assistance right from the start? Could it be that corruption poses a threat to her as well?

Indeed, despite unforeseen circumstances during the Cordu ritual, the padre, as the host of the sacrificial ceremony, was shielded by the power of

Inevitability. He did not transform into a monstrous entity or merge into the three-headed giant like the others and successfully escaped… Susanna Mattise also planned on relying on the protection of the ritual to resist corruption?

Hence, she bought time, awaiting the completion of the ritual's preparations!

She did not target and control me initially because she knew that pushing too hard would prompt Termiboros to intervene prematurely, introducing too many uncertainties.

Thus, she endeavored to create an illusion for me, fostering the belief that resistance and escape were within reach. Only when I broached the subject of the angel did she stall for time, stringing together a series of seemingly revealing words. She concealed her true trump card, biding her time for me to make the wrong choice with Termiboros's aid and fall into her prearranged trap.

Although she did not anticipate the attack from the Montsouris ghost, had it not been for an external intervention exploiting the crack created by the ghost, I would have remained trapped within the Tree of Shadow's depths. Moreover, she was on the verge of officially activating the ritual and gaining protection.

Dammit! Beautiful Actors truly possess the knack for deceiving others!

As Lumian and Franca sprinted ahead, their surroundings suddenly transformed into a surreal spectacle. Vibrant layers of colors intertwined with indescribable, fantastical creatures.

His head spun, and his vision became hazy.

When his sight cleared, Rue Anarchie was nowhere in sight, and the vibrant palette had vanished.

Instead, he found himself standing on a verdant hillside, facing Madam Magician, adorned in an orange dress.

She's here too… Lumian glanced around but couldn't spot Franca.

As if sensing his unspoken question, Madam Magician smiled and spoke, "The Two of Cups departed with her Major Arcana card to attend to some matters."

"The Two of Cups?" Lumian was perplexed.

"That's Franca. She is one of us. Her code name is Two of Cups, just as you are the Seven of Wands," Madam Magician casually explained. "You have officially joined our ranks. Speak to the Two of Cups later and have her introduce our organization. I won't say much."

Not only is Franca a member of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society, but she is also part of the secret organization utilizing tarot card codenames? Lumian felt a mix of surprise and elation.

This meant that he and Franca were true comrades.

Madam Magician scrutinized Lumian's charred countenance and fragmented attire. From somewhere, she produced a simple brown suit tailored for a man and tossed it to him.

"Change into this later. While it's not particularly scandalous for Trieriens to roam the streets nude, one mustn't entirely succumb to the surroundings. You must maintain your true self. Only then can you resist the potion's corruption and minimize the risk of losing control."

Lumian caught the clothes, and Madam Magician pondered for a moment before speaking, "Tell me in detail what has transpired recently. Although I knew you would encounter followers of the evil gods and become entangled with them, I did not anticipate you getting embroiled in such weighty matters directly."

Lumian recounted the events, starting from his arrival in Trier to his use of the Summoning Dance to lure Susanna Mattise. He focused on the sacrificial ritual, Termiboros's involvement, and the enigmatic lizard-like creature.

As Madam Magician listened, her expression grew solemn. Once Lumian finished speaking, she nodded slightly and said, "This is highly abnormal. Both Termiboros and that elf are far from ordinary."

She gazed at Lumian, speaking in a direct manner, "It wasn't Termiboros who aided you in enhancing Fallen Mercury's abilities within the Tree of Shadow and allowed the Montsouris ghost to arrive early."

"Not Him?" Lumian had speculated the issues that Madam Magician might uncover, but he never expected her to address this matter so clearly.

If not Termiboros, then who else could it be?

Moreover, the subsequent changes only occurred after the compromise of the Inevitable angel.

"I don't have the answers either." Madam Magician shook her head slowly. "What I can affirm is that the seal of that great existence wouldn't allow Termiboros to unleash such power. If that were possible, He would have long manipulated you to assist Him in breaking the seal."

Observing Lumian's perplexed expression, Madam Magician continued, "All Termiboros can do is influence your judgment and choices. After all, He is sealed within you, and your fates are intertwined to a certain extent.

"To put it simply, concerning Charlie's situation, Termiboros couldn't expedite Susanna Mattise's recovery. He couldn't dictate when or how she planned to find Charlie. He could merely utilize this situation to instill in you the intention of employing the Luck Transference Spell to alter Charlie's fate and augment the corresponding likelihood.

"From this standpoint, do you believe He possesses the capability to enhance Fallen Mercury's abilities and allow the timely arrival of the Montsouris ghost?

"However, it is plausible for Him to aid you in shouldering the burden of the past scenes within the Tree of Shadow.

"Hence, I have consistently advised you to seek my counsel beforehand on critical and perilous matters rather than making decisions on your own."

Lumian's heart surged like a tumultuous ocean.

He recollected the incident where Rentas took Charlie underground and realized that Madam Magician's words held truth.

Charlie's gruesome plight and destiny stemmed from two factors. Firstly, the threat posed by the Bliss Society through Rentas, and secondly, Lumian's own choice at the crossroads of fate. Thus, once Rentas was slain by their hands, Charlie's fortune merely improved marginally. Only when Lumian made the correct decision did everything revert to normalcy. There were no indications of Termiboros's influence.

If He could sway Charlie's path in the same manner He manipulated the Montsouris ghost, Lumian would have fallen victim long ago.

Moreover, why would Susanna Mattise entertain the idea of capturing me alive, knowing that I can receive indirect assistance from an angel after she departed from the Tree of Shadow and was in a weakened state, despite being aware of Termiboros's limited influences?

Unless Susanna Mattise, who possesses a trace of godhood due to the Tree of Shadow, had already deduced that Termiboros was impotent in exerting influence and remained tightly sealed following the internal conflict within the Tree of Shadow. There must be another origin to this quandary! And that origin did not depart alongside her! Dammit! I had presumed that even if my judgment faltered or the fate exchange prolonged, Termiboros would never allow Susanna Mattise to capture me alive, as it would render Him a sacrificial pawn. Little did I know, He lacked the capability entirely… Lumian postulated, obtaining a more rational explanation for the recent turn of events.

"What exactly happened?" he inquired, a tinge of anguish and anger coloring his tone.

Madam Magician pondered for a few seconds before responding, "Taking into account those misfortunes, I suspect that Termiboros has allies in the outside world. In other words, there may be a Beyonder lurking around you who possesses the ability to influence fate. He secretly accomplished tasks in accordance with the ideas transmitted by Termiboros, but he did so with subtlety to avoid exposure."

A word suddenly flashed across Lumian's mind: Sufferer!

In his dream, after entering the underground altar with Ryan's team, they had become tainted by the aura of a Sufferer!

As for the owl and the other "him" within the Warlock's tomb, prior to their unveiling, they always gave him the impression that they were the root of the problem and the mastermind behind it all.

Could these be symbolic as well?

Chapter 263: Choice

Lumian had always believed that his dream self represented his darker side, a twisted persona born from the corruption of Inevitability.

But now, it seemed there was more to it.

There was no problem with his understanding of his own essence, but was he, along with the owl hidden in the Warlock's tomb, also serving as a symbol?

A representation of the puppet master behind the scenes, the true orchestrator of the lizard-like creature and the grand ritual in Cordu?

And now, he was lurking in the shadows, attempting to collaborate with Termiboros in order to break free from the seal.

However, Termiboros's attitude towards the lizard-like creature seemed to suggest otherwise…

Lumian fell silent for a few seconds before sharing his speculations in detail with Madam Magician.

The Magician listened attentively, pondering for a moment before speaking.

"I initially believed that by undergoing progressive psychiatric treatment and recalling forgotten events one by one, the truth of Cordu Village would become clear to you. It wouldn't be any different from what I already know."

"But hearing what you've just said, I suspect that some of the symbols and metaphors in your dreams hold deeper, hidden secrets."

"But regardless, those symbols and metaphors are projections from my actual experiences. It's impossible that I still can't decipher them after regaining my memories, right?" Lumian objected.

Madam Magician smiled and replied, "That might not be the case."

Seeing Lumian's confusion, she explained simply, "On the one hand, you may not have directly experienced those events, but your spirit and subconscious sensed danger and abnormalities, projecting them into your dreams with symbolic elements.

"On the other hand, Termiboros is sealed within you. Your fate is intertwined with His. Your subconscious might have detected something unusual through this connection."

Lumian grasped Madam Magician's meaning to some extent and pondered for a moment.

"After completing the full psychiatric treatment, can Madam Susie directly awaken my subconscious and inquire about the meaning of the different symbols?"

"It's extremely risky. When the time comes, we'll have to rely on the joint opinion of the two Psychiatrists to decide if it's worth attempting," Madam Magician replied thoughtfully. "But that's a long way off. Before then, I can assist you in finding Beyonders skilled in decrypting symbolism to see if we can accurately interpret it without relying solely on your subconscious. Would you like that?"

"Alright," Lumian agreed eagerly.

Then, he asked with concern, "What about the potential Termiboros ally lurking nearby? Are we not going to do anything about them?"

Madam Magician remained calm as she answered, "Now that we have sensed this possibility, I don't think they will risk staying close to you. Of course, I will continue to keep watch."

She then inquired, "Do you plan to continue the mission assigned to you by the Aurora Order? Many people probably witnessed you charging toward the Tree of Shadow. This will raise Gardner Martin's suspicions.

"If you don't want to take the risk, inform Mr. K about it. He will likely be delighted that you've slain a Fallen Tree Spirit and thwarted the Bliss Society's plan. He can assign you a new mission.

"If you wish to proceed, I can arrange for someone to blur the memories of those who saw you. In any case, it's normal for your exact appearance and physical characteristics not to be clearly discerned in that environment."

Without hesitation, Lumian declared, "I wish to proceed."

Gardner Martin, a Sequence 6 or Sequence 5 of the Hunter pathway, commanded a formidable group of Hunters. If Lumian continued to interact with him and joined the Iron and Blood Cross Order, there was a high chance of acquiring the potion formulas and main ingredients after Pyromaniac.

Through these experiences, Lumian had gained a profound understanding of the disparities between Sequences, the terror of powerful individuals, and his own limitations. He felt an urgent need to enhance his strength. It was a sharp contrast to his initial nonchalance upon arriving in Trier, where he sought hope amidst confusion.

Only by becoming strong enough could he withstand misfortune and unveil the truth behind the catastrophe in the perilous world of mysticism. Only then could he discern whether various propositions using Resurrection as bait concealed sinister intentions!

Madam Magician nodded slightly, granting Lumian's request.

Prompted by their previous conversation, Lumian inquired with curiosity, "Has the Tree of Shadow been dealt with?"

"How could that be?" Madam Magician scoffed. "Even if both Churches requested divine intervention, the Tree of Shadow would remain unresolved. Heh heh, it's not impossible, but the price is exorbitant, deterring anyone from paying it."

"What sort of price?" Lumian pressed further.

As if taking a leisurely stroll, Madam Magician moved two steps to the side of the hill.

"After being nourished and exerting influence for over a thousand years, the Tree of Shadow has become one with Trier. It's akin to its shadow, its dark aspect. Unless we obliterate the entire city and exterminate every inhabitant, not even a true deity could fully eradicate it.

"Of course, we could relocate Trier elsewhere and resettle its entire population. Then, after five to six years, when the Tree of Shadow has weakened due to the loss of nourishment, we could uproot it. However, by doing so, the other perils lurking beneath Trier would become uncontrollable."

There are other dangers? Lumian furrowed his brow.

Isn't the underground of Trier too daunting?

Perplexed, he asked, "Why wasn't the Tree of Shadow destroyed when it was first planted?"

Madam Magician chuckled.

"Well, wasn't it due to the urgency of constructing the city and countering certain underground threats? They failed to notice someone secretly planting the Tree of Shadow."

She didn't divulge details about the dangers, implying that Lumian didn't need to know them at present.

Lumian keenly sensed this and sealed his lips.

Madam Magician looked at him and let out a self-deprecating laugh.

"Are you unhappy that I sent you directly to Trier and involved you in a series of perilous affairs without providing corresponding assistance?"

"No," Lumian replied, puzzled by Madam Magician's question.

From his perspective, accepting missions, completing tasks, and reaping rewards seemed fair enough. And throughout this process, Madam Magician would offer guidance through letters.

Apart from the past few years of adoption, Lumian had long grown accustomed to not relying entirely on others and making full use of the various resources at his disposal to achieve his goals.

Madam Magician chuckled.

"Didn't you see the Major Arcana card summoned by the Two of Cups? It happened because she was coincidentally in Trier. Otherwise, it wouldn't have been so effortless and effective."

She paused for a moment before continuing, "If I were to treat you as an extension of my eyes and hands, a loyal subordinate devoid of your own will, I could allow you to recite my name and provide ample assistance to ensure your safety most of the time. However, you chose the Hunter pathway. It's a path that demands combat and a strong sense of self.

"A flower nurtured in a greenhouse cannot become a qualified Hunter. It's immensely challenging for a Hunter, who always fights within their comfort zones with a patron, to attain godhood and become a saint. In due time, they will have to invest more time and pay a higher price to compensate for their present deficiencies.

"What kind of person do you aspire to be?"

Lumian fell silent for a moment before responding, "I want to be the one who makes those scoundrels tremble."

His answer was unequivocal.

Madam Magician nodded in satisfaction.

"Of course, that doesn't mean I won't care about you. I will still reply to your letters, provide my opinions, and even extend assistance upon request. However, I don't want you to feel perpetually shielded."

Lumian nodded, signifying his understanding.

He recalled Susanna Mattise's swift recitation of certain words to seek high-level assistance. Combining that with the keywords mentioned by Madam Magician, he spoke thoughtfully,

"Can reciting the honorific name of a specific entity draw their attention and receive corresponding aid through prayer?"

"Yes," The Magician nodded subtly. "However, it requires the sufficient goodwill of the other party. Once you reach a certain stage, I will also disclose my name to you. Yes, you are aware of Mr. Fool's honorific name, but without a ritual, simply reciting it will be difficult to elicit an effective response. It may even have adverse consequences. This is because Mr. Fool is contending with an ancient deity. The outcome will determine the fate of us all and whether this world can survive the apocalypse."

Mr. Fool? The abbreviation for that mighty existence is The Fool? Truly befitting of a secret organization that employs tarot cards as their codenames… When Lumian heard of The Fool, he instinctively connected it to the tarot cards he encountered daily, rather than associating it with the honorific name. It seemed more like a description.

Madam Magician changed the subject and glanced at the tree trunk in Lumian's hand.

"This is a valuable item. Attacks without godhood cannot harm it, and upon striking a target, it may trigger a particular desire.

"If you acquire Beyonder characteristics that align with it, you can find a way to employ a saint-level Artisan to combine them, turning it into a mystical item.

"You shouldn't carry it with you at all times, though. Otherwise, your desires will gradually spiral out of control. It poses great danger for Beyonders who consume potions."

Just as she finished speaking, Madam Magician turned her head slightly, as if listening to something. Then, she addressed Lumian, "That will be all for today."

In the blink of an eye, Lumian's vision filled with a blend of vibrant colors and ethereal, indescribable creatures.

In the next moment, Rue Anarchie appeared before him, riddled with cracks.

Madam Magician had vanished,

leaving Lumian bewildered as he hastily donned the clothes and pants he held in his hands.

His attention was then drawn to Franca, standing not far away.

Simultaneously, the two of them exchanged smiles.

Before they could convey their shared sense of being part of the same secret organization, Jenna emerged from the alley shadows, dressed in a grayish-blue gown.

Lumian and Franca instinctively went on guard.

Jenna winced, gripping her wounded ribs, yet expressed joy, "Dammit! You guys are alright!"

She appears genuine… Franca mumbled and approached her, concern etched on her face. "What happened to you? Why are you injured?"

Jenna cast nervous glances around and lowered her voice.

"I assassinated Hugues Artois and ended up getting shot."

"Dammit! You succeeded? And you managed to escape?" Franca exclaimed, taken aback.

Even she didn't believe she could pull off such a feat.

What was this called? This was the embodiment of a true assassin!

Lumian noticed a few passersby on Rue Anarchie, so he interrupted Jenna.

"We can discuss it once we reach Auberge du Coq Doré. I'll extract the bullet and treat your wounds."

"I still have half a vial of Healing Agent," Franca chimed in happily.

She supported Jenna and, following the shadows along the roadside, they made their way back to Auberge du Coq Doré.

As they neared their destination, they encountered Anthony Reid, the information broker.

Lumian chuckled derisively.

"I thought you'd have escaped."

"I still have some unfinished business in the market district," Anthony Reid replied vaguely.

The four of them took a few more steps and laid their eyes upon the beige five-story building.

Auberge du Coq Doré leaned a little more than before. Cracks marred its walls, intertwined with withering vines and branches.

As the remaining tenants had yet to return, it exuded an indescribable dilapidation and silence.

…

It had been some time since the catastrophe.

Amidst the crowd, a young man dressed plainly disembarked from the steam locomotive, carrying an old suitcase. He left the platform behind and strolled all the way to Rue Anarchie.

There, he laid eyes upon the beige five-story building, its surface adorned with streaks of vibrant red paint.

"Auberge du Coq Doré," he murmured, reciting the name of the establishment. He reached into his pocket, feeling the banknotes and coins, realizing it was likely within his means.

To his surprise, Auberge du Coq Doré was much cleaner than he had envisioned. While certain areas were plastered with outdated newspapers and cheap pink paper, there were no signs of the ubiquitous bedbugs, repugnant phlegm, or various types of rubbish.

After renting Room 302 for 15 verl d'or, the young man climbed the stairs with his suitcase, feeling content.

It's even more affordable than I thought. A clean motel like this costs only 15 verl d'or per month…

Once he had stowed away his suitcase in the cramped room, he decided to treat himself to a drink using the money he had saved.

In the Capital of Joy, one had to play the part!

He made his way to the underground bar, immediately engulfed by the lively clamor as he stepped inside.

A man in a shirt and bow tie, beer in hand, flailed his short arms, energetically expounding to the people around him. Others reveled, singing and dancing, refusing to be subdued.

At the bar counter, a few patrons sat with an intriguing contraption.

Curiosity piqued, the young man approached, examining the rubber hose and glass canister of the device. He asked with fascination, "What is this?"

A handsome customer with blond hair streaked with black turned his body and responded with a bright smile,

"It's called the Idiot Instrument that tests an individual's intelligence. Or you could say that it measures a person's foolishness."

(End of Volume Two—Lightseeker)

Chapter 264: Secret Organization

Volume Opening: Everyone is a hunter, and everyone is prey.

"Deputy Director of Loen Kingdom's MI9 Spotted in the Crossfire of Market District Terror!"

"Fiery Debate at National Convention: Eternal Blazing Sun Church's Role in Hugues Artois Assassination!"

"Shocking Malpractice!"

"Negotiating the Limits: Two Churches in Talks Over Parliamentary Immunity Restrictions"

"No Oath, No Immunity: Debating the Rights of Unsworn Members"

"National Convention or Heretic Haven?"

"Hugues Artois Shielding Heretics Behind Market District Terrorism!"

The headlines from different newspapers stood out, capturing Jenna's attention under the blazing afternoon sun. She scanned the newspapers' headlines, witnessing the fervent debate taking place from different angles.

Jenna's gaze eventually settled on the wanted posters adorning the newsstand's side.

"Guillaume Bénet…"

"Pualis de Roquefort…"

"Lumian Lee…"

"Celia Bello…"

Jenna stared at her own poster, finding it peculiarly enchanting.

The portrait displayed bore no resemblance to her; her features were almost reversed, except for her undeniable beauty. Even her brother Julien would fail to recognize her as his sister, let alone any bounty hunters.

And so, Jenna continued her studies at the Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons by day, and entertained audiences with her voice at the Salle de Bal Brise by night, making ends meet. Her life remained unchanged, just as it had been.

If it weren't for the daily newspaper debates surrounding Hugues Artois's demise and the ensuing conflicts, Jenna would have doubted whether her act of assassinating him was merely a dream born out of emotional turmoil.

Based on Franca's findings and her own speculations, the official Beyonders seemed to appreciate Jenna's elimination of Hugues Artois. They believed she had made a significant contribution in eradicating a group of heretics. Had it not been for the pressure from the National Convention and the various restrictions in place, they might have even considered honoring Jenna with a medal.

Hence, they intentionally spread misleading information, crafting a wanted poster that deviated from reality. They employed an investigation as a pretext to aid Jenna's brother, Julien, in purging the malicious powers that had destabilized his emotions. They cured his latent psychological illness and provided him with a legitimate occupation as a fitter, all under the guise of humanitarianism and support for believers.

For Jenna, aside from the necessity to avoid her neighbors whenever she encountered Julien, her life remained relatively unhindered. She pursued her studies in theater acting and transformed into Showy Diva whenever the need arose.

Drawing from Franca's experience, if Jenna lingered in the market district for a few more days, the Purifiers of the Eternal Blazing Sun Church would likely approach her, sharing common knowledge and taboos to prevent any accidental disasters caused by her wild Beyonder powers. They might even attempt to recruit her as an informant.

If it were a Beyonder from the Church of the God of Steam and Machinery, they might choose to observe her covertly, trailing her steps and uncovering the source of her Beyonder characteristic. Depending on the circumstances, they would determine whether to apprehend her immediately and transform her into an informant or play the long game to capture more significant players. The Purifiers, on the other hand, would likely adopt a more transparent approach, considering Jenna's substantial assistance in their cause.

Jenna paid little mind to these matters. If the official Beyonders sought her capture, she would flee. If they wished to recruit her as an informant, she would comply. And if they disregarded her altogether, she would continue working to repay her debts and save for next year's tuition.

Retracting her gaze, Jenna, dressed in a grayish-white gown, stepped out of Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons. She turned towards Rue des Blouses Blanches, seeking some rest before adorning her face with smoky and decadent makeup, preparing to become the captivating Showy Diva at the Salle de Bal Brise.

Apartment 601, 3 Rue des Blouses Blanches.

Franca, clad in a blouse, light-colored breeches, and wooden slippers, warmly greeted Lumian.

"Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons proves more profitable than anticipated!"

At the heretic's estate charity auction for the post-disaster reconstruction, Gardner Martin had acquired Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons for 50,000 verl d'or and entrusted its management to Franca. Most of the profits were left in her hands as his mistress.

During the auction, he had also secured Auberge du Coq Doré for 2,000 verl d'or. Occasionally, he dispatched individuals to conduct peculiar investigations, as if seeking to uncover the truth behind the disaster.

Lumian undoubtedly took charge of the daily operations.

As the weather warmed, Lumian embraced the change by donning a light brown pair of trousers, a crisp white shirt, and a black waistcoat. He didn't bother with a coat.

Rather than inquire about the profits of Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons, Lumian surveyed the surroundings and posed a question.

"I wish to know more about the secret organization we've joined."

He had initially assumed Franca would inform him at an opportune moment. However, after waiting for several days, it seemed Franca had forgotten about the matter, leaving Lumian no choice but to seek answers himself.

Franca was taken aback, her surprise evident as she blurted out, "You don't know?"

You joined without any knowledge of the organization?

Had it not been for Madam Judgment's confirmation that Lumian was a member, Franca would have suspected he was bluffing and hadn't actually joined.

Lumian explained sincerely, "I was on probation before, and after passing the assessment, my Major Arcana card left it to you to reveal the details."

Franca accepted the explanation, recalling her own limited knowledge during her early days with the organization.

She settled back into the recliner, crossing her legs and straightening her posture.

"We are all members of the Tarot Club."

Tarot Club… Upon hearing the name, Lumian, already seated on the opposite sofa, showed no surprise. After all, members of this clandestine group adopted tarot cards as their code names. The core members were associated with the Major Arcana cards, while ordinary members bore the Minor Arcana cards.

Franca's face gradually lit up with pride.

"Our Tarot Club is the most exceptional secret organization in the entire world. One could even argue it is among the most powerful."

"That's because our leader is a supreme entity standing at the apex of all deities. In other secret organizations, the deities they serve merely watch over and provide divine insight. They do not actively participate. However, before Mr. Fool descended into a deep slumber, He regularly convened gatherings in His divine kingdom for the Major Arcana cardholders. What do we call it? A true Divine Council! Other Churches may have so-called Divine Councils, but at best, they are meetings held under the watchful gaze of a deity. It is not a gathering conducted in the presence of a deity with the deity's direct involvement."

Franca pressed a hand to her chest and offered a slight bow.

"Praise The Fool!"

Lumian had contemplated the Tarot Club's potential. After all, Madam Magician exuded an air of mystery and power. Yet, he never anticipated that the great existence she spoke of would be the leader of the Tarot Club.

This shattered his preconceived notions of deities.

After a moment of contemplation, he voiced his thoughts.

"Is Mr. Fool called 'The Fool' because He holds The Fool card from the Major Arcana?"

So He, too, is a member of the Tarot Club?

"That is partly the reason," Franca replied after a brief pause. "However, no one can confirm it. I suspect it is because 'The Fool' is one of the many honorific names bestowed upon Mr. Fool. Hence, when establishing the secret organization, He chose the name 'Tarot Club' and assigned different tarot cards to each member."

"But can we really address Him directly as 'Mr. Fool'?" Lumian questioned, finding it somewhat blasphemous or disrespectful to refer to a deity using the honorific 'Mr.' It seemed too ordinary and lacked the necessary sanctity.

Franca smiled and assured him, "There is no issue. It is said that Mr. Fool Himself quite enjoys this form of address."

Seeing that Lumian had no further inquiries, Franca continued.

"In many ritualistic magics, if you are unable to find a suitable recipient for your prayers, you can seek aid from Mr. Fool. Although the process may differ from your expectations, it will invariably lead to the desired outcome in a wondrous manner."

"The only caveat is that Mr. Fool is in a deep slumber, and we must not disturb Him too often. According to my Major Arcana card, we should not do so more than once a month unless absolutely necessary. Reciting His honorific name alone will not draw attention or assistance. In fact, it may result in failure and pose a certain risk. The power inadvertently released by a slumbering deity is capable of obliterating us countless times over. Thus, we must perform a ritual to ensure our safety."

Madam Magician had mentioned this before, but as per her explanation, Mr. Fool's slumber holds more significance than mere sleep… Franca seems unaware of the details? Lumian contemplated this as he asked thoughtfully, "What kind of deity is Mr. Fool?"

Franca cleared her throat and replied, "My lecture wouldn't do it justice. Haha, I don't remember all that much. I suggest you visit Mr. Fool's cathedral and listen to the bishop's sermons."

"Mr. Fool's cathedral?" Lumian exclaimed in surprise.

Was there a cathedral dedicated to Mr. Fool in Trier?

Weren't there only two Churches in Intis?

Franca explained, "Mr. Fool's Church primarily resides in the Rorsted Archipelago of the Sonia Sea and some locations in the Southern Continent. However, due to the beliefs of many merchants, sailors, bounty hunters, and treasure seekers at sea, we often encounter followers of Mr. Fool at Lavigny Docks in the square district."

"Later, for certain reasons, the two Churches agreed to construct a small cathedral there for Mr. Fool's Church, allowing passing sea merchants to offer their prayers. However, proselytizing or preaching outside the cathedral is strictly prohibited. Most Trieriens are unaware of its existence."

The square district lay on the north bank of the Srenzo River, west of Trier. Lavigny Docks bustled with various goods arriving from numerous seaside ports. Sea merchants frequently passed through, while sailors sought to experience the vibrancy and prosperity of Trier.

To the west of Lavigny Docks stood Trocadéro Town, renowned for its Trocadéro liquor.

Lumian nodded and said, "I shall find time to visit and listen."

With that settled, he asked curiously, "What is the connection between Mr. Fool's Church and our Tarot Club?"

Chapter 265: The Major Arcana Cards

Franca, sitting cross-legged in the recliner, had long pondered over this question. After careful consideration, a smile curved on her lips as she spoke,

"Mr. Fool's Church is akin to an independent subsidiary of our Tarot Club."

Observing Lumian's bewilderment, she went on to explain, "Each of our Tarot Club's Major Arcana Cards represents an influential figure in the world, be it in reality or mysticism. I suspect that the Pope of The Fool's Church is one such figure. As for the other Major Arcana Cards, they may lead different organizations. While these organizations might not believe in Mr. Fool, they can provide assistance to certain operations of the Tarot Club."

"To put it simply, the Tarot Club is the highest governing body directly overseen by Mr. Fool. Each holder of a Major Arcana card possesses a distinguished status and their own sphere of influence. And one such holder is The Fool's Church," Franca elaborated.

Lumian grasped Franca's meaning roughly and inquired, "How many Major Arcana cards do we have?"

Franca shook her head and replied, "I cannot provide an exact number as the identities of the Major Arcana card holders are kept confidential. The only card we interact with the most is the Major Arcana card to which we are subordinate. Well… mine is Madam Judgment."

"Mine is Madam Magician," Lumian added.

Franca chuckled, "It seems that these two cards often appear together. Yes, our Tarot Club has a habit of scattering the entire deck of tarot cards at the scene after completing a task. We also place the card that represents us in the most prominent position…"

"Isn't that wasteful?" Lumian interrupted Franca.

"What harm is there in using a deck of tarot cards? Don't you find such actions cool?" Franca muttered. "You can leave the card that represents you, but what use is a deck without one? You'll have to buy a new one next time. If you visit the factory and customize a large number of tarot cards with just one card, you'll become an easy target."

"I can draw it myself," Lumian proposed, already formulating a solution.

While he couldn't replicate the printed quality, he could capture the main characteristics of the Seven of Wands.

Franca fell silent for a moment, then said, "Wouldn't something you draw have a mystical connection? Wouldn't you have to expend energy to counter divination?"

"Sigh, we don't have to scatter them every time. We don't have to scatter them when working with non-Tarot Club members. We don't have to scatter them during stealth missions, such as the one we're on now. And we don't have to scatter them when we're under suspicion.

"Dammit! How did we get off track? What I wanted to convey is that due to the Tarot Club's customs and traditions, I've learned from various newspapers and mystical gatherings about the more active Major Arcana cards.

"Madam Justice has appeared multiple times on the Midseashire coast, in Trier, and Backlund. Mr. Hanged Man has made appearances at sea. We have Madam Hermit and Mr. Sun, as well as Mr. Moon and Mr. Star from the Southern Continent. As for any other Major Arcana card holders, I'm unaware."

Madam Justice, Mr. Hanged Man, Mr. Sun, Madam Hermit, Mr. Star, Mr. Moon… Lumian realized that the names possessed an air of mystery and sophistication, unlike the mundane-sounding Seven of Wands and Two of Cups.

After pondering for a while, he recognized a crucial point mentioned by Franca: Madam Justice had been seen in Midseashire, Trier, and Backlund.

Apart from Madam Judgment and Madam Magician, this was the only Major Arcana card with confirmed sightings in Trier.

Lumian distinctly recalled that Madam Susie had mentioned the possibility of people from the West Midseashire Coast being Beyonders of the Spectator pathway.

This implied that she had a good understanding of the West Midseashire Coast.

Considering that she and the other Psychiatrist were in Trier, their areas of activity overlapped by at least two-thirds with Madam Justice's.

Furthermore, when Madam Magician mentioned that the two Psychiatrists were equals and that his psychological problem involved matters at a higher level, Lumian suspected that one of them was Madam Justice.

Based on the fact that both Madam Magician and Madam Judgment preferred to address themselves with tarot cards and conceal their true names, it was more likely that the enigmatic lady sitting across from him was the holder of the Major Arcana card, Justice. Susie, on the other hand, seemed to be her subordinate Minor Arcana card.

With these thoughts in mind, Lumian glanced at Franca, who had adjusted her sitting position, and spoke, "Were you planning to find a genuine Psychiatrist for Jenna's brother from within our Tarot Club?"

Franca, confused by Lumian's sudden change of topic, was taken aback.

"No, I intended to approach members of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society.

"I try my best not to contact my Major Arcana, Madam Judgment unless it's a particularly critical or serious matter. Although she always appears composed and willing to help, do you know? She's a true demigod and a prominent figure with godlike status. I can't burden her with trivial matters frequently. She says she doesn't mind, but who knows if she's truly honest. Each insignificant problem might decrease her favor towards me.

"When her favorability drops to a certain extent, a demigod has numerous ways to make your life unbearable. Besides, you won't even know why it's happening.

"I usually handle things on my own. If that fails, I turn to Gardner Martin or the members of the Research Society. And if that doesn't work, I consider reaching out to Madame Judgment."

Lumian shared the same sentiment, but he had the excuse of reporting the mission's situation and suppressing Termiboros's influence. He could write to Madam Magician from time to time to gather information.

In any case, he was already in the process of writing a letter. There was no harm in asking!

Observing that Franca's Psychiatrist wasn't the same as his own, Lumian didn't mention Susie. He nodded gently and replied, "Same here."

Franca glanced around and lowered her voice.

"However, don't hesitate to seek help when you need it. The resources and influence wielded by Major Arcana card holders exceed your imagination. What you find difficult can be resolved with a mere command or thought.

"Wasn't my mystical item, the Ring of Punishment, incredibly powerful? Madame Judgment granted it to me directly upon my request. She even allowed me to owe an equivalent exchange for a period of time.

"Uh… I see how you obtained the Pyromaniac potion formula and its main ingredient so quickly!"

You're not wrong… Lumian smiled, conveying to Franca that she had hit the mark.

He believed that if he could acquire Beyonder characteristics that complemented the Shadow Branch, he could genuinely seek the help of Madam Magician in finding a saint-level Artisan to craft the corresponding mystical item.

Compared to him, who was only a Sequence 7, Madam Magician, already a demigod, was more likely to be acquainted with a high-level Artisan!

Franca exhaled and continued the conversation.

"Every bearer of a Major Arcana card is a demigod, with a high probability of being a saint. At the very least, the more active ones don't seem to be at the level of Grounded Angels. However, Madam Judgment told me that the Tarot Club has more than one angel!"

At least eight saints, and more than one angel? They're even stronger than the Aurora Order… Truly befitting the most extraordinary secret organization… Lumian sighed, wondering if the Tarot Club's core members were exaggerating to instill a stronger sense of belonging among their subordinates.

With a yearning expression, Franca added, "My current dream is to progress step by step to Sequence 5, then advance to Sequence 4 of the Hunter pathway and become a demigod. That would grant me the right to obtain a Major Arcana card.

"Not only would it mean greater strength and a sense of security, but it would also allow me to participate in the Divine Council and ask Mr. Fool about things once he awakens."

According to Madam Magician, obtaining a Major Arcana card isn't dependent on advancing to Sequence 4 and becoming a demigod… Lumian dealt Franca a blow to prevent her from having overly high expectations.

However, Franca didn't mind at all. She smiled and said, "In any case, my question will have to wait until Mr. Fool wakes up. When the time comes, demigods will undoubtedly be more qualified than other members to obtain a Major Arcana card."

At this point, she looked at Lumian and continued, "Apart from us, there are four more Minor Arcana cards active in Trier. In total, there are 23 cards in the world, but there might be fewer. Many Beyonders find it fashionable to scatter tarot cards at the scene of an incident and intentionally imitate us. They might do it to misdirect the official Beyonders' investigation.

"In Trier, the most renowned card is the Knight of Swords. At the beginning of the year, he detonated a warehouse belonging to the Southern Continent's terrorist organization, the Rose School of Thought. The warehouse concealed a significant amount of explosives, and non-human remains were found at the scene…"

Lumian listened attentively to Franca's account, gaining a better understanding of the Tarot Club and the Major Arcana and Minor Arcana cards.

After a brief moment of contemplation, he asked, "Do Minor Arcana cards have gatherings in the world of mysticism?"

"No," Franca shook her head again. "Unless we meet in person, like we have, we can only communicate through our respective Major Arcana cards. Yes, regular gatherings do take place between Major Arcana cards in Mr. Fool's divine kingdom!

"However, Madame Judgment mentioned once that in urgent situations, with the assistance of our Major Arcana, we can communicate in a way that transcends reality, but such occurrences are rare."

Lumian had no further questions. After chatting for a while, he heard Jenna's footsteps ascending the stairs.

He stood up, preparing to leave.

"Where are you going?" Franca asked, puzzled.

At this hour, there was nothing for him to do in Salle de Bal Brise, so he might as well stay and play Fighting Evil, the game Emperor Roselle had "invented."

Lumian smiled, a mix of emotions in his expression.

"To the catacombs."

The ashes of the lunatic Flameng and the Ruhr couple were finally being laid to rest in the catacombs.

Chapter 266: Catacombs

Outside the police headquarters in the bustling market district, Lumian, donning the enigmatic Prying Glasses, climbed aboard the carriage adorned with painted irises.

Two ordinary constables, clad in black uniforms, occupied the seats opposite, their feet resting beside three somber urns. The names of the departed flickered in fluorescent ink.

Taking his place across from them before the carriage slowly steered forward, Lumian caught the older constable's inquisitive gaze.

"What brings you here? What's your connection to these departed souls?"

He remembered that two of the deceased had neither kin nor friends, and the remaining one had distant relatives who trembled at the mere mention of the name Flameng. Not only were they unwilling to come and collect the ashes and relics, but they also reluctantly admitted that they were related by blood or marriage.

Lumian responded calmly.

"I'm their landlord, in a manner of speaking."

"Just the landlord?" The older constable appeared skeptical.

"Officer, a landlord is a person too. They can feel for others!" Lumian chuckled. "I've shared a drink or had a chat with them. Accompanying their remains into the catacombs isn't a big deal."

The younger constable feigned disinterest, gazing out the window, while the older constable exuded an air of familiarity.

"Youth suits you well. But in the motel or apartment business in the market district, you must guard against developing attachments to tenants. Otherwise, you'll either be deceived or heartbroken. After a few more such experiences, your enthusiasm for others will wane."

Lumian offered a perfunctory reply, and the constable broached another subject.

"We still have Flameng's belongings. His kin refuse to collect them. Would you like them? If not, we'll handle it ourselves."

"I'll take a look when I return from the catacombs," Lumian replied nonchalantly.

During the journey from the market district to the Place du Purgatoire in Quartier de l'Observatoire, the older constable chatted away, alternating between engaging Lumian and attempting to draw his colleague into conversation. His chatter seemed ceaseless.

Finally reaching their destination, Lumian disembarked from the carriage, cradling Ruhr's ashes in his arms. Despite his outgoing nature, Lumian felt a newfound relief, as if his ears had been granted respite.

The catacomb administrator, whom Lumian had encountered before, awaited their arrival.

In his mid-thirties, of average build, with curly brown hair, a thick beard, and slightly upturned eyes, he sported yellow pants, a white shirt, and a blue vest.

"Kendall, why is it you again?" the older constable greeted him warmly.

Kendall held an unlit carbide lamp and smiled.

"Robert, I heard you were coming, so I made sure to delay my other duties and be here for you."

As Kendall spoke, he scrutinized Lumian and emphasized, "You didn't forget to bring the white candles, did you?"

"That will be the last thing I forget!" Robert, clutching Flameng's urn, fumbled in his pocket and retrieved three white candles. He tossed one to his colleague and another to Lumian.

With everything in order, Kendall ignited the carbide lamp and turned around, leading them deeper into the darkness, down the stone staircase comprising 138 steps.

Along the way, they passed a heavy wooden door engraved with two imposing Sacred Emblems and traversed a hushed corridor where even the sound of their breaths seemed amplified.

Lumian was no stranger to such a foreboding atmosphere, but the young constable displayed signs of nervousness. He clutched Madame Michel's urn tightly, seeking solace.

After traversing a broad avenue, illuminated by gas street lamps, the quartet arrived at the catacombs' entrance.

The natural cavern, subsequently modified, stood silently in the dim yellow glow. Skulls, skeletal arms, sunflowers, and reliefs depicting steam elements adorned both sides. Beyond them, an impenetrable darkness loomed.

Etched on the lintel were two inscriptions in Intisian:

"Halt!

"The Death Empire lies ahead!"

Although Lumian had witnessed this sight before, he still felt a profound sense of reverence.

Unlike his previous curiosity and confusion, he now keenly grasped the gravity conveyed by these warnings and the surrounding environment.

Beneath Trier's surface lurked countless perils capable of obliterating the entire city and even Intis itself. These dangers included, but were not limited to, Trier, the Tree of Shadow, and invisible flames from the Fourth Epoch. The catacombs, situated here, were unlikely to be innocuous.

According to Osta Trul, a Secrets Suppliant, visitors who descended into the catacombs with lit white candles invoked the protection of a concealed entity, akin to a ritual.

Lumian couldn't help but suspect that opening such a place to the public served to suppress some subterranean peril, much like the new city erected upon Trier in the Fourth Epoch.

Kendall turned to Lumian and the others.

"It's time to light the candles. We must ensure they don't go out before we leave the catacombs.

"If we happen to get separated, don't panic. Look for a road sign. If you can't find one, follow the black line above you until you reach the exit."

With Kendall holding the carbide lamp, Lumian and the two others ignited their white candles, casting a soft yellowish glow.

As the four candles flickered gently, Kendall extinguished the carbide lamp and led the way through the boulder gate, entering the realm of the Death Empire.

Lumian followed closely behind, clutching the urn in one hand and the white candle in the other.

Suddenly, a chill swept over him, sending shivers down his spine.

But the cold didn't originate from his surroundings; it emanated from deep within his heart, causing his hair to stand on end.

Simultaneously, Lumian felt eyes fixed upon him, their gazes piercing his soul.

Using the flame of his candle, he looked to his right and saw pits carved into the stone wall, each one containing a ghastly skeletal corpse.

The hollow-eyed skulls stared at him lifelessly, devoid of emotion.

Lumian didn't avert his gaze as he carefully observed the corpses. He realized that the eerie sensation of being watched didn't stem from them, yet the feeling remained.

An instinctive urge to activate his Spirit Vision surged within him, but he had changed since arriving in Trier. He had encountered enough to know that many warnings were inscribed with blood and tears by those who came before him.

I shouldn't look at what I shouldn't… Since it poses no danger to me, there's no need to search for the source of this abnormality… Lumian silently muttered, turning his attention to the police officers beside him.

They seemed oblivious to any anomaly and continued following the tomb administrator, Kendall, as if everything was normal.

This made Lumian suspect that the experience was a result of the qualitative change in his spirituality after his advancement to Pyromaniac.

It's good that you can't feel it… Lumian couldn't help but sigh.

Under the weight of countless gazes, his skin erupted in goosebumps.

He cautiously looked up and saw a thick black line painted on the top of the tomb, with an arrow pointing toward the exit.

As he advanced, Lumian noticed that both sides of the path were lined with bones. Some were nestled in pits along the stone walls, others were piled by the roadside, and some were covered by tattered garments. Some lay bare, stripped of all burial items, their skulls coated in a layer of dark green mold. The air carried a diluted scent of decay.

The catacombs were divided into multiple chambers, each designated by name, ensuring visitors could locate specific remains.

Lumian and his companions followed Kendall through the narrow passage between the tomb chapel and the tomb memorial pillar. Ahead, they saw dozens of yellowish candles.

At times, the flames clustered together like fireflies in the night, while other times they formed a river of dim starlight.

Lumian glanced around casually and spotted a bride, her face veiled in white, adorned in a sanctified gown. Beside her stood a groom in a black tailcoat, a floral handkerchief adorning his chest pocket. Surrounding them were 30 to 40 youths, holding lit white candles and laughing merrily.

"What's happening?" Lumian couldn't hide his confusion.

Kendall scoffed and explained, "It's part of a wedding ceremony.

"Since last year, newlyweds have been bringing young guests into the catacombs, crossing paths with the deceased. It's become a popular tradition in Trier. Young folks are always daring, taking pride in their courage and delighting in scaring others. I've seen guests purposely pick up skeletal hands and pat the bride and groom on the shoulder, nearly causing them to faint in fear."

Oh, you Trierians… Lumian shook his head in amusement.

It didn't take long for the four of them to reach their destination, the Tomb of Lights.

In the center stood a black pedestal, atop which an obelisk painted white bore the emblem of the Sun. At its peak rested an ancient, extinguished oil lamp. The walls and floor were filled with bones, urns, and countless tear bottles.

Upon entering, Lumian realized a problem.

"Where are Flameng's relatives?"

He had wanted Flameng to rest alongside his children, wife, and parents.

After a brief moment of contemplation, Lumian suddenly understood why Flameng hadn't specified the location of his kin's remains.

He felt guilty and self-reproachful. Flameng desired to be with his family, yet he didn't dare approach them. He intended to stay in the same chamber and watch over them from a distance.

An indescribable sorrow enveloped Lumian as he stood silently, choosing to honor Flameng's final wish. He found an empty spot and gently placed the urn of the troubled soul.

Once Robert and the others had arranged the urns of the Ruhr couple, the four of them offered simultaneous prayer, either uttering "Praise the Sun" or "By Steam."

On their way back, they encountered the newlyweds and their young entourage.

As Lumian brushed past them, he noticed a young couple in the group. Seizing the moment when the tomb administrator's attention waned, they impulsively attempted to blow out the white candle in their hands, curious to see what would happen.

Whoosh!

They had indeed done it.

The two yellowish flames were extinguished.

In that instant, Lumian's mind turned adrift.

Quickly regaining his composure, he realized the young couple had vanished without a trace.

They're gone… Lumian's eyes widened as he tried to comprehend the situation.

A few seconds later, he accepted the undeniable truth.

The young couple had truly vanished!

Lumian then shifted his gaze back to the entourage.

Whether it was the newlyweds leading the way, the attending guests, or those at the rear, no one seemed to notice anyone missing. They continued to smile, joke, and move forward.

Chapter 267: Remains

For a moment, Lumian thought he must be seeing things.

There was no sign of the couple, nor any attempt to put out the candle flames!

If Lumian hadn't witnessed it himself and been well aware of the dangers lurking in Underground Trier, he might have questioned whether the problem was with his own mind rather than searching for any trace of the couple's existence.

The people behind the couple hastened their steps and caught up to the person in front, closing the sudden gap in the procession.

They showed no surprise, fear, or confusion.

Everything appeared normal.

Lumian, already aware of the countless unseen gazes fixed upon him, felt the goosebumps on his skin intensify.

Subconsciously, he glanced at Kendall, the tomb administrator, who led the way with two police officers, to gauge his reaction to the recent events.

Clad in yellow trousers and a blue vest, Kendall held an extinguished carbide lamp in one hand and a quietly burning white candle in the other. He walked directly toward the exit of the catacombs, seemingly oblivious to the strange happenings surrounding the entourage.

Suddenly, Kendall turned around and met Lumian's gaze.

"Is something the matter?" Kendall's deep voice reverberated through the passageway, echoing in the nearby skull chambers.

Lumian maintained a composed demeanor and replied calmly, "I'm afraid I might get lost."

Kendall nodded almost imperceptibly.

"Then I'll slow down."

He continued toward the exit, deliberately reducing his pace. He staggered slightly, remaining silent, resembling a zombie from a horror novel.

Lumian held the flickering yellow candle and passed by the laughing wedding party participants, who occasionally made eye contact with the white skulls. Thoughts raced through his mind.

They truly didn't notice that someone was missing…

When they leave the catacombs, will the families of the man and woman discover their absence?

I've always wondered. The catacombs are open to the public, and university students often take risks and dance among the bones. Are there truly no issues?

Even visitors guided by the catacomb administrators disobey the warnings, let alone youngsters who venture in with a solitary white candle…

Initially, I believed there were safety measures or that accidents were infrequent enough not to deter those individuals. Now, it seems to be a different matter altogether…

Lumian suspected that not only would the body of the person "consumed" by the catacombs vanish, but even the memory of their existence would be erased from the minds of friends and relatives!

Why can I remember them? Could it be because Termiboros is sealed within me, connecting my fate to His to some extent?

Why do the government and the two Churches continue to open such a perilous place to the public? Do the catacombs require a constant flow of living people to keep something suppressed? Are those who disregard the warnings deemed necessary sacrifices? The more Lumian dwelled on it, the more his hair stood on end. He forced himself not to delve further into the analysis.

Without sufficient information, he couldn't explore the matter any deeper.

Regardless, there was nothing worth investigating within the catacombs. Visiting occasionally posed no threat as long as he adhered to the rules!

Once they entered the catacombs, the "talkative" police officer, Robert, fell silent, clearly uncomfortable in the environment.

With his silence, the conversation ceased. In an indescribable silence, the quartet retraced their steps to the natural entrance adorned with intricate reliefs and emerged back into the open.

As soon as Lumian crossed the threshold, he sensed the countless invisible gazes vanish.

The chill in his body dissipated, and his skin quickly returned to normal.

"Phew…" Robert exhaled deeply. "I always feel uneasy whenever I'm in the catacombs. Kendall, how can you go in more than ten times a day and still be so cheerful?"

Kendall chuckled and replied, "Do you think we remain unaffected? If we're not on night duty, those with families rush to find their wives. If not, they head to places like Rue de la Muraille and bask in the warmth of others."

"To be honest, after spending so much time here, I feel as if I'm slowly turning into a corpse."

As they conversed, Kendall lit the carbide lamp and extinguished the candle in his hand.

Returning to the surface, Robert glanced at the police headquarters carriage parked outside the entrance building and sheepishly smiled at his colleague and Lumian.

"That prolonged discomfort makes me need to use the loo. Wait for me. I'll go to the restroom first."

With that, he headed toward the two-story building, painted a muddy gray, which served as the ticket office for the catacombs.

Lumian gazed at the stone-engraved dome and positioned himself by a pillar at the edge, absentmindedly observing the pedestrians on Place du Purgatoire. The other police officer boarded the carriage and settled in to wait.

At that moment, Lumian felt a sudden chill.

It resembled the sensation he experienced upon entering the catacombs, though not as intense.

Instinctively, he warily turned around and saw Kendall, the tomb administrator, standing behind him, wearing an expressionless face.

"What's the matter?" Lumian calmly inquired.

Kendall, with his thick brown beard, spoke in a deep voice, "What were you looking at?"

Lumian's heart sank as he responded with a mixture of sincerity and pretense,

"Which aspect are you referring to?"

"When we passed by that group of people on our way back." Kendall's tone remained neutral.

Lumian acted as though a light bulb had switched on.

"I find the concept of a wedding among the dead quite intriguing. They seemed unafraid and were enjoying themselves."

Kendall scrutinized him for a couple of seconds before nodding.

"Don't imitate them."

With that, the tomb administrator carried the unlit carbide lamp and made his way toward the muddy gray building that housed them.

Before long, police officer Robert jogged back, and the carriage departed for Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman.

…

In the Evidence Room deep within the corridor on the first floor of the market district's police headquarters, Robert led Lumian to a wooden frame divided into multiple compartments and pointed to one of them.

"Here, Flameng's belongings."

Among the items, there was a dark suitcase, a fountain pen, paper, an ink bottle, and several large books crammed inside.

Lumian pulled out one of the books and quickly skimmed through its pages. He realized it was a mineralogy textbook focusing on Trier's underground rock formations. As an unschooled youth, the content proved challenging, with numerous unfamiliar words that were exclusive to mineralogy.

The other books were also mineralogy texts, some containing basic teaching materials while others comprised complex collections of papers.

Confirming this, Lumian retrieved the suitcase, placed it on the floor, and opened it.

Inside, along with two sets of clothes and daily essentials, the suitcase was filled with small grayish-white cloth bags. Each bag had a different name written on it with a fountain pen:

Flower, Sedge, Sheep…

These are the names Flameng mentioned, referring to the various rock strata beneath Trier… Could these bags contain corresponding mineral specimens? Lumian briefly recollected Flameng's words and formed a rough idea of what the cloth bags contained.

Despite his madness, Flameng hadn't forgotten to bring along his research subjects!

But all of this held little significance for Lumian, and he began contemplating letting the police headquarters handle them.

Just then, Termiboros's magnificent voice resonated in his ears.

"The cloth bag on the far right."

Oh, so a loser like you is finally speaking up again? Lumian's initial reaction was to mock Termiboros. However, he turned his gaze toward the cloth bag hinted at by the Inevitability angel, feeling a mix of surprise and suspicion.

The cloth bag rested on the far right side of the suitcase, sandwiched between Flameng's socks and his razor. Dark blue ink formed a combination of terms on its surface:

"Earth Blood."

Earth… Blood… Lumian, crouching beside the suitcase, silently muttered as he calmly picked up the cloth bag in front of the police officer, Robert, and opened it.

Inside the bag was a brown rock pockmarked with potholes. Each depression contained dark-red speckles, resembling blood seeping from the earth.

For some reason, just looking at it filled Lumian with a sense of frustration.

He refrained from touching the mineral specimen with his bare hands. Instead, he securely tied the cloth bag and placed it back in the suitcase.

He swiftly skimmed through the book detailing the materials found in Trier's underground rock formations, searching for answers.

With a clear target in mind, he quickly discovered the answer.

"Earth Blood rock stratum lies between 55 and 56 meters underground in Trier and has a thickness of approximately 0.76 meters… This is the deepest mineral we can gather. Beyond lies the forbidden Ancient Ruins Reserve…"

Beside this textbook description, Flameng's familiar handwriting jotted a few words:

"A small number of ores within the Earth Blood rock stratum are more peculiar than the others. They are suspected to contain volatile toxins that can induce irritability and lead to a mental illness known as mania.

"A researcher suddenly went berserk and slashed his colleague.

"To handle specific mineral specimens from the Earth Blood rock stratum, one must wear corresponding protective gear."

Earth Blood is a rock stratum near Fourth Epoch Trier? It's undeniably peculiar… No wonder Termiboros made me pay attention… As Lumian pondered, Robert urged, "Do you want them or not? Make a decision quickly!"

"Yes," Lumian responded, rising to his feet.

Even though he only desired the mineral specimen from the Earth Blood rock stratum and the mineralogy textbook detailing Trier's underground rocks, he signed and took possession of all of Flameng's belongings to avoid arousing suspicion.

Upon returning to Room 207 of Auberge du Coq Doré, Lumian neglected to wash off his enigmatic makeup. He whispered to Termiboros, "What makes this mineral specimen so special?"

Termiboros's voice echoed in Lumian's ears once more.

"Don't tell me you think it's normal for the Montsouris ghost to spare Flameng?"

Chapter 268: Possible Encounters

Upon hearing Termiboros's question, Lumian felt a jolt of alarm.

He had never suspected that there might be something amiss with Flameng's prolonged stay at Auberge du Coq Doré, evading the clutches of the Montsouris ghost.

From Lumian's perspective, Flameng's immediate family and wife had already met their demise, and it was only a matter of time before he met a similar fate. The archives at Psychic's headquarters revealed instances where victims had been slain by the Montsouris ghost up to 11 months after encountering it. While Flameng's circumstances were rare, they were not unprecedented.

In an instant, Lumian's mind seized upon an intriguing detail.

The previous victims had all met their end within the same year of their encounter, whereas Flameng had crossed paths with the ghost last year. He had even sought the sanctuary of the clergy during the New Year festivities.

Although less than a year had passed since Flameng's encounter with the Montsouris ghost and his subsequent suicide, it was an unprecedented delay compared to the other cases.

"Could this Earth Blood ore be responsible for protecting Flameng, causing the Montsouris ghost to repeatedly postpone its actions and disrupt its usual patterns?" Lumian asked Termiboros, his voice hushed, seeking confirmation.

Termiboros was a true angel, devoid of power due to a perfect seal but possessing remarkable insight, knowledge, and level made Him capable of deciphering many matters.

Termiboros replied in a majestic voice, "It instills fear and repulsion in the Montsouris ghost, but it holds no power of its own. For you, this could be a crucial key."

"A key?" Lumian swiftly made numerous connections. "The key to a hidden chamber in Fourth Epoch Trier?"

Termiboros responded in an unusually deep voice, "You will inevitably enter Fourth Epoch Trier. It is where your destiny, both treacherous and serendipitous, awaits you.

"Rather than remaining passive, it would be wiser to explore proactively, leveraging the insights gained from each venture to better prepare yourself."

"Aren't you revealing your intentions too quickly?" Lumian couldn't help but chuckle. "Are you trying to hasten my demise? So that you may utilize the unique underground environment to block the signal of the collapsing seal and ensure your own safe escape?"

Given that the Tree of Shadow hadn't taken root in Fourth Epoch Trier, Lumian held no interest in venturing underground.

Without awaiting Termiboros's response, he left the room and made his way to the nearest washroom, eager to wash off the mystical makeup that concealed his true identity.

Having eliminated the latent threat, Lumian settled at a wooden table and began to write.

It was clear that both Flameng and the Earth Blood ore were extraordinary cases. He couldn't simply follow Termiboros's directives; consulting Madam Magician was imperative.

If he lacked knowledge and blindly believed the words of an angel tied to an evil deity, he would inevitably suffer dire consequences, even risking his life.

Termiboros's voice resonated once more.

"Can you truly trust this Magician, this Tarot Club, as they claim?

"They sealed me within your body instead of seeking my eradication. I fear they have ulterior motives, intending to exploit you for their nefarious purposes."

"They cast you into Trier, the very heart of the storm, yet they displayed no concern nor made any inquiries about your well-being. Don't you find this suspicious? It cannot be explained away as mere training."

Lumian beamed and said with a sigh, "Have you never deceived or manipulated others in the past, relying solely on your status and abilities to achieve your goals?

"Would you like me to purchase a copy of the Art of Persuasion and read it aloud daily for your instruction?

"Allow me to enlighten you. Such tricks wouldn't have ensnared me during my early teenage years. I am well aware of those I can depend on, my true friends, my adversaries, and those I must remain wary of."

Termiboros fell silent, seemingly contemplating whether to acquire the art of rhetoric.

Lumian swiftly penned a letter to Madam Magician, detailing the recent developments, and entrusted it, along with the Earth Blood ore, to the puppet messenger he had summoned.

In due time, a reply arrived from Madam Magician, who returned the mineral specimen.

"I'm relieved to see that you remained cautious and didn't fully trust Termiboros's words.

"However, there is some truth to what He said. The ore lacks inherent power, but it carries remnants of unknown auras and characteristics, mostly dissipated. It won't aid you directly, but it seems destined to bring about encounters in the future, which could be either beneficial or detrimental. Its current state is highly chaotic, making it difficult to provide an accurate interpretation.

"What Termiboros intentionally misled you about is that the fortuitous encounter He spoke of might not necessarily occur in Fourth Epoch Trier, but somewhere underground.

"If, in the future, you wish to explore the potential encounters and are prepared to take risks, carry it with you whenever you venture into Underground Trier. Alternatively, if you wish to avoid the risk, keep it safely stored in your room.

"The symbolic elements I mentioned previously have already begun to unfold. A friend of mine mentioned that he possesses great proficiency in deciphering such matters. Once he completes his current tasks, I will arrange for you to meet him…"

Suddenly, a blaze erupted from Lumian's hand, reducing the letter to ashes.

Contemplating the words of both Madam Magician and Termiboros, Lumian couldn't help but believe that the Earth Blood ore before him could trigger some kind of mutation within Underground Trier. It could lead to a fortuitous encounter or even claim his life.

For now, it's best not to take unnecessary risks, Lumian thought, aware of his current strengths.

As a Sequence 7 Pyromaniac, he had overcome any deficiencies in both close-quarters combat and long-range attacks, excelling in hand-to-hand combat and spellcasting. He had surpassed the limitations of an ordinary individual. However, Hunters leaned more towards conventional battles and lacked the peculiar abilities and methods to deal with the peculiarities of Underground Trier.

Lumian decided to wait until he had fully digested the Pyromaniac potion and obtained the Contractee boon. Then, he would consider carrying the Earth Blood ore based on the information he had gathered about Underground Trier.

It would be even better if he could transform the Shadow Branch into a mystical item before that.

Suppressing his thoughts, Lumian took the mineral specimen to Rue des Blouses Blanches and concealed it in his safehouse.

Before the afternoon sun waned, he delved into Aurore's grimoire, meticulously studying its contents alongside Franca's teachings and his own experiences with fire spells, searching for any potential issues.

After more than an hour, Lumian stumbled upon a section about summoning creatures from the spirit world and forging contracts.

His mind immediately turned to White Paper, Aurore's contracted creature.

The fragile spirit entity possessed the ability to withstand a specific ability of the contractor.

I wonder if the contract between Aurore and White Paper has been severed. According to the notebook, aside from the designated ritual, the contract can only be broken if one of the parties is completely deceased.

Regrettably, contracted creatures can only be summoned by the contractor and not by others like a messenger. Otherwise, I could utilize White Paper to determine if Aurore is truly deceased…

Hm… Is it possible that Aurore left behind any information with White Paper?

Lost in thought, Lumian's mind shifted to another matter that had previously escaped his notice.

Considering that Aurore occasionally gained clarity and assisted him in cutting up the livre bleu, reassembling letters, and seeking aid from the authorities, and since her initial response in the dream was to summon the messenger of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society's Vice President, Hela, to seek her counsel, why didn't she occasionally summon the messenger when she was lucid and inform Madam Hela about her predicament?

In Madam Hela's earliest response to me, she clearly seemed unaware of the situation.

What prevented Aurore from making such an attempt?

Or could it be that she did summon a messenger, and Hela is concealing it?

Lumian narrowed his eyes. Without the accompanying memories, he couldn't discern the source of the problem.

For now, he wasn't overly suspicious of Hela, believing there must be another explanation.

It was worth noting that Hela's messenger knew Lumian's exact location. If the woman was truly entangled in Cordu's affairs and played a dishonorable role, she would undoubtedly wish to eliminate the final "survivor" without leaving any loose ends. Yet, all this time, she not only refrained from making any substantial moves but also kindly provided knowledge and suggestions.

For a moment, Lumian considered writing down his questions and sending them to Hela to gauge her response. However, he restrained himself, fearing that it might expose the king's new clothes and lead to unfavorable outcomes.

He decided to first have a conversation with Franca and gather opinions from her teammates in the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society and the Tarot Club regarding Hela's trustworthiness.

If Franca believed Hela to be reliable and had shared information about the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society with her Major Arcana card, Lumian would request Madam Magician to keep a watchful eye before sending inquiries to Hela.

He forced himself to regain composure and resumed studying Aurore's grimoire. Only when evening arrived did he leave Rue des Blouses Blanches, making his way onto Avenue du Marché and entering his Salle de Bal Brise.

"Good evening, Boss!" Greetings echoed from all directions as Lumian nodded in acknowledgement and led Louis and Sarkota to the second floor.

Before he could settle in at the café, René, the dance hall manager, approached him.

The slender middle-aged man pressed a hand to his chest and bowed respectfully.

"Monsieur Ciel, Monsieur Martin requests your presence at Rue des Fontaines tomorrow at 10 a.m."

Boss wants to see me? Lumian was both surprised and delighted.

He was taken aback that Gardner Martin had sent for him despite the recent lack of incidents. Yet, he couldn't help but feel a sense of joy at the prospect of further interaction with Gardner Martin and the opportunity to gain his trust to join the Iron and Blood Cross Order.

Chapter 269: Islander

"Alright." Lumian nodded at Manager René.

Lumian dabbed his mouth with a napkin and rose to his feet. He strolled towards one of the café's balconies, casting his eyes over the nocturnal scenery of Avenue du Marché.

The gas street lamps cast a soft, golden glow, illuminating the carriages and pedestrians that traversed the road.

At that moment, people streamed into Salle de Bal Brise one after another, joining the revelry within.

To be honest, Lumian preferred the cozy atmosphere of the basement bar at Auberge du Coq Doré to this place. It allowed him to unwind and find enjoyment.

From his perspective, the patrons of Salle de Bal Brise were excessively self-indulgent. They cared little for their families or their futures. All they sought was a night of revelry, drowning themselves in alcohol, beauty, dance, and uproar. In contrast, the regulars at the basement bar were mostly tenants of Auberge du Coq Doré. They would return around 9 or 10 p.m. and had to be in bed by 1 a.m. They drank, sang, boasted, and frolicked, making the most of those fleeting two to three hours to find their own slice of joy.

Only then did they gather the courage to face the arduous tasks of the following day and embrace the promise of a new dawn.

It was akin to kerosene lamps that required regular refueling to continue casting their light.

Lumian surveyed Avenue du Marché for a few minutes before his attention was abruptly drawn to a familiar figure.

There stood Charlie, adorned in a white shirt and blue waistcoat, embroiled in a street brawl, his formal coat casually slung over his arm.

Now we're talking… Lumian smiled, a touch of nostalgia and sentimentality washing over him as he used an expression that had recently gained popularity.

Pressing his right hand against the balcony, Lumian gracefully leaped from the second floor, landing nimbly at the edge of Avenue du Marché. With a few brisk strides, he reached the scene of Charlie's altercation.

He made no move to intervene or assist Charlie. Instead, he observed the fight with keen interest.

The other party engaged in this scuffle with Charlie was a slender young man in his mid-twenties, possessed of dark skin and sunken eyes. His lips were thick, and his slightly curly black hair marked him as a descendant of the Fog Sea Islander lineage. However, compared to his fellow islanders, he appeared somewhat more presentable.

"Cheat! You damn cheat!" Charlie spat out, his curses interwoven with their tussle.

The Islander, donning a blue shirt with a fountain pen tucked in his breast pocket, deftly dodged Charlie's onslaught while offering an explanation.

"I didn't want this to happen either. I, too, fell victim to deceit!"

"Dogsh*t!" Charlie's kick missed its mark.

The two engaged in their amateurish scuffle until their breath grew ragged. Simultaneously, they slowed their movements and eventually ceased their struggle.

Only then did Charlie notice Lumian standing beside him, observing the brawl with a smile.

"Ciel, it's Monette! That swindler! The one who conned me out of 10 verl d'or, nearly leaving me to starve!" Charlie's face lit up as he eagerly revealed the identity of his Islander adversary. "Praise the Sun for granting me this encounter!"

The Islander whom Charlie deemed deserving of a dire fate… Lumian chuckled to himself.

"You're partly to blame as well. Haven't you heard the saying? 'Never trust an Islander.'"

"I thought we were friends," Charlie muttered, his frustration evident.

How could you be so naïve and easily swayed? You too possess a certain knack for mischief… People like you can be easily ensnared by scheming individuals, falling into their traps without gaining either the affection or the riches you desire. Ah, you've already fallen victim… Lumian chastised, shifting his gaze towards the Islander named Monette.

Monette responded with an obsequious smile.

"I genuinely intended to help Charlie find employment, but I, too, fell prey to a scam and lost all my money.

"I couldn't face Charlie, so I secretly departed from Auberge du Coq Doré."

As he spoke, he reached into his pocket and withdrew a stack of banknotes, counting three 5 verl d'or bills. He handed them over to Charlie.

"I returned to the market district to find you and return your money, along with interest."

Charlie's emotions eased considerably as he verified the authenticity of the three banknotes under the glow of the street lamps. He asked, still somewhat suspicious, "Are you someone who gets scammed easily?"

Ever since Charlie had encountered Monette until his departure, he had only witnessed him conning others. He had never seen him on the receiving end of such deals. True to his Islander identity.

Monette sheepishly smiled and replied, "Not only was I swindled once, but I fell for it a second time.

"The first instance, I encountered a group of people who claimed that Salle de Bal Unique in Quartier de l'Observatoire wanted to expand and were offering shares for sale. Each lot cost a mere 200 verl d'or.

"You all know how lucrative the dance hall is. I couldn't resist dipping into my savings, but the share subscription certificate I received turned out to be counterfeit!

"I confronted them, only to be swindled once more."

Salle de Bal Unique… Lumian's eyelids twitched involuntarily.

The bankrupt merchant, Fitz, residing in Room 401 of Auberge du Coq Doré, had previously been duped out of 100,000 verl d'or by the owner of Salle de Bal Unique, Timmons. Fitz had sought Lumian's aid in recovering the sum, but Lumian had investigated and consulted several sources. He found the dance hall's practices dubious, possessing a formidable network. They appeared to wield considerable power, causing Lumian to abandon the commission.

Now, he had encountered another victim of Salle de Bal Unique.

"You were swindled by them once before. How did you fall for it a second time?" Charlie couldn't fathom such foolishness.

Monette cleared his throat twice.

"They openly confessed to being a group of swindlers and refused to return the money. They even said that reporting them to the authorities would be futile. Impressed by my skills, they asked if I was willing to learn the art of deception from them, allowing me to recoup my losses.

"In the end, they merely taught me what I already knew. They only gave me something else."

"What was it?" Charlie was always a curious one.

In the blink of an eye, Monette retrieved a transparent monocle from his pocket.

He smoothly placed it into his right eye socket.

For some reason, Lumian sensed an inexplicable change in Monette as soon as he wore the monocle. It was as if he had transformed into a different character altogether.

The corners of Monette's mouth curled slightly as he positioned the monocle over his right eye. He glanced at Charlie first, then turned his gaze towards Lumian. His eyes shifted from Lumian's face to his chest and hands.

Lumian felt a subtle unease, but he detected no immediate danger.

Monette smiled and said, "Are you Ciel, the mastermind behind the Idiot Instrument?"

"Yes." Lumian did not deny it and remained silently cautious.

Monette adjusted the monocle on his right eye.

"Quite adept at pulling pranks, I must say.

"Would you like this monocle? It's of no use to me. I could exchange it for some cash. With it, you can disguise yourself as a member of Salle de Bal Unique and earn a good amount of money there."

Do I look like a fool to you? Lumian promptly rejected Monette's suggestion without hesitation.

"I have no interest in donning monocles."

He had always been skeptical of the peculiar rules of Salle de Bal Unique, keeping his guard up.

Disappointed, Monette redirected his gaze, removed the monocle, and turned to Charlie.

"I've given you the money and the interest. If you ever need anything in the future, come find me at Salle de Bal Unique."

Charlie scoffed dismissively.

He still harbored suspicions that Monette had intended to scam him in the past.

After the Islander left Avenue du Marché, Lumian turned to Charlie.

"Remember to keep your distance from that fellow. Otherwise, you might end up encountering the same situation with Susanna Mattise."

The latter part of his statement was a fabrication, primarily to instill fear in Charlie and ensure he took the advice seriously.

Charlie was instantly alarmed. Without questioning further, he hastily nodded and replied, "Alright, alright!"

…

At midnight, Lumian and Jenna, the latter wearing a sparkling red dress, exited Salle de Bal Brise and made their way towards Rue des Blouses Blanches.

Jenna did not inquire about the reason for their route. After a moment of silence, she spoke up.

"Have you ever felt like nothing matters? Lost and devoid of motivation?"

"Definitely," Lumian replied casually, his gaze fixed on the street ahead. "In such moments, you must rediscover the meaning of life and determine what truly matters to you."

Jenna fell silent once more. After a while, she asked, "Have you ever experienced something akin to an illusion shattering within you? A mysterious cosmos materializing, adorned with stars of varying sizes?"

"No," Lumian replied after a brief pause.

He had experienced the sensation of illusory objects abruptly disintegrating. It occurred every time the potion was completely digested. However, he knew nothing of the mysterious cosmos or the glimmering stars of different magnitudes.

Jenna remained silent, deep in thought about the implications of this phenomenon or contemplating other matters.

Soon enough, they arrived at Apartment 601, 3 Rue des Blouses Blanches.

Franca was already back and regarded them warily as they entered side by side.

Before she could inquire, Jenna brought up the topic of the shattered illusions and the appearance of the mysterious cosmos.

Franca was taken aback but spoke joyfully, "Your Assassin potion has been fully digested! Assassinating a parliament member in public and under heavy security certainly facilitated the digestion process."

Is this a sign of potion digestion? Lumian couldn't hide his surprise and perplexity.

Why do I experience only the first half and not the second?

Franca scrutinized him suspiciously.

"You've never experienced it before? How did you advance then?"

Not only is the seal on me restraining Termiboros, but it also restricts some of my mystical senses? That's right. The seal resides within me. It's impossible for it to have zero impact… Lumian formed a vague hypothesis and casually brushed it off.

"It wasn't as pronounced."

Franca, more concerned about her female companion, did not press the matter further and curiously asked Jenna, "So, have you managed to summarize the principles of acting?"

"Acting principles?" Jenna pondered for a moment. "After the assassination, I learned many principles. Yes, assassination is a matter of risking one's life. It is the ultimate form of punishment, a calamity for those criminals…"

Enthusiastically delving into the "acting method" and discussing acting principles with Jenna, Franca suddenly remembered Lumian's presence.

"What—what's the matter?" She glanced at her male companion, who had settled onto the sofa.

Lumian met her gaze and indicated that they needed to speak privately.

Jenna instantly understood, excused herself to change clothes, and retreated into the guest bedroom.

Lumian lowered his voice and addressed Franca, "What do you make of Hela? What kind of person do you think she is?"

Chapter 270: Agreement

"Madame Hela? How do you know her?" Franca's immediate reaction was one of surprise and astonishment.

She quickly remembered that Lumian's sister, Muggle, was also a member of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society. She hastily added, "Did your sister mention Madame Hela to you?"

Lumian nodded.

"Not only did she mention her, but she also gave me the incantation to summon Madame Hela's messenger."

"Did she suggest seeking help from Madame Hela when you faced trouble?" Franca speculated. "Are you planning to summon Madame Hela's messenger and ask if she can be trusted?"

"Sort of," Lumian affirmed. "I've already established a connection with Madame Hela and summoned her messenger, but today I realized that some of my sister's actions during the disaster in Cordu were unusual. It seems to be connected to Madame Hela. I don't know if I should question her directly."

Observing that Lumian hadn't provided further details about the disaster in Cordu or Aurore's abnormal behavior, Franca understood why and refrained from prying. She pondered and replied,

"Personally, I trust Madame Hela. Dammit, you've established a connection with her without even telling me!

"Well… She's one of the most advanced members of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society on the paths of the divine. There are suspicions that she belongs to the Corpse Collector pathway."

"Not only does she willingly share her knowledge and experience with us, but she also offers assistance whenever possible. The items she trades are only slightly more expensive than their cost price."

"To many of us, including your sister and me, Madame Hela is like a dependable older sister. She has rescued us from helplessness, anxiety, and indecision. We trust her implicitly."

"Understood," Lumian sighed with relief. "I'll have an honest conversation with Madame Hela to uncover the true cause of the problem."

At this point, he changed the subject.

"Does your Major Arcana card know about the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society?"

"I haven't mentioned it to her directly. All I said was that I joined a secret organization that provides mutual assistance. However, she seems to be aware of the Research Society's situation," Franca lowered her voice unconsciously. "I suspect I'm not the only member of the Tarot Club in the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society."

With his lingering doubts cleared, Lumian turned around, smiling, and waved his hand.

"I'm going to summon Madame Hela's messenger."

"Hey, it's still early. Want to play Fighting Evil for a couple of hours before heading back?" Franca, who wasn't fond of going to bed early, tried to find some entertainment.

Lumian rejected her without hesitation.

When he returned to Room 207 of Auberge du Coq Doré, Lumian didn't rush to summon Hela's messenger. Instead, he unfolded a piece of paper and wrote to Madam Magician once again.

He briefly mentioned the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society and informed the demigod that Aurore was willing to seek help anonymously from the authorities when she was lucid. However, she hadn't summoned Hela's messenger for advice, which didn't align with her behavior in Lumian's dream. He didn't know if Aurore was under another restriction or if there was an issue with Hela.

Before long, Madam Magician replied with a simple line: "Based on the information we have, Hela is trustworthy."

Phew… Lumian relaxed and began writing a letter to Madame Hela.

In the letter, he candidly pointed out Aurore's abnormality and asked if she had missed receiving any letters.

Skilled in the process, Lumian made slight adjustments to the altar and changed the ingredients. He swiftly summoned a human skull that appeared to be made of pure silver.

As he gazed at the pale-white flames silently burning in the skull's eye sockets, Pyromaniac Lumian felt a greater sense of danger emanating from it than ever before.

It was no less intense than the feeling he got from Madam Magician's puppet messenger!

The pure silver skull clamped onto the letter and vanished into the dense darkness around it.

Lumian didn't rush to tidy up the altar. He patiently waited.

As time ticked by, a letter suddenly materialized on the wooden table in front of him, and he hadn't sensed its arrival until the end.

Of course, this was a significant improvement from before. Previously, he only noticed it after the pure silver skull had placed the letter.

Lumian unfolded the letter and swiftly scanned it under the glow of the two yellow candles on the altar.

"I haven't received any letters from Muggle since February of this year.

"I understand that a one-sided story lacks credibility, but if you carefully consider it, you should find some details that support this matter.

"I suspect that some force had influenced Muggle, causing her to refrain from seeking help from me for some reason. In fact, if she had written to me before the catastrophe completely unfolded, I could have arrived earlier than the official Beyonders. I might have been able to save Muggle and prevent the catastrophe.

"Often, letters and exchanges fail to inspire insights, making it difficult for us to engage in broader and more profound discussions. I will be in Trier in the coming days. If you are willing, we can arrange a time and place to meet and discuss your sister's encounter and the disaster in Cordu in detail. Perhaps, then, I can offer you useful suggestions."

Lumian pondered for a few seconds before recalling a detail from his dream.

Aurore had attempted to summon Hela's messenger but ultimately refrained from doing so. She was afraid of triggering a loop that would cause Cordu to restart frequently.

This likely meant that she had given up summoning Hela's messenger in reality or that she had tried but failed for some reason.

After realizing this, Lumian replied to Hela's suggestion, "No problem. We'll arrange a time and place when you arrive in Trier."

After sending the letter, concluding the ritual, and tidying up the altar, Lumian realized it was getting late. He quickly washed up, lay on the bed, and drifted off to sleep.

The following morning, Lumian awoke naturally to the resonating sound of the cathedral bell.

After visiting the washroom, he embarked on his usual morning jog along familiar streets like Rue Anarchie and Avenue du Marché, fully energizing his body.

During his routine, he discovered an empty space in the square outside Église Saint-Robert and spent nearly an hour practicing combat techniques.

Returning to Auberge du Coq Doré, Lumian enjoyed a meatloaf breakfast while sipping a Whiskey Sour. On his way, he passed the Suhit steam locomotive station, where new vendors were already selling photos of street maîtresse d'ateliers.

Lumian scanned the scene and caught sight of Baron Brignais.

The Savoie Mob leader, adorned with a diamond ring and smoking a mahogany pipe, appeared gentlemanly with his half top hat and the absence of any accompanying thugs.

Holding a seven- or eight-year-old child, he made his way from the steam locomotive station towards a carriage parked by the roadside.

The child donned a caramel coat with brass buttons, a black-and-white checkered shirt, and a linen coat. His black strapless leather shoes and white socks paired with a dark-red school bag that appeared somewhat heavy and solid.

With yellow hair, brown eyes, and a sturdy physique, the child had noticeable baby fat on his face and exuded an air of simplicity and honesty.

Baron Brignais's child? He usually resides in other provinces and visits Trier for summer vacations? No wonder they don't seem too familiar… Lumian muttered to himself, redirecting his gaze and continuing his stroll.

…

11 Rue des Fontaines, within Gardner Martin's grayish-white three-story villa.

Lumian arrived in the exclusive carriage of Salle de Bal Brise. He passed through the hall adorned with weapons and armor, arriving at a room filled with bookshelves.

Gardner Martin, displaying his amiable disposition, deep facial features, and brownish-red eyes, sat in an armchair at the back of the study. Standing before him were the short "Rat" Christo, with his gray-black hair, dark-blue eyes, and mustache, and the towering "Giant" Simon, measuring over 1.9 meters, his light-yellow hair closely cropped, clad in an unusually tight black suit.

Sensing Lumian's entrance into the study, "Giant" Simon and "Rat" Christo turned to regard their colleague.

"Giant" Simon's eyes displayed caution and defiance as he instinctively raised his head.

He believed that Ciel, who had defeated "Hammer" Ait, shouldn't be underestimated. However, he also believed that he himself was unquestionably stronger than that fool and might not lose to Ciel.

"Rat" Christo showed no evident emotions, but the right pocket of his dark brown shirt suddenly stirred, as if something alive resided within.

Christo slipped his right hand into his pocket, his expression abruptly changing.

His gaze upon Lumian grew intense with fear, and he couldn't help but smile obsequiously.

Wh… Lumian felt a tad uneasy.

After pondering for a moment, he suspected that "Rat" Christo had used an item in his pocket to "see" that Lumian had advanced to Sequence 7 and become a Pyromaniac.

In contrast, "Giant" Simon clearly lacked such intuition, failing to notice the subtle shifts in his colleague.

"Good morning, Boss," Lumian energetically greeted Gardner Martin.

A few days ago, he had informed the boss of the Savoie Mob that he had consumed the potion and advanced to Pyromaniac.

Gardner Martin nodded slightly, shifting his gaze from Lumian's face to "Rat" Christo and "Giant" Simon.

After nearly ten seconds, he spoke in a low voice, "I have a mission for all of you. At precisely noon, retrieve something from Underground Trier and bring it to Rue des Fontaines."

Mission? Lumian's eyebrows twitched, sensing a potential trap.

As a new Beyonder to the Savoie Mob, trust between him and Gardner Martin was still lacking. Why would he be assigned such a crucial and confidential task?

With these thoughts racing through his mind, Lumian had two conjectures: either he was mere cannon fodder or this was a test.

Chapter 271: Acting

With this in mind, Lumian's gaze automatically drifted over "Rat" Christo and "Giant" Simon, taking them in.

He sensed that the chances of them becoming expendable pawns were slim. Potion-consuming Beyonders, unlike the Blessed relying on divine favors from evil gods, were a rarity. They couldn't be simply stockpiled at will. Firstly, the ingredients required were specific, and secondly, ample time was needed. At the Mid-Sequence, luck and mastery of the acting method played a role.

If he were to use them as mere pawns in this mission, the likelihood of reclaiming the Beyonder characteristics would be greatly diminished. It constituted a substantial portion of Gardner Martin's control over the underground world in the market district.

As a member of the secretive organization, the Iron and Blood Cross Order, Gardner Martin could indeed bear such a loss, but he wouldn't make such a colossal sacrifice for something insignificant.

And if the mission was of sufficient importance, sending only one Sequence 7 and two Sequence 8 Beyonders was clearly inadequate. Shouldn't Gardner Martin be concerned about failure?

With this realization, Lumian swiftly revised his conjecture.

Either this was a preliminary test, a low-risk mission designed to assess him, regardless of whether "Rat" Christo and "Giant" Simon were aware of it, or it was indeed a crucial and perilous operation. While using them as pawns, there would be powerhouses present as a safety net. This was also a test.

With this in mind, Lumian's initial reaction was to gaze at Gardner Martin and accept the mission, projecting an image of an ambitious young man striving to climb the ranks.

If it was the first possibility, this was his best chance to prove himself. If it was the second possibility, Lumian still had Mr. K's finger quietly nestled in his pocket as a trump card. When the time came, if he needed to divulge his affiliation with the Aurora Order to ensure his survival, he could abandon the Iron and Blood Cross Order's mission.

As long as he remained alive, he could await another opportunity!

After the catastrophe caused by the Tree of Shadow, Lumian visited Psychic's headquarters and met Mr. K before Gardner Martin could conduct an investigation.

He concealed his experience with the Tree of Shadow, merely mentioning that something had occurred in the market district, trapping them in a peculiar wilderness. Then the brownish-green tree descended, and Susanna Mattise appeared, draining everyone's energy. To combat the Fallen Tree Spirit, he used the finger to fashion a robust defensive flesh robe, but he didn't receive additional assistance.

Later, with the aid of the tree's further descent, Susanna Mattise's weakened state, and the involvement of the other two present Beyonders, he barely overcame the enemy and vanquished her using his Pyromaniac abilities and the Fallen Mercury from Cordu.

He spoke the truth, albeit blurring the sequence of events, time, and location, as well as omitting a few details. The logic remained intact. Mr. K harbored no suspicions after hearing the account; instead, he sighed and cautioned Lumian not to overly rely on the finger since there were multiple ways to sever the mystical connection between him and it.

Satisfied with Lumian's advancement to Pyromaniac with Gardner Martin's assistance, Mr. K plucked another finger for him.

This led Lumian to believe that, as long as he didn't encounter extraordinary environments like Paramita or the Tree of Shadow and wasn't entangled in the perilous affair of confronting a godlike entity head-on, with Mr. K's finger, even if he couldn't completely reverse the situation, he still had a high chance of escape.

Just as Lumian was about to express his stance to the boss, he suddenly sensed that he shouldn't push his acting too far.

That was what Jenna would occasionally say.

According to Franca, Boss is at least a Sequence 6 Conspirer. I can't underestimate his intelligence and discernment…

My background is undeniably evident. I'm young and hail from the countryside. I was once entangled in a Beyonder catastrophe and lacked knowledge. I wanted to change my fate, but I've spent a considerable time in the market district, openly and covertly accomplishing much. Even with what the Boss only knows, it should be enough for him to perceive that I'm not an ignorant country bumpkin who acts rashly and mercilessly.

Based on today's incident, the impression the boss has of me should be someone capable of detecting mission abnormalities and potential dangers. Simply agreeing without reason or observation would only raise suspicions of ulterior motives or reliance on something.

That would be troublesome…

A whirlwind of thoughts raced through Lumian's mind. He immediately shifted his gaze to "Giant" Simon and "Rat" Christo, eagerly awaiting their reactions and attitudes toward the mission.

It remained unclear whether "Rat" Christo was recalling the incident involving the "mirror person" or his brother's demise due to it. His expression grew nasty, tainted with fear and apprehension.

Doubt and wariness flickered across "Giant" Simon's face, yet he didn't voice any objections.

After a few seconds, they nearly spoke simultaneously.

"Yes, Boss!"

Observing this, Lumian deliberately hesitated before continuing, "Yes, Boss!"

With keen eyes, Gardner Martin observed Lumian, Christo, and Simon, assessing their expressions and demeanors.

After their unanimous agreement, the boss of the Savoie Mob grinned with satisfaction and said, "I shall now disclose the mission details."

He reached into a drawer and retrieved a scroll made of faux goatskin, laying it out on the desk before them.

Approaching, Lumian and his companions beheld a map revealing a section of Underground Trier!

The map measured a meter in length and 50 centimeters in width. The upper level depicted the Underground Trier, formed by the municipal department through the excavation of various tunnels and reinforcement of the quarry cave. It corresponded to the streets and squares above ground.

The map focused solely on the underground areas of Quartier du Marché, Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative, Quartier du Jardin Botanique, and Quartier de l'Observatoire. However, it was intricately detailed, as if copied from the original by infiltrating the municipal department.

Lumian could clearly discern extensions on both sides, although the drawing did not continue.

In the middle of the map lay quarry caves, ancient catacombs, and underground river tributaries, scattered in a haphazard manner and connected to the upper level through visible or concealed tunnels.

This portion contained numerous gaps and omissions. Beside these areas were inscriptions such as "to be investigated," "to be explored," and "to be searched."

The lower levels of the map encompassed collapsed mines and more missing information, as if veiled in a shroud of fog. Even the Iron and Blood Cross Order, a secret organization, lacked comprehensive knowledge.

Numerous passageways extended downward from this level, but the map did not indicate their connections.

Fourth Epoch Trier? The place referred to as the Ancient Ruins Reserve by the authorities?

It's evident that this map is a copy of a more comprehensive one…

A complete version includes Fourth Epoch Trier?

The Iron and Blood Cross Order possesses extensive knowledge of the underground… Lumian speculated as he committed the incomplete map to memory.

After his three subordinates had taken a cursory glance at the map, Gardner Martin pointed to a location and said, "This is your destination."

It marked a collapsed mine, yet there remained some open space.

Situated at the lowest level of the map, it was near Fourth Epoch Trier.

Above it, corresponding to Avenue Sèlbù, Rue des Mauvais Enfants, and Place de la Forêt, lay the intersection between Quartier de l'Observatoire and Quartier du Jardin Botanique.

"It's called the Albert Mines," Gardner Martin introduced. "To reach it, you must traverse two privately-bored tunnels. It remains unknown to the authorities and most people who travel underground."

As he spoke, Gardner Martin traced the tunnel with his finger and instructed Lumian, Christo, and Simon on the correct entrance.

Finally, he sighed with a tinge of emotion and added, "Six years ago, Albert Goncourt, the leader of the rebellion and the mastermind behind the uprising, relied on this mine, which he discovered and named, to elude the army, police, and official Beyonders who were searching the underground. He survived."

Six years ago… Rebellion… Uprising… Lumian instantly recalled what he had witnessed and heard.

During the war with the Loen Kingdom, prices in Trier skyrocketed, leaving people in despair due to the exorbitant cost of food. This triggered a massive protest that swept through the city, resulting in various conflicts.

From Gardner Martin's words, it was evident that the protest wasn't purely spontaneous. Someone had planned and guided it. Was the Iron and Blood Cross Order also involved? Lumian continued to gaze at the map, lost in thought.

Concluding his explanation, Gardner Martin said, "Your task is to reach the Albert Mines before noon and await the arrival of a trader who will hand you a box.

"You need not give him anything, nor do you need to communicate with him verbally.

"On your return journey, you must not open that box, as doing so would expose you to immeasurable danger.

"As long as you strictly follow my instructions, the mission poses minimal risk. While you may encounter peculiar phenomena concealed underground or face Beyonder monsters, good teamwork will resolve those challenges."

After providing them with additional guidance, Lumian, Christo, and Simon each took a carbide lamp and departed from 11 Rue des Fontaines, making their way to the nearest entrance to Underground Trier.

Casting a final glance at the now-out-of-sight grayish-white villa, Lumian considered the impression Gardner Martin had of him.

With a smile, he casually inquired of "Rat" Christo and "Giant" Simon, "Have you undertaken similar missions before?"

"Rat" Christo fell silent for a few seconds before answering, "Thrice."

"Once," "Giant" Simon replied in a slightly buzzing voice.

Lumian chuckled.

"Well, the fact that you're still alive suggests that such missions aren't too perilous."

"Rat" Christo remained silent, as though he had fallen into a grim recollection. "Giant" Simon reassured himself, echoing Lumian's words.

"You're right. Perhaps this is a test from the boss. Those who pass may have an opportunity to advance further."

Lumian smiled.

"And what about those who fail? Do they perish on the spot?"

Chapter 272: Charismatic Artist

"Giant" Simon found himself momentarily speechless, struggling to find the right words. After a few seconds of contemplation, he finally spoke up.

"Are you out of your mind? If you fail, the worst outcome would be missing an opportunity."

"Rat" Christo chimed in.

"If the mission is truly important, the Boss wouldn't hesitate to handle it personally. He wouldn't send us. And if it's not a significant task, the risk won't be too high."

This train of thought mirrored Lumian's initial concerns.

Lumian glanced towards the nearby entrance of Underground Trier, intentionally wearing a smile.

"Perhaps we are merely bait in this scenario?

"For instance, the Boss suspects that a faction is secretly watching us, so he has deliberately devised this mission. If everything goes smoothly without any abnormalities, he can deactivate the alarm and consider it a test. However, if he does catch something, he can follow the trail of clues to uncover the truth and eliminate any hidden dangers. As for us being the bait and potentially getting caught, it's not his concern. As long as we ultimately achieve his goal, losing a few Low-Sequence Beyonders falls within his level of tolerance."

"Rat" Christo's face turned pale upon hearing these words, while "Giant" Simon fell into silence.

Although they lacked experience with mysticism, their years as mobsters and leaders had honed their basic analytical skills.

They couldn't help but admit that Ciel's theory made sense.

This, naturally, brought about a deep sense of fear for their lives.

Especially for Christo, memories of his brother Erkin's death and the pained expressions of his wife and children flooded his mind.

If it weren't for the Boss assigning him another task and excluding him from the smuggling operation, he might have been replaced by the so-called "mirror people" and met a tragic end somewhere underground.

And as for his wife, his dogs, and the other animals he cared for, the "mirror person" would have had the opportunity to enjoy them for a while!

With these thoughts weighing on their minds, the three of them ignited their carbide lamps and descended the steel stairs in silence.

Christo scanned the dark tunnel with the bluish-yellow light, his voice trembling as he spoke.

"The Boss wouldn't purposefully send us to our deaths.

"Even as Low-Sequence Beyonders, we still have our uses. If we perish underground, it might take the Boss half a year or even a whole year to groom a replacement."

The "mirror people" incident came to his mind, the Boss's request for him to undertake a different task being a clear attempt to protect him without revealing anything.

"Everything comes at a price. Perhaps the stakes involved this time are more valuable than the three of us combined." Lumian held the carbide lamp emitting a yellowish glow, walking steadily through the dark and slightly damp passageway. He sneered and said, "I hope this mission won't be as perilous as the Boss claims, but we can't afford to be naive. We must prepare for the worst."

Noting Ciel's significant improvement, Christo couldn't help but ask, "What should we do?"

From his perspective, Ciel was the most reliable person in this mission—a lifeline in critical moments.

Surprised by Christo's sudden timidity, "Giant" Simon turned towards him.

When did the "Rat" become so fearful?

As a leader under the Boss, why would he choose to display weakness and worry in front of Ciel?

Where is his pride and self-esteem? Wasn't he afraid that Ciel would overshadow him and encroach upon his smuggling business?

This was precisely the effect Lumian intended. He genuinely spoke up.

"The Boss has helped me multiple times, and I'm more than willing to carry out missions for him. However, the risk involved should not be excessively high, leaving us with only the option of 'death.' Damn it, I haven't lived long enough!

"That's why my stance is to attempt the mission if possible. If it becomes too dangerous, I won't hesitate to abandon it and ensure my own survival. This might require the three of us to let down our guard against each other and cooperate fully to overcome any hidden threats."

Such an attitude struck a chord with Christo and Simon, prompting visible or imperceptible nods from them.

No one was entirely selfless. Taking a calculated risk for the Boss was already a testament to their loyalty!

Accepting this attitude and genuinely cooperating to resist danger seemed to be the only viable choice, at least on the surface.

"How should we collaborate?" Christo swiftly made up his mind.

He didn't want another "mirror people" incident.

Lumian smirked once more.

"First and foremost, we must understand each other's abilities so that we can complement one another more effectively."

Christo pondered for a moment before speaking up, "I'm a Beast Tamer, a Sequence 8 of the Apothecary pathway. I can directly confront and communicate with various beasts to a certain extent. I have the ability to gradually tame them and make them my assistants.

"I'm also skilled in treating illnesses and providing comprehensive medical care…"

At that moment, he couldn't help but cast a questioning glance at Ciel, as if hinting at his need for a remedy to improve his performance in bed and replenish his physical stamina.

Word had gotten around about Ciel being quite a libertine. Not only was he involved with Jenna, "Red Boots'" mistress, but he had also been linked to nearly ten dancers. He had arranged for them to receive acting lessons at Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons, allowing them to earn money without having to accompany customers.

An Apothecary? If only I had known that "Rat" Christo was an Apothecary, I would've gotten him to give plenty of medicine to Jenna's mother… She would've made a quick recovery and returned home that very night… Lumian silently sighed and nodded approvingly in the flickering light of the carbide lamp.

The more "Giant" Simon listened, the more astonished he became.

He began to suspect that "Rat" Christo had lost his mind by divulging the secrets of his Sequence!

Until now, apart from Gardner Martin, nobody knew Christo's Sequence or the pathway he belonged to. After all, there were plenty of people in Trier who had a fondness for pets—some even had a large number of them or formed intimate relationships with animals, as occasionally seen in the newspapers.

In a flash, an idea struck Simon.

"Rat" Christo was in charge of the smuggling business and had completed most of the Boss's secret missions. Perhaps he knew something and had become pessimistic about this operation, hence his sincere cooperation with Ciel.

Christo let out a sigh and continued, "I've been unlucky. I haven't managed to tame a genuine Beyonder creature yet. Otherwise, I wouldn't be powerless against Mid-Sequence Beyonders even if I encountered them.

"This mission was sudden and we didn't have time to prepare. I only brought a few companions with me. Is he afraid that we won't die quickly enough?"

As he spoke, he raised his right hand.

A colorful snake-like creature with a triangular head emerged from his sleeve.

Soon after, Christo had the snake retreat back into his sleeve. He reached into his pocket and produced a palm-sized rat.

This rat was different from the ordinary kind. Its fur was pale white and distinct, with eyes as bright as rubies.

"This is Taffy. It's a unique creature I discovered underground during my smuggling days. It can't be used as the main ingredient for any potion, but it has the ability to sense hidden dangers," Christo briefly introduced.

"It can also sense the approximate strength of others, right?" Lumian asked thoughtfully.

Christo looked at Lumian with surprise and hesitated for a moment before replying, "Yes."

Recognizing that Christo had already divulged enough information, Lumian didn't press further, despite suspecting that he possessed other abilities or other animal companions. Instead, he shifted his gaze to "Giant" Simon.

Simon hesitated for a moment, recalling his earlier speculation. In a muffled voice, he said, "I'm a Sequence 8 Pugilist of the Warrior pathway. Like 'Hammer' Ait, I excel in face-to-face combat and various fighting techniques. I carry a gun, a dagger, a bayonet, and boxing gloves."

His explanation was brief, as Pugilists didn't possess any extraordinary abilities.

No mystical item? That's true. It's indeed challenging for mobsters groomed by secret organizations to acquire such items… Lumian chuckled to himself.

"You're stronger than 'Hammer' Ait because you're intelligent and can read the situation clearly."

These words left Simon unsure whether to feel angered or proud.

Holding the carbide lamp, he looked at Lumian and said, "What about you? Which Sequence 8 pathway are you from? Hunter?"

Since they were working together, Ciel couldn't keep his Sequence a secret!

Lumian smiled, raising his right hand in front of him.

Silently, a crimson flame emerged from his palm and hung in the air, burning silently.

"You're a Pyromaniac?" Simon exclaimed in surprise.

Among Trier's mystical circles, the most common information concerned Mid-Sequence Beyonders of the Hunter pathway, especially those below Sequence 6.

Lumian didn't respond, opting to maintain his smile instead.

Simon suddenly understood why "Rat" Christo's attitude towards Ciel had undergone such a drastic change and why he appeared to seek his assistance.

Sequence 7 was the starting point for Mid-Sequence Beyonders. Compared to Low-Sequence Beyonders like themselves, their strength had undergone a qualitative transformation. They were countless times more powerful!

With his attention now diverted from the pocket of "Rat" Christo, Simon asked Lumian in surprise and suspicion, "Does the Boss know that you've advanced to Sequence 7?"

"The Boss provided me with the necessary supplementary ingredients," Lumian truthfully replied, dissipating the crimson flame in his palm under the yellowish glow of the lamp.

Wha… Simon's pupils dilated.

Lumian looked around and continued, "That's why, if I can complete this mission, I will do everything in my power to see it through."

With those words, he pulled out an iron-colored canister and tossed it to Simon.

"This is Scorpion Poison that I obtained from 'Hammer' Ait. You can apply it to your weapon.

"Increasing your strength will increase our chances of survival."

Simon caught the canister, momentarily taken aback.

Though Ciel disgusted him and they were at odds, his knowledge, intelligence, strength, and approach to things made him seem reliable. Unconsciously, he found himself listening to him and following his lead.

Lumian, who was walking ahead without turning back, let out a sigh of relief.

He had exaggerated the risks and instilled fear to dampen the spirits of "Rat" Christo and Simon, plunging them into a state of worry. Then, by revealing his own strength, offering convincing suggestions, and providing small favors, he would establish himself as the team's leader.

Only then could he fully harness the team's combined strength without exposing his hidden trump cards and effectively combat any potential threats.

Chapter 273: Trader

Holding the carbide lamp aloft, "Giant" Simon trailed behind Lumian for a few steps, his keen eyes picking up on the inconsistencies in Lumian's words.

"Ciel, the Boss knows you've turned into a Pyromaniac. He won't just toss you aside recklessly, will he?"

Lumian gazed ahead at the tunnel bathed in the yellowish glow, a smile playing on his lips as he posed a question without turning around.

"How long have I been with the Savoie Mob?"

Both "Giant" Simon and "Rat" Christo had a moment of enlightenment and found themselves in agreement with Lumian's explanation.

It was true that Lumian, a Beyonder with a dubious past who had recently joined the mob, had brought with him a crucial ingredient for a potion. Such a person couldn't be trusted right off the bat. They had to undergo a series of tests in the form of missions.

And if Lumian were to meet his demise during one of these missions, it would simply be chalked up to his ill luck. Losing a foreign Beyonder was far less painful for the Boss than losing a subordinate he had meticulously groomed.

The two leaders of the Savoie Mob hesitated no longer. They cautiously followed Lumian, maintaining a distance of two to three steps. It was a familiar arrangement, much like when they traveled with a few mobsters stationed at similar positions behind them.

In the midst of their journey, "Giant" Simon donned gloves and applied a small amount of Scorpion Poison to his dagger, bayonet, and boxing gloves. He then returned the canister to Lumian.

The trio descended into the tunnel marked on the map. Despite their soft steps, the special environment caused their footfalls to echo faintly in the dark, eerily silent underground.

Nearly 45 minutes later, they passed through the area marked as an ancient tomb and arrived at the entrance of a concealed passageway.

It led to an abandoned quarry cave that had lain dormant for ages. The ground was uneven, covered in moss. In the distance, the sound of an underground river could be heard, occasionally accompanied by the rumbling of a steam subway passing by.

Lumian observed for a moment, clenching the ring of the carbide lamp between his teeth. With both hands, he grasped a protruding stone wall and climbed to the cave's summit.

Then, extending his right hand, he pushed an apparently ordinary stone behind him, wedging it between the side wall and the cave roof.

A pitch-black hole materialized, allowing someone as tall as Simon to bend over and crawl through.

The hidden tunnel had been fashioned using a long-forgotten ventilation system that already existed in a nearby quarry.

The three of them hunched over and strode deeper into the underground tunnel. Gradually, the sounds of the underground river and the steam subway faded away.

Apart from their own breathing and footsteps, the surroundings were silent as a tomb.

After nearly half an hour, Lumian and his companions followed the markings on the map and leaped from an exit, emerging into an already existing underground cave.

From high above, stalactites dangled like the menacing teeth of a terrifying beast lurking in the darkness.

Lumian didn't rush to enter another hidden tunnel at the cave's base. Instead, he turned to "Giant" Simon and "Rat" Christo, who had accumulated a fair amount of dust on their heads. Wearing a grave expression, he spoke.

"Before we proceed, let's confirm something to avoid any mishaps. We won't have time for verbal communication."

"Alright." Both "Rat" Christo and "Giant" Simon accepted Lumian's words without question.

With a subtle nod, Lumian replied, "Firstly, from the moment we enter the second tunnel until we return here, no one is allowed to speak. Make use of physical gestures as much as possible. If that's not feasible, you must obtain my permission before uttering a word."

This precautionary measure stemmed from Gardner Martin's advice regarding the lack of need for communication with the trader. Lumian had expanded its scope and made it absolute to prevent any potential mishaps.

Christo and Simon recalled the Boss's counsel and nodded in agreement.

Observing their response, Lumian pressed on, "Secondly, no matter what anomalies occur, unless something attacks both of you, stay calm and act in accordance with my lead.

"Thirdly, I won't force you, but if you wish to survive, it's best to heed my instructions."

These two requests were met with resistance from "Rat" Christo and "Giant" Simon. They would be entrusting their safety to Lumian's intelligence, skills, reactions, and knowledge. It was a departure from their usual reliance on their own wild Beyonder instincts.

After a few seconds of hesitation, "Rat" Christo forced a smile, recollecting Ciel's strength and previous performances.

"I'll follow your arrangements, but if you fail to react in time and Taffy warns me of danger, I'll take matters into my own hands.

"Dammit, the longer I've been in this smuggling business, the more I dread Trier's underground."

"Giant" Simon chimed in, "I'm with you on that, 'Rat.'"

Lumian felt a sense of satisfaction, having successfully "tamed" the two Beyonders who also served as leaders in the Savoie Mob. He didn't push further and simply nodded in agreement.

"No problem.

"Fourthly, I will be the one to make contact with the trader later and retrieve the box the Boss desires."

Upon hearing this, "Rat" Christo and "Giant" Simon looked at Lumian as if they were seeing Ciel in a new light.

They had expected the Pyromaniac to leverage his strength and authority to assign one of them to interact with the trader and handle the riskiest part of the mission. Alternatively, they thought Lumian might suggest drawing lots to determine who would handle the task. To their surprise, Lumian volunteered to take on the responsibility himself.

Ciel is quite fair… "Giant" Simon couldn't help but sigh.

He knew he wouldn't be able to do the same if he were in Lumian's position.

This realization made both "Rat" Christo and "Giant" Simon less resistant to following Lumian's instructions.

Though the lighting was dim, Lumian managed to observe his two colleagues' reactions.

He couldn't help but sneer inwardly.

If it weren't for the fact that you two Beyonders lack mystical knowledge and might cause trouble during the box exchange, I wouldn't be taking such a risk myself.

Lumian sighed from the depths of his heart. Sometimes, weakness could be an advantage.

Emphasizing that they were to maintain silence, Lumian picked up the carbide lamp and made his way to the bottom of the cave. He gestured for "Giant" Simon to embrace a rock about half his height and move it aside.

The rock was incredibly heavy, posing a challenge even for Simon's strength. It took him some time to shift it, revealing the deep entrance to the hidden tunnel.

The tunnel wasn't particularly long, and it took them only seven to eight minutes to crouch down and make their way through. They arrived at a mineral cave that had suffered significant collapse, leaving only a limited space.

This was their destination—the Albert Mines.

Lumian surveyed the cluttered gray-black stones and turned to "Giant" Simon, who was dressed in a black formal suit. He pointed at his chest.

Understanding the unspoken request, Simon produced an iron-gray pocket watch and opened it with a snap.

The dial revealed numerous tightly clenched gears, exuding a sophisticated yet cold mechanical beauty.

"Giant" Simon held up his pocket watch, showing it to Lumian and "Rat" Christo, indicating that there were still over ten minutes until the designated time of the transaction—noon.

Lumian nodded and remained silent, patiently awaiting the appointed hour.

After a while, he subtly turned his head, listening intently for any signs of movement around them.

He sensed an unusual sound emanating from underground, as if a multitude of people were screaming, roaring, and fighting.

Beneath the illumination of the carbide lamp, Lumian glanced at Simon and Christo, noticing their similar reactions, as if they too had caught wind of the commotion.

Observing Simon and Christo's gazes fixed on him, Lumian lowered his right hand, signaling them to refrain from being affected.

Intermittently, they could hear peculiar movements. The three of them stood at the edge of the Albert Mines, silently waiting.

Suddenly, the sound of footsteps echoed from the other side of the mine, as if someone in leather shoes was approaching from an unusually quiet tunnel dozens of meters away.

Is that the trader? Lumian mused, casting his thoughtful gaze in that direction.

The footsteps paused and then resumed, resonating through the Albert Mines.

When they were merely a few meters away from the entrance, they mysteriously ceased altogether.

After a brief wait, Lumian and his companions spotted a figure emerging from the opposite mine entrance. It was a man over 1.8 meters tall, donning a white shirt, yellow vest, black formal suit, and dark pants. He clutched a small brown leather suitcase in his hand.

The man wore a silk top hat pulled low, casting a shadow over his face. However, Lumian's Hunter eyesight allowed him to discern the man's appearance with the aid of the three carbide lamps.

The man had short auburn hair, brownish-red eyes, slightly unkempt and thick beard, and thick eyebrows. He resembled a starved male bear, exaggeratedly thin.

The collar of his shirt was tightly fastened, as if he dreaded the cold.

Lumian held the carbide lamp and was about to approach the man.

But then, Christo tugged at his arm.

When Lumian turned his head, Christo anxiously and fearfully pointed at his right pocket.

Does this mean that Taffy, the peculiar rat, has issued a warning of danger? But judging from Christo's behavior, the threat hasn't materialized yet and is still manageable. Otherwise, he would have already turned and fled… Lumian interpreted the signs and nodded at Christo, indicating that he would proceed with caution.

Christo didn't stop him. He watched Lumian with concern as he advanced toward the trader.

As he closed the distance, Lumian's gaze carefully assessed the man's physique, analyzing every detail.

His clothes are slightly oversized, as though they don't quite fit him… He seems fearful of something, yet his eyes hold anger and hatred… His hands don't extend beyond his sleeves, and they're concealed within, including the handle of the suitcase… His feet…

Lumian's pupils dilated as he noticed that the trader wasn't wearing shoes but rather a pair of gray socks.

This contradicted the sound of leather shoes they had just heard!

Could it be that the footsteps didn't belong to him but someone else? Lumian grew increasingly vigilant.

With limited space remaining in the Albert Mines, he swiftly arrived in front of the trader.

The man, resembling a starved bear, chuckled and inquired with a hint of amusement, "Did Gardner Martin send you?

"Was he scared out of his wits after receiving a message from his companion, who went underground to search for the entrance to the Fourth Epoch Trier, months after disappearing, claiming to possess an important item to deliver to him."

Chapter 274: Escape

The entrance to Fourth Epoch Trier? The Iron and Blood Cross Order is hunting for it? This person reappeared after vanishing for months? Lumian's mind raced upon hearing the trader's words.

He kept in mind the warning not to speak and tried his best not to. Leaning forward slightly, he extended his right hand to receive the small brown leather suitcase.

The man, resembling a starved bear, didn't refuse and chuckled.

"If I were Gardner Martin, I'd pray I never find out what's in this box."

What does this mean? Lumian wondered as his palm touched the suitcase.

At that moment, his eyes narrowed as he noticed the trader's right palm was absent from the suitcase's handle, floating as if held by an invisible force.

Following the handle, Lumian saw there was no arm in the sleeve. It was empty, supported by something invisible!

No arm! His heart tightened as he glanced up at the trader. His brownish-red eyes, accentuated by his thick beard and eyebrows, were as cold as a wild beast's, filled with undisguised hatred and fear.

Various thoughts raced through Lumian's mind as he forced himself to control his reaction. He calmly took the suitcase, not inquiring or observing. He didn't instinctively defend or attack, as if he hadn't noticed anything.

The trader's emotions seemed to shift slightly, and his laughter carried a hint of sorrow.

"Tell Gardner Martin that it won't be long before he goes underground too!

"All the pain and torture I've endured, he too will experience them!"

Lumian didn't say a word. He picked up the small suitcase and was about to turn around and leave the Albert Mines with "Giant" Simon and "Rat" Christo.

Suddenly, footsteps echoed from the other entrance behind the trader.

Compared to earlier, it became much clearer, almost within arm's reach.

Lumian felt more certain now; he could hear the distinct sound of leather shoes approaching from the silent tunnel!

In an instant, a figure emerged before Lumian, Christo, and Simon.

It was a man, completely naked, his head missing, blood oozing from the neck wound.

He wore only dark-blue shorts and strapless black leather shoes.

With two swift steps, the headless monster reached the trader from behind, stretching out its hands, seizing his head, and yanking it upwards.

"Save me! Save me!" cried the trader, unable to hide his panic and fear.

Almost simultaneously, his entire head was lifted, exposing a blood-stained spine dangling below. The spine was unusually long, swaying gently like a tail.

Silently, the trader's shirt, vest, pants, and formal attire lost support and collapsed to the ground.

He had no body left, only his head connected to the bloody spine.

"Save me! Save me!" The trader struggled with all his might, but the headless monster held him tightly, seemingly attempting to stuff him into its empty neck.

Although Lumian had encountered many terrifying and warped creatures in Cordu, this was the first time he had come across something so bizarre and terrifying.

Without hesitation, he turned around and dashed towards the entrance of the hidden tunnel, ignoring the trader's pleas for help.

"Giant" Simon and "Rat" Christo, who had been frightened from the very start, finally lost control. Like cyclists hearing the starting signal, they bent down and hurried into the tunnel.

Lumian caught up with them in a few strides, the echoing voice of the Albert Mines haunting their trail.

"Save me! Save me!"

"If I die, you guys can forget about living!"

"Help!"

With their carbide lamps in hand, the trio silently made their way through the hidden tunnel, their hearts constricting at the screams left behind.

A few minutes passed, and the shrill cries suddenly ceased, leaving an eerie silence that enveloped the Albert Mines.

Then, the echoing sound of tapping leather shoes reverberated through the hidden tunnel.

"Rat" Christo, being the shortest, found it easiest to keep his back bent as he moved forward. In a state of fear, he frantically pointed at his pocket with his right hand, as if he had seen death itself.

Has that peculiar rat given us a perilous warning? Lumian glanced at Christo's left chest and nodded reassuringly, indicating that he would cover their rear. All they needed to do was run with all their might.

As the tapping sounds drew nearer, Lumian and the others grew tense.

Though they had to bend their backs to navigate the concealed tunnel, it only slightly reduced their escape speed. After all, they were skilled Beyonders, their physical abilities notably enhanced.

With each passing moment, Lumian felt a chill down his spine. Just as the sound of the leather shoes approached to within a few meters, the trio finally reached the tunnel exit and burrowed out.

Seeing "Giant" Simon about to flee on his own, Lumian, who had already returned to their agreed position, could no longer stay silent. He lowered his voice and growled, "Block the door!"

As he spoke, he turned around and abandoned the carbide lamp and small suitcase, attempting to push the heavy rock beside the exit.

"Giant" Simon subconsciously ignored Lumian's command, but his heart still trembled from the low shout.

Throughout their journey, he had grown accustomed to following his instructions, as if it were the only way to ensure his survival.

He found himself caught in a dilemma.

After a brief moment of hesitation, "Giant" Simon suspected that if he ran away and left Ciel to fend for himself against the monster, Ciel might very well attack him and kill him as a deserter once he survived the attack!

"Rat" Christo had similar thoughts, but he believed that if they both didn't help, Ciel wouldn't waste time blocking the tunnel exit. When the time came, whoever ran the slowest would become the monster's first target, buying enough time for the other two to escape.

After evaluating each other's pathway characteristics and Sequences, Christo realized he was definitely the slowest. Moreover, he couldn't injure "Giant" Simon and "Lion" Ciel in a short period of time, meaning he couldn't slow them down and overtake them.

Without hesitation, he stopped fleeing and returned to the tunnel exit, assisting Lumian in pushing the stone to block the door.

Taking a cue from the "Rat," "Giant" Simon chose to obey and turned around.

Together, in just a few seconds, the trio secured the entrance to the hidden tunnel.

The sound of footsteps faded into nothingness.

Simultaneously, "Rat" Christo couldn't contain his surprise and delight, exclaiming, "Everything's fine now!"

There was no more visible movement in his pocket, where the rat named Taffy resided.

Lumian didn't share Christo's exuberance. He picked up the carbide lamp and small suitcase, speaking in a deep voice, "Let's talk when we get back to the first underground level."

"Giant" Simon and "Rat" Christo's relaxed minds tensed up once more. Instinctively, they followed Lumian up the rock wall and turned into another hidden tunnel.

Along the way, they didn't encounter any attacks, but being underground meant they were surrounded by either complete silence or occasional strange sounds. After their recent fright, the environment was far from pleasant for them. If Lumian hadn't remained calm and composed, "Giant" Simon and "Rat" Christo might have resorted to drastic measures.

Upon returning to the area corresponding to the streets and squares above ground, "Rat" Christo reached into his pocket to comfort Taffy and let out a long sigh.

"When I saw that monster, I thought we were going to die right there."

Though he and Simon had killed over ten people, interacted with other Beyonders, and even fought them, they had never encountered a monster like the headless one before. It was an abnormal horror they had never experienced.

This was even scarier than the horror stories they had heard in their youth!

Lumian smiled.

"Didn't the Boss say that there won't be much risk if we don't communicate or open the box?"

However, in such a situation, most people couldn't stay calm! "Giant" Simon and "Rat" Christo gained a newfound appreciation for Ciel's mental fortitude.

Thanks to the shock brought about by the trader and the headless monster, Lumian and his companions weren't interested in what lay inside the box. They hurriedly left the underground and returned to 11 Rue des Fontaines, where they met Gardner Martin in the study.

Gardner Martin took the small suitcase and examined it casually. He smiled and said, "Very good. You've all done well. I'll reward you later."

After praising them, the Savoie Mob boss looked at Lumian and nodded gently.

"I have a message for you. If you wish to progress further on the Hunter pathway, you must remember this sentence:

'The Demon is our friend, and hell is someone else's.'"

The Demon is our friend, and hell is someone else's… Lumian couldn't fully grasp the true meaning of this sentence, but Gardner Martin didn't provide further explanation.

As his three subordinates left the study, Gardner Martin turned to the door connecting to the activity room.

The door creaked open, and a man in a half top hat, white shirt, yellow vest, black suit, and dark pants approached.

He had short auburn hair, brownish-red eyes, a thick, messy beard, and thick eyebrows, resembling a starving bear. He was the trader who had given the small suitcase to Lumian and the others and been dragged back by the headless monster.

"Olson, any thoughts on him?" Gardner Martin inquired.

The trader addressed as Olson replied with a smile, "Simple background, clear origins, smart, bold, and decisive. He could bring together a few people who were originally unrelated into a team in a short period of time. Isn't that what you want?

"As for loyalty, that's the least of my worries. When the time comes, even if he's not loyal, he'll become loyal."

Gardner Martin nodded slightly.

"Observe him for a while longer and see who he interacts with."

After discussing this topic, Gardner Martin looked at the small suitcase on the table and asked curiously, "What's inside?"

"Like I said, you'd better pray you never find out." The trader known as Olson smiled, picked up the suitcase, and left the study.

After taking a few steps in the hall, he suddenly found his head a little tilted. He raised his hands, held his head, and straightened it with a snap.

Chapter 275: Poaching

In the carriage heading back to the market district, Lumian stared out the window, reflecting on Gardner Martin's actions after completing the mission.

He felt that the Savoie Mob's boss didn't seem too concerned about the suitcase they risked their lives for. The boss merely glanced at it casually and placed it on the desk.

Was it really some kind of test? The Iron and Blood Cross Order possesses information about the spine-dangling head and headless monster. As long as I stick to the prescribed procedure and don't act independently, they won't really come after me?

But the Boss used to be a Conspirer. Perhaps he just wanted us to see the suitcase, but it might not reveal his true intentions…

Regardless, the head-only trader and the headless humanoid monster are real. What do they symbolize? Can I trust the words of the former? He disappeared for months searching for the entrance to Fourth Epoch Trier and experienced terrifying events. His head and body got separated, and both gained consciousness?

When Boss said, "The Demon is our friend, and hell is someone else's," it felt like he was warning me not to trust others easily… Did he mention this because he was satisfied with my performance on the mission?

Has he sent someone to secretly follow and observe us in detail? Or maybe "Giant" Simon or "Rat" Christo are not as scared as they seem and one of them is secretly working as a spy for the Boss?

Since the Boss didn't keep me here, the "audit" isn't over yet. Could someone be tailing this carriage and lurking in the shadows?

Heh heh, Mr. K and his subordinates love doing this too. It'd be amusing if they ran into each other…

In the carriage, "Rat" Christo and "Giant" Simon, who were using the Salle de Bal Brise's carriage to return to the market district, grew a bit uneasy as Lumian remained silent and gazed out of the window.

After five minutes of indescribable silence, Christo forced a smile and asked, "Ciel, what are you looking at?"

"It's too cramped," Lumian sighed, disregarding the question.

Christo and Simon exchanged glances, thinking that Ciel might be mocking them for taking up space in the carriage.

After hesitating for a moment, Christo decided to share his intentions.

He lowered his voice and said, "Ciel, I want to use this opportunity to talk to you. Damn it, I didn't expect Simon to join us!"

"Son of a sow. I was the one who suggested borrowing the carriage in the first place!" "Giant" Simon retorted.

Ignoring him, Christo continued, "Ciel, this mission has allowed me to reacquaint myself with you. Apart from Boss, you are the most intelligent, powerful, and calmest Beyonder around me."

The calmest? You haven't seen me when I'm impulsive… Lumian teased, deliberately provoking.

"Is that so? Am I more intelligent than Brignais and stronger than Franca?"

"Rat" Christo was at a loss for words. After a few seconds, he said, "Uh, well… what I mean is, in the future, when the Boss assigns me secret missions, I want your help to analyze and figure out what to do. I don't want to be flustered when facing a similar monster next time."

Oh, intel has come knocking on my door? Lumian smiled and replied, "I don't mind helping, but aren't you afraid the Boss will be angry if he finds out?"

Christo glanced at Lumian, then at "Giant" Simon beside him, and his tone turned cold.

"If you keep quiet, and we keep quiet, the Boss won't find out."

Simon's eyelids twitched, and he added, "My thoughts align with Rat's."

He didn't want to die on the next secret mission either.

Lumian pondered for a moment and grinned.

"Alright, I can assist, but I can't guarantee I'll uncover the truth or find a way to avoid danger based solely on your descriptions. Also, I might make some small requests."

"No problem!" "Rat" Christo agreed without hesitation.

Today's encounter alone wouldn't have pushed him to this state. He had just escaped the mirror people incident, and his nerves were on edge.

"Giant" Simon also expressed his agreement. Then, he looked at Lumian and cursed himself softly,

He cleared his throat and said, "Ciel, my Big Bro, I apologize. I wasn't too friendly before, and I even encouraged you to deal with 'Red Boots' when you were new to the Savoie Mob and knew little about us.

"I'm a rough and unrefined guy. I can't say pleasant words, but I hope you can accept my apology. In the future, I, Simon, will follow your lead!"

Wow, you've grasped the situation so quickly, and you're so humble… This fellow is quite a talent… Lumian pretended to be nonchalant and replied, "I've already forgotten about the past. Besides, have I targeted you or sought revenge recently?"

With that said, Lumian added inwardly, Well, it's mostly because I'm too busy to bother with a mere mob leader like you…

Simon breathed a sigh of relief, convinced that Ciel wasn't too petty.

Lumian smiled and questioned, "Why do you call me Big Bro? I'm much younger than you."

Simon smiled sheepishly.

"You're already a Sequence 7. In terms of strength, I should call you Big Bro."

Lumian couldn't help but jest, "If you stick to addressing someone by their Sequence, will you have to call me 'Uncle' once I reach Sequence 6?"

Simon hesitated for a moment before clearing his throat.

"If you wish…"

Damn it, isn't this guy too shameless? Is he like this even when talking to the Boss privately? "Rat" Christo turned his head in surprise and looked at the burly man, who stood more than 1.9 meters tall, as though this was the first time he had met this giant.

Simon continued, "But I believe I'll reach Sequence 7 before you hit Sequence 6.

"You must have just become a Pyromaniac. It might take years, even decades, to fully master the power of flames and withstand the next potion."

He was implying: "Haha, I was just joking. Perhaps we'll both be Sequence 7s soon, and you'll still be my Big Bro."

Upon hearing this, Lumian's mind wandered back to the moment he had used invisible flames to burn Susanna Mattise to death, feeling the potion digesting a little inside him.

However, he couldn't be sure as he hadn't yet completed the first acting principle, making the degree of digestion unclear.

Combining past experiences and recent events in the market district, Lumian sensed that the first acting principle was close to being revealed, but it always fell short. His thoughts lacked clarity, and he had a feeling that he needed to wait for the right opportunity.

His mind then shifted to Gardner Martin's possible covert observations and subsequent tests.

As a result, Lumian decided to postpone his plans to attend Mr. Fool's bishop's preaching at Lavigny Dock in the square district the day after tomorrow. He felt it would be better to wait until he passed the test and officially joined the Iron and Blood Cross Order.

But what about my psychiatric treatment scheduled for tomorrow afternoon? Should I still go?

I believe my mental state and emotional control have improved over the past few days, but I'll need the two ladies to confirm it. Yes, they always use Psychological Invisibility. Madam Justice is a true demigod, so it's unlikely for Gardner Martin or his subordinates to see her. As a Hunter, it's normal for me to have an interest in studying plants. After visiting the botanical garden, I'll have a coffee and take a break. No one can accuse me of anything… Lumian made a quick decision to continue the psychiatric treatment the next day.

However, before heading to Mason's café, he planned to spend two to three hours exploring the nearby botanical garden.

Once the carriage stopped at Salle de Bal Brise, Lumian went upstairs to enjoy a cup of coffee while watching "Giant" Simon and "Rat" Christo leave Avenue du Marché.

Around 4 p.m., he put on a dark wide-brimmed round hat and left the dance hall. His destination was Franca's place at Rue des Blouses Blanches to discuss the peculiar mission and Gardner Martin's behavior in the afternoon.

As Lumian strolled along Avenue du Marché, a sudden thought struck him.

If Boss is indeed sending someone to watch my actions during this period, he might think I'm having an affair with Franca if I frequent her apartment on Rue des Blouses Blanches.

But maybe, as a Trierien, he wouldn't mind?

Right, there's already a rumor about me having an affair with Jenna. I'm going to Rue des Blouses Blanches to find Jenna, not Franca. He won't be suspicious…

Lumian calmed himself and arrived at 3 Rue des Blouses Blanches. He knocked on the door of Room 601.

Franca, who was wearing her usual blouse and light-colored pants, snapped, "Why are you here again?"

At that moment, Lumian noticed peculiar drawings on her face—a turd on the left side and a dark green turtle on the right.

"Lost at cards?" Lumian raised an eyebrow.

Franca had mentioned playing cards with Jenna and her dancers, involving strange punishments without money being at stake.

Franca glanced back and lowered her voice, "Jenna has been in a bad mood lately. I'm trying to find a way to cheer her up."

Lumian followed her gaze and noticed that Jenna's face was also decorated with strange drawings—moles and a pig's mouth. The lead dancer had similar marks.

"In that case, I'll wait for you to finish," Lumian said as he entered the living room.

Assuming Ciel was there for Jenna, the lead dancer hurriedly got up, washed her face, and left Apartment 601.

Being in a better mood, Jenna teasingly asked Lumian, "Are you here for me or Franca?"

That came out wrong… Lumian replied honestly, "Boss assigned me a strange mission, and I want to consult Franca."

Curious, Franca asked, "What mission is it?"

Lumian briefly recounted the noon encounter, including how he managed to keep "Rat" Christo and "Giant" Simon in check, making them follow his instructions.

Both Franca and Jenna were scared by the head-only trader and the headless monster, and they fell into silence for a moment.

After a few seconds, Franca clenched her teeth and said, "Gardner Martin, that son of a bitch!"

"What's wrong?" Jenna didn't understand why Franca suddenly cursed the Boss.

Franca explained vaguely, "I suspect this mission is Gardner Martin's way of testing Ciel. He wants to see if Ciel is fit to enter the core group.

"Dammit, f*cking hell, I've been with him for so long, and he still doesn't trust me. He doesn't even want to test me!"

Chapter 276: The Disappointed Susie

Jenna, who had no experience in relationships and was clueless about the truth, didn't know how to respond to Franca's complaint.

Lumian roughly understood Franca's anger and disappointment.

We're all here to infiltrate the Iron and Blood Cross Order. Why is the test scheduled just a month after your joining? I've been here for nearly a year, and I'm almost giving birth to Gardner Martin's child, yet there's still no progress!

This makes me look like a failure!

After carefully considering Franca's thoughts, Lumian replied earnestly, "This might not be an opportunity, but a danger.

"The fact that they want to 'audit' me so quickly suggests they might see me as expendable. Or perhaps my Beyonder pathway is just right and could be useful for something recent."

Jenna found Lumian's explanation reasonable and quickly advised Franca, "Maybe the Boss didn't 'audit' you because he cares for you and doesn't want you involved in dangerous matters."

"…" Franca's expression turned odd. "That's not right…"

This made her feel guilty for deceiving others.

When Madam Judgment arranged for her to be an undercover agent in the Savoie Mob and wait for an opportunity to join the Iron and Blood Cross

Order, she had been explicitly instructed not to sacrifice herself by seducing the target. The Tarot Club didn't engage in such tactics. Later, as a Witch, she wanted to experience a romantic relationship with a man, and Gardner Martin happened to be interested, so they became lovers.

From Franca's perspective, this was a pure, joy-sharing relationship that didn't involve any emotional aspects. They wouldn't have real expectations of each other. After the mission was completed, they would part ways without hesitation and continue with their exciting lives.

Of course, at that time, the Iron and Blood Cross Order might have already suffered a setback. It remained unknown if Gardner Martin could continue with his exciting life.

If Franca had enough strength, she would have rehearsed the scene of a cold assassin killing her lover.

After a few seconds, Franca exclaimed, "Impossible, impossible!"

"That guy is very chauvinistic and discriminates against women. Him not auditing me must be because he thinks that a woman should just manage the dancers well and have the ability to protect herself. She should just bear a child sometime later. She doesn't need to be qualified to join the core group!

"Dammit! Did I fail because of my gender?"

What she didn't want to admit was that the undercover mission had likely failed because she took a chance, which led her to form a stronger bond with Gardner Martin.

Cannon fodder didn't matter if they were male or female!

It didn't matter if the expendables of a secret organization were male or female either!

Jenna and Lumian exchanged glances and pursed their lips. Then, they turned to Franca and asked curiously, "How can you tell that the mission is a test?"

Those two monsters were undoubtedly terrifying and dangerous!

Jenna didn't think she was as foolish as Lumian had teased her, but she knew she lacked experience in mysticism and playing these kinds of games. Subconsciously, she yearned to learn more.

Franca smiled again and said confidently, "I deduced it from the whole process and final outcome.

"Think about it. Does this matter really require Ciel, Simon, and Christo's involvement?

"Find a couple of core members who understand the situation roughly. Follow the procedures and precautions, and you can escape the monsters and retrieve the box successfully. Moreover, there's no need to worry about leaks or give them any special reminders.

"No matter how dangerous the darkness around us seems, the fact that nothing happened this time suggests that there's a way and people to resist them. If someone else were to go, they could still complete the transaction."

Jenna pondered Franca's analysis for a while and exclaimed in admiration, "That's true… Dammit! Why didn't I think of that just now?"

Hearing this, Franca and Lumian exchanged smug and pleased glances.

The fact that Jenna could curse meant she was gradually feeling better!

Lumian had also considered this before concluding that the Boss was "auditing" him.

So, it was very likely that there were observers around him during this period.

After some thought, Lumian asked Franca, "Do you know what those two monsters are?"

They lurked underground and were suspected to be related to Fourth Epoch Trier. Lumian might have to venture underground in the future using Earth

Blood mineral. Knowing about the terrifying monsters he might encounter would help in his preparations.

Franca appeared thoughtful.

After a while, she said uncertainly, "Neither I nor anyone I know has encountered such monsters, but I've heard rumors from sailors.

"On the Sonia Sea, there's a port called Bansy. Once, a humanoid monster with a spine and no head appeared there. It sounds quite similar to what you described, but the port is now abandoned, likely due to damage caused by a high-level power."

Bansy? Lumian wasn't unfamiliar with the term.

Madam Magician had used it once to illustrate Cordu's likely fate. It had been severely corrupted and directly destroyed by the Church, leaving a deep impression on Lumian.

After chatting for a while, Lumian and Jenna returned to Salle de Bal Brise. Jenna had changed into a beige fluffy short dress and transformed into Showy Diva.

Late at night, upon returning to Room 207 of Auberge du Coq Doré, Lumian drew the curtains and unfolded a piece of letter paper. He penned down his encounter, thoughts, and Franca's analysis, preparing to send it to Madam Magician.

Shortly after, he arranged the altar, creating a wall of spirituality, and summoned the arm-height puppet messenger.

In the faint blue candlelight, Lumian gazed at the pale-white spirit world creature in a light-gold dress, with light-blue eyes and pure golden hair. A sudden idea struck him, and he asked thoughtfully, "Is there someone monitoring me nearby?"

The messenger spoke in an ethereal and illusory manner, "Yes."

There really is… Lumian wasn't surprised and pressed further, "Can he or they discover that I'm summoning you?"

The messenger's eyes flickered as she replied disdainfully, "They're not worthy."

Relieved, Lumian thanked Miss Messenger and watched her vanish into the candlelight with the letter.

Before long, a neatly folded reply appeared on the desk in Room 207.

Lumian skillfully opened it and began reading.

"It's not a good thing to be chosen so quickly and be tested.

"From now on, especially after becoming an official member, you have to be more careful. Once you're assigned a mission and feel that things aren't simple, something that even Mr. K might not be able to handle, find an opportunity to summon my messenger and inform me.

"The two monsters you encountered are indeed similar to those in Bansy, but they are quite different. They seem to have their own consciousness.

"As for what abilities and characteristics they can display, since Bansy Harbor has already been destroyed, I can't give you any useful information.

"I believe most of what the head said is true. What it didn't say was that it and its body might have entered Fourth Epoch Trier during the months he was missing.

"There's a high chance they possess a method to enter Fourth Epoch Trier. You need to pay special attention to this matter.

"By the way, the Sequence after Alms Monk is a Contractee. You need to sign a contract with different creatures and obtain one of their abilities. When the time comes, don't be in a hurry to choose. Write a letter and tell me that you already have the corresponding power. I can give you a pile of information on spirit world creatures for you to choose from. I have significant knowledge in this area. I'll also give you a copy of Sights in the Spirit World."

Madam Magician truly possesses a deep understanding of the spirit world… Lumian gleefully crumpled the letter and watched it fuse with the crimson flames.

…

On the sunny Sunday afternoon, Lumian satisfied his hunger and hopped into a public carriage headed for Trier's botanical garden. After buying tickets, he leisurely strolled through the vibrant flora.

He marveled at the sight of many plants he had only encountered in books, newspapers, and magazines, including the Donningsman Tree, which the Intisians mocked as Loen's national tree.

These trees originally thrived in the rainforests of the Southern Continent. Legend had it that the sap from these trees could promote hair growth, a tempting prospect for many Loenians lacking significant hair volume.

Around 3:30 p.m., Lumian made his way to Mason café and settled into Booth D. He ordered a cup of Reem espresso, eagerly anticipating the arrival of Psychiatrist Madam Susie.

Before long, he heard a familiar, gentle female voice.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Lumian Lee."

Without turning around, Lumian smiled and replied, "Good afternoon, Madam Susie."

Susie commented, sounding surprised, "Your mental state seems better than I expected."

Lumian smiled wryly.

"Perhaps it's thanks to my previous treatment that I've regained some inner strength.

"As the saying goes, what doesn't kill you makes you stronger."

Susie expressed her curiosity, asking in a conversational tone, "I wonder if you're willing to share your experiences?"

Lumian pondered for a moment before looking ahead and muttering to himself, "Are you in the same organization as Madam Magician?"

"Yes," Susie confirmed.

Relaxing, Lumian leaned back on the sofa, sipped his espresso, and began recounting his ordeal.

From capturing Louis Lund to taking down Susanna Mattise and saving the lives of most people involved in Paramita, he concluded,

"Since that day, my mental state has significantly improved. It's like a fire still burning within my heart."

Susie responded gently, "Sometimes, life itself plays the role of a psychiatrist. Those experiences indeed triggered your inner strength and improved your condition. However, it also requires resilience and a suitable personality. Otherwise, one might easily descend into a state of collapse, despair, self-blame, and abandonment."

"And this vulnerability might be exploited by the angel sealed within you."

At this point, Susie's emotions were complicated. She added with a hint of disappointment, "Your remarkable progress has rendered the treatment plan I prepared for today useless."

Chapter 277: Guidance

Susie's words elicited a chuckle from Lumian. "Isn't that a good thing?"

Susie replied, smiling, "That's a good thing. One of the happiest moments for every psychiatrist is to see their patient gradually emerge from their trauma."

Lumian probed, "Can we move on to the next stage of treatment?"

"Let's have a chat first. I'll assess your mental state." Susie's voice was gentle, and her demeanor remained calm.

"About what?" Lumian had already shared most of his recent experiences.

Susie verbally ruminated for a few seconds before responding, "We can talk about what else you're confused or troubled about."

Lumian fell silent momentarily before continuing, "Am I really the unlucky one? Will I bring disaster to the people around me?"

This time, it wasn't Susie who answered, but the other lady.

She said with a soothing chuckle, "If disaster is the inevitable fate of those around us, it isn't your fault. If it comes because of you and fate turns sour, it just means that destiny isn't set in stone.

"The entity sealed inside you by Mr. Fool isn't the entity named Inevitability—just an angel from the same realm. He can't use His powers and can only rely on others, so He can't determine a changed fate."

"So, you're saying I had a chance to change their fates, but I blew it all?" Lumian sipped his espresso, his voice unconsciously deepening.

The woman maintained her tone.

"First, we gotta be sure that the person who messed with their fate and caused their doom is the companion of that Inevitability angel lurking around you. He came for the seal and Termiboros. It's got nothing to do with you.

"Your only issue is that you didn't do good enough, but nobody can guarantee perfection in everything."

At this point, the woman spoke with a hint of self-deprecation,

"I get your feelings. Over the years, I've tried my best to do many things, but many of them failed. I even ended up hurting others despite my good intentions. It hit me hard and made me feel real guilty. I felt like running away and never coming back.

"Thankfully, during that time, I managed to achieve a lot. I helped people, stopped disasters, and rooted out corruption. That gave me confidence and motivation, strengthening my beliefs and ideas.

"Later, whenever I felt confident and positive about what I wanted to do, I'd remember my mistakes and failures. It would remind me not to be careless, not to be biased, and not to underestimate anyone.

"Likewise, when setbacks and guilt hit me, I'd remember the people I helped and the disasters I prevented. It reminded me that I'm not all bad, and my beliefs and ideas have a positive side.

"Our past experiences are both a burden and a source of strength, motivation, and growth."

Lumian listened intently, finally facing the guilt in his heart and not suppressing it anymore.

Maybe some tragedies could've been avoided if I knew more about mysticism.

It is my problem, but I'm not the one causing the disaster. I just haven't done a good enough job. I need to fix this weakness. I gotta strive to improve and be more careful in the future. I can genuinely save those who want help and bring disaster to those bastards who intentionally cause harm…

As these thoughts raced through his mind, Lumian recalled the peddlers, pedestrians, and tenants who had fallen from the Tree of Shadow. He remembered how he had watched with a smile.

Phew… He let out a slow breath, leaning back against the sofa.

"I feel much better now."

He scoffed and said, "The person who helped Termiboros and messed with my fate and the people around me couldn't have guessed that the pain he caused didn't break me, make me despair, or give up. Instead, it led me to get excellent psychiatric treatment, improving my mental state significantly.

"I really want to find him and 'thank' him in person."

The lady chuckled.

"That's why I keep telling Susie that psychiatric treatment is tricky and subtle. If you're not careful, it could lead to the opposite outcome. You can't just be fearless because you're a Beyonder.

"Hmm… Let me remind you of something.

"We can't assume the target's current intentions solely based on their original image and goals without sufficient evidence."

Lumian didn't quite understand.

"What do you mean?"

The lady explained in a gentle voice, "Many people are deceived because they always assume the other person remains the same, believing that their personalities and thoughts won't change due to the environment, experiences, and circumstances.

"Take what you just said as an example. Have you considered another possibility? Termiboros's companion might have deliberately brought those misfortunes not to make you collapse, but to stimulate you and awaken the power in your heart, allowing you to break free from your mental cage and regain your mental state?"

"How is that possible?" Lumian responded subconsciously.

Could Termiboros's companion be so benevolent?

She smiled and replied, "Just because I'm giving an example doesn't mean it's true.

"But why is that impossible? Perhaps that person initially wanted to cooperate with Termiboros and use various methods to influence your state and create an opportunity for Him to escape the seal. However, gradually, he realized that this was an opportunity that could turn him into an angel.

"As he receives more boons and sees the angelic-level door, he can extract Termiboros's power by controlling you. He can even undo the seal and devour Him while He is weak.

"And to increase the probability of success, he has to ensure that you're in good condition. You can extract Termiboros's power time and time again, weakening Him.

"How is it? Does he have a motive to help you improve your mental state?"

Lumian fell silent.

The more he thought about it, the more he realized that from a human's perspective, this was an undeniable possibility.

After a few seconds, he retorted, "Is that person not afraid of angering the entity known as Inevitability?

"The power from boons is definitely more influenced by the higher-ups. They are proud to carry out Their will and wouldn't have any blasphemous thoughts."

The woman in Psychological Invisibility laughed meaningfully and said, "The being known as Inevitability desires an obedient angel to descend upon this land. Whether it's Termiboros or another bestower, I reckon He holds no particular preference or inclination."

That's true. If someone devours Termiboros, they might become an angel of the Inevitability domain. Perhaps this is what Inevitability expects. If Termiboros can make it here, so be it. If He fails and faces a seal or purification, other bestowers will seek a way to devour His relic and become an angel. Ultimately, an angel in service of Inevitability will emerge on Earth. But the identity of this angel is not crucial… Lumian pondered as he nodded gently.

Suddenly, a wave of inspiration washed over Lumian. He considered the lady who was suspected of wielding the Justice card. Was she not only using this opportunity to teach him, but also conveying these words to Termiboros?

Could she be creating a rift between Termiboros and Inevitability, making Him distrust His companion?

If I can think of this possibility, surely Termiboros can as well…

Uh, He could have figured this out, but since His companion has been discovered, he wouldn't dare to show himself for a long while, nor would he communicate with Him. In such times, suspicions would easily grow between them.

Once the seed of suspicion took root and flourished, it would prove difficult to uproot in the future!

A Spectator is truly terrifying…

Lumian sighed and said sincerely, "I understand."

The lady smiled and said, "So, we can't assume that people won't change; they can evolve over time. We need to pay close attention to their circumstances and thoughts.

"Other Beyonders might not need to think so deeply, but your next Sequence is a Conspirer. You have to learn to analyze human nature."

Lumian nodded, gaining a fresh perspective on Gardner Martin's teachings. "The Demon is our friend, and hell is someone else's."

Continuing the discussion, he smiled and asked, "Is it possible that Termiboros's companion intended to help me improve my mental state from the beginning?"

"That's a possibility," Susie replied, "but what would be the reason?"

"Why?" Lumian inquired.

His expression suddenly changed, and he sat up straight, trembling slightly.

"Maybe, just maybe, she wanted to help me. She's…"

The lady, suspected to be the holder of the Justice card, interrupted gently.

"Your memories are unlikely lying to you."

Lumian let out a long sigh and relaxed against the sofa once more.

The lady's voice remained soft as she continued, "However, in the world of mysticism, there are cases where a person's death might not be their true end.

"The world of mysticism holds too many mysteries.

"Once, I encountered a follower of an evil god. He suddenly died just as I was about to eliminate him. It felt too coincidental, so I examined his corpse, his fate, and various mystical connections. Everything seemed in order; he was truly dead, and his family and friends believed so as well.

"Later, when I was eradicating a subsidiary branch of an evil god cult, I came across him again. He had assumed a new identity with a new fate and mystical connection.

"This time, he met his final end. From him, I learned the Sequence name of an evil god pathway—Deceased. They can use death to escape their original fate."

This is similar to the Substitution Spell, but it seems simpler and lacks prerequisites. Moreover, after the substitute's demise, the original identity and fate appear irretrievable… Lumian pondered on this, recalling a ritualistic magic that came with Alms Monk.

Chapter 278: Consultation

The lady believed to hold the Justice card fell silent, and it was Susie who spoke up.

"Your mental state has improved significantly. If you'd like, I can guide you back into the dream to awaken those forgotten memories."

"No problem." Lumian leaned against the sofa and closed his eyes.

Unbeknownst to him, he dozed off. He found himself in Cordu, bathed in sunlight amidst the mountains, surrounded by turquoise alpine pastures. White-gray sheep roamed like clouds, creating a painting-like scene.

The events unfolded like an art exhibition. Lumian alternated between experiencing them firsthand and observing as a bystander, his thoughts deeply immersed in the unfolding drama.

As the events progressed, the weather mirrored Lumian's mood, turning increasingly gray and devoid of sunlight. Occasionally, the fog lifted, revealing an azure sky.

These memories confirmed Lumian's suspicions. An anomaly had been brewing in the village from May to June of last year.

Initially, he didn't pay much attention, but by the end of the year, he realized the seriousness of the issue. Aurore didn't take his concerns seriously, dismissing them without investigation.

He later discovered skeletons in Louis Lund's closet and extracted information from him. In the new year, more villagers began revealing certain problems, leading some unaffected ones to sense that something was wrong. As a result, Ava, Reimund, Naroka, and others were silenced.

During this process, Lumian stumbled upon Pons Bénet and his crew burying a corpse and sought revenge, gravely injuring the villain's lower body. However, he couldn't take on the thugs alone and ultimately failed.

Pons Bénet almost crippled him, but Aurore arrived just in time to rescue him.

Only then did Lumian realize that something was amiss with his sister. She was suspected to be part of the padre's group and held a high status.

Most of the time, she appeared cold and indifferent, which was completely different from the sister Lumian knew. Only rarely did she show her true self. Worried for both her and her brother's future, she sought help.

However, she never mentioned summoning the messenger of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society's vice president, Hela. The information in Lumian's dream likely came from her soul fragment.

What followed matched Madame Pualis's account. Aurore stopped her, and Guillaume Bénet, the padre, led a large group of bestowers to attack the administrator's castle, dismantling her setup. She had no choice but to abandon the "territory" she had built up for a long time and leave Cordu with her remaining subordinates.

The only difference was Madame Pualis's claim that she had only given birth to one child whose father was the padre—he eventually perished in the attack. However, Aurore, a Blessed of Inevitability, stated that Madame Pualis had personally given birth to two children. One of them vanished after the administrator's castle was destroyed.

In the end, it wasn't Aurore who knocked Lumian out and brought him to the altar. It was the deputy padre, Michel Garrigue, who also had a lizard-like elf crawl out of him in his dream.

Lumian blinked open his eyes, taking deep breaths to steady himself.

He had anticipated this moment, but the emotional upheaval still left him reeling.

Emerging from the nightmarish life of a street urchin, he had finally found a true, warm home with new friends and boundless joy. Even the villagers' chase and occasional beatings for his pranks couldn't dampen his spirits during those moments of triumph.

However, his idyllic life began to unravel as the people around him changed. The constant anomalies he noticed clouded his heart with growing unease and uncertainty. He tried to persuade his friends, Aurore, Reimund, Ava, and others, to leave Cordu and move to Dariège, but Aurore always delayed, thwarting his plans.

Amidst his fear and disappointment, tragedy struck his friends. To his dismay, he even noticed disturbing signs in his own beloved sister.

In that moment, his mind plummeted into a dark abyss, much like when his grandfather had died. He felt terrified, helpless, sorrowful, and in pain.

But this time, he also felt a profound sense of despair.

Had it not been for the occasional glimmer of hope when Aurore briefly regained her true self, Lumian might not have held on till the end.

Even now, recollecting the past few months felt unbearable. It was as if he was trapped in a suffocating cage, surrounded by darkness and misery, unable to escape. It was suffocating, painful, and full of despair.

Phew, phew… Taking deep breaths, Lumian gradually regained his composure and offered a bitter smile.

"Just as I suspected."

He hadn't personally experienced the remaining pieces of the puzzle concerning the catastrophe. He needed to decipher the dream's symbols or find the padre Guillaume Bénet to obtain the missing information.

Susie spoke in a gentle tone, "You've shown tremendous resilience and faced your past head-on. It's a sign that your psychological struggles have improved significantly. Now, the rest of the healing process lies in your own hands."

"If everything goes as planned, we should only have one more psychiatric session. After you find padre Guillaume Bénet and communicate with him, I'll need to evaluate your psychological state once again and conclude the treatment."

"Thank you, Madam Susie. Thank you…" Lumian hesitated before adding, "Madam Justice."

The woman in Psychological Invisibility didn't deny it and smiled, saying, "Just because we have only one session left doesn't mean we won't be in touch again. I might need your assistance with certain matters in the future."

Lumian smiled back, saying, "I'm only a Sequence 7. I doubt I'll be of much help."

"We should never underestimate anyone," the lady replied with a knowing smile. "Besides, different people can have unique impacts on different matters."

Lumian nodded and said, "No problem."

He pondered for a moment before changing the subject.

"Ladies, after the Cordu disaster, my sister pushed me away and instructed me to take note of her grimoires. Given your understanding of human nature, what might be hidden in her notebook, and where could it be?"

Though Lumian had studied Aurore's entire grimoire multiple times, he still couldn't grasp many aspects or find anything suspicious.

Susie responded promptly, "Aurore wouldn't have intentionally left any messages or clues in her grimoires. If there were, she would have told you directly or hinted at it once she regained consciousness."

Lumian nodded slowly, accepting her explanation. Aurore could have sought help from Hela's messenger, but she chose not to.

Susie continued, "I believe there might be something in the notebook that Aurore once considered normal, but later suspected was amiss. So, identifying any abnormalities through superficial observation alone would be challenging."

No wonder I've been stumped for so long… Lumian asked anxiously, "Then how can I figure out if there's a problem?"

The holder of the Justice card seemed lost in thought as she spoke, "Since you've deduced that the anomaly began in May or June of last year, focus on that particular time frame to find the root of the problem.

"If the source truly lies with Aurore, she must have encountered something before that period that caused her transformation. So, pay special attention to the grimoires six months prior. It's likely to contain something significant that triggered her change.

"Additionally, the grimoires from the last three months might reveal Aurore's true intentions. They are an essential part of the castle in her heart.

"If you analyze these two time periods, you're most likely to find something relevant."

January to June last year, and January to March this year… Lumian mentally noted Madam Justice's advice.

As Aurore's grimoire spanned over five years, narrowing down the suspected content would save Lumian a considerable amount of time and effort.

If he focused solely on the notebooks from those two periods, his workload would decrease by 90%, enabling him to analyze and consider them more effectively.

After a brief moment of contemplation, Lumian expressed his gratitude once again.

"Thank you, Madam Susie. Thank you, Madam Justice."

After their discussion, the psychiatric treatment came to an official close. Lumian finished the remaining espresso and left Mason café, waiting for the public carriage by the roadside.

In Trier, dark clouds gathered to the northwest in the distance, while raindrops cascaded down like threads. To the southeast, the sky remained azure, and pure white clouds were tinged with golden light.

…

Apartment 601, 3 Rue des Blouses Blanches.

"Let's attend a gathering," Franca said to Jenna.

"What gathering?" Jenna, who hadn't yet put on her smoky makeup, asked with confusion.

Franca rarely invited her to such events.

Franca chuckled.

"A mysticism gathering. Now that you've digested the Assassin potion, you should consider advancing to Instigator. Attending mysticism gatherings, gathering materials and information, and earning money and supplies are compulsory tasks for every wild Beyonder."

"Advancing?" Jenna was bewildered, as the term was unfamiliar to her.

Franca clicked her tongue and explained, "An important figure told me that the number of evil god believers will increase in the foreseeable future. The same goes for various mysticism-related disasters.

"If you wish to protect yourself, your brother, and the people you care about, you must progress step by step on the divine paths and grow stronger."

Jenna fell silent for a few seconds before finally nodding and saying, "Okay."

"Then let's go." Franca smiled again.

However, Jenna hesitated for a moment before adding, "Should we invite Ciel? It seems like he also needs to attend mysticism gatherings."

"…" Franca's expression froze.

Chapter 279: Deep Valley Cloister

After a moment, Franca forced on a reassuring smile and spoke, "Don't worry about him. He's got his own mystical gatherings."

Jenna nodded and didn't say much more.

With disguises, masks, and a bit of makeup, they left 3 Rue des Blouses Blanches and made their way to Avenue du Marché. They hopped on Subway Line 2, which connected the bustling market district's Suhit steam locomotive station to the elegant cathedral district's Northern Trier Train Station. Their destination was Quartier 9, the renowned Quartier de la Maison d'Opéra in the Northern Continent.

They arrived at the world's largest and most vibrant arcade, surrounded by department stores and fancy shops. The colorful glass dome above, supported by steel frames, painted the sunlight with a touch of grandeur, showcasing scenes of sacredness and epic tales.

To make up for the dimness from the stained glass, new kerosene lamps on the iron-black street lamp poles burned brightly, emitting a dazzling white light.

They were called draft lamps that utilized the heat they generated to turn kerosene into steam, spraying it onto the scorching mantle around it, creating a bright white light.

In terms of illumination, they were far superior to conventional gas street lamps or regular household kerosene lamps, a modification of the Church of the God of Steam and Machinery.

Jenna followed Franca into the public washroom in the middle of the Opera House arcade. Each found a stall, changed their clothes, and applied simple makeup to downplay their looks.

After that, they headed underground through a nearby entrance.

Unlike other districts in Trier, the underground street beneath the Opera House arcade was bustling with people. Cafés, galleries, beer houses, and small shops filled the space, making it feel anything but dark, cold, or confined.

Only when they left the area did Jenna find her usual impression of Underground Trier.

As Assassins, they could see in the dark. However, to avoid exposing their Sequence abilities to those attending the mysterious gathering, they each held a carbide lamp that cast a bluish-yellow light ahead.

Studying Franca's actions closely, Jenna mimicked her and donned a silver metal mask that covered the upper half of her face. Silently, she ventured deeper into the damp tunnel.

After walking for a while, Franca pointed to a fork in the road and smiled.

"There's a legend of ghosts in that direction."

"What's the legend?" Jenna asked, playing along.

Franca grinned and replied, "They say people in the opera house often hear strange male voices coming from underground. They hired several bounty hunters to investigate, but none of them returned."

"Didn't the official Beyonders intervene?" Jenna inquired, puzzled.

"They did, but they found nothing. That's because it's a legend we made up," Franca chuckled.

Jenna was even more perplexed.

"Why make up such a legend?"

For amusement?

Franca assured her, smiling, "To prevent the people of Underground Trier from meddling with our gathering."

Jenna finally realized the reason behind it.

"So, you scared them off, and they wouldn't dare come here?"

"No." Franca shook her head with a serious expression. "No, it's not about scaring them away. It's about diverting their attention to that area, so they don't bother with the surroundings. In simpler terms, it gives the adventurous Trier citizens and university students something to keep them occupied."

Having grown up in Trier, Jenna fell silent. After a few seconds, she muttered, "Dammit! The Trieriens around me are nothing like this!"

Everyone worked diligently. They just liked to go to bars, dance halls, and other places to drink, sing, dance, or vent their emotions by cursing each other after a busy day.

"People from Trier can be different," Franca said, clicking her tongue and shaking her head.

As they talked, they squeezed through a gap and entered a new tunnel, arriving at a quarry cave overgrown with dark green moss.

Outside the quarry cave stood a white skeleton, its face hidden behind an iron mask, its eye sockets dark and empty.

Jenna, who had never encountered anything related to mysticism before, couldn't help but feel her heart race with fear.

Franca raised her hand and greeted, "You always send a skeleton. Is all this caution really necessary?"

"Dammit, you even put a mask on the skeleton. What's there to be embarrassed about?" she added.

The white skeleton spoke with a voice that sounded like metal rubbing against metal, "I like a line from The Adventurer series: 'That's basic courtesy.'"

With its eye sockets devoid of flames, it looked at Jenna.

"Who is she?"

"My friend. I brought her here to take a look," Franca simply replied.

The skeleton didn't push for more information. It cracked its neck, signaling that they could enter the quarry cave at the back.

Inside, Jenna saw many people in various disguises, either sitting on rocks or standing in a corner. Silence enveloped the place.

After scanning the area, Jenna lowered her voice and asked Franca, "They're letting me in just like that?"

Isn't this too easy?

Aren't they concerned about my trustworthiness or safety?

Franca smirked and replied, "I trust him, and he trusts me."

"Is that so…" Jenna nodded, but she sensed something strange. "How did that skeleton know it was you? Weren't you disguised?"

"He has a special way of recognizing people," Franca vaguely explained.

Fifteen minutes later, more people arrived one after another. By the time the iron-masked skeleton announced the official commencement of the trade gathering, nearly twenty people had gathered in the quarry cave.

Jenna observed the transactions with curiosity, absorbing the new terms as Franca whispered them to her.

During this process, she couldn't help but be shocked by the prices of potion formulas, mystical items, Beyonder weapons, and various ingredients. Even the cheapest ones required an entire week's salary as an underground singer. As for the expensive ones, she felt that she had no hope in her life.

The last third of the trade gathering focused on commissions. Jenna sat up straight, hoping to find one that could earn her a large sum of money.

A man dressed in a black robe, resembling a Warlock from horror stories, spoke in a deliberately shrill voice, "I have a mission worth 20,000 verl d'or."

20,000 verl d'or? All eyes in the room turned to the entrustee.

Jenna was no exception. She had never seen such a large sum of money in her life.

The man glanced around and said, "The gatekeeper of the Deep Valley Cloister in the hill district has been missing for three days. I hope you can help me find him or his corpse.

"I can't verify the authenticity of the clues, so only those who bring him or his corpse back to the Deep Valley Cloister can claim the 20,000 verl d'or reward.

"Alternatively, you can bring him here."

The Deep Valley Cloister belonged to the Church of the God of Steam and Machinery, where ascetic monks devoted themselves to the study of machinery and steam. They didn't marry, have children, or preach.

Located in the hill district, Quartier 19, it was bordered by the cathedral district of the Church of the God of Steam and Machinery's cathedral and the Northern Trier Train Station to the west, and Quartier 20, the cemetery district, to the east.

Seeing no immediate response, the man continued, "The authorities have already investigated, but they found nothing.

"You can all take this commission and investigate Deep Valley Cloister as bounty hunters. Don't worry about suspicion. I'll post notices in bars, dance halls, and beer houses in various districts."

I can give it a try. It won't cost me anything if I come up with nothing. At most, it'll take some time from me making money… Jenna turned to Franca, tempted.

Franca nodded, agreeing that they could take on this mission.

She was curious about the case, and she wanted Jenna to gain some experience before resorting to dangerous assassinations. If they sensed any danger or discovered something amiss, they could retreat in time.

Of course, the high bounty was also appealing.

After a brief silence, the participants began asking questions one after another.

They wanted to gather enough information before starting their investigations.

The entrustee's responses were brief. He informed everyone that the missing cloister's gatekeeper was Pinker, a resident of nearby Deep Valley Town in his early fifties. He was a devout believer of the God of Steam and Machinery, and he had never married. With a fanatical passion for machinery, he became a gatekeeper at Deep Valley Cloister after owning fields.

He returned home once a week, spending one day each time, but he didn't disappear at home.

One night, while the monks were testing a steam contraption in the courtyard, they spotted Pinker standing at the door of the gatekeeper's hut, watching with interest. But the next morning, he was gone.

Jenna took note of the information just like during her acting studies.

Before long, the mysticism gathering concluded, and the participants departed in groups.

…

A few nights later, Lumian sat at the bar in Salle de Bal Brise, savoring his favorite absinthe and watching Jenna sing and dance.

Just then, Louis approached him and whispered in his ear, "Boss, the Big Boss is here. He's waiting for you at the café on the second floor."

"Boss came personally?" Lumian was slightly surprised.

Without saying a word, he downed the rest of the green liquid, stood up, and headed towards the stairs.

At that moment, Gardner Martin stood near the window, dressed casually in a dark brown jacket and a wide-brimmed hat, as if he had just come from the docks or the depot.

He looked at Lumian with his brownish-red eyes for a moment before motioning for the others to leave.

Soon, only Gardner Martin and Lumian remained in the café.

The Savoie Mob boss smiled and said, "I've expressed my admiration for you more than once, haven't I?"

"Indeed, thank you, Boss." Lumian nodded.

Gardner Martin's expression turned serious.

"Are you interested in joining my circle? This will allow you to come into contact with more Beyonders, stronger powers, and abundant resources."

Is that all for the audit? Lumian wondered, not hiding his puzzlement.

"What's the price?"

Gardner Martin smiled again.

"The price is that you might encounter more danger and have to follow orders to complete certain missions.

"However, as long as you do well, you will definitely progress rapidly. Perhaps in a few years, you can take my position."

Lumian pretended to hesitate and pondered for a moment before saying, "I don't have a problem with that."

Gardner Martin nodded solemnly.

"Before that, you need to undergo a test.

"Go to 13 Avenue du Marché now and stay there until the sun rises."

13 Avenue du Marché? Lumian frowned, doing his best to recall.

Finally, he remembered where that was.

Osta Trul, the Secrets Suppliant, considered it the most dangerous place in the market district.

It was the burned-down building that had yet to be demolished!

Chapter 280: The Knocker

As Lumian thought of 13 Avenue du Marché, his first instinct was that Gardner Martin intended to do him harm.

The place is abnormal, a mystery even to official Beyonders. Why are you asking me to spend the night there?

The image of the dark, charred building he had seen through the Mystery Prying Glasses still lingered in his mind, with a blurry face staring back at him through the empty eyes behind a window.

It had given him an uneasy feeling, as Osta Trul had warned it was a dangerous place. However, Lumian had no interest in exploring it and wouldn't have triggered any anomalies due to him lacking an adventurous spirit, so he put it aside.

Amidst his thoughts, Lumian dismissed the idea that Gardner Martin would set a trap in the charred building to harm him.

As a member of the Iron and Blood Cross Order—a secret organization—a powerful Beyonder likely at Sequence 5 or at minimum a 6, Gardner had other, more direct methods to deal with subordinates with ulterior motives.

Simultaneously, Lumian recalled everything he had seen and heard recently.

The charred building stood close to Rue des Blouses Blanches. Each time he passed it while going to his safe house from Salle de Bal Brise or searching for Franca, he would see vagrants seeking refuge from the rain inside. Never had he witnessed any official Beyonders or patrolling police shooing them away, nor had he heard of any fatalities occurring there.

For three reasons, Lumian considered the charred building highly perilous. Firstly, Osta Trul's spiritual perception had urged him. Secondly, its existence remained intact, as if some mysterious force prevented its demolition. Thirdly, his experience with the Mystery Prying Glasses had left him with a certain feeling.

Combining all these signs, Lumian couldn't help but think there was indeed a problem. And it wasn't some trivial matter either. Though under normal circumstances, these abnormalities were unlikely to be triggered; they required specific conditions.

But if there wasn't any trouble, why would Gardner Martin arrange for me to spend the night there? Is it some kind of courage test? That's pointless, Lumian thought to himself.

He believed that the most striking impression he left on Gardner Martin and the others was that of his boldness.

After a brief moment of contemplation, Lumian stared at Gardner Martin, showing his concern and suspicion.

"13 Avenue du Marché? I've heard there's something strange going on there."

"If nothing were amiss, what kind of test would it be to send you there for a night?" Gardner Martin replied with a smile. "As long as your response is flawless, I believe you'll come out of it unscathed."

So, this is a test to see how I handle a 'sudden' abnormality without any prior information? Lumian nodded in understanding, but the situation left him even more puzzled.

If that's the case, why did Gardner Martin come here in the middle of the night and ask me to go to 13 Avenue du Marché immediately? Couldn't he have waited until daytime for me to do this? Then, he could test my ability to gather information and see who I'll contact…

Now, I won't have the chance to summon Madam Magician's messenger and seek her opinion or possible help, allowing me not to face the hidden danger of the charred building alone…

But Gardner Martin doesn't know that I can summon a demigod's messenger. That's probably not what he's worried about… If he suspects that I have another faction backing me, he wouldn't have given me a chance to infiltrate the core— in other words—the Iron and Blood Cross Order. He would have already found a way to make me completely 'disappear'…

Yes, if he really suspects me, he'll give me ample time to see where I go and who I contact to determine if there's a problem…

He must have some hidden motive for making things so urgent…

Giving me time to prepare means I might go back on my word. Instead of heading to 13 Avenue du Marché, I might turn around and sell information about this charred building's possible connection to the Iron and Blood Cross Order to the authorities?

But the problem is, even if I manage to stay until the sun rises, I can still go back on my word or betray them… I'll be apprehended right then and there and forced to sign a contract?

After careful consideration, Lumian still couldn't decipher Gardner Martin's true intentions.

The test was likely just one aspect, but there had to be a hidden motive!

The only thing Lumian was sure of was that Gardner Martin wasn't planning to kill him—at least not for the time being. This mission might be life-threatening, but the real danger lay elsewhere.

With various thoughts racing through his mind, Lumian finally made up his decision.

"Alright, I'll go now."

Gardner Martin grinned.

"Excellent. If you'd agreed too quickly, it would have disappointed me.

"One of the most crucial traits for those who join our core is intelligence and the ability to think. Otherwise, why wouldn't I just purchase a few new steam robots from the God of Steam and Machinery Church?"

Are you suggesting that Franca is smart, but not very much so? She thinks, but not holistically? Lumian couldn't help but criticize inwardly.

Of course, he knew that this wasn't the reason why the Boss refused to let Franca join the core team.

After his inner critique, Lumian responded to Gardner Martin with a smile, "I'm looking forward to experiencing the core you've described, Boss."

As he spoke, he turned around and prepared to head downstairs to 13 Avenue du Marché.

Gardner Martin casually called out to him, "Don't reveal this to anyone, not even to those sleeping with you, like Jenna, who's singing downstairs."

"Alright," Lumian said, though he didn't give it much thought.

He had to share this with Franca and Jenna!

However, the two of them had been busy investigating the disappearance of the Deep Valley Cloister's gatekeeper and hadn't paid much attention to the affairs of the Savoie Mob.

After leaving Salle de Bal Brise, Lumian touched his left chest.

Then, he drew a triangular Sacred Emblem, as if praying to the God of Steam and Machinery for good luck.

There was still water on the ground from the rain. Lumian followed the iron-black street lamps and reached the intersection near Rue des Blouses Blanches at a moderate pace.

A pitch-black six-story building stood diagonally in front of him. Many of the walls had collapsed, as if pairs of empty, pitch-black "eyes" had grown out of the house.

At that moment, two or three tramps were sleeping on the ground floor, devoid of doors or window frames. It was strewn with blackened bricks and charred wood.

Lumian stood by the roadside and observed for a while, but he couldn't find the blurry face pressed against the window.

Must I wear the Mystery Prying Glasses to "see" it? Without hesitation, Lumian passed through the filthy doorway and entered the target building.

He felt no abnormalities from his body to his soul.

Walking around the tramps, Lumian found what appeared to be the activity room.

There was a small room inside. The wooden door was charred and wobbly, but it remained intact. Beyond the shattered glass window lay an alley behind Avenue du Marché.

Lumian walked in and carefully closed the wooden door.

Then, he sat by the window, ready to climb out of the abnormal building at a moment's notice.

Amidst the inevitable torment, time ticked by, and the night deepened. Lumian remained oblivious to any abnormalities. It was so quiet that only the tramps' occasional coughs echoed.

Suddenly, he straightened his back.

He heard sluggish footsteps.

The footsteps drew nearer, knocking on the dilapidated wooden door that couldn't be locked, instantly tainting the quiet night with an uneasy atmosphere.

At that moment, Termiboros's magnificent voice echoed in Lumian's mind.

"Don't respond."

Don't respond… Lumian's hair stood on end.

Although he couldn't fully trust the Inevitability angel, considering the current situation, he chose to look at the door silently after weighing the pros and cons.

Knock! Knock! Knock!

The knocks on the door echoed one after another, the intervals long, slow, and heavy.

Knock! Knock! Knock!

After a while, the person outside finally spoke.

"Help me. I was the one sleeping outside.

"Help me, help me. A murderer has barged in!"

This fabrication is absurd… Lumian calmed his tense nerves by entertaining himself.

He didn't respond, acting as though there was no one in the small room.

The voice outside grew more intense, but the pace slowed. There was an indistinct, strange pause.

"He's. Here! He's. Here! I'm. About. To. Be. Killed!

"The next one. Is. You!"

As soon as he finished speaking, the person knocking on the door suddenly let out a scream.

Lumian heard a dull thud.

Thud! It was as if someone had fallen to the ground.

Then, a heavy object outside the door was slowly dragged further away.

Before long, a bone-chilling cutting sound filled the room, accompanied by the sound of gnawing and loud chewing.

An image suddenly surfaced in Lumian's mind: A shadowy figure squatted on the ground, dividing a human corpse with an axe and other items. Occasionally, it would pick up an arm and take a few bites.

After a while, the similar commotion vanished.

Knock! Knock! Knock!

There was another knock on Lumian's small room.

"If you don't. Open the door. I'll. Come in. Myself." It was the same person who had asked for help.

Lumian gazed at the shaky wooden door and had an idea.

As long as I don't respond, the abnormality outside won't be able to open this door and truly threaten me?

This door is clearly unlocked and was burned by the fire. It's very fragile, but it can't open it…

It doesn't have the ability to open any door. Does it require a response from the person behind the door to establish a connection in the mystical sense?

As these thoughts raced through his mind, Lumian gained a deeper understanding of the current situation and felt more confident.

Knock. Knock. Knock. Amidst the knocking, the person outside spoke in a staccato manner, "I am not. Lying.

"I really will. Open the door. And come in.

"I'll give you. Another. Ten seconds."

Lumian scoffed, feeling increasingly certain.

He wanted to mock the other party in his heart and tell it to open if it had what it took, but he was worried that it would also be considered a response, so he suppressed those thoughts.

Knock! Knock! Knock!

Three more knocks separated by a long pause.

Suddenly, Lumian heard an inaudible creak.

Then, he saw the rickety wooden door slowly pull back, revealing a dark crack.

It was opening.

Chapter 281: Reflection

As the charred and decrepit wooden door creaked open slowly, Lumian felt a shiver down his spine, like ice water trickling over his scalp.

Wasn't it impossible to open the door?

Was my guess wrong?

If it could open the door, why did it take so long and talk so much?

Just get on with it! Is there something wrong with its brain?

Although Lumian had become a Pyromaniac and had experienced various dangerous situations, his heart couldn't help but race at this moment. It felt like a steam locomotive hurtling on tracks and pillowwood. If he weren't worried about Gardner Martin or other members of the Iron and Blood Cross Order lurking nearby, he would have set up an altar then and there, summoning Madam Magician's messenger or praying to Mr. Fool.

Instinctively, Lumian prepared to summon Fire Raven and create a cloak, readying himself for a battle. But Termiboros's warning echoed in his mind once more: Don't respond.

This was entirely different from just not opening the door! Lumian couldn't shake the feeling that something fishy was going on. Why would the creature knock on the door, threaten him, and then open it itself? So, he restrained himself, staying silent and staring at the door like a statue.

The charred wooden door continued to swing open, and the dark gap gradually widened, enough for one person to pass through. But there was nothing outside the door. The room, far from the window, was engulfed in darkness. The crimson moonlight seeping through the broken glass barely revealed any outlines.

Where was the fellow that knocked on the door? Lumian's first instinct was to activate his Spirit Vision to see if there was an invisible monster. But he held back, afraid that it would count as a response.

The wobbly door came to a halt, and nothing emerged from the darkness outside. No wriggling shapes, just silence. Lumian remained motionless in his sitting position, gazing in that direction. This whole situation was incredibly bizarre. He couldn't even target an enemy if he wanted to set them on fire.

Silence took over, and time seemed to stand still. Then suddenly, a drop of liquid fell from the ceiling, landing in front of Lumian. His eyelids twitched, and under the crimson moonlight, he saw that it was bright red, resembling blood.

Drip. Drip. Blood dripped, gradually staining a large area red.

Lumian couldn't shake the unease that crept over him.

Drip!

Another droplet landed on Lumian's right cheek. It was cold, sticky, and silky. It didn't seem like human blood, but it wasn't tainted by darkness either. The pungent smell of blood filled Lumian's nostrils, making him want to roll to the side, stand up, and leap out of the window instinctively.

Don't respond. He recalled Termiboros's words once again.

Lumian took a deep breath, allowing the viscous liquid that smelled like blood to hit his face and head. Gradually, he felt his body grow heavier. He quickly examined his exposed hands.Cold, viscous blood dripped onto his hands, silently merging into one, as if encasing him in a blood-colored glove.

Lumian began to suspect that he was trapped in a mucous blood membrane, making him feel heavier and heavier. Instinctively, he thought about reaching into his pocket to pull out Mr. K's finger. He wanted the Aurora Order Oracle, skilled in blood-related spells, to help him resist this strange mucous blood membrane.

"Don't respond." This time, the Inevitability angel's powerful voice echoed in Lumian's mind, instead of him reminding himself of Termiboros's earlier warning.

Lumian managed to regain control of himself, but he could feel his body growing heavier, and his breathing became labored. Slowly, the strange blood began to seep into his skin, as if it had a life of its own, determined to enter his body and consume him from the inside out.

As the blood infiltrated him, his thoughts grew hazy, and a surge of violent tendencies flooded his mind. The urge to kill and burn everything—this place, Trier, the entire world—overwhelmed him!

Dammit! Could Termiboros be using this opportunity to deceive me and use the strange power here to take control and escape the seal. He couldn't help but question the effectiveness of Termiboros's "don't respond" and the true intentions of the Inevitability angel.

Despite wanting to resist and break free from the burned-down building, Lumian couldn't shake the feeling that there was something mystical about the "abnormality" and the creature's persistence in knocking, talking, and asking for permission.

If he hadn't harbored those suspicions, he wouldn't have fully trusted Termiboros, an enemy rather than a friend. He wouldn't have endured until now. With these thoughts swirling in his mind, Lumian decided to hold on a little longer and observe what would happen next.

His head felt heavy, and his thoughts grew increasingly chaotic. A grinding sound rang in his ears, and his body seemed to ache from a distant pain. It was as if he was slipping into a semi-conscious state, while someone took the opportunity to dismember him, severing his limbs and tearing his body apart.

Then, suddenly, Lumian's consciousness withdrew. It was as if his spirit had separated from his body. He watched himself sitting by the window, covered in blood, with his eyes strangely empty. In front of him squatted a charred figure, brandishing a bloodied axe and hacking at his thigh, splitting the bone in half.

Uh… Lumian slowly realized that something was amiss.

He instinctively looked down and saw that his body remained whole!

He was still sitting by the shattered window, but the scene he witnessed was no longer the crumbling charred wooden door. Instead, he saw a "reflection" of his surroundings and his own dismemberment by the burnt shadow.

Compared to his severed legs and extracted bones, the most striking aspect was his empty, lifeless eyes.

After a brief daze, the horrifying and bloody vision disappeared, and the open, dilapidated wooden door returned to his sight.

He knew it wasn't an illusion because he felt as if he had surfaced from water, and his entire body relaxed.

If I had responded, what would have happened? Would the nightmarish scenes I saw have become real? Would that response have established a mystical connection, allowing those terrifying and almost illusionary encounters to materialize? Lumian exhaled slowly, fear still lingering in his heart.

He placed his hand on his left chest, lowered his voice, and chuckled.

"Temiboros, you truly are remarkable."

Indeed, a worthy angel. Even in His sealed state, He easily discerned the essence of the abnormality.

Termiboros's voice echoed, overlapping as if from multiple sources. "The abnormality here is considered minor."

"Minor?" Lumian couldn't believe it. "If you hadn't reminded me not to respond and if I hadn't been determined enough, something terrible might have occurred. That Gardner Martin, that vile scoundrel, really wants me dead!"

Termiboros replied in a thunderous voice, "You won't die. The abnormality will merely transform you, leading your thoughts to become fanatical about certain things while rejecting others."

Lumian pondered the explanation, finding it a bit hard to grasp.

Just then, Termiboros added, "It's like being conquered, both physically and mentally."

Suddenly, realization dawned on Lumian, and he spoke quietly, "Gardner Martin wanted me to stay here overnight so he could use this anomaly to control me and eliminate any potential threats.

No wonder he came to Salle de Bal Brise so late and didn't give me time to think!

Termiboros confirmed Lumian's suspicion, "Have you only just realized how shallow you are?"

Lumian cursed under his breath and thought to himself, Even if he succeeds, I won't be under Gardner Martin's control; I'll be manipulated by the power of this place. Isn't he worried that something might go wrong?

The abnormality here is connected to the Iron and Blood Cross Order. Is he not concerned about that?

With these thoughts swirling in his mind, Lumian furrowed his brow and asked Termiboros, "Since I won't be affected or altered abnormally, will Gardner Martin notice something off about me when I leave tomorrow morning?"

Termiboros's voice boomed.

"If such a level of corruption was easily detectable, Gardner Martin and his allies would have been eliminated by the official Beyonders long ago.

"Unless the source of corruption provides direct information, they can't tell that you're unaffected."

Hmm… As Lumian contemplated the situation, he suddenly realized a hidden truth in Termiboros's words—Gardner Martin and the members of the Iron and Blood Cross Order were already corrupted!

They were under someone else's control!

Hiss… The more Lumian thought about it, the more he found it terrifying.

After a few seconds, Lumian tried to get more information from Termiboros, asking, "When I meet Gardner Martin, how should I display my fanaticism, and which beliefs should I reject?"

Termiboros surprisingly replied, "Show fanaticism towards war and chaos and reject belief in other deities."

Lumian nodded, but another concern arose. "Considering the intensity of the recent abnormality, shouldn't everyone who enters and stays here be corrupted?"

Termiboros clarified, "Only two specific pathways inevitably trigger the abnormality here. The rest require specific actions at precise times before the anomaly will occur. The officials only recognize the latter situation and secretly prevent others from entering this building at those specific times."

"Two special pathways… Hunter and Demoness?" Lumian could roughly guess.

Termiboros didn't deny it.

As Lumian recalled the entire incident, he couldn't help but smile, saying, "Termiboros, it seems you've truly understood your situation and positioned yourself wisely."

Termiboros remained silent this time, providing no response.

In the following hours, Lumian encountered two more abnormalities. One almost broke his neck, while the other caused an explosion that sent his organs flying.

Remembering the words "don't respond," he endured the trials, eventually returning to his unharmed body.

Finally, a tinge of reddish-gold appeared on the horizon as the sun rose. Lumian stood up, basking in the morning light for a moment before leaving 13 Avenue du Marché.

There, he saw Gardner Martin sitting in a carriage opposite. Their eyes met, and in the next moment, Gardner Martin smiled.

Lumian smiled back.

Chapter 282: Treacherous

Gardner Martin stepped out of the carriage and warmly embraced Lumian.

Oh, his attitude changed instantly… Lumian criticized as he returned the hug. After the embrace, Gardner Martin let go and smiled, declaring, "From now on, we're true brothers."

True brothers? Can I inherit your estate if you die? Lumian, whose mental state had improved significantly and had successfully passed the difficult "test," held back his teasing thoughts.

"You're still my boss," Lumian said, his habitual loyalty shining through in his words.

He thought that while it might have been a bit over the top, the gesture didn't feel insincere or out of place.

Gardner Martin laughed.

"In the future, when there's nobody else around, you can call me 'CO Sir.'"

"CO Sir…" Lumian found the title a little strange.

The Iron and Blood Cross Order was a secret organization, not an army.

Gardner Martin didn't offer any explanation; he just smiled.

"Come to 11 Rue des Fontaines at 8 p.m. tonight. That's when your initiation ritual will take place."

With that, he gave Lumian's shoulder a reassuring pat.

"Rest well now."

Lumian acknowledged his words with a nod and bid farewell to the boss of the Savoie Mob. He made his way back to Auberge du Coq Doré and drew the curtains of Room 207.

It was already past 6 a.m., so Lumian didn't need to catch up on sleep. He sat at the wooden table and began writing to Madam Magician. He recounted the previous night's encounter and Termiboros's performance. Finally, he inquired about how to report this matter to Mr. K.

Alone, Lumian couldn't avoid the peculiar "abnormality" in the abandoned building. He needed to explain the situation convincingly to Mr. K without revealing that he possessed The Fool's seal and an angel from the Inevitability domain.

After neatly folding the letter, Lumian set up a ritual and summoned the "doll" messenger in the light-gold dress.

The messenger lowered her head and nodded with satisfaction upon seeing the square-shaped letter.

As she levitated the letter, she warned Lumian, "Someone is still monitoring you."

Huh? I didn't notice it at all… His tracking, concealment, and observation skills are impressive… Lumian prided himself on being a skilled Hunter with strong anti-tracking abilities. Yet, he had failed to detect the presence of the monitors!

Mr. K's subordinates? No, if Miss Messenger felt the need to warn me, it couldn't be the Aurora Order… The monitors sent by Gardner Martin must still be lurking, even after passing the test and facing that abnormal corruption last night. I've let my guard down after being informed about my induction, and that's made me vulnerable… Damn, how cunning! Lumian realized he had been too naive and not cautious enough compared to Gardner Martin.

If he hadn't pretended to be exhausted from sleep deprivation and torture, drawing the curtains to sleep would've been an obvious red flag. It would have definitely raised suspicion among the monitors.

At the same time, Lumian was grateful that Madam Magician's messenger seemed powerful enough not to be detected by the monitors.

After sending off the "doll" messenger, Lumian lay on the bed, waiting for a reply. When it finally arrived, he read the message carefully.

"As a secret organization with a history spanning two to three centuries, the Iron and Blood Cross Order doesn't recruit members so readily. The fact that they are allowing new members to be corrupted goes against the test I know of.

"It appears that the Iron and Blood Cross Order has undergone some negative changes over the years. Don't rush to uncover the reasons behind this just yet. Take it step by step and focus on protecting yourself for now.

"When Termiboros offered help and warned you, it was likely because He didn't want you to be corrupted or perish outright. That would have an impact on Him. At the same time, He probably wants to earn your trust before revealing His true intentions at a critical moment.

"Always remember that an evil god's angel is a true madman. He will surely bring disaster to you and those around you. Stay vigilant at all times. You must both use Him to your advantage and guard against His treachery.

"As for Mr. K, it's simple. Just explain that you recited that entity's honorific name at a crucial moment, and miraculously, you remained untainted.

"Don't worry about him verifying the authenticity of your claim with that entity. Devout believers wouldn't do such a thing. Besides, even the entity Himself might not be certain if He responded to your prayers."

Wh— Lumian felt a bit bewildered by the last part.

How could a deity not know if He had responded to a specific believer?

Isn't that too absurd?

In an instant, Lumian recalled something Madam Magician had once told him.

If he used anything other than the three-line honorific name to pray to Mr. Fool, she couldn't guarantee that the response would be from that great being. It could be very dangerous.

Something similar to this situation? Matters involving deities are truly unfathomable. And any mistake could lead to a situation more tragic than death… Could Aurore have faced the same problem? Lumian's thoughts drifted.

For the past few days, he had meticulously combed through Aurore's grimoires, copying everything from the two highlighted time periods that Madame Justice had pointed out. His plan was to show it to the vice president of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society, Madam Hela, when the opportunity arose.

Franca had already read through the corresponding content and found no suspicious details. The unconventional mysticism knowledge was just ordinary spells that could only be cast by a Warlock or Beyonder of the corresponding domain. Neither of them could practice it.

The only issue they found was that since the beginning of the year, Aurore's grimoires had gained a significant amount of ritualistic knowledge related to sacrificial rituals and secret deeds. These were obtained from the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society, but they didn't point to any evil god or hidden existence. They were more basic applications.

A crimson flame engulfed the letter, turning it to ash in Lumian's hand.

He lay down and pretended to sleep, but his mind was busy contemplating the grimoires and planning his next steps.

The most important thing to him was that the one-month deadline set by the Prophecy Spell was approaching. Guillaume Bénet, the padre, would appear somewhere in Quartier de la Princesse Rouge.

…

In the hill district, at the entrance of Deep Valley Cloister.

Franca, dressed as a typical bounty hunter with a fake mustache and a top hat, sighed to Jenna,

"There's really no clue at all."

Jenna was disguised in a white shirt, brown vest, dark pants, and black boots, with a brown beret. She had altered her features slightly to look more ordinary, without any moles or smoky makeup.

As they gazed at the peculiar iron-black building with steel components and massive chimneys resembling steeples, it felt more like a special factory than the Church of the God of Steam and Machinery cloister.

At that moment, white smoke billowed from the chimneys, accompanied by a loud mechanical roar.

"It's mainly because those monks don't want to interact with outsiders…" Jenna replied, feeling frustrated.

For the past few days, they, like other bounty hunters and private detectives, were only allowed to enter the first-floor courtyard. They could only inquire with the new gatekeeper and a few other servants.

The ascetic monks only provided a list of relevant personnel's statements.

Franca diverted her gaze and clicked her tongue.

"This won't be an easy case. Otherwise, the official Beyonders would have figured it out by now.

"Since we can't find any clues in the cloister, let's take a look around."

"Alright." Jenna lacked experience in such investigations and was still learning from Franca.

They strolled around the cloister in the valley, occasionally encountering other investigators drawn by the high bounty.

After about fifteen minutes of walking, they came across a mountain wall showing signs of collapse and new trees growing.

On the side of the mountain wall, there was a cave sealed by a heavy wooden door. A man in his forties sat beside it, seeking shelter from the wind and rain.

He flipped through old newspapers with comic strips, occasionally chuckling. A brass key hung from his waist.

Franca approached and asked in a deliberate hoarse voice, "What's this place?"

The plain-looking, slightly ragged man glanced up at Franca's face and frowned a bit.

His gaze quickly shifted to Jenna, and he seemed more at ease.

"This is the entrance to the Deep Valley Quarry.

"I'm a gatekeeper."

"Why is there a door, and why is it locked?" Jenna had seen a real quarry south of the market district.

"This place is abandoned and could collapse anytime. We can't allow anyone daring enough to disturb a sleeping tiger," the gatekeeper of the Deep Valley Quarry explained with a smile.

"Is this place not connected to Underground Trier?" Franca inquired.

The quarry's gatekeeper shook his head.

"It's on the verge of complete collapse. How could it be connected? I'm about to lose my job!"

With that, he looked at Jenna and tried to be friendly.

"Do you want some work? I'll pay you to have some fun with me—just once."

"You Trierians…" Franca tutted and shook her head.

Jenna responded with her usual catchphrase, rejecting his proposition.

…

8 p.m., 11 Rue des Fontaines.

Lumian followed Gardner Martin's butler, Faustino, across the lawn and through the hall until they reached a windowless room.

Inside, there was a dining table, but it didn't resemble a lavish villa restaurant. Instead, it appeared quite plain, almost empty.

Lumian glanced around and noticed three rows of dishes neatly arranged on the table. The first row held various utensils, the second row contained cups and bottles, and the third row displayed prepared dishes and unlit candles.

The setup was meticulously symmetrical, forming three parallel lines.

Chapter 283: Idea

Gardner Martin's butler, Faustino, didn't leave the room after guiding Lumian in. Instead, he opened his arms with a smile.

"Welcome, new brother."

You're also a member of the Iron and Blood Cross Order? Lumian was taken aback at first, but then he accepted it as a matter of fact.

A butler, as the master's eyes, ears, and limbs, likely knew many of Gardner Martin's secrets. So it made sense that he either promoted Faustino to be a member of the Iron and Blood Cross Order or had a member of the Order become his butler.

Lumian observed Faustino's slightly gray temples, sunken eyes, and light-blue eyes, then embraced him warmly.

"Thank you."

Faustino, dressed in his butler attire, went to the dining table and pulled out a chair at the west end, saying to Lumian, "Sit here."

Lumian nodded and settled down, feeling strangely at home.

Of course, thanks to Aurore's education, he had avoided the habit of raising his legs and crossing them at the edge of the dining table.

Faustino seated himself beside Lumian and briefly explained, "A few more brothers will come later."

Fifteen minutes later, the rest of the Iron and Blood Cross Order members arrived. Following Faustino's introductions, Lumian embraced each one.

They were:

Vincent Lorraine, representing Gardner Martin in the Rist dock operations, was under 30 years old with a typical Intis look—black hair, blue eyes, refined appearance, and slender figure. He didn't strike Lumian as a Beyonder of the Hunter pathway as he didn't differ much from ordinary white-collar workers, but that begged the question—how did he survive the vigil?

Parsifal, who helped Gardner Martin manage the depot and freight company, appeared as an average middle-aged man with slightly disheveled brown hair and amiable brown eyes when he smiled. However, his emotionless gaze gave Lumian chills, making him wary.

Not in charge of specific matters, Albus seemed to operate in the dark and had a hint of red in his hair. His sharp brown eyebrows and eyes made him rather handsome, but he had a less likable appearance.

There was also an acquaintance of Lumian's, "Blood Palm" Black of the Savoie Mob.

As the manager of Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman, he was dressed formally, had brown hair and blue eyes, and enjoyed a cigar with a warm smile.

Lumian had suspected that the Savoie Mob had an official member of the Iron and Blood Cross Order secretly monitoring the market district and their activities. However, he hadn't expected it to be "Blood Palm" Black, who didn't stand out at all.

Lumian had initially thought it might be Baron Brignais or "Rat" Christo, but it turned out differently.

Strangely, Black bore a resemblance to Gardner Martin.

With Faustino and Lumian, there were now six members of the Iron and Blood Cross Order present.

In the past, Lumian had criticized, "Isn't it too much for a regional mob like the Savoie Mob to have five or six Beyonders?" But now, he found it unsurprising.

As a secret organization with a long history, it was normal for the Iron and Blood Cross Order to have such influence and heritage. Even its subsidiaries enjoyed abundant resources.

After exchanging pleasantries, Butler Faustino introduced the items on the table to Lumian.

"In the ensuing ritual, the goblets will be our weapons. They can also be used as cannons. Red wine will be ordinary explosives, white wine will be potent explosives, food will be the components, and knives and forks will be sharp swords…"

Lumian listened quietly, wondering if there was something odd about their thinking.

Are they too self-aware?

Or is there some mystical significance to this?

By the time Faustino finished speaking, Gardner Martin, now wearing his tailcoat and an Iron Cross medal embedded with a ruby over his chest, entered the room.

He stood on the east side of the long dining table, facing the six seated members on the west side.

With a swoosh, the five members, excluding Lumian, stood up in unison.

Oh… Lumian inwardly sighed as he rose to his feet.

"Good evening, CO Sir." Faustino, Black, and the others greeted him in unison. Lumian was slightly slower to respond.

Gardner Martin motioned for everyone to take their seats and smiled.

"We'll officially begin the ritual when the Supervisor arrives.

"Ciel, let me tell you what the core you're about to join represents."

Gardner Martin locked eyes with Lumian, his tone growing more serious.

"We are all members of a secretive organization with a history spanning centuries.

"It's known as the Iron and Blood Cross Order."

Lumian didn't show any intentional surprise or dismay. After all, the name sounded rather ordinary.

Albus, the young man with dark-red hair sitting at the edge of the dining table, seemed about to speak, but Gardner Martin shot him a stern look.

The Commanding Officer of the Iron and Blood Cross Order turned his attention back to Lumian.

"Nearly 300 years ago, a few influential figures established the Iron and Blood Cross Order. They believed that deities were merely powerful Beyonders, and no matter how you look at it, even the weakest Beyonder is fundamentally different from ordinary people.

"Our philosophy is that regardless of how one obtains Beyonder powers, they should be recognized and treated with a status above ordinary people. However, the two Churches and the government only acknowledge the Beyonders they nurture. They also insist that supernatural powers should be concealed from ordinary folks as much as possible.

"This goes against nature and the course of history. We must change it.

"This also means we have to oppose the government and the two Churches, but there's no need to fear. We possess sufficient strength and true demigods.

"In the future, if the two Churches are willing to accept wild Beyonders and acknowledge their statuses, we might consider cooperating with them."

In other words, the ultimate goal is to overthrow the government and establish a country where Beyonders hold positions at all levels? Lumian interpreted Gardner Martin's words from his own perspective.

Gardner Martin glanced at the six members of the Iron and Blood Cross Order seated opposite him and smiled once more.

"Our Iron and Blood Cross Order's strength is mainly concentrated in Intis, with over a third of our members based in Trier. As you can see, we have many powerful brothers in the market district alone, and even more Beyonders under our control.

"I am the CO, or Commanding Officer, responsible for leading you and handling various matters in the market district. Above me are several branch presidents, also referred to as 'Deputy Brigade Commanders.' Each of them is a true and powerful demigod.

"Above the branch presidents is our Iron and Blood Cross Order's president, also known as the Brigade Commander. He is a mysterious and formidable figure.

"Below me are NCOs. When we have more than ten brothers in the market district, I'll appoint two NCOs to assist me in management. NCOs receive additional resources and support."

Is this some kind of military game? Lumian guessed from the titles of the different levels within the Iron and Blood Cross Order.

Gardner Martin turned his gaze to the door and spoke, "Apart from that, we also have many Supervisors. Each Supervisor acts independently and patrols the areas under the jurisdiction of different commanding officers.

"In the future, if anything happens to me and I exhibit any abnormalities, you must find the Supervisor immediately and report the situation to him. Similarly, if you discover that the Supervisor has done something abnormal, inform me immediately."

Gardner Martin grinned playfully at Lumian and said, "Ciel, let me introduce you to Olson, the Supervisor in charge of the market district."

Perplexed, Lumian followed Gardner Martin's finger and looked at the door.

In the next moment, a tall, thin man in a blue vest and black suit entered the room.

The man had short auburn hair, reddish-brown eyes, thick eyebrows, and a wild beard. He resembled a famished bear.

As Lumian recognized Supervisor Olson, his pupils widened.

It was the trader he, Christo, and Simon had encountered underground!

Lumian vividly remembered that he had been nothing but a head and a blood-stained spine. He had been pursued by another headless monster, both of which were extremely dangerous. Yet, here he was, underground and appearing at Gardner Martin's house!

Lumian couldn't help but glance at Olson's hands, noticing his fair skin and the small suitcase he carried.

He has a body again? Has he merged with the headless monster? Lumian's mind raced as he observed Olson approaching Gardner Martin.

He began to suspect that the two monsters they had encountered during the transaction were illusions created by Olson. There was nothing abnormal about him.

Since the transaction had been a test, it wasn't surprising that the monster had been fake.

But was it not too realistic? Lumian watched with suspicion as Gardner Martin and Olson each took a goblet and addressed everyone present, "Load the explosives!"

Albus, Parsifal, and the other members of the Iron and Blood Cross Order placed a goblet in front of them and poured alluring red wine into them.

So this is how you load explosives? Lumian recalled Faustino's words about goblets being weapons or cannons, and wine being explosives.

After filling the "cannons" with "explosives," Gardner Martin called out, "Attention!

"Port arms!"

In an instant, everyone stood up and placed their right hands on the goblets filled with red wine.

"Present arms!" Gardner Martin gave another command.

In unison, he raised the goblet to his chest.

Lumian marveled and followed suit, imitating the actions of the other members around him.

Chapter 284: Entering the Order

Gardner Martin observed the Iron and Blood Cross Order members opposite him and nodded with satisfaction.

"Aim!"

At this command, Faustino and the others raised their goblets to their lips.

Is this what aiming means? Lumian almost laughed, but the seriousness of the other Iron and Blood Cross Order members stopped him.

He had grasped the essence of the ritual and had an idea of what would happen next.

Just then, Gardner Martin issued a new order.

"Fire!"

Almost simultaneously, Parsifal, Black, and the others downed a third of the red wine in their goblets.

"Fire!"

Gardner Martin called out the word again.

Lumian lifted his head slightly and downed another third of the red wine.

Gardner Martin followed suit.

He then continued, "Attack!"

The Iron and Blood Cross Order members present finished the remaining red wine.

Gardner Martin removed the goblet from his mouth with a serious expression.

"Ground arms!"

As he spoke, he raised the goblet above his eyes, pressed it against his forehead, and then placed it back on the dining table.

Vincent Lorraine and the others followed suit.

Then, they straightened their backs, slapped their left chests with their right hands, and shouted together, "War! War! War!"

As they shouted in unison, Lumian felt a subtle shift in the room's atmosphere, as if it had been filled with enthusiasm, excitement, and passion.

The atmosphere infected the Iron and Blood Cross Order members, connecting their hearts and minds, making them feel like true brothers.

Even without being influenced by any abnormality or fanatical thoughts, Lumian couldn't help but be affected by the environment and atmosphere. He felt a surge of excitement[1].

He had previously criticized the initiation ritual of the Iron and Blood Cross Order for lacking mystique and not living up to the title of a secret organization. Now, he realized that it was merely different in quality from the Aurora Order.

Besides, the more mystical part was the vigil at 13 Avenue du Marché.

Gardner Martin gestured with his right hand, prompting Faustino, Albus, and the others to stop and fall silent.

He smiled once again and said, "Let us welcome our new brother, Lumian Lee!"

This time, he used Lumian's real name, indicating that the Iron and Blood Cross Order knew the members' situations very well.

The Iron and Blood Cross Order members, including Supervisor Olson, applauded one after another. Lumian stood up and poured himself a goblet of red wine, which he downed in one gulp as a sign of respect.

This fully showcased his characteristics as a regular customer of Ol' Tavern.

"Very good. We're all brothers. There's no need to stand on ceremony," Gardner said as he took a seat. While Faustino distributed plates and cut bread, Gardner smiled and continued, "I've already explained the history and philosophy of our Iron and Blood Cross Order. Now, let's talk about what we want to do."

His smile vanished as he grew more serious.

"The most important thing we've always been working towards is to overthrow the current government, establish a country ruled by Beyonders, and transform this world. For this, we've been plotting and experimenting. We've established multiple branch organizations to prepare for chaos.

"Specifically, as for me, I'll use companies and mobs to control dockworkers, construction workers, porters, handymen, and laborers in the market district. When necessary, I'll let them take to the streets and use barricades to fight the police and army."

Lumian furrowed his brow and asked in confusion, "Isn't it said that Beyonders are fundamentally different from ordinary people? Beyonders are superior to ordinary people. Why make controlling and using workers a goal?"

He found it ironic that the Iron and Blood Cross Order's philosophy and actions were completely inconsistent.

Although this could be considered normal—concepts were concepts and slogans were slogans—and they couldn't be equated to reality, Gardner

Martin could always address these matters at a later time. It didn't feel right for his words to contradict himself just seconds later.

If he hadn't just joined this secret organization, Lumian's tone would have been even more mocking.

Gardner Martin grinned.

"Very perceptive. You've noticed a very important problem.

"Before this, only Albus suggested it. Everyone else naturally accepted it."

Not only is he using ordinary people to create chaos, but he also has other intentions? Lumian turned his head to glance at Albus, who was sitting at the edge of the dining table. He realized that the dark-red-haired young man's posture was rather casual. His right leg was crossed, and he kept shaking his ankle.

Gardner Martin explained simply, "First, you need to understand something. Why did those deities establish Churches and spread Their teachings?

"You probably don't buy the words 'God loves the world.' If They truly had love, the market district wouldn't be like this, and Intis wouldn't have so many tramps."

Lumian agreed with this. He nodded slightly and didn't interrupt the Commanding Officer.

Gardner Martin smiled and said, "We reckon that deities require believers, and we've proven this over the centuries.

"The more common folk we influence, the greater our resources to strike fear into the hearts of the Eternal Blazing Sun Church and the Church of the God of Steam and Machinery. This'll weaken their support for the current government and boost our chances during the riots.

"Eventually, it'll become a crucial bargaining chip to make them agree to us, if not outright support us."

"They're all just bargaining chips…" Lumian's eyes flickered.

The people he knew and interacted with were distinct individuals—unique families.

Gardner Martin let out a sigh.

"If we aim to control more workers and citizens, we need the government and the National Convention to cooperate with us.

"I've always known what kind of person Hugues Artois is and the forces behind him, but I still decided to support his bid for parliament. I knew he'd inevitably create plenty of chaos in the market district. Being associated with the National Convention and the government, the worse he performed, the more people would flock to our side. Unfortunately, this piece of trash was assassinated just a few days after being elected."

So, that's why the Savoie Mob supports Hugues Artois… I thought there was an evil god backing you, and the evil gods all support Hugues Artois… Lumian realized.

Without Gardner Martin's personal explanation and a proper understanding of the Iron and Blood Cross Order's philosophy, Lumian couldn't possibly fathom the secret organization's true intentions behind supporting Hugues Artois's candidacy for parliament.

Gardner Martin summarized, "Hence, in the market district, we place great importance on docks, depots, warehouses, freight companies, and construction firms. The Savoie Mob's purpose is to interact with various individuals and gather crucial information, all while contributing to the organization's funds.

"Naturally, mobs also serve as a vital tool to control ordinary people."

No wonder he poured so many resources into the Savoie Mob… Lumian glanced at the intense "Blood Glove" Black and inwardly mocked him for being better at acting than himself.

Haven't you heard the Boss's words countless times? Why are you still looking so focused?

Look at Albus, constantly eating, drinking, and shaking his leg.

After Lumian nodded, Gardner Martin took a sip of red wine and said, "One more thing we're doing is exploring the underground to find the entrance to Fourth Epoch Trier."

Lumian couldn't help but glance at the silent Supervisor Olson.

The lanky man, looking like a hungry bear, was slicing a medium-rare steak and devouring the juicy meat.

Lumian's eyes scanned Olson's neck several times, but there were no signs of sutures.

Could it be that the state of having only his head and spine is just an illusion created by some power? Lumian wondered to himself.

However, this was in line with the legend of Bansy Harbor!

Either Olson has a deep understanding of the unforeseen events in Bansy Harbor, or he encountered similar monsters elsewhere…

Even if it's an illusion, it can't be something he imagined. It must be based on his experience and knowledge…

Madam Magician said most of his words were likely true. She even suspected that he disappeared for a few months because he entered Fourth Epoch Trier…

Where did he encounter a monster with only its head and spine?

If he already entered Fourth Epoch Trier, why is Gardner Martin still searching for the entrance? Is Madam Magician's suspicion off? Lumian's thoughts raced as he made a series of guesses.

Looking at Gardner Martin, he asked in confusion, "Why search for Fourth Epoch Trier's entrance?"

Gardner Martin grinned.

"To other Beyonders, it's hell, an abyss. It's a calamity they can't approach, but to Hunters, it represents a massive treasure trove.

"And our Iron and Blood Cross Order is dominated by Beyonders of the Hunter pathway."

"A treasure trove?" Lumian thought of the Tree of Shadow and the invisible sea of flames that could incinerate a portion of the tree roots.

Gardner Martin continued, speaking solemnly, "I don't know how much you know about the history of the Fourth Epoch, but I can tell you that in that era, deities once walked the earth, and angels often appeared. It was known as the Age of the Gods.

"In the Northern Continent, there were three powerful countries during the Age of the Gods, and one of them was the Tudor Empire. Its capital, Trier, had sunk underground.

"The Tudor Empire's Emperor, Alista Tudor, was known as the Blood Emperor. He was a true deity who controlled the Hunter pathway!

"He perished in a battle of gods. His remains are in Fourth Epoch Trier!"

Blood Emperor Tudor's remains? Lumian instantly recalled some of the contents of Aurore's grimoires. Aurore didn't delve deeply into the history of the Fourth Epoch, only having a rough understanding. She mentioned the Solomon Empire, the Trunsoest Empire, and the Tudor Empire. She also mentioned titles like the Blood Emperor, the Night Emperor, the Emperor of the Underworld, the Black Emperor, and the War of the Four Emperors.

According to Aurore's description, the Blood Emperor was as powerful as a deity.

[1] Adapted from a ritual conducted by the Les Neuf Sœurs.

Chapter 285: Maxim

The Blood Emperor's remains, the remains of a deity… Does it hold the Beyonder characteristic of Sequence 0? No wonder the Iron and Blood Cross Order dreams of entering Fourth Epoch Trier…

But what's this got to do with me? As a Sequence 7, I don't even dare think about becoming a demigod. Advancing to a Sequence 6 Conspirer is beyond my consideration for now. All I can focus on is digesting the Pyromaniac potion. I've got nothing better to do than contemplate High-Sequences or deity-related items!

Besides, Madam Magician warned that such items always come with negative effects. Tsk, negative effects involving godhood can easily kill me…

Lumian, with vast knowledge of high-end mysticism, remained unfazed by Gardner Martin's provocation. Thoughts raced through his mind, and he sneered inwardly.

Looking at Gardner Martin, he asked innocently, "If Fourth Epoch Trier truly contains the remains of The Blood Emperor Tudor, why didn't the Eternal Blazing Sun and God of Steam and Machinery Church take it away instead of leaving it for our Iron and Blood Cross Order?

"Even if only Hunters can enter safely, it's just a matter of time before they nurture a High-Sequence Hunter with the resources they have. The Fifth Epoch has been around for over 1,300 years."

Gardner Martin fell silent for two seconds before responding, "There are other factors restraining them, but they won't be a problem for us.

"I'll tell you all the details once we find the entrance to Fourth Epoch Trier."

Isn't that just saying, "I don't know why, but we have to give it a try?" Uh, maybe the Boss knows the reason, but he's afraid of scaring us if he reveals it. He can't directly tell the present members that there are many dangers hidden underground that even deities can't resolve—the kind that requires rebuilding a Trier above the Fourth Epoch ruins as a seal. That's why the two Churches won't attempt to enter. Heh heh, who would dare to go underground when they're not seriously corrupted? Lumian tried his best to control his gaze and posture, so as not to show any air of superiority.

Compared to the members of the Iron and Blood Cross Order here, him having a rough understanding of the underground situation and having seen the Invisible Sea of Fire, the Tree of Shadow, and the bizarre catacombs indeed made him qualified to be superior.

Of course, he had no idea how well Commanding Officer Gardner Martin and Supervisor Olson knew about the underground situation.

Perhaps the latter, suspected to have entered Fourth Epoch Trier, knew more secrets.

Gardner Martin didn't continue discussing the Blood Emperor and the Fourth Epoch. Instead, he turned to Lumian and asked, "Is there anything you need these days?"

Oh, are you about to hand out the membership perks? Lumian's spirits lifted as he replied with sincerity, "I'm in need of a mystical item with peculiar properties to compensate for my deficiencies in Beyonder powers.

"And if there are no relevant mystical items available, perhaps you could provide me with the corresponding Beyonder… ingredients. I'll try to find an Artisan to craft them."

He had almost mentioned the term "Beyonder characteristics" but quickly changed it to "Beyonder ingredients" after a pause, feigning embarrassment.

Though people often spoke of Beyonder characteristics at Trier's mysticism gathering, they usually referred to the fusion of two main potion ingredients.

Of course, some people had long discovered that Beyonders were also Beyonder creatures, capable of producing ingredients for potion concoction, hinting at the Law of Beyonder Characteristics Indestructibility.

Typically, Lumian's mention of Beyonder characteristics wouldn't attract suspicion or attention, but he needed to be cautious not to arouse suspicion from a Conspirer like Gardner Martin.

"Heh, you really dare to ask?" Albus mocked Lumian, shaking his feet with crossed legs.

Even Parsifal, Vincent Lorraine, and the others wore strange expressions.

None of them had dared to make such a bold request when they joined the Iron and Blood Cross Order.

Undeterred, Lumian sneered back at Albus, "Why not? I'm not like some piece of trash who can't handle a reward. What the organization gives me today, I'll repay tenfold in the future!"

With a whoosh, Albus lowered his right leg and glared at Lumian with fiery intensity, clearly displeased with his response.

The others, except for Faustino who maintained his butler demeanor, also showed discontent.

Lumian's snide remark had included them as well.

"Enough," Gardner Martin intervened, smiling at Lumian. "As the Commanding Officer, I must be fair. I can't grant you a mystical item right now, as others will protest. But don't worry; our Iron and Blood Cross Order is not stingy. Once you complete a few missions and accumulate enough merit, I'll provide you with a few mystical items to choose from.

"Meanwhile, before each mission, suitable mystical items will be temporarily provided to the participating members, ensuring their safety and mission completion."

Lumian nodded, accepting the response. He hadn't expected much, but he still made the request in case Gardner Martin was in a generous mood.

After a brief consideration, Gardner Martin added, "I'll inform René that the advance you received was my reward to you. You'll still get your share from Salle de Bal Brise in the future."

"Thank you, CO Sir," Lumian expressed his joy openly.

This meant his membership door gift was 12,000 verl d'or, a significant sum.

Hence, most of the money he spent on advancing to Pyromaniac came from the Aurora Order and the Iron and Blood Cross Order's "financing." His gratitude was genuine, as he had only contributed less than a third of the expenses himself.

Gardner Martin cut into a medium steak, chewing and swallowing before asking, "Any other questions?"

Deliberately, Lumian inquired, "How can I quickly master the Pyromaniac potion?"

He wanted to see if the acting method was common knowledge within the Iron and Blood Cross Order.

Gardner Martin chuckled and replied, "That's an excellent question.

"To master a potion, you need to start with its name. Get close to it, understand it, and embody it. In addition, I have to tell you a maxim: flames can both incinerate others and harm yourself."

Lumian listened attentively and got a rough idea of the situation.

The Iron and Blood Cross Order kept the precise interpretation of the acting method hidden from ordinary members, using vague descriptions, regulations, warnings, and maxims to guide them without revealing everything.

This approach allowed ordinary members to avoid certain risks while gradually gaining insights by sticking close to the potion's name. They could speed up their progress but couldn't fully grasp a more suitable acting principle for themselves,

In other words, it was easier for them to "master" the potion than wild Beyonders and advance in shorter periods. However, other than the talented, those who stuck close to the acting requirements couldn't compare to Beyonders who knew the acting method.

Lumian suspected that he would only learn the entire acting method once he became an NCO and received greater attention from the Iron and Blood Cross Order.

He believed that such a secretive organization spanning centuries must possess the acting method.

In contrast, Madam Magician of the Tarot Club had already given him extensive high-end mysticism knowledge, including the acting method.

As for Mr. K, Lumian was unsure if he had forgotten to teach the method due to devotion to his prayers and work or if he believed Lumian would naturally encounter it at the Iron and Blood Cross Order and exposing him to this knowledge too early would put him at risk of exposure.

"Pyromaniac is all about setting fires! Just go to the National Convention building and set it ablaze. You'll master the potion in no time," Albus taunted Lumian, pushing the matter.

Lumian scoffed and replied, "I'm a Pyromaniac, not an Arsonist. Meaningless acts of arson will only harm myself."

Albus sneered, "How do you know it's meaningless? Burning is the meaning."

Lumian clicked his tongue.

"Then why don't I burn your hair too?"

After engaging each other for a while in an argumentative manner, Gardner Martin intervened in the conversation, which was becoming increasingly meaningless and close to a personal attack.

Lumian shifted the conversation to probe the Iron and Blood Cross Order's knowledge of the underground.

"I went to the catacombs some time ago and sensed something amiss, but I couldn't figure out what it was. CO Sir, do you know anything about it?"

Gardner Martin glanced at Supervisor Olson beside him and finally replied, "That has nothing to do with our actions. You don't need to know.

"All I can say is that the danger lurking there is as serious as that in the Fourth Epoch Trier."

Lumian nodded thoughtfully and continued asking questions while enjoying the delicacies.

During the process, he noticed that Vincent Lorraine remained relatively quiet, and Parsifal and "Blood Palm" Black were amiable but guarded with their words, revealing little valuable information. Faustino seemed to play the role of a butler instead of the secret organization's official member.

Only the dark-red-haired Albus, despite his malicious and mocking comments, gave Lumian some useful insights.

By 10 p.m., the initiation concluded, and Lumian was the last to leave 11 Rue des Fontaines, boarding the carriage belonging to Salle de Bal Brise.

As the carriage moved, Lumian's heart skipped a beat as he looked up at the seat opposite him. At some point in time, another person had joined him—Supervisor Olson, who looked like a hungry bear.

The trader who played the underground monster!

Chapter 286: Magic Mirror Divination

Ignoring Lumian's tense state, Olson spoke in a deep, raspy voice, "As per tradition, I must speak to you in private as Supervisor."

Lumian let out a relieved breath. "About what?"

Olson placed the brown suitcase beside his left leg.

"If you discover anything suspicious about your Commanding Officer, Gardner Martin, or any abnormal occurrences, report them to me immediately."

That's only right. A spot will be vacated only if something happens to the Boss… Lumian thought silently with a hint of mockery before asking, "How do I contact you?"

Olson looked into Lumian's eyes and said, "Leave the information in the basement of 13 Avenue du Marché."

13 Avenue du Marché… The Iron and Blood Cross Order is indeed linked to the burned-down building… Olson might have entered Fourth Epoch Trier and is likely seriously corrupted. Does he have a way to exploit the anomaly at 13 Avenue du Marché? Lumian recalled the previous night and felt that Supervisor Olson was even more mysterious than Commanding Officer Gardner Martin.

He suspected that Olson was secretly monitoring his movements at 13 Avenue du Marché. Gardner Martin was clearly unwilling to enter unless necessary.

Combined with the burning of 13 Avenue du Marché over a decade ago, Mr. K had mentioned that the Iron and Blood Cross Order had drifted from the other organizations that believed in that entity in recent years. Madam Magician had mentioned that the current vigil ritual wasn't the Iron and Blood Cross Order's usual test. Lumian vaguely formulated an incomplete sequence of events in his mind.

He believed that 13 Avenue du Marché hadn't been burned down by the Iron and Blood Cross Order. However, they had subsequently discovered the secret there and suffered the corresponding corruption, evoking an abnormality.

Of course, it could be the other way around: perhaps some members of the Iron and Blood Cross Order had been corrupted elsewhere, allowing them to grasp the anomaly at 13 Avenue du Marché.

"Alright." Lumian nodded in agreement.

As Lumian's mind raced with questions, he turned to Supervisor Olson, a look of puzzlement on his face.

"Was the trader I saw in the Albert Mines really you? Can your head leave your body and survive autonomously? Or was that an illusion you created?"

Olson let out a husky chuckle before responding, "Coincidentally, as Supervisor, I have three things to tell you. Firstly, what the eyes see may not be true. Secondly, we will eventually enter the Fourth Epoch's Trier. It is an inevitability. And thirdly, don't readily trust in the words of others."

Don't readily trust in the words of others… Interesting. Should I believe your first point? What I saw in the Albert Mines was actually real? Heh heh, it's fine to talk about inevitability in front of me, but will Termiboros tolerate it? Lumian pondered, resisting the urge to place his right hand on his left chest.

Seeing Olson pick up the small brown suitcase again, Lumian couldn't help but ask, "What's in there? Why do you keep carrying it?"

Olson smiled.

"If I were you, I'd pray I never find out the answer."

With that, Supervisor Olson opened the carriage door and leaped into the darkness, disappearing instantly, without intentionally concealing himself as he had done when he first arrived.

"Acting all mysterious…" Lumian muttered under his breath.

Taking the carriage back to the bustling market district, he resisted the urge to hurry to Auberge du Coq Doré or the safe house on Rue des Blouses Blanches to contact Madam Magician's messenger and report his official admission into the Iron and Blood Cross Order. Instead, he made his way to Salle de Bal Brise.

His concern grew as he suspected that the treacherous members of the Iron and Blood Cross Order might be taking advantage of his relaxed state to continue their final, clandestine surveillance.

Although they couldn't locate Madam Magician's messenger, Lumian knew better than to return to Room 207 or the safe house at this time; it would surely raise suspicions.

Taking a seat at the bar counter, Lumian ordered a glass of Kirsch. As he savored the drink, he immersed himself in the lively song and dance happening on the stage.

Jenna had the night off, and the performers tonight were two other Showy Divas and a male underground singer known for his high-energy songs.

…

Hill District, outside the Deep Valley Cloister.

Wearing a silver-white half-mask, Jenna regarded Franca, who had donned an assassin's outfit, with concern.

"What are we going to do tonight?

"Don't tell me you're thinking of infiltrating the cloister for an investigation?"

"Of course not!" Franca denied vehemently. "The Deep Valley Cloister is one of the most well-known cloisters of the Church of the God of Steam and Machinery. They have powerful Beyonders and hide mysterious artifacts crafted by Artisan monks. With our abilities, we'd only be walking into a trap… or worse."

Franca couldn't help her mind from wandering.

She had heard rumors that though the monks in the cloister were focused on steam and machinery and didn't marry or have children, it didn't mean they refrained from sex with others.

The Church of the God of Steam and Machinery didn't prohibit such interactions!

Some said that some monks would seek out street girls from time to time to relax, while others engaged in affairs with colleagues or men who sold their bodies.

There were still a large number of people who had mechanical fetishes or were truly undergoing ascetic training, capable of controlling themselves.

Of course, Trieriens tended to exaggerate and embellish these rumors with their own ideas. It likely strayed far from the truth. Franca didn't entirely believe it, but she couldn't dismiss it entirely either.

She believed that some monks might have such inclinations, but they were likely not the majority. Nonetheless, infiltrating a cloister as a wild Beyonder was dangerous. They could be accidentally killed by machinery, used as experimental subjects, or become playthings for a select few monks. The chances of success were slim.

In short, whether male or female, anyone below Sequence 4 or lacking enough confidence ought to forget about infiltrating the Deep Valley Cloister.

Behind her hood, Franca smiled and explained in a good mood, "We scoured the area today, but found no clues. But there's one place we haven't checked."

Jenna thought for a moment and asked, "That Deep Valley Quarry?"

"That's right," Franca affirmed with a grin. "Tonight, we'll infiltrate it and conduct a search."

In truth, she didn't expect they would find anything since the official Beyonders had likely completed their investigations. Franca wanted to guide Jenna through the process and acquaint her with such matters.

"Okay." Jenna nodded slightly.

Franca saw this as an opportunity to instruct her, "Before we officially infiltrate, there's some preparatory work we must do."

"For Assassins, it's about familiarizing themselves with the environment, gathering information, and observing locations and routes. As for Witches, they must perform divinations beforehand."

With that, Franca took out a palm-sized mirror she always carried.

Jenna immediately focused.

She had long been intrigued by mirror-related Witch abilities.

Previously, after she assassinated Hugues Artois and fled to Auberge du Coq Doré, Franca heard that she had left blood at the scene. Franca had swiftly used Mirror Substitution to sever the mystical connection between Jenna's true self and the spilled blood.

Franca surveyed the area and spoke in hushed tones under the cover of evening shadows.

"When you become a Witch, you'll naturally master Magic Mirror Divination and Staff Divination. Learning other divination methods is easy for Witches.

"The key to successful Magic Mirror Divination is choosing the right entity to pray to. The mystical symbol of the mirror connects you to an unknown being, and their answers can be obtained through this connection. However, if the unknown entity holds malice or is in a state of madness, they may influence the divination or provide a result that traps you, putting you in danger.

"When the time comes, I'll give you a few relatively safe entities to pray to. These have been verified. Among them, the one with the most accurate divination results will require you to pay a corresponding price. Unless the matter is extremely critical and urgent, I usually avoid praying to him."

"What price?" Jenna's curiosity was piqued.

Franca cleared her throat awkwardly and said, "The price could lead to you experiencing social embarrassment or something not as severe, but it will certainly be uncomfortable."

She recalled the first time she prayed to that entity for Magic Mirror Divination. In front of Madam Judgment, she was asked, "When you're masturbating, do you occasionally fantasize about certain men and feel tempted to try new experiences?"

That question almost made her shatter the intermediary mirror. At the time, she had recently become a Witch and still identified fully as a man, even though her body had already transformed into a woman's. It was natural that she would occasionally fantasize, but this revelation made her feel guilty and ashamed. Yet, she was forced to answer honestly in front of a demigod.

Even now, Franca couldn't help but cringe at the memory, wanting to bury her head in the sand and avoid any recollection.

What was social death? This was it!

Franca believed that this incident had affected her when she subsequently approached Gardner Martin to give it a shot. This caused a crack in her psychological defense and make her give up on herself.

Embarrassment… Social death… Jenna understood the implication behind Franca's words. Though Jenna had her thoughts, she chose not to voice them aloud.

Franca provided a brief explanation of Magic Mirror Divination, concluding with a demonstration. She gently caressed the surface of the mirror and recited the name of a safe entity.

As an aqueous light shimmered in the mirror, she posed a serious question, "Will exploring Trier's Deep Valley Quarry tonight be dangerous?"

Since it was a question-based divination, the requirements for the statements weren't too stringent.

Under Jenna's curious and hopeful gaze, a deep, old voice emanated from the mirror, as if it had emerged from the depths of a river. "There is a certain level of danger."

Chapter 287: Key

Franca finished the Magic Mirror Divination and then turned to Jenna, giving her interpretation of the answer.

"Normally, this means it's dangerous, but we can handle it. If we're careful, we should be fine."

Jenna asked in surprise, "I thought the divination results would be straightforward."

Surprisingly, such a brief sentence came with such a long explanation.

"It's straightforward!" Franca emphasized with a smile. "If you visit the Divination Club in Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative and find amateurs, their readings will be even vaguer. It makes it easier for them to interpret any result. Oh, have you never had anyone do divination for you before?"

Jenna nodded frankly.

Performing a divination cost a fortune!

Franca looked thoughtful, her eyes darting around.

"You can subscribe to Psychic, Lotus, Arcane, and Hidden Veil. While they have their problems and errors in specific applications, they offer valuable basic knowledge about mysticism.

"Ah, right. Ciel often buys those magazines. You can… Uh, I'll help you borrow them!"

"Alright." Jenna had only heard of mysticism magazines but had never bought one.

Having obtained satisfactory divination results, the duo, who had observed the route and surroundings during the day, swiftly arrived at the entrance of Deep Valley Quarry under the cover of the night.

The gatekeeper, who seemed to be in his forties, was sleeping in a small hut made of rocks. Wrapped in a dirty, old, and thin felt cloth, he leaned against the mountain wall.

Suddenly, a slender, smooth palm reached out from the shadow beside him, covering his mouth with a white handkerchief.

The gatekeeper didn't struggle. Within seconds, he went from slumbering to unconsciousness.

Franca, wearing a black hood, emerged from the shadows and clicked her tongue, sighing.

"The Bliss Society's sedative is really effective. It saves me a lot of trouble."

For this operation, she had borrowed Rentas's sedative from Lumian.

Jenna couldn't understand. "Couldn't we just knock him out?"

"That would work," Franca explained casually, "but that would leave traces. It won't be easy to make it seem like he's still asleep. Many bounty hunters and private detectives are involved in this mission. We shouldn't be the only ones targeting this quarry. So, it's better to be cautious and avoid leaving any loose ends."

Jenna, who had lived in Quartier du Jardin Botanique and the market district for many years, roughly understood Franca's point. She pondered for a moment and asked, "Are you worried that the bounty hunters and private detectives will have ill intentions if they find us entering the quarry ahead of them in the dead of night?"

Franca nodded, satisfied with her response.

"That's right. Many bounty hunters and private detectives switch to becoming bandits, robbers, and even murderers, depending on the situation and their surroundings.

"They take risks for money, not for justice. Since there are no leads for this mission and the current environment is suitable, it's in line with their style to steal from their peers and eliminate competition. After all, there's no one else here.

"Of course, with our strength, we don't have to fear bounty hunters and private detectives. But what if we make a similar mistake in another situation or face something more dangerous? That's why we have to be mindful from the beginning."

What Franca didn't say was that, being women, they might likely suffer more.

Jenna nodded slowly, agreeing with the reasoning.

She had seen criminals kill an old man living alone for just 5 verl d'or.

Franca smiled and teased, "Did you want me to knock him out to get back at him for asking if you wanted to join the street girl business this morning?"

"Dammit! Am I such a petty person?" Jenna couldn't help but curse.

Whether it was during her years helping her mother with chores or when she was a local singer in the market district, she had been asked if she wanted to be involved in the street girl business so many times that she was used to it. She was a little angry, but not too much.

To show her magnanimity, Jenna exhaled and said, "When you use that sedative on others, it reminds me of what happened to me."

She had also been drugged and nearly became a victim that disappeared. Fortunately, she had encountered Lumian.

Franca simply acknowledged her words.

"I understand your feelings, but since you've embarked on the path of the divine and intend to become stronger, you'll have to use various means to deal with your enemies in the future. You can't give up on a better option just because you feel a little repulsed."

Jenna knew Franca had a point, but she couldn't help asking, "Can't a Beyonder lead a quiet, ordinary life without being drawn into conflicts and battles while protecting loved ones?"

"In the past, maybe it was feasible, but nowadays it's exceedingly challenging. The more you advance, the harder it gets until it's virtually impossible," Franca replied with a sigh.

Jenna fell silent for a moment before saying, "Could it ever be possible in the distant future, I wonder?"

Franca glanced at the "slumbering" gatekeeper and answered, "That prominent figure once told me that such a life might be attainable at the end of the Fifth Epoch and the beginning of the Sixth Epoch, if there's even a Sixth Epoch at all."

Sixth Epoch… Those words made Jenna reflect for a few seconds before she burst into laughter at herself.

"I guess it's just wishful thinking on my part. Achieving that kind of life is simply an illusion. At least, it is for me. With superpowers and a history of attempted assassination, I know I'd be unable to stand idly by if my family and friends faced hardship. I'd feel compelled to use my abilities to tackle problems that go beyond what the law and police can handle."

Franca nodded in agreement. "That's just the way it is."

She hadn't simply digested the Assassin and Instigator potions hoping her attire alone would do the trick, nor had she only encouraged her friends by instigating them.

Without much ado, Franca bent down and picked up the brass key from the gatekeeper.

"There's just one door. Why are there so many keys? Are they all for his house?" Franca muttered as she exited the hut and walked toward the entrance of Deep Valley Quarry. She tried each key, one after the other.

In the end, she muttered to herself in shock and suspicion, "None of it is right…"

"None of them are right?" Jenna hadn't expected such a possibility.

If not a single key could unlock the entrance to Deep Valley Quarry, what was the point of watching the door?

Franca said, partly instructing and partly thinking aloud, "Perhaps this set of keys is a decoy. The real key must be hidden somewhere else."

She then said to Jenna, "Search the area. I'll take a look at the gatekeeper."

Jenna didn't object. With her Night Vision, she began searching the nearby bushes and crevices starting from the hut.

Franca squatted beside the gatekeeper and meticulously searched his body from head to toe.

When she reached his crotch, she bent her finger and flicked it firmly. She sneered and whispered, "Jenna may not be petty, but I am!"

After their search, the two of them met at the heavy wooden door, shaking their heads to signal they had found nothing.

Franca clicked her tongue and said, "There's definitely something wrong with this quarry.

"That guy is truly a gatekeeper. He's only meant to watch the door but lacks the ability to open it!"

"Are we still going in?" Jenna asked hesitantly.

"I'll give it another shot." Franca extended her right hand to the copper lock embedded in the heavy wooden door.

Thick frost emerged from her palm, filling the keyhole.

The frost continued to accumulate and compress until it finally solidified into ice.

Franca skillfully extracted the ice block, revealing a transparent key.

That works? Jenna was surprised and eager to see what happened next.

Sensing her gaze, Franca said smugly, "I have a friend, you see—I really have a friend—one who's quite skilled at picking locks. We had a conversation about using a Witch's power for such purposes."

Once she made the ice more solid, Franca inserted it into the keyhole again and twisted it gently.

With a click, the heavy wooden door swung open.

Franca retracted the ice key and allowed it to melt, erasing all traces.

Before venturing into Deep Valley Quarry, the Witch hung the brass key back on the gatekeeper's waist and adjusted his posture to make him appear asleep.

With that done, Franca fetched a pouch of coins and took out a thick iron-colored ring adorned with tiny spikes.

"This is the Ring of Punishment I mentioned before. You'll wear it today. I've already explained how to use it and its taboos. One thing to remember: you can't use it more than three times within an hour. Also, take it off immediately after the operation and put it back in this coin bag."

"Alright." Jenna extended her left hand and allowed Franca to put the iron-colored ring on her middle finger, keeping their skin in contact.

Franca couldn't contain her inexplicable joy as she adjusted her hood, confidently pushed open the creaky wooden door, and stepped into Deep Valley Quarry.

Once Jenna joined her inside, she made sure to close and lock the wooden door behind them.

This made it nearly impossible for anyone outside to detect their presence within the quarry.

As skilled Assassins with night vision, Franca and Jenna didn't rely on carbide lamps, yet they could easily see everything within the tunnel.

The passageway was in a state of disrepair, covered in moss, and with cracks running along the stone walls, giving an ominous feeling that any moment, a piece might collapse.

A short distance ahead, they noticed an empty hole, no different from the other underground ones they had seen before.

For almost half an hour, Jenna and Franca diligently searched the small area, looking for any signs of suspicious activity, but their efforts yielded no results.

"Something's definitely not right," Franca whispered, her voice barely audible, as they returned to the spot near the tunnel entrance.

The complete absence of anything unusual happening made them even more suspicious about the gatekeeper not having the key to unlock the door.

Jenna pondered for a moment and then suggested, "Maybe he's afraid that someone might storm in and cause the mine to collapse, so he decided to keep the key away. A gatekeeper's job is only to intercept, not to open the door."

Before Franca could say something, they heard a distinct click.

It was the sound of the Deep Valley Quarry's door opening!

Franca and Jenna exchanged glances and quickly found cover not far from the exit of the tunnel.

The quarry door creaked open, and the soft bluish glow of a carbide lamp spilled out, pushing back the darkness in the tunnel.

Franca and Jenna peeked out and caught sight of a man in a gray robe.

The man had a white apron wrapped around his waist, a typical garment worn by ancient stonemasons. The hood of his robe rested at the back of his neck, not covering his head.

Such attire was commonly associated with ascetics or monks of the God of Steam and Machinery Church.

Holding a lit carbide lamp, the monk had dark, short hair. His left eye was a mesmerizing combination of iron-gray gears, screws, and springs, all supporting an emerald-green crystalline false eye.

Chapter 288: Self-Recommendation

In the city of Trier, prosthetic eyes were not a common sight, but there were still a fair number of people who wore them. But Jenna and Franca had never seen anyone take mechanizing a quarter of their faces for a prosthetic eye to this extent.

However, when they recalled that the monk was suspected to be from the Church of the God of Steam and Machinery, it made sense. Fanatical devotion to machinery was their hallmark!

Carrying a carbide lamp and wearing a white apron like a stonemason, the monk entered the tunnel step by step. His emerald-green prosthetic eye, surrounded by gears and springs, seemed to possess a life of its own as it rotated left and right, scanning the surroundings.

Franca tugged at Jenna, signaling for her not to look towards the tunnel. She was to quickly avert her gaze to avoid detection.

The two of them slunk deeper into the shadows, hiding beyond the reach of the carbide lamp's light.

The gray-robed, hooded monk from the Church of the God of Steam and Machinery advanced slowly, surveying his surroundings as he approached the bottom of Deep Valley Quarry, the area that had collapsed and been buried.

Thanks to their Assassin abilities and the cover of darkness, Jenna and Franca remained undetected. They waited until the monk was far away before quietly peeking out from their hiding spot, eyes fixed on his back.

The monk stopped beside the collapsed area, extending his right palm which glinted with an iron-like metallic sheen, grasping a protrusion on the wall.

A grinding sound echoed as if multiple massive gears were slowly rotating and meshing.

The stone wall cracked open as metal chains extended out from behind each rock. The rocks bloomed like flowers, revealing a dark cave behind.

With the help of the monk's carbide lamp and their eagle-eyed Assassin vision, Franca and Jenna could see a thin white fog inside the cave and arms and legs embedded in the rock walls—human arms and legs!

Some were still fresh while others had shriveled, but there were no signs of decay.

Jenna and Franca exchanged shocked and fearful looks.

As the monk entered the cave and triggered a mechanism, the metal chains relaxed, allowing the rocks to return to their original positions, leaving only faint cracks as signs of the hidden entrance.

So that's how it is… I assumed the cracks were from a collapse, so I didn't inspect them… Franca realized why they hadn't noticed anything amiss before.

She tugged Jenna's arm and whispered, "Let's get out of here first and come back another time."

Having discovered the secret and knowing how to open it, there was no need to confront the monk from the God of Steam and Machinery Church directly. They could return later!

Jenna nodded slightly, twirled the Ring of Punishment on her finger, and crouched down. She followed Franca away from their hiding spot and back through the tunnel to the entrance of Deep Valley Quarry.

Seeing Jenna about to open the door, Franca quickly stopped her and whispered, "No hurry."

"Why?" Jenna asked, puzzled.

Franca straightened instinctively and smiled.

"Just because one monk went in doesn't mean he's alone. Perhaps there are two companions outside, guarding against intruders. If we stroll out casually, we might expose ourselves and get attacked! Besides, the gatekeeper could be awake already."

Jenna looked a little abashed. "You're right."

Franca consoled her immediately, "It's just experience. Now you know better for the future."

She took out a palm-sized mirror and handed it to Jenna. "Help me carry this. I'll scout ahead. If I get ambushed, take the chance to hide in the shadows by the door and sneak out with the mirror."

Realizing Franca intended to use Mirror Substitution, Jenna agreed without hesitation.

Franca carefully opened the heavy wooden door a crack and peeked out.

The only sounds were chirping insects and frogs. All was still otherwise.

The door opened wider and Franca slipped out into the darkness beyond the crimson moonlight's reach.

Jenna gripped the mirror tightly, tense and ready.

After more than ten seconds, Franca returned and whispered, "It's clear, let's go."

Jenna exhaled in relief and darted out, closing the door silently behind them.

As they left the quarry, they glanced at the rock-walled "hut" and saw the gatekeeper still asleep, but in a different posture.

From a distance, Franca noticed a red and swollen mark under his ear. "He was knocked out, not drugged…" she murmured with a frown.

Jenna recalled the cybernetic-eyed monk and pointed at the quarry door. "The one inside did it?"

Franca nodded gently. "Very likely. He doesn't want the gatekeeper to know he's here. Poor man, he probably fainted again before the sedative wore off."

Jenna smiled. "Or someone else knocked him out before we got here. Someone might have used some other method to knock him out."

"…" Franca paused, then sighed sympathetically. "If so, I feel bad for him."

Oblivious to each other, every group had dealt with the gatekeeper their own way. As a result, the poor man remained unconscious repeatedly.

Wasting no time, Jenna and Franca slipped away under the cover of the night.

…

Avenue du Marché, Salle de Bal Brise.

Lumian returned to the café upstairs, ordered a glass of red wine, and sipped it slowly.

After a while, Louis came up and whispered, "Boss, some bounty hunters are causing trouble at Salle de Gristmill, demanding a cut of the profits."

With the Poison Spur Mob's upper ranks destroyed, some remnants had been arrested, some had fled, some joined other mobs, and some found legitimate work. Their former businesses had been taken over at low prices by various factions.

The Savoie Mob got the largest share but now lacked manpower. Some industries operated fairly independently. Occasionally, opportunists tried to take advantage of the "power vacuum."

Lumian cracked his knuckles and grinned. "Send word asking if they want to be my enemies or my dogs."

He realized that after becoming a Pyromaniac, he had grown more aggressive. Itching for a fight after so long, his hands twitched in anticipation.

Furthermore, for someone to dare challenge a dance hall nominally belonging to the Savoie Mob, there might be one or two Beyonders among the bounty hunters. Lumian's Shadow Branch lacked a corresponding Beyonder characteristic.

"Yes, Boss!" Louis replied eagerly before hurrying downstairs to send the "invitation."

Lumian had planned to return to Auberge du Coq Doré to write Madam Magician but now waited patiently.

In less than half an hour, Louis returned with a man.

He appeared to be in his mid-thirties, wearing a cheap suit and black top hat. With brown hair, brown eyes, refined features, and a burly build, he could have been a protagonist at the Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons

Seeing Lumian, the man smiled, doffed his hat, and greeted, "Good evening, Boss."

"Who are you?" Lumian asked with an amiable smile.

The man replied solemnly, "Boss, didn't you ask me to be your dog?"

"…" Momentarily stunned, even the quick-witted Lumian needed a few seconds to respond.

He had said it purely to provoke them and see if they would retaliate.

After recovering, Lumian chuckled. "I told you to be a dog, and you'll really do it?"

"This is my big chance!" The man didn't seem ashamed at all, rather honored. "I believe following you will let me achieve my true worth. In time, I could even become your godson!"

How old are you? You're more fawning than "Giant" Simon… Interested, Lumian asked, "Why do you think I'll give you a chance?"

The man didn't answer immediately but glanced meaningfully at Louis and Sarkota, hinting for them to leave.

Unworried about assassination attempts, Lumian had them exit before smiling at the man. "Go on."

The man cleared his throat. "My name is Lugano Toscano, a Beyonder."

"Which pathway? What Sequence?" Lumian's eyebrows rose.

Lugano forced a smile. "I'm a Planter, Sequence 9."

Earth Mother Church's pathway? Lumian nodded thoughtfully. "From Feynapotter?"

"No, Riston Province," Lugano replied, smiling. "A few years ago, some friends and I became bounty hunters. I got to know a Feynapotter Beyonder and later acquired his belongings when he passed away."

A fellow countryman… Did you kill him or just conveniently profit from his death? Lumian gestured for him to continue.

Lugano chuckled. "I can now advance to Sequence 8 Doctor but lack funds for the potion ingredients. I've heard of your exploits, Boss, and believe you to be a powerful Beyonder. I also know the Savoie Mob lacks manpower, so I caused some trouble to meet you. I hope to work for you, help manage your estates, and earn money through hard work. Doctors are useful for ordinary people and Beyonders alike."

Chapter 289: Late Night Visitors

"Doctor?" Lumian recalled the two canisters of Healing Agent obtained from the Poison Spur Mob.

Their healing effects were quite impressive indeed.

Leaning back in his chair, Lumian gazed intently into Lugano Toscano's eyes, pondering silently for some time.

Gradually Lugano grew uneasy, his body tensing up.

Finally Lumian smiled.

"Salle de Gristmill isn't my property. I'm just managing it for the Boss.

"I'm not sure you can handle it, but I'll give you a chance."

Lugano visibly relaxed and smiled. "Boss, I won't let you down!"

Lumian raised his voice to call Louis over.

"From now on, you'll be Lugano's deputy at the Gristmill. Manage it together."

Is this for real? But why give an untested new recruit such an important post? Before Louis could react, Lumian had already turned to Lugano.

"You have two months. You and your friends will be the dance hall's protectors for now. Take a portion of the profits; negotiate the details with the manager."

He deliberately left the profit distribution vague, especially his own cut. He wanted to see what Lugano would do.

"Thank you, Boss!" Lugano's joy was unconcealed.

He nearly blurted out, "Once I'm a Doctor, I'll treat any illness or injury you have." But that felt like cursing misfortune upon Lumian, so he quickly sealed his lips.

Watching them leave while discussing the dance hall, Lumian's smile faded.

Lugano's fawning and zeal made him suspect ulterior motives, like him with Baron Brignais and the fake diamond necklace.

But Lumian had cowed the Baron by showing his might and madness. The key was proving the value of exploiting him. Lugano was more focused on ingratiation. Of course, he had revealed his usefulness too.

That's why Lumian decided to give him Salle de Gristmill for two months—to monitor any abnormalities and act quickly if the bounty hunter had hidden motives. Or gain a Doctor cheaply if he was clean.

Either way, it wouldn't cost Lumian anything. Salle de Gristmill belonged to the Savoie Mob; he would just lose some of his own share. That could be offset by Lugano stabilizing the unruly dance hall.

After sitting awhile, Lumian left for Room 207 at Auberge du Coq Doré. Drawing the curtains, he sat at the table and began writing.

"Esteemed Madam Magician,

"I've officially joined the Iron Blood Cross Order.

"The initiation ritual was…

"I'm puzzled. The Order has members clearly not from the Hunter pathway. How did they pass the vigil? Assassins? Or did Gardner confirm their trustworthiness some other way, bypassing corruption?"

He almost asked about entering 13 Avenue du Marché at special times, but that was surely monitored by official Beyonders. It was unlikely anyone could approach then.

After neatly folding the letter, Lumian summoned the doll messenger on the altar.

Wary, he asked, "Am I still being watched?"

"No," the doll slowly shook her head.

Relieved, Lumian scheduled reporting to Mr. K and heading to The Fool's cathedral for a sermon.

After nearly fifteen minutes, Madam Magician replied:

"I once heard from Mr. Fool's Oracle that a friend of his was originally in the Iron and Blood Cross Order but couldn't stand it and fled to sea.

"I didn't understand at first, but now I see—it's been hard on you."

It wasn't so bad. Watching them perform was rather interesting, a study in human diversity… Lumian didn't see an issue with it.

Something else concerned him more.

When mentioning the Oracle, Madam Magician didn't say "one of."

Lumian suspected Mr. Fool had only a single Oracle!

Meaning the Major Arcana card holders of the Divine Council weren't considered Oracles.

Pondering this, Lumian read on:

"They might be Assassins or used another corruption method.

"Remind the Two of Cups—if accepting the vigil, bring the ancient underground mirror. Other than keeping in mind not to respond, it's best to bring the ancient mirror that provides entry into the underground mirror world. Hunter/Demoness corruption likely differs. It may help."

That mirror… Mulling it over, Lumian swiftly burned the letter in crimson flames.

Just as he was about to wash up, he sensed something and glanced at the door.

A series of knocks promptly came.

"Who is it?" he called.

A strained voice answered, "Guess who I am."

Seated, Lumian looked helplessly at the bedbug-free ceiling. "Come in."

As expected, it was Franca and Jenna, dressed as Assassins.

"Here to play Fighting Evil?" he joked.

Franca scoffed, "I don't play cards with sore losers like you."

Having tricked many into drinking excessively over card games recently, Lumian had been winning at Fighting Evil with the ladies and mocking their poor skills. Suspecting cheating, Franca had intensely coached her dancers the past few days.

Entering, Franca added, "We're here to borrow mysticism magazines."

Lumian sneered. "Nice try. Why come so late just for that? Is waiting till morning not an option? Jenna doesn't seem the studying type."

He smiled. "What's really going on?"

The two gritted their teeth in sync.

After Franca shut the door, Jenna glanced around and whispered, "Are the walls too thin here? Could neighbors overhear us?"

Lumian smiled approvingly. "You're learning—thinking about eavesdroppers now. Not like before, blabbing recklessly without a care."

Before… Franca's suspicious gaze shifted from Jenna to Lumian, then from Lumian to Jenna.

"Dammit! "We didn't discuss anything important!" Jenna defended. "Why not mention Charlie? He spills secrets immediately."

Charlie? Franca's frown faded.

"It was fine—others were asleep or gone. That's why I didn't stop him." Lumian stood, ritual dagger in hand. Letting spirituality flow from the blade, he enveloped the room in a wall of spirituality.

The singing and rowdiness on the streets and the inn's noises instantly grew distant and muted.

Jenna was amazed. Franca pursed her lips and said to Jenna, "A basic wall of spirituality ritual. Once you become a Witch, you'll naturally master it."

At this point, she couldn't help but imagine what Witch Jenna would look like.

The two ladies sat side by side by Lumian's bed and discussed the missing Deep Valley Cloister gatekeeper, focused on their quarry findings tonight.

"What's down there? What should we do?" Franca returned Lumian's sedative.

Lumian smiled at his companion who wasn't wearing red boots. "Don't you have an answer already?"

With Franca's experience, she surely had a plan by now.

Franca smiled awkwardly. "Just wanted your thoughts."

"My thoughts?" Lumian joked, "Sneak in while the monk's away for that 20,000 verl d'or!"

Jenna looked around warily. "Meaning it's too dangerous to investigate further?"

Having heard Lumian's mockery countless times now, she could distinguish sarcasm, well-meaning teasing, and jokes.

"Right," said Franca. "Recalling the client, there seems to be an internal Deep Valley Cloister conflict—someone hiding, someone exposing. Meddling in an orthodox Church's internal conflict is dangerous for any Beyonder."

"Internal conflict?" Jenna was startled.

Lumian chuckled. "A missing gatekeeper, and some random person offers 20,000 to find him, even just the corpse? And said corpse needs to be carried to the Deep Valley Cloister. Clearly wants someone to see it."

Jenna was almost convinced, but she still had a lot of doubts. "B-but the limbs in the cave seem too sinister for an orthodox Church."

Chapter 290: Lavigny Docks

"Er…" Franca deliberated briefly before telling Jenna, "When it comes to losing control and madness, orthodox or wild Beyonder—all are equal. Those monks can become monsters too, or have mental problems and walk the abyss."

Jenna grew grave as she listened.

It wasn't the first time Franca had said something similar, but without personal experience, the full cruelty and horror of those words never quite sunk in. Seeing the limbs in the dark cave had driven home the visceral reality of losing control and madness.

Lumian added meaningfully, "That's why the acting method is so important."

"But never forget you're only acting. You should know very well being a theater actress—you mustn't lose yourself in a role. Even without being a Beyonder, that path leads to mental issues." Franca and Lumian educated the newcomer one after another.

Jenna nodded solemnly.

Franca returned to the missing gatekeeper. "My plan is this—reveal the cave anonymously to the Eternal Blazing Sun Church via my sources. How they handle it is their affair. Even if they suppress it, they'll be vigilant against trouble now. I'll also inform the client and see his reaction. We might get paid for our work."

She chose the Eternal Blazing Sun Church over the God of Steam and Machinery Church Beyonders, unsure which side was trustworthy in this internal conflict.

"No objections here," Jenna conceded after hearing their advice, shelving her longing for the 20,000 verl d'or reward.

Franca turned to Lumian. "I've found a buyer for Harvest Sacrifice, but the deal isn't finalized yet. Offer is 10,000 verl d'or. I gave you 4,000 already, and can give you another 1,000 in two days."

"Very efficient." Lumian smiled approvingly.

"Can't tell if that's praise or mockery," Franca muttered.

Jenna listened enviously. 10,000 verl d'or was casual business for them, while her family struggled to pay 7,000-8,000 for the treatment of her mother.

This is what it means to be a Beyonder… Her understanding grew clearer.

Glancing at the curtains, Lumian didn't get Jenna to leave. "Last night, I completed the test and officially joined the Boss's inner circle."

"What kind of test?" Still aggrieved, Franca had already vented her anger once, leaving mostly curiosity.

Lumian described Gardner's late visit to Salle de Bal Brise, how he was requested to stay the night at 13 Avenue du Marché, and him overcoming the abnormal corruption until sunrise.

He concealed Termiboros, portraying himself as intelligent, decisive, perceptive and steadfast—grasping the crux with just a few details and adhering to the principle of no response despite the influences.

Lumian excelled at fabrication.

Franca still felt lingering fear and suspicion. "You really didn't waver at all?"

Jenna agreed—she would have responded the moment the door opened. Franca might have lasted until her face bled.

Lumian chuckled. "I definitely felt some uncertainty, but I trusted my judgment more."

Franca sized him up doubtfully. "You really thought of not responding by yourself?"

"No." Lumian ended the fiction honestly.

"…" The ladies were stunned.

Lumian seized the chance to divert attention, smiling. "Don't be daft. A recently graduated mysticism novice like me could never think of that. I got intelligence beforehand of course. If you do the vigil, remember—do not respond, and take the mirror that provides entry into the underground mirror world. 13 Avenue du Marché's abnormalities may differ by pathway."

Enlightened, Franca grasped his source. She muttered, "No girlfriend for you with that attitude!"

She had almost been provoked just now, let alone a real woman. Relieved, Franca thought the rascal Ciel had no romantic prospects currently.

While still irked by the mockery, Jenna also regained confidence.

She had thought her intelligence irredeemably inferior to Ciel's.

Admirably, he had firmly trusted the intelligence and not wavered.

She pursed her lips and said, "I'm seeing more of the mysticism world's horrors."

The 13 Avenue du Marché abnormality was even more terrifying than the Deep Valley Quarry's secret cave scene. By comparison, her underground ordeal with Hedsey seemed just a criminal case.

"There will be more such occurrences in the coming years." Franca seized every chance to motivate Jenna's advancement.

Lumian then mentioned his guess that Avenue du Marché 13 only affected Beyonders of the Hunter and Demoness pathways at specific times.

Discussing a while longer, the ladies left with a stack of mysticism magazines, returning to Rue des Blouses Blanches.

…

At 3 p.m. the next day, Lumian, who had been playing the part at Salle de Bal Brise all day, arrived at Lavigny Docks in the square district by taking multiple public carriages, ready to hear The Fool bishop's sermon.

It was a lively inland river port, teeming with steam ships emitting white fog. Countless dockworkers used various tools and their strength to move crates of goods and stack them on flat surfaces along the tracks.

Massive machines towered over the docks, some standing more than ten to twenty meters tall, made entirely of steel components. Operated by massive steam engines and controlled by technicians, they effortlessly lifted steel crates that would be impossible for humans to move.

Lumian observed the chaotic and bustling scene, a mix of spectacular sights and grimy realities.

He strolled around the dock, acting like a carefree tourist rather than inquiring about The Fool cathedral's location from suspicious foreigners.

Buildings surrounded the harbor, housing bars, motels, warehouses, beer houses, cafés, restaurants, and dance halls. Street vendors loudly peddled their goods along the paths.

Lumian also noticed frosted glass windows with green shutters, indicating licensed brothels.

After taking a long detour, Lumian finally arrived at Mr. Fool's cathedral.

It looked like an ordinary four-story house with a bell tower and pointed roof, completely black. Engraved on the outer wall was the familiar mystical symbol: Mr. Fool's symbol, a silvery-white symbol composed of an incomplete Pupil-less Eye and a portion of Contorted Lines.

Before entering, Lumian took his time, continuing to explore the area as if he were casually shopping.

As a Hunter, it was second nature for him to assess his surroundings when he had the chance.

After walking for a while, Lumian chose a bar called Sea Breeze to gather information about The Fool cathedral from merchants, sailors, and locals.

The interior of Sea Breeze was decorated like a cabin, with taxidermied fish, rudders, and sail fragments adorning the walls. The air was thick with the scent of liquor and cheap cosmetics.

Some sailors sat together, engrossed in a card game, while others were seen in the company of street girls. At the bar counter, a few were enjoying drinks and boasting.

Lumian scanned the area and noticed a man who immediately caught his attention.

This man sat in an armchair near the bar, exuding an air of arrogance as he casually rested his hands on the chair's back. He occasionally sipped his wheat beer, propping his legs up on the small round table.

It wasn't just the man's demeanor that intrigued Lumian, but the way the other sailors behaved around him.

They either kept their distance, giving the area a wide berth, or approached with deferential expressions. Even if they were teased by the man, they seemed honored to be in his presence.

A significant figure from the sea, perhaps? Lumian speculated silently as he subtly studied the man.

The man appeared to be in his thirties, dressed in a linen shirt, a brown vest, dark brown pants, and sturdy black leather boots. His eyebrows and hair were charred yellow, like they had been kissed by flames. His bright, dark blue eyes and facial features hinted at a southern Intis heritage.

Feeling Lumian's gaze on him, the man smiled and lifted his wheat beer in a toast.

Returning the smile, Lumian made his way to the bar counter, ordering a glass of Lanti Proof, a favorite among pirates and sailors.

Taking a sip of the flavorful and potent malt liquor, Lumian couldn't contain his curiosity. He nodded towards the nearby armchair and asked the bartender in a hushed tone,

"Who is that?"

The bartender's expression turned serious as he responded in a deep voice, "You don't know him?"

To him, not recognizing that individual was rather surprising.

Chapter 291: Important Figure

Lumian set his glass down and flashed a smile, speaking in Intisian but with the accent of the Riston Province.

"I arrived in Trier just two days ago. Came to Lavigne in search of work."

Thanks to Aurore's help, he could speak like a local from Trier, shedding his Riston Province Dariège accent. Having spent six years in Cordu, he had a knack for learning, imitating, and adapting to new dialects effortlessly.

The tired bartender looked around as if he hadn't slept well and spoke cautiously, "That's the famous Blazing Danitz, a significant figure at sea!"

"I've never heard of him," Lumian replied bluntly.

The bartender cleared his throat, reminding Lumian to watch his tone and attitude.

"Have you heard about the six Pirate Kings and nine Pirate Admirals?"

"A little," Lumian honestly admitted.

His knowledge about the Pirate Kings and Pirate Admirals came from newspapers and adventure novels, and he was aware of Gehrman Sparrow hunting down a few. He knew that the great adventurer's servant, Dubois, had once served as a pirate on Vice Admiral Iceberg's ship. He knew of Ailment Maiden or Vice Admiral Ailment, and the frequent change of Pirate Admirals. As for the Pirate Kings, they were well-established and had held their positions for so long that no one could remember when they first came to power.

Realizing Lumian wasn't completely ignorant, the bartender breathed a sigh of relief.

"That individual used to be a pirate, acknowledged to be stronger than all the Pirate Admirals, second only to the six Pirate Kings."

Quite impressive… Lumian couldn't determine the exact Sequences of the Pirate Admirals and Pirate Kings, but their survival despite constant pursuit by the authorities showed they weren't weak.

Blazing Danitz ranked seventh among the pirates, almost reaching the level of a quasi-Pirate King. He was undeniably formidable!

A Saint? If he's one, the same can be said for the Pirate Kings… The strongest among Sequence 5s? Lumian quickly grasped the bartender's words.

"Used to be?"

"Yes, used to be. He's no longer a pirate or a Treasure Hunter. Look, there's no wanted poster of him on the wall." The bartender gestured around.

But there's my wanted poster… Thankfully, the bounty is low. It's tucked away in a corner where no one pays attention… Lumian asked curiously, "He can just stop being a pirate because he wants to? Did the authorities cooperate and revoke his wanted poster?"

Which country or orthodox Church did he surrender to?

The bartender lowered his voice even further.

"He's now a member of the Church of The Fool, the envoy of that deity."

Mr. Fool's Oracle? Perhaps that one and only Oracle? Lumian was taken aback.

The bartender assumed Lumian wasn't familiar with the Church of The Fool, so he explained, "That's a deity recognized by all orthodox Churches. Heh heh, why would a deity choose such a name?

"The Fool's faith is very popular at sea. Many sea merchants and sailors believe in Him. They even pooled money to build The Fool cathedral in Lavigny."

"The cathedral's bishop is that Oracle?" Lumian deliberately lowered his voice.

"No." The bartender shook his head. "But Blazing Danitz often comes to Trier. He likes it here. Yes, he's from Intis. There isn't an Intisian who doesn't long for Trier."

Just as Lumian was about to say something, the important figure at sea, the Oracle of The Fool's Church, Blazing Danitz, finished his remaining wheat beer and stood up, heading towards Sea Breeze's entrance.

Almost simultaneously, the sailors—playing cards, drinking, boasting, and making out with street girls—stood up in an unusually orderly fashion.

They didn't cause any commotion as they silently and orderly followed Blazing Danitz out of the bar.

If he hadn't witnessed this scene, Lumian wouldn't have realized that all the sailors in the bar were subordinates of The Fool's Oracle.

Blazing Danitz… From his nickname, he deals with fire… Could he also be from the Hunter pathway? Lumian sipped his Lanti Proof and chatted with the bartender about the Church of The Fool.

"What kind of deity is The Fool?"

The bartender gestured a triangular Sacred Emblem on his chest and shook his head.

"I'm not a follower, so how would I know?"

"By steam!" Lumian drew a triangular Sacred Emblem on his chest as well.

The bartender glanced at the empty area and said, "But the Church of The Fool isn't bad. Even if you're just a tramp, even if you don't believe in The

Fool, you can still receive communion after entering their cathedral.

"If you ask them for help, you might even get a meal with meat and bread and a room to sleep in."

"Should I join the queue now?" Lumian asked with a smile.

The bartender shook his head again.

"No need. They can't leave the cathedral to preach or proselytize. Only the local tramps know they can seek help there, but they only go once in a while because the Church of The Fool is more willing to offer job opportunities to them."

After a pleasant chat and having figured out the schedule of The Fool's cathedral's bishop sermons, Lumian finished his Lanti Proof and decided to make the most of the spare time by exploring the nearby streets in detail.

He soon noticed that several strategic points were guarded by the military, armed with cannons and massive firearms that required water-cooling.

The government's distrust of these sailors and merchants, who occasionally indulge in piracy around the docks, is evident… Lumian turned away and hurried towards The Fool's cathedral before darkness fell.

The cathedral had a simple layout, devoid of gold embellishments or intricate machinery. The most remarkable aspect was its numerous windows, allowing natural light to illuminate the interior without the need for candles and gas lamps even before nightfall.

Like many religious spaces, the walls were adorned with giant murals, although the colors were muted and somber.

Using the fading light of dusk, Lumian examined the mural's contents and discovered that it depicted a wilderness where humans struggled to navigate.

These humans were unusually tall, almost resembling legendary giants. Some had three eyes, while others lacked noses, leaving only two dark holes. They looked more like monsters than ordinary people.

Despite the pain and despair evident on their faces, their eyes shimmered with hope.

Leading these peculiar humans were several distinct and detailed guides. Some had gray hair and carried two swords on their backs. Others wielded dark-blue sledgehammers emitting a sun-like glow. There were also figures clad in dark black armor with silver-gray curly hair…

At the forefront of these guides stood a figure.

Dressed in a black trench coat and a half top hat, the figure walked with a straight back, holding a lantern.

Just ahead of the figure was a ball of light—the altar of The Fool's cathedral—a silver-white Sacred Emblem emitting a radiant glow under the sunlight.

Lumian's attention was drawn to a few stained glass panes. Sculpted in an exaggerated style, angels and saints adorned them. Some were also featured in the murals, while others were not. There were angels with wings and halos, and saints with only halos.

Lumian carefully circled the area, observing for over half an hour. Eventually, he found a seat and settled in to wait for the 6 p.m. sermon.

As time passed, many people entered the cathedral. Some were dressed as merchants, others as typical sailors. There were also dockworkers, visibly exhausted after a long day's work, and a few street girls as well.

Amidst the tolling of the bell, the bishop arrived at the altar.

His hair and eyes shone with a golden hue. Towering at 2.56 meters tall, he donned a finely tailored black trench coat and a half top hat, hardly resembling a typical clergyman.

With a hearty gesture, the boorish bishop pressed his hand to his chest and called out in a booming voice, "Praise The Fool!"

"Praise The Fool!" echoed the gathered believers, and Lumian enthusiastically joined in.

Flipping through the black-and-silver-patterned bible in his hand, the bishop spoke with a voice that reverberated through the cathedral,

"Our lord is known as The Fool. Across past, present, and future, he reigns supreme over the spirit world. He is also the King of Yellow and Black who wields good luck. A beacon for all in the pursuit of eternity…

"He is compassionate, benevolent, and the savior of this world. He allows us to address him as him instead of Him…

"Our lord resides above both reality and the spirit world. His benevolence extends to Heaven and the land. Beside him stand eight angels…

"The Angel of Mercury is the embodiment of fate, our Lord's most cherished angel. The Angel of Death has followed our Lord for the longest period of time and is the consul of the Underworld. The Angel of Redemption is our Lord's bugle, once taking on the form of Gehrman Sparrow to deliver his revelations. The Angel of Life is the crystallization of wisdom itself, the indestructible spirituality that resides in everyone's body."

Gehrman Sparrow? That adventurer is an angel of Mr. Fool? Lumian was astonished by the revelation.

The giant bishop continued, "There's also the Angel of Retribution beside the Lord's throne. He is the Lord's lightning, the Lord's rage, and the Lord's palm, the judge of all the fallen and the ones who aren't chaste.

"Next to the Angel of Retribution is the Angel of the Holy Spirit, reigning over all spirits and representing our lord in controlling the spirit world.

"In contrast to Them, there are the Angel of Time and the Angel of Stars.

"The Angel of Time was an angel of ancient times. He eventually submitted to our Lord and now strikes the bell of Heaven.

"The Angel of Stars is a witness, a recorder, the eyes and ears of our lord…"

Lumian listened attentively, finding it hard to believe that there were eight angels by The Fool's divine throne.

Wasn't this strength too terrifying?

It seemed no different from an orthodox Church!

Suddenly, Termiboros's magnificent voice resounded, "Do you believe it?"

"Why not?" Lumian replied in a hushed tone, as if reciting passages from the bible.

After all, whose bible, even among the orthodox Churches, didn't have a touch of exaggeration?

Even without embellishments, it was still impressive!

Chapter 292: Communion

Termiboros fell silent.

Lumian continued to listen intently to the bishop's sermon as he recounted the general situation of the Church of The Fool. He discovered that there existed another continent in this world called the Forsaken Land of the Gods—a place cursed and abandoned by the gods Themselves.

Despite the gods turning their backs on the continent, Mr. Fool refused to forsake it. He dispatched the Angel of Redemption—Gehrman Sparrow—to lead the surviving humans from the lost city-states out of the Forsaken Land of the Gods and guide them in rebuilding their homes on the maritime islands.

Consequently, the Church of The Fool's headquarters were established in the New City of Silver in the Sonia Sea.

The other two Holy Lands, New Moon City and Bayam, the capital of the Rorsted Archipelago, were also located in the same area.

Lumian listened with fascination, gaining a fundamental understanding of the Church of The Fool.

Following the sermon, the bishop and a few priests distributed communion.

It consisted of a glass of transparent, colorless liquid and a large fruit shell with charred marks covering it.

Lumian picked up the glass and took a sip. The liquid had a slight sweetness, reminiscent of dairy products but with a more fragrant essence.

Next, he used a wooden spoon to scoop out the food from the huge fruit shell.

As soon as he tasted the food, Lumian's expression turned surprised.

It's meat!

Isn't this a bit extravagant?

Even the Eternal Blazing Sun Church's Communion couldn't compare to this. They only had red wine and unfermented flatbread.

Lumian perked up and chewed the food with interest. It was delicious, with a meaty texture and a mix of sweetness and slight sourness, like that of a fruit. Its aroma was entirely different from the usual dishes found in Trier.

While he ate, he listened to the bishop explain the origins of Communion.

It turned out that this was Angel of Redemption Gehrman Sparrow's favorite food during his travels across the land. As the bugle of the Lord, he preached the revelations of the Lord.

The liquid was called Teana, derived from a giant fruit unique to the Rorsted Archipelago, and it was extracted from the pulp.

Having lost most of its pulp, the Teana rind was stuffed with mashed mutton and fish, culminating in the communion, Teativa.

However, transporting such massive fruits from the Rorsted Archipelago to Trier for Communion was impractical. It required crossing three seas, and no matter how unripened the fruit was, it would inevitably rot, wasting valuable resources.

With the help of a particular botanist, the Church of The Fool had cultivated a modified Teana tree that could grow in southern Intis, producing a stronger milky scent.

A delicacy with a maritime charm… If it weren't for the Church of The Fool's inability to preach and proselytize, who knows how many people would convert solely due to the Communion… But that could lead to financial issues as well. Too many believers in The Fool would cause the expenses of Communion to skyrocket… After pondering the Church of The Fool's finances for a moment, Lumian, who hadn't eaten dinner yet, finished the Teativa clean and gulped down the Teana juice.

"Praise The Fool!" Lumian stood up sincerely and bowed. He slowly left the candlelit cathedral and stepped into the night.

Under the warm glow of gas street lamps, Lumian strolled along the port area, dressed in a linen shirt, black vest, and rolled-up sleeves. His destination was the other side of the docks, where he intended to catch a public carriage to Avenue du Boulevard.

Lavigny had grown quiet, with only occasional groups of sailors passing by, singing or shouting.

All of a sudden, a commotion erupted nearby, followed by a piercing scream.

As the sound echoed through the night, Lumian noticed a figure hurtling towards him at an incredible speed.

Casually, he sidestepped, acting like an innocent bystander.

Yet, if the approaching person happened to be vile or had indeed committed some wrongdoing and was now being chased, Lumian wouldn't mind sticking out his right foot and tripping them, just for the spectacle.

Within seconds, the figure reached the edge of the street lamp's glow, making Lumian's eyebrows twitch in surprise.

So fast!

Clearly not an ordinary human!

With the help of the gas lamps, Lumian got a good look at the figure's appearance.

It wasn't human—it was a monster!

Though its wrinkled head resembled a human's, its dark-green scales covered its body. Wearing a torn linen shirt and brown pants, its feet lacked shoes, and thin, tough skin membrane grew between its fingers. Slippery dark green mucus oozed over its form, and its palms and mouth were stained with blood.

Having encountered numerous monsters in Cordu's ruins, Lumian remained unperturbed. He only frowned slightly.

It reminds me of those murlocs mentioned in mysticism magazines. Those dark-green scales must provide formidable defense…

As Lumian pondered, the monster noticed him sidestepping and grew more violent and crazed in its expression.

Without warning, it lunged at Lumian.

Reacting swiftly, Lumian arched his body, not backing away, but stepping forward to face the suspected murloc.

Bang!

His right hand, emitting sparks, struck the creature's abdomen.

Then, he swiftly lowered his body, slipping under the armpit of the dark-green-scaled monster, avoiding its counterattack and effectively positioning himself behind the assailant.

Lumian spun around, his arms swinging. His fists, with flickering flames, delivered powerful blows to the back of the suspected murloc, knocking it to the ground.

Blows resounded until Lumian withdrew his hands, ceasing his assault. He observed silently as the struggling body left corrosive marks on the ground.

With a muffled explosion, crimson sparks erupted from the monster's eyes, nose, ears, and mouth. Its body swelled before collapsing, shedding several dark-green scales.

After a few convulsions, it lay still.

Lumian averted his gaze and looked towards the figures chasing after him. He nonchalantly flicked his hands, alleviating the corrosive pain caused by the dark-green liquid.

His injuries were minor. After all, he had delivered a barrage of powerful punches, and his contact with the dark-green scales and viscous liquid had been brief.

Soon, the figures reached the lamp pole.

They were sailors, led by a mixed-blood man from the Southern Continent, sporting braided hair and brownish-red skin.

He appeared to be in his thirties, with thick lips. His eyes first scanned the murloc-like monster lying motionless on the ground, then he looked at Lumian with surprise, suspicion, and fear.

After a few seconds of silence, the sailor with the braided hair spoke with a solemn voice, "This is the murloc we captured at sea. It injured one of our crewmates and managed to escape."

It is indeed a murloc… Did they truly capture it? Why didn't they turn it into various materials and transport it to Trier? Why risk keeping it alive? Lumian silently mused as he asked with a smile, "Are you planning to apologize on its behalf and compensate me for my mental distress to soothe my terrified mind?"

The sailor and his companions exchanged glances, unable to decipher the lad's true intentions.

In the distance, the sound of regimental-like running resonated, accompanied by gunfire.

Patrol soldiers had rushed over upon hearing the scream.

The sailor's heart tightened as he unconsciously grabbed the monster's corpse, closely observing Lumian's reaction. He intended to stop once the other party showed any dissatisfaction.

Simultaneously, he continued, "No problem. We have no problem."

What he meant was that they would provide compensation for Lumian's mental distress.

Lumian sensed that they mainly wanted the Beyonder characteristic produced by the murloc, but the monster was too weak. He wasn't in the mood to discuss how the prize would be divided with them.

It was not worthy of the Shadow Branch at all!

If these individuals, who acted recklessly without concern for covering their tracks, managed to evade pursuit and crossed paths with him again, he could simply demand compensation from them for his mental distress.

As Lumian watched the sailors carry the murloc away, he continued on his way as if nothing had happened.

Before long, several patrolling soldiers caught up with him, examining his condition and inquiring if he had witnessed anything unusual.

Lumian candidly pointed in the direction the sailors had fled.

"I heard a scream and saw a group of people running that way. They were dressed like sailors."

The officer leading the patrol nodded approvingly.

"Thank you for your cooperation."

"No need to thank me. It's what any responsible citizen should do," Lumian replied with a smile.

Soon, the other soldiers discovered traces of corrosion and scales on the ground, along with sticky liquid that hadn't entirely evaporated. They followed the trail towards the docks.

Lumian clicked his tongue and continued on his way towards the public carriage stop.

Clap! Clap! Clap! He heard a soft applause.

Feeling uneasy, Lumian turned his head and saw someone sitting on a nearby cargo box, seemingly having appeared out of nowhere.

The man's eyebrows were charred yellow, and his hair shared the same color. His eyes were dark blue yet radiant. He wore a linen shirt, a brown vest, and a pair of black leather boots hung from his dark brown pants.

Lumian recognized the man and felt alarmed.

Blazing Danitz, a great pirate second only to a few Pirate Kings!

But Lumian calmed down when he recalled the man's other identity: He was no longer a pirate; he was now Mr. Fool's Oracle!

As the holder of a Minor Arcana card, Lumian believed that as long as he revealed his identity, Blazing Danitz wouldn't give him trouble.

Blazing Danitz gazed at Lumian for a few seconds before effortlessly leaping down from the top of the wooden crates.

He chuckled and spoke leisurely, "To be able to swiftly choose the most effective, targeted, and efficient attack method against your prey, perfectly evading the enemy's enhanced scale defense—your combat intelligence is quite impressive. I admire it.

"So, how about it? Are you interested in joining my team and becoming my subordinate?"

Chapter 293: "Pious"

Inviting me to join your team without even checking my background or confirming my strength? Are you that confident, Mr. Fool's Oracle? Lumian couldn't help but criticize, feeling unsure about the whole situation.

He looked at Blazing Danitz and responded with a smile, "No."

Blazing Danitz acknowledged tersely, his voice gaining intensity as if confirming it for the last time.

Lumian slipped his right hand into his pocket, maintaining his smile.

"Not interested."

What a joke. How can I complete the Tarot Club's mission if I join your team?

This requires your consultation with Madam Magician!

Danitz's dark-blue yet bright eyes narrowed slightly, his aura instantly becoming more intense.

Lumian felt as if he were facing a spear or a loaded gun pressed to his forehead. Fear and danger washed over him.

However, he didn't look away and met Blazing Danitz's gaze with a calm determination, as if facing an apex predator.

After a brief silence that filled the air with tension, Blazing Danitz broke into a smile.

"Not bad. You're quite resolute and bold. I admire you even more."

With those words, the former great pirate, now The Fool's Oracle, turned around and strolled towards the well-lit street in the distance.

Confidence naturally breeds resoluteness… Lumian thought silently as he withdrew his right hand from his pocket, revealing a tarot card held between his thumb and index finger.

The tarot card—Seven of Wands!

Though he couldn't fathom Blazing Danitz's impromptu recruitment, he felt somewhat glad to have encountered Mr. Fool's Oracle.

This meant that The Fool Church held substantial strength in Trier.

…

After leaving Lavigny Docks, Lumian hopped onto a public carriage and soon arrived at Avenue du Boulevard. He walked to 19 Rue Scheer and met Mr. K beneath the headquarters of the Psychic organization.

The Aurora Order Oracle remained seated in the red armchair, his face concealed in the deep shadows of his black hood.

His voice rasped as he inquired, "How's your progress in gaining Gardner Martin's trust?"

Lumian replied calmly, "I've already joined the Iron and Blood Cross Order."

Mr. K fell silent for a moment before asking, "How did you gain Gardner Martin's trust? How did he test you? And how did you pass the test?"

The Aurora Order Oracle altered his usual demeanor, posing three questions at once.

Lumian chuckled.

"Well, there was no need to gain Gardner Martin's trust. Simply joining the Iron and Blood Cross Order earned loyalty."

Upon hearing this, Mr. K, who had been reclining in his chair, sat up straight. The shadows in the basement seemed to stir, almost alive.

With his expertise and knowledge, discerning the hidden meaning behind Lumian's words wasn't difficult for him.

And it undoubtedly spelled danger: Lumian had indeed become a member of the Iron and Blood Cross Order, pledging his allegiance to them. He was here to report while bringing the powerful figures of the Iron and Blood Cross Order!

Lumian smiled, unfazed by the immense pressure radiating from Mr. K. He proceeded to recount how he informed Gardner Martin that he had become a Sequence 7 Pyromaniac, leading up to the vigil at 13 Avenue du Marché and the formal initiation ceremony.

He didn't hold back the fact that he had engaged in an underground transaction and fled in terror after encountering Supervisor Olson's monstrous creation.

As Lumian finished, Mr. K stood up, excitement in his tone as he verified Lumian's various details at 13 Avenue du Marché repeatedly.

Upon realizing that Lumian had used the honorific name at a crucial moment and received a divine revelation of "don't respond," Mr. K burst into a fit of maniacal laughter.

"Hahaha, hahaha, just as I thought, piousness is the only way out!"

The hooded Oracle's laughter grew wilder, echoing through the basement, making Lumian's eardrums tremble and a faint scent of salt and blood fill the air.

"Hahaha! Hahaha!"

Mr. K laughed so hard he nearly doubled over.

He no longer concealed his condition. The whole basement seemed enveloped in darkness, and he stood as the source of danger behind it all.

After a while, Mr. K paid no mind to Lumian's presence, instead kneeling down, lowering his body to pray almost silently, as if thanking the Lord that created everything, the omnipotent and omniscient God.

Lumian managed to keep his lips from twitching. Before leaving for Lavigny Docks, he had performed a ritual, praying to The Fool for the angel's protection. He praised the True Creator of the Aurora Order and drew a cross on his chest, following an up-to-down, left-to-right order.

With a sudden display of piousness, Mr. K stood up and said with fervor, "This was all arranged by the Lord. He brought you here to join us."

It depends on which lord you're talking about… Lumian muttered, finding amusement in the situation, and replied humbly, "What He says will come true."

This was one of the religious texts of the Aurora Order taught by Mr. K. Lumian had always regarded it as a sermon praising the deity's strength. He found it quite useful in the present conversation.

The hooded Mr. K nodded, thoroughly satisfied.

"I had arranged for others to approach the exposed members of the Iron and Blood Cross Order before, but they lost contact with me and stopped reporting. They even put me in considerable danger.

"Now I understand why they failed. Their lack of piousness! In the face of danger and corruption, they didn't even think to recite our Lord's honorific name and seek His protection!

"But you, at the critical moment, had only my Lord in your mind. That's the kind of piousness I admire the most.

"That's why you successfully joined the Iron and Blood Cross Order without being corrupted!"

With only faith in a deity left in your mind… Will this affect your intelligence? Lumian observed Mr. K, gaining a deeper understanding of his state of mind and way of thinking.

Mr. K paced back and forth in front of Lumian, his excitement palpable in his voice.

"Based on the information you brought back, I now have a better understanding of the Iron and Blood Cross Order's problems. I have a new insight into their current situation and their intentions.

"I can say you've completed half of the mission I assigned you. Next, you need to investigate the source of the abnormality, the exact timeline, and their roadmap for inciting the riot.

"If they find a way to enter Fourth Epoch Trier or a passageway, you must inform me immediately. Don't let them succeed."

Mr. K pondered for a few seconds and said, "The first option is to take out my finger and ignite it. As long as the environment isn't special, I can sense it and roughly understand the cause.

"If that doesn't work, pray to my Lord immediately, just like this time."

"Alright," Lumian agreed.

When the time came, he might have to try contacting Madam Magician. It seemed like he would be very busy.

After assigning the subsequent mission, Mr. K looked at Lumian in a friendly tone and asked,

"Since you've completed half of the mission and brought back crucial information, I can't be stingy with the rewards. Tell me, what do you want?"

"I want a mystical item of bizarre nature. If you don't have it, a corresponding Beyonder characteristic will do. I'll find an Artisan to craft it myself," Lumian answered without hesitation.

Mr. K let out a chuckle.

"You deserve that. Come back in three days. I'll give you a few choices, or I'll offer what I think suits you best."

"Thank you, Mr. K," Lumian expressed his sincere gratitude.

This was much more generous than what the Iron and Blood Cross Order offered!

"It's not me you should be thanking, but the Lord," Mr. K replied with a smile.

Helpless, Lumian drew the cross again.

"Praise be to you, the creator of all things. Praise be to you, who carries the burdens of the world's sins."

Mr. K chimed in, praising the True Creator.

"Unfortunately, our Aurora Order doesn't have things like godfathers or godchildren. Otherwise, I'd be more than willing to baptize you again."

Why do so many people express their admiration by wanting to be someone else's father? Lumian found it amusing.

…

In high spirits after Mr. K's assurance, Lumian made his way back to Auberge du Coq Doré. He headed straight to the basement bar and ordered a glass of the unique textured distilled lemon liquor. As he chatted with the others, he found amusement in Charlie's return, spreading all sorts of rumors.

Meanwhile, intermittent singing and clapping rhythms filled the air, creating a lively atmosphere that lasted until the early hours of the morning. When the customers, who had to work at dawn, finally departed to their residences, the bar quieted down.

Lumian realized he had been spending too many nights at Auberge du Coq Doré lately, neglecting his sleep at Salle de Bal Brise. He decided it was time to balance things out and head there next.

As he left Auberge du Coq Doré and walked along Rue Anarchie, where there were no gas street lamps, he noticed a figure emerging from the dark shadows ahead.

The person was almost as tall as Lumian, with broad shoulders and a muscular build, dressed in a linen shirt, a brown jacket, and a brownish-yellow wide-brimmed hat.

Gray hair adorned their head, and dark eyes stared intently. The man's hairy skin added to his rugged appearance, giving off a wild sense of beauty.

Having halted Lumian, the man, whose age was difficult to gauge from his appearance, lifted his chin slightly and inquired, "Are you Ciel Dubois?"

Do you truly think yourself worthy of addressing me by my name? Lumian contemplated responding in a similar manner, uncertain of the man's intentions, and sensing a hint of arrogance. Thus, he chose to pretend.

He asked cautiously, "And who might you be?"

The man remained composed, showing no signs of being affected. With a cold expression, he pressed on, "Tell me who the boss of your Savoie Mob is."

Chapter 294: Beyonder

You don't even know who's running the show for our Savoie Mob? And you're coming to me with this question? You must be clueless about the real deal. Our Boss is the Commanding Officer of the secret organization called the Iron and Blood Cross Order, and we're just a small part of the whole setup, Lumian thought, sliding his right hand into his pocket.

He quickly considered three possibilities.

First, Gardner Martin used the Savoie Mob for his secret missions, like smuggling some bizarre stuff through "Rat" Christo. Having been detected by someone or some faction, they now wanted to dig into the mob and expose the mastermind behind it.

Second, some members of the Savoie Mob must have offended the wrong people, and now the consequences were knocking at their door.

Third, after the Poison Spur Mob got wiped out, the Savoie Mob expanded rapidly, attracting attention from certain factions.

Lumian quickly dismissed the first two options. Whether it was some secret getting leaked or someone causing offense, he wasn't going to be the one facing questions about the identity of the Savoie Mob's Boss!

Usually, whoever did something secretive would get a visit from the investigators. Similarly, if someone offended another, they'd be targeted, or the leader shielding them. Lumian had never truly been involved in the Savoie Mob's clandestine affairs, nor had he recently defended any subordinates.

The person standing across from him was directly probing about the identity of the Savoie Mob's Boss. It wasn't about which individual belonged to the mob or some specific incident in the past.

Based on this, Lumian strongly suspected that some faction or individual had taken an interest in the Savoie Mob and planned to incorporate them.

Of course, he couldn't dismiss the possibility that a rival mob had teamed up with a powerful being to seek help in taking down the Savoie Mob's Boss.

Yet, in either case, they seemed to have a shallow understanding of the Savoie Mob. They didn't even know the superficial identity of Gardner Martin. All they knew was the most famous member of the mob in recent times. They had just asked about him and paid him a "visit."

In other words, they are treating the Savoie Mob as a regional mob with only a few Beyonders. Sending real powerhouses to deal with such a mob is clearly impractical, and they probably can't afford to hire them either. Even a Mid-Sequence Beyonder is highly esteemed; it doesn't go beyond Sequence 6. Lumian made this rough judgment in just a couple of seconds.

Seeing Lumian remaining silent and not reaching for his weapon, the tall man with bushy hair, dark eyes, and a brownish-yellow wide-brimmed hat let out a cold snort. His expression and eyes revealed a clear sense of danger.

Almost simultaneously, Lumian felt the darkness around him grow heavier, swallowing up the faint glow of distant street lamps and the crimson moonlight from the sky.

The darkness condensed like frost, slowly but firmly seeping into Lumian's skin, flesh, and bones, causing an uncontrollable fear to well up within him.

Is that all? Lumian, who had been through major situations before, scoffed inwardly.

Gazing at the muscular man with gray hair, donning a linen shirt and a brown jacket, Lumian feigned a twinge of fear and blurted out, "It's Gardner Martin! Gardner Martin, a member of the Savoie Chamber of Commerce!"

The man nodded, pleased, and pressed on, "Where does he usually reside?"

"Lion" Ciel, the ruthless, crazed, and powerful mob leader, is no different from other mobsters!

They only know how to bully the weak and rely on their mob's backing to take on rival mobs. When facing genuinely formidable foes and simple dark-type spells, their timidity and cowardice become evident!

Lumian swallowed hard and managed to say, "He lives at 11 Rue des Fontaines."

At that moment, Lumian shook himself out of his daze.

"Let me tell you, our boss is a member of a secret organization. His strength is even more terrifying than you can imagine!"

A member of a secret organization? The broad-shouldered man was momentarily taken aback before breaking into a smile.

This was truly an unexpected windfall!

"Lion" Ciel is even more timid than I thought. He even spilled such vital information!

The man lifted his chin and sneered with a deep voice, "Well, did I mention that I, too, am part of a secret organization? A very ancient one."

With those words, the surrounding darkness seemed to tighten its grip.

Really? I can't quite tell… Lumian pondered the idea of luring this man and the faction behind him to confront the Boss. He wanted to see what would happen when the two secret organizations clashed, hoping to expose more of the Iron and Blood Cross Order's secrets.

After a brief silence, Lumian couldn't bear the weight of the darkness any longer. His right hand and arm, tucked into his pocket, trembled slightly.

"I don't know, I don't know. The Boss didn't tell us the exact name!"

The man scrutinized Lumian for a few seconds and concluded that he shouldn't know the details of the secret organization.

For a regional mob like theirs, the Boss is at most a member of some secret society.

The man couldn't help but smirk sinisterly.

"Then take me to 11 Rue des Fontaines."

As soon as he spoke, he lunged at Lumian, moving with such speed that he left afterimages.

Almost simultaneously, his nails shot out, long and sharp, flickering with a metallic light that exuded a dark sheen.

Yet, Lumian showed no fear, offered no resistance, and didn't panic. He also moved to evade the attack, all while extending his right hand from the depths of his pocket.

In his hand, he held a blazing white fireball the size of a fist, sending it hurtling toward his assailant like a gift.

Fireball… Blazing white… The man with short gray hair on his face and the back of his hands found himself too close to turn around due to his speed. As these thoughts raced through his mind, he collided with the condensed, blazing-white fireball.

Boom!

Amidst the muffled explosion, the man's abdomen burst into a bloody mess, emitting a distinct charred smell.

After the other party inquired about the Savoie Mob's boss, Lumian discreetly tucked his right hand into his pocket. However, it wasn't to draw a weapon or guard against attacks. Instead, he used his clothes as cover to steadily conjure crimson flames in his palm. Layer by layer, he compressed them to their utmost, turning the flames into a blazing white. The explosive power was on par with a Giant Fireball, but even more concentrated, capable of burning through skin.

If the enemy's speed hadn't exceeded Lumian's expectations, he would have had a high chance of witnessing the enemy's neck exploding upon impact.

Amidst the rumbling, the man was sent flying, and Lumian was affected by the aftershocks, stumbling backward and tumbling a few times.

Both of them got up simultaneously. Lumian's shirt and vest bore burn marks, and many parts of his skin were damaged.

He saw an irregular, gaping wound on the man's abdomen, with blood-stained intestines flowing out and being stuffed back into place. The surface was marked with fractures and charred spots.

Despite the severe injury, the man didn't lose mobility. As he pressed his abdomen to prevent his intestines and other internal organs from spilling out, he let out a low growl of pain, anger, and violence.

Accompanied by the growl, short gray fur sprouted from his body, transforming him into a towering wolf.

His severed intestines began to writhe, attempting to reconnect. His charred skin slowly healed, and he forcefully closed the huge crack in his abdomen with his palm. Flesh and blood intertwined, bit by bit.

What potent vitality… Lumian sighed from the bottom of his heart at the sight.

He realized that given enough time, the other party would likely recover!

The other party's behavior and state reminded Lumian of a few passages recorded in Aurore's grimoires:

"Werewolf, a Sequence 7 of the Prisoner pathway, a category under Mutants. During the full moon or when they nearly lose control of their emotions, they will be controlled by their bloodthirsty and murderous desires, involuntarily transforming into a true werewolf.

"They possess terrifying strength, agility, and speed, and their self-recovery abilities are outstanding. Their claws and teeth are sturdy and sharp, and they are venomous. They are equivalent to Beyonder weapons of the same Sequence, capable of destroying thinner steel plates.

"They also know a few dark-type spells, capable of turning ordinary humans into puppet monsters with short lives.

"Werewolves often appear in the Southern Continent. They are often associated with various terrorist activities in the Northern Continent…"

I actually encountered a Werewolf Beyonder… Lumian didn't give the other party time to recover from his injuries. Crimson Fire Ravens materialized behind him, spiraling towards their target.

The Werewolf didn't sit idle either. Clutching his stomach to suppress the wound, he approached Lumian with extraordinary speed.

Most of the Fire Ravens' initial lock-on missed, but a few made minor changes in direction and landed on the target one after another, causing continuous rumbling.

The Werewolf suffered several more wounds, leaving him charred and blood-red.

Relying on his potent recovery abilities, he swiftly closed the distance between him and Lumian, disregarding his injuries. He intended to engage in close combat with the Pyromaniac, who excelled in spells, and tear him to pieces with his sharp and venomous claws.

At some point, the darkness around Lumian further encroached on him, causing him to feel an eerie chill on this summer night and slightly affecting him.

In an instant, crimson flames erupted from his body, enveloping him in scorching warmth.

The very next second, Lumian turned around and fled, dodging the Werewolf's claws.

This made the Werewolf, whose mind was filled with bloodthirsty and murderous desires, feel his adversary's fear. He believed that his target had already gone all out and lacked experience in such battles.

He chased after him and caught up to Lumian in a few swift strides.

Chapter 295: Brains Are Important

Sensing the swipe that carried the scent of blood and char behind him, Lumian swiftly pivoted and darted into the alley leading to Rue du Rossignol.

The Werewolf's pitch-black eyes were bloodshot, and his severe injuries fueled his anger and desire to kill, overpowering most of his thoughts. He forcefully turned around and sprinted into the alley after Lumian.

Seeing Lumian vault over a barricade up ahead, he followed suit and leaped up as well.

In the next instant, he caught sight of an uncovered entrance to the sewers. Iron-black stairs led straight into the depths.

Lumian deftly stepped on the edge of the sewer entrance and jumped over the "natural" trap.

Bam! The Werewolf crashed into the sewers, finding himself halfway in. His wounds worsened, and his head spun.

Lumian seized the moment to turn around and conjure crimson Fire Ravens, sending them spiraling towards the Werewolf, who was stuck at the sewers entrance.

Amidst a muffled rumble, the crimson flaming ravens engulfed the area, setting the Werewolf's gray fur on fire, scorching patches of his skin, and tearing more flesh.

The Werewolf exerted strength with both hands and finally managed to leap out of the sewers. Lumian took the opportunity to flee, having successfully dealt a blow.

The Werewolf grew even angrier. All he wanted was to tear Lumian apart and spill his innards to the street dogs.

With a swoosh, Lumian, who had rushed to the alley exit, turned at high speed and sprinted to the left.

The Werewolf caught up in a few strides and followed the target's escape route.

However, a nearly one-meter tall barricade emerged in the darkness ahead of him. Lumian, already prepared, reached out and pressed down, using the situation to somersault and jump over.

The Werewolf realized it too late and didn't have time for other strategies. He could only choose between hastily jumping up or crashing straight into the barricade.

Exerting strength in his legs, he attempted to leap to the top of the barricade, but his forward momentum couldn't be stopped. Before he could fully ascend, his feet caught onto the obstacle.

Thud!

The Werewolf tumbled off the barricade; his fall made him see stars.

Lumian halted once more. With one hand in his pocket, he gazed at the enemy.

Around him, a new wave of Fire Ravens condensed and flew towards the base of the barricade.

The Werewolf tried his best to roll, but he was still struck by at least ten flaming ravens. The wound on his abdomen, which no longer had pressure on it, reopened, and blood-colored intestines flowed out.

Only then did the Werewolf realize that he had fallen into the other party's trap. He regained some of his rationality and assessed his weak body and unstable condition.

He extinguished the flames over his body and struggled to his feet, attempting to escape.

At that moment, Lumian's mocking voice echoed in his ears.

"Didn't your mommy tell you not to fight in an environment familiar to Hunters? You actually dared to pursue me on Rue Anarchie and the surrounding areas. I can only say that brains are important, but you don't have any."

The Werewolf's mind buzzed, and he became abnormally infuriated.

He willingly sacrificed his rationality and erupted with desire, bolstering his body in all aspects.

He had become a Lunatic!

He pursued Lumian once more.

Occasionally, Lumian would abruptly halt and counterattack. Other times, he would sneak under a stone statue's arm from a corner. When the Werewolf slammed into an obstacle, Lumian would turn around and unleash a volley of crimson Fire Ravens. Sometimes, he would feign entering Underground Trier but lie in ambush, waiting for the incoming attack.

As the pursuit continued, the Werewolf finally reached his limit, his body teetering on the brink of collapse.

Regaining his senses from his frenzied state, he felt a strong premonition of danger. All he wanted was to leave this area and escape Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman.

At that moment, Lumian halted, as if he had sensed something. He turned around and smiled.

He watched as the Werewolf fled much slower than before while condensing a blazing white spear in his hand.

Lumian swung his body and hurled the flaming spear.

A blazing white stream of light streaked through the air, piercing the Werewolf's ravaged body, pinning him to the ground, and setting him ablaze.

Amidst the sudden blaze, Lumian walked toward the enemy with one hand in his pocket.

Crimson Fire Ravens materialized behind him, whistling and spiraling as they approached the Werewolf. They burrowed into his wounds, destroying his heart, lungs, and other organs.

By the time Lumian reached his target, the Mutant was no longer breathing—he was dead.

His eyes were wide open, filled with regret and fear.

Why'd you have to attack me? If you needed something, you could've just gone to the Boss of our Savoie Mob, couldn't you? Lumian shook his head while looking down at the Werewolf. Did you plan on turning me into a puppet for the assassination of Gardner Martin? Did you really think so low of mobsters? Your confidence made you arrogant.

Earlier, Lumian prepared for a tough battle. He had even prepared for a Sequence 6. His escape route was always near Rue des Blouses Blanches.

Once there, he could get Franca's attention and have her secretly use the enemy's blood to cast a fatal curse.

Lumian considered using the explosion caused by a fireball on Avenue du Marché to create a commotion and scare the enemy away if capturing the target proved difficult even with teamwork.

But the enemy's madness and desire to kill made Lumian doubt if he could think rationally and end the battle quickly to escape the pursuit of official Beyonders. He himself had to hold on until dawn arrived.

Squatting down, Lumian searched the Werewolf's clothes, finding only 3 verl d'or coins, burnt banknotes, and a wallet without anything useful.

Have you never considered bribing me? Do you only want to rely on your strength to intimidate me? Lumian cursed, his heart aching.

He wasn't too disappointed as he knew the chances of this Werewolf being a bestowed were slim. Soon, it could secrete a Sequence 7 Beyonder characteristic that included Sequence 9 and Sequence 8 Beyonder characteristics, worth 30,000 to 40,000 verl d'or, or even more. He could use it to complement the Shadow Branch, create mystical items, or exchange it for more suitable Beyonder characteristics.

Considering the relatively weak explosions he caused, Lumian didn't linger on the street. After briefly dealing with the Werewolf's corpse, he picked him up and brought him to the back door of Salle de Bal Brise.

Sarkota and the other members of the Savoie Mob were no strangers to destroying corpses, quickly placing the body inside a bag and sending people to clean up the blood along the way.

Lumian tossed the body bag into the carriage belonging to Salle de Bal Brise, fully intending to find Gardner Martin that very night.

During the journey, he opened the body bag several times and finally noticed a blackish-green light secreting from the corpse, which merged with a sharp canine fang.

After a few seconds, Lumian had obtained this strange black-green fang.

After a moment's consideration, he decided to keep the fang in the body bag and see what Gardner Martin would do.

Based on the Commanding Officer's behavior, Lumian knew he would undoubtedly reward him when the time came. He might hand over the Werewolf Beyonder characteristic, switch it to another one, or purchase it at market value.

In any case, Lumian was ready to be honest about it.

Around 1 a.m., Salle de Bal Brise's carriage stopped at 11 Rue des Fontaines in Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative. Lumian unceremoniously pulled the rope beside the iron fence door, causing the chimes to reverberate through the grayish-white three-story villa.

Before long, a valet of Southern Continent descent arrived and opened the door, though he looked displeased at being woken up. When he saw Lumian's charred and tattered clothes and the body bag he dragged behind him, his attitude changed to that of a courteous servant.

Lumian brought the body bag into the villa and saw Faustino, the butler, who was also a member of the Iron and Blood Cross Order.

After tying his bow tie, Faustino stared at Lumian and the body bag for a few seconds before asking in surprise, "What's this?"

"A strange fellow," Lumian replied with a smile.

Faustino didn't inquire further and led Lumian into the activity room on the first floor.

There, Gardner Martin, donning a dark-blue silk robe, sat in a recliner and asked with a smile, "Who's in the body bag? For you to rush here overnight, it doesn't seem simple."

Lumian untied the body bag and dumped the Werewolf's corpse and the strange black-green fang onto the carpet in the activity room.

Gardner Martin's expression turned serious at a single glance.

"A Werewolf…"

Lumian chuckled. "He came to me to inquire about the identity of the Boss of our Savoie Mob. He even wanted to control me and turn me into a puppet."

Gardner Martin nodded slowly and said, "And?"

"And then?" Lumian raised his eyebrows and replied with a smile, "Then I killed him."

Upon hearing this, Faustino, the butler standing beside the Commanding Officer, glanced at the Werewolf's corpse on the ground and then at Lumian, whose clothes were clearly charred and torn. His expression was no longer calm and composed.

Gardner Martin's eyes narrowed. After a few seconds of silence, he sighed and said, "Unfortunately, you don't know how to channel spirits; we missed out on a lot of information."

Lumian wanted to say, "Perhaps I need a mystical item that can channel spirits," but he was worried that it would take up a portion of the reward and cause the Shadow Branch to lose its match.

Gardner Martin continued, "I'll arrange for follow-up investigations and responses. Don't worry about this for the time being. I'll inform you when you need to carry out your mission."

"What's he up to? He doesn't seem simple." Lumian glanced at the Werewolf's corpse and deliberately expressed his confusion.

Gardner Martin shook his head.

"I can't be sure yet." He then looked at Lumian and asked with a smile, "Do you want this Werewolf fang or something else?"

"What are the choices?" Lumian didn't hold back.

Chapter 296: Request

Gardner Martin was well accustomed to Lumian's straightforwardness. He gave a slight nod and said, "If you want a quick trade, I have three items of equal value to the Werewolf fang."

"The first is the Shadow Bracelet, a mystical item that lets you conceal yourself within larger shadows. It can summon a Shadow Servant with a few special abilities and can bring shadows to life to restrain targets to some extent.

"It's a foreboding item. More than a third of those who've used it have gone mad, while another third mysteriously disappeared without it, never to be seen again. Many of those who remain seem fine, but they often complain of tinnitus and hallucinate sounds.

"In recent years, unless there are special circumstances, no one has dared to use this mystical item."

Lumian expressed his confusion through his gaze: Then why are you offering it to me? Do I look like a lunatic or an idiot to you?

Gardner Martin smiled and explained, "I'm one of the few people who hasn't encountered problems with the Shadow Bracelet. I know a way to weaken its negative effects, but I can only tell you if you choose it."

When did you start hallucinating that there's nothing wrong with you? Lumian suppressed his concerns and held his tongue.

He thought that Gardner Martin, who had been corrupted by the abnormality at 13 Avenue du Marché, might not be any better than those who had gone mad or disappeared mysteriously.

According to Madam Magician's description of corruption, the person standing before him might not be the same Gardner Martin as before.

Gardner Martin glanced at Lumian and smiled. "Actually, there's no need to be so reserved in front of me. That won't make you seem like a Hunter who hasn't advanced to Sequence 6. If you say something that might 'provoke' me, I'll probably just respond with sarcasm. Look, isn't Albus still alive and well?"

"Yes, CO Sir," Lumian replied, not revealing the secrets that couldn't be disclosed to the Iron and Blood Cross Order.

Gardner Martin got up from his recliner and continued, "The second item is a Beyonder characteristic left behind by a Spirit Medium. Do you know what Beyonder characteristics are?"

Lumian answered calmly, "Killing a Beyonder creature will yield one of the main ingredients for concocting a potion. Killing a Beyonder will definitely yield the corresponding items, just like the transparent golden-red ball from 'Hammer' Ait and this Werewolf fang."

"I believe these are Beyonder characteristics. They all correspond to a potion. There's no need to gather additional main ingredients, right?"

Gardner Martin nodded approvingly. "That's right. Your judgment is accurate."

Gardner Martin didn't go into detail about the Law of Beyonder Characteristics Indestructibility, as if he believed it involved many secrets Lumian couldn't grasp at the moment.

With his hands clasped behind his back, Gardner Martin paced in front of the unlit fireplace.

"Spirit Medium. From its name, you can roughly guess the abilities of the mystical item created from it. Of course, what you obtain depends on an Artisan's ability.

"If I'm not mistaken, it should be an Eye of Death, allowing one to disguise as a zombie and endure the effects of decay, cold, death, and other auras. It can also identify the weaknesses of undead creatures and directly communicate with natural spirits and various undead creatures in the real world, using them for various magical effects. If you're lucky enough, you might even have all of those abilities.

"Try not to carry this Beyonder characteristic with you. Otherwise, you'll become the target of surrounding natural spirits and undead creatures. You'll never know when you might suffer a bizarre attack."

Impressive as it sounds, it's somewhat similar to a Contractee—relying on other creatures to gain strength… Lumian pondered for a few seconds and asked, "And the third?"

Gardner Martin settled back into his recliner.

"It's also a Beyonder characteristic. If you carry it, you'll find yourself rather lucky. This will be reflected in the details of various matters.

"The corresponding Sequence name is Lucky One, but you have to remember that reveling in luck is often a precursor to disaster. Also, it might allow you to see things you shouldn't see."

Sequence 7 of the Monster pathway? Lumian recalled the contents of Aurore's grimoires.

The Monster pathway, also known as the Fate pathway, was a pathway known for its high spiritual perception and close connection to fate.

Lumian chuckled and said, "The Lucky One ultimately transformed into a Beyonder characteristic in an unlucky manner? What an ironic joke."

Gardner Martin agreed. "Don't underestimate bad luck, and don't rely on luck. Otherwise, you may also become a Beyonder characteristic."

"Very philosophical." Lumian took note of the words filled with experience and lessons learned.

He carefully recalled Gardner Martin's introduction and realized that he wasn't stingy with information about the corresponding Sequences.

Merely the descriptions of the abilities of a Spirit Medium and Lucky One could fetch a good price at many mystical gatherings.

Gardner Martin pointed at the blackish-green fang on the ground.

"It's a Werewolf Beyonder characteristic. Once transformed into a mystical item, it should provide powerful self-healing abilities, allow transformation into a werewolf, and grant a short burst of power at the expense of rationality.

"But, as you saw, Werewolves are always affected by killing and bloodlust. During the full moon or Blood Moon, there's the latent danger of losing your mind and control.

"Have you decided which item to choose? If you choose the Beyonder characteristics, I can help you contact an Artisan and assist with the production fee. It's the reward you deserve for your contribution tonight."

Is the Artisan you're hiring a Saint? How will you react if you discover that I'm hiding a Shadow Branch? Lumian wondered, seriously considering his options.

First, he eliminated the Shadow Bracelet, suspected to be a mystical item of Mr. K's pathway. Mr. K might offer similar but better options in his rewards soon. Besides, the negative effects of the Shadow Bracelet were too perilous. Even if Gardner Martin claimed he could weaken them, Lumian didn't dare take the risk.

Most importantly, such a risk was pointless.

A Spirit Medium can compensate for my shortcomings, but it doesn't complement the Shadow Branch. I can't create a mystical item with the effect of lingering human-ghost emotions. Yes, some characteristics overlap with a Contractee…

Lucky One can make the Shadow Branch always trigger suitable desires? The Werewolf's rationality sacrifice and the influence of being murderous and bloodthirsty are quite compatible with the Shadow Branch. I wonder what kind of mystical item it would produce…

After careful consideration that spanned a few minutes, Lumian made his decision.

"I want Lucky One."

The main reason he gave up the Werewolf Beyonder characteristic was its potential negative effect of losing rationality.

Others might find ways to reduce the impact, using it only when facing enemies or avoiding certain lunar phases. But Lumian couldn't take that risk. Losing his mind even once could lead to Termiboros exploiting him and causing the seal to lose its balance.

Furthermore, he belonged to the Inevitability domain as a Beyonder in some way. In the future, when he reached a higher Sequence, he might be able to enhance the mystical item's effects through the Lucky One trait.

As for seeing things he shouldn't, Lumian already had the Mystery Prying Glasses, so having something similar didn't bother him.

Gardner Martin seemed surprised. He had expected Lumian to choose between the Spirit Medium Beyonder characteristic and Shadow Bracelet.

However, he quickly composed himself and didn't inquire further. With a smile, he said, "Humans are obsessed with good luck."

The Boss of the Savoie Mob, Commanding Officer of the Iron and Blood Cross Order, briefly left the activity room and went upstairs.

A few minutes later, he returned with a transparent glass jar, once used to hold sweets.

Inside the jar lay a mercury-colored eyeball, swiveling left and right as if it were alive.

"To carry and store it, place it in a narrow dark space," Gardner Martin instructed as he wrapped the jar in black cloth.

Handing the item to Lumian, he added, "Change the jar every seven days."

"Thank you, CO Sir." Lumian put the glass jar containing the Lucky One Beyonder characteristic into his pocket.

Gardner Martin didn't wonder why Lumian didn't ask him to contact an Artisan. The true effects of a mystical item were something the wielder wanted to keep as secret as possible. Seeking an unknown Artisan was more conducive to secrecy.

Just as these thoughts crossed his mind, Lumian brought up the matter himself.

"CO Sir, I'd like to exchange the free Artisan service for other rewards."

Curious, Gardner Martin asked, "What reward do you desire?"

A grin crept across Lumian's face. "Help me find someone."

"Who?" Gardner Martin had a hunch.

Lumian's expression turned serious.

"Guillaume Bénet.

"Since you know I'm from Cordu, you must have seen the padre's wanted poster.

"I've been tracking him, hoping to apprehend the heretic who caused disaster for me. I just received information that he might appear in Quartier de la Princesse Rouge next week. I'd like to request your assistance in locating him, CO Sir."

Gardner Martin burst into laughter.

"I thought you wanted to handle it yourself, enduring pain, tracking alone, and seeking revenge in secret.

"Nicely done. You've learned to leverage an organization's strength sooner than I expected. That's something a Hunter must understand.

"I agree to your request."

Chapter 297: Informant Contract

On his way back to the market district, Lumian leaned against the carriage wall, pondering the whole situation once more. He realized he had overlooked a problem.

A Sequence 7 mysteriously vanishes during a relatively simple mission, and it is now suspected to be dead. Would the secret organization behind him just pretend that nothing had happened?

Would they realize the truth tonight and launch an investigation?

As a Conspirer, there's no way the Boss wouldn't have thought of this. Yet, he didn't warn me and allowed me to go home alone… Is he using me as bait?

Yes, the secret organization behind the Werewolf might not take action tonight. As long as they keep their wits about them, they should realize that their missing subordinate is a huge problem. It seems the Savoie Mob is not as simple as it appears. If I were in their shoes, I'd hold back for a while until further events unfold. Then, I'd use the chaos to figure out the true situation of the Savoie Mob.

Of course, if they have an angel's protection and can get Him to temporarily descend upon Salle de Bal Brise, they can do whatever they want…

Now that I think about it, although that Werewolf was arrogant, he wasn't that stupid or reckless. He's just average. He must have captured some ordinary members of the Savoie Mob beforehand and roughly figured out the situation of the few leaders before targeting the leader who recently joined the Savoie Mob—me. Logically speaking, I wouldn't have been involved in the Savoie Mob's core matters. I wouldn't know many secrets, and I won't cause too many implications…

Furthermore, ordinary members of the Savoie Mob don't know that I've advanced to Pyromaniac. Judging from my recent combat records, that fellow believes he can easily handle me. In close combat, a Werewolf with stronger self-healing abilities, faster speed, greater strength, and nimble reactions, possessing claws equivalent to Beyonder weapons, is far superior to a Provoker…

By the time Lumian returned to Salle de Bal Brise, he had already sorted out the situation. He touched Mr. K's finger in his pocket and entered the room on the second floor, seemingly oblivious. He washed up and went to bed.

…

As the sun began to rise, Jenna hurriedly left 17 Rue Pasteur in Quartier du Jardin Botanique, a piece of toast in her mouth.

Last night, she had returned to visit her brother. She tossed and turned in the bed that she had shared with her mother until midnight before finally falling asleep. She woke up early in the morning, not wanting to run into her neighbors who might inquire about the wanted criminal named "Celia Bello."

It was still dark, and the streets were mostly empty. Jenna passed by the few vendors and passersby and turned into an alley near Rue Saint-Hilaire, which was even more desolate.

And then, she saw a familiar figure approaching.

He was a man with brown skin, thick lips, and light-yellow hair neatly combed. He had native blood from the Southern Continent and an inconspicuous piece of tape on the bridge of his nose. Wearing a light-colored shirt and a yellow vest, a golden Sun Sacred Emblem was pinned to his chest.

Sun Sacred Emblem… Jenna's heart skipped a beat as she remembered who he was.

He was a Beyonder from the Eternal Blazing Sun Church, once responsible for protecting Hugues Artois!

Jenna instinctively wanted to turn and leave the alley, but she noticed another Beyonder from the Eternal Blazing Sun Church standing guard at the alley's exit! He too was an Eternal Blazing Sun Church Beyonder who had protected Hugues Artois!

Valentine's eyes were bluer than lake water, and his expression was cold.

Jenna stopped turning and held her breath. Her right hand rested on her waist, ready to draw her hidden revolver and dagger in an instant.

Seeing her cautious stance, Imre quickly called out, "Relax! We're not here to arrest you."

Recalling Franca's analysis about the possibility of the official Beyonders making her an informant, Jenna calmed down a bit, but still eyed Imre and Valentine warily.

Imre flashed a friendly smile and said, "We do eliminate wild Beyonders, but that doesn't mean we don't have options."

"Don't be intimidated by the rumors about the stake. This is Trier. Wild Beyonders who aren't truly sinful won't face such a fate. Of course, similar cases happen in other provinces, villages, small cities, and towns."

Jenna grew more certain of the official Beyonders' intentions. She feigned inexperience and asked, "What do you want from me?"

Imre smiled.

"We hope you can cooperate with us.

"In fact, if we hadn't deliberately let you go, you would have been arrested long ago."

Jenna pondered for a moment, thinking about how she managed to lead a peaceful life after assassinating Hugues Artois.

After a while, she asked hesitantly, "Cooperate?"

Imre smiled and nodded.

"Let me introduce myself. I'm Imre, a Purifier of the Eternal Blazing Sun Church's Inquisition. This is my colleague, Valentine.

"Not every wild Beyonder earns our goodwill and the chance to cooperate. We've looked into your situation and confirmed that you're also a believer of God and haven't committed any serious offenses. Moreover, after gaining superpowers, you restrained yourself and didn't misuse your abilities, except for assassinating Hugues Artois.

"We understand your hatred and your choice. After all, he's a heretic who deserves death. Anyone has the right to purify him on behalf of God. You must know that if we hadn't arranged it and deliberately turned a blind eye to your actions, you wouldn't have escaped from the member of parliament's office."

Jenna nodded slowly, showing that she had realized it later.

Imre continued, "Because you're a believer who inherently stays true to yourself and doesn't abuse your abilities, we want to invite you to be our informant and provide us with corresponding intel.

"Don't worry, we won't force you to betray your friends. We just want you to keep an eye out for anything that might bring disaster to the market district and Trier."

Stay true to myself and refrain from abusing my abilities… I used to be like that in the past, barely so in the present, but will I be in the future? Jenna thought, mocking herself. She wanted to tell them that they had arrived too late, and she was no longer the same person.

After a moment's hesitation, she said, "I also live in the market district. I'd be glad to help resolve any issues that might harm this place through you."

She tactfully expressed her willingness to cooperate.

At that moment, Jenna felt inspired and blurted out, "I discovered something two days ago!"

"What?" Imre glanced at his teammate Valentine in surprise.

They hadn't expected their newly-hired informant to provide intel right away.

Jenna recounted how she'd attended a mysterious gathering where she heard about the disappearance of the Deep Valley Cloister's gatekeeper. Upon accepting the corresponding commission, she described how she and her companion accidentally stumbled upon a cybernetic-eyed monk entering a nearby quarry and opening a secret cave filled with numerous human arms and legs.

Throughout the process, she kept her companion's identity and name, as well as the time and location of the mysticism gathering, hidden.

Imre and Valentine were a mix of joy and solemnity.

They were delighted by the unexpected gain, but the peculiarity of the situation also troubled them.

"Very good. That's the kind of cooperation we need," Imre praised Jenna after she finished speaking.

Valentine nodded reluctantly.

It wasn't that he didn't see the need for such an informant; the incident with Hugues Artois had changed his perception of wild Beyonders significantly. However, he was a bit emotional as Imre could have convinced Celia Bello alone, yet he insisted on involving Valentine.

After praising the morning sun, he could have gone home to rest and enjoy breakfast with his family.

Nevertheless, Imre's reasoning was sound.

According to the rules, it was best to have two Purifiers present when developing informants, especially Beyonders who belonged to a few pathways like Demoness.

Imre explained that over the years, many Purifiers had fallen into the trap of being seduced while developing Demonesses as informants or pursuing them. This led them to fall in love, betray the Church, and lose control amid the torment of faith.

Hence, having two Purifiers to supervise each other in such cases was essential.

Though Jenna was still an Assassin and had plenty to go before qualifying as a true Demoness of Pleasure, one couldn't be careless about such matters, especially with a rare female Assassin.

After the praise, Imre added, "Cooperation means both sides can benefit from this matter. We'll reward you accordingly based on the intel you provide. You can choose from money, materials, knowledge, weapons, and more."

Jenna hesitated for a moment before asking, "Will there be a reward for what I just said?"

"What do you want?" Imre inquired.

"The main ingredient of the Instigator potion," Jenna replied without hesitation,

having already received the potion formula from Franca.

Imre wasn't surprised. He nodded and said, "We'll discuss it after we verify the authenticity and importance of this intel."

"Alright," Jenna replied, not too disappointed as she didn't hold out much hope.

Imre produced an ordinary-looking piece of white paper with a few simple clauses written on it, outlining what he had just said.

The terms didn't demand Jenna's faith to be constantly with the Eternal Blazing Sun, but they required her not to believe in an evil god.

Being experienced, Jenna read the terms over and over again until she confirmed that there were no issues, and then she readily signed her real name.

She watched Imre take out a fountain pen made of pure gold and sign his name. He then quickly wrote a few bright red words in the Notary position.

A sun-like glow briefly enveloped the contract before vanishing.

After bidding farewell to Imre and Valentine, Jenna headed towards Rue des Blouses Blanches.

…

Apartment 601, 3 Rue des Blouses Blanches.

Lumian roused Franca from her sleep at the crack of dawn and faced her wrathful expression as he recounted the Werewolf incident.

Franca swiftly focused her mind and mumbled contemplatively, "If there's a follow-up investigation, the one you'll face will either be Zombie or Wraith. I'm more inclined to believe the latter."

"Huh?" Lumian was bewildered.

Franca explained matter-of-factly, "They are Sequence 6 and Sequence 5 of the Prisoner pathway."

Lumian sighed, still puzzled, and commented, "You seem to know this pathway quite well."

"Of course." Franca chuckled. "In the whole world, besides a few Prisoner pathway Beyonders, the rest belong to two factions. One is the Southern Continent's terrorist organization, the Rose School of Thought, that I mentioned earlier, and the other is…"

At this point, she paused, teasing Lumian deliberately. After a few seconds, she revealed, "Mr. Fool's Church."

Chapter 298: Rose School of Thought

Mr. Fool's Church? Lumian was both surprised and unsurprised by the answer.

He hadn't expected the Church of The Fool to have a large number of Beyonders from the Prisoner pathway, but he figured that, according to the Bible's description, it wasn't too surprising for anyone from any pathway to appear.

Franca smiled and began to explain in detail, "Actually, the Prisoner pathway Beyonders of the Rose School of Thought and the Prisoner pathway Beyonders of the Church of The Fool were originally one."

"They later fractured?" Lumian hazarded a guess.

Franca confirmed tersely. "The Rose School of Thought is an incredibly ancient organization, boasting a history stretching back over two millennia, even predating the Fourth Epoch—prior to the Cataclysm."

Over 2,000 years old… Lumian was astonished.

When he learned that the Iron and Blood Cross Order had been established only 200 to 300 years ago, he had considered it ancient. But compared to the Rose School of Thought, the Iron and Blood Cross Order seemed like a child who hadn't even attended compulsory education.

Franca continued, "The Rose School of Thought was originally an orthodox organization in the Southern Continent. It ruled the Paz Valley and Star

Highlands, where the government and the church were one, until the invasion of the Northern Continent's countries."

"When the invasion occurred, they lost their country and went underground, becoming clandestine. On the one hand, they resisted the colonists and attempted to expel them from the Southern Continent. On the other hand, they frequently caused terrorist acts in the Northern Continent. Heh heh, this actually had no effect on their resistance to colonization. Instead, it incurred the hatred of the people of various countries. Of course, their primary goal might not be this. Perhaps it's purely for blood sacrifice and certain rituals."

"How did they fracture?" Lumian was more concerned about this question.

Franca leisurely paced two steps in the living room.

"The Rose School of Thought has held different beliefs for ages. Their core principle revolves around the notion that willpower is born from diverse desires, capable of reshaping reality and achieving incredible feats. Yet, there's a divide in how they approach these desires.

"Some adhere to indulgence, embracing passionate cravings at all times, even resorting to bloody or primitive sacrificial rituals to bolster their willpower. On the other hand, the temperance faction, working from the potions' names, advocates for suppressing desires, keeping them pent up within their hearts, only unleashing them during critical moments to unleash formidable forces.

"Hence, one faction is known for indulgence, while the other is the temperance faction."

Prisoner… Lumian silently echoed the name of Sequence 9 potion and pondered. "I reckon the temperance faction has got it right."

"Any sensible person would think the same. After all, the body is like a cage for the heart, and the world is a cage for the body. Madness must be curbed, and desires must be reined in," Franca sneered. "But there'll always be a few with a few screws loose. After indulgence, all that's left is madness. They'll barely be able to retain their basic faculties."

No wonder the Werewolf reacted that way… It seems he truly belongs to the Rose School of Thought… If the others in their ranks share his mindset, it only confirms their strength. Surviving to this day without wit would demand remarkable strength… Lumian's thoughts carried both mockery and vigilance.

Franca gazed out the window, watching the daylight grow brighter, and spoke, "In the beginning, the indulgence faction and the temperance faction barely tolerated each other. If you ignore me, I won't meddle with you or the people you protect. But later, the indulgence faction started claiming that the Chained God, whom both factions believe in, is actually the embodiment of some evil god."

Some evil god… Giving in to desires… Lumian's brow furrowed as he sought confirmation.

"Mother Tree of Desire?"

"Yes," Franca smiled. "Someone you know, or rather, a deity you know."

No, I don't want to know Her at all… The Rose School of Thought actually believes in the Mother Tree of Desire. The Werewolf's investigation of the Savoie Mob's information seems more complicated than I suspected… Does the Bliss Society have any connection to the Rose School of Thought? Or do they withhold such information? Lumian fell deep into thought.

Franca sighed sincerely and said, "Powers related to desire can be quite useful, but why can't they be used for the right purpose?"

"Blame it on the evil god?" Lumian cautioned his companion. "It's best if you don't try."

Franca smiled sheepishly and said, "I still know what I can try and what I shouldn't. I understand the dangers posed by evil gods better than you."

"Yes, later on, the indulgence faction launched a surprise attack on the temperance faction and inflicted severe injuries. The remaining members of the temperance faction fled in a sorry state and were hunted down for a long time until they found protection under Mr. Fool."

"I've heard that Saint Sharron from Mr. Fool's Church was once a member of the temperance faction. Likewise for the Angel of the Holy Spirit beside Mr. Fool's throne…"

The indulgence faction is terrifyingly powerful to be able to hunt down the angel-led temperance faction and send them scurrying. There's no doubt they have angels, and not just one… And Mr. Fool's Church can protect the temperance faction… After hearing this, Lumian gained a rough understanding of the Rose School of Thought's history. He grew more confident in the Church of The Fool's strength and associated some of the names from the Bible with significant figures in reality.

Simultaneously, he understood why the Knight of Swords, the other holder of a Minor Arcana card, intended to blow up the Rose School of Thought's weapons warehouse.

"Heh heh, should we stop calling it the Rose School of Thought? Can't we just call it the School of Indulgence?" Lumian taunted.

Franca replied in amusement, "What a lame name! Do you think every secret organization is as uncreative as the Iron and Blood Cross Order?"

As they chatted, they heard Jenna's familiar gait approaching.

Jenna opened the door and was taken aback to find Lumian standing there.

"Something happened to him last night," Franca explained.

"What happened?" Jenna scrutinized Lumian but found no signs of injury.

Franca briefly recounted the Werewolf and Rose School of Thought, leaving out the deep connection that tied her, Lumian, and the Church of The Fool.

The more Jenna listened, the more alarmed she became. She felt that a Sequence 9 was nothing in the world of mysticism.

Her determination to become an Instigator as soon as possible grew stronger.

After the discussion, Franca added, "I'll briefly explain the situation of Zombie and the Wraith so you don't rush forward without knowing anything or sense the abnormality without realizing it.

"Compared to Werewolf, a Zombie's greatest transformation is their steel-like sturdiness. They're unafraid of fire, bullets, or cannonballs. You need to hit the same spot more than five times in a row to break through their defenses. As Zombies, as long as their heads remain intact, they are not in danger.

"They have also mastered decomposition, frost, and death-type spells that can awaken and control ghosts and corpses.

"A Wraith can freely transform into a specter. They no longer have a physical body and are unafraid of physical damage. Their spellcasting abilities are significantly improved. They can even forcefully possess you, taking control of your body and making you kill yourself.

"After entering the Wraith state, they can traverse different mirrors and use them to conceal themselves. Even if you activate your Spirit Vision, it's almost impossible to see them directly.

"If you encounter something similar to a poltergeist, you mustn't be careless. You have to consider the possibility of dealing with a true Wraith."

Lumian listened attentively and pondered before saying, "Are attacks targeting the spirit more effective against Zombies and Wraiths?"

"Yes, I recommend the abilities of the Sun domain," Franca said with a chuckle. "However, I suggest that you run if you can when facing such an enemy. If you can't, seek help quickly."

Lumian never found it embarrassing to ask for help. As he expressed his agreement, he proposed a new idea.

"They're all members of the indulgence faction. Wouldn't it be better to deal with them using an ability to influence desires?"

If that was the case, the mystical item made from Shadow Branch would come in handy.

Lumian had yet to contact Madam Magician. He planned to wait for Mr. K to reward him before deciding which domain's Beyonder characteristic to match the Shadow Branch.

"In theory, yes, but it might have the opposite effect," Franca warned him.

After discussing the Rose School of Thought, Jenna recounted how she had been recruited as an informant and provided information about the Deep Valley Cloister.

Franca genuinely felt happy for her.

"That's right. This way, you'll have a fixed source for resources, but the officials are very strict about key items. You can't rely on them completely."

Lumian hadn't expected Valentine to be in the market district as well. He was concerned about his lack of necessary disguises. The Mystery Prying Glasses could only be used at critical moments.

After some thought, he said to Jenna, "Showing your devotion to the Eternal Blazing Sun in front of a Purifier will yield unexpected gains."

"You seem very experienced." Jenna's eyes darted around, sensing that Ciel held many secrets.

…

Leaving 3 Rue des Blouses Blanches, Lumian strolled back to Salle de Bal Brise.

The more he delved into secret organizations, the more he sensed his lack of knowledge about mysticism.

Lumian sipped a glass of absinthe and settled into his office.

Just as he was about to find a more comfortable position, starlight oozed forth, forming a dazzling and dreamy door.

The door swung open, and Madam Magician emerged. Today, she sported a beige shirt, a brownish-yellow dress, and dark brown leather boots.

What's the matter? Lumian rose to his feet.

Madam Magician grinned and replied, "The friend I mentioned earlier, the one who can help you decipher the symbolic elements, has finished his recent work and is on a short vacation. I'll take you to him now."

Lumian responded with unusual excitement, "Alright!"

Chapter 299: Interpretation

Lumian had been eagerly waiting for the dream symbols to be interpreted so that he could get enough clues before meeting with Padre Guillaume Bénet.

Only then could he effectively interrogate his target.

This time, when Madam Magician placed her hand on his shoulder, the usual layers of saturated colors and strange creatures were absent.

Instead, he felt a surge of starlight before finding himself in a distorted and concealed dark tunnel. His spirit and body seemed in chaos, unsure if he was moving forward, retreating, or simultaneously ascending and descending.

The state lasted briefly, but Lumian couldn't grasp the duration accurately, as if time had slipped from his grasp temporarily.

When he returned to his senses, he almost suspected that he was at Salle de Bal Brise just a moment ago, and in the next instant, he had arrived at his destination.

Before him lay a primitive forest, its dense canopy almost blotting out the sky. In an open space surrounded by towering trees stood a brownish-yellow hunter's hut.

"Go in," Madam Magician's voice echoed, though he couldn't see the demigod.

Following her instructions, Lumian stepped forward, treading on tumbling leeches and navigating through the dancing poisonous insects in the air and vegetation. He reached the hunter's hut and pushed open the unlatched wooden door.

Inside, rows of bookshelves lined the walls, and a wooden table stood in the center, seemingly existing in a different world compared to the primitive forest outside.

A figure sat behind the table, dressed in a white shirt and an open black coat, appearing somewhat obscured by a thick fog. Lumian could barely make out the clothes, facial features, and gender of the person, but not his face clearly.

"Have a seat," the figure spoke with a slightly magnetic and ethereal voice.

"Hello," Lumian greeted with a polite bow before taking a seat. "May I know how I should address you?"

The figure pondered for a moment and replied, "Think of me as a poet."

Poet? Lumian didn't fully grasp the significance of the code name, but he still chose to show respect. "Hello, Mr. Poet."

The poet gave a small nod and said, "Magician has already shared the entire dream and related information with me, but I'd still like to hear you recount it in detail."

Addressing her directly as Magician… Is he also a member of the Tarot Club? A holder of a Major Arcana card? Lumian sized up the poet opposite him with a guess.

In the dense fog's outline, he got a clearer impression.

His black hair was longer than usual, giving him an artistic appearance. His eyes were emerald green, not sharp but captivating. He had a slim face and a relaxed posture…

The combination of these elements and the thick fog made the poet seem like he emerged from a dream.

"Alright," Lumian replied.

He recounted Cordu's nightmare, supplemented by the various traces found in the ruins and the vast amount of information he gathered over the past month.

Compared to before, his emotions were still stirred by recalling these matters, but not as intensely. Throughout the entire process, he only took a single deep breath.

As he spoke, Lumian noticed the poet, leaning back in his chair, clasping his hands between his chest and abdomen. The poet's green eyes were much clearer than before.

In the next second, Lumian noticed strange insects crawling in and out of the other party's eye sockets.

The insects switched between translucency and opaqueness, as if carrying rings on their backs.

Such a scene nearly made Lumian forget to continue his recount. It was like facing the headless monster created by Supervisor Olson. He couldn't help but feel shocked.

He composed himself and forced himself to ignore the strange insects wriggling into his eyes, expressing everything he wanted to say.

After his words trailed off, the poet fell silent for a moment before continuing, "It's truly a dream filled with symbolic meaning.

"Let's start with the simplest part—the deceased Warlock in the tomb."

Doesn't it symbolize Aurore becoming Inevitability's Blessed and ultimately dying? Lumian was about to ask this question, but before he could, the poet seemed to sense his thoughts and took the initiative to explain.

"This is a typical dual-structure symbol. In other words, it contains two layers of meaning.

"The first layer is about the Warlock representing the power of Inevitability, or rather, corruption. And it also stands for Termiboros. The coffin is like the concept of 'death.' Both symbolize the sealing of Inevitability's power and its loss of vitality. The tomb itself represents the seal.

"In the dream, we can see that the Warlock is truly dead and has never left the tomb. This aligns with the sealed state on your body.

"Your sister Aurore got some boon from Inevitability in this incident as well. She's suspected to be one of the leaders, embodying the power of Inevitability to a certain extent. Plus, she's already dead, so the Warlock matter takes on a second symbolic meaning.

"These two layers of symbolism are superimposed through Inevitability's core power, which can easily make interpreters overlook one of them."

So that's how it is… Lumian's heart sank as he gradually became convinced by the poet. From another perspective, he now understood the essence of the Warlock legend.

The poet kept his seated posture, and there were no longer any strange insects crawling in and out of his eye sockets.

"Now that we've unraveled the full symbolism of the deceased Warlock, there's a preliminary answer for the owl and the other you.

"The other you symbolizes both your mutated personality due to corruption and Termiboros's attempt to achieve His goal by influencing your thoughts. If we only had the first symbol, the other you probably wouldn't be able to leave the tomb.

"The fact that the owl can freely enter and exit the deceased Warlock's tomb means that it can bypass the seal to some extent. It also displayed a few characteristics: monitoring your changes, not showing up at critical moments, and guarding the deceased Warlock.

"Based on our interpretation of the symbolic meaning of the deceased Warlock, the owl represents another Blessed of Inevitability, assigned to monitor your condition. Its attitude towards the deceased Warlock is quite ambiguous. It didn't exhibit the protective behavior it should have, nor did it assist during the final ritual with the angel's descent.

"Bypassing the seal suggests it's in the outside world and might be communicating with Termiboros in some way. I'm not entirely sure about that yet. You shouldn't ignore other possibilities."

So, the symbol of the Sufferer turns out to be the owl. I thought it was the other me or Aurore… Lumian heaved a sigh of relief but also felt a sense of disappointment.

During the momentary pause in the poet's speech, he seized the opportunity to pose a question. "The underground altar exists, but what does the Sufferer aura in the dream symbolize?"

"The first layer symbolizes the previous appearance of the power of Inevitability there, but only on this layer. It's unlikely that the symbolic elements will take the form of the Sufferer aura." The poet took a moment to interpret. "As for the second layer, if the owl—the Blessed of Inevitability—who watches over you is already a Sufferer, it means it doesn't want others to come into contact with the altar of Inevitability. It also symbolizes the power of Inevitability.

"Furthermore, we observed that you suffered the least damage back then. This suggests that the Sufferer isn't willing to kill you. It might even protect you to some extent. This is quite similar to the psychiatric treatment you experienced in Trier's market district."

So, from the beginning, that person was already eying Termiboros? Of course, before his intentions are fully revealed, he will cooperate with Termiboros to do something… Termiboros attempted to influence me several times, but without success. Could this be the reason? Lumian couldn't help but sympathize with the Inevitability angel sealed in his chest.

The poet continued, "I suspect there's a third symbolic layer. It represents a true Sufferer in Cordu, a Sufferer who's not at the Beyonder level."

A true Sufferer… Lumian's heart skipped a beat.

He made numerous connections but couldn't find the correct answer.

The poet wasn't entirely certain about this, so he didn't elaborate further. Instead, he focused on interpreting the symbol that Lumian was most concerned about.

"Whether or not the lizard-like elf actually exists, its symbolic importance in the dream is quite evident.

"Firstly, it represents a yearning for the cemetery and a fascination with entering and exiting tombs, but it never truly enters the tomb of the deceased Warlock. This signifies its affiliation with another faction, linked to the power of Inevitability, yet not exactly the same. It appears to be using this connection to seek and attain something related to Inevitability.

Another faction… Lumian recalled the diaphanous "lizard" present during the Tree of Shadow incident.

The poet sat up straighter.

"Secondly, it symbolizes concealed corruption and unconscious alterations.

"In the entire dream, only two individuals had a lizard-like elf crawl out of their mouths. One was your sister Aurore, and the other was the deputy padre, Michel Garrigue. What do you recall about him in reality?"

Lumian pondered for a moment and responded, "He's somewhat similar to the dream, but not as exaggerated.

"He's a devoted follower of the Eternal Blazing Sun. When he was shunned by Guillaume Bénet, he became fixated on giving sermons and hearing confessions. Later, his behavior became more and more apparent, neglecting all other matters…"

Suddenly, Lumian was startled.

He thought of Aurore, the other person from the dream who had a lizard-like elf emerge from their mouth.

Hadn't she also neglected to ask Hela for help?

Mr. Poet nodded.

"Your sister Aurore should have exhibited similar behavior.

"Thirdly, the faction or deity represented by the lizard-like elf does not want to witness an angel of Inevitability descending. It symbolizes the role of a saboteur."

Seeing Lumian's confusion, the poet continued, "If it hadn't been the person with the lizard-like elf crawling out of their mouth who knocked you out, brought you to the final sacrificial site, and turned you into a vessel, the descent ritual might have succeeded.

"Consider this: during the ritual, if someone else had stood in front of Aurore instead of you, would she have gained a moment of clarity and pushed him off the altar?"

Chapter 300: Another Symbol

Upon hearing Mr. Poet's question, Lumian was caught off guard. A shiver ran up his spine and pierced his brain like an icy dagger.

Whether it was Aurore, who had knocked him out in the dream and led him to the sacrificial grounds, or the deputy padre, Michel Garrigue, who had done it in reality, they all had been secretly corrupted by the lizard-like elves—evident from them crawling out of their mouths!

If Lumian hadn't become the vessel, forced onto the altar and stood before Aurore, Termiboros's descent ritual might have succeeded. Aurore wouldn't have pushed the vessel out the altar, ruining the rite, and Lumian's Mr. Fool mark wouldn't have been activated!

This realization left Lumian's mind in chaos.

He never imagined that the lizard-like elf was behind the sabotage of the ritual. They had insidiously corrupted Aurore and the deputy padre, making them blind to important matters and missing their last chance to save themselves!

"W-what does it want? What's its true motive?" Lumian asked, feeling a pang of pain.

The poet's voice, veiled in mist, replied calmly, "I'm just interpreting the symbolic meaning of your dream's elements. I can't fully reconstruct the truth.

"But I can offer some speculation.

"The faction represented by the lizard-like elves aims to use the large-scale sacrifice of the Inevitability believers to summon an angel for some hidden purpose. However, they don't want Termiboros to descend upon this land for real.

"There must be a conflict between them and the entity known as Inevitability."

Lumian nodded, finding it the most logical explanation.

He couldn't help but furrow his brow.

"What hidden motives do they have?"

"That's one of the paths for your subsequent investigation," the poet said with a smile. "Decryption isn't divination or prophecy. You need enough information for deduction. You can't make wild guesses."

Lumian nodded slightly, eager to catch the padre, Guillaume Bénet.

The poet leaned forward, placing his elbows on the wooden table, hands still clasped together.

"I've already deciphered the more crucial symbolic elements. There's only one left.

"Your dream itself holds a strong symbolic meaning."

"The dream itself?" Lumian pondered for a few seconds but couldn't grasp the specific symbolism.

The poet's voice deepened, no longer abnormally ethereal but more magnetic.

"It symbolizes protection.

"Back then, due to intense emotional upheavals, your mind was on the verge of collapse, and you fell into a deep slumber. If not for the comfort and hope brought about by the dream of reality, perhaps you would have collapsed completely. Driven by your self-destructive tendencies, you would have acted irrationally until your death.

"Moreover, we can confirm that you don't have the ability to produce a dream of reality, nor can you draw investigators into that dream. The sealed Termiboros can't do it either. In other words, the dream of reality is a result of external interference.

"We haven't grasped the specific abilities of the High-Sequence Beyonder of the Inevitability pathway. We can't determine if it was done by the Inevitability Blessed symbolized by the owl or if it was influenced by other factions. Given the previous interpretation and the situation in reality, all of them have sufficient motives.

"In short, besides the entity known as Inevitability, no one else wants to see Termiboros truly descend upon the land."

Lumian instantly recalled the area around the blood-colored mountain peak in Cordu's ruins that induced slumber.

Before he could bring up the subject, the poet added, "Considering that the area that forces others into sleep is around the sacrificial ground and not the house where you sleep, I'm inclined to believe that it's influenced by other factions. Their main purpose is to disrupt the ritual, and pacifying you just comes with it.

"If it was done by the Inevitability Blessed symbolized by the owl, the location of the abnormal area would be completely opposite."

The faction represented by the lizard-like elf did it, or someone else did. Is there another faction? The more Lumian understood the situation, the more he realized that the truth of the Cordu disaster was far more complicated than he had expected.

He fell silent, taking a moment to gather his thoughts before speaking.

"What's the significance of the empty baby cradle in the administrator's castle?"

The poet took a few seconds to contemplate and then replied, "It's a rather minor symbol. It represents the child of the Great Mother. Based on the information you provided, it seems that the child might have entered our world secretly during the final sacrificial ritual, aided by another blood-related son hidden by Madame Pualis. It then left Cordu unnoticed, leaving behind the empty cradle."

The spawn of the Great Mother… Lumian hissed to himself, realizing the seriousness of the situation was on par with Termiboros's descent.

Inevitability's faction had taken a significant risk and worked tirelessly for nearly a year, all for the sake of obtaining a sealed angel. Ultimately, it served the Great Mother's purpose.

With those thoughts, Lumian let go of his worries.

The saints and angels of the Tarot Club and the Church of The Fool would undoubtedly handle this matter. It was beyond the concerns of someone like him, a mere Sequence 7.

Besides, this issue primarily revolved around the sacrificial ritual and had little to do with the truth behind the Cordu disaster. Lumian's main focus was tracking down and capturing the padre, Guillaume Bénet.

He then inquired, "Why was the entire Cordu village destroyed, while only my home remained intact?"

The poet pondered for a moment and answered, "I believe it symbolizes Aurore's nostalgia, reluctance, and regret.

"After the ritual, she should have regained some clarity. In the midst of the fusion of the villagers' flesh and blood, she instinctively protected the building that represented her beautiful past life.

"Of course, it's possible she also leveraged other forces interfering with the ritual."

Nostalgia… Reluctance… The beautiful life of the past… Lumian fell silent, lost in thought.

Observing this, the poet unclasped his hands and said, "I've deciphered all the symbolic elements of your dream."

"Thank you, Mr. Poet." Lumian stood up and, following the Church of The Fool's customs, pressed his hand to his chest and bowed slightly.

For a moment, his mind turned adrift, seeing the poet, the wooden table, the surrounding bookshelves, walls, the primitive forest outside, and all kinds of insects fade away like a dream, returning to deep darkness.

In an instant, the darkness vanished, and Lumian found himself standing at the edge of a marketplace.

In the distance, there were white buildings with dark black or earthy yellow bell towers and spires. Nearby, cloud-like tents and herds of cows, sheep, and horses were scattered around.

Most of the people passing through the market had dark skin, as if they were exposed to the sun every day. Among them, men wore felt hats and dark-red or sky-blue robes, while women wore colorful multi-layered gowns.

A chilling wind howled as Lumian gazed at the snow-covered mountain peak in the distance, momentarily lost in his thoughts.

His conversation with the poet and what he had just experienced felt like a vivid dream.

No, it was a dream!

That's why he couldn't see Mr. Poet clearly.

I didn't realize I was dreaming at all. When did the dream start? It felt eerily similar to the dream I had in the ruins of Cordu. Could it be that Mr. Poet's divine path has the power to make others have vivid dreams? And could the abnormal area around the blood-colored mountain be related to similar abilities? Lumian was shocked at first, but then numerous thoughts rushed through his mind.

Just then, Madam Magician appeared before him, wearing a beige shirt, a brownish-yellow dress, and dark brown leather boots.

"Do you want to go back to Salle de Bal Brise now?" the Major Arcana card holder asked.

Lumian casually asked, "Where are we?"

Madam Magician gazed at the azure sky and pure white clouds and replied, "We're in Star Highlands' Rapus, once a significant city in the Highlands Kingdom, also known as the City of White."

Star Highlands… Lumian recalled the Rose School of Thought and recounted the Werewolf attack and Gardner Martin's arrangements to Madam Magician. Finally, he asked, "Did the Rose School of Thought enter the market district because of the Tree of Shadow? And didn't they gather detailed information about me from the Bliss Society?"

Madam Magician chuckled.

"You should have asked these questions earlier. The gentleman who helped you decipher the dream symbols is an expert at dealing with the Rose School of Thought. Alright, I'll ask him for you now."

With that, she vanished in front of Lumian. A few minutes later, she reappeared in the same position, unnoticed by the people passing through the market.

Madam Magician smiled at Lumian and said, "Based on that gentleman's experience, although the Mother Tree of Desire and its worshiping organizations show clear purpose, sufficient decisiveness, accurate foresight of the future, and excellent planning on a higher level and at the macro scale, when it comes to specific events, they often appear chaotic, disorderly, and even mad. It reflects the nature of the evil god itself.

"In simpler terms, the organizations worshiping the Mother Tree of Desire don't cooperate or communicate well. They sometimes act erratically and unpredictably. It's a common situation.

"However, in the past year or two, that gentleman noticed some rudimentary cooperation among these organizations. Some members of the Devil families are even involved."

"Devil families?" Lumian had never heard of such a term.

Madam Magician casually explained, "The families that control the Devil pathway—the Criminal pathway. Some of them show signs of worshiping the Mother Tree of Desire."

Chapter 301: Devil

Criminal pathway… Lumian began to recall the contents of Aurore's grimoires.

Sequence 9 Criminal possessed a formidable physique, sharp senses, and a range of criminal skills. They were adept at wielding various weapons and could even kill their targets using something as mundane as a spoon.

Sequence 8 Coldblooded were heartless and inhuman. Their bodies were further strengthened, and they gained mastery over spell-like abilities with a leaning towards the eviler domains. Different Coldblooded excelled in different aspects, making them challenging opponents to deal with with no one-size-fits-all solution.

Sequence 7 Serial Killer was well-versed in devilish knowledge and rituals. They could summon projections of devils from the Abyss and had a sick fascination with creating serial murders.

Turning to Madam Magician with a thoughtful expression, Lumian inquired, "What are the names of Sequence 6 and Sequence 5 on the Criminal pathway?"

"Sequence 6 is called Devil, and Sequence 5 is Desire Apostle," Madam Magician readily shared her knowledge.

From worshiping the devil to becoming one—a fitting name for the Devil pathway. And Desire Apostle sounds like a Beyonder who would follow the Mother Tree of Desire. It's a compatible match. They might as well rename it to Mother Tree of Desire Apostle… Lumian couldn't help but criticize as he analyzed the information.

Madam Magician continued, "The first major qualitative transformation of the Criminal pathway is at Sequence 6 Devil. After the corresponding Beyonder temporarily transforms into a devil, not only will their strength, speed, and defense improve, but they become immune to most poisons and acquire a certain resistance to curses and flames.

"More importantly, they possess Malicious Perception. If someone can cause fatal damage to them in a short period of time and begin to take steps to make it a reality, and both parties are within the range of their abilities, the Devil Beyonder can sense the source of danger and the perpetrator. This allows them to take targeted revenge in a counterstrike."

So powerful… Lumian couldn't help but frown.

If the Rose School of Thought's subsequent operations had members of the Devil families involved, the situation would become exponentially more dangerous.

Of course, the Prisoner pathway's Zombie and Wraiths were also terrifying.

Most importantly, at a certain Sequence, Beyonders of these two pathways boasted formidable defenses against flames.

Dammit, Pyromaniacs would be in for a rough time! Lumian made a self-deprecating comment, infected by Franca's and Jenna's vulgarities.

After pondering for a moment, Lumian inquired, "How short can the period of time be for the Malicious Perception to be effective?"

Madam Magician smiled and replied, "The Devil pathway is highly individualistic. Devils from various races each possess their distinct abilities. Even among devils originating from the same race, differences arise due to their individual nature. The reason behind this lies in the requirement of ostentatious malice, which varies from person to creature.

"Unique wills, distinct hearts, and a penchant for desires all amalgamate to form the diverse nature of devils.

"Now, to your query. Some Devils can sense malice merely minutes before its occurrence, whereas others can foretell it hours or even more in advance. As they progress in Sequence, this ability only grows stronger.

"The range of this ability's influence can span a few kilometers, an entire market district, or perhaps even encompass the whole of Trier.

"Furthermore, Devils wield an array of spells involving flames, poison, and filth."

The more Lumian listened, the more serious he grew. Devils were truly powerful—just like Zombies countering Pyromaniacs, who were experts in fire spells and close combat.

After briefly explaining the Desire Apostle's abilities, Madam Magician comforted him with a smile,

"Don't worry too much. Even if the Rose School of Thought takes action in the future, their target will most likely be Gardner Martin. You'll just be along for the ride. The Iron and Blood Cross Order, being a secret organization, has enough strength to resist the Rose School of Thought even if the Devil families send someone to participate.

"If the Bliss Society and the Rose School of Thought share intelligence, you may become their primary target, but they won't launch a fatal attack on you paradoxically. They fear releasing an Inevitability angel like Termiboros. As long as you pay more attention to abnormalities and suspected conspiracies around you, you'll have enough time and opportunity to seek help."

Upon hearing this, Lumian retorted, "If the Rose School of Thought sends an angel to capture me, how will I have time to seek help?"

Madam Magician chuckled.

"Do you think Trier is a public washroom where an angel can descend and snatch someone away easily?

"If it weren't for the alternate space of the Tree of Shadow with the Paramita World enveloping it, that brainless Abomination wouldn't have been able to descend its power.

"So, remember to avoid such places and live under the sun in Trier."

Lumian heaved a sigh of relief and asked in confusion, "Abomination?"

Could it be the power summoned by Susanna Mattise?

Madam Magician's expression turned odd.

"Yes, Abomination—the child of the Chained God whom the Mother Tree of Desire worshipers and the Rose School of Thought originally worshiped. He's a Sequence 1 angel and the current leader of the Rose School of Thought.

"I won't tell you His real name. This guy is covered in curses. If you say His real name often, you might become a frog that needs a prince's kiss to recover. Or worse."

"Why a prince?" Lumian had read the Intis Fairy Tales Collection published two years ago and remembered that the protagonist of the story was a princess.

"Why else would it be called a curse?" Madam Magician wore a matter-of-fact expression.

Lumian was speechless. He asked, "The spawn of the Mother Tree of Desire are angels, already roaming our world. And to descend, the child of the Great Mother requires a ritual. Is one more special than the other?"

"They're equally special," said Madam Magician, her expression taking an odd turn once more. "The crux of the matter is that it wasn't the Mother Tree of Desire who gave birth to the Abomination, but a high-ranking existence in our world known as the Chained God."

Lumian's heart filled with trauma as he immediately thought of Louis Lund, Administrator Béost, and his valets.

"Can the Mother Tree of Desire impregnate creatures of all races and genders through the barrier?" Lumian asked with a hint of fear in his voice.

Madam Magician shook her head.

"She doesn't have authority in that regard. That belongs to the Great Mother.

"However, if you're enticed by Her and end up interacting with the power She has descended or the aura that seeped into our world, She has plenty of ways to impregnate you. Furthermore, the Chained God pathway—the Prisoner pathway—is rather special and has a close connection to the Mother Tree of Desire.

"If it weren't for Mr. Fool's protection, the temperance faction members would have more or less been influenced by Her in the past year or two."

Lumian nodded, then brought up the issue of the indulgence faction and the temperance faction.

"I believe the temperance faction's philosophy is correct, but why can the indulgence faction still grow and possess such strength? Is it because there's no fear of losing control when they are already crazy?"

Madam Magician chuckled and responded, "The temperance faction's philosophy is correct, but it doesn't mean that the indulgence faction's viewpoint is necessarily erroneous.

"You have to remember that acting based on the potion's name is like tarot cards. There's a difference between the upright and reversed position. And even if we act in the upright manner, the acting principles summarized by different people will vary according to their unique minds and experiences. After all, we're just acting. Our goal is to deceive the mental imprint left behind by that entity and digest the potion bit by bit. It would be troublesome if we were to completely align with Him."

Lumian nodded in understanding.

"So, the phrase 'remember that you're only acting' not only prevents us from losing ourselves to avoid mental problems but also helps avoid such problems altogether?"

"That's right," Madam Magician affirmed.

Lumian then steered the conversation back to matters pertaining to the Mother Tree of Desire.

"Mr. Poet mentioned that there are multiple organizations that worship the Mother Tree of Desire?"

"Poet…" Madam Magician's lips curled up slightly. "They're all relatively small organizations that haven't formed a large cult. They're far inferior to the Rose School of Thought and the few Devil families, but they're relatively hidden. Currently, we are aware of three. One is the Bliss Society, the other is the Naturism Sect, and the third is the Tree Worship Sect."

After pondering the matter for a while, Lumian finally brought up the idea of crafting a mystical item using the Shadow Branch.

"Madam, once I receive the reward from Mr. K, I'd like your help in finding a saint-level Artisan to craft the item. Do you happen to know the price?" Lumian inquired.

Madam Magician grinned and replied, "I haven't rewarded you yet for successfully joining the Iron and Blood Cross Order. How about using that reward to cover the cost?"

"That sounds perfect," Lumian happily agreed.

Receiving three rewards for a mission was truly a remarkable thing.

Madam Magician nodded thoughtfully and said, "A friend's relative knows a demigod-level Artisan. I'll check with them first. If it doesn't work out, I'll find another option."

She then smiled and asked, "With the gap between the Lucky One and the potential reward from Mr. K, are you sure you want to use one of them to create a mystical item?"

Lumian responded with certainty, "I won't have any regrets."

His approach had always been to utilize available resources as swiftly as possible.

It had to be known that the padre was already a Sequence 5 bestowed when he left Cordu. He might have even taken a potion to boost his abilities. Dealing with him on one's own was akin to embracing death for Lumian.

He needed to make use of every available resource to enhance his skills quickly and gather more allies to increase his chances of success!

During his early days as a wanderer, Lumian once stumbled upon a wild apple tree laden with fruit. He intended to wait for the apples to grow larger and less sour before figuring out how to pluck them. However, to his surprise a few days layer, someone else had managed to harvest all the small and sour apples.

This incident left a profound mark on Lumian, significantly influencing his approach to handling things.

Chapter 302: Mummy Ashes

Madam Magician didn't say more and asked again, "Do you want to return to Salle de Bal Brise now, or stay here until noon?"

Lumian had never left Intis, let alone come to the Southern Continent. Since he had nothing planned, he nodded and replied, "I'd like to explore around a bit."

Madam Magician gave a slight nod and vanished before him.

Almost instantly, a bone-chilling wind swept through the crowd and struck Lumian.

Having come from Trier in the summer, he couldn't help but shiver in the harsh highlander winter.

Accompanied by the cold breeze, the distant clamor of the market, a few hundred meters away, filled Lumian's ears, making him feel truly immersed in this world.

Recalling how Madam Magician's arrival and disappearance had gone unnoticed by the surrounding people, Lumian quickly made a guess.

Did she create a wall of spirituality or pull me into a separate alternate space?

As these thoughts raced through Lumian's mind, he noticed that the passersby looked at him with wariness and puzzlement. He was only wearing a thin shirt, a black vest, and thin pants, which were hardly suitable for the harsh winter.

"What are you staring at? Haven't you seen someone acting cool?" Lumian muttered. Relying on Alms Monk's endurance, he nonchalantly ventured into the market.

The smell of fresh livestock dung, the sweet aroma of corn, and the tantalizing scent of roasted meat with spices filled his nostrils.

Lumian surveyed the area and spotted numerous stalls selling various food items made primarily from corn. There were boiled whole corn, roasted corn with red sauce, corn chunks served in thick soup, roasted corn wrapped in beef and mutton, onions, and potatoes, corn ground into a gooey paste and stuffed into various meat chunks, and corn spread into rough flatbread sprinkled with ingredients…

After a moment of consideration, Lumian made his way through the "cleared" path among the marketers and arrived at a stall.

The stall owner was a man in his thirties with dark and flushed skin, gaunt face, high cheekbones, and dark brown eyes. He had long greasy black hair and wore a black felt hat along with a dark red robe made of wool and other materials.

Lumian pointed at the bubbling yellow corn paste in the iron-colored pot and asked in Intisian, "How much?"

He had noticed that some folks here understood Intisian. The transactions were done using various metal currencies, including verl d'or.

The stall owner seemed scared, and he replied in non-fluent Intisian with a hint of flattery, "5 coppet for 1 cup."

A lick, pretty cheap… Lumian glanced at the corn paste with mutton chunks and pulled out a brass coin with a Hornacis mountain range pattern on the front.

The vendor breathed with relief and quickly produced a paper cup that didn't quite match the market's style and technology. He filled it up generously, even adding a few extra meat chunks.

As Lumian received the cup, warmth spread through his body.

It was a wonderful experience to have something warm while enduring the biting wind.

The even better experience was the warm corn paste flowing from his mouth into his esophagus and into his stomach, spreading warmth to every nook and cranny of his body.

The corn paste, with its light sweetness and a hint of spiciness and pungency, perfectly complemented the beef and mutton cubes, neutralizing their gamey smell. It was peculiar and appetizing, a treat for his taste buds.

Ignoring the cautious glances from the women and the fear and loathing from the man driving the cows and sheep, Lumian sipped his corn paste and made his way to the end of the market.

Soon, he entered the City of White, Rapus. He spotted the golden Eternal Blazing Sun cathedral and the God of Steam and Machinery cathedral adorned with various industrial components. The white buildings, shops selling leather and fabrics, the Highland Import and Export Corporation, and the Rapus Mining Federation signs were all visible. Carriages pulled by long-haired cows and medium-sized horses filled the streets, accompanied by locals in robes and a few foreigners in formal attire.

Lumian picked a shop called Highland Mystic Potion and entered like a tourist.

The owner, an Intisian in his forties, with typical black hair and blue eyes, wore a white shirt with floral patterns, thick cashmere clothes, and a dark blue coat with golden trim.

Upon seeing Lumian, he greeted him warmly, "Good morning, dear compatriot."

The man checked out Lumian's attire and asked with concern, "Did you encounter a bandit?"

"I just arrived in Rapus. There was an accident on the way," Lumian replied, smiling with a Trier accent.

The proprietor of the mystic potion nodded in understanding.

"The Southern Continent isn't all it's cracked up to be, but it's a paradise for adventurers. I arrived in West Balam fifteen years ago in search of opportunities. Life only turned for the better when I found true opportunities in the City of White. By steam!"

With a sigh, he drew a triangular Sacred Emblem on his chest.

"By steam!" Lumian responded with the same etiquette.

The owner's smile grew warmer.

"Brother, would you like some mummy powder? Real mummy powder!"

Lumian looked around the small shop and smiled.

"Why don't you display the mummy in the window to prove its authenticity?"

The boss smiled sheepishly and said, "That would upset the barbarians.

"Some buy mummy powder, but most can't accept mummies as commodities."

Lumian deliberately said, "When I left Trier, there was a shortage of mummy powder. The price skyrocketed. Ever thought of transporting mummies back to Trier for sale?"

"Maritime trade is too risky, and the import-export companies give terrible prices, not to mention the taxes they charge. Those damned hyenas!" The owner glanced at Lumian, testing the waters, "If you're willing to take the risks, we can cooperate."

"How many mummies can you provide?" Lumian feigned skepticism.

The boss smiled.

"That depends on how many you want. I have the right connections."

I can have as many as I want? Have you unearthed the grave of a nobleman from the Highlands Kingdom? Or will you find a corpse or even a living person to make one on the spot? Lumian engaged in a conversation with the owner of the Highland Mystic Potion and left the shop, pretending he needed time to consider the offer.

After wandering for some time, Lumian came across a magnificent three-story white building by the roadside, bustling with locals swarming in.

Curiosity got the better of him, and he followed the crowd inside, only to find Intis soldiers, clad in their distinctive black triangular hats and blue coats with gold threads, guarding the entrance in their white pants and black leather boots.

Rapus, Lumian thought to himself, is truly an Intis colonial city. His gaze settled on the golden words above the main entrance, which read: "Rapus Specialized Court."

Taking a seat in an empty corner of the courtroom, Lumian tuned in to the trial that was underway.

Two Intis soldiers stood accused of a heinous crime—intercepting a newlywed couple in the suburbs, murdering the husband, and subjecting the wife to unspeakable horrors.

The latter was fortunate enough to survive. With numerous witnesses and ample evidence, the entire case appeared quite clear-cut.

After much deliberation, the judge, who was now holding the third hearing, finally pronounced them guilty, decreeing their immediate expulsion from the highlands. Upon their return to Intis, they would face further punishment in a military court.

The verdict didn't sit well with the local crowd, and they expressed their dissatisfaction loudly. However, the judge remained resolute, ordering bailiffs and soldiers to remove the dissenters from the court.

Lumian observed the faces of the agitated and angered locals as they were forced to leave, and only when they had gone did he decide to leave the courtroom as well.

As he strolled past the Eternal Blazing Sun cathedral's square, he noticed a group of clergymen in white robes adorned with golden threads.

They were walking towards the cathedral, keeping a safe distance from the crowd, and speaking in hushed tones.

Lumian, relying on his Hunter's ears, strained to catch their words from afar.

Though the distance made it difficult, he managed to make out two phrases: "Evernight's power… has invaded this place…"

What could that mean? Is the Evernight Goddess Church of the Loen Kingdom extending its reach into the Star Highlands? Lumian pondered for a moment before continuing on his way.

…

At 12:30 p.m. Trier time, Madam Magician escorted Lumian back to Salle de Bal Brise, and he reappeared in his bedroom.

He sat down at his wooden table and began organizing Mr. Poet's interpretation of the dream's symbolic elements.

In the midst of his work, Lumian heard familiar footsteps approaching and an impolite knock on the door.

Putting down the fountain pen, Lumian stood up and glanced at the entrance.

"Come in."

It was Franca, dressed in her usual attire of blouse, beige breeches, and red boots. However, she now wore a light-colored pleated dress around her waist.

"Very strange," Lumian remarked honestly.

Franca sighed, a mix of joy and melancholy on her face.

"I'm not used to wearing dresses yet. This will have to do for now.

"This is to welcome Pleasure."

"Pleasure?" Lumian was puzzled by the term she mentioned.

Franca closed the door behind her and explained with a complex expression,

"Since you've joined the Iron and Blood Cross Order, my initial mission is considered accomplished. Now, I'll see if I can join and assist with your operation.

"And since the mission is complete, there should be a reward. The next Sequence for a Witch is Demoness of Pleasure.

"Yes, I already have all the main ingredients and most of the supplementary ones, except for real mummy ashes. I came to ask if you could keep an eye out during your mysticism gatherings. Damn it, those mummy ashes sold in shops are all fake!"

Chapter 303: Sparks of "Fire"

Mummy ashes… Lumian's mind immediately went to the Highland Mystic Potion shop in Rapus.

The mummies had their origins in the old Highlands Kingdom, and they had a special ancient Highlander term for it. Emperor Roselle translated it into "mummy."

In simpler terms, the most genuine and ancient mummies could be found in Star Highlands, the largest source of mummy ashes.

Franca grew more and more agitated as she spoke.

"Why do you think men in Trier are so keen on things that enhance their abilities in that area? They even dare to consume mummy ashes! This means that those who genuinely need them can't afford the real deal!"

"Many women in Trier are interested as well, hoping their husbands and lovers can perform better in bed." Lumian had read about it and asked Franca curiously, "Does it really work?"

Franca scoffed.

"I can't see any other effects besides getting sick from using powder made from a specially prepared corpse. Well, its use in mysticism is a different matter.

"Think about it. Trier is now flooded with fake mummy ashes. People are gobbling them up without knowing if they're authentic!

"There are many herbs with similar effects, but once they are labeled as mummy ashes, the price skyrockets. Who wouldn't take advantage of that?

"Don't overestimate the merchants' conscience. I've heard complaints at many mysticism gatherings about people finding dead rats, grinding them into powder, mixing it with herbs, and selling it as mummy ashes.

"When I, um, before I had superpowers and was still struggling, I saw the café owner making fake coffee from chicory. Later, he couldn't even afford that. He gathered coffee dregs, animal bile, and even brick dust and soot as a substitute. Believe me, if you visit the kitchens of certain restaurants and cafés, you'd want to hang the boss from the gallows. Those escargot shells are reused, picked up from the trash, filled with ingredients, and served to new customers"

Franca continued her rant, expressing her frustration with counterfeit and inferior products hindering her Beyonder career.

After she finished speaking, Lumian asked with certainty, "Have you finished digesting your Witch potion?"

Franca's emotions returned to normal as she replied smugly, "That was a long time ago. Have you seen me act as a Witch during this period of time?"

Lumian changed the subject thoughtfully.

"You seem to despise the Rose School of Thought for their acts of terror in the Northern Continent. You even mock them for hindering the colonization resistance by the Southern Continent natives. I don't quite understand your logic. Shouldn't they resist and take revenge when bullied?"

Franca walked to the window of Lumian's bedroom and gazed at the dock and depot concealed by buildings. Her gaze was unfocused as she said, "They should—if they wish to seek the adrenaline from exacting vengeance, for a moment of exhilaration. But if you want to lead the Southern Continent to expel the colonists, such actions will only have the opposite effect. A philosopher back home once said that no king should send troops out in anger. Resisting colonization is a serious and challenging matter; it's something that shouldn't become a wastebasket for venting one's emotions."

Seeing Lumian's confusion, Franca pointed out the window.

"There are many workers and laborers there. They work hard every day and sleep in bedbug-infested rooms. Are they colonists? Did they benefit from the colonies? True, their jobs may be a result of colonial trade, but will they lose their jobs without the colonies and normal trade? I don't think so. The most likely possibility is that they will still have a job that barely provides sustenance; it's the bosses who lose excessive profits.

"They have their own demands and a desire to change the current society. They often join Trier's citizens in various marches and protests, expressing deep dissatisfaction with the government.

"There are many similar people in Trier. Some of them have various reasons and even sympathize with the Southern Continent colonies.

"A philosopher king back home once said that we must distinguish between our friends and foes when carrying out deeds. The Rose School of Thought's various terrorist acts will only pit those who sympathize with the colonists and those who are also resisting the government against them. It makes them the object of hatred that will be exploited by the rulers to bridge any internal conflicts. It will harm the people of the Southern Continent's resistance against colonization.

"The philosopher king even prohibited his intelligence officers from carrying out assassinations or seeking revenge, let alone causing terrorist incidents."

Franca snapped out of her daze and spoke with enthusiasm, her eyes sparkling, "As long as we can gather more allies, isolate our enemies, and ignite that tiny spark, it can set a whole wilderness ablaze!"

Who is friend and foe… Finding allies and isolating the enemy… Even a tiny spark can set a whole wilderness ablaze… The words left a profound impact on Lumian. He pondered Franca's words repeatedly, especially her last sentence. It unveiled a new understanding of Pyromaniac, bringing him closer to unveiling his first acting principle.

After a few moments, Lumian nodded solemnly.

"I agree with you now. The Rose School of Thought's acts of terror are extremely foolish, mere decisions made after their minds are filled with desire. Uh, as believers of the Mother Tree of Desire, it's quite expected."

Franca pursed her lips.

"If the Rose School of Thought focused on assassinating colonial generals, members of parliament, and high-ranking government officials, as well as destroying battleships and arsenals, I wouldn't mock them. But their blood sacrifices, indiscriminately killing people, are the actions of lunatics. I don't want to become a sacrifice to these madmen one day."

Lumian remarked, "It's a classic case of turning sympathizers against each other."

Franca disdainfully added, "Not only do these lunatics carry out blood sacrifices in the Northern Continent, but they also do it in the Southern Continent, turning villages into uninhabited lands. The Southern Continent has the Rose School of Thought as another insurmountable obstacle besides the colonists."

Lumian nodded gently and said, "That lady took me to the Star Highlands and during my tour of Star Highlands, I encountered a mummy merchant. Should I request permission to visit again and obtain some real mummy ashes for you?"

That lady… Franca realized something and decided not to press further. After some thought, she said, "No need for that now. Just because Trier has plenty of counterfeit goods doesn't mean there's nothing authentic. Let's try to find the authentic ones first. If not, we'll go to the Southern Continent."

Lumian honestly shared his intentions, "I hope you can advance to Sequence 6 within a week and become a Demoness of Pleasure."

"Huh?" Franca was confused.

Who's the one making the advancement?

Lumian didn't hide anything, responding directly, "It has been prophesied that Guillaume Bénet will appear in Quartier de la Princesse Rouge next week. I want to find him and capture him, and I need the help of more friends. The Boss has already agreed to help me find him. The stronger you are, the higher our chances of capturing Guillaume Bénet."

Amused, Franca teased, "You're learning on the spot, kid. You really aren't holding back anymore. You made a request without getting my agreement to help."

Lumian smiled, replying, "Isn't that what I'm doing now?"

Franca pondered for a moment before saying, "Wait a few more days. If we still can't find real mummy's ashes, we'll go to the Southern Continent to search for them. Remember, try not to trouble the Major Arcana card holder if possible."

"Right then," Lumian said, sharing a similar view, but he never missed a chance to fleece. Otherwise, it would be best to seek Madam Magician's help in dealing with Guillaume Bénet.

A subordinate who couldn't handle problems on their own, bothering their superior all the time, would eventually be left behind!

Furthermore, the Tarot Club followed a rule of equivalent exchange. What price would one have to pay to enlist the help of a demigod-level Major Arcana card holder?

After chatting for a while, Franca, who was about to leave, glanced at the window and suddenly said, "Although Gardner Martin already knows the situation and has made preparations, you can't be careless. You can't place all your hopes on him. The Rose School of Thought is an ancient secret organization. It must possess various abilities."

Why are you bringing this up all of a sudden? Lumian was taken aback for a moment before responding with tacit understanding, "The Boss is at least a Conspirer. He has probably set countless traps in secret, awaiting the arrival of the Rose School of Thought."

On this topic, the two of them continued their conversation as they left the bedroom and entered the corridor.

Franca lowered her voice and said, "I sensed something amiss with the glass in your window. I suspect a Wraith."

The Rose School of Thought's Wraith? Franca discovered something wrong with her Witch's grasp of mirrors? Lumian's nerves tensed as he nodded slightly, acting as though they were discussing an ordinary topic.

He saw Franca stroll into the café and depart Salle de Bal Brise before stepping out of the corridor. Like always, he settled into his regular seat and savored his aromatic coffee.

An hour went by, and Lumian started to feel a bit more at ease. He thought the Wraith had probably left, so he shifted his focus to Gardner Martin and the potential traps.

The following days were filled with paranoia for Lumian. He sensed eyes on him from the glass window in his room and the bathroom mirror, but nothing alarming occurred.

Finally, the day of the reward promised by Mr. K arrived.

As Lumian descended the stairs of Auberge du Coq Doré, he encountered an unfamiliar woman.

Dressed in a lake-blue dress, her brown hair flowed naturally, and her brown eyes had a uniquely ethereal quality. Her looks were above average, her cheeks plump, and her demeanor stood out from the ordinary.

As Lumian passed by the front desk, he casually asked Madame Fels, "Is that young lady a new tenant?"

The plump Madame Fels smiled ingratiatingly. "No, she's Miss Safari, staying in Room 309. She went to a small seaside town to be a human model for a painter. She only returned today.

"How enviable. Her job lets her take a vacation by the sea."

That human model? Lumian nodded and left Auberge du Coq Doré, catching a public carriage to Avenue du Boulevard.

Chapter 304: Decency

Avenue du Boulevard, 19 Rue Scheer, basement.

Mr. K's face remained hidden under the massive hood, but Lumian could feel the admiration and recognition in his gaze.

Standing behind a red armchair, Mr. K pointed to a narrow wooden table by the wall.

"Make a choice. These are Grade 2 Sealed Artifacts, as per the standards of various Churches. They have distinct characteristics but come with dangerous negative effects. Nonetheless, there are ways to resolve those issues and utilize them to some extent."

Following the gesture of Mr. K's raised right hand, Lumian spotted three containers on the narrow wooden table.

One was an exquisite wooden box adorned with rubies, emeralds, agates, and other precious items. Another was a rubber injector, and the last one was a wide-mouthed bottle filled with a dreamy green liquid with a golden object at the bottom.

Mr. K approached the table, picked up the wooden box with gems, and opened it.

Inside, there lay a thin and soft leather mask. As Mr. K lifted it to display, an exaggerated face outlined in red, yellow, and white oil paint emerged.

For some reason, Lumian's mood took a plunge at the sight of the face, and his heart filled with sorrow.

"It's called the Clown Mask," Mr. K introduced in a low, raspy voice. "Wearing it enables you to create Paper Figurine Substitutes. You can ignite combustible objects within a 50-meter radius and leap between flames, allowing you to transfer wounds across your body and turn a fatal injury into a minor one. However, each wound can only be transferred once.

"It will also meld with your face, altering your appearance. This aspect is beyond your control, but it grants you strong expression control and sharp premonition for a short duration.

"To store it safely, you'll need a high-value container. Otherwise, it will continuously bring frustration, pain, and sorrow to those around it, gradually driving them insane until they break down. For Beyonders, this often means losing control.

"That's why you can't wear it for more than ten minutes at a time. Additionally, you have to 'watch' a comedic performance once a week; otherwise, it will attempt to replace you when you wear it, truly becoming your 'face.'"

Wound transference… This Sealed Artifact belongs to the Seer pathway. It corresponds to the Sequence of Bureau 8's Miss Leah or higher, Lumian quickly deduced based on his experience.

He felt that the Clown Mask suited him well. With Pyromaniac and Flaming Jump, he could significantly increase his strength.

He was in need of changing his appearance, but the limitation of wearing it for only ten minutes made it similar to the Mystery Prying Glasses, albeit more convenient.

Moreover, Paper Figurine Substitutes and wound transference could effectively boost his survivability, but when it came to dealing with Zombies, Wraiths, Devils, or Desire Apostles, these abilities lacked specificity.

Emotional influences were currently a taboo for Lumian. While his psychological issues had been somewhat healed, the flames of pain couldn't be fully extinguished. They still smoldered deep in his heart. If this emotional breakdown erupted, Termiboros would undoubtedly be grinning from end to end.

As Lumian pondered, Mr. K put the Clown Mask back into its exquisite wooden box and picked up an injector made of rubber hoses, a glass syringe, and a thin needle.

At that moment, a tube of bright red liquid quietly filled the syringe, as if it had just been extracted from a person's body.

Mr. K gently shook the injector and said, "It's called Lifeblood. Once injected into your body, it allows you to control your flesh and blood completely for a short period. You won't need to maintain your human form deliberately, and your vital points will be safe. Moreover, you can envelop a target, corrode their body, and kill them from the inside.

"Simultaneously, you can transform into your own shadow and merge with the surrounding shadows. That way, you can secretly trail the enemy and avoid detection.

"With each injection, you'll become closer to our Lord, closer to the most ancient appearance of humanity's original form. Others and creatures won't endure it well. Their bodies will collapse gradually with each injection, and they won't be able to return to their original state. Their minds will be cloaked by shadows, making them crave flesh and blood, turning them into irrational monsters. However, we need not worry. As long as we devoutly believe in our Lord and remember to pray to Him always, there won't be many issues with our bodies and minds.

"I've injected myself several times before. Am I not normal now?"

Lumian didn't fully buy into it. I don't think you're normal… The flesh corrosion ability seems useful against Zombies…

Furthermore, he wasn't devout when it came to the True Creator. He usually used psychological cues to seal the memories of His honorific name and didn't pray at all.

"If you carry Lifeblood without injecting yourself, it won't affect you other than making you crave flesh and blood," Mr. K explained. He then picked up a wide-mouthed bottle filled with green liquid

filled with an alcoholic fragrance and retrieved a golden brooch carved into a Scotch Broom from it with his white palm that appeared sickly.

"This one's called Decency.

"Once you wear it, you can acutely detect a target's weaknesses. By symbolically giving them items, you can complete a Bribe, significantly weakening their attack, defense, or control over you for a certain period.

"In addition, you can Distort the target's words, actions, and intentions. You can also Distort certain actions of yourself or others to create an environment that's beneficial to you."

Using Bribe to weaken the target's attack, defense, or control… This ability is very versatile. It can be used against Zombies, Devils, or other Beyonders… If I use Distortion well, I can come up with all kinds of tricks… Lumian's spirits lifted, believing this was what he wanted.

The next step was to see if the negative effects could be endured.

Mr. K continued, "It must be kept in liquor that exceeds 45 proof. Otherwise, it might result in arrest from official Beyonders or other factions at irregular intervals.

"You can't wear it for more than fifteen minutes. In the following hour, you'll become repulsive and disdainful. It's best not to go out. Wait patiently until the negative effects fade."

As a Hunter, how can I not be repulsed and despised? And it's normal for regulars at Ol' Tavern to carry two or three flasks of liquor with them… Sometimes, I can even use it to attract nearby factions to capture this characteristic for "fishing." It's a perfect part of certain traps… Lumian quickly made up his mind and said firmly, "I want Decency."

Now, the question was whether this Sealed Artifact could be matched with the Shadow Branch to create a mystical item with both characteristics.

Mr. K respected Lumian's decision and didn't offer any persuasion.

He tossed the Decency brooch back into the wide-mouthed bottle of liquor, capped it, and handed it to Lumian.

Lumian swiftly caught it and mumbled, What if I'm not skilled enough to catch it and shatter the bottle? We'll exchange looks and then flee before the official Beyonders come after us?

Lumian gripped the bottle of liquor suspected to be absinthe and deliberately said, "I have something to report."

He briefly recounted the Werewolf incident and concluded, "The Rose School of Thought suffered repeated setbacks, yet they remain arrogant. I heard they also believe in the evil god, the Mother Tree of Desire."

Mr. K's gaze turned cold, and his voice carried an oppressive metallic quality.

"The evil god's believers are indeed becoming more impudent.

"Since some deities can't shoulder such a heavy responsibility, let us share Their burden."

Lumian could sense Mr. K's anger igniting as his Pyromaniac potion was showing signs of digestion.

After bidding farewell to Mr. K, he left the basement and closed his eyes in the corridor.

Through this experiment, combined with the fire in his heart when he advanced to Pyromaniac, Franca's words, the various situations in the market district, and the actions of the people of Rapus and the Southern Continent, he concluded his first Pyromaniac acting principle: "Pyromaniacs not only ignite matter but also the mind and society."

…

In the market district, Auberge du Coq Doré, Room 207.

Lumian gazed at the enticing green liquor bottle, contemplating the need for sturdy military flasks to prevent it from breaking during a potential fight. Simultaneously, he made the final decision—to utilize the Lucky One Beyonder characteristic and the Shadow Branch to create a mystical item.

He felt that Decency's powers didn't mesh well with the Shadow Branch, and its drawbacks were manageable. On the other hand, Sealed Artifacts offered decent effects and could be used independently.

Without any hesitation, Lumian penned a letter, seeking Madam Magician's aid in locating a demigod-level Artisan.

Afterward, he made his way to the safe house on Rue des Blouses Blanches, summoned the messenger, and dispatched the Shadow Branch and Lucky One Beyonder characteristic, along with the letter, to the holder of the Major Arcana card.

In no time, Lumian spotted the puppet messenger materializing above the desk, dropping a thick stack of papers with a loud thud.

Bang!

The table groaned under the weight of the hefty object.

Lumian rose to his feet and noticed a response placed on top of the stack.

"No problem. I'll assist you in making contact. The process will take some time, as will the crafting of the item. If you don't mind, I'll add a condition that the final product should be portable."

"Additionally, while observing celestial phenomena, I sensed that you are on the verge of assimilating the Pyromaniac potion and can endure a new Inevitability boon. Here's information about some creatures from the spirit world. You can study it beforehand and explore which contracts you might form to borrow their abilities."

Madam Magician possesses knowledge of astromancy? Her predictions are remarkably accurate… Lumian felt a bit lightheaded as he glanced at the substantial stack of papers.

Having summarized the core principle of his initial Pyromaniac acting, he knew he wasn't far from fully digesting it.

Chapter 305: Test

Lumian took his time with the thick stack of information on spirit world creatures. He stowed them and Aurore's grimoires in an iron cabinet he had acquired earlier.

But now, there were other pressing matters at hand.

Unscrewing the lid of a wide-mouthed bottle, he reached into the green liquor to retrieve the Scotch Broom brooch known as Decency.

His plan was to test the Sealed Artifact's abilities and its negative effects.

Waiting for a real battle wouldn't do; he needed to familiarize himself with it now. Figuring it out on the fly during a fight would be disastrous, leaving him unable to coordinate his Beyonder powers and attacks effectively.

He also wanted to test the extent of the brooch's adverse effects while he was still in good shape. After a battle that had taken a toll on his body and mind, it would be too risky to face those effects hastily.

Understanding the brooch's negative effects in advance would allow Lumian to make better choices when forced to use Decency, minimizing its influence on him.

A Hunter who wasn't familiar with their weapon was bound to fail!

Lumian placed the Scotch Broom brooch on the table before him, focusing his mind to sense its power.

As he did so, a gust of wind blew in from the open window, making his heart race. He quickly stood up, extended his right hand, and shut the window tight.

The moment the window closed, the room fell eerily silent, as if it had been sealed off from the outside world.

Lumian then walked over to the door, gently opening and closing it.

It seemed like the safe house had turned into a secluded sanctuary.

Seating himself again, Lumian exuded an aura that could provoke disgust and hatred in small animals—this was an application of Provocation.

Almost instantly, a rat appeared from nowhere, snarling and attacking him with its claws.

Without much effort, Lumian flicked his index finger and thumb, and a crimson spark shot out, incinerating the rat as it squealed in pain.

The rat desperately tried to escape while suffering the scorching pain, but the invisible force sealed all exits, leaving it trapped.

It lacked the ability to open a door.

Lumian nodded with satisfaction, using the rat to test the other abilities of the Decency brooch.

The test lasted for about 12 to 13 minutes, but Lumian couldn't be sure without a pocket watch. He decided to proceed with caution and removed the Decency brooch, throwing it into a container of green liquor.

Then, with another small crimson fireball, he ended the rat's life, filling the room with the smell of roasted fat.

After stowing away the container, Lumian left the safe house, ready to test the brooch's repellent effect on others.

The gas street lamps were already lit as he stepped out, and he immediately noticed the glares of pedestrians and vendors around him.

It felt as if they despised him deeply, wanting to attack him with knives, bottles of alcohol, or even an iron pot filled with food.

However, "Lion" Ciel's trademark golden-and-black hair seemed to deter them from acting on their impulses.

Th-this effect is equivalent to a large-scale Provocation… However, it's not within my control… Lumian assessed roughly, realizing that he couldn't fully control it. Under the unfriendly gazes, he walked along the roadside and made his way towards Avenue du Marché.

At that moment, two police officers dressed in black uniforms, their shoulders adorned with silver epaulets, and armed with revolvers strolled by the area.

Catching sight of Lumian, they immediately pointed at him and bellowed, "Halt right there! Routine inspection!"

The effects are truly potent… Lumian didn't waste a breath and swiftly turned on his heels, dashing away.

"Stop!"

The two officers shouted, drawing their revolvers and taking aim at Lumian.

He skillfully evaded a pedestrian's sneaky attempt to trip him, making a sharp turn into an alleyway blocked by a barricade. Without glancing back, he hurried into Underground Trier.

He hadn't brought his carbide lamp, nor did he possess night vision. However, as a Pyromaniac, he could conjure light in any environment.

Crimson fireballs materialized above Lumian's head and on his shoulders, illuminating his path. Easily outpacing the police officers, he made his way toward another Underground Trier entrance near Rue des Blouses Blanches.

As he walked, Lumian abruptly twisted his body, narrowly avoiding a black shadow that lunged from a corner.

It was a snake-like creature with bluish-black scales.

The creature reared up, flicking its bright-red forked tongue in an aggressive stance, challenging Lumian.

It doesn't only arouse disgust and disdain from humans… They need to see or make contact with me to be influenced… Lumian sighed and shook his head, allowing one of the fireballs to shoot out and reduce the venomous snake into three charred pieces, emitting a burnt fragrance.

Having already gauged the strength and reach of the negative effects, he decided not to take any more risks. He found a nearby empty cave, extinguished the fireballs, and sat in the darkness, quietly waiting for the effects to wear off.

After what seemed like an hour, he stood up and conjured three crimson fireballs above his head, left shoulder, and right shoulder to illuminate the tunnel ahead.

In no time, Lumian found himself at an exit near Rue des Blouses Blanches. There, he spotted a figure with a carbide lamp emerging from a nearby tunnel.

With a grin, Lumian raised his right hand in a wave.

"Well, well, look who's wandering in Underground Trier like a rat."

It was Jenna.

As she caught sight of Lumian, her brow furrowed.

"Did you use Provocation on me? Why are you so irritating?"

Lumian replied vaguely, "Something like that."

Jenna couldn't hide her annoyance and blurted, "Dammit! Why did you use Provocation on me?"

Not bad. You didn't come over to beat me up. That means you still treat me as a friend… That's probably how strong the negative effects are when they're about to disappear… He smiled and explained, "I encountered something that left me tainted with a dreadful aura, but it will soon fade away."

Shifting gears, Lumian examined Jenna, who wore a light-white shirt and a faded yellow dress. Her hair cascaded down her back, and she wore a small Sun Sacred Emblem around her neck.

"What brings you to Underground Trier?"

Jenna, now looking more like a college student in Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative, pursed her lips and replied, "Meeting the two Purifiers. I wanted to show my devotion to god as you suggested. So I dressed in a way that the Church advocates, even wearing a Sun Talisman. But they guided me to Underground Trier, claiming it was to avoid crowds. Dammit, it's just absurd to go around here dressed like this!"

As the negative effects of Decency waned, Jenna understood why she reacted strongly and calmly shared her experiences with Lumian.

"Did it work?" Lumian glanced at the brown wooden box in Jenna's right hand but didn't rush to ask what it contained.

Puzzled, Jenna inquired, "Yes, it did. Valentine, the Purifier, became much more receptive to me. Imre also changed, but they seem to be cautious and suspicious of me for some reason."

"Maybe they think you're trying to ingratiate yourself and have ulterior motives," Lumian speculated, attempting to analyze the Purifiers' mindset. He pointed at the wooden box Jenna was carrying with his chin. "Is that their reward for you?"

Jenna couldn't help but smile.

"Exactly. They verified the information about Deep Valley Quarry and acknowledged its importance. As compensation, they gave me two main ingredients and one supplementary ingredient for the Instigator potion. I'll collect the rest myself."

"Franca probably has the rest of the supplementary ingredients." Lumian mused. "The main ingredient for a Sequence 8 potion isn't cheap, it's precious, you know. Is the information about Deep Valley Quarry really that important?"

What did this entail?

Jenna tersely acknowledged his words.

"They didn't elaborate much. The only thing they said was that the Purifiers can't directly enter the quarry due to issues between the Churches. But they'll keep an eye on it to prevent things from escalating."

"They also want me to keep contacting the client to get more information from him. Apparently, part of the main ingredients for the potion is an advance payment," Jenna explained.

Lumian nodded approvingly. "Makes sense."

Jenna sighed. "I'm such a degenerate."

"Why do you say that?" Lumian raised his eyebrows.

Jenna grabbed her hair. "I should have asked for enough money to pay off my debts before even thinking about the ingredients for the Instigator potion."

"When you become an Instigator, that money won't be a problem," Lumian scoffed. "You're not planning to stick around as a local singer forever to repay your debts, are you?"

Jenna fell silent for a moment before admitting, "But I don't want to harm anyone."

"Why not just target villains?" Lumian tried to ignite Jenna's determination.

"Damn it, you're the Instigator, not me, right?" Jenna muttered, adding, "How much should I pay Franca? We got the information together; it's not fair if she doesn't get anything."

Lumian chuckled. "Considering the potion formula she gave you, even with a friend's discount, you should pay her a minimum of 20,000 verl d'or."

"20,000 verl d'or minimum…" Jenna's face showed a hint of pain. "For now, I can only owe her. Do you think I'll accumulate more debt the higher my Sequence? The potion formula and ingredients are so expensive…"

"But your earning potential will increase," Lumian half-instigated, half-comforted.

He extinguished the three fireballs on his body and headed toward the exit of Underground Trier, Jenna's carbide lamp lighting their way.

After a few steps, Jenna asked with curiosity, "Why did you create fireballs above your head and both shoulders? What's the point?"

"Haven't you heard of people carrying three lamps—one above their head, one on their left shoulder, and one on their right shoulder?" Lumian asked.

"No," Jenna shook her head, intrigued, "Is it some mystical knowledge?"

"Nah, just folklore," Lumian smiled. "I thought it looked cool, so I went with it."

Jenna couldn't help but curse, "Dammit! You're so childish!"

As they chatted, they left Underground Trier and entered Apartment 601, 3 Rue des Blouses Blanches, where Franca gave them a suspicious look.

Chapter 306: Ambivalence

Lumian calmly recounted his encounter with Jenna in the depths of Underground Trier while he was enduring the air of repulsion and disdain.

Franca gave a slightly awkward smile and deftly changed the topic.

"How can you be repulsive and detestable? You didn't lose control."

Franca had encountered Beyonders on the Hunter pathway succumbing to a loss of control numerous times, most of them exuding traits that attracted hostility from those around them. This was the principal reason they were swiftly dealt with.

Lumian briefly explained, "I obtained a Sealed Artifact. Its negative effects manifest an hour after I remove it, causing me to exude repulsion and disdain."

Jenna, curious, interjected, "What happens if you don't take it off?"

Lumian's lips curled as he replied, "Then it turns into an alarm, drawing the attention of nearby official Beyonders who'd like to apprehend me."

"It's quite the attention-seeker," Franca remarked with a playful grin.

"It does have a fondness for 'decency,'" Lumian said, his tone meaningful. Then, he added nonchalantly, "Its abilities lean heavily towards Bribe, with a touch of Distortion."

Given the likelihood of needing to collaborate with Franca in the future to deal with Padre Guillaume Bénet, Lumian took the initiative to divulge the situation regarding the Decency brooch. However, he refrained from delving into intricate details, especially regarding the strength and range of its powers. After all, mystical items were a Beyonder's ace in the hole. Exposing them risked a sense of vulnerability. Just as Franca had shared information about the Ring of Punishment while omitting the brass revolver and other items during their earlier operation.

It was a delicate balance—sharing yet withholding the full truth; building trust while maintaining essential precautions.

Franca didn't press further. She pondered for a moment before saying, "It corresponds to a Sequence 7 Briber and a Sequence 6 Baron of Corruption from the Black Emperor pathway. It seems a Baron of Corruption met his end, melding his Beyonder traits with the objects on him to create the Sealed Artifact. Its abilities aren't fully revealed."

"Black Emperor?" Lumian had never heard of this Sequence, nor had Jenna.

"The deity appellation for the Lawyer pathway," Franca whispered, excitement in her voice. "Rumor has it that Emperor Roselle achieved Black Emperor status before his demise—a true deity!"

For a brief moment, Lumian and Jenna were rendered speechless. Their expressions mirrored their astonishment.

Franca couldn't accurately fathom Emperor Roselle's standing in their eyes as genuine Intisians.

Had he—no, had He truly ascended to godhood?

"Rumors, mere rumors," Franca hastened to add, lest her dependable image be tarnished in Jenna's eyes.

After a few more exchanges, Jenna opened the wooden box in her right hand, revealing the smaller boxes within.

They contained a small, dark, hive-like heart, a sac exuding dark green liquid, and a slender, smoked tube-like substance.

Franca scrutinized them briefly before giving a nod of approval.

"The heart of the Demon Throat Honeyguide and the poison sac of the Dark Prowler—these are the main ingredients. Yes, the Dark Prowler is a peculiar two-headed snake.

"You've also acquired the Demon Throat Honeyguide's syrinx. You only need blue Jimsonweed juice, fern powder, walnuts, and pure water… I have the blue Jimsonweed juice. The other three supplementary ingredients are easy to come by."

Fern powder… Lumian recalled the supplemental ingredient for the Provoker potion shared a similarity. It implied being "susceptible to others' words."

In that light, Instigator and Provoker bore resemblance. Hunter and Demoness truly were neighboring, interchangeable pathways.

Noticing Jenna's keenness to buy ferns and walnuts from the right shops and prepare pure water overnight, Franca cautioned, "Hold on a moment. Set yourself straight first. You've digested the Assassin potion, and chances of losing control with the Instigator potion are slim these days, but why not aim for the best? Wouldn't it be wiser to minimize the chance of losing control entirely?"

Lumian scratched his chin and added, "I'm curious what kind of monster an Instigator would end up as after losing control."

Jenna shot him a glare and settled onto the sofa, shutting her eyes and focusing on her breath.

Lumian sprawled in the armchair next to him, his arms draped over the armrests. He turned to Franca and inquired, "Have you gotten your hands on genuine mummy ashes?"

"Nope," Franca shook her head, a touch of helplessness in her expression. "I even offered 500 verl d'or for 10 grams, but those guys keep pushing fakes. Worthless bunch. They can't even tell the real from the fake!"

"Only 500 verl d'or?" Lumian teased. "Aren't you rolling in it?"

"Normally, 10 grams go for just over 100 verl d'or. 500 is already a small fortune, alright?" Franca snapped back, her frustration evident. "And I'm not exactly swimming in money at the moment."

Lumian nodded, getting why Franca's funds were running dry.

Her infiltration of the Iron and Blood Cross Order wasn't a true success. It could only be considered as aiding Lumian in reaching the goal. So, the reward she received wasn't the main ingredients for the Demoness of Pleasure, but rather the privilege to buy them at a discount.

"How much more do you need?" Jenna's eyes popped open, a willingness to help evident in her gaze.

Franca shook her head and replied, "If 500 verl d'or can't get me the real stuff, neither will a grand. They'll just think I'm a fool, waiting for me to bid higher."

She then turned her gaze to Lumian.

"What's your plan for now?"

Given time, she could likely snag actual mummy ashes in a fortnight or a month. However, Lumian needed her assistance within the next week, pushing her to consider searching for true mummies in the Star Highlands of the Southern Continent.

Lumian caught onto Franca's unspoken message and mused, "Maybe consider a little arson and digesting the potion to some extent."

This way, he could unlock the Contractee boon, garnering diverse abilities from different creatures through contracts.

As far as he knew, a freshly minted Contractee could only forge three contracts. Lumian intended to cherry-pick three from the four possible abilities: ones that impacted the Spirit Body or psyche, basic teleportation skills, a moderate level of disguise, and an ability akin to invisibility or shadow blending.

The final choice hinged on the information on creatures from the spirit realm. Maybe the willing creatures suitable for a contract with Lumian didn't wield matching skills.

Lumian was sure of one thing—all spirit world creatures could traverse the spirit realm—a basic form of teleportation. The variance lay in swiftness. If he struck a pact with White Paper, perhaps he'd manage only ten to twenty meters per jump. Not the optimal choice for traversing to the Southern Continent—exhaustion would likely make him lose control long before he arrived there.

"Arson… What's your thinking?" Franca sat cross-legged in the recliner.

Lumian recounted the acting principle he had deduced about the Pyromaniac.

Franca shared her insight based on her own experiences. "Upright acting is incitement, and inverted acting is instigation. They can all help you digest the potion. Wouldn't that be easy? Go down to the docks tomorrow and incite the dockworkers into a strike. The rallying cry will be for better pay."

Lumian shook his head slowly.

"If I can rally them into a strike and there's a good chance it'll get them some benefits or help them achieve their goals, I'll give it a shot. But if it's only going to bring disaster upon them, I'm not so keen on it.

"I can't stand exploiting others without benefiting them and causing harm instead—unless there's no other way. Then anyone can be sacrificed.

"Once there was this guy who always said that we could only grab more and have enough food if we united. But when we did unite to fight others for food, he took advantage of the chaos and made off with the food."

"You've got quite a bit of experience." Franca studied Lumian anew, feeling that he wasn't just as simple as Muggle's brother.

Jenna had been through similar situations.

Franca sighed and said,"As expected, you're quite the instigator in the upright sense. I'd be the same if I were you. Though I can put up a tough front, truth be told… haha, I can't bring myself to do it."

Lumian regarded her thoughtfully and spoke,

"I find you a bit paradoxical. Sometimes you're seasoned, well-informed, and have a knack for analyzing things. Other times, you're foolish, innocent, and naive."

Lumian had only encountered such a contradictory disposition in one other person—his sister Aurore.

Stirred by Lumian's string of words, Franca blurted out, "Are you trying to provoke me? How am I foolish or naive?"

At this, she caught Jenna's disapproving glance.

"Ahem." Franca cleared her throat and went on, "It's because I have this core kindness and certain expectations for the world. Even after seeing how harsh life can be, I still cherish life. Sigh, most in my group are like that. Only a few are resilient, brilliant, and agile. They seem to never be daunted by hardships or moral dilemmas."

The Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society? Why do they have such similarities? Lumian nodded, choosing not to probe further.

With Jenna's plan to gather the remaining supplemental ingredients the following day to advance as an Instigator, Lumian swiftly departed from Rue des Blouses Blanches and returned to Auberge du Coq Doré.

As he made his way up the stairs, Lumian caught sight of Anthony Reid, the information broker, coming down with a suitcase.

"Moving out?" Lumian inquired.

"That's right." Anthony Reid, still donning his military-green camouflage, gave a slight nod.

Lumian chuckled and remarked, "Didn't you mention some unfinished business in the market district?"

"The lead's gone cold." Anthony Reid let out a soft sigh.

Gone cold? Suddenly, Lumian recalled having seen a parliamentary election poster in the other man's room. He prodded, "Because Hugues Artois is dead?"

Chapter 307: Instigation

Upon hearing Lumian's question, Anthony Reid, his round face slightly pudgy and his skin with a slight sheen, fixed his dark brown eyes on him for a moment before responding, "I'm not sure what you're getting at."

The information broker's emotions appeared steady, and his expression seemed unaffected. It was almost as if Hugues Artois's demise hadn't affected him in the least.

Lumian's grin widened, and he didn't press further. Pointing toward the lower level, he suggested, "Let me buy you a drink. You've aided me in the past, and we've fought side by side. Consider it a parting gesture."

Anthony Reid scratched his retreating, light-yellow hairline with his free hand, his other holding a suitcase, pondering briefly before conceding, "Okay."

Descending the narrow, gas-lit staircase, the duo entered the basement bar and settled at the counter.

"What's your poison?" Lumian inquired in a casual tone, as if he'd just stepped into his own abode.

"Fennel absinthe," Anthony Reid replied succinctly.

"Absinthe, eh?" Lumian chuckled, producing a verl d'or silver coin and four coppet copper coins. He tossed them to the barkeep, Pavard Neeson, who sported a ponytail. "Two glasses of Somersault."

Somersault was bar parlance, signifying a double serving of fennel absinthe and a measure of "little mummy."

The latter took seven licks, while the former required twelve.

Pavard Neeson deftly flipped over standard cups and filled them with a dreamy green liquid for Lumian and Anthony Reid.

As Lumian took a sip, he savored the familiar bitterness and revitalization. He observed Pavard Neeson, whose dark brown beard framed his lips, muttering in a low, ingratiating tone,

"Ciel, got any of them peculiar drugs?"

The bar owner and amateur painter believed that Ciel, a notorious mob leader, surely possessed a couple of routes for obtaining proscribed substances.

Lumian caressed the glass with his thumb and smiled, inquiring, "What kind of drug are you after?"

Recognizing that Anthony Reid was an information broker often entangled in illicit affairs, Pavard Neeson did not hold back, explaining in hushed tones,

"Banned psychotropic drugs. Sigh, when that odd tree affected me, I created the draft I was most proud of. Actually, it wasn't just my most satisfying piece; it embodied the aesthetics I'd always strived for but never reached. It perfectly channeled my thoughts and convictions. Since then, that sensation's eluded me completely. Every stroke of mine has turned into dogsh*t! I'm considering experimenting with psychotropic drugs, hoping to recapture that sensation."

Lumian took another sip of the misty absinthe, his lips curling in a derisive smile,

"If I were you, I'd steer clear of painting altogether. You lack the innate aptitude."

Without waiting for Pavard Neeson's retort, he chuckled and stated, "Relying on drugs for passable creations signifies your dearth of talent!"

"But many famous painters have resorted to it…" Pavard Neeson began, only to be cut off by Lumian. He clicked his tongue and interjected, "That's an indication their creative faculties are waning, their fountain of inspiration drying up.

"Isn't that cheating? Pitting drug-fueled works against those of other artists, barely eking out a victory. Earning a spot in an exhibition and proudly proclaiming to every visitor: 'Behold, I'm despicable. I possess an inferiority complex. Drugs are my prowess, and demons are my parents.'"

Seeing Pavard Neeson's visage turn ashen, Lumian spread his arms slightly, probing, "Does that fill you with pride?

"Should you possess talent, you'd no longer be an amateur painter. Even if critical acclaim eluded you, and the World's Artists Exhibition snubbed you, private galleries would come seeking. You understand the harsh reality better than I do."

At this juncture, Lumian's smile broadened.

"Drugs won't save you. It's available to all, like a common commodity. When everyone resorts to it, won't they be pitted against their innate skill and standards?"

Pavard Neeson's lips quivered, yet he remained speechless.

With a somber expression, he took a couple of steps back, slumping into his seat, as if his spirit had vacated his body.

Anthony Reid, who had been quietly sipping fennel absinthe, turned his gaze to Lumian. "You're not a fan of those forbidden psychiatric drugs?"

"Otherwise?" Lumian scoffed.

Anthony Reid shifted his attention to Pavard Neeson, visibly grappling with his inner turmoil, and spoke contemplatively. "You seem to have swayed him."

"I merely stoked the embers of his guilt," Lumian replied with calm composure.

Anthony Reid nodded gently. "But what if your persuasion falls short?"

Lumian laughed. "I'm not his godfather."

If he couldn't sway him, so be it.

A brief pause fell upon Anthony Reid before he turned his gaze back to Lumian.

"Your method of dissuasion deviates from your usual approach. Is this acting?"

Impressively observant and astute, as expected from a Mid-Sequence Beyonder of the Spectator pathway… If I can kindle the inner fervor within a Spectator's heart, it should greatly aid my digestion… Lumian mused inwardly. Holding his glass of verdant liquid, he looked ahead and replied, "I stumbled upon some fliers earlier. They made mention of Hugues Artois deserting his troops during the war against the Loen Kingdom a few years back, leading to countless casualties."

Anthony Reid remained silent, savoring his fennel absinthe in quietude.

Lumian's gaze flickered toward the vacant bar counter as he continued, "I recall you wrestled with the lingering effects of PTSD from that war a few years ago."

With a gulp, Anthony Reid took a swig of the green liquor.

Lumian opted to not bring up the parliamentary election poster found in the information broker's room. He glanced at the vacant shell that was Pavard Neeson and mumbled to himself, "If the sole motivation is animosity towards Hugues Artois, then news of his assassination would be met with jubilation and him drinking until he dropped at the bar.

"But if one wishes to unravel the reason behind Hugues Artois's actions, understand how he wormed his way into politics and a parliamentary bid despite his past, and uncover the strings being pulled in his favor, one must seek out other breadcrumbs to grant the departed some semblance of peace.

"The official Beyonders should be on this case, but they labor under too many constraints. They lack the untamed boldness of wild Beyonders."

Seated still, Anthony Reid took another swig of fennel absinthe.

Lumian chuckled.

"It's indeed a vexing conundrum. The hurdles are countless, and the perils are real. Surrender becomes a tempting option for everyone. In the end, though, Hugues Artois lies deceased. The instigator of that tragedy rests in the grave. The departed souls should find some solace."

Anthony Reid ceased his imbibing, his middle-aged visage betraying no emotion.

Lumian glanced his way, lowered his tone, and smiled knowingly.

"Folks plagued by severe mental ills can't ascend far in the Spectator path. And even if they do plateau, external stimuli can trigger catastrophic lapses, transforming them into monstrosities. In this ever-more perilous world, stability is but a distant wish for flawed Beyonders."

At this juncture, Lumian reined in his expression and fixed his gaze upon Anthony Reid's profile. He inquired, his voice resonating with gravitas, "Do you fancy departing laden with remorse and reluctance, languishing in the throes of becoming a monster, shying away from your former comrades, or do you dare venture forth in pursuit of the truth, courting danger, and crafting your own heroic saga?"

Without acknowledging Anthony Reid's response, Lumian gracefully alighted from the barstool, lifted his fennel absinthe, and downed the remainder in a single gulp.

With that, he whispered into Anthony Reid's ear, "I contributed to Hugues Artois's demise. We're still untangling his problem."

Observing Anthony Reid's slight tremor, Lumian straightened up and exited the subterranean bar without casting a backward glance.

He strolled back into Room 207, not bothering to shut the door behind him, and lit the carbide lamp.

With a casual swivel, he spun the chair around and settled into it, his posture easy as he fixated on the dim corridor outside.

Lumian waited in abnormal silence, as he held a certainty that the figure he awaited would materialize.

As moments ticked away, the couple's voices escalated into a quarrel anew, and the rowdy drunkards began to trickle onto the street.

The soft patter of hesitant steps drew near Room 207, each sound echoing the uncertainty.

A sly grin played upon Lumian's lips, and he reclined in the chair, his gaze steady on the door.

Before too long, Anthony Reid stepped into view, garbed in a military-green shirt and matching pants, capped off by tall leather boots. His hair lay cropped and thin.

Standing within the circle of light cast by the carbide lamp, he regarded Lumian seated at the wooden table, a smirk adorning his lips. His features danced in a contorted display.

In a rich timbre, he intoned, "I know you're trying to provoke me. I know you're acting, but… you're correct…"

Anthony Reid, middle-aged and weathered, raised his right hand and pressed it to his chest, his expression one of fierce resolve.

"Over these past few years, my heart has been seared by anguish and righteous anger."

A knowing smile graced Lumian's face as he shut his eyes momentarily, sensing the Pyromaniac potion digesting a little.

He rose from his seat and addressed Anthony Reid, saying, "Truth wields the mightiest power of persuasion."

Anthony Reid felt a weight lift after speaking, the inner conflict and confusion subsiding.

He ventured into Room 207, the door clicking shut behind him. His eyes swept over the surroundings in a swift assessment.

"Did you truly eliminate Hugues Artois? How deep did your investigation penetrate?"

"Celia Bello, the one who assassinated Hugues Artois, is a friend of mine. It was I who first unearthed the heretic cults supporting Hugues Artois," Lumian responded in a matter-of-fact tone before extending a sincere apology. "My earlier words held a deceit, and for that, I'm sorry."

Anthony Reid was taken aback.

"Which statement?"

A mischievous grin curved Lumian's lips.

"Actually, we haven't even embarked on the trail to uncover the people and forces behind Hugues Artois."

Chapter 308: Incomprehensible Choice

The plump, middle-aged Anthony Reid found himself taken aback. But after a brief moment, he grinned in a self-deprecating way and uttered, "I was so rattled that I couldn't even judge the authenticity of that sentence. As anticipated, a Spectator must take a seat in the audience."

Lumian remained calmly seated, his smile unwavering.

"No, it's not that simple. Why did I leap off the barstool? Why did I murmur into your ear from behind? My aim was to shield you from my subtle expressions and involuntary body language. In those moments, your emotions were already stirred, blurring your ability to decipher my true intent."

A short pause followed Anthony Reid's contemplative silence, then he spoke,

"That's one reason. Another lies in your characteristic demeanor. I don't know if you've caught on, but you tend to put on a bit of a show, appear nonchalant, or in modern terms, act cool.

"Just then, I believed those actions, given the circumstances, were in line with your usual behavior, aimed at lending weight to your words. So, suspicion didn't even cross my mind."

A chuckle escaped Lumian's lips.

"It's only natural for a lad like me to yearn for a touch of coolness, a bit of swagger. It also conveniently masks my true motives. Actually, both are genuine. That's why they remain impervious to scrutiny."

It was akin to him having Fire Ravens circling him with one hand in his pocket, unleashing them on his adversaries as he advanced. First, it was undeniably cool, and second, he seized the chance to grasp Mr. K's finger to avert any potential mishaps.

Anthony Reid pondered momentarily before nodding.

"Only a superficial motive, steeped in authenticity, can truly deceive a Spectator."

Raising his right foot over his left knee, Lumian steered the conversation back on track.

"Our journey to unveil the people and forces behind Hugues Artois hasn't yet commenced, as we are engaged in more pressing matters. But fear not, we shall delve into this matter next week. We possess the relevant sources of information as well."

Lumian's strategy involved Jenna delving deeper into Hugues Artois's background through the Purifiers, exploring ways she could "assist."

As the one responsible for Hugues Artois's demise, it was logical for Jenna to keep tabs on the investigation's progress, hoping to unearth all details without arousing the official Beyonders' suspicion. These thoughts and tendencies were inherent in Jenna, so Lumian didn't need to fuel them further. Just a reminder would suffice.

In due course, the Purifiers could subtly guide Jenna and her companions toward actions they might find inconvenient. This would undeniably supply Anthony Reid's investigation with invaluable leads.

Anthony Reid's deep brown eyes mirrored Lumian's figure as he absorbed the discourse in silence.

The information broker offered an almost imperceptible nod.

"I'll stay a while longer."

Engaging with Spectators of the Beyonder path is straightforward. There's no need to concoct another tale or search for an excuse to sway him. He can ascertain the truth for himself… Lumian flashed a grin and gestured toward the bed. "Take a seat."

This way, he needn't expose Jenna's true identity or her role as a Purifier informant.

Anthony Reid stood near the door, rooted in place, and spoke, "You've more or less sussed out what's happened to me. Is there something else you want me to add?"

"I'd prefer a more detailed account," Lumian responded without much ceremony.

Having been through the Poison Spur Mob, the Bliss Society, the Cordu catastrophe, Ruhr and Michel's deaths, and the explosion at the Goodville Chemical Factory, Lumian found the evil gods and their minions abnormally repulsive. His casual demeanor had been replaced by a newfound seriousness.

Once, he'd believed that people could fancy whatever beliefs they pleased—that it didn't concern him. Now, his perspective had entirely changed. He held that only heretics who'd gone to their grave were the good ones. The living ones were ticking time bombs of doom, liable to unleash havoc on him and his companions sooner or later.

So, he wasn't just spinning tales for Anthony Reid. He truly planned on delving into Hugues Artois' affairs and uncovering more of those heretics when he could spare a moment.

Moreover, this could endear him to Mr. K and the Aurora Order.

Of course, it did seem quite odd for a wanted mob leader to be lending a hand to the authorities in taking down cultists.

Anthony Reid's expression darkened as he said, "Towards the end of the war with the Loen Kingdom, my comrades and I were stationed at a vital route in the northern foothills of the Hornacis mountain range. Our commanding officer was Major Hugues Artois.

"We were split into three companies, each at different positions. We were to prevent small Loen Kingdom Beyonder teams from crossing the treacherous path and attacking us from the rear, as well as defend against direct assaults.

"That night, gunshots and cannon fire suddenly shattered my sleep. I watched as my comrades were torn apart, one by one, from behind. Their heads exploding, bodies rent asunder. The earth became a sea of blood…"

At this point, Anthony Reid's breath quickened, as if he was reliving the trauma.

He paused for a moment before continuing, "In the midst of that war, I had a fortuitous encounter that pushed my Sequence upward. I never reported it to Hugues Artois. Using my newfound abilities, I managed to break through the encirclement with four wounded comrades and retreated.

"Two of them were gravely hurt and were left behind on the mountain path for—forever. I can still see their pained and angry gazes.

"At first, I thought maybe one of the other positions had been compromised, or that Loen's airships had dropped troops behind us under cover of darkness. But later, I realized that the reason was that Hugues Artois's company had chosen to retreat without informing us, after encountering only a probing attack!"

Lumian pondered for a moment before replying, "When Hugues Artois ordered the retreat, didn't those soldiers question it? Didn't they try to get word to the other two positions?"

"Hugues Artois was our commanding officer, and he knew how to give rousing speeches. Plus, he had a warrant supposedly signed by General Philip," Anthony Reid said, his expression grim. "The soldiers back then assumed he had already passed on orders to the other positions. I still can't wrap my head around why he'd sacrifice us. It wouldn't have taken much time or caused him any harm."

"Maybe he was overwhelmed and forgot," Lumian suggested, not out to defend the late Hugues Artois, merely offering a possible explanation.

Anthony Reid shook his head.

"He wasn't a green recruit on his first battlefield. He had proven his mettle in prior fights, showed his leadership under duress."

Lumian didn't delve further, allowing Anthony Reid to continue.

"Once we found out the truth, the three of us fought to bring Hugues Artois to military court, but it was futile. They'd simply tell us that imagination wasn't evidence.

"Helpless, we watched Hugues Artois shift into politics after the war and rise through the ranks.

"My other two comrades were frail to start with. They passed away burdened by fury and pain. When Hugues Artois threw his hat in the ring for the Enlightenment Party in the market district's parliamentary election, I ended up here."

Lumian nodded slightly and inquired, "Being an information broker, that's to hide your true identity?"

"No, I've been scraping by as an information broker for a few years now," Anthony Reid replied with a wry smile. "Plus, this cover helps me dig deeper into Hugues Artois' dealings."

"Any breakthroughs?" Lumian asked naturally.

Anthony Reid's expression darkened as he answered, "Hugues Artois' foray into politics seems unremarkable. He rode General Philip's coattails and climbed the ladder. His eloquence caught the eye of several senior Enlightenment Party MPs. And he forged ties with a handful of ex-noble families."

"Is General Philip a concern?" Lumian queried, straightforward as ever.

Anthony Reid sighed slowly, his voice heavy, "The general met his end before I could investigate him. Official word is—illness took him."

Lumian posed a few more questions before saying, "I'll catch up with you when I've got more to share."

"Sure." Anthony Reid understood Lumian's sincerity.

…

After departing Auberge du Coq Doré, Lumian made his way back to the safe house on Rue des Blouses Blanches. He swung open the iron cabinet, retrieving a hefty stack of information concerning the denizens of the spirit world.

Within the assortment, he discovered a notebook labeled 'Sights in the Spirit World.' Flipping through a couple of pages, he could feel a surge of frustration and anxiety creeping into his mind.

His immediate aim wasn't to grasp the intricacies of the spirit world, but rather to pinpoint suitable creatures from that realm. Thus, he closed the notebook and delved into the introductions of the various spirit world entities.

Somewhat inexplicably, after poring over the pages for over half an hour, Lumian sensed his mental energy draining away. His thoughts seemed to evaporate, forcing him to bring his study session to an abrupt close. He sprawled out on the bed, drifting into slumber.

Early the next morning, Lumian arrived at Apartment 601, 3 Rue des Blouses Blanches, and rang the doorbell.

Franca had already risen from her sleep, attired in her customary shirt and breeches. She directed her gaze towards Lumian and inquired, "What brings you here so early?"

Lumian's eyes flicked towards Jenna, who occupied the living room, a smile tugging at his lips.

"Isn't today the day Jenna advances to being an Instigator? I'm here to witness the moment."

A frown played across Franca's features as she muttered, "You seem quite concerned about her."

"Absolutely," Lumian affirmed, his grin widening. "Once she's an Instigator, she can aid me in dealing with Guillaume Bénet. While I can't exactly count on her for a direct confrontation, she'll excel at launching sneak attacks and surveying the surroundings to forestall any potential mishaps."

Jenna emitted a derisive snort, while Franca offered a mix of exasperation and amusement through a tongue click. "Your words are like honey."

"The kind that's already been digested?" Lumian chuckled, his self-awareness evident.

Chapter 309: Restoring Confidence

Naturally, Franca caught onto Lumian's true intentions; otherwise, her Instigator potion would've been a wasted effort. She felt satisfied that Lumian was one who wouldn't falter in a battle of sophistry, and she hoped he could maintain that.

"Come on in." Franca gestured for Lumian to step into the living room.

Right then, boxes already occupied the coffee table, containing Demon Throat Honeyguide and other ingredients.

Simply glancing at these items stirred something in Lumian, an urge to devour them.

Thankfully, it wasn't overwhelming. It was more like hungry folks eying a chef grilling lamb.

Jenna's focus had returned to the ingredients. Gazing at the white porcelain broth bowl with its dual handles and cover, she found it absurd that she was going to consume it the same way she had consumed the Assassin potion.

How was this potion concoction? It seemed more like cocktail mixing or broth preparation!

Mysticism was nowhere to be found!

Jenna inhaled deeply, then poured 100 milliliters of pure water into the broth bowl using a measuring cylinder. She added the Demon Throat Honeyguide and the Dark Prowler poison sac.

Amidst the bubbling sounds, the two main ingredients fused in the pure water.

A manifestation of the law of Beyonder characteristics convergence… Lumian observed closely, holding his words.

Franca carefully unsheathed a ritual dagger and conjured a wall of spirituality around the living room.

The hive-like heart and the dark-green poison sac began to dissolve simultaneously, coloring the pure water in the white porcelain bowl with a gleaming black hue.

Jenna then added the syrinx of the Demon Throat Honeyguide, five drops of blue Jimsonweed juice, and 10 grams of fern powder. Finally, she tossed in an unpeeled walnut.

Watching the walnut disappear as if swallowed by crimson molten steel, Jenna couldn't help but feel a shiver of fear.

Can this thing really be drunk?

"Not bad. It's exactly like the Instigator potion I brewed before," Franca commended with an easy smile.

Of course it's the same. Concocting a potion is that simple… Lumian thought to himself.

Franca waved her hand, her confidence unwavering, and continued, "No need to fret. Downing a Sequence 8 potion directly won't trouble you. Plus, you've already digested the Assassin potion."

Infected by her confidence, Jenna's expression gradually turned resolute.

Oh, you're employing Instigation, are you? Is this an upright approach for an Instigator? Lumian grasped Franca's intentions, yet he didn't call her out.

Jenna steeled herself and composed her mind. She picked up the double-handled broth bowl and lifted it to her lips.

Gazing at the obsidian potion fizzing with tiny bubbles, as though harboring hidden desires and ill intent, she tilted her head back and poured the contents from the porcelain bowl into her mouth.

An acute pain coursed from her mouth down to her esophagus, radiating to her brain and other parts of her body.

The pain jolted her awake, memories of the explosion at Goodville Chemical Factory flashing through her mind. She gained fresh insights, a better understanding of the true intentions and thoughts of those involved. She sensed malevolent thoughts that had either come to fruition or were waiting to be acted upon.

Soon, Jenna's heart was filled with rage, loathing, and a desire to obliterate those individuals and matters. She felt an urge to cease holding back and unleash her emotions.

Recalling Franca's repeated warnings, she resisted letting her hatred, anger, and desires take the reins. She clenched her fists, standing still.

Her shadow seemed to deepen, and her brownish-yellow hair appeared to lengthen.

In a little over ten seconds, the pain gradually receded, and Jenna reconnected with her body.

It's indeed quite easy… Most of the reason why I'm feeling half-dead after gulping down potions at a low Sequence is due to Inevitability's corruption… Lumian sighed.

Jenna swiftly gathered her thoughts and stretched her limbs, examining the changes in her body.

"Oh, my body's definitely gotten stronger. And I've got this new ability, Instigation…"

"It's actually pretty great. Instigation is more than just an ability. It lets me feel what others are feeling—emotions, desires, even malice. It sharpens my thinking and analytical skills. Ha, I'll have to use this to my advantage. Can't have Ciel always making fun of my smarts and performance…

"Even if I don't speak, using Instigation actively will make me seem more reliable and approachable. It'll help folks around me think better of me."

"With the Instigation ability and some clever talk, I can plant certain thoughts or desires in someone's mind, making them choose to act the way I want…"

After a quick adjustment, Jenna confirmed that her combat skills hadn't improved significantly, but she could be much more valuable in other situations.

"How'd it go? Told you there wouldn't be any trouble," Franca said with a grin, her satisfaction not hidden at all.

Jenna's blue eyes still had traces of black threads in them. She let out a relieved breath and replied, "I was a bit worried earlier."

"That's just the way it is at low Sequences. You'll need to be careful when you move up to Sequence 7," Franca reminded Jenna, ensuring she didn't underestimate the risks of a potion.

Jenna nodded and said to Franca, "I owe you 30,000 verl d'or, including this time. I'll pay you back in installments."

She included the Assassin potion from earlier.

Franca had discussed this with Jenna the night before. She had intended to treat it as a gift. After all, she could continue selling the potion formula and information about the Deep Valley Quarry. However, seeing Jenna's determination, she decided to accept it after some thought.

With a smile, she replied at that moment, "No need to rush. Take your time repaying. You could even stretch it into a 20 or 30-year loan."

Lumian couldn't help but click his tongue and turned to Jenna. "Has the compensation from the Goodville Chemical Factory come through?"

"Imre and Valentine told me the legal process is done. Once the auction wraps up, the assets will be distributed—perhaps in two weeks." Jenna didn't quite grasp why Lumian was suddenly bringing this up. "Julien and I should get around 6,000 verl d'or. We'll split it evenly after settling our debts. Honestly, I don't really want it, but he won't agree for sure."

Lumian nodded and inquired further, "And what about your father's compensation?"

"Because of the Goodville Chemical Factory explosion, the court's given its final say, but the factory owner's dragging his feet. Ugh, is he trying to move his assets out before he pays up?" Jenna's tone carried a hint of anger as she spoke about it.

A chuckle escaped Lumian's lips.

"How about this? We pay a visit to the families waiting for compensation soon. You 'instigate' them, and I'll 'incite' them. We alternate, gather them at the factory owner's place, and demand what's owed to them. It helps them and gives us a chance to digest the potion."

"The factory owner's got a bunch of armed guards, and he's got ties to the police. What if they hurt the people just asking for their dues? They're already going through so much," Jenna expressed her concern.

Lumian arched an eyebrow and replied, "The court has made its decision. They've got every right to seek their compensation. If anyone dares to fire shots, I promise they won't shoot again. Don't worry, with us around, they'll be safe. Besides, you can give the heads-up to the Purifiers. They'll understand."

Jenna was convinced, her thoughts racing.

"Dammit, you're inciting me!"

While she grumbled, she accepted Lumian's idea and decided to gather information as soon as possible to figure out where the factory owner was now residing.

Simultaneously, another thought crossed her mind. "Now that I'm an Instigator, I need to interact with the entrustee. It's a task from the Purifiers. Franca, when's the next meetup?"

Franca said indignantly, "Next weekend. Reaching out to the entrustee is risky business. The Purifiers are kind of taking advantage of your lack of knowledge by only advancing you one ingredient for the Instigator potion. If it were me, I'd demand a better deal!"

Habitual instigation… Lumian chuckled inwardly.

As Franca and Jenna tidied up the coffee table, Lumian remained seated in an armchair, looking all repulsive.

After a while, Jenna approached him, her body lowering.

Lumian turned his head in surprise.

With a confident smirk, Jenna adjusted her hair.

"I can safely say that you didn't just show up to watch me drink that potion for dealing with Guillaume Bénet."

Her grin was playful and teasing. Though she wasn't wearing makeup, it brought Lumian back to their first meeting when she was an underground singer at Salle de Bal Brise.

Before Lumian could respond, Jenna straightened up and strolled toward the bathroom, leaving behind a casual question.

"Is it really so hard to admit that we're friends and you care about your friends?"

…

On his way back to Salle de Bal Brise, Lumian mulled over his role as Pyromaniac.

He was teetering on the edge of taking the first step towards digesting the potion; his hunger for more acting chances was insatiable.

Though I must set aflame minds and society, I cannot overlook the elemental act of kindling substances and fulfilling fire's symbolic essence.

Who would be a suitable candidate for burning…

As these thoughts raced through his mind, Lumian's gaze spotted Baron Brignais.

The mob leader, who usually emulated Gehrman Sparrow, had discarded his customary poise and genteel demeanor. Instead, he marched restlessly and agitatedly along Avenue du Marché, his eyes darting around incessantly.

Lumian fixated on him briefly, though Baron Brignais remained oblivious.

Baffled, he retraced his steps to Salle de Bal Brise and inquired of Sarkota, who had once served under Baron Brignais, "Do you have any knowledge of what happened to Brignais? I observed him in a state of great unease just now."

The reticent Sarkota glanced towards the café's glass window and replied, "Baron Brignais's illegitimate son has gone missing."

Illegitimate son? Gone missing? Lumian's thoughts immediately turned to the young lad Baron Brignais had picked up from the Suhit steam locomotive station.

Chapter 310: Encounter

"How did he go missing?" Lumian asked, puzzled.

Baron Brignais wasn't just a mob leader; he was a Beyonder, too. As long as he was attentive, how could he allow his child to disappear?

Moreover, who in the market district would dare to snatch his child?

Sarkota shook his head. "He didn't provide details."

Could it be the machinations of the Rose School of Thought, striving to expose the truth about the Savoie Mob from Baron Brignais? With recent events woven into the mix, Lumian had some unconfirmed theories.

After a brief pause of thought, he inquired, "Do you know what Brignais's illegitimate son looks like?"

Sarkota nodded. "The baron's underlings came by with a portrait that resembles a photograph."

A portrait that resembles a photograph… Had he invoked ritualistic magic? Lumian's memory recalled the contents of Aurore's grimoires.

Gazing at the brilliant sunlight streaming through the window, he turned to Sarkota.

"Gather some men and aid Brignais."

Regardless of whether the child was ensnared by the Rose School of Thought or had truly gone missing, if they couldn't locate him soon, the outcome would be grim.

At his age, even without additional complications, his fate as a street urchin wouldn't be kind.

"Understood." Sarkota refrained from inquiring why his boss had decided to lend a hand to Baron Brignais.

After all, it wasn't yet noon, and Salle de Bal Brise had just commenced operations. The real hustle and bustle didn't kick in until three or four in the afternoon. Apart from the janitors and kitchen staff, most folks had time aplenty.

Lumian ordered a glass of ice water topped with sugar-infused alcohol and stood on the café's balcony, observing the mobsters interrogating vagrants along Avenue du Marché.

After a while, "Rat" Christo appeared. The diminutive smuggling chief emerged from an alley, trailed by seven or eight dogs of varying hues and breeds, and entered the diagonally opposite alley.

Before long, he drew nearer to Salle de Bal Brise.

At this sight, Lumian finished the remaining alcohol, placed the glass on the railing, and leaped from the second floor to the street.

Christo, his two rat-like whiskers wiggling, approached with a sycophantic grin.

"Good morning, Ciel."

"Are you aiding Brignais in locating his illegitimate son?" Lumian inquired directly.

Christo nodded gently. "Indeed. He personally reached out to me for assistance. Coincidentally, these kids excel at tracking down people."

As the "Rat" spoke, he affectionately patted the dogs' heads.

They alternated between gathering and dispersing, following a distinct scent.

Baron Brignais truly cares for that illegitimate son… Lumian advised "Rat" Christo with a pensive air, "There might be something peculiar about this situation. Stay vigilant. I don't want you to go missing before finding the boy."

The Rose School of Thought being responsible for abducting the boy was always one of the possibilities.

Christo was taken aback, pondered for a moment, and remarked, "There's indeed something amiss. In recent years, we've never heard of Brignais having such a son. Moreover, he holds him in high regard. Why would the boy vanish?"

A sudden appearance of an illegitimate child? Lumian's intuition suggested this might be more intricate than he presumed.

After contemplating briefly, Christo gratefully said, "Ciel, your intellect surpasses mine."

"Don't you possess medicine to enhance your mind?" Lumian inquired, half jesting and half curious.

As Christo allowed the dogs to nuzzle his trousers, he sheepishly smiled and replied, "Indeed, but they're short-term solutions. Their effects are middling, nowhere near the potency of a potion. Damn it, excessive consumption can lead to complications."

Lumian shifted the conversation, asking, "Do you possess authentic mummy ashes?"

Christo assumed an enigmatic expression.

"How much do you require? I can provide you with the best version. That 'Little Minx' Jenna often frequents Franca. She's a tricky one. Just days ago, Franca inquired if I had genuine mummy ashes. Tsk, even the Boss is having trouble."

Ciel also had numerous dancers and actresses as mistresses. Despite his youth, he still relied on medicine.

"I mean true mummy ashes." Lumian stroked his chin.

"I don't." Christo shook his head. "That stuff is ineffective, and I don't know who propagated the falsehood, but I do have a concoction that can satisfy all your paramours. It's composed of various herbs; I merely claim mummy ashes as the primary ingredient."

"Did Franca buy it?" Lumian inquired with a grin.

"She did." Christo cooperatively chuckled. "Probably because the Boss is too embarrassed to approach me."

Her facade was impeccable. She concealed her true desires from the "Rat," seeking the so-called "ineffective" mummy ashes… Lumian sighed and confessed openly, "I need genuine mummy ashes. They possess mystical uses. Keep an eye out since you often engage with merchants trading in alchemical materials."

"No problem." Christo suspected that Ciel aimed to preserve his dignity and wouldn't acknowledge his quest for such a remedy. He insisted on mysticism as a pretext for seeking mummy ashes but didn't expose him. After all, it was a minor matter.

Observing Christo's persistent search for Baron Brignais's missing illegitimate son with his dogs, Lumian turned on his heel and made his way back to the dance hall.

As he was about to approach the bar counter, Termiboros's commanding voice reverberated in his ears: "To the cellar."

To the cellar… Lumian's initial thought was that the Inevitability angel had something planned.

"Which cellar?" he inquired.

"The one used to store ingredients," replied Termiboros.

So proactive, so eager… What's He plotting? Lumian began to wonder if there was an underlying scheme at play.

Termiboros continued, "It's a stroke of fate for you. Even if you don't go, it will find its way to you. It's destined."

You're giving me chills… Termiboros won't likely put me in immediate danger right now… What could be in that cellar… Lumian contemplated briefly and reckoned that the ingredient storage cellar was usually bustling around noon. In theory, there shouldn't be anything unusual or perilous.

After careful consideration, he decided to head to the cellar, listen at the door, and take a look. If he sensed anything awry, he would write to Madam Magician and inquire if he should heed Termiboros's advice and enter.

Amidst the greetings of the chefs, kitchen helpers, handymen, and dishwashing maids, Lumian crossed through the kitchen and descended the stairs to the ingredient storage cellar.

The cellar's dark-brown wooden door was securely shut, as usual.

Lumian strained his ears, intently listening for any signs of activity.

A faint chewing sound reached his ears.

It wasn't a dramatic sound, devoid of the horrifying notion of a creature devouring flesh. Rather, it resembled a tramp gnawing on food after a long bout of hunger.

Something's definitely amiss… Lumian cautiously pushed open the cellar door.

The light from the stairs seeped in, revealing a figure.

It was a boy of seven or eight, his back to Lumian. He had short yellow hair, a caramel coat, white stockings, and black strapless leather shoes. Behind him lay a dark red school bag that seemed somewhat weighty and sturdy.

Lumian found the attire oddly familiar.

Suddenly, he recalled where he'd seen it before.

Baron Brignais's illegitimate son!

So, his disappearance led him to hiding in the ingredient cellar of Salle de Bal Brise? Lumian had intended to take a quick glance before shutting the door and leaving to pen a letter to Madam Magician at Auberge du Coq Doré. Yet, upon realizing that the person in the cellar was likely Baron Brignais's illegitimate son, he furrowed his brow slightly and swung open the dark brown wooden door a bit more.

Additional light streamed in, causing the boy to instinctively turn and face the door.

Lumian caught sight of the brass buttons on his clothes, a black-and-white checkered shirt, and a linen coat. He saw a face with evident baby fat, unperturbed but vacant brown eyes, and a mouth smeared with blood.

The boy clutched a few raw steaks tinged with a dark red hue in his hand. His mouth kept opening and closing as he chewed on a vague mass of flesh resembling a rat. Its thin black tail gently swayed near his lips.

Lumian narrowed his eyes and slipped his left hand into his pocket.

The boy remained unperturbed, his gaze vacant as he continued staring at Lumian. He chewed a few more times before swallowing the bloody rat, tail and all.

Lumian arched an eyebrow and asked, "Are you Brignais's illegitimate son?"

"No," the boy mumbled, nibbling at a piece of raw steak.

"Then what's your connection?" Lumian queried in a "peaceful" manner.

After a while of eating raw steak, the boy answered, "He's my godfather and guardian in Trier."

Remarkably precise Intisian, hardly any accent… Lumian regarded the peculiar boy with puzzlement and probed, "Are you running away from home?"

"Yes," the boy replied, blood staining his mouth as he continued nibbling on the raw steak.

Behind him stretched a thick darkness, enveloped by the dim light from the corridor.

"Why did you flee from your godfather? Do you need me to help you return?" Lumian asked, offering a friendly smile, noticing that the other party was more amicable in conversation.

The boy shook his head vigorously.

"No! I don't want to go back to attending classes, studying, doing homework, taking practice tests, and sitting for exams!"

Wh— The boy's reasoning left Lumian oddly bewildered, as if he had glimpsed his own past.

He was intelligent and had no trouble attending classes, reading, or taking exams. He absorbed knowledge swiftly, but he disliked homework or practice tests. He relied on Aurore's "heartfelt education" to barely persevere. He often wished he could rope in Reimund, Ava, and his friends to do those tasks for him.

Is this rat-chewing enigma the fateful encounter Termiboros alluded to? Lumian pondered and inquired, "You don't seem to be from Intis?"

With an honest demeanor and a bloodied mouth, the boy responded, "I'm from Lenburg."

Chapter 311: Strange Boy

Lenburg? Baron Brignais's illegitimate son or godchild resides in Lenburg? Lumian was puzzled, his mind racing with playful guesses.

Baron Brignais places a high value on education, entrusting his most beloved child to the kingdom of the God of Knowledge and Wisdom for learning…

Lumian studied the young lad before him and asked in a laid-back tone, "Aren't you supposed to be hitting the books in Lenburg at your age? The education there is leagues ahead of what Trier offers."

The boy's face lit up with an oddly animated expression. "Nah, I'm not up for the daily grind of school, burning the midnight oil over homework, and tackling exams every month!"

Sounds a little terrifying… A shiver trickled down Lumian's spine at the thought of such a life.

At the very least, it didn't sit right with him.

Agreeing with a nod, Lumian casually asked, "Are live rats tasty?"

The boy regained his composure. "It's not exactly gourmet, but I can't be choosy when hunger gnaws. Waiting till midday to raid the kitchen doesn't cut it. True bliss is savoring a meal whipped up by a maestro chef. And some mild hunger pangs do add a certain… flair."

After explaining, he must have felt he came across too mature and quickly recalibrated.

"Can't blame me if your kitchen's dragging its feet until noon!"

Well, that's hardly the point, now, is it? When I was wandering about without a proper place to stay, I sure as heck didn't have any notions of munching on live rats. The big issue, of course, was that I couldn't even catch the pesky things. And if by some miracle I did, then I had to somehow figure out how to set up a fire, skin them, and roast them. But this kid right here? He's out here grabbing rats, using nothing but his own bare hands. His strength or maybe just his good luck isn't half bad, I'll give him that. It's not even an hour away from noon, and he's acting like he's got an insatiable hunger? The more Lumian looked at him, the more he was convinced there was something peculiar about this little lad.

Amused, he inquired, "Brignais didn't bother to feed you, then? Need me to escort you to the police headquarters so you can lodge a complaint about his child abuse?"

"Well, aside from pestering me about my studies, he's alright. He makes sure I have a proper meal every two hours. On top of that, he whips up cakes, biscuits, roasted meat, and pies for those midnight hunger pangs." A subtle lick of the lips revealed the boy's longing.

Are you a pig? Lumian had never eaten so much while undergoing puberty.

And yet, the lad didn't appear overweight, only solidly built.

In the blink of an eye, the boy's gaze shifted as he spoke in rapid succession, "Perhaps studying demands a lot of energy. I need all this sustenance to keep my brain firing on all cylinders."

Is there no saying about how "trying to explain is just a cover-up" in Lenburg's education? Your elaborate justification makes me wonder if your appetite is problematic… All this eating hasn't exactly made you a genius, has it? Lumian grinned and quipped, "If Brignais wasn't intentionally starving you, why resort to raw rats and steak?"

In a frustrated tone, the boy retorted, "I managed to slip away without breakfast or morning tea today!"

And yet, you're so famished that you're downing raw rats? If you go hungry for another half day or so, will you start eying pedestrians on the street? With a fluid motion, Lumian produced an iron-gray military flask from his shirt pocket.

His left hand slid into his trouser pocket, deftly unscrewing the cap of the flask before tucking it away.

Lumian raised the iron-gray metal flask, breathing in the fragrance with a satisfied grin. He inquired, his voice light, "Fancy a sip?"

Gulp! The boy's Adam's apple bobbed as he swallowed his saliva.

Struggling, he responded, "I'm not of age yet. I'm just a kid!"

He's tasted it before, and he's taken a liking to it… Lumian passed his judgment and swallowed a mouthful of the spirit.

Maintaining the military flask at his lips, he spoke in a casual tone, a question hanging in the air, "Which deity do you believe in?"

"Why're you asking?" the boy inquired cautiously.

Seeing the lack of alarm, Lumian breathed a sigh of relief. He tipped the flask again, the liquid gurgling.

He lowered the military flask, his expression bright as he spoke with clarity, "As a devout follower of the God of Steam and Machinery, I've got to verify the faith of those with uncertain origins."

"By steam!"

This time, Lumian spoke without the veil of alcohol.

Subconsciously, the boy shook his head.

"Words don't mean much. Just saying I believe in whichever deity doesn't make it true."

Lumian studied the boy's reaction. "It's true that folks from the orthodox Churches can sometimes claim belief in any deity without much sincerity, but they're harmless. I'm more concerned about worshipers of evil gods. They're fervent and unpredictable. They won't fake it to deceive others, believing that to be against their faith and blasphemous."

Instinctively, the boy retorted, "Not always. Some followers of evil gods will pose as adherents of the orthodox gods to further their holy missions. They can pray, attend rituals, join Mass, and chant the names of other gods without a second thought—as long as they repent to their own deity afterward, they reckon there's no issue…"

At that moment, the young lad abruptly halted. He exchanged gazes with Lumian and lapsed into a prolonged silence.

After a spell, he took a bite out of his uncooked steak and introduced himself, "I'm a believer of the God of Knowledge and Wisdom. The devoted faithful in our Church have this peculiar knack for pointing out slip-ups in the other party's speech, just like before. Yep, just like before!"

Lumian fixed a piercing gaze on the lad for a few beats before inquiring, "What might be the usual prayers at the God of Knowledge and Wisdom Church?"

Quick as a flash, the boy responded, "Like I was saying earlier, folks who believe in those evil gods can mutter the honorific name of an orthodox god with a heavy heart and toss out those prayers. You can't rightly figure out what's in others' minds unless you're a card-carrying member of the Eternal Blazing Sun Church and you've got it notarized that you won't lie…"

With that, the lad clammed up once more, his gaze fixed vacantly on Lumian.

After a brief pause, he stretched out his empty right hand, and pressed it to his forehead. "May wisdom be with you!"

Such a foolish fellow shouldn't be a spy sent by an evil god… From his intelligence, he's really a child… Lumian struggled to maintain his composure, requiring a concealed deep breath to regain control over his facial muscles.

"Indeed," he concurred, his lips curving into a smile. Mirroring the boy's action, he brushed his head with the base of the iron-gray military flask and uttered with significance, "May wisdom be with you!"

Without affording the boy a chance to reply, Lumian adopted an alluring tone. "Would you care to join me at the café on the second floor? I'll treat you to a proper meal. The chefs here are quite remarkable."

The boy swallowed visibly. "You won't turn against me, will you?"

"You can tail me the entire time. That way, I won't ever get a shot at double-crossing you." Lumian initiated a little trial, testing if the other guy's brains matched his looks and age, or maybe they lagged behind. "And mind you, we only prohibit the God of Knowledge and Wisdom Church from preaching in Intis or setting up a cathedral. We do let their believers cross the border. Trier's got the Lenburg Chamber of Commerce, you see."

The boy pondered for a moment and said, "Okay."

Lumian sized him up, withdrew his left hand, sealed the liquor flask, and tucked the iron-gray flask back in his brown coat.

Then, he pressed his forehead again. "May wisdom be with you!"

With that, Lumian pivoted and ascended the stairs.

The kid stuck to him, politely shutting the cellar's deep-brown door behind him.

Seeing Lumian whirl around, the kid explained earnestly, "If it's left open, the food inside will spoil."

"True enough." Lumian pulled his gaze and climbed up the stairs.

The kid trailed him close, eyes peeled for any odd moves, any signs of betrayal.

Lumian steered him into the kitchen, then upstairs to the café on the second floor and ordered a set meal.

In no time, the spread hit the table: fried veal steak, grilled eel, roasted leg of lamb, chicken pie, red wine, and cream.

Lumian settled in, watching the kid wolfing down like he was bottomless.

Every now and then, he tossed a comment,

"Veal is crisped good, but the meat is nothing special…

"Sweet sauce masks the eel's fishiness, but it makes it greasy…

"Leg of lamb is roasted just right, crispy outside, tender inside. Spices are off a touch, though. Too much fennel…

"…"

Just eat. Why are you so talkative… Lumian silently watched the boy eat the table full of food with a satisfied expression.

Fifteen minutes later, Baron Brignais walked in from the second-floor entrance, donning a half top hat with a diamond ring shining.

The boy turned in surprise and glanced back at Lumian.

Lumian smiled and said, "Did you think I'm the only one here who knows you?"

The boy was startled as he fell silent.

Baron Brignais walked up to Lumian and said with unconcealed relaxation, "Appreciate it, Ciel."

"Just so happened to catch him skulking around in the cellar, munching on something," Lumian responded, his voice warm and friendly.

Baron Brignais gave him a sidelong glance before shifting his attention to the boy. "Time to head back, Ludwig."

Ludwig, the young boy, remained silent. Swiftly, he polished off the last remnants of his meal and rose from his seat.

"Ciel, we'll catch up," Baron Brignais directed a nod at Lumian.

Seated opposite, Lumian observed as Baron Brignais clasped Ludwig's hand, their departure imminent. Lumian's lips curved again before saying, "Don't forget to settle the tab."

Baron Brignais displayed a hint of surprise. His eyes flickered, suggesting a momentary uncertainty in his initial assessment.

Yet without uttering a word, he withdrew a wallet brimming with banknotes and promptly covered the cost of Ludwig's meal.

Lumian maintained a contemplative silence, watching the duo disappear down the stairwell. Leaning back in his chair, he murmured softly, his voice a mere whisper, "Temiboros, where exactly is the stroke of fate you mentioned?"

Chapter 312: Hint

Though Lumian maintained a cautious skepticism toward Termiboros, his curiosity about the enigmatic "stroke of fate" continued to gnaw at him.

The way Termiboros had alluded to the Earth Blood ore as an "encounter" had caught his attention. Could this time involve Ludwig, the young boy?

There was something off about this fellow, something amiss. Yet, as their conversation unfolded, Lumian came to acknowledge Ludwig's intelligence, origins, and apparent devotion to the God of Knowledge and Wisdom. Despite this interaction, Lumian found himself gaining no true insights or foresight. It was unlike his understanding of the Earth Blood ore's potential, which hinged on specific conditions of going underground, finding the right area to encounter something.

Once again, Termiboros's powerful voice reverberated through Lumian.

"The moment will reveal itself."

"Can't you people make yourself clear?" Lumian's frustration surged, his blood boiling in his veins..

"I'm unlike what you consider people," Termiboros responded, straightforwardly. "I'm a Mythical Creature."

"…" Lumian was left speechless, taken aback. He forced a scoff and retorted, "I doubt even your sealed form can truly grasp fate's threads. Each time, your answers are mired in vagueness. What sets you apart from amateurs in the Divination Club? If you possess the power, reveal clearly where my next opportunity lies!"

Termiboros responded with a deep tone, "Tonight, at 11 p.m., Rist Docks, Warehouse 3."

Huh? Surprise coursed through Lumian; Termiboros's hint was unexpected.

Yet, within his astonishment, puzzlement persisted.

Inevitability's angel is that kind?

As a high-ranking Alms Monk, He shouldn't have been provoked so easily to interpret my fate…

Could there be an ulterior motive?

Regardless, I'll consult Madam Magician's insight first.

Lumian decided swiftly. He rose, departed Salle de Bal Brise, and embarked on a journey to Rue des Blouses Blanches.

Executing a simple act of arson, he could initiate the initial potion digestion step and contemplate gaining a Contractee boon. Despite his anxiety, Lumian refused to lower his guard against Termiboros.

Within Rue des Blouses Blanches, in the safe house.

Lumian meticulously documented the particulars regarding Ludwig and Termiboros's clue. Subsequently, he conducted a ritual, summoning the doll-like messenger.

As Lumian awaited Madam Magician's response, he delved into a trove of information concerning spirit world creatures. Reading the descriptions of certain knowledge consumed a substantial amount of his spirituality. Some even induced dizziness, nausea, frustration, headache, a burning sensation, and illusions.

Similar to Aurore's grimoires' portrayal of profound knowledge about deities and high-level creatures, this information is fraught with intense corruption and perilous ramifications. If all the knowledge that pursues humans bear such attributes, it's genuinely chilling. The prospect of losing oneself upon hearing it or succumbing to immediate demise is unsettling… Thus, Lumian punctuated his reading to safeguard his mental well-being from plummeting to precarious thresholds.

After poring through descriptions of approximately 30 to 40 spirit world creatures, Lumian stumbled upon a figure he recognized.

"Rabbit of Knowledge:

"Weak spirit world creature, friendly to humans and possesses an innate thirst for knowledge. Their summons are rarely declined.

"Diverse experiences yield distinct Rabbits of Knowledge. Shared traits include mastery of various languages, spoken and written communication skills, and adept reading capabilities. Extracting salient information from extensive knowledge is their forte, and their transcription speed outpaces even mechanical typewriters.

"Drawback: Limited communication finesse and inflexible thinking. Some Rabbits of Knowledge have been tainted by anomalous knowledge, evolving into significant hazards. To summon, restrict choices to the friendly and weak."

So, it goes by the name "Rabbit of Knowledge." Summoning this entity in the future should be more targeted… Yet, its abilities and attributes are of limited value. If I had gone as per Aurore's vision of university enrollment, I would benefit from its multilingual proficiency and strong reading skills… Noteworthy, the text omits mention of its speed within the spirit realm, implying its negligible worth in that aspect. It moves sluggishly, drains spirituality… Lumian lowered the document, massaged his temples, and embarked on his third respite.

During this juncture, the messenger bore Madam Magician's response:

"I share curiosity regarding what encounter the lad named Ludwig would bring. His appearance in Trier intrigues me; motivations remain nebulous.

"Vigilance is prudent. His existence carries intrigue.

"Proceed. The window of acting presents itself to me as well."

Can't you people make things clear… Lumian's lips twitched, absorbing the succinct message.

However, a nuanced sense emerged that Madam Magician's opening sentence wasn't an immediate response. It resonated more as a condensed echo of her contemplations.

In essence, Madam Magician, imbued with her astromancy prowess, struggled to glean Ludwig's fate. Her perceptions seemed clouded, suggesting she only harbored conjectures.

The obscurity surrounding Ludwig's destiny, evident in her inability to perceive it, spoke volumes.

…

At 10:50 p.m., at Rist Docks, outside Warehouse 3.

Lumian took cover in the shadows, poised to seize the much-anticipated opening for action.

Soon enough, two silhouettes approached Warehouse 3, drawing within a mere five to six meters of Lumian.

One of them spoke hushedly, riddled with concern, "Héctor, the accountants arrive tomorrow for an audit. How do we address this? Shall I hire a thief to pilfer the account records?"

"What purpose would that serve? The moment they inspect the warehouse, suspicion will arise. Our remaining stock barely equals a tenth of the required amount." Héctor's tone escalated, simmering with intensity. "If we're to proceed, we ought to do so comprehensively by reducing the warehouse to ashes. This way, any discrepancies would remain concealed."

I see… Listening closely, Lumian deduced his cue to act.

As his companion wavered, Héctor interjected, "Fires are commonplace in Trier, normalized in everyone's mind. Moreover, igniting them ourselves isn't necessary. The market district swarms with miscreants and rogues. Once the time is ripe, we can entice them to vacate Trier with a handsome fee.

"Honoré, we can't wait any longer. You must decide now."

Honoré paused, then spoke resolutely, "Agreed! We'll locate Guy and recruit him into our plan!"

The duo conducted a swift survey of the warehouse's surroundings before departing for the docks, en route to rendezvous with their comrade, Guy.

After a brief trek, the sky abruptly reddened, casting an incandescent hue across the scene. Simultaneously, the crackle of flames resounded.

Honoré and Héctor instinctively spun around, bearing witness to an inferno emerging. Vermilion flames surged, fierce and ravenous, soaring to engulf the structure.

"Fire, fire…" Héctor mumbled, a glint of realization dawning. "Indeed, fire! Praise the Sun, it's a fire!"

Honoré exhibited a similar reaction, his right hand tracing a triangular Sacred Emblem over his chest, lips moving in muted invocation.

Yet, within the momentary elation, disquiet brewed within Honoré's senses.

Trepidation tinted his voice as he discerned, "The warehouse isn't aflame. It's our office!"

Positioned meters away from the warehouse was their office—a modest gray two-story edifice.

The expanse separating it from the warehouse remained empty, devoid of combustible material.

"…" Héctor's visage contorted in terror. Clenching his jaw, he spoke with grim resolve, "We must set fire to the warehouse now!"

Even as the words left his lips, an explosion erupted from the locus of crimson flames.

Though not seismic, the detonation garnered the attention of dock workers and firefighters.

"Fire! Fire!" The clamor resounded as responders converged. In Trier, a city renowned for frequent conflagrations, firefighters were seasoned in addressing such crises.

Observing the scene, Héctor and Honoré, who hadn't reached Warehouse 3, slumped onto the roadside, their vigor sapped.

At the entrance of the dock.

Albus, his hair now a fiery hue, averted his gaze from the raging blaze to the middle-aged man at his side.

"Monsieur Guy, your colleague seems even more agitated than you."

Guy's complexion paled as he shook his head in bewilderment.

"The warehouse wasn't the target of the fire…"

A pause lingered before Albus sneered.

"I warned you already. Hesitation begets mishaps. Now, ponder your escape. May you be more decisive this time."

Beside the unassuming two-story structure, Lumian gazed upon the soaring flames. The timber and flammable materials metamorphosed into an ephemeral dragon, casting his countenance in fiery red, eyes alight with fervor.

With a grin, he advanced toward the blaze.

The duo's intent to commit arson entailed erasing incriminating evidence by reducing the warehouse to ashes. However, Lumian's purpose was to generate turmoil, inviting scrutiny that would unearth the discrepancies within the warehouse!

Such was the duty of a responsible citizen.

A mantle of flames enveloped Lumian, adhering to his attire obediently—merely a hair's breadth from ignition.

Donning the flaming cloak, Lumian marched into the roaring blaze.

Fire coalesced with fire, repelling smoke. Effortlessly traversing the structure, Lumian exited on the opposite end of the dock.

Following the arson, Lumian acquired a rudimentary mastery over the potion's powers. He tamed it, dispelling the burning sensation on his skin and the trepidation in his heart.

While his potion digestion remained incomplete, Lumian had already adapted to his present state, giving him the capacity to receive an additional Inevitability boon.

…

After carrying out a few rounds of anti-tracking, Lumian returned to the safe house on Rue des Blouses Blanches.

Initiating the initial step of digesting the Pyromaniac potion prior to tracking down the padre filled him with satisfaction. He maintained a smile, yet his demeanor faltered upon glimpsing the towering pile of dense information within the iron cabinet.

It would take at least a month or two to finish reading them!

How could he identify an apt contracted creature in so brief a span?

Chapter 313: Plans with Different Styles

Lumian stood before the iron cabinet, his mind immersed in contemplation.

With just a handful of days remaining until the date designated by the Prophecy Spell, Lumian earnestly aspired to secure Contractee status, thereby attaining three distinctive abilities. This enhancement was imperative prior to pursuing Guillaume Bénet. The augmentation would tip the odds in his favor.

Relying solely on Pyromaniac, even in collaboration with Franca, now a Demoness of Pleasure, and the support of Anthony Reid and Jenna, prevailing against the padre's uncanny abilities remained tenuous. Victory might be attainable, but apprehending the adversary without incurring losses was a near-impossible endeavor—except if he enlisted the assistance of the Aurora Order Oracle via Mr. K's finger.

This assessment solely considered Guillaume Bénet as Lumian's adversary. If the padre had other confederates, alongside a cohort of bestowers or Beyonders, and if he had grown mightier than his state upon departing Cordu, Lumian's undertaking wouldn't assure triumph—even with Mr. K.

Lumian's aspiration was to pinpoint the padre's whereabouts and engineer a snare, drawing him out. Such an approach would markedly simplify the process. Nevertheless, Lumian needed to bolster his strength substantially. Otherwise, the "fishing" operation would entail dire jeopardy.

As Lumian perused the stack of dense information concerning spirit world entities, his mind whirled, seeking avenues to locate a suitable contract partner within a constrained timeframe.

Should I designate a time frame for reading and strive to cover as much ground as feasible? Then, my selection must derive from my existing familiarity?

This proposition falls short of my expectations. It risks bypassing the most fitting opportunity…

Although the circumstances aren't optimal, I must reconcile with reality. Perfection remains elusive; I must confront my own limitations head-on.

Son of a sow, it hasn't reached a juncture necessitating blind acceptance!

For now, I'll withhold any definitive moves until I ascertain the padre's whereabouts next week. I'll bide my time. Following the completion of this information assimilation, a comprehensive strategy will crystallize, right?

It will take approximately a month. The potential for accidents looms large…

Uh, the Rabbit of Knowledge appears to have the ability to read and extract key points. Can I summon one to help me read the information and extract the keywords of every spirit world creature, like when I whistleblowed? Then, I'll carefully study the corresponding spirit world creatures based on the keywords…

It's a creature of the spirit world to begin with. Having come into contact with such knowledge, it will definitely be less affected than me and can last longer…

Lumian gradually grew excited. The more he thought about it, the more he felt that it was feasible to ask the Rabbit of Knowledge to help him do the reading and write a brief summary.

He swiftly perfected the corresponding plan.

That rabbit is quite stupid and silly. I have to design a table in advance and list the 'page number', 'strength', 'whether it's friendly', 'brief description of abilities', and 'points of characteristics'. I'll let it fill in the columns in step and order.

Unfortunately, a person can only summon one Rabbit of Knowledge at a time. Otherwise, if I had ten or twenty, I will be able to complete the summary on spirit world creatures before dawn…

If one person can only summon one, what about having more than one person?

I can have Franca, Jenna, and Anthony Reid summon one each for me!

Uh… Rabbits can read quickly, extract essential points, and fill out summaries. Humans can do the same. Franca, Jenna, and Anthony can help browse through the information and quickly extract keywords from the columns.

I'll contribute knowledge, and they contribute labor, spirituality, and time!

Lumian's eyes grew brighter and brighter. He felt that if he pushed this plan forward, even with frequent breaks to mentally recover and the time to summon a Rabbit of Knowledge again, he should be able to produce a summary on the spirit world creatures in twelve hours.

When the time came, he would browse through the summaries that wouldn't affect his mind and select 20 to 30 suitable ones. He would read the raw information in a targeted fashion and make a final decision.

The only problem now was that the information on these spirit world creatures had been provided by Madam Magician; Lumian hadn't exchanged it using contributions or money. He believed that before "sharing" with others, he had to obtain the approval of the Major Arcana card holder.

This was basic respect.

Lumian sprang into action without hesitation. Swiftly, he composed a letter outlining his inquiry and the comprehensive plan he had crafted.

Soon, Madam Magician responded: "For a moment, I don't know what to say about your idea. It appears you possess an aptitude for such considerations.

"Sharing your knowledge with your friends is permissible, but remember to advise them against engaging with powerful or perilous spirit world creatures. These entities hold no sway over you, thanks to Mr. Fool's seal. It serves as a deterrent in the spirit world, offering you a measure of protection that others lack."

"Actually, there are simpler and easier ways:

"Take the information to Two of Cups and spread it in every corner of the room. Then, get Two of Cups to recite the divination statement repeatedly and throw out three tarot cards or three coins.

"Choose whichever spirit world creature they land on. Even if it's not the most suitable for you, it's relatively suitable. It might be useful in a future occasion."

Hiss, what a brilliant charlatan! Madam Magician is indeed skilled in divination. Her style is completely different from mine… Lumian hadn't considered divination.

After careful consideration, he decided to follow his plan. The answer chosen through divination always felt unreliable and unreal. He subconsciously didn't want to rely on it.

By relying on his own intelligence and abilities to filter them out, he would feel more confident and convinced.

Unless there was no other way, Lumian hoped to finish "reading" the information before making a choice.

He burned Madam Magician's reply and carefully wrote up the form. For the time being, he only made five copies.

Immediately after, he set up the altar to see if he could accurately summon the Rabbit of Knowledge.

To this end, the summoning incantation he had devised was: "Rabbit-shaped spirit wandering in the void, a friendly creature that can be communicated with, a weakling who pursues knowledge."

The choice to avoid using the human-coined "Rabbit of Knowledge" as its name spoke of Lumian's respect for the enigmatic nature of these creatures.

Having carefully considered his approach, Lumian ignited a solitary candle and made a summoning in his own name.

His incantation concluded, and the candle's flame transformed into a deep shade of green, expanding to resemble a human head in size.

From within the luminous green flame, a translucent creature emerged, its appearance reminiscent of an amusingly awkward rabbit.

Relief washed over Lumian as the ritual proved successful. The creature's presence signaled a triumph, and Lumian's experienced voice addressed it, "I wish to share knowledge with you, seeking your assistance in distilling key points and completing a form."

The rabbit's eyes brightened, and in a tone that mimicked Lumian's voice and Trier's Intisian accent, it inquired, "Where is the knowledge?"

This was the first time Lumian had heard such a creature speak. He didn't expect it to imitate his tone and pronunciation.

With purpose, Lumian retrieved a stack of information about spirit world creatures he had yet to delve into. He gestured towards the form on the table, articulating the task's parameters in a manner befitting a creature of limited intellect.

The rabbit absorbed Lumian's guidance, its long ears drooping as it committed the instructions to memory. Eventually, it nodded in comprehension.

Seated at Lumian's desk, the rabbit's eyes sparkled as it engaged with the information.

Lumian noted with satisfaction that, despite its unwilling nature, the rabbit demonstrated proficiency in its repetitive task. It diligently extracted pertinent details and methodically filled out the form with words like "powerful" and "dangerous."

Although it's not very smart, doing such repetitive work isn't a problem for it… It's at least twice as fast as my reading… Lumian nodded in satisfaction and lay on the bed, preparing to close his eyes and rest while the Rabbit of Knowledge was busy working to alleviate his fatigue.

After an unknown period of time, he suddenly sensed danger and hurriedly sat up.

He saw that the transparent rabbit had grown to two meters tall, constantly flipping through the information and extracting.

"Stop!" Lumian didn't understand what was happening and instinctively stopped the other party from coming into contact with the knowledge.

The rabbit turned its head, its eyes bloodshot.

After staring at Lumian for a few seconds, it reluctantly halted its work.

Lumian's introspection led him to deduce the cause behind this transformation.

As a creature of the spirit world, the Rabbit of Knowledge was similarly affected by that knowledge, albeit to a relatively mild extent. However, it wasn't like ordinary humans due to its lacking intelligence. It didn't know to stop and rest after an abnormality unless it directly endangered its life.

As it accumulated, it inevitably underwent a certain mutation.

Phew, it's useful—that's true, but not having much intelligence is a huge problem… Lumian ended the summoning and allowed the Rabbit of Knowledge to return to the spirit world and slowly recover.

He washed up briefly, lay on the bed, and prepared to rest.

An idea surfaced just before sleep claimed him. Lumian summoned the rabbit once more and directed it to replicate a hundred copies of the form he had devised.

Only then did he truly relax and fall asleep.

…

The following morning, Lumian was brimming with vigor as he set off for Rue Anarchie. His first stop was to locate Anthony Reid, the information broker, and discuss the potential of his assistance.

As he approached Auberge du Coq Doré, a figure emerged from a nearby side alley.

It was Baron Brignais, adorned in a half top hat and a formal black suit, mahogany-colored pipe in hand.

"I promised to catch up with you and express my gratitude for aiding me in finding Ludwig," Baron Brignais began with a smile. "It's quite surprising to find you neither at Salle de Bal Brise nor Auberge du Coq Doré."

Gratitude? Then help me read and write a summary! Lumian muttered subconsciously before swiftly dismissing the notion.

Compared to Anthony Reid, an information broker with a mental illness, Baron Brignais was not only a member of the Savoie Mob, but his background also seemed problematic. It was best not to let him discover that his relationship with Franca didn't rely solely on Jenna.

A smile tugged at Lumian's lips.

"The night offers its own beauty. It's pointless to remain confined within one's room. How do you intend to express your gratitude?"

Rather than providing a direct answer, Baron Brignais diverted the conversation. "I may not have mentioned this earlier, but I converted to the worship of the God of Knowledge and Wisdom a few years back."

Chapter 314: Crowd-Sourcing

Did you communicate with your godson and come to me to confirm the situation? Lumian maintained his smile.

"What you believe has no bearing on me, as long as you don't subscribe to an evil god. Furthermore, devotees of the God of Knowledge and Wisdom are not wanted criminals in Trier."

His implication was clear: "I'm still a wanted criminal. Believe what you will."

Baron Brignais had always been astute. He changed the subject and continued, "Thank you for aiding me in locating Ludwig. I'm unsure how to adequately express my gratitude."

He refrained from specifying a thank-you gift, hoping to gauge Lumian's stance and thoughts.

Lumian pondered briefly before recalling the idea he had set aside.

Getting Baron Brignais to assist with reading and summarizing didn't necessitate his presence alongside Franca, Jenna, and Anthony Reid. He could impart some information, clarify what he needed to focus on, and allow him to return home to peruse and transcribe.

Likewise, before Anthony Reid committed to joining the pursuit of Padre Guillaume Bénet, direct contact with Jenna and Franca couldn't be allowed. An isolated "office" could be arranged for him at a later time.

Lumian glanced at Baron Brignais and inquired deliberately, "Are you proficient in reading and drafting notes?"

Aurore's grimoires had denoted that the pathway under the Church of the God of Knowledge and Wisdom was labeled Reader. This was also the title of Sequence 9 potion. Sequence 8 was Student of Ratiocination, and Sequence 7 was Detective.

Given Baron Brignais rarely exhibited special abilities and mostly leveraged his exceptional intellect, above-average combat skills, and sharp marksmanship to lead the Savoie Mob, coupled with his present faith, Lumian speculated he was a Beyonder of the Reader path.

From the potion's nomenclature alone, one could infer such an individual excelled in reading.

Baron Brignais drew from his pipe and responded, "In contrast to the illiterate, my reading and learning aptitude is rather commendable."

He couldn't entirely fathom Ciel's intentions, yet he suspected Ciel was prying into his Beyonder pathway.

And it wasn't confidential. Gardner Martin had long been privy to this.

Lumian unveiled a genuine smile.

"Of late, I've acquired a trove of information concerning creatures from the spirit world. However, as you're aware—you should be aware, correct? Delving into such knowledge extensively exerts a significant toll on the mind. As a Beyonder of the Hunter path, I shan't require this information for an extended period. Nevertheless, I wish to have access to the pertinent knowledge when necessity arises, without squandering precious time. Therefore, I intend to furnish you with a portion of the data. Kindly assist me in reading and extracting the key terms."

"Much akin to constructing an index for a library." Baron Brignais promptly grasped.

He grinned and remarked, "Truthfully, this would prove advantageous to me. That knowledge holds considerable value."

Library index… As anticipated of an adherent of the God of Knowledge and Wisdom. How professional… Lumian rejoiced, sensing Baron Brignais was roughly on par with Anthony Reid combined with a Rabbit of Knowledge.

Simultaneously, he harbored a cautious sentiment toward Baron Brignais. For instance, he would furnish this God of Knowledge and Wisdom follower with ten pages of information. He would peruse them in advance and jot down notes. Subsequently, he would cross-reference them with the index submitted by Baron Brignais to discern any deliberate omissions or alterations.

Of course, this was Lumian's unrefined approach. He could alternatively beseech Franca to verify via divination, but the potential for interference still existed.

Lumian slid his hands into his pockets and surveyed Baron Brignais, akin to an artisan observing a laborer. He beamed and uttered, "I'm indifferent to who benefits, as long as I accomplish my objective."

Baron Brignais nodded faintly, refraining from further commentary. He solely apprised Lumian of his whereabouts the following morning and requested the information to be conveyed there.

Auberge du Coq Doré, Room 305.

Facing Anthony Reid, Lumian eased back and reiterated his words to Baron Brignais. Concluding, he voiced, "This knowledge serves as your compensation. Furthermore, I shall impart to you the knowledge of ritualistic magic. You'll be able to summon a unique spirit world creature to peruse the information alongside you and distill the essential points. How does that proposition strike you? Are you inclined to accept this assignment?"

Anthony Reid's deep brown eyes mirrored Lumian's form as he contemplated and responded, "You're pressed for time. This matter bears added weight for you. It carries great significance."

Lumian had no intention of concealing this. He seized the opportunity and conveyed, "I'm confronted with the need to face a formidable adversary soon, and I seek to secure a fitting contracted creature. When the moment arrives, I might extend you an invitation, primarily in a supportive role. You can consider whether to agree and what form of compensation you desire. Heh heh, there's no rush for an answer. Think over it for the next two days."

"You're paving the way for me to be mentally prepared and foster appropriate expectations." Anthony Reid deciphered Lumian's thoughts.

Instantly, Lumian felt a twinge of embarrassment, but he was never one to blush easily. He maintained a composed smile and articulated, "Can you not tell that being honest will put your life in danger?"

Anthony Reid offered a slight nod, affirming certain aspects prior to committing to aid in perusing the information and crafting the "summary."

…

On the second floor of Salle de Bal Brise, in the room adjacent to Lumian's quarters.

Lumian surveyed Anthony Reid and the Rabbit of Knowledge, seated in tandem, diligently sifting through the information and completing forms. He subtly nodded in relief.

Once more, he reiterated the caution not to delve deeply into the spirit world creature knowledge marked as "powerful" and "dangerous." Exiting the room, he entered the office at the corridor's end.

Franca cozied up in Lumian's armchair, her red-booted feet propped on the desk's edge.

Baffled and intrigued, she inquired, "What exactly do you need our help with? Why are you being so mysterious?"

Jenna settled into the chair across from her, turning her body as her gaze drifted to the door.

Lumian nonchalantly shut the door and recounted the scenario, elucidating his need to secure a contracted creature prior to confronting the padre.

"Wouldn't a simple divination suffice?" Franca pondered as she acquiesced to Lumian's entreaty, while Jenna simmered with curiosity about the spirit world creatures.

Before long, Franca gazed up at the trio of Rabbits of Knowledge and Jenna, as well as Lumian, each absorbed in their respective tasks of poring over documents. Amusement laced her voice as she quipped, "Why does this feel like a miniature workshop, and we're the toiling transcribers?"

Congratulations, your instincts are on point… Lumian retorted in jest, "Am I not also perusing the information and completing forms?"

Franca mulled it over and conceded. She resumed her "labors."

And so, they persisted until well past 10 p.m., punctuating their efforts with numerous breaks—meals, siestas, catnaps—to mitigate the strain. Brief reprieves preceded the summoning of the Rabbits of Knowledge once more.

Intermittently, during his short intervals, Lumian observed Franca, Jenna, Anthony Reid, and the quartet of Rabbits of Knowledge. He remained vigilant to prevent them from becoming too engrossed and to detect any anomalies they might experience.

Jenna reached her threshold first. Having newly ascended to Instigator, she hadn't fully acclimated to the potion's effects and was grappling with containing the surge of power. Her state was less than optimal.

Anthony Reid followed suit. His psychological scars ran deep, rendering him susceptible to certain deviations.

Lumian, Franca, and the seventh set of Rabbits of Knowledge soldiered on till the end.

Baron Brignais concluded his task around 6 p.m. and delivered the documents and forms to the café.

After dismissing the summons and seeing off the fatigued "assistants," Lumian returned to the safehouse on Rue des Blouses Blanches, arranging the forms in a neat stack.

Perusing the papers briefly, he confirmed the general state of affairs. A sense of accomplishment swelled within him as he casually tossed the forms onto the table.

The immediate selection wasn't on his agenda. His plan was to first establish a Contractee status and sort out the specifics of the contract. Only afterward would he consult the index, thereby preventing the likelihood of stumbling upon a spirit world creature that matched his criteria in all respects but failed to meet the contract stipulations.

Lumian rested for a spell before summoning a Rabbit of Knowledge and tasking it with duplicating two more forms.

Storing the three indices separately, Lumian's weariness was palpable. The prospect of cleansing himself seemed distant as he tumbled onto the bed and surrendered to sleep.

…

At 6 a.m., Lumian brimmed with vigor, showing no haste to descend underground, arrange an altar, and beseech for a boon. Instead, he engaged in his usual regimen: jogging, practicing boxing, and cultivating his mental equilibrium.

By nearly 8 a.m., he stood before the doorway to Room 207 at Auberge du Coq Doré, ingredients at the ready.

After a brief internal debate, Lumian ultimately seized the carbide lamp—although he no longer required specialized illumination equipment; he was, in essence, a paragon of such abilities.

His aspiration rested on his foes' initial assumption that he lacked night vision and was inept at generating light.

In Underground Trier, within the quarry cavern that had once borne witness to Inevitability-linked rituals on several occasions.

Lumian briefly tidied the dank, lightless setting, positioning a blood-infused candle upon the altar stone.

Just as he concluded the sanctification of the ritual silver dagger and readied to cast a spiritual barrier, faint footfalls reached his ears.

The sounds reverberated within the subterranean passage, seemingly not distant from the present mine.

Someone is passing by? Lumian's pulse quickened, his intent fixated on swiftly restoring the area to order and concealing himself.

Yet, as he neared the altar before him and before he could extinguish the carbide lamp, soft footsteps drew close, manifesting at the cave entrance.

Aware that concealment was futile, Lumian promptly swiveled around, one hand nestled in his pocket, his gaze converging on the source of the sound.

A slender man of brownish-black complexion stood there, clutching a carbide lamp. His black hair bore a slight curl, and his eyes held a profound allure. He sported a black seer's cloak reminiscent of those seen in a circus.

Monette… Lumian recognized the figure.

He was an Islander swindler who had duped Charlie and been hoodwinked by the con artists in Salle de Bal Unique.

Monette, too, saw Lumian.

A smirk tugged at the corners of his lips as he greeted with palpable cheer, "What a coincidence."

In tandem with his words, the swindler produced a crystalline monocle, inserting it into his right eye socket.

Chapter 315: Anxious Termiboros

What a coincidence? Lumian knew better than to consider it mere coincidence.

Deep within the expansive underground of Trier, unexpected encounters were not uncommon, given the diverse cast of characters that frequented its depths—quarry police, smugglers, cave adventurers, mineral researchers, wandering university students, members of secret organizations, wanted criminals, mobsters, heretics, and anti-government militants were active here. However, the odds of stumbling upon familiar faces in such a dark domain were almost negligible.

This wasn't like the time he had rescued Jenna—Lumian had doggedly followed the trail.

Monette's presence, monocle affixed, roused Lumian's caution. He mustered a semblance of a smile and replied, "Indeed. What a coincidence."

With one hand casually slipped into his pocket, Lumian played his role, pretending to secure the candles and materials on the stone surface. The intention was to convey that the ritual was complete and he could depart whenever he pleased. There was nothing of value to plunder or destroy.

Monette adjusted his monocle and with a wave of his hand, offered a departing smile.

"See you aboveground."

And just like that, he withdrew, his footsteps fading into the depths.

Lumian was caught off guard.

He's leaving just like that?

Could it really have been a coincidence?

Judging from Monette's familiarity with Underground Trier, it is evident he has traversed these passages countless times. Yet, that level of familiarity should have taught him that barging into a well-lit spot amidst the darkness could easily trigger conflict…

Common sense dictates that a stranger's presence in the quarry cave warrants cautious observation for any approach. The abrupt, nonchalant "appearance" seemed off…

Does he truly possess that much confidence in his prowess?

It can't be just to scare me!

As Lumian's thoughts raced, he shifted his gaze from the cave entrance to the candles and materials neatly arranged on the rocks.

The question arose whether to persist with the boon ritual.

In that instant, the voice of Termiboros reverberated within him: "You'd best relocate."

Uh… Lumian's senses tingled, catching a note of unease in Termiboros's tone.

It was subtle, almost elusive, making Lumian doubt his judgment.

This was the first time Lumian had perceived emotional fluctuations in this Inevitability angel.

In previous interactions, no matter how much Lumian goaded and prodded, Termiboros merely maintained silence.

And yet, something about this encounter had stirred anxiety and apprehension within the angel!

As his heart quickened, Lumian blurted out, "Is this person truly dangerous?"

"He isn't inherently dangerous, but I sense a looming threat," Termiboros responded.

This confirmed Lumian's guess.

The angel had sensed a looming problem through the strings of fate, a predicament that could jeopardize His very essence.

"Why does a seemingly less formidable individual trigger such unease? What's his motive?" Lumian pressed on.

Termiboros reverted to His usual depth as He intoned, "I'm sealed. I can only perceive the outside world through you, so I lack ample information. To uncover the answers to these queries, the seal must first be weakened."

Do I look like an idiot to you? I even suspect that your anxiety and worry might be fabricated to exert pressure and intimidate… But given Termiboros's previous conduct, even if progress hadn't been made, such overt intentions should not have been revealed so swiftly… Monette's appearance was indeed oddly coincidental, his actions shrouded in inexplicable bizarreness. If possible, I must evade him. It's safer to assume he poses considerable danger rather than underestimate and expose myself… With a brisk pace, Lumian gathered his belongings, clutched the carbide lamp, and exited the quarry cave.

Drawing upon the subterranean map meticulously memorized from Gardner Martin's records, Lumian navigated closer to Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative, discreetly delving a few meters below ground level to stumble upon another somber, soundless quarry cave. He incorporated no fewer than three evasive maneuvers along the way to evade potential trackers.

Phew… Exhaling a breath of relief, Lumian surveyed his surroundings and rested his carbide lamp upon the ground. On a moderately level rock, he arranged the candles and ritual components, ensuring their proper alignment.

Abruptly, a flicker of motion in the shadows at the quarry's edge pricked his senses.

Hiss… Lumian's heart skipped a beat. Clasping the carbide lamp cautiously, he directed its beam toward the source.

A bluish-yellow radiance pierced the obscurity, unveiling a black rat partially concealed by gravel.

The rat made no effort to evade the light; it stood still. After a few heartbeats, it pivoted languidly and vanished into a minuscule crevice at the rock wall's base.

For some reason, Lumian sensed a disproportion between the rat's right and left eyes.

Gripping the carbide lamp, tension once again coursed through Lumian. He hushed, "Temiboros, is there a problem here too?"

Termiboros's voice resonated within Lumian's being, emanating a regal aura.

"It's best if you pray to The Fool immediately for angelic protection before moving elsewhere."

Could the situation be that grave? Lumian's pupils dilated. Swiftly producing an additional candle, he hastily constructed the altar.

Not a shred of concern lingered regarding Termiboros potentially manipulating him into a detrimental choice. After all, supplicating The Fool was Lumian's last resort, and it undeniably served his interests.

From a different vantage, the very fact that circumstances compelled an Inevitability angel to indirectly beseech The Fool's protection implied that something far amiss was afoot. Unleashed, the peril would prove unfathomable!

Being both mentally and physically optimal, Lumian's adept hands fashioned the candles, a process lasting just over ten seconds. He sanctified the dagger and forged a wall of spirituality that enshrouded solely him and the altar.

Methodically, he ignited the three candles sequentially, from deity to humanity, from left to right, punctuating with drops of essential oil and extract.

Amidst the haze and wisps of fog, Lumian exhaled, reciting gravely, "The Fool that doesn't belong to this era, the mysterious ruler above the gray fog; the King of Yellow and Black who wields good luck.

"I implore you,

"I implore your protection…"

As the ritual unfolded, Lumian surrendered to the mist's embrace, the prickle of his skin, the lassitude of his mind. Once more, he glimpsed the twelve-winged seraph, pure luminescence descending from infinite heights to envelop him.

As the radiant wings receded and dissolved, Lumian's senses jolted back to him. Gauging his state, he hastened to pack up the altar items and hastily exited the mine's confines.

Descending beneath the bustling market district, Lumian maintained his vigilant, practiced evasiveness, pushing forward with meticulous attention.

Almost twenty minutes elapsed before Lumian stumbled upon another concealed quarry cave, secured by its discreet location, courtesy of his map.

Stepping inside, he assessed the surroundings. His voice hushed, he inquired, "Temiboros, is there any issue here?"

"Presently, none," Termiboros responded.

Lumian shut his eyes, a newfound calm settling over him.

He mulled over his options.

Should I surface and await the anomaly's dissipation before seeking out a secluded haven for the boon-praying ritual? Or should I seize the moment, briefly escape the abnormality, and hasten my progression to Contractee, capitalizing on The Fool's angelic protection?

In keeping with Lumian's disposition, he leaned towards the risk. The scenario wouldn't change later. He couldn't ascertain if the anomaly had genuinely dissipated. He needed the counsel of someone higher in rank.

In that case, he might as well seek that counsel now!

The altar was reinstated. Yet, this time, he bypassed protection or boons, summoning instead Madam Magician's messenger.

The "doll" messenger, clad in a gown of light gold, coalesced above the flickering candle flame.

Observing Lumian, it grumbled, "This isn't a good place."

With that, it retrieved the hastily inscribed letter from Lumian's hand.

The letter briefly recounted Monette's behavior and Termiboros's response, querying the possibility of initiating the boon prayer ritual at present.

Lumian exercised some cunning here. He didn't outright solicit Madam Magician's protection, merely inquired about feasibility.

Hiring a demigod came at a steep price. Lumian deemed it currently unaffordable. Instead, he aimed to draw her attention by inquiring.

Of course, if push came to shove, he'd consider it. Debts could be repaid. Or if the person was deceased, repayment became moot.

This isn't a good place… Does this pertain to the current quarry cave or the entirety of Underground Trier? Lumian contemplated the messenger's words.

Swiftly, the messenger returned, bearing Madam Magician's response: "That's a big problem."

Madam Magician's opening remark twitched Lumian's eyelids.

"Of course, the situation isn't dire—at least, I haven't discovered the gravest entity's return to this world yet.

"What we must ascertain is His true intent. Termiboros's reaction implies He's the target, but this individual excels at concealing motives. This may well be a calculated illusion meant to deceive us or another party.

"For the time being and the foreseeable future, anomalies should be absent. Stabilize yourself and proceed with the boon prayer.

His? That's an angel? The entity whose hostility Monette exhibited is an angel? Lumian hissed involuntarily, engulfed by a renewed surge of trepidation.

This brought to mind the uniqueness of Salle de Bal Unique. He suspected that confronting them to reclaim a debt might entangle him with a host of angelic Blessed!

Seeing Madam Magician's assessment align with Termiboros's, Lumian composed himself and reconfigured the altar.

Before long, he focused on the pair of gray-white candles symbolizing Inevitability's power and himself. Amidst the intricate fragrance of gray amber perfume, he retreated slightly and intoned deeply, "Power of Inevitability!

"You are the past, the present, and the future;

"You are the cause, the effect, and the process."

Chapter 316: "Invitation Letter"

In a repetition of events, the silver-black candle flame once again solidified into a beam of light, striking Lumian's left chest, already wracked with agony and turmoil.

Amidst the pervading gray fog and the unsettling black wind, a silvery-black illusionary liquid began to trickle out.

At some elusive point in time, Lumian's pain and vertigo faded into insignificance. He felt as though he had transformed into an entirely different entity.

Standing in the wilderness, he gripped a wooden bow in his hand and released an arrow that gleamed with a blue radiance toward his aerial target.

Lumian vaguely remembered who he was, but he felt that everything was extremely real and he was experiencing it.

The keen, spectral-blue arrow cut through the sky, finding its mark in the belly of a dusky vulture.

An acute agony surged into Lumian's consciousness. He observed himself beating his wings, descending with an arrow lodged perilously close to his abdomen.

No, why have I become a vulture… Amidst the present experience, Lumian maintained a fragment of awareness about his own state and condition.

Bang!

He collided brutally with the ground, each bone fracturing with excruciating force. Agony pierced his core.

Lumian teetered on the brink of unconsciousness as a hyena lunged, its sights set on him.

Warm, repulsively scented flesh filled his mouth. He found himself ravaging the lifeless form of the grayish-black vulture. The bluish-tinged arrowhead had snapped within the avian creature.

This taste is nauseating… I'm no Ludwig, the monstrous child… Lumian's internal complaint resounded.

He didn't completely mistake himself for a hyena, but he continued to bite and devour his prey uncontrollably, not letting go of the poisoned parts.

Abruptly, a searing pain stabbed into his back, and he was thrust onto the ground by razor-sharp claws.

His attacker: an uncanny lion marred by decay, oozing blood-yellow pus from its wounds.

Lumian tore the hyena's throat apart and retreated with it into the nearby underbrush.

As he witnessed the scene through an observer's lens, he systematically dismantled the hyena.

Amidst a mix of satisfaction and revulsion, Lumian's abdomen seethed. His Beyonder powers, teetering on the edge of control, were fully ignited by the venom, resulting in a chaotic anomaly.

His sanity waned, spiraling into insanity. All that remained was an insatiable urge to obliterate the beings before him, to unleash chaos.

No, I mustn't succumb… The paramount objective remains incomplete… Lumian drew in the faint, sweet aroma of gray amber, resisting complete surrender to madness.

In the midst of his cathartic sprint, his attention fixed on a hunter, and he lunged at the figure.

With a wooden bow in his grasp, Lumian caught a whiff of a repugnant odor and sighted a decaying lion, two wart-like growths on its shoulders.

Its mouth, adorned with remnants of vibrant red flesh and blood, stretched to its limit.

A jolt of alarm coursed through Lumian as his full self-awareness returned. He discerned that the hunter's "form" had turned ethereal, akin to the vulture, hyena, and lion, morphing into intricate silver-black words and bizarre symbols.

The words linked with the symbol, weaving a ring that abruptly contracted into his body.

Lumian's eyes opened, and he confronted the flickering silver-black candle flame. A half-meter-tall stone, functioning as an altar, met his gaze.

The encounter felt tangibly authentic… As if I had been the vulture, the hyena, the lion, and another human… Lumian massaged his throbbing head and gradually rose to his feet. Reflecting on his prior experiences, he assimilated the newfound knowledge within his mind.

He couldn't remember when he rolled on the ground in pain.

Phew… Exhaling deeply, Lumian affirmed that he had acquired a fresh boon and transformed into a Contractee.

He swiftly tidied up the altar, dismantled the wall of spirituality, and grabbed the carbide lamp, ready to leave the quarry cave at any moment.

Simultaneously, Lumian assessed his transformation and the Contractee's abilities.

His spirituality had seen a marked increase.

His Dancer flexibility and the Alms Monk's endurance in harsh environments had shown modest improvement, though not substantial.

His intuitive sense for luck had also seen a slight upgrade. However, upon recognizing that Termiboros could sway his fate and judgment, he refrained from frequently relying on this ability for protection.

Summoning Dance now exerted a broader sphere of influence, and his ability to forcefully possess the bizarre creatures had extended further.

The Contractee status bestowed upon him just a single fresh ability—the power to enter into a contract with a summoned creature, directly borrowing a distinctive characteristic skill.

Contrary to Lumian's anticipations, this unique contract had merged with his body and soul during his advancement. Its transfer to others was impossible.

In essence, he had become an indivisible part of the contract, the most pivotal aspect. In time, he would need to rely on this element to compose the remaining sections of the contract and offer them to the target creature for "signing."

After musing for a time, Lumian had a rudimentary understanding of the specifics of the Contract ability.

The agreement could solely be formed with the consent of the target creature.

Once the contract was sealed, he could handpick the traits he desired, guided by his volition.

With each ratified contract, not only would he acquire a skill, but he'd also assimilate a measure of influence from the contracted being. The higher its rank, the greater the adverse impact.

The count of contracts inked depended on his resilience. Perhaps he could endure just one high-level or exceedingly potent attribute. Several ordinary traits might be borne, keeping pace with his standing. Particularly feeble ones could be pursued more liberally.

Upon signing a contract, a cost was entailed. Part was a tribute to the contracted entity, and the remainder was a tribute to the witness. The cost could encompass life, limbs, kin, loved ones, offerings, one's spirituality maximum, a fraction of reason, and so on. The precise demand hinged on the desires of the contracted creature.

Hence, much of the intelligence Lumian gleaned from this boon concerned the corresponding creature. This encompassed specific abilities and the "compensation" the counterpart sought.

Nevertheless, most of these odd creatures were sinister and uncanny, and the price he'd need to pay was consistent. Lumian didn't wish to select from their ranks.

Of course, this wasn't the prime rationale. Conceivably, these creatures harboring the mystical knowledge interwoven with the power of Inevitability had ties to the entity known as Inevitability. Lumian dreaded that forging a contract with them might covertly manipulate him, propelling his destiny into the abyss.

Consequently, Lumian had no intention of designating the entity as the object of prayer and witness while entering into a pact.

A superior choice was at hand: Mr. Fool!

According to the sermons in The Fool's cathedral that Lumian had heard, this great entity reigned over the spirit world. The Angel of the Holy Spirit by His throne presided over the spirit world on His behalf.

Even if embellished, this testified to Mr. Fool's considerable sway in the spirit world.

In such a situation, Lumian—marked by The Fool's seal and enlisting The Fool as an intermediary and pact witness—could potentially yield substantial advantages and concealed benefits when attempting to forge a pact with a spirit world creature. It was just like other Contractees signing contracts with strange creatures that came with knowledge.

Lumian promptly sorted through the recently acquired knowledge and discerned that certain aspects remained quite ambiguous, as if they encompassed myriad possibilities.

For instance, the stipulation of obtaining the target creature's consent before signing a contract did not specify the methodology of obtaining consent. Securing agreement through offerings as a bribe constituted consent, but so did beating them into unreserved submission. Similarly, the "compensation" demanded by the latter should be negotiable.

Additionally, the deleterious impacts that the acquired knowledge from contracted creatures brought along, along with the limits of one's endurance, precluded the prospect of Lumian circumventing the system to forge a pact with a high-ranking creature and attaining godlike power at a reasonable price via Mr. Fool's seal, the sovereign of the spirit world.

Nonetheless, the liberty to cherry-pick any amalgamation of skills within a defined spectrum imposed a considerable upper boundary on the potential of a Contractee. Naturally, the floor was equally low. Opting for an ill-suited skill and exacting an erroneous price could render one subpar even in comparison to an elite non-Beyonder individual's aptitudes.

Lumian steadied himself and murmured with a sense of contentment, "Temiboros, do you have anything to add?"

To be candid, Lumian's foremost apprehension upon descending into the underground was whether Termiboros would exploit the boon-seeking ritual to instigate harm. After all, the potency of the boon he was acquiring was escalating, posing a genuine threat to the angel of Inevitability. Even if securely sealed, He would unearth a method to stir up discord. It was improbable for Him to remain inert, permitting His strength to wane.

Furthermore, during the boon ritual, the seal would inevitably crack slightly, permitting the essence of Inevitability to trickle out. This would afford Termiboros a distinct opportunity.

Initially, Lumian had intended to solicit safeguards before officially beseeching a boon. Unexpectedly, Monette's bizarre appearance and the angel backing him had expedited the need for a blessing. Termiboros had turned more tractable, abstaining from conspicuous interference.

Termiboros's voice resounded with His response, "The mine entrance."

The mine entrance… What does that imply? Lumian clutched the carbide lamp and advanced toward the entrance of the quarry cave, mired in bewilderment.

A bluish-yellow luminescence cast light over the debris-strewn expanse, revealing a meticulously trimmed piece of stiff paper.

It wasn't present when I entered… Lumian tensed and cautiously drew closer. On the ebony paper, a monocle had been meticulously drawn, almost replicating reality. Four lines of bold, vibrant red Intisian words graced the page:

"Salle de Bal Unique

"Night of Lovers

"7 p.m. on the last night of every month

"You're invited."

Salle de Bal Unique… Monocle… Night of Lovers… Lumian's thoughts instantly summoned an image of Monette donning a monocle in his right eye socket.

He had earnestly invoked The Fool's angelic safeguard and expended considerable effort to elude detection, yet he had failed to shake off the enigmatic trickster?

No, Mr. Fool's angelic blessing exudes a high-tier anti-divination and anti-prophecy influence. Unless Monette has been lurking in my vicinity without being thrown off, it's implausible for him to regain proximity! Lumian's heart skipped a beat as he instinctively surveyed the surroundings.

Silence reigned within the obscurity bordering the quarry cave. Yet, Lumian's skin prickled, as though an abundance of eyes remained concealed within the air.

Chapter 317: Summoning Target

In the Cordu days, Lumian might have snatched up that invitation and made his way to the Salle de Bal Unique by month's end, all to unleash a prank to return the shock.

However, this time around, Lumian's grip on the mystical world was firmer, a result of his brush with countless otherworldly aberrations. He conjured a flicker with the snap of his fingers, sending forth a crimson spark that alighted on the ebony paper before him.

Amidst the swiftly burgeoning flames, Lumian departed the quarry cavern, his carbide lamp casting its light, guiding him towards the nearest exit of the Underground Trier.

Yet, on this journey, an unshakable paranoia seized him. The moss on the rocky walls, the unseen insects within the shadows, even the intangible entities that traversed the air—it was as if Monette's eyes bore into him from all angles.

It wasn't mere illusion but rather a reality that wound Lumian's mind taut, each heartbeat a gallop of unease.

Termiboros's unwavering quiet provided the lone solace, a lack of agitation hinting that the quandary hadn't escalated—yet.

A quarter-hour's passage led Lumian to ascend the steel stairs, emerging onto solid ground once more.

As sunbeams pierced the sky, penetrating a sea of white clouds and bathing his visage in their glow, he felt as though he'd been reborn.

Phew, no wonder Madam Magician said to live under the sun in Trier as much as possible… Exhaling a sigh, Lumian snuffed the carbide lamp, locked in his bearings, and charted his course back to Rue des Blouses Blanches.

Upon reentering the safe house, he immediately summoned Madam Magician's messenger, apprising the holder of the Major Arcana card of the developments that unfolded.

Madam Magician's reply was simple:

"Exemplary work. Steer clear of Salle de Bal Unique.

"The Lord's Angel of Time shall keep vigilant watch over this affair."

Why would Mr. Fool's Angel of Time direct His attention toward Salle de Bal Unique? Is there indeed an Angel of Time? The angelic entity whom the charlatans of Salle de Bal Unique revere bears a link to Mr. Fool's Angel of Time. Or perhaps, an animosity? Lumian ruminated, momentarily adrift in the murk of comprehension.

With a measure of relief prevailing, he reclined upon the bed, surrendering himself to sleep's embrace—an interlude wherein his mental fortitude and vitality underwent reinvigoration.

At noon, Lumian ate two savory meat pies and drank a glass of Apple Whiskey Sour. Seated at the table, he engaged in earnest perusal of the bestiary chronicling the spirit world creatures.

As he raced through the pages, a sleek black fountain pen danced in his hand, crafting purposeful circles on the paper to accentuate potential candidates.

After over an hour of intense scrutiny, Lumian distilled a preliminary list of 50 to 60 spirit world entities boasting suitable attributes and modest threat levels. Following the breadcrumbs of indicated page numbers, he retrieved the source manuscripts and embarked on meticulous research.

Intermittent breaks punctuated his reading. As evening painted the sky in hues of twilight, Lumian at last concluded his meticulous perusal of the source materials, now in possession of their profound knowledge. A final selection had been forged.

First in line was the Abscessed Hand. This enigmatic spirit, once shrouded in legend across the southern and central parts of the world, had been conjured by aficionados of mysticism, leaving a trail of lifeless bodies in its wake.

From crime scene accounts, the fallen were strewn across the forest expanse. With the exception of those initially claimed within a hunter's lodge, the remaining deaths occurred nearly simultaneously. This revelation hinted at the Abscessed Hand's swift transitions between victims, throttling one soul and in a heartbeat, lunging towards its next quarry.

Dream divinations unveiled a bluish-black, gangrenous hand, swollen and oozing with putrescence. Its appearance was always abrupt, snapping a victim's neck within two to three seconds before vanishing to assail another, irrespective of the distance.

Based on the hand's traits, Lumian inferred its considerable aptitude for traversing the spirit world.

As for its danger level, Madam Magician's accounts deemed it commonplace, bound by the constraints of the summoning ritual.

Nevertheless, a significant detail stood out from the Major Arcana card holder: "It's suspected to be a fragment of something greater."

Severed hand? Could its kindred comprise severed legs, heads, torsos, and innards? What would happen when these fragments converge? If reassembled, what would manifest? Lumian scoured the index in vain, failing to unearth analogous entities. His focus rested on abilities, traits, and threat levels, with little heed to nomenclature.

An alternative theory remained afoot. The remaining Abscessed Hand counterparts might reside within the powerful and dangerous categories, evading the scrutiny of Franca, Jenna, and the Rabbits of Knowledge.

Should the anticipated spirit world traversal prowess prove elusive, or if the cost demanded an untenable toll, Lumian had an arsenal of alternatives at his disposal.

With regards to disguising abilities, he found a peculiar fondness for a spirit world creature known as the Headless Bride.

This mythical tale was woven within the heart of the Haagenti Kingdom in the Southern Continent. It began with the story of a young girl who dared to elope with her beloved.

In the shadowed chambers of their hidden nuptials, her kin unveiled the shrouded ceremony. Amidst the assembly of family and kin, her own brother exacted a swift, brutal end, severing her head in the name of matrimonial transgression and ancestral decree.

Perhaps this girl was special to begin with, or perhaps she had come into contact with something related to the spirit world during her elopement. Thus, ignited by the agony, fury, and rancor that gripped her before her demise, she imbibed the essence of the spirit world, transmuting into a creature akin to an evil spirit.

Dressed in scarlet bridal raiment adorned with gilded motifs, she hunted and hexed her lineage, subjecting them to an unending torrent of catastrophes spanning three decades, until the tapestry of their lineage was all but erased.

In the present, the Headless Bride prowled the spirit world, shape-shifting with calculated artistry. Its transformations beguiled unwary beings and unsuspecting travelers, drawing them closer to their doom in its relentless embrace.

For a Pyromaniac, this was an easy target with the protection of a ritual.

Headless Bride's alternative was Human-Faced Mantis:

"This is a unique creature from the spirit world. When he was alive, he was a playboy with elegance and good looks.

"As an educator in Sion within the Intis Republic's Hornacis Province, he was embraced by admiration and ardor from both distinguished dames and youthful maidens.

"He was gifted in literature, skilled in poetry, and had numerous lovers.

"This idyllic existence found an abrupt termination when a spurned spouse denounced him to the Church as a Warlock, accusing him of employing sorcery to control his wife.

"Agents dispatched by the Eternal Blazing Sun Church probed into the matter, gathering accounts from a multitude of local men. Astonishingly, their testimonies echoed the allegations in the complaint letter. Strangers to one another, these men's narratives converged in unsettling symmetry.

"In contrast, the dames and young maidens adamantly attested to their willing involvement, fervently defending the playboy's actions.

"Amid simmering resentment from the local men, the trial raced to a conclusion. The playboy met his end at the stake.

"Upon later investigation, officials confirmed his innocence, unveiling the accusations as a construct of collective envy and enmity.

"It's suggested that an Instigator was behind the scenes.

"In the spirit world, the playboy's essence metamorphosed into a mantis bearing a human visage. Festering within him was an all-consuming loathing, mingling with a mastery over metamorphosis and relentless predation…"

Lumian turned emotional as he read the two pieces of information.

Six years in the countryside had acquainted him with the ignorance that shadowed village life.

From this, he deduced that not all spirit world denizens sprang from nature's womb. Rather, under exceptional circumstances, the souls of departed humans could transmute into enduring spirit creatures. A plausible explanation for hauntings.

Pondering meticulously, Lumian relinquished his aspiration for invisibility and concealment. Instead, he earmarked his final contract slot for traits with direct influence over his Spirit Body.

His choices boiled down to the Thousand-Eyed Evil and the Shadow of Shriek.

These two entities were quintessential 'natives' of the spirit world, venturing forth only in the realms of nightmares and tomes of authentic Warlock craft.

The Thousand-Eyed Evil comprised fleshy forms, exuding a pink ichor, each adorned with an eye bereft of lashes.

Gazing into the ebony pupils of these multitudes, whether human, beast, or mere Spirit Bodies, led to swift slumber.

Their connection to dreams was palpable; they occasionally manifested in the darkest recesses of the most harrowing nightmares.

The Shadow of Shriek, on the other hand, manifested as a confluence of translucent shadows. With frequent outbursts of shrieks, they induced unconsciousness in those who dared to draw near.

Beyond their shrieks, they bore the attributes of ordinary shadows.

Lumian meticulously transcribed all the details concerning the alternative contenders onto fresh paper, folding it as he slipped the paper into his pocket.

He lingered within the precincts of Salle de Bal Brise for a period, eventually departing from Avenue du Marché around 10 p.m. Navigating the pathways along Rist docks, he ultimately gained entry into the two-story edifice he had once reduced to smoldering ruins.

Though the inferno that had previously ravaged the building had long since been quelled, the structure now stood cloaked in inky darkness and utter desolation.

Recognizing that his intended audience was none other than Mr. Fool, rather than the entity called Inevitability, Lumian had no intentions of executing the summoning ritual underground. This strategic choice was to avoid any potential encounters with the odd and dangerous swindlers of Salle de Bal Unique.

His primary objective was to locate a secluded enclave, far removed from prying eyes. This calculated approach would ensure that even in the event of an unforeseen mishap during the conjuration, should the summoned entity lose control, the collateral damage would be contained, thereby facilitating a swift resolution.

Having meticulously arranged a relatively unscathed chamber ensconced within the obsidian heart of the decrepit building, Lumian proceeded to meticulously arrange the altar.

Relying on the insights gleaned from his role as a Contractee, Lumian diverged from the norm by invoking two additional candles, each symbolizing a deity.

In this ritual, Mr. Fool was both the focal point of supplication and the solemn observer.

With a wall of spirituality set in place and candles aglow, Lumian didn't rush to commence the incantation. Instead, he extracted an iron-gray flask from the inner pocket of his worn brown jacket.

Within this flask, Lumian had ingeniously affixed a slender thread, its counterpart connected to the Decency brooch that lay submerged within a pool of absinthe.

This ingenious design facilitated Lumian's swift and precise retrieval of the Sealed Artifact. No clumsy maneuvering was required; a simple hook of his index finger and the Scotch Broom brooch was within his grasp.

As he tugged at the brooch, a burst of crimson sparks erupted, severing the knot binding the Sealed Artifact.

Without a moment's hesitation, Lumian adorned the resplendent Decency brooch upon his chest.

He harbored the belief that brokering a contract with a denizen of the spirit world carried an inherent cost, akin to a form of bribery. In this context, Lumian hoped the Decency brooch would assume a role of significance.

Securely fastening the brooch, Lumian's gaze shifted to the trio of candles, silently ablaze before him. Drawing a deep breath, he steeled himself for the upcoming ritual.

Chapter 318: Price

Lumian recited in ancient Hermes, following the precise summoning ritual as described in Aurore's grimoire and the mystical knowledge of Contractees.

"The Fool that doesn't belong to this era;

"You are the ruler above the gray fog;

"You are the King of Yellow and Black who wields good luck.

"I beseech your shelter.

"I pray for your attention.

"I!

"In the name of The Fool, I summon:

"A peculiar creature that roams the upper realm, the enigmatic severed hand, the bluish-black throat crusher."

Lumian crafted this summoning incantation based on insights from the Abscessed Hand's data. As the ritual afforded some degree of protection to the subject of the invocation, and since the Abscessed Hand was not deemed perilous, he omitted the terms "weak" and "friendly," infusing it instead with other phrases that would effectively pinpoint the target creature.

The bluish-black candle flames surged, intertwining to shape an ethereal doorway adorned with cryptic symbols. A faint gray mist filled the surroundings, instilling an eerie atmosphere.

Gradually, the door creaked open, and a decaying bluish-black severed hand emerged. It loomed twice the size of Lumian's palm, with the potential to crush a human skull.

The afflicted severed hand hovered before the enigmatic illusory entrance. Its fingers extended toward Lumian's throat, yet it abstained from aggression.

Lumian retrieved a flask of military-grade alcohol, differing in hue, unscrewed the cap, and drizzled a few drops towards the altar where the Abscessed Hand stood.

The liquid struck the ground midway, but with a glint from the Scotch Broom-shaped brooch, the Bribe was discreetly consummated.

Only then did Lumian speak. His voice resonated within his throat and chest as he enunciated alien syllables.

These were words he had never encountered, sourced from the mystical knowledge of Contractees, empowering him to master their pronunciation and essence.

They fell under the Mystical Language of Fate, an integral part of this arcane tongue.

Lumian's vocal resonance coalesced into silvery-black glyphs, akin to symbols, materializing from thin air.

They descended upon the faux goatskin resting on the altar, melding into a brief yet uncanny covenant.

As the pact solidified, Lumian established an intricate connection with the Abscessed Hand, akin to utilizing the Summoning Dance to anchor it to his very being.

Through this conduit, Lumian gleaned the rudimentary abilities and traits of the Abscessed Hand, sensing its yearnings in the process.

These yearnings were the price Lumian had to pay.

"Locate my body, or godhood shall elude you forever!"

An advance payment and a debt to be settled later… Could this be the unfolding of the Bribe? No, that's not it. Upon sealing a contract, the price is promptly remitted—manifesting as my inexorable fate of ascending to demigodhood. Once I uncover the remaining segments of the Abscessed Hand, the reward shall naturally replace the price… Presently, it's akin to providing ample collateral… Lumian's musings raced as he gleaned the crux of the pact.

Concurrently, he found the coveted spirit world traversal ability from the Abscessed Hand's attributes and qualities, inclusive of its anti-divination, quasi-invincibility, and the skill to snap the necks of those without godhood.

A trait intrinsic to the Abscessed Hand, not a mere ability. Its effects marginally deviated from Lumian's expectations, yet remained within tolerable thresholds.

With Decency's utilization window limited to fifteen minutes, the cost was bearable, and its attributes neared sufficiency. Lumian squandered no time, summoning the other candidates and vowing in ancient Hermes.

"I shall aid you in finding your body. Until then, godhood shall elude me."

These words fused with the surroundings, morphing into wisps of bluish-black mist that seeped into the faux goatskin parchment.

The Abscessed Hand descended, leaving a tincture of yellow-tinged, sanguineous pus within the contract's vacant space.

Spontaneously, the covenant ignited, yielding myriad silvery-black symbols and words.

They interlinked, configuring an intricate and enigmatic pattern, abruptly condensing onto Lumian's shoulder.

Though concealed beneath his attire, Lumian's psyche conjured an image of his right shoulder.

A curious black seal-like emblem materialized there.

Instinctively, Lumian apprehended that upon activating the contract sigil, he could harness the Abscessed Hand's attributes to traverse the spirit world. Dissolution of the contract was only conceivable upon the demise of either party—a destiny preordained.

Without bothering to experiment with spirit world traversal, Lumian terminated the summoning and embarked on a fresh ritual.

…

"In the name of The Fool, I summon:

"The vengeful spirit that wanders the void, the headless bride in her eternal plight, and the wellspring of a bloodline's malevolence."

Once again, the enigmatic illusory portal manifested, enshrouded in bluish-black flames interweaving. A frigid wind swept forth, transforming the summer night into a wintry chill.

Lumian observed a form materialize from within the illusory entrance. Adorned in a vibrant red festive gown, meticulously threaded with gold, the figure stood before him.

Without question, the figure lacked a head, exuding an aura of deep-seated malice and resentment.

Lumian meticulously followed the prescribed procedure—utilizing the liquor as a "bribe," reciting the contractual pledge. He discerned the price demanded by the Headless Bride.

"Sacrifice a kin or friend."

"Thank you for your presence," Lumian murmured with a sardonic smile, concluding the summoning.

From this seemingly fruitless summoning, he gleaned valuable insights. He confirmed that Bribe wielded a degree of influence.

The original demand from the Headless Bride entailed a kin's sacrifice; however, Bribe had managed to expand the scope to encompass friends.

Lumian's sights next shifted to the Human-Faced Mantis. He had formulated a summoning phrase: "The vindictive spirit that wanders the void, a hunter adopting mantis guise, a shapeshifter adept at donning human semblance."

Amidst a peculiar swooshing sound, an immense, translucent cyan mantis emerged from beyond the illusory door.

Its head bore the visage of youth, handsome and radiant, inadvertently lowering one's guard.

Sensing the summoner's presence and gender, the mantis swiftly transformed into a resplendent woman attired in a black evening gown.

Internally scoffing, Lumian meticulously fulfilled the entire sequence: Bribe, recitation, and perception.

The Human-Faced Mantis delineated three categories of offerings, requiring solely one to be met: "Contractor's reproductive organs; Contractor's capacity for lying; Contractor's immolation at the stake."

Post-Bribe, the stipulations underwent some relaxation, affording an additional choice or two. This entity seeks but a single thing—human anguish… The first aligns with his malevolence towards men. If I were of the female gender, this option likely wouldn't surface… The second corresponds to slanderers and false accusers, while the third aligns with the stake he himself endured… Lumian swiftly concluded.

As a Pyromaniac, the third demand posed no grave challenge. On one hand, he exhibited formidable resistance to flames, and on the other, enduring agony was his forte.

Were this choice absent, Lumian intended to forfeit and subsequently summon several comparable spirit world beings later. Depriving him of the power to lie would markedly undermine his capabilities, rendering survival in a place like Trier implausible. He also wasn't certain if his reproductive organs would return at 6 a.m. after sacrificing them; he didn't want to take the risk.

Without delay, he found the Niese Face he sought from the arsenal of the Human-Faced Mantis's abilities.

"Niese" had been the name of the Human-Faced Mantis during its living days. The essence of this ability leaned more toward illusion than corporeal transformation. Nevertheless, absent the means to nullify it or godhood, piercing through the illusion remained beyond reach.

This occasion saw the black insignia affix to Lumian's left shoulder, accompanied by surges of crimson flames welling from his feet.

Unperturbed by Lumian's actions, they ignited his attire and charred his flesh.

Sensations reminiscent yet distinct from his encounter with Susanna Mattise enveloped him. An amalgamation of familiar and unfamiliar torment coursed through his consciousness, assailing his senses.

Swiftly forsaking his cherished belongings, Lumian clutched the Decency brooch in his palm.

The conflagration endured for a full three minutes. Lumian's skin charred, his clothes imprinting scorched marks onto his body.

For a Pyromaniac, such wounds posed no mortal peril—they scarcely even qualified as severe. He maintained the vitality to prepare for the ensuing summoning.

"The enigmatic entity that roams the upper realm, a mass of flesh bedecked with myriad eyes, a participant in the abyssal realms of nightmares."

As the chant resonated, a creature of flesh and sinew rolled forth through the illusory door. Each flesh fragment sported a white eye, its pupil veiled in obsidian.

Clasping the aluminum-white military flask, Lumian's grip faltered, and he abruptly descended into a profound slumber, ensnared by the myriad gazes.

After an indeterminate stretch, he snapped back to consciousness, realization dawning that the ritual had concluded on its own accord. The Thousand-Eyed Evil had retreated to the spirit world, forgoing a genuine assault.

I was lulled to sleep by mere sight. Communication is impossible… Also, this level of influence lies beyond the ritual's inherent protection… Lumian exhaled, seizing the Salle de Bal Brise pocket watch to ascertain the time.

Thankfully, I only slept for a few minutes. There's still about three minutes left… Lumian focused, initiating afresh, summoning forth the Shadow of Shriek.

…

"The spirit that wanders in the void, a confluence of myriad silhouettes, the progenitor of incapacitating shrieks."

Once more, the mysterious illusory entrance swung ajar. Yet, what met Lumian's gaze wasn't an anomalous shadow coiled into a blob, but a nebulous silhouette draped in a pitch-black armor resembling fish scales.

Distinct from all armors documented in newspapers and magazines, this suit bore scales each akin to miniature, writhing shadows.

Hmmm… Could the summoning incantation have been imprecise, yielding a kindred spirit world creature? It seemingly boasts an incapacitating shriek. Let's first gauge the prospects of cementing a pact… Lumian fathomed the situation and embarked upon another cycle of Bribe, utterance, and apprehension.

The armored shadow stipulated an offering: "A blood tribute of ten or more lives or gold amounting to 100,000 verl d'or."

Courtesy of Bribe, the prerequisites exhibited leniency, demanding the sacrifices be rendered within three months. Failing to comply would precipitate contract retribution, a potentiality encompassing control loss or, worse yet, fatality.

A sum of 100,000 verl d'or… Lumian discerned this to be modestly manageable, thereby delving into the ability roster and traits of the armored shadow to locate the coveted incapacitating shriek.

While scouring, he happened upon an ability bearing an intriguing nomenclature: "Spell of Harrumph."

Chapter 319: "Travel"

The Spell of Harrumph derived its name from a combination of a snort from the nose and a harrumph from the mouth, giving it a distinct quality that Lumian found intriguing.

Moreover, the enigmatic armored shadow, while alive, was believed to be either human or a humanoid intelligent creature. Many of its distinct attributes and abilities had been given their own names. These attributes weren't like the dense individuals who relied on Lumian to simplify and assign labels for their ease of remembrance.

Information channeled through the unique connection revealed to Lumian that the Spell of Harrumph was a spell-like ability capable of affecting a Spirit Body.

Through the dual sounds, it stirred one's consciousness to induce a mystical transformation, generating a unique fluctuation that surged towards its designated target.

Any creature touched by such a fluctuation would experience severe dizziness at a minimum or even a Psychic Piercing assault at its worst, potentially rendering the target unconscious.

This ability would grow in potency as the user advanced in levels. In essence, it possessed the potential to influence divine entities, provided Lumian also ascended to Sequence 4 or temporarily elevated his level in some fashion.

Impressive. It's on par with the incapacitating shriek. Moreover, harrumphing seems more dignified than indiscriminate shouting…

Realizing time was of the essence, Lumian made a commitment and formalized the agreement.

He harbored a genuine curiosity about the additional attributes and capabilities of the armored shadow. Their names held a certain uncanny quality, such as the Night Parade of Ten Thousand Demons and the Soul Devouring Scream.

This instance, the seal-like object descended onto Lumian's right chest, marking the conclusion of the ritual.

Swiftly, he secured a thread around the Decency brooch and returned it to the iron-gray military flask. Dismissing the spiritual barrier, he cleared the altar and retrieved the objects he had laid out.

Subsequently, a ghostly light emanated from Lumian's right shoulder, and he abruptly vanished, traversing into a mystical realm drenched in layers of hues and peculiar creatures.

In the subsequent moment, he exited the spirit world, dazed, reappearing in his bedroom on the second story of Salle de Bal Brise.

As Lumian massaged his throbbing head, he surveyed his surroundings and nodded approvingly.

It's indeed true spirit world traversal. This ability is very useful…

The only problem rested in its exorbitant spirituality cost. With Lumian's Contractee and Pyromaniac enhancements, he could only execute it three to four times. Considering the consumption of flames and the contingency allocation for safety measures, he could employ it once or twice in a relatively intense confrontation.

For a pure Contractee, they could merely "teleport" twice as standard procedure, excluding any other expenditure.

Furthermore, this was contingent on selecting a proximate coordinate. Of course, proximity didn't exclusively signify the immediate vicinity.

The spirit world encompassed a realm of mystique and peculiarity. Up, down, left, right, front, back—even time—intermingled there. It intersected with the real world, governed by its distinct chaos. Beyond concepts linked in nature, everything else seemed scattered without deliberate arrangement.

In essence, Trier as a holistic notion held sway. It boasted a corresponding domain in the spirit world, unsullied by fragmentation or dispersal. Nonetheless, its surroundings extended beyond neighboring towns and villages. It might correlate to a river's conceptual presence in the Southern Continent, or manifest as a settlement projection for undersea beings.

Minus precise coordinates, Lumian could solely "teleport" within Trier's immediate ambit. Otherwise, he risked straying into the spirit world's treacherous realm, a hazardous endeavor indeed.

When he had endeavored to traverse the spirit world previously, all of Trier's locations had materialized within his consciousness as unfamiliar coordinates. This granted him the capacity to "teleport" back to Salle de Bal Brise instead of venturing to remote corners of the metropolis.

Concurrently, Lumian faintly perceived the Highlands Kingdom's City of White, Rapus—his former destination. It wasn't overtly distant in the spirit world from Trier, but neither was it nearby. Directly "teleporting" there remained infeasible for Lumian. He needed to ascertain one or two intermediate coordinates between the two locations.

Remarkable. Lumian acknowledged with satisfaction.

Inclusive of limited uses and range, his spirit world traversal from Abscessed Hand perfectly met his expectations.

Lumian proceeded to the full-length mirror. Activating the black mark on his left shoulder, he observed his charred form transition into that of a middle-aged man, featuring a few strands of silver at his temples. His cheeks were rounded, eyes amber-red, and facial contours dignified. The features were sharp, radiating an approachable aura.

Gardner Martin!

It can replicate one's appearance, physique, and demeanor. Yet actions and mannerisms must stem solely from myself… Lumian evaluated Niese Face's potential.

The transformation had expended a notable degree of spirituality, but its maintenance necessitated but a fraction. He could adopt Gardner Martin's likeness for more than ten hours.

Dispelling Niese Face, Lumian retreated a few paces. Gazing upon the mirror, he opened his mouth.

"Ha!"

In response, his spirit surged into the black mark on his right chest. His Spirit Body quivered, releasing an almost imperceptible yellow light from his mouth.

The radiance penetrated the mirror, traversing the wall, vanishing after a span of nearly ten meters.

Effective solely at close quarters… Consuming less spirituality than spirit world traversal yet surpassing Niese Face in expenditure. Applicable four or five times within combat… Lumian, his body marred by burns, exhaled leisurely. He donned his attire, settled onto the bed, and surrendered to sleep.

Temporarily shelving thoughts of the gold he owed the armored shadow and the commitment to locate Abscessed Hand's body, Lumian had ample time for these matters. Current requisites centered on recuperation and rest, alongside allowing the repugnant aura accompanying the Decency brooch to dissipate.

The next morning.

Lumian, clad in a black felt hat, shirt, sweater, and sturdy jacket, pressed the doorbell of Apartment 601 at 3 Rue des Blouses Blanches.

Franca greeted him with a downcast countenance, seemingly taken aback by Lumian's outfit.

"Is your sense of temperature playing tricks on you?"

Lumian inquired, "Have you gotten your hands on genuine mummy ashes?"

"Didn't you ask that very question just yesterday?" Franca snapped.

The answer was no.

A smile tugged at Lumian's lips.

"I'll take you to find a real mummy."

"Where?" Franca was puzzled and curious.

Lumian stepped into the room and replied nonchalantly, "The Southern Continent's Star Highlands."

"How will we get there?" Franca glanced toward the washroom before lowering her voice. "Are you suggesting we bother your Major Arcana card holder?"

"I've merely penned a letter to inquire about a transit junction," Lumian responded with a smile.

"Transit junction…" Franca combined her understanding of the mystical arts and swiftly formulated a hypothesis. "Have you obtained a mystical artifact capable of teleportation?"

Lumian shook his head and elaborated succinctly,"Through my contracted creature."

"What sort of contract yields such extraordinary results?" Franca exclaimed, genuine surprise tinging her words.

She had been wondering over Lumian's haste in filtering contracted creatures. Typically, those amenable to a Sequence 7 contract were fairly commonplace. Moreover, their summoning typically necessitated a ritual, rendering them rather impractical for most confrontations.

Lumian let out a chuckle.

"A unique kind of contract."

"Uh…" Franca studied Lumian carefully, circling around him.

The pants-wearing, shirt-clad Witch cleared her throat and remarked, "Are we considered brothers?"

"Not quite," Lumian answered promptly. "We hold different beliefs!"

Franca lowered her voice again. "Isn't it just superficially Steamed, but actually, it's Mr. Fool?"

Lumian replied piously, "I still maintain some faith in the Eternal Blazing Sun."

After all, he had upheld this faith for nearly six years.

Franca found herself momentarily speechless. After a few seconds, she inquired, "Could we be considered friends?"

"Yes." Lumian now spoke in accordance with his true feelings.

Franca's brows eased.

"Could you teach me that unique contract? Name the price."

She made her request straightforwardly.

Lumian shook his head again.

"I can only employ that contract due to unique circumstances."

"Alright." Franca refrained from pressing further, though a tinge of disappointment lingered.

At that moment, Jenna emerged from the washroom. Lumian asked half-teasingly, "Are you interested in journeying to the Southern Continent?"

"Travel? Why would I want to travel?" Jenna appeared perplexed.

Franca swiftly recounted her need for genuine mummy ashes and Lumian's method of "teleporting" to the Star Highlands. Ultimately, she queried, "Do you wish to come along and observe?"

Jenna deliberated briefly and responded, "Okay."

She recognized her need for greater experience in the realm of Beyonder powers, a necessity for observation, learning, and training.

Furthermore, her maximum geographical range had been confined to Trier's Quartier de la Maison d'Opéra. For a while, she had been captivated by tales of the Southern Continent circulating in the taverns and dance halls.

Lumian assessed his two companions and offered a gentle reminder with a smile, "I'd advise you to don thicker garments. The altitude is considerable, and it's currently winter there."

"Oh…" Franca looked at Lumian and understood why he had bundled up for winter.

Before long, Franca changed into a black coat resembling leather armor and donned dark knee-length pants with plush interiors, adopting the guise of a female mercenary or bounty hunter. Jenna hadn't yet transported her thick clothes, thus she borrowed Franca's clothing. Though their appearances matched, Jenna was shorter, necessitating a tightened belt, secured sleeves, and rolled-up pant legs to prevent impeded mobility.

Lumian reached out and grabbed their shoulders, activating the contract mark on his right shoulder.

A spectral light danced along the seams of his clothing, enveloping Jenna and Franca in a surreal realm, awash with vibrant overlapping hues and enigmatic creatures retreating in every direction.

In an instant, they departed the spirit world, materializing on a desolate island.

Before Jenna and Franca could fully adjust, Lumian initiated spirit world traversal once more.

Upon their return to reality, the Assassins found themselves facing a distant snow-clad mountain peak and an adjacent foreign city dominated by a white edifice.

Jenna soon regained her composure and involuntarily exclaimed, "How magical…"

If she were compelled to encapsulate the magic and articulate her sentiments, a choice of expletives might have been used.

Although not certain if this location was indeed the Southern Continent's Star Highlands, the fact that she could translocate swiftly from Rue des Blouses Blanches to this wilderness underscored the mystical potential of teleportation!

Lumian endured the pulsing headache and the substantial drain on his spiritual energy as he pointed toward the City of White, seemingly unperturbed.

"Proceed inside."

Chapter 320: Mummy

Franca and Jenna couldn't tear their eyes away from the grazing herd of cows, sheep, and horses. The swarthy men donned felt hats and thick blue or red robes, while the local women flaunted their colorful, multi-layered gowns. Numerous white buildings and shops peddling leather products dotted the scene. It was a captivating and unfamiliar sight.

Franca stepped aside as a wooden carriage, drawn by a long-haired bull, trundled by in the biting wind. She glanced at Lumian and Jenna before speaking up.

"Why the silence? Let's engage with the locals."

After all, what was the point of wandering without interacting?

Lumian fell momentarily quiet before responding, "I lack sufficient information."

Jenna felt a pang of embarrassment. "I don't know enough either."

All she was acquainted with were tales of romantic exploits featuring Pharaoh queens and adventurers unearthing treasures within rainforests.

"Uh…" Franca gestured dismissively with her right hand. "I'm not much better."

How much is not much? Lumian didn't pry further. He ushered his companions into a shop named Highland Mystic Potion.

The proprietor, Sallent Empaya, an Intisian dressed in a blue coat adorned with gold accents, recognized Lumian right away. After all, his distinctive hair color and appearance set him apart. Moreover, only a few days had passed since their last encounter.

Sallent assessed Franca and Jenna, extending a warm smile to Lumian. "What brings you here this time?"

Lumian, struggling with a headache from expending too much spirituality, got straight to the point. "Real mummy's ashes. I want to see the mummy!"

Sallent's eyes flickered briefly, but he refrained from probing. "Very well, I'll show you."

Being a seasoned purveyor of mummy ashes, he knew these products didn't bestow virility; they were combined with genuinely efficacious medicine before hitting the shelves. However, since the clients didn't inquire about the practicality of real mummy ashes, he saw no need to divulge that information.

Furthermore, he suspected Lumian and the two women intended to purchase a mummy for resale and profit. This was a substantial transaction.

Sallent temporarily closed his shop and guided Lumian, Franca, and Jenna to the rear warehouse, where ordinary herbs were stored. They descended a narrow staircase, reaching the basement door.

Turning to face Lumian and the others, he sought confirmation. "Do you really want to see it?"

It wasn't so much a guilty conscience as a cautionary note.

"Absolutely," Lumian responded without a moment's hesitation.

In the midst of his words, his gaze fixated on the basement's pitch-black wooden door.

It bore a mystical symbol, its form a distortion of dark-green and pale-white hues.

Within, a mix of rudimentary skulls, intertwined arms and vines, and inverted triangles melded to create an enigmatic pattern.

Threads of the same hues radiated outward from these symbols, infiltrating walls, floor, and ceiling alike.

Sallent brought forth a golden key, advancing toward the door. Franca's voice dipped to a hush as she addressed Lumian and Jenna. "Those arcane symbols appear rooted in the domain of Death."

Jenna furrowed her brow. "What significance do they hold?"

Franca's head shook gently as she replied, "I'm uncertain. Generally, these would play a pivotal role in ritualistic magic. Yet, without a wellspring of power, such magic can falter.

"As I understand, the cathedrals of orthodox Churches feature akin arrangements. The devout believers who pray daily lend their spirits and spirituality to sustain the ritualistic magic. While individual contributions may seem modest, their accumulation wields ample strength."

"Perhaps this location holds the power necessary for sustaining ritualistic magic." Lumian grinned at Franca. "You might have a reason to rejoice. This perspective heightens the likelihood of finding a genuine mummy."

A relieved sigh escaped Franca's lips. "Hopefully, counterfeits aren't as rampant here as in Trier."

Perplexed, she inquired, "But why the need to bring us here to see a real mummy? My divination could discern the authenticity of the ashes."

"To broaden your horizons," Lumian replied confidently.

Before Franca could curse, he added, "Directly requesting mummy's ashes might tempt him to provide counterfeits. When your divination results manifest on the spot, should I then smash his cabinet or engage in a scuffle? Such violence is hardly ideal."

Lumian drew on an adage often uttered by Aurore.

Of course, he left out the adverse effects of the three contracts. The Abscessed Hand stoked a yearning to snap a target's neck. The Human-Faced Mantis fueled a heightened disdain for those who unjustly maligned the innocent. The armored shadow goaded him to break free from the shackles of life's confines.

Perhaps Mr. Fool's witness or the boon of Bribe rendered these effects relatively manageable. They were detriments he could subdue with focus, yet their collective might occasionally sparked such impulses.

Simultaneously, Franca and Jenna scoffed, unified in their disdain.

Only Hunters harbored an affection for violence!

At that juncture, after a brief struggle with the lock, Sallent triumphantly swung open the pitch-black wooden door, its surface adorned with a cryptic symbol.

Within the basement passageway, Lumian's eyes landed on wall-embedded oil lamps, forever alight.

Drenched in the dancing hues of dark-green firelight, Franca and her companions trailed behind Sallent, the shopkeeper of concealed curatives, as they ventured into the corridor that lay beyond the portal.

Light permeated the space, yet an illusion of advancing into darkness seized them step by step.

The already cold atmosphere seemed to plummet several degrees Celsius lower.

Sallent proceeded seven to eight meters ahead, navigating past firmly shut grayish-white stone doors. He halted before a chamber positioned at the corridor's midpoint.

These stone doors and the encompassing walls bore symbols akin to those at the basement entrance.

Sallent nudged open the stone door confronting him, unveiling a diminutive sepulcher to Lumian and his comrades.

In the chamber's heart rested an exotic humanoid sarcophagus adorned with a golden base and a kaleidoscope of colors.

"This mummy hails from five centuries ago," Sallent introduced, drawing near the stone casket and pressing down its lid.

"He seems rather unconcerned about us making off with the mummy…" Lumian mused under his breath.

Franca emitted a soft chuckle, her voice hushed. "Perhaps he simply thinks nothing of us."

Jenna remained silent during their exchange, her curiosity and trepidation fixated on the innards of the golden sarcophagus.

Within, a corpse swathed in yellowish-brown fabric lay. Its lips were slightly parted, while faint voids marked the spots where eyes once resided. Hints of seeped oil stained its form.

Unrestrained by the foreign surroundings, Franca extracted a mirror and initiated a divination before Sallent's presence.

His eyes flickered momentarily, swiftly reverting to their prior state, as if he'd encountered such phenomena too frequently.

Before long, an aged voice resonated from Franca's mirror, its cadence accompanied by the gentle rush of water.

"A bona fide mummy, albeit not ancient in origin."

Franca's gaze snapped up at Sallent, the proprietor of the mystic potion store.

Sallent offered an awkward smile in return.

"I fibbed earlier. This mummy isn't a relic from five centuries past. Truth be told, it was crafted just a fortnight ago and dispatched here. However, regardless of origin, it underwent a comprehensive and protracted mummification process. The sole disparity from ancient mummies is the brevity of its interment."

An "ancient" mummy born a mere fortnight prior? Lumian quirked an eyebrow at Sallent, his tone casual. "Do you hunt down the living to fashion mummies?"

Sallent gently shook his head.

"No need for such methods. The Southern Continent witnesses countless daily deaths. Procuring fresh cadavers requires only a nominal fee. Hiring hunters to track and capture would entail far greater expenses. Undertaking the task personally would exact an exorbitant temporal toll."

He involuntarily assessed the advantages and drawbacks of multiple strategies.

Post this explanation, Jenna regarded the mummy with a newfound perspective.

It was the body of someone who hadn't long been dead.

His motionless form stood exhibited as a tradable commodity.

Though the two-week-old mummy served its purpose and met the requisites, Franca yearned for superior specimens.

With a sigh, she averted her gaze from the recently minted mummy, prompting Sallent with a question. "Are there older mummies available?"

Sallent hesitated momentarily before treading cautiously. "How about those from last year?"

This constituted the most "ancient" mummy within the basement.

Franca emitted a rueful sigh. "That works too."

Less enthused, Sallent led the trio to another sepulcher.

Initially presuming Lumian and his companions intended to purchase an entire mummy, Sallent had showcased the most well-preserved specimen. Now, it seemed Lumian merely sought a segment.

The yellowish-brown mummy dating back to the prior year already displayed signs of fragmentation. Not only were lower extremities absent, but its chest and abdomen also sported gaping voids.

With Franca's divination validating its authenticity, Sallent posed his inquiry with diminished enthusiasm. "How much do you require?"

"50 grams," Franca responded, intending to amass a larger reserve.

Sallent mulled over the request before pronouncing, "500 verl d'or."

Promptly, Franca remitted the payment, her eyes fixed as Sallent procured a hammer and dirk, employing them to sever a portion of the mummy's arm, akin to extracting ore.

Jenna stood dumbfounded. To her, it seemed somewhat gruesome and brutal.

Though she'd witnessed mob fights and personally taken a life, she'd never encountered someone treating human remains as inexpensive commodities.

Internally, Franca sighed and suppressed her emotions.

This was the stark reality of the Beyonder world and its potion system, yet compared to the boons, it was strangely appealing.

With the fraction of a mummy's arm now in her possession, Franca wordlessly led Jenna out of the tomb, trailed by Lumian and Sallent.

They had traversed scarcely three meters when the kerosene lamps lining the corridor receded, casting an eerie dimness.

Sallent swiveled his head, his demeanor a mix of surprise and uncertainty.

Chapter 321: Compensation

In the dim corridor, despite the unchanging temperature, an icy gust swept through, sending shivers down the spine.

Lumian, who had cleared his mind to restore his spirituality, snapped back into attention. He examined the tombs on both sides, his demeanor unaffected by the sudden disturbance.

His initial urge was to reach into his pocket and grasp Mr. K's finger. Yet, he held back, mindful of the unfamiliar territory that was the Southern Continent. Mr. K might not sense the use of his finger, so Lumian suppressed his instinct.

Franca reacted swiftly too. A small mirror materialized in her palm. Jenna, less experienced, didn't grasp the scene's significance, but her instincts told her it wasn't a positive development.

It was akin to the spooky tales told in bar dance halls to frighten young girls!

Sallent, avoiding the dim oil lamp's gaze, briskly moved past Jenna and Franca, making a beeline for the pitch-black wooden door to the basement. He paid Lumian no attention.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Sounds of impact echoed from the tombs on either side. It wasn't clear if sarcophagus lids had been struck or heavy stone doors pounded.

Sallent's expression shifted, and he bolted out.

In the silent basement, the echoes of the pounding lingered. Lumian and the others hurried after the mystic potion store owner, easily overtaking him.

At that very moment, the pitch-black wooden door creaked shut abruptly.

Seeing this, Franca sprinted forward and flung the mirror out the door.

A resonant crack marked the mirror's collision with the wooden door, fragments scattering across the floor.

Lumian and Franca came to a halt simultaneously, their attention on Sallent. Jenna, still in motion, comprehended and made the same choice.

In the eerily dim corridor, Sallent, decked in a blue coat with gold accents, stood frozen, his pale face tinged with a sickly green hue.

The pounding from the tombs persisted, its reverberations shaking everyone present to the core.

Sallent trembled visibly, muttering to himself, "We're done for. We're all finished…"

Franca inquired swiftly yet composedly, "What's going on?"

Only by grasping the core issue could she devise a swift and effective strategy!

Seemingly detached from his own senses, Sallent didn't answer. He half-mumbled, "We're done for. We're all finished…"

Before he could complete his thought, the entire basement quivered.

The dark-green flames that had shrunk to the size of rice grains flickered noticeably in the same direction.

Fear warped Sallent's features, his voice unconsciously amplified.

"It's awake! It's awake!"

"Who is it?" Jenna found it more spine-chilling than any ghost story she'd encountered, but she pushed herself to ask.

Sallent remained unresponsive, repeating his panicked cry, "It's awake! It's awake!"

Seeing that the mystic potion store owner was clearly in a state of extreme horror and not in his right mind, Franca decisively abandoned her attempts to ask him for information and took out a mirror.

Her plan was to use Magic Mirror Divination to swiftly assess the current situation.

Even if the divination's response wasn't crystal clear and required interpretation, it was still better than being completely clueless!

In a matter of moments, Franca completed the incantation and witnessed an aqueous light emanating from the mirror.

Just as she was preparing to gather her thoughts and formulate appropriate questions to obtain corresponding answers, Lumian, who had been standing silently beside her, suddenly spoke up. "Did it work?"

"It did. I can perform the divination," Franca cooperatively responded, although she was puzzled by Lumian's actions.

Lumian immediately broke into a grin.

"No need for questions."

Uh… Franca was caught off guard before she grasped Lumian's intention.

Just then, the basement shook once more. Sallent, the mystic potion store owner, was so overcome with fear that his voice turned high-pitched.

"It's here! It's here!

"We're going to die!"

In the next heartbeat, Lumian seized his shoulder.

Simultaneously, Lumian firmly held Jenna's arm with his other hand, while Franca hooked her arm around his shoulder like a bro.

An eerie light shimmered through the crevices of their clothing, and the four of them materialized outside the basement, standing before the pitch-black wooden door adorned with intricate and enigmatic symbols.

"It's here! It's here!

"We're going to die!"

Sallent's cries of despair still echoed in the air.

Lumian cast an appraising glance at the mystic potion store owner, pondering whether to utilize the Niese Face to transform into a mummy and give him a scare.

Therapeutic provocation had its merits too!

However, considering his waning spirituality and the prudence of revealing too many abilities to a stranger, Lumian ultimately shelved the prank idea.

Smack!

Jenna swung her right palm, delivering a resounding slap to Sallent's face, leaving him bewildered. He gazed at the woman before him, utterly perplexed.

Franca and Lumian exchanged speechless glances, unsure how to react to this unexpected turn of events.

As the pitch-black door and the basement walls swayed gently, the cacophony outside abruptly subsided.

Jenna felt the weight of their gazes and mumbled, "Isn't this how they wake them up? That's how they would bring back my neighbor when she lost control of her emotions."

It wasn't madness. In the factory district, people had their own practical remedies. More often than not, they did the trick, though occasionally they proved ineffective.

Of course, if he were part of her family, she wouldn't dare try it. She'd seek professional assistance instead.

Franca snapped out of her reverie and commended sincerely, "Well done."

Several moments elapsed, and Sallent's gaze cleared.

Instinctively, he scanned their surroundings and exclaimed in surprise, "We're outside? When did we get out?"

"When you were screaming 'we're going to die,' 'we're going to die,'" Lumian retorted with an annoying tone.

He then raised an eyebrow and inquired with a deep intonation, "Who were you saying was about to wake up?"

Sallent's expression shifted multiple times before he stammered, "A genuine ancient mummy. It slumbers deep within the tomb and occasionally stirs. It only woke up a few days ago. Why did it wake up so quickly…"

Normally, there was a rough timeframe for how long the mummy remained "awake." According to Sallent's experience, it would be at least another month before it awoke again. That was why he dared to bring Lumian and the others into the basement.

Unexpectedly, an accident occurred!

What caused the ancient mummy to awaken prematurely? Lumian directed a thoughtful gaze at Franca, as if silently asking her if she wished to consider obtaining the genuine ancient mummy.

Franca comprehended his inquiry and shook her head, indicating that it wasn't necessary.

The mummy's ashes were merely supplementary ingredients. The ones formed the year before were still usable. There was no need to risk dealing with what seemed to be a perilous entity.

Lumian withdrew his gaze and pushed through the headache gnawing at his temples. He turned to Sallent and grinned.

"I don't care if it's last year's mummy or an ancient one awakening. There are two things I know for sure.

"First, I saved your life. Second, we were scared out of our wits and nearly met our end down there.

"So, you owe me a thank-you present and compensation for the mental strain. How much do you think is fair? Keep in mind, I only want gold."

With the memory of owing the Armored Shadow and Mr. Fool a total of 100,000 verl d'or in gold, Lumian was keen on seizing every opportunity to amass funds.

As the tumult behind the pitch-black wooden door gradually settled, Sallent heaved a sigh of relief and responded, "How about 1,000 verl d'or? That's all the gold I have on hand."

His heart ached at the thought of parting with the money, but he acknowledged Lumian's point. Without their intervention, he'd have met his end in that basement, becoming fodder for the mummy.

Moreover, the group had demonstrated significant prowess. Rejecting their request outright seemed like a risky proposition.

"Agreed." Lumian didn't push for more or attempt to haggle.

As the quartet made their way toward the stairs leading to the warehouse, Franca lowered her left hand and surreptitiously let something slip into the shadowy corner.

After obtaining 1,000 verl d'or in gold coins, gold nuggets, and jewelry, Lumian, Franca, and Jenna exited the Highland Mystic Potion Shop.

Franca glanced back at the shop and let out a wry chuckle. "Tsk, all this trouble, and we ended up with a mummy's hand and an additional 500 verl d'or."

Without waiting for Lumian's response, she queried with a grin, "Are you running short on funds again? You used to save people without expecting payment. They could give it or not."

"Have you switched to the Spectator's Pathway?" Lumian teased, nodding in agreement. "The special contract I mentioned involves sacrificing 100,000 verl d'or worth of gold within a set timeframe after the pact is made."

100,000 verl d'or? Jenna's understanding of monetary matters had undergone quite a transformation since entering the world of mysticism.

Based on what she knew, even someone like Ciel didn't possess as much liquid wealth as her. Yet, he dared to accumulate a debt of 100,000 verl d'or just for a contract granting access to those special abilities.

Franca clicked her tongue and inquired, "Why didn't you 'teleport' us right to the door from the start? The basement door wasn't closed then, so no mishaps would have occurred."

"Don't you think it's more dramatic to do it at the last moment?" Lumian retorted with a question.

Naturally, the actual reason was that he had recently gained the ability to traverse the spirit world and hadn't ingrained a reflex to use it. When the pitch-black wooden door in the basement shut, he had been hesitant to attempt teleporting for fear of it failing.

Later, Franca successfully completed her Magic Mirror Divination. Through it, Lumian confirmed his ability to remain connected to the outside world within the seal, which allowed him to make the definitive teleportation.

Amid Franca and Jenna's baffled expressions, Lumian massaged his aching head and announced, "Let's find an inn. I need to rest and restore my spirituality."

"Okay." Franca wasn't in a hurry to secure an inn. Instead, she turned into an empty alley and produced an ornate makeup mirror.

"Why are you using divination?" Jenna queried inquisitively.

Franca's lips curled into a smile.

"I'm using it to divine the reflection in my other mirror."

Seeing Jenna's perplexity, she elucidated, "I left a small mirror that looks like a shard outside that basement."

With that, Franca caressed the mirror and chanted an incantation.

Before long, the mirror projected an image: Sallent, the mystic potion store proprietor, stood before the pitch-black wooden door, his posture hunched as he cried out, "Only death endures forever!"

Chapter 322: Pleasure

"Only death endures forever?"

Lumian and Jenna struggled to grasp the gravity of the situation unfolding before them. Their attention turned towards Franca.

Franca observed as Sallent bowed and offered his prayers before departing from the dimly lit basement. The mirror's enigmatic display dissolved into darkness, marking the end of the divination. She spoke contemplatively, "He seems to be from the Numinous Episcopate."

Numinous Episcopate? Lumian, who had encountered references to this secret organization within Aurore's grimoires, knew that it originated from the royal lineage of the Balam Empire on the Southern Continent and ancient Death believers. The organization's mission seemed to involve awakening or reviving Death while expelling colonists to restore the Balam Empire to its former glory.

Aurore's knowledge of the Numinous Episcopate was somewhat superficial, lacking details about prominent figures, rituals, or specific practices.

"The Numinous Episcopate?" Jenna's lack of familiarity was apparent in her voice.

Franca proceeded to provide a succinct overview of the Numinous Episcopate's background, aligning with Lumian's understanding.

She concluded, "In the Southern Continent, the Numinous Episcopate holds a comparable status to the Rose School of Thought. Although they don't resort to blood sacrifices or terrorism like some secret faith-based organizations, rituals are inherent to their nature. The Numinous Episcopate's pursuit of death's revival necessitates sacrificial rites."

"Right, the Numinous Episcopate's leader is a demigod nicknamed Pale Empress."

Pale Empress? Given the Numinous Episcopate's similarity in strength to the Rose School of Thought, it's plausible that Pale Empress is an angel… Lumian rubbed his head, lacking the energy to analyze further.

Jenna's gaze shifted toward the Highland Mystic Potion shop, her confusion evident.

"Why would the shop owner, an Intisian, join the Numinous Episcopate?"

The Numinous Episcopate's goal was to eradicate colonists and rebuild the Balam Empire. Intis was one of the colonial powers established in West Balam.

Sallent, though having lived in the Southern Continent for over a decade and reaping the rewards of being an Intisian, found himself in a puzzling predicament. His allegiance to the Numinous Episcopate, despite these benefits, raised questions. Sallent wasn't one of the lowest-class denizens of Trier like Jenna who didn't have a clear concept of colonial interests.

Franca muttered, "Who knows? Numerous possibilities exist. Enforced conversion after being captured, manipulation by mysterious forces, gradual enticement with escalating benefits leading to devout belief, or a transformative experience thanks to being rescued by a kind Death believer.

"In any case, the Numinous Episcopate displays cunning by employing a genuine Northern Continent native to operate a mystical potion shop, peddle mummies, and act as an inconspicuous spy. Their strategy appears well-orchestrated, defying easy suspicion."

Observing Lumian's weariness, Franca decided to not delve further. She located a nearby inn and secured lodgings for them.

Upon Lumian's awakening, sunlight streamed through the glass window, casting a warm glow on Franca and Jenna, who were seated at the table. The sky was serene, adorned with fluffy clouds resembling wisps of cotton.

Franca and Jenna savored a burrito seasoned with spices, enveloping succulent beef and mutton, while Lumian indulged in a plate of roasted onions, potatoes, corn, and assorted meats. A sweet corn-based beverage graced their table, emanating a delightful aroma.

As Lumian sat up, a chuckle escaped his lips. "Looks like you two had quite the time."

Munching on her food, Franca mumbled, "I don't often venture to the Star Highlands, and I accomplished what I set out to do. Naturally, it's time to unwind.

"What's this called? It's called… Dammit, forget it. You get the idea!"

Despite a prolonged attempt, Franca struggled to articulate her thoughts in the appropriate language. Eventually, she abandoned the effort, prioritizing her meal.

Jenna gestured to her right. "We brought you some lunch."

A strip of fried beef, coated with a crimson sauce exuding a subtle alcoholic aroma, lay before Lumian.

"I figured you might be hesitant to venture out due to the language barrier," Lumian admitted, promptly satisfying his hunger.

He had previously realized that only a minority of the locals understood Intisian, and even then, only on a basic level for rudimentary communication.

Franca, swallowing a bite of burrito, sipped on a cup of steaming corn juice.

"Body language is universal."

Jenna added with a grin, "Franca's gestures are truly something to behold. She even mimics pig squeals, cow moos, and sheep bleats to communicate her meat preferences to vendors unfamiliar with Intisian. Yet, the nobles here are a departure from my expectations. They appear more akin to Northern Continent counterparts than their Southern Continent peers."

In this relaxed ambiance, the trio enjoyed a leisurely lunch, recounting their escapades as if they were on an authentic holiday.

…

Under the cover of night, within the Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman district, nestled at Rist docks, an abandoned building stood—a site Lumian had previously set ablaze.

Cognizant of the potential disturbances that advancements within an apartment might trigger among nearby residents, Franca heeded Lumian's advice and selected this vacant location.

Promptly erecting a wall of spirituality, Franca collected the ashes of the incinerated mummy—thanks to Lumian—along with the other requisite ingredients.

Meanwhile, Lumian and Jenna maintained a careful distance, intently observing as Franca adroitly mixed the ingredients and consumed the potion.

A brief hush enveloped the scene, then Franca's visage twisted in anguish.

Almost instantly, her flaxen hair, formerly bound in a ponytail, broke free of its constraints. Propelled by an invisible force, the hair drifted and extended, resembling a radiant web expanding in all directions.

More ethereal strands emerged, dense and elongated. Swiftly, they populated the space embraced by the wall of spirituality, fashioning a spectral woodland of filaments.

Once again, Jenna bore witness to the mystifying and surreal attributes of the potion,

while obscured by the burgeoning hair. Alongside Lumian, she patiently awaited the anomaly to subside.

Whether this passage of time spanned dozens of seconds or stretched beyond two minutes, the ethereal flaxen hair finally withdrew, returning to

Franca's form.

With a jubilant countenance, Franca pivoted to face her companions, her limpid eyes radiating contentment.

"Everything went quite seamlessly. I'm anticipating future advancements to be quite cumbersome and challenging."

Curiously, Jenna found Franca's flowery blouse and off-white breeches harmonizing impeccably with her demeanor for the first time. The attire seemed to accentuate an ineffable allure, evoking a blush and a warmth in Jenna's ears, despite her own femininity. On the other hand, Lumian experienced an unfamiliar and unwanted warmth and reaction.

As Franca acclimated to the powers of the Demoness of Pleasure, Lumian and Jenna's racing hearts eventually steadied, restoring a semblance of normality.

Concluding their task and dismantling the spiritual barrier, Franca rejoined them, sporting a radiant smile. Her eyes shimmered akin to a lake glinting with reflected light.

"How much of an improvement are we talking about?" Lumian posed a direct question.

A rough comprehension of the situation would facilitate better teamwork!

Franca's eyes danced playfully as she responded, a grin adorning her face. "Take a guess."

"I'm not a Demoness. How can I guess?" Lumian's retort barely left his lips before he frowned.

An intangible force had coiled around his legs and body!

Then, with a sudden rush, Lumian's form was engulfed in crimson flames that erupted from within him, engulfing the enigmatic threads.

Only now did Lumian and Jenna perceive the intangible tendrils, tinted in fiery hues resembling translucent spider silk.

Amidst her amusement, Franca inquired of Lumian and Jenna with a mischievous glint, "Do you understand now? Perhaps you'd like to explore another?"

"No!"

"No need."

In unison, Jenna and Lumian retorted, their voices echoing their apprehension.

Franca maintained her smile, suggesting, "Are you truly certain you don't wish to give it a try? I assure you, a mere touch can envelop you in true pleasure."

"Dammit!" Jenna instinctively retreated a step, her expletive punctuating her reaction.

Lumian regarded Franca, grappling with whether she was indeed teasing him or harboring some genuine intent.

Yes, the target should be Jenna… I can't rule out the possibility of using simple contact to embarrass me… As Lumian's thoughts raced, Franca suddenly composed herself and said seriously, "In addition to the two I mentioned earlier, my proficiency in Black Fire, Frost, Curse, and Mirror magic has all been elevated. Their integration has expanded as well. For instance, I can utilize a mirror to focus on a target and employ Black Fire to enact a curse. Another scenario involves my utilization of Mirror Substitution and Staff Substitution to counteract fatal harm while gaining some measure of recuperation.

"My capabilities as an Assassin and Instigator have also been enhanced."

She succinctly summarized her advancements without delving into particulars.

Lumian nodded, mulling over Franca's capabilities. He inquired thoughtfully, "Do you possess a charm-like ability too?"

Franca's smile hinted at an answer, but she chose to remain silent.

Jenna observed Franca for a moment and then noted something else, pointing at her and remarking, "You've become even more beautiful!"

Franca's individual features and overall appearance had transcended any imperfections. Her demeanor radiated an undeniable brilliance—a striking, flamboyant beauty that demanded no disguise.

"Is that so?" Franca responded, her surprise evident.

Lumian couldn't resist stroking his chin, pondering whether Madame Hidden Blade would genuinely switch to Iron-blooded Knight when going from Sequence 5 to Sequence 4.

As Lumian bade Franca and Jenna farewell and embarked on his return to Auberge du Coq Doré, a sudden realization swept over him. He lowered his voice and inquired, "Temiboros, what's the next boon after Contractee?"

Yet, Termiboros remained silent, offering no reply.

Lumian let out a scoff.

"It's fine. Once I locate the padre, he'll divulge the information."

Although his confidence might waver internally, maintaining an outward appearance of assurance was essential in times like these.

…

The day of the prophesied event arrived swiftly.

In Quartier de la Princesse Rouge, at the crossroads of Rue de la Muraille and Rue du Cheval Blanc, Lumian disembarked from a public carriage with a casual grace. Clad in a white shirt, a black vest, brown trousers, and sleek leather shoes, he cast his gaze upon the slumbering neighborhood that lay ahead.

Chapter 323: Psychological Profile

Lumian stood at an intersection, his hands casually tucked into his pockets as he strolled leisurely toward Rue de la Muraille.

This street held more significance to the people of Trier than even the renowned Avenue du Boulevard. It was their aspiration.

In the days before Emperor Roselle ignited the Industrial Revolution, Trier's cityscape hadn't sprawled to the extent it had now. It nestled in the easternmost corner, fortified by stout city walls and vigilantly guarded by soldiers. Their military encampment wasn't distant, which prompted the emergence of numerous brothels and prostitutes nearby.

As the sands of time sifted through, Rue de la Muraille garnered its reputation, and Trier's population burgeoned. A modest market burgeoned into a realm of prestige and extravagance that stretched across the Northern and Southern Continents.

Lumian passed beneath the sheltering canopy of Intis parasol trees, his gaze taking in opulent palace-like structures alongside unassuming apartments. They all shared a common trait—windows adorned with frosted glass and the occasional green shutter.

Rue de la Muraille appeared to be rousing from its midday slumber. The road hosted few pedestrians, but each one bore a distinct air. Some dashed by in somber gray-blue work attire, driven by haste, while others donned antiquated finery. They glanced around before slipping into apartment complexes. Cameras slung around necks captured candid moments before these wanderers vanished into ornate edifices. Attempts at projecting an Intisian facade couldn't mask true identities, betrayed by hairlines and exaggerated heights.

Moreover, Lumian's keen eye caught sight of an iron-gray robot, towering at two meters. A steam-spewing outlet adorned its back, accompanied by gears, torsion springs, screws, and bent pipes—a symphony of decorative mechanics.

Perched on the robot's left shoulder, a lavishly dressed man flaunted intricate makeup. His leisurely observation spanned pedestrians, dignitaries shrouded in gold or silver masks, and groggy men stumbling into wakefulness.

Here, the ordinary and elite intertwined in a peculiar harmony.

As Lumian advanced, he methodically surveyed his surroundings, his gaze unrelenting in its pursuit of his target.

In a flash, he spotted Albus approaching from a side alley.

The Iron and Blood Cross Order member, sporting dark-red locks, acknowledged Lumian with a sly grin. He lifted his right hand, pointed at his own head—provocation in motion.

Under Gardner Martin's directive, Albus was tasked with tracking down Padre Guillaume Bénet. It seemed Albus was insinuating a competition of sorts, pitting Lumian against himself to see who'd uncover the "prey" first.

Beyond Albus, the Iron and Blood Cross Order likely deployed several official or peripheral affiliates. In this, Gardner Martin had kept his promises.

Undeterred by Albus's gesture, Lumian pressed on, deeper into Rue de la Muraille.

Guided by the revelations of Demoness of Pleasure Franca's Magic Mirror Divination, the prophecy's domain narrowed:

Guillaume Bénet's presence was expected on five streets, including Rue de la Muraille and Rue du Cheval Blanc, within the week.

However, Rue de la Muraille's length, its expanse, and the thronging populace created a nebulous landscape for Lumian's quest. Carpet searches and widespread net-casting was virtually impossible. Success hinged on the possibility of enlisting aid from the authorities and mustering an army to seal off this domain, vigilantly guarding every entrance to Underground Trier.

Previously, Lumian could only hope that the Iron and Blood Cross Order, a secret organization teeming with formidable Hunters, boasted superior tracking and manhunt techniques. Or perhaps, Termiboros—an Inevitability angel—might drive them to converge. As long as the distance between Lumian and Guillaume Bénet was moderate, they would "reunite" as though preordained.

However, a new trail had emerged.

This advancement was predominantly the fruit of the mystical knowledge he had acquired as a Contractee!

Within this trove of knowledge lay a menagerie of uncanny creatures, summonable or recruitable, complete with the requisite costs for forging contracts. The compendium detailed the abilities obtainable and the subsequent penalties incurred post-contract.

Merging the exhibition of Guillaume Bénet's contractual capabilities from his memory and dream, Lumian pieced together a fragment of insight:

Summoning Abyss Demon Flowers necessitates a sacrifice of fresh human blood. The downside—an increased desire for coitus.

Invisibility mandates thirteen portions of prepared meat. The downside—an intensified susceptibility to hunger.

Slow Flight sacrifices one's romantic infatuation perpetually. The downside—an urge to show off.

Bone Curse predicates the sacrifice of a living person. The downside—drowsiness.

The Soul Assimilation Mystic Spell exacts no fewer than three human souls. The downside—random bouts of dizziness, numbering four to five daily.

Internal Explosion demands the sacrifice of any Beyonder characteristic. The downside—unrelenting spirituality drain, tantamount to permanent reduction of spirituality capacity.

From the detailed description of the Soul Assimilation Mystic Spell, Lumian conjectured that the padre had inadvertently met an additional, covert cost.

That was his name!

The Soul Assimilation Mystic Spell affected the target's Spirit Body by invocating their true name, causing them to experience dizziness and other reactions, amplified by deeper comprehension of the target and employment of verbiage echoing the spirit world.

In contracting with a spirit world entity armed with the Soul Assimilation Mystic Spell, Guillaume Bénet inadvertently disclosed his true name. Entities endowed with such powers could wield a person's true name for manifold feats—a potentially profound latent hazard.

This clandestine peril was merely one amid numerous akin enigmas housed within a Contractee's mystic wisdom. Therefore, Lumian opted for an extensive screen of spirit world creatures, personal interaction followed by experimental engagement.

Based upon the known downsides accompanying the contracted abilities, Lumian hatched an educated hypothesis.

After Guillaume Bénet, a man driven by insatiable desires, found his appetite for sex surging, he had definitely sought out women. The prophecy's alignment with Quartier de la Princesse Rouge harmonized with the results unearthed from the Magic Mirror Divination about the five nearby streets.

Furthermore, he found his hunger more voracious than ever, and the act of intimacy left him drained of vigor. Thus, the likelihood was high that he would gravitate towards a brothel that catered to both carnal and culinary needs or invite a woman back home.

Guillaume Bénet was not only a man of fervent desires but also an ambitious soul, thirsting for power. Being confined in the village and before the contractual abilities imbued his life with adverse effects, his lust mirrored an expression of power. Otherwise, it was impossible to explain how his desires sprawled across every woman, an inclination spanning the spectrum between esteemed paramours and those of lesser stature.

To him, appropriating the companions of other men became a testament to his standing, might, and allure.

Stepping onto Trier's soil, a place where his provincial accent drew disdain from the citizens, he undoubtedly sought vindication, manifesting his claims in his own unique manner.

Fused with his relentless pursuit of strength and his past style, Guillaume Bénet very likely went after sought-after courtesans, stoking the fires of envy amongst the local denizens. He might even spirit one or two of these coveted women away to grace his home.

This comprehensive analysis of the padre's character and psyche wasn't Lumian's solitary undertaking. Rather, it emerged from the expertise of Anthony Reid, a Psychiatrist. Armed with Lumian's intricate portrayal of Guillaume Bénet, Reid painted a psychological canvas, a vivid portrait of this heretic's inner workings.

Thus, two distinct paths unfurled to ensnare his prey. The first entailed staking out upscale brothels, where both meals and famous courtesans awaited. The other trail veered towards investigations surrounding courtesans who had entered matrimony, taken on mistress roles, or even vanished within the past two months.

For the former pursuit, the mantle rested upon the shoulders of the Iron and Blood Cross Order. Lumian's current task revolved around unearthing a conduit to intelligence about Rue de la Muraille's clandestine tales.

Anthony Reid, an adept intelligence broker, held a key. He was well-acquainted with Bühler, a Ghost Face columnist renowned for exposing scandals and whispers that wove through the fabric of Rue de la Muraille.

Bühler, a connoisseur of drinking and writing, would frequent a corner of Hope Café where he could survey the entrance before venturing into the brothels.

With his objective clear, Lumian embarked on a steady stride toward the café nestled amidst Rue de la Muraille.

En route, he revisited the entirety of the task at hand, stirred by an indescribable emotion.

His divination capabilities paled in comparison to Franca's. A lone Prophecy Spell rested in his arsenal, a tool he dared not wield recklessly. The finesse of Anthony Reid's psychological profiling and information-gathering expertise dwarfed Lumian's own. However, mobilizing these allies allowed him to harness these strengths, akin to gaining possession of these abilities.

Lumian couldn't foretell the ramifications of ascending to godhood. Yet, one thing was certain: beneath Sequence 4, one's prowess met constraints. Cooperative squads harnessed the potential for synergy, enabling them to confront even higher Sequences sans those with godhood.

Soon, Lumian caught sight of Hope Café, its entrance adorned in a milky-white veneer.

After pushing open the heavy door, he cast his gaze upon the corner granting anyone a vantage point.

A slender-faced man in his thirties, his ebony hair framing azure eyes, his beard trimmed meticulously and waxed to precision, met Lumian's gaze—his attention fixated on the entrance.

Sensing Lumian's scrutiny, the man's visage transformed. He reached for the soft-covered notebook and crimson fountain pen upon the table, on the verge of vanishing through the back door.

In response, Lumian drew his revolver and dispatched a shot toward the café's rear exit.

With a resounding bang, the bullet embedded itself into the wood.

The café's patrons were jolted into alarm, their reactions oscillating between concealment and inquiry, engendering chaos.

The bearded man stood immobilized, neither sure if he should run or stay.

Under the collective gaze of bartender, patrons, and staff, Lumian advanced toward his target, revolver in hand, amusement playing across his features.

"Are you Monsieur Bühler?"

"Yes, that's me." Bühler forced a smile.

Lumian gestured toward Bühler's original seat and spoke nonchalantly,

"Take a seat. I've come to purchase information."

A sigh of relief escaped Bühler as he hunched, retracing his steps to settle into the chair.

Lumian occupied the opposite seat, putting down his revolver. With a trace of playfulness, he queried, "Why the preference for such a dim corner?"

Bühler sighed and said, "In my line of work, reprisals are a constant concern. You're well aware that some individuals detest seeing their names or likenesses entangled in the web of scandals across newspapers and periodicals.

"This corner grants me an unobstructed view of the entrance, affording early detection of any potential troublemakers. And, should the need arise, I can effect a swift escape through the back."

Chapter 324: Which Is True and Which Is False

After a brief mention of the reason for selecting his seat, Bühler glanced up at Lumian, a self-deprecating smile on his lips.

"I didn't expect you to open fire so quickly."

Lumian's hand rested casually on the revolver by his side as he offered a faint smile in return.

"It seems the folks you've encountered before are law-abiding citizens."

Bühler's instincts, honed from past experiences of being beaten, urged him to retort. But as he compared Lumian's demeanor with those of his previous encounters, he found a strange logic in the man's words.

Thanks to the shelter of the law, he, a columnist for Ghost Face, had managed to survive up to this point!

"Are you not afraid of attracting the police?" Bühler turned to look at the waiter, who dared not approach with the menu and drink list. "Firing a gun in a place like this isn't a minor incident. Someone should have already alerted the authorities."

Lumian chuckled.

"That's why we have to hurry."

His words punctuated by deliberate actions, Lumian picked up his revolver, rotated the cylinder, and slotted a yellow cartridge into the empty chamber, right before Bühler's eyes.

"I want to know which courtesans have left Rue de la Muraille, this haven of extravagance, in the last two months," Lumian inquired with a calm resolve.

Instinctively, Bühler shook his head. "They aren't true courtesans. Those women possess their lavish residences and permanent paramours. They frequent high society, wielding influence over industries and policies with their words alone. This place merely acts as a reserve for courtesans."

"I'm only interested in those who fit my description." Lumian dismissed the specifics of courtesanship.

Bühler's gaze flickered between the revolver in Lumian's grip and said, recollecting,

"Four of them. Lil' Jort wed a Loen merchant and relocated to Backlund. 'White Vase' Sophie became the lover of Member of Parliament Batis, attending high society banquets and salons. She had a chance of becoming a true courtesan. 'Dew Rose' Mary fell victim to mental illness and mutilated her face with scissors one morning. She's confined to an asylum. 'Condiment Beauty' Paulina vanished from Rue de la Muraille without a trace, as though whisked away by someone of status."

As Bühler recounted, he noticed the dashing figure before him, ready to fire at the slightest provocation, producing a post-it note and a fountain pen, meticulously jotting down notes.

Swallowing unease, he continued, "I encountered Paulina on Rue Vincent not long ago. She seemed well off, with a four-wheeled carriage, a maid, a valet, and even a butler.

"Sadly, I had pressing matters then and failed to determine her place of residence."

Rue Vincent… Lumian's memory jogged. It was one of the five streets Franca had divined. Farthest from Rue de la Muraille, it exuded a quieter, upscale aura.

Based on Bühler's account, he suspected Paulina had become Guillaume Bénet's paramour.

For a fugitive, a prospective courtesan proved a safer choice than frequenting Rue de la Muraille. Guillaume Bénet was intelligent and capable. His present yearnings for intimacy and his voracious hunger hadn't rendered him a mindless imbecile. He would surely opt for a less risky strategy.

Just then, hurried footsteps resonated outside the café as three police officers neared the entrance.

Coolly, Lumian donned his dark-blue cap, stashed his note and pen, and slid 50 verl d'or notes onto the table before Bühler.

With these tasks accomplished, he reclaimed his revolver, stood up, and proceeded to the café's rear door. Swiftly, he opened it and departed.

Bang!

The police officers burst into Hope Café through its main entrance.

…

On the elegant street of Rue Vincent, stately villa-like houses adorned both sides of the road. The road was wide and well-kept, with only occasional pedestrians and carriages passing through.

After Lumian turned into the street, he found himself at a loss.

He couldn't infiltrate every house and search every room, could he?

Besides, he wasn't the most suitable candidate for this kind of investigation. Franca would be better suited for it, but involving her was risky.

After a brief contemplation, Lumian allowed a smile to grace his features. He strolled toward one of the houses and pressed the doorbell.

A young valet opened the dark-brown door. His appearance suggested no trace of Southern Continent lineage, and he gazed at Lumian in bewilderment. In a clear Trierien accent, he inquired,

"Sir, how may I assist you?"

With an amiable grin, Lumian replied, "I'm here to inquire about the most splendid madam residing on this street."

"…" The valet was momentarily speechless. This was the first instance he'd encountered someone seeking such peculiar information.

Or perhaps not. While such matters were whispered about behind closed doors and boasted about in taverns, there were occasionally individuals who exhibited curiosity about such affairs. However, who would approach a stranger's door in the sweltering sun to inquire?

What was this person up to?

Before the valet could react, Lumian produced a 10 verl d'or note and offered it with a genial demeanor.

The valet's eyelids twitched. He hesitated for a moment before accepting the payment.

He suspected this young man to be a counterfeit Dandyist, specialized in duping affluent ladies of their bodies and riches. The appearance and conduct matched the descriptions found in newspapers.

However, if the lady wasn't the valet's mistress or lady, why refuse the reward?

When the stranger acquired what he sought, a certain madam would also receive some gratification!

The valet cast a furtive glance around before lowering his voice.

"The lady in Unit 50 is exquisitely beautiful. A genuine Trierien, she married a foreigner from the southern lands. That accent…"

As the valet spoke, he shook his head with a mixture of indignation and scorn, as if he had harbored this sentiment for some time.

Lumian's smile broadened.

Indeed, under the sway of his burgeoning impulses, the padre couldn't resist sharing his prize with the neighbors—a stunning Trierien courtesan.

He might not host grand banquets or waltz to proclaim his conquest, nor would he escort his lover for a public appearance. Nonetheless, he would inevitably find subtle ways to make his neighbors aware that even foreigners could possess resplendent courtesans as mistresses.

At times like this, Guillaume Bénet had to exercise prudence in disguising himself. However, his mistress's beauty wasn't something easily concealed. She might even meticulously dress herself to exhibit her remarkable presence.

Of course, Lumian couldn't be certain if the lady was Paulina, the presumed mistress. Yet, the gradual collection of anticipated information through bold assumptions and careful confirmation made him feel he was steadily closing in on Guillaume Bénet.

Beyond the gates of 50 Rue Vincent, Lumian glanced at the facade as an ordinary passerby might.

The three-story beige structure stood before him, surrounded by a lush green lawn and a garden vibrant with colors. A gardener tended to the greenery, offering a partial view.

Lumian promptly averted his gaze from the building's pillar, wary that prolonged observation could arouse suspicion.

As for any possibility of being recognized by the padre, Lumian held no concern. Prior to setting out, he had employed Niese Face to alter his appearance and communicated to his companions that it was due to cosmetics.

Lumian's striking appearance—a fusion of golden and black hair—could be anyone's. As long as Guillaume Bénet lacked the ability to penetrate the illusion or actively employ it, it was unlikely he'd realize his pursuer had infiltrated the vicinity.

Lumian's current plan was to leave Rue Vincent and switch places with Jenna or Franca. He would then ensconce himself in the shadows across from Unit 50, patiently observing until all suspicion around the target was dissipated.

He refrained from adopting the guise of a tramp this time, given the scarcity of such individuals on this refined street. While a rare appearance might occur, these transients were promptly shooed away by the household staff.

Just as he prepared to depart from the beige edifice, Lumian turned his head in a casual manner. His gaze alighted on a figure visible through the living room window.

The figure stood at a modest height, barely reaching 1.7 meters. Clad in a dark shirt and black trousers, the person possessed a slightly stocky build. Their nose bore a gentle curve, and their black hair fell in a mid-length cascade.

Lumian's pupils dilated for a fleeting moment before swiftly returning to their normal state.

A wisp of a smile tugged at the corners of his lips, and an invisible fire seemed to ignite in his eyes.

Despite the adept disguise, Lumian would recognize him even if he were reduced to ashes!

It was Guillaume Bénet, the padre of Cordu!

Lumian wrestled to contain his surprise, his gaze steering onward.

Simultaneously, his mind raced as he evaluated the next course of action to undertake.

Before long, he reached the end of Rue Vincent.

At that very juncture, a parrot adorned with green and white feathers took flight from Rue de la Muraille and perched itself on Lumian's shoulder. It chirped excitedly, "We've located the target!"

Located the target? Then who did I just see? Another padre? Lumian was momentarily flabbergasted and perplexed.

Which one was the genuine Guillaume Bénet? Had he erred in judgment, or had the Iron and Blood Cross Order and "Rat" Christo been deceived?

…

Fifteen minutes earlier, at the Dill Brothel on Rue de la Muraille.

Within the annex bar on the first floor, Albus savored his Lanti Proof while discreetly observing the attendants, laborers, and the overseer who managed the establishment.

His assessment encompassed the clientele as well, but it yielded nothing of note. Many concealed their identities by donning assorted masks, making it nearly impossible to unveil their true selves.

Having gained a preliminary insight into the inner workings of the Dill Brothel, Albus seized the chance to make his way toward the washroom. He veered onto the path leading to the kitchen when an attendant approached, carrying a collection of post-it notes.

This attendant's responsibility encompassed recording the requirements of each room and relaying orders to the kitchen.

Albus, marked by his dark-red hair, advanced and retrieved a handful of glistening coins along with a substantial bundle of banknotes from his pocket.

The attendant's features twisted into a blend of perplexity and intrigue.

Albus smiled and said, "I'm on the hunt for a scoundrel. Uncertain about his guise, I'm merely aware he shares your build and possesses a penchant for consorting with the most celebrated ladies. Post-exertion, he seeks sustenance to satiate his hunger immediately.

"If you're able to furnish me with the relevant particulars, all this is yours."

Chapter 325: Visit

The attendant's gaze locked onto the handful of gold coins and the banknotes, their unique ink fragrance captivating his senses. He couldn't help but hold his breath, caught in the allure of the treasure before him.

After a few heart-pounding moments, he swiftly surveyed the area, ensuring no prying eyes were nearby. Gradually, a sense of relief washed over him.

"A-all of it?" The attendant's voice quivered as he swallowed with difficulty.

With a precise flick of his wrist, Albus tossed a gold coin worth 5 verl d'or into the attendant's waiting palm. A confident smile tugged at his lips as he spoke, "That depends on the value of the information you provide. Rest assured, you'll receive another 20 verl d'or, no matter what."

The attendant gingerly bit the gold coin, stealing a glance back at the path they had traversed. His voice dropped to a hushed tone as he shared, "Just as you surmised, the man from the south, in Room 2 on the sixth floor, frequents the company of the most renowned courtesans. He possesses a penchant for pre-ordering his meals, which we dutifully deliver to his quarters every half hour."

A southerner with a penchant for famous courtesans and a habit of pre-ordered meals. Room 602… Albus wasn't one to skimp on appreciation. He tossed two 10 verl d'or coins, etched with the likeness of a warship, to the attendant.

Seizing the calmness on Rue de la Muraille, Albus covertly ascended to the sixth floor, concealing himself on the balcony at the corridor's far end.

Within mere minutes, the attendant tasked with meal deliveries arrived at Room 602, carried by a steam-powered mechanical elevator. A silver-white metal serving cart accompanied him. Carefully, he pressed the doorbell.

Albus straightened up, aligning his view with Room 602's entrance. His gaze intensified.

The door swung open, revealing a man of slight stature, not exceeding 1.7 meters. His attire comprised a pitch-black half-mask, a crisp white shirt, and pale-hued boxer shorts.

Removing his trousers but leaving his upper attire on… Concealing tattoos, perhaps? The more Albus observed, the stronger his conviction that the occupant of Room 602 matched the likeness of Guillaume Bénet from the wanted posters.

Abstaining from "disturbing" his quarry, Albus settled back into a white-paneled armchair on the balcony. From his pocket emerged a gray-furred rat—one of Beast Tamer Christo's pets.

Lumian had engaged the services of the "Rat," his abilities allowing easy communication and efficient coordination among team members.

Naturally, Christo served as the intermediary and the "translator."

Albus tenderly patted the rat's head, signaling it with a gesture—a thumb and index finger forming a ring, with the remaining fingers raised.

This signified the discovery of the prime suspect.

With a high-pitched squeak, the rat darted from Albus's grasp, off to find its owner at a nearby tavern.

…

Upon learning from Christo's pet parrot that members of the Iron and Blood Cross Order had located the padre, Lumian found himself plunged into a momentary maelstrom of shock and confusion.

Had they truly found Guillaume Bénet? Then, who did I see?

If the occupant of 50 Rue Vincent is Guillaume Bénet, where did the counterfeit they see come from?

In the whirlwind of his thoughts, a realization struck Lumian with the force of lightning.

Substitution Spell!

Guillaume Bénet must have enacted the Substitution Spell ritual!

It was one of the five specialized ritualistic magics Lumian had acquired as an Alms Monk. The padre, now a Sequence 5 Fate Appropriator, was evidently familiar with it.

This ritual enabled the user to choose another person to inhabit their identity for a period upon sensing impending danger. By gaining the genuine or fake approval of those around them and establishing a strong mystical connection, a ritual could then finalize the switch.

If the Substitution Spell succeeded, the stand-in would be indistinguishable from the original in the eyes of others, although their self-awareness and performance might be compromised to a degree. Nevertheless, their core identity would remain.

When the substitute faced imminent disaster, the one who cast the Substitution Spell could alter their own fate, thus avoiding the impending calamity.

Of course, this hinged on the substitute being kept unaware of the impending danger.

While this ruse could prove effective on other Beyonders, Lumian was well-acquainted with the circumstances surrounding the Substitution Spell. Thus, he couldn't be easily deceived.

For Lumian, the paramount issue at hand was this: Which individual was the true Guillaume Bénet, and which was the substitute?

To deal a decisive blow to the padre and apprehend him with minimal casualties, Lumian needed to consolidate his forces and make a choice. He couldn't attack both entities simultaneously.

Gardner Martin had merely agreed to assist in locating the "prey," without extending further support. Consequently, the majority of individuals dispatched by the Iron and Blood Cross Order were Low-Sequence Beyonders or even regular people.

If Lumian opted to solicit Gardner Martin's aid, it might take hours for the Iron and Blood Cross Order to assemble sufficient reinforcements. Guillaume Bénet didn't possess limitless endurance, and the courtesan wasn't a Demoness of Pleasure who could allow an extended encounter. He would definitely be gone by then.

The question remains: What decision would Guillaume Bénet make? Would he have the substitute remain at the residence to divert danger while he ventured out for personal pursuits? Alternatively, would he dispatch the substitute to showcase his characteristic behavior, drawing danger away from himself? Lumian found both scenarios challenging to dismiss.

After deliberation, his gaze shifted to the green and white parrot. He addressed it, "Locate 'Red Boots' Franca and ask her to divine the authenticity of the Guillaume Bénet at 50 Rue Vincent and the one present here."

The parrot stared at Lumian as if questioning his sanity. "I'm just a parrot."

What I said is too complicated. It can't understand or memorize everything? Lumian swiftly arrived at a decision.

"Guide me to 'Red Boots' Franca. Actually, first lead me to Christo."

Time remained on their side. The individual at 50 Rue Vincent couldn't elude them. The team responsible for the mission could convene briefly, exchanging essential information.

In the shadows they lingered, while their foes roamed in plain sight. As long as they didn't startle the targets, they could afford to wait. Of course, they had to conclude before Guillaume Bénet's deed with the courtesan reached its conclusion. After all, tailing an individual posed inherent risks, especially when dealing with the padre and his array of bizarre and unfamiliar abilities.

…

In a narrow alley near Rue de la Muraille.

The afternoon sun cast its radiant touch upon the mostly dismantled barricade, while even the breeze seemed to take a momentary pause.

Franca, now garbed in an Assassin's attire, and Jenna, disguised as a female mercenary, rendezvoused with Anthony Reid, still clad in his military green attire, and Lumian, sporting a cap, a black vest, and a white shirt.

Lumian delivered a succinct briefing, omitting details about the Substitution Spell due to time constraints, referring to it merely as a form of witchcraft capable of generating lifelike substitutes.

Before Lumian could inquire further, Franca retrieved a mirror from her possession. As her fingers grazed the surface, she intoned an incantation.

Soon, an aqueous luminescence radiated from the mirror, accompanied by an aged voice.

"They are both real."

Both real… Franca turned to Lumian in surprise.

The witchcraft responsible for creating the substitute proves potent—resembling the original down to appearance and fate. Conventional divination methods stand powerless against such deception!

Both real… Lumian had anticipated this response and had already devised an alternative course of action.

Sensing his silence, Franca drew a deep breath, hesitatingly suggesting, "D-Do you need me to consult another source?"

She aimed to seek confirmation from the entity renowned for unerring divination.

Yet, this approach risked unveiling a question that could render her socially deceased before Jenna, Lumian, and Anthony Reid.

She envisioned the other party asking, "Do you often entertain the idea of doing the deed with Jenna?"

How would she navigate her future interactions with Jenna?

Lumian shook his head, asserting, "No need. I have a plan."

Turning his attention to Jenna, he directed, "Conceal yourself in the shadows diagonally across from Room 602 in Dill. Keep a vigilant watch on that Guillaume Bénet's activities.

"If he concludes his affairs and prepares to depart, but we haven't arrived yet, refrain from impulsive pursuit. Instead, discreetly monitor his movements from a distance and deduce his chosen path."

"Understood." Jenna nodded, mentally rehearsing her upcoming task.

Lumian shifted his focus to Franca and Anthony Reid.

"Let's proceed to 50 Rue Vincent together. I'll directly confront Guillaume Bénet. Franca, maintain invisibility and follow me closely. We mustn't launch an attack until we're certain of his authenticity.

"Anthony, secure the perimeter outside. If the Guillaume Bénet on Rue Vincent proves to be counterfeit and we hasten to Dill, covertly monitor the madame there, tracking her movements. In case Guillaume Bénet manages an escape, she could serve as a pivotal lead for subsequent pursuit.

"If the 50 Rue Vincent counterpart is genuine and a skirmish erupts, approach discreetly and provide reinforcement."

Franca harbored no objections to this arrangement. Aware of Lumian's teleportation abilities, she grasped that once he confirmed the Rue Vincent Guillaume as fake, he could facilitate swift transition for the primary combatants to the opposite location, preventing the two Guillaumes from "exchanging information."

Assessing the calculated risks, Anthony endorsed the plan, confirming his willingness to execute his designated role.

…

50 Rue Vincent, near the beige three-story building.

Observing Franca's seamless invisibility, Lumian raised his right hand and swept it across his face.

In an instant, he transformed into a man in his thirties, attired in a black uniform with an inspector's epaulet.

Niese Face!

Satisfied with his condition, Lumian proceeded to the designated building and pressed the doorbell.

The door swung open, revealing a man garbed as a butler. His gaze landed on Lumian as he inquired with a touch of confusion, "Officer, how may I assist you?"

"I'm here regarding a missing vagrant case linked to this street. I'd appreciate a conversation with your master," Lumian nonchalantly fabricated.

A subtle shift occurred in the butler's expression.

"Please wait a moment, Officer. I shall inquire with our master."

After a brief pause, the butler returned to the doorway, addressing Lumian, "Officer, our master invites you to the small parlor on the ground floor."

Lumian offered a slight nod and trailed the butler into the abode at 50 Rue Vincent.

The living area exuded spaciousness, hosting a bluish-gray cat huddled in one corner, its presence accompanied by the ceaseless chirping of caged birds. Positioned in the aisle, a black dog, reminiscent of a hound, remained seated, its gaze unwaveringly fixated on the unfamiliar entrant.

Circumventing an elegant sofa, the butler led Lumian into a parlor towards the rear. There, a man with midnight hair, azure eyes, and a slightly hooked nose reclined in an armchair. He sported a dark-hued shirt and black trousers, his demeanor one of relaxed arrogance as he gently caressed the head of a sizable brown-furred dog.

"Officer, in what way may I be of assistance?" The man inquired, rising with deliberate languor.

It's him—Guillaume Bénet! Padre Guillaume Bénet! Lumian's pupils contracted, closing the distance to a mere five meters.

Then, he parted his lips and voiced, "Ha!"

Action was the sole path to distinguishing the genuine from the imposter!

Chapter 326: Substitute

"Ha!"

Lumian's right chest glowed faintly. His Spirit Body quivered as a yellowish beam shot forth from his mouth.

It instantly struck Guillaume Bénet, dressed in a dark shirt and black pants, causing him to collapse in confusion and shock.

Spell of Harrumph!

He's fake! Lumian's eyes narrowed as he assessed the situation. He wasn't too surprised by the outcome.

It was evident that this wasn't the real Guillaume Bénet—a Sequence 5 Fate Appropriator. The way the man reacted to the attack, coupled with his lack of familiarity with Beyonder powers and mysticism, made Lumian believe that the substitute was an ordinary person thrust into an unfamiliar world.

Disregarding the bewildered butler, Lumian swiftly turned on his heels and sprinted out of the compact living room.

As he ran, he whispered, "To Dill!"

Franca, draped in her hooded, leather-armored black robe, materialized in front of Lumian.

Lumian grabbed her shoulder, allowing the black mark on his right shoulder to flicker with a dark light.

Amidst the swirling maelstrom of vibrant hues, the duo found themselves on the balcony of Dill's sixth floor.

Having sent Jenna to inform Albus previously, Lumian had already memorized the coordinates.

Upon seeing her companion arrive, Jenna, dressed as a female mercenary, emerged from the shadows. She pointed at Room 602 and lowered her voice.

"It's not over yet.

"Dammit, he's dragging this out!"

"The second round, perhaps?" Lumian chuckled.

According to Albus, the occupant of Room 602 had already blown his load once before having afternoon tea. Now, it had begun again.

"The soundproofing here is impressive," Franca remarked, her head tilting as she listened for any signs of activity from within Room 602.

Jenna observed as Lumian wiped his face, disguising himself as a typical Dill brothel attendant. She clicked her tongue and voiced her thoughts.

"That woman in there screams occasionally. Dammit, is that perverted padre into some abusive stuff?"

Jenna, an underground singer frequenting bars and dance halls, had cultivated an open and passionate image. Her close rapport with Franca, who managed the dancers, exposed her to a world beyond the ordinary. She had zero experience, but her insights were substantial.

Franca caught on swiftly. She modulated her voice and clicked her tongue.

Lumian, his Niese Face transforming him, glanced at Franca, silently requesting her to sprinkle fluorescent powder in the corridor outside Room 602.

A countermeasure against Guillaume Bénet's invisibility!

Lumian knew that the invisibility didn't erase traces or scents. Should Guillaume Bénet escape into the corridor during combat, the fluorescent powder would create a luminous trail, guiding Lumian's pursuit.

However, Lumian reconsidered and decided that the use of fluorescent powder might be too conspicuous. Guillaume Bénet could easily detect the abnormality and escape using his bizarre abilities before Lumian could launch a surprise attack.

After a moment's reflection, Lumian leaned in to whisper to Franca, "Deploy Invisibility to conceal yourself in the corridor. Use invisible spider silk to create a web that covers the target's door from the ground to the ceiling."

This approach would neutralize the effectiveness of Invisibility, while also entangling Guillaume Bénet if he attempted to employ Slow Flight.

"No problem." Franca adjusted her black hood and entered the corridor.

In a blink, her form dissolved, as if a snowman had melted in the sun.

Seven to eight seconds later, a gentle breeze brushed against Lumian's legs.

He was taken aback for a moment before comprehending.

Franca is using the invisible spider silk to signal readiness.

Since this dude advanced to a Demoness of Pleasure, everything she does carries a sense of teasing… Yeah, she just advanced and might not have full control over the potion's power. She could be unwittingly affected…

Muttering inwardly, Lumian shifted his attention to Jenna and instructed, "Conceal yourself in the shadows here. If Guillaume Bénet flees this way, you can shoot or execute an assassination. If that fails, withdraw immediately. If he heads in another direction, don't pursue."

"Got it." Jenna, well-versed in these situations, didn't push for more involvement.

She understood that her capabilities could be effectively deployed only under specific circumstances.

With his team arranged, Lumian pivoted and directed his gaze at the wooden door of Room 602.

He inhaled deeply, exhaling slowly to steady his nerves.

With that, he fetched an armchair from the balcony and positioned it in the corridor.

The invisible spider silk avoided him as he moved some distance away from Room 602 and set down the chair.

In the following moment, he lightly tapped the chair's back. Crimson flames flowed from his palm, slithering over the chair like serpents.

As the armchair caught fire, Lumian jogged toward Room 602 without attempting to conceal his movements. He rapped his knuckles against the wooden door.

"What is it?"

A voice tinged with contained anger reverberated from within Room 602, indicating a pivotal juncture.

"Fire! There's a fire!" Lumian shouted in feigned panic.

"Son of a sow!" The male voice inside cursed in a Riston Province accent.

Simultaneously, Hunter Lumian detected a distinctive motion—someone getting off the bed.

Two to three seconds later, the door swung open, revealing a naked man wearing an iron-colored half-mask and a white shirt, his lower half exposed.

A brunette, clad in a fishnet nightgown, was still draped over him.

Holy heck, can't you even let go of her? Franca's amused commentary echoed in Lumian's mind from her invisible position diagonally across.

However, Lumian's focus was unshaken. When the suspected Guillaume Bénet appeared, his gaze flickering towards the smoky, flaming chair, Lumian acted swiftly.

"Ha!"

Another yellowish beam shot forth, piercing through both the man in the iron-colored half-mask and the woman in the fishnet nightgown, enveloping them.

A glimpse of shock and panic flashed across the eyes of the supposed Guillaume Bénet, revealing his grasp of Beyonder powers.

Then, his eyes dulled, and he collapsed, a fraction after the woman.

As the sound of something heavy thudding to the floor echoed, Lumian seemed to enter a surreal trance.

Impossible. A Fate Appropriator like Guillaume Bénet couldn't be knocked out by a Contractee's Spell of Harrumph…

Is he a decoy?

The one at 50 Rue Vincent was an imposter too!

Where is the real Guillaume Bénet?

Shaking off his momentary daze, Lumian knelt, peeling off the iron-colored mask from the unconscious man.

The face beneath was unnervingly familiar—it was the hooked-nose countenance of Guillaume Bénet.

Darkening with concern, Lumian pushed the half-dressed woman away from his target and tore open the white shirt.

In the next heartbeat, his eyes fell upon three black marks resembling signatures on the unconscious man's upper body—one on the left chest, one on the right chest, and another on the abdomen.

This wasn't Guillaume Bénet!

Guillaume Bénet held more than three contracts—probably a dozen or more!

All fake? All substitutes? Lumian clenched his fists, his eyes igniting with an invisible blaze.

He rose, dragging the man, an identical look-alike of Guillaume Bénet, back into Room 602. Then, he found a blanket, swathed the unconscious woman, and deposited her in the corridor.

In the interim, Franca discerned the falsity of the prey once again, vanishing her invisibility. She summoned frost and doused the flames consuming the armchair.

As she transferred the woman from the corridor to a vacant room, Lumian extended his right hand, fingers closing around the throat of the Inevitability bestowed.

With a decisive snap, he broke the man's neck, rendering him unconscious and lifeless.

Following that, he shut the wooden door, drew the ritual silver dagger, and sanctified it. A wall of spirituality enshrouded Room 602.

Subsequently, Lumian initiated the Summoning Dance, opting to engage in a preliminary, purpose-driven spirit channeling through this method.

He had chosen not to enlist Franca's aid for a reason: he was uncertain about the peculiar creatures the deceased had contracted. It was possible they would induce corresponding corruption. Only Lumian, having long been an Inevitability bestowed, remained unaffected by the spirit channeling process.

The sedatives and the last remnants of truth serum from the Bliss Society were reserved for use on the real padre.

…

Diagonally opposite 50 Rue Vincent.

Perched on the second floor of the building and ensconced in cover, Anthony Reid, steadfastly observing the target, espied a graceful lady in a pale-green gown hurrying out, accompanied by her valet, maid, and butler. The group entered a carriage, deftly relocated from the rear to the front entrance, before embarking toward the far end of Rue Vincent.

Without precipitously giving chase, Anthony meticulously memorized specific details concerning the carriage and the horses.

…

Amidst the fervent and contorted dance, the departed spirit detached from its corporeal vessel, hovering midair. It cast a glare laden with animosity and perplexity upon Lumian.

Drawing his own blood, Lumian enacted a command, compelling the spirit to bind to him.

Although desire and voracity ignited within him, Lumian remained resolute, detecting an additional presence.

Summoning the Abyss Demon Flower…

Invisibility…

Transfiguration… Dammit!

An involuntary curse escaped Lumian's lips.

He began to grasp the unfolding situation!

The individual at 50 Rue Vincent was possibly a product of the Substitution Spell. The one at the Dill brothel, on the other hand, had been fashioned as a substitute by Guillaume Bénet, utilizing Transfiguration, exploiting its negative effects.

He was vigilant against anyone exploiting his negative effects to track him down!

Transfiguration was a contractual ability capable of altering a person's appearance, physique, and disposition. It also possessed a measure of resistance against divination. The price exacted was one's own visage, with the detrimental side effect manifesting as a desire for the exploitation of others.

Lumian steadied himself, summoning to mind the genuine Guillaume Bénet—his visage, his deeds. This resonance united with the memories that had left the most indelible mark on the spirit of the deceased, enabling Lumian to hunt for clues.

In due course, a cluster of seven or eight memories quivered slightly. Lumian selected one, striving to magnify it for deeper understanding.

Chapter 327: The Real Guillaume Bénet

The memories of the false Guillaume Bénet surged, and Lumian found himself immersed in the familiar confines of 50 Rue Vincent's cozy parlor.

Draped in an air of regal poise, the counterfeit Guillaume Bénet stood before the armchair, addressing the recipient of these memories with calculated words, "Take this money and venture to Rue de la Muraille. There, seek out the renowned courtesan of utmost repute. But you must assume my looks, veiled by a mask."

With humility and deference, the memory's owner bowed. "Understood, Archbishop."

And thus, this memory concluded. Lumian held a steadfast conviction that the Inevitability bestowed before him was a meticulously crafted proxy, a construct devised by none other than Guillaume Bénet himself.

It appeared that he had likely garnered a cohort of adherents to Inevitability. From among them, he had singled out a candidate from southern Intis, one who swiftly reaped three successive boons. This candidate was meticulously endowed with the same abilities as him: the summoning of the Abyss Demon Flower and the shroud of Invisibility. This granted him an impeccable guise, perfectly mirroring the true him thanks to the contracts' negative effects.

Of course, Transfiguration remained an integral, indispensable ability.

From this vantage, it became evident that Guillaume Bénet hadn't neglected the adverse ramifications of the specialized covenant. He might have contemplated this from inception or perhaps gained insight subsequent to a dire prophecy, reviewing his recent undertakings. Regardless, this counterfeit Guillaume Bénet—proficient in Transfiguration—appeared to be a deliberate ruse.

Lumian suspected the presence of other Inevitability devotees who clandestinely monitored the Dill brothel. They clandestinely shadowed the sham Guillaume Bénet, primed to relay swift notification to the authentic padre should danger befall his double.

In such a scenario, Guillaume Bénet enjoyed a distinct advantage—whether he elected to abscond, leaving the product of this Substitution Spell to grapple with looming peril, or opted to ensnare his antagonists using the doppelganger as bait.

Synthesized with the fragments of the fake Guillaume Bénet's recollections, Lumian surmised that the genuine Guillaume Bénet primarily resided at 50 Rue Vincent. Yet, he permitted the substitute to operate overtly, effectively obfuscating his true whereabouts.

Upon this realization, Lumian harbored a pang of vexation.

Had Albus not unearthed the sham Guillaume Bénet within the confines of the Dill brothel, Lumian wouldn't have been lured away from the decoy; he would have been affixed on the Guillaume at 50 Rue Vincent. This would have spared him the frenzied teleportation prompted after the incapacitation of the Substitution Spell's byproduct. Lumian would have gravitated towards scouring the building, conceivably unearthing the genuine Guillaume Bénet.

Granted, absent the synchronous "appearance" of Guillaume Bénet, Lumian wouldn't have entertained notions of a Substitution Spell. He'd have likely fallen prey to deception, swerving far from the path leading to the authentic padre.

With this epiphany at the forefront, Lumian cast aside his intention to scout for lurking Inevitability adherents. Recognizing that the bona fide Guillaume Bénet had been alerted, Lumian terminated his Summoning

Dance and dissolved the wall of spirituality. Turning to Franca and Jenna, shrouded in separate shadows, he intoned, "Let's head to 50 Rue Vincent now."

Presently, Lumian clung to the hope that vestiges of clues lingered or that Anthony Reid, entrusted with overseeing the locale, had gleaned pertinent insights…

Franca and Jenna emerged from the shadows one after another, wasting no time to inquire about the current situation. Lumian grabbed their shoulders and activated spirit world traversal once more.

In the blink of an eye, their forms solidified within the modest confines of 50 Rue Vincent's parlor.

Absent were the butler, valets, and maids, leaving an unattended figure—unconscious, the result of the Substitution Spell—laid out on the carpet.

A meticulous scan of the surroundings concluded with Lumian's approach. He knelt beside the proxy, employing a variety of techniques to rouse him from his stupor.

As the counterfeit Guillaume Bénet's eyes fluttered open, they met an unfamiliar visage.

Startled, he jolted upright, fear tinting his tone. "Who are you? Why did you barge into my house? Get out! I'll call the police! I'll call the police!"

He recollected the recent attack—a curse-like assault!

Lumian drew his revolver and pressed it against the fake Guillaume Bénet's forehead.

The substitute fell silent.

"Where is the true master of this residence?" Lumian's voice resounded, deep and steady.

As if pierced by a sudden realization, the imposter Guillaume Bénet spat out, "I am the true master!

"I'm the master here!"

Lumian's lips curled into a smile.

"In that case, I offer my sympathies. Your wife, it seems, ran off with the butler with your valuables. The valets and maids, meanwhile, seem to have embraced an opportunistic approach—essentially relieving you of anything tangible except this house.

"In a while, the police will arrest you, citing your involvement in the slaying of a vagrant and perpetrating cultic rituals and extensive deceit."

A mosaic of fact and conjecture, Lumian's words emerged with an intent to intimidate the substitute, dismantling any fantastical illusions.

Considering the retreat of the madame, butler, valets, maids, coachman, and gardener from 50 Rue Vincent, Lumian inferred their conversion into believers of Inevitability, orchestrated by the genuine padre. This intricate maneuver camouflaged a multitude of cultic practices and eccentric observances, all harmonized through the Substitution Spell.

The false Guillaume Bénet at Dill, having reached Sequence 7 Contractee status, was indicative of multiple instances of boon-request rituals in Trier. Innocents would undoubtedly become sacrifices, and the best candidates were undoubtedly tramps.

At Lumian's declaration, the imitation Guillaume Bénet gazed about, bewildered and panic-stricken, his voice piercingly beseeching, "Paulina! Paulina!"

Paulina… It's indeed the Condiment Beauty. Unfortunately, she's now a heretic… Lumian watched as the fake Guillaume Bénet fell silent, his eyes filled with despair.

"Any final words?" Lumian inquired once more.

The fake Guillaume Bénet shuddered and said, "I'm real. I'm really the master of this place!

"However, that woman—that woman is a succubus. She surreptitiously lured someone and ensconced him within the cellar!

"Sh-she's having an affair with a devil!"

Affair with a devil… In the basement… Was she secretly meeting the real padre in private? Yes, the negative effects of Guillaume Bénet's desire for coitus will always exist. They won't disappear just because he has two substitutes… Lumian scrutinized the mock Guillaume Bénet, who tenaciously clung to his façade as the genuine master of 50 Rue Vincent. Left hand poised, he controlled his might, and with precision, delivered a calculated blow behind the imposter's ear.

The fake Guillaume Bénet fainted again.

Lumian's strategy entailed swift exploration of the residence, as allowing the imposter to run amok could inadvertently trigger calamity.

He rose to his feet, massaging his throbbing temples, and turned to Franca and Jenna for an update. "Any word from Anthony Reid?"

"No." Franca shook her head gently. "It seems he followed your directive to trail Madame Paulina."

Lumian tersely acknowledged.

"Then let's search this place and await his feedback."

Franca adjusted her black hood and emphasized, "One team of three. Don't split up."

This was the "territory" of the heretics. Even if they had already escaped, residual vestiges might still remain. Should they split their efforts and encounter mishaps, timely rescue would be jeopardized.

When the authorities carried out such operations, they had to be at least in groups of three or within sight of each other if they wanted to split up.

Lumian issued a pointed gesture toward the staircase adjacent to the parlor, "Let's proceed to the basement."

The trio descended, and as they did, Franca leaned to Jenna, her tone hushed,

"Ciel's exchange with the counterfeit was textbook instigation. When you return, dissect the intent behind each phrase."

"Okay." Jenna absorbed the counsel like a parched sponge.

In due course, they reached the basement door. Lumian turned toward his companions,

"Preparations before we venture inside."

To thwart lingering echoes of Inevitability's powers or unconventional creatures, precaution was paramount.

Promptly, Lumian, now adorned with altered visage and partially lengthened hair, pushed the door open, revealing the basement's dim recesses.

Within, an unremarkable array of miscellaneous items cluttered the space. No conspicuous anomalies were apparent.

Just as Franca readied for Magic Mirror Divination, Lumian, with his Hunter's acumen, discerned subtle traces.

With metallic clinks, he unveiled a concealed door.

Beyond lay a stairwell descending further into the subterranean depths.

The trio descended cautiously, arriving after moments at a vast yet rudimentary chamber, bathed in gas lamp radiance.

It was unknown if Guillaume Bénet had created it himself or if he had sealed off a portion of Underground Trier and modified it into a private "territory."

In the center of the stone-floored hall stood an altar, surrounded by ghastly white human bones, complete sheepskin, cowhide, and giant canine skin.

Upon seeing this, Lumian was taken aback as he recalled one of the five special ritualistic magics that Alms Monk had:

Animal Creation Spell!

Simultaneously, remembrances of the felines, avians, and canines inhabiting the floor above, and the brown-furred dog nestled beside the mock Guillaume Bénet, surged forth.

Dog… Dog… Animal Creation Spell… With an epiphanic rush, Lumian pieced together the genuine Guillaume Bénet's concealment.

He had invoked the Animal Creation Spell to transmute himself into the hulking, brown-furred canine. In this form, he paraded brazenly before his counterfeit and the surrounding onlookers.

With a recitation of the preordained incantation, the true Guillaume Bénet could rapidly molt his canine facade, resuming his human guise.

…

In the confines of the parlor, the counterfeit Guillaume Bénet remained enshrouded in an unconscious reverie, utterly oblivious to the stark duality between reality and illusion.

Cautiously, he inched the guest room door ajar, greeted by a jarring tableau. Before him sprawled his beautiful wife, Paulina, ensconced upon the sumptuous bed, unclothed, whilst a hulking brown-furred canine loomed beside her. At the bedside, a plate bearing a medium-cooked steak was positioned…

…

Amidst clenched teeth, Lumian communicated the enigma of the Animal Creation Spell and his speculative hypothesis to Franca and Jenna, his words resounding, "I hope we find that damned dog. No, he should have shed his dog skin by now."

Animal Creation Spell… Humans turning into dogs… Jenna was alarmed.

The world of mysticism is so bizarre and terrifying!

The three of them worked together and swiftly searched for traces.

Before long, Jenna picked up something from a crevice in the stone slab and exclaimed in surprise, "I've found something!"

Franca ran over and realized it was brown dog fur.

Both approached Lumian, who continued his investigative fervor, presenting their find.

Lumian's elation was palpable. He postulated Guillaume Bénet's evasion via an underground covert route, disentangling him from Paulina and the rest.

Then, they discovered a few strands of brown dog fur. Following the fur, they found another hidden door.

After opening the hidden door in the rock wall, Franca performed a simple Magic Mirror Divination and received a revelation that nothing was amiss. Then, she followed Lumian and Jenna in.

At that moment, Jenna, who was in the middle of the group, lost sight of Lumian. Franca was still following behind her.

Without waiting for Jenna to speak, Franca surveyed the room and frowned.

"We've circled back to the sacrificial hall."

…

Emerging through the secret door, Lumian entered an expanse echoing a quarry's cavern.

With gas lamps conspicuously absent, Lumian summoned forth a crimson blaze to pierce the shadows.

Almost simultaneously, he sensed that Jenna and Franca hadn't followed him.

We got separated just like that? Puzzlement swirled within Lumian's mind, overridden by a low voice that echoed from the abandoned mine's depths: "Lumian Lee!"

Chapter 328: Bottle of Fiction

"Lumian Lee!"

Lumian found himself frozen in place, his gaze distant as he reacted to the ominous growl.

In a shadowy corner of the abandoned mine, a figure outlined itself.

Clad in a complete coat of brown dog skin, the figure's torso and abdomen burst open, revealing a human form adorned in a white robe, embellished with intricate silver and black threads.

Without a sound, the canine skin dropped to the ground, unveiling a man of slight stature, barely reaching 1.7 meters.

His thin black hair framed a face with sharply intense blue eyes, and a slightly upturned nose added to his air of authority. This was none other than Guillaume Bénet, the padre of Cordu Village!

At that very moment, a smile graced Guillaume Bénet's lips. He held a white human bone in his grasp, his eyes aflame with a fanatical zeal that suggested he was on the cusp of receiving a newfound boon from the forces of Inevitability, a boon that could reshape his destiny.

Guillaume Bénet's initial instinct was to flee from 50 Rue Vincent the moment he saw his decoy incapacitated by the strange spell, and his adversary vanishing through the aid of spirit world traversal.

In doing so, the decoy could fulfill its full potential of averting disaster. He would escape the looming catastrophe, embarking on a fresh start in a new location, unburdened by the present circumstances.

Yet, within an instant, his abilities as a Fate Appropriator alerted him to the anomaly in the assailant's destiny and the lingering traces of a formidable entity aligned with the Inevitability pathway.

From this revelation, he deduced that the individual responsible was Lumian Lee, the very person harboring the angel he had once tirelessly invoked!

Rapid thoughts raced through Guillaume Bénet's mind. As a devoted adherent to the might of Inevitability, he was instantly consumed by zealous fervor.

He sought to capture or eliminate Lumian Lee!

He aspired to break the seal, allowing Inevitability's angel to truly descend upon the land!

He yearned to obtain a godhood boon, breaking free from the constraints of mortality. He longed to stand as Inevitability's chosen representative, guiding the troves of foolish humanity.

Having swiftly assessed the situation on both fronts, Guillaume Bénet ordered Paulina and the others to flee, luring any potential allies of Lumian Lee away from the scene. Meanwhile, he left behind the "substitute," creating a trail of clues for Lumian Lee to follow—leading him into the basement to unveil a hidden door.

With his preparations in place, Guillaume Bénet entered the sacrificial chamber, deliberately preserving the sheepskin, cowhide, and dog skin. This would enable Lumian Lee, already versed in the Animal Creation Spell, to swiftly uncover the truth.

Simultaneously, he shook off a tuft of dog fur, inadvertently revealing his escape route. He chanted the incantation he had prearranged, dispelling the Animal Creation Spell. Drawing upon his concealed power, Guillaume Bénet unlocked the door leading to Underground Trier—a contractual power known as the Bottle of Fiction.

This ability, a source of personal avarice, enabled Guillaume Bénet to convert designated, modest-sized spaces—those harboring symbolic elements like doors and windows—into realms encapsulated within the Bottle of Fiction. He could impose simple entry conditions, permitting only those who met the prerequisites to enter, while others would be promptly returned to their original positions.

Guillaume Bénet's stipulation for entry was "one bearing the power of Inevitability."

This criterion was one he shared with Lumian Lee. Regardless of whether Lumian had embraced Inevitability's boon, as a carrier of the Inevitability angel, enmeshed in the threads of fate, he undeniably possessed Inevitability's power. This design ensured that Lumian's allies couldn't breach the Bottle of Fiction's barrier without a boon of Inevitability. It left only Lumian Lee and himself secluded within. And if they had indeed embraced Inevitability, they would both remain influenced by the great existence—transforming them into equivalent companions during pivotal moments.

Guillaume Bénet sidestepped the utilization of individuals hailing from Cordu as entry criteria into the Bottle of Fiction, as it posed a vexing challenge to confirm such origins. Such a determination demanded consultation with the spirit world, unlike the more direct assessment of one possessing a distinct power.

Furthermore, should Paulina and the others manage to elude their pursuers and return to this very spot, they could provide essential aid through the opening of the bottle.

Having meticulously orchestrated his plan, Guillaume Bénet concealed himself, poised for Lumian Lee's entry into the Bottle of Fiction.

As anticipated, upon seeing Lumian Lee, now under an altered guise yet devoid of any traces of the Inevitability angel's influence, Guillaume Bénet took swift action, invoking the Soul Assimilation Mystic Spell.

Understanding that Lumian Lee wasn't the individual's original name but had been assumed for nearly six years, recognized by all those around him, Guillaume Bénet was certain this identity held a mystic connection that could serve as the true name.

Endowed with the knowledge of Cordu as its padre, he possessed a certain insight into Lumian Lee's circumstances. With conviction in the efficacy of the Soul Assimilation Mystic Spell, he anticipated it would gravely disorient Lumian Lee.

Observing Lumian Lee's form, frozen at the threshold of the Bottle of Fiction, head bowed and body swaying with instability, Guillaume Bénet's grin expanded.

Acting without hesitation or speech, he hurled the white human bone he clutched, intending to employ a curse spell capable of rendering the target comatose indefinitely.

With this achieved and Lumian Lee under his sway, his intention was to retrieve the pre-prepared ritual sheepskin, enshroud the captive, and intone the incantation, transforming him into a voiceless, nearly powerless sheep.

At that juncture, Guillaume Bénet could lead the sheep elsewhere, endeavoring to shatter the seal and unleash the imprisoned angel.

Once successful, he would ascend to sainthood, becoming a potent human figure bestowed with godhood powers!

Smack!

As the bone landed, Guillaume Bénet surged forward, rapidly enunciating a Hermes incantation.

"Blind, d…"

Midway through the chant, the padre—having made all of Cordu village a sacrificial offering—suddenly experienced a tightening within his chest, an uncommon premonition heralded by fate.

For him, such premonitions occurred rarely. Including this instance, it was the second occurrence. The prior occasion had led him to reassess his actions upon arriving in Trier, spurring him to execute the Substitution Spell and Transfiguration, generating a substitute.

With absolute faith in Inevitability, Guillaume Bénet ceased his chant and lunged to the side.

In the next second, he heard Lumian's voice.

"Hmph!"

A nearly imperceivable white beam shot forth from Lumian's nostrils, impacting the precise spot where Guillaume Bénet had stood. The beam streaked through the air, vanishing upon contact with the uneven gray-black terrain.

Lumian's gaze lifted, his eyes extraordinarily clear, seemingly untouched by the Soul Assimilation Mystic Spell.

Concealed beneath his elongated hair, his ears were snugly filled with soft paper balls!

In anticipation of residual effects upon entering the basement, he had taken precautionary measures, blocking his ears and altering his appearance to fend off the Soul Assimilation Mystic Spell's influence.

How could I be affected if I can't even hear you call my name?

Admittedly, the paper balls couldn't wholly stifle sound. A faint shout did reach Lumian, though he failed to discern it as his name. The impact was but a mild vertigo, quickly dissipating.

Capitalizing on this opportunity, he deduced the affliction he had confronted to be the Soul Assimilation Mystic Spell. With feigned gravity, he baited his lurking adversary into revealing himself, launching a surprise counter with the Spell of Harrumph.

Yet, Lumian hadn't envisaged Guillaume Bénet as his assailant.

Unwilling to flee just yet, he clung to his resolve to confront the foe and liberate the imprisoned angel!

Such a determination heightened Lumian's intensity, a fusion of anxiety and exultation, an undercurrent of madness underscoring his elation.

Instantaneously, Guillaume Bénet vanished upon landing beside him. Ebony tendrils, contorted like serpentine forms, descended from the mine's apex, shrouding the Bottle of Fiction in an enveloping embrace, blossoming into colossal flowers as crimson as blood.

Circling the entryway, Lumian retrieved the iron-gray military alcohol flask, uncapped it, and withdrew the Decency brooch.

Swoosh! Swoosh! Swoosh! Emerald-green arrows exuding a pale pallor streaked forth from the rear of the black vine, piercing the space Lumian had just vacated.

Where these arrows connected, the rocks and earth seemed to undergo the assault of concentrated acid, manifesting glaring and exaggerated signs of corrosion.

After donning the Decency brooch, Lumian's form agilely evaded the Ghastly Green Arrows, targeting his cranium. Simultaneously, he genuflected and inclined forward, palms pressed to the gravel and dirt.

Abruptly, vermillion flames surged forth, forging a crescent-like barrier.

This fiery barricade extended in all directions, kindling the obsidian vines in its path and inciting the vivid flowers, their fierce maws agape.

An inconspicuous, saccharine aroma permeated the air, inducing a drowsy haze, an inclination toward slumber.

Guillaume Bénet, unveiling himself after launching the Ghastly Green Arrows, nimbly shifted his position. Inhaling the anesthetic gas engendered by the blazing Abyss Demon Flowers, he beheld the crimson wall poised to transmute the entire abandoned mine into an inferno.

Why would Lumian Lee ignite the Abyss Demon Flowers, knowing they induce sleep? A momentary bewilderment flashed across Guillaume Bénet.

In a flash, his insight converged with Lumian's stratagem.

Lumian aimed to cultivate an environment saturated with anesthetic gas, an environment impartial to ally or adversary alike!

In essence, this would induce slumber in Lumian Lee as well as Guillaume Bénet. Lumian's companions stood sentry outside the Bottle of Fiction. It was conceivable they would soon decipher a means to shatter the contract spell's hold!

Comprehending this, Guillaume Bénet emitted a disdainful snort, his visage adorned with a metallic sheen.

Steel Body!

This was also a contract ability he had never exhibited in front of Lumian Lee.

Temporarily morphing him into a metallic entity, it rendered Guillaume Bénet impervious to the anesthetic gas's effects!

Naturally, metamorphosing into a metallic entity would curtail his capacity to wield most of his abilities.

…

Outside the Bottle of Fiction.

Upon grasping that she and Jenna had returned to the sacrificial chamber while Lumian had mysteriously disappeared, Franca swiftly procured a mirror.

Stains of blood and black splotches marred the mirror's surface.

Puzzled, Jenna inquired, "Why are you employing Mirror Substitution?"

Wouldn't it be more sensible to make another attempt at traversing the hidden door?

With an air of solemnity, Franca explained, "This mirror carries the Mirror Substitution spell I prepared for Ciel prior to our mission. It allows me to cast a reversed curse on Ciel.

"Presently, I'll employ a milder curse to assess if I can establish a connection with him."

Should she succeed in placing a curse upon Lumian, it would imply the connection remained intact. If the bond hadn't been severed, an alternative resolution had to be pursued!

Chapter 329: Metallic Creature

Simultaneously with Franca's explanation, inky flames emanated from her right hand, melding with the mirror that belonged to Lumian's substitute.

Jenna observed with a mixture of apprehension, her breath held involuntarily.

…

Within the Bottle of Fiction.

Just as the wall of flames surged forth, kindling the Abyss Demon Flowers, a pang of agony gnawed at Lumian's heart, birthing a faint shroud of black flames upon his chest.

In response, his Spirit Body descended gradually, drawn into an abyssal darkness, a void obliterating light.

Curse? Lumian, ensconced within the cradle of crimson flames, was caught off guard.

The reasons behind this unexpected curse eluded him.

On the one hand, he had preemptively plugged his ears, blunting the impact of the Soul Assimilation Mystic Spell. On the other, Guillaume Bénet lay concealed among the dormant Abyss Demon Flowers, offering no overt indications of invoking contract abilities. Furthermore, he remained unscathed, leaving behind neither flesh nor blood. Every strand of his discarded hair had been consumed by the encroaching flames.

As the black flames emerged, the curse lingered at a subdued level, manifesting as a faint affliction that refrained from impeding his movements. Instantaneously, Lumian formulated a hypothesis.

This curse came from Franca!

Employing Mirror Substitution, she sought to reach out to him!

With renewed determination, Lumian thrust his hands in the direction of the padre's covert location.

Resounding with crackling, another barrier of crimson flames materialized, fire enveloping the descending Abyss Demon Flowers.

Leveraging this veil to obscure Guillaume Bénet's line of sight, Lumian pivoted and sprinted toward the entryway of the Bottle of Fiction.

His actions and his overt choice resonated with unmistakable clarity, conveying to Guillaume Bénet: Why should I fight you within your chosen battleground? If my comrades are barred from entry, I'll venture outside and unite with them!

Emerging from his concealment behind a cluster of Abyss Demon Flowers, Guillaume Bénet radiated a metallic gleam across his exposed skin.

Blazing tongues of fire surged toward him, yet they could only "strip away" a fraction of fabric, unable to sear his flesh.

Through the fiery veil, the Cordu padre bestowed a smile upon Lumian's indistinct figure.

Given the capability to freely traverse the Bottle of Fiction with requisite conditions fulfilled, he had ingeniously laid a trap at the entryway, awaiting Lumian's unwitting ensnarement!

Having assumed a metallic form, his utility was confined to boons involving his body, fate, and three distinct contract abilities untouched by his transformation. Among the latter was:

Shadow Burial!

A black mark on Guillaume Bénet's torso wavered, summoning pallid-white and abyssal-black arms that extended from the encroaching shadows, ensnaring Lumian, mid-sprint toward the entryway.

Lumian, with a forceful stomp, catapulted into the air, seemingly aiming to vault over the eerie appendages emerging from the shadows, seeking sanctuary at the hushed, inky exit.

Behind him, a crimson fireball materialized, poised to detonate at a moment's notice, transmuting into a vessel of obliteration.

Simultaneously, fierce fireballs ignited to his left and right, as if poised to counteract the grasp of the arms.

Guillaume Bénet's metallic visage bore a smile more discernible than before, though it remained deprived of vitality—stern and emotionless.

He anticipated Lumian's imminent leap into the Bottle of Fiction's exit.

The strange arms accompanying the Shadow Burial served as a diversionary tactic, forestalling any suspicions from arising!

It's a pity that I can't use Bone Curse in my metallic state. Otherwise, this would be a good opportunity… Guillaume Bénet hesitated to dispel his Steel Body and deal Lumian another blow.

That way, he wouldn't be able to transform into a metallic creature again anytime soon. The abandoned mine now permeated with anesthetic gas would shortly transform into an inferno. For weak humans lacking godhood, this hostile terrain was untenable. Even Alms Monks could sustain themselves only a brief interval longer.

In the throes of hesitation, Guillaume Bénet ultimately opted to persist with Shadow Burial, permitting the nightmarish arms to continue their relentless encroachment upon Lumian.

With a vigorous leap, Lumian neared the exit of the Bottle of Fiction, almost within grasp.

At that moment, the pitch-black exit—a shadowed orifice devoid of flame—suddenly writhed faintly, akin to a shadowy maw yearning for sustenance.

Undetected, a suffused aura of "shadow" had enshrouded the secret door's surface, a profundity seemingly imbued with life!

This was a trap Guillaume Bénet had meticulously laid. The mechanism lay dormant during Lumian's initial entrance, solely activating when Lumian attempted exit. This safeguard was devised to preempt Lumian from having any danger premonitions when initially entering the Bottle of Fiction, deterring him from braving its confines.

Lumian perceived the sensation of plummeting into an abyss, the final lifeline eluding his grip.

The deceptively thin veil of darkness coiled, an amalgam of endless shadows that converged into an abyssal maw, an aperture on the verge of engulfing him.

Mid-flight, Lumian extended his right palm, yet just before it made contact with the shadowy maw shrouding the hidden door, he abruptly withdrew it, mimicking a gesture of prying open a door.

In tandem, the Decency brooch nestled upon his right chest emitted a subdued golden glow.

Distortion!

Lumian distorted the action of opening the door with the concept of "unsealing this confined space!"

From the outset, his intent to depart the Bottle of Fiction was absent. Instead, he sought to find a way for his companions to infiltrate, thus furnishing reinforcement.

This enclave laden with combustible resources stood as a haven for a Pyromaniac!

Boom!

With a resounding detonation, the crimson fireball positioned to Lumian's left erupted, issuing a horizontal thrust that exacted a substantial toll. His attire lay rent, and his flesh bore charred imprints, inflicted by the fiery onslaught. Gradually nearing the shadowy vortex, the forceful explosion propelled him away from the exit of the Bottle of Fiction and beyond the enshrouded region brimming with appendages swathed in pallid-white and abyssal-black.

Resounding with a thud, Lumian tumbled, ensconcing himself behind a rampart of surging flames. This maneuver forestalled the further encroachment of the shadowy expanse, obliging the strange arms to contend with the blistering blaze.

Outside the Bottle of Fiction.

A frigid zephyr brushed against Franca and Jenna, wafting from the hidden door's interior.

Swiftly, the chill metamorphosed into a searing fervor. Behind the hidden door lay a derelict mine engulfed in a sea of crimson flames, the blazing inferno punctuated by the descent of undistorted fire dragons, their incandescence unbridled.

The remaining black vines, the crimson flowers, and the strange arms all succumbed to the fiery onslaught, pursued relentlessly by the raging conflagration.

Signaling to Jenna, Franca receded into the shadows as she drew closer to the hidden door.

Jenna understood Franca's intentions and rationally retreated into the shadows outside the hidden door, concealing herself.

She knew that it would be difficult for her to participate in the battle with her strength. Thus, she chose to bide her time, awaiting the enemy's emergence through the threshold, poised to exploit a fleeting opportunity to deliver a decisive, lethal strike.

Within the ajar Bottle of Fiction, Lumian, having concluded his somersault, propped himself up with a single hand.

Locking his gaze onto the distant Guillaume Bénet—his form akin to that of a metallic marionette—Lumian's lips curled wordlessly, yielding an eruption of crimson flames that engulfed his flesh and attire.

A familiar pang of torment reverberated across Lumian's psyche, jolting him awake from the lethargic stupor.

It's been some time! Lumian's grin was tinged with distortion as he hurtled toward the metal-encased Guillaume Bénet. His forward momentum stirred the encompassing crimson flames, elongating behind him like a shimmering, unfurled cape.

Wary of Lumian's earlier utilization of the harrumph spell, Guillaume Bénet, resembling a puppet forged from steel, evaded direct confrontation, executing artful shifts in position.

Discerning Lumian's strategy of harnessing the flames to stave off the Abyss Demon Flowers-induced anesthetic gas, Guillaume Bénet discerned this endeavor to be fleeting. At best, Lumian's fiery gambit would delay his descent into unconsciousness. Certain matters couldn't be resolved by self-harm!

Having adopted the form of a metallic entity via Steel Body, Guillaume Bénet remained impervious to the anesthetic gas's effects, even forgoing the need to draw breath. This form also minimized the conflagration's impact on him. Guillaume Bénet was convinced that Steel Body's efficacy would persist until Lumian Lee succumbed to unconsciousness.

Furthermore, his assessment revealed Lumian's substantial spirituality expenditure, coupled with Lumian's evident abstention from spirit world traversal.

This deduction led Guillaume Bénet to surmise that the harrumph spell likely bore limitations on its frequency of use.

Of course, sustained evasion was untenable. Lumian Lee's actions hinted at him using some unconventional means to open the Bottle of Fiction, suggesting his companions had likely infiltrated covertly through invisibility. Guillaume Bénet couldn't allow this duo to demonstrate the potency of their teamwork.

Nimbly maneuvering around the plummeting tendrils of flaming vines, Guillaume Bénet executed a sudden pivot, facing Lumian with unwavering intent.

His metallic countenance mirrored the flaming luminance, refracting a kaleidoscopic iridescence.

Myriads of diminutive "rainbows" coalesced, cleaving Guillaume Bénet as though he gazed upon his mirror image.

Light Incarnation!

One of the three contractual abilities accessible in his Steel Body state.

Its premise lay in leveraging light to forge a fleeting incarnation, capable of channeling an individual's capabilities.

Two metallic Guillaume Bénets surged toward Lumian simultaneously.

Thud! Thud! Thud! Each stride they undertook fostered corporeal expansion, culminating in the metamorphosis into metallic titans, which tore asunder their white robes adorned with silver-black threads.

Elevating his right hand, Lumian summoned into being a host of crimson Fire Ravens that swirled about him.

The Fire Ravens promptly surged toward the two Guillaume Bénets, demonstrating no clemency.

Given the inherent challenge of distinguishing authenticity from imitation within a short span of time, Lumian adopted a stratagem of unleashing an onslaught indiscriminately—comprising both genuine and illusory manifestations!

For truth could not be falsified, nor could falsity be genuine!

In an abrupt detonation, the Guillaume Bénet before him disintegrated.

Rumble!

Accompanied by the explosion, amid which a multitude of Fire Ravens were prematurely engulfed in combustion, a Water Cannon sculpted from dark-green liquid surged forth from the fake Guillaume Bénet's fragmented remnants.

The Water Cannon, of astonishing alacrity and proximity, penetrated Lumian's fiery shroud, impinging upon his form. As a consequence, Lumian's physique began exhibiting telltale signs of liquefaction.

Draynere Gland Poison!

One of three contractual abilities he could use as a metallic entity!

With a brittle crack, Lumian's corporeal structure fractured, metamorphosing into mirrors.

A mere ten meters from Guillaume Bénet, Franca, owing to the activation of Mirror Substitution, involuntarily escaped her state of Invisibility.

Observing her emergence, Guillaume Bénet's blue irises assumed a pallor bordering on translucence. A deft push of his right palm propagated the emergence of an expansive river of mercurial sigils encircling Franca.

Pitting himself directly against Lumian Lee proved to be a disconcerting engagement for Guillaume Bénet. His paramount and most formidable Fate Appropriator ability remained inaccessible, for its utilization would catalyze a consequential backlash from Inevitability.

Since it couldn't be used on Lumian Lee, it could be used on his companion!

Chapter 330: Forewarned is Forearmed

A Fate Appropriator harbored two primary abilities:

Firstly, the capacity to magnify a corresponding fate tributary, thereby setting in stone an imminent destiny for the target. This process could be expeditious, yet its future influence spanned a mere ten seconds. The resulting efficacy was contingent upon environmental compatibility; a more congruent backdrop augmented the probability of the event materializing in the forthcoming future.

Secondly, the ability to swap an accumulated fate for a fragment of the target's own destiny. Absent a premeditated arrangement, one had to either kill the adversary to access their fate or employ their personal fate as a substitute. Relatively more protracted in execution than magnifying an impending fate tributary, this method prohibited one from assailing the target or inducing harm mid-process.

At this moment, Guillaume Bénet, who wasn't fighting one-on-one, clearly didn't want to engage in a fate exchange. His plan was to utilize the current environment and magnify Lumian Lee's female companion's fate tributary of being affected by the Abyss Demon Flower's anesthetic gas to make it a reality.

Of course, as the woman in the black hood hadn't fallen asleep and wouldn't be paralyzed or knocked unconscious for ten seconds, the sole recourse was to expedite the process while steering it toward the most dire outcome.

In a similar vein, this elucidated one of the rationales behind Guillaume Bénet's abstention from interfering with Lumian Lee's fate tributary.

What he refrained from attempting was the exchange of the adversary's fate or the inversion of key tributaries into the principal course, lest he suffered the backlash invoked by Inevitability. He wouldn't have a problem if he only made Lumian Lee slip and fall, achieving futures that wouldn't have significant impact.

The mercurial river encircling Franca was reflected in Guillaume Bénet's lightened eyes. After some discernment, he grabbed at one of the tributaries formed by the mercury symbol that wrapped around itself.

Concurrently, Franca arched her neck, thereby unveiling her supple neck and moist vermilion lips under the hood's shadows.

Peculiarly, a palpable flutter stirred in Guillaume Bénet's chest, reverberating to his nether regions as he recollected scenes of his liaisons with courtesans along Rue de la Muraille. Yet, these recollections paled in allure compared to the figure opposite him, despite her visage remaining partially veiled.

Despite his momentary lapse, Guillaume Bénet promptly reinstated his focus.

Capitalizing upon this fleeting respite, Franca—enlightened to the general scope of a Fate Appropriator's abilities courtesy of Lumian—sparked latent black flames, engendering frost that enshrouded her form.

Opaque filaments converged, manifesting palpable encasement amid the frigid shroud, akin to a cocoon.

Unperturbed, Guillaume Bénet's lips curled into a smirk, unfazed by the unfolding situation.

If a Fate Appropriator's abilities were so easily rendered ineffectual, they wouldn't be called Fate Appropriators!

Furthermore, as long as the target's fate tributary was magnified or underwent a fate exchange, they wouldn't be able to break free even if they used a substitute.

With measured deliberation, Guillaume Bénet extended his right palm and executed a slight wrist rotation, magnifying a particular fate he had chosen.

Nonetheless, in this precise instant, he perceived the hooded lady's fate river adopting an uncanny semblance of illusory ambiguity, an etherealness so pronounced as to border on feigned fabrication.

A decoy!

Guillaume Bénet's endeavor to augment the fate tributary was abruptly thwarted. The cocoon disintegrated, frost fragmenting and black flames metamorphosing into coruscating beams of light.

Yet, the focus of the protection wasn't Franca herself, but rather, a mirror!

Capitalizing on Guillaume Bénet's momentary bewilderment, a casualty of the Demoness of Pleasure's allure and his self-imposed adverse effects, Franca seized the initiative. Employing Mirror Substitution, she ensconced herself in layers of black flames, frost, and spider silk, confounding the adversary while concealing the real lethal peril.

Thus, she extricated herself from the figurative crosshairs, evading the adversary's targeting.

Simultaneously with the failure of Guillaume Bénet's attempt to amplify the fate tributary, a figure garbed in an Assassin's attire manifested behind him, its visage partially obscured by a classic brass revolver, aimed steadfastly at the enemy's cranium before pulling the trigger.

Bang!

The iron-black round collided with the dodging Guillaume Bénet's head, emitting a distinct metallic clang.

Guillaume Bénet's head, bedecked in a metallic sheen, yielded to the impact, though its structural integrity endured, deflecting a potentially lethal strike.

Nearly in tandem, Lumian, having used Mirror Substitution to evade the effects of Draynere Gland Poison, and draped in flaming clothes, emerged nearby. Dropping to a genuflecting posture, he pressed his palms to the ground.

In response, twin crimson fire serpents surged into being, consuming the incendiary vines while spreading the flames along their trajectory, ultimately converging to form a colossal pair of fire dragons.

Both entities surged toward Guillaume Bénet. However, their purpose wasn't to ingest their quarry, but to intertwine and coalesce, giving rise to an ostentatious and brilliant conflagration-blooming flower.

As the fiery flower unfurled before him, Guillaume Bénet grappled with comprehending Lumian Lee's intentions.

With his Steel Body, his resistance to flames was steadfast for the time being, but the other party wouldn't go as far as wasting an opportunity and do nothing but perform fire magic, right?

This was Bribe!

Lumian had "gifted" Guillaume Bénet with a blazing flower—an emblem signifying incineration and obliteration. Capitalizing on the Decency brooch, he had completed a Bribe, thereby attenuating the adversary's defenses.

Although Lumian Lee's true motives remained opaque, Guillaume Bénet's intuition kindled with the conviction that this augured unfavorably.

In rapid succession, Guillaume Bénet invoked Light Incarnation anew, fragmenting into three iterations as he advanced toward Lumian. As Franca's assault faltered, she vanished anew.

Witnessing the three iterations of the metalized Guillaume Bénet rapidly engorge, Lumian conjured a new cohort of Fire Ravens and distributed them evenly amongst the trio of adversaries.

Then, turning his form and slowing his pace, he primed himself for a prospective evasion of the ensuing Water Cannon conjured from Draynere Gland Poison.

Swoosh! Swoosh! Swoosh! The crimson Fire Ravens landed precisely on the three metalized Guillaume Bénets.

Rumble, rumble, rumble!

They exploded simultaneously!

A torrent of dark-green liquid surged forth from one of Guillaume Bénet's forms—Water Cannon. Lumian, braced for the assault, deftly evaded, his gaze fixed upon the collision of aqueous impact against the rocky wall, a tremor rippling through the Bottle of Fiction.

Yet, as Lumian's evasion completed, he detected a colossal shadow enshrouding his feet. Thereupon, a medley of pallid-white and obsidian-black arms extended forth from this obscurity.

In contrast, Lumian's other choice of direction was shrouded in a dark shadow.

At Sequence 5, Light Incarnation permitted Guillaume Bénet the creation of up to three incarnations, each incarnation fake. One harbored Draynere Gland Poison, while the other pair wielded Shadow Burial, intent on ensnaring Lumian within their shade-infused grasp.

Curved, grotesque limbs ensnared Lumian's ankles, striving to haul him into the nebulous depths.

Amid this peril, a figure emerged from the inky depths—a half-naked, metallic-finished Guillaume Bénet.

Shadow Burial was a form of shadow concealment for him!

By capitalizing on three Light Incarnations—which consumed a large amount of spirituality—to veil his position, thereby detaining Lumian temporarily, Guillaume Bénet engineered his stealthy approach via the shadows, orchestrating a decisive assault.

His body suddenly expanded as he punched Lumian behind the ear.

A thunderous crack resonated as Lumian's form fragmented akin to a glass pane, fracturing into myriad minuscule fragments subsequently claimed by the pallid-white and obsidian-black arms.

Mirror Substitution!

It was precisely due to the implementation of Mirror Substitution that Franca refrained from intervening on Lumian's behalf when she saw him restrained by the strange arms extending from the shadow. Rather, she bided her time, anticipating Guillaume Bénet's advent to administer a terminal blow.

Amidst the cracking sounds, Franca's hooded, black-robed figure involuntarily appeared once more, quickly spotted by the padre.

Guillaume Bénet had been waiting for this opportunity to stop himself from being affected by the charm and turn his blue eyes light-colored again.

He saw the mercurial river of fate and began to choose the fate of being paralyzed by the burning gasses of the Abyss Demon Flowers.

Yet, an abrupt surge of peril seized Guillaume Bénet's consciousness, compelling a stark realization: interference with the adversary's fate would undoubtedly yield cataclysmic repercussions.

Impossible! Moments earlier, such consequences hadn't arisen! Yet, as he scrutinized the figure before him, Guillaume Bénet, who had been able to interfere with his target's fate normally previously to near success, saw a hooded woman hiding behind the hooded woman. The woman behind her held a palm-sized mirror that illuminated his figure.

In an instant, Guillaume Bénet understood what was going on.

The hooded woman standing in front of him, revealing the river of fate, was Lumian Lee!

After activating Mirror Substitution, he took the initiative to appear in front of his companion. Seizing the opportunity, he used a Transfiguration-like ability to change his appearance and disguise himself as his companion!

You do realize, using the same trick won't work twice? Franca, who was hiding behind Lumian, chuckled when she saw this.

Seeing Lumian under attack, she took out her teammate's Mirror Substitution and threw it in front of her. Taking advantage of the cover and the enemy's drawn attention, she aimed another mirror at Guillaume Bénet.

Without hesitation, Franca's palm was enveloped in black flames as she swiped the mirror's surface.

Curse!

Demoness's Curse!

In a simultaneous eruption, a quietly smoldering black flame ignited from within Guillaume Bénet's metallic form.

Elated that his Steel Body rendered him impervious to conflagration, inflicting only minor wounds, he soon perceived an anomalous drain on his spirit, coupled with indications of severe ethereal scorching.

In the span of an eye's flutter, the Cordu village padre emitted a tormented cry.

Instantaneously, his metallic semblance plummeted to the earth with a cacophonous clatter, reconstituting into a form unadorned by metal, starkly naked and manifestly fleshy.

At the same time, Franca, too, experienced a visceral tremor, her countenance assuming a pallid hue.

"Rebirth!"

The contract ability in question facilitated Guillaume Bénet's revival within the slayer's body!

Guillaume Bénet's spirit smiled and hastened to replace the woman holding the mirror and take control of her body.

Yet, he confronted a disconcerting reality: before him stood an enshrouded woman brandishing a mirror, baring her lower visage in a manner reminiscent of malevolent allure.

She's in front… Then whose body did I Rebirth into? A disorienting befuddlement inundated Guillaume Bénet.

Meanwhile, Lumian, ensconced within Franca's semblance, donned a knowing grin, gradually retracting his right palm from the padre's lifeless cadaver, the Decency brooch aglow with a dusky-golden luminescence.

Distortion!

How could he not guard against Guillaume Bénet's Rebirth ability when he already knew that Guillaume Bénet's mistress had chosen such an ability?

Lumian couldn't overtly commandeer Guillaume Bénet's Rebirth with his seal and corruption alone. Nevertheless, Lumian, resembling Franca with uncanny precision, had already instructed Franca to bring the Earth Blood ore.

Innately repellent to even the Montsouris ghost, the Earth Blood ore imposed an unseen force field compelling Guillaume Bénet's Spirit Body's circumvention.

Leveraging the Distortion afforded by the Decency brooch, coupled with the Earth Blood ore's obstructive efficacy and the Niese Face's transformation, Lumian orchestrated Guillaume Bénet's Rebirth within his very body!

Although Lumian's visage paled and his frame quivered slightly, a smile graced his lips as he extended his hand towards his left chest, gently declaring, "Padre, everyone is waiting for you."

Chapter 331: Spirit Channeling

As Lumian's words reverberated, an inexplicable chill settled over Guillaume Bénet, even in his Spirit Body form.

Simultaneously, a peculiar tug gripped him, causing him to involuntarily convolute and plunge towards a specific direction.

There, a colossal, semi-transparent vortex unfurled, ensconced in a wispy gray fog at its nadir. Within this haze materialized a dimly lit village, populated by spectral forms.

One of these apparitions gazed skyward, noticing Guillaume Bénet's struggle against the vortex's inexorable pull.

His pale-white face instantly lit up with excitement and fanaticism as he shouted, "Oh, my deity, my lord, you're here too?

"Quickly, join us! Hasten your approach!"

The figure belonged to Guillaume Bénet's brother, Pons Bénet.

Sensing Pons Bénet's abnormality, the figures lingering in the dim village looked up at Guillaume Bénet.

Among them, Madonna Bénet, Philippa Guillaume, and the others, who had once been Guillaume Bénet's mistresses, extended their pale-white arms to the sky and smiled blankly.

"Quickly, join us! Hasten your approach!"

Immediately after, Shepherd Pierre Berry, Lumian's comrade Guillaume Berry, Azéma Lizier, and more added their supplicating gestures.

In an instant, a peculiar, pallid forest seemingly sprouted from within the village's dim enclave, its spectral denizens directing their palms towards the padre.

Guillaume Bénet's descent escalated, his Spirit Body verging on fragmentation.

Struggling to counteract the vortex's pull, he sought to resist its sway, aiming to evade its dominion and flee Lumian's profoundly perilous vessel.

He couldn't care less about the Rebirth in the other party's body and the corresponding fate.

That was something he couldn't bear!

Lumian's grin expanded, seemingly attuned to the cacophony of terror and anguish echoing within his own body.

Indeed, possessing him via Rebirth and forcing a possession by luring others over via the Summoning Dance were completely different treatments!

The former would form a connection with his fate and, in an attempt to replace it, it would inevitably trigger the seal. Guillaume Bénet's profound corruption by Inevitability meant that the resonance of this seal's potency was inevitable.

Though Lumian remained ignorant of the precise ramifications, he intuited they would bode ill.

Perceiving Guillaume Bénet's vehement longing to extricate himself, Lumian opted to refrain from thwarting his escape, willingly relinquishing any interference.

Post-Rebirth, save for scenarios involving specific domains such as Sun, Lumian lacked the capability to forcibly expel an uncooperative Guillaume Bénet from his body. Mirror Substitution, too, proved ineffectual in such a case. However, should Guillaume Bénet yearn to depart, the course of action was rendered straightforward.

Ultimately, Guillaume Bénet—having expended a considerable amount of his spirituality—struggled to escape from Lumian's body.

Precisely then, Lumian deftly rotated his wrist, enlisting Distortion anew.

A dark-golden glimmer traversed his chest, heralding Guillaume Bénet's emergence within the palm-sized mirror clasped in Franca's grasp.

Franca's palm coalesced an unblemished frost, which she spread over the mirror's surface.

Instantaneously, Guillaume Bénet's form became ensconced within a veneer of ice, ensnared within the mirror's confines.

Concurrently, Franca summoned black flames, which enshrouded the icy enclosure.

Though the ice in itself was inadequate to bar a Spirit Body's escape from the mirror, the shrouding black flames bore that capability. Should Guillaume Bénet dare venture beyond the ice's protection, the flames awaited to engulf him.

With Guillaume Bénet's Spirit Body securely sealed, Franca glanced up at Lumian—who had removed the paper balls—and directed, "Channel his spirit after we're out. Your flames and anesthetic gas are everywhere."

With her physique and expenditure, holding on for another two or three minutes sans Mirror Substitution posed no undue challenge. Nonetheless, she sensed Lumian reaching his threshold.

Affirming Franca's directive with a nod, Lumian briskly pivoted and surged towards the Bottle of Fiction's exit.

Consequent to Guillaume Bénet's "demise," the concealed trap had naturally been lifted.

Having returned to the sacrificial hall, Lumian promptly dissipated the Niese Face, reverting his appearance from that of Franca's hooded visage and black robe.

His upper body bore the telltale markings of being charred, yet owing to his skillful management following the initial digestion of the Pyromaniac potion, his trousers remained unscathed.

This approach, evoking pain, stimulating cerebral activity, and rousing his senses, didn't necessitate subjecting his entire form to incineration—localized scorching proved sufficient.

Observing his somewhat unconventional appearance, Franca—torn between concern and amusement—chimed in with an air of teasing, "Do you have a penchant for masochism? You go through this ordeal every time you engage in combat."

Lumian directed his attention toward the mirror ablaze in Franca's grip and casually responded, "That's how Hunters are."

"I'd be deluding myself if I bought into your fabrications. I'm an Instigator, after all!" Franca had borne witness to prior Pyromaniac skirmishes.

Witnessing their conversational exchange, Jenna deduced that their adversary had been ensnared and the situation had reached its resolution. Thus, she emerged from the concealment of the shadows.

Franca graced her with a smile before turning her attention back to Lumian, relaying, "Hold on for a moment. Don't fret. Guillaume Bénet isn't entirely dead yet. Once the Rebirth effect wanes, he'll morph into a recently expired spirit, his faculties adrift. At that juncture, channeling his spirit will prove less hazardous, and we can be sure he doesn't lie."

Lumian calculated the remaining duration of the Decency brooch's efficacy and remarked, "Let's wait here."

Leveraging the mystical knowledge gleaned from the boon, he discerned that the Rebirth effect endured merely two minutes—its termination was imminent.

Abandoning their current location to embark on a quest for a more secure locale for spirit channeling would necessitate identifying another concealed setting, subjecting Lumian to an additional hour of repulsion before spirit channeling could ensue.

The optimal time frame for spirit channeling would subsequently elapse.

Moreover, Lumian harbored a reluctance to further procrastinate.

Franca nodded in understanding.

Stepping toward the altar, she set the mirror upon the pitch-black ring symbol crafted from thorns, thereby maintaining the enshrouding black flames.

This facilitated Lumian's observation.

Fixated on Guillaume Bénet's pale and ashen visage, ensnared beneath the duality of black flames and ice, Lumian smirked with brilliant satisfaction gradually etched upon his lips. He uttered, "You're truly foolish!

"If I were you, I'd evade and refrain from launching an assault post Steel Body activation, awaiting the adversary's inevitable fatigue.

"Ah, I neglected to apprise you. My spirituality has plummeted below the safety threshold, thereby making spirit world traversal or even utilization of the Spell of Harrumph impossible. I'm barely able to kindle fire, changing my face, and using the brooch. Should you have bided your time, I would've neared my limit and fainted on the spot.

"I acted rashly and reacted relatively slowly towards the end. On the one hand, I didn't want to expend more spirituality and wanted to save them for critical moments. On the other hand, Mirror Substitution consumed Franca's spirituality. On the other hand, heh heh, it was a trap for you.

"Do you remember the flaming flower? Without this 'gift' to complete Bribe, Franca's curse wouldn't have been able to kill you, a Sequence 5…"

Upon hearing the term Spell of Harrumph and recalling Lumian's actions of knocking out two fake Guillaume Bénets in a row, Franca's eyelids twitched in shock and confusion.

Jenna looked at Lumian, who kept mocking the Spirit Body in the mirror, and tugged at Franca with a measure of concern. She whispered, "Perhaps we should attempt to assuage him?"

"No need." Franca shook her head and took the initiative to distance herself from Lumian, giving him a "private" space to vent.

Jenna tersely acknowledged and followed Franca to the edge of the sacrificial hall, casting a lingering glance at the visage of pallid, pale-white and ashen hues reflected within the mirror.

Guillaume Bénet emanated a mixture of hostility, terror, and ultimately—despair.

…

Dill brothel, sixth floor.

On a distant balcony, Albus positioned himself in a discreet corner, his concealed gaze unwaveringly fixed upon Room 602.

Once Lumian and his companions had seemingly "teleported" away, Albus stepped out from his concealment, a wry smile tugging at his lips.

To think a mere Sequence 7 individual wields an artifact that enables traversal of the spirit world?

His connection with Red Boots isn't simple. Whether Gardner Martin is privy to this or remains in the dark, I wonder…

As he muttered, Albus's smile carried a hint of ambiguity and playful intrigue.

…

50 Rue Vincent, underground sacrificial hall.

Lumian's continuous taunting endured until the Rebirth effect gradually subsided, a shadow darkening Guillaume Bénet's eyes.

Meanwhile, Franca, intently calculating the elapsed time, positioned herself near the altar and erected a wall of spirituality, priming herself for the forthcoming endeavor.

With the moment at hand, she softly intoned the incantation, engaging her self-devised Magic Mirror Spirit Channeling Spell.

Yet, just as success appeared imminent, Lumian summoned the Decency brooch's Distortion once again, rerouting the inquiry of the Magic Mirror Spirit Channeling Spell toward himself.

In a final bid for success within a singular attempt, he even invoked the Niese Face, transfiguring into Franca once more.

Almost instantaneously, the mirror's surface dimmed, casting Guillaume Bénet's pale visage into a slightly blurred disposition.

With his capacity to sustain the Niese Face dissipated, Lumian reverted to his original form and shifted his focus back to Guillaume Bénet.

"Who led you to place faith in Inevitability?"

Although Franca harbored a degree of curiosity, she was mindful of the repercussions of Lumian broaching forbidden topics, thus jeopardizing her corruption. Subsequently, she parted the wall of spirituality, positioning herself at a distance from the altar.

Guillaume Bénet, in a somewhat dazed state, responded, "It was Aurore Lee!

"Upon discovering that the faith of an accursed deity was disseminating, she covertly approached me, affirming that I could harness superpowers without supplicating the bishops. Moreover, I was assured of the prospect of obtaining godhood in the future, potentially ascending to the rank of saint and thereby securing eternal life.

"At the time, I remained skeptical. Nevertheless, my curiosity compelled me to withhold judgment. Over time, however, I witnessed her burgeoning might, my reservations gradually subsiding."

After a brief lull, Lumian inquired, his blue gaze intense, "Who influenced Aurore Lee to embrace Inevitability?"

"I don't know." Guillaume Bénet's bewilderment was palpable as he shook his head.

Following a moment of contemplation, Lumian continued his line of questioning, "What profound impression did Aurore Lee leave upon you?"

Guillaume Bénet's countenance shifted, a semblance of recollection mingling with apprehension.

"S-she said that she wasn't Aurore Lee!"

Chapter 332: Sinners

She said she wasn't Aurore Lee? Lumian felt as if a bolt of lightning had struck him, his thoughts freezing in their tracks.

In fact, he could deduce that Aurore Lee wasn't his sister's real name. Someone deliberately settling in a border village wouldn't likely use their true identity. Yet, after almost six years together, he could sense that his sister embraced the name "Aurore Lee." She never spoke of her original identity or her past life in his presence. Moreover, the forged identity documents she possessed seemed increasingly genuine. When she rose to fame as a best-selling author, their authenticity was unquestionable.

Why would she suddenly say that?

And how did it tie into her inexplicable faith in the enigmatic existence known as Inevitability?

A sharp ache throbbed in Lumian's head, jolting him back to reality. Anxiously, he inquired, "Did she mention who she was?"

On the mirror-like surface, no longer shrouded in black flames and frost, Guillaume Bénet, pallid and tinged with a bluish hue, responded with a dazed expression, "She claimed to be Roche Louise Sanson."

I've never heard of such a name… Lumian furrowed his brow and probed further, "Did she mention anything else about this identity?"

Guillaume Bénet shook his head.

"Nothing more."

Lumian pressed his left hand against his temple. After a brief silence, he pressed on, "Was Roche Louise Sanson involved in the plot to sacrifice Cordu in exchange for the arrival of the Inevitability angel?"

Guillaume Bénet appeared to wrestle with himself, but ultimately yielded to the sway of the spirit channeling. His response came forth, candid and unfiltered: "No, that was my doing.

"I was driven by the desire to attain godhood swiftly, to ascend as a saint. Aurore Lee initially approved, only to oppose my plan mere hours later. She was indecisive. Eventually, I chose to conceal my intentions from her and made covert preparations. Later on, she seemed to tacitly endorse our efforts, offering aid during critical junctures. Occasionally, though, she resisted and engaged in acts of destruction, yet she'd quickly relent."

The Aurore you depict almost seems schizophrenic… Lumian found himself clinging to the image of Aurore, yet he couldn't escape the memory of the lizard-like, diaphanous elf emerging from his sister's mouth. He recalled her sporadic awakenings, her discussions on escaping their predicament.

But even in those moments of "clarity," Aurore's behavior hardly resembled normalcy. She even overlooked the option of summoning Hela's messenger for swift assistance, the most direct solution out of their ordeal.

Lumian shifted the conversation, asking, "When did Aurore begin propagating the faith of Inevitability in Cordu?"

Guillaume Bénet appeared even more muddled than before.

"My initial investigation pointed to around May or June of last year. After that, she paid me a secret visit."

Seems to be consistent with my suspicions… Something must have transpired back then to corrupt Aurore… If she was an original believer in Inevitability, she wouldn't wait five or six years before proselytizing… Lumian's expression flickered with pain, which he quickly suppressed.

"Have you ever come across diaphanous, lizard-like creatures in Cordu?"

"No," Guillaume Bénet answered truthfully.

"Do you have any knowledge of a figure known as the Sufferer in Cordu?" Lumian inquired further.

Guillaume Bénet appeared taken aback.

"I don't know. No."

Lumian's facial muscles twitched involuntarily.

"Have you observed an owl around Aurore?"

"No," Guillaume Bénet negated again.

Lumian continued to pose inquiries regarding the Cordu catastrophe, yet the answers offered were far from satisfactory. Finally, he probed, "Is there a secret organization or a heretical Church associated with Roche Louise Sanson?"

Guillaume Bénet, his pallid countenance increasingly diffused, finally nodded.

"Yes, it's called Sinners. I now hold the position of one of the Sinners' archbishops."

Sinners… The heretical Church which believes in Inevitability? Lumian's intrigue grew as he delved further.

"Who leads the Sinners, and who acts as the intermediary for you?"

"I'm uncertain of the leader's identity, but he's the sole individual among all the sinners who possesses godhood," Guillaume Bénet's hollow voice responded with an eerie timbre. "The individual responsible for my contact is Bouvard Pont-Péro."

Sole individual possessing godhood… Could it be the Sufferer lurking in my midst? Lumian's mind raced as he continued his probing.

"How can I establish contact with Bouvard Pont-Péro?"

"It's futile," Guillaume Bénet's ethereal voice replied, a hollowness to its tone. "Upon my demise, he will sense the shift in fate and preemptively erase all traces. Transfiguration is one of the abilities granted through a pact. He can become anything, but he is no longer himself."

Can take on any form, but at the cost of his own identity… Prolonged use of Transfiguration might have driven him to complete madness… Perhaps I can visit the asylum and seek out any patients with similar cognitive impairments… I must be careful with acquiring further contract abilities. If there are only three or four negative effects, that's manageable. However, if the list becomes extensive, it not only invites trouble but also provides enemies with exploitable openings… If the padre had encountered a member of the Bliss Society or a bestowed from the Mother Tree of Desire, he would undoubtedly fall victim easily… Lumian gazed at the altar mirror and posed another question, "Why did the Sinners organization send you to Quartier de la Princesse Rouge?"

Guillaume Bénet's indistinct visage lit up with zealous fervor.

"It satisfies my desires and simultaneously serves as a recruitment ground for believers, all in preparation for the upcoming grand ritual. Only by allowing our lord to tread upon this realm can sinners like us seek redemption and baptism, thus escaping our predetermined fates."

"Did the Sinners organization provide you financial support, or did you amass funds independently?" Lumian aimed to trace the origins of the money for potential leads.

Guillaume Bénet shook his head.

"It's an anonymous deposit from Aurore Lee—no, Roche Louise Sanson. The sum totals 100,000 verl d'or."

"Dammit, you swine!" Lumian cursed.

While he had foreseen this, the realization that the padre had been using Aurore's earnings to support a courtesan and sustain a lavish lifestyle for recruiting heretics ignited a seething anger within Lumian.

Suppressing his emotions, Lumian let out a scornful chuckle and stated, "Did the Sinners organization not provide you Beyonder characteristics? Have you never consumed a potion?"

Otherwise, the padre would have been even more formidable and difficult to deal with.

"Beyonder characteristics of the Seer, Monster, Apprentice, and Marauder pathways that Inevitability's bestowed are compatible with aren't easily acquired. I've been searching for them.

"Given the adverse effects those contracted creatures have on me, drinking potions from other pathways would undoubtedly lead to a loss of control on the spot."

Fortunately, my current negative effects remain minimal and feeble. If they were more potent, it could jeopardize my ability to ingest Hunter pathway potions in the future… Lumian's spirituality was dwindling, so he capitalized on the moment to pose one final inquiry.

"What are Sequences 6 to 0 of the Inevitability pathway?"

Guillaume Bénet's voice hollowed further.

"Sequence 6 is Ascetic, Sequence 5 is Fate Appropriator, Sequence 4 is Circle Inhabitant, and Sequence 3 is Sufferer. Beyond that, I am unaware."

Ascetic… It seems akin to the advancement of an Alms Monk… Why didn't Termiboros inform me? Right; as a victim, He will likely have the Ascetic boon extracted from Him in the future. It's only natural for Him to evade answering related queries. If He remained utterly impassive and too willing to provide an answer, I would have grown wary and suspected a trap… Lumian's gaze lifted slightly, his countenance involuntarily contorting.

"What abilities does an Ascetic possess?"

Guillaume Bénet's voice drifted as he responded, "An Ascetic is defined by endurance, accumulation, and eruption. After accruing one's usual strength within the body, it can be momentarily unleashed during combat, rendering the Ascetic akin to a giant. Accumulating ritualistic processes permits the simplification of certain special rituals, making them applicable in combat."

Akin to a giant… A momentary outburst… Lumian recollected the confrontation between Shepherd Pierre Berry and the investigator, Ryan, along with the metallic giant the padre had morphed into.

Had the metalized Guillaume Bénet not been overly cautious of the Spell of Harrumph and abstained from close-quarter combat, constantly maintaining a safe distance and shifting positions swiftly, thereby thwarting Franca's Psychic Piercing, by amalgamating Steel Body with Ascetic, the padre could have likely outmatched Lumian, who needed to use his spirituality judiciously.

This corroborated Lumian's rationale for disregarding the strange creatures that came with the boon's knowledge and opting to identify a contract target from the spirit world bestiary. If he hadn't, the padre would have been able to determine if the Spell of Harrumph was still at Lumian's disposal and gauging his remaining combat strength. In that scenario, his adversary's battlefield decisions would probably have starkly diverged from the ultimate outcome.

Guillaume Bénet had earlier "shared" details of the simplified ritual.

By enveloping an individual in sheepskin through ritualistic accumulation and intoning the incantation, they could be transmuted into a sheep. A cumbersome and intricate ceremony was unnecessary.

Just as Lumian was on the cusp of inquiring about the abilities of a Sufferer, an acute pang surged through his head, thwarting his continuation.

A pang of disappointment ensued, albeit one he could accept. Had Franca not devised the Magic Mirror Spirit Channeling Spell, Lumian wouldn't have been able to amass such a wealth of answers through his line of questioning.

Lumian engaged his Spirit Vision and concluded the spirit channeling. He took deep breaths as Guillaume Bénet's spirit drifted out of the mirror.

Having calmed down, Lumian suddenly extended his right palm, capturing the padre's Spirit Body.

Though his grasp couldn't control the intangible entity, crimson flames surged forth from Lumian's palm, immolating the already fragile spirit of Guillaume Bénet.

Amid the flames, which burned fiercer than the noonday sun, Lumian watched the apparition writhe instinctively, a pained visage etched upon it. A faint smile curved Lumian's lips as he proclaimed, "Praise the Sun!"

Momentarily bewildered, Guillaume Bénet's form swiftly disintegrated within the flames.

Chapter 333: Gains

Lumian's smile gradually softened as he watched the Spirit Body writhing and wailing within the flames.

This was one of the ways the padre died as he had predicted.

Certainly, when he initially ignited the Abyss Demon Flowers, transforming the derelict mine within the Bottle of Fiction into a fiery inferno, he hadn't anticipated Guillaume Bénet's direct incineration.

During that moment, he had relied on his combat instincts and seasoned experience to create an environment that favored his strengths and mitigated his most vulnerable points. The summoning of the Abyss Demon Flowers by the padre had presented an opportunity.

The anesthetic gas produced by the incineration of the Abyss Demon Flowers wasn't his intention. His aim was to battle within an infernal hell.

During that period, his remaining spirituality had been scarce. Nonetheless, a Pyromaniac's resistance to flames significantly outclassed a Fate Appropriator's. Moreover, this resistance was a physical attribute that didn't deplete his spirituality.

As the Bottle of Fiction transformed into a blazing inferno, even the very air could scorch the trachea and lungs. Lumian believed he would ultimately prevail. He could outlast Guillaume Bénet, enduring until the flames extinguished themselves due to lack of fuel.

With his grasp of the Inevitability pathway, and in the absence of unforeseen deviations for Sequence 6 Beyonders, Guillaume Bénet's constitution was merely more robust than that of an ordinary person. His strength lay in his flexibility and tolerance, rather than fire resistance.

Lumian's observations during the Cordu confrontations validated this point. Both Guillaume Bénet and Pierre Berry, individuals who had clearly progressed beyond Sequence 7, exhibited remarkable combat capabilities, albeit lacking commensurate defensive attributes.

Lumian hadn't anticipated the padre contracting the Steel Body ability. This ability possessed pros and cons. On the one hand, it thwarted Lumian's initial plan for an infernal hell. On the other hand, it curtailed the padre's own capabilities, granting Lumian an opportunity to contend more effectively and unseal the entrance to the Bottle of Fiction. This would permit his accomplice to join the fray and offer assistance. Lumian subsequently exploited Guillaume Bénet's determination to eliminate unnecessary obstructions by dealing with Franca first. He then improvised, crafting a lethal snare.

Amidst the sizzle of burning air, Guillaume Bénet's wailing Spirit Body disintegrated swiftly, gradually dissipating.

With the task accomplished, Lumian pivoted, acknowledging Franca and Jenna with a nod, signifying his completion.

In the ensuing instant, he staggered toward the altar, retrieving the skins of cow, sheep, and dog.

These items were whole, exuding a sinister aura upon closer inspection.

These constituted specialized hides, amassed through the initial half of the Animal Creation Spell ritual, harnessed by leveraging Ascetic powers for accumulation. Upon grasping the corresponding incantation and enveloping individuals and oneself with these skins, the Animal Creation Spell could be executed outright.

Although Lumian hadn't yet deciphered the predetermined incantation for animal creation or its nullification, these obstacles could be surmounted in due course. He could, for instance, detain Paulina, the padre's butler, and others to determine if they possessed such knowledge. Alternatively, he could engage a Cryptologist of the Marauder pathway to decode the incantation. He could even resort to trial and error, applying his knowledge of the Inevitability domain and his comprehension of Guillaume Bénet's persona. Last of all, he could use divination to get any clarity on success.

Thus, these two sheepskins, a single cowhide, and two dogskins held considerable value. Employed judiciously, they could unleash unparalleled effects. Guillaume Bénet had nearly beguiled Lumian previously by adopting the guise of a massive, brown-furred dog, attempting to flee Rue Vincent and sever their destined encounter. However, his fanaticism in Inevitability's boon and his greed due to his contract had overridden reason. This led him to transition from prey to hunter, setting a trap in reverse.

When Lumian's body began to sway as if he had lost his footing, Franca and Jenna lent their support, each helping him bear a share of the cow, sheep, and dog skins.

In that instant, the Bottle of Fiction quaked.

Stripped of Guillaume Bénet's reinforcement and subjected to the infernal hellfire for a duration, it eventually fractured akin to ice, its fragments plunging into the void.

The derelict cavern, encompassed by its confinement, unveiled itself to Lumian and his companions through the secret door. All the Abyss Demon Flowers had been reduced to ashes and strewn across the ground. The flames had exhausted their combustibles, and bereft of Lumian's spirituality, most had dwindled to cinders. Only select regions persisted with a crimson luminescence, which was waning steadily.

Lumian glanced at Franca and said, "I'll head back to Rue des Blouses Blanches through Underground Trier. Carry the Earth Blood ore as you make your way to the surface."

Once the Decency brooch was removed, Lumian would inevitably be scorned by those around him. Should he retrace his steps, numerous mishaps could befall him. Alternatively, if he didn't remove it, an alert would be triggered within two to three minutes, attracting the attention of nearby official Beyonders or concealed factions.

Given the potential complications involved in carrying the Earth Blood ore into the underground, coupled with the possible difficulties Jenna might encounter upon receiving it, Franca nodded, pursing her lips, and turned toward Jenna. "Follow Ciel. He's at his limit. He might not even stand a chance against a dog."

"If it's the same dog as before, I wouldn't be able to defeat it," Lumian muttered.

As the exit on the opposite side of the abandoned mine remained unobstructed, a frigid gust swept into the sacrificial hall, dispersing the anesthetic gas with the fragmentation of the Bottle of Fiction. Lumian staggered onward, arriving at the charred remains of Guillaume Bénet.

He kicked the body and turned it over, ensuring nothing was concealed within.

Lumian picked up the iron-gray military alcohol flask and advanced toward the abandoned mine's exit. There, he noticed a brown-furred dog skin that no longer bore a sinister aura.

This particular area had avoided incineration, leaving the dog skin intact. Nevertheless, the process of reconstituting the Animal Creation Spell ritual was mandatory. Only through the application of an Ascetic's ability could it regain its status as a Beyonder item.

Beyond the abandoned mine's exit, two objects were propped against the rocky wall.

One comprised a kerosene-lit lantern, while the other was a dark-green canvas backpack favored by adventurers and mercenaries.

Lumian hoisted the backpack, finding it surprisingly weighty. It was almost too heavy to lift.

Curious, Franca crouched down and unfastened the backpack. Within it lay gratifying gold bars, stacks of banknotes, and golden coins.

"Wow!" Franca exclaimed.

So much money? Lumian's initial thought was: Thank goodness, the padre didn't expend all of Aurore's accrued royalties. This was followed by a rather visceral reaction: F*cking dammit, this man is so sinister!

Evidently, Guillaume Bénet had anticipated the possibility that Paulina and the others might not escape. In such an eventuality, Lumian and his companions could deduce that the padre had chosen an alternate escape route based on the scarce funds carried by these Inevitability believers. Consequently, they would converge on the basement, inadvertently walking into a trap.

"Not too shabby, not at all," Franca remarked, grinning. "While these heretics might not drop characteristics, they do drop other spoils."

Indicating upward with her hand, she continued, "I'm heading back up. Pass me this dog skin."

She relinquished the three ritualistic hides to Jenna and returned to 50 Rue Vincent, clutching Guillaume Bénet's dog skin.

Jenna slung the dark-green canvas bag over her shoulder, gripping the five sinister hides. She observed as Lumian picked up the lantern and kindled it.

After a few strides through the dim tunnel outside the abandoned mine, Lumian promptly removed the Decency brooch and placed it in another military alcohol flask hanging from his waist, sinking it to the bottom of the liquor.

Lumian took a few more steps before suddenly shuddering. He turned around, glancing at Jenna who was trailing behind.

Jenna, clasping the cow, sheep, and dog skins while toting the canvas bag, bore a somber expression, marked by repugnance. She struggled to speak, her voice faltering, "I-I can control myself. Dammit, I won't beat you up!"

Though Lumian was skeptical, he had no choice but to continue his journey.

After seven to eight minutes, he encountered an abandoned tunnel and settled into a corner, awaiting the dissipation of the Decency brooch's adverse effects. He seized the opportunity to rest and recuperate some of his spirituality.

…

The events that transpired at 50 Rue Vincent remained unknown to anyone as Franca methodically erased all evidence and conducted an anti-divination process in the manner befitting a Demoness.

Throughout this endeavor, she combed through every room. Vigilant against potential corruption, she refrained from delving too deeply, though her explorations yielded neither valuable clues nor significant items of interest.

Ultimately, she returned to the parlor on the ground floor, rousing the unconscious impostor Guillaume Bénet.

The imposter Guillaume Bénet gazed at the cloaked figure adorned in a black robe, a brown dog skin clutched within her grasp. For a fleeting moment, he experienced a sensation akin to being trapped within a dream, unable to awaken.

Franca emitted a soft chuckle.

"As you can see, we've killed that devil."

In her eyes, the imposter Guillaume Bénet was no longer identical to the padre. He had become very unfamiliar.

Perhaps this was his true appearance.

"I-I…" The imposter Guillaume Bénet stammered in surprise and elation, "Are you here to aid me?"

"We're Demon Hunters," Franca fabricated. "What else can you tell us about this devil?"

Though her Magic Mirror Spirit Channeling Spell enabled Lumian to glean extensive information from Guillaume Bénet, its reach had limitations. It could not cover every facet. Further inquiry into relevant individuals was imperative to avert the risk of overlooking crucial leads.

The imposter Guillaume Bénet found the shrouded woman before him remarkably affable. He contemplated briefly before responding, "Other than engaging in an affair with my wife and indulging in steak and mutton chops, there's nothing particularly remarkable about that devil.

"Yes… I-it vanishes for one day each week before resurfacing without fanfare."

Disappearing once a week? Franca acknowledged this detail and pursued further inquiries.

Having exhausted the potential for extracting additional information, she smiled and subtly instigated the imposter Guillaume Bénet.

"If I were in your position, I'd hastily depart this location. Your wife is akin to a devil.

"I would relocate any valuable possessions to regions where my identity remains unknown. I'd purchase a new residence, enter a fresh marriage, and embark on a new chapter."

Guillaume Bénet's heartbeat hastened, and his resolve to stand his ground waned.

In the ensuing moment, he observed the woman before him liquefy akin to melting ice.

Chapter 334: Clues

In the abandoned tunnel, Lumian's eyes snapped open.

Unintended slumber had overtaken him, but it also served to rejuvenate his spirituality. At the very least, the pounding in his head had ebbed away, and the searing fire coursing through his veins, organs, and flesh had altogether abated.

Lumian's sight plunged into unadulterated darkness. His hands groped for the lantern that had been snuffed out, and after lighting it, he noticed Jenna. Clad in the guise of a female mercenary, she sat diagonally across from him. She reclined against the tunnel's wall, her gaze affixed to the dark-green canvas backpack and the five ritualistic hides splayed before her.

Sensing the corresponding motion, Jenna looked up at Lumian.

After scrutinizing him for a few seconds, she playfully jested, "Finally, you're no longer as annoying."

Have the negative effects of the Decency brooch been lifted? Lumian instinctively exhaled a sigh of relief.

Jenna's lips curled into a grin as she rose, hoisting the dark green canvas backpack onto her shoulder. She told Lumian, "Earlier, I entertained notions of beating you up and painting your face with dog poop while you slept. But I managed to restrain myself."

"Much appreciated," Lumian said, his gratitude tinged with sarcasm.

With the backpack slung casually over one shoulder, Jenna stooped to gather the five ritualistic hides. Her smile bore an air of leisure as she uttered, "You're welcome."

And with that, she strode toward the tunnel's exit, a smile dancing on her lips.

"Chalk it up to me treating you as a friend?"

You're mocking me again… Lumian grumbled under his breath, picking up the lantern before following suit.

…

Apartment 601, 3 Rue des Blouses Blanches.

Franca, now dressed in her usual attire—a blouse and light-colored breeches—awaited Lumian and Jenna's return.

Her eyes traveled over Lumian's scorched upper body, and a grin formed on her lips.

"Jenna didn't take the opportunity to stab you a few times? Decency's negative effects aren't as potent as I'd imagined."

Jenna interjected before Lumian could respond, "For the first half-hour, it was a real struggle. I had to hide outside the tunnel where he was resting. Every few minutes, I checked for potential threats from below ground, the ceiling, or behind the rock walls. But even then, I seriously contemplated collapsing the tunnel and burying him alive."

That's not what you said just now… Lumian couldn't help but glance at Jenna.

For a moment, he couldn't tell if the Instigator was telling the truth in the abandoned tunnel or if she was telling the truth now.

Franca chuckled and gave Jenna a thumbs-up.

"That couldn't have been easy. You maintained your vigilance, even in a semi-enclosed, deserted tunnel. You anticipated attacks from below, the cave's ceiling, and the very walls surrounding him."

Jenna's brows relaxed, and her smug smile was unmistakable.

"You're always feeding me those horror tales, remember? Like hands emerging from the earth to grab ankles, bloody heads dangling from ceilings, or figures springing from walls to embrace the protagonist."

Every night's entertainment involves retelling horror stories to Jenna? Lumian glanced at Franca, sensing that her intentions might run deeper.

"See? Those stories have their uses!" Franca beamed.

Then she turned her attention to Lumian.

"Need a doctor?"

The burns appeared quite severe.

"No need. For a Pyromaniac, it's merely a minor scrape." Lumian refrained from mentioning that he would be fully recovered by 6 a.m. the following morning. "And if things worsen, I can always seek out Rat."

His nurtured Planter hadn't risen to the ranks of a Sequence 8 Doctor yet, so his assistance was rather limited at the moment.

Observing Lumian's lack of visible discomfort, Franca's concern lessened. She picked up the dark-green canvas backpack Jenna had left on the armchair and prepared to place it on the coffee table to meticulously tally their spoils.

Casually, Lumian pushed aside cups, plates, newspapers, and magazines that cluttered the table, creating enough space.

Glancing around, he noticed the magazine's title: Women.

It was a widely read weekly among middle-class Intisien women, showcasing Trier's latest fashion trends, lifestyle advice, and beauty tips. The Loen Kingdom had its own bootleg version, Ladies Aesthetic.

Lumian raised his head with a smile, and his gaze shifted to Franca, a playful question in his eyes:"Oh, you read such magazines?"

Franca pursed her lips and puffed out her chest in response: "What's wrong with me reading Women?"

After their brief exchange, Franca unzipped the backpack and removed banknotes, coins, and gold bars.

"Roughly 60,000 verl d'or," she assessed after a moment's calculation.

In a little over two months, the padre had managed to deplete 40,000 verl d'or of Aurore's savings. And all that without acquiring Beyonder characteristics or obtaining any mystical items… The more Lumian pondered, the more vexed he grew.

It wasn't that the padre lacked options for mystical items; rather, suitable ones were proving elusive. On the one hand, his status as a heretic warranted caution, limiting his exposure. He didn't frequent many mysticism gatherings, and thus remained ignorant about numerous aspects. On the other hand, his slew of contracted creatures came with many negative repercussions. Several mystical items would be counterproductive or perilous for him. Some might even bring about abrupt, fatal consequences.

Franca pondered for a moment before addressing Lumian and Jenna, "All the gold is Ciel's share. I'll take half of the remaining assets. Jenna, you and Anthony can divide the rest. Let's decide on the distribution once Anthony returns and we see what he's managed to acquire. Does that sound fair?"

This arrangement would allocate around 30,000 verl d'or to Lumian and 15,000 to Franca.

"I'm fine with that," Jenna responded with a hint of concern. "But Anthony still hasn't come back. Dammit, could something have happened to him?"

"If it were anyone else, I might suspect trouble, but Anthony is a Psychiatrist. He's highly skilled in reading people, so falling into a trap is unlikely for him. Plus, he's an experienced information broker. His tracking abilities are on par with mine or Ciel's," Franca explained with a smile. "Most importantly, while waiting for you two, I used Magic Mirror Divination to ensure his safety. Heh, it might actually be a good sign that he's taking so long. It suggests he hasn't lost his target and might have gained something."

"Why do you have to explain so much instead of just saying you checked through divination?" Lumian quipped, finding amusement in the situation.

Franca made a tongue-clicking sound and chuckled.

"You don't get it. This is about not solely relying on divination."

She gestured toward the five ritualistic hides.

"Are those the components for the Animal Creation Spell? Can we use them?"

"At the moment, only I can utilize them," Lumian replied, shaking his head. "And I haven't obtained Guillaume Bénet's preset incantation yet."

Franca's expression showed a tinge of disappointment as she settled into her recliner.

After a few seconds, her smile returned.

"By the way, I've discreetly informed the authorities using my contacts that a wanted criminal is hiding at 50 Rue Vincent. Once Guillaume Bénet's death is confirmed, we should be eligible for a bounty of around 20,000. Should we stick to our initial plan for distributing that?"

Entrusting this task to Jenna wasn't feasible. It could raise suspicions that Lumian Lee was among the people she associated with.

Anthony Reid, the information broker, was the most suitable choice, but his absence raised concerns. Franca worried that further delays might lead the police to uncover the situation at 50 Rue Vincent before they could claim the bounty.

Once Lumian and Jenna acknowledged the plan without objections, the trio settled in to await Anthony Reid's return.

After a few minutes, the seated Lumian leaned forward, fixing his gaze on Franca and Jenna. In a measured tone, he said, "There's a matter I need your analysis on."

With Aurore's affairs, he often found himself grappling with his emotions and straying from rationality. This was why he wanted to hear perspectives from Franca and Jenna.

One of them shared a connection with Aurore, yet their bond was markedly different from Lumian's deep tie with Aurore. The other had no direct involvement, making their viewpoints invaluable in approaching the situation from diverse angles.

"Sure," both Franca and Jenna responded in unison, adopting a professional demeanor by shifting their postures.

For the first time, Lumian recounted the events in Cordu. While he omitted certain details such as the Inevitability angel and anything related to the dreamscape, he provided an overview of the catastrophe. This encompassed Aurore's unusual behavior, Louis Lund, Madame Pualis, Guillaume Bénet, and the rest.

Franca had some prior knowledge, but Jenna was largely unfamiliar with this narrative. As Lumian spoke, the underground singer of Salle de Bal Brise and apprentice actress at Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons found herself transported into a world that seemed both distant and strangely familiar.

While the notion of the Animal Creation Spell was already unnerving, they weren't prepared for concepts like "men giving birth" and "babies scaling walls like birds."

It was madness, utter madness!

Franca's primary concern, however, revolved around Aurore's transformation. She had harbored curiosity about Muggle's death in Cordu but hadn't dared to probe too deeply, fearing it might agitate Lumian.

Franca couldn't believe it when she realized the source of the problem was Aurore. This didn't match her impression of Muggle at all.

Aurore's revelation that she wasn't Aurore Lee in the presence of Guillaume Bénet caught Franca off guard. Her initial surprise morphed into a grave expression.

Soon, Lumian narrated the concluding sacrificial ritual. Aurore's sudden awakening within the altar and her act of shoving him to safety allowed him to survive.

In response to this account, Franca abruptly rose from her seat.

Baffling Lumian and Jenna with her actions, she hurried to her bedroom, returning with a stack of papers in hand.

These were Aurore's grimoires, transcribed by Lumian who harbored a suspicion that something might be awry. He had hoped Franca could offer insights.

The papers were spread across the coffee table, and Franca extracted one sheet, her expression morphing into a blend of trepidation and seriousness. She began, "I think I know what's wrong."

Lumian looked over in surprise and saw that the notebook had a copy of the Warlock spell known as Soul Summoning.

A supplementary spell designed to aid spirits in separating from the flesh or to help Astral Projections find their spirits when adrift in the spirit realm.

Having previously studied the spell structure, Lumian had discerned no problematic elements. It wasn't associated with any evil god.

However, Franca's words carried a weight that demanded attention. Lumian directed his gaze to the spell once more, focusing on the date and its origin.

"April 1, 1357, purchased from the April Fool's Gathering."

Chapter 335: Another World

Lumian withdrew his focus from the grimoire and turned his attention to Franca.

"Is there a problem with that?"

He had meticulously studied the Soul Summoning Spell on numerous occasions. If there had been a problem, he should have uncovered it sooner.

His limitation lay in his inability to learn the spell and discern its ultimate effects. However, as a Pyromaniac, he didn't possess the necessary capacity for such learnings, being incompatible with the corresponding Sequence.

Franca remained silent for a few seconds before speaking up, "What happens when the Soul Summoning Spell is used on others?"

"It enables a spirit to reunite with the body from which it was separated, providing a means to call back Astral Projections lost in the spirit world, thus offering an opportunity for reconnection with their physical forms," Lumian began, describing the spell based on Aurore's grimoire before offering a personal example for clarity. "In the previous battle, if I had been afflicted by Guillaume Bénet's Soul Assimilation Mystic Spell, resulting in severe disorientation, the Soul Summoning Spell might have roused me from unconsciousness. Naturally, the premise here is that there exist Beyonders with the ability to learn and employ this spell."

Franca disregarded Lumian's answer and inquired with gravitas, "What if one were to employ it on oneself?"

What kind of question is that? Lumian pondered for a moment and asked, "It would be ineffective. If no signs of separation between spirit and body are evident, the spell would have no impact when cast on oneself. If there's already a problem resembling such a condition, then one wouldn't be able to employ any spells at all."

"But what if, hypothetically…" Franca began before her words trailed off.

Jenna, observant and quick-witted, glanced at Franca, then at Lumian before rising from her seat and flashing a smile.

"We've been engrossed in discussion for quite a while. Aren't you both feeling hungry? How about I get some afternoon tea?"

"Sure," Lumian agreed on Franca's behalf.

He sensed that Franca was on the brink of revealing something that might be problematic if Jenna caught wind of it. This was why she stopped short in the midst of speaking.

Lumian had already contemplated introducing Jenna to Mr. Fool's faith. They were comrades now, destined for numerous joint endeavors. In such scenarios, certain secrets couldn't be concealed, and in constantly doing so, would inevitably hinder collaboration.

As for whether to share information about the Tarot Club and Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society, Lumian hadn't reached a conclusion.

After careful consideration, he determined that preaching to Jenna would be more fitting once she became a Witch. Her Sequence was still too low, and she lacked the strength to shoulder the weight of such knowledge. Too much information could make her vulnerable and inadvertently divulge secrets. However, Sequence 7 Witches of the Assassin pathway represented a qualitative transformation below the demigod tier, empowering Jenna to fend for herself.

While Lumian remained unfamiliar with the Sequence 5 of this particular pathway—its name and the Beyonder powers it encompassed—he believed that a Sequence 6 Demoness of Pleasure didn't manifest a drastic metamorphosis compared to a Witch. The latter could even alter an individual's gender, illustrating the considerable gap in their capabilities.

Franca's gaze followed Jenna's retreating figure until the sound of her gradually fading footsteps reached her ears. She settled into a cross-legged position on the recliner, emitting a soft sigh.

"It's not that Jenna couldn't know about this, but I'm concerned that it might make her fearful of me, that she'll distance herself and view me in a different way."

Lumian didn't pose the question: "Aren't you worried I might react similarly?" He retook his seat, patience etched on his features as he awaited Franca's explanation about the Soul Summoning Spell.

Franca's lips pursed, her demeanor wavering between hesitation and apprehension. After a beat, she chuckled self-mockingly.

"It's also why I sensed a dangerous aura in this matter—otherwise, I wouldn't have even thought about sharing this with you. I would have kept it to my grave. Uh, there's another reason too—your Spell of Harrumph's origins are of great significance to me. I hope you'll lay bare all the details with me, just as I'm about to disclose my secret to you.

"Sigh, we, members of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society, share one commonality—we all come from another world!"

With that, Franca slouched further into the recliner, seemingly drained of energy.

Observing a Demoness of Pleasure adopt such a posture inadvertently fueled a subtle warmth within Lumian, despite his thoughts being directed elsewhere.

"Another world?" Lumian echoed, genuine surprise coloring his voice.

This was an outcome that hadn't even crossed his mind.

Such a possibility was one that ordinary individuals would scarcely contemplate and a rarity even within the confines of fiction.

In a fleeting moment, he sensed an odd alignment with this notion.

With a conscious effort to rein in his emotions, he inquired thoughtfully, "Is this the 'home' my sister often speaks of—the place she claims she can never return to?"

Initially, Lumian had surmised that his sister's homeland had been ravaged by conflict or catastrophe, hence her assertion of being unable to return. Otherwise, armed with her Warlock strength, she could have surreptitiously revisited, even if she was being pursued by the entire world.

Subsequently, Lumian discovered Aurore's status as a Trierien, causing him to find her references to an enigmatic "home" perplexing.

Franca's expression shifted into one of complex emotions upon hearing Lumian's question. Her countenance was a blend of wistfulness, melancholy, and sorrow.

"Does she frequently speak of 'home'?" Franca inquired, her eyes briefly shuttered to mask the shifting emotions within.

Without awaiting Lumian's reply, Franca's lips pursed, and she continued, "Think of it as another planet or alternate dimension."

Lumian dipped into his memories, muttering to himself, "No wonder she enjoys climbing up to the rooftop to gaze at the cosmos…"

"The cosmos…" Franca echoed with a sigh.

A hushed ambiance enshrouded Apartment 601 as Lumian and Franca delved into their introspective reveries.

After a pause, a memory resurfaced within Lumian's mind.

Madam Magician had mentioned evil gods like the Mother Tree of Desire existing outside our world, separated by a barrier. These entities perpetually seek methods to breach that boundary.

Lumian's gaze shifted toward Franca, and he voiced his thoughts, "Could it be that all of you are spawn of an evil god released into this world?"

"Pfft!" Franca immediately shook off her contemplative state. "Do we look anything like that to you?"

"No," Lumian responded after a brief pondering, "You're far too weak for the efforts of the evil gods to be expended in sending you here. They could have instead focused on sending more of Their saints. Or perhaps They are pinning Their hopes on your potential growth?"

After all, being weak had its own advantages. Infiltration through the barrier would be less likely to be detected.

Amused and slightly annoyed, Franca was tempted to refute his words, but tangible evidence eluded her grasp, leaving her with little recourse.

"In any case, I've come to believe in Mr. Fool. Not one member of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society whom I've encountered shares faith in an evil god."

"Even if they did, they might not reveal it to you…" Lumian muttered.

Franca ignored his comment and continued, "I also remain uncertain about the why behind our transmigration. I've been seeking an answer for quite some time. What I do know is that we arrived in this world as spirits and found ourselves reborn within other individuals' bodies. It's comparable to Guillaume Bénet's process of Rebirth."

Drawing on this analogy, Lumian effortlessly comprehended the situation of Franca and her companions in the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society.

"In other words, you inhabit the bodies of other people?"

"Yes." Franca cast a sidelong glance at Lumian, remarking, "Are you disheartened to learn that the sister you hold dear is essentially a wandering spirit occupying another's body?"

"Why would I be disheartened?" Lumian responded casually. "Aurore Lee, the person who took me in and shared my life in Cordu for nearly six years, is my sister. I care not for the past of that body or its history."

Franca seemed to seek Lumian's perspective on her own behalf, "Don't you find this situation morally dubious? Do you not consider your sister and me as thieves who appropriate the corpses and lives of others? Does this not present you with moral dilemmas or conflicts?"

"I have no morals," Lumian replied calmly.

Expanding upon his statement, he added, "I show kindness to those who are kind to me."

Franca's mouth slightly agape, she struggled to find an immediate rejoinder.

Lumian glanced at her and said, "That person is already deceased. It's a pragmatic use of available resources. If guilt weighs on you, treat her—no, his family well. Perhaps even fulfill some of his unfulfilled desires."

"True." Franca pressed her lips together, nodding in agreement.

Steering the conversation back to its initial trajectory, she inquired, "What might occur if individuals like us were to employ the Soul Summoning Spell on ourselves?"

"Could it summon a departed spirit? And if there's an underlying issue with the spirit itself…" Lumian's train of thought expanded abruptly.

Simultaneously, he recalled a line of inquiry introduced by Madame Hela, the vice president of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society.

"Muggle's parents and other relatives likely remain alive in this world. For some reason, she distanced herself from them and refrains from returning to Trier. It's unclear whether there's something amiss with them or if they've come into contact with heretics…"

Did Madame Hela already harbor suspicions? Lumian's brows furrowed as he whispered,

"Could Roche Louise Sanson be the original boyd's spirit? Is she and some of her family members associated with Inevitability, perhaps even linked to the Sinners organization?"

"Continuing our investigation in that direction is indeed a possibility," Franca admitted after a moment's contemplation. "Two other questions arise. Why did Muggle resort to the Soul Summoning Spell for herself? Did the April Fool's member who sold her the spell foresee this outcome?"

Franca had chosen to share the secret of their transmigration with Lumian, sensing that something might be awry within the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society and discerning an impending threat.

Lumian offered a subdued nod, his expression void of emotion. A subtle smile played upon his lips as he ventured, "You mentioned that April Fool's Day was formed by members of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society who are disheartened by the future and seek only joy. Could it be that the individual who sold Aurore the Soul Summoning Spell hoped to experience such amusement?"

Franca fell into a brief contemplative silence before replying, "I don't know. I'll take charge of locating the April Fool's member and delve into their motivations."

Lumian offered a curt acknowledgment. "I'll follow the trail of Roche Louise Sanson."

With the conversation surrounding the Soul Summoning Spell concluded, an interim quiet settled within the living room of Apartment 601.

After a pause, Franca exhaled softly and told Lumian, "You can now tell me about the Spell of Harrumph."

Chapter 336: Armored Shadow's Origins

Lumian shifted his focus away from thoughts of Roche Louise Sanson, the Soul Summoning Spell, and April Fool's. He began recounting the tale from the very beginning, all at the behest of Franca.

"In the wake of the Cordu disaster, I found myself tainted by the corruption of the evil god, Inevitability. Fortunately, the protection granted to me by Mr. Fool allowed me to retain my sanity, preventing me from transforming into a monster.

"This corruption, a curse and yet a blessing, is now being extracted in stages, as per the instructions of Madam Magician. The aim is to channel this corruption into my own power, finding equilibrium with the corresponding Sequence Beyonder characteristic."

Franca was enlightened.

"So, what you were referring to as a 'special contract' is essentially the power of a Contractee? No wonder you mentioned it's impossible for me to learn it."

Since Lumian didn't know the powers of a Sequence 6 of the Inevitability pathway, she deduced his current state as a dual Sequence 7 Pyromaniac and Contractee.

Lumian nodded.

"That's why Guillaume Bénet doesn't dare to meddle with my fate recklessly. The degree of corruption within me is rather substantial."

A sudden revelation crossed Franca's mind. "To require Mr. Fool's safeguard, it means there must be godhood involved. Could there be a chance for me to receive similar boons?"

Do you want to give everything a shot? Lumian clicked his tongue and asked, "Are you prepared to seek out the Great Mother, engaging in daily cycles of pregnancy, childbirth, and breastfeeding? Alternatively, do you wish to put faith in the Mother Tree of Desire and drag stray dogs to bed?"

"Hiss…" Franca gasped and said, "I was merely musing. Engaging in the risky business of following an evil god is out of the question for me. The immediacy of gaining Mr. Fool's protection by merely brushing against the power of an evil god, much like you, is a rarity indeed."

"This isn't a mere brush against power." To dispel Franca's unrealistic thoughts, Lumian divulged a little more. "The power of Inevitability is sealed within me. In essence, I beseech Mr. Fool and the corruption within me, for a boon instead of the entity known as Inevitability. This approach is pivotal for ensuring my very survival. Otherwise, I risk becoming unrecognizable or just dying abruptly."

Franca instinctively exhaled and said, "Just tell me about the Spell of Harrumph."

Lumian restructured his narrative, stating, "To prevent any indirect influences from Inevitability, I gave up the strange creatures that accompanied the knowledge bestowed by the boon. Instead, I obtained a wealth of information about creatures from the spirit world through Madam Magician. You know the rest.

"The Spell of Harrumph originates from a creature of the spirit world that I summoned. Initially, I aimed to summon the Shadow of Shriek. However, whether due to my invocation being witnessed by Mr. Fool or my summoning incantation lacking precision, I can't say for certain, but the entity I summoned greatly diverged from the description of the Shadow of Shriek…"

Lumian delineated the relevant summoning incantation, the concept driving its formulation, the Armored Shadow's visual attributes, and its array of capabilities, all in meticulous detail. He even used his barely-passable drawing skills to illustrate a rudimentary schematic.

Fish Scale Armor… Spell of Harrumph… Night Parade of Ten Thousand Demons… Soul Devouring Scream… Franca softly uttered these names to herself while gazing at the sketch on the coffee table, her gaze seemingly distant.

Lumian probed, "Is there an issue?"

Were Aurore present, would she also react in a similar fashion?

Franca snapped back to the present, her expression a blend of solemnity and exhilaration.

"That Armored Shadow might very well be from our world!"

"The world that you guys come from?" Lumian hadn't expected such an answer.

Yet, it made sense. The armor's design and the ability names bore a distinctive uniqueness, setting them apart from the present world.

Franca confirmed tersely.

"There are many countries in our world, and the culture and language of each country are different. The Armored Shadow is very similar to some entity in the myths and legends of the country your sister and I hail from."

"Are you from the same country as Aurore?" Lumian was most concerned about this.

He paused a beat before continuing, "Did Mr. Fool's might, combined with my imprecise incantation, summon the Armored Shadow from your world? Or did he transmigrate long ago, much like you, eventually transforming into a spirit world shadow after his demise?"

Franca said excitedly, "If it's the former, it could signify a bridge between our two worlds. This implies the potential for our return! If it's the latter, the question arises: how did he use the capabilities of our original world? Did he bring these skills along, or did he acquire them at a later time?"

Resolving these mysteries would inch her closer to the truth of transmigration, potentially paving the path back home!

Franca rose from her seat, her eyes gleaming with intrigue as she faced Lumian.

"Can you summon the Armored Shadow? I'm keen to witness it firsthand."

"I have a pact with him. The need to invoke Mr. Fool's intervention is eliminated for precise summoning," Lumian observed Franca's evident enthusiasm, as though she was readying to assist in setting up the altar. Steering the conversation, he added, "Nonetheless, I perceive him to be immensely dangerous. While under Mr. Fool's aegis, the danger is mitigated. However, if that protection wanes, we could well find ourselves killed by the shadow. Yet, should we remain sheltered by Mr. Fool, direct communication remains an impossibility, precluding spirit channeling. We can solely execute the summoning rite."

Franca frowned in disappointment.

"What's our course of action then?"

Lumian pondered for a moment and said, "Wait till I gather 100,000 verl d'or worth of gold and fulfill the contract.

"By doing so, the pact's power shall act as our shield, enabling us to figure out why the Armored Shadow demands such a substantial sum."

After a thoughtful pause that spanned nearly a minute, Franca finally exhaled.

"That's all we can do for now."

Initially, her intention had been to promptly corroborate the situation concerning the Armored Shadow and extract pertinent insights from it. Subsequently, she planned to inform the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society, pooling their collective effort to unearth viable solutions. However, for the time being, she had no choice but to defer these actions.

After a period of immersion in the summoning incantation, it became evident that Franca's success rate in summoning was rather low, presumably due to an imprecise methodology. While it was possible that a Shadow of Shriek could be summoned, Lumian surmised that by omitting a particular descriptive line and using "Lumian Lee's contracted creature," the target could be pinpointed more precisely.

After a while, Jenna returned with a spread of coffee, treats, and meatloaf. The ravenous appetites that had ensued from their prior battle now found their solace in afternoon tea.

As evening approached, Anthony Reid, masquerading as a clerk, made his return to Apartment 601 at 3 Rue des Blouses Blanches.

"How did it go?" Lumian's concern was evident, unabashedly displayed.

With his weathered top hat set aside, Anthony nodded slightly.

"I trailed the lady, her butler, valet, maid, and carriage driver to 20 Rue de la Terrasse, within the library district.

"It appears to be an alternate residence of sorts, akin to a safe house."

Franca turned her gaze towards Lumian, inquiring, "Should we maintain surveillance?"

Lumian ruminated for a beat and then grinned.

"No need. Periodic checks to ensure they haven't left will suffice."

"Why?" Jenna had expected Ciel to rush to deal with them to gather more information.

Lumian's smile was radiant.

"Behind them stands an organization known as the Sinners. Their point of contact is likely aware of Guillaume Bénet's demise, prompting them to disengage and erase any traces, making investigation thorny.

"Yet, if the Sinners find that they had managed to evade our pursuit and that there's no surveillance, what might come to pass?

"Perhaps a connection will be reestablished!

"Only authentic non-surveillance can convince the Sinners that the issue has faded. They could then become active anew, crawling out from their rat's nest!"

Dammit… Jenna cursed silently.

Ciel is so sinister!

Anthony, having garnered significant intel, claimed two-thirds of the final 15,000 verl d'or, leaving Jenna with a share of 5,000.

As banknotes were deftly stowed away within assorted pockets, Anthony Reid turned his attention to Lumian.

"I'm eager to delve into the secrets surrounding Hugues Artois and the truth behind his treachery. I hope to begin the investigation soon."

This was the primary reason for his involvement in the operation.

"Very well." Lumian had already discussed this matter with Jenna and Franca.

Jenna was set to glean relevant details from the Purifiers.

As Franca was highly excited about the Armored Shadow matter, she took the initiative to suggest, "I have acquaintances from Loen. I'll see if I can obtain a battle record from the Loen military. It might shed new light on the situation."

"That's a good idea." Anthony Reid's eyes lit up.

The notion of soliciting the truth directly from the attacker had not previously crossed his mind.

…

On Rue Anarchie's forever-bustling nights, Lumian, relinquishing the task of divining the incantations to Franca, walked towards Auberge du Coq Doré. There, his intent was to summon the messenger of Madam Magician, intending to relay matters regarding Guillaume Bénet, the Sinners organization, and the Armored Shadow. Concurrently, he hoped she could relay to Madam Justice and Madam Susie his readiness for their final therapy session.

Under the cool embrace of the night breeze, Lumian's thoughts unfurled languidly.

After learning from Franca about the shared trait among members of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society, Lumian's impression of Aurore crystallized.

Of course, the vagueness was something he didn't understand at first, but he deemed it of little consequence. Investigations were unwarranted.

It's no wonder that Aurore severed her familial ties to reside in Cordu, a frontier village. It's no wonder that she harbors a disinclination towards Trier. It's no wonder she always says strange words and likes to explain to me what they mean. It's no wonder her novels were different from the contemporary ones. It's no wonder she likes to say 'a certain philosopher from home once said' only to substitute it with 'Emperor Roselle once said'… Lumian ruminated in a wordless, contemplative cadence, a sensation of calm washing over him, as if he wasn't strolling on Rue Anarchie but Cordu.

It was a place he could never return to.

Simultaneously, Lumian gained an understanding of the symbolic elements in the dream.

Aurore's acquisition of the land previously occupied by a deceased Warlock—could this embody her possession of Roche Louise Sanson's body?

Consequently, might the legendary Warlock, Roche Louise Sanson, symbolize the original adherents of Inevitability?

Mr. Poet failed to interpret the dual symbolic meanings because he lacked crucial information previously. He had solely indicated to Lumian that they likely bore their own significance.

As his thoughts raced, Lumian returned to Room 207 and saw a simple folded letter on the table.

Letter? This doesn't seem like Madam Magician's… Lumian walked over, alarmed and suspicious. He picked up the letter and unfolded it.

Two lines of elegant Intisian script graced the parchment:

"I have arrived in Trier.

"Hela."

Chapter 337: Magician's Speculation

Madame Hela has arrived in Trier? Lumian held the letter with a countenance etched in complexity.

In essence, nothing seemed awry about this development. After all, the vice president of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society, codenamed Hela, had alluded to her impending visit to Trier beforehand. However, Lumian's introduction to Roche Louise Sanson had occurred merely that afternoon, sparking suspicions of Aurore's original body harboring beliefs in Inevitability and hinting at a potential anomaly within the April Fool's team. Strikingly, this very evening saw the arrival of this woman in Trier, soliciting a meeting.

She had advised Lumian to keep a vigilant watch over Muggle's familial roots, surmising it to be a promising avenue of investigation.

Sheer coincidence, or is there another reason? Lumian pondered briefly before easing into his seat. Beneath the carbide lamp's glow, he set pen to paper, commencing correspondence with Madam Magician.

In succinct prose, he relayed the day's occurrences, his discourse with Franca, and the conundrum of the Armored Shadow. While he withheld no mention of Hela's arrival, he refrained from disclosing the fact that the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society's members hailed from an alternate world.

Approximately half an hour later, Lumian received a response from Magician:

"Giving up on the creature accompanying the boon and autonomously choosing a contract partner from the spirit world was a prudent choice. Your transition into an Inevitability Hunter, with the bestowed of the Inevitability pathway as your objective, proves that my subtle guidance bore fruit after all."

At this point, Lumian was a little puzzled.

When had Madam Magician ever hinted at forgoing the strange creatures that came with the boon?

Suddenly, a realization surged forth.

Before praying for a Contractee boon, unaware that the mystical knowledge it brought would encompass contract targets, Madam Magician had offered him information on creatures from the spirit world for his consideration.

It was indeed a hint, but did it have to be so subtle? Lumian mused that those skilled in divination or enamored with astromancy seemed averse to straightforward elucidation. Instead, they favored dropping crumbs of insight or weaving riddles imperceptible to others.

After figuring this out, Lumian lowered his head and resumed poring over Madam Magician's response.

"Sinners, a secret organization that venerates Inevitability, has been around for more than six years. Its origins can be traced back to the closing stages of the Loen Kingdom, the Feysac Empire, and the Intis Republic's war. Roche Louise Sanson, the name you mentioned, might have been an adherent of Inevitability, though perhaps not granted its corresponding boons. In sum, that war provided evil gods more crevices for invading our world.

"You've likely discerned the close connection between Roche Louise Sanson and your sister Aurore. To a certain extent, they're one, yet not wholly distinct personas. Much like the Rebirth ability, your sister carried a prior background, resurrecting within the departed body of Roche Louise

Sanson. According to the normative progression, your sister should've taken such a path:

"Integration of Roche's memories and sentiments→internal conflict→a prelude to dissociative identity disorder→self-harmony→embracing a fresh existence.

"If self-reconciliation fell short, engaging a genuine Psychiatrist was requisite.

"Judging by your sister's behavior during the first five years, even if her self-harmony remained incomplete, she fared reasonably well. Likely, her disquiet was manageable. Yet, she found Roche's association with an evil god unacceptable. This unresolved matter provided an opening for the Soul Summoning Spell.

"Just as you're puzzled, why would she want to use the Soul Summoning Spell on herself? It's a crucial question…

"I suspect that Sinners is not only the secret organization's name, but also a Sequence 2 or Sequence 1 of the Inevitability pathway.

"The entity known as Inevitability does have authority over the past, present, and future. You glimpsed this in your dream, did you not? Sinners of the past and Sufferers of the present, do they not harmonize splendidly? But what befits the future?"

Sinners of the past, Sufferers of the present… I wonder if Termiboros signifies the past or the future… Yes, Madam Magician's guess is similar to Franca's, but she doesn't seem to agree that it's purely the resurgence of a wraith. It rather appears a fusion of dissociative identity and lingering spirit… Lumian meticulously pondered the message's depictions, wary of omitting any hints.

He was relatively calm now. Be it the real Roche Louise Sanson's revival or Aurore's dissociative identity and the vestige of spirit unveiled through the Soul Summoning Spell, he could embrace either without much hardship.

One was an evil person doing evil deeds, and the other was his sister being sick—what was so unacceptable?

Lumian released a deliberate, slow breath, shifting his gaze towards the letter behind.

"The Armored Shadow problem is very complicated. Neither you nor the Two of Cups should be privy to the specifics at this juncture. In fact, prior to your summoning of such a shadow, I'd only heard of analogous entities from Mr. Hanged Man. He's come across them only three or four times, one instance even within a dream.

"In the future, as you summon the Armored Shadow again and fulfill your commitment, remember to write to me and inform me of any noted changes."

Mr. Hanged Man… The holder of the Hanged Man card in the Tarot Club? Responsible for addressing the problem with the other world? Lumian's mind engaged earnestly, realizing Madam Magician's implicit message: This entails a matter of high caliber. Details are beyond your grasp for now, but you can investigate and follow leads within your capabilities.

This implies the Tarot Club's vested interest in the world represented by the Armored Shadow… Lumian tacitly nodded, his focus returning to the remnants of the letter.

"I'll notify you when the timing for the final psychiatric treatment is confirmed…

"Your mystical item should be ready within the upcoming week…

"Meet Hela. No glaring concerns on my end. You might even hint that Aurore's anomaly might have stemmed from the sale of the Soul Summoning Spell by an April Fool's member, gauging her reaction. As for telling her about the Armored Shadow, it's up to you and the Two of Cups."

Lumian lightly brushed his fingertips, causing the crimson flames to set the letter alight.

After completing this task, he composed a response to Hela.

"Honorable Madame Hela, if it suits you, let's meet tomorrow at 10 a.m. at Quartier de l'Observatoire's Little Cow Café on Rue Ancienne."

Lumian had initially planned to choose a meeting spot in the market district he knew well. But the risk of the Iron and Blood Cross Order spotting him with a stranger was too high.

His second option was to pick a café or beer house near a cathedral. However, he felt that this might come off as overly cautious. It would seem as if he could seek refuge in the cathedral if anything went awry. But the truth was, he didn't dare to hide there.

In the end, he settled on Rue Ancienne, the street where Salle de Bal Unique was situated.

When the time came, if there was something amiss with Hela, he would draw the danger to the dance hall that set his nerves on edge. He wanted to see if he could manipulate the troublemakers into turning against each other.

After receiving Hela's response and confirming the time and place, Lumian returned to Rue des Blouses Blanches with the Earth Blood ore. He knocked on Franca and Jenna's door once more.

Franca was still dressed in her usual attire, not having changed into her nightwear. She looked at Lumian with a puzzled expression and asked, "Why are you here again?"

Instead of answering, Lumian inquired, "Where's Jenna?"

"Why do you need to know? She received a payment from you and left to visit her brother," Franca replied, sensing that Lumian had serious matters to discuss.

Only then did Lumian bring up his meeting with Hela the next day. Finally, he posed the question, "Should I mention Armored Shadow?"

"Not yet. We'll wait until we have a clearer picture," Franca said after careful consideration. "For now, don't mention me. Act as if we've never met."

A chuckle escaped Lumian's lips. "You're suspicious of everyone."

"It's better to be cautious," Franca sighed. "The Soul Summoning Spell has made me excessively vigilant."

Once the details were confirmed, Lumian glanced at Franca. "Are you heading out?"

"Yes, I'm going to Rue des Fontaines to find Gardner," Franca replied openly, a mischievous grin on her face. "I'm going to introduce him to some real pleasure."

Lumian was momentarily speechless.

Franca let out a soft laugh.

"I don't have much of a choice. Since neither you nor Jenna are helping me, I need to find someone else to share in the pleasure."

Without waiting for Lumian's response, she added with a smile, "I'll also tell Gardner that I took part in your operation against your enemy at Jenna's request, and that I received a substantial share of the spoils."

Lumian was surprised. "I thought you'd keep it a secret from him."

Franca chuckled and explained, "That guy is actually a very suspicious person. In most cases, telling him the truth works better than keeping things from him."

As Lumian nodded in agreement, Franca recalled something.

"The ritualistic incantations have been divined. The dispelling incantation is 'His Grace,' and the usage incantations are 'Cow,' 'Sheep,' and 'Dog.' It depends on the type of hide used. Everything's in Hermes."

With that, the Demoness waved her hand and left with a joyful demeanor.

The dispelling incantation is 'His Grace'… The padre sure has a taste for power… Lumian entered Apartment 601, grabbed the five ritualistic hides, and made his way to his safe house.

Of course, he didn't forget to lock the door for Franca.

…

The following morning, on Rue Ancienne, Quartier de l'Observatoire.

Lumian walked among the vintage buildings, realizing that Salle de Bal Unique and the Alone bar remained closed at this hour.

Ding ding ding. A postman pedaled by in a blue floral coat.

Lumian diverted his gaze from the firmly shut door of Salle de Bal Unique and continued his stroll, heading towards the café named Little Cow.

Chapter 338: Hela

Little Cow Café served the working-class folks of the nearby streets, offering them affordable breakfast and lunch options. Even amidst the bustling night market, patrons could enjoy a hearty and satisfying meal for just 1 verl d'or. Many individuals with modest incomes, such as motel attendants, restaurant handymen, and cleaning staff earning between 60 to 80 verl d'or per month, frequented the café either alone or with their families every couple of weeks to treat themselves.

When Lumian finally arrived, the bustling breakfast rush had subsided. The café had only a handful of customers, and the staff seemed somewhat fatigued, lacking any enthusiasm.

After placing an order for a cup of Macael coffee brewed from ground coffee beans, Lumian settled into the designated spot, patiently awaiting Hela's arrival.

As the cuckoo wall clock in the café struck the hour, a woman pushed open the door and stepped inside.

Clad in an intriguing black dress, she emitted an enigmatic allure, reminiscent of the attire one might expect from a widow.

Upon spotting the woman approaching, Lumian straightened up and scrutinized her intently.

Her skin possessed an unnaturally pale complexion, as though she had been shielded from sunlight for an extended period. Light golden hair cascaded naturally over her shoulders, soft yet lacking in luster. Her eyes seemed to absorb all available light, rendering them dark and impervious to revealing their true color. Though her facial features were rather attractive, they didn't leave a distinct impression on Lumian. It was almost as though her cold demeanor had cast a shadow, preventing him from forming a complete assessment.

Her icy demeanor didn't merely create distance; it seemed to emanate from within her, causing the ambient temperature to dip slightly.

Before Lumian could discern more details, the woman seated herself across from him and inquired in a chilly tone, "Muggle's brother?"

Although Lumian had already surmised that this was Madame Hela, her directness caught him slightly off guard.

He hadn't expected her to appear without any attempt at disguise, seemingly unconcerned about potential betrayal.

Lumian didn't use the Niese Face or the Mystery Prying Glasses, but he usually employed basic disguises. Relying on his distinctive golden-black hair and simple makeup, he maintained enough divergence from the Lumian Lee depicted in the wanted posters.

Perhaps this is a form of disguise that I can't detect… Lumian offered a polite smile and nodded. "Madame Hela?"

The lady nodded slightly, acknowledging her identity.

"May I offer you something to drink?" Lumian asked politely.

Hela didn't stand on ceremony.

"A glass of absinthe, and a triple espresso shot."

Drinking liquor at 10 a.m., quite the match for my habits… And she even goes for a triple shot of Reem espresso… Did she have a sleepless night? Or perhaps a night of drinking, seeking absinthe to clear her senses? Lumian lifted his right hand and snapped his fingers, signaling the waiter.

Once the light-green absinthe and the strong Reem espresso arrived in front of Hela, Lumian surveyed his surroundings to ensure a secure environment for their conversation.

Gulp… Hela downed half the glass of absinthe in one swift motion, her pale face gradually regaining some color.

Setting the glass down, she turned a ring on her right middle finger using her left thumb and index finger.

The ring possessed an elegant simplicity, a black diamond with numerous facets set into a base of pure silver.

As Hela rotated the ring gently, Lumian experienced a subtle shift in the surroundings, as if the ambient light had dimmed.

"No one can eavesdrop on us now." Hela's voice retained its chilly demeanor.

Impressive… This mastery goes beyond Franca's abilities. Truly befitting of a member of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society who has ventured farthest along the paths of the divine… Lumian maintained his gaze on Hela's black eyes that possessed a light-swallowing intensity. He proceeded with calm composure.

"I've made some new discoveries recently."

Hela remained silent, her gaze fixed on Lumian, awaiting further disclosure.

"I've caught Guillaume Bénet." Lumian conveyed this without an air of boastfulness; it was akin to a bartender at Salle de Bal Brise mentioning the concoction of a new cocktail.

Hela's response was a nod, displaying scant interest in the specifics of Guillaume Bénet's capture.

Commencing with Guillaume Bénet, Lumian recounted the transformations of Muggle—Aurore—detailing the peculiarities that arose, including the appearance of the lizard-like elf and the name Roche Louise Sanson.

In conclusion, he presented a stack of papers.

"This is the grimoire my sister penned three months prior to the spread of Inevitability's faith in Cordu. Please review it and ascertain any irregularities."

Throughout the narrative, Hela remained an attentive listener. Yet, her emotional fluctuations and facial expressions remained limited. Only when Lumian mentioned the second appearance of the lizard-like elf and uttered the name "Roche Louise Sanson," did she exhibit a slight frown.

Hela, who had maintained silence, swiftly perused the grimoire, her pace almost supernatural, as though she could glean mystical insights from its pages with each flip, detecting any anomalies.

After a span of five to six minutes, she extracted a page from her notebook.

It bore the Soul Summoning Spell that Aurore had documented.

Only members of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society and those sharing common experiences would detect the issue at a glance… Lumian found himself stirred by a sudden wave of emotion.

Hela raised the absinthe once more, finishing the rest of the dreamy green liquid in a single gulp.

After finishing it, she turned her gaze to Lumian and spoke, "What are your thoughts on the matter of the lizard-like elf?"

"I've heard rumors that Heaven has banished a group of elves in recent times. Among them are some who bear resemblance to diaphanous lizards," Lumian responded. He refrained from delving into the symbolic interpretations that Mr. Poet had provided, instead opting to present the account provided by the official investigator, Ryan.

Hela's complexion took on a slightly rosier hue, the chill in her demeanor diminishing.

"I possess certain insights into these elves and have conducted a degree of study on them.

"They were not banished from Heaven. It's plausible that they originated from an alternate realm. Aligning certain folklore and events in the alternate realm, coupled with the passage of time, may have allowed elements from the alternate realm to permeate the spirit world and enter our world.

"At present, this is a hypothesis I personally have. I haven't substantiated it as yet. I simply wish to convey that I've studied the phenomenon of these elves in recent years and have personally encountered the diaphanous lizard-like elves you described. However, they differ from the diaphanous lizard-like beings you've mentioned."

"Not true elves?" Lumian expressed no surprise at this assertion. After all, Ryan and his colleagues had been theorizing, and Mr. Poet's perspective leaned towards an affiliation with a different faction.

Hela chose not to elaborate, confirming Lumian's suspicion with a nod.

"I will continue to search for similar motifs in elf legends from various sources."

Having said that, she spun the grimoire containing the Soul Summoning Spell and pushed it toward Lumian.

"This is likely where your sister's problem originates."

Lumian's eyes conveyed his anticipation for an explanation.

He was genuinely curious to hear Hela's perspective. However, he didn't expect her to reveal the most closely guarded secret of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society, as Franca had done.

Hela's tone remained as cold as ice as she began, "I've had numerous interactions with your sister and have discerned that she had been grappling with psychological turmoil rooted in her original family.

"Something is amiss with her biological family. Consequently, your sister had no recourse but to distance herself from them and seek refuge in the border village. It mirrors your gradual realization of Cordu's growing abnormality, prompting your desire to escape. That's why I directed your attention to this avenue of investigation.

"And should one employ the Soul Summoning Spell detailed in this notebook upon themselves, it's highly likely that your sister's psychological distress will escalate into a mental ailment, potentially leading to true dissociation of her personality."

Lumian pondered for a moment before inquiring, "Are you suggesting that Roche Louise Sanson is a dissociated persona of my sister? That the foundation of Inevitability's faith originates from her biological family?"

This deduction, while refraining from disclosing the most guarded secret of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society, seemed to be the most logical conclusion. Yet, Madame Magician had also entertained the notion of dissociative identity disorder as one potential cause.

Hela took a sip of her triple-shot Reem espresso.

"The situation might be more complicated than a case of dissociative identity disorder. There seems to be some bizarre mystical phenomenon involved. That, however, remains contingent upon your future investigations."

Lumian acknowledged her response with a nod and posed his question with a serious demeanor,

"Is there any issue with the April Fool's member who sold the Soul Summoning Spell to my sister? Did they foresee a scenario involving dissociative identity disorder?"

Hela remained silent for a few seconds before responding, "It's suspicious, but I cannot definitively be sure. I intend to probe further, although it might take a considerable duration of time. As you're aware, the organizational structure of the Research Society is quite informal, and my connections with the individuals from April Fool's are limited."

"I understand." Lumian had heard a similar sentiment from Franca.

Hela glanced at him and pondered for a moment.

"In reality, you are the most suitable candidate to investigate this matter. Unfortunately, you lack the necessary prerequisites."

"Why do you say that?" Lumian questioned, genuine surprise lacing his words.

For someone known for wit and mischief in Cordu, the prospect of heading the investigation was unexpected. He had assumed that his role would merely entail supporting Franca.

Hela's tone retained its chilliness.

"If you possessed a Beyonder power to physically alter your appearance, you could transform into Muggle and participate in various Research Society Gatherings as her.

"Then, when the occasion arises, you could observe any April Fool's member who reacts oddly to Muggle's presence and displays signs of abnormal behavior. You could even employ yourself as bait to draw out any individual harboring hidden motives."

Me assuming Aurore and using the code name Muggle to become a member of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society? Lumian had never envisioned such a scenario.

His brow furrowed as he remarked, "Can I really pull off being my sister even with a transformation item? Especially within your Research Society?"

He wasn't familiar with their world and its intricacies. How could he effectively bridge the communication gap?

Just a sentence or two could potentially blow his cover!

Chapter 339: Purpose of Visit

Hela continued in her cold voice, "Don't worry, there's no reason to fret. Our Research Society operates rather informally. Except for a handful of members who maintain close private communication, the rest only convene two to four times a year, all while in disguise.

"Your sister behaves quite relaxed at these gatherings. Her interactions would resemble her usual demeanor with you. However, she'll take care to guard her genuine information. You can certainly play the part.

"And many of the coded terms and expressions we employ for communication are familiar to you. Given your relationship with your sister, she won't intentionally keep them from you or abstain from using them."

"Understood." Lumian's mood suddenly soured. "She'll also explain the exact significance to me and attribute it to a philosopher from back home or even Emperor Roselle."

Upon hearing this, Hela responded, "If you truly possess the potential to masquerade as Muggle and engage with the Research Society members, there's no need to forcibly cite philosophers from back home. Simply allude to the latter portion of the content."

"Then, should I incorporate 'Emperor Roselle once said'?" Lumian deliberated the specifics earnestly.

He lacked a key item and couldn't authentically impersonate Aurore. And even though the Niese Face was primarily an illusion, it could be instantly deciphered by Beyonders equipped with the corresponding abilities—whether the other party held a rank as low as Sequence 9 Mystery Pryer, they'd discern his non-female identity at a glance. Yet, he remained determined to give his utmost. Who knew if a chance for Transfiguration with diminished negative effects would arise in the future?

Regarding mystic makeup achieved through the use of the Mystery Prying Glasses, it wouldn't provide psychological suggestions, given that attendees concealed their faces at the gathering. Furthermore, it couldn't alter his gender.

Hela lapsed into silence, her facial muscles twitching subtly.

"In the event that you're presented with an opportunity to enact such a role, make sure to avoid these mentions. You might not possess precise discernment about when such references are suitable.

"Just keep in mind, other members frequently employ the phrase 'Emperor Roselle once said' to liven the mood or offer amusement."

Why does it feel like Emperor Roselle's image in the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society isn't too favorable… It's not that it's unfavorable. Instead, it assumes a comedic quality… Speaking of which, Aurore appears to do the same. Whenever her spirits dip, as long as I deliberately reference Emperor Roselle's words, she tends to loosen up and finds herself chuckling involuntarily… Lumian struggled to fully grasp the rationale of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society members, but he refrained from further probing, recognizing the necessity to feign ignorance concerning their most profound secret.

If the opportunity arose, he intended to seek Franca's insights on the matter.

Hela continued, "While participating in the gathering, keep in mind to listen more than you speak. If you lack confidence, avoid delving into profound discussions. Should others delve into the past, if possible, shift the focus and maintain a patronizing tone. Emulating Muggle's traits and characteristics will aid in effectively acting as her."

Lumian pondered for a moment.

"This guise, however, remains merely a surface-level ruse. Your Research Society houses Beyonders adept in divination and possessing keen intuition. They could readily discern that I'm not my sister."

"No, quite the contrary. They might prove you to be the genuine Muggle," Hela furnished an unforeseen response to Lumian's expectation.

In the midst of his unveiled astonishment, Hela expounded, "To begin with, most of us remain unaware of the realities of our fellow members, impeding our capacity for efficacious divination or prophecy.

"Additionally, with my understanding of your sister, I employed an artifact to divine her state. Yet, I couldn't ascertain her life or death status. It was akin to confronting a formidable anti-divination barrier."

Wh— Lumian was caught off guard before grasping the underlying rationale.

As per Madam Magician, Aurore hadn't entirely died. A possibility of revival persisted, her soul shard sealed by Mr. Fool, thereby rendering conventional divination unable to circumvent the seal and ascertain Aurore's genuine condition. A potent anti-divination effect was at play.

Hela took another sip of her triple shot Reem espresso.

"Most crucially, subsequent to our meeting today, my spiritual intuition tells me that when I confront you, divination or prophecy regarding Aurore will point toward you."

What? Lumian nearly blurted out the question.

Before long, he cast his gaze downwards to his left chest and offered a wry smile.

"Perhaps this stems from the fact that a fragment of my sister's soul has been specially preserved within me."

Lumian let out a long sigh.

"What a pity…"

Post Hela's analysis, he harbored the conviction that he could seamlessly stand in for his sister within the folds of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society without incurring exposure.

He yearned to do so. This way, he could not only aid Franca in her operation but also safeguard her from solitary risks. Together, they could operate—one in plain sight, the other in the shadows—ensnaring their adversary in a carefully orchestrated trap.

Simultaneously, Lumian recognized the potential of utilizing the society's gatherings to gather invaluable information about Aurore.

Regrettably, his one hindrance was his lack of Transfiguration abilities. The power to alter his gender, stature, or physique eluded him.

A brief silence hung in the air before Hela reiterated her commitment to investigating the April Fool's predicament.

Following that, she spoke candidly, "I've come to Trier this time to delve deeper past the catacombs. Do you have any information about that place?"

Deeper into the catacombs? Lumian's heart skipped a beat as he took the initiative to remind her, "It's very dangerous there."

Madame Hela's guidance from her letters and prior suggestion had been invaluable. With deep appreciation, he recounted his grasp of the catacombs and the bizarre phenomena he had borne witness to. Finally, he said, "For some inexplicable reason, I alone retain memories of the ill-fated couple. The rest feign ignorance, as though they never existed. True, Kendall, the administrator of the tomb, ought to have sensed it as well, yet he feigned ignorance."

Hela listened in quiet contemplation. Without astonishment or consternation, she inquired, "Have you heard of the Samaritan Women's Spring?"

"I have, though from the mouth of a charlatan…" Lumian mused, his brow furrowing as he tried to recall Osta Trul's narrative. "He claimed that the Samaritan Women's Spring on the upper level of the catacombs is a sham. Just a puddle left behind due to a construction error back then. The administrators spun it into a legend. But deep in the underground world, within an ancient tomb, there lies the real Fountain of Oblivion."

Hela refrained from commenting on Lumian's account and simply nodded.

"Thank you."

With her gratitude expressed, she downed the last of her three-shot espresso, rose from her seat, and made her way toward the café's exit.

As she rose from her seat, the heavy silence was shattered, and the sunlight once again flooded the area with its radiance.

Lumian remained seated a while longer, savoring the last sips of his Macael coffee. Afterwards, he strode along Rue Ancienne, his destination being Place du Purgatoire. There, he planned to catch a public carriage back to the market district.

Passing by Salle de Bal Unique and the Alone bar, a sudden, crystalline tinkle reached Lumian's ears.

His heart skipped a beat, and he swiftly turned around. He saw a figure he knew well, who had just entered the newly opened Alone bar.

Draped in a delicate, pale-white fishnet dress, the figure sported a small, circular hat adorned with silk flowers. Two dainty silver bells dangled from the intricate hair buns, complementing the similar accessories on the figure's dark-hued boots.

Leah… Bureau 8's Leah… Lumian recognized the person as Leah, the official investigator who had entered his dream.

Once affiliated with Bureau 8's Riston Province branch, she had now appeared in Trier and entered the somewhat peculiar Alone bar.

Salle de Bal Unique is perilous. Could the Alone bar be used by Bureau 8 to monitor the opposing stronghold? After retracting his gaze, Lumian continued forward as if nothing had happened.

…

Returning to Salle de Bal Brise, Lumian found himself summoned to 11 Rue des Fontaines in Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative by Gardner Martin, just when he was hoping for some rest.

Inside a room adorned with bookshelves, Gardner Martin, donned in a light-colored shirt and dark trousers, greeted him with an energetic smile.

"Franca mentioned that your vengeance is complete?"

Lumian detected an odd thrill emanating from the Boss, as if he had indulged in immense pleasure and hadn't fully calmed down.

He responded candidly, "Yes, I've already killed Guillaume Bénet. Thankfully, Red Boots, Jenna, and Anthony Reid, the information broker I hired, assisted me."

He spared no details about the participants—there was no use concealing anything. They relied on "Rat" Christo and his pets to communicate, after all.

Gardner Martin nodded slightly and commented, "You've exceeded my expectations in terms of efficiency. Franca didn't delve into the specifics. Can you give me an overview of the overall situation?"

Lumian held nothing back when it came to the Sinners organization. He elucidated Guillaume Bénet's various abilities, detailing their specific impacts.

Gardner Martin listened intently and asked in thought, "What do you reckon is Guillaume Bénet's strength equivalent to in Sequence?"

Lumian replied without hesitation, "Sequence 5."

A brief pause ensued as Gardner Martin fell into contemplative silence before he uttered, "I've summoned you for a purpose, a mission."

"What mission?" Lumian didn't hide his curiosity.

Gardner Martin's smile reappeared.

"It's quite straightforward. Make your way to the Mechanical Café in Quartier de l'Opéra and establish contact with a literary and arts group named 'Black Cat.'"

"I lack any artistic inclination," Lumian honestly admitted.

Gardner Martin smiled and said, "No artistic inclination is necessary. Your primary role will involve sponsoring and befriending one of the members of Black Cat.

"His ancestor boasted an aristocratic title of a count, a fact he's quite fond of calling himself that.

"Right, his name is Poufer Sauron."

Chapter 340: Black Cat

Quartier de la Maison d'Opéra, Rue Lombar.

The street was famous for its array of sweets, and colorful candies adorned every corner.

At the end of Rue Lombar stood the Mechanical Café, nestled next to a small confectionery factory.

From the outside, it looked like an ordinary place, and even peering through the glass windows, there was no hint of its mechanical nature. The black Triangular Sacred Emblem on the weighty wooden door was the only reminder of its true identity.

Lumian pushed the dark-brown door, but it resisted as if locked from within.

After a moment's observation, he pulled the doorbell hanging by the secondary window.

Amidst the tinkling chimes, Lumian caught the soft clink of metal and watched as the door inched open.

A mechanical arm extended from its rear, reaching all the way to the bar counter like an ornamental display.

Surveying the surroundings, Lumian made his way to a corner of the café. Two single-legged tables were placed there, hosting five individuals.

Among them, a middle-aged man with fiery red hair stood out. Fair-skinned from cosmetics, with dark circles accentuating his brownish-red eyes, he was a captivating figure.

Clean-shaven, he sported an open brown velvet coat and a red shirt sans bow tie, exuding an air of refinement and casual elegance.

This was "Count" Poufer, the member of Intis's former royal Sauron family whom Lumian sought.

Having inherited a substantial fortune from his father, he hadn't ventured into politics, military service, or trade. Instead, he moved within various artistic circles as a literary critic and frequented "Black Cat" gatherings.

Approaching with a smile, Lumian inquired, "Are you Count Poufer?"

Poufer Sauron looked up casually, his tone relaxed as he asked, "Are you the friend Martin mentioned?"

"Yes, Ciel Dubois." Lumian responded without any reservation, claiming a seat by pulling up a chair.

Poufer gave him a measured once-over, a satisfied smile playing on his lips.

"Not bad at all; you're quite the beautiful friend."

"Among literature, oil paintings, sculptures, poetry, and music, what's your preference?"

"Novels," Lumian replied without hesitation.

Poufer leaned back, gesturing towards the plump middle-aged man diagonally across from him.

"Anori, the author with the most literary eloquence in recent times."

The author who delved into the realm of erotica, forgetting that the essence of writing is to explore human nature? Lumian naturally recollected Aurore's assessment of this novelist.

Initially, Anori's works had explored love as a means to understand humanity. But over time, the focus shifted, consumed by the former. Aurore believed that if not for restrictions, Anori might have penned something akin to 'Monks Chasing Dogs'—a risqué novel.

Of course, Lumian cared little for probing human nature; he simply enjoyed the engaging parts.

"Your novels have certainly broadened my horizons," he said to Anori genuinely.

With black hair and blue eyes, Arnaud puffed on his pipe and remarked, "Luckily, you didn't mention appreciating my 'Death of a Herald.'"

Death of a Herald… Isn't that Adri's work? Right, Aurore had mentioned the similarity in names, leading to frequent confusion. Enlightenment dawned as Lumian inquired, "You mean the Adri who's backed by the government, earning a five-figure fortune yearly, yet only manages to produce dogsh*t?"

Anori erupted in laughter.

"That's worth a glass of absinthe!"

With that, he tapped the silver-gray metal button on the single-legged table before him, thrice.

Count Poufer took pleasure in Lumian's reception and proceeded to introduce the other members of the Black Cat organization.

Among them were Mullen, a painter with a pale and weary complexion, Ernst Young, a slightly stern-looking literary critic, and Iraeta, a poet who held a cherrywood pipe.

Just as Lumian was wrapping up his greetings, he witnessed the iron-colored surface of Anori's one-legged table split open unexpectedly, unfolding like a blossoming flower.

Within the "stamen," a glass of emerald absinthe, radiating a dreamlike sheen, appeared on a tray that ascended through a mechanical lift.

Author Anori picked up the glass of absinthe and tossed a silver coin worth 1 verl d'or onto the tray.

Gradually, the mechanical elevator descended, causing the parted metal surface to seal shut, restoring the one-legged table to its original state.

Anori slid the absinthe toward Lumian, a smile gracing his features.

"Cheers to what you just said!"

It's really a Mechanical Café… Lumian reacquainted himself with this place.

His gaze drifted to the table's broad and sturdy leg, suspecting it to be hollow and linked to an underground conduit.

Taking a sip of the absinthe and savoring its familiar bitterness, Lumian directed his attention to the one-legged table.

"No change?"

"Here, a glass of absinthe costs 1 verl d'or," Anori responded with a grin.

Isn't that rather steep? Salle de Bal Brise and the basement bar only charge seven licks. Their quality is nearly identical… Lumian critiqued inwardly.

1 verl d'or was equivalent to 20 licks.

At that instant, Mullen, the pale-faced painter who seemed perpetually fatigued but was a handsome man, took a sip of his coffee and shared, "I heard that an elephant has arrived at Trier Zoo. Quite an uncommon sight."

The pudgy Anori muttered, "What's so intriguing about an elephant? It strikes me as utterly mundane."

Count Poufer let out a soft chuckle.

"Shall we then discuss the ongoing clash between the parliament and the two Churches, the high-ranking government officials perpetually stumbling, the detestable censorship of publications, and the covert agents shadowing us like hyenas?"

Anori sighed in resignation.

"Let's just stick to that elephant."

Amidst the laughter of the Black Cat members, Count Poufer crossed his right leg and proposed, "Since we have a new friend, how about engaging in a game of mysticism?"

A game involving mysticism? Lumian's eyebrows twitched.

"What sort of game?" inquired Iraeta, the poet, puffing contemplatively on his pipe.

Count Poufer smiled and said, "A game known as King's Pie."

Observing the perplexed expressions around the table, Count Poufer chuckled and continued, "Don't any of you have a childhood or a family? Haven't you played this game?

"The rule is to divide the King's Pie into portions equal to the number of participants plus 1. The larger piece is ritually dedicated to a deity or esteemed ancestor we hold in reverence. Among the remaining portions, one contains a broad bean or coin, hidden. Whoever discovers it becomes the 'king' for the day, empowered to issue commands to the others. Naturally, these commands must remain within the bounds of reason."

The mysticism aspect involves offering up the excess King's Pie in sacrifice? Lumian cast a glance at Anori, Mullen, and the rest, intrigued by the idea and curious whether any Beyonders were part of the group.

Of course, none of them appeared to be.

In just over ten seconds, Count Poufer's proposal garnered agreement from everyone except Lumian.

He commenced by pressing the corresponding button on his one-legged table, hitting it the appropriate number of times to signal the kitchen to dispatch a King's Pie.

Reportedly, this dessert had been a favorite since the era of the Sauron Dynasty.

…

In the underground of Église Saint-Robert, within the confines of the Inquisition, a gathering of Purifiers was underway. Valentine, Imre, and their fellow Purifiers congregated in the office of Deacon Angoulême.

Dressed in a light-gold shirt and pale-white pants, Angoulême raised the dossier in his hand and addressed the group, "We've verified the body found at 50 Rue Vincent in Quartier de la Princesse Rouge to be that of Guillaume Bénet, the former wanted padre. Ensure that the police headquarters takes down the wanted posters from the market district."

The market district case wasn't under the Purifiers' jurisdiction, but Valentine had heard about it. Finally, there was confirmation.

Sporting a formal blue coat, Valentine glanced at Angoulême and asked, "Deacon, have there been any developments in the investigation into Guillaume Bénet's killer?"

"At the moment, no suspects," responded Angoulême, his golden hair, eyebrows, and beard lending him an imposing aura. He continued, "What we can ascertain is that there were clear signs of incineration at the scene, and it's likely that Guillaume Bénet succumbed to a Demoness's curse."

"At least a Sequence 7 Hunter and a Demoness? That's an uncommon combination," Imre remarked, clearly taken aback.

To his knowledge, most who followed the Demoness pathway were affiliated with the Demoness family, a formidable secret organization that seldom required collaboration.

"Uncommon doesn't mean impossible," retorted Angoulême.

As a Purifier deacon, he had access to more confidential information and experience compared to Imre, Valentine, and the others. He had even personally executed two members of the Demoness family.

Valentine furrowed his brow, ruminating for a moment before suggesting, "Could Lumian Lee be involved? He does have a solid motive."

"But he lacks the power," Imre objected. "How could he advance to Pyromaniac so quickly after leaving Cordu? Isn't he concerned about losing control? Furthermore, based on your description, not even a Pyromaniac would be a match for Guillaume Bénet."

Valentine clung to his conjecture.

"That's why he might have sought help from a Demoness.

"Could he have joined the Demoness family to seek revenge and then transition into becoming a Demoness himself?

"If that's true, this could become a major issue. Lumian Lee carries significant problems with him. And you mentioned the Demoness family's penchant for sowing chaos."

Angoulême nodded. "We must keep a close eye on this. I'll report this matter. Meanwhile, intensify the scrutiny of suspicious individuals in the market district."

Having made up his mind, he reassured Valentine, "Don't be overly anxious. Lumian Lee isn't the only one with a reason to eliminate Guillaume Bénet. There are powerful bounty hunters, official members of the Aurora Order, and the bestowed of other evil gods."

Valentine acknowledged concisely, signifying his comprehension.

Following their discussion on recent Beyonder cases, Valentine and Imre exited the deacon's office, passing by Charlie who was acquainting himself with a mechanical typewriter, before heading towards the tunnel leading to Église Saint-Robert.

"Why do you think the quasi-Demoness is seeking us? Has she uncovered crucial information?" Imre inquired curiously, conversing with his fellow teammate.

Valentine ruminated briefly before responding, "Could it be related to Guillaume Bénet's death?"

Imre was caught off guard.

"Are you suggesting she had contact with the Demoness family?"

Before Valentine could reply, Imre shook his head.

"That's impossible. The Demoness family despises female Assassins. If they encounter one, they'll surely eliminate them."

Chapter 341: Branch

On Rue Doyle, nestled between the market district and the solemn Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative, stretched a verdant street. Its clean pavements and modern architectural style set it apart from its surroundings. Jenna had deliberately chosen this location to rendezvous with the Purifiers. The individuals frequenting this place had little connection to her former life, and the likelihood of recognition was slim.

Clothed in a pristine white blouse and a light-brown dress, Jenna's attire differed slightly from her previous encounters with the two Purifiers. This strategic variation was intended to thwart any attempts by the other party to decipher her intentions if she were to wear the same ensemble repeatedly.

Nevertheless, her overall presentation remained faithful to a certain style: a portrayal of cleanliness, radiance, and vitality. This image was a composite distilled from the bishop's sermons and the impassioned advocacy she had encountered during her involvement in Church activities.

A Sun Talisman dangled around her neck, accentuating her brownish-yellow hair that was neatly tied up. She followed the elongated shadows cast by the trees, moving toward Apartment 17.

In the midst of her journey, a brown four-wheeled carriage rumbled by. The window was ajar, revealing an arresting visage.

Adorned in a black court dress, a lady graced the carriage's interior. A dark veil hat adorned with white feathers crowned her head, intricately framing her raven-black hair. Her face boasted soft contours; her chin held a graceful curve. A slender, elevated nose bridge led to plump, subtly upturned crimson lips. Within her dark gray eyes, a glint of brightness coexisted with a hint of melancholy, evoking a pang of sympathy.

How beautiful… Jenna sighed from the bottom of her heart as the carriage passed.

Even though Jenna herself could be considered attractive, she remained capable of appreciating the allure of others. Simultaneously, she acknowledged the stark contrast between her appearance and that of Franca, who had ascended to the rank of Demoness of Pleasure, as well as the lady who had just passed.

Shifting her focus, Jenna ascended to the roof of Apartment 17 on Rue Doyle.

Her wait was brief, for Imre and Valentine soon appeared.

Valentine's demeanor, though frosty, gave way to a proactive inquiry. "Have you obtained crucial intelligence?"

Valentine's gaze swept past Jenna's neck, where the Sun Sacred Emblem was suspended. A subtle nod confirmed his satisfaction.

Jenna shook her head slowly. "No."

Without permitting Imre and Valentine to voice their queries, she bared her emotions in earnest. "I want to repent."

Repent? Imre exchanged a quizzical glance with Valentine.

Had something gone awry?

Jenna's gaze lowered, a bittersweet smile touching her lips as she regarded the ground.

"My mother haunts my dreams, recurring persistently.

"And each time she appears in my sleep, I find myself grappling with a nagging question: Why did the Church permit someone like Hugues Artois to partake in the elections? Upon uncovering the truth, why did they not promptly apprehend his accomplices and thus forestall the ensuing catastrophe?

"I-I yearn for redemption. The pain gnaws at my heart, sowing doubt in my faith, and causing me to question whether God and the Church still watch over us."

These sentiments were sincere, albeit less intense than they seemed.

Valentine felt ashamed and didn't know how to respond to Jenna.

Imre, who had experienced many similar situations, sighed and consoled her skillfully, "There's no need to doubt that God is always watching over us. The Sun graces the land each day, yet we understand that the ebb and flow of light and darkness constitutes the essence of our world. Just as the Sun sets inevitably to give rise to night, it's this very cycle that allows us to revel in the radiance of the morning and the ascent of the sun.

"Likewise, the Church isn't all-powerful. In Intis, we remain subject to the constraints imposed by the Church of the God of Steam and Machinery, the National Convention, and the government. Our actions are bound by limitations; we cannot operate without restraint and probe at will.

"Pain and calamity are integral facets of existence. Their presence varies, but they are transient, much like the Sun's emergence after the darkness."

Jenna fell into contemplative silence for a few seconds before exhaling, a slow release of tension. She extended her arms slightly, proclaiming, "Praise the Sun!"

"Praise the Sun!" both Valentine and Imre echoed in unison.

With her sincere performance, Jenna asked, "Who propelled Hugues Artois to the position of parliament member? And who facilitated his representation for an evil god?"

"We're in the midst of investigating. No substantial breakthroughs have emerged thus far," Imre replied after measured consideration.

Jenna's expression turned to one of anxiety and concern.

"Why the lack of substantive progress? Is it due to the limitations mentioned earlier, which hinder the acquisition of pivotal leads? Do you require my help? I operate unbound by restrictions and hold no fear of breaching the law!"

Imre and Valentine weren't caught off guard by Jenna's reaction. It echoed the same spirit as her abrupt assassination of Hugues Artois, albeit in a more subdued form.

The two exchanged glances, a wordless deliberation on whether to entrust this matter to an informant bound by contract, thereby affording greater flexibility and latitude.

Drawing upon Franca's counsel, Jenna refrained from invoking Instigation directly. She instead gauged the disposition of the two Purifiers and employed words to accomplish her intent.

"If the Church itself finds its hands tied, could it not delegate the task to capable devotees?

"Which holds greater importance—the Church's dignity or the well-being of God's children?

"With each thwarted catastrophe, numerous families and lives are spared. They all stand as devout supplicants to the Sun.

"An evil god was backing Hugues Artois!"

Valentine found himself swayed, and observing Imre's absence of dissent, he addressed Jenna with gravity, "Are you sure you want to help us investigate this matter? It's very dangerous. The odds of forfeiting your life are substantial."

Jenna responded with a smile suffused with complexity, "I'm afraid of death, but I'm more afraid of becoming a sacrificial lamb for the heretics, much like my mother."

She didn't hide her hatred at all.

Imre then said, "In the course of our investigations, we've ascertained that Hugues Artois shared close ties with General Philip. Certain covert activities trace back to him. However, General Philip succumbed to illness last year, resulting in the loss of all leads.

"The other backers and supporters of Hugues Artois either owed their allegiance to General Philip or deemed him an asset worthy of support. Their involvement in heretical belief or secret organizations remains unverified."

Jenna blurted out, "What about Philip's family? What of the heretics who encircled Hugues Artois?"

"There's nothing wrong with Philip's family," Valentine responded, his tone revealing traces of vexation. "We've apprehended only two heretics affiliated with Hugues Artois's campaign. Their roles were comparatively inconsequential. The individual most knowledgeable opted for suicide when escape became unfeasible. His fanaticism stymied our quest for the sought-after leads. We've effectively eliminated two branches of the secret organization, the Order of All Extinction."

Order of All Extinction… Jenna recalled the secret organization that believed in an evil god.

Imre supplemented, "The primary source of knowledge is the red-haired woman named Cassandra. She hails from the Sauron lineage, a collateral branch of the former royal family. A Beyonder and a heretic graced with a boon."

"Is there anything wrong with the Sauron family?" Jenna inquired further.

Imre shook his head.

"At present, no concrete conclusions exist. The noble families that supported Hugues Artois maintain standard relations with the Sauron family. Cassandra chose an adventuring life, as she encountered minimal regard within the Sauron family hierarchy. Subsequently, she became a Beyonder, ultimately joining Hugues Artois's team last year."

…

Quartier de la Maison d'Opéra, Rue Lombar, Mechanical Café.

Mechanical precision guided the King's Pie to Poufer Sauron and his associates within the Black Cat organization. The pie bore the appearance of a brown floral marvel adorned with intricate black motifs.

Poufer looked around and said to Lumian, Anori, and the others, "I suggest that this game of King's Pie serves as a tribute to one of my esteemed forebears. He held the title of the first Count Ardennen and the twenty-seventh Count of Champagne."

In his interactions, Poufer habitually designated himself as Count Ardennen.

"The Count of Champagne, the one who coveted Roselle's ass?" Novelist Anori quipped with a grin.

Over the past year, the most sought-after banned manuscript within Trier's covert book market had been "Emperor Roselle's Secret Chronicles." Within its pages lay a trove of Emperor Roselle-related rumors, intermingled with an array of outlandish, sizzling revelations.

Poufer sighed and said, "That would be the thirtieth Count of Champagne, the great-grandson of my illustrious ancestor. He hails from a distinct Sauron family branch."

"I have no objections." The flaxen-haired painter, Mullen, steered the conversation back on track.

This was merely a game—no one else insisted on allocating the surplus King's Pie to a specific figure, thus prompt consensus was achieved.

Considering Lumian's usual style, he should have objected and angered Count Poufer. However, he recalled that his current role revolved around that of a friend of Gardner Martin, scion of a prosperous merchant family with a penchant for art. He was essentially playing the role of a spendthrift imbecile, a persona that basked in the lavish spending only to incur disdain.

Poufer shifted his attention to the more reticent literary critic, Ernst Young, and instructed, "You shall have the honor of cutting the pie."

Ernst Young, his black curls framing his face, indulged in a self-deprecating smile.

"I despise the absence of waiters in the Mechanical Café. It makes me feel like a waiter."

"Isn't that a good thing? It signifies the absence of spies," Novelist Anori muttered.

A puff of cherrywood smoke escaped the pipe held by Iraeta, the poet, as he chuckled in response, "Perhaps the spy is among us."

At that moment, Ernst Young had already picked up the table knife, slicing the King's Pie into seven equal portions.

Poufer delicately positioned one of the King's Pie slices near the plate's rim, hands clasped, cradling it against his chest. His voice, a soft cadence, invoked an invocation, "To you, member of the mighty Sauron family, the great Vermonda Champagne Sauron."

Poufer repeated the incantation thrice. Lumian couldn't help but note that Mechanical Café, already bereft of its waiters, descended into an amplified hush, akin to the commencement of the bishops' sermons.

After offering the excess portion of the King's Pie to Vermonda Sauron, Poufer raised his gaze to Lumian and grinned.

"You're the guest. You'll be the first to choose."

Without observing, Lumian extended his hand to the King's Pie closest to him.

At that moment, Termiboros's resonant voice echoed in Lumian's ears: "Switch."

Chapter 342: Fright?

Switch? Lumian hadn't anticipated that Termiboros would drop a hint at a moment like this.

Whether this Inevitability angel aimed to use the opportunity to set a trap or had some other intention, or if He simply sought to avert any trouble from befalling His vessel at this particular time and place, it was clear that this seemingly unremarkable game of King's Pie concealed profound hidden hazards. Once triggered, it would plunge all those present into a perilous abyss.

When Count Poufer brought up the mystical aspect, the act of sacrificing a piece of King's Pie to a deity or revered ancestor, Lumian suspected the presence of a Beyonder element. It resembled the divination games favored by many enthusiasts of mysticism. To his astonishment, the issue proved even graver than he had initially imagined. It had prompted an angel to believe that he—Lumian, a dual Sequence 7—was incapable of handling it or could be harmed by it.

As these thoughts raced through his mind, Lumian struggled to fathom Termiboros's motives. All he could manage was cautiously extending his arm and nonchalantly selecting one of the remaining five slices of King's Pie.

This time, Termiboros didn't intervene.

After Lumian, Anori, Mullen, Ernst Young, and Iraeta each acquired a slice of King's Pie, only the one nearest to Lumian remained.

"Seems like it's mine." Count Poufer leaned in, grinned, and seized the slice of King's Pie. He brought it to his mouth and delicately took a bite.

Lumian followed suit. The crust was crisp, the filling sweet, its aroma lingering on his palate. The quality was rather impressive.

After a few bites, Count Poufer chuckled and remarked, "Looks like I'm the king today."

As he uttered the words, he extracted a broad bean from his mouth.

The instant Lumian laid eyes on the broad bean, a faint trace of blood and rust wafted to his senses.

Meanwhile, the atmosphere in the Mechanical Café grew heavy, as if everyone dreaded receiving an order they couldn't bear.

Count Poufer rose from his seat, his back to the window that faced the street, blotting out the sunlight, which cast a faint shadow over his face. His smile seemed somewhat dark.

Count Poufer's gaze fixed upon the novelist Anori, a mischievous smile dancing on his lips.

"Step outside the café and declare to the passersby, 'I'm dog sh*t.'"

Anori, who had been on edge, let out a sigh of relief and responded with a grin, "Sure thing."

The portly man rose from his seat and hastened to the door, grasping the handle nestled in the side wall.

Amidst a grinding noise and faint clatters, the mechanical arm suddenly tightened, its grip "dragging" the weighty wooden door ajar.

Anori ventured outside and onto the street. He directed his voice at the pedestrians, "I'm dogsh*t!

"I'm a piece of dogsh*t raised by a sow!

"My whole family is dogsh*t raised by sows!"

The passersby stared in astonishment before erupting into laughter.

After cursing himself, Anori returned to Lumian and the others in high spirits.

"You've got an impressive mental fortitude." Lumian compelled himself to rephrase "you're really thick-skinned" in a more polished manner.

Novelist Anori chuckled and said, "Whenever I'm stuck in my writing, I'll curse myself out on the balcony. It's the simplest method."

"You writers do have your peculiarities." Lumian was reminded of his sister, who fancied herself afflicted by an advanced stage of procrastination syndrome.

Anori took a sip of absinthe and resettled himself. His attention turned to Count Poufer, who, with his back to the light, cast his gaze upon Mullen, the pale and handsome painter.

"Slap Iraeta."

Mullen relaxed in his seat, opting not to rise. He leaned forward and delivered a slap to Poet Iraeta.

Iraeta, his hair thinning and his facial muscles slightly sagging, remained unperturbed. He merely drew another puff from his pipe.

Noticing Lumian's scrutiny, he offered a casual smile.

"As a poet, I must learn to relish the malice around me."

Finding joy in malice… What a poetic youth. Well, more accurately, a poetic middle-aged man… Lumian surveyed the participants of the game, realizing that aside from Count Poufer, who had consumed the broad bean, nothing else appeared amiss.

Count Poufer shifted his posture slightly, his features still shaded by the backlight.

He said to Ernst Young, "Express your loyalty to me."

When the Black Cats convened, they often engaged in a variety of audacious acts. In a more contemporary characterization, they were avant-gardes of performance art. Hence, Ernst Young felt no qualms about kneeling on one knee and professing loyalty. He even considered it insufficient, sensing that it lacked excitement or humiliation.

Count Poufer then turned to the poet, Iraeta, and dictated, "Give all your money to the beggar across the street."

Iraeta was taken aback. His heart ached as he responded, "Alright.

"As you know, I'm a pauper. Over the past five years, I've scarcely earned 3,000 verl d'or from my poetry. Each day, I ponder which friend might organize an event and offer me a free drink."

Quite the honest poet… Lumian pondered whether he should sponsor this individual and witness what kind of verses he could produce. After all, the "sponsorship fee" was supplied by Gardner Martin. Not employing it would result in it going unused. Conversely, by sponsoring certain artists, he could potentially pocket a portion for himself.

Before Count Poufer could reply, Iraeta suddenly burst into laughter. He fumbled in his pocket and exclaimed with excitement, "That's why I only brought 5 verl d'or!"

"5 verl d'or? At the Vichy Café, that'd barely cover half a bottle of mineral water and two boiled eggs," Novelist Anori murmured as he watched Poet Iraeta hastily depart. He tossed the 5 verl d'or to the beggar opposite.

Vichy Café resided in an alley off Avenue du Boulevard. It drew parliament members, high-ranking government officials, bankers, industrialists, financiers, famed courtesans, and esteemed authors, painters, poets, and sculptors from the upper echelons of society.

By this juncture, every participant had taken their turn, leaving Lumian as the last.

Count Poufer fixed his gaze on Lumian, his look profound as he spoke, "This is your inaugural time attending our Black Cat gathering. I'll assign you a simple task. Take your slice of King's Pie and proceed to the last room in the café's basement. Exchange the pie for a sheet of white paper."

This bears a hint of mystique… If anything goes awry, I'll just burn down that basement… Lumian mumbled to himself as he clutched the partially-eaten King's Pie. As per Novelist Anori's guidance, he located a staircase leading to the basement close to the kitchen.

Before venturing forth, he ignited the gas wall lamps in the vicinity. Under their faint yellow radiance, he navigated a corridor cluttered with various items until he reached the last room.

The vermilion door stood tightly sealed. Lumian listened attentively but detected no movements from within.

There were no suspicious signs around the door either.

Lumian extended his right palm, gripped the handle, gave it a gentle twist, and gradually pushed inward.

As the gas lamps in the basement's corridor illuminated the space, objects came into view.

These objects were heads, clustered within the dusky shadows, their gazes devoid of emotion, fixed on the "intruder" at the entrance.

Lumian's pupils dilated as he recognized a few familiar heads.

They belonged to Novelist Anori, Painter Mullen, Critic Ernst Young, and Poet Iraeta!

Just before conjuring a fireball, Lumian, experienced and resilient, forced himself to steady his nerves and discern the situation.

The heads lacked the pallor of the deceased, and the room was bereft of the distinct scent of preservatives.

Lumian reined in his initial reaction and scrutinized the scene. He realized that these were wax heads that had been taken down.

Resembling melons, they were stashed within compartments on a wooden frame.

Is this mission intended to startle me? Were it not for Termiboros's forewarning, how could such a prank perturb me? What's so mystical about this? Lumian ruminated for a moment before placing his King's Pie on a wooden shelf and extracting a sheet of white paper from one of the wax heads.

Upon returning to the Mechanical Café with the white paper in hand, he was met with smiles from Anori, Iraeta, and the others, as though gauging any lingering trepidation.

Count Poufer nodded in satisfaction.

"You executed the mission admirably."

What if I hadn't executed it admirably? What would have transpired? Lumian simulated residual unease and inquired,

"Those wax heads seemed so lifelike that they nearly stopped my heart!"

"Haha," Anori chortled. "This serves as Count's welcome gesture to every newcomer. He's rather fond of collecting wax figurine heads. Each individual he acknowledges receives an invitation from a wax sculptor to immortalize their heads as art and place them in the basement of the Mechanical Café."

It's almost as if your heads have been given to Count Poufer… Lumian eyed Anori and the others' necks, yet found no trace of sutures.

After delving into various rumors circulating within the novelists' circle and offering 2,000 verl d'or to sponsor the Black Cat, Lumian took his leave.

As he departed, his gaze inadvertently swept over the two-legged tables.

Abruptly, Lumian's pupils constricted.

He observed that Count Poufer, Anori, and the others still had unfinished King's Pie on their plates, while the white-glazed porcelain plate that had previously held the pie now sat empty.

There should have been a slice of King's Pie intended for the Sauron family ancestor!

It was gone!

Lumian's perplexity couldn't be concealed. He gestured toward the snack plate and remarked,

"I recall there being a slice of King's Pie left."

Count Poufer chuckled and sipped his coffee.

"I ate it."

"Is that so…" Lumian smiled in realization.

Turning away, he exited the Mechanical Café, the smile on his face gradually waning.

Count Poufer had only taken two bites of his slice of King's Pie!

Chapter 343: Feedback

As Lumian strode down Rue Lombar toward the nearest public carriage stop, a sense of unease settled over him. Observing the deserted street, he dropped his voice to a hushed tone as he muttered, "Temiboros, why did you make me choose the King's Pie slice without the broad bean?"

What if he had consumed that fateful broad bean and ascended to the role of the "king"?

But Termiboros remained silent, withholding any response.

Lumian pondered for a moment, then rephrased his question.

"Though the entire incident held a few unsettling details, the outcome appeared unremarkable. It's hard to discern whether it's tied to mysticism or Beyonder powers."

After a brief pause, Termiboros's deep voice echoed in Lumian's ears.

"Next time, you could consider defying the king's orders."

What if I chose to disregard the king's commands? What if I indulged in my King's Pie instead of placing it in the room of wax figurines or even walking away with the paper? Lumian's mind plunged into contemplation.

Rather than heading directly back to the market district, he hailed a public carriage bound for Rue Scheer on Avenue du Boulevard.

As an official member of the Aurora Order, he bore the responsibility of promptly reporting his execution of Guillaume Bénet and the latest developments within the Iron and Blood Cross Order to Mr. K. Simultaneously, he hoped to fleece something out of them.

Participating in three secret organizations came with the potential of receiving triple rewards, but it also entailed making three reports per mission.

19 Rue Scheer, underground of Psychic's headquarters.

Mr. K, perpetually unchanging, sat in the red armchair, attentively listening as Lumian recounted his strategic utilization of the Iron and Blood Cross Order's resources to pinpoint and eliminate Guillaume Bénet, the heretic.

When Lumian mentioned how the former padre of the Eternal Blazing Sun Church had embraced the entity known as Inevitability in pursuit of power and strength, Mr. K lowered his head and traced a cross upon his chest in a deliberate up-and-down, left-to-right motion. His voice, hoarse and subdued, chanted a prayer, "Merciful Father, forgive the world's transgressions."

Lumian's lips twitched, mirroring Mr. K's penance, although he couldn't fathom the necessity of such repentance.

Post-repentance, he succinctly recounted Aurore's dual nature and the sinister Sinners organization that underpinned Roche Louise Sanson. Finally, he said, "Mr. K, I request your aid in locating the original family of Aurore—or rather, Roche Louise Sanson. They may well be tied to the Sinners, a heretical group devoted to Inevitability."

Mr. K's face, obscured beneath a voluminous hood, remained shrouded in shadow. His words, tinged with satisfaction, hoarsely resonated. "I understand your desire to avenge Aurore. There is no problem in that. The benevolent Father and the omnipotent God do not bar believers from securing their own futures. If they can intertwine personal matters with the sacred crusade against heresy, all the better.

"In this endeavor, leveraging your assets and harnessing the resources of the Iron and Blood Cross Order to fulfill your objective is a strategy I admire. Strive for more of such feats.

"I'll investigate the Sinners."

He agreed to Lumian's request as it aligned perfectly with his own aspirations.

By unearthing Roche Louise Sanson's family, he could deal with the Sinners, a faction devoted to the evil god, Inevitability!

"Thank you, Mr. K," Lumian said sincerely.

He pondered for a moment before proceeding, "The death of Guillaume Bénet might trigger an intensified pursuit from the official Beyonders. I'm wondering if there exists a mystical item that would suit my needs, enabling me to alter my appearance and stature at will?"

He was seeking a means to assume Aurore's identity, infiltrating the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society as Muggle.

Mr. K's tone shifted abruptly, infused with zeal.

"Only the Lifeblood I possess can accomplish what you seek. So long as you can master your flesh and blood, altering your height and appearance becomes attainable. While it may not provide an exact replica of your desires, it suffices to veil your true identity. The caveat lies in the necessity for early injection and its limited duration. You won't possess the liberty to transform at your whim."

Precision isn't required; members of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society assume disguises, masking their true selves during gatherings… Yet, that falls short. A perceptive Spectator might notice something from Aurore's eyes or the contour of the chin. To fully pass off as Muggle and dupe everyone, the masked face must mirror Aurore's flawlessly… Plus, the adverse effects of Lifeblood are beyond my tolerance… Lumian's thoughts coalesced, and he articulated his response.

"I'm concerned that administering Lifeblood could revert me to the most primordial human archetype. Despite the Lord's protection mitigating severe physical and mental consequences, the Iron and Blood Cross Order could easily detect the anomaly and discern my true allegiance."

Mr. K sighed in disappointment.

"That's a problem. Though I believe the Lord will safeguard you, preserving your devout persona from exposure, your concerns bear merit."

Having declined the offer of Lifeblood, Lumian continued, "Recently, the Iron and Blood Cross Order tasked me with an interaction…"

He detailed Gardner Martin's summons, narrating until the culmination of the King's Pie game.

The sole omission was Termiboros's warning, the reason subtly placed on his intricate grasp of mysticism. A niggling suspicion prodded him to sidestep the matter, avoiding any potential anomalies.

Mr. K listened attentively, refraining from interjection. As Lumian concluded, Mr. K stood and paced the room.

"Your next objective is to figure out the Iron and Blood Cross Order's rationale for engaging the Sauron family. Are they coveting the Saurons' inheritance or considering collaboration?"

"Yes, Mr. K." Lumian recognized the need for him to remain well-informed, irrespective of Mr. K's order.

Mr. K halted his pacing, fixing his gaze on Lumian.

"Your intuition is sound. Should any mishap occur within that game, it could set off a mystical catastrophe.

"The central figure of Poufer's sacrifice, Vermonda Sauron, held significant standing within the Sauron royal family of that era. Born into the Champagne lineage, he was adopted into the main family by King Odo the 12th, who invested resources in his upbringing.

"Vermonda began auspiciously but met a negative end. His later years saw him vanish without a trace, dealing a heavy blow to the Sauron dynasty. In the ensuing two decades, several prominent Sauron family members met untimely and mysterious deaths, or succumbed to sudden insanity. The family's power dwindled, paving the way for Roselle's eventual overthrow."

Emperor Roselle's successful usurpation of the Sauron Dynasty was partly facilitated by the apparent decline of the ancient royal line? Vermonda's inexplicable disappearance spanned two to three centuries. How could today's sacrifice catalyze a dangerous mystical shift? Lumian's thoughts raced, absorbing the details recounted by Mr. K.

…

Apartment 601, 3 Rue des Blouses Blanches.

Jenna, having gleaned some insights from the Purifiers, sought out Franca in hopes of sharing her findings.

As her gaze roamed the room, Jenna's attention was drawn to the slightly ajar master bedroom door, from which emanated a rhythmic tapping sound.

"Franca?" she called.

Franca's clear voice resounded.

"I'm here! Come inside."

Jenna, who had never entered Franca's bedroom, hesitated for a moment before walking over and pushing open the door.

A burst of amazement brightened her blue eyes as they fell upon an intricate apparatus nestled against the wall, distant from the window.

The contraption consisted of a myriad of interlocking gears encircling brass cylinders, interconnected through levers, crankshafts, and screws.

In awe, Jenna regarded the towering device and inquired, "What is this?"

Seated before the elaborate mechanism, Franca's fingers danced across a state-of-the-art mechanical typewriter as she proudly introduced it to her companion, "This is a third-generation difference engine, cleverly modified

—a sort of analyzer. It's a truncated version, simplified and miniaturized. The complete model wouldn't fit in my room."

"Are you really a believer of the God of Steam and Machinery?" Jenna blurted out.

Franca chuckled and explained, "Sometimes."

Jenna's scrutiny lingered on the so-called analyzer, revealing the connection of a telegraph machine and two metallic mechanical typewriters at its lower end.

It wasn't long before Franca ceased her typing, and the analyzer's mechanical appendage set the second typewriter into motion, producing letters upon pristine paper. The energy and information seemed to flow from the radio transceiver.

"What… what are you doing?" Jenna felt illiterate.

Franca happily pointed at the analyzer and said, "When the coding remains consistent, this contraption can automatically decode telegrams and codes for me. Through the metallic fingers linked to the mechanical typewriter's keypad, it types the corresponding letters, shaping the intended words.

"In essence, I can directly read the content of telegrams. No need to laboriously decode the encrypted messages I receive. It saves me considerable time and effort.

"Likewise, I can draft telegrams in standard language. The machine will autonomously encode them and transmit them via a predetermined radio frequency."

Studying the gears as they turned in their various states, Jenna struggled to grasp Franca's intent.

"But what's the purpose?" she asked, befuddled.

Franca was caught off guard.

"Purpose? Well, the purpose is to simplify telegram conversations. Make it something mundane and routine. Though admittedly, it does consume quite a bit of paper."

"Telegram conversations?" Jenna felt a touch of perplexity.

Franca had constructed such an intricate apparatus and embarked on such an elaborate matter simply for conversation?

The late-night typewriter sounds were Franca engaged in casual chatting?

"Exactly," Franca affirmed with a self-satisfied grin. "A friend of mine in the Loen military agreed to share the information Anthony Reid seeks during that timeframe. We just had a brief exchange."

While Franca could easily request the pertinent information from Madam Judgment, she preferred not to burden her Major Arcana cardholder unless absolutely necessary.

As Franca finished speaking, the analyzer completed its task of typewriting, and the telegram materialized in Intisian.

Snatching the paper, Franca's countenance darkened as she scanned its contents.

…

At night, in Apartment 601.

Lumian, Anthony Reid, Franca, and Jenna reassembled.

Waving the paper in her grip, Franca addressed Anthony Reid, stating, "I've received a response. The Loen military's official report on the encounter states: No such battle occurred!"

"No such battle occurred?" Anthony Reid's eyes widened as he jolted to his feet.

No battle at all? Lumian arched an eyebrow.

Such a response was undeniably unexpected.

Franca nodded gently, her gaze fixed on Anthony Reid.

"To put it simply, it's highly probable that the assault against you and your companions was not executed by the Loen army!"

Chapter 344: Boxing Gloves

"Not by the Loen army…" Anthony Reid muttered under his breath, his eyes distant.

The night of the attack had haunted his dreams, replaying over and over, each iteration etching the brutality and mercilessness of the Loen soldiers into his consciousness. These nightmares had grown, evolving into an inescapable nightmare. And now, shockingly, someone was telling him that they were not Loen soldiers!

Franca's demeanor, the subtle shifts in her expressions and body language—it all told him that Franca wasn't lying; she wasn't bluffing him!

This revelation rendered his years of suffering, of misattributed blame, into a cruel jest.

As a Psychiatrist, Anthony Reid was acutely attuned to the waves of disillusionment that crashed through his psyche. His emotional stability quivered, struck by a potent aftershock.

Instinctively, he used Placate on himself.

As Anthony Reid struggled to "save" himself, Franca elaborated, "Either the battle's secrecy is of the highest order, barring my Loenese friend from obtaining the truth for now, or a different faction entirely orchestrated the assault on your unit."

Her inclination leaned toward the latter possibility. In the grand scheme of the Loen Kingdom, this skirmish was a minor one. Anthony's company held no strategic value, no pivotal figures, so there was no reason for a high-level concealment.

"Who could it be?" Jenna had already raised this question after reading the telegram, but both of them couldn't come up with a reasonable answer.

She even speculated that an Instigator might have sowed seeds of internal discord amidst the Intis army to digest a potion. This made one of the companies impersonate as Loenese soldiers, launching a deadly nocturnal assault on Anthony Reid and his comrades.

However, this was far too difficult. No matter how formidable an Instigator was, there was no hope of success unless Anthony Reid's company had discovered evidence of someone's serious crimes or formed a deep feud with other companies due to conflicts on the battlefield.

"Indeed, who could it be…" Anthony Reid, now more composed thanks to his Placate, intoned with a voice etched in determination.

He understood why the Loen army would attack him and his comrades—their animosity, though intense, was comprehensible within the context of war. But an attack from an unknown faction? That puzzled him.

Franca pondered for a moment and said, "Did your unit forsake allies on the battlefield? Or perhaps lay claim to spoils of war that weren't rightfully yours?"

Anthony Reid ruminated briefly before shaking his head resolutely. "No."

Lumian chimed in with conviction, "Absolutely not. This ties back to Hugues Artois. It can't be a squabble between comrades or external rivals."

Jenna, absorbed in contemplation, posed another question, "Did you defy Hugues Artois's orders? Or did your actions inadvertently cost him something?"

Anthony Reid shook his head again.

"If I had, I wouldn't have grappled with years of puzzlement."

Silence enveloped Apartment 601, a contemplative hush broken only by Lumian's recollection. A shard of Madam Magician's prior words tugged at his thoughts, and he ventured,

"Could it be a sacrificial rite? A blood offering to an evil god?"

Madam Magician had mentioned that Sinners, a secret organization devoted to evil gods, emerged in the war's later phases. The conflict had unwittingly provided opportunities for these evil gods to infiltrate the realm. Could Anthony Reid and his comrades have stumbled upon one of these opportunities?

"Blood sacrifice…" Franca and Jenna recalled the support various evil god factions had given Hugues Artois.

Had he forged an alliance with these heretics? Did he sacrifice his own company?

Anthony Reid fell silent for a moment before saying, "The heretics, disguised as the Loen army, orchestrated our annihilation with Hugues Artois's complicity?"

Franca said insightfully, "It's the most logical explanation, though the question remains—who gains? Certainly not Hugues Artois. He reaped no boons, not even in death."

For a moment, no one could answer Franca's question.

After a few seconds, Lumian said, "That's one of the avenues we must delve into as we proceed. It might intertwine with Hugues Artois's ascent to power and his parliamentary role."

Upon hearing this, Jenna recounted the information she had obtained from the Purifiers and concluded, "The pressing issue lies in the fact that General Philip, who seems the most suspicious, is already deceased. It's as if all the threads converge at a sudden dead-end."

"He died just in time." Franca chuckled. "A pre-emptive elimination, perhaps?"

Lumian stroked his chin and spoke slowly, "In the world of mysticism, certain deaths don't necessarily mean true demise."

Madam Justice had mentioned that an evil god's boon had a Deceased Sequence. They could use death to escape their original fate.

Similarly, if General Philip had used the Substitution Spell, the one who died might not be the real him.

Franca, who had previously helped with finishing Guillaume Bénet, immediately understood.

"Substitution Spell?"

"We cannot dismiss the possibility." Lumian smiled. "Our immediate objective remains the investigation of General Philip, ascertaining the truth of his demise. Even if he is truly dead, there may be traces he left behind, undiscovered by the Purifiers due to the constraints imposed on them."

Anthony Reid, though still grappling with the shattering revelations, felt the warmth of unity and purpose in his companions' discourse. It bolstered his resolve, a spark of renewed determination igniting within him.

He nodded slightly and said, "There's no need to rush. This matter must be very complicated. I'll first gather preliminary information about General Philip, his family, and friends."

After Anthony Reid took his leave, Lumian observed Franca preparing to head to Rue des Fontaines in search of Gardner Martin, so he left Apartment 601 with her.

As they walked down the stairs, Lumian broached the subject of his conversation with Hela, sharing the details with Franca.

Her excitement burgeoned as she absorbed his words, a fervor building within her.

"Great! Great! Quickly transform into Muggle. Let's make contact with April Fool's together!"

"Why are you so excited?" Lumian glanced at him.

Franca made a tongue-clicking sound and chuckled.

"Back home, there's a saying that goes— if you get drenched in the rain, rip up someone else's umbrella. Haha, it's all in jest, but isn't it interesting? Even though your appearance leans towards masculinity, a few simple adjustments can render you strikingly beautiful. Once the Pyromaniac potion has been digested, have you not considered having a potion of Pleasure? Sigh, forget it. There's still some risk before reaching Sequence 4."

Laughter and jesting flowed between them, Franca's demeanor then taking a more serious turn as they reached the street

"Furthermore, you're one of the few people I can trust now. If I could obtain your direct collaboration in our probe of the April Fool's conundrum, I'd feel significantly more secure. Unfortunately…"

"Unfortunately…" Lumian echoed the sentiment, a tinge of regret shading his words.

His curiosity then led him to inquire about Emperor Roselle and the perplexing attitudes of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society members.

Franca's expression turned strange, as if she struggled to suppress a bout of laughter.

After a moment, she exhaled and said, "This matter is quite complicated. It's difficult to explain in a few words. I'll explain in detail tomorrow or the day after tomorrow when I'm free. In short, be mentally prepared."

"How complicated can it be?" Lumian muttered. He bade Franca farewell and commenced his journey toward Rue Anarchie.

Upon reaching Room 207 at Auberge du Coq Doré, despite having already deciphered the issue with Aurore's grimoires and no longer needing to delve into them, Lumian's habits dictated that he retrieve the copies and skim through their contents, his thoughts wandering amidst the scattered pages.

Approaching midnight, a stirring within Lumian's heart drew his gaze toward the carbide lamp.

The light it emitted bore a dark green hue.

The "doll" messenger, clad in a light-gold dress, suddenly materialized. It glared coldly at Lumian, as if striving to contain its emotions.

With twin thuds, a pair of iron-black boxing gloves, adorned with multiple short thorns, landed soundlessly on the table. The impact carried a resonance more akin to wood meeting wood than metal striking wood.

Simultaneously, a folded sheet of paper drifted toward Lumian.

"Thank you." Although the "doll" messenger quickly vanished, Lumian still expressed his gratitude politely.

He refrained from touching the boxing gloves for now, opting to unfold the piece of paper and peruse the contents of Madam Magician's message.

"The Shadow Branch and the Lucky One Beyonder characteristic have been made into a mystical item.

"How does it fare? Has its form been modified, rendering it more convenient for transport? This is a masterpiece forged by a master.

"It remains nameless for now. With common words, you could dub it the 'Lucky Shadow Boxing Glove.' For a touch of panache, 'Flog' could be a stylish choice. The name is yours to determine.

"Any target struck by this glove, regardless of creating injuries, whether they defend with a weapon or not, will undergo a surge of desire or emotion. The specific emotion hinges on your luck. Yet, with the presence of Lucky One, you can envision or simulate the corresponding desires and emotions ahead of time, guiding the target's reaction. The success rate stands impressively high—around 70 to 80%.

"Following the trigger of a target's desires or emotions, a second strike won't engender new feelings. Instead, there's a likelihood of causing the pre-existing desires or emotions to erupt. This unleashes an overwhelming tidal wave on most targets, inflicting significant harm, even rendering them temporarily incapacitated.

"While the likelihood of invoking desire or emotion with each hit isn't substantial, repetitive blows will eventually yield the desired outcome—unless you are cursed with bad luck that counteracts the influence of Lucky One.

"However, the glove's most exceptional facet isn't its offensive potential, but its defensive capabilities. It possesses unparalleled sturdiness, capable of withstanding an assault from a Reaper without incurring any damage. (Note: Reaper refers to Sequence 5 of the Hunter pathway.) Naturally, this hinges on the attack squarely targeting the glove. In such a scenario, there's even a possibility of taking a strike infused with godhood, at the expense of shattering or fracturing the glove. This probably places the glove at Sequence 4.

"On the downside, carrying the glove will erode your self-control, intensifying the oscillations of various desires and emotions. Withstanding this requires exceptional endurance. Moreover, while donning the glove, you will attract the attention of a hidden entity since it originated from the Tree of Shadow. While They cannot directly harm you for various reasons, They can summon dangerous entities to your vicinity, influencing or attacking you.

"Hence, each use of the boxing gloves should be accompanied by a change of location, and their usage should not be for extended periods. Failure to adhere to these guidelines may attract hidden dangers. However, should you maintain your composure and endure one or two attacks, the world will expel those dangerous entities who can't truly descend here.

"Ah, one last detail—your two Psychiatrists request a final follow-up consultation at the usual time tomorrow afternoon."

Chapter 345: Dream

I need exceptional endurance to withstand the weakening of self-control brought about by carrying the Flog. The waves of various desires and emotions surge stronger… Alms Monk excels in handling such situations… While reading Madam Magician's letter, Lumian swiftly considered if he could fulfill the conditions for using the mystical item.

Naturally, he didn't have to keep the Flog boxing gloves with him to employ them. Lumian could position them in advance and entice the enemy into an ambush before revealing them. Alternatively, he could accumulate enough resources to purchase a steam robot and have emotionless tools carry the gloves for him. Nevertheless, thanks to Alms Monk's abilities in managing adverse effects, he didn't need to resort to such complicated strategies.

With this in mind, Lumian recollected the adverse effects of Contractee contracts.

A substantial portion of them seemed to be mitigated by Alms Monk's resilience and self-restraint.

First acquiring the Alms Monk boon prior to becoming a Contractee. Could it be that one must bolster their endurance to endure a contract? Otherwise, the padre with over ten negative effects would have self-destructed long ago…

Yes, Guillaume Bénet's utilization of Alms Monk and Ascetic powers wasn't overly adept. Could this stem from his ingrained indulgence, making change difficult? Or did he leap directly into being a Contractee before evolving into a Fate Appropriator? His grasp of the Alms Monk and Ascetic boons seemed inadequate, relying largely on instinct. Lumian murmured to himself.

Recalling how the padre in the dream transformed from an ordinary individual to a Fate Appropriator within a day, Lumian was more inclined to believe the latter possibility. He surmised that the events in the dream marked Guillaume Bénet's advancement to a Fate Appropriator with only two to three boons.

Lumian redirected his attention to the letter in his hand and read through the remainder in one go.

Concerning the utilization of the Flog boxing gloves to attract perilous creatures, he intended to seize an opportunity and approach Franca for assistance to verify the precise circumstances.

If indeed hazardous, he would need to contemplate reserving one usage of spirit world traversal to escape any future influence or attack.

Crimson flames silently surged, setting the letter ablaze, its words turning to ash.

Amidst the dispersed ashes, Lumian reached out his hand toward the iron-black boxing gloves.

Although they lacked the metallic texture and chilliness, they were exceptionally rigid.

Almost in unison, two voices resonated in Lumian's mind:

One was the voice of the eloping couple, casting curses; the other was the voice of inebriated individuals shattering bottles and clamoring in the street.

The former set Lumian's imagination ablaze, while the latter spurred him to draw his revolver and open fire.

The sensations weren't overpowering and could be endured and repressed.

After confirming the fit of the boxing gloves, Lumian set them beside the pillow.

…

In the depths of night, in a hazy state, Lumian felt as though he had stepped into an ancient beige castle. Its exterior bore numerous dark and crimson stains, as if drenched in a copious amount of blood.

Hysterical laughter and shouts reverberated from within the castle. Lumian instinctively raised his gaze and spotted a deep-red visage peering at him through a narrow window on the third floor.

Their eyes met, and suddenly, the man raised his right hand and cruelly gouged out his reddish-brown eyes.

Fine blood vessels detached from their sockets, leaving behind a pair of inky-black, blood-soaked cavities.

"Hahaha! Hahaha!" The eyeless man chortled with a maddened demeanor.

Lumian's thoughts blurred as he involuntarily stepped into the ancient castle.

What unfurled before his eyes were gruesome scenes: The maid rent her abdomen with a dining knife, drawing forth pallid intestines marred by blood. The valets ascended the staircase to the second floor, only to throw themselves back into the hall, repeating their falls in a macabre cycle. The butler clutched a comely female head, his lower body severed. He dragged himself with his elbows, leaving behind a broad and extended trail of blood. The headless mistress sat in an armchair, lifted her cup of coffee, and poured it into the gash on her neck…

The pungent stench of blood and the frenzied ambiance pierced Lumian's mind, snapping his eyes open.

He beheld the familiar, squalid ceiling and caught the ceaseless nocturnal clamor of Rue Anarchie.

Had it all been a dream? The scene from his dream lingered in Lumian's memory, a residual unease remaining.

As a Beyonder seasoned with the world of mysticism, he didn't underestimate such a dream.

It likely bore the marks of a revelation through Astral Projection or an external influence.

Swiftly reviewing the day's occurrences, Lumian zeroed in on two potential "culprits."

Could it be the lingering effects of the King's Pie game from earlier, or perhaps linked to the impact of the Flog boxing gloves?

He cast a glance at the iron-black spiked boxing gloves, left untouched beside his pillow, sensing that the game was the likely trigger.

An attempt to commune with Termiboros yielded no response.

After securing the Flog boxing gloves within a drawer in his wooden table, Lumian drifted back into slumber.

Throughout that night, nightmares plagued him repeatedly. Each instance, he encountered the bizarre ancient castle.

Fortunately, the dream's lucidity waned progressively, eventually melding into a commonplace nightmare.

…

The following morning, Lumian adhered to his routine of jogging and practicing boxing, then set out in search of a distinctive breakfast in the bustling market district.

After spending nearly the entirety of the morning at Salle de Bal Brise, he eventually found himself standing before Apartment 601 at 3 Rue des Blouses Blanches.

With a flush on her face and a lively demeanor, Franca answered the door. "You're quite the eager one."

Lumian was forthright about his intentions.

"Remember you mentioned wanting to discuss Emperor Roselle with me?"

"Well, well…" Franca's expression shifted oddly once more.

She grumbled, "I'm feeling unwell!"

"What sort of ailment?" Lumian found it hard to believe that the Demoness of Pleasure could fall ill.

As Franca led him to the living room, she muttered, "It's empathetic embarrassment!"

Lumian shut the door and took a seat on the sofa. After a moment's thought, he inquired, "Is this embarrassment on behalf of Emperor Roselle?"

"Exactly." Franca, seated cross-legged in a recliner, scratched her flaxen hair. "I'm seriously concerned that he might be so mortified that he'll rise from the grave to strangle anyone who's privy to the information!"

After a rather odd comment, Franca sighed and explained, "In simpler terms, Emperor Roselle, like us, hails from another world."

"Emperor Roselle is also one of the transmigrators you mentioned?" Lumian blurted out in astonishment.

Franca confirmed succinctly, "Many of his inventions, beliefs, and ideas originated in our world. What's more significant, his diary was penned in the language of the nation your sister and I come from. That's why it remained undeciphered for so long until our transmigration."

Lumian's mind was a whirlwind of confusion. It all seemed too fantastical, like something out of fiction. However, Aurore's attitude toward Emperor Roselle and his diary lent credence to Franca's words.

Seeing his silence, Franca added with understanding, "Nonetheless, he's an extraordinary individual. Progressing from a mere Sequence 9 individual, he ascended the paths of the divine step by step, overthrowing the Sauron

Dynasty and enacting monumental changes upon Intis and the world. His impact on the history of the past two to three centuries and generations of humanity is profound."

That's true. Emperor Roselle once said that a hero is a hero, irrespective of their origins… Where Emperor Roselle came from was immaterial… Lumian quickly collected his thoughts and asked with curiosity, "Did Emperor Roselle's famous quotations originate from philosophers in your world?"

"Many of them did." Franca, in a way, supported her fellow countryman's public image. "But some are genuinely his own. Consider this: a person who's undergone so much, tasted both triumph and failure, must possess unique insights across various domains. He's not lacking in memorable sayings."

Now I understand why Aurore chuckles whenever I mention something Emperor Roselle said… A realization dawned on Lumian. He grasped his sister's sentiments at that moment and the jesting tone the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society adopted toward the Emperor.

He then inquired, "Did one of you write Emperor Roselle's Secret Chronicles?"

"Yes, but I'm unsure who the author is," Franca honestly admitted. "The writer possesses quite the literary talent."

"Is everything in there accurate?" Lumian contemplated seeking out an underground bookseller to procure a copy.

Franca chuckled. "About half of it. Even among the portions based on actual events, half of that is a sensationalized expansion of a couple sentences from the Emperor's diary into a narrative rife with explicit details. For instance, the Emperor once shared more than just friendship with a Demoness…"

Franca suddenly paused.

Realization dawned upon her that she herself was now a Demoness.

A worthwhile addition to my collection… Emperor Roselle does seem to live up to the legendary reputation of being a flirt… Lumian's anticipation for the underground book grew.

He opted not to delve further into the topic of the Emperor and the Demoness. Instead, he brought up the King's Pie game from the prior day and the subsequent nightmarish dreams. He then sought Franca's insights as an adept practitioner of divination.

"What revelations are hidden in that dream?"

"I can't decipher it," Franca said after a prolonged pause. "It conveys a sense of danger and advises to stay away. Also, those nightmares appear to be lingering effects from some form of insanity."

Lumian contemplated for a moment, deciding not to probe deeper for the time being. He planned to consult the two Psychiatrists later in the day.

…

At 3:20 p.m., Lumian reached Mason Café in Quartier du Jardin Botanique and took a seat in Booth D. He requested a cup of aromatic Intis coffee and two cream-filled cupcakes.

Once the coffee and confections were served, he patiently waited for a minute or so before catching the sound of Susie's gentle, feminine voice.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Lumian Lee."

Lumian responded with an easy smile.

"Good afternoon, Madam Susie. Good afternoon, Madam Justice."

Chapter 346: Follow-Up Visit

"How did you know I was here?" Madam Justice's voice held a smile.

Lumian gazed at the chair across from him and responded, a grin tugging at his lips, "Can't hurt to extend a greeting."

Susie steered the conversation forward, "Congratulations on completing the initial phase of your vendetta. Care for a brief discussion?"

"No problem." Lumian's composure remained unshaken, not even flinching at the mention of "vendetta."

Of course, part of his calm demeanor stemmed from the fact that he hadn't brought along the Flog boxing gloves. This was a psychological evaluation, after all. He couldn't allow external influences to taint his thoughts and skew the doctor's judgment.

From the point of seeking assistance and crafting a strategy, he recounted his experiences of the past two days. He glossed over the secret of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society but provided a concise account of everything else.

Following a momentary silence, Susie's soothing voice resumed its course.

"Your mental state has held up admirably. A certain degree of overreaction in specific scenarios is par for the course. Psychiatric therapy doesn't strip a person of their emotions or feelings. Instead, it aids in unburdening oneself, fostering reconciliation, and discovering inner resilience. Nightmares won't deal a devastating blow to you any longer. Otherwise, according to the more dubious therapists who advocate severing the frontal lobe for eternal tranquility, you'll forever be at peace."

"Removing the frontal lobe?" Lumian's ears caught wind of this concept for the first time.

Susie's tone tinged with revulsion.

"It's a notion that has cropped up in the last couple of years. It doesn't yield the intended outcomes; rather, it inflicts grave harm upon the patient. There's an evident malevolence behind this treatment proposal. It's as if some callous individual propagated it with the sole intention of making a mockery out of medical professionals and those seeking solace."

A prank that toys with the lives of others? Lumian shifted gears, steering the conversation onto a different course.

"Madam Susie, you haven't even delved into my emotions or analyzed my thoughts, yet you've already deduced that I've made some strides towards recovery, and a follow-up might not be necessary?"

Susie's demeanor lifted rapidly, and she replied with a grin, "At times, a person's actions can be more telling of their psychological state than their thoughts. Understand that humans excel at deceiving themselves. They concoct a slew of rationales for their actions, which often stand less grounded in reality than their deeds. To decipher an accurate psychological portrait from this labyrinth of complex and contradictory thoughts requires meticulous analysis. But such scrutiny can easily unearth problems. Hence, I chose to commence with an examination of your actions.

"Evidently, whether you're willing to admit it or not, you've successfully reestablished social connections and fostered a level of trust in others. You've also exhibited a willingness to extend your trust to others.

"Prior to your ambush of Guillaume Bénet, you demonstrated the capacity for calm contemplation and thorough preparation. While there were impulsive undertones and hints of macabre inclinations in your operation, they were inevitable. Their absence would only have hinted at more severe psychological turmoil. And once the affair concluded, you swiftly reverted to your norm and dived right back into life, embarking on another investigation.

"Grounded in the sequence of actions you've undertaken, I extend my congratulations. The pronounced self-destructive tendencies have lost their grip, and you've truly extricated yourself from the abyss of agony.

"Naturally, the pain won't dissipate entirely. It will wane and recede. Perhaps it might resurge abruptly in the future, once again occupying your mind. Yet, there's no need to succumb to panic. Armed with this period of experience, I trust you're equipped to navigate it adeptly. Psychologically speaking, this signals a path to recovery.

"In similar fashion, the past invariably leaves its imprints upon us. Your self-destructive propensities, your extremities, your pathological behaviors—no doubt they're more potent than in most individuals, but they all abide by the bounds of reason and normalcy."

In response, Lumian let out a slow exhale and murmured, "I sense it myself, honestly. The present me is an entirely different person from the one who initially set foot in Trier.

"Thank you, Madam Susie. Thank you, Madam Justice."

He realized that his transformation from an initial state of apathy was thanks to the efforts of these two psychiatrists and his escapades in the market district. The prospect of death itself had lost its sting. He had shifted from a vindictive malevolent specter to an individual fueled by an ardent thirst for retribution, driven by a potent desire for action.

"In essence, this is your own redemption." Susie's tone brimmed with a delight not present before. "The primary contributors to this turnaround are none other than yourself and your sister, Aurore. Were it not for the tiniest ember of hope that you harbored, coupled with your will to persist, and were it not for Miss Aurore gifting you nearly six years of cherished moments to savor and to mold your thoughts, we might not have been able to reel you back in."

As Lumian processed these words, a montage of scenes flickered across his mind: Aurore inhaling deeply, using the breaths to temper the vexation derived from instructing him. The tempestuous storms of combat training, coupled with her impromptu "attacks." The two of them ensconced in the study, each absorbed in their respective books, relishing the tranquility of the night. And, as the number one experimental subject, he was obligated to consume the culinary reproductions of food back home that his sister conjured, be they successes or failures…

Lumian's expression softened as he recollected a line from his sister's novel: The joy and pain of days past are equal to the me of the present.

After a pause lasting more than ten seconds, he straightened in his seat and queried, "Were last night's nightmares all rooted in the King's Pie game?"

This time, it was Madam Justice who responded, her voice soft with understanding, "Indeed. Considering the current situation, it's likely that you were mentally corrupted during that time."

"Mental corruption? Does it actually involve Beyonder powers?" Lumian asked with genuine curiosity.

Madam Justice replied, "Ordinarily, the simple act of sacrificing a King's Pie wouldn't have yielded any results. Otherwise, the game wouldn't have remained a popular tradition in Intis for centuries, fading into obscurity only after the establishment of the Republic. Only a handful of families still recall it."

"Yes, that's what I assumed back then. Poufer didn't employ any mystical language or invoke a complete honorific name. It's implausible for the sacrifice to succeed," Lumian concurred.

Madam Justice continued, "Nevertheless, exceptions exist—sacrificers who share blood ties with the subject of the sacrifice and exhibit numerous similarities.

"If you participate frequently in Poufer's King's Pie game and repeatedly endure the mental corruption it entails, the ramifications won't dissolve with a mere spate of nightmares. Rather, before they fully dissipate, they'll progressively warp your psyche and lead you into madness."

"Could the content of these nightmares be symbolic?" Lumian inquired succinctly.

Madam Justice's response flowed measuredly.

"It's highly probable that they're a fusion of specific deranged occurrences from your past, projected into your dreamscape through the taint of corruption."

"So, that ancient castle and those deranged individuals could really exist…" Lumian mused, nodding in contemplation.

As Lumian engaged in a conversation with Justice and Susie for a while, he intuited that the day's follow-up session was drawing to a close.

In that instance, Madam Justice took the lead, saying, "Didn't I mention previously that I might require your assistance with something?"

"Of course, no problem," Lumian swiftly agreed.

Consider it the cost of the psychiatric treatment!

Moreover, he held the belief that Madam Justice wouldn't have entrusted him with the task without assessing his capabilities. The endeavor couldn't be excessively dangerous.

Madam Justice chuckled and said, "Should you succeed, I shall bestow an additional reward upon you, one that will cater to your requirements in a specific manner."

"Something capable of altering my appearance?" Lumian's heart skipped a beat with excitement.

"Something along those lines." Madam Justice's initially gentle tone turned solemn. "I'm hoping you can venture to an ancient tomb situated on the fourth floor of Trier's catacombs, specifically to retrieve a vial of the Samaritan Women's Spring for me."

Samaritan Women's Spring? Lumian was taken aback.

Madame Hela had previously mentioned that she had journeyed to Trier in pursuit of an artifact hidden deep within the catacombs. Concurrently, she had inquired about the legend surrounding the Samaritan Women's Spring!

Wasn't this too much of a coincidence?

Almost as if she sensed his thoughts, Madam Justice chimed in with a smile, "Don't you find it too coincidental?

"Yes, what I'm hoping for is that you can leverage Madame Hela's exploration to assist me in securing some Samaritan Women's Spring water. Doing so yourself might yield slim chances of success.

"In truth, I could 'arrange' for you to undertake this task in a more clandestine manner, but that approach contradicts my philosophy and principles. I still require face-to-face communication with you and your explicit consent for such matters. I'm disinclined to ensnare you passively through covert cues to fulfill my objectives.

"For me, indulging in the manipulation of others' minds is a treacherous endeavor.

"Of course, honesty is also an effective way at influencing others' thoughts."

Lumian's skepticism and doubts gradually ebbed away. He inquired, perplexed, "Madam Justice, given that you possess a general awareness of the Samaritan Women's Spring's approximate location, why wouldn't you retrieve it yourself? Why involve a Sequence 7 Beyonder like me?"

The Tarot Club's Major Arcana card was definitely a demigod, countless times stronger than him!

Madam Justice laughed.

"To put it succinctly, certain locales become progressively hazardous with an increase in Sequence."

A location where higher Sequences meet with increased danger? Lumian found this notion confounding.

Madam Justice added, "As Sequences rise, proximity to the Oldest One increases, accumulating more madness along the way. Consequently, individuals in higher Sequences are more susceptible to particular forms of corruption.

"Hela is also beneficial in this matter. At the very least, this approach will save her time and permit her to narrow down her search to a designated area."

After a brief contemplation, Lumian agreed to Madam Justice's request. From her, he gleaned the approximate location of the Samaritan Women's Spring—situated within the westernmost ancient tomb on the fourth floor of the catacombs.

…

Following the session, Lumian made his way back to Rue des Blouses Blanches in the market district, his objective being the retrieval of the Flog boxing gloves from the iron cabinet.

Upon his arrival at the safe house, an odd inkling settled upon him.

Intrusion!

Someone had infiltrated his safe house!

Lumian's heart tightened as he advanced with purpose, unlatching the iron cabinet.

While observing that Aurore's grimoires and the Flog boxing gloves remained, a sigh of relief escaped him involuntarily.

However, he proceeded to conduct a thorough inspection, and his scrutiny bore fruit. One article was conspicuously absent—the Earth Blood ore was gone!

Chapter 347: Strange Theft

Looking at the open iron cabinet, Lumian found it absurd and surreal.

The thief had entered the house without taking the most valuable Flog boxing glove, nor did they flip through Aurore's grimoires to see if there were any banknotes inside. They had only taken a mineral specimen that didn't look like a gem at all.

Disregarding the traps, if the thief were truly a Marauder with Beyonder powers, he wouldn't have given up on the boxing gloves made of unique materials and capable of powerful abilities. If he were just an ordinary thief, he wouldn't have just taken the Earth Blood ore. He might have even casually thrown the seemingly worthless item to the ground.

All of this led Lumian to suspect that the thieving intruder had only one motive: take away the Earth Blood ore!

The other party clearly knew what was special about the mineral specimen and was attempting to exploit it!

"Termiboros, who stole the Earth Blood ore?" Lumian couldn't identify any suspect no matter how hard he thought.

Apart from dealing with Guillaume Bénet a few days ago when he retrieved the Earth Blood ore and handed it to Franca, he kept the mineral specimen in the safe house. He never carried it with him to avoid being targeted.

Of course, the thief might have divined or prophesied to narrow down the area. He searched every room and finally found the target item.

Termiboros's magnificent voice suddenly resounded.

"I don't know."

Don't know… Lumian was alarmed.

This answer was meaningless, but coming from Termiboros meant many things.

While Termiboros, sealed within Lumian's body, couldn't exert any direct power, his angelic nature granted Him unique insights. As an angel of the Inevitability domain, He possessed an uncanny ability to detect problems and traces that eluded many Low-Sequence Beyonders through Low-Sequence Beyonders's eyes and fate.

But now, He claimed ignorance!

This revelation carried significant weight, suggesting that whoever had stolen the Earth Blood ore was no ordinary individual. It hinted at the involvement of a high-level power, possibly tied to a secret organization or cult.

Hiss, I have to write a letter and inform Madam Magician about this. After all, she once predicted that the Earth Blood ore would bring me some misfortune. However, the item is lost before the misfortune arrived… Lumian had initially hesitated to burden his Major Arcana card holder with this matter, as he didn't attach much value to the mineral specimen. Its applications were limited, and its loss seemed inconsequential. However, with the situation taking a bizarre turn, he couldn't simply dismiss it.

In the world of mysticism, negligence often led to painful lessons.

Truth be told, Lumian didn't harbor anger over the loss of his possession, nor did he feel compelled to retrieve it. Though the Earth Blood ore might lead to fortuitous encounters, it remained an abstract concept, difficult to quantify or cherish.

Moreover, Madam Magician's warning of potential misfortune made him view its loss as a means to mitigate risk.

Lumian meticulously inspected the safe house once more, confirming that none of the traps had been triggered. Only the Earth Blood ore had vanished. He settled down to compose a letter.

This time, the summoned puppet messenger displayed a less frigid demeanor, no longer suppressing intense emotions.

In mere minutes, Madam Magician's response arrived, concise and to the point: "There's indeed something amiss in this matter. I can't identify the thief of the Earth Blood ore either. If you're not fearful, you can venture to the entrance of Salle de Bal Unique and seek anyone with a monocle in their right eye. Even if they aren't the culprits, they should possess knowledge of the suspect. If you find it too risky, exercise patience. Someone will inquire on your behalf."

Salle de Bal Unique… That makes sense. The Sequence preceding a swindler is Marauder. Could those monocle-wearing individuals hold sway over all the thieves wielding Beyonder powers in Trier? Lumian pondered this in silence.

Aurore's grimoires had mentioned that Marauder occupied Sequence 9 on one of the paths of the divine. Above Marauder was Swindler, and further up was Cryptologist.

After careful consideration, Lumian opted to wait for someone to inquire on his behalf. He had no immediate need for the Earth Blood ore.

The thought of Salle de Bal Unique, Monette, the monocle-wearing Islander swindler, and the swindlers who emulated his style sent shivers down his spine. He preferred to avoid any unnecessary contact for the time being.

After burning the letter, Lumian shifted his attention to the iron cabinet, the repository of Aurore's grimoires, Flog boxing gloves, and various other items.

The once-secure safe house had become compromised, and he needed to find a new location for these possessions.

I'll take Flog with me. I'll carry the rest if I can, and sell what's sellable. If not, I'll secure another safe house… For Aurore's grimoires and the gold, I'll rent an anonymous safe deposit box at a large bank for their safekeeping… When this property's current lease expires, I wouldn't renew it… Lumian had a clear strategy in mind.

His plan encompassed the items he couldn't easily transport or wished to part with, which primarily included the five ritualistic hides, in addition to Aurore's grimoires and his accumulated gold. Finding a new home for these items was a priority, along with securing another safe house for himself.

With these considerations in mind, Lumian began drafting a letter addressed to Hela.

In the letter, he revealed that he had acquired information about the approximate location of the Samaritan Women's Spring through a secretive channel. The information source had tasked him with venturing underground to retrieve a genuine bottle of water from the spring.

However, as Lumian was writing, he felt a sense of puzzlement.

It seemed unnecessary for him to be directly involved when he could have entrusted Hela with the task of obtaining the spring water on his behalf.

Madam Justice should have considered this. Why am I required to descend into the fourth level of the catacombs personally? Is it because of the perceived difficulty Hela might encounter in procuring the water by herself? She needs my assistance?

What's so special about me? Apart from the angel sealed within me, my Sequence isn't high…

Madame Hela's Sequence is relatively high. It's relatively dangerous for her to approach the Samaritan Women's Spring and she will be prone to madness. Am I responsible for monitoring her condition and awaken her if needed?

I previously believed that Madame Hela was at least a Sequence 4. She claimed she could resolve the Cordu problem before the descent ritual, but now it appears she hasn't ascended to a demigod. Otherwise, she wouldn't be able to enter the fourth level of the catacombs, let alone approach the Samaritan Women's Spring… Does she possess a Grade 1 Sealed Artifact or a mystical item equivalent to a saint? Lumian combed through the entire situation and made some guesses and judgments.

Continuing to write, Lumian used the information provider's request as a pretext to express his personal desire to enter the ancient tomb.

After the summoning ritual, the skull, crafted from pure silver and radiating a gentle glow, retrieved the letter and departed.

Before long, a messenger returned with Hela's response: "No problem. I'll meet you at the gates of the Death Empire at 4 p.m. tomorrow."

Phew… Lumian exhaled a sigh of relief, his body trembling with a mix of excitement and trepidation.

His adventurous spirit and penchant for experimentation had always defined him. The bizarre vanishing of the couple in the catacombs had etched a profound mark on his psyche.

…

The next morning, at 11 Rue des Fontaines.

Lumian dutifully arrived at Gardner Martin's villa and reported the details of his meeting with Count Poufer and the other Black Cat members.

Inside, Gardner Martin, unusually excited, sat behind his desk and spoke with a hint of joy,

"Despite your claim of lacking artistic inclination, your background allows you to converse with them effectively. That's precisely why I chose you instead of Albus.

"I was concerned you might not exhibit enough generosity, but you handled it admirably. You even sponsored them with 4,000 verl d'or on your first visit."

Gardner Martin, the Commanding Officer of the Iron and Blood Cross Order, implied that Lumian's status as the younger brother of best-selling author Aurore Lee, even without artistic inclination, provided him with a wealth of insider knowledge about the scandals, grudges, and grievances within the literary and artistic circles.

Lumian, however, didn't waste any time and cut straight to the point. "What I don't understand is why the King's Pie game gave me a sense of danger. I even had a few nightmares last night."

Gardner Martin nodded thoughtfully.

"That's because Poufer is quite unique. He bears a striking resemblance to his ancestor, Vermonda. They share a strong blood connection, which allows them to bypass many crucial steps during a ritual."

"Has his ancestor turned into an evil spirit? How can he still accept sacrifices after centuries?" Lumian asked, basing his question on logical reasoning, without mentioning Mr. K's account.

Gardner Martin responded with solemnity, "That's something you should investigate when you approach Poufer. Don't worry; as long as you don't participate in the King's Pie game every two or three days, the only aftereffect you'll experience is those nightmares. Keep that sense of danger intact and resist becoming a king. It's easier for you to become a king than anyone else, except for Poufer himself. If you're uncertain about making the right choice, let Poufer choose first."

The Iron and Blood Cross Order wants to uncover the whereabouts of the mysterious Vermonda Sauron, who has been missing for centuries? Heh heh, why didn't they warn me about the dangers of the King's Pie game beforehand and advise me to be the last to make a choice? Lumian suspected that Gardner Martin hadn't mentioned it to confirm a crucial matter.

…

In the afternoon, near the Trier Opera House, within a concealed quarry cave, Franca and Jenna, wearing half-masks, once again met the Warlock in the black robe.

He was the same client who had previously commissioned the investigation of the disappearance of the Deep Valley Cloister's gatekeeper.

Franca scanned their surroundings, her voice intentionally hoarse as she spoke,

"We've made some progress in our investigation regarding the disappearance of the Deep Valley Cloister's gatekeeper. We wish to discuss it with you privately."

The man fell silent for over ten seconds before finally nodding. "Very well."

Their iron-masked skeletal escort led them, along with the client, into a secluded "conversation room" within the quarry cave.

…

With an hour left until their agreed meeting time, Lumian equipped himself with a carbide lamp and entered the market district's corresponding entrance to Underground Trier.

Chapter 348: The Bustling Underground

The carbide lamp emitted a bluish-yellow light, casting an eerie glow over the tunnel, which was divided by stone pillars.

Lumian strolled casually, carrying a black canvas bag that had become popular among university students in recent years. Inside, he had stashed the Flog boxing gloves and a stack of white candles.

After conducting numerous experiments, Lumian had discovered that carrying them in his bag was less risky than tucking them into his shirt or pants pockets. While it didn't make a significant difference, it was still better than the alternative.

As he followed the route marked on Gardner Martin's map, leading him toward the underground of Quartier de l'Observatoire, Lumian suddenly perked up his ears, listening for signs of approaching footsteps.

A cacophony of faint footsteps echoed in the air, barely audible.

Lumian scanned the path ahead and to his right, unsure which route the unidentified group would take. To remain inconspicuous, he clambered up to a stone pillar supporting the tunnel's ceiling, extinguishing his carbide lamp, and disappeared into the shadows.

Before long, a group of men emerged.

Most of them wore tattered jackets or were shirtless, hunched over while carrying heavy crates. Over a dozen burly men, dressed in well-worn attire with sinister expressions, held various firearms and carbide lamps, interspersed throughout the group.

Smugglers… Lumian peered out, examining the crates illuminated by the smugglers' lights. They appeared to emit a metallic gleam.

Firearms or something else? He mumbled silently, observing the smuggling caravan as it entered the right tunnel.

As they advanced, possibly due to a shadow that moved too much like a human, one of the smugglers raised his gun, took aim, and fired.

With a resounding bang, the alarm ceased, and the group pressed onward.

Lumian clicked his tongue and shook his head, finding their reaction overly tense and excessive.

In Underground Trier, such actions could easily lead to trouble!

It was well known that aside from university students exploring and citizens cultivating mushrooms to eke out a living, most individuals venturing underground were not to be underestimated. The chances of encountering Beyonders were significantly higher below ground than on the surface. Firing upon any passerby could potentially provoke members of secret organizations, bestowed of evil gods, anti-government militants, or formidable cave adventurers.

With this in mind, Lumian drew his revolver and squeezed the trigger in the direction of the smuggling caravan, which was about to disappear at the end of the tunnel to his right.

He wasn't aiming at anyone, just firing into the air.

Bang! The armed smugglers either spun around or scrambled for cover, unleashing a barrage of bullets at the crossroads.

However, Lumian was no longer concerned. He was already scaling the rock wall, almost reaching the top.

After exchanging gunfire with the empty air for a brief moment, the smugglers shifted their positions nervously, puzzled and flustered.

Lumian observed their backs and couldn't help but smile.

No need for thanks. Consider it a free lesson!

He leaped to the ground and relit his carbide lamp.

Smelling the lingering scent of gunpowder, Lumian grinned and holstered his revolver before continuing along his planned route.

A few minutes later, he came across a group of quarry police officers dressed in dark uniforms, armed with semi-automatic revolvers.

The officer leading the group, upon seeing Lumian's youthful appearance, backpack slung diagonally, and well-dressed attire, muttered under his breath, "Son of a bitch, why is it another college student!?"

He then exhaled loudly and asked, "Did you hear anything just now?"

"There was a gunfight over there. Bang, bang, bang. I wanted to go over and take a look, but I didn't dare," Lumian replied, concealing nothing about the smuggling caravan.

The quarry police officers exchanged glances and swiftly passed Lumian, sprinting toward the intersection.

…

In the "conversation" room.

Observing the iron-masked skeletal host's departure, the man dressed in Warlock attire turned his attention to Franca and Jenna and said,

"What did you discover? As I mentioned, you need to find the gatekeeper or his remains to claim your reward."

Jenna replied calmly, "We haven't really thought about payment yet. We believe the situation is more complex than you described.

"One night, we infiltrated the Deep Valley Quarry…"

Upon hearing the term "Deep Valley Quarry," the man, hidden under a hooded shadow, subtly lifted his gaze.

Franca keenly observed his body language.

She had consulted with Anthony Reid and knew the kind of subconscious reactions ordinary humans would exhibit in such situations.

The man's actions suggested he was highly sensitive to the mention of Deep Valley Quarry.

Only someone aware of the issue would react in such a way.

Jenna continued to recount their discoveries, including the cybernetic-eyed monk and the secret cave adorned with limbs.

The Warlock-dressed man remained composed, making no unnecessary movements. However, to Franca, this indicated that he understood the abnormality within Deep Valley Quarry.

After hearing Jenna's account, the man deliberately raised his voice and said, "I can't confirm if it's related to the gatekeeper's disappearance, but if you can enter the secret cave, capture a few photographs, or retrieve valuable items, I'm willing to offer half the payment upfront. Perhaps you'll find clues about the gatekeeper's whereabouts inside."

Do you take us for fools? Are you expecting us to take such a risk for a mere 10,000 verl d'or? Franca muttered silently.

Had this mysticism gathering not been organized by her friend, she would have found a way to tail the client and uncover his true identity. She could then extract more detailed information from him and have Jenna sell it to the Purifiers.

…

"Halt!

"The Death Empire lies ahead!"

Lumian once again found himself standing in front of the natural arch, adorned with a peculiar mix of white bones, sunflowers, and steam symbols carved into the stone.

Before he could reach for the pocket watch he had borrowed from Salle de Bal Brise to check the time, Hela, dressed in a mysterious widow's black robe with withered blonde hair, approached from the other side.

The woman nodded slightly and said, "Since you're already here, let's proceed ahead of schedule."

"Very well." Lumian opened his bag and produced two white candles.

After lighting them and handing one to Hela, he grinned and remarked, "Aren't you worried that the information I obtained about the Samaritan Women's Spring might be incorrect?"

"Success comes after numerous failures," Hela replied with icy detachment.

A chuckle escaped Lumian's lips.

"I thought you might say that failure is the mother of success."

"This isn't the Research Society," Hela replied tersely.

Lumian didn't waste any more time. He extinguished his carbide lamp and advanced toward the rocky arch, clutching the white candle, its flame now an intense orange.

As expected, a figure emerged from the shadows beyond the door.

The figure sported a blue vest and yellow pants, with gray hair and few wrinkles. His light-yellow eyes held a faint cloudiness, marking him as an elderly man.

The old man cast a disapproving look at the white candle in Lumian's hand and asked with a furrowed brow, "Didn't you find a guide?"

You… Not you guys? Lumian glanced at Hela out of the corner of his eye and realized that the candlelight around her had dimmed, as if it had been corroded by the underground darkness or shrouded in dense fog.

In this state, she appeared to have vanished from the tomb administrator's view.

Lumian flashed a smile at the old man.

"I don't require a guide. I've been to the tomb many times, though I'm more accustomed to entering through the Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative entrance. Don't worry, I remember all the taboos, and I won't deliberately break them."

The old man snapped, "You college students! Remember, exit before your candles burn out!"

With that, he stepped aside and disappeared into the darkness behind the door.

As Lumian passed through the rocky passage and entered the Death Empire, he turned to the aged tomb administrator and asked curiously, "Why can you hold a lit white candle?"

The tomb administrator's faintly turbid light-yellow eyes suddenly darkened, and an icy aura emanated from him.

In a deep voice, he replied, "I'm just stationed by the entrance, not venturing too deep."

Is that so? Lumian, who had already entered the catacombs, rationally abandoned any further inquiry. He focused on the chill in his heart and the unseen gazes from the surrounding darkness.

He couldn't help but sense a resemblance between the tomb administrator's current aura and Hela's presence.

Under the ever-watchful gaze of the corpses in the stone pit and the heaps of bones lining the sides of the passage, Lumian pressed on through the musty air. He walked alongside Hela, passing landmarks like the chapel tomb and the memorial pillar tomb.

Hela broke the silence, her tone frosty. "Which level are we heading to?"

"The fourth level," Lumian replied, holding the white candle aloft and pointing to a nearby tomb sign, not withholding any information.

Hela nodded once more and picked up her pace, striding ahead of Lumian.

She seemed intimately familiar with the first level of the catacombs. After a few twists and turns, she led Lumian to a staircase that descended to the second level.

Compared to the previous level, there were far fewer tourists here. Occasionally, they encountered university students singing, dancing, or testing their courage under the "gaze" of the candlelit corpses.

Hela showed no signs of slowing down. Soon, Lumian spotted a weathered stone door.

With the candle's flickering yellow glow illuminating the way, he read the Intisian inscription on the stone door: "Entrance to the Old Ossuary."

"Down here, we enter the third level. Just beyond the door is the Sun and Steam altar. Keep walking until you reach the Krismona Night Pillar, and that's where we enter the fourth level," Hela explained, her voice still cold.

"Do you have a complete map of the catacombs?" Lumian couldn't help but inquire, aware that only the map of the first level was readily available on the market.

Hela shook her head.

"I know less the deeper we go. From the third level onward, you have to rely on the road signs and the guiding black line on the cave ceiling."

Lumian chose not to press the matter further. With Hela leading the way, they crossed the threshold of the Old Ossuary and descended a wide stone staircase, imbued with a palpable sense of history.

Upon reaching the third level of the tomb, they encountered a flickering candlelight and a makeshift altar composed of two weathered boulders.

The candle's flame belonged to a young man with black hair, brown eyes, and a pale complexion.

Upon spotting Lumian and Hela, he rushed toward them as if grasping at a lifeline.

As he ran, he shouted, "M-my friends vanished! Just like that!"

Chapter 349: Sacrificial Square

His friends had vanished? Lumian, clutching a white candle, watched as the young man dashed over, his eyebrows twitching slightly.

In the catacombs, it was common for people to disappear. What was unusual was that this guy still remembered his friends and their strange disappearance.

He wasn't a tomb administrator, nor did he have an angel sealed within him!

Any anomaly that occurred meant that something was wrong!

"Stop!" Lumian drew his revolver with his free right hand and pointed it at the black-haired, brown-eyed, and pale-faced young man.

In the flickering candlelight, the lad shook his head frantically and said, "Help! Save me! They've all vanished!"

He slowed down slightly but didn't stop.

Bang!

Lumian pulled the trigger of the revolver, sending the yellow bullet grazing the lad's body into the distance, disappearing into the darkness that couldn't be illuminated by candlelight.

Sensing Lumian's determination to stop him, the lad finally halted and revealed a pleading expression.

"Save me! Save me!"

Observing Hela's silence with no intention of making conversation, Lumian had no choice but to inquire, "What happened?"

As he spoke, he used the yellow candle flames in the trio's hands to survey the environment on the third level of the catacombs.

Unlike the first two levels of the tomb, which were surrounded by white bones and had corpses lining both sides of the path, this level had a small square devoid of corpses.

The square was paved with mottled cobblestones, with no moss or soil in the crevices. It was unbelievably clean.

Two grayish-white pillars made of boulders stood on either side of it. Their surfaces were severely weathered, leaving peeling marks.

Even so, Lumian, with his keen eyesight, discerned the Sun Sacred Emblem and Triangular Sacred Emblem engraved on the two pillars. Surrounding them were symbols like Sun Flowers, crankshafts, and connecting rods.

Around the square, where candlelight couldn't penetrate, the darkness was dense, as if countless figures stood there, casting gazes that made Lumian's skin prickle.

The young man with black hair, brown eyes, and a pale face replied fearfully,

"I don't know. We were just about to leave the square where the altars of the Eternal Blazing Sun and the God of Steam and Machinery stand to explore the ancient tomb on the third level. Suddenly, they stumbled over something and fell, one by one. Even the candles in their hands fell to the ground and went out.

"I-I was at the back and saw them vanish just like that!"

"Vanish?" Lumian asked deliberately, probing for more information.

To him, the most pressing question wasn't how they vanished but why the witness still remembered their disappearance.

"Yes, they vanished!" The young man nodded fervently. "It was as if they evaporated right in front of me at an incredibly fast speed. I-I was so scared that I didn't dare look for them or return to the surface. I could only wait in this sacrificial square, praying to the Sun. Just as my candle was about to burn out, someone finally arrived!"

It's clear that if you aren't affected by the strangeness and manage to escape, your faith in the Eternal Blazing Sun would surge… Lumian couldn't discern anything amiss with the other party, so he casually posed another question.

"Are you college students?"

The lad nodded again.

"Yes, we're students from Trier Normal College. We formed a team to adventure here. My—my name is Gérard."

Lumian couldn't help but chuckle. He even considered inviting Gérard to join him and Hela in their search for the Samaritan Women's Spring. After all, the chances of a student like him surviving until graduation seemed slim. He might be more useful as bait.

As he contemplated how to determine if there was anything wrong with Gérard, Hela suddenly spoke with a cold tone, "We'll escort you back."

Surprisingly kind? Lumian turned to Hela, taken aback.

His impression of this lady was that even her blood ran cold.

Gérard was so grateful that tears and snot streamed down his face. He continued to thank them profusely as he approached.

Lumian observed his every move. He retrieved a white candle from his canvas bag and tossed it over.

Desperately, Gérard caught it and lit the new candle with the old one, which had only a small segment left.

Seeing the flickering candlelight, the college student breathed a sigh of relief and followed Hela and Lumian down the stone staircase leading to the second level.

Just as he took ten steps up, Gérard was suddenly stunned.

Lumian looked over and noticed that the lingering fear on his face had disappeared.

"Will it be a problem for you to return to the surface by yourself?" Hela asked again, but her words were entirely different from before.

Gérard chuckled.

"No problem. Thank you for the candle. Sigh, losing the spare candle is troublesome."

Uh… Lumian's heart stirred as he probed, "Did you venture to the third level of the tomb alone?"

Gérard nodded proudly. "Of course, I possess enough courage and experience."

He has finally forgotten about his schoolmates… Did he not forget because he was at the sacrificial square? Did Madame Hela notice that, thereby suggesting escorting him? Lumian nodded in enlightenment.

After watching Gérard ascend the stairs and leave through the entrance of the Old Ossuary, Lumian and Hela returned to the sacrificial square.

This time, when Lumian looked at the two sacrificial pillars representing the Eternal Blazing Sun and the God of Steam and Machinery, his feelings for them were entirely different.

Perhaps they symbolized the protection of a deity!

However, even with the deity's gaze and protection, the two stone pillars inevitably showed signs of weathering and corrosion after countless years in the depths of the catacombs.

Lumian believed that more protection meant greater confidence. He wouldn't lose anything by giving it a try. Facing the sacrificial pillar engraved with the Sun Sacred Emblem, he raised his body slightly and spread his arms.

"Praise the Sun!"

Hela watched silently, not interrupting his prayer.

After Lumian finished his concise praise, the two of them made their way toward the Krismona Night Pillar to the north, following the black line above their heads and the road sign at the edge of the square.

Lumian, holding a white candle, had only taken a few steps away from the sacrificial square when his heart stirred. He cast his gaze forward.

At some point, a skeleton, covered in dark-green mold, had collapsed by the road. The bones of its hands lay across the road, as if it wanted to grab a passerby's ankle.

If Lumian had walked faster and failed to carefully observe the environment, he might have tripped over the corpse!

This instantly reminded him of Gérard's description: The college student's companions stumbled over something and fell to the ground, extinguishing their candles. Only then were they "swallowed" by the catacombs, leaving no trace of their existence!

Did they trip over these fallen bones? Lumian thoughtfully kicked the hand bone away.

Amidst the clanking sounds, he and Hela continued forward. However, after a few steps, they encountered another white skeleton with half its body lying on the road.

Lumian frowned and instinctively looked back at the spot where he had almost tripped.

The dim candlelight barely reached there, but Lumian could barely make out the details with his Hunter's eyesight.

His pupils dilated as he realized that the pale-white hand bone he had kicked had returned to its original position, still serving as an obstacle for passersby!

"They're still alive? Undead creatures?" Lumian asked, his nerves on edge.

"No, but it's a possibility," Hela replied succinctly.

Seeing Lumian's puzzled expression, she explained, "They must have been affected by the environment deep within the tomb and are exhibiting certain abnormalities. When the hidden dangers and horrors in the environment erupt, it's likely that they will all turn into undead creatures."

All of them turning into undead creatures… Lumian instinctively shuddered as he imagined such a scenario.

Whether complete or incomplete, there were at least a million skeletons on this level. It might even be an order of magnitude more. If they all became undead creatures with a hatred for the living, the situation would be terrifying to the extreme!

Seeing that Hela had no intention of turning back, Lumian followed. They relied on the guidance of the road sign and the black lines above their heads to navigate through the bones that were trying to obstruct them and slowly made their way toward their destination.

After an unknown amount of time, they finally reached the Krismona Night Pillar without encountering another living person.

It was a colossal pillar made of black marble, its upper end reaching the cave ceiling. There were no patterns or symbols engraved on its surface, nor were there any signs of weathering or corrosion.

Lumian was taken aback.

In the sacrificial square, the two stone pillars symbolizing the Eternal Blazing Sun and the God of Steam and Machinery had been weathered and corroded!

Is this pillar more special than the sacrificial ones?

As if sensing Lumian's thoughts, Hela spoke coldly, "Krismona is a member of the Demoness Sect, which can also be called the Demoness family.

"She was a Sequence 2 Demoness of Catastrophe. She perished in the War of the Four Emperors in the previous epoch, dying inside Fourth Epoch Trier. However, her characteristics were retrieved by the Demoness family.

"Apart from the Krismona Night Pillar, there are also the Marianne Night Pillar and Lius Night Pillar on the third or fourth level."

"Who are these two?" Lumian believed they were angels as well. Otherwise, they wouldn't be on par with Krismona.

"Marianne was the pope of the Church of Evernight back then, and Lius was a Blessed of ancient Death, a Death Consul. Their characteristics were also retrieved by their respective factions. As for whether other angels perished here, I'm not sure, but many of the angels who followed the Blood Emperor must have perished." After Hela briefly explained, she pointed at the stone staircase behind the Krismona Night Pillar. "Let's go to the fourth level."

Lumian tersely agreed, and they quickly replaced their rapidly burning white candles before ascending to the fourth level.

…

After attending the mysticism gathering, Franca and Jenna retraced their steps to the underground area corresponding to the arcade of the opera house.

As they turned a corner at a fork of the road, Franca leaned over and whispered into Jenna's ear, "Someone's following us."

Someone is following us? Jenna's heart skipped a beat.

Chapter 350: Negative Effects

"How can that be?" Jenna exclaimed, her surprise and confusion evident.

She recollected the mysticism gathering's conclusion, where participants dispersed through various routes at sporadic intervals. The two of them had been cautious, ensuring they left no clues. So, how had they been followed?

Observing Jenna's restraint from looking back, Franca calmly moved ahead and whispered,

"Who knows? Perhaps another participant chose this route and stumbled upon someone ahead. They might want to tail us, hoping for an opportunity to strike it big. Or maybe someone with unusual skills tracked us in an unexpected way.

"Let's keep moving forward as if nothing's amiss. We'll be safe once we reach the street under the arcade.

"If our pursuer strikes before then, drop the carbide lamp immediately and hide in the nearby shadows. Depending on the situation, you can decide how to join the fight."

Jenna nodded subtly, indicating her willingness to follow Franca's instructions.

Unintentionally, she tightened her grip on the carbide lamp.

After traversing the dark, damp tunnel for a hundred to two hundred meters, Franca slowed down and glanced back with confusion.

"The stalker has vanished…

"It's also possible that he found a way to bypass the spider silk I left behind…"

As she finished speaking, a figure emerged from the darkness ahead, illuminated by the carbide lamp's glow.

Jenna reacted swiftly, dropping the carbide lamp in her left hand and blending into the shadows.

Relying on her Mirror Substitution technique, Franca didn't rush to evade. Instead, she fixed her gaze on the stalker who had circled around to confront them.

It was the man masquerading as a Warlock, his face concealed beneath a hooded shadow.

The entrustee!

He gazed at Franca and deliberately spoke in a high-pitched voice, "I want to strike a deal with you guys."

…

Behind the Krismona Night Pillar, Lumian trailed behind Hela, clutching a new white candle that flickered in the dim light. They followed the worn stone steps, seemingly descending into the depths of hell.

The stone walls on either side slowly gave way, revealing intricate reliefs of human heads. Dark gray figures clustered together, reminiscent of the countless bones piled high in the upper tomb.

As Lumian completed the descent and stepped onto the hushed fourth level of the catacombs, an overwhelming restlessness overcame him. It was as if he had been imprisoned for a long time, yearning for freedom.

This sensation wasn't unfamiliar; it was a side effect of the Armored Shadow contract, but it had never been this intense before!

It was as if his spirit felt trapped within his body, finally becoming cognizant of the truth.

It sought to break free from this "cage," to shatter this world and gain true freedom.

Phew… Lumian exhaled slowly, calming himself down.

Even without the Alms Monk boon, he believed he could manage these turbulent emotions. With the Alms Monk's power, he could control them even better.

According to Madam Justice, the higher one's Sequence, the more susceptible they are to madness and the hidden corruption of the fourth level of the catacombs. Is that what I'm experiencing? Is it because my Sequence isn't high that I could endure and control it? Lumian quickly made a guess about the current situation. He instinctively looked up and cast his gaze diagonally at Hela.

Her neck is slender, mostly concealed in the widow-like attire's collar, a suitable target for snapping…

Just as this thought crossed Lumian's mind, he hurriedly shook his head, dismissing the negative effects of the Abscessed Hand's contract.

Simultaneously, he noticed that Hela's face had turned pale-whiter, resembling a corpse that had been dead for many days rather than a living human.

In an instant, Hela produced a military flask, unscrewed the cap, and downed its contents.

Lumian caught a whiff of the strong scent of alcohol.

Silently, he muttered, It should be liquor… Could Hela be like the alcoholics in Feysac, carrying multiple flasks with her?

After finishing a third of the bottle in a single gulp, Hela's complexion flushed slightly as she inquired, "Which way should we go?"

Lumian responded honestly, "It's in an ancient tomb on the westernmost side. We have a general idea of the area, but not the exact location."

Hela nodded and glanced at the top of the tomb, where a thick black line was drawn with arrows pointing in various directions.

Combining this with the signs near the entrance, Lumian could roughly discern the route leading west.

Nevertheless, he pulled out a compass he had prepared beforehand to confirm.

Under the feeble candlelight, the compass needle oscillated continuously, erratic and unceasing.

"It's acting crazy," Lumian commented, attempting to alleviate his pent-up irritation with humor.

"We'll have to rely on the road signs and black lines," Hela responded, seemingly expecting this.

Lumian sighed, eyeing the erratically moving compass. He chuckled self-deprecatingly.

"If it never stops, could it power a perpetual motion machine?"

Hela glanced at him.

"Aren't you a believer in the Eternal Blazing Sun?"

Lumian replied sincerely, "At least for now, I am."

Hela didn't press the topic further. Following the road sign beside her and the black lines above, she stepped to the right.

"The Marianne Night Pillar and Lius Night Pillar are both on this floor. There's also François's Tomb, the Blood Order Hall, and Crazy Shrooms Cave… Uh, the style of this name is completely different from the others," Lumian rambled, diverting his attention from the road sign.

The most noticeable difference between the fourth and third levels was the absence of corpses lining the path. It appeared wider and cleaner, yet it was eerie in its silence.

The ancient tombs had sealed entrances, concealing their contents from prying eyes.

Without turning around, Hela remarked, "Does your mental unrest manifest in talking and rambling more?"

"Not exactly. Talking just helps me cope with the irritation," Lumian admitted.

They continued to navigate, using the road signs and black lines to adjust their direction as they went along.

As Lumian passed by the partially natural tomb cave named the Order Hall, the outer soil tinged with a hint of blood, he suddenly spotted someone.

It was a woman in a plain white robe, her black hair flowing down her back, and her features extraordinarily exquisite, perfectly harmonious. Her aura was so pure that she seemed out of place in this silent and filthy tomb.

Despite having seen a Demoness of Pleasure frequently, Lumian couldn't help but be amazed. He even felt an unholy urge to ravage her.

This wasn't just a drawback of Flog's boxing gloves; it was a dark impulse from the depths of his heart.

Lumian snapped out of it. The woman had sparkling blue eyes, cold and lifeless, and her hands were empty, holding an unlit white candle!

In the catacombs, the living would vanish without the protection of the white candle's flames!

Lumian's body tensed as the woman slipped into the surrounding darkness, blocked by the outer wall of the Blood Order Hall, and disappeared without a trace.

"What are you looking at?" Hela's cold voice cut through the silence.

"Didn't you see?" Lumian recounted the scene he had witnessed in detail.

Hela fell silent for a few seconds before saying, "I didn't see it indeed. However, as soon as you stopped moving, I cast my gaze in that direction."

"Was I the only one who could see it? Or was I the only one allowed to see it?" Lumian couldn't be certain if it was due to Termiboros's influence, his Sequence, or his gender.

Hela pondered for a moment and replied, "Don't concern yourself with such matters. It's normal for special wraiths and evil spirits to linger in the depths of the catacombs, but this place is like a powerful seal. As long as you don't break the rules and trigger an anomaly, you should be safe."

Lumian nodded.

"I was just thinking," Lumian began, "Ordinary tourists and adventurous college students wouldn't be able to pass through the third level of the tomb to reach this place. Why did they produce the guiding black line and accurate road signs? Who are they for?"

Hela answered as she took another step forward, "Official Beyonders who come here regularly to clean up and tomb administrators who patrol the area every day."

She then offered a simple reminder. "Based on your description, the female figure you saw earlier resembles a high-ranking Demoness."

Lumian's heart skipped a beat.

"Could it be the lingering vengeful spirit of the Demoness of Catastrophe, Krismona?"

"I'm not sure," Hela replied, taking another sip from her military flask.

Lumian casually glanced around, his eyelids twitching.

He noticed a purplish-red patch on the back of Hela's right hand.

It hadn't been there before.

It resembled the livor mortis seen on the deceased!

Is this the effect of the corruption on the fourth level of the catacombs? Is Madame Hela using alcohol to resist it? Lumian continued his small talk.

Amidst his babbling, they meandered through the unmarked ancient tombs and eventually reached the westernmost area of the floor.

At the edge of the rock wall, dozens or possibly hundreds of ancient tombs stretched out of sight.

Just as Lumian was about to ask Hela if she could expedite the search for their target, he heard knocking from an ancient tomb nearby.

Both Hela and Lumian tensed, their eyes fixed on the tomb as more of its damaged stone walls crumbled, revealing a dark cavern that humans could enter and exit.

A figure emerged, hunched over.

Lumian, filled with tension, wanted to unleash a Giant Fireball, but he restrained himself, opting to observe first.

The man who crawled out of the ancient tomb held a lit white candle, dusted off his clothes, and slowly straightened up.

Dressed in a black seer's robe commonly seen in circuses, he had brownish-black skin, a slender build, curly black hair, and deep-set eyes. A crystal-like monocle adorned his right eye. He was none other than the Islander swindler, Monette.

Monette flashed a smile at Lumian and Hela.

"What a coincidence!"

Chapter 351: Killing Intent

Dammit! Lumian couldn't help but curse inwardly when he saw Monette.

A mix of anger and fear washed over him, a reaction to the stress of the situation.

Why is it him again?

Why did he appear underground in front of me at such a critical moment?

What is he up to?

Why is he like the bedbugs at Auberge du Coq Doré, the cockroaches in the trash, and the rats in Underground Trier, ubiquitous and unavoidable?

"Who are you?" Hela asked coldly.

Her deadpan demeanor swiftly soothed Lumian's emotions. His mind raced as he analyzed the intentions of the Islander swindler, Monette, and the Salle de Bal Unique dance hall backing him.

Monette, with a sly smile, pinched the monocle in his right eye socket and replied,

"Like you guys, a tomb adventurer."

Tomb adventurer… You make grave robbers sound so honorable… Madam Justice once said that the higher a Sequence, the more dangerous it is to enter the catacombs… Therefore, the angel Monette believes in can't provide him with any assistance here. The saints with godhood in Salle de Bal Unique don't dare enter either… In other words, if Madame Hela and I join forces, we have a high chance of keeping Monette here forever, preventing him from roaming around like a cockroach! Lumian narrowed his eyes as he gazed at Monette.

The fear in his heart dissipated significantly, and the dangerous thoughts of using this opportunity to eliminate the swindler in front of him rapidly multiplied.

Lumian smiled and looked at Monette.

"Tomb adventurer? Do you know this place well?"

Monette smiled and said, "Of course."

He raised his right hand and pointed at an ancient tomb at the edge of the candlelight's range.

"That belongs to a member of the Fourth Epoch's Zoroast family."

Immediately after, Monette pointed to a few nearby tombs.

"That's a member of the Jacob family, a member of the Abraham family, a member of the Blood Legion…

"Unfortunately, there are no Beyonder characteristics left behind."

Lumian's surprise and puzzlement grew as he realized that the Islander swindler had genuinely answered his question. This raised even more questions about Monette's motives.

He cautiously pointed towards the ancient tomb from which Monette had emerged.

"Whose tomb is that?"

Monette took a few steps forward, noticing the subtle shift in Lumian's demeanor. He stopped and maintained his enigmatic smile.

"A member of the Fourth Epoch's Amon family."

This swindler's knowledge of the Fourth Epoch families and the catacombs' fourth level is far more extensive than what should is written on the road signs…. Amid Lumian's bewilderment, Hela spoke again.

"Then do you know where the Samaritan Women's Spring is?"

Monette stroked the outer edge of his monocle and wore a smirk.

"Why should I tell you? What kind of reward can you offer?"

"Why should we believe you have the exact location of the Samaritan Women's Spring?" Lumian asked instinctively.

He suspected that Monette was about to embark on his habitual deception.

Monette chuckled lightly.

"I really don't know. The name Samaritan Women's Spring isn't that impressive. It seems to come from an ancient book I once read. However, after coming to this level many times, I discovered some strange phenomena. Some occasionally animated bones will automatically gather in this area, enter a tomb, and never come out."

The undead animated by the environment will be affected by this tomb's abnormality and drawn to it automatically? Or is that the Samaritan Women's Spring? Western side, some ancient tomb. The conditions match… Lumian's heart raced as he became even more vigilant.

Monette, the Islander swindler, voluntarily disclosed such crucial information without receiving any payment ?

This was completely out of character for him!

Any anomaly that occurred meant that something was wrong!

Lumian suspected two potential scenarios: either Monette was luring him and Hela into the ancient tomb where the undead gathered, hoping to lead them into a trap, or he was using them as scouts to navigate this dangerous territory.

Both possibilities were equally plausible. Although the former didn't benefit Monette, some people did enjoy seeing others suffer.

"That's all I know." Monette pinched the monocle in his right eye socket and said with a smile, "I'll search the other tombs. If you can find the so-called Samaritan Women's Spring, remember to leave a note for me in the tomb of the Amon family member; tell me what's so special about it."

As he spoke, he advanced toward Lumian.

In Lumian's tense state, poised to strike at a moment's notice, the Islander swindler sidestepped him and headed for the distant tomb, carrying a lit white candle.

Soon, his silhouette disappeared at the crossroads, plunging the area into darkness once more.

Has he truly left? Lumian remained vigilant, his attention focused on Termiboros's reaction.

The Inevitability angel remained silent, seemingly unperturbed by Monette's reappearance.

Hela took a few steps back and positioned herself beside an ancient tomb, pushing open its rickety stone door.

Confronted by the pale-white bones strewn at the tomb's entrance, Hela raised her right hand.

As if pulled by invisible threads, the bones swiftly converged, morphing into a swaying humanoid skeleton with a creaking sound.

Hela refrained from issuing any commands to the undead creature she had summoned. She observed coldly as it slowly departed from the tomb, drawn by an unseen force into the darkness.

Is Madame Hela from the Corpse Collector pathway, or does she possess a corresponding mystical item? Lumian roughly discerned Hela's intentions.

She intended on utilizing the undead creatures' characteristic—the automatic attraction to the problematic ancient tomb—to chart their course.

The most probable anomaly in this region was the Samaritan Women's Spring!

Holding their burning white candles, the pair followed the humanoid skeleton through the westernmost tombs.

Suddenly, another figure emerged from the darkness around the corner, a candle flame accompanying him.

A crystal monocle adorned his right eye socket, and an enigmatic smile graced his face.

It was that Islander swindler Monette once more!

As Lumian jumped in fright, Monette asked with a smile, "Is that Samaritan Women's Spring interesting? Can I accompany you?"

Why didn't you ask previously? Lumian's killing intent surged.

Without batting an eyelid, he said, "We haven't even located it yet. How would we know if it's interesting? Why didn't you conceal yourself in the shadows, awaiting the completion of our exploration and confirmation of any dangers or traps before venturing forth? That way, the risk would be considerably lower. And even if we succeed, we won't be able to remove the Samaritan Women's Spring in its entirety."

Monette pressed the back of his right index finger against the monocle and nodded in agreement.

"You make a valid point."

The swindler grinned and retreated into the darkness around the corner.

The candle's flame promptly dwindled until it vanished.

He left so easily? Lumian's thoughts raced, but he couldn't quite decipher Monette's intentions.

He glanced at Hela and noticed that she was sipping liquor again, but her complexion had a pallid, almost bluish hue.

She resembled a corpse even more now.

"Do you have any idea what's up with these monocle-wearing folks?" Lumian inquired.

Hela placed the empty military flask back into her hidden pocket. As she continued to follow the humanoid skeleton, she replied in a cold, ethereal voice, "It's tied to the Fourth Epoch's Amon family."

Fourth Epoch's Amon family… The ancient tomb Monette emerged from belonged to a member of the Amon family… They control the Marauder pathway, much like Franca mentioned the Demoness family's control over the Assassin pathway. Seeing that Hela wasn't inclined to share more, Lumian had no choice but to keep silent and follow.

Monette's reappearance pushed aside any thoughts of idle chatter to ease his restlessness.

As they proceeded, the candles held by Lumian and Hela took on a faint, eerie shade of dark green.

The "resurrected" skeleton turned into a massive, decaying tomb with a partially open stone door.

Lumian's spirits soared, sensing that the Samaritan Women's Spring lay ahead.

At that moment, another figure poked its head out from the side of the tomb.

Under the yellowish candlelight, the crystal monocle gleamed with an unsettling brilliance.

It was the Islander swindler, Monette, once more!

He grinned and inquired, "Do you have any messages for your family and friends? I can help convey them."

Lumian was so startled that he almost couldn't contain the urge to strike down Monette right then and there!

There couldn't be a better place to deal with him!

"No," Hela replied icily, choosing not to engage.

Lumian exhaled slowly and said, "Neither do I."

"What a shame." Monette returned to the dark tunnel beside the tomb, looking disappointed.

The yellowish candlelight flickered slightly, indicating that he hadn't gone far and was waiting nearby.

Lumian couldn't help but glance at Hela and gesture with his right hand as if cutting a throat.

He was asking if they should eliminate the Islander swindler in advance.

Hela remained silent for a few moments before gently shaking her head.

"We'll leave as soon as we obtain the Samaritan Women's Spring."

She intended to stay focused on their objective and avoid stirring up further trouble.

Yes, once I've collected the spring water, I'll teleport away with Madam Hela… Lumian agreed and replaced their candles with fresh ones.

After some time, the skeleton still hadn't emerged. Cautiously, they entered the massive tomb through the partially open stone door.

At that moment, a raspy, elderly voice echoed from the depths of the tomb.

"Halt!"

Within the perimeter of the yellowish candlelight, a figure trembled into view.

Chapter 352: Spring Source

A figure staggered out from the depths of the tomb.

As the figure entered the range of the candle flames, it seemed uncomfortable with the light. It raised its right hand to shield itself from the glare.

Similar to the tomb administrators, the figure wore a blue shirt and yellow pants. However, his face bore deep wrinkles and light-brown patches. Sparse, dry, white hair adorned his head, and his eyes were an unusual pure black, giving off an icy coldness.

For some inexplicable reason, Lumian found it challenging to discern the features of the aged tomb administrator. His form seemed to blur at the edges, blending seamlessly with the surrounding darkness, impervious to the white candle's glow. His breath was so faint it bordered on non-existent.

In a hoarse, emotionless voice, like that of a corpse capable of speech, he uttered, "Get out of here!"

"Since it's open for viewing, there shouldn't be any restricted areas!" Lumian retorted, echoing the tone of college students in Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative, attempting to reason with him.

But the aged tomb administrator repeated, "Get out of here!"

Lumian turned to Hela, hoping she might succeed in persuading the gravekeeper.

If that failed, he was prepared to take more direct action, either restraining the other party or even rendering him unconscious.

The Spell of Harrumph was perfectly suited for such tasks.

However, Hela shook her head slowly and began to exit the tomb.

…

Deep underground near the arcade of the opera house, Franca gazed at the entrustee and inquired, "What kind of deal?"

The Warlock-dressed man responded in a shrill tone, "I'll increase the reward to 50,000 verl d'or. Go to the Deep Valley Quarry and create a huge commotion, exposing the secret cave.

"If you're willing, you can sign the contract now. I have a way to ensure the contract's binding powers on both parties."

Fifty thousand verl d'or to create an explosion capable of shattering the stone wall at the secret cave's entrance? Why seek us out for such a straightforward task while offering a generous compensation of 50,000 verl d'or? Franca's suspicion deepened.

With a subtle movement, Franca produced a fist-sized grayish-white cloth bag and tossed it into the shadows beside her. She assumed a guarded posture against the man across from her and as though it was inconvenient for her to find a necessary item.

"Help me find my seal."

Seal? Jenna materialized from the shadows and caught the small coin bag, hearing the metallic clinks within.

She was baffled by Franca's request.

Isn't the bag supposed to be filled with coins and the Ring of Punishment?

Franca smiled at the entrustee.

"What are the specific terms of the contract?"

She sensed the possibility that the other party might manipulate the contract using Beyonder powers from the corresponding domain. Franca had a plan to attack before committing to any contract—capture him, clarify the terms, and then consider whether to sign it!

…

Baffled, Lumian followed Hela out of the tomb and asked, "What do we do now?"

"Grab my right arm," Hela's voice was colder than before, devoid of warmth.

Lumian roughly grasped her thoughts and quickly complied, reaching out to firmly grasp her right arm.

Almost instantly, Hela twirled the black diamond ring on her right middle finger with her left palm.

Almost simultaneously, Lumian felt a profound shift. He was no longer in the same world as the tomb entrance.

Surveying his surroundings, he noticed that everything, including the dim candlelight, had become hazy, shrouded in dense fog.

Guided by Hela, Lumian moved cautiously through the thick fog, taking one step at a time.

There was no movement in the depths of the tomb, and the two of them slowly advanced in silence.

Before long, within the limited visibility of five meters, he spotted a rotting coffin standing upright on the ground.

The aged tomb administrator lay motionless in the coffin, his eyes wide open and devoid of life.

Lumian couldn't detect any sign of breathing this time.

In this foggy state, the aged tomb administrator seemed to pay them no mind, allowing Lumian and Hela to pass by as they headed towards the end of the tomb.

There, they found a gentle downward slope leading to an unknown destination.

Hela gestured for Lumian to release his grip, and the enigmatic concealment dissipated.

Standing at the top of the slope, Lumian held a candle flame in his hand, illuminating a path lined with scattered, broken bones.

An unsettling chill emanated from the depths of his heart, stifling his emotions and desires. Yet, an unshakable anger and malice of wanting to snap someone's neck persisted, growing stronger. Lumian felt as though he was observing his own duality—a sane self contrasted with a crazed, unfamiliar self.

He couldn't help but glance at Hela, who downed a flask of liquor in one go. Her face remained pale, and purplish-red patches marred her skin, making her look as if she had been dead for some time.

"Are you alright?" Lumian remembered his primary role as a constant reminder to Hela to prevent her from being corrupted by the catacombs and undergoing any abnormalities.

Hela put away the empty flask and replied in a lifeless voice, "I'm fine for now. I've made preparations to deal with this situation. As long as I don't linger too long, I should be alright."

Lumian pressed, "How long can you stay?"

"About half an hour," Hela replied, beginning to descend the slope.

Lumian planned to grab Hela's arm and use spirit world traversal to force her out of here a few minutes in advance, regardless of what they found later.

Descending deeper, the slope became littered with more bones, gradually taking on complete and original forms. Some resembled humans, while others appeared monstrous.

The skeleton Hela had awakened earlier knelt on one knee on this slope, unable to proceed further.

As they continued, Lumian noticed a thin grayish-white fog up ahead, contracting and expanding, as if it had a life of its own.

Hela slowed her pace and regarded the fog with heightened caution.

"Is there a problem?" Lumian asked, finding the fog oddly familiar.

Hela nodded and said, "It's very dangerous. I've prepared as best as I can, but I'm not certain it will work."

As Lumian listened to Madame Hela's response, he continued to observe the grayish-white fog.

Suddenly, he recognized it.

Isn't this the same fog that shrouded Cordu's ruins?

The very fog that provided protection when I prayed for boons?

In that moment, Lumian realized the true reason behind Madam Justice's insistence that he accompany Madame Hela in the search for the Samaritan Women's Spring.

He cautiously extended his right palm towards the grayish-white fog, and as they touched, he felt warmth in his left chest.

He knew that Mr. Fool's seal had been activated.

He pushed forward, his right palm passing through the grayish-white fog without encountering any danger or abnormality.

With newfound confidence, he couldn't help but think, Praise The Fool!

After a brief prayer, Lumian turned to Hela with a confident smile.

"I've also made the necessary preparations, and they seem effective.

"I'll grab your arm."

Hela didn't inquire further about Lumian's preparations or the information he possessed. She allowed him to grab her left arm, and together, they ventured into the grayish-white fog.

The surroundings grew even quieter, and an unusual, almost palpable aura seemed to fill the air. Before long, they heard an ethereal and faint splashing sound.

The sound of water… Lumian felt a surge of excitement and relief.

They were in the right place, and the Samaritan Women's Spring was likely nearby!

They continued to move forward, and as they did, the grayish-white fog rapidly dissipated, revealing a pond-sized spring.

Around the spring, a dark substance of an indescribable color encircled the pale-white water at its center.

In the water, wet, black seaweed-like hair floated, and a few vague figures struggled to crawl out from the depths.

A woman stood beside the spring. It was the white-robed figure Lumian had seen before, suspected to be a high-ranking Demoness.

Her face was pale-white and translucent, her eyes blank and cold. White bones were scattered around her.

Splash!

Suddenly, the pale-white spring water receded with a splash, leaving behind a pitch-black hole that seemed to defy the presence of light.

With another splash, the spring water surged from the dark hole, filling the pond-sized spring once more.

This time, it was dimmer, less pale-white, and appeared empty and dark, containing countless indescribable colors.

In an instant, the spring water blended with the surrounding grayish-white fog, restoring its original appearance when Lumian and Hela first laid eyes on it.

In this place, their memories began to blur as if they were slowly fading away.

In a hurry, Lumian reached into his pocket, intending to retrieve the metal canister he had prepared to collect the pale-white spring water.

But he touched something stone-like.

He had never put anything similar into his pocket!

Lumian retracted his right hand in surprise and saw a brown stone in his palm. The stone was riddled with potholes, each filled with dark-red speckled spots.

Earth Blood ore!

It was the Earth Blood ore he had previously lost.

When did it return? Why did it suddenly appear in my possession? This is a part of Underground Trier! As Lumian's pupils dilated in alarm, a frenzied, terrifying aura saturated with blood and rust emanated from the dark hole that had swallowed the pale-white spring water once more.

The mere presence of this aura froze Lumian and Hela simultaneously, rendering them immobile.

Beside the suspected high-ranking Demoness, a skeleton raised its palm and touched its right eye.

Simultaneously, it bared its white teeth and emitted a chilling, delighted laugh.

"You've already obtained it. How can you not give it a try?"

Around the spring, other white skeletons joined in, their mouths opening to produce the same voice: "You've already obtained it. How can you not give it a try?"

Chapter 353: Crazy Figure

"You've already obtained it. How can you not give it a try?" The ghastly white skeletons stared at Lumian, their terrifying aura intimidating him. They laughed mockingly, their laughter exaggerated and crazed.

Splash!

The dark spring water, not pale-white enough, gushed from the dark hole and filled the small "pond."

Compared to before, there was an additional figure in the water.

The figure seemed to be engulfed in an intense inferno, almost colorless flames covering its entire body.

Despite occupying only a corner of the spring, Lumian, frozen in fear, felt it was abnormally huge, like a mountain peak.

Within the nearly intangible flames, the figure revealed long, blood-colored hair. Its sculpted face was marred by decay and pus, and its bones gleamed with a metallic luster. Its iron-black eyes seemed rusted, emitting a sinister blood-red glow.

Yellowish "magma" dripped from the figure's body, quickly extinguished by the pale-white spring water.

As the Samaritan Women's Spring surged again, the dense white bones that had made the sound fell silent, as if they were about to decay into mud.

Seeing the decomposing mountain-like figure, the stench of blood and rust intensified in Lumian's nostrils. His stunned mind was tinged with a madness that yearned to destroy everything, igniting his already violent and ferocious aura.

If he hadn't been on the brink of death, his thoughts completely stalled, he might have lost his mind and become a lunatic.

He could lose control at any moment if that happened.

In any case, he stood frozen in place, as if facing his most feared natural enemy. All he knew was to tremble, forget to resist, and forget to escape.

Splash!

The highly decayed figure, shrouded in intangible flames, entered the pitch-black cave, determined to reach the edge of the Samaritan Women's Spring. It reached out its right palm, dripping with a faint yellowish-red liquid, trying to grab Lumian, who stood there.

The spring water surged, and a faint fog gathered, preventing the figure, which appeared as massive as a mountain, from leaving the spring.

A low growl escaped the figure, and its iron-black eyes emitted a corrupting redness, capable of unsettling anyone who lay their eyes on them.

Under this influence, Lumian's mind buzzed, and he went blank. The Samaritan Women's Spring trembled violently.

Although the terrifying figure couldn't break free from the spring's constraints, it successfully blocked the spring water's retreat into the dark hole.

Simultaneously, the decayed and shadowy figures within the spring surged toward the shore, driven by the low growl.

Among them, there was a woman filled with pus exuding a serene night-like temperament, a decaying corpse adorned with a golden crown, an iron-colored skeleton sprouting greasy feathers, a figure entwined with countless shattered maggots, and a strange black entity…

These figures, too, couldn't leave the Samaritan Women's Spring but approached the edge, extending pale-white, pus-covered or highly decayed palms made of repulsive maggots toward Lumian's feet.

The long black hair floating on the water's surface, resembling a tangle of weeds, suddenly came to life and extended rapidly beyond the spring.

The white-robed woman lingering around the Samaritan Women's Spring was instantly ensnared by the long black hair. Lumian's figure reflected in her stiff, cold blue eyes.

Bizarre and terrifying palms gripped Lumian, and the long black hair tugged at him. Slowly and uncontrollably, he slid toward the Samaritan Women's Spring, drawing closer to the colossal figure formed by madness and flames.

His body grew colder, and his thoughts went blank.

At that moment, all light suddenly vanished, and he was consumed by a most profound darkness.

Melodious singing and chanting echoed from afar, soothing the area. The blurry and shadowy figures no longer displayed the same level of madness as before, as if they had been pacified.

The terrifying palms that had clutched Lumian's feet and nearly froze his spirit and flesh retracted. The long black hair that had tugged at his body lost its vitality and fell to the ground, powerless. The figure suspected to be a high-ranking Demoness lingering around the Samaritan Women's Spring also came to a halt, as if listening to a nocturnal symphony.

Even the most terrifying and frenzied figure slowed down, its terrifying aura significantly weakening.

Lumian snapped out of his daze and instantly comprehended what had transpired.

The thief who had stolen the Earth Blood ore was none other than Monette of Salle de Bal Unique!

Monette had deliberately orchestrated a coincidental encounter with him on the fourth level of the catacombs. Using his thieving skills, he had surreptitiously returned the Earth Blood ore, enabling Lumian to bring the ore specimen to the Samaritan Women's Spring without detection, triggering this bizarre turn of events!

Lumian had never intended to take the Earth Blood ore underground, deeming it too dangerous given his current abilities. Monette's theft and return of the ore had been a passive way to provoke an encounter, the nature of which remained uncertain!

As for Monette's motives, Lumian knew he might only uncover them after this ordeal concluded.

With his thoughts racing, Lumian instinctively reached for Hela's arm, intending to activate his contract mark and escape using spirit world traversal.

In the process, he attempted to rid himself of the Earth Blood ore, hoping to distract the crazed figure with long, blood-colored hair.

However, the Earth Blood ore appeared to be affected by the abnormal environment, showing visible signs of deterioration.

Silently, it crumbled, dissolving into the air. The hidden blood stains marked Lumian's palm, corroding his skin.

Meanwhile, the flame of the white candle Hela held flickered precariously, on the brink of extinguishing. The black diamond ring on her right hand emitted a profound darkness.

After grasping her arm, Lumian realized they were both frozen in place.

This area seemed to be cut off from the spirit world, rendering escape impossible!

I can't escape… Lumian retracted his hand decisively and addressed the fiery figure, who gazed at him with madness: "Ha!"

A pale-yellow beam emanated from his mouth, striking the dark, mountain-like figure.

The figure swayed, but remained unharmed. It unleashed an intangible roar once more.

Receiving this new "command," the bizarre figures, previously calmed by the tranquil night, trembled. They extended their decaying or repulsive hands once again, clutching at Lumian's feet. The black hair, previously lying dormant, rose again.

Realizing evasion was futile, Lumian's body erupted in fiery flames.

The crimson blossoms of destruction rapidly dimmed and faded, as if their vitality had been extinguished in an instant.

The pale-white, pus-filled hand was the first to seize Lumian's right foot, "silencing" him as his thoughts rapidly waned.

The highly decayed hand, the iron-colored skeleton adorned with light-yellow feathers, and the form intertwined with shattered maggots fulfilled their tasks one after another. They dragged Lumian, who appeared as if in a trance with wide-open eyes, toward the Samaritan Women's Spring.

Hela found herself encircled by layers of long black hair. It pierced through the tranquility of the night, enveloping the lady, who displayed signs of decay.

Lumian stared vacantly at the rigid, decomposing countenance, at the iron-black eyes tinged with blood. He sensed an overwhelming, unadulterated madness but could summon no coherent thought.

His body grew more rigid, and purplish-red livor mortis emerged on his flesh.

He was now just a step away from the pale-white spring.

At that moment, the Samaritan Women's Spring, which had been held at bay by the colossal figure for an extended period, finally surged forward, breaking through the barrier. It swept all the figures, including the colossal one engulfed in invisible flames, back into the lightless abyss of the dark hole.

The colossal figure emitted a furious roar, but it was helpless against the relentless flow of pale-white spring water, vanishing into the depths of the abyss.

Lumian "woke up" and spotted the white-robed woman lingering nearby. He swiftly turned and sprinted toward the crest of the slope.

His plan was straightforward:

Since the abnormality stemmed from the Earth Blood ore, which had partially melded with his palm, he needed to seize this chance to escape. It was not the time to collect the remaining spring water.

As long as he could make his getaway before the pale-white spring surged again and the menacing figures resurfaced, Hela would be safer left behind. She could gather the water calmly and share it with him later.

To escape, given that teleportation had failed, his legs were his sole option now.

As Lumian ran, he readied himself for any potential setbacks.

Harnessing his Pyromaniac abilities, he steadied the flame of the white candle and retrieved the Flog boxing gloves from his bag, fitting them onto his hands.

Concurrently, he attempted to invoke The Fool's honorific name in Hermes.

"The Fool that doesn't belong to this era…"

This inspiration was triggered by the grayish-white fog enveloping the Samaritan Women's Spring!

Splash!

Midway through his invocation and while covering some ground, Lumian heard the sound of the spring water surging.

It was faster than he had anticipated!

The growl, steeped in the scent of blood and rust, reverberated through the surroundings.

Unaware of Lumian's thought process, Hela's body shuddered once more, as if she had transformed from an emotionless corpse into a frightened living being.

Out of the corner of her eye, she caught sight of the colossal, invisible-flame-shrouded figure with blood-colored hair and tattered, bloodstained armor.

Lumian, too, was taken aback. He even felt an inclination to surrender and give up his resistance.

He strained to endure, unable to continue invoking the honorific name. His only recourse was to place his faith in the Flog boxing gloves.

If he could hold out just a little longer, the hidden evil gods might direct Their attention toward him because of the material of the boxing gloves, sending forth dangerous creatures to influence or assail him.

In the past, Lumian would have prayed for the impending abnormality to remain manageable. But now, he hoped that the more dangerous it became, the better!

Only by muddying the waters would a fish have a chance to escape!

Chapter 354: Palm

Underground near the arcade of the opera house.

The Warlock-dressed man spoke to Franca in a shrill voice, "It's simple. There are only three specific terms. First, you two must promise to blow up the hidden door of the secret cave in Deep Valley Quarry, creating a commotion that can attract everyone nearby. Second, I'll pay both of you 50,000 verl d'or with an advance of 20,000. Third, you'll face consequences if you don't uphold your end of the bargain. This restriction applies to both parties. We can discuss the details."

The man had no intention of deceiving the two Beyonders in the contract. Instead, he planned to use his abilities to modify the mission's content the moment the contract was established, forcing them to infiltrate the secret cave in Deep Valley Quarry and retrieve what he wanted, along with sufficient evidence.

This entrustee had once purchased a human soul for 1,000 verl d'or using this unique ability to tamper with transaction terms. He believed he wouldn't be disappointed this time.

As Franca conversed with the Warlock-dressed man, Jenna, hidden in the shadows, reached into the small money bag and idly stroked the gold, silver, and copper coins inside.

She was certain that there was no seal inside the money bag.

Or rather, Franca didn't have a seal!

What does she mean? Jenna's gaze shifted to the entrustee who had stated the terms of the contract, finding it rather peculiar.

If he wanted to strike a deal, why not apply for notarization at the mysticism gathering just now?

If he were afraid that the contents of the commission would be exposed, he could have gone to the "conversation room" and borrowed the host's mystical item. There was no need to secretly follow us for the commission!

Something is definitely off!

Jenna understood why Franca had tossed the coin bag to her.

As soon as she realized that something was amiss, she was to immediately use the Ring of Punishment to attack the other party and take control over the situation!

Phew… Jenna exhaled slowly and put on the Ring of Punishment. Using the shadows, she closed the distance between herself and the entrustee.

Franca glanced at the shadows not illuminated by the carbide lamp and smiled at the entrustee dressed as a Warlock.

"That sounds reasonable, but I need to confirm if you're lying and if there's a problem with this matter."

As she spoke, she gently tossed the carbide lamp in front of her and retrieved a mirror from the Assassin suit's hidden pocket. She smiled and said, "Coincidentally, I'm skilled in divination."

Upon hearing this, the entrustee dressed as a Warlock's pupils dilated, and his entire body tensed up.

He wasn't sure if Magic Mirror Divination could expose his scheme!

Hidden in the shadows, Jenna detected his abnormality. Without hesitation, she raised her right hand slightly, causing the iron-colored ring covered in tiny spikes to glow.

Simultaneously, two blinding bolts of lightning shot out from her eyes.

Psychic Piercing!

…

At the Samaritan Women's Spring.

Lumian and Hela were once again gripped by a horrifying terror, consumed by pure madness. They stood frozen in place, their bodies quivering slightly.

While this madness immobilized them, it paradoxically spared them from imminent death. Their frozen bodies burned with an intense heat, and their dormant thoughts ignited with fury and brutality.

However, their purplish-red livor mortis and decaying skin continued to worsen, showing no signs of improvement.

Darkness descended once more, and Hela used the black diamond ring on her right hand to try and pacify the spectral figures hovering in the Samaritan Women's Spring, including the burning giant in rotting armor.

Lumian recollected his thoughts and realized that his escape with Hela had not been in vain.

They had distanced themselves more than ten meters from the spring, and the decaying, shadowy figures could not leave the Samaritan Women's Spring or reach the shore to grasp their legs and drag them underwater.

These figures clustered at the spring's edge, their vacant eyes staring into nothingness. Their heavily decayed or distorted hands occasionally reached out from the water, only to be forcefully pulled back by some mysterious force.

Silently, they emitted roars that made the entire slope tremble, inducing drowsiness and feelings of submission in Lumian and Hela, causing various adverse reactions.

However, the madness that had ignited their thoughts and the strange effects that had led to signs of dissociative identity disorder had failed to take hold.

Around the Samaritan Women's Spring, only the lingering female figure and the long black hair, resembling seaweed, could approach Lumian. One gazed at him with eerie eyes, while the other extended itself, attempting to ensnare him.

Lumian was relieved. Even if his resistance failed, he would be dragged toward the Samaritan Women's Spring by the long black hair and the indistinct figure suspected to be a high-ranking Demoness. With more than ten meters to cover, he had a chance to hold on until the pale-white spring water overcame the terrifying figure with its reddening iron-black eyes and carried him back into the pitch-black abyss.

When the moment arrived, Lumian could make a swift escape. In two or three attempts, he could exit the area shrouded in the grayish-white fog and return to the chamber above.

Later, he would send Hela inside to retrieve the Samaritan Women's Spring's water, avoiding the adverse reaction caused by the blood ore and the colossal figure which was clearly more potent than the other "water ghosts."

But in the next moment, Lumian's body froze unnaturally.

White frost appeared and vanished repeatedly on his body.

In the blue eyes of the woman, Lumian was now imprisoned in ice.

The long black hair coiled tighter around him, dragging him toward the Samaritan Women's Spring.

Seeing Lumian in peril, Hela, who had remained relatively unaffected, swiftly aimed her right hand at the unknown entity, suspected to be the lingering spirit of a high-ranking Demoness, using the black diamond ring that emitted a constant darkness.

The night transformed into a shroud, enshrouding the other entity and inducing slumber.

Lumian seized this opportunity to release a harrumph, channeling a white stream of light through his nose and into the crystalline ice that bound him, targeting the seaweed-like black hair.

The black hair that ensnared him suddenly lost its strength.

Simultaneously, the curtain of night that had surrounded the entity abruptly constricted, leaving it empty.

Not far away, the female figure in the white robe reappeared, her gaze fixed on Lumian.

Though danger still loomed, Lumian felt a surge of relief. He believed that, even if he stopped resisting now, he could hold on until the pale-white spring withdrew into its depths.

At that moment, the iron-colored eyes of the colossal figure floating in the spring grew wilder, and the rust-like redness became as vivid as blood.

He tugged violently at the spring water, as if trying to break free from invisible chains.

Finally, amid a tumultuous earthquake-like upheaval, the figure draped in tattered, blood-soaked armor and engulfed in invisible flames reached the edge of the Samaritan Women's Spring.

Rumble!

The ground quaked, sending grayish-white dust raining down.

Lumian's mind buzzed, and he blacked out instantly.

When he regained his senses, he found himself back at the edge of the Samaritan Women's Spring, having covered over ten meters in an instant.

From the corner of his eye, he saw Hela rushing back towards him, her eyes vacant and bloodshot, resembling a puppet or a mindless soldier following orders.

Lumian could already guess that when he closed his eyes, he had returned to the spring's edge in a similarly empty and obedient state.

At this moment, he couldn't flee upon regaining consciousness. Behind him were the coiling black hair and the figure of the supposed high-ranking Demoness. In front of him were the grotesque, decaying, and repulsive palms.

Simultaneously, they clawed at Lumian, intent on dragging him into the spring. The colossal figure with long, blood-red hair hanging over it was just a step away.

Gritting his teeth, Lumian seized the chance to bite the base of the white candle and reached into his pocket with his gloved left hand.

As he did, he cursed internally.

You dogsh*t evil gods have been observing me for so long. Why haven't you sent anything to harm me?

Where are the promised dangerous creatures?

Are you afraid to confront that insane figure here?

Despite his curses, Lumian didn't give up. He drew a dagger and was about to cleave off his right palm, which had been corroded by the Earth Blood ore.

If you want it, take it!

As for whether the 6 a.m. reboot each morning would cause his missing right hand to regenerate, he didn't care at this point.

At that moment, a pale-white hand emerged from the pitch-black hole at the depths of the spring, where the ground trembled and quaked.

The fingers of the hand were slender, with cracks running along its back. These cracks oozed pale-yellow feathers and decaying yellow pus. The skin on either side of the cracks was crystalline like jade, but pale and dark.

As the palm emerged, it crossed the barrier of the spring water and seized the right leg of the colossal figure.

The figure, clad in tattered, blood-stained armor and shrouded in intangible flames, swayed uncontrollably as it was pulled toward the pitch-black abyss deep within the pale-white spring water.

It struggled and resisted with all its might, but the bizarre palm's retreat remained relentless. The only response was the falling of light-yellow feathers, pus stained with blood, and skin that was no longer crystalline but highlighted with black, living blood vessels.

Countless complex symbols—pale-white, pitch-black, or dim—appeared, carrying the frenzied and terrifying figure as it rapidly shrank toward the pitch-black spring.

Lumian couldn't witness the scene, nor could he see what was happening. All he knew was that the massive figure with a decaying face, blood-red hair, and iron-black eyes was moving away from him. The terrifying hands that had grabbed him stopped moving, frozen in place.

The crazed figure growled repeatedly but couldn't break free. In the blink of an eye, most of its body had been dragged back into the depths of the spring.

Just as it was about to disappear completely, its madness materialized. Two dark-red "rust spots" shot out of its iron-black eyes and darted straight toward Lumian.

Instinctively, Lumian raised his right hand to block. The two rust marks pierced through the Flog boxing glove and into his skin, which had been corroded by the Earth Blood ore.

Splash!

The pale-white spring water receded entirely, pulling all the floating figures into the pitch-black abyss.

The vicinity of the spring fell eerily silent.

Chapter 355: The Real Spring Water

In the midst of the eerie silence, Lumian sensed an unusual heat in his right palm, as though it were ablaze.

Swiftly, he stripped off his boxing gloves and inspected his palm. The Earth Blood ore's corrosive touch had left it bright red, radiating waves of excruciating pain that left him seething with frustration and anger.

Aside from this, nothing appeared out of the ordinary for now.

Given the circumstances, Lumian couldn't afford a detailed examination. Ignoring the cold creeping through his body and his "calmed" thoughts, he retreated to assess the situation at the Samaritan Women's Spring.

Indistinct figures and the long, weed-like black hair submerged in the water were drawn into a lightless abyss, swaying relentlessly, as though a fierce battle raged within.

The white-robed, corpse-like figure that had lingered nearby had vanished into thin air, leading Lumian to suspect that his encounter with the suspected high-level Demoness on the fourth floor was linked to a similar change in the Samaritan Women's Spring.

This sight sparked a daring idea in Lumian's mind.

Seeing the terrifying figure pulled back to the fountain by a strange power, one in fierce resistance and the other trying to suppress it, it seemed unlikely a victor would emerge quickly. Lumian decided to stay vigilant, pause his escape, and explore the possibility of setting a trap while collecting some of the pale-white spring water once it surged again.

The "water ghosts" were nowhere to be seen at the spring's bottom, nor were there any blurry figures lingering nearby. It appeared to be a safe moment.

In the next instant, Lumian noticed Hela producing a golden bottle adorned with intricate, mystical symbols, reminiscent of the symbols he had seen at the basement door of the Highland Mystic Potion shop.

Hela didn't wait for the pale-white spring water to rise again. She squatted down and pressed the bottle's opening to the damp soil at the spring's edge.

The soil was dark-colored, and the closer they got to the pitch-black hole, the more it seemed to contain countless colors. The soil was more ordinary the farther it was from it. It was no different from the slope itself in areas where hadn't been submerged by the spring water.

The soil, dark and filled with countless colors near the pitch-black hole, dried up as the pale-white spring water receded into the abyss. However, the periphery remained slightly moist, producing droplets that were more tangible than the pale-white spring water and resembled the color of a nocturnal lake.

Seeing that Hela's target was the liquid, Lumian asked in confusion, "Aren't you going to wait for the Samaritan Women's Spring to resurface?"

Hela shook her head.

"This is the true Samaritan Women's Spring Water. The pale-white water is too dangerous to touch right now. Contact with it means instant death, wandering forever near the spring or its source. Our containers are no exception."

That terrifying? Could it be that the Samaritan Women's Spring is a byproduct of the pale-white water and not its true form? Lumian took out a metal canister he had prepared in advance and held it to the droplets seeping from the soil at the spring's edge.

With just one drop, the canister showed signs of rust and decay from prolonged submersion.

Without a word, Hela produced a golden canister engraved with intricate symbols and tossed it to Lumian.

Only then did Lumian manage to collect the Samaritan Women's Spring. His attention remained focused on the dark spring.

As long as the earth-shaking tremors ceased, he planned to make a hasty retreat with the Samaritan Women's Spring water he had collected.

One drop, two drops, three drops. The spring water entered the golden canister at a painstakingly slow pace, as if it might stop at any moment. His prepared canister, on the other hand, grew increasingly rusty and fragile.

Lumian watched the sluggish progress, concerned that the pale-white spring water might surge again.

Frustration and anxiety welled up inside him.

Hence, he silently cursed to relieve his pent-up emotions.

Drip, drip. He had only filled a third of the bottle when Hela decided to stop and seal the golden canister.

I mustn't be greedy… Lumian warned himself, putting an end to the collection of Samaritan Women's Spring with Hela.

Together, they sprinted toward the summit of the slope.

Before long, the sound of water echoed from behind them.

Once more, the pale-white spring gushed forth from the pitch-black hole!

Without looking back to assess the situation, they continued their sprint through the grayish-white fog, as if a relentless, intangible monster pursued them.

In a matter of seconds, they finally reached the fog's edge. Lumian grabbed Hela's arm and propelled himself forward.

Exiting the shroud of grayish-white fog, Lumian finally breathed a sigh of relief. The coldness in his body abated, and his thoughts settled significantly.

…

Psychic Piercing!

Jenna emerged from the shadows, her eyes crackling with lightning.

The man in the Warlock robe heard a surreal crack and felt an intense surge of pain radiate from the depths of his Spirit Body, gripping his mind.

Instinctively, he crumpled to the ground, curling up in an attempt to alleviate the agony.

Franca wasted no time and seized the moment. She pointed the mirror she held at him.

As the Warlock-clad entrustee appeared in the mirror, black flames ignited in Franca's palm and spread across the glass.

Demoness's Curse!

Black flames erupted from the man's body, weakening his struggling spirit.

Soon after, crystalline ice encased him layer by layer, and colorless spider silk cocooned him, revealing his form.

Franca's intention was to restrain him, not kill him. After all, nobody knew if he was involved in any corruption or high-level matters, and reckless spirit channeling could lead to accidents.

Seeing the man weakened and heavily restrained, Franca whispered in surprise,

"That's it?"

She had no doubt that she and Jenna could defeat the other party with a surprise attack, but she hadn't expected it to be so straightforward.

In the next moment, the man struggled to speak under the threefold control of black flames, ice, and spider silk, his voice faint but determined. "You're committing a crime!"

As soon as he finished speaking, a violent tremor emanated from deep underground. A rock from the tunnel's ceiling plummeted toward Jenna's head.

Jenna swiftly rolled to dodge, but she still felt the impact of falling debris.

Franca faced a similar predicament. She sensed that if this continued, the entire tunnel might collapse. Even with Mirror Substitution, she couldn't guarantee her safety in this segment of the tunnel.

Without hesitation, she clenched her right hand, reigniting the remaining black flames within the entrustee's body.

Black flames engulfed his Spirit Body, and the Warlock-dressed man quickly met his end.

The tunnel's tremors ceased, leaving nothing but dust hanging in the air.

Franca breathed a sigh of relief and wasted no time. She swiftly set up a spirit channeling ritual, while Jenna kept a vigilant eye out for any passersby while kneading her shoulders and back.

After a while, Franca completed the Magic Mirror Spirit Channeling Spell. Holding the mirror, she gazed at the pale-white face with a hint of arrogance and inquired, "How much do you know about the secrets of the Deep Valley Quarry?"

The man's spirit responded in a daze, "Some seek to use machinery to prolong their lives, while others seek machinery to acquire life.

"A portion of the Deep Valley Cloister is sliding into the abyss."

Can't you be more specific? Franca pressed, "Which organization are you from? Why are you exploiting the gatekeeper's disappearance?"

Just as the man was about to respond, an ever-changing fog suddenly enveloped the mirror.

Crack!

The mirror in Franca's hand shattered instantly.

Bang!

The man's body, encased in ice and spider silk, exploded. His flesh disintegrated into mist that filled the surroundings.

Almost simultaneously, Franca shattered like a mirror, breaking into fragments that fell to the ground.

Her figure quickly outlined at the tunnel's intersection and appeared beside Jenna.

"As expected, something was amiss," Franca said solemnly, watching as the indeterminate blood mist gradually settled and melded with the ground.

By that point, the corpse had transformed into a pile of minced meat, with only the metal items on it remaining intact.

Franca and Jenna conducted a simple search and found a brass key and coins worth 200 to 300 verl d'or.

They didn't dare linger. After erasing any traces of their presence, they made their exit.

Approximately two to three minutes later, a pair of legs clad in knee-length brown boots materialized beside the puddle of flesh and blood, clutching a shrunken, golden kettle with a protruding wick.

…

The scorching sunlight bathed the entrance to the catacombs of Place du Purgatoire, and Lumian felt as though he had returned from the kingdom of the dead to the world of the living. The chill that had permeated his body gradually dissipated.

Turning to Hela, whose pale-white complexion, purplish-red livor mortis, and signs of decay had yet to fully heal, he smiled and remarked, "Even though it wasn't a real battle, it's the closest I've come to death."

Hela replied simply, "Those who can retain a mark in the pale-white spring water for a long time were once formidable individuals."

As Lumian strolled to the edge of the square, he casually inquired, "What's the purpose of the Samaritan Women's Spring? You can't actually use it to forget the past and pain, can you?"

Hela shook her head.

"For me, it can serve as a replacement for a certain ritual, or rather, become the central element of another ritual."

Lumian didn't fully grasp the concept, so he didn't press for more details.

Soon, however, he noticed that the residual chill in his body and thoughts hadn't completely vanished just because he had left the catacombs.

While it had mostly dissipated, it seemed to linger within him, resurfacing gradually as night fell.

"The abnormality in our bodies is still present," Lumian reminded Hela with a solemn tone.

Hela nodded.

"I have a solution. The one who tasked you with obtaining the spring water should have a solution as well."

Lumian acknowledged her words briefly and bid farewell to Hela, making his way toward the public carriage stop.

Compared to the abnormality of gradually dying, he was more concerned about the Earth Blood ore that had corroded his palm, as well as the bizarre "rust."

Chapter 356: Scar

As time ticked away, Lumian sensed his body temperature slowly dissipating. Even the blazing sun outside the public carriage window couldn't stave off this change.

His thoughts dulled, and the skin on the back of his hand turned a pallid white.

At last, Lumian made it to the market district.

As he disembarked from the public carriage, his limbs seemed to stiffen.

Just as he turned onto Rue des Blouses Blanches, a man who approached him was taken aback. He let out a quiet gasp, his eyes filled with fear.

Lumian instinctively glanced to the side, assessing his reflection in the café's glass window.

His blonde-black hair appeared as if it hadn't been washed for days, and his face had turned a sickly shade of pale blue. There were purplish-red patches and signs of decay on his neck, and his eyes mirrored the cold emptiness of a corpse that had lain dead for many days.

Lumian smirked at the man and remarked, "Well, what do you think? Have I convincingly transformed into a zombie?"

He noticed his voice adopting a colder tone, reminiscent of Hela.

The gentleman silently cursed and bypassed the fellow who appeared ready to attend a masquerade ball.

Lumian knew the corruption consuming him was worsening. He quickened his pace and reached the safe house he hadn't yet turned over.

Swiftly, he arranged the altar, unfolded a piece of paper, and penned a brief letter to Madam Magician.

"I've fulfilled Madam Justice's mission and acquired the spring water of Samaritan Women's Spring, but I'm also succumbing to corruption. It's worsening. How can I eradicate it?"

After neatly folding the letter, Lumian summoned Madam Magician's messenger.

The "doll" messenger materialized above the blue candle flame and gave Lumian an approving nod.

"I'm quite fond of your current demeanor, though your hair is too greasy."

The aura of near-death? Lumian's urge to mutter was weaker than before.

After watching the "doll" messenger depart, he set a fifteen-minute time limit. If Madam Magician didn't respond by then, he'd have to explore other avenues to rid himself of the corruption. One possibility was to perform a ritual and beseech Mr. Fool.

Tick, tock. The needle on the pocket watch borrowed from Salle de Bal Brise maintained a steady rhythm. However, Lumian had previously noticed that it was nearly ten minutes slow. It was as if the closer he came to the Samaritan Women's Spring, the slower it ticked.

Suddenly, starlight materialized from the void, forming a mysterious and ethereal door.

The door swung open, and Madam Magician emerged, dressed in a brownish-yellow gown. Beyond the door, there was a profound darkness adorned with starlight.

The Tarot Club's Major Arcana card holder glanced at Lumian and gave a gentle nod.

"Pray to Mr. Fool for an angel's purification."

I'll still have to pray to Mr. Fool? Lumian didn't probe further. He proceeded with the ritual at the prepared altar.

He lit the candles in the correct sequence and let the extract drip. After burning the herbs, he stepped back, gazing at the candle flames, and intoned in a deep voice, "The Fool that doesn't belong to this era, the mysterious ruler above the gray fog; the King of Yellow and Black who wields good luck…

"I implore you,

"I implore you to cleanse the corruption within me…"

Once the ritual concluded, Lumian once again saw an angel formed from light, surrounded by twelve pairs of luminous wings.

With only his peripheral vision remaining, he felt the chill in his body dissipate, and his body temperature quickly returned to normal.

Before long, the angel departed. Lumian looked at the full-length mirror in the room and realized that his complexion, hair, and eyes had completely returned to normal. The purplish-red livor mortis had vanished entirely. Only a few traces of decay remained, but there were no signs of deterioration. It seemed that these remnants would heal with time.

Lumian expressed heartfelt gratitude to Mr. Fool and concluded the ritual.

As he turned to Madam Magician, a sudden recollection struck him, and he hastily raised his right hand to inspect his palm.

The wound from the corrosion of the Earth Blood ore was still there. Though it was no longer as vividly red as when it first fused with the "rust," it hadn't faded either. It appeared as if he had marked his palm with a few scars using blood.

Sensing a faint undercurrent of madness and violence emanating from his right palm, Lumian furrowed his brow in confusion.

"Can't this be cleansed?"

Madam Magician fixed her gaze on his right palm for a few moments but didn't provide a direct answer. Instead, she spoke, "Share the details with me."

She took the initiative to pull up a chair and sat down, showing no inclination to continue the conversation standing.

Lumian settled into a chair at the wooden table, beginning with Madam Justice's assignment and recounting how he and Hela had each extracted a third of a canister's worth of Samaritan Women's Spring water.

He narrated the encounter with the colossal, frenzied figure and the bizarre power. Simultaneously, he didn't omit any details about Monette's appearance and actions, as well as the curious "return" of the Earth Blood ore.

Madam Magician listened to Lumian's account in silence before letting out a chuckle.

"It's quite challenging for truly formidable figures to die completely. Even without Beyonder characteristics, bodies, or souls, they often leave behind mental imprints, death marks, residual auras, and other remnants. When the right conditions align, they may find a way back into the real world with a suitable vessel."

"Like the Oldest One, the Creator?" Lumian grasped the gist of Madam Magician's explanation and inquired further, "So, who is this figure?"

Madam Magician took a moment to reflect and replied, "It's likely the Blood Emperor of the Fourth Epoch, Alista Tudor."

"The Blood Emperor? One of the Four Emperors?" Lumian had heard this title and name mentioned by Gardner Martin.

Alista Tudor's empire once spanned what was present-day Intis. The Trier, submerged underground, had served as His capital.

According to Gardner Martin, the Blood Emperor was a true deity who grasped the Hunter pathway, signifying that He was a Sequence 0 Red Priest!

"That's correct," Madam Magician affirmed. "The War of the Four Emperors was a genuine conflict among gods. Alista Tudor met His end in the submerged Fourth Epoch Trier, which also caused the capital to sink underground. He had long descended into madness and committed numerous atrocities. Rumor has it that He nearly entombed all the deities who participated in the war alongside Him. Even now, many remnants of that war lie buried beneath Trier, profoundly shaping some aspects of the Fifth Epoch's history."

The Fifth Epoch, the epoch in which Lumian and his companions resided, was often referred to as the Iron Age.

Nearly burying all the deities who participated in the war? The Blood Emperor was truly deranged… Lumian mused, genuinely intrigued.

"What occurred during the War of the Four Emperors?"

"I'm not entirely certain either," Madam Magician admitted with a shrug. "I've only heard about it from two beings who personally witnessed the war. Even They don't possess the full picture. After all, one should not look directly at a god. Remember, never look directly at a god, even if it's an incomplete Mythical Creature transformed from a Sequence 4 saint."

Beings who had personally experienced the War of the Four Emperors and still survived to this day? To have participated in such a divine conflict, they must be at least angels… Could they be the two angels beside Mr. Fool's throne? Yes, the Holy Bible mentioned that Mr. Fool's Angel of Time was an ancient angel, and one of them could be this figure? Lumian pieced together the information he had and ventured a guess.

Having heard Aurore mention the concept of Mythical Creatures and their associated complexities, Lumian had no doubt about the admonition "never look directly at a god."

Eagerly, Lumian asked, "So, after the Blood Emperor's demise, His mental mark, death mark, or residual aura remained sealed within the Samaritan Women's Spring?"

"That would likely be a death mark, but I suspect it's intertwined with a mental mark, residual aura, and even some lingering spirits left behind for reasons unknown. Otherwise, Blood Emperor Alista Tudor wouldn't persist in a combative state within the spring. Heh heh, combat can indeed be considered a Hunter trait," Madam Magician speculated.

As Madam Magician spoke, she extended her hand into the void, disappearing from Lumian's sight.

After a brief search, she reappeared, holding a tempting glass of Kirsch.

"Didn't your sister teach you? When you have a guest, remember to ask if they want tea or wine, or perhaps offer snacks," Madam Magician chided playfully as she took a sip of the light red wine and shook her head.

How could I remember at a time like this? Where did she get her wine? Only then did Lumian realize that he had forgotten to ask about the most important thing.

He sincerely acknowledged the lesson and then raised another query.

"What's the origins of the strange power that dragged the Blood Emperor back into the spring?"

"I don't know," Madam Magician replied candidly. "Even a true god might not know. All I can be certain of is that it has no connection to the War of the Four Emperors."

Lumian decided to put this matter aside for now and turned his attention to his right hand, where the mysterious traces remained.

"What are these marks? Can't Mr. Fool cleanse them?"

"If this isn't corruption, it can't be cleansed," Madam Magician explained while sipping her Kirsch. "It's more similar to a mystical item embedded in your hand. It will bring about certain adverse effects, and these effects can't be cleansed unless the item itself is removed."

"A mystical item… What's its purpose and what dangers does it hold?" Lumian hadn't anticipated this revelation.

"It's useless." Madam Magician chuckled. "I mentioned it's similar, but not equivalent. It certainly isn't a direct source of power enhancement. Rumor has it that in the underground of the Fourth Epoch's Trier, there are numerous treasures left behind by Blood Emperor Alista Tudor in various hidden locations. Only those with the Tudor family's bloodline can unlock them. And now, you can unlock them as well."

So, it's like my palm contains some of Tudor's blood and aura, unrelated to Beyonder powers? Lumian tried to probe the bright red scars on his right palm with his consciousness.

As soon as the two connected, he was abruptly engulfed by a surge of frenzied, violent, terrifying, and dominating aura. The entire room, and even the entire apartment, quaked uncontrollably.

Chapter 357: Monette's True Identity

The sudden change and the frenzied aura that had affected Lumian instinctively made him withdraw his consciousness from the scar on his right palm.

The anomaly ceased, and everything returned to normal.

Lumian surveyed his surroundings, concerned that the aura might attract unwanted attention.

At that moment, the room fell unusually silent, and the surroundings dimmed slightly, as if a layer of dark-colored soundproof glass had been added.

Lumian relaxed and turned his gaze back to Madam Magician.

"What happened?"

"The trace carries the aura of Alista Tudor, but it has no practical effect. It can't intimidate others or make them submit." Madam Magician held a cup filled with Kirsch and smiled. "With the Niese Face, you can act as The Blood Emperor at Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons."

It could only be used for acting or to frighten people under specific situations? Lumian nodded thoughtfully.

"What kind of negative effects will these traces have on me?"

Madam Magician chuckled.

"You'll become crazier, more ferocious, and more impulsive, but you're not lacking in those qualities already."

What she meant was that you have many similar negative effects. As long as they don't exceed the limit, there wouldn't be any problems. Or rather, you are already used to it, so it couldn't get any worse.

"That's good." Lumian heaved a sigh of relief.

Madam Magician took a sip of Kirsch and reminded him, "For now, you mainly rely on your perseverance and Alms Monk endurance to suppress the negative effects and maintain your normal state. However, when the time is right, you need to vent. It's like a reservoir. You can't keep accumulating water. You have to find an opportunity to release a portion. Otherwise, if you accumulate it day by day, it will either break the dam or spill out of the reservoir, leaving behind psychological problems."

That's true. While Alms Monk's subsequent advancement to Ascetic emphasizes endurance and accumulation, there's also an explosive aspect… Lumian understood Madam Magician's words.

Simultaneously, he thought of something.

After joining the Iron and Blood Cross Order, he would inevitably explore Underground Trier. Although he possessed the Blood Emperor's aura and had the qualifications to enter specific places and open certain treasures, would he trigger more abnormalities and encounter more danger?

Lumian expressed his concerns, and Madam Magician nodded slightly.

"This is a completely foreseeable discovery.

"Like, uh, as the saying goes, it's both a boon and a curse."

"If you don't want to take such a risk, pray to Mr. Fool again in two or three days and ask him to help you eliminate Alista Tudor's aura. Remember, you must specify that it's the aura of a high-level Beyonder of the Hunter pathway to prevent any misunderstandings of removing any unnecessary things during the surgery."

"Can't I clear it with my daily 6 a.m. reset?" Lumian asked out of habit.

Madam Magician shook her head.

"It can't reset an aura of this level."

Lumian fell into deep thought, contemplating whether to retain Alista Tudor's bloodline aura or use a ritual to remove it.

Recalling that entering the underground to search for the Fourth Epoch Trier would undoubtedly be a mission assigned by the Iron and Blood Cross Order, and triggering an abnormality was highly likely, he steeled his resolve and chose to keep the bright red scar on his right palm.

Unlike other members of the Iron and Blood Cross Order who had been corrupted by the building at 13 Alista, only Alista Tudor's bloodline aura could allow him to withstand the same underground "treatment" as the corrupted without losing his sanity.

As for the potential dangers, he was concerned, but he could only choose the option with fewer disadvantages.

In any case, searching for the entrance to the Fourth Epoch Trier wasn't his sole mission. When the time came, many members of the Iron and Blood Cross Order would undoubtedly join the effort. Gardner Martin might even lead the team. If the sky collapsed, they would all face it together!

Seeing that Lumian had made up his mind, Madam Magician didn't say anything else and quietly savored her Kirsch.

Lumian then inquired about something else.

"That group of Monette Islander swindlers, or rather, the people at Salle de Bal Unique? Could it be that they want me to obtain Alista Tudor's bloodline aura and open a treasure trove in the future? But why not obtain it themselves? They've already stolen the Earth Blood ore, and they can clearly enter the area around the Samaritan Women's Spring."

"Perhaps it's too dangerous for them, and they don't want to try it themselves. If you fail, it could unleash the Blood Emperor's remnant spirit. If you succeed, they just have to wait until you find the treasure," Madam Magician replied with a smile.

"Ushering in the Blood Emperor's remnant spirit?" Lumian expressed his puzzlement. "Back then, I felt that as long as I came into contact with the pale-white spring water, I would die immediately and completely. I probably can't become a vessel for the Blood Emperor's resurrection."

Madam Magician pondered for a moment and said, "Normally, that should be the case, but since you're a Hunter and possess Mr. Fool's seal and an angel from the Inevitability domain, once you're dragged into the spring and fused with the Blood Emperor's remnant spirit, it might trigger an unpredictable explosion, allowing Alista Tudor's figure to escape its restraints and prevent death from imprisoning Him."

Lumian pondered Madam Magician's words and felt that the more he thought about it, the more questions arose, making him feel more terrified.

Madam Magician gently swirled her glass.

"That was just my guess. The true motives of those at Salle de Bal Unique remain to be confirmed. It might even be a prank that could endanger your life to interfere with our judgment of other matters.

"In short, you have to be vigilant. Don't relax just because you feel that the other party has achieved their goal."

Lumian tersely acknowledged, indicating that he wouldn't let his guard down.

In fact, even if Madam Magician hadn't mentioned it, he would have taken precautions against the Islander swindler who always appeared underground at critical moments.

This guy was close to traumatizing him.

"Should we report the anomaly at Salle de Bal Unique to the two Churches?" Lumian inquired.

Madam Magician wore a peculiar expression as she replied, "I've been observing the dance hall for some time and realized that most of the people wearing monocles in their right eyes are normal. Only a few are problematic, and the few who are problematic are irregular. It's difficult to lock onto them as they can be one thing today and something else tomorrow.

"Furthermore, no one knows if He is among those who don't wear monocles with their right eye. To completely eliminate Him, we might have to apprehend everyone on that street and those who have visited the dance hall, either destroying or purifying them.

"However, this won't truly finish Him. It will only force Him into the shadows.

"Mr. Fool's Angel of Time is keeping an eye on this matter, hoping to find His most important avatars. Only then can we inflict pain and keep Him in check for a while."

Lumian was abnormally confused. Puzzled, he asked, "What do you mean if He is among those?"

Madam Magician spoke as if the abnormal ones were the same person.

Madam Magician pondered for a few seconds and said, "He has already interacted with you several times. It's necessary for you to understand Him to a certain extent.

"He is the great noble of the Fourth Epoch's Tudor Empire, Amon. He is also the child of the Ancient Sun God, who ruled the entire world in the Third Epoch."

"He's Amon?" Lumian recalled that the Islander swindler, Monette, had crawled out of the tomb of a member of the Amon family.

The person behind him was an ancient angel!

It's no wonder he knows so much about the Fourth Epoch tombs!

Madam Magician nodded.

"He was once a King of Angels and ascended the throne of a deity, but He was defeated by Mr. Fool. Now, He is an ordinary angel.

"He belongs to the Marauder pathway. High-ranking individuals of this pathway have a special ability called Parasitism. It is the separation of a portion of themselves and parasitize the bodies of others. There are shallow levels of Parasitism and deep levels of Parasitism. The latter can allow the host to become an avatar.

"The higher the Sequence, the more targets they can parasitize."

Lumian was alarmed and afraid as he blurted out, "Island swindler Monette has been parasitized by him?"

He was actually a formidable figure who had once fought Mr. Fool!

Madam Magician agreed with Lumian's guess.

"That's right. Every member of the Fourth Epoch Amon family is Amon. The abnormal ones in Salle de Bal Unique are also Amon. The ones who haven't shown any abnormalities are potential Amons, or potential believers of Amon."

Lumian was rendered speechless.

He found it fitting to describe those wearing monocles with their right eyes as bedbugs in Auberge du Coq Doré and cockroaches from the trash.

It was too similar!

Monette had, in a way, risen from his own grave.

"How many avatars does He have?" Lumian inquired after a brief pause.

Madam Magician shook her head and replied, "Since the Fourth Epoch, He has been hunting Beyonders of the Marauder pathway for ages, gathering many characteristics. No one knows how many avatars there are. What you need to remember is that when you encounter an Amon, there are already many Amon lurking around. They can be rats, bedbugs, or even smaller creatures."

"Isn't this perfect for monitoring others?" Lumian's hair stood on end.

He roughly understood why Amon knew he had the Earth Blood ore and could grasp his movements. He also understood why he had felt that something was amiss when he prayed for the boon the last time—the "illusion" of someone watching him.

"What's the approximate Sequence of Amon's avatar?" Lumian asked with lingering fear, recalling his desire to eliminate Monette in the fourth-level tomb.

Madam Magician finished the remaining Kirsch and tossed the glass back into the void.

"He has a way to weaken His avatar, but He's still an angel. You can't underestimate His avatar because of this. Yes, it's similar to a special scene on the third level of the tomb and below. You can determine and treat it according to the specific situation."

Lumian rubbed his temples, feeling a headache brewing. Without a clear understanding of Amon's intentions, every venture into the depths of Underground Trier was risky.

He changed the subject.

"What's the purpose of the Samaritan Women's Spring?"

Chapter 358: Negligence

Madam Magician chuckled.

"Why do you care? You can't use it. You can only use it to forget all your memories and original feelings and become a new person.

"Right, in the Corpse Collector, Sleepless, and Warrior pathways, the Samaritan Women's Spring has different uses depending on usage, ritual, and compatibility. It includes, but isn't limited to temporarily clearing memories, healing essential damage to the spirit, improving one's spiritual perception, becoming an ingredient for important rituals, and unlocking various abilities, among other things."

Corresponding to the three neighboring, exchangeable pathways, Corpse Collector, Sleepless, and Warrior? Lumian extracted crucial information.

At that very moment, Madam Magician glanced at him, her smile restrained yet knowing.

"Are there any more questions?"

Lumian took a moment to contemplate before responding, "Not for now."

Madam Magician nodded. "Then it's my turn to ask."

"Ask what?" Lumian was puzzled.

He had recounted all the details.

Madam Magician tapped her finger against the empty air in front of her.

"Why didn't you inform me that Miss Justice sent you to the Samaritan Women's Spring?"

Lumian was taken aback.

"I thought she would have informed you herself. Moreover, since she's also a Major Arcana card holder in the Tarot Club, I didn't see any need to confirm it with you."

Madam Magician wore a thoughtful expression.

"Normally, there would be no issue, but this world is filled with anomalies."

Lumian, now feeling bewildered, asked, "Is something wrong with Miss Justice?"

Madam Magician shook her head. "No, that's not it. The problem lies in the fact that shortly after you accepted the journey to the Samaritan Women's Spring, the Earth Blood ore went missing. I had no knowledge of your impending trip to the fourth level of the catacombs, and Miss Justice wasn't aware that the Earth Blood ore had fallen into someone else's hands. It's not a matter of whether you wanted to take it with you or not."

"If we had communicated beforehand, I could have delayed the mission to ascertain the whereabouts of the Earth Blood ore or made suitable arrangements."

Lumian reflected on her words, realizing the truth in them.

Having foreseen that the Earth Blood ore would bring about certain encounters underground, she couldn't ignore the hidden connection between the loss of the Earth Blood ore and the journey to the Samaritan Women's Spring.

Lumian's negligence, or rather, his assumption of a reasonable course of action had led to the subsequent encounters that later awaited him.

Madam Magician fixed her gaze on Lumian for a few seconds before responding, "You can't entirely be faulted for how you handled the situation. I'm merely reminding you to exercise more caution in the future."

She paused, her words heavy with meaning.

"This will become even more crucial when you seek the entrance to the Fourth Epoch Trier in the days to come."

"Yes, Madam Magician." Lumian accepted her guidance wholeheartedly.

After Magician disappeared with the bottle of Samaritan Women's Spring water, Lumian swiftly tidied up the altar and settled back down.

He contemplated his errors during the operation.

Firstly, Madam Magician is right. I should have informed her about Madam Justice's commission. Even if they had already communicated privately and there were no issues, I should still mention it. After all, my Major Arcana card holder isn't Justice but Magician. Helping other Major Arcana card holders requires my own Major Arcana card holder's permission.

Secondly, before entering the Samaritan Women's Spring, I should check my condition and items for a final confirmation. Unless there's a battle or an emergency, this should be a necessary process.

If I had remembered and completed this matter, I could have avoided many problems in advance. I wouldn't have brought the Earth Blood ore into the Samaritan Women's Spring area undetected. Monette, no, Amon, appeared several times and deliberately frightened me to disrupt my thoughts and keep my attention on Him instead of my own state, causing me to neglect the Earth Blood ore's "return."

Thirdly, I didn't notice Termiboros's abnormality. He remained silent in the face of Monette's appearance, unlike His vigilance and anxiety from before. Heh, although He is sealed, He can sense His surroundings through me. As an angel, how could He not notice Amon stuffing the Earth Blood ore back into my pocket?

Furthermore, His fate is intertwined with mine. When I entered the Samaritan Women's Spring with the Earth Blood ore, my fate must have changed. How could He not have noticed? Why didn't He warn me?

Does He also want to use the special environment of the Samaritan Women's Spring and the abnormality caused by the Earth Blood ore to find a way to escape the seal? Yes, He was the one who warned me that the Earth Blood ore was special and said it would bring me a fortuitous encounter!

The strange power ultimately prevented Him from achieving His goal. Who could it be?

It's true that an evil god's angel can't be trusted completely. Termiboros has been acting so reliably recently. He reminds me from time to time not only to avoid dangers that can affect Him but also to lull me. He's waiting for an opportunity to stab me in the back.

Heh heh, you're a Hunter too?

After entering the Samaritan Women's Spring, there was no problem with my choices. The adverse effects erupted, and with all kinds of mental corruption stacked on top of each other, it was already very difficult for me to react. Regardless of right or wrong… If the corruption hadn't conflicted and hindered each other, I might have gone crazy on the spot.

Lumian reviewed the entire matter and suddenly chuckled.

"Termiboros, how did you not notice Monette stuffing the Earth Blood ore back to me?"

But Termiboros remained silent, withholding any response.

Lumian roughly ascertained the role this Inevitability angel had played in the recent events. He examined the items on his body, fearing that they would also lead him to "death."

Thankfully, the inanimate objects were relatively unaffected and suffered no substantial damage. As for the "rust" that the Flog boxing glove encountered, it wasn't a true attack. Apart from leaving some traces, it didn't affect its usage.

As for the gazes and dangerous creatures that wearing the boxing gloves would bring, Lumian didn't have any thoughts. He believed that the special environment of the Samaritan Women's Spring limited the corresponding negative effects.

After doing this, Lumian surveyed the surroundings. He felt an indescribable fear and disgust for the safe house that Amon had once entered. He felt as if there were eyes hidden in the surrounding air.

Of course, this was mainly psychological. After all, Madam Magician had already visited.

After dismantling the hidden traps in the safe house, Lumian opened the door and left with all his belongings. He planned to never return, preferring to waste the rent.

…

In Trier, in a verdant park.

Magician, adorned in a brownish-yellow dress, observed a golden retriever leisurely strolling on the grassy path. She turned to the woman standing beside the dog, who wore a simple white dress with delicate green patterns. Her long blond hair flowed casually down her back, tied loosely. Her eyes resembled sparkling emeralds, mirroring the nearby trees in their clear depths.

"The Samaritan Women's Spring has been retrieved."

The woman smiled and said, "Did something happen? You should have gotten a messenger to bring it over."

Magician nodded and summarized the key information. Finally, she said, "Coincidentally, we haven't met in the past few days and haven't communicated.

"This led me to know that he had lost the Earth Blood ore, suspected of being stolen by Amon, but I didn't know that he was going to retrieve the Samaritan Women's Spring. You, on the other hand, knew that he was going to retrieve the Samaritan Women's Spring, but you didn't know that the Earth Blood ore had been stolen."

Justice listened in silence for a few seconds before sighing.

"It's very similar to that person's style…"

"Is it really that person?" Magician frowned slightly. When did He cast His gaze over? Did we fail to hide from Him since the beginning?

Justice pondered for a moment and said, "That's not surprising. The most important thing now is what arrangements He has in mind."

"I don't know," Magician replied with a self-deprecating smile. "But since the Samaritan Women's Spring incident has already occurred, I can foresee…"

As she stepped into the void, surrounded by starlight, she sighed and said, "It won't be long before Fourth Epoch Trier's door truly opens."

…

Outside an abandoned castle.

Justice materialized at the door, clutching the golden canister containing the Samaritan Women's Spring.

In front of her, a dark illusory sea materialized. She stepped into it and arrived in a special dream.

In the dream, not only was a portion of the inverted black mausoleum missing, but it had also split in half. Deep cracks covered its surface, and pale-yellow feathers stained with oil and various symbols of death were scattered everywhere.

Justice floated in midair, tipping the golden canister in her hand.

Under her guidance, a portion of the Samaritan Women's Spring's water transformed into dark rain that gently sprinkled onto the ground.

All the damage healed further, and the two halves of the mausoleum gradually closed in.

Amidst this transformation, Justice stowed away the golden canister and gazed at the remaining Samaritan Women's Spring. She muttered to herself, "Two more rounds should suffice."

…

On the second floor of Salle de Bal Brise, Lumian's bedroom.

After taking a nap, he raised his right palm and realized that the bright red scar had faded significantly. It looked more like the marks left by compression.

Lumian heaved a sigh of relief. That won't attract too much attention.

His original plan was to wrap his right palm in a white bandage to prevent the Boss and the others from spotting anything amiss.

As for now, Lumian thought for a moment and wrapped the bandage around his left palm, which appeared normal.

After completing this task, he eagerly awaited the compensation Madam Justice had mentioned. He wondered when it would arrive.

He believed it wouldn't take more than a few days.

Suddenly, Lumian turned his head and looked at the window in the alley behind him.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

There were knocks on the glass.

Chapter 359: Malady God

Lumian glanced over and noticed Franca, clad in a blouse, patting the glass.

He opened the window, a grin on his face, and asked, "Why didn't you use the front door?"

"Don't you often resort to window-climbing antics?" Franca leaped into the room with grace, followed by Jenna.

Jenna observed for a moment and pointed at Lumian's left palm.

"Are you injured?"

Why's it bandaged?

Lumian chuckled.

"I headed into the fourth level of the catacombs and crossed paths with a creature that seemed like an evil spirit. I had an intense battle with it and ended up with a few scratches."

Franca examined Lumian's left palm, perplexed. "Really? The fourth level of the catacombs…"

"Believe it or not, that's your choice," Lumian replied with a smile.

Franca got the message and dropped the subject.

Jenna, however, muttered under her breath, "I think it's a mix of truth and lies…"

Lumian chose to ignore Jenna's comment and asked, "Did something happen to you guys too?"

"That's right." Franca proceeded to recount their encounter in detail and produced a brass key. She eagerly suggested, "Should we try to divine which door this key opens? Whoever's offering a bounty of 50,000 verl d'or must be loaded!"

Lumian scoffed.

"You've got an adventurous spirit, alright.

"Of course, a matter this dark should be left to the Purifiers for investigation. Besides, it involves some monks from the God of Steam and Machinery Church descending into the abyss. You don't really want to explore the secret cave in the Deep Valley Quarry on your own, do you?"

Franca admitted sheepishly, "To be honest, I'm tempted. The idea of extending life through machinery and giving life to machinery fascinates me. But my rationality keeps me in check."

Jenna stayed silent, indicating that she had discussed this with Franca on the way.

After sharing her delusions, Franca agreed to let Jenna find a way to hand over the key to the Purifiers and report their encounter.

She then turned to Jenna. "I plan to head to Rue des Fontaines. What about you?"

Jenna had already made plans. She said to Lumian, "Didn't you ask me to find out where the factory owner lives? Well, I've followed him and gathered plenty of information. Now we can locate the families awaiting compensation and guide them into demanding what's rightfully theirs."

Lumian replied with a smile, "I didn't ask you to do it; you wanted to."

Franca acknowledged his response curtly before proceeding with her plan to visit Rue des Fontaines.

…

In Quartier du Jardin Botanique, at the intersection of Rue Pasteur and Rue Evelyn.

The buildings bore a mishmash of components that seemed like they didn't belong, like building blocks assembled by a careless child. The place exuded an unsettling vibe, akin to a wild and unstable forest.

Jenna pointed toward a woman crouched by the street, washing clothes, and said, "That's Madame Mogana. Her husband also perished in that accident a few years ago."

Madame Mogana wore a worn-out grayish-white patched dress, her face marked by wrinkles that spoke of over fifty years of life.

Lumian, having digested a bit more of the potion's effects after igniting the Bottle of Fiction, was in no rush. He replied, "You handle it."

Jenna gazed silently at the gaunt, high-cheekboned Madame Mogana. After a few seconds, she spoke, "Truth be told, I don't really like her."

Curiosity piqued, Lumian asked, "Why's that?"

Jenna let out a sigh and explained, "She's quite malicious. The kind of person who wishes ill upon her neighbor when she's going through a tough time. She does despicable things even when there's no gain for her.

"As you know, my mother was a theater actress and was somewhat literate. She used to work as a tutor for a middle-class family. It was a respectable job with good pay. But when Madame Mogana found out about it, she followed my mother and discovered the family. She told the servants who were out running errands that my mother was moonlighting as a street girl, that she was immoral and skilled at seducing her male employer. Before long, my mother was fired. She had to settle for jobs as a cleaning lady, a dishwashing maid, or even working in a chemical plant.

"Madame Mogana, illiterate as she is, had no chance of getting the job my mother lost because of her actions, but she seemed oddly pleased."

Lumian nodded in understanding. "Jealousy is indeed one of humanity's cardinal sins. Why didn't you take revenge on her?"

Jenna whispered with a chuckle, "That was a long time ago. Besides, in a place like this, similar things are bound to happen sooner or later. When my father passed away, my brother was considered a strong lad. Otherwise, our family would have been in an even worse state. If a widow moved in with her daughter, someone would come knocking on your door the next day, cursing you and claiming that her husband stole a few glances at you. The neighbor would pretend to be friendly and introduce you to her male relatives.

"If you refused, that relative of hers would sit outside your door and drink every day. The police didn't bother with such matters, and you couldn't count on anyone else for help. One day, when he got really drunk and bold, I don't need to spell out what would happen, right?

"Sometimes, the police would arrest him, but arresting one would only bring in a second or third. They might even enrage his relatives. They'd smash your window every night, pile feces at your door, and recruit older kids to harass your daughter.

"But the worst part was being targeted by the mob.

"To survive in a place like this, you either needed a few adult men in the house or you had to be tough and make it clear that you wouldn't back down even if it cost you your life. Thankfully, when our lease ended, my mother moved to the other end of the street, and the environment improved significantly."

Jenna's words were spoken as if she had witnessed such hardships many times before.

While Lumian had faced his own share of difficulties, ones worse than Jenna's, he had never encountered anything like that. The conflicts and confrontations among wanderers were even more overt. It was a matter of either being beaten into submission, forcing others into submission, or hovering on the fringes like feral dogs, scavenging what remained of others. When he arrived in Cordu, his sister, a Beyonder, protected him, allowing him to play pranks without worry. The other villagers were mainly subjected to the padre's family's bullying.

He looked at Jenna, who was recounting her past, and asked thoughtfully, "Didn't you say that everyone around here is just trying to survive?"

Jenna cursed, frustration evident in her gestures as she gestured toward the woman washing clothes not far away with her chin. "Dammit, that doesn't excuse their vileness. Take Madame Mogana, for instance. She works three part-time jobs a day just to give her son a chance to escape this place. Heh heh. You might not believe it, but despite maliciously slandering my mother, she sometimes slips me a piece of bread when I'm hungry and waiting for my mother to come home."

Lumian glanced at Madame Mogana.

"People like her are easily instigated."

"Exactly," Jenna affirmed with a nod and walked over.

Her demeanor shifted dramatically as Jenna shouted at the woman washing clothes, "Madame Mogana, did you know? That damned Alphonse betrayed us!

"That piece of dogsh*t always tells us to wait a little longer. He claims that since the court has already passed the verdict, Edmund Sr. would surely compensate us. But that scheming swine plans to run away, with no intention of giving us a single coppet!

"That swine Alphonse must have secretly pocketed his share to say such a thing!"

Madame Mogana stood up, water droplets trickling from her rough fingers.

Her expression twisted with a mix of anger and concern as she asked, "Is that true? I'm going to confront that swine!"

Jenna's face also contorted with resentment.

"We can't waste time on him now. Edmund Sr. is on the verge of escaping!

"Let's hurry and stop him. I know where their family lives!"

Lumian stood about five to six meters away, listening as Jenna stirred up the locals who were waiting for compensation. He casually surveyed the area and realized that this place was similar to Rue Anarchie. Vendors, children, women, and a few men mingled together, crowding most of the road. Occasionally, regular carriages passing by would alter their route after a brief observation.

In the midst of this bustling scene, one individual stood out noticeably.

Draped in an old linen shirt and dark pants, his face was relatively clean, and his hair neatly combed. He contrasted sharply with the surrounding vendors and residents.

At that moment, the man was engaged in conversation with a few women holding long sticks of rye bread.

He presented a stack of banknotes, not too thick or thin, and counted them meticulously, one by one.

"195, 200… Check if it's 200 verl d'or?

"If you don't trust me, you can count it yourselves."

The smallest denomination of the banknotes was 5 verl d'or.

The women had likely never held so much cash before. They trembled as they counted and confirmed that it was indeed 200 verl d'or.

The man took the banknotes back and counted them again.

"195, 200, 205… See, as long as you sincerely utter God's name, you get an extra banknote with each count!"

Impressive magic tricks… A swindler? Whenever Lumian encountered swindlers, he couldn't help but recall Monette and the Salle de Bal Unique. Anger and hostility welled up within him.

The women recounted the money and realized there were indeed 41 banknotes. There was an extra note—an extra 5 verl d'or!

Upon seeing this, the middle-aged man said with solemnity, "My Lord is the ruler of all diseases. If you believe in Him, you'll never fall sick again. Even if you do fall ill, you'll recover quickly.

"Illness is the punishment of the Malady God. If you have faith in the Malady God and devoutly worship Him, He will spare you…"

Hearing these words, Lumian's eyes narrowed as he approached.

He drew his revolver, flipped it skillfully, and then swung it at the middle-aged man's head.

Bam!

Instinctively, the middle-aged man crouched down, clutching his head. He couldn't even scream.

Between his fingers, bright red blood began to flow.

Amidst the bewildered and fearful gazes of the surrounding crowd, Lumian crouched down, shaking the barrel of his gun. He smiled at the middle-aged man and remarked, "Come, let's see how the Malady God heals you."

The middle-aged man yelled in shock, fear, and anger, "Malady God, hiss, the Malady God will punish you!"

Lumian picked up the banknotes that had fallen and handed them back to him.

"If you can't count an additional 100,000 verl d'or today, don't even dream of leaving."

With that, he raised his revolver and struck the man in the side of his face, causing blood to splatter in all directions. His face caved in, and his teeth were sent flying.

Chapter 360: Physical and Mental Wellbeing

The middle-aged man's fear-filled gaze locked onto Lumian, uncertain about what had triggered this sudden confrontation.

He wasn't the one being deceived, nor was he one of the mobsters who held sway over this neighborhood. He wasn't a relative or a friend of theirs. So, why was Lumian rushing up to assault him like this?

Adding to the confusion, Lumian didn't even give him a chance to defend himself. He unleashed a blow after each sentence!

His eyes fell upon the revolver, and he discreetly glanced at his aides concealed in the shadows. Their hesitance to intervene weighed heavily on his heart.

He couldn't afford to threaten Lumian or resist him. Trembling, he stammered, "I-I can't produce that much money. I didn't bring that kind of cash."

Lumian responded with a regretful smile, "How disappointing. I'm short of 100,000 verl d'or. Who taught you the magic of counting money? Who introduced you to the Malady God?"

The middle-aged man's throat tightened, and he remained silent.

With an air of calmness, Lumian opened the revolver's cylinder, revealing the yellow bullets to his captive.

He then closed the cylinder and pressed the muzzle against the middle-aged man's forehead.

"Three, two…" Lumian's finger on the trigger moved back with each count down.

Panic and terror swelled within the middle-aged man's eyes.

Though he doubted anyone would dare to shoot him in broad daylight, this man had started the encounter with an inexplicable beating. It was impossible to predict how much further he might go.

Just as Lumian reached the final count, the middle-aged man cried out in desperation, "It's the Envoy!"

"Envoy?" Lumian arched an eyebrow.

With his psychological defenses shattered, the middle-aged man abandoned any hope of escaping unscathed. He blurted out, "The Envoy of the Malady God!

"He approached me, taught me some tricks, and told me about the Malady God. He asked me to help him recruit believers, promising a share of the profits."

Is he a genuine believer in an evil god, a swindler exploiting a deity's name for riches, or perhaps a blend of both? Lumian withdrew the revolver from the middle-aged man's forehead and lightly tapped his still-intact cheek with it. A smile crossed his face as he remarked, "Now, that's more like it. All it took was a little chat, didn't it?"

Bang!

A bullet tore through the air, embedding itself into a nearby felled tree.

Lumian exclaimed.

"Sorry, it went off accidentally. I didn't scare you, did I?"

The middle-aged man's heart pounded wildly, and a small puddle formed beneath him.

Lumian cast a brief glance at the trembling man and offered another reassuring smile.

"What's the name of this envoy of the Malady God? Where does he reside, and what does he look like? Lately, I've been running low on funds, so I thought I'd pay him a little visit."

Inwardly, Lumian pondered,

He didn't react to that little prank just now. He's not a bestowed…

The middle-aged man vigorously shook his head.

"I-I don't know."

Seeing Lumian raise the revolver once more, he hastily amended his response, "All I can tell you is that he's tall and slender, with pale skin, almost as if he's chronically ill. His eyes are a grayish-blue shade, and he has black hair. It's short, like the haircut of a wealthy boss's secretary.

"He visits me once a week, but I have no clue how to track him down."

Meanwhile, Jenna had joined Madame Mogana and the others, her curiosity piqued by Lumian's actions. She stole a moment to cast a glance in his direction, wondering what her Hunter companion had uncovered and what he was up to.

However, the urgency of the situation prevented her from inquiring at that moment.

Jenna had effectively instigated several individuals who had been long-awaiting compensation. The more these wronged souls spoke, the fiercer their fury grew. Some had already taken it upon themselves to seek out other victims or their families, urging Jenna to lead them in confronting the factory owner named Edmund.

In the midst of this mounting outrage, Jenna found that she no longer needed to actively instigate. The collective anger had taken on a life of its own, and individuals were stepping forward to aid her in this quest.

As they hurried toward the neighborhood where Edmund Sr. resided, Jenna had an epiphany.

To instigate someone, she had to converse with them, but to instigate a group of people, she didn't need to personally converse with every member of the group to incite them. Understanding the situation and igniting the spark in a few initial individuals was sufficient. The ignited ones would, in turn, become agents of instigation, rallying more people to their cause in a snowballing effect.

While Jenna and the mob progressed toward their destination, Lumian remained behind to extract more information from the middle-aged man. After confirming that he couldn't elicit any further details, he rose to address the deceived women who had been observing the unfolding events.

"You heard him. This guy is trying to deceive you. Do you intend to let him off the hook?"

Lumian had discreetly employed the Niese Face to alter his appearance slightly when confronting the middle-aged man, ensuring that no one would associate him with the wanted criminal, Lumian Lee.

One of the women present had actually been the middle-aged man's collaborator, assisting in the preaching and swindling of money. In this dire situation, she dared not utter a word and looked to the others for guidance.

Among the women, some were brimming with anger, ready to hand the con artist over to the authorities, while others cowered, fearing that the swindler might have dangerous accomplices who would seek revenge.

Lumian observed in silence as they voiced their opinions, casually scanning the onlookers nearby.

Among the bystanders, he noticed three men attempting to slip away unnoticed.

These three were the accomplices of the swindler, responsible for resorting to violence when required.

Without hesitation, Lumian raised his revolver and discharged three rounds.

The trio let out cries of pain and crumpled to the ground, suffering from wounds to their legs and calves, blood streaming freely.

"No need to worry about them seeking revenge," Lumian assured the women with a grin.

The victims, their emotions running high, fell silent, almost like statues.

After a few seconds, they stammered, "It's up to you…"

Lumian nodded with satisfaction and motioned for the trembling cheat and his injured accomplices.

"Take them to the nearest… Uh, Steam Cathedral."

…

At the intersection of Quartier de l'Observatoire and Quartier du Jardin Botanique, 5 Avenue Sèlbù, a swarm of men and women dressed in tattered attire surged toward a beige three-story building.

The two guards stationed at the entrance observed the approaching, agitated crowd and swiftly withdrew their legally owned semi-automatic revolvers. Their voices rang out, commanding, "Halt!"

Confronted with the sight of firearms, even Madame Mogana and her determined followers involuntarily slowed their advance.

The presence of the weapons was undeniably daunting.

Sensing the hesitation, Jenna rushed to the forefront and hollered at the two guards, "We're here to demand our rightful compensation. The court has already rendered its verdict!

"You sons of bitches, go ahead and shoot if you dare!

"Do you even have enough dogsh*t bullets? Can you take down all of us? If not, each of us will take a bite out of you that you won't recover from!"

With fiery determination, she strode toward the entrance.

Beads of sweat formed on the palms of the two guards as they peered out at the sea of faces. The sheer number of debt collectors was overwhelming, their exact count obscured by the throng.

It was impossible to predict the response if they opened fire on the crowd. They felt exposed and isolated, like logs confronting a relentless flood.

Jenna, utilizing her Instigation ability, pressed forward with her rhetoric.

"If we disable or kill you, do you think you'll still receive your compensation?

"Look at us. Our due compensation has been withheld for years. Are you certain you'll get your payment from that stingy old scrooge? His family might flee town tomorrow!"

The two guards were taken aback.

This was indeed a problem.

Furthermore, they were well aware that the boss's family had liquidated most of their assets and were on the verge of fleeing the city in two days, seeking refuge in another province. Would they take two injured and incapacitated bodyguards along? Would they seize the opportunity to withhold compensation?

The harsh reality was laid bare before them!

As the guards hesitated, Jenna had already reached the entrance, with the crowd of debt collectors close behind.

Instinctively, one of the guards followed standard procedure, raising his right hand and firing a warning shot into the sky, attempting to deter the approaching horde. The other guard tried to subdue an elegant-looking young woman who appeared to lack substantial combat prowess.

Jenna recoiled momentarily, grabbed hold of the guard's arm, and unceremoniously brought him crashing to the ground, causing his firearm to skid away.

Spurred by the gunshot and Jenna's boldness, Madame Mogana picked up the semi-automatic revolver. Although she wasn't familiar with its operation, her resolve surged, and she sprinted toward the entrance, cursing all the way.

The remaining guard hesitated for a fleeting moment before relenting, opting not to open fire on the advancing crowd and instead allowing them to swarm into the house.

Inside the living room, Edmund Sr. and his family, on the brink of departure, found themselves instantly encircled by Jenna's nearly hundred-strong assembly of debt collectors. It was an impenetrable wall of humanity.

Clutching a revolver, Edmund Sr. voiced his trepidation, "What do you intend to do?"

"We're here for our money!" Jenna seized the revolver from Madame Mogana's trembling hands and leveled it at Edmund Sr. She declared, "Without the compensation we're owed, we won't survive. Let's find out who meets their end today!"

Edmund's hand trembled, as though he had contracted an incurable ailment.

…

Outside a Steam Cathedral that bore a resemblance to a small factory, Lumian gave instructions to the woman assisting the injured swindler.

"Take them to the padre and have them explain the money conjuring magic and their association with the Malady God. If they refuse to talk, provide an account on their behalf."

The women nodded solemnly and, with their black eye, guided the swindler's group into the cathedral, a trail of blood marking their passage.

Lumian holstered his revolver and observed silently from the doorway.

He reflected with a touch of amusement, Madam Magician's suggestion is indeed on point. It's healthy both physically and mentally to let off some steam now and then.

Of all things to believe in, they choose an evil god, and on top of that, they're swindlers!

After a mere two minutes, Lumian casually strolled away, while the police officers hurriedly arrived on the scene.

…

Lumian unexpectedly crossed paths with Jenna and the jubilant debt collectors outside 5 Avenue Sèlbù.

"So quickly?" he inquired, surprise evident in his tone.

Jenna pursed her lips.

"I didn't anticipate it happening this swiftly either. I was prepared for someone to call the police and handle the situation accordingly. However, once we had Edmund Sr. and his family surrounded, and we issued our threats, he yielded and began paying according to the list.

"Damn it, his family's cash, gold, and other valuables added up to more than enough for our compensation. There's even a surplus. And that doesn't even account for his assets that haven't been liquidated yet. He delayed our compensation for so long!"

Lumian chuckled.

"Giving always stings. Sometimes things seem complex, but when you truly commit to them, they become simple. And then there are situations that seem straightforward but turn out to be fraught with twists and turns that nearly cost you everything."

His words carried the weight of experience.

Jenna knew that Lumian needed gold, and the compensation she had received came in the form of various types of gold jewelry, which were collectively worth 3,000 verl d'or at their pure gold value.

She offered, "Here, I'll sell these to you."

Lumian fell briefly silent before responding, "I'll withdraw the money from Salle de Bal Brise."

He only had banknotes and silver coins totaling just over 600 verl d'or on him.

In the evening, Lumian found himself with some free time and leisurely returned to Auberge du Coq Doré. He descended to the basement bar and spotted Charlie, beer in hand, regaling a group of patrons with stories.

Lumian grinned and declared, "Drinks are on me!"

Amidst the cheers of 20 to 30 people, Lumian added a playful twist, "Charlie's footing the bill!"

Charlie's expression froze.

Lumian chuckled and shouted again, "And if he does a strip dance, I might even cover that too!"

Chapter 361: Farewell

Recently, those who frequented the basement bar had grown indifferent to Charlie's lectures on respectability and civility. Now, with a chance to tease him, they became exceptionally excited and engaged in a shouting match.

Dressed in a white shirt and an unbuttoned black vest, Charlie hesitated between buying drinks for nearly 30 people or performing a striptease.

Swiftly, he set down his beer and leaped onto a small round table.

In the past, when he was drunk here, he had done all sorts of foolish things. Why should he be afraid of a striptease?

Lumian smiled and applauded, taking out a 20 verl d'or banknote and placing it on the bar counter. He said to Boss Pavard Neeson, "A drink for everyone. Let them have whatever they want."

With that, he picked up his glass of Lanti Proof and watched as Charlie clumsily gyrated his hips and carefully unbuttoned his shirt amidst the cheers.

"More passion! More energy!" Lumian shouted, as if he were watching a show.

The other patrons chimed in.

Sweat beaded on Charlie's forehead, fearing that excessive energy from removing his clothes might damage his shirt.

This wasn't a cheap old linen shirt!

After some thought, he decided to take it off as one would a sweater since the top buttons on his shirt were already undone.

Lumian took another sip of the Lanti Proof and leaned back at the bar counter. He glanced at Gabriel, who was wearing black-framed glasses and dark suspenders, and asked with amusement, "You're early today?"

Hadn't this playwright, accustomed to staying up late, only come here for a drink after midnight?

Gabriel held the green absinthe and smiled calmly.

"I'm moving out tomorrow."

"Lightseeker has begun airing?" Lumian immediately had a guess.

Gabriel ruffled his disheveled brown hair and smiled.

"Not yet, but after rehearsing for a while, both Monsieur Lopp and the directors and actors at Théâtre de la Renaissance think highly of me. They're very confident. I won't have to worry about my living expenses even after moving to a more expensive place and spending the 1,000 verl d'or advance. As you know, I don't write trite stories for tabloids anymore."

"Where are you planning to move to?" Lumian asked casually.

Gabriel said with a yearning expression, "Rue Saint-Michel in Quartier 2, where many authors and painters find their haven. Not far away is the National Museum, the Trier Art Center, various galleries, and sculptures of various forms."

Quartier 2, also known as the arts district or financial district, was a blend of ancient charm and modern opulence, housing not only the artistic community but also the financial heart of the city. It was home to major banks like the Intis Central Bank and the Trier Bank, along with financial institutions, the Trier Stock Exchange, and the Intis Futures Market.

Rue Saint-Michel, on the outskirts of this vibrant district, offered affordable rent, making it an attractive choice for artists and writers.

Lumian couldn't resist recalling Aurore's teasing about Rue Saint-Michel, and he playfully paraphrased it, poking fun at the struggling poets. "What a fantastic place! You might toss a brick and hit three authors and two painters, and let's not forget those poets who die without anyone noticing."

Gabriel, slightly embarrassed, took a sip of his absinthe.

"However, that's indeed the most suitable place for artistic exchange and creativity. It's not like here, where it's relatively quiet only at night, but it's only relative. And the repulsive bedbugs…"

Gabriel suddenly remembered that the violent and elegant mob leader beside him was the current boss of Auberge du Coq Doré. He quickly shut his mouth.

At that moment, Charlie completed his striptease act and donned his shirt once more. He skillfully navigated his way out of the crowd of patrons, who had "maliciously" remarked on his physique, and settled beside Lumian. He casually remarked, "I've been swamped lately. Haven't been around for a few days. As soon as I get home, I feel like collapsing into bed. You see, this is the drawback of being a decent bloke. Sigh, why in the world are they suddenly launching such a massive investigation into those wanted criminals from Cordu?"

Oh, you've become much smarter. Lumian, who was keen on improving his rhetoric, replied with a smile, "What concern is Cordu's business to me, Ciel Dubois?"

Having contracted the Niese Face from the Human-Faced Mantis, he wasn't particularly concerned about being recognized by the authorities.

Seeing Lumian's self-assured demeanor, Charlie dropped the subject. He eagerly mentioned that a colleague had introduced him to a female teacher. Although she wasn't interested in him romantically, it marked another stride towards his quest for true dignity.

They continued to enjoy their drinks until nearly midnight. Lumian and Gabriel, who was set to move the following day, bid Charlie farewell and ascended the stairs to the second floor.

Gabriel's gaze fixated on the corridor wall, illuminated solely by a gas wall lamp and adorned with newspapers and faded pink paper. Suddenly, he let out a heartfelt sigh.

"It's only when I'm on the verge of leaving that I realize there's something worth reminiscing about here.

"When I first moved in, I thought it wouldn't be long before I'd escape this dump—well, this wretched motel—with my talents. Who would've guessed I'd end up staying here for ten whole months? Even if I move to Rue Saint-Michel, I'll often think of that cozy little bar downstairs. I'll reminisce about the absinthe that could both sober me up and make me intoxicated, the pungent smell of sulfur, those pesky bedbugs, and the people who brought light to my darkness. Miss Séraphine, Charlie, and… you."

As Gabriel spoke, he paused, extending his hand to touch the crack in the wall where a fallen newspaper had revealed it.

Lumian couldn't resist a playful jab, "Do you authors enjoy launching into spontaneous soliloquies and lengthy speeches?"

Gabriel chuckled sheepishly and replied, "I don't know about other authors, but I do find myself doing it occasionally.

"I've called this place home for nearly a year, and I've witnessed numerous tenants abruptly vanish, leave in haste, or succumb to the pain of life. Yet, the very next day, or maybe just an hour later, new tenants move into the very rooms left behind by those chasing prosperity and dreams in Trier. Most of them fail and fade away like dust, but waves of people keep coming. Perhaps one or two among them will actually succeed.

"This is the wellspring of inspiration for the 'Lightseeker' script."

"You're the one who succeeded." Lumian couldn't help but recall Madame Michel, who had tragically ended her life while singing "In the Capital of

Joy, forever Trier," a memory that left him with no capacity for mocking Gabriel.

"Hope." Gabriel's face lit up with anticipation.

He took another step toward the second floor, as if driven to continue ascending.

"Where are you going?" Lumian could guess the answer, yet he asked politely.

Gabriel motioned upstairs.

"To bid farewell to Miss Séraphine and express my gratitude for her unwavering support."

Lumian couldn't resist a sly smile, pursing his lips and letting out a playful whistle. "Have a romantic night!"

"I am not!" Gabriel instinctively protested.

Lumian turned and headed towards Room 207, waving his hand dismissively.

"Can't a person have a romantic night all to themselves?"

Gabriel was speechless.

After witnessing Ciel's entrance into the room, Gabriel cleared his throat and continued his ascent to the third floor.

As he climbed, memories flooded his mind—the initial encounter with the human model, Séraphine, their first conversation about his creation, and the first words of encouragement…

He understood that human modeling was a meagerly compensated profession. Even the most popular male models barely received 80 to 90 verl d'or a month. Ordinary models scraped by on 60 to 70, equivalent to the earnings of an apprentice motel attendant. Female models fared even worse, with a meager 40 verl d'or, forcing them to take on part-time work. No one chose to expose their bodies as artists' models out of laziness or greed for pleasure.

Séraphine was no exception. She endured the criticism to earn more money and improve her circumstances.

Gabriel halted outside Room 309 and rapped gently on the door.

"Please come in." Séraphine's somewhat hollow voice responded.

Gabriel pushed the door open and found Séraphine standing by the wooden table near the window. Her lake-blue dress had slipped from her form and lay in a heap on the floor.

In the crimson moonlight, Séraphine's brown eyes flickered, and her brown hair cascaded down her back. Her fair body bore the imprint of human faces.

Some were stunning, some sinister, some handsome, and some wicked. They all fixed their gaze on Gabriel simultaneously.

Gabriel nearly let out a startled cry.

"What's the matter?" Séraphine's voice, tinged with detachment, rang out once more.

Gabriel shook off his stupor and realized that the faces were nothing more than lifelike oil paintings. The canvas was Séraphine's body.

Remembering that she was a human model, Gabriel refrained from probing further. He exhaled and expressed, "I'm moving out tomorrow. Thank you for your encouragement these past few months."

As soon as he finished speaking, Séraphine extended her right hand, her eyes distant.

Gabriel couldn't resist complying.

Half an hour later, Gabriel lay on the bed, holding Séraphine close, and spoke with sincerity, "Come with me to Rue Saint-Michel."

Séraphine shook her head resolutely. "I'm moving as well. Somewhere else."

Gabriel persisted, "Where to?"

"To a place called the Hostel. My friends are there." Séraphine's voice turned hollow once more.

Gabriel made several attempts to convince her, but the human model remained steadfast.

He had no choice but to leave disheartened. Séraphine rose from the bed, entirely unclothed, and watched him as he walked towards the door.

In that instant, the crimson moon was veiled, plunging the room into an unnatural darkness. The oil-painted faces on Séraphine's body suddenly appeared to come alive, their mouths opening as Gabriel retreated.

Eventually, tranquility returned, and Gabriel respectfully closed the door.

…

The following morning, Lumian stuck to his routine—going for a run, practicing his boxing, and hunting for breakfast in his customary fashion.

Upon his return to the Auberge du Coq Doré, he noticed that Gabriel's neighboring room was already open. There was no sign of Gabriel, nor any trace of luggage.

Intrigued, Lumian made his way to the third floor and discovered that Room 309 was in the same state.

He clicked his tongue and returned to Room 207 with a wry smile.

Before long, the "doll" messenger made an appearance, tossing a neatly folded letter and a silver mask onto the wooden table.

Madam Justice's reward has arrived? Lumian's delight was palpable.

Chapter 362: Lie

Lumian hesitated briefly before touching the silver mask. He carefully opened the letter and began to read the elegant handwriting, which was quite different from Madam Magician's.

"This is the promised reward.

"Lie:

"It allows you to truly transform your appearance, adjusting your form within a certain range, and altering your height.

"At the same time, it grants you the ability to use Flame Controlling and Damage Transfer like a Magician. You'll also have an enhanced sense of danger, as well as improved balance and agility.

"It can change its appearance at will. It can become anything you desire.

"But, when you wear it, your emotions will be amplified. You must learn to control yourself, or there will be significant problems.

"Also, remember:

"Don't lose yourself in Lie."

It's actually portable without any negative effects? Lumian's initial reaction after reading the letter wasn't one of delight that Lie's effects suited his needs but rather one of surprise that the mystical item's negative effects were far weaker than he had imagined.

It only amplified one's emotions when worn!

In other words, Lumian could store it in a bag, wallet, or any other container and carry it with him at all times without facing any side effects.

Compared to Lie, Decency had to be ensconced in liquor, making it rather troublesome to retrieve and safeguard. Flog also exerted an influence while being carried.

With a sigh, Lumian couldn't help but make a self-deprecating remark.

Why does it always have to be something that messes with my emotions?

With this combination, even Alms Monk would explode on the spot…

This combination of dark corruption from the contracted creatures, the fluctuations in desire stemming from Flog, and the "gift" bestowed by the Blood Emperor Alista Tudor was sure to wreak havoc on his emotions. When you added Lie to the mix, the equation became something like 1+1+1+1>4.

Having just finished psychiatric treatment for his past wounds and painful memories and returning to his normal state, Lumian realized that if he wanted to avoid descending into madness and losing control, he shouldn't let Flog's boxing gloves and Lie take effect simultaneously.

Lie is meant for the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society gatherings. It's for socializing; I don't need Flog for that. And when I'm not using Lie, I have the Niese Face to replace it, Lumian thought, pondering for a moment before tossing the satchel containing the Flog boxing gloves onto the bed.

After this decision, he reached for the silver Lie mask and covered his face.

The mask began to melt, its silvery substance seeping into Lumian's skin like mercury, completely enveloping his head.

In an instant, everything began to shift and transform. Lumian's contours and facial features swiftly adjusted.

Before long, the silvery liquid seemed to be absorbed or evaporated, and Lumian's skin returned to normal, now even fairer than before.

Then, his body underwent a sudden change, and his white shirt strained against his bulging chest.

Lumian lowered his head and scrutinized his appearance for a few seconds before muttering to himself, There's a limit of 10 centimeters for becoming shorter or taller…

I used to be 1.76 meters tall, just 8 centimeters taller than Aurore, but now I'm 1.81 meters tall. Yes, three centimeters of difference shouldn't be noticeable to ordinary people. Besides, it is quite normal for both men and women to use special shoes to appear taller…

I can even imitate voices. That's all part of the true transformation of one's appearance…

With his loose pants and a snug shirt, Lumian left Room 207 and entered the washroom, casting his gaze at the mirror.

A beautiful woman stared back at him in the mirror. She had long, thick blond hair, light-blue eyes, a tall, delicate nose, and red lips as bright as the morning sun.

The details of her facial features and the contours of her face continued to subtly change for dozens of seconds before settling into their final form.

Lumian gazed at the woman in the mirror, his eyes gradually softening as the corners of his mouth curled up.

After a few seconds, he chuckled and said, "Long time no see, Aurore."

…

Franca, returning from Rue des Fontaines, gracefully opened the door to Apartment 601.

What she saw when she entered left her stunned—a face identical to her own.

This person had a flaxen ponytail, bright, smiling lake-colored eyes, brown eyebrows that reached her temples, and thin red lips…

Franca's tension was palpable as she blurted out, "Who are you? Why are you impersonating me?"

The doppelganger also pointed at her and said, "Who are you? Why are you impersonating me?"

In exasperation, Franca laughed and secretly wrapped the spider silk she released around the imposter.

In an instant, crimson flames erupted, igniting the invisible threads around them.

Franca immediately understood the truth. She pointed at the fake Franca and said, "You Six-Eared Macaque, how dare you impersonate me!"

The fake Franca's face squirmed as she transformed back into Lumian.

His body grew taller.

After removing the Lie earring, Lumian asked curiously, "What's a six-eared macaque?"

Franca hesitated for a moment, debating whether to keep it a secret, but then she realized that Lumian already knew everything he needed to know. There was no need to hide such trivial details.

She replied, "Back home, there are many myths and legends for your sister and me. The Six-Eared Macaque is one of them. It can hear all your secrets and become identical to you."

Without waiting for Lumian's response, Franca asked excitedly, "Did you acquire a mystical item that can alter your appearance and figure?"

Lumian raised his left hand, wrapped in a few white bandages, and replied, "Can't you see I'm injured? I accepted Madam Justice's commission and helped her retrieve an object from the fourth level of the catacombs. This is the reward: Lie."

As he spoke, Lumian flicked the earring-shaped mystical item with his right hand.

"Is that so?" Franca had suspected that Lumian's visit to the catacombs was likely arranged by the Tarot Club, so she hadn't inquired further in front of Jenna.

Curious, she asked, "What was the object?"

Lumian pondered for a moment and realized that neither Madam Magician, Madam Justice, nor Madame Hela had asked him to keep it a secret. Hence, he replied, "The spring water of the Samaritan Women's Spring."

"Is there really a Samaritan Women's Spring?" Franca was astonished.

She had read Trier's mysticism magazines and heard rumors about the Samaritan Women's Spring. She even went to the catacombs to find the one named by the administrators but found nothing magical.

"Yes," Lumian confirmed after some thought. "It's deep in the catacombs and has something to do with Fourth Epoch Trier."

Franca's eyes sparkled as she inquired, "Is it magical?"

Lumian glanced at her.

"It's magical, but it's only for Beyonders of the Corpse Collector, Warrior, and Sleepless pathways. If you want to give it a try, there's only one outcome. You'll forget who you were and the home you keep talking about. From then on, you'll become a true Trier Demoness."

Franca shuddered and subconsciously shook her head.

"What's the difference between that and being dead?"

She stopped asking about the Samaritan Women's Spring and said excitedly, "Can you transform into Muggle? Let me take a look."

Lumian gazed at Franca for a few seconds before finally donning the silver-white earring again.

Soon, Aurore, clad in a white shirt, black vest, and simple pants, appeared before Franca.

"Wow!" Franca exclaimed. "She's even more beautiful than I imagined!"

"Is that the point?" Lumian asked in Aurore's voice.

Franca smiled sheepishly.

"I'm not sure how close this is to the real Muggle, but we disguise ourselves at gatherings. This is enough."

Lumian reverted to his original form. As he removed the Lie earring, he said,

"I've already written a letter to Madam Hela. She said she'll inform me about the next gathering and bring me there."

Franca averted her gaze in disappointment.

"Then there's no need for me to worry. Yes, let me tell you about the different methods of the gathering and the characteristics of the members of the Research Society…"

Franca's supplementary class continued until noon.

Seeing Lumian preparing to leave, she hesitated for a moment and said, "Um, can you… can you transform into me again?"

Lumian, puzzled but not refusing, frowned.

Before long, with a reference, he accurately transformed into another Franca.

Franca gazed at her face, seemingly intoxicated.

Suddenly, she extended her right hand and touched Lumian's cheek.

"Hey!" Lumian took a step back.

Franca snapped out of her daze and smiled sheepishly.

"The feeling of a real person and a mirror is indeed different. However, I feel that you're still lacking something, but I can't tell what."

Lumian pondered for a moment and asked with a smile, "Lacking a feminine charm?"

"Maybe." Franca exhaled and watched Lumian walk towards the door.

Just as Lumian opened the door, he heard the Demoness of Pleasure shout from behind, "Dammit, were you secretly cursing me? What feminine charm!"

…

In Salle de Bal Brise, as Lumian sat down, Sarkota approached him with a wanted poster and said,

"Those black dogs have been asking around with it for the past two days."

Lumian glanced at it and realized it was his wanted poster.

He smiled nonchalantly. "It's fine. Let them search."

Sarkota didn't say anything else and informed Lumian, "The Boss wants you to make a trip to Rue des Fontaines today."

What's the matter now? Lumian pondered and nodded.

It was almost evening when he arrived at 11 Rue des Fontaines in Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative.

The lawn seemed to have been ravaged, and the hall filled with weapons and armor was severely damaged.

Upon seeing Gardner Martin, Lumian didn't hide his confusion.

"Did something happen?"

Gardner Martin, his face glowing, smiled and said, "After the Werewolf incident, they launched a sneak attack and were forced back. They suffered a loss."

The Rose School of Thought ultimately fell into the Boss's trap? Seeing that Gardner Martin didn't want to elaborate, Lumian asked, "Boss, why did you summon me?"

Gardner Martin produced an exquisite invitation.

"Count Poufer invites you to his Red Swan Castle for a salon this weekend."

Red Swan Castle? Lumian frowned slightly.

Chapter 363: Studying Leads to Improvement

Lumian still vividly recalled the night he played King's Pie. Nightmares haunted him repeatedly, and every time, he found himself in an ancient beige castle, its surface tainted with the marks of ages-old blood, its interior a horrifying canvas of madness.

Seeing his silence, Gardner Martin flashed a reassuring smile.

"Just remember to let Poufer choose first in situations like the King's Pie game, and you'll be fine."

But I'm no longer the same person I used to be. Can I really depend on being the last to choose to avoid the problem when there's the Blood Emperor's aura corrupting my right hand? Lumian silently pondered for a moment before responding, "Yes, Commanding Officer."

He then inquired, "Where is Red Swan Castle?"

He intended to scout the area when the opportunity arose. At the very least, he needed to pinpoint the location of the nearest cathedral.

"Quartier Éraste, near Emperor Roselle's Summer Palace and the West Lognes Forest," Gardner Martin replied succinctly.

Quartier Éraste was designated as 17. In Roselle's time, it served as a suburban retreat for nobles and royalty, but now it was enclosed within the city walls, becoming one of Trier's largest districts. Known as the barracks district due to its multiple army encampments, it was situated in the northwest, boasting a national park, West Lognes Forest, a conference center, and numerous arsenals. Additionally, it was home to the Church of the Eternal Blazing Sun's largest cloister in Trier, the Sacred Heart Cloister.

Lumian recalled a map of Trier he had seen and nodded in acknowledgment.

"It's near the square district."

Emperor Roselle's summer palace wasn't situated in Quartier Éraste; it resided in the square district, nestled between West and East Lognes Forest.

Gardner Martin cast a glance at Lumian's left hand.

"Why are you injured?"

Lumian smiled candidly and said, "I recently delved into the catacombs with a friend I met at a mysticism gathering and got injured."

He couldn't shake the feeling that the Iron and Blood Cross Order had an interest in the underground world, possibly with spies lurking around the tombs. It was safer to focus the lie on something else. The Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society also doubled as a mysticism gathering, after all.

Gardner Martin nodded with approval.

"Avoid unnecessary explorations and risks in the future. They won't bring you the mystical knowledge you seek, nor will they yield valuable items. Only danger, danger, and more danger awaits."

Is that so? Does the Samaritan Women's Spring count as a high-value item? Lumian inwardly criticized. Nevertheless, he earnestly agreed,"Yes, Commanding Officer."

Had it not been for Madam Justice's request, he would have had no inclination to venture into the catacombs' fourth level.

Now, the odds drew closer to zero. He couldn't help but wonder if he might stumble upon another of Amon's tombs!

After bidding farewell to Gardner Martin, Lumian hopped onto a public carriage headed back to Avenue du Marché.

As the carriage rumbled along, he leaned against the wall, letting various thoughts swirl through his mind. He used this time to relax and ponder any potential issues he might have overlooked.

Amidst the rhythmic sounds of horses' hooves and the carriage's wheels, a sudden thought struck Lumian.

Could the Rose School of Thought, after suffering another setback at the hands of Gardner Martin, decide to seek out others who were involved in the Tree of Shadow incident?

The Bliss Society only lost Charlotte Calvino and Susanna Mattise, the high priestess. There are still other members to contend with, such as Maipú Meyer, the former manager of Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons, or the actresses who had once played lead roles there before departing.

I wonder if Susanna Mattise had divulged the details of the Tree of Shadow to these members. If she had, they would likely know that the high priestess's true target was either me, Ciel Dubois, or rather, Lumian Lee…

If that were the case, the Rose School of Thought and the Bliss Society might redirect their focus towards me. That could spell trouble…

How annoying. I really wish I could eliminate every member of the Rose School of Thought and the Bliss Society…

Towards the end, upon realizing the various negative effects on him, Lumian cursed inwardly before controlling himself.

If it weren't for the Actors' remarkable skill in disguise and concealing themselves, he might have seriously contemplated eliminating all members of the Bliss Society to eliminate any hidden threats.

He suspected that the Flog boxing gloves might have a miraculous effect on individuals with twisted desires, like those in the Bliss Society.

How should I find them? Lumian fell into deep thought.

Just then, as the public carriage pulled into a halfway stop, a passenger boarded.

It was a boy, around seven or eight years old, dressed in a white shirt and a miniature black formal suit with matching shorts. He wore white socks and black shoes, had short blond hair, and his brown eyes held determination. His chubby cheeks suggested he still had traces of baby fat.

Oh, isn't this Baron Brignais's godson, Ludwig? Lumian's mood brightened as he smiled.

Almost simultaneously, Ludwig noticed him

and his expression turned to panic. He swiftly attempted to disembark from the carriage.

He was still carrying the heavy dark-red hard school bag.

Running away from home again? Lumian thought as he stood up, alighting from the carriage ahead of schedule.

The boy had already disappeared from the vicinity of the stop sign.

He's quite fast… Lumian identified the nearby footprints and calmly chose a direction.

Escaping a Hunter's pursuit without addressing tracks promptly was nearly impossible.

After trailing the footprints for a couple of streets, Lumian turned into a secluded alley and approached a half-broken barricade that barely reached waist height. He couldn't help but chuckle as he said, "Come out."

Ludwig cautiously peeked his young face out from behind the barricade, a mixture of nervousness and resentment evident in his voice as he said, "You swindler, stay away! If you come any closer, I-I'll devour you!"

Lumian raised his right hand and stroked his chin thoughtfully.

"Why did you run away from home again?"

Ludwig responded angrily, "It's all because of all that damn homework!"

Lumian couldn't help but tease, "Yo, you've learned to curse. You've improved since last time."

He noted that Ludwig, even if his unusual appetite and eating habits were disregarded, seemed more like a real child now compared to their previous encounter.

With this in mind, Lumian concluded, "This proves that studying is still useful."

Ludwig was momentarily taken aback and seemed to forget to retort.

Lumian sized him up and said sincerely, "You weren't born with a high IQ; in a way, you're relatively less intelligent. But if you don't study, do your homework regularly, and occasionally take exams to gradually improve your thinking abilities, I can guarantee that someone like me could easily deceive you the moment you step outside, and you wouldn't even realize how you fell for it."

Ludwig muttered to himself in a daze, "Did I really improve? Is studying, doing homework, and taking exams really useful…"

You're not born stupid, are you? Is your brain damaged? You believed me just like that? I can't even imagine what would happen to you if you were thrown at the Salle de Bal Unique's entrance… As Lumian muttered inwardly, his smile remained unwavering.

"That's right. If you find it too burdensome, talk to Brignais about reducing the amount of homework. There's no need to run away from home. Giving up on studying will only make you more foolish."

At that moment, Lumian had a single prevailing thought:

It is better to keep such abnormal and brainless humans or humanoid creatures under the supervision of the orthodox Church.

However, wouldn't the Church of the God of Knowledge and Wisdom be too arrogant to think that Baron Brignais could control a fellow who ate everything he saw?

He has already escaped twice!

If he hadn't encountered me every time, he would have caused trouble long ago!

Ludwig fell silent for a few seconds before he spoke up, "Will you negotiate for me?"

Lumian didn't hesitate in his response, "No problem."

Negotiating was something he was quite experienced in, especially when dealing with his sister.

"Then I'll trust you again." Ludwig hesitated for a moment before making up his mind.

He then flipped over the dilapidated barricade.

Don't say that. It'll only make me feel like scamming you again… Lumian muttered and led Ludwig to the nearest public carriage stop.

On the way, he glanced at the boy's filthy clothes and said, "Did you bring a change of clothes?"

"No." Ludwig shook his head.

Running away from home without any spare clothes? Lumian asked in amusement, "So, what's in your bag? Food?"

Again, Ludwig shook his head, displaying a rather obedient attitude.

It's not food or clothes… Lumian cast a puzzled glance at the dark-red hard school bag.

"It can't be filled with books and papers, can it?"

"No either…" Ludwig suddenly shut his mouth.

What could it be? Lumian narrowed his eyes.

At that moment, Ludwig asked innocently, "Is there anything to eat?"

"No, we'll eat when we return to Avenue du Marché," Lumian replied mercilessly.

What a joke. With your appetite, why would I use my own money to treat you?

Disappointed, Ludwig let out a sigh and began sucking his finger, as if he wanted to take a bite out of it.

Fortunately, their destination, Avenue du Marché, wasn't too far away. After another stop, they arrived, and Lumian spotted Baron Brignais waiting at the entrance of the usury company. The gentleman visibly relaxed upon seeing Ludwig.

"This can't go on," Lumian interjected before the other party could speak. "Do you think I'll keep running into him every time? Reduce his homework by half."

Baron Brignais weighed the options for a moment. "Okay."

Ludwig interjected in a hushed tone, "And add another dessert meal."

With the godfather and godchild relationship seemingly back to normal, Lumian bid them farewell and couldn't help but wonder, Why did the Church of the God of Knowledge and Wisdom send such an abnormal child to Trier?

…

In the hill district, in Deep Valley Town, in front of an old grayish-white house with only two floors, Valentine and Imre, now in possession of the brass key obtained from Celia Bello, stood behind the Deacon Angoulême with serious expressions.

According to the feedback from a Sealed Artifact, the brass key left behind by the mysterious entrustee of the gatekeeper's disappearance pointed to this very building.

Chapter 364: Red House

The door to the grayish-white old house creaked open, needing no key to grant access.

Inside, chaos reigned, with assorted items strewn about, as if someone had burglarized the place.

Valentine surveyed the disarray and remarked, "Someone's made off with valuable items from here."

His gaze fell upon the open and empty doors to the first-floor rooms, evidence of heavy boxes that once occupied the space.

"We're too late. The entrustee's companion must have sensed trouble and moved out," Imre lamented.

The Purifiers fanned out, scouring the cramped area for clues.

Before long, Angoulême discovered a handful of white papers scattered near the stairwell's edge. He carefully examined them in the sunlight.

Taking a pencil from his pocket, he began to gently shade one of the papers.

Gradually, faint marks emerged, forming a few legible words: "Albert Goncourt… Underground… Riot… Time…"

"Albert Goncourt…" Imre glanced at the paper in the deacon's hand and couldn't help but frown.

Albert Goncourt had been the mastermind behind the Trier uprising six years ago, a leader of the Carbonari—a prominent anti-government militant faction.

Angoulême remained silent, urging his team to press on with their investigation.

After thoroughly searching both the first and second floors, they descended into the cellar.

At the far end stood a black iron door, its brass lock gleaming in the dim light.

Angoulême patted the grayish-white humanoid machine by his side and inserted the brass key he had obtained from Celia Bello into its palm.

Immediately after, Angoulême adjusted a few knobs on the mechanical contraption.

From the high-energy pyrokinetic backpack on the robot's back, a billowing white mist erupted. Steadily, it pushed the rigid machine forward, guiding the brass key into the lock at the correct height.

Watching this spectacle, Imre couldn't help but sigh, "Deacon, among the Inquisition—no, the entire Church—you're truly the most fond of mechanical creations."

Angoulême glanced at his usually laid-back subordinate and replied, "I don't discriminate, whether it's a product of the Church of the God of Steam and Machinery or not. I only care about its utility.

"When a robot malfunctions, we can fix or replace it. If a person breaks down, I'll be dealing with compensation claims and grieving friends and families."

The Purifiers recognized the deacon's protective tone and turned their attention to the grayish-white humanoid machine with a smile.

Currently, it could only be used to move things and hammer nails. It could barely walk and run. It couldn't do any intricate or brain-intensive operations, and it didn't last long enough. Otherwise, it would have saved them a lot of trouble.

With a mechanical click, the robot turned the brass key, and the heavy iron door swung open.

A thin fog billowed from within, distorting the door and revealing ethereal faces, etched in the mist, contorted with hatred and pain.

The faces were formed by white fog, filled with hatred and pain.

They clawed and cursed at the mechanical creation opening the door, but it remained impassive.

Rays of brilliant sunlight descended one after another, swiftly clearing the fog behind the black iron door.

As the fog dissipated, Valentine and the others saw what was there.

It was a small altar, made of grayish-black stones, rising only halfway up.

Angoulême, after repeated confirmations that the area was safe, guided the robot inside.

He observed a shallow, narrow groove on top of the grayish-black altar, suggesting that something had once been embedded there but was now gone.

"A ring?" Angoulême mused in a hushed tone.

…

In the market district, at 3 Rue des Blouses Blanches, at the entrance of Apartment 601.

Franca sported an exquisite shirt adorned with lace flowers at the collar and cuffs, paired with her beloved beige breeches under the sunlight. Her slippers completed the ensemble as she gazed at Lumian. Franca questioned, "Why are you here again?"

Not wasting any time for his response, she raised her hand and quipped, "If you transform into Muggle, you're more than welcome!"

Lumian pushed his way into the room and scanned his surroundings.

"I need to discuss something with you."

"What's the matter now?" Franca, visibly apprehensive, inquired, "Can't you wait patiently for the gathering next week?"

Lumian chuckled.

"How about a trip to Trocadéro, specifically the Red House Café?"

"The Red House Café known for hosting women's orgies?" Franca asked in surprise.

Oh, you remembered it immediately. You must have been thinking about it a lot, right? Lumian replied with a smile, "Yes."

Franca shook her head.

"Forget it, forget it. Fantasizing about it is enough. No need to actually go. It would be too indulgent. I must maintain control, resist desires, and avoid complete indulgence."

Then, she scrutinized Lumian and remarked critically, "Don't tell me you intend to use Lie and Transfiguration to disguise yourself as a woman and infiltrate the orgy for firsthand experience?"

Lumian mocked, "Did you truly think that through, leading you to believe I'd consider such a plan? This is a serious matter!"

He recounted the Rose School of Thought's failure and his concerns.

"Someone from the Bliss Society mentioned that they're in contact with members of the Moment Society and the Narcissus Society, who also participate in the Red House female orgies. They want to convert them into believers of the Mother Tree of Desire.

"If we follow this trail, we might uncover the core members of the Bliss Society, or at least eliminate Maipú Meyer and those who were aware of

Susanna Mattise's rough plan."

Franca nodded slightly and said, "Moreover, we can't entrust this to official Beyonders. If they extract any information, your cover could be blown."

With a resolute expression, she declared, "Since it's a serious matter, we have to be there."

Then, with enthusiasm, she asked, "When are you planning to go? Do you know the party's time and the conditions for an invitation?"

"That's today's objective. Visit the Red House Café, enjoy coffee for an hour or two while subtly displaying your feminine charm. See if you attract the attention of potential contacts among the homosexuals or identify any women who might be orgy participants. Initiate conversations and establish connections to gather further intelligence." Lumian understood the importance of a methodical approach, especially in delicate situations like this one.

Franca nodded heavily.

"No problem."

Lumian produced Lie, in the shape of a silver necklace, and handed it to Franca.

"Use this to alter your hair, eyes, and facial features. You can't appear in your true form. What if Maipú Meyer is lurking? He'd recognize you as the current boss of Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons in an instant!"

As soon as Franca finished donning Lie, she said eagerly, "Let's go now!"

Lumian's lips curled up.

"I forgot to mention that this mystical item amplifies the wearer's emotions."

"Uh…" Franca was taken aback. "No wonder I've been feeling so anxious!"

Lumian added with a smile, "Emotions that weren't there before won't be amplified."

"…"Franca, clenching her teeth, retorted, "Well, my desire to punch you has definitely been amplified."

Lumian ceased his mockery and began to earnestly explain the functions and precautions of Lie.

Franca walked to the full-body mirror and observed her hair rapidly turning black, her pupils turning dark brown, her skin becoming more delicate, and her lines softer.

Compared to her flamboyant beauty, she now appeared more composed and mature. Her facial features leaned towards elegance, giving her an indescribable charm.

Gazing at her altered reflection in the mirror, Franca remained silent for a prolonged moment.

"It doesn't resemble your true appearance, but it's still beautiful and charming," Lumian complimented objectively.

He wanted to say that she had the charm of a Demoness, but he chose not to agitate Franca.

Franca snapped out of her daze and silently changed into non-red boots before walking towards the door.

Upon entering the corridor, she snapped out of her daze and glanced at Lumian beside her.

"If you're giving me Lie, how do you plan to disguise yourself as a woman? Are you relying on the transformation illusion?"

Lumian replied with a hint of amusement, "Who says I'm masquerading as a woman?"

He led Franca to a new safe house on Rue du Rossignol, retrieved a brownish-yellow ritualistic dog skin, and wrapped it around himself.

Then, he recited an incantation in Hermes.

"Dog!"

A dark light suddenly surged from the ritualistic dog skin, enveloping Lumian completely.

In an instant, a large dog with brownish-yellow fur appeared in the room.

Franca, with her black hair and brown eyes, was taken aback.

She finally understood Lumian's plan for monitoring the situation at the Red House Café.

After a moment of curiosity, Franca asked, "What does it feel like to become a big dog? Are you sure you don't feel burdened?"

The brownish-yellow-furred dog rolled its eyes at Franca and opened its mouth. "Woof!"

Are you stupid? Do you think dogs can speak and answer your questions?

Franca clicked her tongue and, with Lumian in brownish-yellow dog form, hired a rental carriage to head to Trocadéro Town, west of Lavigny Docks.

Along the way, Lumian had the urge to bite her several times. From time to time, she would curiously stroked his dog fur, stomach, and head, hoping to find something distinct from a real dog.

After more than an hour, the carriage arrived outside Trocadéro.

Franca paid the fare of 2 verl d'or, and Lumian, in his dog guise, hopped out, behaving as if he had no connection to her. He began to scout the streets for the Red House Café, which emitted a distinctive aroma of fermented grapes.

Soon, he located the establishment near East Lognes Forest.

While the entire building wasn't red, it sported a magnificent mushroom-shaped red roof. The main structure was beige, adorned with bold graffiti on the walls.

Lumian settled near the café's entrance, lying down quietly, and watched as Franca, transformed into a black-haired beauty, entered the establishment.

Chapter 365: Observation

The ambiance at the Red House Café radiated a small-town charm. Enamelware utensils, wooden-framed decorative paintings, checkered tablecloths, and exposed ceiling beams gave it a simple yet elegant vibe, a striking contrast to its vibrant and trendy exterior.

Franca, seated by the window, ordered a cup of fragrant Intis coffee and basked in the sunlight.

With a casual glance around, she observed the clientele and waitstaff.

Most of them were women, particularly the waitresses, and their attire and graceful movements indicated specialized training.

Only two men, seemingly foreign wine merchants, sat across from each other, discussing the impact of this year's abundant rain and sunlight on grape quality. Among the three female patrons, one was a local elderly woman with gray hair, dressed modestly, occasionally greeting passersby. Another was in her thirties, wearing a veiled black hat and a blue corset dress, her features fairly ordinary. The third, a striking beauty with delicate eyebrows, had naturally cascading brown hair in wavy curls, dressed simply, and exuded a calm demeanor.

Apart from the local elderly lady, the other two might be participants in the orgies. Franca turned her attention away, thinking that the first floor, with a dozen or so tables, didn't seem like the place for such private affairs.

Her guess was that it might be happening in the basement or on an upper floor closer to the distinctive red mushroom roof.

From Franca's vantage point, she had a clear view of the café's entrance. Lumian, in his brownish-yellow dog form, lay there quietly, soaking up the sun and keeping a close eye on everyone entering and exiting the Red House Café, as well as the patrons and waitresses inside.

No one paid much attention to the wild dog by the roadside, except for a few stray dogs that passed by.

One of them bared its teeth at Lumian, who occupied his usual spot, and growled menacingly.

Lumian felt somewhat helpless. Could he really engage in a dogfight in his current form?

This wasn't a significant concern for him, but what mattered was that the Animal Creation Spell had sealed most of his Beyonder powers, reducing his strength to that of a dog.

Of course, given his size as a large dog, intimidating smaller canines was a breeze. However, the dog growling at him was also quite substantial, albeit on the thin side.

Fight! Fight! Franca couldn't contain her excitement as she watched the scene unfold through the window.

She had no intention of intervening; it was a rare opportunity to witness Lumian in such an awkward situation. How could she resist the spectacle?

Lumian, sprawled by the door, raised his right palm—no, his right foreleg. Drawing from past experiences, he focused a portion of his consciousness on his paw.

A faint sense of madness and a scent of blood, perceptible only to Lumian, hung in the air.

The brown-furred dog, its skeletal frame visible, was taken aback and hastily retreated with its tail between its legs.

Oh… Come on! Be more daring! Why run away? Franca, inside the Red House Café, was left disappointed.

She couldn't fathom why the dog had suddenly become afraid of Lumian.

The Hunter couldn't unleash his full powers—he could exude an aura of provocation at best!

Simultaneously, Lumian chuckled self-deprecatingly.

If The Blood Emperor ever found out that I used His aura to scare off dogs, He might just skin me alive, wouldn't He?

After the brief interlude, Franca refocused her attention on the café.

Drawing from her experience and observations in fashion magazines, she gracefully sipped her coffee and occasionally performed everyday actions that highlighted her feminine charm, all learned over the past year.

It didn't escape her notice that nearly everyone in the café had their eyes on her. Some glanced discreetly, while others openly admired her, some even offering warm smiles.

The elderly local lady, who had been seated nearby, smiled at Franca, picked up honey-roasted chicken wings from her plate, and made her way out of the Red House Café.

Stopping in front of Lumian, she mumbled to herself in amazement, "It's another one…"

Lumian had an uneasy feeling as he watched the old lady squat down and offer the brownish-yellow roasted chicken wing to him.

After a moment's hesitation, he bit into the chicken wing like a real dog, allowing the old lady to stroke his furry head.

Truth be told, he wasn't accustomed to eating like a dog, but fortunately, the old lady stood up and departed after a couple of affectionate strokes.

Inside the Red House Café, Franca couldn't help but burst into laughter as she watched Lumian awkwardly nibble at the chicken wings. Unable to resist her amplified emotions, her body trembled with laughter.

If she didn't need to maintain her image, she might have doubled over in laughter.

She also wanted to take something to feed Lumian!

In her natural state, Franca's true charisma shone through. Her black hair, brown eyes, and effortless elegance captivated those around her, giving her a unique and magnetic presence in the café.

The mysterious charm of her black hair and brown eyes, along with her elegant and casual demeanor, made her uniquely attractive.

At that moment, a woman wearing a light-colored hunting suit rode up on a brown horse from the nearby racetrack near East Lognes Forest.

She skillfully dismounted and removed her hat.

Her long, orange-red hair flowed like a waterfall, adding a touch of wildness to her otherwise clean, pure, and exquisite face.

Carrying a whip, the woman in the hunting attire secured her horse and made her way into the Red House Café. She approached the quiet and beautiful young woman.

Franca had ceased her laughter at Lumian's antics and couldn't help but feel that this new arrival seemed more like a participant in the orgies than anyone else present.

Despite being the most beautiful with exquisitely delicate features that gave her an innocent appearance, there was an aura about her that could easily pass for that of a man.

There was likely to be someone like her at a female orgy.

Franca elegantly raised her right hand and brushed back the black hair that had fallen across her lips, subtly displaying her own feminine charm.

The woman with long orange-red hair, who had been unconsciously surveying the café's occupants, appeared visibly taken aback, as if she had been momentarily stunned.

However, Lumian, who had been lying quietly by the entrance, noticed a slight furrow in the woman's brow after her initial surprise.

She averted her gaze and continued her approach toward the quietly elegant woman with wavy hair. They engaged in light banter before they ascended the wooden stairs to the second floor amidst some chatter.

Franca observed them from the corner of her eye and began to form a rough idea.

There is a strong likelihood that these two are indeed participants in the female orgies, though whether they belonged to the Moment Society or the Narcissus Society remains uncertain.

Franca continued to sip her coffee leisurely, deliberately making no move.

After more than half an hour had passed, and with no sign of the women descending, she decided to leave her seat and walked out of Red House Café.

She planned to call it a day, so as to not risk arousing suspicion by approaching them too hastily.

Her plan was to maintain her cover as a resident of the nearby Lavigny Docks and return to Trocadéro every two or three days, or even more frequently. After all, this area was renowned for its wine production and scenic beauty, attracting numerous tourists daily. It would be entirely plausible for a lady who had recently moved nearby to explore the area.

Lumian, stationed at the entrance of the Red House Café, appeared disinterested, as though he had no connection to Franca's actions.

Almost simultaneously, his sharp senses detected the beautiful woman with long orange-red hair standing behind a glass window on the second floor.

The woman observed Franca's departing figure with a solemn, vigilant, and contemplative expression, devoid of any apparent homosexual romantic interest.

Why is there such a reaction? Did she discover something amiss with Franca? How did she discover it? Lumian felt puzzled as he stood up, as if he had soaked up enough sun, and moved to the alley between the Red House Café and the neighboring building, which was closer to Franca's departure direction.

Before long, the woman with long orange-red hair reappeared behind the second-floor window.

She carefully scanned her surroundings, confirming that no one was paying attention. There was only a brownish-yellow dog dozing off in a corner. Gently, she pushed open the window and gracefully descended to the alley below, as light as a feather.

Immediately after her descent, the woman with the clean and pure appearance blended into the shadows.

Lumian, pretending to be in a state of drowsiness, silently observed this unfolding scene, his mind racing.

Featherfall… Shadow Concealment… Beauty… Remarkable charisma… Could she be a Demoness?

Was it precisely because she is also a Demoness that she sensed something unusual about Franca's appearance and demeanor, prompting her to follow and observe?

Lumian discreetly stood up and began to follow Franca from a distance, giving the appearance of a leisurely stroll.

The orange-red-haired woman remained hidden in the shadows, elusive and difficult to pinpoint. Lumian couldn't ascertain her exact location, but he was certain that she was not far from Franca.

Franca, playing her part convincingly, didn't seem in a hurry to leave Trocadéro. She embraced the role of a tourist, visiting the nearest vineyard, sampling the free red wine at a shop, and purchasing some regional specialties.

Just before noon, Franca entered the town's upscale department store and began trying on various styles of women's clothing.

As Lumian watched, nearly fifteen minutes later, he lost sight of Franca. It was then that he observed the clean-looking woman in hunting attire emerging from the shadows in a corner of the department store, her eyes scanning the surroundings.

Franca had successfully shaken her pursuer.

Lumian's guileless dog face lit up with a gratified smile.

The final stage of today's operation, getting rid of the would-be stalker, had been executed flawlessly. Franca, with Lie's assistance and her ability to counter divination, had done a commendable job!

She must have utilized the shoppers in the department store, changing into a different set of clothing as a ruse, transformed herself, and exited openly to evade detection.

After the woman in the hunting attire returned to the Red House Café, Lumian left Trocadéro and made his way toward Quartier Éraste.

While still in his canine form, he intended to explore the vicinity of Red Swan Castle.

Guillaume Bénet's Animal Creation Spell had a duration of seven days, after which it would naturally dissipate, requiring a new ritual.

As Lumian had anticipated, Red Swan Castle stood atop the hill, its beige exterior tainted with the marks of age-old blood. It stood in eerie silence, surrounded by a small river.

Lumian conducted a few circles around the area before arriving at the closest church building—the Sacred Heart Cloister of the Eternal Blazing Sun Church.

Beneath the shade of the green trees, he squatted quietly and gazed at the magnificent golden building adorned with steeples.

During his observation, Lumian couldn't help but notice a golden retriever squatting more than ten meters away, its attention also fixed on the Sacred Heart Cloister.

Chapter 366: Demoness Sect

Are all the dogs around the cloister so devout? He retracted his gaze while criticizing.

He quickly left the forest behind.

His primary concern was to chart a route from Red Swan Castle to the Sacred Heart Cloister, taking note of any advantageous terrain and hiding spots along the way. What the Sacred Heart Cloister actually looked like or if it held any special significance was of little concern to him.

By mid-afternoon, Lumian had thoroughly scouted the area surrounding Red Swan Castle. He discovered several potential escape routes, some following the main road, some along the freight railways, others winding through forests, past lakes, or over hills. Not only were they well-concealed, but they also featured natural traps.

Initially, Lumian had contemplated infiltrating Red Swan Castle in his canine form, but he soon realized that security was exceedingly tight. Stray dogs were not tolerated, and intruders faced certain death.

Unfortunately, the Animal Creation Spell only permits transformation into larger animals. The implicit requirement is that the hide must be able to envelop a curled-up human. Otherwise, I could transform into a rat. I don't believe they could guard against that! He sighed and retreated to a nearby secluded spot.

With his spirituality, Lumian manipulated the air within the dog hide and murmured two words of Hermes.

"His Grace!"

Creating a sound in this manner was not challenging for Lumian. What proved difficult was that his spirituality was constrained by the Animal Creation Spell. It could not extend beyond his body or the dog hide, and it was in limited supply. Thus, any sound produced remained confined to the dog hide, hidden from others' ears. Furthermore, he could dispel the incantation after uttering a few words.

In a swift, shadowy motion, the brownish-yellow dog skin split open, revealing Lumian's human form.

He crawled out, carefully folded the hide, and cradled it against his chest.

Though it had lost its mystical properties, Lumian had no intention of discarding it. Finding such a complete and large dog hide was a rarity.

I only have one ritualistic dog hide left. I must conserve it. Lumian muttered these thoughts as he resumed his journey along the familiar road toward the nearest town.

In a bustling metropolis like Trier, ritualistic dog hides proved more practical than ritual sheepskin or cowhide. Donning the latter two and transforming into the corresponding animals would undoubtedly draw attention. After all, who wouldn't be tempted to guide a lone sheep wandering the streets home to prepare it into various delicacies? Moreover, in Trier, there were those with perverted inclinations, ones who fancied sheep buttocks.

…

As Lumian returned to Apartment 601 at 3 Rue des Blouses Blanches, the night had already fallen, casting a dark veil over the city.

Franca swiftly changed back into her usual attire and settled into the recliner, her gaze fixed warily on the Lie necklace resting in a corner of the coffee table, as though it might spring to life and ensnare her at any moment.

"What's wrong?" Lumian closed the ajar door behind him and casually stowed away the Lie necklace.

Franca's expression shifted, and she sighed, confessing, "After I returned, I found myself with idle time, so I attempted to adjust my appearance, but…"

At this point, she let out another sigh, her emotions a mixture of fear and nostalgia.

"I became entranced by my own reflection in the mirror!

"I've never seen such a flawless woman. Just by gazing at her face, I could do so for an entire day—no, for eternity!"

Lumian contemplated her words for a moment before responding, "You can use Lie to deceive others, but never deceive yourself."

"I understand, but the allure of the Demoness of Pleasure and the effects of Lie are genuinely potent," Franca admitted earnestly. "It wasn't easy for me to regain control. I forcibly removed the necklace and tossed it onto the coffee table. While my fixation may be partially due to its amplification properties, I can't help but reminisce. I can't help but yearn to give it a try. Heh heh, my mind has passed the test."

With the Lie necklace out of her sight, Franca visibly relaxed. She chuckled and remarked, "Were you meme–uh, using your sister's way of speaking to caution me?"

"Yes, in preparation for your upcoming gathering," Lumian confirmed, making no effort to conceal the fact that he had been practicing Aurore's manner of speech recently.

Franca nodded thoughtfully and commented, "It felt quite natural. If it remains at this level, deceiving them shouldn't pose a problem."

Without awaiting Lumian's response, the Demoness of Pleasure playfully inquired, "So, how did the honey-roasted chicken wings taste?"

Lumian provided an objective assessment, "They were decent."

Franca's curiosity and teasing spirit persisted as she asked, "Could it be that your taste buds were improved due to your canine senses? Had your sense of smell become more acute?"

Lumian replied with an experimental tone, "It does have some influence on me, but I haven't transformed entirely into a dog. I still retain a significant portion of my human senses."

Franca continued, "And what about other aspects?"

After a moment of contemplation, Lumian explained, "Other aspects? It's more like my soul is confined within a real dog's body. Everything I do is restricted and influenced by my physical form, including…"

Seated on the divan, he raised his leg, mimicking the posture of a canine taking a leak.

Franca exclaimed, "You really don't care about your image at all, do you? It doesn't bother you?"

Lumian shrugged, responding, "What's there to be concerned about?"

Franca thought for a moment before posing her final question, "One last thing, will you be affected by dog hormones and react strangely to other dogs?"

"The body is mine, and the dog is just a disguise. It's merely an external constraint." Lumian's expression suggested he wasn't a fool.

He then adopted a mimicry of Madam Magician and asked, "Are there any more questions?"

"I'm done." Franca was satisfied.

Lumian chuckled.

"Then it's my turn to ask. What are your thoughts on the ladies you observed today?"

Franca absently twirled a few flaxen-colored strands of hair that had come loose from her ponytail as she replied, "There are two potential suspects…"

She proceeded to recount her speculation and added, "That woman with the orange-red hair still gives me an odd sensation, as if she's drawing me in."

Lumian smiled approvingly. "You're onto something. She's at least a Demoness of Pleasure or a Beyonder with a corresponding mystical item."

After identifying that the Beyonder belonged to the Demoness pathway, Lumian sensed a magnetic allure in every gesture she made, similar to Franca's. It was a bit challenging for him, with most of his abilities sealed, to resist such temptation. Fortunately, Alms Monk's endurance held firm.

"Demoness?" Franca pondered the possibility and mused to herself, "That makes sense. How could a gathering of females dedicated to pleasure not attract one or two Demonesses…"

Lumian had a moment of realization and posed a question, "Is it to bring pleasure to others and oneself?"

He sensed that this might be a fundamental requirement for their acting.

"That's one aspect of it. Even if it weren't for the potion, I'd still want to attend. However, I can control myself, but the same can't be said for other Demonesses," Franca said with disdain and a sigh.

Lumian, not fully grasping the implication behind her words, remarked, "She followed you but you managed to shake her off."

"Ah…" Franca was momentarily surprised. "She should be from the Demoness family."

"The Demoness family you mentioned?" Lumian had previously heard Franca briefly mention this secret organization.

He had always been curious about how Demonesses could form families.

Matriarchal society?

Franca sighed and said, "Yes, it's also known as the Demoness Sect. Its origins trace back to the descendants of the Primordial Demoness during the Fourth Epoch. The Primordial Demoness is a Sequence 0 of the Assassin pathway, essentially a true deity. She's widely regarded as an evil god, also known as the Chaos Demoness."

Primordial Demoness… Lumian committed the name to memory.

Franca continued, "The core of the Demoness family always includes a descendant of the Primordial Demoness, but they also recruit or cultivate Assassins with different surnames. It's essentially a sect that controls all the potion formulas and most of the resources related to this pathway.

"Only a Demoness from the Demoness Sect would tail a wild Demoness upon their first encounter."

"To retrieve the Beyonder characteristic?" Lumian inquired.

Be it recruitment or elimination, it was a way of reclaiming Beyonder characteristics.

Franca pursed her lips and responded, "Exactly. They don't want the Beyonder characteristics of the Demoness pathway to be lost outside their sect. Moreover, they hold a deep disdain for female Assassins and eliminate any they come across."

"Why?" Lumian couldn't comprehend.

Franca shot him a resentful glance, as if blaming him for asking such a question.

She sighed and said, "It's because the Primordial Demoness was originally male. During the process of attaining godhood through the Assassin pathway, She transformed entirely into a woman. This transformation left Her mind twisted and filled with agony. The Demoness Sect claims they want to emulate the Primordial's experience.

"So, every Demoness in the sect was once male. After enduring immense pain and suffering, they became profoundly distorted. They yearn to see other men undergo similar ordeals. Perhaps you don't know, but these Demonesses seek out men to father their children. Baby girls are sent away, while baby boys are kept behind to relive their mothers' lives."

As Cordu's Prankster King, Lumian couldn't help but shake his head in disbelief.

"Isn't this incredibly twisted?"

"What's even more twisted is that these children's fathers eventually become Demonesses themselves." Franca recounted the information she had obtained from Madam Judgment and exhaled in fear. "I've been avoiding them, not wanting them to discover me."

"But you're originally a man. Why should you be afraid?" Lumian asked, puzzled. "Are you worried that being around them might corrupt you and warp your senses after joining the Demoness Sect?"

Franca nodded solemnly.

"Yes.

Besides, I'm already a Minor Arcana card holder of the Tarot Club. How could I possibly join the Demoness Sect?"

Lumian fell silent for a few moments before speaking again.

"Didn't you want to join the Iron and Blood Cross Order too?"

"That's different. It's a mission for the Tarot Club," Franca defended reflexively.

Lumian didn't press the issue and instead nodded thoughtfully.

"No wonder you mentioned that female orgies easily attract Demonesses."

Franca scoffed.

"It's just that most Demonesses are members of the Demoness Sect and have connections either vertically or horizontally. Otherwise, half of the female orgies might consist of Demonesses.

"What's even more extreme is that when you receive an invitation to a strip ball and attend with enthusiasm, it's always packed with men."

After muttering a few words, Franca looked at Lumian and asked awkwardly, "So, what should we do next?"

Chapter 367: Salon

Lumian understood Franca's concerns and smiled.

"Two directions:

"First, consult with your Major Arcana card holder about the possibility of establishing contact with the Demoness Sect. Remember, you originally were a man, so there's no need to fret about being eliminated. As long as you can pass their background checks, you can tap into their resources to enhance yourself. And when pretending isn't an option anymore, have your Major Arcana card holder assign you a mission to steer clear of Trier and make a swift getaway.

"Think about it. You're already at Sequence 6. Most of the top-tier resources are within the Demoness Sect's grasp. Infiltrating their ranks and acquiring these resources from within is a much simpler and safer route compared to making enemies and taking risks to hunt them. Of course, this hinges on your Major Arcana card holder providing a way to elude the watchful eye of the Primordial Demoness."

Franca was taken aback and mumbled, "How do you sound so experienced…"

Lumian scoffed. "Are you amnesiac? I'm doing something similar right now. I'm infiltrating the Iron and Blood Cross Order on behalf of the Tarot Club.

"What's the major perk? Once I complete the Iron and Blood Cross Order's mission, I can claim rewards from Gardner Martin and report back to my Major Arcana card holder. I can use the pretext of my spying progress to secure rewards from her—two rewards with one mission. Otherwise, why do you think the number of mystical items on me have increased so rapidly?"

Of course, he didn't need to mention Mr. K's contributions to Franca.

"Two rewards with one mission…" Franca repeated it a few times before a realization dawned on her. "I've been cooperating with you on missions related to the Iron and Blood Cross Order. Will this clash with contact with the Demoness Sect?"

Lumian's expression said: "As expected, you're still inexperienced."

"There's no clash; why would there be? Simply convey to the Demoness Sect your desire to transition to the Hunter pathway at Sequence 4 and revert to your original gender. That's your motivation for pursuing leads on the Iron and Blood Cross Order. You've already left enough clues and made substantial progress.

"From what you've described, those Demonesses went from being men to women. I refuse to believe they haven't considered leveraging the pathway switch to regain what they've lost. That reason should be enough to convince them.

"Moreover, Demonesses and Hunters belong to neighboring pathways. They surely have ulterior motives concerning the Iron and Blood Cross Order. Given your opportunity to infiltrate them, they're more likely to embrace you than hinder you. In fact, they might even value your presence.

"Most importantly, if things go as planned, you could become the Demoness Sect's liaison responsible for matters related to the market district and the Iron and Blood Cross Order. If you want the higher-ups among the Demonesses to be aware of what's transpiring here, they'll be informed. If you prefer keeping it under wraps, they'll remain oblivious. For instance, Jenna being a female Assassin."

At this point, Lumian smiled.

"You can also exploit the Demoness Sect to nurture Jenna. When the high-ranking Demonesses discover that a powerful pure female Demoness is paid for by their own sect, won't they lose control on the spot?"

It was an intriguing thought. It could be described as extreme provocation and mockery.

Franca nodded indiscernibly.

"Kid, if you had taken the Instigator potion, you might have fully digested it within a week."

"I'm just kindling a specific fire within you." Lumian leaned back on the sofa.

Franca couldn't help but scoff in a half-mocking, half-teasing tone.

"If I were to genuinely join the Demoness Sect, and you reach the Sequence 5 qualitative transformation without obtaining a Sequence 4 potion formula and the corresponding main ingredient from the Iron and Blood Cross Order, would you consider becoming a Demoness?"

Lumian considered the question seriously before answering, "It depends. If I urgently require the strength and capabilities of a Sequence 4 to complete specific tasks, it's not out of the question. I'll choose the path that's simpler and more attainable."

"…" Franca was taken aback. "Are you sure you won't find it mentally burdensome?"

He made it sound as if he was drinking absinthe or Lanti Proof tonight.

Lumian borrowed a phrase from his sister's vocabulary.

"I'll do whatever it takes." He then added, "I'll stop at nothing to achieve my goal.

"Besides, can't we just switch back when we reach Sequence 3?"

"You can't just switch at will. Most Beyonders never advance beyond Sequence 4 in their lifetime, let alone Sequence 3. As they ascend, it becomes increasingly difficult. Whether it's the risk of losing control or obtaining the necessary resources, the challenges remain the same," she cautioned.

Lumian let out a chuckle.

"Anyway, it's all just a fantasy at this point, isn't it? To confirm if it's feasible at all."

Franca was left momentarily speechless and then inquired, "You mentioned two directions. What's the other one?"

"The other option is to track down the Demoness of the Demoness Sect and extract detailed information about the female orgies from her. Subsequently, focus on identifying potential members of the Bliss Society among the participants. As soon as you can, pinpoint the core members with close ties to Susanna Mattise and eliminate any hidden threats," Lumian explained the alternative plan concisely.

"While it's a viable plan, if the Bliss Society members aren't directly involved in the female orgies and are merely associating with certain individuals, targeting the Demoness alone might not provide the information we need. Additionally, it's bound to draw the attention of high-ranking members of the Demoness Sect, leaving little room for further investigation. I'll start by reaching out to my Major Arcana card holder and inquire if she has any reservations about my contact with the Demoness Sect." Franca analyzed after some thought.

She was clearly tempted by Lumian's suggestion.

Lumian acknowledged her analysis without rushing her. After all, she wouldn't return to Trocadéro's Red House café for another two or three days, with an invitation to Count Poufer's salon preceding that event.

…

Three days after scouting the surroundings of Red Swan Castle and informing Madam Magician and Mr. K of the invitation, Lumian arrived at the beige castle in a four-wheeled four-seater provided by Gardner Martin.

He chose not to dress too formally for the occasion. No tailcoat, top hat, or cane that stereotypically marked a gentleman.

Instead, he wore a light-brown hunting suit, off-white breeches, and brown boots. In his hand, he held a Loen-style deerstalker hat, allowing his golden-black hair to catch the wind.

Lumian was aware, through Aurore's gossip, that appearing overly grandiose in a literary and artistic salon like this would make him appear out of place among the other participants, possibly even a laughingstock.

Of course, this outfit had been funded by Gardner Martin's recent contribution of 10,000 verl d'or, costing Lumian a total of 1,000 verl d'or.

Holding the invitation letter, Lumian underwent the guard's scrutiny and passed through the imposing several-meter-tall door.

In this area, there was a hall, but it was relatively modest. It served as a waiting area for the butlers, valets, maids, and guards accompanying the guests during a grand banquet.

Lumian scanned his surroundings and confirmed that this wasn't the hall from his unsettling nightmare.

Beyond the hall was the atrium, and on the opposite side stood Red Swan Castle's main edifice.

It rose six to seven stories high and was encircled by a ring of towers.

Lumian couldn't help but glance up at a narrow window on the third floor.

In his nightmare, a man with dark-red hair had gouged out his own brownish-red eyes from behind that very window.

Now, however, there was nothing behind the clear glass window but a slightly mottled light-colored wall.

Mottled… Shouldn't the rooms' walls have been repainted? Aurore had mentioned that the annual maintenance cost for such an ancient castle is astronomical… Lumian shifted his gaze away and proceeded to enter the main building.

The moment he crossed the threshold, his eyes narrowed, and his heart sank.

This hall was an exact replica of the one in his nightmare!

From the crystal chandelier hanging high above to the spiral golden staircase leading to the second floor, everything mirrored his dream with eerie precision.

Though Lumian had expected this, encountering it in reality stirred up complex emotions within him.

The male servants in the hall, adorned in their vibrant red uniforms with golden trimmings, stood in two neat rows to welcome Lumian's arrival.

Lumian's eyelids twitched, finding the vividness of the red to resemble flowing blood.

The salon was situated in a spacious living room on the first floor, elegantly decorated with a thick, dark red carpet adorned with intricate patterns. A set of plush sofas graced one side of the room, and bar stools and armchairs were scattered around them.

On the opposite end of the living room, a tall young woman sat at a brown piano. She wore a simple yet pristine sky-blue-patterned white corset dress, and her auburn hair cascaded gracefully down her back.

As Lumian entered the living room, the girl's fingers danced gracefully across the piano keys, conjuring a sprightly melody.

Count Poufer occupied an armchair, engaged in conversation with an elegant lady with black hair, blue eyes, and an air of refinement as she leaned against the armrest in a crouched position, chuckling merrily.

Novelist Anori, Painter Mullen, critic Ernst Young, and Poet Iraeta, each accompanied by their female companions, were either gathered on the sofa, engaged in conversation, or lingering near the table adorned with desserts and roasted meats.

In addition to these well-known figures, other guests filled the room. Lumian scanned the crowd and spotted a familiar face.

It was Laurent, the inhabitant of Auberge du Coq Doré, rumored to have used Madame Lakazan's hard-earned money to frequent upscale cafés and mingle with high society.

Laurent still donned the same pristine black tailcoat, and his neatly combed brownish-yellow hair followed a precise 30-70 cut. He stood out amidst the casually attired authors, painters, poets, and critics surrounding him.

He displayed no restraint in his interactions, his dark-brown eyes sparkling as he exchanged pleasantries with the gathered guests.

Within moments, Laurent locked eyes with Lumian, and his pupils dilated, as if he had encountered an evil spirit.

I-Is this not Ciel Dubois, the current owner of Auberge du Coq Doré and the infamous mob leader?

In an instant, fear coursed through Laurent's veins.

He worried that Lumian might expose his true identity, jeopardizing the connections he had painstakingly cultivated.

He was on the verge of success!

Oh, you're doing quite well. You've even received an invitation to such a salon… Lumian remarked with a smile, pointing to himself as if to suggest that they both belonged to a certain type and could feign ignorance of each other.

A sigh of relief escaped Laurent as Lumian approached Count Poufer.

With a hint of annoyance, he grumbled, "You didn't inform me about bringing a female companion. You're making me look like a fool!"

"Haha." Count Poufer and the others chuckled, delighted that their prank had succeeded.

After the laughter subsided, Count Poufer gestured toward the girl at the piano.

"If you don't mind, you can invite my cousin, Miss Elros."

Chapter 368: Speculator

Lumian settled into an armchair with a polite smile aimed at Count Poufer. He responded, "That would be my honor."

With a graceful gesture, he extended an invitation to Miss Elros.

Count Poufer, dressed in a crimson shirt, waved his hand.

"After she finishes playing this piece."

Lumian shifted his gaze towards the piano, finally getting a clear view of Miss Elros.

Her chestnut eyebrows framed her expressive brown eyes, which sparkled with a youthful vibrance. The delicate curve of her cheeks and gentle facial contours suggested her age to be under 20, and there was no apparent trace of Sauron lineage.

Lumian surmised that Elros likely inherited her Sauron lineage from her maternal side.

He turned away briefly, his fingers wrapping around a glass of red, white, and blue liqueur resting on the coffee table. Engaging in lively conversation with Count Poufer, Novelist Anori, and others, Lumian discussed the latest trends and scandals circulating in their circle.

He had been diligently reading newspapers like Novel Weekly, Journal des débats, Youth of Trier, and Ghost Face to keep himself well-informed for occasions like these.

The black-haired lady who had been kneeling beside Count Poufer had already moved away to observe the newspaper editors engaged in a game of billiards.

Lumian was aware that she couldn't be Count Poufer's wife. Aurore had once enlightened him about the peculiar customs of Trier: in intimate gatherings and small-scale balls, the male and female hosts refrained from appearing together. It was considered improper and might invite unnecessary gossip. Therefore, when one of them hosted a salon, their spouse would attend someone else's event.

Back when Lumian first learned of this, he was barely fifteen, and it struck him as a bizarre set of rules. Now, reflecting upon it, he couldn't help but think:

You Trieriens have devised such absurd and comical unwritten rules to facilitate discreet affairs, and everyone willingly adheres to them!

As the musical piece concluded, Elros gracefully left the piano and made her way to the sofas. Her cousin introduced her to Lumian, pulling over a barstool for her. She sat with her legs neatly together, a silent observer of the ongoing conversation.

As time flowed by, others gradually converged in their direction. Laurent followed a casually-dressed, middle-aged man who sported an impressive beard.

Count Poufer took it upon himself to make introductions, saying, "This is Cornell, the editor-in-chief of Le Petit Trierien."

Lumian had perused the newspaper before, and he vividly recalled the for the "interstellar bridge to the crimson moon" featured in its pages.

Now, with that memory in mind, he couldn't help but suspect that it might be a cleverly disguised scam or perhaps a piece of Trierien performance art. He also harbored suspicions that it might be connected to devotees of some evil god.

"This is Ciel Dubois, the general manager of Coastal Import and Export Corporation," Poufer introduced the identity Gardner Martin had fabricated to Cornell.

Cornell extended his right hand with a look of surprise as he greeted Lumian. "You're quite the young lad."

Lumian accepted the handshake, offering a charming smile.

"This is the result of my unwavering diligence and hard work."

Just as Poet Iraeta was on the verge of commenting on the diligence of most individuals present without becoming the general manager of a large company at such a young age, Lumian added a touch of self-deprecation to his tone.

"It's precisely because I excelled in both areas that my father appointed me as the general manager of the import and export company."

The room erupted in laughter as everyone grasped Lumian's meaning.

Their perception of Ciel Dubois underwent a positive transformation.

In their social circle, there was no shortage of individuals who had landed important positions at a tender age due to familial connections. These people typically either avoided mentioning their parents and elders, striving to demonstrate their self-proclaimed abilities, or they struggled with confidence and maturity, endlessly fixating on their fathers or uncles. There were very few who exuded the kind of openness, honesty, and humor that Lumian effortlessly radiated. Back then, Count Poufer could scarcely be counted among them.

Lumian, with a touch of mischievous humor borrowed from his sister, turned his gaze toward Laurent and inquired, "Who might this be?"

Thud! Thud! Laurent's heart raced in response.

While they had an unspoken agreement not to reveal each other's true identities, Laurent lacked a thorough understanding of Ciel Dubois, the mob leader, and worried that Lumian might suddenly change his mind.

Cornell, the editor-in-chief of Le Petit Trierien, gestured to the young man by his side.

"This is Laurent. He's remarkably talented, well-informed, and unfailingly polite. I've been observing him for nearly three months, and I'm considering offering him a position as my assistant and deputy editor-in-chief. Laurent, how do you feel about this unexpected proposition?"

Laurent initially found himself taken aback, but soon, he was overwhelmed by joy and felt a slight sense of vertigo.

All the pains and anxieties he had endured, from his mother's tears to his neighbors' disdain, had led to this moment.

He had always believed that with his talents, he shouldn't be stuck at the bottom, and he had been actively seeking an opportunity, even if it meant squeezing his mother dry to maintain a facade of dignity.

Laurent refrained from displaying excessive excitement and responded to Cornell with a gracious smile, saying, "It would be an honor."

Not bad at all, Lumian thought as he assessed the situation. Speculation could be a risky endeavor, but the rewards could be substantial. However, there's the importance of changing one's mindset and genuinely starting from their current position. Speculating to improve social status might lead to losing everything in the long run. Lumian recalled his sister's comments after losing in the stock market as he considered Laurent's actions.

He was unlike Charlie and others; Lumian held a disdain for those who exploited their mothers in the speculative process. As long as Laurent's mother could accept it and didn't resort to violence against her son or show strong resistance, Lumian didn't pass harsh judgment.

With Cornell and the others now seated, Lumian's curiosity led him to ask, "Where did you first encounter Laurent?"

Cornell responded with a smile, "At the Vichy Café. He often visits to engage in discussions about various Trier-related matters and to share his opinions."

Vichy Café—the place where 5 verl d'or could buy half a bottle of mineral water and two boiled eggs? Laurent's mother, Madame Lakazan, doesn't even earn 3 verl d'or after a long day's work. Yet, the investment has clearly paid off. Even a rookie deputy editor-in-chief at a newspaper like Le Petit Trierien earns nearly 5,000 verl d'or annually, and that's just the tip of the iceberg. Lumian observed the differences and realized that Laurent's fixation on speculative networking had a certain logic.

Still, success in such endeavors was a rare occurrence—one in a hundred at best.

Lumian cast a glance at Laurent, who eyed him with caution, and smoothly changed the subject with a smile.

"Cornell, I happened to come across an for the Interstellar Bridge in Le Petit Trierien last month, or perhaps even earlier. It piqued my interest. Any comments about it?"

Cornell indulged in a puff from his pipe before bursting into laughter.

"I believe it's a bunch of delusional folks, but since they paid, there's no reason why I shouldn't run their . Maybe it can fool some fanatical enthusiasts of mechanics and science."

"How are they now?" Lumian chuckled. "I'm even thinking of investing in them, just to see if they're swindlers or if they can actually produce something."

Poet Iraeta picked up his pipe and muttered, "You might as well sponsor me instead of investing in them. At least then, you can berate me for writing like a piece of dogsh*t, and I won't have any comeback."

Lumian played along, acting as if money was of no concern to him. "No problem. How about 5,000 verl d'or?"

His intention was to give Iraeta only 3,000 verl d'or later, using the excuse of not having enough cash on hand at the moment.

Iraeta lowered his pipe and spread his arms theatrically.

"Praise the Sun and let Ciel's malice strike harder!"

"Haha, let's head back to the old city together after the salon." Lumian subtly hinted at his intention to sponsor Iraeta later but refrained from handing over the money directly to avoid the stink of money.

Following this brief diversion, Cornell seemed to warm up to Lumian's presence.

"I'm not sure how those people are faring. They only paid for a one-month ad."

As the conversation flowed, Count Poufer glanced at the setting sun and proposed a game with a warm smile. "Shall we play King's Pie? Consider it a warm-up before dinner."

Is this the only game you know? Do you have a childhood… Lumian couldn't help but inwardly critique Count Poufer's choice of games, but he refrained from objecting.

The others readily agreed, and Count Poufer promptly instructed his valet to bring out the sizable King's Pie that had been prepared in the kitchen.

It resembled the lid of a grand saucepan, emitting a tantalizing aroma and color.

"Who shall be in charge of the cutting?" Count Poufer surveyed the participants, his gaze sweeping over each of them.

After a moment's thought, he decided, "Elros, you do the honors. You're the youngest and most beautiful lady here."

Elros, seated on a barstool beside Lumian, gracefully rose and took up the table knife to start dividing the King's Pie.

Rather obedient of your cousin. Living off the Sauron family, off Count Poufer? Lumian realized that Elros's techniques were deft, perhaps from frequent practice.

In no time, the colossal King's Pie was divided into roughly 29 portions.

As was customary, Count Poufer proposed offering the extra slice to his ancestor, Vermonda Sauron, and no one voiced any objections.

After completing this part of the ritual, the living room seemed to descend into an eerie silence, as if the very atmosphere outside the castle had solidified.

Count Poufer then turned his attention to Lumian and Laurent. "Laurent, this is your first time attending my Saturday salon with Ciel. You'll be the first to choose."

Lumian laughed and said, "Of course, the host should be the first to choose. Don't you all think so?"

Instigated by him, the other participants readily agreed that the male host should have the honor of making the initial selection.

Count Poufer didn't insist and took up a slice of King's Pie, addressing the group, "Whoever bites into the gold coin shall be king."

Seeing that the Sauron family member had made the first choice, Lumian felt more at ease and leaned forward to survey the slices.

This was double insurance. First, he would let Count Poufer make his selection. Then, while there were still plenty of slices left, he would exploit Termiboros's aversion to the matter to choose a slice without the gold coin.

This time, Termiboros remained silent, not offering any warnings. Lumian naturally picked up the King's Pie slice he had personally selected.

But as he settled back into his seat, his mind spun unexpectedly. It was as if he saw the narrow glass window once again, and the image of the dark-red-haired man who had gouged out his own eyes intruded upon his thoughts.

Chapter 369: King? No, Emperor!

Compared to his previous nightmare, Lumian could now "see" him more clearly. The dark-red-haired man behind the narrow glass window bore a striking resemblance to Count Poufer.

As he raised his right hand to dig at his eyes, his facial muscles twitched, and his facial contours transformed, instantly becoming identical to Lumian's.

It was identical to Lumian Lee from Cordu Village, not the current Ciel Dubois!

When the dark-red-haired man with Lumian's face gouged out the bloody eyeball, Lumian's eyes ached, and his vision darkened.

Simultaneously, wild laughter echoed in his ears, infecting him to the point where he wanted to release his frustration, unleash violence, and satisfy his bloodlust.

Suddenly, his right palm heated up, and pure madness surged into his mind.

Out of nowhere, frustration, violence, and bloodthirst surged out of him as the maniacal laughter instantly ended.

Lumian's vision returned to normal, and he saw Novelist Anori sitting across from him, with Count Poufer beside him.

They grinned as they observed the other participants selecting slices of King's Pie, completely unaware of the unusual changes happening to Lumian.

Lumian counted the King's Pie slices that had vanished and glanced at Laurent, who was engrossed in his choice. He realized that only a few seconds had elapsed, but it felt like an eternity.

Drawing upon his Alms Monk abilities, he resisted the emotional turmoil stirred by the Blood Emperor's presence. He faintly perceived a peculiar, insane, bloody, and ruthless mental impression lingering in the void above him.

The desire to infiltrate Lumian's body, sending shivers down his spine, remained suppressed by Alista Tudor's hidden aura; it dared not descend. Instead, it circled above the living room, akin to vultures eager to feast on carcasses but cautious of nearby predators.

None of the participants in the King's Pie game detected the existence of such a manic spirit glaring fiercely at them from above. They giggled and selected their slices of King's Pie.

Come, dance with the Blood Emperor! Let's see who's crazier, you or Alista Tudor! Lumian scoffed inwardly, his emotions in turmoil.

Of course, he understood that his Blood Emperor aura was a mere facade. If the spirit were to forcefully enter his body, he wouldn't have the power to resist it. All he could do was hope that Mr. Fool's seal would activate and yield some effect.

However, judging by appearances, the frenzied and cruel spirit lacked any rationality. It operated solely on instinct and harbored an innate fear.

Lumian took a moment to collect himself. While observing Elros and the others choose their King's Pie slices and sensing the frenzied spirit's erratic movements, he contemplated the corresponding dilemma.

This appears to be the core of the Sauron family's King's Pie game…

Poufer employs his bloodline and a simplified ritual to summon the lingering spirit of his ancestor, allowing it to inhabit the person who consumes the symbol and becomes the king…

If a frenzied and bloodthirsty spirit were to truly take control of my body and corrode my mind, I might lose my sanity instantly. It's nearly impossible for ordinary individuals to resist such a force. What does Count Poufer rely on to maintain his composure? At the very least, he seems normal and has become king countless times…

No wonder Termiboros insisted I switch slices last time. If I were to lose control, He wouldn't fare any better…

Son of a sow! Why didn't you warn me today? Did you choose to remain silent because you knew I possessed the Blood Emperor's aura and wouldn't succumb to this insane mental invasion?

Where does this frenzied spirit originate from? It's been two to three hundred years; how can it still exist?

Could it be that the Sauron family has a special method for preserving the spirit of a high-ranking individual across generations? Or could Vermonda Sauron actually still be alive? Or perhaps the Beyonder trait he left behind has become too corrupted? Is the Sauron family attempting to gradually eradicate it using this method? But it's been two to three hundred years!

Gardner Martin's objective is to ascertain Vermonda's condition…

Hmm, this crazy spirit continues to hover above my head without descending… Will it eventually retreat, change its target, or trigger other alterations?

Lumian remained on high alert, keeping a constant watch on the frenzied spirit lingering in the air.

If it displayed any signs of forcefully invading through the Blood Emperor's aura or causing other unfavorable developments, Lumian would opt to "teleport" away.

Anori, Mullen, Iraeta, and the others each selected their King's Pie slices, leaving only the one reserved for Vermonda Sauron on the plate.

Count Poufer surveyed the surroundings with a grin and declared, "Everyone, let's dig in. The one who finds that gold coin will be the king for today."

With that, he elegantly sampled a portion of the King's Pie in his hand, then took a few more bites. His countenance gradually shifted from one of confidence to one of blank panic.

There was no gold coin!

Count Poufer stared at the other participants in disbelief, his assurance of control crumbling.

In that moment, a single thought consumed his mind:

No, this can't be! I'm the one who most closely resembles my ancestor!

His eyes fixed on Elros, the sole guest possessing the Sauron family's bloodline.

Though Elros was perplexed by her cousin's frantic and intense gaze, she still took a few bites of her King's Pie slice.

Yet, still, there was no gold coin to be found.

Count Poufer's confusion deepened. His gaze darted around, his mind racing with conjectures.

Could there be an illegitimate son of a family member here?

No, even if there were, I bear the closest resemblance to the ancestor!

Could a high-ranking member of the Hunter pathway be present?

Impossible!

Or perhaps someone here has been tainted in the underground world?

Lumian noticed Count Poufer's distressed head-scratching, and most of the game participants had sampled their King's Pie slices. He gradually lifted his right hand and took a bite.

As anticipated, his teeth encountered a solid metallic object.

He spat out the item onto his left palm. It was, without a doubt, a 10-verl d'or gold coin.

Count Poufer's pupils widened as he fixated on Lumian's visage, a burning desire to dissect every inch of his flesh evident in his gaze.

Novelist Anori let out a chuckle.

"Ah, a new king at last. It being always Poufer tires me out. He was getting rather dull with his pranks."

Lumian picked up the gold coin and cast a cold glance at Anori.

"Who gave you permission to speak?"

Anori's body quivered, and he instinctively clamped his mouth shut.

Lumian struggled to maintain control over the influence of the Blood Emperor's aura. He sensed the frenzied spirit above him spiraling faster and faster, as if growing more impatient and savage.

He surveyed the surroundings leisurely and offered a smile.

"From this moment forward, I am your King. Or would you prefer to address me as Emperor?"

For some inexplicable reason, all the participants, including Count Poufer and Miss Elros, experienced a stirring in their hearts, as if they were compelled to heed Lumian's commands.

Of course, it was merely a pulsing sensation, induced by the combined impact of his words and aura.

Among them, Poet Iraeta, who had recently entered into a sponsorship agreement with Ciel Dubois, rose nonchalantly, pressed his hand to his chest, and bowed.

"Indeed, Your Majesty!"

The others followed suit, either embracing the spirit of the game or yielding to the pulsing sensations in their hearts. They stood and offered their bows in their own unique ways.

"Indeed, Your Majesty."

Lumian's lips curled into a satisfied smile as he signaled for everyone to retake their seats.

Then, he turned his gaze towards Count Poufer and raised his chin slightly.

"I command you to present 30,000 verl d'or worth of gold."

Count Poufer was taken aback, a whirlwind of complex emotions surging within him.

This was the first time he had been subjected to the King's Pie commands.

He had an urge to respond with a jest, but he remembered the gravity of the consequences if he disobeyed the king's orders during this mystical game. He would meet a dreadful fate.

Count Poufer clenched his teeth and rose from his seat.

"Indeed, Your Majesty."

Exiting the living room, he ascended to a floor of the castle's main building and retrieved five hefty gold bars from a secure vault.

For him, parting with 30,000 verl d'or wasn't a significant loss.

Seeing Count Poufer offering him gold bars totaling 30,000 verl d'or, Lumian couldn't help but feel a pang of regret.

Had he known that his orders would be followed to the letter, he might have demanded even more!

The dilemma now lies in how to discreetly make off with the gold later. In normal circumstances, even if I accepted 30,000 verl d'or in person, I would have to privately return it. Failing to do so could offend Count Poufer… Moreover, I need to figure out how to explain to Gardner Martin that I had become king while remaining unaffected. Lumian pondered as he tucked away the five gold bars.

Then, he turned to Novelist Anori.

"Your mission is to bestow a kiss upon someone here. Your target is…"

As Anori eagerly eyed the beautiful women present, Lumian pointed towards Poet Iraeta, who had just taken a puff from his pipe.

"Our poet."

A momentary silence hung in the air, followed by a whistle from one of the guests, and then the others joined in.

Reluctantly, Anori stood up and muttered, "I really don't want to kiss that guy with bad breath. I could accept it if it were Mullen…"

Despite his reservations, he complied, giving Iraeta a gentle kiss on the lips.

Iraeta took it in stride, chuckling, and remarked, "I can sense your discomfort, Anori. Pull yourself together. Don't act like a naive country bumpkin."

Lumian observed with an impassive expression, his attention primarily drawn to the swirling madness.

Though it refrained from attempting to invade anyone's body, the influence of the madness made everyone slightly restless, their emotions displaying signs of instability.

Upon hearing Iraeta's teasing, Anori's countenance turned icy, as if he contemplated picking up a table knife and stabbing him.

However, he ultimately restrained himself.

Lumian suspected that as the game unfolded, the participants would grow increasingly agitated, irritable, and prone to bloodlust while the madness continued to linger.

At that very moment, a piercing, terrified scream echoed from somewhere within the castle.

Chapter 370: Sending Off

A chilling scream, filled with terror, reverberated through the living room, causing the hearts of every guest to race with fear.

Painter Mullen was very sensitive to this. His pale-white complexion exchanged a concerned look with Count Poufer.

"What happened?"

Count Poufer furrowed his brow, puzzled by the sudden disturbance.

Upon hearing Mullen's question, he snapped back to attention and casually reassured everyone,

"It seems there may have been an accident. I'll have a servant find out the details. Don't worry, it won't disrupt our gathering. What could possibly go wrong?"

With that, Count Poufer signaled to his valet, positioned discreetly in a corner of the living room, to investigate the source of the scream.

Then, he addressed the assembled guests, saying, "Please, let's continue."

As he spoke, the Sauron family member directed his gaze towards Lumian.

Ever since presenting the gold bars, he had been closely watching Emperor Lumian, analyzing every subtle movement and expression. He was determined to unravel the mystery of how Lumian had chosen the King's Pie slice with the gold coin and not him.

Lumian fought to keep his composure in the face of the madness that seemed to consume him and turned his gaze towards Painter Mullen.

"Create a piece of art using your buttocks."

In his role as Cordu's Prankster King, Lumian had an array of tasks in his arsenal to assign to each participant in the game, ensuring that none of them would forget their missions.

Yet, Lumian's main concern wasn't the playful antics but the malevolent presence that loomed over the sofas.

This sinister entity refused to dissipate, even after failing to infiltrate Lumian. It hovered in the air, exuding an impatient, bloodthirsty, and irritable aura.

Lumian suspected a connection between the earlier scream and this ominous mental vortex.

The handsome yet pallid and weary painter, Mullen, stood in bewildered silence, grappling with this bizarre request. Painting with one's buttocks was entirely uncharted territory.

Novelist Anori and the others, having readily accepted their own missions, not only cheered with enthusiasm but also summoned the servants to bring paint and drawing paper. They even "assisted" Mullen by loosening his belt.

With no escape, Mullen reluctantly covered his posterior with paint and made a few awkward imprints on the drawing paper. The result resembled a child's crude doodle.

Observing this spectacle, Novelist Anori was struck by an idea.

"Why don't we frame it and send it to art critics? Let's see their reaction to such a unique creation."

"The painting's signature is the word 'The Emperor.' For the title… Right, Mullen, any suggestions?"

Mullen, avoiding the crowd, cleaned himself up and contemplated for a moment before responding, "Let's call it 'Café.'"

Curious, Cornell, the editor-in-chief of Le Petit Trierien, asked, "What does it signify?"

Mullen shook his head as he discarded the paint-stained handkerchief and soft paper, pulling up his pants. "It doesn't signify anything. This painting was meaningless from the start."

As they discussed, Count Poufer's valet returned to the living room and whispered something into the host's ear.

Influenced by the unsettling aura of the Blood Emperor's madness, Lumian struggled to make out the words despite his best efforts, catching only fragments.

"Lost… harm… danger…"

Count Poufer's expression darkened, a hint of seriousness creeping in.

He nodded subtly, signaling for his valet to return to his previous position, maintaining an air of nonchalance.

Observing Count Poufer's reaction, Lumian racked his brain, searching for a way to dispel the malevolent spirit.

I can't wait for everyone to complete their missions, can I? No, there's one crucial step missing. At the end of the previous King's Pie game, Count Poufer had consumed the King's Pie slice meant for Vermonda Sauron…

With this thought in mind, Lumian fixed his gaze on the untouched offering that remained on the plate. Leaning forward, he extended his right hand and claimed it.

Count Poufer had no doubts about this.

From his perspective, it would be suspicious if Lumian didn't retrieve the offering!

Almost simultaneously, the frenzied entity, radiating negativity, reacted vehemently, positioning itself directly above Lumian's head.

It emitted waves of negative emotions, as though cursing the audacious human who dared to partake in its offering.

Lumian sensed anger, hatred, and an insatiable desire to rend his soul asunder.

Yet, he remained unfazed and even smiled.

This reaction confirmed that he had made the correct choice!

Had the agitated spirit not responded so vehemently to his appropriation of the offering, Lumian would have remained clueless about how to banish it from lingering above everyone's heads.

This wasn't a guarantee of success, and it might entail danger, but it was a preferable alternative to the participants of the King's Pie game growing increasingly agitated and bloodthirsty, ultimately turning on each other.

When the moment was right, Lumian could still "teleport" away. As for the others, barring Count Poufer, their chances of survival were slim.

Naturally, he couldn't predict whether there would be unforeseen changes or new threats after consuming the offering, but in this dire situation, it was better than nothing.

For the participants in the King's Pie game, Lumian's intervention was their only hope. Without his actions, their demise was certain. With them, there was a fighting chance.

Lumian raised the sacrificial King's Pie to his lips and took a substantial bite.

The frenzied spirit grew even angrier and more violent.

It no longer hovered above the others but remained directly above Lumian's head. At times, it seemed poised to descend upon him, while at others, it attempted to tear into its target. However, it was thwarted by Alista Tudor's aura, instinctively holding back from further aggression.

Another scream resounded.

It came from somewhere in Red Swan Castle—originating from a different person than the previous one.

A moment ago, it had been a man, but now, it was a woman.

Count Poufer's eyelids twitched, and he smiled.

"It seems the servant responsible for cleaning up the earlier mishap must have stumbled upon some rather terrifying sights."

Literary critic Ernst Young and the other guests readily accepted this explanation.

As guests, they lacked the authority to pry into the castle's internal affairs. Moreover, they had gradually become engrossed in the King's Pie game, growing a tad fanatical, impatient, and preoccupied, diverting their focus away from other occurrences within the castle.

Lumian relished the King's Pie offering, savoring the intangible anger and curse like a melodious symphony playing in his ears.

Compared to the horrifying ravings he endured whenever he received a boon, this was akin to the beautiful performance of an orchestra.

Unable to vocalize itself and hesitant to invade his body, the frenzied spirit could only indirectly influence his emotions and mental state.

During this process, Lumian turned his attention to assigning missions to various individuals, noting that the participants were fully immersed in the game, their gazes fixed on it.

Periodically, another scream would punctuate the air, sending shivers down the spine.

Finally, Lumian finished the offering, and the frenzied spirit hovering above him abruptly halted.

In the next instant, it vanished mysteriously, dissipating into thin air.

While the participants of the King's Pie game still appeared fanatical, their irritability and agitation had considerably waned.

Lumian let out a quiet sigh of relief and turned to Elros, seated beside him.

"Let's see you do the Twist. If you're not sure how, ask someone to show you."

In contrast to the risqué Can-can dance, which was already laden with suggestive undertones, the Twist seemed relatively innocent as long as it wasn't a male-female dance. However, it had a comical appearance.

Elros complied, rising from her seat and attempting the Twist with a hint of awkwardness.

Amidst the laughter of those present, Lumian continued to assign missions to the remaining participants.

After all the participants had completed their assigned missions, Lumian straightened up and assumed an air of superiority as he delivered his final instruction.

"Last mission:

"Keep everything that happened today a secret. You must not divulge anything about today's game to anyone."

"Yes, Your Majesty!" Elros and Laurent, still caught up in the game's ambiance, responded in unison, their expressions displaying utmost respect.

This compliance was partly due to the lingering presence of the Blood Emperor's aura that still clung to Lumian.

Observing the instinctive obedience of each participant, Lumian let out a contented sigh and offered a warm smile.

"That concludes today's game."

Count Poufer rose from his seat and gestured with a smile.

"Let's proceed to the dining room."

As they moved from the living room to the dining room, they had to pass through the castle's main hall. Lumian, who had returned to his usual self, noticed out of the corner of his eye that a few valets and maids were diligently at work near the corridor.

They were using mops to clean up a reddish puddle.

Red… Lumian's eyelids twitched as he swiftly averted his gaze.

Following dinner, the guests bid their farewells one by one. Lumian sought out Count Poufer and retrieved the five heavy gold bars with a smile.

Count Poufer shook his head.

"Since I proposed the game, I must adhere to its rules. Do you think so little of me, believing I can't do without the 30,000 verl d'or?"

"It's simply a gesture of courtesy," Lumian responded with a smile. He didn't insist and smoothly returned the gold bars to his pocket.

According to their arrangement, Lumian arranged for the poet, Iraeta, to join him in his four-wheeled, four-seater carriage. Using the pretext of having limited funds on hand, he handed Iraeta only 3,000 verl d'or.

Iraeta didn't seem to mind at all. He stashed away the banknotes and engaged in a conversation about his artistic preferences.

As the carriage began its journey, Lumian inquired, "Which district are you heading to?"

"Just take me to the Sacred Heart Cloister," Iraeta replied with a grin. "I'm meeting a friend there. Sponsored poets always find friends to share a drink with."

Sacred Heart Cloister… Lumian nodded slightly and instructed the carriage driver accordingly.

Before long, the carriage arrived at the picturesque cloister. Even in the darkness of night, the golden façade of the building reflected the crimson moonlight, creating a surreal and dreamlike atmosphere.

After watching Iraeta enter the cloister, Lumian directed the carriage driver to head back to Rue des Fontaines in Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative.

As the carriage rattled along, leaving behind the woods and fertile fields,

Lumian suddenly heard the resonant voice of Termiboros.

"A dangerous creature is tailing you; it has been since Red Swan Castle. It brims with hostility and is preparing to strike."

Dangerous creature… Lumian narrowed his eyes, calmly opened the carriage door, and effortlessly leaped out.

Facing the carriage driver, he spoke with the remaining authority of an Emperor, "Wait for me in the nearby town."

The carriage driver hesitated for a moment before complying with the order.

As Lumian watched the carriage and its driver disappear into the distance, he calmly retrieved the Flog boxing gloves from his briefcase and methodically donned the iron-black gloves.

The nearby forest seemed to darken, and the river that flowed through it took on an eerie blood-red hue.

Chapter 371: Wax Statue

A figure emerged slowly from the blood-stained river.

Lumian's mind seemed to freeze momentarily for some inexplicable reason as he observed the figure crawling ashore. Instead of an immediate attack, he watched the figure climb out of the water.

The unfamiliar man's face bore an eerie stiffness, and his clothes clung to him from being soaked in water. The latter seemed to merge with his flesh.

It was a wax statue, a wax statue that came to life!

Crimson blood seeped from the waxen figure, mixing with the river's flow before smashing against the wild grass along the bank.

The wax statue's light-blue eyes shifted slightly within their white sockets, casting a vague reflection of Lumian.

Meeting that gaze left Lumian feeling overwhelmed, unable to resist mentally or physically. Instinctual fear surged within him, drowning out all other emotions.

Suddenly, Lumian's survival instincts kicked in, fully erupting and overpowering all other emotions and states.

Lumian's vision was restored.

The wax statue, with its cold, unyielding eyes, was now less than a meter away. Its pale-white hand, dripping with blood, extended its fingers like deadly blades, thrusting toward him.

Lumian had no time to react. He raised his right palm to shield his face, and there was a resounding impact as the wax statue's razor-sharp finger collided with his iron-black Flog boxing glove, adorned with short thorns.

Where the boxing glove fell short, the wax statue's finger pierced Lumian's palm, leaving a conspicuous wound on his face.

Had he not shaken off the initial intimidation, the blow might have punctured his skull and reached his brain.

The familiar searing pain jolted Lumian awake. Clenching his left hand, he conjured a blazing crimson flame and launched a powerful punch at the wax statue's face from the side.

Simultaneously, with a smile, he tightened his right palm, using his own flesh and blood to hinder the wax statue's right hand, preventing it from evading his fiery strike.

Bang!

The Flog boxing gloves knocked the wax statue's head askew, and the iron-black thorns on their surface etched exaggerated scratches onto its unyielding face, the wounds shifting from deep to superficial.

Despite the vivid flow of bright red blood, there was no flesh-like texture to the injuries, only layers of wax that seemed to melt under an invisible fire.

In response, blood-colored capillaries extended from the wax statue's light-blue eyes, exuding an intense, bloodthirsty desire that lent it an eerie vitality, making it resemble the living.

Lumian had chosen the Flog boxing gloves for its potency, a mystical weapon of utmost power, especially against the creature that Termiboros had labeled as dangerous. He couldn't afford to be careless. However, he never expected his enemy to be a wax statue rather than a living being.

It rendered the Flog's ability to evoke specific desires or emotions ineffective; it could only serve as a defensive tool.

If not for the bizarre intimidation, Lumian would have discarded his boxing gloves and opted for the Decency brooch. Now, with his adversary before him, he had no choice but to stick with the Flog gloves, focusing instead on Fire Infusion.

To his astonishment, his punch had ignited the wax statue's bloodlust, suggesting that the entity retained a degree of life, along with faint emotions and desires of its own.

"Good to see you're still kicking!" Lumian's grin widened.

He pulled back his right palm, gritting his teeth through the pain, and his fiery fist realigned the wax statue's head.

The wax statue, its bloodthirsty desires now heightened, showed no inclination to increase the distance between them. It resumed its intimidating tactics, instinctively and desperately engaging in close combat with Lumian.

This played perfectly into Lumian's strategy. His iron-black boxing gloves, ablaze with crimson flames, consistently clashed with the wax statue's limbs, fists, shoulders, torso, and head in rapid, precise succession.

Each punch lacked brute force; what Lumian needed was a relentless onslaught.

Bam! Bam! Bam! Bang! Bang! Bang! Lumian's fists, adorned with the Flog gloves, trailed crimson flames, effectively suppressing the agile and skilled wax statue to the point where it couldn't employ any other abilities.

His feet executed a fluid dance of stepping forward and raising knees to fend off the attacks from below.

Within a mere ten to twenty seconds, the wax statue abruptly ceased its movements, and an ethereal explosion emanated from its form.

The capillaries within its eyes ruptured, staining the once light-blue hue a vivid crimson. Cracks crisscrossed its head, connecting with the injuries inflicted by the Flog gloves.

Desire Detonation!

Lumian's relentless assault had triggered the Desire Detonation effect of the Flog boxing gloves.

In response, Lumian withdrew his fists and watched in silence as the wax statue's blood-red eyes revealed signs of pain.

Two crimson teardrops slowly welled up at the corners of its eyes, streaming down its waxy cheeks.

The wax statue opened its mouth as if attempting to speak, yet no sound escaped.

Rumble!

A muffled explosion emanated from within its body, and the exaggerated wounds extended across its form.

Crimson flames erupted from these regions, engulfing the wax statue entirely.

Fire Infusion!

Amidst the fierce inferno, the wax statue rapidly softened, its body dripping with blood-stained, viscous droplets.

Thud!

It collapsed to the ground.

What kind of monster is this? Lumian gazed at the fallen creature for more than ten seconds, his Hunter's instincts telling him that this prey couldn't possess Beyonder characteristics.

During this moment, he retrieved his briefcase and carefully stowed away the Flog boxing gloves.

Without hesitation, Lumian turned and exited the forest.

Behind him, crimson flames surged, consuming his dripping blood.

Within the blazing inferno, the wax statue had melted beyond recognition. Lumian's figure gradually faded, disappearing not far from the scene.

Spirit world traversal!

To evade the attention of evil gods and the dangerous entities summoned by the Flog boxing gloves, Lumian shifted his position, effectively "teleporting" to a nearby town.

It was a location he had scouted in advance, with precise coordinates within the spirit world.

After several dozen seconds, the forest path was suddenly replaced by a desolate wilderness, with only a few flickering flames remaining.

The weeds gradually flourished, and the figure of a person in a white robe materialized swiftly.

This figure donned a light-colored veil, and her abdomen was notably swollen. An unmistakable maternal aura enveloped her form. It was Lady Moon of the Nightstalkers.

Lady Moon directed her gaze towards the entirely melted, blood-stained wax statue, silently observing the dance of crimson flames.

After more than ten seconds of contemplation, the woman and the desolate wilderness vanished.

…

In a room within the main building of Red Swan Castle,Count Poufer, clad in a red shirt and sleek black trousers, occupied a cluttered desk. His icy stare remained fixed upon the wax statue's head placed before him.

The head bore an uncanny resemblance to a living being, with light-blue eyes and jet-black hair.

As the silence lingered, Count Poufer couldn't conceal a hint of restlessness. Occasionally, he tugged at his collar, shifted in his chair, and even unbuttoned the top of his shirt, as if the air had grown unnaturally thin, impeding his breathing.

As time ticked by, the wax statue's head suddenly emitted an ominous cracking sound.

It shattered into numerous pieces, each one grotesquely melted.

Poufer shot to his feet in shock, his pupils dilating in disbelief.

Tiny blood vessels protruded from his eyes, ruptured, and dyed them a vivid shade of red.

It was killed? Poufer murmured to himself, his astonishment mingling with suspicion.

Ciel Dubois was even more mysterious and formidable than he had initially thought!

Even if he wasn't, the hidden faction operating behind him was!

Count Poufer paced back and forth with a solemn expression.

…

After Lumian "teleported" to the town ahead, he exercised caution, remaining concealed in the shadows while meticulously calculating the time.

Only when he felt that a Hunter could potentially reach his location from the forest by running did he cautiously make his way into the town. He located the carriage driver and arranged for his return to 11 Rue des Fontaines in Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative.

In a room adorned with bookshelves, Lumian fixed his gaze upon Gardner Martin, who held a cigar in his hand. Lumian spoke frankly, "I was attacked."

There was no way to hide the truth from the Boss.

"Huh?" Gardner Martin responded in his distinctive nasal tone.

Lumian proceeded to recount the events, detailing how he had chosen the King's Pie slice after Count Poufer and subsequently felt a frenzied spirit attempting to invade him. He described how he had utilized Fire Infusion to dismantle and melt the wax statue, displaying the wounds on his hands and face.

What Lumian chose not to reveal was that he had discerned why the frenzied consciousness hadn't fully occupied his body and that he had used the Flog boxing gloves. He attributed the former to an unknown cause.

Gardner Martin smoked his cigar, listening quietly, unsurprised that Lumian's mind had remained incorrupt.

Had he displayed any hint of astonishment or suspicion, Lumian would have swiftly "invited" Mr. K to eliminate the Iron and Blood Cross Order's stronghold.

With a cigar in hand, Gardner Martin smiled and remarked, "It appears that the official members of our Iron and Blood Cross Order are more favored by Poufer's ancestor's spirit than Poufer himself. However, we also instill fear in it."

Does this refer to Beyonders who have succumbed to the peculiar corruption at 13 Avenue du Marché? The frenzied consciousness won't invade the other formal members of the Iron and Blood Cross Order, even in the absence of the Blood Emperor's aura? I wonder how true this is. Why don't you give it a try, Boss? Lumian suddenly felt the urge to goad Gardner Martin into playing King's Pie with Count Poufer.

"Now, I've confirmed something," Gardner Martin's expression grew serious. "The ancestor of the Sauron family, Vermonda Sauron, is not truly deceased. He exists in a manner beyond our current comprehension."

Chapter 372: Primary Mission

Lumian couldn't quite understand how Gardner Martin could be so certain that Vermonda Sauron wasn't dead. Still, it seemed that the other party didn't intend to explain, so he could only give up on asking.

He was concerned about one thing:

"Does that mean my mission is over?"

Clearly, combined with Count Poufer's fondness for creating wax statue heads for friends he knew and the fact that a wax statue had attacked him, Lumian believed that he was now under suspicion by the other party. It would be very dangerous to interact with him again.

Gardner Martin shook his head slowly.

"No, you have to continue."

Holding the cigar, he stood up and paced towards the floor-to-ceiling windows.

"The fact that you became the king after Poufer will undoubtedly make him suspicious of your origins, but he will be more eager to find out the real reason for that incident. The subsequent wax statue attack was mainly attributed to this.

"Therefore, he will still invite you over to test you in different ways and extract your hidden secrets. For us, this is an opportunity to confirm the true state of Vermonda and the Sauron family's ancestors.

"And through this, we can grasp the reason for the gradual decline of this once exceptionally powerful family. This is of great significance to us, who are also mainly from the Hunter pathway. It is our primary mission now.

"To put it simply, the Sauron family is like Red Swan Castle. They've been in disrepair for a long time, but they hide many secrets. They have guards that can deter spying. What we need to do is figure out the castle's defense flaws and confirm if those secrets pose a fatal threat to us. Then, we can find an opportunity to break through the guards, bypass the traps, and take the treasure.

"Don't worry, I'll covertly provide protection for Poufer's future invitations. The risk you'll take won't be significant."

Lumian pondered for a moment and said, "Commanding Officer, you mentioned before that our primary mission is to find the true entrance to the Fourth Epoch Trier."

How could the primary mission change so easily?

Gardner Martin took a puff of his cigar and smiled.

"These two matters are connected to a certain extent and serve the same purpose, but you don't need to know for the time being."

What's their motive? In other words, the Iron and Blood Cross Order's current focus is on exploring the underground, finding the entrance to the Fourth Epoch Trier, investigating the Sauron family's decline over the past 200 to 300 years, and securing something precious from them? According to Mr. K, one reason for the Sauron family's decline is their descent into madness and the loss of many important members over time. Gardner Martin and I are mainly responsible for the Sauron family aspect. Are the other members, including Supervisor Olson, exploring the underground? Lumian had a clearer understanding of the Iron and Blood Cross Order's recent plans.

This was also his primary mission.

Of course, he only knew what to do and didn't understand why.

"Yes, Commanding Officer," Lumian agreed without further ado.

He had a hunch that this would be an opportunity for him to digest the Pyromaniac potion and advance further on the Hunter pathway.

According to Madam Magician, the Sauron family was once a powerful faction with a Hunter angel.

Gardner Martin didn't inquire about how much gold Poufer had offered to the "king," hinting that Lumian could leave and await the Count's future invitation.

Passing through the renovated hall, Lumian spotted Faustino, the butler, who was also an official member of the Iron and Blood Cross Order, leading a black-cloaked figure in.

The man was of average height, barely 1.75 meters tall. His attire was loose, and he was tightly wrapped, obscuring his exact appearance and physique.

Lumian could only determine that it was a man based on his walking posture, height, and strides.

Faustino nodded at Lumian as a greeting before leading the mysterious man through the hall and into Gardner Martin's study.

Who could it be? What brings him here so late at night for a discussion? Lumian averted his gaze, his thoughts racing as he left 11 Rue des Fontaines.

…

In the market district, Rue Anarchie, Auberge du Coq Doré.

Upon reaching the second floor, Lumian suddenly gave weight to his pace, producing thumping sounds.

He leisurely returned to Room 207, ignited the carbide lamp, turned around in the armchair, and sat down. He smiled at the unlatched door.

After 20 to 30 seconds, soft footsteps echoed from Room 201.

The footsteps hesitated before showing determination. Soon, they arrived outside Room 207 and gently knocked on the door.

"Please come in," Lumian said, raising his chin slightly.

As expected, it was Laurent. He wore a linen shirt and black pants, completely different from whenever he headed out.

After closing the door, Laurent looked at Lumian and said, "Monsieur Dubois, I wish to borrow 500 verl d'or from you."

Lumian was taken aback, not expecting this development.

He thought the man was here to plead with him not to expose his true identity.

Unexpectedly, he came to borrow money!

"Why 500 verl d'or?" Lumian's expression remained unchanged.

Laurent's voice deepened as he said, "I'm about to become one of the deputy editors-in-chief of Le Petit Trierien. Although I'll be the most junior-ranking editor, I can't continue living here. I have to invite my colleagues to gatherings at home regularly to build a good relationship with them.

"Therefore, I wish to borrow 500 verl d'or to rent a good apartment in Quartier de l'Observatoire or Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative. I want to bring my mother there and use the time to teach her how to host a small banquet.

"Once I receive my salary, I'll repay the debt in installments. How much do you think the interest rate should be?"

This is not only borrowing money to secure his job, but also taking the initiative to give me leverage and some benefits so that I won't ruin his plans… Lumian thought a little higher of Laurent and nodded thoughtfully.

"I don't need interest. You'll definitely come into contact with some interesting news, information, and s at Le Petit Trierien. I hope you can organize them regularly and give me a copy."

As Lumian spoke, he took out his wallet and counted five banknotes worth 100 verl d'or.

"Just pay it back this year."

Laurent heaved a sigh of relief and said, "No problem."

After watching the speculator write the IOU and leave Room 207, Lumian took out the five heavy gold bars from Count Poufer's pocket and tossed them in his hand.

With this unexpected windfall, he had amassed 75,000 verl d'or worth of gold. At the same time, he had 2,000 verl d'or that hadn't been exchanged for gold and the remaining 4,000 verl d'or funds for his activities.

It won't be long before I complete the Armored Shadow's contract and summon it again… Lumian fiddled with the gold bars for a while before leaving the briefcase containing the Flog boxing gloves on the armchair. He washed up and went to bed, awaiting the inevitable nightmare.

…

In his daze, Lumian once again caught sight of Red Swan Castle, its beige outer walls stained with aged blood.

In a daze, he walked in and arrived at the large living room where he had played King's Pie.

Miss Elros, Painter Mullen, Le Petit Trierien's editor-in-chief, Cornell, and the other guests who often attended Count Poufer's banquet sat on the sofa, as if awaiting Lumian's arrival.

Laurent and the other guests' temporary female companions were absent.

This made the scene seem like another salon or a past one.

As Lumian approached the sofa, Count Poufer and the others stood up and greeted him respectfully.

"Good afternoon, Your Royal Majesty," they greeted in unison.

Instinctively, Lumian glanced at them coldly.

"Oh?"

Count Poufer and the others were taken aback for a moment.

"Your Imperial Majesty!"

Lumian nodded slightly and settled into an armchair, watching as the guests settled around him.

They chatted nonchalantly, their topics diverse and vague.

Suddenly, Novelist Anori raised his right hand and scratched his face.

With a tearing sound, he ripped off a large piece of skin, revealing squirming flesh and blackened tubes.

Almost simultaneously, Painter Mullen and the others either stabbed themselves in the heart or tore at their companions' necks.

In an instant, the entire living room turned abnormally bloody, and there was a terrifying scene everywhere.

Lumian's thoughts raced as his vision underwent an immediate transformation.

In another hall of the castle, surrounded by countless lit white candles was a coffin.

The coffin was made of bronze and its surface was rusted. It was unknown how long it had been there.

Lumian's heart swelled with sorrow and helplessness, as if he had lost his kin and support. He slowly extended his right hand, attempting to caress the rusty bronze coffin.

At that moment, the coffin's lid creaked open, revealing a deep crack.

Suddenly, a palm with dark-red, nearly-black blood vessels extended, holding an extremely withered heart with some blood seeping out.

The heart was still gently and indiscernibly contracting and expanding.

Upon seeing the withered heart, Lumian's thoughts raced chaotically, tainted with a certain madness.

His right palm felt slightly warm, and he suddenly woke up from his dream.

He wasn't surprised or flustered by the nightmare. As he calmed his racing heart, he recalled the details of the nightmare.

Gradually, Lumian frowned.

In the first scene, most of the King's Pie game participants eventually went crazy. They either mutilated themselves or others, but there were three exceptions. Even when the scene changed, they were still normal.

One was Lumian himself, and the other was Count Poufer.

There was another one Lumian hadn't expected: Miss Elros!

She's not as reserved and obedient as she appears. She has her own secrets… Lumian smiled silently.

As for what the bronze coffin, dead body, and withered heart represented in the second scene, he couldn't decipher them at all. He could only guess that it might be related to the Sauron family's secret.

Just like the last time, Lumian had several nightmares that night, but the clarity and completeness of his dreams gradually decreased.

Just before dawn, the nightmare was completely gone.

After waking up, Lumian quickly wrote a letter and sent it to Madam Magician while his memories still remained fresh.

Chapter 373: Summoning the Armored Shadow Again

After fifteen minutes, Madam Magician replied with a brief letter:

"The Iron and Blood Cross Order's investigation into the Sauron family's decline contradicts my previous speculations. It seems that what they claim to have may not align with their actual possessions. Perhaps they possess only critical information that allows them to achieve their goals under specific conditions. One of these conditions is unavoidable for the Sauron family."

Lumian's temples throbbed at Madam Magician's response. She had conveyed a lot, but the crucial details remained elusive. While he understood each word individually, their combined meaning eluded him.

What does the Iron and Blood Cross Order actually possess and what does it claim?

Lumian massaged his temples and continued reading.

"This situation presents both danger and opportunity for you. Investigating the truth behind the Sauron family's downfall is a mission I eagerly anticipate. Mr. Fool assigned this long-term mission to our Tarot Club, much like the Two of Cups interacting with the Demoness Sect to confirm the Primordial Demoness's condition. There's no need to rush. Take your time. Even if it takes years to complete."

"…" Lumian was taken aback.

He had expected Franca's Major Arcana, Madam Judgment, to agree to her contact with the Demoness Sect. But what kind of terrifying mission was it to ascertain the Primordial Demoness's condition?

That was a true deity!

Based on Lumian's recent knowledge from various sources, not only was direct observation of deities impossible, but attempting to understand Their specific situation was exceedingly perilous.

As for the evil gods like the one known as Inevitability, mere awareness of Their existence equated to corruption.

A long-term mission… a task that could only be completed once Franca achieved demigod status? Lumian thoughtfully read the last sentence of Madam Magician's reply.

"Focus on this matter. If you need help or find yourself in a bind, contact me in advance. As for the Aurora Order, refrain from participating in other missions. Concentrate on the Iron and Blood Cross Order. I believe Mr. K will understand."

Madam Magician had previously tasked me with infiltrating the Aurora Order and slowly gaining Mr. K's trust, with the ultimate goal of becoming an Oracle. However, it is apparent from her tone that priorities had shifted. Now, she emphasizes giving precedence to the Iron and Blood Cross Order… Lumian discerned this as a significant signal from her reply.

Crimson flames erupted as Lumian burned the letter in his hand. He slung a satchel over his shoulder and placed the Flog boxing gloves inside. Then, he made his way to Rue des Blouses Blanches.

He located a random café and had breakfast there.

It wasn't until nearly nine o'clock that Lumian knocked on the door of Apartment 601.

Franca didn't express any annoyance at being awakened this time. She didn't appear to be asleep, wearing a troubled expression instead.

Upon seeing Lumian, she tugged at her flaxen-colored hair, which was left untied, and said, "Guess what? I've accepted a suicide mission!"

"Confirming the Primordial Demoness's condition?" Lumian chuckled.

Sensing that Franca had done so willingly, he no longer fretted about her.

"How did you know?" Franca asked, surprised.

"Do you want to hear the truth or a lie? For the lie, I divined it. The truth is, I just reported the recent situation to my Major Arcana card holder, and she mentioned your choice." Lumian strolled over to the divan and sat down casually. "Where's Jenna?"

Realization dawned on Franca as she casually said, "To Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons.

"Ever since she received her father's compensation, she's been keen on instigation. Yesterday, she poached a supporting actress whose contract had expired and convinced her to switch to a theater in Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative. While it did boost her income significantly, I could have matched the offer if I had been informed. Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons has been quite profitable lately."

Franca didn't hold a grudge against Jenna because Jenna had sought her opinion beforehand and obtained her approval. She believed such instigations were beneficial. Plus, having a supporting actress leave opened up opportunities for apprentices like Jenna and the former dancers.

After recounting the matter briefly, Franca sighed and continued, "Madam Judgment only wants me to interact with the Demoness Sect. Under the condition that I control my desires and mental state, I can use their resources to enhance myself, monitor their activities, and understand their immediate plans. Confirming the Primordial Demoness's condition can be considered once I truly attain godhood and become a saint. I can deduce certain situations through the Demoness Sect's activities, their recent plans, and the reactions during prayers to the Primordial Demoness."

"Aren't you troubled by the mission?" Lumian raised his eyebrows.

Franca sighed.

"I am troubled by the mission, but what's troubling is that I'll remain a Demoness at Sequence 4. I won't be able to transform back into a man."

"You can wait until Sequence 3," Lumian suggested with a relaxed demeanor.

"That's true, although it would be even more challenging." Franca had thought it through and then asked why Lumian had suddenly reported the situation to Madam Magician.

Lumian briefly recounted his experience at Red Swan Castle from yesterday and Gardner Martin's words, omitting specific details.

Franca listened intently, contemplating for a moment before saying, "Our current missions combined involve the secrets and movements of the relevant factions within the Hunter and Demoness pathways.

"The Tarot Club appears to attach great importance to such matters…"

Lumian chuckled.

"That's the only way we'll have a chance."

Franca acknowledged his words tersely and suddenly remembered something.

"How much gold did you command Count Poufer to give you?"

"30,000," Lumian replied honestly.

Franca's eyes lit up.

"How much gold do you have now?"

"75,000. I can add another 6,000 at any time," Lumian disclosed without hesitation.

Franca's smile widened.

"Then I'll lend you 25,000 first, interest-free!

"Let's summon the Armored Shadow tonight and try to figure things out before the gathering next week."

"You have 25,000 verl d'or?" Lumian was mildly surprised.

He recalled that Franca had spent all her savings to advance to the Demoness of Pleasure.

Franca said smugly, "I received 20,000 verl d'or for assisting you in dealing with Guillaume Bénet, and Gardner Martin has been quite generous lately. He entrusted me with managing most of the earnings from Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons and the dancers. Heh heh, Madam Judgment even provided me with 10,000 to support my activities."

Your earnings are quite impressive as well… Lumian realized that while the profits from Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons and the dancers might not match those of Salle de Bal Brise, they were undoubtedly substantial. If Franca could claim a significant portion of them, she could easily make around 20,000 per month.

He nodded and said, "Alright, we'll perform the summoning ritual at 11 tonight at the same place the other time."

Franca's joy was palpable.

"I'll arrange for someone to exchange the 25,000 gold right away."

…

Late at night, at Rist Docks, within the charred remains of a building.

Franca observed Lumian as he set up the altar and placed all the gold upon it.

Rather than staying outside the wall of spirituality, she chose to remain by her companion's side.

Lumian proceeded to light the candles one by one, letting the essential oil drip. Stepping back, he intoned, "The Fool that doesn't belong to this era;

"…"

Almost simultaneously, Franca chanted Mr. Fool's honorific name, ensuring her safety in the presence of the ritual's power.

Soon, amid the faint fog and a sense of impending danger, Lumian recited the final part of the incantation.

"I!

"In the name of the great Fool, I summon:

"The spirit that wanders the void, a combination of numerous shadows, Lumian Lee's contracted creature."

Within the wavering candlelight, an ethereal door adorned with enigmatic symbols materialized. From it emerged a shadowy figure clad in dark armor reminiscent of fish scales.

Just as before, each scale seemed to bear a face, each belonging to a different creature.

Those are indeed fish scales… Franca couldn't tear her gaze away, her anticipation and anxiety

overriding the eerie ambiance that surrounded them and the evident malevolence emanating from the Armored Shadow.

Lumian locked eyes with the Armored Shadow and spoke in Hermes, "I will fulfill the contract and offer you gold valued at 100,000 verl d'or."

To be honest, Lumian harbored some doubts about the 100,000 verl d'or worth of gold. The ever-changing exchange rates between verl d'or and gold left him uncertain whether he should prepare the amount based on the exchange rate at the time of signing the contract or the current rate. As a precaution, he had only acquired an additional 1,000 verl d'or worth of gold as a backup.

As Lumian finished his words, the gold bars, jewelry, and various items on the altar suddenly disintegrated, transforming into golden particles that flew toward the mysterious illusory door.

Most of these particles landed on the Armored Shadow, while a few passed through the open illusory door and disappeared.

Gradually, almost a fifth of the Armored Shadow's pitch-black armor, resembling fish scales, transformed into gold. It was no longer dark and foreboding but radiated a holy and pristine aura.

Franca's eyes widened.

Legends and terms from her original world rushed into her mind as she muttered to herself, "Could this be… the reconstruction of the golden body?"

In her memory, the golden body referred to the golden powder or gold foil applied to the surface of idol statues. Sometimes, it denoted the special form of someone with godlike status or significant achievements. The Armored Shadow now resembled a weathered statue that had been rejuvenated with a coating of golden powder.

When all the gold on the altar had vanished, Lumian sensed that the contract had been completely fulfilled.

Taking the opportunity, he asked on Franca's behalf in Hermes, "Where do you come from?"

The Armored Shadow opened its mouth and spoke with a deep, dignified, and somewhat sinister voice.

However, Lumian couldn't comprehend its words at all. He could only watch in confusion as the Armored Shadow returned to the illusory door.

Once the summoning ritual concluded, Lumian turned to Franca and noticed that her companion seemed lost in thought, her brows furrowed.

His heart stirred as he asked, "Did you understand the Armored Shadow's response?"

Franca nodded slowly.

"The language he used is very similar to the language from my home world.

"He said…"

Franca paused and muttered to herself, puzzlement evident on her face,"The Blood Son of Heaven disrupted the netherworld, and the Underworld Daoist sacrificed himself to enter the river."

Chapter 374: Preliminary Speculation

Despite Franca speaking Intisian, it left Lumian perplexed. He struggled to grasp her meaning or intentions.

Surveying the silent ruins around him, he found nothing out of the ordinary. Turning his attention back to Franca, he inquired, "Care to explain?"

Franca contemplated for a moment before responding, "The Son of Heaven is roughly equivalent to an Emperor. As for Daoist, eh—think of it as a mighty Beyonder."

"In essence, this Emperor, bearing the title 'Blood,' wrought havoc in hell, sowing chaos. As for the Daoist known as 'Underworld,' a powerful Beyonder, they made the ultimate sacrifice, entering a certain river to seal away this Emperor."

The Emperor with the title of Blood… Lumian was alarmed.

"The Blood Emperor?"

Memories from the Samaritan Women's Spring came flooding back.

In those vivid recollections, the Blood Emperor's elusive figure burned with concealed flames, his battered armor soaked in blood. The dark waters receded within the fountain only to surge forth again, merging with the ethereal mist, transforming into a pale spring. Alista Tudor's apparition was tugged back into the fountain's depths by an inexplicable force. It appeared as though a fierce battle had transpired between the two entities…

With Franca's explanation, Lumian's mind began to piece together a new interpretation of the Armored Shadow's cryptic words and his encounter.

He said thoughtfully to Franca, "I suspect the 'Blood Son of Heaven' you mention is none other than the apparition of the 'Blood Emperor' Alista Tudor."

"But how did the Blood Emperor's apparition find its way to my home?" Franca didn't immediately connect it to Alista Tudor, but Lumian's deductions were beginning to make sense.

The special fish-scale armor and the Spell of Harrumph, which originated from myths and legends, made her suspect that the Armored Shadow came from back home. And now, the language basically matched, making her even more certain.

Lumian nodded, continuing, "I'll have to start with the events at the Samaritan Women's Spring, where Madame Hela and I fetched the water…"

"You went with Madame Hela?" Franca murmured, her curiosity piqued but allowing Lumian to proceed.

Lumian went on to recount the events at the Samaritan Women's Spring in detail, ensuring Franca remained focused on his narrative. He then presented his theory.

"I suspect that during the War of the Four Emperors, the Blood Emperor did not fully perish. For some extraordinary reason, He preserved a fragment of His lingering soul. During the godly war, a passage was opened between our world and your homeland, allowing a mysterious river from your world to infiltrate ours. Mr. Fool sealed it, creating the Samaritan Women's Spring.

"This river appears closely tied to the realms of death and the Underworld. The Blood Emperor's apparition, trapped in a state of death, traverses between your world, the Samaritan Women's Spring, and even the Fourth Epoch Trier.

"The Blood Emperor possesses an innate desire for resurrection, and the first step to achieving that is to escape the river's confinement. In this process, He brought chaos to the Underworld of your homeland. The powerful Beyonder from the domains of Death and the Underworld had no choice but to make the ultimate sacrifice, immersing themselves in the mysterious river to harness its power fully and seal away the Blood Emperor's apparition."

Franca alternated between confusion and clarity. When Lumian finished sharing his theory, she responded with a mixture of surprise and suspicion, saying, "Your guess seems quite realistic and logical…"

His explanation shed light on the words of the Armored Shadow and the peculiar occurrences at the Samaritan Women's Spring.

Franca fell into a brief silence, then continued, "Back in my homeland, that elusive and mysterious river is known as the Yellow Springs."

"However, before I transmigrated, the Yellow Springs and the netherworld were nothing more than legends, unverifiable myths. There were no tales of the Blood Son of Heaven or the Underworld Daoist…

"Could it be that I was just an ordinary person who never had the opportunity to encounter such things?"

Lumian chuckled.

"Before I discovered Aurore was a Warlock, concepts like superpowers, demons, and ghosts were nonexistent."

Franca acknowledged his words, her expression gradually shifting towards excitement.

"Now that there's a passageway connecting our worlds, returning home is no longer an unattainable dream!"

Lumian, in a friendly tone, warned, "Madame Hela mentioned that the pale-white spring water is deadly to anyone who touches it."

Franca's expression froze for a moment, then she replied, "That may be true for us now. But with the power of godhood and ascending to sainthood, we might be able to handle it."

Lumian reminded her again, "There are the figures of an angel and a true god imprisoned in the spring."

"…" Franca rolled her eyes at Lumian. "Aren't you a buzzkill! Compared to before, when we had no answers, no direction, and no hope, now there's a glimmer of hope. We know where to focus our efforts. One of the reasons Madame Hela went to retrieve the Samaritan Women's Spring might have been to confirm if it's connected to the Yellow Springs. She's truly exceptional at finding leads!"

Lumian simply shrugged, opting not to dampen Franca's newfound optimism and enthusiasm.

Franca's excitement was palpable as she paced back and forth before suddenly posing a question.

"Were you asking where the Armored Shadow came from? Why did it mention the Blood Emperor and Daoist Underworld?"

That wasn't an answer!

Could there be some hidden secret?

Lumian thought for a moment and said, "It's a shadow born after death, and some of its abilities clearly belong to the Death domain. It also has a strong urge to break free from its restraints and escape imprisonment… Given these factors, I believe it's a ghost-like entity sealed by Daoist Underworld. Asking about its origins would inevitably lead to uncovering the current state of the Daoist Underworld, which is why I received that answer."

Franca was enlightened.

"That makes sense!

"Underworld Daoist destroyed its golden body and sealed it. Could that be why it's collecting gold to reconstruct its golden body and break free from its imprisonment?"

Observing Lumian's puzzled expression, Franca clarified the concept of a golden body and her interpretation.

"Is that so?" Lumian nodded slowly. "It seems like we might be able to continue trading gold with the Armored Shadow in the future, but fully restoring it to its original state should be avoided. This entity is extremely dangerous and holds a deep malice. I wonder what it will do once it escapes its seal."

Franca agreed wholeheartedly. "At the very least, we need to advance to Sequence 4 before considering this matter."

Lumian snickered. "Didn't you mention that achieving godhood and becoming a saint is an arduous endeavor? Why the newfound confidence?"

Franca glared at Lumian. "Isn't it because I have a goal now? Can't I indulge in a little daydreaming with all the motivation I have? Seriously, did we switch roles?"

She recalled that not long ago, she had remarked that Lumian made the path to godhood and switching pathways sound too simplistic.

Lumian chuckled and said, "It's good to have a goal and motivation. Yes, the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society's gathering is coming up next week. Should I inform the others about the Armored Shadow, the Blood Emperor, Underworld Daoist, and the Yellow Springs?"

Franca pondered for a moment and said, "In the past, I would have shared this information, but now I can't do so until I solve the issue with April Fool's Day. However, we can inquire about the illusory river related to death and see if anyone has relevant information."

Lumian thought for a moment and said, "I'll do the asking."

Franca was momentarily surprised but quickly understood Lumian's reasoning.

Lumian had gone to the Samaritan Women's Spring with Madame Hela. It made more sense for her companion, who was posing as Muggle, to inquire about the situation at the Samaritan Women's Spring. There was a logical rationale behind it.

From Hela's perspective, Lumian and Hidden Blade were strangers who didn't know each other. If Franca were to casually mention the River of Death, it would undoubtedly raise suspicion.

…

On Monday, Franca arrived at Trocadéro's Red House Café once again.

This time, she had taken care to dress more in line with her usual attire, wearing a shirt, pants, and boots, even though she still maintained her black-haired, brown-eyed form.

Her intention was to create the illusion that she was a man who had transformed into a Demoness, which she hoped would deter any sudden attacks from the Demoness she was waiting for.

However, the long-haired orange-red Demoness did not appear throughout the morning. Instead, Franca found herself engaged in conversations with two female patrons who took the opportunity to strike up a chat with her.

Franca calmly sipped her coffee, seemingly unfazed by the interactions.

She couldn't help but notice that Lumian appeared unusually calm and encouraged her to take her time. Franca understood the urgency of eliminating the core members of the Bliss Society, particularly those close to Susanna Mattise. Failing to do so would mean Lumian would forever be overshadowed by the Rose School of Thought.

…

Lumian had already reported to Madam Magician about the Bliss Society, the Rose School of Thought, and the activities at the Red House Café. The response he received was concise: "Do not leave Trier for the time being, and there should be no major issues."

Lumian ignited the letter and departed Rue du Rossignol, strolling towards Avenue du Marché.

As he approached Salle de Bal Brise, he spotted a familiar figure—a man with dark-brown eyes, a prominent nose bridge, and a flaxen-colored beard that covered his chin. This man wore a robe reminiscent of an ancient Warlock's attire. It was Secrets Suppliant Osta Trul, the same person who had introduced Lumian to Mr. K's mysticism gathering.

"My cabbage," Lumian inquired with a smile. "What brings you here?"

Osta Trul responded with a magnetic voice, "I've come to find Baron Brignais to settle my debt."

"You've got the money?" Lumian raised his eyebrows.

Osta Trul smiled and replied, "Yes, I've come to realize that some honorific names derived from the potion can be used for prayers. There's no danger involved. This discovery has been quite helpful to me."

Lumian was slightly taken aback by this revelation. With a dark look, he tapped his chest four times—up, down, left, and right.

Osta Trul mirrored his actions with an even warmer smile.

Lumian didn't continue the small talk. He simply waved his hand and walked past Osta Trul.

Quietly, he approached the white spherical statue constructed from skulls outside Salle de Bal Brise, releasing a soft sigh.

At 9 p.m., Lumian returned to Room 207 at Auberge du Coq Doré. He finally received a letter from a pure silver skull with pale-white flames burning in its eye sockets.

The letter was from Hela, and its content was brief.

"There will be a gathering in one hour.

"If you wish to participate, silently recite the following incantation within five minutes of 10 p.m."

Chapter 375: Gathering Venue

It's finally here… Lumian exhaled, folded the letter, and left Auberge du Coq Doré.

He didn't need to look for Franca. They had discussed the gathering many times before, so there was no need to waste time confirming it.

Lumian made his way to the new safe house on Rue du Rossignol and tossed the satchel containing the Flog boxing gloves onto the bed.

He hadn't prepared an additional iron cabinet. With a few traps hidden in the room, regular thieves couldn't approach the core area. Forcing their way in would only cost them their lives. An iron cabinet wouldn't stop exceptional thieves anyway.

When the time was right, Lumian donned a hooded black robe that bore a striking resemblance to the attire worn by Warlocks, all according to Madame Hela and Franca's descriptions of his sister's appearance at these gatherings.

Then, he pulled out Lie and transformed it into a simple yet exquisite silver-white earring. He secured it onto his right earlobe.

Gazing into the full-length mirror, Lumian maintained a calm demeanor as he observed a sudden transformation of him growing shorter. His hair morphed into a luxuriant shade of pure gold, growing thick and cascading down his back.

His facial features underwent a metamorphosis, mirroring those etched in his memories of Aurore. His nose bridge, now elevated and delicate, complemented his lips, neither too full nor too thin, painted in a subtle shade of red. His eyes, light-blue and clear, emitted a faint but captivating luminescence.

In the past, Lumian had always perceived his sister as a paradox, her inner self contrasting sharply with her outward appearance. She exuded an aura of sunshine, cheerfulness, and open-mindedness, yet in reality, she was a homebody, reluctant to venture out for social interactions. Only those who had truly earned her trust were privileged to witness her relaxed demeanor, the quirky phrases she often uttered, and her playful and bullying side.

On the contrary, Aurore displayed no apprehension when stepping out into the world. Much like Lumian, she possessed the natural ability to connect with the elderly ladies of Cordu and regale the children with captivating stories, earning their affection.

Ever since Lumian had learned about his sister's true background, he had come to comprehend the stark divergence between Aurore's inner self and her external appearance and demeanor. Certainly, many people grappled with such contradictions, but Aurore's unique circumstances had magnified this incongruity.

Lately, Lumian often found himself pondering what his sister had been like and the kind of life she had led.

As he stared into the mirror, Aurore's light-blue eyes seemed to take on a misty quality, as if she too were lost in reminiscences of days gone by.

Lumian still held vivid memories of the first time his sister had mentioned her homeland. It happened during his second year in Cordu.

Back then, when the shepherds had returned to the highland pastures, Aurore had taken him to pat the newly born lambs and, "cruelly" bought their loved ones. They ventured into the green pastures adorned with white and yellow wildflowers, carefully selecting a spot that wouldn't disturb the serene surroundings. They then set up a charcoal grill for a picnic.

As night descended upon them, and the starry heavens unveiled themselves like a boundless river of glistening diamonds, Aurore suddenly drifted into a reverie, her fingers brushing away tears.

Lumian inquired about her thoughts, and she confessed to a profound sense of homesickness.

Aurore's gaze in the mirror seemed to lose focus, mirroring the soft, yellowish-blue glow of the carbide lamp.

The mountain village nestled beside those vibrant green pastures under the radiant sun—it was a place they could never return to.

After a while, Lumian opened the pocket watch he had borrowed from Salle de Bal Brise, confirming the time.

Then, he donned a sleek silver-white half-mask, revealing his finely sculpted lips and chiseled chin to the world.

Without delay, Lumian retrieved a piece of paper adorned with the ancient Feysac script and affixed it securely to his left breast, displaying the word "Muggle."

As Franca had explained, the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society boasted a sizable membership, each member donning unique disguises during their gatherings. Without the corresponding code names, distinguishing one from another would be an insurmountable task, save for those closely acquainted with each other.

Despite hailing from the same world, the society's members hailed from diverse homelands, each with their distinct languages. Upon their transmigration to this world, they found themselves scattered across different countries, inevitably erecting language barriers. Initially, they relied on the linguistic prowess of fellow members who were polyglots. However, over time, they gravitated towards adopting ancient Feysac, the common tongue of the Northern Continent, as their shared language.

For Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society members residing in different nations, ancient Feysac bore striking similarities to their mother tongues, easing its acquisition and mastery.

Naturally, there were exceptions among the society's ranks—those whose native languages diverged significantly from ancient Feysac—but they were a minority. They had to follow the majority, knowing that, until they mastered the language, someone would always be there to translate for them.

Lumian had already laid a strong foundation in ancient Feysac. Ever since his arrival in Trier, he had diligently immersed himself in Aurore's grimoires, plunging deeper into this linguistic realm. Basic communication posed no challenge for him any longer.

Approaching 10 p.m., Lumian made final adjustments to his appearance in front of the full-length mirror, ensuring everything was in its rightful place. He concealed an assortment of ritual components and the alcohol flask containing the Decency brooch within the concealed pocket of his Warlock-like black robe.

With Madame Hela's letter clutched firmly in his hand, Lumian began the recitation for the Hermes gathering.

"A Beyonder from ancient times, Ruler of the Nation of the Evernight, noble Mother of the Sky, I beseech your permission to enter your kingdom."

As the words escaped Lumian's lips, the world around him underwent a sudden and eerie transformation. He beheld his own reflection in the mirror, like a pencil sketch hastily erased by an eraser.

His vision dimmed, plunging him into what felt like the deepest of slumbers.

Abruptly, Lumian's consciousness drifted to the gathering, the pounding of his heart resonating within his ears.

He snapped out of his reverie, finding himself within a palace marked by crumbling stone walls and encroaching weeds.

In its heart lay a massive, weathered stone throne, yet no one ventured near it. Through the fissures in the walls and the timeworn windows, Lumian glimpsed a night shrouded in darkness and cold, veiled by a thick fog.

Faint starlight penetrated the fog, casting a feeble glow upon the palace and the dreamlike town enshrouded by the fog.

The town appeared utterly deserted, as if plucked from a dream. Within the palace, stone candlesticks embedded in the walls flickered, bathing the surroundings in their warm, yellow flames.

At that precise moment, over a hundred figures arrived, each attired in distinctive garments. Lumian scanned the assembly but could not yet spot Madame Hela. However, he recognized Hidden Blade Franca.

Clad in her favored assassin's garb—black robes complemented by leather armor, a hood drawn low, and a silver half-mask gracing her countenance—Franca engaged in conversation with a group of similarly attired individuals.

Yet, among them, Franca stood as the sole genuine Assassin.

Lumian didn't greet Franca. Following her instructions and the hints in Madame Hela's letter, he approached the huge stone chair.

Such a crowded gathering was no different from a marketplace. It was unlikely to form a unified communication and transaction. The gathering naturally fragmented into smaller groups. Only when there was a matter of particular significance would President Gandalf or vice presidents like Hela take their place by the massive stone chair to address the assembly.

Of course, someone could do the same if they wanted to share their intentions with the entire gathering.

Aurore had been a regular attendee at the Academy's gatherings. Their designated meeting spot nestled deep within the palace, tucked away to the left of the huge stone throne.

As Lumian advanced in that direction, he couldn't help but marvel at the mystical nature of the gathering.

After reciting the incantation, he had departed from the Rue du Rossignol safe house in the market district, only to find himself transported to this mysterious and ancient palace.

The members of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society hailed from diverse corners of the Northern and Southern Continents, yet they had all managed to converge here within a specific timeframe.

Lumian had never encountered such a mystical power before, surpassing even teleportation. Only the bestowed Sowers of the Great Mother could compare.

What baffled him, however, was Franca's never sharing the method of entering the gathering. Even if they were face-to-face, he wouldn't hear it unless granted permission by Madame Hela.

But it was just reciting an incantation, wasn't it? How could he not hear it?

As Franca had explained, this power likely stemmed from a Sealed Artifact—an Artifact Madame Hela couldn't fully control but could employ to a certain extent.

Beyond this method of convening, the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society possessed other means, although these were established by various groups for internal or clique gatherings. For instance, Hidden Blade Franca had set up a telegram group with select members, utilizing a miniaturized and simplified analyzer for scheduled chats.

Recalling Franca and Hela's rough descriptions of Aurore during the gatherings and forming his own assumptions, Lumian's steps grew lighter.

He believed that, given the unique and shared origin of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society members, even if his sister wished to remain guarded amidst the assembly, her relaxed demeanor, akin to his interactions with her, would prevail, possibly even more prominently so.

This was a state devoid of profound secrets.

Additional figures began to manifest, their forms rapidly taking shape in the air, akin to oil paintings successfully duplicated.

Among the members of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society, a diverse and eclectic array of disguises flourished. Some were clad in traditional iron-gray full-body armor, while others embraced vibrant red, yellow, white, and multicolored paint, transforming into clowns. A handful sported extravagant makeup veiling their true visages, resembling wicked witches from ancient folklore. Still, others adorned themselves with monstrous helmets sculpted from orange-yellow pumpkins or relied on makeshift hoods to become pale vampires with strikingly red lips. Some even chose horse-like attires that enveloped them from head to toe…

It was a spectacle more fantastical and imaginative than the masquerade balls documented in newspapers and magazines.

As Lumian strolled amidst the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society's diverse members, a faint smile played on his lips. Occasionally, he would nod in acknowledgment of those who greeted him.

At last, he reached the corner housing the Academy team.

His eyes naturally swept over the code names displayed on their attires: Pettigrew, Professor, Griffin, Eagle, Bear, Headmaster, Periodic Table, Isotope…

Chapter 376: Different Teams

Pettigrew stood at just over 1.6 meters tall, his disheveled, yellow hair peeking out from under a face mask designed for performances. His right palm was encased in a flamboyant silver glove, and he wore an open brown jacket over a dark shirt.

As Lumian approached, Pettigrew stepped forward, exclaiming in surprise and delight, "Muggle, you've finally reappeared."

Lumian replied with a smile in Aurore's voice, "Something happened some time ago; it took me a while to recuperate."

"Are you alright now?" Pettigrew asked with concern.

"It's alright," Lumian replied nonchalantly, unsure of Aurore's friendship with him.

He turned his gaze to a lady sitting on the stone steps.

The woman donned a black butterfly mask, a white shirt adorned with a bow tie, and a long, dark coat. Pinned to her chest, a clearly typeset paper name tag read: "Professor."

Lumian greeted her with a smile, "Did Associate Professor not make it?"

Associate Professor was a man. A few years back, due to their shared code names, they had met in real life and became husband and wife.

Both were avid Warlocks, delving deep into the study of various spells. Aurore's grimoires contained the Weed Removal spell, courtesy of Associate Professor.

Professor's lips bore a faint hue, and her gaunt face framed her beautiful brown eyes. She simply replied, "He's occupied in the real world, playing host to guests. He couldn't spare the time. Nevertheless, my presence is akin to his; it doesn't alter matters. Muggle, what's the matter?"

Lumian smiled faintly and said, "I want to thank him for his Weed Removal spell."

"What's there to be grateful for? Could it be that your home was overrun by a large number of weeds?" Pettigrew asked curiously.

Lumian mirrored Aurore's expression as he recounted the past. His light-blue eyes darted around as he continued, "Some time ago, I encountered a plant rumored to originate from the Abyss. It not only grew at an astounding rate but also possessed remarkable vitality. It emitted anesthetic gasses and devoured humans like a man-eating flower. Whenever it surfaced, it did so in the hundreds, if not thousands. The Weed Removal spell, however, could wither them all. While it didn't annihilate them outright, it rendered them dormant for a considerable duration."

"Weed Removal works on Beyonder plants?" Professor exclaimed in astonishment.

Lumian nodded and said, "But it's effective only against grass or vine-type plants."

These were the insights Aurore had penned in her grimoires.

It was evident she had conducted experiments with the Abyss Demon Flower of the Padre, meticulously documenting her findings with scholarly dedication, even when her condition was clearly off.

"This is an interesting discovery." Professor held Lumian's hand, delving into the intricacies of the Weed Removal spell.

Fortunately, Lumian had delved deeply into this spell and sought guidance from Franca and Madame Hela. Though he couldn't use it, his knowledge was sufficient for a conversation.

After a lengthy discussion on spells and mystical knowledge with the Academy team, Lumian suddenly sensed a looming presence, casting a shadow over his surroundings.

Raising his eyes, he beheld an immense figure.

This figure towered at an imposing 2.4 meters, draped in a plain linen robe. Its head was concealed beneath a hood, and in its grip, a formidable magic staff, capable of shattering the skulls of ordinary humans, was held.

It was none other than Gandalf, the president of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society. Franca had suggested that he might have reincarnated as a middle-aged man within the Feysac Empire, endowed with a giant bloodline. He had a penchant for liquor and an insatiable thirst for mystical knowledge, yet the nature of his pathway remained an enigma. Sometimes, he displayed traits of the Reader pathway, embodying characteristics of a Savant and Mystery Pryer. At other times, it made people feel that with his physical condition, it would be a pity not to take the Warrior pathway.

High-end mystical knowledge like the Law of Beyonder Characteristics Indestructibility originated from Gandalf.

Oddly, Franca's expression took on a peculiar twist when mentioning Gandalf, as though his code name didn't quite align with his towering stature and imposing presence.

Gandalf, his visage obscured by an eerie shadow, fixed his gaze upon Lumian and gruffly extended a smile.

"You've missed a few gatherings. I was concerned something might have befallen you."

Lumian responded with pursed lips, his momentary sigh and helplessness hidden beneath the surface. "Something did happen, but it's been resolved."

"That's reassuring." Gandalf nodded in relief.

Following a few more courteous exchanges with Lumian, he made his way towards the other teams.

This was Lumian's first time participating in the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society's discussions. Following Madame Hela's counsel, he adopted a stance of speaking less and listening more. Often, he remained in silence.

Throughout this process, Lumian, now seated on the stone steps, observed those who spoke with a faint smile, projecting an aura of extreme attentiveness.

Aurore often employed a similar tactic. When conversing with Madame Pualis and the elderly ladies in Cordu, she would grace the speaker with a warm smile, making them feel truly valued. The discussion might be captivating, but beneath her apparent engagement, Aurore's thoughts would occasionally drift. She would intermittently return to grasp the essential points, safeguarding against potential awkwardness when she needed to respond.

Of course, when it came to discussions of mystical knowledge or striking deals, Lumian remained fully engaged, simply mirroring Aurore's demeanor.

After a while, Lumian found a suitable moment to rise from his spot, signaling his intention to depart from the Academy team's gathering area.

A lady, her face adorned with removable oil paint, exclaimed in surprise, "Aren't you purchasing anything today?"

Do you really need to spend a small fortune at every gathering to find joy, Grande Soeur? Lumian muttered silently and smiled.

"I have two reasons. Firstly, I've recently hit a bottleneck and am more focused on gathering the formula and ingredients for the Scrolls Professor potion…"

He spoke earnestly while analyzing the absence of corresponding requirements. Finally, he said, "Secondly, I'm broke and owe someone a substantial sum."

Members of the Academy team chuckled warmly, their understanding evident.

They had all noticed that Muggle had met with a significant problem during her hiatus from the gatherings, transforming from a well-off individual into someone burdened with debt.

However, they weren't overly concerned for Muggle. Over the past few years, they had witnessed their companion's knack for accumulating wealth.

Gracefully, Lumian made his way to the third pillar on the right of the colossal stone chair, where the Purgatory team congregated. Madame Hela frequently engaged in their discussions.

The lady was already present, albeit with a noticeable reduction in the chill that enveloped her. Under her veiled hat was a blur, revealing only a pale, yet not dismal, white complexion.

Silently, Lumian observed the discussions and dealings of the Purgatory team. After a while, he inquired thoughtfully, "Have any of you heard of an illusory river associated with the domain of death?"

Hela cast a fleeting glance at Lumian but remained silent.

Another member of the Purgatory team, a man bearing the code name Cerberus, pondered the question and responded, "Muggle, why do you ask?

"I've heard rumors of an illusory river deep within the Underworld, within the realm of hell. It's said to be connected to one of the High-Sequence Beyonders of the Corpse Collector pathway."

He actually answered without hesitation and didn't seek compensation for the intel, even though it's only hearsay and not verified fact… Lumian smiled and said, "I've recently been intrigued by the presence of such a river in both the myths and legends of our homeland and here."

He raised the topic indirectly without delving into further details.

Cerberus pondered for a moment before commenting, "This might be rooted in the commonality between the origins of myths and human thought."

Lumian tersely acknowledged with Aurore's voice and didn't inquire further.

He listened for a while longer before turning his attention to a hole in the ancient palace.

With his previous preparations in place, Lumian could smoothly blend into the April Fool's team, allowing him to eavesdrop on their conversations.

As Lumian made his way to the designated location, he quickly reviewed what he had observed and heard.

He couldn't help but notice that his sister, Aurore, had garnered quite a bit of popularity. Both the members of the Academy and the Purgatory team had shown her kindness.

While moving diagonally through the ancient palace, Lumian's attention was drawn to a man with stockings covering his head. This individual leaped onto a broken pillar and addressed the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society members, who were clad in various eccentric outfits.

"Allow me to recite a poem!

"Ocean, you are all water;

"Horse, you have four legs.

"Demoness, you truly taste great!"

This isn't a poem at all… Lumian had already purchased Emperor Roselle's Secret Chronicles, which included jests about the Emperor having a more than friendly relationship with a Demoness. In the diary, he even commented on the taste of Demonesses.

With one step following another, Lumian approached the April Fool's team. He spotted a man with his back turned to him, dressed in a black seer's robe. Behind this figure, an ancient Feysac word was inscribed in golden paint: "Loki."

Franca had mentioned that Loki was a figure from certain legends in their world, associated with lies, mischief, and flames. This member bearing the code name 'Loki' is the founder of the April Fool's team. Although he has progressed on the paths of the divine at a pace not inferior to Hela and the others, he hasn't ascended to the position of vice president… Various pieces of information flashed through Lumian's mind.

He entered the area where the April Fool's team was, and all laughter abruptly ceased.

In unison, Loki and the others turned to face Lumian, who was clad in a half-mask and a black Warlock robe.

As Muggle, Lumian's lips curved into a radiant smile.

"Long time no see, everyone."

Chapter 377: An Earlier Transmigrator

Facing Lumian's greeting, the dozen or so members of the April Fool's team fell silent.

Among them, several people's gazes and body language gave Lumian the distinct feeling that something was amiss.

There was "Bard" wearing stockings to conceal his appearance, "Hisoka" with a half-mask, vertical red hair, and teardrop and star makeup on his face, "Mad Lady" sporting red, yellow, and white clown paint, and "Ultraman" in comical attire.

Some of these April Fool's team members appeared surprised and puzzled, while others subtly shrank back. Some narrowed their eyes, and others changed their postures, becoming even more vigilant than before.

If Lumian hadn't sought guidance from Psychiatrist Anthony Reid during this time and focused on observing the guilty's reactions when they realized their victim was still alive, he wouldn't have been able to discern these differences so clearly. He might have missed something important.

In contrast, Lumian's earlier suspects, "Loki" and "I Know Someone," had more normal reactions.

The former was the founder and leader of the April Fool's team. If anything unusual occurred within the team, the chances of him remaining unaffected were slim. According to Franca, he was believed to be a member of the Spectator pathway, possibly a Psychiatrist. However, Aurore's understanding of this pathway was notably deficient. Her grimoires didn't align with the details uncovered in the dream.

Dressed in a black circus divination-style robe, Loki obscured his face with the shadows of his hood, seemingly unconcerned about being identified.

After a brief silence, he expressed his surprise, saying, "Muggle, you've reappeared.

"I thought you lost control and went mad after hearing the Hidden Sage's cram school classes, and that's why you haven't attended any gatherings for months."

"Rap, it's rap, not cram school classes," corrected Bard with a smile.

Lumian had learned from Franca that "rap" was a strange form of music that some members of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society liked to compare to the ravings of unknown entities.

Muggle's thin red lips curled up slightly in response.

"I did show signs of madness, but I managed it."

In the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society, this was a common topic. Many members had lost control for various reasons, turning into monsters or even dying. As a result, Psychiatrists could make a killing by treating their companions' psychological or mental problems during gatherings.

Dressed in a white coat and wearing a bird-beak mask, I Know Someone nodded.

"Last year, I assessed your mental and psychological state. There wasn't much of a problem, but you haven't had regular assessments in nearly a year. You need to be careful. I know someone who was careless and overconfident and ended up in an asylum."

This Psychiatrist appeared normal enough and was genuinely concerned about his patient's condition. However, his membership in the April Fool's team raised some suspicions for Lumian. At the very least, his mental state didn't seem entirely healthy.

As a prankster, Lumian didn't despair about the future or made it his life's mission to seek fun. Having such circumstances would undoubtedly put a toll on their psychological well-being.

Loki didn't press further about Muggle's absence from numerous gatherings. He spread his hands and addressed all the members of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society in the April Fool's team's spot.

"Everyone, I've recently come across another transmigrator from history!"

"Who is it?" Bard with stockings blurted out, and the other members turned their attention to Loki.

Taking note of everyone's gazes, Loki gestured meaningfully and continued, "I've obtained ancient texts that mention the existence of an Ancient Sun God in the Third Epoch.

"Haven't we always been puzzled by the scriptures of the various Churches, especially the Eternal Blazing Sun Church? Don't they bear a striking resemblance to the religious texts of our world?

"Now, I believe I've found the answer."

As the leader of the April Fool's team spoke, he tapped his chest four times—top, down, left, right—as if indicating a religion from his homeland.

Lumian's eyelids twitched.

Mr. K had made the same gesture while praying to that entity!

Was it merely a coincidence, or was there an inevitable connection?

Furthermore, wasn't the Ancient Sun God the father of the angel at Salle de Bal Unique?

Loki continued in an exaggerated tone, "Yes, just as you suspect. The scriptures of the various Churches are derived from the Ancient Sun God, but they have different focuses and have altered certain details.

"I've only managed to find a few of that entity's books, but I can confirm they're from our world.

"I hope you can gather more information about the Ancient Sun God and eventually confirm that He too is a transmigrator, possibly even predating Roselle. If you wish to see the books I've obtained, remember to request a trade later. 100 grams of gold or an equivalent currency for a copy is a very reasonable price, don't you think? We're all on the same side, and this discovery holds the key to our hopes of returning home. Otherwise, I wouldn't sell it for such a small amount of gold."

The comical-looking Ultraman let out a sigh and said, "It's all rather pointless. I believe you think that this entity, who has become a deity, must have a better understanding of the world's truth than us. He might have already unraveled the secret of transmigration and the way back. But according to your information, didn't He also fail to return?"

"See the light!" Loki's lips curled up. "And I suspect that the reason that individual couldn't return is because He perished in a divine battle."

"Sounds intriguing," Hisoka, dressed in clothes with poker card patterns, suddenly chimed in.

Loki slowly scanned the members of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society and flashed a smile.

"The information about that entity and the ancient books related to it has been deliberately erased, with only a small number of them circulating in secret. Most are hidden underground near the source of power left behind by that entity.

"It's said that in those places, the higher your Sequence, the more dangerous it becomes. It's easier to lose control. Ordinary Beyonders like us stand a chance to approach. Perhaps it holds the truth about the connection between our two worlds and a way to return to our homeland."

At this point, Loki's gaze passed over Lumian's masked face.

Is he subtly encouraging Aurore and the other members of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society to venture underground? Lumian maintained his vigilance against any potential "pranks."

However, there was another reason why he sensed a potential issue instantly. Madam Justice had mentioned that the higher one's Sequence, the more dangerous it would be when approaching the Samaritan Women's Spring. She had also explained the nature of the problem.

This led Lumian to suspect that the Ancient Sun God's location mentioned by Loki might be a place similar to the Samaritan Women's Spring. He knew firsthand how perilous and terrifying the Samaritan Women's Spring could be!

Inciting others to explore underground in their quest to return home while avoiding the risks himself, or is this merely a prank that could harm others without benefiting Loki? Lumian glanced at Loki's profile and deliberately interjected, "I've been pondering a similar question lately.

"Why do many myths and legends in this world involve an illusory river associated with the domain of death, just like in our homeland?

"Could it be the result of some senior who transmigrated back?"

Given Lumian's knowledge of Aurore, he knew she couldn't resist getting involved if she caught wind of any leads regarding returning to her hometown. Since he had questions of his own, he needed to steer the conversation away from Loki's direction. Finding a relevant topic was his best strategy.

This was a lesson Lumian and his sister had learned through their battles of wits and pranks over studies, homework, exams, combat, and pranks.

Mad Lady, adorned with red, yellow, and white clown paint, chuckled and remarked, "Human nature, my dear, humans tend to blend their own experiences into myths and legends. In ancient times, they relied on water for survival, so they believed there should be a river in the afterlife. Likewise, when they dug graves, the deeper they went, the more likely they'd encounter an underground river."

Lumian, emulating Aurore's tone, responded, "Your explanation is quite scientific, but I think it lacks mysticism. And if we aim to return, mysticism might be just what we need."

He recounted the legend of the River Styx, which he had recently acquired from the Purgatory team, and concluded, "I believe this could also be a path worth exploring."

Loki's face remained hidden in the hooded shadows as he chuckled and remarked, "Although the Underworld should be somewhere in the spirit world, I believe it must be closely related to the underground. In numerous folklores from the Northern and Southern Continents, 'hell' is often depicted as being hidden underground.

"That's why our investigation needs to be centered on the underground. Whether it's the remains of the Third Epoch's Ancient Sun God or issues related to the River Styx, we must delve deep underground to truly connect with these mysteries."

Lumian couldn't help but mutter to himself, You just want everyone to meet their end faster…

He pretended to be engaged and continued sharing information about the Ancient Sun God, underground exploration, and the River Styx with Loki, I Know Someone, and the other members of the April Fool's team.

After almost twenty minutes of conversation, Lumian decided to step away from the April Fool's team's vicinity.

He had already sensed abnormal reactions from at least four members of the April Fool's team. The next step was to leave this to Hidden Blade Franca.

If there was indeed something awry with the April Fool's team, they would be highly cautious when dealing with Muggle. They wouldn't readily engage or probe, fearing they might fall into a trap.

Their primary objective should be observation and indirect information gathering at this point.

When it came to Hidden Blade, they could play pranks without reservations. Later on, Franca could use those pranks as an excuse to locate the April Fool's team members in the real world and confront them individually. She could win the support of other members of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society. Whether they could extract any significant information during these confrontations remained to be seen.

As Lumian took a few steps away from the gathering, he spotted the 2.4-meter-tall president, Gandalf, approaching the massive stone chair and addressing the group with a resounding voice, "Everyone, I have something important to discuss."

Chapter 378: Investigation

Lumian halted and turned his attention toward the president of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society, who was dressed in a linen robe.

The nearly half-giant Gandalf didn't require mechanical contraptions or mystical techniques to project his voice throughout the ancient palace.

"I just had a conversation with Isotope and noticed a matter that deserves our attention.

"He mentioned that ever since advancing to Sequence 6, he's been encountering Beyonders more frequently and getting involved in Beyonder affairs.

"This aligns with my general observations over the past few years. You know I enjoy talking to every member and asking about the additional changes brought about by superpowers. For me, I've delved deeper into the paths of the divine than most, gaining a profound understanding.

"Having said that, I want to share a conclusion.

"There are almost no exceptions. As Beyonders progress in Sequence, the frequency of mystical matters involving them significantly increases. At Sequence 9, this phenomenon isn't prominent. But starting from Sequence 7 or even Sequence 6, even those who typically don't pay much attention to such matters will feel that they are constantly encountering Beyonder events.

"Let me illustrate with numbers. At Sequence 9, the assumed number of Beyonder incidents or encounters with other Beyonders each season is 1. This can easily slip under the radar during mysticism gatherings and small circle activities you participate in. It's challenging to pinpoint precisely.

Now, at Sequence 8, it's 2. For Sequence 7, it might surge to 5 or 6. In other words, one may come across one or two Beyonder incidents or unfamiliar Beyonders once or twice a month.

"Do you have any thoughts or speculations about this phenomenon? Can you discern the cause? Perhaps there are fundamental laws of mysticism at play."

Lumian fell into a daze.

Isn't this the Law of Beyonder Characteristics Convergence?

This transmigrator, code-named Gandalf, possessed a sharp investigative spirit. He was astute in noticing even the smallest details and had actually uncovered the outward signs of the Law of Beyonder Characteristics Convergence!

He was also the one who had suggested that advancing to Sequence 9 and Sequence 8 in recent years would be easier than before, even allowing for the direct consumption of Beyonder characteristics. He had provided a more precise assessment of the increased risk.

A research-focused talent… Lumian sighed, using Aurore's usual terminology.

For someone like him, with an evil god's angel sealed within and a deity-level aura shrouding him, the manifestation of the Law of Beyonder Characteristics Convergence was so intense that it couldn't be ignored. Anyone would recognize the problem.

What do you mean one or two Beyonder incidents a month?

It's practically every week!

Including the Beyonders he had encountered, it could be said to be a daily occurrence!

However, at times, Lumian felt that the Law of Beyonder Characteristics Convergence hadn't fully played its role. Only by attracting members of the

Sinners organization and Roche Louise Sanson's family to Avenue du Marché and coincidentally meeting them would it qualify.

Perhaps the power of a boon wasn't as potent as the convergence of Beyonder characteristics, or perhaps Termiboros's seal had mitigated the effect. In any case, his desire remained unfulfilled.

As someone who had taken his sister's place at the gathering, Lumian refrained from approaching Gandalf directly and offering a substantial price for information on the Law of Beyonder Characteristics Convergence.

Casually scanning the area, he noticed Madame Hela and Hidden Blade Franca remaining silent, listening to the discussions among members of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society regarding this phenomenon.

Lumian knew that Franca was familiar with the Law of Beyonder Characteristics Convergence. With Hela's concealed knowledge from her exploration of the Samaritan Women's Spring, she should have observed such a phenomenon.

They didn't explicitly mention the term "convergence" due to their different motivations. For Franca, as long as she didn't seek to ascend to godhood, immediate understanding of the Law of Beyonder Characteristics Convergence wasn't necessary. She just needed to recognize the corresponding phenomena and avoid risks. The specific details could be sold at the gathering when she needed funds and gained Madam Judgment's approval.

As various groups engaged in fervent discussions about President Gandalf's topic, Lumian made his way toward the Academy team.

As Lumian continued on his path, he spotted Hidden Blade Franca approaching.

"Muggle? You're finally back at the gathering! I was genuinely worried something had happened to you!" Franca's expressions were slightly exaggerated, but it was well within the norm for her. In the eyes of all the members of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society, she was known for her rich emotions and her love for interacting and experimenting.

Lumian pursed his lips and offered a smile.

"Something did come up, but it got sorted out."

Impressive mental resilience. He didn't react strongly when the Cordu disaster was mentioned. Franca looked at Muggle's exposed lower face with curiosity and asked, "What happened?"

"A mysticism catastrophe," Lumian replied, taking on a resistant demeanor.

Franca knew when to change the subject and shifted the conversation with a smile.

"Just a while ago, in the April Fool's group, Loki mentioned that he stumbled upon another ancient transmigrator known as the Ancient Sun God." Lumian took the initiative to bring up his conversation with April Fool's. "Mad Lady, Hisoka, Bard, and Ultraman are a bit skeptical."

Mad Lady, Hisoka, Bard, Ultraman… Franca and Lumian shared an unspoken understanding. She immediately grasped his intentions—take note of the four April Fool's team members Lumian suspected of being problematic.

Including Loki and I Know Someone, who were often discussed as potential suspects, there were now a total of six individuals.

"Is that true? Besides Emperor Roselle, are there other ancient transmigrators?" Franca asked with genuine excitement.

She wasn't faking it. She had always been interested in ancient transmigrators.

Seeing the opportunity, she bid Muggle farewell and approached the area in the palace where the April Fool's team was located.

Lumian returned to the Academy team and listened as Professor, Isotope, and Pettigrew discussed the mysticism experiences they had encountered.

The gathering had a strict two-hour time limit, but attendees could leave at any moment. They simply needed to recite an incantation, changing the last sentence to "I beseech your permission to leave your kingdom," and they would return to their original location.

Many members of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society chose to depart early after conducting their business and sharing their concerns, to prevent any accidents from occurring in the real world. However, a significant number of members opted to stay.

For them, the opportunity to interact with people who shared their unique origins and not worry about accidental disclosures of their secrets was a pleasure. Even if their conversations veered into trivial topics, it still improved their emotional well-being and provided relief for their mental and psychological states.

Lumian believed that his sister had found these gatherings quite relaxing. Thus, he partly attended to impersonate her and show no difference while also enjoying the atmosphere on Aurore's behalf, patiently remaining until the end.

Vaguely, he sensed that his emotions were becoming more sensitive and easily stirred. It was as if Aurore's soul fragment had risen to the surface and was affecting his psyche.

As the gathering drew to a close, Professor, wearing a shirt with a bowtie, turned her attention to Lumian and inquired, "Muggle, are you still residing in the south?"

Hmm, she's not referring to a specific country… Does she know that Aurore is in Intis? Lumian's thoughts raced as he responded candidly, "No, I've already moved to the Trier greater region."

A smile curved on Professor's lips.

"Associate Professor and I are also residing in Trier. Would you be interested in an offline gathering?"

"I'm in the Trier greater region as well," Pettigrew chimed in eagerly. Periodic Table and Isotope nodded in agreement.

An offline gathering… Aurore did occasionally go out for a few days in the past. Could she have attended a real-life gathering with Professor and the others? Different circles have different styles. Franca and her associates have a telegram group, and these individuals from the Academy participate in real-life gatherings depending on the region? Lumian pondered for a moment and replied, "Another time. After I've sorted out some personal matters."

He intentionally brought up certain personal matters, hoping that this information might reach the April Fool's suspects like Loki and Mad Lady.

"Alright." Professor and the others acknowledged. After all, Muggle had previously revealed that something had occurred to her.

...

"A Beyonder from ancient times, the ruler of the Nation of the Evernight, the noble Mother of Heaven, I beseech your permission to leave your kingdom."

With each repetition of the incantation, the figures in the ancient palace gradually faded away.

When Lumian regained consciousness, he found himself back in the safe house on Rue du Rossignol.

How magical… Compared to this, Mr. K's mysticism gatherings are like comparing my safe house to Emperor Roselle's summer palace. They're on entirely different levels. The contrast is quite significant… Lumian sighed and returned to his original appearance.

He wasn't in a rush to write to Madam Magician to report the Armored Shadow's response or to inquire about the Ancient Sun God. Instead, after changing his clothes, he headed straight to 3 Rue des Blouses Blanches and knocked on the door of Apartment 601.

Jenna had gone to visit her brother and wouldn't return until the next morning. Franca sat in a recliner, muttering as if cursing someone.

"What's bothering you?" Lumian asked as he settled onto the divan.

"That rascal Loki. I wanted to buy some information from him, but he told me others could pay with gold, but not me," Franca replied indignantly. "He said he wanted to experience the taste of a Demoness. Damn it, why didn't he drink the potion and become a Witch himself? After I cursed him, he claimed it was a joke and sold me the ancient information."

She chuckled after recounting the encounter.

"Although there's a special barrier in the gathering venue that prevents us from tracing the ownership and location of the items we trade, the essence of the items can't be concealed. Regarding the copy of the information, it includes details such as the type of paper, which factory it originated from, the model of the mechanical typewriter or printing machine used to produce it, and even the approximate location. This could provide some clues. It might help us locate Loki in the real world. Of course, that's assuming he hasn't taken any anti-divination measures, misdirection, or hidden anything."

As Franca spoke, she took out a mirror and prepared for Magic Mirror Divination.

After reciting the incantation, the mirror darkened, accompanied by the faint sound of water.

Franca held the copy of the information she had obtained from Loki and inquired thoughtfully, "Where can we find the mechanical typewriter used to create this information?"

Within the mirror, an aged voice responded, "Trier, Alone Bar."

Chapter 379: Bold Speculation

Alone Bar? Lumian was taken aback by the answer.

Loki, the founder of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society's April Fools' team, is actually in Trier and connected to the Alone Bar?

Isn't this a little too coincidental?

Lumian's impression of the Alone Bar was that it stood diagonally opposite Salle de Bal Unique. In the basement, there was a theater for marionette shows. The lighting was dim, and the colors were dark, giving it a slightly sinister appearance.

Initially, he didn't see it as a problem, but now that he knew that the monocle-wearing patrons of Salle de Bal Unique were in a superimposed state of being "Amon" and "Not Amon," he believed that the Alone Bar, which could compete with this dance hall and survive, wasn't simple.

Moreover, he had once observed Leah from Bureau 8 entering the bar. He suspected it to be Bureau 8's covert hideout, designed to keep an eye on the Amons at Salle de Bal Unique.

Could Loki also be a member of Bureau 8, a true official Beyonder?

Or was it possible that he merely resided in Quartier de l'Observatoire and recognized the uniqueness of Alone Bar? Was that why he used the mechanical typewriter there to create a copy of the information, preventing anyone from tracing it back to him?

"What's the matter?" Franca watched Lumian furrow his brow and plunge into deep thought. After a prolonged silence, she extended her right hand and waved it in front of his eyes.

Lumian contemplated for a moment and said, "There's a significant issue with this bar."

"You're familiar with this bar?" Franca looked surprised.

This man appeared to harbor many secrets she was unaware of!

A soft chuckle escaped Lumian's lips.

"We'll need to start with Madame Hela and me searching for the Samaritan Women's Spring."

Franca was taken aback. "How many times do I need to have you give out every detail? Are you a tube of toothpaste, giving out a little with each squeeze?"

"The focus was on the situation at the Samaritan Women's Spring, and this all happened along the way," Lumian explained, without feeling embarrassed.

Starting from his encounter with the Islander swindler, Monette, and his repeated scares, he connected Charlie being swindled, the uniqueness of Salle de Bal Unique, and Madam Magician's connection to Amon. Finally, he mentioned that Alone Bar was diagonally opposite Salle de Bal Unique, and an official member of Bureau 8 had once entered and exited.

Franca felt like she was listening to a ghost story. She subconsciously wanted to hug a pillow, but there was none on the recliner.

Quickly shaking off her daze, she straightened her back, trying to maintain an expression that suggested a "true man" wouldn't be frightened by such a terrifying incident.

All this was used to torment Jenna!

After Lumian finished speaking, Franca hissed and said, "You've had quite the array of experiences. You've even encountered an old monster that only exists in horror stories."

"Why didn't you warn me earlier? That Islander swindler shows up in the market district from time to time. What if I run into him one day?"

"It's for your own safety. If you didn't suspect anything when you encountered him, he wouldn't pay you any attention. But now, if your demeanor changes when you see him, he might become suspicious and involve you in his Parasitism," Lumian warned, half-scaring Franca.

"That's true." Franca gritted her teeth and added, "The next time I meet him, I'll pray for the angel's protection from Mr. Fool when I get home!"

She pushed aside her fear of the Amons and steered the conversation back to the main topic.

"This all ties into the Alone Bar. Investigating it in the future is going to be very challenging…"

Franca suddenly had an imaginative guess.

"Do you think Loki has already been parasitized by an Amon?"

Lumian struggled to follow Franca's train of thought and responded, "Huh?"

Franca continued, her tone grave, "Consider this. The books and legends of the Ancient Sun God have been missing for two to three thousand years, and since the Churches of the Seven Gods' bibles are copied from Him, they must have erased relevant information. How did Loki come by this information?

"While there are various possibilities, if he is indeed Amon, it would make sense. No one knows His father's situation better than Him.

"As a child of a transmigrator, not to mention that He can obtain Loki's memories through Parasitism, even if He can't, He can perfectly act as our companion. You also mentioned that He enjoys deceit and has frightened you a few times. This is very similar to Loki's usual behavior.

"And when Amon from Salle de Bal Unique created the duplicate, he deliberately went to the Alone Bar diagonally opposite to use a mechanical typewriter to mislead potential tracing. This also fits with this style."

Franca's bold imagination surprised Lumian. After a moment of thought, he responded, "This does explain why this information oddly points to the Alone Bar.

"Under the guidance of this evil angel, the April Fool's team gradually felt despair for the future and pursued their own joy. It was a reasonable development for them to start targeting other members of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society.

"However, Amon wouldn't intentionally lead the information to the Alone Bar, as that would naturally make investigators suspect Him, who resides diagonally opposite…

"Perhaps He anticipated the investigators' thoughts," Franca countered.

Lumian shook his head slowly.

"If it were Amon, your divination would have been misled or you wouldn't have received an answer.

"Yes, regardless, this is indeed a possibility. I plan to visit the Alone Bar for a drink in the next two days and investigate the situation on the ground, but I won't delve further."

Franca acknowledged his words tersely and sighed.

"In truth, I also realize that the likelihood of Loki being parasitized by an Amon is very low. Our primary purpose in attending the gathering is to transition into a special state. In this state, the Sealed Artifact borrowed from Madame Hela should be able to detect any abnormalities in each member's bodies. It won't transform the corresponding object and leave it where it is.

"Sigh, I'm just finding excuses for myself. It's not wise for us to pursue Loki without substantial evidence and strong suspicion.

"It makes me feel like I've betrayed the Research Society and my companions. That's why I hope that Loki was indeed parasitized by Amon. That way, I won't experience a similar sense of guilt. I'd be helping the Research Society eliminate hidden dangers."

Filtering abnormalities in the body by entering a special state and attending the gathering? But nothing happened to Termiboros… Lumian wondered if it was because Mr. Fool's seal was unique or if Madame Hela's Sealed Artifact lacked the ability to filter abnormalities and guard against parasitic angels like Amon.

However, he didn't voice any objections at the moment and instead smiled.

"In my view, there's definitely something amiss with Loki. It's just a question of whether it's a major or minor issue.

"When he sold you the information, did he encourage you to explore the underground and seek out more remnants of the Ancient Sun God?"

"He did," Franca confirmed. "He also mentioned that in such places, the higher the Sequence, the more dangerous it is. It's easier to lose control. Only Low-Sequence Beyonders like us can approach it."

"That's only a relative perspective. Did you find it dangerous when I explored the Samaritan Women's Spring earlier?" Lumian inquired.

"It was extremely dangerous," Franca acknowledged, knowing much about the matter.

And you don't even know that the Blood Emperor's apparition nearly caught me… Lumian muttered, "Searching for the remnants of the Ancient Sun God will likely be even more dangerous.

"If Loki doesn't make an attempt, he'll be essentially using you as cannon fodder by encouraging you to explore underground. And if he does try, he'll inevitably be corrupted and gradually mutate. He lacks the purification of a great existence like Mr. Fool.

"So, it's crucial to locate Loki as soon as possible. It's in both your and his best interests."

Franca bit her lip and agreed, "You're right. Loki clearly has malicious intentions in this matter. The other members of the April Fool's team might be curious and willing to participate, but I believe they're cooperating with him."

After persuading Franca, Lumian asked curiously, "Tell me, the prerequisite for entering the gathering is to enter a special state. What state is it?"

Franca, no longer hesitating, shared eagerly, "I've asked my Major Arcana card holder about it before. Although I couldn't reveal the incantation or provide a detailed description of the gathering, she speculated that it involves a 'Concealment' power based on my description and its effects."

"Concealment" power… Lumian nodded.

It was indeed well-concealed. Even the incantation had been hidden, preventing anyone from discovering it.

Franca went on, "The power of Concealment is associated with the Evernight pathway, which is the divine pathway controlled by the Evernight Goddess Church."

She lowered her voice and added, "I suspect that Madame Hela is affiliated with the Church of Evernight."

"Similar to 007?" Lumian inquired. He hadn't encountered 007 today, as too many people had participated in the gathering, and he didn't know the usual attire or team of 007.

Franca tersely confirmed his assumption.

"Something along those lines, but she may hold a more significant position. She's at a higher level and has access to more concealed knowledge."

Recalling Madame Hela's actions in obtaining the Samaritan Women's Spring, Lumian couldn't help but agree with Franca's assessment.

Indeed, the lady possessed a wealth of secret knowledge. Moreover, she wore a black diamond ring that clearly exceeded ordinary mystical items and was suspected to possess godlike powers.

Additionally, the Sealed Artifact she had borrowed to convene the gathering was beyond Lumian's imagination.

In a casual manner, Lumian asked, "What are the primary manifestations of the Evernight pathway's powers?"

According to Aurore's grimoires, the first three Sequences of this pathway were Sleepless, Midnight Poet, and Nightmare. They primarily involved enhancing spirituality, increasing mental strength, reducing the need for sleep, the mystical application of poetry, and the unique ability to induce sleep in others.

Franca thought for a moment and replied, "The power of Concealment, command over spirits, and the ability to create realistic dreams…"

Realistic dream… Lumian was taken aback by the answer.

He couldn't help but recall the realistic dream he had experienced in the ruins of Cordu.

Chapter 380: Bell Chimes

At the conclusion of the Cordu disaster, Lumian found himself not only grappling with the seal within his body and the fading aura of Inevitability surrounding him, but he had also been thrust into a vivid, lifelike dream. Surprisingly, even the investigators, Ryan and the others, succumbed to an uncontrollable slumber as they entered a specific area, becoming entangled in his dream.

During that time, Lumian, who was still unfamiliar with the intricacies of mysticism, failed to sense anything amiss. It was only later, when he enlisted the help of Mr. Poet to decipher the symbolic meanings woven into the dream, that he realized its origins were not tied to Termiboros's power or Mr. Fool's seal. It had a different source, one that conveyed protection and solace.

Ever since that moment, Lumian had tirelessly pondered the origin of this lifelike dream, but he had never unearthed a definitive answer. The possibilities were endless. However, with Franca's detailed account of the Evernight pathway and his own experiences at the gathering, a sudden revelation struck him.

The Evernight pathway, known for inducing nightmarish visions, could also weave the fabric of realistic dreams!

Could it be that Madame Hela, upon learning of Aurore's tragic fate in Cordu, had arrived too late to intervene directly? Perhaps she had resorted to employing the power of a Sealed Artifact to draw me into the lifelike dream, an attempt to provide solace for my tormented soul?

No, there's no need for her to hide this from me and feign ignorance. What's there to hide?

Moreover, if she were responsible, there would be no lingering traces of slumbering power left behind…

Could it be that the continuous use of the incantation involving Concealment powers during the gatherings somehow marked or corrupted Aurore with the Sealed Artifact's influence? When her body disintegrated, the Sealed Artifact sensed the disturbance and, albeit unsuccessfully in saving her, led me into the realm of this lifelike dream?

Yes, it makes sense. Leah and the others were compelled to slumber on the blood-colored mountain peak, situated near the sacrificial ground, close to the three-headed, six-armed giant. This aligns with my theory. The source of the dream's power is intricately tied to Aurore's fate…

Franca observed Lumian's prolonged silence, realizing he was deeply engrossed in contemplation. She wisely refrained from interrupting, allowing him to return to the present before gently inquiring, "What thoughts have crossed your mind?"

"Do you recall the Cordu disaster I mentioned? There's an area around the sacrificial ground, which became the blood-colored mountain peak. Anyone who ventured into it fell into a deep slumber and experienced a realistic dream," Lumian explained succinctly.

The more Franca absorbed his words, the more astonishment and trepidation filled her.

"Could it be that there's something wrong with Madame Hela too?"

"I don't think so." Lumian shook his head in response and outlined the crucial aspects of his conjecture.

Relief washed over Franca, and she couldn't hide her emotions.

"This theory does seem to fit the circumstances."

"Right, did you notice? The initial part of the incantation features a three-line honorific name. This implies that the Sealed Artifact either possesses characteristics of a living entity or was once alive. It's reasonable for it to instinctively influence those who beseech its power."

After careful consideration, Lumian recognized the validity of this point.

The two of them continued their conversation, ultimately deciding that Lumian should find a suitable time to pay a visit to the Alone Bar.

…

Returning to the Auberge du Coq Doré, Lumian drew the curtains and settled at the table. Bathed in the soft glow of the carbide lamp, he began composing a letter addressed to Madam Magician.

The letter primarily centered around the Armored Shadow's performance and its response. Lumian was particularly interested in gathering information about the Ancient Sun God and its connection with the Aurora Order.

However, mindful of the late hour, he decided to wait until he "naturally" woke up in the morning, had his breakfast, and then sent the letter.

At noon, Lumian received a reply from Madam Magician, and he felt a sense of satisfaction for having purposely returned to Room 207 of Auberge du Coq Doré.

"The Armored Shadow's response and its current condition offer us valuable insights into the situation regarding ____."

Lumian was taken aback by the first sentence.

His gaze fixated on the blank portion of the sentence, uncertain whether Madam Magician had intentionally injected humor into her letter or if some form of distortion had affected the message.

Drawing from his knowledge of Magician, Lumian's initial assumption was that she had initially composed the entire sentence but later realized that certain information couldn't be disclosed at this moment. Instead of redacting it or starting anew, she had employed some mystical means to erase the phrase.

Why can't I be privy to this information? It's merely another world, right? Lumian mused as he proceeded to read the subsequent sentence.

"While this is a valuable acquisition, its immediate utility may be limited, though Mr. Hanged Man will undoubtedly be pleased.

"In due time, when he deems it appropriate, he might get you to summon the Armored Shadow once more. He will be responsible for providing compensation in gold for the chance to pose inquiries.

"Let him determine the questions. Your role is to facilitate the communication, and the Two of Cups will handle translation. Oh, and do not forget to request a reward from Mr. Hanged Man."

Mr. Hanged Man… Lumian repeated the code name, his eyes continuing to scan the contents of the letter.

"The Ancient Sun God's problem is complicated, and my knowledge on the matter is limited. At this juncture, I can only offer this: He was the ruler of the Third Epoch, the one who brought an end to the tyrannical reign of the brutal ancient gods and ushered in an era of light for humanity.

"The entity revered by the Aurora Order maintains a complicated connection with Him. Understanding this connection carries risks. Consider Him as the inheritor of half of His legacy, while the other portion is shared among select members of the seven deities. This division directly gave rise to what we commonly term the Age of the Gods, also known as the Fourth Epoch."

If remnants of history, legends, documents, and artifacts were still available from the Fourth Epoch, the prior Third and Second Epochs existed mostly within the scriptures of various Churches, veiled in almost mythical obscurity. Lumian possessed only scant knowledge, recognizing the Third Epoch as the Cataclysm Epoch and the Second Epoch as the Dark Epoch.

In Madam Magician's words, Lumian sensed the majesty and allure of ancient history unfolding before him.

The brutal ancient gods, the Ancient Sun God who ended humanity's dark age, the ruler of the Third Epoch whose demise remains shrouded in mystery, and the Age of the Gods that emerged from His corpse…

Why would such an ancient deity give birth to someone like Amon? And who is Amon's mother? Could there be a connection between Amon and the figure revered by the Aurora Order? The more Lumian contemplated this, the more he discerned problems with the Ancient Sun God's method of raising offspring.

He harbored a favorable impression of this deity, not only because of His role in ending the dominion of the ancient gods and offering humanity a glimmer of hope, but also due to the suspicion that He might be an earlier transmigrator from the same world as Aurore and Emperor Roselle.

Simultaneously, Lumian began to understand why Mr. K and the Aurora Order held such vehement disdain for heretics. The one they revered was the rightful heir to the legacy of the Ancient Sun God.

A flame erupted, igniting the letter in Lumian's hand.

He tidied up and fastened the silver Lie earring, making subtle adjustments to his appearance to ensure he bore no resemblance to Lumian Lee.

With that done, he removed Lie and slipped it into a concealed pocket.

His recent insights indicated that his transfigurations from Lie wouldn't end when he was separated from Lie. It was a flesh-and-blood reconstruction. If he wanted to return to his original state, he had to use Lie to adjust it again.

Lumian grabbed his satchel and left Auberge du Coq Doré.

On his way to Avenue du Marché, he heard the chime of a bell, signaling that it was 1 p.m.

Lumian retrieved the golden pocket watch he had borrowed from Salle de Bal Brise and synchronized it with the distant tolling of the bell.

The pocket watch would lose a minute every few days.

After a journey of more than half an hour, Lumian arrived at Rue Ancienne.

His steps led him toward the Alone Bar, and his gaze naturally drifted across Salle de Bal Unique.

At that moment, the establishment had yet to see many customers. Three guards, each sporting a monocle over their right eyes, lounged in various corners, engaged in sporadic conversations or drifting into daydreams.

A postman in a distinctive blue uniform adorned with floral patterns parked his bicycle by the roadside and approached Salle de Bal Unique's mailbox, clutching a stack of letters.

Like the guards, he too wore a monocle on his right eye.

An inexplicable shiver coursed through Lumian's scalp, prompting him to avert his gaze and continue his course into the Alone Bar.

Inside, the dimly lit atmosphere persisted, casting a shadowy ambiance even at noon. At present, Lumian found himself the sole patron.

The bartender stationed behind the bar counter was not the same individual as before. Instead, it was Leah, the Bureau 8 investigator, whom Lumian recognized!

She was attired in a white shirt, a bow tie, and a black knee-length dress. Her hair had been elegantly tied into a simple bun, adorned with tiny silver bells—a departure from her previous appearance, exuding a distinct charm.

"Gin on the rocks," Lumian stated as he settled onto a barstool at the counter, tapping the surface lightly.

A chuckle escaped him as he continued, "Why do we have a new bartender?"

Leah cast a playful glance in his direction and quipped, "Monsieur, there's no strict rule that dictates a bar must employ only one bartender. That would surely lead to their exhaustion."

"Fair enough," Lumian agreed, paying eight licks for his drink and patiently awaiting the arrival of his iced gin.

After savoring his beverage for nearly ten minutes, he casually inquired, "Is there a typewriter available here? I've just remembered a document I need to complete."

Leah, wiping a glass, responded, "In the room next to the theater in the cellar, there's a typewriter reserved for scripts. It costs 2 licks and 1 coppet for each sheet of paper."

"That's quite pricey…" Lumian muttered as he rose and entered the cellar with his glass of gin.

He steered clear of the marionette theater, harboring some lingering unease from his previous encounter. Instead, he ventured into a nearby room.

There was indeed a brass mechanical typewriter here, and a man engrossed in reading a newspaper beside it.

Lumian, in line with his prior preparations, proceeded to type out a brief document.

Some of the worn letters on the typewriter matched the information provided by Loki with uncanny precision.

Satisfied with his work, Lumian offered payment to the silent man for his use of the typewriter and paper before promptly exiting the somewhat eerie basement room.

As he returned to the bar's lobby, he was abruptly met with fugue, as he heard the faint chime of a bell.

Lumian swiftly regained his composure and directed his gaze towards Leah, noticing that she displayed no signs of alarm or surprise.

"Did you hear the bell?" Lumian inquired, placing his glass on the bar counter.

Leah furrowed her brow. "The hour has not yet struck. Why would the bell toll?"

Suppressing his bewilderment, Lumian finished his drink and departed the Alone Bar.

While passing Salle de Bal Unique, he observed that only two guards with monocles remained stationed at the entrance. The postman was conspicuously absent.

Without further ado, Lumian continued down the street, putting distance between himself and the establishment.

As he boarded a public carriage headed back to the market district, the clock chimed two o'clock with impeccable precision. Instinctively, Lumian retrieved his pocket watch, opening it to check the time.

To his astonishment, the pocket watch, which he had meticulously calibrated just an hour earlier, had once again slowed down.

A minute slow.

Chapter 381: Elimination

Lumian carefully examined the pocket watch, ensuring that there were no mechanical issues.

He hadn't bumped or jostled it in the past hour, so there should be no reason for it to malfunction.

Ever since I calibrated my pocket watch, the only odd occurrence had been the fugue state and the faint ringing of a bell when I left the Alone Bar. Additionally, there is one less monocle-wearing guard at the entrance of Salle de Bal Unique. Could there be a connection between these events and the sudden one-minute slowdown of my pocket watch? Lumian pondered this seriously, trying to come up with possible explanations.

He planned to write and inquire with Madam Magician once he returned to the market district.

Normally, he wouldn't bother his Major Arcana card holder with such minor issues, but the pocket watch's abnormality had likely started on Rue Ancienne. Moreover, there had been changes in Salle de Bal Unique's Amons. These were reasons to be cautious.

Lumian stowed his pocket watch away. When the public carriage came to a stop, he swiftly disembarked and turned into a nearby street, keeping a vigilant eye on the people and animals passing by.

He changed public carriages three times, each leading to different destinations, attempting to identify and elude any potential pursuers.

This was the self-cultivation of a Hunter.

After completing this elaborate process, Lumian entered a department store. He placed the satchel containing the Flog boxing gloves in a public washroom cubicle, put on his Lie earring, and reverted to his original appearance.

He also swapped his brown jacket for a dark vest that he had kept in his satchel, transforming himself back into Ciel Dubois as he returned to Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman.

Lumian breathed a sigh of relief after sending the letter to Madam Magician, detailing his experiences with the fugue state, the faint bell chimes, and the alterations in Salle de Bal Unique's guards.

Whenever he visited Rue Ancienne, even though he never encountered a genuine disaster, he always felt an unsettling and inexplicable fear gripping his heart.

The puppet messenger swiftly returned with a reply from Madam Magician.

"Your instincts are keen and accurate.

"The fugue you experienced and the bell chimes you heard were the result of Mr. Fool's Angel of Time. He located his target and obliterated Salle de Bal Unique along with all the Amons in Trier. The reason your pocket watch slowed down by a minute was also a consequence of this clash.

"In the near future, you needn't concern yourself with what Amon might do to you. Nevertheless, you should be aware that dealing with such a Mythical Creature is far from simple, and they cannot be completely annihilated. There are still numerous Amons lurking in the various countries of the Northern and Southern Continents, and a few might even be concealed beneath Trier, beyond the reach of angelic powers."

As Lumian read Madam Magician's response, he was momentarily stunned.

That brief fugue he had experienced indicated a battle on an angelic scale?

Had he not recently calibrated his pocket watch, he might not have gathered any substantial evidence!

And if it weren't for the angelic Termiboros sealed within him, he might have suffered the same fate as Leah—unable to hear the bell or even be in a fugue state!

Is this the might of an angel? The confrontation between the Angel of Time and Amon had not affected the ordinary people in the vicinity. Otherwise, the residents of Rue Ancienne would have died without even realizing it…

The pocket watch had fallen a minute behind… During my momentary fugue, an angel-level battle had unfolded… The Angel of Time, Mr. Fool's Angel of Time, possesses true mastery over time…

Once one crosses the threshold into divinity, their array of abilities take on a mystical quality. The Circle Inhabitant's repetitive loop, the Concealment power of the Evernight pathway, Madam Magician's Door of Starlight, and now the Angel of Time's bell chimes—all of these surpass my wildest imagination… For the first time, Lumian didn't long for the power of a High-Sequence Beyonder solely to resurrect his sister.

It was an innate yearning.

Lumian's spirits lifted at the prospect of no longer living in fear of Amons suddenly emerging from the shadows and thrusting him into peril. He offered genuine praise to Mr. Fool and the Angel of Time, as well as his Major Arcana card holder, Madam Magician.

With a sense of relief, he incinerated the reply and made his way to Apartment 601, 3 Rue des Blouses Blanches.

Franca was waiting for his return with information about the Alone Bar and Loki.

"Good news and bad news. Which one do you want to hear?" he inquired, still grinning, as he closed the door.

Franca sized him up.

"You seem rather cheerful…

"The good news is that you've found leads on Loki?

"The bad news is that we lack the strength to continue investigating?"

"Neither." Lumian seized Franca's reclining chair.

Franca was taken aback. She hadn't expected Lumian to be so shameless.

Before Franca could voice her surprise, Lumian continued, "The good news is that Mr. Fool's Angel of Time has taken action. Salle de Bal Unique and all of Trier's Amons have been wiped out. If Loki shows up at the next gathering, it means he hasn't been Parasitized by an Amon."

"The bad news is that the copy of the information you bought was indeed created using a mechanical typewriter in the cellar of the Alone Bar. However, we can't continue our investigation while in Bureau 8's territory. I'm quite certain that it's Bureau 8's stronghold."

Leah was already working there as a bartender.

Franca's expression shifted between excitement and concern.

"Did you see Mr. Fool's Angel of Time? But why didn't I sense any obvious developments in Trier…

"Indeed, whether Loki is a member of Bureau 8 or not, asking directly about anyone who has recently used that mechanical typewriter will result in us being targeted by Bureau 8. And finding an excuse to use that typewriter to attempt divination with the last user might point to some members of Bureau 8 or even saints.

"There must be a High-Sequence Beyonder overseeing Bureau 8's stronghold diagonally opposite Salle de Bal Unique!"

Franca, her attention diverted to serious matters, forgot to ask Lumian to leave her exclusive seat.

Lumian recounted the minute delay in his pocket watch and Madam Magician's reply, leaving Franca amazed and fascinated.

After mentioning the Angel of Time, Lumian pondered for a moment and said, "Loki didn't conceal his appearance well at the gathering. I suspect he possesses abilities similar to Niese Face or Lie."

Franca nodded.

"If he's truly an official member of Bureau 8, I believe he's a Beyonder of the Seer pathway. He's at least a Sequence 6 Faceless. Your Lie corresponds to this Sequence. Yes, many Beyonders in Bureau 8 are from the Seer pathway."

Above Magician is Faceless? After Lumian obtained Lie, he suspected that it belonged to the Seer pathway, but he didn't know the corresponding Sequence name.

"That's right. This pathway becomes bizarre and difficult to kill after Sequence 7 Magician. It excels at transformations. At Sequence 5, its abilities are even more terrifying. It can silently turn a person into a puppet without a sense of self. Its name is Marionettist." Franca, who had entered the world of mysticism and joined the Tarot Club earlier than Lumian, clearly possessed more information about the pathways of the divine.

After Lumian conversed with Franca about the Seer pathway, the two of them fell into a dilemma about how to find Loki in reality.

Just then, brisk footsteps echoed upstairs before Jenna opened the door to Apartment 601.

She glanced at Lumian, who was sitting in the recliner, and Franca, who was standing beside him, and asked in confusion, "What are you guys talking about?"

"We're pondering over a conundrum," Lumian clarified, informing Jenna that he and Franca were in trouble tracking an enemy with the code name Loki. Finally, he asked, "Any ideas?"

Jenna shook her head in amusement. "You've rejected all the solutions I can think of."

Without waiting for her companions to speak, she said thoughtfully, "Ciel, put yourself in Loki's shoes. Think of yourself as someone who likes to tease others. Think of everything that happened from their perspective and see if you can find any clues. Don't you also like pranks? You should have something in common with them."

My pranks are quite different from theirs… Lumian didn't say it out loud. He tried to recall his motives, thoughts, and changes in mentality during the pranks to analyze the actions and motives of the April Fool's team.

After a moment, he furrowed his brow.

"All pranks are meant to bring joy when the target is embarrassed or suffers a blow. Those people used my sister as a target for pranks, but they can't confirm the final outcome, so it's difficult for them to obtain true joy…

"Similarly, how are they going to track Franca's movements and witness her tragic end by instigating her to explore the underground? You have to know that even if Franca never goes to the mysticism gathering again, she might have encountered an accident due to something else."

The three people in the room pondered this question.

If a prankster failed to witness the end of a prank, they would lack a sense of accomplishment and the expected joy. How could Loki and the others determine Aurore or Franca's encounter?

After a while, Lumian said in a deep voice, "Either the prank is a cover-up, and they have an ulterior motive, or they have a way to monitor the corresponding target."

Franca suddenly felt a chill down her spine and subconsciously surveyed the room.

"What way?" Jenna asked on her behalf.

Lumian shook his head slowly. "I don't know. This might be a lead."

Amidst the alternations between silence and discussion, the three of them couldn't come up with an answer, so they could only put this matter aside for the time being.

On his way back to Salle de Bal Brise, Lumian gazed at the afternoon sun and probed, "Temiboros, can I find Loki through the Prophecy Spell?"

Termiboros's magnificent voice resounded, "After you left Rue Ancienne, if you hadn't done any anti-tracking, you would have encountered Loki."

Chapter 382: Seizing the Opportunity

If I hadn't used anti-tracking, I would have encountered Loki? Lumian was taken aback by Termiboros's response.

All he wanted to know was whether the Prophecy Spell would work against Seer pathway Beyonders. It didn't matter if Termiboros answered or not. As a Contractee, he could answer his own question and acquire a bottle of Prophetic Concoction to test its effects. To his surprise, the Inevitability angel did provide an answer.

Lumian's mind raced as he dissected the information in that sentence.

After leaving Rue Ancienne, Loki had been tailing him for some time!

The source of the copied information had been a trap!

This noon, Loki had been at the Alone Bar!

He deliberately chose the Alone Bar's mechanical typewriter to make a copy of the information. His plan was that anyone chasing him would discover it, allowing him to start tracking the other party, aiming for a lethal strike.

And if the pursuer turned out to be formidable, he could ensure his basic safety by being inside Bureau 8's stronghold. He wouldn't be easily discovered. He could even manipulate Bureau 8, an official organization, to go after the other party.

With this in mind, Lumian felt a mixture of regret and relief.

Regrettably, he hadn't spotted Loki's pursuit after leaving Rue Ancienne until the anti-tracking process was finished. This meant he had "missed" the founder of the April Fool's team. He could have had the chance to discuss Muggle-related matters with him.

But Lumian was also relieved because he wasn't prepared. If he had discovered Loki and was forced to act prematurely, there was a high chance he would have met a tragic end. After all, according to Franca's description, a Sequence 7 Magician possessed many bizarre abilities. As a Marionettist, they could silently eliminate others.

If Loki had launched a surprise attack, Lumian wasn't sure if he would have had the opportunity to use Mr. K's finger. He also wasn't sure if he could have located the real Loki in time and escaped with the Spell of Harrumph.

However, at this moment, regret outweighed relief in his heart.

Lumian's pace toward Salle de Bal Brise involuntarily slowed. He recalled his experience at the Alone Bar at noon.

The bar was dimly lit, and it was well past lunchtime. Besides a couple of inebriated patrons chatting by the window, Leah, disguised as a bartender, appeared to be the only one on the first floor.

From the cellar, which doubled as a marionette theater, he could occasionally hear conversations from different people.

In the room with the mechanical typewriter, a man was reading a newspaper. He remained silent, his gaze fixed on the newspaper. Even when collecting the typing fee, he merely nodded…

Which one of them was Loki? Lumian stopped diagonally across from Salle de Bal Brise, his gaze unfocused.

Clearly, Leah couldn't be Loki. It wasn't due to gender differences but rather her lack of Sequence. According to Franca, Loki had a habit of revealing his appearance as of last year or even earlier. It was suspected that he had advanced to Faceless, and Leah was only a Sequence 7 Magician a few months ago.

In the lifelike dream, she likely couldn't conceal her specific Sequence.

Lumian's suspicion gradually settled on the man who was engrossed in reading the newspaper and watching the typewriter.

He has the ability to use the mechanical typewriter to duplicate information at will. It would be easy for him to notice if any strangers borrowed the typewriter…

Lumian carefully recalled the man's appearance and realized he was entirely unremarkable. He was in his thirties, with black hair, blue eyes, and an average appearance, dressed in a plain black suit like any common clerk.

Moreover, a Marionettist can create marionettes. The man might just be one of those marionettes, not Loki, which is why he remained silent and pretended to read the newspaper…

But if a Marionettist can control people, can they also turn rats, cockroaches, bedbugs, and other creatures into marionettes?

In that case, the possibilities are endless. Every living thing in the Alone Bar could potentially be Loki…

How could I ever hope to find him? What a vexing individual. Though his manifestations differed from those of the Amons, they are equally vexing!

It's only thanks to the angel trapped within me, Mr. Fool's seal, and the Blood Emperor's aura that I could evade a Marionettist—a Seer Beyonder—so far. Relying solely on anti-tracking and Lie likely wouldn't be enough to escape Loki's grasp…

How frustrating. The Alone Bar is Bureau 8's stronghold. I can't simply flush the real Loki out with a broad sweep… The more Lumian contemplated it, the more exasperated he became.

Having successfully eluded pursuit, it seemed nearly impossible to bait Loki with a similar ploy. Anyone with a modicum of intelligence would smell a trap in this recurring situation.

What's worse, frequent visits to the Alone Bar would undoubtedly attract Bureau 8's attention, further complicating matters.

Lumian took a deep breath, exhaling slowly, forcing himself to regain his composure.

He concentrated on his analysis of Loki.

According to Anthony's theory, Loki and most members of the April Fool's team have high opinions of themselves. Otherwise, after experiencing despair for the future, they wouldn't seek solace in pranks. They would indulge in their desires and the pleasures of life…

Is it possible to lure such a person into a trap they believe they had outsmarted?

Lumian dismantled and reassembled various pieces of information in his mind, searching for a viable solution.

His frustration grew, and he longed to storm into the Alone Bar and eliminate everyone except Leah.

Then, an idea struck Lumian.

While it might not form a direct plan against Loki, it could serve as a means to probe the situation at the Alone Bar, uncover exploitable details, and gather information. Additionally, it would provide an outlet for his emotions and anger, and perhaps even earn him some money.

After careful consideration, Lumian turned around and made his way towards Rue Anarchie.

…

Auberge du Coq Doré, Room 401.

Lumian pushed open the unlatched door, where he found the bankrupt merchant, Fitz, sitting at a wooden table, dipping a long, stick-like rye bread into a thick, sticky soup.

Fitz glanced back, placing the food aside, and stood up, clearly confused and somewhat panicked.

"Monsieur Ciel, what's the matter?"

The bankrupt merchant's brown hair appeared greasy, yet he stubbornly maintained a semblance of tidiness. His dark-brown eyes and smile lines gave him a naturally ingratiating appearance.

In contrast to their previous encounter, Fitz's clothes now bore a bit of dirt, as if he hadn't had the time to clean them.

Lumian cut to the chase, his tone blunt.

"Can you provide evidence that Timmons owes you 100,000 verl d'or? The owner of Salle de Bal Unique."

Fitz's eyes lit up.

"Yes! I have a contract for our joint venture. It clearly states that he agreed to repurchase his shares within a specified time frame, along with paying me 100,000 verl d'or and the corresponding profits.

"Monsieur Ciel, you don't need to use Salle de Bal Unique to jog my memory about Timmons. I curse that scoundrel a hundred times a day!

"Monsieur Ciel, do you believe there's a chance of recovering my money?"

Lumian's lips curled up.

"This could be your once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. If you miss it, you may never see that money again."

Salle de Bal Unique was at its most vulnerable!

Without the Amons, it was now inhabited solely by humans with varying degrees of mutation!

Fitz was a mix of excitement and apprehension upon hearing this. He hastily retrieved the valuable contract and handed it over to Lumian.

While he didn't entirely trust the mob leader, he had no choice but to place his hopes in him, praying that Lumian would return with good news.

…

Quartier de l'Observatoire, Rue Ancienne.

Lumian changed his appearance and clothes. He walked towards Salle de Bal Unique in a shirt, vest, top hat, and thin formal suit.

He encountered a guard sporting a monocle on his right eye and dressed in a short black suit, who obstructed his path.

"Monsieur, you must wear a monocle to enter our dance hall."

Lumian responded with a smile.

"Monette introduced me here. He mentioned that I don't need to wear a monocle on my right eye, like you gentlemen."

The two guards exchanged meaningful glances and exchanged knowing smiles.

"Then it's not an issue."

From their appearances, it seems they are well aware of the consequences of being invited by Monette. They might even have been influenced by Monette's devious personality and secretly are faithful to Amon. Unfortunately, they remain oblivious to the fact that Salle de Bal Unique is no longer the same as they remembered. Lumian sneered inwardly and decided to seek out someone most resembling Amon later, intent on shattering their monocle with a punch.

This act was both a release of his pent-up anger and fear from being manipulated and intimidated by Amon, and a means to catch the attention of the Alone Bar. After all, how would they know that someone could reclaim the money from Timmons?

It was already evening, and gas wall lamps and stained-glass chandeliers illuminated Salle de Bal Unique's dance hall.

Dancers in monocles and short suits swayed on the dance floor while others leaned against the railings with glasses of wine, wearing smiles as they observed others dancing. Musicians played violins and the clarinet in one corner, contributing to the lively atmosphere.

It appeared as though nothing unusual had occurred here.

After observing for a while, Lumian made his way to the stairs leading to the second floor.

The guard with a monocle, stationed at the top of the stairs, extended his right hand to block Lumian's path.

He asked with an inscrutable smile, "Who are you here to see?"

Lumian maintained a relaxed demeanor as he replied, "I'm here to collect some debts from Timmons."

"Then you can't proceed upstairs," the monocled guard retorted, his tone almost amused, as if he were witnessing a comedy.

Lumian's lips curled into a radiant smile.

Bang!

His left fist connected with the guard's face, sending the monocle flying. It crashed to the ground with a resounding crack.

Chapter 383: "Forced Storming"

Amidst the sound of the monocle falling and sliding, the guard tilted his head, surprise and confusion crossing his face.

His reaction was rather bizarre. He didn't react with anger or call for backup. It was as though he considered what had just happened a part of some performance filled with mystery.

Lumian passed by with a smile, heading up the stairs without a second glance.

The guard's expression flickered, but he eventually gave up trying to intervene.

Still filled with puzzlement and thought, his eyes darted around, and a strange, anticipatory grin played on his lips, as if he expected something thrilling.

As Lumian reached the second floor, the two guards with monocles simply watched him pass without hindrance. They wore similar enigmatic and expectant smiles.

No Low-Sequence Beyonders? Lumian muttered, disappointed.

He had braced himself for a confrontation, something to showcase for the Alone Bar across the street. But, to his surprise, the other fake Amons in the Salle de Bal Unique were just regular folks. None of them seemed inclined to engage with him.

It made sense, though. Amon wasn't like Mr. Fool or the Great Mother, capable of granting large-scale boons to believers. As for the Low- and

Mid-Sequence Beyonders, they had likely been dealt with. In the undetectable angelic struggle, they might have been eliminated.

The remaining individuals probably had no idea that the dance hall had turned unusual, and many of their colleagues had vanished without a trace. They likely believed that Lumian was about to join them or go mad from some sort of prank.

With no imposter Amon to confront, Lumian had no option but to improvise and enact the situation himself.

He pulled his revolver from its holster and nonchalantly fired at the rooms on both sides of the corridor.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Each bullet hit a window with precision, the shattering glass echoing through the hall, accompanied by gunshots.

The second-floor guards were both surprised and perplexed by Lumian's actions. They suspected that he had been repeatedly fooled by a coworker, leading to a mental breakdown.

Otherwise, why would he be taking on the air and windows?

Instinctively, the guards raised their right hands to adjust their monocles in their eyes. Their expressions became increasingly eager, as if they were anticipating the climax of this thriller.

Go, confront the iceberg beneath the sea and the fear lurking in the darkness!

After firing four shots, Lumian reached the largest office.

He pushed the slightly ajar door open and found a man seated behind a massive wooden desk.

The man had a wide forehead and narrow cheeks. His dark, slightly curly hair framed his face, and his light-blue eyes seemed unfocused.

He also sported a crystal-like monocle over his right eye and wore a loose, comfortable black robe.

"Timmons?" Lumian inquired, entering with a furrowed brow.

The man snapped out of his daze and responded with a sense of disappointment, as if he had lost something precious.

"I'm Timmons."

"You're not dead yet?" Lumian asked, both surprised and amused.

As far as he knew, the other members of Salle de Bal Unique were in a state of being Amon and not Amon. However, Timmons, the boss here, must have been deeply parasitized. Such a person should have perished in the angelic-level battle, losing his life.

But that wasn't the case.

Timmons glanced at Lumian, maintaining the frustration and emptiness of someone who had lost their soul.

"Many people wish me dead, but they don't seem to have the power to curse me.

"Perhaps I'm already dead. All that's left is a shell."

"That's not important. What matters is that you return my client's 110,000 verl d'or, along with the interest," Lumian stated as he retrieved the contract from his satchel with his left hand, courtesy of the bankrupt merchant, Fitz.

He anticipated Timmons' rejection of his request and an ensuing confrontation.

Timmons shook off his despondency, raised a hand to his forehead, and smiled.

"There's cash and accessories in the safe. Help yourself. The password is 010103."

"I thought you'd put up a fight." Lumian sighed in disappointment.

Timmons gazed at the revolver in Lumian's hand and remarked, "I'm just a swindler, not a miser. I can swindle others again when I'm out of money. But if I'm dead, there's nothing left.

"Besides, I've already lost the most important thing today. Compared to that, 110,000 verl d'or is nothing."

What do you mean you can swindle others if you're out of money? Haven't you ever considered becoming wealthy through legal means? Lumian pursed his lips and made his way towards the mechanical safe in the office.

Three, two, one… As he approached the safe, he counted down, expecting Timmons to launch a surprise attack from behind.

Yet, the owner of Salle de Bal Unique remained motionless. He didn't cry out for help or attempt to summon the police.

Lumian crouched in front of the iron-gray mechanical safe. Using the password provided by Timmons, he twisted the knob repeatedly until he heard a satisfying click.

He glanced at the banknotes and gold bars that clearly exceeded 100,000 verl d'or, opened his satchel, and collected them all.

With that task completed, Lumian raised his revolver, shattered the office window, and climbed out.

Timmons's lips curled into a playful smile, one shared by everyone present.

However, at that moment, Lumian unexpectedly spun around and pulled the trigger.

Bang!

A yellow bullet grazed Timmons's hair and embedded itself into a cabinet nearby.

The monocle-wearing Timmons's body tensed, and his smile disappeared. His eyes were filled with bewilderment.

He even caught a whiff of something burning above his head.

Lumian grinned and waved his hand.

"Surprised?"

With that, he leaped off the windowsill and landed in the alley behind Salle de Bal Unique.

Timmons's expression gradually shifted, now marked by confusion and bewilderment.

Inside Salle de Bal Unique, the dancers with monocles on their right eyes and short suits went about their business, eagerly awaiting the intruder's descent, imagining him donning a monocle and officially joining their ranks.

However, amid the intermittent gunshots, they failed to witness the spectacle they had anticipated.

…

Near Place du Purgatoire in Rue Ancienne, there was a bell tower belonging to the Eternal Blazing Sun Cathedral. Adjacent to the bell tower stood a newly constructed ten-story building.

Franca, disguised as a typical female mercenary, positioned herself at the rooftop's edge with a brass telescope, her gaze fixed on the Alone Bar in the distance.

Amidst the distant echoes of gunshots, Leah, the bartender clad in a white shirt, black bow tie, and a dark knee-length dress, emerged at the bar's entrance, her eyes directed towards Salle de Bal Unique, situated diagonally across from her.

Before long, Franca observed gray rats emerging from beside Leah's feet. These rats crossed the street and disappeared beside the ancient building.

After another two to three minutes, a man and a woman exited the Alone Bar, pushing their way through the guards and entering Salle de Bal Unique.

Franca scrutinized the pair through her telescope and noticed that their expressions seemed animated and their movements agile when they "interacted" with the guards. However, as they crossed the street and passed by the guards, their expressions grew stiffer, and their movements became somewhat robotic.

Marionettes? Franca speculated.

As for the whereabouts of the Marionettist who created and controlled these marionettes, she couldn't discern it at all. The only thing she could deduce was that the effective range of this ability spanned dozens of meters, if not more.

Simultaneously, she couldn't help but complain, When there are people, they appear as 'real people.' But when there's nobody around, the Marionettist can't be bothered to maintain their facial expressions and character details? Isn't this too unprofessional?

Or perhaps it's a tactic to intimidate occasional onlookers and passersby who happen to catch a glimpse?

Franca maintained her vigil until Lumian had returned to his original form, changed his attire, and completed his anti-tracking measures. Even then, she couldn't spot the Marionettist when he met up with her.

Other than Leah, everyone else appeared to be marionettes!

Franca conveyed her frustration to Lumian, "Isn't this level of caution and meticulousness excessive? I couldn't find anything conclusive. All I can confirm is that there's definitely a Marionettist here, and it's highly likely that there's more than one."

Just hearing her account made Lumian's head ache, much like when dealing with Amon.

Could it be that they became "neighbors" because they excelled at concealing their true forms and were exceptionally elusive and hard to uncover?

"Is there no way to use Magic Mirror Divination to gather some clues?" Lumian pondered briefly before inquiring.

Franca gently shook her head in response.

"This is the Seer pathway. Unless I can directly possess one of the marionettes, I won't be able to locate their true bodies."

Lumian fell silent as he gazed at the now tranquil Salle de Bal Unique.

"Let's head back. At the next gathering, we'll gather information from I Know Someone, Hisoka, and Bard. They shouldn't be as elusive as Loki. We can still pretend to be duped and see if we can draw them out."

When the time came, Hidden Blade couldn't step forward; Muggle would have to handle it herself. Franca had already purchased a copy of Loki's information and was among the potential suspects.

"Agreed," Franca concurred, realizing that this was their best course of action.

The two of them promptly departed from the high-rise apartment and secured a four-wheeled, four-seater rental carriage.

As the carriage reached the intersection between Quartier de l'Observatoire and Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative, Franca turned to Lumian.

"Aren't you going to perform another anti-tracking procedure?"

"Wouldn't relying on your anti-divination skills be sufficient?" Lumian responded with a smile. "Besides, after leaving Salle de Bal Unique, I've already undertaken several anti-tracking measures."

Franca stared at him for a couple of seconds before letting out a resigned sigh.

"Fine."

…

Avenue du Marché, market district.

Lumian, carrying a satchel filled with banknotes and gold, said his goodbyes to Franca and proceeded towards Rue Anarchie. Franca, on the other hand, headed back to Rue des Blouses Blanches.

Rue Anarchie was as lively and crowded as ever. Lumian weaved his way through vendors and pedestrians, drawing closer to Auberge du Coq Doré.

Suddenly, he experienced an unsettling sensation. His body seemed to lose coordination, as if someone had injected glue into his joints.

Chapter 384: Stagnation

Not good! Lumian was both a Hunter and a Dancer, and his mastery over his body was amazing. Any unfamiliar or abnormal situation immediately triggered his instincts, alerting him to potential danger.

But in that critical moment, his thoughts seemed to slow down, shrouded in a dense fog. Each idea froze, demanding tremendous effort to clear.

I've been attacked…

Loki is really… here…

Is this… the performance… of a Marionettist's abilities?

As it nears the end… I won't be able… to think… Will I… become his… marionette?

My sense of danger… is clouded…

Dammit… Termi… boros, it's impossible… that you didn't notice… the changes in my fate… You didn't… warn me…

Did He intentionally tell me… that Loki… nearly tracked me… to make me do it again?

Me becoming Loki's… puppet… aids… Him in escaping… the seal?

I can't just… wait like this… I must resist with all my might…

Where is… Loki…?

In these fragmented thoughts, Lumian strained to move. His hand found its way into his pocket, and he surveyed his surroundings with stiffness.

Previously, he and Franca had discussed the limitations of the Marionettist's power. They agreed that it must have a certain range or require proximity. Otherwise, it would exceed the capabilities of a Sequence 5 and only be within the realm of a saint who had transcended into godhood. Those from different pathways that Franca knew couldn't resist it at all.

The duo believed that this ability either required a certain medium or could only be activated at a close distance. Just like the Ring of Punishment's Psychic Piercing, it could only be effective if the distance between them was reduced to five meters.

Lumian suspected Loki was hiding nearby in the crowd, perhaps no more than ten meters away.

What greeted his eyes were street vendors and passersby. Some of their faces were familiar, while others were unfamiliar. They were no different from usual.

In his haste, Lumian couldn't discern Loki among them. Adding to the challenge, Loki was a Faceless, skilled in transformation and disguise.

As Lumian continued his search for Loki, a crimson flame manifested in his left palm.

His motives were twofold: first, to test his ability to resist a Marionettist's control and invasion by inflicting pain upon himself, and second, to set a question and observe how Loki would respond. By studying Loki's reactions, he hoped to glean insights into Loki's exact whereabouts and weaknesses in his marionette-making abilities.

But just as the searing pain coursed through his mind, Lumian heard a distinct snap.

Instantly, the crimson flame in his palm dissipated into a harmless stream of light, unable to form anything explosive.

Lumian spun around, trying to identify the source of the snapping of fingers.

However, his joints had become encased in a sticky "glue," and his movements grew increasingly rigid and sluggish.

This delay caused him to turn a second slower than he intended. Everyone within his line of sight appeared normal, and he couldn't pinpoint who had snapped their fingers.

Marionettist… is indeed capable… of Flame Controlling…

Pain… doesn't… help much… in the slowdown of my thoughts… and stiffening of my body… It only… marginally… increased… my reaction speed…

I can't… waste time… on such matters… The most important thing… now… is to find… Loki. Otherwise… whether I use… the Spell of Harrumph… summon Mr. K… or wait for… Franca to save me… wouldn't… significantly change… the situation…

I wonder… if spirit world traversal… can be used… If… the next… two or three attempts… fail… I'll… give it a try… and see if I can teleport out… of a Marionettist's… ability range…

Lumian's thoughts grew increasingly sluggish, but they weren't to the point where he couldn't think, react, or dodge any attack.

Soon, with his rich combat experience, he came up with an idea.

From the… current situation… a Marionettist… indeed needs… to be at close range… to gradually transform… their target… into a marionette…

In that… case… I'll make sure… there's no one… or animals… within a ten-meter… radius!

Whoever… lingers… within the Inferno Hell… shall be Loki!

Once Lumian understood the situation, he immediately opened his mouth and shouted, "There… is… a… fire!"

Crimson flames surged from Lumian's body as he finished his staccato sentence.

With his feet as the center, they spread out, igniting the fruit peels and litter on the ground.

Alerted by Lumian's warning, nearby street vendors and pedestrians swiftly gathered their belongings and fled toward the ends of Rue Anarchie upon seeing the rising flames.

Seeing their hasty retreat, Lumian's sluggish smile emerged.

Yes, you can use Flame Controlling, but I'm not going to do any delicate maneuvers now. My only move is to constantly ignite the surrounding things and increase the variety of fire sources!

Moreover, this will inevitably draw the attention of official Beyonders!

Crimson flames expanded in all directions, resembling a vibrant ocean gradually consuming the earth.

Despite his faltering gaze, Lumian still managed to catch a glimpse of a figure flickering within the flames—a figure with black hair, blue eyes, and an ordinary face, blending in with the crowd of clerks on the road.

…

After bidding Lumian farewell, Franca made her way toward Rue des Blouses Blanches.

However, her journey took an unexpected turn as she suddenly veered into an alley, disappearing into the shadows.

This Demoness of Pleasure began to stealthily make her way toward Rue Anarchie.

This was her prior agreement with Lumian.

If their initial plan of barging into Salle de Bal Unique failed to provoke the Beyonders in the Alone Bar or have them reveal themselves, they had a backup plan—a kind of "fishing" expedition after leaving Rue Ancienne to see if they could "encounter" their target.

Franca's earlier inquiry about Lumian's intention to engage in counter-tracking was essentially confirming if they should stick to their original strategy. Lumian's response had been affirmative.

As Franca approached Rue Anarchie, she retrieved a mirror from the shadows.

This mirror was a Mirror Substitution, crafted using Lumian's blood and hair!

While it couldn't be used as a substitute for death or injury at this distance, it had a profound mystical connection to the original body. It could be employed to monitor Lumian's general condition.

In simple terms, if the mirror were to suddenly shatter, it would signal that Lumian had met his demise. If it displayed a few deep cracks, it would indicate that Lumian had suffered severe injuries.

Likewise, Franca had placed a Mirror Substitution on Lumian. This precaution was taken because they were uncertain whom Loki might target after their separation. They had no choice but to conceal themselves in the shadows and continue their activities. Through Mirror Substitution, they could keep tabs on each other's well-being and provide timely assistance.

This method was more reliable than attempting to discern changes in luck, as Loki possessed formidable anti-divination abilities and could manipulate fate after making decisions.

Franca, deep in her stealthy advancement, was suddenly alerted as the mirror in her hand grew icy cold.

Utilizing her Dark Vision, she pierced through the shadows and witnessed the mirror's transformation into a lifeless gray, as if it had rusted or been submerged in the depths of an icy lake.

Ciel is under attack? Franca's heart tightened as she quickened her pace.

Upon reaching Rue Anarchie, she was met with the sight of spreading flames. Within the crimson inferno, a figure flickered intermittently. Occasionally, it opened its mouth, producing a sharp bang.

It sounded like a real gunshot, causing vendors and pedestrians to scatter in fear, believing a violent gunfight between the mobs was unfolding.

Lumian, on the other hand, struggled to evade the attacks, but he failed twice. The Air Bullets grazed his body, leaving noticeable wounds.

However, it was clear that the figure didn't truly intend to harm him. It seemed more concerned about the potential complications that injuries might cause before a specific juncture.

Relieved that Lumian was relatively unscathed, Franca retreated into the shadows and approached the battlefield cautiously. As she drew nearer, she retrieved a mirror and,

disengaging from the shadows, directed the mirror toward the clusters of flames. Her right hand became enshrouded in zero-temperature black flames.

When the figure appeared in the mirror's reflection, Franca swiftly ran her right hand across the mirror's surface.

Silently, the figure burst into pitch-black flames.

He swiftly thinned and shrank, transforming into an intricately cut paper figurine.

Among the crowd, roughly ten to twenty meters away, an unusually ordinary-looking man clad in a black suit emerged.

Lumian's thoughts snapped back to full speed, and his body shook off the stiffness that had hindered him.

In a flash, he vanished from his previous position and reappeared just seven meters away from the suspected Loki.

Lumian then exclaimed, "Hmph!"

A brilliant beam of white light shot forth from his nostrils, targeting the ordinary-looking man with black hair and blue eyes.

Simultaneously, Franca acted in perfect coordination. She conjured a transparent ice spear and hurled it toward their target.

Upon piercing the ground, white frost rapidly spread from the impact, chilling those nearby and causing their bodies to stiffen.

At that very moment, a thin-faced passerby with brown hair and brown eyes interposed himself between Lumian and the suspected Loki, intercepting the white beam created by Lumian.

He appeared unharmed, his blank eyes gazing upwards as he began to sing an aria.

"Oh, my Sun!"

In an instant, it was as if a blinding sun had risen within the minds of Lumian, Franca, and others nearby, rendering their thoughts sluggish.

Instinctively, the duo moved to evade, with one either retreating into the shadows while encasing herself in a crystalline and resilient frost or rolling to the side of the road and using the Niese Face to alter his appearance.

When the intense sunlight eventually receded, they found that both the man suspected to be Loki and the "passerby" singing the aria had vanished into thin air.

Fearful glances from vendors and passersby were directed their way. Those closest to the spectacle had shut their eyes tightly, tears streaming down their faces.

Chapter 385: Before and After Comparison

Lumian swiftly assessed the surroundings, taking in the scattered gas street lamps and their flickering crimson flames. In the distance, figures moved about cautiously, but none dared to draw near. The individuals up ahead couldn't even open their eyes due to the blinding glare of the "sun."

In this situation, whether it was the suspected Loki or the "passerby" who had sung that aria, there was no sign of either of them.

"Son of a sow, did they just vanish into thin air?" Lumian couldn't help but curse under his breath, his anxiety and anger mounting.

Had they fled without even engaging in a proper battle?

Did they disengage once a single strike failed?

"Dammit, were you born in the year of the rat? Slippery as eels, and they vanish at the drop of a hat!" Franca cursed as she approached Lumian, using a peculiar phrase that seemed like a translation. "The Seer and Marauder pathways are truly interchangeable. Their styles are too damn similar, aren't they?"

This was primarily evident in their inability to strike or capture the primary target.

The key difference was that the Seer pathway started behaving this way from Sequence 7, while the Marauder pathway might have to wait until they reached Sequence 4 to exhibit such traits.

Lumian's mind raced as he pondered how to track down Loki and his marionette.

Perhaps they had already made their escape, or maybe they were lurking somewhere in the evening streets of Rue Anarchie!

A marionette…

Yes, that aria-singing marionette had taken my Spell of Harrumph head-on without flinching. That suggests there's a high chance it's already dead. No active, conscious Spirit Body…

My near-transformation into a marionette confirms this indirectly…

If the marionette is dead, it probably doesn't possess the fate of a living being. No so-called luck. Even if there is, it's locked in darkness. That spells death…

If we can't locate Loki, who possesses Faceless powers, maybe we can start with his marionette!

With this plan in mind, Lumian concentrated, carefully observing the destiny of the people standing more than ten to twenty meters away.

He scanned everything that had a destiny and wasn't shrouded in darkness.

After a rapid survey, Lumian couldn't identify any potential marionette targets.

He let out a slow, disappointed sigh.

"Let's get out of here. The firefighters are on their way. Official Beyonders should be arriving soon," Franca warned Lumian.

Lumian withdrew his gaze and left Rue Anarchie before the crimson flames could be extinguished.

His intention was to take a circuitous route back to Auberge du Coq Doré. There, he would return the scammed funds he had obtained from Salle de

Bal Unique to the bankrupt merchant, Fitz, and claim his share as agreed.

After taking a dozen steps, Lumian suddenly remembered Monsieur Ruhr, who had succumbed to illness, and Madame Michel, who had hanged herself while singing the Capital of Joy.

He feared that he might unwittingly bring a catastrophe involving Beyonder powers to Auberge du Coq Doré and his entrustee, Fitz.

Aurore had portrayed despicable and deranged criminals in two of her novels. They relished beginning their torment with those their targets held dear, forcing them to witness the tragic deaths of their friends one by one.

As the leader of April Fool's, Loki took pleasure in manipulating others' minds. He had no qualms about harming his comrades, let alone murdering innocent people he had never met. Therefore, the likelihood was high that he would commence with Lumian's acquaintances and employ their deaths to shatter Lumian's psyche. He would secretly revel in watching Lumian descend into madness before seizing the opportunity to end his life.

Though it was only a possibility, Lumian refused to take the risk. He halted and turned towards Avenue du Marché.

"What's the matter?" Franca inquired, her expression one of confusion.

Having regained his composure, Lumian flashed a reassuring smile and replied, "Let's grab a drink at Salle de Bal Brise."

The fate of the mobsters he frequently associated with was of lesser concern. Mobsters knew they had to be prepared for such eventualities!

Franca was momentarily taken aback but quickly grasped Lumian's underlying worry.

Loki had hooked a big fish but failed to capture it. It was clear he had seen through their true appearances. He could hide in the shadows and wait for the perfect moment. As for Lumian and herself, unless they abandoned their current identities and used their anti-divination and anti-tracking abilities to survive elsewhere, they would be left in a state of constant suspicion, fearing that any rat they saw might attack them.

Compared to Auberge du Coq Doré, the second floor of Salle de Bal Brise offered a quieter and more defensible location.

Furthermore, in the event of a Beyonder-level confrontation, it was better to involve mobsters rather than innocent bystanders.

"I'll change my attire as well," Franca hinted, indicating her desire to alter her appearance and remain hidden in the shadows, making it difficult for Loki to locate her and launch any potential attacks.

Similarly, she intended to have Jenna return home and stay with her brother for a while to avoid becoming collateral damage.

In the face of such a bizarre and terrifying adversary, the survivability of an Instigator remained too fragile.

Lumian gently patted the concealed Franca's Mirror Substitution hidden beneath his clothing with his right hand, signaling the need for them to watch each other's backs.

Franca nodded solemnly, affirming her understanding of the situation.

…

Salle de Bal Brise, the café on the second floor.

Lumian settled at the far end near the window and turned to his bodyguard, Sarkota.

"Go to Auberge du Coq Doré and fetch a bankrupt merchant named Fitz."

With such an intermediary, Fitz would appear to have achieved his objectives through his association with the Savoie Mob, and there was no direct connection to Ciel Dubois. If Loki intended to select a victim, he would likely focus on the Savoie Mob members affiliated with Lumian.

With the weighty satchel resting on his lap, Lumian patiently awaited Fitz's arrival while contemplating the Loki-related issues at hand.

Having lost track of the April Fool's leader, Lumian was left with only certain phenomena to guide him in this matter.

One of the details was an option Lumian had predetermined before taking action.

If Loki had indeed taken the bait, why did I manage to elude this April Fool's leader's tracking abilities using anti-tracking techniques in my previous encounter but not this time?

Upon leaving Salle de Bal Unique, Lumian had intentionally followed the same anti-tracking procedures as before. He reverted to his original appearance, changed his clothing, and modified his satchel. However, as he traversed Rue Ancienne again and reunited with Franca, he refrained from employing any anti-tracking measures. This was done to establish a comparative sample and identify any discrepancies.

After all, if he failed to capture the bizarre and seemingly unkillable Loki, his efforts would be in vain.

He needed to gain something valuable from this encounter.

This was a smaller trap concealed within a larger one.

Logically, if my anti-tracking procedures had shaken off Loki previously, there should be no reason for an exception this time. I had meticulously paid attention to the people and creatures around me, even avoiding the watchful eyes of birds in the sky. Even if a mere insect became one of Loki's marionettes, it would struggle to keep up with my swiftness…

Therefore, either Franca had been targeted early in the morning, or Loki recognized me when I passed through Rue Ancienne again after my anti-tracking.

Franca carried out anti-divination procedures and was a distance away from the Alone Bar and Salle de Bal Unique. She didn't even enter Rue Ancienne and had used non-mystical methods to observe. It's unlikely that she'll be exposed so quickly unless Loki was aware from the outset that such an observer would be present…

The likeliest scenario was that Loki had recognized me when I passed through Rue Ancienne again after my anti-tracking procedures. But how had this recognition occurred? I had reverted to my original appearance, altered my clothing, and even chosen to pass through in a rented carriage to avoid suspicion. According to Anthony, this should have concealed my unchanged leather shoes from prying eyes and hidden my typical gait and body language…

I had even applied cologne to mask my original scent…

What unique characteristics do I possess that allows Loki to discern my identity within such a brief period?

Lumian compared the differences and gradually arrived at a hypothesis.

Either a Marionettist or one of his marionettes possesses the ability to directly identify a person at the level of their soul, consciousness, or some other aspect, or Loki can perceive distinctive traits that set me apart from others—such as Inevitability's angel, Mr. Fool's seal, or the Blood Emperor's aura?

Although Lie belongs to the Seer pathway, it does not have a readily detectable convergence force that corresponds to Loki's Sequence…

The more Lumian pondered, the more convinced he became that Loki had a means of piercing his disguise, but his tracking abilities were limited. A vigilant target who remained wary of strangers, animals, birds, and insects while being impossible to carry out any direct divination would successfully evade him.

Regardless of how Loki told him apart, this was the best explanation when carrying out the before-and-after comparison.

With this in mind, Lumian had a new idea.

Lumian's lips curled slightly as he cast his gaze toward the dark night sky.

Fifteen minutes later, Fitz, the bankrupt merchant, was brought into the café by Sarkota

Lumian signaled for Sarkota to step aside momentarily and addressed Fitz, "I've already recovered the money. How much do you think you should receive?"

As he spoke, Lumian emptied the banknotes, gold coins, and valuable accessories onto the table, his eyes briefly scanning over them.

"About 130,000 verl d'or in total."

Fitz blurted out, "60,000, no, 50,000. No, just give me 30,000 verl d'or."

With a smile, Lumian separated a few bundles of neatly bound banknotes and tossed them to Fitz.

"As we agreed, the interest belongs to me, and I'll take 50% of the principal. Here's 50,000 verl d'or."

Fitz accepted the money with gratitude, expressing his heartfelt thanks.

While he didn't receive the full amount, 50,000 verl d'or was a substantial sum that would enable him to start anew with hope in his heart.

50% of the principal along with interest was a fair arrangement!

Lumian was equally pleased. Through the operation facilitated by the Angel of Time by Mr. Fool's side, he had effortlessly gained 50,000 verl d'or in banknotes and 30,000 gold coins.

After all, he had worked so hard to gather gold, but in the end, he only accumulated 75,000 gold.

Deep in thought, he contemplated the idea of purchasing sacrificial offerings from the corresponding domain as a token of gratitude to Mr. Fool and the Angel of Time.

After waiting for over half an hour, Lumian ascended to the bedroom on the second floor. He discarded his satchel and employed Lie to alter his appearance once more, assuming the likeness of a male Aurore with black hair and brown eyes.

He changed into a shirt, vest, trousers, and leather boots, stowed away Lie, and transferred the Flog boxing gloves into his briefcase. He carefully surveyed the scene beyond the window.

Once he confirmed that no humans, rats, or birds were in the vicinity, Lumian pushed open the window and gracefully leaped out, seemingly unaware that Loki might possess the ability to see through his disguise.

Chapter 386: Caution

In the dark and deserted back alley,

Lumian carefully navigated the maze of discarded refuse infested with rats and cockroaches. His movements were deliberate, alternating between rapid dashes and cautious steps, sudden changes in direction, and even a few circles, as if he were evading an unseen pursuer.

Finally, he arrived at Rue des Blouses Blanches and entered the seemingly "abandoned" safe house, whose lease had not yet expired.

Following a process, he pulled the heavy curtains shut and meticulously inspected every corner of the room.

Compared to before, he not only eradicated the bedbugs and routed the rats but he also left no room for tiny, rice-grain-sized flying insects. He demanded absolute cleanliness.

With that done, Lumian seated himself at the table. He smoothed out a sheet of paper and began to write.

"Honorable Madame Hela,

"When I took part in the April Fool's team discussion masquerading as my sister, Muggle, I couldn't help but notice the peculiar reactions of Hisoka, Mad Lady, Bard, and Ultraman upon Muggle's unexpected return after her prolonged absence. I suspect 'I Know Someone' was the psychiatrist Muggle sought in her final moments.

"Simultaneously, they were collaborating with Loki in a ruse, hoping to entice members from other teams to embark on a subterranean quest for the remains of the Ancient Sun God.

"I believe Loki is the de facto leader of April Fool's. If there's anything awry with the others, it undoubtedly concerns him as well. Consequently, I acquired a copy of the Ancient Sun God's information from him and enlisted divination services to examine the mechanical typewriter responsible for producing the text. It happened at the Alone Bar on Rue Ancienne in Trier Quartier de l'Observatoire.

"Following some field investigation, it became apparent that this locale serves as the stronghold for Bureau 8. However, Loki appears to have set his sights on me. I was assaulted in the evening and narrowly escaped becoming his marionette. My escape, though, exposed my true identity to him.

"As I write this letter, I find myself in the safe house I had previously prepared. Nevertheless, I can't be certain whether I have eluded Loki's pursuit.

"I strongly suspect there's something amiss with him. If left unchecked, he could pose a grave threat to the Research Society in the days ahead.

"I hope to receive your assistance."

Lumian felt no shame in laying out his intentions plainly.

His plan was to make himself the bait that would draw Loki out of hiding, while Hela, with her ability to harness Concealment, would lurk in the shadows, ready to deliver the decisive blow to the leader of April Fool's.

Perhaps only Hela, with her superior Sequence and mastery of Concealment, had a chance of evading detection and discovering the true body of their bizarre and unkillable adversary.

After folding the letter, Lumian swiftly arranged the altar and summoned the pure silver skull adorned with pale-white flames in its eye sockets.

…

Franca stealthily made her way back to Apartment 601 at 3 Rue des Blouses Blanches. She used her persuasive abilities to convince Jenna to temporarily vacate the premises for a couple of days.

Only after Jenna repeatedly confirmed that she would be of no assistance did she reluctantly give up her facade of bravery, departing amidst a string of curses.

Quickly, Franca changed into different attire and donned the disguise props she had acquired from Rentas, a member of the Bliss Society, transforming her appearance entirely.

As she applied makeup, she couldn't help but curse fate's mother.

Dammit, I shouldn't have let Jenna go so soon! She's much better at handling these things than me, and her makeup skills are superior.

Such skills were fundamental for an apprentice actress.

With a simple disguise in place, Franca seamlessly shifted between invisibility and concealment within the shadows, weaving her way through the market district.

She made a concerted effort to thwart any attempts at divination and employed anti-tracking techniques learned from Lumian.

Finally, she returned to Rue des Blouses Blanches and entered Building 6.

This was the safe house she had prepared for herself, conveniently overlooking her original residence.

Phew… Franca, having completed all the procedures, heaved a sigh of relief and lay down in the Loen-style recliner.

Simultaneously, she muttered to herself, I've only known Ciel for less than three months. Why does it feel like I've experienced more in this time than in the past year…

Is this guy some sort of jinx reincarnate?

…

In the secure confines of the safe house on Rue des Blouses Blanches, Lumian patiently waited for nearly fifteen minutes. Then, from the abrupt darkness, the pure silver skull's head emerged, clutching a simple folded letter in its skeletal teeth.

"Thank you," Lumian replied habitually, accepting the letter.

If Hela was unwilling to engage with a suspected member of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society, Lumian had no choice but to abandon his current plan and swiftly locate Franca. He would guide her through spirit world traversal to distant locales like the hill district, Quartier Éraste, and other suburbs before returning.

He felt that it was the only way to evade Loki's pursuit or lock-on. Moving openly was out of the question unless he shifted to an entirely different area.

Lumian unfolded the paper and discovered that Hela's response was succinct: "Got it."

A wry smile curled at the corners of Lumian's mouth as he conjured crimson flames from his hand, igniting the reply.

Without delay, he restored the table's surface to its ordinary state and reverted to his original appearance, aided by the Lie earring.

Next, Lumian extinguished the carbide lamp and reclined on the bed, closing his eyes and feigning slumber.

As minutes slipped away, night settled in, and Rue des Blouses Blanches descended into stillness.

The crimson moonlight filtered through heavy curtains, casting a subdued, eerie glow within the room.

After an indeterminate span of time, a small, grayish-black figure emerged from a concealed crevice in the corner—a nondescript rat.

Soundlessly and stealthily, the rat approached the table, ascending its surface. It moved about with deliberate intent, as if surveying its territory for any signs of intrusion.

After a brief inspection, it halted its actions and retreated into the shadowy corners untouched by the dim moonlight. Its body now faced the bed.

The rat fixated its gaze upon Lumian with an unnervingly human-like intensity.

It appeared to meld with the darkness, assuming a statue-like stillness, completely immobile and unwavering in its focus on Lumian.

Nearly ten minutes passed, and faint, nearly imperceptible footsteps echoed from the corridor outside the apartment.

Tap, tap, tap. The footsteps drew nearer.

Abruptly, the footsteps vanished as if they had never been or had come to a standstill at some unseen juncture.

The rat retreated from the shadowy realm untouched by the crimson moonlight, traversing the table and vanishing through the same crevice it had emerged from.

With swiftness, it disappeared, leaving the room in an even deeper silence, broken only by the faint sound of Lumian's slow, rhythmic breathing.

Lumian didn't open his eyes. His body was very relaxed, as if he had truly fallen asleep.

…

6 Rue des Blouses Blanches, in an apartment.

Franca reclined in the recliner, swaying back and forth with the chair.

Troubled, she pondered what to do next. With such a bizarre and terrifying foe lurking in the shadows, the constant sense of being watched had left her restless, and she couldn't find solace whether sitting or standing.

I need to resolve this quickly. One can be a thief for a thousand days, but how can you guard against a thief for a thousand days? One misstep, and it's all over…

Why don't I abandon the mission and relocate? Or I can go all out and ask Madam Judgment for help to apprehend Loki under the pretext that the mission will likely fail. It's feasible, but I'll shoulder a debt that I won't be able to repay until I become a demigod. Even if Ciel takes half of it, it'll be a heavy burden…

We can also ask Madam Hela to convene an emergency gathering and accuse Loki and the others of causing Muggle's death on the spot. We can request that we find reliable members to interrogate each other and see which side is lying. Uh, we can't be entirely sure if there's really something wrong with Loki and the others, but it's certain that I colluded with an outsider and lured in a spy…

The more Franca thought about it, the more frustrated she became. She used proverbs from her homeland and didn't deliberately change it.

Suddenly, an overwhelming sense of danger gripped her, and simultaneously, an eerie chill crawled up her spine.

Her body stiffened, and a figure reflected in her lake-like eyes.

Clad in a short black formal suit typical of clerks, with neatly combed brown hair, a face bearing Southern Continent heritage, and dull green eyes…

Wraith! The word flashed through her mind as she recognized the nature of the impending attack.

Franca's thoughts became hazy, and her right hand instinctively rose, as if resisting an unseen force.

She channeled the spirituality within her Soul Body, preparing to unleash the black flames of a Demoness.

This ability targeted a Spirit Body and was capable of incinerating Wraiths. Demonesses possessed a heightened resistance to such flames compared to other pathways, and they could even use injuries to escape or severely harm their adversaries.

At that moment, Franca heard a magnetic voice.

"It's futile. Surrender."

The sound pierced Franca's mind like sharp arrows, interrupting her attempt to condense the black flames.

As soon as the voice faded away, her mind seemed to be shrouded in a thick fog, and a thick frosted glass appeared in front of her.

The voice continued, "I didn't use my full strength in the evening to test the waters. The person impersonating Muggle with a high-level existence sealed in him must possess some special abilities. If I hadn't done my best to gather information, I might have been the one to die.

"After the probe, things got even more interesting. I went to his place just now and felt that it wasn't safe enough. Therefore, I planned to turn you into my marionette and launch a surprise attack.

"Heh heh, do you think you can escape my grasp? There's something special about us. As long as we're within a kilometer of each other, I can use the power of a great existence to sense your location.

"I've long yearned for a Demoness to be my marionette. It'll definitely taste good…"

Franca's Spirit Body was repeatedly affected by the sound, interrupting her efforts to activate Mirror Substitution and condense black flames in advance. Her thoughts became increasingly sluggish, and her joints felt as if they were filled with glue.

Can… Loki… sense… my location?

What's… so special… Why… can he…

Before Franca could piece together any answers or formulate a complete response, the magnetic voice, now with a sinister smile, continued, "I can't waste any more time. I must accelerate to avoid unforeseen complications."

At this point, the voice turned respectful and recited in Franca's unusually familiar language, "The Immortal Lord of Heaven and Earth for Blessings;

"The Sky Lord of Heaven and Earth for Blessings…"

Chapter 387: Vile

In the room with the thick curtains, Lumian suddenly felt the Mirror Substitution inside his clothes turn abnormally cold. Even through the linen shirt, he couldn't help but shiver.

His heart tightened. He couldn't afford to feign sleep anymore. He sat up and took out the mirror.

Beneath the faint crimson moonlight, the mirror lost its luster, its surface resembling ice.

Lumian knew that Franca was in danger. Without hesitation, he activated the mystical connection between the substitute and its true form, emitting a dim light from the black mark on his right shoulder.

In an instant, Lumian vanished from the bed, reappearing in the living room at 6 Rue des Blouses Blanches.

Almost simultaneously, Lumian saw the surroundings engulfed in an eerie grayness, a fog obscuring the crimson moonlight. Franca lay in a recliner, her body contorting as if she fought for survival.

Her lake-colored eyes were filled with a turbulent mix of emotions: anger, fear, anxiety, and worry. A vague figure seemed to encircle her. Her head tried to move, but her movements were restrained by invisible threads.

Suddenly, the sound of nails scraping on a blackboard assaulted their senses, incomprehensible words piercing their Spirit Bodies. Their consciousness soared upward until they reached a dark void shimmering with countless stars.

In the highest reaches of this void, mysterious symbols swirled, their forms beyond description.

They coalesced into a dynamic, otherworldly door that defied the intrusion of even the moon's crimson light.

Lumian and Franca's spirits were drawn inexorably toward the door. As they approached, a faint voice emanated from within—a voice that seemed to hold the secrets of the entire universe, as well as the madness, self-destruction, and darkness lurking within every heart.

With each step toward the dynamic door, the maddening ramblings grew more intense, causing their heads to throb in agony. Yet an overpowering, primal urge compelled them to enter, to merge with the formless entity behind the door, and to partake in a clandestine pact that promised essential, primordial, extraordinary, and potent knowledge.

Amidst the sea of incomprehensible symbols, the door stood slightly ajar, allowing invisible entities to pass through.

With a resounding hum, Lumian and Franca's minds were plunged into a state of blankness, as if struck by a relentless force.

The chaotic ravings they had heard coalesced into grotesque, shadowy entities that corroded their very Soul Bodies and physical bodies.

Franca's eyes widened, and her flaxen-colored hair fluttered in the windless air, vaguely thickening.

Blood seeped from the corners of her eyes, nostrils, ears, mouth, and pores, as if a demon was trying to separate her flesh from her skin.

Franca's thoughts were in a state of intense disorder, as if a human had been thrown into a factory blender.

Seizing the moment, the Wraith that had been attached to Franca detached itself from the Demoness of Pleasure.

This Wraith, dressed in a sleek black suit, its eyes flickering with a sinister green hue, let out a piercing shriek.

A cacophonous shattering sound, both illusory and real, filled the room as Franca's body vanished from the recliner and reappeared in the bedroom.

Her Mirror Substitution had been activated instinctively, saving her from losing control, but she remained unconscious, collapsing on the spot.

Beneath the shattered mirror's reflection on the recliner, Lumian, though still affected by the ravings and shrieks, fared better than Franca.

His extensive experience with advancing Sequences and invoking boons where he met with more potent and terrifying murmurs had fortified his resistance against such assaults.

Despite the excruciating headache, scattered thoughts, and ruptured capillaries in various places, he retained some semblance of instinctual reaction and basic cognition. His face contorted grotesquely amidst the blood, but he held on.

In the next moment, the Wraith disappeared from the recliner and manifested within Lumian's blue eyes.

His mind instantly fogged, and his body grew frigid, as if his very blood had turned to ice.

Still capable of thought, Lumian promptly utilized his spirit world traversal ability to escape the room, teleporting several hundred meters away.

He understood that a Marionettist couldn't naturally transform into a Wraith, and the Wraith that possessed him was likely a marionette. With their distinctive combat styles, it was improbable for a Marionettist to engage directly. Therefore, once the marionette was beyond the Marionettist's range, it would lose control and become useless.

When the time came, Lumian would "teleport" back and attempt to take Franca away.

While this would leave him essentially incapacitated, it would also disable Loki's marionette. The adversary would then need to decide whether to launch a direct assault or retreat cautiously, as he couldn't predict how many teleportations Lumian's spirituality could endure—a capability unusual for a Pyromaniac. Loki's assessment might not be entirely accurate in this regard!

Just as Lumian was on the verge of activating his spirit world traversal mark, he heard a magnetic voice: "Give up."

The words pierced Lumian's Spirit Body, disrupting his intentions.

Subsequently, his thoughts grew sluggish, and his body stiffened.

The magnetic voice chuckled softly.

"I don't know what kind of trap you've set in your room, but it likely involves Hela, doesn't it? After all, without her cooperation, you couldn't have masqueraded as Muggle and infiltrated the Research Society, could you? Lumian Lee, Aurore Lee's brother, I've seen your wanted poster."

"In Trier, the easiest Beyonder to come into contact with is from the Hunter pathway. That's why there's a saying:

"'Never fight a Hunter on his turf.'

"No one knows what sort of strange traps Hunters have laid in their 'turf.'

"I didn't want to take that risk, nor did I plan to face Hela directly. Although I'm not overly concerned about her unless she's found a way to become a demigod, why would I engage her on a Hunter's 'turf'? My choice was to stage a surprise attack on Hidden Blade, drawing you out and away from your turf to fight on a ground of my choosing.

"After this afternoon's reconnaissance, I confirmed that both of you possess an item capable of monitoring each other's condition or a mysticism connection—likely the exchange of Mirror Substitution. Heh heh, ever wonder what my other marionette was doing during that time?

"In truth, I have no intention of killing Hidden Blade or turning her into a marionette. A living Demoness serves my purposes better. I can use this encounter to make her suffer and despair. When she advances to Sequence 4 using that, I'll have a demigod marionette…"

The voice carried no provocation, yet each word ignited a burning rage within Lumian.

These words continued to disrupt Lumian's mind and Spirit Body, interfering with his abilities. With the dual constraints of Wraith possession and Marionettist, Lumian resembled a statue, unable to speak or move. He stood frozen, awaiting the inexorable verdict of fate.

A thin gray fog enveloped the room, sealing off all sound from the outside world.

The magnetic voice chuckled again, its taunting words continuing.

"It really shouldn't have been so complicated, but you see, you have a high-ranking individual sealed within you. To ensure my own safety, the only option is to turn you into a marionette. I have no desire to face a high-ranking being after your demise. Who knows if he'll thank me or finish me along the way?

"Curious how I recognized you, aren't you? It's highly unlikely that others would sense the seal within you, but in my eyes, it's as conspicuous as a firefly in the night. The moment you entered the room with the typewriter, I knew you were the one impersonating Muggle. So, unless you could maintain a considerable distance from me, like the first time you tried to evade my tracking, I could have followed you without the aid of my marionette.

"Indeed, when you showed up at the gathering and joined our April Fool's team, I sensed that something was amiss. I suspected that Muggle had used a seal to escape the fragmentation of her soul. Little did I know, she was truly deceased. You are her brother…

"Haha, I still remember, in the latter part of last year, every time she attended a gathering, she sought out I Know Someone to treat her psychological issues and the hidden dangers arising from the improper use of the Soul Summoning Spell. And I Know Someone would divulge her pain, struggles, vulnerabilities, and transformations to all of us each time.

"It's quite vile, completely against a doctor's principles, but it's fun and interesting. It gave us a sense of accomplishment and made us all laugh."

Upon hearing this, Lumian's mind buzzed.

He had been mildly annoyed by Loki's earlier critiques, but now, as Loki recounted Aurore's experiences, his anger reached a boiling point.

Aurore had been genuinely unwell, seeking treatment from a doctor. However, not only did this doctor patronize her, but he also derived amusement from her suffering. He repeatedly violated her privacy, sharing her struggles and illnesses with others, leading them to mock her behind her back.

What made it all the more despicable was that this group of individuals had sold Aurore the Soul Summoning Spell.

Dammit!

Every single one… of them… deserves death!

They deserve… the most tragic way… of death!

Though Lumian's mind remained ensnared in stasis, his anger finally erupted. It surged through his spirit and coursed into his flesh.

He couldn't control it, not under the constant interference.

Crimson flames erupted from Lumian's body, and small red tendrils protruded from his eyes, radiating a malevolent blood-red hue.

It was a precursor to losing control. If this continued, he would truly lose control.

But Lumian felt no fear. Instead, he cooperated.

Even if I… lose control and turn into a monster… or a lunatic… I will… drag you… all of you… into the abyss!

Relying on his body's "instinctive reaction," crimson flames spread in all directions, incinerating the Wraith, igniting furniture, and causing a fire.

Unfortunately, this fiery onslaught proved ineffective against the Wraith-form marionette and Loki, who remained concealed somewhere beyond reach of the flames.

Its sole purpose, for those brief two seconds, was to disrupt the magnetic voice.

"It's useless. I know you mainly aim to use the flames to signal for help from the outside world rather than attacking me directly. But I've previously deceived Hidden Blade. Despite my claims of accelerating the progress, I actually harnessed the power of the gray fog to create a unique environment that isolates information here.

"While you can indeed break through the residual fog barrier if you go all out since I can't ask for too much power, I can't allow that."

As Loki finished speaking, a frenzied, terrifying, violent, and exaggerated aura exploded from Lumian's body. It shredded the thin fog and shot skyward.

Chapter 388: An Unquiet Night

As the frenzied and violent aura surged out of the thin gray fog, 6 Rue des Blouses Blanches trembled slightly, as if in shock.

In the various rooms of the building, the bodies of those who were already sound asleep involuntarily trembled, plunging into a blood-red nightmare. Those who were still awake looked around in surprise and confusion, as if they had been transported back to a time when barricades were everywhere and gunshots echoed through the air.

On a bed in a quiet room diagonally below Franca's apartment, a man whose eyes had been tightly shut, seemingly asleep, suddenly snapped awake. He gazed up warily and fearfully at the source of the terrifying aura.

At the same time, beneath Église Saint-Robert, within the market district's Inquisition's office,

Angoulême de François, who was on night duty, leaped to his feet and prepared to rush to the area where mystical items were sealed. He hoped to enhance his ability to handle accidents and disasters in a short period.

In other rooms, Imre, Valentine, and the others also sensed the violent aura that seemed to shake all of Trier. Some trembled, while others turned pale.

This was even more terrifying than the Tree of Shadow disaster.

However, they didn't stand still. Some dashed out of the room to rendezvous with Angoulême, while others raised their arms and hastily prayed to the Sun before sprinting toward the Église Saint-Robert above.

Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative, 11 Rue des Fontaines.

Gardner Martin, who had been stroking his full-body armor, furrowed his brow and cast a puzzled glance toward the southeastern region.

He felt something calling to him, causing his blood to boil.

Deep underground in Trier, Olson, the starved bear-like man who had been lugging a small brown suitcase, suddenly perked up his ears to listen for any nearby movements.

The distant sounds of killings and shouts faintly reached him.

The Supervisor of the Iron and Blood Cross Order's eyes flashed with ferocity and madness. He extended his right hand and pressed it against his neck.

An indiscernible thread emerged, emitting fiery blood.

In the island district at the center of the Srenzo River, the Eternal Blazing Sun Church's Saint Viève cathedral was already shrouded in darkness. Only the nearby bell tower remained lit, but at that moment, the slumbering cathedral suddenly bathed in brilliant sunlight.

Sunlight flooded the onion-like domes, illuminating every stained glass window.

To the north of Trier, in the heart of the cathedral district, towering iron-black chimneys loomed above the God of Steam and Machinery's patriarchal cathedral.

Rumbling sounds echoed as the massive steam engine installed within the cathedral roared to life. Vast amounts of pale-white fog billowed forth from the forest-like chimneys, enshrouding the night sky.

In Quartier Éraste, a small town very close to the Sacred Heart Cloister, a golden retriever and the lady beside it turned and gazed into the distance of Trier's metropolis.

Within Red Swan Castle, Count Poufer, already lying on his bed, opened his eyes.

He sensed the entire ancient castle become extremely oppressive, and nightmarish roars and screams echoed from deep underground.

At that moment, the Beyonders in the market district and powerful figures elsewhere in Trier were distracted by the undisguised and flamboyant aura of madness.

Hidden in a room diagonally below Franca's apartment, Loki had just reacted to the violent and terrifying aura. Before he could summon back the Wraith that had possessed Lumian and use it to escape through the spirit world with him out of caution, the surrounding darkness instantly intensified, swallowing the crimson moonlight and bringing an extreme calmness to the area.

He couldn't resist closing his eyes; he wasn't even aware of it. He tumbled backward onto the bed and fell into a deep slumber.

Lumian's thoughts returned to normal. He channeled his anger, pouring all his pent-up emotions into the crimson flames.

"Go to hell!"

With a low growl, he took a left step forward, his eyes protruding with red vessels while twisting his waist and swinging his right fist with all his might.

With a muffled explosion, the flames on Lumian's body coalesced on the surface of his fist, naturally condensing into a blazing white fireball.

The blazing white fireball shot from Lumian's right fist, following a predetermined path, and crashed into the wall beside the apartment.

The voice he had just heard emanated from behind the wall!

Boom!

A large hole tore through the wall, revealing a man standing in the corridor.

He had brown hair, brown eyes, and a gaunt face. He was the marionette Loki had employed that evening.

He was the one who had been speaking!

Before Lumian could realize that he hadn't found the real Loki, darkness surged over him like a tidal wave, engulfing him.

Having already vented his anger and flames, Lumian's heart quickly calmed. He subconsciously closed his eyes and slowly sank to the ground.

His contorted face began to relax, and his body and soul found peace.

He no longer showed any signs of losing control.

Dressed in a black widow-like dress and a veiled bonnet, Hela emerged from the darkness.

Being the closest to the apartment while searching for traces of the battle between Loki and Lumian, she was undoubtedly the first to arrive.

Without hesitation, she made Lumian, Franca, Loki, and the two marionettes vanish.

Her figure faded, and the dense darkness rapidly dissipated.

Apart from the collapsed wall, no evidence remained at the scene.

Two seconds later, the apartment was suddenly bathed in sunlight.

…

In an uninhabited mine beneath Trier.

Lumian, Franca, and company swiftly materialized.

They were all in a deep slumber, except for Hela. Her pale face remained conscious as she stood to the side.

The vice president of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society no longer had the dry, withered hair she'd had before. It had transformed into smooth strands, now bearing the color of the night.

She pulled out a flask filled with liquor and downed a third of its contents before fixing her gaze on Lumian.

Hela's forehead began to crack silently, emitting an eerie, ancient glow that manifested into an indescribable, ancient bronze door.

The door swayed and creaked, revealing a narrow gap. Beyond it lay endless darkness, filled with countless dense, indescribable eyes seemingly lurking within.

Under the influence of this deathly aura, the Wraith attached to Lumian flew out without resistance.

In an instant, it landed on the ground, and Hela raised her right hand, pressing it against its forehead. The ancient bronze door vanished, and the dim light receded into the crack.

Hela shifted her attention to the still-slumbering Loki.

The leader of the April Fool's had an ordinary face, blending into the crowd like any other resident of Rue des Blouses Blanches.

Hela stared at him for a brief moment before her eyes lost focus.

In Loki's dream.

Hela appeared, clad in a black widow-like attire, in front of an ancient castle shrouded in a thin gray fog.

The castle's massive doors stood wide open, eerily silent like the entrance to a cemetery.

Hela glanced up at the pitch-black castle with its numerous spires and thin form before stepping through the door. She passed through the dimly lit atrium, and proceeded into the hall, where peculiar chandeliers with unknown light sources hung.

Numerous guests filled the hall, their expressions frozen like wax statues, unmoving.

Surrounded by dozens or even hundreds of wax statues was a gray platform with three stone steps. In the middle of the platform was an ancient dark-red chair.

A man in his late twenties occupied the seat.

He wore a silk top hat and a black tailcoat, with dark-gray eyes and short, brown hair. Under his high nose bridge, the subtle curl of his mouth hid a non-obvious smile.

Pressing down on the armrests on both sides, the man relaxed and leaned back in his chair.

"Who are you?" His voice echoed through the ancient castle, as if questioning Hela.

Hela walked past the crowd suspected to be wax statues and arrived in front of the man.

Her cold voice remained impassive as she inquired, "Loki, don't you recognize me?"

Loki's grin intensified.

"Hela, you've come after all…"

Seizing the opportunity presented by his dream state, Hela confronted him directly.

"Why did you harm a member of the Research Society?"

Loki's gaze shifted upwards, and he let out a laugh.

"The only purpose those fools serve is to amuse us.

"You must know that the apocalypse is imminent, just a few years away. They're all destined to die, sooner or later. It's better for them to sacrifice themselves now to provide us with entertainment."

Hela fell silent, and a chilling silence enveloped the dream, the air growing colder. Decaying, pale-white hands extended from the stone floor and surrounding walls.

After a few moments, Hela spoke again.

"Why did you harm Muggle?"

Loki's laughter ceased abruptly, replaced by a smirk as he looked at Hela.

"Because…"

His expression shifted suddenly, and Hela sensed imminent danger within the dream.

"Because the Celestial Worthy of Heaven and Earth for Blessings…"

Loki's voice faded rapidly, and the entire dream began to crumble under Hela's will. The ancient castle disintegrated into fragments, vanishing into an eerie, yet pure darkness.

Back in the real world, deep within the uninhabited mine beneath Trier, Hela opened her eyes. Countless tiny creatures wriggled beneath her pale-white skin.

In an instant, her form shifted and reassembled, no longer exhibiting the eerie abnormalities she had displayed earlier.

Loki's body had disintegrated into a pool of flesh and blood, with grotesque maggots crawling in and out of it. Hela observed silently, but no Beyonder characteristics emerged from the remains.

…

Within the pitch-black castle enveloped in a thin fog, a dark-red coffin lay in a sinister chamber.

Suddenly, a pale-white hand emerged from the coffin, gripping its wooden edge.

Chapter 389: Suspected God

In the uninhabited quarry cave beneath Trier.

Hela observed as the transparent and distorted maggots perished, yet she didn't detect any Beyonder characteristics emerging.

She turned her attention to Lumian and Franca, who were sound asleep. Satisfied that they had regained control thanks to the night and their dreams, and their breathing had steadied, she ended her forced slumber.

Two seconds later, Lumian's eyes shot open, and he leaped up with the agility of a leopard.

In an instant, he summoned three crimson flames that illuminated the cavern.

As he kept a vigilant watch over his surroundings, Franca, still recovering from severe mental injuries, rubbed her head and slowly got to her feet, fear in her eyes.

Then, she spotted Hela in her distinctive black widow-like dress and the familiar bonnet with a veil. She blurted out, "Madame Hela, what brings you here?"

Instant regret washed over her. She had inadvertently revealed her affiliation with the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society.

If she hadn't spoken, she could have pretended to be nothing more than a friend of Ciel—that she wasn't Hidden Blade.

"Hidden Blade?" Hela inquired.

Franca let out a dry laugh.

"Yes, how did you recognize me?"

"You're the only Demoness in the Research Society," Hela replied calmly.

Franca felt even more embarrassed and replied ridiculously, "I recognized you based on your attire and demeanor. You never showed your face at the gatherings."

As the two acknowledged each other, Lumian's wariness visibly eased. With Madame Hela's presence, he felt his safety was assured.

Then, he noticed the two marionettes lying lifeless on the ground, surrounded by a pool of flesh infested with translucent maggots.

"Is that Loki?" Lumian pointed at the grotesque, horrifying mass.

Hela cast her gaze over.

"Yes."

Lumian fell silent for a moment before asking, "Is he dead?"

Hela nodded slightly and said, "He succumbed to his own loss of control, but it's not a complete demise."

"Huh?" Franca asked in confusion.

Look at how badly minced he is. Maggots are crawling out, but he's not completely dead?

She had already figured out why Madame Hela had appeared. Ciel, that scoundrel, must have used her as bait again and written a letter to Madame Hela to clean up the mess!

Hela looked at Lumian and said coldly, "High-level Demonesses aren't the only ones capable of resurrection; high-level Seers can do it too. Loki likely worships an evil god in this domain. Combined with his uniqueness, he can abandon his body upon death and revive in a pre-prepared location with his characteristics intact.

"Unfortunately, I didn't foresee this. If I had prayed for true Concealment in advance, he wouldn't have been able to revive, and he'd leave behind his Beyonder traits."

The woman calmly recounted her oversights, offering no excuses and showing no frustration.

Lumian's eyes remained fixed on the grotesque mass of flesh infested with dead maggots, a slow smile spreading across his face.

The corners of his mouth curled upward as he remarked, "Not bad at all. If he were to meet his end like this, I'd be disappointed. How can I not be the one to kill him with my own hands?"

As Lumian spoke, a burning desire for High-Sequence Beyonder powers ignited within him.

Loki was undeniably formidable. Even when he and Franca had joined forces, Loki had come dangerously close to turning Lumian into a marionette. Yet, Hela, suspected to have advanced to Sequence 4, had effortlessly dispatched him in less than ten seconds.

Lumian understood that unleashing the Blood Emperor aura would undoubtedly draw the attention of official Beyonders from the market district, possibly prompting them to seek assistance from the Churches' saints. Therefore, after Hela had sought him out, she had to subdue Loki and relocate him within ten seconds. Otherwise, the chance of being intercepted by Trier's saints and angels was exceedingly high.

This was what a demigod was like!

Lumian eagerly looked forward to summarizing more Pyromaniac acting principles and digesting the potion over the next two to three months. His goal was to attempt an advancement to Conspirer. He recollected his plans for revenge against Loki and the others, the eradication of heretics, and his insatiable thirst for mystical, high-end powers.

Seeing Lumian's lack of regret or disappointment, replaced instead by an unwavering fighting spirit, Hela subtly nodded in approval.

Lumian's gaze remained fixed on Loki's corpse.

"Which evil god does he worship?"

Franca's heart skipped a beat at this question. She turned to Hela and asked, "Could it be…"

The Demoness of Pleasure paused briefly before switching to a complicated language that Lumian couldn't understand.

"The Immortal Lord…"

Hela abruptly cut her off.

"Have you forgotten that I don't understand that language either?"

"Uh…" Franca couldn't help but slap her forehead.

My pig brain!

Hela continued, "Speak in ancient Feysac or Intisian. Also, remember, pause after each line and tell me something else."

Franca quickly acknowledged her instructions, organized her thoughts, and began speaking in ancient Feysac.

"The Immortal Lord of Heaven and Earth for Blessings…"

Hela interrupted her once again and engaged in a brief discussion about Loki's assault.

Franca continued, "The Sky Lord of Heaven and Earth for Blessings…"

Lumian, paying close attention, began to grasp the purpose of Madame Hela's request.

It was a precaution to prevent Franca from reciting the evil god's full honorific name and potentially attracting unwanted attention.

"The Exalted Thearch of Heaven and Earth for Blessings…" Franca repeated the third line and massaged her temples. "When I heard Loki recite it, it felt like I had been transported to another world. Everything was shrouded in fog, and I couldn't discern anything clearly. My thoughts slowed to a crawl. I vaguely recall that there should be another phrase."

Hela chimed in with her own addition in ancient Feysac, "The Celestial Worthy. Of Heaven and Earth. For Blessings."

This time, she even paused the simple line twice.

Lumian couldn't help but express his confusion. "This name has a rather odd style."

It differed significantly from the honorific names of deities like Mr. Fool, the Eternal Blazing Sun, and others he was familiar with. The format and words gave off the impression of belonging to a distinct civilization.

Franca furrowed her brow in thought.

"Now that you mention it, I recall something."

Lumian inquired, "What is it?"

Franca was about to speak but then abruptly closed her mouth.

She looked at Hela with a sheepish smile.

"Do you mind if I assisted Ciel in infiltrating the Research Society to investigate the April Fool's team?"

"He had my approval," Hela replied calmly.

Franca maintained her "submissive" smile.

"Then, would you mind if I had shared the secret of our transmigration with Ciel?"

Hela fell silent for a few moments before responding, "Does it matter if I mind now? Should I Conceal both of you?"

Franca suddenly realized that this situation might not be entirely negative and hastily explained, "You see, the April Fool's team is under suspicion for Muggle's death, and there's no way around revealing our secret when investigating them. That's why I told Ciel about it. Besides, Ciel has genuinely helped us find clues related to transmigration and the possibility of returning to our world!"

She wore an expression as if she had already made up for her mistake.

"What clues?" Hela blurted out for the first time.

Franca exhaled and said, "This is somewhat complex. Let me start by recalling what those honorific names reminded me of.

"We've been communicating, trying to find commonalities and similarities in what each of us did before transmigration to uncover the reason. Some received mysterious phones, others entered abandoned ancient temples in the mountains, and some were studying folklore culture. But I can't pinpoint what I did that led to it. It's not that I can't remember, but I've done so much.

"As you all know, I enjoy novelty. I buy new phones, play new games, try out new restaurants, and even create clothing and cosplay at major conventions. I engaged in a multitude of activities before transmigrating, making it difficult to determine which one triggered the transmigration.

"However, when I heard the honorific name Loki recited, I recalled that on that particular night, I had played a new video game called 'Terror Attack.' In the game, there was a hidden monster that had faith in something called the 'Celestial Worthy of Heaven and Earth.'"

Though Lumian didn't comprehend the concept of a "video game," he grasped the essence of Franca's explanation.

Her transmigration in this world appeared to be connected to the Celestial Worthy of Heaven and Earth for Blessings, whom Loki worshiped!

Hela, her light-blond hair flowing naturally over her shoulders, listened attentively and contemplated for a moment before speaking, "I don't have similar recollections. As I mentioned earlier, before transmigrating, I delved into non-mainstream mythological books. There was a deity skilled in deception and pranks who bore a striking resemblance to Loki…"

Franca's eyes gleamed with insight as she ventured a hypothesis.

"Could Loki have transmigrated by reciting the four lines of the honorific name? So, upon his arrival in this world, he recollected his actions from that time and attempted to recreate them, forging a connection with that evil god?

"Yes, he spoke vaguely when discussing such matters. The members of the April Fool's team shared a similar experience…

"Could it be that we were all brought here by the Celestial Worthy of Heaven and Earth for Blessings? Or did He summon us to this world?

"He's highly suspicious!"

Hela contemplated this for a moment and nodded slightly.

"At our next gathering, we can revisit this topic and communicate with others with a clearer focus."

Franca was taken aback.

"Will the members of the April Fool's team still attend?"

"The problematic ones probably won't," Hela replied calmly. "Even if we hastily arrange a gathering now, we'd have to notify them individually. This period of time is sufficient for Loki to revive and alert his associates."

Lumian raised his eyebrows.

"Why does everyone need to be notified individually? Just invite the April Fool's team to an emergency meeting. They won't know if others will attend. It won't take long to inform a dozen of them."

Chapter 390: Hidden Danger

Hela glanced at Lumian and fell silent for two seconds before saying, "Alright, I'll get ready now.

"But don't get your hopes up. No matter how urgent the gathering is, you have to give others ten minutes to disguise themselves. Otherwise, they probably won't come."

Ten minutes, combined with the discussion they just had, was enough time for Loki to revive and alert his accomplices.

Lumian's expression remained unchanged as he nodded gently. "We have to give it a try."

"That's right. Capture as many as we can. With an incisive point, it'll be much easier to find the others," Franca agreed with Lumian.

She suspected that Loki and his crew were responsible for the deaths of some members of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society.

Without wasting any more time, the surroundings around Hela suddenly darkened, resisting the light of the three flames.

Her figure vanished without a trace.

This marked the beginning of preparations for the emergency gathering.

Lumian's eyes flickered as he gazed at the decaying flesh teeming with dead maggots, lost in his own thoughts.

Franca carefully examined her body and realized that there were no substantial or obvious injuries. The pain she had previously endured was a result of the impact on her mind. As her Spirit Body was soothed and treated, only faint cracks remained.

Franca let out a long sigh of relief and said, "Loki is truly cunning and powerful. Fortunately, you thought to seek Madam Hela's help. Otherwise, we might have become his marionettes by now."

Lumian wholeheartedly agreed.

If he hadn't considered borrowing Hela's power and guessed that Loki could detect a certain trait in him, leading to the decision to bait him out tonight, perhaps the outcome wouldn't have been in their favor.

When they were unprepared, Loki had approached them and attacked with full force. Neither he nor Franca could retaliate.

He could still use the Blood Emperor's aura, which was relatively easy to activate and didn't require complicated procedures, to attract all official Beyonders. Then, he could exploit the time difference to escape using "teleportation." However, it would condemn Franca to be controlled.

Of course, without the baiting operation, Lumian might have chosen to leave with Franca by traversing the spirit world and slipping out of Loki's sight before returning stealthily.

"You don't have to worry about becoming a marionette. Loki wants to groom you into a Sequence 4 Demoness," Lumian casually reassured Franca.

Franca was taken aback.

"He told me he's been yearning for a Demoness marionette for a long time…"

Lumian calmly pointed out that Franca had been deceived. "He lied to you. He even said that the four-line honorific name meant to accelerate the progress was, in fact, a trap for me that could isolate most of the struggling commotions."

"…" Franca couldn't help but curse. "Dammit! Is there any truth in his words? As expected of the leader of April Fool's, the new-age swindler who lives diagonally opposite Salle de Bal Unique!"

Franca muttered to herself, "The honorific name he recited must be real. Him being able to use the traits we share and the power of that Celestial Worthy to directly locate me should be real too. As for the exact range, given the style he displayed, there's a high chance that it's nonsense. It can't be believed.

"What kind of traits could it be…

"If the transmigration was indeed caused by that Celestial Worthy, it's very likely that we have His aura or brand on us. And with His power, Loki can easily locate us within a certain range."

Franca suddenly turned to look at Lumian.

"Loki should have recognized that you were fake during the gathering! You don't have the aura or mark of the Celestial Worthy on you!"

"Yes." Lumian's mood sank.

"I'll have to share this detail with Madam Hela later and see if anyone can come up with a way to eliminate the Celestial Worthy aura on them. Otherwise, they'll be hunted down by Loki and the others in the future," Franca said as she looked at the Wraith that had a dark-green light seeping out and merging with a certain part of the corpse. "What should we do with this Beyonder characteristic?"

This was a Sequence 5 Beyonder characteristic!

She had her own thoughts about this spoil of war, but she didn't know Lumian's attitude.

"Madam Hela killed Loki herself, so the spoils of war must belong to her," Lumian said nonchalantly.

He then pointed at the corpse of the other marionette.

"Why hasn't he manifested any Beyonder characteristics?"

"That's right. He can't be resurrected too, can he?" Franca muttered. "Could it be that he's a bestowed who doesn't have Beyonder characteristics?"

Her plan was to give Madame Hela the Wraith Beyonder characteristic.

Lumian nodded slowly.

"In the evening, I thought he was a marionette of the Sun pathway. Later, when I was under his control, every word he spoke sounded like crazy ravings. It could affect my mind and Spirit Body, which was different from the Sun pathway's style. Yes, he should be a bestowed of an evil god, made into a marionette by Loki."

"I'll ask Madam Hela later." Just as Franca finished speaking, Hela's figure in a black widow-like dress outlined itself in the empty mine.

She said to Lumian and Franca, "In five minutes, we'll recite the incantation and enter the Nation of the Evernight's palace."

"Alright." Lumian took a deep breath and exhaled slowly.

Franca immediately informed Hela about the possible common trait among the members of the Research Society. Finally, she asked, "Is there a way to confirm and eliminate it? A Marionettist like Loki lurks in the shadows and can find us at any moment. It's truly terrifying."

Hela pondered for a moment and replied, "Firstly, advance to Sequence 4 and become a demigod. Only then can you barely suppress the aura left behind by Celestial Worthy. Secondly, search for mystical items with hidden and secret-keeping effects.

"I can only think of these two solutions at the moment. I'll see if anyone else has a better idea at the next gathering."

At that moment, Lumian looked at Hela and asked anxiously, "Madame, did you find out anything from Loki?"

Hela took out a flask and downed another third.

Her pale-white face flushed as she said coldly, "When I asked Loki why he wanted to harm the other members, he said it was for fun and to create pranks to satisfy his emotions and mind. However, when I asked him why he wanted to harm Muggle, his answer was Celestial Worthy of Heaven and Earth for Blessings…"

Hela didn't finish her sentence, but both of them understood what she meant.

Selling the Soul Summoning Spell to Aurore and guiding her to use it on herself seemed to be the will of the Celestial Worthy of Heaven and Earth for Blessings.

"Why does He want this done… Aurore is only a Sequence 7. She's just a nobody…" Lumian lowered his head and muttered in pain.

Hela replied coldly, "Probably because the original body of Muggle and her family are problematic."

Lumian fell silent for a moment before saying, "Could Loki be lying? A person full of lies like him might not be telling the truth."

"In the dreamscape I created, he can't lie unless he gains the ability to maintain lucidity in advance, but that's impossible." Hela denied Lumian's guess.

Dreamscape… Franca glanced at Hela and felt that this didn't match her impression of her Sequence pathway.

Lumian fell silent once again.

Aurore's transmigration was suspected to have been brought about by the Celestial Worthy of Heaven and Earth for Blessings. After her resurrection, she had been targeted by the Celestial Worthy of Heaven and Earth for Blessings because Roche Louise Sanson and her family were believers in

Inevitability. This made Aurore's subsequent encounter seem like a predetermined tragedy.

Seeing this, Franca changed the subject and pointed at the two marionettes' corpses.

"Madame Hela, that Beyonder characteristic is the spoil of war you deserve. What we want to know is why this marionette didn't produce any Beyonder characteristics?"

Hela didn't refuse. As she watched the Wraith Beyonder characteristic emerge, she inquired about Franca and Lumian's feelings when they were controlled.

After a brief exchange, she pondered and said, "This should be a bestowed who believes in an evil god. The corresponding Sequence 7 is an Orator, and Sequence 6 is a Singer. These two Sequences can transmit different mystical powers with their voices, matching your descriptions.

"In addition, Beyonders of this pathway often perform secret deed rituals at Sequence 9 and obtain mysteries and knowledge through a formless door. Different people hear and experience different things, and the subsequent abilities they obtain will be different. Being able to use singing to create a sun's blinding effect should be one of these manifestations."

"Which evil god?" Franca blurted out.

Hela shook her head.

"I don't know the exact honorific name either. It's dangerous for us to know anyway.

"I've encountered His believers. They sometimes refer to this evil god as the First Philosophy or Arcane Controller."

Without waiting for Franca to ask further, Hela nodded slightly and said, "We should head to the gathering."

Lumian and Franca recited the incantation simultaneously.

"A Beyonder from ancient times, Ruler of the Nation of the Evernight, noble Mother of the Sky, I beseech your permission to enter your kingdom."

As the surrounding darkness and slumber dissipated, Lumian and Franca arrived at the ancient and dilapidated palace again.

There was no one here yet. It was empty and silent.

Franca felt that something was amiss. After thinking for more than ten seconds, she realized something.

"We haven't disguised ourselves!"

Just as she finished speaking, she saw Lumian shrouded in a hazy dream-like fog, obscuring his exact form and appearance.

Lumian then used the Niese Face to transform himself into a hooded Muggle clad in a Warlock's black robe.

With Madame Hela's help, Franca breathed a sigh of relief and waited patiently for the April Fool's team to arrive.

As time ticked by, two figures suddenly outlined inside the silent palace.

Chapter 391: Idiots

The figures entering the ancient palace were Black Earth and Bax. Black Earth sported a furry hat and a thick leather mask, while Bax, on the other hand, had opted for just shorts and a brass mask.

Upon spotting Hela, they acknowledged her with a slight nod as a greeting.

Their eyes then roved over Franca, who hadn't tagged her code name, and Muggle, enveloped in a dreamy mist.

"Who's this?" Black Earth, clad like a Hunter from the mountains, pointed at Franca, a note of confusion in his voice.

"Hidden Blade. I rushed and forgot to tag myself," Franca replied.

Black Earth and Bax promptly dropped their suspicions and relaxed.

In a situation like this emergency gathering, it was perfectly normal for Hidden Blade to slip up.

This was her style!

Soon after, other members of the April Fool's team arrived one by one, but Lumian didn't see the five most suspicious targets— I Know Someone, Hisoka, Bard, Mad Lady, and Ultraman.

His expression darkened gradually, sensing that Loki had been resurrected and the problematic members had been alerted.

The dozen or so individuals gathered here were potential pawns. If Loki and his gang went too far and were discovered by other members of the Curly-

Haired Baboons Research Society, they could be used as scapegoats for the investigation.

There was nothing to find fault with them, thus ensuring the six true believers in the Celestial Worthy of Heaven and Earth for Blessings remained concealed.

At that moment, Black Earth and the rest started to realize that something was amiss.

Why were there so few attendees at the emergency gathering?

The agreed time had already passed, and typically, at least half of the society should have shown up by now.

"Hela, what's going on?" Bax, wearing nothing but a mask and shorts, asked in a deep voice.

Lumian sneered, looking at them as if they were a bunch of fools.

If Loki and his crew were evil, then these people were simply fools. They believed they were clever and had uncovered the truth, thinking they were indulging in pre-apocalypse pleasures. In reality, they were just being used as pawns and shields.

Lumian was willing to bet that Loki, I Know Someone, and the other core members of the April Fool's team would mock these fools during their private gatherings.

Hela's tone remained as cold as ice as she began, "I summoned you to this gathering because Loki betrayed us."

Black Earth, Bax, and the others were taken aback. They glanced around, but Loki was nowhere to be seen.

Hela continued, "He believes in an evil god and led I Know Someone and the others to harm numerous Research Society members."

"Such accusations require evidence," Bax instinctively retorted.

With the Lie earring on, Lumian spoke in Aurore's voice, "I'm the evidence!

"You must have seen me buy the Soul Summoning Spell. This caused a mental problem and nearly caused me to lose control. Fortunately, I found someone to help me in time and sealed my split personality.

"Before this, I've been seeking treatment from I Know Someone, but instead of improving, my condition only worsened.

"I approached them to reason with them, but they ended up planning to murder me!"

Black Earth fell silent for a moment before saying, "I remember that you bought it from Mad Lady. They lied to you because transmigration should be a matter between two parties, not a one-sided reason. Otherwise, why did you transmigrate to this world and happen to possess such people? The original bodies must have done something to establish the connection between the two worlds. Therefore, before figuring out what caused you to transmigrate, finding the remnant soul of the original body and asking might gain something unexpected.

"Muggle, weren't you homesick back then? How could you believe such a reason?"

As they heard this, some of the April Fool's team members present couldn't help but show teasing and mocking expressions in their eyes.

Muggle had fallen for a trick that could only fool children!

None of them had been fooled by Mad Lady. Even if she claimed to have tried and achieved certain results, it couldn't be considered a clue.

Mad Lady… Lumian repeated the code name inwardly.

A chuckle escaped him as he continued, "I was indeed blinded by the desire to return home, but you weren't any better.

"Take a look. Are Loki, Mad Lady, and Bard here?

"They know what they're doing, and they understand that if they're exposed, they have to leave the Research Society immediately. But you, fools, and idiots, don't know anything and are still cooperating with them!

"Even pigs and dogs are smarter than you!"

The absence of Loki and the others was like Muggle's mocking arrow, piercing the hearts and minds of Black Earth and the other April Fool's team members.

Some of them erupted in anger, feeling humiliated and wanting to retort. Others swayed in despair and confusion, while some felt as if countless insects were gnawing at their hearts. The pain was palpable.

Witnessing this, Franca entered Instigation mode and delivered a decisive blow.

"Don't you understand? You're discarded pawns, abandoned targets, mere agents who have lost their usefulness!

"You've never been core members of April Fool's. You've never earned Loki's trust. They only mock you behind your backs!

"Now that Loki and the others have been exposed, they can hunt down the Research Society members without fear. Who do you think will be the easiest for them to locate and target?

"The only thing you can do is recall the details of your dealings with Loki and the others, including the real-life pranks you executed, so that we can eliminate these traitors as soon as possible.

"Remember, leniency comes with honesty, resistance comes with severity."

Black Earth, Bax, and the others followed Hidden Blade's logic and realized the grim possibility.

They exchanged glances, their hearts clearly wavering. The few who had witnessed Loki and the others' capabilities couldn't help but tremble slightly.

Finally, Franca dropped a bombshell.

"Don't think you can escape the hunt just because you can relocate. Let me tell you, Muggle's experience indicates that Loki and the others seem to have a way to track Research Society members within a certain range through some mystical connection.

"I'll share the specific method with everyone at the next official gathering."

Black Earth gritted his teeth and said, "There are too many details. I don't think I can recall them all in just a few hours."

The other April Fool's team members nodded in agreement.

Hela thought for a moment and replied, "Go back, write down all the details, and send them to me.

"Remember, pack your belongings and stay at a motel or hotel at least five kilometers away."

Bax and the others let out sighs of relief and agreed.

Shortly after, Lumian noticed their eyes closing, as if they had fallen asleep while standing.

He and Franca exchanged thoughtful glances and then realized that Madame Hela's eyes had lost focus before closing as well.

After a moment, Hela opened her eyes and said to Lumian and Franca, "There are no hidden Loki helpers or believers in the Celestial Worthy."

This is a precaution in case Loki had risked leaving an accomplice to gather intelligence… Franca came to a realization.

In the next instant, Black Earth, Bax, and the others awakened simultaneously, reciting the incantation discreetly as they left the ancient and decaying palace.

Lumian dispelled the Niese Face, took off the Lie earring, and turned to Hela.

"Every time we use the incantation at a gathering, we should be tainted by the Sealed Artifacts' Concealment aura, right?

"Can we use this to track down Mad Lady and the others?"

Hela shook her head.

"They no longer have the corresponding auras."

Clearly, she had tried it before.

Lumian remained silent, exhaling slowly and silently.

The trio left the Nation of the Evernight and returned to the uninhabited mine beneath Trier.

Hela put away the Wraith Beyonder characteristic and spoke to Lumian and Franca.

"If we can't uncover Loki and truly eliminate him, you can stay in Trier's market district for another three months at most. When that time comes, regardless of any unfinished business, you'll have to consider relocating."

"Why three months?" Franca inquired, her confusion apparent.

Staying even another week seemed perilous.

Hela provided a simple explanation.

"While Loki has been resurrected with his Beyonder characteristics, he has lost all his marionettes. A Marionettist won't rashly appear and attack others without a marionette, unless they are excessively confident and perceive you as weak. And you've already demonstrated significant strength.

"For a Marionettist without a marionette, acquiring a suitable and powerful marionette requires planning, luck, and frequent replacements. You should have a window of three to six months."

"Understood," Franca replied, deciding to inform Madam Judgment that if no progress was made within two months, she would request permission to abandon the Iron and Blood Cross Order mission and relocate.

Lumian nodded in agreement.

He contemplated whether he could digest the Pyromaniac potion within three months and gather the Conspirer potion formula and main ingredients.

At that moment, Hela pointed at Loki's mushy flesh, twisted maggots, and said, "The dead worms are excellent spiritual ingredients that can be used for many things. However, they also come with hidden issues. They have been corrupted to a certain extent, posing unknown dangers to you."

Franca recalled her terrifying experience of almost becoming a marionette and shook her head, indicating she didn't want them.

Lumian gazed at the countless maggots and the mushy flesh for a moment before suddenly summoning the crimson fireball floating on his shoulder. He directed it towards Loki's remains.

Instead of exploding, the fireball ignited fiercely, casting a crimson glow.

As he watched the maggots and flesh burn, Lumian felt as though he had digested the Pyromaniac potion once more.

This came from his experience of being controlled by Loki and using the near-loss of control to ignite his own body, triggering the resonance of the Blood Emperor's aura.

This led Lumian to formulate his own acting principle for Pyromaniac: Pyromaniacs aren't arsonists. Only by daring to set themselves ablaze can they set others ablaze!

Chapter 392: Switching Pathways

The digestion of the Pyromaniac potion progressed much faster than Lumian had expected. This quick reaction was likely due to the activation of Blood Emperor Alista Tudor's aura without proper protection, akin to setting a blaze in Trier. The flames burned even the Saint Viève Cathedral and the patriarchal cathedral of the God of Steam and Machinery Church.

Hela watched the flesh and maggots consumed by the crimson flames for a moment before turning to Franca.

"Can we now discuss the clues about transmigration?"

Franca tersely acknowledged her words and gathered her thoughts.

"Ciel had previously attempted a unique summoning ritual, which inadvertently brought forth a shadow suspected to be from my homeland, the one I share with Muggle. He even formed a contract with this entity.

"After discovering this, I had Ciel summon the shadow again to communicate with it.

"The shadow's language is remarkably similar to that of my homeland. When asked about its origin, it said, 'The Blood Son of Heaven disrupted the netherworld, and the Underworld Daoist sacrificed himself to enter the river.'"

Franca translated the last sentence into Intisian.

Hela listened attentively and then turned her gaze to Lumian.

"Could this be the apparition of Blood Emperor Alista Tudor?

"Underworld Daoist was the one who dragged Him back?"

"That's our hypothesis," Lumian replied succinctly, indicating that Franca was also aware of the Samaritan Women's Spring. There was no need for excessive secrecy.

"Underworld Daoist…" Hela murmured the term softly.

Franca continued to recount her and Lumian's theories, suspecting that the illusionary river behind the spring might connect to the original world of her and the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society members.

Hela remained silent, her dark eyes gleaming with a subtle brilliance, as though concealing a galaxy.

"That covers most of it. Once we've dealt with the traitors in the Research Society, I'll share this information with everyone," Franca said after a brief pause. She also reminded Hela, "Apart from April Fool's, Loki's allies might be lurking in other teams. They tend to participate in activities without playing pranks and only reveal themselves during crucial moments."

Hela nodded slightly and replied, "I'll discuss how to handle this with Gandalf and the others."

The woman then turned her gaze to Lumian.

"If there's nothing else, I'll take you back to the surface."

Lumian withdrew his gaze from the flames and let out a deep breath.

"I'll take care of this."

He crouched down and placed his hands in front of Loki's lifeless body.

Rumble. Accompanied by a muted explosion and a slight tremor in the ground, the earth, carrying flesh, blood, and maggots, suddenly sank into the mire and rocks.

Franca nodded in realization.

This way, any remaining corruption on Loki's corpse wouldn't be exposed to cave adventurers who might pass by later.

She assisted in carrying the corpses of the two marionettes over, contemplating whether to collect the Wraith's teeth and nails.

These were excellent spiritual ingredients that could be used to forge Beyonder weapons.

If the Wraith had lost control and transformed into a monster, Franca wouldn't feel any psychological burden dealing with his corpse. However, he still retained his human form.

Considering that she didn't lack offensive weapons or poison for coating them, Franca simply harvested the powder from the translucent Wraith and absorbed its residual spirituality.

After removing the clothes bestowed by the evil god and checking for any clues, Franca tossed the two corpses into the blazing pit.

Once she had completed this task, she turned to Hela and asked with curiosity,

"Madame Hela, have you advanced to Sequence 4 and become a demigod?"

Otherwise, how could she have subdued Loki so effortlessly?

"Yes," Hela confirmed with a nod.

Franca pondered for a moment and probed further, "You used to follow the Corpse Collector pathway, but this time, you displayed the power of the Evernight pathway. Did you use a mystical item?"

Was it similar to using a Sealed Artifact to enable everyone to enter the Nation of the Evernight in Concealment and participate in the gathering?

The Corpse Collector pathway was also known as the Death pathway.

Hela's voice was icy as she replied, "I've switched to Sequence 4 Nightwatcher of the Evernight pathway."

"Why?" Franca was intrigued by Hela's choice.

While she had once contemplated switching to the neighboring Hunter pathway when advancing to Sequence 4, it was mainly to restore her body to its male form. Under usual circumstances, sticking to a single pathway until the end was generally the better choice. After all, the acting acquired in the earlier Sequences were deeply ingrained in that pathway, making it easier and safer to become a Sequence 4 Beyonder of the same pathway.

Of course, if one couldn't find the Sequence 4 potion formula and main ingredient for their pathway, they might consider switching to a neighboring pathway. It wouldn't necessarily lead to half-madness, and they could gain a mix of unique abilities.

Franca had never seen any indication from Hela of wanting to switch pathways. When they discussed and exchanged information at the Research Society, Hela primarily focused on topics related to the Corpse Collector domain. Most of the materials and items gathered and sold were concentrated in this pathway.

Could it be that the Sequence 4 potion formula, main ingredients, or corresponding rituals of the Corpse Collector pathway proved impractical? Franca speculated, drawing on her extensive knowledge of mysticism.

Hela's pale face softened.

She gazed into the darkness beyond the abandoned mine, her voice taking on a contemplative tone.

"If I continued along the Death pathway, the deity I believe in would eventually transform me into a crucial vessel for specific moments."

At this point, Hela wore a rare smile and spoke with a distant look in her eyes.

"It's already a challenge for Her to maintain Her humanity. So, I shouldn't burden Her any further."

Franca was initially perplexed but began to grasp Madame Hela's reasoning for switching pathways.

Hela gave her a brief look and added, "If I can advance to Sequence 3, I should either revert to the Death pathway or switch to the Warrior pathway.

"The upper ranks of the Evernight pathway are facing a severe resource shortage."

"Wow," Franca couldn't help but envision Hela wielding various Sequence abilities from the Evernight, Corpse Collector, and Warrior pathways. She found it both impressive and formidable.

She, too, felt a sense of excitement about the possibility of acquiring the abilities of a Demoness and a Hunter in the future.

Meanwhile, Lumian incinerated Loki's mutated remains and filled the pit.

Hela promptly obscured the area in darkness.

…

When Lumian and Franca regained consciousness, they found themselves outside the abandoned mine near the entrance to Underground Trier on Rue Anarchie.

In the distance, they could hear faint movements coming from Rue des Blouses Blanches.

"Phew, this is the most dangerous situation I've encountered since becoming a Beyonder," Franca said, exhaling deeply and speaking with emotion. "If Loki hadn't used me as bait to lure you here, there's a high chance I would have become a marionette."

Lumian tersely acknowledged her words and remained silent.

He took a step forward and began to walk down the street.

Franca followed him and asked curiously, "Did Loki say anything when he tried to disrupt your mind with his trash talk? Although many of his words may be lies, they might contain valuable information."

For example, the suspicion that every member of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society possessed the lingering aura of the Celestial Worthy.

Lumian remained silent for a few moments before responding.

"He recounted how they harmed Aurore, how they repeatedly disclosed her mental state and psychiatric treatment process, and how they shamelessly mocked her…"

His explanation was concise, but the simplicity of his words couldn't mask the anger that rose in him again.

"Huh?" Franca was initially surprised but quickly grasped the gravity of the situation. "That Psychiatrist, I Know Someone?"

Lumian nodded slowly.

Franca contemplated the situation carefully, her anger growing with each passing thought.

"Dammit! How can they be so evil? I fully support you in tearing them apart, dismembering them, skinning them, and stuffing them with grass!" After several seconds of contemplation, she unleashed a curse.

Lumian remained silent, seemingly weighing the feasibility of such actions.

Franca glanced at him and hesitantly suggested, "When you faced the other April Fools' team members earlier, you held back and didn't kill them directly…"

Lumian chuckled.

"Why should I kill those idiots? It's more agonizing, humiliating, and regretful for these individuals who believe they're clever when they realize how Loki and the others manipulated them. It brings me greater satisfaction than killing them.

"In the future, whenever anyone mentions Loki, it will be akin to insulting their intelligence to their faces, and they won't be able to escape it."

Franca breathed a sigh of relief.

She said to Lumian, "Rue des Blouses Blanches seems quite lively. I plan to stay at Jenna's tonight. Heh heh.

"Yes, I'll be informing my Major Arcana card holder briefly about this matter. I'll convey that if Loki isn't completely eliminated within two months, I would like to request a transfer out of the market district. You, too, can apply to take charge of the Iron and Blood Cross Order's branch elsewhere."

"I'll also write to my Major Arcana card holder," Lumian assured her, indicating that he wouldn't underestimate the potential harm Loki could cause.

Lumian had always maintained a clear distinction between personal matters and official matters. Whether dealing with the padre or investigating Loki, he had never considered seeking Madam Magician's assistance. However, this time, his use of the Blood Emperor's aura had caused quite a commotion, and it would be necessary to report it later.

Seeing that Lumian remained rational, Franca felt at ease. She waved farewell and stealthily made her way toward Quartier du Jardin Botanique.

Lumian averted his gaze and entered Auberge du Coq Doré, walking along the still-warm street.

He had no desire to encounter the official Beyonders who might be searching for clues on Rue des Blouses Blanches at this late hour.

As he pushed open the door to Room 207, Lumian spotted a figure inside.

It was Madam Magician, dressed in an orange waist-length dress and holding a wide-brimmed hat adorned with flowers.

"Were you waiting for me?" Lumian inquired almost instinctively.

Magician smiled.

"What else would I be doing?"

"How did you know I would come back here?" Lumian closed the door.

Magician smiled and said, "This is a revelation of fate.

"Now, tell me, why did you unleash the Blood Emperor's aura?"

Chapter 393: Information About Celestial Worthy

Lumian was taken aback.

"Did it cause a huge commotion?"

He knew that once the Blood Emperor's aura was activated, it would undoubtedly attract the attention of nearby official Beyonders and powerful figures. It would be akin to setting Saint Viève Cathedral on fire. The commotion wouldn't be small, but he never expected this to catch the attention of Madam Magician, who didn't seem to be in Trier, for her to rush over.

He had intended to write a letter and report this matter.

Madam Magician nodded seriously.

"Very. It even led some people to believe that the door to Fourth Epoch Trier had opened."

The commotion is even greater than I had imagined. As expected of Blood Emperor Alista Tudor… Lumian wasn't vexed or surprised; instead, he calmly sat on the edge of the bed.

It had already happened, so there was no point in feeling vexed or surprised. Moreover, even if he had to do it again, he would still do it.

Lumian began recounting how he had posed as his sister to infiltrate the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society and determine if there was anything amiss with the person who had sold her the Soul Summoning Spell. He continued until Loki lost control and died, but no Beyonder characteristics emerged. It was suspected that there was a way for him to revive. There was also the honorific name of an evil god that Hela and the Two of Cups had pieced together.

Magician didn't interrupt, but the smile on her face had vanished at some point in time.

"Do I need to recite the honorific name's four lines intermittently, or can I just say them?" Lumian finally asked.

Madam Magician's voice was calm as she replied, "Just say it. It won't be a problem as long as you don't use ancient Hermes, Jotun, and other unprotected Beyonder languages."

Lumian subconsciously surveyed the room and realized that it had grown dimmer. Although the crimson moonlight could penetrate the glass window, it seemed to be obstructed by an invisible, soundproof, and deep curtain.

He then repeated Franca's translated honorific name.

With that said, he saw Madam Magician fall silent, as if she had transformed into a statue.

"What's wrong with that?" Lumian probed.

Magician pondered for a moment and looked at him.

"You're saying that you relied on the brink of losing control from your anger to trigger the resonance of the Blood Emperor's aura and create a commotion that can break through the three layers of the thin fog's concealment?"

"That's right," Lumian replied, still feeling a lingering fear as he recalled the situation. "Normally, once my emotions exceed the limit, I would recall the cues left behind by Madam Susie. However, even the corresponding memories became intermittent and vague, preventing the cues from having the desired effect. In fact, if I hadn't held out hope when I was first controlled and instead tried to activate the Blood Emperor's aura immediately, Loki probably wouldn't have been able to truly stop me. When the control deepened, it wouldn't have worked. I could only rely on such passive reactions…"

Madam Magician wore a thoughtful expression and didn't respond.

"Is there a problem with this part of the situation?" Lumian asked bluntly.

Magician nodded slightly and said, "There's nothing wrong with this detail. It's very reasonable. It's a normal development of the situation back then. The problem is that you just obtained the Blood Emperor's aura not long ago, so it came in handy."

Lumian was taken aback for a few seconds before blurting out, "Could Amon have foreseen my encounter tonight by stuffing the Earth Blood ore into my pocket? Is His purpose to help me?"

Help that nearly got me killed?

"This might be just one of the goals, and it's not His," Madam Magician said with a soft sigh. "It's the goal of the one who's roughly equivalent to His father."

Lumian was taken aback once more.

"The one the Aurora Order believes in? The one who inherited half of the Ancient Sun God's inheritance?"

For some reason, Mr. K's maniacal laughter echoed in his mind.

Piousness is the only way out!

Madam Magician muttered to herself, "Previously, I thought I wanted to involve you more deeply in matters related to the Sauron family, the Iron and Blood Cross Order, and the Fourth Epoch Trier. Now, it seems that I'll have to include disrupting that entity's plan…"

Seeing that Lumian still didn't understand why it involved the deity believed in by the Aurora Order, Magician explained, "Do you remember when you thought accepting another Major Arcana card holder's commission was a normal and reasonable matter? You didn't need to tell me?"

"I remember," Lumian replied, not seeing any problem with that. "It's true that I made a mistake, but it has nothing to do with that person. It's a manifestation of my true thoughts."

Madam Magician chuckled.

"Coincidentally, I didn't meet Miss Justice during that time, so there was an information gap."

Lumian's eyes flickered as he caught a whiff of a conspiracy.

Madam Magician continued, "The combination of two coincidences might not be coincidental. Think about the complete honorific name of that entity."

"I can't recall," Lumian admitted. "Madam Justice made a psychological cue. I can only recall it if I pray for Mr. Fool's angelic protection."

"There's no rush. When you can recall, you'll naturally understand the source of the problem," Magician warned him simply. "You have to be vigilant once you encounter too many coincidences."

Lumian nodded solemnly.

Madam Magician consoled him,"There's no need to be too nervous, let alone reject contact with Mr. K. This time, with that entity's arrangements so obvious, He's telling us that He knows, that He is watching and listening.

"This also means that He holds no ill intentions for the time being. Otherwise, not only would you be finished, but I would also be in danger."

Lumian was burdened with numerous issues. He couldn't afford to fret at such a high level. It was pointless to fret. After all, he relied on the Tarot Club the most.

He then inquired, "Madam, which evil god does Loki and company believe in?"

Only by clarifying the evil god's domain and characteristics could he better guard against and deal with His believers in the future.

Magician fell silent for several seconds, so silent that even a Beyonder as bold as Lumian couldn't help but feel his heart race.

Eventually, she let out a sigh and remarked, "Actually, I have mentioned that evil god to you."

"Huh?" Lumian had no impression of such a thing.

Madam Magician fell silent for a few seconds before saying, "I've told you before, Mr. Fool is facing off against an ancient deity. This outcome holds the power to shape our destinies and determine whether our world can survive the impending apocalypse.

"That ancient deity is known as the Celestial Worthy of Heaven and Earth for Blessings."

"It's actually Mr. Fool's enemy…" Lumian hadn't anticipated such a revelation.

Me branded by Mr. Fool… Aurore, possibly brought to this world by the Celestial Worthy of Heaven and Earth for Blessings… Loki and his associates, who are devout followers of the Celestial Worthy of Heaven and Earth for Blessings, sold the Soul Summoning Spell to Aurore, triggering a series of catastrophic events… Mr. Fool is in direct opposition to the Celestial Worthy of Heaven and Earth for Blessings…

A torrent of information flooded Lumian's mind, leaving him feeling like he was on the verge of unraveling a truth that was still missing crucial details.

Madam Magician pondered for a moment before continuing.

"I've also mentioned that if you address Mr. Fool using anything other than his three-lined honorific name or attempt to invoke him without following the proper ritual, I can't guarantee that he will be the one who responds. It might even lead to perilous encounters.

"Now, I can offer you a clear answer. Under those circumstances, the response you receive could very well be from the Celestial Worthy of Heaven and Earth for Blessings."

Praying to Mr. Fool in an incorrect manner might gain a response from the Celestial Worthy of Heaven and Earth for Blessings… Lumian was overwhelmed by the sheer volume of information. His head felt like it was about to burst.

Then, a crucial detail caught his attention.

The title "The King of Yellow and Black" in Mr. Fool's honorific name bore a striking resemblance to Franca's translation of the Celestial Worthy of Heaven and Earth for Blessings!

With this revelation, a chilling sensation washed over Lumian.

He hesitated for a few seconds before deciding to inquire, "What's the connection between Mr. Fool and the Celestial Worthy of Heaven and Earth for Blessings?"

Madam Magician offered a wry smile in response.

"What I know isn't that detailed or precise. For example, after the one the Aurora Order believes in inherited half of the Ancient Sun God's inheritance, the Ancient Sun God was resurrected in some way."

Lumian grasped the general idea and let out a relieved sigh.

"It seems to mirror Aurore's association with Roche Louise Sanson."

This facilitated his understanding.

Madam Magician seemed taken aback.

Almost instinctively, she reached out as if attempting to retrieve a drink from thin air, but she restrained herself in the end.

Lumian recounted the entire incident, a hint of pain and deep confusion in his voice.

"What could this Celestial Worthy be planning? Aurore was just a Sequence 7. Even if Roche Louise Sanson and her family are devout followers of Inevitability, they wouldn't be able to do anything of significance…"

Madam Magician sighed once more.

"Perhaps He intends to hasten the arrival of the apocalypse and allow the evil gods beyond the barrier to invade more easily.

"In that case, in order to protect this world and us, its inhabitants, Mr. Fool might consider abandoning the confrontation and permitting the Celestial Worthy's return intact."

Lumian listened in a daze, a sudden thought racing through his mind.

What would happen if Mr. Fool indeed chose to stop resisting the Celestial Worthy of Heaven and Earth for Blessings?

Magician didn't delve further into the topic.

"I can't share more information at this moment. In short, pursuing Loki and his associates is both your personal vendetta and a shared mission of our Tarot Club. If you're confident, take action on your own. If not, feel free to seek assistance from other Major Arcana card holders at any time to eliminate the minions of the Celestial Worthy to the best of your ability."

With that, the woman stood up, and the room suddenly transformed into a celestial spectacle, filled with twinkling stars.

It felt as if Lumian had been transported into the vast and dazzling cosmos.

The stars revolved continuously, as if conveying a message. Madam Magician observed them for a moment before remarking, "It's true that divination doesn't reveal Loki's whereabouts or identity after his resurrection, and the others lack sufficient information.

"Once Hela has organized the relevant data, provide me with a copy."

Chapter 394: Eye of the Storm

Lumian was also waiting with anticipation for the abandoned April Fool's team members to recall useful details. He nodded and replied, "Got it."

Madam Magician fixed her gaze on him for a few moments, lost in thought.

"In the future, if I assign you a mission that seems clearly problematic, you have the option to either reject it or discuss it face-to-face with me while discreetly reaching out to other Major Arcana card holders."

"Why?" Lumian was a little confused.

By doing so, isn't Madam Magician implying that something might happen to her?

Magician chuckled self-deprecatingly.

"Because I'm a high-risk individual, susceptible to the influence of the Celestial Worthy.

"The Celestial Worthy holds the highest position in the Seer, Marauder, and Apprentice pathways. The higher the corresponding Beyonder Sequence, the more susceptible one is to His influence. Everyone carries an Oldest One within them, you see. And as a high-level Beyonder of the Apprentice pathway and a believer in The Fool, it's natural for me to occasionally be led astray, fooled, or deceived by the Celestial Worthy.

"Of course, Mr. Fool himself also stands at the pinnacle of these three pathways, which is why he opposes the Celestial Worthy. So, you need not worry about me. Most of the time, I'm under Mr. Fool's influence. There won't be anything wrong with my condition, but occasional anomalies might occur."

It's akin to praying without a ritual or invoking a name beyond those three lines; all of that can draw the Celestial Worthy's attention and invite His response, potentially planting hidden dangers… High-ranking individuals in the Seer, Marauder, and Apprentice pathways are closer to the Celestial Worthy and Mr. Fool. Even if one follows all the usual procedures, there's still a chance that something might go wrong… Lumian grasped Madam Magician's instructions before realizing that her words were revealing mysticism information that defied common sense.

Mr. Fool and the Celestial Worthy of Heaven and Earth for Blessings could simultaneously hold the pinnacle of three pathways!

Normally, reaching Sequence 0 in a pathway marked one as a true god. So what title did the individual at the peak of three pathways bear? A great existence?

For the first time, Lumian began to comprehend that Mr. Fool and the Celestial Worthy of Heaven and Earth for Blessings might surpass even true gods like the Eternal Blazing Sun.

Similarly, Amon's father, the Ancient Sun God, must belong to this echelon. After all, half of His inheritance had given rise to the one the Aurora Order believed in.

Soon, Lumian remembered Madam Magician's distinct descriptions of different deities.

Merely knowing of Their existence and invoking Their honorific names could corrupt certain deities, causing Them to undergo mutations or face peril.

Some deities could be mentioned in general terms, as long as one refrained from uttering Their honorific names beyond the three lines of Beyonder language, thus avoiding attracting Their attention.

This likely represents the division among deities… Mr. Fool and the Celestial Worthy of Heaven and Earth for Blessings occupy three neighboring and interchangeable pathways. Is this a hidden requirement for mastering a composite pathway? Lumian dared not probe further, fearing that knowing too much might lead to unintended consequences.

As for Madam Magician belonging to the Apprentice pathway, he had anticipated it. Aurore's grimoires had mentioned that Sequence 9 Apprentices in this pathway excelled at opening doors. Sequence 7s were known as Astrologers, aligning with Madam Magician's usual behavior and her occasional references to "astrology," "divination," and "fate."

"Understood," Lumian replied. He went on to explain his plan: if he failed to eliminate Loki within two months, he intended to use the Iron and Blood Cross Order's internal processes to relocate from the market district, as well as the problem about concealing the sealed mark on his body.

Magician was very understanding.

"No problem. Although you can also write to me and use yourself as bait, Loki might have the patience to wait a few more months, and I can't always be with you.

"As for the issue of the seal, if you don't actively activate it, only Beyonders of the Seer, Apprentice, and Marauder pathways who believe in the Celestial Worthy can sense it directly. This is different from the uncontrollable aura of the Celestial Worthy.

"If you need something quickly, seek angelic protection from Mr. Fool or write to me. I'll craft a charm that can safeguard secrets.

"That's the best way to manage the Celestial Worthy's aura on the Two of Cups for now. Fortunately, evil gods like the Mother Tree of Desire no longer pay special attention to people like them."

Lumian breathed a sigh of relief and inquired, "Can I share the information you just mentioned about the Celestial Worthy with the Two of Cups?"

Magician declined his request, explaining, "Her Major Arcana card holder will give her a simplified explanation, but it won't be as clear as what I just said. She doesn't know enough either. If you reveal everything I shared with you, it could put her in danger."

Lumian didn't press further and watched as Madam Magician used starlight to create a dreamy door. She stepped through it and disappeared.

The room's soundproof glass receded to its original state, and the crimson moonlight poured through the window, casting a glow on the table with the carbide lamp.

Lumian settled by the bed, his mind racing, and he couldn't help but recall Loki's description of his exploits against Aurore.

Taking a deep breath, he decided on his next course of action: digesting the Pyromaniac potion!

…

Quartier du Jardin Botanique, Rue Pasteur.

As dawn broke, Franca and Jenna made their way back to the market district along this street.

For the time being, Franca hadn't figured out how to broach the subject of the dangerous situation from last night with Jenna. She used the excuse that Jenna's brother was at home and might overhear them, so she decided to delay the conversation until tonight.

When they returned to Avenue du Marché, Jenna waved goodbye and headed towards Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons.

However, before she could enter the modified brick-red three-story building, she noticed graffiti in a corner, almost resembling the work of a child.

It served as a sign that the Purifiers were calling for an urgent meeting, complete with time and location details.

Jenna naturally averted her gaze and entered Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons.

After about fifteen minutes, in her role as the boss's lover, she left through the back door without any hindrance and arrived at a secluded alley near Église Saint-Robert.

Before long, Valentine and Imre appeared.

The former didn't waste time with pleasantries and got straight to the point, asking, "Have you received any news about the terrifying aura from last night?"

Jenna was perplexed.

"What terrifying aura?"

"You didn't sense it?" Imre, who had some Southern Continent heritage, inquired with a furrowed brow. "You didn't experience any nightmares?"

Jenna shook her head.

"I wasn't in the market district last night. I went home to visit my brother."

"Is that so…" Imre examined Jenna's expression and concluded that she was telling the truth.

She genuinely had no knowledge of the terrifying aura.

The two Purifiers briefly recounted the sudden appearance of a terrifying and violent aura on Rue des Blouses Blanches the previous night, urging Jenna to be more vigilant towards anyone displaying unusual behavior lately.

Jenna agreed and asked with curiosity, "Was that aura very noticeable? Why were you able to sense it even from the cathedral?"

"It's hard to describe," Imre admitted. "If you ever have the chance to experience it, you'll understand." He himself couldn't fully grasp the extent of the influence of the terrifying aura.

After bidding farewell to the two Purifiers and returning to Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons, Jenna's thoughts turned to Franca, who had acted strangely last night.

She had cryptically mentioned danger and advised Jenna to go home for a while. Eventually, she had come to share her bed late at night, explaining that something had occurred on Rue des Blouses Blanches and that she couldn't return…

That terrifying aura had appeared on Rue des Blouses Blanches… Jenna nodded, piecing things together.

Meanwhile, Franca finished her coffee and returned to her apartment on Rue des Blouses Blanches, which had returned to its usual state.

However, upon opening the door to Apartment 601, she noticed that the invisible "spider silk" she had concealed in the crack had fallen.

This could only mean one thing—someone had entered!

In the next instant, she spotted someone sitting in her recliner.

It was Gardner Martin, a man with distinct facial features, brownish-red eyes, and a genial demeanor. A few gray strands of hair adorned his temples.

Startled, Franca exclaimed, "Why are you here?"

She was relieved that she hadn't returned with Lumian.

Gardner Martin asked, bemused, "What's your take on the aura from last night?"

"What aura?" Franca was perplexed.

Gardner Martin, dressed in a formal suit without a bow tie, examined Franca closely and explained, "A terrifying aura reeking of blood and rust."

"When did this happen?" Franca recalled and shook her head. "I was at Jenna's house last night. I wasn't in the market district."

Gardner Martin nodded slowly and smiled.

"No wonder you didn't sense it."

Apart from Ciel, Madame Hela, and me dealing with Loki, did anything else happen last night? Franca walked to the coffee table in confusion, picked up her cup, and took a sip of water.

"What happened?"

Gardner Martin stood up and approached the window, looking down at Rue des Blouses Blanches.

"Late last night, a violent and terrifying aura emerged from Building 6 on this street. It lasted nearly ten seconds."

Building 6… Building 6? Franca nearly choked on her own saliva.

Isn't that the safe house I had rented through a Loen merchant who had already left Trier?

Isn't that where I fought Loki last night?

Could Madame Hela or Loki have caused the commotion?

Or was it Ciel?

Franca quickly regained her composure before Gardner Martin turned around.

She felt as though she had missed many crucial details due to her fainting.

…

Rue Anarchie, Auberge du Coq Doré.

Lumian, who had just returned from his morning exercises, had just changed into fresh clothes and was making his way to the first-floor hall when he encountered Anthony Reid, who had been deeply engrossed in his investigation regarding General Philip's widow and child.

The Psychiatrist glanced at Lumian and inquired, "What happened in the market district last night? I've had numerous individuals attempting to buy information related to it from me."

Lumian chuckled.

"Perhaps a strange aura erupted from Rue des Blouses Blanches."

Chapter 395: Progress on the Other Side

Anthony Reid, the middle-aged psychiatrist, observed Lumian's smile and mused, "Your performance suggests that this matter is personal to you."

Dammit, you can tell from that? Lumian had thought his smile, expression, and body language appeared normal. His response hadn't been exceptional, but he hadn't made any obvious mistakes.

Anthony Reid continued, "Your smile and actions betrayed a sense of smugness.

"And your reaction tells me this matter is deeply intertwined with you."

Could it be discerned even without mind reading? It wasn't until that moment that Lumian realized his seemingly ordinary expressions and actions might conceal hidden information in the eyes of a Psychiatrist.

Anthony Reid calmly advised, "I'm telling you directly how I've interpreted your cues. In the future, when you find yourself facing a Psychiatrist and wish to deceive them, it's best to prepare your emotions in advance and mentally rehearse your narrative as if it were genuine.

"If you'd rather not discuss the strange aura on Rue des Blouses Blanches, that's perfectly fine. I don't have the energy to gather information and trade it for money."

Lumian contemplated Anthony's words and nodded gently. He then inquired, "How's your investigation into General Philip going? Do you require our assistance?"

Anthony Reid glanced around, confirming there were no passersby in the hall at this late hour, and Madame Fels was at a considerable distance. He whispered, "General Philip's widow, child, and his closest friends during his lifetime don't seem to be a concern. They are leading normal lives.

"However, I've discovered that General Philip's widow donates a substantial sum to a charitable organization called Dreamseekers every quarter. The total donation amounts to nearly half of their apparent family assets."

Lumian pondered for a moment and asked, "Quite generous. What can you tell me about the Dreamseekers charity?"

Anthony Reid replied, "That's the subject of my next investigation. At present, I only know that their mission is to assist talented young individuals who have come to Trier to pursue their dreams but have encountered temporary hardships. They are not affiliated with the two Churches or established by government entities. It's a private charity primarily funded by donations from high society."

Lumian smiled and issued a warning with a hint of mockery, "Be cautious when delving into the Dreamseekers. Of course, if you happen to be reckless, it won't matter. At the very least, I'm already aware that if you were to suddenly vanish or meet an untimely demise, the source of the trouble likely stems from that charitable organization."

Anthony Reid stroked his light-yellow hair.

"Don't worry, I'm timid and value my life. I duck for cover at the sound of gunfire. If I ever sense danger, I won't be too proud to seek your assistance. Besides, this is what you promised me."

Without waiting for a reply, he continued, "Guillaume Bénet's wife has been residing at 20 Rue des Terraces in the library district and hasn't attempted to relocate.

"I've bribed some ordinary folks around her. Recently, they've informed me that a mysterious man occasionally visits her late at night, raising suspicions of an affair."

Condiment Beauty Paulina… Her decision to stay put on Rue des Terraces likely means she feels more secure now. Combined with the neighborhood rumors, there's a strong likelihood that she has reestablished contact with Bouvard Pont-Péro of the Sinners organization… Lumian smiled once more.

"Instruct your informants to compile a summary of the mysterious man's visitation patterns. This way, we can catch them in the act more precisely."

It was imperative to apprehend the Sinners' liaison, Bouvard Pont-Péro!

Only then could Lumian hope to trace the Sinners organization and locate Roche Louise Sanson's family.

Initially, he had hoped to start his investigation with the Sanson family name, possibly targeting Jacques Sanson, who had once run for parliament in the market district. However, he soon realized that Sanson was a common surname in Intis, and Jacques Sanson's family connections appeared straightforward. There were no apparent issues on the surface, and there were no reports of disappearances involving his sister, daughter, or other relatives.

After much contemplation, Lumian concluded that, for the time being, his focus needed to shift to the Sinners, an organization dedicated to the belief in Inevitability. His goal was to locate someone connected to the original Aurore's body.

He couldn't shake the feeling that there were still mysteries surrounding Loki and the others who had targeted Aurore. It was impossible that the Celestial Worthy of Heaven and Earth for Blessings had directly sent a revelation instructing Loki and the others to guide Muggle into using the Soul Summoning Spell on herself, right?

Such a direct involvement didn't align with the typical status of a deity, and considering the Celestial Worthy's ongoing conflict with Mr. Fool, his condition shouldn't be that favorable.

Moreover, Aurore had never participated in the April Fool's team's real-life gatherings. How then could Loki determine that her original body was a follower of an evil god?

Lumian contemplated two possibilities. Either Aurore had long been tormented by Roche Louise Sanson's lingering will and sought help from I Know Someone, inadvertently revealing her secret and drawing their attention, or one of the core members of the April Fool's team had a close connection to the Sinners organization and stumbled upon the matters related to Roche Louise Sanson.

Anthony Reid nodded in approval as he observed Lumian's patience in waiting for the mysterious man who had visited Guillaume Bénet's wife to provide more clues.

…

Avenue du Marché, Salle de Bal Brise.

Just as Lumian reached the staircase, he spotted Sarkota waiting there.

"The Boss is upstairs," Sarkota whispered.

He had been a part of Baron Brignais' operation for a long time, but he had no inkling about the true identity of the elusive Boss of the Savoie Mob. By the time Ciel had taken over Salle de Bal Brise, the Boss had made two visits!

What's the Boss doing here? Lumian's mind raced as he quickly recalled the events of the past two days. A rough idea began to form.

Ascending the staircase to the second floor, he spotted Gardner Martin, impeccably dressed in formal attire, sans bow tie, leisurely savoring his coffee.

Gardner Martin put down his cup and asked with a smile, "Where did you go?"

Lumian responded with candor.

"I had a chat with Anthony Reid, the information broker. I assigned him a mission: keeping tabs on the widow of Guillaume Bénet, the enemy I just dispatched, and observing her associates.

"I suspect that Guillaume Bénet might be backed by a secret organization that worships an evil deity."

Gardner Martin chuckled and remarked, "You're not leaving any room for mercy, are you? You're even more ruthless than I thought. Yes, we can enlist the authorities' assistance to deal with these secret organizations of evil gods."

Without allowing Lumian a chance to reply, he inquired further, "Did you sense that menacing and terrifying presence last night?"

Lumian nodded honestly.

"I felt it."

I was present at the scene…

Recalling the sensation coursing through his veins when he resonated with the Blood Emperor's aura, he added,

"Back then, my blood seemed to be on fire.

"I wanted to investigate the origin of that aura, but the official Beyonders were quicker and sealed off Rue des Blouses Blanches."

Gardner Martin appreciated Lumian's forthrightness.

"When the official Beyonders are less vigilant, pay a visit to 6 Rue des Blouses Blanches and do some digging. You might stumble upon something."

"Alright," Lumian agreed readily.

A return to the crime scene promised its own brand of intrigue.

…

Late at night, 3 Rue des Blouses Blanches, Apartment 601, Franca's room.

Sitting beside the typewriter and radio transceiver, the Demoness of Pleasure perused the information before turning to Jenna, who sat by her bedside.

"The gist of the matter is that Ciel has stumbled upon a new enemy. This guy is a Sequence 5 Marionettist of the Seer pathway, a member of Bureau 8. He's sinister and powerful. Not only did he detect our surveillance, but he also traced us back and launched an ambush…"

Franca skipped over the part about the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society and recounted the entire incident.

In this narrative, Hela's identity had been that of a formidable Beyonder hired through a mysticism gathering.

Franca spread her hands and said, "I was out cold and unaware of the terrifying and violent aura that permeated the scene. When I came to, we were all underground. The Marionettist, who went by the code name Loki, was already dead. Ciel was incinerating his body, and that woman was watching."

Jenna was astounded by the capabilities and performance of a Marionettist. She tensed, feeling the summer night grow colder.

Seeing Jenna's reaction, Franca seized the moment to add, "But there's something even more chilling!"

She proceeded to recount everything she knew, sending shivers down Jenna's spine. Jenna involuntarily took a few steps closer to Franca.

"Dammit, what else have you guys been up to that I don't know about?" Jenna mustered her courage, spewing out a few choice expletives.

"It's not us, it's Ciel!" Franca was about to delve into the horror when a message crackled through the radio transceiver.

The intricate analyzer automatically translated it, spitting out a piece of paper through a connected mechanical typewriter.

Franca picked it up and saw it was from 007.

"Hidden Blade, do you have any information about the terrifying aura in the market district last night?"

Franca typed out her response,

"I don't reside in the market district. Why would I know anything about it?"

007 quickly replied, "Most of the information you provide and the favors you ask from me are related to or within the vicinity of the market district. If you haven't set foot there in the past six months, I'll eat my own hat!"

Franca chuckled dryly and responded, under Jenna's watchful gaze. "I do have some knowledge about this incident.

"But I can't spill the beans right now. You'll get the scoop at our next gathering."

…

As Franca conversed with 007, Lumian was resting in Room 207 of the Auberge du Coq Doré.

For the moment, he refrained from finding any acting possibilities. Despite having received treatment from Madame Hela and no longer teetering on the brink of losing control, as well as the auto-recovery at 6 a.m., there were lingering mental issues that required time and rest to slowly mend. Additionally, he needed to wait for Madame Hela to extract "confessions" from the April Fool's team members.

Just before midnight, the pure silver skull emerged from the shadows, its teeth gripping a thick stack of papers.

Chapter 396: Pure Evil

Lumian expressed his gratitude and took the stack of papers. He lit the carbide lamp and quickly skimmed through the "confessions."

Hela had already thoroughly read through them and had made notes on the essential information. This saved Lumian a lot of time. Besides, he didn't know much about the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society's history. If he were the one making the choice, he might struggle to grasp the key points accurately.

After nearly an hour of reading, Lumian had a rough understanding of the overall situation.

"There aren't many April Fool's members, and they don't meet often or play pranks frequently. They mainly operate in three areas: Trier, the coastal province of Gaia in the Feynapotter Kingdom, and the West Balam region of the Southern Continent.

"The core members involved in the gatherings in Trier are Loki, I Know Someone, and Mad Lady.

"In the Gaia Province, during the sea prayer rituals at Port Santa, the April Fool's team members who pulled pranks were Bard, Ultraman, and Mad Lady. Bard and Ultraman incited local college students to march in Torres, the capital of Gaia Province…

"In the pranks that took place in the Southern Continent's West Balam, the core members involved were Hisoka and Mad Lady.

"At a private gathering in Trier, Loki jokingly mentioned that he had inherited an ancient castle.

"At another Trier gathering, I Know Someone suddenly felt inspired and wanted to hypnotize certain psychiatrists to make them 'conceive' a solution to treat certain mental illnesses by destroying the frontal lobe…"

Madam Susie's accusation of malicious treatment that would forever "calm" patients turns out to be a prank by I Know Someone… That's true. Only someone from another world could skip previous speculations and come up with such an idea…

His sole purpose was to see if the psychiatrists of this world were as foolish, bigoted, and despicable as to create an absurd tragedy that would leave a mark on medical history… The dozens or hundreds of patients who had completely lost their "souls" would never expect their tragic encounter to stem from an inhumane prank…

Loki and I Know Someone are worse than I imagined… Lumian couldn't help but shake his head as he read the last page of the "confessions."

He believed that he had already witnessed the worst side of humanity during his tramp days. People had committed heinous acts for food, to escape trouble, to vent their emotions—they had murdered other tramps, sold companions to the mines while they were asleep, abducted children from the streets, bullied the weak, and humiliated them in various ways. Some had formed gangs and chased away other tramps every day, turning a blind eye to their suffering.

But now, Lumian realized that these evils were clearly inferior to those of Loki, I Know Someone, and the other core members of April Fool's. They were on a whole other level.

"Even demons from the Abyss would have to address them as godfathers when they see them. Compared to them, the padre can be considered a saint," Lumian muttered, setting fire to these people repeatedly in his mind.

He exhaled and extracted useful information from these "confessions" and Madame Hela's markings.

At least eight members of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society are suspected to have perished as a direct or indirect result of pranks by the April Fool's team…

I Know Someone, like Loki, participates in every private gathering in Trier, but he has never been to Feynapotter's Gaia Province or West Balam. This suggests he likely resides in Trier as well…

Similarly, Bard and Ultraman are suspected to be in Feynapotter's Gaia Province. Hisoka is located in the Southern Continent's West Balam…

Mad Lady participates in private gatherings everywhere, and these gatherings occur within a month after an agreement is made. This implies that Mad Lady has a teleportation-like ability or item…

The joke about Loki inheriting the ancient castle aligns with his dream. Perhaps I can start with investigating the appearance of the ancient castle to find Loki's whereabouts…

I Know Someone displayed extensive medical knowledge at gatherings, not limited to the psychological domain… He was either a formidable general practitioner before transmigrating or possessed the body of a senior doctor. Could such a person be usually a doctor in disguise? He has the qualifications and ability to impersonate and earn a large sum of money…

Bard loves to collect Emperor Roselle's diary pages and mock him in various ways. Could he have written Emperor Roselle's Secret Chronicles?

Ultraman and Hisoka keep a relatively low profile during the gatherings, leaving no details worth pondering…

Based on this information, Lumian finalized his next course of investigation.

Firstly, he wanted to find the ancient castle from Loki's dream. Secondly, he aimed to delve into the medical profession, seeking clues about I Know Someone. Thirdly, he planned to wait for the next gathering to confirm whether the author of Emperor Roselle's Secret Chronicles was among the current Research Society members before pursuing the original author.

As for the others, he would consider them after dealing with these matters and gaining something more valuable.

Lumian summoned the Rabbit of Knowledge and had it copy the information before sending it to Madam Magician.

…

"What's this?" Jenna looked at the pure silver skull emerging from the darkness, a little afraid to meet the pale-white flames in its eye sockets.

Franca smiled awkwardly and said, "This is the messenger of that formidable lady. She helped us organize the accomplices' statements."

Franca snatched the thick piece of paper from the skull's mouth, not wanting Jenna to see the firsthand information.

Revealing it would expose the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society!

Jenna looked at the pure silver skull disappearing into the darkness and asked in confusion and curiosity, "What's a messenger?"

"It's like a postman in the world of mysticism. It's a postman for private use," Franca explained simply.

Jenna shifted her gaze to Franca.

"Do you have one?"

Franca fell silent.

"This can only be obtained by a specific pathway at a specific Sequence or with their help."

"Oh, you don't…" Jenna deciphered Franca's words.

Intrigued, she asked, "At which Sequence in the Demoness pathway does one need to reach before they can have a messenger?"

Franca fell silent again.

"Not even at Sequence 4 that I know of."

With that, she muttered under her breath, "You can switch to the Hunter pathway with your provocative abilities."

Jenna chuckled and thought for a moment.

"The last time I helped Ciel read about spirit world creatures, I seemed to have noticed a description of a few spirit world creatures that said they were 'suitable as messengers.' Can we summon them and sign a messenger contract?"

"No, uh, it's not impossible." Franca suddenly realized that she could use Mr. Fool's power to summon creatures from the spirit world and ask Him to be a witness to the contract, just like Ciel's contract ability.

Seeing Franca deep in thought, Jenna waited silently.

After a moment, Franca nodded slowly.

"I've come up with an idea. We'll try it later."

She then said to Jenna, "I'll sort out these statements. Don't stay up too late. You still have to go to Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons tomorrow morning."

Jenna didn't inquire further and left Franca's bedroom.

Franca let out a sigh of relief and took a telegram that had just been received.

It also came from 007.

"Hidden Blade, when are you moving out of the market district?

"Ever since you arrived here, all kinds of troubles have been happening one after another. I'm about to become a real 007. I suspect you're the walking source of disaster!"

"Pfft!" Franca spat and muttered to herself, "Is the problem me? It's Ciel!"

Ever since Lumian arrived in the market district, her life hadn't been as leisurely as before.

The incident with Loki had just subsided, and the small cracks on her skin had yet to fully heal. She had to go to Trocadéro tomorrow afternoon to interact with the participants of the Red House Café's female orgy and the woman suspected to be a member of the Demoness Sect.

…

Around 9 a.m., Lumian, having completed his morning exercise and breakfast, found himself with a rare moment of leisure.

On the Iron and Blood Cross Order's side, he awaited Poufer Sauron's next summoning. Concerning the Sinners organization, he patiently gathered information without alerting the occasional mysterious visitor. Anthony Reid would handle matters related to Hugues Artois, but his assistance wasn't needed yet. It proved challenging to discreetly tail Franca during the Bliss Society investigations as she needed to make contact with the Demoness Sect. Lumian had leads on Loki's ancient castle and I Know Someone, but lacked a clear breakthrough.

After careful consideration, Lumian decided that acting as a Pyromaniac was the best course of action. However, the market district was in a delicate state, closely monitored by numerous high-ranking individuals. Finding a safe opportunity was crucial.

Should I take the opportunity to report to Mr. K and inquire if he has a suitable mission for me to act as a Pyromaniac… Lost in thought, he walked past the Salle de Gristmill on Rue Anarchie's other side.

The establishment was under Lumian's ownership, currently overseen by the bounty hunter Lugano Toscano and Louis of the Savoie Mob.

After a brief moment of reflection, Lumian decided to enter the Salle de Gristmill.

The dance hall was closed at that time, and every waiter greeted Lumian respectfully but kept their distance.

Lumian quickly spotted Lugano Toscano, the well-built bounty hunter with sharp features, thick eyebrows, and large eyes. He was dressed in a simple formal suit and a black top hat.

Holding a magazine, he smiled at Lumian. "Boss, what brings you here?"

Lumian didn't respond immediately. His attention was drawn to the magazine in Lugano's hand. "What magazine are you reading?"

"Basics of Medicine," Lugano replied, displaying the book.

Basics of Medicine… Lumian's eyebrows twitched. "Why are you reading such books?"

He could understand if it was the First Aid Manual.

Lugano smiled and explained, "My next Sequence is Doctor. Although the potion will directly grant me corresponding Beyonder powers, having more medical knowledge will enhance my abilities. Plus, I aim to pose as a genuine doctor to earn some extra income."

Stumbling on the acting method coincidentally… Doctor… Lumian's heart stirred as he asked, "Have you ever heard of frontal lobe removal surgery?"

Chapter 397: Execution Ground

Lugano cast a puzzled glance at Lumian.

"You've heard about this surgery too?"

After a moment of thought, he forced a smile.

"As expected of you. You're knowledgeable and have a wide range of interests. You even know about such cutting-edge surgeries."

"Seems like you know a lot," Lumian brushed off Lugano's ingratiation.

Lugano nodded quickly.

"I've read in several magazines that doctors believe the essence of such surgery is to destroy the patient's brain, and it's irreversible. In other words, while it appears to cure the patient's madness, it leaves him with lower intelligence and eternally calm, devoid of emotional fluctuations.

"They believe that if we don't use this surgery, there's still a chance of recovery from the madness through other methods, but once they become stupid, there's no hope of recovery."

Intis still has many doctors with high academic standards who dare to speak the truth. Their professional ethics aren't bad either… Lumian nodded inwardly.

After confirming that Lugano had a certain understanding of the medical world, he casually asked,

"Any strange medical cases recently?"

Lugano pondered for a moment and slowly shook his head.

"Nothing out of the ordinary."

Just as Lumian was about to change the subject, Lugano added, "If you insist on something strange, there's a folklore that's been trending on a small scale recently."

"Medical-related folklore?" Lumian discerned the underlying meaning in Lugano's words.

Lugano, with his brown hair and eyes, replied with a smile, "Sort of.

"It's probably because a group of Trier citizens believe that the blood shed by a death row inmate carries the last vestiges of life's resilience. If you eat some bread dipped in it, it can treat various illnesses. This infuriated many medical columnists, who called it a retro, bloody, and foolish act. In comparison, going to the cathedral to seek protection might be more effective."

"Why haven't I heard of such folklore?" Lumian found the Trier citizens' actions indescribable. They weren't just foolish.

Lugano chuckled.

"Boss, that's normal. I've never heard of it before either. It's a folklore that only appeared in the past two to three months. Perhaps it's brought about by some foreigners. More and more people are believing it."

Lumian chatted with the bounty hunter, who had saved up to purchase the Doctor main ingredient, for a while longer, gaining a vague understanding of Trier's medical world.

Shortly before noon, having filled his stomach, he turned onto Rue des Blouses Blanches and entered Apartment 3.

Throughout this process, Lumian didn't conceal his curiosity. He carefully examined 6 Rue des Blouses Blanches, but found no traces.

He knocked on Apartment 601's door and tossed the Lie earring to Franca, whose flaxen-colored hair was tied up in a simple ponytail.

This companion had to interact with the Demoness Sect in the afternoon again. She had to revert to her previous appearance.

"What took you so long?" Franca precisely caught the silver earring. "Didn't you receive the information from Madame Hela? I've been waiting for you to come and discuss it."

A soft chuckle escaped Lumian's lips.

"Why are you even more anxious than me?"

After closing the door, he sat on the sofa and recounted the key information and corresponding guesses he had extracted from the information. Franca chimed in from time to time, offering her opinions.

Towards the end, Lumian recounted the bounty hunter Lugano Toscano's description of Trier's medical world and the strange folklore.

Franca's expression turned odd.

"Is there a problem?" Lumian wasn't alarmed but delighted.

Franca confirmed succinctly, "The rumor that eating bread stained with the blood of death row inmates can treat illnesses is very similar to ancient folklore back home, but that was many years ago. Ever since education was made universal, such folklore has basically disappeared.

"In the original folklore, steamed buns dyed red by the blood of death row inmates could treat severe lung ailments, provided they were eaten while they were still hot."

Lumian raised his right eyebrow.

He had found the strange folklore giving him an indescribable feeling.

It felt like a prank!

This was the style of April Fool's!

"I Know Someone came up with it?" Lumian suddenly felt a surge of excitement.

A Psychiatrist capable of hypnosis could make such folklore appear and spread without anyone knowing!

Franca nodded solemnly.

"I Know Someone is also from your sister's and my homeland. Otherwise, your sister wouldn't have trusted him and sought treatment for her psychological problems.

"His code name and the language he knows bear witness to this. Besides him and Black Earth, the other members of April Fool's might not be aware of that ancient folklore."

"Loki doesn't know either?" Lumian asked in surprise.

"I'm not sure." Franca frowned. "I'm not familiar with him, and he has never revealed his identity as a fellow countryman. If he hadn't recited the four-lined honorific name in the language of your sister and me, I wouldn't have known that he knew it. I always thought that their team's Emperor Roselle diary entries were translated by I Know Someone and Black Earth."

A mischievous grin curved Lumian's lips.

"If it's really a folklore prank created by I Know Someone, I'll go to the execution ground in the prison district and watch."

The prison district, also known as Quartier du Red Hat, officially numbered 4, was one of the oldest urban districts. It boasted Intis's most renowned prison, Saint-Maar Prison, hence the district's name.

Near Saint-Maar Prison stood one of Trier's busiest execution grounds—Rois Comprehensive Execution Ground.

"Be careful. Psychiatrists are more cautious than Marionettists," Franca warned.

Although I Know Someone wasn't a Beyonder of the Seer, Marauder, or Apprentice pathways and couldn't discover the seal on Lumian's body even if he believed in the Celestial Worthy of Heaven and Earth for Blessings, Lumian still felt that he couldn't be careless. He got back the Lie earring and briefly changed his appearance. He was worried that the resurrected Loki had already communicated with I Know Someone about his and Franca's real appearance.

Franca took back the Lie earring and asked curiously, "What was up with that terrifying aura from that day?"

Lumian chuckled.

"We'll need to start with Madame Hela and me searching for the Samaritan Women's Spring."

"…" Franca was taken aback for a moment before cursing. "Dammit! How many details did you leave out?"

"It depends on when it comes up." Lumian briefly mentioned how the Blood Emperor's aura had corroded his flesh.

Franca had already forgotten her anger. She carefully observed Lumian's raised right palm and finally noticed the indistinct marks that seemed to have been squeezed beyond recognition.

"Wow, you actually have the aura of a true god on you. Although it's just an empty shell, it's still the aura of a true god. Furthermore, it's a true god of the same pathway." Franca sighed enviously, wishing she could have one for herself.

She then looked at Lumian's bandaged left hand.

"What's on this one?"

"Nothing. It's just to attract attention," Lumian replied with a smile.

Franca was stunned for two seconds.

"You're so sinister! If you advance to a Conspirer, your digestion speed will definitely be very fast!"

"I hope the outcome is as good as your blessings," Lumian replied without modesty.

…

In the afternoon, Lumian took a public carriage to the north bank of the Srenzo River and arrived at the Rois Comprehensive Execution Ground in the prison district.

One of Trier's citizens' hobbies was watching the execution of criminals. Although it wasn't the weekend, there were still many people gathered here. There were even many vendors setting up stalls or traversing among them, hawking food and drinks.

Among them, there was no shortage of gorgeously dressed street girls seeking business, as well as a group of authors who had deliberately come to take a stroll.

If not for the name "Rois Comprehensive Execution Ground" written at the intersection and the gallows and beheading platform standing in the distance, Lumian would have suspected that he had come to the wrong place and entered a nearby market. It was bustling and noisy.

Stepping on the muddy ground, Lumian concealed himself in the crowd and circled the execution ground as if he were strolling through a market.

He didn't spot anyone suspicious, but he saw a dozen or so men and women with bread in their hands crowding in front. Their clothes were old, and some of them could be considered crude.

After a while, the crowd suddenly stirred, squeezing to the sides of the road leading to the execution ground to welcome the procession from Saint-Maar Prison.

Lumian didn't join in the bustle, but he heard cheers, whistles, and women shouting, "I'm willing to marry you."

The latter wasn't a proposal, but a jest about past folklore. In the classical era before Emperor Roselle, if a death row inmate received a proposal while walking from prison to the execution ground and he agreed, he would receive a change in sentence and survive. However, not all death row inmates would accept it. Some valued looks very much, while others had dignity. They all chose death to uphold their ideals.

The two most renowned cases involved a handsome death row inmate who rejected the proposal of a woman, believing her appearance to be a nightmare. On the other hand, a beautiful girl, faced with an executioner's courtship, gave up the opportunity to save herself, believing it was an insult to love and marriage.

Lumian squeezed into the front row of onlookers and saw two death row inmates standing at the firing point.

They were relatively young, no more than 30 years old. They wore standard prison uniforms—red short shirts, yellow pants, and green hats. Their feet dragged iron balls, and their hands were tied behind their backs with iron chains.

One of the men had black hair and blue eyes, while the other had brown hair and brown eyes. They were good-looking, but their gazes were filled with hatred.

Upon seeing the execution gunmen reach their designated positions and raise their rifles, the two death row inmates shouted, "Long live freedom!"

"Return to glory!"

After shouting, the two of them glared at each other angrily and collapsed amidst the gunshots, blood gushing out.

The people holding the bread were excited, but they were stopped by the soldiers in front of them and couldn't rush to the firing point.

Once the condition of the two death row inmates was confirmed, the soldiers left in formation. The bread-wielding citizens charged towards the blood-stained soil.

Lumian didn't look at them. Instead, he observed his surroundings to see who was enjoying this absurd comedy.

Chapter 398: Human Blood Bread

Some of the citizens of Trier were curious and began asking around for the reason behind the commotion, while others watched with excitement. Lumian couldn't discern who was genuinely enjoying the prank's results and who was simply caught up in the fun.

This was a part of Trier's folklore. Lumian believed that even a formidable, higher-Sequence psychiatrist like Madam Susie wouldn't be able to pinpoint the source of the commotion, identify the prankster, or distinguish the intentional misguidance from the innocent bystanders.

Although Lumian had anticipated this, he couldn't help but let out a sigh.

"You Trierians…"

No wonder the April Fool's team held their private gatherings here. It was like a homecoming.

Lumian abandoned his observations and casually singled out a middle-aged man who was using rye bread to soak up the blood left behind by the death row inmates. He waited until the man made a dash for an exit of the Rois Comprehensive Execution Ground before quietly following behind.

In a secluded alley devoid of barricades, Lumian took a few steps forward, blocking the path of the middle-aged man in a tattered linen shirt.

Raising his bandaged left palm, Lumian inquired, as if he were a mobster giving a condescending glance to an ordinary citizen.

"What have you got there?"

The gaunt middle-aged man with short black hair replied timidly, "It's bread stained with the blood of death row inmates."

"And what's the purpose of this?" Lumian adopted the tone of a curious monster with a touch of intrigue.

The middle-aged man's fear was palpable.

"I-It can treat illnesses."

"Who told you it could treat illnesses?" This was Lumian's main question.

The middle-aged man answered in a daze, "I heard it from Guillaume, who lives across the street. He said that his coworker's child got better after eating this kind of human blood bread."

The child of a coworker's neighbor… Lumian regarded it as nothing more than a rumor. Tracing its origin would be challenging.

He studied the middle-aged man clutching the blood-stained bread and asked with contemplation, "Is someone in your family sick too?"

"Yes." The middle-aged man instantly looked downtrodden and filled with despair.

He glanced at the blood-stained bread in his hand, a glimmer of hope in his eyes.

Lumian remained silent for a moment before responding, "What did the doctor say?"

The middle-aged man lowered his head slightly, his gaze fixed on the blood bread.

"He said there's no cure, and I don't have the money to…"

Lumian didn't press further. He turned silently, allowing the middle-aged man to pass through the barricade with his blood-soaked bread and continue down the secluded alley.

He moved slowly, retracing his steps back to the Rois Comprehensive Execution Ground, and noticed that the "market" was still in full swing. Many citizens had taken advantage of the situation to have picnics, sing, and dance, turning it into an impromptu gathering.

Lumian took cover behind the trees on the edge of the square, sitting in the shadows, and continued to silently observe the people coming and going.

As time passed, the bustling "market" in the execution ground gradually quieted down. The sun had dipped below the horizon, casting the surroundings into darkness.

Lumian remained hidden, keeping an eye on the departing citizens and vendors. However, he didn't identify any suspicious individuals.

With the arrival of the dark night, the Rois Comprehensive Execution Ground was deserted, bathed in the eerie light of the crimson moon. Lumian slowly rose to his feet, preparing to depart.

Suddenly, he caught sight of a dark figure leaping over the side fence and swiftly infiltrating the execution ground.

Lumian froze and pressed further into the shadows of the tree.

The slender figure, adorned with a top hat, made his way to the area where the death row inmates had met their end. He knelt down, reached out, and collected the soil stained with their blood.

Could this person also believe in the healing properties of death row inmates' blood? His actions and agility suggest he might be a Beyonder… Lumian silently watched the mysterious figure.

Before long, the tall, thin figure in the top hat straightened up, holding a mound of blood-soaked soil.

Rather than immediately leaving the Rois execution grounds, he ventured deeper, heading towards the gallows.

Under the crimson moonlight, the figure buried the blood-stained soil beneath the gallows. He seemed to scrutinize the plants growing there, as if searching for something.

…

In Trocadéro Town, inside the Red House Café with its vibrant mushroom-like roof,

Franca, sporting black hair, brown eyes, and hunting attire, placed her dinner order: beef seasoned with coarse salt, red wine, fries, Feysac omelet, quail bisque with a few slices of ham.

Earlier that afternoon, she had engaged in a lively conversation with a group of ladies and could sense the longing and desire in their eyes.

Simultaneously, she felt someone secretly observing her, prompting her to stay until nightfall.

As Franca neared the end of her dinner, a woman descended from the second floor.

It was the Demoness who had tailed Franca previously. Today, her long orange-red hair cascaded down her back, and she wore a white man's shirt, brown dungarees, and dark brown boots that accentuated her perfect figure. Her appearance was exquisite and clean, with an aura that was both pure and slightly wild.

Without hesitation, the woman, presumably a member of the Demoness Sect, walked straight toward Franca, pulled out a chair, and sat opposite her.

Franca deliberately assessed the Demoness's appearance and figure with a masculine gaze. She smiled and watched as the woman sat down, waiting for her to speak.

"Why are you here again?" the orange-red-haired Demoness inquired, studying Franca closely.

Franca smiled and replied, "Trocadéro Wine is my favorite wine. The scenery and atmosphere here are quite appealing."

Noticing the Demoness's disbelief, Franca added with a sly smile, "Besides, I've heard…"

She lowered her voice and insinuated, "There are female orgies here."

The eyes of the Demoness with long orange-red hair flickered.

"Who told you that?"

Franca looked at the Demoness's face and said provocatively, "Once, I encountered a nymphomaniac who tried to ambush me, but I handled him. He claimed to be a peripheral member of an organization called the Bliss Society. The core members of this organization are lesbians, and they are trying to connect with participants in the female orgies at the Red House Café, looking to recruit new members."

Franca wasn't sure if the Demoness Sect had any ties to the Bliss Society. After all, it wasn't inconceivable for organizations worshiping evil gods to form alliances to some extent, similar to how Hugues Artois had numerous heretics under his influence. Therefore, she "confessed" this information to gauge the reaction of the person sitting across from her.

As she spoke, she prepared herself for any potential surprise attacks.

The Demoness with long orange-red hair's expression shifted slightly, becoming more serious.

The hostility and wariness in her eyes diminished, but there was a clear sense of repulsion.

Oh, does she view the participants of these female gatherings as her lovers and is unwilling to let me, possibly once a man, near them? Franca couldn't help but mimic Lumian's tone inwardly and playfully tease.

She was reasonably certain that the other party had never heard of the Bliss Society, but she had detected some signs.

The Demoness sitting across from Franca fell into deep thought, appearing to consider a potential issue.

After more than ten seconds, she unconsciously brushed back her long orange-red hair and asked cautiously, "Are you here to investigate the Bliss Society, or are you interested in joining the orgy?"

Franca's laugh drew astonished looks from the surrounding customers, who were clearly taken aback by her stunning expression.

"Both," Franca replied, meeting the orange-red eyes of the Demoness. "But if I had to choose, I'd prefer attending the orgy. How can people like us resist such a tempting party? Wouldn't you agree?"

In this way, Franca subtly indicated that she had deduced that the other person was also a Demoness and likely a former male Assassin.

She also hinted at her own history as a man to deter any sudden attacks.

The Demoness, now dressed as a man, seemed to resist this notion but remained silent, clearly captivated by Franca's presence and aura.

Leaning forward, Franca asked in a more masculine tone, "What should I call you?"

The Demoness hesitated briefly before responding somberly, "I'm Browns Sauron. And you?"

Sauron… Another member of the Sauron family? Franca suddenly recalled that Lumian's recent mission under the Iron and Blood Cross Order involved interactions with members of the Sauron family.

She didn't conceal her true name and smiled. "Franca Roland."

Browns Sauron let out a silent sigh and continued, "Our party places great importance on the privacy and safety of all members. We can't allow problematic individuals to join. If you're truly interested, you'll need to undergo an audit."

Franca didn't mind at all. She toyed with the buttons on her shirt and inquired with a grin,

"So, where should we start this audit?"

…

Prison district, Rois Comprehensive Execution Ground.

Under the crimson moonlight, the tall, slender figure in the top hat carefully unearthed a few handfuls of weeds from the ground beneath the gallows.

The roots of these weeds emitted an eerie, blood-red glow, appearing especially otherworldly in the moon's dim light.

This tall, thin figure had a prominent nose bridge, fair skin, and impeccably groomed medium-length black hair. His eyes were a striking shade of red, and he possessed a certain androgynous allure.

Clad in a white shirt, a vibrant red bow tie, and a sleek black suit, he gazed with fascination at the peculiar weeds in his hand. He was on the verge of rising to leave the execution grounds.

However, at that very moment, a curious male voice broke the silence.

"What are you digging?"

The lanky figure, who had been crouched beneath the gallows, looked up in astonishment. To his surprise, he realized that, at some unnoticeable point in time, a figure had materialized before him, peering down with a penetrating gaze.

This new arrival had blond hair and eyes as blue as serene lakes. He wore a simple white shirt and a black vest, giving him a youthful and refreshing appearance.

How did he manage to approach me without detection? I didn't pick up on any scent or movement! The lanky figure's heart raced with alarm and trepidation.

Chapter 399: Mandrake

The lanky figure, though startled, sprang into action.

In a swift motion, he launched a powerful kick with his knee, lunging at Lumian, leaving only a blur behind.

Rather than reaching out with his right hand, which was gripping the strange weeds, he extended his nails, etched with mystical symbols and patterns, appearing hard and razor-sharp.

Darkness surrounding Lumian seemed to awaken, converging into pitch-black chains that aimed to ensnare him in place.

Lumian's gaze remained resolute as he observed the rapidly approaching figure. He emitted a soft harrumph.

Two beams of brilliant white light shot forth from his nostrils, striking the target before he could evade in time.

The tall, slender figure suddenly crumpled to the ground, unconscious.

The illusory chains, formed from darkness, disintegrated into nothingness.

Lumian, donning a different visage, grinned and shook his head. "You actually opted for an attack rather than fleeing."

Utilizing spirit world traversal, he teleported to close the distance with his target discreetly, preventing him from sensing the impending danger. When they were within mere meters of each other, escape or counterattack became impossible. At worst, both parties would sustain injuries. Hence, Lumian still had time for a "greeting." If the other party cooperated and answered civilly, there might be no need for a confrontation.

It was akin to a phrase frequently espoused by the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society:

Encouraging compliance through good morals!

Lumian carefully observed for a few moments and confirmed that the tall, thin figure had indeed fainted.

He bent down to examine the peculiar blood-red rooted weeds. Apart from their extraordinary spiritual properties, they seemed rather ordinary.

After some contemplation, Lumian hoisted the unconscious figure and shook him vigorously.

As the target began to stir, Lumian released his grip and stepped back.

Based on the previous skirmish, Lumian suspected that the other party was a Mid-Sequence Beyonder from the Apothecary pathway, specifically Sequence 7, known as Vampire. This meant that any human who consumed the corresponding potion to advance would eventually undergo a transformation into another species.

Aurore possessed substantial knowledge about Vampires' characteristics and abilities, as the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society included two individuals known as Sanguines, one of whom bore the code name "Headmaster."

Hence, Lumian deduced the target's identity based on his swift reflexes, formidable nails, and the dark shackles-like spells he wielded.

Since he wasn't a Psychiatrist and didn't possess any similar items, they weren't truly enemies. The best course of action was to engage in a friendly and cooperative conversation.

As soon as the lanky figure regained consciousness, he sprang to his feet and scanned his surroundings with a wary gaze. His eyes fell upon a blond youth standing by the gallows, dressed in a crisp outfit and wearing a friendly smile.

Instinctively, he considered launching an attack, but a rational thought held him back.

The other party had clearly demonstrated the ability to subdue him effortlessly, with the power to end his life or sell him at any moment. However, instead of harm, he had chosen to awaken him!

This implied an absence of immediate malice. Moreover, it indicated a profound confidence in his own capabilities, as if he were unafraid of any resistance or escape.

The lanky figure recalled the other party's sudden appearance and the peculiar white beams. He couldn't help but feel that even if the barons or even viscounts from his family were to confront him, the outcome wouldn't be so swift and one-sided.

Coupled with his ignorance of the two white beams' nature and the corresponding pathway, he suspected that the individual before him had surpassed his expectations in terms of Sequence.

"What do you want?" the lanky figure inquired in a deep voice.

Lumian remained composed, ready to employ the Spell of Harrumph if necessary.

"Are you a Vampire?"

"Sanguine," the lanky figure emphasized.

Lumian cast his eyes skyward at the crimson moon and inquired with a smile, "Which family?"

Though he possessed no knowledge of the numerous Vampire families or the renowned last names, it didn't prevent him from assuming the role of an ancient being, wise and well-traveled.

Sensing the fear in the lanky figure's demeanor, Lumian seized the opportunity to play this role, drawing inspiration from figures like the ancient monster Amon, who had lived for eons.

"I hail from the Bruch family," the tall, slender figure declared with pride. "My name is La Nou Bruch."

What kind of family is this? I've never heard of them… Lumian nodded slightly and said, "Ah, the Bruch family."

He glanced at the strange weed in La Nou's hand. "What is this?"

"It's Mandrake," La Nou responded truthfully, believing that such a potent Beyonder wouldn't have much interest in a plant primarily used for spiritual purposes.

You mustn't merely answer my questions one by one. Be proactive and provide context and your reasons for being here. How can I maintain my image like this? Lumian chided him internally as he thought rapidly.

"Did you come specifically to retrieve it because this herb holds unique significance for you?"

La Nou hesitated for a moment before succumbing to his fear.

"Yes, the lotion made from it can help me withstand the spirituality surge during the full moon."

Spirituality surge… Lumian recalled some details from Aurore's grimoires: The Headmaster of the Academy team had sought a solution to the spirituality surge during the full moon within the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society, but had found none.

According to Sanguine accounts, after the awakening of the Ancestor of the ancient species a few years ago and Her reclamation of authority from the Evernight Goddess, all Sanguines had become unstable during the full moon.

This wasn't the madness that afflicted the Mutants, but a form of sublimation. Nevertheless, the sudden surge in spirituality, akin to a rising tide, placed a substantial burden on the Vampires' bodies. Some experienced hallucinations or unnecessary danger due to their heightened spiritual perception during this period.

Lumian regarded La Nou with interest and asked, "Mandrake can suppress the spirituality surge during the full moon?"

"The few Sanguines I've encountered seem to be unaware of this."

The entire Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society was unaware!

La Nou didn't hide his smugness.

"I believe I may be the first to have made this discovery. Mandrake is a plant that thrives beneath the corpses of hanged individuals. It appears to draw power from some sort of earthbound divine influence."

Spiritual plants associated with the earth domain? Lumian inquired thoughtfully, "How did you stumble upon this revelation?"

Observing that such a formidable Beyonder was ignorant of the origins and applications of Mandrake, La Nou's smile broadened.

"At first, there were rumors circulating about the plants that grew beneath the bodies of the hanged being able to treat various ailments. Given that every Sanguine is an Apothecary, I couldn't entirely dismiss these rumors. So, I decided to give it a shot. I crafted a Mandrake lotion and found that it remarkably suppressed spirituality fluctuations."

Rumor… Rumors once again… Lumian suppressed his frown.

"Do you happen to know where these rumors originated?"

"I'm afraid not," La Nou replied with a shake of his head. "In Trier, rumors abound. For example, in recent months, I was concerned that the reckless harvesting of Mandrake by uninformed citizens might disrupt its growth. However, new rumors have surfaced, with people now chasing after blood-soaked soil from death row inmates."

"It's indeed a challenge to trace the origins of rumors in Trier," Lumian remarked, a touch of resignation in his voice.

"Why did you bring soil stained with the blood of a death row inmate to the gallows?"

La Nou proudly displayed his findings.

"I've discovered that Mandrake flourishes beneath the bodies of hanged individuals. While it's most effective, hanging people isn't a common occurrence. However, by using the blood of other death row inmates to nourish it, Mandrake can still grow. Although it's not as potent, it gets the job done."

Lumian nodded thoughtfully, considering another aspect of the issue.

"Who initially gave the Mandrake its name? Wasn't it merely a rumor in the beginning?"

When it came to topics within his apparent "profession," La Nou spoke confidently.

"This plant has borne its name for quite some time, though no one had discovered its medicinal value until now. It was primarily utilized as a spiritual ingredient and as a component in certain spells…"

At this juncture, La Nou suddenly fell into a momentary stupor.

"Why haven't my ancestors, the illustrious Apothecaries, attempted to concoct lotions with Mandrake? They aren't confined to traditional knowledge; they explore ingredients based on principles and develop new lotions…"

"Perhaps they did try, but there was no spiritual surge in those times?"

Could it be that Mandrake possessed some mystical power triggered by the spirituality surge accompanying the full moon? Lumian, not being an Apothecary or a Mysticologist, couldn't arrive at a conclusive answer. All he could do was speculate based on La Nou's musings.

He changed the subject.

"Why did you refrain from reporting the Mandrake's utility to your elders? It could hold great significance for the entire Sanguine community."

La Nou stammered, "There are still some issues with the lotions I've crafted. I'm uncertain if the toxicity of Mandrake can be entirely neutralized. I plan to verify this before informing the higher-ups. Only then can I have a clear chance at ascending to the rank of baron."

"What issues have you encountered?" Lumian queried, part-curious and partly assisting the Headmaster of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society.

La Nou adjusted his long, black hair and expressed his concerns with a mix of confusion and apprehension.

"Whenever I consume the various Mandrake-based lotions, it's akin to ingesting poisonous mushrooms. I witness an abundance of flowers blooming on the ground, with countless tiny figures dancing amidst them. I find myself covered in mushrooms.

"The illusions vary somewhat each time, but recurring elements persist."

Could it be that your preemptive entry into the illusion mitigates the adverse effects of your spirituality surge state? Is that why you believe Mandrake can suppress this phenomenon? Lumian silently pondered.

Without further ado, he activated his spirit world traversal ability and vanished from La Nou's view.

A Sequence 5 Traveler or an item of similar nature? La Nou heaved a sigh of relief, hazarding a rough guess as to why the other party could appear beside him before he could react.

Coupled with the strange white beams, such a figure was undoubtedly formidable below the demigod level.

Chapter 400: Transferring Burdens

The street lamps outside the window had already lit up. Franca gazed at Browns Sauron and spoke, "I've already mentioned my name. I reside in the market district and hold a significant position within the Savoie Mob. That's all I can reveal. You're free to investigate me as you wish. In any case, I have two objectives. Firstly, I intend to probe into the Bliss Society and eliminate any hidden threats. Secondly, I plan to take the opportunity to gain insight into the female gathering."

Franca couldn't help but smile at her last statement.

Her strategy for the day involved connecting with people genuinely—a tactic she had devised with Lumian. If the Demoness at the Red House Café approached her, she would "confess" her intentions and assess if the other party had any ties to the Bliss Society.

Franca had even discussed specific details with Anthony Reid, a Psychiatrist, to prevent herself from reacting excessively. If that happened, it could do more harm than good.

According to Anthony Reid's suggestion, she was "candid," but not completely forthcoming. Revealing that she was once a man, had transformed into a Demoness of Pleasure, and was infiltrating the Savoie Mob to join the Iron and Blood Cross Order and eventually return to her original gender would not only fail to gain trust but also raise suspicions of ulterior motives due to her excessive honesty.

Thus, she only disclosed her identity and primary motives on the surface, leaving the rest hidden in the details, allowing the other party to uncover and investigate on their own.

Information gathered through effort was much more credible than mere words!

Browns Sauron fixed his gaze on Franca's eyes and remarked, "With the strength you've demonstrated, why limit yourself to being a mob leader?"

"For something of great importance, I believe you would have done the same," Franca replied cryptically, hinting that she had also discerned the other party's path, approximate Sequence, and original circumstances.

With that, she raised her hand to touch the silver-white earring fastened to her right earlobe and added with a grin, "I forgot to mention that this isn't my true appearance. My disguise is quite effective. Otherwise, why did you lose track of me the last time?"

Browns glanced at the silver earring, nodding in comprehension.

Instead of delving deeper into Franca's identity, the conversation shifted toward the topic of the Bliss Society.

Franca could discern that the Demoness placed significant importance on the Red House Café's female orgies and was cautious about any organizations or individuals with hidden agendas.

Are you telling me that you genuinely form romantic connections with some of the participants in these orgies and have developed feelings for them? If this continues, you're bound to encounter trouble sooner or later. It's perfectly natural to have emotions, but seeking them in such gatherings is a sign of a narrow perspective… Can't you completely separate the spiritual from the physical? When there's too much spiritual connection, the desire for physical intimacy grows. Conversely, with too much physical intimacy, it's inevitable for souls to draw closer… As an observer, Franca offered her critique of Browns Sauron's situation, drawing from the knowledge and experiences of two lifetimes that had led to her philosophical reflections.

This insight allowed her to grasp her first principle as a Demoness of Pleasure to some extent.

She didn't withhold any information. On the one hand, she suspected that the Demoness Sect had fostered such an "innocent" and emotionally driven Demoness because they had their sights set on the Sauron family. On the other hand, she recounted the general activities and abilities of the Bliss Society.

Upon hearing the name "Sex Addict" and its corresponding behavior, Browns Sauron's expression grew serious and cautious.

Franca knew when to conclude the conversation. She finished her after-dinner liqueur, rose gracefully, put on her blue bonnet, and departed from the Red House Café.

As she entered the rental carriage and returned to the market district, her mind raced, analyzing potential vulnerabilities.

I need to persuade Jenna to move out. But having her stay in my apartment might reveal my true gender. I must remind her not to display her Assassin and Instigator abilities for the time being…

The issue with Ciel is that if Browns Sauron and Poufer Sauron frequently interact, they might discover that the affluent merchant's generous scion is, in reality, the leader of the market district's mob, exposing the Iron and Blood Cross Order's hidden agenda. Yes, Browns is affiliated with the Demoness Sect and doesn't share the same interests as the Sauron family. There is a significant likelihood that she would conceal this fact and exploit it…

Browns is brimming with emotions. Is she preparing for the "affliction" of a Sequence 5?

"…"

…

Rue du Rossignol, market district.

Lumian "teleported" back to his safe house.

While waiting for Franca to return Lie to him and allow him to revert to his original appearance, he contemplated the rumors circulating about the human blood bread.

It would have been manageable if I had discovered it from the outset, but now it's already widely believed. Hundreds or perhaps thousands of people have bought into it. Tracing it back to the source will be extremely challenging. Moreover, even if I locate the origin, the person responsible may be filled with false information and unable to identify their source… Finding a skilled Psychiatrist who can hypnotize people is quite a task…

The Mandrake rumor La Nou Bruch had heard appears suspicious…

After careful consideration, Lumian decided not to dwell on it. He would report it to Madam Magician and explore the possibility of hiring someone like Madam Susie or even a high-ranking Psychiatrist such as Madam Justice to investigate the source of the rumors.

They were experts in similar operations and possessed all the abilities of "I Know Someone," and even more!

The matter concerning the Celestial Worthy of Heaven and Earth for Blessings was a shared mission of the Tarot Club.

Likewise, Lumian intended to burden the Major Arcana card holders with the other clue. Given his abilities, it was practically impossible for him to investigate it further.

He believed that since Loki was operating within Bureau 8, there was a chance he had either subtly influenced some of his colleagues or been discovered by them. All these were potential leads.

However, based on his experiences dealing with a Marionettist, Lumian recalled the events at the Alone Bar and the puppet show in the basement. It wasn't as murky as he had initially thought. It exuded an aura of malevolence, obscurity, and terror, and he could distinctly perceive the tangible danger concealed within the various details.

He suspected that most of the spectators at the marionette theater were, in fact, marionettes themselves, fitting the bar's name: Alone!

It seemed that there was only one living person amidst the marionettes!

Of course, this was somewhat exaggerated. It was evident that a few Bureau 8 members were working as bartenders and waitstaff at the Alone Bar, including Loki and Leah.

Nevertheless, Beyonders capable of manipulating an entire theater filled with marionettes were far more powerful than Loki. They likely exceeded Sequence 5 and might even be demigods of the Seer pathway.

Regardless of Lumian's confidence, he didn't believe he could uncover any clues in a bar protected by a demigod. He didn't dare to attempt it.

Only the Major Arcana card holders of the Tarot Club could conduct a thorough investigation in that direction!

Without hesitation, Lumian unfolded a letter and began reporting his findings to Madam Magician.

As the "doll" messenger was summoned, it cast a glance at Lumian and remarked, "Do you enjoy dressing up?"

Is that because I'm wearing a new face? Lumian smiled and replied, "It's a necessity in certain situations. Disguises help ensure that one remains unrecognized when carrying out certain tasks."

The messenger nodded slowly.

"No wonder you can't tell I'm different every day."

Lumian gazed at the light-golden attire of the "doll" messenger, unsure whether to offer a truthful response or a white lie.

In what way is it different from before?

Observing Lumian's silence, the messenger snatched the letter and stated sharply, "My hair is smoother, my skin is more elastic, and my dress is new…"

With those words, the messenger's voice gradually faded away as it dissolved into the candlelight.

Lumian let out a sigh and muttered to himself, Perhaps the more familiar I become with someone, the less I notice their subtle changes…

It was akin to Franca, who appeared so relaxed around him that she didn't feel the need to rack her brains on many things.

If one had to rack their brains and be on edge when interacting with others, their mental state would inevitably deteriorate over time.

Seeing that it was time, Lumian left Rue du Rossignol and arrived at Apartment 601, 3 Rue des Blouses Blanches. He knocked on the door, and Jenna opened it, looking surprised.

"Who might you be?"

Lumian scoffed. "Can't you still not tell from my gait?"

"Dammit, your aura, which makes others want to beat you up, will make your disguise useless!" Jenna knew that Lumian possessed a mystical item capable of altering his appearance.

Once Lumian entered the living room, he glanced around.

"Where's Franca?"

"She hasn't returned from her visit to the Red House Café," Jenna replied, already aware that Franca had intentions of engaging with a member of the Demoness Sect. She had also heard her companion mention the secret organization's animosity towards female Assassins.

Lumian stroked Franca's Mirror Substitution in his arms and settled into an armchair when he saw that nothing was amiss.

This was Jenna's usual spot.

Jenna rolled her eyes at him and perched on the armrest of a nearby chair. She asked thoughtfully,

"Why do you have so many enemies? How many of them are there?"

Lumian had briefly recounted the Cordu disaster but had omitted much of his past. He replied simply, "The Soul Summoning Spell that caused my sister's problem was acquired from an organization called April Fool's. They intentionally sold it to my sister. My current objective is to locate their key members and execute them one by one."

Jenna pursed her lips, refraining from delving into the specifics to avoid upsetting Lumian.

"How can I assist?" she inquired earnestly.

Lumian pondered for a moment and replied, "Your dedication to becoming a Witch is the greatest assistance you can provide me."

Not only were the core members of April Fool's formidable, but they also had no boundaries. Jenna could only participate in the pursuit of these individuals after becoming a Witch and gaining the ability to create a Mirror Substitution of herself.

Internally seething with anger, Jenna refrained from voicing her frustration. She quietly observed Lumian for a few seconds and remarked, "I sense that you're more exhausted than before…"

Lumian subconsciously smiled.

"But I'm also more motivated."

"But isn't this too intense? Franca mentioned that a constantly tense string is prone to snapping. The best approach is to alternate between tension and relaxation," Jenna expressed her concern.

Lumian gave a self-deprecating smile.

"But they won't allow me to relax. They're determined to kill me themselves."

Noticing Jenna's confusion, he added with a cold expression, "They haven't reported me to the authorities despite knowing that I'm a wanted criminal. It's clear they want me to remain in the market district until they finalize their plan and make all the necessary preparations."

Chapter 401: Dreamwalker

From Loki losing control and collapsing without being completely dead, Lumian had been vigilant about being reported by the core members of the April Fool's team and staying prepared for potential surprise attacks from official Beyonders. After all, Loki knew that he was Lumian Lee, a leader of the Savoie Mob, overseeing Salle de Bal Brise. He even knew that Lumian carried the aura of the Blood Emperor Alista Tudor.

In the end, official Beyonders merely approached the market district's police headquarters to inquire about the abnormality that night and to see if Ciel Dubois, a capable mob leader, knew anything.

This convinced Lumian that the April Fool's team still had their sights set on him. They were reluctant to hand their target over to the authorities or force him out of the market district where they could no longer keep an eye on him.

It had to be known that a marionette sealed with an angel was undoubtedly an item that could cause Loki's strength to undergo a significant transformation. Missing out on Lumian meant he could almost never meet another one.

Furthermore, the Celestial Worthy of Heaven and Earth for Blessings might have a use for Termiboros.

The core members of the April Fool's team were quite direct about this matter. They didn't bother concealing their mockery and malice. They believed Lumian could see through it and expected him to be provoked, eventually choosing to wait in the market district.

When to make their move was entirely up to them. They wouldn't recklessly attack while Lumian had assistance.

Jenna sensed the anger and hostility lurking beneath Lumian's composed demeanor and calm words. She didn't attempt to persuade him further and simply mumbled, "I hope these villains get what's coming to them."

Lumian's emotions had been on an upheaval, causing the lingering effects of his near-loss of control to resurface.

Taking a deep breath, he raised his right hand and massaged his temples to ease the pounding in his head.

"What's wrong?" Jenna asked, her concern evident.

Lumian replied succinctly, "The mental trauma from the battle with Loki will take a week or two to fully heal."

Jenna's eyes darted as she offered, "Do you want me to give you a head massage? Franca taught me. I'm quite skilled at it.

"Don't be shy. We're friends, after all!"

Her last statement trailed off playfully, an attempt to divert Lumian's attention and alleviate his emotional state with a teasing tone.

Lumian scoffed.

"Why do you keep saying that from time to time? 'Franca mentioned this, Franca taught me that.'"

"Don't you often…" Jenna started but abruptly stopped herself.

Initially, she had intended to say, "Don't you often say, 'My sister said that, my sister taught me that.'"

Lumian fell silent, and Jenna did the same. After a few seconds, seeing that Lumian didn't object, Jenna left the chair armrest and moved behind him.

She reached out and began massaging his temples and both sides of his head.

Lumian's body tensed up.

Jenna playfully teased, "Have you never been intimate with a girl before?"

Lumian scoffed. "As a Hunter, I would instinctively throw anyone who dared to touch my head or bestow them with a massive fireball. It took a lot of effort not to roast you."

Amused and exasperated, Jenna tightened her grip.

"Did the Provoker potion completely alter your language and speech patterns?"

Lumian responded bluntly, "Yo, why the fancy words?"

As the two of them bantered, Lumian's body gradually relaxed. After a few minutes, he leaned back on the sofa and half-closed his eyes.

While enjoying Jenna's massage and relieving his headache, he naturally brought up the "pranks" of Loki, I Know Someone, and the other core members of the April Fool's team. Jenna's anger flared, and she subconsciously tightened her grip.

"Take it easy," Lumian said with a hint of physical discomfort.

An Assassin possessed considerable strength.

Jenna eased her grip, still fuming.

"I've never encountered such scoundrels or vile individuals in all my performances. They deserve every bit of suffering!

"Dammit, why am I not a Witch yet?"

Lumian's eyes remained closed as he asked, "How's the digestion with the Instigator potion? Have you grasped the principles of acting?"

Jenna's attention shifted. As she continued to knead, she reflected, "There are currently two key points. First, Instigation is a means, not an end. Second, the essence of Instigation lies in understanding the core of the matter and the conditions of the people involved, not in the use of abilities. Additionally, I've come to a realization. Instigation will inevitably bring about consequences; it just depends on whom you want to face those consequences."

"Not bad," Lumian commended, a rare occurrence.

Standing behind him, Jenna lifted her chin modestly and said, "I find opportunities to practice every day, especially among theater actors and apprentices at places like Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons, where conflicts are abundant. Instigating someone forces me to consider who I want to benefit and who will be taught a lesson or suffer losses. It made me realize that instigation is merely a tool."

Lumian's demeanor noticeably softened as he let his thoughts wander. He casually inquired, "Where do you think I might find an opportunity to act as a Pyromaniac?"

Jenna's hands continued their soothing motion as she thought and replied, "Trier is a place of relatively basic order. You can only act on smaller matters; you can't create a major spectacle there…

"But there might be an opportunity during the pursuit of those villains. When you mentioned it earlier, I wanted to set them ablaze!"

Lumian suddenly had an idea, though it wasn't entirely clear.

At that moment, footsteps echoed from the stairs, growing progressively louder.

Jenna released her grip on Lumian's head and approached the door with a smile.

"Franca is back."

…

In the bustling streets of Trier, the night might lack tranquility, but the citizens living in those areas still found their way into slumber.

In one person's dream, they envisioned their children gradually improving and becoming healthier after consuming human blood bread.

Suddenly, a golden retriever carrying a small backpack made an appearance in the dream.

The golden retriever sat at the dream's edge, guiding the hazy scenes to reveal hidden memories deep in the dreamer's subconscious.

It was the excitement of pushing through the crowd and rushing towards the death row inmate's corpse with bread in hand. It was the hesitation that came after believing that human blood bread could cure illnesses. It was the mixture of joy and skepticism that had accompanied their first hearing of this rumor…

The golden retriever caught sight of the figure who had initially informed the dreamer about the blood bread rumors. It turned out to be a neighbor who lived next door.

And so, the golden retriever traversed dream after dream, activating the corresponding subconscious memories to search for the source of the blood bread rumors.

After hundreds of dreams, the golden retriever noticed two dreams with clear contradictions.

One belonged to a father who believed that he had obtained the secret of human blood bread from a Warlock he happened to meet, using it to cure his daughter's illness. The other dream belonged to his child, who had suddenly fallen ill and then just as suddenly recovered, as if the human blood bread was a miraculous elixir.

The golden retriever guided the father to manifest the Warlock in his dream.

It was very ordinary and unremarkable.

Scenes in the dream flickered rapidly, and the image of the Warlock began to change, memories flowing back.

When their initial encounter was revealed, the golden retriever saw a Warlock with a completely different face from before!

Then, the face rapidly shifted, eventually settling into the image the dreamer normally associated with the Warlock.

The golden retriever had her own interpretation of this.

The Warlock's Hypnosis could only be fully effective in a face-to-face encounter, allowing the dreamer to retain their first impression of him. Only then would they be affected by the hypnosis and have the image in their memory altered.

There was no need to repeat the process of awakening the subconscious within the dream. The original image of the Warlock naturally surfaced in the golden retriever's mind.

He had short brown hair, parted in a 3-7 split, flaxen-colored eyes, and a thin, freckled face. He wore gold-rimmed glasses on the bridge of his nose…

Exiting the dream, the golden retriever turned her attention to Madam Magician, who had suddenly appeared beside her. In a human voice, she declared, "I've obtained a result."

Dressed in a blouse and a long brown dress, Madam Magician sighed and eagerly said, "Give me the information, and I'll confirm it."

The golden retriever remained silent, her eyes darkening.

After a few seconds, Madam Magician took a few steps forward, causing starlight to manifest around her.

It resembled a reflection of the vast cosmos on the ground.

The resplendent and condensed stars spun rapidly, providing a revelation.

Once Madam Magician finished interpreting, she pulled open an illusory door hidden in the darkness and disappeared.

In just over ten seconds, she reappeared and said to the golden retriever, "There's no target on the street the astromancy results point to."

"Were we misled?" the golden retriever inquired in a female voice once more.

Madam Magician nodded and smirked. "But this also proves that what you've seen is the actual target."

As she finished speaking, Madam Justice, clad in a white dress with green trimmings, swiftly materialized.

"Where did you go?" Magician asked in puzzlement.

Madam Justice replied in a gentle voice, "To plant a cue in the dreams of those seeking human blood bread. I've informed them that The Fool Pharmaceutical Company will conduct a volunteer consultation in Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative this weekend, offering free treatment and medicine."

"When do you plan to hold the volunteer consultation?" Magician asked out of curiosity.

Madam Justice smiled.

"Tomorrow. I'll sponsor it."

…

At 6 a.m., Auberge du Coq Doré, Room 207.

Lumian naturally woke up from his dream and got ready for the day.

Before he could decide on breakfast, he noticed the "doll" messenger appearing and delivering a letter.

Puzzled, Lumian unfolded the letter and saw a portrait.

Beside the portrait was Madam Magician's handwriting: "This should be what I Know Someone looks like. We'll mobilize all the card holders in Trier to search for him, including you."

Chapter 402: Good Luck

Lumian examined the portrait in his hand and let out a chuckle.

He hadn't anticipated that the Major Arcana card holders would swiftly uncover the source of the rumors and unveil I Know Someone's true identity.

It made sense. Rumors had started circulating two to three months ago, and Lumian hadn't yet arrived in Trier or infiltrated the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society. Loki and I Know Someone hadn't met with any genuine threats. They were naturally audacious when it came to pulling pranks. No matter how cautious they were, leaving traces behind was inevitable.

While it might be challenging for other Beyonders to detect these traces, Madam Justice was a high-ranking Beyonder of the Spectator pathway, also known as the Psychiatrist pathway. She possessed a profound understanding of I Know Someone's various abilities and was his match in every aspect.

Even if this Major Arcana card holder herself didn't execute the operation, her partner, Susie, was more than capable of completing the mission. Lumian knew that this lady was at least a Sequence 5 of the Psychiatrist pathway, just one step away from becoming a demigod.

Gazing at the portrait of I Know Someone, with gold-rimmed glasses, a freckled face, and a thin visage, Lumian caressed the paper and muttered to himself, "Wherever you go, you leave your mark… One day, those unable to control their sinister desires will be exposed."

Taking the portrait, he knocked on Room 305 before Anthony Reid, who frequently came and went from Auberge du Coq Doré.

"Keep an eye on this individual for me. He's most likely a doctor or a medical researcher." Lumian presented the portrait to Anthony Reid, who was disguised as a clerk.

Then, he briefly recounted I Know Someone's performance at the gathering and a few of his typical pranks. He asked earnestly, "Where could someone like him be hiding?"

Anthony Reid sighed and replied, "I'm a Psychiatrist, not a Seer.

"You mentioned that he often exhibited extensive medical knowledge at gatherings?"

Receiving Lumian's affirmation, Anthony Reid pondered for a moment and continued,

"In a gathering filled with pranks, the various details displayed by a Beyonder of the Spectator pathway are what he wants you to remember. They don't necessarily reflect his true identity and could even be misleading.

"I suspect that I Know Someone isn't actually a doctor, but he possesses a deep understanding of medicine and has accumulated extensive knowledge."

Not a doctor… Madam Magician's letter had also mentioned not restricting the search to doctors… But this way, millions of people in Trier could be suspects… Lumian felt both relieved and frustrated.

Anthony Reid added, "A person with antisocial tendencies and enough intelligence might have a fondness for flirting with danger. He enjoys playing with others like a clown. Perhaps it won't be long before he pulls another prank, mocking all those who pursue him."

The only condition being that he remains unaware of the many demigods observing this matter… Lumian watched as Anthony Reid hastily departed and then turned toward Rue des Blouses Blanches.

He had initially intended to locate Lugano Toscano, a quasi-doctor, and inquire if he recognized the person in the portrait. However, it was still too early for that. Salle de Gristmill had not yet opened, and he had no information about where Lugano resided.

Apartment 601, 3 Rue des Blouses Blanches.

Franca had already risen early, having also received a letter from her Major Arcana card holder, and was discussing the potential course of their investigation with Jenna.

Franca cautioned Lumian, saying, "We can't involve too many information brokers in the search. I Know Someone might notice it beforehand and change his appearance or leave Trier."

Lumian nodded slowly and responded, "It's nearly impossible to locate someone like this in Trier on our own…

"Don't forget we still have Anthony." Franca winked at Lumian, implying that they had all the card holders in Trier on their side.

"Yes, and I'm here to help too," Jenna chimed in.

Lumian tersely acknowledged her words and decided to proceed with his original plan to begin with doctors.

…

In the afternoon, Jenna arrived at Avenue du Marché and patiently waited by the public carriage stop sign.

Today, she had donned a beige dress and a light brown straw hat, which shielded her from the sun and was adorned with a few cloth flowers. Her brownish-yellow hair was neatly tied into a bun at the back, with the rest cascading naturally.

Without any makeup, her face remained fresh, and her blue eyes held a sweeter charm despite the absence of black eyeliner.

Jenna boarded a public carriage and headed towards Quartier 7, Quartier des Thermes.

Situated on the west side of Quartier de l'Observatoire, this district boasted a pleasant environment and was home to many affluent individuals. The now-bankrupt owner of the Goodville Chemical Factory had once lived here, as had the Hôtel du Cygne Blanc, where Charlie had worked as an apprentice attendant.

Quartier des Thermes, also known as the Museum District, featured numerous renowned museums. Adjacent to one of the hot springs lay Delta Asylum, Trier's largest and most formal asylum.

Jenna was visiting Showy Diva, the underground singer who had once taken care of her. Showy Diva had been the victim of rape by Margot of the Poison Spur Mob and had subsequently left the market district to reside in an asylum.

After Lumian eliminated Margot, Jenna had intentionally approached Showy Diva to share the good news. Since then, she had been regularly visiting her.

Initially, Jenna had limited funds and was preoccupied with repaying her debts, so she couldn't do much for her friend. However, when Lumian hunted the padre, Jenna earned a substantial sum of 5,000 verl d'or. Coupled with two compensations and various other sources of income, she still had over 7,500 verl d'or left after repaying all her debts, except the one to Franca.

With less pressure from Franca to repay the debt, Jenna could now afford to allocate a portion of her money to send the former Showy Diva to Delta Asylum, where the facilities, environment, doctors, and nurses were clearly superior.

She visited her friend regularly, partly to pay the fees and partly to demonstrate to the doctors and nurses that this patient had family and friends looking out for her. Anyone who dared to mistreat her would have someone to answer to.

Jenna disembarked from the public carriage, adjusted her brown straw hat, and proceeded along a bustling street.

After a few steps, she noticed a seven- or eight-year-old boy standing alone by the roadside.

The boy had a chubby face and was dressed in the attire of a young gentleman. His neatly combed light-yellow hair complemented his appearance.

Seeing the confusion in the boy's eyes, Jenna approached, crouched down, and asked gently,

"Are you lost? Do you need me to take you to the police station or bring a police officer here?"

The boy sported a mercury bow tie on his white shirt. He sighed and replied, "I'm not lost. It's just that a lady who likes to drink asked me for a favor. I didn't know how to help, and it seemed a bit dangerous where she went, so I decided to wait here."

Over there… Jenna followed the boy's outstretched finger and realized he was referring to either Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative, the market district, or Quartier du Jardin Botanique.

"Why did you choose to wait here to help?" Jenna couldn't quite fathom the child's reasoning.

The chubby boy let out another sigh and said, "I don't know why. My instincts just told me to do it."

At this point, the boy looked up at Jenna with a pitiful expression.

"Could you buy me some ice-cream? The weather in Trier is unbearably hot!"

"Where's the lady who likes to drink and asked for your help?" Jenna inquired, her curiosity mixed with caution.

The boy scanned the area and replied, "After I said I wanted to wait here, she went off by herself to find a place to drink."

Isn't this too irresponsible? What if the child goes missing? Jenna couldn't help but frown.

The boy eagerly asked again, "You can buy ice-cream from this café. That way, I can have ice-cream and wait inside without worrying about getting lost."

Jenna, now financially stable, hesitated for a moment before agreeing, "What flavor would you like?"

"Vanilla!" the boy quickly exclaimed with enthusiasm.

Jenna then spent 1 verl d'or to purchase a cup of vanilla ice-cream for the boy from a nearby café.

Seated by the window, the boy received the ice-cream with pure delight on his face.

"Thank you. You'll be lucky!"

Jenna paid little attention to his gratitude. Instead, she observed as the boy joyfully savored the ice-cream and then quickly left. She found patrolling constables and informed them of a missing child in the café ahead.

Once she saw that the two constables had entered the café, Jenna breathed a sigh of relief and continued on her way with determined steps.

Before long, she arrived at the Delta Asylum.

The asylum was situated near a hot spring, and behind a wall, there stood a three-story building with a grayish-blue exterior and an annex. The surroundings were adorned with lush lawns bathed in the golden sunlight, along with various mobility aids. It was an excellent environment.

Jenna successfully met with her friend.

The former Showy Diva, like other female patients, had short hair that reached her ears. Her face appeared ordinary, and her eyes held a serene expression. She seemed no different from an ordinary person.

When Jenna conversed with her, it was easy to forget that she was afflicted by mental illness. However, Jenna knew all too well that provoking her could lead to an immediate and frenzied outburst, endangering both herself and others.

After chatting for nearly half an hour, Jenna left the designated meeting room, ready to depart.

As she walked along the outer corridor, she gazed out of the window absentmindedly.

On a green lawn, around 20 to 30 mental patients strolled leisurely, each lost in their own thoughts. They leaned against trees, soaked in the sun, or gathered in small groups, engaging in quiet conversations.

They appeared just like ordinary people.

Jenna scanned the surroundings casually, preparing to shift her attention elsewhere.

At that moment, she spotted a figure dressed in a blue-and-white striped hospital gown.

The figure stood tall at over 1.75 meters. His short brown hair was parted in a 3-7 fashion. Gold-rimmed glasses mostly concealed his flaxen-colored eyes, and his face appeared notably thin, adorned with freckles. In that moment, he paced back and forth on the green lawn, seemingly lost in deep contemplation, as if pondering some philosophical question.

Jenna's pupils dilated.

Th-this is I Know Someone!

Chapter 403: Drawing From Experience

Jenna's instincts screamed at her to turn around, her fear that the psychiatric patient, suspected to be I Know Someone, might catch her staring.

Yet, in almost the same instant, she recalled how she'd acted around Hugues Artois. With that memory in mind, she controlled her neck, shifting her gaze away with a slow, natural motion.

She kept her composure, exiting the grayish-blue building one step at a time, stepping into the sunlight that poured through the window. Jenna donned a light brown straw hat adorned with cloth flowers.

As she finally left Delta Asylum, returning to the same street where she had first encountered the mysterious boy, Jenna let out a sigh of relief.

Her expression remained unchanged as she boarded the public carriage bound for the bustling market district.

…

In the evening, at 3 Rue des Blouses Blanches, Apartment 601.

Lumian, who had been summoned by Jenna, listened to her findings intently.

Lumian couldn't conceal his surprise and suspicion.

"Is this for real? Are you sure you didn't see it wrong?"

Wasn't this just too much of a coincidence?

Jenna had only laid eyes on the portrait of "I Know Someone" that morning, and in the afternoon, she had tracked down the target at Delta Asylum—a place she had visited just twice. Lumian, Franca, and the Major Arcana and Minor Arcana card holders in Trier had turned up nothing!

The sheer coincidence here made Lumian's instincts tingle with hints of conspiracy and arrangements, robbing him of any tangible joy.

"That's right. Isn't this too darn coincidental…" Franca's demeanor had been skeptical even before Lumian's arrival.

She muttered, "Though it's a classic move for an antisocial, intelligent fellow to hide in an asylum and rub shoulders with the doctors, should he really be unlucky enough to cross paths with a visitor who's seen his wanted poster? There can't be more than 50 people in Trier who've laid eyes on that wanted poster!"

This tally included Anthony Reid and the inquiries made by the other card holders today.

"Why didn't I know of such a classic scenario…" Jenna mumbled. "But I did stumble upon him. I'm not mistaken. Maybe I've just been lucky lately?"

At this point, she noticed the disbelief etched on Lumian and Franca's faces.

Lumian, a man well-versed in the power of coincidence, pondered and asked, "Recall this morning and see if any other coincidences stand out, or if anything unusual occurred."

Seated in an armchair, Jenna delved deep into her thoughts.

After nearly fifteen minutes, she cussed, "It's business as usual! Uh, there is one thing I've never encountered before…"

She recounted how she had come across a lost boy and treated him to a cup of vanilla ice-cream. She had also found constables to watch over him. Finally, she inquired with uncertainty, "There shouldn't be anything unusual about that, right?"

Franca mumbled to herself, "Did the boy mention anything about you receiving good luck?"

Lumian honed in on another detail.

"Did he say he was brought here by a lady who loves drinking?"

"Yes," Jenna replied to the two questions with a single word.

Lumian immediately grew suspicious.

Apart from a few dancers, he only knew of two ladies who were quite fond of alcohol. The rest were just casual social drinkers.

One was Madame Hela, and the other was Madam Magician.

The former always carried multiple flasks of liquor with her, while the latter reveled in tasting various alcoholic beverages, and she could even summon a glass of wine from thin air and savor it.

Since the hunt for I Know Someone was a shared mission of the Tarot Club, and Madame Hela hadn't been informed about it, Lumian cautiously deduced that the boy had been brought to Trier by Madam Magician.

Combined with Franca's question about Jenna's "receiving good luck," Lumian believed that the boy possessed extraordinary abilities that could bestow good fortune upon others. Jenna, having experienced this stroke of luck, was naturally fortunate enough to cross paths with "I Know Someone."

As Lumian and Franca fell silent for what felt like minutes, Jenna's unease deepened.

"Is there really a problem with this situation?"

Lumian gazed thoughtfully at his companion and responded, "It's possible that your luck has taken a favorable turn today, starting with your act of buying ice-cream for that young boy."

Such exchanges of giving and receiving were not uncommon in the realm of Inevitability. For example, the enhancement of luck often required the recipient to willingly accept the medium and derive some benefit from it. Moreover, there had to be a subjective desire on their part to complete the luck-enhancing ritual.

Therefore, Lumian had a reasonable suspicion that the boy might be a Beyonder of the Monster Pathway, also known as the Fate Pathway. Through a subtle transaction involving ice-cream and the bestowal of good luck, he had orchestrated Jenna's encounter with I Know Someone.

The phrases like "I didn't know how to help, so I decided to wait here" or "Buy me ice-cream, and you'll have good luck" had all the mysterious signs of the Fate domain!

"That's right…" Franca had clearly considered this possibility.

Jenna immediately understood.

"Are you suggesting that this boy might be an exceptionally powerful Beyonder? That he granted me an abundance of good luck?

"But apart from encountering I Know Someone, I haven't felt anything extraordinary. I haven't stumbled upon any money or come across free items."

Franca sighed, explaining, "Meeting I Know Someone probably consumed all the good luck you were given."

Lumian abruptly stood up.

"I need to verify this."

He made his way into Franca's bedroom and closed the door behind him.

Curious, Jenna asked Franca, "How is he planning to confirm it?"

Franca speculated and replied, "He's going to write a letter."

"To Madame Hela?" Jenna knew that the woman had a messenger.

Franca couldn't give a clear answer. "Another lady."

In her bedroom, Lumian, who had tidied up the altar, promptly received a response from Madam Magician.

"So, that's how we found I Know Someone. Even as an Astrologer, I find this matter charlatanic.

"There's no need to doubt that it was indeed a helper we hired. We expended a considerable number of favors and a substantial amount of ice-cream.

"Since there's a result, take action. I'll keep an eye on you and help guard against any unforeseen incidents."

As expected… Lumian grinned.

From Madam Magician's words, he deduced that the boy wasn't a member of the Tarot Club. Hence, he wouldn't participate in shared missions without receiving some form of compensation, which in this case involved favors and ice-cream.

What the hell is up with ice-cream? Can such a powerful Beyonder be moved by ice-cream? Lumian found it absurd and amusing. However, he recalled Baron Brignais's godson, a rather peculiar individual who could be swayed by delectable treats.

This led him to wonder if Beyonders in a boy's form had similar "weaknesses."

Lumian pushed open the door and returned to the living room.

Nervously, Jenna stood up and inquired, "Did you confirm it?"

"He's a helper with the specific task of bestowing good luck, and your encounter with him was orchestrated by fate. By treating him to ice-cream, you'd chosen the correct path of destiny," Lumian responded, using the manner of a charlatan.

As a Beyonder with dominion over the Inevitability domain, he held a certain sway over fate.

"Phew…" Jenna let out a sigh of relief, her worries about falling into a trap dissipating.

Seeing Franca rise from her seat, Lumian produced the silver Lie earring with a smirk.

"Let's head to the asylum now. I can't wait."

"Very well," Franca replied, her inner thoughts sighing.

Ever since Ciel's arrival, she had been embroiled in constant battles.

It had been just a few days since Loki's attack!

…

In a four-wheeled, four-seater rental carriage en route to Quartier des Thermes, Lumian gazed out of the window at the black street lamp poles and furrowed his brow.

He muttered to himself in confusion, "Did Jenna truly spot I Know Someone?"

Franca and Jenna turned their attention to him, simultaneously recalling a similar situation:

From their hunt for the padre, Guillaume Bénet, they had encountered two substitutes in succession, and the actual Guillaume Bénet had turned out to be a large dog lounging by the side!

Franca lowered her voice and inquired, "Do you suspect it might be a substitute?"

Drawing lessons from past experiences and expanding their awareness was crucial. After witnessing the padre's clever deception, failing to consider such possibilities would signify their inadequacy in the Hunter and Demoness pathways.

Lumian pondered for a moment and whispered, "With his issue coming to light and the potential pursuit he might face, wouldn't I Know Someone be concerned that the 'pranks' of the past few months could become a lingering threat?

"If I were in his shoes and couldn't erase the corresponding traces, I'd leave Trier swiftly and return after some time. Yet, he hasn't done that.

"This suggests that he either possesses ample confidence that we won't locate him, or he has something of significance to accomplish in Trier. In that case, remaining in the shadows while presenting a substitute in plain sight would be a clever choice."

Jenna, puzzled, asked, "Could it be that he also wields Lie or the Substitution Spell you mentioned?"

Lumian chuckled.

"He may not have Lie, but the evil god he believes in governs the Seer domain and ranks as one of the most potent Faceless. With mastery of the corresponding ritualistic magic, he can beseech this deity to alter the appearance of a specific target."

It was akin to how members of the Tarot Club could summon creatures from the spirit realm in the name of Mr. Fool.

Using Faceless-related ritualistic magic to create a substitute while secretly monitoring in person… But why didn't he just change his appearance? Why resort to creating a substitute? It would make him virtually untraceable! Franca thought of a dangerous possibility.

Lumian nodded.

"If the individual in Delta Asylum is indeed a substitute, it implies that he serves as a trap and is intentionally using it to lure us in. I Know Someone will undoubtedly pay close attention to the eventual outcome.

"Consequently, either the extreme peril concealed within the substitute will not only ensnare the pursuer but also cause a significant disturbance, or the two individuals are intimately connected in some mystical manner.

"Don't be concerned about the first scenario. With a formidable lady guarding against mishaps, the ensuing possibilities will depend on you, Franca…"

If the person in the asylum turned out to be I Know Someone, the situation would be relatively straightforward.

…

Late at night, in a room on the third floor of Delta Asylum's eastern wing.

A pair of gold-rimmed glasses sat on the bedside table, reflecting the moonlight filtering into the room. The patient in the bed was fast asleep.

Suddenly, a shadowy figure opened the substantial door adorned with iron bars and quietly entered.

With a polite grip, the intruder gently shut the door, rendering the room impervious to external sounds.

The entire interior space seemed to be sealed.

Chapter 404: Patient

Lumian harnessed the power of the Decency brooch, distorting the door and sealing the entire room.

With Lie altering his appearance, Lumian refrained from an immediate attack on the patient lying in the bed. Instead, he strolled to the side, casting a discerning eye upon him.

The patient's eyes remained tightly shut, lost in a deep slumber. His facial features, hairstyle, and hair color undeniably matched those of I Know Someone.

As Lumian observed this slumbering figure, who had no realization of his intrusion, he began to suspect that this might be a substitute.

As suggested by Madam Magician's letter, I Know Someone was at least a Sequence 6 Hypnotist of the Psychiatrist pathway, with a slight chance of being a Sequence 5 Dreamwalker. On either pathway, these individuals were skilled observers, unlikely to sleep soundly in the presence of an intruder.

The conundrum now lay in discerning the trap with such a substitution.

Beneath the faint moonlight filtering through the curtains, the patient on the bed suddenly snapped open his eyes.

In those flaxen-colored eyes, Lumian's image was instantly mirrored.

Simultaneously, Lumian once more glimpsed the dark void, the countless twinkling stars, and the mysterious symbol that had come to life, forming an invisible door.

A voice resonated within his heart and ears, seemingly emanating from the depths of the void and the source of his consciousness.

"Pass through it. Pass through this formless door, and you will gain a transformative experience in your life and boundless knowledge…"

"Everyone possesses godhood and can hear the voice of this world's origin. To hear it clearly, you must open this invisible door and step inside…"

Lumian's head throbbed as he "witnessed" the gradual opening of the formless door. Each word from the voice transformed into a living, peculiar entity within his heart.

Once more, the voice echoed, its tone tinged with perplexity and confusion. It muttered to itself, "Where is the end of the world? What did the universe resemble at its inception…

"Which deity brought all of this into existence, and who created Him…

"What lies beyond the confines of the universe? How do other worlds differ…

"What sets human nature apart from godhood? Does true self-awareness equate to human nature or godhood…

"Where lies the demarcation between madness and reason? Is madness the ultimate destination for every living being…"

Lumian's head throbbed with agony as he absorbed these questions, a fusion of mystical contemplation and the pursuit of answers to profound philosophical queries. It was the first time in a long while that he felt the sensation of a steel drill boring into his skull, stirring his delicate brain.

Moreover, these questions triggered bizarre alterations in his spirituality and his surroundings.

Madness surged forth, as if probing the boundaries of sanity. The enveloping darkness seemed to take on human nature, visibly writhing. The bed before him and the floor beneath his feet gradually etched out bizarre patterns. Even though Lumian couldn't see them, his body was suddenly consumed by an intense itch, as if yearning to shed his outermost layer of skin…

"Is there something that surpasses all limitations and conceptual thinking…" the voice persisted in questioning the void.

Within the writhing darkness, an indescribable form began to take shape.

Lumian found himself powerless to resist or halt this transformation. All he could do was witness it helplessly as an overwhelming terror descended, his head throbbing.

In that critical moment, a blinding and brilliant bolt of lightning erupted right before him.

The colossal dendrite appeared as if it had sprung forth from a divine realm, and each silver-white "branch" emitted a crackling sound.

Rumble!

As the silver lightning struck the patient on the bed, Lumian was assaulted by a deafening thunderclap that reverberated through his eardrums and resonated within his soul.

The strange creature that had animated those thought-provoking questions convulsed his body, significantly easing the throbbing pain in his head, leaving behind only a disorienting sensation caused by the deafening roar.

A terrifying cascade of lightning surged across the patient on the bed, sending waves of agony and paralysis coursing through Lumian's skin, even though he stood a few steps away.

In the midst of this electric frenzy, a holy chant echoed faintly, as if proclaiming, "I came, I saw, I recorded." The ward darkened, as if it had been thrust into a mysterious realm, isolated from the outside world by some insurmountable force.

Lumian exhaled and shifted his gaze back to the bed. There, he beheld the patient's entire form transformed into a pitch-black, charcoal-like substance, emitting an eerie burnt odor.

The body, still clad in tattered hospital gown, bedsheets, and blanket, began to dissipate, morphing into a dark silhouette.

On the surface of this shadowy figure, cracks materialized, each adorned with mystical symbols and patterns. These formations resembled eyes or myriad mouths that incessantly opened and closed.

Before Lumian could fully fathom this transformation, his vision was flooded with pure, radiant, golden sunlight.

Once more, the ethereal, holy voice resonated in his ears.

When his vision settled back into normalcy, only a faint black mark remained on the scorched surface of the bed, twisting in an uncanny, serpent-like manner.

It's indeed a trap… Lumian mused, his lack of surprise evident.

He also deduced that both the patient and one of Loki's marionettes were recipients of the same evil god's boon based on the starry void and the formless door formed by wandering symbols. The substitute for I Know Someone clearly occupied a higher Sequence.

Had Loki and I Know Someone once targeted a secret organization that worshiped an evil deity?

This is the will of the Celestial Worthy of Heaven and Earth? What did He seek to achieve?

Did this all somehow tie into I Know Someone's decision to remain in Trier?

Is this substitute merely a taunting jest aimed at those who pursue them?

I know you're on the hunt for me, and I'm aware of the clues you may uncover. Yet, I'm intentionally granting you a glimmer of hope?

Thoughts raced through Lumian's mind like lightning as he attempted to analyze the current situation from I Know Someone's perspective and extract clues about the fugitive's whereabouts.

Given the level of danger posed by the patient, Lumian deduced that both I Know Someone and Loki would have struggled to capture him alive and recruit him into their team.

With Loki possessing a marionette with a similar pathway, it seemed clear that the patient hadn't actively and consciously cooperated with them.

This, coupled with the bewildered tone and endless questions of the substitute, led Lumian to suspect that the man had succumbed to madness due to some knowledge or truth gained through the boon or the use of some abilities, rendering him a true mental patient.

Leveraging his professional skills as a Psychiatrist, I Know Someone had likely skillfully guided the patient, fostering a sense of trust and camaraderie. Eventually, he reached a point where he could "convince" the patient, enabling him to perform a ritual and request a change in appearance.

Glancing at the iron-barred window, Lumian noticed that the deep darkness had receded. Crimson moonlight filtered through the relatively thin glass and bathed the ward in its glow.

Conversely, the darkness that had once been typical at Delta Asylum's periphery had intensified. The void seemed distorted, as if encased in a spherical barrier.

Madam Magician hadn't employed any additional abilities after dealing with the dangerous patient. She had merely concealed the entire asylum and its surrounding lawn.

It appeared as though she was implying that Lumian needed to handle this situation independently. She only assisted by preventing any disturbances from alerting Trier's official Beyonders.

Lumian breathed a sigh of relief. Starting from his search for Loki, he quickly filtered through the matters related to April Fool's.

Slowly, a conjecture formed, weaving together the pieces of the puzzle into a cohesive "narrative."

I Know Someone had once been connected to Delta Asylum, whether as a doctor, nurse, or patient. One day, he had stumbled upon a peculiar patient who incessantly posed profound philosophical questions.

Guided by the Celestial Worthy of Heaven and Earth for Blessings, I Know Someone had initiated interactions with the patient. During this process, he had likely sensed the presence of an evil god's bestowed lurking around the patient. Consequently, with the assistance of Loki, they had driven away these problematic figures and gained control over the strange patient. Loki had even managed to gain a marionette.

Upon Loki's resurrection, I Know Someone, who had been alerted, had leveraged the patient's trust in him to perform ritualistic magic and beseech the Celestial Worthy of Heaven and Earth for Blessings, resulting in his transformation into a substitute and a walking trap.

As for I Know Someone himself, he must have successfully altered his appearance; his whereabouts now unknown.

Amidst Lumian's frustration, he suddenly thought of something.

Jenna had indeed encountered the substitute for I Know Someone, thanks to good luck.

However, encountering a substitute, one designed as a trap, hardly constituted good luck.

This was unlucky!

That was unless they could somehow use the substitute to trace back to I Know Someone or if Jenna had encountered both the substitute and the real I Know Someone but failed to recognize or directly see him!

Both scenarios pointed toward a high probability that the elusive I Know Someone was still lurking within the asylum!

Even if the trap ultimately failed, pursuers would likely conclude that I Know Someone had long since relocated to a new hiding place.

Beneath an oil lamp lay the darkest and most easily overlooked spot!

With this revelation, Lumian acted swiftly. He spun around, heaved open the heavy door, and sprinted into the asylum's corridor.

With a resounding crash, he burst through a window at the stairwell's corner, landing on the lawn encircled by the main building and its adjoining structures.

Simultaneously, he employed the Niese Face to transform into the patient he had encountered earlier.

In a commanding voice, Lumian bellowed his questions to the cosmos from the lawn:

"Where is the end of the world? What did the universe resemble at its inception…

"Which deity brought all of this into existence, and who created Him…"

His voice resonated throughout the asylum, reaching into every room.

A few seconds later, Franca's voice echoed in Lumian's ears.

"There's an abnormality in the doctor's duty room and the nurse's workstation on the first floor, as well as in the first ward on the third floor near the west wing."

Upon hearing his companion's report, Lumian couldn't help but chuckle.

He pressed his hands against the void before him, instantly igniting crimson flames.

The flames spread swiftly, illuminating the invisible spiderwebs that enshrouded the entire building.

These intricate layers of spiderwebs extended into every room, diligently monitoring the movements of all its inhabitants.

This complex setup had consumed nearly half of Franca's spirituality and required a significant amount of time to prepare and maintain.

The crimson flames transformed into three blazing serpents, each colossal in size, which slithered through the spiderwebs toward the doctor's duty room and nurse's workstation on the first floor, as well as the ward on the third floor.

Chapter 405: No Reservations

The blazing serpents reflected in the eyes of the doctor on duty, the three night nurses, and the patient who had woken up. Fear appeared on their faces, and they turned around in various panicked movements. As they fled in the opposite direction of the flames, they shouted, "Fire! Fire!"

"Help! Help!"

As their voices echoed, the flaming serpents burned the invisible threads of spider silk, accompanied by a scorching wind formed by the clash of cold and heat. It pursued them relentlessly, blocking the exit from the room and forcing them into a corner.

The five of them acted normally. They darted around, searching for a safe escape, wrapping themselves in blankets, and attempting to force their way through the wall of flames. They also rushed to another window, with the intention of jumping down.

It seemed Lumian had misjudged the situation. Any abnormal movements didn't necessarily mean I Know Someone. If this continued, he risked incinerating five innocent people.

However, the three crimson flaming serpents showed no hesitation. They continued to pursue the doctor on duty, the night nurses, and the mental patient, emanating an icy, ruthless madness that showed no regard for human life.

As the blazing serpents closed in on their targets, a few of them began to show signs of despair. The patient on the third-floor ward suddenly halted and turned around.

Grayish-white, stone-like scales sprouted on his once ordinary face, covering his skin that was not concealed by the blue-and-white-striped hospital gown.

In an instant, he transformed into a horrifying, lizard-like figure. The grayish-white scales resisted the scorching flames and aided him in breaking through the barrier of the crimson serpent.

Sensing this transformation through the flames, Lumian's lips curled into an eerie grin.

According to the information provided in Madam Magician's letter, Beyonders of the Spectator pathway at Sequence 6 Hypnotist would gain an ability known as Dragon Scales. This ability allowed them to manifest grayish-white scales on their skin, greatly reducing and resisting damage.

This ability was closely tied to the Spectator pathway's Mythical Creature form, as every high-ranking Spectator ultimately transformed into a dragon—a mind dragon!

The appearance of Dragon Scales confirmed that the patient in the west wing on the third floor was at least a Sequence 6 Beyonder of the Spectator pathway. Combined with the trap and his unusual movements, the patient's identity became evident—I Know Someone!

Lumian activated the black mark on his right shoulder and used his ability to traverse the spirit world, instantly appearing in the ward.

During this hunt, he refrained from wearing the Lie earring or carrying the Flog boxing gloves. This was because his adversary was a formidable Psychiatrist, and any openings in his emotions or desires could be easily exploited.

As Lumian's figure vanished from the lawn, the crimson fire serpents, which had expanded from consuming flammable materials in the doctor's duty room and nurse's workstation, abruptly dissipated. They transformed into glimmering specks of light that disappeared before the faces of the despairing and terrified onlookers.

Apart from the charred remnants of various items, there was little evidence of the inferno they had narrowly escaped.

On the third floor of Delta Asylum, Lumian emerged from a room adjacent to the west wing. His gaze locked onto the patient, whose body was covered in grayish-white scales, and whose eyes emitted a faint golden hue.

He didn't exchange pleasantries or make inquiries. Instead, he opened his mouth and let out a sharp exclamation: "Ha!"

An imperceptible yellow beam shot forth from Lumian's mouth, aimed at the suspected I Know Someone.

However, at a distance of two to three meters, the pale-yellow aura beam by the Spell of Harrumph brushed past the Beyonder and struck the iron-barred glass window behind him.

Battle Hypnotism!

This was one of a Hypnotist's Beyonder abilities. It could forcefully hypnotize an enemy in battle, causing them to act irrationally or make incorrect judgments. However, such actions couldn't directly harm the hypnotized person, and the effect would wear off quickly as they regained their senses.

Just moments ago, when Lumian and the Beyonder locked eyes, the former had unwittingly fallen under his hypnosis. He had mistaken his own reflection in the glass window for his target, causing the Spell of Harrumph to veer off course.

Seizing the opportunity, I Know Someone's light-gold eyes widened, reflecting Lumian's male Aurore form.

Lumian's head jerked backward, as if caught in a whirlwind.

His emotions swirled with a mixture of joy and hatred. Crimson flames surged beneath his skin, and his eyes glinted with a sinister madness.

Frenzy!

This was a Psychiatrist's Beyonder ability designed to trigger intense emotions and destabilize the target's mental state, causing them to enter a Frenzied state and suffer severe mental damage. If the target had existing psychological issues or strong emotions, they might even lose control when subjected to Frenzy.

Before undergoing psychiatric treatment from Madam Susie and Madam Justice, encountering I Know Someone in this state could send Lumian spiraling into madness, turning him into a monstrous figure.

At that moment, magma-like blood dripped from his nose. His mind was in disarray, and he instinctively took deep breaths, temporarily losing the ability to execute his planned moves.

I Know Someone refrained from launching another attack on Lumian at that moment. Firstly, causing the other party to lose control or perish would lead to the immediate release of the high-level creature sealed within his body, a sight that could drive even a Beyonder below the demigod level to mental and physical collapse. Secondly, since Muggle's brother was present, it was likely that Hidden Blade wasn't far away. The invisible spider silk that had been ignited was likely her handiwork.

In this dire situation, I Know Someone's first instinct was to swiftly exit the battlefield, escape Delta Asylum, and find a place to conceal himself once more.

In an instant, he retrieved a broken arrow from the pocket of his blue-and-white-striped hospital gown.

The broken arrow looked ancient, with an obsidian-like arrowhead at its tip, adorned with mysterious patterns.

With a squelching sound, I Know Someone thrust the obsidian arrow into his own chest.

The item sprang to life, greedily absorbing the crimson blood that flowed forth.

I Know Someone immediately sprinted toward the tightly sealed door, leaving behind an afterimage.

Despite the grayish-white Dragon Scales covering his face, he exuded an uncanny charm, as if he had transformed into a dashing young dragon.

This was the Arrow of the Bloodthirsty. By piercing it into his chest and feeding it his blood, it temporarily transformed I Know Someone into a Vampire. This granted him extraordinary speed, accelerated regeneration, and a few spell-like abilities.

Bang!

As I Know Someone pushed open the heavy, solid door of the asylum ward, he failed to dart into the corridor. He collided with an ice barrier that had formed at some point.

Amidst the sounds of cracking and shattering, the ice wall crumbled, but it also caused I Know Someone to lose his balance and tumble to the ground.

Most of the shattered ice failed to penetrate his Dragon Scales. Only a handful managed to breach his defenses, leaving traces of blood in their wake.

Thanks to the Vampire's rapid regenerative abilities, the minor injuries swiftly began to heal.

I Know Someone saw no need to rise to his feet. As his light-gold eyes flickered, invisible waves radiated from him, enveloping the surroundings.

In her state of invisibility, Franca felt as though she was witnessing the most horrifying scene from the depths of a nightmare, recalling her past terrors. Her body trembled, and she abandoned the protection of her invisibility, appearing in the corridor of the asylum.

Awe!

This was a Psychiatrist's Awe, also referred to as Dragon Might or Mass Chaos. It had the power to instantly induce panic in a single target or all living beings within its range, plunging them into chaos.

Relying on Dragon Might to maintain control of the situation, I Know Someone agilely leaped up, intending to put some distance between himself and Franca as he sprinted down the corridor.

He refrained from attacking her at this moment because he understood that Demonesses possessed abilities like Mirror Substitution and Staff Substitution. Trying to kill her or cripple her combat abilities with a single strike would only delay his escape.

As he vaulted out of the shattered ice, I Know Someone caught a glimpse of the ward, now empty.

Lumian Lee appeared to have recovered from the effects of Frenzy and used teleportation to evade Awe's influence in the nick of time!

Just as this realization crossed I Know Someone's mind, he saw the male version of Aurore—Lumian—materialize in front of him.

Without hesitation, I Know Someone's golden eyes focused on Lumian, preparing to cast Awe once more.

In the next moment, Lumian's figure vanished again.

He had employed Spirit World Traversal twice in quick succession!

Almost simultaneously, I Know Someone's pupils dilated, and a shiver ran down his spine. The hairs on the back of his neck stood on end.

This time, Lumian's destination was behind him.

It was akin to Blink!

Lumian's figure instantly materialized behind I Know Someone, witnessing a dense black fog emanating from the latter's body, an attempt to evade to the side of the corridor.

Too slow! Lumian harrumphed, sending two white beams of light shooting from his nostrils to encompass the area ahead.

I Know Someone couldn't evade and was struck by the white beams as he was thrown to the ground, tumbling twice.

Lumian breathed heavily, feeling drained as his head throbbed with pain.

Three consecutive "teleportations" and two rounds of using the Spell of Harrumph and other abilities had completely sapped his energy.

If it hadn't been for the substantial amount of Pyromaniac potion he had digested compared to when he hunted the padre, sustaining this level of expenditure would have been extremely challenging.

Franca, who had recovered from Awe, approached and shook her head in disapproval.

"No need for all that. It's not like you don't have assistance."

Why go all out when help was available?

Even if the Major Arcana card holders hadn't been lurking in the shadows, and even if I Know Someone had managed to escape the asylum, wouldn't he have left behind some blood that could be used for a curse?

Lumian didn't respond, making his way over to the unconscious form of I Know Someone.

Chapter 406: Inevitability-like Ending

Staring at the unconscious enemy in the corridor, Lumian refrained from an immediate attack. He squatted down in silence.

He retrieved a bottle of sedative obtained from the Bliss Society's Rentas, unscrewed the cap, and brought it to the patient's nose.

Franca glanced over and advised, "Remove the broken arrow from his chest first. Otherwise, I think his body can handle most of the sedative's effects."

The grayish-white stone-like scales on the Beyonder suspected to be I Know Someone slowly dissipated due to the unconsciousness in spirituality brought about by the Spell of Harrumph.

Lumian nodded and used the hand holding the bottle cap to carefully remove the obsidian arrow.

Franca breathed a sigh of relief and continued, "The question now is how do we confirm if this guy is the real I Know Someone.

"A powerful Hypnotist can manipulate a Beyonder of the same pathway and Sequence, altering their self-awareness and making them believe they are 'I Know Someone.' They can substitute the real deal to appear in all sorts of occasions, completing different pranks and fight any adversaries.

"F*ck, why does it seem more troublesome than dealing with a Marionettist!?"

What Franca meant was that the enemy in front of her might also be a victim, someone whose perceptions had been altered to make them believe they were "I Know Someone."

This possibility couldn't be ruled out, so she wasn't capable of steeling herself to kill him before channeling his spirit.

Furthermore, Lumian's remaining truth serum wouldn't work in this case. The hypnotized person would only tell what they believed to be true.

Lumian screwed the cap back onto the sedative bottle and thought for a moment before suggesting, "Let's set up a ritual and seek confirmation from Mr. Fool. Since Loki can use Celestial Worthy's help to locate members of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society within a certain range, we can employ a similar method to activate the special aura on I Know Someone. If it's there, he's real. If not, he's fake."

"What if he's a member of the Research Society who was captured by Loki and I Know Someone? In the past, several people went missing without their deaths being confirmed, including some Psychiatrists." Franca began to suspect the source of I Know Someone's Beyonder characteristics that allowed him to advance to Sequence 7.

Research Society members they had hunted?

Lumian pondered for a moment and replied, "In that case, let Jenna in. She might still have some lingering good luck in this aspect. If she doesn't encounter anyone else, it proves that the unconscious one is I Know Someone.

"You're responsible for protecting Jenna…"

Before Lumian could finish, Madam Magician's voice echoed in his ears, "There's no need to go through so much trouble."

Crouching in front of the unconscious person, Lumian sensed the space around him come alive, contracting inward and swallowing the Beyonder suspected to be I Know Someone.

"Wow," Franca exclaimed, and Lumian slowly stood up.

The two of them waited patiently. In just 20 to 30 seconds, the Beyonder in the blue-and-white-striped hospital gown was ejected from the void.

Immediately after, they heard Madam Magician's response: "It's 'I Know Someone.'"

…

Beneath the crimson moon in the sky, the Delta Asylum loomed, its darkness even denser and curved into an eerie arc compared to the surrounding night.

On the rooftop of the three-story grayish-blue building, the shadowy Magician turned to her companion and said, "Apart from the lunatic, there are no hidden dangers or traps.

"Did I overreact and overestimate the situation?"

Justice, resembling a dream, replied calmly, "There's nothing wrong with your choice. It's never wrong no matter how much importance you attach to matters related to that Celestial Worthy.

"Only by paying enough attention each time can we avoid being suddenly deceived and falling into a true trap."

Magician nodded slightly, closed the notebook in her hand, and cast her gaze towards the third-floor corridor which wasn't in her line of sight.

…

Upon hearing Madam Magician's conclusion, Lumian let out a chuckle.

He put away the remaining half of the sedative and turned to Franca, saying, "We can let Jenna in now."

Franca nodded and disappeared into the shadows along the corridor.

Lumian looked down at the seemingly ordinary I Know Someone, his eyes deep and a sly smile on his lips.

The effects of the Spell of Harrumph should have worn off long ago, but the Bliss Society's sedative was still doing its job.

Considering I Know Someone's physique, this sedative wouldn't last much longer. However, Lumian was prepared for this moment.

At that very instant, the Delta Asylum was in chaos due to the fire and shouting. Particularly on the first floor, the commotion was intense. The duty doctor and a few burly guards patrolled the area to ensure that no tinder remnants remained.

Meanwhile, Jenna and Franca skillfully navigated through the shadows and ascended to the third floor.

Lumian took a sheepskin from Guillaume Bénet, the padre, and spread it on the ground.

He carefully wrapped I Know Someone in it.

After a brief contemplation, Lumian raised the obsidian arrow in his hand and plunged it into I Know Someone's left eye.

The excruciating pain jolted I Know Someone awake, and his left eye turned bloodshot.

Almost simultaneously, he heard a sinister chuckle.

"Sheep!"

Amidst the echoing Hermes words, I Know Someone, cocooned in the ritual sheepskin, was instantly engulfed by dark light, rendering him powerless.

When the dark light finally subsided, he had transformed into a grayish-white sheep.

Lumian withdrew the obsidian arrow from the crushed eyeball and swiftly plunged it into I Know Someone's right eye.

A blood-curdling scream echoed through the room as Lumian pulled out the arrow. He pressed down on the struggling "sheep" with one hand and stroked its head with the other, a sinister smile playing on his lips.

"Now, we can finally have a good chat."

While Lumian engaged in this whispering conversation, he tossed the obsidian arrow to Jenna.

Next, Lumian produced an ordinary bottle of wound medicine and meticulously applied it to I Know Someone's blood-colored eye socket. He wrapped the other party's eyes in layers of white bandages he had prepared.

Only then did I Know Someone, who had awakened from his coma and was enduring intense pain, regained some composure. He attempted to use his abilities, but to no avail.

Franca and Jenna watched Lumian intently as he continued to tend to the transformed sheep, I Know Someone, feeling a mix of curiosity and unease. Initially, Jenna had wanted to assist Lumian in extracting information or exacting revenge, but now, she felt that this scenario was enough.

She shifted her attention to the obsidian broken arrow in her hand but noticed no negative effects. She wondered if it was one of the mystical items Franca had mentioned before.

As Lumian retrieved a brownish-yellow twine he had prepared in advance and began to wrap it around the sheep's neck, the duty doctor, alerted by the sheep's bleating, arrived on the third floor with several burly guards.

Franca and Jenna swiftly concealed themselves in the shadows, while Lumian, disguised as Aurore, calmly turned and led the sheep to the end of the corridor.

Crimson flames erupted from Lumian's body, which had regained some of its spirituality, and blazed fiercely in the corridor.

The duty doctor and the guards dared not approach, witnessing a figure walking through the flames, heading to the end of the annex corridor.

The figure was also guiding a sheep. It resisted, unwilling to leave, but the rope around its neck forced it to move forward.

After being dragged on the ground for a while, the sheep, its neck tightening and its breathing becoming labored, finally stood up and followed.

By the time the flames in the corridor abruptly extinguished, sparing any damage to the adjacent rooms, the doctor on duty and the guards had lost all trace of the man and the sheep.

Am I hallucinating… The situation was so odd and unbelievable that these individuals shared the same thoughts.

Meanwhile, the charred corridor stood as evidence that a fire had indeed occurred, miraculously without harming anyone.

Leaving a guard to report the incident to the nearest police headquarters, the duty doctor returned to his office on the first floor in a bewildered state.

As he sank into his chair, he couldn't help but wonder, Could it be that the infernal being associated with fire has emerged from the abyss? Is its signature to lead a sheep? Is this the embodiment of flames?

His thoughts grew more fantastical with each passing moment, and he couldn't shake the feeling that he should have gone straight to the cathedral to consult the bishops and padres rather than involve the police.

Knock, knock, knock!

He heard a knock on the door.

The doctor on duty jolted in his chair. He straightened up and responded with a deep voice, "Come in, please."

As the door creaked open, the doctor's eyes froze.

It was the blond devil, accompanied by the sheep with its eyes wrapped in white bandages, and its grayish-white face stained with blood.

"I need to trouble you with something," Lumian said calmly as he led I Know Someone into the doctor's office. "My sheep exhibits severe anti-human tendencies and extreme violence. I want to treat its mental illness."

How… Before he could formulate a response, the handsome blond devil inquired, "Do you know how to perform a lobotomy?"

"Yes, a little," the doctor on duty replied subconsciously. "But it's a sheep…"

Could the brain structure be the same?

As he contemplated this, he watched the sheep struggle frantically in its bindings, unable to escape.

Lumian chuckled.

"It doesn't matter. We can give it a try. It's just a sheep. If it dies, so be it. We can still roast it."

With that, he dragged the unruly sheep toward a nearby treatment table, using his hands and feet to pin it down.

If the patient had been human, the doctor, lacking experience and prohibited from performing a lobotomy, would never have dared to attempt it. However, because it was a sheep, he had no reservations.

In an effort to avoid antagonizing the arsonist devil and cooperate while awaiting the arrival of the police, the doctor on duty cautiously approached the treatment table.

He said hesitantly, "I need an ice pick."

His intention was to create an excuse to go to the ice warehouse and distance himself from the arsonist devil. However, just as he finished speaking, a hand emerged from the shadows, offering him a sharp icicle.

W-what's going on… In his shock, the doctor vaguely heard the words, "No need to thank me."

Numbly, he accepted the thin icicle and unwrapped the white bandage covering the sheep's head.

The sheep's struggle intensified.

Assessing the damage to its eye sockets, the doctor on duty inserted the thin, sharp icicle through the crack and carefully manipulated it, stirring its brain's frontal lobe.

After a few moments of struggle, the grayish-white sheep abruptly fell silent.

Chapter 407: Reward for Good Luck

After the surgery, the blind sheep stepped off the treatment table, calm and docile, no longer resisting. The duty doctor felt like he was in a dream.

The operation was a success…

The surgical technique designed for humans had actually worked on a sheep…

The doctor watched in a daze as the arsonist devil guided the blind sheep—now cured of its mental illness—out of the room and disappeared into the crimson moonlit night.

Wherever they went, crimson flames ignited the white bandages and barely visible fur.

In the blazing flames, black fire flowed like a river, "cleansing" away the remaining icicles, footprints, and any other traces.

The doctor felt no immediate danger and watched in a daze, as if enjoying a spectacular fireworks show.

After an unknown amount of time, all the flames subsided. The guard who had been dispatched returned to the Delta Asylum with a group of black-uniformed police officers.

"Why did it take you so long?" the doctor blurted out instinctively.

The leading officer cursed angrily, "Son of a bitch, we were ambushed in the shadows on the way here. Someone was shooting at us from the darkness!"

…

In Apartment 601, 3 Rue des Blouses Blanches, in the market district.

After securing I Know Someone to one of the dining table's sturdy legs, Lumian paid the sheep no mind. He lay on the sofa in the living room and pretended to be asleep.

His appearance had been altered back by Lie, and the Decency brooch had long been taken off.

Franca glanced at the sheep, which stood silently and didn't attempt to escape with the dining table, and asked, "Aren't we going to interrogate him now?"

She avoided looking at Lumian because he had become so irritating that she felt like punching him. Even the sheep, now a pacifist, was eager to do the same.

Lumian's voice remained calm as he replied, "I'll question him once I've regained my spirituality."

That makes sense. It's safer this way. After all, I Know Someone is now a sheep with his frontal lobe removed. He can't use his abilities or put up resistance… Franca, dressed in an Assassin suit, averted her gaze and headed to her bedroom to avoid losing control of her hands, black flames, frost, or spider silk.

She wasn't worried that any accidents might occur prior to the interrogation, leading to I Know Someone's bizarre death or him turning into a monster due to losing control. Madam Magician and the Major Arcana card holder had already confirmed I Know Someone's identity. They must have seized the opportunity to obtain the most important information.

Jenna, holding the broken obsidian arrow, approached the divan with a warped expression.

"Your trophy."

She offered the obsidian arrow to Lumian, who hadn't yet closed his eyes.

During this exchange, her right hand trembled slightly, as if she wanted to thrust the arrow into the other party's eye.

Lumian didn't take it and calmly said, "This is your reward for your good luck.

"Or rather, this is your true stroke of luck."

Why does he sound like a circus fortune-teller… Jenna didn't refuse. After mumbling to herself, she quickly turned around and entered Franca's bedroom.

It had to be said that after her companion advanced to Demoness of Pleasure, even as a woman, she would blush and feel her ears heat up when she saw her change her clothes.

After changing into comfortable home clothes, Franca used Magic Mirror Divination to get a rough understanding of the name, abilities, and negative effects of the obsidian arrow.

"Name: Arrow of the Bloodthirsty.

"Ability: Plunge it into the chest where the heart and let it absorb blood. The user will gain potent self-healing and regeneration abilities, along with exceptional physical attributes. Whether it's speed, agility, the ability to communicate with animals, vision, smell, or hearing, they will all be greatly enhanced. Their charisma will also receive a significant boost.

"In addition, the user will gain Dark domain spell-like abilities such as Abyss Shackles, Claw of Corrosion, and Wings of Darkness.

"Negative effects:

"While in use, you will despise sunlight and crave blood.

"Your blood will be continuously drained by the item until you succumb to excessive blood loss. You must constantly monitor your condition and remove the broken arrow in time.

"The more you use it, the more likely it is to cause subtle changes in your body. If these accumulate beyond a limit, it might even lead to bodily collapse. Note: Try not to use it for more than three minutes at a time. It's best to use it with intervals of more than three days. This way, your body will have a chance to recover and prevent any mutations.

"Avoid using it during a full moon. While it can enhance your condition, it can also easily lead to illusions and danger."

"Not a bad mystical item," Franca praised sincerely as she handed the Arrow of the Bloodthirsty back to Jenna. "Carrying it doesn't have any negative effects. Such a mystical item could fetch over 40,000 verl d'or at various mysticism gatherings."

Holding the Arrow of the Bloodthirsty, Jenna pondered and said, "If I give it to you, will that settle the debt I owe you?"

She believed she owed Franca 30,000 verl d'or.

Franca chuckled.

"Don't worry. This Arrow of the Bloodthirsty can significantly boost your strength, providing you with true self-preservation abilities. You can sell it later once your Sequence has advanced to the point where it's no longer useful.

"Take your time paying back the money you owe me. There's no rush."

Jenna fell silent for a few moments before nodding in agreement.

…

Lumian slept until 6 a.m., feeling refreshed but still with a slight throbbing in his head.

As he sat up and looked around, he noticed that the sheep I Know Someone had transformed into was standing quietly by the dining table, its empty eye sockets filled with dried blood.

Lumian chuckled.

"Your resilience is impressive. Such severe injuries and basic treatment didn't do you in."

He led the sheep into the living room and poured the remaining truth serum into its mouth.

With that task completed, Lumian recited an incantation in Hermes.

"His Grace."

A dark light flashed, and the grayish-white sheepskin split open, revealing I Know Someone's body in a blue-and-white-striped hospital gown.

Lumian guided him to a chair and had him sit down. Staring into his empty blood-red eye sockets, he smiled and sighed.

"As I mentioned yesterday, we can finally have a good chat."

The calm I Know Someone remained silent.

Lumian retreated to the sofa and sat down. He patiently waited for the truth serum to take effect before asking, "What's your name, what was your original occupation, and why were you in the Delta Asylum?"

He began with the simplest questions, using the truth serum to guide the other's instinctive responses.

I Know Someone's voice was unremarkable, yet strangely compelling.

"My name is Pierre Theuriau. I was originally one of the deputy editors of Basic Medicine.

"I once mentioned that I know someone who ended up in an asylum due to negligence and overconfidence. Well, that someone was me. I was obsessed with manipulating the minds of others and didn't pay enough attention to my own issues. One day, I just lost my mind.

"When I finally regained consciousness, I found myself in the Delta Asylum. Fortunately, I was only mentally unstable and didn't completely lose control. I still had some sense of self-preservation and didn't unleash my Beyonder powers recklessly. If I had, they would have sent me to the Inquisition."

The person you mentioned is indeed yourself… After discovering that "I Know Someone" was hiding in the asylum, Lumian gained a new understanding of what he had said back then.

He pressed further, "Now that you've regained your consciousness and the ability to think, why do you choose to remain in the Delta Asylum?"

I Know Someone didn't show any mockery or amusement. He answered calmly, "I find the asylum fascinating. The thought patterns, mental states, and mental constructs of the patients here are significantly different from those of ordinary people. They deserve observation, research, and analysis.

"Moreover, some of them have gone mad due to illness, while others have become mentally unstable due to other factors. The latter group includes individuals who have come into contact with the mysterious and abnormal."

"Including the one that posed as you?" Lumian asked, seeking confirmation.

I Know Someone nodded slowly.

"Yes, he's quite special. I've been observing him for a long time. He's like a philosopher, constantly posing unusual questions. Patients close to him, nurses who care for him, and even doctors who treat him have gradually shifted toward his mental state. There were also guardians with hidden supernatural abilities lurking around him.

"We dealt with the guardians and worked to gain his trust. Everything went smoothly. We learned that they are part of an organization called the Entry Persons and practice a secretive ritual known as Midoro's Worship. It allows one's Astral Projection to ascend to various heavenly domains and witness extraordinary phenomena. They can touch the fringes of immortality and gain knowledge and corresponding abilities, enabling them to undergo a fundamental transformation behind the formless door."

Entry Persons… Formless door… Lumian memorized the information and continued asking,

"After Loki's resurrection and his given warning, why didn't you immediately flee Trier?"

I Know Someone's response lacked any emotion as he said, "How lame would that be? We'd have to eliminate a few pursuers before making our escape."

So that's the reason… Lumian thought there must be something significant that had kept I Know Someone in Trier.

"Then why didn't you go into hiding somewhere else?"

I Know Someone replied calmly,"I want to witness the despair and suffering of those chasing me."

Using my life for amusement… Lumian couldn't help but chuckle.

"Do you not realize the strength of the Tarot Club?"

I Know Someone pondered for a moment and then said, "The secret organization that uses tarot cards as their code names? What do they have to do with you?"

Upon hearing this, Lumian burst into laughter as he bent over, his amusement clearly exaggerated.

Chapter 408: Motive

Amidst exaggerated laughter, the doors of the two bedrooms creaked open.

Franca and Jenna appeared at the door, casting puzzled glances at Lumian.

"What's so funny?" Franca muttered as she approached.

How could he interrogate a criminal to get a reaction akin to watching a comedy performance?

Lumian stopped laughing and remarked, "Ignorance can lead to many dangers, as can arrogance. And having ignorance and arrogance makes it almost irredeemable."

Observing this, Jenna retreated to the bedroom and closed the door.

She knew there were certain matters between Ciel and Franca that were best left unknown to her.

"Why? Is this guy really ignorant and arrogant?" Franca used her right hand to quickly tidy her disheveled hair after waking up.

She settled into the recliner and fixed her gaze on I Know Someone, who remained composed and emotionless.

Lumian recounted how I Know Someone found it pointless to simply escape and insisted on seeking some amusement. He also mentioned his ignorance regarding the pursuer's connection to the Tarot Club.

Franca was left speechless.

She couldn't decide if this core member of April Fool's was highly professional and committed to his principles or simply arrogant and ignorant.

After a few moments, Franca glanced back at the guest bedroom door.

"Jenna is getting more involved in our affairs. Sooner or later, she would uncover our true faiths and the secret organization supporting us…"

Lumian said nonchalantly,"It's simple. Mr. Fool is an officially recognized orthodox god. In a few days, take Jenna to Lavigny Docks and reveal who we truly worship and whose blessings we receive. Ask her if she wants to secretly convert to Mr. Fool. If she declines, that's okay too."

"Okay." Franca nodded solemnly.

Lumian refocused his attention on I Know Someone, who remained remarkably composed, and he redirected the conversation.

"Why were the lot of you targeting Aurore, Muggle?"

I Know Someone seemed to be discussing something unrelated to himself.

"Because many members of the Research Society were praising her, we decided to embarrass her."

"What kind of logic is that?" Franca blurted out. "You want to tease people when they are praised?"

I Know Someone nodded gently.

"Breaking the idealized image in the minds of many people is part of the spirit of pranks. Their reactions bring us immense satisfaction."

Franca's face flushed with anger. She wanted to unleash a tirade but restrained herself due to her lacking vocabulary.

She took a deep breath and exhaled slowly.

"So, do you even remember what happiness and joy are? Do you still experience these emotions?"

Lumian let out a long sigh and asked,"And then?"

I Know Someone wore a nostalgic expression.

"Capitalizing on Muggle's visit to our team to trade, I occasionally offered her helpful advice. She began to trust me more, even sharing her concerns with me as a psychiatrist seeking solutions.

"During that time, I played the role of a credible source, all while collecting enough information and planning a massive prank. Eventually, I discovered that the body Muggle inhabited following her transmigration belonged to a girl who believed in a evil deity of Inevitability. Furthermore, she realized that her family, including her father, mother, brothers, and sister, displayed odd behaviors. There were numerous unsettling details upon closer examination, enough to induce fear in anyone who delved too deep. So, she found an opportunity to escape from home.

"This situation bore a striking resemblance to a family I knew, with a female member who had mysteriously vanished.

"After careful comparisons, Loki, the family, and I confirmed that Muggle was indeed their missing relative. Then, one day, Loki provided the family's modified Soul Summoning Spell and instructed me to find a way to sell it to Muggle for her use.

"Drawing on my understanding of Muggle's psychological and emotional state, I meticulously crafted a persuasive argument. Leveraging her longing to return home and her habit of searching for clues, I convinced Mad Lady to sell the Soul Summoning Spell to her.

"As expected, she began to suffer from schizophrenia. In a sense, Roche Louise Sanson came back to life.

"In each subsequent treatment session, I made her appear better on the surface, but her condition deteriorated with each passing session. At times, I even guided Roche's personality to emerge and engage with her. It was quite intriguing."

Lumian listened in silence, refraining from interrupting I Know Someone's account with anger. Franca, on the other hand, was seething with anger, repeatedly sipping water to calm herself.

Why are these people so detestable!

They didn't regard others as real people at all!

After I Know Someone had finished speaking, Lumian inquired further.

"The Soul Summoning Spell comes from Roche Louise Sanson's family?"

"That's correct." I Know Someone's condition was akin to a windless lake. "They combined the knowledge obtained from a boon and a Warlock's Soul Summoning Spell, giving rise to the Soul Summoning Spell that Muggle purchased. I'm not sure what makes it special; I'm not a scholar of witchcraft."

Knowledge from a boon… Lumian quickly reviewed his knowledge of Dancer, Alms Monk, and Contractee within the Inevitability pathway, but he found nothing that could be connected to the Soul Summoning Spell.

He suspected that it might be a knowledge linked to a higher Sequence of the Inevitability pathway or perhaps a unique boon bestowed by the evil god known as Inevitability.

After a few moments of contemplation, Lumian asked slowly, "Does Roche Louise Sanson's family know about Muggle's existence and her condition? Are they aware of her true identity and her current location?"

I Know Someone nodded.

"I informed them of the first part, and Roche herself disclosed the rest. Later, they managed to establish contact with Muggle, bypassing both me and Loki."

The Sinners is involved in spreading the Inevitability faith in Cordu and providing various resources… That's correct. The padre could have joined them immediately after leaving Cordu and become their so-called archbishop. This indirectly confirms it… Lumian's emotions remained subdued, but his mind was sharp.

He subconsciously clenched his fists and focused on I Know Someone.

"What are the names of the members of Roche Louise Sanson's family? Where are they currently residing? Are they affiliated with a secret organization or a cult?"

I Know Someone shook his head.

"After I moved into the asylum, I lost contact with them. During this period, I attempted to locate them but discovered that they had already relocated. It seemed they were no longer using their original identities, as if they were trying to hide from something.

"Roche's father's name is Voisin, her mother's name is Constace, her elder brother's name is Bliss, her elder sister's name is Annette, and her younger brother's name is Atur. They are all part of a branch of the Sanson family. However, I do not know their current names.

"Voisin was once a struggling merchant on the brink of bankruptcy, but he later joined a secret organization known as the Sinners. Miraculously, he escaped his financial woes and regained his success. He had numerous businesses, with the most notable being the Voisin Café, that doubled up as a hotel, restaurant, and various functions. It was frequented by high society, but before they relocated, these businesses were sold."

Lumian proceeded to gather more information about the Sinners and sought details about the appearance, mannerisms, and habits of each family member.

With the newly acquired information in hand, Lumian spoke thoughtfully, "Do you know what role the Sinners' demigod or Beyonder at a higher Sequence played in the Cordu disaster?"

I Know Someone replied,"Not long before I moved into the asylum, Voisin informed me that they were taken by surprise. This occurred much earlier than the agreed-upon time, so none of them had arrived at the scene.

"It appears that some individuals were overly eager to obtain the boons. The ensuing mishap resulting from their failure also caused them to lose many leads. Otherwise, they would have discovered you much earlier."

The Sufferer lurking in the shadows of Cordu and around me isn't the demigod of the Sinners, so who is interfering with my fate with Termiboros? Lumian frowned and asked, "Did Roche not inform the Sinners, her parents, or her siblings about the early ritual?"

"No," I Know Someone replied succinctly. "They believe she wished to reduce the number of individuals receiving the boons and concentrate the power."

Lumian fell into a contemplative silence, sensing that something was amiss.

Could the lizard-like elf be involved?

It had prevented Aurore from seeking Madame Hela's help and Roche Louise Sanson from contacting the Sinners?

Lumian attempted to inquire further about this matter but did not receive additional information.

Wary of the truth serum's effects wearing off, he decided to change the subject.

"What does the deity you believe in want you to do in Trier?"

I Know Someone's vacant eyes remained fixed on the sofa as he responded, "He occasionally grants us revelations for us to decipher independently.

"If we interpret them correctly and complete the corresponding task, we receive something unexpected.

"Apart from these revelations, He rarely communicates with us directly. We can only pray to Him through a ritual, and this can be done no more than once a week."

The Celestial Worthy of Heaven and Earth for Blessings and Mr. Fool's state are very similar… Lumian was tempted to inquire about the revelations granted by the Celestial Worthy but decided it might be too risky to discuss.

After a brief moment of consideration and deliberation, he decided to approach it from another angle and indirectly inquire.

"Did you start the rumors about human blood bread?"

"Yes," I Know Someone admitted without hesitation.

Lumian continued, "What about the rumor that Mandrake can treat illnesses?"

I Know Someone calmly replied, "I was the one behind that as well.

"It was a revelation from the Celestial Worthy. It was then that I realized I could influence events this way. After some time, rumors of human blood bread began to spread."

The Mandrake rumor is a revelation from the Celestial Worthy of Heaven and Earth for Blessings? Will there be any hidden dangers in using it to suppress the spirituality surge? Lumian contemplated the idea of warning the naive Vampire, La Nou Bruch.

He circled around and inquired about other revelations about the Celestial Worthy of Heaven and Earth for Blessings. He didn't obtain much useful information, so he could only move on to the last topic.

"Tell me about Mad Lady, Ultraman, Hisoka, Loki, and Bard."

Chapter 409: Fire Execution

I Know Someone said calmly, "Mad Lady is probably a Traveler. I have no idea where she lives…

"Ultraman used to be a Sequence 6 Notary of the Sun pathway. I'm not sure anymore. He hasn't been to Trier recently, and I haven't left the asylum. We only exchange a few words at each gathering…

"Loki is a Sequence 5 Marionettist of the Seer pathway, but I suspect he wields more power from Celestial Worthy than us. He can access resources unknown to us. He even owns a mysterious ancient castle, Dylan, hidden somewhere…

"Bard is a Sequence 6 Prometheus of the Marauder pathway. Of course, I'm unsure of his current situation. We haven't seen each other in reality for a long time… He did write Emperor Roselle's Secret Chronicles and published it under someone else's name…

"I'm not familiar with Hisoka. He hasn't attended any real-life gatherings in the Northern Continent. In my opinion, he's very dangerous, second only to Loki. He's similar to Mad Lady…

"If I hadn't gone crazy for a while, I would be a Sequence 5 by now…"

Castle Dylan… Lumian recalled Madame Hela's description of Loki's dream and suspected that the mysterious ancient castle hidden somewhere was where Loki had been resurrected.

He hadn't expected Bard to be a Beyonder of the Marauder pathway. He believed that the nickname originated from the Ocean Songster of the Sailor pathway or the Midnight Poet of the Evernight pathway, but on second thought, it made sense. In rural stories, bards often moonlighted as thieves.

This also confirmed the Celestial Worthy of Heaven and Earth for Blessings's influence on the Seer, Apprentice, and Marauder pathways. Half of the six core members belonged to these three pathways.

After I Know Someone finished speaking, Franca asked with concern, "Who else in the Research Society is involved with this?"

I Know Someone couldn't resist keeping it a secret. He replied calmly, "I know Pettigrew is one…"

"Pettigrew?" Franca blurted out in surprise. "I thought he was making fun of his height with that nickname, but it turns out he's mocking his identity?"

I Know Someone nodded gently.

"Before finding the organization and joining the Research Society, he already knew Loki. As you all know, Loki can use the Celestial Worthy's power to sense transmigrators within a certain range, and Pettigrew is also in the Trier Greater Region.

"He first became Loki's subordinate before joining the Research Society. He was assigned to another team. He actually nicknamed himself Pettigrew because he wanted to play a prank and reveal the truth. He mocked and fooled all the Research Society members who lacked insight, but in reality, I knew he was hesitating, feeling guilty, and struggling. He hoped to use this method to warn the other Research Society members that there was something wrong with him.

"My plan was to find an opportunity to tell him that Muggle, who never discriminated against his height and was gentle and amiable to him, was harmed by us. He could be considered an indirect helper. When the time comes, his devastation and pained expression would have been very interesting."

"Dammit!" Franca cursed.

Although I Know Someone had been lobotomized and he had become very calm, his tone no longer mocking, his straightforward thoughts were still filled with vileness, making Franca unable to control her emotions.

"What else?" Lumian asked on her behalf.

I Know Someone recited five more aliases in a row before concluding, "These are the few I know. As for the ones Loki and the others secretly developed or didn't tell me, I'm not sure."

"There's quite a few…" Franca was filled with hatred and frustration.

Lumian turned to her and said, "Just share this information with Madame Hela. How they handle it is up to the president and vice presidents. You don't need to be troubled or hesitant. Just enjoy the fruits of your labor. Isn't there a saying back at Aurore, uh, your home? If you don't witness the lamb being killed and don't cook it yourself, you can enjoy the delicious mutton without it weighing on you. Otherwise, it's inevitable that you'll be benevolent, soft-hearted, and conflicted."

Franca exhaled and muttered, "Your sister's adaptation of famous quotes is ridiculous…"

She gathered her composure and looked at I Know Someone.

"Did you spread news of the impending apocalypse because you believed in the Celestial Worthy and rushed to pursue joy, allowing you to commit all sorts of evil deeds without feeling guilty? Or did you become desperate and believe in the Celestial Worthy because you were certain that the apocalypse was about to arrive and humans couldn't resist?"

I Know Someone replied,"Both. Some tried to replicate their pre-transmigration actions and immediately gained the Celestial Worthy's attention, while others faced catastrophes and learned about the apocalypse. They only believed in the Celestial Worthy after their mental breakdown."

At this point, I Know Someone's empty eye sockets turned to Franca, who had just asked the question.

"Later, the Celestial Worthy even gave us some revelations, allowing us to guess a portion of the truth, including…"

For some inexplicable reason, Lumian suddenly felt a strong sense of danger and interrupted I Know Someone's statement.

"You don't have to continue!"

I Know Someone immediately closed his mouth.

"Why can't he say it?" Franca eagerly awaited the answer, but there was no response.

Lumian recalled concepts like the "barrier" related to the apocalypse and said seriously, "It's not suitable for you to know the truth about the apocalypse yet. That knowledge might cause you to lose control or be fatally corrupted on the spot. You can inquire about it when you become a demigod."

"Alright." Franca glanced at Lumian and muttered, "Why do you act like you know the truth…"

Why can he do it, but I can't?

"I only know a little," Lumian replied candidly. "And that knowledge brought me danger. It's all thanks to Mr. Fool's seal."

As the effects of the truth serum wore off, I Know Someone returned to his usual unchanging calm. Even his willingness to answer questions had vanished.

Franca gazed at the lobotomized Psychiatrist for a few seconds before sighing.

"Sometimes, we're still too naive. We might even think of ourselves as the protagonist."

Lumian knew that "we" referred to the members of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society.

Franca averted her gaze and turned to Lumian.

"While the sheep was undergoing the operation, I searched both I Know Someone's and his substitute's wards. I found some papers at the latter's place. I didn't read the content carefully, but it felt a little esoteric."

As she spoke, she rose and returned to her room, retrieving a thin stack of papers.

Lumian flipped through them and frowned.

"Midoro's Worship…"

"What's this?" Franca hadn't heard the first half of the interrogation.

Lumian explained briefly and concluded, "This should be a spell that allows one to traverse the Formless Door and closely align with an evil god, gaining knowledge and experience. Even ordinary people should be able to learn it after receiving proper guidance."

Franca sighed from the bottom of her heart and said, "No wonder it sounds so sinister. The layers of the heavenly domains, the Formless Door, the extraordinary phenomena, and the fringes of immortality. It sounds very dangerous!"

Lumian put away the secret deed spell, Midoro's Worship. Although he didn't know how to use it, nor did he need to, he could still grasp the corresponding knowledge. This would help him deal with the heretics who relied on Midoro's Worship to obtain knowledge and strength.

He then said to Franca, "Relay this information to Madame Hela. I'll handle I Know Someone."

"Alright." Franca nodded gently and watched as Lumian put on the Lie earring and walked to the armchair. He grabbed the calm man's shoulder and instantly vanished.

…

Prison district, Rois Comprehensive Execution Ground.

It was not yet 7 a.m., and there was no one here. It was wet, as if isolated from the world.

Lumian emerged from the void with I Know Someone and tied the April Fool's core member to the stake.

Then, he retreated a long distance, crouched down, and pressed his hands to the ground.

Two crimson tongues of fire swiftly darted towards I Know Someone's body along the weed-covered ground.

They grew larger and larger until they transformed into a giant serpent, engulfing I Know Someone completely.

Lumian stood up and used his feet to maintain the flow of flames. He silently watched as the calm Psychiatrist revealed grayish-white Dragon Scales under the stress.

His body subconsciously struggled, but it wasn't as intense. His various Beyonder powers scattered in all directions, but they failed to affect Lumian who stood beyond their range.

Lumian condensed a dangerous flaming spear and hurled it, piercing and burning a hole around I Know Someone's chest and abdomen.

The crimson flames that hadn't incinerated the Dragon Scales elsewhere surged into I Know Someone's body.

As Lumian watched the April Fool's core member truly begin to burn, his body instinctively emitting pained cries, his thoughts raced. He quickly recalled the battle last night and today's interrogation.

He had learned a lot from this, but he couldn't quite grasp the acting principle.

Flames aren't just lethal; they can also be used as deterrence, intimidation, and a signal…

It is necessary for Pyromaniacs to combine their flames with traps…

…

As the raging flames engulfed I Know Someone, Lumian felt as if a fire was burning in his heart.

It was anger, satisfaction, and catharsis.

At that moment, Lumian's Pyromaniac potion digested a little more, just as it had after the battle the previous night.

After an unknown period of time, in the uninhabited execution ground, I Know Someone ceased his struggles and lost his breath. His body was charred as it cracked apart.

Chapter 410: A Leisure Week

In the drizzling execution ground, Lumian watched as the crimson flames gradually dwindled before his eyes. He observed as translucent, colorless mucus seeped out of the corpse. It surrounded the charred and cracked I Know Someone, attempting to burrow into his head through the empty eye sockets and fuse with some organ.

Crimson Fire Ravens materialized around Lumian, darting through the remaining blood-red eyes before the slime could reach its destination.

Rumble!

I Know Someone's head exploded from the inside out, splattering grayish-white colloids everywhere.

The transparent, colorless mucus had lost its binding substance, leaving it only able to condense independently, eventually forming a sticky colloid.

This colloid landed beneath the stake. From a distance, it resembled an unfixed mirror, capable of reflecting everything around it.

Lumian strode over and retrieved the colorless colloid, which was likely a Hypnotist Beyonder characteristic. He did this amidst the scorching air and the flames that flowed around him.

As he gazed upon it, he noticed minuscule transparent bubbles deep within the colloid. They caught and refracted sunlight from various angles, displaying an array of colors.

After storing away the Beyonder characteristic, Lumian turned on his heel and departed from the stake.

Behind him, the lingering flames continued their relentless assault, devouring the charred corpse.

As the light flickered, Lumian's figure vanished from the Rois Comprehensive Execution Ground.

…

In Apartment 601, 3 Rue des Blouses Blanches, in the market district.

Lumian, who had reverted to his original form with the Lie earring, rubbed his temples and turned to Franca.

"It's already taken care of. It's fitting for someone like him to meet his end at the stake."

"Unfortunately, he's a believer in the Celestial Worthy. Even if he doesn't take action, he remains a hidden threat—a potential time bomb. Otherwise, I would have spared him, albeit with his frontal lobe removed and his sight forever gone."

Franca breathed a sigh of relief. "That's reassuring."

In truth, she felt a twinge of regret. If not for the insanity that had gripped I Know Someone in the past and his faith in the Celestial Worthy of Heaven and Earth for Blessings, who was suspected of triggering their transmigration, she might have attempted to channel his spirit and inquire about the potion formula for the Spectator pathway, from Sequence 9 down to Sequence 6 or even Sequence 5. However, after thorough contemplation, she decided to forsake this perilous scheme.

Lumian's gaze shifted to the open door of the guest bedroom.

"Where's Jenna?"

"She's gone to the Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons," Franca taunted Lumian. "She's much more diligent than you in digesting the potion."

Lumian replied thoughtfully, "After venting the flames within me to battle and carry out the execution, my Pyromaniac potion has significantly digested. At this rate, if I can distill a new acting principle, it should be fully digested within two months."

He didn't dwell on the subject and continued, "I intend to share I Know Someone's Beyonder characteristics with Madam Magician. Without her and the Tarot Club's support, we might have lost track of our target or lost control during our initial assault."

"No problem," Franca replied without hesitation. "The Beyonder characteristics of these followers of the evil god have eluded the grasp of high-ranking individuals. I wouldn't dare to possess them myself. There's no need to think about repaying me. Dealing with I Know Someone is also a mandate from the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society."

Lumian didn't stand on ceremony. He observed as Franca returned to the bedroom, changing into a white lace-adorned shirt and slim beige pants, seemingly preparing to go out.

"Where are you off to?" Lumian asked casually.

Franca responded with a hint of annoyance, "I've been caught up in all sorts of messes you've stirred up lately, and I haven't had a moment to pleasure myself. Now that it's finally settled, it's only fair that I take a break, right? I suggest you behave yourself for the next few days!"

Lumian couldn't help but smile as the Demoness of Pleasure slipped on her boots, swung the door open, and left.

Once the door slammed shut, Lumian, who had originally planned to return to Auberge du Coq Doré to write to Madam Magician, grabbed a pen and paper from the nearby table. He meticulously jotted down all the information I Know Someone had given him.

He then neatly folded the paper and placed I Know Someone's Hypnotist Beyonder characteristic on top of it.

Summoning the "doll" messenger, Lumian patiently waited.

Before long, the "doll" messenger returned, carrying the translucent colloid and a square piece of folded paper.

Madam Magician's reply read:

"This is a shared mission of the Tarot Club. There's no need for a reward. Keep it for yourself. I've already removed the corruption that could be removed.

"We'll mobilize various resources to search for the whereabouts of the remaining five April Fool's members, but we currently lack a solid lead. The pranks mentioned in the information have been ongoing for too long."

Lumian finished reading in silence, allowing the crimson flames to consume the paper in his hand.

He longed to teleport directly to Feynapotter's Gaia Province and the Southern Continent's West Balam to personally hunt down the suspicious April Fool's team members, such as Bard. However, he knew it was futile. Without sufficient information or clues, it was like searching for a needle in a haystack.

He couldn't rely on the ice-cream-eating boy's luck every time, could he?

All I can do now is wait for the Tarot Club to uncover useful leads… The only person I can track down at the moment is the publisher of the underground book, Emperor Roselle's Secret Chronicles. If only they had met with the real author, Bard… Lumian felt a mixture of disappointment and relief.

He planned to take his time with the Hypnotist Beyonder characteristic. While he searched for a suitable Artisan, he waited for Anthony Reid to investigate General Philip's widow.

If the Psychiatrist gained something and succeeded in curing his psychological issues, Lumian wouldn't mind selling him the Hypnotist

Beyonder characteristics and splitting the proceeds with Franca.

If Lumian found a suitable Artisan before that, he would designate the mystical item he crafted as a common resource, allowing Franca, Jenna, and the others to use it as they saw fit.

After tucking away the Hypnotist Beyonder characteristic in a concealed pocket, Lumian exhaled and leaned back in his dining chair.

Only then did he hear the growl of his stomach and realize his hunger.

Since waking up at 6 a.m., he had been engrossed in the interrogation, execution, and letter writing, completely forgetting about breakfast.

Honestly, leaving me alone here; it's as if I live here… Lumian mumbled to himself as he got up and ventured into the apartment's kitchen to see what ingredients were available.

Scanning the area, he spotted a few potatoes.

Lumian was momentarily surprised but quickly rolled up his sleeves and grabbed an apron hanging nearby. With skillful hands, he peeled, washed, and thinly sliced the potatoes into fine strips.

Following the process, he ignited the stove, heated a pan, added oil, sautéed, and tossed in the shredded potatoes. He seasoned the dish accordingly.

Once it was ready, Lumian toasted two slices of bread and poured a glass of milk.

Sitting down at the dining table, he sandwiched the crispy shredded potatoes between the slices of toast and savored them, occasionally taking a sip of milk.

Outside the window, the drizzle had cleared, and the sun beamed brightly.

…

During the following week, Lumian made the most of his time. He patiently awaited the recovery of his mental damage from the past two battles, taking the opportunity to act as a Pyromaniac and gradually digest the potion.

In the midst of this process, he also managed to report to Mr. K about his recent activities and the discovery of the evil god organization.

Members of the Savoie Mob in Salle de Bal Brise were surprised. Their boss had unexpectedly appeared for five to six consecutive days and had stayed for extended periods each time. Compared to their previous experiences of him being unavailable, it was as if he had found a double.

Charlie was equally astounded. Ciel frequented the basement bar every night to drink, tease, and taunt people, making him the prime target of this unusual dedication.

Just as Franca was about to revisit Trocadéro's Red House café and discreetly remind Browns Sauron not to forget auditing her, Hela's pure silver skull sent out a notice of a special gathering to Apartment 601 at 3 Rue des Blouses Blanches and Lumian's abandoned safe house on Rue des Blouses Blanches.

It had been a while since Lumian had visited the safe house. If Franca hadn't inquired about the letter upon receiving it, he might not have been aware of it.

Many members of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society operated in a similar fashion. They had designated locations for receiving and sending letters but did not actually reside there. They only visited periodically to avoid detection by Hela,

finding comfort in these small details.

Lumian arrived at the abandoned safe house on Rue des Blouses Blanches and carefully unfolded the letter. Its contents read:

"Muggle:

"There's a special gathering scheduled for 10 tonight. We need to discuss something of utmost importance that concerns everyone's safety."

…

At night, just three minutes shy of ten o'clock, Lumian recited the incantation imbued with Concealment powers within the confines of the safe house on Rue du Rossignol.

Gradually, he felt himself sinking into a profound slumber, the sensation akin to his body being erased by an enormous eraser.

After an indeterminate period, he suddenly regained consciousness and found himself standing amidst an ancient palace enveloped in the misty shroud of a town.

Over a hundred members of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society had already assembled, their figures still taking shape.

Navigating through what resembled a grand masquerade ball venue, Lumian, now transformed into Aurore using Lie, wore a Warlock's black robe and half-mask as he approached the Academy team.

He scanned the area but didn't spot the member known as Pettigrew.

Standing beside a slender man with a brownish-yellow manila document bag obscuring his head was Professor, adorned in a black butterfly mask, a bow tie shirt, and a long dark coat.

It was her husband, Associate Professor.

Professor regarded Lumian with curiosity and inquired, "Do you know what's happening? Why did they convene this special gathering?"

Lumian, taking on the persona of "Muggle" Aurore, smirked and let out a sigh.

"Because we have traitors among us."

"Traitors…" Professor and the other members of the Academy team echoed the term.

At that moment, the half-giant president, Gandalf, attired in a simple robe and hood, and the vice president, Hela, who appeared as a black widow with her face concealed by a veil, made their way to the massive stone throne situated deep within the ancient palace.

Chapter 411: Review Committee

The notice had already made it clear that this was no ordinary gathering. Most members of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society didn't split into groups to chat. Instead, they took their customary positions and fixed their eyes on the massive mottled stone chair.

Ten minutes past the agreed time, Gandalf, the president in his linen robe, looked around and spoke in a booming voice, "Everyone, I've brought you here for something crucial.

"We've got a bunch of traitors among us!"

A bunch of traitors… Even though Professor and the others from the Academy had received Lumian's hint, they hadn't expected the issue to be this severe.

It wasn't just one traitor; it was a whole bunch!

The ancient palace, though dilapidated, exploded with commotion. Some members of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society were skeptical, while others became instantly wary, suspicious of everyone around. Some thought there might be a problem, but they didn't think it was as bad as Gandalf made it out to be.

As they whispered amongst themselves, Hela, her face shrouded in black, spoke with an icy tone, "First, let's have one of the victims share her experience."

Her voice wasn't loud, but it cut through the silence of the night, reaching every member of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society.

She then turned her gaze toward the area where the Academy team was positioned.

Understanding Hela's intent, Lumian confidently ascended the steps and stood next to the massive, ancient mottled stone chair.

He channeled Aurore's emotional reaction if she were to discover the truth about her death and spoke with a deep, resonant voice, "On April 1st, I acquired a spell known as the Soul Summoning Spell from Mad Lady of the April Fool's team…"

Without any need for amplification, Lumian's imitation of Aurore's voice harnessed the Concealed power that saturated the Nation of the Evernight, ensuring that everyone present could hear without any leaks.

It was evident that Hela had lent her assistance. Lumian, not being a true Warlock, couldn't employ supplementary spells himself.

Upon hearing this revelation, most members of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society shifted their attention to the palace's crevice housing the April Fool's team. They noticed the conspicuous absence of Mad Lady and a significant number of her team members.

They could now infer which group the traitors were affiliated with. Those who had been pranked by the April Fool's team couldn't help but feel a sense of vindication.

Lumian continued with his account. He didn't immediately divulge Loki and I Know Someone's "confessions." Instead, he reconstructed Aurore's emotions.

The trust in I Know Someone, the yearning for home, the obsession with clues, the fascination with Mad Lady's claims, the fear and unease upon discovering a soul fragment fused with her memories after using the Soul Summoning Spell and the subsequent split into a separate personality, the desperate search for treatment from I Know Someone, the helplessness and horror from her repeated improvements before repeated deterioration…

Lumian's agitation grew as he spoke. At times, he even choked back a sob.

Part of this stemmed from his frustration. He had failed to notice Aurore's abnormal emotions and state earlier. His relaxed demeanor around those close to him had caused him to overlook subtle changes. By the time he had realized the gravity of the situation, it had already spiraled out of control.

Simultaneously, as he recounted and simulated Aurore, her fragmented soul seemed to stir and hover near the edge of the seal, exerting an influence on his own psyche.

As he neared the end of his narrative, Lumian took a deep breath.

"I came perilously close to death because of it. Fortunately, I received assistance at the eleventh hour and managed to seal my split personality. That's why I was absent from the gatherings for almost half a year.

"After my initial recovery, I reached out to Madame Hela and recounted my encounter. We began our covert investigation into Loki, I Know Someone, and Mad Lady."

Hela took charge of the conversation.

"So far, Loki has revealed a significant number of issues and has been dealt a severe blow from our actions. I Know Someone, on the other hand, was apprehended by Muggle and the rest, resulting in the extraction of a wealth of information."

As Hela noticed the growing fear and concern among the members of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society, she recounted Loki's mockery of Muggle and I Know Someone's intricate schemes.

This revelation stoked the flames of fury within most of the Research Society's members, and they began to grasp the reasons behind Muggle and Hela's actions.

Hela surveyed the assembled crowd and continued, "Muggle wasn't the sole victim of their malevolence. Many members who had previously met untimely ends or disappeared were also targeted.

"Now, let's invite a few witnesses up."

With that, several witnesses, including Black Earth and other April Fool's team members, took the stage one by one to share what they knew. Their accounts sent shivers down the spines of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society members, leaving them with a lingering fear.

It became abundantly clear that if Muggle hadn't survived and exposed their true colors, countless more individuals could have fallen prey to their schemes!

After the witnesses had concluded their accounts, President Gandalf presented the evidence, including diaries and items. Finally, he addressed the assembly, "According to I Know Someone's confession, we've managed to eliminate Loki's accomplices who were embedded in other teams. Among them, Pettigrew took his own life, overwhelmed by guilt. He was a good person but lacked determination and courage. If he had reached out to Hela and me earlier and hinted at the situation more effectively, many unfortunate events might have been averted. He wouldn't have had to carry this heavy burden."

As sighs rippled through the audience, Gandalf's resonant voice grew stronger.

"Everyone, we've only dealt with those accomplices known to I Know Someone. It's entirely possible that there are still spies embedded in various teams, loyal only to Loki. I propose the formation of a Review Committee consisting of Hela, myself, and three other trusted companions who have already undergone mutual reviews. Our mission will be to assess the remaining members and root out any hidden threats. We'll take decisive action against Loki and his allies."

Members of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society hesitated, concerned that this move would expose their secrets and realities to the Review Committee.

If any ambitious individuals were part of this committee, they could potentially exploit the information to manipulate and control members, posing a more significant threat than Loki's gang.

Gandalf remained observant, waiting for their deliberations before adding, "Do not be overly concerned. Our review process won't delve into your personal secrets or true identities. The primary goal is for the Review Committee to draft a stringent contract that ensures Research Society members won't harm each other. Everyone will sign it, and the contract will be notarized by Apollo. We don't care which deity you believe in, your real-world profession, or your hidden secrets. As long as you pose no threat and don't become hidden time bombs, you will be fine. This limitation will be clearly outlined in the contract."

Apollo, one of the five vice presidents, was known by a different nickname before. However, one day, he had unexpectedly approached the massive stone chair and announced his new moniker.

He had already successfully passed Gandalf and Hela's scrutiny.

In comparison to a comprehensive body-to-soul review, signing a binding contract to ensure each other's safety seemed far more acceptable to the members of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society.

After a show of hands, the Review Committee was officially established with nearly unanimous support.

The committee comprised five members: President Gandalf, Vice President Hela, Vice President Apollo, Hidden Blade from the Sanctuary team, and Headmaster from the Academy team.

Hela had initially suggested that Muggle join the Review Committee, but Lumian felt that, given that he wasn't truly Muggle, it wouldn't be appropriate for him to hold such a position. Thus, he rejected Hela's proposal.

As the vote passed, Lumian overheard Hidden Blade Franca mutter, "Humans are still the same. If you want to open a window, there will always be plenty of objections. But if you propose to tear down the roof, they'll happily agree to let you open the window."

Upon noticing Muggle's gaze, Hidden Blade Franca added, "I didn't say that."

Subsequently, the members split into groups to discuss the terms of the contract. Their aim was to ensure that it contained no extraneous content and that it could effectively expose traitors and harmful actions without any loopholes.

As Lumian descended the steps, he noticed Hidden Blade Franca engaged in conversation with a tall individual wearing a lion headgear.

As he approached, the lion-headed man turned to "her" and offered a smile.

"Muggle, you're in the market district too?"

"007, why do you say that?" Franca asked with deliberate curiosity.

That 007 who's affiliated with an official faction in Trier… Lumian nodded and smirked.

"Just because you're active in the market district doesn't necessarily mean you live there."

"That's true," 007 replied, then turned to Hidden Blade with a hint of jest in his voice, "You've already told me about that terrifying aura that night, and today you mentioned Loki and the others' betrayal. It would have been strange if I couldn't connect the dots and figure out that it was Madame Hela, you, and Muggle dealing with Loki and I Know Someone in the market district. Besides, I heard about a Marionettist going missing from Bureau 8 during that time, and it matched the abilities Loki displayed."

At this point, 007 looked at Hidden Blade and Muggle in puzzlement.

"None of you are Beyonders of the Hunter pathway."

The higher-ups suspected that the terrifying aura had been emitted by a high-level Beyonder of the Hunter pathway.

"Can we create that terrifying aura ourselves? It must be exogenous!" Franca was telling the truth, but she was deliberately misleading him into thinking about charms, Sealed Artifacts, and so on.

As 007 nodded slowly in contemplation, Lumian focused on him and inquired, "What's the official stance of Bureau 8 regarding the missing Marionettist? Why do they believe he disappeared?"

Chapter 412: Purge

Wearing a lion headgear, 007 took a moment to think before speaking.

"I've only heard rumors that the Marionettist disappeared with some classified information."

"That's not true," Franca replied, dropping the act. 007 had already figured out that the truth of that night involved the two of them teaming up with Hela to deal with Loki.

Loki didn't possess any such information!

007 didn't argue with her and continued discussing the rumors.

"And the classified information seems to be tied to a treasure left behind by a secret organization."

Left-behind treasure… Lumian and Franca both remembered the Castle Dylan mentioned by I Know Someone.

The location of this mysterious castle remained unknown, and Loki's dreams featured a towering and ominous ancient castle.

007 continued, "There are also members of Bureau 8 who suspect that the terrifying aura from that night is connected to the missing Marionettist. An intelligence supervisor named Antoine has been repeatedly asking for more details."

Antoine… He believes Loki's disappearance wasn't random, and something must have happened to him? Lumian made a mental note of the name.

After recounting the rumors, 007 glanced at Muggle and said half-jokingly, "It's best if you avoid the market district. Hidden Blade has stirred up trouble there. It's very dangerous."

"Who said that? Security has clearly improved!" Franca responded confidently.

Ever since she and Lumian had taken down the leaders of the Poison Spur Mob, the Savoie Mob had taken control of the entire market district. The frequency of mob fights, shootings, and killings had decreased significantly, and security had improved.

007 sighed and remarked, "That's only on the surface. There are more incidents involving supernatural powers than before."

"Sigh, I wonder when I'll get a long vacation."

Lumian, in the role of Muggle, conversed with 007 for a while before returning to the Academy team.

Professor, wearing a black butterfly mask, approached him and let out a soft sigh.

"I was worried that something had happened to you due to the Hidden Sage's whispers, and you needed some time to recover. Who would have thought that Loki's gang was behind it?"

After cursing Loki and his gang, she turned to Muggle for confirmation.

"Have you noticed that the Hidden Sage's whispers have taken on a disturbing change in recent months?"

Aurore's grimoires didn't contain any records of this… Lumian thought for a moment and replied with a hint of bitterness, "Nothing much. As you know, I was affected by the Soul Summoning Spell in the first few months of this year. My mental state was unstable, and recently, I've sealed a part of my personality. The issues with my body haven't been fully resolved. I had already digested the Warlock potion and was planning to gather ingredients for advancement, but I haven't dared to do so now."

The professor understood and cautioned, "You should be careful. Until your mental problems are completely resolved, and you return to your normal state, don't consider consuming the potion."

Her voice lowered as she continued, "I've noticed that the Hidden Sage's whispers have been revealing more living knowledge lately. It's the kind of knowledge that actively seeks out individuals and insists on entering their minds. This makes it even more dangerous for Beyonders of the Mystery Pryer pathway like us."

More knowledge actively pursuing individuals… Has the Hidden Sage's nature changed? Lumian had heard his sister Aurore mention the Knowledge Pursuer, so he didn't appear confused or bewildered.

He nodded solemnly and said, "I'll be cautious."

Professor didn't press further and continued discussing the specifics of the contract with Associate Professor and the other Academy team members. "Muggle" Lumian also took part in the conversation.

It took more than half an hour for the teams to gather their members' opinions, document them, and submit them to the Review Committee.

After careful consolidation, adoption, and rejection by Gandalf, Hela, and others, along with collective discussions involving all members of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society, the terms of the contract were painstakingly finalized.

It wasn't clear if everyone tacitly agreed to enter the Nation of the Evernight, but the gathering included transmigrators. There was no requirement for members of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society to be of the same kind or come from the same world. Hela was aware of this but chose not to bring it up. This allowed Lumian to fully meet the conditions and willingly comply with the contract's restrictions. He wouldn't secretly investigate the backgrounds of the Research Society members and wouldn't intentionally harm one another.

However, there were certain exceptions. The contract granted the Review Committee the right to investigate suspected members, but they couldn't pass judgment or make decisions unilaterally. They had to convene a special gathering and inform all members of the situation. Every member would then vote on guilt and suggest a rough range of punishment.

Loki and the others, who were currently being pursued, were no longer protected. Anyone had the authority to apprehend them.

After the contract was approved, Hidden Blade Franca, who stood beside Lumian, let out a sigh of relief and genuinely commented, "Once everyone signs the contract, the Research Society will truly become a secret organization.

"It was too lax before. Many matters relied on everyone's self-awareness."

Lumian, showing only the lower half of Aurore's face, smiled and replied, "After all, you all didn't come together for anything significant before. You lacked a strict hierarchy. It's only natural that you had the freedom to do as you pleased."

A loosely organized group could only mature gradually after weathering various challenges.

As Vice President Apollo drafted an extensive mystical contract, the various teams resumed their daily discussions.

This time, the primary focus of each team was on Loki and his companions' actions and potential accomplices.

Gandalf, Headmaster, Hela, Hidden Blade, and others moved from team to team, observing each member's reactions closely.

Suddenly, the Research Society member disguised as a horse, began reciting the incantation to leave the Nation of the Evernight before the

Review Committee could patrol his area.

"A Beyonder from ancient times, the ruler of the Nation of the Evernight, the noble Mother of Heaven…"

The voice echoed through the ancient palace, but before the figure could finish the incantation, his eyes closed, and he fell asleep.

The surrounding members of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society were momentarily shocked before realizing the situation.

They cursed, "Traitor!"

This individual had been one of Loki's hidden accomplices.

With the mole incapacitated, the Review Committee resumed their patrol.

Fifteen minutes later, the contract, as large as two dining tables, was produced, bearing the signature of a Notary.

Exhausted, Vice President Apollo drank a potion provided by Gandalf to alleviate his mental fatigue.

In the following period, members of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society ascended the steps one by one. Under the watchful eyes of the Review Committee, they read the contract and signed it using the nicknames they had been using for years.

During this process, the fog outside the ancient palace grew denser, as if preventing any external interference.

Once all the members had signed, three more traitors were exposed.

One of them transformed into a torch of light after signing, while another attempted to abduct his companion next to him, only to fall into a deep slumber. Seeing this, the third traitor chose to confess.

After a vote, the one who confessed was handled by a Hypnotist to erase relevant memories. He was expelled from the Research Society, while the remaining three turned into Beyonder characteristics.

Hela concluded, "Gandalf and I will investigate the family situations of these members. If they are ordinary people and there are no issues, I suggest auctioning off the Beyonder characteristics for money and providing compensation."

This compensation wasn't a reward for their wrongdoings but rather a way to assist the relatives of the members who had taken over the bodies and could no longer provide support.

Many members of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society had transmigrated to this world five to six years ago. Some had wives and children. Upon hearing this proposal, they were moved and felt it wouldn't be fair to implicate their families.

Lumian had no objections. He still considered himself an outsider in this situation.

In the remaining time, Lumian visited various teams, following Hidden Blade Franca's guidance, and identified two Artisans capable of crafting mystical items.

He didn't rush to interact with the Artisans and entrust them with the Hypnotist Beyonder characteristic from I Know Someone. Instead, he planned to wait for Anthony Reid.

The assistance a Hypnotist could provide far exceeded that of a corresponding mystical item. After all, most mystical items couldn't speak or offer advice and guidance.

Due to Loki's incident and the exposure of hidden traitors, many members of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society lost their enthusiasm and chose to depart without lingering, causing the number of people in the ancient palace to dwindle.

The Professor and Associate Professor couple, who had initially intended to organize an Academy team gathering in Trier, temporarily abandoned the idea.

…

At noon the following day, Lumian casually arrived at Salle de Bal Brise with a Rouen meatloaf in hand.

Upon entering the café on the second floor, he spotted "Rat" Christo.

The short smuggling leader, sporting a pair of rat-like whiskers, greeted him with a smile.

Lumian raised his eyebrows and asked with a smile, "Got into trouble?"

Simultaneously, he thought to himself, This guy is a Sequence 8 Beast Tamer. Beyond that is Sequence 7 Vampire. With his current appearance, I wonder how the potion will increase his charm and height?

Christo chuckled and said, "There's something I want to ask you. I can't make up my mind."

Lumian pulled up a chair and sat down.

"And what's the matter?"

Christo, resembling a large rat, glanced around and said, "The Trier Cave Association invited me to join them. Why do you think they're interested in recruiting me?"

The Trier Cave Association was a group of individuals passionate about exploring and studying caves. Over time, it expanded its scope to include mining and drew in mine owners as well.

In Trier, the region with the most caves was underground.

Chapter 413: Cave Association

Upon hearing the name Trier Cave Association and their invitation to "Rat" Christo, Lumian didn't feel puzzled initially. Instead, he recalled the secret map of Underground Trier he had once seen from Gardner Martin.

The upper section of the map was as detailed as if one had infiltrated the municipal department and copied the original information.

Now, Lumian suspected that it might have been leaked from the Trier Cave Association.

This seemingly civilian organization had a large number of cave researchers. Some of them were employees of the municipal department or expert consultants. They had ample opportunities to come into contact with confidential exploration and construction information. There was no lack of people who had participated in the municipal modification decades ago. They were hands-on witnesses who had bored through various tunnels and reinforced all the quarry caves.

They had a deep understanding of Underground Trier.

Lumian looked at "Rat" Christo and asked thoughtfully, "Do you really not understand why they invited you to join the association?"

"Rat" Christo smiled sheepishly and said, "I have a guess, but I'm not sure.

"Ciel, don't tell me they've discovered I'm a smuggler leader?"

As a merchant who had long exploited Underground Trier's concealed nature to smuggle alcohol, weapons, and ammunition, Christo's knowledge of different tunnels, remote mines, underground tombs, and hidden chambers rivaled that of most members of the Cave Association. He even possessed secret routes that remained unknown to others.

Moreover, his nickname was "Rat," and he was a true Beast Tamer. With the help of his animal friends, his "tentacles" could extend to many areas that humans couldn't reach.

Christo suspected that the Cave Association had taken a liking to him because of these traits.

That was why he felt uneasy. Whether it was his status as a Beast Tamer in the Beyonder domain or his nature as a big-time smuggler, they were enough to send him to trial. His options would probably range from hanging, a firing squad, incineration, beheading, to becoming a low-level experimentalist.

Lumian chuckled.

"I don't believe that adventurers who join the Cave Association haven't been involved in smuggling and don't have Beyonders among them."

"That's right," "Rat" Christo exhaled and said, "The Cave Association wants some business from me?"

Lumian glanced at him and said, "That's why you should consult the Boss about this, not me."

Christo lowered his voice and smiled ingratiatingly. "I'm just worried that the Boss will take the opportunity to assign me some dangerous mission."

Based on Gardner Martin's previous missions and the confidential map, this "Rat" keenly sensed the Boss's extraordinary interest in Underground Trier.

He felt that if he joined the Trier Cave Association, Gardner Martin might arrange for him to contact some members of the association and attempt to steal confidential information or participate in research and risky expeditions.

And that often meant danger.

He had consulted Lumian not only because he felt that his colleague was powerful, knowledgeable, and quick-witted but also because he wanted to find someone to shirk his responsibility in advance.

He had already made up his mind to join the Trier Cave Association and keep it a secret from Gardner Martin, the boss of the Savoie Mob.

For him to progress from an ordinary mobster to a Beyonder and take control of the Savoie Mob's smuggling business, he relied on two principles: One, he had to avoid provoking anyone stronger than him, choosing only to bully the weak. If he ran out of options, he could seek help from his colleagues and join forces. Two, he had to never place all his chips on a bet or one person.

Previously, he had fawned over Lumian, displaying a certain degree of submission. His words were filled with praise for Lumian because he valued his colleague's rapid advancement in Sequence, his strength, and his intelligence. If he befriended him, he might be able to save his life from a dangerous mission given by Gardner Martin at a critical moment.

Now that he had a chance to join the Trier Cave Association and interact with more factions and powerful figures, "Rat" Christo naturally didn't want to let it go. He didn't want his connections to be limited to the Savoie Mob and the market district. If Gardner Martin lost power one day or he was given a certain death mission, he needed to switch teams, one that could protect him.

Gardner Martin definitely couldn't know about this, but if he accidentally discovered the matter, Christo could naturally blame it on Ciel:

I, 'Rat,' am a boorish and uncultured individual. I spend my days dealing with animals, laborers, and the dark underground. I have limited knowledge and ain't very bright. I often seek guidance from Ciel when I encounter matters, and he told me that I could join the Cave Association. He said it was a very normal and personal matter.

Lumian looked at Christo with a faint smile, his dark-blue eyes and grayish-black hair, and didn't respond to his inquiry. Instead, he asked, "You've been a Beast Tamer for a long time, right? Do you know what the next Sequence is?"

Judging by Rat's care and concern for his animal companions, even if he didn't know the acting method, the Beast Tamer potion should have mostly been digested.

"I don't know. The Boss didn't tell me," Christo's eyes darted around.

Lumian chuckled and said, "As far as I know, the next Sequence of Beast Tamer is a qualitative change. It will bring you an all-around improvement, including a longer lifespan and a body with better recovery traits."

Without waiting for Christo to press further, Lumian changed the subject.

"Therefore, you must work hard to complete the mission given by the Boss and strive to obtain the corresponding rewards as soon as possible."

"Yes, yes, yes," Christo hastily agreed.

Only then did Lumian steer the conversation back on track. He smiled and asked, "Do you wish to join the Trier Cave Association?"

Christo stammered, "I-I'm curious about their motives. Moreover, the person who came seems polite and keeps smiling, but I keep feeling that his actions are a threat to me. Yes, a threat!

"The one following him is even more expressionless. He looks at me as if I'm a dead man, a criminal awaiting trial!"

Curious… Lumian chuckled inwardly, grasping Rat's inclination and thoughts.

"Angrily," he said, "How dare they threaten a leader of our Savoie Mob? We must inform the Boss about this!"

"No, no need!" Christo panicked. "The Cave Association is a semi-official organization. We're just mobsters. There's no need to clash with them. This won't do you, me, or Red Boots, who are members of the Savoie Mob in the market district, any good."

Lumian clicked his tongue silently, planning to add fuel to the fire and force the truth out of "Rat."

At that moment, Sarkota, who had been guarding the staircase at the bottom, walked up and said to Lumian, "Boss, two individuals calling themselves Trier Cave Association liaisons are here to pay you a visit."

Visit me? Someone from the Trier Cave Association is visiting me? Lumian glanced at "Rat" Christo, who had his hands on the table in surprise and confusion. He leaned back in his chair and said to Sarkota, "Invite them up."

The Trier Cave Association's two liaisons were young. They wore black formal attire and blue bow ties. One had brown hair, brown eyes, and a reserved smile. The other had black hair and brown eyes, expressionless and cold.

The friendly liaison glanced at "Rat" Christo and fixed his gaze on Lumian's face.

He smiled and asked, "Good afternoon. Are you Monsieur Ciel Dubois?"

"Yes." Lumian wanted to see what the Trier Cave Association was up to.

The liaison who had asked the question earlier smiled condescendingly and said, "We're members of the Trier Cave Association. My name is Joseph, and this is my colleague, Rayan. We're here to invite you to join our association. We just invited Monsieur Christo, who's standing beside you, a few hours ago."

Lumian didn't hide his emotions and asked with amusement, "What do I have that caught your Cave Association's eye?"

I'm not a smuggler who frequents Underground Trier!

Could it be that you know that I entered the fourth level of the catacombs and obtained the Samaritan Women's Spring water?

Could it be that you still know that I'm a member of the Iron and Blood Cross Order and am aware of a series of hidden catacombs like the Albert Mines?

Joseph replied with a smile, "We have our reasons. If you're willing to join our association, you'll definitely know the specific reason."

Rayan, who was taller than Joseph, added coldly, "That's a good thing for you."

Lumian gazed at them for a few seconds before chuckling.

"I'm not interested in your association."

The expressionless Rayan narrowed his eyes.

"I hope you won't regret it."

Joseph smiled meaningfully and said, "You might not know the significance of our Cave Association in Trier.

"Unfortunately, you missed this opportunity."

With that, the two of them turned around and prepared to walk towards the stairs leading to the ground floor.

As Lumian watched them leave, he raised his head slightly.

What is the Trier Cave Association up to? This matter is definitely not simple…

Perhaps this is an opportunity. If I offend the Cave Association, Gardner Martin probably won't let me stay in the market district anymore…

My current mission in the Iron and Blood Cross Order is to investigate the Sauron family's decline and explore the underground to find the entrance to

Fourth Epoch Trier. It has nothing to do with staying in the market district…

Once I leave the market district, I'll be out of Loki's sight. I can slip into the shadows and wait patiently…

I wonder if I can continue enjoying Salle de Bal Brise's share of profits…

If anything goes awry, I'll teleport away immediately…

As these thoughts raced through his mind, Lumian suddenly knocked on the coffee table in front of him.

Amidst the thumping sounds, he glanced at Joseph and Rayan's figures and asked calmly, "Who gave you the permission to leave?"

Chapter 414: Reason

Joseph and Rayan came to a sudden halt, swiftly turning to face Lumian.

Lumian observed them in silence, offering no immediate explanation.

Joseph, maintaining his smug and condescending grin, inquired, "Monsieur Ciel, I'm not sure I comprehend your meaning."

Lumian spoke with composure, "I granted you permission to visit me, not the freedom to depart."

"This is my Salle de Bal Brise, not your home. You can't come and go as you please."

Though Lumian didn't intentionally use Provocation, his demeanor, tone, and message radiated unmistakable disdain, as if he held no fear of their wrath.

Rayan, his expression unchanged, narrowed his eyes, turned away, and continued his stride toward the staircase, completely disregarding Lumian's words.

Joseph, with brown hair and eyes to match, glanced at Lumian, then at Rayan. His gaze flickered, but he made no move to stop him.

Unfazed, Lumian calmly drew his revolver and discharged a round toward the staircase without hesitation.

With a bang, Rayan came to an abrupt standstill once again.

Slowly, he pivoted to face Lumian, exuding a palpable pressure from his eyes.

A subtle movement in Christo's pocket betrayed his discomfort and vigilance, sensing imminent danger.

Unperturbed, Lumian, holding the revolver, issued a sincere apology, "I'm sorry, I am carrying a concealed firearm."

As he spoke, he glanced back at Rayan and Joseph, a faint, fearless smile playing on his lips.

Joseph's feigned polite smile crumbled, replaced by a piercing gaze fixed on Lumian, as if assessing the mob leader's resolve, confidence, and strength.

Lumian contemplated uttering, "What are you staring at? If you want to fight, let's fight. If not, back down." to further infuriate the Trier Cave Association representatives, but considering the presence of "Rat" Christo, he abandoned the notion.

It would expose his true intention of provocation rather than investigating their true purpose, making it challenging to explain to Gardner Martin, the current or former Conspirer.

His unwavering gaze remained locked with Joseph and Rayan. With the revolver in his right hand, he deftly spun the cylinder.

After more than ten seconds that left "Rat" Christo visibly sweating, Joseph once again wore a polite smile and asked, "May we depart now, Monsieur Ciel?"

Oh, so you see through my true intentions of deliberately finding fault, hoping to get some action? Where's your arrogance and self-esteem? Lumian chuckled inwardly and said in an infuriating tone,

"Not just yet."

Rayan took an abrupt step forward, but Joseph restrained him.

The freckled, brown-haired, brown-eyed young man raised his chin slightly and locked eyes with Lumian.

"What must we do to gain your permission?"

Lumian's smile held a tinge of disappointment as he replied, "Answer my question, why did you invite Christo and me to join the Cave Association? I don't recall having a hobby of exploring and studying caves."

Joseph fell into a brief silence before explaining, "Our association's cave adventurers have encountered Christo several times underground and noticed his in-depth knowledge of Underground Trier. He appears to be well-acquainted with many hidden routes, which aligns with our cave association's criteria for invitations."

"Rat" Christo didn't voice any objections to this explanation. Although his primary activities involved smuggling underground, there were no completely hidden smuggling routes. They inevitably crossed paths with tunnels and mines known to cave adventurers and quarry police. During these encounters, it was inevitable that he would come across a few "passersby" or be covertly observed from a distance.

Lumian, all the while, idly stroked the revolver's muzzle without interrupting Joseph's narrative.

Joseph paused for a brief moment before elaborating, "There are two reasons for your invitation."

"The first reason is an Earth Blood ore specimen."

The Earth Blood ore specimen… Lumian hadn't anticipated this reason at all.

Without taking much time to consider, guided by his prankster instincts and recent advice from Anthony Reid, Lumian swiftly responded, "An Earth Blood ore specimen… Ah, I recall now. I acquired it from a lunatic named Flameng. Isn't it just a stone? It holds no value to me. I don't even know its whereabouts."

Lumian then added with a touch of nostalgia, "It appears to have been stolen. I left it in a rented apartment. Heh heh, individuals like us rarely have a place solely for rest and sleep. My apartment was laden with numerous traps. Who would have imagined a thief successfully infiltrating and accessing the cabinet? What's more, they only took the Earth Blood ore and left everything else untouched. It puzzled me at the time, making me wonder if my recollection was flawed—the stone has long been lost, and no thief had broken in…"

Ciel Dubois's words were delivered with a sincere and detailed tone, and his demeanor conveyed an apparent lack of concern regarding the ore specimen. Now, it merely seemed like the loss of some insignificant item. Joseph and Rayan exchanged glances, their attitudes subtly shifting.

As Lumian finished his act, his mind raced, trying to decipher the rationale behind the Trier Cave Association's interest in the Earth Blood ore.

The Earth Blood's rock stratum has existed beneath Trier for centuries, if not millennia. The specific minerals concealed within it couldn't have surfaced recently, catching the attention of Flameng and other mineral researchers…

Official factions in Trier and certain secretive organizations probably know that a select few minerals within the Earth Blood rock stratum hold a connection to the death of Blood Emperor Alista Tudor. However, they haven't uncovered their practical significance, merely corrupting the minds of those who encountered them…

That night, I activated the brand on my right hand, causing numerous high-ranking individuals in Trier to sense it. Someone might have identified the aura of Blood Emperor Alista Tudor through various means, prompting an investigation into relevant items…

The whereabouts of the specific minerals within the Earth Blood rock stratum are a vital lead in their inquiry. Flameng's belongings were registered with the market district's police headquarters…

Given the Cave Association's connection to the authorities, they likely accepted the mission and sought me out, the one who had acquired Flameng's belongings…

But why didn't they just send someone from the police headquarters to inquire directly? The Purifier, Machinery Hivemind, and Bureau 8 members all possess corresponding police identities…

Of course, the authorities aren't unified. They are officially divided between the government and the two Churches, but in practice, each faction harbors internal divisions.

The Eternal Blazing Sun Church's Order Of Preachers clashes with the Brotherhood Minor and other ideological factions. The Church of the God of Steam and Machinery's cloister system opposes the cathedral system. Bureau 8 is even more of a mixed bag. Some members come from secret organizations recognized by the government, some are former nobles like Sauron, who retains some influence, and others had been groomed by Bureau 8 over the years…

The only thing holding them together is the fact that Bureau 8 members can't officially align with any political party, or it would become even more chaotic…

In such a fractured environment, it is possible that a group within a faction had identified the Earth Blood ore's unique trail of clues but doesn't want others to know. Hence, they bypassed the police station's public channels and conducted their investigation through the unofficial Cave Association…

Perhaps someone within the Cave Association has recognized this clue and possesses an in-depth knowledge of underground terrain and mineral specimens. They are likely among the most proficient professionals…

Is this why they hadn't directly requested my cooperation with the investigation and instead attempted to recruit me into the Cave Association?

Lumian swiftly reached this preliminary conclusion, eagerly awaiting Joseph to reveal the second reason.

Joseph said, "We believed you had an interest in underground minerals and were a kindred spirit."

"Did it really get stolen, or did you leave it somewhere else but have forgotten about it?"

"It must have been stolen," Lumian said truthfully. "I found some traces of a break-in. Because of this, I became concerned about the gold I had saved, so I went to the bank to rent a safe deposit box for it."

Joseph nodded gently and said, "The second reason is that Kendall, an administrator of the catacombs, told us that among the individuals who brought Flameng's ashes there for burial, you seemed to possess a unique sensitivity to something abnormal that others couldn't perceive."

They connected the dots from the Earth Blood ore to the catacombs… Lumian was enlightened.

"I'm not sure what you mean by 'special.'"

Joseph didn't elaborate or push for further information. He simply looked at Lumian and asked, "Monsieur Ciel, may we leave now?"

Lumian regarded them for a few seconds before nodding slowly.

"Sure."

The situation had taken an unexpected turn, causing him to abandon his plan of provoking the two liaisons and antagonizing the Trier Cave Association further.

While he had undoubtedly irked Joseph and Rayan, they had also obtained the answers they were seeking, or at least a part of them. There might be minor repercussions in the future, but a major confrontation was unlikely.

After Joseph and Rayan disappeared down the stairs, Lumian sat in contemplation for several moments. He holstered his revolver, stood up, and addressed "Rat" Christo, "This situation is more complex than I anticipated. I need to report it to the Boss."

He considered a dangerous possibility.

If it turned out that the Sauron family was behind the investigation into the special Earth Blood ore through the Cave Association, and they discovered a connection between Ciel Dubois, a mob leader, and the supposed son of a wealthy businessman who exhibited peculiar behavior in Poufer Sauron's King's Pie game, it could pose a significant problem.

Therefore, he needed to inform Gardner Martin immediately, be forthright with him, and eliminate any potential hidden threats while seeking useful advice.

With the Iron and Blood Cross Order as a secret organization backing this entire operation and his primary mission assigned by Gardner Martin, Lumian had no intention of handling the matter on his own.

"Rat" Christo hesitated for a moment before forcing a smile and responding, "Alright."

Chapter 415: The Sinner Complains First

Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative, 11 Rue des Fontaines.

Gardner Martin, dressed in a crisp white shirt and black pants, stood before the floor-to-ceiling windows in the Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative. Bathed in golden sunlight, he listened intently as Lumian and Christo shared the details of their encounter with the Trier Cave Association.

Lumian took the lead, briefly explaining the origins of the Earth Blood ore specimen.

"While I was staying at Auberge du Coq Doré, I crossed paths with a man named Flameng, a Lunatic who had a tragic encounter with the Montsouris ghost, leading to the bizarre deaths of his family.

"Occasionally, he regained lucidity. We drank together a few times. One day, he hanged himself. His belongings, including the Earth Blood ore specimen, ended up with the police. They said they were to hand them over to his surviving relatives, but they refused to accept them. Eventually, they asked me to retrieve them, which included the Earth Blood ore specimen.

"I knew that lunatic and had drinks with him. I didn't throw away the mineral specimen and casually placed it in an iron cabinet of my safe house…"

Lumian spoke the truth, not a single word being false. He only concealed the fact that he had helped Flameng escape the Montsouris ghost and Termiboros's reminder regarding the Earth Blood ore.

Gardner Martin, his brownish-red eyes reflecting wisdom and a touch of silver hair in his black hair, inquired, "Where is your safe house?"

Lumian replied honestly, "It's in the leftmost room on the third floor of 19 Rue des Blouses Blanches."

This wasn't on the same side as Apartment 6, which had emitted a terrifying aura, and there was a distance between them, so Lumian's answer was straightforward.

Gardner Martin smiled.

"No wonder you frequent Rue des Blouses Blanches so often. It's not just because of Jenna."

Boss, are you hinting at me not to visit Franca too often? Are you implying that you're aware of this situation? Lumian grumbled and continued.

He gave the same story he had told Joseph and Rayan from the Cave Association.

Finally, Lumian subtly probed, "Will this pose a problem for our Savoie Mob? There might be an official faction hidden behind the Cave Association."

He wanted to convey to Gardner Martin that his cover in front of Poufer Sauron might be at risk, trusting the boss's intelligence to grasp the implication.

Gardner Martin gave a slight nod and turned his attention to "Rat" Christo, saying, "If you want to join the Cave Association, you can, but ensure it doesn't interfere with our smuggling operations."

Christo nodded repeatedly.

"Understood, Boss."

Following Gardner Martin's instructions, he departed from the study, leaving Lumian alone.

Gardner Martin smiled and consoled the official member of the Iron and Blood Cross Order.

"Don't worry about Poufer. Even if he figures out your true identity, he'll pretend he doesn't know. Ever since you became the king in the King's Pie game, he's been suspicious of you. He'll definitely probe and exploit you again and again."

It was a subtle message, urging Lumian to remain in the market district and continue overseeing Salle de Bal Brise, Auberge du Coq Doré, Salle de Gristmill, and other businesses.

Lumian couldn't help but smile with relief. "Alright, I was just worried that it would affect the most important mission."

Simultaneously, he sneered inwardly.

He keenly felt the irrationality of Gardner Martin's plan.

Transitioning control to another Beyonder to oversee Salle de Bal Brise and other operations, allowing Lumian to slip into the shadows, was a straightforward task for the boss of the Savoie Mob and the Commanding Officer of the Iron and Blood Cross Order. There were no downsides to this arrangement.

Even though he couldn't afford to mistreat Lumian, a subordinate on an important mission, he could compensate him by continuing to share the profits from Salle de Bal Brise and other businesses. He couldn't risk keeping an official member, who had already attracted suspicion, in his current location.

While Lumian's retreat into the shadows might make him appear even more suspicious, potentially putting the Savoie Mob in the crosshairs, Gardner Martin had encountered such challenges numerous times before. There had to be a solution.

Sensing the Commanding Officer of the Iron and Blood Cross Order's suspicion, Lumian aimed to use the Cave Association to keep testing him.

His account and explanations were entirely truthful. Normally, Gardner Martin would believe him, but the issue was that too many unusual events had occurred around him recently. As a former or current Conspirer, Gardner Martin would instinctively smell something fishy.

The detailed reasons were no longer enough to hide the overall abnormality.

With this thought in mind, Lumian's determination to kill surged.

He stared at Gardner Martin, positioned by the floor-to-ceiling windows, and estimated the distance between them to be about five meters.

At such a close range, if he were to suddenly employ the Spell of Harrumph, and Gardner Martin hadn't reached Sequence 4 and achieved godhood, lacking a mystical item to defend against such abilities, he could quickly subdue the Savoie Mob boss and eliminate him.

The current situation resembled that of two ordinary individuals without Beyonder powers standing within a five-meter radius. One held a high social status and excelled in combat, while the other held a low status and lacked physical strength. However, they both concealed a revolver and possessed exceptional marksmanship.

Within five meters, regardless of an ordinary person's status or combat skills, they would succumb to a single shot!

Considering the missions for the Tarot Club and the Aurora Order, Lumian composed himself and inquired, "Commanding Officer, I wish to purchase the Conspirer potion formula from the Order."

He had gained valuable insights from his advancement to Pyromaniac. He didn't want to go through the nerve-wracking process of searching for each Conspirer potion ingredient after digesting the Pyromaniac potion. His goal was to gather Conspirer ingredients in advance while continuing to digest the remaining Pyromaniac potion, thereby maximizing his time efficiency.

Gardner Martin responded with surprise, "Do you have that much cash for that?

"The Conspirer potion formula can command prices ranging from 70,000 to 80,000 verl d'or at the most mysticism gatherings, if not more. It's unlike Pyromaniacs, who are constantly perishing as others advance. Conspirers understand the importance of self-preservation, and they've become more cautious about sharing their Sequence potion formulas."

In Trier, the most common potion formulas available ranged from Sequence 9 to Sequence 7 of the Hunter pathway.

Without waiting for Lumian's reply, Gardner Martin grinned and added, "If you can unearth even a portion of the Sauron family's decline secret, I'll reward you with the Conspirer potion formula. It doesn't have to be the whole story, just a piece of the puzzle."

"If you're eager to advance and don't want to wait, as an official member of the Iron and Blood Cross Order, you have the privilege of purchasing the Conspirer potion formula at a discounted price of 60,000 verl d'or."

Lumian agreed without hesitation, "No problem. I'll bring 60,000 verl d'or tomorrow."

His initial plan had been to inquire with Mr. K and Madam Magician if Gardner Martin declined his request.

"Do you really have 60,000 verl d'or?" Gardner Martin chuckled.

Lumian's heart raced as he replied deliberately, "Just about. I previously assisted a tenant of Auberge du Coq Doré in recovering a 100,000 debt owed by Salle de Bal Unique on Rue Ancienne in Quartier de l'Observatoire. I took a bit over half of it."

In total, he had received 50,000 verl d'or in banknotes and gold, worth 30,000 verl d'or. After repaying Franca's 25,000, he had 55,000 left. Combined with the original 1,000 gold, 1,000 banknotes, and 4,000 verl d'or, he had 61,000 verl d'or in liquid assets.

"Salle de Bal Unique…" Gardner Martin repeated, his expression growing more serious. "You really managed to retrieve the debt from Salle de Bal

Unique?"

Evidently, the Commanding Officer of the Iron and Blood Cross Order was familiar with Salle de Bal Unique.

Lumian nodded, his demeanor open and honest.

"Yes."

The members of the Savoie Mob at Salle de Bal Brise were more or less aware that he had helped Fitz collect his debt. Lumian couldn't keep Gardner Martin in the dark, so he decided to disclose it directly to confuse the situation and divert the Iron and Blood Cross Order's suspicions.

Furthermore, he could use this opportunity to put a little fear into Gardner Martin!

Gardner Martin scrutinized Lumian and subtly moved closer to the floor-to-ceiling windows.

After a few moments, he inquired with curiosity, "Have you never heard of the issues surrounding Salle de Bal Unique?"

"I have," Lumian replied with a smile.

If he had a monocle, he might have playfully inserted it into his right eye socket at that moment, savoring Gardner Martin's intriguing expressions and subconscious reactions.

After a pause, Lumian continued, "After accepting the commission, I conducted a thorough investigation of the dance hall and realized it wasn't as simple as it seemed. It had a mysterious background and posed a significant danger, so I initially decided to abandon it. However, one day, while trailing an adversary, I noticed something unusual. One of the guards at Salle de Bal Unique's entrance had inexplicably vanished. And upstairs, behind a window, their boss, Timmons, appeared to have lost his spirit.

"I saw this as an opportunity, so I made an attempt to enter and collect the debt. To my surprise, I succeeded!"

As Lumian spoke, he took a step forward and asked earnestly, "Commanding Officer, are there any hidden dangers I should be aware of?"

Gardner Martin discreetly took another step forward and smiled.

"Not at the moment. Keep an eye out for any future anomalies."

Lumian seized the opportunity to express his bewilderment.

"Commanding Officer, something doesn't quite add up. Why have there been so many events swirling around me lately? Some I initiated, while others just seemed to find their way to me. Am I truly a harbinger of trouble? Or has my recent fate been to rush around and handle things, leaving me constantly busy and weary?"

Gardner Martin regarded him with meaning and replied, "Perhaps, this is the destiny that every Hunter is bound to face."

After Lumian departed, Gardner Martin shifted his gaze to the side.

A hidden door creaked open, and Supervisor Olson emerged, bearing a resemblance to a hungry bear.

"How is it?" Gardner Martin inquired.

Olson smirked and responded, "It's natural for him to be discontent with your arrangements. His loyalty isn't firmly established yet. He won't be able to join your team for the time being."

Gardner Martin shifted the conversation thoughtfully.

"The calamity on him is more conspicuous than any of us. Is it possible that he's more compatible?"

Olson fell silent for a few moments before replying, "Let's observe and wait."

…

Meanwhile, as Lumian returned to the market district, Franca sat at Trocadéro's Red House Café. Her gaze fell upon Browns Sauron, her long, flowing orange-red hair resembling a waterfall, as she asked, "When will you folks complete the audit?"

Browns Sauron didn't provide a direct response. She studied Franca, who had black hair and brown eyes, for a moment before saying, "We've identified a suspected member of the Bliss Society."

Chapter 416: Suspect

You're quite efficient. After receiving the warning, you swiftly unearthed the problem and found the clues. Instead of confirming it yourself, you're now informing me directly, intending to leverage this issue for the final audit? No wonder you didn't respond when I inquired about the audit completion date… Franca's mind raced as she grasped Browns Sauron's true intentions, representing the Demoness Sect.

Admiring the Demoness's appearance and demeanor, she smiled and asked, "Is it just a suspicion?"

She was prompting the other party to provide more details.

Browns Sauron ran her fingers through her long orange-red hair and spoke with a somber expression, "After learning from you that the Bliss Society interacts with the participants in the orgies, I observed my friends and noticed two members who were behaving unusually.

"One of them fell in love with a man once again and entered into a romantic relationship. Consequently, she started declining participation in the female orgies. The other one encountered a new woman and succumbed to her advances, leading to feelings of guilt for betraying us."

Friends? Girlfriends! Franca couldn't help but criticize.

She smiled and inquired, "Who do you suspect are the members of the Bliss Society?"

"That woman," Browns Sauron's aura remained dark. "She took the initiative to ask about the orgies and reassured Adaina that there was no need to feel guilty. She claimed that everyone has the right to control their bodies and freely indulge their desires without caring about others' opinions, societal judgments, moral restrictions, or religious constraints. She also stated that only deities and churches that genuinely embrace free will, physical freedom, and desire freedom are worth following."

Physical freedom, desire freedom… It's indeed the hallmark of the Mother Tree of Desire's believers… The core members of the Bliss Society truly excel as Actors. Their acting skills are remarkable. They can artfully package indulgence and debauchery, presenting desires as a manifestation of willpower, subtly diminishing the importance of rationality, clarity, and thoughtful reflection… Franca clicked her tongue and inwardly sighed.

For a Demoness of Pleasure, this approach proved highly effective. If the surrounding humans believed it, she could swiftly immerse them in intense and genuine pleasure, causing them to lose themselves in a sea of indulgence. Long-term consequences and effects were typically disregarded by most Demonesses, as they would have already digested the potion by then.

However, Franca could discern that Browns Sauron was possessive and didn't want her girlfriends to engage with humans outside of the orgies.

"That certainly resembles the Bliss Society," Franca objectively remarked.

Browns added with a gloomy expression, "As for the other one, the lover is primarily concerned with money, houses, banquets, vacations, and various luxury items. It's quite evident that he's a male courtesan. They understand women very well, are eloquent, and possess considerable capabilities."

"What do you plan to do?" Franca asked curiously.

She sensed that Browns Sauron wasn't the type to simply give up on one of her girlfriends, especially when the new lover seemed unreliable.

Browns Sauron hesitated for a few moments before saying, "I've encountered him before, and I can tell he harbors an unusual desire for me. I intend to teach him a lesson, immersing him in pleasure without granting him true gratification. Once his body and mind are completely under my control, I'll discard him."

Wow… Did you learn this without a mentor? Do you even remember your original form? Franca raised an eyebrow, finding a rare target for mockery.

Browns glanced at her mockingly and retorted, "Based on what I've discovered and confirmed, you have two male lovers. One is mature, and the other is young. You seem to excel at enjoying yourself."

Her implication was clear: "What right do you have to mock me? I'm merely planning to offer that man some pleasure without engaging in actual intimacy. As for you, you've long abandoned your gender, ending up in the beds of different men!"

Half of my reputation has been tarnished by Ciel! Franca didn't lose her composure over the humiliation. She maintained a smile and said, "I view this as a unique experience.

"I've already become a woman. How can I not explore something entirely different from my previous existence? If you don't experiment now, you may never have the chance in the future. Don't you desire to return to your original form. Do you not know how?"

She subtly hinted at her knowledge of mysticism, paving the way for revealing her true motives for infiltrating the Savoie Mob in the future.

Browns was left momentarily speechless, unable to refute Franca Roland's twisted logic.

Franca continued, "Life is confined to just a few decades. Why confine yourself to such a limited scope? As long as you avoid indulgence and obsession and always remain true to yourself, you're merely experiencing the present moment. Why not venture into various realms and experiences?"

At this moment, Franca had an epiphany.

Pleasure wasn't just something to offer to others; it was also meant for oneself!

Is this my first principle of acting…? No wonder my digestion speed hasn't been slowing down recently; it's even considered fast… How can being coy be considered Pleasure? Franca thought with a sense of delight.

Browns fell silent for a few seconds before speaking, "Your mindset surpasses my expectations, but with this mindset, it will be very, very challenging for you to perform a ritual, advance to Affliction, or experience pain and inflict it."

"I'm currently focused on Pleasure. I'll deal with Affliction when the time comes," Franca replied casually.

The digestion process would take months, half a year, or even longer to complete. What was the point of worrying too much?

Browns glanced at Franca for a moment, feeling a mix of repulsion and envy.

It wasn't that she desired it, but the Demonesses she had encountered, whether at higher Sequences or those who had just consumed the Witch potion, lacked this calmness and radiance. Each of them carried their own distortions, conflicts, and pain, and some even teetered on the edge of madness.

Browns decided not to delve further into personal philosophy and steered the conversation back on track.

"Adaina encountered the suspected Bliss Society member at an art exhibition. She goes by the name Theresa and comes from a former noble family. She's now an art dealer.

"I've conducted some investigation. Her identity and name are real, but they don't belong to her. In other words, there is a real art dealer named Theresa. She's impersonating her and has altered her appearance to make herself more appealing.

"This aligns with the characteristics of an Actor, as you mentioned. When Adaina had intimate contact with her, she also experienced the abilities of a

Sex Addict.

"I attempted to tail her earlier, but I was too cautious and lost her trail.

"Adaina has a date with her tonight."

Franca listened attentively and then asked thoughtfully, "Can we trust Adaina now?"

Browns's expression contorted as she replied, "She can be trusted."

Franca didn't press further and reminded her deliberately, "Then, will she exhibit any unusual behavior during her date with Theresa tonight? She's dealing with an Actor."

"Perhaps. She needs a Psychiatrist or an even more powerful Beyonder of the Spectator pathway to plant a cue or hypnotize her. This will help her maintain her normal state and prevent Theresa from becoming suspicious.

"If you can't find one in a hurry, I can introduce someone, but it will come at a cost."

Browns's expression softened as she nodded in agreement.

"You're indeed more experienced than I am."

Following her sigh, she smiled and asked, "Is that Psychiatrist also a man?"

Franca was taken aback.

"Yes."

Hey, what kind of image do you have of me!

The two of them silently refrained from discussing which side would handle the subsequent questions after identifying the fake Theresa. It was as if they had already reached an unspoken agreement.

…

At 7 p.m., in Quartier de la Maison d'Opéra, just outside the Delan Music Hall, Franca and Lumian, both dressed in light-colored pants, walked toward the entrance while discreetly holding each other's arms.

They had used Lie to alter their appearances and heights, ensuring that they wouldn't be recognized by anyone they might know.

Their target for this operation was the woman entering the concert hall, about seven to eight meters away.

Among them, Adaina, a participant in the Red House female orgies, had long, light-yellow hair with thin, curly bangs. Her face was powdered, her eyes light blue, and her nose perky, making her quite attractive. As for the art dealer, Theresa, she had long, wavy brown hair and a simple style. When her flaxen-colored eyes scanned the surroundings, they sparkled with liveliness.

This woman, suspected to be a member of the Bliss Society, had somewhat stiff facial features. It lacked softness but still exuded a strange charm.

Inside the small concert hall, Lumian and Franca found their seats and then swiftly locked onto Theresa and Adaina's location, discreetly observing them from behind.

Franca watched with interest as Adaina and Theresa leaned against each other, feigning intimacy.

It was a pity that, despite her claim of loving women, Franca's limited experience mainly revolved around "teasing" Gardner Martin's other lovers. She had seldom been able to admire such scenes from a distance.

"Be careful," Lumian warned with a sigh.

Franca responded disapprovingly, "For a Trierien, this attitude is entirely normal. Look around you. Aren't others openly watching as well?"

Lumian snorted and didn't push the matter further.

Their immediate objective was observation, not tailing. It was crucial to assess the target's situation before taking any action.

Turning an ambush and surprise attack into an open confrontation would be a failure for any Hunter.

Lumian's primary goal was to gather information about Theresa's probable Sequence. If she happened to be a Sequence 7 Actor or a Sequence 6 Recipient, Lumian was confident in executing a successful surprise attack. However, if she turned out to be a Fallen Tree Spirit of a specific tree with a changed lifeform, the effectiveness of the Spell of Harrumph might be questionable.

Although Franca had suggested using Magic Mirror Divination to gather this intel, Lumian still wanted to witness it firsthand. The desires of a corresponding Sequence of the Mother Tree of Desire pathway couldn't be easily concealed!

Chapter 417: The Importance of Intel

The concert began as scheduled, and Theresa and Aldina separated, completely immersed in the orchestra's performance.

In Trier, the citizens displayed immense enthusiasm and respect for the arts. During the Living Artists Exhibition, the daily number of visitors surpassed that of those who frequented various execution grounds to witness executions.

Franca withdrew her gaze with regret and closed her eyes, savoring a symphony that evoked the image of moonlight glistening on a tranquil lake at night.

Lumian had received no formal education in this domain, so his knowledge of music was limited to three things. Firstly, Aurore's occasional humming and the melodies of shepherds' flutes. Secondly, songs from places like Ol' Tavern, Cordu Village Square, and Salle de Bal Brise, which were often laced with suggestive lyrics and rhythms. Lastly, the psalms from the Eternal Blazing Sun's Mass. However, now, he found himself deeply moved by the band's performance. His mood gradually settled, as if he could envision Cordu Village and the highland pasture nestled in the darkness.

It was a serene night, adorned with a canopy of stars.

Lumian wasn't entirely captivated by the music. From the corner of his eye, he scrutinized the lady impersonating Theresa, carefully observing her every move.

The imposter Theresa appeared highly emotional, her demeanor shifting from sorrowful during the lyrical passages to exuberant during the ensemble. She seemed to be completely attuned to the fluctuations in the music.

Lumian pondered whether she had an exceptional affinity for music or if she harbored a strong desire to perform and convey something profound.

If it was the latter, Lumian could tentatively conclude that the imposter Theresa was likely a Sequence 7 Actor. Based on his understanding of the Mother Tree of Desire's boon pathways, Beyonders typically wouldn't be so profoundly affected by the desires associated with a Sequence after moving beyond it. However, there might still be a more pronounced influence compared to ordinary individuals.

As time passed, the orchestra played three symphonies, culminating in the conductor turning, bowing, and addressing the audience.

"The final movement is titled 'The Girl Under the Moon.' I'd like to invite the most beautiful lady here onto the stage, so that our entire orchestra can have the honor of taking a photograph with her as a beautiful memento."

Franca quickly lowered her head.

She had no desire to be chosen and become the center of attention.

This would embarrass her a little.

Nonetheless, she wasn't overly concerned. Having altered her appearance and height with Lie, she could only be considered ordinary and mildly charming. After all, the greatest challenge for a Demoness of Pleasure when tailing a target lay in their inherent beauty, charisma, and attention-grabbing aura. If she didn't become invisible or remain concealed in the shadows, she ran the risk of being discovered.

Such requests were not uncommon in Trier, and several women in the audience were eager to step forward.

To them, being chosen would symbolize a significant acknowledgment of their appearance and demeanor.

Lumian's gaze swept over the attendees, eventually settling on Aldina and the imposter Theresa.

The former seemed visibly excited, her anticipation clear in her demeanor. On the other hand, the latter's body exhibited an abnormal tension, and she trembled slightly, a mix of excitement and nervousness evident in her demeanor.

Upon witnessing these reactions, Lumian couldn't help but smirk slightly, gaining a rough understanding of the fake Theresa's situation.

The desire for recognition was one of the fundamental desires of a Sequence 6 Recipient of the Mother Tree of Desire pathway!

Hence, it was likely that the fake Theresa was a Sequence 6 Recipient, not yet a Sequence 5 Fallen Tree Spirit. Otherwise, her yearning for recognition wouldn't be so overwhelming.

The invitation to bring the most beautiful lady onto the stage for a photograph wasn't a mere coincidence—Lumian had sponsored it himself.

After discovering that the first stage of the date between the imposter Theresa and Aldina involved attending a concert, Lumian had sought out the Delan Music Hall to ascertain the evening's repertoire. He had then devised a plan in line with Trier's style based on the title of the final movement, attempting to bribe the orchestra.

Ultimately, he had succeeded in convincing the conductor, not just because he had used Franca's 1,000 verl d'or, but also because Lumian had provided a compelling reason.

It was a romantic gesture intended for a certain lady, a gesture driven solely by affection, without any expectation of reciprocation or leaving a name.

Romantic gestures had a special place in the hearts of these Trier artists.

Through this event, Lumian sought to "detect" whether the fake Theresa harbored any exceptional desires.

A skilled Hunter couldn't simply wait for opportunities to arise; they had to know how to create them!

Of course, the precondition was having sufficient intel. Otherwise, planning with precision or avoiding easy detection would be impossible.

The conductor scanned the room and singled out the woman whom he believed to be the most beautiful.

He also assumed that she was the object of the young man's affection from earlier in the day.

Such extraordinary beauty was a rarity!

The woman, with her bright gray eyes and neatly tied black hair, gracefully approached the orchestra, while the fake Theresa slouched in her seat, unable to hide her disappointment, regret, and frustration.

"How should I address you?" the conductor inquired of the lady in the elegant black court dress beside him.

With a gentle and melodious voice, she replied, "Clarice."

Franca gazed at Clarice with admiration, finding her exceptionally captivating, although she couldn't quite pinpoint the reason why.

After the concert concluded, Lumian and Franca decided not to tail Adaina and the impostor Theresa. Instead, they headed straight to Room 502 in Apartment 25 on Rue Ménier in the square district.

This was a rented apartment that they had temporarily cleared out by paying. Across the way, in Room 401 of Building 23, was Adaina's chosen rendezvous point for clandestine meetings.

Tonight, she would return to that very room with the fake Theresa.

With Lumian and Franca's enhanced Beyonder vision, the distance between them and the target room wasn't enough to obscure their view of the situation inside. Their primary objective now was to remain hidden and avoid detection by the fake Theresa while observing.

Before long, the window of Room 401 in Apartment 23 across the street illuminated. Several gas wall lamps cast a bright glow throughout the living room.

Immediately after, Lumian witnessed the passionate embrace between the fake Theresa and Adaina as they approached the glass window.

Their longing was palpable, but they also wanted to shield their intimate moment from prying eyes.

"Quite focused," Lumian teased with a smile.

Franca didn't reply, her breathing growing heavier.

"Be prepared," Lumian whispered to Franca, making sure the fake Theresa's attention was on her companion.

Franca nodded slightly and responded in her usual tone, "Got it."

Her primary mission was to watch for any unexpected developments.

Without hesitation, Lumian activated the black mark on his right shoulder.

A faint light shimmered beneath his clothing, and he vanished from the shadows of Building 25.

Across the street in the apartment, Adaina and the impostor Theresa wrestled with the curtains while they were stuck to one another, attempting to shield the glass window.

Lumian's form materialized suddenly, two meters behind the fake Theresa, facing Adaina, whose eyes were clouded with desire and cheeks flushed.

Adaina's eyes narrowed, and her pupils dilated. She couldn't fathom how a tall, slender man with blond hair and blue eyes had appeared in her room out of nowhere.

For a moment, it felt like she was trapped in a surreal dream. The disjunction between her physical senses and her bewildered mind was stark.

Almost simultaneously, Lumian let out a heavy harrumph.

Two beams of white light shot from his nose, targeting the fake Theresa and affecting Adaina.

In unison, the two women closed their eyes and slumped into unconsciousness.

Lumian acted swiftly, catching the fake Theresa before she could fall to the ground. He then raised his right palm and delivered a firm strike behind her ear.

A mystical coma combined with a physical one!

With the fake Theresa safely incapacitated, Lumian gently placed her on the carpet, keeping a cautious distance from the unconscious Adaina.

He squatted beside the woman he suspected to be a Recipient and began searching her dress and handbag for canisters.

Having familiarized himself with the mystical drugs commonly used by the Bliss Society, Lumian located a canister of sedatives, unscrewed the cap, and brought it to the fake Theresa's nose, allowing her to inhale its contents for more than ten seconds.

Only then did Lumian exhale a sigh of relief. He stowed away the sedative, no longer concerned about the imposter Theresa waking up suddenly.

He stood up and made his way to the glass window, where the curtain was only partially closed. Lumian signaled to the fifth floor of the opposite building with his thumb and index finger forming a circle, while his other three fingers remained extended.

He was informing Franca that the operation had been successful. The target was under control, and she could join him now. Lumian might need to employ Magic Mirror Divination later.

After drawing the curtains shut, Lumian turned his attention to the unconscious fake Theresa and sighed inwardly.

Intel is crucial…

The same principle applied to the synergy of abilities.

Without a rough understanding of the names and characteristics of Sequence 9 to Sequence 5 within the Actor pathway, along with knowledge of their corresponding desires and states, Lumian wouldn't have taken such a calculated risk. He wouldn't have been able to resolve the situation in just a few seconds.

As for the Contractee's three abilities, if they weren't carefully chosen and harmonized, they could easily be defeated by a Sequence 9 Hunter, much like the mouth-orifice monster in Cordu's ruins. Even with Spirit World Traversal and the Spell of Harrumph, Lumian might stand a chance against some Sequence 5s, but it would be a formidable challenge to sustain such efforts.

…

As Lumian waited for Franca to join him in the adjacent apartment to Adaina's,

Browns Sauron remained hidden in the shadows, her keen senses tuned to the situation behind the wall as she gazed at the building opposite.

She could already discern the sounds of Adaina and the fake Theresa returning to the apartment, along with the rustle of curtains being drawn. These scenes seemed to play out vividly in her mind.

The situation tormented her. She felt a deep sense of injustice and pain, as though she had willingly sent her lover into the arms of her romantic rival.

Despite her understanding that this was a carefully planned trap and that her lover and her rival had been intimate on multiple occasions, she still felt an overwhelming sense of worry and anxiety. The sporadic noises only fueled her imagination with various scenarios.

Standing there made her uncomfortable, and leaning against the wall didn't alleviate her unease.

Observing Franca and her young lover's concealed apartment across the way, Browns Sauron couldn't help but mutter with frustration, "Why haven't they launched their attack yet?"

Chapter 418: Beatrice

Franca ended her concealment and quietly opened the door to Adaina's apartment. The first thing she saw was Lumian, a tall, slender man with blond hair and blue eyes. He was crouched beside the unconscious Adaina, vigorously wiping her face with a wet towel.

Franca lowered her voice and asked in confusion, "W-what are you doing?"

Shouldn't the target be the Bliss Society member posing as Theresa, the art dealer?

Lumian smirked and responded, "I've had a sudden thought.

"Actors can impersonate anyone. Once the imposter Theresa establishes an intimate relationship with Aldina, she can easily control this female companion and impersonate her to infiltrate the Red House Café's female orgies."

"Allowing Adaina, who everyone is familiar with, to convey the Bliss Society's philosophy and hidden evil god faith will definitely be more persuasive and trustworthy than a new member."

At this point, Lumian gazed toward the bedroom in a chilling tone and said, "Perhaps, the real Adaina is hidden in a corner here, in the form of a corpse."

Franca couldn't help but imagine such a grim scenario and took a deep breath.

She straightened her back and muttered to herself, "Not a bad story. I'll share it with Jenna later."

After her muttering, she silently closed the door and approached Lumian, refuting his suspicion.

"Browns Sauron is likely a Demoness of Pleasure. Surely, she can recognize the authenticity of her female companion? Furthermore, she interrogated Adaina and knows the approximate abilities of an Actor."

Lumian, who had been "assisting" Adaina in removing her makeup, confirmed that despite her altered appearance, she was still the same person.

He chuckled and said, "Based on your description, I don't fully trust Browns Sauron's judgment. She clearly has less experience in the Beyonder domain than you. However, since she has the Demoness Sect backing her and confirmation has been made, the interrogation results are still credible."

Lumian didn't spare Adaina another glance. He gestured towards the fake Theresa, who had been hit with a triple dose of unconsciousness—the Harrumph Spell, a physical knockout, and a sedative from the Bliss Society. He turned to Franca and said, "Use Magic Mirror Divination to confirm if she's a core member of the Bliss Society."

While Lumian had already suspected the fake Theresa was a core member based on her performance at the concert, they hadn't followed her closely the entire way. They had instead been waiting at their destination. What if she had sensed something amiss and had switched to a decoy during the journey?

Considering the fake Theresa possessed a unique concoction like the Bliss Society's truth serum, she was undoubtedly connected to the Bliss Society. However, it remained uncertain if she was a core member.

This answer would guide Lumian's subsequent actions.

…

Next door to Adaina's apartment, Browns Sauron continued to monitor the commotion. She could hear faint and indistinct conversations but couldn't detect much else.

Adaina and the fake Theresa plan to chat for a while and have some red wine? Though it isn't overly passionate, it holds a romantic ambiance… Browns Sauron glanced at the building opposite, mentally urging Franca and her lover to begin, hoping they wouldn't wait until the fake Theresa was completely engrossed in desire before launching a surprise attack.

…

In the living room of Adaina's apartment, Franca raised her right palm and rapidly created a crystalline icicle. With precision, she pierced the fake Theresa's hand, drawing a small amount of blood.

The fake Theresa instinctively pulled back her arm but hadn't broken through the three-layered coma.

Franca then smeared the blood on a mirror, intending to use it as a medium and sacrifice to ask an entity from the Underworld, hoping to obtain a unique identification of spirits.

Once all preparations were complete, Franca picked up the mirror and recited in Hermes,

"The shadow that lingers in the Underworld, the friendly creature that can be communicated with, the unique eye that never dies…"

The surface of the blood-stained mirror suddenly emitted a dark green hue, and a pale-white aqueous light rippled.

After reciting the incantation, Franca asked respectfully, "Is the owner of the blood Theresa, the art dealer?"

"No," came an indifferent voice from the mirror, as if enduring the corrosion of endless time.

Franca posed her second question.

"Is the owner of the blood a core member of Trier's Bliss Society?"

The indifferent voice gradually faded.

"Yes."

Franca refrained from asking further questions, as the entity only answered two at a time.

She watched as the pale-white aqueous light rapidly receded, and the blood on the mirror's surface strangely seeped in and disappeared.

Turning to Lumian, Franca reported, "She's a core member of the Bliss Society."

Lumian let out a soft sigh and said, "Unfortunately, I don't know how to perform a lobotomy. Anthony Reid isn't a Hypnotist yet, so we can only channel the spirit directly."

Using the truth serum didn't guarantee that the fake Theresa wouldn't resist when she woke up. Given her faith and abilities, a fierce battle was inevitable when the time came, and there was a high chance that she would be killed. In that case, he decided to proceed now.

As Lumian spoke, he crouched down, his right palm ablaze with crimson flames.

The flames intertwined and swiftly converged, turning white.

Gently pressing his right palm against the fake Theresa's body, the blazing white fireball vanished into thin air.

Rumble!

A muffled explosion erupted from within the fake Theresa's body. She trembled a few times before life left her completely.

Franca had been busy preparing the Magic Mirror Spirit Channeling Spell during this entire process.

While she could forcibly channel the spirit while the fake Theresa was unconscious, it wasn't a safe option. It could lead to unnecessary trouble for her mind and spirit, and the fact that the target believed in an evil god meant there was a risk of corruption if she wasn't careful.

…

Next door to Adaina's apartment, hidden in the shadows, Browns Sauron sensed a subtle fluctuation.

Powers have been used. Has it begun? She wondered if the imposter Theresa had initiated the powers of the Mother Tree of Desire pathway to flirt or if Franca Roland and her lover had already infiltrated the target location and were preparing to attack.

Without hesitation, Browns Sauron, dressed in a black hunting suit, silently pushed open the window and crawled out through the shadows. She clung to the outer wall and slowly approached Adaina's apartment.

…

Franca completed the Magic Mirror Spirit Channeling Spell, and the dark and deep mirror aqueous light flickered, "reflecting" a beautiful yet pale-white face.

"What's your name?" Franca asked directly, using the simplest question to test the effect of the Magic Mirror Spirit Channeling Spell.

The fake Theresa's illusory voice replied, "I'm Beatrice Incourt."

"What's your true identity?" Franca continued to ask.

Beatrice Incourt's expression remained stoic as she replied, "I run a winery. It's from my deceased husband."

Franca then directed the question to the crucial point.

"Are you a core member of the Bliss Society?"

"Yes." Beatrice Incourt's nod was subtle.

Franca didn't delve into the Bliss Society's faith or any recent revelations. Although she wasn't as fearful of the evil god, the Mother Tree of Desire, as she was of the Celestial Worthy of Heaven and Earth for Blessings, to the point of not daring to channel spirits, she was aware of the risks involved. She knew what to ask and what not to ask, what was safe, and what could lead to corruption.

After a brief pause, she inquired, "Do you know Lumian Lee or Ciel Dubois?"

Beatrice replied in a daze, "I don't know."

I don't know… Lumian, who was listening, raised his eyebrows.

None of the core members of the Bliss Society know about Susanna Mattise's ultimate plan?

Franca was equally surprised. She frowned and asked, "Why did Susanna Mattise go to the market district before her death?"

Beatrice Incourt replied calmly, "She wanted to awaken the great divine tree and allow its roots to enter Fourth Epoch Trier, allowing its crown to reach into the kingdom of the false gods."

"Did she say what the awakening process was?" Franca pressed.

Beatrice Incourt's voice grew colder, and her expression became more wooden.

"She didn't say."

They really don't know that Susanna Mattise wanted to capture me and sacrifice me to the Mother Tree of Desire? Lumian's thoughts raced, and he whispered a name to Franca: "Maipú Meyer."

Franca understood and asked the spirit in the mirror, "Where is Maipú Meyer?"

Maipú Meyer was the former manager of Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons, Susanna Mattise's paramour, and her most trusted subordinate.

Beatrice replied in a voice increasingly resembling the dead, "I'm not sure. He's a man, and we despise and keep a distance from him."

Upon hearing this, Lumian was enlightened, roughly understanding the reason.

Regarding the Tree of Shadow, Susanna Mattise, who had become an evil spirit, was extremely extreme in her choices and actions. She didn't inform the other core members of the Bliss Society about the detailed situation or progress. Only her direct subordinates, Maipú Meyer and Charlotte Calvino, knew the complete plan.

After Susanna Mattise and Charlotte Calvino's deaths, Maipú Meyer, who had relied on the former to become a core member of the Bliss Society, was ostracized and suppressed. Consequently, he didn't divulge the relevant issues to anyone else.

This made sense. A secret organization centered around "desire" would undoubtedly experience a multitude of desires, both open and covert. Maipú Meyer was a visible anomaly among the core group that advocated women and loved women.

Franca pondered for a few seconds and changed her question, "What are Maipú Meyer's plans for the time being?"

Beatrice's face turned pale-white and green, and even her stiff expression vanished.

"A few weeks ago, Maipú Meyer mentioned that he wanted to sneak back to the market district to do something. I haven't seen him since."

Sneak back to the market district to do something? Lumian and Franca were alarmed by this revelation.

Chapter 419: New Priestess

Why did Maipú Meyer return to the market district?

This question raced through the minds of Lumian and Franca simultaneously. They felt a lurking danger.

Could it be that Maipú Meyer genuinely cared for Susanna Mattise and sought retribution?

But even then, exposing the true killer and concealed secrets to the other core members of the Bliss Society seemed like the most fitting way to exact revenge!

Without harnessing the collective might of the entire organization, he would inadvertently aid his adversary, Lumian, by relying solely on his own capabilities!

As Lumian observed Beatrice's pallid countenance and vacant gaze, he tried to think from Maipú Meyer's perspective and find a rationale for his actions.

Maipú Meyer, a Sequence 6 Recipient, harbors an insatiable hunger for recognition and a fervent desire to accomplish something noteworthy…

Despite facing rejection and isolation from the other core members of the Bliss Society, he does have a motive to make a substantial solo contribution and earn genuine recognition…

While revealing the existence of the Tree of Shadow to Beatrice and the others could be seen as a contribution, it doesn't measure up to rectifying his past mistakes independently to appease the Mother Tree of Desire to the fullest extent. The latter would truly earn him recognition…

This peculiar competition might be perplexing to ordinary folks, but it isn't unusual for a Recipient to engage in it…

The question now is: What does Maipú Meyer hope to achieve in his quest for recognition?

Is it revenge against me? Although a direct confrontation holds little hope for him, he could pose a significant threat if he conceals himself in the shadows and suddenly influences me at a critical moment. After all, I lack a substitute ability, and my physical strength hasn't undergone a qualitative change compared to ordinary people. He could eliminate me with a revolver.

However, Maipú Meyer must have heard plenty about me from Susanna Mattise. There is a good chance he knows about the angel sealed within my body. Isn't he concerned that corruption might erupt after my demise, potentially dragging him down as well?

If he were to perish, how could he satisfy his yearning for recognition?

Or is it the mere notion of taking a formidable foe with him to the grave that would leave the other members of the Bliss Society awestruck and filled with genuine remorse and admiration? Is his ultimate aim to climax in tears and be propelled towards his demise by desire?

Otherwise, does he aspire to make a sacrifice akin to Susanna Mattise's? Yes, securing recognition from the Mother Tree of Desire is a higher-level and noble pursuit.

But the Tree of Shadow is severely damaged and won't recover for a long time. How can he even make such a sacrifice

Lumian struggled to decipher Maipú Meyer's plan or intentions, vaguely grasping his motives.

Nonetheless, Lumian couldn't suppress a surge of frustration and violence at the mere thought of a pair of icy eyes lurking among the pedestrians, nearby tenants, dance hall customers, and peddlers. It was as though someone close to him had been replaced by Maipú Meyer without anyone's awareness. He burned with anticipation to unmask the Actor.

The detrimental effects of the contracts, items, and brands on him continued to destabilize his emotions.

Franca, on the other hand, didn't dwell on this. Although the Magic Mirror Spirit Channeling Spell endured much longer than standard spirit channeling spells, it was not entirely boundless. There was still a time limit, one measured in minutes. She was unwilling to squander this precious time on analysis that could be postponed.

She continued to ask Beatrice Incourt.

"Of all the members of the Bliss Society, who does Maipú Meyer have the closest relationship with?"

Beatrice's voice grew increasingly ethereal.

"He had the strongest bonds with the members in the market district, but they're either deceased or captured."

Genuinely ostracized… Franca's hopes dimmed, and she inquired further,

"Who in the Bliss Society is most likely to be privy to Maipú Meyer's whereabouts and plans?"

Beatrice responded lifelessly, "No one, not even the new high priestess."

Franca found herself at a dead end and changed her line of questioning.

"Who is this new high priestess?"

Beatrice's eyes were piercingly vacant as she replied, "It's Siber."

"What's her true identity?" Franca pressed.

Beatrice's eyes on the mirror's surface seemed far more translucent than before.

"I don't know. She joined us later. At that point, we had evolved beyond a simple lesbian organization. We started concealing our true identities.

"Siber might still be a theater actress."

…

On the outer wall of Adaina's apartment, Browns Sauron clung there in silence, resembling a colossal black spider.

Through the curtains, she could only discern two shadows not far away. The voices were even fainter and more distant than before, but she could vaguely identify them as female.

Adaina and the imposter Theresa are still conversing? That doesn't add up. At this proximity, with an Assassin's acute hearing, I should be able to clearly hear them even through the sealed glass window and thick drapes… What's happening inside? Browns Sauron's anxiety and curiosity swelled as she attempted to extend invisible spider silk through the gap in the window.

…

Franca's Magic Mirror Spirit Channeling Spell had reached its limit, and she concluded it rationally. She watched as Beatrice Incourt's image faded from the mirror's surface.

She wasn't overly disheartened because she already knew the crucial details about several core members of the Bliss Society and their weekly gatherings' time, venue, and method.

But there is no need to personally track them. They are unaware of Ciel. Even if the Rose School of Thought locates them, they wouldn't extract any valuable information… Franca cast a glance at Lumian, stowed away the mirror, and dispelled the wall of spirituality.

Amidst the howling wind, the two of them sensed a disturbance at the window and the presence of a figure that seemed human.

The wall of spirituality had isolated their movements, reducing interference but also affecting their perception and surveillance of the surroundings.

Franca's form abruptly vanished, and Lumian sidestepped, evading the window's direct line of sight.

They didn't rush to attack because they had a vague notion of who was outside.

Amidst the commotion, Browns, who had discreetly pried open the window, witnessed the curtain "self-consciously" part to either side, revealing her own silhouette.

Just as she was about to react, she spotted Franca Roland's current disguised countenance.

Their gazes locked, and silence hung in the air for over ten seconds.

Finally, Browns snapped out of her trance and inquired with concern, "Where's Adaina?"

"She's unconscious." Franca gestured towards the carpet near the window.

Browns scrutinized her female partner, then glanced at the motionless impostor Theresa, and queried once more, "Has it been dealt with?"

"It's resolved," Franca replied calmly.

The spirit channeling had already come to an end!

Browns's gaze darted between Franca and Lumian, her expression a mix of surprise and confusion. She inquired,

"When did you launch the attack?"

Before the curtains were fully drawn… Franca was about to respond, but she hesitated, realizing that revealing the timing of the attack might expose Ciel and her combat abilities. Instead, she quickly changed her response and smiled.

"Why don't you take a guess?"

Browns Sauron recollected the faint movements she had sensed but found no overt signs of a battle.

This left her even more astonished.

Could this wild Demoness and her young partner be truly that formidable?

Are their richer experiences and varied gains truly that advantageous?

Consumed by jealousy, Browns leaped into the room and shut the window.

She doesn't seem concerned about being attacked by us at all… Is she inexperienced, or does she have great confidence in the Demoness's various substitutes? Or is there something she's relying on? Lumian observed with indifference, making no move.

Franca maintained her smile and said, "We've gathered some intel, including information on the current high priestess of the Bliss Society and a few core members."

She began recounting the information she had acquired from Beatrice.

The more Browns listened, the more astonished she became.

They managed to gather so much intel?

This should have taken a significant amount of time!

When did they attack and how long did they take to finish the battle?

It couldn't be that the imposter Theresa was ambushed the moment she entered the room and approached the window, could they?

Based on her observations, this member of the Bliss Society appeared to be a Sequence 6 Recipient, on par with her and Franca Roland, even surpassing the suspected Sequence 7 Pyromaniac, Ciel Dubois!

Franca paid no heed to Browns's reaction and continued, "I'm pleased to inform you that our problem is simpler than we thought, and it's been resolved. Now, it's your problem. Heh heh, Beatrice isn't the only core member of the Bliss Society with an interest in the Red House Café."

She was subtly suggesting that the Demoness Sect should "take over" in eliminating the remaining members of the Bliss Society.

"Are you instigating me?" Browns asked sharply.

Franca replied with a smile, "No, just a reminder."

While they continued their conversation, Lumian returned to Beatrice's lifeless form, crouched down, and conducted a more thorough search.

This time, he discovered banknotes and gold coins amounting to 1,500 verl d'or, along with a neatly folded note.

Lumian unfolded the note and read the Intisian written on it: "Go to the hostel and retrieve the painting within three days."

Hostel… What hostel? What painting is this referring to? This seems like a deal made by the authentic art dealer, Theresa, but somehow, the receipt ended up in the hands of the impostor? Where is the real Theresa now… We forgot to inquire about this… Lumian pondered the implications as he held the note.

He stood up, prepared to question Browns Sauron about the real Theresa's situation. Although Browns recognized that Franca was trying to instigate her, she couldn't deny that Franca had a point.

Browns looked down at Adaina, attempting to rouse her.

At that moment, all three of them halted simultaneously and directed their attention toward Beatrice Incourt's lifeless body.

The light over there seemed to dim slightly, and the corpse underwent a subtle transformation.

Chapter 420: Beyonder Item

Beatrice Incourt may have already been lifeless, but something within her appeared to stir. Slowly, it seeped out, rising like invisible steam, as if it sought an escape into some distant darkness.

This caused the ambient light to dim, making the apartment's ceiling appear strangely ethereal. Lumian, Franca, and Browns all felt an uncanny sensation, as if they were under scrutiny.

It wasn't as if an actual gaze was directed at them; rather, it was as if they were the sole occupants of the entire building, with no obstructions to the crimson moonlight in the sky, which inevitably cast an eerie glow upon them.

Thump, thump. Lumian's heart raced.

The two Demonesses, skilled in divination, experienced an overwhelming sense of imminent danger.

With a sudden snap, a translucent boil of blood materialized on Beatrice Incourt's lifeless face, followed by a strange, tree-like wart with a brownish hue.

The wart burst open, oozing blood-colored pus, wet and sticky.

Wh— Lumian's pupils dilated, caught off guard by this turn of events.

Although he had taken the lives of more than a few members of the Bliss Society and had spent some time beside their corpses, he had never encountered anything like this. Death ended everything. How could a corpse cause an unsettling undercurrent to surge around it?

Even though Lumian didn't fully grasp the situation, he swiftly formulated a plan.

He glanced at the hazy, illusory ceiling and the faint movements within the walls. His intention was to step forward, seize Beatrice's lifeless body, and "teleport" to the Albert Mines, a place he had visited previously.

The deeper they ventured into the Fourth Epoch Trier's underground, the greater the peril. Various corruptive elements that led to a loss of control lurked there. Even with a corpse on the verge of mutation, it shouldn't pose a significant issue.

That place was inherently an amalgamation of problems!

Lumian planned to utilize Spirit World Traversal for a third time, returning to the surface and avoiding any danger by abandoning Beatrice's body.

While Lumian made his decision, Franca instinctively moved toward Beatrice's lifeless form, which now had a second tree-like wart.

Her right hand reached into the concealed pocket of her dress, aiming to retrieve the ancient mirror she had discovered underground.

This ancient mirror was connected to a strange and perilous mirror world. She could attempt to encase Beatrice's body within it, allowing one form of danger to counteract another!

This would buy them precious time for further deliberation. Ultimately, whether the departed believer of the Mother Tree of Desire triumphed or the enigmatic mirror world absorbed the corruption and "stilled" the mutation, it wouldn't directly impact Franca, the humans present, or the surrounding residents.

Compared to them, the inexperienced Browns Sauron's initial reaction was to incinerate the remnants of spirituality in the corpse with her black flames, freezing the emerging mutation. This was the most Demoness-like approach to disrupting the deteriorating situation.

At that very moment, Lumian and the others sensed a significant dimming of the light around them, as if the crimson moon had vanished, leaving only a few dim wall lamps.

Instinctively, Lumian turned his gaze to the window and discovered that the glass had turned pitch-black, no longer offering a view outside. It had transformed from a "window" into a sealed barrier.

Simultaneously, the formless entity that had been slowly emanating from Beatrice's body appeared lost, unable to find its path to the infinite darkness. It seemed to meander aimlessly, gradually receding.

Their mystical connection to an unknown entity dissipated. Lumian, Franca, and Browns suddenly lost the sense of being "watched" from afar and "illuminated" by unseen eyes.

Thud! Thud! Their heartbeats slowly returned to normal as they witnessed the tree-like wart on Beatrice's body wither rapidly, and no more blood boils emerged.

The darkness surrounding the corpse gradually receded, and an imperceptible object began attaching itself to the diamond necklace adorning Beatrice's corpse.

…

Beneath the crimson moonlight, the building at 23 Rue Ménier lay concealed in darkness. Every window remained void of light, with no signs of life to be found. It exuded an eerie stillness and a sense of foreboding, reminiscent of a haunted house.

Across the street, within an apartment room, an unusual and ornate mirror rested in a spotless hand.

The mirror was adorned with intricately designed black serpents that intertwined. Each "snake" featured a large crimson eye on its head, devoid of a mouth or fangs.

In that precise moment, the mirror's surface remained crystal clear, revealing a well-lit scene.

Gas wall lamps emitted a warm, yellowish radiance from the windows on every floor of the building, where various domestic scenes played out.

The elderly guard on the first floor smoked a cigarette butt he had collected and leaned against the lobby wall, savoring the tranquility of the night. On the second floor, a couple occupied the living room, one engrossed in a novel, the other unfolding a newspaper in front of them. Near an ajar window on the third floor, a half-naked man kept a cautious eye on the door, ready to make a hasty escape to the street at any moment…

Meanwhile, on the fourth floor, Lumian, Franca, and Browns found themselves perplexed. One contemplated using his abilities to discern an escape route from the "crime scene," while another delved into a concealed pocket with her right hand, seemingly searching for something. The third member appeared to have a premonition and distanced themselves from the other two.

Another spotless hand extended and lightly grazed the peculiar mirror, encircled by the one-eyed "snakes."

In an instant, the well-lit building disappeared from the mirror's surface, and the silent, gloomy apartment at 23 Rue Ménier began to illuminate one by one. Figures were reflected one after another, and distant sounds could be heard.

…

Lumian surveyed the room and realized that Adaina's apartment had returned to its usual state. The unsettling anomalies, like the impenetrable darkness and the strange glass windows, had all dissipated.

Beatrice Incourt's corpse had reverted to its original form, and the horrific transformation now felt like a mere nightmare.

Lumian, who had been ready to whisk Franca away at a moment's notice, relaxed somewhat and exchanged a look with Browns Sauron.

The Demoness Sect won't just send such an inexperienced member to investigate Franca…

Had one of the powerful Demonesses, who had been covertly observing the situation, intervened to help resolve any potential anomalies?

This behavior doesn't seem characteristic of a Mid-Sequence Beyonder. A high-level Demoness, or a Sequence 5 Demoness of Affliction wielding a godhood item?

No wonder Browns had entered so openly, seemingly unconcerned about potential attacks from me and Franca.

I wonder if the hidden Demoness had seen my Spell of Harrumph…

Franca shared a similar thought. She diverted her attention from the window and regarded Browns Sauron.

She expressed her guess calmly but didn't inquire further. She looked down at Beatrice's corpse and asked with curiosity and confusion, "The necklace appears to have changed."

Lumian also noticed this transformation. The transparent diamond on the necklace seemed to reflect the light from the gas wall lamp in a captivating manner, causing his heart to race and his mouth to go dry.

Could it have become a Beyonder weapon similar to Fallen Mercury? Had the previous boons returned to their source because there were no abnormalities? Lumian formed a rough conjecture. He approached the corpse and knelt down cautiously.

As he reached out to touch the necklace, a multitude of desires surged uncontrollably, making him quickly retract his hand, shivering from the bloodlust.

With items like Flog and a host of contractual negative effects, he was no longer suitable for contact with the necklace, which had the power to awaken the deepest desires.

"You handle it," Lumian said, standing up and gesturing for Franca to take care of the necklace.

Franca accepted the task without hesitation and carefully removed the diamond necklace with anticipation.

Without further delay, the two of them bid farewell to Browns and made their way back to the market district.

…

Avenue du Marché.

Franca had successfully dealt with Beatrice and stood a chance of passing the Demonesses' audit. She had also acquired a Beyonder item that complemented the abilities of the Demoness of Pleasure. Her good mood was evident, and she almost hummed a tune to express her positive feelings.

She glanced at Lumian, who walked beside her in silence.

"What's on your mind?"

"I'm wondering where Maipú Meyer might be hiding…" Lumian replied, his tone serious. "Let's go underground now."

Franca was taken aback for a moment but quickly understood Lumian's thoughts.

"Do you think Maipú Meyer might return to the place where Susanna Mattise once conducted the sacrifice to the Tree of Shadow?"

"Perhaps." Lumian wasn't entirely certain, but he felt there might be some clues or traces left behind.

Franca, feeling confident in her gains from the spoils of war, didn't attempt to dissuade him. Together with Lumian, they entered Underground Trier from the Avenue du Marché entrance.

Using a fireball for illumination, they navigated a relatively familiar path, passing by the collapsed mine where Rentas, a member of the Bliss Society, had been buried and the location where Jenna had been drugged. They ventured deeper into the altar area, a place they had previously avoided.

The area was marked with scorching signs, devoid of any living creatures or the malevolent aura that once lingered. It was as if it had been exposed to intense sunlight for days, leaving behind only piles of withered bones from various creatures.

The cave's collapses and crevices had been filled with soil and rocks. Lumian examined the area carefully and noticed fresh marks around the original altar.

These marks clearly didn't belong to the same person and came from different "visitors."

As Lumian examined the marks and the deep-rooted cave-ins, memories of the Tree of Shadow, the Samaritan Women's Spring, and the Iron and Blood Cross Order's conspiracy flooded his mind.

These seemingly disparate elements all pointed to one thing: They, directly or indirectly, pointed to the underground, to the hidden histories and perils lurking beneath Trier.

Chapter 421: Abnormal Silence

Franca also noticed the footprints and traces. After carefully observing them for a while, she remarked, "At least four people have come together in the past two weeks…"

"Maipú Meyer has accomplices?"

Lumian gazed at the collapse that had been filled in and pondered for a moment before saying, "What's more important isn't whether they have accomplices, but what they're doing here.

"If it's truly Maipú Meyer and not a random team of cave explorers, he long knew that this place had been destroyed by the official Beyonders. There wouldn't be anything valuable left behind. Why did he bring people here recently? To pay homage?"

"It's not impossible," Franca muttered. "What if he achieved something and received a new boon from the Mother Tree of Desire, becoming a Fallen Tree Spirit?

"It's also known as Baby Cupid. There must be a distorted desire in affairs of the heart, just like Susanna Mattise did with Charlie. Therefore, Maipú Meyer coming specially to pay homage to his deceased love fits the characteristics of the pathway."

"But there's no need to bring three or four people to watch him perform, right?" Lumian surveyed his surroundings. "Perhaps he didn't do it on purpose but just happened to pass by?"

Franca quickly caught Lumian's drift.

"Are you suggesting that Maipú Meyer and his accomplices frequent the underground of the market district?"

Lumian offered a curt acknowledgment.

"I now believe that Maipú Meyer didn't return to the market district to deal with me. He might eventually seek revenge, but that's the outcome, not the process."

"Is their target something underground in the market district?" Franca frowned. "But the Tree of Shadow is severely damaged. What's so special about this place? It can't be that the entrance to the Fourth Epoch Trier is beneath the market district…"

Franca stopped abruptly.

That wasn't impossible!

Lumian quickly recalled the situation in the market district and various rumors he knew. Suddenly, he recalled something.

Madam Magician's "doll" messenger had a strong aversion to Salle de Bal Brise, claiming that old bones were buried beneath the area.

This had to refer to a unique situation beneath the market district. Moreover, the building facing Salle de Bal Brise was suspected to be related to Église Saint-Robert's old cemetery.

Lumian promptly shared this insight with Franca before they continued following the traces out of the destroyed sacrificial mine.

"There's really a problem… It's not hard to figure out. Summon that messenger later and ask," Franca remarked, bemoaning the poor fengshui in the market district. She followed Lumian, providing mysticism support for his pursuit.

The two of them journeyed deeper underground, but they eventually lost the trail of their target. The suspected members of Maipú Meyer's group had traversed several well-known and long-used tunnels frequented by cave explorers, smuggling caravans, and mushroom-growing citizens. Their tracks had been effectively concealed by those who came later after more than ten days.

Lumian, with a crimson fireball above him, came to a halt and stared into the pitch-black mine ahead. He remained silent for an extended moment, his thoughts shrouded in mystery.

Franca was about to suggest leaving when Lumian suddenly spoke.

"Don't you think the market district has been unusually quiet for the past month or so?"

"How do you mean quiet?" Franca retorted involuntarily.

007 certainly didn't think so!

Lumian pondered his words and continued, "Let me put it another way. Apart from the Beyonder problem we caused, isn't the market district oddly quiet regarding mysticism incidents?

"No, to be more precise, after the Tree of Shadow was severely damaged, the heretics have become extremely inactive!

"Right, no new factions have emerged to devour the remaining smaller mobs, or to engage in conflicts with the Savoie Mob. There have been no suspected sacrificial cases. Even among those that preach secretly, I only encountered a swindler from the Sick Church, and he was just an ordinary person…"

Since the Tree of Shadow incident, the only true heretics Lumian and Franca had encountered were Guillaume Bénet from the Sinners organization and Beatrice Incourt of the Bliss Society. However, they had followed a trail based on former clues which weren't within the market district.

The Rose School of Thought's Werewolf could barely be considered one, but that was an aftermath of the Tree of Shadow incident.

Browns Sauron of the Demoness Sect could only be considered half an element. This organization had a solid history and believed in the evil entity of this world, not alien evil gods."

Franca was taken aback.

"Isn't that normal? Secret organizations that believe in evil gods must operate in secret. If they were encountered by someone like you every day, they would have been wiped out long ago!

"Look, we didn't notice Maipú Meyer returning to the market district before."

If it were anyone else, your explanation wouldn't be a problem, but I have an alien evil god's angel sealed within me. According to Madam Magician's rubbish repulsion convergence theory, there must be an abnormal reason why I haven't encountered a heretic causing trouble for so long… Termiboros has been excessively quiet recently… Lumian's thoughts raced as he said to Franca, "Can you use dream divination on me to help me remember something?"

"No. Perhaps a powerful Seer can, but not me." Franca shook her head. "What do you want to recall? You can seek Madame Hela's help. She can definitely create a real dreamscape now."

Lumian nodded slowly and responded, "I'd like to recall an address where suspected heretics reside. I plan to check it out and see if they've vanished, gone into hiding, or fallen silent. Yes, there's no need to trouble Madame Hela for the time being. I know who to ask."

This was him carefully making confirmation built upon bold assumptions.

Seeing Lumian return to the surface as he spoke, Franca hurriedly asked, "What address? Who are you asking?"

"We'll talk later. Let's head to Rue de Scotch Broom in Quartier de Noel first," Lumian said without turning around.

Why does this address sound so familiar… Franca mused for a moment as she followed closely behind.

As she neared the surface, she finally remembered.

Madame Pualis's address!

Madame Night from Cordu!

…

Quartier de Noël, Rue de Scotch Broom.

This suburban area was filled with villa-like buildings, each with a lawn facing the street and a garden at the back.

Lumian walked in the shadows where the street lamps couldn't reach, carefully inspecting the lawns and gardens of each building.

Franca did the same. Without knowing Madame Pualis's house number, they had to rely on the unusually vigorous and lively plants to make a judgment.

As they approached the end of the street, Lumian and Franca simultaneously noticed a garden filled with blooming flowers, resembling a lush forest of plants.

The grayish-white building housing the garden appeared unlit, slumbering in the darkness, in stark contrast to the surrounding residences filled with family life.

"It feels like no one has lived here for a long time…" Franca began to understand Lumian's concerns. "Has Madame Pualis, a member of the Nightstalkers, also moved out and hidden herself quietly?"

Lumian observed and listened for a while to confirm that the building was empty. He then took out a piece of wire, opened the door, and entered.

During this process, Franca used Magic Mirror Divination to confirm via mysticism means.

The living room was devoid of furnishings, the linen long gone. Dust had gathered on the table, indicating that no one had lived there in some time.

Lumian proceeded further into the house, and Franca followed him cautiously, not daring to near or touch anything.

Upon reaching the coffee table, Lumian bent down and picked up an abandoned newspaper. Although it was tattered from rat bites, there were still some remnants left.

Lumian examined the newspaper under the moonlight and whispered, "Early July… This means that Madame Pualis didn't leave immediately after I got the address out from Louis Lund, nor did she depart immediately after the Tree of Shadow incident. She resided on Rue de Scotch Broom for a while and chose to abandon this place for unknown reasons."

"Something is indeed amiss," Franca noted with a grave expression.

They quickly searched the building and then boarded a rental carriage to their next destination.

Upon receiving an old newspaper advertising the Interstellar Bridge from Laurent, the former tenant of Auberge du Coq Doré and now deputy editor of Le Petit Trierien, Lumian and Franca arrived at 9 Rue Saint-Martin in Quartier 2.

The fifth floor was an office rented by a group of swindlers and suspected heretics. They aimed to raise funds for constructing an interstellar bridge to the crimson moon.

Under the dim starlight, the entire fifth floor lay shrouded in darkness.

Lumian cautiously reached out and pushed open the door to the apartment-like office.

Crimson moonlight filtered through the window, revealing scattered papers on the ground. Complex mechanical symbols and intricate bridge diagrams displayed concepts that appeared both imaginative and plausible.

Many of the drawers were open, devoid of any belongings, as if the swindlers had hastily retreated upon realizing the arrival of the police.

Based on the written information and various traces at the scene, Lumian and Franca concluded that this floor had been vacant for nearly two weeks.

"There's definitely something unusual," Franca remarked. "Why have the heretics from various organizations suddenly reduced their activities, hidden themselves, and gone quiet?"

Lumian's expression grew solemn as he said in a deep voice, "This abnormality suggests that something significant might be in the works."

Without waiting for Franca's response, he instructed her, "Contact 007 and inquire about any information regarding the Sick Church. Also, find out what problems might be lurking in Église Saint-Robert's old cemetery.

"I'll write a letter to Madam Magician and share our findings and speculations."

He planned to also ask the "doll" messenger about the meaning of the old bones.

"Alright," Franca responded promptly.

…

Auberge du Coq Doré, Room 207.

Lumian set up the ritual and summoned the "doll" messenger donning a light-gold dress.

As he handed the folded letter to her, he managed a smile and inquired, "What did you mean by the old bones underground?"

The "doll" messenger displayed a disgusted expression.

"Filthy, repulsive old bones from the Fourth Epoch!"

Chapter 422: Formula

Old bones from the Fourth Epoch… Lumian disregarded the doll messenger's emotional descriptions and focused on extracting the essential information.

But this didn't provide a deeper insight compared to what he already knew. After all, most of Trier's underground issues had their roots in the Fourth Epoch.

Lumian took a moment to ponder and inquired, "Where does it come from? How do the old bones look like?"

The messenger responded angrily, "I've never seen them before! Their aura alone is so repulsive, disgusting, and filthy!"

So, you're not entirely sure of the situation either… Lumian decided not to press the "doll" messenger further and observed as she vanished, carrying the neatly folded letter.

Only then, as Lumian awaited Madam Magician's response, did he have the opportunity to assess his gains from the night.

A vial of truth serum, a vial of Bliss Society sedatives, a vial of Mysticism Smelling Salts, and 1,500 verl d'or.

…

Apartment 601, 3 Rue des Blouses Blanches.

"So late? I thought you'd resolve it quickly." Jenna, clad in a light cotton dress, stood up and greeted Franca upon her return.

She believed that Franca and Ciel had a high chance of winning, even if they encountered a Fallen Tree Spirit!

Franca muttered, "We ran into an accident. Uh, just a moment."

Franca looked at Jenna with a serious expression.

"What's wrong?" Jenna sensed something was amiss.

Franca walked to her side and examined her pupils.

There were no signs of her wearing blue contact lenses!

"Phew…" Franca let out a sigh of relief and said, "In the future, we need to continuously verify if we're Actors in disguise."

Actors of the Mother Tree of Desire pathway couldn't alter their bodies or fundamentally change their appearances like Faceless. They relied more on makeup items and various props.

Among these, the color of the eyes was the most challenging for Actors to mimic. They had to use external objects. They could prevent Actors from infiltrating their ranks by checking if anyone around them was wearing colored contact lenses.

Of course, this wasn't foolproof. They could always find actors with the same eye color as the target to act.

In the current situation, Maipú Meyer's eyes were dark brown, Jenna's were blue, and Lumian's were the same. Franca's were a lighter shade, more akin to the blue of a serene lake. For the time being, they had no reason to worry about being impersonated by the former manager of Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons. Maipú Meyer had distanced himself from the Bliss Society, and he couldn't recruit a new Actor anytime soon.

The only person they needed to be concerned about was Anthony Reid, who also had a pair of dark brown eyes.

As an acting apprentice at Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons, Jenna was particularly attuned to the Bliss Society's activities. She instantly became alert and scrutinized Franca's eyes, fear in her voice as she asked, "Are they targeting the market district again?"

"It's Maipú Meyer. He's back in the market district. We don't know where he's hiding," Franca replied without reservation, recounting the entire incident.

Of the Bliss Society members, the only one Jenna was familiar with was Maipú Meyer. She had a deep-seated fear of him because he had once been her manager and could influence her future.

Unconsciously, she touched the Arrow of the Bloodthirsty concealed in her pocket and nodded solemnly, saying, "I'll be cautious."

Franca didn't offer any additional information. She glanced at the wall clock and retreated to her room. She activated the radio transceiver and prepared to contact 007.

Before long, she used the mechanical typewriter and analyzer to send a telegram.

"007, paging 007!"

Within 20 to 30 seconds, a telegram produced by a machine appeared.

"Hidden Blade, don't do this to me. I'm scared. What's going on now?"

"This could be a significant problem!" Franca honestly warned 007. "Bro, before I disclose the exact situation, help me gather some information. I need to confirm two things: First, if there have been any developments related to the Malady God faith in Quartier du Jardin Botanique, specifically on Rue Pasteur and Rue Evelyn. Second, what lies deep beneath the old cemetery of Église Saint-Robert?"

After a brief pause, a new telegram arrived.

"I'm off-duty tonight, seriously! And now I have to go back to work overtime!

"Give me half an hour to an hour."

Franca replied: "No problem." As she conversed with other members of the telegram group, she retrieved the diamond necklace she had acquired from Beatrice Incourt and used various methods to assess the Beyonder accessory's capabilities and adverse effects.

The diamond corresponds to a total of five desires: lust, appetite, lust, acting, and fulfillment…

It doesn't seem to have many uses. Usage of each desire shouldn't exceed two…

With it on, I seem to be better at acting and makeup…

I'll just keep it in my pocket. Without it coming into direct contact with my skin or flesh, there won't be any negative effects…

After wearing it, I'll become more excited than usual, and my various desires will significantly increase. If I encounter Beyonders with similar abilities, I'll be effectively restrained and even suffer a huge loss…

Among them, the most intense desire is the desire for recognition…

Yes, this thing can't be used against Beyonders of the Mother Tree of Desire pathway. Its weakness lies in their strengths…

What should I call it? The Seven Emotions and Six Desires Pendant? Uh, the style doesn't seem right. Forget it, I'll call it Beatrice's Necklace. It's simple, convenient, and clear!

007's response arrived faster than Franca had anticipated. In less than half an hour, he provided the relevant information.

"According to the heretic database shared by various official factions, the Malady God's envoy hasn't been located. He appears to have sensed danger in advance and hasn't resurfaced.

"The situation at Église Saint-Robert's old cemetery is extremely classified. I can't investigate it for the time being."

Extremely classified? Franca inwardly hissed and relayed to 007 the eerie quietness from organizations devoted to evil gods.

…

Rue Anarchie, Auberge du Coq Doré.

Madam Magician's slow response arrived after an hour of waiting:

"After the death of a bestowed, the return of power to the source is deducible, but typically, you wouldn't be able to sense it.

"This time, it was due to your wearing the Flog boxing gloves. They are made from the Tree of Shadow and are closely related to the one that the Bliss Society believes in, the source of the boon powers. Therefore, when Beatrice's boon power returned and the connection was strengthened, that entity indirectly noticed you and the Two of Cups, which caused the corpse to exhibit an abnormality. This abnormality allowed the flow of the boon power to become visible.

"To retain the boon power and prevent it from returning, you require the corresponding ability or a unique environment. Sometimes, these two elements are one and the same. In simple terms, you need to advance to Sequence 4 and become a demigod or obtain something at this level. Only then can you have a chance of preserving the remaining boon's power and forming a Beyonder item. Of course, in specific underground environments, such as near the Samaritan Women's Spring, you can achieve this without a high Sequence."

Lumian now had a clear understanding of the anomaly of the night.

Unlike his previous killings of members of the Bliss Society, he now possessed the Flog boxing gloves, bringing about a different development.

The use of the Flog boxing gloves attracted the attention of hidden entities to begin with, and its connection to the Mother Tree of Desire through Beatrice's belief had influenced the return of boon power, causing the abnormality.

Understanding the situation and how to prevent it in the future, Lumian continued reading Madam Magician's reply.

"We have already noticed Trier's anomaly and are monitoring one of the leads. However, it is unclear when we will find any answers. What we can say for certain is that changes will occur, with a timeframe ranging from as short as two months to as long as half a year.

"I cannot provide a definitive answer regarding what lies beneath Salle de Bal Brise as it is challenging for me to approach. All I can tell you is that it is certainly more than just the corruption left behind by Blood Emperor Alista Tudor.

"Don't dwell too much on this matter. It is beyond your capabilities to handle. Your focus should be on accumulating strength and biding your time."

Accumulate strength and bide my time… Lumian repeated these words to himself as he absorbed the advice.

The next morning, Lumian had a conversation with Franca and Jenna. Afterward, he gathered all his funds and went directly to 11 Rue des Fontaines in Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative.

"Boss, here are 30,000 gold and 30,000 verl d'or banknotes," Lumian said with a smile as he placed the heavy leather bag on Gardner Martin's desk.

He still had 1,000 gold and nominal funds of 1,500 verl d'or.

Gardner Martin glanced at Lumian, unzipped the bag, and began counting the money.

He didn't inquire about Lumian's remaining funds. With a smile, he retrieved a faux goatskin that appeared to have been prepared in advance.

"You need to promise two things. First, memorize this formula before burning the piece of paper. Second, you cannot resell the Conspirer potion formula without my or the Supervisor's permission," Gardner Martin stated these terms without requesting a notarized pledge, as if issuing an order.

Lumian agreed to these terms without hesitation, saying, "No problem."

Gardner Martin nodded in satisfaction and handed over the faux goatskin to Lumian.

Lumian took it and began reading:

"Conspirer potion formula:

"Main ingredient: Black Hunting Spider's composite eye, Sphinx's brain;

"Supplementary ingredients: One Black Hunting Spider's poison gland, 80 milliliters of Sphinx blood, 10 grams of amber powder, and two white oak fruits."

After reading and memorizing the formula, Lumian's right hand trembled, allowing the crimson flames to engulf the faux goatskin.

…

Time passed in an eerie silence. Unbeknownst to them, the heat in Trier began to wane, and the temperature gradually dropped.

One mid-September day, Franca stood before the window of Apartment 601 and cursed Browns Sauron for what felt like the hundredth time.

She had already passed the Demoness Sect's audit and informed Browns that she had joined the Savoie Mob to infiltrate the Iron and Blood Cross Order. However, she never anticipated there would be an assessment period. Only after this evaluation could she officially become a member of the Demoness Sect.

Her current liaison, Browns Sauron, used this as an excuse to prevent her from participating in the Red House Café's female orgies. This left her with no option but to endure tormenting Gardner Martin and his lovers for the past month or so.

Franca turned her attention to Jenna, who appeared lost in thought, and couldn't help but sigh at her companion's fortune.

The Demoness Sect remained oblivious to Jenna's true identity as a Beyonder of the Assassin pathway.

"What's troubling you?" Franca inquired.

Jenna responded with a hint of distress, "My Instigator potion has completely digested."

Franca exclaimed in pleasant surprise, "That's a good thing!"

Jenna scratched her head and let out a sigh. "I haven't even paid you back for the money I owe you, and now I have to consider the Witch potion formula and its ingredients. Dammit, why does it feel like the more I advance, the poorer I become?"

Chapter 423: Unexpected Encounter

Franca chuckled at Jenna's complaint and replied, "That's typical. As long as you master the acting method, progress comes quickly before reaching the mid Sequences. The pace at which you save money often falls short of the expenses for purchasing the potion formula and the necessary ingredients.

"Don't fret about the money. Sequence 7 in the Assassin pathway is a game-changer. It significantly boosts your combat prowess and survival skills. You're aware of the potential catastrophe on the horizon. Only by becoming a Witch and wielding the Arrow of the Bloodthirsty will you stand a chance at survival and protecting the people you care about."

Jenna fell silent for a moment, then she swore, "You instigated me without using your abilities!"

"Haha, it's just the way things are. I'll share the Witch potion formula with you now. Let's start gathering," Franca said as she returned to the coffee table, spread out a piece of paper, and swiftly jotted down the instructions.

Jenna stood beside her, examining the Intisian words taking shape.

Meanwhile, Jenna silently tallied her debts.

Including the Purifier reward and the earnings from my underground singing, I've saved nearly 10,000 verl d'or.

According to Franca and Ciel, a Sequence 7 potion formula can go for between 30,000 and 40,000 verl d'or, depending on its rarity. At the very least, I owe Franca another 30,000 verl d'or, bringing the total to 60,000…

Even if I sell the Arrow of the Bloodthirsty, I won't be able to make up for it. In the future, I'll have to purchase various ingredients for the Witch potion, costing me over 30,000 verl d'or… Dammit! It's no wonder why so many Beyonders at those mysticism gatherings seem strapped for cash and penny-pinching!

The more Jenna calculated, the more her head throbbed.

If it weren't for the potion's tangible transformation and the clear, visible abilities it grants, she would have suspected she'd fallen into a scam. Why did her debts keep increasing as she worked harder?

In the past, her whole family had often felt hopeless when dealing with a debt of a few thousand verl d'or. But now, she owed Franca 60,000, and there was no end in sight.

Even with her cash and assets, she still fell short by 10,000 verl d'or.

Gritting her teeth, Jenna decided to put these worries aside for now and deal with them after advancing to Sequence 7 as a Witch.

Franca quickly finished writing down the Witch potion formula:

"Sequence 7: Witch;

"Main ingredient: Every drop of an Abyss Demonic Fish's blood and an Agate Peacock's egg;

"Supplementary ingredients: 80 ml of purified water, five drops of Jimsonweed juice, 3 scales of a Shadow Lizard, and 10 drops of Daffodil Juice."

She handed the paper with the formula to Jenna and added in thought, "Avoid gathering these materials at the mysticism gathering we attend. Acquire them from the gathering you discovered and joined, as well as from the Purifiers. Oh, ask Ciel for assistance too."

Franca was still in the Demoness Sect's assessment period and worried about potential spies from the secret organization in the mysticism gatherings. If participants gathered the ingredients for the Witch potion, it could raise suspicions.

In contrast, the Purifiers were a more secure source of these ingredients, given their history of dealing with Demonesses. They definitely had the corresponding characteristics in reserve.

Of course, Franca would also help inquire and gather information at the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society, but she couldn't inform Jenna about it.

"Alright." Jenna rwas well aware of the Demoness Sect's hostility toward wild Assassins like her.

As Jenna memorized the Witch potion formula, Franca inquired with concern, "Has your brother left Trier?"

Recognizing that the heretics were oddly quiet and them receiving confirmation from a Major Arcana card holder, Lumian and Franca had suggested that Jenna and her brother Julien relocate from Trier to another city in Intis for six months to monitor the situation.

Jenna had insisted on staying to spend time with her comrades and had promised to advance her Sequence quickly.

This was the primary reason she had accepted Franca's gift without hesitation.

As for her brother Julien, Jenna genuinely wanted to keep him away from another mysticism disaster. She wanted him to live a safe and happy life, and she had been busy instigating him to leave Trier.

Jenna couldn't help but smile. "I went to Port LeSeur last weekend."

Port LeSeur, situated at the estuary of the Srenzo River, was one of Trier's primary ports for shipping goods out to sea.

Franca was surprised and pleased for her friend.

"Did you manage to instigate that stubborn fellow?"

Without divulging the truth,Jenna shook her head and said, "No. I shifted my instigation efforts to a different target. I discovered that the shipyard where Julien works has a branch in Port LeSeur, so I used my Instigation ability to convince their supervisor to propose a six-month technical exchange program between the factories. I also paid to include Julien in the list.

"I only digested the potion after successfully instigating this. Dogsh*t, no matter what I told Julien, he refused to listen. He even reneged on his word the next day after the Instigation. As soon as his supervisor issued the order, he started packing!"

After venting her frustration about her brother, Jenna glanced at Franca and added with a sly grin,

"The skilled workers from Trier arrived in Port LeSeur last weekend. The return leg from LeSeur to Trier will be half a year later to avoid the potential disaster.

"Franca, why don't we figure out a way to get more people to leave Trier and lay low for a while?"

"They won't believe us even if we tell them," Franca sighed. "Moreover, if more people leave, those evil god organizations might sense it and act prematurely. If the official Beyonders aren't prepared, it could lead to more casualties."

Unspoken was the fact that, combined with Madam Judgment's words and Ciel's intel, the surface Trier served to seal the underground Trier. Everyone in the city contributed their strength, and if too many left, the seal might weaken, putting the remaining citizens in danger.

Jenna fell silent for a moment, choosing not to dwell on the topic.

Her upbringing and six months of experience had taught her to accept the harsh reality. All she could do was save as many as she could within reasonable bounds.

After a pause of about ten seconds, Jenna said thoughtfully, "When I Instigated the supervisor to propose the exchange program, I noticed that many neighboring factories had similar arrangements. That's why I had an example to raise and succeeded without much difficulty.

"Now that I think about it, could it be a covert effort by official Beyonders to reduce the population in the market district?"

"It's certainly possible," Franca considered for a moment before hesitating to add more.

What she wanted to say was that it might also be orchestrated by the Tarot Club or Church of The Fool. Madam Justice, a Major Arcana card in the Spectator domain, was well-suited for such matters.

Franca refrained from saying this because she hadn't yet told Jenna about her and Ciel's belief in Mr. Fool.

She had initially planned to "visit" The Fool's cathedral at Lavigny Docks with Jenna, but she dared not do so once she came under the scrutiny of the Demoness Sect.

Yes, I'll have to get Ciel to take Jenna to Lavigny Docks. If she embraces the faith of Mr. Fool, she'll be safer in the future… Franca's thoughts drifted to Lumian.

…

In a four-wheeled four-seater carriage, navigating through the forest and farmland, Lumian, dressed in a casual formal suit, looked out the window at the golden harvest, his mind drifting.

The past month had been his most leisurely period in the past six months, but he didn't find this leisure enjoyable. He seized every opportunity to digest the Pyromaniac potion.

This included visits to the large morgue in the island district to help "cremate" corpses, "bury" abandoned large-sized trash, venturing underground to use flames to intimidate passing smuggling teams, successfully securing insurance compensation for small distressed merchants through fires, tracking down and incinerating a few wanted criminals, and igniting a desire among many to leave Trier and explore opportunities in neighboring cities…

This string of actions had brought Lumian to the brink of fully digesting the Pyromaniac potion. It might only take another half a month, a week, or perhaps even less.

Today, Lumian had received an invitation from Count Poufer to visit his Red Swan Castle as a guest.

Over the past month, the Sauron family had hosted five gatherings—one at the castle, one for hunting, two for casual chats at a café, and one for a masquerade ball in an abandoned house.

Lumian had participated in all of them, but nothing significant had occurred. The only notable exception was that Poufer Sauron hadn't played King's Pie again.

Where's the probe Gardner Martin mentioned? Could it be a probe this time? The Cave Association hasn't made another appearance. Do they believe me? He redirected his thoughts from the near-harvest farmland and contemplated the invitation for the day.

What intrigued him even more was Gardner Martin's promise to secretly monitor every gathering hosted by Count Poufer. So, where might Gardner be concealed at this moment?

Under the afternoon sun, the carriage arrived at its destination.

Lumian gazed up at the beige castle, tainted with the stains of ancient blood. Passing through the imposing door and the vast atrium, he reached the elegant living room on the first floor, adorned with a dark-red, plush carpet.

Poufer Sauron, dressed in a red velvet coat, was engaged in conversation at the entrance with another guest when Lumian arrived.

Lumian's gaze froze.

The guest standing beside Count Poufer was not someone he had expected to see.

Clad in hunting attire, with what appeared to be reddish-dyed hair, sharp brown eyebrows, and piercing eyes, it was Albus, another member of the Iron and Blood Cross Order.

As a member of the Iron and Blood Cross Order under the command of Commanding Officer Gardner Martin, Lumian was well aware of their identities and objectives. However, Albus was enigmatic and seldom seen in the market district, only making appearances at gatherings for a free meal.

"Who is this?" Lumian didn't conceal his confusion.

Is he here to assist me in completing my mission?

Poufer Sauron introduced with a smile,"A new friend. He'll be joining us at our gatherings more frequently."

At this point, Poufer turned to Albus, whose expression appeared rather unlikable, maintaining his smile.

"His full name is: Albus Medici."

Chapter 424: Underground Maze

Albus Medici… Lumian repeated the name to himself, glancing at the member of the Iron and Blood Cross Order who had suddenly appeared.

During Gardner Martin's gathering, Albus had never revealed his last name, and Gardner Martin had never introduced him. Now, he had actually given his full name to Poufer Sauron.

Is he trying to make it more realistic? Lumian's gaze swept across Albus's face, and he realized that when Count Poufer mentioned the surname Medici, he didn't hide his mockery at all, as if mocking the Sauron family member.

"Ciel Dubois," Lumian extended his right hand and politely introduced himself.

Albus casually shook his hand, a smile evident in his eyes.

He said, "I've heard your name before, a generous patron of art."

The member of the Iron and Blood Cross Order emphasized "generous."

"That's mainly thanks to my sponsor," Lumian said with a double entendre.

In the ears of the other guests, he was referring to his father—his wealthy family. As a member of the Iron and Blood Cross Order, Albus caught the subtle message.

Poufer Sauron exchanged a few pleasantries with Lumian before escorting him to the sofa.

The gathering was intimate, with familiar faces all around, including Poufer's cousin, Elros, Novelist Anori, Painter Mullen, Critic Ernst Young, and Poet Iraeta.

After some casual conversation and nibbling on snacks accompanied by black tea, Count Poufer glanced around and suggested with a mischievous smile, "How about we embark on an adventure today?"

"Adventure?" Albus raised an eyebrow and couldn't resist a playful quip, "An adventure in the bedroom?"

His insinuation was clear. Red Swan Castle might be spacious, with room for a key family member and even hundreds of soldiers at its zenith, but it hardly seemed like a place fit for adventure. Were they supposed to reenact a Trier-like adventure under a bedroom's plush sheets?

The jest lightened the atmosphere, and Poufer Sauron cleared his throat before continuing,

"Perhaps you're unaware, but Red Swan Castle harbors an extensive underground area.

"In the era of its construction, its primary function was war. It had to boast a cavernous cellar and a tunnel for escape during dire situations, or it would be deemed inadequate.

"Throughout the centuries, my forebears expanded and modified the underground, turning it into a labyrinth resembling something out of a horror story. Even though I grew up in Red Swan Castle, my knowledge of that place is limited to the areas I frequently use.

"Our objective today is to venture deep into this subterranean maze and locate a Count's crown that one of my ancestors misplaced in one of its chambers. The crown is adorned with numerous rubies, making it easily distinguishable.

"The one who retrieves the Count's crown will be crowned today's king."

Deep into the underground maze… Scenes suddenly flashed through Lumian's mind.

The constant self-mutilating people in Red Swan Castle…

Screams of unknown origin…

A bronze coffin, surrounded by countless white candles…

A palm with dark-red, nearly-black blood vessels…

And a withered, black heart with a trickle of crimson seeping out…

These latter objects seemed to be concealed somewhere in the depths of the underground hall!

In an instant, Lumian comprehended the gravity of Poufer Sauron's proposal.

Poufer Sauron's probing was here!

Suppressing the urge to scan his surroundings and possibly catch a glimpse of Gardner Martin, who might be lurking, Lumian turned his attention to Albus Medici.

The member of the Iron and Blood Cross Order clicked his tongue and chuckled.

"Sounds intriguing. This is a game for the courageous!"

As if to quell any doubts or reluctance among the group, doing so meant: Those who decline to participate are merely cowards!

Count Poufer seized the opportunity to reassure them, "Worry not. If you lose your way and cannot find your path back, just pull the bell rope in your chamber. The servants will be dispatched to search for you and bring you back from below."

"No problem," Anori, the short and plump novelist, quipped with a mischievous glint in his eye. "I'm quite looking forward to something happening. After all, it will provide me with excellent material for my writing."

"Like Anori's Last Day?" Lumian joked.

Having attended numerous gatherings hosted by the Black Cat art organization, Lumian was well aware of Novelist Anori and Poet Iraeta's unique quirks. Anori had a taboo for never praising fellow authors, while Iraeta's ire was only stirred by the current social realities in Intis.

Anori took a sip of his black tea and mumbled, "Those old fogeys from the Intis Faculty of Arts will absolutely love this theme."

Seeing no objections, Count Poufer rose from his seat and addressed the assembled guests,

"Let's divide into two groups and begin this adventure. We'll set out individually along the way.

"One group will follow me, and the other will accompany Ciel. These individuals have all been kings in the past three months.

"Those willing to join Ciel, raise your hands."

"Me!" Albus Medici was the first to raise his hand. Lumian had expected him to follow Poufer Sauron closely to complete the Iron and Blood Cross Order's mission.

Count Poufer appeared unfazed, as if this was the anticipated course of events.

The second to raise her hand was Elros, the cousin of the host.

With her long auburn hair, soft features, and bright brown eyes, she smiled at Lumian and said, "I've always been Monsieur Ciel's companion in the past. I see no reason to change that now."

Lumian nodded and returned her smile.

He was aware that beneath her youthful appearance, Elros possessed a complexity that belied her innocence.

In one of his unsettling dreams, most participants in the King's Pie game had descended into madness, inflicting self-harm or harm on others. Only three individuals remained unaffected: Lumian himself, Poufer Sauron, and Miss Elros.

Lumian couldn't help but wonder about her true motivations for choosing to accompany him into the underground maze.

The third to raise his hand was the poet, Iraeta.

Holding his cherrywood pipe, he offered a straightforward reason, "He's my sponsor!"

The remaining guests, including Novelist Anori, Painter Mullen, and Critic Ernst Young, formed a team with Poufer Sauron.

They left the comfort of the living room and found themselves standing next to a fully-armored statue. Descending the nearby stairs, designed for two people to walk side by side, they ventured further into the depths of the castle.

The walls of the staircase were mottled and grayish-white, winding their way down into the bowels of the earth. The surroundings grew increasingly quiet as they descended.

After traversing about three floors, Lumian and his group reached the entrance of the underground maze.

The passageways were illuminated by numerous wall lamps, some connected to gas pipes, while others had a more classical design with candles burning brightly.

Lumian gazed up at the ceiling and noticed the aqueous-black stone bricks above, shrouded in darkness. Their cracks were distinct, and the surface exhibited signs of peeling.

"Let's choose this one," Poufer declared, taking a carbide lamp from the wall and leading his team down the leftmost passageway.

After setting up the carbide lamp, Lumian instinctively proceeded down the corridor ahead without hesitation.

He believed that in such an environment, methodical searching might cause them to overlook something significant. By relying on the convergence of Beyonder characteristics and the concealed Blood Emperor aura, he believed he would stumble upon something of value.

"What's your reason for choosing this path?" Albus Medici's expression was always a little annoying.

Lumian responded with a hint of nonchalance, "I have faith in fate."

"I like that reason," Elros chimed in with a faint smile.

Poet Iraeta took a puff from his cherrywood pipe and added, "I believe in it too, but only if fate is inclined to favor me."

The quartet ventured deeper into the corridor, encountering what appeared to be storage rooms along the way.

Soon, they arrived at a dimly lit hall with three doors, each bearing a single word in ancient Feysac: Hope, Death, and Madness.

Lumian had abandoned deep thinking by this point. Without hesitation, he walked towards the Door of Madness and gently pushed it open.

As the door swung ajar, darkness enveloped the room, and the light from the carbide lamp spilled in, revealing an eerie sight. Lifelike wax statues stood throughout the room, both men and women, adorned in either ordinary or exquisite attire, their expressions twisted in agony.

"Not bad," Albus commented, disdainfully patting a wax statue's face with his right hand.

Elros glanced at him.

"Didn't your mother teach you manners?"

Albus chuckled.

"I don't have a mother."

Elros was momentarily taken aback, not quite sure how to respond to that statement.

In the background, Poet Iraeta spoke with a touch of admiration, "In the past, when rumors circulated about me having an affair with a widow, I'd quietly spread gossip that I had kidnapped the Member of Parliament's daughter and was suspected of murdering a merchant. I even found myself entangled in rumors involving human meat pies, and my neighbors mysteriously vanished.

"As long as I don't care about my reputation and actively tarnish it, no one can perch on the moral high ground and point fingers at me."

As expected of a poet… Lumian praised inwardly. Holding the carbide lamp, he led the way through the room filled with wax statues, their goal being the exit at the far end.

The wax figures, illuminated by the dim yellowish light of the gas wall lamps, appeared unnervingly lifelike. Their eyes seemed to follow Lumian and his companions, creating an unsettling and bizarre atmosphere.

Lumian couldn't shake the memory of the previous wax statues that had come to life and attacked. He couldn't help but feel that any of these figures could suddenly spring to life and lunge at them.

Breaking the indescribable silence, Albus Medici

spoke in a relaxed tone, addressing Elros, "You're Poufer's cousin. Your last name isn't Sauron, is it?"

Elros candidly admitted, "You're right."

Albus casually inquired, "Which family do you belong to?"

Elros turned her head to look at Albus Medici and then at Lumian. She replied with a smile, "My full name is: Elros Einhorn."

Chapter 425: The Living

Einhorn? Even though Lumian was a young man deprived of an education, he had received Aurore's rigorous education and knew that this last name represented the royal family of the Feysac Empire in the north.

Previously, when he had observed Elros acting reserved and obedient in front of Poufer Sauron, he had assumed that her father's family wasn't particularly outstanding and had perhaps even declined, forcing her to rely on her cousin. He hadn't expected her to bear such a distinguished last name.

It was worth noting that more than a thousand years had passed since the establishment of the Feysac Empire in the late Fourth Epoch. The Einhorn family had always held the throne, while the Sauron family had lost the Intis throne nearly two centuries ago. It was clear which family held the upper hand.

Albus Medici glanced at Elros in surprise and added a touch of provocation to his words, "You're an Einhorn? I couldn't tell."

Elros gazed straight ahead, returning to her obedient demeanor.

She spoke emotionlessly, "The Sauron family and the Einhorn family often formed marriage alliances. Even though the Sauron family has long left the Intis throne, this tradition endures. My mother just happened to marry a member of the Einhorn royal family."

Poet Iraeta asked with interest, "So your last name is Einhorn. Why did you come to Trier? You were living in Red Swan Castle when I first met Count Poufer."

"Six years ago, my father perished in the war between the Feysac Empire and the Loen Kingdom. My mother brought me back to Trier, where we stayed with my maternal grandfather, who also happened to be Poufer's grandfather," Elros explained with a soft sigh. "Two years ago, my maternal grandfather passed away. Last year, my mother succumbed to illness."

The frequency of death does seem remarkably high? Right, Aurore had mentioned that while the four powerful countries of the Northern Continent sometimes collaborated and at other times clashed, marriages between the royal family and nobles never ceased. Consequently, cousin marriages had become frequent… According to Franca, the Hunter pathway has mainly been in the hands of the Sauron and Einhorn families. Could a Hunter-Hunter marriage guarantee that future generations would be better suited for the Hunter pathway? Lumian held the carbide lamp and proceeded down the corridor toward the exit of the wax statue's room.

The wax statues on either side, bathed in the yellowish glow of the carbide lamp, seemed eerily lifelike.

As they ventured further down the corridor, it grew narrower, and the wax statues almost obstructed their path.

Lumian couldn't help but bump into them. Their bodies were cold, and their limbs felt stiff. They were indeed genuine wax statues.

Finally, the four of them reached the end of the room and opened the iron-black wooden door.

Just as Lumian was about to depart, a subconscious impulse made him glance back.

In the dimly lit room, the pained expressions on the wax statues' faces appeared haunting, as if their eyes were fixed on the exit.

Lumian was reminded of his earlier encounter with the wax statue in the river. He instinctively raised his wrist slightly and discreetly extended the middle finger toward the wax statue in the room.

"I really wish I could set this place on fire," Albus Medici lamented with a touch of regret.

Lumian was momentarily surprised, but he secretly concurred.

Good idea!

He had a suspicion that if he could incinerate these wax statues, the potion would be fully digested.

Elros Einhorn remarked calmly, "Red Swan Castle experiences an average of three fires a month."

Is she suggesting we should go ahead and burn it down without any apprehension? Lumian grumbled in his thoughts and proceeded into the corridor behind the wax statue's room.

The passageway descended diagonally, leading them deeper underground.

Lumian felt an urge to purse his lips and whistle in amazement, but he resisted.

The four of them continued down until the corridor leveled out once more.

The wall lamps were not lit. Whether gas or candles, they slumbered in the darkness.

With the yellowish glow of their four carbide lamps, Lumian discerned a room at a diagonal angle ahead, its wooden door slightly ajar. A faint, lingering odor of blood emanated from within.

He approached and pushed open the wooden door.

Light streamed into the room, and the scene within was cast upon the eyes of Lumian, Albus, and the rest of the group.

It was a small bedroom, but time had not been kind to it. The bed had crumbled, the wood decayed, and the table lay in ruins. A collection of assorted items lay scattered in the center of the room.

The walls bore vivid, deep gouges, as if they had been violently clawed at by someone until their fingers must have bled and rotted.

The blood, having seeped into the crevices, had oxidized over time, turning black. Its original appearance was lost, but a faint cloyed odor still lingered.

Then, a whistle reached Lumian's ears.

Albus Medici expressed his emotions through this sound.

He moved past Lumian, entering the room, and ran his fingers along the deep scratches on the wall.

"I can only imagine the horrifying sounds that were produced," the chubby-faced Elros commented, her focus on the matter somewhat off.

Lumian surmised that someone from Red Swan Castle had once descended into madness and been confined in this room. The marks on the wall were the haunting legacy of their torment.

After a cursory search that yielded no findings, they pressed on.

They opted for the right path at the three-way intersection, leading them to a room with its wooden door partially open.

Inside, the room was in shambles, marred by the presence of the blackened bloodstains. The walls appeared to be adorned with what could only be described as decaying flesh.

Albus Medici observed it and let out a disapproving click of his tongue.

"A guy exploded here. From the inside out. Blood and flesh splattered everywhere."

Lumian nodded almost imperceptibly. The judgment aligned with his.

Could it have been the result of a Pyromaniac losing control and meeting their end?

Poet Iraeta, holding a carbide lamp in one hand, took a puff from his cherrywood pipe, struggling slightly, and offered his own perspective.

"I can't quite fathom why such a tragedy unfolded, but there's a certain poetic quality to it."

Is an explosion a form of art? Lumian muttered as he entered the room and began his search.

In this environment, his emotions were somewhat more agitated than usual, and his aggressive impulses were undeniably heightened.

The putrid blood and decaying flesh seemed to exude an aura that could influence one's mental state.

After moving forward for over ten meters, the group discovered another room adjacent to the corridor, its wooden door partially open.

The room didn't reek of blood, but Lumian felt as if sharp blades were pressed against his skin, causing his hair to stand on end.

Sharpness!

That was the word that naturally came to his mind.

As the light from the carbide lamp illuminated the room, Lumian, Elros, and the rest observed that the furniture had been reduced to tiny fragments. Beds and desks lay in finger-sized squares, partially collapsed.

"Remarkable swordsmanship," Albus Medici remarked with a chuckle.

Lumian wasn't too concerned with this matter. What troubled him was that this place was unlike the previous two rooms, which had signs of decaying blood and rotting flesh.

Where had the person who once occupied this room disappeared to? Lumian scrutinized the area intently before deciding to move on.

Shortly, they reached a descending stone staircase. The lower portion of the staircase was enveloped in darkness, seemingly endless.

On either side of the stairs were rooms with slightly open wooden doors. The interior of these rooms was pitch-black, as though it could swallow all light and motion.

Lumian instinctively chose the left side, pushed open the door, and extended the carbide lamp into the room.

Bathed in the direct yellow light, an intact bed, an undamaged table, and a chair all stood in perfect order.

Two gleaming, cold swords adorned the wall before them. On the table, a pile of colorful building blocks of various shapes and a row of iron soldiers, each as tall as a candle, were neatly arranged.

These iron soldiers were clad in blue coats with golden embroidery. They wielded spears that resembled tree branches or black rifles, a popular toy in Intis that had enjoyed popularity for a century or two.

Lumian walked over and placed the carbide lamp down. He picked up one of the iron soldiers and adeptly twisted the torsion spring on its back.

With a series of creaking sounds, the iron soldier sprang to life, swaying forward while raising its spear.

Memories of owning a set of such iron soldiers during his youth, before his mother's illness and his pépé's financial troubles, flooded into Lumian's mind.

"There are no signs of damage here. It's as if it contains items from childhood to adulthood," Elros observed as she circled the room.

Albus Medici grinned and remarked, "I wonder where the owner of this room is now. Hopefully not mad enough to scratch the walls or self-destruct from the inside out."

As they conversed, Lumian extended his right palm, attempting to open the wooden desk drawer to see what it held.

Suddenly, an ethereal voice echoed around them.

"My grandfather went mad and ventured into the depths of the underground palace, never to return…"

Lumian tensed, his body swiveling as he scanned the surroundings for the source of the voice.

Albus, Elros, and the others followed suit, clearly hearing the unsettling voice.

"My father went mad and ventured into the depths of the underground palace, never to return…

"My brother went mad and ventured into the depths of the underground palace, never to return…

"I… hear the summonings from the depths of the underground palace…"

Lumian, Albus, Elros, and Iraeta simultaneously directed their gazes at the wooden door across the corridor.

The spectral voice emanated from there.

With a snap, Iraeta, positioned in the corridor, pushed open the wooden door behind him. Ignorance often knew no fear.

The yellowish light immediately illuminated two figures and a pile of materials.

One of them was a flesh-toned puppet mounted on a metal frame, hairless with rudimentary facial features.

Surrounding it were molds, hair, clay, and pigments stored in containers.

A man clad in a grayish-black robe, his natural red hair flowing, was diligently painting the puppet with a fine brush.

Sensing the intrusion of light, the man slowly raised his head, revealing a weathered face adorned with thick hair and dark, iron-like eyes.

Upon spotting Lumian, Iraeta, and the rest, he spoke slowly, his voice ethereal as he inquired, "Are you here to make wax statues?"

Chapter 426: "Curse"

Iraeta unconsciously took a step back.

"No, there's no need."

He snapped out of his daze and focused on the man in the gray robe who was diligently painting the puppet in the dimly lit room. He asked with curiosity, "Are you the artisan of wax statues who serves Count Poufer?"

This Count had a peculiar hobby of crafting wax figures for his friends.

The man with the fiery red beard avoided direct eye contact and continued coloring the half-finished puppet in front of him.

Lumian, who had already returned to the corridor, turned his head and glanced at Albus Medici. Instead of speaking, he directed his question at the enigmatic man in the cluttered room, "What should we call you?"

Lumian was certain that something was amiss with the wax statue artisan before him, but he couldn't determine the extent of the problem. They had just noticed that no light escaped from this room, indicating that the man had been working on the puppet in complete darkness!

The man with deep, iron-black eyes and a fiery red beard looked up once more and spoke in a spectral tone, "My grandfather went mad and ventured into the depths of the underground palace, never to return…

"My father went mad and ventured into the depths of the underground palace, never to return…"

"So, are you mad as well?" Albus Medici interrupted the man's ramblings.

The man hesitated for a moment before answering, "I… hear the summonings from the depths of the underground palace…"

At this point, his gaze swept across the faces of Lumian, Albus, and Elros. The corners of his mouth, obscured by his beard, curled up slightly, hinting at an elusive smile.

His vacant iron-black eyes grew more intense, and his voice carried a sense of urgency.

"The three of you, hurry to the depths of the underground palace…"

Iraeta muttered under his breath, "Why not me?"

Lumian's mind raced as he sought common ground with Albus and Elros.

As Poet Iraeta had pointed out, the "three of you" in the strange man's statement didn't include him. Given the peculiar atmosphere and circumstances, something was definitely awry.

I'm a Hunter, and Albus is a Hunter. Could Elros also be a Hunter? While Lumian contemplated this, Albus Medici seemed unfazed by the eerie words of the wax statue artisan. He flashed a cheeky smile and asked, "Do you want us to venture deep into the underground palace to rescue your grandfather, father, and brother, or would you prefer to send your regards?"

Quite aggressive… Logically speaking, he's at least a Pyromaniac, the kind whose potion has mostly been digested. There's no need to provoke everyone with every word… Could it be that he's intentionally misleading others to believe that he's only a Provoker? Lumian looked at Albus's well-defined side profile and muttered inwardly.

The man painting the puppet paid Albus no attention and continued his work.

"Sorry to bother you," Lumian said, not giving Albus a chance to escalate the situation. He reached for the vermilion wooden door's handle, gently closed it, and left the room behind.

Lumian decided not to explore the room with the iron-clad soldier, fearing it might trigger unwanted events.

In the darkness, Lumian descended the worn stone steps, carbide lamp in hand.

Amid the echoing footsteps, Elros Einhorn suddenly commented, "That man looked like a lion…"

Lumian recalled the wax statue artisan's appearance. Indeed, with his long, dense red hair and beard, he did resemble a humanized lion.

Albus Medici gently swayed the carbide lamp in his hand and glanced at Elros.

"This is your maternal grandfather's castle. You've lived here for nearly six years. Don't act like a visitor like us who doesn't know anything."

"I genuinely don't know who that person was," Elros replied, shaking her head. "I rarely enter the underground palace. The farthest I've gone is the room filled with wax statues."

In other words, during your limited explorations, you had chosen the same path as me. You had selected the Door of Madness among the three doors of Hope, Madness, and Death… Why didn't you continue deeper? What were you worried about? Lumian deduced some information from Elros Einhorn's succinct answer.

Albus scoffed.

"Have you heard of the legend of Sauron family members going mad and venturing into the depths of the underground palace, never to return?

"For example, my grandfather went mad and ventured into the depths of the underground palace…"

The member of the Iron and Blood Cross Order mimicked the man's speech with an uncanny accuracy.

Excellent, you've asked the question I wanted to ask… Despite Albus Medici's grating manner, he did serve a purpose.

He had no reservations and, with great acumen, asked questions that he couldn't.

With such a teammate around, Lumian could maintain a semblance of distance and conceal his true thoughts and attitude.

The worn stone steps seemed never-ending. As Elros descended carefully, she sighed and explained,

"I've always known about such legends.

"The master of Red Swan Castle and the Sauron family members who reside here, both men and women, gradually become violent and irritable, eventually going mad. It's possible for them to enter the depths of the underground palace after mutilating themselves and never return. These incidents occur sporadically, sometimes once every few years, or two or three times a year.

"Apart from the family members who yearn to restore their forebears' glory, Sauron has distanced himself from this ancient castle. He doesn't want to go mad.

"This has a certain effect, ensuring the Sauron family's continuation and heritage. However, that madness seems to be a curse, a curse rooted in the bloodline. Sauron, who resides elsewhere, will occasionally have people suddenly return and repeat the experiences of their forebears here."

Is this the surface explanation behind the Sauron family's decline? If the core members of the family go mad one by one and enter the depths of the underground palace without returning, the family will indeed decline bit by bit… Why did Elros tell us in detail about the matters that's privy to the Sauron family… She believes that we won't leave alive, so she's satisfying her desire to share? Lumian couldn't help but recall the nightmares he had experienced due to the King's Pie game.

In the nightmares, Red Swan Castle was overrun by lunatics who mutilated themselves in gruesome ways, gouging out their own eyeballs and more.

It seemed that these lunatics might have included various individuals from the Sauron family who had gone mad over the course of more than two centuries.

But not all of them shared the Sauron bloodline. Lumian remembered how Novelist Anori and other participants in the King's Pie game had also gone insane and committed grotesque acts to themselves and others, despite lacking the Sauron family's lineage.

Albus Medici, in his irritating manner, wore a smirk as he asked Elros, "Did your maternal grandfather also go crazy and venture into the depths of the underground palace?"

Elros remained calm and replied, "No, he passed away due to chronic headaches. Not every owner of Red Swan Castle eventually goes mad."

Albus, undeterred, continued to press, "What are the common factors among those who don't go mad?"

Elros's face was illuminated by the carbide lamp's glow as she responded in her usual tone, "It's a family secret."

In essence, she was saying: "I'm not going to tell you."

This response left Lumian, who was leading the way, feeling a growing sense of frustration.

If Elros had simply cautioned them against prying into the Sauron family's affairs from the start, he wouldn't have reacted emotionally. But her willingness to share intriguing information, only to withhold the crucial details, felt like a deliberate provocation.

After a moment of silence, Albus Medici's smile returned, and he probed further, "What about your mother?"

Elros replied, "She passed away normally due to an illness."

Albus chuckled and continued, "What about you? You also have the Sauron family's bloodline. Will you suddenly go crazy?"

Elros turned her head and glanced at the impolite fellow, revealing an indescribable smile.

"In the long run, we'll all go mad."

Who do you mean by "we"? Lumian's forehead twitched, sensing that Elros wasn't just referring to the Sauron family.

A moment of silence followed, broken by Poet Iraeta's heartfelt sigh.

"The fear of a family, the curse that has lasted for generations, and the forebears who have ventured into the dark underground. What an excellent theme for an essay. It's very inspiring. If Anori were to find out, he would definitely produce a classic novel. Even I would have the urge to write a long poem."

As they conversed, the four of them finally reached the end of the lengthy stone steps.

Before them stretched a vast hall with grayish-white stone pillars supporting the dark ceiling above.

The four carbide lamps illuminated the space, revealing several piles of bones partially exposed behind certain stone pillars.

"Plenty of the dead." Albus Medici, undaunted, sighed with a smile and strolled toward one of the bone piles.

At that moment, Lumian picked up a rustling sound.

He swiftly raised his head and raised the carbide lamp.

In the dim yellow lighting, mottled ceiling, a colossal shadow moved with surprising speed, crawling across the uneven surface before vanishing into the shadows on the other side.

The shadow was a spider-like creature.

In comparison to its kind, it had only one pair of eyes, but each eye contained numerous tiny single eyes moving independently, radiating a cold and eerie light.

Countless long, thick bristles encircled a withered, blackened, fist-sized heart on its back.

Lumian's blood ran cold as a term leaped to the forefront of his mind: Black Hunting Spider!

This was one of the main ingredients of the Conspirer potion.

Over the past month, although Lumian hadn't yet acquired any ingredients related to Black Hunting Spiders and Sphinxes, he had amassed a general understanding of these two Beyonder creatures, including their appearance and abilities. Recently, he had contemplated "teleporting" to another location in his quest to locate these creatures.

However, the Black Hunting Spider he had just witnessed was even more unusual than the information he had gathered. It deviated significantly in several details, particularly the presence of a withered heart that eerily resembled that of a human.

Chapter 427: Hunters' Cooperation

The suspected Black Hunting Spider flashed and disappeared into the shadows on the other side of the hall.

Lumian only saw it but didn't react in time. Albus Medici and Elros Einhorn were equally caught off guard.

By the time Iraeta sensed the abnormality and looked up at the ceiling, the colossal black spider had vanished.

"What are you looking at?" the poet asked curiously, casually commenting, "There's no mural on the walls of the underground maze. This doesn't match the Sauron family's former glory."

In the Northern Continent, murals were essential when constructing grand buildings. All painters took pride in being invited to create these magnificent works of art, especially when it came to epic paintings on cathedral domes and walls. These paintings were not just a status symbol but also required months or even years to complete.

Lumian withdrew his gaze and smiled.

"I saw a venomous spider. No one has been here for a long time. It seems to have become a haven for dangerous creatures."

Without waiting for Iraeta's response, he suggested, "Albus, Elros, and I have impressive skills and extensive hunting experience. It's clear you lack sufficient training. Why don't you return to the surface ahead of time? Continuing forward could be perilous for you. You don't truly believe you can find the crown and become king, do you?"

Iraeta muttered, "No problem. You're my sponsor, after all.

"If it weren't to accompany you guys and have some fun, I wouldn't venture into this pitch-black underground. I'm past the age of adventuring and performing arts. Alright, I'll head back to the surface now and wait for you in the living room. There's La Fée Verte, black tea, refreshments, and tobacco. It's much more comfortable than here."

As the poet spoke, he turned and walked toward the stone steps at the hall's exit.

Just as he took several steps, a blaze erupted from the shadow on his right, hurtling towards Iraeta like a crimson spear.

Behind Lumian, flames surged around Albus Medici, transforming him into a crimson spear that collided with the flaming spear attacking the poet.

The member of the Iron and Blood Cross Order transformed into a crimson spear and flew out with a whoosh, colliding with the flaming spear that had attacked the poet.

With a resounding crash, the two flaming spears disintegrated, revealing Albus Medici and the colossal black spider with a withered heart.

The spider emitted a high-frequency squeak, raising its body and swinging its four thick-furred limbs, resembling scythes that flickered with a cold light, at Albus Medici.

At the same time, a nearly white-hot spear flew and struck the side of the black spider, incinerating its hard shell and piercing through it.

It was Elros Einhorn. She seemed prepared and quietly shifted her position, waiting for the colossal black spider to appear.

In the next moment, agile crimson Fire Ravens followed different trajectories, rushing into the wound created by the burning-white spear.

Rumble!

The fiery explosion within the colossal black spider's body created a chaotic storm of flames, tearing at its outer carapace and flesh.

Lumian didn't hold back his impressive abilities.

He had started condensing the Fire Raven the moment Albus Medici confronted the assailant.

The colossal black spider's scythe appendages missed Albus, who had seized the opportunity to retreat.

Under the relentless assault, the spider emitted a piercing screech that reverberated within its chitinous shell.

The shriveled, blackened heart behind it suddenly glowed dark red, creating blazing fireballs.

These fireballs formed a net, enveloping the colossal black spider, and shot toward Lumian, Albus, and Elros, leaving crimson trails in their wake.

In contrast, Iraeta, who had been stunned by the superhuman battle, was ignored and unharmed.

Rumble! Rumble! Rumble!

As Lumian and the others dodged the incoming fireballs, one of them shot deep into the hall, dissipating quickly.

Hidden within the fireball, the colossal black spider seized the opportunity to break through Lumian and the others' encirclement and disappear once more.

The crimson flames around them continued to burn. Albus Medici glanced at the dark-red liquid dripping from the heavily injured black spider but didn't immediately pursue it. Instead, he smiled at Lumian and said,

"Nice baiting."

Lumian didn't deny it.

He had asked Poet Iraeta to return to the surface alone to lure out the colossal black spider as bait.

If the spider didn't take the bait, Iraeta would have left the underground palace without any danger. But if the spider planned to hunt an ordinary person alone, Lumian was ready to use Spirit World Traversal and the Spell of Harrumph to protect the target. He aimed to eliminate the creature, suspected to be a potion ingredient, as quickly as possible.

With such an opportunity, he wasn't willing to hold back and hide his trump cards. He wanted to end the battle swiftly to prevent any mishaps.

Unexpectedly, Albus Medici's reaction was quicker than his. Therefore, Lumian stopped in time and switched to Fire Ravens. He intended to observe the black spider's combat style and uncover any secrets it might hold.

Now, Lumian was certain that the colossal black spider was more formidable than a Black Hunting Spider. If it were the latter, it would never have escaped the encirclement of three Hunters; it would have perished from the repeated explosions.

Although it was confirmed that the black spider wasn't equivalent to a Black Hunting Spider, it was undoubtedly from the Hunter pathway. With the corresponding Beyonder powers, the special parts on its body could certainly be used to brew potions.

Lumian turned to Elros and said straightforwardly, "That monster is different from a Black Hunting Spider. There's a human-like heart on its back. What's going on?"

Elros gazed at the dark-red blood dripping into the hall's shadows, pondering for a moment.

"I've never seen such a Beyonder creature before."

She paused for a moment before continuing, "All I know is that if the owner of Red Swan Castle and many core members of the Sauron family don't go mad and venture into the depths of the underground palace without returning, someone will extract their heart and send it somewhere in the underground palace."

Upon hearing this, Lumian suddenly recalled a scene he had dreamt of due to the lingering effects of the King's Pie game.

In a bronze coffin surrounded by countless white candles, a hand with dark-red, almost black blood vessels extended, holding a shriveled, withered, black heart with some blood seeping out.

What the f*ck is the Sauron family up to? Lumian couldn't help but curse inwardly.

What lay in the depths of this underground palace, and how many mutated monsters lurked within?

At that moment, Poet Iraeta finally snapped out of his daze. He looked at Lumian and the others in shock, fear, and excitement.

"Are all of you Beyonders capable of using Beyonder powers?"

"You know about Beyonders too?" Albus Medici wore an expression that suggested he wasn't worthy of knowing.

As Iraeta approached Lumian, he quickly explained, "Seven or eight years ago, I went to a battlefield to gather material and saw something. I knew that there were many people in our army who could use superpowers. They were called Beyonders."

"We do have superpowers, and they look quite similar," Lumian said with a smile, glancing around. "Do you want to follow us deeper or return to the surface yourself?"

Iraeta didn't hide his fear and muttered, "Of course, I'll follow you. Although it's very likely that I'll encounter the large spider again, it's better than walking alone in the darkness with unknown monsters lurking around.

"I don't want the last poem of my life to be 'Oh, foolish Iraeta.'"

Lumian pondered for a few seconds and calmly said, "If you wish to return to the surface, I can escort you to the entrance of the underground palace."

"Then I'll definitely choose to return!" Iraeta changed his mind without hesitation.

Lumian then turned to Albus and Elros and asked, "Do you want to join me, wait here, or venture deeper by yourselves?"

Albus Medici gave Lumian a deep look and sneered.

"I didn't expect you to be such a moral person. You can escort this poet with a dubious reputation yourself."

His implication was clear: "You must have ulterior motives for escorting someone out, considering your lack of morals."

He didn't specify if he intended to stay or venture in alone.

"I'm with Albus," Elros, who stood by Albus, replied with a smile, holding the carbide lamp.

Lumian observed the dark-red blood droplets left by the black spider and proceeded to ascend the stone steps with Iraeta, using the carbide lamp for illumination.

In the pitch-black and silent underground, they returned to the corridor where the wax statue artisan and the iron soldiers were.

Poet Iraeta glanced back at the deep darkness below and said to his sponsor, "Those two shouldn't be simple."

"I know," Lumian replied nonchalantly.

Holding the carbide lamp that emitted a yellowish glow, he advanced at a moderate pace.

Iraeta walked closely beside him and continued in his usual tone, "The war between the Loen Kingdom and the Feysac Empire ended over seven years ago. But Miss Elros mentioned that her father died in the war six years ago. If I recall correctly, it was likely due to dissatisfaction with the Feysac

Empire's losing treaty, leading to a rebellion. This was a civil war in the Feysac Empire. Why did Miss Elros mention the Loen Kingdom?

"Is her father a representative of the extreme faction or a member of the royal family who perished in the rebellion?"

A member of the royal family who rebelled? Is that why they fled to Trier? Lumian considered the information provided by the political enthusiast, Iraeta.

Iraeta glanced at his sponsor and continued, "Actually, before today, I saw Albus Medici elsewhere."

Lumian's curiosity was piqued as he asked, "Where?"

Iraeta glanced around and lowered his voice.

"Sacred Heart Cloister."

Chapter 428: Incineration

Sacred Heart Cloister? The largest cloister in Trier's Eternal Blazing Sun Church? Why did Albus Medici go there? Could he be an undercover agent sent by the Purifier into the Iron and Blood Cross Order? Or did Gardner Martin instruct him to keep an eye on the Sacred Heart Cloister? Lumian's mind raced with questions and guesses.

As he advanced, clutching a carbide lamp, Iraeta hastily interjected with more information.

"I have a friend at the Sacred Heart Cloister. I often go there to drink with him."

Lumian, momentarily diverting his focus from Albus Medici, jested, "Can the cloister monks drink?"

The two moved through the shadowy passageway, guided solely by the yellowish glow of the carbide lamp.

Iraeta rambled, "Of course they can, but they can't partake in liquor or get inebriated. The wine brewed by the Sacred Heart Cloister is the finest I've ever tasted."

"Is your friend a monk?" Lumian walked at a moderate pace, his footsteps echoing through the seemingly endless passageway.

Iraeta appeared content conversing with Ciel and didn't hide anything.

"Yes, he's a member of the Brotherhood Minor and served as my nephew's baptism priest. Later, he could no longer tolerate the cathedral's clergy indulging in pleasures and chose to become a monk. He joined the Sacred Heart Cloister and is currently overseeing the brewery."

A member of the Brotherhood Minor, champions of temperance and asceticism… Lumian deduced this and redirected their conversation.

"How often have you and your friend seen Albus Medici? What was the reason for his visit to the Sacred Heart Cloister?"

"Just once," Iraeta muttered. "I don't concern myself with such matters. There are no nuns there. When I saw him, he was walking through the corridor with a monk and entered the rear of the cloister."

It appears that Albus Medici had not entered covertly or with fear of discovery… Lumian deduced this from Iraeta's account.

Amidst Poet Iraeta's relentless search for topics, the two of them finally passed through the eerie wax statue room, leaving behind the hall with the enigmatic doors of Hope, Madness, and Death. They retraced their steps to the underground palace.

Iraeta let out a long sigh of relief and relaxed. He grumbled, "The underground palace is so dangerous, and there are creatures with supernatural abilities. Poufer truly led us into an adventure down here!

"Is he attempting to get us killed?"

You've all been corrupted by the King's Pie game many times. I wonder if you're truly alive… Lumian refrained from a direct response to Iraeta's grievances, opting for a playful smile as he remarked,

"It seems that the more frightened and tense you are, the more you like to talk."

"That's what makes me feel alive," Iraeta confessed. He extinguished the carbide lamp as they exited the underground palace via the spiral staircase.

Lumian turned back, retracing his steps to the Door of Madness.

He hadn't closed the door when he left. Even though he hadn't approached yet, the yellowish light from the carbide lamp made the wax statues appear faintly, as if they were waiting in the darkness.

Lumian stopped at the door, slowly bent down, and placed the carbide lamp on the ground in front of him.

Then, he straightened up and swept his gaze across the wax statues' faces, their expressions frozen in agony and shrouded in shadows.

Crimson Fire Ravens began to materialize around him, one after another.

Since Count Poufer had shown ill intent by leading them into the perilous depths of the underground palace—any ordinary person would already have died—there was no reason to show any courtesy to a member of the Sauron family, the owner of Red Swan Castle!

Lumian's plan was straightforward: to set the wax statues ablaze. This had several purposes. First, it might assist in digesting his potion. Second, it could preemptively eliminate potential threats, preventing the wax statues from coming to life and attacking at a critical moment. Lastly, it could create a chaotic situation that would disrupt Count Poufer's secret plan, sowing doubt and confusion for their further exploration.

Chaos often created opportunities.

Swoosh! Swoosh! Swoosh! With a swift motion, he released a flurry of Crimson Fire Ravens that darted towards the wax statues.

After dispatching two batches of Fire Ravens, Lumian dropped to one knee, pressing his hands to the ground.

From his palms, fiery serpents slithered out, winding their way through the pile of wax statues and swiftly igniting them.

A cacophony of explosions followed as the wax statues' heads burst, and their lower extremities were engulfed in flames, creating a cage of crimson fire.

The flesh-white wax that composed their bodies melted rapidly, turning into liquid droplets or softening and crumbling away, rendering them fragile under the dual onslaught of explosion and combustion.

Smack!

The "muscles" on one of the wax statues completely disintegrated, revealing a new face.

It was a human face!

It was a male human who had lost his eyes and died long ago, his face filled with pain!

Silently, more wax statues softened and crumbled.

Without exception, there was a human corpse inside every one of them.

Among the corpses encased in the wax statues were men and women, some with exposed flesh and skin, others with heads and bodies that appeared to have been crudely stitched together after death. Some had open stomachs, their intestines tangled and filled with white wax, creating a grotesque sight…

What all of them had in common was the haunting expression of pain etched across their faces, as if they had lived through unspeakable horrors or had been trapped in the darkest of nightmares.

As Lumian observed, the melted wax transformed into a viscous liquid that oozed from the faces of the deceased humans. It was as if these tortured souls were weeping tears of relief as they faced the purifying embrace of the flames.

Inside the statues are actually real people… Lumian, who had his fair share of horrifying scenes, couldn't help but tense up, instinctively feeling repulsed and afraid.

He finally knew where the ordinary people from Red Swan Castle who had gone mad and mutilated themselves in his nightmares had gone.

Lumian rose to his feet, clutching the carbide lamp. Crimson flames erupted from his body, transforming into blazing meteors that streaked to every corner of the wax statue-filled chamber, turning it into an inferno.

The flesh-white wax began to burn fervently, feeding upon itself until there was no space left for the fire to consume.

Lumian's eyes reflected the crimson conflagration and the viscous wax tears on his pale face.

He didn't avert his gaze but watched intently.

At that moment, he gained a newfound understanding of his pyromaniac abilities. The once-vague third acting principle became clear.

The Pyromaniac wreaked havoc and caused utter catastrophe!

As for Pyromaniacs, they could willingly unleash disaster and destruction upon anyone.

Lumian fervently wished that the heretics and those who had gone "mad" and could only harm others would be engulfed by the flames!

Having amalgamated his various acts into this principle, Lumian had an uncommonly clear sense that his Pyromaniac potion had been entirely digested. He could even hear an imaginary shattering sound.

With a series of thuds, the lifeless bodies, stripped of their wax support, fell one by one to the ground. They piled up and burned even more fiercely.

All of a sudden, the wooden door creaked open from the exit opposite the wax statue's chamber.

The wax statue artisan, his thick beard and hair resembling a humanoid lion, stood before Lumian.

His iron-black eyes were tinged crimson by the flames that surged toward the ceiling. His voice sounded ethereal as he inquired, "Why… did you… set my wax statues ablaze?"

Lumian didn't answer; instead, he activated the black mark on his right shoulder.

Spirit World Traversal!

A spectral light flickered within his clothing, and his form swiftly materialized next to the wax statue artisan.

Almost simultaneously, Lumian parted his lips.

"Ha!"

A pale-yellow, gaseous light shot out of his mouth and struck the wax statue artisan's head.

The wax statue artisan, clad in a grayish-black robe, swayed visibly, as if momentarily losing his balance. He didn't lose consciousness completely; it was more like he had undergone a Psychic Piercing and was in a state of shock induced by the pain.

Lumian didn't rely solely on the Spell of Harrumph. He raised his prepared left palm and hurled a crimson fireball, tightly compressed in layers, into the wax statue artisan's mouth and nose with Fire Infusion.

The fireball, gradually turning white in color, whooshed into the target's mouth and nostrils, invading his brain.

Boom!

The blazing white fireball exploded from the inside out while Lumian watched as the wax statue artisan's head expanded rapidly before exploding.

Flaming flesh and blood spurted out. Lumian, already prepared, shielded his face with the carbide lamp in his right hand, leaving the back of his hand stained with blood.

With a thud, the wax statue artisan, with only a small half of his head remaining, swayed and collapsed to the ground.

Lumian, who had meticulously prepared a sequence of attacks, found himself momentarily taken aback. He hadn't expected the situation to resolve so effortlessly.

He had foreseen that the enigmatic wax statue artisan might pose a formidable challenge, and he had readied himself to "teleport" instantly if things took a turn for the worse.

It was worth noting that the wax statue that had reanimated previously had been more formidable than the wax statue artisan himself. Merely being in its presence had weighed heavily on Lumian's body and mind, almost rendering him incapable of resistance.

Did he possess the unique ability to create these wax statues, but lacked inherent power? Or did he need to draw strength from the Sauron family's underground palace to bring these menacing wax figures to life? Perhaps my attack was too swift, leaving him no time to react. He perished on the spot before he could tap into any external strength? Lumian gazed down at the wax statue artisan and assessed the situation.

…

In the depths of the underground palace, within a hall adorned with white candles,

Poufer Sauron, seated in a corner, abruptly opened his eyes and fixed his gaze upon the bronze coffin situated in the center of the chamber.

Around the coffin, numerous candles strangely extinguished without warning.

Wh— Poufer rose to his feet, his expression slightly twisted in consternation.

…

At the exit of the wax statue chamber, Lumian witnessed a crimson radiance emanating from the wax statue artisan's body.

Initially, the luminescence surged towards the head, but only a small fragment of the wax statue artisan's head remained. Consequently, it shifted to his chest, yet it couldn't dissipate.

Lumian felt a tinge of surprise. He tore open the grayish-black robe of the wax statue master, unveiling his chest.

There lay a sinister, pitch-black wound, and the space where his heart should have resided was hollow!

The heart is missing… Elros had mentioned that the Sauron family members' hearts had to be sent deep into the underground palace… Lumian vaguely grasped the reason behind the wax statue artisan's formidable yet fragile nature.

Ultimately, the crimson light coalesced into an ethereal entity with myriad gullies, resembling a shrunken blood-colored brain.

Unsure of its significance, Lumian stashed it away and made his exit.

The flames in the room continued to burn, but for some unknown reason, they failed to spread.

…

In the stone pillar hall where the confrontation with the black spider had transpired.

Albus and Elros observed as Lumian returned, carrying a carbide lamp that emitted a faint yellowish glow.

Almost simultaneously, they noticed the specks of blood on Lumian's body.

"Did you kill the poet?" Albus asked, amused.

Lumian shook his head and replied calmly, "I killed the one making the wax statues."

Chapter 429: Orders

Upon hearing Lumian's response, Albus's eyes widened slightly, and his eyebrows twitched.

Elros's mouth hung open as if something was stuck in her throat.

She quickly smiled and scrutinized Lumian's face with a meaningful gaze.

At that moment, Albus returned to normal and gazed at Lumian. He clicked his tongue and said, "You're really ruthless. You even went back and killed the wax statue guy."

"I had no choice. He stopped me from burning the wax statues," Lumian said with a gentle smile.

Albus's eyebrows twitched again.

"Did you really burn them?"

"Of course," Lumian shared his findings sincerely. "The wax statues' surfaces melted and peeled away to reveal human corpses."

Albus wasn't surprised at all. He applauded and smiled mockingly.

"Well done! I must praise your courage."

It's as if he's saying that I'm ignorant and fearless… Lumian didn't believe that Albus was really praising him.

Elros maintained her smile and spoke as though a bystander, "The Sauron family isn't the only one in Red Swan Castle who's gone mad. The butler, guards, valets, and maids have also gone mad. Their deaths after mutilation are terrifying. It's not suitable for their families and the public to know. They can only report their disappearance and compensate them a large sum of money."

Even so, they can still recruit new servants… Is it because the salary is high, or is the matter kept under wraps? Will they only choose foreigners who have just arrived in Trier and don't know anything? Lumian knew that ancient families like Sauron had servants who served them for generations, but their numbers were already limited.

"Shall we continue forward?" Elros inquired.

"Of course." Lumian still wanted to track down the severely injured black spider and extract the Beyonder characteristic it would produce to study the withered, black heart.

Albus Medici answered with his actions and walked deeper into the hall.

Under the yellowish glow of the carbide lamp, the darkness gradually receded, revealing the drops of dark-red blood flowing from the mutated giant spider.

As he advanced, he casually asked Elros, "Who's responsible for sending the extracted hearts into the depths of the underground palace?"

"Just because members of the Sauron family go mad and disappear into the depths of the underground palace doesn't mean that ordinary members of the Sauron family can't enter. In particular, the successor of Red Swan Castle often goes to certain rooms and halls in the underground maze. It begins the first time Poufer becomes king while playing King's Pie."

Influenced by the frenzied and violent spirit? Lumian recalled the invisible entity that had circled above his head after winning the King's Pie game while not daring to descend due to the Blood Emperor's aura.

Soon, the trio reached the end of the hall. Through an open wooden door, they followed a corridor with numerous reliefs of soldiers engraved on both sides and a few storage rooms.

The yellowish light shone further, first outlining the outline of a wooden door, then a figure.

The figure wore a light-colored formal suit and had curly black hair. He had a slightly mean appearance and was clearly a participant in this gathering. He was Ernst Young, the critic assigned to Count Poufer's team.

"Are you lost?" Albus Medici greeted him "enthusiastically."

Ernst Young held a carbide lamp that no longer emitted any light and smiled bitterly.

"We had already split up, and each believed we could find the Count's crown. But before I could search carefully, the carbide lamp suddenly went off. I had no choice but to return in the dark and search for a room with a bell rope."

"How unlucky." Albus sighed exaggeratedly for Ernst Young.

He had already reached the open door and stood beside Ernst Young.

Suddenly, crimson fireballs shot out from his free left hand, landing beside the critic and creating a blazing circle of flames.

"W-what are you doing?" Ernst Young asked in surprise.

Albus replied with a smile, "I'm here to help you illuminate the area. Isn't it very bright now?"

Ernst Young fell silent, crimson flames dancing on his face.

He's not surprised that Albus can create flames and possesses superpowers… Lumian had sensed that there was something amiss with Ernst Young when he saw him, like a troublemaker sent by Poufer Sauron. However, saying that something was amiss was an understatement; he was entirely abnormal.

Flames raged, and the temperature around Ernst Young soared.

Lumian glanced over and noticed a strange softening on the critic's face.

A viscous, wax-like liquid seeped out of Ernst Young's skin.

As Lumian's forehead throbbed, Albus extended his hands, leaned forward, and pushed open the wooden door.

Amidst the creaking sounds, the scene behind the door was tainted with a yellowish glow.

Coffins of varying sizes had been chiseled into the walls. Chains hung from the ceiling, and coffins of various colors dangled from them. The ground was filled with countless coffins, with only narrow gaps for people to pass through.

At that moment, Ernst Young raised his hands, his eyes empty, and tore at his face.

The half-waxed, half-real skin was torn off, revealing bloody flesh and dark-blue—nearly black—blood vessels.

A potent scent of blood and burning wax permeated the air, causing all the coffins in the hall to tremble simultaneously.

Bang! Bang! Bang! The coffin lids of various colors opened one after another, and black giant spiders with compound eyes, lush bristles, and withered hearts inlaid crawled out.

Rustling sounds filled the air as the giant black spiders covered almost every corner of the hall.

Aiming at Lumian and the others, they extended their mouths and quickly condensed a crimson fireball that was nearly white.

Numerous fireballs flew out, as if a volley had been fired from an artillery battery.

Whether it was Lumian, Albus, or Elros, they all lunged to the side of the corridor, avoiding the location facing the hall.

Rumble! Rumble!

The entire corridor was engulfed in flames, ravaged by the shockwaves. The walls on both sides showed signs of collapse.

Lumian's target was an empty storage room to the side, successfully evading the violent bombardment.

Elros was the same. Only Albus used Ernst Young as a cover.

Amidst the incessant explosions, the critic, who had lost most of his face, shattered into pieces. Flesh and blood splattered, and some parts of his body melted like candles.

The rustling sound resounded once more, and the innumerable black spiders seemed to surge out of the hall.

Lumian's scalp tingled as he listened. His first instinct was to quickly "teleport" away.

In the face of such mutated black spiders, he had no problem dealing with one or two. Two was a bit of a stretch, but three meant he had to consider retreating. And now, there were dozens of them!

Son of a sow! There are so many of you. What do you usually eat to survive? Just air? Lumian cursed inwardly as he activated the black mark on his right shoulder to use Spirit World Traversal.

Suddenly, he heard a nearly ethereal female voice.

The voice quickly became clearer. It belonged to Elros Einhorn.

Then, the girl's voice in Hermes reverberated.

"I command you, in the name of the Sauron family bloodline.

"Leave this area!"

The rustling stopped abruptly, and the entire area fell into an indescribable silence.

After a few seconds, the rapid crawling sounds of arthropods echoed again, but they spread in all directions.

Lumian ceased his attempts to use Spirit World Traversal and cast his gaze towards the corridor beyond.

The flames gradually extinguished, and no black spiders appeared.

Lumian left the side storage room in thought and saw that all the coffins in the hall ahead were open, but there was no sign of the giant black spiders.

Elros, dressed in a light-colored dress, stood in the corridor, her right hand clenched tightly, her left palm hanging low. Her aura seemed slightly different from before, as if the commander-in-chief of an army had arrived before her loyal soldiers, naturally displaying an alluring charm that made people submit to her.

Clap! Clap! Clap! Albus Medici stood up from behind the crumbled Ernst Young, clutching a lamp.

He smiled mockingly and said, "Aren't you an Einhorn? Why are you using the Sauron family's name?"

Elros cast a cold glance at the Iron and Blood Cross Order member, causing him to subconsciously shut his mouth.

"I have half of the Sauron bloodline." Elros turned to Lumian and smiled again. "Do you want to continue?"

"Of course!" Albus Medici was the first to respond.

Lumian cracked his neck and smiled. "The game isn't over yet."

Although he had the urge to escape the underground maze, the more he wanted to succumb to his urges, the more he couldn't show it.

His experience and Aurore's teachings had taught him not to let others guess his true thoughts under such circumstances.

The aura around Elros that made people involuntary submissive gradually dissipated, and she returned to her obedient state.

Lumian and Albus entered the hall ahead side by side and saw that the wooden coffins of various colors were empty. The corpses that should have existed looked like they had been eaten by the giant black spiders.

Just as he was about to pass through the mass tomb, Lumian spotted a massive black spider sprawled in a corner. Its side was hideously torn, and dark-red blood continued to flow.

This was the Beyonder creature that had previously fought the three Hunters. Due to its severe injuries, it couldn't leave the tomb according to Elros's "orders." It could only stay where it was and "lick" its wounds.

Upon seeing Lumian and the others, the giant black spider half-raised its body and let out a threatening squeak.

Glancing at the shriveled heart on the black spider's back, Lumian casually smiled and said, "It's mine, and the rest of the spoils of war are yours. How does that sound?"

Albus Medici chuckled. "Is that all you eye? Only you care about such things."

Elros's lips curled into a faint smile. "I have no problem with that, but since it's your spoils of war, you can retrieve it yourself. I won't provide any assistance."

"I like that. You can occasionally say something nice," Albus praised Elros before casting his gaze at Lumian.

The two Hunters, a man and a woman, appeared to be waiting to "appreciate" Lumian's performance.

The colossal black spider had suffered severe injuries but had clearly not lost its ability to fight!

Chapter 430: "Reckless"

Sensing Albus and Elros's gazes, Lumian cautiously approached the injured black spider with the carbide lamp in hand.

As a Hunter, he had a clear grasp of his two teammates' current mindsets.

It was akin to navigating a dark forest. Everyone assumed the role of the hunter, but the moment one revealed their vulnerability, they became the hunted, vulnerable to collective assault.

Albus and Elros desired insights into Lumian's condition and capabilities.

They harbored doubts that Lumian could easily dispatch the wax statue artisan, believing he must have paid a significant price. Moreover, they aimed to decipher the precise Sequence of the previous winner of the King's Pie game and the mystical items he carried.

Lumian had no qualms about eliminating the severely injured black spider, but he was reluctant to unveil his trump cards—Spirit World Traversal and the Spell of Harrumph—to Albus and Elros.

As he closed in on the black spider, his thoughts raced, pondering the most efficient strategy that would incur minimal cost and time, making the task as straightforward as possible.

Lumian's gaze swept from the torn-open side of the black spider, which remained trapped in the hall like its kin, dark-red blood oozing out. With his left hand, he casually retrieved a silver earring from his pocket and fastened it to his left earlobe.

Lie!

Having fully digested the Pyromaniac potion, Lumian's emotions steadied. He could now covertly wield the Flog boxing gloves and employ Lie.

Crimson flaming ravens materialized around him.

Almost simultaneously, the colossal black spider reacted. The shriveled heart within it emitted a dark-red glow, conjuring a plethora of menacing fireballs, as if weaving a protective crimson net.

Swoosh! Swoosh! Swoosh! The Fire Ravens encircling Lumian shot out, each following a distinct trajectory towards their respective targets.

Over a hundred crimson fireballs erupted from the black spider's form, hurtling forward with menacing howls.

Rumble!

In an instant, some Fire Ravens were intercepted by the fireballs, while others detonated them, setting off a series of explosions around the black spider, causing flames to erupt one after another.

At that precise moment, a brilliant fireball streaked towards the hall's exit.

Lumian had been awaiting this opening. He raised his left hand and snapped his fingers.

With a resounding crash, the bright fireball lost its trajectory and plummeted to the ground.

Instead of detonating, flames billowed upward, revealing the black spider's figure.

Lumian charged forward, his left hand ablaze with crimson flames.

They coiled, layer upon layer, compressing until they almost turned white.

Upon reaching the black spider's side, which lay stunned from the impact, Lumian leaned in and swung his left arm, pressing the blazing white fireball against the grotesque laceration, allowing it to penetrate the creature's body.

Amid the frantic thrashing of its limbs, the black spider barely managed to turn around. Lumian had already capitalized on the moment to lean back and roll, increasing the distance between them.

His form materialized beside the crimson sea created by the Fire Ravens and the fireball, distancing himself from the creature's violent aura.

Boom!

The white-hot fireball detonated within the black spider's body. The incineration might not have been visually apparent, but the swift expansion of gas tore through the Beyonder creature entirely, ejecting its chitinous shell along with its flesh.

The colossal black spider emitted a spine-chilling screech as its eight hairy legs frantically recoiled.

Lumian wasted no time, preventing it from regaining its composure. He condensed a crimson spear that gleamed nearly white and hurled it toward the creature.

The flaming spear soared through the air, piercing the gaping wound and pinning the giant black spider to the ground.

The spear disintegrated, setting its insides ablaze. The black spider writhed a few times before falling silent.

Lumian didn't rush to approach his fallen foe. He turned to Albus and Elros. With a smile, he removed Lie and said, "It's settled."

As he spoke, he summoned dozens of crimson Fire Ravens and sent them swooping toward the seemingly lifeless black spider.

Boom!

The black spider leaped once more, self-destructing.

It had been pretending to be dead!

Unfortunately for it, Lumian had maintained his distance and didn't fall into the trap. He only sacrificed a dozen Fire Ravens.

The remaining crimson Fire Ravens swarmed the battered body of the black spider, restoring "peace" to it.

Upon witnessing this, Albus nodded slowly and grudgingly admitted, "Not bad."

Elros observed thoughtfully, offering no immediate response to Lumian's proclamation.

Lumian turned to the motionless black spider, waiting for an iron-black light to emerge from its body before he approached.

After assessing the black spider's condition, he decided to exploit its severely injured state. Potential weaknesses included a probable decrease in Flame Controlling ability and agility. Therefore, he activated Lie and harnessed its Flame Controlling attributes to match his own speed and agility.

The iron-black light didn't converge on the black spider's compound eye as Lumian had anticipated. Instead, it flowed into the shriveled, blackened heart embedded in its back like a stream.

Lumian halted beside his prey, puzzled by the unfolding scene. After the Beyonder characteristic seeped out, he decided to collect it before drawing any conclusions. He carefully removed the shriveled heart, black compound eyes, and poison glands from the mouth, stashing them in separate concealed bags and metal canisters.

"Don't tell me you're merely a Pyromaniac and haven't advanced to become a Conspirer?" Albus taunted.

You know perfectly well that I only recently became a Pyromaniac when I joined the Iron and Blood Cross Order… Lumian grumbled inwardly. He straightened up and offered a smile.

"That's correct. I'm still just a Pyromaniac."

"Pyromaniacs aren't capable of taking down the wax statue artisan…" Elros mumbled softly.

Albus's gaze briefly flickered towards Lumian's pocket where Lie was concealed, but he said nothing more.

See, I'm speaking the truth. If you doubt me and suspect otherwise, there's little I can do… Lumian chuckled, picked up the carbide lamp, and led the way to the exit of the hall.

After traversing another dark corridor, they arrived in a dimly lit room.

Within the yellowish light, iron-clad soldiers donned in blue coats adorned with golden threads came into view.

Unlike children's toys, each one stood nearly two meters tall. The spears they held glinted with a frigid gleam and appeared exceptionally sharp.

"If they were to come to life, it'd be an entire army," Albus remarked with a hint of significance.

Army, soldiers… Lumian suddenly recollected the desire for submission in the King's Pie game. He remembered the wax statue's actions when it attacked him and the evident hierarchy within the Iron and Blood Cross Order—Brigade Commander, Deputy Brigade Commander, Commanding Officer, NCO, and Soldier.

In the midst of his musings, Lumian made an educated guess.

Could the higher ranks of the Hunter pathway involve the military, obedience, and regimentation?

The wax statues resemble soldiers awaiting commands, as do these iron automata. Could a high-Sequence Beyonder of the Hunter pathway possess the ability to create specialized soldiers?

The underground palace of Red Swan Castle is indeed teeming with the essence of the Hunter pathway. It's no wonder I encounter creatures from this pathway so frequently…

This meant that Lumian didn't have to search. He merely needed to engage in combat to secure the corresponding rewards.

What a perilous hunting ground, one that could potentially make me the prey, yet offers substantial gains! He sighed deeply.

Lumian observed as Albus Medici summoned layers of compressed white fireballs and casually sent them gliding across the room.

The fireballs didn't detonate; they hovered silently over the ground, resting on the shoulders and hats of the iron soldiers.

After the trio departed the room, Albus transferred the carbide lamp to his left hand, raised his right palm, and snapped his fingers, emulating Lumian.

Rumble! Rumble! Rumble!

In the room behind them, the white-hot fireballs ignited one after another, setting each other ablaze and causing the ground to quiver slightly.

Delayed Explosion!

One of Pyromaniac's abilities, Delayed Explosion!

Despite the fact that the iron soldiers in the room were constructed of metal, they either lost their limbs or internal components under the formidable shockwave. Some were even buried beneath stone bricks as a result of the collapsed wall.

Noticing Lumian's gaze, Albus wore a satisfied smile.

"To eliminate concealed threats, just like how you handled those wax statues."

"I thought you wouldn't dare," Lumian replied with a grin.

Upon witnessing Albus's actions, Lumian discerned his intentions. He was taken aback that Red Swan Castle's underground palace appeared to possess a form of self-defense mechanism. No matter how potent the explosions or flames, their effects were confined to a single room, preventing spillover.

Indeed, without such protective measures, Red Swan Castle would have likely crumbled long ago, given the rampant monsters dwelling within… Lumian observed another descending corridor ahead.

At the corridor's terminus stood a pair of hefty iron doors, the dark surface marred by large splotches of red, as if someone had splattered blood on them.

Elros took a deep breath and moved ahead of Lumian and Albus.

She reached the door, carefully set down the carbide lamp, extended her hands, leaned forward, and exerted force.

Amidst a grating sound, the iron-black door slowly swung open.

Lumian's eyelids twitched when he beheld a vast expanse of candlelight.

The bronze coffin from his nightmare was starkly reflected in his vision.

At that moment, nearly a third of the white candles surrounding the coffin had been snuffed out, while a substantial portion still burned brightly.

In the flickering candlelight, the door creaked open. Lumian rapidly surveyed the area but found no other individuals present.

The three Hunters remained rooted by the door for over ten seconds.

Finally, Albus Medici turned his head and tauntingly asked, "Why aren't you guys going in?"

"Why did you stop too?" Elros Einhorn inquired instead of responding.

"We're waiting for you to take the lead," Lumian replied with a casual grin.

This hall was rife with danger and concealed profound secrets. Naturally, he wanted others to scout the path first!

Lumian realized he wasn't alone in thinking this. Albus and Elros shared similar sentiments.

Albus withdrew his gaze and let out a soft chuckle.

"Since you're all cowards, I'll have to do it myself."

With that, he abruptly dropped to one knee and placed his hands on the ground.

Silently, two crimson fire serpents darted toward the bronze coffin.

Hey! Lumian's eyes narrowed. He hadn't anticipated Albus would act so recklessly.

Assaulting the most problematic element without conducting any investigation?

Elros's expression froze as she instinctively extended her right hand, as if attempting to halt Albus.

Chapter 431: Three Hunters, One Stage

Elros extended her right palm and unleashed a crimson fireball.

The fireball streaked in front of the two fiery serpents and collided with the ground.

Amidst the rumbling, it engulfed the flaming serpents in its own explosion, halting their advance toward the bronze coffin.

Without further ado, Albus picked up the carbide lamp and rose to his feet.

He glanced at Elros and grinned.

"So you do know something?"

Albus then taunted Lumian,"You're in the dark here."

Dammit! If it weren't for this inappropriate setting, I'd go head to head with you… Only now did Lumian realize that Albus's recklessness had been a test and a trap.

"This is the Red Swan Castle of the Sauron family," Elros replied, not directly addressing Albus but stating a simple fact.

She was implying that she had the Sauron family's bloodline and had resided in Red Swan Castle for nearly six years. It was only natural for her to possess knowledge.

Albus shifted his gaze to the white candles, their flames nearly one-third extinguished, as if he hadn't heard Elros. He asked straightforwardly, "What are you doing in the depths of this underground palace? If you don't share, how can we cooperate and assist you?"

Elros looked at the bronze coffin and unexpectedly turned to Lumian, "I wish to explore this forbidden area, known as the family's secret ground. Only a few are allowed inside to discover if the curse in our blood is connected to this place."

"You're an Einhorn. Do you genuinely consider yourself a Sauron family member?" Albus Medici taunted the lady.

This was both a dig at Elros for concealing the complete truth and an effort to sow discord between her and the Sauron family, making her aware of her place. So, there's no need to help the Sauron family conceal those secrets? Lumian discerned a double meaning in Albus's words.

This made him suspect that the other party might already be a Conspirer. His unlikable demeanor might be a disguised trap.

Unfazed, Elros sighed and said, "I bear half of the Sauron family's bloodline and am also a Hunter. I too will be haunted by that curse."

At this point, she turned her gaze towards Albus Medici and inquired, "What brings you to the depths of the underground palace? Don't tell me you're truly here to indulge in my naive cousin's childish games?"

Albus responded in a half-sigh, half-sincere tone, "It's time for the Sauron family's curse to come to an end.

"And to break this curse, we must first fathom the essence and origin of this curse."

"Is that so?" Elros no longer displayed the same obedience and restraint.

Albus chuckled.

"You misunderstand. This is what we call the highest level of love, compassion, and benevolence. There are no limits, and I embody that."

I'd be a fool to take your word for it… Nevertheless, a true Conspirer doesn't just tell lies. They always reveal partial truths or even the whole truth. It's just that they omit the crucial parts… What was the truth in Albus Medici's response? Could it be that he genuinely wishes to help the Sauron family break the curse? If Elros were to say so, I'd believe her. How can an outsider like him, with no ties to the Sauron family, possess such kindness… Could it be a byproduct of pursuing his true objective? Lumian listened silently, dissecting the responses of his two "companions."

He didn't completely trust Elros either, suspecting that she was only revealing part of the truth.

Her abrupt change in demeanor and her command over the giant black spiders didn't seem like something a young girl living in her grandfather's house would be capable of.

Elros and Albus evaluated Lumian's explanation with identical, almost mocking smiles. Then, they both turned to him and asked in unison, "Why did you venture into the depths of the underground palace?"

"Me?" Lumian pointed at himself with his free left hand and responded honestly, "Someone entrusted me with investigating the Sauron family's decline and provided me with something."

The "someone" referred to Gardner Martin, and the "something" pertained to the dangerous corruption at 13 Avenue du Marché, although Lumian didn't disclose whether he had accepted it.

Albus smiled, acknowledging the lie while being aware of Lumian's "true identity."

Elros's eyes flickered, swiftly assessing which parts of Lumian's words were true and which were lies or incomplete.

After a moment of silence, Lumian sighed and chided both Albus and Elros.

"You Hunters, despite all you've said, not a single one of you took a step forward!"

The three of them remained at the door, waiting for one another to step into the minefield.

"Talking to you guys is a waste of time." Albus sighed.

Nevertheless, he refrained from advancing. He clicked his tongue and added, "If only a Beyonder of the Sailor pathway were here at a time like this."

"Don't assume that Beyonders of the Sailor pathway are impulsive, reckless, and impatient. The potion may have an effect, but a person's character and experience are the most critical factors determining their actions. If you rely on such stereotypes for Beyonders of the Sailor pathway in the future, you may find yourself turned into a characteristic," Elros mocked Albus.

Lumian abstained from joining their debate and asked contemplatively, "If we hadn't chosen the middle path and the Door of Madness, would we still be here?"

"Yes, but some rooms are even more dangerous," Elros replied, her gaze fixed on the hall's surroundings.

Lumian nodded and asked, "Will we encounter demigod-level monsters?"

"Most of the demigod-level Beyonder characteristics have been retrieved. Many below the demigod level still linger in the underground palace, turning this place into a restricted hunting ground for members of the Sauron family seeking to improve themselves." Elros didn't seem inclined to conceal anything for the Sauron family.

Most of them have been retrieved… Does that mean some are still hidden in the depths of the underground palace? Did this coincide with the complete disappearance of some core members? Do the Sauron family not want to retrieve them, or are they incapable of doing so?

Indeed, Elros's description aligns with the Sauron family's current situation. There aren't many saint-level demigods, but it's still a substantial number. Many core members are scattered in the military, politics, and business world, holding significant influence… Are they lacking strength at a higher level? There are no angels, only a Grade 0 Sealed Artifact. Or is there just one angel? Lumian glanced around and realized that Elros and Albus remained remarkably patient, as if they had frozen in their spots.

Truth be told, Lumian was tempted to observe the outcomes of Elros and Albus, using their luck to gauge the danger of venturing deeper into the hall within the underground palace. However, given Elros's erratic temperament and the unnerving silence of Termiboros, he abandoned the idea.

Not only was it extremely risky, but it could also mislead him!

At that moment, Lumian suddenly felt a surge of danger.

He swiftly turned, his gaze following the glow of the carbide lamp, and Albus and Elros did the same.

In the diagonal corridor above, a hand with dark-red, almost black blood vessels extended from the darkness, pressing against the wall, illuminated by the faint yellowish glow.

Lumian's eyelids twitched as he recalled the image that had left the most profound mark on his nightmares, a result of the King's Pie game.

In the bronze coffin, surrounded by white candles, a hand with dark-red, nearly black blood vessels suddenly extended, gripping a shriveled, blackened heart, from which blood oozed!

Has the menacing creature from the bronze coffin surfaced? Before Lumian could activate Spirit World Traversal, an intense fear overwhelmed him, as if it wanted him to yield, and he involuntarily bent forward.

Instinctively resisting and struggling, he, along with Albus and Elros, stepped back and entered the hall.

In an instant, an illusion materialized before their eyes.

Lumian "witnessed" the hall enveloped in surreal purple flames, akin to an inferno from myths and legends.

At the heart of the purple flames was the bronze coffin. It had turned transparent, as if it had lost its physical form, revealing an iron-black ring pressing down on it.

The ring was embedded in the ground, with viscous, bottomless blood-colored spring water in its center. In the spring water, shriveled and blackened hearts bobbed up and down.

Bloodlines extended from the iron-black ring. Some wound around the base of the bronze coffin and burrowed into it, while others connected to the white candles.

In the next moment, Lumian heard a frenzied and violent illusory roar, as if emanating from deep underground.

His mind reeled, and he lost consciousness.

…

In the boundless darkness, the bewildered Lumian faintly heard a majestic voice, but the words eluded his understanding.

In his stupor, he strained to discern the voice. Aurore's melodious song and the ethereal flute of the shepherds echoed in his ears.

"I'm the elf of spring…"

As the voices gradually grew more distinct, Lumian sensed searing heat in his right palm.

The intensity of the sensation was almost tangible, accompanied by a burning pain.

Pain… Pain! Lumian snapped out of his fugue and forced his eyes open.

Before him, a crimson fireball blazed, and he found himself encased within a metal framework, his body held upright.

At that moment, a man dressed in black robes, sporting a vivid red beard that made him look like a human-lion hybrid, stood before the metal frame. He held softened candles and pressed them against Lumian's body, one by one.

Without hesitation, Lumian activated the black mark on his right shoulder.

With a ghostly flicker, he vanished from the metal frame, along with a portion of the candles.

Lumian materialized swiftly at the entrance to Red Swan Castle's underground labyrinth.

He hastily scanned the surroundings and breathed a sigh of relief, seeing that everything seemed normal.

Without delay, Lumian brushed the wax from his body and examined his belongings.

To his astonishment, not only were the original mystical items, gold coins, banknotes, and various lotions intact, but even the Beyonder characteristic of the wax figure artisan and the shriveled heart he had obtained in the underground palace remained.

No one searched me? Amid his bewilderment, fragmented memories flitted through his mind.

He recalled scenes of himself walking in silence through the darkness without his carbide lamp.

In those images, his countenance appeared lifeless and rigid, like that of a wax figure.

Eventually, he reached a room and nestled within a metal framework, calmly awaiting the wax figure artisan's transformation.

This doesn't resemble me at all… Lumian rubbed his throbbing head and opted to ascend the stairs, departing the underground labyrinth.

He promptly returned to the first-floor living room, where he found the poet, Iraeta, happily sipping absinthe.

"You're back too?" Iraeta inquired with curiosity.

"Yes," Lumian replied, having regained his composure, as he settled onto the sofa and offered a smile. "I got separated from them."

As he finished speaking, Albus, with his fiery red hair, made his appearance at the living room door.

Chapter 432: Beatdown

Albus was caught off guard when he spotted Lumian comfortably seated on the sofa.

"That was quick."

"You're not slow either," Lumian replied with a "kind" smile.

From his point of view, breaking free from the ethereal, underground roar and not turning into a wax statue indicated that Albus wasn't just an ordinary member of the Iron and Blood Cross Order. Perhaps the sinister corruption at 13 Avenue du Marché was helping him withstand that terrifying roar.

In contrast, Elros Einhorn, with her unique Sauron family bloodline, seemed more likely to emerge unscathed and return safely.

Albus flashed a smile, pulled up a chair, and casually enjoyed some refreshments as though nothing out of the ordinary had occurred. He signaled the servant nearby to replace his tea with a fresh cup of black tea.

After about four to five minutes, both Lumian and Albus simultaneously shifted their attention towards the living room door.

Elros, dressed in a comfortable dress, entered the room.

Seeing Lumian and Albus, she appeared surprised but not shocked. She quickly put on a polite, obedient smile.

Elros resumed her seat, becoming once again the reserved girl staying at her maternal grandfather's house.

Poet Iraeta seemed oblivious to the unusual atmosphere. He sipped his absinthe and discussed poetry writing with Lumian.

Fifteen minutes later, Count Poufer, decked out in a scarlet velvet coat, returned to the living room with Novelist Anori and Painter Mullen.

When Poufer laid eyes on Lumian, the owner of Red Swan Castle was visibly taken aback, nearly losing control of his expression.

He never anticipated encountering Ciel Dubois again, or more accurately, Ciel Dubois in his present state!

Shortly after, Poufer's gaze swept across Albus, Elros, and Iraeta, his face reflecting shock and suspicion as if he had stepped into a surreal dream.

"Ah, Poufer, you're finally back. We had given up on the adventure long ago and decided not to delve deeper into the dark maze." Albus set aside his mille-feuille and warmly welcomed him. "How did it go? Did you manage to locate the Count's crown?"

Instinctively, Poufer shifted his body to prevent Albus, with his hands smeared in pastry flakes, from giving him a hug.

He managed to force a smile and replied, "We had no luck finding it either. When did you get back?"

"Less than half an hour ago." Only then did Albus remember to smack his hands and brush off the pastry crumbs.

Lumian rose from his seat and inquired, "Where's Monsieur Ernst Young?"

Novelist Anori shook his head.

"He got separated from us. I hope he remembers to pull the bell rope and summon the servants to find him."

"That's correct. The servants in this castle know the underground palace better than I do," Poufer remarked, his expression returning to its usual state as he settled into an armchair.

Lumian was eager to return and confirm his discoveries. He glanced at the antique wall clock hanging on the wall and smiled at Poufer.

"I still have some matters to attend to, so I won't be attending the banquet tonight."

Poufer's mind seemed preoccupied, and he didn't press Lumian to stay. He rose once more and escorted Lumian to the living room's exit.

Lumian cast a grateful look at the owner of Red Swan Castle and shook his hand with sincerity.

"Count, thank you for a fantastic afternoon. I thoroughly enjoyed this game. I hope we can play it again."

From the depths of his heart, Lumian wanted to express his gratitude to Poufer Sauron. Not only had he provided an "opportunity" to digest the potion, but he had also "unveiled" the family's hunting grounds, making it easier for Lumian to locate suspected Beyonder creatures related to Conspirers without extensive searching.

How could he not show his appreciation?

Of course, Lumian genuinely desired to eliminate Poufer Sauron. If not for his uniqueness, he would have been turned into a wax statue.

Lumian's sole reason for not launching a direct attack wasn't concern about Sauron family retaliation or fear of spoiling the Iron and Blood Cross Order's plans. Instead, he instinctively believed that even though Poufer Sauron appeared to be an ordinary person or a relatively weak Beyonder with limited knowledge, if Lumian were to confront him, he might well be the one facing danger.

Count Poufer's expression soured as he received the heartfelt gratitude.

Lumian appeared oblivious to this and reiterated his desire to partake in another underground palace adventure game. With that, he turned and exited the living room, leaving Poufer Sauron perplexed and watchful.

After departing from Red Swan Castle and boarding the four-wheeled, four-seater borrowed from Gardner Martin, Lumian's smile faded, replaced by a solemn countenance.

At the conclusion of this underground palace adventure, he had gained a clear understanding of the disparity between his strength and that of higher-level entities. With a mere illusory roar, he lost consciousness and self-control, unable to resist.

Only thanks to Mr. Fool's seal, Termiboros's presence, and the lingering aura of the Blood Emperor Alista Tudor did he manage to escape with his life.

My Sequence is still too low… Lumian sighed inwardly and closed his eyes, reflecting on the adventure's details.

…

Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative, 11 Rue des Fontaines.

Gardner Martin leisurely roamed through the armor and weapons on display in the hall, running his fingers over the metallic textures as Lumian recounted his encounters in the depths of the underground palace. He described the room with the wax statues, the wax statue artisan, the mutated black spider, the iron soldiers, the bronze coffin, the white candles, and the eerie roar.

However, Lumian omitted the details of how he had escorted Poet Iraeta back to the underground palace's entrance. He also left out the part about burning the wax statues and him murdering the wax statue artisan.

Finally, he couldn't conceal his anger, frustration, and perplexity.

"Commanding Officer, didn't you promise to secretly watch to prevent any mishaps? If I hadn't inexplicably awakened, I'd be a wax statue now!

"Did you use Albus to keep an eye on me?"

Lumian's questioning tone didn't seem to provoke Gardner Martin. The latter turned to him, his smile widening as he spoke calmly.

"I was indeed observing from the shadows."

At this point, his smile grew even more, but his voice remained composed.

"I witnessed you escorting the poet back to the underground palace's entrance. I saw you set fire to the wax statues in that room and detonate the wax statue artisan's head."

Wh— Lumian's eyes narrowed, and a shiver ran down his spine as his hair stood on end.

He blurted out, "Albus is already back?"

How did the Boss find out about my actions?

Could he truly be trailing me in secret or monitoring my every move in the underground maze?

How did he do it? I didn't notice at all!

Gardner Martin chuckled.

"Albus hasn't returned yet."

It wasn't Albus? That's right, Albus had no knowledge of my actions regarding the wax statue artisan's demise. No one else was present… How did the Boss discover it? Lumian's usual tendency to underestimate Gardner Martin vanished, replaced by a sense that the head of the Savoie Mob, the Commanding Officer of the Iron and Blood Cross Order, possessed more mystery and power than he initially believed.

Previously, perhaps Madam Magician of the Tarot Club and Mr. K of the Aurora Order had displayed abilities that Lumian found beyond imagination or awe-inspiring. Therefore, when facing Gardner Martin, who appeared to be the weakest of the three "superiors," Lumian had always considered him less formidable. He even believed that if they were within a five-meter range, he might have a chance to eliminate this Commanding Officer.

Now, from the looks of it, Lumian wasn't confident.

Considering that Gardner Martin might have revealed this information to unnerve him, Lumian didn't attempt to conceal his changing expressions and body language.

Gardner Martin observed Lumian's bewildered and fearful expression and added with a smile, "Do you really think you woke up for no reason?"

Whoa, so you're the one who helped? If I hadn't heard the grandiose voice, Aurore's humming, and the conversation with the people in Cordu and felt the burning pain in my right palm, I would have believed you… In essence, the corruption at 13 Avenue du Marché could have helped me break free from that state, but the Boss had intentionally left it ambiguous. He wants me to believe that he had played a role. This Hunter didn't lie, but he certainly didn't disclose the whole truth. How much of what he said was based on what he saw with his own eyes, and how much was gathered through other means? Lumian's thoughts raced as he bowed his head.

"Thank you, Commanding Officer."

Gardner Martin nodded warmly with a smile and said, "We've gained something from this operation. At the very least, we know that there are terrifying items sealed deep in Red Swan Castle's underground palace. Do you want to exchange them for rewards or save them to trade for valuable items later, such as higher Sequence potions?"

Lumian had accumulated a sum of 20,000 verl d'or over the past month through Gardner Martin's funds, his "salary" from Salle de Bal Brise, and his earnings from acting. Money wasn't an immediate concern.

He pondered for a moment.

"Let's save them for now."

As he spoke, he presented the Beyonder characteristic of the wax statue artisan and other items to Gardner Martin and inquired, "Boss, can I use these to concoct the Conspirer potion?"

Gardner Martin examined the shrunken blood-colored brain and the shriveled, blackened heart for a moment.

"When combined, they can be used to concoct the Conspirer potion, but they will have additional Hunter, Provoker, and Pyromaniac characteristics compared to ordinary ingredients. You need to be very confident before using them.

"Right, this heart still retains traces of the Sauron family's bloodline, which might affect your advancement to some extent. If you're not confident, I can provide you with a Conspirer potion in exchange for these ingredients and make up the difference. Consider it a partial reward."

In essence, ordinary Black Hunting Spiders and Sphinxes only possess the Conspirer Beyonder characteristic, excluding the ones from before. The wax statue artisan and the mutated black spider were like two halves of a Conspirer. When combined, they formed a complete Sequence 9 to 6 Beyonder… Lumian grasped the situation and smiled.

"It sounds like it will make me stronger. I'd like to see if I can handle the associated risks."

Gardner Martin didn't push further and allowed Lumian to depart.

…

Upon returning to Auberge du Coq Doré, Lumian took his place at his desk and began writing a letter to Madam Magician.

Chapter 433: Secret Past

Lumian diligently wrote down every detail of the events that had unfolded from the moment Lumian set foot in Red Swan Castle. He condensed the communications, focusing on the key points.

He had a strong sense that the Sauron family's underground maze concealed a crucial secret. Fearing that he might lack the knowledge and write off problematic parts as normal, inadvertently overlooking something, he decided to mention everything and allow Madam Magician to assess it herself.

It took Lumian half an hour to draft the letter.

He then closed the curtains and performed a ritual, summoning the "doll" messenger.

After nearly twenty minutes, the messenger returned with two folded squares of letter paper.

There are actually two pages. She places quite a lot of importance on this… Lumian contemplated for a moment before silently unfolding them.

"Gardner Martin is correct. The so-called wax statue artisan and mutated black spider are actually an enhanced Sphinx and Black Hunting Spider respectively. They contain Beyonder characteristics of the previous Sequences. What he didn't mention is that using the heart not only affects your advancement but is also linked to a special ritual that causes Beyonders who use it to merge with some of the Sauron family's bloodline, potentially subjecting them to a curse. However, for you, there's nothing to worry about. You've already taken the role of emperor during the King's Pie game. Why should you fear this?

"That tiny trace of the Sauron family's bloodline might have an undiscovered significance at some point."

Undiscovered significance… Is Madam Magician hinting at something she observed in her astromancy? If I genuinely use that withered heart to concoct the potion, not only will I possess a hint of the Blood Emperor's aura, but I'll also have a bit of the Sauron family's bloodline. What kind of f*cking amalgamation would this be!? Lumian mercilessly mocked himself.

If he further possessed an Einhorn bloodline, Lumian wouldn't even dare to imagine whether he'd be considered a prodigy in the Hunter pathway or simply mediocre.

After this self-mockery, Lumian continued to read.

"You've gained a lot from this adventure. Combining your experiences, what you've witnessed, what you've heard, and what you've encountered in the previous two King's Pie games, my initial assessment is that the formidable angel Vermonda Champagne Sauron from 200 years ago is still alive. He resides somewhere underground in that chamber, confined within a bronze coffin, surrounded by white candles, iron-black rings, blood-colored spring water, and the hearts extracted from the Sauron family's core members through a unique ritual. Even the entire underground maze is linked to a perilous Sealed Artifacts, designed to limit Vermonda Sauron's movements to the greatest extent.

"This is the first victim of the Sauron family's curse. Why did He vanish suddenly, why did He descend underground, and why does He remain alive? It has had a profound impact on generations of Red Swan Castle and the Sauron family, driving them to the brink of insanity. This is a crucial matter that requires further clarification. It's the real cause behind the Sauron family's decline.

"It's too dangerous for you. At your Sequence, you would find it extremely challenging to investigate. As you've experienced, even hearing Vermonda Sauron's voice causes temporary disorientation, leaving you in a daze, and the wax statue artisan would reconstruct you. This prevents you from getting close to the bronze coffin and the seal over it.

"Of course, once you possess a trace of the Sauron family's bloodline and master the special ritual that Poufer Sauron once underwent, you might have a chance to enter that chamber. But all in all, I advise against taking this risk until you're prepared to advance to Sequence 4 and approach the threshold of godhood. If Gardner Martin assigns a similar mission in the future, just perform it perfunctorily.

"Considering your contributions, the next time you require a potion formula or specific ingredients, feel free to contact me directly. You'll receive a substantial discount."

Angel? Lumian's eyelids twitched.

The mysterious and missing Sauron family ancestor, Vermonda, was, in fact, a formidable angel!

The voice that had instantaneously robbed him of consciousness and nearly caused him to faint belonged to a genuine Mythical Creature!

Furthermore, this angel remained in a state of complete madness and needed to be sealed.

The Sauron family's underground maze is indeed a perilous place, but it also conceals a wealth of "treasures"… Lumian muttered with a mix of lingering fear and anticipation.

In reality, even without Madam Magician's advice, he had no desire to risk approaching the chamber with the bronze coffin.

What if Poufer Sauron was waiting there next time, and he ended up losing himself, only to be killed?

It appeared that the mission to investigate the cause of the Sauron family's decline could only progress once he grew stronger.

Of course, Gardner Martin could handle it himself or seek assistance from the vice presidents of the Iron and Blood Cross Order.

After digesting these paragraphs, Lumian exhaled and continued reading the last part of the letter.

"Albus Medici isn't as straightforward as he may seem—not just a member of the Iron and Blood Cross Order. His last name is self-explanatory.

"In ancient times, before Blood Emperor Alista Tudor became the Red Priest, the God of War had another name. He was one of the eight Kings of Angels who had once served under the Ancient Sun God, known as the Red Angel or War Angel Medici.

"One of His duties was to watch over and instruct Amon."

King of Angels… How do they differ from regular angels? The Ancient Sun God's impact on the future was profoundly significant. The one revered by the Aurora Order, some of the seven orthodox gods, Amon, and the former God of War, Medici… Lumian pondered, realizing that many issues of the current era might trace back to events two to three thousand years ago, linked to the Ancient Sun God's downfall.

His curiosity was piqued, and he read the remainder of the content with greater focus than before.

"Red Angel Medici, the Sauron family, and the Einhorn family's most ancient ancestor all perished simultaneously under Alista Tudor and the nobles' combined efforts, giving rise to the Red Priest. However, after the Blood Emperor's demise, the Sauron and Einhorn families reclaimed their Beyonder characteristics.

"A King of Angels doesn't meet His end so easily. For some reason, the Red Angel, Sauron, and Einhorn merged into a potent evil spirit, a fusion of malevolence. Just a few years ago, this evil spirit found a means to break free from the geographical confines, vanishing without a trace from its place of origin.

"Red Angel Medici left behind numerous descendants and established a secretive angelic lineage, with many residing in Bansy Harbor. Yes, the same Bansy Harbor I mentioned earlier, which was greatly corrupted and directly annihilated by the Church of Storms. However, over the past one to two thousand years, members of the Medici family have gradually departed the island and returned to the Northern Continent. Albus Medici should be a direct descendant of one such individual.

"It's reasonable to suspect that Albus may have already crossed paths with this evil spirit. Removing the Sauron family's curse could be part of the evuk spirit's agenda, and the portion linked to Red Angel Medici likely desires the Sauron family's hoarded possessions. They also seek to uncover what Vermonda Sauron experienced.

"As for Albus's presence at the Sacred Heart Cloister, it might be due to the evil spirit guiding him or the Iron and Blood Cross Order sensing an anomaly and sending him to establish contact with the monks and gather information.

"Don't worry, Miss Justice and Susie will keep a close watch."

There's an issue with the Sacred Heart Cloister… Lumian hadn't foreseen problems with the Eternal Blazing Sun Church's largest cloister in Trier, but Madam Magician's words had unmistakably highlighted this situation.

Previously, when he speculated about Albus's purpose at the Sacred Heart Cloister, he had engaged in extensive analysis, yet he hadn't contemplated an issue with the cloister itself. He had merely assumed that Gardner Martin was seeking to understand certain matters there and gauge the inclinations and attitudes of various Eternal Blazing Sun Church factions.

Combined with Madam Magician's statement that someone from the Tarot Club was monitoring a potential lead, Lumian now suspected that the issue with the Sacred Heart Cloister might be linked to the worship of an evil god!

A substantial crisis is brewing… Lumian's sense of urgency surged.

At the end of the letter, Madam Magician wrote:

"Perhaps Gardner Martin's ability to 'see' something in the underground maze is related to his exposure to the corruption at 13 Avenue du Marché. It could also be due to the item smuggled in through Rat. I don't know what it is exactly.

"Consume the potion soon and advance to Sequence 6. If the catastrophe is averted unsuccessfully in the future, teleport out of Trier with the Two of Cups and your friends, or seek refuge in Mr. Fool's cathedral."

Lumian read the reply and contemplated it for a moment, silently watching it consumed by the crimson flames.

…

3 Rue des Blouses Blanches, Apartment 601.

Franca, clad in a cotton shirt and light-colored pants, looked surprised when she saw Lumian outside the door.

"Didn't Poufer Sauron's banquet just begin?"

Why did he return so suddenly?

"I ventured into Red Swan Castle's underground maze this afternoon and gained quite a bit," Lumian replied with a smile as he entered the room and closed the door. "I need your help now."

"What did you gain? And how can I help?" Franca inquired, a mix of curiosity and confusion in her expression.

Lumian chose to address the latter question.

"Help me hold something. If something goes wrong after I consume the potion, open it immediately."

"Consume the potion?" Franca was taken aback. "Have you finished digesting your Pyromaniac potion?"

"The digestion is complete," Lumian affirmed with a smile.

Franca instinctively asked, "Have you gathered all the ingredients for your Conspirer potion?"

"Yes," Lumian replied with a grin.

"…" Franca couldn't help but mutter, "You've only been out for an afternoon, but it feels like you've been gone for two to three weeks…"

Not only had the Pyromaniac potion been fully digested, but he had also acquired most of the ingredients for the subsequent potion!

Lumian showed an unusual sincerity as he explained, "This is all thanks to nature—no, thanks to Poufer Sauron."

Chapter 434: Utilizing the Special Environment

In a dim tunnel supported by stone pillars, Franca, indifferent to the presence of carbide lamps, turned to Lumian and expressed her concern.

"Are you absolutely sure there won't be any issues with using that heart to advance? Even if you don't appear afraid of the Sauron family's curse, it could still affect your condition after consuming the potion and potentially lead to failure. Honestly, Gardner's proposal is worth considering. Consuming an additional Sequence 9 to Sequence 7 potion will make you stronger, but not by much. There won't be any qualitative changes, so it's better to take a safer route."

The Demoness of Pleasure had already learned about Lumian's experiences in Red Swan Castle's underground maze and most of the information from Madam Magician's letter.

While she was awed by the special soldiers' existence and the frenzied cries of the uncontrollable angel, she couldn't help but be concerned about Lumian's plan to use the Beyonder characteristic of the wax statue artisan and the shriveled heart of the mutated black spider to concoct the potion.

Lumian, holding a carbide lamp, chuckled.

"I'm doing it because I'm more than confident."

Franca remained skeptical. "Do you have a method to negate the influence of the heart's remaining bloodline?"

At this point, it was as if she snapped out of her reverie.

"Where are we headed? Aren't you going to drink the potion? Just find a quiet spot. There's no need to keep wandering underground, right?"

Lumian chuckled.

"It's precisely because the destination is special that I believe I can minimize the influence of the Sauron family's residual bloodline in the heart."

Simultaneously, it would reduce the risk of the corruption in his body during the advancement!

Franca's curiosity was piqued. "Where are we going?"

Lumian replied with a smile, "You'll find out when we get there."

"Dammit! I hate people like you who leave sentences hanging!" Franca couldn't resist cursing.

…

After more than half an hour, Franca pointed ahead to a naturally formed and modified stone door cave, her expression a mix of surprise and realization. She asked, "Is this the destination you were talking about?"

The entrance was marked with numerous engravings of skulls, skeletal arms, sunflowers, and symbols related to steam.

This marked the entrance to the catacombs, leading to the Death Empire!

"Somewhere inside," Lumian replied. He retrieved a white candle from the satchel containing the Flog boxing gloves and tossed it to Franca. With a smile, he added, "I want to consume the potion under the watchful eyes of God."

"Under the gaze of God?" Franca eyed Lumian suspiciously, wondering if he had succumbed to the peculiar habits of an Astrologer.

He didn't seem to be speaking in a straightforward manner!

Lumian chose not to elaborate. Instead, he lit a white candle and ventured into the catacombs.

As usual, the administrators challenged them, and they made their assurances. The two eventually reached the third level of the catacombs, where they encountered a sacrificial pillar composed of two weathered boulders, surrounded by a small square.

Upon entering this remarkably clean area, Franca had an epiphany.

"Are you trying to exploit the uniqueness of this place?"

She had previously explored the catacombs but hadn't ventured deep into the third level. Lumian had only mentioned that there was a square here with two sacrificial pillars symbolizing the Eternal Blazing Sun and the God of Steam and Machinery.

Under the protection of these two pillars, even if the candle flames in their hands were extinguished, the individuals in the square wouldn't be plunged into darkness, and there wouldn't be any trace of their presence erased.

"Yes." Lumian smiled.

He handed the white candle to Franca and approached the mottled pillar adorned with symbols like the Sun Sacred Emblem, sunflowers, and radiating lines. He extended his arms reverently and offered a sincere prayer.

"Praise the Sun!"

His plan was to utilize the catacombs' uniqueness and the protective power of the sacrificial square to suppress the influence of the Sauron family's residual bloodline and the corruption of Inevitability within his body.

From his experiences, a substantial part of these influences stemmed from external sources and the outside world. For instance, the sealed Vermonda Sauron deep within the underground palace and the power of Inevitability beyond the barrier.

Without these external influences, all that would remain was the corruption within his body. Lumian had endured this during his previous three advancements and believed it was manageable. This was because the external support this corruption received would be weakened by the catacombs' uniqueness and the protection of the sacrificial pillars.

The initial idea for this plan had been inspired by the creation of the Beyonder accessory, Beatrice's Necklace. Madam Magician had mentioned that specific environments could sever connections and prevent the power of a boon from returning to its source, such as the area around the Samaritan Women's Spring.

Lumian believed that although the sacrificial square in the catacombs might not be as special as the area around the Samaritan Women's Spring, it wouldn't be too far off. After considering the catacombs' peculiarity and the protection of the Eternal Blazing Sun sacrificial pillar, the external influence would undoubtedly be significantly reduced.

Furthermore, the sanctity of the sacrificial square stemmed from the protection of orthodox gods. Lumian didn't need to worry about any backlash from consuming the potion to advance here.

Franca watched in momentary surprise as Lumian genuinely praised the Sun.

He was truly under the "watchful eye" of a deity!

But isn't he afraid of being directly purged as a follower of Mr. Fool?

After the prayer, Lumian returned to Franca and handed her an exquisite perfume bottle.

"What's this?" Franca inquired, puzzled.

"Gray amber perfume," Lumian explained with a flicker of emotion in his eyes under the candlelight. "After I consume the potion, watch my reaction closely. If you sense anything amiss, unscrew the cap and bring the bottle to my nose."

Initially, he would have done this himself, but this time, given the influence of the Sauron family's residual bloodline and his status as a Mid-Sequence Beyonder, he was concerned that the situation might worsen. He might not have the strength to open the perfume bottle. Additionally, if he had used it from the beginning, his subconscious might remember that he had created it, potentially negating the intended effect.

"Alright." Seeing that Lumian had no intention of explaining, Franca suppressed her curiosity and refrained from inquiring.

Lumian glanced at the broad stone steps leading to the catacombs' second level and added,

"One more thing, you need to ensure that the tourists don't disturb me."

"Do you think I'm stupid?" Franca rolled her eyes.

Did you really need to ask?

Without further delay, Lumian retrieved a beer mug with a crystal-like appearance from his satchel.

Using a measuring cylinder, he began the process. First, he poured a total of 80 milliliters of the wax statue artisan's dark-red blood into the mug. Then, he added the mutated black spider's poison gland, 10 grams of amber powder, and two white oak fruits he had collected over a month ago.

These ingredients, infused with potent spirituality and corresponding symbols, didn't dissolve instantly; instead, they created a dark foam on the surface.

Lumian gently submerged the blood-colored object that resembled a shrunken human brain and the withered, black heart into the mixture.

With a sizzling sound, a crimson-tinged mist diffused and then receded. All the solid ingredients rapidly disintegrated and merged, causing the potion's color to intensify.

Bubbles rose and burst until the liquid inside the beer mug turned an iron-black hue, with a tinge of reddish rust.

Observing this transformation, Franca mumbled softly, "Indeed, one's heart is tainted when one employs battle strategies. Even the potion is tainted…"

Contemplating the dark, blood-colored concoction, Lumian removed his satchel and military flask, setting them aside.

After handing Lie to Franca, he took a slow, deliberate breath and composed himself.

After 20 to 30 seconds, he sat cross-legged, his wrist steady as he picked up the beer mug and drank the potion without hesitation.

The potion had a strong rusty taste, cold like a serpent slithering in the darkness, slippery and icy.

However, Lumian's body didn't burn as it had before. Instead, he felt a chilling sensation, as if all the flames had been absorbed by the potion.

Simultaneously, his head throbbed with a familiar pain, and his vision quickly blurred. All the thoughts and information he knew materialized, intertwining in the form of miniature pictures, forming layers of interconnected spiderwebs.

This tore Lumian's mind apart. Terrifying ravings, seemingly emanating from an infinite distance while simultaneously echoing in his ears, were accompanied by violent and frenzied emotions.

Yet, the pain from the former didn't render Lumian nearly unconscious. He instinctively rolled, his expression involuntarily contorted with malevolence. His hands clenched tightly, and he couldn't help but groan in pain. The latter was within the tolerance of an Alms Monk.

Lumian's right palm felt a slight warmth from the stimulation.

Finally, the inferno reached him. This time, it converged within Lumian's mind, unreal and illusory.

Franca, who had been watching closely, wanted to open the perfume bottle several times, but each time she thought about it, Lumian returned to normal.

The entire ordeal lasted only 20 to 30 seconds. Lumian's clenched hands slowly relaxed, and his contorted facial muscles gradually returned to their original positions.

Phew… Lumian exhaled a scorching breath and opened his eyes.

"Did it work?" Franca asked subconsciously.

Lumian, experiencing sharp pain in his head and body, responded with a wry smile, "If it hadn't worked, you would've already started fighting the out-of-control me."

This had been even easier than his previous three advancements.

"Who knows if a Conspirer's loss of control is an act of pretending to be a normal person and secretly attacking me…" Franca couldn't help but argue, even though she knew she had spoken out of turn.

Lumian raised his hand to rub his temples. Despite the pain, his thoughts seemed clearer than ever.

He quickly recalled the events that had occurred and sensed that some of the details might be problematic.

This was something he hadn't noticed before.

For instance, according to his nightmares, Iraeta, the poet who frequently participated in King's Pie games, should have transformed into a half-wax statue, gone insane, harmed himself or those around him at any moment. Yet, not only was he unscathed, but he had also entered the problematic Sacred Heart Cloister and coincidentally encountered Albus Medici!

Chapter 435: An Early Acting Principle

In the nightmare, Poet Iraeta failed to escape his deranged fate. It's not that he isn't affected by the King's Pie game, but that he hasn't shown it yet. Just like Painter Mullen and Novelist Anori…

In other words, the likelihood of him already being anomalous is very low, nothing like Elros and Albus…

He has a facilitator behind him, ensuring his current safety and allowing him to transmit effective information? If that's the case, who is the facilitator? Someone from the Sacred Heart Cloister? Did he make many similar arrangements after discovering the turbulent undercurrents in the cloister? Lumian's thoughts raced faster than usual, and he quickly made a guess.

He retracted his thoughts and focused on observing the changes in his body after consuming the potion.

In addition to his enhanced insight, sharper and clearer thinking, and a series of specific manifestations, like improved intelligence and the ability to fabricate excuses to convince others, he also had superpowers in misdirection, confusion, and deception.

These abilities were core components of conspiracies, but a qualified Conspirer would only employ them subtly and at critical moments. Under normal circumstances, they tried their best to rely on their wits to prevent targets with backgrounds from detecting the existence of superpowers and seeing through their schemes.

Similar to Misleading, there's another ability called Incitement or Instigation. This is very much like the Demoness' Instigation. And when Lumian played Pyromaniac, he consciously incited others to ignite the flames in their hearts.

Lumian couldn't help but mutter, Is my acting too advanced, or is the Hunter pathway deepening in certain concepts? Is acting in a previous stage an ability at the later stages?

Yes, the Conspirer potion revolves around conspiracies. There's no qualitative improvement in combat…

After repeated confirmation, Lumian realized that his physique had improved to a certain extent, and his precise control over flames had improved. He no longer had to rely on Fire Raven, Fireball, Spear, Fire Serpent, and Fire Wall every time. He could casually shape the flames into different forms, such as whips and sabers.

Similarly, the difficulty of repeatedly compressing the crimson flames to form incandescent white flames decreased. The time required was significantly reduced and, depending on the flame's specific appearance and energy density, it ranged from one to three seconds.

In addition, Lumian could temporarily merge his body with fire. He could use fireballs and other projectiles to quickly shift positions, either escaping the enemy's attack range or closing the distance. This allowed Lumian to have more options in battle. He didn't have to rely on Spirit World Traversal every time.

Conspirer had also enhanced his spirituality. Although Lumian hadn't experimented, he believed that at his limit, he could complete Spirit World Traversal six times, up from the original four times.

Lumian sniffed and unsurprisingly caught a whiff of something further away, discerning more details.

This was due to the enhancement of a Conspirer's information-gathering abilities. It would inevitably enhance their five senses and spiritual perception.

That's about it… Lumian stood up, his body suddenly enveloped in flowing crimson flames.

He transformed into a fireball and flew away with a whoosh.

In less than ten meters, he landed on the ground, and flames dispersed around him.

The current limit is ten meters. It will gradually increase as the potion is digested… Lumian nodded indiscernibly and returned to the spot where he had discarded the black satchel and the military flask.

He was now fully aware that he was already a Sequence 6 Conspirer.

Franca held Lie and the gray amber perfume and asked with curiosity and concern, "Very cool… How do you feel?"

Lumian pondered silently for a few seconds before saying, "The changes in my abilities aren't as much or as strong as I imagined."

"That's normal," Franca consoled, empathetic. "For most pathways, there are only two qualitative changes below the high Sequences. For the Hunter pathway, one is at Sequence 7 Pyromaniac, and the other is at Sequence 5 Reaper. Regardless, each potion brings about new abilities or strengthening of the original abilities. If used well, it's normal for a Sequence 6 to kill a Sequence 5."

Lumian nodded slowly, deep in thought.

"I also discovered that I've been acting as a Conspirer for a long time…"

When he was wandering, he relied on ruthlessness and conspiracies to fend off humans who were older than him for food and a place to sleep in the cold. When he was in Cordu, every prank could be regarded as a conspiracy with low malice. After leaving Cordu, he had been trapped in conspiracies over the past few months, either screwing over his targets or falling into the traps of others…

Although Lumian didn't digest a portion of the Conspirer potion on the spot, it made his condition much better compared to when he first consumed the Pyromaniac potion. The potion's potency didn't dissipate without control.

He didn't feel like a Conspirer who had just advanced after consuming a potion. He felt more like a Sequence 6 Beyonder who had some time to adapt to it.

Simultaneously, he deduced two acting principles from his past experiences:

Firstly, a Conspirer's core lay in their intelligence, not superpowers!

Secondly, the key to a conspiracy lay in concealing one's true motives!

In the past, the acting principles were derived step by step, leading to a substantial digestion of the potion. In contrast, these two acting principles were accumulated from past experiences. Although they couldn't directly result in the digestion of the potion, they facilitated Lumian's subsequent acting, reducing the time it would take for him to fully digest the potion. To put it simply, he might only need to spend half his energy to achieve twice the effect.

Lumian had originally believed that digesting the Conspirer potion would take at least half a year, but from the looks of it, perhaps three months would suffice. Of course, the prerequisite was that there would always be a chance to act and conclude a new acting principle.

Franca shared his sentiments.

"That's right. Just like how it was easy for me to act as an Assassin. I had too much 'experience.'"

When she said the word "experience," her voice involuntarily softened, as if she felt a little guilty.

Lumian paid no mind to this detail. After stuffing the items on the ground into his black satchel, he retrieved Lie, the gray amber perfume, and the burning white candle.

Seeing that her companion was indeed fine, Franca heaved a sigh of relief and said, "It's a good thing to advance before the catastrophe. Damn it, if it weren't for Browns Sauron being petty and jealous of me, preventing me from attending the orgies, my Pleasure potion would have been significantly digested. Hmph, I'll have her experience true pleasure later!"

For the 103rd time, she cursed Browns Sauron.

Franca then asked, "Are we going to make a move on those individuals next?"

These individuals referred to members of the Sinners organization.

Over the past month, Lumian had repeatedly sought to capture the Sinners' liaison through Guillaume Bénet's widow, Paulina. First, he sought to uncover the Sanson family, seeking revenge for his sister and tracking Loki's whereabouts—they had a deep connection to Loki. Perhaps they knew the location of the castle where Loki had been resurrected. Second, the Sinners organization also believed in an evil god. It was possible they knew a little about Trier's cultists' abnormal silence. Perhaps it could help Lumian and the others figure out the source of the disaster and the essence of the outbreak.

Back then, Lumian hadn't figured out the pattern of the Sinners organization's liaison, so he had postponed any operation. Later, he planned to wait until he advanced to Sequence 6 and gained greater strength before taking action. After all, other members of the Sinners organization weren't like Padre Guillaume Bénet, whose contract abilities and corresponding negative effects were grasped by him, allowing him to prepare in advance. If the contract abilities of the evil god bestowed synergized well, they would be quite a tough nut.

Of course, Lumian had no intention of completely annihilating the Sinners organization by relying solely on his small team. It was a cult with a saint.

His plan was to capture the liaison and obtain the information he needed before calling the Tarot Club for reinforcements.

"That's right." Lumian nodded with a smile and replied to Franca, "In two days, the Sinners' liaison will likely visit Madame Paulina again."

"Yes, I hope he knows something." Although Franca didn't think she could prevent the potential disaster, she still hoped to do something.

She paused for a moment and continued, "Take Jenna to Lavigny Docks tomorrow and introduce her to Mr. Fool's faith."

"Alright." Lumian had such thoughts to begin with.

…

The following morning, Lumian knocked on Apartment 601's door.

He glanced at Jenna, who had changed into a light-blue dress, and smiled.

"I need your help with something."

"Me?" Jenna pointed at herself and turned to Franca. "How can I help?"

"Don't ask. You'll find out when you get there." Lumian couldn't be bothered to find an excuse.

Jenna's eyes darted around in confusion.

"Dammit! Can't you make yourself clear?" As she cursed, she gestured to Franca, indicating her helplessness.

Then, she followed Lumian out of the apartment door.

Franca fell into deep thought when she saw this scene.

…

In the four-wheeled, four-seater rental carriage, Lumian didn't mention the purpose of his trip. He chatted with Jenna about the drunkards at Salle de Bal Brise and the actors at Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons. The atmosphere was relaxed and cheerful, as if they were on a school autumn outing.

Jenna didn't inquire further and displayed considerable patience.

Finally, the rental carriage arrived at Lavigny Docks. Lumian paid the fare of 1.75 verl d'or, opened the door, and agilely leaped out.

Jenna moved to the carriage door, but before she could gracefully leap down, her eyes narrowed as she let out Franca's usual sigh.

"Wow!"

Lumian followed her gaze and saw an ancient-looking three-masted sailboat parked at Lavigny Docks, clearly lagging behind the times.

Such a boat was rare at Lavigny Docks, but those who had grown up reading or listening to the The Adventurer series found it oddly familiar.

These great pirates seemed to be fond of such boats.

Chapter 436: Open and Inclusive Faith

Lumian had seen a similar three-masted sailboat in the illustrations of The Adventurer series. It stood out amidst the bustling Lavigny Docks, a contrast to the inland steamboats, and drew the attention of passersby.

Simultaneously, Lumian felt a warmth in his right palm, which then subsided.

What's happening? Has the lingering aura of the Blood Emperor experienced a change under stimulus? This… this feels like a kind of resonance… Lumian pondered in surprise and confusion.

Could there be a connection between this ancient three-masted sailboat and Blood Emperor Alista Tudor?

As Lumian stared at the sailboat, Jenna disembarked from the carriage and playfully remarked, "You didn't bring me here just to show me this vintage pirate ship, did you?"

She had read the first two serialized volumes of The Adventurer series in the newspapers. Books had always been expensive in her family, and when her father's work-related compensation didn't arrive after his unfortunate death, her reading opportunities grew scarce. She'd occasionally find old newspapers used to paste on the wall or for other purposes and read until sunset.

With the presence of street bards and her mother's bedtime stories, her spirit remained far from desolate.

Since arriving in the market district and becoming an underground singer, Jenna had found a means to earn a substantial income. She had even saved up to purchase a pirated copy of The Adventurer series from an underground bookseller to finally appreciate the intricate illustrations. This endeavor often made her feel remorseful for Madam Fors Wall. She planned to buy an authentic set once she had cleared all her debts.

To her surprise, her debts only seemed to accumulate.

Lumian withdrew his gaze and replied with a teasing grin, "Consider this a bonus."

The two of them stood on the harbor's edge, discussing the disparities between the ancient sailboat and the illustrations from The Adventurer series.

After a while, Lumian led Jenna to the unassuming The Fool's cathedral.

Jenna looked up at the bell tower and steeple atop the four-story building, examining the silver symbol comprising an incomplete Pupil-less Eye and a section of Contorted Lines. Baffled, she inquired, "Is this a cathedral?"

Aren't cathedrals supposed to be grander?

The cathedral of the Eternal Blazing Sun Church in the market district and Quartier du Jardin Botanique was far more magnificent and sacred in comparison.

"Yes," Lumian affirmed, leading the way inside.

Jenna trailed closely behind, increasingly surprised by the cathedral's simplicity.

The stained glass windows were scarce, and there was no ornate gilding to be found. The cathedral lacked intricate machinery. The only semblance of religion lay in the massive murals, which seemed to favor muted colors and subdued illumination.

The most striking feature of the cathedral was the large, numerous windows. Even on the ground floor, the interior was awash with natural light.

Jenna's gaze flitted over the murals, and she instinctively felt that they symbolized guidance and redemption.

It was slightly past 10 a.m., and the cathedral's attendance was sparse. It was silent, exuding a sense of serenity.

Lumian guided Jenna to the third row of pews facing the altar.

He surveyed their surroundings, his gaze resting on The Fool's Sacred Emblem before him. In a solemn tone, he disclosed,

"You should be aware that Franca and I are keeping something from you. There are some secrets we haven't shared with you."

"Yeah," Jenna nodded gently, awaiting Lumian's explanation.

Lumian continued, "As you can tell, Franca and I aren't related. She and my sister Aurore are close friends who share common interests. Loki and I Know Someone, whom we dealt with previously, are also part of this group, but they betrayed others, causing a disaster in Cordu and costing my sister her life."

"I see…" Jenna replied, having refrained from delving too deeply previously but having a vague understanding.

Lumian's gaze remained fixed on Mr. Fool's altar.

"There's another connection between Franca and me. We don't believe in the Eternal Blazing Sun or the God of Steam and Machinery…"

Jenna couldn't help but chuckle.

"I've already guessed it. When have any of you gone to church? I don't usually see you praying at fixed times!

"At least you know which street Église Saint-Robert is on. Franca might not even know where the cathedral's door opens to."

She, on the other hand, prayed, listened to the sermons, and attended Mass at least once a week. This was both a display of piety to the Purifiers and a habit of faith from all these years.

The only downside was that she often sang at Salle de Bal Brise until midnight before returning to Rue des Blouses Blanches to sleep. She couldn't get up to welcome the morning sun and dawn, so she could only set a fixed prayer time for noon.

"No, I'm not going because I'm a wanted criminal. I can barely be considered a believer in the Eternal Blazing Sun," Lumian replied with a smile. Then, he said solemnly, "Franca and I believe in this orthodox god, the great Mr. Fool."

Lumian pressed his hand to his chest and whispered solemnly, "Praise The Fool!"

The Fool… Jenna found the deity's name peculiar.

After a moment of thought, she asked, "The Fool from tarot cards?"

"Yes, you've guessed it correctly," Lumian affirmed.

Jenna spotted a tall figure in a black trench coat and a half top hat approaching the altar. She instinctively lowered her head and said with a hint of smugness,

"I've discovered almost ten decks of tarot cards from Franca, and she doesn't usually use them for divination."

That fellow… Could it be that she thought it would be cool to toss a Two of Cups on the corpse after taking out a target, so she made preparations? The more Lumian considered it, the more he felt that this was Franca's style.

Jenna paused for a moment and asked, "Does The Fool Pharmaceutical Company also belong to the Church of The Fool?"

"Uh…" Lumian was momentarily caught off guard.

He hadn't given it much thought. Initially, he believed the pharmaceutical company was named after tarot cards.

Now, it appeared that The Fool from the tarot cards seemed to equal Mr. Fool!

Lumian hesitated before responding, "Maybe."

He wasn't entirely certain if The Fool Pharmaceutical Company was affiliated with the Church of The Fool or if it was simply a venture by a member of the Tarot Club.

Jenna demonstrated her keen insight as she inquired, "You brought me here not only because it's a safe place for discussing your faith but also to show that the Church of The Fool is a recognized, mainstream church capable of constructing a cathedral in Trier."

"You're not as naive as you appear," Lumian turned his head and smiled. "My third purpose is to ask if you'd consider converting to Mr. Fool?"

"Convert…" Jenna's mind was in a whirl.

Lumian adopted a persuasive tone, saying, "This doesn't conflict with your contract with the Purifiers. Mr. Fool is an orthodox god acknowledged by all the Churches. However, the propagation of this faith is concentrated on the maritime islands and certain regions of the Southern Continent. Most people in the Northern Continent are unaware of it."

"But…" Jenna hesitated. "I've never thought about changing my faith…"

Her faith in the Eternal Blazing Sun couldn't be described as devout or fanatical, but it was a habit she had cultivated since childhood. She had also accepted most of the teachings. Until today, the idea of conversion had never crossed her mind. She didn't feel a strong urge to change her faith, nor did she harbor any deep dissatisfaction with the Church.

The only times she'd voiced discontent were during the most challenging years her family endured, especially after her mother's passing. At those moments, she occasionally grumbled about the Eternal Blazing Sun, feeling that He didn't protect true believers. However, these moments were far from sufficient to motivate a conversion.

Lumian glanced at Jenna's face and offered a reassuring smile.

"It's entirely fine if you don't want to convert. I'm merely suggesting it. My main concern is ensuring that if you ever find yourself separated from us during the impending disaster, you know this place is a refuge. Don't worry, even if you're a believer of the Eternal Blazing Sun, Mr. Fool's Church will welcome you and provide protection."

Jenna seemed puzzled and asked, "Then why can't I go to Église Saint-Robert?"

Lumian collected his thoughts and explained, "Franca and I share the same faith and work for a secret organization. Two days ago, we received information from the organization.

"There's a problem with the Eternal Blazing Sun Church's Sacred Heart Cloister, similar to the issues with the Deep Valley Cloister of the God of Steam and Machinery Church.

"In such a situation, some cathedrals may not be trustworthy, and you might not be able to distinguish between the reliable and the unreliable. So, it's better to choose those that are known to be reliable."

Jenna had personally experienced the troubles at the Deep Valley Cloister, so she understood the significance of potential problems in the Sacred Heart Cloister.

She murmured to herself, "Could the catastrophe begin from within the Churches?"

"Perhaps," Lumian replied, though he couldn't provide a definitive answer.

At that moment, a towering figure, dressed in a custom-made black trench coat and a half top hat, approached Lumian and Jenna. He stood at a towering 2.56 meters, with golden hair and eyes.

He looked at Jenna and asked with a warm smile, "Sister, is this your first visit to my lord's cathedral?"

"Yes, but I'm here with a friend," Jenna replied. She instinctively resisted the idea of converting her faith and inquired, "And who are you?"

"I am the bishop here, Teslian," the half-giant introduced himself with a confident smile.

Jenna observed his attire, which looked far from conventional clergy attire.

Teslian turned his gaze to Lumian and continued, "Would you be interested in hearing me introduce our beacon and savior, the great Mr. Fool?

"Don't worry. Our lord doesn't compel people to convert, and he doesn't mind if they believe in him alongside other deities. In turn, believing in him can also coexist with other beliefs."

"You… you can do that?" Jenna stammered.

This was completely beyond her understanding!

Which deity would allow their followers to have impure or multiple beliefs?

Additionally, why refer to this deity as 'him' instead of 'Him'? The latter is the exclusive pronoun for deities! Why address this deity as 'mister'?

Jenna's mind was filled with questions, and her thoughts were in disarray.

"Yes, Mr. Fool is known for his compassion and benevolence," the bishop responded, seeing that Jenna and Lumian didn't object. He then opened the black Bible with silver patterns and began to preach.

Chapter 437: Cashing Out

Jenna remained indifferent during the initial part of the sermon, finding it reminiscent of the Eternal Blazing Sun Church's Holy Bible.

However, her attention perked up when The Fool requested to be addressed as "him" rather than "Him." This slight change in expression indicated her growing focus.

As the sermon continued, Jenna's surprise became evident, and her face revealed a mix of shock and intrigue.

Is Gehrman Sparrow, the adventurer, truly connected to The Fool's Church?

Could he be an angelic messenger delivering The Fool's message of redemption?

Jenna wondered amidst her astonishment. Teslian, the half-giant bishop, didn't press her about her belief in The Fool but instead turned his attention to a supplicant deeply immersed in prayer.

The supplicant appeared to be a sailor in his prime from the sea. His skin was bronze, and his face bore obvious signs of the elements. His hair was disheveled and dark-blue, and Jenna couldn't see his features due to his bowed head in prayer.

Dressed in the same linen shirt, brown jacket, and loose dark pantaloons favored by sailors and pirates, he also sported a unique belt adorned with a dagger, telescope, and various tools.

He's probably a captain. He looks quite dignified… Lumian retracted his gaze and looked at Jenna.

Jenna, still processing the revelations, rose in a daze and left the cathedral. She wandered aimlessly along the harbor district's edge.

Lumian followed, hands in his pockets, refraining from immediate persuasion.

After walking for nearly ten minutes, Jenna slowed down and muttered to herself, "No wonder you claim to be a shallow believer in God."

The God referred to the Eternal Blazing Sun.

Lumian replied with a smirk, "You can also be a shallow believer in Mr. Fool. He doesn't concern himself with such matters."

"I… I'll think about it," Jenna replied, her beliefs shaken by the unconventional sermon. It wasn't that the Bible was well-written; rather, The Fool's claims and the Church of The Fool's approach differed significantly from her previous teachings. She now hesitated and struggled with her faith.

Lumian glanced at her and didn't incessantly persuade her.

In such situations, it was crucial to know when to stop, as excessive attempts could lead to resistance and repulsion.

Almost simultaneously, Lumian sighed inwardly.

As expected, proselytizing needs to be done by professionals…

Given my friendship with Jenna, she didn't hesitate to reject my suggestion to convert. However, the bishop's sermon had stirred something within her, causing her to reconsider her stance…

The two of them continued in silence for another 10 to 20 meters, with Lumian stealing glances at the bustling harbor and the deserted streets nearby. He casually asked, "How's your progress with gathering the Witch potion ingredients?"

Jenna was caught off guard by the question.

"I only digested the Instigator potion two days ago. How could I have gathered the main ingredient for the Witch potion so quickly?"

Perhaps it was the residual influence of the cathedral, but Jenna's urge to curse wasn't as pronounced.

Lumian dropped a bombshell. "Well, I digested the Pyromaniac potion yesterday and managed to acquire both the main ingredient and the supplementary ingredients for the Conspirer potion on the same day."

Jenna couldn't help but exclaim, "Dammit! How can we be the same? I want a special hunting ground for hunting and digestion too!"

Franca had already informed her of Lumian's encounter in Red Swan Castle, excluding Magician's response.

Jenna found it surreal.

Just last night, they were both at Sequence 8 and Sequence 7 respectively, and the gap wasn't that significant. Why did the things they experienced differ so much, as if they were worlds apart?

One of them still dwelled on the fringes of mysticism, occasionally encountering the horrifying bizarre. The other had delved deep into the mysteries, surrounded by secrecy and danger.

After venting her frustration, Jenna disclosed, "I asked the Purifiers, and they don't seem very supportive of my advancement to become a Witch. They won't pay me in advance for the main ingredients. They claimed there's no pressing need for my investigations at the moment. However, they did promise to sell me the main ingredients and the more elusive supplementary ingredients at a discount if I can raise the funds. The main ingredients alone cost 16,000 verl d'or each."

A discounted price… Besides, does this promise mean that the Purifiers have every main ingredient for the Witch potion? I thought they only had converged Beyonder characteristics. After all, their method of obtaining Witch-related items should involve hunting… Does the Eternal Blazing Sun

Church have a way to restore Beyonder characteristics to main ingredients? Lumian didn't quite understand.

Turning his gaze to the road, Lumian pondered and asked, "Do you owe Franca 60,000 verl d'or now?"

"Yes, I do." Jenna fretted at the mention of it. I wonder when I'll be able to pay it back."

Lumian chuckled.

"In that case, would you like to owe a bit more?"

"Huh?" Jenna's thoughts froze.

With his hands still in his pockets, Lumian grinned.

"Owe me 35,000 verl d'or, and I'll help you gather all the ingredients for the Witch potion."

Jenna, intrigued, inquired, "D-do you actually know where to find them?"

Lumian chuckled.

"I'm not entirely certain, but there's a good chance."

He intended to exchange it from the Iron and Blood Cross Order.

Yesterday, he had received recognition from Gardner Martin for his adventure in Red Swan Castle's underground maze, and this contribution could be redeemed immediately or accumulated for higher Sequence potions. Lumian hadn't made up his mind on how to use it yet, but now he decided to utilize it to get all the ingredients for Jenna's Witch potion.

He might need to fork out some money, but disaster could strike at any moment. He might not remain with the Iron and Blood Cross Order in the future. Converting his contribution into a tangible reward made sense.

Moreover, the items gained through such contributions were of lesser value compared to having a willing, living Witch's assistance.

When the time came, with Conspirer Lumian, Demoness of Pleasure Franca, and Witch Jenna working together, they could form a formidable team even among official factions and the Inquisition. Combined with the appropriate mystical items, they could handle most Beyonders below the demigod level. Additionally, they had an unofficial member—Psychiatrist Anthony Reid.

Lumian believed that Gardner Martin likely had the necessary Witch potion ingredients. After all, the Iron and Blood Cross Order primarily followed the Hunter pathway, which was closely related to the Assassin pathway. Over the years, it was improbable that no convergence effect had occurred.

If needed, Lumian could also seek assistance from Mr. K and Madam Magician.

Jenna fell silent, unable to respond immediately.

Lumian chuckled again.

"It's not a good thing to owe me. In addition to repaying the principal, you have to pay interest, which is helping me with certain tasks. Fortunately, you'll soon have an opportunity to do so."

Jenna pursed her lips and exhaled slowly.

"Alright, I'll give you 10,000 verl d'or first, so I'll only owe you 25,000."

"No problem," Lumian agreed indifferently.

Seeing that Jenna was about to say something, he chuckled and said, "No need to thank me…"

He then lowered his voice and feigned a feminine voice. "We're friends, after all!"

"…" Jenna struggled to find the words. "Dammit!"

Lumian simply chuckled and said nothing.

Jenna, on the other hand, silently followed him across the street toward a few rental carriages parked there.

As they boarded the carriage, Jenna suddenly muttered to herself, "Thank you."

Lumian appeared to be in his own world, occupying a seat in the carriage and disregarding his image.

…

In the afternoon, at 11 Rue des Fontaines.

Lumian spotted Gardner Martin, dressed in a shirt and sweater.

Lumian got straight to the point, saying, "Boss, I wish to exchange my contributions for the Witch potion or all the corresponding ingredients."

Gardner Martin, without displaying any surprise, looked at Lumian with a smile and inquired, "Who is the Witch potion for?"

Lumian replied candidly, "It's for Jenna."

Gardner Martin appeared to be listening and gestured for Lumian to continue.

Lumian said sincerely, "I'm looking for a reliable ally with considerable strength."

At this point, he smiled. "Moreover, I want to experience genuine pleasure."

Gardner Martin burst into laughter.

"Not bad. That's what an ambitious Hunter should aim for.

"No problem. Come by tomorrow morning to collect the Beyonder characteristics and supplementary ingredients. Oh, and make up the difference with another 10,000 verl d'or."

Gardner Martin understood that Lumian and Jenna had a close relationship with mutual trust. Furthermore, Lumian and Franca's cooperation didn't involve seeking pleasure.

Lumian responded with a smile, "Thank you, Commanding Officer."

After leaving Rue des Fontaines and returning to Salle de Bal Brise, Lumian finally had some free time after a long day of activity.

In the evening, he enjoyed La Fée Verte while listening to Jenna, dressed as Showy Diva, singing passionately to earn money. His mind wandered.

How much can a local singer earn? It's only a few thousand verl d'or a year…

It's still better to fleece the Iron and Blood Cross Order and hunt heretics… When Jenna becomes a Witch, she'll have the strength to participate in battles at this level…

Speaking of which, I didn't think much of it when I read The Adventurer series in the past. Now that I think about it, doesn't Gehrman Sparrow spend most of his time hunting pirates with Beyonder characteristics? How can he become a famous pirate or a great pirate without Beyonder characteristics?

Yes, although the corresponding battles are vague and exaggerated, only highlighting the main points, it's obvious that the author has a certain understanding of Beyonder battles. Is Madam Fors Wall also a Beyonder?

Relaxing until nearly midnight, Lumian returned to Auberge du Coq Doré.

As soon as he pushed open Room 207's door, he saw a square of letter on the table under the crimson moonlight.

Madam Magician's letter… Lumian lit the carbide lamp and unfolded the letter.

"Mr. Hanged Man hopes that you and the Two of Cups can summon the Armored Shadow again soon. He'll be responsible for providing the gold.

"Let me know when you've confirmed the time."

Chapter 438: Ghost Ship

Mr. Hanged Man is ready… Lumian took out his golden pocket watch and opened it to take a look.

He could summon the Armored Shadow at any moment. His only concern was that it might pose a danger. Summoning it without a good reason could lead to an attack or a curse. However, with The Hanged Man—the Major Arcana card holder of the Tarot Club—present, there was no need to worry about such matters.

The uncertainty now lay in Franca's availability. After all, she had to translate.

Lumian burned the letter and left Auberge du Coq Doré, heading straight for Apartment 601 at 3 Rue des Blouses Blanches.

"Why are you here so late?" Franca clearly wasn't the early-to-bed type.

Lumian glanced at Jenna, who had just finished removing her heavy makeup, and smiled at Franca.

"Do you have time tonight? We can summon the Armored Shadow again and ask it questions."

Summon the Armored Shadow again… Franca's eyes lit up as she blurted out, "I'm free!"

The Armored Shadow was most likely from her homeland, involving the secret of their transmigration and their way back. Even at 6 a.m., she would say she had time to be a translator, let alone just midnight!

Noticing Jenna's confusion and curiosity, Franca explained excitedly, "Didn't Ciel ask us to gather information on spirit world creatures that fulfill the summoning conditions? One of the summoning targets he chose had a directional ambiguity when designing the summoning incantation, attracting a very peculiar spirit world creature. The ability to snort and spit you saw earlier came from a contract with that spirit world creature."

Out of jealousy and envy, Franca described the Spell of Harrumph as snorting and spitting.

Jenna had a deep impression of the Spell of Harrumph and found its effects potent and mystical. Her initial reaction was to ask, "Is it possible for us to sign a contract with similar spirit world creatures?"

"Sigh, I wish I had a similar contracted creature, but I can't obtain such a special contract," Franca expressed her regret and resentment sincerely. "In short, that spirit world creature is very unique and involves many secrets. A big shot of the organization backing us—uh, a demigod—is very interested. And now, only Ciel can accurately summon the target creature through the contract's connection."

Franca asked Lumian, "Is that person here?"

"Yes." Lumian nodded gently.

Jenna looked at them thoughtfully and asked, "Is it Justice, Magician, or have The Star or The Moon arrived?"

Franca's expression froze, her mouth slightly agape, her eyes filled with disbelief. Lumian was taken aback. He didn't expect Jenna to reveal the code names of the Major Arcana card holders and make the connection that her two companions were related to them.

Amidst the indescribable silence, Jenna's brows relaxed, and she smiled.

"I guessed right! You guys belong to the secret organization that uses tarot cards as their code names!"

"H-how did you know?" Franca asked in surprise.

Jenna pursed her lips and sneered.

"You have nearly ten decks of tarot cards in this room, and you don't usually use them for divination. Then, Ciel told me that the Mr. Fool you believe in is roughly equivalent to The Fool in tarot cards. As for me, I've been attending mysticism gatherings recently and heard about the legend of Justice and the other Major Arcana card holders, as well as the existence of Minor Arcana cards.

"With so much information placed before me, if I don't make any connections and probe, won't I appear stupid?"

The more she spoke, the more pleased she became.

Franca was taken aback for a moment before saying, "Your Instigator potion wasn't wasted…"

"Excellent," Lumian praised reluctantly. "You're prepared to drink the Witch potion."

Without further ado, he left Apartment 601 with Franca. He planned to write a letter to Madam Magician at Auberge du Coq Doré, informing her that he could summon the Armored Shadow now.

Jenna watched them leave and muttered to herself, Witch… What would happen if a man drinks the Witch potion…

…

Auberge du Coq Doré, Room 207.

After Lumian sent the letter, he didn't extinguish the candle's flame and waited for a reply under the dual illumination.

Franca paced back and forth in the cramped room, feeling excited and a little nervous.

She yearned for clues about returning home via the Armored Shadow, but she feared that even her last hope would be obliterated.

Time ticked by. Just as the Demoness of Pleasure felt as if a year had passed, the candlelight in the room suddenly surged.

In the dim yellow flames the size of a human head, resplendent starlight flew out, enveloping Lumian and Franca.

It was as if they had arrived in the boundless cosmos, becoming abnormally insignificant.

After a brief moment of dizziness, Lumian and Franca realized that they had left Room 207 of Auberge du Coq Doré and arrived on a pitch-black deck.

The first thing they saw was an ancient triple mast, its grayish-white sails curled up like an open door.

The crimson moonlight fell from the sky, but it couldn't completely illuminate the area where Lumian and Franca were. It was dark, and the wooden planks were mottled, like an ancient haunted building.

Franca quickly surveyed the area and sighed with relief.

"Wow, an ancient sailboat.

"It's perfect for horror films!"

"What's a horror film?" Lumian asked casually.

Franca smiled awkwardly.

"A play depicting a ghost story."

As she spoke, she touched the dark flaxen rope resting on the shipboard, as if trying to discern its exact era.

Suddenly, the rope came alive and nimbly wrapped around Franca's right hand, attempting to bind the Demoness of Pleasure.

A layer of black flames erupted, scorching the dark linen rope that seemed to possess a life of its own.

The rope snapped back, as if in pain.

Simultaneously, a rope that had been lying silently on the deck swung towards Lumian.

Lumian raised his slightly scorching right palm and grabbed the front of the rope.

The rope suddenly turned still, as if all its vitality had been drained.

All the ropes that had come back to life in this area returned to normal. They landed with a thud and stopped wriggling.

Lumian looked down at his right palm and muttered silently, The Blood Emperor's remnant aura on me faintly resonates with this ship…

These strange ropes became obedient when they felt the heat in my right palm…

Is this the ancient sailboat I saw at Lavigny Docks this morning?

Lavigny Docks… The Fool cathedral… Is this Mr. Hanged Man's ship?

Lumian's thoughts raced as he quickly made a guess.

Franca spun around and said excitedly, "This is a ghost ship, a ghost ship!

"It's alive to begin with!"

As the Demoness of Pleasure's voice reverberated across the deck, Lumian heard Madam Magician's words: "Mr. Hanged Man's ghost ship is a relic from the Tudor Empire. There are many unsolved secrets. When he rewards you, you can choose to explore this ship. As for when to embark on the exploration, it's up to you."

As expected, it has something to do with the Tudor Empire… Lumian's resolve grew as he walked towards the cabin.

As Franca followed, she looked around curiously, touching and tapping here and there. Occasionally, she whispered, as if she wanted to communicate with Mr. Hanged Man's ghost ship.

Amidst the creaking sounds, a door in the cabin opened on its own.

A thick, dark-brown carpet covered the area, flanked by bookshelves and a liquor cabinet. Yellow-covered books and dark-red bottles of wine filled the space.

In front of the bookshelf stood a wide wooden table. On it were a variety of items—an ink bottle, a quill, a brass sextant, a black metallic telescope, and white candles.

Leaning against the desk stood a middle-aged man of average stature. His dark-blue hair was disheveled, and his skin was bronze and rough. He wore a linen shirt, a brown jacket, and loose dark pantaloons. He exuded a dignified aura. He was the supplicant Lumian had seen at The Fool cathedral that morning.

"Are you Mr. Hanged Man?" Lumian inquired.

The man in his prime nodded slightly.

"I'm The Hanged Man."

Franca scrutinized the man and recalled that they were on a ghost ship. She immediately recalled something.

"Y-you're Stormbringer Alger? Is this the Blue Avenger?" Franca blurted out in surprise and delight.

The Hanged Man glanced at her and replied expressionlessly, "You've heard of me?"

"Of course!" Franca praised sincerely. "You're a maritime king without the title of a Pirate King. If you hadn't fought the King of the Five Seas in the Fog Sea and caused the surrounding ships to experience a terrifying storm, no one would have known you were a demigod.

"Furthermore, you're different from those pirates. You're a genuine, unadulterated treasure hunter with lofty aspirations. You never plunder proper ships. You've been exploring the western borders of the Fog Sea, searching for the Lost City of Newins and the Solomon Empire's inheritance."

It wasn't easy for her to hold back the words "you're my idol." She felt that it would appear to transcend the times. Franca had once dreamed of being a pure treasure hunter and sailing the Five Seas.

Stormbringer Alger… After Lumian discovered that Church of The Fool's power center was at sea, he had consciously shared information about the Pirate Kings and Pirate Admirals with Franca. He knew that Alger, nicknamed Stormbringer, was a demigod captain, but he wasn't a Pirate King. Therefore, his nickname didn't include the term "king." However, Vice Admiral Ailment, who had become a Pirate King, was now known as the Queen of Ailment.

As for the Lost City of Newins and the Solomon Empire's legacy, they were treasure legends that had been popular in the Five Seas for many years.

At times, Lumian couldn't help but admire Fors Wall, the author of The Adventurer series. She had the audacity to write erotic stories about the Pirate Kings.

Aren't you afraid of being found and executed?

Or was she under the protection of the Church of The Fool?

In the face of Franca's enthusiastic praise, The Hanged Man Alger fell silent for two seconds before saying,

"Maintaining a certain level of purity is both a good and a bad thing.

"Can we begin the summoning ritual?"

Franca muttered under her breath, "A man still has a youthful side even in death…"

Lumian responded to Mr. Hanged Man's question, "Anytime."

Chapter 439: Three Questions

With The Hanged Man present, Lumian didn't need to worry about an attack from the Armored Shadow. Instead, he followed a straightforward procedure: creating a protective wall of spirituality and summoning the Armored Shadow as if beckoning a messenger.

Before the candle's dark-green flame, an indistinct shadow silently hovered in midair, adorned in pitch-black armor adorned with golden fish scales.

The contorted faces on the scales twisted ferociously, wordlessly expressing their agony, which had transformed into a deep-seated hatred and malice toward all living beings around them.

The Hanged Man Alger, dressed as a sailor, took a step forward, and subtle silver lightning bolts crackled from the wall of spirituality.

In an instant, they materialized out of thin air, causing Lumian and Franca's skin to prickle.

Amidst the oppressive calm preceding the impending storm, the myriad transparent faces on the Armored Shadow returned to their silence, but their malevolent gazes persisted.

Lumian fixed his gaze on the six radiant gold bars on the altar, steadying himself. In Hermes, he spoke, "I offer a sacrifice. Please answer three questions."

The blurry faces on the Armored Shadow's form shifted their attention to the glowing gold, silently conveying their agreement to Lumian.

Lumian then nodded at The Hanged Man.

After a brief pause, The Hanged Man posed his first question, "Who are you?"

Lumian repeated the query in Hermes. As his contracted creature, the Armored Shadow would only engage in communication under these circumstances.

After a moment of silence, the Armored Shadow spoke in a language that only Franca could barely decipher.

"I am Chen Tu, the God of Ghost Suppression, imperially conferred by the Celestial Master."

Celestial Master… Franca paused, considering her words carefully.

"His last name is Chen and his first name is Tu; he holds the title of the God of Ghost Suppression, which was granted by the leader of Daoism. He is responsible for suppressing evil spirits."

"What is Daoism?" The Hanged Man inquired after some thought.

"What does 'imperially conferred' mean?" Lumian turned to Franca and asked in Intisian.

To him, referring to as an '-ism', regardless of the prefix, seemed no different from the Church of The Fool or the Eternal Blazing Sun Church.

Franca appeared troubled.

"It's a complex topic. We can discuss it later. I'm afraid the Armored Shadow may not have the patience to wait."

That's true… Lumian cast his gaze at Mr. Hanged Man.

The Hanged Man paused briefly before asking the second question, which Lumian translated into Hermes. "What makes the eastern sea so special?"

In a deep and solemn tone, the Armored Shadow replied, "In the East Sea, there's a long-lost immortal mountain known as Penglai."

Penglai… It's really my homeland… Franca was delighted by this revelation. Her translation speed increased as she continued, "On the eastern sea, there's a mountain peak inhabited by various powerful warlocks and unique deities. It has been lost to history, and its name is Penglai."

Both Lumian and The Hanged Man found these words to be straightforward and didn't raise any further questions.

After a brief pause, The Hanged Man Alger asked in a deliberate manner, "Have there been any unusual occurrences in the eastern sea in recent years?"

In recent years? How could the Armored Shadow be aware of recent events when he was suspected to have been killed by the Underworld Daoist, imprisoned by his side, and transported to the Yellow Springs millennia ago? It's a time when the Blood Emperor had just perished or recently perished. Franca quietly mused on this but refrained from correcting The Hanged Man.

Lumian repeated the question, and the Armored Shadow responded with a cold tone, "A corpse from Penglai floated over via the river…"

Franca was taken aback and quickly translated, "The mountain called Penglai has reappeared. A powerful warlock or special deity residing on it has perished, and their corpse drifted to a place that might be the River Styx! It's—it's the river where Blood Emperor Alista Tudor was suppressed by Underworld Daoist. It's the source of the Samaritan Women's Spring!"

Does this mean that the eastern sea of the world where the Armored Shadow resides has undergone an abnormality in recent years? The long-vanished divine mountain, Penglai, has reappeared, and powerful Beyonders residing there have perished? Has the mountain known as Penglai always stood tall in the East Sea, or does it only appear occasionally? Lumian yearned to inquire further, but he couldn't ask any more questions due to the rules pertaining to summoning.

The six gold bars on the altar disintegrated, turning into sparkling specks of light that merged with the pitch-black fish-scale armor.

This time, nearly one-fifth of the armor plates turned golden and radiant.

The Hanged Man observed as the Armored Shadow faded into the dark-green candle flame. He remained silent, lost in thought, his intentions unclear.

Lumian completed the ritual and swiftly tidied up the altar. Turning to Franca, he said, "You can explain the terms in the first answer."

You're killing me! Franca grumbled silently and pondered for a moment before saying, "An imperial conferment is equivalent to a boon. Yes, a boon!

"This Armored Shadow named Chen Tu was granted a position within the Church or a deity's kingdom. Through this role, he gained the corresponding powers to suppress evil spirits.

"It's not a direct gift from a deity but rather a ceremonial act performed by the leader of that school of thought, acting on behalf of the deity and bestowing a specific title."

Lumian listened attentively and started to grasp the concept of imperial conferment.

This more structured boon system not only linked the power of boons to a specific role but also emphasized the role of the deity's proxy.

Franca exhaled and said, "That's the basic idea. There are many more intricacies if you delve deeper into it. It's a complex topic that can't be fully explained in a short time. Terms like the Heavenly Court, the Netherworld, Ritual Protocols, Receiving Scriptures, and others are related, but I'm not well-versed in all of them. My knowledge is limited to individual terms."

Seeing Mr. Hanged Man and Lumian still staring at her, her heart skipped a beat.

"You really want me to explain all of it?"

The Hanged Man nodded slightly.

"I understand it might be challenging to explain on the spot, and there may be inaccuracies. You can take your time to recollect and organize the information when you return. It might be helpful to put it in writing and convey it to me through your Major Arcana card holder."

"Alright." Franca was relieved that The Hanged Man was understanding and accommodating. He seemed skilled at considering things from another person's perspective. She then grumbled silently,

Why did I agree so quickly…

The Hanged Man exuded a sense of dignity without arrogance as he smiled and said, "Once you've prepared the written information, you can think about what kind of compensation you'd like."

Franca had several desires, including a mystical item similar to the Spell of Harrumph, a Sealed Artifact that could enable teleportation, and the Sequence 5 Demoness of Affliction potion formula.

She found herself in a dilemma, as she had considered the reward in advance and had almost forgotten to explain the term "Daoism" until Lumian reminded her.

After careful consideration, Franca provided a succinct explanation, "Daoism is a school of thought that venerates the natural laws and the corresponding philosophy that shapes them into unique deities for worship. Their leader is called the Celestial Master, which essentially means a teacher who comprehends the world's operating laws and spreads that knowledge. The 'ways of heaven' refers to the operating laws and corresponding philosophy of the world I mentioned earlier."

Lumian attempted to distill the main point, asking, "So, Celestial Masters are akin to leaders like pontiffs, popes, chief shepherds, and matriarchs, with different titles depending on the denomination?"

Franca hesitated for a moment before confirming, "You could put it that way."

As long as one didn't contemplate joining Daoism, this simplified explanation was sufficient to understand the basic concept.

Lumian nodded.

"It seems like a Celestial Master and an Underworld Daoist are on a similar level."

"I agree," Franca agreed.

During their conversation, The Hanged Man, Alger, rarely interrupted. He mostly listened quietly, occasionally expressing his thoughts or asking questions, which allowed the conversation to flow smoothly. Lumian and Franca shared a lot of information in one go.

Finally, the Major Arcana card holder looked at Lumian and asked, "The Armored Shadow's three answers have been very helpful. What would you like as a reward?"

Very helpful? Apart from allowing us to gain a better understanding of that world and know that the missing Penglai divine mountain has reappeared, there's nothing of practical use… Lumian kept to Madam Magician's advice and said without hesitation, "I would like the opportunity to explore this ghost ship."

Franca was surprised by Lumian's request. Her initial shock was quickly replaced by excitement.

I want it too. I want the opportunity to pilot the ghost ship and study it!

The Hanged Man glanced at Lumian and remarked, "As I expected, you've already sensed the uniqueness of the Blue Avenger. It's one of the Tudor Empire's relics. Would you like to explore it now?"

Before Lumian could respond, the deep voice of Termiboros echoed in his mind, "Dangerous."

Danger… For real? Is Termiboros merely concerned about being implicated by me, so He warned me? Or is He afraid that I might gain something special during my exploration of the Blue Avenger, potentially disrupting Trier's potential catastrophe and foiling His scheme? Lumian was momentarily unsure if he should believe Termiboros's words.

Termiboros continued in a deep voice, "If you wish to resurrect Alista Tudor within your body, you can explore it now."

Lumian didn't pay much attention to Termiboros's words. He recalled Madam Magician's prior hint: I can decide when to begin the exploration…

Does this mean I should consider delaying it? Otherwise, why mention it at all? Just request the reward to be a chance of an exploration… Perhaps Aurore's philosophy of balance is at play here. My current negative effects are temporarily balanced, so there's no rush to strengthen the Blood Emperor's aura… As a Conspirer, Lumian quickly made a decision.

"Mr. Hanged Man, I'd like to explore the Blue Avenger at an opportune moment."

Chapter 440: Illusory Sigh

The Hanged Man agreed to Lumian's request and instructed him to contact him through Magician.

After expressing their gratitude, Lumian and Franca left the captain's cabin and followed the creaking wooden planks, just wide enough for three people to walk side by side. In the dim torchlight, they returned to the deck.

They noticed that Alger wasn't alone on the ghost ship, the Blue Avenger. A dozen sailors were scattered around, hiding in the shadows and making no attempts to approach.

Suddenly, Lumian and Franca witnessed a brilliant star hanging in front of them. It gleamed with an eerie, blue light, as though it had emerged from another realm.

The star expanded rapidly, as if it had descended to the ground in an instant. Its radiant glow enveloped everything in its vicinity.

Lumian and Franca blinked, momentarily blinded by the starlight. When their vision cleared, they found themselves back in Room 207 of Auberge du Coq Doré.

"A-absolutely stunning!" Franca exclaimed, her face brimming with longing.

She lamented the fact that her only option for switching paths was to become a Hunter, unable to experience the carefree life of an Apprentice. She could only hope to acquire a Sealed Artifact with similar abilities in the future.

Lumian, lost in thought, didn't echo Franca's praise.

Observing his contemplative demeanor, Franca couldn't help but voice her concerns, "Don't you find this situation a bit odd?

"Gathering 100,000 verl d'or in gold should be a breeze for a treasure hunter as formidable as a Pirate King. Coming up with those three questions shouldn't take long, yet Mr. Hanged Man only sought you out to summon the Armored Shadow after all these days, and it happened after he arrived in Trier.

"Besides, Madam Magician could easily transport us to the sea and the Blue Avenger before sending us back. So, why wait for Mr. Hanged Man to arrive in Trier to do so?"

Lumian smiled, praising Franca's astute observation.

"You're quite perceptive this time. It seems that putting your brain to work has its benefits. Idleness can give the impression of a lack of intelligence."

"Dammit, are you praising me or insulting me?" Franca retorted, her brow furrowed. "Either Mr. Hanged Man was in some unique situation that prevented an individual from pinpointing his location, or he has other motives for being in Trier…"

At this point, Lumian and Franca both remembered the impending catastrophe and felt the ominous pressure of an approaching storm hanging over the city.

"Could the Tarot Club be dispatching more Major Arcana card holders to Trier? Perhaps to protect as many citizens as possible if we fail to avert the disaster?" Franca speculated.

Lumian nodded thoughtfully, refraining from argument.

After a moment of silence, Franca changed the topic with enthusiasm, exclaiming, "I want to become a demigod. I want to amass gold!"

Observing Lumian's inquisitive expression, Franca continued, driven by her desires, "That way, I can have you summon the Armored Shadow and ask the questions I've been itching to ask. No need to rely on the protection of Major Arcana card holders!"

"Then give it your all, Miss Pleasure," Lumian teased.

…

The next day, just before noon, Lumian returned from Rue des Fontaines. He led Jenna underground to the third level of the catacombs, arriving at a small square with two sacrificial pillars.

Puzzled, Jenna asked, "Why did you bring me here?"

If she didn't know Lumian well enough to understand his character, she might have suspected that her friend suddenly had sinister intentions.

Lumian, wearing a black satchel slung diagonally across him, stood confidently with his hands in his pockets. He smiled and explained, "I'm giving you the safest environment for your advancement."

Having heard Franca's account and Madam Magician's words, Lumian had reason to believe that Sequence 0 of the Assassin pathway, the true goddess worshiped by the Demoness Sect, was likely a woman who had transformed from a man, and Her nature was deeply twisted.

It was said that this Primordial Demoness was driven by pain and a desire to replicate Her experiences through the generations. Consequently, She despised ordinary women who became Witches. Even the Demoness Sect hunted down female Assassins, female Instigators, and true Witches.

Given this context, Jenna's consumption of the Witch potion might be affected. After all, even the Hidden Sage, an existing occupying Sequence 0, could subtly influence every Beyonder of the Mystery Pryer pathway while they consumed the potion for their advancement. He whispered to them and imparted knowledge to them. There was no reason the true evil goddess, Primordial Demoness, couldn't exert significant influence on the Witches.

At lower Sequences, the influence shouldn't be too strong—even Aurore had advanced to Sequence 7 and become a Warlock under the Hidden Sage's constant whispers. However, it was better to be cautious. Since there was a way to reduce or weaken these influences, it made sense to do so.

Witches represented the first qualitative transformation of the Assassin pathway, perhaps even the core essence of Demoness. The Primordial Demoness, who sought to change men into women, would likely pay more attention to this particular Sequence advancement. Neither Franca nor Lumian wanted Jenna to take unnecessary risks.

Of course, Madam Magician had occasionally mentioned that this evil goddess wasn't in a stable state.

"The safest?" Jenna looked around, still somewhat unconvinced.

The surroundings were immersed in darkness, and corpses were scattered about. How did it seem safe?

Only the two weathered stone pillars appeared strangely warm and calming.

Lumian briefly explained the unique nature of the sacrificial square and concluded, "At the pinnacle of the Assassin pathway is an evil goddess. No one knows if She might suddenly lose Her sanity. Deities of the same pathway have the ability to influence Beyonders when They consume potions for advancement. This, well, divine manifestation, complicates things."

"This place can significantly weaken that connection."

Jenna listened intently and approached the stone pillar engraved with the Sun Sacred Emblem. She extended her arms slightly and began to pray.

Noticing that she hadn't asked Franca why she hadn't been affected by this before, Lumian raised his right hand, stroked his chin, and clicked his tongue.

"Praise the Sun!" Jenna sang praises to the Eternal Blazing Sun reverently as she concluded her prayer.

Lumian remained silent as he handed Jenna the Witch Beyonder characteristic, Shadow Lizard scales, and other ingredients from the black satchel.

He had used her 10,000 verl d'or to obtain these items from Gardner Martin.

Jenna examined the dark-blue vertical eye-like "jewel" and the intricate thread-like patterns on its surface. She knelt on one knee and began concocting the potion on the unusually clean square ground.

Before long, she held a dark-red potion with concealed shadows in her hand.

Jenna steadied herself, feeling as though she had been pushed forward by various events in the past few months. She couldn't stop now.

Perhaps this is my destiny… Praise the Sun! Jenna closed her eyes and added silently in her heart, Praise The Fool!

At this critical moment, in her quest for smooth advancement and survival, her faith inadvertently shifted.

This was partly because Franca and Lumian seemed relatively relaxed about consuming potions and advancing their Sequences. At the very least, they both believed in Mr. Fool.

Without hesitation, Jenna swallowed the potion, fully accepting the notion that she had been dead when she assassinated Hugues Artois.

The potion was icy and illusory, like melting frost. Jenna quickly began to feel an itching, painful sensation spreading all over her body.

Her thoughts began to blur, and she felt as though she were slowly sinking into water.

Suddenly, excruciating pain surged throughout her body, jolting Jenna back to full awareness. She found herself surrounded by black, silent flames that were slowly consuming her.

Above her, a translucent layer of frost-encased ice, like a mirror, prevented Jenna from escaping the black flames.

In the next instant, a face and a figure materialized on the ice.

The face bore an uncanny resemblance to Jenna's own!

The figure was another Jenna, but her master hand had transformed into her left!

The Jenna above the ice stared at the figure engulfed by the black flames with anticipation and desire.

Experienced in combat, Jenna reacted quickly despite her surprise and horror. She summoned all her strength and delivered a powerful punch upward.

The ice shattered without a sound, and the "corrupted" Jenna plunged into the black flames.

In the distance, a python-like black object swayed gently, with a dark-blue vertical eye at its tip.

The bizarre "python" vanished in an instant, not entering the area. Instead, it delved into a black shadow.

Almost simultaneously, Jenna heard a long, painful sigh.

The ethereal sigh seemed to emanate from very close to her, as if it originated from the vicinity of the sacrificial square and the surrounding corpses.

The black shadow cast by the strange serpent expanded wildly, growing larger and fainter.

It enveloped Jenna and the malevolent figure and seeped into their bodies.

Jenna refused to surrender. Enduring the pain and dizziness, she crawled out of the abyss of black flames and onto the nearby ice. The black shadow weakened and ceased its pursuit. It could only drag the malevolent Jenna into an unfathomable abyss.

The scene shattered instantly, and Jenna's vision returned to normal. She saw the mottled stone pillar engraved with the Sun Sacred Emblem.

Her face contorted, but the pain in her body gradually subsided.

Lumian watched as the black flames on Jenna's body rapidly shrank and dissipated, while the surrounding frost melted. He understood that his companion had successfully advanced to Sequence 7 and had become a Witch.

Only then did he turn his gaze towards the edge of the sacrificial square, where the tomb and the surrounding corpses lay in darkness.

Not long after Jenna consumed the potion, he sensed an anomaly in that direction. However, nothing entered the clean square with the two sacrificial pillars.

When Jenna's unusual state finally subsided, she rose to her feet and noticed Lumian gazing into the distance. Puzzled, she asked, "After drinking the potion, I thought I heard a sigh from over there."

Lumian nodded slowly and replied, "On this level of the catacombs, there's a Krismona Night Pillar. It represents a Demoness of Catastrophe who once met her end here."

Chapter 441: Demoness Cooperation

"Demoness of Catastrophe…" Jenna had never heard of this term from Franca. "Is it a Sequence name?"

Lumian didn't hold anything back.

"Yes, a Sequence 2 angel. Heh heh, the term angel and Demoness always seem strange together."

Angel… Jenna didn't have a clear impression of individuals at this level.

Though she had often heard Lumian and Franca talk about the terror and might of demigods, it had remained theoretical for her. She didn't know how terrifying or powerful they were.

Jenna muttered to herself, "Krismona… Hasn't She already perished? Why am I still hearing Her sigh? It should be from Her, right?"

Lumian looked at Jenna and said solemnly, "For such a formidable figure, even if They were to perish completely, there would still be remnants of Their mind that wouldn't dissipate. It's like not stiffening even after becoming a corpse.

"In the future, if you come into contact with the inheritance of a similar influential figure, you must be very, very careful."

Jenna looked surprised and vigilant. She glanced at the edge of the sacrificial square and asked with concern, "What do we do now?"

Lumian chuckled.

"What can we do? What else but wait for Her to sigh? Do you have thoughts of comforting Her?

"Don't worry. She's imprisoned by death and bound by the spring water. She can't leave the fourth and third levels of the catacombs. As long as you don't explore this place, you don't have to worry about anything.

"How was it? Was there any influence from the Primordial Demoness?"

It was only then that Lumian, holding the white candle, assessed Jenna's appearance.

Her skin, which hadn't been particularly good due to her background and experiences, seemed to have been reborn. Her facial features looked the same as usual, but the details had become more exquisite, as if there was a luster flowing through them. Overall, she exuded an alluring charm and became even more feminine.

Even with Lumian's experience, he couldn't help but marvel inwardly.

Jenna was also scrutinizing herself. She felt that her height had increased a little, and the ratio of her body parts she had previously been dissatisfied with had approached perfection.

"I sensed a peculiar python appear, but it didn't really approach me. It quickly vanished…" Jenna recalled as she took out a prepared mirror. Facing the yellow candle flame in Lumian's hand, she scrutinized her reflection and couldn't help but smile.

It was common for most people to appreciate beauty, and Jenna was no exception. Seeing how beautiful and charming she had become made her quite happy. She even felt enchanted by herself.

Reluctantly, she put away the mirror and assessed her changes from various angles.

I can now use black flames that incinerate the Spirit Body and spirituality. I've gained the blessing of frost. I've mastered various forms of black magic. With prepared ingredients, I can directly become invisible and cast rare spells. Additionally, I can curse targets through blood and other media. I've unlocked the door to Mirror magic and now possess anti-divination and the ability to create substitutes. I am skilled in using staff and can also use them as substitutes…

Compared to Assassins and Instigators, Witches had undergone a qualitative transformation. They possessed comprehensive abilities, considerable strength, and excelled in survival. Only then did Jenna truly feel like a member of the world of mysticism and a controller of superpowers.

She suddenly felt an urge to test a Witch's various abilities on a target.

However, after glancing at Lumian, she abandoned the idea.

She felt that there was still a significant gap between them. Even a Sequence 6 Franca likely wasn't Ciel's match. Of course, if Franca truly intended to assassinate Lumian, her chances of eliminating him weren't slim. Most Beyonders below Sequence 4 were relatively weak. If they committed an error, it could very well plunge them into the depths of hell.

Lumian tossed a burning white candle to Jenna and pointed at his black satchel.

"There's some cosmetics in here. Make yourself look less attractive to hide your striking charm. That way, the Demoness Sect's hidden members won't recognize you as a Witch at a glance."

For this purpose, he had brought a set of women's cosmetics.

Jenna clicked her tongue.

"You even thought of such details in advance…"

"In the Beyonder world, being cautious and meticulous effectively increases your chances of survival," Lumian said, turning around. "Let's disguise ourselves elsewhere. It's not suitable to stay here for too long."

"Why do I get the feeling that you're often impulsive and a little crazy…" Jenna muttered softly before smiling. "Do you also think I've become more beautiful now?"

She wasn't wearing any makeup, but her blue eyes seemed to contain starlight as they darted around.

Lumian scoffed.

"I respect the potion's effects and believe in the influence of Beyonder characteristics."

With that, he turned around, holding the candle, and walked towards the wide stone steps leading up.

You sure never lose out in a battle of tongues! Jenna cursed under her breath, quickly packed her things, and followed him.

Before she could figure out how to continue teasing Lumian and express her gratitude, she heard the man slowly walk forward and casually say, "Also, you have to work for me tomorrow."

"Dammit!" Jenna blurted out.

…

In the library district, Rue des Terraces.

The street was known for its diverse terraces, frequented by tourists.

Lumian stood on a café terrace decorated in shades of green and white, casting a sidelong glance at Building 20, where Guillaume Bénet's widow, Condiment Beauty Paulina, resided.

The terrace of the house was painted a refreshing white, supported by a wooden frame that shielded it from the wind and rain. It resembled a resort hotel on the southern coast of Intis.

Lumian sipped his coffee as all the information and conjectures he had gathered during this period flashed through his mind.

Every week, a mysterious man visits the Condiment Beauty at night. Once or twice a week… At least once this week. It should be within these two days…

According to the observations of the surrounding citizens, there are a total of three mysterious men who visited Paulina at night. One is young, one is in his prime, and one is nearly 60 years old…

Who among them could be the Sinners' liaison, Bouvard Pont-Péro?

One of Bouvard's contracted abilities is Transfiguration. These three might or might not be him. They're just substitutes he creates to attract attention, and he sneaks in disguised as one of Paulina's servants…

The price of Transfiguration is one's own face. The downside is the desire to abuse others… The buildings on Rue de la Terrasse are quite soundproof. None of the neighbors heard Paulina's screams…

Some time has elapsed since Guillaume Bénet's demise. It's highly likely that Paulina officially joined the Sinners organization, received a boon, and became a Beyonder…

The most important part of the plan is to determine who Bouvard Pont-Péro is…

Lumian had a plan. As the sky darkened, he finished his coffee and donned his brown round hat. Without making a sound, he left the building and vanished into an alley on the side of the street.

…

20 Rue de la Terrasse, in the spacious and warm master bedroom.

The mature and beautiful Paulina, adorned in a pale-white nightgown, walked to the full-body mirror, removed her clothes, and examined the whip-like marks on her body.

They had faded to a faint dark-red hue, likely to dissipate completely within a few days.

Paulina let out a soft sigh at the thought of the pain she would have to endure for the next two days.

Her gaze fell upon the black mark on her right shoulder, and she rejoiced that the first contract ability she had chosen after becoming a Contractee was Regeneration.

Once activated, it could regenerate flesh and skin to a certain extent, allowing various injuries to quickly recover.

Paulina had never tested whether this could regenerate limbs, believing it should work if the conditions were met.

Of course, the dead couldn't activate their abilities.

Paulina adjusted her light-white nightgown and prepared to put on light makeup to welcome a potential guest.

At that moment, she suddenly felt a strong sense of danger.

This also stemmed from her contract ability. She felt that sensing danger was more important than actual combat.

For this, she had paid the price of "fertility" and received the negative effect of mild mental weakness.

Paulina's nerves tightened, and her body abruptly bent backward. With the flexibility of a Dancer, she distanced herself from the source of danger.

Simultaneously, she opened her right palm, and silver-white lightning shot out, intertwining with a crackling sound, enveloping the area where she suspected the assailant was hiding.

This was her third and final contracted ability, Electric Arc. It could effectively compensate for her weaknesses in offensive means. The price was that she was prone to lightning strikes in a thunderstorm. The downside was that her body had become more sensitive. She could originally withstand 70-80% of her original threshold for pain. This made Paulina resistant to Bouvard Pont-Péro's visit. She relied on Alms Monk's endurance to hold on every time.

With a cracking sound, a mirror suddenly appeared in the area covered by the lightning in her palm. It quickly charred and shattered into pieces.

From the corner of her eye, Paulina spotted a figure swiftly outlined by the drawn curtains. She hurriedly contorted her body to avoid it.

Suddenly, a white fist materialized behind her head and smashed below her ear.

With a bang, Paulina blacked out.

Behind Condiment Beauty, Jenna, dressed as a female mercenary, instantly appeared.

She and Franca easily controlled their target with dual invisibility, anti-divination tactics, one to attract attention, and the other to launch a sneak attack.

Franca took a few steps forward, retrieved the Bliss Society's sedative, and brought it to Paulina's nose.

After completing her task, Jenna drew the curtains to leave a slight crack, casting her outstretched palm in the light of the room.

This was a signal to Lumian that the operation had succeeded.

Before long, Lumian scaled the outer wall and entered the master bedroom with Jenna's help.

Then, he tossed the Lie earring to Franca.

Franca transformed the mystical item into a silver pendant and hung it on her chest.

Her appearance and height changed, becoming more and more like Paulina.

Chapter 442: Opportunity to Act

Seeing Franca appear before her as Paulina, Jenna couldn't help but marvel at the wonders of the Lie accessory.

This transformation was countless times more potent than that of an Actor of the Mother Tree of Desire pathway. It was the most mystical disguise she had ever encountered.

Franca gazed at her reflection in the full-body mirror and stroked her face gently. She chuckled and said, "I like this style too."

"What don't you like?" Lumian mocked.

"This is called having an eye for beauty!" Franca opened Paulina's wardrobe and chose a pair of pajamas that could hide many items. She entered the master bedroom's washroom and began changing.

Soon, "Madame Paulina" emerged. Jenna knew Franca well, but she temporarily couldn't tell the authenticity.

After Franca entered Invisibility, Lumian administered some truth serum to the unconscious Paulina.

He estimated the time and felt that it was about time. Then, he took out the Mysticism Smelling Salts and brought them to Paulina's nose.

Amidst the sneezes, Lumian capped the bottle and retreated into a crevice beside the wardrobe, preventing Paulina, who had regained consciousness, from seeing him.

Jenna retrieved a small revolver from her dark brown belt, squatted down, and pressed it against Paulina's forehead, ready to pull the trigger.

Paulina snapped out of her daze and saw a face adorned with a silvery-white half-mask.

The face was uncovered, and although the skin wasn't fair and had some flaws, and the texture was concealed by cosmetics, the curves were quite beautiful, making people of the same sex take a second look.

Immediately after, Paulina felt the coldness of the gun's barrel and saw a revolver held to her head.

Her body tensed instinctively.

Jenna didn't give her a chance to express her doubts or pleas. She asked bluntly,

"When will Bouvard Pont-Péro arrive?"

Paulina replied subconsciously, "In the next two days…"

Before she could finish, she suddenly shut her mouth, disbelief etched on her face.

W-why did I say what was on my mind?

Jenna raised a second question based on her preparations.

"In the past two months, among the mysterious men who visited you under the cover of night, who was Bouvard Pont-Péro? Or were all of them him?"

Paulina struggled for a few seconds before blurting out, "No, it's Bouvard only once a week. The rest are just his attempts to confuse others. Moreover, he changes his appearance every two or three times. He—he has Transfiguration."

Jenna asked curiously, "Will the others Bouvard Pont-Péro send sleep with you?"

Did they keep up the act to the very end, or did they only keep up appearances for the latter half?

"No," Paulina replied, swallowing her saliva. "Bouvard possesses a strong sense of possessiveness. Since I've already become his lover, he won't allow me to have any more intercourse with other men. The people he sends will only chat with me, have dinner with me, and wander around the bedroom for a while before leaving."

Very possessive… Lumian's thoughts raced as he listened in the shadows, recalling the mysticism knowledge he had obtained when he became a Contractee.

Soon, he found a contracted creature that fit the criteria and its corresponding abilities.

Evil Shadow Black Beast, a spirit world creature that resides in the shadows of creatures. The birth of its descendants requires the stripping of a shadow as a carrier. Creatures that lose their shadows will die on the spot…

By sacrificing a human's shadow, he could obtain the Shadow Substitution ability from the Evil Shadow Black Beast, and his possessiveness would significantly increase…

By controlling the target or subduing them in advance, he could complete Shadow Substitution in battle and use someone else's shadow to take damage on his behalf, avoiding dangerous attacks. Under such circumstances, the distance between the main body and the target couldn't exceed 20 meters…

"I wonder how much those actors earn…" Jenna teased with a smile before asking, "What Sequence Beyonder is Bouvard Pont-Péro equivalent to. What contractual abilities does he possess?"

Paulina pursed her lips, unwilling to answer.

After a few seconds, she couldn't resist the urge to spill the beans. She opened her mouth and said, "Bouvard is an Ascetic. He said that a Fate Appropriator is the most important Sequence of the Inevitability pathway before obtaining godhood. One needs to make significant contributions to obtain the corresponding boon. He's still far from that.

"He once mentioned that Ascetic can have six contractual abilities, but I don't know if that refers to ordinary circumstances or special circumstances."

Leaning against the wardrobe, Lumian couldn't help but chuckle inwardly.

Temiboros, are you aware of this?

He didn't ask because he knew Termiboros wouldn't answer such a question.

Paulina continued, "He didn't display all his abilities in front of me. He always wore pajamas and didn't expose his upper body during sex.

"I've seen him emerge from the shadows and know he has three imps. He even suggested I choose the Danger Premonition ability, believing it to be useful."

Shadow Burial, Tamed Imps, Danger Premonition, Shadow Substitution, Transfiguration… That's a total of five contracted abilities… If Bouvard Pont-Péro is nothing special, there should be only one unknown contracted ability. Even if he's stronger than ordinary Ascetics, there's a high chance that his total abilities won't exceed eight… Lumian quickly formed a clearer understanding.

The price of Shadow Burial was having normal dreams. The downside was becoming more extreme and paranoid. The price of Tamed Imps was three infant corpses that had died before they were born. The downside was that he had to use his life force to feed the imps, and there was a risk of backlash. The specific method was to grow sarcomas that looked like breastfeeding. Danger Premonition involved sacrificing fertility and become mentally weak…

Contractee abilities are truly peculiar… Ever since becoming a Witch and becoming deeply involved in the Sinners organization, Jenna had learned about Contractee, Alms Monk, Ascetic, and other Inevitability Sequences. She now knew why Lumian possessed Spell of Harrumph, Spirit World Traversal, and other abilities.

She thought for a moment and asked, "Apart from contractual abilities, does Bouvard Pont-Péro possess any mystical items, Beyonder weapons, or other items?"

Paulina shuddered inexplicably.

"H-he has two pockets that I can't touch. He always chooses the kind of pajamas with pockets or pants pockets."

Carries some items… I wonder what powers they possess… But at least we won't end up empty-handed… Lumian allowed his thoughts to wander.

Jenna followed the predetermined rhythm of their conversation and inquired about Paulina's performances in front of Bouvard Pont-Péro, her interactions with the butler and servants in the building, her abilities, and her assets.

It wasn't until Lumian tossed the sedative from the Bliss Society that Jenna stopped asking and caught it with her freed left hand.

Then, Paulina fainted again.

"She possesses Regeneration, much like a Vampire's self-healing ability. The sedative's effects will likely be diminished and won't endure for long," Jenna inquired. "Why didn't you simply eliminate her?"

Lumian cast a glance at the new Witch and let out a chuckle.

"You're quite the ruthless one, aren't you?"

Jenna pursed her lips and stated, "Showing kindness to heretics only harms innocent citizens."

"Exactly!" Franca, disguised as Paulina, deactivated her Invisibility and concurred.

The more she observed Witch Jenna, the more she found herself liking her. Despite Jenna deliberately donning unattractive makeup and a half-mask, Franca had a discerning eye for beauty.

Lumian scoffed and said, "Haven't you heard that Bouvard Pont-Péro seems to possess Danger Premonition? Even though you can counter divination, if Paulina were to die now and her boon's power returns to its source, do you think Bouvard won't receive a warning from fate?

"Anthony still has time to enter. He won't engage in direct combat, but he'll serve a purpose in my scheme."

Lumian not only aimed to capture Bouvard Pont-Péro but also intended to act as a Conspirer in this endeavor.

"I understand," Franca said with widened eyes. "I just adhere to the notion of being ruthless toward heretics."

As she spoke, she removed the Lie silver pendant from her chest and tossed it to Jenna. Lumian instructed Anthony Reid to infiltrate the building via the outer wall of the master bedroom.

…

As the drizzle descended into night, the gas street lamps on both sides of the street emitted a hazy glow.

At 20 Rue de la Terrasse, a man in a silk top hat, black suit, and dark bow tie rang the doorbell.

He had an ordinary appearance, short, thick eyebrows, and deep blue eyes. He wouldn't attract anyone's attention when he walked along the bustling arcade.

The butler of the house opened the door. He glanced at the visitor and discreetly gestured.

The man formed a circle with his hands and asked, "Where's Paulina?"

"Madame awaits you in the bedroom," the butler replied respectfully.

The man nodded and made his way through the living room and up the stairs, arriving outside the master bedroom.

Without knocking, he turned the handle and entered.

In the spacious and warm master bedroom, the wall lamps had all been extinguished. The candlelight flickered dimly, casting a soft, rosy glow that quickened one's pulse.

The man's eyes fixed on Paulina, reclining on the bed, and a grin crept across his face.

"Why does it feel even more enticing than before?"

"Something special just for you," Paulina whispered.

The man stared at the alluring contours, his pulse racing. He chuckled and said,

"Why do I find you more captivating than ever?"

"I dressed up just for you." Paulina, in her two-piece pajamas, seemed bashful, her cheeks flushed as she closed her eyes.

The man swallowed hard, his mind on high alert, though his body couldn't resist taking a step forward.

Chapter 443: Trap Within A Trap

The man suspected to be Bouvard Pont-Péro took a step forward and finally regained some rationality.

He adjusted the dark bow tie beneath his neck, and three indistinct figures materialized above his head and shoulders.

These figures weren't large; they looked like newborns with pale-white, bluish skin and sinister expressions on their round, distorted faces.

Tamed Imps!

The three translucent and indistinct imps burrowed toward Bouvard Pont-Péro's chest, each finding its place and began suckling in a frenzied manner.

Suddenly, their figures became much clearer. They left his body, circling around and flying at an extremely fast speed to different parts of 20 Rue de la Terrasse.

With no corporeal form, they effortlessly traversed walls and doors. In a short span of time, they went through the master bedroom's wardrobe, desk, changing room, and washroom, leaving no room for any assailant to hide.

One sinister-looking imp with a bluish-white face even circled the room's shadows, ensuring that no Beyonder could rely on supernatural powers to lurk in this special environment.

Seeing Paulina's puzzled and watery gaze as she opened her eyes, Bouvard Pont-Péro subconsciously explained, "My Danger Premonition tells me that something is amiss here. Lately, I need to be extremely cautious and avoid making any mistakes. After I eliminate the hidden danger and confirm my safety, I'll enjoy my evening with you."

For some inexplicable reason, Bouvard's tone was gentler and more eager to explain than before when facing Paulina. It was as if her attire and demeanor tonight had touched his heart, making him irresistibly attracted and eager to please her.

As Bouvard Pont-Péro finished speaking, one of the imps left the master bedroom and entered the adjacent room.

With its bluish-white skin, it reached the end of the corridor, passed through the wardrobe, and entered.

In the next moment, it saw a figure bound and gagged.

The figure wore a pale-white nightgown, and her clothes were disheveled, revealing a large area of her skin. She was beautiful, elegant, and had a plump body like a ripe fruit. She was another Paulina!

The contorted-faced imp let out a shrill cry and rushed back into Bouvard Pont-Péro's embrace. As it drew closer to his chest, sucking, it relayed the scene it had witnessed to its feeder.

Bouvard Pont-Péro's expression changed, realizing he had fallen into a trap and been ambushed.

Luckily, he had been cautious enough to detect hidden dangers in advance!

The Sinners' liaison darkened and merged with his shadow, sliding into the wall's shadows like a snake.

His Shadow Burial's ability was unlike that of many Beyonders. They relied on the dimness of shadows to hide, while he transformed himself into a shadow, truly becoming part of the darkness. Just like the special creatures that inhabited such environments, he could stray into alternate spaces connected to certain shadowy regions.

At that moment, Bouvard Pont-Péro felt as if he had plunged into a lightless sea. His body extended and merged with the inky droplets.

Quickly, he darted towards the room at the end of the corridor.

His mission: to save Paulina and escape Rue de la Terrasse with her.

He harbored an extraordinary possessiveness for this Condiment Beauty.

As Bouvard moved through the shadows, he suddenly heard a crisp crack.

The yellow gas wall lamp blazed to life, filling every inch of the glass cover with flames.

The gas lamps in the corridor transformed into miniature suns, banishing the shadows.

Only a serpentine humanoid shadow remained on the floor.

Jenna, who had transformed into the lady's maid using Lie, emerged from a side room, casting a black flame onto Bouvard Pont-Péro's shadow.

The Sinners' liaison immediately felt pain and weakness originating from the depths of his soul.

Without hesitation, he used Shadow Substitution.

In 20 Rue de la Terrasse, Paulina's butler and servants had already become believers in Inevitability. They submitted to the envoy, Bouvard Pont-Péro, and their shadows were offered for exchange!

In Paulina's lady's maid's room, the human shadow suddenly squirmed and transformed.

The black shadow stood up, becoming plumper, resembling Bouvard Pont-Péro.

The shadows in the corridor quickly dissipated under the black flames. The lady's maid in the room twitched a few times, and black flames oozed from her nostrils, ears, mouth, and eyes. Then, she fell silent and ceased breathing.

Bouvard Pont-Péro seized the moment when Shadow Substitution took effect to activate another contracted ability.

He sprinted forward, leaving behind dozens, even hundreds of phantoms.

His body flickered amidst the phantoms, shifting positions so that Jenna couldn't lock onto him or distinguish him.

In the blink of an eye, Bouvard Pont-Péro, accompanied by a group of figures, entered the room where Paulina was bound and opened the corresponding wardrobe.

Paulina's eyes were filled with surprise, desire, and hope as she watched Bouvard's right hand, gleaming with a metallic luster, become incredibly sharp.

In an instant, the Sinners' liaison severed the rope and attempted to escape the encirclement with Paulina.

He had a total of eight contracted abilities, one of which had never been used before.

At that moment, as the rope loosened, Paulina couldn't help but remember her traumatic experiences of abuse at the hands of Bouvard, the pain etched into the depths of her mind.

Uncontrollable hatred surged in her heart. She longed for the one who had harmed her to face justice.

She suddenly raised her right hand.

Alarm bells rang in Bouvard's mind as he sensed an intense Danger Premonition.

Yet, at this distance, no one could react faster than Electric Arc.

Silver-white lightning shot from Paulina's palm and struck Bouvard's body. His body went numb, and even his thoughts seemed to be engulfed by lightning, temporarily rendering him powerless.

Franca, disguised as Paulina, had already closed within five meters, aiming the Ring of Punishment she wore.

Lightning flickered in her eyes, and Bouvard's body shuddered, as if his soul was being torn apart, in excruciating pain that left him unable to think straight.

Psychic Piercing!

Smack!

Jenna, who had dashed to her target's side, clenched her fist and struck behind Bouvard's ear before he could rely on his Ascetic endurance to recover.

The Sinners' liaison slipped into unconsciousness.

Before Bouvard lost consciousness, he glimpsed a pair of black leather shoes and heard a taunting voice.

"I don't even need to lift a finger when dealing with you."

…

Bouvard abruptly broke free from the darkness and regained consciousness.

The first thing he saw was a right leg resting on his left knee and that pair of black leather shoes. Then, he saw a young man leaning back in an armchair, his hands pressing on the armrests.

Bouvard instinctively wanted to use his abilities, but all his thoughts seemed to sink into a quagmire, unresponsive.

In the next moment, he noticed that his feet had transformed into cow hooves, and he was wrapped in a layer of brown cowhide.

Animal Creation Spell… Bouvard instantly grasped his predicament. He watched as the young man with golden and black hair leisurely flipped through the grayish-blue cloth bag he had hidden in his pocket.

Wh— Bouvard instinctively held his breath, hoping that the other party would take out the item.

Soon, the young man retrieved a gold coin with a 5 verl d'or denomination with a Sunbird relief from a grayish-blue cloth bag.

Yes! That's it! Bouvard anticipated what would happen next.

Simultaneously, he focused on observing the other party's luck.

This was one of the few abilities not restricted by the Animal Creation Spell.

Bouvard's bullish face now donning an honest look, suddenly froze.

He saw his enemy's luck of all kinds, and he saw layers of colors constantly changing!

A sharp pain pierced Bouvard's brain, and he instinctively closed his eyes. He felt a sticky, warm, and bloody liquid slowly trickle down from his eyeballs.

As Bouvard's pain subsided, as if he had seen something he shouldn't have, he heard the young man say with a smile, "Were you hoping that I'll take away this gold coin of misfortune and have my luck changed passively, allowing you to escape your predicament?"

He knows the Luck Transference Spell… He also knows the Animal Creation Spell… Does he belong to another organization that believes in Inevitability or… A name suddenly flashed through Bouvard Pont-Péro's mind: Lumian Lee?

Lumian seemed to sense Bouvard's thoughts and smiled without humor.

"I thought you were always on guard against me."

Bouvard's heart sank, and he abandoned any hope of luck. He immediately used his spirituality to stir the air within the cowhide and indistinctly recited the honorific name of the individual.

However, he quickly realized that his spirituality was on the verge of drying up, and his mind was extremely weak. He couldn't even do such a thing.

"If you understand your situation, you can answer my questions," Lumian said with a smile.

Bouvard subconsciously opened his mouth and mooed.

He had an urge to communicate with the other party, but he could only let out a cow's moo.

Jenna, dressed as a female mercenary, brought over a brass mechanical typewriter and placed it in front of Bouvard.

This was Franca's suggestion: There was no need to worry that Bouvard Pont-Péro wouldn't be able to answer questions after being transformed into a bull by the Animal Creation Spell. As long as he wasn't illiterate and had a certain level of intelligence, he could compose answers by typing on the keyboard. The only drawback was that his speed wouldn't be too fast.

Seeing the calf sit down on its hind legs and place its front hooves on the mechanical typewriter's button with difficulty, Franca, who was invisible and could stop the other party from doing any irrational act at any moment, muttered silently, Now, no one can tell if the person typing at the keyboard is human or bull…

Lumian glanced at Bouvard and asked bluntly, "Where are the Sansons?"

Chapter 444: The Sinners' Leader

The brown male calf's front hooves delicately tapped the mismatch-sized mechanical typewriter, careful not to press any keys accidentally.

Lumian toyed with the gold coin of misfortune, patiently awaiting Bouvard's full response.

Seizing the opportunity, he swiftly reviewed the operation in his mind.

From the start, he had no intention of acting personally. First, he wanted to try playing the role of a Conspirer. Second, he aimed to improve the performance and teamwork of the small team members.

Considering Bouvard Pont-Péro's possessiveness, Lumian shifted his attention to Paulina. Through Anthony Reid's repeated Psychological Cues, the woman's accumulated resentment from the abuse had fermented, turning into a seed that would sprout once her restraints were removed.

To make Bouvard lower his guard, allowing his Danger Premonition to only trigger at the end, Lumian not only made Franca prepare against divination but also had his companion masquerade as Paulina, making the target believe subconsciously that the one tied up was the real Paulina.

Of course, she was the real deal. Before Bouvard cut the rope, Paulina didn't hold any true grudge against him. Her sincere desire was to be rescued, an emotion that couldn't be feigned. It was enough to convince Bouvard without setting off his Danger Premonition.

Jenna's role was to launch an attack and provide suppression, preventing the target from observing the environment or contemplating details. This forced him to approach Paulina and escape from 20 Rue de la Terrasse with his precious belongings as quickly as possible. Additionally, they wanted the enemy to instinctively believe that the ambush centered around the master bedroom. The room where the actual Paulina was held was, therefore, relatively secure.

As Lumian had foreseen, Bouvard "sprinted" right into the trap.

Without focusing the conspiracy on Paulina, with Bouvard's Danger Premonition, regardless of how convincing Franca's performance was or how similar she looked to Paulina, he would have sensed it in advance and sent his imps to confirm it cautiously.

From this act, traps are the simplest and most direct conspiracy, while conspiracies are the deepening and escalation of traps… Lumian sensed the potion's minute digestion and sighed inwardly.

Simultaneously, in her invisible state, Franca sensed no impending or brewing danger as Bouvard's hooves struck the keys. She gradually relaxed.

She couldn't help but recall her conversation with the Sinners organization's liaison while impersonating Paulina. Her face flushed red, and she felt intense embarrassment.

How embarrassing! How f*cking embarrassing!

Finally, Bouvard completed his initial keyboard conversation.

Jenna ripped the paper filled with words from the mechanical typewriter and swiftly read it to Lumian and Franca.

"More than two months ago, the Sansons went somewhere and haven't returned yet.

"I don't know where that is. From what they said, it's related to something important.

"Before this, Constace, the mistress of the Sansons, had already gone mad. To prevent her from taking drastic actions when out of control and attracting the attention of official Beyonders and affecting the other members of the organization, her husband, Voisin Sanson, along with their child, killed her and allowed her to return to the Lord's kingdom."

Purged due to madness? When did you get the impression that you weren't mad? However, the extent of your madness isn't serious. You're at a stage where your perspectives are distorted and abnormal. You even know how to disguise yourself… Lumian muttered silently after hearing that.

From his perspective, ever since establishing a connection with the entity known as Inevitability, those believers were no longer ordinary people. They had more or less been corrupted and had potential mental problems. At some point in time, they might completely lose their minds or collapse.

If Lumian didn't possess Mr. Fool's seal and had the Beyonder characteristics balancing things out, he would have been crazier and more terrifying than Constace, whom Bouvard had mentioned.

Jenna, who stood between him and Bouvard, couldn't help but hiss. She felt that it was a good thing to be ruthless to heretics.

Those people had lost their normal emotions. They killed their wife or mother without hesitation!

If they could even do this to their loved ones, one could imagine how they would treat the people around them!

"Who were the ones who went to the unknown place you mentioned?" Lumian inquired.

Tap! Tap! Tap! The calf began typing on the keyboard again.

This time, it was much more proficient than before. Its answers appeared character by character on the paper.

"Voisin Sanson is our leader. He received a revelation and led a few Fate Appropriators in Trier to that place."

"Voisin Sanson is the leader of the Sinners organization?" Lumian asked in surprise.

According to I Know Someone, didn't Voisin Sanson choose to join the Sinners organization because he was on the verge of bankruptcy and later successfully changed his luck and obtained the power of boons?

Tap! Tap! Tap! A new answer was printed on the paper and read out by Jenna.

"He was the first to spread the faith of Inevitability in Trier. He obtained godhood nearly three years ago and became a Circle Inhabitant.

"He likes to disguise himself. In front of his collaborators, he pretends to only be a key member of the organization and not the founder.

"His wife and children were all brought into the mysticism world by him to become the bestowed of Inevitability. Apart from the deceased Roche, his wife and three other children are now Fate Appropriators. Of course, Constace has already been purged."

A demigod—a Circle Inhabitant—actually interacted with Low- to Mid-Sequence Beyonders like Loki and I Know Someone. He's truly sinister and cunning… I wonder if I Know Someone and the others noticed. If they didn't, they're truly living in their own world. They think the people around them are fools who can be exploited and squeezed dry of their value… Who's the hunter and who's the prey? Lumian mocked the two key members of April Fool's once again.

Simultaneously, he gained a deeper understanding of the Sinners organization.

The cult had been established with the Sansons as its core.

As for how Voisin Sanson had come into contact with the faith of Inevitability and obtained the boon of an evil god, that was another matter.

From the looks of it, his business had failed, and he was on the brink of bankruptcy. With no other choice, he had tried various things.

"Why didn't Voisin Sanson let Guillaume Bénet know he was the leader of the Sinners?" Lumian attempted to confirm the details.

Guillaume Bénet was already a Sequence 5 Fate Appropriator, on par with the Sansons and other key members. He was significantly stronger than Bouvard Pont-Péro.

Once again, the calf satiated his desire to share information with his typewriter.

"His Excellency Voisin believed Guillaume Bénet was overly ambitious. If he's involved in core matters, it will make him arrogant and do unnecessary things."

To put it simply, Guillaume Bénet's early conduct of the sacrificial ritual in Cordu had left Voisin dissatisfied. He believed that he had messed up the descent of the Inevitability angel. However, due to the entity known as Inevitability not punishing the Fate Appropriator on the spot, he could only suppress his dissatisfaction and temporarily accept Guillaume Bénet before marginalizing him? Lumian roughly grasped Voisin Sanson's take on the matter from Bouvard's response.

He pondered for a moment and changed the question.

"Has Voisin Sanson occasionally contacted you after visiting that place? What are you responsible for? Why do you think you need to be cautious and not make any mistakes?"

The calf's proficiency with the mechanical typewriter increased once more.

"Before His Excellency Voisin departed, he informed me that he wouldn't contact me for three months and would only return after the matter was concluded.

"Me and a few other members are responsible for managing different businesses and contacting different believers. We want them to focus on their prayers and businesses for the next three months and not cause any trouble. Likewise for the few of us."

Does Inevitability's oracle believe that the catastrophe will descend within three months? It's been more than two months since Voisin Sanson and company vanished… In less than three weeks, the problem will definitely erupt? Time is of the essence… Lumian inquired about the Sansons and the Sinners organization's current situation, but it was evident that Bouvard Pont-Péro didn't know much. He only knew about the matters under him.

Finally, Lumian pointed at the items he had retrieved from the other party's pocket and asked, "What are these? What's their purpose?"

The calf replied truthfully through the mechanical typewriter: "You were holding a gold coin of misfortune made using the Luck Transference Spell.

"I once encountered an extremely unlucky person and used the Luck Transference Spell to give him a new life. As a result, he became a believer of my lord. This gold coin of misfortune was the product of that help."

Once… Lumian frowned and said, "How long can the Luck Transference Spell of an Ascetic last?"

At the Alms Monk stage, he had relied on a ritual to transfer a target's fate to a corresponding item. The effect could only last three days. Beyond this time limit, if he didn't find another person to shoulder the fate, it would return to the original owner and couldn't be transferred again.

After becoming a Contractee, Lumian hadn't used the Luck Transference Spell again. He could only estimate that the duration would increase to somewhere in the vicinity of five to seven days based on the mystical knowledge he had obtained.

As he spoke, he focused on the 5 verl d'or gold coin in his hand and realized that it was entwined with blood-red—nearly black—luck. It tried to spread towards him but failed to do anything.

Ordinary misfortune can affect me, but extreme misfortune will affect the intertwined fates of Termiboros and me. Without the corresponding level, it can't shake the main stream… Lumian made a preliminary judgment.

The calf replied amidst the tapping: "Thirteen days is the limit of the Luck Transference Spell. If I want to raise it further, I can only rely on the abilities of a Fate Appropriator.

"In 13 days, if I don't have an enemy I need to deal with, I'll randomly choose a target and subject him to misfortune. Then, when his misfortune starts, I'll promote the power of Inevitability and help him change his luck. I'll obtain another gold coin of misfortune and a new believer."

Dammit, a perpetual motion machine! Franca, in her invisibility state, couldn't help but criticize.

Chapter 445: Spoils of War

Lumian was flabbergasted.

You can do that?

After careful consideration, he realized that it was indeed possible. The mystical knowledge that came with the boon only stated that if bad luck hadn't been transferred and returned to the original individual, it couldn't be affected by the Luck Transference Spell. It didn't mention anything about whether people whose fates had been altered by cursed gold coins and other items could be transferred again.

I can't underestimate others. Although they are mostly foolish and not very clever, they occasionally come up with strange ideas and unusual methods. Aurore had once said that no matter how foolish a person is, they will always succeed once after thinking a thousand times… As a Conspirer, Lumian couldn't ignore such a possibility. Otherwise, he might stumble over a proverbial obstacle sooner or later and fall hard. This experience provided Lumian with valuable insight.

Since he didn't show any signs of losing control or the potion's power dissipating after advancing to Conspirer, and he had already digested a bit of the potion, Lumian could pray for the Ascetic boon in a few days and gain the ability to establish a new balance.

Lumian gazed at the calf "sitting" there with difficulty and pondered.

"Can one keep repeating this process?"

Bouvard's hooves tapped on the brass mechanical keyboard, while Jenna read the contents of the paper.

"With each transfer of luck, the river of fate will undergo a certain change and advance to a higher level. This will result in misfortune occurring sooner. The difficulty of stirring it will also keep increasing.

"Two or three more people's fates on the gold coin of misfortune aren't something Ascetics can stir. The same goes for the unlucky banknote.

"An Alms Monk can only maintain one item of fate at a time, while an Ascetic can manage two."

The unlucky banknote referred to a single 20 verl d'or banknote that had originally been stored in the grayish-blue cloth bag. On the front was a bust of Intis's first president, Levanx, and a large dock on the Srenzo River.

So it wasn't that you didn't want more gold coins of misfortune, but you couldn't make them… Lumian nodded slowly.

"How much longer can the gold coins of misfortune and unlucky banknotes last?"

"Ten days." The calf quickly typed out two words.

Franca had heard Lumian mention the Luck Transference Spell, instructing her and Jenna to carefully distinguish spoils of war when facing those on the Inevitability pathway and not to touch anything they shouldn't.

Listening to their conversation, she muttered silently, What unlucky banknotes? I think they're life-threatening banknotes!

Before I transmigrated, I knew a little about such sorcery, but I thought it was fake and rooted in feudal superstition. But now, it seems that humans' thoughts and beliefs are similar in similar environments. Even the sorcery they create is relatively similar. Or could there be traces of an Inevitability evil god or a deity in a similar domain in our world?

Lumian pointed at the two metal canisters beside the gold coin of misfortune and the unlucky banknote and inquired, "What are they?"

"They're all Prophetic Concoctions," Jenna recited the sentence typed by the calf.

Prophetic Concoctions? I've always found them troublesome, so I didn't make them. Besides, if I were to find a corpse and administer the Prophetic Concoction, I might be secretly influenced by Termiboros, resulting in inaccuracies or misleading outcomes. Lumian shifted his attention to the item he found in Bouvard Pont-Péro's other pocket.

It was a monocle—something Lumian didn't dare to recognize—with a peculiar design.

Its main body was a thick, circular cover made of pale-white flesh and dark blood vessels, as if it could be worn directly over one's ear.

One end of the circle extended, connecting to a lens intertwined with a transparent purple tube, still flowing with blood.

Just now, when Franca put on her gloves and took out the item, a strange and illusory voice echoed in her ears, but she couldn't hear it clearly.

"What's this?" Lumian asked.

Bouvard tapped on the mechanical typewriter's keyboard.

"A dangerous mystical item. I call it the Eye of Truth.

"It seems to have been severely corrupted. All that's left is the ability to see through illusions and perceive the truth, the light of spirituality. If you wear it, you can hear the voice of some hidden entity at any moment and experience an irresistible negative influence.

"If you only carry it and don't touch it with your body, you'll only experience faint tinnitus and auditory hallucinations."

An incomplete Eyes of Mystery Prying… Lumian fell silent for a few seconds before asking, "Don't you have any ritual sheepskin or dog skin?"

"There are three ritualistic dog skins back home," the calf eagerly shared. He took the initiative to provide details even without Lumian asking. "The incantation for usage is 'Circle,' and the dispelling incantation is 'Arrangement of Fate.' Any language that can stir supernatural powers is fine."

Quite devout… Lumian exhaled and smiled.

"What other valuable items do you have at home?"

"There are banknotes worth over 13,000; gold coins, gold bars, and accessories currently valued at 30,000 verl d'or; 20,000 verl d'or worth of stocks and bonds, and real estate deeds for three houses." The calf listed his assets.

Stocks? I need to secure those stocks and sell them on the black market. Who knows if they will crash tomorrow! Franca keenly caught the keywords relevant to her.

Real estate that can't be easily discovered by official Beyonders and is difficult to liquidate with more than 60,000 verl d'or… As expected of the liaison responsible for a portion of the Sinners organization's believers and corresponding businesses… Lumian immediately inquired about the whereabouts of Bouvard's residence.

Finally, Lumian inquired about the other liaisons and important members of the Sinners organization, but Bouvard had limited knowledge. They mainly had one-way contact with the Sansons and handled their own specific tasks. Interaction with other members was minimal, with occasional meetings at the Sansons' residence once or twice.

Lumian listened quietly but didn't immediately decide Bouvard's fate. Instead, he turned to Franca, Jenna, and Anthony Reid, who was waiting outside the door, avoiding Bouvard's sight.

"With Paulina's assets, we'll gain 75,000 verl d'or, the Eye of Truth, three ritual dog skins, two bottles of Prophetic Concoction, a gold coin of misfortune, and an unlucky banknote," Lumian explained.

"None of you can take the last two items. Only I can carry them. In addition to them, I want the Eye of Truth and a ritualistic dog skin. You decide what spoils of war you want."

Jenna cast her gaze at Franca, feeling that her companion's "sacrifice" was somewhat excessive. She had the right to choose first.

Franca dispelled her invisibility and considered her options. She finally said, "I want the two bottles of Prophetic Concoction and a ritual dog skin. Well, forget it, I can't get used to it yet. I'll switch to 15,000 verl d'or, all in gold!"

Jenna then turned her gaze to the door, signaling to Anthony Reid to make his choice.

Anthony's voice quickly reached their ears.

"I want two ritualistic dog skins. They'll be very useful to me. Ciel, I'll need your help when the time comes.

"Oh, and another 20,000 verl d'or."

Jenna realized that she had a total of 40,000 verl d'or left for her own selection.

She looked at Lumian with a touch of uncertainty.

"I'm essentially working for you as interest payment."

Lumian replied with a smile, "There are spoils of war even for work. Take them all. Have you noticed that making money has become easier since advancing to Sequence 7?"

Jenna pondered for a moment before saying, "Alright, I'll return 25,000 to you and 15,000 to Franca."

With this decision, Jenna's debt was significantly reduced, and she no longer owed Lumian anymore. The speed at which she was amassing wealth had surpassed her expectations.

As Lumian and the others discussed the distribution of the spoils of war, Bouvard couldn't help but find the situation intriguing. Most of the items they were talking about had once belonged to him.

He observed them engrossed in their discussion, and even the Demoness, who had been invisibly monitoring him, seemed to relax her vigilance. His heart stirred.

He sensed that Lumian wasn't an Ascetic, as he had questioned about those abilities. This indicated that the ritualistic cowhide covering him likely originated from Guillaume Bénet. The fact that he hadn't been awakened by the power of Inevitability while unconscious suggested that it wasn't a live ritual.

Bouvard was well aware of Guillaume Bénet's Animal Creation Spell item's usage and dispelling incantations.

After a prolonged interrogation, Bouvard's spirituality had somewhat recovered. He began to secretly gather his focus, preparing to recite the incantation of "His Grace."

However, just as the first word echoed within the brown cowhide, Bouvard's eyes narrowed when he realized that Lumian was looking at him with a faint smile.

"Hmph!"

Two beams of white light shot out and rendered Bouvard unconscious once more.

Lumian looked at the collapsed calf and chuckled.

"The test is completed. There are no other secrets. He only possesses the padre's dispelling incantation."

Rather than dealing with Bouvard first, Lumian had discussed the distribution of the spoils of war, hoping to uncover any additional secrets held by the Sinners organization's liaison, who had somewhat recovered spiritually.

Franca glanced at the unconscious calf and subtly hinted, "Should we take him away?"

Her suggestion implied taking Bouvard to the pillared square in the catacombs for sacrificial purposes, potentially preventing some of the boon's power from returning and forming Beyonder items.

Lumian considered for a moment before responding, "We might be discovered. Let's deal with him here."

Lumian couldn't teleport Bouvard to a specific area in the catacombs from the outside world. Various entrances were guarded by tomb administrators, and any suspicious activity might trigger their intervention or a police report.

"Alright," Franca responded after a brief pause. She added with anticipation, "I happen to want to try the Prophetic Concoction."

This experiment required a recently deceased corpse, one that had not been purified or cremated and had been dead for less than seven days.

Lumian stood up and gestured toward the door.

"Call me when Bouvard is dead."

He carried the Flog boxing gloves with him as he left the scene. Staying in the vicinity might disrupt the return of the boon's power.

Franca acknowledged his instructions and then turned to Jenna with a mischievous smile.

"Take care of this. This is your chance to act as a Witch."

"Can this be used to act as a Witch?" Jenna had previously found the Sequence name of Witch to be abstract and comprehensive, and she hadn't yet thought of a specific way to act as one.

Franca smiled and explained, "In mysticism, Witches are often associated with negative forces that bring catastrophe. They are seen as possessing mystical, evil, and powerful traits.

"Imagine this: a woman using black flames to kill someone and then pumping their corpse with a strange concoction to make prophecies about the future. It's sinister and mysterious, just like a Witch."

Chapter 446: Prophecy

Witches are associated with negative forces that bring catastrophe… Catastrophe… Jenna, in her role as an Instigator, had come to understand that instigation inevitably led to catastrophe. However, given that the outcome depended on the subjective intentions of the Instigator and the uncertainty of the recipient, Jenna was quite sensitive to the term "catastrophe" and believed it could be a key element in portraying a Witch.

At the same time, she confirmed a suspicion.

Negative force… Witches do indeed represent a negative force…

Sequence 2 of the Assassin pathway is called Demoness of Catastrophe… This means that even at the demigod level, catastrophe is crucial…

Jenna nodded slightly and approached the door of the activity room. She turned the knob on the wall, causing the gas wall lamps to emit a dimmer light.

After doing the same for all four gas wall lamps, the room grew darker. The faint light blended with the shadows, creating an atmosphere of impending terror.

Franca surveyed the room, her curiosity piqued as she asked, "Are you trying to create a dark, terrifying, and eerie atmosphere?"

Jenna smiled and said, "Don't Witches always appear in such settings in various plays and novels?"

"As expected of a true apprentice actress," Franca praised Jenna, a sense of pride swelling within her. She, too, had quickly grasped the essence of portraying a Witch. she had even experimented with concocting dark potions for a period, though it paled in comparison to the work of Apothecaries.

In the gloomy and dimly lit room, Jenna returned to the calf.

She leaned forward slightly and, in a deep voice, whispered two words from the Hermes language, "His Grace."

Nothing happened.

Outside the door, Lumian chuckled, recognizing Jenna's commitment to her role. She knew she lacked the bestowed powers of Inevitability and couldn't use the simplified Animal Creation Spell. To portray a Witch convincingly, she had to follow a predetermined process.

Lumian raised his voice, mimicking the grandeur of Termiboros, resembling a hidden entity responding to a Witch reciting an ominous incantation.

"His Grace."

In the activity room, an eerie darkness enveloped the area, causing the brown cowhide to split open, revealing Bouvard Pont-Péro. He was dressed only in a white shirt, black pants, and dark socks.

With this accomplished, Lumian proceeded until he reached the entrance of 20 Rue de la Terrasse. Through the glass of the oriel window, he stared at the drizzle, which seemed to meld with the night.

Jenna crouched down and placed her right hand on Bouvard's forehead.

From her palm, black flames emerged, seeping into the Sinners organization's liaison.

These flames didn't crackle but engulfed Bouvard like inky water.

After over ten seconds, Bouvard's body convulsed violently.

Moments later, his body relaxed, and the smell of incontinence wafted through the air.

He had lost his life.

Dressed as a female mercenary, Jenna examined her attire with dissatisfaction. She stood and extended her hand to Franca.

Franca understood this as her acting as a mysterious and powerful Witch, so she handed her a bottle of Prophetic Concoction.

Jenna genuflected once more and poured the potion into Bouvard's mouth.

The dark liquid, bubbling with silver-black light, flowed into the corpse's mouth and lingered there.

A faint gust of wind blew, and the dim gas wall lamp's light took on a faint blue hue.

Sensing this familiar change, Lumian knew that Bouvard was now entirely lifeless, and the power of the boon had returned to its source. Thus, he turned away from the door, passed Anthony Reid, and re-entered the activity room.

Gulp!

The sound of the corpse swallowing the liquid reached his ears.

With a swish, Bouvard sat up. His face was deathly pale, and his eyes had turned translucent and devoid of color.

As Jenna gazed into those clear eyes, she marveled at their magical quality—the vibrant colors, the pure light, the invisible form, and the mercurial ripples. She endured the intense chill and then turned her attention to Lumian and Franca.

She had no questions; she was merely acting.

Franca motioned for Lumian to take the lead in asking the questions, as she aimed to learn how to make better use of the remaining canister of Prophetic Concoction.

Lumian, well-versed in the rules, carefully considered the inquiry and addressed Jenna, saying, "Ask, where is Voisin Sanson, the former owner of the Voisin Café in the Trier region of the Intis Republic, this time next week?"

This question carried not only its apparent meaning but also a hidden implication.

If Bouvard's corpse couldn't provide a valid answer, or if the response seemed abnormal, it could indicate that Voisin Sanson had left the place where the powerful bestowed resided, possibly signaling an impending catastrophe.

Jenna nodded and posed the question to Bouvard's lifeless form, her voice deep and enchanting.

The corpse's pale face, tinged with a hint of dark green in the dim blue light, opened its mouth and replied in Intisian, "Room 7."

Room 7… So specific? But there's no restrictive description from before… Lumian originally imagined that Bouvard's corpse would be like the deceased he had previously used, using a broader description like Trier's Quartier de la Princesse Rouge. This could narrow down the scope of the Tarot Club's investigation. However, he never expected Bouvard's corpse to directly reveal Voisin Sanson's room number.

To Lumian, this answer wasn't as useful as the Quartier de la Princesse Rouge. There were countless Room 7s in Trier.

Furthermore, what if Room 7 wasn't in Trier? It wasn't necessary to plan a conspiracy while in Trier!

Bouvard is a bestowed of the Inevitability pathway. He possesses the power of fate and the corruption left behind by the power of Inevitability… After his corpse consumed the Prophetic Concoction, it must have seen more than the average deceased and foreseen it more clearly. Is that why such a change occurred? Lumian muttered inwardly.

He then asked for confirmation.

"Ask him where Pualis de Roquefort from the Dariège region of the Riston Province in the Intis Republic is this time next week."

After hearing the Witch's relating it, Bouvard's corpse responded with an illusory and ethereal voice, "Room 12."

Room 12, Room 7… Madame Pualis and Voisin Sanson are indeed in the same place. The powerful bestowed of these cults in Trier are gathered together. They definitely aren't here for food and drink… Lumian nodded slightly and quickly thought of what to ask next.

From the two responses, he vaguely guessed that it had something to do with where the evil god bestowed were. The Prophecy Spell appeared significantly interfered with and was unable to provide precise information. He could only ask in another manner.

A few seconds later, Lumian looked at Jenna and said, "When will Voisin Sanson leave his current building?"

This question aimed to determine the timing of potential catastrophe or the significant operation.

The strange scenes in Bouvard's eyes quickly dissipated. After hearing Jenna's question, he opened his mouth and replied faintly, "Rain, water…"

Suddenly, Bouvard's eyes burst open, and blood sprayed from them, leaving behind two contaminated black and red cavities.

His body started to swell, becoming pale, dim, and moist, as if he had been submerged in water for an extended period.

In the blink of an eye, the corpse vanished from the sight of Lumian and the others, as if it had never existed.

Franca, clutching the mirror and preparing to cast a curse on the mutated corpse, lost her target. She frantically scanned the area but found only remnants of the exploded eyeballs.

Drawing from her limited experience, Franca speculated, "Could it be that an extraordinary event or entity was prophesied, leading to a horrifying backlash that dragged him away into the unknown?"

She sighed and added, "See, divination and prophecies are treacherous undertakings."

Lumian nodded in agreement and suggested, "Let's leave now and head to Bouvard's residence to secure the remaining spoils of our mission."

"Yes, we must be cautious," Jenna said, gazing up at the ceiling. "What shall we do with Paulina and the other heretics? Should we eliminate them all?"

"I'll take care of it! I'll handle this!" Franca eagerly raised her hand. "I want to find some enjoyment, no—pleasure for myself!"

She wanted to simply act.

Observing the perplexed expressions on Jenna and Lumian's faces, Franca retorted,

"What's on your minds? I'm not talking about that! That's not the only way to have pleasure!"

Doing something to entertain herself? Lumian scoffed and walked out of the activity room, leaving a parting remark. "You have five minutes."

Five minutes? Franca muttered as she settled in front of the brass mechanical typewriter. Donning gloves, she swiftly typed on the keyboard.

Before long, Paulina, the butler, and the others who were securely bound had notes attached to them. The notes read:

"We're heretics!"

"Our faith is in an entity known as Inevitability!"

"Arrest us!"

"Our leader is Voisin Sanson!"

"Voisin Sanson and his core subordinates have gone somewhere. It's said that they'll stay for three months!"

"They went there over two months ago!

"I have Regeneration, Danger Premonition, and Electric Arc. Please be careful!"

After pasting the papers, Franca scanned the notes with a sense of delight.

She then turned her attention to the unconscious Paulina and remarked, "A Dancer's flexibility might help you escape the ropes. I can only add two more layers of unconsciousness to you."

With that, she ignited Paulina's Spirit Body with black flames, significantly weakening her. She followed this with the Bliss Society's sedative.

Clap! Clap! Franca clapped her hands together and left the room, leaving behind black flames that burned all kinds of traces.

…

After ensuring the success of their police report, Lumian and his companions retrieved assets that could be quickly converted into cash from Bouvard's residence in the library district.

Reverting to his original appearance and taking a carriage back to the market district, Lumian was on the verge of inquiring Franca about something when he noticed a figure darting through the darkness outside the window.

The figure was dressed in a white shirt, black pants, and dark socks. Its eye sockets were hollow and empty, and its skin appeared swollen and pale, as if it had been soaked in water.

Bouvard Pont-Péro!

Bouvard Pont-Péro's previously vanished corpse!

Chapter 447: Association and Speculation

Lumian's body tensed, then he quickly relaxed.

He calmly shifted his gaze away from the carriage window, as if he hadn't noticed anything.

"What's the matter?" Anthony Reid inquired of Lumian.

Lumian chuckled. "Nothing."

Franca, seated across from him, remarked, "Your smile and your responses always make me suspect you're up to no good!"

Lumian's lips curved into a smile.

"When you assume I'm up to no good, only to discover I haven't done anything, could it be seen as a conspiracy?"

"Why does your sister always teach you such things?" Franca critiqued, sounding "severe."

Jenna glanced at Lumian but didn't press for more information. She remained on guard.

The four-wheeled rental carriage returned to Rue des Blouses Blanches in the market district. The team didn't immediately go their separate ways. Following Lumian's suggestion, they gathered in Franca's apartment to discuss Bouvard's "confession" and prophecy.

As Lumian closed the door, he suddenly spoke, "I need to use a bedroom."

"Now?" Franca's smile faded.

She sensed the seriousness in Lumian's tone and, considering the earlier events, realized that something had indeed occurred.

"Yes," Lumian replied, heading toward Franca's bedroom and closing the door behind him.

Jenna, Franca, and Anthony Reid exchanged glances but remained standing. They each took positions beneath the glow of the gas wall lamp, neither too close nor too far from one another.

In just three to four minutes, Lumian reemerged from the master bedroom.

Franca peeked inside and noticed that the curtains in her bedroom were drawn.

Lumian surveyed the area and smiled before Franca could voice her question.

"Let me introduce you to a friend, but I need you to turn off the lamps first."

"What friend? You're acting all strange. You can't even speak properly after becoming a Conspirer," Franca muttered as she turned the knob valve at the bottom of the black gas wall lamp.

Jenna murmured, "He didn't like to talk nicely before either. It always felt like a Provocation…"

This wasn't a Conspirer issue; it was a chemical reaction between his personality and the traits of the Hunter pathway!

Soon, the lamps were extinguished, plunging the living room into darkness. Only the crimson moonlight and dim starlight near the window provided some visibility.

Lumian looked at the glass window and waited patiently.

Franca, experienced, asked thoughtfully, "Do we need to activate Spirit Vision?"

"I don't think so…" Just as Lumian finished speaking, he saw a face reflected in the dark glass window.

The skin on the face was puffy, pale, and moist. The eyes were empty, save for two black holes that were dyed red!

Bouvard Pont-Péro's vanished corpse reappeared!

Jenna, who had little experience with such situations, took a step back in fear, and black flames ignited in her palm.

"Has… has it been following us?" Franca had already taken out a mirror.

"That's right," Lumian said with a relaxed smile. "According to my observations, it only appears in a very dark environment. As for when it will attack us, I'm not sure yet."

"Aren't you worried or nervous? This thing is a severely corrupted mutated corpse. No one knows what terrifying abilities it possesses." Franca was affected by Lumian's relaxed attitude and didn't rush to deal with Bouvard Pont-Péro's corpse, which had its face pressed against the glass window.

Lumian chuckled.

"Shouldn't you be happy to see an old friend again?"

He paused for a moment and explained simply, "I regretted not being able to prevent Bouvard's corpse from vanishing.

"Although its prophecy has been interrupted, the source of the corruption and the backlash it suffered, as well as its traits, can point to many problems and some hidden entities.

"Isn't this also a clue?"

Just as Lumian finished speaking, Bouvard Pont-Péro's bloated corpse, as if drowned, suddenly fell backward. It was as if someone had grabbed his collar and yanked him out of the living room window.

Behind him, the darkness intensified, as if a strange tunnel had opened, leading to an unknown destination.

In the depths of the tunnel, specks of starlight flickered in the distance.

Bouvard Pont-Péro's eyeless corpse plummeted into the tunnel, accelerating and shrinking until it vanished entirely, swallowed by darkness.

"I just found a helper." Lumian's smile persisted.

Even if the four of them could easily deal with Bouvard's mutated corpse, Lumian didn't think anyone present could carefully investigate and determine the source of the problem while ensuring their safety. They had to seek help. In that case, it was better to seek help from someone capable from the beginning.

Entering the room to write to Madam Magician… Franca came to a realization and didn't probe further.

Jenna also guessed that the secret organization that used tarot cards as their code name had taken action.

Their members were connected by messengers!

Anthony Reid pondered for a moment and asked, "So, the next step is to await the autopsy report?"

"Not necessarily. Perhaps the autopsy report isn't something we can read," Lumian smiled and settled into an armchair.

He looked at Anthony Reid and gestured towards the divan, signaling him to take a seat.

"Did you find anything in your investigation of the Dreamseekers charity organization?"

It was a private charitable organization that had received a substantial donation from General Philip's widow.

Anthony Reid shook his head.

"No. In the past two months, they've been operating very regularly. There were no abnormalities. Perhaps, as you said, the key members of the heretics have gone somewhere. The rest have been instructed to behave themselves for the time being."

Lumian nodded slightly and turned to Franca, who had settled into the recliner.

"Do you know what happened to the Bliss Society?"

"It's similar to the Sinners. They've eliminated several key members, but the two most important ones seem to have vanished. They must have gone to that place too," Franca recounted the information she had obtained from Browns Sauron.

'They' referred to the Demoness Sect.

That place… Lumian leaned back on the sofa, his mind racing as he searched for any possible clues.

Ultimately, his thoughts settled on the prophecy made by Bouvard Pont-Péro's corpse.

"Room 7, Room 12… Where could it be?"

Anthony Reid pondered and said, "If it were a private house, there wouldn't be such a numbering scheme."

"Sounds like an apartment."

"Or a hotel," Franca added.

Hotel… Hotel… Lumian's eyes widened as a bolt of lightning flashed through his mind, illuminating a detail he hadn't previously found problematic.

After he and Franca killed Beatrice Incourt, a key member of the Bliss Society, they found a note on her body. It read:

"Go to the hostel and retrieve the painting within three days."

Isn't a hostel a lower-class hotel? Isn't it normal to have Room 7 and Room 12? Lumian's thoughts instantly became clear.

At the time, he had thought that the note belonged to Beatrice, disguised as Theresa, who had purchased the receipt for a painting. Now, it seemed that the note belonged to Beatrice, a key member of the Bliss Society. It was very likely sent by the Bliss Society's high priestess, Siber, who resided in the hostel, for Beatrice to retrieve a painting!

"Hostel…" Lumian uttered the term.

Is that where Trier's numerous evil god bestowed go?

Franca, who had overheard Lumian's question about Theresa, remembered the note's contents.

Her excitement was palpable as she turned to Lumian and asked, "Did Voisin Sanson, Pualis, and the others go to that place with the codename 'hostel'?"

Lumian replied slowly, "We still need to confirm it," before swiftly inquiring, "Has Theresa, the art dealer, returned?"

He had questioned Browns Sauron about Theresa's whereabouts upon discovering the note. According to the member of the Demoness Sect, the art dealer had been sent to St. Millom, the capital of the Feysac Empire, for a business deal, allowing Beatrice to impersonate her without raising suspicion.

Franca responded uncertainly, "She should be back. It's been quite some time."

She hadn't paid much attention to the ordinary art dealer's activities.

Jenna, perplexed, interjected, "What's this about a hostel and an art dealer?"

Franca briefly explained, omitting Browns Sauron's involvement, attributing it to an operation against the Bliss Society.

Anthony Reid, after careful consideration, voiced his thoughts, "The problem now is that even if the 'hostel' is indeed where the heretics gather, we still don't know what it refers to or where it is."

Lumian sighed softly and flashed a smile. "It's better than having no direction."

He then turned to Franca and said, "Ask about the real art dealer, Theresa's residence tomorrow. I want to visit and confirm if the note belongs to her or Beatrice."

"Understood," Franca replied enthusiastically.

She had two motives: pressing Browns Sauron to determine when the assessment period would end and contributing to averting the impending catastrophe.

Back in her gaming days, she often chose storylines that involved saving humanity. Only when she grew bored of that did she experiment with something different.

Sigh, the phrase Demoness doesn't quite align with preventing catastrophe… Franca sighed inwardly.

Lumian shifted his attention to Anthony Reid, pondering for a moment before revealing his plan,

"Since they've all been behaving themselves, it's our turn to misbehave."

Anthony Reid, catching Lumian's drift, asked in confirmation, "What do you mean?"

Lumian's smile broadened.

"We'll abduct General Philip's widow and the true controller of the Dreamseekers Charity Organization and interrogate them!"

Chapter 448: The Power of Painting

The next morning.

Lumian changed into fresh attire. As he prepared to depart, a surprise greeted him when the "doll" messenger materialized from the wall, delivering a meticulously folded letter.

Madam Magician has unearthed clues from Bouvard's tainted remains? Lumian's spirits soared with anticipation. He expressed his gratitude to the messenger and proceeded to unravel the letter's contents.

"We possess limited knowledge regarding the evil gods beyond the barrier. The Hostel and its location still eludes us, but we have formulated some conjectures.

"In examining Bouvard Pont-Péro's corrupted remains, I discerned a corruption bearing a resemblance to the Apprentice pathway—a contamination from alternate dimensions and spacetime. Had I not intervened, unless it had manifested and attacked, you would not have been able to make direct contact with it.

"In the past, we've encountered similar instances, primarily involving artists, writers, and avid readers.

"We've observed that painters often descend into madness, but due to their artistic disposition, their ramblings and abstract fantasies often go unnoticed. Some of these musings unveil profound truths about our world, while others exert an uncanny influence on their surroundings, turning the fictional into reality. They emerge from canvases or pages, though their presence typically has a time limit.

"An example involved an artist who, under the influence of a psychotropic substance, painted an indescribable creature. This entity materialized from the canvas, murdering its creator and any other living beings in the apartment.

"I once encountered a perilous artwork, a Sealed Artifact that resembled a painting. The deity portrayed within it came to life and vanished, thankfully without triggering a catastrophe.

"Similarly, while confronting a deranged heretic, we encountered Gehrman Sparrow, the Queen of Ailment, and various characters and scenes that were originally confined to novels within the structure he inhabited.

"Fortunately, these manifestations lacked the full potency of their original counterparts. They possessed only a rudimentary semblance of their appearance, personalities, and abilities.

"It was confirmed that these creations were the handiwork of a deranged bestowed of an evil god. He had been a fervent reader of novels and, upon losing his sanity, instinctively recreated a fantastical realm within his abode, mirroring the content of the novels.

"From this standpoint, it also bears some resemblance to the Spectator pathway, but it is fundamentally distinct. One derives its power primarily from the mind, while the other seems to harness the qualities and might of alternate dimensions or alternate spaces to manifest entities. Initially, it might function as a gateway or perilous portal, but in time, it could evolve into a near-real alternate space or even an entirely separate world."

As Lumian absorbed the contents of the letter, his eyelids twitched with a whirlwind of thoughts.

His initial reaction: Is this something I can read?

While some portions seemed manageable, others, particularly the elaborate examples and analysis, left Lumian's mind in turmoil. His heart raced, and he felt a peculiar tightness in his skin.

A deity from a painting coming to life and stepping into reality?

Is it that terrifying?

If the painting hadn't been sealed, wouldn't it be able to destroy the entirety of Trier?

Given more time, the entire world might have been finished!

Amidst this mental storm, Lumian's mind struck upon an idea.

What if I captured a skilled painter with similar powers and got them to create a flawless replica of Aurore's oil painting? Could this act bring Aurore back into reality?

It was akin to a resurrection.

After a tense pause lasting over ten seconds, Lumian released a long, contemplative sigh.

While his heart pulsated with the desire to attempt such a feat, rationality won the battle within his mind. The Aurore "resurrected" through this method would likely be a perilous entity, masquerading as Aurore, rather than the genuine person. If it was merely her appearance he sought, he could achieve it at any time with Lie's abilities.

If it was merely her appearance he sought, he could achieve it at any time with Lie's abilities.

In the wake of this realization, Lumian's thoughts turned to a mystical item he hadn't employed in quite some time: the Mystery Prying Glasses!

The brown gold-rimmed Mystery Prying Glasses, originating from a deceased Beyonder, held a mysterious and intriguing history. Its previous owner had crafted an oil painting infused with madness, vibrant colors, and a mesmerizing, psychedelic pattern before their untimely demise.

When Lumian put on these Mystery Prying Glasses, the world around him transformed, revealing hidden truths that were once invisible. Occasionally, these revelations kindled a desire to sketch, resulting in drawings imbued with supernatural power, each with unique effects. For instance, they could cause an itching sensation across his body, ushering in warmth and radiant sunlight, aligning with Madam Magician's account of paintings by evil god bestowed that influenced their surroundings.

With the abilities granted by the Niese Face and Lie earring, Lumian no longer required the Mystery Prying Glasses for disguise. However, he retrieved them from his pocket and pondered for a moment.

Was its original owner a bestowed of a Hostel-related pathway, or did it come into contact with a corresponding item and suffer a certain level of corruption?

Yes, I'll report to Mr. K later and inquire about further details. Uh… The Aurora Order is fanatical about hunting heretics. Perhaps they possess more information about evil gods than the Tarot Club. Mr. K might know something about the Hostel…

Lumian was part of four different secret organizations and could gather information from four unusually well-developed information systems. As a result, he didn't have an urgent need to participate in mysticism gatherings. He only visited occasionally to join in the fun and listen to rumors and stories.

After stowing the Mystery Prying Glasses, Lumian continued reading the letter's content.

"Until now, the evil god bestowed following this pathway have been relatively passive, avoiding bloodshed and not frequently engaging in sacrificial rituals. Even if they did, it was usually confined to themselves and those in their immediate vicinity, minimizing the danger.

"However, their nature may not be as 'harmless' as previously believed. They could pose a significant threat.

"You might want to consult Termiboros about the Hostel. He possesses the most extensive knowledge of these evil gods and their bestowed. Although, don't be surprised if He chooses not to share."

Lumian set the letter ablaze with crimson flames and whispered with a chuckle, "Termiboros, do you know the meaning of Hostel and its association with which evil god?"

Termiboros's majestic voice resounded. "Not an evil god, but a great existence."

After retorting, He answered Lumian's question, "I'm aware."

Then, there was nothing else.

This provoked Lumian.

Was I hoping to hear you say you are aware or not? What I wanted to know what it represents and to which pathway it belongs!

After pressing further, Termiboros asked in a deep voice, "Do you truly wish to know?"

Lumian, sensing danger, responded cautiously, "There's no need for an honorific name or other details about the evil god. Just describe the situation and characteristics of the corresponding pathway of Hostel."

Termiboros fell silent, withholding the requested information.

Lumian scoffed, believing that the entity's response indicated: "I have nothing to lose. Why not give it a shot? What if my vessel suddenly turned foolish?" Termiboros had no intention of revealing details about Hostel.

He exhaled and left Room 207, prepared to find Mr. K for further guidance.

…

As Lumian made his way to Avenue du Boulevard, Franca had already met up with Browns Sauron.

Both were clad in hunting attire, armed with double-barreled shotguns, and positioned at the edge of the East Lognes Forest, where they took aim at wild deer hidden behind the trees.

"Browns, when will you f*cking end my assessment?" Franca stressed her original gender with a touch of stereotypical vulgarity.

Browns, her orange-red hair mostly concealed beneath a deerstalker hat, peered forward and responded, "Soon, soon."

Franca, her frustration palpable, retorted, "Does the high-ranking Demoness in charge of Trier want to keep testing me indefinitely, or are you playing tricks?"

Browns, her trigger finger poised, stopped abruptly, a subtle change in her expression evident.

"Could it really be you?" Franca exclaimed in surprise.

Browns replied solemnly, "I merely suggested it. The higher-ups agreed."

"Why on earth would she agree to such an absurd proposal? Is she your mother?" Franca cursed.

Bang! Browns squeezed the trigger, and the bullet pierced through the forest, narrowly missing the wild deer.

Watching this, Franca mused, Could they really be related, or perhaps they're intimate lovers?

The Demoness Sect is essentially a family, and it's common for members to have some familial connections…

The Sauron family once held sway in the neighboring Assassin pathway, so it's not inconceivable that the Demoness Sect has infiltrated certain branches over the years.

Observing Franca's silence, Browns cleared her throat and made an offer, "If you promise not to partake in the Red House Café's orgies, your assessment will end this week."

"…" Franca fought the urge to curse and burst into laughter instead. "Haha, I'd call you 'pure,' but you're quite the expert in female orgies. As for 'promiscuous,' you're selective with your participants."

Without waiting for Browns's reply, Franca continued, "I can promise that. Besides, I can organize orgies myself."

Her true intentions were rooted in the impending catastrophe that might engulf Trier in a week or two. She needed to swiftly infiltrate the Demoness Sect and procure valuable information. After the crisis subsided, and if she was still alive, she could contemplate participating in Browns's orgies.

A true man could be indulgent and flashy, but when necessary, he could bear personal hardships.

Browns turned her head to scrutinize Franca, who met her gaze without a hint of guilt.

After almost ten seconds, Browns whispered, "Remember what you just said."

Franca responded with a smile, signifying her agreement.

With the assessment period now set to conclude, Franca raised her shotgun and shared,

"Some time ago, Ciel and I ventured into the catacombs and reached the Krismona Night Pillar. I had a peculiar feeling about that pillar. Could it have been left behind by a Fourth Epoch Demoness?"

After hearing about the sigh from Jenna, Franca had become intrigued by the Krismona Night Pillar.

"Ciel? Your lover?" Browns turned to Franca.

Franca replied candidly, "Yes."

Browns fell into a brief silence before revealing, "Krismona is indeed a Fourth Epoch Demoness. S-She is the child of the Goddess."

Chapter 449: Tracking Clues

Chapter 449 Tracking Clues

A child of the Goddess… Franca jumped in fright, almost causing the double-barreled shotgun, which wasn't aimed at the target, to discharge accidentally.

She glanced at Browns and sought confirmation, "A child of the Primordial One?"

Even though her assessment period wasn't yet over, she had already passed the audit and was now considered an associate member of the Demoness Sect. She knew that this secret organization worshiped the deity known as the Primordial Demoness, often referring to Her as the "Primordial One."

Browns nodded slowly and replied, "As far as I know."

The Primordial Demoness had once given birth? Franca couldn't hide her curiosity and asked, "Who is Krismona's father?"

"I don't know," Browns cautioned Franca. "That's not something we should be privy to."

This is a scandal at the deity level… Franca thought to herself and shifted the conversation to her primary reason for coming to Trocadéro today.

"Has Beatrice Incourt returned from the Feysac Empire? Do you know where she is residing?"

"Why do you ask?" Browns inquired warily.

In her eyes, Franca Roland and her lovers were powerful and dangerous Beyonders. Only Jenna, who lived with her, seemed relatively ordinary.

Franca chuckled.

"Yesterday, I helped Ciel exact revenge and apprehended a heretic who believed in Inevitability. From him, I learned that many of Trier's bestowed individuals have disappeared to some mysterious and strange place."

"Based on the information he provided, we suspect that the 'hostel' mentioned in the note about Beatrice is the destination for these bestowed of evil gods. We want to confirm with Theresa whether the note is intended for her or Beatrice."

Browns felt uncomfortable hearing Franca mention heretics and the bestowed of evil gods.

In the world of mysticism, the Primordial Demoness had always been considered an evil goddess.

Of course, their sect, followers of the Primordial Ones, believed they were devoted to an ostracized true god, an existence shrouded in secrecy.

After Franca finished speaking, Browns replied, "There's no need for you to seek out the art dealer. When we discovered that the Bliss Society's high priest and another key member had vanished, we patiently waited for Theresa's return based on the contents of the note.

"She told us that she doesn't know what the 'hostel' is, and she hasn't purchased any artwork from any painter staying at a motel.

"We've verified the authenticity."

Franca felt a growing frustration and said, "It's really a message meant for Beatrice. Judging from the note, Beatrice knows the location of the 'hostel.' Otherwise, she wouldn't have the ability to retrieve the painting within three days.

"If only we had found the note first and performed the spirit channeling afterward…"

A realization struck Franca, and she sensed that fate was playing a cruel game in this matter.

It seemed like fate was conspiring to keep information about the "hostel" hidden.

Is Inevitability's power at play, or is it the evil god pathway that Ciel previously mentioned, using death to escape its original fate? Is information about the "hostel" destined not to be leaked? Franca's thoughts raced as she felt an increasingly abnormal aura surrounding the situation.

Seizing a rare opportunity, Browns immediately struck Franca down.

"Aren't you guys quite experienced? You conducted spirit channeling without thoroughly examining the corpse. The hour after death is prime time. There's no need to rush."

Franca considered explaining that fate might be at play, but she decided against it.

Why should she warn Browns and give her a lesson?

It was better to keep her in the dark, potentially for future exploitation!

Franca looked at Browns and clicked her tongue, saying, "You're quite the talker…"

Before she could finish her sentence, she extended her right hand with a smile and gently grasped the other party's chin.

"I don't mind skipping your orgies, but I'd like to undergo your 'assessment.'

"Are you up for it?"

Browns instinctively pushed Franca's right hand away, taking a step back and saying, "If you acted like a regular woman, I might consider assessing you, but right now…"

Her implication was that Franca's current demeanor resembled a libertine, a playboy who embraced Dandyism.

"You're a tough one," Franca scoffed, her words, though unusual, comprehensible to Browns.

She picked up her double-barreled shotgun and strolled into the forest without further conversation with Browns.

…

On Avenue du Boulevard, 19 Rue Scheer, at the base of the luxurious beige house,

in the basement, Lumian once again met Mr. K, who was cloaked in a black robe and a wide hood.

He had already reported the unusual silence of the cults to his superior, and Mr. K had verified this information after an investigative period.

Today, Lumian's focus was on Bouvard's corpse's prophecy, his own thoughts, and the Sinners' situation.

He relayed the information he received from Madam Magician as Bouvard's confession, including having seen a painting with strange powers from Voisin Sanson.

Finally, Lumian presented the Mystery Prying Glasses.

"Mr. K, has this mystical item also been affected by the Hostel pathway's influence?"

Mr. K stood before a red armchair and spoke in a low, raspy voice, "Wait a moment."

With a soft clap of his hands, he summoned an attendant into the room and whispered something to him.

As Mr. K waited for the attendant to return, the entire basement fell into an eerie silence due to Mr. K's silence.

Lumian felt somewhat awkward in this silence and thought to himself, Say something. Even sharing your faith would suffice. You can't just leave me standing here like a fool…

Of course, Lumian was well aware that Mr. K's silence was intentional, and he was likely communing with a deity or uncovering hidden information.

Before long, the attendant returned, holding an oil painting about half a meter in height and nearly 70 centimeters in width.

The painting depicted a dark forest, accentuating the turquoise grass illuminated by the sun.

Upon closer inspection, there was a white area on the grass that appeared to have been scratched, resembling a figure.

Mr. K finally spoke.

"It was discovered with the Mystery Prying Glasses. Apart from the mysterious and chaotic oil painting that can affect one's mind, there was also this artwork hanging on the wall.

"It was originally meant to be a portrait, but when we saw it, the person had disappeared from it. Only the scenery remained."

Walked out of the painting? Lumian felt a sense of alarm as he recalled Madam Magician's example.

He chose not to share this information with Mr. K, considering Bouvard didn't seem to be well-informed.

"Did something abnormal occur that caused the portrait to vanish?" Lumian inquired.

Mr. K's hooded head nodded slowly.

"Perhaps it returned to life and left the painting.

"It could be the source of that Beyonder's anomaly."

The Aurora Order appears to be quite knowledgeable… Lumian remarked sincerely, "A strange power, a horrifying phenomenon."

Mr. K added in his raspy voice, "We investigated fairly famous painters in Trier and found that, aside from a few who had completely lost their minds or even died long ago, most seemed relatively normal. However, there were instances of abusing psychotropic substances and alcohol-based drinks.

"Based on other information we acquired, we can confirm that it's not that painters easily become heretics of that pathway and gain corresponding powers. Instead, the bestowed of that pathway gain the ability to create art and naturally become painters. However, only a small number of them specialize in painting. The rest blend into society and create their own works without publicizing them."

"Is the Sequence name Painter?" Lumian asked thoughtfully.

This seemed to align with the power.

"God says yes," Mr. K replied devoutly and zealously.

Lumian immediately lowered his head.

"What else does the Lord instruct us?"

"God has revealed that foreign visitors stay at the Hostel." Mr. K appeared satisfied with Lumian's attitude.

Foreign visitors? Visitors from outside the barrier? Lumian's senses heightened as he became increasingly focused.

However, Mr. K didn't share further revelations. It appeared that this was all the divine guidance he had received.

Mr. K's raspy voice carried a hint of seriousness.

"Our most crucial task now is to locate the Hostel."

Without waiting for Lumian's response, he took two steps forward and continued, "The number of evil god incidents we handle pales in comparison to those holding official positions. Perhaps they have more information.

"It's inconvenient for me to directly intervene in this matter, but you can attempt to gather information from them through other means."

The Aurora Order seeks collaboration with the authorities, not necessarily to prevent the catastrophe but to thwart the ambitions of these evil gods. For this purpose, they are willing to humble themselves and cooperate with the authorities… Lumian silently mused and solemnly agreed.

…

On the roof of Apartment 17 on Rue Doyle in the market district, Jenna, disguised to conceal her allure, met with Imre and Valentine.

She cast a glance at the verdant trees lining the street below and began, "I've got important information."

Valentine's expression turned serious.

"What information?"

He had been worried that the Assassin might inquire about the primary ingredient in the Witch potion, but now his attention was fully on work.

Jenna spoke truthfully, "I've received news that some individuals suspected of being followers of evil gods have gone to a place known as the Hostel."

She didn't mention the eerie silence of the evil god's followers. With the help of 007, this had become a consensus among Trier's official Beyonders. Jenna had already been given hints regarding what to focus on.

"Hostel…" Imre, who hailed from the Southern Continent, furrowed his brow slightly.

Such a reaction… Jenna keenly sensed their reaction and posed a question, "Do you know what Hostel means?"

Imre and Valentine exchanged troubled glances.

They didn't want Celia Bello to be fully informed, but if they kept her completely in the dark, she wouldn't be able to assist in gathering the necessary clues. She needed some information to know what they wanted her to pay attention to.

After a brief pause, Imre carefully composed his words and said, "One of our colleagues once heard the term Hostel from a peculiar creature."

Chapter 450: Infiltrating Openly

Chapter 450 Infiltrating Openly

They really know about the Hostel… Jenna couldn't hide her curiosity and concern.

"What kind of peculiar creature was it? What did it say?"

Imre glanced at Valentine before responding, "Under normal circumstances, it's an invisible creature. You can only confirm its existence through some traces and see if it's lingering around you."

Valentine explained eagerly, "From what I understand, it exists somewhere between the spirit world and reality. It's untouchable and difficult to detect with Spirit Vision. It's in a very peculiar state."

"I don't think that's all. According to the dossier, there are a few conceptual and abstract aspects about it. In short, you can only perceive it or sense its form through its reactions—if it's willing—or when it attacks you," Imre corrected Valentine.

Th-this is very similar to Bouvard's condition after his corpse was corrupted… However, Bouvard's corpse wasn't that formidable. As long as the environment is dark enough, it can be seen. Yes, according to Ciel, other than Beyonders of a few pathways who have reached a certain Sequence, it's indeed impossible to touch it directly and deal with it… Jenna made a connection and increasingly believed that the Hostel Valentine and company knew was equivalent to the one they knew, unless there were more than one of the same nature.

Imre, who had a habit of wearing skin-colored tape across the bridge of his nose, paused for a moment before continuing, "If that peculiar creature hadn't attacked our colleague, it wouldn't have been discovered.

"We obtained several pieces of information from it. One of them mentioned the Hostel."

"What did it say?" Jenna played along.

Perhaps this contained the future direction of their investigation!

Valentine furrowed his brow.

"It only said that it comes from the Hostel—their home in this world."

Jenna didn't use her Instigation ability, but it was akin to instigation. "Is there any other information? Otherwise, I wouldn't know how to help you gather information and who to watch out for."

Imre hesitated for a few seconds.

"The rest of what it said isn't suitable for you to know.

"Yes, it calls itself a Pixie."

Pixue… An untouchable pixie… The corresponding Sequence name of the boon's pathway? Jenna nodded thoughtfully.

After a brief silence, Valentine said, "Our colleague encountered this peculiar creature in an artist's studio.

"As for the painter, he was once treated for mental illness. He always claimed to travel with his Spirit Body every night and enter a strange space that's neither in reality nor in the spirit world. He fought invisible creatures, strange souls, and evil spirits that attempted to invade reality through that space to protect the peace of the entire street.

"Such claims led to him being sent to the asylum for treatment for a period of time. Subsequently, he was under prolonged medication. Our colleagues confirmed that what he said might be true."

"It sounds like he's corrupted by an evil god… But why would he wander about as a Spirit Body and guard the street?" Jenna didn't mention the term bestowed.

Imre smiled disinterestedly and replied, "The power of an evil god isn't necessarily evil, but They often bring catastrophe or cause illusions and changes in the recipient's personality. Can you accept that you're no longer yourself?"

Jenna wanted to habitually respond using silence, but she remembered that there were two Purifiers opposite her, so she slowly shook her head.

Valentine's tone remained anxious.

"We're telling you this because we want you to pay more attention to painters, novelists, or those who have private hobbies of painting, reading, and telling stories. If you discover anyone's abnormal behavior and language, report it to us immediately."

"By the way, some painters' works also possess a certain amount of supernatural power. That's also one of the clues," Imre added.

Jenna nodded solemnly. "No problem."

…

Lumian, who had gathered a wealth of information from various sources, realized that although he and the others had a basic understanding of the Hostel pathway, they lacked substantial progress in their investigation. They still didn't know the location of the Hostel or the heretics' plans.

He had no choice but to turn his attention to General Philip's widow and the charity organization known as the Dreamseekers.

Late at night, at 9 Rue Lviv, Quartier 3, also known as the administrative district.

It was a three-story beige building surrounded by a garden, lawn, stables, a fountain, and statues.

"I was hoping to find an opportunity to ask for your help. I could use the ritualistic dog skin to infiltrate this place and search," Anthony Reid, with his buzz cut, said, glancing at Lumian beside him.

Lumian let out a chuckle.

"Official Beyonders can't afford to worry about such trivial matters in the current situation."

As he spoke, he crossed the street towards the beige building with sculpted outer walls.

The two of them circled to the side of the garden and watched as the two valets passed by together and turned to the front.

Lumian leaped up, pressing his hand against the white-painted iron fence. He stretched his body and leaped over, landing silently.

Anthony Reid was a seasoned veteran who had been forged by the crucible of the battlefield and maintained a habit of exercising. Although Sequence 9 to 7 of the Spectator pathway didn't significantly enhance his combat techniques, nor did his physique improve significantly, it didn't prevent him from easily vaulting the fence and entering the garden.

Lumian didn't bother concealing himself. Holding a top hat, he left the garden with one hand in his pocket and approached the main building.

Occasionally, he paused, avoiding the gazes from inside the building's windows and the maid who was eager to return to her room.

Before long, they arrived at the side door.

The wolf-shaped dog guarding the area had already fallen asleep.

Anthony Reid guessed that it was the doing of the two Demonesses who had long concealed themselves and whose whereabouts were currently unknown. However, he felt that if that was the case, why act as if they were infiltrating?

Lumian seemed to sense the Psychiatrist's thoughts and smiled.

"The sedative we obtained from the Bliss Society is very effective. We have to use it sparingly."

Furthermore, the Demoness Sect had already purged the Bliss Society once, leaving only two key members and Maipú Meyer, who was currently hiding in the market district. For the time being, no one was available to provide Lumian, Franca, and the others with supplies. Of course, the Demoness Sect had definitely gained a lot. After Franca passed the assessment, she should have a chance to obtain something from them.

Lumian walked past the unconscious dog, retrieved a wire, and expertly opened the side door of the building.

At that moment, almost all the lights in the house had been extinguished, and the corridor was shrouded in darkness.

With one hand in his pocket and the other clutching his top hat, Lumian made his way upstairs to the master bedroom, openly treating it as though it was his own home.

Last time, he hid behind the scenes and instructed his partners to set traps. This time, he's using himself as bait to lure out potential problems? Different choices and different acting methods for a Conspirer? Anthony Reid followed Lumian from behind, enlightened.

Lumian reached the third-floor master bedroom. Along the way, he took a detour and climbed up from the second-floor balcony, avoiding the bodyguard at the staircase.

Gazing at the vermilion door, he chuckled and said, "After General Philip passed away, didn't his widow receive the protection of Beyonders?

"The bodyguards they hire with their own money can only scare off ordinary thieves and bandits."

"There are Beyonders, but Beyonders working as bodyguards not only charge a high price, but they also have an attitude. They typically don't do night duty," Anthony Reid recounted his observations during this period. "Let's pay attention to our volume later."

"At a time like this, the benefits of being a Sleepless will be revealed," Lumian responded in a deep voice as he used the wire to open the master bedroom's door.

Sleepless was a Sequence 9 of the Evernight pathway, renowned for not needing much sleep while staying vigorous.

Anthony Reid followed Lumian into the room and closed the wooden door behind him.

Then, Lumian donned a black top hat and lit the gas wall lamp on the wall.

In the yellowish light, they saw a woman wrapped in a silk blanket lying on the bed.

The woman stirred slowly, her wavy black hair framing a face that had seen four decades of life. Though traces of age marked her features, her skin remained remarkably smooth.

Her amber eyes gradually blinked open, revealing a faint yellowish glow. They fixed on Lumian's transformed face, courtesy of the Niese Face, and the black top hat.

Just as she prepared to speak, a cold muzzle pressed against her crimson lips.

"Relax. We're here for a small fortune and a few answers. If you cooperate, you won't get hurt," Lumian assured her with a smile.

Despite having her house broken into in the dead of night and held at gunpoint, General Philip's widow, Annis, didn't dare to resist. She nodded quickly, signifying her willingness to comply.

"Look me in the eye. I want to be sure you're telling the truth." Anthony Reid lit a cigarette and brought it to his lips.

Annis subconsciously met the gaze of the intruder, doing her best to convey her sincerity through her eyes.

She couldn't help but notice the robber's unusually clear, dark brown eyes, as if they held the key to his soul. The cigarette between his lips burned with a fiery red glow.

The red dot flickered…

After a while, Anthony Reid, who had used his actions, words, and demeanor to lull Annis into a semi-hypnotic state, delved into the depths of her Body of Heart and Mind.

"Why did you donate so much of your wealth to the Dreamseekers charity organization?"

Annis's Body of Heart and Mind replied without reservation, "It was in Philip's will. If I didn't donate two-thirds of my assets to that charity, my child and I wouldn't inherit the remaining third."

There is something suspicious about the Dreamseekers, and perhaps even General Philip too… Lumian found it difficult to believe the general to be that generous.

Noting that Annis continued her life without any disruptions and seemed oblivious to any potential issues with General Philip, Anthony Reid changed his line of questioning.

"Was Philip still a devoted follower of the Eternal Blazing Sun?"

The Psychiatrist believed that the general's daily routines in a marriage were hard to hide from Annis, even when other problems remained concealed.

Annis's eyes grew distant as she replied, "He hadn't prayed fervently in a long time, and his praises were quite perfunctory.

"I overheard him whisper in the corridor once, 'Goddess bless.'"

Chapter 451: Fate's Prank

Chapter 451 Fate's Prank

Goddess bless… Is he a believer in Evernight or an evil goddess? From the looks of it, it's likely an evil goddess… Lumian made a preliminary judgment as he listened to Annis's answer.

Simultaneously, he sighed silently.

No wonder people who believe in evil gods love to convert their parents, spouses, and children into one. Otherwise, no matter how cautious they are, many details can't be hidden from their families who spend day and night with them…

Anthony Reid held the quietly burning cigarette in his hand and pondered for a few seconds before saying, "How did Philip die?"

The information he had gathered so far indicated that General Philip had succumbed to a sudden ailment, but that was the public declaration. The actual situation remained unknown.

Annis's tone drifted as she replied, "He had a heart attack in the middle of the night and couldn't make it to the hospital before he died."

Anthony Reid asked calmly, "Where's his body?"

"It was purified, cremated, and sent to the family cemetery in Quartier de l'Erato." What Annis said was public information.

Lumian turned to Anthony Reid.

"Ask her about the fate of his Beyonder characteristics."

He believed that Philip was definitely a Beyonder. After all, he had managed to rise up the ranks to general in the army, and he also came from an aristocratic family—the chances of him not being a Beyonder were slim.

After the Psychiatrist finished his question, Annis said in a daze, "What are Beyonder characteristics?"

Anthony Reid analyzed the mentality and knowledge of the individual and changed his question.

"Where did the thing that emerged from Philip's body go? Or did he have any special items on or around him? Where did it go?"

Annis recalled and said, "When the servant arrived to carry him downstairs to take the carriage, he told me with difficulty that if he died, there was no need to be surprised by any strange changes in his body. I was to stow away the thing that appeared and leave them for the children.

"L-later, too many things happened during the funeral, and I was too sad. That thing disappeared and was never to be found…"

Never to be found… Lumian had long suspected that General Philip was faking his death. Now, he was more inclined to believe it.

He even felt that the other party's Beyonder characteristics hadn't truly emerged. The phenomenon Annis saw and the thing she had put away were an illusion created by a corresponding ability or ritual, and they naturally vanished in time.

Anthony Reid, who had discussed this matter with Lumian and the others several times, clearly had similar thoughts. His voice was calm as he asked, "What did it look like?"

Annis's Body of Heart and Mind replied in a voice, "It was his fist. It turned skinless, and the joints were like black metal. They were very sharp, and they easily cut through the back of the chair…"

The Beyonder characteristic fused with a certain part of the body, transforming into the potion's main ingredient… Lumian was experienced in this.

Anthony Reid further inquired and confirmed that Annis didn't have much information. She didn't even know the Sequence of General Philip's original pathway.

Seeing this, Lumian circled the master bedroom, and his gaze landed on a photo frame on the desk.

On it was a photo of Philip's family, but color photography technology that had emerged in recent years wasn't used.

In the family portrait, General Philip wore a high-ranking military officer's suit adorned with numerous medals. He wasn't too tall, and judging from the surrounding items for scale, he stood about 1.7 meters tall.

His hair was thick and slightly curled, and his eyes were small, but they had the sharpness of an eagle staring at its prey. The beard around his mouth was neatly trimmed, and the tip was even coated with paraffin. The bridge of his nose was unique, as if it had been broken and hadn't healed, causing the middle section to bulge.

Lumian observed closely and memorized Philip's exact appearance and characteristics.

If he had truly faked his death to escape his original fate, according to Madam Justice, this likely involved the loss of an old fate and the acquisition of a new one. It wouldn't alter his appearance.

In other words, the current individual was likely a stranger who looked identical to General Philip. Lumian hoped to recognize him at a glance if he encountered him in the future.

"Let's go," Anthony Reid concluded his Telepathy and said to Lumian in disappointment.

Lumian wasn't disheartened by the setback. He nodded gently and said, "To that charity organization."

The purpose of the charity organization, known as the Dreamseekers, was to provide assistance to outstanding young men who had come to Trier to pursue their dreams but had temporarily fallen into a predicament. To this end, even the staff employed such young men and provided them with free apartments.

The apartments were located in a house rented by the Dreamseekers. The lower two floors housed workplaces, and the upper two floors housed staff quarters.

Ossa, who controlled the charitable organization, also resided there, indicating that he was genuinely assisting the Dreamseekers and not seizing the opportunity to amass wealth.

After leaving Rue Lviv, Lumian and the others hurried towards Quartier 2, the arts and financial district.

Quartier 2 was very close to Quartier 3, where they were currently located. Before long, they arrived not far from Rue Saint-Varro.

The Dreamseekers was located in Building 11 there.

As soon as they alighted from the carriage and before they could approach the street where their target was, Lumian and Anthony Reid saw crimson flames rising in the dark night.

Fierce flames transformed a building into a colossal torch in the night.

Lumian's eyes narrowed as he had a bad premonition.

After exchanging glances with Anthony Reid, they sprinted towards Rue Saint-Varro.

Thud! Thud! Thud! The two of them passed through an alley with a barricade and saw that the house that had turned into a fiery hell was Building 11. It was the office and staff quarters of the Dreamseekers!

The crackling flames soared into the air, sealing off the four-story building and scorching it black. No one cried out for help or attempted to leap down from the windows. It was as silent as if everyone had died long ago.

Residents of the street woke up and fled in a hurry, others wanting to help the firefighters or watching the commotion from afar.

Anthony Reid looked at the burning building and sighed. "We're too late…"

Lumian stared intently for a moment before slowly shaking his head.

"No.

"Perhaps fate doesn't want us to gain anything. No matter how early we arrive, we'll see something similar."

With so many evil god-blessed involved in the planning, investigations would inevitably encounter various forms of interference. Some were direct, some indirect, some seemingly normal, some rather bizarre, and some seemingly failing to gain fate's favor.

Lumian paused momentarily before continuing,

"At least this means we're on the right path."

Anthony Reid fell silent for a few seconds before saying, "This indirectly proves General Philip's connection to an evil god's faith. My encounter with my comrades might stem from this…"

As he spoke, his voice trailed off.

Dozens of meters away from the burning building, Lumian's face mirrored the fiery inferno as he gazed ahead, his voice steady.

"Do you still want to pursue this?"

"This situation is getting more perilous with each passing moment. It's far more dangerous than the encounter with gunfire you've experienced before."

"Up to this day, do you still wrestle with the fear from that night, the sounds of sudden gunshots? Do you truly possess the courage and determination to press on?"

Anthony Reid lapsed into silence. The middle-aged man, battle-hardened and weathered, remained contemplative for an extended moment.

Before them loomed a house engulfed in raging crimson flames. Masked firefighters in their red and blue uniforms, citizens in disarray, and chaos swirled around them.

After an uncertain pause, the Psychiatrist, his receding hairline and slightly plump face, spoke softly.

"Perhaps I perished in that attack. What remains is an avenging spirit, relentless in its pursuit of truth and retribution.

"I can be vanquished, but I can't relinquish the pursuit. That's what I felt when you mentioned the existence of leads and hope."

Lumian offered a sly grin and turned toward Anthony.

"Welcome to the abyss of vengeance."

…

Returning to the market district, Lumian wasted no time in composing a letter to Madam Magician, apprising her of the night's operation and its final outcome.

He couldn't shake the feeling that the current situation had stretched beyond the capabilities of his team. Regardless of the clues they unearthed, it seemed as though the threads of destiny conspired to sever them, leaving their investigations seemingly fated to failure.

This uncertainty gave Lumian pause, making him wary of delving deeper into the mystery, fearing that their actions might inadvertently endanger the slim glimmer of the less significant leads on your own. Termiboros resides within you—a heavy stone capable of stirring ripples in the River of Fate. He's not easily swayed, unlike the hope they still clung to.

Before long, the "doll" messenger returned, bearing neatly folded papers.

"All fates intertwine to weave a grand drama.

"Should you come across any future clues, share the vital ones with me. Investigate the less significant leads on your own. Termiboros resides within you—a heavy stone capable of stirring ripples in the River of Fate. He's not easily swayed, unlike the others.

"Furthermore, we shall make other attempts."

Other attempts… Lumian sensed that the Tarot Club had undertaken numerous clandestine endeavors, yet like his own, these investigations had ultimately proved futile.

Considering the Tarot Club's potency, Lumian suspected that this case might be met with direct interference from angels or even evil gods.

After reducing the letter to ashes, Lumian reclined on his bed. As he prepared for sleep, he contemplated the direction his investigation should take.

"Linked to the Hostel, individuals engaged in painting, writing, and those with a penchant for reading tend to encounter trouble…"

In the whirlwind of his thoughts, Lumian's mind settled on one person.

Gabriel, the playwright who had once taken up residence at Auberge du Coq Doré.

Gabriel had relocated to Rue Saint-Michel in Quartier 2, a district teeming with painters and authors. It was an ideal hub for artistic exchanges.

Mr. K and the official organizations had only ruled out well-known painters and authors. Countless aspiring talents who hadn't yet made a name for themselves flock to Trier. The investigation of all these hopefuls within a short span seems an insurmountable task. Moreover, many young dreamers pursuing artistic ambitions call this city home. The Dreamseekers had even thrown their records to the flames…

Lumian quickly reached a decision. At the break of dawn, he planned to visit Gabriel, inquiring whether the playwright had encountered any obscure authors or painters who had yet to garner recognition, or if any unusual anecdotes had circulated among these artistic circles.

Chapter 452: Manuscript

Chapter 452 Manuscript

At noon the following day, Quartier 2, Rue Saint-Michel.

Lumian quickly realized that it was only a short distance from Rue Saint-Varro, where the Dreamseekers charity organization was situated, just a block and a square away.

As expected of the arts district… Lumian raised his brows, feeling that he was drawing closer to the truth and edging ever closer to the answers he sought.

He glanced away from the Sun Obelisk standing proudly in the square's center and strolled along Rue Saint-Michel, tracing the path that winded past the ancient and weathered buildings.

He couldn't help but notice impoverished painters hunched over their sketchpads at the square's edge and along both sides of the street. Musicians played their diverse tunes with guitars, violins, and flutes. Every so often, white homing pigeons glided gracefully beside a fountain that sent water cascading in sync with the music.

The warm autumn sun cast a poetic charm over the scene.

Having spent a considerable amount of time in the market district, often consumed by thoughts of revenge, engrossed in investigations, or participating in banquets, Lumian had rarely immersed himself in the everyday life of Trier's core area.

Unfazed by the sunlight and the languid ambiance, donning a brown round hat, a light-blue shirt, and a casual brownish-yellow suit, he made his way into a bar named "Third-Rate Authors."

Here, most patrons sported well-worn attire, sipped affordable spirits, and engaged in animated discussions on various subjects. Occasionally, when inspiration struck, they'd retrieve well-thumbed notebooks and jot down their thoughts with the fountain pens they carried.

As Lumian approached the bar counter, he couldn't help but overhear a lively discussion among some of the patrons regarding the latest art exhibition.

"That piece called 'Cafe' is incredibly controversial. Some people laud it for its vibrant colors and audacious composition, seeing it as a silent protest delivered in an absurd form. Others think it's a deliberate attempt at abstract art, a ruse to dupe the public's intellect."

"I find it fascinating. The artist's ideas are vividly depicted through those overlapping colors. Just think about it. Isn't that how many cafés are? Noisy, bustling, with people from diverse backgrounds clashing and mingling like a chaotic blend…"

"I'm willing to call it a groundbreaking masterpiece of abstract art!"

"Are you talking about the kind of abstract art that's never been recognized or sold?"

Lumian couldn't help but think, Café… Isn't this the painting Mullen created using his buttocks? Someone genuinely holds it in high regard? Could it possibly become the most renowned and valuable work of his life? He pursed his lips, inwardly sighing. You Trierians…

Upon reaching the bar counter, Lumian spent eight licks on a glass of absinthe and raised his voice.

"Everyone, I have a question. If anyone can provide the answer, this glass is on me!"

As all eyes in the bar turned towards him, Lumian spoke up:

"I'm looking for the playwright, Gabriel.

"I need him to write a script."

In Rue Saint-Michel, nearly anyone one bumped into on the road could be an author or painter, let alone in a bar known for its literary discussions and artistic creativity.

Gabriel had frequent meetings with fellow writers and may even host private gatherings in his rented apartment. After all, "Lightseeker" had seen successful screenings and was quite popular, which would bring him significant benefits.

"He hasn't shown up for a few days. He claims he's locking himself away to finish a story," a middle-aged man near the bar counter responded to Lumian's inquiry with a smile. "He's probably swamped with scripts. Would you consider other playwrights? There are several equally talented young folks around here."

Hasn't shown up for a few days… Lumian furrowed his brows momentarily before relaxing.

"How will I know if I don't give it a try? I come with plenty of sincerity."

"Alright," the middle-aged man in the tattered formal coat murmured. "I hope you won't be disappointed."

He led Lumian to 34 Rue Saint-Michel and climbed the stairs up to the fifth floor, near the attic.

The outer walls and stairs had a slightly outdated but still well-maintained appearance, and it was notably cleaner and more spacious compared to Auberge du Coq Doré.

"This is where Gabriel resides," the bearded middle-aged man informed Lumian, rapping on the brown wooden door of Room 503.

A muffled sound echoed, but there was no response.

"Perhaps he's out searching for food, or maybe he's completed his work and gone to see the theater manager who commissioned it," the middle-aged man suggested with a forced smile. "Would you like to return to the bar for another drink? I'm an experienced writer myself, though I've never ventured into script writing. My novels sell quite well in the underground market."

"What have you written?" Lumian asked, glancing at the firmly closed brown door, showing no signs of anxiety.

The middle-aged man sighed and said, "I wrote 'Monk Pursuing Dog' and its sequel, 'Dog Pursuing Monk,' but they weren't published under my name. For one, it would lead to my arrest by spies, and secondly, my boss wouldn't permit it."

"A sequel?" Lumian hadn't visited an underground book market or a banned bookstore for some time. His last visit had been to purchase "Emperor Roselle's Secret Chronicles."

As he looked at the somewhat forlorn and slightly greasy middle-aged man, his perspective shifted.

He could be considered one of his initiates into the adult world!

"It came out last month," the middle-aged man replied, nodding gently. "These two novels have made my boss a fortune, but I didn't even get a tenth of that, no, not even a hundredth!"

"Boss?" Lumian inquired, recalling that Bard, a key member of April Fool's, had once authored "Emperor Roselle's Secret Chronicles." He saw this as an opportunity to gain insight into the workings of this profession and prepare for future tracking.

The middle-aged man sighed again.

"We don't have authorship rights, just writing tools for the boss. He pays us a fixed but tiny salary for our manuscripts, specifies the direction and requirements for our writing, and then sells them through his own channels.

"On Rue Saint-Michel, there are many third-rate authors like me who don't even have pen names. We're like assembly line workers."

Lumian, showing respect, asked, "May I know your name?"

The middle-aged man replied, "Rabe." His eyes were filled with hope as he gazed at Lumian.

Lumian probed further into the world of underground literature, gaining insight, and ultimately said, "If my attempt to reach an agreement with Gabriel falls through, I'll consider offering you an opportunity."

Rabe's joy was palpable as he responded, "As long as the boss doesn't assign me any new missions, you'll find me here at Third-Rate Authors every day!"

Watching the underground author, an initiate for many Intis youths, descend the stairs, Lumian took a wire from his pocket and unlocked Gabriel's door.

Compared to the playwright's room at Auberge du Coq Doré, this space was considerably more expansive, encompassing a bathroom and a small bedroom. Beyond that, it served as a living area, study, dining room, and kitchen. A coal stove for cooking was neatly arranged in a corner.

Lumian quickly surveyed the room and noticed a jumbled stack of papers that resembled manuscripts on the desk by the window.

He shut the wooden door behind him and proceeded towards the desk.

It's Gabriel's handwriting. Rabe was telling the truth. This is definitely Gabriel's residence… Lumian mused as he held the stack of papers and began to peruse them.

Moving into the bedroom, he spotted a pair of black dungarees casually draped over the bed. The sight confirmed his earlier suspicion—he was in the right place.

This was a pair of pants Gabriel had frequently worn in the past.

However, the playwright himself was conspicuously absent.

Recalling Rabe's statement that Gabriel hadn't been seen for several days, Lumian's caution escalated.

He meticulously examined every item in the room, much like a hunter tracking the movements of his prey.

After a few minutes, Lumian picked up a white-glazed porcelain cup with a single handle from the desk. He noticed that about a third of it still held cold water, with dust floating on the surface, too subtle for ordinary eyes to discern clearly.

At least a day. Lumian's heart tightened with concern.

What could have happened to Gabriel?

Was it possible that his prominence had attracted the attention of government spies seeking a "conversation"? Or perhaps he had unwittingly become the target of money-seeking kidnappers?

Setting the porcelain cup down beside the manuscript, Lumian meticulously combed the room, searching for any clues or signs of interest. His search yielded nothing of note.

Returning to the desk, he picked up the stack of manuscripts, eager to delve into Gabriel's work before his unexplained absence.

The script told the tale of a struggling author who crossed paths with a woman coerced into joining a criminal organization. Together, they found solace in their shared despair, pain, torment, and the harshness of daily life. They offered each other encouragement and warmth, ultimately leading to the author's recognition by the newspaper's editor-in-chief and a steady income. His reputation steadily grew, while the woman, still trapped in her circumstances, chose to vanish.

Before the story could conclude, it ended with a passage about the lover's disappearance and the author's introspective musings:

"She's here;

"My beloved has arrived from the night.

"She's left;

"My beloved walked towards the distant hostel…"

The mention of the word "hostel" made Lumian's forehead twitch.

Though it was an ordinary word in a script, it stood out to him due to his daily contemplations and associations, sparking connections in his mind.

His gaze suddenly shifted from the manuscript to the desk.

At some point, the white-glazed porcelain cup with a single handle, which he had moved to the manuscript, had somehow returned to its original place!

Lumian's eyes narrowed, and the muscles under his clothing tensed.

As a Hunter, he had an unwavering memory for any alterations he made in his surroundings—it was a fundamental part of him!

A creature that is challenging to detect with the naked eye and can only be confirmed by certain traces. Lumian silently recollected the information Jenna had relayed from the authorities.

Suddenly, he reached into his pocket and retrieved a pair of glasses.

They were brown gold-rimmed glasses—Mystery Prying Glasses!

Chapter 453: Missing Author

Chapter 453 Missing Author

Lumian carefully positioned the Mystery Prying Glasses on the bridge of his nose, and immediately, the room seemed to whirl, and the ground beneath him trembled.

Suppressing his nausea and dizziness, he observed the scene before him fragment and overlap, creating a surreal and captivating tableau.

The bed pressed against the desk, which seemed to lean against the ceiling. Behind the ceiling appeared to be a tap, as if it were installed within a wardrobe. These scenes were like translucent canvases superimposed on each other, reflecting themselves in Lumian's vision.

A pale-white face materialized beside the wardrobe.

The face had disheveled brown hair, naturally parted. Dark-brown eyes glistened beneath black-framed glasses. It was Gabriel, looking cleaned up and as though he hadn't burned the midnight oil in a while.

The playwright gazed at Lumian with a vacant, distorted, yet strangely genuine smile.

His right hand reached out from the void, waving gently before his face shrank into the depths of the translucent layers, vanishing completely.

Lumian quickly surveyed the room, but Gabriel hadn't reappeared. He promptly removed the Mystery Prying Glasses, replacing them with the Eye of Truth on his left side.

This mystical item, composed of pale-white flesh and dark blood vessels, covered the corresponding ear, allowing Lumian to hear rapid voices from the distant horizon. The intertwined purple blood vessels formed a lens that adhered to his eye, revealing faint blood, layers of colors, and the room with a third of it blending into the surroundings. An invisible curtain resembling mullioned glass was also discernible.

The latter two phenomena rapidly dissipated or gradually returned to normal.

Before the whispers could become more distinct, Lumian removed the Eye of Truth and massaged his throbbing forehead.

Based on the combined information from both mystical items, he deduced that Gabriel had been corrupted by Hostel, becoming a presence that couldn't be perceived or touched in the conventional sense.

However, the playwright retained a certain degree of rationality. He recognized Lumian and even happily bid him farewell.

Returning the white porcelain cup with a single handle to its original position seemed to serve as a greeting, an attempt to capture Lumian's attention.

Lumian frowned slightly. Why does Gabriel seem to accept his transformation into a monster and was even pleased. When had he come into contact with Hostel?

His gaze shifted to the manuscript on the desk. The story in the unfinished script felt eerily familiar.

Lumian picked up the manuscript and read it meticulously, at a slower pace than before.

After perusing the first section, he confirmed that the protagonist of the script was Gabriel himself. The character's personality, the details of his life, the cold treatment he endured, and the demand to produce vulgar works all aligned seamlessly.

Regarding the female lead, who immersed herself in the underworld and persistently encouraged the male lead's creations, Lumian couldn't help but feel that if it weren't for the difference in gender, he could be the one with such a background.

However, the female lead's personality, her way of speaking, and her encouraging words were entirely distinct from his own. Even in the scenes involving the mobs, Lumian could discern traces of Charlie.

In essence, the female lead's identity, background, and experiences in the mob appeared to be a blend of Charlie's and my situation. It was however someone else who interacted with the male lead. Gabriel had previously mentioned that only me and the human model Séraphine encouraged him at Auberge du Coq Doré. Charlie merely drank with him without mocking him or teasing him. A human model… that's right! The human model for a painter. Séraphine spent a night with Gabriel before moving out. Lumian rapidly connected the dots, sensing that the root of the problem might lie with Séraphine, the human model!

This woman had once accompanied a painter to a small seaside town as a model. After an extended absence, she returned to Auberge du Coq Doré.

Painter!

Could Gabriel have been corrupted on that night when Séraphine returned? Was it possible that Séraphine had moved to the Hostel? Lumian meticulously perused the script, leaving no word unread.

Since this was a story born from Gabriel's own experiences, it undoubtedly contained numerous factual details and genuine emotions—invaluable clues!

As Lumian continued to read the script, bathed in the sunlight filtering through the oriel window, he sensed the concealed love that resided within Gabriel's heart. He could feel the ache of remorse, reluctance, and the yearning for a relationship that Gabriel believed he could easily discard when he moved to a better neighborhood to start anew. In the end, he found himself unable to forget it.

The protagonist, increasingly aware of his heart's true desires and feelings, ceased to evade them and actively embarked on a quest to uncover traces of his beloved.

He sought out people who were acquainted with her, visited motels and hotels that occasionally haunted his dreams, and explored galleries in search of new artworks based on his lover…

Yet, his endeavors proved futile, leading him to compose the inner monologue.

It ended here abruptly… I can't tell if he found Séraphine… Lumian placed the manuscript down in disappointment and decided to check the drawer for any drafts, outlines, or notebooks that might contain further information or inspiration.

Regrettably, the contents of the drawer only covered the first half of the script. By the time Gabriel had reached the second half, he appeared to have delved deeply into his emotions and penned his inner monologue in a single burst.

Lumian looked at the papers before him, pondering the situation.

From the script and the other items in the room, it's apparent Gabriel hadn't managed to locate Séraphine…

In other words, he hadn't actually come into contact with the Hostel…

Furthermore, neither the script nor Rabe's description suggests that Gabriel exhibited any signs of corruption or boons until he ceased writing. While he was undoubtedly suffering from the loss of his lover, this was a typical emotional response…

So, why had this person suddenly transformed into an untouchable, unseen monster? Just knowing about the Hostel shouldn't lead to such a situation… Apart from me being special, Franca and Jenna know about the Hostel. Anthony Reid, Theresa, the Demoness Sect member in Trier, Mr. K of the Aurora Order, and a large number of Purifiers of the Eternal Blazing Sun

Church all know about it. There are ordinary people and Beyonders among them, but none of them are in trouble…

Beatrice of the Bliss Society knows the location of the Hostel and aims to retrieve a painting, which was the reason Franca and I made a mistake. Bouvard of the Sinners prophesied a catastrophe associated with the Hostel, leading to his corruption into a peculiar corpse. The Dreamseekers charity organization likely sponsored heretics connected to the Hostel, such as painters and authors, and they were destroyed at the slightest hint of exposure.

What was the reason for Gabriel?

Could he have recently encountered something that deepened his understanding of the Hostel, or perhaps he had found traces of Séraphine?

Lumian made a preliminary guess and conducted a thorough search of Gabriel's rented apartment with a clear objective in mind.

Nothing.

He then left 34 Rue Saint-Michel and made his way back to the Third-Rate Author bar, where he seated himself next to Rabe, who was engrossed in his drink.

"A glass of La Fée Verte," Lumian ordered as he tapped the bar counter.

Then, he turned to Rabe and inquired, "Do you have any idea where Gabriel has been over the past few days?"

Rabe pointed to a small round table near the window and replied, "You'll have to ask them."

As an underprivileged author working as a ghostwriter without a pen name, Rabe considered himself fortunate to know a rising star like Gabriel and attend his private gatherings. He had to work regularly every day to fulfill the missions assigned by his boss, preventing him from participating in their activities.

Guided by Rabe, Lumian approached the small round table and was taken aback upon seeing the four individuals seated there.

Weren't these the same individuals who had discussed Painter Mullen's art spoof art, "Café"?

In response to Lumian's inquiry, the leader of the group responded with a puzzled expression, "We last saw Gabriel two days ago. We all went to the Trier Art Center together to attend an art exhibition."

Art exhibition… Lumian's eyebrows twitched.

…

Trocadéro Town.

Franca, dressed in a white jacket, followed Browns Sauron, who wore a black coat, as they navigated through the manor adorned with grapevines.

With curiosity evident on her face, Franca, who had been invited, couldn't help but ask, "Where are you taking me?"

Browns cast a brief glance in her direction.

"I'm taking you to meet my teacher. You've successfully passed the assessment and are now an official member of our sect."

Browns Sauron's teacher… A high-ranking Demoness? Could this person be the leader of the Demoness Sect in Trier? Franca's thoughts raced as she smiled and inquired, "Does this mean I can enjoy the membership perks?"

The term "perks" was coined by Emperor Roselle and had gained recognition in Intis.

Browns maintained a bit of distance from Franca as she questioned, "What would you like in exchange?"

Without hesitation, Franca responded, "The potion formula for Affliction."

Affliction was the name of the Assassin pathway's Sequence 5, often referred to as the Demoness of Affliction.

Browns let out a scoff.

"Quite bold to make such a request. Do you believe you have accrued enough contribution points to ask for the potion formula for Affliction?"

She paused for a moment before adding, "Of course, if you can assist the sect in achieving something, this can be your perk."

Franca, who had initially held limited hope and was merely testing the waters, glanced at Browns.

"And what's that something?"

Seizing the opportunity, Browns explained, "We've received information that the Iron and Blood Cross Order discreetly smuggled an item into Trier through an underground tunnel several months ago. If you can uncover what it is and identify its possessor, you'll be entitled to the Affliction potion formula."

A few months ago… The underground tunnel… Secret delivery into Trier… Franca suddenly recalled "Rat" Christo's loss of his biological brother.

In an effort to aid the Savoie Mob's smuggling leader in recovering his brother and the transported goods, she and Lumian had been drawn into a strange mirror world, where they narrowly escaped.

During their adventure, Franca had acquired a classic sterling silver mirror.

Chapter 454: Hidden Honorific Name

Chapter 454 Hidden Honorific Name

Franca had long harbored the desire to uncover the nature of the item that Gardner Martin had smuggled into Trier through "Rat" Christo. However, in the months that had passed, Gardner Martin had acted as if the incident had never occurred, and nothing of note had appeared around him.

From the looks of it, the Demoness Sect attaches significant importance to that item… That's right. Given that this item had triggered the strange mirror world, it is highly likely that it was linked to the powers of the Assassin and Hunter pathways… Franca took a moment to consider and then admitted, "I know what you're referring to…"

She explained to Browns Sauron in the same manner they had explained the situation to "Rat" Christo in the past. In essence, she shared everything except the fact that she and Lumian had been drawn into a mirror world. Instead, they relied on Lumian's unique ability to escape and how she obtained a classic silver mirror that led them to the mirror world.

"According to the 'Rat,' his brother and many of his subordinates turned into monsters, including the reversal of their left and right hands. This attracted the Purifiers' attention were eliminated." Franca deliberately elaborated, probing Browns Sauron gauge her reaction to the appearance of the mirror people.

Browns displayed a slight furrow of her brow.

"How did the official Beyonders become aware that something was amiss?"

She seems to know about the mirror people and their specific traits… Franca looked away and shook her head.

"For that question, you'd need to approach a Purifier, not me."

Without further discussion, Browns led Franca to a circular pavilion enclosed by grapevines and various vines.

Seated in the circular pavilion was a woman donned in a black court dress. Her bright dark gray eyes held a touch of sadness, and her neatly tied black hair featured a few loose strands, which cascaded naturally and added a hint of allure to her otherwise composed countenance.

Upon catching sight of the woman's slightly curved red lips, graceful jawline, and soft facial features, Franca was initially struck by the overwhelming beauty that met her gaze. However, her astonishment was quickly overshadowed by an unexplainable sense of sympathy.

Although she was taken aback and touched by a sense of heartache, it took nearly ten seconds for Franca to remember encountering this woman before.

She had seen her during her and Lumian's surveillance of the fake Theresa, Beatrice Incourt, at the concert. As the most beautiful woman in attendance, she had been invited on stage to take a photograph with the orchestra as a keepsake.

Is she Browns's teacher, a high-ranking Demoness? It's no surprise; having a high-ranking Demoness overseeing the operation and ensuring its success… Franca was momentarily surprised but soon realized that this situation was in line with what she had anticipated.

What she hadn't expected was that this woman had openly followed them and even participated in a photograph on stage.

Browns Sauron introduced her teacher, saying, "This is my teacher, Demoness of Black Clarice."

Demoness of Black… According to Madam Judgment, Demonesses with a color in their title are considered exceptional even among the demigods of the Demoness Sect. Some are even suspected of being angels. Franca placed her hand over her chest and offered a slight bow. In a polite and gentlemanly manner, she said, "It's a pleasure to make your acquaintance, Demoness of Black."

Franca avoided complimenting the woman's appearance. She understood that most Demonesses in the Demoness Sect took pride in their beauty while simultaneously harboring inner conflict regarding it. Compliments from outsiders were typically accepted with grace, potentially leading to some embarrassment. However, if Franca, who knew their true gender, were to offer such compliments, it might be perceived as provocation or mockery.

Demoness of Black Clarice nodded slightly and said, "Every member needs to believe in the Primordial One. You should have known about this more than a month ago. It's time to officially pray to Her."

Franca was not surprised at all. Secret organizations that worshiped evil deities typically required new members to open themselves to their deity, thus gaining a measure of control and filtering out most insecurities.

Lately, when visiting Browns, Franca had followed Madam Judgment's instructions, conducting a preliminary ritual that sought the protection of an angel from Mr. Fool.

"We are all the children of the Primordial One," Franca responded devoutly and respectfully, adhering to Browns's guidance during this period.

Clarice's expression grew solemn, and her eyes were filled with admiration.

"Recite the honorific name of the Primordial One with me in Hermes.

"The source of all catastrophes, the symbol of destruction and the apocalypse, the Demoness who controls Chaos…"

Although the Demoness of Black spoke in Intisian, the surroundings darkened significantly. The grapevines writhed gently, as though transforming into venomous snakes.

Franca remained composed and repeated the three-lined honorific name in Hermes.

Suddenly, she saw grapevines extending towards her.

They grew thicker and thicker, completely enveloping the circular pavilion.

One of the python-like vines extended toward Franca, and a dark-blue vertical eye opened at its tip.

It reflected Franca's figure.

The figure rapidly distorted, transforming into a man with a bloodied face.

The man had short flaxen-colored hair, slightly thick brown eyebrows, and lake-blue eyes. His lips were thin, and his appearance was ordinary.

Franca was taken aback. This face was familiar to her.

It was the face she saw in the mirror every day before consuming the Witch potion.

This was her past self, Franco Roland!

In the deep-blue vertical eye, Franco Roland's expression turned ferocious. His eyes held a tangible hatred, and his face was filled with a viciousness that could cause nightmares.

Franca's body stiffened, as if she had turned into a statue made of rock.

After staring at her for a few seconds, the vine with the blue vertical eye retracted into the canopy of grapevines, its eyes reflecting its unhappiness.

Franca finally felt her body. She blinked and saw that everything around the circular pavilion was normal. Sunlight pierced through the gaps between the vines and shone here.

There were no python-like vines, nor were there any blue vertical eyes. It was as if the bizarre and nightmarish encounter had never happened. All of it appeared to be a fleeting, surreal vision.

She lowered her head and completed her prayer.

As Franca continued her rituals, she couldn't shake the eerie experience from her mind. The connection between the Primordial Demoness and the underground mirror world was undeniable.

She had encountered her past self, Franco Roland, in the mirror world as well.

This time, it wasn't Franca reflected in the blue vertical eye either. It was Franca's former appearance—Franco Roland!

Demoness mirror magic and mysticism's mirror world seem to hold many secrets. What Madam Judgment told me isn't everything… With this realization, Franca raised her head and opened her eyes to look at the Demoness of Black Clarice and Browns Sauron beside her.

Clarice, with a black veiled hat on her head, nodded.

"Now, you're a child of the Primordial One."

"Thank you for your guidance." Franca smiled and inquired, "I thought the honorific name for the Primordial One would include a description akin to the Ruler of the Mirror World. I'm surprised it's not part of it?"

The Demoness of Black, Clarice, replied in a cold, indifferent, yet pitiful tone, "This isn't the complete honorific name of the Primordial One. There are two more lines you can't know right now."

The Primordial Demoness has two hidden lines for Her honorific name? Franca suddenly felt that this detail revealed something, but she was uncertain about its significance.

Clarice continued, "Every new member receives a Primordial One statue. It possesses anti-divination and early warning abilities, and it can assist you in performing rituals. You must pray to it every day."

While speaking, she produced a bone statue, the palm-sized statue vaguely resembling a beautiful woman with hair that reached her ankles. Each strand of hair was intricately carved with distinct, snake-like eyes, some open and others tightly shut, densely packed and unsettling.

Praying every day… Franca hesitated, deciding to be patronizing on this matter.

After Franca stowed away the Primordial Demoness statue, Clarice's brow furrowed imperceptibly.

"Keep a close watch on the Iron and Blood Cross Order, especially Gardner Martin. If they make any unusual moves, contact Browns immediately. If the situation becomes critical, retrieve the Primordial One statue, set up the altar, and perform the designated ritual. After completion, place the prepared letter into the mirror on the altar."

Keep a close watch… Unusual moves… Franca extracted the key points from the Demoness of Black's instructions.

She sensed an impending catastrophe and couldn't help but grow anxious.

Does the Demoness Sect believe that the Iron and Blood Cross Order is on the brink of launching a major operation?

…

In Quartier 2, outside the Trier Arts Center, Lumian stood on the steps, contemplating the authors' responses that flashed through his mind.

"Gabriel has been enjoying art exhibitions and galleries for the past month or so."

"He doesn't pay much attention to each painting. It's as if he's searching for the one his soul has been waiting for."

"There's nothing unusual about him."

"He didn't fixate on any other visitors at the exhibition."

"…"

The information revealed by these answers left Lumian puzzled about his next steps. Nonetheless, he had decided to visit the Trier Art Center to explore the art exhibition titled "Future Impressions."

It was scheduled to end in another two days.

Before arriving, Lumian had secured a hotel and a room for setting up a ritual. He summoned a messenger and informed Madam Magician about Gabriel's encounter and the direction of his investigation.

Initially, he had planned to relay the message from the bar's washroom, but he recalled that the "doll" messenger had severe mysophobia and obsessive-compulsive disorder. Consequently, he opted to spend a bit of money to find a clean and suitable place.

As he gazed at the colorful art center with its sun-like roof, Lumian took a slow breath and presented his ticket to enter the building.

"Future Impressions" wasn't a large art exhibition, occupying only three exhibition halls. Lumian strolled through, admiring the artworks displayed on the walls.

Suddenly, he spotted a familiar figure.

Chapter 455: Two Children

Chapter 455 Two Children

The figure he saw was a boy of about seven or eight, dressed like a young gentleman with yellow hair, brown eyes, and chubby cheeks. He had an honest and innocent aura, and Lumian immediately recognized him as Baron Brignais's godson, the peculiar boy, Ludwig.

Ludwig stood in front of a wall painting adorned with doughnuts, his young eyes fixated on the artwork. Sensing someone watching him, he turned around and spotted Lumian.

Lumian smiled and playfully teased, "Running away from home again?"

Ludwig, this time with more composure, replied, "No. I told my godfather that learning can't be limited to textbook knowledge. It's equally important to read more, hear more, and interact with other things."

Lumian inquired, "And he brought you here to see the art exhibition?" However, he couldn't spot Baron Brignais in the vicinity.

He noticed that Ludwig's intelligence and knowledge seemed to have improved a bit, allowing him to come up with an excuse he had used before.

It appeared that learning was having a positive impact on him!

Ludwig nodded and added, "Yes. It's important for a child to cultivate an appreciation for art from a young age."

Lumian clicked his tongue and continued, "So, no textbooks, homework, or exams today?"

Ludwig responded, a joyful smile unknowingly plastered across his face, "It's incidental."

Internally, Lumian noted, There's been some growth, but not much…

At that moment, Baron Brignais, donning a silk top hat and a black suit, approached from the other side of the exhibition hall.

Lumian couldn't help but make a mocking remark, "Aren't you worried he'll get lost?"

As a Conspirer, Lumian picked up on something unusual about this situation.

Given Brignais's past anxiety when Ludwig ran away, he shouldn't have left the child alone in the exhibition hall!

Brignais smiled and said, "Ludwig has been doing well recently and hasn't tried to run away from home. He was engrossed in admiring the paintings, so I didn't want to disrupt him when I went to the washroom."

Sounds like something an irresponsible parent would do, but Baron, you weren't like this before. I suspect you did it on purpose… You deliberately left Ludwig alone in the exhibition hall to see what this strange child would do? Heh heh, you don't have to worry about him. You have to worry about the surrounding visitors. If this guy gets hungry and you don't provide food in time, I'm afraid someone will be eaten, Lumian criticized as he made a guess.

He sensed that Baron Brignais had an ulterior motive for arranging this visit to the exhibition. It was akin to leading an experienced hound to a specific occasion, releasing its ropes to see if it would track down certain prey.

After answering Lumian's question, Baron Brignais, clutching his bulging briefcase, looked at Ludwig.

"When you get back, write an essay regarding the art exhibition, detailing your feelings and the work that left the deepest impression."

Ludwig's expression crumbled.

Lumian was not surprised. He had plenty of experience being thrown into such a situation.

Instead of conversing with Baron Brignais and Ludwig, he chose to continue his observation of the paintings. His attention fixated on the presence of any motel-like structures within the corresponding pieces, the existence of a human model resembling Séraphine, and the potential impact on the visitors' perceptions and their surroundings.

Regrettably, Lumian's exploration of the three small exhibition halls yielded no significant findings. Instead, Mullen's "Café" drawing, which he had created with his buttocks, drew the attention of numerous tourists, sparking both admiration and criticism.

Standing in the final exhibition hall, Lumian contemplated his next move. Retrieving his brown, gold-rimmed glasses, he decided to give them a try.

Since his unaided vision and Spirit Vision revealed no discernible issues, he opted to test the Mystery Prying Glasses from the same pathway!

Carefully positioning the glasses on his nose bridge, Lumian braced himself as the world around him seemed to spin and whirl. His focus remained on the scenes unfolding within his "vision."

Each painting took on a life of its own, breaking free from the confines of the walls.

Some of the paintings seemed to regard Lumian with a chilling, penetrating gaze.

Initially taken aback, Lumian feared that something extraordinary was afoot with all the portraits, potentially placing him in a dire situation. However, he soon realized that he wasn't under attack.

The figures within the portraits merely stared at him with silent and cold intensity.

It was as if they had attained a degree of consciousness and a sense of being, yet they hadn't fully emerged from their canvas confines to walk among the living.

A revelation dawned upon Lumian.

Through the lens of the Mystery Prying Glasses, he was witnessing another reality.

Perhaps, in some parallel aspect of the world, each painting held a semblance of reality. However, they remained two-dimensional, flat, and lacking in depth, incapable of significantly impacting the human realm or the spirit world. There might be exceptions, moments where extended contemplation of certain works induced feelings of delirium or anxiety.

It occurred to Lumian that Painters could potentially amplify the limited, flat nature of these objects, opening a pathway to the realm of the real.

In essence, the characters within ordinary paintings might possess an incomplete, condensed, and spiritually deficient existence in this two-dimensional, flat world. With the aid of the Mystery Prying Glasses, they were unveiled in their true form.

Likewise, Lumian's perception unveiled deeper truths—the artist's most profound creative intentions.

One painting depicted the future of Trier, a divided realm. On the surface, men and women reveled in lavish banquets, adorned in opulent attire. Beneath the surface, ragged individuals dwelled in dark tunnels, subsisting on earthworms, rats, and moss. Yet, through the Mystery Prying Glasses, Lumian glimpsed fat, glutinous pigs with oil oozing from their mouths on the surface. Below, grotesque, contorted visages and decaying hands reached upwards.

This was the true message the artist sought to convey.

In the next instant, Lumian spotted Baron Brignais and his godson Ludwig.

The former appeared unremarkable when viewed through the Mystery Prying Glasses, but there was a faint, brassy aura emanating from his form. As for the latter, something chilling unfolded as he abruptly turned his head, seemingly locking eyes with Lumian across two exhibition halls.

Ludwig's chubby face took on an unsettling transformation; his skin seemed to writhe, as if it were on the verge of shedding, and something from beneath the surface attempted to burrow out.

Lumian's heart tightened, and he instinctively removed the Mystery Prying Glasses,

instantly restoring the scene to its normal state.

There's indeed something amiss with Ludwig… Thankfully, I reacted quickly. Otherwise, I might have seen something I shouldn't have… Lumian's head spun, and his feet felt like they were stepping on cotton.

He had always sensed that Ludwig was far from ordinary, but this encounter had sent his danger instincts into overdrive.

The true nature of the innocent-seeming human skin concealing the boy beneath remained an ominous mystery.

Ugh… Lumian had worn the Mystery Prying Glasses for an extended period this time, and his discomfort was overwhelming. Despite the diminishing dizziness, he felt profoundly nauseous, with a painful ache in his stomach, a pressing need to vomit and tend to other bodily functions.

Even a Conspirer's constitution couldn't withstand this.

Taking a deep breath, Lumian made his way to the washroom adjacent to the three exhibition halls.

It was situated at the end of a long corridor adorned with statues and paintings, perfectly in line with the Trier Arts Center's ambiance.

Once inside the washroom, Lumian attended to his urgent needs, and after washing his face with cold water, he gradually regained his composure, with the discomfort dissipating.

Exiting the washroom, Lumian's gaze naturally drifted toward the opposite wall, where a series of paintings were on display.

One particular painting drew his attention, a macabre and enigmatic piece that gripped his senses.

It was an oil painting set against a vividly layered background, with a focal point on a naked woman.

Her face remained blurred, as if the painter had intentionally left it blank. On her body, distinct faces emerged, each bearing a different emotion—anger, hatred, malice, joy. Some of these faces resembled those of cats, others of dogs, and some appeared to exist solely in the realm of fantasy. What united them was their eerie, translucent yet lifelike quality.

As Lumian stared at this unsettling painting, a thought dawned on him.

During Gabriel's visit to the art exhibition, he had seemed perfectly normal, at least as per the accounts of the authors. But they couldn't have monitored his every move, especially during mundane activities like visiting the washroom!

…

Avenue du Marché, Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons.

Jenna had just stepped out when she spotted a familiar figure standing beneath a gas street lamp on the opposite side of the road.

It was a young boy, dressed in a white shirt, silver vest, black coat, and a mercury bow tie, his light-yellow hair neatly combed.

The child who brought me good luck last time… that formidable Beyonder! Jenna exclaimed inwardly, taken aback. She instinctively crossed the street and approached the boy.

With a slight bow, she greeted him with a smile, "Were you waiting for me?"

The boy glanced at her and muttered, "I wasn't waiting for you. You were waiting for me. You met me earlier than any other choice."

What's the matter this time? Are you offering me good luck for the impending catastrophe and getting me to discover something? Jenna's thoughts raced as she casually asked, "Didn't you say that this direction was a little dangerous last time? Why are you here this time?"

The boy's response was measured and earnest, "That day was that day, and today is today. Just because it was a little dangerous that day doesn't mean it's dangerous today."

"Alright…" Jenna probed with a probing smile. "Do you need my help to buy you an ice-cream?"

The boy, however, responded with a long, almost adult-like sigh.

"It's something else; I'll pay you."

Pay? Giving me good luck? Jenna had a vague idea, but she didn't inquire about the reward. She decided to cut to the chase, asking, "What's the favor?"

The boy reached into his pocket and retrieved a gleaming golden coin, sidestepping her question.

"This will be your reward—a lucky gold coin."

Chapter 456: The Charlatan's Instructions

Jenna examined the gold coin in the boy's hand and noticed an unfamiliar portrait of a man wearing a crown.

Perplexed, she inquired, "This isn't verl d'or?"

The boy chuckled and explained, "This is a gold pound, more valuable than Louis d'or."

"You're not from Intis?" Jenna was taken aback, but she didn't think there was a problem.

The boy's appearance did differ somewhat from the locals.

"I'm Loenese," the boy with neatly combed, light-yellow hair replied honestly.

Jenna chose not to dig deeper, understanding that whether the coin was a gold pound or Louis d'or didn't affect its practical worth.

Based on their previous encounter, she trusted the boy's ability to bring good luck.

She looked at him, awaiting his next words.

The boy returned the lucky gold coin to his pocket, showing no intention of prepayment.

Instead, he pointed at the ground and said, "At ten tonight, enter Underground Trier from the entrance here. Proceed as far as you can, following any available path, until you reach an underground river.

"Find a hiding spot nearby and wait for the first person to pass by. Take all their belongings."

"Before completing this matter, you can't tell anyone what you want to do or where you plan to go."

Go underground purely based on intuition and rely on luck to find prey? Jenna found the boy's instructions rather reminiscent of Ciel's "charlatan temperament."

As for how to acquire the person's belongings, there seemed to be only one solution: through combat; she was to subdue the other party!

Jenna knew the boy was likely a formidable Beyonder aligned with her cause, and without hesitation, she agreed, "Got it."

The boy smiled.

"When you obtain those items and hand them over to me, I'll pay you the lucky gold coin as a reward."

"How should I address you? And where should I find you when the time comes?" Jenna, aware that he wasn't an ordinary boy, couldn't help but speak in a respectful tone.

The boy mumbled, "You can call me Will. Talking to me like that makes me sound like an adult. I'm just in elementary school!

"When the time comes, you'll naturally encounter me."

Is he one of those born Beyonders mentioned at the mysticism gatherings? He's indeed young, but his abilities are outstanding? Jenna made a connection and followed his instructions. She replied with a smile, "Alright, Will."

Will waved her off and said, "You may leave."

But I'm planning to have lunch at the café diagonally behind you… Jenna muttered and changed direction to head back to Rue des Blouses Blanches for food.

However, after walking for more than ten meters, her curiosity got the best of her, and she turned to glance at the iron-black gas street lamp pole.

The strange boy, Will, had vanished from his spot.

Jenna took a closer look and realized that he had entered the nearby café and was now seated at a booth by the window, where an attendant had just brought him a cup with three scoops of ice cream.

He's truly just a child… Jenna mused, her curiosity satisfied as she continued on her way.

…

In the financial district, within the Trier Arts Center,

Lumian took out the brown Mystery Prying Glasses once again after having surmised something.

With no hesitation or fear, he donned the mystical item.

The exhibition hall had been his main focus, with the washroom separated by a long corridor.

Amidst the familiar dizziness, the oil painting in front of Lumian underwent a peculiar transformation.

The faces adorning the naked woman's body turned to look at him.

Simultaneously, Lumian sensed the presence of a creature on the rooftop, where the overlapping sky was, staring at him from a distance. It appeared to be trying to navigate the obstacles and approach him rapidly.

As the blurry face of the woman in the oil painting gradually clarified, her true identity became apparent: brown eyes darting, brown hair cascading, a plump, smooth-skinned face, and an air of detachment…

Lumian recognized her. She was none other than Miss Séraphine, the former tenant of Auberge du Coq Doré, the human model, and the lover playwright Gabriel had been searching for!

As Séraphine's face became clearer, Lumian's surroundings darkened, as if faces were on the verge of emerging from the painting or the void.

Quickly, he removed the Mystery Prying Glasses from his nose bridge, and all the anomalies vanished in an instant, leaving only the sensation of raised hair on his skin.

As expected, the human model for this oil painting is Séraphine…

Although Gabriel is an ordinary person and doesn't possess the Mystery Prying Glasses, he once slept with Séraphine and knows her physical characteristics. That must have been how he noticed traces of his lover when he entered and exited the washroom…

Could it be that Séraphine possesses multiple faces on her body, appearing both painted and alive, just like this oil painting?

Wasn't Gabriel afraid back then?

After discovering the oil painting with Séraphine as the model here, he encountered that normally difficult-to-see creature when he returned?

The timing matches up—the water glass on his desk was more than a day old, and he visited the art exhibition two days ago… Something must have transpired late at night.

After being attacked and possibly corrupted, why did he remain in the apartment until my visit?

As Lumian's thoughts raced, he turned his attention to the oil painting's signature—Claude Pierre August.

The painter was not widely recognized; otherwise, his artwork would not have been hung along the corridor to the washroom. Furthermore, his work was perhaps added for the "Future Impressions" exhibition.

Likewise, he believed that since something had happened to Gabriel, Pierre might have gone missing. He had even gone to the "Hostel" when Séraphine moved out of Auberge du Coq Doré.

Regardless, I should inform Madam Magician. What if there are any clues left behind? Otherwise, they wouldn't have dealt with an ordinary person like Gabriel. Lumian had no intention of pursuing Claude Pierre August himself. This was because it would take a lot of time to gather information about the other party through various channels. And with the target's name and identity, an astromancy master like Madam Magician should be able to quickly lock onto the painter's residence.

In addition, Gabriel had been attacked late at night after learning about Claude, the painter. Lumian's current information was only a fraction of his own.

Lumian gazed at the oil painting, his lips curling into a smile.

Will I be attacked?

I'm looking forward to it.

…

Around 9 p.m., at 3 Rue des Blouses Blanches, Apartment 601, Franca, recalling the Demoness Sect's mission, suspected the Iron and Blood Cross Order would soon make a significant move, and her plan was to visit Gardner Martin while digesting the Pleasure potion along the way.

Rather than her usual method of knocking on the door and entering, Franca decided to take a more covert approach.

She intended to hide around 11 Rue des Fontaines, in the garden, or on the lawn, observing discreetly before finding Gardner Martin.

Recognizing Gardner's Sequence and abilities, she returned to her bedroom and retrieved a palm-sized Primordial Demoness statue, which she concealed in a pocket.

This would enhance her ability to remain hidden and reduce the chances of Beyonder powers detecting her.

"I'm heading to Gardner's." Franca waved at Jenna, opened the door, and left Apartment 601.

Jenna acknowledged and breathed a sigh of relief.

She was about to leave and was a little nervous.

Franca arrived at Rue des Fontaines via a rental carriage but chose not to have the driver stop at Building 11 as usual. Instead, she disembarked from a distance and swiftly disappeared into the shadows, stealthily making her way to Gardner Martin's residence.

Her familiarity with the surroundings allowed her to find a gap in the guards' patrol, and she nimbly scaled a side wall to silently descend into the garden.

Franca didn't attempt to infiltrate the building directly. Instead, she followed the shadows, circling to the edge of the front lawn. Next to a gas street lamp, she observed the grayish-white three-story villa, still illuminated.

As time passed, Franca remained vigilant, focused on observing the figures appearing at the windows and their activities.

Suddenly, the main door of the villa swung open, and butler Faustino emerged, accompanied by a figure cloaked in black.

The black-cloaked individual was of average height, standing at around 1.75 meters. Their entire form was concealed, making it impossible to discern their appearance or physical attributes.

Who could it be? Gardner Martin's partner, or a key member of the Iron and Blood Cross Order in charge of other regions? Franca wondered.

As the black-cloaked figure exited the iron fence while butler Faustino retreated into the villa, Franca hesitated for only a moment before making a decision.

She realized that unless she ventured inside Gardner Martin's residence thoroughly, she wouldn't obtain valuable information. Her earlier exploration had been open and yielded little. The cloaked individual might provide her with fresh leads leading to unexpected gains.

Franca, who was invisible, touched the Primordial Demoness statue in her hidden pocket and grew confident.

She circled around the lawn's edge and scaled the iron fence, stealthily trailing the mysterious figure in the black cloak.

…

At 10 p.m., Jenna embarked on her journey into Underground Trier, an entrance not far from Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons.

Lacking a carbide lamp, she relied on her Assassin's night vision to navigate in the pitch-black environment. Jenna was determined to commit the path to memory and proceeded deeper into the underground tunnels, trusting her instincts.

As she advanced, the silence around her grew ever more profound.

Jenna exhaled slowly, alleviating the tension and fear in her heart.

Jenna deliberately moved away from the tunnel's center, pressed herself against a rock wall, and continued cautiously.

After an indeterminate amount of time, the sound of running water reached her ears.

She proceeded for another seven to eight meters around a rocky outcrop, where a small river flowed slowly in the dark underground.

Jenna steadied herself, spotting a mottled stone pillar to hide behind, her form merging with the dense shadows.

She refrained from using Invisibility, recognizing her limitations as a Witch—the duration she could maintain her powers was limited, and she had no way of knowing how long it would take for the target to arrive.

In the silent underground, time seemed to stretch, and Jenna's mental stress steadily built up.

At last, the reverberation of footsteps reached her ears.

Chapter 457: Unexpected Target

Auberge du Coq Doré, Room 207.

After briefing Madam Magician on the situation, Lumian left and went to the second floor of Salle de Bal Brise.

His next objective was to ascertain whether the enigmatic entity that had targeted him from afar, attempting to approach rapidly while he observed Séraphine's oil painting with the Mystery Prying Glasses, would pay him a visit during the night, much like how it had dealt with Gabriel.

He lay on the bed, closed his eyes, and gradually drifted off to sleep.

Lumian had full confidence in Madam Magician. As a Major Arcana card holder in the Tarot Club, she appeared to possess the ability to launch long-range attacks and was skilled at dealing with untouchable and enigmatic creatures.

As his thoughts blurred and he succumbed to slumber, Lumian found himself in a hazy dream, returning to Auberge du Coq Doré. Dim light filtered through the glass windows on each floor of the slightly tilted building. Gabriel, attired in a white shirt, dark jacket, black pants, and strapless leather shoes, sat on the entrance steps.

The playwright's visage was somewhat translucent, and an air of detachment lingered in his eyes.

Upon spotting Lumian, Gabriel stood up abruptly, a conspicuous smile crossing his face.

Lumian halted warily and looked at him.

"What are you doing here?"

Gabriel's smile waned as he spoke urgently,

"Leave Trier immediately! This place is about to become extremely dangerous!"

Lumian frowned and inquired, "What have you discovered?"

Gabriel cast a wary gaze around before responding, "I'm not entirely sure what they're planning, but I do know it will bring destruction to all of Trier."

They… Lumian pressed for more information. "Are you staying at the Hostel? Where is it?"

A hint of confusion appeared on Gabriel's face.

"You need to be like me to enter or gain the approval of the pixies.

"I didn't know how to find it. I found myself at the door as soon as I arrived."

As expected, the Hostel is closely related to the Pixies… Did Gabriel rely on the corruption to alter his existence and reach the Hostel like teleportation? Lumian's thoughts raced as he asked in a deep voice, "Why did you choose to go to the Hostel? Were you coerced into it?"

"No," Gabriel shook his head, his voice softening. "I did it of my own accord. Séraphine came to fetch me personally, and I couldn't refuse. It's what I wanted."

A touch of happiness crossed his face.

It was Séraphine who corrupted Gabriel and led him to the Hostel… Lumian suddenly felt a pang of sorrow.

"Have you realized that you've become a monster?"

Gabriel fell silent for a few seconds before responding, "I know, but I won't harm anyone!

He paused a beat before continuing, "My script has already achieved success. I have the reputation and income I desired most. I have no regrets in that regard. All I want now is to be with Séraphine, whether she's human or a monster."

Lumian didn't scold or berate him. Instead, he looked at Gabriel and let out a long sigh. "I understand your feelings and thoughts."

Gabriel's face showed gratitude, and he spoke sincerely, "After becoming a monster, I seem to have the ability to see a certain future. That's why I knew you would come to me. I asked Séraphine to let me stay in the room for two more days to bid you farewell. She agreed. She's not a pure monster!"

Lumian's heart stirred, and he spoke in a bewitching tone, "Do you want me to rescue you and Séraphine from the Hostel?"

"Is it possible?" Gabriel's face contorted, and his eyes revealed a mixture of yearning, as if his body and mind existed in different worlds.

Lumian took a step closer and spoke earnestly, "There is hope, but I need you to tell me all the details."

Gabriel's expression shifted between blankness, coldness, excitement, longing, and rejection, each emotion expressed vividly.

In that moment, he extended his hand, his eyes filled with intense fear.

Silently, Gabriel's form shattered, and the image of Auberge du Coq Doré disintegrated, along with the faint mist.

Lumian's eyes snapped open, and he found himself gazing at the ceiling of the second-floor bedroom in Salle de Bal Brise.

It had all been a dream, but it had felt incredibly real.

…

Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative.

Franca, carrying the Primordial Demoness's statue, followed the black-cloaked man while remaining invisible.

The man appeared to have extensive experience and skill in evading pursuit. He frequently changed direction and even doubled back on his path.

If Franca hadn't relied on her invisibility and the assistance of the Primordial Demoness statue, she would have lost him several times.

Finally, the black-cloaked man came to a stop in front of an entrance to Underground Trier.

He half-turned and examined his palms under the crimson moonlight, leaving Franca perplexed.

What's going on? Is he performing palm-reading on himself? Remaining hidden behind a gas street lamp pole, the invisible Franca observed his actions with curiosity.

After a moment, the man descended the steel staircase and disappeared into the dim entrance.

Franca followed closely behind, venturing deeper into Underground Trier.

Twenty minutes later, the black-cloaked man reached a sealed tunnel.

It was unclear what he touched, but a stone door immediately swung open on the rock wall next to him.

Franca, standing a few meters away, looked over and saw three lamps embedded in the stone wall.

Three classic oil lamps, one high and two below, each with a flame burning inside.

Franca had been in Trier for a long time and had a good understanding of the situation here. This scene triggered a connection in Franca's mind.

Carbonari!

She recognized this as one of the symbols of the Carbonari, an organization seeking to overthrow the government. Lighting three lamps was symbolic in their ranks—the one above represented the sun, while the other two below symbolized the moon and the stars.

The Iron and Blood Cross Order collaborates with the Carbonari? Franca was both surprised and unsurprised.

From her perspective, the Iron and Blood Cross Order aimed to seize power in Intis itself by toppling the government, but their current focus seemed to be on the underground and the entrance to Fourth Epoch Trier.

The black-cloaked man swiftly passed through the self-opening stone door, and Franca noticed a thin, ever-changing white fog emanating from inside.

This fog looks familiar. There must be something wrong… Franca hesitated to follow when she felt a slight tremor in her hidden pocket.

Franca reached out and touched it, her expression changing slightly.

The classic silver mirror had trembled slightly—the one connected to the underground mirror world!

Franca remained in her concealed position, watching the stone door slowly close without taking another step forward.

…

Beside the flowing underground river, the figure moved swiftly along the water.

He didn't use lanterns, carbide lamps, or other sources of light, yet he moved through the darkness with ease, navigating around potholes, rocks, and obstacles effortlessly.

Jenna, hidden behind a mottled stone pillar, noticed a flickering red light in the target's eye.

Taking a deep breath, she retrieved the ancient Arrow of the Bloodthirsty from her black coat and prepared herself for the confrontation.

Her combat experience wasn't limited, but it wasn't much either. In particular, she had never faced a Beyonder alone. All she could do was use everything in her arsenal to augment herself from the onset. She had to go all out to minimize any accidents.

Jenna plunged the obsidian arrow into her chest, letting it draw her blood and come to live.

Before the figure could approach, she sprinkled fluorescent powder over herself and chanted a Hermes incantation at an almost inaudible volume: "Body Concealment!"

With that, Jenna vanished completely, blending into the darkness, her movements masked by the sound of the underground river.

Moments later, the figure with the red eye arrived in the area. Jenna watched from the shadows.

Suddenly, the darkness came alive beneath the figure's feet, forming inky black chains that wrapped around the legs, waist, and torso.

The figure stopped abruptly, a red light shooting from its eye.

From behind, Jenna's form materialized.

Only then did Jenna get a clear look at her target. He was a man, holding a grayish-white cloth bag and wearing a dark gray robe similar to that of a monk. His face was a menacing sight, constructed with iron plates, gears, springs, screws, cranks, and other mechanical contraptions. There was a vivid red gem embedded in his right eye.

A monk from the Deep Valley Cloister? Jenna's heart raced. She hadn't anticipated Will targeting a monk from the God of Steam and Machinery Church.

She and Franca had crossed paths with similar monks in the Deep Valley Quarry before. These monks had augmented their bodies with mechanical modifications, giving them an eerie appearance.

Confronted with a target whose skull had transformed into metal, Jenna abandoned her initial plan of striking behind the ears. Instead, she concentrated a dark flame in her right palm and pressed it against the mechanical monk's head amidst the howling wind.

Simultaneously, a red beam shot forth, slicing through a few shackles resembling the Abyss. However, it only addressed the front. The other directions were already ensnaring the mechanically enhanced monk.

With a resounding impact, Jenna thrust the black flame into the target's head.

The silent yet menacing black flames expanded instantly, consuming the monk's Spirit Body and setting his spirituality ablaze.

Leveraging the high-speed agility granted by the Arrow of the Bloodthirsty, Jenna continuously shifted her position around the monk to evade counterattacks.

Simultaneously, she sought opportunities to weaken him to the fullest extent with the Demoness's black flames, bolstered by dark, binding spells.

In less than two minutes, the monk, unable to break free, collapsed to the ground, rendered unconscious and weakened.

Jenna exhaled and lowered herself to the ground.

She picked up the grayish-white cloth bag, untied the rope, and inspected its contents.

Inside, she found an array of canned paints and oil paintbrushes.

Chapter 458: Same Direction

Paint… Paintbrushes… Jenna stared at the contents of the grayish-white cloth bag for a moment, momentarily stunned by the unexpected discovery.

She quickly recalled the Purifier's advice and the recent clues they had gathered: Keep a close watch on painters and individuals with painting as a private hobby, as it was likely that some of their works possessed supernatural abilities!

Could this monk be a passionate painter?

Or was he simply delivering paint and brushes to an artist?

It seems like a routine task, but the fact that he had chosen the depths of Underground Trier for this errand raises suspicion. It didn't appear to be a matter of time constraints…

Either there's a problem with his destination, or the painter he's looking for is problematic. Perhaps everything is problematic…

A barrage of thoughts raced through Jenna's mind, leading her to suspect a connection between the mechanically enhanced monk and the Hostel they were investigating.

It was possible that an artist with supernatural powers was working on murals underground, requiring a substantial supply of paint and tools!

Jenna decided to search the monk's robe for any clues, finding only a few coins and banknotes.

She placed these items in the same grayish-white cloth bag and secured it with a knot. As she examined the intricate mechanical components that comprised half of the monk's body, she contemplated using the Demoness's black flames to incapacitate him once more. Her plan was to transport him back to the surface for an "interrogation" with the help of Ciel, Franca, and Anthony.

Being a Witch, Jenna had mastered ritualistic magic related to spirit channeling, but she lacked practical experience and was concerned about making a mistake that might disrupt their lead. She also needed a safe prayer target, so she intended to leave this task to the experienced Lumian and Franca.

As Jenna was about to put her plan into action, multiple gears on the unconscious monk's face suddenly began to turn on their own,

producing an unsettling clicking and clacking noise. The mechanical parts came to life,

spinning wildly and devouring the flesh and blood on the other side of the monk's body, turning it into a gruesome mess.

The scene resembled a horrific accident in a factory where an operator had fallen into a massive machine.

Jenna's instincts immediately warned her of impending danger, but before she could react, the mechanical parts, along with her own flesh and blood, lunged towards her.

Amidst the coexisting sounds of cracking and creaking, she transformed into a mirror, shattering inch by inch.

Jenna managed to reappear approximately ten meters away from the underground river.

Without looking back, she swiftly grabbed the grayish-white cloth bag and the Arrow of the Bloodthirsty embedded in her chest. She darted around the rock wall, making a hasty escape to the surface.

Behind her, the sounds of metal grinding and colliding persisted, but they couldn't catch up to her. Gradually, the commotion began to subside.

Finally, Jenna heard the crisp sound of metal parts falling to the ground,

and she couldn't help but let out a relieved sigh as she slowed her pace.

Jenna ran until she reached a named location in Underground Trier, where she finally slowed down and carefully removed the Arrow of the Bloodthirsty from her chest.

She could feel her strength waning due to the loss of blood, but she was grateful for her earlier caution in not removing the obsidian arrow from her chest when the monk had fainted. She had chosen to complete the search with it embedded in her.

If not for that, she might have been caught by the menacing mechanical body before having the opportunity to use the mystical item once more.

As Jenna assessed her surroundings and sought out the underground Avenue du Marché, she reflected on her harrowing experience. It felt as though the chilling tales Franca and Ciel had shared, along with their horrifying abilities, had become a reality.

The parts of the monk's body that had undergone mechanical enhancements had assumed an eerie lifelike state!

And the revived machinery was devouring human flesh and blood!

This is the true nature of the mystical world, where Beyonder powers are accompanied by unimaginable perils… Jenna turned onto the underground Avenue du Marché and made her way towards the stairs that would lead her back to the surface.

Simultaneously, she couldn't shake the suspicion that the enigmatic monk and the sinister secret cave she and Franca had stumbled upon in the Deep Valley Quarry were somehow linked to the impending catastrophe.

…

After the stone door closed, and the dark tunnel fell silent, Franca emerged from her hiding place and remained invisible as she returned to the surface.

She replayed the scene she had just witnessed, trying to pinpoint the source of the familiar feeling emanating from the ever-shifting thin white fog.

Just as she was on the verge of resorting to Magic Mirror Divination or Dream Divination to find answers, a memory resurfaced.

She recalled the moment she and Jenna had eliminated the Deep Valley Cloister's Warlock-dressed man underground. A similar fog had appeared in the mirror during their spirit channeling!

The other party's exploded corpse transformed into a blood mist, revealing the corresponding characteristics, but the colors were different!

007 had informed us that by the time the Purifiers arrived in Deep Valley Town, their target had already shifted. The items on the altar were gone, leaving behind only cryptic words on certain papers…

Those words were Albert Goncourt, Underground, Riot, and Time… Albert Goncourt is one of the leaders of the Carbonari… and this aligns with the three oil lamps I had seen moments ago! Could it be that the Iron and Blood Cross Order is collaborating with the Carbonari to incite a riot, possibly involving monks from the Deep Valley Cloister?

Hiss, could it be that the item Gardner Martin used to smuggle "Rat" Christo into Trier was requested by the Carbonari?

Is it located not far behind that stone door? Is that why my ancient silver mirror reacted?

Franca gradually connected the dots.

She realized the urgency of reporting this matter. Though it wasn't directly related to their primary mission of finding the Hostel, it seemed far from a trivial issue. If it escalated, it could lead to another catastrophe, and Franca felt compelled to do her best to prevent it.

In the next moment, Franca pondered her options.

Should I report to the Tarot Club, the Demoness Sect, or inform the authorities through 007?

She quickly made up her mind.

Only children choose to do multiple-choice questions. Adults select them all!

The only thing to be concerned about was that the reports weren't sent to the wrong parties.

…

Lumian awoke from his dream, his mind filled with questions as he slowly sat up and surveyed his surroundings.

There were no signs of Madam Magician pursuing Gabriel at the Hostel.

Madam Magician didn't realize that Gabriel had used a dream to warn me to escape Trier immediately? That's impossible. This lady possessed the ability to enter and exit my dreams at will in Cordu, and she is known to be the bane of these special monsters. Even Bouvard's lifeless body, which should have been untouchable, hadn't been spared when she dragged it away… Lumian paced back and forth in the room, pondering the puzzling situation.

He couldn't believe that Madam Magician wasn't paying attention. She had the means to observe from a distance, so there was no urgency in rushing to Salle de Bal Brise.

The insight he gained from Conspirer's influence left Lumian with a nagging sense that the dream was not what it seemed.

To deceive Madam Magician while communicating with him indicated that there was something extraordinary about Gabriel or the Hostel itself!

As Lumian was only a Sequence 6 and lacked extensive knowledge of mysticism, he refrained from speculating and instead sat at his desk, taking up a pen and paper to write a letter.

Knowing the "doll" messenger's preferences, he decided to send the letter only after returning to Auberge du Coq Doré, patiently awaiting a response.

Before long, Madam Magician's reply arrived.

"I didn't notice Gabriel influencing your dream.

"Initial considerations are:

"You have a close connection to the Hostel."

There's a close connection between me and the Hostel? Lumian's forehead twitched as he read the message, feeling as if a bucket of ice-cold water had been poured over his head.

How is that possible?

When did I establish such a bond with the Hostel?

Could it be that Gabriel used this connection to conceal himself from Madam Magician's scrutiny and directly influence my dream?

Lumian found Madam Magician's hypothesis absurd, but he couldn't help but analyze the possibilities.

As Lumian pondered the situation, a sudden realization struck him like a bolt of lightning.

Maipú Meyer!

Susanna Mattise's lover, the ostracized key member of the Bliss Society, the former manager of Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons, who had claimed to be returning to the market district to do something!

Could it be that Maipú Meyer had secretly done something in the market district that led to my unexplained close connection with the Hostel?

He wants to prove himself. I'm definitely one of the targets… Was it his plan for me to establish a close connection with the Hostel and detonate it at a critical moment?

How did he do it? I had a close connection to the Hostel without realizing it… Lumian subconsciously glanced at his left chest and suspected that Termiboros, the traitor, might have played a role in this matter.

Otherwise, he wouldn't have failed to notice anything amiss.

Amidst his surprise, Lumian didn't panic. Instead, he felt a sense of joy.

I wonder if I can use my close connection to the Hostel to find that place…

When the time comes, I might have the opportunity to meet the Sansons and have the support of numerous Major Arcana card holders…

Just as Lumian was about to write and inquire about Madam Magician, he heard soft footsteps approaching his room.

Knock, knock, knock. There was a gentle knock on the door of Room 207.

Lumian opened the door and was surprised to find Franca and Jenna standing there.

One of them wore a garish blouse, and the other was dressed as a female mercenary. Their expressions were serious.

Franca felt the need to communicate with Lumian before writing a report. "We've discovered something significant."

You've found something important too? Lumian was taken aback, pointing at the ceiling.

"Call Anthony over as well."

Nearly fifteen minutes later, Franca and Jenna shared their experiences in Room 207 of Auberge du Coq Doré, carefully omitting details about the Demoness Sect and Will.

As Lumian listened, his brow furrowed.

Some of the Deep Valley Cloister monks are suspected to be linked to the Hostel and the impending catastrophe?

That was an important cloister of the God of Steam and Machinery Church!

Lumian couldn't help but rub his temples, recollecting that something unusual had also occurred at the Eternal Blazing Sun Church's Sacred Heart Cloister.

Are the two Churches no longer as reliable?

Could Trier still be saved? Could there be a future?

Chapter 459: Price of Bestowment

After Franca and Jenna, who were sitting by the bed, had finished speaking, the room fell into silence, creating a solemn atmosphere.

A few seconds later, Lumian flashed a self-deprecating smile.

"At the very least, those monks at the Deep Valley Cloister are still discreet when they're up to no good. It means they still have reservations, which suggests that the entirety of the God of Steam and Machinery Church isn't problematic. A significant number of clergymen, or maybe even the majority, are normal."

"I think so too," Anthony Reid agreed, raising his hand and drawing a triangle on his chest.

Lumian continued, "At this point, this is no longer something a small team like ours can handle. It's best to leave the Deep Valley Cloister's problem to the Purifiers and the Machinery Hivemind."

What he didn't say was that the Tarot Club would keep a close watch. After all, no one knew how many hidden dangers were waiting to emerge within the two Churches. What if someone triggered them prematurely, delaying the investigation of the Deep Valley Cloister?

"Alright," Franca concurred; it was her original plan to begin with.

With the plan confirmed, Franca and Jenna left Auberge du Coq Doré and returned to Rue des Blouses Blanches.

Lumian drew back the curtains, gazing at the crimson moon in the sky. Casually, he said to Anthony Reid, who was about to leave, "Your best option now is to head to Suhit's steam locomotive station as soon as you wake up tomorrow and purchase a ticket to leave Trier. The sooner the departing train, the better."

Anthony, dressed in military-green camouflage, halted in his tracks, slowly turning around, his gaze locked on Lumian's retreating figure.

"Oh?"

Lumian poured himself a glass of light beer, which served as potable water, and took a sip. He continued to peer out the window and said, "You've been with us recently, and you've learned a lot. You should be able to discern the looming issue in Trier. The impending catastrophe will be dire. If you don't depart quickly, you might never get the chance.

"As for seeking revenge, for finding Philip, who faked his death, we can wait until the catastrophe is over. There's no rule stating you can't return after leaving Trier."

Anthony Reid fell into silence for a few seconds before slowly joining Lumian at his side. He too gazed at the night sky and asked, "Why aren't you leaving?"

Lumian replied with a smirk, "Aren't you a Spectator? Can't you see we're on a mission? How can we just leave Trier like that?"

Anthony turned his head to fix his stare on Lumian's face and eyes, remaining silent for a long while.

Lumian held the light beer in his hand, his gaze still fixed outside the window. His eyes were vacant, and his focus seemed clouded.

After a while, he scoffed.

"Besides, I have the ability to survive such a disaster. I can protect Franca and Jenna, but only the two of them. Do you think you can compare to beautiful women who have a deeper relationship with me?"

His "protection" referred to teleporting Franca and Jenna to The Fool's cathedral at the Lavigny Docks.

Anthony didn't respond and looked at the dark sky outside once more.

Slowly, he retrieved a box of cigarettes from his shirt, took one out, placed it between his lips, and lit it with a match.

Taking a few deep breaths and exhaling white smoke, the Psychiatrist muttered to himself, "I was born and raised on the West Midseashire Coast. It's an area with many industrial cities, where the God of Steam and Machinery has more believers than the Eternal Blazing Sun.

"The wind in Midseashire is fierce. Summers aren't very hot, but they're humid. Winters bring snow, and everything is covered in white. The surroundings are either thick forests or pockmarked with coal and iron ore mines.

"When I was fortunate enough to become a Beyonder, my greatest dream was to retire safely from the army with some savings. I'd buy land near my hometown, close to the forest. I'd hire a few people to help me with farming. In my free time, I'd secretly hunt in the forest, breathe the sea air, or go fishing. Heh heh, you might not know this, but the fish in Midseashire are inedible due to heavy industrial pollution. Locals only eat it if they have no other choice."

Anthony Reid's voice deepened.

"If I were to return to the West Midseashire Coast and my hometown now, I might never be able to enjoy such a life. It's not about money; I need a sense of relaxation.

"I still have nightmares about our camp being ambushed, with corpses everywhere. Every time, I can feel my heart racing. I can imagine that if I leave tomorrow and see the news and photos of the Trier catastrophe in the newspapers, I'll have similar nightmares. I'll dream of Trier being incinerated by flames, with corpses strewn everywhere.

"That time, I fled out of fear. This time, I don't want to do that again."

Anthony Reid took another drag on his cigarette.

Without waiting for Lumian's mockery, he added, "I'm well aware of my limitations, and all of this doesn't directly concern me. However, I've been in Trier for several years. I know many informants, neighbors, and children who will trade information for sweets or coppet. I don't want to hear about their deaths in a few days and see their pained faces when I close my eyes.

"I'll do my best to cooperate with you and do what I can. Only when there's no other choice will I consider retreating.

"You don't need to understand. This might be the paranoid decision of a patient with severe psychological problems."

Lumian chuckled and commented, "You make it sound as if nobody else has psychological problems."

Before completing my treatment, my psychological problems were far worse than yours!

A smile appeared on Anthony Reid's face.

"So, you chose to stay too, didn't you?"

He turned around and left Room 207, puffing on his short cigarette.

Lumian relished the night view of Trier, the enduring cacophony of Rue Anarchie serving as a backdrop to his contemplation. He emptied his glass of light beer.

Then, he took his seat, drew the curtains, and commenced writing to Madam Magician.

"New leads…

"There are now three investigation directions:

"Firstly, the Deep Valley Cloister and the Sacred Heart Cloister.

"Secondly, I can use the strong connection between myself and the Hostel to infiltrate the underground route that Jenna followed when she encountered the monk by the river. By following my instincts, I can attempt to reach the Hostel directly.

"Thirdly, an assault on Gardner Martin. Since the Iron and Blood Cross Order collaborates with the Carbonari, which is linked to the Deep Valley Cloister incident, they might be involved and have valuable information."

After dispatching the letter, Lumian paced his room, grappling with a mixture of worry, frustration, and anticipation.

Before long, Magician replied:

"We'll take responsibility for the first direction. I refrained from mentioning the second direction because it poses a significant risk to you. Furthermore, Gabriel's warning has likely been detected, so the Hostel will be on high alert against such intrusions.

"We can cautiously explore the third direction, but you must be well-prepared before confronting Gardner Martin."

Silently, crimson flames erupted, setting the paper in Lumian's hand ablaze. He planned to get some rest to recover from mental fatigue. At dawn, he would convene with Franca, Jenna, and Anthony to discuss their plan of action.

…

Apartment 601, 3 Rue des Blouses Blanches.

Franca hadn't changed into her cotton pajamas; she was still dressed in her daytime attire.

Observing her pacing the room, Jenna asked, her brow furrowed in confusion, "What's bothering you?"

Franca sighed and replied, "I intend to seek out Gardner now. Although Ciel didn't mention it just now, I can sense that he will propose dealing with Gardner in the next two days. This is a clear breakthrough. Sigh, I must seize the opportunity to digest more Pleasure."

Jenna regarded Franca's profile, pursing her lips before changing the topic.

"Don't you have many lovers? Even without Gardner Martin, there are others."

Franca couldn't help but clear her throat and smile wryly.

"Long gone, long gone. Gardner and his lovers are my current interests."

Jenna chuckled and playfully teased, "Without Gardner Martin, you can turn to Ciel."

"No, no!" Franca waved her hand vigorously. "I can't get past myself."

With those words, she headed toward the door.

"I'm going to Rue des Fontaines."

Jenna's smile faded as she offered a solemn reminder, "Don't display any unusual behavior later."

"I understand," Franca replied, her expression turning serious. "I won't let Gardner feel like I'm giving him hospice."

With that, she opened the door and exited.

Jenna let out a soft sigh as she watched Franca vanish behind the closed door.

Then, her gaze turned to the grayish-white cloth bag on the coffee table, and she muttered to herself, I wonder when I'll encounter Will to deliver this bag…

…

In the middle of the night, Jenna awoke suddenly from a vivid dream.

In her dream, she found herself in an underground quarry cave, with Will standing before her.

Although it was only a dream, Jenna had an uncanny sense of familiarity with the location and knew how to reach it in reality.

Understanding the significance of her dream, Jenna nodded slowly and changed into her female mercenary attire. Carrying the grayish-white cloth bag, she left Apartment 601 and ventured underground through the entrance on Rue des Blouses Blanches.

Following the revelations of her dream and guided by her spirituality, she descended, turned, and squeezed through gaps at times. Finally, she arrived at the quarry cave she had seen in her dream.

In the center of the mine, Will, dressed as he had been during the day, held an orange jack-o'-lantern. He didn't appear particularly pleased, resembling a student caught playing hooky by parents and teachers.

"Is this what you want?" Jenna handed him the grayish-white cloth bag filled with various paints and brushes.

Will accepted it but didn't open the bag. Instead, he retrieved an item known as the lucky gold coin and sighed.

"This is your reward.

"This is both your luck and misfortune. It signifies that you will encounter many things and bear significant responsibility.

"You may not fully grasp it now, but one day, you will."

Ever since the heretics brought catastrophe to the market district, there's been no turning back for me… Only by forging ahead in this perilous world of mysticism can I protect those I care about… Jenna silently mused, taking the Loen gold pound. She inspected it and inquired, "How should I use it?"

"Simply keep it with you," Will advised, waving his hand before vanishing into the depths of the quarry cave, clutching his jack-o'-lantern.

Jenna stowed the lucky gold coin and made her way back to the surface. To her astonishment, she found that she couldn't recall the route she had taken.

While she had arrived guided by her spirituality, she was now fully awake and devoid of the same guidance.

Jenna had no choice but to navigate her way independently, following a general principle of "ascending."

After walking for some time, the ground suddenly shook violently, as if an explosion had occurred in the distance.

An earthquake or some other anomaly? Jenna furrowed her brow and quickened her pace to find a path leading upward.

As she turned a corner around a rock wall, her feet abruptly gave way.

The ground had already caved in, and now, it had completely collapsed.

Amidst the deafening sounds of collapse, Jenna couldn't react in time and tumbled deeper as the ground disintegrated.

She swiftly adjusted her body and activated her Assassin abilities, allowing her to descend gracefully like a feather.

Chapter 460: Chain Reaction

In the Deep Valley Quarry in the hill district, the gatekeeper "fell asleep" once more, carried away by two members of the Machinery Hivemind.

Clad in a white priest's robe and a clergyman's bonnet, Horamick Haydn gazed at the open mine entrance, his benevolent and gentle face veiled in shadows.

After the Church of the God of Steam and Machinery lost all its dioceses in the Loen Kingdom, the former Archbishop of Backlund, a member of the Divine Council, returned to the headquarters in Intis. Over the past few years, he had traveled to various places like a firefighter, handling various serious Beyonder incidents.

He understood better than most clergymen of the God of Steam and Machinery Church that, despite the outward appearance of peace, the world was riddled with festering wounds. Problems abounded, and hidden dangers lurked in the darkness. The orthodox Churches and government organizations could only strive to maintain stability.

Horamick collected his thoughts and sighed silently. He turned to the Machinery Hivemind deacon beside him and declared, "Let's take action. God will protect us. By steam!"

As he spoke, he drew a Triangular Sacred Emblem on his chest.

The burly Machinery Hivemind deacon issued the command for purification, and the members of the Hivemind sprang into action. Some raised iron-black barrel-shaped objects, while others shouldered weapons resembling steam firearms, devoid of backpacks or golden ammunition belts. Still, others produced leather scrolls, charms crafted from various metals, and some pointed rings, canes, and other objects forward.

Rumble!

The miniature sun-like golden fireball was the first to blast out of a cannon barrel, landing at the heart of the quarry cave.

Behind it followed a cascade of colorful "cannonballs" and bullets of varying shapes. The light and dispersed waves purged the entire Deep Valley Quarry repeatedly, maintaining the cave's structural integrity, resulting in only a slight collapse.

After a few rounds of purification, the concealed cave within the quarry was breached, unveiling its interior.

Horamick's eyes gleamed with an inhuman, dark-red light. He could clearly discern that the white mist within the secret cave had nearly dissipated entirely. Human arms and legs were embedded in the rock walls on either side.

The archbishop advanced, leading two squads of Machinery Hivemind members through the quarry and into the concealed cave.

Before entering, he cast a glance back at the nearby Deep Valley Cloister, closely monitored by Trier's archbishop with Sealed Artifacts.

Horamick studied the human arms and legs attached to gears, crankshafts, and other mechanical components, resembling experimental subjects.

Under the deacon's orders, the Machinery Hivemind members initiated another round of purification. They persisted until the arms, legs, and machinery had turned to ashes or fragments, allowing them to proceed further into the secret cave and descend the tunnel.

After several iterations, Horamick and the Machinery Hivemind members, their pale-white hair concealed by clergyman bonnets, reached a vast, laboratory-like chamber.

Here, human arms intertwined with machinery, following ceiling tracks, perpetually gripping cabinets, sinks, long tables, and iron boxes, moving them toward the blazing fire at the deepest part of the hall.

A few human corpses were piled in the chamber, and a humanoid figure made entirely of machinery stood among them.

This mechanical being stood at a towering height of over three meters. One of his cybernetic eyes resembled an emerald, while the other resembled a ruby, supported by numerous components. His temples were encased in a transparent special material, revealing the squirming grayish-white brain within.

The mechanical giant cast a glance at Horamick and the others, who were scattered at the entrance of the chamber, and emitted a metallic chuckle.

"Surprised, are you? I don't require steam to power myself or a human body to control me. I can perform any task just like a normal person, including combat. Unfortunately, my Sequence isn't high enough to replace the human brain.

"Seeing this, you have no reason to doubt, right? We are the chosen children of God. We follow the true teachings of God, while your spirits and flesh have been tainted by the pleasures and indulgence of the mortal world, causing you to abandon the throne of God!"

Horamick surveyed the surroundings and noticed that the Machinery Hivemind members present remained extraordinarily vigilant and resolute. He nodded in approval.

Turning his attention to the mechanical giant, his benevolent expression remained undisturbed.

"You used a spirituality gem, didn't you?

"Using humans to refine spirituality gems is even more ruthless and wasteful than employing steam to drive them.

"Claude, I thought you were momentarily lost and would gradually return to your senses within the Deep Valley Cloister. I didn't anticipate that you would become a heretic!"

"Heretic?" The mechanical giant laughed. "You are the heretics! When was the last time any of you received a revelation?"

"All the time," Horamick responded with composure. "Claude, tell me, where is the Hostel? Are you in league with those evil gods to set your sights on Fourth Epoch Trier?"

In his mechanical giant form, Claude's eyes emitted red and green lights as he spoke with solemnity,

"You have strayed from the teachings of God. You no longer possess the spirit of sacrifice.

"The future of this world and the chance for a deity to ascend to the pinnacle lies within Fourth Epoch Trier. The sooner we unlock it, the greater our hope!"

Without waiting for Horamick's reply, the mechanical giant declared coldly, "I will show you who the heretics are and who the true followers of God are!"

As soon as Claude finished speaking, the light in his cybernetic eyes flared, and the entire chamber trembled. The sounds of machinery in operation resonated with an enigmatic aura.

In an instant, the Machinery Hivemind members, who had been on the verge of unleashing their firepower, witnessed projected paintings depicting the evolution of humans emerging from obscurity, advancing step by step, and building civilizations at various stages.

These paintings were ethereal, weighty, delicate, and magnificent. Horamick and his companions seemed to transform into the people within the paintings, experiencing the gravity and splendor of civilization.

At that moment, a face appeared "outside the painting."

This figure wore a towering crown, with his nostrils decayed to the point where only two black holes remained. His eyes were filled with countless overlapping star charts, and they stared greedily at Horamick and the others, as well as their civilization.

Silently, more faces pressed against the surface of the painting. Some had their heads bisected by a ruler, while others were adorned with yellow paper covered in strange symbols. Some were covered in ears of wheat and rice, while others barely took on human forms, their bodies adorned with various symbols.

These faces were larger than Horamick and his companions combined. They stared fixedly at the scene through the painting.

The Machinery Hivemind members who beheld these faces experienced a profound fear from the depths of their hearts, as though their entire civilization would be obliterated.

Just as they were on the verge of losing control, the faces vanished mysteriously, just as they had appeared.

The scene before Horamick's eyes reverted to its normal state. The mechanical giant Claude and the frenziedly operating chamber reentered his field of vision.

The archbishop remained unruffled, though his voice resonated with anger.

"Heretics!"

As his voice reverberated, he flexed his left wrist with his right hand, unveiling a black, cold, and weighty metal tube.

The sound of gears clicking filled the chamber, illuminating it as brightly as daylight.

The Machinery Hivemind members launched their attacks in succession.

Rumble!

The Deep Valley Quarry experienced a distinct tremor, as though a brief, violent earthquake had struck.

…

In Underground Trier, just outside the stone door through which the Carbonari had disappeared, crimson fireballs hovered in the air, casting a warm glow in the dark tunnel.

Blazing Danitz, dressed in a linen shirt, a brown jacket, dark pants, and black leather boots, had one hand in his pocket as he fixed his gaze on the nearby stone door.

His burnt-yellow hair and eyebrows framed his face, and he casually held a weed in his mouth, surveying the surroundings with his dark-blue yet bright eyes.

Nearly 20 men, all dressed as sailors, silently fanned out in the vicinity. Some twirled daggers, others wiped the barrels of their revolvers, and a few stretched their necks in anticipation.

A grinning, brown-haired sailor finally broke the silence and questioned Blazing Danitz, "Captain, why are we aiding the Intis government in pursuing the Carbonari? And why are we doing it for free?"

Danitz glanced at him, spat out the weed from his mouth, and muttered under his breath, "Damn fools, do you want to see Trier in ruins? Are you lads not still Intisian?"

As he spoke, he swung his fist at the stone door.

Doesn't this group of assholes not know that their captain owns numerous properties in Trier?

Upon the surface of Danitz's clenched fist, blazing white flames gathered as he thrust forward. Eventually, they coalesced into a fireball emitting a destructive aura.

Boom!

The ground shook, and the stone door shattered.

…

Jenna descended gracefully in the seemingly endless darkness, occasionally brushing against gravel but escaping physical harm.

After what felt like an eternity of descent, her feet finally touched solid ground.

Her beautiful blue eyes reflected a building.

It was a slightly crooked beige house. The lower three floors bore the architectural marks of Roselle's era, featuring pillar walls, arches, and large windows. The top two floors, in stark contrast, seemed crudely appended as an afterthought.

This is… Jenna was visibly taken aback.

The building before her was one she recognized all too well.

It was Auberge du Coq Doré!

At that moment, light streamed from numerous rooms within Auberge du Coq Doré. Jenna spotted a man and a woman, standing on the third-floor balcony, wrapped in each other's embrace.

The man sported black-framed glasses, his neatly combed brown hair adding to his refined appearance. As for the woman, she wore a lake-blue dress, her plump face and ethereal brown eyes creating a curious juxtaposition.

Thud, thud. Jenna's heart raced.

She had never actually met the woman, but she was familiar with the man.

It was the missing playwright, Gabriel!

Chapter 461: Strange World

In Room 309, Gabriel casually surveyed the street diagonally across the way and suddenly spotted Jenna, who had disguised herself as a female mercenary.

He was taken aback for a moment before swiftly retreating from the window with Séraphine cradled in his arms.

Only then did Jenna, who appeared to be lost in a daydream, snap back to reality. Instinctively, she took two steps back and melted into the shadows cast by the building.

As her thoughts raced, chaos reigned in her mind.

Is that Gabriel?

I'm seeing him again… Didn't he morph into a monster and head to the Hostel?

Is this the Hostel? Auberge du Coq Doré is the Hostel?

No, the real Auberge du Coq Doré definitely isn't a Hostel. Otherwise, Ciel and the secret organization with tarot cards as their code names would have discovered it long ago…

Is this a mirror image of Auberge du Coq Doré, or is it the sketch of someone somewhere?

Jenna quickly deduced, relying on the information at hand.

Yet, upon further reflection, she sensed that something was off.

Auberge du Coq Doré used a naming system like Room 207 and 305. According to Bouvard's prophecy, Voisin Sanson was in Room 7, and Pualis de Roquefort was in Room 12. They didn't match up.

There must be something awry!

Jenna averted her gaze from the counterfeit Auberge du Coq Doré and surveyed her surroundings.

She noticed that this place was identical to Rue Anarchie. The buildings lined up perfectly, some tall, some short, some askew, and some precariously balanced, but all standing firm.

On the street, vendors peddled meatloaf, Whiskey Sours, and other wares. Pedestrians streamed in and out, creating a bustling scene.

If she hadn't spotted Gabriel and had been plummeting this entire time, Jenna would have believed she'd returned to the surface and Rue Anarchie.

As Jenna carefully observed the pedestrians and vendors, it became clear that something was off.

Their vacant expressions and infrequent changes gave them an eerie, mechanical quality. Many familiar faces seemed to vanish at the end of the street, only to reappear, circling around from somewhere and returning to the entrance of Rue Anarchie in a repetitive cycle.

It's indeed fake… like a massive stage production. Most people, like the surrounding buildings, serve as a backdrop, but it's just a backdrop… Jenna analyzed the scene, drawing parallels with theatrical performances she knew well, trying to make sense of what she was witnessing.

Her attention then shifted to the counterfeit Auberge du Coq Doré and Room 207.

With the curtains drawn, it was impossible to determine if a mirror image of Lumian was inside.

After a few moments of contemplation, Jenna decided not to risk infiltrating the fake Auberge du Coq Doré. She opted to explore the area carefully, gaining a rough understanding of the overall situation to see if there was a way out.

Following the shadows along the street, she cautiously made her way toward Rue des Blouses Blanches.

The layout and situation here mirrored Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman. Jenna barely needed to distinguish the path before returning to Rue des Blouses Blanches.

With every step, her sense of unease grew. She even began to question if her usual neighborhood was real.

Jenna couldn't help but look up at the sky from the shadows.

Blue sky, white clouds, the westering sun, and billowing smoke.

It all felt real, yet helped Jenna confirm that this wasn't the genuine market district.

She had descended into the underground in the middle of the night to search for Will. Could she have been missing for twelve hours?

From across 3 Rue des Blouses Blanches, Jenna surveyed Apartment 601.

Beside the glass window in the living room, she saw Franca, dressed in a blouse and holding a bottle of dark red wine in her hand. Her flaxen hair was tied in a ponytail.

Behind Franca, Jenna, dressed in a light-blue dress, busied herself with tidying up, occasionally disappearing from the window's view.

Jenna wasn't shocked, but her heart sank.

She and Franca were undeniably present!

Is this really the reflection of the market district?

Jenna closely observed Franca and confirmed that Franca still used her right hand, ruling out the possibility of her being a mirror person.

Likewise, in Apartment 601, both Franca and Jenna's vacant expressions persisted as they continued their lives following predetermined paths without any deviations.

While remaining hidden in the shadows, Jenna pondered the location of the exit.

Lacking much experience, she sought inspiration from Lumian's accounts and the plays she had witnessed.

Should I head to the border and investigate the edge of this fake world?

Since this place faithfully replicates the market district, well, at least Rue Anarchie and Rue des Blouses Blanches, it resembles a reflection. Could I find the exit by locating distinct places?

The Church has always told us that we can seek refuge in the cathedral in times of danger or accidents… I wonder what Église Saint-Robert looks like here. Does it seek God's protection or adhere to the Black Sun? If it's truly the Black Sun, it's an entirely different realm…

Jenna decided to stealthily make her way to Avenue du Marché and observe the state of the Eternal Blazing Sun Church's Église Saint-Robert in this strange world.

She made sure not to expose herself to passersby, residents on both sides, or newsboys peddling their wares. Through the various shadows, she carefully and quietly turned onto Avenue du Marché.

After advancing a distance, Jenna's eyes suddenly froze.

She noticed something different.

There was no sign of Salle de Bal Brise on Avenue du Marché!

Where the khaki-colored building and the skull statue should have been, there was only impenetrable darkness. Even the sunlight from the sky couldn't pierce it.

In this dark black hole-like scene, bright red lines alternated between slowly materializing and being consumed by the surroundings. Their ultimate destination remained a mystery.

What's most peculiar about this place is Salle de Bal Brise? Ciel mentioned that there's something ancient and sinister beneath Salle de Bal Brise… Jenna stared into the darkness, sensing that this might be the heart of the problem.

Muttering to herself, Jenna contemplated, Will I be able to leave this strange world by walking into that darkness? But I have a hunch that not only does it not lead to safety, but it also represents danger. I can't enter rashly…

As these thoughts raced through Jenna's mind, she was suddenly jolted by a commotion.

Swiftly, she cast her gaze towards the other end of Avenue du Marché, where she spotted several indistinct figures hovering in the air, emitting a faint glow as they meticulously scrutinized every shadow and conceivable hiding spot for humans.

They clutched a stack of papers, which they compared to the pedestrians on the road.

Jenna's heart tightened as a thought crossed her mind.

Did the masters or guards of this world discover the collapsing tunnel above and suspect that outsiders had entered, prompting them to launch a thorough search?

Uncertain about the abilities of these blurry figures emitting a faint light, Jenna didn't dare risk assuming they couldn't spot her lurking in the shadows. Her only option was to swiftly retrace her steps and return to Rue des Blouses Blanches, planning to take a detour through an area that had already been inspected.

Yet, even on the other side of Rue des Blouses Blanches, faintly-lit figures were conducting inspections.

Jenna's heart raced, and amidst her unease, she had a sudden idea.

She slipped into a nearby building, scattered dust in an inconspicuous corner, and recited an incantation to become invisible.

With this newfound invisibility, she dashed along the street's shadows and infiltrated Apartment 601 before the floating figures could search 3 Rue des Blouses Blanches.

After patiently waiting for several moments, Jenna discreetly followed the imposter Jenna into the washroom.

Seizing the moment while the impostor was occupied with washing a piece of cloth, Jenna, still in her invisibility state, drew a dagger and executed an Assassin's Mighty Blow.

Her form materialized as her dagger found its mark in the impostor Jenna's back.

The fake Jenna's eyes bulged in shock, but Jenna swiftly covered her mouth and nose to stifle any outcry.

After a brief struggle, the imposter met her end.

Rather than withdrawing her dagger, Jenna chose to change into the fake Jenna's clothes. Her extensive experience with worn-out clothes helped her conceal the hole at the back.

She then concealed the impostor's body in the cupboard beneath the sink to prevent any blood from flowing.

With this done, Jenna wrangled up the cloth and mimicked the actions she had observed, maintaining the vacant expression.

Soon, a faint figure floated outside Apartment 601's window.

Jenna didn't look up, continuing to tidy the coffee table, which had already been devoid of miscellaneous items. She could sense two substantial gazes on her, accompanied by the sound of paper being flipped.

After an agonizing seven to eight seconds, the faint figures moved on to search the next apartment.

Jenna let out a relieved breath and proceeded to the washroom with a measured pace.

After what had just transpired, she felt an urgency to seek help. She couldn't afford to wait any longer. Even the suspected exit seemed too dangerous to approach, and numerous figures emitting a faint light were "patrolling" the area.

While these figures didn't appear overly formidable, Jenna knew that engaging them would undoubtedly draw the attention of the administrators of this world.

If this place was indeed the Hostel, the previous residents, granted boons by evil gods, would pose a significant threat. This included Madame Night Pualis, who alternated between a demigod and a Sequence 5, or the true demigod, Circle Inhabitant Voisin Sanson.

Jenna hadn't reached out to the outside world for help from the beginning because she lacked the means to send a message without leaving this place. Now, she was left with no other choice but to attempt something.

I wonder if the telegraph office here can be of any use… It doesn't seem promising… Uh… perhaps I should offer a prayer to a deity and recite His honorific name in Hermes. I hope He can hear my plea…

Jenna's heart raced as she seized the opportunity to clean the cloth in the washroom. She outstretched her arms and began reciting the honorific name of the Eternal Blazing Sun.

"The mighty Eternal Blazing Sun, Inextinguishable Light, Embodiment of Order, God of Deeds…"

As the soft Hermes words reverberated, Jenna's surroundings remained unchanged.

She couldn't help but regret not having made up her mind after becoming a Witch and putting her faith in Mr. Fool. That way, she might have obtained The Fool's honorific name from Lumian. But now, it was too late to consider that option.

Phew… Jenna let out a sigh and retrieved the lucky gold coin from a hidden pocket in her light-blue dress.

She felt that her best option was to rely on luck for now. She wanted to see if luck alone could help her elicit a response without using a complete honorific name.

Holding the lucky gold coin, Jenna continued her prayer in Hermes, "Great Mr. Fool, please help me leave this place. Please protect Trier…"

…

In the market district, Auberge du Coq Doré, Room 207.

Lumian suddenly awoke, sensing a faint warmth in his left chest.

Chapter 462: Critical Interference

Lumian's heart skipped a beat as he bolted upright.

He quickly unbuttoned his shirt and glanced at his left chest, where he saw the bluish-black symbol that represented Mr. Fool's seal. It was a fusion of a portion of the Pupil-less Eye and a portion of the Contorted Lines.

What happened? Mr. Fool's seal has been activated… Did Termiboros attempt to escape? Lumian's thoughts raced. However, as he pondered, he began to sense that something was amiss.

Sunlight filtered through the drawn curtains, casting a semi-darkness over Room 207.

At first glance, there was nothing unusual, as if someone had overslept until the sun was high in the sky.

But Lumian was different. He reset his body and mental state every morning, waking up naturally at 6 a.m. It was already autumn, and Trier didn't see the first light until 7 a.m.

Lumian recalled an earthquake that had occurred not long ago, and he suspected that the official Beyonders might have taken action. However, after carefully listening to his surroundings and confirming the safety of the market district, he had gone back to sleep.

It was still late at night!

Either Termiboros has escaped, and I'm no longer affected by the Circle Inhabitant's power, or there's been an anomaly in the market district… Lumian shrank into a gentle crouch, leaning against the desk beside the bed. He cautiously raised a corner of the curtain.

What he saw was a familiar daily scene, but soon, Lumian noticed blurry figures floating in the air, emitting a faint, eerie glow.

These figures had different faces, but they all shared an unsettling stiffness, emptiness, coldness, and detachment. They bore a certain resemblance to the corrupted Bouvard's corpse and Gabriel, who had transformed into a monster. It was as if they could disappear into the crevices of space at any moment, gazing coldly and dispassionately at reality.

The monsters of the Hostel pathway have invaded Trier? But where are Trier's protective powers? This doesn't feel very strong; it's more like a product of corruption… He observed carefully and noticed that the street vendors and pedestrians also appeared somewhat empty, as if they too had been affected.

Combined with the anomaly in time and the westering sun, Lumian quickly surmised the situation.

I'm not in the real market district!

I've been drawn into a strange world suspected to be the Hostel. This is the reason why Mr. Fool's seal was activated!

Lumian released his right hand's grip, allowing the curtains to gently fall back against the wall, sealing off the interior from the exterior once more.

With a sense of purpose, he got out of bed and checked his belongings to ensure they were all intact.

Without wasting any time, Lumian set up the altar and erected a wall of spirituality, readying himself to perform ritualistic magic to seek Mr. Fool's assistance.

One by one, he used his spirituality to light the three candles and incinerate the herbal powder and essential oil. Stepping back twice, he began to solemnly recite The Fool's honorific name.

"The Fool that doesn't belong to this era, the mysterious ruler above the gray fog; the King of Yellow and Black who wields good luck.

"I implore you…"

As he spoke, a thin gray fog suddenly emanated from the wall of spirituality. The candle flames took on a bluish-black hue, casting a sinister and dark atmosphere over the entire altar.

Lumian's thoughts slowed down once more, and an uncomfortable sensation coursed through his flesh. It was as if an army of countless worms were wriggling beneath his skin.

Unlike previous interactions, he suddenly felt a strong sense of imminent danger. It was as though the gray fog harbored blatant and unusually overt malice directed at him.

This malevolence would briefly fade, only to surge back. It didn't fully dissipate, nor did it manifest into tangible reality.

The cycle of vanishing and resurfacing was akin to a monstrous entity in the water extending its tentacles to the shore, only to be pulled back into the deep sea by an unseen force.

Lumian struggled to complete the ritual, waiting in vain for the angel's protection or any revelations to come.

The influence of the gray fog intensified, leaving him with no choice but to prematurely end the ritual and extinguish the candle flames.

As the wall of spirituality disintegrated, Lumian's thoughts finally returned to their normal pace.

Sometimes malice, sometimes no issues… Is The Celestial Worthy of Heaven and Earth for Blessings interfering with Mr. Fool's response?

He usually can't do it. Has He gathered enough strength to take a risk at a critical moment?

This implies that the situation has reached a critical turning point…

…

In Quartier Éraste, outside the Sacred Heart Cloister with its numerous golden steeples, the Major Arcana card holders, Magician—clad in a white knotted shirt and a beige dress—and the elegant and pristine Justice, stared at the magnificent building.

A golden retriever accompanied them, doing the same as well.

Rumble. The ground quaked, as if a brief earthquake had struck Trier.

Magician smiled and said, "It's beginning."

They understood that this commotion was likely stemming from the Deep Valley Cloister and the quarry. Their aim was to initiate a series of changes and set off a chain reaction, with the hope that Lady Moon, hidden within the Sacred Heart Cloister, would step out on her own and trigger their plan ahead of schedule.

By doing so, they could avoid forcefully entering the Sacred Heart Cloister and provoking the Eternal Blazing Sun Church. Their target was Lady Moon, the evil god's bestowed who nurtured a deity.

Assuming there were very few Angel-level heretics Blessed within the barrier, Lady Moon represented the Great Mother and the most potent power among all of Trier's heretics. It was highly likely that she was at the center of the problem. By controlling her, they could disregard the intricate web woven by fate and grasp the heart of the issue, possibly resolving it on the spot.

If Lady Moon didn't emerge, Magician intended to capitalize on the chaos in Trier, attempting to conceal the grand complex of buildings blessed by the Eternal Blazing Sun, and forcibly locate her target.

Justice nodded gently.

"In fact, I've always had a sense that something is amiss with Lady Moon. The problem may not be what we've suspected and might have lured us here.

"However, regardless of the situation, we have many dependable companions. Even if something occurs elsewhere, I believe they can handle it."

Magician concurred tersely.

"The two of us can't do everything. Believing in our companions is both hopeful and necessary."

At that moment, she suddenly turned her head and looked into the distance.

Justice asked calmly, "What's the matter?"

Magician frowned and replied, "The seal experienced a fluctuation… Mr. Fool has also sent a revelation, but I'm not certain if it's authentic…"

…

After tidying up the altar, Lumian was just about to settle down and consider the current situation and ways to contact the outside world when he heard two sets of footsteps approaching from upstairs.

Are they heading for Room 207? Had the dissolution of the wall of spirituality alerted someone here? Lumian surveyed the area, his fingers finding the gaps in the newspaper-covered wall as he climbed up to the ceiling.

Like a colossal spider, he relied on a Dancer's flexibility and a Hunter's physique to silently cling closely to the wall, waiting for the two people in the corridor to approach.

If they didn't spot anything unusual, he would consider it a successful deception and let them pass. If they sensed anything was amiss, he would strike without hesitation.

At that moment, Lumian felt a deep sense of gratitude for Auberge du Coq Doré's aged appearance. It was filled with damage and signs of repair. This was why he could grasp certain protrusions, secure his grip in certain crevices, and anchor his body safely to the ceiling.

In just over ten seconds, the door to Room 207 creaked open.

Lumian's eyes focused on Gabriel's hairline and forehead, as well as the black-framed glasses perched on the bridge of his nose.

Behind the playwright stood Séraphine, a model clad in a lake-blue dress, exuding an aura of detachment.

It's indeed the Hostel… Although Lumian couldn't fathom why he had inexplicably ended up at the Hostel, he still felt a surge of excitement despite his taut nerves.

From this point onward, as long as he could deceive Séraphine and the others, establish a connection with the outside world, and seek help, there was hope for resolving the problem!

Gabriel took two steps inside and halted. He scanned the room and said to Séraphine, "No issues here."

Séraphine tersely acknowledged his words and proceeded to inspect the other rooms.

Gabriel followed the model closely, making sure to close the door of Room 207 behind him.

After they ascended from the second floor, Lumian released his grip on the ceiling and gently landed on the floor.

He pulled up a chair, turned it around, and sat down, leaning back as he kept his gaze locked on the door.

After a few minutes, footsteps approached from the third floor.

Lumian remained motionless, unsurprised as he watched the wooden door gently open.

Gabriel's figure appeared.

"Why did you come in?" the playwright, now a monster with a slightly vacant expression, asked with a note of rational concern.

Lumian chuckled.

"I'd like to know that too."

Gabriel entered the room quietly, shutting the door behind him.

He was dressed in a white shirt, a dark jacket, black pants, and strapless leather shoes, his face showing signs of pain.

"Leave this place as soon as possible. I'm losing control. I don't know when I'll betray you. By the way, Jenna has also entered. I don't know where she's hiding."

Jenna is here too? Lumian raised his eyebrows and asked the most critical question, "How do I leave?"

Gabriel began to respond, but the door to Room 207 creaked open once more.

Only then did Lumian sense the intrusion and turned his gaze towards the door.

Séraphine stood there, with her plump face, naturally disheveled brown hair, and brown eyes exuding a unique ethereal aura.

Lumian didn't panic. He put on a calm demeanor and said, "You seem to know Gabriel so well."

Despite his outward composure, every muscle in his body tensed.

"He's not good at hiding his thoughts," Séraphine replied in an empty voice.

Communicable… Lumian suppressed his urge to use the Spell of Harrumph and sighed.

"I thought you had already become a pure monster."

Séraphine's lips formed a self-deprecating smile.

"The difference between me and them is that before I turned into a pure monster, I realized there was still someone who truly loved me."

Gabriel smiled.

Lumian sighed and inquired, "Is this the Hostel?"

"Yes," Gabriel confirmed before anyone else could.

Lumian glanced at the dimly lit corridor.

"But the room here isn't Room 7, Room 12. It's still Room 207, 309."

Séraphine gazed at Lumian, her expression becoming increasingly ethereal, and her voice even more illusory.

"Here, they call me: Room 12."

Chapter 463: Noncorresponding Details

Room 12… Lumian's gaze on Séraphine froze.

He had considered various possibilities, but he hadn't guessed what Room 12 signified.

Room 12 was where Madame Night Pualis de Roquefort, her husband, butler, lady's maid, and the children resided!

Almost simultaneously, Lumian recalled the oil painting he had seen at Trier's art center. The woman in the painting, modeled after Séraphine, was naked, her skin adorned with faces.

Were those faces the symbols of the room's occupants, or were they the manifestations of the Hostel itself? Lumian's pupils dilated as he fixed his gaze on Séraphine, prepared to activate the black mark on his body at any moment and use the Spell of Harrumph to block the exit of Room 12's occupants.

He was still haunted by the memories of Madame Pualis.

Séraphine tugged at her lake-blue dress, her plump face contorting with obvious pain.

"I can't influence how long the residents inside can sense the outside world…"

In other words, Madame Pualis hasn't discovered me yet… Lumian heaved a sigh of relief, but he didn't dare to be careless. What if Séraphine's interference quickly failed?

At that moment, Séraphine pulled down the collar of her dress, revealing a portion of her skin.

Lumian could clearly see the oil painting-like faces there. They were half-hidden and half-exposed, looking exceptionally terrifying.

This confirmed Lumian's guess and piqued his curiosity.

Why use a corrupted human model as a room in the Hostel? Why allow Madame Pualis, Voisin Sanson, and other powerful evil god-bestowed individuals to stay there? Couldn't they just move into this replica—the fake Auberge du Coq Doré?

Was this to interfere with divination, prophecy, and other mysticism methods employed during a search?

Why does it feel like a ritual? It's like a specific setup and requirement… As an Alms Monk with ample knowledge of ritualistic magic, Lumian sensed something sinister about this matter.

Seeing that Séraphine hadn't left, he seized the opportunity to inquire, "How many rooms does the Hostel have?"

"From Room 2 to Room 13," Séraphine replied in her ethereal voice.

"No Room 1?" Lumian asked immediately.

Gabriel answered for his lover. "There's supposed to be one, but we've never seen it. Room 1 has never moved into the Hostel."

Mysterious Room 1… It's confirmed at the moment that there are 12 rooms, but there might be more than one evil god bestowed living in each room… Lumian realized that time was of the essence and quickly changed his line of questioning.

"How can I escape from here?"

"With the permission of the pixies or through the black hole on Avenue du Marché, but it's very dangerous. It might lead you to places you shouldn't be," Séraphine replied, her eyes shifting between emptiness and pain.

Avenue du Marché's black hole… Lumian inquired further, "How many pixies are there, and where can I find them?"

"Three," Gabriel responded. "They don't reside in this world and only visit occasionally. They typically allow the servants to maintain order here—they are the flying and glowing figures you see outside."

Three pixies… According to the Purifiers' information, the Sequence of a Pixie likely hasn't reached godhood. I can tentatively consider them equivalent to Sequence 5, but their unique states mean that unless they actively enter reality, some Saints might not even be able to attack them… I do have the potential to deal with the pixies when encountering them, especially if I could capture one to facilitate my escape… Lumian's thoughts raced as he asked further, "Do the pixies have a regular pattern of entering and exiting?"

"No…" Séraphine replied, her demeanor gradually fading as she shook her head slowly.

Lumian switched to another line of questioning, "Do you know where Jenna is hiding?"

"I don't know," Gabriel replied quickly. "The pixies' servants haven't located her either. They're uncertain if anyone has truly entered this place. The pixies must have ordered an investigation based on the changes in the outside world out of caution."

Before Lumian could ask another question, Séraphine's face twisted once again.

She turned and left Room 207, heading upstairs.

It was evident that her ability to influence the residents' perception of the outside world was quickly fading.

Gabriel's condition worsened as he slowly made his way to the corridor outside.

"Is there a boundary here?" Lumian inquired one last time.

Gabriel nodded, his eyes growing increasingly vacant.

"Only Avenue du Marché and the area around it are real.

"It's surrounded by a dark, deep void with a formless barrier."

Barrier… Lumian repeated this word in his heart, his expression unchanged as he watched Gabriel close the door for him and listened to his footsteps returning to the third floor.

The word "barrier" brought to mind something Madam Magician had mentioned before.

She had spoken of a barrier outside their world, preventing the invasion of alien evil gods.

Although Gabriel's description of the barrier might not be the same as Madam Magician's, Lumian couldn't ignore the possibility that these barriers were connected, especially given the evil god believers' grand plans.

Turning away from the door, Lumian realized that time was of the essence.

Séraphine and Gabriel's corruption would only worsen, rendering them increasingly out of control. Once fully mutated, they would no longer help Lumian and Jenna hide the truth, likely reporting it to the pixies.

There are two pressing issues at hand. First, how to contact the outside world or escape this place. Second, finding Jenna. Lumian focused and employed his Conspirer thinking abilities.

Regarding the first question, especially how to contact the outside world, he quickly brainstormed several potential solutions:

1. Fully activate the Blood Emperor's aura in his right hand to see if it could break through the barriers of this abnormal world, attracting the attention of the demigods in Trier.

2. Set up a boon-seeking ritual to bypass The Celestial Worthy of Heaven and Earth for Blessings's interference and transmit information to Mr. Fool.

3. Test the spirit and flesh connection between himself and Mr. K's finger.

4. Attempt to summon Madam Magician's messenger.

5. Attempt to summon Madame Hela's messenger.

6. Recite the incantation used to enter the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society's gathering—the Nation of the Evernight palace—to see if it could be of use in this situation without any prior request.

7. Find the fake Franca in this world and check if she possesses the ancient silver mirror they had obtained from underground to potentially use it to escape.

8. Create a commotion to attract one or two pixies and capture them.

9. …

Before diving into any of his numerous plans, Lumian knew that locating Jenna was a top priority, as any of his actions could potentially alert the pixies and draw their attention.

How should I find Jenna? He tried to put himself in Jenna's shoes, considering how she, an experienced Witch, would handle being in this strange world, suspected to be the Hostel's location.

Jenna must have also seen Gabriel, and she wouldn't take the risk of entering the fake Auberge du Coq Doré immediately.

She can become invisible and hide in the shadows. She usually has the patience to observe. It's not difficult for her to notice the peculiarities of pedestrians and vendors…

Under these circumstances, what should I do if I were her?

Yes, I'd search for the boundaries of this place… I'd see if cathedrals and other deity-protected buildings have been replicated. If they have, I'd investigate what's inside and whom they believe in… I'd identify the differences between this place and the real market district to find any clues for my escape… And my first task will be to confirm if there's a fake me.

The pixies' servants were conducting a search…

Lumian's thoughts gradually cleared. He returned to the desk, drew the curtains slightly, and peered outside.

Lumian waited until the ethereal pixie servants, blurry figures emitting a faint glow and wearing blank expressions, had finished their investigation and disappeared before he took out the silver Lie earring and placed it on his left ear.

Swiftly, he transformed into Madame Fels and descended to the first floor, as though inspecting every room.

Then, he became a vendor who didn't sell his wares nearby, passing by Madame Fels and leaving Auberge du Coq Doré.

This was his home territory. Even though it was a replica or a reflection, it didn't stop him from already knowing the environmental details and the common figures that often appeared in this area.

Lumian didn't hurry to Rue des Blouses Blanches. Instead, he circled Rue du Rossignol and entered his secure hideout.

As soon as he opened the door, his brow furrowed slightly.

There was only one trap at the door among the many he had set up—the simplest one.

Lumian's gaze then swept across the room, but he didn't see the ritualistic furs or the used cowhide and dog skin that were placed here in the real world.

It's not a strict correspondence… he muttered to himself.

The more he thought about it, the more he realized that this place resembled the real market district on the surface. In particular, in a room protected by traps, various details didn't correspond.

It's like an external observation and the re-creation of key rooms… It's like… It's like… Lumian's pupils dilated as he had an epiphany.

It's like painting!

…

Fake 3 Rue des Blouses Blanches, Apartment 601.

Jenna clutched the lucky coin and offered a brief prayer to Mr. Fool. A thin gray fog materialized before her eyes but then dissipated.

"It… it's actually working," Jenna stammered.

That lucky gold coin proved to be truly lucky enough!

Jenna didn't receive any revelations, so she had no choice but to persevere and maintain her guise as her counterfeit self. She diligently tidied up the room and wiped the coffee table.

Time in this world appeared to pass slowly, with the sun in the sky staying fixed in its position, unmoving.

Suddenly, Jenna heard the door open and instinctively turned her gaze in that direction. The fake Franca continued with her task, showing no reaction.

Jenna's eyes locked onto Lumian's golden-black hair. She immediately averted her gaze and assumed an expression of emptiness, not certain if Ciel was the real deal.

In the next instant, she heard a familiar, taunting voice.

"As expected, you're here. That's all you can think of."

Chapter 464: A World in a Painting?

The familiar mockery and lack of a blank expression confirmed to Jenna that Ciel was indeed real.

"Dammit! Can't you speak properly?" Jenna cursed, waving the cloth in her hand.

Lumian closed the door behind him and smiled.

"You're quite energetic. You're not crying from fear."

Jenna cautiously looked out the window, confirming that the faintly glowing figures had long disappeared.

Suppressing her urge to argue with Lumian, she wasted no time and asked, "How did you get in here too?"

As she spoke, she reminded herself, As an adult woman with rich life experiences and many setbacks, I shouldn't argue with such an immature minor at such a critical moment!

Lumian's gaze moved over to Franca, who was sipping red wine by the window. He settled onto the divan and leaned back comfortably.

"First, tell me how you got in."

To be honest, he didn't know why he had suddenly arrived in this strange place resembling Hostel.

Jenna remained standing by the coffee table, ready to assume a dummy appearance at any moment.

She then recounted how she had received a dream revelation, came underground to deliver the mission item, and acquired a lucky gold coin.

Lumian listened attentively without interruption. Finally, he chuckled.

"Now, I can answer your question.

"I was sent here by Mr. Fool to save you."

He roughly understood why he had appeared in Room 207 of the fake Auberge du Coq Doré after waking up.

"Did Mr. Fool really send you? I don't even know His—his full honorific name. Did my prayer succeed with just the lucky gold coin?" Jenna had her suspicions, but she still found it unbelievable.

"Of course it's true," Lumian replied sincerely.

What puzzled him was something else.

Why did Mr. Fool send him and not Madam Magician?

If it were Madam Magician who had been pulled into the Hostel, the problem would have been easily resolved!

This could be explained by the seal of The Fool on him, but Madam Magician was a Major Arcana card holder, a key member of the Tarot Club who could participate in a meeting before a god. Furthermore, she definitely possessed similar marks in the three pathways of the divine controlled by The Fool. She could likely be "assigned remotely."

I'm afraid there's another reason I don't understand… Lumian pondered for a moment and focused on Jenna's description of the world, then asked for confirmation, "From the outside, the only difference between this place and reality is Salle de Bal Brise?"

Previously, Séraphine and Gabriel had only mentioned that there was a black hole on Avenue du Marché through which there was a chance of leaving, but it was also very dangerous. They hadn't specified its location. Although Lumian had a vague guess, he couldn't be sure until Jenna revealed her discovery.

"I've only explored a few nearby streets and less than one-fifth of Avenue du Marché," Jenna replied cautiously to prevent Ciel from making a misjudgment.

She then continued, "And inside, there are many differences. For example, here, the layout of the room, large pieces of furniture, and reality are the same. The other details are somewhat different.

"I suspect, I suspect…"

Lumian looked at Jenna and spoke before she could.

"A world in a painting."

"Yes, a world in a painting!" Jenna's hazy thoughts finally became clear.

Combined with the Painter Sequence and the paints and brushes she had found from the mutated monk, she believed that it was an oil painting that only copied some of the streets in the market district and possessed supernatural powers. It was called Hostel!

Jenna was both concerned and intrigued.

Drawing a painting seemed to create a world!

Lumian teased, "I'm glad you could also come to such a realization. It's no easy task. This painting world isn't considered advanced. The oil painting created by an angel of the Painter pathway might truly be a world with living beings inside."

Unlike the current one, there were many aspects with fakeness.

What was the purpose of such a relatively low-level painting?

Without waiting for Jenna's response, Lumian instructed her, "Check Franca's hidden pocket and see if there's a classic silver mirror."

"Why don't you search for it yourself? You know what that mirror looks like better than I do." Jenna suddenly chuckled. "Don't tell me you're shy?"

Lumian said nonchalantly, "If you're not here, I'll search for it on my own. But since I can instruct you, why should I tire myself out?"

Jenna gritted her teeth and wasted no time. She walked to the window and rummaged through the fake Franca's various pockets.

She quickly came to a conclusion.

"There are no ancient mirrors. Many of the hidden pockets weren't depicted."

Lumian nodded slowly and inwardly crossed out Plan 7.

He turned to Jenna and said, "Try Magic Mirror Divination and see if it works."

Jenna, experienced, knew that Lumian wanted to use this opportunity to confirm if the world in the painting was connected to the spirit world and determine if his "teleportation" could succeed or help them leave. Therefore, she took out a makeup mirror from her hidden pocket and prayed to one of the safer targets Franca had provided.

Before long, the preparations for Magic Mirror Divination were completed. The palm-sized mirror turned gray, but there was no aqueous light.

"It failed, but there's still something supernatural about it," Jenna said, puzzled.

With a subtle nod, Lumian replied, "It's likely that there's a fake spirit world here. If you activate Spirit Vision, you might be able to see a few remnant souls, but this isn't connected to the real spirit world, so you can't find the entity you're trying to inquire about."

In other words, he could "teleport" within the world within the painting, but he couldn't leave it.

Lumian reached into his pocket, retrieved Mr. K's finger, and flicked it in front of his eyes.

There was no reaction, nor was there any change.

"What's this?" Jenna was taken aback.

Ciel actually carried a blood-stained human finger with him!

"It's a mystical item. It can't contact the outside world," Lumian explained patronizingly.

Simultaneously, he sighed inwardly.

Mr. K's finger seemed impressive, but it could never be used to its full effect.

Most of the time, Lumian had no use for it. When he needed it, the environment was often special, preventing him from using its connection to the true form to summon Mr. K.

Jenna didn't press further. She pursed her lips and said, "So, what should we do next?"

She couldn't think of any other way to leave this place. She could only consider starting with the black hole in Salle de Bal Brise, the edge of the painting world, and the situation with the two fake cathedrals.

Lumian chuckled.

"No need to rush. I still have eight plans left.

"But before we try them, we need to make a trip to Avenue du Marché and observe the black hole at Salle de Bal Brise up close."

"Are you planning to leave from there?" Jenna asked with a frown.

It seemed perilous.

Lumian stood up and walked towards Apartment 601's door. "It is my last resort, but it's also a necessary preparation. I don't want to try the other methods and fail, only to be discovered by the pixies and blocked by the tenants of the Hostel. When that happens, I won't even be able to approach Salle de Bal Brise even if I want to risk it."

Jenna looked out of the window again, only to see that the Sun was setting in the west, and the pixies' servants had yet to return.

Only then did she quickly follow Lumian down the stairs.

On the way, she inquired, "Why did those heretics create such a painting world to hide the Hostel's residents?"

Lumian pondered for a moment and replied thoughtfully, "I believe this is a secondary purpose. Overall, it seems more like a ritual.

"Think about it. This place resembles a phony market district. The Salle de Bal Brise should be the only place left without any correspondence. And I've already told you that beneath the Salle de Bal Brise are old bones from the Fourth Epoch. It's connected to the secret of Église Saint-Robert's old cemetery. It's definitely not a coincidence that the world in the painting left it blank."

"I also think that's the key to the problem." Jenna instinctively wanted to prove that she wasn't stupid by having a similar guess.

As Lumian descended, he pondered and said, "When the abnormality truly occurs, will such a painting world temporarily replace some streets in the real market district? Will only Salle de Bal Brise remain intact?

"Who and what is this to confuse…

"In mysticism, this represents the application of the Law of Similarity. When the similarity reaches a certain level, acts on the counterfeits can be reflected in reality…

"Could they be using this method to unravel Salle de Bal Brise's underground secrets and uncover the old bones of the Fourth Epoch?

"No, it's probably not just for the old bones… Are they trying to open the entrance to Fourth Epoch Trier?

"But it's not that simple. The entire sealing system hasn't been destroyed or weakened…"

Lumian gradually formed an idea, sensing that he was getting closer to the key plan of this disaster.

If he could ultimately grasp the truth, it would be an excellent performance for a Conspirer's observational abilities.

Jenna nodded slightly, agreeing with Lumian's guess.

As they conversed about the fake 3 Rue des Blouses Blanches, their gazes suddenly froze.

On the road diagonally opposite, a woman in a loose strapped white dress was staring at them!

The woman had a beautiful face, her slightly curly black hair cascading messily over her shoulders. Her blue eyes were rather vacant, and her entire person appeared detached yet real.

Lumian and Jenna had encountered similar auras and feelings in another person.

It was the human model, Séraphine, Room 12 of the Hostel!

Is this another room in the Hostel—another human model? Why is she here? It's as if she's waiting for Jenna and me. Lumian tensed up and instinctively reached out with his right hand to grab Jenna's shoulder.

Simultaneously, the beautiful woman's voice drifted with a smile.

"Fate predestined us to meet.

"Convergence always happens inadvertently."

Chapter 465: Circle

Convergence… Predetermined fate… Could it be Room 7, Voisin Sanson, and his family? As these thoughts raced through Lumian's mind, he activated the black mark on his right shoulder without hesitation.

Spirit World Traversal!

He and Jenna vanished, heading for the entrance of Auberge du Coq Doré. Lumian had never set foot on Avenue du Marché in the painting world, so he didn't have the coordinates for the spirit world there.

The spirit world in the painting realm still comprised dense layers of colors and countless transparent, strange figures. However, the seven bright and pure lights at the "top" appeared rather blurry, as if separated by many panes of mullioned glass.

Guided by his spirituality, Lumian pinpointed the corresponding coordinates at Auberge du Coq Doré's entrance and teleported there.

They swiftly departed the spirit world and found themselves on the street.

But what Lumian saw before them was the building at 3 Rue des Blouses Blanches, the very spot where they had just been.

They hadn't left the street onto Rue Anarchie; they had merely shifted seven to eight meters from one side of the road to the other.

Circle Inhabitant… Jenna and I are already ensnared in the Circle? Lumian turned his head and wasn't surprised to see the beautiful woman suspected to be Hostel's Room 7, standing only a few meters away on the same side of the street as them.

"Voisin Sanson?" Lumian asked in a deep voice.

He temporarily abandoned the idea of teleportation, as their previous attempt had proven ineffective in escaping Rue des Blouses Blanches.

As Lumian spoke, Jenna discreetly retrieved a mirror, preparing to utilize black magic to maneuver around and launch an attack.

She sensed that, at such a tense and crucial moment, Ciel's inquiry, instead of initiating a series of attacks, might be an attempt to divert the enemy's attention and create an opportunity for her to deliver a fatal blow.

Although Lumian had mentioned that Voisin Sanson was a Sequence 4 Circle Inhabitant of the Inevitability pathway, a Saint bestowed with a boon, a true demigod, she believed that they had to make an attempt, despite the odds. So what if he had undergone a qualitative transformation in various aspects compared to Low- to Mid-Sequence Beyonders that even a small team combined wouldn't be a match for him?

Upon hearing Lumian's question, the beautiful woman in a white dress revealed a fleeting and distant smile.

"Seems like you're well-informed…"

Before "she" could finish her sentence, Lumian took a step forward and harrumphed.

Two beams of white light shot out from his nostrils and landed on the woman suspected to be Room 7.

Although the Spell of Harrumph's power had increased following his advancement to Sequence 6, he didn't believe it would truly work on a Saint. At best, it might make her sway slightly.

Lumian opted for this approach instead of donning the Flog boxing gloves to target the various negative effects of a Contractee. As a Conspirer, he keenly noticed a crucial detail: he and Jenna were trapped in the "Circle," but Voisin Sanson hadn't left Room 7. He remained within the beautiful woman's body.

This clearly hindered his performance.

Therefore, he either had arrogance as a negative side effect of his contract ability, or he couldn't leave the Hostel's room for some reason.

Combined with his earlier hypothesis that the world in the painting and the situation in the Hostel were part of a ritual, Lumian was more inclined to believe the latter possibility.

In that case, even if my Spell of Harrumph can't affect you, can't it affect your room?

The human models, corrupted by the Painter pathway and adorned with special patterns, were equivalent to Mid-Sequence monsters!

As two beams of white light descended, the beautiful woman in the white dress fainted.

Almost simultaneously, Lumian and Jenna's vision blurred, and they felt slightly dizzy.

When they regained their senses, they found themselves back at the exit of 3 Rue des Blouses Blanches, facing the beautiful woman in a white halter dress diagonally across from them.

The woman's lips curled up, but she didn't repeat her previous statement.

Circle Inhabitant!

Lumian realized that he and Jenna were truly trapped in a loop, and the successful attack on Room 7 triggered the loop's restart.

Moreover, he confirmed that Voisin Sanson and his family couldn't leave Room 7 until something concluded. They could only exert influence on the outside world through obstacles. Otherwise, they would have opened the door and confronted Lumian with all their might. They sought to control the target with an Angel sealed in his body as efficiently as possible!

Even if Voisin Sanson had the negative side effect of arrogance, it was improbable for all three of his children to be the same!

Without hesitation, Lumian sank his consciousness into his right palm, revealing a few bright red scars.

An extraordinarily frenzied, violent, and high-and-mighty aura surged into the sky, as if it sought to dominate the land.

Alista Tudor!

Lumian activated the Blood Emperor's mark.

While this had no real impact in the physical world, it caused those around him to feel a slight fear, making them tremble. However, the response from the painting world exceeded Lumian's expectations.

The sky suddenly turned dark-red, and the westering sun appeared tinted with an iron hue as it swayed left and right.

Rue des Blouses Blanches and the entire world trembled as if struck by an earthquake.

The vendors and pedestrians on the street, as well as the residents and animals on both sides, blurred and distorted.

The beautiful woman in Room 7 of the Hostel was taken aback. She instinctively trembled and wanted to hug herself tightly.

An invisible force shrouding half of Rue des Blouses Blanches materialized, resembling transparent glass.

Suddenly, it shattered, revealing multiple cracks.

Seeing this, Lumian grabbed Jenna's shoulder and activated the black mark on his right shoulder once more.

This time, they swiftly passed through the local spirit world and arrived at Auberge du Coq Doré's entrance. They didn't return to the Circle.

The painting world existed between reality and fiction, and it was very sensitive to the aura of high-level figures, materializing the impact. As Lumian's thoughts raced, a distant rumble reached his ears.

It emanated from Avenue du Marché!

Lumian and Jenna exchanged glances as a term came to their minds: Salle de Bal Brise!

Has something happened to the black hole corresponding to Salle de Bal Brise?

Was it a subsequent change brought about by The Blood Emperor Alista Tudor's aura, or has the ritual officially begun, heralding the impending catastrophe? Lumian's thoughts raced as he raced towards Avenue du Marché.

Jenna's response was as swift as his, making the same decision.

…

Deep underground, in a hidden cave undetectable to the outside world.

The rock walls here had been meticulously modified, featuring two vertical beams and multiple horizontal beams, each marked with longitudinal gaps.

To anyone familiar with Trier's map, these formations would correspond strictly to a section of Avenue du Marché. Each rock wall was the equivalent of a side street, and each vertical gap represented an alley.

Adorning each rock wall were lifelike oil paintings, portraying buildings of various architectural styles, dark iron street lamps, pedestrians dressed as clerks, vendors selling an array of goods, and scenes from windows, all depicted with vivid and natural colors.

These scenes were almost identical to those on the corresponding streets.

On the eastern rock wall of Avenue du Marché, three men in white shirts with unbuttoned vests were using mural tools to craft a complex, bright red door at the spot corresponding to Salle de Bal Brise.

Their bodies were coated in paint, and their eyes displayed a peculiar detachment, as though they were gazing at a distant realm rather than a rock wall.

Each time they completed the bright red door on the rock wall, it mysteriously vanished after a fifth was completed. The three painters had no choice but to repeat their efforts in vain.

Suddenly, the mine trembled gently, and minuscule cracks that were almost imperceptible to the naked eye appeared on the rock wall adorned with various scenes.

The female painter in a blue beret and the male painter in red pants looked up at the depiction of Avenue du Marché on the rock wall.

In the next moment, they pressed their hands against the rock wall and vanished.

Two figures emerged within the massive oil painting. One was a woman donning a blue beret, and the other a man in red pants. They both wore white shirts and open beige vests.

The third painter, a man in his twenties, remained on the outside. He was clad in black pants with tassels, his brown hair disheveled, and a bit of stubble adorning his mouth.

The distant expression in his flaxen-colored eyes faded as he cautiously surveyed his surroundings.

Observing that the mine's tremors were limited to this area and that the anomaly in the painting hadn't extended, the young painter let out a sigh of relief. He redirected his gaze to the empty Salle de Bal Brise, seemingly contemplating whether to change his approach or wait for the right moment to try again.

At that precise moment, a skeletal palm suddenly extended from the rock wall and the ground.

It had a yellowish hue and a withered texture, with its surface covered in iron-colored rust, giving it an ancient appearance.

As soon as the skeletal palm appeared, it seized the young painter's ankle, aiming to drag him deep into the earth.

…

Late at night, 11 Rue des Fontaines, Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative.

Franca's dream had been an odd one, with various bizarre scenes woven together into a nonsensical narrative.

Suddenly, she jolted awake and instinctively looked to her side.

Although the room was shrouded in darkness due to the heavy curtains blocking the crimson moonlight, it didn't hinder her from noticing that the spot under the velvet blanket beside her was empty; Gardner Martin was nowhere to be found.

Franca's pupils widened with a mixture of surprise and suspicion.

It wasn't that she was shocked by Gardner Martin's disappearance. There was nothing he could do that would truly surprise her. What caught her off guard was her failure to detect his departure.

Demonesses possessed formidable spiritual senses. It was impossible for someone sleeping beside them to slip out of bed and leave without their knowledge. Franca had only snapped out of her reverie when she felt the drop in temperature on the other side of the bed!

Franca swiftly got out of bed, dressed, and opened the bedroom door.

The corridor lay in darkness, and an eerie silence hung in the air.

Chapter 466: Encounter

Franca blended into the shadows and moved silently through the shadows, her eyes fixed on the crimson-lit corridor.

She even began to suspect that Ciel had failed to find her and had enlisted the help of Madam Magician to teleport Gardner Martin away. How else could he have vanished without her noticing?

The third floor of the grayish-white villa remained still. Franca listened closely, feeling like she was the only one left in the building. The butler, valet, maid, gardener, and chef seemed to have disappeared into thin air.

She cautiously approached the valet's room, extending her right palm and silently turning the handle.

Through her Dark Vision, Franca spotted two people lying on the bed, wrapped in each other's embrace and covered by a thin blanket.

Almost simultaneously, Franca's pupils dilated.

The two of them were headless, their necks nestled against each other, their wounds stained with blood.

Initially taken aback, Franca recalled Ciel's description of the Iron and Blood Cross Order's Supervisor Olson. She suspected that Gardner's valet and his lover had experienced a similar situation. Their heads had seemingly "come to life" and left their bodies.

Without further scrutiny, she quietly closed the door and blended into the dense shadows of the staircase.

Franca wanted to see if anyone else in the building had suffered a similar fate.

Upon descending to the first-floor hall, her eyes froze.

The armor and weapons that had been there were gone!

What a drastic change… F*ck, how did I not notice it at all? Franca, who had been confident in her abilities, experience, and reactions, couldn't help but waver.

In the next moment, the washroom door on the first floor swung open, and a lady's maid in an old nightgown emerged.

The lady's maid shook off the liquid in her hand and slowly made her way back to the servants' quarters, her head empty and her neck stained red.

Hidden in the shadows, Franca cast her gaze out the window. The two patrolling guards had also lost their heads, and the shadow reflected in the glass was like a magnified beer bottle.

Franca, having roughly confirmed the situation at 11 Rue des Fontaines, didn't hesitate and quickly sneaked out of the villa.

She planned to report this to Madam Judgment immediately and use the Primordial Demoness figurine to inform Browns Sauron and Demoness of Black Clarice about the anomaly here.

The latter necessitated a ritual. Franca was concerned that attempting it in this abnormal building would trigger unnecessary changes and bring unpredictable danger, so she decided to escape the abnormal environment before taking the corresponding measures.

In the darkness of the night, the Demoness of Pleasure lurked in the shadows of an empty house. She exited the building from the side and circled the lawn ahead.

…

Beneath Trier, Blazing Danitz forcefully opened the stone door.

Behind them, they found a small mine, with three classical oil lamps embedded in the stone wall—one high, and two low.

In the center of the mine, a staircase descended into darkness. The bottom was hidden in shadow, appearing to have no end.

Danitz retracted his fist and turned his body, signaling the nearly 20 sailors following him to enter the mine and cooperate.

Among them were Hunters responsible for observing the environment and detecting hidden traps and subtle traces. Seers used coin tosses or crystal pendants to determine the direction and danger of pursuit. A Mid-Sequence Sailor was ready to assist his teammates and handle any mishaps…

With this coordination, Danitz's team swiftly made their way through the stairs and tunnel, and their vision suddenly brightened.

They found themselves in a caved-in quarry cave, scattered with straw mats, rags, pottery jars, and other items.

Danitz scanned the area and chuckled.

"It's been turned into a weapons cache… Not long ago, dozens of rebels lived here."

His gaze shifted to the end of the quarry cave, where a wide tunnel led to an unknown destination.

A sailor standing beside Danitz clicked his tongue and remarked, "There should be many similar military hideouts nearby. Are the main rebel forces led by the Carbonari all here?"

"I'm not blind. I can see!" Blazing Danitz cursed. "The question now is, where did they go? Is the chaos about to begin?"

…

In the market district, at Auberge du Coq Doré, Room 305,

Anthony Reid was awakened by the previous earthquake.

Ever since his escape that night, he had become sensitive to various movements, although not as fearful as when he heard gunshots.

Given the dangerous signals provided by the intelligence they had discussed earlier, he couldn't fall asleep quickly.

Anthony Reid got out of bed and poured a glass of light beer to ease his anxiety.

After using Placate on himself, he intended to force himself to sleep a little longer.

At that moment, he heard pounding at the motel's entrance.

Who returns so late at night? It feels a little urgent… Anthony Reid listened intently, sensing that something was brewing in secret.

Before long, footsteps approached his door,

and Anthony Reid immediately opened it to peer into the dimly lit corridor.

He spotted an impatient man in a grayish-blue worker's uniform and cap.

This was an informant he had developed at the docks.

"What happened?" Anthony Reid asked in a calm and gentle voice.

Having been placated, the informant's anxiety dissipated, and he cautiously glanced around before lowering his voice.

"There will be a huge strike at the docks tomorrow. Rumor has it that weapons will be issued."

"Issued weapons…" Anthony Reid's mind instantly filled with images of barricades, incendiary bombs, smoke grenades, rifles, and two-wheeled carts symbolizing Trier's chaos.

In Trier, due to the strong resistance of the citizens and their adeptness at protests and battles, such occurrences weren't too unusual, happening every two or three years, sometimes even two or three times a year. The only difference was in their scale. However, considering the critical situation before a terrifying catastrophe, a massive strike suddenly distributing weapons led Anthony Reid to consider the possibility that it had been premeditated and was part of the impending catastrophe.

The information broker produced a Louis d'or and instructed the informant, "Your intel is very important. Find an excuse not to go to the docks tomorrow and hide at home."

Instinctively, the informant bit into the gleaming Louis d'or, bid Anthony Reid a cheerful farewell, and departed from Auberge du Coq Doré.

Anthony wasted no time and swiftly descended to the second floor, arriving at Lumian's room.

He knocked lightly on the wooden door of Room 207, but as the sound reverberated, there was no movement inside. It was so silent, as if no one had lived there for a long time.

Anthony Reid stopped and furrowed his brow.

…

In the painting world, the westering sun cast its illumination on Rue Anarchie, keeping the sky bright.

Lumian and Jenna hurried past the broken gas street lamps, sprinting toward Avenue du Marché.

They were uncertain when Room 7, where Voisin Sanson's family resided, would discover their teleportation destination. Their goal was to reach the black hole representing Salle de Bal Brise before the other party could lock onto them again.

This way, even if their other plans failed or couldn't be completed in time, they still had a final option—to enter the black hole and try their luck to see where they would appear.

Thud! Thud! Thud! Lumian led Jenna forward, and Avenue du Marché came into view. He grabbed Jenna's shoulder and spewed crimson flames from his body, enveloping them both in a huge fireball.

The fireball sped forward with incredible velocity.

Lumian forcefully led Jenna across a distance of seven to eight meters towards the intersection of Rue Anarchie and Avenue du Marché.

During this process, Jenna, unlike Lumian, wasn't immune to the flames. Her hair and skin singed, but she didn't struggle violently. Instead, she shrank her body and created frost to resist the crimson flames, easing the pain.

In the blink of an eye, they reached the edge of Avenue du Marché.

From there, they had a clear view of Salle de Bal Brise in the distance and the pitch-black darkness.

This allowed Lumian to identify his destination without needing coordinates.

What he saw was where they'd arrive!

The black mark on his right shoulder emitted a dim light once more.

Spirit World Traversal!

In an instant, Lumian and Jenna appeared beside the darkness.

At that moment, a crystal-like wall materialized before them.

It extended upward, enclosing the entire Salle de Bal Brise like a transparent lid.

Lumian and Jenna subconsciously gazed up and saw two figures in the air.

One was a young woman wearing a blue beret, a tied-up white shirt, and dark pants. Her beige vest was open, and her body was covered in paint. Her orange hair was short, and her yellow eyes were deep and ethereal, as if hiding a world.

The other man, in his thirties, wore similar attire but with red pants for his lower body. He had gentle facial features, light eyebrows, and distant, ethereal blue eyes.

He still held a thick paintbrush in his hand, with a palette of mostly used paint.

Behind them, a pair of translucent dragonfly-like wings flapped gently, helping them hover in the air.

Painters? Those Pixies? Lumian and Jenna instantly speculated.

The man looked at Lumian with surprise and spoke in a voice that seemed to come from afar,

"Welcome back to the Hostel, Room 1."

Room 1… Lumian's eyes froze.

Room 1? Jenna couldn't help but turn to her companion in shock.

Chapter 467: Old Bones

Upon hearing the term "Room 1," Lumian was genuinely surprised, even with his wealth of experiences.

Séraphine and Gabriel had previously mentioned that the Hostel had a total of 13 "Rooms," but Room 1 had never been mentioned. It was as if it had never entered the Hostel. Lumian had always found this to be a mysterious omission, suspecting that there were critical points hidden in this fact. To his amazement, the painter-dressed man, likely a Pixie, now addressed him as "Room 1."

This was beyond belief!

Lumian was certain that the symbols on him were related to Mr. Fool and the entity known as Inevitability. They had nothing to do with the Painter. While Termiboros, an evil god's Angel, resided within him, it was fundamentally different from the Hostel Rooms like Séraphine's.

They had different sources of power and were different forms of abode!

At that moment, Lumian didn't waste time analyzing why the suspected Pixie called him Room 1 or whether there was important information hidden in it. He knew one thing—unless he could quickly eliminate or control the two enemies in midair and take command of the black hole in the Salle de Bal Brise area, the Hostel residents would undoubtedly notice the abnormality and rush their Rooms to the scene, making the situation more complicated.

Upon hearing "Room 1," Jenna was equally shocked, but she didn't question Lumian or waste time seeking answers. She retrieved the Arrow of the

Bloodthirsty, made of obsidian, and plunged it into her chest, despite having used it only a few hours ago.

At this point, she cared little about the accumulation of mutations in her body.

Similarly, even if something was amiss with Ciel, she would have to wait until they escaped before inquiring about it.

As the Arrow of the Bloodthirsty pierced her chest, a dense black fog emanated from Jenna's back, forming a pair of colossal and rather illusory bat wings.

With a powerful flap, she lunged for the woman in the blue beret and the man in red pants.

Simultaneously, black flames gradually condensed in the Witch's palm.

The colossal bat wings extended from bottom to top, obscuring the Painters' line of sight.

The man in red pants swiftly turned his paintbrush around and dipped it in silver paint, drawing a menacing lightning bolt on his clothes.

Silver-white lightning detached from the man's white shirt and struck Jenna's illusory membraned black wings, numbing her entire body with the crackling electrical energy. The dense black fog that had formed the bat wings was diminished by the lightning, and Jenna began to descend slowly as she lost control of her flight.

In that critical moment, Lumian's form materialized in midair right behind the painter in red pants.

Without the ability to fly or float, Lumian chose to "teleport."

Seeing Jenna use the Arrow of the Bloodthirsty to create Wings of Darkness and fly boldly towards the two presumed Pixies, Lumian understood that his companion was likely drawing the enemy's attention and creating an opportunity for him to swiftly attack one of their targets.

Witches rarely fought in such a manner.

"Ha!" Lumian exclaimed as a pale-yellow light, resembling a stream of air, shot forth from his mouth and struck the man in red pants.

Before the Painter, who had just drawn lightning, could react or even realize that Lumian had appeared behind him, he closed his eyes and lost consciousness.

Without suspension, he plummeted to the ground.

The woman in the blue beret remained composed. Figures emerged in her eyes, as if they held a world within them.

One of the figures traversed the boundaries of fiction and reality, moving from the realm of fantasy into the world within the painting.

Dressed in a light-blue dress with long, thick blond hair and serene light-blue eyes—Aurore!

It was Aurore!

Upon witnessing this, Lumian's resolve remained unwavering. His eyes burned with anger.

Are you worthy of imagining Aurore?

As he descended from the sky, crimson fireballs materialized around his body and were launched towards the woman in the blue beret.

The woman extended her right hand and pressed it into the void. Her entire being suddenly turned illusory, her expression vacant and cold.

Numerous fireballs landed on her, but they didn't detonate, as though there was nothing there.

They passed through her figure and exploded nearby.

At the same moment, the Painter in red pants landed before Jenna with a distinct cracking sound.

The excruciating pain brought him back from the unconscious state induced by Lumian's Spell of Harrumph. He instinctively opened his eyes.

Just as the woman in the blue beret dodged the explosion, she exited her peculiar state and flew toward Jenna, who was about to land.

In an instant, she collided with Jenna, sending starlight and sparks flying like meteors.

Crack!

Jenna's body shattered into fragments, transforming into mirror pieces that reflected the sunlight.

Her form reappeared beside the profound darkness within Salle de Bal Brise.

Lumian descended with a whoosh, his feet landing heavily on the ground, his body swaying.

At that very moment, the three of them, along with the woman in the blue beret, seemed to sense something. They turned their heads, casting their gazes towards the intersections leading into Avenue du Marché.

Women with detached dispositions, fleeting eyes, and indifferent expressions emerged from different directions. They were Room 12—Séraphine—and Room 7, which Lumian and Jenna had recently encountered.

Gabriel followed closely behind Séraphine, his gaze growing increasingly vacant, his face contorted with agony.

Jenna and Lumian felt a creeping unease, as if they were inexorably descending into an abyss.

Suddenly, a hand extended from the darkness within Salle de Bal Brise.

It was a hand devoid of flesh and skin, composed of withered, yellowed bones stained with rust.

…

In the enigmatic cave adorned with a colossal mural, the young painter altered his form and broke free from the skeletal palm's grasp.

He existed in a state between reality and the spirit world, untouchable by anyone and unable to touch anyone. His only capacity was to observe as the empty space on the rock wall and the ground intersected, turning dark and viscous, akin to a bottomless swamp.

At that moment, an incomplete skeleton, composed of dark-red stained bones and rust, emerged from the swamp.

The skeleton appeared to hail from ancient times. It extended its bony fingers into the oil painting on the rock wall, corresponding to the incomplete Salle de Bal Brise.

Beneath it, more yellowed skeletons crawled out from the depths of the swamp. Some bore shattered iron-colored armor, others carried rusty weapons, a few were missing a third of their bodies, and some were devoid of their heads…

…

In the market district, beneath Église Saint-Robert, within the Inquisition.

In his office, Angoulême de François, donned in a golden shirt, attentively observed his subordinates delivering intel one by one.

"A violent explosion in the direction of the Deep Valley Cloister…"

"Abnormal activity detected underground…"

"Saint Viève Cathedral has issued an order to maintain maximum vigilance tonight…"

"Someone at the docks is organizing a huge strike tomorrow morning and distributing weapons…"

"There are also people organizing a march at the factories to the south…"

The Purifiers had a vast network of informants, surpassing even the most prolific information brokers. The manifold reports concerning unusual events in various locations within the market district nearly made Angoulême lose control of his expression. His facial muscles twitched ever so slightly.

When it finally grew silent, and no more subordinates came in to report, Angoulême stood up, adjusted his collar, picked up a substantial dossier, and slammed it onto the table.

While doing so, the Purifier deacon cursed silently, Hidden Blade, do you want me dead?

Ever since Hidden Blade had informed him about Gardner Martin's collaboration with the Carbonari, the anomalies between the Carbonari and the Deep Valley Cloister, and the Hostel's situation, various irregularities had emerged from every corner, relentlessly testing his nerves.

Only a few hours had passed, but Angoulême felt as though a tempest was gathering.

Phew… Angoulême exhaled and compiled the gathered intel, Hidden Blade's reports, and the questions she had requested clarification on into a single document. He pinned it to the wall with a thumbtack, hoping to discern any patterns or overlooked details.

The Purifier deacon's gaze roved the room.

After some time, his eyes settled on one of the documents.

Hidden Blade had inquired about the secret of Église Saint-Robert's old cemetery but hadn't received an answer.

The old cemetery lay within the current Salle de Bal Brise.

Angoulême's heart stirred, and he resolved to seek answers to this question once more.

It was one of the few things he could undertake at the moment.

Blasted Hidden Blade, once this matter is resolved, if you don't leave the market district, I'll request a transfer! Angoulême inwardly cursed as he hurried into the telegraph room, angrily composing a telegram.

He intended to convey to the higher-ups that they shouldn't be overly strict about confidentiality classifications when it concerned intelligence.

The sooner he could figure out the details, the sooner he could unearth the truth and forestall impending catastrophe.

After a ten-minute wait, Angoulême received a response:

"The old cemetery of Église Saint-Robert is situated above a node for the sealing of Fourth Epoch Trier. In the past, there was a breach that led to the release of some Fourth Epoch deceased. Subsequently, it was reinforced, and the situation was contained.

"When the sealing system for the catacombs replaced such nodes, the old cemetery lost its significance and wasn't retained."

Chapter 468: Q&A Game

Église Saint-Robert's old cemetery had once served as Fourth Epoch Trier's node for the seal. However, leaks had occurred, allowing the ancient dead to crawl out… Angoulême carefully considered the information and felt that there might be hidden dangers lurking beneath Salle de Bal Brise.

He returned to the office and fixed his gaze on the piece of paper pinned to the wall.

The paper not only clearly detailed Hidden Blade's previous inquiry about the old cemetery's secret but also provided the circumstances under which she had made the inquiry.

This was all part of their investigation into the Sick Church case!

Their goal was to uncover the reasons behind the unusual quietness of Trier's heretics and their activities as though they had gone into hiding for some massive endeavor.

Hidden Blade suspects that the old cemetery's secret is somehow linked to the heretics' plans? They aim to use the former leakage point to bypass the seal and open the door to Fourth Epoch Trier? Angoulême, with his experience, immediately connected the dots.

Entering the telegraph room, he informed the higher-ups of his theory and made a recommendation.

"Send one or two teams underground to investigate the original leakage point as soon as possible, preferably led by Saints."

After sending the telegram, Angoulême breathed a sigh of relief.

His next task was to assemble his team and coordinate with the police, military police, and army to prevent the protests from escalating into riots before dawn.

This process would inevitably lead to clashes with members of the Iron and Blood Cross Order and the Carbonari. Beyonders would also be involved.

Additionally, as 007, Angoulême needed to find an opportunity to contact Hidden Blade and share the secret of the old cemetery with her.

There was no more time for casual chats in the telegram group; he had to activate their prearranged practical approach.

…

Apartment 601, 3 Rue des Blouses Blanches.

"Ciel is missing too?" After informing Madam Judgment and Demoness of Black about Gardner Martin's abnormality, Franca returned to the market district, only to realize that Jenna, who should have been asleep in bed, had vanished. Before she could inspect the house, Anthony Reid, with his buzz cut, visited late at night and reported that Lumian had mysteriously vanished. There were no signs of a fight at the scene.

"Yes," Anthony Reid was even more certain that something was amiss. It wasn't Lumian switching to a safe house for sleep.

"There are no signs of a struggle here either…" Franca walked to the guest bedroom door and looked at the lifted blanket.

She could tell that Jenna had taken her time before leaving. Not only had she removed her pajamas and changed into her female mercenary attire, but she hadn't messed up the bedroom.

Franca furrowed her brow, pondering the possible reasons.

Although she knew this was a serious matter, she still habitually complained inwardly, Why does it seem like my girlfriend ran off with my boyfriend…

Amidst her thoughts, she remembered that Jenna hadn't handed over the grayish-white cloth bag she had obtained from the cyborg monk to the strange boy, Will.

Franca immediately turned her gaze to the coffee table, recalling that it had originally been there.

Seeing the grayish-white cloth bag vanish, the Demoness of Pleasure heaved a sigh of relief.

Jenna must have been "notified" by the strange boy, Will, to deliver the mission item somewhere and collect the corresponding reward.

And why did Ciel disappear?

Could it be that Will's request was for Ciel to accompany her?

Yes, after all, he was invited by Ciel's Major Arcana card holder, Madam Magician…

"Doesn't seem like a terrible thing?" Anthony Reid keenly sensed Franca's change in state.

"So far, that's the case." Franca produced a palm-sized mirror. "I'll use Magic Mirror Divination to confirm."

She retrieved Jenna's pajamas and caressed the mirror with her free hand.

Simultaneously, she recited in Hermes, "Celia Bello's current location, Celia Bello's current location…"

Although the name "Jenna" could also be used for divination, as Jenna had been using this stage name for a long time, and most people around her called her that, Franca felt that it would be more accurate to use her real name at a time like this.

In the gas-lit living room of the apartment, the lights dimmed, and the environment became oppressive.

The mirror's surface emitted an aqueous light, as if it had sunk into the depths of a river.

However, Franca saw nothing. Snowflakes kept appearing in the mirror like noise.

The divination yielded no results… Franca frowned again.

Could it be because of the presence of the strange boy, Will?

However, after handing over the mission item and obtaining the lucky gold coin, Jenna should have separated from Will. They shouldn't have been together for more than five minutes. Theoretically, it can't be such a coincidence…

Franca was cautious. "We'll try again in five minutes."

Anthony Reid nodded gently and asked, "Do you need me to go to Auberge du Coq Doré and retrieve one of Ciel's clothes?"

"No need." Franca shook her head without hesitation.

That fellow bears Mr. Fool's seal and the aura of the Blood Emperor. It would be strange if I could gain anything from divination!

Time ticked by, and finally, five minutes passed. Franca used the simple Magic Mirror Divination to inquire about Jenna's location once again.

There was still no answer, and no scene appeared.

That's not right… Franca immediately switched to the complete Magic Mirror Divination form of praying to certain entities.

In the dark mirror, an aged voice echoed, accompanied by the sound of water.

"Celia Bello is in an undetectable location."

Undetectable… Franca began to feel that the problem might be more complicated and troublesome than she had guessed, so she asked, "Where is Lumian Lee now?"

Amidst the sound of water, the aged voice replied, "I can't see, I can't see…"

The voice gradually faded into confusion and disorder. Franca hastily ended Magic Mirror Divination.

She paced back and forth, feeling that she had to report this matter to Madam Judgment.

But before that… Franca clenched her teeth and said to Anthony Reid, "I want to use Magic Mirror Divination to pray to an unknown and hidden entity. The results of His divination are the most precise. Perhaps it can help us obtain an answer, but you have to swear to the God of Steam and Machinery not to divulge everything you hear later."

"No problem." Anthony, clad in military-green attire, gestured a Triangular Sacred Emblem on his chest.

After Anthony swore an oath to the deity he believed in, Franca didn't hesitate. She lit three candles in a ritualistic manner and extinguished the gas wall lamps in the room.

In the dim light, her right hand caressed the mirror's surface three times as she recited an honorific name in Hermes.

"Eyes that watch all living beings, the stigmata from the Primordial Land, the omniscient one who serves The Fool, the great Arrodes…"

The glass of the makeup mirror darkened, fluctuating and enshrouding at times, emitting aqueous light.

As a Psychiatrist, Anthony Reid suddenly felt a strong sense of unease, as if a pair of eyes had scanned him from top to bottom.

Franca finished her preparations and asked, "Where is my friend, Celia Bello, now?"

In the mirror, an aqueous light flickered, revealing an image:

It was a mine that was too blurry to see the details clearly.

Immediately after, the scene shifted, revealing a portion of Avenue du Marché.

Franca recognized it immediately as the Salle de Bal Brise area, but the building didn't exist. Instead, it was replaced by a dark and crystal-like barrier. Jenna, dressed in a light-blue dress, stood beside the barrier, her expression solemn as she observed an unrevealed part of the scene. Beside her was a figure suspected to be Lumian.

As expected, they're together… Where is this place? Just as these thoughts crossed Franca's mind, she saw a few lines of ancient Feysac words dripping with blood appear on the mirror.

"Based on the principle of reciprocity, it's my turn to ask a question."

"If you answer incorrectly or lie, you will be punished."

Franca closed her eyes, waiting for the question to be raised.

The blood-red letters formed another sentence: "Have you ever fantasized about doing Trieriens' favorite activity with Jenna?"

Thankfully… Franca breathed a sigh of relief.

The shame of this question depended on Jenna's presence. If she were present, Franca would rather slam her head against a wall. But now, there was only one Psychiatrist watching.

Is there a problem with telling a Psychiatrist that I have a psychological problem and like women, my good friend, so much so that I want to do that with her?

Franca couldn't help but blush, but she replied smoothly, "I did."

Anthony Reid, who was observing, wasn't surprised at all. As a Spectator, if he didn't discover Franca's abnormal feelings and thoughts about Jenna, it could only mean that he wasn't up to standard.

He hadn't expected Franca to be relatively calm and not ashamed.

Franca then asked the magic mirror, "Where is the Avenue du Marché where Jenna currently is?"

This time, there was no scene in the magic mirror. Instead, bright red terms appeared: "A world in a painting."

A world in a painting… Painter, Pixie… Franca immediately made a connection and a guess.

On the mirror's surface, bloody words distorted and squirmed, forming new words:

"Based on the principle of reciprocity, it's my turn to ask a question."Have you ever fantasized about doing Trieriens' favorite activity with Lumian Lee?"

"…" Franca's face burned. She could feel the temperature rising.

I-I haven't… She subconsciously wanted to respond, but then she remembered the pain of being struck by lightning.

She gazed at the magic mirror, striving to forget that there was a Psychiatrist beside her. Her lips quivered as she replied, "I-I have. Sometimes, just occasionally! I can't control myself in my dreams!"

Anthony Reid didn't allow his gaze to shift to Franca's face, nor did he allow his expression to change. It was as if what he saw and heard was ordinary.

This was the basic professionalism of a Psychiatrist.

Franca hurriedly concluded Magic Mirror Divination and entered the master bedroom. She organized information on Lumian, Jenna's disappearance, and the Magic Mirror Divination's response into written information and reported it to Madam Judgment.

After completing this matter and returning to the living room, she was about to discuss the situation with Anthony Reid when she heard a rumbling sound from the northwest of Trier.

It was as if multiple cannons were firing.

Chapter 469: "Reinforcements"

Quartier Éraste, Trier's garrison encampment.

Under the dim moonlight, a significant number of soldiers poured out of various buildings. They organized into teams with remarkable precision, either firing cannons at the distant roadblocks or shouldering rifles as they advanced toward Avenue du Boulevard in coordinated squads.

Among them were combatants equipped with steam-powered backpacks and massive firearms, strategically positioning themselves on elevated vantage points and in concealed spots.

Inside a building within the camp, Albus, his hair appearing to be dyed red, sat confidently in an officer's chair, his legs casually crossed at the edge of the table before him.

In his field of vision, disembodied heads dangled by bloody spines, almost like they had extended tails.

These severed heads soared toward headless bodies clad in blue soldier coats adorned with golden threads. They aimed for the vacant necks, inserting their bloodstained spines with precision.

Crack! They completed their "integration" simultaneously, twisting left and right to acclimate themselves to their new hosts.

The freshly created soldiers promptly retrieved their weapons and charged out in an orderly formation, following mysterious directives.

Albus Medici clicked his tongue and remarked, "This is quite the reminiscent sight. Will this night turn into a bloodbath?"

…

Beyond the multitude of towering steeples and the golden-hued buildings, Magician and Justice were alerted by the distant rumble of cannons.

"An early uprising?" Magician, dressed in a crisp white collared shirt and a beige dress, gazed with starlight in her eyes, as if she had glimpsed through the veils of the spirit world and witnessed the turmoil at the military encampment.

Her prior astromancy predictions had suggested that the catastrophe was still some time away. However, when Jenna caught the cyborg monk and discovered their ties to the heretics and job of transporting paints and brushes, it was evident that destiny had shifted, setting the illusory gears into motion prematurely.

The catastrophe had begun without proper preparation.

Justice, garbed in a light-blue dress, listened to the booming cannons and responded with a composed tone, "Given the scale, it's clear that this won't topple Intis's current government. It can only incite a certain degree of temporary chaos…

"Could there be strikes, protests, marches, riots, and other forms of civil unrest colliding?"

"These are the strengths of the Iron and Blood Cross Order and the Carbonari. Perhaps Gardner Martin and some of his associates went into hiding to spark the flames, but it appears their coordination isn't strong enough. Without effective collaboration, they can't establish a connection." Magician's gaze shifted toward the southeastern region, where Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative, the market district, and Quartier du Jardin Botanique were situated.

Justice nodded in agreement and added, "This means that our efforts have yielded results. They were compelled to accelerate their plans. It's impressive they accomplished such a feat given these circumstances."

As soon as she finished speaking, the "doll" messenger, dressed in a light-gold gown, materialized from the void and handed the letter from Judgment to Magician.

"Good evening, Miss Justice. A good day to you," the messenger cheerfully greeted Justice.

She was a mysophobic, obsessive-compulsive creature from the spirit world with a penchant for beauty, and Miss Justice was the embodiment of her preferences.

On the other hand, her employer had many shortcomings that she found intolerable. Therefore, she often took on additional tasks herself. This, however, had built a strong bond of closeness and trust between them.

Magician unfolded the letter and quickly scanned its contents. Her expression underwent a subtle change.

"A world in a painting."

"Did Arrodes use the lucky gold coin and The Fool's seal on Lumian to gain a vague glimpse of the scenes within the painting world?

"Partial glimpses of Avenue du Marché…"

After murmuring to herself, Magician turned to Justice and said, "I have a rough understanding of what those heretics are after and why they are utilizing the Hostel's form and the essence of its rooms.

"We can't afford to waste any more time. Let's take action now. Control or eliminate Lady Moon before we search for the painting world."

Justice nodded. "Agreed."

She then smiled and added, "We should place our trust in our comrades and collaborators."

"Very well." Magician took a step toward the Sacred Heart Cloister, her beige dress hem billowing in the breeze.

She raised her hands, and a constellation of resplendent stars materialized around her.

They appeared both distant and densely packed, converging to create a night sky over the highlands.

The countless stars cast their radiance upon the surface of the Sacred Heart Cloister.

With a determined effort, Magician lifted the void in front of her, as if bearing a heavy burden.

Amidst the tumultuous yet silent vibrations, the Sacred Heart Cloister, along with its myriad steeples and the ground beneath it, was "projected" into a pitch-black void. Fierce hurricanes and layers of darkness encircled them.

Almost simultaneously, brilliant sunbeams illuminated the interconnected buildings, as if conjuring thousands of miniature suns.

They resisted the encroaching darkness, striving to reveal the concealed void.

Magician and Justice vanished, reappearing in a space that seemed to bend and contract, forming a dark sphere.

Close by, a crouching golden retriever activated Psychological Invisibility, carefully observing her surroundings and maintaining the highest level of vigilance.

…

Painting world, Avenue du Marché.

From the darkness that corresponded to Salle de Bal Brise, dark-red and rust-stained yellow skeletons emerged.

They exuded a palpable aura of death, and the strong scent of rust and blood hung heavy in the air. When gathered together, they created and intensified a frenzied and violent atmosphere.

This sensation was tangible, immediately shaking the crystal barrier enveloping the darkness. It produced numerous cracks before silently collapsing.

Witnessing this horrifying scene, the woman in the white halter dress who had brought the Sansons to Avenue du Marché and the various rooms with similar auras to Séraphine's brought over, certain words spoken by the "doll" messenger flashed through Lumian's mind.

Those old bones!

With a swift thought, he seized Jenna's arm with his left hand and immersed his consciousness into his right palm.

Bright red scars reappeared, and an exceptionally violent, maddening, and domineering aura surged from his body, causing the blue sky, white clouds, and the setting sun to visibly quiver.

Even Séraphine and the other "rooms," despite their experience, were taken aback and couldn't help but shudder.

The two pixies outside were even more terrified, convinced that a formidable presence had descended and that the painting world was on the brink of collapse.

The yellowish, ragged, and incomplete old bones creaked and turned, bowing their heads in unison to Lumian. They refrained from instinctively attacking the nearest humans.

Lumian raised his chin slightly and pointed his right hand with an icy determination at the "rooms" and the two pixies.

The old bones, clad in tattered armor and brandishing rusty weapons, transformed into dangerous incandescent fireballs that exploded towards every genuine target.

The blue-beret-wearing pixie's pupils dilated, and she abruptly extended her palm into the void.

Her form turned ethereal once more, suffused with even greater emptiness and indifference, as if she had hidden herself in another realm.

Boom!

The white-hot fireball merged with her form, resulting in a powerful explosion, but it couldn't reach the distant fantasy world and harm its intended target.

The Painter, donned in red pants, had suffered a severe fall, with fractured bones and a lingering sense of dizziness. There was no time to change his condition. His only option was to attempt a rapid repositioning, employing the maximum speed a Sequence 8 could muster. Yet, just as he sprang to his feet, he was struck by a blazing white fireball.

Boom!

The Pixie was left in a gory state from the explosion. His abdomen was torn open, internal organs spilled out, and his left arm severed. Severe burn marks covered his body.

He lost consciousness, his life ebbing away.

The incandescent white fireball hurtling toward Séraphine and Gabriel suddenly veered into the wilderness, distancing itself from the indifferent and vacant human models by several hundred meters.

The farther it flew, the weaker it became. After enduring for a hundred to two hundred meters, it eventually touched the ground and exploded.

Perhaps the most dangerous factor was the woman in the white halter dress, with curly black hair and a beautiful face. She appeared soulless as multiple blazing white fireballs were aimed at her.

However, the hazardous fireballs either bypassed the raised palms of the human model or exploded prematurely in a strange manner. Some even ascended into the air and transmuted into fireworks.

It was akin to Room 7 being impervious to attack.

Not far from Séraphine, there stood a stunning woman in a bright red dress. Her eyes held a vacant quality, and her aura appeared somewhat detached.

At that moment, she watched a blazing white fireball hurtling toward her like a meteor, remaining utterly motionless.

The blazing white fireball grew fainter and smaller. Just as it was about to collide with its target, it completely extinguished and reverted to a yellowish skeleton holding a rusty spear.

The skeleton swayed a few times before disintegrating, the withering sensation becoming more pronounced.

In the café diagonally opposite, an elegant plump lady in a black dress materialized. On one hand, she seemed to have lost her vitality and appeared unusually ethereal. On the other hand, she displayed a yearning expression and gaze. She opened her mouth as the incandescent white fireball approached and raised her hands, clutching a silver knife and fork.

With a whoosh, she sliced the blazing white fireball in half.

An illusory vortex filled with fanged phantoms formed in her mouth, devouring a portion of the fireball, "neutralizing" the threat.

Boom!

Most of the fireballs lost their course and veered off, shattering the café's glass and toppling tables, chairs, and nearby outer walls.

Beside the darkness of Salle de Bal Brise, Lumian watched the old bones transform into blazing white fireballs, attacking the various "rooms" and the two pixies. He didn't wait to see the final outcome or seize an opportunity to launch a surprise attack. He grabbed Jenna's arm, kicked with his right foot, and lunged towards Salle de Bal Brise's original location, where the old bones had emerged.

Chapter 470: Three Heads, Six Arms

Lumian and Jenna plunged into the darkness, the area that should have been Salle de Bal Brise before the Hostel's "rooms" and the blue-beretted pixie could escape the entanglement of old bones.

His vision plunged into darkness before specks of spiritual light emerged ahead.

They converged like resplendent stars, turning densely packed, akin to a black velvet curtain adorned with diamonds or countless grains of sand in water.

Amidst these spiritual lights, an ancient, heavy, illusory, and mysterious door materialized in distortion.

Iron-black, its surface marred by dark-red rust, as if a large amount of blood had spilled upon it.

…

In Underground Trier, within the undetectable mine.

In his untouchable state, the Painter witnessed yellowed skeletons clamoring into the colossal oil painting on the rock wall. Iron-black and dark-red lines outlined themselves in the previously empty Salle de Bal Brise, forming a door that shouldn't exist in reality.

"It's not time yet, not time yet…" The Painter, with tassels adorning his trouser legs, stared blankly, unable to believe such a development.

Though he and his accomplices had been attempting to depict this imaginary door, they knew it was destined to fail. At most, they would complete a fifth of it before having to start anew. They persisted for the experience, anticipating that once the ritual commenced, they could draw the crucial parts swiftly.

Having already finished the main part of the Hostel oil painting, they had nothing else to do. Why not try a few more times? What if a miracle occurred?

Now, a miracle unfolded without their attempts!

The Painter gazed at the transformation before him, a mix of anticipation and shock.

He couldn't help but look up at the cave ceiling and silently mutter, Do we not need cooperation from aboveground to make the entrance appear?

Could the abnormality in the painting world be causing this?

If we don't coordinate with the surface in time, even if the entrance appears, we won't be able to bypass the seal and enter…

…

Lumian and Jenna descended as if through a dark pipe, uncontrollably approaching the void adorned with spiritual specks of light and the bloodied, rusted door.

Almost simultaneously, Lumian's left chest heated up, and terrifying ravings echoed in his ears from an infinite height and distance.

Familiar with this sensation, indicating the corruption of Inevitability in his body, Lumian knew Termiboros was up to something, and Mr. Fool's seal had been triggered.

However, unlike before, Lumian refrained from attempting to crack the seal to steal Inevitability's power. Consequently, he didn't enter a state of excruciating pain, just a bit dazed.

In his daze, Lumian saw Séraphine—Room 7—clad in a white halter dress. Other "rooms" with varied appearances and attire, yet nearly identical dispositions,

seemed to detach from the painting world and overlap with the fake Avenue du Marché.

The left chests of these "rooms" emitted a faint glow, suggesting they too had seals on them.

Lumian's head spun as a scene—whether real or fake—unfolded before him.

Séraphine and the other 12 "rooms" stepped into the void and surrounded him, invisible and hidden connections intertwining.

Jenna, arm clutched by Lumian, sensed something and turned her head.

Flesh on Lumian's left and right shoulders writhed as two illusory heads emerged.

One head looked like a ten-year-old Lumian, covered in dirt, and his eyes filled with ruthlessness. The other, nearly thirty, with blood-red hair and iron-black eyes, looked violent and crazy.

Wh— Jenna felt as if she had entered a nightmare, witnessing her companion transform into a monster.

Lumian's body expanded, gripping Jenna like a palm-sized puppet.

Behind him, illusory arms sprouted from his ribs.

Lumian didn't neglect the changes in his body. He saw his current form in Jenna's eyes.

A three-headed, six-armed giant!

It bore a striking resemblance to the monster in Cordu's ruins!

However, Lumian didn't lose his mind. He was certain The Fool's seal on his chest and Termiboros were still intact.

An illusory collision reverberated as Lumian crashed into the ancient, heavy, and mysterious door, causing it to tremble and creak. It was about to open.

At that moment, the spiritual spots on the black velvet curtain lit up, stabilizing the iron-black door stained with blood and rust.

Witnessing and experiencing this, Lumian suddenly grasped what Hostel was, why they referred to him as Room 1, and the heretics' intentions and plans.

The concept of Hostel likely emerged after the Tree of Shadow disaster.

At some point, Maipú Meyer, ostracized, established contact with other cults, informing them of Lumian's existence and state.

They imitated the situation where an evil god's Blessed was sealed within Lumian's body, creating Hostel, Rooms 2 to 13. They invited various evil gods' Blessed to take up residence, establishing a mystical connection among them based on this systematic similarity.

When Lumian entered the painting world, actions taken on the other "rooms" of Hostel were equivalent to acts on Lumian.

When the Hostel took shape and all the "rooms" were pieced together, Lumian couldn't help but be affected.

Since the "rooms" displayed the levels of their residents, Lumian underwent a corresponding change.

The resident within him was an Angel, Termiboros!

After the mysticism-based Hostel ritual, Lumian, lacking the strength of an Angel or a true Mythical Creature form, had briefly attained the level of an Angel!

This explained why Voisin Sanson and company didn't leave the room and attacked Lumian directly.

Termiboros was sealed, so they naturally wanted Him too. They had to maintain this state until the ritual ended!

Of course, the heretics weren't kind enough to help Lumian experience the state of an Inevitability Angel. Their goal was to use this opportunity to enter Fourth Epoch Trier.

Opening the door using an Angel's level!

Hence, the Hostel had to align with some areas of the market district and exhibit environmental similarities.

Lumian speculated that the Salle de Bal Brise's underground corresponded to a weak spot in the seal. In the past, there had even been problems. Many old bones, guided by Alista Tudor's aura, had crawled out. The corruption leaked, affecting 13 Avenue du Marché.

This made Lumian wonder if his arrival in the market district and his stay at Auberge du Coq Doré had something to do with the attraction the underground area had on Hunters.

Due to this crucial information, the Salle de Bal Brise in the painting world remained blank and dark. The streets surrounding it and the people who often appeared nearby were replicated in appearance.

When the corresponding ritual truly commenced, the surface's market district and the underground market district would likely undergo a switch. Reality would become a fabrication, and fabrication would become reality, revealing or outlining the seal corresponding to Salle de Bal Brise, weakening it to the extreme.

When the time came, Lumian, an Angel, could "open" the door to Fourth Epoch Trier!

Maipú Meyer's return to the market district aimed to harness his Actor abilities, acting as different individuals. He would enter various houses and assist Pixies in grasping the specifics of these streets to complete the massive painting of Hostel.

Worried that Lumian, Franca, and others would notice in advance, he avoided their rooms, lacking sufficient knowledge.

Looking at the mysterious door beneath him, Lumian tried to distance himself, but he couldn't break free. It was as if a huge magnet was sucking him—now an Angel—behind the door, causing him to involuntarily squeeze inside.

Thanks to countless spots of spirituality in the surrounding darkness, the ancient door, stained with blood and rust, didn't open.

Lumian sensed that this was because the Hostel ritual hadn't fully commenced.

He and Jenna had barged into the painting world ahead of time, disrupting the heretics' arrangements!

Now, if the Hostel ritual was to be completed and the surface and underground switched, there were at least two key points that couldn't be matched.

Firstly, the subterranean seal, which could only be released by destroying Trier and eliminating most of the people here, now had the switch between reality and fabrication, a temporary acquisition of an angelic level, and the discovery of weakness in the seal; thus, the requirement could be significantly reduced. However, lowering the requirement further would necessitate a riot bringing chaos to the surface Trier.

Secondly, it was afternoon in the painting world, and the Sun was only westering. The sky was still bright, but in reality, it was the middle of the night. The moonlight was dim, and the darkness was dense.

…

Avenue du Marché, market district.

In a double-breasted brown coat, Angoulême de François noted the secret of Église Saint-Robert's old cemetery on paper, placing it in the safe house provided by Hidden Blade, hoping she would discover it in time.

The Purifier deacon guided his robot toward Imre and Valentine, who awaited near Salle de Bal Brise.

At that moment, the rumbling salvos reached his ears.

Instinctively, he turned his head to see Trier's sky illuminated by flames.

An army rebellion? Angoulême furrowed his brow.

Now, most Purifiers from the dioceses were dispersed to quell strikes, marches, and protests after daybreak.

Unexpectedly, trouble arose in the military camp!

Was news of the massive strike deliberately sent to us, forcing a dispersion of forces and making it impossible for us to organize manpower to resolve the problem in a short period of time? A conspiracy by the Iron and Blood Cross Order? Angoulême instantly had a suspicion.

…

In Quartier Éraste, a wilderness emerged from the Sacred Heart Cloister that had been thrown into turbulence and darkness.

Lady Moon's voice resonated, her smile evident as she addressed Magician and Justice,"You might not have guessed who's sheltering us this time…"

Before she could finish, the sound of a baby crying echoed.

"Waaa!"

The baby's cries were vibrant, bringing forth endless golden sunlight.

The entire Sacred Heart Cloister transformed into a blazing sun, piercing through the turbulent storm and distorting space.

In the real Trier, the still-sleeping citizens were jolted awake by the sunlight.

In Apartment 601, Franca and Anthony Reid instinctively looked up at the suddenly bright sky.

A dazzling golden sun hung in the sky, positioned to the west.

Chapter 471: Topsy-Turvy

Angoulême, racing towards Église Saint-Robert with Imre and Valentine to gather more intel and receive the latest orders, suddenly found himself blinded by sunlight. It was as though he had been shrouded in darkness for too long, struggling to adapt to the sudden brightness.

After a few moments, he and his teammates gazed skyward.

In Trier, where it had been late at night, the scene had transformed into a sunny afternoon!

Feeling the warmth of the sun, Angoulême couldn't shake off the chill crawling down his spine. He sensed that the problem had escalated dramatically, and a catastrophe loomed on the horizon.

In the blink of an eye, a series of explosions echoed from the Rist Docks, Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman, Suhit's steam locomotive station, and the nearby depot and warehouses.

Thunderous rumbles echoed through the air. Even from a distance, Angoulême and his comrades witnessed the crimson flames and burning structures. Gunshots, salvos, and shouts pierced through the chaos.

The entire market district plunged into anarchy.

Is Quartier Éraste's military rebellion thinning Trier's Beyonder forces to support the insurrection in the market district? This can't be the same group responsible for the earlier docks and factory strikes at dawn… What is happening? Angoulême's expression hardened as he changed course, hastening towards the epicenter of the most intense explosions.

Imre and Valentine followed closely behind.

…

In Salle de Bal Brise, the café on the second floor,

Gardner Martin donned his silver-white full-body armor and positioned himself by the window. A smirk played on his lips as he observed Angoulême de François and his team departing the area.

The leader of the Savoie Mob could already envision the chaos unfolding at the Rist Docks, Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman, and other key locations.

Without reservation, he unveiled the hidden might of the Iron and Blood Cross Order in the market district, aiming to sow maximum chaos in the shortest time possible.

Whether it was "Blood Palm" Black overseeing Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman, Vincent Lorraine at the Rist Docks, Parsifal managing the depot, or Faustino, the infiltrator at Suhit's steam locomotive station, each was leading a team in acts of arson, detonating explosives, and unleashing indiscriminate destruction and carnage.

"Fortunately, we were well-prepared. Even if we had to expedite our plans, we can still complete the corresponding ritual," Gardner Martin remarked to Supervisor Olson, standing not far behind him.

Olson, resembling a starving bear, clutched his small brown suitcase, his voice indifferent as he inquired, "You didn't eliminate the Demoness?"

Gardner Martin grinned.

"No need to waste effort on such a foolish Demoness. She poses no real threat. Moreover, taking her down would be time-consuming, and you're aware of their formidable survivability. It might cause us to miss the crucial moment.

"As for the others causing trouble, I dispatched Albus to the military camp in Quartier Éraste. Lumian…"

At the mention of Lumian, Gardner Martin's smile broadened.

He lifted the visor of his helmet, peering out the window once more.

Under the brilliant sunlight, the flames of Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman painted the sky crimson. Shouts, cries, gunshots, and explosions reverberated through the air.

Gardner Martin tilted his chin upward, closed his eyes, and contentedly awaited the unfolding climax of the play.

The ritual was on the brink of completion.

…

In the painting world, the westering sun in the sky assumed a heightened realism, its glow merging with the faint shadow in an uncanny dance.

Similar transformations unfolded across every structure. Vendors and pedestrians on the streets ceased to be lifeless figures, now frantically darting about in pandemonium, desperately seeking refuge.

The subterranean market district and its surface counterpart gradually transitioned into tangible existence. One was now bathed in flames like an oil painting, and the two began to mirror each other, interweaving as "projections" in the spirit world.

Suddenly, like illusory objects flipping upside down, the painted market district emerged on the surface, severing its complete seal with the rest of Trier. The authentic market district had transformed into a mural within the cave, linked to the underground.

In the actual Trier, Salle de Bal Brise existed in darkness, mitigating the effects of the seal.

Within that darkness, the three-headed, six-armed giant, Lumian, adhered to the enigmatic door. With a resonant creak, it slowly swung open, stained with blood and red rust, revealing a crevice seemingly ablaze with invisible flames.

Rumble!

Trier shuddered in its entirety, and the sunlit sky descended into a twilight adorned with fiery clouds.

…

Quartier Éraste, Red Swan Castle.

Count Poufer, roused from his slumber, snapped awake in the midst of a dream.

Blood-stained sunlight filtered through the thick curtains, accompanied by cruel and frenzied screams.

The beige castle, adorned with ancient bloodstains, trembled violently, as if a colossal entity beneath the ground clung to its foundations.

Poufer felt a summoning and a magnetic pull from the depths of his soul. Excitement painted his expression as he hastily vacated his bed and dashed out of the bedroom.

In his frantic haste, he disregarded slippers and eschewed a change from his dark-red cotton robe. Barefoot, he sprinted down the corridor, the hem of his robe swinging behind him.

How many nights had he yearned for this awakening?

It signified the long-awaited recognition from the remnant spirit of his ancestor, the fulfillment of the prophecy by the mysterious leader of the Secret Order, and the dawn of hope for the Sauron family to reclaim their strength. It meant the end of the curse that haunted the other Saurons and the promise of rebirth!

Count Poufer understood the potential consequences for himself, but he faced the situation without flinching or hesitation.

Hadn't every member of the Sauron family, choosing to reside in Red Swan Castle and not relocating after reaching adulthood, been mentally prepared for this moment?

To become the vessel for their ancestor's resurrection, to merge with Him, was an honor for every Sauron family member!

Descending the stairs, Count Poufer entered the underground maze.

In the darkness behind him, a figure emerged from the vicinity adjacent to the stairs.

It was Elros, donned in beige hunting attire with her long auburn hair tied into a ponytail.

The girl, bearing both the Sauron and Einhorn bloodlines, followed her cousin at a steady pace, her presence silent yet profound.

…

In Apartment 601, 3 Rue des Blouses Blanches, in the market district.

Franca and Anthony Reid found themselves momentarily bewildered as they witnessed the sun appearing and hanging low in the west.

It's past 2 a.m. What sun could there be?

What was going on?

Why was this strange phenomenon happening?

Their thoughts were abruptly shattered by the reverberations of explosions and gunshots in the market district. Anthony visibly trembled, instinctively attempting to dodge the unforeseen onslaught.

Fortunately, having chosen to remain in Trier earlier, he managed to regain control more effectively than in past episodes.

A shared glance exchanged between Franca and Anthony revealed surprise, confusion, and underlying worry.

"Has the catastrophe struck?" Anthony Reid queried in a deep, resonant voice.

Franca, brow furrowed, mused, "But according to Bouvard's corpse's prophecy, the catastrophe was accompanied by rain and water, and now…"

Before she could complete her sentence, her spirituality alerted her to something outside the window.

An unmistakable phantom materialized in the building opposite, the two figures overlapping and swiftly parting ways.

Simultaneously, a wave of dizziness enveloped Franca, as if she had plunged weightlessly and failed to utilize an Assassin's Feather Fall.

Anthony Reid experienced a similar sensation. He spoke solemnly,

"Indiscriminately affecting everyone?

"The effect of a ritual?"

A ritual to trigger the catastrophe?

Just as Franca considered suggesting leaving the apartment to approach The Fool's cathedral at the Lavigny Docks for a clearer understanding, her attention was drawn to the abrupt changes in two items tucked within her hidden pockets.

She quickly made a judgment based on the locations they were located.

One was the palm-sized Primordial Demoness figurine, which, even through clothing, exuded an abnormal coldness.

The other was the ancient silver mirror from the underground, an object connected to a peculiar mirror world. It trembled subtly, as if stirred or resonating with the current environment and nearby objects.

Wh— Franca's eyes narrowed.

Coupled with the simultaneous movements of the two items, she suspected the presence of a high-level Beyonder of the Demoness pathway nearby!

…

In the Sacred Heart cloister, now transformed into a sun, the continuous cries of an infant filled the air.

The cries unsettled Madam Magician with a starlit visage, causing a multitude of door-shaped insects to crawl in and out. Miss Justice, her skin covered in grayish-white scales, was compelled to Placate herself.

The piercing sunlight forced the two Major Arcana card holders to instinctively shut their eyes. Before them, voids intersected, and layers of starlight blocked the spreading flames "into the distance."

They recognized the incoming force all too well.

It was the divine power of the Eternal Blazing Sun!

Although this true god hadn't physically descended from the spirit world into reality, Lady Moon, who had nurtured a deity, and the newborn baby she held, indirectly channeled some of His strength.

The power of a god!

Magician and Justice, though struggling to endure, remained composed. They knew they weren't alone.

Upon discovering Lady Moon's hideout in the Sacred Heart Cloister, they had anticipated the worst-case scenario.

…

On the Blue Avenger at the Lavigny Docks, The Hanged Man Alger, adorned in a sailor's attire with dark-blue hair, positioned himself at the bow of the ship. Witnessing the sudden brightening of the sky and the sun hanging low in the west, a mix of worry and excitement washed over him. Swiftly, he retrieved an item from his possession.

It was a card featuring Emperor Roselle with raised hands and a papal tiara adorning his head. Behind him, the depiction showcased lightning, violent winds, and tumultuous waves.

The Tyrant card!

One of the Cards of Blasphemy crafted by Emperor Roselle.

The Hanged Man Alger had made a special trip to Trier, abstaining from involvement in operations elsewhere, anticipating the worst calamity!

Through prior communication, pre-installed imprints, and adept prayers, as a Saint of the Sailor pathway, he possessed the ability to employ the Tyrant card. This allowed him to temporarily harness someone's power, enabling resistance against the sun in the sky without jeopardizing the stability of the astral world.

Whoosh!

As Alger bowed his head in prayer, the Tyrant card illuminated, causing Trier's sky to darken. Countless water droplets descended to the ground beneath the sunlight.

Rain, a deluge of torrential rain.

Chapter 472: Weather

Chapter 472 Weather

In the midst of the torrential rain, The Hanged Man Alger concluded his prayer.

His body involuntarily straightened, and his head snapped up.

The Tyrant card in his hand suddenly thickened and brightened, transforming into a luminous book.

The pages of the book rapidly flipped, revealing various forms of Emperor Roselle. He alternated between the attire of a Sailor, sporting a nautical hat, and singing with head held high amidst the waves…

The scene settled on the Emperor donned in a papal tiara and a pontiff's robe.

His interaction with the dim sky summoned a colossal bolt of lightning, piercing through the clouds.

Rumble!

Amidst the thunderclaps, the illusory figure of Emperor Roselle merged with The Hanged Man Alger.

His demeanor abruptly became dignified, and the Srenzo River around the Blue Avenger instantaneously calmed, resembling a windless lake.

"Adorning" the papal tiara and "draping" the pontiff's robe, The Hanged Man Alger conjured a silver staff condensed from lightning.

Stepping forward, he ascended into the sky, surrounded by the wind.

Rumble!

Above Trier, thunder roared, and a visible hurricane swept up myriad dark clouds, forming a colossal, dark, and ominous vortex.

Within the vortex, dense bolts of lightning of various hues intertwined, extending out to shroud the blazing sun in the west.

Whoosh!

The rain, like an opened faucet, cascaded into every nook of Trier, creating a misty fog that enveloped everything.

In the blink of an eye, a layer of water covered the ground, illuminated by both sunlight and lightning.

The citizens, roused by the morning sunlight, now felt an impending apocalypse as they stared at the pitch-black backdrop untouched by the blazing sunlight and snake-like lightning.

…

In the profound darkness corresponding to Salle de Bal Brise, Lumian, a colossal giant standing over ten meters tall with two additional illusory heads and four exaggerated arms, witnessed the mysterious door to which he was attached slowly creaking open with a weighty grinding sound. Gradually, a crack emerged, and within the fissure, formless flames flickered.

This time, less than a tenth of the nearby spiritual light spots remained. The various mystical symbols and connections had either dissipated or weakened to an extreme degree.

The iron-black door, tainted with blood and rust, finally broke free from its constraints, and the crack became more pronounced.

Before the collision of torrential rain, lightning, and the sun, the formless flames behind the door retreated silently, unveiling an endless path with no discernible end.

Holding Jenna tightly, Lumian couldn't resist the ominous pull and descended through the door.

His left chest glowed, and, along with the entire Hostel and the other twelve rooms, they were on the verge of passing through the mysterious door.

…

In the real market district, on the second floor of Salle de Bal Brise.

As reality and fiction switched, Gardner Martin, Supervisor Olson, and the members of the Iron and Blood Cross Order, who hadn't gone to set fire to Rist Docks and other locations, seamlessly transitioned into the painting world.

They remained on the ground, beside the deep darkness that represented Salle de Bal Brise. This was thanks to a figure who had silently materialized behind them.

Behind Supervisor Olson stood a man in formal attire, sans a bow tie. Aged between his thirties and forties, he possessed a high nose bridge, deep-set eyes, and light-blue irises. His slightly curled brown hair framed an unusually stiff countenance, his eyes reflecting open disdain and arrogance.

Behind Gardner Martin stood an old man with meticulously combed dark-red hair, clad in a blue military suit adorned with a sash and medals.

Though wrinkles marked the old man's face, his dark eyes emanated sharpness capable of toppling houses and uprooting the earth wherever they landed.

They were the president and the most powerful vice president of the Iron and Blood Cross Order. Under their guardianship, Gardner Martin and

Olson remained unaffected by the heretics' ritual, refraining from entering the painting world.

As for the other upper echelons of the Iron and Blood Cross Order, they wreaked havoc in various parts of Trier, diverting the attention of official Beyonders.

Observing the dark depths of Salle de Bal Brise morph into a pair of blood-stained iron-black doors, the four members of the Iron and Blood Cross Order entered without hesitation, as if they had executed the maneuver countless times before.

…

In the deepest depths of Red Swan Castle, within the hall located in the underground maze.

Count Poufer, clad in a robe and barefoot, had already arrived. By the glow of white candles, he fixated on the rusty bronze coffin.

The coffin's lid shifted, unveiling illusory purple flames that filled the interior.

These flames merged with the iron-black ring embedded in the ground, beneath the bronze coffin. They blended with the viscous blood and withered hearts within the ring, forming an entrance—a deep entrance tainted with blood and rust.

Through this entrance emanated a lofty, bloody, and frenzied aura from the underground.

Count Poufer trembled under the influence of the aura, yet his eyes burned with fanaticism and fearlessness.

This was his first proximity to the ancestor's mind!

A twisted smile adorned Poufer's face as he strode forward, passing through the peripheral glow of candlelight and approaching the anomalous bronze coffin.

In the entire world, only the Sauron family members with the corresponding talents who had bided their time in Red Swan Castle, the mysterious leader of the Secret Order, and the long-dead Emperor Roselle knew that beneath Red Swan Castle lay another breached seal of Fourth Epoch Trier.

The repairs had been completed using the hearts of generations of important Sauron family members as a seal, yet the problem proved irreversible.

Vermonda Champagne Sauron, who once dominated the Sauron family, had gone mad and entered the upper levels of Fourth Epoch Trier!

His frenzied spirit lingered at the seal, inextinguishable. His anguished roars echoed, affecting everyone in Red Swan Castle and those of the same bloodline.

Now, it was time to put an end to the curse that had caused the Sauron family's decline and trapped the Saurons in nightmares!

Count Poufer felt a potent sense of mission and honor. With the conviction that he would die here, he laughed maniacally, pressed his hand to the edge of the bronze coffin, and lay down.

His figure plummeted into the deep entrance stained with blood and rust.

As Count Poufer vanished into the bronze coffin, Elros Einhorn, in a beige hunting suit with a ponytail, entered the hall.

Her gaze swept over the white candles and the bronze coffin, scrutinizing the changes in the seal. She then cut her finger, dripping three drops of bright red blood on the ground.

Lowering her head, she recited solemnly, "The embodiment of Iron and Blood, the symbol of the Calamity of War, the Priest who controls the weather, the great Snarner Einhorn…"

After finishing the incantation, the blood on the ground boiled, expanding into a blood-colored lake before condensing into a figure clad in iron-black, blood-stained armor.

Standing over 1.8 meters tall, with long dark-red hair and flamboyant golden earrings, the figure exuded androgynous, handsome features.

Darkened brown eyes fixed on Elros as the figure nodded gently and spoke,"Well done. In the previous war, the family lost its most important object. We must seize every opportunity to make up for our losses, even if it's just a portion."

With that, Snarner Einhorn entered the deep entrance of the bronze coffin.

Elros's eyes flickered as she observed the scene.

Finally, she sighed and said, "Regardless, the Sauron family's curse will end…"

…

In Apartment 601, 3 Rue des Blouses Blanches.

Franca, with a mixture of surprise and concern, took out the Primordial Demoness's bone figurine and the ancient silver mirror she had obtained from underground.

Uncertain about the significance of the abnormality in these two items, she decided to place them at a distance. Her plan was to wait and observe subsequent changes before deciding on the next course of action.

At that precise moment, the classic silver mirror unexpectedly reflected the Primordial Demoness figurine, even though it wasn't in its line of sight. This occurrence triggered a seismic disturbance throughout Rue des Blouses Blanches.

Dark light surged from the mirror, enveloping Franca and Anthony Reid before they could employ any abilities.

As the darkness subsided, only the coffee table, sofa, and various furnishings remained in Apartment 601.

Adjacent to the mural depicting a segment of the market district, behind the ecstatic Painter, an ancient silver mirror detached from the painting world and gently descended into the shadows. Gradually sinking deeper and deeper, it swiftly vanished.

…

Amidst the indescribable heat and the swirling world, Lumian and Jenna landed on a ground covered in pale-black stone bricks.

Their eyes were met with the sight of a magnificent city in the distance, featuring asymmetrical black buildings and vibrant red houses.

A thin fog intermittently shrouded the city, giving it the appearance of a mirage, the kind occasionally encountered by pirates and sailors.

In the wilderness beyond the city, dark clouds gathered, lightning flashed, thunder rumbled, and rain poured. A colossal figure, dozens of meters tall, stood surrounded by these natural phenomena, barely visible and indistinguishable.

"He" lingered outside the city, enveloped in smoke, flames, hail, lightning, torrential rain, and violent winds, as if perpetual.

Is this Fourth Epoch Trier? Lumian speculated, though uncertainty lingered. This wasn't quite what he had expected.

Jenna subconsciously turned to look at him and noticed that he had reverted to his original appearance, no longer abnormally huge. He no longer possessed three heads and six arms.

Chapter 473: Weakening of Corruption

Chapter 473 Weakening of Corruption

"You've recovered," Jenna whispered to Lumian.

She refrained from speaking loudly, fearing that it might agitate her companion and trigger the same mutation again. Plus, there was the concern of attracting the ominous giant's attention, shrouded in smoke and rain that made it elusive.

Lumian locked eyes with Jenna and realized from the reflection that he was back to normal.

Subconsciously, he responded, "This means the Hostel ritual, conducted by the heretics using me as a template, has ended…"

Suddenly alert, Lumian scanned the area.

With the Hostel ritual concluded, he anticipated the arrival of the evil gods' bestowed from the other twelve rooms.

His gaze focused on an unusual area adorned with pale-black stone bricks, dominating the scenery.

It sprawled out, filling Lumian's field of view, except for where it stopped short of the distant grand city and the colossal figure amidst the turbulent weather.

Stretching across his vision, grayish-white stone pillars loomed every 20 to 30 meters, some standing tall and others succumbing to collapse. These pillars, broad enough to span the reach of three to four people, obstructed Lumian's and Jenna's view beyond.

The sky above, supported by these stone sentinels, took on an odd translucency, as though an unseen fire silently raged, invisible to the naked eye.

The resulting glow cast an eerie brightness, akin to dusk on a war-torn battlefield. Lumian, lacking Dark Vision, could perceive his surroundings clearly without conjuring a crimson fireball.

He didn't notice Madame Pualis and the other bestowed of evil gods.

"Did the residents of the Hostel not enter, or are they scattered in various places, arriving at random locations?" he mused aloud.

Unfazed, he redirected his focus, hoping Jenna possessed the pertinent information.

Though Jenna grappled with the concept of "random," she grasped Lumian's intent.

Without delving deeper into that mystery, she pivoted to the more pressing concern.

"What should we do now?"

At the same time, Jenna made a connection.

The Hostel was created using Ciel as a template… Based on the mystical knowledge involved in a Demoness's curse, could Ciel harbor an evil god's bestowed within him? Uh… He seemed to have mentioned before that he had Mr. Fool's seal on him, and the one sealed is an evil god's bestowed? The transformation was actually similar to the effects of a curse, but due to the seal, there were no serious consequences?

What do we do? Lumian assessed the chaotic scene before him: a colossal, blurry giant amid smoke, rain, lightning, and flames. He chuckled, "Our move now is to put some distance between us and that giant."

"We'll head in the opposite direction of the city, find a secure hiding spot, and observe the unfolding events. Our goal is to locate an exit swiftly."

Despite feeling an unusual pull towards the giant and the city, Lumian managed to resist. He was no longer under the intense attraction that had gripped him before—now that he lacked an angelic level. Rationality prevailed as he carefully considered the risks and benefits.

The giant, undoubtedly godlike in nature, seemed to be in a state of madness. Lumian, a Sequence 6 Conspirer, couldn't afford to approach it casually. Just a glance could make him lose control!

The city, possibly Fourth Epoch Trier, held its own dangers—one that caused even demigods to perish within—with potential undead creatures and corruption like the old bones. Lumian had The Fool's seal and the aura of Blood Emperor Alista Tudor, but he couldn't feel as relaxed, carefree, or fearless as returning to Cordu before the corruption.

If he had entered the Fourth Epoch's Trier with such intentions, he might have turned into an irrational, perpetually lingering monster sealed with an angel in the blink of an eye.

With that, Lumian turned and sprinted in the opposite direction of the giant's figure in the ever-changing weather, away from the magnificent city.

He needed to put some distance between himself and the looming threat. Nobody could predict if the massive creature would make any noise!

The unrestrained voices of high-level Beyonders posed a grave danger to Mid-Sequence Beyonders.

Jenna put her trust in the seasoned Ciel and followed him with grace. They maneuvered past the grayish-white stone pillars, some standing tall while others lay in ruins, pushing further into the area paved with light-black stone bricks.

As Lumian sprinted, a slight frown creased his forehead.

He could feel a significant drain on his spirituality after the intense battle in the painting world and multiple Spirit World Traversals. If another mishap occurred, he questioned how long he could endure.

I need to find a way to replenish my spirituality… In reality, it's midnight. Should I lay low until 6 a.m.? Lumian contemplated as he dashed forward.

…

In the fake market district on the surface, torrential rain cascaded upon Séraphine and the other "rooms."

They stood on the street across from Salle de Bal Brise, their chests radiating with various hues.

One by one, figures materialized, piercing through the void and descending into the profound darkness. They entered the iron-black door tainted with blood and rust within the depths of the shadows.

Séraphine gazed at the surreal scene, her vacant eyes and rigid expression suddenly overtaken by sorrow. Rainwater drenched her long brown hair.

Beside her, Gabriel's face beamed with joy as he spoke in an otherworldly tone, "Is it over? Can we be together forever?"

Séraphine's rain-soaked face twisted. She instructed Gabriel, "Leave this place and stay away from me!"

"Why?" Gabriel questioned, perplexed.

Séraphine's role as a Hostel Room had been fulfilled. There shouldn't be anything else, right?

The monster could resume its normal life.

Séraphine uttered in pain, "With the tenants gone, the Hostel's rooms no longer hold any value…"

Before she could finish, a pair of transparent dragonfly-like wings sprouted from her back, etched with open, cold eyes.

Silently, Séraphine's form disintegrated. The wet lake-blue dress lost its support and plummeted to the ground. Adorned with writhing flesh and blood, each piece bore dragonfly-like, dreamy wings and eye-like patterns.

Séraphine's head remained relatively intact. Surrounded by blood dragonflies, a few wheat ears and mushrooms sprouted from her face. Raindrops struck her face and slid.

She opened her mouth, as if leading to another world, and her voice turned shrill.

"We're not bestowed, but the work of pixies!

"Go!"

Gabriel stared vacantly at Séraphine, a composition of blood dragonflies and a head. An indescribable sorrow etched across his empty, cold face.

In the midst of the pouring rain and sunlight, he instinctively took a few steps in the opposite direction before halting.

The playwright turned, retracing his steps toward Séraphine.

A gentle smile curled on the corners of his mouth.

"I'd forgotten. I'm already a monster. Where can I go?

"I'm grateful you let me run on my own in the end."

As Gabriel spoke, he bent down, allowing his knees to touch the ground and the puddles.

His arms enveloped the countless blood dragonflies and Séraphine's struggling head, and he planted a deep kiss on the lips adorned with wheat ears and mushrooms.

Thud! Thud! Thud! The blood dragonflies sliced through his flesh with their wings, burrowing into his body, draining his life force.

He persisted in the kiss.

Raindrops pelted them.

Before long, translucent and dreamy wings emerged from Gabriel's back, stained with blood.

Amidst the spine-chilling gnawing sounds, Gabriel's body collapsed and melted, likewise for Séraphine's head.

In the midst of the ensuing blood, strange-shaped dragonflies with translucent wings, resembling meatballs, soared into the air, resembling bright fireworks in a storm.

Suddenly, blazing sunlight descended, engulfing the area and the abnormal bodies.

Not far away, Angoulême, Valentine, and Imre spread their arms in unison.

Upon returning to église Saint-Robert, they remained unaffected by the ritual, no longer within the world of the painting. They stayed grounded, and once the situation stabilized, they made their way to Salle de Bal Brise.

…

Quartier éraste, Sacred Heart Cloister.

Storms and lightning veiled the golden sun, but for now, they couldn't thwart the sunlight from piercing through.

This caused the entrance to Salle de Bal Brise to blur and tremble, yet it persisted. The painting world that had swapped with the surface gradually became ethereal, drawing nearer to returning to the rock wall.

After Magician and Justice escaped the onslaught of sunlight, they realized they had lost Lady Moon's trail.

The former's eyes sparkled with resplendent stars.

Soon, she "saw" Lady Moon's silhouette.

The evil god's Blessed didn't conceal herself as she forcefully entered the unstable darkness and the mysterious, illusory iron-colored door.

With a flash of starlight, the Major Arcana card holders, Magician and Justice, arrived outside Salle de Bal Brise.

The two hesitated, uncertain whether to pursue her.

At that moment, Justice softly exclaimed, "I feel that the underground's allure and beckoning towards me have weakened…"

Their hesitance stemmed from the fact that delving deep underground into Fourth Epoch Trier would subject them to immense and abnormally terrifying corruption for demigods.

The heretics didn't mind. Essentially, they had gone mad. At most, their madness would be more intricate and thorough, but they had no choice but to consider this issue.

"The corruption has weakened?" Magician was surprised.

As far as she knew, only two individuals could cause this phenomenon:

One was Mr. Fool or The Celestial Worthy of Heaven and Earth for Blessings. By temporarily bolstering the seal's power, They could curb the various corruptions in Fourth Epoch Trier and diminish them.

The other was the deity who had gained a rudimentary grasp of the greatest abnormality underground: "The Lord that created everything, the omnipotent and omniscient God, the Lord who reigns behind the curtain of shadows, the ruler of the mind world, and the degenerated nature of all living things."

Chapter 474: Encounter

Justice, adorned in a simple yet elegant dress, turned her head to glance at Magician, discerning her thoughts.

The woman nodded slightly and uttered, "It would have been abnormal if He hadn't intervened in this incident. You, too, know what He wants most."

Magician didn't hesitate. With a sigh and a chuckle, she stepped into the faltering darkness.

Justice followed closely behind.

As they vanished, sunlight flooded the sky from Saint Viève Cathedral on Trier's island area, coalescing into a miniature sun.

The sun's rays pierced the darkness of Salle de Bal Brise, illuminating a translucent woman in a white robe adorned with golden threads. She possessed a captivating beauty and emitted a holy aura, as if impervious to the touch of dust.

Trier's guardian angel paid no heed to the Sacred Heart Cloister as she passed through the illusory door with a crack.

Simultaneously, a whistle resonated from the patriarchal cathedral of the God of Steam and Machinery to the north of Trier.

As if part of a ritual, it emitted an iron-black chimney, serving as the building's spire.

A substantial amount of pale-white fog billowed into the air, contorting and writhing to take on a discernible form.

The figure that materialized was tall and handsome, with long chestnut hair. Cloaked in a monk-like gray robe and a white apron,

He was Saint Bornova, recently assigned to the Church of the God of Steam and Machinery in Trier.

Unlike Saint Viève, the Angel didn't enter the seal; instead, He hovered in the air, vigilant against potential mishaps, including an attack from the Rose School of Thought's Abomination.

At that moment, a colossal hurricane erupted, enshrouding the golden sun above the Sacred Heart Cloister in dark clouds, lightning, and torrential rain.

With the advent of this apocalyptic phenomenon, the already unstable effects of the ritual, disrupted by various interferences, could no longer be sustained. The figures in the paintings lingering on the ground and the illusory illusions of surrounding buildings became instantly recognizable as fake.

This virtual reality-like scene seamlessly overlapped with the tangible market district once more.

Just as the surface and the underground were on the brink of switching, a figure materialized abruptly in front of the mirror-like darkness of Salle de Bal Brise.

This figure sported straight eyebrows and blue eyes, along with long chestnut hair cascading to the waist. Adorned in a white shirt with ribbons and flowers, a brown captain's coat with intricate patterns, beige pants, and dark brown leather boots, the ensemble exuded an eclectic charm.

In her left hand, she gripped a golden item engraved with mysterious patterns, resembling a miniature lamp.

Silently, the wick extending from the lamp's mouth spontaneously ignited, emitting a viscous, aqueous golden light.

Within the luminous glow, a distorted and indistinct pale-gold figure materialized. In a dignified and majestic voice, it conveyed,

"To resolve your father's problem, we can only allow Him to accept another corruption at the same level—one more compatible with Him—forming a certain balance…"

The woman holding the peculiar lamp scrutinized the pale-golden figure deeply before her body suddenly turned ethereal, disintegrating into countless symbols and words. Like a torrent, she surged through the iron-black door and the completely collapsed darkness.

…

Franca and Anthony Reid, emerging from the dark light, regained their vision to find themselves in a dimly lit mine.

A feeble light seeped into the mine from a distance, offering limited visibility.

Damn it, did I enter that special mirror world again? Did the anomaly in the market district cause the Primordial Demoness's figurine to resonate with the ancient mirror, triggering a chain reaction? Franca cursed inwardly.

What is this called? When it rains, it pours!

As a Spectator, Anthony Reid's immediate response upon confirming his condition was to observe his surroundings.

He noted that the mine wasn't overly expansive, with no other tunnels branching off. There was only one path ahead, leading toward the faint light.

Franca, in that moment, realized that this place differed from her previous visits. It felt like she had reached the end of a particular dead end. Granted, she and Lumian had never thoroughly explored this special mirror world, making it normal for them to be unfamiliar with uncharted areas.

"Where are we?" Anthony Reid inquired of Franca, who clearly held some knowledge, when he saw a figure emerge from a crevice in the rock wall beside him.

The figure curled up and hugged him, trembling.

The figure, dressed in military-green attire and sporting a light-yellow crew cut, was Anthony Reid himself!

As if sensing Anthony's gaze, the figure turned his head, his dark brown eyes filled with resentment and malice.

Unfazed, Franca sighed with familiarity. "Your mirror version isn't too aggressive."

The trembling Anthony Reid vanished.

Franca averted her gaze and briefly elucidated their location and the means of departure.

Upon checking her belongings, she realized that only the ancient silver mirror was missing. The Primordial Demoness's bone figurine remained securely in her possession.

Franca concluded, "The problem now is that the path out is guarded by a powerful monster. I relied on Ciel's uniqueness to divert it last time. I don't know what to do now.

"Let's find another exit first. Yes, we have to hurry. Staying in this mirror world for too long will cause problems."

"Alright." Anthony Reid, lacking experience in this area, chose to heed Franca's suggestion.

The two of them paid no mind to the faces lurking in the darkness on either side. They swiftly moved forward and entered the only tunnel.

As they progressed, the illumination increased, and visibility improved.

After walking for a while, Franca and Anthony Reid halted at a suspected exit.

It resembled a cave, sealed by pure light.

After exchanging glances, Franca initiated the use of Magic Mirror Divination and other methods to confirm the authenticity and danger of the exit.

However, she received no response.

"Phew…" Franca exhaled and said to Anthony Reid, "Let's give it a try. If it's not right, we'll retreat. There's no other way."

"Okay." Anthony Reid nodded and placed his hand on the door of light alongside Franca.

Their figures passed through.

…

Lumian and Jenna sprinted between towering, collapsed grayish-white stone pillars until they reached the edge of the area covered in pale-black stone bricks.

However, what awaited them was still the pitch-black and blood-red city, with the giant figure shrouded in violent winds, lightning, heavy rain, smoke, and flames.

The only change was their perspective, now positioned on the side instead of facing the giant and the turbulent weather.

Confused, Jenna muttered, "We were running in the opposite direction. Why did we circle back?"

Lumian glanced back and explained, "As a Hunter, it's unlikely for me to get lost. The current situation suggests that there's a problem with the directions of this space. Perhaps, no matter where we run, we'll eventually return to this vicinity."

Fortunately, the distance between them and the giant figure had barely increased, estimated to be two to three thousand meters.

Upon hearing Lumian's explanation, Jenna cast her gaze forward.

Beyond the pale-black stone bricks, in the wilderness connected to the majestic city, mirror fragments were scattered. They weren't large, but there were thousands of them.

Lumian surveyed the scene, contemplating an alternative plan.

A sudden realization struck him—a swift method to rapidly restore his spirituality.

In a space effective at weakening the influence of an evil god, he could execute a ritual, siphon the boon, and ascend to Sequence 6 Ascetic of the Inevitability pathway!

By destabilizing various states, the ritual would promptly restore and amplify Lumian's spirituality.

In essence, he could exchange the stability of his current state for the enhancement and replenishment of his spirituality.

Before initiating the ritual, Lumian needed to ascertain one crucial detail.

Would this place render Mr. Fool incapable of observation?

If that were the case, Termiboros might exploit the ritual to escape with the unintelligent seal itself. After all, the core of the ritual involved breaking the seal and drawing out the corresponding power of Inevitability!

Just as Lumian was about to instruct Jenna to keep a vigilant watch, a figure emerged from a shattered mirror in the wilderness.

Their pupils dilated, and instinctively, Lumian and Jenna sought cover behind the grayish-white stone pillar and the partially collapsed rubble.

The figure swiftly materialized, standing over 1.7 meters tall and clad in a black cloak.

Lumian stole a quick glance in that direction before retracting his gaze.

The figure seemed oddly familiar.

Before long, a familiar voice rang out from the side.

"You're not slow either."

Th-this is Gardner Martin! He's involved too? Lumian didn't dare to peek out.

Then, he recalled the identity of the cloaked figure.

The Carbonari member he had encountered, the one followed by Franca!

Shouldn't the Carbonari be causing chaos on the surface? Lumian wondered.

At that moment, Jenna produced a mirror and gestured if Lumian needed assistance.

She could use mirror magic, utilizing mirror-like items to display their reflections onto a designated mirror.

Numerous mirror fragments lay nearby at the edge of the wilderness.

Lumian shook his head slowly and mouthed and gestured to Jenna, signaling her to "Wait a moment."

He decided to act at a critical juncture. There was no need to take unnecessary risks at this point.

At that moment, a mellow, deep voice responded to Gardner Martin, "Where's the president of your Iron and Blood Cross Order?"

"Headed there, of course," Gardner Martin replied with a smile. "It's the stage for important figures, and we have our own mission."

He paused a beat before continuing, "Why are you still wearing the cloak? Is it someone new beneath?"

"You're still as cautious as ever," the deep voice sighed.

Lumian and Jenna heard the rustling of clothes.

Lumian immediately signaled Jenna with his eyes.

Jenna took the hint and recited the incantation silently, her hand resting on the mirror.

The aqueous light on the mirror's surface flickered, revealing a figure.

The figure wore a cloak without the hood. His hair was thick and slightly curly, and his eyes were as sharp as an eagle's. His beard was neatly trimmed, and the bridge of his nose was slightly raised.

Wh— Lumian recognized the person.

Philip!

The deceased General Philip!

Chapter 475: Conspirer

Recognizing the black-cloaked man as the late General Philip, a surge of realization struck Lumian's mind, cutting through the darkness.

He connected various dots and reevaluated details he had previously deemed a stretch.

Earlier, Lumian had queried Gardner Martin about his support for Hugues Artois, the spokesperson of numerous evil gods. Martin asserted that he was well aware of Artois's nature and the sinister forces backing him. Martin endorsed Artois for parliament with the belief that he would repeatedly bring calamity to the market district, compelling citizens and workers to rally behind the Iron and Blood Cross Order, preparing for a future government overthrow.

Until today, Lumian had accepted this reasoning on the surface. Even if Martin hadn't disclosed the complete truth, he had unveiled a fraction of it. However, now it appeared that 90% of Martin's statement was a fabrication!

Hugues Artois had been groomed by the late General Philip and thrust into politics. Gardner Martin had clearly established a cooperative relationship with General Philip long ago. His backing of Hugues Artois wasn't merely an opportunistic exploit; rather, he had been intricately involved in the plan from the outset!

Similarly, General Philip, having feigned his death and diverged from his intended fate, utilized the Dreamseekers charity organization to finance Painters and other evil god-bestowed. Simultaneously, he joined the Carbonari, fomenting riots and rebellions. Lumian found this not entirely surprising, but the connection with Gardner Martin and the Iron and Blood Cross Order added an intriguing layer to the details.

By the time the Hostel ritual officially commenced, Lumian had already grasped the essence of this conspiracy. Yet, some explanations seemed a bit forced. For instance, how had Meyer Maipú, having left the Bliss Society in frustration and returned to the market district to prove himself, managed to contact the Painters or the evil gods' bestowed planning the Hostel ritual?

One plausible explanation was that Susanna—while still the high priestess of the Bliss Society—had established connections with other cults before her demise. As Maipú Meyer's lover and a crucial member of the Bliss Society, he should have had some contacts. However, upon closer scrutiny, it felt a tad contrived. Did Maipú Meyer truly maintain good relationships with believers of other evil gods? Would he naturally seek their aid when confronting challenges to prove himself?

Despite Maipú Meyer's knowledge of an Angel sealed within Lumian's body, he couldn't fathom exploiting this information beyond offering sacrifices. Unless the Mother Tree of Desire bestowed a revelation directly, why wouldn't the Recipient, potentially having received a divine revelation, flaunt it? Why face ostracism from other Bliss Society members?

Lumian found that all the details made more sense now that Gardner Martin and his connection to General Philip were revealed as part of the conspiracy.

Following the Tree of Shadow disaster, Gardner Martin tasked Lumian, Franca, and their subordinates in the market district with investigating the incident and Hugues Artois's assassination. However, he would undoubtedly gather information about the Bliss Society's actions, mistakes, and issues through General Philip.

In these circumstances, Maipú Meyer, seeking a return to the market district, naturally established a connection with General Philip, who had shown interest in such matters, and provided crucial information. Consequently, Gardner Martin had long been aware of what was sealed within Lumian.

The entire Hostel ritual might have been conceived by him, General Philip, and the Painters.

One of them harbored a longstanding desire for Fourth Epoch Trier and possessed extensive knowledge of secrets and mysticism. They understood the seal's operation and its past leaks. Salle de Bal Brise, owned by the Savoie Mob, and 13 Avenue du Marché served as a testing ground for the Iron and Blood Cross Order's new members.

The other had a deep connection to the domain of fate. Through the financial support of the Dreamseekers charity organization, he had united many cults, accumulating vast knowledge in various aspects.

The reason why Hugues Artois had numerous evil gods' bestowed protecting him wasn't merely due to his ability to interact with problematic individuals or the deeply ingrained "enlightened" perception he had on others. Instead, it was because his backer, General Philip, a veteran of large-scale wars, had long been dedicated to cooperating with heretics to achieve a crucial goal.

Lumian suspected that Gardner Martin hadn't officially tested him and allowed him to join the Iron and Blood Cross Order out of initial trust. Instead, he had finalized the Hostel plan and decided to keep Lumian under close watch, exerting various influences and manipulating him.

If the Tarot Club hadn't intervened and the ritual hadn't been hastily advanced, it was highly likely that Gardner Martin or a demigod of the Iron and Blood Cross Order would have been the one to ultimately confront Lumian and transport him into the painting world to activate the ritual!

As these thoughts raced through his mind, Lumian's understanding became clear.

Everything Gardner Martin had undertaken since the Tree of Shadow disaster was geared towards the Hostel ritual!

As expected of a former or current Conspirer… Lumian sighed sincerely.

Certainly, Gardner Martin might not have been aware of the residual aura of Blood Emperor Alista Tudor that Lumian carried, but he likely harbored suspicions. However, he couldn't fathom the core issue. After all, he was aware that an Angel was sealed within Lumian Lee's body, a walking anomaly bound to attract attention.

Regarding whether Gardner Martin knew about another organization backing him and Franca, Lumian believed that Martin had sensed something awry, but the precise details remained elusive. Even Maipú Meyer, not present at the Tree of Shadow ritual, was unaware of the events during that time.

Lumian signaled Jenna to cease the mirror magic to evade detection by Gardner Martin and General Philip. Meanwhile, he pondered.

Why does the Iron and Blood Cross Order covet Fourth Epoch Trier so intensely, going to such lengths in preparation? What is their ultimate goal?

If I hadn't arrived in Trier, stayed at Auberge du Coq Doré, and attracted the Fallen Tree Spirit Susanna Mattise, what would have been the original plan of the Iron and Blood Cross Order and the various cults? How did they intend to bypass the seal and unlock the door to Fourth Epoch Trier?

As the latter question surfaced, Lumian recalled something.

Gardner Martin had once directed "Rat" Christo's smuggling caravan to transport an item into Trier through an underground tunnel. This item activated the special mirror world hidden underground. Later, Franca sensed that item while tracking the black-cloaked Carbonari member, General Philip, who had faked his death…

Now, General Philip had also entered this place, suspected to be Fourth Epoch Trier!

They had made extensive preparations, including orchestrating a massive riot. Their goal was to use that item and its connection to the mirror fragments in the wilderness to infiltrate this place through the seal leak that once appeared beneath Salle de Bal Brise. Later, they had a better choice—me…

Dammit! Gardner Martin's words about why he supported Hugues Artois's election as a member of parliament were mostly true! He did need such a person to incite public anger in the market district, not to overthrow the government, but to satisfy the ritual!

Heh heh, pushing villains into power while posing as the leader of the resistance. He's both the antagonist and the protagonist. He's truly extracting the value from all the people in the market district dry… Lumian reacquainted himself with the Sequence name "Conspirer" through Gardner Martin.

At that moment, Jenna grasped Lumian's meaning and discontinued the mirror magic.

Gardner Martin smiled and said, "It's indeed you, Philip. Let's enter Fourth Epoch Trier."

Philip… Jenna, who had only a vague impression of General Philip's photo from the shadows, now realized that the cloaked man Franca had been trailing was General Philip, the one who had faked his death.

Philip's deep, mellow voice resounded.

"Aren't you going to find Lumian Lee? If he becomes your loyal subordinate and joins your team, you can immediately complete the ritual, consume the potion, and advance to a demigod."

Gardner Martin sighed and responded, "I find it a pity too. An Angel is sealed within him, and he alone is a team. I've given him many chances, but he never understood what loyalty meant. Now, I have an alternative. Let him perish naturally in Fourth Epoch Trier."

An Angel sealed within him? Jenna's eyes widened as she looked at Lumian.

Lumian smirked and scoffed at Gardner Martin's words.

I'd be a fool to believe you!

The person scheming to use me from the start talking about loyalty and pity?

Just as Gardner Martin and General Philip turned around to walk toward the magnificent city, two figures emerged from a mirror fragment in the nearby wilderness.

It was Franca, dressed in a blouse, beige white breeches, a small dark brown coat, and black leather boots, along with Anthony Reid, clad in military green.

Franca scanned the surroundings and spotted Gardner Martin, encased in full-body silver armor with his visor raised.

Anthony Reid's gaze locked onto General Philip's face, featuring a prominent bulge on his nose.

The eight eyes met, and the air momentarily froze.

…

Count Poufer's figure materialized at the edge of the wilderness, in front of the pale-black stone bricks.

Gazing at the giant shrouded in storms, lightning, flames, and smoke, standing dozens of meters tall, he sprinted over with the fanatical expression of a sacrificial lamb.

It was Vermonda Sauron, who had lost control and gone underground.

The former Archangel, the Conqueror, who was very close to a deity's throne!

Chapter 476: Calamity Giant

Count Poufer charged through the tempest, battling fierce winds, drenching rain, and bolts of lightning. Meanwhile, the Pixie in the distinctive blue beret—the overseer of the Hostel, positioned near the shroud of darkness around Salle de Bal Brise—took advantage of the moment and slipped through the enigmatic iron-colored door.

Fully aware of the peril awaiting her inside, she felt compelled by the will of a deity. Even the prospect of death didn't daunt her. It would only earn her the deity's favor and a return to the eternal realm of fantasy.

Regrettably, upon her arrival, she found herself suspended in the midst of the raging storm, amidst smoke and flames.

The colossal figure was clearly reflected in her eyes.

It resembled a horrifying charred giant, its once-fleshy exterior now absent. The charred metal skeleton, engulfed in blazing purple flames, formed what seemed like an intact body, but cracks riddled its structure. Continuously emanating illusory symbols—lightning, hail, fog—the majestic purple flames and the iron-black metal skeleton held inscrutable knowledge, representing countless real phenomena.

Drip, drip. Blood-hued, magma-like pus oozed from the cracks, transforming into black purple flames and various weather phenomena midair.

Witnessing this, the Pixie in the blue beret combusted from within.

Instinctive fear flashed in her eyes as she desperately reached into the void, entering an intangible state.

Yet, her physical form did not change for the better.

With a swift whoosh, every cell in the Pixie's being ignited, including the translucent dragonfly-like wings on her back.

After enduring agonizing contortions, she metamorphosed into a Pixie crafted from crimson flames. Lifeless eyes stared out from her now-empty gaze.

Within the fiery dragonfly wings, the altered Pixie danced around the giant's figure, as if escorting him.

Rumble!

Count Poufer was struck by bolts of lightning, and nearby, purple flames erupted.

Drenched in the relentless rain, enduring hailstones that battered him until he bled, he persevered through the thick smoke.

Perhaps due to the Sauron family's bloodline coursing through him, he remained unaffected by the surrounding chaos.

As the smoke cleared and the storm abated, Poufer eagerly gazed at the towering giant, dozens of meters tall.

Within the iron-black skull and amidst the purple flames, a distorted face of pain intermittently flickered.

The face bore some resemblance to Poufer, except its eyes, weathered and blood-black, were deathly still and vacant.

Upon spotting the giant, Count Poufer also ignited in flames.

Excruciating pain wracked him, yet his gaze remained fixed on the giant's face.

Amidst the encircling purple flames, faces filled with venom, hatred, and madness, as if cursing all living beings, alternated. Men and women, bearing a resemblance to both the giant and Count Poufer, emerged on the surface of withered hearts floating in the flames.

Poufer glimpsed the family's forebears from the oil paintings. Despite the difficulty, his mouth curled up, his face contorted by the flames.

In the turmoil, he transformed into a flaming pixie as well. However, instead of circling the rampaging giant, he was drawn by his family's bloodline into the perilous purple flames on the iron-black head, into Vermonda's face that flickered in and out.

In an instant, the two fused.

Vermonda's mouth twitched, a hint of liveliness in his eyes.

He opened his mouth and let out a scream filled with destructive desire and madness.

With this scream, the ground, scorched by the purple flames, shook dramatically, and earth puppets crawled out.

These puppets—equally tall at three to four meters tall, charred with an iron hue—were speckled with dark-red blood.

Transforming as they squirmed, the earth puppets became soldiers, guarding the area with a semblance of life.

Almost simultaneously, a fiery meteor descended from the heavens.

Streaking across the sky, it plummeted towards the edge of the fog.

Bang!

A figure emerged amidst the meteorite-like crash and ensuing tremors, standing upright.

It was Snarner Einhorn, adorned in iron-black, blood-stained armor.

The 1.8-meter-tall Angel, with long dark-red hair and flamboyant earrings, didn't hesitate. His body expanded, unveiling a Mythical Creature form reminiscent of Vermonda Sauron's current state.

It was a giant, a representation of calamity, crafted from flames and various symbolic elements.

…

Under the silent blaze of invisible flames in the sky, across the wilderness, Pualis de Roquefort, draped in an elegant black dress and a veiled hat, fixed her gaze on the majestic city not far away.

She didn't get her husband, butler, and children to enter the Hostel. Instead, she arranged for them to temporarily depart Trier and reside in a suburban town beyond the city wall.

After a brief survey, Madame Pualis turned her attention to the man merely 20 to 30 meters away.

Despite appearing in his fifties, his dense blond hair showed only slight traces of gray, and his lake-blue eyes were clear.

Neatly encircling his mouth, the beard framed his unusually deep facial features. It was evident he had been a handsome man in his youth.

He was the Circle Inhabitant of the Sinners, Voisin Sanson!

Roche Louis Sanson's father.

Madame Pualis shifted her gaze back to the seemingly boundless city, sensing an inexplicable calling from somewhere. It was gradually contracting and expanding, akin to the embrace of a long-forgotten mother.

She took a step forward.

…

Franca hadn't anticipated encountering Gardner Martin immediately upon exiting the mirror world.

As an undercover agent for both the Tarot Club and the Demoness Sect, she felt a twinge of guilt instinctively. The urge to casually greet him with a "what a coincidence" surfaced subconsciously. However, she was no longer the naive rookie from her initial transmigration. Her worldly and combat experiences ranked among the elite in the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society. Swiftly reacting, she yelled at Anthony Reid, "Duck," and, turning invisible, lunged to the side.

Almost simultaneously, dozens, perhaps hundreds, of blazing white fireballs materialized around Gardner Martin. His eyes were profound, body clad in silver armor, as the fireballs howled and erupted at the previous location of Franca and Anthony Reid.

Anthony, his gaze fixed on General Philip's black-cloaked figure, heard Franca's warning, "duck," echoing in his ears.

Experienced, though unsure of what to expect, he followed his teammate's advice. Adjusting his body mid-air, he kicked down with both feet, hurtling toward General Philip without picking a side.

Amidst the explosive chaos, General Philip was astonished to find a slightly greasy middle-aged man in military-green camouflage clothing glaring at him with hatred, launching towards him.

Does he hold a grudge against me? Philip wondered, his eyes darkening as focus slipped away.

He "saw" a myriad of intertwined fates and discerned the threads' approximate origins.

So, you're a survivor of the sacrificial company… Lucky enough to escape back then, and now you dare return for revenge? General Philip sneered with disdain.

As a Sequence 5 Reaper of the Hunter pathway, he made the decision to put his faith in the great Goddess of Fate and receive the corresponding boon. This choice stemmed from his firsthand recognition of the limitations and issues within his original pathway in the mysticism domain, along with the impending apocalypse he couldn't avoid.

His aim was clear—to swiftly ascend to demigod status, securing the protection of a mighty existence to endure the impending apocalypse. Ordinary channels simply couldn't provide him with what he needed.

Despite the initial weaknesses and constraints of the Goddess of Fate's pathway, he accepted it without hesitation.

It was worth noting that the boon corresponding to Sequence 9, Dreamless, merely granted him a dreamless state and the ability to sense the flow of fate. Consequently, he forfeited the potential of gaining revelations through his spirituality via dreams.

Sequence 8 Musicians were a slight improvement. In certain worlds, Musicians often blinded themselves to enhance their focus on the voice of fate before playing it like a symphony. However, this method demanded extensive preparation and sufficient time to orchestrate the tune in order to influence a target's fate.

As for Sequence 7 Fate Pryers, they shared essential similarities with Seers. However, unlike Seers, they didn't require a medium to directly perceive or hear the revelations of fate.

By Sequence 6, the bestowed of the Goddess of Fate finally acquired relatively potent abilities. Those who glimpsed fate could convey it and directly impact a target, but each usage came with a significant drawback—a self-imposed silence lasting for an extended period.

This Sequence was known as Mute.

Only after faking his death and breaking free from his original fate did the Sequence 5 Deceased no longer bear the previous restrictions. They could now function relatively normally.

As a dual Sequence 5, General Philip unraveled the threads of fate, discerning the origin of Anthony Reid's animosity. He chuckled, releasing a voice that seemed confined for an eternity.

"Fate can't be avoided. You'll ultimately end up as my sacrifice."

Amidst these words and the explosive tumult, Anthony Reid's mind replayed the harrowing scene of the camp attack, causing him to break out into a tremble.

Thud! He landed on the ground and clutched his head in fear.

Not far away, concealed behind a half-collapsed grayish-white stone pillar, Lumian and Jenna both heard Franca's urgent cry to "duck."

Franca has entered too? How did she do it? Lumian wondered, a sense of alarm coursing through him.

Chapter 477: Frenzy

Chapter 477 Frenzy

Lumian felt a brief moment of surprise before taking a shot in the dark.

Considering that General Philip likely used a special item to access the underground mirror world, Lumian figured Franca, equipped with the ancient silver mirror boasting the same powers, should have a shot at it too.

The why and what of it didn't matter now. Those questions could wait until after dealing with Gardner Martin and General Philip or finding a way to slip past them. There might be a chance to escape this place.

At the fringes of the wilderness, Gardner Martin's attempts to flush out Franca from her invisibility failed, even after a series of explosions.

His former lover had vanished to some unknown spot.

Being a Demoness of Pleasure, Franca relied on her Assassin abilities, leaving no footprints, masking her scent and spiritual aura. It made her a formidable challenge to track, countering a Hunter's knack for gathering environmental intel.

Gardner Martin, donned in silver-white full-body armor, kept on the move. Familiar with the Demoness pathway's traits and abilities, he knew that, having ascended to Pleasure, Franca didn't need blood, hair, or nails for her curses. Reflecting him into mirrors and enveloping him in black flames would do the trick. He couldn't stand still for more than three seconds, to prevent himself from being reflected in the mirror.

As he swiftly maneuvered, Gardner Martin glanced at Philip and Anthony, the information broker. He noticed the latter lying on the ground, clutching his head and trembling. Anthony sporadically used Placate on himself, resigning from resistance. Philip's black cloak expanded slightly, and crimson, nearly white flaming ravens materialized beside him, as if preparing for a grand sacrifice.

Observing the scene, Gardner Martin paid no heed to the ongoing battle. He raised his right hand and lowered his visor.

A broadsword, aglow with condensed light, materialized in Gardner Martin's grip, casting a radiant and holy Sunrise Gleam over a vast expanse. Its brilliance dispelled illusions, compelling shadows to retreat and revealing Franca's ponytailed form more than ten meters behind him.

This was the power of a Sequence 6 Dawn Paladin of the Warrior pathway.

The power emanated from Gardner Martin's silver armor, a numbered Sealed Artifact bestowed by the authorities. He had acquired it in an operation a few years back, slaying two Purifiers of the Eternal Blazing Sun Church and claiming the armor from their fallen bodies.

"Number: 247.

"Name: Pride Armor.

"Danger Grade: 2. Dangerous. Use with care and moderation. It can only be applied for operations that require more than three people, or by deacons and diocesan bishops.

"Security classification: Official Purifiers and above.

"Sealing Method: Place it in a dark chamber and select physically strong humans to guard them with a rotation every three hours.

"Description: Late into the war between the Loen Kingdom and the Feysac Empire, a plethora of meteors descended from the sky, causing widespread catastrophes.

"This armor was discovered in a ruined building in the suburbs of Port LeSeur. The humans inside had met a brutal end.

"Through experimentation, it bestows upon the wearer the might of a giant. It blankets an area of 48 meters in Sunrise Gleam. These rays dispel illusions, erase shadows, and nullify invisibility effects. They also affect Wraiths and Shadows, diminishing their peculiarities and even weakening evil spirits.

"It possesses decent defensive capabilities and can be damaged but regenerates slowly. Depending on the extent of the damage, recovery can range from half an hour to a day. For detailed data, refer to Appendix 2.

"It also grants the wearer the ability to manifest a hefty, robust, yet sharp two-handed broadsword. Each strike carries a purifying effect, and dismantling the radiant broadsword results in a formidable Hurricane of Light. This phenomenon can obliterate the human body, vanquish Wraiths, and harm evil spirits.

"The wearer's combat skills see a significant boost, accompanied by heightened arrogance. They hold disdain for those standing behind them and targets concealed in the darkness or invisible.

"It indiscriminately eliminates weak humans within a 50-meter radius. Should the wearer weaken, they too become a target.

"The criteria for determining one's physique are inconsistent, sometimes very high, sometimes low. Initial findings suggest a correlation with the armor's condition and the surrounding environment. Most humans with regular exercise or those who rely on potions to enhance their physique pass the assessment without incident. For exceptions, it was later discovered they suffered from undetected serious illnesses or indulged excessively in the past two days.

"No matter who you are, caution is warranted when positioned behind this armor, though attacks don't always occur.

"Similarly, the wearer is vulnerable to its attacks when using other mystical items. Experimental results show heightened reactions when facing items from the Evernight pathway and the Earth pathway.

"The wearer of the armor eventually experiences varying degrees of betrayal, irrespective of whether they still wear the item.

"At night, this armor is very quiet, exhibiting minimal aggressiveness. However, under a moonlit sky, its demeanor becomes notably irritable, reaching maximal offensiveness.

"The highest level of experimental subjects is Sequence 5…

"Appendix 1: The wearer of the armor grows taller to varying degrees. Multiple wearings do not stack.

"Appendix 2…"

Under the influence of the Sealed Artifact, 2—247, Franca materialized.

Gardner Martin, wearing a visor, hesitated briefly before slashing with the radiant broadsword in his hand.

Simultaneously, a multitude of crimson, nearly white Fire Ravens condensed around him.

Surrounded by crimson Fire Ravens, General Philip locked eyes with the prone Anthony Reid. With a slight lift of his chin, he declared, "Accept your fate."

Anthony sensed the imminent danger but found himself powerless to resist. Trembling, memories of that haunting night flooded his mind, making it difficult to put up any resistance.

However, as he recalled General Philip's words about becoming a sacrifice, the tragic fate of his comrades, and the years of investigation, anger ignited within Anthony.

It's him!

He's the one responsible for harming my comrades, those rough but endearing individuals, and my companions who once had my back!

Suddenly, Lumian's earlier question echoed in Anthony's thoughts.

"Up to this day, do you still wrestle with the fear from that night, the sounds of sudden gunshots? Do you truly possess the courage and determination to press on?"

Anthony remembered his response:

"Perhaps I perished in that attack. What remains is an avenging spirit, relentless in its pursuit of truth and retribution.

"I can be destroyed, but I can't give up…"

That's right. I should have died long ago. My sole purpose in life is revenge. And today, my true enemy stands before me!

Why should I be afraid? I'm not even afraid of death. Why fear gunshots, explosions, or being a sacrifice?

Wouldn't the worst outcome be death and being sacrificed to an evil god? I was already mentally prepared!

This time, I chose to stay in Trier, not to flee from potential catastrophe but to make amends for my regrets.

Now, the opportunity has presented itself!

The flames of revenge roared within Anthony Reid's heart. He lifted his gaze to meet General Philip's slightly reddened, hatred-filled dark-brown eyes—once his superior's superior's superior.

Go to hell! Anthony cursed inwardly as he unleashed a Psychiatrist's Frenzy.

This ability could manipulate the emotions or destabilize the mental state of the target, pushing them into a frenzied state and inflicting severe mental damage.

In some cases, it could even lead the target to lose control.

Just as General Philip prepared to unleash a swarm of Fire Ravens, a surge of Danger Premonition hit him. Before he could react, the intended sacrifice raised his head, locking eyes with him, bloodshot dark-brown eyes burning with intensity.

With a buzzing sound, Philip's head snapped back, his thoughts thrown into disarray.

Ever since embracing the Goddess of Fate, originally being a Sequence 5, he, armed with the corresponding knowledge, could keenly sense shifts in his personality and thoughts. His body had undergone gradual changes as the power of the boons increased.

For Philip, mentally prepared as he was, this was acceptable. One concern nagged at him—his mental state had become unpredictable. Sometimes rational, sometimes fanatical, sometimes cold, and sometimes calm. His behavior was capricious.

It mirrored those great existences.

General Philip's mind felt like a storm had been unleashed within it. His facial skin swelled, and his pale-white hair crinkled, resembling someone submerged in water for days.

Invisible threads materialized from each pore, tinged with a faint mercurial hue, giving Philip's flesh the appearance of being ablaze with flames.

General Philip briefly succumbed to Frenzy.

At that moment, a figure materialized behind him.

It was Lumian, dressed in a partially tucked white shirt, brown pants, and oil painting-like black leather shoes.

Recognizing Franca's voice and sensing the onset of the battle, Lumian didn't immediately rush out to provide assistance. Instead, he opted to wait for the right opportunity.

Aware that his current spirituality dictated a single optimal choice, Lumian needed to eliminate either Gardner Martin or General Philip swiftly. Franca, Jenna, and Anthony could then join forces to handle the remaining adversary.

Choosing a target was no easy decision for Lumian.

Gardner Martin, corrupted by 13 Avenue du Marché and the Commanding Officer of the Iron and Blood Cross Order, possessed numerous peculiarities. Lumian couldn't guarantee that a combination of punches would conclusively finish him. General Philip, with his boon involving fate, might sense danger ahead of time, making Lumian's surprise attack unlikely to succeed.

Both options carried substantial risks, forcing Lumian to exercise restraint and wait patiently.

As long as Franca and Anthony remained alive for the time being, Lumian would hold back.

Patience was a fundamental quality of a Hunter, equally crucial for a Conspirer.

However, Lumian's waiting wasn't blind. Relying on Jenna's mirror magic and the shattered mirrors in the wilderness, he observed the situation closely. Prepared to intervene and save Anthony, Lumian found the opportune moment when Anthony turned the tables on Philip with a Frenzy.

This was an opportunity!

Lumian gazed at General Philip, struggling in his frenzied state, and coldly exclaimed, "Hmph!"

Two beams of white light shot out and struck Philip.

The Deceased's eyes lost focus suddenly, and his body swayed, on the brink of collapse.

Lumian had already raised his right hand, bent his pinky and ring finger, and aimed at the back of General Philip's head, mimicking a revolver.

Bang! With an added sound effect in his mind and a slight lean backward, a crimson fireball rapidly compressed and shot out from the tips of his index and middle fingers, hurtling towards the target like a bullet.

Chapter 478: The Mockery of Fate

Chapter 478 The Mockery of Fate

Bang!

The crimson fireball, unleashed from Lumian's fingertips, honed in on its target, striking General Philip's head with deadly precision. The explosion that followed resembled a cannonball's impact.

Philip's body disintegrated starting from the point of impact, as if a hammer had shattered a mirror reflecting his form.

Amidst the chaos concealed by the explosion, shards of glass scattered across the wilderness, joining the reflections of those already present.

Lumian's eyes widened as he observed the unexpected turn of events.

Does the Deceased pathway also possess Mirror Substitution?

Or does General Philip wield a mystical item from the Demoness pathway?

Such thoughts raced through Lumian's mind as he processed the scene. Philip's black-cloaked figure swiftly reappeared more than ten meters away. His eyes, once frenzied, now regained clarity.

Simultaneously, Jenna, disguised as a female mercenary, materialized from invisibility behind General Philip. She aimed her revolver at the Deceased, who had narrowly escaped the fatal attack and negative state.

To be honest, Jenna found herself in a perplexing and shocking situation.

The revelation that General Philip possessed Mirror Substitution didn't catch her off guard. However, she hadn't processed the implications before realizing he had "chosen" to position himself right before her, as if anticipating her to backstab him.

Originally, Jenna had devised a plan to exploit Lumian's clash with General Philip. Her intention was to utilize Invisibility, slip away from her hiding spot, and reach the wilderness's edge. Her goal: to assist Franca, cast a curse if Lumian's strike fell short, or create a frosty hindrance on the ground. Unexpectedly, General Philip had "escaped" to a location directly in front of her.

Such a golden opportunity couldn't be ignored!

Confused by the unfolding events, Jenna instinctively raised her right hand, aiming her revolver at the back of General Philip's head.

Though unsure of the reasons behind this bizarre turn of events, she suspected it was connected to the lucky gold coin she had received from Will.

Bang!

Jenna squeezed the trigger, and a yellow bullet, wreathed in black flames, shot out from the muzzle, hurtling toward General Philip's skull.

Meanwhile, Franca emerged from the radiant Sunrise Gleam, witnessing Anthony Reid overcoming his fear to employ his abilities on General Philip. Lumian had for some reason arrived in the vicinity, appearing mysteriously behind Philip.

Without time to dwell on her surprise, Franca swiftly raised her brass classic revolver and fired an iron-black bullet at Gardner Martin, who wielded his broadsword of light.

Her strategy was clear—unleash her full strength to stall Gardner Martin and deny him the opportunity to save General Philip!

Franca's decision to use invisibility wasn't about tapping into Assassin tactics to backstab her ex-lover. Drawing on her battle experience, she instinctively chose invisibility for a different purpose—to escape Gardner Martin and General Philip's sight, gaining a brief moment of safety.

During this fleeting period, Franca not only moved with agility but also retrieved the coin bag filled with coins. Wearing the iron-black Ring of Punishment on her left thumb and Beatrice's Necklace around her neck, she completed her ensemble.

Finally, she withdrew the Cannon Gun from her underarm holster, clasping it firmly in her palm.

In her invisible state, Franca armed herself to the teeth, entering her strongest state before the inevitable reveal.

Bang!

As the iron-black bullet sped toward Gardner Martin, Franca's diamond necklace on her chest emitted a faint glow.

Simultaneously, Franca's eyes welled up, and her red lips parted slightly, amplifying the allure of a Demoness of Pleasure.

Gardner Martin's body suddenly heated up, feeling his blood rush to his nether regions.

Scenes of his past entanglement with Franca flooded his mind, captivated by the Demoness's uncanny demeanor amidst iron and blood.

His eyes reddened, breathing grew labored, and movements visibly slowed.

Lust!

From Beatrice's Necklace and the lust of the Mother Tree of Desire pathway, coupled with the charm of a Demoness of Pleasure, it had a synergistic effect greater than the sum of its parts.

Moreover, Gardner Martin wasn't a stranger to such experiences. He had always agreed with the words in Emperor Roselle's Secret Chronicles: "The taste of a Demoness ain't bad." In this situation, how could he control himself after tasting a Demoness?

Clang! The iron-black bullet struck Gardner Martin's chest, causing cracks in his silver armor.

Franca, not surprised that the attack hadn't worked, realized in her haste, she hadn't activated the Heavy Strike effect of the Cannon Gun.

The brass revolver, a mystical item purchased from the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society, wasn't particularly potent or mystical; it had two simple abilities. The first, a normal shot, equivalent to a rifle, and the second, a Heavy Strike, akin to a small cannonball or a sniper rifle.

Franca always carried it to compensate for a Demoness's lack of offensive capabilities when she couldn't use a curse. The Cannon Gun's negative effects were minimal—if all six rounds were not fired in a day or maintained every other week, rare situations like chamber explosions or misfires could occur.

Observing Gardner Martin's infatuated gaze behind the visor, Franca hesitated before using her right thumb to pull back the Cannon Gun's hammer, signaling the activation of the Heavy Strike effect.

Bang!

As Franca moved, she pulled the trigger at Gardner Martin, who lunged at her as if seeking a mate.

The iron-black bullet collided with him, accompanied by blazing flames.

Almost simultaneously, Franca sensed an anomaly in the Primordial Demoness figurine casually stuffed into her pocket.

Not only did it turn cold again, like ice, but it also trembled slightly.

Dammit! Why is it you again? Are you done!? Franca, feeling both angry and cautious, pulled the trigger and threw the palm-sized bone figurine far away.

Simultaneously, on the other side, Jenna's bullet, fired from an ordinary revolver, pierced the back of General Philip's head with black flames. Unsurprisingly, the Deceased shattered like a mirror, his figure outlined at the edge of the Sunrise Gleam created by Gardner Martin.

At that moment, as Franca hurled the Primordial Demoness's bone figurine, General Philip's body froze.

Black flames erupted, silently igniting his Spirit Body. Cold frost swiftly condensed, enveloping him.

Blood seeped from his eyes, nose, mouth, and ears, emitting a series of cracking sounds.

The mirror he carried appeared to have shattered.

He was clearly in a daze, as if he had been cursed.

Without hesitation, Lumian employed Spirit World Traversal once more, emerging from behind General Philip.

Meanwhile, Anthony Reid had stood up, his expression no longer filled with fear but focused hatred.

As Philip was not far from him, on the edge of the clear Sunrise Gleam, he ran towards the general—his mortal enemy.

Philip's figure reflected in his eyes, and he couldn't help but smile.

His pupils turned vertical, tinged with a faint golden hue.

This time, he refrained from employing Frenzy, fearing it might cause General Philip to lose control and transform, giving Gardner Martin an opportunity to kill his team.

He chose Awe, also known as Dragon Might!

General Philip trembled.

Under normal circumstances, he wouldn't have succumbed to such a severe Awe. At most, he would have experienced temporary fear. However, he was in a dire state, influenced by an unknown force, betrayed by an item on him. Consequently, his entire being fell into a blank state.

Observing this, Lumian refrained from using the Spell of Harrumph. His right hand took the shape of a revolver again, aimed at the back of General Philip's head, and fired a crimson fireball that was nearly white from his fingertips.

Philip was jolted awake by a tangible premonition of danger, only to witness his impending demise.

A wave of indignation washed over him.

Despite being stronger, possessing lethal strikes, and an array of mystical abilities, he suffered a relentless beating without a chance to retaliate. He didn't even have an opportunity to fight back before Death knocked on his door.

In his eyes, countless fates interwove into a net, constantly changing, as if mocking him.

This made him feel like a clown.

Bang!

General Philip's head exploded from Lumian's crimson, nearly white fireball. Numerous skull fragments splattered with charred marks, red blood, and milky-white brain matter.

The Deceased's lifeless body thudded to the ground, and an item rolled out of the hidden pocket of the black cloak.

It was a pitch-black figurine, palm-sized and resembling a beautiful woman. Long snake-like hair cascaded to its feet, and it had eyes of various forms at the top.

Wh— Lumian's gaze instinctively shifted to the Primordial Demoness figurine that Franca had thrown out.

Similar to the one on General Philip, one was pure white, while the other was pitch-black.

Suddenly, Lumian grasped why General Philip had Mirror Substitution and why he had appeared directly in front of Jenna, who was invisible.

With the special Primordial Demoness figurine, he naturally converged with Demonesses!

Subsequently, Franca's official Primordial Demoness figurine resonated with the pitch-black one, causing an abnormality that led to General Philip being "cursed" by the item at a critical moment.

The pitch-black Primordial Demoness figurine was likely the item Gardner Martin had smuggled into Trier through "Rat" Christo's smuggling caravan!

Chapter 479: Matching Items

Chapter 479 Matching Items

Bang!

The jet-black bullet, ablaze with fiery fury, slammed into Gardner Martin, who was gripped by desire, dead center in his gleaming silver armor once again.

It hit him like a battering ram, sending shockwaves through his frame.

A web of fractures sprawled out from the impact zone, causing Gardner Martin's advance to stagger, forcing him to lean backward.

This abrupt jolt snapped him out of his reverie. He witnessed General Philip, wreathed in black flames and encased in frost, while Lumian materialized behind the Deceased. Lumian's right hand acted as a revolver, launching a crimson fireball straight at the back of Philip's head.

Behind Gardner Martin's mask, his pupils dilated, and a shiver raced down his spine, as if an icy cascade had been dumped over him.

This abrupt awakening effectively quelled his desires. Without hesitation, he dropped to one knee and drove the hefty broadsword into the wilderness.

The broadsword shattered, breaking into myriad fragments of light that swept toward Franca, Lumian, and the others, including the lifeless form of General Philip.

Amidst a resounding crack, Franca, constantly shifting positions, remained enveloped by the Hurricane of Light, her body fracturing like a shattered mirror.

Lumian and Jenna met the same fate. Only Anthony Reid, lacking Mirror Substitution, instinctively lunged to the ground, curling up to shield his vital parts.

The luminous tempest rapidly dissipated before Lumian and his companions outlined themselves on the outskirts of the wilderness, facing the pale-black stone bricks.

They witnessed a brilliant white flaming spear hurtling towards the distant majestic city, covering more than a hundred meters in the blink of an eye.

As soon as the fiery-spear materialized upon impact with the ground, Gardner Martin, draped in silver armor, rose again, directing his focus towards the city veiled in a thin fog.

After several consecutive attempts, Gardner Martin distanced himself from Franca and the others, sprinting towards the dilapidated structures at the city's periphery.

Lumian chose not to pursue him. Instead, he sprinted to the edge of the Sunrise Gleam to check on Anthony Reid.

The Psychiatrist's body bore a multitude of bloody wounds, with the most severe on the left side of his back, revealing a glimpse of his beating heart.

Lying on his side, curled up and bloodied, Anthony Reid forced a smile upon seeing Lumian.

There was no fear of death in that smile—only relief, relaxation, and satisfaction.

The taste of revenge was indeed sweet.

Observing Anthony Reid's lips moving as if he intended to entrust something, Lumian scoffed and remarked, "Do you wish to utter your final words? Do you want us to dispatch your belongings to your home on the West Midseashire Coast?"

As he spoke, Lumian retrieved a silver earring, securing it to his left earlobe.

Squatting down, he pressed his left hand against the gaping wound on Anthony's back.

Abruptly, his palm slid upward, and the gruesome wound shifted to Anthony's shoulder.

In the blink of an eye, the most critical injury on Anthony's body vanished, leaving him as good as new. However, the initially minor wounds on his shoulder deepened, revealing white bones and causing blood to seep out.

This was Lie's Damage Transfer, capable of addressing one wound at a time.

Anthony was taken aback, feeling as if life had been restored to him.

Though the pain persisted, and his body weakened, at least the specter of imminent death had dissipated.

Then, Jenna approached, placing him in a supine position.

With a swift pfft, Jenna thrust an obsidian arrow into Anthony's chest.

The Arrow of the Bloodthirsty promptly absorbed the blood, turning Anthony's pupils red. The invisible flames in the sky seemed a bit blinding, and the scent of blood in the air proved enticing.

Simultaneously, the smaller wounds on his body swiftly healed, and the more severe ones showed significant improvement. In a matter of minutes, they should close up on their own, ceasing to impede his movements.

Anthony Reid, teetering on the edge of death, stood up, bewildered, examining his body with disbelief.

I've nearly recovered? I'm alright just like that? As a Spectator, his emotions visibly fluctuated.

"Not a bad combination," Franca praised. "As long as you don't perish on the spot and refrain from losing control and transforming into a monster, there's still a chance to save you. At most, you'll become weakened."

Lie's Damage Transfer, coupled with the formidable self-healing abilities bestowed by the Arrow of the Bloodthirsty, produced such a remarkable effect.

Franca turned her gaze to Lumian, questioning, "I thought you'd intercept Gardner Martin."

In that critical moment, the others couldn't match Gardner Martin's speed as he fled. Only Lumian, capable of Spirit World Traversal, had the potential to catch up and effectively hinder him.

"Do you think I didn't want to?" Lumian retorted, a note of mockery in his tone.

However, he lacked the ability!

Had he not been affected by Voisin Sanson's Circle Inhabitant during his first "teleportation" today, returning him to his original spot without expending his spirituality, Lumian wouldn't have maintained a stable state. He wouldn't even have been able to use Lie for Damage Transfer. He would have had to rely on Franca or Jenna. How could he possibly have caught up to Gardner Martin?

Franca instantly grasped Lumian's meaning—he had engaged in battles before and after entering this place, and his spirituality was on the verge of depletion.

"Alright." Franca shifted her attention to the two Primordial Demoness figurines, one black and one white, lying undisturbed on the ground, untouched by the Hurricane of Light. Frowning, she inquired, "Where should I toss these two?"

Them constantly causing abnormalities seemed like a scam!

"Take them with you." Lumian considered for a moment before smiling. "If it weren't for them, how could we have dispatched General Philip so effortlessly? We might need them to escape in the future. Yes, we can't entrust both to one person. You take one, and Jenna will take the other."

After a brief pause, Franca responded, "I'll still take the white one."

As a member of the Demoness Sect, holding the orthodox Primordial Demoness figurine was only natural.

Observing Jenna pick up the pitch-black Primordial Demoness figurine, Franca muttered in confusion, "Why is there such a figurine? According to the Purifiers' dossier and information from other secret organizations, members of the Demoness Sect only carry bone figurines. There's nothing that's so black."

While Franca spoke, she scrutinized the charred Primordial Demoness bone figurine, comparing it with her own.

Soon, she discerned differences in the details.

Aside from the stark white and pitch-black hues, the eyes at the tips of the Primordial Demoness's snake-like hair faced different directions. If one looked left, the other would undoubtedly look right.

"Like a mirror image, mirror… Is this the Primordial Demoness in the mirror?" Franca ventured a guess, amalgamating the abilities and traits of the Demoness pathway with her experience in the peculiar mirror world. "This shouldn't be possible under normal circumstances. It wouldn't be easy for the Iron and Blood Cross Order to find such a figurine…"

She now comprehended the reason behind their encounters with Gardner Martin and General Philip.

This was a manifestation of the Law of Beyonder Characteristics Convergence. Except for Anthony, an unwitting Psychiatrist brought in by his companion, everyone present was either a Hunter or a Demoness.

Furthermore, Franca and Anthony had entered through the same method as General Philip. They would inevitably emerge at the edge of this wilderness, teeming with mirror fragments.

Primordial Demoness in the mirror… Lumian found the description ominous.

Without delay, he addressed Franca and the others, "Search General Philip's corpse and help me guard the surroundings. I'll set up a ritual to restore my spirituality."

Jenna expressed surprise. "There's a ritual that can restore spirituality?"

Her gaze naturally swept over General Philip's corpse, realizing it had been split into five or six pieces, each a gruesome mess.

The Beyonder characteristics had yet to emerge at that moment. The boon from the evil god couldn't return to its source, slowly sinking back into the lifeless form.

Lumian entered a dimly lit area with grayish-white stone pillars, found cover, and swiftly set up the altar. Franca could surmise who he was praying to, so she joined him to guard against any unforeseen incidents.

Jenna contemplated for a few seconds before approaching the altar. Retrieving the lucky gold coin, she said to Lumian, "This is the lucky gold coin that the boy gave me. I don't know if it's useful when given to others, but there's no harm in trying."

She delegated the task of searching the corpse to Anthony Reid, who was rapidly recovering.

Franca observed in silence for a moment before affirming, "True."

Lumian didn't hesitate. After all, Will had a close connection to the Tarot Club. Even if the lucky gold coin couldn't be lent to others, it wouldn't bring about any negative effects.

Placing the Loen gold pound on the altar, Lumian conjured a wall of spirituality, ignited all the candles, and took two steps back.

Rather than proceeding with the boon-seeking ritual, he attempted to recite Mr. Fool's honorific name.

"The Fool that doesn't belong to this era, the mysterious ruler above the gray fog; the King of Yellow and Black who wields good luck…"

As Hermes reverberated, the lucky gold coin on the altar illuminated. A thin gray fog emanated from the wall of spirituality, enveloping the wilderness's periphery.

The fog in the distant majestic city appeared to thicken.

Before long, just as Lumian began praying for a boon, a frenzied and terrifying roar echoed from the area where the weather was chaotic and faint giant figures lingered.

Despite the thin gray fog, the four of them felt dizzy. The blood in their bodies raced, and their hearts pounded.

"It's truly useful. It's genuinely lucky…" Lumian gazed at the dazzling golden coin on the altar, sighing sincerely.

Had it not been for the ritual and Mr. Fool's gray fog's protection, the roar could have inflicted severe damage, especially considering Lumian's nearly depleted spirituality. He might have lost control, putting Anthony Reid, still recovering from severe injuries, in jeopardy.

Phew… Lumian exhaled and continued to recite in a deep voice under the watchful eyes of Franca and Jenna, "Power of Inevitability!

"You are the past, the present, and the future;

"You are the cause, the effect, and the process…"

Chapter 480: Ascetic

Chapter 480 Ascetic

Amidst the frenzied and terrifying roars, a hurricane tore through the abnormally chaotic weather, shrouding the scene in smoke, flames, lightning, and hail. It spiraled into the sky, merging with the silent inferno.

Not far from the apocalypse-like hurricane, two figures felt the impact of the roar simultaneously. One's head tilted back slightly, as if punched, while the other's wrinkles quivered, and his eyes grew sharper.

The former was the man who had originally stood behind Olson, vice president of the Iron and Blood Cross Order, Tony Twain. The latter was aged, donning a blue military suit with a sash and medals. His neatly combed back dark-red hair identified him as the mysterious president of the Iron and Blood Cross Order, known as Diest.

Diest shifted his gaze from the hurricane to Tony Twain.

"The chance to become a Conqueror is before us. If I can seize it, I'll find a way to separate the Weather Warlock's Beyonder characteristic and bestow it upon you."

As Tony Twain observed the violent hurricane, lightning, and torrential rain, his light-blue eyes hinted at mockery.

"Can we really succeed? A Weather Warlock has already joined. Even if Vermonda Sauron loses control and transforms into a monster, he's still a Sequence 1 monster."

Tony Twain's words showed no respect for a Sequence 2 Weather Warlock or a Sequence 1 Conqueror, despite not being an Angel yet.

Diest's expression remained unchanged, and his aura surged.

With his military attire, he resembled the commander-in-chief of all armies.

"Elsewhere, we'll surely fail. Even without interference, we'll need to embark on a lengthy hunt to stand a chance against the out-of-control Vermonda Sauron. But here…" Diest spoke in a deep voice, "We can harness that power for a brief period."

As he finished speaking, the area between his brows turned red, as if something sought to emerge.

Simultaneously, Diest retrieved a coin pouch from his waist, concealed beneath his suit.

Filled with soybeans and a few palm-sized iron soldiers, Diest grabbed them and tossed them forward.

Amidst the howling wind, the iron soldiers sprang to life and expanded. The soybeans swelled rapidly, transforming into giants with blurred faces and yellowish skin, as if soaked in water.

Failing to bring his team here in time, Diest abruptly transformed into a blazing dark-red, nearly purple flame, engulfing the newly created soldiers.

A beam of light shot up, tearing through the sky and homing in on the giant figure within the hurricane.

…

At the edge of the magnificent city veiled in a thin gray fog, Gardner Martin removed his helmet. His breastplate bore web-like cracks, revealing blood-stained clothes beneath.

With one hand pressed against his head, he staggered forward, intermittently emitting crimson flames bordering on white.

The terrifying roar had clearly taken its toll.

Navigating through the ruins, Gardner Martin quickly approached the thin gray fog. Half-collapsed asymmetrical buildings stood within, seemingly frozen in time, struck by a devastating blow and sunk into the ground.

Abruptly halting, Gardner Martin glanced to the side and asked in a deep voice, "Who is it?"

Amidst the sound of gravel tumbling, Olson, resembling a hungry bear, emerged from behind a collapsed black building, carrying a small brown suitcase.

The Supervisor, sporting a half top hat, yellow vest, and black suit, looked at Gardner Martin and said, "I didn't know who was coming, so I hid for a while. Where's Philip?"

Gardner Martin breathed a sigh of relief and replied, "We encountered Lumian Lee and his team. They killed Philip. I was injured and barely managed to escape."

Olson, with his thick beard, didn't delve into the details of the battle and sized up Gardner Martin. "You're quite beaten up."

Gardner Martin chuckled, saying,

"Fortunately, I had Pride Armor to shield me from most of the damage. Yeah, I blame it mainly on the angelic roar; it affected me to a certain extent. Fortunately, I was relatively far away, so the problem isn't that serious. Look, even the Pride Armor hasn't attacked me, indicating that I haven't weakened."

"That's good. Let's enter Fourth Epoch Trier now," Supervisor Olson nodded with an indifferent expression.

Gardner Martin turned around, clutching the silver helmet with one arm, and walked towards the thin gray fog not far away.

Olson carried a small brown suitcase and trailed behind the Commanding Officer of the Iron and Blood Cross Order.

As the two advanced, Olson's eyes suddenly turned fierce and vicious.

You'd used 'fortunately' twice… You've already taken off the Pride Armor's helmet… Olson muttered silently to himself, his brownish-red eyes reflecting Gardner Martin's staggering figure in the silver armor.

…

At the edge of the wilderness, scattered with mirror fragments, Franca and Jenna couldn't hear the chants emanating from the wall of spirituality, but they observed the grayish-white stone pillar and two candles of the same color mysteriously softening. Fist-sized candle flames flickered in silver-white and black, while an illusory pewter-black liquid oozed from Lumian's chest, enveloping him.

As Lumian curled up on the ground, occasionally rolling, Franca sighed softly and remarked, "It looks painful…"

This likely marked Ciel's fourth encounter with such an ordeal.

"That's right." Despite standing outside the wall of spirituality, Jenna felt an inexplicable fear, goosebumps forming on her skin.

While she had witnessed Ciel's mental pain and confusion, this was her first time witnessing such intense physical suffering.

Franca spoke sincerely, "If Ciel were to switch to the Affliction potion now, he wouldn't have to worry about not reaching Sequence 4. It's too compatible!"

Sequence 5 of the Assassin pathway was known as Affliction or the Demoness of Affliction.

After another terrifying roar, the silver-black illusory liquid beads on Lumian's body seeped into him. His expression gradually relaxed, and his body ceased its curled-up state.

He lay sprawled beside the collapsed grayish-white stone pillar, reluctant to move for a few seconds.

While his spirituality had recovered and even increased, his body and mind were visibly exhausted. It was akin to the sensation one experienced after completing an exceptionally challenging task in their most focused state.

Lumian, aware of the urgency, forced himself to his feet.

He noticed that the silver-black candle flame had returned to normal, and the surrounding gray fog was gradually dissipating.

His plan to rely on the gray fog's protection against the terrifying roar had failed before implementation.

Mr. Fool's response had a time limit!

Furthermore, he had to consider the interference of the Celestial Worthy of Heaven and Earth for Blessings.

As Lumian swiftly tidied up the altar, he scrutinized his transformation:

The improvement in spirituality was evident with the Ascetic boon. Lumian believed that even after using the Spell of Harrumph a few times, he could complete nearly eight Spirit World Traversals.

Ascetic had also enhanced his endurance, making him more adaptable to extreme weather. Even if he encountered frost, he wouldn't be frozen. Similarly, he found himself better at enduring emotions and desires. While he still felt them, he could endure many things.

This extended to an Ascetic's core ability, Compression. It could be used for the mind and also produced positive effects in the physical and mystic domains.

The former involved emotions and desires, which were mostly tolerated. They didn't completely disappear but were suppressed. At critical points, they needed to be vented or relieved, or psychological problems could arise. The Compression ability could accumulate these emotions and desires and erupt at critical moments for the desired effect. For Lumian, the negative effects of the Contractee's three abilities and the corresponding effects of mystical items on him were more bearable. However, he needed to regularly break an enemy's neck as a way to vent.

The latter aspect referred to spirituality, strength, and ritual steps. Through Compression, Lumian could compress and store spirituality and strength beyond the average person when he had nothing to do, releasing them when needed. This allowed his spirituality to recover once and temporarily enlarge him. His strength, speed, and agility were sufficient to withstand a Sequence 6 Dawn Paladin of the Warrior pathway for a minute or two. Additionally, the accumulation of ritual steps enabled Lumian to use abilities like the Animal Creation Spell and the Exorcism Spell in actual combat.

Furthermore, after becoming an Ascetic, Lumian's previous boons had been enhanced. For instance, the number of contract abilities he could withstand had increased to three, although he didn't want to maximize them. He preferred choosing one or two suitable ones, as too many contracts brought too many negative effects. Even Ascetics would suffer because of them, as evidenced by negative examples like Guillaume Bénet and Bouvard.

Of course, this wasn't an immediate concern, as summoning creatures from the spirit world was impossible in this location.

Lumian swiftly stashed away the items and dispelled the wall of spirituality. Handing back the fortunate gold coin to Jenna, he spoke in a low, commanding tone, "Let's make our way to Fourth Epoch Trier."

"Huh?" Jenna was bewildered.

Ciel had warned them to steer clear of the giant and the grand city!

Franca looked back with contemplation and said, "Do you suspect that the fog shrouding the city belongs to Mr. Fool? Entering might provide some protection. We won't have to worry about getting taken out by that lunatic's roar or succumbing to the risk of transforming into a monster?"

"Yes, it's dangerous, but there's a chance for us to defend ourselves and await further developments." Lumian inferred that the same fog enshrouded

Fourth Epoch Trier, drawing from the fog around the Samaritan Women's Spring and the lingering shadows of significant figures from the Fourth Epoch.

It emanated from Mr. Fool's powers!

Franca wasted no time and nodded decisively. "Okay."

Jenna chose to trust her two companions without delving into questions.

At that moment, Anthony Reid had finished clearing the battlefield and approached with the spoils.

Chapter 481: The Thing in the Suitcase

Anthony Reid clutched the items salvaged from General Philip's lifeless form, wrapping them in a torn cloak. He avoided direct contact, a cautious move as he moved forward.

"Found these…" he began to explain, but Lumian swiftly cut him off.

Clear and rapid, Lumian outlined their plan, "We're heading to the outskirts of the city enveloped by the gray fog. Want to come with us?"

Anthony Reid's eyelids twitched. "Okay."

He knew going solo could mean a swift demise, especially if the terrifying roar echoed again.

Lumian wasn't in a hurry to inquire about General Philip's belongings. Gripping Jenna and Anthony, he signaled Franca to hold onto his collar.

A dark light emanated from the black mark on his shoulder as the quartet disappeared, seemingly teleporting to the periphery of the majestic yet crumbling city, just before the thin gray fog.

What they saw was where they arrived.

Lumian attempted to step into the gray fog, but the seal on his chest remained dormant.

Franca and the others could traverse it without his guidance.

…

Resembling a hungry bear, Olson fixed his gaze on Gardner Martin's head, devoid of its helmet. His brownish-red eyes flickered with a sinister light, pinpointing Martin's vulnerability.

In mere seconds, Olson identified Martin's weakest spot.

Even if he couldn't deal a fatal blow, inflicting damage to the party again meant a high chance that the Pride Armor would betray its wearer and kill him!

Silently, Olson reached into his pocket, retrieving a yellow bullet held between his thumb and index finger.

A crimson, nearly white fireball rapidly condensed in his palm, leading to a controlled explosion.

The violent shockwave propelled the bullet towards the back of Gardner Martin's head with a thunderous boom.

Gardner Martin staggered, narrowly avoiding the bullet.

Nearly simultaneously, the surroundings were bathed in the bright and holy Sunrise Gleam.

Black smoke billowed from Olson's body as if a long-dead zombie had been exposed to the sunlight created by the Purifiers.

Instinctively, Olson's eyes closed against the intense light.

Meanwhile, Gardner Martin, no longer feeble, donned his helmet with a cold expression and sharp eyes.

He ignited, transforming into a blazing white spear of flames, piercing Supervisor Olson's forehead with a whoosh.

Despite Olson's formidable resistance to scorching flames, his skull suffered charring from the impact. As the flames dissipated, Gardner Martin's figure detached from the burning spear. Clenching his silver-armored fist, he swung it at Olson's head from midair.

As the flames dissipated, Gardner Martin's figure detached from the burning spear. Clenching his silver-armored fist, he swung it at Olson's head from midair.

Olson's neck snapped, and his head flew up, dragging along a bloody spine.

Gardner Martin's skull-crushing punch missed, and he landed on the ground once again.

However, a heavy and sharp broadsword of light materialized in his other hand at some point, ready for the next phase of the battle.

Gardner Martin thrust the broadsword into the blackened soil, unleashing a terrifying storm. Countless light fragments filled the air, creating chaos in the vicinity.

The Pride Armor swiftly condensed the Sword of Dawn again, the Hurricane of Light forming with a much shorter interval than an ordinary Sequence 6 Dawn Paladin. Only a minute or two had passed since Gardner Martin last wielded this formidable power.

Olson, reduced to just his head with a brownish-red beard, showed focus in his eyes and attempted to merge with a burning-white spear for a hasty retreat.

However, the storm arrived, its light engulfing him completely.

As the Hurricane of Light subsided, Olson's body displayed severe damage, riddled with cracks, some piercing through his chest and tearing internal organs. His severed head, carried by a bloody spine, bore the marks of destruction—eyes and nose obliterated, skull cracked, and blackened brain exposed.

Gardner Martin, poised and composed, conjured ten to twenty crimson fireballs.

They darted toward Olson's nearly unconscious head, triggering a resounding explosion that shattered the head into fragments and liquid, splattering on the ground.

With a chuckle, Gardner Martin raised his visor, surveying Olson's headless corpse and the scattered skull. He remarked, "I've always found you a little odd. This was a good opportunity to test you. I didn't expect you to really attack me. That's good too. Not only have I eliminated a hidden danger, but I've also counteracted the traitorous curse of the Pride Armor."

Deliberately appearing fine while exposing some problems through the details was meant to bait Olson—simple acts of vulnerability could easily raise the other party's vigilance and suspicion.

With a sigh, Gardner approached the battered suitcase that had fallen to the ground and lifted it, on the verge of shattering.

He had long been curious about its contents, as Olson had always evaded the question. Now, Gardner could finally open it himself.

Gardner Martin unlatched the suitcase and opened it in front of him.

Inside was a head.

The features were unmistakable—deep facial features, brownish-red eyes, slightly disheveled black hair, a few silver strands at the temples, and well-defined facial features. The head which wasn't considered thin was stained with blood.

It was Gardner Martin!

It was Gardner Martin's own head!

…

Once Lumian and his companions traversed the outermost gray fog, the transition from morning to evening seemed to unfold before them. Darkness enveloped their vision, concealing the black asymmetrical buildings and houses that appeared as if splattered with blood. Everything silently melded into the obscurity.

As they advanced, the looming, half-collapsed palace drew nearer. The city bore the brunt of colossal damage, as if a giant had delivered a devastating blow, unleashing shockwaves that wreaked havoc on the surroundings.

Details eluded Lumian's scrutiny. The lack of sufficient light and the considerable distance obscured the exact nature of the scene. Various houses obstructed their view, and only the excessively tall palace and surrounding structures, despite their partial collapse, allowed them a glimpse of the peripheral city.

"Let's find a nearby hiding spot," Franca suggested, her gaze scanning the area. She had no intention of venturing deeper into Fourth Epoch Trier.

The quartet found themselves on a narrow street, where the houses on both sides were so close that occupants could almost shake hands by extending their arms.

The structures, resembling victims of a violent earthquake, teetered but refused to collapse, adorned with ghastly cracks.

Jenna's attention fixated on a relatively intact house. Iron-black in color, it featured an arched window on the left and a square on the right. Dark-red graffiti adorned one side, while the other remained clean. Not a single weed grew between the rocks.

Apart from the two obvious pots, the house exhibited various asymmetrical details, with centipede-like cracks mainly concentrated on the lower left side.

"Should we go there?" Jenna inquired.

Lumian shook his head.

"The more intact, the higher the likelihood of abnormalities. The current state of Fourth Epoch Trier's citizens is unknown.

"Let's find a completely collapsed building to hide behind. At least, everything inside should be buried."

"Agreed," Franca concurred with Lumian's decision.

In Fourth Epoch Trier, she couldn't fully perform Magic Mirror Divination.

Lumian and his team swiftly reached the center of the dimly lit street. In a setting that could plunge into darkness at any given moment, they strategically maneuvered around the ruins of a dark-red building, seeking cover.

It wasn't until now that Anthony Reid seized an opportunity to extract the Arrow of the Bloodthirsty from his chest, returning it to Jenna.

With the dark-stained black cloak spread on the ground, he showcased his findings.

There were three items in total:

The first, a blackened ulna punctuated by dark-red holes, resembling a rough bone flute that had been kept in storage for ages.

The second, a small wooden box painted in dark hues. Compact enough to fit into a concealed pocket, it featured large holes on both sides veiled by swaying, leather-like "curtains."

Lastly, a collection of gold, silver, and copper coins.

Anthony Reid gestured toward the "bone flute" and explained, "This formed from the convergence of light spots on Philip's ulna. It seems something formless has settled on it."

Conspirer or Reaper Beyonder characteristic combined with his ulna and the power of the Deceased boon? Lumian nodded indiscernibly.

Philip hadn't had a chance to retaliate before, leaving him uncertain about the general's Sequence—a Sequence 6 Conspirer or a Sequence 5 Reaper. What was clear, however, was the general's affiliation with the Hunter pathway. This deduction was based on the creation of numerous crimson Fire Ravens, almost white in hue. Moreover, the general wasn't just a Sequence 7.

If it were the latter, Lumian would have been pleased to obtain the main ingredient for his advancement. The issue lay in the mixture of the power with an evil god's boon, rendering it unsuitable for direct use in potion concoction.

"What settled on it is the corruption of an evil god. It was a wise choice not to touch it directly," Lumian informed Anthony.

Within the underground seal, the power of an evil god's boon couldn't return to its source.

"This was found on Philip's body…" Anthony pointed at the dark wooden box. Before he could finish speaking, another frenzied and violent roar echoed from afar.

This time, the four of them, having entered the gray fog, only experienced a slight dizziness and remained unaffected.

Chapter 482: Bodies Chasing Heads

Franca shook off the dizziness induced by the terrifying roar and sighed from the bottom of her heart.

"As expected, the gray fog here provides protection."

Without it, facing a roar that could harm their Spirit Body and affect their minds would result in losing control, turning into monsters, or immediate death.

"Praise The Fool!" Lumian openly expressed his faith.

He then reminded her in an icy tone, "But the hidden dangers here might be more terrifying than the previous roar."

Franca fell silent for a few seconds before speaking in an encouraging tone, "Hidden dangers are preferable to those that have already surfaced. Let's avoid triggering them. If nothing else occurs, we'll stay in this corner and wait for help!"

While Jenna and Anthony Reid harbored doubts about the strategy of passivity, they hesitated to venture deep into Fourth Epoch Trier and reluctantly accepted the plan that wasn't really a plan.

In the eerie silence, Anthony was the first to regain composure. He pointed at the dark wooden box and stated, "I'm not sure of its purpose. A simple, temporary touch doesn't seem to have any obvious negative effects."

As for the coins, their significance was apparent. A quick glance and rough calculation revealed a total of 312 verl d'or and 26 coppet.

Franca leaned against a collapsed pillar in the shadows, her eyes fixed on the mysterious dark wooden box. "What the hell is this thing?"

It was obviously no ordinary container; its appearance suggested it held some kind of mysterious power.

Lumian and Anthony turned their attention to the Demoness of Pleasure simultaneously.

Lumian chuckled, "I should be the one asking you that."

Franca exclaimed, "There was nothing I could do. I couldn't spare time for spirit channeling, and this place isn't connected to the real spirit world. I can't perform Magic Mirror Divination. To understand the abilities, effects, state, and potential drawbacks of these two items, I'll have to experiment with them myself repeatedly.

"Of course, if we encounter an Artisan, many of our problems might be solved."

She gestured towards Jenna, saying, "Just like the black Primordial Demoness figurine, it undoubtedly has other functions. For instance, it allows the holder to create Mirror Substitution. As for mine, apart from providing a certain anti-divination and early warning effect, it can only be used as a supplicant during rituals.

"They're both figurines, differing only in color and orientation. Why such a significant disparity?"

Franca avoided mentioning why she didn't employ various methods to gather information about the black Primordial Demoness figurine. The unspoken understanding among the group was clear—in their current situation, ensuring their safety took precedence over risking injury or adverse effects to test their spoils of war. Any mishap could lead to dire consequences, potentially even death in the experiment.

As a heavy silence settled among Jenna and the others, Franca sighed inwardly.

The black figurine clearly is problematic, and its mysterious origin is intriguing. It explains why the Demoness Sect wants me to investigate what Gardner had smuggled in through the underground tunnels…

If I hand it over, will the Demoness Sect reward me with the Affliction potion and pledge assistance for my ritual, or will they choose to silence me?

Lumian stroked his chin, addressing Anthony Reid, "In that case, keep the verl d'or. We'll distribute the remaining spoils of war when we return to the surface."

Anthony inquired further, "Should we wrap it in a cloak and place it on the ground before taking it when we leave?"

Lumian smiled and gestured at the charred bone flute,

"Otherwise? You can also carry it with you. This way, we might witness the abilities of a Deceased. Philip died in a hurry and didn't have time to show us.

"Of course, judging from his condition at the time of death, the holder of the item will most likely be the recipient of those abilities in the form of a curse."

Anthony, unfazed by the mockery, pulled up the blood-stained and tattered black cloak, wrapping it around the bone flute and the small wooden box once more.

Lumian, with a thoughtful expression, poked his head out and looked at the abnormally narrow street.

"If we encounter an enemy we find challenging to handle later, we can consider throwing these two items to him. It might have a miraculous effect. General Philip will be very pleased to know that he would still be of use after death."

It might bring about a curse of fate!

Despite the tense atmosphere, Lumian's constant mockery of General Philip brought a slight amusement to Jenna.

"Dammit, General Philip is already dead. There's no need to harp on about him."

Before Lumian could respond to Jenna, two tragic screams pierced the air.

The cries emanated from the same location, filled with undisguised fear.

Soon after, two figures rushed into the narrow street, as if pursuing an unidentified flying object hovering in the air.

Franca, alongside Lumian, peered out of the shadows, her expression freezing at the sight.

The two figures, a man and a woman, were decapitated, their necks mangled, devoid of any signs of bones.

Chasing them were two heads, displaying pure fear and dragging bloody, tail-like spines behind them.

One head belonged to a man with puffed-up cheeks resembling a squirrel. He chewed on long, thick black hair that emerged from his dark brown eyes, nostrils, and ears. Similar hair grew from the headless body chasing him, denser and more exaggerated, resembling seaweed.

The other head belonged to a beautiful woman with black hair and brown eyes. She flew forward frantically, coughing and shaking out resplendent starlight. Gravel in the surroundings, sent flying by the pursuit, swayed as if in slow motion.

Suddenly, the two heads and bodies, about to climb over a collapsed building and exit the narrow street, froze.

The heads shook in confusion, attempting to dispel a discomfort. The headless corpses raised their hands, clutching their left chests.

In mere seconds, the two heads, with bloody spines trailing behind them, plummeted into the collapsed black house, their bodies crashing onto the stacked rocks.

A heavy silence fell upon Lumian and the others.

After a few seconds, Lumian scoffed, "See, this is what happens when you venture deep into Fourth Epoch Trier."

"Do you suspect they're residents of the Hostel?" Jenna inquired thoughtfully.

Lumian replied with a smirk, "Otherwise? "Where else could you find such fresh heads and bodies in an ancient ruin that's been buried for a millennium or two?"

This brought back memories of Supervisor Olson. He had been in this state when he first appeared.

Now, Lumian was almost certain that Olson was a true monster, with a head and body that could be separated.

Franca also recalled Gardner Martin's servants. She withdrew her gaze and pondered for a moment before stating,

"Why do bodiless heads still cough, as if they're sick…? What happened to them at the end seems like a cerebral infarction. The two headless bodies show signs of cardiac arrest.

"Is this the work of the Sick Church's evil god's bestowed, or is there another murderer?

"Right, a Sequence 5 of the Demoness pathway is called Affliction. It can spread various illnesses, and I can enter this place with the Primordial Demoness figurine and the ancient silver mirror…

"This place clearly has a lot to do with the Demoness pathway. Could the high-level power leaking out cause monsters to fall ill and die?"

"Not bad. You still have some intelligence at critical moments," Lumian praised mockingly.

Jenna, on the other hand, rejoiced.

"Fortunately, we didn't venture too deep. Otherwise, who knows when we'd fall ill and die."

Lumian smiled at her.

"Why do you think we're not currently surrounded by disease?"

"B-but we didn't cough…" Jenna's voice trailed off as she glanced at the hidden pocket of her clothes.

Inside was the pitch-black Primordial Demoness figurine.

Franca also peered into her pocket, as if she could discern the bone-carved Primordial Demoness figurine through the fabric.

Anthony turned to Lumian and sought confirmation,

"Are you suggesting that the Fourth Epoch's Trier is plagued with illnesses, and we're unharmed because we're carrying the two figurines?"

Lumian spread his hands and said,

"I believe this explanation makes more sense."

…

Beyond the gray fog, at the edge of the Fourth Epoch's Trier ruins.

In the small brown suitcase, Gardner Martin's blood-stained face suddenly opened, revealing Gardner Martin clad in silver armor, reflected in its eyes.

It opened its mouth and expelled a blazing white fireball.

The distance between them was so close that Gardner Martin couldn't dodge at all. All he could do was lean back, attempting to avoid the target's initial attack.

Boom! Gardner Martin was sent flying by the massive explosion.

The spiderweb-like crack on the chest of the silver armor shattered, tearing through the skin and flesh below.

This strike was akin to hitting Gardner Martin's vital points. Had it not been for the Pride Armor, which absorbed most of the damage, he would have perished on the spot.

However, this meant that the Pride Armor lost its protection over the chest for a period.

Gardner Martin's bloodied head flew up, dragging along a bloody spine.

On the other side, Olson's headless corpse stood up once more.

Gardner Martin's head aimed for the empty neck stump and inserted the ghastly white spine.

Amidst a cracking sound, this "Gardner Martin," seemingly from hell, twisted his neck and smiled sinisterly at Gardner Martin, who had already changed positions and condensed a large number of crimson Fire Ravens that were nearly white.

"Olson is long dead. I've been controlling his head and body.

"In the future, I'll replace you."

…

In the wilderness, the ground trembled violently, and blazing cracks slithered into the distance like fiery serpents.

The figures of Magician and Justice appeared.

Chapter 483: Hidden History

Dressed in a white shirt with a knot and a beige dress, Magician fixed her gaze upon the menacing hurricane that bridged the gap between sky and earth. Her eyes glittered, as if concealing the vast cosmos.

"Vermonda Sauron is indeed a Sequence 1 Conqueror. It's no wonder He could influence generations of the Sauron family after losing control and going underground. It's no wonder the Sauron family, once a royal lineage, swiftly declined," Magician mused, sighing.

Justice, inquisitive, asked, "I wonder how the former leader of the Secret Order, Zaratul, and Emperor Roselle played a role in Vermonda Sauron losing control and entering the Fourth Epoch Trier. The Sauron branch, wielding Grade 0 Sealed Artifacts, obstinately believes that they harmed Vermonda, causing the Conqueror to lose control. The former even left a prophecy to mislead generations of Sauron family members."

Magician chuckled and replied, "Based on the information Lumian gathered and my research into the seal, the issue deep within Red Swan Castle's underground maze doesn't seem like something Zaratul or Emperor Roselle could create. Only a Weather Warlock and a Conqueror can resonate abnormally with Fourth Epoch Trier day after day, creating dangerous changes in corresponding places. Zaratul and Emperor Roselle likely exploited the problems that Red Swan Castle and Vermonda Sauron already had."

While she spoke, the Tarot Club's Major Arcana card holder shifted her gaze away from the hurricane sweeping through the world and focused on Fourth Epoch Trier, veiled in a thin gray fog.

The starlight in her eyes remained, as if she sought something to pinpoint her next target. She didn't abruptly halt and engage in conversation at a crucial moment.

Justice nodded in agreement and remarked, "If it were me, I wouldn't venture further into Trier after becoming an Angel to minimize the abnormal influence the underground might have on me. Vermonda Sauron disregarded hidden dangers and stayed in Red Swan Castle for an extended period. He must have had a strong desire for something in Fourth Epoch Trier."

"Didn't the Sauron family construct the White Maple Palace outside Trier? Previously, Vermonda's royal family resided there and rarely returned to Trier." Magician brought up the fact that the Sauron family was aware of the issue before adding, "Zaratul likely played a significant role in Vermonda Sauron's situation. As you know, He is an Archangel of the Seer pathway. Without His 'assistance,' it wouldn't have been easy for Vermonda Sauron—even as a Conqueror—to create a leak in the seal. He entered Fourth Epoch Trier after losing control. Back then, the seal's effects weren't as potent as they were a few years ago. There was no need for modifications."

Justice pondered for a moment and said, "What I'm more curious about is who designed the Hostel ritual. Their use of mysticism similarities and loopholes resembles that of high-level Seer, Apprentice, or Marauder Beyonders. Or perhaps they have had long interactions with these high-level Beyonders and were adept at learning."

"Perhaps the corresponding pathway of the Deceased excels in this as well. Perhaps it's secretly influenced by that Celestial Worthy, or perhaps that entity wants to use the temporary opening of the seal to do something. As you know, the Iron and Blood Cross Order used to believe in Him. It's too easy for Him to mislead us," Magician mused, uncertain of the right answer.

Starlight flickered in her eyes; she found it challenging to observe and determine the situation in the thin gray fog.

As Magician scrutinized Fourth Epoch Trier, she informed Justice, "The level of the catacombs' seal corresponds to this location.

"At its heart lies the Samaritan Women's Spring, where Blood Emperor Alista Tudor met His end. The razed imperial palace and its surroundings harbor diverse dangers. The lingering divine power is unimpressive and consumable. Sigh, every time I bring up something of this sort, it feels like I should adopt a more vulgar vocabulary. Only then can I truly capture my sentiments about the Blood Emperor's lunacy.

"Hence, you won't unearth anything significant from here. Only upon approaching will you discern that Mr. Fool's gray fog has grown denser, thicker, and more palpable.

"The catacombs' fourth and third levels correspond to Fourth Epoch Trier, excluding that specific area. Corruption and divine power still linger abundantly. Navigating certain areas demands adherence to specific rules; otherwise, even Angels may meet Their demise.

"The two levels above the catacombs correlate with the wilderness beyond the gray fog. Humans can traverse them to a certain extent, but with Vermonda Sauron lingering, the danger rivals that of the Fourth Epoch Trier…"

Just as Magician concluded her words, a frenzied and terrifying roar echoed from the area where the weather had dramatically shifted.

The formless flames that illuminated the surroundings and shrouded the entire "sky" seemed to be influenced, coalescing into a massive vortex.

Within the vortex, shapeless and translucent flames descended from above, striking the wilderness like a colossal sword that pierced through heaven and earth.

Amidst this chaos, the ground quaked even more violently. Fiery crevices extended further towards Fourth Epoch Trier, concealed within the gray fog.

Magician remained unperturbed as she observed the splendid yet dilapidated city for a while.

Then, she said to Justice, "Let's enter."

Justice tersely acknowledged, offering no objections.

Both of them tacitly avoided mentioning Vermonda Sauron, an Archangel who had lost control—a Conqueror. They had no intention of joining the battle or seizing the Beyonder characteristic.

For them, the Tarot Club's primary goal in this matter was to prevent the evil gods' bestowed from approaching the innermost seal, ensuring they couldn't leak the danger within which would affect Trier aboveground and the entire world.

Furthermore, they sought the lost Minor Arcana card holders to guide them out.

As for the Conqueror Beyonder characteristic, symbolizing an Archangel and Sequence 1, as long as it didn't fall into the hands of heretics, obtaining it wasn't a particularly grave issue for anyone. Magician didn't mind observing and, if the opportunity arose, pilfering the gains. However, she wasn't a high-level Beyonder of the Marauder pathway capable of dividing herself and participating in every battlefield.

Despite achieving a similar effect by moving back and forth, she had to respect Mr. Fool's gray fog and the core seal of Fourth Epoch Trier. Corresponding restrictions were undoubtedly in place.

Starlight blossomed, and Magician and Justice vanished. The thin gray fog enshrouding Fourth Epoch Trier undulated.

…

As soon as Gardner Martin's head—nestled over Olson's headless corpse—finished speaking, a multitude of blazing white fireballs materialized around him, hurtling towards Gardner Martin, who had suffered a chest wound.

In the midst of the rumbling explosion, Gardner Martin's figure in the silver armor suddenly vanished.

After the shockwave subsided, he reappeared in a corner of the ruins.

Then, he witnessed the other "him" merge with the blazing white flaming spear, which burrowed into the thin gray fog and disappeared into the randomly scattered buildings of Fourth Epoch Trier.

Gardner Martin's pupils constricted, and he was about to give chase when a violent and furious roar echoed from afar.

His entire body froze. Blood vessels beneath the visor on his face appeared, dark red as if flowing with flames.

Instinctively, Gardner Martin turned and prepared to sprint towards the distant apocalypse-like hurricane.

The space between his eyebrows twitched, and a faint red dot appeared.

Gardner Martin finally regained control of himself. He took a deep breath and returned to normal.

He gazed in the direction the other "him" had fled and muttered in a self-deprecating tone, "Were those harsh words and all-out attacks meant to make it easier for him to escape? As expected of me. Do you realize that failing to assassinate me means staying here means I'll inevitably kill you?"

As Gardner Martin muttered to himself, he produced a canister made of dark glass, its liquid a green hue reminiscent of grass.

He unscrewed the cap and downed half the canister. The wound on his chest began to heal at a visible rate.

It was a healing agent concocted by a Madame of the Nightstalkers, obtained by Gardner Martin through Philip.

Philip, who had united numerous evil god cults, had no shortage of similar items, but under the Hurricane of Light, the fragile canisters shattered.

After stowing away the remaining half canister of the agent, Gardner Martin, clad in silver-white full-body armor, ventured into the thin gray fog and Fourth Epoch Trier.

…

In the cover of a narrow street, behind a collapsed building, Franca hissed in agreement with Lumian's conjecture.

"That's right. This is a true relic from a divine war, and it's even more dangerous. It's entirely possible that the entire city is riddled with ailments."

She suspected that the closer she got to the place where Blood Emperor Alista Tudor had met his end, the more peculiar and horrifying the ailments became. Some seemed to have sprouted from the decaying corpses of deities. Ignoring Low-Sequence Beyonders whose bodies didn't fundamentally differ from ordinary humans, even Saints and Angels would likely succumb to the "disease" and perish.

Franca paused for a moment before suggesting to Jenna, "Why don't you give the black figurine to Anthony for safekeeping? It might be dangerous for you to hold it, and he can use that item to create his own Mirror Substitution, effectively increasing his chances of survival."

Franca couldn't shake the feeling that it wasn't a wise decision for a female Demoness like Jenna to possess a Primordial Demoness figurine, whether it was the genuine article or the mirrored version.

Without waiting for Jenna's response, Lumian spoke in a deep voice, "It's better if Jenna holds it. She has the lucky gold coin."

"That's true…" Just as Franca finished speaking, she suddenly heard a chime not far away.

It resembled the bell of a bicycle, yet it was clearer and rang out for a longer duration.

Chapter 484: Mockery

Franca wasn't surprised at all, even though she wondered why so many things were happening in this damn place.

This was Fourth Epoch Trier. Even if it wasn't a land of a fallen god, it wouldn't lack abnormalities!

Lumian and the others cautiously emerged from their concealment, peering from different vantage points toward the source of the chimes.

The location wasn't distant, yet the fog in that direction seemed unusually dense. The structures loomed faintly, as though just a fragment of history had materialized.

Within the fog's depths, a contraption reminiscent of a steam locomotive glided by without a fuss. It sported only two carriages, lacking a smokestack. Peculiar frames extended from the top, linking it to something suspended in midair.

Ding ding ding. The train ventured into a zone of even thicker fog, disappearing from view.

Although Franca and her companions couldn't discern the details clearly, an unexplained dread seized them, akin to standing on the precipice or treading on blades piercing their skin.

Before they could contemplate the ramifications of the fog's metamorphosis and the arrival of these peculiar objects, their surroundings plunged into a profound darkness. Dusk gave way, and night loomed.

A dense fog cloaked the area.

Lumian, sensing an unsettling disturbance, yearned to evade it, but the abnormal fog, tainted with a dark hue, obstructed any attempt to "teleport" to an unaffected area. Beyond the fog, the wilderness they came from eluded his senses.

The cold fog permeated their skin, prompting involuntary shivers from Franca and Jenna.

Almost simultaneously, the narrow street came alive with the flickering of candle flames and oil lamps. Laughter, cries, and voices erupted, transforming the once-silent surroundings.

Fourth Epoch Trier burst into vibrant life, resonating with clamor and the pulsations of existence.

Anthony, without conscious thought, surveyed the diverse houses and narrow streets, catching sight of an asymmetrical, pitch-black building. Candlesticks dangled from above, casting light upon the figure standing at the window.

The figure donned a black bonnet, with one side sunken and the other protruding. Dark clothes adorned him, with buttons haphazardly fastened, and a smooth wound diagonally sliced his body from shoulder to waist.

Evidently caused by a sharp broadsword.

In that moment, the man's diagonally cleaved body resembled a child's stacked building blocks, not properly assembled.

He nonchalantly nibbled at a meat pie, chewed morsels falling from the wound to the ground, yet he remained oblivious.

Additional figures emerged in other habitable houses.

Some appeared like melted candles that had solidified once more, their flesh viscous and indistinct. Others had pale-white skin, and greasy white feathers sprouted from their pores, oozing yellowish pus. Some had tiny holes in their bodies, with black insects flying in and out. There were those reduced to white skeletons, with only a mismatched human-skinned mask covering their faces. Some had degenerated into black shadows, as if burned…

On the narrow street, a yellow, blue, and red sphere, about half the height of an adult human, rolled forward. An inverted clown, dressed in exaggerated clothes, stood atop it.

The clown's ears were unlike those of a human, dog-like and slightly pointed. Dark gray hair covered his red-yellow-painted face.

These are the long-dead citizens of Fourth Epoch Trier? Lumian's eyelids twitched.

He, Franca, and the others also observed the bloodstained faces and cold expressions of these figures.

"Very similar, very similar to those Mirror People…" Franca muttered to herself before exclaiming in horror, "Could the gray fog's transformation have transported us to the Fourth Epoch Trier in the mirror? The citizens of Fourth Epoch Trier in reality are dead, but the ones in the mirror are still alive?"

Before she could finish, Lumian and Anthony's gazes turned toward her and Jenna.

"Could it be that it's the problem with those two things again?" Franca's scalp tingled as she said, "Did they cause us to be devoured by the mirror's Fourth Epoch Trier after the gray fog transformed?"

"That's not it. I believe it's a universal abnormality. Apart from a few special individuals who enter this place, they all arrive in the mirror ruins after being enveloped by the expanding gray fog." Lumian observed the narrow street brimming with vitality, pondering for a moment. "The most likely possibility is that the two figurines triggered Fourth Epoch Trier, causing changes like the gray fog's expansion."

Jenna fell silent for a moment before frowning.

"But we've been here for a while. Why did something only happen now? We didn't do anything just now…"

"That's right!" Franca suddenly realized. "Those Hostel residents must have triggered something while wandering around after their entry!"

As soon as Franca finished speaking, a hoarse and terrified shout echoed nearby.

"Help!

"Save me!"

Lumian and his companions turned their attention toward the voice and witnessed a man in a black formal suit, his hair neatly combed like a prominent figure's secretary, sprinting down the narrow street.

His face was marred by abscesses, oozing mucus. Occasionally, he turned his head 180 degrees, his eyes filled with fear as if a formless and terrifying entity pursued him.

"Save me!"

Amidst his cries, the man's body suddenly froze, and he involuntarily retreated. His retreat accelerated until he lifted off.

"Ah!"

Amidst intense screams, he plunged into the dense gray fog and the shadowy buildings.

In the next moment, the voice abruptly ceased, and silence enveloped that area.

Lumian and the others' hearts pounded with a strong sense of danger.

Despite the man in the black suit not being an ordinary person, suspected to be the bestowed of an evil god from the Order of All Extinction or the Sick Church, and having been corrupted by this place to a certain extent, allowing him to turn his head 180o, Lumian, Anthony, and their companions still felt the terror lurking in the depths of the gray fog.

It was as if they could already envision themselves being "dragged" into the gray fog and vanishing.

However, at that moment, they had no idea what to do or how to hide. Dense black gray fog surrounded the suspected mirror ruins, and unknown dangers loomed in the shadows, quietly approaching.

At that moment, Termiboros's majestic voice resonated in Lumian's ears:

"Keep running until you reach that pillar. Don't stop on the way. Don't turn back. Don't teleport. Don't pull your companions."

Isn't… isn't that the direction where the monster was "devoured"? If we take the initiative to approach, wouldn't we be sending ourselves as food to its doorstep? Lumian grappled with uncertainty, unsure if Termiboros had sensed real danger and planned to intervene or if He was exploiting the opportunity to advance His own agenda.

"You can choose not to believe it," Termiboros's deep voice added.

Despite his suspicions, Lumian's gaze remained fixed on the spot where the evil god bestowed's figure had been "devoured."

Deep within the gray fog, amidst looming, collapsed, and towering buildings, a hazy black pillar stretched into the sky.

Suddenly, Lumian recalled something.

At the entrance of the fourth level of the catacombs—Krismona Night Pillar.

As for Krismona, she was a high-ranking Demoness who had perished during the War of the Four Emperors in Fourth Epoch Trier!

She was even a child of God, a true child of the Primordial Demoness… This place is suspected to be the mirror's Fourth Epoch Trier… Lumian surveyed the surroundings and saw that the situation elsewhere was similar. He gritted his teeth and said, "Let's move forward! To the black pillar!"

The sense of danger intensified, pushing Lumian to make a decisive gamble.

Move forward? Franca, Jenna, and Anthony were brimming with questions about Lumian's choice.

Everyone had witnessed the chilling fate of the man in the formal suit!

Lumian stood tall and declared in a commanding voice, "Jenna, carry the spoils of war. Don't stop, don't turn around, and don't pull any of our companions!"

Upon finishing his sentence, he darted out of his hiding spot.

Given the specificity of Lumian's instructions, Franca cast a glance at him and chose to trust his judgment.

Jenna tightened her grip on the lucky gold coin, hoisted the cloak containing the spoils of war, and followed suit. Anthony, having exacted his revenge, harbored no regrets or obsessions. Lumian had proven his correctness multiple times, so he didn't question him and trailed closely.

Thud! Thud! Thud! The quartet sprinted down the narrow street, passing by the inverted clown, who rolled forward on the ball at a deliberate pace. They plunged into the depths of the gray fog, heading towards the black pillar.

…

In a corner of Fourth Epoch Trier, in front of a black iron-like house adorned with a red pattern, a wilderness overgrown with weeds had been condensed to the size of an ordinary square.

Within a dark-red open carriage in the wilderness, Lady Moon, draped in a loose white robe and a light-colored veil, queried Madame Pualis, who stood beside her, "What's wrong?"

Madame Pualis, dressed in black with her head covered by her right hand, replied, "I can hear my child crying again…"

Lady Moon nodded gently and offered reassurance, "That's unavoidable. Rest here and catch up when you've recovered."

"Are you sure you can handle it alone?" Madame Pualis's facial muscles twitched and distorted intermittently.

Lady Moon smiled and responded, "My child left me a gift. Don't worry."

She didn't consider Madame Night to be of much help in this matter. Madame Night could enter because she needed to stay at the Sacred Heart Cloister to draw attention and couldn't remain in the Hostel.

"Alright," Madame Pualis said regretfully.

After Lady Moon's carriage and the wilderness departed, Madame Night's expression quickly returned to normal.

Lady Moon's carriage, pulled by two Demon-like creatures, advanced for a while before the gray fog thickened and expanded.

Her eyes narrowed as a blood-stained umbilical cord materialized in her hand.

The umbilical cord emitted a brilliant golden sunlight, warding off all corrosion and influence.

Thus, Lady Moon successfully reached the periphery of the land of a fallen god. The gray fog here stood as dense as a wall.

Attempting to approach, she found herself blocked, akin to an ordinary person encountering an impenetrable barrier.

Lady Moon felt a compelling force but couldn't proceed any further.

She whispered in surprise and confusion, "How could this be…"

As she pondered to herself, Lady Moon surveyed her surroundings.

Suddenly, her gaze froze.

On the surface of a nearby half-collapsed palace-like structure, a flamboyant red color seized the wall, outlined in a bloody state: "Didn't anyone tell you that there's another seal here?"

Chapter 485: Night Pillar

The intensifying gray fog at the core that spread to every corner of Fourth Epoch Trier didn't faze Gardner Martin, wrapped in sleek silver-white full-body armor. Instead of alarm, delight surged within him. Since the invasion of the power from Building 13 on Avenue du Marché, and being able to hear the great voice, such scenes had frequented his dreams. It felt like returning home, the door wide open for him.

Without hesitation, Gardner Martin sprinted toward the heart of Fourth Epoch Trier, heading for the land of the fallen god.

…

Through a street so narrow that the residents in the houses on both sides could almost reach out and shake hands, Lumian and his companions sprinted forward.

After only a dozen steps, Lumian sensed an intangible force emanating from the pitch-black gray fog. It was like the countless arms of a terrifying entity, gently and methodically caressing every living being to determine its prey.

Lumian's scalp tingled. Even with his clothes providing cover, goosebumps erupted where the formless entity touched him.

Instinctively, he wanted to resist, but then he remembered Termiboros's words.

"Don't stop. Don't turn back. Don't teleport. Don't pull your companions!"

While this didn't explicitly mention resisting, defending, or attacking, Lumian felt it wise to observe and wait for developments.

Suppressing the urge to incinerate the formless entities, he compelled himself to move forward.

Jenna, by his side, and Franca and Anthony behind him, closely monitored Lumian. If he didn't act, neither did they. If he did, they would quickly follow suit.

Observing Lumian refraining from confronting the formless entity in the dim gray fog, they braced themselves, enduring the intense and danger-filled caresses.

In the midst of this, Franca found the formless object somewhat familiar.

Recalling the suspicion that this place was the mirror's Fourth Epoch Trier, closely linked to the Demoness pathway, she quickly had an answer.

It bore a striking resemblance to a Demoness of Pleasure's spider silk!

Could it be left behind by a high-level Demoness? Franca imagined a scene: a colossal pitch-black, half-human spider, nestled silently in the depths of the gray fog, extending spider silk that seemed to possess a life of its own, attempting to locate and capture its prey.

After covering more than ten steps in a sprint, Lumian was pleasantly surprised to notice the formless entity slowly retracting. It no longer actively caressed him, but given their dense presence, occasional brushes or touches were inevitable.

This change appeared to be a response to his proactive approach towards the source of the formless entities.

These formless entities seemed to single out those attempting to escape!

Upon breaking free from the narrow street and delving into the thick gray fog, Lumian suddenly felt his hair stand on end, a chilling sensation running down his spine.

His intuition warned of immense danger ahead, a threat capable of obliterating them all. The consequences of getting closer were beyond imagination.

Franca and the others involuntarily slowed down. The horror felt palpable, like a loaded revolver pressed against their foreheads, poised to fire at any moment.

Lumian clenched his teeth and pressed on.

Having chosen to trust Termiboros's advice, he needed to endure until there was evidence to the contrary. Otherwise, he might as well do something else from the beginning!

He didn't halt, and Jenna and the others didn't dare to either. They resembled fools aware of an impending cliff, understanding their insignificance, yet choosing to rush forward, like an idiot.

At that moment, Lumian caught sight from the corner of his eye of black flames erupting over Jenna's body. Pain etched her face, fear mirrored in her eyes.

Crack! Jenna shattered like a mirror, only to reappear, still engulfed in black flames and frost.

Her eyes pleaded with Lumian.

Instinctively, Lumian raised his left hand, as if to aid Jenna. However, a brief moment of hesitation swept over him, and he withdrew his hand, fixing his gaze ahead.

Don't pull companions!

Despair, surprise, and resentment filled Jenna's eyes instantly.

She coughed and came to a standstill.

Swiftly ensnared by the formless entities, she was dragged deeper into the gray fog.

Franca, witnessing this, had an immediate change in expression, ready to offer assistance when Lumian's instructions flashed through her mind.

She hesitated.

In that moment, Jenna's expression transformed into one of pure hatred, blood seeping from the pores on her face. A shrill scream escaped her lips, akin to a curse echoing towards everyone.

Seeing this, Lumian and the others experienced a strange sense of relief.

This Jenna seemed more like a Mirror Person!

Amidst the shrill scream, Jenna vanished into the depths of the gray fog, her voice abruptly silenced.

Almost simultaneously, Lumian caught Jenna in his peripheral vision, sprinting beside him with an anxious and nervous expression.

As expected! Lumian roughly comprehended why Termiboros had cautioned against pulling companions.

In this realm, a companion could seamlessly switch with their mirror counterpart at any moment. Assisting the "Mirror Person" risked harm to their true companion, leading to complete assimilation into this place, becoming "food" for the entity at the source of the formless objects.

Dammit! Couldn't you be more explicit? These reasons aren't particularly intricate. You insist on us experiencing them ourselves and overcoming them! Cursing Termiboros inwardly, Lumian pressed on with even more determination.

In the subsequent encounters, similar challenges arose multiple times. Yet, armed with experience, they refrained from resisting or attempting escape. They resisted the impulse to aid their companions.

Lumian and the others, focused on their path, ran straight using the black pillar as a guide. Occasionally, they bypassed obstacles.

Finally, the black pillar loomed not far ahead.

Simultaneously, Lumian, Anthony, and the rest were astonished to find that the imminent danger, on the verge of colliding with them, had mysteriously vanished.

No, it hadn't disappeared. It was now behind Lumian and the group—distant!

Running toward danger results in moving away from it? Just like the pale-black stone brick area in the wilderness, the direction here is twisted and chaotic? Amid Lumian's surprise, he didn't glance back, nor did he pause to celebrate. He persisted, sprinting toward the black pillar.

Had he not set a resolute example, Franca and Jenna might have turned around. Nonetheless, they pressed forward, a sense of relief mingling with lingering fear.

After covering dozens of meters, the quartet reached the square where the black pillar stood.

The ground was paved with pale-black stone bricks, and numerous grayish-white stone pillars lay in ruins, only a few remnants remaining.

Compared to the black pillars, these "surviving" grayish-white stone pillars were as inconspicuous as ants.

The colossal black pillar surpassed even the Krismona Night Pillar Lumian had witnessed on the third level of the catacombs. It stretched into the sky, seeming to burn with formless flames, its destination shrouded in mystery.

The scene brought to Lumian's mind the pale-black stone bricks in the wilderness outside and the numerous grayish-white stone pillars in the vicinity, but nothing akin to the black pillar.

Had the Night Pillar in the wilderness collapsed and been destroyed? Did that event lead to the old bones crawling out, causing the corruption in Building 13 on Avenue du Marché? Was it then mended by constructing the catacombs and relocating countless corpses? Lumian ventured a guess based on these thoughts.

Franca and Jenna surveyed the square ahead, observing that the area surrounding the black pillar had sunk into the ground. Below, there seemed to be white magma flowing, and faint black tentacles lurked.

Though there were no explicit warnings of danger, Lumian and the others sensed that this might be even more dangerous than the entity they had previously encountered.

Next to the black pillar stood a 1.78-meter-tall snowman. Its frosty face, cracked to form eyes, nose, and mouth, lacked ears.

As Lumian's gaze nonchalantly swept across the snowman, it abruptly froze.

He noticed a dark stain on the snowman's right eye, as if it wore a monocle.

Amon? Lumian startled, a desire to flee taking hold.

At that moment, Termiboros's majestic voice echoed in his ears.

"It's dead."

Dead… Lumian breathed a sigh of relief.

It made sense. Amon, a nobleman of the Fourth Epoch's Tudor Empire, wouldn't be exempt from the casualties of the divine war. It was plausible that dozens, even hundreds of avatars perished back then. Retrieving them might not have been feasible in the circumstances.

For some reason, Lumian detected a trace of joy in Termiboros's concise words.

Observing the snowman, Anthony suddenly felt his forehead heat up, and his breath turned hot. His Spirit Body rapidly weakened.

"I'm infected," he calmly informed his companions.

Ailment… Lumian glanced at the black pillar again.

Could this be the true form of the Krismona Night Pillar?

Even the figurine of the Primordial Demoness can't stem the corruption of ailments in this place?

Franca's heart skipped a beat as she instructed Jenna, "Take out that figurine."

Simultaneously, she reached into her pocket and pulled out the Primordial Demoness figurine crafted from bone.

After Jenna handed her the black one, Franca motioned for Anthony to come closer and observed his expression.

"How do you feel now?"

"It seems better. I'm… I'm getting better." Anthony scrutinized his physical condition earnestly.

Franca smiled.

"I knew it. How could Jenna and I be fine, but you're sick?

"Looks like we have to maintain a certain distance from the figurines."

As soon as she finished speaking, blazing white Fire Ravens soared out from behind the black pillar, hurtling toward them.

Then, a figure emerged. It was Gardner Martin, attired in a black formal suit and yellow vest, an unusual sight.

His gaze fixed on the black figurine in Jenna's hand and the bone statue in Franca's, revealing a longing expression.

Chapter 486: The Mirror People's Conspiracy

As the blazing-white Fire Ravens erupted from behind the black pillar, Lumian's reflexes kicked in.

While Franca, engrossed in deciphering the cause of Anthony's ailment, Lumian seemingly engaged in the discussion. Yet, beneath the facade, he—a Hunter—maintained a vigilant stance, keenly aware of his surroundings.

In this dangerous and ominous setting, he couldn't afford to focus solely on conversation.

Lumian thrust his palms towards the oncoming blazing-white Fire Ravens. In a swift motion, a colossal crimson fireball materialized, hastily intercepting the impending assault.

However, before it could reach its target, the unstable structure caused it to detonate.

Amidst the explosive chaos, a shockwave, laced with flames, surged forward and sideways, engulfing nearly all the blazing-white Fire Ravens like a torrent.

Confronting the fiery wave head-on, the Fire Ravens staggered, losing stability in the storm. They prematurely blossomed, transforming into a dazzling display of fireworks.

The Fire Ravens circling from the side were also affected by the explosive waves, deviating from their intended trajectories or being partially extinguished.

Hunters, particularly those at higher Sequences like Pyromaniac and Conspirer, proved unparalleled in defending against the swarm attacks of Fire Ravens.

Thanks to this interference, Franca and Jenna, both Assassins, along with the Psychiatrist, Anthony Reid, effortlessly dodged the tracking-capable, blazing-white Fire Ravens. They observed as these dangerous projectiles landed on the ground, setting off fiery eruptions.

In the blink of an eye, Franca vanished, and Jenna swiftly moved toward the nearest grayish-white stone pillar. She scattered fluorescent powder and chanted the Invisibility incantation in Hermes.

Anthony, seemingly back in the fray, rolled and sprinted, encircling another relatively intact grayish-white stone pillar in an attempt to find cover.

Lumian maintained his position, hands poised to push forward. His golden-black hair swirled in the ordinary "gust of wind" that followed the massive fireball's explosion.

Looking at Gardner Martin, unusually tall and face marked with bloodstains, Lumian taunted, "Is this your way of greeting? Sending a swarm of Fire Ravens to welcome us? Hey, what's with the change in appearance and the missing armor? Are you the mirror's Gardner Martin?"

Gardner Martin, donned in a black formal suit and yellow vest, ceased his attack. Instead, he paused and sneered, "Sooner or later, I'll become the real Gardner Martin."

Observing the situation, Lumian didn't rush to "teleport" behind Gardner Martin. He chuckled and remarked, "So, you're admitting to being a counterfeit?"

His aim was to provoke and incite the other party, unraveling the motives of these Mirror People.

Surely, their purpose wasn't merely to replace genuine forms and return to the real world for a serene life.

It had to be one of the objectives, but not the sole or primary one. The actions of a Mirror Person were too intricate for such a straightforward motive.

Mirror Gardner Martin scanned Lumian's surroundings, as if seeking the invisible Franca and Jenna.

In response to Lumian's mockery, he sneered and stated, "Counterfeit? We, the counterfeits, might be the only ones to secure victory and survive.

"Look at the Fourth Epoch Trier, destroyed and reduced to ruins. Yet, it persists within the mirror. All its citizens remain alive."

You call that living? Lumian Lumian refrained from interrupting the Mirror Gardner's resentful narrative.

The formidable Beyonder with a peculiar form chuckled.

"Counterfeit? Countless members of the Iron and Blood Cross Order you usually encounter are already on our side. They've emerged from the mirror, spawned since the unexpected seal incident decades ago and the ensuing power leak. We've been covertly engaging in similar activities.

"Otherwise, how would Gardner Martin, Tony Twain, and Diest have known about Vermonda Sauron's underground entrance into the seal? How would they have recognized it as a Sequence 1 Conqueror Beyonder characteristic? How could they have been so focused on exploring the underground and inadvertently influenced?"

"…" Lumian was taken aback.

So, this involves the plans of your Mirror People?

Damn it, how many factions are entangled in this, and how many conspiracies are woven together?

While Gardner's words in the mirror shed light on the murky situation, making many details more plausible, Lumian still found it absurd.

Aren't there too many factions and conspiracies? And behind these conspiracies, even more conspiracies, as intricate as spiderwebs!

Mirror Gardner's expression returned to normal as he smiled and said,

"Ever wonder how the Iron and Blood Cross Order discovered the black figurine? How did they realize they could exploit the uniqueness of this mirror world to bypass the seal?

"Do you dare to keep carrying that figurine? It holds no practical value for you. Why not hand it over to me, and I'll let you leave this mirror world?

"Don't worry; you're not Gardner Martin. I can't replace you. I harbor no insurmountable malice towards you."

So, were the Fire Ravens from earlier merely a greeting? Lumian laughed and inquired, "Essentially, that figurine holds great value for you? What do you people intend to do with it?"

Lumian suspected that the Iron and Blood Cross Order's discovery or acquisition of the black Primordial Demoness figurine was orchestrated by these Mirror People. Their plan was undoubtedly intricate.

Mirror Gardner's lips curled as he replied, "Did you think I'd tell you?"

"Whom do you people serve?" Lumian interjected.

As the Mirror Gardner's mouth opened, his expression suddenly darkened, and his eyes brimmed with hatred.

"That's all the answers!"

Observing the Mirror Gardner's sudden shift, Lumian had a profound realization that these Mirror People could maintain normalcy most of the time and seamlessly replace the originals. However, when certain matters arose, they couldn't suppress their monstrous side.

Mirror Gardner seemed poised to convince Lumian and the others to surrender the black Primordial Demoness figurine when a figure materialized behind him.

Franca, lacking an Assassin suit, revealed a Hidden Blade from her left wrist. Enveloped in black flames, she thrust it into Mirror Gardner's back, causing the blood-stained figure to shatter like a mirror.

He reappeared on the other side of the black pillar, on the fringe of the collapsed area, wearing a sinister smile. He declared, "You're stalling for time and completing preparations. Me too!"

As he finished speaking, a man emerged from the debris of a crumbled grayish-white stone pillar outside the collapsed area, dripping with magma.

His face bore bloodstains too, and his short flaxen-colored hair, along with slightly thick brown eyebrows, framed aqua-blue eyes and thin lips. Despite his unremarkable appearance, he uncannily resembled Franca.

Witnessing this figure, a phrase flashed through Franca's mind: "It's over…"

It was her past self, her former identity as a man!

Ever since Franca began suspecting that this area represented the mirror's Fourth Epoch Trier, she harbored concerns that her past self would surface, exposing his true identity to Jenna. Now, her fears materialized.

It's over. Social death… Franca's mind raced as a woman emerged from behind another intact grayish-white stone pillar.

Adorned in a white shirt, a black vest, and dark pants, her pure black hair cascading over her shoulders, she exuded an imposing beauty. Despite her deep and delicate facial features, her blue eyes betrayed a sense of mockery.

Uh, t-this is eerily similar to Ciel… The mirror version of him is a woman? Franca swiftly scanned her surroundings, concealing herself again.

Behind different grayish-white stone pillars, two more figures emerged. One donned mercenary attire, with handsomely styled flaxen-colored hair, reminiscent of Jenna. The other wore military-green tops and bottoms, exuding a mature charm with a slightly plump figure. Beautiful with eyes as deep as an ancient forest pond.

Dammit! A male version of Jenna and a female version of Anthony! Anthony looks even more handsome and charming! This is different from the mirror world outside! Franca felt puzzled yet relieved.

This could provide a plausible explanation for "his" former appearance to resurface!

Lumian, equally perplexed by his mirror counterpart having a different gender, and the others weren't experiencing the same thing as Franca. Even if the mirror reflected their past selves, it shouldn't manifest like this.

If this was a fusion of a Demoness's mirror world, the stacking of feminization, and one's past, Jenna should be a woman, no matter what!

As Lumian's thoughts raced, he considered the Hunter pathway's ability to transform women into men, which was adjacent to the Demoness pathway.

Could it be that this mirror world is influenced by the Blood Emperor's corpse or residual divine power? Is it akin to Mr. Fool and the Celestial Worthy of Heaven and Earth for Blessings—a power controlling these two pathways leaked, forming a unique mirror world that causes an overall reversal? Lumian didn't delve too deeply into it, as Mirror Gardner and his four helpers attacked.

The "Mirror Person" in a black formal suit and yellow vest didn't conceal his hatred, excitement, and desire.

…

In the wilderness, the entire ground seemed to sink two to three meters.

Diest's massive iron soldiers and yellowish-skinned giant entourage stood at the edge of the hurricane. Occasionally, one of them would self-destruct, reducing to fragments.

Despite the wary standoff between the president of the Iron and Blood Cross Order and Snarner Einhorn, They directed Their attention to the mildly intelligent monster that appeared to have lost control and was more challenging to deal with.

In the intense battle, They managed to restrain or knock Vermonda Sauron to the ground two or three times, but They themselves were also affected, in a dire state that hindered Them from seizing the opportunity.

In the current moment, They found themselves temporarily disabled.

Suddenly, a surge of knowledge materialized into a beautiful woman wearing a brown captain's coat, with long chestnut hair and eyes resembling the blue sea.

Snarner, Diest, and the others' hearts tightened, fearing that the newcomer would take the initiative and ultimately claim the Conqueror Beyonder characteristic.

They all recognized the woman:

The eldest daughter of the deceased Emperor Roselle, Bernadette Gustav!

She, too, was an Angel!

Holding a pale-golden lamp, Bernadette observed the Angels' battle without direct involvement. Transforming into a torrent of knowledge once again, she surged towards the gray fog-shrouded Fourth Epoch Trier.

It was as if She had casually glanced at them while passing by.

"…" Snarner and Diest were initially taken aback by Her actions, but They swiftly regained Their composure and resumed their battle.

Chapter 487: Self-Confrontation

In Fourth Epoch Trier, shrouded in a dense gray fog, Voisin Sanson, with thick blond locks, a well-kept beard, and deep-set features, yielded to the whims of destiny. He threaded through the chaotic streets, drawing nearer to the faintly discernible grand palace.

Abruptly, the stone slab beneath his feet shattered, and with swift precision, a skeletal hand shot up, seizing his ankle.

At the same instant, a knight adorned in jet-black armor charged on horseback. Wielding a broadsword ablaze in ghostly white flames, he slashed diagonally at Voisin Sanson.

Voisin Sanson's form swiftly morphed into an ethereal state, resilient against the onslaught of the pitch-black knight. However, with the passage of time, it gradually faded until it dissipated entirely.

His true self materialized almost 20 meters distant, fixating on the adversary.

Beneath the black visor of the knight, two dark-red flames flickered like candlelight. A grotesque wound, with pale-white intestines protruding, adorned its chest and abdomen. Perched on a desiccated white horse resembling a skeletal corpse,

the knight presided over a vast square wilderness. Within this expanse, myriad figures roamed. Some draped in white linen, their faces pallid and vacant. Others reduced to mere skeletons, while some concealed their visages behind masks of white paper.

On the fringes of the wilderness, a dark-red cradle-shaped carriage advanced, drawn by two abyssal, Demon-like creatures boasting goat horns.

Seated within the carriage was the regal Madame Pualis. Adorned with a flower crown and a green dress, her long brown hair was elegantly tied high. Bright brown eyes gazed forth as she held a small bowl crafted from green jade in one hand and an oak branch entwined with mistletoe in the other.

"What do you want?" Voisin Sanson inquired with a calm, resonant voice.

Madame Pualis responded, her smile unwavering, "Revenge, naturally."

Her eyes, once warm, gradually turned cold, but the grin on her face endured.

"Revenge…" Voisin Sanson echoed the word, a note of confusion in his voice. After a brief pause, he furrowed his brow and questioned, "For Aurore?"

In that moment, the undead and several Death Knights scattered across the wilderness withheld their attacks on Voisin Sanson, as if anticipating the emotional release sought by the Madame they served.

Seated within the carriage, Madame Pualis offered a self-deprecating smile.

"For a Villain, one-sided love is destined to be fleeting. Passion inevitably wanes quickly. Yet, she met her end during that brief period, becoming a thorn lodged deep in my heart, unextractable. The mere thought of it is painful, fueling my anger and resentment.

"And all of this was caused by you!

"I desired to strike when we crossed paths earlier, but the circumstances weren't conducive. Lady Moon had yet to make her entrance, and I couldn't afford to delay the Great Mother's affairs for a personal vendetta. But now, in this quiet moment…"

Voisin Sanson narrowed his eyes. "After receiving the Great Mother's boon, shouldn't these delicate and easily shattered emotions be eradicated? Aren't you worried about undermining the grand objectives of the great entities?"

Madame Pualis chuckled and replied, "There are more fitting and potent individuals for that task. Like Lady Moon. As for me…"

Her expression softened, revealing a trace of wistfulness.

"In the past, I put my faith in the Great Mother to attain strength and break free from the constraints of the antiquated Churches. I didn't have to concern myself with moral judgments or public opinion. No need to fear being attacked by some past victim at any moment, free to do as I pleased. Now, what I desire is vengeance!"

As Madame Pualis concluded her words, a pair of ethereal wings unfolded behind her, adorned with brown feathers of human size.

"Ah!"

A sharply discordant and anguished scream escaped her lips.

The remaining glass in the nearby structures shattered. Voisin Sanson's mind reverberated, as if he could sense his Spirit Body wailing.

…

In the rundown square, suspected to be the whereabouts of Krismona Night Pillar, Lumian zeroed in on his feminine "mirror self."

Only he comprehended the extent of the trouble he posed!

He might not be the most formidable presence among the gathering, but his unique skills and array of items could swiftly tip the scales in his favor. It was imperative to neutralize him in advance!

As for the mirror version of Gardner Martin, it was suspected that he possessed Mirror Substitution—proving challenging to dispatch swiftly. Lumian's strategy was to eliminate the auxiliary threats first before zeroing in on him.

When the moment arrived, the combined effects of Psychiatrist's Frenzy, Flog's strikes, and the arousal triggered by Beatrice's Necklace would exploit the psychological vulnerabilities of the Mirror People. Their abundance of negative emotions and the potent desire to achieve and supplant made them susceptible.

A dark mark on Lumian's shoulder illuminated, and his form abruptly vanished, reappearing behind the heroic-looking female Lumian, similarly attired but with black hair.

Almost simultaneously, the blue eyes of the female Lumian gleamed with a mocking glint.

Then, she vanished.

Her figure materialized behind Anthony Reid, mostly concealed by the grayish-white stone pillar.

Spirit World Traversal!

She knew the technique as well!

Dammit! Lumian cursed inwardly. The dark mark on his right shoulder emitted another shadowy glow.

He had to hurry to his aid.

While he had considered the possibility of his mirror self possessing teleportation abilities, he had anticipated that the other party would target him, prioritizing his elimination—the most significant threat. At worst, they might exchange positions. However, he hadn't expected the female Lumian to focus on Anthony Reid.

In that critical moment, Lumian pieced together the rationale.

Primarily, the Mirror Person harbored an intense resentment toward the original counterpart, driven by a desire to supplant them. Given their profound psychological issues, these could be effectively countered by Psychiatrist's Frenzy and similar abilities. Secondly, Anthony Reid lacked proficiency in evasion and lacked diverse substitutes. His defense wasn't substantially superior to that of an ordinary person, rendering him susceptible to swift elimination, thereby reducing their team's strength.

As Lumian engaged in discourse with the Mirror Gardner Martin, Anthony Reid remained concealed behind a nearby grayish-white stone pillar. He observed his surroundings and assessed the enemy's mental state, strategizing his actions for the impending battle.

He had noticed the appearance of his feminine version, as well as the Mirror Gardner, male Jenna, and male Franca to either hide in the shadows or vanish. The complexity of the situation intensified, and he instinctively sensed the impending challenge posed by these formidable adversaries.

As the figure of the female Lumian vanished, Anthony Reid, familiar with Lumian's Spirit World Traversal, quickly discerned the monster's intentions and thought process.

She was employing "teleportation," with him as her target. Her primary focus was dealing with the Psychiatrist!

As these realizations raced through his mind, Anthony didn't attempt to evade to either side.

Given the proximity and his limited physical abilities, escaping the danger zone before female Lumian unleashed her subsequent onslaught was an impossibility.

Instead, he opted for an offensive approach, intending to disrupt any forthcoming storm of attacks with his own strikes!

Anthony forcibly twisted his body, his eyes widening in silent determination, a faint golden hue tinting his gaze.

Then, he confronted the captivating and seemingly welcoming figure of female Lumian.

The other party harrumphed.

Spell of Harrumph!

Two beams of white light shot out from female Lumian's nostrils, striking Anthony.

As the white beams reflected in Anthony's eyes, he made no attempt to dodge or evade. Instead, he invoked Frenzy.

With a thud, he crumpled to the ground, unconscious.

Female Lumian's facial muscles contorted, and dark-red blood vessels emerged beneath her skin, resembling tiny fire serpents coming to life.

Her blue eyes radiated violence and madness, while crimson flames bordering on white emanated from her body.

Lumian materialized beside her and the unconscious Anthony. Choosing not to employ the Spell of Harrumph, he clenched his right hand, enveloped in almost blazing-white flames, and delivered a punch to his "mirror self's" head.

With a cracking sound, female Lumian's body shattered like a mirror.

She, too, possessed Mirror Substitution!

Upon witnessing this, Lumian cursed inwardly once more.

Dogsh*t!

Despite anticipating that these Mirror People were closely related to mirrors and might have multiple Mirror Substitutions, thus opting for a flaming punch instead of the Spell of Harrumph to conserve spirituality, the confirmation left him frustrated and angered.

Only by facing it personally did he realize how repulsive abilities like Mirror Substitution and Paper Figurine Substitutes were!

Now, there were a total of five enemies with Mirror Substitution. Four of them had even replicated their team's abilities. How could they possibly prevail in such a situation?

In that moment, the flames dissipated from Lumian's fiery fist, precisely as expected, landing on Anthony Reid.

The scalding pain abruptly snapped the Psychiatrist out of his stupor. Reacting instinctively, he rolled to smother the flames.

Suddenly, Mirror Gardner Martin's cold, smiling voice echoed from an unseen location.

"How does it feel? Are my aides proving stronger than you expected?

"Unfortunately, they hail from profound mirror images, and their genders have been reversed. They can't replace you and return to the real world.

"What do you say? Surrender the figurine in exchange for my friendship and an opportunity to depart this place? It's of no use to you."

If you're so powerful, why don't you just kill us and take the figurine? Are you wary of something? For example, Termiboros's escape? Or are you deliberately using such words to weaken our resistance and ensure your own safety to the greatest extent? Or are you actually not strong and are stalling for time for some development? A series of guesses raced through Lumian's mind.

Meanwhile, Anthony Reid, having extinguished the flames, rose to his feet and coughed.

Lumian's throat itched as he heard that.

Soon, Franca and Jenna emerged from invisibility amid uncontrollable coughing, having intended to encircle the female Anthony.

The voice of the Mirror Gardner resonated, accompanied by evident laughter.

"I neglected to mention that the Fire Raven I initially employed carries an Affliction disease. Igniting and detonating them only aids the spread of the disease.

"Those two figurines can only suppress non-conscious diseases, but this—this is under my control!"

Chapter 488: Mutual Provocation

Fire Raven fused with an Affliction disease? Is that even possible? Will I pull off something similar when I switch to the Hunter pathway? Is this the merging of different abilities through pathway switching? It's more unique and bizarre? As Franca coughed, surprise, solemnity, and a touch of anticipation painted her expression.

Even though she was compelled to break her invisibility, Franca found herself in close quarters with the female Anthony. Her left hand rose, directing the Ring of Punishment, snug around her thumb, at the Mirror Person.

Yet, Franca refrained from employing Psychic Piercing. It was a calculated move to confound the target and any hidden foes.

Having observed Lumian's skirmish, Franca suspected that female Anthony also possessed Mirror Substitution. Psychic Piercing wouldn't yield the desired effect.

In that case, why not afflict the opponent with a negative state that wouldn't trigger Mirror Substitution?

Beatrice's Necklace, dangling from Franca's chest, reflected the engulfing flames, stirring female Anthony's ambitions to life.

Franca had long discerned that these Mirror People harbored resentment and animosity toward their authentic selves. Their burning desire to prove themselves was their weakness.

The longing for success served as their greatest vulnerability.

As two coughs reached female Anthony's ears, she, being a Psychiatrist, mirrored the choice made by her male counterpart.

Unable to evade the ensuing assaults, she swiveled halfway around, locking eyes with Franca and Jenna, who had already materialized.

Her pupils turned vertical and shifted to a pale-golden hue.

Awe!

Unlike her male counterpart, female Anthony opted for Awe, considering the presence of two assailants. This ability had the potential to influence both targets.

The aura of a dragon—the pinnacle of the food chain—swiftly descended. Franca and Jenna couldn't help but tremble in fear.

One of them found themselves immobilized, while the other sought refuge behind the nearest grayish-white stone pillar.

Before female Anthony could unleash Awe, Jenna, still coughing, seized the moment. She flung a half-blood-stained cloak, causing the bone flute and wooden box to tumble toward the target's feet.

With her other hand, Jenna pulled the trigger of her revolver, propelling a yellow bullet engulfed in black flames towards female Anthony.

However, in that critical moment, Awe took effect. Jenna's right hand quivered, causing the bullet to veer off course.

Amidst the gunfire, the shadowed Mirror Gardner narrowly evaded the bullet's trajectory.

Swiftly moving, he leaped to the ground, dodging the projectile, and rolled into another shadow, vanishing from sight.

Unharmed, female Anthony's eyes seemed to blaze with flames. She abandoned the idea of casting Frenzy on Franca, who succumbed to the effects of Awe, redirecting her focus to the coughing and moving male version of herself.

Thud! Thud! Thud! She charged forward, determined to prove herself by defeating the male Anthony.

At that moment, figures materialized behind the frozen Franca and the fleeing Jenna. They were male Franca and male Jenna, who had previously concealed themselves with their abilities.

The former aimed his hidden blade at Franca's back and struck with all his might. The latter fixed a glare at Jenna's back and pulled the trigger.

With two cracking sounds, Franca and Jenna's bodies shattered like mirrors, allowing them to escape the effects of Awe. However, their throats remained irritated. They had no choice but to endure the discomfort and occasionally cough as they faced off against male Franca and Jenna.

Lumian's throat itched, and his head, accustomed to enduring high temperatures, still radiated warmth.

As an Ascetic, this level of illness couldn't challenge his endurance. He glanced at female Lumian, not far away, and crimson flames enveloped him, transforming into a fireball that shot forward.

Female Lumian, her face still marked by blood vessels, sneered and vanished from her spot once more.

Spirit World Traversal again!

Her figure reappeared behind the rapidly moving Anthony, as if she wouldn't stop until she had vanquished the Psychiatrist.

Just then, the fireball that had just shot out dissipated prematurely, morphing into a stream of light.

In the stream of light, Lumian's figure flashed as he "teleported" to Anthony's side.

He had been feigning an attack, anticipating female Lumian's use of Spirit World Traversal. He seized the opportunity to closely follow and block her!

To achieve this, Lumian not only destabilized the fireball's structure in advance but also utilized Lie's ability to strengthen his control over flames.

Appearing beside Anthony as swiftly as female Lumian, he promptly raised his iron-black boxing gloves and unleashed a flurry of chain punches!

Simultaneously, Lumian conjured the desire he longed to witness in his mind.

The desire to replace a real person!

This desire proved easier to trigger, and its detonation even better!

Having already adorned the Flog boxing gloves, Lumian aspired to exploit this state, potentially immune to Mirror Substitution, to impact the target and temporarily incapacitate his "mirror self" in combat.

With a resounding bang, Lumian's left and right punches met the resistance of female Lumian's raised hand. However, she lacked boxing gloves, and her forearm bore several bleeding punctures from Flog's short thorns.

Her eyes brimmed with escalating resentment and malice, as though she yearned for Lumian's demise in the very next second.

She had entirely forsaken her pursuit of Anthony Reid.

Bam! Bam! Bam! Lumian unleashed a barrage of punches, incessantly thwarting his mirror self's attempts to employ other abilities.

He persisted in taunting his counterpart.

"Hey, no Flog boxing gloves? Are you so feeble that you can't even mirror a mystical item below the demigod level?"

On the one hand, Lumian sought an emotional release. On the other, he aimed to use Provocation to incense his female self, heightening the likelihood of the Flog boxing gloves triggering the other's desires and emotions.

Female Lumian didn't hide her anger. Blocking Lumian's punches, she taunted with Provocation, "Imbecile! If you had detected Aurore's anomaly earlier, the issue might have been resolved.

"Imbecile! If it were me, I would've undoubtedly handled it better than you!"

Lumian's mind buzzed. Even as an Ascetic, he found himself affected by Provocation.

This frustration and guilt had long been buried deep in his heart, one of the root causes of all his pain.

His eyes turned bloodshot, a blend of embarrassment, anger, and a compelling urge to self-destruct surged from the depths of his being.

His attacks intensified as he sought to infuse the thought into his right hand. He wanted to witness the outcome if he unleashed the Blood Emperor's aura here in the mirror's Fourth Epoch Trier.

When the time came, everyone present—Voisin Sanson and the other gods bestowed from different regions—would meet their demise together!

Just then, Lumian's thoughts abruptly cleared. His emotions and impulses felt as though caressed by a gentle breeze. The melodious melody his sister Aurore used to hum seemed to echo in his ears, swiftly calming him.

"Placate!"

Psychiatrist Anthony Reid's Placate.

Seizing the opportunity while Lumian relentlessly pounded female Lumian with punches, Anthony distanced himself. As he eluded the pursuit of his female self, he circled back to Lumian's vicinity. Sensing his companion's volatile mood, he promptly cast Placate.

Affected by Beatrice's Necklace, female Anthony only had eyes for her true self, indifferent to the fate of female Lumian.

Suppressing the urge to self-destruct, Lumian witnessed female Lumian teetering on the verge of collapse under his relentless onslaught, her expression contorted. Franca and Jenna's coughing intensified, hindering the use of their abilities. Their male counterparts seized the moment, forcing them to employ Mirror Substitution once again.

Franca was still okay, but Jenna likely had only one Mirror Substitution remaining.

Observing this, Lumian, his forehead ablaze, felt a mix of concern, nervousness, and confusion.

Where was Mirror Gardner?

In such a chaotic scenario, any attack—whether directed at Franca, Jenna, himself, or Anthony—would prove highly effective. He might even succeed in eliminating them one by one. After all, he was a Reaper.

Yet, Mirror Gardner refrained from attacking. Only the echoing, mocking laughter signaled his continued presence. He persisted in persuading Lumian and the others to surrender the black figurine and cease resisting.

"Hmph!"

Seizing the opportunity when Lumian's assault momentarily slowed, female Lumian, pushed to her limits, invoked the Spell of Harrumph.

Two beams of white light struck Lumian's body. His vision darkened, and he experienced the same sensation as his previous adversaries.

Crack!

A mirror shattered on Franca's body, and Lumian materialized beside her.

As Lumian's thoughts returned, a flurry of ideas raced through his mind.

After spreading the disease with the sick ravens, Mirror Gardner refrained from employing any other offensive abilities. Instead, he chose to hide in the shadows or conceal himself…

Wait, it didn't begin with the disease spread by the sick ravens. It began with the emergence of male Franca and the other Mirror People…

Why didn't he attack?

Considering my mirror self's lack of the Flog boxing gloves, she probably doesn't possess the Blood Emperor's aura, Mr. Fool's seal, or Termiboros… The Flog boxing gloves were crafted from the branch of the Tree of Shadow…

The mirror world, despite its apparent danger and terror, shouldn't be incapable of mirroring the Flog boxing gloves…

Suddenly, Lumian had an epiphany.

These four Mirror People weren't naturally formed in the mirror's Fourth Epoch Trier. Mirror Gardner Martin had utilized his unique connection to this place to create them!

It was akin to an ability!

Mirror Gardner's decision not to attack stemmed from his concerted effort to sustain the four Mirror People. He couldn't engage in direct assault; his only recourse was to conceal himself and use words to interfere with the enemy, disrupting their combat will!

As these realizations coursed through his mind, Lumian couldn't help but smile.

Dodging male Franca's attack and anticipating the teleportation of female Lumian, he retrieved the Eye of Truth obtained from Bouvard. Lumian then adorned the peculiar monocle, seemingly fashioned from flesh and blood.

It had the ability to pierce through illusions, perceive reality, and discern the light of spirituality!

Chapter 489: Greed

Despite the severe corruption of the Eye of Truth, its ability to hear the voices of a hidden entity at any moment, and the risk of encountering uncontrollable negative effects, Lumian trusted that Fourth Epoch Trier, with its potent seal isolating external influences, provided a safeguard. Even the boons of evil gods couldn't trace back to their source, making it unlikely for him to hear the Hidden Sage's ravings.

In this realm, there should be no adverse effects when using the Eye of Truth, especially within the mirror's Fourth Epoch Trier.

However, Lumian acknowledged the potential presence of a fallen Angel from the Mystery Pryer pathway or remnants of corresponding divine power. Even with the Eye of Truth, there was a chance of hearing voices he shouldn't. Consequently, Lumian didn't plan to use it extensively. He intended to locate Mirror Gardner Martin and remove the mystical item when the opportunity presented itself.

Through the lens affixed to his eye, Lumian discerned nearly invisible spider silk swaying around Franca, subtly influencing male Jenna and the other Mirror People.

Similarly, male Franca had created a plethora of spider silks, utterly unaffected by the constraints of the term "Witch."

Lumian also took note of the fine snake-like black hair covering the area. They manifested and disappeared, delicately caressing every living being they touched. Their origin seemed to be the black pillar extending into the sky.

Concurrently, Lumian's left eye reflected Mirror Gardner Martin.

Concealed beside a grayish-white stone pillar, he seemed invisible.

Without hesitation, Lumian activated the black mark on his right shoulder, the fifth time since becoming an Ascetic.

With the Eye of Truth in place, he instantaneously vanished, reappearing behind Mirror Gardner.

The corners of Lumian's mouth curled up as he swung his right fist at his exposed foe, who had just realized his concealment had been shattered and had no time to react.

His hands were encased in iron-black boxing gloves adorned with multiple short thorns.

Flog!

In the midst of Mirror Gardner's attempt to lunge forward and transform into a burning-white spear, flying to the opposite side to distance himself, Lumian landed a punch behind his ear.

In a haste, Mirror Gardner could only duck, abruptly contorting as if he were boneless, attempting to somersault away.

Bang!

Lumian's right fist connected with Mirror Gardner's right shoulder.

The impact distorted the other's shoulder, causing his body to stagger, nearly losing balance.

Mirror Gardner's combat prowess proved formidable. Despite tumbling to the ground, he seized the opportunity to pivot.

He was unfazed by the potential of the white beams or being shot in the head; he still possessed Mirror Substitution!

Confronting Lumian, who lunged at him with blood still dripping from his iron-black boxing gloves, Mirror Gardner smiled, his eyes reflecting blatant greed.

This time, Lumian opted to trigger Greed!

In an instant, Mirror Gardner ignited with blazing-white flames, morphing into a spear charging at Lumian.

At this range, he doubted that Lumian could evade the impending attack.

Having committed to close combat, he had to bear the consequences—rendered unable to fully utilize Spirit World Traversal!

Lumian didn't attempt to dodge, nor did he plan to. He swiftly adjusted his posture, watching as the blazing-white spear collided with his right chest.

His defense against flames was robust. The blazing-white spear took nearly two seconds to burn through his skin and flesh.

Yet, Lumian maintained a smile on his face. The pain only contorted his countenance, a testament to the resilience of an Ascetic.

Anthony Reid's Placate had indeed restored Lumian's composure, but the psychological issues brought to light lingered for the time being.

With two resounding bangs, Lumian seized the opportunity to deliver a left and right punch to the burning-white spear.

He exploited every chance to kindle Mirror Gardner's desires and emotions.

Ultimately, the blazing-white spear pierced Lumian's right chest, propelling him more than ten meters through the air.

Lumian's smile retained a touch of frenzy. Adorned with a silver earring, he withdrew his right palm, pressed against the grievous wound on his chest, and slid downward.

The injury swiftly spread to his abdomen, and almost-white crimson flames erupted from Lumian's palm, consuming his mangled flesh.

He willingly accepted increased risk in the future to mitigate the impact of his injuries.

With that, his figure melded into the void.

Just as Mirror Gardner emerged from the dissipating blazing-white flaming spear, Lumian materialized behind him.

Bang! Bang!

Lumian swung his fists again, targeting Mirror Gardner's arms, denying him a chance to catch his breath.

He opted not to strike vital points, fearing that excessive damage might trigger Mirror Substitution.

As Mirror Gardner transformed into a blazing-white spear to assail Lumian, female Lumian, intending to "teleport" over to assist, stood stunned, as if temporarily losing autonomy.

Likewise, both male Franca and male Jenna exhibited similar reactions, as if their resemblance to real people had momentarily waned.

Franca and Jenna, in dire straits, seized the opportunity to catch their breath.

Although they didn't immediately comprehend the reason, they keenly sensed that Mirror Gardner held the key to the problem.

Lumian's assault on the leader had brought about such a change!

Franca, relying on her experience, swiftly instructed Jenna, "Give me that… Cough! Arrow!"

She needed the potent self-healing abilities of the Arrow of the Bloodthirsty to withstand the infectious disease and recuperate to a relatively healthy state within a specific timeframe. Franca aimed to delay female Lumian and the other Mirror People, creating an optimal environment for Lumian to confront Mirror Gardner solo.

Her only hope rested on Lumian catalyzing positive changes before the infection and illness exacerbated, outpacing the effectiveness of her self-healing abilities.

Jenna had intended to use the Arrow of the Bloodthirsty herself. Despite having used it twice already—with another use risking a collapse of her body—she was willing to disregard the consequences in the current dire situation.

However, upon hearing Franca's request, she hesitated momentarily before tossing the obsidian arrow to Franca.

From Jenna's perspective, Franca, a Sequence 6 Demoness of Pleasure armed with numerous mystical items, possessed significantly more strength than herself. Thus, Franca's temporary recovery held greater benefit for the ongoing battle.

Franca caught the Arrow of the Bloodthirsty and plunged it into her chest.

Observing that female Lumian and the other Mirror People had regained their composure, becoming lively once again,

Franca's lake-blue eyes silently transformed to a fiery red. The rubber band securing her ponytail snapped as if corroded, allowing her flaxen-colored hair to billow in the air, enhancing her enchanting allure.

Her increasingly frequent coughs momentarily subsided, and the invisible "spider silk" surrounding her ceased its gradual, silent encroachment on male Franca, male Jenna, and female Lumian, no longer tightening and ensnaring them layer by layer.

Like mirror images, Franca and Jenna felt their bodies grow heavy, their limbs constricted.

From the outset, male Franca had been covertly using spider silk. Only when there was no way to further ensnare them layer by layer in secret did he reveal it.

In an instant, Franca and the others were immobilized. Female Lumian, who had just "teleported" over, was the least affected by the spider silk and was skilled in using flames. She swiftly activated Spirit World Traversal in a crimson light, heading towards Lumian and Mirror Gardner's battlefield.

Taking advantage of the momentary pause in female Anthony's actions, Anthony could finally counterattack.

Enduring the terrifying cough, dizziness, and fever, he raised the revolver purchased from the black market and pulled the trigger at the Mirror Person, clearly more charming than him.

At that moment, no one interrupted their "internecine attacks."

Amidst the gunshots, female Anthony shattered into numerous fragments.

Upon reappearing nearby, she didn't immediately rush to rescue Mirror Gardner. Instead, she continued pursuing Anthony amidst her soaring desire for achievement.

Amidst the sounds of flesh colliding, Lumian landed multiple punches on Mirror Gardner, sending waves of pain through the powerful Beyonder's head and stoking his anger.

His greed made him reluctant to abandon the other four Mirror People and the advantage his side enjoyed on other battlefields. However, if he didn't give up, he wouldn't be able to focus on dealing with Lumian. He found himself restricted in every way and faced a disadvantaged situation.

This was why Lumian had chosen to trigger his Greed!

Bang!

Lumian tightened his fists, delivering a powerful blow to Mirror Gardner.

Mirror Gardner crashed to the ground, instinctively summoning a swarm of crimson, almost white fireballs for protection.

This caught female Lumian off guard as she had just "teleported" over.

Unfazed by the nearly-white crimson fireballs, Lumian swiftly "teleported" toward Mirror Gardner.

The safest spot was, of course, where the caster stood!

Amidst the explosive chaos, Lumian gritted his teeth against the searing pain in his back and landed another punch on Mirror Gardner's face.

The short thorns on the iron-black boxing gloves pierced through skin and flesh.

Suddenly, Mirror Gardner Martin's gaze froze, blood streaming from his eyes, nose, and other wounds.

The intense greed within him erupted, not killing or knocking him out but weakening and disorienting him.

In this dazed state, whether it was female Lumian, male Franca, male Jenna, or female Anthony, they all froze in place. Their bodies rapidly faded, growing more translucent until they vanished.

Witnessing the scene, Lumian straightened up, removing the Flog boxing gloves. He tossed them to Franca and Jenna, ensuring each had one.

Franca noticed the residual blood and grasped Lumian's intent immediately.

Dipping her hand into the blood, she retrieved a mirror, ready to cast a curse.

Lumian had three reasons for opting for the Flog boxing gloves:

Firstly, the ability to stir desires wouldn't trigger Mirror Substitution. Secondly, as a mystical item, it could attract the attention of dangerous entities, causing unpredictable changes that might lead to opportunities amid the chaos.

Thirdly, it provided a chance to "collect" a curse's medium—the target's blood!

Even if his triggered greed couldn't be controlled, leading to Mirror Gardner's Mirror Substitution, Lumian planned to seize the moment when the other Mirror People were temporarily affected. He would throw the Flog boxing gloves to Franca and Jenna, aiding them in intercepting the attacks.

Repeatedly cursing with the possession of the blood, Lumian aimed to challenge how many times Mirror Substitution could be used and find an opportunity to sever the connection.

Flames erupted around Lumian as he transformed into a fireball, distancing himself from Mirror Gardner.

Just as he was about to remove the Eye of Truth, a peculiar sound caught his attention.

Chapter 490: Sounds

The strange sounds Lumian heard echoed from a far-off realm, an elusive destination beyond his grasp.

His heart tightened as he quickly removed the Eye of Truth, but the sounds remained.

Bam! Bam! Bam! The sounds reverberated as if two massive rocks collided. Lumian witnessed sparks flying, and dried leaves and branches catching fire. In the midst of the flames lay scattered bones. The cave, shrouded in darkness with an unknown depth, echoed with distant howls resembling wolves.

Thud! Thud! Thud! A leather drum's beats and ancient musical instruments resonated, creating a solemn, holy, and magnificent atmosphere for Lumian. The scene in his mind shifted to a vast wilderness with a towering altar. A figure, his face veiled with beaded coverings, a splendid headdress, and a flowing black robe, ascended to the highest point. Around him, people with demon-painted faces danced frenziedly to the drumbeat. Suddenly, the sky darkened, and a face appeared from the ominous clouds. The ritualist, with beads sliding aside, revealed a terrified expression.

A distant, haunting voice pierced the clouds, resonating through the desolate land. Lumian felt a profound shake in his mind and body. Before him stretched vast highlands, with withered trees, sparse grass, and yellow soil and rocks exposed. Gullies crisscrossed like wrinkles on an old man's face, separating silent towns. A massive river surged, majestic yet tainted with turbid yellow.

Ding. Dang. Ding. Dang. The sound, like pearls on a porcelain plate, was crisp and gentle, emanating from a peculiar wooden pavilion. The surrounding buildings burned fiercely, and shouts echoed from the river. Amidst the pleasant melody, the pavilion collapsed in flames, yet the performer continued unabated.

In the midst of the gentle singing, a woman in a peculiar dress stood on the platform, captivatingly expressing herself. Below her, people sat at various tables, savoring drinks under dim lights. Gunshots, like firecrackers, echoed outside what seemed to be a bar's dance floor, as citizens collapsed on the street. Fierce soldiers rushed in, stabbing the struggling ones with bayonets attached to their guns. Distant buildings burned, and flames soared into the sky.

These voices and images surged into Lumian's mind like a torrent, causing his eyes to redden. His head felt unusually swollen, as if it were on the brink of exploding, and his thoughts became a chaotic jumble.

Franca and Jenna, engrossed in their battle against Mirror Gardner Martin, remained oblivious to Lumian's unsettling state.

Franca took the lead, pressing the black flames against the mirror stained with the target's blood. She successfully saw the enemy—weakened by the eruption of desire. He succumbed to the engulfing black flames, inflicting damage to his Spirit Body.

Crack!

Mirror Gardner shattered, and his figure materialized nearby, his dazed eyes now alert.

Seizing the opportunity, Jenna, moving with remarkable speed, adjusted her makeup mirror stained with Mirror Gardner's blood. Pressing the black flames in her hand against it, s

Mirror Gardner was once again ignited by the Demoness's black flames and subjected to another fatal curse.

He shattered anew, reappearing beside the black pillar.

His right hand reached into his pocket, as if he wanted to take out a mirror and use nails, hair, blood, and other media to sever the connection between the source of the curse and himself.

However, Franca, who was also moving at high speed, leaned back and raised the mirror in her hand. It made contact with her other hand, holding the Flog boxing glove ablaze with black flames.

The flames erupted within the mirror, thwarting Mirror Gardner's attempt at curse-evading mirror magic.

The duo, Franca and Jenna, continued their intricate dance—one advancing, one retreating, one cursing, and the other awaiting their turn. It was a mesmerizing duet, a choreography of combat.

After enduring six curses, Mirror Gardner froze in front of a grayish-white stone pillar, not shattering like before.

In the silence of the black flames, he rapidly weakened, teetering on the brink of unconsciousness.

Seeing this, Franca discarded the Flog boxing gloves, opting for her Cannon Gun. She drew the weapon, pulled back the hammer, and took aim at the target.

Bang!

The iron-black bullet tore through Mirror Gardner's skull, shattering it into fragments.

His nearly headless body swayed briefly before collapsing to the ground.

As the corpse faded away, it left behind a peculiar mirror fragment, its surface nearly lightless as if coated with black paint.

Meanwhile, Anthony Reid, ever proficient at observation, detected Lumian's abnormal state. Racing towards him, the Psychiatrist attempted to Placate him. However, Lumian remained unresponsive, his face contorting further, blood vessels on his forehead bulging ominously.

"There's a situation here!" Anthony, noting Mirror Gardner's demise from the corner of his eye, swiftly informed Franca and Jenna. He hoped that the two Demonesses could find a way to address Lumian's unsettling condition.

However, an instant later, the pitch-black mirror fragment emitted a faint light.

The surroundings plunged into instant darkness, transmuting into a bizarre transparency, as if the entire world had transformed into a mirrored container.

Within the dark and shadowy confines of this mirror container, an unseen force seethed with rage, materializing the air and exerting pressure from every direction.

Though Franca, Jenna, and Anthony witnessed no visible or audible phenomena, an overwhelming fear gripped them. Their bodies felt as if plunged into an icy cavern, freezing instantaneously.

A faint sigh, distinctly feminine, resonated suddenly.

Nearby, the black pillar radiated a dim light. The tiny snake-like black hairs concealed in the void retracted, coalescing into a massive black-haired sphere, forming a protective barrier around the square.

Franca and the others experienced an immediate sense of tranquility. Fear released its grip on their bodies and minds, allowing them to move freely.

Meanwhile, Lumian's consciousness wrestled with an onslaught of voices and scenes, his rationality gradually eroding.

Suddenly, he heard a voice.

It was a male sigh.

Then, he saw a face and a figure—a man seated cross-legged in a serene room, adorned with a headdress and a blue robe.

Though handsome, the man's eyes betrayed profound sorrow and pain, lending him a withered appearance.

His gaze fixed on Lumian, comprehending the scenes unfolding, and he picked up a brown rod adorned with numerous white silk strands at one end, resting beside him.

As the sigh persisted, the myriad sounds and images Lumian perceived vanished, replaced by overlapping shrill cries akin to curses.

While Lumian couldn't comprehend the language, the phrase echoed in his mind, infused with the purest knowledge, enabling him to grasp its meaning.

The voices converged into a torrent, laden with resentment and hatred.

"Celestial Master!"

…

At the base of the Deep Valley Quarry, the once busy hall now stood in partial ruins. The tumultuous activity had taken its toll, leaving many members of the Machinery Hivemind injured. Conscious of the need to avoid hindering their comrades' battles, these individuals strategically retreated.

Claude, the mechanical giant, abruptly halted his movements, his colossal ears resonating with overlapping roars.

Amidst the roars, a sigh descended from above, casting an eerie atmosphere upon the indistinct wilderness.

In that wild expanse, numerous ethereal figures lingered, occasionally gazing at the sky and emitting haunting screams.

Observing this mysterious transformation, Archbishop Horamick refrained from seizing the opportunity to attack Claude directly. Instead, he swiftly withdrew from the crumbling hall, leading the remaining members of the Machinery Hivemind away from the illusory wilderness.

The cybernetic eyes of the mechanical giant, with one resembling a ruby and the other an emerald, suddenly dimmed.

It appeared as if intelligence had deserted him. Slowly turning around, Claude stepped into the surreal "wilderness," seemingly intent on joining the lingering figures.

Midway through, the mechanical giant turned to regard Archbishop Horamick and his companions, gears spinning loudly.

An indescribable smile graced the face comprising multiple metallic components.

In the next instant, the mechanical giant retracted his gaze, resuming his forward journey.

His figure gradually took on an illusionary quality, merging with the mysterious wilderness until both vanished into the unknown.

…

In the depths of the Fourth Epoch Trier, adjacent to the wall-like grayish-white fog, Magician and Justice materialized, their intense gazes fixed upon Lady Moon. She had lost her veil, revealing a vacant expression.

The bestowed of the Great Mother, the lady who had nurtured a deity, stood in front of the gray fog, her shadow tainted by char.

Magician and Justice were surprised to see this.

Almost simultaneously, the wall-like grayish-white fog expanded, pulsating like a beating heart.

Almost simultaneously, an imposing aura, one that seemed to look down upon all existence, permeated the surroundings. It quelled the earlier sigh that had echoed through the air.

The grayish-white fog in the vicinity heightened its intensity, spreading in all directions once more, thickening the gray fog throughout the entirety of

Fourth Epoch Trier.

"Him?"

"So it's Him?"

Justice and Magician exchanged silent whispers. Unaffected by the adverse consequences targeting others, they persisted in their actions.

The dazed Lady Moon immediately found herself shrouded in resplendent starlight.

…

In the wilderness, Snarner Einhorn and Diest, the President of the Iron and Blood Cross Order, continued their struggle to restrain Vermonda Sauron—a Calamity Giant, an Angel who had lost control. Their efforts, however, were met with fierce counterattacks, forcing Them into a gradual retreat, unable to capitalize on the situation.

Amidst the chaos, the gray fog shrouding the ruins of Fourth Epoch Trier stirred violently, as if the very city had awakened.

The turbulent fog swiftly coalesced into a spear-like form, a weapon capable of shattering mountain peaks. It hurtled towards the captive Vermonda Sauron.

In an instant, the spear, crafted from the gray fog, erupted into violent flames, taking on a violet hue. It exuded an aura of supremacy, as if it aimed to conquer all in its path.

Witnessing this surreal phenomenon, whether it was Snarner Einhorn, Diest, Vermonda Sauron, or their allies, it was as though they beheld a city enshrouded in fog. A sense of awe overwhelmed their bodies and minds, dissuading any inclination to resist.

The majestic purple flaming spear traversed a significant distance, impaling Vermonda Sauron—the Calamity Giant yet to regain mobility. His chest rent open, the colossal being was pinned to the wilderness.

As the purple flames dissipated, a figure stood up from a genuflecting position.

Clad in blood-stained black armor, adorned with long red hair, the youth exuded a handsome yet haunting presence. Rotting wounds marred both sides of his face, and a vivid red mark resembling a banner flag adorned his forehead.

Chapter 491: Unexpected "Helper"

The gray fog encircling Fourth Epoch Trier extended into the wilderness, as if intercepting and obstructing an unseen force.

In the midst of the tempest, Snarner, Diest, and the other formidable beings felt a high and formidable aura. An instinctive urge to bow in submission washed over them. It was as if the Blood Emperor Alista Tudor, who had met His end deep in Fourth Epoch Trier, had returned from the abyss. However, He wasn't as unhinged or violent as before. Instead, a veiled sense of danger and calamity lingered.

Fighting the impulse to surrender while stepping back, Their eyes fixated on the figure of a young man clad in blood-stained black armor, adorned with long red hair and a conspicuous red mark between his brows.

Their nerves tensed as a name echoed in their minds:

Medici!

Red Angel Medici!

He was a king from ancient times. As early as the Fourth Epoch, or even during the catastrophic demise of the Third Epoch, he held the title of King of Angels.

Kings of Angels were Archangels beyond Sequence 1, yet They hadn't attained the level of a Sequence 0 true god. Through the consumption of multiple Sequence 1 potions or the possession of the key to deity status, However, having something missing prevented Them from taking that crucial step.

The Red Angel was among the eight Kings of Angels who had once served the Ancient Sun God. Though He met his end at the hands of Alista Tudor during the Fourth Epoch, leading to the latter's ascent as Blood Emperor, the King of Angels hadn't completely perished. Transformed into an evil spirit in a hidden sanctuary, He survived and reemerged a few years ago, resuming His activities.

As Angels of the Hunter pathway, Snarner and Diest grew increasingly apprehensive about the situation. They suspected that Medici might have already acquired a Conqueror Beyonder characteristic, ascending once again to a Sequence 1 Archangel.

While devising a plan to obtain Vermonda Sauron's Conqueror Beyonder characteristic, Snarner and Diest remained cautious of the possible involvement of the ancient king. When Albus Medici disclosed his name, Their vigilance heightened, and They kept a constant watch on him. Only when the operation was unexpectedly hastened, and the Red Angel showed no signs of breaching the seal, nor did Albus Medici display any abnormal behavior, did they finally ease up.

But just at that critical juncture, Red Angel Medici appeared!

With a terror-inducing aura that subjugated everything, He soared majestically from the depths of Fourth Epoch Trier. Seizing the opportunity, he dealt a severe blow to Vermonda Sauron with a single strike.

Medici's disdainful gaze swept across Snarner and Diest as He casually tossed an item to the struggling Calamity Giant, Vermonda Sauron.

It was a blood-stained umbilical cord.

The moment the umbilical cord left Medici's hand, it burst into flames, emitting a golden light resembling a miniature sun.

Above surface Trier, the sun, engulfed by hurricanes, lightning, and torrential rain, suddenly emitted a blinding light, tearing through the calamitous scene.

A chubby baby, seemingly crafted from pure sunlight, soared out of the tear, transforming into a golden sun hurtling towards Red Swan Castle in Quartier Éraste.

The scorching sun tore through the sky, liquefying the spires, walls, and floor of the ancient castle. It plunged into the depths of the underground maze and into the bronze coffin.

Wherever it passed, darkness dissipated, and the withered hearts turned to ashes. Elros Einhorn, stationed outside the underground palace, instinctively shut her eyes, her body trembling uncontrollably.

High in the sky, The Hanged Man didn't pursue the self-destructing sun. Instead, he hovered above the storm, his gaze fixed on Red Swan Castle, which bore a massive wound. It remained unknown what he contemplated.

Danitz, leading his team in Quartier Éraste's battle against the mutated soldiers and the monstrous Carbonari army, couldn't help but curse under the intense sunlight.

The people around him and the mutants shared a similar reaction.

In the outer seal of Fourth Epoch Trier, an invisible flame burning silently in the sky formed a massive vortex, tainted with a golden hue.

The sun descended from the vortex, illuminating the entire wilderness and Fourth Epoch Trier as if it were daytime.

It caught up to the burning umbilical cord and enveloped the severely injured Archangel, Vermonda Sauron.

Sunlight erupted, and darkness vanished. The Calamity Giant, formed by a Conqueror's loss of control, emitted a tragic cry and swiftly dissipated, undergoing profound purification.

The infant that had transformed into a sun ceased to exist. Only the remnants of its power burned fiercely, emitting light and warmth.

Snarner, Diest, and the other powerhouses turned sideways, steeling themselves to withstand the impact of the sunlight.

…

In the brilliantly lit Fourth Epoch Trier,

Voisin Sanson and Madame Pualis, entangled in intense combat, simultaneously closed their eyes, as if unaccustomed to the direct sunlight.

Upon reopening their eyes, they found themselves separated, no longer able to see each other. One stood in a square adorned with stone pillars, while the other perched on a collapsed black building.

"Wh…" The two bestowed, who had already tasted the power of godhood, were momentarily taken aback before realizing that Fourth Epoch Trier had undergone a transformation due to the impact of the golden sunlight, leading to a shift in direction and spatial disarray.

…

Gardner Martin, donned in a full-body silver armor, could already discern the dense grayish-white fog ahead, resembling an impenetrable wall. A surge of joy coursed through him.

What he desired, what he sought, was within reach.

Suddenly, sunlight pierced through, illuminating the nocturnal environment.

Instinctively, Gardner Martin shut his eyes and decelerated.

Then, a cracking sound reverberated.

It emanated from his neck.

In surprise, Gardner Martin lowered his head, acclimating to the sunlight.

Accompanied by an intense and peculiar pain, he witnessed the widening gap between his head and chest. Blood spurted from the stump of his neck, staining the area crimson.

He also beheld his white, bloody spine.

How could this be… This thought flashed through Gardner Martin's mind, a mix of shock and fear.

He had always believed himself to be the favored one, the special one. Hence, under the watchful eyes of the great will deep within Fourth Epoch Trier, even upon entering 13 Avenue du Marché, he assumed he would only suffer minor corruption. He could wield a certain power from Fourth Epoch Trier to a limited extent without transforming into a terrifying monster like Olson, whose head and body had been severed.

Yet now, his head had detached from his body, dragging along his spine. Just as he was on the verge of approaching the great will!

…

Lady Moon, adorned with brown wings and bird-like claws, crumpled amidst cascading silver lightning.

Initially, she descended into madness, morphing into a bewildered monster. This marked the onset of the Plague Storm from the Spectator pathway, succeeded by Magician's nine attacks from nine directions.

As sunlight bathed the scene, Magician instinctively closed her eyes. With a sweep of her right hand, the void contorted, shaping into a sealed dark sphere that encased her, Justice, and the swiftly fading Lady Moon. Together, they withstood the ensuing anomalies as a unified entity.

…

Within the sphere woven from thick black hair, Jenna, Franca, and Anthony felt the tumultuous storm and various catastrophes outside, causing the ground to quake and the sphere to sway.

In an instant, time slowed, and the snake-like black hair composing the dark sphere swiftly split open, revealing a beam of sunlight above.

In the sunlight, Jenna and Franca seemed to discern an ethereal female voice.

"Reconcile with your mirror self…"

With these words, the snake-like black hair disintegrated entirely, no longer coalescing into a sphere. It retreated into the void.

Franca and the others found themselves surrounded by a layer of dark glass, silently shattering and falling under the sunlight.

The lights and figures in the nearby buildings vanished, and Jenna and the others returned to the dead silence reminiscent of when they first entered the ruins.

After adjusting to the sunlight, Anthony immediately looked at Lumian and noticed that the blood vessels on his companion's face had faded. His contorted expression gradually eased.

"Are you alright?" Anthony inquired, employing Placate.

Upon hearing the roars, Lumian's mind was filled by the man's sighs in the dark room. The overwhelming knowledge that gripped him in corruption had subsided. He no longer felt like his head was about to burst or lose his rationality.

He quickly returned to normal, no longer hearing the sigh or seeing the withered man in strange attire.

"I survived," Lumian replied to Anthony's question.

Simultaneously, he thought, Is that the Celestial Master the Armored Shadow mentioned?

Using the Eye of Truth here is even more dangerous than the outside world.

Franca gathered the items, picked up Flog and other belongings, and threw out the Arrow of the Bloodthirsty.

"What happened to you just now?"

"The aftereffects of using the Eye of Truth." Lumian took the Arrow of the Bloodthirsty and stabbed it into his chest. Surveying the area, he said, "Let's quickly collect our items and relocate."

Previously, he had used Flog, hoping to attract the attention of dangerous entities, thereby creating chaos to find an opportunity. Now that Mirror Gardner had been dealt with, it was crucial to move to avoid new threats.

Jenna, with no time to ponder the meaning of reconciling with her mirror self, placed the bone flute, wooden box, and other items in the blood-stained cloak. Following Lumian, Franca, and Anthony, she sprinted in a random direction around the black pillar.

…

Beneath the blistering sunlight, the purple flames constituting Vermonda Sauron's flesh and blood flickered out one by one. The anguished faces representing the diverse Sauron family members disappeared sequentially.

The Red Angel's form abruptly expanded, resembling a diminutive mountain peak.

Brandishing a broadsword condensed from purple flames, He advanced with a step and swung it at the dying Vermonda Sauron.

Having regained their composure, Snarner, Diest, and the other formidable beings were not inclined to yield. They acted in unison, intervening to impede Him.

Chapter 492: Pride

Red Angel Medici stood unfazed amidst the onslaught from Snarner, Diest, and the other formidable adversaries. His focus unwavering, He channeled His conquering will to subdue Vermonda Sauron, wielding a broadsword ablaze with purple flames, ready to cleave through the menacing foe.

Seizing the opportune moment, with the uncontrollable Calamity Giant at its weakest, Medici aimed to deliver the final, fatal blow!

Suddenly, a radiant light burst forth before the eyes of Snarner, Diest, and the rest. It was pure sunlight, banishing the darkness and cleansing the surroundings of filth and the stench of blood. The two Angels, now in their Mythical Creature forms, appeared as if exposed to the brilliance of the sun at close range.

From within the luminous glow emerged a holy and beautiful woman, draped in a white robe adorned with golden threads—Trier's guardian angel, Saint Viève!

She shielded the Red Angel from the relentless attacks of the other powerhouses.

Simultaneously, Medici, clad in blood-stained black armor, descended like a mountain. Plunging the purple broadsword into Vermonda Sauron's skull, which showed signs of melting under the intense sunlight, Medici marked the decisive moment in the battle.

Boom!

The implosion absorbed the surrounding flames, hurricanes, lightning, hail, and sunlight into the Calamity Giant's colossal form. The once tumultuous wilderness now stood cleansed, except for the remnants of invisible flames in the sky and a vast golden vortex.

Boom!

Reaching its limit, the implosion rapidly expanded, unleashing a barrage of projectiles. A violent hurricane tore through Vermonda Sauron's charred skeleton, casting darkness upon the once brightly illuminated landscape.

A torrential downpour accompanied by countless bolts of lightning and thunderclaps ensued, marking the demise of an Angel—a Conqueror.

Snarner, Diest, and the other powerhouses, breaking through Saint Viève's obstruction, witnessed the scene unfold. Vermonda Sauron's body disintegrated, and Red Angel Medici, now in the form of a Mythical Creature, brandished His purple-flamed broadsword. He turned disdainfully, mocking those who dared challenge Him.

Snarner Einhorn narrowed His eyes, evaluating the situation. Swiftly transforming into a blaze, He ascended into the air, disappearing into the colossal vortex of formless flames.

Realizing that even with the support of the Iron and Blood Cross Order, victory against Red Angel and Saint Viève was unattainable, He chose to retreat.

The former was undoubtedly a Sequence 1 Conqueror. Moreover, in this unique setting, He appeared capable of tapping into the formidable power hidden within the Fourth Epoch Trier to some extent!

In that situation, He'd fall back and escape if needed; otherwise, He could meet His end right here!

Snarner dashed into the massive vortex in midair, while Diest morphed into a beam of light and shot into the sky. He raced out of the wilderness with Tony Twain, chasing after the Einhorn family's Weather Warlock.

As Angels of the Hunter pathway, Their judgments and choices were strikingly similar.

Red Angel Medici, observing Their departure, chuckled and muttered to Himself, "The heroic escape of your descendant is reminiscent of yours many years ago."

His attention then turned to Saint Viève with a smile.

"Now, we can proceed to the final part of the plan and eliminate the bestowed of the Outer Deities."

Saint Viève nodded in agreement, emitting a blazing light as She flew towards Fourth Epoch Trier, enveloped in a shroud of gray fog.

…

In the depths of Fourth Epoch Trier, alongside a wall-like grayish-white fog, Bernadette Gustav, the eldest daughter of Emperor Roselle, fixated Her gaze on a seal adorned with countless mysterious symbols.

In Her palm, a faint golden figure materialized once more through the viscous light emanating from a golden lamp that resembled a miniature lamp.

It said to Bernadette, "Take another step forward and find a monster to 'replace' your wish using the method I told you. I can use Under-the-table Transaction to help you obtain something from here to counterbalance the corruption affecting your father."

Bernadette remained steadfast, not advancing. Calmly, she responded, "I entered this place to analyze the seal and understand how the various corruptions have intricately balanced themselves through years of mergers and confrontations. That sigh was merely an unexpected bonus."

"Time is of the essence. If you don't act more assertively, once the Mother Goddess of Depravity breaches the barrier, your father will truly transform into a monster," warned the distorted, blurry, pale-golden figure.

Undeterred, Bernadette continued absorbing knowledge related to the seal, her focus unwavering.

The pale-golden figure fell silent and retreated into the peculiar lamp without making further persuasion.

…

Gardner Martin's head, donned with a silver-white helmet, soared into the air, carrying his blood-soaked spine with it.

Glancing down, he witnessed a broadsword of light materializing in his hand.

He—no, his body could use the Pride Armor's Hurricane of Light again!

However, this time, the target appeared to be him—specifically, his head!

Is this the traitorous curse? My own body turning against my head… Why another betrayal? Could it be linked to constant wearing of the Pride Armor? Gardner Martin's pupils dilated, fear gripping his heart.

In a desperate attempt to mitigate the impending impact of the Hurricane of Light, he condensed numerous crimson, almost white fireballs. The explosions around him aimed to lessen the force of the onslaught. Simultaneously, he sank his consciousness into his glabella, seeking a connection with the great will, praying for its protective intervention.

…

Beside the shattered corpse of Vermonda Sauron, Red Angel Medici extended His right hand, observing as a beam of light, reminiscent of iron and blood, emanated from the Conqueror's body. It landed on the damaged skull cradled in His palm.

In that moment, Gardner Martin's desperate shout and plea reached Him.

Red Angel chuckled dismissively, paying no heed to the pawn that had served its purpose and was now deemed expendable.

Gardner Martin had not submitted to the great will from the depths of Fourth Epoch Trier but to Red Angel Himself!

Over the past few years, Red Angel Medici had lurked in the shadows, orchestrating a scheme to obtain the Sauron family's lost Sequence 1 Conqueror Beyonder characteristic. Leveraging His uniqueness and level, He assisted numerous members of the Iron and Blood Cross Order in maintaining their lucidity and rationality in the face of corruption at 13 Avenue du Marché. They did not transform into monsters but were only slightly affected.

Using His uniqueness, Medici disguised Himself as a great will from the depths of Fourth Epoch Trier, He manipulated the Iron and Blood Cross Order members to grasp the underground situation and pinpoint Vermonda Sauron's exact location.

During this process, He uncovered the issue with the Mirror People but refrained from interference, pushing the plan forward. His intention was to involve Trier's evil god bestowed and utilize them to divert the attention of other factions while extracting corresponding special value and uncovering hidden problems.

As the plan unfolded, Philip informed Gardner Martin about Lumian Lee, who had undoubtedly prayed to the great will.

Seizing this opportunity, Red Angel Medici refined the plan, bestowing Gardner Martin with a divine vision. This allowed him to acquire significant mysticism knowledge and "conceive" the Hostel ritual.

The ritual, designed to create minimal disturbance and increase the chances of success, aimed to "fool" Trier's most formidable evil god bestowed into Fourth Epoch Trier. The ultimate goal: capture them all and purify them in one fell swoop!

Observing the Beyonder characteristic rapidly condense in His hand, Red Angel Medici raised His gaze to the gradually shrinking golden vortex.

The smile on His face, adorned with decaying wounds, deepened.

Whether it was the Hostel plan or the original strategy involving the special mirror world, both required the cooperation of a faction and the assistance of a true god.

Enter the Eternal Blazing Sun!

Indeed, how can the sun, intolerant of darkness, filth, and humbleness, genuinely collaborate with the Mother, the symbol of depravity and evil?

Having ascended to godhood and abandoned His original Lord in the past, He had chosen this path precisely because He refused to submit to another deity. Why would He now bow to the Mother Goddess of Depravity, an Outer Deity, a different entity altogether?

His needs and acknowledgments were reserved for a collaborator. And I willingly embraced this role. Even if I were to become a Great Old One in the future, I vowed to honor this agreement and stand together in defense as a collaborator.

With the Ruler of War's divine spot vacant and Cheek in dire straits, I emerged as the most likely candidate to ascend to true godhood and attain the status of a Great Old One in a short span.

The Sun didn't repent or return to the original Lord's side, nor did He submit to the Mother Goddess of Depravity who reigned above the gods. Instead, He chose the path of enduring pressure and facing the worst possible outcome to support a new Great Old One.

This decision may have seemed nearly the worst, yet He embraced it wholeheartedly.

Because He is the proud Sun.

Through the golden vortex, the Red Angel's gaze surveyed the gradually calming storm above Trier, noting a significant decrease in the frequency of lightning.

His smile grew even more smug.

As expected, Tyrant and the old dragon have grasped the entirety of the situation. They are no longer seizing the opportunity to confront the Sun, rendering the entity that had inherited most of the original Lord's legacy effectively useless.

They, too, yearn for the emergence of a new Great Old One.

Red Angel Medici directed His gaze to His palm, where an iron-black object, resembling a blood-stained crown, was on the verge of taking shape.

Recollections of past events and the betrayal He had only comprehended a few years ago flooded His mind. It all stemmed from His unwavering loyalty to that Lord of 2,401 years.

His choice was unforgiving. He chose to collaborate with the Eternal Blazing Sun.

This was because He was also a proud King of Angels, once the most loyal Red Angel.

As the Sequence 1 Conqueror Beyonder characteristic fully condensed, Medici chuckled and declared, "The curse of your useless descendants can end now."

He pressed the blood-stained iron crown, formed by the broken skull in His hand, between His eyebrows and devoured it without concocting a potion.

Vermonda Sauron's blood and shattered corpse, scattered across the wilderness, seemed to come alive, pouring into the Red Angel's body like a torrent.

Chapter 493: Crimson Hell

Sprinting through the silent, desolate, and dilapidated Fourth Epoch Trier, Lumian's abdominal injuries came under control, thanks to his potent self-healing abilities. It seemed they wouldn't worsen any time soon.

Beneath the sunlight, the direction in which Lumian, Franca, and the others were heading appeared to be in complete disarray. They traversed narrow, partially destroyed streets only to encounter magnificent red buildings, and attempts to reach landmarks led them further away, regardless of the directions they took.

Fortunately, the four of them remained relatively close, avoiding the perils of getting "lost" or separated from the group.

As Lumian contemplated finding a place to hide, a large number of violent fragments of light materialized in front of them.

It was evident that the power emanating from the Fourth Epoch Trier had been transferred from a distance.

Lumian and the others were no strangers to this terrifying storm of light. They had encountered it once in the wilderness, courtesy of Gardner Martin's silver-white full-body armor.

Gardner Martin? Lumian halted in time, wisely refraining from rushing into the weakened but still perilous storm of light.

Franca's expression became complicated, uncertain whether this encounter was luck or misfortune.

As the light subsided, she witnessed Gardner Martin's head, a long, blood-stained spine trailing behind. His armor was incomplete, his face covered in charred and hideous wounds. The helmet had caved in, revealing his grayish-white brain faintly. His eyes appeared empty, unfocused, and filled with dizziness, as if he had experienced an exaggerated shock from the intense impact.

Gardner Martin's adversary stood as his silver-white armor-clad body, lacking a head. The neck stump was drenched in blood.

Raising his hands, he condensed a massive axe made of light.

Though incapable of unleashing the Hurricane of Light, it proved sufficient for ordinary combat.

Franca gazed at the familiar yet unfamiliar tragic face and exhaled. She took out a mirror and reflected it.

In that moment, Gardner Martin's thoughts returned to normal. Aside from his headless body, he saw Franca's beautiful lake-colored eyes, appearing calm.

Franca placed her right hand, engulfed in black flames, on the mirror reflecting Gardner Martin's head and whispered, "I'll liberate you."

Gardner Martin, still reeling from the immense blow to his body, found himself instantly enveloped by black flames, his spirituality igniting from within.

Struggling to scream, he discovered his voice stifled. Desiring aid from the great will and attempting to utilize his uniqueness to summon Fourth Epoch Trier's bestowed power, he encountered only silence.

With a whoosh, the headless Gardner Martin wielded the radiant axe, striking the head's face. The missing visor shattered, and the axe cleaved into the skull.

Lumian, having taken a few steps to the side, raised his right hand, unleashing a crimson fireball, almost white, like a cannonball aimed at Gardner Martin's sunken skull.

The fireball landed on the crack, exploding and tearing apart the unprotected grayish-white brain.

Under the relentless assault from his body, lover, and subordinate, Gardner Martin's head and eyes bulged, filled with hatred and pain.

With a snap, the head detached from the helmet, falling to the ground in a half-broken state, devoid of vitality or movement.

As the silver helmet landed, Gardner Martin, still clad in armor, spun around, raising the glowing axe and charging at Lumian and the others.

Observing the unfolding scene, Lumian subtly arched his body and advanced confidently.

With each step, his stature appeared to expand, and by the time he stood near the headless Gardner Martin, his clothes and pants strained against his growing form.

The power of an Ascetic!

During his time at the edge of Fourth Epoch Trier, Lumian had strategically "Compressed" some of his strength. Now, he was unleashing it.

Although the accumulated strength wasn't overwhelming, it had visibly transformed him. Coupled with the enhanced speed, agility, and physique granted by the Arrow of the Bloodthirsty, Lumian was confident in withstanding the impending attack from the silver armor-clad Gardner Martin.

Just as the collision became imminent, Lumian deftly sidestepped, allowing the axe of light to cleave through the air. He swiftly punched the headless Gardner's wrist.

With a resounding bang, the headless Gardner discarded the radiant axe, clenched his metal-gloved fist, and delivered a forceful strike against Lumian.

Lumian's body swayed slightly, while the headless Gardner stood like an unwavering mountain peak.

Retracting his left fist, Lumian released it, swinging it in the air to alleviate the pain as he prepared to strike with his right fist.

At that moment, Franca, having vanished while Lumian approached the headless Gardner, reappeared behind the enemy clad in silver armor.

Raising the iron-black ring on her left thumb, her eyes illuminated like lightning.

Unsure if the headless body could still be affected by Psychic Piercing, Franca believed it should be possible. As long as there was a spirit, Psychic Piercing could exert its influence.

In an instant, the headless Gardner froze. The exposed skin and flesh on his neck and chest twitched.

Jenna, who had been slower due to reciting incantations and using materials, arrived as well. Revealing herself at a distance from the headless Gardner, she caused black flames to condense and fly out, landing on the enemy's bloody neck, unprotected by the silver armor. This ignited the spirit in a state of pain.

Thud! Thud! Thud! Anthony Reid sprinted past Jenna, closing the gap between him and the headless Gardner.

Then, his pupils turned vertical, a faint golden hue coloring them.

Frenzy!

Suddenly, flames erupted from the headless body in the silver armor, scorching its flesh.

Upon witnessing this, Lumian leaned back, kicking the ground with his right foot to "fly" away from the headless Gardner. Simultaneously, he condensed crimson fireballs, nearly white, around him.

The fireballs whizzed through the unprotected neck and into the body, detonating from the inside out with a resounding rumble. The silver armor trembled violently as the headless body was reduced to charred flesh and blood, "painting" the inner layer of the armor.

Boom!

Lumian, propelled backward by the explosion's waves, landed on the ground.

Simultaneously, the silver-armored mountain collapsed to the ground.

Just as Lumian rose and prepared to commend Franca and the others for their coordinated effort, he suddenly sensed the sky transforming into a deep shade of blood-red.

Rain drops began to descend from above.

However, it wasn't rain. It was flames—blazing-white flames.

Within this fiery deluge, droplets of blood accompanied the falling fire.

Franca swiftly rolled towards a nearby building, utilizing its extended roof as cover from the scorching-white fire rain. Lumian, Jenna, and Anthony followed suit.

White-hot flames and drops of bright red blood fell at an increasingly rapid pace, painting the surroundings in hues of red and setting buildings ablaze.

The burning structures melded into a sea of flames.

Contemplating whether to activate the Blood Emperor's aura for potential solutions to the unfolding horror, Lumian's eyes caught sight of Madam Magician, clad in a knot shirt and beige dress.

A sigh of relief escaped him.

Resplendent starlight illuminated the scene, and they vanished from the street, taking with them the Pride Armor, Gardner Martin's corpse, and various items scattered on the ground, all converging into the diminishing golden vortex in the sky.

…

Blazing-white flames, mixed with blood, cascaded down, but they passed through Bernadette Gustav's form, unable to ignite Her.

It was as if the Angel existed beyond their reach.

Her focus remained on the dense gray fog and the diverse corruptions within the city. After a moment, Her body transformed into transparency, eventually disintegrating into a pile of bubbles that mirrored the flames.

As the bubbles dispersed, so did Bernadette, departing from Fourth Epoch Trier.

…

Two elegant women with captivating eyes approached the wall-like grayish-white fog, only to realize that the sky above was tainted with blood, and dense white flames, resembling raindrops, descended.

Just as they considered seeking shelter, a golden sun suddenly reflected in their eyes.

In the blink of an eye, they were entirely purified.

Elsewhere in Fourth Epoch Trier, the Hostel residents who had ventured within were already undergoing abnormalities. Some perished, transformed into monsters, others were engulfed in incandescent white flames, and a few caught sight of the sun.

…

Madame Pualis discovered a relatively intact asymmetrical house amidst the chaos.

Observing distant sunlight and blazing-white flames setting nearby buildings ablaze, she hesitated to seek refuge within the door due to the deep, terrifying darkness within.

Suddenly, her head throbbed violently, and she heard an almost illusory cry of a baby.

It was the cry of her child, a fragment of memory echoing nearby.

Driven by the mystical sensation, Madame Pulias ventured into the infinite darkness beyond the door.

…

Amidst the incandescent white flames that descended, Voisin Sanson, positioned in the collapsed square, was set ablaze. However, he promptly reverted to his original state.

Soon after, he witnessed his impending purification by the sun.

In that moment, his peripheral vision captured a figure emerging from behind a grayish-white stone pillar at the square's edge.

It was a diaphanous, indistinct lizard-like creature.

The creature's cold eyes silently observed him.

…

In Fourth Epoch Trier, numerous buildings were engulfed by incandescent white flames, their facades now tainted red by rainwater transformed from blood and charred black by the inferno.

Red Angel Medici, donned in blood-stained black armor, emerged from the wilderness into the resplendent city, now permeated with the air of destruction.

He navigated through the charred and collapsed houses, moving amidst falling white flames and beneath blood-like raindrops, a visible smile gracing His face.

The two decaying wounds on His face, exposing the bones beneath, had already started to heal, leaving behind marks resembling a mouth.

Splash.

Flames and blood cascaded from the sky, casting a fiery glow upon Fourth Epoch Trier and shrouding the ruins, transforming it into a crimson hell.

After 2,081 years, Medici had once again ascended to the title of King of Angels.

Chapter 494: "Stolen" Information

The looming dark clouds over Trier had vanished, replaced by the glow of the crimson moonlight that bathed every nook and cranny of the city, casting reflections in the calf-deep puddles below.

On the rooftop of an unknown building, Lumian and Franca materialized at the edge. Before them, Magician hovered in the void, accompanied by a stack of items. Jenna and Anthony, encased in what seemed like dark glass, fixated their gazes elsewhere.

Without prompting from Lumian, Magician let out a weary sigh and divulged, "Medici has ascended once again to King of Angels. Once hailed as the most formidable Conspirer, He has returned."

"The Red Angel who once served the Ancient Sun God and met His demise at the hands of the Blood Emperor, Medici?" Lumian's reaction was a mix of surprise and inevitability.

How could the Angel of the Hunter pathway not be entangled in the affairs of the Sauron family's secrets and Fourth Epoch Trier?

The existence of Albus Medici was irrefutable proof!

Lumian, previously under the impression that the clandestine nature of the Hostel ritual and its premature commencement had prevented the Red Angel from exacting influence, now realized Medici was apparently the ultimate victor.

Madam Magician, in a relatively composed manner, chuckled and remarked, "No need for the latter half of that statement. It makes it sound like you're provoking Him, especially with the Blood Emperor's aura mark still imprinted on your right hand."

Franca, having heard Lumian's mention of the Medici family, inquired out of curiosity, "What did the Red Angel do?"

As she spoke, her eyes flitted towards Jenna and Anthony, only to realize they were oblivious to the conversation with Madam Magician, as if trapped in another dimension.

Behind Franca, the water that had pooled on the rooftop began its gradual retreat, the drain's sloshing sounds echoing.

Magician sighed.

"When the Einhorn family's Angel, the powerhouses of the Iron and Blood Cross Order, and the Sealed Artifacts, along with the unique powers of the Fourth Epoch Trier, were on the brink of killing the out-of-control Vermonda Sauron, He seized the moment to terminate the entire battle and acquire the Sequence 1 Beyonder characteristic.

"The blood-colored sky and the fiery rain you witnessed were the aftermath of His return as a King of Angels in Fourth Epoch Trier."

That explains it… Lumian, recalling the situation, gained a firsthand understanding of the dread and power wielded by a King of Angels.

At that moment, his feet were bare, lacking shoes and socks—the consequence of being transported to the painted world while asleep. The painted footwear he later wore was evidently short-lived.

Pondering the recent events, he inquired, "Was that roaring giant the out-of-control Vermonda Sauron?"

No wonder the roar had nearly rendered them unconscious. Thankfully, Mr. Fool's gray fog had provided protection.

"That's correct. Vermonda Sauron's loss of control and descent into the sealed underground marked the beginning of the Sauron family's downfall. While many details remain shrouded in mystery, the overall picture is becoming clearer."

Angel of the Einhorn family… Lumian connected the dots, realizing that one of Elros Einhorn and the Iron and Blood Cross Order's primary objectives was to break the seal, hunt the out-of-control Vermonda Sauron, and obtain the Sequence 1 Beyonder characteristic. Lumian nodded thoughtfully and asked with uncertainty, "Did these powerhouses enter Fourth Epoch Trier through the Hostel ritual?"

"Most of them accessed it through the underground leakage of Salle de Bal Brise triggered by the Hostel ritual. The representative from the Einhorn family entered through the leakage deep within the underground palace of Red Swan Castle, but it's essentially a result of the chain reaction caused by the Hostel ritual. As for how the Red Angel entered, that remains unknown to me." Magician's expression turned serious. "However, there's reason to believe that the Hostel ritual was orchestrated by the Red Angel. He manipulated the Iron and Blood Cross Order and Gardner Martin. Truly befitting the entity that once guided and watched over Amon."

Lumian felt a surge of enlightenment, finding that many previously confusing details now made more sense.

Franca's emotions were a mix of complexity.

Madam Magician, glancing at them, offered consolation, "Regardless of the circumstances, our actions accelerated the Hostel ritual, mitigating the damage this plan inflicted on Trier. In the entire market district, only a handful of night duty personnel from places like Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman and Rist Docks bore the brunt of the disaster. Some soldiers lost their lives in other areas. Overall, the impact was mainly financial. Our efforts were not in vain."

She smiled self-deprecatingly and gazed up at the sky.

"The only unexpected thing was that They chose to cooperate."

They… Lumian and Franca thought inwardly.

Eager to uncover who the Red Angel collaborated with, they realized that Madam Magician had no intention of revealing that information.

The lady's eyes traveled over the silver-white full-body armor, Gardner Martin's remains, and the items Jenna had discarded during the battle. She smiled and offered, "I'll assist you in handling the corresponding corruption and throw in specific usage information as a bonus for this mission.

"By the way, I recommend you temporarily overlook the corruption on the bone flute. It can produce peculiar effects. With Gardner Martin's Beyonder characteristics, you don't necessarily need Philip's. Plus, your unique attributes can effectively counteract the negative effects of the bone flute."

The last sentence was directed at Lumian.

Observing Lumian's nod, Magician continued, "This wooden box serves as an under-the-table transaction. It's not meant for combat, but it can resolve many issues that violence can't under specific circumstances. I'll jot down the details and have the messenger send them over.

"The mirror fragments left behind by Mirror Gardner are closely tied to the special mirror world in Fourth Epoch Trier. My intuition suggests it might be linked to the current state of the Primordial Demoness.

"As for this armor, it's quite special. Wearing it will lead to some fortuitous encounters. Heh heh, ever thought of transforming into a beautiful woman or a handsome lad four to five meters tall?"

After playfully providing basic information about the various items, Magician nodded slightly and added, "Once I'm done, I'll send them back along with the information, and you'll receive an official reward.

"Seven of Wands, it's time for you to leave Trier for a while. The Iron and Blood Cross Order's mission has concluded. Your only task is to inform that mister. I'm confident he'll comprehend and accept it."

Recalling his involvement in two consecutive catastrophes in Trier, Lumian concisely acknowledged and stated, "I share the same sentiment. I intend to track down the remaining April Fool's members."

Magician shifted her attention to Franca.

"Your next steps will hinge on the Demoness Sect's reaction. Remember to report to your Major Arcana card holder when the time comes."

After Franca acknowledged, Magician glanced at Anthony and Jenna.

"When the aftershocks settle, inquire if they'd like to draw a Minor Arcana card and join the Tarot Club. If they decline, don't push it. I'll ensure they keep it a secret."

Franca asked cheerfully, "Will they become Minor Arcana card holders under you?"

Magician smiled.

"Not necessarily. It's a matter of fate."

Addressing Lumian, she advised, "No need to rush your departure. You can lay low for a few days. Head back to Auberge du Coq Doré for now. I sense a fortuitous encounter of fate awaits you there."

Fortuitous encounter of fate? Lumian was puzzled, but it was evident that Madam Magician had no intention of providing specifics. Perhaps she had glimpsed something but not the full details.

In the next moment, Madam Magician and the objects around her dissolved into starlight and disappeared.

"How surreal…" Franca remarked genuinely.

Turning to Lumian with a pensive expression, she mused, "Do you think Madam Magician might be the Angel of Stars from the Church's Bible?"

"No way…" Lumian instinctively responded before sinking into contemplation.

…

Rue Anarchie, Auberge du Coq Doré.

As Lumian ascended to the second floor, he noticed a figure crouched outside his door.

It was a chubby, earnest-looking seven- or eight-year-old boy, toting a dark-red school bag.

Ludwig? Baron Brignais's monstrous adopted son? Lumian furrowed his brows and approached.

"What's the matter?"

Ludwig, with his yellow hair and brown eyes, stood up and implored, "Can you help me leave Trier? I don't want to stay in the Church of Knowledge any longer. I don't want to be under Brignais's control. I don't want to deal with homework or tests. I can reward you!"

"Reward?" Lumian arched an eyebrow.

Could this be the fortuitous encounter of fate Madam Magician mentioned?

Ludwig vigorously nodded.

"Yes."

Without hesitation, he unzipped the dark-red hard school bag, revealing a stack of papers.

"I stole this from the Church of Knowledge. No, I brought it here."

Lumian extended his hand, accepting the papers, and quickly scanned the front page.

"Number: 01."

"Name: Deity's Fallen Banner, Salinger's Blood Banner."

"Danger Grade: 0. Extremely Dangerous. It's of the highest importance and of the highest confidentiality. It is not to be inquired, disseminated, described, or spied."

Information on Grade 0 Sealed Artifacts? And it's 0-01! Lumian's forehead and eyelids twitched simultaneously.

He was aware that the Churches had sealed numerous mystical items with significant harmful and negative effects, categorized into four grades. "3" was the lowest, and "0" was the highest. A "1" often indicated a threat to Saints and the potential for a catastrophic event. The implications of "0" were evident.

Lumian's gaze shot up to Ludwig, realizing that the boy's face betrayed nothing out of the ordinary, only pleading.

He lowered his head, swiftly absorbing the rest of the content.

"Security Clearance: Only messengers of God."

"Sealed Method: Place it in an underground mausoleum with a large number of soldier mannequins. Construct a cemetery with more than a million corpses above it, supplemented by a real city with a population of more than 100,000. The exact execution and ritual arrangements are…"

"Description: This is a charred banner. The flagpole is iron-black metal, and there are a large number of dangerous blood spots on the banner.

"…Beyonders with strength surpassing Sequence 5 are forbidden from approaching. Warning, Beyonders with strength surpassing Sequence 5 are forbidden from approaching!

"…The experimentalist responsible for changing the soldier mannequins must be blindfolded and carry a lantern… If the lantern is extinguished, the experimentalist will vanish. Everyone who knows him will believe that he's long dead… If he's not blindfolded, the one who leaves the mausoleum will be a monster resembling him…

"…The City of Exiles, Morora, on the surface often encounters extreme weather, including but not limited to hurricanes, torrential rain, earthquakes, and volcanic eruptions…

"…There were originally no volcanoes around Morora…

"…The inhabitants of Morora are unusually belligerent. There are numerous duels with fatal casualties every day, and protests and riots occur more than six times a year…

"…The residents of Morora have no intention of leaving this city. At any moment…"

"…According to ancient texts, it has witnessed the demise of at least two true gods…"

Dammit, can I even read this? The more Lumian read, the more alarmed he became.

He looked at Ludwig in bewilderment and questioned once more, "Did you really steal it?"

Could information of this gravity be stolen so easily?

Ludwig, looking like a child, wanted to retort, but he nodded sincerely.

"Yes."

Frowning at the boy, Lumian fell into a profound silence.

(End of Volume—Conspirer)

Chapter 495: Distribution

Oh, merciful Father, I implore your mercy for the transgressions I've made.

In Apartment 601, 3 Rue des Blouses Blanches.

Lumian, Franca, Jenna, and Anthony fell silent as they stared at the gleaming full-body silver armor before them.

Before delving into the details, they had already sensed the power emanating from the Sealed Artifact. The brief yet potent Hurricane of Light it unleashed was a deadly force. Even Gardner Martin, a Sequence 5 Reaper, was willing to trade other mystical items for its might. However, upon scrutinizing the information provided, their initial enthusiasm waned, and they instinctively distanced themselves from the armor named Pride.

Within the Sealed Artifact information was a stark warning in red ink:

"The curse of betrayal originates from a deity's intense aversion and hatred before Their demise. Even Angels can't fully escape its grasp, only mitigating the negative effects to a certain extent. The sole solution is to shatter the armor and restore it to a pure Beyonder characteristic. However, this means losing its uniqueness. For instance, the ability to use Hurricane of Light again in just two minutes without delay. Moreover, those Beyonders who advance by consuming a potion derived from that Beyonder characteristic will endure reasonable but not-too-severe betrayal for an extended period."

Recalling Gardner Martin's tragic end, Franca, initially skeptical, now felt an unexplained fear. The betrayal curse seemed more formidable than she had imagined.

Lumian observed the hesitancy in Franca, Anthony, and Jenna, realizing none were eager to claim the particular spoils of war.

With a smile, he declared, "I'll go first."

Pointing at Gardner Martin's remains on the coffee table, he stated, "I choose Reaper."

The Beyonder characteristic had fused into a finger, creating an unusually sharp, bone-blade emitting an icy glint. The holder needed to be cautious to avoid accidental injury.

Immediately afterward, Lumian shifted his gaze to the charred bone flute originating from General Philip.

"I'll trade the Hypnotist Beyonder characteristics and the Decency brooch for this. You guys wouldn't be able to handle it anyway."

Per Madam Magician's intel, while the bone flute held significant power and uniqueness, it carried the risk of bringing misfortune in the form of injuries, death, and other grisly calamities. Only Lumian possessed the resilience to withstand these negative effects and mitigate them without succumbing to excessive misfortune.

In truth, if General Philip's grudges before his demise hadn't been so potent, and if the curse of misfortune stemming from the Deceased pathway's boon hadn't been so exaggerated, Lumian might have struggled more to endure it. After all, enduring perpetual misfortune wasn't anyone's wish. Even if it wasn't lethal, it would still lead to considerable trouble.

Experiencing excessive bad luck was akin to tempting the fate intertwined with Termiboros, a fate deeply connected to Lumian. The potency of the bone flute wasn't sufficient to affect an Angel.

As per Madam Magician's detailed description, Lumian, naming the bone flute the Symphony of Hatred, discovered it possessed three abilities:

"With a simple blow, it emits a sharp, ear-piercing sound. This not only damages the Spirit Body, inducing dizziness, nausea, and convulsions in the target, but it can also directly impact Beyonders with weaker physiques—those equivalent to ordinary adults. They might suffer temporary blindness, paralysis, or internal organ damage.

"It appears that a symphony resonating from the depths of the river of fate inflicts a weakness on the enemy's mind. Those with unstable minds may experience symptoms akin to madness. Those with psychological issues might have latent problems triggered. There's even a chance that excessive desires could cause them to explode on the spot. Individuals with illnesses or old injuries will inevitably face severe consequences. Those less fortunate may find themselves extremely unlucky. Of course, the player needs some knowledge about musical instruments to play the bone flute effectively; otherwise, they'll only create noise, similar to the effect of a simple blow.

"While this bone flute is brittle and can't be used for blocking, wherever it stabs is equivalent to hitting a vital point. If it strikes a true vital point, the enemy will either be killed in a single blow or face the fate of social death for an extended period."

Franca observed as Lumian placed the colorless colloid with numerous bubbles and the Decency brooch, crafted into a Scotch Broom, on the coffee table. She nodded imperceptibly.

"That seems like a fair trade."

Observing the lack of objections from Anthony and Jenna, Lumian produced a deep-black cloth bag resembling a coin pouch. He carefully placed the Reaper Beyonder characteristic and the Symphony of Hatred bone flute inside.

This was one of Madam Magician's true rewards for him: Traveler's Bag.

Crafted personally by Magician, it was a Beyonder item devoid of characteristics. At first glance, it seemed to hold only up to two hundred coins, but it concealed another dimension within, equivalent to the entire

Apartment 601. It could accommodate a vast array of items, including the Pride Armor.

Magician had also placed a specific seal inside the item. While within the bag, Beyonder characteristics didn't require regular relocation, and the negative effects of mystical items would significantly diminish.

The Traveler's Bag needed resealing and reinforcement every six months; otherwise, it would lose its mystical abilities and become ordinary. In such circumstances, if the items inside weren't retrieved promptly, they would be lost to the spirit world and nearly impossible to recover.

Similarly, Franca received a Traveler's Bag as her reward.

After claiming his share, Lumian turned his attention to Anthony Reid, indicating for the Psychiatrist to make his selection.

Anthony smiled wryly. "I contributed the least. I'll take this Hypnotist main ingredient. I feel that my psychological problems have been alleviated. I can contemplate advancing."

In his interactions with Lumian, Franca, and the others, he often heard words and sentences infused with mystic knowledge. Though he refrained from direct inquiries, over time, he vaguely grasped various patterns and the essence of things he wouldn't have considered before. It was as if a new world had unfolded before him.

"No problem," Franca replied, not insisting on Anthony choosing another item. She turned to Jenna and said, "I want the mirror fragment left behind by the fake Martin."

Madam Magician referred to this item as the "Mirror World Fragment." It served as a crucial clue for Franca's subsequent investigation into the state of the Primordial Demoness, and it possessed a unique quality: Using it to reflect a target allowed the user to create a corresponding "Mirror Person." However, they couldn't replicate entities with godhood, and the mirroring effect could only be maintained for a maximum of five minutes.

The fragment produced two types of Mirror People. The first was a shallow mirror image, replicable in ten seconds. The second was a deep conversion that took a minute to complete. The former retained the original body's state, as long as the body hadn't undergone a gender change—similar to those Franca and Lumian had encountered before. However, these Mirror People were relatively weak, equivalent to the original body at a certain past stage and lacked abilities like Mirror Substitution. The latter was a nearly perfect replica, akin to the ones recently encountered, possessing special traits.

Of course, for a Demoness of Pleasure, this wasn't practical. If she could already capture the other party's figure with a mirror, why not directly cast a curse instead of creating a Mirror Person?

Lumian interjected, "You can take another one, Franca. No need to be modest. Your contributions in these battles are second only to mine."

"What do you mean second only to you?" Franca scoffed, pushing the Decency brooch in her direction.

The only remaining spoils of war were the small dark-painted wooden box, each side adorned with a membrane curtain, and the Pride Armor. Jenna swiftly made her choice and selected the Authority Holder's Under-the-table Transaction.

According to Lumian, her lucky gold coin no longer carried any additional luck. Its usefulness was now limited to specific situations. Recognizing this, she didn't believe she could resist the betrayal curse of the Pride Armor. Jenna understood the importance of not being overly prideful and blindly relying on luck, taking Gardner Martin's fate as a sobering lesson.

The usage of Authority Holder's Under-the-table Transaction involved grasping valuable items with one's hand, inserting them into the dark wooden box through the side "curtain," handing it to the outstretched palm-like object, and stating one's requirements. This process simplified complex matters and eased difficult transactions.

However, one needed to have a clear, achievable target—no vague requests were allowed. For example, directly stating a desire for a specific Beyonder characteristic or mystical item was useless. Users had to find the corresponding Beyonder characteristic or mystical item, fail to reach a deal, and then make their request. This approach involved changing the seller's mind, with a high chance of securing a steep discount.

The "Under-the-table Transaction" had various applications, even allowing two individuals with deep grudges to reconcile by shaking hands inside the box—though the individual shaking hands wasn't actually the other party.

Authority Holder's Under-the-table Transaction was an active remnant of boon powers, and without Beyonder characteristics, it could only be used nine more times. The downside was that each use increased the likelihood of encountering evil creatures like Demons in future transactions.

As Jenna stowed away the Authority Holder's Under-the-table Transaction, Franca smiled and said,

"I wish to use the Decency brooch to exchange for the black Primordial Demoness figurine, or would you prefer to zero your debt as an exchange?"

Following Madam Judgment's suggestion, Franca intended to use this unique figurine to gauge the Demoness Sect's reaction and potentially exchange it for their rewards.

"T-this is everyone's spoils of war," Jenna responded in confusion.

Franca grinned and explained, "No, it's yours. Back then, only you with the lucky gold coin could hold it, so it's rightfully yours. To put it simply, this is a gain from 'luck.'"

Jenna glanced at Lumian and Anthony, finding their nods of agreement. She muttered, "Dammit, you're making me feel embarrassed… I want the Decency brooch. Only by personally paying off a debt does it become meaningful."

As she spoke, Jenna handed the black Primordial Demoness figurine to Franca and stowed away the Decency brooch, carved into a Scotch Broom.

Finally, the group directed their attention to the silver-white Pride Armor, and a contemplative silence ensued once again.

After a lengthy pause, Franca exclaimed, "Ciel, keep it. Treat it as a communal item that anyone can use. Only the both of us can carry it conveniently now. Besides, you're about to head to Port Santa in Feynapotter's Gaia Province. You can't borrow my Mirror Substitution anymore. This armor will be very useful in critical moments."

Lumian had already made the decision to investigate the sea prayer ritual in Port Santa, Feynapotter Kingdom's Gaia Province, and search for traces of the April Fool's key members—Bard and Ultraman.

Chapter 496: Sin

Lumian commented nonchalantly towards Franca's suggestion, "That works too. In the future, if anyone wants to use this armor, I'll 'teleport' it to you. What's this called? It's called Ciel Postal Service. It'll be delivered immediately!"

After joking, he approached the Pride Armor standing beside the coffee table and began stuffing its silver-white glove into the opening of the Traveler's Bag.

With this motion, the towering full-body armor shrank into the small black cloth bag.

As long as one part of an item could enter a Traveler's Bag, it could pass through the opening regardless of its size, as long as it didn't exceed the space within. Typically, flesh and blood infused with vitality couldn't be stored in a Traveler's Bag.

Considering these factors, Lumian's initial thought upon obtaining the Beyonder item and its "explanation manual" was that it could be used to conceal a corpse.

"How magical…" Jenna watched the scene unfold with envy.

Despite attending numerous mysticism gatherings, she had never encountered such an item. The closest thing she knew was the world inside a painting.

Lumian concealed his Traveler's Bag beneath his clothes, a smile playing on his lips. Addressing Anthony and Jenna, he remarked, "After this incident, you ought to know Franca and I are backed by a secret organization. It's not the Iron and Blood Cross Order or the Demoness Sect. So, what do you say? Interested in joining? If not, I'll need you to sign a confidentiality agreement or swear a binding oath of secrecy."

Having heard Lumian and Franca discuss the secret organization and knowing that they genuinely believed in Mr. Fool, Jenna was familiar with the tarot card code name. Having received The Fool's response, her decision was swift.

"I'm in."

Anthony Reid pondered in silence for a moment before inquiring, "Does your organization follow some hidden entity?"

"It's an orthodox god," Lumian responded, addressing Anthony's unspoken concerns. "If you doubt me, I can show you the cathedral."

Observing Lumian's expression, Anthony confirmed the sincerity.

The Psychiatrist let out a bitter laugh and admitted, "Then I don't have an issue. My past experiences and this incident have taught me that I'm still too feeble to prevent such a catastrophe. Even if it stands right beside me, I can only watch as myself and those around me plummet into the abyss."

For Anthony, joining a secret organization seemed like a pragmatic choice to strengthen himself—especially one that followed an orthodox god.

As a believer of the God of Steam and Machinery, Anthony had carefully considered it. He realized that the Church's scriptures lacked any mention of animosity between orthodox gods, unlike the Eternal Blazing Sun Church, which perpetually preached hatred towards the Lord of Storms and the God of Knowledge and Wisdom.

In other words, his faith wouldn't hinder Anthony from joining such a secret organization.

Without waiting for Lumian and Franca's response, Anthony grinned self-deprecatingly and admitted, "I originally planned to head back to the West Midseashire Coast, live in the countryside, but now I'm worried I can't escape the looming catastrophe. Just like those in the market district, who'd willingly dance on the edge of life and death amidst repeated abnormalities? Yet, their wills and desires are futile.

"From what I've seen, catastrophes are becoming more frequent."

Lumian mocked his companion.

"You've turned into a nag after your mental illness got sorted."

He continued, "We'll hash out the details once you confirm your Major Arcana card and get your mission assignment."

Jenna pursed her lips, a dark expression crossing her face.

"I actually kinda like living in the market district…"

It seemed like she needed to leave this place.

A soft chuckle escaped Lumian's lips.

"This is, in fact, protection for the market district. Hunters and Demonesses always bring catastrophe."

Always bring catastrophe, even if they don't do anything? Jenna's eyes narrowed as she sank into deep thought.

"F*ck off! You're the only one like this!" Franca cursed, a mix of irritation and amusement.

In the past few months, most catastrophes in the market district had orbited around Ciel. What did it have to do with Jenna and me?

Wouldn't that prove that 007 was right?

After discussing other matters, Lumian and Franca stepped out of 3 Rue des Blouses Blanches into the morning sun. One headed for Psychic's headquarters on Rue Scheer in Avenue du Boulevard, while the other made her way to Trocadéro.

Lumian opted for a four-wheeled, two-seater rental carriage instead of the usual public carriage.

Outside the carriage window, street vendors hawked Whiskey Sour, meatloaf, freshwater fish, onion bread, spicy sauce, soybean paste, and various other items. Passersby either paused to make a purchase or briskly moved on. Some were clad as clerks, others in an array of differently colored workers' uniforms.

After the riot of the previous night and the apocalyptic downpour, this place was once again alive with activity.

For Lumian, it was reminiscent of the market district of the past, but now, he was a wanted criminal again—in his identity as Ciel Dubois, a member of the Iron and Blood Cross Order and a leader of the Savoie Mob.

Salle de Bal Brise and the other establishments had undoubtedly been seized by the police headquarters. The Iron and Blood Cross Order's grip on the market district had almost been eradicated.

Lumian found it regrettable as it meant losing a stable source of income.

However, after taking Ludwig in the previous night and informing Madam Magician about the information, he intentionally returned to Salle de Bal Brise before the chaos settled. He secured 30,000 verl d'or from the safe, bringing his total to 75,000 verl d'or and 1,000 gold.

Lumian's mind wandered as he observed the passersby and listened to the vendors' pitches.

After "reporting" the previous night's matters to Mr. K and obtaining the Aurora Order Oracle's approval, he planned to leave Trier for the Feynapotter Kingdom.

Before embarking on his journey, he had three priorities:

Firstly, he needed to locate Lugano Toscano, who had lost his job again, and inquire if he was willing to accompany him to the Feynapotter Kingdom's

Port Santa. This Sequence 8 Doctor, often journeying to the Feynapotter Kingdom, was fluent in highlander. Lumian, knowing only Intisian and ancient Feysac, risked communication challenges without him—having to resort to body language.

Secondly, he awaited Jenna and Anthony's Major Arcana card missions to see if they could collaborate and assist each other.

Thirdly, he planned to use the messenger-related spirit world creature information that came with the Reaper formula from Madam Magician to attempt gaining a messenger. This would make future communication with Franca and others more convenient. Additionally, he had to perform a ritual to acquire one or two more contractual abilities.

…

On Avenue du Boulevard, at 19 Rue Scheer, beneath the luxurious beige house, Lumian met Mr. K once again in the basement.

The Oracle, his face concealed in hooded shadows, occupied a red armchair, his profound gaze fixed on Lumian.

"Last night, I entered Fourth Epoch's Trier," Lumian got straight to the point, hoping to capture Mr. K's attention.

Mr. K's hooded head nodded. "I know. Tell me the whole story."

You know? Lumian was surprised. He recounted capturing Bouvard Pont-Péro during his revenge, and the subsequent events of how he, Franca, and company defeated Mirror Gardner, using the special mirror world to escape Fourth Epoch Trier.

Throughout the entire narrative, he shared only his experiences, avoiding any mention of Jenna and the others' encounters or his speculations. For instance, he omitted details like the fortunate gold coin or Jenna's prayer to Mr. Fool, stating only that he had inexplicably entered the world in the painting.

Similarly, he left out many specifics.

Mr. K listened attentively without interrupting Lumian's account.

After Lumian mentioned the elimination of the Iron and Blood Cross Order's market division and his exposed identity, Mr. K stood up and spoke in a hoarse voice, "No problem. Feel free to seek my assistance at any time."

Without awaiting Lumian's response, the Aurora Order Oracle turned around, knelt, and prostrated himself on the ground.

Mr. K's face pressed tightly against the floor tiles as he muttered to himself, his thoughts incomprehensible.

Lumian waited in silence, refraining from interrupting Mr. K. The shadows around him deepened, as if unseen eyes were fixed on him, sending shivers down his spine.

Yet, he remained unfazed. It seemed normal for individuals from the Aurora Order to suddenly exhibit erratic behavior.

After an indeterminate period, Mr. K coughed violently, and blood spurted from the ground.

He looked up and spoke in a deep, frenzied voice, "Oh, merciful Father, I implore your mercy for my transgressions."

After repeating this three times, Mr. K's face pressed against the ground again, emitting sounds of chewing and devouring.

After performing these peculiar actions, he stood up and tapped four times —top, down, left, right—on his chest.

"What happened? Why the repentance?" Lumian asked curiously.

Mr. K rasped, "Our Aurora Order failed to react in time to last night's catastrophe. Failing to cooperate with you in destroying the ritual was my dereliction of duty."

"It's not your responsibility," Lumian replied, his lips twitching.

The Tarot Club's actions had primarily propelled the Hostel's plan forward. It was already commendable for the Aurora Order to swiftly discern what had occurred. There was no need for Mr. K to repent and shoulder the blame for the lapse.

Mr. K shook his head. "No matter the reason, failure to act is a sin."

Do you have to be so responsible… You're just a secret organization, not fanatical believers of the Eternal Blazing Sun… Lumian muttered silently.

As if sensing Lumian's thoughts, Mr. K spread his arms wide and spoke with abnormal fanaticism, "Because our Aurora Order is born to bear all sin."

I think you're being too extreme… Lumian struggled to control his expression.

Chapter 497: The Fragment's Origins

Mr. K didn't impose any specific requests for Lumian's journey to Feynapotter. He merely reiterated that Lumian could utilize the finger anytime he faced challenges. As long as he wasn't in a unique environment, the Aurora Order Oracle could sense it through the blood connection and offer prompt assistance.

Sensing it over quite a long distance. As expected of being a part of your body… I wonder if Demonesses can complete a curse after obtaining this finger… Lumian bade farewell to Mr. K, his thoughts drifting, and exited the opulent beige house at 19 Rue Scheer.

…

In Trocadéro Town, at the entrance of the manor surrounded by grapevines, Franca caught sight of Browns Sauron, her long orange-red hair cascading down like a waterfall.

The Demoness smirked mockingly and said, "I heard your lover is dead?"

"Did you just drink the Provoker potion?" Franca retorted without backing down. "Could it be that members of the Sauron family carry a Provoker trait from birth?"

Without waiting for Browns's response, Franca walked past her, chuckling.

"Yes, Gardner Martin is indeed dead. I killed him myself."

Browns's pupils dilated as she turned her head in surprise to gaze upon Franca's side profile. She saw that the new Demoness had a faint smile on her face, but her eyes were deep and dark—a mix of pleasure and pain, solemn and ruthless.

Franca considered adding, "I was even present to hear your ancestor's scream while being killed," but that would expose her grasp of extensive secret intel and mysticism knowledge that she ought not to have at her level. It would arouse the Demoness Sect's suspicion, so she abandoned the idea. As she advanced, she smiled and said, "Then, I found the item Gardner Martin and his collaborators smuggled into Trier through the catacombs."

"You've found it. What is it?" Browns hadn't expected Franca to complete this mission, a mix of surprise and a tinge of jealousy crossing her features.

Franca didn't hide anything. This was her purpose in coming to Demoness of Black Clarice.

She produced the pitch-black figurine with its hair facing the opposite direction of the orthodox version and waved it in front of Browns.

Browns's expression froze, as if she had seen something terrifying.

"W-why? How is it appearing here…?" The Demoness of Pleasure's voice trailed off, her tone filled with unconcealable shock.

Franca seized the opportunity to ask, "You know what it is?"

Browns snapped out of her daze, her eyes flickering as she said, "My teacher will tell you."

Franca didn't press further and changed the subject with a smile.

"Why does your teacher call herself the Demoness of Black? Wouldn't any ordinary person consider a Demoness a derogatory term?"

"Everyone has different aesthetic standards. Some like to call themselves Saintesses, while others find Demonesses cool. They have a unique and unorthodox flair." Browns appeared more inclined to the latter.

Franca pondered seriously, Men retain their youthful spirit even in death. Is there such excessive self-awareness? Even if they were once men... She realized that if someone called her a Demoness of XX, she would probably feel a strange sense of smugness despite her embarrassment. However, if it were Saintess, she would definitely have goosebumps—her toes cringing so bad that they could dig a hole and bury herself in it.

Before long, Franca encountered the Demoness of Black at the circular pavilion amidst the grapevines and numerous vines.

Clarice's dark gray eyes, tinged with melancholy, swept across Franca's face and the black Primordial Demoness figurine in her hand.

Her gaze lingered on the latter for a few seconds before she said, "Did you obtain this from the Iron and Blood Cross Order?"

"Yes, I did." Franca took the initiative to recount the previous night's encounter.

She recounted from the moment she failed to tail the Carbonari member until how she and Anthony Reid mysteriously entered the sealed Fourth Epoch Trier under the influence of the Primordial Demoness figurine and the ancient silver mirror despite clearly being in Apartment 601 at 3 Rue des Blouses Blanches.

She didn't hide the existence of the ancient silver mirror anymore. She only said that she had accidentally obtained it underground a few months ago. This time, it had some effect but disappeared without a trace after they sank underground.

Everything she said was the truth—every word the truth.

Demoness of Black Clarice interrupted Franca's account and asked thoughtfully, "Did you run into Gardner Martin as soon as you entered?"

Although she hadn't seen it with her own eyes, she seemed to foresee the development.

"Yes, there was also that Carbonari member. He's General Philip, who faked his death. This strange figurine was found on him," Franca replied truthfully. "At that time, Anthony and I nearly died at Gardner and Philip's hands. Fortunately, Ciel and Jenna inexplicably entered and were hidden nearby."

She briefly recounted the battle and deliberately redirected Jenna's ability towards Vampires.

After listening for a while, the Demoness of Black raised her right hand and gently stroked her face.

"You said that there was an area in the wilderness with chaotic weather in the distance, and there was a giant figure surrounded by hurricanes and thick fog?"

"Yes, we also heard his roar and nearly lost control. Fortunately, we entered the gray fog-shrouded city in time. The commotion outside became very muffled." Franca hadn't expected the Demoness of Black to be so concerned about the giant.

Clarice listened quietly and let out a soft sigh. She felt a mix of sorrow, disappointment, and indescribable relief, making her feel exceptionally pitiful.

Browns looked at her teacher with a puzzled expression, as if she didn't understand why the Demoness of Black had such a reaction.

Franca was puzzled at first, but then her heart skipped a beat.

Browns belongs to the Sauron family. Could it be the same for the Demoness of Black?

Could they be a branch of the Sauron family that had pledged allegiance to the Demoness Sect?

However, the Demoness of Black's hair and eyes don't resemble those of a genuine Sauron family member…

If they are all from the Sauron family, could the Demoness of Black be Browns's relative, or even her father or mother, leading to Browns's current state?

Had the Demoness of Black heard about Vermonda Sauron's current situation and understood the Iron and Blood Cross Order's scheme? Is that why she's so emotional?

As these thoughts raced through Franca's mind, she continued to recount the battle between the four of them and Mirror Gardner. Finally, she took out the pitch-black Mirror World Fragment.

"Your Excellency Demoness of Black, what's this? And what's this figurine?"

Demoness of Black Clarice gazed at the Mirror World Fragment and the black Primordial Demoness figurine and said, "In conventional mysticism, the mirror world isn't a true world. It's an amalgamation of the concept of doors, connected to mirrors and alternate spaces. However, many members of our Demoness Sect are aware that in certain special places, for specific reasons, there are a few mirror worlds with monsters. You encountered one of them, and this is a fragment of that world…"

She briefly recounted what Franca already knew about the Mirror World Fragment. Finally, she said, "This should have been handed over to me for a reward, but according to your description, many underground Mirror People have already infiltrated Trier. This fragment can help you track them, find them, and eliminate them. You can keep it for a while until the mission is completed.

"Hmm, this is your next mission. Clean up Trier's Mirror People and gather any similar fragments that might be on them."

The origins and effects are the same as what Madam Magician said. From the looks of it, Clarice wasn't lying to me… Sigh, my next mission is in Trier. I can't follow Ciel to Feynapotter to search for Bard and company… At critical moments, I can get him to 'teleport' me there to provide help…

Franca sighed inwardly and said, "Yes, Your Excellency Demoness of Black."

The Demoness of Black continued, "This figurine originates from one of the special mirror worlds.

"We believe in the Primordial One in reality. The Mirror People believe in the mirrored Primordial One, but it's actually just a projection of the Primordial One in the mirror."

Just as I suspected… The Primordial Demoness's projection in the mirror underwent an abnormality and gained self-awareness, causing Her condition to worsen? Or is Clarice not telling the entire truth? Under the Demoness of Black's instructions, Franca handed over the special figurine.

Clarice nodded slightly and said, "You completed the Iron and Blood Cross Order mission better than I expected by retrieving this special figurine. What reward do you want?"

Franca didn't hesitate and answered, "The potion formula for Affliction, or perhaps a mystical item that allows me to traverse the spirit world."

The Demoness of Black revealed an inconspicuous smile.

"This time, I'll give you the potion formula for Affliction. Once you complete your next mission, you can choose a mystical item with the Spirit World Traversal ability."

Does that mean I can't exchange my contributions for teleportation-type items this time, but they surpass the value of the Demoness of Affliction formula? I can save a portion and exchange them together when I make other contributions? Franca pondered for a moment and said, "Okay."

Demoness of Black Clarice raised her right hand and swiped at the void.

Franca immediately noticed numerous dark Hermes words outlined on the watery surface at the edge of the circular pavilion.

"Affliction potion formula:

"Sequence: 5;

"Main ingredient: Flower-Faced Bat's head, Two-Tailed Black Snake's gallbladder;

"Supplementary ingredients: 30 milliliters of Flower-Faced Bat blood, 50 milliliters of a seriously ill human's blood, tail tip of the Two-Tailed Black Snake, 10 drops of Enfinitas Eucalyptus essential oil;

"Ritual: Without substitutes, be burned at the stake for fifteen minutes and survive without going mad."

Hiss… Just reading the description hurts… Franca couldn't help but shrink back.

After memorizing the potion formula, she left the manor with Browns.

Demoness of Black Clarice watched her silently as she retrieved an item from a hidden pocket in her black court dress.

It was a pitch-black mirror fragment.

It bore a striking resemblance to Franca's Mirror World Fragment, albeit with an irregular fracture at the edge.

Chapter 498: Suspicious Attitude

Lugano Toscano, a burly man with brown hair, brown eyes, and sharp features, donned a budget-friendly black formal suit. He lowered his head as he navigated through the lively crowd, his top hat shading his face.

After a series of turns, the Beyonder, now a Sequence 8 Doctor, entered Rue des Pavés beside Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman. He ascended a creaking wooden staircase to the top floor of an ancient house.

Upon waking that day, before having breakfast, his companion informed him of being wanted—due to his role as Ciel Dubois's trusted subordinate managing a dance hall.

Despite Lugano's confusion about the Savoie Mob's motives and his certainty of non-involvement, as a wild Beyonder, merely existing rendered him guilty. Reluctant to seek clarification from the Purifiers and Machinery Hivemind, he packed his bags and moved to the safe house without notifying his companions. His plan was to observe for a few more days before deciding on his next move.

During the factories' lunch break, making the market district bustling, Lugano descended and surveyed the area. True to his expectations, he discovered he was indeed wanted, with a bounty of 2,000 verl d'or.

Considering his perceived lack of importance, Lugano hoped to fade from the official Beyonders' attention in due time.

Entering the room, not much larger than an attic, Lugano used a brass key to open the dark-brown wooden door.

Amidst the creaks, a figure caught the Doctor's eye.

Seated at a simple wooden table, Ciel Dubois displayed golden-black hair, a silver earring, a white shirt, a dark jacket, grayish-blue pants, and leather shoes.

How did he find this place? Besides me and the landlord residing in another quartier, no one knows about this safe house! Officially put to use for the first time today! Lugano's pupils dilated, as if he wanted to scrutinize the figure in the dim room.

At some point, the open curtains had been drawn.

Lumian grinned at Lugano and remarked, "Why? Am I not welcomed?"

Lugano instinctively forced a smile, replying, "It's an honor to have you here. I just didn't expect you to know about this doghouse of mine."

He spoke with humility but also subtly hinted at Lumian: I haven't forgotten that I'm your dog!

As Lugano spoke, he entered the room, closing the wooden door behind him.

The space darkened, and a snap echoed.

The candles on the simple wooden table suddenly ignited, casting a yellowish flame.

Lumian lowered his raised right palm and nodded slightly, asking, "Any questions?"

Lugano didn't delve into the crimes of the Savoie Mob's brass that had made him a wanted man. Instead, his concern was elsewhere.

"Monsieur Ciel, how did you know about this safe house of mine?"

Lumian chuckled.

"I can find anything if I put my mind to it."

Wh— Lugano's eyes narrowed, sensing the formidable confidence in the other party.

Ciel's actions also validated his words.

Of course, Lumian wouldn't tell Lugano that he had followed him multiple times, determining the locations of his three safe houses.

As a Hunter, Lumian often roamed the market district during his free time, honing his tracking skills. He was well-acquainted with the area.

While he randomly chose targets for ordinary passersby and residents, Lugano Toscano, a Beyonder seeking to join his ranks, was a crucial subject of investigation to prevent betrayal. Lumian kept a close eye on him to avoid being blindsided by any potential treachery.

Without waiting for Lugano to delve into further inquiries, Lumian got straight to the point.

"I need your help with something."

"It's my honor." Lugano didn't seek details and acted as if he was unquestionably on board.

Isn't this too toady? I'm now a wanted criminal. Without Salle de Bal Brise and other businesses, it's impossible for me to provide any more resources… Lumian stroked his chin with his right hand.

"I need to make a trip to the Feynapotter Kingdom. I wish for you to be my translator."

Lugano promptly responded, "No problem."

Is that so? But I have a problem… Lumian, a Conspirer, grew suspicious of Lugano's unquestioning loyalty, given the lack of inquiry or discussion about returns. He instantly became highly focused.

Could it be that this fellow, like Ludwig, has been "sent" by some faction to interact with me? Lumian raised his eyebrows and smiled.

"I thought you'd refuse. After all, you've already become a Doctor. Even without taking any risks, you can lead a very good life."

Doctors could use superpowers to treat illnesses and injuries, easily sustaining themselves in any country or city.

Lugano said sheepishly, "I'm also wanted. I'm planning to find a place to hide before returning to Trier. Besides, I believe you'll reward me handsomely.

"Although Doctors can treat illnesses, we can't use Beyonder powers openly. That would attract the attention of official Beyonders unless we only dabble in the black market. The best choice is to forge a doctor's license and open a clinic. Add on Beyonder powers while providing regular treatment. However, it will require a large sum of starting funds and sufficient medical knowledge. I already have the latter. As for the former, I've just exchanged all my savings for the main and supplementary ingredients for the Doctor potion."

As he spoke, Lugano's smile ingratiated.

"Once I become a renowned doctor in Trier, I'll earn at least 200,000 verl d'or annually. That way, I won't have to adventure anymore. Even if I don't want to become too famous and attract the attention of official Beyonders, it'll be easy for me to earn 40,000 to 50,000 verl d'or a year."

You're quite familiar with Trier's doctor incomes… Lumian gazed at Lugano's face, his doubts dissipating but still lingering.

He quickly made up his mind and stood up slowly.

"Excellent. Wait three days for me here. I'll come to you after I'm done with other matters. When the time comes, I'll pay you a 5,000 verl d'or advance. When I don't need your translation services, I'll give you another 5,000 verl d'or. If there's a battle midway, you can divide the spoils of war according to rules between adventurers. I'll provide further compensation later, no less than 5,000 verl d'or."

"Alright, Monsieur Ciel." Lugano escorted Lumian out of the room with a smile.

Throughout this process, Lumian observed Doctor's expressions and actions from the corner of his eye, but he didn't detect any abnormalities.

Is this really how he is? There's nothing abnormal about him, or is his acting skills good enough? Lumian looked ahead and descended the stairs steadily.

…

Jenna didn't linger in Apartment 601 at 3 Rue des Blouses Blanches. She swiftly packed her belongings, intending to transfer to Franca's safe house in Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative.

Despite being a leader of the Savoie Mob and Gardner Martin's mistress, Franca strangely hadn't become a wanted criminal. However, the Demoness of Pleasure anticipated that she might face arrest by official Beyonders at her residence soon. Therefore, Franca had prepared to move to Trocadéro Town, having packed her own belongings and Jenna's luggage into a Traveler's Bag for a quick escape.

Carrying a brown suitcase, Jenna entered Rue des Blouses Blanches and noticed peculiar symbols in a side alley, resembling child's graffiti—a sign of the Purifiers' request for a meeting.

Jenna hesitated as she walked forward.

Although she had discussed with Lumian, Franca, and Anthony what to say about the previous night's encounter, meeting official Beyonders still felt risky. The unease lingered.

After nearly ten minutes of contemplation, Jenna let out a soft sigh and turned onto Avenue du Marché, making her way towards the alley behind Église Saint-Robert—the designated meeting venue.

Her brother Julien was still in Port LeSeur and would return to Trier in a few months. Jenna aimed to avoid implicating her remaining relative and wanted him to live free from hiding and fear. Her plan was to establish a positive relationship with the Purifiers and entrust them with her brother's safety.

I'm already a Witch who can bring about a catastrophe. I'll shoulder these dark and dangerous matters, Jenna silently muttered to herself, lowering her eyes and quickening her pace.

This time, Valentine and Imre weren't the only ones in the back alley of Église Saint-Robert's cathedral. There was also a man with blond hair, golden eyebrows, and a golden beard, dressed in a brown double-breasted coat.

"This is our deacon, Monsieur Angoulême," Imre introduced. "He attaches great importance to last night's catastrophe and wants to know what information you have."

From their perspective, Celia Bello had close ties to Ciel and Franca. One of them was Gardner Martin's subordinate in two aspects, while the other was his mistress. They were expected to be aware of the riots and anomalies in the market district.

Jenna's role as an informant had prompted the Purifiers, on Angoulême's suggestion, to hold off arresting Franca and Apartment 601 at 3 Rue des Blouses Blanches. For now, their focus was on making Ciel Dubois, confirmed as a "soldier" of the secret organization, a wanted man.

Jenna averted her gaze from Angoulême's golden buttons and suddenly smiled.

"Are you referring to the catastrophe triggered by the unsealing of Fourth Epoch Trier last night?"

Imre and Valentine were initially dazzled by Jenna's smile, but then their eyes widened in shock at the information she revealed.

Angoulême was taken aback and sighed inwardly, as if he had anticipated this.

Jenna tilted her head slightly and added with a smile, "Would you believe me if I said that I witnessed the beginning of the problem and the ritual's process with my own eyes, and I entered Fourth Epoch Trier yet managed to escape?"

Valentine and Imre's eyes widened as they remained silent, unsure of how to respond.

"Is it related to the Hostel you previously reported?" Angoulême asked in a deep voice.

Jenna tersely acknowledged and nodded.

"Where are Franca and Ciel?" Angoulême inquired.

Jenna replied truthfully, "They've left the market district. They probably won't return."

Angoulême breathed a sigh of relief and said,"Tell me more about your experiences."

Chapter 499: Minor Arcana Card

Jenna briefed the three Purifiers about their investigation of Hostel, emphasizing the encounter with a cyborg monk from the Deep Valley Cloister underground, who carried a load of paints and brushes. As they subsequently investigated, Ciel and she stumbled upon a tunnel collapse during an earthquake-like upheaval, leading them to fall into the painting's world.

Imre couldn't hide his disbelief, interrupting Jenna with a skeptical tone. "You just fell into the painting world like that?"

Seems too coincidental?

The coincidence seems so unreal that even best-selling authors wouldn't concoct such a plot twist!

Valentine muttered to himself, "Could it be a miracle from God?"

Jenna nodded, recalling her initial disbelief when she first laid eyes on the painting's market district. "Yes, it was hard to believe at first."

Angoulême, with a subtle gesture of his right hand, signaled Imre and Valentine not to press further, allowing Celia Bello to continue.

Jenna shifted her focus to Séraphine and Gabriel's detailed description of Hostel, delving into her and Ciel's harrowing escape, encounters with pixies, and the relentless attacks from the other "Rooms."

Upon grasping the significance of "Hostel" and "Rooms," Valentine's mind churned with contemplation, making a vital connection.

"Each room harbors a 'resident,' akin to concealing immense power within one's body, allowing a portion of it to leak out… Where have I seen such a state before…"

As images and information flashed through Valentine's mind, he looked up, interrupting Jenna's narrative with a probing question.

"What's Ciel's true identity?"

When the Purifiers plastered the wanted posters across the city, they were onto Ciel Dubois and his fake identity cooked up by the Savoie Mob. The police headquarters had their hands full interrogating the captured Savoie Mob members, digging for any shreds of information about Ciel Dubois's background.

Jenna understood that now that he was wanted, Ciel couldn't conceal his true identity further. After some consideration, she smiled and said,

"Don't you know?

"His real name is Lumian Lee—also a wanted criminal from Cordu in the south."

Lumian Lee… Valentine's eyelids twitched as he realized his suspicions were correct.

Jenna glanced at him and softly "explained," "Ciel joined the Savoie Mob and the Iron and Blood Cross Order to enhance himself and seek revenge on the evil gods' bestowed. He played a crucial role in this matter. Without his investigation, the Hostel ritual wouldn't have been brought forward, and the catastrophe would have been even more severe. Though he claims it's to finish off the bestowed of evil gods, deep down, he doesn't want others to suffer the same fate after he experienced a disaster."

Valentine's expression eased, revealing a mix of regret and relief.

He sighed, acknowledging, "He is indeed a devout follower of God. Unfortunately, fate and those malevolent forces pushed him into the darkness."

Jenna, muttering silently, A devout follower… I'm afraid you have some unnecessary misunderstandings about Ciel.

Angoulême responded to the revelation with a self-deprecating smile.

"I didn't expect the one preventing the catastrophe from escalating last night to be a wanted criminal, a member of an evil organization. Even without standing in the light, one can still be a hero."

Jenna agreed with this sentiment, choosing not to divulge the pixies' reference to Lumian as Room 1. Instead, she focused on the escape from the painting world, describing their emergence in the wilderness outside Fourth Epoch Trier after passing through the darkness corresponding to the Salle de Bal Brise at sunrise.

She detailed the collapsed grayish-white stone pillar, the distant giant's figure, General Philip's feigned death, the black Primordial Demoness figurine, Mirror Gardner Martin, the terrifying roar, the descending sun, the reddened sky, and the rain of fire. However, she discreetly omitted the specifics of the ensuing battle.

Angoulême and the rest wisely held back from prying too much. Among wild Beyonders, certain intel could fetch a handsome sum, but the details of their abilities and combat techniques were strictly confidential.

"Finally, we obtained the figurine and the fragment left behind by Mirror Gardner, left the seal, and returned to the normal underground," Jenna continued. Though the first half of her sentence wasn't directly related to the second half, it created an impression of how they left Fourth Epoch Trier.

"The complexity of the matter is beyond imagination, and it involves a high-level power," Angoulême sighed softly.

They had no idea what had happened for the sun to rise from the Sacred Heart Cloister last night, nor did they understand why it had fallen into the

Fourth Epoch Trier's seal. They felt that it had something to do with an Angel-level battle.

"Where is the figurine and the mirror fragment?" Valentine asked anxiously.

Jenna couldn't be more honest. "It's with Franca."

Angoulême nodded gently.

"Where's the full-body armor?"

This was linked to the deaths of his two former colleagues.

Of course, Gardner Martin's death could be seen as a form of successful "revenge."

"Magic Mirror Divination revealed a terrifying betrayal curse associated with it. Gardner Martin's fate served as proof. None of us dared to take the risk. Ultimately, we left it with Ciel." Jenna, even as a Witch, found the curse to be exaggerated and ridiculous.

After a brief silence, Angoulême addressed the issue, "If you encounter Ciel again, tell him he can sell us the armor."

Jenna nodded in agreement, and the Purifier deacon got serious.

"The intel you provided is very important. What kind of compensation do you want?"

"The potion formula for Pleasure and all the ingredients," Jenna replied, intending to set a high starting point for negotiation.

This came from years of bargaining experience.

Angoulême glanced at the Witch and said, "Are you planning to leave the market district too?"

"That's right." Jenna smiled sadly and self-deprecatingly. "Witches bring catastrophe. I don't want to impact the people here. No wonder the Witches in stories always live in the dark forest, away from people. However, I'll return occasionally and remain your informant. You can continue to contact me through the agreed method."

Her slightly sad smile prompted an instinctive urge in Imre to look away, wary of falling for her.

"Once we verify the authenticity of your intel, we'll help you apply for the formula and ingredients for Pleasure. I can't guarantee its success. Items at this level require approval from the higher-ups," Angoulême promised without entering into further negotiation.

After bidding farewell to the Purifiers, Jenna picked up her suitcase and took a carriage to Franca's safe house in Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative.

Once settled, she reflected for a moment and decided to express her gratitude at The Fool's cathedral in Lavigny Docks. She felt compelled to thank this great entity for answering her prayers and enabling Ciel to enter the painting world to provide assistance.

This marked the official commencement of her commitment to Mr. Fool.

In the pristine cathedral with clear windows, Jenna sat at the edge of the last row of pews. She closed her eyes, clasped her hands, brought them to her chest, and bowed her head in prayer.

Amidst the tranquility of the religious space, it felt as if she had entered a deep slumber, her mind empty, and her words mere offerings of praise.

Vaguely, she sensed someone settling beside her.

Ignoring the newcomer, she continued with her prayer.

After a few minutes, she opened her eyes and noticed a petite lady praying beside her.

The lady had shoulder-length yellow hair and wore light pants, a masculine-looking shirt, and a small brown coat.

Although her eyes remained closed, the delicate contours of her brows, mouth, and nose were discernible from her side profile. Despite her lack of height, she exuded a calm and dignified aura.

Sensing Jenna's gaze, the woman opened her eyes and greeted her with a smile.

"Jenna?"

"Yes… Whom am I speaking to?" Jenna felt puzzled and vigilant, but she sensed no danger in Mr. Fool's cathedral.

The young lady introduced herself, "I'm the Major Arcana card holder of the Two of Cups, whom you might know as Franca, Judgment.

"I came to The Fool's cathedral to pray today, not expecting to meet you. Perhaps this is fate. How about it? Do you want to draw a Minor Arcana card?"

Feeling the friendliness in her tone, Jenna nodded and said, "I'd be delighted, Madam Judgment."

If it were any other Major Arcana card holder, Jenna might have been instinctively worried, but Franca and Lumian had already mentioned Judgment and Magician to her. She had a natural favorable impression and trust in them.

Judgment retrieved a stack of tarot cards from a small black bag hanging from her waist. She casually cut them a few times and handed them over with a smile.

"Draw one."

Jenna felt inexplicably nervous. After contemplating for a moment, she reached out her right hand and drew a Minor Arcana card.

The card depicted seven cups floating in the clouds, with skulls and people looking at them below.

"Seven of Cups," Madam Judgment chuckled. "This represents confusion, puzzlement, dreams, illusions, and choices. But what's important is not that. Our Tarot Club's two Demonesses drew a Cup card."

She produced another tarot card, this one portraying an angel sounding a trumpet to guide the departed.

Major Arcana card, Judgment!

"Keep this card. When faced with unforeseen danger, take it out and recite 'Rain Judgment' in Hermes. As long as I'm in Trier, I can provide assistance. Of course, you have to be in Trier too when requesting. Except in places like Fourth Epoch Trier—I won't be able to hear you," Madam Judgment calmly explained.

"Thank you, Madam Judgment," Jenna expressed her gratitude sincerely, accepting the Major Arcana card.

Judgment nodded and continued, "Now, cooperate with the Two of Cups to carry out the Demoness Sect's mission, but with a different direction. Avoid the Demoness Sect and investigate the special mirror worlds. The Demoness of Catastrophe, Krismona, who perished in the Fourth Epoch, is a starting point. She's a child of the Primordial Demoness, a natural-born woman—a pure female Demoness, just like you."

Chapter 500: "Nonexistent" City

The child of the Primordial Demoness must be born as a woman? Jenna pondered the Sequence name "Witch" and began to grasp its significance.

A god's offspring can't be just ordinary, and being a Sequence 9 or 8 from birth seems impossible, doesn't it?

"Alright," Jenna agreed.

Upon joining the Tarot Club, her initial mission didn't require her to part ways with her companions or expose herself to unnecessary risks, bringing a sense of comfort.

Madam Judgment responded with a smile, saying, "Allow me to update you on the Tarot Club's current situation…"

…

After Anthony Reid left Apartment 601 at 3 Rue des Blouses Blanches, the exhaustion of a sleepless night hit him hard.

As a Psychiatrist, his physical condition hadn't improved much. Staying awake until dawn and enduring severe injuries took a toll. Surviving with the help of the blood-sucking obsidian arrow had left him weakened, having lost a significant amount of blood. Subsequent intense battles and relentless running had drained his stamina, leaving him naturally fatigued and yearning for a bed.

At times like these, he couldn't help but envy the Hunters. Lumian, just one Sequence higher, hadn't slept either. Despite being the main force in both battles, he showed no signs of weariness, appearing energetic enough to take on Gardner Martin once more.

Pressing on, Anthony Reid turned onto Rue Anarchie, entering a brownish-gray house and reaching a corner on the third floor.

This was his safe house, an apartment vacant for a long time.

He believed it unsafe to rent from a landlord or broker for a safe house. Any interaction risked betrayal and tracking. Leveraging his identity as an information broker, he identified unused or abandoned apartments in the market district. If things went awry, he could choose a random one to hide without making contact.

Dusty bed and moldy blanket didn't bother Anthony. He collapsed and quickly succumbed to sleep.

In the hazy dream, clarity and rationality returned suddenly.

Ahead, Avenue du Marché unfolded, a café bustling with patrons and thriving.

Following his peculiar intuition, Anthony Reid passed a golden retriever at the café's entrance and arrived at Booth D by the window.

A lady in a light-green and white dress sat there. Anthony sensed he should see her face clearly, one capable of leaving a stunning impression, but a clear mental image eluded him.

It was as if all the information had been gathered, but his brain or Body of Heart and Mind struggled to process it.

"Good morning. I'm Justice," the lady introduced herself in a gentle voice, carrying a hint of briskness.

Justice… Anthony had already learned from Lumian and Franca that the secret organization they belonged to was the Tarot Club. Members used tarot cards as code names, with Major Arcana card holders representing key demigod members, and Minor Arcana card holders as peripheral members under the different Major Arcana cards.

Justice was undoubtedly a Major Arcana card.

"Are you going to be my Major Arcana card holder?" Anthony asked respectfully, taking a seat across from her.

Justice smiled.

"You can also choose to switch. It's not that fate can't be changed.

"Of course, some entities don't think so."

The Major Arcana card opposite him was friendly, not imposing at all. She even initiated a joke, easing Anthony's tense heart.

He exhaled quietly and said, "I can draw a card now."

As he finished speaking, a stack of tarot cards appeared in front of him.

Anthony habitually selected one from the middle and placed it on the table.

The Minor Arcana card revealed: a man carrying a sword sitting beneath three hanging swords.

Four of Swords!

"You've already unburdened your heart. The remaining rest and preparation are for propelling yourself further into the future. As a Psychiatrist, this card signals you to be vigilant about your mind at all times. We can shoulder new burdens at any moment, and it's crucial to know how to accept, accommodate, and resolve them," Madam Justice interpreted the Minor Arcana card.

A stack of tarot cards appeared in front of her, noticeably less than before.

With casual ease, she drew a card and placed it at the center of the table.

The card portrayed an impartial goddess seated on a stone chair, wielding a sword and scales—the Justice card from the Major Arcana!

Pushing the Justice card toward Anthony, she smiled and said, "You have two missions now. First, collaborate with the Two of Cups to eliminate

Mirror People and investigate the Demoness Sect's predicament. Second, make contact with a covert organization known as the Psychology Alchemists…"

Psychology Alchemists… Anthony mulled over the name.

After laying out the missions, Justice inquired, "Did they brief you on the specifics of the great existence we're following and the Tarot Club?"

"All I know is that you follow an orthodox god named The Fool and use tarot cards as code names, following His name," Anthony honestly replied.

Before formally joining the Tarot Club, Lumian and Franca had kept details scarce.

Justice chuckled.

"Then allow me to introduce you to our beacon and savior, the great Mr. Fool…"

Her tone held a touch of joy.

…

After leaving Lugano Toscano's secure hideout, Lumian took a carriage to Quartier du Jardin Botanique. He navigated the street named Rue des Pavés in the market district and entered the safe house he had leased earlier.

Ludwig sat on the sofa, engrossed in a novel and indulging in dessert. Lumian glanced at him, sneering, "Escaping the Church of Knowledge doesn't mean you should stoop to reading novels only!"

Ludwig diverted the conversation. "Someone of ill temper sent you a letter. It's in the bedroom."

"Ill-tempered?" Lumian furrowed his brow.

"The one in the golden dress, like a doll," Ludwig replied, not bothering to look up. Midway, he paused to savor a bite of carrot cake, a specialty from the Loen Kingdom.

Madam Magician's messenger… Lumian asked in puzzlement, "Why did she lose her temper at you?"

"I saw her and had a little spat with her," Ludwig replied nonchalantly.

Just an argument? She didn't string you up for a beating? Lumian muttered silently as he entered the bedroom and picked up the folded letter from the desk.

This letter differed from the one that had previously rewarded him. It primarily addressed Lumian's inquiries after acquiring the 0-01 information.

"This seems to be a hint from the Church of Knowledge.

"If you can attain a high position, they are willing to offer some assistance. They might even tacitly permit you to take possession of the Sealed Artifact.

"However, there are two prerequisites. Firstly, you must achieve the status of a Sequence 4 Saint at the very least, possessing godhood and the qualifications to step onto the chessboard. Secondly, you must have a method to transport that Sealed Artifact without causing harm to the surrounding humans and the environment.

"If you fail to meet these two conditions, the Church of Knowledge won't extend clear support.

"There's also a contradiction for becoming a demigod and how those more formidable than Sequence 5 are unable to approach 0-01. Perhaps there's a hidden message here, suggesting that after proving your ability to advance to Sequence 4, but before consuming the potion through a ritual, entering the City of Exiles, Morora, and approaching 0-01 is the next step. Leave a mark or achieve something to lay the groundwork for controlling it when you advance to a higher Sequence.

"As for their specific expectations, I cannot discern them at the moment.

"In simple terms, if you demonstrate and prove your potential, the Church of Knowledge is willing to support your bid for the Red Priest position, competing against Red Angel Medici. Does that surprise you? Are you excited?"

Surprise? More like shock! Lumian had never truly entertained the idea of becoming a true god.

Despite not being a devout believer, he had grown up in a society influenced by such beliefs. His exposure to the mystical world was relatively recent, making the notion of "I too can become a god; I also want to become a god" unlikely.

As for the terror and might of Red Angel Medici, Lumian had witnessed it in Fourth Epoch Trier.

The prospect of becoming enemies with such a formidable entity and vying for the Red Priest's deity position instinctively struck him as absurd and meaningless.

What's the fundamental difference between this and Aurore's jest during combat class, claiming you've mastered basic combat techniques and can now slay a god?

As these thoughts raced through his mind, Lumian suddenly muttered to himself, If I become a true god, can I resurrect Aurore…

After a moment of silence, he smiled self-deprecatingly and said, "Even deities can perish, and may not be resurrected."

Madam Magician mentioned that the betrayal curse of the Pride Armor stems from the aversion and hatred of a deity before Their demise… However, according to the information she provided, the Pride Armor first appeared at the end of the all-out war in the Northern Continent. Did a true god perish back then?

The abilities of the Pride Armor clearly belong to the Warrior pathway… The one who perished was the God of War? But in the Feysac Empire, the

Church of the God of Combat is still fine. Uh, that's what the newspapers, magazines, and merchants said…

Lumian pondered for a moment but couldn't come to a conclusion. He shifted his gaze back to the letter.

"I never intended for you to pursue the Red Priest's deity position, actually. I believed that with an Angel sealed within you and a changed fate, there was a chance for you to become a High-Sequence Beyonder. Now, follow your heart's desires. Our Tarot Club is here to support you.

"However, there's something to be cautious about:

"I went to Lenburg and consulted a few local scholars known for their knowledge, but none of them have heard of the City of Exiles, Morora.

"In the eyes of ordinary people and even the lower- and middle-class clergymen of the Church of Knowledge, this city is nonexistent and unrecorded."

Chapter 501: Honorific Name

City of Exiles, Morora, doesn't exist? When Lumian perused the information Ludwig had "stolen," he couldn't shake the sensation that Morora was vivid and right before him. This stemmed from the fact that the scribe had meticulously chronicled every folklore and characteristic of the city. Even those who hadn't set foot there could conjure a mental image.

Yet, Madam Magician had just dropped the bombshell—the City of Exiles, Morora, didn't exist in Lenburg!

I read it so intently, feeling so nervous and afraid. Finally, you tell me, 'I'm sorry, I made all this up?' As Lumian grappled with the absurdity, his gaze reverted to the letter, eager to uncover Madam Magician's speculations.

The Major Arcana card holder teased, "Perhaps the individual who penned this Sealed Artifact information had already lost their sanity, conjuring the City of Exiles, Morora.

"Maybe it's a colossal prison nestled in the mountains, patrolled by guards. They provide supplies unattainable independently and remain cut off from the outside world.

"Perhaps Morora is genuinely an imagined City of Exiles, yet, in a peculiar way, it already exists…

"Don't dismiss the first and third conjectures as absurd or hyperbolic, making them implausible. Let me enlighten you; when dealing with Grade 0 Sealed Artifacts, numerous things defy common sense and intuition. Especially when we're talking about 0-01.

"Personally, I fancy the first conjecture. It emanates a fantastical beauty. A deranged Keeper jotting down information about a Sealed Artifact, filled with ramblings and delusions, and treating it as reality. But what about the truth? Where did it vanish to? Is it no longer in place?"

At the sight of this, Lumian felt an inexplicable chill, and his hair stood on end.

Madam Magician had expounded terrifying possibilities. Moreover, she had employed seemingly casual strokes, brisk descriptions, and a barrage of questions to cultivate an atmosphere of composure and distortion, pushing one's nerves to the brink. Prolonged contemplation of it could drive one to the brink of insanity.

Isn't this superior to the narrative prowess of most current bestselling authors in crafting horror tales? Lumian critiqued his Major Arcana card holder.

Shaking his head, he relegated 0-01 and the City of Exiles to the recesses of his mind.

He feared that dwelling on it might tip him into madness.

It wasn't out of the realm of possibility. Lumian hadn't slept since perusing the information. While he leveraged the 6 a.m. reset of his body every morning to alleviate fatigue, he occasionally heard indescribable and spine-chilling voices resembling calls from the depths of the mountains.

Phew… Lumian exhaled and resumed reading the letter.

"Alright, I won't terrify you any longer. In essence, until you truly confront 0-01, don't summarily dismiss any conjecture or potentiality.

"I've verified the auditory hallucinations you mentioned. It's a mild corruption induced by delving into 0-01's information. Some entities can induce corruption merely by knowing their names instead of their code names. Fortunately, your destiny is entwined with that long-named fellow. To some extent, it's akin to having the status of an Angel. Furthermore, you bear Mr. Fool's seal, the Blood Emperor's aura, and other high-level paraphernalia. That's why you only experienced a faint auditory hallucination and sensed the beckoning. You didn't suddenly descend into paranoia and extremism, harboring a desire to seek treasure in the mountains before vanishing one night."

Madam Magician revels in spinning horror stories. She insists on expanding concise explanations into potential scenarios for me… Lumian had been in correspondence with his Major Arcana card holder for quite some time, becoming well-acquainted with her choice of words and writing style.

"Let me remind you that you're akin to an Angel to some extent, yet you won't succumb to the corruption associated with higher Sequences. That's what sets you apart. It's why you can venture into many peculiar places. Hence, some entities seek to exploit this. Exercise caution and vigilance, continually scrutinizing yourself.

"By the way, Miss Justice and Judgment extend their gratitude. The revelation of 0-01 and Vermonda Sauron's whereabouts allowed them to fulfill a mission entrusted by Mr. Fool before his slumber. Hence, the rewards are particularly generous this time…

"Your concerns are valid. If you miss the initial trail, whether it's Bard, Mad Lady, or the traces left by other key members of April Fool's, it's more likely a trap than a clue. Of course, traps can yield certain information. As long as you can withstand the associated peril, you might uncover the architect of the trap.

"If, and I say if, you chance upon a High-Sequence Beyonder of the Seer, Apprentice, and Marauder pathways while delving into the whereabouts of the key members of April Fool's, you can invoke my name and seek my assistance.

"Remember, this is my name. It carries the power to conceal secrets from others.

"Cosmic Traveler, beholden to the King of Yellow and Black, and the Sorcerer chronicling the world."

The King of Yellow and Black is an alias for Mr. Fool… Cosmic Traveler and chronicling the world sounds amazing… Could she truly be the Angel of Stars from the Bible? As Lumian committed it to memory, he witnessed the honorific name gradually fading, as if erased and consumed by the void.

At the conclusion of the letter, Madam Magician added: "The Minor Arcana, Knight of Swords, subordinate to Ma'am Hermit, journeyed to Feynapotter a few months ago for a certain matter. When you arrive there, should you require assistance or information, you can reach out to him.

"His messenger is:

"A peculiar creature wandering above the world, a half-fairy who fiddles with melodic strings, a messenger that belongs solely to the Knight of Swords."

Half-fairy… Lumian had skimmed through information about such spirit world creatures, mainly to select a suitable contract partner. He hadn't delved into the details, making it challenging to recall.

Simultaneously, he noted that the Knight of Swords's messenger incantation deviated from the conventional format. Perhaps there was concern that foes could decipher the correct three-line description and summon the messenger to target him.

Regardless, with the limiting phrase "a messenger that belongs solely to the Knight of Swords," the second sentence didn't necessarily have to depict a creature friendly to humans. However, since it could serve as the messenger of the Knight of Swords, it could tacitly be considered as friendly to humans.

Lumian reread Madam Magician's letter from start to finish, mindful not to overlook any crucial information embedded in her cryptic statements.

Suddenly, a knock echoed on the bedroom door.

Lumian glanced up, and the door creaked open. Ludwig stuck his chubby head out and, in a daze, uttered, "I'm hungry. It's time for you to cook."

"Didn't you just eat plenty of cake and crackers?" Lumian's lips twitched.

Ludwig replied seriously, "That's dessert, not the main course."

Subtly, he licked his lips.

"Moreover, your culinary skills are quite impressive, and those dishes are quite unique. With a chef around, I don't want to settle for raw beef, hard bread, and freshly bought potatoes."

The boy's expression turned pleading.

Lumian scoffed.

"Why don't you do it yourself?"

"I can only cook by myself after I recover a little," Ludwig replied subconsciously before changing his tone. "I'm still a child. You're actually asking me to cook in the kitchen? Aren't you afraid that I'll be injured by a knife or burned?"

I'm just afraid you'll eat the knife… What does it mean to cook after recovering a little? Is Chef a higher rank than your current Sequence's strength? Can't you cook if you're not a chef? Lumian observed Ludwig leaning against the door frame, looking at him with expectant brown eyes, and suddenly found the scene familiar.

In the past, he had begged his sister Aurore in the same way.

Lumian sighed and stood up.

"I'm only responsible for three meals. The rest of the time, rely on dessert, bread, and cold dishes. Don't bother me."

As he spoke, he left the bedroom and entered the kitchen.

While donning an apron and engrossed in cooking, Ludwig, in a caramel coat, waited at the kitchen door, occasionally wiping his mouth.

After pan-frying a steak, Lumian picked it up and casually tossed it out.

Ludwig deftly caught it, tore it in a few bites, and stuffed it down his abdomen.

Observing this, Lumian chuckled inwardly, feeling that this fellow was even more absurd than he had been back then.

…

In Underground Trier, within a quarry cave.

Lumian stood before the altar, encircled by the recently dismantled wall of spirituality.

He had completed the Contractee summoning ritual and gained two new contracted abilities. Now, he awaited Franca and the others to witness who could successfully gain a messenger.

One of these abilities was Shadow Transformation. It allowed Lumian to authentically morph into a shadow, merging with it to conceal himself and move stealthily—a skill he currently lacked.

While such abilities existed in the mystical knowledge of Contractees, Lumian opted to acquire them from the spirit world creature information provided by Madam Magician. This prevented the bestowed of Inevitability from discerning the negative effects he might endure.

Ultimately, Lumian contracted a spirit world creature known as Long Shadow. He sacrificed six servings of fresh cow and sheep meat in exchange for this ability, making him more susceptible to sunlight than ordinary humans.

This wasn't as severe as the aversion Vampires had to sunlight. Lumian could endure it with his Ascetic endurance.

Another ability he had acquired was the Bottle of Fiction. He found the unique and practical ability demonstrated by the padre intriguing. It could effectively screen an enemy, creating a concealed space where the other party couldn't escape and could only exit through the bottle's opening; traps could be added.

Since no spirit world creature could provide this ability, Lumian summoned the creature called the Fantasy Face and completed the contract with a bottle of blood with strong spirituality.

The blood needed to come from a Beyonder above Sequence 7 or a corresponding Beyonder creature. Lumian, naturally, wouldn't use his own blood, as sacrificing it to the Fantasy Face could gradually transform him into a monster. Instead, he used the blood Madam Magician extracted from Gardner Martin's corpse—one of the supplementary ingredients for a Reaper. It was substantial, and there was plenty.

The corresponding downside was a trace of greed.

Before long, Franca, Jenna, and Anthony arrived at the quarry cave, one after another.

Chapter 502: Messenger Ritual

Anthony stared at the altar, the flickering candlelight casting shadows on his face. He voiced his concerns and uncertainties about having their own messenger.

"Can we really have our own messenger?"

His knowledge of mysticism hinted that messengers were a rare occurrence. Only Beyonders of specific pathways at a certain Sequence or high-level Beyonders with godhood possessed these special contracted creatures, accessible at any time and summoned by others.

Franca, grinning, reassured him, "Other Beyonders might not cut it, but we still have a chance.

"There are three prerequisites for possessing a messenger. First, you need to understand spirit world creatures, knowing which ones can be used as messengers. You must grasp their characteristics and devise incantations for precise summoning. Second, the spirit world creature must be willing to respond to the summoning and not reject signing a contract to become your messenger. Third, you need a unique undead contract and a deity to bear witness, restraining both parties and clarifying their responsibilities.

"See, there aren't any restrictions on pathways and Sequences among these three. There are only hidden restrictions, but there are ways to bypass them.

"For ordinary Beyonders, the first requirement is the toughest. Usually, they lack a deep understanding of spirit world creatures. Summoning one might make them tremble with fear, afraid the incantation could lead to a monster that could harm their family. With time, they might rely on their predecessors' experiences to accumulate reliable summoning incantations, but most have nothing to do with a messenger.

"We're different. As members of the Tarot Club, we have Madam Magician, an expert in spirit world creatures. Ciel has a pile of information on them. Madam Magician selected 30 spirit world creatures suitable for being a messenger, some with a desire to serve as a Mid-Sequence Beyonder's messenger. This allows us to skip the greatest obstacle.

"Otherwise, consider the speed at which spirit world creatures traverse. Some messengers can cover the distance from southern Intis to Trier in just a few minutes. Others take ten minutes to half an hour, while some may take half a day or even a full day. Without knowledge, signing a messenger that takes half a year or one year to cover such a distance is pointless."

"My name isn't Ciel Dubois anymore," Lumian reminded Franca after she finished explaining a portion of the knowledge to Anthony and Jenna, who were novices in the mysticism world.

Franca let out a hollow laugh.

"Isn't it just a habit of the mouth? When I first met you, your name was Ciel. I've been calling you that for months."

She continued, "The second prerequisite is that we have a way to bypass it. Beyonders of pathways like Corpse Collector, affiliated with the undead and other creatures in the spirit world, can make them willing to be summoned. Then, it's possible to sign a messenger contract. At the Sequence of Spirit Guide, they can even semi-compulsively turn a target they fancy into their messenger. Without such specialties, one can often only rely on their status to suppress and intimidate them.

"As for us, we follow Mr. Fool. You've all heard the Church's bible, so you should know that Mr. Fool is the great ruler who controls the spirit world. Strictly speaking, those spirit world creatures are under his control. As members of the Tarot Club, summoning spirit world creatures and signing a messenger contract with them will definitely be much easier. In particular, Lumian here has Mr. Fool's power. Have you ever seen him fail in summoning spirit world creatures? At most, it's vague. What comes isn't what he wants.

"The third prerequisite is that Madam Magician has already given Lumian a special undead contract, specially prepared for messengers. The witness should be Death, but they can be replaced by an Angel from the Underworld or the undead domain. And there's an Angel of Death by Mr. Fool's throne. He's the Consul of the Underworld!

"Actually, I don't think it's a problem to use Mr. Fool's honorific name directly. Would spirit world creatures not obey the orders of the great ruler who controls the spirit world?"

The information from Madam Magician contained a four-line description targeting the Underworld, suitable as a witness.

Jenna and Anthony absorbed the mysticism knowledge attentively, realizing its value in explaining many problems in ordinary summoning rituals.

Once Franca had concluded her instructional role, Lumian produced a carefully selected stack of information about spirit world creatures and directed his attention to Jenna.

"You first."

Jenna, pointing at herself in confusion and surprise, asked, "Me?"

She was a complete novice at summoning rituals.

Lumian let out a chuckle.

"You have the lucky gold coin. According to Madam Magician, it has a certain connection to Mr. Fool, equivalent to his memento. This will make you more likely to summon a specific creature and complete the messenger contract than Franca and Anthony.

"My chances of success should be about the same as yours, but I have a lot of messy things on me. I'm afraid it'll cause an anomaly and ruin the rest of tonight's attempts, so I'll be the last."

Jenna considered Lumian's explanation and agreed.

Muttering under her breath, she took the document and flipped to the page she had chosen earlier.

It recorded a spirit world creature she was relatively familiar with: "Rabbit of Knowledge."

However, this wasn't an ordinary Rabbit of Knowledge; it had absorbed some specific knowledge and undergone a special mutation to become suitable as a messenger.

Jenna had a positive impression of the Rabbit of Knowledge. She found it friendly and willing to help humans, making it her preferred choice from the beginning.

Additionally, its silly appearance added to its charm.

Retrieving the page of information, Jenna entered the altar. Recalling Franca's teachings and the mystical knowledge from the Witch potion, she swiftly sanctified the ritual silver dagger and created a wall of spirituality.

Having completed all the preparations, Jenna took two steps back, focused on the candle flame, and uttered a concise and forceful word in ancient Hermes.

"I!"

Then, she switched to Hermes.

"I summon in my name:

"Rabbit-shaped spirit that wanders about the unfounded, a friendly creature that can be communicated with, a runner who pursues knowledge."

In this modified incantation, the original "weakling" was replaced with "runner" to specifically denote the special Rabbit of Knowledge.

The candle flame abruptly shifted to a dark green hue, expanding to the size of a human head.

A translucent creature resembling a rabbit emerged from the dark-green candle flame.

Unlike other Rabbits of Knowledge, its eyes emitted a wise glint, and it held a blurry book with an orange-red cover in its hand.

Its legs were powerful, indicating its proficiency in running.

Jenna couldn't contain her joy at successfully summoning it on her first attempt.

Slightly perturbed, she addressed the creature in ancient Hermes, "Are you willing to become my messenger?"

The mutated Rabbit of Knowledge glanced at Jenna and asked in Intisian, "Have you ever called my kind fools or idiots before?"

"No," Jenna replied sincerely. "I curse occasionally, but it's not directed at anyone. It's just an expression of my emotions."

Occasionally? Lumian mocked Jenna inwardly.

The mutated Rabbit of Knowledge observed Jenna intently, somehow confirming that she wasn't lying.

However, this might have been more of a formality, as the answer of not having engaged in name-calling was sufficient. Whether it was entirely true or not seemed inconsequential.

The rabbit nodded and said, "You have to pay me. Every time you summon me, you have to give me a book or knowledge of equal value. You can give it to me directly or burden the person who's writing to you."

It agreed just like that? Having name-called it in the past, I can't summon this rabbit as a messenger? Well, I can't summon it now either. There should only be one special Rabbit of Knowledge that has evolved to be capable of being a messenger… Lumian knew it was generally easy to deal with, but he didn't expect it to be so amiable.

Jenna glanced at the information placed at the edge of the altar, noticing a notification: "The knowledge you feed the Rabbit of Knowledge determines what it will become in the future."

Will reading more postman-related books improve its awareness and abilities as a messenger? Jenna wondered to herself as she replied, "No problem. Let's sign a contract."

Following the template provided by Madam Magician, she used the dark-red fountain pen on the altar to swiftly write a contract on the yellowish-brown goatskin, outlining the agreed compensation.

The contract was composed in ancient Hermes, with every word seeming to resonate with the forces of nature and the spirit world. Jenna had utilized her usual studies and the knowledge from the Witch potion to quickly grasp this Beyonder language.

In addition to the contract, Jenna penned a description of the mysticism related to the Underworld.

"The home of all death, the hell hidden deep within the spirit world, the witness of the decay of all living things, one that solely belongs to the kingdom of Death."

As she wrote, the ancient Hermes words burned with dark-green flames, including the original ones.

Remembering Lumian's earlier advice, Jenna deliberately included a clause fixing the summoning incantation as "Rabbit-shaped spirit that wanders about the unfounded, a runner who pursues knowledge, a messenger that belongs solely to the Seven of Cups."

Still cautious about revealing her real name, Jenna refrained from using it. She worried that someone familiar with her messenger summoning incantation might uncover her true identity, potentially implicating her brother Julien in the future.

After scanning the contract and confirming its accuracy, Jenna signed her code name.

The goatskin floated up and flew toward the mutated Rabbit of Knowledge.

Picking up another fountain pen, the Rabbit of Knowledge wrote its name: "Chasel Sávio."

"You have a name?" Lumian was a little surprised.

He was also within the wall of spirituality.

"I named it myself after reading a book. It's my name now," replied Rabbit Chasel as the ghastly green flames on the goatskin merged, incinerating the contract into ashes and transforming it into an invisible force.

Jenna breathed a sigh of relief and engaged in a brief conversation with Rabbit Chasel before concluding, "I! I end this summoning in my name."

Rabbit Chasel returned to the spirit world, and Franca eagerly watched as the wall of spirituality dissipated before stepping into the altar.

Jenna's ease had filled her with confidence.

However, she faced a shameful failure.

Chapter 503: Penitent

Franca attempted summoning five different spirit world creatures. Despite her successful summonings, none of the spirit world creatures were willing to sign a contract and become her messenger.

The repeated failures struck her hard, and her disappointment and frustration were evident from her blank expression.

Nevertheless, she didn't let her emotions dictate her actions. Undeterred, she proceeded to summon the remaining 24 spirit world creatures.

The situation was becoming increasingly clear—success, if achievable, would happen in the first few attempts!

Jenna glanced at the disappointed Franca.

"Give it a try when your Sequence is higher."

Franca grumbled, "When I reach a higher Sequence, I might use a mirror and the mirror world to send messages. Why would I need a messenger? Why aren't there any spirit world creatures tempted by a Demoness's charm and willing to become a messenger?"

Lumian let out a chuckle.

"I've seen something similar in the information about spirit world creatures. Would you like to give it a try?"

Despite her reluctance to admit defeat, Franca remained pragmatic. She cursed, "Forget it, forget it. Such spirit world creatures are definitely dangerous. All they can think about is dragging a Demoness into the spirit world. Even delivering a letter will help me turn my friend into an enemy."

Seeing that she had calmed down, Anthony Reid, a fellow novice in ritualistic magic, made his attempt.

Like Franca, he too faced a series of challenges. Five attempts were made, with two summoning failures and three unsuccessful contract formations.

"Looks like I can't have a messenger for the time being," Anthony sighed with a bitter smile.

Franca's emotions eased significantly.

She wasn't alone in facing difficulties.

"Which one do you want to summon?" she asked Lumian curiously.

"The coolest one." Lumian, maintaining an air of nonchalance, sanctified the ritual silver dagger and recreated the spiritual barrier.

Focusing on the burning candle flames, he took steps back, alternating between ancient Hermes and Hermes.

"I!

"I summon in my name:

"A creature wandering above the world, the penitent who awakens from the flames of pain, a friendly person corrupted by darkness."

This summoning incantation, unique information from Madam Magician, deviated from the norm. It wasn't just a spirit but a creature wandering above the world. The latter descriptions combined encounters and characteristics, adding an intriguing layer to the summoning.

Lumian found the temperament and style of this particular creature impressive and decided to make it his first attempt. He sought a messenger capable of delivering a letter and traversing the spirit world, indifferent to other considerations. Why not choose the coolest one?

As the incantation echoed, the candle flame expanded, acquiring a dark-green hue bordering on black.

With each intensifying flicker, a figure materialized.

It was a tall, human-like being dressed in deep-black robes reminiscent of the Eternal Blazing Sun Church clergy.

However, his exposed face and limbs bore the marks of prolonged incineration, leaving only bones and charred flesh. Empty eye sockets glowed with dark flames, while strange, viscous black flames lingered, causing perpetual pain to the spirit.

Lumian gazed at the Penitent and asked in ancient Hermes, "Are you willing to become my messenger?"

Responding in ancient Feysac, the source of several Northern Continent languages, the Penitent offered a condition,

"If you're not concerned about being implicated by me and slowly slipping into the darkness, I can help you deliver letters."

No compensation, but there's latent danger? Since Madam Magician provided the Penitent's information, it means I can bear it… Lumian, who had too much mysticism "debt" to worry about, smiled and said,

"That depends on whether you and darkness can win the tug-of-war. No problem. I was mentally prepared for this before summoning you."

This time, he switched to ancient Feysac to communicate with the other party. After all, it was quite troublesome to use ancient Hermes, which could stir the power of nature, to say so much.

Soon, he drafted the contract and penned the four-line mysticism description representing the Underworld's representative as witness.

Illuminated by ancient Hermes words engulfed in ghastly green flames, Lumian fixed the summoning incantation to: "A creature wandering above the world, the penitent who awakens from the flames of pain, a messenger that belongs solely to Lumian Lee."

Lumian didn't adopt a code name like Jenna and the Knight of Swords. After all, those who knew about his messenger might not know that he was a Minor Arcana card holder of the Tarot Club. This was the self-cultivation of a veteran spy, and it didn't matter if Lumian Lee's name and corresponding background were known.

With his name penned down, Lumian witnessed the yellowish-brown goatskin fly towards the black-robed Penitent.

The Penitent signed his name: Baynfel.

The ghastly green flames intertwined, consuming the contract and seamlessly merging with the spirit world.

Curious about his new messenger, Lumian queried Penitent Baynfel, "What are you penitent about?"

However, Baynfel remained silent, and a viscous black flame descended from his body, disappearing into the soil.

Despite Lumian's persistent questioning, Baynfel kept his silence.

Lumian chuckled and remarked, "Very good. All hairdressers should learn from you," before concluding the summoning.

After he dismantled the wall of spirituality, Franca looked at him with a resentful expression.

"You succeeded on the first try?"

"I succeeded on the first try." Lumian lacked any evident joy, as if he was talking about something ordinary.

Perplexed and unable to let go of her own failures, Franca questioned, "Why? Why aren't Anthony and I popular with the spirit world creatures? Why?"

It had to be said that the Demoness of Pleasure was quite charming. Seeing Franca like this, Ascetic Lumian wanted to walk up to her, raise his right hand, and flick her forehead.

It made him want to bully her!

He pondered for a moment.

"I roughly understand the reason. Being a Minor Arcana card holder of the Tarot Club increases our chances of successfully summoning special spirit world creatures. Even a Psychiatrist like Anthony succeeded several times during his first ritualistic magic.

"However, to gain their favor or obedience, you need a higher level, a special pathway, or something related to Mr. Fool. For example, Jenna's lucky gold coin and Mr. Fool's power on me."

A sudden realization struck Lumian.

If that's the reason, does the Knight of Swords, who also possesses a messenger, have something similar?

"I see!" Franca, buoyed by this insight, regained confidence.

It wasn't that there was a problem with her; she simply lacked a "prop."

She then looked at Jenna, contemplating whether to borrow the lucky gold coin to complete the messenger contract.

Franca eventually dismissed the idea. There was a significant mysticism difference between "ownership" and "loaning." She was afraid that Jenna wouldn't be able to handle it if she were to give it and take it back in the future without a unique opportunity.

Phew… Franca exhaled and was about to inquire when Lumian planned to leave Trier and how, when she noticed her companion's inexplicable silence and a hint of dejection.

"What's the matter?" Franca inquired, concerned.

"Nothing." Lumian shook his head.

He suddenly remembered that Aurore had once yearned for a messenger.

Anthony glanced at Lumian, but no words were exchanged. Jenna brought up the Purifiers' Deacon Angoulême's proposal to purchase the Pride Armor, prompting Lumian to fall into a brief silence before chuckling.

"I'll decide after some time."

Despite recognizing the danger of the Pride Armor, Lumian acknowledged its formidable power. It could pose a threat to all Beyonders below the demigod level. If wearing it was the key to defeating Loki and other key members of April Fool's, Lumian wouldn't hesitate to use it, prepared to face the consequences.

Lumian wouldn't give up on the Sealed Artifact just because it was dangerous, until he eliminated all those scoundrels or until he was too strong for Pride Armor.

"Alright," Franca inquired, "Are you leaving Trier tomorrow? Will you take a boat, a steam locomotive, or seek the spirit world's coordinates from Madam Magician and 'teleport' there?"

Lumian chuckled.

"All of them are possible. I'll decide tomorrow. Let's see what fate has in mind."

Franca muttered, "When did you learn to act all mysterious…"

…

After bidding farewell to his three companions, Lumian adorned the silver Lie earring and subtly altered his hair color and appearance. Making his way down Avenue du Marché into Rue Anarchie, he arrived at Auberge du Coq Doré's underground bar.

Seemingly unaffected by the previous night's catastrophe, the bar retained its lively atmosphere. Regular patrons occupied their usual spots—some singing loudly, others dancing around small round tables, and a few engaged in gambling with alcohol as stakes.

Charlie, now in a black coat, stood at a small round table, enthusiastically exclaiming, "You might not know this, but Ciel Dubois and I are friends. We've been through life and death together! Look, look, his bounty has been updated to 60,000 verl d'or! What a substantial sum!"

You're quite proud of me… Lumian scoffed and settled at the bar, ordering a glass of absinthe.

In the midst of the commotion, he silently listened, savoring the bitter liquor.

Pavard Neeson, the proprietor wiping glasses, noticed the new face and smilingly inquired, "Have you just arrived in the market district?"

"Yes," Lumian responded in a deep voice.

Pavard Neeson said gently, "You seem to have a story."

Lumian sighed, taking a sip of the dreamy La Fée Verte. With a self-deprecating smile, he said, "I'm a nobody…"

Chapter 504: "Breakup"

"In an instant, I found myself with no alternative but to depart. Staying put was not an option. Besides, lingering too long might jeopardize my friend and jeopardize the fortune he had tirelessly amassed.

Lumian raised the emerald-green absinthe to his lips once more.

Pavard Neeson, the proprietor of the bar, gently placed his glass on the counter and let out a sigh.

"That's truly unfortunate."

A sly grin played on Lumian's lips.

"Alright, I've wrapped up my tale. How about a complimentary drink on the house?"

Pavard, his ponytail giving him a somewhat artistic appearance, was momentarily taken aback.

…

Minutes before the stroke of midnight, Charlie, clad in a black coat, exited the basement bar of Auberge du Coq Doré and retraced his steps to his rented apartment.

Under the gentle autumn night sky, a soothing breeze played, neither bone-chilling nor overly brisk. It seemed to cleanse both body and mind with each inhale. Charlie couldn't resist taking a deep breath.

"Dogsh*t, which drunkard peed all over the place again?" The foul odor in the air soured Charlie's mood.

At that very moment, a silhouette emerged from the shadows up ahead.

The figure boasted golden-black hair, piercing blue eyes, and a strikingly handsome face—none other than Ciel Dubois.

Haven't you left Trier? Charlie's heart surged with joy, ready to inquire further.

But almost instantly, he caught sight of the dark expression on Ciel's face, as if a tempest brewed within his eyes.

Charlie jumped in fright, his thoughts racing. Instinctively, he said, "I-I was going to let you know…"

Before he could finish, Lumian materialized before him, his right fist meeting Charlie's face with a solid impact.

The force sent golden specks dancing in Charlie's vision. He teetered backward, struggling to maintain his balance.

Lumian's countenance darkened as he spoke, "Considering our past friendship, I won't kill you this time."

With that, he pivoted in his dark jacket and strode towards a dimly lit alley, away from the glow of street lamps.

Clutching his throbbing face, Charlie watched Ciel vanish into the shadows. Anxious and incensed, he blurted out, "But I couldn't locate you! How was I supposed to inform you that you're wanted?"

Lumian offered no response, disappearing into the alley.

Rooted to the spot, Charlie couldn't suppress his curses.

Frustration and resentment welled up within him.

Why did he suddenly become so unreasonable?

It's not my fault you're wanted. I've done my utmost to help!

I'm just a clerk; there's a limit to what I can accomplish!

…

The next morning, Charlie had just settled into his subterranean office at Église Saint-Robert, armed with a meatloaf. Before he could even start brewing a cup of coffee, he spotted Angoulême, the deacon clad in a brown double-breasted coat, heading his way.

"Morning, Deacon," Charlie exclaimed, rising to his feet and greeting him with eager deference.

Angoulême glanced at the bruises on his left cheek.

"What happened? Did you get into a scuffle?"

"Oh, no, not at all! I, uh, collided—with a statue!" Charlie suddenly grew jittery and waved his hand dismissively. "It might sound unbelievable, but those lunatics get wild when they're drunk. Some rant about toppling the government, others believe their vomit is gourmet cuisine, and a few decide to relocate hefty statues to random corners. I accidentally bumped into one."

Angoulême maintained a steady gaze on the clerk and spoke with measured calmness,

"Your lies lack finesse. Do you recall the clause in the contract about not concealing crucial information?"

Charlie's expression stiffened, his lips faltering before he stammered, "I-it's Ciel. Ciel Dubois attacked me. Perhaps he's resentful because I didn't notify him beforehand about being wanted by us."

Angoulême listened in silence. After a brief pause, he remarked, "Very well. That's more like what a competent Purifier clerk should be. Where did you encounter him?"

"Right outside Auberge du Coq Doré, just past the first alley leading to Avenue du Marché," Charlie responded, a blend of nervousness and concern coloring his voice.

Angoulême delved into further details and said to Charlie, "Given that Ciel Dubois's true circumstances surpassed our expectations, we scrutinized all the files associated with him. It came to light that you share a close bond with him and that he was implicated in Susanna Mattise's Beyonder case. Upon including him in that matter, it became apparent that you concealed numerous details."

Charlie, upon hearing the deacon's words, stiffened, beads of cold sweat forming on his forehead.

"I-I…" He faltered, unable to find words, as if the specter of his impending doom loomed large.

At that moment, Angoulême took the initiative to ask, "Did Ciel force you to hide these details?"

"No, it wasn't coercion," Charlie responded instinctively, quickly adding, "He requested it."

"As expected, a request," Angoulême nodded thoughtfully and probed into every nuance of the Susanna Mattise incident.

With his psychological defenses stripped away, Charlie laid bare every detail to the Purifier deacon.

Upon concluding his account, Angoulême spoke with gravity, "For someone in your position as a Purifier clerk, concealing vital case details would typically lead to immediate dismissal, if not imprisonment…"

Though Charlie had braced himself for such a repercussion, the actual words felt like a blow to the head. His body swayed, teetering on the brink of imbalance.

Before he could mount a plea, Angoulême shifted the conversation.

"However, your recent performance has been commendable. You've shown diligence, dedication, and commitment to your studies. Moreover, it appears you haven't leaked information to Ciel, caushing his resentment towards you.

"As the deacon of the market district's Inquisition, I'm inclined not to cast aside someone who has earnestly climbed out of the abyss and crush their last hope. Given your clean record after becoming a Purifier clerk and the authenticity of the Susanna Mattise incident, I'm offering you another chance. I can't just push you out and wait for Ciel to kill you or the Mother Tree of Desire's bestowed to find you again, can I?

"You'll be terminated, but you can intern here. Your salary will revert to the intern level for six months. If you excel and avoid errors during this period, you may be rehired. Otherwise, you'll be asked to leave immediately.

"In simpler terms, your punishment is a six-month probation."

Charlie, upon hearing these words, felt a surge of relief, as if he had plummeted into hell only to be yanked back into heaven.

In a frenzy of gratitude, he slumped back into his seat, drained of strength.

As Angoulême departed, Charlie's mind reeled, scenes flashing before his eyes.

After a few seconds, he raised his right hand and delivered a self-inflicted slap.

Muttering in frustration and regret, he reflected,

"To think, last night at the bar, I boasted about Ciel and me being friends who had faced life and death together…"

…

Shortly after returning to his office, Angoulême received a telegram.

It originated from Saint Viève Cathedral's Plessy Descartes, overseeing the Trier diocese.

The Cardinal summoned Angoulême to Saint Viève Cathedral for a discussion.

Saint Viève Cathedral.

Ascending a dazzling staircase to an area near the dome, a small room awaited. It stood as one of the places in Trier closest to the sun.

Clad in a white robe adorned with golden threads, Cardinal Plessy spent his days here, bathed in holy light.

An elderly man with high cheekbones and grizzled blond hair, his demeanor lacked sternness, yet a radiant glow made direct eye contact impossible, rendering the room eerily devoid of shadows.

"While you faced challenges during the recent catastrophe due to unforeseen events and intel disruptions, your ability to grasp crucial information and manage subsequent arrangements was noteworthy. We haven't overlooked your performance in the market district over the past year," Plessy commended amicably.

"Praise the Sun!" Angoulême proclaimed, extending his arms in acknowledgment of the Lord's glory.

Plessy's satisfaction deepened.

"In light of the current circumstances and the foreseeable future, we intend to establish three Purifier teams directly under the Trier diocese. This will provide flexibility in handling various Beyonder incidents."

At this point, the Cardinal offered a rare smile.

"You've been swamped with work for the past six months. Privately, you've voiced concerns about lacking leisure time. Do not blame yourself; it's a common human experience. As a deacon in the Trier diocese, you should find more leisure time. Your role will involve addressing cases beyond the capacity or timeframe of the Purifiers in the districts.

"Of course, this also entails risk. You must comprehend this clearly.

"François, Sequence 4 marks a qualitative transformation. Many within the Inquisition are aspiring to become Saints. If you wish to surpass them, you must make remarkable contributions. The first step is to become a deacon of a small team under a large diocese. The second step involves amassing contributions and wielding a Holy Artifact. The third step is to await an opportune moment.

"Do you aspire to be a deacon? I respect your desires."

Flexibility… Addressing cases beyond the reach of Purifiers in various districts… I should typically have considerable freedom. How could there be so many significant matters… I don't know if Gandalf's apocalyptic prophecy holds true, but there's no harm in self-improvement… Angoulême pondered briefly and responded, "Your Eminence, thy will be done."

Plessy smiled and said, "As a deacon, you'll be tasked with selecting team members."

"Yes, Your Eminence." Angoulême extended his arms once more, praising the sun.

Upon returning to the underground confines of Église Saint-Robert, he summoned the mixed-blood Imre to his office, apprising his subordinate of the Trier diocese team.

"Are you willing to follow me?" Angoulême inquired.

Imre smiled and replied, "Does this mean I can advance my Sequence and earn a higher salary? I have no issue with that!"

After agreeing, the mixed-blood inquired, "Who should we choose next?"

Angoulême fell into silence for over ten seconds before stating, "Don't consider individuals like Valentine, those with a wife and children. Approach those who are single.

"A team under direct command is both an honor and a risk."

Angoulême released a soft sigh and added, "Which Purifier with a happy family wouldn't want to witness their child grow and spend more time with their spouse? Let the single individuals among us bear this burden."

Chapter 505: Departure

Having apprehended everyone deserving of it in the market district and putting those who hadn't been arrested on the wanted list, Angoulême found a rare moment of leisure. He shifted his focus to selecting members for the Trier diocese team.

Choosing from the Inquisition in the market district was impossible. Armed with information from Saint Viève Cathedral, he casually visited the Inquisition in Quartier de l'Observatoire, the prison district, and other locations where he engaged in detailed conversations with the target Purifiers.

He swiftly concluded his work and returned to his rented apartment in Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative, promptly falling asleep.

Angoulême slept until the early hours of the morning, awakened by the growling of his stomach. He nibbled on a piece of white bread, complemented by his stockpiled jerky, butter, and red wine.

Observing the unwashed cutlery on the coffee table, he contentedly seated himself in front of the miniaturized analyzer and switched on the radio transceiver.

During this time, the telegraph group was most active.

After sending a telegram to announce his presence, Angoulême pulled over a pillow, placing it behind him as he leaned comfortably against the wall.

Soon, amidst the clicking sounds, the analyzer, powered by numerous components, spat out a telegram.

Angoulême's forehead twitched at the sight of the telegram's signature: Hidden Blade.

He picked up the telegram and quickly scanned its contents.

"007, you're finally here. I have something to tell you!

"I've just received news that the Mirror People we mentioned have been infiltrating Trier over the past decade, replacing the original ones. Countless Trier citizens are already Mirror People, and no one knows their ultimate goals, but it can't be anything good.

"I'm investigating these Mirror People. I'll give you new clues at any moment. Keep an eye out for such matters in advance."

After reading it, Angoulême took a deep breath and exhaled slowly.

…

The following morning, Lumian sat in a four-wheeled, four-seater rental carriage. Ludwig, clad in a caramel coat and carrying a red school bag, occupied the seat beside him. On the opposite side sat Lugano Toscano, with thick eyebrows and large eyes, emanating a distinct protagonist aura.

Glancing out the window at Avenue du Marché, Lumian noticed little deviation from the usual scene.

Street vendors, public carriages, and rental carriages bustled about. The Suhit steam locomotive station welcomed numerous foreigners, waiters actively seeking customers, cafés doubling as beer houses, inexpensive restaurants, and card rooms, along with clerks and workers in a hurry.

While seemingly unchanged, subtle shifts had occurred. "Rat" Christo had fled, "Giant" Simon was apprehended, and Baron Brignais was nowhere to be found. He didn't even commission information brokers to seek out his smuggled godson.

The Savoie Mob, once dominant, faced total annihilation, setting the market district on the brink of new mob conflicts.

The dark-brown rental carriage, marked with a yellow plate, gradually departed from the lively and somewhat chaotic surroundings.

Observing Lumian divert his attention, Lugano inquired ingratiatingly,

"Should we travel by boat to Feynapotter, or perhaps get false identities and take the southbound steam locomotive to explore Riston Province first?"

He initially considered mentioning Cordu but refrained, sensing it might unsettle Lumian. Instead, he referred to their shared hometown, Riston Province, in a broader context.

"It's in the hands of fate," Lumian replied with a smile.

Producing three post-it notes, he scribbled various options with the black fountain pen he carried: "Boat," "steam locomotive," and "direct travel."

Crumpling the notes into balls, he deftly shuffled their positions, presenting a dazzling display of sleight of hand.

"Your turn. Let's see what fate has in store." Lumian extended his right hand to Lugano.

Isn't this too arbitrary? Lugano pondered, surprised by the randomness of selecting their travel method to the Feynapotter Kingdom through drawing lots. Despite the absurdity, he dutifully picked up a paper ball.

In any case, he had already received the 5,000 verl d'or advance payment!

Lugano unfolded the paper and read the word "ship."

Lumian nodded and smiled.

"Very good. Then let's take the steam locomotive."

"…" Lugano's expression became uncertain as he instinctively glanced at the wanted criminal worth 60,000 verl d'or sitting across from him. He wondered if Lumian was manipulating him to eliminate the wrong option or simply playing a prank.

Forcing another smile, Lugano suggested, "Shall we head back to the Suhit steam locomotive station?"

"No, to the Northern Train Station," Lumian replied, turning to Ludwig, who had been quietly eating without uttering a word.

Northern Train Station? Lugano felt increasingly puzzled by his employer's decision.

Trier had two main steam locomotive stations: Suhit, connecting the southern and central regions, and the Northern Train Station, responsible for the northern provinces. If their destination was the Feynapotter Kingdom and Riston Province, the logical choice would be Suhit. Why, then, were they going north?

Recognizing that it wasn't his place to question his employer's decisions, Lugano instructed the carriage driver to alter their course.

As noon approached, the rental carriage arrived at the Northern Trier Train Station.

I have to disguise myself and find a broker to fake my identity to buy a ticket… As Lugano directed the carriage driver to a more remote area, he turned to look at Lumian, preparing to make a suggestion.

He was met with an unfamiliar face.

The short flaxen-colored hair, brown eyes, and other facial features combined to create the appearance of a stranger.

If not for the silver earring on his right ear and the familiar clothes, Lugano might have believed they were ambushed by official Beyonders, having quietly dealt with Lumian.

"Purchase a ticket to Port Gati in Upper Coastal Province," Lumian calmly instructed.

Upper Coastal Province, Port Gati… Lugano suddenly grasped Lumian's strategy.

While his employer did intend to take a boat to the Feynapotter Kingdom, he chose a less obvious route. Instead of departing from the nearest Port LeSeur in Paz Province, he opted for Upper Coastal Province to the north.

For an ordinary person, it might seem wasteful, but for a wanted fugitive evading enemies, an unconventional approach could prove to be a prudent choice at avoiding potential dangers.

…

In the business carriage of the steam locomotive, divided into six cozy private rooms, Lumian's gaze swept across the slightly ajar carved wooden door, the table adorned with a vibrant, multi-colored tablecloth interwoven with golden threads, the plush sofa that doubled as a bed, and the slender wooden wall adorned with oil paintings. A satisfied nod escaped him.

A private room like this commanded a hefty price of 400 verl d'or, accommodating no more than four individuals.

The steam locomotive promised a 12-hour journey with an eight-hour night stop, totaling 20 hours. Travel costs were 30 verl d'or for a third-class seat, 45 verl d'or for second class, and 60 verl d'or for first class. The exclusive small private rooms in business class demanded 100 verl d'or per person, sold only in packages to maintain the privacy of business companions.

For a wanted fugitive like Lumian, this setup was perfect.

Equipped with the Lie earring and the Niese Face, Lumian had no real need for the privacy or luxury of the business carriage, but there was a compelling reason for his choice:

The business carriage provided two complimentary meals—dinner tonight and breakfast tomorrow.

A convenience that would spare Lumian from many hassles.

Sigh, a child has to eat something warm.

I just hope his appetite doesn't startle the attendants…

After catering to Ludwig for over two days, Lumian recognized the importance of his Traveler's Bag, capable of storing ample rations and desserts for long trips with the boy. The boy had to eat frequently!

Amidst the whistle, Lumian settled into his seat, absorbing the rhythmic clanging sounds as the scenery rapidly retreated on both sides.

In less than fifteen minutes, the colossal steam-spewing train departed from the bustling metropolis through the "cave door" carved into the high wall.

It left behind a metropolis pulsating with desires, immersed in both joy and pain.

Lumian half-closed his eyes, overhearing someone in the private room ahead sigh, as if reciting a poem.

"Goodbye, Trier!"

At 8 p.m., under the cover of complete darkness, the steam locomotive came to a halt at its scheduled stop—Dardel Station.

Situated on the outskirts of the Upper Coastal Province's Faust region, in Darder Town, the platform was already bustling with 20 to 30 men and women eagerly rushing to different carriages. Devoid of luggage, their faces radiated enthusiasm.

Knock! Knock! Knock! A middle-aged man, sporting thick black hair and a slightly hooked chin, rapped on the glass window corresponding to Lumian's private room.

With interest, Lumian pushed open the window and greeted with a smile, "What can I do for you?"

"Monsieur, would you like a drink? Perhaps a cozy bed instead of a sofa?" the middle-aged man inquired in Intisian, his accent heavy.

"A bar with its own motel?" Lumian was enlightened.

It seemed like local merchants were soliciting customers right on the platform.

"That's right, that's right. Our bar boasts some charming little frogs," the middle-aged man winked suggestively.

"Little frogs?" Lugano, seated across from Lumian, asked, puzzled.

The middle-aged man pondered for a moment and explained, "That's our slang here in Coastal. It means the same as your Trier pussies."

In Trier, "pussies" often carried dual meanings, referring to both "female reproductive organs" and "prostitutes."

Is that so… Lumian had suspected as much but wasn't entirely certain.

Seated beside Lugano, Ludwig chimed in eagerly, "Anything good to eat?"

Without awaiting the middle-aged man's response, Lumian teased Ludwig with a smile, "I thought you were going to ask if the meat was tender or chewy and if it tasted good."

Initially unresponsive, Ludwig suddenly realized something and cursed, "Sick!"

Observing this, the middle-aged man swiftly introduced the local specialties.

Meanwhile, outside the station, dogs started barking in the town.

A lone bark triggered a chorus of canine voices, shattering the night's silence.

The middle-aged man's expression shifted, tainted with an indescribable sense of fear.

Chapter 506: Illness

Amidst the nighttime cacophony of the town's barking dogs, Lumian let out a low chuckle.

"Do you have that many dogs in Dardel?"

"Y-yes." The middle-aged man managed a hesitant smile.

Something is off as expected. Has something happened to this town? Lumian had intentionally inquired, keen on observing the reactions of the resident across from him.

Amidst the persisting dog chorus, he concentrated on gauging the other party's luck.

He had no plans to leave the steam locomotive and venture into Dardel for investigation. His only recourse was to probe into the luck of the town's residents, anticipating hidden problems before they could unexpectedly spread to the train station.

While Termiboros could influence his luck observation, there was always a chance of being misled. Lumian, lacking expertise in divination or prophecy, had limited options for gathering information without leaving the steam locomotive.

Factoring in various environmental details, he aimed to discern potential issues.

In Lumian's view, the middle-aged man's luck took on a ghastly green hue.

This indicated an impending illness—a rather peculiar one.

The specifics, such as when or what kind of illness, eluded Lumian's current Sequence.

Dog barking inducing fear, future special illness—do Dardel's wild dogs cause calamities by biting and spreading diseases? That's a plausible explanation, and it's not a Beyonder incident, but that means there's a potential solution. The man outside seems to be grappling with a hint of despair… Lumian turned to the middle-aged man who was soliciting customers and said, "Can you bring over the food we ordered?"

"We can do so if the meal cost exceeds two verl d'or. You know, it's not easy for us to enter the platform," the middle-aged man, now smiling again, replied.

At that moment, the clamor of dozens of dogs subsided, no longer as intense as before.

"No problem," Lumian casually ordered a variety of dishes—apple liqueur, deep-fried potato pancakes, shrimp in gravy, Dardel meat sauce, stewed pork, saltmarsh mutton, buttered pancakes, and wick cheese. The total cost amounted to 10 verl d'or.

Ludwig couldn't help but gulp with each mention of a dish.

Four hours prior, an attendant had delivered a four-person standard dinner. Despite managing to finish two portions alone, Ludwig remained unsatisfied. He had also retrieved multiple pieces of jerky from Lumian's Traveler's Bag.

Two hours ago, he had his first supper, consisting of cheese, dessert, bread, jerky, and more.

Now, he was hungry again.

The middle-aged man, who had used simple words and symbols to record the dish names, couldn't resist asking,

"Is the food provided in a carriage of this level not tasty?"

Otherwise, why would Ludwig look as though he hadn't eaten dinner?

Lumian responded in turn, "That's right. Don't ever expect to eat tasty food on a steam locomotive."

After noting down the dish names and receiving 5 verl d'or banknotes as a down payment, the middle-aged man with a slightly hooked chin moved to another private room.

"Wait," Lumian suddenly called out.

"Is there anything else, Monsieur?" the middle-aged man turned around and inquired.

Lumian smiled and said, "You don't look well. If you don't want to get sick, you need more rest in the next few days."

The middle-aged man froze, his expression struck by lightning.

After a momentary pause, panic and fear mixed on his face.

"A-alright. Thank you." He turned around in a hurry and dashed out of the platform, forgetting to solicit other customers.

Dardel's abnormality is indeed linked to illnesses… Lumian mused as he withdrew his gaze thoughtfully.

Lugano asked with curiosity, "Why can't I tell that he's sub-healthy and could fall ill at any moment?"

Being a Doctor, he possessed corresponding abilities. Even without activating his Spirit Vision, he could discern various external manifestations of a person's body.

Recognizing a concealed illness and with Lumian's warning, he activated his Spirit Vision to observe the person's Ether Body.

"Sub-healthy" was a term coined by Emperor Roselle, but it had only gained popularity in Intis's medical world in recent years.

He's not currently in a sub-healthy state, but it's very likely that he will contract a special illness… Lumian used Lugano's questions to confirm that the townsfolk's illness didn't originate from him.

He smiled and responded to Lugano's question, "It's never wrong to care about others' health and encourage them to rest more."

Instinctively, Lugano revealed an expression that said, "I don't buy it." Then, he masked it with a smile.

"He seems to share that concern."

"That's right," Lumian replied patronizingly.

Dardel's barking subsided and resounded at times. Sometimes, it was just outside the platform, and at other times, it came from the edge of the town. Lumian listened quietly and sighed inwardly.

Why am I encountering something like this again?

Do I bring calamity, or does calamity lure me here?

From the looks of it, the problem in Dardel has been around for a while. It has nothing to do with my arrival… No matter how I avoid it or make choices via the use of others, I'll always be drawn to calamities and unknowingly approach them…

Is this why a Hunter with an angelic level and the Blood Emperor's remnant aura will inevitably encounter an abnormal situation despite their low Sequence?

In the future, will a novelist write about my experiences like Gehrman Sparrow's? Then, the line "he's always accompanied by calamity" would be included.

As time ticked by, the middle-aged man who had been soliciting customers arrived with a bar waiter, each carrying a food container.

"Is this what you want?" He and the waiter handed plates and glasses through the window.

Seeing the table covered in an exquisite tablecloth filled with tempting food, Lumian took a sip of the slightly sour apple liqueur and paid the remaining 5 verl d'or for the meal.

"We'll collect the cutlery in an hour. We won't be disturbing you, will we?" the middle-aged man asked politely.

Lumian nodded, giving them permission.

After sidestepping with the waiter for a moment, the middle-aged man found himself returning to his original position. He couldn't resist the urge to inquire,

"Monsieur, how do you know I'm about to fall ill?"

Lumian, gesturing towards Lugano across the way, explained, "My friend is a renowned doctor in Trier."

The term "renowned" here applied to a wanted poster.

Without awaiting the middle-aged man's reply, Lumian casually inquired, "What's your name?"

"Just call me Pierre," the middle-aged man replied, hunched over as he observed Lumian in the snug private room on the steam locomotive.

Do you folks fancy that name around here too? Lumian grinned and asked, "Do you think you'll get sick too?"

Pierre's eyelids twitched, his expression momentarily freezing.

Instinctively, he replied, "No, no. Just a bit concerned."

"Well then, get some rest, drink more water, and perhaps seek out the clergyman at the cathedral for repentance," Lumian advised without pressing further.

Pierre moved towards the front of the locomotive in silence, hoping to drum up more business. However, his steps seemed burdened, as if his feet were encased in lead, each stride a struggle.

"Woof, woof, woof!"

The barking resumed near the platform.

Pierre's face contorted, overwhelmed with worry and fear. Suddenly, he turned around, shaking off the waiter and rushing to the window of the small private room where Lumian and the others were situated.

"Save me, Doctor, save me!" he pleaded, pressing his hands against the glass with a desperate expression.

Lumian seized the moment, stating, "Unless you disclose the cause of the illness, my friend won't be able to treat you."

The commotion reached the passengers in the adjacent private rooms, but in their slumber, they were indifferent to the unfolding drama.

Pierre swallowed hard, stealing a glance at the equally terrified bar waiter.

"Yes, yes…"

Before he could complete his sentence, a figure materialized on the platform's wall.

The figure stood firmly, legs apart, body contorted, but its head tilted upward, fixated on some distant point.

It was a man, clad in tweed garments, conspicuously marked by tears and frays. His facial muscles contorted dramatically, and his eyes were rolled back, leaving only a white patch visible.

Saliva dribbled from his open mouth as he attempted to speak.

"Woof! Woof! Woof!"

The barking harmonized with the other canine sounds in Dardel, forming a disconcerting chorus.

"It's Derangement!" Pierre finally exclaimed.

"Derangement?" Lumian shifted his attention from the man barking on the wall to Lugano.

Lugano observed the abnormality for a moment before slowly shaking his head at Lumian.

His message was clear: this wasn't your typical case of rabies.

Pierre, mistakenly thinking Lumian was addressing him, was on the brink of emotional collapse.

"Yes, Derangement!

"I don't know when it started. People in our town began turning into barking lunatics. Initially, it was just one, but then two, three, ten… Many acquaintances of mine got infected, completely losing their minds. They only bark like dogs and are most active during the night!"

"Did they contract it from being bitten by these lunatics?" Lugano inquired with a furrowed brow.

"No, the ones I know weren't bitten, but they still went mad! I-I feel like I'm soon next!" Pierre exclaimed in despair.

"You didn't seek help from the government?" Lumian was puzzled, thinking that official Beyonders wouldn't allow such a situation to escalate.

"We heard about a village having a similar situation as Derangement; they reported it to the government, and then the whole village vanished. We… we didn't dare approach either the government or the Church!" Pierre explained frantically, with the bar waiter by his side equally terrified.

Lumian's eyes narrowed.

"Where are the people from the town's health department, police station, and the cathedral's padre?"

"They were the first to succumb to madness." Pierre, caught up in distress, didn't consider Lumian's intentions in asking.

The initial casualties were the padre, police, and health officials… Lumian raised an eyebrow and remarked, "So why haven't you tried escaping from Dardel?"

"Escape…" Pierre and the bar waiter were startled, staring blankly at Lumian.

Beneath the crimson moonlight, the whites of their eyes took on a bloodshot hue.

Chapter 507: Dead End

Pierre and the bar waiter locked eyes with Lumian and the others, their bloodshot gaze shifting from vacant to sheer terror.

In hushed tones, they uttered frantically, "You folks are aware… You folks are aware that there's Derangement here…"

Abruptly, Pierre's face contorted, and he bellowed in hysteria, "None of you can leave!

"Once the outsiders catch wind of this, we're all done for!"

He swiftly maneuvered through the steam locomotive's open window, attempting to climb in and forcefully pull Lumian and the others out.

In response, Lugano rose to his feet, delivering a powerful blow with his right fist.

With a resounding thud, Pierre slumped, unconscious, hanging awkwardly from the window. The bar waiter, seemingly unhinged, trampled over the fallen man, attempting to leap into the carriage.

Lugano struck again, his punch rendering the bloodshot-eyed bar waiter unconscious. He slumped over Pierre, creating an unusual tableau.

They didn't abnormally transform into monsters… Lumian had previously speculated that the two town folks had succumbed suddenly to Derangement.

Turning to Lumian, Lugano inquired in a low voice, "What do we do?"

"What do we do?" Lumian echoed the Doctor's inquiry.

The unfolding events not only displayed an abnormality but also left him with a sense of inner conflict and displacement.

The peculiar Derangement, causing people to lose their sanity and transform into canine-like creatures, coupled with the consecutive onset of various illnesses, unmistakably hinted at supernatural forces at play. However, the mystery deepened as Pierre and the other townsfolk, who were evidently concerned about keeping Derangement a secret, freely disclosed the information to Lumian.

This apparent contradiction could be attributed to Pierre's overwhelming mental stress, pushed to the brink. Lumian's mention of future sickness served as the tipping point, prompting Pierre to instinctively guard the secret from leaking when reminded.

Yet, the lingering question persisted: Why not escape?

Faced with an infectious and unstoppable Derangement, wouldn't it be prudent for ordinary humans to flee Dardel and return once the plague had subsided?

Even if they feared attracting attention from the authorities by fleeing, a temporary escape into the nearby mountains after addressing those potentially afflicted could provide a solution.

Unless there was some force preventing the citizens of Dardel from escaping!

Lumian deduced this from various details.

The townsfolk were cognizant of similar Derangement cases elsewhere, resulting in entire villages being wiped out by the authorities. Normally, such incidents would be reported as a tragic disaster with everyone buried.

After the initial infection, key figures like the cathedral's clergyman, the police, and health department officials succumbed to madness, severing Dardel's connection with regional authorities from the start.

It appeared as if an intelligent and dangerous individual deliberately spread Derangement, employing tactics to hinder the townsfolk from escaping.

Why would this mastermind allow Pierre and others to divulge the situation to the Doctor on the steam locomotive?

If the steam train were to stay in Dardel, unable to reach Port Gati by the next morning, it would undoubtedly attract official Beyonder investigation.

Lumian, thinking from the mastermind's perspective, considered it illogical to choose a transportation hub regularly frequented by steam locomotives. Even without Lumian's inquiries, those choosing to enter Dardel to sleep under a warm blanket and sample beautiful frogs would eventually notice the abnormality, raising suspicions. They couldn't all be made to stay behind, could they? This would lead to an investigation!

There are many contradictions, inconsistencies, and inexplicable aspects… He's smart yet foolish, cautious yet careless… Lumian, contemplating the intricacies, turned to Lugano and said, "What else can we do? Of course, we have to find a way to inform the authorities about this. Don't tell me you want to investigate the source of the Derangement and save the residents here, do you? I didn't expect you to be so noble."

Lugano smiled awkwardly. The latter possibility had never crossed his mind.

"How should we inform the authorities?" he asked sincerely, admitting his lack of experience in such matters.

"The simplest solution is to get the train police here and tell them what Pierre said. Have them use the train's radio to contact the relevant departments in the Faust area or the Upper Coastal Province," Lumian suggested casually.

However, Lugano hesitated, expressing concern, "B-but as witnesses, we'll be invited to assist in the investigation. O-our identities are fake, and even if we use your mystical item to change our appearances, it's easy to expose that we're Beyonders under the influence of some mysticism abilities."

Lumian pondered for a moment and offered an alternative with a smile, "Then find an empty room on the platform, pile dozens of bundles of explosives, and detonate them. The explosion will send the roof flying, destroying the house. This way, the conductor and the train police will report it quickly, and the officials in the Faust area will take notice. When they investigate further, they'll discover the hidden problem in Dardel. How about that? We won't need to personally show our faces in this plan, right?"

Lugano considered the proposal but raised another concern, "When the authorities investigate further, they'll discover that we've interacted with Dardel's residents. They'll worry that we might also be in danger of contracting Derangement. When the time comes, we won't be able to pass the scrutiny."

Lumian felt a twinge of frustration, recalling how he and his sister had been trapped in Cordu after the abnormality. Everything they did had its cons.

He chuckled and said, "Then investigate the source of the Derangement personally and blast it into pieces!

"This will completely resolve the problem without attracting the officials' attention!"

Ludwig, who had consumed countless suppers, swallowed the deep-fried potato pie in his mouth and calmly said, "After informing the authorities about Derangement, why stay here and wait for them to investigate?

"Can't we just leave, change our identities, and take another steam locomotive to another port?"

Uh… Lumian was taken aback.

Why hadn't I thought of such a simple idea?

Just now, the more Lugano and I discussed, the deeper we delved into a dead end. We were entirely focused on finding a reason and excuse for entering Dardel to investigate the source of the Derangement…

A realization hit Lumian, and his heart skipped a beat.

Nonchalantly, he gazed at Lugano, assessing the Doctor's luck.

The other party's luck in the future would also be tainted with a ghastly green!

With a smile, Lumian said to Lugano, "You also have the possibility of contracting Derangement."

Lugano was taken aback for a moment before asking with a pale face, "Really?"

"Think of it as a joke," Lumian turned his head, seemingly relaxed, and said to Ludwig, "See, there are many benefits to studying more. In the past, you wouldn't have thought of such a solution and only knew nothing but eating."

Ignoring the Hunter, Ludwig forked a piece of mutton into his mouth.

"What should I do? What should I do…" Lugano muttered to himself, attempting to use his Doctor powers on himself to see if he could be saved.

Lumian interrupted him.

"No rush. There's just a risk of contracting the illness. You just need to leave this place before you get truly infected."

As he spoke, he stood up and walked out of the private room.

"W-where are you going?" Lugano blurted out.

Lumian slipped his hands into his pockets and responded with a smile. "Inform the authorities about Derangement."

Lugano was momentarily at a loss for words and expressions. All he could do was watch in a daze as Lumian strolled out of the private room.

Reaching the train's washroom, Lumian locked the door and activated the black mark representing Spirit World Traversal.

His figure swiftly vanished, reappearing in Apartment 702 at 9 Rue Orosai, Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative in Trier.

Neither Franca nor Jenna was asleep at this hour. One was engrossed in a novel, while the other contemplated what knowledge to impart to Rabbit Chasel.

"W-why are you back?" Franca jumped in fright.

She had the illusion that she had just dropped him off at school in the morning and found him at home, legs up, eating snacks, and watching television in the afternoon.

Lumian glanced at Franca and smiled. "We encountered a Beyonder incident and wish to inform the authorities through your channels to have them resolve it."

Franca exclaimed in surprise and amusement, "Y-you encountered another Beyonder incident? What a mysticism catastrophe detector!?"

Jenna looked at Lumian and suddenly felt that it was a good thing for him to leave Trier.

"I didn't want to either." Lumian spread his hands sincerely.

Franca exhaled and said, "Where is it? What kind of incident?"

"In Dardel in Upper Coastal Province's Faust region…" Lumian briefly recounted the situation.

Franca and Jenna were both surprised and terrified by the contagious Derangement.

Simultaneously, Franca muttered inwardly, I wonder how 007 will react to this "surprise"…

He's always telling me to get out of the market district. If I really do, he'll realize that not only will Beyonder cases in Trier's other districts pile up on him, the mystical catastrophes of Intis's other provinces will also descend upon him…

Ah, that's right. What does it have to do with me? It's all Lumian's fault!

Thankfully, this fellow is heading to the Feynapotter Kingdom in the future. No matter what Beyonder incidents he encounters, it's no longer 007's problem. He can't possibly collaborate across borders…

After explaining the situation in Dardel, Lumian didn't linger. He "teleported" back to the washroom of the steam locomotive's business carriage.

He turned on the tap and washed his hands without hesitation. Then, he left the washroom and returned to the small private room. He said to Lugano, "The authorities will react soon. Let's prepare to leave."

Lugano sprang to his feet.

At that moment, the unconscious Pierre slowly regained consciousness, shaking the bar waiter off his body and landing on the platform.

Lumian looked at him and smiled.

"We'll stay and investigate the source of Derangement. Can you tell me who patient zero was?"

"Who was it…" Pierre didn't lose his mind and attack Lumian and the others like before. Instead, he fell into deep thought.

Chapter 508: Patient Zero

Lugano, who had been listening, shot Lumian a puzzled glance. He couldn't fathom why Lumian would strike up a casual conversation with Pierre just as they were on the verge of departing.

A few more moments, and the official Beyonders would make their entrance!

Besides, delving too deep into this matter could invite trouble down the road. They might end up under scrutiny, or worse, attract the attention of the Derangement's source, prompting immediate intervention!

Pierre pondered for more than ten seconds before uttering with uncertainty, "Patient Zero seemed to be a guest renting a room at our bar…"

"Foreigner?" Lumian inquired with composure.

Having already briefed the official Beyonders about the Derangement through Franca and resolved to find an opportunity to "teleport" away later, Lumian was no longer as tense as before. Thus, before leaving, he aimed to unravel more about Derangement and construct a plausible explanation for the inconsistencies.

This quest for information, problem analysis, and uncovering of clues and answers was all part of a Conspirer's acting. With some idle time on his hands, Lumian seized the chance to digest some of the potion.

Lumian wasn't overly concerned about the potential repercussions of being privy to this situation.

Could the information on Derangement hold a candle to 0-01's sealed intel?

Moreover, as long as he didn't go berserk on the spot, he could later seek assistance from his superior to explore potential solutions!

Pierre contemplated for a few seconds, his expression reflecting confusion, and then he said, "Probably… I can't recall her name, and I have no idea where she came from. All I remember is that she suddenly lost her mind and dashed from the motel upstairs to the bar. She tried to bite people and barked like a dog."

The infected foreigner spreading Derangement to Dardel? Then why were the townsfolk displaying no inclination to escape this place? Is this also a manifestation of Derangement? Lumian asked thoughtfully, "Did she manage to bite anyone? What happened to her?"

"We took care of her before she could sink her teeth into anyone. We apprehended her and handed her over to the health department," Pierre recollected.

Sent to the health department? Lumian nodded slowly.

"Did the next person to succumb to madness come from the health department?"

"Yes, exactly!" Pierre affirmed this time.

Lumian pondered for a moment and inquired, "What did the resident look like?"

"A young woman. Her face was a bit pale, and her eyes were vacant. I-I can't recall her appearance…" Pierre couldn't help but raise his palm and rub his head.

Upon hearing this, Lumian's heart stirred.

If the root of all the abnormalities in Dardel indeed stemmed from a deranged individual, many contradictions could find an explanation!

Patient Zero was already in a state of madness; instinctively, she would spread Derangement to those around her in a supernatural sense, regardless of whether it was an isolated village or a bustling town serving as a transportation hub.

Simultaneously, she would subconsciously employ her ability to disseminate the supernatural Derangement, dropping hints to the townsfolk that leaving wasn't an option. She would control all channels that might carry the news. However, due to her madness and lack of thorough consideration, she didn't explicitly order the townsfolk not to discuss Derangement with the steam locomotive passengers.

Certainly, it wasn't necessarily due to a lack of thorough consideration. Lumian believed it was more plausible that the lunatic's instincts desired to involve more people and infect them with Derangement. Consequently, people who were aware of this weren't permitted to leave or seek help from the authorities. On the other hand, the prohibition didn't prevent residents from discussing Derangement with passersby.

This was a limited and relatively safe method of contagion. Passengers who knew about Derangement were akin to approaching the source of the plague. For instance, Lugano's luck had turned, increasing the probability of contracting the disease. Lumian and he had forgotten the option of escaping. The more they communicated, the more desperate they became, ultimately reaching a dead end. They were resolute in entering Dardel to investigate.

This was a precursor to becoming infected with Derangement. Unbeknownst to them, they had inadvertently received a mental cue.

With this in mind, Lumian suspected that the young woman might be a survivor of the village that had previously been eradicated, a potential carrier who had escaped the authorities' purge.

She had intertwined these memories with Derangement and disseminated them. That was how the residents of Dardel learned about a similar plague in a village wiped out by the authorities.

Typically, they lacked the qualifications or means to know such things!

Having formulated this preliminary hypothesis, Lumian smiled and turned to Pierre and the bar waiter, asking, "Where is the village you mentioned that was destroyed by the authorities because of Derangement?"

"I-I think it's somewhere in the Haut-Hornacis Province…" Pierre recalled the rumors he had heard.

Haut-Hornacis Province… That's quite a distance from Upper Coastal Province. Moreover, there's no direct steam locomotive; it requires a transfer through a few provinces in the West Midseashire Coast or Trier. How could you folks, who rarely leave Dardel, have heard such a rumor? Did a bard or passenger from Haut-Hornacis Province pass by this transportation hub? The more Lumian pondered, the more he leaned toward his hypothesis.

He refrained from pressing further and probed Pierre, "This Derangement holds significant research value. We'll venture into Dardel to investigate its source and try to find a cure.

"However, preparations will take some time. Moreover, it's nighttime.

"At dawn, we will step into Dardel. We won't depart until we resolve the problem."

Lumian stressed the phrases "will enter Dardel" and "will not leave for the time being" to gauge Pierre and the bar waiter's reactions.

Their expressions underwent several changes, and they were no longer as hysterical as before.

After a few moments, Pierre implored, "You must come to town tomorrow!"

"No problem," Lumian replied with a reassuring smile.

He was now even more convinced that this was an instinctive infection and influence. There was no structured approach to handling the alterations. As long as he avoided triggering a crucial matter or even took the initiative to broach the topic of cooperation, he could effectively deceive the source of Derangement.

Observing Pierre and the bar waiter about to move toward the other windows of the steam locomotive, Lumian called out to them, "Wait a moment."

After the two of them turned in surprise, Lumian gestured towards the table between the two sofas.

"You can take the cutlery away now."

Pierre and the bar waiter glanced at the dining table in confusion, realizing that only remnants were left on the empty plates.

Had they finished eating already? The delivery men hadn't even departed yet!

Pierre and the bar waiter were aware that they had spent a considerable amount of time discussing the Derangement issue, but it still felt surreal.

Won't they eating too quickly?

Was he feeding three lions?

Burp… Ludwig wiped his mouth with a tablecloth, a content expression on his face.

After the two townsfolk cleared away the cutlery, gathered their food boxes, and departed from the platform, Lumian smiled at Lugano and remarked, "Continue watching. Chill."

I can't chill. How are we to escape when the official Beyonders arrive? Lugano's heart felt like it was being grilled.

Observing his reaction, Lumian muttered silently, He's indeed acting like a wild Beyonder with a low Sequence and little knowledge… He doesn't show anything special like Ludwig… Is he really an ordinary wild Beyonder who only accepted a mission to follow me?

Simultaneously, Lumian focused his attention and checked Lugano's luck. He realized that the ghastly green traces had vanished, and there was no grisly calamity in store.

This meant that the Doctor no longer had the potential to contract Derangement, and he likely wouldn't be embroiled in the officials' operations to deal with Dardel's abnormality later.

After a while, Lumian heard a loud noise and saw the night suddenly brighten outside.

Light streamed down from midair.

Lumian looked up and noticed two colossal objects floating in the night.

They were two airships clad in dark gray paint, frantically spinning their paddles.

They were much smaller than the one Lumian had seen in Trier. The condensed light shone from their front and lower positions, converging on the edge of Dardel.

Simultaneously, the town erupted in a cacophony of barking once more, as if movement was taking place everywhere.

The officials from the Faust region are here? Lumian averted his gaze, awaiting the outcome.

Shouts, cries, gunshots, and various beams of sunlight continued for nearly an hour before completely subsiding.

Before long, a team of police officers entered the private room, questioning the now disguised, fake identification-wielding Lumian and company's interactions with Dardel's residents.

Other than anything related to Derangement, Lumian told them everything honestly.

He was ready to "teleport" away with Ludwig and Lugano at any moment.

After recording and comparing tickets and identification, the police officers left the carriage.

Lumian patiently waited until dawn. The police officers returned, presenting three contracts and requesting their signatures.

The contract explained that the disturbance from the previous night had resulted from a special military operation, and everyone was obligated to keep it confidential.

Does what I revealed before my signature count? Lumian chuckled inwardly and calmly signed with an alias.

His fake identity had just been activated, and it had minimal mystic connections.

After the police departed, Lumian, having intentionally gone through the official process firsthand, intended to grasp Lugano and Ludwig's shoulders and "teleport" away.

Uncertain if the contract signed with an alias would be discovered, he aimed to avoid potential risks.

At that moment, Lumian noticed a towering figure behind Lugano.

It was his messenger, Penitent Baynfel, draped in a dark clergyman's robe and surrounded by charred flames.

Baynfel sent a folded letter drifting towards Lumian.

Lugano was taken aback to see a piece of paper materialize. He instinctively glanced behind him, but Lumian opened the letter and perused its contents.

"Based on the feedback I received, this should be the escape of a Sealed Artifact.

"That Sealed Artifact resembles a young woman. It first surfaced during a catastrophe in Haut-Hornacis Province. Most of the time, she remains in her normal state, appearing lifeless, pale, and muddle-headed. However, once she enters a state of madness, she gradually infects the surrounding people with the same Derangement as her. There's no definite transmission pattern.

"She might not be in the same state every time she goes mad. The same goes for her Derangement symptoms.

"In her normal state, although she's like an unintelligent ghost and acts on instinct, she possesses a power akin to the power of speech, where whatever she says comes true, and if she declares someone dead, they will die…"

Chapter 509: Ironclad Merchant Ship

Also possesses the ability to turn spoken words into reality… Before the Derangement took hold, she acted on instinct, her pale face and lifeless eyes mirroring the description of Patient Zero by Pierre. Lumian delved into the catastrophe's details through Franca's letter, gaining a deeper understanding.

His speculations, rooted in Pierre's answers and behavior, aligned closely with the truth.

The divergence lay in Lumian's belief that the initial infected individual was a genuine lunatic that acted on instinct, while official information identified her as a humanoid Sealed Artifact, still governed by instinct, that lacked intelligence whether in her normal state or deranged state.

Lumian's speculations, however, didn't rule out the possibility that the young woman had transformed into a true lunatic—one that instinctively spread Derangement—due to some form of corruption, necessitating her sealing.

As for why it was a seal and not a direct eradication, Lumian could roughly guess the reason.

The ability to kill anyone at will was still coveted, despite various restrictions. The power to eliminate anyone at will remained highly sought after, despite certain constraints. Whether it was the Inquisition, the Machinery Hivemind, or Bureau 8, they all prioritized sealing over destruction if a viable method existed. Lumian knew they might even depend on her to handle future crises.

His eyes moved down the letter's contents, absorbing the information.

"As for additional details, confidentiality prevents the source from providing more."

"Keep a vigilant eye on individuals like her. If you uncover anything suspicious, immediately distance yourself and report it to the authorities."

No specifics about her origins, the sealing technique, the manifestation of speech, or how to counteract Derangement were provided. No concrete seal level or number… Despite Dardel's abnormality and prior descriptions, even if it isn't a Grade 1 Sealed Artifact, it holds significant and terrifying properties among Grade 2 Sealed Artifacts… Lumian pondered briefly, then stowed the letter in his Traveler's Bag without incinerating it on the spot.

At that moment, Lugano was observing his back in bewilderment.

Despite activating his Spirit Vision, he found nothing.

Lumian's messenger, Penitent Baynfel, had long departed.

"Let's go," Lumian sighed, reaching out to grasp Ludwig and Lugano's shoulders.

His foremost regret was the wasted third of the 400 verl d'or fare.

He still needed to source different cafés for Ludwig's breakfast; he couldn't allow him to be satiated from one place to avoid raising suspicion.

In the next instant, Lugano felt as if he had crossed into the spirit world he'd just glimpsed. Instead of being a mere observer, he plunged deeper into layers of saturated colors, bathing in the light of seven different-colored brilliances overhead. Surrounded by indescribable faces and figures, he "sped" toward an unknown destination.

Dizziness overcame him, but in just over ten seconds, his feet met solid ground. Buildings in beige, brownish-red, and light yellow surrounded him.

Lumian hadn't "teleported" too far and chose Faust, with Dardel falling under its jurisdiction.

Under the dawn's light, Lumian adorned the Lie earring and retrieved a tweed coat from his Traveler's Bag, seamlessly altering his appearance, height, and attire in a secluded alley.

In less than a minute, he morphed into an entirely different person.

Though not the first time Lugano had witnessed this, he couldn't help but be slightly shocked by the scene.

What a mystical item and formidable ability!

Whether it was the silver earring allowing one to adjust appearance within a certain range or the coin bag with seemingly infinite capacity, Lugano had never seen anything like it. Occasionally, he'd heard other bounty hunters speak of official Beyonders possessing Beyonder-level disguises.

Lumian tossed the Lie earring to Lugano, casually stating, "Get three more sets of fake identities and buy steam locomotive tickets that will arrive in Port Gati today."

Am I a translator, guide, or your attendant? Lugano criticized as he caught the mystical silver earring.

He forced a smile and said, "I've never been to the Faust area, so I don't know who to find for fake identities."

"The principles are common. I trust your experience," Lumian replied with a smile.

Alright, since you're paying… Lugano muttered silently, retrieving a change of clothes from his suitcase.

At the Northern Trier Train Station, Lumian had already paid him 1,000 verl d'or for the fake identities and informed him that he would handle similar expenses in the future.

After Ludwig put on the Lie earring, Lugano left the alley with his suitcase.

Lumian activated the Niese Face, altering his appearance once more, and trailed Lugano from afar while holding Ludwig, who was adjusting his height and appearance.

He wanted to observe the Doctor's actions and reactions in an unfamiliar place to uncover potential issues.

To prevent Ludwig from protesting, Lumian held down his wide-brimmed hat and tossed him a few loaves of baguettes.

Ludwig, not clamoring for a hot meal, obediently nibbled on the food as Lumian pulled him along.

In the early morning, the bars were closed, so Lugano headed to the nearest market and approached a prowler suspected to be a mobster. Using money, he bought access and discovered where to obtain fake identities.

Throughout the process, Lugano appeared no different from an ordinary bounty hunter.

Lumian wasn't disappointed or displeased. He calmly followed Lugano until he secured a differently scheduled steam locomotive. Only then did he dispel the Niese Face and rendezvous with his companion.

…

In Port Gati, Upper Coastal Province, Lumian occupied a luxurious hotel room near the sea.

Standing before the expansive glass window, he observed the azure sky, seemingly washed in water, contrasting with the clear and pure sea below, resembling gems.

The clear and melodious calls of gurgling seabirds, accompanied by their graceful figures, traversed between white clouds, white beaches, and ship masts. Even without opening the window, Lumian could intuitively feel the refreshing sea breeze from the sea.

This port, a main entry point for products from industrial cities in the West Midseashire Coast into the Fog Sea, was famous for trade and shipbuilding, boasting prosperity.

Contrary to Trieriens' beliefs about scarce sunlight in the north, Port Gati remained perpetually bathed in sunlight, with autumn maintaining a mild temperature.

As Ludwig chewed, Lumian admired the seascape and distant harbor, awaiting Lugano's return with tickets to the Feynapotter Kingdom's Port Santa.

At that moment, Penitent Baynfel, abnormally tall and clad in a black clergyman's robe, emerged from the void, silently handing Lumian a letter.

"Thank you," Lumian acknowledged out of habit before taking the letter and unfolding it.

"Dardel's Derangement has been contained. They've eliminated the severely infected residents, treated the slightly infected, but the Sealed Artifact is nowhere to be found.

"According to the information gathered at the scene, it appears she returned to normal a few days ago and left Dardel. Her current whereabouts are unknown. The spreading Derangement resulted from the severely corrupted sea of minds.

"The townsfolk's abnormal behavior—unwilling to leave Dardel yet keen on informing passersby about Derangement—likely stems from the corrupted sea of minds. Anthony's recently learned terminology describes it as a sea of collective subconscious forming a mind world with the island of consciousness and the spirituality sky.

"Be cautious in the future; there's a risk of being drawn to another mystical catastrophe caused by the Sealed Artifact."

They didn't catch the Sealed Artifact… Lumian clicked his tongue, sensing a brewing headache.

Honestly, there was nothing he could do. Upon arriving in Dardel, the other party had already departed, leaving the catastrophe still unfolding.

At 3 p.m., Lumian, accompanied by Lugano and Ludwig, boarded the Flying Bird, a merchant ship bound for the Feynapotter Kingdom's Port Santa.

Opting for a first-class cabin, they secured a suite featuring a master bedroom, a child's room, a servant's quarters, a living room, and a washroom. With specialized attendants at their service, they gained access to the most upscale dining room and the exclusive cigar room. The cost, a hefty 700 verl d'or, was nearly equivalent to Charlie's annual income as a hotel attendant.

Money was something Lumian cared about, yet not too much. Past experiences and his sister's guidance had made him instinctively calculative, but the relatively "easy" acquisition of money, like the 30,000 verl d'or he obtained from the safe at Salle de Bal Brise, lessened the sting.

Besides, he already possessed the potion formula, main ingredients, and supplementary ingredients for his next Sequence, eliminating the immediate need for accumulating funds.

As a devoted reader of The Adventurer series, Lumian knew of the numerous human-shaped treasures at sea. If he needed money, he was willing to imitate his idol and cull them.

The Flying Bird, the latest steam-powered ship, was entirely made of steel, with no sails but smokestacks emitting fog and masts with watchtowers.

Iron-gray with intertwining red and gold colors, the ship boasted a wide deck, numerous gun emplacements, and surpassed classic sailboats in displacement, passenger capacity, speed, and sturdiness. When compared to those backward-era fellows, it was like an adult looking down on children.

Before the Cordu incident, Lumian had considered embarking on a maritime journey, inspired by the adventurer Gehrman Sparrow, to entice his sister. However, Aurore had deferred this plan until after his university graduation.

In the spacious, brightly lit living room of the first-class cabin, Lumian gazed out the window at the azure sea, lost in thought.

Ooo!

Amidst the whistle, mist billowed from the chimneys of the Flying Bird.

The massive iron-armored merchant ship slowly departed Port Gati, accompanied by the symphony of various machinery starting to operate, heading into the depths of the sea.

Squawk! Squawk! The cries of seabirds reverberated through the clouds.

Chapter 510: First Day at Sea

Amidst the billowing smoke, the Flying Bird cut through the Fog Sea, heading west towards the Intis colony in the Fog Sea Archipelago. They were the same islands in the saying, "never trust an Islander." From there, it would journey south to Port Santa, northwest of the Feynapotter Kingdom.

Though the Fog Sea was notorious for its heavy fog, the offshore areas were less affected. Lumian spent the next three hours under the bright sun, immersed in a book—an introductory textbook for the Feynapotter Kingdom's Highlander language. While he had Lugano, his translator and guide, Lumian didn't want to be completely reliant on him for information and communication. If anything happened to Lugano, or if he were to deliberately manipulate translations, Lumian would be vulnerable.

Mastering some basic Highlander phrases before reaching Port Santa would allow Lumian to verify the accuracy of translations and give him some independence.

Typically, learning Highlander in less than ten days was nearly impossible for Beyonders not from the Reader pathway. However, Lumian had a significant advantage: his knowledge of ancient Feysac, the original language from which Highlander evolved. The two languages shared many similarities in sentence structure, meaning, grammar, and word structure, allowing Lumian to learn Highlander much faster.

"When can dinner be delivered?" Ludwig paced restlessly in front of Lumian's recliner, frustrated that the exclusive attendant hadn't yet arrived with dinner, despite the darkening sky.

Lumian closed his book as the sun dipped below the horizon, casting long shadows illuminated by the kerosene lamp. With a chuckle, he said, "Blame yourself for ordering so much. They need time to cook it all. Thankfully, the first-class cabin has an independent kitchen, otherwise they'd be overwhelmed…"

Before he could finish, the doorbell rang.

As the chimes reverberated, Lugano opened the thick vermilion door to find the young attendant pushing a dining cart into the room, its surface covered in a thick yellowish-brown carpet.

Under Ludwig's eager gaze, the attendant calmly laid out the tablecloth and utensils.

"This is a local delicacy, Gati herring. It involves marinating smoked soft herring filets, onions, and carrot slices in olive oil, thyme, bay leaves, and other spices for 24 to 48 hours. It's perfect with warm potato salad."

"And these are deep-fried fries. In Upper Coastal Province, there's a saying: without fries, there's no heaven…

"There's also raisin cream bread…

"These are fresh oysters and shellfish…

"This is Faust turkey, ham and mushroom burrito. This is Umu's duck minced meat and coarse brown sugar vanilla waffle…

"This is traditional orange cheese… and there's also a pungent gray cheese. Would you like to give it a try?

"This is Upper Coastal Province's favorite apple cider[1]…"

Lumian listened with genuine interest as the attendant described each dish. He noticed that, despite his impatience, Ludwig didn't immediately attack his food. Instead, he waited patiently until the attendant finished before sampling the pre-meal bread and savoring the pickled herring.

Did something awaken in him? Lumian glanced at the child in confusion.

"Not bad," Ludwig remarked with a professional air. "The smoky taste is just right. It blends perfectly with the fragrance and seasoning…"

Despite his praise, seven-year-old Lumian couldn't help but find the whole scene with Ludwig's chubby, youthful face and serious demeanor comical.

Port Gati, being near the sea, boasted excellent seafood. The oysters and other shellfish were not only tastier than most restaurants in Trier, but also considerably cheaper. Lumian sipped his brewed apple cider, enjoying the unique local flavors.

With Ludwig's impressive appetite, the eight-person dinner soon ended, leaving only clean plates and bones behind.

Lumian and Lugano, despite not being small eaters themselves, found themselves dwarfed by Ludwig's consumption despite eating two servings each. This was especially impressive considering he'd already devoured afternoon tea and dessert earlier.

I don't see you visiting the washroom often… Where does all the food go? Do you have a bottomless pit for a stomach? Lumian mused, sizing Ludwig up. He stood up and turned to Lugano.

"I'm feeling for a drink. Want to join me at the ship's bar?"

"I didn't catch a wink last night. Planned to hit the hay early today." Lugano couldn't wrap his head around his employer's boundless energy. Despite a sleepless night and a full day of travel, Lumian buzzed with life, ready to hit the bar.

Could it be because his Sequence is higher?

The kid with the odd appetite looks pretty charged too…

Lumian didn't extend an invite to the translator. After leaving a late-night snack for Ludwig, he swapped into a plain dark brown jacket and left the room, heading for the first-class bar.

The bar oozed elegance, filled with the soft tunes of a small band. Sparse patrons scattered around, soaking in the quiet atmosphere.

Lumian scanned the scene for a moment from the entrance, then shook his head and exited.

He descended the stairs to the deck, slipping into the bar serving third-class cabins and the regular crew.

A chaos of noise—shouts, cheers, claps, and random singing—saturated the air, echoing around Lumian.

He instantly felt a sense of homecoming. A wave of ease washed over him, and every cell in his body kicked up a notch.

That's more like it… A seasoned regular at the Ol' Tavern from a young age, Lumian swayed a bit as he edged up to the bar counter.

"A glass of La Fée Verte." He thumped the wooden surface.

The bartender, a young man with Feynapotter features, greeted Lumian. His face was slim, adorned with black hair, eyes, and distinct contours. His slightly yellowish skin highlighted his appealing facial features.

"Alright, 10 licks," the bartender replied in Intisian, his foreign accent apparent.

The ship's prices trumps even those in Trier… As Lumian counted out the coins, he noticed the bartender divert his attention and engage with sincerity and enthusiasm.

"Madame, what would you like to drink?"

"A glass of cherry wine," a lady in a thick yellow dress responded, showcasing a pretty face and light green eyes.

"Alright!" The bartender, not seeking payment upfront, prepared to serve the lady.

"I was here first," Lumian reminded the bartender with a smile.

Without hesitation, the bartender replied, "This is such a beautiful and dazzling lady. My heart tells me to serve her first."

Oh, he's truly from Feynapotter… Lumian didn't get upset. Instead, it felt like he was watching a circus act.

Feynapotterians, with their romantic nature and relentless pursuit of love, placed their faith in Earth Mother, emphasizing the importance of women. Men in this kingdom would praise any woman they encountered, openly pursuing those they fancied.

Aurore had once mentioned that Feynapotter's men were masters of country romance. Despite their mushiness and overt sincerity, they didn't come off as cheesy; rather, they exuded a different kind of elegance.

In comparison, the romantic Intisians seemed lacking.

However, influenced by tradition and faith, most Feynapotterians placed great importance on family, reproduction, and children, preferring settled family lives. Unless entering marriage without coercion, they were akin to the conservative Loenese, finding it challenging to accept extramarital affairs.

While exceptions existed, even in the most conservative Loen Kingdom, the prevalence of adultery wasn't as exaggerated or common as in Intis. Many believed that love didn't necessarily thrive within the confines of marriage.

After the lady settled her tab and departed with the cherry wine, the bartender served Lumian La Fée Verte, garnishing it with a mint leaf.

He remarked without a trace of guilt, "My grandmother always said to give special treatment to every lady, especially the beautiful ones."

"I get it." Lumian slipped back into his role as a regular at Ol' Tavern. Sipping his absinthe, he concocted a tale. "I once had numerous beautiful companions, even more stunning than the last lady. Unfortunately, being just one person, I couldn't marry them all simultaneously…"

The bartender suddenly felt a camaraderie.

"I often feel the same regrets. There are too many beautiful women in this world, and I'm just one person."

"What's your name?"

"Louis, just call me Louis." Lumian provided his alias.

His current identity was Louis Berry.

"I'm Francesco," the bartender shared with Lumian.

The familiar setting, the customary boasting, and the vibrant ambiance left Lumian feeling a bit tipsy, despite not imbibing much.

If not for the mysticism catastrophe, if Aurore were still alive, if he'd already entered university with no other concerns, wouldn't it be nice to just unwind at a bar?

Sea travelers couldn't help but discuss pirates. Bartender Francesco informed Lumian, "With the widespread use of ironclad warship technology on merchant vessels, it's become tough for pirates. Their sailboats can't match these iron-skinned monsters cruising at 16 to 17 knots. They can't plunder them even if they tried!"

Lowering his voice, Francesco continued, "Pirates' go-to strategy now is sending individuals disguised as passengers to board ships from different ports. Once they hit a designated area in the sea, they create internal chaos, gaining initial control and allowing a nearby pirate ship to close in."

"Is that so?" Lumian inquired with interest. "Any guesses on who might be an undercover pirate on this ship?"

Francesco was taken aback.

"It's just the first day. How can I tell?"

Lumian smiled, teasing, "Ever been through something like this before?"

[1] From "Le Tour De France Gourmand"

Chapter 511: Warning

511 Warning

Francesco let out a heavy sigh and spoke, "Back in the first half of the year, when I tended bar on another ship, we ran into pirates. Over ten of them were among the passengers. They seized control of the engine and boiler cabins right from the start, repelling any attempts by the crew to fight back. They waited for their pirate vessel to draw near.

"Thank you, Earth Mother. They only ransacked the cabins one by one, and as long as we didn't resist, they left us unharmed. Naturally, the beautiful ladies and gentlemen were excluded. You can't expect pirates to have high moral standards."

Lumian took a sip of mint-flavored absinthe, a smile playing on his lips.

"Aren't they worried that there might be someone like the adventurer Gehrman Sparrow among the passengers? What if they encounter a powerhouse unwilling to part with their money and ready to use force?"

Francesco was caught off guard by Lumian's question.

After a pause, he replied, "Being a pirate involves higher risks, doesn't it?"

"That does make sense," Lumian nodded in agreement.

Francesco went on, "Many merchant ships nowadays hire retired navy personnel, maritime adventurers, and professional mercenaries for protection. They're tough and can handle onboard disturbances. Plus, they make pirates think twice, leaving room for negotiation.

"There was a similar incident on a merchant ship before. Pirates had the upper hand, took control, but hesitated to take on a sailor team led by adventurers. They opted for negotiations, demanded a protection fee, and withdrew without looting the cabins."

Lumian chuckled.

"If I were a pirate, I'd start a security company in Port Gati, offering knowledgeable maritime mercenaries. If ships hire them, I'd earn some fees. If not, well, then it's time for a good old-fashioned plunder. Either way, I'd make a profit."

Francesco eyed the black-haired, green-eyed man in his twenties with surprise and muttered,

"Don't tell me you're an undercover pirate? The maritime factions are in chaos. Can your subordinates protect those who hire you from other pirates? Sigh, that's why I've never liked the sea. Stepping on the ground gives me a greater sense of security.

"Praise the Earth, praise the Mother of All Things!"

A pure Feynapotterian who believes in Earth Mother… Lumian smiled and asked, "If you don't like the sea, why are you still working as a bartender on the ship?"

Francesco's expression gradually became animated.

"Don't you find it romantic to have an independent kingdom, one that can hardly contact the outside world, floating out at sea? When you meet a beautiful lady here, you'll feel that only the two of you are left in the entire world. You can only rely on each other."

Your ultimate goal is to find a romantic encounter? Sometimes, Lumian found it hard to comprehend the Feynapotterians and some Trieriens who resembled them.

At that moment, Francesco gestured towards a round table.

"That's Philip, the security supervisor of the Flying Bird. He claims to be a retired officer of the Fog Sea fleet. He destroyed numerous pirate ships with his cannons and personally captured many pirates with wanted posters."

Lumian followed Francesco's finger, gazing at the hall illuminated by kerosene chandeliers.

A group of men and women gathered around a round table to the side. In their midst was a middle-aged man with short light-gold hair, light-blue eyes, and a weathered face. Despite his appearance, he didn't exude seriousness or formality.

Philip, clad in a dark-blue tweed crew attire, raised a glass of Lanti Proof and boasted, "When I served on the San Martin, I crossed paths with the Queen of Ailment, Tracy. Back then, she was only Vice Admiral Ailment. Tsk tsk, as expected of the most beautiful woman in the Five Seas…

"I'll tell you this, if we ever encounter a formidable pirate, don't fret. I know them, and I have a certain level of friendship with them. At the very least, I can negotiate…

"Haha, don't ask why naval officers have ties to great pirates. There are many things at sea you don't understand, and it's best not to delve into them…"

The men and women surrounding Philip listened attentively, occasionally expressing surprise at the mention of influential figures or when he narrated thrilling adventure stories.

At some point, Philip's left hand had wrapped around a girl's waist, and she didn't make any attempt to escape. Instead, she wore a shy expression.

Lumian averted his gaze and asked bartender Francesco, "Does he really know so many great pirates? Is he genuinely a retired officer of the Fog Sea fleet?"

Having finished wiping a cup, Francesco spread his hands and said, "Who knows? However, since he took over as the Flying Bird's security supervisor, we haven't faced any pirate attacks during our five trips out to sea in the past few months. I don't know if it's luck or if he truly knows many pirates and can spot spies at a glance, giving them an advanced warning."

In the Five Seas, where pirates are a constant threat, the likelihood of avoiding encounters on five consecutive long-distance voyages is slim… Lumian turned his body again, scrutinizing Philip, whose skin bore the rough, red, and weathered marks of a seasoned mariner.

It was challenging to discern if this person was a Beyonder, let alone determine his Sequence. However, Lumian could deduce from the physical details that he had spent considerable time at sea.

Lumian focused and briefly observed Philip's luck.

It carried a hint of blood.

There's a possibility of combat and injuries in the future, but it won't endanger his life… Lumian frowned, finishing the absinthe in his hand and requesting another glass of Lanti Proof.

Before long, Philip left the bar with the girl still wrapped around his waist, his face flushed.

Lumian clicked his tongue and shook his head.

"You Intisians."

After a while, rhythmic music filled the bar. Many customers stood up and rushed to the empty space in the middle to dance.

Lumian held the liquor, swaying gently to the rhythm, appearing lost in thought.

Since discovering that the evil god's bestowed beings were up to no good, he hadn't felt this relaxed in a long time.

The Hostel plan was now in the past. The investigation of April Fool's key members could only commence upon reaching Port Santa.

This was a rare vacation.

Estimating that it was time for Ludwig's second late-night snack, Lumian set down his glass and left the bar on the deck.

As Lumian made his way back to the first-class cabin, he suddenly whispered, "Temiboros, is there any way to identify Beyonders on the ship and the passengers disguised as pirates? I want to visit them one by one, warn them to behave, and not interfere with my enjoyment of the journey."

If anyone refused to heed the warning, 007 could assist in collecting the bounty. The Beyonder characteristics they produced could also be exchanged for money!

Termiboros's majestic voice echoed in Lumian's ears.

"Only when you become an Inevitability demigod or switch pathways will you have a solution."

Without waiting for Lumian's response, the sealed Angel added, "With Alista Tudor's lingering aura and the slight corruption of 0-01, there's a high chance that you'll trigger a calamity if you really warn those people."

Does that mean I'm the greatest calamity and just need to take care of myself? Lumian, who had hoped to reorganize the Flying Bird's dark world and ensure a pleasant journey, understood Termiboros's meaning. He had no choice but to give up.

At that moment, the Flying Bird had fallen into a deep slumber. Lumian walked across the solid floor, the faint creaks and muffled cries echoing around him.

Somewhere within the ship, a woman wept in heartbreaking sobs.

Lumian was no stranger to such despair. He'd often heard Miss Ethans, the object of Charlie's admiration at Auberge du Coq Doré, cry in similar anguish.

There are people who suffer everywhere. Sad people… Lumian, influenced by his writer sister, possessed a touch of the artistic spirit.

Shaking his head, he returned to Room 5, his first-class cabin.

Lugano had already retired to the servants' quarters, while Ludwig, clad in pajamas and a nightcap, awaited his late-night snack.

Lumian sighed and retrieved the easily preserved food from his Traveler's Bag, grateful he'd restocked at Port Gati.

He calculated the cost of Ludwig's daily meals—100 verl d'or, translating to almost 40,000 verl d'or annually. A wave of vexation washed over him. At this rate, Ludwig would deplete his savings within two years.

He couldn't help but wonder if Baron Brignais had breathed a sigh of relief upon confirming Ludwig's "disappearance."

After settling the two midnight meals, Lumian quickly washed and settled into the master bedroom.

As the gentle sway of the ship lulled him, his mind drifted off to sleep.

Lumian woke up at 6 a.m., feeling refreshed.

The dining table was bare, Ludwig and Lugano still asleep.

He pushed open the window and stretched, inhaling the crisp morning air.

Just before seven, the doorbell rang.

My breakfast was scheduled to arrive at 8:30 a.m.… Lumian opened the door and found Philip, the Flying Bird's security supervisor with his blond hair, blue eyes, and weathered face, standing before him.

Philip looked grim, a stark contrast to the jovial man he'd been at the bar the previous night.

"I've confirmed that your identification documents are fake."

How did he confirm it? Why did he specially check our identification? Lumian didn't feel that anything about them stood out after they boarded the ship.

Suppressing his confusion, he frowned and asked, "Are you attempting to extort us?"

Philip glanced at the living room and said solemnly, "I don't care who you were or what you plan to do. Just behave yourselves during your stay on the Flying Bird. Enjoy the journey, don't cause any trouble, and we'll all be fine."

He's really confirming if we are problematic… How did this guy do it? He's quite capable. He's not as frivolous and simple as he seems… Lumian replied calmly, not giving in, "I'm afraid I don't understand. Perhaps there's a misunderstanding?"

Philip locked eyes with him for a long moment.

"As long as you understand what I'm saying," he finally replied before turning and walking away.

Chapter 512: Strange Pirate Ship

512 Strange Pirate Ship

Lumian watched Philip's retreating figure disappear into the distance, a silent chuckle escaping his lips.

This guy was competent, he had to admit. Gone was the frivolous, greasy, and undisciplined facade he'd displayed at the bar the night before.

It was a common trait among many Intisian men, Lumian observed. When not engaged in demanding work and surrounded by attractive women, they turned into preening peacocks, desperate to display their prowess. Becoming a Beyonder didn't change that fundamental nature.

Demonesses thrived in Intis, especially in Trier. This wasn't just due to the city's underground allure; there was a deeper, more harmonious connection with the society at large.

Lumian wasn't offended by Philip's warning, nor did he take it personally.

He'd planned to enjoy the voyage over the next few days, even considered lending a hand in maintaining order on the ship, becoming a shadow inquisitor of sorts.

But now, his primary concern shifted to how Philip had unmasked their true identities.

Lumian had meticulously combed through Aurore's grimoire, studying the abilities of Low-Sequence Beyonders across 22 pathways, and supplemented his knowledge with information gleaned from various sources over the past months. From this, he formed a preliminary hypothesis.

Philip is likely a Beyonder of one of three pathways—Spectator, Reader, or Arbiter.

One excels at observing minute details and reading people's true thoughts. Another is a master of deduction, their Sequence 7 even being called "Detective." They can detect abnormalities from the most subtle clues. The third, at Sequence 8 Public Security Officer, wields extraordinary control within their jurisdiction, allowing them to sense and trace anomalies…

Given that we haven't spoken directly with Philip before, I can eliminate the Spectator option. Besides, Spectators aren't typically chosen as security supervisors, it's not their forte…

After discovering that there was a problem with us through his abilities and that our origins were unclear, Philip likely checked copies of our identification and sent telegrams to the issuing authorities. And he received confirmation that these three people didn't exist?

This explains the delay in his warning. He'd waited for the investigation and response before making his move.

This also implies he has a network of helpers across different regions, receives information and feedback, and possesses extensive connections.

Doing this alone wouldn't be possible. He has an organization backing him, something more official, perhaps? He did claim to be a retired officer of the Fog Sea Fleet, after all…

Such a person is indeed well-suited to lead the security on a heavily armed merchant ship like this.

Lumian turned away and closed the door, a wave of relief washing over him.

With such a capable security supervisor at the helm, issuing discrete warnings to potential threats, the journey ahead promised to be relatively safe.

Lumian spent the morning in the comfort of his first-class cabin, Cabin 5, indulging in a leisurely study of Highlander and breaking up his reading with bouts of exercise. Meanwhile, Ludwig, after breakfast, had begged Lugano to take him on a tour of the ship, spending over an hour on deck playing like a genuine child.

Lumian, however, suspected the true purpose of this excursion was to meticulously survey the location and condition of the ship's food reserves.

Before lunch, drawn by the bright sun, Lumian descended to the deck. He rested his hands on the railing and gazed out at the vast, dark-blue expanse of the sea.

From the corner of his eye, he caught sight of Philip, back to his usual casual demeanor. He was now entangled with the girl from the previous night at the bow of the ship, whispering sweet nothings and laughing, the picture of a smitten couple.

You Intisians… Lumian shook his head with a chuckle.

After leaving Trier, he had adjusted his usual phrases to better reflect reality.

Philip and the girl continued their stroll along the deck, their laughter echoing through the air.

With the enhanced hearing of a Hunter, Lumian had no trouble making out the girl's name—Gozia. Though not conventionally beautiful, she exuded a youthful vibrancy that was undeniable.

Lumian watched as Philip's gaze darted beyond the ship's railing, his face hardening for a brief moment.

Following the security supervisor's line of sight, Lumian scanned the horizon, spotting a colossal shadow lurking beneath the undulating waves!

It disappeared as quickly as it appeared, swallowed by the surging sea.

Smaller than the Flying Bird, but far larger than any sea creature… Giant fish, or something more? Lumian mused, a spark of excitement igniting within him.

"My dear, what has captured your attention?" Gozia's voice broke through Philip's reverie.

"My sweetheart, just thinking about which first-class restaurant I'll treat you to later," Philip replied nonchalantly.

Suddenly, a thin veil of fog crept upwards from the sea, obscuring the sun and dimming the surrounding environment.

The passengers and crew on deck remained unfazed, accustomed to such sudden weather changes in the Fog Sea. Although less intense than the Berserk Sea, the unpredictable nature of the region was ever-present.

As Gozia reveled in the first foggy day of their journey, Philip discreetly raised his right arm, gesturing towards the spot where the shadow had vanished.

He doesn't think it's a passing giant fish… Lumian admired the sea ahead with interest. He noticed several crew members ending their breaks and taking their positions, including the gunners.

The peaceful atmosphere was shattered by a loud splash as a monstrous iron-black behemoth surfaced from the depths.

It was a peculiar-looking "ship."

It was covered in a layer of metal, with only thin pipes resembling snail eyes protruding from its hull.

As seawater cascaded off its sides, the upper half of the strange vessel split open, revealing a fearsome array of cannons and masts rising from within, creating a wide deck.

Dozens, perhaps even hundreds of pirates armed with firearms and swords were on the deck, filling the air with their intimidating cries.

A white sail unfurled automatically, right to the top of the mast.

Wow… Lumian marveled inwardly.

He had never seen such a magical vessel before, a vessel that could disappear and reappear from the depths of the sea.

Philip's expression grew increasingly grave.

Beside him, Gozia froze, her eyes wide with terror as she instinctively huddled closer to her lover.

"Which pirate crew is this?"

"Only one man commands such undersea vessels," Philip replied, his voice devoid of its usual frivolity and heavy with grim certainty. "Admiral Deep Sea, Howl Constantine. Judging by the size of this vessel, it's not his flagship, the Newins. It's the Black Octopus, commanded by his most trusted subordinate, Bone Splitter Basil."

Gozia's vision swam, and she nearly fainted.

The night before, during their conversation, Philip had mentioned the infamous maritime kings and pirate admirals who ruled the Five Seas. Among them, Howl Constantine, who had recently risen to the rank of Admiral, was shrouded in mystery.

Legend whispered of his monstrous heritage, claiming he possessed the blood of sea monsters. He had even ventured into the ruins of a sunken city, recovering the relics of ancient alchemists: two stealth boats capable of navigating the depths of the ocean unseen.

Inspired by these vessels, the Church of the God of Steam and Machinery had attempted to develop their own undersea fleet. However, they failed to mass produce them. Due to the reliance on higher Sequence Beyonders, only one or two of these vessels could be assigned to each Intisian fleet, each serving specialized functions.

Of Admiral Deep Sea's two undersea vessels, the first, the Newins, was a behemoth rivaling the Flying Bird in size. Inspired by a renowned maritime treasure legend, it served as Howl Constantine's flagship. The second, the Black Octopus, which had just emerged from the depths, was entrusted to his most trusted subordinate, Bone Splitter Basil.

He was an equally formidable figure, known for his cold-blooded brutality and ruthless tactics. He took pleasure in torturing his captives, and the bounty on his head, far exceeding that of most non-Admiral pirates, stood at a staggering 250,000 verl d'or.

The revelation of the Black Octopus and Bone Splitter Basil plunged Gozia into a pit of despair.

How could a mere armed merchant ship like the Flying Bird possibly stand against such notorious pirates from the Five Seas?

What horrors awaited them under Bone Splitter Basil's reign of terror?

Philip, however, had no time for his new lover's distress. His full attention was focused on the unfolding spectacle of the Black Octopus and its menacing cannons, ready to unleash their fury at any moment.

Standing a short distance away, Lumian felt a thrill coursing through his veins when he heard the name Bone Splitter Basil, the strongest subordinate to Admiral Deep Sea Howl Constantine. This was not nervousness, but the exhilarating feeling from catching a whiff of iron and blood.

This was one of the Hunters' belligerence.

Even after fully digesting the potions, a Beyonder would still be affected by them.

Lumian's emerald eyes, sharp as an eagle's, locked onto the bizarre iron-black ship as he formulated his next move.

Once Bone Splitter Basil emerged and the two vessels closed the distance, Lumian planned to "teleport" behind the infamous pirate and unleash the

Spell of Harrumph.

If the Spell of Harrumph's effect proved insufficient and failed to incapacitate Basil, Lumian would don his Flog boxing gloves, instill a specific desire within his opponent, and "teleport" again, creating greater distance before activating the Symphony of Hatred, amplifying the instilled desire to a maddening degree.

With Bone Splitter Basil severely wounded and momentarily incapacitated, Lumian would seize the opportunity to unleash his full Hunter arsenal, striking the enemy down with devastating blows.

To prevent interference from the surrounding pirates, he could potentially create a Bottle of Fiction and isolate Bone Splitter Basil for a one-on-one duel…

A complex plan, complete with contingency measures, raced through Lumian's mind, causing a slight tremor in his body, as if anticipating the thrill of the coming battle.

Just as the tension reached a peak and a naval confrontation seemed imminent, the pirates aboard the Black Octopus turned as one, their eyes fixed in shock upon the stairs leading deeper into the vessel.

A few seconds later, the bizarre iron-black ship made an abrupt turn, altering its course and steering away from the Flying Bird.

With swift precision, the exposed sections of the Black Octopus retracted, sealing its interior once more.

In the eyes of Lumian and the others, the Black Octopus rapidly distanced itself, diving back into the depths of the foggy sea.

In the blink of an eye, it transformed into a mere shadow, disappearing completely.

"E-escaped?" Uttering the word after a long moment of dazed silence, Gozia turned to her lover, her voice filled with surprise and confusion.

Bone Splitter Basil and his Black Octopus were simply leaving?

Without a fight, without plundering?

Philip, himself bewildered, stared at the spot where the Black Octopus had vanished, forcing a smile onto his face.

"Didn't I tell you that I know many great pirates?"

Chapter 513: Worry

513 Worry

Gozia's gaze instantly turned fervent upon hearing Philip's response, her admiration evident.

Have they escaped? Lumian's lips twitched. The Black Octopus's abrupt change of course and sudden dive left him speechless.

The maneuver caught him off guard, leaving him frozen for a critical moment.

This incredible underwater ship, commanded by a great pirate with a massive bounty, simply turned tail and fled without even firing a single cannon?

How could one be a pirate with such puny guts?

Bone Splitter Basil? With a bounty of 250,000 verl d'or and a fearsome reputation? Don't even think about showing your face on the high seas again!

Lumian cursed under his breath, then frowned thoughtfully. Why had Bone Splitter Basil fled without revealing himself?

I could understand if it was the Blood Emperor's aura I activated that made you run so fast, but why now?

It couldn't be that he targeted the wrong ship, did he? The Flying Bird isn't the merchant vessel he wanted to plunder, so he was rushing to corner his real prey?

Did he somehow sense that hijacking this ship would lead to disaster?

If he truly possessed the power of divination or prophecy, they would have known not to come. He wouldn't have had to embarrass himself in front of the crew and passengers, only to turn back and drift aimlessly…

Danger Premonition? A Hunter's danger intuition wouldn't react so strongly until it's face-to-face with the threat…

Then it hit him. A Sequence that had him wary for months: Sequence 6 Devil of the Criminal pathway!

Beyonders at this Sequence possessed a unique ability called "Malicious Perception."

If someone within their range intended to cause them lethal harm and acted on it within a specific timeframe, they could sense the source of the danger and identify their attacker.

Bone Splitter Basil… a Devil? His title and reputation certainly fit…

I had just formulated a hunting plan for him, intending to "teleport" over after confirming the situation. Did he sense my malice and confirm the extent of the danger before swiftly deciding to escape?

Hey, you're a Devil. Are you running away without a fight? I'm not even confident in defeating a Devil. Besides, you're on your alchemical boat with a large number of subordinates around you. You probably don't lack mystical items. Do you have to be so cowardly?

The plan I envisioned had a high success rate, so much so that Basil's ability to sense danger exceeded his endurance. Therefore, he didn't take the risk and chose the most effective and safest response—escape? The more Lumian pondered, the more he felt that this guess was close to the truth.

This amused him as well.

To be honest, his plan was quite idealistic. He didn't consider the Bone Splitter Sequence or the abilities of the surrounding pirates, nor did he consider how to use the Bottle of Fiction to single out Basil for a one-on-one battle. All of this depended on his subsequent observations of the Black Octopus

Hunters might not be the ones who charged forward to fight from the beginning. They might even be the last to appear and be responsible for harvesting.

But did such a simple plan and malice scare away a Devil in advance?

Lumian suspected that Basil might not be able to sense the specific plan. It was only because he had the Angel of Inevitability, the Blood Emperor's aura, Mr. Fool's seal, and 0-01's mild corruption, regardless of whether they were powerful or not, that they combined with a feasible plan and clear malice. It strongly agitated the Bone Splitter, making him feel that the impending danger was beyond his ability to handle. Hence, the scene just now.

Are all Devils so timid? Lumian cursed silently and left the deck in disappointment, returning to Room 5 of the first-class cabin.

At that moment, the exclusive attendant had arrived with lunch. Ludwig focused on the delicacies, while Lugano lingered by the window, his face filled with excitement.

Upon seeing Lumian's return, the Doctor exclaimed excitedly, "Just now, a great pirate appeared—Bone Splitter Basil, Admiral Deep Sea Howl Constantine's most formidable captain. He even operates the Black Octopus. H-have you heard of the Black Octopus? It's a mystical ship that can dive to the seabed!"

"I heard it from someone at the bar last night," Lumian replied honestly.

Prior to this, he didn't know much about Admiral Deep Sea and his pirate crew. All he knew was that there was such a pirate admiral. After all, Howl Constantine was quite mysterious and rarely appeared in newspapers and magazines that recorded sea stories. His only appearance in The Adventurer series was his title and name, giving him a background without any plot lines.

Lugano didn't hide his emotions.

"I witnessed the mystical pirate ship with my own eyes. It truly surfaced from the seabed and can bloom like a flower!

"I thought we'd clash with the Bone Splitter and use your teleportation abilities to escape. To my surprise, Black Octopus chose to leave after observing for just over ten seconds."

Over ten seconds? Aren't you looking down on Bone Splitters? It was a few seconds! Lumian retorted inwardly.

Lugano continued, "When I chatted with a few sailors this morning, they told me that the Flying Bird's security supervisor is a formidable retired officer who knows many great pirates. I thought they were boasting, but from the looks of it, that security supervisor isn't simple. It's really possible that he has ties to many great pirates. That's why Bone Splitter Basil didn't plunder the Flying Bird!"

"That's right, that's right," Lumian echoed.

Rip… Ludwig tore off the oily skin and meat from a duck leg.

Lumian glanced at the boy, who was engrossed in his food, and suddenly had a new idea.

Could the malice and danger that Bone Splitter Basil sensed be more than one? Could it not be solely from me?

Ludwig might have swallowed hard upon hearing the word "bone dismantling"…

However, even though this walking bottomless stomach when compared to me appears high-ranking, he lacks the corresponding abilities…

…

To celebrate the fact that the Flying Bird hadn't been plundered by the Black Octopus, the captain hosted a party on the deck in the evening, featuring clowns, magicians, and beast tamers. He treated everyone to three glasses of beer.

Late at night, the third-class bar bustled with activity. Philip became the center of attention, surrounded by nearly all the patrons. They took turns praising him and treating him to drinks.

They were all grateful to the security supervisor for using his friendship with Bone Splitter Basil to persuade the great pirate to leave and prevent the passengers of the Flying Bird from suffering.

Lumian, seated at the bar counter and engaged in conversation with bartender Francesco, savored the Lanti Proof. His gaze casually swept across Philip's face, and he noticed a hint of seriousness and worry beneath the blond-haired, blue-eyed middle-aged man's frivolous smile.

In other words, he wasn't that happy.

Yes, I'm sure he didn't scare the Black Octopus away… Heh heh, you're still relatively clear-headed. It's not something to celebrate knowing that a huge problem approached your ship but abnormally chose to leave. This often means that there's greater trouble lurking on your ship… Lumian chuckled inwardly and averted his gaze. He continued to converse with bartender Francesco about the beautiful women in the third-class cabin.

After nearly an hour, Philip squeezed out of the drunken crowd and sat beside Lumian with his lover, Gozia.

He knocked on the table and ordered a glass of golden beer. Casually, he said, "You actually enjoy drinking in such a rowdy place."

"The girls here are more enthusiastic than in first class." Lumian could roughly guess Philip's motive for coming, but he didn't inquire further.

Philip chuckled. "That's true."

Casually, he inquired, "What did you do when the Black Octopus arrived?"

"Don't you remember? I wasn't far from you. Don't you know what I did?" Lumian replied candidly.

Philip nodded slightly and didn't press further.

Lumian took a sip of liquor and asked with a smile, "Do you think there's a huge problem on the ship that scared off that little troublemaker?"

Philip turned his head and glanced at Lumian, not too surprised that he had made such a connection.

"What are you two talking about?" The tipsy Gozia couldn't quite grasp the conversation between the two men.

It was as if they were speaking in riddles.

"That's the most logical explanation I can come up with," Philip replied, ignoring his lover's question.

Lumian asked with interest, "Who do you think is suspicious?"

From yesterday afternoon to noon today, the security supervisor must have warned many people.

Philip set down his beer mug and massaged his temples.

After some thought, he smiled. "I wanted to tell you, but I don't think that's necessary now."

"Why?" Lumian inquired curiously.

Philip took another sip of his beer and chuckled.

"As long as that huge problem doesn't erupt on the ship, it won't be a problem for me.

"As you can see, it hasn't revealed itself and is quietly hiding. This means that it might just want to reach the archipelago or Port Santa without a hitch."

At this point, Philip sighed and said with experience, "Many times, when you see an abnormality, there's no need to care or figure out the truth. Pretending not to notice and patiently waiting for the abnormality to leave is the best choice.

"The abnormality that didn't erupt isn't abnormal. Your investigation and investigation might agitate it, escalating the problem and causing the catastrophe to truly descend.

"As long as that abnormality doesn't truly harm us, try your best to maintain reverence and avoid stimulation. That's one of the key reasons why I've been able to survive at sea until now."

Lumian nodded gently and said, "A relative of mine once mentioned that in certain events, those who can't see, hear, speak, or smell are more likely to survive."

Philip smiled and extended his right hand.

"I'm glad you share that understanding."

This was his true motive for coming to talk to Lumian. He wanted Lumian, who was using a fake identity, not to be curious and try to figure out the hidden trouble on the ship.

That might implicate the entire ship!

Understanding Philip's meaning, Lumian couldn't help but raise his eyebrows.

Does this mean there are other troubles on the ship?

Chapter 514: Huge Wave

514 Huge Wave

Lumian took a moment to consider. He didn't think there was any real danger.

Philip's concern was based on Bone Splitter Basil's reaction, which only hinted at a potential problem on the ship. While Philip knew which passengers and crew members were suspicious, he couldn't pinpoint the real source of the trouble. He wasn't even sure if he was right, and wouldn't dare to be certain. Therefore, his suspect might not be the actual issue.

In other words, it was more likely that the real problem was actually sitting right beside him: Lumian and his new godson, Ludwig. However, Philip wasn't aware of this, and by excluding them, would mistakenly focus on other suspects.

Apart from Ludwig and me, whether there are other serious problems or not, Philip is right, Lumian thought, letting out a soft sigh. Before any major troubles surface, it's best not to investigate or provoke them. We'll pretend not to see, hear, or speak, and wait for them to reach their destination and leave the Flying Bird…

Of course, this depends on the situation remaining stable. If any abnormalities arise, we'd have to find a way to resolve them immediately. Sometimes, pretending not to see things doesn't prevent them from worsening. The Cordu catastrophe is a gruesome reminder of that… Lumian thought and sighed softly.

He turned around and extended his hand, briefly shaking Philip's with a smile.

"I'm glad we reached an agreement."

Philip breathed a sigh of relief, retracted his right hand, and downed his golden malt beer.

He had been worried that someone like Louis Berry, who used a fake identity and was suspected of being a criminal, would be stubborn and adventurous. He was concerned that Louis wouldn't listen to reason and would insist on uncovering the "huge problem" that scared off the Black Octopus.

Philip felt no sympathy for someone who might die because of their own foolishness, but he didn't want them to endanger everyone else.

Thankfully, Louis Berry seemed like someone who could be reasoned with.

As Philip drained his beer, he kept assuring himself:

The Fog Sea Archipelago wasn't far from the Republic. In fact, its proximity was why Intis had chosen it as its first overseas colony. The Flying Bird wouldn't need to stop at other ports for supplies on its journey, allowing it to arrive directly.

Assuming the weather remained calm, the Flying Bird should dock in Farim, the capital of the Fog Sea Archipelago, by the following evening. If they encountered bad weather, they might need to slow down, change course, or seek refuge in another port. The latest they could arrive would be noon the day after tomorrow.

Perhaps that troublesome problem would disembark in Port Farim?

Even if something was brewing beneath the surface, it wouldn't fully erupt in just a day or two.

Endure, and it would be over!

Reassured, Philip—hugging his lover, Gozia—rose from his barstool and left the bustling bar.

Lumian continued sipping his Lanti Proof, seemingly unfazed.

With a smile, he turned to the bartender, Francesco, and remarked, "I've heard that many Feynapotterians are homesick. Even when they have to leave for work, they often return home, write letters, or send telegrams. You, however, chose to work overseas, on a ship that makes it difficult to stay in touch with the outside world."

Francesco raised his hand and gestured. "While I love my family dearly, families like ours, with generations living together, often face various problems and conflicts. My grandmother, a wise woman, manages us well, but it can be stifling for the younger generation. There are too many elders eager to share their life experiences.

"Furthermore, my home is in Port Santa. The Flying Bird docks there almost every month. So, for me, this job is both work and a trip home."

It's just like the book that described Feynapotterian customs. Feynapotterians enjoy living in large families spanning multiple generations. And in such families, the most senior woman who has given birth becomes the natural matriarch, controlling the entire family's affairs, regardless of whether her husband is alive. In a religious sense, such a woman is considered the embodiment of Earth Mother within the family… His chat with Bartender Francesco wasn't purely for relaxation. He had two goals: Firstly, he wanted to understand the passengers better through Francesco's eyes. His final destination was Port Santa, which was five to six days away. Paying attention to the various details of life on the Flying Bird was crucial. Secondly, he wanted to verify the information in his books and gain a grasp of local customs in the Feynapotter Kingdom. Missing out on important knowledge could lead him to misinterpret situations in Port Santa.

…

The night passed peacefully, save for a child waking up twice to eat, the rhythmic chewing noises hardly disturbing Lumian's sleep. The gentle rocking of the ship and the waves outside his window created a lulling atmosphere.

Just when he thought the Flying Bird would smoothly reach Port Farim, the capital of the Fog Sea Archipelago, by evening, the weather took a sudden turn.

The sea, previously veiled in a thin fog, began to seethe. Giant waves, like towering mountains, rose and fell in rapid succession.

The Flying Bird bobbed precariously on the waves, its air of colossal power replaced by vulnerability.

Now, it was a mere leaf tossed between the sky and the sea, a toy in the hands of a giant. Tiny and fragile, it seemed ready to capsize at any moment.

Oddly, the massive waves were not accompanied by darkness or torrential rain. Instead, the howling wind dispersed the fog above, revealing a clear azure sky.

A sailor scrambled down from the observation deck and, holding his telescope to Philip, shouted, "Boss, this wave isn't right!

"Only our area has waves this big! Everywhere else is calm!

"There's no rain here either!"

Philip, holding onto Gozia who trembled pale from the force of the elements, instinctively furrowed his brow.

Abnormal waves?

Had that "major problem" caused them?

No sooner had the thought crossed his mind than the Flying Bird was flung into the air by a monstrous wave, only to be slammed onto another.

Terrifying jolts and tremors reverberated through the air, eliciting screams of fear from many passengers.

They sensed the Flying Bird teetering on the brink of capsizing, a shipwreck imminent.

In first-class cabin number 5, Lugano stared calmly out the window, gripping the frame as the dining table slid across the room with the force of the storm.

He knew that if the Flying Bird couldn't withstand the tempest, Lumian Lee would undoubtedly "teleport" him and Ludwig to safety in Port Farim.

Lumian, gazing at the strangely calm azure sea beyond the monstrous waves, sensed something amiss.

He wasted no time, retrieving the Mystery Prying Glasses from his Traveler's Bag, hoping to uncover the hidden cause of this disaster.

As the brown, gold-rimmed glasses settled on the bridge of his nose, a familiar dizziness washed over him. He saw a chaotic montage of scenes around him unfold.

On deck, a tidal wave surged, tossing Philip. Clutching a rope in desperation, he descended rapidly with Gozia. He instinctively positioned himself below her, shielding his new lover from the fall. He landed with a heavy thud, the rope burning a gash into his palm, drawing blood.

Chaos reigned in the dining hall as plates, knives, and forks flew through the air; customers were flung around.

In one room, a blurry figure of a woman sat by the window, sobbing uncontrollably.

The boiler chamber was a scene of disarray, scattered coal littering the floor. Beneath it crawled a horrifying horde of creatures resembling seashells.

And beneath the deceptively calm azure surface, a peculiar fish gazed up at the beleaguered Flying Bird!

Its size rivaled that of a shark, its grayish-black body devoid of scales, replaced instead by numerous, pulsing meatballs. These strange orbs shimmered with an interconnected, faint starlight, forming cryptic symbols. It sported a pair of eyes on each side of its head, and its gaping maw was as sharp as a flagpole.

Surrounding this strange fish and numerous similar fish seemed to form a school.

With a sharp gasp, Lumian ripped off the Mystery Prying Glasses and stuffed them back into his Traveler's Bag, his chest heaving.

He suspected the strange fish were behind the violent waves, though it was unclear if the wind was a consequence of the upheaval or a separate cause.

Knowing the strange fish were submerged, Lumian discarded the idea of using a massive fireball to guide the Flying Bird's cannons towards them.

Instead, he activated the black mark on his right shoulder and "teleported" himself to the nearby patch of sea he had just witnessed.

As he did so, he retrieved the blackened bone flute adorned with dark-red holes.

General Philip's Symphony of Hatred!

Lumian materialized mid-air and, while descending, brought the bone flute to his lips.

He had learned the flute from shepherds during his time in Cordu, and over the past few days, he had been diligently practicing and refining his skills. Now, he began to play a melodious tune, one filled with a longing for home.

It was a favorite melody among the wandering shepherds.

The muffled explosions of fireballs churned the water, slowing Lumian's descent. But amidst his melody, a new tune, one that seemed to emanate from the depths of destiny itself, pierced through the seawater and reached the "ears" of the strange fish and their kind below.

Suddenly, the strange fish froze. A mountain-like wave descended, but no new ones followed.

Boom! Boom! Boom! The smaller fish surrounding the strange fish exploded from their heads, turning on their own kind in a frenzy. Others simply died and floated to the surface.

Lumian's descent accelerated as his feet, legs, and body submerged into the icy sea.

He continued playing the shepherds' longing melody, feeling the seawater reach his neck and threatening to engulf his mouth.

The next moment, dark-red blood oozed from the four eyes and multiple bumps on the shark-sized fish.

The terrifying waves subsided rapidly.

With only half his head above water, Lumian lowered the bone flute and smiled. He activated Spirit World Traversal once more.

Cough, cough, cough! As he materialized back in Room 5 of the first-class cabin, salty seawater spewed from his mouth.

In his eagerness to ensure the effectiveness of the music, he had stopped playing too late, ending up swallowing a mouthful of seawater. Additionally, fearing that too much commotion would disrupt the "teleportation," he had held his breath until returning before choking.

Is this a form of unluckiness? Lumian mused.

Lugano, startled by Lumian's drenched state, asked, "Is it resolved?"

"Seems like it," Lumian replied with a smile.

His shoes and trouser legs bore the marks of wear and tear, scorched and dripping seawater.

At that moment, cheers erupted across the Flying Bird as passengers and crew noticed the receding waves.

"Praise the Sun!"

"By steam!"

"Thank you, Mother of All Things!"

"…"

Chapter 515: Strange Fish

515 Strange Fish

Philip, unlike the other jubilant crew and passengers, pushed Gozia away whilst ignoring the pain in his back and palms and dashed to the ship's side, eyes scanning the vast expanse of the sea.

He shifted relentlessly, searching for anything unusual, anything out of place.

Then, a muffled cry pierced the air.

Stunned, he pinpointed the source and sprinted towards the Flying Bird's bow.

The cry grew louder, more desperate. Philip saw a crimson stain blossoming on the distant blue, a large shadow shifting beneath.

The shadow rapidly materialized into a monstrous fish with four eyes—grayish-blue orbs replacing scales and a terrifyingly sharp mouth.

This wasn't a small fish. It writhed and thrashed, frantic flicks of its tail sending water droplets flying.

Waves surged around it, reaching heights of five to six meters even without the wind's aid, crashing down with thunderous force.

The shrill cries subsided momentarily, and the four-eyed monster, gripped by palpable fear, plunged back into the depths, swimming away with a speed that belied its size.

Its remaining brethren followed close behind.

In the first-class cabin 5 by the window, Lumian changed into dry clothes with the casual indifference of someone unobserved.

He knew the Symphony of Hatred had ignited the four-eyed fish's terror, which is why he opted for a swift "teleport" back instead of leaping into the air and unleashing another devastating attack while the creature surfaced.

Fear would drive the monster away and prevent it from unleashing its full fury and raising further havoc.

"Phew," Philip breathed, relief washing over him as the four-eyed fish disappeared from sight.

"Thank goodness, thank goodness," he muttered, his voice filled with gratitude. He spread his arms wide and exclaimed, "Praise the Sun!"

"Do you know that fish?"

A voice suddenly broke the silence beside Philip.

He turned in surprise to see Louis Berry, with his black hair, green eyes, and sharp features, standing beside him.

His lover, Gozia, stood hesitantly at the cabin entrance, wanting to approach but afraid of approaching the shipboard.

"It's the Mutated Bannerfish. Heh heh, that's what scholars call it. At sea, they have another name for it—Death Navigators," Philip answered Lumian's question, pressing his hand against the shipboard for support.

"Death Navigators? Why haven't I heard of it?" Lumian asked, genuinely curious.

To be honest, his knowledge of Beyonder creatures was limited. His previous experiences mainly involved dealing with Beyonders, heretics, and Rampagers.

Philip glanced at him, exhaled, and smiled faintly.

"These fish-like creatures have only appeared in recent years. Many sailors call them the sea's demons."

Only appeared in recent years… Lumian frowned thoughtfully.

Such descriptions often pointed towards the corruption of evil gods, environmental anomalies, or natural disasters.

"Has it only recently appeared in the Fog Sea, or was there no legend of such a fish in the Five Seas?" Lumian interrupted Philip's explanation, eager to clarify his doubts.

Philip pondered for a moment before speaking.

"I used to serve in the Fog Sea fleet. Apart from the Fog Sea, I've only traveled the North Sea. I don't know much about the Berserk Sea, the Sonia Sea, or the Polar Sea, but until a few years ago, I never heard any mention of such a strange fish from the crew, pirates, or colleagues from other fleets."

Could they be fish corrupted by an evil god? Lumian suddenly felt grateful that he hadn't impulsively tried to eliminate the Mutated Bannerfish.

Not only would it have exposed his Beyonder powers to the many crew members and passengers, but it could have also led to unforeseen dangers. And for what?

A pile of trash that would only be good enough to feed Ludwig!

Seeing that Louis Berry was no longer fixated on the detail, Philip continued, "Mutated Bannerfish appear on fog-free nights, hovering upright as if silently observing the cosmos. Many sailors and pirates have witnessed this sight, believing the fish are summoning an evil entity.

"Think about it. The night sea is pitch black, the crimson moon barely visible, and only starlight illuminates the terrifying, distorted fish heads silently emerging from the water, motionless and arranged in strange patterns… It's enough to scare anyone!"

Gazing at the cosmos… Could they have been corrupted by an evil god's power for some reason? Lumian pondered for a few seconds before asking, "Why are they called Death Navigators?"

Philip rubbed his cheeks.

"After surveying the cosmos, the Mutated Bannerfish remain on the surface, forming two lines like an arrowhead that points towards a specific spot in the sea, as if guiding some unknown creature.

"Some pirates, adventurers, and treasure hunters believe this points to valuable items or hidden treasures, so they try to follow the Mutated Bannerfish to see where they lead.

"But none of the ships that attempted this ever returned, and the crew vanished.

"That's why we call them Death Navigators."

Philip sighed and continued, "I once heard from sailors that the Death Navigators can control the waves. Judging by what we just saw, this rumor seems very likely, and it's much worse than I imagined.

"Right, that Mutated Bannerfish must have been relatively powerful even among Death Navigators.

"However, no Death Navigator has ever attacked a human ship before…"

A soft chuckle escaped Lumian's lips.

"Perhaps they attacked, but no one survived to spread the news."

Philip was taken aback.

"That's true. In such a tidal wave, once a ship capsizes or shatters, only those with special abilities would stand a chance."

He paused and muttered to himself, "Did that troublesome figure provoke the Death Navigators' attack?"

"It's possible," Lumian replied sincerely.

After confirming that the Death Navigators hadn't returned, Philip turned to the passengers and crew huddled by the window and cabin entrance.

"The danger has passed! The weather has returned to normal!"

The humans, who had cheered earlier, erupted in relieved cries, praising their deities.

Philip looked away and pondered, "Did the Death Navigator ultimately succumb to that unknown threat? I could feel its immense fear."

"It's possible," Lumian replied with the same sincerity.

With this interlude, the Flying Bird increased its speed and arrived at Port Farim, the capital of the Fog Sea Archipelago, before nightfall.

The sun set behind Saint Tick Island, casting a crimson glow over the distant sea, vast forests, and the dormant brown volcano. The sight was magnificent and breathtaking.

Farim, in the native language of the Fog Sea Archipelago, meant "having fragrance and sweetness." Saint Tick Island was rich in cloves, nutmeg, pepper, and sugarcane. Fruits were mainly bananas and grapes, while the rest of the land was planted with cotton.

Looking at the white-walled, red-roofed buildings lining the coastline, the masts, sails, and smokestacks emitting fog, Lumian chuckled and said, "Emperor Roselle, who named this city back then, probably didn't expect Farim to become the last bastion of the indigenous language."

Under generations of cultural genocide, the current Islanders could only speak Intisian. Their native language had been lost long ago.

There might be elders in the primitive tribes living deep within the forest who still understood the indigenous language, but in all the colonial cities and surrounding plantations, one language reigned supreme—Intisian.

Of course, the Fog Sea Archipelago had its own unique dialects, a blend of Intisian and indigenous languages, rarely used by Intisians outside this region.

"Are you disembarking?" Lugano inquired of Lumian.

The Flying Bird wouldn't be leaving the port until the next afternoon.

"Of course," Lumian replied with a hint of excitement. "Now that we're here in Farim, I can't miss the chance to try their famous Golden Somme! Would you like to lead the way, bringing me and Ludwig around, or would you prefer to stay here and keep an eye on him?"

The Fog Sea Archipelago was known for its superior sugarcane, and the sugar liquor produced from its syrup, called "Golden Somme," was legendary.

Lugano's first instinct was to accompany his employer, as he felt safer around Lumian's capable and decisive presence. However, after a moment of reflection, the Doctor decided it would be wiser to stay on board.

While Lumian was undeniably formidable, his talent for attracting trouble was equally impressive!

Leaving Ludwig with enough food for dinner and two rounds of late-night snacks, Lumian disembarked from the Flying Bird, dressed in a white shirt, a black vest, a dark jacket, and matching pants.

In Trier, it was already early autumn, and the air was crisp with chill. However, the Fog Sea Archipelago seemed to be enjoying the tail end of summer. Though the air was warm, it was quickly dispersed by the refreshing sea breeze.

As Lumian strolled out of the port, he spotted a brown-skinned, wrinkled old woman with black features selling golden straw hats across the street.

These hats were woven from a local plant called Golden Leaves, which was favored by the believers of the Eternal Blazing Sun religion. Wearing one supposedly gave the illusion of having the sun shining directly overhead.

Intrigued by the idea, Lumian purchased a hat for 5 licks and placed it on his head. He then continued his leisurely stroll towards the nearby square.

In the heart of the square stood a Sun Obelisk, surrounded by numerous notices adorned with wanted posters.

Lumian stopped, his hands instinctively slipping into his pockets. Before the sun dipped below the horizon, he scanned the wanted posters and committed the bounties to memory.

"Queen Mystic, one of the maritime kings… Bounty of 100 million verl d'or.

"King of the Five Seas Nast, one of the maritime kings… Bounty of 20 million verl d'or.

"Queen of Stars Cattleya, one of the maritime kings… Bounty of 11 million verl d'or.

"King of Immortality Agalito, one of the maritime kings… Bounty of 4 million verl d'or.

"Queen of Ailment Tracy, one of the maritime kings… Bounty of 3 million verl d'or.

"King of Dusk Bulatov Ivan, one of the maritime kings… Bounty of 2.6 million verl d'or…"

Observing Lumian's intense scrutiny of the six maritime kings' wanted posters, an adventurer standing beside him couldn't resist cracking a joke.

"Looking to hunt the maritime kings, eh?"

Chapter 516: Questioning Method

516 Questioning Method

Lumian whirled back to face the teasing man.

"Doesn't every adventurer who comes to sea dream of following in Gehrman Sparrow's great footsteps?"

The joking adventurer wasn't past his twenties. Curly brown hair topped a gaunt face, his Intis-blue eyes sparkling with amusement. Despite the unkempt stubble adorning his chin, he emanated a middle-class Trier air, refined in his details.

His attire: a thin blue coat, white pants, and brown boots. A large-caliber revolver and an exquisite rapier balanced his waist.

Lumian's retort and lofty aspirations seemed to surprise the adventurer. He chuckled after a moment, "Even Sparrow didn't manage to hunt down any pirate kings."

"Wasn't Gehrman Sparrow the one who supposedly killed Barros Hopkins, the vanished King of Black Throne, one of the original Four Kings of the Sea?" Although The Adventurer series hadn't touched upon it yet, Lumian was a dedicated reader of maritime tales in newspapers and magazines.

The adventurer scoffed, "Unconfirmed. Only when it's inked into The Adventurer series is it truth. They say Fors Wall was specially hired by the Church of The Fool to promote Sparrow's exploits."

Just as I suspected, the famous author, Fors Wall, operates under the protection of The Fool Church, allowing her to write without fear about the secrets of the great pirates… Lumian asked with interest, "So, the relationship between Gehrman Sparrow, the former Vice Admiral Ailment, and the current Queen of Ailment is real?"

"I'd bet on it. The Queen of Ailment herself has never denied it," the adventurer replied, clearly enjoying the conversation.

After their chat, the adventurer, with his playful demeanor, found Lumian even more appealing. He smiled and asked, "How should I address you? After learning your name and you becoming a legend like Gehrman Sparrow, I can brag to other adventurers that I knew you before you became famous."

His last sentence was laced with good-natured jest.

"Louis Berry," Lumian offered his alias. "What about you? Perhaps you'll be the next Gehrman Sparrow."

"Batna Comté." The adventurer with the wide-aperture revolver and exquisite rapier chuckled and said, "I don't expect to end up like Gehrman Sparrow. I wouldn't mind becoming the next Blazing Danitz or even the former Strongest Hunter of the Fog Sea, Anderson. That would be quite satisfying."

Quite ambitious… He doesn't seem like a newbie to the seas… Lumian quickly assessed Batna, unconsciously slipping into a Conspirer's mindset. He still believes achieving power like Blazing Danitz is possible after everything he's seen. That suggests a strong sense of self-belief… Could he be a Beyonder as well?

Adjusting his golden straw hat, Lumian smiled at Batna Comté. "Drink's on me. How about it?"

Stepping into Port Farim, the bustling capital of the Fog Sea Archipelago, Saint Tick Island, Lumian carried a double purpose: to unearth more pirate intel and acquire the remaining supplementary ingredients for the Reaper potion.

This mission demanded contact with Beyonders and local information brokers.

As his thoughts raced, Madam Magician's reward flickered across his mind:

"Reaper potion formula:

"Sequence: 5;

"Main ingredients: Gray Demonic Wolf's front claws, Forest Hunter's tongue;

"Supplementary ingredients: 80 milliliters of Gray Demonic Wolf's blood, two Forest Hunter's fangs, 10 drops of Colorful Bearded Horned Lizard venom, and 10 drops of hornbeam essential oil;

"Ritual: Plan and execute a successful capture of a target with a Sequence higher than your own. Flaunt the completed conspiracy before them, and consume the potion as they witness your victory, filled with fear and despair.

"Note 1: The increased number and higher Sequence the captured targets and the greater their fear, regret, and anger, the more potent the ritual's effect.

"Note 2: The two main ingredients can be substituted with Gardner Martin's Beyonder characteristic. His blood and two teeth can also replace the Gray Demonic Wolf's blood and Forest Hunter's fangs, respectively.

In other words, Lumian only had one sole missing ingredient: the venom of the Colorful Bearded Horned Lizard. This ingredient hinted at a rare creature. Fortunately, hornbeam essential oil, a common ingredient among mysticism enthusiasts, was already in his possession before he left Trier.

"Alright." Batna Comté didn't reject Lumian's invitation.

The two walked towards a side street off the square, where a bustling open-air market unfolded.

Towering piles of fruits lined the roadside, while stalls brimmed with Golden Leaves straw hats, juicy sugarcane, sweet scones, savory roasted meat, native cigarettes, and fried banana slices. Brownish-black Islanders, foreign sailors, curious tourists, and seasoned adventurers mingled around barbecue stalls, sharing drinks and laughter.

Two nearby bars, their doors flung open, offered round tables spilling onto the sidewalk, inviting passersby to linger and enjoy a drink.

Batna surveyed the lively scene and cautioned Lumian, "Seems like this is your first visit to the archipelago. Remember, never trust an Islander.

"Their outward deference and meekness mask their true intentions. They dream of swindling our money and selling us for a hefty price. If you lack the strength and intelligence to put them in their place, their evil thoughts will surely be put into action."

Lumian met Batna's gaze and chuckled.

"Did they take advantage of you when you first arrived?"

Batna fell silent, avoiding the question.

Lumian didn't press further. He spent two licks for a small bag of freshly fried banana slices. The crisp exterior gave way to a soft, sweet interior, bursting with flavor.

As he chewed, Batna muttered, "Those are just for children and women."

How could a grown man, determined to follow in Gehrman Sparrow's great footsteps, be indulging in fried banana slices?

In theory, at least, I'm still a minor… Lumian mentally dismissed the matter. As they continued through the market, he turned to Batna and asked, "Do pirates often enter Port Farim in disguise?"

"Yes, frequently," Batna replied without hesitation. "But hunting them here is hardly worth the trouble."

"Why not?" Lumian raised an eyebrow. "It would be easier to collect the bounty on their heads."

Batna chuckled and lowered his voice.

"Port Farim's officials tacitly allow pirates to come here, selling their plundered goods and buying supplies and pleasures in return.

"The pirate trade is a major economic force in Port Farim. Many, including the governor, the local fleet commander, and the garrison head, have amassed wealth through it."

"As long as the pirates keep a low profile, going after them in Farim is like challenging the local power players. If that happens, you and the pirates risk getting caught, but the pirates might find a way to 'jailbreak.'"

"Does Trier not have any objections?" Lumian asked, amused.

Outside Trier, people often referred to the Intis government as Trier.

"Who knows? Maybe those who know about the pirate trade are swimming in wealth from corruption. If they don't, they won't bother figuring it out," Batna chuckled. "Either way, pirates are pretty chill in Port Farim and prefer avoiding trouble."

"Is that so…" Lumian pondered for a moment and said, "If a pirate attacks me, don't I have the right to defend myself?"

"Yes, but why would they initiate an attack on you?" Batna could sense this guy was trying to provoke the pirates.

"Perhaps they think I'm an easy target?" Lumian replied as he and Batna Comté turned to a nearby bar.

They entered it, choosing to sit inside instead of on the street.

It was equally lively inside, with a mixed-race woman dancing provocatively on the wooden stage at the hall's center. Her moves synchronized with the music, frequently lifting her legs and following the rhythm. Gradually, she shed her jacket and various layers, revealing ample areas of healthy skin and gentle curves.

As she placed her hand on her undergarment, the surrounding patrons responded with whistles and loud cheers, the atmosphere reaching its climax.

"How about this? In some ways, isn't Farim more open-minded than Trier? Not only can you see it, but you can also take it away with a sum of money," Batna remarked with a smile.

Lumian raised his right hand and declared, "This only means that Farim is far enough from the reach of both the Churches and the Trier Avenue du Boulevard."

"What do you mean?" Batna was momentarily taken aback.

Lumian adopted a pious tone, mimicking a devout believer in the Eternal Blazing Sun. "It's too far from justice to be bound by the law!"

Seeing Batna's expression freeze, Lumian smiled again.

"Just kidding! Out at sea, who cares about the law? Might makes right!"

Batna chuckled, relieved. "For a second there, I thought you were about to purify the place in the name of God."

Taking their seats, they ordered the Fog Sea Archipelago's famous sugar liquor, Golden Somme.

Eight licks per glass was much cheaper than a Trier.

As the caramel-sweet liquor warmed his throat, Lumian launched into an enthusiastic conversation about Gehrman Sparrow, acting like a devoted follower. He chatted with Batna and even the bartender, drawing them into his passionate discourse.

After a while, Lumian finished his Golden Somme and stood up, drawn towards the central wooden platform where a new stripper had taken the stage.

Batna watched with a knowing smile. He assumed the lad couldn't resist the allure.

Lumian approached the platform, grabbed two patrons who were blocking his way, and effortlessly tossed them aside. With a powerful push against the platform's edge, he leaped onto the stage.

Under everyone's bewildered gaze, Lumian drew his revolver, aimed it at the bar's ceiling, and fired.

Bang!

Dust rained down, startling the stripper into a crouch. Patrons panicked, scrambling for cover. Some stood frozen in shock, others glared indignantly or frowned, and a few even sported expectant grins.

What is he thinking? What is he doing? Batna was dumbfounded.

Lumian blew on the revolver's muzzle and flashed a grin at the patrons.

"Everyone, may I have your attention. I have something to ask you."

Chapter 517: Prominent Merchant

517 Prominent Merchant

Lumian ignored the stunned silence that followed his question. A smirk played on his lips as he addressed the group,

"So, where can a fellow find some mystical trinkets around here?"

Upon hearing this question, Batna Comté couldn't help but raise his right hand and finish his remaining Golden Somme.

Where did this punk come from?

How could he ask such a question in public?

Even if nobody reported him, they'd only see him as a fool!

For a moment, Batna regretted accepting Louis Berry's invitation. This fellow would tarnish his reputation by association.

Noticing the odd expressions around the bar, Lumian gave a nonchalant shrug. He holstered his revolver and announced,

"Looks like you're all just ordinary folk, then."

With that, he leaped off the wooden platform, navigating through the startled crowd back to the counter.

The two drunkards he'd thrown out, along with the others who had been frightened by him, measured his strength and weapons, choosing not to retaliate.

Back on his barstool, Lumian ordered a Lanti Proof with a grin at Batna.

"Port Farim is certainly more open than Trier."

Batna studied Louis Berry with an "are you serious?" expression, forcing a smile.

"We must follow Gehrman Sparrow's career, not his actions."

Is this fellow so obsessed with Gehrman Sparrow that he mimics his cold, reckless demeanor?

Gehrman Sparrow, at least, had the strength to back up his madness. What about you?

Furthermore, Gehrman Sparrow exudes a cold and indifferent madness, while you are reckless, foolish, and brainless. How can the two be equal?

Lumian ignored Batna's jab and turned the conversation to the recent surge in pirate activity in the Fog Sea.

After finishing his Lanti Proof, he bid farewell to Batna and headed out. Walking through the bustling open-air market, he made his way towards the harbor.

Just as Lumian returned to the square plastered with announcements, a sudden jolt sent him whirling around.

A male Islander, sporting a half-top hat and a dusty black jacket, approached hesitantly, a strained smile plastered on his face.

"I saw you at the bar earlier."

"Cut to the chase," Lumian urged impatiently.

The Islander, his brownish-black skin stretched over a lean face, leaned in and lowered his voice.

"Looking for mystical items, are we? I know just the place."

"Really?" Lumian asked in disbelief.

"Can't promise anything, but it's worth a shot. Just don't buy anything if they turn out unsuitable." The Islander's gaze flicked to Lumian's left armpit. "Besides, you're armed and dangerous. Not exactly an easy target for robbery, right?"

"That's true." Lumian contemplated this for a moment, then gave a slow nod. "What's your name?"

"Carmel." The Islander gestured towards a narrow street branching off the square. "Follow me. It's close."

Lumian trailed nonchalantly behind Carmel, their path crossing two streets before they arrived in a district eerily reminiscent of Rue Anarchie.

Crumbling buildings huddled close, new construction jostling for space amidst the narrow road.

Carmel led Lumian into a dimly lit laundry shop, its interior draped with damp clothes. They navigated the maze of hanging garments, arriving finally deep inside the dark room.

There was a door there.

"Disguise yourself first," Carmel instructed, retrieving two hooded black robes from a hook nearby. "Those who dabble in such things prefer to keep their identities secret."

Lumian donned the robe, pulling the hood low over his face. Carmel then rapped on the door in a specific rhythm.

It creaked open, revealing a makeshift living room furnished with an old sofa, threadbare armchairs, and a mismatched assortment of furniture.

Six figures, cloaked in identical robes, sat in various positions, their faces obscured by the shadows.

Lumian politely closed the door behind him as Carmel made a brief introduction.

After the two pulled up a stool and sat down, a man with his hood pulled low leaned forward and whispered,

"I need a Royal Jellyfish's venom crystal. I can offer 5,000 verl d'or."

Silence.

The next participant sold a Strange Sea Eagle eyeball he had procured.

Seeing that their discussion was on point, Lumian stood up and surveyed the gathering.

"I need a Sphinx's brain. Name your price."

The man seeking the Crown Jellyfish's venom crystal's voice was carefully controlled as he replied, "I happen to have one. If you pay me 30,000 verl d'or, it's yours."

"How can I be sure of its authenticity?" Lumian asked him directly.

The Strange Sea Eagle eyeball seller interjected in a raspy voice, "I can notarize it for you."

"Excellent. Let me take a look at the goods first," Lumian smiled, approaching the seller.

The man replied calmly, "Such a valuable mystical item, you wouldn't expect me to carry it around, would you?

"I'll only bring it to you if you pay a 50% deposit first. It's upstairs. You can follow me and make sure I don't escape. You can even put the deposit with the Notary for safekeeping."

"Very reasonable." Just as Lumian finished speaking, he suddenly lunged at the trader with the speed of a cheetah, a right hook swinging through the air.

Bang!

The man crumpled to the ground, his teeth flying in a spray of blood.

The other participants, including the Notary and Carmel, were momentarily stunned before scrambling for the door.

None of them challenged Lumian's assault, nor attempted to use their powers. Their sole focus was on escape.

Carmel, closest to the exit, flung open the door and bolted.

In an instant, his vision blurred, and he found himself back in the simple living room, alongside two others who had suffered the same fate.

They all looked bewildered, as if witnessing a folktale come alive.

Bang!

A yellow bullet slammed into the exit door.

The hooded figures huddled down, covering their heads with practiced movements.

Lumian spun around, pulled back the trader's hood, and pressed the revolver's muzzle against his forehead.

"Not a bad scam," Lumian said with a smile.

He had orchestrated an impromptu conspiracy, drawing attention with a gunshot in the bar and publicly expressing his need for a mystical item. This allowed him to identify any greedy pirates or local swindlers who might possess knowledge beyond the reach of ordinary citizens, including black market information.

It was also a way to digest the potion.

The seller was a typical Islander, with brownish-black skin, a long face, gentle features, and dark amber eyes.

"I wasn't lying to you!" he insisted anxiously and angrily.

"Really?" Lumian cocked the revolver's hammer.

Before closing the door, Lumian had created a Bottle of Fiction, setting a condition that only Beyonders could enter.

None of the participants had successfully "escaped," which confirmed the absence of Beyonders.

If you're not a Beyonder, why mention the main ingredient of the Conspirer potion? Just for fun?

The seller trembled and stammered, "I-I'm sorry. We just wanted to scam some money. We-we can't survive otherwise!"

Lumian wasn't interested in their motives. He glanced at the neatly lined-up accomplices and tapped the trader's forehead with the gun's muzzle.

"What's your name?"

"Roddy," the seller replied, swallowing hard.

Another tap to the forehead.

"Where did you hear about the Sphinx brain, Crown Jellyfish's venom crystal, and Notary?"

This information was inaccessible to ordinary people.

"I-I can't say." A sheen of cold sweat appeared on Roddy's forehead.

Confidentiality agreement or other restrictions? Lumian studied Roddy for a few seconds and smiled.

"Then tell me who your master is."

Roddy froze, his eyes widening in fear.

He hadn't expected the other party to be so certain he had a master, that he was someone else's servant.

"Three, two…" Lumian began the countdown.

"It's Sir Morgalla," Roddy blurted out.

"Then take me there," Lumian calmly requested.

Roddy's sweating intensified.

"No, no, I'm Monsieur Fidel's attendant.

"He's the vice president of the Port Farim Joint Chamber of Commerce."

Participating in numerous mysticism gatherings organized by Fidel as an attendant? Although he can't divulge the corresponding information to others, he can use the information he obtained to swindle adventurers? Lumian stood up thoughtfully, dismantled the Bottle of Fiction, and led Carmel and his swindler accomplices out. He interrogated them one by one and confirmed that Roddy was indeed Fidel Guerra's attendant.

One of the vice president of the Port Farim Joint Chamber of Commerce's primary tasks was to assist pirates in handling sensitive and illegal cargo.

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Port Farim, Quartier des Black Pearls, Governor-General's Office, 16 Rue Coreas.

Lumian patted Roddy, now donned in his red attendant's attire with gold trimmings and crisp white pants. A smile played on Lumian's lips as he spoke.

"Tell Monsieur Fidel that I'm interested in purchasing some mystical ingredients and would appreciate the opportunity to discuss it further."

"Alright." Roddy yearned to utter a single plea: "If you could kindly remove the revolver from my back, I would be eternally grateful."

Leaning against the weathered wall of a nearby house, Lumian watched as the swindler nervously entered Unit 16, the four-story gray-roofed building adorned with numerous statues.

The moment Roddy stepped inside, escaping the revolver's direct aim, his first instinct was to bury the whole incident and forget it ever happened.

But then he remembered the chilling warning delivered by the man who fired without hesitation: a ten-minute silence from Fidel, and Roddy's true colors as a swindler would be painted loudly across the street.

Should I lie and claim Monsieur Fidel is unavailable? But he doesn't seem easily duped. A drastic reaction could be worse… Roddy, caught in a dilemma, clenched his teeth and rapped on the study door.

Fidel Guerra, a man descended from both Intis and Feynapotter blood, possessed curly black hair that had started to show signs of age, dark brown eyes, and skin darkened by the sun. Though once known for his refined demeanor, time had etched its mark on his face, leaving behind a mane of mottled white hair and prominent wrinkles.

Dressed in a crisp white shirt and a brown vest, he quietly sipped his wine as Roddy, trembling with fear, stammered out their confession. He spoke of their ill intentions, of their attempt to swindle the new adventurer.

As soon as Roddy mentioned Lumian leaping onto the wooden platform, firing a shot to attract attention, and boldly inquiring about obtaining a mystical item, the merchant sighed and interrupted his flustered attendant.

"There's no need to elaborate further. Does he wish to see me now?"

Chapter 518: Merchant's Entrustment

518 Merchant's Entrustment

16 Rue Coreas.

Twirling the brim of his golden straw hat, Lumian stopped just outside the office door and met Fidel Guerra's gaze across the desk. Lumian's grin was anything but friendly.

"Made a decision, have you? Faster than I expected."

Fidel Guerra, with his partially Feynapotterian features, turned to Roddy and let out a soft sigh.

"Didn't expect my attendant to be the ringleader of a scam syndicate."

"Maybe the paychecks he receives from you don't quite match the lifestyle he sees on a daily basis," Lumian shot back habitually.

Fidel ignored the jab. He studied Lumian, eyes narrowed.

"So that bar act was all for show? To dupe fools like him?"

"Let's say I'm grateful for their thousand verl d'or donation. Looks like Port Farim's got a bright future for con artists." No shame in his banditry, not a flicker.

Roddy felt a swarm of regret gnaw at his insides.

Fidel nodded and inquired, "What's on your shopping list?"

Lumian, affecting an air of indifference, responded, "I'm in the market for a bottle of Colorful Bearded Horned Lizard's venom."

Isn't it the Sphinx's brain? Roddy, who was listening, was taken aback.

For a moment, he couldn't help but wonder if he was the swindler or the man opposite him.

Clad in a white shirt and brown vest, Fidel contemplated for a moment before offering, "I don't have it in stock, but I can procure it for you. It might take two to three days. As for the price, it varies, usually between 3,000 to 4,000 verl d'or, depending on the seller. Need my assistance in acquiring it?"

"No problem." Lumian, arms slightly spread, replied, "Praise the Sun. You're a gem."

Fidel, suspecting mockery, frowned slightly.

He maintained his composure, stating, "I'm not charitable; I'm a businessman. Why not make a profitable deal? Besides, I find forming connections with adventurers like you beneficial. Given money and resources, certain matters are easier for you to handle."

Fidel, smiling, questioned, "Aren't you concerned about counterfeit goods? How do you confirm authenticity on the spot?"

Lumian, with an approving smile, quipped, "I know you live here. That's assurance enough. The famous merchant Fidel? Gunned down six times in a row for pulling a fast one in a deal worth a few thousand verl d'or. Not the kind of rep you'd call respectable news."

He left the issue of confirming the Colorful Bearded Horned Lizard venom's authenticity unaddressed.

Fidel maintained his impassive gaze on Lumian before a smirk crossed his face.

"I can't recall the last time someone dared to threaten me like this.

"Interested in knowing what fate befell those who did?"

"Curious if I've got the nerve to make a move now?" Lumian's gaze narrowed a touch. His smile remained, but it chilled the room in an instant.

He met Fidel's gaze without hesitation.

After a while, Fidel sighed without anger and remarked, "Your approach reminds me of someone—the legendary adventurer, Gehrman Sparrow."

"Yes, I'm mimicking him," Lumian admitted candidly.

Fidel chuckled.

"Imitating his madness, then? So, underneath the act, you're a calm, rational, and cunning individual?"

Lumian shook his head, smiling, and replied, "No. If I don't imitate him, I'd be even crazier."

The atmosphere in the study became tense once more.

Fidel, picking up and sipping fragrant black tea from a bone porcelain cup, acknowledged, "You're quite the young firebrand. Your vigor even makes an old man like me a bit envious.

"How about taking on a commission? It can fetch you a hefty sum and earn you fame at sea, akin to Gehrman Sparrow."

Lumian, adjusting his golden straw hat, inquired, "What's the job?"

"Eliminate a pirate, Baronet Black, Class Khizi, captain of the Golden Nepos. The bounty is 65,000 verl d'or," Fidel stated calmly. "He used to be the third mate of the King of Dusk, Bulatov. Left the fleet, turned to plundering on his own. Four months back, he stole a batch of my goods on Saint Tick Island. It's likely sold by now. I don't expect to recover it. I just want him dead. Let everyone know that anyone who touches my goods meets their end."

Lumian, teasingly, asked, "What if it was the King of Dusk who did it?"

Fidel fell into silence.

After a brief pause, Fidel brushed off Lumian's question and continued, "I'll provide you with regular updates on Khizi—his characteristics, strength, ship location, and onshore whereabouts. As a bonus, I'll throw in an extra 25,000 verl d'or as a reward.

"If you manage to take down Khizi, I'll expedite the process to secure the full bounty through my connections and help spread your reputation. Everything Khizi owns will be yours.

"So, what do you say? Eliminate Khizi, and you'll become one of the most renowned adventurers at sea."

25,000 additional reward and intel support… Lumian thought for a moment and asked with a smile, "How many adventurers have you pitched this to?"

"Seven or eight, all of whom I hold in high regard," Fidel replied candidly. "There's no penalty for failure, as long as you survive."

Inwardly, Lumian mused, So, it doesn't matter whether I accept the mission or not? He nodded.

"Hunting pirates is the duty of every adventurer."

With a verbal agreement established, Fidel reached into a drawer, producing a brown paper envelope, which he tossed to Lumian.

Lumian deftly caught it with one hand, untied the thread, and extracted the information, swiftly flipping through it.

Abruptly, he looked up at Fidel.

"Has Khizi been seen in Port Farim recently?"

"Yes, I'm certain of this intel, though his exact hiding spot is unknown," Fidel replied with a slight nod.

Agreeing to return in two days for updates on both the Colorful Bearded Horned Lizard venom and Baronet Black, Lumian left 16 Rue Coreas and made his way towards the harbor.

Roddy, fearing severe punishment, was surprised when Fidel merely waved him off, instructing, "Go back to your room and reflect."

"Yes, Monsieur Guerra." Roddy, relieved, left the study and ascended the dimly lit stairs to the second floor.

Yet, as he walked, a chill overcame him, and he shivered.

The darkness around him deepened, and in the dim light, something emerged from behind his shadow.

Attempting to cry out for help, Roddy, gripped by terror, found himself forever voiceless.

…

Meanwhile, Lumian didn't head directly back to the Flying Bird. Instead, under the cooling night sky, he strolled towards a street he had recently passed.

There stood a modest cathedral—The Fool's Cathedral.

Having previously spotted The Fool's Sacred Emblem on the bell tower, Lumian had decided to offer a prayer upon his return.

As expected, Mr. Fool's faith seems prevalent at sea. Port Farim, being an Intis colony, boasts several cathedrals. Lumian gazed at the warm light emanating from the cathedral, removed his golden straw hat, and entered.

Inside, Lumian noticed around 20 to 30 individuals, likely homeless, resting at the edge of the wide hall. Some had tattered blankets, while others relied solely on their clothes for warmth.

The Fog Sea Archipelago wouldn't turn these tramps into ice statues this season, but rain lurked, ready to pour at any time. Finding shelter was a coveted haven for these tramps, and The Fool's cathedral offered solace.

Back in my vagabond days, when brutal weather hit or days without food wore me down, I'd roll the dice in the cathedrals of the two Churches. If the bishop or padre was decent, they'd toss a meal my way and a spot to crash for the night. But come dawn, I had to vanish, or I'd end up in those rotten relief centers… Lumian reminisced, found a seat, and started praying.

The Fool's cathedral embraced silence at night. Now and then, folks strolled in, muttered their prayers, and exited. Some wore merchant garb, others rocked a sailor's look, and a few even emitted a faint pirate vibe, but none disturbed the peaceful aura.

Lumian wasn't sure what to pray for. Back when he'd occasionally drop by the Eternal Blazing Sun cathedral, he'd just echo bits of scripture in his mind, tossing wishes like coins and hoping for corresponding blessings. What if they actually came true?

Now, he knew such rituals were futile, and he had few desires.

Most importantly, Lumian had only heard clerical teachings about The Fool a few times. He couldn't remember much from the Bible except for the eight Angels and Mr. Fool's authority. But did that matter now?

Recounting his journey from leaving Trier to arriving at Port Farim, Lumian's emotions gradually settled into a sense of tranquility.

"May Mr. Fool bless me. May all catastrophes be resolved. May Aurore be resurrected…"

After about fifteen minutes, Lumian concluded his prayer with a simple wish.

As he stood up, a distant rumble echoed. The cathedral's windows rattled, and the building creaked and swayed.

Lumian raised his eyebrows. Amidst the startled tramps, he walked to the door and gazed towards the source of the noise.

Near the governor-general's office, billowing smoke and flames rose into the sky, casting an eerie glow on the surroundings.

Lumian couldn't help but raise his right hand and stroke his chin. He muttered to himself, This shouldn't have anything to do with my arrival, right?

It seemed something significant had occurred in Port Farim.

Chapter 519: One Event A Day

519 One Event A Day

The flames of Quartier des Black Pearls danced in Lumian's eyes, pulling him deep into thought. As a Conspirer, his mind instinctively dissected the possibilities.

The Resistance and civil independence factions were easily ruled out—they had no presence in this archipelago, Intis's first far-flung colony. The religious and cultural genocide, along with the assimilation efforts of successive governments, they had tirelessly worked to make it happen. Emperor Roselle's policies had transformed this place into something akin to Intis's overseas province—loose laws and weak security. The Islanders, having abandoned their original faith, now saw themselves as discriminated citizens in the Intis border regions. This discrimination mirrored the plight of Reemians in the south of Intis and Savoyards in the east. Regardless, Trier's citizens held a universal disdain for all foreigners. However, their vigilance heightened against Islanders notorious for scams and thuggery.

Did the pirate trade spark internal strife, or were Southern Continent organizations, seeking to overthrow colonial rule, deliberately causing trouble in the Fog Sea Archipelago? Perhaps some ambitious individual is following the lead of an evil god. Lumian's thoughts raced as he noticed a 2.5-meter-tall half-giant emerging from a room beside the cathedral, dressed in a black trench coat and silk top hat.

Addressing the bewildered supplicants and tramps, he assured them, "Don't worry. The Lord will protect everyone.

"Stay here and don't go out. Wait for the riot to subside. There won't be any danger."

"Praise The Fool!" The believers of The Fool Church found solace, pressing their hands to their chests and bowing.

Their expressions softened, conveying a sense of security.

The tramps exchanged glances, but none dared to leave.

In the minds of most Intisians, a cathedral was a safer haven than any government, regardless of the Church it belonged to.

At that moment, golden sunlight descended into the area where the explosion had occurred, accompanied by a series of dense explosions, though not as deafening as before.

It was evident that the governor-general's office and the Beyonders of the two Churches were addressing the anomaly.

Simultaneously, Lumian observed the sky, once illuminated by moonlight and starlight, darkening. Despite no change in the weather, the street outside seemed cloaked in a thin, dark fog.

Ignoring the half-giant bishop's shouts after a moment of contemplation, Lumian opened the cathedral door of The Fool and stepped out.

The temperature outside had notably dropped, akin to Trier's autumn.

Beneath the gas street lamps' glow, Lumian retraced his steps back to the port.

Suddenly, a swaying figure emerged from a nearby alley.

The figure, clad in a thin shirt and pants with bare feet, had a pale, wrinkled face.

His eyes were more white than brown, and livor mortis covered his exposed skin.

Zombie? Lumian raised his eyebrows.

As the suspected zombie—an old man—staggered towards Quartier des Black Pearls, it seemed to detect a hint of spirituality and blood, abruptly turning to Lumian and emitting an inhuman sound.

Lumian promptly condensed a crimson fireball, nearly white, and sent it hurtling towards the zombie.

Amidst the rumbling explosion, the zombie's head shattered, and its body disintegrated. It met its demise once more.

No more movement.

Is that all you've got? Lumian had originally wondered if he had encountered a more dangerous undead creature.

Pressing on, he formed ten to twenty crimson fireballs above his head, behind him, on his shoulders, and at his sides, allowing them to follow his movements and maintain a relative suspension.

As Lumian rounded a corner, he spotted a young couple screaming in terror and fleeing.

Behind them, a zombie pursued, its dark-red heart and white intestines faintly discernible from numerous gunshot wounds.

A nearly white crimson fireball, unleashed by Lumian, flew past the couple and exploded on the pursuing zombie.

Rumble. The charred corpse scattered in all directions, accompanied by residual flames.

The young couple, halted in surprise, stared at Lumian surrounded by ten to twenty crimson, nearly white fireballs. Confusion and disbelief filled their eyes.

"Are you waiting for death?" Lumian cursed as he advanced. "Take the back street and enter The Fool's cathedral."

"Alright, alright!" The young man and woman responded instinctively, as if facing armed police officers or adventurers.

The fireball was clearly more powerful than a gun!

As the couple entered the street where The Fool's cathedral was located, Lumian, resembling an envoy of flames, continued towards the port at a moderate pace.

Along the way, he encountered a few more waves of people emerging from bars, open-air markets, and other places, who had encountered zombies.

Lumian didn't say a word. He directed the crimson, nearly white fireballs around him to help them eliminate the revived corpses. Then, he instructed them to hide in the nearest cathedral.

The zombies' pursuit and the intimidation of the fireballs made his words persuasive. No one insisted on finding their own way.

If there were any, Lumian couldn't be bothered.

After several similar encounters, Lumian began to discern a pattern.

These zombies weren't reanimated from the living; they were originally deceased. The entirety of Port Farim's deceased had risen without any discernible cause.

These zombies instinctively headed towards the explosion site, but if they encountered the living on the way, they'd be drawn by both flesh and spirituality, leading them to pursue, kill, and gnaw.

With this understanding, Lumian no longer advised passersby to seek refuge in distant cathedrals. Instead, he directed them to avoid hospitals, graveyards, and similar places, urging them to stay for two to three hours in bustling bars, dance halls, or houses where no recent deaths had occurred.

After a series of halts and advances, Lumian returned to the port and reboarded the Flying Bird. He continued unleashing the crimson, almost white fireballs until only two remained.

Philip, leaning against the ship's rail, kept his eyes fixed on the governor-general's office.

"What happened?" he inquired of Lumian.

"How would I know?" Lumian replied, amused.

Philip swiftly changed the topic.

"Did you come across any anomalies?"

Only then did Lumian briefly recount the explosion near the governor-general's office and the sudden reanimation of the corpses.

"Zombie summoning?" Philip muttered to himself, a frown creasing his brow.

Without awaiting Lumian's response, he sighed and said, "It was smooth only on the first day of this voyage. On the second day, we encountered Bone Splitter. On the third day, Death Navigators attacked us at noon. By night, or rather in the early hours of the fourth day, another zombie calamity struck in Port Farim… We still have six days until we reach Port Santa…"

Lumian felt a pang of guilt.

In theory, his attraction to or attraction by calamities shouldn't be so frequent. When he was in Trier, he didn't encounter mystical incidents every day. If that were the case, 007 would have died from overwork.

Encountering one or two calamities throughout the journey would be understandable, but considering Dardel's Derangement, it's truly a daily affair… Could it be that some unclean entity is tailing me? Could it be the cause, the trigger, or the convergence? And is there essentially only one calamity I've encountered? The more Lumian pondered, the more he felt the urge to correspond with Madam Magician to investigate if there was an underlying issue behind such frequent calamities.

"Perhaps the zombie calamity was triggered by the initial trouble on the ship. Once we leave the Flying Bird, our subsequent journey might become peaceful," Lumian casually consoled Philip.

He didn't hold much confidence in his words.

"Hope so." Philip spread his arms slightly and prayed devoutly. "Praise the Sun!"

Lumian took his time before heading back to the first-class cabin. He lingered by the shipboard, surveying Port Farim.

The authorities' silent endorsement of pirate activities in the Fog Sea Archipelago had resulted in a certain level of chaos and misconduct. However, it had also led to a notable increase in the number of Beyonders compared to regular Intisian cities. Swiftly organizing a resistance, they cleared the streets of zombies, minimizing the casualties among citizens and tourists.

Whether pirates and adventurers exploited the turmoil to commit crimes or settle scores remained uncertain.

In less than half an hour, the turmoil near the explosion site subsided. Official Beyonders dispersed, addressing disturbances on other streets.

"Very good. Nothing major happened. They managed to control it in time," Philip remarked, relieved.

You can say that, but I can't… Lumian laughed self-deprecatingly.

Only then did Philip feel at ease enough for casual conversation.

"Did you go into Farim for a drink?"

"That's right," Lumian replied with a smile. "I happened to receive a commission."

"What commission?" Philip asked casually.

"Hunting a pirate—Baronet Black." Lumian didn't withhold any details.

Philip's eyes narrowed as he inquired with a frown, "Are you sure you're stronger than Baronet Black? He has a ship and over a hundred subordinates! Besides, even if you find an opportunity to assassinate him, aren't you afraid of the King of Dusk's retaliation? He's one of the maritime kings!"

"Just because I accepted a commission doesn't mean I'll definitely do it. I don't even know where to find Black Baronet Class Khizi. That's his name, right?" Lumian didn't mind the potential repercussions from the King of Dusk.

There were more than one Saint who wanted to deal with him!

Philip observed Louis Berry's nonchalant demeanor, realizing he had accepted a mission but would reconsider only if there was a chance to complete it. Thus, he didn't press further on the matter.

The next morning.

As the security supervisor finished breakfast, a subordinate sailor informed him: The governor-general's office had ordered the port to be temporarily closed, and all ships were prohibited from leaving!

Philip suppressed the urge to stand up and asked in a deep voice, "What are the soldiers at the port doing?"

"Searching ship by ship," the sailor replied truthfully.

In Room 5 of the first-class cabin, Lumian observed the chaotic harbor where the army had entered and continued writing a letter to Jenna and Franca.

"Something seems to have happened to Port Farim on Saint Tick Island in the Fog Sea Archipelago. Ask that person and see if he knows the exact situation."

At this point, Lumian raised his right hand and tapped his chest four times—up, down, left, right—like Mr. K. He whispered sympathetically, "Poor 007."

Chapter 520: Demon Warlock

520 Demon Warlock

Trier, Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative, 9 Rue Orosai, Apartment 702.

Franca awoke naturally, rising lazily from her bed. Her plans were simple—grabbing a piece of toast, anticipating a heavy lunch.

Lately, the absence of Mirror People leads had made her days relaxed.

Thank the Heavens, thank the Earth, thank Mr. Fool. Lumian, the jinx, has left Trier… Franca muttered in her pre-meal prayer.

As she sipped her milk, Jenna returned and pointed to the coffee table.

"Rabbit Chasel delivered a letter this morning. It's from Lumian."

"Letter?" Franca's eyes narrowed as her relaxed body tensed.

The source of Dardel's Derangement was still at large. What had happened this time?

"He mentioned an incident in the capital of the Fog Sea Archipelago. He wishes to gather details and hopes you can inquire with your contact among the authorities. I refrained from waking you since you only reach out to that contact late at night, so I opted to read the letter immediately. It seems you can only make inquiries during the night," Jenna explained concisely.

"How considerate. Lumian, that rascal, would undoubtedly knock on the door and jolt me awake!" Franca, who had experienced Lumian's disruptive wake-up calls countless times, felt unusually touched.

She chuckled.

"Did something happen to Port Farim once he arrived? Even though it seems unrelated to him, but…"

Franca leaned back slightly and remarked, "What's up with the walking mysticism catastrophe detector?"

Since it wasn't urgent, she planned to ask about 007 in the telegram group later at night. After all, he was an official Beyonder of Trier. It was unlikely he would have immediate information about the events in the Fog Sea Archipelago's capital. If she didn't initiate the inquiry, he might remain unaware.

Franca, with her penchant for instant messaging, set down the bottle of milk and wrote Lumian a teasing reply.

"If you want to know what's happening, investigate it yourself. A walking mysticism catastrophe detector like yourself doesn't need clues or information. Stroll through the streets of Port Farim aimlessly, and who knows, you might bump into the person involved!

"Hey, let's not turn letter-writing into work-related communication, using it only to discuss issues or ask for help. Can't you share the interesting sea tales and details of pirates' bounties?

"Heh heh, ever since you left Trier, everything's been calm and quiet. I can enjoy sleeping in again. Enjoy your sweet revenge. No need to rush back. Give us a heads up if you need assistance…"

Jenna observed Franca thoughtfully as she gleefully filled nearly two pages of the letter.

…

Inside Room 5 of the Flying Bird's first-class cabin in Port Farim, Lumian, confined to his quarters, sneered as he finished reading Franca's reply.

How many complaints has this fellow received from 007? She's blaming me for the frequent mysticism catastrophes.

Folding the letter, he brought it to Ludwig's lips.

The boy, who had just finished dessert, looked at Lumian and remarked, "I'm not a shredder."

"I thought you eat everything," Lumian replied casually as he lit the letter, watching it turn to ashes in the sea breeze blowing through the window.

Shortly after lunch, Philip knocked on the door, accompanied by four soldiers in blue military uniforms adorned with golden threads.

The officer, holding copies of Lumian and the others' identification documents, compared their faces to black-and-white photos.

"Like you, they came from Port Gati and only arrived last night?" the officer inquired, having confirmed Philip's reliability.

"Yes, I watched them board the ship. We met frequently in the past two days," Philip replied, wisely choosing not to expose the fact that Lumian and the others' identities and information were fake.

Very wise… Otherwise, you'll witness true trouble… Lumian joked inwardly.

If his disguise were to be exposed, he would choose to "teleport" away with Lugano and Ludwig rather than make a scene and reveal the adventurer Louis Berry to the world. Lumian's only devotion to Gehrman Sparrow, ready to hunt pirates when the opportunity arose. In truth, Lumian had no intention of becoming a true adventurer. His purpose for venturing out to sea was revenge!

After confirming Lumian and the others' situation, the officer led the soldiers to the next room, with Philip accompanying them.

Lumian observed that the investigation of the Flying Bird was thorough, yet not overly intense. The officers followed procedures meticulously without delving into further inquiries.

It made sense. The explosion in Quartier des Black Pearls and the abnormality of the corpses couldn't have occurred overnight. Even if it was an accident, it had been brewing for a while. The extensive impact suggested a prolonged development. Unless the person involved was a demigod, it was nearly impossible for ordinary authorities to trace any demigod-related traces.

This meant the Flying Bird, having arrived in Port Farim only the previous night, likely had no connection to the incident. The focus was on confirming the passengers' identities.

The possibility of a demigod being injured and unable to escape Port Farim was considered, warranting a comprehensive investigation, but there were no suspicious casualties on the Flying Bird.

The officers disembarked after nearly two hours, accompanied by 20 to 30 soldiers. Lumian, now on the deck, approached Philip and inquired, "What happened last night?"

Philip glanced around and lowered his voice.

"I heard from my former colleague that they're searching for Demon Warlock Burman."

"Burman?" Lumian expressed his ignorance.

Having only read a portion of the wanted posters the previous night, Lumian was not familiar with Demon Warlock Burman. His attention had been on maritime kings, pirate admirals, and other significant pirates. Then, he had shared a drink with Batna Comté.

"He's a wanted adventurer," Philip explained with a sigh. "Before I left the Fog Sea fleet, he was still normal. He chased bounties and treasures and met his wife, Helen, a female adventurer. Later, Helen died in an accident, causing Burman to go crazy. He wanted to revive his wife and did many things—both good and bad attempts.

"He mercilessly orchestrated the destruction of a 300-person town to fulfill the conditions for a resurrection ritual. He organized gatherings of evil Warlocks, aiming to use the lives of others, especially newborns, for cruel and bloody witchcraft to revive Helen. These events pushed his bounty to surpass Bone Splitter Basil, reaching 600,000 verl d'or."

In his quest to resurrect his wife, he was driven to become a cruel and cold Demon Warlock? Lumian suddenly sighed.

If Madam Magician hadn't found him back then, if Mr. Fool hadn't offered a glimmer of hope, and if the Tarot Club hadn't arranged for two formidable Psychiatrists to provide treatment, would he now resemble Burman and carry a Demon-prefixed moniker?

Moreover, simply treading the path of boons would expedite his growth. With Termiboros's aid, he could reach Sequence 5 Fate Appropriator within a few months. The obliteration of a 300-person town held the potential to elevate him to a Circle Inhabitant.

"600,000 verl d'or is nearly on par with Vice Admiral Black Tide Holle Sassen, who has the lowest bounty among pirate admirals," Lumian remarked, drawing a comparison.

Vice Admiral Black Tide was a great pirate who had only gained fame in recent years. His bounty was 700,000 verl d'or.

Philip fell silent for a moment before adding, "Burman might not be weaker than Holle Sassen, but he doesn't have his own fleet. He's always alone and occasionally collaborates with those evil Warlocks. This allows him to escape authorities' encirclements and successfully infiltrate towns adorned with his wanted posters."

From Philip's description, Lumian gathered that Demon Warlock Burman possessed diverse abilities, excelling at disguises.

With the elegance of a true Warlock, Burman combined it with mastery over the power of the dead, whether acquired through resurrection research or inherent in his original Sequence's contradictory description of both "comprehensive" and "specialty skills."

…

The port blockade left the Flying Bird stranded in Farim, delayed from its scheduled departure.

At 4 p.m., Lumian found himself with nothing to do. Sporting his new golden straw hat, he disembarked from the ship, where passengers and sailors could now freely move. Once more, he stepped into Port Farim.

He planned to investigate the scene of last night's explosion. Perhaps he could unearth some clues.

What lay in ruins was a hospital. Nearly half of it crumbled, unveiling a massive pit leading underground. Corpses littered the remaining structures, amidst fresh blood and humanoid shadows charred by the blast.

With the ban lifted, numerous adventurers flocked to the site, seeking answers. Lumian blended into the crowd, discreetly observing.

"Louis, you're here too?" Suddenly, Lumian recognized a familiar voice.

It was Batna Comté, armed with a substantial revolver and an exquisite rapier. Meticulously groomed, he looked sharp and sophisticated.

"That's right," Lumian replied with a smile. "As an adventurer, how can I miss the grand occasion of pursuing the Demon Warlock?"

Our main goal is to gather clues for a reward… Batna muttered under his breath.

As he investigated the battle remnants for leads, he casually inquired, "Did you come across those resurrected corpses last night?"

"I did. Besides being a bit eerie, there's nothing noteworthy about them," Lumian boasted.

Batna glanced at him and suddenly smiled.

"Anything unusual happened to you after leaving the bar last night?"

Lumian replied nonchalantly, "I ran into a few swindlers and walked away with a small fortune."

A small fortune… Batna was taken aback.

He suddenly recalled Louis Berry's actions at the bar and his words: "Perhaps they think I'm an easy target?

Chapter 521: Guidance of Fate?

521 Guidance of Fate?

When Batna turned his gaze back to Lumian, there was a discernible shift in his eyes.

The mimicry of Gehrman Sparrow and the apparent recklessness that characterized this guy seemed all too contrived. Beneath the facade lurked cunning and a hint of sinister intent!

Anyone falling for his act was in for a world of trouble!

Lumian chose not to dwell on how he'd managed to swindle a small fortune out of the swindlers. Instead, together with Batna, he meticulously surveyed the aftermath of the explosion, scrutinizing every detail.

Regrettably, even the official Beyonders, armed with their diverse Sequences and synergistic combinations, were at a loss, let alone the duo lacking any proficiency in divination or prophecy.

Batna absentmindedly ran his fingers over the finely crafted rapier hanging diagonally at his waist, letting out a sigh.

"I know it's a long shot, but I can't resist coming here, wasting my time. It's not about the bounty. What adventurer doesn't dream of overnight fame?"

Hunting down the Demon Warlock Burman wasn't the only route to fame. Assisting official Beyonders in tracking this wanted criminal, whose bounty rivaled that of a pirate admiral, was a noteworthy feat in itself.

"Wasn't your primary motivation to gather clues for the money?" Lumian inquired, a playful smile on his face.

"Uh, well, that's a secondary motive," Batna awkwardly defended himself.

Suddenly, he had a realization.

He never explicitly mentioned that his investigation aimed at accumulating clues for monetary gain. He merely thought about it!

Can he read my thoughts, or is he just bluffing? Batna scrutinized Lumian with a perplexed expression.

Lumian chuckled.

"Don't let your thoughts betray you. If you cross paths with a Spectator, your secrets won't stay hidden."

Batna instinctively lifted his right hand and touched his face.

Is my expression management that bad?

He vented his frustration with a muttered curse, "With the scene in this level of chaos and no traces left on the nearby streets, unless a deity blesses me, or I'm imbued with luck, finding any clues is like searching for a needle in a haystack… How about we grab a drink instead?"

Luck… Finding clues doesn't necessarily hinge on good luck; bad luck could work just as well… Lumian's heart stirred as he pulled a bandage from his pocket and calmly wrapped it around his eyes.

Batna Comté, utterly bewildered, couldn't help but ask, "What on earth are you doing?"

"Blindfolding. Relying solely on instinct to navigate the nearby streets eliminates external influences and unleashes the full force of luck," Lumian explained with a chuckle. "Perhaps today, luck is truly on my side?"

According to Franca, a mystical catastrophe detector like him didn't need conventional clues or intel; he might just stumble upon the person involved while strolling around.

In that case, Lumian decided to follow the whims of fate this time.

If he succeeded, he could use the Demon Warlock or related clues to claim a handsome bounty. If he failed, it would prove Franca's words to be nothing but baseless slander.

Batna couldn't help but wonder if Louis Berry had lost his mind. "Can you really do that?"

"There's no harm in trying," Lumian replied confidently, blindfolded and ready to step onto the street.

After a few paces, he abruptly halted.

Blindfolding, he realized, was useless for Hunters.

The path he had taken and the scenes he had observed while searching for clues were vividly etched in his mind, meticulously arranged according to their real-world locations.

Essentially, he possessed a high-definition mental map of the surrounding streets, allowing him to reach shops and buildings with uncanny precision.

With a Hunter's exceptional control over their body and direction, even without sight, coupled with heightened senses of smell and hearing, Lumian couldn't help but conclude that relying on the whims of fate was redundant.

After a moment of contemplation, he began to ponder his next move freely.

Demon Warlock Burman's elusive escapes hints at special abilities or possessions granting him such freedom…

Can he "teleport" away like me, alter his appearance and height at will, or perhaps even disguise himself as someone of a different gender?

Despite numerous bloody and cruel experiments, Burman has evaded capture, suggesting conventional methods and thinking wouldn't suffice…

Can I change my mindset and let him take the initiative to appear?

Yes, if we can't find him, we can make him come to us…

His primary concern is resurrecting his wife, Helen. If I can fabricate a few cases of resurrection or discuss resurrection at certain mysticism gatherings and provide verifiable mysticism knowledge in related domains, this Demon Warlock might very well follow the clues I left behind…

However, this plan faces two challenges. The official Beyonders might have attempted similar schemes, and Burman, being cautious, could see through them. Additionally, the time needed for setup and waiting could be weeks or even months, a luxury I lack in Port Farim… I can only weave the plan gradually into mysticism gatherings and bar conversations, occasionally revealing "secrets" to make it more realistic and my motives less apparent…

Lost in his thoughts, Lumian relied on Batna Comté for occasional support, preventing mishaps during their walk. When Lumian had a complete albeit time-consuming plan, he stopped, removed the bandage covering his eyes, and smiled at Batna.

"Where are we? My intuition says there might be clues about the Demon Warlock hidden here."

"It's a regular street with regular houses. The residents seem wealthy and powerful," Batna replied helplessly.

Lumian finally caught sight of the evening sun.

As Lumian adjusted to the evening sun, his eyes narrowed, and his heart quickened.

Although unfamiliar with many streets in Port Farim, his instinctive journey guided by fate had led him to a familiar place: 16 Rue Coreas!

The adjacent grayish-brown building, adorned with a sculpted outer wall, belonged to Fidel Guerra, the prominent merchant. Lumian had reserved Colorful Bearded Horned Lizard venom here last night and accepted a commission to hunt down Black Baronet Class Khizi!

"Temiboros, are you behind this?" Lumian's immediate instinct was to question the Inevitability Angel sealed within him.

Termiboros remained silent, leaving Batna, standing beside Lumian, puzzled. He couldn't fathom who Louis Berry was addressing.

If Termiboros didn't intentionally lead me here, then something in Fidel Guerra's house is aligning with my fate. Is it an item related to the Hunter pathway or connected to an evil god? Or could the clues to Demon Warlock Burman's whereabouts truly be found at Fidel's residence? Lumian's mind raced as he rapidly considered a series of possibilities.

Staring at Fidel's building, he evaluated the likelihood of the Demon Warlock's presence.

Burman, engaged in numerous resurrection experiments, likely struggled to complete his preparations alone. Snatching various resources would draw the attention of both official Beyonders and pirates who sought his capture. Only the assistance of other evil Warlocks could provide him with the necessary help.

If a well-connected merchant like Fidel supported him in secret, Burman wouldn't face difficulties obtaining experimental materials…

For Fidel, with a Sequence possibly not high enough, having a Demon Warlock reliant on him for covert protection is undoubtedly advantageous.

Considering Fidel's clandestine business, vulnerable to attacks from powerful pirates or adventurers, having a Demon Warlock at his disposal makes sense.

In case of future conflicts with authorities, the Warlock could shield him, enabling a change of identity and a fresh start in another city or country. According to Aurore's insights, such individuals often maintain fake identities and reserve assets in multiple places…

Last night, soon after I met Fidel, a mishap occurred involving the Demon Warlock's failed experiment…

Lumian averted his gaze. Lumian increasingly suspected that the merchant, Fidel Guerra, had motives to shield Demon Warlock Burman.

Of course, if Termiboros intentionally guided him here, the situation would only become more complex and serious.

"What are you looking at?" Batna inquired, following Lumian's gaze to 16 Rue Coreas.

"I met Fidel Guerra, a prominent merchant, here last night and received a commission from him," Lumian replied candidly.

"What commission?" Batna asked with curiosity.

Lumian responded with a smile, "Hunt the captain of the Golden Nepos, Black Baronet Class Khizi."

"Is the rumor true that Black Baronet Class hijacked Fidel's shipment? Fidel hired numerous adventurers to deal with Black Baronet…" Batna enlightened before lowering his voice. "Don't tell anyone about this."

"Why?" Lumian inquired with a smile.

Batna, stroking his neatly trimmed stubble, whispered, "These bounties and commissions don't necessitate actual acceptance, nor do they require success."

"Yes, if word gets out that an adventurer plans to hunt a pirate, and they're not too far apart, revenge from said pirate is inevitable. It's both a punishment and a warning.

"Baronet Black is a notorious pirate. If he catches wind that a newcomer like you is taking on a mission to hunt him and is spreading the news, do you think he'll take offense? He might track you down and use your demise as a lesson for other adventurers and Fidel."

Baronet Black is indeed in Port Farim… Lumian nodded thoughtfully.

"That's a smart approach."

Smart? Batna was momentarily taken aback.

In the evening, at a bar, Lumian, Batna, and the others had been reveling for nearly two hours, filled with joy and excitement.

Suddenly, Lumian lifted his glass and descended from the barstool to the floor. Addressing the adventurers and ordinary patrons around him, he declared, "Everyone, remember my name, Louis Berry!

"I'm on the brink of fame. I've accepted a commission from the prominent merchant, Fidel. My objective is to track down Black Baronet Class Khizi!

"When I succeed, the name Louis Berry will echo across the Five Seas!

"When that time comes, you'll proudly say you shared a drink with me!"

Ah… Batna froze on the barstool.

It felt like witnessing Louis Berry once again leaping onto the wooden platform and firing his gun the night before.

Chapter 522: Excellent Scheme

522 Excellent Scheme

Amid the bustling scene, Lumian relished his drink until the clock neared midnight. Exiting the bar with Batna, they stepped onto the street, where the once-warm sea breeze had turned chilly.

Batna hesitated before asking, "Do you seriously plan to go after Baronet Black?"

Hadn't Louis Berry's performance been a repeat of the previous night's scheme, expecting Black Baronet Class Khizi to come looking for him?

Lumian turned his head, his green eyes devoid of any signs of intoxication. "Otherwise? If he doesn't seek me out, where am I supposed to find him? Sneak onto the Golden Nepos and take on their entire ship solo?"

Fair point… Batna conceded that Louis Berry's logic had merit.

Once Black Baronet made land, he would likely disguise himself, making him hard to track. At sea or on his own boat, a lone adventurer would find it nearly impossible to take him down. Even lions feared a wolf pack. Moreover, among the wolves, aside from Class Khizi, there were a few heads with Beyonder powers.

Batna had to admit that every head was no less formidable than himself.

After a brief pause, Batna sensed something amiss and blurted out, "Are you sure you can handle Baronet Black and the two or three helpers he might have?"

Lumian's lips curled into a smile.

"Every adventurer who comes to sea dreams of following in Gehrman Sparrow's great footsteps."

It wasn't the first time he said this, but the tone was different. This time, Batna detected a calm and serious demeanor.

Is he for real?

Is he sly and cunning or just plain reckless?

At that moment, Batna had to reconsider his understanding of Louis Berry.

There was a method to his madness, a trap meticulously laid out, but the aspirations and strategies were impractical. What struck Batna most was that Louis knew it was unrealistic, yet he calmly and persistently pressed on to realize his grand dream.

How to describe this guy? Batna couldn't find the right words.

At that moment, Lumian had already reached the open-air market stalls. He dropped 5 verl d'or on fried banana slices, scones, roasted meat, roasted oysters, grilled fish, roasted shrimp, and sugarcane.

"You're still hungry?" Batna asked, surprised.

During their drinking session, they had already ordered fries, fish, meatloaf, and more.

Lumian smiled and replied, "Getting supper for my godson."

Godson? At your age? Batna couldn't quite fathom this guy with a Savoie Province accent.

Maybe it's a trend in the mountainous province for young men to become godfathers?

After Lumian picked up the brown paper bags, Batna exhaled and remarked, "Your plan might not be effective. Adventurers boasting about their exploits are a dime a dozen. They might not consider your declaration a joke to spread it to others. It's too common."

Lumian smiled and said, "No, they'll spread it like wildfire. In a few days, the entire Port Farim will know that a new adventurer has taken a commission to hunt down Baronet Black."

"How's that possible? You can't control their mouths," Batna retorted subconsciously.

Suddenly, he was taken aback.

"You can't really… control their thoughts, can you…"

Lumian scoffed and tapped his head with the paper bags.

"Use your brain and think carefully.

"They won't want to spread it. Someone will help me spread it."

Batna had an epiphany.

"You want to secretly hire a group of people to help you publicize this matter…"

He paused for a few seconds before continuing, "There's no need for you to hire them. The merchant, Fidel, will help you achieve your goal once he finds out about your act. He has ample resources. But what if he doesn't know…"

"I'll pay him a visit tomorrow," Lumian replied calmly.

It's meticulous and feasible. It's like iron chains, all interconnected… The more Batna thought about it, the more he realized that every detail of this plan had been considered, but overall, it exuded a sense of madness.

After a while, he instinctively assessed, "If Baronet Black leaves the Fog Sea, it might take months for him to hear the news. If he happens to be in Port Farim, perhaps he'll find out in two or three days."

Port Farim had a population of just over 100,000, including tourists. It might not even be comparable to a quartier in Trier. More people were scattered across Saint Tick Island's plantations and the Andatna Volcano Mines.

"I hope he's in Port Farim," Lumian said with a satisfied expression as he strolled through the night.

Batna fell silent, unsure of what to say.

Returning to the Flying Bird, Lumian entered Room 5 of the first-class cabin and found Ludwig enjoying the supper he had left for him. He placed the brown paper bags on the dining table.

The aroma of fried ingredients and barbecue filled the air.

Ludwig looked up in surprise before quickly devouring the food Lumian had brought back.

Lumian settled into a nearby recliner, rocking gently.

Finally, Ludwig let out a contented sigh and said, "You get tired of always eating cheese, bread, cakes, and crackers for supper."

A person who can even eat live rats raw doesn't have the right to say that… Lumian criticized and smiled.

"This proves that I haven't forgotten you, my godson.

"By the way, how long do you plan to follow me? I've already helped you escape the Church of Knowledge."

Ludwig pondered seriously.

"I'll follow you until I can earn my own living. N-now, I'm still a child!"

That's true. If this fellow doesn't have the money to buy food, something terrifying might happen… Also, before I go to the City of Exiles, the

Church of Knowledge probably won't allow Ludwig to leave me… Lumian laughed self-deprecatingly.

"I, an unmarried underage man, have to support a child like you for a long time."

Ludwig muttered under his breath, "Not necessarily very long…"

Does that mean you can recover to the point of supporting yourself within this year or next? Lumian pretended not to hear Ludwig's muttering and gestured towards the servants' quarters with his chin.

"Has that guy been acting okay?"

Ludwig, acting as a spy, asked in confusion, "For Intisians, is flirting with women on the deck and in the bar under the pretext of attending to patients considered okay?"

"Yes." Lumian sighed helplessly.

You Intisians.

…

The next afternoon, amid rumors of the port closure possibly ending the following morning, Lumian disembarked from the Flying Bird and headed straight to Rue Coreas in Quartier des Black Pearls to pay an early visit to the prominent merchant, Fidel Guerra.

The previous evening, Lumian had received a letter from Franca, delivered by Jenna's Rabbit Chasel. The explosion in Port Farim matched Philip's intel, but there were more details.

By the time official Beyonders reached the scene, Demon Warlock Burman had already vanished.

Facing an undead monster made of limbs and corpse fragments, capable of awakening the deceased in Port Farim, official Beyonders had their hands full.

The hospital suffered casualties—patients fell victim to the monstrous horror…

In Fidel Guerra's study, Lumian met the man—a blend of Intis and Feynapotter blood, smoking a cigar with a grin.

"Did you come here because of the smell? I just received the Colorful Bearded Horned Lizard venom."

Just obtained? I'm afraid it's been here all along. Considering my earnest efforts to draw out Baronet Black and fulfill your request, you're not suggesting you haven't secured the goods… Lumian ventured a guess, a smile playing on his lips.

"Seems luck's smiling upon me. How much?"

"3,800 verl d'or. My cut isn't much," Fidel replied sincerely.

Lumian didn't negotiate. He produced a stack of banknotes and tallied out 3,800 verl d'or.

Observing this, Fidel signaled an attendant and gave instructions.

Soon after, the attendant returned, carrying a brown glass bottle.

Fidel directed the attendant to take the money and hand over the goods while he kept a distance of roughly ten meters from Lumian. "Metal containers won't do. The venom's potency can be affected by corrosion."

Lumian nodded subtly, casting a glance at the brown glass bottle before stashing it away in his pocket.

After the attendant departed, Fidel grinned once more.

"I heard you replicated your act from the night before at the bar last night?"

This influential merchant showcased his well-informed nature.

"Indeed, we must employ effective strategies repeatedly," Lumian tacitly concurred.

Fidel nodded.

"I appreciate a sharp young man like you. I'll help disseminate your message and ensure Class Khizi hears it promptly.

"Heh heh, the adventurers I assigned to this task previously were far too risk-averse."

"No problem. That's precisely why I'm here today," Lumian mentioned before making his way to leave.

After a few steps, he abruptly halted, turned around, and spoke thoughtfully, "Do you think Demon Warlock Burman is hiding here?"

Fidel was taken aback.

"What are you talking about?

"What does the Demon Warlock have to do with me?"

"Not much. Just a wild guess," Lumian replied with a smile. "Rue Coreas is very close to where the explosion occurred last night, and your establishment is quite suitable for hiding."

Without waiting for Fidel's response, he took another step and casually exited the building.

Fidel observed Lumian's departure, furrowing his brow in confusion. He couldn't fathom why Lumian had uttered those words.

…

In the deep of night, the sound of waves echoed in the distance, and the Flying Bird swayed gently.

Lumian reclined on the bed in Room 5 of the first-class cabin, enveloped in a velvet blanket. His eyes shut tight, breathing deep, he was sound asleep.

Suddenly, a dark cloud materialized outside the window, obscuring the crimson moon and stars in the sky.

The room, draped in curtains, plunged into darkness. Even looking at one's hands, one could barely discern five fingers.

Within the shadows, something seemed to stir to life.

Chapter 523: Eye of Illusory

523 Eye of Illusory

A lanky shadow emerged from the shadows in translucent form. Swiftly, it lunged at Lumian, as if eager to claim a new host.

Resembling the possession of Wraiths and evil spirits, this entity sought control but lacked the speed to complete the process in a mere blink.

In an instant, Lumian, previously dormant, transformed into a shadowy figure, melding seamlessly with the darkness, leaving the bed bereft of his presence.

This marked the manifestation of his newly contracted skill—Shadow Transformation!

An eerie hush enveloped the room, dominated by the tall, translucent shadow, erasing any trace of Lumian or his unseen assailant.

Suddenly, the darkness rifted, revealing a decaying, skeletal python oozing yellowish-green pus.

Empty-eyed, its fangless mouth resembled a vortex, emitting a hurried, piercing sound. A suction force tugged at the surrounding shadows, drawing them in.

It seemed like an undead creature, a specialist in consuming shadows and shadowy creatures.

Room 5 of the Flying Bird's first-class cabin's master bedroom assumed an otherworldly tableau. Despite the lingering dim light, shadows dissipated, leaving everything cloaked in pure darkness.

In due time, Lumian emerged from the shadows, resuming his human form against the backdrop of a lush carpet and an exquisite wardrobe.

Simultaneously, a towering figure materialized—a knight adorned in tattered black armor. Pale flames flickered in its eye sockets, putrid liquid seeping from the armor's crevices, with only sticky flesh clinging to its exposed skin.

With a broadsword raised, the dead knight advanced, slashing at Lumian, as if poised to shatter both bed and wardrobe.

Lumian's agile form shifted, maneuvering from facing the Death Knight, the Shadow-Swallowing Python, and the looming tall, thin shadow to flank them all.

Crash!

The broadsword of the Death Knight cleaved through the wardrobe, sending fragments flying. Lumian, reacting swiftly, crouched down, clenched his fists, and struck the heavy brownish-yellow carpet.

From the center, a multitude of crimson, nearly white flames burst forth, consuming every inch of the room. The inferno devoured the three undead entities suspected to be from the spirit world.

Rumble!

Within the roaring flames, fireballs materialized and shot out from Lumian's form.

They homed in on the Death Knight, the Shadow-Swallowing Python, and the lanky black shadow, or recklessly engulfed the sizable bedroom.

Rumble!

The crimson, nearly white fireballs detonated consecutively, tearing apart the three undead beings, pulverizing the bed, desk, and other furnishings. Pungent smoke billowed from the scorched carpet.

In this explosive turmoil, any entity lacking pure ethereality or possessing partial corporeality faced inevitable destruction in the confined space. The once steel-clad armor of the Death Knight crumbled instantly, and the Shadow-Swallowing Python fractured into a multitude of burning remains.

Though the lanky shadow fared relatively better, it too succumbed to the engulfing flames, dwindling in substance.

Rumble!

Although the Flying Bird boasted a steel structure, the impact of such force—reminiscent of multiple cannons targeting a confined space—inevitably took its toll on Room 5 of the first-class cabin. Strangely, only cracks marred the inner wall, with neither the wall nor the door fully giving way.

However, the formless barrier enveloping the area shuddered violently, on the verge of disintegration.

As shockwaves rebounded from the walls, doors, and ceiling, Lumian, the catalyst of the explosion, suffered as well. It was akin to being struck repeatedly by a massive hammer, with his vision clouded by golden specks and a metallic taste of blood in his throat.

The air, instantly devoured by flames, left him with a suffocating sensation.

Amidst the tumultuous flames, a figure emerged from the darkness, standing near the window, adorned in a black robe with a loose hood. Numerous wounds marked his body, testament to the explosive waves and engulfing flames, leaving charred imprints.

Lumian observed that the man's once fine hairs had transformed into pale-white, nearly indistinguishable feathers. Some were charred, emitting a dark dense fog instead of thick smoke.

Rather than the usual red blood, a thick yellowish-green hue oozed from the wounds.

Under the raised hood, Lumian discerned a pale-white face and a few ulcers reaching down to the bone. Vague traces of pale-white fur adorned the wounds.

In the blink of an eye, Lumian locked eyes with his opponent, who sported cold flaxen-colored irises. Between the brows of the hooded figure, a crack swiftly widened, revealing an illusory vertical eye with a deep purple border that almost verged on black. Devoid of eyelashes or pupils, it seemed to harbor countless pale-white patterns.

This peculiar vertical eye instantly mirrored Lumian's figure.

His initial intention to "teleport" behind the hooded man and employ the Spell of Harrumph met an abrupt freeze.

The impact resonated at the spiritual level.

It was akin to Lumian's Soul Body losing the protective shield of his physical form and standing exposed to scorching sunlight. Instinctively, fear, stiffness, and lethargy gripped him.

Ordinarily, humans explored the spirit world through Astral Projection, rarely detaching their Soul Body—the core of their soul—from their physical being, always shrouded in protection.

The Arbiter pathway's Psychic Piercing bypassed the physical body, Ether Body, Astral Projection, and Body of Heart and Mind, directly influencing the Soul Body. It carried an almost undefendable reputation, affecting individuals to varying degrees.

Lumian suspected that the Spell of Harrumph shared these characteristics.

Within the assailant's dark-purple, nearly black vertical eye, pale-white patterns silently spun, as if seeking the essence of Lumian's Spirit Body.

The sensation resembled being scrutinized by penetrating rays of light, causing Lumian's Spirit Body to quiver slightly, impeding intricate thoughts.

Just as he was about to take the simplest action of sinking his consciousness into the Blood Emperor mark on his right hand, the hooded man emitted a sudden pained groan.

His head snapped back as if struck by a bullet, the once illusory, dark-purple vertical eye now blurry, oozing dark-red blood mixed with yellowish-green pus.

With a pained groan, the hooded figure swiftly turned and soared out of the window, dragged by an unseen force.

Observing this, Lumian didn't hasten to block the escape with Spirit World Traversal. Instead, he raised his right hand and snapped his fingers.

Boom!

At the window, a crimson, almost blinding light erupted, and a violent explosion engulfed the hooded man.

Lumian had set this as a trap.

Before entering a state of "sleep," he had concealed the master bedroom within the Bottle of Fiction. There were two entrances, one by the window and the other by the door, accessible only to beings with superpowers. Both exits harbored delayed explosion fireballs.

Any trigger would unleash devastation.

Amidst the fiery explosion, the hooded man was propelled off his feet, crashing against the window frame. His limbs seemed on the brink of tearing from his body.

Without a moment's hesitation, Lumian "teleported" to the severely injured and unconscious man, harrumphing at his foe.

Two beams of white light shot forth, striking the target and rendering him completely unconscious.

As Lumian prepared for his next move, pairs of arms suddenly emerged from the darkness at the shattered exit of the Bottle of Fiction.

Some were covered in warts, some decayed to the point of pus overflowing, and some only displayed blackened bones…

These arms seized the hooded man's clothes and dragged him into the shadows, disappearing without a trace.

Observing this, Lumian refrained from an immediate transformation into a shadow creature to pursue them. Instead, he stood his ground, a slight frown creasing his brows.

The assailant shared an uncanny resemblance to Demon Warlock Burman as depicted on the wanted posters, but the non-human feeling was even more pronounced. The details suggested an undying monster rather than a human.

Lumian wasn't caught off guard by Demon Warlock Burman's appearance. It was one of the anticipated outcomes.

He had deliberately voiced suspicions about Fidel's connection with the Demon Warlock in front of him without providing clarity, fostering the illusion that Louis Berry, a bold adventurer with a penchant for conspiracies, was attempting to extort money from the prominent merchant.

Under normal circumstances, even if Fidel had something to hide, he wouldn't act so swiftly. He would likely observe closely for a few days to confirm the situation. Lumian, however, had "offered" him an opportunity this time.

Louis Berry, the adventurer, had made public the commission he accepted to lure out Baronet Black!

In such a scenario, it wouldn't raise eyebrows if he were killed by Class Khizi.

The death of an overconfident individual in Port Farim wouldn't spark trouble or suspicion.

So, why not nip the danger in the bud?

Even if Louis Berry's suspicions lacked evidence, they would still draw the attention of official Beyonders.

Lumian's "performance" at the bar the previous night seemed to bait Black Baronet Class Khizi, but in reality, it was bait for the merchant, Fidel Guerra!

If Fidel had no ties to the Demon Warlock, it wouldn't trigger an additional reaction. Lumian merely needed to pursue the superficial purpose of hunting Black Baronet. If there was a connection, he would promptly receive a "response."

To Lumian's surprise, the abilities exhibited by Demon Warlock Burman shared similarities with the few divine pathways he knew, but there were also notable differences!

Chapter 524: Infighting

524 Infighting

The illusory eye between the Demon Warlock's brows bore a remarkable resemblance to the Eye of Mystery Prying from the Warlock pathway. However, this entity took a unique form, manifesting as a vertical eye rather than the typical manifestation within the eye itself. Lumian had never encountered or heard of such a phenomenon before.

While a Mystery Pryer might experience similar abnormalities as a High-

Sequence Beyonder, it was clear that Burman hadn't reached the Saint level. Otherwise, Lumian would have been the one fleeing, not him. In such a scenario, Lumian might not have been able to escape even if he desired; his only hope would be that the residual aura of the Blood Emperor could momentarily distract Burman, enabling him to "teleport" away.

Considering the authorities' wanted poster, information from 007, and details gathered from Philip and others, Lumian had long concluded that a Demon Warlock like Burman couldn't be a Sequence 4—he certainly wasn't audacious enough to hunt a demigod.

Based on the illusory vertical eye and Burman's diverse, comprehensive abilities, Lumian sensed a true alignment with the characteristics of a Warlock. However, no Warlock's Eye of Mystery Prying resembled this. Not only did it grow between the brows and become a vertical eye, marked with pale-white patterns against a nearly black background, but it also possessed the ability to intimidate others' Spirit Bodies, revealing a perceived "truth."

In that moment, Lumian felt as if he had been stripped of all externalities, leaving only his Spirit Body to resist Burman's. Yielding or failing would result in fainting or enslavement.

Fortunately, the "truth" on him was beyond the perception of Low- to Mid-

Sequence Beyonders, and Burman was no exception. Before Lumian could activate the Blood Emperor's residual aura, the Demon Warlock suffered a backlash, nearly incapacitating him.

Moreover, Burman's command over the undead and the protection he received after fainting surpassed typical Warlock capabilities. Even if others could achieve similar effects with learned or invented spells, it wouldn't be to that extent, let alone so effortlessly.

Which evil god's pathway is this? Or has Burman, a Warlock, been corrupted and acquired abnormal traits? That would explain the non-human details on him. After conducting so many resurrection experiments, he wouldn't lack the kind that sacrifices to evil gods…

The illusory vertical eye was undeniably powerful and bizarre. I couldn't withstand it head-on. Were it not for the protection of Mr. Fool's seal, Termiboros, and the lingering aura of the Blood Emperor—all surpassing my current level—I might have met my demise at Burman's hands. Lumian's thoughts raced as he quickly made a guess.

Seizing this moment to counteract the impact of the explosion, he retrieved the golden straw hat from his Traveler's Bag and placed it on his head before disappearing.

Lumian "teleported" to 16 Rue Coreas, the entrance of Fidel Guerra's opulent residence.

While Demon Warlock Burman had the means to escape, the same couldn't be said for this prominent merchant!

If Burman had been in good condition when he fled, Lumian worried that he might return out of professional courtesy and rescue his employer.

However, since Burman had been rendered unconscious and taken away by some undead creature, he wouldn't be returning to 16 Rue Coreas. He wouldn't even after waking up either. The more time passed, the more likely Fidel Guerra's house would become a trap for the Demon Warlock.

Hence, Lumian still had time to ponder Burman's Sequence and the non-human issues he exhibited.

His deliberate delay served a purpose.

If Demon Warlock Burman were to wake up promptly and flee with his employer, Lumian's calculated delay of a minute or two would ensnare both of them.

Standing at the entrance of 16 Rue Coreas, Lumian's brow furrowed slightly.

As a Hunter, he detected a faint scent of blood emanating from inside the house.

After a moment of consideration, Lumian gently pushed open the dark-blue door.

It was unlocked.

The door bore splatters of fresh blood that hadn't fully congealed. It seemed as though someone in a panic had sought refuge here, unlocking the door just before being pursued and torn to pieces.

However, there were no remnants of the corpse to be found.

Lumian halted at the doorway, listening intently. The entire house remained eerily silent.

Did Fidel act swiftly, eliminating those in the know and relocating to safety before Burman could strike me down?

In such a scenario, if Burman's operation proved successful and he uncovered the reasons for my suspicions and if there were others privy to the information, Fidel could use the pretext of a late-night attack by Black Baronet and other pirates, where he nearly lost his life. Escaping wouldn't have been easy before returning here. Alternatively, he might vanish forever, adopting a new identity to embark on a fresh business venture… Lumian pondered this mystery as he navigated past the blood-stained area at the entrance, intending to search the house for clues. His goal was to uncover the exact relationship between Fidel Guerra and Demon Warlock Burman.

Leaving the door slightly ajar, he proceeded towards the staircase, the scent of blood lingering in the air.

Perhaps sensing his approach, heavy footsteps suddenly echoed.

Amidst the rhythmic sounds of footsteps, a figure emerged from the basement, coming into Lumian's line of sight.

It wasn't human, or rather, it couldn't be deemed human any longer.

Standing three to four meters tall, its body comprised fragments from various human corpses. It possessed a mix of feminine curves and masculine traits, sewn together by linen threads, with blood-stained mucus dripping from the joints.

This "person" featured a relatively intact head, with only one source—Fidel Guerra, a mixed-blood Intis and Feynapotter.

The merchant's head didn't align with the body; it was as if a child's head had been placed on a half-giant's neck. Dark brown eyes, vacant yet still filled with fear and confusion, stared out.

Dead? Fidel is dead? Did he turn himself into a monster? Lumian pondered. Just as this thought crossed his mind, the stitched corpse lunged forward, dragging three human leg bones that seemed fused together.

A pale-white flame ignited on the colossal "bone sword."

Lumian's eyes narrowed, and his body abruptly vanished, reappearing instantly behind the massive stitched corpse.

"Ha!"

He opened his mouth and emitted a pale-yellow light.

However, the light struck Fidel's head, failing to disorient him, let alone render him unconscious.

It became apparent that the undead creature was immune to the Spell of Harrumph!

Almost simultaneously, the rapidly running sutured corpse forcefully pivoted, emitting a muffled sound from its throat—a language Lumian didn't understand or a word carrying magical effects.

Lumian's soul trembled, as if cowed by evil and death.

He momentarily froze.

The sutured corpse turned around, advancing with purpose. It raised the colossal "bone sword," burning with pale-white flames, and slashed at Lumian's head.

Lumian, experienced in such situations, mostly stemming from encounters with high-level entities, found the current threat less severe than the consequences of the Demon Warlock's illusory vertical eye.

Just in time, Lumian "woke up," activating the black mark on his right shoulder.

Amidst the howling wind, the colossal "bone sword," engulfed in pale-white flames, struck the afterimage left behind.

This time, Lumian materialized close to the stitched corpse's back, stabbing the Symphony of Hatred retrieved from his Traveler's Bag into it.

With a pfft, the pitch-black bone flute, seemingly fragile, plunged into the stitched corpse's flesh.

The flaxen threads burst open, and chunks of flesh and blood peeled off, revealing a dark-red heart emitting pale-white flames.

Lumian extended his left hand, pressing it against the near-fatal wound. The crimson fireball, nearly white, compressed layer by layer as it was pushed in.

Utilizing the reactive force, Lumian abruptly flew backward, dodging the massive "bone sword" that slashed at him.

Rumble!

In midair, he witnessed crimson, nearly white flames erupt from the sutured corpse, tearing apart the beating heart.

Rumble!

The sutured corpse disintegrated, and the flesh and blood of various humans scattered on the ground.

Bang! Fidel's head landed in a pile of flesh and blood, the blankness giving way to a pained expression.

"Who turned you into this?" Lumian inquired, glancing out the window, sensing that the explosion would likely draw the attention of the patrolling police.

Fidel's head opened its mouth, words muffled and filled with hatred.

"It's—it's Burman!"

"Burman?" Lumian was taken aback. "Were you infighting?"

Fidel's head throbbed with pain as his voice trailed off.

"I thought you were testing me. I wanted to observe for a few more days, b-but he couldn't wait. He w-wanted to kill you tonight. I didn't agree, and he killed everyone in the house…

"H-he's a true lunatic!"

At this point, Fidel's head lolled, his eyes closed, and he fell silent.

Demon Warlock Burman's mental state is quite problematic… Lumian thought. Is that why he killed his employer's entire household? If he really wanted to kill me, he could have acted alone… Lumian had previously considered whether Fidel would think he was baiting him. For this reason, he deliberately created the illusion that he was baiting Black Baronet to lull Fidel. As for the effect, Lumian didn't care too much. If Fidel didn't take the bait, he would use another method. "Fishing" wasn't the only method in his arsenal.

Unexpectedly, this triggered infighting between Fidel and Burman.

Lumian believed even he couldn't bring himself to do such a thing when his psychological problems were at their worst. That was unless Fidel provoked him, such as pointing out that only a lunatic would believe in resurrection.

Observing the corpse fragments for a while, Lumian noticed no signs of a Beyonder characteristic emerging.

Curse my luck. Burman must have taken it. He shook his head and walked towards the room where the safe might be.

Chapter 525: Repair Fee

525 Repair Fee

Lumian wasn't sure if he should attribute the misfortune of Demon Warlock Burman taking the banknotes, coins, and gold from the safe to the Symphony of Hatred. After all, he hadn't arrived at 16 Rue Coreas and hadn't utilized General Philip's blackened bone flute. Its abilities likely weren't potent enough to rewind the past.

However, Fidel, living up to his title as a prominent merchant, had numerous wallets stashed in various clothes. Lumian conducted a quick search, revealing a total of 30,000 verl d'or.

This provided a modicum of relief for his "psychological injury."

Upon hearing the arrival of a carriage outside, Lumian left Fidel's bedroom and turned to the adjacent room. He suspected it was the patrolling constables here to investigate the recent explosion.

The room was clean and tidy, yet a faint, uncomfortable smell lingered—the stench of decaying corpses.

Entering the room felt like stepping into a catacomb, surrounded by the marks of his own kind and their deaths, creating an uneasy atmosphere.

This should be Demon Warlock Burman's room. It allows him to protect Fidel in the shortest time possible, heh heh, but he ultimately killed him… This story tells us that the most important condition for choosing a bodyguard is mental stability… Lumian mused as he surveyed every corner of the room.

At that moment, the constables had already pushed open the house's door, revealing spilled blood and scattered flesh.

One of them swiftly drew his revolver, while the other blew a whistle, producing a piercing sound.

Lumian's gaze focused on the blackened marks in the room. The blood, suspected to be old, emitted a sinister aura.

"Burman once killed a special creature in this room to complete a resurrection experiment?" Lumian muttered to himself.

He didn't assume it was Demon Warlock Burman's blood because he believed that the other party wouldn't leave behind such a crucial item when he had enough time.

If a Beyonder skilled in curses obtained it, Burman would be in grave danger unless he had a way to sever the connection in advance.

In contrast, Burman's blood and flesh were more likely to be found in the master bedroom of Room 5 of the Flying Bird's first-class cabin. The Demon Warlock had suffered severe injuries from the explosion and the flames.

Of course, the blanket explosion and subsequent intense combustion might have rendered the ingredients for cursing inactive.

Lumian crouched down and retrieved a glass bottle from his Traveler's Bag. He scraped away the black marks on the wall and stored them inside.

After completing his task, Lumian cleared any potential traces—hair, skin, and other items. He activated the black mark on his right shoulder and vanished from 16 Rue Coreas before more constables and official Beyonders arrived.

Upon returning to the Flying Bird, he immediately inspected the previous battlefield, now reduced to ruins, scattered with charred and shattered remnants. Metal walls bore marks of distortions and minor cracks, remnants of the intense encounter.

The lingering gasses from the burning carpet and items slowly dissipated through the open window.

After Burman triggered the trap at the exit, the Bottle of Fiction had dissipated.

Lumian focused on examining the windowsill, finding charred remnants.

Phew… Exhaling deeply, he departed Room 5 of the first-class cabin, descending to the deck.

Philip, the security supervisor, leaned against the shipboard, gazing at the night view.

Where's your lover?" Lumian approached Philip, resting his hands on the shipboard.

Philip sighed and replied, "Her destination is Port Farim. Apparently, she was heading to a relative's plantation to assist them."

"Something to celebrate. This means you'll have a new lover," Lumian said, adopting the tone of a Dandyism believer.

"Please allow me to be downcast for another two days," Philip responded, not objecting to Lumian's words but emphasizing his invested feelings.

Of course, it was just a little.

"Did you just return from the port? Why didn't I see you board the ship?" Philip inquired, following his professional instincts.

"I've been in my room the whole time. There was a minor accident at the party just now that set the master bedroom ablaze. Many things were burned. Get someone to fix it promptly tomorrow," Lumian explained, seeking Philip's assistance in resolving the situation. Despite the possibility of staying in the fire-damaged room, Lumian preferred to take action to rectify the situation.

Philip appeared confused. "Party… Ablaze… What did you do in the room? I didn't hear anything…"

Lumian grinned and responded, "A passionate guest made an appearance. Their actions were a bit extreme."

"Really?" Philip inquired subconsciously.

"No," Lumian admitted straightforwardly. "Do you want to hear the real reason?"

Philip fell silent. After a few seconds, he said, "There's a need for compensation for such damage. We'll charge you the repair fee.

"Fortunately, we're still in Port Farim. We can replenish various items immediately. Otherwise, it would have been quite troublesome."

Lumian handed over a stack of banknotes.

"This is the repair fee. I hope it can be completed by tomorrow. If it's too much, consider it a tip. If it's too little, ask me for more."

Philip took the money, frowning as he weighed the stack of banknotes.

"What did you do to the bedroom?"

Why is he giving so much for the repairs?

Is this hush money?

Lumian smiled, turned around, and returned to Room 5 of the first-class cabin.

Observing him disappear through the cabin entrance, Philip counted the stack of banknotes under the crimson moonlight and the gas street lamps at the port.

"2,000 verl d'or? Did he blow up that room?" Philip was shocked and suspicious.

But I didn't hear anything…

That night, Lumian slept in a recliner in the living room.

Initially planning to summon Jenna's Rabbit Chasel and write Franca a letter about the Demon Warlock, seeking her help with Magic Mirror Divination to identify the source of the old blood in Burman's room. However, he remembered that Franca might still be awake while Jenna was already asleep.

Patiently waiting until the morning, Lumian set up the ritual using "Rabbit-shaped spirit that wanders about the unfounded, a runner who pursues knowledge, a messenger that belongs solely to the Seven of Cups" to summon the book-holding transparent creature resembling a rabbit with powerful legs.

Today's Rabbit Chasel, unlike the last time, wore a pair of indistinct gold-rimmed glasses.

Handing the letter and the glass bottle containing the blood and powder to Rabbit Chasel, Lumian asked curiously, "Why are you suddenly wearing glasses? Is this the downside of knowledge?"

Behind the gold-rimmed glasses, Rabbit Chasel's eyes glinted sharply.

"No, I learned this from a novel given by the Seven of Cups."

"What novel did she give you?" Lumian inquired, having a hunch.

"The last time I helped you deliver a letter to her, she didn't have any other books with her, so she could only lend me one of her newly purchased collections." Rabbit Chasel adjusted its gold-rimmed glasses on the bridge of its nose. "That novel is called 'The Adventurer 1: First Show of Strength.'"

As expected, Lumian thought. So, that's why you learned to wear glasses? He didn't know how to comment on this matter.

After Rabbit Chasel left, Ludwig and Lugano woke up one after another, with the former casting a glance at Lumian's bedroom before eating his pre-breakfast snacks. Lugano, however, seemed puzzled.

"Was there a fire last night?"

Why don't I know?

Lumian chuckled.

"It happened while you were engrossed with a certain lady. I quickly resolved it."

"Is that so…" Lugano reined in his disbelief.

Choosing to explore local delicacies in Port Farim rather than enjoying the ship's breakfast, Lumian disembarked.

Shortly after, Philip, the security supervisor, arrived with a dining cart.

Standing in the doorway of the charred bedroom, Philip was stunned.

You call this a minor accident?

Even if it was blasted by cannons, it couldn't be in a worse state, right?

Was he planning to dismantle the entire ship?

Uh, such destructive power actually didn't affect the room's exterior. Even the damage to the walls is within repairable limits… I didn't hear anything either…

What had Louis Berry done in the room last night?

No wonder he gave 2,000 verl d'or!

At that instant, Philip's blood surged into his brain.

…

In the Sun Square open-air market of Port Farim, Lumian enjoyed a tortilla filled with various fruit cubes and sipped a peculiar coffee laced with salt as he leisurely strolled through the stalls.

Occasionally, he treated himself to a roasted sausage, relishing the sizzling, oily delicacy.

Approaching the end of the open-air market, he encountered Batna Comté.

The well-dressed adventurer's eyes lit up as he approached Lumian and whispered, "Something happened to your employer!"

Curious, Lumian inquired, "What happened?"

He wanted to know how the official Beyonders had publicized this matter.

"It's that Demon Warlock. He killed Fidel's family and all his servants!" Batna's relief was evident; he hadn't been present yesterday and was glad to have avoided potential danger.

The evidence does seem to point toward the Demon Warlock… The authorities must have shared all the details… Lumian smiled at Batna and remarked, "So, everyone at 16 Rue Coreas fell victim to the Demon Warlock?"

"Yes," Batna confirmed with a solemn nod.

Lumian glanced at him and joked, "Remember how I blindfolded myself yesterday, hoping fate would guide me to uncover clues left behind by a Demon Warlock? Do you recall where we ended up?"

Batna was momentarily taken aback before muttering, "16 Rue Coreas…"

Suddenly, he looked up at Lumian in shock and fear.

Chapter 526: Resolution

526 Resolution

Batna exclaimed in surprise, "Your blindfolded walk that day was quite effective…"

The destination was Demon Warlock Burman's next target!

Without waiting for Lumian's response, the adventurer mumbled to himself in puzzlement, "Are you a Blessed of luck?"

No, a Blessed of calamity… Lumian replied inwardly.

As thoughts raced, Batna suddenly formulated a new hypothesis.

Could this be Demon Warlock Burman himself?

He had investigated the explosion scene, returning to flaunt his prowess at the crime scene and blindfolded himself to randomly choose the next victim!

Such an explanation seemed far more plausible than being blessed with luck!

Lumian glanced at Batna's Batna's tense expression and smiled.

"Don't tell me you think I'm Burman? How long have I been in Port Farim?"

That's exactly it. Something happened the night you first arrived in Port Farim… Batna didn't dare vocalize it.

"When the Quartier des Black Pearls exploded, I was still praying in the cathedral," Lumian said with amusement, providing an alibi.

Batna pondered for a moment and relaxed, but confusion still lingered on his face.

Lumian sighed and inquired, "Yesterday, I didn't expect to encounter anything related to the Demon Warlock while walking blindfolded. I just found it fun."

He spoke the truth.

However, he couldn't shake the suspicion that the corruption caused by 0-01 might be more severe than he had imagined.

Of course, he couldn't rule out the possibility that Trier, a seal from the Fourth Epoch, had effectively suppressed the preexisting issues within him.

The excuse of finding it "fun" barely convinced Batna. He felt that Louis Berry was undoubtedly such a person.

Yet, the other party would sporadically set traps just for the amusement of it. Anyone treating him as an idiot would end up becoming one!

"Perhaps I was truly blessed by luck yesterday," Lumian concluded.

He then recounted his hypothesis about the Demon Warlock's connection with Fidel and expressed regret, "Unfortunately, I didn't believe I'm that lucky."

Lumian's reasoning convinced Batna that Demon Warlock Burman's continuous evasion and access to resources stemmed from his close symbiotic relationship with Fidel, a prominent merchant. The subsequent tragedy likely resulted from the pressure exerted by the official Beyonders' investigation, leading to internal strife.

This ruled out the possibility that Louis Berry was a Demon Warlock. He had just arrived in Port Farim a few days ago, and Burman had been here for a long time.

"What a shame…" Batna sighed. "If I had sold the clues about the Demon Warlock's close connection to Fidel to the authorities beforehand, I could've bagged a hefty bounty."

It would've been at least 5,000 verl d'or!

Batna shook his head.

"No, without evidence, the authorities won't buy it. Can't tell them we stumbled on clues blindfolded, blessed by luck. They'd just cuff us for being fraudsters."

A chuckle slipped from Lumian's lips.

"Can't you fabricate some evidence to back the clues?

"Say you spotted someone suspicious at Fidel's back door, maybe the Demon Warlock. Let the official Beyonders confirm it themselves. They'll uncover the truth in due time."

"T-That'd work?" Batna's mouth hung slightly agape.

"Why not?" Lumian grinned. "If you truly found the Demon Warlock, tell them not to sweat the details. Just ask if the clues are legit and if they helped capture the Demon Warlock. If they miss Burman, it's a small scam at worst. Few days of hard labor for you."

"Official Beyonders can take tips from adventurers without solid certainty, right? They'd miss genuine info otherwise."

Lumian's words left Batna silent momentarily before he blurted out, "Don't tell me you've got Islander blood?"

Deception seemed to be his forte.

Lumian casually replied, "Knew an Islander in Trier, quite the con artist with rich experience and techniques."

With a flicker of interest, Lumian raised his left hand, pinching his left eye socket.

Glancing at Batna, he asked, "How long have you been adventuring? Why still so green?"

"Over a year," Batna defended himself. "It's just that I stick to the rules with authorities. I'm more adaptable when dealing with pirates and others."

"Adventurers slipping clues to authorities also dabble in deceit, right?" Lumian grinned. "They scam if they can."

He suspected Batna's strict adherence to rules came from a well-bred background, a notion confirmed by the other party's attire and appearance.

Observing Batna's silence, Lumian finished his remaining salted coffee and glanced back at the lively open-air market.

"Try not to go to the morgue, cemetery, or other places for the time being."

Just as Batna was about to ask why, he instantly grasped the advice's true meaning.

Without Fidel to provide resources, the Demon Warlock might feel compelled to take action!

…

At noon, Lumian returned to Room 5 of the Flying Bird's first-class cabin. He noticed the master bedroom had undergone a transformation with a change in carpet, bed, wardrobe, desk, and other furniture, replaced by various ornaments. However, the distortions and cracks in the metal walls had only been partially repaired, not fully restored.

Before long, his messenger, Penitent Baynfel, emerged from the void and handed him a letter.

Franca:

"Based on your latest account and my discussion with 007 last night, I suspect that Demon Warlock Burman had been compelled to switch Sequences.

"He was originally a Warlock, but to revive his wife, he switched to the neighboring Death pathway. He went half-mad, becoming half-human and half-monster.

"Though this could be explained as a Warlock receiving an evil god's boon, your situation doesn't align. No cases of Beyonder powers from two pathways fusing and mutating have been documented. This was evident in your clash with Burman. The Eye of Illusory you mentioned has the Eye of Mystery Prying, revealing the side of reality, but it also displays the Death pathway's suppression of the Spirit Body or even enslavement.

"As far as I know, the Death pathway gains an Eye of Death ability at Sequence 8 Gravedigger. Did it fuse with the Eye of Mystery Prying, forming that distinctive Eye of Illusory?"

As Lumian read, he suddenly recalled the appearance of the Eye of Illusory.

Embedded vertically in his forehead, illusory and blurry, a deep purple bordering on black, with numerous pale-white patterns—undeniably a fusion of the Eye of Mystery Prying and the Death pathway's abilities.

Lumian's gaze shifted downward as he continued reading.

"White feather-like fur, decaying wounds, control over various undead creatures, unstable emotional states, and extreme actions—all indirectly confirming my hypothesis…

"The origins of the old blood are rather peculiar. I've conducted Magic Mirror Divination several times and consulted various entities, but all I've gleaned is that it stems from the depths of the spirit world. No further information. It seems the irreversible half-mad Burman had some other fortuitous encounter."

Unstable emotions… Extreme actions… irreversible half-madness… Lumian mulled over the descriptions and let out an inaudible sigh.

How determined and desperate must Burman have been when he chose to consume the Death pathway potion?

Wild Beyonders didn't know they could switch to neighboring pathways at a specific Sequence. They believed once a divine pathway was chosen, it couldn't be altered. Forced consumption of potions from other pathways led to madness or death.

Moreover, Mystery Pryer and Death weren't adjacent pathways that allowed switching.

Burman wouldn't have drunk the Death pathway potion without a resolve bordering on death, all to revive his wife, even at the cost of his sanity.

Lumian sensed he might have made the same choice in such a situation, hence his conflicting emotions.

Franca's letter ended with reassurance: "Don't fret over the aftermath. Burman's mental state will soon cause him to resurface without Fidel's support and restraint. He might succeed once or twice in gathering materials for experiments, but it won't last. Official Beyonders will eliminate him within weeks or even days."

Lumian glanced at Penitent Baynfel, yet to depart.

"Help me deliver my reply to the sender."

Swiftly, he penned a line: "I'll kill Burman as soon as possible."

Before long, Penitent Baynfel returned with Franca's reply: "Why?"

Lumian wrote on the same piece of paper: "I wish to punish him for his crimes…"

He paused for a moment before continuing, "And end his pain."

Folding the letter into a square, Lumian handed it to Baynfel and glanced at the messenger.

"Don't you find it troublesome to send letters back and forth?"

It wasn't concern but puzzlement.

After delivering the letter, Penitent Baynfel didn't leave immediately. Instead, he waited for a potential reply.

This time, Baynfel didn't remain silent. He replied in a deep voice, "Being busy makes me feel better. It's better to have something to do than always watch the darkness."

Lumian listened quietly without responding, watching Penitent Baynfel turn and walk into the void.

He empathized with those words.

Franca didn't stop Lumian. Her reply was concise and forceful: "Be careful!"

Phew… Lumian exhaled and walked to the living room window, casting his gaze at Port Farim bathed in the blazing sunlight and the distant Andatna volcano.

Chapter 527: Immersion

527 Immersion

Under the sunlight, Port Farim appeared to be tinged with a golden hue, and the air seemed to carry the sweetness of cane sugar.

Lumian lingered by the window, contemplating the whereabouts of the Demon Warlock.

During his rescue the previous night, Burman had slipped into a deep coma, unable to direct the undead creature he controlled. Therefore, the undead being must have relied on its instincts and routines to transport Burman to a safe haven he frequented.

Ordinarily, Fidel's residence would be his top choice. Yet, when Lumian scoured the premises, there were no traces indicating Burman's return.

His initial assumption was that Burman had employed the undead creatures to eliminate Fidel's family, attendants, and servants. Recognizing 16 Rue Coreas as a battlefield and unsafe, they likely sought an alternate hideout.

Where could that be?

From his Traveler's Bag, Lumian retrieved the information Franca had provided about Burman and the rest of the details gathered from Philip, Batna, and the others. He read through it again, attempting to immerse himself in the mindset of the Demon Warlock, simulating his thoughts, actions, and motivations.

Burman hailed from Fog Province, also known as Winter Province, situated in the northern part of Intis. Bordering the Feysac Empire, the region had relatively rustic folk customs, with a penchant for strong liquor.

His wife, Helen, a Port Farim native without Islander heritage, had a grandfather who worked as a cane sugar merchant traveling between Port Farim and Port LeSeur. Unfortunately, he encountered pirates, losing most of his business and relying on a plantation he had previously acquired.

Born and raised on that plantation, Helen witnessed its sale due to conflicts among her father's generation after her grandfather's death. Her family received a portion of the money and relocated to Port Farim. After her father's passing and her mother falling ill, she became an adventurer and crossed paths with Burman.

Both had experienced fortuitous encounters during their adventures, gaining superpowers. They even acquired property in Port Farim, planning a future away from the adventurous life as they grew older.

Several years ago, they, along with a group of fellow adventurers, rented a boat to explore the seas for treasure. Unfortunately, they encountered sea monsters, and only Burman and two others survived.

Following this tragic incident, Burman's attempts to revive his wife took a progressively desperate turn.

"Treasure hunting at sea? Are there really that many treasures at sea?" Lumian mumbled, convinced that it was highly likely Burman was still in Port Farim.

This place held his dearest memories, remnants of the years spent with his wife, Helen. When selecting a hiding spot, he would instinctively lean towards this area.

With this in mind, Lumian continued reading the latter part of the intel.

As anticipated, Burman's past dangerous experiments had unfolded near the Fog Sea Archipelago, encompassing other islands and the villages and towns along the Northern Continent's coast. If he connected them into irregular concentric circles, the center would be in Port Farim on Saint Tick Island.

Burman uses Port Farim as a base for resurrection attempts in various places… Lumian pondered. He hasn't stirred trouble in Port Farim before, so why the exception this time? If I were Burman in his half-mad state, I'd treat Port Farim as my spiritual home, a haven of beautiful memories. Typically, I wouldn't disrupt the order here. I might even secretly maintain it and handle some audacious pirates and adventurers on the sly… Lumian analyzed thoughtfully.

He had substituted Port Farim with Cordu. Believing that if his sister's death had no connection to Cordu and the peace remained, anyone daring to disturb Cordu's daily life and alter the situation would be his enemy!

Frowning slightly, he sensed there might be crucial details unclear about the previous night's explosion. There could be a reason why Burman killed Fidel and his family beyond a mere disagreement. Fidel, having collaborated with Burman for years, should have known about his unstable mental state. How could such a shrewd merchant not consider the potential repercussions of his words on the Demon Warlock?

Moreover, Burman aimed to eliminate the adventurer Louis Berry to conceal his collaboration with Fidel. If Fidel was already dead, why silence Lumian?

Perhaps, Fidel had assumed he could persuade Burman to wait a few days before acting, only to find Burman already in a deranged state, driven by instinct.

After careful consideration, Lumian decided to re-enter Port Farim and visit Burman and Helen's former residence.

Even though Burman had sold it long ago to fund his resurrection experiments and it was under official Beyonder scrutiny, there remained a possibility of discovering crucial clues.

What if the mad Burman insisted on returning to his previous abode?

Instructing Lugano to keep an eye on Ludwig, Lumian descended to the deck and encountered Philip.

The Flying Bird's security supervisor regarded Lumian with a mixed expression. Without mentioning the room that seemed to have been bombarded by cannons, he stated, "I'll distribute the remaining repair fees to the participating workers and attendants."

The implication was clear: "I've already compensated those who need to be silenced."

"You can take a share yourself," Lumian replied with a smile.

Philip shook his head and sighed.

"Not having any more incidents like that on the way from Port Farim to Port Santa would be the best reward for me."

"I'll do my best," Lumian sincerely assured him.

He refrained from making promises, acknowledging factors beyond his control.

He also looked forward to reaching Port Santa without trouble and beginning the hunt for the key members of April Fool's—Bard and Ultraman.

Philip gazed at Lumian for a few seconds, as if contemplating whether to report him in advance.

He sighed again.

"The port lockdown will be lifted tonight. The Flying Bird will set sail again tomorrow morning. Don't miss it."

Lumian nodded and asked curiously, "The Demon Warlock has been apprehended?"

"No, but it's pretty much confirmed that it has nothing to do with the ships at the port. Nor is he hiding here," Philip replied nonchalantly. "Burman even killed the prominent merchant Fidel's family last night. They seemed to be in a cooperative relationship. Perhaps Fidel wanted to betray him…"

At this point, Philip gave Lumian a sharp glance.

"Last night, the battle in your room—could it be related to this?"

"What kind of connection do you think there will be?" Lumian asked, amused.

Philip pondered for a moment and couldn't make the connection.

Observing this, Lumian waved his hand and donned his golden straw hat. He descended the gangway to the docks and left the port district.

As Lumian reached Sun Square, adorned with numerous wanted posters, he was approached by an Islander man with brownish-black skin, sunken eyes, and a deep-set gaze. The man handed him a folded book with a plethora of words and crude patterns printed on it.

"Traveler, this is Port Farim's travel guide. It lists scenic spots, unique delicacies, and sexual entertainment venues," the Islander introduced with zeal. "It'll make your stay here more enjoyable."

Lumian played along and asked, "How much?"

"It's free! I'll give it to you for free!" the Islander exclaimed in a high-pitched voice. "The government prints these for tourists, hoping for a positive impression of Port Farim."

"Awesome." Lumian accepted the guidebook with an expression of "pleasant surprise" and unfolded it.

The guide detailed scenic views and recommendations from various shops—sugar cane outlets, sexual entertainment venues, renowned eateries, and more.

Suddenly, Lumian swiftly drew his revolver and pressed it against the Islander's forehead.

The Islander froze, stunned. After a few seconds, he stammered, "No, no charge. I'm not lying!"

Was this minor situation worth a gun being drawn?

I'm going to call the police!

Lumian smiled and inquired, "What's the connection between these recommended shops and you?"

"No…" The Islander felt the chill of the gun and carefully changed his words. "Th-they paid us to recommend them. Some of them are owned by our partners."

"How many are legitimate shops?" Lumian pressed, undeterred.

"90%." Just as the Islander finished speaking, Lumian cocked the revolver's hammer, sending a clear message.

He hastily added, "90% of them are connected to us."

Lumian chuckled, continuing with another question, "What about the scenery?"

"50%. Only the plantations and primitive tribes are connected to us." The Islander trembled in fear.

Lumian shook the travel guide and smiled at the Islander.

"Show me the real ones."

The Islander quickly pointed out different parts, worried that the gun might misfire.

Only then did Lumian stow away his revolver and take the guidebook to the open-air market on the other side of Sun Square.

He had engaged the Islander partly to frighten the swindler and partly because a new idea had struck him.

For Burman, who had resided in Port Farim for many years, were some of the delicacies and scenery here also part of his cherished memories?

During setbacks, when he killed his best partner and faced defeat in battle, would he, driven by madness and paranoia, seek out places with beautiful memories to draw strength and recharge?

Lumian believed if he were in Burman's shoes, he would have done the same.

Reason might suggest that he could be tracked and discovered, but half-mad individuals often ignored reason.

Therefore, whether it was the moonlit scenery of the lighthouse, the setting sun behind the volcano, Reptow minced pork, Gasparo seafood rice, or Saint Tick chocolate ice cream, all could attract the covert patronage of the Demon Warlock.

In his current state, there was a high chance that he wouldn't meticulously erase his tracks.

Adjusting his golden straw hat, Lumian made his way through the open-air market, heading toward the cliff mountain outside Farim, where Port Farim's lighthouse stood.

Chapter 528: Treasure Legend

528 Treasure Legend

The crash of azure waves echoed against the cliff's base, creating a cascade of white flowers in their wake.

Approaching the lighthouse, Lumian pondered its rumored history, a relic left behind by the Intisians upon their arrival at Saint Tick Island, his gaze fixating on the distant sea.

The night's crimson moonlight, still hours away, refrained from casting its dreamy glow, rendering the scene quiet and undisturbed by tourists.

Circling the lighthouse reminiscent of Roselle's era, Lumian observed for nearly fifteen minutes, fruitlessly searching for any sign of the Demon Warlock.

He didn't anticipate a direct encounter with Burman; it wasn't yet the time to admire the moon. Lumian simply sought to discern if Burman would visit to reminisce about the past and his wife after waking up last night—a moment of solace to steady his heart and find the strength to persevere.

The lighthouse guardian, with a pipe emitting the aroma of roasted tobacco leaves, offered a friendly reminder, "Kid, there's nothing much to see here during the day. It's a whole different story at night."

Lumian smiled and inquired, "Do people come in the middle of the night?"

"Indeed," the 50-year-old guardian boasted. "Those Trier playboys love bringing their dates here to bask in the moonlight."

"Any mysterious figures, perhaps someone donning a hood and pretending to be a Warlock?" Lumian pressed on.

The lighthouse guardian's face betrayed a nostalgic expression.

"Sometimes. Thought it was a ghostly silhouette a few times."

"Did such a figure visit late last night?" Lumian queried, a subtle curl forming on his lips.

There was nothing wrong with his speculation from his immersion!

Perhaps his similar experiences allowed him to better understand Burman's mental state and paranoid thoughts.

The guardian replied, "Can't say for sure. I didn't see anything."

Lumian didn't press further. He decided to return in the early morning hours, the enchanting few hours beneath the moonlight.

Over the next three hours, he explored the truly renowned gourmet restaurants in Port Farim. Despite asking similar questions, Lumian obtained no valuable information.

It became apparent that Demon Warlock Burman exercised restraint under normal circumstances, avoiding impulsive actions. He seldom frequented crowded places, and when he did, his disguise was impeccable.

By 4 p.m., Lumian reached Port Farim's modest steam locomotive station. He spent 3 verl d'or for a ticket bound for the Andatna volcano mine.

If he aimed to witness the sunset there, the journey had to commence now.

Woosh! Clunk! Clunk! Clunk! The iron-black carriage belched thick smoke as it lumbered along the railway sleepers.

Gradually, it gained momentum, akin to a colossal giant overcoming inertia and mobilizing its components.

Seated by the window, Lumian held a golden straw hat, quietly admiring the vanishing plantations.

Shortly before 6 p.m., the train halted outside Andatna's volcanic mine.

Adorning his straw hat, Lumian bypassed the mine entrance, opting for a nearby trail leading to the volcano's summit.

As the greenery dwindled, grayish-black hues prevailed. Occasional red rocks punctuated the landscape.

Approaching the mountaintop, desolation intensified. Grayish-black gravel lay dormant in the hushed wind.

Without the shelter of foliage, Lumian's vision expanded. The peculiar grandeur of this place seemed to embody the vastness of desolation and silence.

Following the tourist-worn grayish-black path, Lumian advanced step by step toward the volcano's mouth, revealing coal-black surfaces with reddish depressions.

The temperature inside was notably warmer.

Unbridled winds stirred, sending grayish-black gravel airborne, causing human forms to sway.

In this spectacle, the nearly setting sun bathed the desolate surroundings in a golden-red glow, intensifying the sunken redness.

Pressing down on his straw hat, Lumian ventured two to three hundred meters along the volcano's crater.

Abruptly, the mountaintop wind subsided, and the suspended gravel settled in eerie silence.

Lumian immediately spotted a figure standing silently on the grayish-black diagonal wall outside the volcano's crater, bathed in the last radiant sunlight.

Cloaked in black robes and a deep hood, the figure attentively watched the gradual descent of the golden-red sun.

Lumian's expression remained unchanged as he advanced step by step, refraining from initiating an attack.

Sensing Lumian's approach, the hooded figure turned around, unveiling a pale-white face marked by decaying wounds and a wide swath of fur.

It was none other than Demon Warlock Burman!

Perhaps influenced by the serene scenery and haunting memories, Burman, known for his madness, spoke wearily, "You've actually found this place."

Lumian, who had been securing his golden straw hat against the strong wind, chuckled self-deprecatingly and responded,

"If not for my illusions and hope, and if I didn't have numerous enemies awaiting my discovery, I would frequently return to Cordu and the nearest high mountain pasture. The grass there is vividly green, vast and expansive, with pale-yellow flowers in full bloom. Countless sheep roam about. The sky mirrors the brilliance of gems, and the occasional drifting white clouds resemble sheep grazing on the ground. At night, the stars emerge, densely packed like diamond gravel at the bottom of a clear river…"

Standing amidst the blazing sunlight and the vast, silent grayish-black surroundings, Lumian couldn't help but reminisce about Cordu Village and the alpine pasture.

Burman didn't interrupt. After Lumian finished speaking, he wore a dazed expression and uttered with a smile more pained than joyful,

"Helen and I thought we could come here to watch the sunset whenever we pleased since it's just a ticket away. But she never came again…"

And you don't even need to take the steam locomotive… Lumian sighed slowly and said, "What happened back then?"

Burman's face contorted in distortion, the agony evident in his expression.

"We were deceived. Something was wrong with the treasure map. We encountered real sea monsters!

"Damn the Islanders. Helen always believed they resorted to deceit and thuggery out of necessity. All the respectable positions were held by pure Intisians, but we treated them well and placed our trust in them. Yet, they colluded with others to betray us for money!

"I'll kill him, those deceivers, and every Islander!"

Lumian chuckled and remarked, "Some of the self-proclaimed noble Trieriens are swindlers, while others sell their bodies. I don't generalize against Islanders, but I remain cautious of specific individuals."

Suddenly, Lumian felt inspired.

"Was the Islander who betrayed you from the Marauder pathway?"

"Yes." Burman's face twitched with unrestrained anger.

Was it a Swindler acting? Lumian asked cautiously, "Did he have a tendency to wear monocles or pinch his eye socket?"

He pointed at his right eye.

"No." Burman seemed perplexed by Lumian's question.

Lumian heaved a sigh of relief.

"What's his name? Did you manage to kill him?"

Burman's pale face suddenly flushed, and decaying liquid dripped down.

"His name is Mark Benito! After that incident, he vanished. I never found him!"

Lumian chose not to provoke Burman further and inquired, "Which treasure were you seeking back then?"

"In the depths of the Fog Sea, there's an island. The inhabitants there don't age or truly die," Burman recalled the treasure rumors he had gathered. "There's reason to believe that something incredibly precious is hidden on that island. We didn't want to become enemies with the islanders. Our only hope was to infiltrate the island and steal some ageless medicine."

His words were somewhat disorganized, skipping over details.

"It bears a striking resemblance to the legend of the Fountain of Unaging," Lumian remarked after pondering. "The Adventurer series has already hinted that the Fountain of Unaging is a falsehood."

Ignoring him, Burman continued, "We found some evidence and obtained a treasure map to the island. To our surprise, the map was a forgery!

"The sea monsters wrecked our ship. In order to allow me to utilize that special witchcraft, Helen stood in front of me… I witnessed her torn into two by the sea monsters. I saw despair in her eyes…"

Burman panted heavily, unable to continue.

"And then, you switched to the Death pathway?" Lumian changed the topic.

Burman's icy flaxen-colored eyes gleamed.

"That's correct. Only Death, who controls the Death domain, can bring Helen back!

"In the treasure legend, many details suggest that only Death can achieve eternal life. Understanding the mysteries of death is the key to true resurrection! It's not that the islanders won't die; they can be revived!"

"Do you genuinely believe in that treasure?" Lumian already had an answer in mind after posing the question.

The partially unhinged Burman clung to every lifeline, trusting every rumor that promised to bring Helen back to life.

"I do." Burman nodded and spoke with a deep voice, "That's because I encountered people from that island some time ago. There really is such an island. There are truly islanders who don't age or truly die!"

"Really?" Lumian blurted out.

Burman's eyes burned with fanaticism as he declared, "I wanted to capture him, but he defeated me. Instead of killing me, he sympathized with my plight and imparted some knowledge about the Death domain. There's a way to bring Helen back to life!

"That cursed swindler. Fidel's attendant is nothing but a swindler. I didn't intend to rush the resurrection ritual. I wasn't fully prepared, but since he's a swindler, I'll kill him! All Islanders are swindlers! They all deserve to die!"

Is he truly from that island? Or could he be another swindler? Lumian realized that the incident with the swindler, Roddy, had triggered Burman. There was also the influence of that islander… Lumian narrowed his eyes and inquired, "What's the islander's name, and what does he look like?"

Burman suddenly became cautious, scrutinizing Lumian.

"What brings you here?"

Observing Burman's reaction, Lumian sighed and, with abnormal composure, said, "I'm here to kill you."

Burman was taken aback before bursting into laughter.

"For what? A bounty?"

Discarding the golden straw hat in his hand, Lumian lowered his body slightly and replied in a deep voice, "Punish your sins and put an end to your suffering."

Burman ceased his laughter and raised his hands with a cold expression.

"Bring it on, then."

Chapter 529: Irrational

529 Irrational

Burman's raised hands released a sprinkling of fluorescent powder.

His body began to fade, growing more transparent, as if he had transformed into a being from the spirit world—difficult for ordinary people to perceive.

In the blink of an eye, the Demon Warlock vanished.

Lumian made no move to intervene or evade potential attacks. Calmly, he retrieved the Flog boxing gloves adorned with iron-black spikes from his Traveler's Bag and wore them.

Completing this preparation, he suddenly knelt on one knee, pressing his hands to the ground.

Crimson flames erupted in all directions from Lumian's body, accompanied by a series of explosions.

Amidst the rumbling, flames surged, dominating the grayish-black wilderness. Burman's black-robed figure materialized in midair.

He slowly floated towards Lumian, narrowing the distance between them.

Lumian's figure abruptly vanished, reappearing behind Burman.

Spirit World Traversal!

Without hesitation, Lumian, holding a crimson fireball in his left hand, harrumphed.

Two beams of white light shot out from his nose, targeting Burman.

Floating in midair, Burman didn't lose consciousness as before. His body swayed, forcefully turning around to observe Lumian descending into the sea of flames on the ground.

An illusory vertical eye, dark purple and nearly black, materialized between Burman's brows, reflecting Lumian's figure amid pale-white patterns.

Almost simultaneously, a lanky black shadow emerged from within Burman's body. Nearby, arms made of bones or decayed flesh and pus extended from the void, encircling Burman's transparent and thin form.

He hadn't used witchcraft to quietly approach Lumian and strike. Instead, he had clandestinely swapped his spirit with the undead under his command, setting a trap to entice the enemy into deploying that peculiar spell to attack his body.

In such a scenario, the absence of one's Spirit Body meant immunity to abilities targeting the Soul Body!

Burman could then seize the opportunity to use the Eye of the Spirit to intimidate the enemy and create an opening for the manipulated undead.

This time, he refrained from delving deeper into the secret of the other party's Spirit Body. His goal was to uncover its vulnerabilities, strike with a lethal blow, and absorb the corresponding mystical knowledge!

Having suffered greatly from the Spell of Harrumph the previous night, he had used this ability as a breakthrough from the beginning.

In an instant, Burman's spirit completed the exchange with the lanky shadow and returned to his body.

Simultaneously, Lumian experienced once again the sensation of his spirit being intimidated and suppressed, as if frozen. Terrifying arms covered in festering warts or with eyes extended from the void, reaching out for his body.

At that moment, the crimson fireball in Lumian's left hand erupted.

Boom!

The explosion's force was mostly mitigated by the Flog boxing gloves, but since they weren't fully covered, the exposed part of Lumian's left palm was turned into a bloody mess.

An intense and familiar pain shot through his brain and Spirit Body, bringing him back to awareness.

Seizing this moment of clarity, Lumian activated the black mark on his right shoulder again, vanishing above the sea of flames and disappearing from the strange undead arms extending from the void.

Likewise, he remained vigilant against Burman's Eye of Illusory.

The crimson, nearly white fireball in his left hand was structurally unstable. He had to divert his attention to maintain it, and he couldn't sustain it when affected by the Eye of Illusory, leading to its natural disintegration and a self-inflicted awakening.

If this failed to disrupt the Eye of Illusory's intimidation, the sea of flames below served as Lumian's second preparation. The residual aura of the Blood Emperor in his right hand was his last resort.

Upon vanishing, Lumian reappeared behind Burman once more.

Prepared, Burman raised his hands and scattered a tree-like powder.

Crackling sounds followed as silver-white lightning struck Lumian's head, as though a storm ruler had unleashed divine retribution from the sky.

For most Beyonders, this would be enough to paralyze and make them tremble incessantly. Yet, Lumian showed no such signs. Instead, he appeared like a reflection in the water, shattered by the lightning.

The real Lumian was curled up at the bottom of the figure. Burman had struck the phantom created using the Niese Face!

The Niese Face was essentially an illusion, but it couldn't be cast on others or items. Lumian had to rely on himself, pretending to be a root system with branches and flowers above, forming a derived illusion.

There was no fundamental difference between this and using the Niese Face to make himself taller and bulkier.

Amidst the crackling lightning, two crimson fireballs materialized beneath Lumian's feet and behind him.

Rumble!

The fireball exploded, propelling Lumian towards the levitating Burman.

Burman, being close proximity, couldn't dodge the swift Lumian in time. He could only slightly turn his body as a bone spear sprouted from his shoulder, its tip unusually sharp.

A grin spread across Lumian's face. He didn't evade, allowing the bone spear to pierce his right chest.

With a resounding thud, he swung his left fist, delivering a powerful blow to the side of Burman's face. The Demon Warlock's head twisted, revealing deep blood-stained, pus-filled holes on his face. His eyes burned with rage, as if he were witnessing the murderer of his wife!

The black mark on Lumian's right shoulder emitted a dim light once more.

His figure vanished beside Burman, dissolving into the encircling lanky black shadows and other undead creatures, leaving behind the bone spear stained with his blood.

This time, Lumian reappeared dozens of meters away, at the edge of the sea of flames.

The wound on his right chest was grotesque, blood dripping from it. In his hand appeared a dark-red bone flute with a hole in it.

Symphony of Hatred!

Lumian brought the bone flute to his lips. As he retreated, he played a mournful and haunting melody.

Once again invoking the Eye of Illusory, Burman, who was on the verge of catching up, was frozen in astonishment. Even the undead ceased their movements.

Suddenly, blood and pus seeped from Burman's eyes, nose, mouth, and ears, as if a muffled and invisible explosion had occurred within him.

His anger, paranoia, and thirst for revenge were fueled by the Symphony of Hatred.

This inflicted a severe blow on him.

Lumian refrained from playing the Symphony of Hatred from the outset because Burman differed from other Beyonders. Others needed to identify the problem, but with Burman, there were too many uncertainties.

His mental state was extremely unstable, burdened by severe psychological issues. His overwhelming desire to revive his wife and seek revenge on the Islander swindler was palpable. His body had undergone modifications from the Death domain, and Lumian had inflicted significant injuries on him the previous night. There were substantial hidden dangers…

Faced with such an adversary, Lumian himself was uncertain about the outcome if he were to unleash the Symphony of Hatred through the shepherd's flute. It might be manageable if it only triggered desires and emotions, but if Burman's mental state lost even the most basic restraints, the Demon Warlock could potentially lose control on the spot, transforming into a monstrous entity with mixed abilities.

Such a monster would likely be even more challenging to deal with than Burman!

Hence, after the Spell of Harrumph failed, Lumian promptly shifted to using Flog boxing gloves to kindle Burman's corresponding desires and emotions. This strategic approach increased the likelihood that when Lumian eventually used the Symphony of Hatred, it would exploit the target's emotions and desires, inflicting severe harm.

Observing Burman descend into the sea of flames amid the eruption of emotions and desires, Lumian executed another Spirit World Traversal, appearing in front of him in an instant.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

He extended his arms, unleashing a relentless barrage of attacks on Burman's body.

On the surface of his Flog fists, a crimson fireball, almost white, compressed layer by layer.

Bam! Bam! Bam! Flog tore at Burman's flesh like a two-headed python.

Rumble!

Crimson fireballs erupted around Lumian, with no concern for waste. They formed a barrier, preventing the lanky figure, strange arms, and other undead from interfering.

One punch, two punches, three punches. Lumian's eyes were fixed on the mangled Burman.

At that moment, he reflected on the village destroyed by Burman and the innocent lives lost because of him.

How many were beloved wives, waiting husbands, dependent parents, and cherished children?

Cordu had been annihilated due to the ambitions of the evil gods. What about the innocent?

Lumian's eyes gradually turned crimson as he clenched his fists.

This time, he didn't empathize with Burman. Instead, he placed himself in the village he had destroyed and the lives he had taken.

Wasn't Cordu like this back then?

The ambitions of these evil gods are to blame!

In just a few seconds, Burman snapped out of his pain and emitted an evil, cold, and incomprehensible voice.

The sound seemed to peel away Lumian's flesh, exposing his Spirit Body to the perilous sunlight and the grayish-black gravel.

Lumian's movements slowed, and the grotesque arms finally reached in, dragging Burman away from the area.

Phew… Lumian exhaled and recovered.

He didn't pursue. Instead, he gazed silently at the void ahead, raised his right hand, and snapped his fingers.

Rumble!

Amidst the sudden eruption of intense flames, Burman's body materialized, shattering from an explosion.

Fire Infusion!

Hunter's Fire Infusion!

In truth, Lumian hadn't acted rationally. His optimal strategy would have been to seize the moment when Burman's emotions and desires were ignited and strike at his vital points with the Symphony of Hatred, delivering a decisive blow. However, he yearned to repeatedly pummel the "hidden" version of himself that terrified him!

With a thud, Burman's head clattered to the ground.

In his daze, he caught sight of a slender figure with black hair, blue eyes, and a delicate face.

It was his wife, Helen.

Y-you're back? Burman couldn't help but smile and extend his arm.

He no longer had an arm.

Gradually, he lost consciousness. Darkness enveloped his vision, as if sunlight lurked deep within.

Demon Warlock Burman—dead.

Chapter 530: Beginning

530 Beginning

Lumian observed Burman's head, frozen in surprise and relief. He removed the Flog boxing gloves and the Symphony of Hatred, as well as ended the Niese Face.

Donning the silver Lie earring and retrieving a white bandage, Lumian wrapped it around the burned wound on his right chest and his bloody left hand.

Crimson flames surged around him, engulfing his dripping blood and splattering flesh.

Throughout this process, Lumian gathered the nearby corpse fragments that Burman had scattered and piled them beside the head.

He had been calculating the time. If Burman's Beyonder characteristic still hadn't materialized, he would have to move the corpse pile to the forest beside the Andatna volcano.

This was because the Flog boxing gloves attracted the attention of certain hidden entities, enabling them to command dangerous creatures to attack.

In the past, Lumian would have had to leave the scene as soon as he finished using the Flog boxing gloves, but the battle lasted only a short time. The Flog boxing gloves had already been stowed into his Traveler's Bag, allowing him to wait a little longer.

Lumian observed various colored light spots—light purple, pale-white, and pitch-black—emerge from Burman's head and the scattered corpse pile.

Among the items on the ground and torn clothes, Lumian found a diverse array of objects.

There was a miniature brain, blood-dyed and resembling brass, a retractable pitch-black telescope, ointment and powder in metal canisters, a short bone scepter, a peculiar badge encircling the sun with bones, a soft-cover notebook in an iron box, an ordinary-looking golden ring, and scattered gold and silver coins…

The deposit certificates and paper cash had likely been destroyed by the explosion and the inferno.

Lumian carefully stowed each item away, sensing that three possessed superpowers. Merely coming into contact with them triggered various adverse reactions.

Thankfully, I had no intention of prolonging the battle with Burman from the start… Him using these mystical items later would have been troublesome… To deal with such a half-mad and resourceful enemy, I must end the battle swiftly and deny him a chance to recover… Some items were likely gathered by him, while others might have been taken from Fidel… Lumian concluded, finally picking up the dented and cracked iron box.

Inside the soft-cover notebook lay a blood-stained treasure map. With a brief glance, Lumian suspected it to be a sea map leading to an island in a specific sea area. It contained records of weather patterns and markings of safe sea routes.

Could this be the fake treasure map sold to Burman by Mark Benito? Lumian mused. Flipping to the first page of the dark soft-cover notebook, he encountered scrawled words:

"My mind isn't reliable all the time. I tend to forget many things. I must record all relevant knowledge and prevent them from being forgotten."

Lumian refrained from delving deeper. He carefully stowed away the fake treasure map and the soft-cover notebook.

Lumian noticed an ordinary-looking golden ring adorning Burman's left ring finger in the corpse pile.

It bore a striking resemblance to the gold rings found in the pile of spoils. They varied in size, texture, and quality.

Lumian instantly grasped the situation.

He removed the golden ring from Burman's finger and tied it to another golden ring with a piece of wire he had on hand.

He approached the grayish-black volcano's crater and silently tossed the rings into the reddened depression.

At that moment, Burman's Beyonder characteristics fully materialized, merging with parts of his corpse, resulting in two distinct items.

One was a light-purple transparent left eye, while the other was a pale-white right eye veiled in darkness.

Lumian carefully stowed away the two Beyonder characteristics, taking hold of Burman's head before vanishing from the spot.

Silently, the remaining parts of Burman's body ignited, enveloping the grayish-black volcano in crimson flames.

More than 200 meters away, Lumian retrieved the golden straw hat that had been blown by the strong wind.

As he secured it on his head, he swiftly disappeared.

This time, he appeared on the road outside the Andatna volcano's steam locomotive.

Lumian glanced up at the grayish-black volcano's crater, witnessing the golden-red sunset, resembling flowing lava, receding faster than expected.

The mountaintop swiftly darkened.

…

In the cathedral of The Fool in Port Farim, not far from Quartier des Black Pearls, Lumian, adjusting his golden straw hat, approached the towering half-giant bishop donned in a half top hat and black trench coat. In a deep voice, he said,

"I want to repent."

The half-giant bishop, with light-blue eyes and a towering stature exceeding 2.5 meters, regarded Lumian for a moment before nodding. "Follow me."

He led Lumian into a specialized confessional—a windowless, pitch-black chamber.

"I don't wish to repent in the dark," Lumian calmly said, removing his golden straw hat.

The half-giant bishop ignited the candles, sealing the door shut.

Pa! Lumian tossed a head with pale-white fur and vacant eye sockets to the half-giant bishop's feet.

"Did you commit murder?" the half-giant bishop inquired in a mellow tone, giving the head a brief once-over.

"No, I just want to help him repent." Lumian gestured towards the bloody head, oozing yellow pus. "He's Demon Warlock Burman."

"Burman?" Only then did the half-giant bishop closely inspect the head, recognizing distinct features.

He fell silent for a few moments before stating, "You want the Church to assist you in claiming the bounty from the Intis government?"

"As I mentioned, I'm here to repent for him. His bounty is part of his penance." Lumian's voice remained unchanged.

The half-giant bishop struggled to comprehend.

Lumian retrieved most of the items acquired from Burman from his Traveler's Bag, leaving behind the dark soft-cover notebook and the fake treasure map.

Clatter. These items, some endowed with superpowers, some valuable, spilled onto the ground.

"They're also part of Burman's penance," Lumian explained simply. "I want to use the bounty and the money exchanged for these items to establish a charity fund to compensate those who have been harmed by Burman, or their relatives. If there's any excess, please use it to help the homeless children."

The half-giant bishop, sporting a top hat and trench coat, fell silent for a few seconds.

"The Demon Warlock bounty stands at 600,000 verl d'or. These items hold considerable value too. Together, they could fetch nearly 1 million verl d'or. It's a substantial sum for anyone. Enough to ensure you don't have to take further risks. Are you certain about donating it to us and establishing a charity fund?"

Lumian didn't directly answer the half-giant bishop's question. Instead, he reiterated, "This is Burman's penance."

"Alright, since you trust our Church, we'll comply with your wishes," the half-giant bishop, named Theis, said. "Remember my name and feel free to monitor the charity fund's progress closely."

Lumian gazed at The Fool's Sacred Emblem in the confessional, pressed his hand to his chest, and gave a slight bow.

"Praise The Fool!"

He then closed his eyes and prayed, Great Lord, I implore you to punish the world for their sins and watch over our compensation. This isn't atonement; it's self-punishment…

Lumian repented earnestly for a while before straightening up. He opened his eyes and turned to leave.

"What shall be the name of the charity fund?" the half-giant bishop hurriedly inquired.

Lumian took a deep breath and replied, "Helen, the Helen Charity Fund."

"Do we need to inform the authorities about who killed Burman?" the half-giant bishop cautiously asked.

"No need, but there's no requirement to deliberately obscure the clues for me." Lumian didn't look back. He put on his golden straw hat and exited The Fool's cathedral.

…

That night, Lumian once again entered the bar beside Sun Square known as Pelican.

Batna Comté, as usual, sat at the bar counter, sipping on Golden Somme sugar wine. Beside him was a girl dressed as an adventurer with adorable facial features.

Lumian walked over and joined Batna and the other patrons. He smiled and snapped his fingers at the bartender.

"A glass of Golden Somme."

Batna glanced at him and remarked, "Someone's in a good mood."

"Indeed." Lumian received the golden syrup from the bartender and tapped the table with the bottom of the glass. Then, he stood up and raised the glass. "Everyone, I've encountered two things worth celebrating today."

He spoke with enthusiasm and joy, "The first is that I completed a commission worth more than 100,000 verl d'or!"

"Impossible…" Batna and the female adventurer beside him exclaimed in unison.

This bounty was even higher than Black Baronet's bounty. How could it be accomplished in a day?

Moreover, Batna knew that Louis Berry's employer, Fidel, was already deceased. How could he have received a new commission?

Lumian continued in a passionate tone, "To celebrate this, I'll treat everyone at the bar counter to a glass of Golden Somme!"

Nearly ten adventurers and patrons expressed admiration. One of them teased, "Regardless of the truth, I believe you!"

The others chimed in.

Lumian's smile widened.

"Second thing to be happy about—I've woven a tale to deceive a group of fools!"

Suddenly, the expressions of everyone at the bar counter froze.

Lumian glanced at them and continued,"But it's true that drinks are on the house!"

The adventurers and patrons booed, expressing that if they could drink for free, they didn't mind being fools.

Thus, Lumian spent 96 licks, or 4.8 verl d'or, treating the twelve people at the bar counter to a glass of Golden Somme.

Observing Louis Berry, Batna silently muttered, He's genuinely happy…

…

Late at night, aboard the Flying Bird, Room 5, first-class cabin.

Lumian returned to the barely habitable master bedroom, ignited the kerosene lamp, and retrieved the dark soft-cover notebook and the fake treasure map he had obtained from Demon Warlock Burman from his Traveler's Bag.

Chapter 531: Depths of Death

531 Depths of Death

Bathed in the yellowish glow of the kerosene lamp, Lumian perused Burman's notebook. The pages chronicled the erratic musings of a mind teetering on the edge of instability.

"Once life slips away, spirits journey to the spirit world, except in rare cases!

"If I can craft the right summoning chant, a Spirit Guide's power could pull Helen's spirit back to our reality.

"That's step one toward bringing her back."

Upon seeing this, Lumian indiscernibly shook his head.

If only resurrection were that simple…

He turned the page.

"New mystical knowledge gained:

"In ancient times, intelligent beings ventured into the Underworld after death. Those deeply devout or exceptionally impactful could ascend to the corresponding deity's Heaven. However, during the Fifth Epoch, a surplus of undead lingered beyond the Underworld.

"I'm uncertain if Helen's spirit has entered the Underworld or returned solely to the spirit realm. When summoning, I must address these separately; mixing them would guarantee failure.

"Despite the sea monsters' formidable might, they lack the power to confine a soul. No similar occurrences manifest in that sea region. For now, special circumstances needn't be considered. Additionally, Helen wasn't a fervent follower of the Eternal Blazing Sun."

...

"I encountered Helen again.

"But she's entirely lost the memory of me.

"Her form and essence are gradually fading away. In a few short years, she'll transform into just another undead.

"I have no more than five years.

"How can I reawaken her consciousness and recover her memories? Merely providing a vessel capable of housing a departed spirit doesn't seem sufficient."

...

"Don't forget the moonlit waves by the city's lighthouse. They bore witness to my proposal and Helen's acceptance."

...

"Don't forget Gasparo seafood rice; it's Helen's favorite. After every adventure, when we returned to Port Farim, she always suggested indulging in it."

...

"Don't forget the sunset at Andatna volcano. That's where we met and vowed to revisit often in the future. Even as we age, we can't let that romance fade away…"

...

"Don't forget… Don't forget… Don't forget…"

...

"My head hurts."

...

"I razed a town, leading to the deaths of two to three hundred people.

"The sight of those couples, parents, and children perishing didn't bring me joy.

"Instead, my heart plunged into darkness.

"I acknowledge this as my sin, an irreversible mistake. I'm aware that I'm no longer the Burman you once liked.

"Yet, I harbor no regrets."

...

"Swindlers, curse them!

"Ending these swindlers has rekindled a long-lost sense of satisfaction."

...

"Helen, if you were still alive, we might have had our own child, right?

"Why do those evil Warlocks always employ infants, children, and their remains as essential ingredients for the creation of their dark arts?

"I've become even more evil than them…"

...

"Helen, I've lost my way. All my endeavors have ended in failure."

...

"Helen, I aspire to acquire the Sequence 5 potion formula and ingredients for the Death pathway."

...

"Helen, Fidel intervened. He warned that it would turn me into a monster and erase my original memories.

"Helen, I refuse to forget you.

"Helen, please forgive my cowardice."

...

"Helen, I actually encountered that islander from Resurrection Island!

"It truly exists!

"Harrison defeated me, but he spared my life. He questioned why I had forcibly transitioned to the Death pathway.

"He revealed that my previous attempts were misguided. True resurrection isn't that straightforward.

"He explained that within the depths of death lies everyone's mark. Only by bringing forth the corresponding mark into reality and utilizing it as a foundation to reconstruct spirit and flesh can we achieve genuine resurrection, retaining our original knowledge and complete memories.

"Helen, I'm overjoyed. I glimpse hope in reviving you once more."

...

"Harrison imparted knowledge about the Death domain to me. It's through understanding this knowledge and reclaiming their mark that he and his kin can undergo repeated deaths and resurrections, escaping the clutches of mortality.

"While they seldom depart Resurrection Island, it's not an absolute. Travel-loving islanders like Harrison have ventured to different lands, leaving the Resurrection Island legend imprinted in the memories of a select few humans. Those with sinister motives compiled this information into a sea map for Resurrection Island.

"The treasure map Mark sold us is counterfeit, but parts of it trace back to the genuine one. Harrison, in his quest, left Resurrection Island to eliminate the authentic map and eradicate all who know how to reach that sea and discover Resurrection Island.

"Helen, armed with Harrison's information, I attempted to summon a spirit from the depths of death. I succeeded, conjuring an evil spirit named Arden. As it was feeble, I easily vanquished it, collecting its blood for the ensuing ritual."

...

"Helen, forgive me. I couldn't rein in my emotions.

"Ever since encountering Harrison and gaining the knowledge to truly bring you back, impatience has seized me. I can't control my emotions.

"Those islanders are swindlers deserving of death. I ended the life of a swindler and numerous others. I refused to squander any more time, hastening the ritual.

"Helen, I'm sorry. I failed again. I wasn't adequately prepared."

...

"Helen, have I lost my sanity entirely? A mere retort from Fidel triggered a frenzy, leading me to slay everyone in the house.

"He must perish too, the one who dared to threaten me and Fidel!"

...

"Helen, I've failed. It's been a while since I sustained such severe injuries.

"My body is largely undead. These wounds aren't fatal, but I lack any allies.

"Damn it, damn it, damn it!"

...

"Helen, I've missed you once again."

Lumian reached the conclusion of the dark soft-covered notebook and fixated on the sentence for an extended moment.

It was as if he had transformed into a statue.

After a few minutes, Lumian couldn't resist raising his right hand to massage his temples.

The marks from the depths of death, Resurrection Island, and Harrison inundated his mind, prompting a sudden regret for not seeking Franca's assistance.

To ensure a clean demise for Burman, he never intended to channel the Demon Warlock's spirit from the outset. This meant he had no plans to return to Trier and bring Franca to his current location.

However, his instinct now urged him to delve further into the resurrection method outlined by Harrison. He desired an understanding of the island where inhabitants experienced repeated deaths and rebirths.

Phew… Lumian closed the notebook and exhaled, making an effort to recollect his knowledge of death-related mysticism.

He recalled hearing the words "death" and "mark" conjoined.

Madam Magician had mentioned the term "death mark" while answering a question about the Tudor figure at the Samaritan Women's Spring!

Is this a concept distinct from remnant spirits and imprints, directly linked to resurrection?

From the depths of death… What lurks within the depths of death…

What I now know that is explicitly tied to death—the Underworld, the Samaritan Women's Spring, the River Styx connecting two worlds…

What a pity. I wonder what Harrison from Resurrection Island looks like…

Burman's recorded knowledge is in disarray. It seemed he wrote whatever thoughts occurred to him. Without him, organizing a complete resurrection ritual and the corresponding principles proves exceedingly challenging…

No, not just challenging. Impossible. Burman only documented what he feared he might forget. The remaining knowledge is entirely absent… Lumian rubbed his temples once more and unfolded the counterfeit treasure map. After careful scrutiny, he couldn't discern which parts were authentic and which were spurious.

He intended to send the map to Franca and Jenna at dawn, employing them to employ mysticism to differentiate between the real and the fake.

…

The next morning, Lumian wiped his mouth with a napkin and observed Ludwig grappling with the breakfast dishes.

Knock, knock, knock. A gentle rap echoed on the door.

"Please come in." Lumian gestured for Lugano to open the door.

Do you really think I'm a servant? Alright, providing the money makes you the boss… Lugano criticized, leaving the dining table to open the door.

It was Philip outside.

Philip entered the room, smiling at Lumian.

"We'll set sail in two and a half hours. If you have any special items you want to buy, do it as soon as possible."

"I don't," Lumian replied with a smile as he stood up.

Philip glanced out the window and said, "By the way, you might not be aware, but the Demon Warlock has been apprehended."

"Is that so?" Lugano looked surprised.

Over the past few days, the most popular topic among the passengers on the ship was Demon Warlock Burman, who had caused them to stay in Port Farim.

Seeing Lumian raise his eyebrows in inquiry, Philip said with a relaxed expression,

"Not only was Burman apprehended, but he was also in the state of a corpse."

"Who's behind this?" Lumian asked, his curiosity piqued.

Philip shook his head.

"I don't have all the details yet. What I do know is that it's closely tied to The Fool's Church. The adventurer Gehrman Sparrow is said to be their messenger."

"Could it be that the adventurer took matters into his own hands?" Lugano asked eagerly.

At sea, he naturally heard about faith in The Fool and had no doubts about it

—sailors, passengers, and dock porters would tell him about it.

"Hard to say. But anyone capable of taking down a Demon Warlock has to be at least as formidable as a pirate admiral." Philip sighed deeply.

Suddenly, a commotion echoed from the gangway. Passengers destined to board at Port Farim were finally given the green light to board the Flying Bird.

Lumian approached the window and spotted a familiar face.

Batna Comté!

He and the adorable-looking female adventurer climbed aboard the deck together.

Lumian pushed open the window and called out, "Batna, are you guys headed to Port Santa as well?"

Batna looked up, surprised, his eyes fixed on the rooms on the top floor.

Spotting Louis Berry, he grinned and replied, "Absolutely. I'm off to witness Port Santa's sea prayer ritual!"

Chapter 532: "Real" Map

532 "Real" Map

Among the nations of the Northern Continent, only the Lord of Storms in Loen wielded authority over the sea. Yet, sailors, sea merchants, and adventurers loyal to other deities sought to evade shipwrecks, brutal weather, and the need for specific protection. This led to various compromises and unique circumstances.

Certain Churches established subsidiary gods, Angels, and Saints endowed with storm and sea-related powers for followers with corresponding concerns. Take, for instance, the Sea God of the Church of The Fool.

In some Churches, believers were tacitly permitted to hold a partial belief in the Lord of Storms.

Other Churches turned a blind eye to the folklore beliefs flourishing in ports and islands, allowing the performance of specific rituals without requiring the presence of clergymen.

The sea prayer ritual of Port Santa in the Feynapotter Kingdom fell into the latter category. Its folklore was believed to trace back to the Fourth Epoch. This annual event, overseen by the Church of Earth Mother, was modest and confined to this port; it lacked any widespread publicity.

In essence, nearly nobody—neither the locals of Port Santa nor the merchants, adventurers, or pirates frequenting the shores of the Fog Sea—

was aware of such a sea prayer ritual.

After gathering the pertinent details, Lumian made an initial assessment that either Bard or Ultraman, the culprits behind the sea prayer ritual pranks, were likely locals of Port Santa or actively engaged in maritime affairs.

Considering that Bard's work, "Emperor Roselle's Secret Chronicles," had been specifically handed over to Trier's underground booksellers for publication, Lumian leaned towards the belief that Ultraman had been the instigator of the problems at Port Santa's sea prayer ritual.

Despite the fact that "Emperor Roselle's Secret Chronicles" seemed more suited for sale in Intis, Lumian reasoned that if Bard had a permanent residence in the Feynapotter Kingdom, it would be wiser to publish it under the Feynapotter Kingdom's name before discreetly selling it to Intis. This precaution was to avoid drawing the attention of Intis's secret police.

Many Beyonders had underestimated the vigilance of ordinary police officers and investigators, resulting in unwanted attention and arrests by official Beyonders who got wind of the news.

Upon learning that Batna and his female companion desired to witness Port Santa's sea prayer ritual, Lumian waved with a grin.

"Me too!"

He stepped back from the window, biding his time until nearly noon to compose a letter detailing his recent encounters and the handling of Burman's "legacy."

After folding the letter and wrapping it within the folds of the fake treasure map, Lumian summoned Rabbit Chasel once again.

The rabbit-like spirit creature still sported its gold-rimmed glasses and a small, blurry half top hat.

Silently observing for a few moments, Lumian then handed over the items destined for Franca and Jenna.

"Thank you," he said politely.

That's basic courtesy!

"No need to thank me," replied Rabbit Chasel, removing his half top hat and executing a slight bow.

Lumian's lips twitched as he witnessed the mutated Rabbit of Knowledge disappear from the room.

He was worried that this rabbit might unpredictably draw its gun and finish off the sender at any given moment.

The next time around, he resolved to caution Jenna against imparting such dangerous knowledge to Rabbit Chasel!

…

Trier, within the Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative, Apartment 702 at 9 Rue Orosai.

Franca glanced at Rabbit Chasel, adorned with its half top hat and gold-rimmed glasses. Leaning closer to Jenna, she whispered, "Isn't it too dangerous to let it read the Adventurer series?"

Jenna smiled and replied, "Don't you find Rabbit Chasel adorable? Furthermore, a messenger can encounter danger. Reading more about Gehrman Sparrow might make it stronger."

Franca had only briefly raised the issue but shifted her focus to unfolding the fake treasure map and letter, reading it with earnest attention.

"Wow, Lumian's efficiency is impressive. He aimed to punish Burman for his sins and managed to complete the hunt in less than twelve hours!

"The Beyonder characteristics didn't form Sealed Artifacts with mixed abilities; instead, they emerged and merged separately. Could it be because Burman no longer harbored madness and paranoia before his death, and his emotions had calmed down?"

"Heh heh, there's no need to inform 007 so quickly if we encounter similar cases in the future. Lumian might resolve it himself within a day.

Everything will return to normal, and world peace will prevail. That way, 007 won't blame me for always causing trouble for him."

Franca had previously informed Jenna that the code name of her collaborator among the authorities was 007.

So fast? Demon Warlock isn't weak… Jenna couldn't believe it.

That was a criminal with a bounty of 600,000 verl d'or. All the verl d'or she had seen so far added up to less!

Lumian's bounty amounted to less than 100,000.

Franca pursed her lips and remarked, "Think about his experiences in Trier and the items and abilities he possesses. He's simply a supermodel, alright? If he were to be released, it would be equivalent to a dimensional reduction strike on Beyonders without any special traits. He wouldn't be much inferior to most Sequence 5 Beyonders!"

Jenna recalled the dangerous situations she had faced alongside Lumian and nodded in agreement.

"What do you mean by dimensional reduction strike?"

Franca, slightly surprised by Jenna's question, took a moment before explaining, "It's akin to an adult bullying a child or a demigod bullying a Low-Sequence Beyonder.

"Furthermore, think about it. A half-mad Beyonder like the Demon Warlock is mentally, psychologically, emotionally, and physically problematic. He was completely countered by Lumian's Symphony of Hatred. When facing him, all you need to do is be wary of the strange combination of abilities and avoid provoking him into a monster. Lumian has the experience, so he won't be careless."

Jenna muttered, "Now that you mention it, why do I feel that killing the Demon Warlock isn't too difficult?"

"You can't put it that way. It can only be said that the forced switching of pathways will indeed make one very powerful and dangerous, but it also has huge flaws and many problems. It's easy to target," Franca corrected her before continuing reading Lumian's letter.

After she was done reading, Franca sighed with excitement and said, "The sea sounds so fun, and the scenery is beautiful. If it weren't for the mission, I'd want to be an adventurer at sea and hunt pirates!"

Jenna, leaning against the sofa and reading the letter from behind, felt a longing in her heart.

Who wouldn't love to travel? It was just that they hadn't had the luxury before.

Franca regained her composure and clicked her tongue.

"Lumian is truly generous. He actually donated all the bounty and spoils of war to establish a charity fund. Sigh, actually, I understand his thoughts…"

Until now, she had been covertly providing for the family of her body's original owner until now.

As Franca and Jenna conversed, they both performed Magic Mirror Divination.

Their answers were unanimous: The map was real!

"Whether it's Burman or the immortal islander, Harrison, they both admit that a portion of this map is fake. It can't help adventurers reach Resurrection Island, and they might even encounter great danger along the way… What's fake about it?" Franca pondered, casting her gaze at the treasure map.

On the map, the location marked as Resurrection Island lay deep within the Fog Sea. The westernmost colonial island of the Intis Republic, Aroca, was still quite a distance away.

…

Can't distinguish the fake parts? Lumian shook his head after receiving the reply and continued reading the information about spirit world creatures in his hand.

His primary focus was to find any introduction to the Arden evil spirit that Burman had summoned from the depths of death.

Lumian flipped through the information until evening, satiating his hunger in his room. Grabbing the golden straw hat he had recently taken a liking to, he descended to the deck and entered the bar.

By that time, the Flying Bird had already departed Port Farim. As expected, Batna and his female companion sat at the bar counter, engaged in animated conversations with the surrounding passengers about Demon Warlock Burman's demise.

"We don't know which adventurer did it either. If it hadn't been officially announced, we wouldn't have known that Burman had been killed. No one in Port Farim's adventurer circle knew about it in advance!" Batna held the Lanti Proof and said excitedly, "To think that such a powerful adventurer remains hidden in Port Farim! Indeed, we can't be arrogant or conceited. Perhaps the tramp sitting by the roadside is a powerful figure!"

Spotting Lumian pushing his way through, Batna whistled.

"You're staying in first-class? Are you that rich?"

"I'm not considered rich," Lumian replied with a smile as he settled onto a barstool. "I just feel that accidents can happen at any moment at sea, and I can be killed by pirates at any moment. So, why not try to pamper yourself? What's the point of saving up money when you're dead? Since you're an adventurer, you have to lead a carefree life because who knows if there'll be a tomorrow."

"Since you're an adventurer, you have to lead a carefree life because who knows if there'll be a tomorrow…" The female adventurer beside Batna whispered Lumian's last sentence, seemingly touched.

Batna took a sip of the Lanti Proof and chuckled.

"However, the prerequisite is that you have some savings. Otherwise, if you end up having fun today, you'll go hungry tomorrow.

"Man, 600,000 verl d'or. I wonder which adventurer obtained Burman's 600,000 verl d'or. And the items on him…"

Batna revealed a yearning and envious expression.

Lumian picked up the absinthe he had just requested and took a sip, savoring the faint bitterness lingering in the fragrance.

…

In the following days, the Flying Bird calmly navigated towards the Feynapotter Kingdom. Philip, the security supervisor, found it surreal.

Is the bad luck over? Did the major problem disembark? Did Demon Warlock Burman's death stem from the major problem entering Port Farim?

Just as Port Santa was only a day away, Philip observed his subordinate deliver a telegram.

"Boss, it's from your comrades in Port Farim." The subordinate handed the folded telegram to Philip.

What happened in Port Farim that requires me to be informed? Did the major problem cause trouble in Port Farim and trace it to the Flying Bird? He unfolded the telegram and scanned its contents.

"The adventurer who hunted Demon Warlock Burman is suspected to be on your ship. His name is Louis Berry."

Chapter 533: Forgotten

533 Forgotten

"His name is Louis Berry."

Philip's gaze froze at the last sentence.

Him?

He killed Demon Warlock?

Suddenly, Philip recalled the tragic scene of Room 5 in the first-class cabin as though it had been shelled.

Could it be that the clash between Louis Berry and Demon Warlock Burman had caused this devastation?

Rumors circulated that the Church of The Fool exchanged Burman's head for a bounty the following day, but procedures like that didn't happen instantaneously. A delay of half a day was ordinary!

Did Louis Berry truly kill Demon Warlock?

Is he truly that formidable? I couldn't discern it at all…

I understand he's a magnet for trouble, and various details attest to his strength and unpredictable nature, but the notion of him vanquishing Demon Warlock caught me by surprise. And he appeared unscathed.

He even contained the battle's impact within a single room, ensuring no one overheard anything…

Could he have also been the one who frightened off Bone Splitter Basil? No, he was near me and didn't make a move… Unless Basil knows him and comprehends his danger?

A person capable of eliminating Demon Warlock is indeed capable of deterring Bone Splitter… Even though Basil might not be weaker than Burman despite the relatively low bounty. Louis Berry, however, possesses the ability to silence Burman without a trace…

What caused the encounter with the Death Navigators?"

Philip muttered silently.

Though he couldn't fully embrace the idea that the young man who always boasted in the bar with a smile was a powerful enough adventurer to vanquish Demon Warlock, Philip hesitated to harbor too many doubts.

"Boss, should we… should we expose Louis Berry's identity as a fake?" the crew member who had delivered the telegram asked in a hushed tone.

Philip instinctively raised the paper bearing the telegram and delivered a light smack to his subordinate's head.

"Do you have a death wish? I've emphasized repeatedly, when faced with anomalies on the ship, turn a blind eye unless it's an immediate crisis, and wait until we reach our destination."

Philip pondered for a moment, concerned that his subordinate might act in error due to misunderstanding or disbelief. He clarified deliberately, "We're still at sea. Even if we report the false identities now, confirming Louis Berry's true identity and existence won't save or aid us unless someone departs from Port Santa. Yet, such inter-country cooperation requires days of prior communication. By the time assistance arrives, Louis Berry will likely have disembarked.

"Moreover, verifying his real identity takes time. To blow the whistle successfully, we'd be risking Louis Berry noticing and retaliating. Is it worth it?

"I prefer to preserve the peace of these past few days."

The crew member pondered for a moment and ultimately concurred with the boss's decision.

Philip breathed a sigh of relief, tearing up the telegram and casually tossing it into the trash can.

"Inform the recipients and translators of the telegram to keep this information under wraps!" Philip instructed before leaving the room and descending the stairs to the deck.

Just as he was contemplating the romantic plans for the evening with his newfound lover, his thoughts came to a sudden halt when he spotted Louis Berry, the central figure of the telegram. There he stood by the shipboard, his gaze fixed on the gently undulating blue sea, idly twirling a golden straw hat in one hand while holding a glass of light golden champagne in the other.

As if sensing Philip's gaze, Lumian turned around, locking eyes with him.

A subtle smile played on Louis Berry's lips as he raised the champagne glass in his right hand, as though toasting him, before taking a leisurely sip.

Philip's body tensed, determined to conceal any change in expression.

Is Louis Berry merely extending a greeting, or does he possess knowledge about the telegram and my decision?

…

Waa! Waa! Waa!

White-headed seabirds soared gracefully under the pristine, blue sky, their cries distinct from those in Port Gati and Port Farim.

At times, they glided low, skimming past wooden fishing boats adorned with billowing white sails.

Fishing, a vital industry in Port Santa, instilled both fear and reverence for the sea in every fisherman's veins.

While they could have children who strayed from the beliefs of the Earth Mother, they couldn't bear descendants who dared to blaspheme the sacred sea prayer ritual.

Lumian, taking in the scenery different from the Intis port and Port Santa's gradually rising mountain range in the distance, silently offered praise to The Fool.

The journey from Port Farim to Port Santa unfolded surprisingly uneventfully

—no storms, no pirates, and no encounters with Beyonder incidents.

This respite allowed him a few days of tranquility. Lumian finished two foundational Highlander textbooks and perused information on spirit world creatures.

He failed to find a description of Arden, the evil spirit from the depths of death. Whether Madam Magician omitted the information or remained unaware of it remained uncertain.

"We'll be entering the port in half an hour." Lumian, who had been taking respite for the past few days, cracked his neck from the living room window of Cabin 5 in first class.

Here lay potential clues about the key members of April Fool's, Bard, and Ultraman!

Of course, it could also be a trap.

Lumian's body trembled slightly, filled with anticipation.

Finally, the Flying Bird smoothly docked at Port Santa.

Lumian, hand in hand with Ludwig and trailed by Lugano carrying their luggage, made their way towards the gangway. On the deck, they encountered Batna Comté and his companion Nolfi, already awaiting their turn.

Perhaps influenced by Lumian's words about seizing the moment as an adventurer, Nolfi, who had initially insisted on separate cabins, had moved in with Batna two days ago.

Batna's face radiated a flush of confidence as he waved and exclaimed, "Louis, you don't strike me as much of an adventurer. What adventurer brings their child out to sea?"

"Isn't it a common task for adventurers to protect their employers' children?" Lumian retorted with a smile.

In a sense, the Church of the God of Knowledge and Wisdom was indeed his employer.

Batna, eyeing Ludwig, dressed in a young gentleman's attire and carrying a distinctive red school bag, found Lumian's explanation reasonable.

Yet, he couldn't help but wonder, how could the child's parents be so nonchalant about entrusting their son to an unfamiliar adventurer?

"At the same time, he's my godson," Lumian added.

Understanding dawned on Batna as he gestured towards the harbor below.

"Where do you plan to stay? Shall we attend the sea prayer ritual together?"

"I'm not sure yet. If the gods will it, our paths may cross again." Lumian's demeanor shifted upon arriving at Port Santa, his nerves tightening. Casual disclosure of his whereabouts was no longer in his plans.

Batna, accustomed to Lumian's occasional seer-like words, detected nothing unusual. He sighed and said, "I hope our paths cross once more."

With a casual wave, Batna led Nolfi toward the ramp.

Lumian smiled and offered a parting reminder, "Do you know Highlander?"

"A bit," Batna replied, gesturing toward Nolfi, whose adorable features, black hair, and brown eyes spoke of her mixed Feynapotter and Intis heritage. "Her mother is a native of Port Santa. She carries blood from both Feynapotter and Intis."

Port Santa local… That explains your desire to experience the sea prayer ritual after learning about it. Lumian held his silence, watching as Batna and Nolfi descended the gangway with their suitcases.

"Not only is Louis generous and warm, but he also has a knack for humor. He appears quite professional," Batna commented before leaving the port district. Glancing back at the Flying Bird, he said to Nolfi, "He didn't disclose their lodging just now. Clearly, he's unwilling to unveil his employer's circumstances. He likely came to Port Santa to escort that child home."

Nolfi nodded gently.

"You shouldn't have asked. An adventurer's companions are only in the present. We might not cross paths again in the future."

"Haha, you've been influenced by Louis's life philosophy." Batna noticed a paperboy approaching and suggested to Nolfi, "Grab a few newspapers related to maritime rumors. We've been at sea for days, and we're out of the loop."

Nolfi shared the same idea, using degan copper coins she had exchanged prior for two newspapers.

Standing on the street, she unfolded the coastal port favorite, Five Seas News, and began reading its contents.

Batna, unfamiliar with Highlander, patiently waited for Nolfi to digest the news and relay the information to him.

Suddenly, Nolfi's eyes narrowed, and her grip on the newspaper tightened.

"What's wrong?" Batna asked curiously.

Nolfi hesitated before sharing, "There's a rumor in Port Farim that the adventurer who hunted the Demon Warlock is named…"

"What's his name?" Batna pressed.

Nolfi fell silent for a few seconds before saying, "His—his name is Louis Berry."

Louis, Louis Berry? Batna was taken aback.

…

Lumian, Ludwig, and Lugano patiently waited for most passengers to disembark before making their exit.

As Lumian stepped off the gangway, his attention was drawn to a woman in a black nun's attire and matching hat. Carrying a brown suitcase, she turned into a fork in the road.

C-could it be the weeping woman I glimpsed through the Mystery Prying Glasses? Lumian pondered, averting his gaze thoughtfully.

As he moved forward, his mind raced with plans for the immediate future.

Firstly, he needed to find an inn in the harbor district. Secondly, he had to compose a letter to Madam Magician, notifying her of his arrival in Port Santa. The situation involved Celestial Worthy and potentially played into Loki's schemes. Carelessness was not an option.

Write a letter to Madam Magician…

Write a letter!

Lumian's pupils dilated as he sought to discern if the world ahead was real.

Throughout his days aboard the ship, he kept forgetting to write to Madam Magician!

He had intended to consult his Major Arcana card holder, questioning the significance of the frequent occurrences related to the Flying Bird's calamities.

Yet, he had completely forgotten about it!

Chapter 534: Over the Mountain

534 Over the Mountain

It was today, amidst Lumian's contemplation of his next moves, that he seemed to snap out of a dream-like trance. The recollection of his intention to write a letter to Madam Magician, now forgotten, hit him like a bullet.

The realization was more unsettling than a battlefield injury, sending shivers down his spine, and causing his hair to stand on end.

Had this situation escalated, he might have perished without even realizing it!

It feels like déjà vu… That's right! In Dardel, Lugano and I had unintentionally overlooked the option of escaping. We were searching for a pretext to enter the town and investigate Derangement. As Lumian's thoughts raced, a sudden revelation struck him.

The woman he had seen weeping on the Flying Bird was the source of Derangement—a humanoid Sealed Artifact that had escaped its restraints!

After leaving Dardel, she had reached Port Gati and boarded the Flying Bird.

Could she be instinctively influencing the minds of those around her, erasing thoughts that might pose a threat? But that would require her to monitor everyone's psychological activities at just the right time.

Or, as Anthony had speculated, did she naturally implant mental cues, causing observers to overlook her existence? Even if glimpsed, the memory of her would fade later. Simultaneously, any communication with High-

Sequence Beyonder powers would be 'actively' forgotten or abandoned. This classification wasn't determined by her but by the individual's self-awareness. If they believed the person to be a High-Sequence Beyonder, then so they were…

Once she disembarked and ceased planting those natural and persistent cues, the overlooked issues could be recalled through other connections.

Fortunately, the Sealed Artifact remained dormant on the Flying Bird. Otherwise, I might have lost control and transformed into a monster…

Apart from me and Ludwig, she also played a part in scaring off Bone Splitter Basil? Heh heh, it's quite funny from the perspective of the notorious pirate. Choosing an ordinary merchant ship for plunder, Basil found himself faced with three escalating waves of malice upon surfacing—a hornet's nest stirred into action. In that scenario, he had no other choice but to escape.

Were the strange Death Navigator fish also drawn by her presence?

Initially, Lumian felt lingering fear, but soon a sense of joy washed over him.

This revelation confirmed that his contribution to the calamities on the Flying Bird was minimal, just as Aurore had suggested. Throughout the journey, only the Demon Warlock incident could be attributed to him.

Lumian could accept such frequency.

With determination, Lumian retrieved a post-it note and fountain pen, hastily scribbling a memo:

"Find a nearby motel and write to Madam Magician. Focus on the death mark and the humanoid Sealed Artifact."

After folding the note and stowing it in his pocket, Lumian utilized Lugano's interactions with the dock's inhabitants to discreetly inquire about nearby motels. Lowering his voice, he addressed his left chest.

"Temiboros, you actually failed to notice such a dangerous Sealed Artifact nearby."

Termiboros's majestic voice resonated. "Why should I warn you?"

Lumian criticized, Oh, you've learned the art of sophistry… He turned to Ludwig, who was nibbling on a long piece of bread.

I wonder if this kid's lack of awareness stems from the Church of Knowledge's seal or a belief that there was no danger since the woman hadn't gone mad. I don't have to dwell on it for now… Averting his gaze, he waited for Lugano to gather directions before leading Ludwig toward the exit of the port district.

Port Santa stood divided, its territories sliced into thirds. One-third bustled with the comings and goings of fishermen, surrounded by a vast open space. Nearby, three ice mills hummed with activity. The remaining two-thirds, a realm reserved for merchant ships, witnessed a constant influx of passengers. Mechanical cranes labored tirelessly, lifting smelted steel, forged swords, and woven wool into the undercabin.

Amidst the pungent scent of fish, Lumian maintained an outward calm. Sometimes, his gaze wandered to the distant mountain range; other times, he scrutinized the billowing black smoke drifting from the southeast, carried downwind by the breeze.

Tasking Lugano and Ludwig with selecting two candidates each, Lumian delegated the decision-making. Ultimately, they settled at an unassuming motel named Solow.

In Highlander, "Solow" translated to "sun."

Although the Feynapotter Kingdom didn't subscribe to the Eternal Blazing Sun faith, instead venerating Earth Mother, the prevalence of sunlight in their environment resulted in the frequent use of words like "Solow" and "Soros" (sunlight) in various place names.

Lumian removed his golden straw hat, shielding him from the October sun, and secured a suite from the motel's owner—a gray-haired, tall figure with prominent cheekbones and a thick beard. The cost: 1.5 gold risot per day, or 3 verl d'or.

Official currencies in Feynapotter included risot, setta, and degan. Legend had it that before the kingdom's split from the south-central regions, the Church of Earth Mother and the Church of the God of Knowledge and Wisdom jointly governed the land. Unlike the Loen Kingdom's unconventional gold pound system, Feynapotter's currency was designed by scholars from the Church of Knowledge. One risot equaled 10 settas, and one setta equaled 10 degans, denominated as five degans, whole degan, half degan, and a quarter degan. Currently, one risot was roughly 2 verl d'or, making 12 risot equivalent to approximately 1 gold pound.

Having exchanged for 1,000 risot, Lumian held a variety of settas and degans in his possession.

After settling the bill and ascending to his quarters, Lumian's attention was drawn to a young girl with long brown hair and freckles entering the establishment. She greeted the proprietor using the Highlander term for "grandfather."

The owner, his cheekbones tinged by the sun, warmly embraced the girl, their right cheeks meeting as he responded with a smile and a single word unfamiliar to Lumian. Puzzled, he turned to Lugano, seeking an explanation with his eyes.

"Ol' Delva said, 'It's so good to see you, my little cabbage.'"

"Little cabbage…" Lumian echoed, taken aback by the term.

Lugano, with his pronounced eyebrows, large eyes, and sharp features, inquired with confusion, "Don't you know that there are many descendants of Dariège here?"

Positioned on the second-floor staircase, he gestured towards the wall outside.

"The distant mountain range is the Pyraez mountain range. You Dariège folks prefer calling it the Dariège mountain range."

At that moment, Lumian grasped the entirety of the situation.

"Is this south of the Dariège mountain range?"

"Southwest. The Dariège mountain range is a few hours away by train. In between, you'll find vast plains, pastures, and numerous towns and villages," Lugano clarified as he ascended the stairs. "As you might know, every autumn, shepherds from Dariège and nearby areas migrate to the southern plains for grazing. Some settle down, while others seek opportunities in the larger surrounding cities, including Port Santa.

"If you head northeast, Highlander might not be necessary. Many people there are familiar with Intisian. I have a cousin who was a widow initially. Later, she met a local while shepherding and married him. She gave up grazing and helped the herdsmen develop businesses related to sheep, cheese, wool, and more. Eventually, they saved enough to start a vineyard. Her husband values her opinions. This might be an example of Feynapotter men. Unfortunately, I'm not a woman; otherwise, I might have converted to Earth Mother!"

Listening to Lugano's insights, Lumian recalled a piece of information Aurore had once shared.

The Dariège mountain range acted as a barrier against the cold winds heading south.

Consequently, the Gaia Province, situated south of the Dariège mountain range, enjoyed abundant sunlight and warm weather. Even in winter, the plains and pastures thrived with lush grass suitable for grazing. Lumian sensed that this knowledge had become "dynamic," forming a network that allowed him to comprehend the geographical and weather characteristics of Port Santa and its northeastern region.

Abruptly, another thought crossed his mind.

Could it be that most of the Beyonders captured by shepherds like Pierre, who believed in Inevitability, hailed from this area?

Given the presence of a thriving port and a mountain range rich in mineral deposits, it makes sense that there would be more Beyonders here…

If that were the case, perhaps my Hunter, Provoker, and even Pyromaniac Beyonder characteristics might have originated from this region.

I'm here now…

Why do I smell the scent of inevitability…

Lumian responded casually to Lugano's information, "How many children did your cousin have?"

"Three," Lugano replied.

"If she hadn't produced children, would her husband have been so obedient?" Lumian, aware of the beliefs of Earth Mother's faith, heard about these matters with the shepherds who frequented the pastures.

They held fertility and reproduction in high regard.

"Definitely not," Lugano affirmed without hesitation.

As the conversation unfolded, the trio ascended to the fifth floor, entering a suite at the corridor's end.

Lumian strolled to the balcony, casting his gaze towards the rugged mountain range in the distance.

There lay a highlander pasture and Cordu.

After nearly fifteen minutes of silent contemplation, Lumian returned to his room and began composing letters to Madam Magician and Franca.

His intention was to inform Franca of the humanoid Sealed Artifact, urging her to alert the official Beyonders of the Feynapotter Kingdom through 007. A potentially hazardous pathogen capable of madness at any moment was not fit for roaming freely outside.

…

"Wow! See? What did I say? Lumian will definitely encounter the source of Derangement again!" exclaimed Franca as she was about to depart with Jenna when she received the letter.

They were heading to Trier's catacombs.

In the preceding days, Jenna harbored a desire to revisit Krismona Night Pillar, hoping to uncover something valuable. However, she hesitated to approach recklessly, fearing it might attract the suspicion of the Demoness Sect. Residing with Franca offered no guarantee of safety from their watchful eyes.

Thanks to Anthony's introduction, she finally secured a mission at a mysticism gathering, providing a valid pretext.

Her task involved venturing to a specific family's tomb on the catacombs' third level, retrieving an antique tearcatcher for her employer.

Chapter 535: Reply

535 Reply

Jenna completed reading Lumian's letter and lapsed into silence for a few moments before remarking,

"The origin of the Derangement is genuinely formidable… Lumian unknowingly endured its effects for nearly half a month."

Luckily, the woman's ailment didn't erupt. Otherwise, everyone on the ship would have descended into madness.

Jenna contemplated for a moment, convinced that if she were in Lumian's position, the outcome would be the same; nothing would alter.

"Hence, Sealed Artifacts above Level 2 wield immense power, but they're not practical for most situations. Their mere existence can bring catastrophe to the surrounding humans," Franca seized the chance to enlighten her companion, who had only been a Beyonder for half a year.

She conveyed this information to Madam Judgment, not 007. This decision arose from the unpredictability of the emergency communication methods. What if 007 happened to be occupied and didn't go to that location? Regular communication had to wait until after 10 p.m.

Considering the imminent threat of Derangement, Franca didn't want to waste valuable time. With Madam Judgment's real-world identity, contacting the official Beyonders of the Feynapotter Kingdom was assured—no worries about not locating her. Come nightfall, she would notify 007, ensuring the message reached the right people.

With this matter settled, Franca and Jenna reached the catacombs in a rented carriage.

Having followed Lumian to the third level, they had drawn valuable information from him. The place was now familiar to them. Soon, they entered a small square illuminated by burning white candles and adorned with two sacrificial pillars.

Jenna reflected for a moment and, to Franca's confusion, approached the sacrificial pillar representing the Eternal Blazing Sun. She outstretched her arms and reverently declared, "Praise the Sun!"

She was seeking protection.

Franca couldn't help but twitch her lips as she observed the scene. Amused, she remarked,

"Why are you becoming more and more like Ciel—uh, Lumian?"

"Dammit! How do I resemble him?" Jenna retorted instinctively.

"In terms of faith flexibility," Franca pointed out with a smile. "Like me, I only praise Mr. Fool. I didn't say anything like 'By Steam.'"

Jenna pondered for a moment and admitted, "Because Lumian and I once truly believed in the Eternal Blazing Sun…"

Suddenly, she halted, her lips moving as she cursed herself.

Am I admitting that I do resemble Lumian?

Franca had only been teasing. After praising The Fool, she left the sacrificial square with Jenna and headed towards the entrance of the fourth level, where the Krismona Night Pillar stood.

Thanks to Lumian's information, they navigated past the skeletal "blockage" on the road. In the dim environment, they moved cautiously, guided by the faint candlelight.

As Franca walked, an idea crossed her mind.

"Do you think we have to hold the lit white candles in our hands? Can we hold them above our heads or make a lantern and place them inside? Will this also protect us?"

Accustomed to Franca's occasional peculiar thoughts, Jenna casually replied, "You can give it a try."

After considering the potential consequences of a failed experiment, Franca chuckled dryly.

"Forget it, forget it. No need to be curious about such things."

She looked at Jenna beside her and changed the subject.

"Why are you dressed like this?"

Jenna, now in a black dress and a dark bonnet, exuded a beauty that carried a touch of maturity beyond her years.

Jenna instinctively scanned the surroundings for any dim yellow candles before whispering,

"I'm playing the part of a Witch to add a mysterious touch."

Clad in a black robe with a hood, she might resemble the witches known to humans, but it could easily raise suspicion from the Demoness Sect, so Jenna found a compromise.

Franca quickly grasped the situation and nodded in approval. "You've put in the effort."

Seizing the moment, Jenna inquired, "What about you? Since Gardner's demise, have you not found an opportunity to digest Pleasure with someone?"

Franca, usually thick-skinned, felt a bit embarrassed by Jenna's words. She coughed twice and replied, "It's not difficult to find someone if I wanted. If it doesn't work out, I'll turn down Browns at an opportune moment and see if she takes offense. Heh heh, if she truly experiences pleasure, she might invite me to join her…"

Franca suddenly shut her mouth, wishing she could raise her right hand and slap herself.

Why did I disclose all this to Jenna?

What a disgrace!

Clearing her throat, Franca said, "Besides, this presents an opportunity."

"Opportunity?" Jenna was puzzled.

Franca nodded solemnly.

"Relying solely on the matters in bed and physical pleasure can indeed slowly digest the potion. It also aligns with the negative characteristics of a Demoness. However, I keep feeling that the meaning of Pleasure shouldn't be limited to this. Taking advantage of the absence of a target for physical pleasure, I want to calm down and slowly experience and explore other possibilities.

"For instance, captivating a man's heart. Bringing joy merely by being around me. Providing pleasure through interaction, yet beyond his reach. Each encounter becomes a torment, a glimpse into the catastrophe and affliction a Demoness brings…

"Dammit, I despise such women the most!"

Franca's frustration blazed as she spoke.

Jenna was taken aback, her lips pursed, her body trembling slightly as she struggled to contain her laughter.

"Something along those lines. At any rate, that's the gist," Franca abruptly concluded the conversation.

In the dim candlelight, Franca passed by a newly constructed tomb beside an ancient one. A sudden frown creased her forehead, questioning if she had missed an opportunity.

If I had sighed and hinted at the stagnation of my digestion due to the absence of a pleasure partner, would Jenna offer sympathy and assistance?

Argh, my stubbornness has cost me!

But perhaps she'd suggest Lumian…

Franca's thoughts raced, but she remained vigilant, especially when she noticed the jumbled bones strewn along the roadside.

Finally, she and Jenna reached the Krismona Night Pillar, a black marble structure supporting the cave's ceiling.

No etchings or signs of erosion adorned its surface.

Franca studied it for a moment and remarked, "It's reminiscent of the one in Fourth Epoch Trier, albeit smaller. More like a tip."

Turning to Jenna, she inquired, "Do you sense anything peculiar?"

Furrowing her brow, Jenna shook her head slowly.

"No."

…

Feynapotter Kingdom, Gaia Province, Port Santa, Solow Motel.

Lumian swiftly received a response from Madam Magician:

"Have you faced the dread of a Grade 1 Sealed Artifact?

"Repeating it won't imprint as deeply as experiencing it firsthand.

"This likely is the power of a High-Sequence Beyonder in the Spectator pathway, constantly shaping the thoughts and perceptions of those around. Remember: 'Beware of the Spectator'…

"The Sealed Artifact has other powers. I'm uncertain if it belongs to the evil gods outside. For now, you needn't pursue or capture it. We'll liaise with the Earth Mother Church through Mr. Moon."

Reading this, Lumian muttered to himself, I'd rather not get involved, but it's not my call. Sometimes, my nature thrusts me into things I'd rather avoid.

It was just like him and the Sealed Artifact being on the same voyage, headed for the same destination.

Simultaneously, Lumian gleaned a vital detail from Madam Magician's arrangements.

Mr. Moon of the Tarot Club had close ties with the Earth Mother Church.

After a moment's reflection, Lumian resumed reading the letter.

"We're also probing Resurrection Island's existence. Mr. Hanged Man and Madam Hermit are leading the investigation. They have theories but can't confirm yet. If they need your aid, they'll inform you and seek your consent. However, don't search for Resurrection Island now. It's very dangerous. Remember, very dangerous…

"The death mark is a lingering essence of death. Ordinary humans leave one mark; certain Sequences of certain pathways can leave many. Such marks erode and merge with death, lasting longer for those higher in status or with special abilities. As for ordinary Low-Sequence Beyonders, the corresponding death mark won't exist for anything beyond a few years.

"Setting up a ritual to summon the death mark is nearly impossible. Even a Sequence 0 true god wouldn't dare approach the essence of death, let alone with a ritual.

"I suspect something amiss with the Arden evil spirit Burman summoned. The decline in Burman's mental state may have started with that spirit, not his encounter with Harrison of Resurrection Island.

"Perhaps, the Arden evil spirit isn't dead."

The Arden evil spirit, leaving behind blood traces and easily dispatched by Burman, isn't dead? What an absurd storyline… Even Madam Magician remains clueless about the nature of this creature. Recollecting Burman's encounter, Lumian couldn't detect anything abnormal.

This behavior seemed like that of a half-mad individual, forcibly transitioning between pathways.

In her closing remarks, Madam Magician cautioned: "Exercise caution during your investigations in Port Santa. Should you encounter any difficulties, don't hesitate to seek aid from the Knight of Swords."

There's no need for that for now… Lumian replied inwardly.

This stemmed from a lack of leads or information. Even if he were to correspond with the Knight of Swords, Lumian wouldn't know what to inquire about or what kind of assistance to request.

Chapter 536: One in the Light and One in the Dark

536 One in the Light and One in the Dark

Lumian's immediate priority upon reaching Port Santa was to delve into the events of the previous sea prayer ritual, particularly focusing on the individuals involved in the accident. This investigation would be crucial in uncovering the true identities of the key members of April Fool's.

However, this phase of his pursuit carried inherent risks of deception and potential traps.

Understanding the intricacies of last year's prank was paramount before engaging the Minor Arcana—Knight of Swords—in any assistance. Lumian didn't find it plausible to enlist aid on such matters.

The sealed knowledge surrounding the events in Port Santa made it apparent that unless the Knight of Swords happened to be present, he wouldn't yield much help.

Initially, Lumian aimed to gather information about the sea prayer ritual and the previous year's incident, but such details seemed exclusive to this location. Peripheral members of April Fool's, involved in minor roles, offered limited perspectives, offering mere snippets of the puzzle.

With a flick of his wrist, Lumian transformed Madam Magician's reply into a blazing fireball.

Exiting the master bedroom of the suite, he addressed Lugano, who waited in the living room, "Let's get ourselves a local identity."

"You've already used Louis Berry's identity to check into the motel," Lugano reminded Lumian after some thought.

Did this mean it's time to depart?

Wouldn't that be a waste of an entire week's rent?

Lugano's heart ached at the thought of the 10.5 gold risot.

Spending money wasn't an issue; just don't waste it!

As a bounty hunter who had lived a tough life for many years, he was quite sensitive to money. Otherwise, he wouldn't have been so thick-skinned as to ask Lumian for a "job."

"Any issues?" Lumian inquired with a smile.

In the October warmth of Port Santa, Lumian sported a straightforward ensemble—light linen shirt, brown pants, a golden straw hat cradled in his grasp.

For a moment, Lugano didn't know if he should voice his primary concern—the matter of money. Finally, he decided to broach the subject.

"Boss, I grabbed a few newspapers from the street. Seems there are rumors in Port Farim about you taking down the Demon Warlock."

Upon reading this news, Lugano rubbed his eyes several times, wondering if he had read wrongly.

When had his boss eradicated the Demon Warlock?

Why don't I know?

Only the memory of the seemingly bombarded master bedroom stirred skepticism.

"It was me," Lumian replied with a slight nod.

"…" Lugano momentarily lost the ability to organize his words.

After a brief pause, he suppressed his curiosity and feigned understanding.

"You've bagged a bounty of 600,000 verl d'or and some spoils of war. No wonder you've been throwing money around lately…"

The rent of 20 to 30 verl d'or didn't seem extravagant anymore.

"All donated," Lumian disclosed matter-of-factly.

"Why?" Lugano blurted out.

Lumian glanced at him.

Lugano immediately shut his mouth and smiled sheepishly.

"We need to change our location. Louis Berry's fame in the Fog Sea makes him an easy target."

In that gaze, Lumian conveyed an unspoken message:

Who's in charge here? You or me?

Did I need your approval to donate the bounty?

With a subtle smile, Lumian posed the question, "Who said we were relocating?"

Lugano, caught off guard, stammered, "Not relocating…"

Lumian's smile held a cryptic meaning as he shared, "Why else do you think I didn't ask the clergyman from the Church of The Fool, who helped collect the bounty, to conceal my identity?"

Louis Berry, the high-profile adventurer, served as a beacon, attracting attention and revealing the landscape of potential threats.

Lumian needed an inconspicuous local guise to operate discreetly in the shadows.

Lugano, grappling with the complexity of his employer's motives, confessed, "I-I thought you just wanted to be as famous as Gehrman Sparrow in the Five Seas." He sensed there was more beneath the surface.

Lumian chuckled.

"Who among our generation wouldn't want to match Gehrman Sparrow's fame in the Five Seas?"

The desire for recognition satisfied his vanity, providing a plausible reason for not letting Theis, the Church of The Fool's bishop, conceal his identity completely.

A superficial motive—one genuine enough to make people believe—could effectively veil hidden intentions.

"Uh…" Lugano, feeling like he couldn't decipher Lumian's true colors or grasp his ultimate goal, sighed inwardly.

Sigh, I'm just a Planter, a Doctor, and a seasoned bounty hunter. My intelligence can only be considered ordinary…

Lumian cast a glance at Ludwig, munching on a potato omelet, and declared, "Let's go."

He nudged the coat rack into a blind spot, hanging the golden straw hat, creating the illusion of an inconspicuous figure if one looked from the opposite building.

Exiting the Solow Motel, Lumian strolled along the grayish-white stone street toward the lively bars near the harbor. Lugano followed, holding Ludwig's hand.

The ancient street boasted mottled houses with white walls and red tiles. Near entrances like Cordu, elderly women chatted in the sun, but they didn't lend a hand in catching lice.

Passersby tread softly, lowering their voices to maintain the tranquility of the scene.

In a casual exchange with Francesco, the bartender at the Flying Bird's basement bar, Lumian learned of a cultural phenomenon in Feynapotter, shaped by the Earth Mother's faith and the significance accorded to family traditions: "Matriarchal culture."

Within each family, the most venerable grandmother, a prolific progenitor, commanded unparalleled respect. As the unquestionable "parent," they wielded a certain degree of control over every family member. Even outside the confines of their homes, this reverence persisted, for these grandmothers represented the familial symbol, embodying the Earth Mother.

The combination of religious beliefs and societal norms secured a unique status for these elderly grandmothers.

Observing this dynamic, Lumian found himself contemplating a question.

In Riston Province, a married woman, functioning as a de facto parent, held the right to be addressed as "Madame" and have her name prefixed with "Na." Could this tradition be an influence from Feynapotter's matriarchal culture just a mountain away?

Nomadic herdsmen and traders, traversing vast distances, inevitably brought back tales of their experiences. Ancient practices from the Dariège mountain range and its surroundings, spanning over a millennium, undoubtedly left an indelible mark.

Navigating the ancient yet serene streets under the brilliant sunlight, Lumian felt a sense of displacement. It was as if he had returned to Cordu during the bustling season when adults toiled in the fields, tended to sheep in the mountains, or embarked on hunting expeditions, leaving only an old woman and young children behind.

…

Trier, third level of the catacombs.

Jenna closed her eyes and extended her senses, but the black Krismona Night Pillar remained silent, devoid of any sighs or motion.

Assessing the Mirror Substitutions, she cautiously approached the enigmatic weather-free pillar, placing her palm against it.

The black pillar that supported the cave's ceiling, though cold and metallic, retained the texture of rock.

Yet, Jenna's probing mind received nothing beyond this information.

"It still doesn't work," she communicated to Franca, shaking her head.

In her reflections, Jenna recalled the two instances and sought their commonality when she had heard Krismona's voice—during her advancement and within a special mirror world in Fourth Epoch Trier.

Both times, danger and intense emotions had been common denominators.

Jenna whispered, "The danger during my Witch advancement was suppressed by the sacrificial square. Is the key intense emotions?" Jenna pondered aloud, delving into memories of painful events that had stirred her emotions,

including her mother's death, separation from her brother, and other poignant experiences of suffering.

Despite the visible fluctuations in her emotions, the Krismona Night Pillar remained silent, the illusory sigh elusive.

Franca, after a moment's contemplation, suggested, "Must there be a special event to trigger it?"

"Perhaps," Jenna replied, biting her lip. "Why don't we try the fourth level? Lumian mentioned the shadow suspected to have formed after the death of the Demoness pathway's Angel. That should be Krismona."

Franca's heart stirred, and she affirmed, "That's right. Moreover, the shadow is controlled by the seal and doesn't have the ability to attack humans. Yes, the prerequisite is that we strictly adhere to the series of rules in the catacombs."

After a brief discussion, the two of them circled around the Krismona Night Pillar, replaced candles, and proceeded to descend the ancient, mottled stone steps. Under the watchful gaze of realistic dark-gray reliefs depicting human heads on both sides of the rock walls, they descended step by step.

Breaking the suffocating silence, Franca spoke up, "This place is perfect for ghost stories. The atmosphere is amazing."

Jenna glanced at her, teasing, "Are you afraid?"

"How is that possible?" Franca retorted stubbornly.

Jenna chuckled.

"If you weren't afraid, you'd just tell ghost stories to scare me. Now, you're just sighing. It means you mainly want to rely on your voice to boost your courage."

It's a waste of your talent not to choose the Spectator pathway… Do theater actors have to learn to read people? Franca was about to argue when they reached the last ancient stone step.

Simultaneously, a sense of oppression enveloped them.

In the next moment, a yellowish candle flame flickered in their eyes.

The candle flame didn't belong to them. It emerged from the distant fourth level of the catacombs.

Chapter 537: Charm

537 Charm

Franca and Jenna's initial reaction was to steer clear of the newcomer. In this subterranean maze filled with corpses, they couldn't afford to be complacent with the living.

Yet, their circumstances didn't permit avoidance. They had to wield a glowing white candle, a feeble defense against the encroaching darkness of the catacombs. The candle's flame, though, made them conspicuous, a visible beacon in the shadows. True concealment required them to find solace behind the sealed doors of an ancient tomb.

The option of becoming invisible or lurking in the shadows was risky—they weren't certain if it meant snuffing out the candle flame.

After a silent exchange of glances, Franca and Jenna chose to take a circuitous route, maintaining a safe distance from the distant candlelight.

In the oppressive stillness that felt like time itself had halted, the two Demonesses cautiously progressed westward, guided by road signs and the black lines on the cave ceiling.

As they approached a point parallel to the candle flame, Franca turned her head to peer down the corridor between the ancient tombs.

Thanks to her exceptional night vision, she identified the person clutching the burning candle.

A man in a black robe—deep black and light hues intermingled in his hair, a gentle profile, pale-white skin, and dark brown eyes, distinct from the Intisians.

Feynapotterian? Strikingly similar, yet subtly different. Why do I sense familiarity? When have I encountered this person before? Did he leave an impression in the memory recesses of the original owner of my body? Franca felt an inexplicable urge to approach and strike up a conversation.

She took a deep breath and suppressed it.

In the hushed darkness of the catacombs, approaching strangers recklessly could easily spark unnecessary conflict.

Franca had dedicated considerable time to delve into the circumstances surrounding the original body's demise and the person's life experiences. She sought to ensure there were no lingering issues that she needed to be wary about acquaintances from the past.

The man in the black robe, having observed the two Demonesses and noting their lack of intent to draw near, continued on his path, eventually disappearing behind an ancient tomb.

"He doesn't look like a college student." Jenna averted her gaze and eliminated an option.

If the individual hadn't ventured into the fourth level of the catacombs merely driven by curiosity and excitement, it hints at a clear motive. Is he on a commissioned search for antiques, paying respects to an ancestor buried on this level, or a Beyonder delving into the mysticism and seal composition of the catacombs? Perhaps, like Jenna and myself, he pursues the revelations from the three night pillars. Franca's mind raced through various possibilities.

On the fourth level of the catacombs, two more night pillars awaited: Marianne's Night Pillar and Lius's Night Pillar.

The former, the pope of the Evernight Goddess Church in the Fourth Epoch, and the latter, the Blessed of the ancient Death. Both had met their demise during the War of the Four Emperors inside Fourth Epoch Trier.

Having shared her analysis with Jenna, Franca gestured with her right hand, the one without a candle, and reassured, "Don't worry about his motives. It won't affect our search for Krismona's shadow."

I didn't want to bother either. You were the one considering all the possibilities… I sensed that impulse in your heart. Did you truly want to investigate that person just now? Jenna, attuned to Franca's nuances, grasped her companion's thoughts but chose to chuckle, keeping the revelation to herself.

At times, Franca could be quite prideful!

After walking along the path for nearly fifteen minutes, they reached a natural cave named Crazy Mushroom Cave.

The entrance was sealed by a dense cluster of pale-white mushrooms tinged with black.

"Why are there so many mushrooms?" Franca observed them with curiosity.

Before Jenna could respond, she continued, "Alright, alright, alright. I get it. Now's not the time for exploration and adventure."

"Dammit, I didn't stop you. Maybe Krismona's shadow is in the mushroom cave." Jenna, feeling stifled since entering the fourth level of the catacombs, vented her discomfort with coarse language, as if confined in a space that oppressed her.

Franca was on the verge of responding when her attention fixated on a figure standing at the corner ahead.

Clad in a simple and unadorned white robe, the figure boasted smooth black hair, exquisite facial features, and a holy aura. Her beauty transcended the surroundings of darkness, silence, and filth, as if she had emerged from the depths of human imagination,

Krismona! The name resonated simultaneously in the minds of Franca and Jenna.

They had indeed stumbled upon a shadow suspected to be a High-Sequence Beyonder—the Demoness, Krismona!

Regaining her composure, Jenna locked eyes with the figure and attempted to speak in ancient Hermes, "Hello."

The woman's beauty was otherworldly, captivating everyone's attention. A faint smile graced the corners of her mouth.

Her allure was fully unleashed.

Entranced by that smile, Jenna and Franca found themselves lost, their minds fixated on a singular thought: Approach her, approach her…

Like moths drawn to a flame, fully aware of the dangers that lay in her beauty, yet compelled to draw near.

One step, two steps, three steps… The two Demonesses, eyes filled with fascination, advanced toward the woman in the simple white robe.

As they walked on, Jenna couldn't help but instinctively sigh and feel a sense of pity.

Why did she sigh when she has such a beautiful smile?

Had she encountered something sorrowful?

Sigh…

Jenna snapped out of her daze, realizing that the woman in the white robe might not be the same as Krismona, who had sighed and protected them. At the very least, she wasn't entirely the same!

Her vision cleared instantly, revealing the beautiful figure's soft black hair billowing. Each strand had become unusually thick, and the top had split open, resembling a snake opening its mouth.

The pitch-black snake's mouth faced Jenna and Franca, seemingly poised for their approach.

Jenna's heart skipped a beat. She swiftly grabbed Franca and whispered, "Something's amiss!"

Franca, initially taken aback, struggled for a few seconds before breaking free from her enchantment.

Coming to a sudden halt, they watched as the holy figure in the white robe stared blankly for a moment before bifurcating into a fork and vanishing into the darkness.

Phew… Franca exhaled, her fear lingering as she remarked, "Why isn't there a rule in the catacombs guidelines that prohibits communication with those who don't hold candles?"

"Perhaps ordinary humans, if they enter the fourth level, will be affected by the environment, unable to suppress their fear and leaving quickly without encountering these shadows," Jenna offered an explanation.

Franca glanced at her with frustration and said, "You managed to break free from the female ghost's charm before I did."

Jenna recounted the thoughts that had recently crossed her mind.

"But I also heard Krismona's sigh and words in Fourth Epoch Trier…" Franca raised her right hand and touched her face. "Am I really more easily enamored with beauty?"

At this point, a sudden puzzlement overcame her.

"Actually, I've always found it strange that Krismona Night Pillar stands in the catacombs.

"As for the other two night pillars, one belongs to the Church of Evernight's former pope, Marianne, and the other is named after the ancient Death's Blessed, Lius. The latter is the Death Consul, which is very compatible with the catacombs. The former should be on the neighboring pathway of Death. In other words, they are closely related to death, home, and the dead. Krismona is the Demoness of Catastrophe, clearly distinct from them.

"I can understand why there was a giant pillar representing Krismona in Fourth Epoch Trier. That's because there's a special mirror world there. It contains the Primordial Demoness's divine power left behind during the War of the Four Emperors. However, why was Krismona Night Pillar included in the catacombs' construction? Back then, an Angel who followed the Blood Emperor perished. Why did it have to be Her?"

Jenna shook her head slowly and redirected her gaze to the spot where the holy figure had vanished.

She attempted to walk a distance in that direction and suddenly realized that the spot where the white-robed woman had been standing was an ancient tomb.

Unlike the other tombs on the fourth floor, its tomb door was open.

…

After departing Rue Aquina, home to the Solow Motel, Lumian found an empty alley and casually tossed the Lie earring to Lugano.

"Find someone skilled in crafting false identities. Change your appearance, and don't use your current look." Lumian gestured towards the café diagonally opposite. "I'll be waiting for you there."

"Yes, Boss." Lugano displayed no sign of worry.

Despite being unfamiliar with this city, he had numerous acquaintances residing here.

Moreover, he was fluent in Highlander.

As Lumian observed the translator-guide completing his disguise, returning Lie, and heading toward Rue des Bars, he led Ludwig into the café, where each table was adorned with a bouquet of flowers.

The sun bore down, rendering the passersby somewhat languid.

Unfazed, Lumian, armed with his limited knowledge of Highlander words and gestures, successfully ordered two cups of Torres coffee with milk, a Santa yolk pastry with cream fashioned into a tower, roasted suckling pig, and duck stewed in pear juice.

Ludwig was pleased.

Sipping his coffee, Lumian surveyed the café. He noticed that the six or seven tables were occupied mainly by couples in their twenties, engaged in dates. There was only one middle-aged couple.

With Lumian's acute hearing, it wasn't challenging for him to catch snippets of conversations at nearby tables, even though he didn't comprehend most of it. Only a few words stood out.

"Ocean… Pray… Going aboard… Island…"

Could they be discussing the sea prayer ritual next month? Lumian mused, shifting his gaze out the window.

On the street, two young men with long swords on their backs engaged in a heated argument for some reason. Drawing their swords on the spot, they seemed poised for a duel.

Chapter 538: Historical Origins

538 Historical Origins

Clang! Clang! Clang!

Even through the glass window, Lumian heard the clash of two lads' swords outside.

He couldn't help but raise his eyebrows.

They're really fighting?

Though duels were popular in Trier, it was rare for them to wield weapons without the formalities. Normally, they'd go through the entire process: determine the type of duel—cold weapons or revolvers—sign a contract, find a recognized witness, and then borrow weapons from the café's front desk or the bar counter. Only these duels were legal, avoiding police intervention.

But wielding a longsword at the slightest disagreement was either a prelude to riot or a mob vendetta. Such lethal weapons rarely surfaced in real fights.

Port Santa, or rather, the Feynapotter Kingdom's security is so poor? Lumian was surprised by this.

From the Flying Bird to the Solow Motel, he noticed the locals' penchant for carrying blades and swords, reminiscent of scenes from classical novels.

It was actually legal!

In a maritime colony like Port Farim, openly carrying such items was unheard of. Even a dagger had to be concealed.

For him, though, this was a welcome advantage.

Fascinated, Lumian observed the desperate struggle between the two lads through the window, occasionally commenting on their combat techniques in his mind.

Suddenly, a group of people jogged over from the street.

All women, they wore black cloth hats with white patterns, black lining, and brown leather armor. Dark cloaks adorned with two crossed swords, and brass revolvers strapped to their waists completed their attire.

The woman leading the group seemed to be in her late twenties, with thick, naturally curly black hair, thick eyebrows, large eyes, and plump red lips—

quite beautiful.

Standing at over 1.7 meters tall, she drew a straight sword from her back and called out to the two men fighting on the street with a cold expression.

Lumian only understood the word "stop."

The two lads truly ceased their actions, standing by the street and accepting the reprimand from the group of women, their imposing demeanor fading.

After a few minutes, they left separately with their swords, not being apprehended.

Lumian took a sip of his Torres coffee, perplexed by the situation.

The language barrier proved quite troublesome.

After Ludwig polished off the food on the table at a controlled speed, Lugano, now sporting an unremarkable face, returned.

Lumian wasn't in a hurry to inquire if he had found a black-market merchant who could craft fake identities. He casually asked, "Is it legal to possess cold weapons in Port Santa?"

Lugano lowered his round-rimmed black hat and dropped his voice.

"That's right. It's a local custom. The Feynapotter Kingdom government respects this tradition. Besides, it's a good thing for them to have more people die in the Gaia Province."

"Why?" Lumian inquired with interest.

Lugano covered his face with his hand, as if afraid of being followed.

Observing this, Lumian tossed him the Lie earring.

Lugano hurried to the washroom and reverted to his original appearance, albeit his facial features becoming more refined.

Only then did he relax and explain, "Have you ever heard of the Battle of the Violated Oath?"

Lumian, shaped by Aurore's rigorous education, instinctively replied, "The Battle of the Violated Oath that began in the Fifth Epoch in 738? The one where Lenburg, Masin, Segar, and other small south-central countries were separated from the north of the Feynapotter Kingdom, and the Church of the God of Knowledge and Wisdom broke off from the Church of Earth Mother?"

Lugano was taken aback.

"Yes."

He only had a rough idea. The other party had actually revealed the exact year and final outcome.

After a few seconds, Lugano lowered his voice and said, "During the Battle of the Violated Oath, the entire Gaia Province, especially those near the Dariège mountain range, attempted to gain independence but failed.

"Later, in order to guard against the natives, despite high-quality iron and coal mines just south of the Dariège Mountains, the Feynapotter Kingdom only set up smelting factories and no gun factories. There wasn't a single native in the troops stationed here; they were all assigned to other places.

"Was there once a widespread belief in the God of Knowledge and Wisdom here?" Lumian couldn't help but glance at Ludwig, who was enjoying dessert.

The key to the independence of Lenburg, Masin, Segar, and other countries in the south-central region was their mainstream faith in the God of Knowledge and Wisdom, not the Earth Mother.

"I don't know," Lugano honestly shook his head.

Undeterred, he pressed on with the matter at hand.

"You should already know that the ancient Gaia Province mainly comprised four types of people. Firstly, farmers. Secondly, fishermen from places like Port Santa. Thirdly, mountain dwellers who relied on minerals and hunting to survive. Fourthly, the herdsmen you're familiar with. The latter three are fierce, wielding swords fearlessly in conflicts."

Lumian nodded.

That was indeed the case.

Whether fishermen, mountain dwellers, or herdsmen, they all lived in relative poverty. They battled nature's cruelty and faced various dangers beyond human settlements. They even had to be wary of those among them with ill intentions. Swords and blades were necessities, not ornaments.

Lumian had heard firsthand from the migrating herdsmen about wolf pack attacks and the brutality of bandits. It had left a deep impression on him.

Lugano downed the lemonade he had just ordered and sighed in relief.

"One of Earth Mother's three combat orders is stationed permanently in Gaia Province. They guard against us in the north and Lenburg in the northeast. Simultaneously, they aim to monitor the locals.

"Heh heh, encountering combat nuns in Gaia Province and Port Santa isn't uncommon. Their demeanors differ from other women…"

Lugano's expression shifted to one of leisure and fascination.

The team just now were the combat nuns who maintain order? Lumian realized.

He teased Lugano with a smile, "They're nuns."

Lugano smiled enigmatically and remarked, "The nuns of the Earth Mother Church don't take vows of chastity. Instead, they pledge to have as many children as possible before a certain age. If they're interested in you, they'll be quite proactive. Sometimes, they might even push a bit. The young folks here love showcasing their bravery in front of these nuns. Their courage might catch someone's eye."

Pledging to have numerous children before a certain age… It sounds peculiar, aligning with Earth Mother's teachings but reminiscent of another Mother. Local customs, governmental involvement, religious doctrines, and primal courtship behaviors has all woven into the folklore of this place where cold weapons rule the streets. Lumian hadn't expected such complexity behind a seemingly trivial matter.

Upon reflection, it was rather intriguing.

At that moment, Lumian suddenly understood Aurore's words from the past.

"If I return to university without life's pressures, I'd study history."

Phew… Lumian exhaled slowly and turned to Lugano, "Any progress?"

Lugano, still lost in thoughts about combat nuns, was caught off guard and struggled to snap out of his reverie.

"You Intisians…" Lumian clicked his tongue.

Only then did Lugano grasp the question. He sheepishly smiled and said, "I've made some. I've found a well-connected black-market merchant who can help.

"Would you like to meet them? He's also a descendant of Dariège."

"Sure." Lumian finished his coffee and stood up.

…

Trier, fourth level of the catacombs.

Jenna and Franca each gripped a burning white candle, their eyes fixed on the ancient tomb that lay open, hesitant to advance.

No one knew what lay buried inside, and the fear of something terrifying emerging lingered in the air.

In the outer world, the two Demonesses could employ divination to discern the situation. However, in the catacombs, establishing a close connection with the ordinary spirit world was nearly impossible. The outcome was evident.

After all, Lumian couldn't enter through Spirit World Traversal, but he could "teleport" within its confines.

After a brief pause, Franca passed her Mirror Substitution to Jenna and stepped forward with solemn determination. Relying on her spiritual premonition, she cautiously approached the ancient tomb.

As they drew nearer, the dim yellow candlelight revealed a heap of pale-white bones in the entrance area, adorned with light greenish-black mold spots.

Franca raised the white candle, casting its light into the depths of the tomb.

Skeletons lay scattered in disarray, occupying every inch of the ground. In the center, a tilted sarcophagus revealed a multitude of decaying bones.

Franca hesitated for a moment before declaring, "It doesn't seem dangerous."

Only then did Jenna approach, returning the Mirror Substitution.

Franca continued her observation and remarked, "Nothing of value either."

Gems and other items were absent among the burial articles, likely lost during the construction of the catacombs and the opening of these ancient tombs. Everything else had decayed or shattered. Even the murals on the walls bore only faint traces.

Jenna observed for a while and said uncertainly, "What about the area where these bones are pressing down?"

"Let me take a look." Franca moved closer, allowing invisible spider silk to spread and entwine the pale-white bones at the entrance, aiding in their movement.

Suddenly, an irregular mirror fragment, seemingly coated in black paint, materialized in the flames.

Jenna and Franca's eyes narrowed.

It bore a striking resemblance to the Mirror World Fragment they had obtained in Fourth Epoch Trier!

"Did a special Mirror Person once die here?" Franca mused. "Did Krismona's shadow appear here to inform us? But why did She attack us?"

Jenna shared the perplexity. After a moment of thought, she said, "Why did the special Mirror Person die here? Who owns this tomb? Or rather, which ancient family does it belong to?"

Franca stared for a moment before nodding solemnly.

"That might be our next investigation."

Finding no anomalies, the duo stored away the mirror fragment. Utilizing the formless spider silk of the Demoness of Pleasure, they meticulously searched the entire tomb but found nothing that identified the tomb owner.

Franca sighed and said, "Well, we'll unravel it when we get back. Let's go acquire an antique tearcatcher for the employer now."

Chapter 539: Information on the Sea Prayer Ritual

539 Information on the Sea Prayer Ritual

In Port Santa, inside a room featuring a lone card table,

Lumian and Lugano, their appearances altered and attire changed, met the black-market merchant claiming lineage to Dariège.

Seated at the head of the table, he sported a white shirt and a black vest, a glass of pale malt-colored white wine at his fingertips and a slowly burning cigar between them.

He did embody the heritage of the Dariège region with slightly sunken eye sockets, slightly curled black hair, and piercing blue eyes reminiscent of a cloudless sky over a towering mountain. His thin cheeks and thick stubble suggested a man in his thirties.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Valerio," Lugano greeted in Highlander.

Valerio, casting a glance at his armed bodyguards, responded with a smile in Intisian, flavored with a distinct Dariège accent.

"It's been a long time since I've returned home. It's a pleasure to see you."

"Indeed, Mr. Valerio," Lumian replied in Intisian, his voice also tinged with a Dariège accent.

While shepherds excelled at navigating the perils of the wilderness, an inherent wariness of authorities in settled human areas lingered.

Valerio nodded subtly and inquired, "Did you come from Larnaca?"

"Yes, I just finished attending the trade fair there," Lumian replied smoothly.

Having learned about Larnaca from the shepherds in Cordu, Lumian was well aware of the monthly trade fair that transformed the suburbs into a bustling marketplace. Shepherds from far and wide flocked to the event, seizing opportunities to trade lamb, wool, cheese, and other goods.

Valerio then delved into the topic of migration and Dariège's folklore. Lumian, well-versed in the subject from a shepherd's perspective, provided insightful answers.

In the midst of the conversation, he felt a bit disoriented. Recollections of his sister's occasional threats echoed in his mind: "If you don't study hard, I'll send you off to be a shepherd!"

Now, irony had it that he found himself playing the role of a shepherd.

After some time, Valerio nodded in satisfaction and took a puff of his cigar.

"You're quite wise. Grazing in the suburbs doesn't require identification, but settling in the city requires it. I'll get you two sets as soon as possible. In the future, if you encounter any difficulties, you can come to me. I might not be of much help, but having one more person will give you more ideas. We're all from Dariège, so we naturally have to have each other's backs."

Lumian wasn't surprised by the black-market merchant's enthusiasm.

Uniting the people of one's homeland would create an exploitable force that couldn't be ignored!

It was reminiscent of the Savoie Mob. In the beginning, the pioneers, mostly Savoyards working as laborers and attendants, paved the way for the big bosses of the Savoie Chamber of Commerce. They expanded operations, safeguarded assets, and contributed immeasurably.

As for how many Savoyards might end up living a less than honest life or end up dead on the streets, the wealthy merchants turned a blind eye.

Lumian applied the acting techniques learned from Jenna and Anthony Reid's guidance to commend Valerio's noble character.

With a smile, Valerio offered a piece of advice.

"If you want to survive here, it's best to convert to Earth Mother as soon as possible. Find a good lady to marry and have a few children as soon as possible. Only then will you avoid hidden trouble."

Is urging marriage and childbearing a tradition in the Feynapotter Kingdom? Lumian criticized and smiled bitterly.

"Without copper coins, there won't be any good girls."

This Dariège proverb echoed in the room, signifying the difficulty for the poor, especially shepherds, to attract fine ladies and start families.

"This is Feynapotter, not Dariège," Valerio remarked, taking a sip of his white wine. "The good ladies here value robust bodies and bravery. The money can wait after you get married."

Perplexed, Lumian questioned, "Why?

"Men like that are more suited for reproduction, and they possess the ability to impregnate good ladies," Valerio explained with a smile. "This place is different from Dariège. The essence of many things lies in fertility and reproduction. Only by understanding this can you truly understand Feynapotter and praise the mother of all things!"

The black-market merchant rose, spreading his feet slightly and raising his hands high.

No wonder Feynapotter teems with people in the Northern Continent. Without their knack for land improvement and food cultivation, sustaining such a population would be impossible. Lumian's thoughts raced as he probed, "Mr. Valerio, I heard there's a sea prayer ritual next month. Any chance to make some money?"

"Yes," Valerio replied, taking a seat. "Port Santa stays relatively warm in November. When my grandfather first came, he rented a wooden box to store popsicles, gathered a pile of ice from the factory, and covered them up. Then, he waded into the crowd, selling popsicles and ice cubes, earning his first bucket of gold. You can still do it now, but the competition is fiercer. You might even need to rent a bicycle for a larger thermal wooden box to hit more ritual venues."

"Many ritual venues?" Lumian asked.

Valerio replied with a smile, "This is a grand event for all of Port Santa. Different processes happen in various places. There's the Dance of the Sea at the port, a parade of flower boats across the city, a sea boat race, the vigil ritual in Milo Village, and the core sea sacrifice."

"What's the sea sacrifice?" Lumian inquired curiously.

Valerio slowly shook his head.

"I don't know the specifics. All I know is that the Governor of the Sea and the Maidens of the Sea board a special boat, head to a certain area beyond the port with sacrifices from fishermen and sea merchants, and perform a unique ritual. The detailed process is known only to those who've been there."

"The Governor of the Sea, the Maidens of the Sea?" Lumian kept picking keywords.

This perfectly aligned with the situation of a Dariège shepherd who had just arrived in Port Santa.

Valerio smiled and said, "The crucial part of the Sea Prayer Ritual is selecting a man as the Governor of the Sea and four girls as the Maidens of the Sea. They'll lead a parade through the city on a flower boat before boarding a special fishing boat at the port. Sailing during the Dance of the

Sea, they signal the start of the race. Later, they circle the port, entering the oldest local fishing village, Milo, for a night.

"At 7 a.m. the next morning, they reboard the boat and head to the sea sacrificial ground with the offerings."

The chosen Governor of the Sea and the Maidens of the Sea… A sea prayer ritual with multiple segments… Lumian repeated the key parts inwardly.

Suddenly, his heart skipped a beat as he made a connection.

This was very similar to the Lent celebration in the Dariège mountains and the Spring Elf!

Though in reality, Lent celebration didn't involve Ava's head being chopped off or blood splattering, the dream scene left a deep impression on Lumian. He instinctively associated the Lent celebration with something sinister and terrifying.

Doesn't the sea prayer ritual here resemble the Lent celebration?

Upon second thought, Lumian felt that the similarity didn't explain the issue.

This was a common process in mysticism—the creation of a specific symbol to represent the sacrificial target to achieve the desired effect.

This was evident in many folklore rituals.

"How are the Governor of the Sea and the Maidens of the Sea chosen?" Lumian asked curiously.

Could it be, like the Spring Elf, they're elected by all the residents of Port Santa?

Could one gain a high reputation and enjoy hidden benefits after the ritual?

Valerio took another drag from his cigar.

"They're chosen by the committee members of the Fisheries Guild, the oldest guild in Port Santa. They keep the specific criteria and whether they want to vote a secret. Even the official members of the Fisheries Guild don't know."

With that, the black-market merchant grinned.

"I also aim to become the Governor of the Sea. They say it comes with many perks, but no one spills the details."

"How have the previous Governors of the Sea fared?" Lumian was more concerned about this matter.

Valerio was taken aback. He thought for a moment before shaking his head.

"I'm not sure.

"Each Governor of the Sea serves only a one-year term. Once they step down, they seem to be relocated. Anyway, they can't stick around in Port Santa to avoid clashes with the new Governor. Heh heh, they're surely offered hefty compensation and allowed to bring their families."

Relocated? Were they truly relocated, or did they face something else? Lumian, drawing from past experiences, couldn't help but think of something ominous and dreadful in the face of such a ritualistic folklore.

Regarding the Governor of the Sea's subsequent experiences during the sea prayer ritual, it did sound peculiar.

Lumian thought for a moment and, adopting the tone befitting his current guise, inquired, "What about the Maidens of the Sea?"

"They're a hit among sea merchants, fishing company shareholders, and fishermen and sailors. Everyone wants to wed the Maidens of the Sea, a symbol of the sea's blessing. Explore various fishing villages, the Fisheries Guild, and the homes of sea merchants, and you'll find many influential grandmothers who were once Maidens of the Sea." Valerio's face brimmed with envy, as if he too harbored dreams of marrying a Maiden of the Sea and becoming a true sea merchant.

This mirrors the hidden benefits of being a Spring Elf… Lumian suppressed the urge to raise his right hand and stroke his chin.

Knowing when to cease, he refrained from pressing further. After depositing 50 gold risot, he exited Valerio's illegal casino with Lugano.

Ludwig didn't come with them. Instead, he was stationed in a nearby family restaurant equipped with a children's entertainment facility, overseen by specialized caretakers and a provided meal.

In Feynapotter, numerous industries supported parents in raising children and alleviating stress. Intis and other countries lacked such facilities, and even if they existed, they were accessible only to the elite.

…

Trier, catacombs.

Franca and Jenna descended to the third level with their flickering white candles.

Feeling a bit less stifled, Franca turned her head and inquired, "What's the name of the tomb we're after?"

Jenna didn't hesitate and replied, "The Thorn and Shieldwall Tomb."

Chapter 540: Entrustee

540 Entrustee

Pa! Franca swiftly kicked away the hand bone attempting to block her path, deftly avoiding a trip.

"Aren't you tired of this? Can't you try something different?" she cursed, turning her head to inspect the road sign beside her.

It indicated they had finally reached their destination.

Each level of the catacombs sprawled vast, evident by the multitude of remains it accommodated. The road signs at each node could only display seven or eight iconic names and nearby tombs. Franca and Jenna relied on returning to the small sacrificial square and starting anew to locate the Thorns and Shieldwall Tomb.

Unlike the fourth-level tomb, mostly sealed off and devoid of corpses and bones along the way, this place was strewn with scattered bones and decaying items, emitting a faint, uncomfortable stench.

Jenna glanced at the pile of bones outside and observed a few thin metal plates inlaid on the tomb wall. Their surfaces were blurry, showing signs of severe corrosion. Only the shieldwall and thorn symbol could be vaguely discerned. Whether there were other patterns remained impossible to tell.

"No wonder it's called the Thorns and Shieldwall Tomb." Franca sighed.

Simultaneously, illuminated by the dim yellow candlelight, she noticed companion items arranged in a groove on the tomb's inner wall. Some were made of wood, weathered and decayed, while others were glass and porcelainware, in the form of fragments. The only intact item was a glass bottle, its surface inlaid with carved patterns resembling gold and adorned with a unique golden lid. Perhaps due to the metal's protection, the glass bottle didn't shatter, but it appeared murky and less transparent.

"It's exquisite, almost like art," Franca commented, puzzled. "Why didn't the catacomb workers take it away?"

It seemed quite valuable!

"Perhaps it was placed in this tomb after the catacombs were completed," Jenna speculated.

The two Demonesses didn't linger on the topic. Jenna retrieved one of the Mirror Substitutions and handed it to Franca.

With a swift leap, Franca vaulted over the seemingly silent but dangerous skeletons, gracefully landing at the entrance of the Thorns and Shieldwall Tomb.

After confirming her surroundings and receiving no warnings from her spirituality, Jenna cautiously approached the groove on the side wall along the ground, avoiding the pale-white bones.

Instinctively, she reached out with her right hand but withdrew it. An old handkerchief from her pocket was produced, shielding her palm from direct contact with the antique tearcatcher.

The tears in the tearcatcher had long dried up.

Jenna scrutinized the tearcatcher for a moment before stowing it away. She retraced her steps and leaped to Franca's side.

"You completed the commission so easily?" she whispered uncertainly.

It was a stark contrast to the disappearance of the Deep Valley Cloister's gatekeeper she had previously accepted.

Franca scoffed and replied, "What kind of difficulty do you want for a 1,000 verl d'or commission?"

Jenna summarized her experience seriously, "That's true. The challenge lies in understanding the hidden dangers in the third level of the tomb."

…

Solow Motel.

As Lumian, reverting to Louis Berry, strode into the front hall, his gaze fell upon a vibrant scene. A young brown-haired girl, clad in a red dress adorned with black patterns, swayed gracefully in a corner. From time to time, she paused to refine her dance moves.

Lumian's thoughts raced as he approached the front desk. Seizing the opportunity, he inquired, "What's she doing?"

This time, he spoke in Intisian.

The grizzled boss, his cheekbones etched with sunburnt marks, appeared taken aback. Responding in Intisian with a Dariège accent, he explained, "She's my granddaughter, Isabella. She's practicing the Dance of the Sea for the performance next month."

"Dance of the Sea… Dance of the Sea for the sea prayer ritual?" Lumian hadn't anticipated this revelation. Instinctively, he smiled and remarked, "That would make many girls jealous, wouldn't it?"

The boss grinned.

"This isn't like becoming a Maiden of the Sea. Not many people will be jealous, but participating in the Dance of the Sea performance can indeed make her proud and happy for a long time."

As Lumian signaled for Lugano to guide Ludwig back to their room, he casually inquired of the boss, "Did you come from Dariège?"

"That's right. I'm a Guillaume," the boss said with a self-deprecating smile. "Otta Guillaume. When I saw your identification this morning, I thought about greeting you in Intisian, but I gave up in the end. You know, Intisians aren't the best bunch. Even among my fellow villagers, I've come across a few with questionable morals."

"How long have you been in Port Santa?" Lumian asked with genuine interest, resting his right elbow on the front desk.

Otta Sr. pondered seriously.

"Forty years, I reckon. Probably forty years. Back then, I was an assistant in a caravan. I met my wife here and decided to stay. Heh heh, she's now a nagging old lady. Always fussing about how to dress when it gets cold or reminding me to head home for dinner, leaving the motel to the assistants. She manages everything so well that I don't have to worry. How great is that? It's rare to encounter such a woman in Dariège."

Lumian endured Otta Sr.'s ramblings for a while before cutting to the chase.

"I've been invited by a friend to Port Santa to witness the sea prayer ritual."

"It's quite lively. The entire port will be in euphoria," Otta Sr. praised without hesitation.

Lumian cast a glance at Isabella, still engrossed in her practice, and casually remarked, "I heard there was an accident at last year's sea prayer ritual?"

"No?" Otta Sr. responded with a puzzled expression. "I watched the flower boat parade, the boat race, and the Dance of the Sea. There were no accidents."

Frowning, he fell into deep thought.

"However, Sandro did mention that the number of shipwrecks has increased significantly this year. We've encountered more pirates, and our fishing gains haven't been as good as last year's… Was there really an accident at last year's sea prayer ritual? Was it the vigil ritual or the sea sacrifice? Did the old fogeys at the Fisheries Guild conceal the problem?

"Who's Sandro?" Lumian pressed.

Otta Sr. smiled again.

"It's my child, Isabella's father. He works as a clerk in the government, and his wife is a teacher at the grammar school."

Is Port Santa's sea prayer ritual genuinely effective? Has its protective power diminished after the April Fool's prank? Lumian's mind flashed with the information he'd gathered earlier.

Of the three peripheral April Fool's members involved in the prank, one journeyed to Torres, Gaia Province's capital, to customize a unique golden ring. Another handled the bribery of the Fisheries Guild, sending the lamb along with the golden ring as an offering to the specially prepared ship for the sea sacrifice. The third, disguised as a reporter, shadowed the Fisheries Guild committee members, observing and documenting their reactions.

The elderly's mix of shock, terror, and anger upon receiving the news was a source of long-lasting delight for the April Fool's participants.

After seeking more details about the sea prayer ritual, Lumian bid farewell to Ol' Otta and ascended to his suite upstairs.

…

At 4 p.m. in Trier, Quartier de l'Observatoire, near Place du Purgatoire.

After donning a hooded black robe and transforming her face into the dramatic persona of Showy Diva, Jenna followed the feedback from her contact and reached a street that specialized in funeral items.

Most Trieriens passing by appeared fairly ordinary, but a handful sported white masks, brandished blunt scythes, and adorned themselves in black robes. They posed as undead messengers from folklore, sewing white skulls and other artistic elements onto their shoulders…

Thanks to their presence and the unique atmosphere of Trier, Jenna, dressed as a warlock with a hood concealing her features, blended seamlessly into the surroundings.

She paused in a quiet corner and retrieved the exquisite tearcatcher.

Before long, someone resembling her approached and, in a gravelly voice, inquired, "How much for this tearcatcher?"

"1,000 verl d'or," Jenna responded, her excitement bubbling.

This marked her first successfully executed commission.

"1,001 verl d'or," countered the warlock-dressed man.

Upon the secret signal matching, Jenna insisted on charging only 1,000 verl d'or.

Once the confirmation was mutual, she handed over the tearcatcher, received the reward, and discreetly departed.

With the tearcatcher in hand, the hooded figure navigated the nearby streets, taking nearly fifteen minutes to circle back to Place du Purgatoire and approach a street bench at the edge.

A man sat there, engrossed in a newspaper.

The hooded figure presented the exquisite tearcatcher, adorned with intricate hollowed-out golden patterns, and whispered, "I've completed your commission. Will it offset the money I owe you?"

The person on the bench lowered the newspaper, looked up, revealing a clerk with curly black hair, sunken eyes, and thick lips. A crystal-like monocle adorned his right eye.

"Monsieur Monette?" the hooded figure pressed in confirmation.

Monette accepted the tearcatcher, gently tracing the golden patterns with a slow smile playing on his lips.

…

Solow Motel, fifth-floor suite.

Lumian spent the entire afternoon within the confines of his room at the Solow Motel. Lounging on a recliner, he swayed gently, engrossed in his ongoing study of Highlander. Now and then, he leafed through travel books detailing the customs of the Feynapotter Kingdom.

As evening approached, Lugano, who had ventured downstairs for a chat, returned to Lumian's room.

Leaning in, Lugano lowered his voice and shared, "Boss, there's a Madame looking for you."

Madame… Lumian felt a chill run down his spine upon hearing that term, and the muscles in his back tensed.

Which "Madame" could this be?

After a brief pause, Lumian realized that Lugano was referring to an ordinary Madame, not the "Madame" of the Beyonder world.

"Which Madame, and what brings her here?" Lumian inquired calmly, sitting up and addressing his translator.

Lugano shook his head and replied, "She didn't say. Just mentioned having something to entrust to the renowned adventurer, Louis Berry."

Lugano emphasized the term "renowned adventurer."

Chapter 541: Simple Entrustment

541 Simple Entrustment

How did my reputation spread so quickly? Even if the rumor of me hunting Burman arrived in Port Santa two days before the Flying Bird, the entrustee would have to take time to determine where I live, the authenticity of the news… Lumian estimated a few days before someone sought his services, and this led his thoughts to the unnatural 'Madame.'

He stood up and said to Lugano, "Invite that Madame in."

With those words, Lumian stooped to pick up the distinctive golden straw hat from the small round table. He aimed to make Louis Berry's image more memorable, adding a touch of flair to his persona.

In no time, Lugano escorted a woman in her thirties into the room.

She wore a loose-fitting white dress adorned with red flowers, accentuating her curves.

Port Santa's women, in contrast to the Dariège region just across the mountain, favored glamorous and stylish attire, embodying a romantic and liberated aesthetic—reflecting the traditional taste of the Feynapotter Kingdom.

The lady, with long brown hair tied up and a healthy complexion, entered without a maid. Her azure eyes, framed by thick eyelashes, focused on Lumian, who held the golden straw hat.

Her red lips moved, and though Lumian couldn't grasp every word, the name "Louis Berry" was discernible in her pronunciation.

Promptly, Lugano initiated the translation.

"The Madame says, Honorable Monsieur Louis Berry, I've heard about your hunt of the Demon Warlock. I wonder if you're willing to help my family solve a problem."

Lumian's gaze shifted from the jeweled bead bracelet on the lady's wrist to her beautiful and mature face.

"What's your name?"

"Giorgia," the lady replied after Lugano translated.

Lumian repeated, acknowledging the lady's name with a smile,

"Madame Giorgia, what would you like to entrust me with?"

Giorgia listened attentively to Lugano's translation and spoke in Highlander with a slight local accent, "An evil creature has appeared in my household. I need your help eliminating it."

Lumian, though grasping the gist, awaited Lugano's translation by casting his gaze at him.

When Lugano conveyed Giorgia's words in Intisian, Lumian chuckled and said, "I'm sorry, I forgot to invite the beautiful Madame to have a seat.

"The great adventurer Gehrman Sparrow taught us that manners are very important."

Gesturing toward the sofa, Lumian settled onto the divan, attempting to caress Ludwig's head, like a godfather.

Ludwig quickly shifted his position, avoiding Lumian's attempt to treat him as a child.

As Giorgia took her place in an armchair, Lumian, shaking his golden straw hat, leaned forward.

"Since it's an evil creature, why don't you just find a clergyman of the Earth Mother Church to handle it?"

Giorgia looked at Lugano and listened attentively.

She pursed her thick lips and replied in Highlander,

"We don't want the Church to know about this. It will damage our family's reputation."

Is that why you are entrusting me, a foreigner who will leave after watching the sea prayer ritual? And that's after confirming my ability to deal with that evil creature… Lumian, pondering this choice, shifted his gaze away from Lugano. After a brief pause, he inquired, "Tell me more about that evil creature."

After a brief pause, Giorgia contemplated and then shared, "It resembles a tailless lizard. It attacked everyone in the household, killing a few maids and valets and devoured their bodies.

"Our family's bodyguards fired on it and injured it, but they failed to kill it because it has very strong scales. We could only chase it to the basement and lock it up.

"We thought it would slowly starve to death from hunger and thirst. To our surprise, nearly two weeks later, it's still alive and trying to break open the basement door."

It doesn't seem very dangerous. They could repel it with ordinary firearms… They didn't mention why the lizard appeared. It appears that this is why they aren't willing to seek out the Church of Earth Mother and the local government to handle it… Lumian thoughtfully compared the few words he understood to the content translated by Lugano and confirmed that the guide hadn't embellished or redacted any content.

Lumian then casually inquired, "Were there any casualties among the bodyguards?"

Giorgia, after the translation, shook her head slowly.

"No fatalities. Two were injured, but nothing severe. Yes, that monster made the entire room feel like it had been dragged into the deep sea, affecting normal movements."

As if dragged into the deep sea… There's indeed certain Beyonder phenomena, but it seems relatively weak… Deep sea… Lumian's interest was piqued as he earnestly inquired about the details.

After a series of responses, Giorgia said gently, "Monsieur Louis Berry, we're willing to pay you 15,000 risot, but you have to promise not to publicize this matter."

15,000 gold risot? According to your description, the monster is worth at most 5,000 gold risot. The remaining 10,000 should be a hush money, right? Lumian smiled and said in broken Highlander, "Sure thing."

Rising from his seat, Lumian announced in Intisian, "I want to observe the situation at the scene."

Giorgia stood up and listened to Lugano's translation.

She wasn't surprised by Louis Berry's request. Familiar with adventurers and bounty hunters, she understood the importance of assessing the situation firsthand and making thorough preparations. It meant survivability or success for the elites.

"Now?" Giorgia sought confirmation.

Lumian comprehended the word and affirmed in Highlander, "Now."

Adorning his golden straw hat, he made his way to the door, supplementing in Intisian, "Also, prepare a sumptuous dinner for me, my godson, and my translator."

Giorgia, slightly taken aback by the translation, watched Lumian's departure. She couldn't shake the feeling that this adventurer possessed a distinct quality compared to those she had encountered before.

…

Port Santa, Saint Lana Street.

To the northeast of the city stood multi-story villas adorned with gardens, lawns, and stables.

Giorgia's residence occupied number 21 on this street. The five-story villa boasted brownish-red outer walls, adorned with statues of Angels and Saintesses from the Earth Mother Church, along with symbols depicting waves and fishing.

Wearing his distinctive golden straw hat and holding Ludwig's hand, the latter carrying a red school bag, Lumian trailed behind Giorgia, accompanied by her maid and valet. Together, they entered the villa's hall, which also served as a spacious dance floor beneath a tall, dome ceiling.

As Lumian stepped inside, he felt unseen eyes upon him from the circular railings on the upper floors.

It's indeed a household with multiple families sharing one roof. There are quite a few people… Lumian mused, choosing not to look up, smiling inwardly.

The concealed observers remained hidden. Giorgia then summoned two legally armed bodyguards, leading Lumian and the entourage down to the second basement where the iron-black door stood tightly shut.

As if sensing someone approaching, the door slammed as if struck by a powerful force.

"It's inside," Giorgia stated, pointing at the iron door with a complicated expression.

Lumian, understanding without the need for translation, pressed down on his golden straw hat and directed, "Take my godson to the living room for pre-dinner dessert."

As he spoke, he strode towards the subterranean iron door without a backward glance.

Upon hearing Lugano's translation, Giorgia and the maid hastily guided Ludwig back to the surface. A bodyguard caught up to Lumian, his expression serious, and handed him a pewter-black key.

Without delay, the two bodyguards drew their revolvers, positioning themselves to aim at the iron door, preventing the monster from escaping.

Lumian methodically inserted the key into the lock, unlocking it.

He tossed the key aside and effortlessly pushed the iron door open with one hand.

In an instant, the monster's figure came into view.

A humanoid lizard, adorned with glistening, robust scales, met Lumian's eyes. Where there were no scales, smooth, sinister snake-like skin was exposed.

The monster's eyes were vertical, and they glowed with a nearly transparent light. Its mouth harbored sharp teeth that formed a menacing vortex.

Simultaneously, Lumian felt the air around him grow dense, like shackles enveloping him, clearly impeding his normal movements.

The moisture gave the sensation of plunging into the deep sea, enduring pressure from all directions.

The humanoid lizard lunged forward, and Lumian's body leaned towards the enemy as if pulled by a vortex.

Yet, the obvious smile on his lips persisted as he calmly attempted to pivot.

Suddenly, a latent power surged within him, allowing him to break free from the air's constraints.

Lumian swiftly rotated his body, swinging his right fist from below.

Instantly, crimson flames, nearly white, ignited from his fist, spreading to his forearm, resembling a dazzling fire serpent.

Bang!

The punch struck the humanoid lizard's chest and abdomen, causing the flames to compress.

Boom!

The humanoid lizard was sent flying, crystalline scales splattering from its chest and abdomen, resulting in a massive wound.

Lumian didn't give chase. With one hand in his pocket, he changed his right fist to a palm and gently pushed forward.

Crimson, nearly white fireballs materialized before him, whistling into the wound on the lizard's chest and abdomen.

Rumble!

The monster disintegrated, its flesh and blood splattering across the ground.

Lumian observed for a few moments before adjusting his golden straw hat. He turned around and walked towards the stairs leading to the surface.

The two armed and vigilant bodyguards maintained their original posture, still in a daze, unable to comprehend what had transpired.

Lumian didn't "rouse" them as he ascended the stairs.

Upon hearing the explosion, Giorgia, on the ground, left the lounge with Lugano and approached the staircase. She saw Lumian coming up.

"Have you confirmed the situation?" Madame Giorgia asked with concern.

Lumian replied with a smirk, "It's resolved."

Chapter 542: Abnormal Situation

542 Abnormal Situation

It's resolved? It's already resolved? Giorgia suspected that the translator had made a mistake. Instinctively, she asked, "Is there a quick solution, or has it already been resolved?"

Lugano cast a sympathetic glance at the beautiful madame, experiencing the same emotions he felt when reading about how his employer had slain the Demon Warlock.

How could a monster confined to the basement by ordinary armed bodyguards compare to Burman, who had a bounty of 600,000 verl d'or?

Despite finding it unnecessary, Lugano respectfully conveyed Giorgia's words to Lumian.

Lumian removed the golden straw hat from his head and said, "You may instruct the servants to clean the basement."

Upon hearing Lugano's translation, Giorgia's pupils dilated as she looked at Lumian in bewilderment, unsure of what to say.

At that moment, a bodyguard guarding the basement ran up. Upon seeing Giorgia, he immediately leaned over, lowered his voice, and whispered something to her.

Giorgia's expression shifted a few times before she smiled and said to Lumian, "As expected of the renowned adventurer. I previously suspected that your hunt for the Demon Warlock was merely a rumor. Now, I completely believe it. Your might is enough to resound throughout the Five Seas."

She paused for a moment and said apologetically, "I'm sorry; we haven't had time to prepare dinner. We might need you to wait in the lounge for a while."

"Better to have me wait than a beautiful lady," Lumian replied with a smile.

That's basic courtesy!

He followed Giorgia's maid into the lounge specially catered for Ludwig to enjoy the pre-dinner dessert.

Giorgia and her bodyguard descended into the basement.

A sense of relief washed over her as she surveyed the blood-stained room, finding no trace of the humanoid lizard; it had completely vanished.

Dinner unfolded in a private chamber, exclusive to Lumian, his companions, and Giorgia. The lady's maid attended to them, serving dishes and pouring wine.

Lumian, intrigued by his surroundings, noted how the expansive mansion accommodated the needs of its diverse occupants. Small private rooms outside the grand banquet hall ensured the privacy of gatherings.

The meal was a delight for everyone. Lumian received 15,000 risot in banknotes; Giorgia appeared visibly at ease; Ludwig appreciated the villa's chefs; and Lugano experienced a high-end banquet for the first time.

The great adventurer, usually one to boast and joke while not in his monster-hunting cold persona, lightened the atmosphere at the dining table.

This pleasant ambiance continued until Lumian departed from 21 Saint Lana Street alongside Ludwig and Lugano.

Lugano, slightly flushed from the white wine, gazed back at the brightly lit building and sighed deeply.

"I wonder when I'll have a house this grand, with numerous servants and chefs, and a wife like Giorgia."

Lumian teased, "Your emphasis is on the last part, isn't it?"

Lugano chuckled sheepishly and replied, "Well, based on your description, I might as well have been capable of taking down that humanoid lizard too."

It meant he possessed the skills to tackle a mission worth 30,000 verl d'or!

With a few more successful missions, Lugano's dream could become a reality!

"With guns and special bullets prepared in advance, coupled with ample combat experience, a Planter is indeed capable," Lumian carefully assessed his guide.

He avoided using "Doctor" to refer to Lugano, as this Sequence primarily bestowed healing superpowers and didn't offer significant improvement in combat.

Lugano was delighted to hear this, sensing a newfound hope in his life.

Lumian glanced at him and added with a smile, "However, if you were to accept this commission, the reward might only be two to three thousand risot.

"The rest accounts for the premium based on the great adventurer's reputation and the hush money for such a renowned figure.

"That's why you need to hunt down Demon Warlock before you can accept such a lucrative mission."

The smile on Lugano's face gradually faded.

If I could hunt down Demon Warlock, my dream would be fulfilled. I wouldn't have to be an adventurer!

Lumian paid no mind to the translator's emotional shifts. He glanced back at the large five-story villa and said thoughtfully, "The Matriarch of this family didn't appear even until the end…"

While it was understandable that the other family members hadn't shown themselves, logically speaking, as the head of the family, the Matriarch should have at least expressed her gratitude to the adventurer who had helped them resolve the problem.

"That's correct. A woman of Giorgia's age shouldn't be the head of such a large family," Lugano acknowledged, sensing the anomaly.

He refrained from bringing up the potential absence of a Matriarch in the villa. In extended families like this, there were likely more than one older woman who had given birth. If one Matriarch passed away, another would soon assume the role. Additionally, the Earth Mother Church was renowned for its adept treatment of illnesses in the Northern and Southern Continents. The Feynapotter Kingdom's average lifespan surpassed that of Loen, Intis, Feysac, and other nations. Plenty of individuals lived beyond the age of 70, especially with Giorgia's family's wealth providing ample medical resources.

Lumian averted his gaze and took a few steps.

"Go to the bar tonight and inquire about Giorgia's family."

As he spoke, he counted out 1,000 risot for Lugano.

"This covers your expenses for your activities during this period, including Ludwig's meal expenses when I'm out."

"Yes, Boss." Lugano appreciated his employer's generosity the most.

Near midnight, the Doctor returned to the suite at Solow Motel, reeking of alcohol. He addressed Lumian, who was observing Ludwig eat supper, "I got the info. Giorgia is the wife of Rubió Paco, a shareholder of Port Santa's Fisheries Company and a committee member of the Fisheries Guild. The Paco family's Matriarch is Rubio's mother, Martha."

Committee member of the Fisheries Guild… Lumian instantly focused.

This was a person knowledgeable about the complete process of the sea prayer ritual and the accident from last year.

"What else did you find out?" Lumian asked casually.

Lugano rambled on for a while before adding, "By the way, Martha was once a Maiden of the Sea."

Maiden of the Sea… Lumian pondered for a few seconds. She had been sought after by a specific crowd before marrying into the Paco family? He asked, "Did you find out anything about Martha's recent situation?"

"No." Lugano shook his head.

Lumian leaned back in his chair, as if preparing to doze off, not pressing for more information.

The next day, he stayed at the Solow Motel, awaiting Valerio's preparations for his local identification documents.

As evening approached, his messenger, Penitent Baynfel, emerged from the void and handed him a letter.

Lumian glanced at the charred corpse, still engulfed in viscous black flames, and casually asked, "Who sent it?"

Only five people were aware of his messenger's summoning incantation.

"A woman very close to death and darkness," Baynfel replied.

Lumian unfolded the letter and read the familiar handwriting: "There's a gathering scheduled for 10 tonight…"

This was from Hela. Before leaving Trier, Lumian had specifically summoned Hela's messenger and informed her of his messenger's summoning method. With his frequent travel and changes in residence, it was impractical to summon Hela's messenger each time he stayed in a motel. Hence, he made such arrangements to convenience her in getting him.

Each messenger was intricately bound to its master. Through the mystical connection of the contract, the messenger could track the contracted target regardless of their changing locations.

The Research Society has another gathering… Lumian dismissed Baynfel and moved to the window of the master bedroom.

He peered into the distance, toward the mottled mountain range to the northeast.

Under the afterglow of the setting sun, the mountains seemed to doze in the burning sky.

Lumian silently observed for a moment, then retrieved the silver Lie earring and placed it on his left earlobe.

In an instant, his hair transformed, turning golden and elongating downward.

…

At 10 p.m., in the ancient and dilapidated palace of the Nation of the Evernight, Lumian, cloaked in a black robe, hood, and a silver-white half-mask with a "Muggle" label, materialized.

He immediately spotted Franca, who wore an Assassin suit and had pulled down her hood.

Franca, no longer concealing their amicable relationship, leaned in and lowered her voice.

"Port Santa didn't have a Derangement outbreak, I suppose?"

"I'm not the embodiment of calamity," Lumian replied.

He then said to Franca, "Help me inquire in different teams later if there are any potions, charms, or items that can allow me to master a language in a short period of time—not true mastery, but the kind that allows mastery for a short period."

Franca asked in confusion, "Don't you have a translator?"

Lumian smiled and said, "It's just that I suddenly had an idea. When everyone thinks I don't know Highlander, I can understand what they're talking about. Perhaps it can bring about unexpected gains."

Your scheming heart is truly stained! After Franca playfully cursed him, she wanted to praise Aurore's beautiful lips and smile, one that ought to be seen more often, but her rationality made her give up on the idea to avoid triggering Lumian.

She glanced at a corner of the palace and said, "The team most likely to obtain such items is actually the Academy. However, it's inconvenient for you to ask. It can easily arouse suspicion. Coincidentally, I'm heading to the Academy team today to inquire if anyone knows who the owners of the ancient tombs in Trier's catacombs are. Heh heh, many of them are considered semi-historians. If no one knows, I'll get 007 to delve into the Church's confidential information."

"Why do you ask?" Lumian raised his eyebrows.

Franca recounted how she and Jenna had obtained a new Mirror World Fragment in the catacombs.

Lumian listened attentively and scoffed.

"Aren't you guys too bold? Jenna has been inspired by your courage!"

As soon as he finished speaking, he saw 007 approaching menacingly.

Chapter 543: Same Dream

543 Same Dream

Wearing a lion headgear, 007 intercepted Franca's path, gritting his teeth.

"Hidden Blade, thanks to your intel, I might be deployed on a mission right now."

"Huh?" Franca didn't quite get it.

Deployed on a mission? If you're out, who do I report problems to in Trier?

007 glanced at Muggle, standing silently beside them, and took a deep breath.

"I might head to Feynapotter as an assistant to retrieve that Sealed Artifact.

"It's Intis' loss, and it wouldn't be good for it to end up in the hands of the Feynapotter Kingdom."

"Will the Feynapotterians allow you to enforce the law in their country? Isn't transnational cooperation troublesome?" Franca roughly understood 007's concerns.

007 pondered for a moment and said, "We're still working through the process, but the Feynapotterians aren't too opposed this time. They want to eliminate the hidden dangers of the Sealed Artifact ASAP. They have precautions to take and can't spare many to surround and intercept it, so they might as well borrow our strength."

The Church of Earth Mother and the Feynapotter Kingdom need to be vigilant. Are they short on manpower? This is a problem with a single

Church country. They don't have the resources like a combination of two or three Churches. Wait, that doesn't make sense. The Feynapotter Kingdom has a royal family, and Beyonders of the Church don't only follow the pathway of their deity. Lumian sensed something amiss from 007's words.

This made him feel that the hidden dangers in the Feynapotter Kingdom were no less than those in countries with multiple deities and Churches.

"Is that so…" Franca suddenly had an idea. "I have a way to ensure you don't have to be deployed!"

"What way?" 007 asked skeptically.

Franca smiled and said, "If you're on an important mission in Trier, there's no need for you to be deployed."

"Important mission…" 007 repeated in a low voice, suddenly having an ominous feeling.

Franca seized the opportunity and said, "We've located another Mirror World Fragment in an ancient tomb on the fourth level of the catacombs."

"Now, we have a lead to pursue the Mirror People in Trier. If you report it and convey that you're conducting an investigation, you likely won't end up in Feynapotter."

007 stared at Franca, dressed in an assassin suit, for a moment. He raised his hand to rub his forehead and spoke gravely, "Thanks a lot, Hidden Blade!"

Franca pretended not to catch 007's underlying message and continued, "The tomb is situated near the Crazy Mushroom Cave. Its door is wide open, and there are no conspicuous signs. Please gather information from the catacombs about its construction date, its occupants, and the ancient family it belongs to. Only then can we determine why the peculiar Mirror People entered and met their demise there."

007 took a deep breath and slowly exhaled.

"You're a perfect boss for me."

All you know is to assign me missions!

Franca let out a hollow laugh and shifted the topic.

"Do you have any idea what's happening in the Crazy Mushroom Cave? Mushrooms are somehow thriving in that silent, dark, and tightly sealed place. Moreover, it seems to be the only location in the fourth-level catacombs where mushrooms grow."

007 nodded gently and replied, "I have some knowledge about that. Once upon a time, I was quite intrigued by the mushroom cave. I conducted an investigation and discovered that it was initially quite ordinary—a naturally formed cave among the ancient tombs. When the catacombs were completed, some of the ancient corpses were relocated there. Within a few weeks, it became overrun with mushrooms and sealed off."

The Beyonder powers brought about by the seal's formal formation combined with the problem of certain ancient corpses created such a Crazy Mushroom Cave? Lumian analyzed the reason thoughtfully.

Observing Muggle's attentive silence, 007 nodded courteously and turned to head towards the Sanctuary team.

Franca couldn't help but chuckle.

"He's so polite to you. If only he knew that most of his troubles and fatigue stemmed from you, his expression would be quite the sight."

Lumian chuckled in response.

"But the Mirror People situation has nothing to do with me."

As they conversed, they strolled toward the corner where the Academy team congregated.

Midway, Lumian suddenly turned to Franca.

"Do you think any member of the Research Society, especially those in Trier, might have been replaced by the Mirror People?"

"That's impossible… Don't scare me!" Franca sounded alarmed.

Lumian fought the urge to pout, not wanting to destroy his sister's beautiful image.

"What's impossible? Any Trier citizen could be replaced by the Mirror People, even if they're part of a secret organization.

"Moreover, most in the Research Society are Beyonders with a strong spirit of exploration. Their encounters with Beyonder incidents are more frequent than regular folks."

Franca nodded seriously, acknowledging the potential risk couldn't be disregarded.

"As a Review Committee member, you should liaise with Madame Hela and the others, observe discreetly," Lumian reminded her.

There lingered uncertainty about whether the Mirror People of transmigrators retained their pre-transmigration memories. If they did, they could bypass the Committee's safeguards easily. Their interactions within the Research Society could go undetected unless they caused harm, staying concealed.

"Understood," Franca responded with solemnity.

At that moment, many familiar members of Lumian's team gathered in the corner, including Professor, Associate Professor, Headmaster, Periodic Table, Bear, Griffin, and Isotope.

Some wore different disguises than before, though Lumian had grown accustomed to their diverse outfits. They were individuals who wouldn't attend a masquerade ball in the same attire twice. Regardless, their general body shape, language, and chest labels helped others accurately identify them.

After exchanging greetings, Lumian and Franca each took a seat.

After a few minutes, Franca raised her hand and said, "Is anyone selling Language Comprehension-type items? I know someone who's going overseas and wants to acquire some."

Upon hearing her request, some chuckled, while others pursed their lips. The former wanted to inquire if her friend was herself, while the latter recalled the key member of April Fool's who had caused numerous catastrophes in the Research Society.

Bear, encased in a brown bear hide, spoke in ancient Feysac in a muffled voice, "I have a Language Comprehension charm that achieves a similar effect."

"Language Comprehension charm?" Franca asked with interest.

Having been fluent in ancient Feysac for many years, she had become relatively proficient in Loen, Highlander, and other languages of the Northern Continent. However, she lacked knowledge of the Southern Continent's languages.

The Academy team member with the code name "Bear" glanced at Hidden Blade with his coffee-colored eyes.

"Yes, its essence is to temporarily strengthen and alter the Body of Heart and Mind, improving understanding, reasoning, and communication. It also imparts a portion of the corresponding language's knowledge. Using one lasts seven days.

"Currently, Language Comprehension charms are divided into three types. The lowest level is for all ancient Feysacian languages. Creating them is the least difficult. You only need…"

Bear paused, making a conversion based on the current exchange rate.

"A thousand verl d'or.

"The middle level covers all ordinary languages. It costs 2,000 verl d'or. At the highest level, you can temporarily master a designated supernatural language. 5,000 verl d'or. Hidden Blade, which one do you want?"

Franca listened attentively, sensing a subtle expression of pity and regret in Bear's gaze.

Is he pitying me for daring to drink the Witch potion back then? Franca wondered silently. Without looking at Muggle, she made the decision.

"Three lowest-level Language Comprehension charms, one mid-level. Uh, can I get a discount?"

She believed Lumian would eventually track down Hisoka in the Southern Continent. It was better to prepare a Mid-level Language Comprehension charm now.

"No." Bear shook his head.

"Alright," Franca said, lacking talent for bargaining. She habitually asked for a discount to avoid potential future regret.

After Franca paid and settled on the delivery method, Professor, adorned with a black butterfly mask, surveyed the area. After a moment of contemplation, she spoke up.

"Associate Professor, I and a few Warlocks I know have been having strange dreams lately. In these dreams, there's a wilderness with many indistinct figures wandering around."

"Have any of you had one too?"

She directed her inquiry towards the other Warlocks in the Academy team.

Wilderness… Wandering figures… Could this be related to some Madame's Paramita? Lumian, concealed behind a silver-white half-mask, furrowed his brow slightly. It seemed unlikely that a Warlock would dream of Paramita. Why would they?

Observing other Warlocks expressing that they had similar dreams, but the frequency and clarity decreased over time, Lumian, acting as Aurore, nodded and posed a question instead of providing an answer.

"When did you guys start having this dream?"

Could it be an abnormality caused by the Hidden Sage?

Professor had clearly made confirmation on this matter.

"The two of us and some friends started after the night of the terrifying storm in Trier—last month."

She knew that Muggle was also in Trier and knew the exact night she referred to.

The sudden, terrifying downpour occurred the night the Hostel ritual was activated… Could it be influenced by the leaked power of the seal? Is there a high-level power of the Mystery Pryer pathway sealed inside? Or were the fallen monks of the Deep Valley Cloister connected to the Hidden Sage? Did this evil god secretly do something that left some power in the real world? Lumian pondered and then said, "I heard something happened to Trier's Deep Valley Cloister that night, and the Savant pathway and the Mystery Pryer pathway are neighboring pathways."

Professor, Associate Professor, and the others turned their gaze to Muggle. They hadn't expected their companion, who had recently moved to Trier, to possess such secretive knowledge about the local area.

Lumian continued slowly, "Shouldn't we inquire with people from the Savant pathway and see if they had similar dreams?"

Good idea! Franca silently praised.

Chapter 544: Threat

544 Threat

Professor agreed with Lumian's suggestion, believing it could help verify certain things. Both Professor and Associate Professor went to another team and found Stonemason, who was known for crafting mystical items.

Dressed in a doctor's white coat with a saucepan over his head, Stonemason's azure eyes focused on the Academy Warlocks through two specially dug holes.

He nodded and said, "Recently, I've also been having strange dreams related to a wilderness. However, in addition to the endless wilderness and wandering figures, there are also some peculiar scenes in my dreams."

As expected, it affects the neighboring pathways of Mystery Pryer and Savant… Lumian nodded slightly as Professor pressed further, "What scenes are they?"

Stonemason's voice echoed within the saucepan.

"I see scenes of primitive humans independently creating fire for the first time. Ancient humans making sacrifices to the sky and land. There were many similar scenes, but they were very vague. I was in a dream and couldn't scrutinize them carefully. I can't remember the exact situations clearly.

"According to the Savant pathway's Beyonders, this is a fragment of civilization."

Upon hearing Stonemason's response, Lumian's forehead twitched imperceptibly.

It reminded him of the moment he heard a peculiar sound accompanying scenes while wearing the Mystery Prying Eye in Fourth Epoch Trier!

As the scenes unfolded, a chorus of voices echoed one name: Celestial Master!

Was what I received a fragment of a civilization? The Eye of Truth correspond to the Mystery Pryer pathway. Upon their use, they activated the powers of neighboring pathways, revealing corresponding sounds? But there is a prerequisite, a special environment… Fourth Epoch Trier holds remnants of advanced powers from the Mystery Pryer and Savant pathways. Celestial Master—the term is similar to the Celestial Worthy of Heaven and Earth for Blessings which influences Seer, Apprentice, and Marauder pathways. Meanwhile, Celestial Master correlates with the Mystery Pryer and Savant pathways. Lumian fell into deep thought after his initial shock.

Franca glanced at him, perplexed by his limited participation in the discussion.

After a moment, Lumian snapped out of his daze. Considering Professor, Stonemason, and others' speculations, he carefully stated, "The sudden downpour in Trier is an outward manifestation of a catastrophe, much like the Deep Valley Cloister.

"I suspect that a high-level power leaked during the catastrophe, affecting Beyonders from two neighboring pathways. The impact is more pronounced for those in Trier but relatively minor for those outside."

At this point, Lumian smirked.

"I've observed that Warlocks outside Trier experienced significant decreases in the frequency and clarity of their wilderness dreams. Strangely, none of the Warlocks in Trier mentioned this."

Bear in a brown bear skin suit nodded approvingly.

Professor and others concurred with Lumian's hypothesis, relieved that the situation was indeed improving.

They couldn't help but marvel at Muggle's remarkable growth after surviving the April Fool's trap.

Franca then inquired about the owner of the ancient tomb beside the Crazy Mushroom Cave in Trier's catacombs.

No one knew the answer. The Warlocks in Trier offered to assist in the investigation, but there were no guarantees of finding anything.

Franca had already entrusted this matter to 007. Her current focus was on uncovering any Mirror People who might have infiltrated the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society, thanks to Lumian's teachings.

After agreeing on the reward, she left the Academy team and headed towards Hela.

After discussing the Mirror People situation with Hela, Lumian emerged from the corner where the Academy team was located, ready to gather mysticism knowledge from the death domain with the Purgatory team.

Franca immediately approached Lumian, lowered her voice, and asked with a smile, "What were you thinking when Stonemason recounted his dream? It seemed like you had thought of something important."

Hadn't I shared what I saw and heard after using the Eye of Truth underground? That shouldn't be the case. I won't forget sharing matters involving the Celestial Master with Franca… Lumian's heart suddenly stirred, feeling that his spirituality was hindering this matter.

After a moment of contemplation, he responded, "It's rather complicated and involves high-level powers. I'll write to Madam Magician later and see if I can share it with you."

"Alright," Franca said eagerly. "Don't forget!"

Her curiosity was piqued.

At that moment, Hela, still dressed as a black widow, approached Lumian and asked, "Any progress in tracking Ultraman and Bard?"

"Not at the moment. I'm still compiling the necessary information," Lumian replied truthfully.

Hela nodded slightly and replied, "If you need assistance, don't hesitate to reach out to me or Gandalf."

The primary objective for most members of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society was to eliminate the April Fool's traitors.

"Got it." Lumian had no plans to confront the key members of April Fool's on his own.

Undoubtedly, it was optimal for him to carry out the final execution.

…

Upon returning to the real world, Lumian noticed that night was falling. He set out a stack of late-night snacks for Ludwig and summoned Madam Magician's messenger. After freshening up—washing his face, brushing his teeth, and snuffing out the wall lamp—he settled into bed.

Just then, a sense of alertness surged through him. He sat up suddenly, focusing on a specific spot in the room.

Outside the window, a faint crimson glow shimmered. In one corner, a shadow swiftly expanded, reaching up to the ceiling, forming a silhouette resembling two goat horns.

It was as if a devil had emerged from the dark abyss.

Lumian's eyebrows twitched as he stared at the colossal black shadow.

The devil-like shadow resonated with a deep and imposing voice.

"Lowly human, you must answer my question truthfully."

It spoke in Intisian.

Lumian cracked his neck gently and asked, "What's the question?"

The devilish figure rumbled in a deep tone, "What did the Paco family's Giorgia hire you to do?"

Lumian chuckled.

"What do human affairs have to do with a devil like you? I'm a professional adventurer. I won't betray my employer."

The devilish shadow growled, "Then I'll use your blood as the answer!"

Before it completed its sentence, its aura surged, and the crimson moonlight in the room instantly succumbed to darkness, shrouding the space in a chilling aura.

The corners of Lumian's mouth curled up. With a swift press of his left hand, he catapulted from the bed like a cheetah, propelling himself towards the ceiling.

Overhead, darkness enveloped him, resembling an abyssal reflection.

In a sudden twist, Lumian's body turned pitch black, almost zero in thickness.

He morphed into a shadow creature and seamlessly melded into the darkness!

Within the dimly illuminated fishnet of shadows, Lumian spotted the "devil."

Standing just over a meter tall, the creature was child-sized, yet its skin was creased like that of an elderly man in his seventies or eighties.

Its disproportionately large head featured protruding eyes, presenting a grotesque visage that was beyond Lumian's knowledge of creatures.

In the form of a shadow, Lumian "swam" toward it, aiming to ensnare the peculiar creature that manifested the devil's projection. He planned on pulling it out of the darkness and controlling it with the Spell of Harrumph.

Many of Lumian's abilities were constrained in the shadow creature form.

The short, malevolent creature with wrinkled skin appeared defenseless against the shadow's entanglement, surprising Lumian, who had anticipated fierce resistance.

Without hesitation, he prepared to depart, leaving the shadow to detain its captive.

Just then, the darkness surrounding him brightened, illuminated by the light from the "sky."

Instinctively, Lumian looked up and witnessed the pure darkness rapidly dissolving, unveiling a colossal star hanging in the void.

The star bore a faint blue hue, resembling a demonic eye.

In an instant, Lumian felt his blood freeze, involuntarily snapping out of his shadow creature form. The big-headed "shorty," adorned with wrinkles, seized the chance to break free from its constraints, swiftly merging into the pale-blue starlight and disappearing from sight.

After a moment, Lumian fully recovered. He stared at the now-normal room, sinking into contemplation.

What in the world was that thing? It seemed so weak, yet it came to intimidate me!

Nevertheless, the blinking star held an air of peculiarity.

Why not just send the star to frighten me right away? After suppressing me, it didn't seize the opportunity to attack. Even though I regained some mobility upon escaping the shadows, I was still relatively slow… Lumian mused silently.

While he couldn't grasp the full picture, certain details became apparent.

No wonder Giorgia didn't casually enlist a foreign adventurer with Beyonder powers to handle the humanoid lizard. Someone lurking in the shadows would interrogate me about the entire matter in the future. Only a renowned adventurer like Louis Berry, capable of hunting Demon Warlocks, can resist it.

Heh heh, earning 15,000 risot isn't a walk in the park…

The one in the shadows knows Louis Berry isn't weak, so they didn't dare to attack directly. Instead, they dispatched a small monster with unique abilities to intimidate me, hoping to extract information?

Why not go to Giorgia's house and ask? Their family doesn't seem to possess any superpowers…

Is this an internal conflict within the Fisheries Company and the Fisheries Guild?

Yes, it's an opportunity to interact more deeply with the Paco family and understand the core process of the sea prayer ritual…

Shaking his head, Lumian reclined on the bed and resumed his slumber.

Around 8 a.m. the next day, Lugano, who had gone out to buy breakfast, rushed back and said to Lumian, "Boss, those combat nuns are looking for you!"

Chapter 545: Order

545 Order

Combat nuns? Amidst Lumian's surprise, he felt a sudden sense of order return to society.

In any country on the Northern Continent, wild Beyonders were unwelcome. They faced control and even apprehension. This wasn't like colonies such as Port Farim, where renowned adventurers could freely roam the streets and boast about their experiences without the concern of official Beyonders knocking on their doors.

"Boss, is there any danger?" Lugano nervously inquired, his perpetual fear evident as a wild Beyonder.

Lumian chuckled, responding confidently, "That depends on their attitude."

The implication was that the nuns were the ones facing danger.

Lumian teased, "Aren't you excited about the combat nuns? Shouldn't you be thrilled that they're here?"

Imagination isn't the same as reality… Seeing his boss showing no intention of "teleporting" away with him, Lugano nervously descended and extended an invitation to the combat nuns.

The leader was the same one Lumian had encountered before.

Most of her naturally curly, thick black hair was neatly tucked into a black hat with white patterns. Her bright and lively light-blue eyes, along with her thick eyebrows, bestowed upon her a unique and captivating charm.

The woman in leather armor gazed at Lumian and inquired gently, "Are you the adventurer Louis Berry?"

Lumian nodded. "Who might you be?"

The strikingly beautiful combat nun replied with a smile, "I'm Sister Noelia of the Fertility Order, in charge of a combat team.

"Praise the Earth, praise the Mother of All Things!"

Noelia raised her hands to the sky, her feet slightly apart.

Observing that Noelia and the other combat nuns of the Fertility Order were not as judgmental as he expected, not viewing wild Beyonders as inherently evil creatures, Lumian smiled.

"Madame, what brings you here?"

Noelia smiled and explained, "You're a great adventurer who hunted Demon Warlock. If we hadn't known you were in Port Santa, we might not have bothered. However, now that we are aware, we must come and speak with you, reminding you to abide by the corresponding order."

"What order?" Lumian inquired, anticipating the answer while holding the golden straw hat.

The demeanor of these combat nuns made him wonder if they were official Beyonders. They didn't directly arrest him, nor did they use stern warnings.

Is this the distinction between the Church of Earth Mother and other Churches? Emphasizing motherhood and respecting life?

Noelia's red lips formed a beautiful smile as she spoke, "In other cities, we would issue a direct warning, bringing you under our control. If you dare to resist, you could be apprehended or even eliminated.

"However, this is Port Santa, and many sea merchants here have a genuine need to resist pirates and protect their goods. We lack the manpower to safeguard them all, so we've tacitly agreed to allow them to hire Beyonder bodyguards.

"Monsieur Louis Berry, you are free to roam Port Santa, but you must adhere to three rules:

"Firstly, you cannot venture inland without our permission. To reach other cities, you need our approval. Secondly, you cannot perform any rituals in Port Santa, consume potions for advancement, or engage in mysticism experiments. Thirdly, you must refrain from using your abilities to cause chaos or catastrophe.

"Of course, if you return to Port Santa in the future, you'll need to register with us first."

It's a reasonable request, and coming from the ruling Church, it's not excessive at all… It's even simpler and easier than obtaining a firearm permit in Port Farim or other places. Of course, not applying for identification in Port Farim isn't a big deal. No one will report it, and there won't be any issues if you don't directly encounter the officials… Lumian nodded gently and replied,

"Sure thing."

At this moment, Lumian's thoughts raced, and he couldn't help but chuckle.

"But Port Santa isn't entirely safe. I encountered a monster last night…"

He briefly recounted how the little monster had disguised itself as a devil to intimidate him. While he didn't conceal that he had accepted Giorgia's commission, he refrained from specifying the details.

Noelia listened attentively and responded without surprise, "We'll handle it. Try not to get involved in the Fisheries Guild's matters in the future. Their internal issues will be resolved internally."

Does this mean that the Earth Mother Church refrains from interfering with the internal strife of the Fisheries Guild, allowing them complete autonomy? Lumian smiled and said,

"I'll do my best to avoid participation, but I'll reserve the right to defend myself and counterattack."

Noelia didn't offer any further comments. Her smile faded as she led the combat nuns to the door.

In just two or three steps, she smoothly drew a straight sword from her back, half-turned, and slashed at Lumian.

The series of movements flowed seamlessly, occurring in the blink of an eye.

Lumian stared at the sword beam, neither dodging nor raising his hand to block.

With a swoosh, the straight sword grazed the tip of his nose and pointed to the ground.

Noelia smiled radiantly and nodded in satisfaction.

"As expected of a great adventurer. Your foresight, judgment, and courage are exceptional."

She then turned around and addressed the combat nuns who followed her.

"This is a true man. Those who only know how to flaunt their muscles and swing their swords can only be called male beasts."

As they spoke, the combat nuns exited Lumian's rented suite.

Lumian raised his right hand and stroked his chin, feeling a strange sensation.

The sight of women openly scrutinizing men made him uncomfortable.

After watching Noelia and the nuns leave, Lugano lowered his voice and asked, "Boss, did a little monster really come to warn you last night?"

"That's right. If you were the one who completed Giorgia's commission, it might not be just a warning." Lumian put on the golden straw hat and casually remarked as he walked towards the door, "We have an obligation to remind our employer that someone is secretly spying on their family."

Lugano was taken aback for a moment before understanding Lumian's intentions. He grabbed Ludwig and followed closely behind.

…

21 Saint Lana Street, in the activity room of a suite on the fifth floor.

Lumian encountered Giorgia once again.

Dressed in a vibrant dress adorned with intricate patterns, the lady glanced at the boy, whose appetite exceeded her imagination, before turning her gaze to the adventurer, Louis Berry.

"What brings you here?"

Lugano translated professionally.

"Last night, a monster came to intimidate me, but I chased it away." Lumian briefly recounted the monster's appearance and behavior.

Upon hearing Lugano's account, Giorgia displayed no obvious surprise. After a few seconds of contemplation, she said, "Wait a moment."

Leaving the maid and valet behind, she disappeared into an inner room.

After a few minutes, she reappeared, arm in arm with a man.

The man seemed to be in his forties, tall and gaunt, his eyes a nearly translucent blue. His grayish-black, slightly curly hair cascaded over his shoulders like an artist's. His appearance couldn't be described as particularly good or bad, yet he possessed an unforgettable quality.

"This is my husband, Rubió Paco," Giorgia introduced.

The shareholder of the Fisheries Company and a committee member of the Fisheries Guild? Lumian had gathered information about the Paco family through Lugano over the past two days.

Rubió's father had initially been a prosperous fisherman who shared a boat with others. After marrying Martha, who had once been a Maiden of the Sea, he gradually established himself. Not only did he manage the Fisheries Company for a time, but he also ascended to become a committee member of the oldest local guild, the Fisheries Guild.

Shortly after the sea prayer ritual last year, the old gentleman passed away. With strong support from Matriarch Marta, Rubió inherited his father's status and became the youngest committee member of the Fisheries Guild.

However, he no longer held a specific position at Port Santa Fisheries Company. He only held onto the shareholders' voting rights and dividends.

This middle-aged man had once been rebellious. He was expected to comply with his parents' arrangements and marry a Maiden of the Sea. However, he remained single until his early thirties and then married Giorgia, the daughter of a textile merchant. If it were any other prominent family, the matriarch would have surely intervened and perhaps even banished Rubió. Yet, Martha indulged him and eventually chose to compromise.

Before Lugano could commence with the translation, Rubió spoke in less fluent Intisian, "We can communicate directly. When I was young, I often took a boat out to sea and visited places like Port Farim."

"Monsieur Rubió, I don't think there's a need for communication, and I don't intend to find out why the monster came looking for me. I'm just here to inform you about this." Lumian glanced at the puzzled Giorgia and suspected that Rubió had switched to Intisian not out of politeness but to keep his wife in the dark about something.

Rubió nodded gently and said, "I understand your concerns. I merely wish to entrust you with another mission."

"What mission?" Lumian asked with a smile.

Rubió calmly replied, "My mother, Martha, hails from Milo Village. Recently, she wishes to return and meet the current Governor of the Sea to request his permission to seek treatment at the Church of Earth Mother. Yes, my mother hasn't been in good health recently. She can't get out of bed."

Martha is still alive? Lumian was slightly surprised.

Experienced as he was, he deduced that the monster might have been transformed by Martha, based on the absence of the matriarch, the Paco family's reluctance to expose the humanoid lizard, and the fact that she was once a Maiden of the Sea!

The sea prayer ritual wasn't just an honor for the Maidens of the Sea. Perhaps there was also hidden corruption that might erupt at some point in time.

But now, from what Rubió had said, Martha was still alive. Previously, she had only been seriously ill.

Where did that humanoid lizard come from? Lumian suppressed his puzzlement and asked in confusion, "Why does Madame Martha need the Governor of the Sea's permission to seek treatment?"

Rubió's expression shifted, a mix of disgust and resistance evident in his words.

"All Maidens of the Sea have to follow the orders of the Governor of the Sea when dealing with Church-related matters. Failing to do so would be blasphemous to the sea prayer ritual."

Chapter 546: Monitor

546 Monitor

Following the Governor of the Sea's orders holds more weight than reverence for the Church… The Earth Mother Church appears indifferent. Lumian chose not to push further. He nodded subtly and stated, "I'll take on this commission without expecting compensation, but I do have a request."

"What might that be?" Rubió asked cautiously.

A cunning smile formed on Lumian's lips.

"I'm here to witness the sea prayer ritual, but I've heard only a select few can observe its core segments. I seek such an opportunity."

Rubió remained silent for a prolonged moment.

Giorgia, unable to contain her curiosity, questioned her husband in Highlander about the conversation and his concerns.

Lugano seized the chance to approach Lumian and translated the couple's exchange.

Lumian's eyebrows twitched imperceptibly upon hearing they were genuinely considering allowing him to pose as a sailor and board the special sacrificial ship.

Is Rubió Paco truly considering my request?

I'm merely offering an outrageous deal to test if I can glean details about the sea prayer ritual. I don't intend to leverage this seemingly straightforward task to gain access to the last two segments of the ritual!

It remained a secret harbored by the Fisheries Guild for over a millennium, the wellspring of their power and prestige!

As these thoughts raced through Lumian's mind, he strongly suspected that the commission to send Madame Martha to Milo Village to meet the current Governor of the Sea carried a high risk. It wasn't a task for any random Beyonder. Therefore, Rubió Paco was reluctant to let go of Louis Berry, the proven adventurer.

But where could the danger lie? This is Port Santa, not the islands on the sea or the remote towns of the Southern Continent. Which Beyonder would dare to attack me on the streets in broad daylight? Aren't they afraid of being captured by the combat nuns and turned into fertilizer for the land? One can't underestimate the power of an orthodox Church!

Unless someone possesses a special ability, like Loki's, to kill me undetected on the bustling streets, or if a Saint with godhood personally takes action, aiming to end the battle before the Church of Earth Mother reacts… But it can't be that exaggerated. It's such a trivial matter… As Lumian pondered, Rubió and Giorgia reached a conclusion.

The former said to Lumian, "I cannot permit your participation in the last two segments of the sea prayer ritual. It is a blasphemy against the sea. Those involved will face expulsion from Port Santa, including their family.

"However, I am willing to allow you to conceal yourself in Milo Village in advance and witness the ancient performances during the vigil ritual."

So, I can't directly witness the vigil ritual, but I can partake in the accompanying folklore performance? Did Ultraman, Bard, and Mad Lady use a similar method to approach the core of the sea prayer ritual and complete the most crucial part of the prank? Lumian noticed that Rubió had already made a significant concession and no longer insisted. He smiled and replied, "Deal."

Without waiting for a response, he "kindly" suggested, "Let's send Madame Martha to Milo Village today, shall we? We mustn't delay when it comes to illnesses. Get her treatment as soon as possible."

Rubió hesitated for a moment before saying, "My mother is already asleep. She's been resting a lot lately. Forcing her awake will impact her body and mind. How about tomorrow morning?"

Is some advanced preparation needed? Lumian nodded thoughtfully.

"No problem."

He cast a quick glance at Lugano, and his heart skipped a beat.

"Monsieur Rubió, my interpreter is, in fact, an excellent doctor. Moreover, he doesn't adhere to the beliefs of the Earth Mother, nor is he affiliated with any Church. If he were to treat your mother, you probably wouldn't need to seek the Governor of the Sea's permission in advance."

Lumian emphasized the word "doctor."

Without hesitation, Rubió Paco shook his head and said, "We trust the Church's doctors more. My mother is my most important family. I don't want her to take any unnecessary risks."

What he implied was that he couldn't vouch for the medical skills of the interpreter. He couldn't use the Paco family's matriarch as an experiment.

Lumian was actually looking forward to sending Madame Martha to Milo Village because it meant he might meet the current Governor of the Sea and have a chance to learn something. He had only suggested that Lugano treat the matriarch to test Rubió.

The result of the probe revealed many hidden secrets in this matter!

Having agreed to escort Madame Martha and her maid to the Governor of the Sea at 9 a.m. the following day, Lumian led Ludwig and Lugano out of the main house at 21 Saint Lana Street. Giorgia walked them all the way to the door.

Lumian nonchalantly remarked, "Does the Governor of the Sea have to reside in Milo Village?"

With Lugano's translation, Giorgia nodded slightly and said, "The Governor of the Sea resides in the building where the vigil ritual is held every night. He can move freely during the day, but he can't leave Port Santa."

The building where the vigil ritual is held? The essence of the vigil ritual is to allow a quasi-Governor of the Sea to enter the residence and replace the former Governor of the Sea, waiting to be officially appointed by the sea the next day? Lumian speculated, combining his mysticism knowledge.

He smiled and asked, "What are the perks of being Governor of the Sea?"

After hearing the translation, Giorgia fell silent for a few seconds before saying, "Among the fishmongers, the merchants, he's already the true governor in their eyes."

It wasn't an answer, just a whisper of truth.

Lumian nodded without pressing further. He led Ludwig and Lugano through the iron gates.

After taking a few steps along the verdant path in the forest, he suddenly looked up.

On a branch stood a gray-feathered myna.

Lumian gave it a cursory glance and continued on, his steps brisk towards the waiting carriage.

After a while, the myna flapped its wings and flew up. After circling a few times, it circled a house two streets away before dipping down towards an open window.

It landed on a middle-aged man's forearm and spoke in precise Highlander, "Louis Berry is back at the Paco house! He stayed nearly half an hour!"

The middle-aged man, dressed in gray clothes with disheveled brown hair, resembling a suburban farmer, fed the myna a few self-made rice grains and said, "Observe further and see if Rubió Paco and Giorgia will go out today."

After the myna flew out of the window, the middle-aged man exhaled and turned around.

Suddenly, his eyes froze as he saw someone sitting in the only armchair!

The man had black hair and green eyes, wearing a white shirt, a black vest, dark pants, and a golden straw hat.

Louis Berry!

Adventurer Louis Berry!

The middle-aged man's back arched slightly, and his feet parted slightly, but he took no further action.

Lumian leaned back in his chair and engaged in casual conversation in Intisian, as if he had been expected.

"What did you have your bird spy on?"

The middle-aged man fell silent for a moment before speaking in somewhat awkward Intisian, "Watch if anyone enters or exits Paco's house, and see if there's anything unusual there."

"Very honest." Lumian nodded approvingly. "Who asked you to do it?"

He was pleased that the other party knew some Intisian. Otherwise, he could only rely on key words to communicate or capture him to have Lugano translate.

"Juan Oro," the middle-aged man replied without hesitation.

Juan Oro… The president of the Fisheries Guild and the former village chief of Milo Village? Lumian smiled and said, "I'm surprised you're so forthright."

The middle-aged man forced a smile and said, "I don't think I'm stronger than Demon Warlock and can defeat you."

"That's right. Those who understand the situation and themselves can live longer." Lumian crossed his right foot over his left leg. "Why is Juan Oro monitoring the Paco family?"

"I don't know, and there's no need for me to know. I'll receive a reward as long as I pass on what I see," the middle-aged man replied sincerely.

Lumian gazed at him for a few seconds before saying, "Did you send that little monster last night?"

The middle-aged man was taken aback.

"What little monster? What happened last night?"

Lumian chuckled and stood up without explaining.

"What's your name?" he asked as he walked towards the door.

The middle-aged man hesitated for a moment before answering truthfully, "Sanches."

Lumian opened the door, walked out, and disappeared from Sanches's sight.

…

Upon his return to Solow Motel, Lumian noticed a folded letter resting on the master bedroom's desk.

Skillfully unfurling it, he found the distinct handwriting of Madam Magician.

"You can share those matters with the Two of Cups, but avoid delving into excessive detail.

"I refrained from elaborating on the voices you heard and the fragments of civilization you glimpsed earlier as they remain too advanced for your understanding. Simply remember not to heed random sounds or sights in an ancient ruin like Fourth Epoch Trier. Also, caution your Warlock associates —

it's acceptable to occasionally take in the Hidden Sage's indoctrination, but they mustn't fully believe in Him. His state is precarious."

After incinerating the letter, Lumian contemplated for a moment and decided to "teleport" back to Trier to inform Franca in person and avert any potential mishaps.

…

Trier, nestled within the Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative, Apartment 702 at 9 Rue Orosai.

As Lumian materialized, Franca and Jenna were engrossed in perusing a stack of ancient information from an unknown source.

"Hey, could you 'teleport' outside and knock? It's quite startling when you suddenly appear like that!" Franca nearly tensed the formless spider silk she'd permanently set up in the room.

Lumian chuckled and remarked, "With a Witch's spiritual perception, what's the difference between me 'teleporting' outside the door and appearing in the living room?"

"Why the sudden return?" Franca paused before asking, "Madame Magician said you could share about that matter?"

"What's going on?" Jenna queried, looking puzzled.

She stood up and prepared to leave.

"Yes," Lumian replied to Franca's question, but he made no attempt to stop Jenna from leaving.

Nor did Franca intervene.

Once Jenna had retreated to her bedroom, Lumian turned to Franca and disclosed, "When they discussed the wilderness dream, it made me recall the voices and visions I encountered in Fourth Epoch Trier. They're connected to the Celestial Master!"

Chapter 547: Source of Familiarity

547 Source of Familiarity

"Is this related to the Celestial Master?" Franca's interest piqued.

Confusion enveloped her.

"In the Fourth Epoch Trier, what did you see or hear that we didn't?"

Everyone had been together unless it was before they met, but Jenna should have been aware!

Without pausing for Lumian's response, Franca contemplated for a moment and suggested, "Could it be the aftereffects of using the Eye of Truth?"

She recalled Lumian's abnormal behavior during that time.

"Yes, that's right." Lumian nodded, pulled up a chair, and settled down. He described the collision of two rocks, sparks flying, and the ensuing blaze that engulfed dry leaves and withered branches, amid echoing voices chanting "Celestial Master."

The more Franca listened, the more her focus intensified. Uncharacteristically, she refrained from interrupting.

As she listened, her gaze gradually shifted, seemingly lost in reminiscence and distant thought.

Once Lumian finished recounting, Franca remained motionless for what felt like an eternity, frozen like a mechanical doll paused mid-action.

After several seconds, she abruptly straightened up, pinched her nose, and forced a smile.

"As anticipated, the Celestial Master is part of our world.

"The fragments of civilization you received bear a striking resemblance to some aspects of my country's history, yet there are differences… Could it be the true history concealed beneath the surface?

"The Celestial Master is attempting to interfere and breach into this world, wielding significant influence over the Mystery Pryer and Savant pathways, much like the way the Celestial Worthy affects Seers, Apprentices, and Marauders?

"Could the depravity among some of the monks in the Deep Valley Cloister and the peculiar state of the Hidden Sage be linked to the Celestial Master?"

Franca's thoughts crystallized as she spoke, her eyes sparkling like a serene lake.

"That's my hunch too," Lumian concurred with Franca.

Franca rose and paced, seemingly alone, contemplating how to follow this trail and unveil the truth behind the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society's transmigration.

After a few minutes, she muttered to herself, "The connection between the two worlds is stronger than I expected. It's not just through the River Styx…

"We should still be able to find many traces of the interaction between the two worlds…"

Franca halted her pacing and fixed her gaze on Lumian.

"When we grow stronger and amass enough gold, I want you to summon Chen Tu again, the Armored Shadow. He should possess some insight into the Celestial Master."

"Alright," Lumian agreed.

Franca lapsed into silence once more, her mind retracing an unknown memory.

A few moments later, she produced four brass metal plates and handed them to Lumian.

"The Language Comprehension charms you wanted. The one with the most intricate patterns allows you to understand the languages of the Southern Continent. The others are for the ancient Feysac language family. The activation incantation is the word 'knowledge' in ancient Hermes."

She and the Bear had completed the delivery through Madame Hela's messenger. The other party proved quite efficient.

After Lumian handed Franca the money, he "teleported" out of Trier and back to Port Santa.

In the hushed aftermath, Jenna cautiously opened the bedroom door and stuck her head out.

"Has Lumian left?"

"Yes," Franca replied, her emotions subdued.

Jenna glanced at her but didn't press for more information. Instead, she redirected the conversation to the stack of information related to the underground tomb.

Late at night.

Franca returned to her room.

Glancing at the small analyzer, the accompanying typewriter, and the radio transceiver, she didn't sit down to chat as usual. Instead, she climbed into bed.

Sitting in the middle of the bed, leaning against the pillow, hugging her legs and curling up, Franca's gaze unfocused on the crimson moon and stars outside the window.

Lumian's words today plunged her into nostalgia, but the more her emotions fluctuated, the less she wanted to reveal vulnerability. She endured it, pretending to have recovered.

Only when solitude enveloped her, as the night fell silent and the seemingly eternal stars adorned the sky, did she shed her thick "armor" and sink deep into her emotions.

After an indeterminate amount of time, Franca lowered her head, burying her face between her knees.

That night, she delved into a multitude of dreams. Broad shoulders carried her as a child, a touch of white hair at the temples, dishes not particularly delicious but always suited her tastes. Pure emotions of her youth, memories of being the "atmosphere livening machine," and her "broadminded" self all danced in fragmented sequences…

As her two decades unfolded in her dreams, she unknowingly opened her eyes, feeling the coldness on her face. Reluctant to move, she lingered in the moment.

Suddenly, a recollection struck her.

Back on the fourth level of the catacombs, she and Jenna had encountered a man who seemed strangely familiar.

Initially, she believed that the original owner of her body had encountered him. Now, the reason for his familiarity became clear.

The man bore an uncanny resemblance to someone from her home country before transmigration!

Despite altering his appearance to thwart immediate recognition, Franca was now certain that his facial features differed from those she had encountered in this world. Softer, less chiseled!

With a mix of fear and excitement, Franca sat up and pondered, Could it be that, aside from us transmigrating souls, there are others who physically transmigrated? Or has someone mastered the ability to freely traverse between both worlds?

…

After breakfast, Lumian stepped into the master bedroom's washroom and retrieved a low-level Language Comprehension charm from his Traveler's Bag.

"Knowledge," he whispered in ancient Hermes.

The brass-like charm ignited with bluish-green flames and swiftly vanished.

Instantly, Lumian felt an abnormal clarity in his mind, as if an avalanche of additional knowledge had flooded in, unveiling the structural origins and connections of numerous words.

Today's agenda: a visit to the oldest fishing village, perhaps meeting the Governor of the Sea. Mastering Highlander in secret seemed imperative to avoid missing crucial clues!

The charm's effects would last for seven days.

Leaving the bedroom, Lumian took Ludwig and Lugano to 21 Saint Lana Street in a rental carriage, where they met Martha, the matriarch of the Paco family.

Martha didn't look like she was in her sixties, with only faint wrinkles at the corners of her eyes, appearing more in her early fifties based on her eyes, nose, mouth, and brows. Her features retained a unique charm.

At that moment, the old lady with grayish-black hair and light-blue eyes wore a black, widow-like dress and a dark, old-styled bonnet. Pale-faced, she was supported by two young maids as they boarded a four-wheeled, four-seater carriage.

"Monsieur Berry, I'll be relying on you," Rubió Paco nodded at Lumian beside the carriage.

He was to accompany his mother to Milo Village to meet the Governor of the Sea.

Lumian directed Ludwig to Giorgia.

"Please keep an eye on him until I return from Milo Village."

Rubió translated this time.

Giorgia smiled and replied, "Don't worry, I'll make sure there's plenty of food."

She had already realized that this boy had the appetite of two or three adults, but as the godson of a great adventurer, it was understandable that he was special.

Lumian wasn't concerned about Ludwig's treatment in the Paco household. He feigned his understanding of Highlander and waited for Lugano's translation before saying, "A meal every two hours."

With that, he sat on the right side of the carriage driver and didn't enter the carriage. Seeing this, Lugano had no choice but to choose the seat to the left of the carriage driver.

Before doing so, he diligently translated Lumian's final instructions.

Although he didn't know what would happen if Ludwig starved, he felt that it wouldn't be good, so he emphasized it twice.

As the carriage set off, Giorgia processed the translation.

"A meal every two hours? Two hours?"

The Paco family's carriage rolled along the grayish-white stone-paved street. Lumian leaned against the carriage wall, retracted his right leg, and stepped on the edge of the carriage driver's seat.

Lugano glanced at him, feeling a bit uneasy.

A seasoned bounty hunter, Lugano sensed something awry in this seemingly ordinary mission that prompted Rubió to assist his employer in hiding in Milo Village.

His heart raced as he observed armed pedestrians on the street, fearing an imminent attack from the crowd.

Under the October sun still blazing in Port Santa, the streets, damp from the previous night's heavy rain, hadn't completely dried. Lugano yearned to reach Milo Village quickly.

Glancing at Lumian, he noticed that Lumian had narrowed his eyes. Lowering his straw hat, Lumian seemed to be peacefully napping, showing no signs of nervousness.

Phew… With a powerhouse like him around, there shouldn't be a problem… Lugano silently reassured himself.

The carriage headed north, leaving Port Santa and reaching a village nestled against the Dariège mountain range, overlooking the azure sea.

Fishing boats set off, accompanied by the resonant singing and chirping of seabirds.

Milo Village's buildings exuded a historic feel. Brown, yellow, and beige stone-brick outer walls, blackened at the lower half, gave them character. Though the wooden components had been replaced, weeds still clung.

A small cathedral belonging to Earth Mother stood near the mountain, and facing the fishing village dock was the Governor of the Sea's residence.

The four-story building, with a white backing and gray bricks, resembled a cathedral and a sacrificial ground more than a human residence.

As they arrived safely at their destination, Lugano sighed in relief and jumped off the carriage. Two maids supported Madame Martha as they headed toward the Governor of the Sea's building, accompanied by Rubió Paco.

Suddenly, Lugano heard his employer's voice.

"Take a look at what's wrong with that old lady."

Uh… Lugano glanced at Lumian, who had appeared beside him, wearing a golden straw hat. He raised his hand and gently tapped his forehead, activating his Spirit Vision.

Observing Madame Martha's back for a few seconds after she entered the Governor of the Sea's residence, he frowned and said, "Most notably is the excessive loss of blood and weak vitality…"

Lugano hesitated before concluding, "It doesn't look like illness. It looks more like an injury."

Chapter 548: Governor of the Sea

548 Governor of the Sea

Injured? Injured by the humanoid lizard? Lumian made a casual guess after hearing Lugano's judgment.

He stood by the carriage, his gaze naturally surveying the surroundings of the Governor of the Sea's residence.

The location was close to the fishing village's docks, with boats sailing into the sea and fishing nets secured to the reefs. Around nearby houses, women were busy processing seafood, turning them into salted fish and jerky. Children ran along various village roads, playing games.

Though different from Cordu, the essence of the scene remained similar.

In front of the Governor of the Sea's residence stretched a sizable square where Lumian and the others awaited Madame Martha, Rubió Paco, and their emergence.

Children gathered in a corner, arranging numerous shells and engaging in an acting game.

The eldest, dressed in a linen shirt, declared, "I'm the Governor of the Sea!"

"I'll be the guard!"

"I'm the mother," the other children replied.

The youngest hopped around, asking, "What about me? What about me?"

The child playing the role of the Governor of the Sea pondered for a moment and said, "You can be the Child of the Sea."

Child of the Sea? What's that? Lumian, though not looking, listened intently to the children's discussion.

These kids may not understand many terms, but their lack of confidentiality made them unwitting carriers of information. The adults in Milo Village wouldn't be overly vigilant against such young children, who might inadvertently reveal details remembered in their daily games.

Recalling his experiences in Cordu, Lumian recognized the value of sounding out children and playing games with them. It was a subtle way to glean insights into family matters.

After absorbing the children's discussions and gauging the time, Lumian adjusted his golden straw hat and headed straight for the Governor of the Sea's residence.

Lugano was taken aback and swiftly followed Lumian.

Two "guards" in brownish-green shirts and pants, each armed with a rifle, blocked the entrance of the cathedral and sacrificial ground, fixing their gaze on Lumian.

"Halt!" the "guards" shouted.

Undeterred, Lumian continued forward, speaking in Intisian nonchalantly, "I don't understand what you're saying."

With a swoosh, the two "guards" raised their rifles, aiming at the outsider in the golden straw hat.

Lugano hurriedly translated, "They won't let you in."

Ignoring his guide, Lumian neither sped up nor slowed down as he approached the white building with gray bricks.

A cold glint flickered in the blue eyes of the two "guards" as they squeezed their triggers.

At that moment, the outsider in the golden straw hat vanished from their sight.

He melded into the sunlit shadows of the governor's residence.

In the next instant, Lumian reappeared from a shadow in the foyer behind them and continued walking.

It was as if the distance between them had been erased.

The two "guards," with keen senses, quickly turned around, peering behind them. However, Lumian had already entered the building, leaving the foyer.

Outside, Lugano stood in a daze, uncertain whether to take the risk of following and acting as a translator or to prioritize his own safety.

After passing through the foyer, Lumian suddenly noticed the space ahead darkening. The dome, just over ten meters tall, emanated an inaccessible aura. Aqua-blue walls adorned with various reliefs caught his eye. Unlike the typical statues of Angels and Saints, these depicted objects from the sea —

starfish, corals, numerous fish, lobsters, and crabs.

Simultaneously, Lumian sensed the reliefs coming to life, casting a dangerous gaze at him.

No, they weren't alive. The building itself seemed alive, instinctively rejecting intruders and exerting layers of pressure.

Lumian's steps instantly became heavy, as if burdened by hundreds of kilograms of food.

Within his field of vision, Martha, the Paco family's matriarch, knelt diagonally on the ground with her legs crossed. Rubió Paco stood at a distance. The two maids also knelt, their backs turned towards the entrance hall, as if unwilling to look at a certain important figure.

Directly opposite the high dome lay a "carpet" made of fish skin. A young man in a retro white robe reclined on it, propping himself up with his elbows as he quietly observed Martha.

Four other beautiful women adorned the "carpet." One knelt behind the lad, serving as his cushion. Another peeled late-ripened grapes and delicately fed them to the lad. The remaining two held trays with alcohol, food, and towels, each standing in a separate spot. Their pregnant bellies were unmistakably visible, radiating a maternal glow.

Upon Lumian's sudden entrance, the lad appeared alarmed, sitting up straight and seeking solace in the embrace of the woman behind him.

Sensing the abnormality, Rubió turned around and saw the adventurer he had hired, Louis Berry.

His pupils dilated slightly as he urgently spoke in Intisian, "Why did you come in?"

Only then did Lumian pause and smile.

"I'm a professional adventurer. You've been inside for too long. I'm worried something might happen."

As he spoke, Lumian sensed dangerous gazes from various parts of the building.

Rubió fell silent for a moment before saying, "Don't worry. Just wait outside for us to come out."

"Alright," Lumian chuckled, turned around, and sauntered into the foyer, acting as if the dangerous gazes didn't exist.

Back in the foyer, he faced the two "guards" and their rifles without giving them a glance as he walked past.

The expressions of the "guards" shifted, but they refrained from firing, allowing Lumian to exit the Governor of the Sea's residence.

Lugano breathed a sigh of relief, grateful he wouldn't be hunted down by the people of Milo Village.

Despite being a Beyonder, facing more than one armed soldier still made him uneasy.

Glancing at Lumian, he hesitated to ask why his employer insisted on barging in.

Lumian settled back beside the carriage driver, tucking in his legs with one bent and the other extended, allowing his right arm to rest on it.

After nearly ten minutes, Rubió Paco and his mother, Martha, emerged from the cathedral-like building.

Rubió took a deep look at Lumian and said, "Let's go. The Governor of the Sea has agreed to let my mother receive treatment at the Church."

Is that lad the current Governor of the Sea? He looked weak and appeared panicked. How can he protect Port Santa's fishermen and sea merchants for a year? Or does he lack abilities but possess a special symbol? Did the April Fool's prank cause an accident at last year's sea prayer ritual? This Governor of the Sea might have failed to receive the sea's boon or appointment, but the Fisheries Guild members conceal the matter to avoid causing panic, treating him as the real Governor of the Sea. He must know about what happened back then… Lumian nodded thoughtfully.

He smiled and asked Rubió in Intisian, "Then, should we thank Earth Mother for Her love and care or the Governor's approval?"

Rubió didn't respond and followed his mother, Martha, into the carriage.

Lugano hurriedly took a seat on the other side of the carriage driver, watching as the horse circled around and changed direction, gradually departing from the Governor of the Sea's residence.

Phew… Lugano sighed from the bottom of his heart.

This commission doesn't seem dangerous…

Apart from his employer insisting on barging into the Governor of the Sea's residence, there were no surprises.

Lumian chuckled and remarked, "That's because I'm here. If it were just you, those hidden observers might have already come knocking."

Lugano fell silent, observing as his employer pointed at the Governor of the Sea's mansion, resembling a cathedral, and uttered a phrase in Highlander word by word.

"What. Will happen if. Blown up?"

Lugano shuddered, his hair standing on end.

He glanced at the astonished carriage driver and advised his employer in Intisian, "You'll probably be hunted down by the entire Port Santa."

Lumian smiled and averted his gaze, remaining silent.

Only then did Lugano realize.

His employer was testing someone!

Why else would he use Highlander, a language he hadn't mastered yet?

He was testing the reactions of the carriage driver and Madame Martha in the carriage!

Listening to Martha and Rubió's conversation, Lumian noted the mother and son barely spoke during the journey, perhaps due to Martha's poor health, with occasional moans of pain.

As the carriage left Milo Village, the driver suddenly pulled the reins, stopping the horses.

An old man with a black cane had appeared in front of the carriage.

With dark and white hair, eyes as blue as the sea, and wearing common fishermen's clothes, the wrinkled face of the old man could have killed a mosquito with its folds.

"Mr. Oro…" the carriage driver whispered, his expression tense, uncertain how to react.

Juan Oro? Lumian thought. The president of the Fisheries Guild and the former village chief of Milo Village?

Supported by a young man resembling him, Juan Oro approached the Paco family's carriage with his cane.

In the carriage, Rubió and Martha remained silent.

At that moment, a revolver appeared on Juan Oro's forehead, pressing the cold muzzle against his flesh.

Lumian raised his chin slightly and looked at the president of the Fisheries Guild. With a calm expression, he asked, "Who allowed you to approach this carriage?"

Chapter 549: True Purpose

549 True Purpose

The young man supporting Juan Oro glanced up at Lumian, who sat beside the carriage driver with one leg bent, the other propped up. His eyes blazed with undisguised anger.

The carriage driver jumped in fright and desperately tried to distance himself from Lumian. However, with a horse in front of him and Lugano on his left, dodging proved impossible in his haste.

Lugano swallowed hard, blaming his employer for being overly aggressive.

Is he trying to imitate Gehrman Sparrow?

But his employer hadn't exhibited such madness before; instead, he seemed intelligent!

Juan Oro, an elderly man with mottled black hair, seemed oblivious to the revolver pointed at his forehead. He turned his head, stepped aside from the firearm, and continued forward.

Observing this, Lumian pulled the trigger without hesitation.

Bang!

A yellow bullet shot from the revolver, heading straight for the side of Juan Oro's head.

At some point, a palm intercepted the bullet, causing it to decelerate and spin. The bullet landed in the palm, feeling as if it had fallen into a thick swamp.

The wide, bronzed hand belonged to the young man supporting Juan Oro. He glared at Lumian, his lips curling in disdain. Then, he bellowed, "Have you lost your mind?"

Before he could finish, fiery crimson orbs, nearly white in hue, materialized right in front of him, barely a meter away. They surrounded him in a blaze.

Almost instantly, Lumian felt as though he'd been ripped from reality. The carriage disappeared from beneath him, the ground vanished from his sight, and he found himself in an endless void of darkness.

The crimson fireballs, almost white, were controlled by an unseen force and changed direction, hurtling down from their original path.

Rumble!

They collided with the roadside dozens of meters away, carving deep, massive craters.

The horses, startled, reared up, neighing in terror. The carriage driver instinctively pulled at the reins, struggling to calm the panicked animals.

The "illusion" Lumian experienced dissolved with the explosion. He saw Juan Oro and the lad again.

Juan Oro, deeply wrinkled with his beard and hair standing on end, lifted his black cane and growled in a low voice, "Have you had enough?"

Lumian grinned and raised his revolver once more, aiming it at the president of the Fisheries Guild.

At that moment, Rubió Paco's voice echoed from the rear carriage.

"Let them through," he spoke in Intisian.

Only then did Lumian lower his arm and offer a smile in Intisian.

"My employer says you're free to pass."

He acted as if he couldn't comprehend Juan Oro and the lad's Highlander.

Juan Oro observed him for a moment before shifting his attention. Using his cane, he circled around to the side of the carriage. The lad supporting him shot a glare at Lumian, but he was at a loss for cuss words since Lumian couldn't understand.

Juan Oro glanced at the window and calmly inquired, "Martha, I heard you're not feeling well?"

"Yes," the old lady weakly replied through the glass.

Juan Oro nodded.

"Has the Governor given you permission to seek treatment? Do you need my help in pleading your case?"

"He's already given permission," Rubió replied on behalf of his mother.

"That's good." Juan Oro nodded slightly and didn't press further.

He turned and slowly walked toward the building housing the Governor of the Sea's residence, using his cane as a crutch.

The young man supporting him shot a final glare at Lumian before refocusing on the old man.

Lumian adjusted his posture, acting as if nothing had transpired. He said to Lugano, "The carriage can continue forward."

Lugano snapped out of his daze and quickly directed the startled carriage driver to soothe the horses and exit Milo Village as soon as possible.

Without any issues, they made their way back to 21 Saint Lana Street.

Lumian retrieved Ludwig, his mouth still glistening with oil, from Giorgia and smiled at Rubió Paco.

"Remember your promise. Otherwise…"

He smiled and left the statement hanging.

"Don't worry," Rubió replied in Intisian.

After Louis Berry, his godson, and the interpreter departed, Giorgia sighed in relief and glanced at her husband.

"I've never seen a child eat so much. He must be abnormal!"

"Otherwise, Louis Berry wouldn't have let him stay with us so easily," Rubió responded, unfazed.

…

Aquina Street, Solow Motel.

After shutting the door, Lugano couldn't resist asking Lumian, "W-why were you so aggressive? He's the president of the Port Santa Fisheries Guild, a big shot. And, we're in Milo Village!"

He suspected his employer had some hidden agenda.

Lumian gave his guide a glance and grinned.

"Why else? When making a scene in public, it's unlikely both parties can go all out. It's the perfect chance to test them, see what they're made of. Trying it under the cover of night, when no one cares about the Earth Mother Church's authority and the Feynapotter government? That would be way too risky."

If Lumian had discovered that Juan Oro had godlike powers, he'd need to act quickly and call for backup!

"Ah, I see…" Lugano had an epiphany.

His employer's craziness was just a facade. Every radical move had an ulterior motive!

But why is he in Port Santa? Is he planning something during the sea prayer ritual? Why target people from the Fisheries Guild?

That sounds very dangerous!

Should I resign early and forget about the remaining paycheck?

Lumian observed the silent interpreter and strolled over to a reclining chair in the living room, settling in with a smile. He leaned back and relaxed.

What he'd told Lugano was just one layer of the motivations behind his recent actions—the most surface-level one.

Most importantly, Lumian aimed to send a clear message with his radical actions:

He was in Port Santa to investigate the sea prayer ritual, unafraid of the Fisheries Guild or Milo Village. He possessed the strength and courage to back it up!

Breaking into the Governor of the Sea's residence or casually pointing a gun at Juan Oro's head and firing—all of it was to convey this information.

Lumian believed there were dissatisfied people in Port Santa regarding the Fisheries Guild's sea prayer ritual. After all, the primary beneficiaries were fishermen, sea merchants, and those in related industries, not representative of the entire Port Santa population.

For instance, even though the Church of Earth Mother and the Port Santa government had allowed the Fisheries Guild autonomy and excluded outsiders from involvement, someone bold enough to investigate, regardless of consequences, might tempt others. Could they silently or even covertly support this person to stir up trouble for their benefit?

Likewise, the beneficiaries wouldn't be united. Some gaining meant others losing; the powerful had jealous rivals. While not wanting the sea prayer ritual to end, they likely desired those in power to suffer and vacate their positions.

Lumian, by setting up a flag to investigate the sea prayer ritual and displaying decisiveness, steadfastness, and strength, didn't need to painstakingly gather clues. From his residence, he could receive various pieces of information, openly and covertly, and compare them to determine authenticity.

For an outsider with limited time, this was the fastest and most effective way to uncover the entire sea prayer ritual process and the truth about last year's accident.

For the key member of April Fool's lurking in the shadows, possibly setting a trap, this was a strategic move to draw attention to adventurer Louis Berry and raise suspicion.

In due time, armed with the acquired information and discovered clues, Lumian had a chance to expose them through their own trap.

Of course, the main drawback of this plan was its relative danger. Putting himself in the spotlight was a risk, but in the pursuit of prey, risks were inevitable. Moreover, Lumian had plenty of allies.

As these thoughts raced through Lumian's mind, he realized that becoming a Conspirer had given him a clearer understanding of the situation and the conflicts between various groups. Using a term favored by Aurore, he developed a deeper insight into conspiracies: "The most brilliant conspiracy is an open conspiracy!"

This became a key principle for his future acting.

Around 2 p.m., Lumian spotted his messenger, Penitent Baynfel, emerging from the void and handing him a letter.

Puzzled, he asked, "Who's it from?"

Haven't those he needed to communicate with already been reached?

"It's from the tall Demoness," Baynfel replied.

What's up with Franca again? Lumian took the letter and began reading.

The man she and Jenna encountered on the fourth level of the catacombs is suspected to be from the world where the Celestial Master resides—the world before her transmigration? Lumian's pupils dilated slightly.

This was different from the members of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society; they had transmigrated through their souls, but these individuals had brought their bodies over!

In the midst of his surprise, Lumian pondered a crucial question.

Why would someone like that venture into the fourth level of the catacombs?

Was it because the Samaritan Women's Spring lay sealed there, along with the River Styx's overflowing water that bridged the two worlds?

Had similar individuals entered our world before? If so, why hadn't they left any trace like Emperor Roselle and the other transmigrators?

Franca and Jenna's expedition to the fourth level of the catacombs appears laden with coincidences. Not only did they uncover a new Mirror World Fragment, but they also encountered such a person.

After penning a letter to Franca, Lumian was about to request Lugano to translate today's newspapers when footsteps echoed from the corridor.

His eyebrows twitched as he pulled up an armchair, facing the door.

Knock, knock, knock. A few seconds later, a knock resounded on their suite's door.

"Who is it?" Lugano inquired.

A mature and gentle voice floated from beyond the door.

"I'm Noelia of the Fertility Order."

Upon hearing this name, Lumian leaned back slightly and offered a smile.

He sensed that his digestion of the Conspirer potion had progressed a bit further.

Chapter 550: Effects of the Sea Prayer Ritual

550 Effects of the Sea Prayer Ritual

Lumian hesitated, embodying the character of the adventurer—Louis Berry —

grappling with the unfamiliarity of Highlander.

Once Lugano finished translating Noelia's words, he nodded gently, sporting a welcoming smile as he spoke in Intisian, "Come in, please."

Simultaneously, he rose from his seat.

Lugano, who had already reached the door, opened it.

The figure outside indeed proved to be Noelia, the combat nun of the Fertility Order. Contrary to expectation, she wasn't cloaked in black or adorned with religious headwear. Her thick, black, curly hair flowed over her brown leather armor, and her lively light-blue eyes exuded energy.

Lumian noticed the pair of straight swords strapped to Noelia's back and the revolver at her waist. Smiling, he stepped forward.

"Thank you for your assistance."

Previously dependent on Lugano's translation, Noelia replied in Intisian, "How did you know I was here to help?"

Lumian didn't conceal his intentions for today's performance. He raised his hand, pointing at his head, indicating deduction.

Of course, his gratitude stemmed from her aid in digesting the Conspirer potion.

Noelia's thick eyebrows twitched approvingly as she nodded.

Then, she turned her gaze to Lugano and Ludwig, as if seeking Lumian's opinion on whether to have them leave. Lugano's expression made it clear he preferred not to be part of it.

Sparing Lugano, Lumian gestured for him to take Ludwig outside, perhaps for street snacks.

After the two departed the suite, Lumian remarked to Noelia, "You actually know Intisian. You didn't say a word of it earlier."

Noelia replied with a smile, "We often take turns guarding the mountain passes in the southern foothills of the Pyraez mountain range."

The Pyraez range, termed by the Feynapotter Kingdom, referred to the Dariège mountain range. Shepherds frequently traversed it, entering the plains and pastures of Gaia and other provinces.

Without awaiting Lumian's further inquiry, Noelia tucked her hair behind her ear and grinned.

"It's impolite to have a lady standing and chatting with you."

Only then did Lumian invite Noelia to sit on the divan while he chose the armchair.

Noelia gazed at him and continued, "Port Santa's sea prayer ritual dates back to the late Fourth Epoch. It's over a thousand years old and can be considered ancient. The Church once purged it, relocating all relevant insiders and purifying all participants. However, less than a hundred years later, someone here began secretly conducting the sea prayer ritual again."

She didn't explain why she shared this history; it seemed like she was merely recounting.

"They didn't continue purging it afterward?" Lumian inquired.

Noelia pursed her red lips and replied with a solemn expression, "In this matter, the brass's orders are often contradictory. Sometimes, they let our Fertility Order handle it; other times, they signal us to observe for a while. All of this has been permitted by a second-in-command Blessed."

Lumian, drawing knowledge from Madam Magician, the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society, and other sources, had come to understand that the Earth Mother Church operated on two major systems: Favored and Blessed. Favored referred to Beyonders of the Earth and Moon pathways among clergymen. Meanwhile, Blessed encompassed Beyonders of other pathways favored by the Earth Mother. Orders from a Favored required at least one second-in-command Blessed to be valid. Without this, they risked being considered products of the influence of evil gods and demons.

Lumian found the Earth Mother Church's intricate system perplexing, seemingly designed to guard against the Favored. Nevertheless, he believed that there must be a reason behind such complexity.

Having undergone numerous experiences, he became increasingly aware that seemingly inconspicuous rules in the mystical world often held lessons etched in blood.

After a moment of contemplation, Lumian inquired, "Are you a Favored or a Blessed?"

"I'm a Blessed," Noelia replied without delving into the specifics of her pathway.

Lumian nodded slightly, indicating for her to continue.

Noelia smiled and sighed.

"After a long period of repetition, we eventually reached an unspoken agreement to allow the sea prayer ritual. At the very least, it brought prosperity to Port Santa without causing social chaos or significant disruptions beyond the participants.

"That decision was made ages ago, and while ancient dossiers provide a rough understanding, the exact reasons convincing matriarchs, presidents, and archbishops remain elusive. Essentially, the sea prayer ritual has evolved into a traditional folklore in Port Santa, fostering prosperity in maritime trade and fisheries."

Crossing her arms over her chest, Noelia intoned with piety, "Life's precious embrace, the harvest's grace."

Lumian, intrigued, narrowed his eyes and inquired, "Why did you change the prayer gesture?"

Is there a problem?

Noelia opened her eyes and grinned.

"This was a gesture frequently used in the past, but as Earth Mother regained some lost authority, we adopted a new posture for formal occasions."

She rose, positioning her legs slightly apart, hands raised high, and passionately explained to Louis Berry as if preaching.

"The feet connect to the benevolent earth, and the palms reach towards the spiritual sky. In the middle resides the light of life. This is the domain of the Mother of All Things."

One can regain some of Their lost authority? Lumian was puzzled, but that wasn't the focal point.

Noelia settled back into her seat and continued, "While we haven't deciphered the core process of the sea prayer ritual, years of surveillance have yielded some insights.

"The Governor of the Sea, who successfully gains the sea's favor, wields the power to control this stretch of the sea, preventing shipwrecks. However, this seemingly comes at the cost of their lives and something more. Simultaneously, the ritual triggers rapid reproduction and thriving life in the area, ensuring fishermen a bountiful harvest. It also intertwines with fate; families with Maidens of the Sea in their lineage tend to experience good fortune, not just due to preferential treatment."

The sea prayer ritual's effects are intricate, wielding the power of the sea domain and influencing fate, reproduction, and abundance… Lumian struggled to grasp the reasons behind these occurrences.

Noelia peered into Lumian's face, her eyes bright yet gentle, and said, "The committee members of the Fisheries Guild, some villagers from Milo Village, and participants in the core process of the sea prayer ritual have all acquired mystical powers. We once confronted the little devils you encountered. When pursuing certain criminals, we discovered them transformed into lizard-like monsters."

Humanoid lizards? Similar to the Paco family's? Lumian hadn't anticipated obtaining any clues from Noelia.

Noelia smiled.

"Later, we found a commonality among those who can transform into lizard-

like monsters."

"What is it?" Lumian couldn't conceal his curiosity.

Noelia replied with a faint smile, "Their mothers were once Maidens of the Sea."

Maidens of the Sea's children? Child of the Sea? Which of Rubió's siblings did I kill? Not only did he transform into a humanoid lizard, but he also went mad and severely injured his mother? Lumian swiftly connected the dots, sensing he had grasped the essence of the Paco family's commission.

Yet, confusion crept in.

If this information is known to families with Maidens of the Sea, why would the Paco family conceal it from Juan Oro and other committee members in the Fisheries Guild?

Noelia didn't seek his thoughts and teased, "After confirming the link between the lizard-like monsters and the sea prayer ritual, we intentionally alerted the Fisheries Guild committee members. Since then, no such criminals have surfaced. They show discipline and restraint. This is why, at times, I understand why the brass tacitly permit the sea prayer ritual in Port Santa. The participants are more obedient and easily controlled compared to adventurers like you."

Noelia implied: "I just advised you to stay away from the Fisheries Guild. Yet, the next day, you stormed into the Governor of the Sea's residence, pointing a gun at Juan Oro's head. That's much more troublesome than those involved with the sea prayer ritual!"

Lumian smiled, choosing not to comment.

Noelia pondered for a moment, locking eyes with him.

"I'm not sure why you're investigating the sea prayer ritual, and I don't want to know. What I can say is, if your actions endanger all of Port Santa, we will step in and expel you. With that condition, we might offer some assistance."

Lumian picked up the straw hat beside him and pressed it against his chest.

"It would be an honor."

Noelia left the Earth Mother Church's objectives in this matter unspoken, and Lumian chose not to delve into it.

The combat nun of the Fertility Order rose, making her way toward the door.

With her left hand on the handle, she abruptly turned around, her eyes sparkling as she asked with a smile, "Do you want to have a child here?"

Lumian was taken aback.

"Madame, aren't you changing the subject too quickly?"

Noelia's eyes held a maternal glint as she said with pity, "According to our assessment, the sea prayer ritual is at least as dangerous as a Saint or a Grade 1 Sealed Artifact when fully utilized for a short period. I don't know what you're up to, but once you're involved in this matter, you can't escape just because you want to.

"Before that, have you considered leaving a descendant for yourself? I can help you."

Are your Earth Mother Church's combat nuns way of inviting someone to a one-night stand so special? Lumian was momentarily speechless.

Noelia spoke sincerely, "Descendants are the continuation of our lives. Flowers wither and fall to the ground, only to bloom into a more brilliant scenery the next year. Are you really not considering having a descendant?"

"Not for now," Lumian replied with a cold expression.

Noelia expressed regret, "Whenever you think it through, come to me."

With that, she opened the door and walked out.

Chapter 551: Coming One After Another

551 Coming One After Another

As Lumian observed Noelia disappearing down the corridor, he pondered the idea of adding another catchphrase: "You Feynapotterians."

Nevertheless, Noelia's kindness served as a reminder that delving into the sea prayer ritual wasn't a straightforward endeavor. The associated risks demanded the Church of Earth Mother's serious consideration.

Despite this, Lumian believed that many dangers could be sidestepped, and he wasn't inclined to actively confront them.

His primary objective wasn't to unveil the truth behind the sea prayer ritual and eradicate the influence of folklore on Port Santa, preventing its inhabitants from transforming into monsters. His true goal lay in unraveling the details of the April Fool's prank to track down Ultraman and Bard, executing them one by one. With Port Santa plagued by numerous problems and abscesses, Lumian saw no need to expose them; he could withdraw in a timely manner.

Concealing his true motives was a fundamental principle of acting as a Conspirer!

This could lead others to misinterpret his decisions and react incorrectly during critical moments.

After shutting the door, Lumian grabbed the golden straw hat and settled into the recliner. Smirking at the corridor, he muttered to himself with interest, Who will be the next to provide information?

Rubió Paco, who clearly dislikes the Maidens of the Sea and detests such matters, or the families who have lost their positions as committee members of the Fisheries Guild for many years?

Beneath the bright sunlight outside the window, Lumian swiftly flipped through the textbooks he had purchased, hoping to memorize and grasp more relevant knowledge. He couldn't wait until the charms' effects wore off, leaving nothing in his mind.

About an hour later, unfamiliar footsteps echoed through the corridor.

Knock, knock, knock. Another knock resonated on his door.

"Who is it?" Lumian inquired in simple Highlander.

"The book you bought has arrived," the motel owner, Otta Guillaume, replied in Intisian.

The book I bought? When have I ever bought a book? Lumian pondered, standing up thoughtfully. He opened the door and received a cheaply packaged but colorful book from the old man.

The title of the book was "Travel around Feynapotter."

Lumian pretended not to get the title written in Highlander and chuckled at himself.

"I'll have to wait for my interpreter to swing back and decode it for me. Might not even wrap my head around it before I bid Feynapotter farewell by flipping through a dictionary."

Otta Sr. expressed his understanding.

"When I first landed in Port Santa, seven or eight mates shared an Intisian-

Highlander dictionary. None of us dared to venture out solo. But after hanging around a bit and pushing ourselves to chat with the locals, we gradually got the hang of it. Truth be told, Highlander's quite similar to Intisian."

Lumian chatted briefly with Otta Sr. before heading back to his room, sinking into the recliner with "Travel around Feynapotter" in hand.

He turned the book over, gripping its spine and giving it a shake.

A folded white paper tumbled out.

Lumian caught it and flicked it open with a swift motion.

Written on it was Intisian:

"The Maidens of the Sea are also not allowed to leave Port Santa or tie the knot with outsiders. But exceptions have cropped up over the years.

"Feynapotter's women dig romance before tying the knot and chase after love. The ladies of Port Santa are no different. Throughout the past millennium, plenty of Maidens of the Sea have bolted to preserve their love or freedom. Around 30 to 40 have made it out. The most recent case dates back over 20 years. A Maiden of the Sea married an Intisian and had a kid. We're unsure if she's still alive because the Fisheries Guild has been hunting her down.

"Her child's name is Nolfi. You might know her. She's already back in Port Santa."

Nolfi? Batna Comté's lover? She's actually a child of a Maiden of the Sea. She even dragged her "partner" to Port Santa to witness the sea prayer ceremony… Lumian sometimes felt something was off with Nolfi while on the Flying Bird, but he never guessed she was so tied up with the sea prayer ritual.

This made him wonder about Nolfi's real reasons for returning to Port Santa. Batna Comté might find himself in a mind-boggling mess over this romantic fling.

Lumian's eyes shifted down as he read the last line.

"Once you're out of these waters and Port Santa, the mystical powers from the sea prayer ritual weakens significantly. Against folks from other regions, the Fisheries Guild mostly wrangles them using adventurers, bounty hunters, and professional assassins."

Is this a go ahead to meddle with the sea prayer ritual and dig into it? As long as I could slip out of Port Santa and these waters, the Fisheries Guild's committee members would be powerless against me? Lumian had no clue about the identity of the person who delivered the paper and the intel. After all, he hadn't seen many folks' handwriting in Port Santa, but he could unmistakably sense their eagerness and anticipation.

Crimson flames roared to life, consuming the white paper laden with information. Lumian reclined, sipping on Feynapotter Kingdom's famed Manzan, the top-tier white wine produced in specific regions without dilution. He absentmindedly flipped through the book "Travel around Feynapotter" penned in Highlander.

The author raved about Feynapotter Kingdom's diverse culinary delights, praising beef, mutton, and pork while expressing disdain for the local tobacco, likening it to smoking chili.

After a stretch, Lugano returned to the suite with Ludwig, bearing a stack of street snacks—roasted baby octopuses, lamb loin, fried fish, potatoes, corn omelet, and pork rolls.

Lumian had long set aside "Travel around Feynapotter." He rose and addressed Lugano,

"Don't forget to change your appearance tomorrow to fetch our new IDs. Also, figure out where Batna Comté will be in the next two days. I want to share a drink with him."

"Alright, alright." Lugano couldn't fathom why his employer suddenly wanted to locate the finely dressed adventurer, but he sensed it wasn't as simple as a casual drink.

After assigning the task, Lumian grabbed the sun straw hat and casually mentioned as he sauntered toward the door, "I'm stepping out for a bit. I'll be back before dinner."

"D-do you need any translations?" Lugano asked instinctively.

Lumian chuckled in response.

"I'm just taking a stroll, getting a feel for the terrain. No need to chat with anyone. Don't worry, I won't lose my way."

Lugano tersely acknowledged and refrained from probing further.

He trusted that his employer's adept body language skills would make simple communication a breeze.

Once out of Solow Motel, Lumian ambled down the street.

He aimed to set the stage for those attempting to reach him and see if the Fisheries Guild would seize the chance to make a move.

…

Solow Motel, fifth-floor suite.

As Ludwig polished off the fermented grape juice, he leaped from the chair and headed briskly to the washroom.

Lugano slouched on the sofa, reluctant to budge.

After tending to the child for nearly two hours, fatigue had settled in. Lugano yearned for a break. His plan was to gather intel on Batna Comté and rendezvous with the spirited Feynapotter ladies at the bar later in the night.

Ludwig entered the washroom, lifted the toilet lid, and half-closed his eyes.

As he relieved himself with determination, a slim silhouette emerged from the shadows in the corner.

The black shadow took the form of an insect, about the thickness of a finger, with long bristles on its surface resembling spoiled food.

Its bristles fluttered, extending like tentacles, reaching out to touch everything in its path.

As it twisted, the black shadow silently crept up behind Ludwig. It abruptly stood up and plunged its head into Ludwig's cervical spine.

At that moment, it caught sight of the boy's brown eyes.

Abruptly, it froze, holding its shape like a snake rearing its upper body.

Ludwig, at some point, had ceased urinating and half-turned around.

He extended his right palm and seized the black shadow.

The shadow didn't put up a fight.

In the next instant, the chubby boy, Ludwig, shoved the black shadow into his mouth.

Amidst distinct chewing sounds, the lower half of the shadow's body twisted upward, melding with the blurry flesh in front of it.

In the blink of an eye, Ludwig consumed the black shadow as if it were a bowl of Feynapotter noodles.

He licked his lips, appearing as though he wanted another serving.

…

Outside Aquina Street, in the café adorned with flowers on every table.

Along the way, Lumian stumbled upon two street brawls. He snagged a skewer of Port Santa's roasted octopuses for a quick bite, yet no one approached him discreetly, attempted to stuff him with something, or whispered secret messages. There were no covert attacks.

Under the radiant sky and brilliant sun, he chose a quiet corner in a café, ordering a glass of Torres coffee with milk, relishing its rich bitterness with patience.

As time drifted by, a woman donned in a blue veil and an exquisite dress suddenly took a seat across from Lumian.

She scanned the surroundings and swiftly raised the blue fishnet hanging from the brim of her hat.

It wasn't a woman—it was a man.

A man dressed in women's attire, with distinctive features and grayish-blue eyes that couldn't conceal the anxiety on his face.

Lumian's pupils widened.

He recognized the man in the feminine garb.

It was the current Governor of the Sea!

The same Governor of the Sea whom Martha had bowed to in the cathedral-

like building, served by numerous maids!

He sought me out? The one coming to me is actually him? Lumian was both astonished and oddly convinced that this made sense.

Noticing that the adventurer Louis Berry had identified him, the Governor of the Sea lowered the blue veil, shrouding his face once more.

Then, he hushed his voice and spoke in Highlander, filled with desire and concern, "Save me! Save me!"

Chapter 552: Fake and Reality

552 Fake and Reality

Lumian didn't find the current Governor of the Sea's plea for help surprising.

He raised his left hand and touched his ear. In Intisian, he asked, "What are you saying? I only understand the word 'help.'"

The current Governor of the Sea, disguised as a woman, appeared dumbfounded, as if the language barrier was unexpected.

Having racked his brains and risked his life to reach Louis Berry, the Governor of the Sea found himself unable to convey his request due to the language barrier!

Maintaining his pretense of not understanding Highlander, Lumian calmly took out a dark-red fountain pen and a stack of post-it notes, handing them over.

"Write down everything you want to say. I'll get someone to translate it."

This time, he used Intisian again but gestured with the fountain pen to guide the other party on what to do.

If the Governor of the Sea is illiterate and unable to write Highlander, it would be troublesome… I would have to resort to communicating with individual words and body language. I don't want to reveal my knowledge of Highlander yet… Lumian thought with concern.

In Intis and Feynapotter, there were numerous illiterate individuals.

The Governor of the Sea, after a brief moment of confusion, grasped Louis Berry's intentions. He took the fountain pen and note and began scribbling.

Lumian observed with a composed expression. Despite being on the opposite side, with a Hunter's vision and spatial imagination, he easily discerned the content of the written message:

"Please help me. Rescue me out of Port Santa! I'm not the true Governor of the Sea!"

Not the true Governor of the Sea… Lumian suppressed the urge to raise his eyebrows and refrained from directly asking, maintaining an appearance of complete ignorance of the words.

He desired to see what additional information the current Governor of the Sea would reveal before considering his next set of questions.

The man dressed in feminine attire paused for two seconds before continuing,

"The true Governor of the Sea died during last year's sea prayer ritual."

Dead? The genuine Governor of the Sea perished during the sea prayer ritual? Lumian felt a sudden surge of joy at this revelation.

I can finally see the tail of the key members of April Fool's!

One consequence of their prank last year was the predetermined Governor of the Sea's failure to successfully perform the sea prayer ritual. He suffered a backlash from Beyonder powers and lost his life!

This aligned with the revelations from Otta Guillaume, the Solow Motel owner, and his son, a government department clerk, regarding an increase in shipwrecks, a decline in fish harvests, and disrupted trade.

The imposter Governor of the Sea wrote swiftly, as if fearing someone might catch up to him at any moment.

"I was chosen by Juan Oro and the Fisheries Guild to impersonate the Governor of the Sea for a year because I resemble the true Governor of the Sea. This was to prevent fishermen and sea merchants from knowing about their grave mistake and the slip-up that caused the sea prayer ritual to fail. Such a failure has not occurred in recent centuries.

"Now that I know this secret, they won't let me leave alive. After the Governor of the Sea handover ritual is completed and the vigil begins, I'll undoubtedly be killed.

"I never wanted to play the role of Governor of the Sea. It was a blasphemy against the sea, but they pointed a gun at me, claiming they had already killed someone who refused to cooperate.

"The Church and the government won't intervene in the Fisheries Guild's affairs. You're the only one daring enough to infiltrate the Governor of the Sea's residence and confront Juan Oro with a gun. I can only seek your help. Over the past year, I've saved up quite a bit of money. I can give it all to you—

100,000 gold risot!

"I've heard about your recent exploits. I believe you have the strength. I implore you to help me!"

Quite educated… Lumian, after studying the three completed post-it notes, sensed that the imposter Governor of the Sea differed from ordinary fishermen, vendors, or workers based on his grammar and vocabulary.

Phew… After jotting down his reasons and request, the fake Governor of the Sea set aside the fountain pen and slid three post-it notes filled with Highlander words to Lumian.

With a quick glance, Lumian contemplated using Highlander words and body language.

"Help? Your. Family?"

The fake Governor of the Sea hastily wrote down a response: "My parents passed away a few years ago. I don't have any other relatives. I was originally an employee of the Fisheries Company."

It's no surprise Juan Oro and his associates dared to "kidnap" this person to be the Governor of the Sea. The Earth Mother Church refrains from meddling in the Fisheries Guild's internal affairs. If it affects other citizens, they will still handle it… Lumian pretended to ask first and planned to find someone later to translate the response.

"Servant girls. Pregnant?"

He inquired about the maids in the Governor of the Sea's residence and the reason for their pregnancies.

The fake Governor of the Sea, concealed behind a blue veil, displayed no change in expression. His right hand trembled slightly as he wrote: "The Governor of the Sea will receive the same treatment as the ruler of Port Santa. He can appoint anyone from Milo Village, the Fisheries Guild, and those sea merchant families as his maids and guards. He can do whatever he wants and directly visit them, enjoying the treatment an owner can receive.

"I couldn't help it."

Observing this, Lumian nearly laughed aloud.

Even in captivity, he's focused on such matters? Does he believe he can't escape and is resigned to his imminent demise? Is he seeking enjoyment while he still can?

The fake Governor of the Sea added: "I can also tax those people and forcefully allocate their market share, but they will listen to me. However, I dare not go too far. Otherwise, Juan Oro will privately whip me with his cane and threaten to kill me."

So, this is the source of your savings? Well, he can't control the weather or the tides. After all, he's merely a false Governor… Lumian took the fake

Governor of the Sea's new post-it note and pondered for a moment before asking in a clumsy manner, "Original. Governor. Where?"

He inquired about the whereabouts of the former Governors of the Sea.

Noelia, the combat nun of the Fertility Order, hadn't raised this issue before. It was unclear if she deemed it unimportant, chose not to disclose it for some reason, or lacked the corresponding information.

The fake Governor of the Sea wrote: "I don't know. I heard a maid from Milo Village mention it before. She's Juan Oro's granddaughter. She said that all the Governors of the Sea will eventually return to the sea."

Return to the sea… That doesn't sound promising… Heh heh, designating Juan Oro's granddaughter as your maid. Are you seeking revenge for the oppression from her grandfather? And Juan Oro agreed to it, indirectly retaliating by lashing you? Juan Oro and his sons are married to Maidens of the Sea, and there's a chance his granddaughter is a lizard-like monster… How would you feel if you knew you were sleeping with a humanoid lizard? Lumian criticized the fake Governor of the Sea internally.

He seemed to ponder for a moment, as if unable to comprehend the other party's writing, and changed the question.

"Juan Oro. Powerful?"

The fake Governor of the Sea suddenly shuddered.

Swiftly, he wrote: "He's very powerful. He's a monster! He can suffocate people and cause them to die in pain!"

After writing this, the fake Governor of the Sea glanced at the sun outside the window. He set down the fountain pen, stood up, and bowed to Lumian.

Then, swaying in his elegant dress, he made his way toward the café's back door and departed.

He appeared anxious about his "disappearance" during the shopping trip potentially raising suspicions from the bodyguards.

Lumian observed his departure, crumpling the post-it notes into a ball in his palm.

Crimson flames trickled from between his fingers before swiftly dissipating.

After sprinkling the ashes into the bottle with flowers, Lumian picked up the partially finished Torres coffee and took a sip.

Lumian's mind raced as he analyzed the information that concerned him the most.

Is what the imposter said true? Could an ordinary person find an opportunity to escape their bodyguards and approach me? Is it possible that Juan Oro and the others secretly prompted him to set a trap for me, waiting for me to fall into it?

During the April Fool's prank, the specially crafted golden ring, lacking Beyonder powers, was concealed within the lamb's body. The lamb was taken as a sacrifice on the Governor of the Sea's ship…

Is April Fool's meant to substitute something with this ring? Is there another sacrificial ring similar to it?

Did the Governor of the Sea's appointment fail last year because the crucial sacrificial ring turned out to be a fake and couldn't be utilized?

This implies that key members of April Fool's or their subordinates are on the special ship. Otherwise, they wouldn't have been able to deceive the committee members of the Fisheries Guild and surreptitiously replace important items…

Based on the information I've gathered, there aren't many sailors on that ship. The only passengers are the Governor of the Sea, four Maidens of the Sea, and a few individuals guiding them through the ritual. Who among them is connected to April Fool's?

The Fisheries Guild must have conducted an investigation afterward. I wonder if they've drawn any conclusions…

I can't dismiss the possibility that the deceased Governor of the Sea is linked to April Fool's. Maybe he was completely deceived, thinking that by changing the ring and causing the ritual to fail, he could avoid returning to the sea like the previous Governors of the Sea. However, Bard, Mad Lady, and Ultraman may not have cared about his life at all…

What's the purpose of April Fool's? Is it merely a prank for their own amusement, or does it harbor a deeper motive?

Ordinary April Fool's members might engage purely for entertainment. As for the key members, truth and lies are invariably intertwined…

Sitting in the café until the sun neared the horizon, Lumian donned the straw hat and leisurely made his way back to the Solow Motel.

Late at night, Lugano returned from the bar, emanating the scent of alcohol. He approached Lumian and said,

"I've inquired with adventurers and bounty hunters about Batna and his lover. They all claim not to have seen them in the past few days. As soon as they arrived at Port Santa, it was as if they vanished."

Vanished? Nolfi, being the child of a Maiden of the Sea, wouldn't be so clandestine if she were merely returning to Port Santa and the Fisheries Guild… Could she be involved in something related to the sea prayer ritual and convinced Batna to join her? Yet, they were targeted upon their return? Perhaps she possesses significant knowledge… I can't personally search for them right now. I need to be more visible as an adventurer… Lugano isn't the most reliable source… What about Noelia, the nun? A flurry of speculations raced through Lumian's mind.

As his thoughts raced, he suddenly realized the kind of assistance he should seek from the Knight of Swords.

Chapter 553: Half-Fairy

553 Half-Fairy

Lumian remained composed, not rushing to summon the messenger of the Minor Arcana, the Knight of Swords. His patience persisted as he waited for a particular individual.

Since expressing a strong desire to investigate the sea prayer ritual and taking action, only three waves of people had contacted him today, openly or covertly. Yet, the person he awaited the most had not shown up.

Maybe Rubió Paco prefers to wait until late at night when there's no one around? Shaking off his thoughts, he smiled at Lugano.

"Batna just began his fling with Nolfi. He might want to explore all the villages, towns, pastures, and vineyards around Port Santa before the sea prayer ritual. If you hear anything about him later, inform me. There's no need to deliberately inquire."

Lugano didn't think it was a big deal and smiled understandingly.

"Maybe he even took on some missions along the way—earning some bucks while traveling."

Once the interpreter and Ludwig retired to their rooms, Lumian settled into a recliner and casually perused the Highlander textbooks under the soft glow of the gas wall lamp.

As time passed, the night grew quieter.

Lumian, confirming no further intel would arrive that night, pondered the situation.

Stroking his chin, he pondered this matter.

It seems more people are observing. Unless the great adventurer's investigation makes a breakthrough and remains unscathed, they won't easily place their bets until I demonstrate greater reliability or value.

The trio who reached out today possesses distinct traits. One affiliated with the Earth Mother Church, insulated from losses even if their gamble fails. Would the Fisheries Guild risk confrontation with the cathedral and the Fertility Order?

The second, the imposter Governor of the Sea, faces high odds of death during the sea prayer ritual. He'd clutch at any chance for survival. Additionally, his lack of confidence in both the Earth Mother Church and Port Santa's government makes him value the adventurer capable of defeating the Demon Warlock more. However, his plea might be a trap by the Fisheries Guild.

The third, elusive figure hinted at useful clues without divulging the sea prayer ritual's secret…

After careful contemplation, Lumian gained deeper insight into the mindsets and choices of various factions.

Conspiracies often manipulated human emotions, exploiting the circumstances at hand. Lumian found himself increasingly fascinated by these two aspects.

This was both a daily routine and an essential necessity.

Putting aside the Highlander textbook, Lumian returned to his bedroom.

Closing the door, a black mark on his body emitted a faint glow.

Bottle of Fiction!

Lumian enveloped the entire room within the Bottle of Fiction. The entry conditions were simple—only spirit world creatures.

Ripple-like light briefly adorned the walls, floor, and ceiling of the bedroom before swiftly vanishing, leaving everything appearing entirely ordinary.

Only then did Lumian compose the letter and arrange the ritual. He sanctified the dagger, erected a wall of spirituality, and lit the candle representing him.

Stepping back, he spoke in ancient Hermes, "I!"

Then, switching to Hermes, he said, "I summon in my name:

"A peculiar creature wandering above the world, a half-fairy who fiddles with melodic strings, a messenger that belongs solely to the Knight of Swords…"

The orange candle flame transformed instantly into a deep blue hue, expanding to half the size of a human.

In the blue radiance, a figure of blood-red hue emerged from the candle flame.

Resembling a female human in form, it shared traits with a creature Lumian had encountered in Cordu's ruins. Devoid of skin or external coverings, it exposed bloody muscles, bluish-black blood vessels, ghastly white tendons, oily yellow fat, and large red or white fascia.

Lumian studied the 1.7-meter-tall Knight of Swords messenger and pondered silently, Does Half-Fairy mean it's divided internally?

I assumed it would be either split vertically or horizontally…

Don't you know how to fiddle with melodic strings? Where are they?

With these musings racing through his mind, Lumian handed the folded letter to the messenger and politely uttered in Hermes, "Kindly deliver this to the Knight of Swords."

As his strength grew, Lumian became increasingly aware that most messengers he encountered could be lethal—if unafraid to unleash the corruptive source, Termiboros.

Though Lumian couldn't gauge the strength of the Knight of Swords' messenger—the Half-Fairy—all his experience urged him to maintain politeness.

The black and white eyeballs of the Half-Fairy, embedded in the blood-colored face, darted around before gently nodding and accepting the letter.

It spoke with a clear, pleasant voice akin to a mountain stream's flow, "I'll deliver it promptly."

How melodious. It's like a bard strumming a guitar… Lumian snapped out of his reverie.

He suddenly grasped the reason for the messenger's melodic string prefix.

"Thank you." He bowed politely.

Observing the Half-Fairy about to retreat into the blue candle flame, Lumian couldn't suppress his curiosity and inquired, "What would you do if given human skin?"

The Half-Fairy fixed its black-and-white eyes on Lumian for a few seconds.

As it delved into the blue candle flame, it left behind a melodious voice, "I'll put it on."

You'll embody whoever's skin you wear? Has the Half-Fairy always sought its other half? Lumian speculated.

At that moment, he recalled an unfinished promise.

Help the Abscessed Hand find its body!

This pledge determined whether Lumian could attain godhood and advance to Sequence 4. However, being only a Sequence 6, he wasn't in a rush.

…

Late at night, in Trier's market district, within an empty room.

Franca, clad in an assassin suit, was having her first face-to-face encounter with 007.

As moments drifted by, 007 strode in, sporting a brown lion headgear and a double-breasted coat.

After confirming his identity, Franca pushed back her hood, emerging from the shadows.

"What brings us to this in-person discussion?" 007 inquired, his brow furrowed.

His instincts screamed to decline, yet he sensed the gravity of the situation. Failing to act promptly could result in a colossal catastrophe.

Ultimately, he acceded to Hidden Blade's request for a meeting.

Franca chuckled, emotions swirling within.

"It's a good thing."

"I'm skeptical when it comes from you, Hidden Blade," 007 expressed his concern openly.

Franca clarified her reason for requesting an "offline" meeting, "It's true. I need your help to find someone. Telegrams can't convey a portrait. I can't craft a digital image using just words and dots, can I?"

007 regarded Franca with suspicion.

"Simply seeking help to locate someone? No ulterior motives?"

Franca chuckled.

"For now, that's all I can divulge."

"That only heightens my apprehension." 007 keenly sensed the search for this individual might harbor a crucial issue. Otherwise, Hidden Blade, having witnessed catastrophic events, wouldn't have taken it so seriously. She wouldn't have insisted on an offline meeting and handing over the portrait personally. More likely, she would have left it somewhere for retrieval.

Franca produced a portrait, drawn through dream divination and ritualistic magic, and passed it to 007.

Upon receiving it, 007's hand naturally emitted a sunlight-like glow, revealing the photo-like drawing in the dark night.

The depicted figure wore a black robe, with his head slightly turned, revealing very short dark hair that seemed freshly grown. The facial contours on his side profile were gentle, and his sickly pale-white skin contrasted with his dark brown eyes, which were not sunken enough.

Initially, 007 perceived nothing remarkable, but trusting Hidden Blade's knack for stirring trouble, he scrutinized it for more than ten seconds.

Beneath the lion's headgear, his brow furrowed as he whispered, "This doesn't seem like someone from any country in the Northern Continent."

Franca smiled playfully and self-deprecatingly.

"Don't you think he resembles us from before we transmigrated?"

007 froze, as if struck by lightning.

He studied the drawing repeatedly and fell silent for nearly 20 seconds before saying,

"Hidden Blade, do you understand what you're saying?"

Franca raised her head slightly and said in a deep voice, "I suspect he came from that country from our world.

"Muggle, I, and the others found signs of interaction between both worlds before!"

"When? What signs?" 007 interjected, fighting the urge to grab Hidden Blade's shoulder and shake her for every bit of information.

Franca chuckled.

"I'm not at liberty to answer you. I can only reveal it after discussing with Muggle and the others. There are many secrets involved. First, discreetly search for the person in the portrait. I encountered him on the fourth level of the catacombs."

007 struggled to contain his impatience, resisting the temptation to handcuff Hidden Blade for details. Through gritted teeth, he said, "Can't you guys discuss it first before involving me?"

I was just considerate of your emotions, afraid that you'd lose control upon receiving so much information at one go… Franca let out a hollow laugh and replied,

"It's not time to meet Muggle and the others yet. I need to find him urgently, afraid he might leave Trier.

"Calm down, calm down. You can't hide your desire to kill me."

Franca smiled sheepishly, fading into the shadows.

Holding the portrait, 007 took a deep breath and exhaled slowly.

…

Feynapotter Kingdom, Port Santa, Solow Motel.

After breakfast, Lumian had just returned to the master bedroom when he sensed a sudden chill.

Simultaneously, a tarot card materialized on the desk.

The card depicted a knight running with a sword in hand.

Minor Arcana card, Knight of Swords!

Chapter 554: Favor

554 Favor

Lumian's gaze fixated on the Minor Arcana card before he noticed another person standing in front of the full-body mirror in the room.

The man sported a white shirt and a black vest, his face unusually pale and his brown hair tousled, suggesting he had just woken up.

For some inexplicable reason, Lumian sensed a conflicting demeanor in this person—elusive yet restrained. The brown eyes held an indescribable weight, akin to staring into an abyss.

"Knight of Swords?" Lumian inquired.

The man nodded subtly and responded, "Seven of Wands, how may I assist you?"

Surprised, Lumian questioned, "How do you know I'm the Seven of Wands?" Lumian hadn't disclosed his exact code name in the letter, merely stating he sought help from the Knight of Swords as guided by Madam Magician.

The Knight of Swords spoke slowly, as if holding back something.

"Ma'am Hermit informed me that the Seven of Wands, affiliated with Madam Magician, would soon arrive in Feynapotter, possibly in need of intel or assistance."

Madam Magician intentionally communicated with Ma'am Hermit about me, Lumian realized.

"I need your help locating two individuals in Port Santa and the surrounding seas. Try not to alert any factions."

"Be specific," the Knight of Swords replied, economical with his words.

Lumian shared Batna Comté and Nolfi's details, adding, "I'm not certain if they're still alive. They might have become corpses by now."

As he spoke, he handed two photo-like sketches to the Knight of Swords—a unique skill he'd acquired from Aurore's grimoires and his expertise in ritualistic magic. These images, directly replicated from his mind, bore an uncanny resemblance to photographs.

The ritualistic magic involved in creating such images demanded a suitable and secure target for prayer—a practice more common among official Beyonders who had orthodox gods to appeal to. Wild Beyonders rarely resorted to praying to dangerous entities for trivial matters. Being part of the Tarot Club, Lumian straddled both worlds, with the ability to seek aid from Mr. Fool or tap into Madam Magician's strength.

The Knight of Swords studied the photo-like sketches before affirming, "I'll help you find them as soon as possible."

There was no demand for payment or any immediate request, prompting Lumian to sigh.

Organizations do have their advantages!

Internal assistance often translated into favors, subtly binding individuals to reciprocal obligations. Some preferred setting clear prices rather than owing favors,

but Lumian didn't entertain such thoughts. Securing the Knight of Swords' presence and help was already a considerable favor in itself.

He pondered for a moment and then inquired, "What mission do you have in Feynapotter? Do you need my assistance?"

The Knight of Swords paused briefly before responding, "The matter in Feynapotter is wrapping up, but I'll be heading to the Southern Continent soon. I might require your help there."

"Sure thing," Lumian agreed.

Intrigued, he asked, "Is Ma'am Hermit also overseeing matters in the Southern Continent?"

Wasn't she too busy?

Madam Magician had indicated that this Major Arcana card holder primarily dealt with sea-related affairs and a clandestine organization dedicated to the Hidden Sage, with little involvement in the Southern Continent.

The Knight of Swords replied in a subdued tone, "It's a personal matter, unrelated to Ma'am Hermit."

"Got it," Lumian acknowledged. Many of his past tasks weren't orchestrated by Madam Magician, and even his mission in Port Santa to track down April Fool's key member was considered personal business if it didn't involve the Celestial Worthy.

After a two-second pause, the Knight of Swords added, "Moreover, I'm only temporarily under Ma'am Hermit's command."

What does he mean by temporarily subordinate? Can one switch to other Major Arcana card holders in the future? Lumian wondered.

Without explanation, the Knight of Swords' form suddenly turned ethereal and disappeared.

Lumian, without activating his Spirit Vision, couldn't catch the departing figure in time.

It doesn't feel like teleportation or blending into the shadows… After a quick assessment, he changed into a brownish-green short-sleeved shirt and loose brownish-yellow pants commonly seen in Port Santa.

Exiting the master bedroom, Lumian tossed the Lie earring to Lugano.

"Go to Valerio and get the new IDs. Remember the face you used when you last saw him."

"I remember it clearly." Lugano took the Lie earring.

As Lugano was about to proceed with his disguise, Lumian halted him.

"Find a secluded spot after leaving the room to use it. When you return, shift back to your original appearance before entering the motel."

Doesn't this mean I'll have this mystical item to myself for a while? Aren't you worried I might take off with it? It's not just unique; it's valuable! Lugano refrained from probing further. Following his employer's instructions, he took the Lie earring, a bag containing his disguise, and exited the room.

Observing Lugano's departure, Lumian picked up a golden straw hat and addressed Ludwig, "There's plenty of food in my bedroom. Stay put until I'm back."

"Sure thing," Ludwig agreed, seemingly eager.

Would someone exploit the absence of his guardians to attack him, the boy?

Lumian, passing by the sofa, casually placed the golden straw hat on Ludwig's head.

Simultaneously, he switched to a common round-rimmed felt hat and left the suite gradually.

He wasn't concerned about Ludwig being alone in the motel. In fact, those who might come into contact with the boy faced more significant risks.

Lumian adjusted his hat in the corridor and activated Shadow Transformation.

Swiftly, he transformed into a pure shadow, blending into the darkness at the base of the walls on both sides.

In the dark, veiled void, Lumian inhaled the scent of the gray amber perfume he had deliberately left on the Lie earring, using it to track Lugano.

His intent wasn't merely to determine whether the interpreter was problematic but to anticipate a potential attack.

With adventurer Louis Berry probing the sea prayer ritual and presenting himself as resolute and radical, it was likely the Fisheries Guild and Milo Village would swiftly react in a decisive manner, eliminating this outsider to dissuade others and factions from clandestinely stirring.

In this scenario, Lumian, Lugano, and Ludwig were at risk.

He specifically tasked Lugano to seek Valerio alone for the IDs, intending to see if Juan Oro and others had their eyes on his companions, seizing an opportunity to strike Lugano.

This strategy allowed Lumian to swiftly intervene if needed, rescuing Lugano while potentially neutralizing some Beyonders from the Fisheries Guild, showcasing the adventurer's strength and instilling confidence in onlookers, compelling further attempts.

However, the Fisheries Guild and Milo Village might not act immediately. They might feign vulnerability, luring hidden adversaries to reveal themselves before eliminating them in one fell swoop.

Lumian shadowed Lugano to Valerio's underground casino, observing him pay the remaining 50 gold risot for two local IDs.

No attack… Could it be the Fisheries Guild is fishing, or did they fail to recognize Lugano after he used the Lie earring? Lumian pondered the potential reasons while traversing through the shadows.

Lugano hurriedly avoided lingering on the streets, well aware that his employer had incurred the wrath of the Fisheries Guild. He feared being ambushed by those unwilling to target Lumian, dragged into an alley, and subjected to a brutal beating.

Seeking refuge in a crevice between two buildings near Solow Motel, he swiftly reverted to his altered appearance. Removing the Lie earring, he switched into his customary black formal suit,

finally exhaling a sigh of relief. He turned onto Aquina Street and made his way back to the motel's entrance.

Several tramps lay dozing on both sides of the street, basking lazily in the sunlight.

Lumian was aware that unlike the severe tramp situation in the Loen Kingdom and the Intis Republic, Feynapotter's tramp issue was less acute due to fertile soil, ample pastures, and the Church's modified agricultural methods, resulting in surplus food production.

Here, food was notably cheaper, about 15 to 20% lower compared to Intis and other countries. Previously, before the Loen Kingdom began importing food from Feynapotter, the price of rye bread of the same weight was nearly twice as high.

Despite the abundance, bankrupt farmers, herders, and city dwellers ended up as tramps due to land acquisition, loan sharks, and other reasons. However, they received free food from various sources like the cathedral of Earth Mother, the Fertility Order, government departments, and charitable organizations, which although not filling, prevented starvation, allowing them to recuperate and find new opportunities.

As Lugano neared Solow Motel, Lumian, concealed in the shadows, sensed a disturbance.

Three tramps on the street abruptly stiffened, adjusting their postures unnaturally.

In an instant, they sprang to their feet like puppet marionettes, drawing revolvers in an odd manner and aiming at Lugano from three different angles.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Their white-eyed state left Lugano no room to evade as they pulled their triggers successively.

Chapter 555: Monster Illustrated

555 Monster Illustrated

It wasn't until three tramps pointed revolvers at him that Lugano sprang into action.

As a seasoned bounty hunter, he had no time to discern where the assailants planned to shoot. He pushed off with strength in his feet, swiftly lunging to the side.

He dodged two bullets, but the third one was too close, altering his trajectory

—inevitably striking him.

In midair, Lugano did something unconventional.

Instead of curling up to shield vital spots, he extended his body, using his palm to shield his chest.

Bang!

The bullet connected with his right rib, unleashing a vivid spray of blood.

With a thud, Lugano landed on the street, rolling forward to evade subsequent shots.

In the midst of his lunge, Lumian's form materialized from the shadows by the roadside. He delivered a powerful punch to the tramp who had just fired.

With a resounding thud, the tramp's eyes rolled back, and he crumpled, unconscious.

Lumian returned to the shadows and swiftly moved behind another tramp. Before he could fire a second shot, Lumian punched him behind the ear.

As the tramp collapsed, Lugano skillfully evaded the second bullet fired by the remaining assailant.

In that tense moment, passersby and elderly women chatting on the street scattered, desperately seeking cover. The surroundings seemed eerily vacant.

Shadows danced as Lumian emerged from the darkness beside the last assailant. Extending his right palm, he seized the other's neck.

Almost simultaneously, the assailant's mouth opened naturally, emitting a slender black shadow.

An insect, as thick as a finger, with tentacle-like bristles floating on its body, lunged straight for Lumian's neck.

"Hmph!"

Two pale-white beams of light flickered in Lumian's nostrils. The slender, peculiar black insect lost its strength, gently descending into his raised left palm.

As anticipated… Lumian withdrew his right hand from the tramp's neck, unfazed.

The tramp's eyes returned to normal. Clutching his revolver, he staggered backward, leaning against the wall before slumping to the ground in a daze.

Lumian paid him no heed. Utilizing the shadows, he swiftly approached an unconscious tramp, noticing a small, bloodless wound on the back of his cervical spine.

Another slender, bristle-covered black insect darted out, attempting escape. Lumian's hand, engulfed in crimson flames, seized it. After a few struggles, the insect emitted a cooked fragrance.

Subsequently, Lumian employed a similar method to handle the strange black insect emerging from another tramp's body.

During this procedure, Lugano half-squatted on the street, his left palm flickering with a clear light as he pressed it against the gunshot wound on his right rib.

The charred wound immediately contracted, ceasing to ooze blood.

Drawing a dagger, Lugano skillfully "picked" a yellow bullet from the wound with precision and efficacy.

With that accomplished, he generated a faint light in his left palm, pressing it against the wound.

The injury squirmed and swiftly fused, reducing to a fifth of its original size in no time.

Lugano had intentionally stretched, hoping the bullet would hit a spot he could conveniently handle!

As he retrieved a bandage to tend to the remaining wound, Lumian approached, extending his free right palm.

Understanding his employer's gesture, Lugano returned the Lie earring, expressing relief, "Fortunately, I'm a Doctor. As long as I'm not killed on the spot, gunshot wounds aren't a big deal."

Silently, Lumian donned the silver Lie earring. Leaning down, he pressed and swiped at Lugano's wound, transferring it to the back of his right hand.

Due to the disparity in location and Lugano's pre-treatment, the wound regressed into a small scrape—one akin to scraping against a rough wall.

"…" Lugano stared at the wound that didn't even require a bandage, falling into a prolonged silence.

Lumian smiled and remarked, "Why else do you think I let you carry Lie?"

"…" Lugano gaped, uncertain of what to say.

Surveying the area, Lumian instructed, "Take the three tramps' guns and wait for the police to arrive. Report that you were attacked.

"After giving your statement, if there's nothing else, take Ludwig to the Fertility Order's entrance and have them uphold justice and maintain order in Port Santa."

"Alright, alright." Lugano hurriedly stood up.

Just as he took two steps toward the dazed tramp, realization struck. He turned around and blurted, "What about you? Where are you going?"

In his haste, he had forgotten to use honorifics.

Lumian simply chuckled, saying nothing.

I sent you to the Fertility Order to inform them of my intentions—to let them know!

Lumian proceeded towards Solow Motel, leaving crimson flames in his wake that incinerated the blood dripped by Lugano.

As he advanced, Lumian lowered his voice and asked, "Temiboros, do you recognize these insects?"

Termiboros remained silent.

Upon reaching the suite on the fifth floor, Lumian observed Ludwig eagerly awaiting him.

His heart stirred as he spread his left palm, revealing three black insects. Casually, he inquired, "Do you know what these are?"

Ludwig nodded obediently, speaking swiftly, "Batings Black Insect, a creature from Planet Heveen 3. Rich in various proteins and possessing high energy levels. They invade human bodies via the cervical spine, controlling their nervous systems to manipulate them to their advantage.

"These Batings Black Insects ceased evolving generations ago. While controlling the nervous system, the host's movements stiffen, and their eyes roll back.

"They seldom directly kill the host, but their larvae, once laid, absorb the host's energy, indirectly leading to their demise.

"In ancient times, many of their ancestors received boons. Though their descendants no longer possess these, their body structures adapted to the boon's power were inherited, eventually evolving into this special species with minor Beyonder-level powers.

"Consider it a special spirit world creature or a degenerated Beyonder creature."

After the long explanation, Ludwig gazed at Lumian longingly, asking, "That's all I have to say. Can I eat them now?"

You really know… You make it sound so real. The Batings Black Insect, Planet Heveen 3. What's happening… The alien planets Aurore mentioned? Lumian was taken aback.

Lumian wasn't surprised that Ludwig had the desire to consume the Batings Black Insects.

This guy could even gnaw on live rats!

The insects even emitted a rather pleasant fragrance after being roasted.

Lumian stared at Ludwig for a few seconds before handing over the three Batings Black Insects in his hand.

Ludwig didn't hide his delight. He swiftly devoured two of the roasted insects, relishing the explosion of juices in his mouth.

He half-closed his eyes, and an unusual fluctuation seemed to surge within him.

Lumian furrowed his brow in confusion but refrained from intervening.

Having used the Mystery Prying Glasses to discover that there appeared to be something beneath Ludwig's skin, coupled with Ludwig's daily behavior and the Church of the God of Knowledge and Wisdom's stance, Lumian speculated that the boy was a monster in human guise, sealed by the Church to carry out tasks inconvenient for deploying clergymen.

Regarding the Reader pathway controlled by the Church of the God of Knowledge and Wisdom, it held various applications at the Body of Heart and Mind level. It was reasonable to assume why Ludwig's mind had suffered damage after being sealed, rendering him seemingly foolish.

After 20 to 30 seconds, Ludwig opened his eyes and rushed to the dining table. Grabbing a small steel table knife, he carefully placed the remaining Batings Black Insect on the tablecloth and skillfully cut it open, removing numerous black fascias.

Ludwig poured a glass of Manzan and arranged the fascia and the shell of the Batings Black Insect on the table, adding the black juice squeezed from the insect's body.

Lumian observed as the pale-golden liquor swiftly transformed into a dark-red, almost black hue, emitting dense bubbles.

Once the bubbles subsided, Ludwig lifted the peculiar cocktail.

Only then did he remember Lumian's presence. Stammering, he asked, "Can I—can I drink a little?"

A sealed Body of Heart and Mind indeed… Lumian smiled and sighed.

"Drink up."

Gulp! Gulp! Ludwig finished the small amount of dark-red nearly black liquor and expressed satisfaction to Lumian, saying, "After concocting the Batings Black Insect's bodily fluids, it can enhance the physique of those who drink it for the first time to a certain extent. It grants everyone the ability to paralyze primate creatures within two hours. Yes, it will only be effective through contact."

Th-this is turning the Batings Black Insect into something akin to charms? Moreover, it provides permanent effects and short-term Beyonder powers… Amidst Lumian's surprise, he sensed that Ludwig had undergone significant changes.

He had never demonstrated the ability to prepare such food before!

Lumian didn't delve deeper and calmly remarked, "Take Lugano to the Fertility Order's entrance later and ensure he informs Noelia about the attack."

"Alright." In a good mood, Ludwig readily agreed.

…

Meanwhile at the port district—while Ludwig and Lugano arrived at the Fertility Order.

Wearing a golden straw hat, Lumian strolled towards the square dominated by an Ocean Waves statue. His attention focused on the grayish-black house adorned with the Port Santa Fisheries Guild's sign.

The four- or five-story castle-like ancient structure was rumored to be over a millennium old, having been destroyed and rebuilt centuries ago.

Lumian's eyes traced the intricate symbols on the wall, which included iron hooks and fishing nets. Adjusting his straw hat, he proceeded towards the Fisheries Guild.

Chapter 556: Violent Beating

556 Violent Beating

The encampment of the Fertility Order in Port Santa sprawled along the city's edge, nestled near the suburbs. It claimed an entire street, complete with fields, orchards, and a variety of livestock, providing a self-sufficient haven for the nuns when they weren't on missions.

Lugano gripped Ludwig's hand and raised his eyes to the green vines entwining the cloister's spire, with the Sacred Emblem of Life at its center. A simple depiction of a baby amidst wheat ears, flowers, spring water, and other symbols. Turning to Noelia, he uttered, "I was attacked. Just wrapped up my statement at the police station."

Noelia, adorned with a black hat adorned with white patterns, blending religion and combat, furrowed her brow and inquired, "Where's Louis Berry?"

Rather than delving into the specifics of Lugano's assault, she honed in on the whereabouts of Louis Berry, the great adventurer.

Lugano shook his head and replied earnestly, "I don't know. He told me to come here after giving my statement and inform you that I was attacked."

Noelia's expression shifted to solemnity.

…

In the bustling port district, standing before the robust grayish-black edifice of the Fisheries Guild, Lumian, now garbed in a white shirt, black vest, and brown pants, topped with a golden straw hat, casually strode to the building.

The two guards stationed here lacked guns, carrying only straight swords on their backs and daggers at their waists, blending in with the multitude of passersby.

"Who are you looking for?" Both guards extended their hands simultaneously, halting Lumian's advance.

Lumian couldn't "comprehend" Highlander. Without hesitation, he drew his revolver, pointed it towards the sky, and squeezed the trigger.

Amidst the gunshot's echo, he slipped between the two guards, entering the castle-like abode of the Fisheries Guild.

The guards exchanged uncertain glances but refrained from intervening.

One of them dashed towards the port's police station, while the other hurried into the grayish-black building, aiming to report to his superior and seek guidance.

Clutching his revolver, Lumian advanced at a measured pace. Beneath the puzzled stares of the staff, who hastily sidestepped, he traversed the hall and ascended the stairs leading to the committee member's office.

Just as he approached the second floor, a figure appeared before him.

Bronze-hued skin, broad and sturdy physique, black hair, and blue eyes characterized the young man who had aided the Fisheries Guild's president, Juan Oro.

He was Fernandez Oro, the old man's grandson.

Fernandez glared at Lumian ascending step by step, gritting his teeth.

"How dare you intrude into the guild!"

Lumian paid him no heed. He maintained a steady pace, neither hastening nor slowing as he approached the entrance to the second floor.

Fernandez masked his expression, his back slightly arched, and his eyes appeared to radiate an ominous glow.

Suddenly, Lumian sensed a significant dimming of the ambient light.

Simultaneously, an intangible force descended from above, entwining around his feet, making him feel shorter and causing his body to sway. Fernandez, in contrast, seemed to grow taller, casting dense shadows that engulfed the corridor's meager light.

Thud!

Advancing, Fernandez swung his right fist towards Lumian's head.

A gusty wind permeated the space, propelling the fist with hammer-like force, guided by an unseen magnet.

Lumian gazed upward as something within him erupted, shattering the binding force.

His thighs swelled suddenly, and his loose brown pants constricted. He grew taller seemingly out of thin air, sleeves and pants tightening around bulging muscles.

Bang!

A left punch from Lumian met Fernandez's incoming fist in a thunderous collision, causing the stairs to quiver and sway.

Fernandez, forced back two steps, bore no fear but a hint of joy on his face.

Retreating, his eyes darkened with a touch of brilliance.

Raising his left hand, a dark-green light swiftly concentrated on his unusually rough fingertips.

The light transformed into a ray, silently hurtling towards Lumian, momentarily immobilized by the collision.

Fernandez chose close combat from the start, creating an opening for the ray, capable of disrupting the human structure and inducing swift internal injuries.

The dark-green danger ray matched the speed of light. Lumian, unable to dodge in advance, could only watch as it struck between his chest and abdomen.

Yet, the dark-green ray pierced through, striking only an illusion.

Leveraging the Ascetic's accumulated strength in clashing with Fernandez, Lumian had seized the chance to arch his back and stand in place like an arc, deftly evading potential sneak attacks.

In this intricate dance, he even employed the Niese Face, creating an illusion of himself still standing upright!

Gradually, the dark-green ray dissipated, vanishing around the corner of the stairs.

Suddenly, a crimson fire, nearly white-hot, erupted from Lumian's body.

Transformed into a fireball, he hurtled towards Fernandez, who had just regained his footing.

Fernandez's pupils constricted, seemingly challenged by the blaze.

Swiftly, he sidestepped, clenched his right hand into a fist, and yanked it down.

An invisible force tugged Lumian to the ground, but undeterred, he dispersed the flames, reappearing with feet firmly planted on the corridor floor.

Clang!

His massive form stomped heavily, causing the building to sway. In a single stride, he stood before Fernandez, who had just risen. His left fist, wreathed in crimson, nearly white flames, collided with Fernandez.

Without a moment to activate his superpowers, Fernandez raised his arms hastily to block.

Boom!

Flames erupted as Lumian's punch sent the young man flying, crashing into the partially open side office, demolishing the wooden desk.

Capitalizing on Fernandez's disorientation and pain, Lumian followed, rushing into the office and delivering another punch with his left fist.

Boom! Crimson flames, nearly white, illuminated the room as the punch explosively struck Fernandez's chest.

The flames were contained by an unseen force, preventing them from entirely obliterating Fernandez's chest. Instead, they crumpled, clouding the target's vision.

Expressionless, Lumian halted, gazing at the semi-conscious Fernandez. He raised his left hand.

A colossal crimson fireball, nearly white, condensed rapidly, poised to act as a Reaper.

In the next instant, the fireball shot forth, homing in on Fernandez.

Abruptly, it ascended, passing the target, and collided with the wall behind the desk.

Boom!

Blazing white and red flames burst through the glass window, the wall, and ignited outside the Fisheries Guild building, creating fiery clouds in the air.

Almost simultaneously, Lumian felt as though he entered a dark and profound void. Distant, resplendent stars blinked like vigilant eyes.

Once more, he confronted Juan Oro, an elderly man with deeply etched wrinkles.

At that moment, Noelia had rushed to the square where the statue of the waves stood, shouting towards the building with a fallen window frame,

"Stop!"

At the sound of the combat nun's voice, Lumian sighed with regret, swiveled his revolver, and holstered it under his armpit. Juan Oro and the surrounding void vanished.

A few minutes later, Juan Oro emerged from the grayish-black building of the Fisheries Guild with his walking stick. In a deep voice, he addressed Noelia, "He attacked Fernandez. You must apprehend him!"

Noelia cast a cold glance at the president of the Fisheries Guild and retorted, "Should I then invite Fernandez to the police station to assist in the investigation of the Aquina Street shooting?

"All of you, calm down and jointly maintain order in Port Santa. Otherwise, do you think the Church can't handle any of you?"

In the final words, the combat nun shifted her gaze to Lumian, issuing a warning as a gesture of fairness.

Juan Oro fell silent for a moment before stating, "I don't know anything about the Aquina Street shooting."

With that, he turned and limped back to the Fisheries Guild with his cane, where many employees rushed to assist him.

Observing this, Noelia led her combat team to "escort" Lumian away.

Once out of the port district, the combat nun instructed her team members to slow down and create some distance, walking alongside Lumian herself.

"You're making things difficult for us. Order, understand? Superficial order must be maintained." Noelia raised her hand, pinching both sides of her forehead. "Fortunately, you didn't really kill Fernandez. Otherwise, I would have had no choice but to carry out the arrest."

Lumian chuckled and remarked, "If I truly wanted to kill Fernandez, he wouldn't have survived until your intervention or Juan Oro's rescue."

His words held undeniable truth.

Noelia was taken aback. After a few seconds of contemplation, she spoke, "Are you displaying your attitude, strength, and confidence for the onlookers? Simultaneously, do you wish for Juan Oro to misjudge your capabilities based on this encounter?"

Lumian remained silent. With a smile, he looked ahead and remarked, "Where did the former Governors of the Sea end up?"

Noelia fell silent for a moment before answering, "On the surface, they were dispatched to various locations. However, according to our observations, it takes at least four to five months, or no more than three years, for these Governors of the Sea to mysteriously vanish without a trace. There are often no signs of a struggle at the scene, and their families remain unharmed."

Did they return to the sea voluntarily? Lumian smiled and said, "See, didn't I gain something from dealing with Fernandez just now?"

The Church of Earth Mother now seemed more willing to share information.

Noelia wasn't upset. She smiled and added, "No one reveals all their cards from the start. Once your investigation reaches a certain point, we'll provide more."

Lumian stared at the azure sea beside him, contemplating for a moment.

"You haven't disclosed the intentions of your Earth Mother Church in this matter."

Noelia's eyes flickered. Suddenly, she raised her hand and pointed at the arguing pedestrians ahead, shouting, "Street brawls are prohibited!"

Before completing her sentence, she sprinted over with her team, leaving Lumian alone.

Lumian scoffed and slowly shook his head.

…

Late at night, as Lumian was about to retire for the night, he heard the deep and hoarse voice of the Knight of Swords, as if suppressing something.

"Clues to the whereabouts of the two targets have been found."

Chapter 557: Purpose

557 Purpose

Already? Lumian hadn't anticipated the Knight of Swords making progress this swiftly—in just a day.

Trusting his gut, he turned, meeting his reflection in the full-length mirror.

There stood the disheveled, pallid-faced Knight of Swords, a sudden appearance.

"Just clues?" Lumian mused, distilling the essence of the other's words.

The Knight of Swords shot him a gaze, tightly reined, and uttered, "The day after hitting Port Santa, they visited Balançat Ship Rental, asking about renting a boat for fishing. Vanished since."

Those words sparked a fleeting thought in Lumian's mind.

Quite romantic. As expected of a three-halves Intisian and half-

Feynapotterian duo. Opting for a fishing date!

If only Nolfi didn't carry the Maiden of the Sea's lineage and this wasn't Port Santa; then, romance might've been their motive. Regrettably, reality doesn't entertain "ifs." Lumian sighed, pondering Nolfi and Batna's true intentions.

Port Santa teemed with fishermen, yet not all owned boats. The lower-class ones either worked on vessels for a set pay or pooled funds to rent or buy. Balançat's profits came from these folks, not the tourists or middle-class sightseers. This wasn't a city known for tourism.

In Lumian's contemplation, the Knight of Swords pressed on, "Nolfi handled the price inquiry, but Batna cooperated without resistance."

Did Batna truly perceive it as a date? For Intisians, it holds allure. No wonder he didn't resist. Renting a boat for a sea excursion… Lumian pondered, his mind racing with possibilities. Was Nolfi planning to intercept the incoming Governor of the Sea during the sea prayer ritual or collide with their ship loaded with gunpowder? Perhaps she intended to replace them at a critical juncture? Lumian's thoughts whirred with conjectures.

Then, a sudden recollection jolted him.

Various sources mentioned a crucial detail about the sea prayer ritual: The final and pivotal part unfolded in a special sea area beyond the port. Details and the location were undisclosed to those who hadn't witnessed it.

A new hypothesis formed in Lumian's mind.

Nolfi's mother, a fleeing Maiden of the Sea, likely visited that special sea and might have shared pertinent information with her daughter.

Was Nolfi's motive for renting the boat to reach that unique sea area?

What lay there?

The core of the sea prayer ritual. Did this imply something, an entity, or power concealed in that zone? Was the ritual designed to harness something extraordinary?

Did Nolfi aim to seize the item and establish herself as the permanent Governor of the Sea? Or did she intend to obliterate it, terminating Port Santa's tradition of selecting the Governor and Maidens through the sea prayer ritual?

If obtaining the item were easy, the Fisheries Guild committee members would have done it long ago. Human nature tends to selfishness. Leaving a boon for the Maidens' children is improbable unless one stumbles upon a stroke of fortune and knows the right approach to secure, elude danger, and navigate the situation…

Destruction might indeed be the simpler route…

As his thoughts raced, Lumian looked up slightly.

Could April Fool's key members have orchestrated a prank to steal the item or its uniqueness?

Had they succeeded?

This was a pivotal question.

The Knight of Swords observed Lumian in silence, not disrupting his contemplation. He stood motionless, resembling a lifeless figure.

After a while, Lumian asked with curiosity, "How did you manage to trace Nolfi and Batna in just one day?"

The Knight of Swords, in a deep tone, responded, "Gathering information from the spirit world and conducting a field investigation. After their departure from the Balançat Ship Rental, all pertinent information was either concealed or eliminated, making it impossible to locate them again."

Isn't this the premise of certain divinations… Nolfi and Batna didn't take precautions against divination before visiting the ship rental company, but they did so afterward?

This doesn't add up. Either they never take precautions, or they do it consistently, unless they are both novices who only remember to guard against divination after inquiring about the boat's price…

Yes, a more plausible explanation is that ship rental falls within the fisheries and sea trade-related industries, deeply intertwined with the committee members of the Fisheries Guild. Nolfi and Batna, as outsiders, inquiring about the price of a ship rental attracted attention, and their identities were exposed, leading to their "disappearance"…

The note revealing that Nolfi is the child of the Maidens of the Sea might come from the owner or a shareholder of the Balançat Ship Rental? Lumian's thoughts gradually became clearer.

He gazed at the Knight of Swords, pondering how to request him to continue the investigation.

At that moment, the Knight of Swords took the initiative to say, "I'll delve deeper into the ship rental company."

"Thank you," Lumian expressed his gratitude sincerely.

Then, he witnessed the Knight of Swords's figure swiftly becoming transparent and vanishing.

Transformed into a soul-like entity? Wraith? Lumian discerned more details this time.

This led him to suspect that the Knight of Swords belonged to the temperance faction of the Church of The Fool. His subsequent journey to the Southern Continent was likely to deal with the indulgence faction of the Rose School of Thought.

Without hesitation, he shed his clothes, donned a faded cotton shirt, and reclined on the bed.

…

Late at night in Trier, Franca strolled beneath intermittently-lit street lamps, clad in a thick tweed shirt and pants that clung to her legs.

Even without makeup and deliberately concealing her appearance in the darkness and shadows, numerous inebriated individuals still approached her upon glimpsing her back or side profile, behaving like tiny flying insects circling under the gas street lamps on a summer's night.

Smack!

Franca's ponytail swayed slightly as she sent a particular drunkard flying with a sidekick.

The drunkard screamed and vomited on the ground.

Franca pursed her lips in disdain and muttered to herself, Pleasure sure brings trouble. It's manageable during the day, but some overconfident types try to flirt at night. And there's malice all around when I'm out. Even the hero who rescues a damsel in distress aims to strike up a conversation later…

However, those scoundrels came expecting joy and anticipation, only to receive a beating and the accompanying pain. Right, could this be considered a simplified version of pleasure causing affliction?

It was precisely because Franca wanted to experience this and potentially find an opportunity to digest the potion that she didn't sneak through the shadows and move undetected.

After a while, Franca slipped into the shadows and reached the empty room where she had previously met 007.

Her associate had mentioned that he'd discovered information about the ancient tomb beside the Crazy Mushroom Cave on the fourth level of the catacombs through the Church's resources and municipal archives. However, it wasn't safe to disclose it in the telegram group, no matter how close their bonds were. Therefore, he compiled the details and left them at the designated spot for Franca to retrieve.

Franca conducted a brief search and found two folded sheets of thin paper.

She unfolded them and swiftly skimmed the content. As an Assassin, even in the dimmest environment, she could decipher the words:

"The ancient tomb where you found the Mirror World Fragment belongs to a noble family from the Fourth Epoch's Tudor Empire.

"Their last name is Tamara. I haven't located specific details about the members in that tomb, but I've stumbled upon something odd.

"Not only does the fourth level house Tamara family tombs, but there are also tombs on the third level, such as the Thorns and Shieldwall Tomb and the Impartial Tomb. Why aren't they grouped together…"

Franca's gaze froze.

Isn't the Thorns and Shieldwall Tomb where Jenna completed her tearcatcher mission?

The mission they used as a pretext involved the Tamara family, and the tomb where they found the Mirror World Fragment belonged to them too!

Wasn't this an extraordinary coincidence?

Could it be a manifestation of mystical laws?

Franca collected herself and continued reading.

"…I can't access more detailed Tamara family information at my level. Figure something out yourself."

Hmm… Franca nodded, resolved to report the entire situation to Madam Judgment, seeking insights and information from the Tarot Club.

…

In the early morning, on Aquina Street in Port Santa.

In a house diagonally opposite Solow Motel, Lumian, his appearance transformed, stood by a window in a room. Clutching the new ID provided by Valerio, he surveyed the suite where he, Lugano, and Ludwig were lodged, as well as the street below.

Now, he aimed to play the role of an ordinary bounty hunter who had taken on a confidential assignment, diligently monitoring the adventurer, Louis Berry.

Given Louis's assertive conduct in recent days, it was likely that all the well-informed individuals in Port Santa knew of this great adventurer's desire to investigate the sea prayer ritual. The probability was high that Bard and other pivotal members of April Fool's would be in tow!

Chapter 558: Tamara Family

558 Tamara Family

Lumian savored the tang of fermented grape juice bought from a street vendor as he coolly surveyed the suite rented by the adventurer, Louis Berry. He occasionally cast a discerning eye over Aquina Street, on the lookout for any potential monitors.

A little over half an hour ago, Lumian had transformed his appearance and changed into a different outfit. He had seemingly "teleported" to a nearby street before returning to secure a suitable room.

Soon enough, Lumian spotted Lugano cautiously heading out to fetch an extra breakfast for Ludwig. A chuckle escaped him.

This guy was still spooked from yesterday's attack.

However, unless the members of the Fisheries Guild had succumbed to the corrupting influence of superpowers, losing control of their emotions and rational thinking, it was improbable for them to target Lugano, the interpreter and guide. Louis Berry's response the previous day had sent a clear message to everyone:

If you can't take me out directly, keep your sights off those around me. You might eliminate me, but I, Louis Berry, can do the same. There'll come a time when your Fisheries Guild's committee members, your kids, and descendants travel without protection or lack strength. Wanna guess if I'd dare to make a move or if I have the capability?

Either find an opportunity to bring me down with all you've got, or play nice!

Faced with such a resolute "answer," the rational committee members of the Fisheries Guild would know what to do. Louis Berry, the adventurer, wasn't bound by official rules like a Beyonder or a cop. Expecting him not to involve family in the game was unrealistic.

Moreover, considering his recent behavior and the circulating rumors, he was a daring adventurer, reminiscent of Gehrman Sparrow. Known for his aggression, madness, and coldness, there were no limits to what such a person might do.

Of course, Lumian wasn't letting his guard down entirely. Lugano would either have Ludwig's "company" in the future, or he'd be under Lumian's watchful eye at all times. After all, beyond the Fisheries Guild, many individuals in Port Santa were secretly plotting to exploit this opportunity for their own gain. Disguised as Fisheries Guild members, they could attack the interpreter and godson of the adventurer Louis Berry, intensifying the conflict and stirring up trouble prematurely.

Ignoring conspiracies at this level would be unacceptable for a Conspirer.

After Lugano returned to his suite on the fifth floor of Solow Motel with a heap of breakfast, Lumian purposefully avoided looking at the high-backed chair, seemingly adorned with a golden straw hat, positioned strategically at the dining table. He turned on his heel and exited the room, ready to explore the surroundings.

Stepping into the corridor, Lumian immediately spotted a burly man standing near the staircase, barely reaching 1.7 meters in height.

The man, with brown hair, brown eyes, and rugged skin, held a distinctive long mouth cigarette between his lips, fixing his gaze on Lumian.

In Highlander, the man inquired, "Who sent you here to keep an eye on Louis Berry?"

Lumian couldn't help but let out a soft chuckle.

"Are you not here to monitor Louis Berry yourself?

"I didn't even inquire about your sender. Why the sudden curiosity?"

He responded in flawless Highlander as well.

The man, with the long mouth cigarette dangling, contemplated for a moment before nodding in agreement, making way for the stairs.

Lumian strolled past him, descending the staircase step by step.

As he departed, the man's gaze took on a gradually ominous edge.

He raised his left hand, delicately twisting the special long mouth cigarette.

Taking a deep breath, he exhaled into the cigarette, and in silence, a slender steel needle shot forth from the charred tobacco, aimed directly at Lumian's back, mere two meters away.

It was a blow dart, originating from certain tribes in the primitive forests of the Southern Continent. Typically, blow darts were one to two meters long, making them unsuitable for concealment or sneak attacks. However, bounty hunters, followers of the God of Steam and Machinery with strong hands, modified them into a more portable version—only slightly longer than regular cigarettes.

While this modification increased portability and its concealed nature, it sacrificed some power and limited its range to a mere four to five meters. When paired with specially crafted arrows carrying anesthetic and lethal toxins, it remained a favored tool among bounty hunters on both Northern and Southern Continents.

The man had concealed the blow dart within the long mouth cigarette, intending to lull the target and strike when the opportune moment arrived.

His objective: to subdue Lumian and extract information about the identity of his employer.

The steel needle flashed past, but Lumian seemed to have anticipated the attack. Just as the man blew air to propel the needle, Lumian swiftly bent forward, arched his spine, and dodged the blow dart in an almost inhuman contortion.

With a soft poof, the steel needle embedded itself into the wooden staircase.

In the next moment, the assailant's eyes widened as Lumian, in a display of flexibility surpassing human limits, swung a boxing glove.

Bang!

He fainted.

Swiftly recovering from his contorted evasion, Lumian bent down, scooped up the unconscious assailant, and dragged him into his rented room.

Taking advantage of the assailant's unconscious state, Lumian administered a dose of truth serum and calculated the time for him to regain consciousness.

Examining the unremarkable, ordinary face of his assailant, Lumian calmly listened to the panicked shout.

"I just wanted to incapacitate you and find a spot to interrogate you about your employer!

"The poison on the arrow is just an anesthetic!"

Squatting in front of the man, Lumian smiled and responded, "Now, let me ask you, who's your employer?"

"It's Juan Oro!" the brown-haired, brown-eyed man blurted out.

Lumian chuckled and probed further, "Is that so?"

"Yes, no, it's actually someone else…" At this point, horror overcame the man, and he fell silent.

Lumian prompted him patiently.

"Who is it?"

After struggling for a few seconds, the man involuntarily spoke,

"Rubió Paco."

Rubió… Why is he keeping tabs on me? Does he seek to gain from the adventurer's activities? Is that why he didn't approach me discreetly to share information? Lumian nodded subtly and straightened up.

"Your breath stinks. Remember to brush your teeth more often."

"…" The assailant looked perplexed, unable to fathom why the conversation had taken this turn. Nonetheless, he replied half-heartedly, "I'm not a fan of brushing my teeth."

Lumian shook his head in disdain, uninterested in the blow dart as a trophy. Leaving the room, he left a parting message: "Make sure to lock the door behind me."

…

In Trier, within Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative, Franca and Jenna's rented apartment.

They had already received Madam Judgment's response via Rabbit Chasel.

Before departing, Rabbit Chasel, adorned with a miniature top hat, shrunken gold-rimmed glasses, and a diminutive black trench coat, made an unusual request.

"Can I use a custom-made revolver as compensation for delivering the next five letters?"

Jenna's mouth hung open, momentarily taken aback.

"Sure."

She questioned, "Why can't you conjure one yourself?"

Similar to your top hat, glasses, and trench coat.

"They have no practical use, but I hope the revolver does. The bullets need to be custom-made too," Rabbit Chasel explained earnestly.

Jenna blinked and acquiesced.

Once the messenger departed, Franca commented with a peculiar expression,

"Why does it feel like it has shifted from pursuing knowledge to pursuing strength?"

Jenna wanted to defend Rabbit Chasel but struggled to find a compelling excuse. Instead, she cursed, "It's not necessarily a bad thing. It might even aid me in future battles!

"Moreover, the stronger the messenger, the safer the letter deliveries."

Franca, lacking a messenger, suddenly felt a twinge of envy. Without delay, she unfolded Madam Judgment's reply.

"The Tamara family, one of the five noble families from the Fourth Epoch's Tudor Empire, held a hereditary duke aristocratic title, akin to the Amon you're familiar with, albeit slightly lower in status.

"In the era when the gods roamed the land, families capable of becoming great nobles undoubtedly possessed angelic powers. According to the information, the Tamara family had existed for many years before Alista Tudor became the Blood Emperor. They were renowned nobles from the previous empire.

"They had the coat of arms changed once and two internal divisions. This is why Tamara was buried on different levels of the catacombs at different times.

"Initially, their coat of arms consisted of thorns, a shieldwall, and vertical swords. Later, it became an open door, with the vertical sword acting as the crack.

"This represents a significant change in the Tamara family. It shifted from being dominated by the Justiciar pathway to being dominated by the Apprentice pathway. However, no corresponding historical information has appeared for the time being.

"A small number of members of the Tamara family, who adhere to the Judgment pathway, have survived to this day and are secretly active.

"The other Tamara group had established a close connection with the Demoness family during the Tudor Empire's era. During the Fifth Epoch, a secret organization known as the Theosophy Order emerged. It had Demoness figures and originated from Tamara's Apprentice pathway. There's reason to believe that they are still cooperating.

"This Tamara group has been estranged from the other one for many years, refusing to acknowledge each other.

"The Tamaras of the Judgment pathway also experienced a division. The exact situation is unknown…"

Upon reading this, Franca and Jenna shared the same thought.

The Tamara family is indeed connected to the Demonesses!

They continued reading the contents of the letter.

"The person who led you to the Tamara family's tomb and discovered the Mirror World Fragment is likely targeting that special mirror world and the Demoness Sect. Don't worry for the time being. Just be vigilant against coincidences, theft, and scams around you…"

…

In the ensuing days, Lumian, along with Lugano and Ludwig, remained unharmed.

Port Santa seemed to settle back into a semblance of normalcy. Those secretly observing displayed no indications of advancing further.

Just as Lumian contemplated taking further actions to elucidate all details before the sea prayer ritual in early November, the Knight of Swords brought fresh information regarding Nolfi and Batna.

His face maintaining a pale-white hue, he spoke to Lumian, "I've identified a suspect involved in the kidnapping of the two targets. Should I handle it alone, or shall we proceed together?"

Lumian took a moment to consider before responding, "Together."

Chapter 559: Top-Notch Collaborator

559 Top-Notch Collaborator

After making his decision, Lumian had a chance to inquire, "Who's the suspect?"

"Lato Guiaro," the Knight of Swords announced.

Lumian recognized this individual. He was also a committee member of the Fisheries Guild. Not only did he own shares in three large fishing boats and the Port Santa Fisheries Company, but he was also involved in shipbuilding, ice production, and other industries. Someone in his family had already married a Maiden of the Sea over a hundred years ago.

Lumian asked thoughtfully, "What's Lato Guiaro's connection to Balançat Ship Rental?"

"He's a creditor of the company and has arranged employment for many relatives there," the Knight of Swords replied succinctly.

"It all adds up." Lumian nodded in agreement and paused to reflect. "Let's convene at the crossroads of Saint Lana Street and Golden Wheat Street. How about meeting in three minutes?"

He had never set foot in Lato Guiaro's extended family estate, so he lacked the corresponding spirit world coordinates. His only teleportation option was Saint Lana Street, relatively close to their target. He needed to utilize Spirit World Traversal discreetly to evade any surveillance.

"Sure." The Knight of Swords dissolved into transparency and disappeared instantly.

Lumian spent two minutes hydrating, donning a vest and a straw hat. Only then did the faint glow of the black mark on his right shoulder illuminate.

In an instant, his figure vanished from the shrouded room.

At the crossroads of Saint Lana Street and Golden Wheat Street, Lumian materialized from a concealed corner. The Knight of Swords, now sporting disheveled brown hair, a switched flaxen-colored shirt, and a dark brown vest, stood at the fringe of the crimson moonlight. His pallid face and oppressive eyes hinted at an underlying transformation, as if he could shed his human guise at any moment, revealing a monstrous form fueled by pent-up desires.

While others might miss these subtleties, Lumian, being an Ascetic, possessed a heightened sensitivity to such situations.

The temperance faction, indeed… Lumian mused at the Knight of Swords's appearance, entertaining a whimsical thought.

Bro, ever considered embracing Inevitability? As an Alms Monk or an Ascetic, you'd spare yourself from enduring so much!

Of course, Lumian merely toyed with the idea and wouldn't actually propose it. Without the right strokes of luck, the boon of an evil god could gradually corrupt Beyonders within the potion system, eventually transforming them into humanoid monsters aligned with the evil deity. Nevertheless, his musings hinted at the potential synergy between specific Sequences of the boon system and potion system.

"Let's proceed." As the Knight of Swords remained silent, Lumian took the lead and spoke.

The Knight of Swords nodded, and they followed the shadows along the street, turning into Golden Wheat Street at a measured pace, heading north.

Soon, they reached a five-story building resembling a small castle.

Observing the illuminated windows and grayish-blue outer walls, the Knight of Swords pointed at a specific glass pane, noting,

"That's Lato's bedroom. He and his wife sleep in separate rooms."

The gathered intelligence is impressively detailed… Lumian acknowledged silently and inquired, "What's your plan?"

"Sneak in and take control of the target," the Knight of Swords responded succinctly.

Isn't that a bit too straightforward and crude? The Guiaro family likely employs more than just ordinary Beyonders. Some members may have gained powers through the sea prayer ritual… Lumian recalled the unique characteristics of a Wraith and assessed his capabilities. With one hand in his pocket, he casually remarked, "Okay."

With those words, his form dissolved into a shadow, seamlessly merging with the darkness.

Beside him, the Knight of Swords had already vanished.

Utilizing the shadows cast on the building's outer wall, Lumian deftly infiltrated Lato Guiaro's room.

In an instant, his target came into view.

A middle-aged man, with slightly curly black hair and dark brown eyes, adorned in a dark-blue cotton robe, greeted Lumian's sight. His long face featured a neatly trimmed thick beard.

Lato Guiaro's expression morphed into one of fear, and his body froze. He stumbled toward the shadow concealing Lumian.

In the reflection within each eye of the Fisheries Guild committee member, Lumian spotted the pale-faced Knight of Swords, clad in a dark brown vest and flaxen-colored shirt, with disheveled brown hair!

Observing Lato Guiaro losing control of his body, unable to utter a sound, Lumian stepped out of the shadow, returning to his original form.

An oppressive heaviness enveloped the air around him, akin to the weight of seawater.

Apart from this, nothing seemed amiss.

With a controlled step, Lumian approached Lato Guiaro, a sensation akin to moving through a swamp.

He refrained from resorting to the direct use of the Spell of Harrumph. Firstly, the other party seemed powerless and could be managed through alternative means, saving his spiritual energy. Secondly, Lumian hesitated due to uncertainty about whether the Spell of Harrumph would incapacitate both of them, given the forceful possession of Lato Guiaro by the Knight of Swords.

Retrieving a bottle of sedative from the Bliss Society, Lumian unscrewed the cap and brought it to Lato Guiaro's nose.

Fanning the opening with his hand to hasten the gas's flow, after about ten seconds, the committee member of the Fisheries Guild closed his eyes and slumped into unconsciousness.

Remarkably, he remained standing, not collapsing to the ground.

The Tarot Club's Minor Arcana card holder, the Knight of Swords, maintained absolute control over Lato Guiaro's body.

This is even simpler than employing teleportation and the Spell of Harrumph… I've faced numerous Beyonders before, but never have I subdued one without laying a hand on them. I strolled up casually, administering the sedative. A Wraith truly stands as an exceptional ally, capable of harmonizing with any Sequence of any pathway… Yes, a Wraith remains impervious to anesthetic gasses. The Bliss Society's sedative had no effect on him. As Lumian observed the noiseless resolution, he almost felt as if he hadn't partaken in the skirmish at all.

He returned the Bliss Society sedative to his concealed pocket and retrieved a canister of truth serum. Seizing the moment, he administered nearly a third of it to Lato Guiaro. Sensing that the sedative's impact might be short-lived on Beyonders with unknown traits like Lato Guiaro, he hastened to complete his preparations before the target regained consciousness.

Within 20 to 30 seconds, Lato Guiaro's eyes fluttered open.

First, he encountered Louis Berry, the adventurer in the golden straw hat, adorned with a faint smile. Subsequently, he discovered himself seated on a chair at some indeterminate moment, facing the divan in the bedroom.

Lato attempted to scream, but his vocal cords rebelled, rendering him motionless.

"Have you grasped your situation?" Lumian reclined on the sofa, placing his right foot on his left knee.

He spoke in Intisian.

Fear etched across Lato's face, rendering him unable to nod or respond.

While he possessed certain abilities, Lato was certain they wouldn't suffice against the adventurer Louis Berry. They would likely result in a renewed coma or a swift lightning strike.

"What do you want?" Lato suddenly inquired.

He, too, knew Intisian.

Attempting to raise his hand in surprise to touch his neck, he found himself immobilized.

Lato Guiaro lapsed into silence.

With a smile, Lumian responded, "I have a few questions for you. Answer them satisfactorily, and I might consider letting you live until tomorrow to assist me in spreading the word about this affair."

Lato remained silent for a moment before consenting, "What do you want to know?"

Lumian casually shook his right ankle.

"Are Nolfi and Batna with you?"

"Yes," Lato responded with a strong inclination to divulge information. "They're locked up in the basement. They're still alive. I just want to use them."

"For what?" Lumian inquired, intrigued.

Lato's lips trembled as he explained, "I intend to use them to lead you to the location of the sea sacrificial ritual and guide you to rent a boat there."

"So, you're the one who wrote that note…" Lumian exclaimed in realization. "How do you plan to guide me?"

Lato struggled to articulate his actions, but his mouth moved faster than his thoughts.

"I want you to discover that Nolfi and the Batna intend to rent a boat and head out to sea. Then, I'll arrange for them to seize an opportunity to escape and relay something to you, letting you know the significance of the sea area."

"And then?" Lumian inquired with curiosity.

Lato sealed his lips shut but eventually spoke.

"What they will tell you is the truth, but they are unaware of one thing: "Never engage a Child of the Sea in a sea battle! Juan Oro awaits you in that sea region, ready to bury you entirely!"

So, the Fisheries Guild planted a deceptive trail through the clue about Nolfi, posing as a turncoat to lure me into a trap and eliminate me… If I hadn't swiftly revealed my intent to investigate the sea prayer ritual, exposing Nolfi and Batna to exploitation, they might already be sleeping with the fishes… The skirmish against Lugano was crafted to deceive me… As Lumian's thoughts raced, he heard Lato express confusion, "You haven't even started your investigation. How did you find me? You merely sent your interpreter to inquire about Nolfi and the others' whereabouts. There was no follow-up…"

Lumian's smile held a cryptic undertone as he disclosed, "Do you think I'm here alone to investigate the sea prayer ritual?

"I represent the will of many. Numerous comrades lurk in the shadows of Port Santa."

Lato felt a chill course through his stiffened body, lending credence to Lumian's words.

Lumian raised his right hand and stroked his chin.

"Where does your power come from?"

Lato's throat constricted as he answered, "From the sea. Each sea prayer ritual grants us strength.

"Unfortunately, the ritual failed last year. We received no replenishment for two years, and everyone weakened to varying degrees. Otherwise, Juan Oro would have finished you long ago. He would have cast your lifeless form into Wave Square, a stark warning to those who cross us!"

Similar to a boon? Theoretically, even without replenishment, a boon's power will gradually wane… Lumian pondered for a moment and remarked,

"The sea prayer ritual is a large-scale boon-seeking ritual, with the Governor of the Sea as the primary sacrifice?"

Lato contemplated for a moment before responding,"He serves as both sacrifice and host. Juan Oro and we act as assistant hosts.

"The sea prayer ritual is essentially a marriage to the sea and appeasing it. The boon is a byproduct."

"Marriage to the sea?" Lumian suddenly found his imagination lacking.

Chapter 560: Traces

560 Traces

Lato rarely divulged details about the sea prayer ritual. He spoke with a weighty demeanor, "Yes, the Governor of the Sea ties the knot with the sea, quelling its violence and bringing peace. They truly become the spouse of the sea, commanding authority over this stretch of water.

"As the assistant and deputy hosts, we also gain varying degrees of in Port Santa receive some boons, although they are limited in number."

So, the Governor of the Sea is synonymous with Husband of the Sea. The assistant and deputy hosts are like close friends or family busy assisting at a wedding, naturally earning gratitude. Those with the sea bloodline are akin to children attending a wedding, typically gaining some candy… Lumian attempted to comprehend Lato Guiaro's description of the sea prayer ritual by combining reality and wedding traditions in novels.

Intrigued, he inquired, "Does the Governor of the Sea engage in those acts with the sea?"

Aren't weddings supposed to conclude with newlyweds consummating their marriage?

"Of course!" Lato affirmed, "After the wedding, the sea will bind itself to the four Maidens of the Sea. Through their union with the Governor of the Sea, the first child of each Maiden of the Sea is a noble with a pure sea bloodline, possessing the strongest Beyonder powers.

"Why four and not one Maiden of the Sea? It's because individual humans can't endure the vastness, expansiveness, weight, and transcendence of the sea. Enough partners are needed to share the burden."

The more I listen, the more ominous it becomes… Marrying a Maiden of the Sea is akin to marrying a remnant of the sea's power. It's no wonder they're highly valued, and their destinies change. The only challenge is acknowledging and loving their wife's first child. Lumian contemplated for a moment and remarked, "And the Governor of the Sea can withstand the passion of the sea?"

And it was four at a time.

Lato, devoid of pity or sympathy, stated, "One of the two most crucial purposes of the vigil ritual is to utilize the house and some of the sea spawn concealed within it to transform the Governor of the Sea's body, enabling them to withstand the violent and unrestrained sea.

"That's why the Governor of the Sea can only serve for a year. Even with the physical transformation, the power acquisition, and the Beyonder enhancement, they won't endure much longer."

Consumable. The husband of the sea is a consumable… Lumian sighed inwardly and queried, "Then why would the Governor of the Sea return to the sea after leaving office?"

"No one knows the exact reason, but there's a certain conjecture. Juan Oro believes that the sea doesn't allow those who were once its husband to start a new life. And I believe that the modifications of the vigil ritual, the intrusion of spousal intercourse, and the influence of maritime authority make the Governor of the Sea more and more like a sea creature and less human. Eventually, he will inevitably return to the sea that gives him peace and comfort." Lato felt that his deduction was correct.

What exactly is the sea you're referring to? Is it a natural spirit or a creature beyond, controlling the sea? Lumian replayed Lato Guiaro's answers in his mind before asking, "Sea spawn? Like the wrinkled monsters that can disguise themselves as devils, and the long black insects that control humans by burrowing into their necks?"

"Yes," Lato responded, yearning for a cigarette but unable to move his hands. "We, the Children of the Sea, are spawn of the sea. One of our duties is guiding certain sea spawn from the depths to settle on land using our Beyonder powers, helping them reproduce."

However, Ludwig mentioned that the Batings Black Insects originate from another planet, not some sea spawn… Lumian didn't rush to ask about the Children of the Sea's Beyonder powers; instead, he focused on the details of the sea prayer ritual.

"What's the other vital purpose of the vigil?"

Lato's expression hinted: "Don't you understand what weddings are about?"

"Well, there's the exchange of rings for marriage. And the vigil ritual modifies the Governor of the Sea's body, attaching a unique trait to a fixed golden ring, matching it to the sea bride's identity."

A unique golden ring… Lumian perked up and said, "And then?"

During last year's April Fool's prank, fringe members received orders to acquire a gold ring from Torres and conceal it within the lamb sacrifice's stomach!

"Then, following the completion of the other rituals, the Governor of the Sea will take the golden ring and cast it directly into the sea before the ship. He will utter in a unique language from the depths,

'We espouse thee, O sea, as a sign of true and perpetual dominion!'

"If the sea consents to this union, gentle waves will stir, transforming into pure white foam petals that will shower over the four Maidens of the Sea.

"The returned ring carries symbolic weight, signifying authority over the waters surrounding Port Santa[1]."

Just the waters encompassing Port Santa? From the indications, it seems it's not the true sea, but rather something that affects this specific area of the waters… Lumian paused briefly before speaking, "How do you express 'We espouse thee, O sea…' in that peculiar language?"

Lato Guiaro contemplated for a moment before emitting a chattering sound.

Under the influence of the Language Comprehension charms, Lumian failed to grasp its meaning. He concluded it wasn't part of the Northern Continent's languages.

Simultaneously, he observed the Knight of Swords in Lato's eyes slightly shaking his head.

If the Knight of Swords truly belongs to the temperance faction that parted ways from the Rose School of Thought to align with the Church of The Fool, he should possess knowledge of the Southern Continent's language. Additionally, with his high Sequence and extensive tenure as a Beyonder, he must have encountered most supernatural tongues. Does this imply it's not from the language family of the Southern Continent, let alone ancient Hermes, Dragonese, Elvish, or other mystical languages? Lumian regarded Lato Guiaro with an intrigued grin.

"Are you certain those words translate to 'We espouse thee, O sea…'?"

Lato hesitated briefly before explaining, "Probably. This is a language passed down from ancient times, existing since the sea prayer ritual. There are only a few sentences…"

He's not sure… They hadn't systematically mastered the language, only capable of uttering two or three sentences based on the legacy… Lumian sensed there might be more to it than Lato's description; there was no denial if the true meaning was akin to "Open Sesame."

The folks from the Fisheries Guild and Milo Village might have been akin to the individuals Aurore and Franca spoke of. They employed a peculiar language, its true meaning eluding them as they substituted it with their own interpretation.

As Lumian pondered, his expression remained unchanged.

"Does the Governor of the Sea safeguard the ring after he acquires the special trait?"

"No," Lato responded, shaking his head. "In addition to the Governor of the Sea, the Maidens of the Sea, and sailors in charge of controlling the ship, there are four pure-blooded Children of the Sea acting as deputy hosts. They guide the Governor and the Maidens through the ritual stages, teaching the unique call to marriage. The golden ring is held by one of the deputy hosts and only handed over to the Governor when needed."

The Governor of the Sea doesn't have a chance to switch ritual rings… Suppressing his anxiety, Lumian continued at a measured pace, "Did the sea prayer ritual fail last year?"

Lato initially seemed taken aback, but then relief crossed his face.

"Did the imposter seek your help?"

"Yes, for some reason, the sea prayer ritual failed. The sea's rage claimed the lives of the Governor of the Sea and the four Children of the Sea serving as deputy hosts. Only the Maidens of the Sea and some sailors survived."

The four deputy hosts are dead? Just as Lumian uncovered clues about April Fool's, he sensed the link had been abruptly severed.

The individuals with the best chance of substituting the ceremonial ring had all perished in the unsuccessful sea prayer ritual!

Lumian thought for a moment before inquiring, "What happened to the surviving Maidens of the Sea and sailors?"

"They're still alive, but under strict surveillance." Realizing that the failure to last year's sea prayer ritual was exposed, Lato, not dwelling on the survivors' details, continued, "We arranged marriages for the four Maidens of the Sea who lack actual sea powers with ordinary family members. Though it won't bring about a Beyonder-level change, it has its benefits.

"The sailors, from Milo Village, received some benefits from Juan Oro but are restricted from leaving Milo Village until this year's sea prayer ritual succeeds."

Shifting gears, Lumian asked, "Did the sailors transport the sacrificial lambs and other offerings for the marriage to the sea to the deck?"

"Yes." Lato nodded. "Sailors handle such cumbersome and laborious tasks."

Within the ranks of sailors, one among Bard, Mad Lady, or Ultraman had sneaked in. If the other side held a stronger Beyonder power or a mystical item from the Marauder pathway, they could snatch the genuine ceremonial ring during the exchange, swapping it with a counterfeit… It wouldn't be a surprise that the Marauder pathway, influenced by the Celestial Worthy, has key April Fool's members wielding matching strengths or artifacts… Lumian swiftly suspected this.

He turned to Lato Guiaro, keeping his tone composed.

"Tell me about the four Maidens of the Sea and the survivors from last year among the sailors."

Lato recounted the details from memory.

Having absorbed the specifics about the potential targets, Lumian inquired further, "Were all participants in the sea sacrificial part thoroughly checked?"

"Absolutely. No unauthorized items allowed onboard to maintain the ritual's integrity. And before the ship reaches its destination, Juan Oro will vigilantly oversee using his powers," Lato elaborated.

As anticipated, Lumian nodded subtly.

"What powers does Juan Oro wield?"

[1] Adapted from the Marriage of the Sea ceremony of the Venice Doge set to be hanged.

Chapter 561: Language of the Stars

561 Language of the Stars

Lato Guiaro struggled to keep silent, but the words burst out of him.

After a long internal battle, he finally responded, "He's the most powerful among us. Before joining the Fisheries Guild committee, he served as a deputy host on the sea sacrifice ship a whopping 11 times. He gained numerous boons and established a solid connection with the sea.

"He can fly. If he's not afraid of losing lifespan, he can temporarily take control of these waters on behalf of the Governor of the Sea. He possesses other special abilities, though they're rarely revealed. We're not entirely sure either. What we do know is that the failure of last year's sea prayer ritual significantly weakened him."

Lato paused and couldn't resist adding, "First and foremost, we are astronomers. Our expertise lies in observing the stars' transformations and calculating their patterns.

"Keep in mind that the annual sea prayer ritual doesn't have a fixed date. It could happen any day during the first week of November. This is because, to enter that special area that communicates with the sea, the stars need to be in specific positions to open the corresponding passageway.

"The date of a similar phenomenon varies from year to year. Astronomers with sufficient knowledge must predict it in advance through observation and calculation."

The idea of Fisheries Guild committee members being astronomers seems comical and absurd… Lumian didn't interrupt Lato Guiaro's narrative.

The self-proclaimed astronomer continued his explanation.

"Secondly, we are humans who worship the sea and the cosmos. We can receive revelations and guidance of fate from the changes in tides, the waves of the sea, and the trajectories of the stars, avoiding danger and making the right choices. Many times, we refer to such revelations and guidance as the Language of the Stars."

The Language of the Stars… sounds pretty dangerous. How do you know it's not something risky like Termiboros or Ludwig winking at you? Lumian resisted the urge to shake his head and sighed inwardly.

"Furthermore, we are descendants of the sea and the cosmos, serving as clergymen who offer sacrifices to them.

"We can manipulate the power of the land to completely immobilize the target or make them float.

"We can emit rays from the cosmos, causing damage to the enemy's body structure and weakening them. Without the corresponding superpowers to treat them, they will face an irreversible and agonizing death.

"We can also create a powerful magnetic effect. Combined with the power of the land, we can generate a half-real illusion. We call it the Cosmic Void." Lato's expression gradually turned fanatical.

From a mysticism perspective, the Beyonder characteristics of the Children of the Sea involve the land and the cosmos. According to Aurore's knowledge, it encompasses gravity, radiation, and electromagnetism. Furthermore, due to gravity and electromagnetism, they also possess some illusionary and spatial abilities. Lumian, rephrasing Lato Guiaro's words for easier comprehension, couldn't help but criticize inwardly, Hey, you're the Children of the Sea, not the Children of the Stars. Why don't I see many sea-related powers…

Lato took a deep breath and continued, "We are also the navigators of the sea and the cosmos. We can find the right path under any circumstances, guided by the performance of the sea and the stars. We can use this power to help others.

"Without our guidance, ships can't enter that special water even on the correct date. That's why Nolfi insisted on returning to Port Santa before setting off. Although she knew the coordinates and route of the sea sacrificial land from her mother, she would never have reached it if she didn't set off from Port Santa.

"The spawn that come to land from the seabed also rely on our abilities in this area to survive the fog, vortex, and storms without losing their way in the sea route or being swallowed by darkness."

Navigators… Lumian suddenly recalled the strange fish he had encountered on the Flying Bird, the Mutated Bannerfish, who could control the waves.

They were also known as Death Navigators!

"Have you heard of the strange fish known as Death Navigators?" Lumian interrupted Lato Guiaro's account.

Lato hesitated for a moment before responding, "Yes, they're also spawn of the sea. We all suspect that they were transformed from the Governors of the Sea who returned to the sea."

Transformed from the Governors of the Sea? Lumian raised his eyebrows.

Lato swallowed and explained, "They should still be fused with the sea, so future generations will be born, but their strength is inferior to theirs.

"In the past, they only roamed those waters. In recent years, for some reason, they occasionally swam out and returned. After the sea prayer ritual failed last year, this situation became even more frequent."

Did the failure of the ritual cause the Death Navigators to go out more frequently? Did the Death Navigators lure sailors to those special waters? Were they ultimately devoured by the sea? Lumian's mind raced with questions, but he knew that Lato Guiaro couldn't answer them.

Lato returned to the main topic.

"We can still manipulate the waves to a certain extent and influence the tides, but we can't compare to Juan Oro, much less the Governor of the Sea."

That's more like a Child of the Sea? That's why they think it's easier to bury me in the sea? Lumian pondered as he inquired about a few more details. He then lowered his right foot from his left knee and slowly stood up.

Nodding at the Knight of Swords in Lato's eyes, Lumian said to Lato Guiaro, "Last request, release Nolfi and Batna."

With that, Lumian walked to the bedroom window.

Simultaneously, the Knight of Swords, who had possessed Lato Guiaro, vanished. The committee member of the Fisheries Guild regained control of his body.

As Lumian left, Lato Guiaro couldn't help but express his confusion, fear, and a hint of uncontrollable emotion, "I thought you'd kill me once you got the information…"

Otherwise, wouldn't it expose the fact that you have many hidden helpers, the secret of a faction behind you, and the uniqueness of your helpers?

Lumian didn't look back and continued forward.

On the way, he pressed down on his golden straw hat and smiled.

"To you, this might be important, but not to me."

Just as Lato Guiaro was about to say something, he saw the body of the adventurer, Louis Berry, suddenly turn black and thin, transforming into a shadow that disappeared from the crimson moonlight's reach.

After staring at the darkness for a while, Lato adjusted the collar of his robe and left the master bedroom. He personally headed to the basement to release Nolfi and Batna.

Opposite the building where his family resided, beneath a row of verdant trees,

Lumian leaned leisurely against the black gas streetlamp pole, gazing at the glass windows illuminated by the light.

The disheveled, pale-faced Knight of Swords materialized behind him and asked in a deep voice, "Are you really not going to kill him?"

Lumian chuckled and said, "If we kill him, who's going to inform Juan Oro that I have powerful helpers and the support of a powerful faction lurking in the shadows?"

He couldn't just toss tarot cards at Lato Guiaro's corpse, could he?

Furthermore, the problem lay in the fact that no one knew that the adventurer, Louis Berry, was a Minor Arcana cardholder of the Tarot Club.

Upon hearing Lumian's response, the Knight of Swords pondered for a moment before vanishing into the darkness.

Before long, Batna emerged from the house where Lato Guiaro's extended family resided, clutching his rapier and revolver.

Upon seeing Lumian, they looked a little ashamed and approached him with slow steps.

"Thank you for saving us," Nolfi, adorable in a blouse and brown pants, expressed her sincere gratitude.

Batna said, "I'm well aware of Nolfi's intentions and haven't been deceived by her. I sympathize with the tragic fate of these sea spawn and hope to help her end all of this."

Lumian looked at Nolfi.

"What kind of tragic end will it lead to?"

The committee members of the Fisheries Guild seemed quite pleased.

Nolfi fell silent for a moment before saying, "All Maidens of the Sea and Children of the Sea eventually transform into a lizard-like humanoid monster. Perhaps earlier, perhaps later, my mother passed away because she was attacked by assassins hired by the Fisheries Guild and wanted to die as a human. Not only did she refuse treatment, but she also inflicted some damage on herself."

In that case, the humanoid lizard at Rubió Paco's house is a common sight in families around Port Santa. Why the need for secrecy? Lumian turned to Batna with a smile, asking, "Did you know Nolfi would transform into a humanoid lizard?"

"Yes." Batna expressed that he didn't mind.

At that moment, Nolfi inquired, "Then do you know what a humanoid lizard looks like?"

As she spoke, the rather attractive female adventurer's eyes widened. Shimmering illusory scales appeared on her body, and her skin transformed into that of a snake.

Batna jumped in fright, taking a step back involuntarily.

Lumian continued to ask Nolfi, "Why didn't you rent a boat at a nearby port and find a sailor to sail it over? Why choose a ship rental company in Port Santa?"

Nolfi undid the phantom scales, reverting to her original appearance, frustration and embarrassment evident in her voice.

"In Port Santa, people often rent boats for fishing and sightseeing. This should be a very ordinary thing…"

Lumian sighed helplessly.

"Did you know that last year's sea prayer ritual failed? The Fisheries Guild will be on high alert this year, investigating all unstable factors. Besides, the sea prayer ritual is only a few days away. It's inevitable to start paying attention to those who rent boats to go out to sea."

Nolfi and Batna remained silent, resembling two students.

After a moment, Nolfi asked in surprise and suspicion, "Did the sea prayer ritual fail last year?"

Lumian didn't answer immediately. He thought for a moment and said,

"You want to end the sea prayer ritual with just the two of you? What gave you the confidence?"

Nolfi pursed her lips and stated, "As long as I can enter those waters and find the palace, I have a way to destroy it and end everything."

"Palace?" Lumian's eyebrows twitched.

Nolfi nodded.

"When my mother was possessed by the sea, she saw a strange palace through her spirituality and the connection between them. It's located at the bottom of the sea. It's the palace of the sea!"

Chapter 562: Changed Plans

562 Changed Plans

Palace? Lumian hadn't anticipated gaining information that Lato Guiaro lacked from Nolfi.

After a brief pause, he inquired, "What's the palace like?"

Was it an ancient relic or the abode of some natural spirit?

Could the sea prayer ritual be tapping into the palace's inner power?

Nolfi shook her head.

"My mother couldn't give a detailed description. She just mentioned that the palace is unlike any structure on land. It boasts a peculiar design, with smooth curves and a reflective metallic sheen. Overall, it's silver-gray."

Lumian envisioned the palace based on Nolfi's account, though lacking specifics, he could only conjure an approximate image.

He grinned and remarked, "If that's truly the sea palace, do you honestly believe you two can bring it down?

"If you struggle against Lato Guiaro and his crew, how do you plan to breach the sea spawn's defenses? How will you escape the sea's fury?"

Nolfi paused for a moment before responding, "I have my ways."

She didn't elaborate on the method.

Could a Child of the Sea, likely below Sequence 7 in strength, truly destroy the sea palace? An entity capable of unleashing violent storms across the entire sea… Lumian pondered, forming a sudden hypothesis.

Was Nolfi's confidence rooted in collaboration with others? Had she not returned to Port Santa without adequate preparations?

As Lumian's mind raced, he shifted his gaze toward Batna.

Batna Comté, who had inadvertently distanced himself from Nolfi by two to three steps, had just re-sheathed his rapier and concealed his revolver.

Sensing Lumian's scrutiny, he grinned sheepishly and explained, "I'm here for support and to command the ship. You might not know, but I served as a second mate for a while before becoming an adventurer."

In other words, he implied: "I'm not sure about Nolfi's plan either. Whether she succeeds or not doesn't concern me much. I've fulfilled my duty as a lover by providing some assistance."

I can tell that you come from a good background based on your refined attire and grooming… Initially, I thought you ran away from home, enchanted by Gehrman Sparrow's adventure story, and went to sea to become an adventurer. Now, it seems your family recommended you to be a second mate to gain work experience. After a while, you resigned and chose the path of an adventurer… Lumian was unsure how to assess Batna's romanticism. Glancing at him, he commented, "Do you realize how dangerous this situation is?"

Batna cleared his throat and replied, "I thought the Children of the Seas wouldn't be too formidable. Nolfi and I have sparred before."

Lumian eyed Batna for a couple of seconds before redirecting his gaze to Nolfi.

"What are your plans moving forward?"

Without directly inquiring about hidden collaborators, Lumian circumvented the question, aiming to lower Nolfi's guard and uncover any hints from her responses.

Nolfi pursed her lips and said, "We've been exposed and targeted by the Fisheries Guild. Our original plan is no longer viable. I intend to lay low until the sea prayer ritual concludes."

"Why not just leave?" Batna interjected, expressing surprise on Lumian's "behalf."

He believed that once Nolfi's motives and identity were revealed, she would promptly abandon this operation and devise an alternative plan for a future sea prayer ritual.

Nolfi fell silent for a moment before revealing, "If the sea prayer ritual succeeds, and I'm still in Port Santa, being a Child of the Sea with a relatively pure bloodline, I should be able to gain a certain boon…"

She paused, briefly gazing at the ground.

"Although it might hasten my transformation into a humanoid lizard, it can also enhance my strength…"

A subtle sorrow lingered in her words.

Batna stared blankly, his mouth agape, but no words escaped him.

Lumian raised his hand, adjusting the golden straw hat on his head. Using a well-known line from the Adventurer series, he remarked, "This is both a blessing and a curse."

As Louis Berry prepared to depart, Nolfi once again expressed her sincere gratitude.

"I don't know how to express my gratitude. If you need any help, feel free to come to me."

"You can find me too," Batna chimed in.

Caught between staying with Nolfi or leaving Port Santa, he hesitated.

Lumian's gaze swept across their faces, and he suddenly smiled.

"Coincidentally, I have something for you two to do."

Nolfi was taken aback but nodded gently.

"Just shoot."

…

Having bid farewell to Nolfi and Batna, Lumian stealthily returned to Solow Motel from the shadows.

Emerging from the darkness in the corner of the master bedroom, he found the Knight of Swords standing by the curtains, silently observing him under the crimson moonlight.

Why do you always appear like a scene from a ghost story… Is this a Wraith trait or a manifestation of the potion's influence? Lumian critiqued, expressing gratitude,

"Thank you for your assistance."

The Knight of Swords remained silent. He looked at Lumian and inquired, "After controlling Lato Guiaro, it seems you've altered your original plan?"

Lumian chuckled.

"You're quite perceptive, but I changed my mind perhaps a little earlier or later than the moment you specified."

He responded with a hint of a charlatan's demeanor and elaborated with a smile, "How can an original plan be executed without any changes? That's not the mark of a Conspirer but an omnipotent and omniscient one.

"During the planning process, one must adjust their approach based on feedback, new information, and changes in the situation, while ensuring the true motive remains intact."

Hence, concealing his true motives was crucial.

It was akin to the many paths between the starting point and the end, with often only one true conclusion. This point was the most vulnerable to blockages and ambushes.

The Knight of Swords listened quietly and then silently vanished by the window.

Lumian allowed himself to relax, washed up, and retired to bed, sleeping soundly until six in the morning.

Following breakfast provided by the motel, he directed Lugano to take Ludwig to the streets for some snacks.

Observing their departure through the closed door, Lumian returned to the master bedroom, where the curtains still hung. In the dimness, he pulled out the armchair from the desk and settled in.

After an indeterminate period, he suddenly noticed glimmers in the depths of the darkness.

He felt himself suspended in midair, devoid of solid ground beneath his feet or a backrest behind him.

Lumian maintained a stoic expression as he gazed into the profound void with a cosmos-like backdrop. From a distance, Juan Oro, the president of the Fisheries Guild, approached, attired in a formal suit and wielding a walking stick.

Lumian looked at the old man in silence, displaying no surprise, as if anticipating Juan Oro's arrival.

As the distance closed to a certain extent, Juan Oro's wrinkles trembled as he uttered in Intisian, "Milo Village was once obliterated, along with the sea spawn that ventured onto the land. Yet, we stand here today.

"As long as the sea endures, as long as the cosmos persists, as long as Port Santa remains a forbidden land for death, we can resurface from the sea's depths, regardless of the blows we endure or the loss of our descendants. We can rebuild Milo Village and initiate the sea prayer ritual anew.

"This is attested by the clergyman of the Earth Mother Church, their combat ascetics, and their nuns.

"If we, the Children of the Sea, are truly pushed to the edge of a precipice, we possess the courage and determination to drag the enemy into the abyss. This is because we firmly believe in our indestructible spirit and the ability to rebuild our village, preventing its extinction."

You share all this with me to convey that the Fisheries Guild and Milo Village's sea spawn are unafraid of threats, possessing both the ability and courage to face powerful enemies. Furthermore, you suggest that the corresponding legacies will endure, resurfacing from the sea in the future. It's akin to a warning, cautioning me not to go too far. Otherwise, they won't hesitate to engage in an internecine conflict… Lumian comprehended Juan Oro's veiled message and chose not to respond. He silently observed the old man, waiting for him to continue.

Juan Oro's azure eyes reflected the image of the black-haired, green-eyed adventurer Louis Berry. In a resonant voice, he questioned, "What do you and the forces supporting you desire? What is your aim? We won't tolerate the disruption of the sea prayer ritual, nor will we abandon the foundations laid in Port Santa."

Realizing that adventurer Louis Berry is not only formidable but also backed by a faction, they must perceive me as a tough adversary. If they were to confront me head-on, they might find it challenging to prevail. Hence, he's here to negotiate, seeking to exchange concessions for my withdrawal? Is he attempting to assert his bottom line and strength to dissuade me from rash actions, leaving both sides with a way out? Lumian showed no surprise. He glanced around and remarked, "Why isn't there a chair? I prefer discussing matters while seated."

After a brief silence from Juan Oro, the armchair reappeared behind Lumian, and he resumed his original posture.

Lumian calmly gazed at Juan Oro, the Fisheries Guild president, and stated, "Would you believe me if I told you I never intended to disrupt the sea prayer ritual?"

"Never intended to disrupt the sea prayer ritual…" Juan Oro repeated, his deep wrinkles furrowing.

Lumian continued, "As long as you're willing to spare the innocent, like the fake Governor of the Sea, cooperation isn't out of the question."

"Cooperation?" Juan Oro couldn't conceal his astonishment. He scrutinized the adventurer who had forcefully intervened in the Fisheries Guild's affairs upon arriving at Port Santa. Lumian had stormed the Governor of the Sea's residence, blown up the Fisheries Guild's main building, and nearly killed his grandson. He wondered if his hearing had slowed down like the other elders.

A smile gradually spread across Lumian's face. He leaned back in his chair and snapped his fingers, igniting a crimson flame.

"Yes, cooperation."

Chapter 563: Another Attempt

563 Another Attempt

Upon learning the intricacies of Louis Berry's collaboration and his unwavering commitment, Juan Oro found himself questioning the reliability of his own ears once again.

It wasn't that the other party's demands were outrageous or absurd, making it sound like some kind of jest. On the contrary, the Fisheries Guild could fulfill his desires with minimal effort, without requiring a substantial payment.

This went beyond Juan Oro's initial expectations.

Prior to meeting Louis Berry, he had mentally prepared himself for potential ruthless "extortion." After all, considering the ease with which the other party subdued Lato Guiaro and displayed strength against the Fisheries Guild, Oro had anticipated a tougher negotiation. Surprisingly, Louis Berry proved to be more amenable to discussion than Oro had envisioned.

This led Juan Oro to contemplate whether there might be some deception at play. He wondered if, in the future, Berry would abruptly turn against him during their collaboration, breaking the promises made.

Lumian observed the wrinkled old man silently, refraining from clarifying his intentions. Explaining might expose his true motives, and the timing wasn't right yet.

After careful consideration, Juan Oro let out a sigh of age.

"We can accede to your request."

"However, throughout our collaboration, we will remain vigilant and formulate contingency plans."

Lumian smiled, rising from the suspended armchair in the void. He extended his right hand to Juan Oro.

"Pleasure working with you."

Juan Oro shook his hand and remarked, "You're not as crazy as you seem…"

Lumian pondered for a moment and smirked.

"Of course, I've always been a clever, rational, and polite adventurer."

Juan Oro wasn't in the mood for idle chatter. He nodded at Louis Berry and stated, "Given your preference for discretion in our collaboration, I should depart now. Otherwise, my visit might become known to others."

Lumian took a moment to contemplate before responding, "I'll dispatch my concealed companion to Milo Village tomorrow night. Ensure the surviving sailors from last year's ritual are brought to your main building in advance and kept under control."

"Agreed." Juan Oro didn't object; this was one of the terms they had agreed upon.

As the cane-wielding old man prepared to leave, Lumian called out thoughtfully,

"I'm a man of my word. I promised Giorgia I wouldn't disclose the details of the commission to anyone.

"But I have a question for you. Have any Children of the Sea from the Paco family gone missing recently or not been seen for an extended period?"

He hinted that his inquiry was linked to the Paco family's commission.

Juan Oro's expression darkened as he contemplated for more than ten seconds.

"The Paco family's Children of the Sea have made appearances recently.

"At first, I thought something had happened to Rubió's mother, Martha, that we shouldn't know about. Yet, it turns out she's still fine, just severely injured."

No missing Children of the Sea from the Paco family? Where did the humanoid lizard come from? Lumian was alarmed.

His initial thought was that the Paco family might be involved with other Children of the Sea. His second thought was that one of the Paco family's Children of the Sea might have been replaced.

Is the impostor parading around with the original's face, while the real individual had transformed into a humanoid lizard, meeting their demise at the hands of the great adventurer?

Lumian couldn't help but associate the substitute and the frequent appearances of the person in question with a Sequence name: Faceless!

It aligned with the Lie earring's Sequence—the previous Sequence of Marionettist Loki!

Could it be that after Loki's resurrection, he infiltrated Port Santa and clandestinely replaced a key member of the Paco family? Was his goal to set a trap for me and execute something during the sea prayer ritual, continuing what he had left incomplete the previous year?

With these thoughts swirling, Lumian couldn't help but experience a blend of excitement and fear.

However, upon further consideration, he dismissed the notion.

If Loki had genuinely substituted an essential member of the Paco family, there wouldn't be any humanoid lizard sightings. He could have discreetly resolved the issue and erased all traces, avoiding such an obvious loophole!

Moreover, Rubió Paco wasn't the sole Child of the Sea in the Paco family. Martha, as a Maiden of the Sea, also wielded the residual power of the sea. How could they struggle against a humanoid lizard whose strength hadn't reached the Mid-Sequence? Why would they take the risk of exposing the secret and hiring an external adventurer, Louis Berry, to handle the situation?

With Lumian's comprehension of the sea prayer ritual and sea spawn deepening, it left him even more bewildered about the Paco family's previous decisions. He believed that crucial information was concealed within.

He turned to Juan Oro, organizing his thoughts.

"Are descendants of the same Maidens of the Sea prohibited from attacking each other?"

"There's no such restriction." Juan Oro dismissed Lumian's speculation.

Lumian deliberately mused aloud, "Then why did the Paco family intentionally hire an outsider like me for the commission instead of utilizing their own Beyonders?"

Juan Oro maintained his serious expression.

"It's for the same reason I hired someone to monitor Paco's house. That's why I sent the Little Devil to interrogate you. That's why I needed to meet Martha."

You call that wrinkled, old man-like monster "Little Devil"? Lumian nodded gently and asked, "The Paco family must be harboring a significant secret."

He refrained from delving deeper and watched as Juan Oro turned away, walking off with his cane.

Soon, the Cosmic Void around him dissipated, and he "returned" to the draped master bedroom of the suite, seated in the armchair before the desk.

Lumian smiled, pivoted, grasped the curtain, and drew it open.

The morning sun flooded in, casting a radiant glow.

…

The next night, within the ancestral house of the Oro family in Milo Village, a structure only one floor shorter than the residence of the Governor of the Sea.

The building had undergone numerous renovations, showcasing a fusion of antiquated and modern architecture. Blackened gray stone walls stood alongside concrete pillars, and beneath the seaweed-covered roof lay red-ringed tiles.

The door to the first-floor lounge had been shut, leaving only an elderly man with a black cane—Juan Oro—and his cherished grandson—Fernandez Oro—alongside eight unconscious villagers of Milo Village sprawled on the ground.

Suddenly, a shadow flickered in a corner of the room, and a figure materialized.

Standing just over 1.7 meters tall, the figure possessed an ordinary face and sported a brownish-green short-sleeved shirt, loose brownish-yellow pants, strapless leather shoes with vents, and a short circular felt hat.

"Who are you?" Juan Oro inquired in Intisian.

As one of Port Santa's strongest sea merchants, he had sailed numerous times between the ages of 30 and 50. It was only natural for him to comprehend Intisian.

The man responded fluently in Highlander, "I'm Louis Berry's companion. You can call me Charname."

It doesn't seem like the spirit-type Beyonder Lato encountered… Louis Berry has more than one companion lurking in the shadows… Juan Oro rejoiced that he had chosen negotiation first.

With these thoughts racing through his mind, he glanced at Fernandez, whose face remained pale, and understood that he wasn't entirely pleased.

It was common for young lads to be calculating about who suffered and who benefited, often forgetting their most essential motives.

"You can start questioning them," Juan Oro instructed the man known as Charname. "Over the past year, we've employed various methods to determine if they're lying or not. We've even exploited the uniqueness of other sea spawn. All the results indicate that they've told the complete truth and concealed nothing. The failure of the sea prayer ritual has nothing to do with them."

Charname's lips curved into a smile as he replied, "How would I know if I don't give it a shot myself?"

Approaching the unconscious sailors, he retrieved a dagger and stabbed their fingertips one by one, smearing the corresponding blood on various spots on the back of his hand.

Amidst the pain, the sailors began to awaken one after another.

In front of them, Charname produced a mirror and smiled.

"Your blood will reveal if you're lying and if you're the genuine person. If anyone deceives me, their blood will burn on the mirror, and they'll face the same fate.

"Alright, answer them one by one."

As Charname spoke, he calmly transferred the blood from the back of his hand to the mirror, a strange sight as it seemed to seep into the glass.

The sailors glanced at Juan Oro, realizing this was another investigation into the cause of the sea prayer ritual's failure last year. Skilfully, they recounted their experiences, leaving no details omitted.

After hearing their accounts, Charname asked thoughtfully, "Were Iru and Salah responsible for transporting the lamb sacrifices?"

"Yes," all the sailors replied in unison.

Charname pressed on, "Did they both perish during the sea prayer ritual?"

The surviving sailors nodded, confirming that their two companions had been thrown overboard in the tidal wave of the failed ritual, never to surface again.

Turning to Juan Oro, Charname inquired, "Do you have any belongings from Iru and Salah? Clothes they've worn many times, toothbrushes not discarded, and the like.

"I want to try summoning their spirits. Although most of their spirits would have dissipated over the past year and can't remember effective information, the state of their spirits can reveal certain things, such as deep resentment and hatred."

Juan Oro shook his head.

"We attempted it after the sea prayer ritual. We couldn't summon their spirits. Those consumed by the raging sea would have their spirits devoured as well."

Charname chuckled and suggested, "Let's give it another shot. There's nothing to lose by trying."

Juan Oro pondered for a moment and agreed. He immediately instructed Fernandez to retrieve Iru's extracted tooth and Salah's clothes, previously used for spirit channeling.

Then, they observed as Charname set up the altar and initiated a summoning ritual.

"I!

"I summon in my name:

"The sailor of Port Santa's Milo Village, a man named Iru Adela, the owner of this tooth…"

A gust of wind blew, and the altar's candle flame took on a dark-green hue.

A blurry figure quickly materialized.

Success? He actually succeeded? Fernandez's pupils dilated as he gazed above the candle flame.

The figure vaguely resembled Iru, but it showed no signs of drowning; its skin was pale-white and swollen. Instead, its face was covered in blood, and there was an evident wound on its forehead.

The specter's eyes brimmed with pain and hatred.

Chapter 564: Individual Roles

564 Individual Roles

Looking at the specter suspected to be Iru, Juan Oro's expression shifted.

Back then, even though they had missed the optimal time for spirit channeling, they still managed to learn about the deaths on the first day and found items that could accurately pinpoint the target. Utilizing the Little Devil's ability, they completed the summoning, but none of the deceased spirits appeared. This led them to believe that the human spirits that angered the sea would be devoured. No further attempts were made.

Nearly a year later, the summoning had actually succeeded!

Moreover, it appeared that Iru hadn't drowned at sea but had been shot.

This was entirely different from the backlash caused by the failure of the sea prayer ritual!

Charname used Hermes to inquire about the spirit suspected to be Iru, but the target was already in a daze and couldn't recall anything. Even his appearance had become blurry, assimilated by the environment.

Charname concluded the ritual and used Salah's clothes, worn over many years, to summon the spirit of the other deceased.

This time, nothing happened.

Charname refrained from further attempts. He extinguished the candle's flame and dispelled the wall of spirituality. In Highlander, he addressed Juan Oro, "The problem has become clearer."

Juan Oro didn't respond. Instead, he turned to his grandson, Fernandez.

"Take them out and send them home. Instruct each of them."

"Alright." Although Fernandez yearned to hear Charname's conjecture and understand the subsequent events, he didn't dare disobey his grandfather's orders. He hurriedly led the surviving sailors out of the lounge and closed the door.

After a few moments, Juan Oro shifted his gaze to Charname, whose features didn't stand out.

"Are you suggesting that the Iru who perished during the sea prayer ritual was an imposter?"

Charname asked with a smirk, "Why do you think the fake Iru is really dead? The others might have been swallowed by the sea, but not him."

Disregarding the miraculous resurrection, nobody present could prove that the fake Iru had indeed fallen into the sea.

Observing Juan Oro's silence, Charname pressed on, "The real Iru should have been assassinated by those saboteurs days or even weeks before the sea prayer ritual. No, he was more likely to have been kidnapped, killed by a gun a period after the sea prayer ritual completed; after all, the living cannot have their spirit channeled. Later, someone disguised themselves as him and lived in Milo Village for a period. Without arousing suspicion, they boarded the Governor of the Sea's wedding ship as a sailor.

"Right, is Iru the kind with no living elders, no spouse, no kids, and not residing with siblings?"

Juan Oro's eyes narrowed as he spoke, "More or less. Their grandmother passed away over a decade ago. His parents, Children of the Sea, established a separate family. After reaching adulthood, they lost control of their powers, turning into pure sea spawn. We had to send them back to the sea."

"As expected, they picked the sailor with the least difficult disguise," Charname remarked with a sigh.

Juan Oro frowned and said, "Yet, everyone boarding the ship undergoes a routine inspection by another sea spawn to confirm authenticity."

Charname chuckled.

"As you said, it's a routine inspection, and in this world, many disguises require specific methods or deeper identification to uncover."

Juan Oro nodded solemnly.

Charname kindly suggested with a hint of flaunting, "Next time, it might be wise to draw blood from everyone boarding the ship and compare it to their closest relatives. It could reveal their true bloodline."

"That's an idea," Juan Oro tersely acknowledged.

Over the centuries, the sea prayer ritual had encountered no issues, so they hadn't considered refining the details.

Juan Oro inquired, "What do those who disrupted the ritual want?"

"We're not certain either," Charname shrugged, glancing towards the curtained window that led to the Governor of the Sea's residence.

Juan Oro sensed a hint in Charname's allusion to something Louis Berry had mentioned earlier. He subtly nodded and added, "When this year's sea prayer ritual succeeds, we'll release Miguel and allow him to live in Torres. By then, the failure of last year's ritual won't remain a secretive burden. There's no need for us to harm Miguel."

"Miguel?" Charname inquired thoughtfully.

"He's the false Governor of the Sea. He used to work for the Fisheries Company, and his lineage traces back to Milo Village," Juan Oro explained succinctly.

Charname diverted his gaze, a faint smile gracing his lips.

"He's had his year of indulgence. Fear may linger, but everything comes with a price."

The companion of the great adventurer paused, curiosity lighting up his eyes.

"Did your ancestor come from the depths of the sea, or did ordinary fishermen suddenly gain inspiration and enlightenment, mastering the art of pleasing the sea and gaining its favor?" he inquired.

Juan Oro took a moment of silence before responding, "We don't know. Both possibilities are equally plausible. Milo Village was once eradicated by the Earth Mother Church. Many legacies were severed, and we're left clueless about our ancestors' origins.

"On a personal note, I lean towards the second theory. We're different from typical sea spawn. The children we bear initially resemble humans. It's only as they absorb more of the sea's power that they transform into humanoid lizards. Additionally, while our strength weakens, theirs does not."

Charname nodded in agreement.

"I'm inclined to think the second scenario is more likely too."

He then asked, "Have all traces of Milo Village's ancestors truly been erased? Is there no evidence left?"

Juan Oro studied Charname for a moment before revealing, "There's some residual evidence in the underground chamber of the Governor of the Sea's residence, but it's just symbols and patterns. They're meaningless and indecipherable.

"If you want to see them, wait until the vigil ritual. But aren't you concerned about the risk of exposing our collaboration by going to the Governor of the Sea's residence now?"

"Fair point." After obtaining other details, Charname abruptly receded into the shadows in the corner and vanished.

Juan Oro watched as the great adventurer's companion disappeared and released a slow sigh.

He sensed a storm brewing around Port Santa.

…

In the master bedroom of the fifth-floor suite at Solow Motel.

Emerging from the shadows, Charname adorned the silver Lie earring behind his left ear. His eyes swiftly transformed, becoming as clear as a lake, and his flaxen-tinted hair cascaded over his shoulders.

Franca, still radiating astonishing charm despite her male attire, tossed the earring back to Lumian. She retrieved a black rubber band from her pocket and tied her long hair into a high ponytail.

"I've discovered traces of Bard!" the Demoness of Pleasure exclaimed with joy.

"Why Bard and not the other two?" Lumian sat in an armchair in front of the desk, tightly drawn curtains behind him.

Deliberately returning to Trier and bringing Franca to Port Santa for her assistance, Lumian believed himself inferior to the Demoness of Pleasure in divination and spirit channeling. Rather than wasting the truth serum, he sought Franca's direct help. Additionally, he wanted Franca to assume the guise of his other identity, completely separating "him" from the adventurer Louis Berry. This would enable him to deceive those secretly monitoring him and potentially execute future deceptions.

Franca shared her findings from the spirit channeling today and the completed conversation.

"The fake Iru must first possess powers akin to a Faceless's, followed by adept thieving skills. Long ago, I Know Someone mentioned that Bard is a

Sequence 6 Prometheus of the Marauder pathway. It's highly likely he's even stronger now.

"If others hadn't confirmed that Loki wasn't involved in last year's sea prayer ritual prank, at least not openly, he would have been the most suitable to impersonate Iru. Now, the probability of Iru being Bard is higher.

"As a Mid-Sequence Marauder Beyonder, perhaps he possesses an item similar to Lie. Maybe he prayed to that Celestial Worthy, undergoing a change in physique and appearance. Additionally, he could be imbued with mystical anti-divination and anti-prophecy traits. Marauder is one of the three pathways most easily influenced by Celestial Worthy."

Lumian listened quietly, and a smile gradually formed on his face.

"Bard's role and purpose in last year's ritual are essentially clear.

"He disguised himself as a sailor, boarded the ship, stole the genuine ceremonial ring, and replaced it with a fake one. Then, he willingly leaped into the sea, feigning his death to make his escape!"

Lumian paused briefly before continuing, "The question now is, what roles did Mad Lady and Ultraman play in this matter? So far, their presence doesn't seem to affect the final failure of the sea prayer ritual."

Franca pursed her lips and paced back and forth.

"Mad Lady might handle receiving and communication. For instance, after Bard jumped into the sea, she could 'teleport' over and whisk him away to prevent him from being consumed by the tumultuous sea. Only a Traveler possesses such an ability.

"Ultraman is likely responsible for providing information about the sea prayer ritual and devising the corresponding plan. But that can't be all. He probably has other roles…"

Lumian leaned back in his chair, stroking his chin thoughtfully.

"I concur with your hypothesis about Mad Lady, but according to the information we have, entering those special waters requires guidance from the Children of the Sea, following a specific route. How did Mad Lady 'teleport' inside? Was she lurking on the ship? Or does Bard carry some special coordinates with him? It's certainly not a physical item; otherwise, it would have been discovered.

"As for Ultraman, I've always suspected he's a native of Port Santa with a profound understanding of the sea prayer ritual. He likely orchestrated the prank last year."

At this point, Lumian stood up.

"My intuition suggests that if we can uncover Ultraman's actions in last year's prank and identify his role beyond being the mastermind, we can discern April Fool's true motives in this matter!"

Chapter 565: Possible Breakthrough

565 Possible Breakthrough

Franca's emotions were stirred by Lumian's words, and she responded with anticipation, "Then it's akin to catching a fox by its tail. When the time comes, we'll summon good helpers and strive to eliminate a few more key members of April Fool's!"

As she spoke, she gritted her teeth.

Despite Lumian and Franca making various guesses and deductions about Ultraman's role in last year's prank, none of them felt they had grasped the key to the mystery.

Franca exhaled and said, "Phew, there are still some important puzzle pieces missing. See if you can fish out more details."

She needed to return to Trier.

Lumian tersely acknowledged her words and asked thoughtfully, "How's your search for the Tamara family's descendant going?"

"Nothing yet, but Madam Judgment intends to inform the other Major Arcana card holders about this. She hopes they can help keep an eye out," Franca briefly explained her situation.

Lumian gazed at her face and said, "I have an investigative direction."

"What?" Franca perked up.

Lumian's lips curled up.

"Investigate the other members of the Demoness Sect in Trier.

"Given the close ties between certain members of the Tamara family and the Demoness Sect, they might even be collaborating to establish the secret organization, Theosophy Order. There's a chance that one of them could directly join the Demoness Sect.

"Moreover, considering Madam Judgment's mission for you to infiltrate the Demoness Sect, discern the Primordial Demoness's current state and issues, why not investigate other Demonesses? Are you going to wait until you reach the level of a powerhouse like a Demoness of Red before gathering information? Do you believe there will be enough Angel-level Hunter Beyonder characteristics to aid your return to your original gender at that point?"

"Why the Demoness of Red?" Franca instinctively focused on this question.

Lumian smiled.

"Have you forgotten your nickname, Madame Red Boots?"

Franca smiled awkwardly.

"Isn't that to create a persona with characteristics that can be easily changed when you're on the run? It's clearly different from the description on the wanted poster.

"Ahem, isn't it too dangerous to investigate other Demonesses under the watchful eyes of the Demoness of Black?"

Lumian raised his eyebrows and smiled meaningfully.

"Why are you investigating the Tamara family?"

"Investigating Mirror People," Franca replied subconsciously.

Lumian asked again, "And who assigned you the Mirror People investigation?"

"The Demoness of Black…" Franca immediately shut her mouth.

She then muttered to herself, "However, an intricate balance needs to be struck. The source of the intel must be fabricated nicely; otherwise, we'll still be suspected."

Lumian didn't say anything else. He grabbed Franca's shoulder and planned to send her back to Trier.

Franca glanced at the curtained window and eagerly said, "Remember to ask me for help when you visit the combat nuns in the future."

She arrived in Port Santa in the afternoon and spent a long time using the fake name—Charname—she chose herself, and the face on Lumian's fake ID to travel about. With her fluent Highlander, she quickly grasped the folklore and combat nuns' styles.

Lumian scoffed dismissively.

"Don't even think about it. You can't impregnate them."

Franca replied indignantly, "Theoretically, it's not impossible, but it's quite dangerous. Think about it, Madame Pualis."

Lumian was left speechless.

"Besides, giving birth isn't the only important thing in life…" Franca continued to search for an excuse.

Lumian exhaled silently and activated the black mark on his right shoulder.

He disappeared from the master bedroom with Franca, who was still talking.

In no time, Lumian reappeared at the exact spot he had left.

Shaking his head and teasing Franca, he eased back into the armchair.

It had to be acknowledged that bantering and joking with friends, free from the need for caution, proved helpful in relieving the pent-up emotions within him.

Having regained his composure, Lumian reclined in his chair, sorting through the information on the sea prayer ritual and various rhetoric in his mind. He sought details that might unveil traces of Ultraman's existence and confirm any overlooked issues.

As a Conspirer, Lumian didn't require jotting down key points on paper. He relied on his eyes to decipher the hints. All the information formed a colossal spiderweb in his mind, slowly weaving and transforming.

After a while, he abruptly sat upright.

A breakthrough had been unearthed that could expose the essence of the sea prayer ritual.

Lumian stood and exited the master bedroom. He spotted Ludwig devouring a crispy potato omelet at the dining table in the living room.

Seated across from the boy, Lumian smiled as he retrieved the mutated black spider's compound eye, a spiritual ingredient lacking Beyonder characteristics.

Ludwig immediately glanced up at Lumian.

"Can you eat this?" Lumian flicked the black compound eye.

Ludwig vigorously nodded.

"Yes."

Intrigued, Lumian took out the Mystery Prying Glasses and inquired, "Can you eat this?"

"Not yet," Ludwig honestly replied.

Not yet. In other words, perhaps in the future? Lumian stowed away the Mystery Prying Glasses and placed the mutated black spider's compound eye on the dining table before him.

"I'd like you to translate something. If you can provide the correct answer, it's yours for consumption."

Ludwig gulped and agreed, "Okay."

Lumian recalled Lato Guiaro's strange pronunciation and emitted a chattering sound.

Finally, he said, "That's the general idea."

Ludwig shook his head in disappointment.

"I don't know."

He paused briefly before adding, "But I think I've heard it somewhere. It's somewhat familiar."

Had most of his memories and knowledge been sealed when his Body of Heart and Mind was sealed? Under Ludwig's reluctant gaze, Lumian returned the mutated black spider's compound eye to his Traveler's Bag.

Ludwig shoved a mouthful of potato omelet into his mouth and mumbled, "If you can find a creature that understands this language for me to eat, I can translate for you."

Wh… Lumian asked in surprise, "Can you acquire a certain ability or knowledge by consuming something?"

"There's a time limit, and it depends on the specific situation," Ludwig succinctly explained without elaborating.

Lumian nodded thoughtfully.

"Were you able to reveal information about the Batings Black Insect because you had consumed that kind of insect shortly before?"

Ludwig nodded. "Yes, it wanted to ambush me. It had been waiting for a long time."

That explains it. I had thought you had recovered some of your memories and knowledge. Indeed, a paralyzing attack wouldn't only target Lugano. After all, this could turn into a trap at any moment… Lumian stood up and left the dining table, returning to the master bedroom under Ludwig's pitiful gaze.

He had no means to find Ludwig a creature that understood the Language of the Sea. The Fisheries Guild members couldn't be certain if their interpretation was accurate.

After entering the master bedroom and closing the door, Lumian lowered his voice and said, "Temiboros, do you understand that language? Do you know the true meaning of that sentence?"

Termiboros's majestic voice echoed in Lumian's ears.

"In any case, it doesn't mean 'We espouse thee, O sea, as a sign of true and perpetual dominion.'"

With that, Termiboros fell silent again, showing no intention of explaining the true meaning to Lumian.

Dammit, might as well not answer! You confirmed my guess but didn't unveil the true content! Heh heh, could it be that you're just pretending to understand? Lumian cursed inwardly, feeling that Termiboros, the Angel of Inevitability, was becoming less direct and straightforward than before. He didn't comprehend the art of sophistry.

Gradually, He learned how to infuriate!

Lumian composed himself and settled back into the armchair. Unfolding the letter, he began writing to Madam Magician.

Detailing his travels, he recounted what he had observed in Port Santa. Finally, he pieced together the pronunciation and wrote down the words to the unknown language. He gave the interpretation of what the Fisheries Guild believed: "We espouse thee, O sea, as a sign of true and perpetual dominion." Then, he made a request: Madam, have you encountered this language before? Do you know its true meaning?"

After folding the letter, Lumian initiated a ritual and summoned the "doll" messenger.

The "doll" messenger, adorned in a light-gold dress, emerged from the candle's flame and surveyed its surroundings. In a menacing tone, it declared, "Don't let that filthy child near me!"

"He's dining outside. He won't enter without my permission." For some reason, Lumian sensed hidden fear in the "doll" messenger's aggressive words.

The messenger nodded in satisfaction.

"Keep an eye on it! If it acts up, don't feed it!"

Using it as a substitute name… Lumian smiled and said, "If I don't feed him, something even more terrifying might happen."

The messenger fell silent for a moment before saying,

"Then feed it more!"

With that, the doll-like messenger swiftly withdrew the folded letter into the candle flame.

Lumian concluded the ritual, extinguished the candle's flame, and gazed at the master bedroom's door. He muttered to himself, It's indeed a dangerous sealed creature…

He then retrieved the golden pocket watch from Salle de Bal Brise and opened it to take a look.

Suddenly, he transformed into a shadow, seamlessly blending into the darkness.

There was still something to attend to tonight.

…

In the port district, atop the Fisheries Guild's castle-like building, Lumian found Lato Guiaro waiting on the spot resembling a tower, dressed in a formal suit.

"Are you on duty tonight?" Lumian casually pressed down on his golden straw hat, as if engaging in casual conversation with a friend.

Lato, the middle-aged man, sighed and said, "Originally, no, but since you wanted to come over, that's the case. We can't let an old man like the president do it, right?"

Without further ado, Lumian conjured delayed crimson, nearly white fireballs and hurled them into various corners of the tower.

Having completed this task, he waved at Lato Guiaro and melted back into the shadows.

Lato approached the tower's entrance, clenching his fists in fear.

In just 30 seconds, the crimson, nearly white fireballs exploded simultaneously.

Rumble!

The entire tower became engulfed in flames, and Lato, stationed at the entrance, was sent flying by the shockwave.

Bright scales had already surfaced on his body to mitigate the damage.

Rumble!

In less than half an hour, everyone in Port Santa who was well-informed learned something: the Fisheries Guild had been bombed!

Chapter 566: Gathered Clues

566 Gathered Clues

Solow Motel.

Lumian gazed at the red flames in the port district, tuning in to the distant commotion, anticipating potential visitors.

Before long, a knock echoed on the door.

Lumian didn't wait for Lugano to wake up. He pivoted and strode to the door.

The moment he swung it open, Noelia, clad in brown leather armor and a wimple, stood before him.

Noelia's expression was as cold as ice. She abruptly raised her hand and uttered ancient Hermes words, "Imprison!"

Lumian found himself instantly immobilized. Transparent walls or a viscous liquid seemed to encase him, turning him into an insect trapped in amber.

In the next second, Noelia unsheathed a straight sword from her back.

Simultaneously, Lumian's pants tightened, as if he had grown taller and more robust. An explosive force emanated from his body.

The transparent "amber" restraining him creaked, revealing invisible cracks.

With a whoosh, Noelia clutched the hilt of her straight sword with both hands, slicing through the air, carving through the already shaky "prison," aiming for Lumian's head.

Lumian's right fist, ready to strike, collided with the side of the straight sword, a condensed crimson, almost white flame accompanying the impact.

Amidst a deep and controlled explosion, the straight sword slanted, grazing the door frame as it descended to the ground.

Taking advantage of the situation, Noelia retreated, sheathed her sword, and inquired in Intisian, "Were you the one who blew up the Fisheries Guild?"

Upon witnessing this, Lumian refrained from retaliation. His body returned to its normal state as he smiled and replied, "It doesn't matter if I blew it up. What matters is whether anyone can prove it."

He understood that Noelia had issued a warning and wasn't truly targeting him. Otherwise, she would have employed other Beyonder powers after the "Imprison" instead of slashing with her sword.

Noelia, upholding the dignity of maintaining order in Port Santa throughout the year, used a questioning tone typical for various suspects.

"Why did you go to such lengths? Why did you cause such a commotion?"

Lumian turned his head, signaling Lugano, who had awakened at the commotion, to return to sleep in the servant's room.

Walking toward the recliner in the living room, he ignored Noelia's question and smiled.

"I've discovered something."

"Like what?" Noelia entered the suite and closed the wooden door behind her.

Lumian motioned toward the divan.

"Let's have a seat and talk. I wouldn't want you accusing me of being impolite."

Noelia glanced at Lumian and grinned.

"What kind of politeness is there without greeting me by pressing your cheek against mine?"

Her demeanor was direct.

Lumian eased into the recliner and responded to the question, "For instance, last year's sea prayer ritual failed."

Noelia didn't display surprise. She sat on the edge of the divan, leaning forward slightly to avoid the straight sword on her back from jabbing her.

"What else?"

Lumian pondered for a moment and casually remarked, "Also, the sea prayer ritual is a marriage to the sea.

"Furthermore, the Governor of the Sea is the husband of the sea, and the Maidens of the Sea embody the sea in the real world.

"Whether it's the Governor of the Sea or the Maidens of the Sea, the offspring they bear are the Children of the Sea. The first one possesses the purest bloodline…"

Though Lumian was well aware that the offspring of the women the Governor of the Sea had slept with were descendants of the sea, whether they were Maidens of the Sea or not, with his profound mystical knowledge and extraordinary insights, he couldn't help but consider that the Governor of the Sea having his children on his own was also part of the equation.

Phew, as expected, the more you know, the easier it is to be corrupted. I wouldn't have thought so in the past… Lumian sighed inwardly. Noelia, in surprise and admiration, sighed.

"You've made faster progress in your investigation than I anticipated. Most of it pieced together in such a short time."

It's been quite a while. My Language Comprehension charm will expire tomorrow. I wonder how much I'll retain from this enhanced week of study… Lumian grinned and teased, "Don't tell me you think my reputation as a great adventurer was just boasting?"

"Claiming a bounty of 300,000 gold risot for the Demon Warlock certainly isn't a boast," Noelia diplomatically acknowledged, indicating she didn't underestimate someone capable of hunting down such a target.

Content, she nodded and continued, "While many Beyonders wield impressive abilities, their intelligence often falls short. They revel in belligerence and flaunt their might, but you're not one of them.

"Still, I must caution you not to push too far. Despite understanding your true motive for stirring up this commotion, we must uphold peace and order in Port Santa. Don't make things difficult for us."

Coupled with the warning, the implication is that you shouldn't disrupt Port Santa's current situation. You're free to investigate the sea prayer ritual, but stirring up trouble with the Fisheries Guild is a no-go. What exactly does your Church of Earth Mother aim for? It seems like there's a mixed desire—both wanting and not wanting some actions to be taken… Lumian contemplated Noelia's hint, a smile playing on his lips as he spoke, "If you had been more forthcoming, I wouldn't have had to work this hard."

Noelia offered a polite yet awkward smile.

"We lack extensive intel. All I can say is the Church allows the sea prayer ritual and the Fisheries Guild to obtain power from the sea for a reason, unrelated to our ability to solve it.

"I'm not privy to the reason—perhaps the Archbishop or our Fertility Order president could shed light."

Lumian scoffed and said, "Then why allow my investigation of the sea prayer ritual?"

With a sigh, Noelia replied, "Do we need to know? We didn't pry into your true motives for probing the ritual, did we?"

With that, the combat nun swiftly rose from the sofa, striding purposefully towards the suite's door.

After a few steps, she halted, a thoughtful expression crossing her face.

"There are ancient traces concealed in the basement of the Governor of the Sea's residence in Milo Village. They might unveil something crucial. It's best to seize an opportunity to investigate."

In the subterranean chamber beneath the Governor of the Sea's residence? According to Franca's account, Milo Village's ancestors had left behind symbols and patterns. Does Noelia suggest these hold vital information? Is the reason for the Church of Earth Mother knowingly allowing the occurrence of the sea prayer ritual hidden in that chamber?

If Juan Oro isn't deceptive or concealing the truth, and isn't engaging in foul play, doesn't that imply that the Earth Mother Church possesses a deeper understanding of Milo Village's ancestors than their own descendants? It makes sense. After all, they once obliterated Milo Village and eradicated the faction of those ancestors. Over the past thousand years, there has been no disruption in the legacy, maintaining a prominent position in the real world. Lumian observed Noelia's departure without pressing further.

As he returned to the master bedroom, preparing for sleep, the "doll" messenger dropped a folded piece of paper, swiftly departing without a greeting.

Ludwig isn't that repulsive, except for being a bit ravenous and devouring everything, right?

Uh, Madam Magician does tend to stay up late. She's quickest with her replies at night… Lumian muttered under his breath as he picked up the response.

Swiftly unfolding it, he scanned the contents.

"Your performance in Port Santa has been impressive thus far.

"I won't interfere or provide excessive guidance. This is a prime chance for you to further digest the Conspirer potion.

"I've roughly reconstructed that sentence and read it multiple times. It's not in any language I know presently, but what I can confirm is its lack of natural power. However, it possesses a certain energy—language can possess such energy.

"What does this imply? It means that during the sea prayer ritual, it can't serve as a sacrificial language or communicate with Beyonder items—in simpler terms, the sea.

"So why does the sea prayer ritual work? The key may lie within the ceremonial ring. There's a high chance it has a distinct appearance, peculiar patterns, strong spirituality, and embedded knowledge. The sentence relies on its pronunciation, structure, and energy to activate the ring, making it functional.

"If you can recreate the ring's state after the vigil ritual, I'm confident I can decode its specific effects and approximate meaning."

That makes sense. When Lato Guiaro recited the words 'We espouse thee, O sea…' there were no indications of natural power being invoked. It must serve a different purpose… Lumian gained a deeper understanding of the sea sacrificial segment after reading Madam Magician's explanation.

Most of the clues seemed to await his infiltration of the Governor of the Sea's residence.

…

The next morning, Lugano led Ludwig through the streets, grabbing breakfast according to the boy's cravings.

Out of nowhere, someone hurriedly passed by, head lowered, and seemingly slipped, accidentally bumping into him.

Lugano smoothly shifted his body, preventing the person from making contact.

He went the extra mile, helping the individual up and hypocritically saying, "Be careful."

The man quickly pressed something into Lugano's hand,

muttered an apology, and seamlessly melted into the crowd.

Lugano glanced down at his palm, revealing a crumpled white post-it note.

Unrushed, he didn't immediately read the note. After securing breakfast for Ludwig, he returned to Solow Motel and briefed Lumian.

Lumian took the crumpled note, unfolding it with a nonchalant gesture.

In delicate handwriting, it conveyed: "After last year's ritual, the sea experienced an anomaly."

Chapter 567: Possible Leaker

567 Possible Leaker

The failure of the sea prayer ritual last year caused an anomaly in the sea? Lumian couldn't help but interpret it that way after going through the contents.

Studying the note in his hand, a familiar fragrance wafted to him.

After some thought, Lumian recalled the source: the Paco family's Madame Giorgia's perfume.

Were they inexperienced or intentionally leaving a trace, implying the Paco family as the source of this information? Lumian mused to himself, recalling the sudden appearance of a humanoid lizard in the Paco family, the severe injuries to Rubió Paco's mother Martha, and the peculiarities surrounding them.

Is the core issue the sea's abnormality? Has it weakened the Paco family's Beyonders, causing an ordinary person without sea lineage to transform into a humanoid lizard? Perhaps they don't want other sea spawn to know and were lacking the strength to handle the humanoid lizard, thus seeking foreign adventurers to resolve it? Lumian gained a new insight into the contradictions within the Paco family's commission.

Lato Guiaro and Juan Oro hadn't mentioned the sea's anomaly.

They only noted the sea's increased violence without the ritual's appeasement, the frequent departure of Death Navigators from their territory, and the declining strength of the Children of the Sea.

From their perspective, this situation seemed normal, foreseeable, and unrelated to any anomaly.

Did the anomaly solely affect the Paco family, or did Juan Oro, Lato Guiaro, and others intentionally conceal this matter? Are they guarding against each other? Lumian speculated as he watched the note consumed by crimson flames in his palm.

He leaned toward the latter possibility. If the Paco family wasn't unique, the sea's anomaly should have widespread effects, not solely targeting them.

This understanding shed light on Rubió Paco's disdain when speaking of the Maidens of the Sea.

Discovering the truth about the Maidens of the Sea and his true lineage likely filled him with self-loathing and contempt for the entire sea prayer ritual. He'd rather forfeit his family's inheritance than marry another Maiden of the Sea. When the sea anomaly affected the entire Paco family, these emotions reached their zenith.

Lumian's suspicion grew that Nolfi's covert ally might be Rubió Paco.

Regardless, given the Paco family's resources and status, they could lead a comfortable life even without the sea prayer ritual.

Lugano stood to the side, observing his employer as Lumian delved into deep thought after reading the note. A twinge of nervousness and fluster crossed Lugano's demeanor.

Is something about to unfold again?

Lumian glanced up at Lugano, his expression pensive.

"Though I haven't reached Highlander proficiency, I've mastered the daily words I need. My body language suffices for a normal life in Port Santa. Plus, the folks I'll be dealing with know Intisian.

"I can settle the remaining balance now and offer you a free 'teleport' back to Trier."

Instinctively, Lugano shook his head.

"You can't attend to Ludwig when you're in action. If I leave now, who'll keep an eye on him?"

It's unclear who's watching whom… Lumian stared at Lugano for a brief moment, sensing, for the first time, an unsettling undertone in the interpreter's demeanor.

Despite prior attacks and potential risks, there was an inexplicable resistance to the suggestion of terminating the employment contract and taking his offer for a safe departure!

It wouldn't even cost him a verl d'or!

Considering Lugano's typical behavior and personality, Lumian assumed he would readily accept the remaining payment and leave Port Santa. Reality, however, proved otherwise.

Perhaps Lugano himself doesn't understand the rationale behind his decision. It is just an "instinctive" choice… Lumian nodded subtly, opting not to press further on settling the final payment and terminating their employment contract.

…

In Milo Village, within the Oro family's extensively renovated ancestral house, Juan Oro lounged by the window, puffing on a hookah, his gaze fixed on the sun dipping below the horizon, casting an orange glow. His thoughts drifted to the impending sea prayer ritual, just over a week away.

Abruptly, he turned his head, eyeing a shadow near the door.

The darkness stirred, and a man with green eyes, sporting a golden straw hat, white shirt, and black vest, emerged—the adventurer, Louis Berry.

"Why are you here again?" Juan Oro sighed, switching to Intisian.

Lumian chuckled, dragging a chair into the sun's waning rays.

"I've got another inquiry and a heads-up about a particular operation."

Juan's eyes narrowed.

"What scheme are you plotting now?"

"Tonight, I intend to infiltrate the Governor of the Sea's residence. If I go unnoticed, I'll observe the rooms where the vigil ritual is conducted. If discovered, I'll make a swift exit. This fits my radical persona and purported motives, doesn't it? It'll deflect suspicion from our covert collaboration," Lumian disclosed, a hint of a smile in his explanation.

Juan Oro harbored an unexplained sense of threat from Louis Berry, yet he found no tangible evidence. Despite this, Lumian's words resonated with an unsettling logic.

He drew a deep drag from his hookah in silence before he spoke.

"What are you getting at?"

Lumian smiled.

"I'm curious to see the ring that marries the sea, its intricate engravings, and the patterns it bears.

"I know you've only crafted the ring mold and haven't completed the ritual to infuse it with something special. However, after serving as deputy host 11 times and assisting even more, I'm confident you've memorized the patterns, symbols, and structure."

Juan Oro stiffened, his tone turning icy.

"What's your motive?"

The room's afterglow, touched by the setting sun, dimmed suddenly, as if being pulled into another dimension.

Unfazed, Lumian responded, "Why all the secrecy? Haven't you heard that the ring's design, patterns, and structure have long been exposed?"

Juan Oro's eyes narrowed."When did this happen?"

Lumian arched an eyebrow.

"Didn't my companion inform you of the true reason behind the sea prayer ritual failure?"

"He merely confirmed the fake Iru on the ship." Juan Oro had his suspicions.

Lumian grinned, shaking his head. He began unraveling his deductions, starting with the custom-made fake ring in Torres and the orchestrated lamb sacrifice sent to the ship after a bribe.

Juan Oro held his silence, his countenance growing darker.

After a tense pause, he spoke in a hoarse tone, "Not many are privy to the intricacies of the Ring of the Sea Queen, and the fact that sea spawn seldom inspect the sacrificial offerings' entrails. Each of them, the Children of the Sea, veterans of countless core rituals, are still alive… Iru and Salah were oblivious…"

As Juan Oro's words, spoken through gritted teeth, reached Lumian's ears, a sudden realization dawned upon him.

Ultraman is affiliated with the Fisheries Guild, a Child of the Sea endowed with numerous powers and a distinct status!

There's also the possibility that he's manipulated such an individual, establishing a clandestine "partnership."

Without such a connection, how could April Fool's possess precise details about the ceremonial ring's appearance and exploit the sea prayer ritual's "supervisory" loophole?

Even though I Know Someone mentioned that Ultraman is a Sun pathway Beyonder, it doesn't rule out his identity as a Child of the Sea. Transforming into a Child of the Sea first and then drinking the Sun pathway's potion shouldn't pose an issue. The power of the Child of the Sea resonates with the cosmos, and the Sun and the cosmos are inherently compatible. Is April Fool's true motive for disrupting the sea prayer ritual preparations related to Ultraman or his collaborator aiming to fully control the power or the palace at the bottom of the sea? Lumian's thoughts gradually clarified.

He looked at Juan Oro with a relaxed smile and remarked, "If there wasn't a mole, how could the sea prayer ritual be disrupted so easily?"

Juan Oro had harbored similar suspicions for the past year; Lumian's words were irrefutable.

After some contemplation with an unpleasant expression, Juan Oro composed himself and stated, "I have to uncover the traitor before the official sea sacrifice…"

At this point, Juan Oro turned his gaze to Lumian.

"I might need your cooperation on something when the time comes."

Oh, you're fishing too? Lumian replied with a smile, "No problem."

Juan Oro set down his hookah and left his seat.

He walked to the desk, retrieved a pen and paper, and began sketching.

Nearly ten minutes later, the old man staggered to Lumian and handed him the paper.

Lumian glanced at it and recognized six designs—representing the front, left, right, back, front, and inner parts of the Ring of the Sea Queen. Each design featured intricate and mystifying symbols and patterns.

"It's actually useless for you to obtain it. It won't have any effect," Juan Oro said in a low, raspy voice. "The corresponding sea spawn have to use their special abilities to inscribe them on the ring and corrode them for six hours to please the sea and gain her recognition."

Lumian nodded and replied,"I have no intention of replicating one."

He was obtaining it solely to send to Madam Magician for interpretation.

He then asked, "Is this the ring-making segment of the vigil ritual? Is there no other step?"

"There's another step. An assistant host will take the ring to the basement and place it in front of the patterns and symbols representing our ancestors for an hour. This is a show of respect to our ancestors, like greeting the elders before a wedding," Juan Oro explained briefly.

After a moment of contemplation, Lumian responded, "Can you also draw the patterns and symbols representing your ancestors?"

Juan Oro returned to the desk.

This time, he completed it in just two minutes.

Lumian took it and noticed scattered lines and arcs. Many details were missing from the middle, making it impossible to discern its original appearance.

"Seeing it in person might allow you to make connections easier." Juan Oro sighed again.

Lumian nodded.

"Then I'll infiltrate the Governor of the Sea's residence tonight."

Juan Oro tersely acknowledged his words.

"Be careful of the sea spawn there. They have their own specialties. They might not be very strong, but they can counter certain abilities of yours."

…

Late at night, under the crimson moonlight, Lumian appeared near the cathedral-like building.

Chapter 568: Patterns of the "Ancestors"

568 Patterns of the "Ancestors"

Lumian swiveled his head towards the docks, his body seamlessly blending into the shadows beyond the moonlight's reach.

Following the shadowy path, he smoothly bypassed the guards at the entrance, slipping into the sacred-looking building without a sound.

In the foyer, he came to a sudden halt.

Amidst the dark "fishnets," he spotted short figures with oddly large heads, bulging eyes, and wrinkled skin – like elders in miniature. Standing just over a meter tall, they were the "Little Devils" mentioned by Juan Oro, a species of sea spawn.

Infiltrating the shadows, these Little Devils patrolled the Governor of the Sea's residence, using their unique abilities to prevent any unauthorized entry.

Having encountered them before, Lumian knew these Little Devils weren't formidable opponents. Despite their talent for blending into shadows and creating illusions, he could dispatch a team with ease.

Yet, eliminating them discreetly posed a challenge. Lumian couldn't be certain that dealing with one group of Little Devils wouldn't stir up trouble and alert other creatures lurking in the building.

Focused, Lumian surveyed the areas untouched by shadows. In the crimson moonlight, he discerned vague figures drifting in the void, intermittently appearing and disappearing.

These were fish adorned in dark-gray armor, their bulging eyes resembling meatballs at both ends. Starlight-threaded "thin threads" peeked through the gaps in their scale-like armor.

The peculiar fish hovered in the air, scattering across different regions. Occasionally, they released bubbles carrying formless storms and impalement-inducing cracks.

Erupting bubbles created countless invisible spikes, setting perilous traps for teleporting "guests."

At the hall intersection and various aisles, silent three-man guard teams patrolled. Their expressions betrayed nothing, but Lumian noticed slender black insects, covered in bristles, emerging from their necks and mouths.

After a brief inspection, the Batings Black Insects swiftly retracted into the guards' bodies.

The eyes of sea creature statues on the wall appeared alive, scanning the areas with a strange awareness.

Just as Juan Oro said, there are a large number of different sea spawn here. Infiltrating silently amidst the diverse sea spawn here proves to be a formidable task. Lumian, patient, opted to remain in the foyer, awaiting the right moment.

In under two minutes, a thunderous bang reverberated from the dock.

Crimson flames shot into the sky, casting an eerie glow on nearby windows, making them quiver.

Little Devils lurking in the shadows, Armored Monster Fish manipulating the surrounding void, Batings Black Insects orchestrating guards, and peculiar creatures concealed in the statues' eyes—all instinctively shifted their focus to the glass window near the dock.

Lumian sprang into action.

He orchestrated the disturbance with a delayed explosion!

Seizing the opportunity, he stealthily navigated through the shadows surrounding the Little Devils and skirted the region patrolled by the Armored Monster Fish.

Before other sea spawn could react, he pinpointed the room at the far end of the hall, relying on Juan Oro's intel.

A dim light emitted from the black mark on his right shoulder as he swiftly reached the door of the target room. In a blink, he transformed into a shadow, slipping through the crack.

Inside, Lumian discovered intricate patterns and symbols etched on the floor, ceiling, and walls, reminiscent of magnified versions of Juan Oro's hand-drawn sacrificial ring pattern.

Besides that, nothing else caught his eye.

Lumian deduced, During the vigil ritual, some sea spawn enter this place, condense the patterns from every direction, and carve them into the ring mold. Then, they infuse them with special energy. Quickly scanning the area, he stepped out of the shadows, activating a black mark on his chest.

Nearly invisible water ripples danced on the surrounding walls, then subsided.

Bottle of Fiction!

Lumian "enclosed" the two connected rooms into the Bottle of Fiction. The entry requirement: ordinary humans.

He positioned himself near the opening of the Bottle of Fiction, deliberately creating loud footsteps as he hid by the door.

Almost instantly, certain sea spawn picked up on the disturbance.

Recalling the explosion at the docks and the towering flames, they realized they had fallen into a diversion.

Summoning the Armored Monster Fish, Batings Black Insects, Little Devils, and their cohorts, they ordered an investigation into the ring-making ritual venue for potential infiltrators.

Despite attempts to rush in through the door, the sea spawn inexplicably found themselves back in the hall.

The Armored Monster Fish, discerning the issue, released bubbles with a formless storm toward the entrance of the Bottle of Fiction.

As before they surged towards him, aiming to breach the room, Lumian, now a shadow creature, slipped through the crack at the base of the wooden door, quietly exiting the Bottle of Fiction and returning to the hall.

His ploy successfully diverted the sea spawn's attention, creating a chance for him to change positions.

Naturally, he needed to employ effective tactics a few more times!

Anticipating the enemy's disbelief in encountering the same trick repeatedly within a short span, Lumian knew they would assume there were alternative plans.

Of course, on the third attempt, heightened vigilance would set in. Everything they saw would seem like a distraction. When the moment arrived, Lumian could flip the strategy.

Seizing the moment when the sea spawn fixated on the Bottle of Fiction, Lumian deftly avoided the gathering of Little Devils. He circled the Armored Monster Fish, reaching a corner of the hall, and once again utilized Spirit World Traversal.

This time, Lumian's destination was the staircase leading to the basement.

The guards, lured into the hall, left the area unmonitored.

As Lumian's silhouette appeared at the staircase entrance, he swiftly transformed into a shadow, slipping into the basement through the darkness.

No guards or sea spawn patrolled this seemingly unimportant area, an area that was merely a testament to the villagers of Milo Village's reverence for their ancestors.

In his shadow creature form, Lumian possessed "natural" night vision. Even without a fireball, he could vaguely discern the dark basement.

Despite its dampness due to proximity to the sea, the absence of a moldy odor was thanks to the various Beyonder powers within the building.

At the center stood a decrepit stone platform, reminiscent of an altar for ancestor worship. Surrounding it were signs of destruction, leaving only disjointed lines, arcs, and indistinct patterns.

Do these fragmented symbols and patterns constitute the coat of arms of Milo Village's ancestors? Or do they possess mystical effects? Lumian scrutinized them repeatedly, struggling to reconstruct the undamaged version in his mind.

Yet, he sensed that since Noelia of the Fertility Order had alluded to the revealing nature of these symbols and patterns, he might extract valuable information.

What kind of information could it be? Maintaining his shadow creature form, Lumian extended into the darkness, surveying his surroundings.

Frowning, he whispered, Could it be that the Church of Earth Mother, fully capable of obliterating this place, deliberately left traces? Does this imply that the sea prayer ritual holds some influence over them too?

Lumian directed his gaze at the stone platform, the sacrificial offering to the ancestors, recalling Juan Oro's details about the ring-making ritual.

After crafting the Ring of the Sea Queen, it would rest here for an hour as a mark of respect to their ancestors.

Was it placed on this partially collapsed altar? Approaching the grayish-black stone platform, Lumian observed no dust accumulation. All remaining lines converged on an empty space at the center of the circle.

His heart stirred as he retrieved a Louis d'or, placing it in the center of the altar.

Nothing happened.

Undeterred, Lumian replaced the Louis d'or with gold risot, Mystery Prying Glasses, Flog boxing gloves, and various other items.

Yet, still no anomaly.

Persistence drove him. Lumian pulled out the silver Lie earring from his pocket and positioned it on an empty space on the stone platform.

In the next moment, a surreal sensation enveloped Lumian.

Within the stone platform, illusory lines and arcs materialized, intertwining with remnants to form two distinct patterns:

One pattern featured layers of doors sketched with simple strokes, while the other resembled a clock divided into twelve sectors, albeit having a single hand.

Lumian observed keenly, sensing something adhering to the Lie earring.

In an instant, the lines from the stone platform dimmed, retracted, and returned to their original positions. Normalcy resumed.

Are these the patterns representing Milo Village's ancestors? Or did they gain knowledge from the initial revelations? Lumian sensed sea spawn surging toward the basement. After muttering to himself, he seized the Lie earring and "teleported" away.

…

In the master bedroom of the suite at Solow Motel.

As Lumian's figure manifested, he settled down and began writing to Madam Magician. Unfazed by checking the changes in the Lie earring, he intended to send it to his Major Arcana card holder for inspection.

Recreating the patterns, symbols, structure, and various scenes from the Governor of the Sea's residence, Lumian neatly folded several letters, arranged a ritual, and summoned the "doll" messenger.

Then, he patiently awaited the reply.

Chapter 569: Language Interpretation

569 Language Interpretation

The crimson moonlight seeped through the not-so-thick curtains, casting its glow on the desk, already yellowed by the gas wall lamp's illumination, emphasizing its presence.

Lumian perused his freshly acquired Highlander textbook, patiently waiting for over half an hour before finally receiving a reply from Madam Magician via the "doll" messenger.

The letter was concise and spanned only two pages.

"Let's start with the basics.

"Combining the patterns, symbols, and structure of the ring—although I can't precisely decipher the meaning of that sentence—I can identify its composition and the practical application of various short sentences.

"It breaks down into three segments:

"The first part serves to precisely locate the ring, facilitating the subsequent activation of special characteristics and the infusion of energy contained in the language.

"The second part involves injecting the energy carried by the words into the ring through resonance and other forms, activating a magic circle formed by patterns and symbols. Consider the sacrificial ring as a charm. The second paragraph is akin to its designated special activation incantation. It doesn't necessitate invoking supernatural powers but requires prior guidance.

"In the third part, I suspect it's a ciphertext attached to the ring. In simpler terms, once the ceremonial ring is fully activated through the first two parts, it records and carries the final ciphertext into the sea to transmit it to something.

"Are you following so far? The ceremonial ring is like a special key, functional only after activation. Furthermore, it necessitates the corresponding password to open the 'doors' of the target.

"Heh heh, the actual meaning of 'We espouse thee, O sea, as a sign of true and perpetual dominion' is roughly akin to 'a key to unlock the passageway. The password is XXXXXXXXX.' Naturally, if translated directly, it'll differ significantly, but that should capture the essence."

Lumian couldn't resist a smirk.

Recalling the solemn recitation by the previous Governors of the Sea, envisioning the act of marrying the sea, anyone familiar with the corresponding language would likely burst into laughter.

What sea, what espousal, what dominion! After all the complexity, it boiled down to unlocking and opening a passageway—a simple password entry!

Contemplating sharing this interpretation with Juan Oro, Lato Guiaro, and the others, Lumian pondered their likely reactions.

No, they wouldn't believe it. A millennium or two of misunderstanding had morphed into faith, perseverance, and legacy. Admitting a mistake wasn't something they'd easily embrace.

Regardless, the result would be the same. Interpretation or translation, it didn't matter how they perceived it!

Collecting himself, Lumian turned to the second page of the letter, eager to continue reading.

"Next is the more complicated part.

"The two patterns you witnessed in the Governor of the Sea's basement have a profound history, stretching back to the early Fourth Epoch.

"They serve as symbols of mysticism and the coat of arms of ancient nobles. One of them is linked to an acquaintance—no, a familiar Angel, Amon!

"The pattern resembling a clock signifies the Worm of Time. It stands as the Amon family's coat of arms."

Worm of Time? The Amons' coat of arms? Why is it Him again! Lumian's eyes narrowed, feeling as though he was still entrenched in the Amons.

What connection did Milo Village's ancestors, Port Santa's sea prayer ritual, and the distinctiveness of those waters share with the Amons?

On the surface, no apparent link existed!

As Lumian's thoughts raced, he suddenly sensed a connection between the sea prayer ritual and the former King of Angels of the Marauder pathway.

Reflecting on the key members involved in the April Fool's ritual prank, Bard, a Beyonder of the Marauder pathway, and Mad Lady, belonging to the neighboring Apprentice pathway, even prayed to The Celestial Worthy of Heaven and Earth—a being with profound influence over the Marauder pathway.

While this didn't directly point to the Amons, the gathering of Marauder-related individuals suggested a reasonable association between the sea prayer ritual and the Marauder pathway.

Lumian exhaled, lowering his head to read further insights from Madam Magician.

"The layers of doors come from the Abraham family. Yes, the Abraham family, one of the five nobles of the Tudor Empire. I previously mentioned that in the Tudor Empire, only five families hold the hereditary duke title: Abraham, Amon, Antigonus, Jacob, and Tamara. Among them, the

Abrahams control the Apprentice pathway. Remember, Apprentices often represent seals.

"Therefore, it's plausible to believe that the sea prayer ritual predates previous estimates, tracing back to before the demise of the Fourth Epoch's Tudor Empire. Encountering matters related to the Tudor Empire sure isn't a coincidence for you, is it?

"Do you now grasp the essence of the sea prayer ritual? Further explanations may not be necessary, correct?

"I'm starting to suspect that Milo Village's ancestors misunderstood the initial sentence's meaning, leading to the expansion of the sea sacrifice and vigil from the revelation. This resulted in an absurd sea marriage ritual spanning a millennium or two. It could very well be a manifestation of that individual's mischievous nature, reveling in playing a joke on everyone, indifferent to the fate of others.

"See, this is what a prank should be. Those April Fool's folks could learn a thing or two.

"If you have more questions or haven't clarified certain aspects, feel free to write and ask.

"By the way, Lie now possesses a temporary ability lasting half a month. It can absorb a specific amount of power from a target, though this power won't endure long. For ordinary people, it might persist for half a year or a year. However, for you, it won't last more than a week due to the conflict with your powers."

Lumian averted his gaze from the letter, his thoughts in disarray.

Madam Magician suggests that the uniqueness of those waters originated from the ancestor of the Abraham family and a certain Amon? The core of the sea prayer ritual was personally devised by these two Angel-level figures. They guided the ancestors of Milo Village in Port Santa and left behind a revelation, compelling them to perform the ritual annually?

Due to Amon's mischievous nature, the ancestors of Milo Village misunderstood the true meaning of that sentence, thinking they were meant to marry the sea. Consequently, the core of the sea prayer ritual became increasingly complex, expanding into more segments over the years. It transformed into an extensive prank that persisted for over a millennium?

Having comprehended Madam Magician's hypothesis, Lumian reconsidered the essence of the sea prayer ritual.

Appeasing the special entity concealed at the bottom of the sea—perhaps that palace?

Apprentice represents a seal… Marauder is stealing…

Stealing…

Lumian suddenly glanced down at his left chest.

He grasped the essence of the sea prayer ritual!

Finding a husband for the sea, pacifying its violence, genuinely pleasing it, and obtaining corresponding boons were all absurd reasons concocted by Milo Village's ancestors after being misled!

The essence of the sea prayer ritual was to steal boons!

The "palace" at the bottom of the sea had been sealed by the Apprentice pathway, but the ancestor of the Abraham family worried that, over time, the seal's power would wane, allowing the "palace" to gradually regain strength. To counter this, he enlisted Amon to devise a ritual for regularly siphoning off the restored power of the palace each year, preventing it from breaking through the seal.

Consequently, after each sea prayer ritual, the sea area would become tranquil, free from excessive storms. The previous year's failed ritual had allowed the palace to accumulate a certain degree of strength. Consequently, the sea experienced abnormality, leading to an increased number of shipwrecks, and Death Navigators departed the special sea area more frequently.

The reason for only entering the sea when the stars aligned and following a specific route to reach the destination was that only then would a complex passageway appear in the outer seal!

Lumian stood up and took a few steps forward.

Having unraveled the essence of the sea prayer ritual, he comprehended the Earth Mother Church's motive for perpetuating it.

Initially, the clergyman of the Earth Mother Church, lacking thorough investigations, destroyed Milo Village, putting an end to the sea prayer ritual. However, at the bottom of the building, they discovered the coat of arms representing the two nobles of the Tudor Empire, halting the final step in time. Later, they realized they needed to dispatch demigod-level Saints to deal with the unique waters each year. High-end forces were required to guard it for an extended period, making it quite troublesome. Consequently, when the sea prayer ritual resurfaced, they tacitly agreed to the reconstruction of Milo Village.

In most cases, the sea prayer ritual didn't adversely affect the innocent or disrupt local order. Every Governor of the Sea possessed a certain amount of the sea's bloodline, and while the Maidens of the Sea would eventually transform into humanoid lizards in their old age, they could alter their fates and enjoy power and wealth for 30 to 40 years or even longer.

For Maidens of the Sea seeking free love, the Church of Earth Mother likely tacitly consented or even aided their escape, as the chances of success were otherwise quite low.

So, why did the Fertility Order encourage me to investigate the sea prayer ritual? Why did Noelia provide some information while withholding crucial details? Lumian's confusion swiftly dissipated.

The real entity fishing behind the scenes was not the Fisheries Guild but the Church of Earth Mother!

The failure of last year's sea prayer ritual had alarmed the Church of Earth Mother, fearing a similar problem this year. Observing Louis Berry's inclination to investigate the sea prayer ritual, they encouraged him to do so, allowing potential saboteurs hidden in the shadows to contact him, surface, and capture them all at once!

Phew. Lumian exhaled, redirecting his focus to April Fool's.

Now, he was certain that April Fool's intended to break the seal around those special waters.

Last year marked the first step towards breaking the seal, but it hadn't progressed to the point where the underwater "palace" could breach it. This year, they would undoubtedly create a similar situation once again. Otherwise, if the sea prayer ritual succeeded, their pranks from last year would be in vain!

The question now was, what would the key members of April Fool's do? How could they seize the benefits represented by the palace and evade the corresponding dangers? Lumian stared at the gas wall lamp emitting a yellowish glow, sinking into deep thought.

…

More than a week quickly elapsed, and in the blink of an eye, the day of the sea prayer ritual arrived.

After completing his breakfast, Lumian heard the melodic tunes of various musical instruments wafting in from the street outside.

With a smile, he wiped his mouth with a napkin and strolled toward the window, welcoming the bright sunlight pouring in.

Chapter 570: Festival

570 Festival

On Aquina Street, a two-story ceremonial boat crafted from wood, cardboard, and adorned with ribbons rolled forward, propelled by four sleek horses.

This intricate vessel mimicked the Governor of the Sea's boat, designed to economize materials and size, allowing horses to guide it through the city.

Eight men and eight women, dressed vibrantly, stood on both upper and lower levels of the flower boat. They sang and danced, their joy infecting the spectators on both sides of the street.

Port Santa's premier folk orchestra surrounded the ceremonial boat, playing rhythmic drumbeats and a variety of instruments such as clarinets, oboes, flutes, and strings.

The onlookers on the roadside were in high spirits, alternating between singing and following the ceremonial boat, hoping to catch a refreshing spray from the water droplets scattered by the sixteen men and women.

Observing the scene from the fifth floor of the Solow Motel, Lumian sensed that the sea prayer ritual had evolved beyond a mere sacrificial ceremony. Excluding its core aspects, it had transformed into a city-wide folklore festival.

Despite many residents of Port Santa being devout followers of the Earth Mother and not attributing spiritual significance to the sea, they embraced the festivities, dancing and celebrating on this special day.

As the flower boat concluded its tour of Aquina Street, Lumian turned to Lugano and remarked,

"Take good care of Ludwig today. No matter which celebration you attend, ensure he's with you."

"Yes, Boss," Lugano replied, influenced by the cheerful atmosphere of the sea prayer ritual, his emotions lifted.

Without wasting any time, Lumian snatched his golden straw hat, exited the suite, and descended the stairs.

In the lobby, his gaze fell upon Otta Guillaume, the Solow Motel owner, doling out cash to the lady at the front desk and the two attendants—two risot each.

"Is this a holiday bonus?" Lumian inquired in Intisian.

Otta Sr. chuckled and replied, "No bonus, just their compensation. They're on duty at the motel today, keeping an eye on the place. They'll miss out on the sea prayer ritual and other celebrations.

"I'm heading to the docks to see my little cabbage dance!"

"I'll be there too," Lumian said with a smile, embracing the festive ambiance once again.

If the sea prayer ritual lacked mystic elements, Lumian would have fully immersed himself in the festive atmosphere, reminiscent of the few years of Lent he experienced in Cordu.

Exiting the motel, Lumian leisurely strolled towards the harbor, taking note of Port Santa's residents bedecked in their most glamorous and festive attire. At a glance, the streets appeared to be awash with a sea of colors.

His attire—a white shirt, black vest, and dark pants—made him stand out like a foreigner amidst the lively crowd.

Lumian adorned the golden straw hat, injecting a splash of color into his appearance.

The rhythmic chime of bicycle bells accompanied the passing of wooden crate-laden bicycles. Vendors energetically peddled popsicles of various flavors to eager citizens anticipating the sea dance and boat race.

Observing the two segments with a relaxed demeanor, Lumian savored the festivities. He patiently waited until the two-story festival boat, carrying the Governor of the Sea and the Maidens of the Sea, embarked on its journey to Milo Village before departing the port.

Choosing to abstain from other citizen-organized celebrations, Lumian sought refuge in a public washroom within the nearest department store, slipping into a cubicle.

Triggering the black mark on his right shoulder, Lumian materialized in a concealed corner of Milo Village.

Shifting into a shadow creature, he seamlessly infiltrated the Oro family's blend of ancient and modern architecture, arriving at Juan Oro's bedroom.

The president of the Fisheries Guild awaited Lumian's arrival, and upon seeing the figure of the adventurer, Louis Berry, emerge from the darkness, Juan Oro, with deep wrinkles, gestured towards the unconscious Milo villagers on the floor.

"These are two of the four deputy hosts for the vigil and the sea sacrificial ritual. Choose one to assume his form."

This condition was pivotal for Lumian's collaboration with Juan Oro. He sought continuous participation in the core sections of the sea prayer ritual.

Initially hesitant due to the inability to deceive other sea spawn and introduce a stranger onto the ship, Juan Oro only agreed to allow Lumian to infiltrate the Governor of the Sea's residence before the vigil ritual, observing it discreetly.

However, with Ultraman under suspicion as a key figure in the Fisheries Guild, Lumian seized the opportunity when Juan Oro required cooperation and assistance, showcasing the abilities of the Lie earring. Thus, Lumian devised a plan to disguise himself as a specific deputy host and gain access to the ship.

After studying one of the deputy hosts for a few moments, Lumian adorned a silver earring. He replicated the appearance of the chosen deputy host, seamlessly blending into his guise.

In no time, except for his clothing, there was no discernible difference between Lumian and the deputy host.

"It's my turn," Juan Oro said in a deep Intisian voice.

He decided to take on the guise of another deputy host and personally board the ship to avert any potential mishaps.

Concerned about Louis Berry's involvement in the sea sacrifice and wary of lurking enemies employing unknown methods to cause trouble, Juan Oro believed that everything would converge during the sea sacrifice segment. Boarding the boat covertly would enable him to address unforeseen circumstances in time, delivering a strategic "surprise."

Juan Oro harbored suspicions that Louis Berry might be an accomplice of last year's saboteurs, his prior actions serving as a ploy to deceive them and allow him to openly disrupt the ritual at a crucial moment.

Lumian casually tossed the Lie earring to Juan Oro, who proceeded to change into a dark-blue robe embroidered with various sea elements.

Upon donning the silver earring, Juan Oro experienced a remarkable control over every detail of his body.

Attempting to adjust the wrinkles on his face, he observed himself becoming ten to twenty years younger in the mirror.

Despite his potent and diverse Beyonder powers, the president of the Fisheries Guild couldn't help but marvel.

"How magical."

After completing his disguise, Lumian pointed at the unconscious deputy host.

"Who's responsible for keeping an eye on them and preventing their appearance before the sea prayer ritual?"

"My wife," Juan Oro replied, already prepared.

She, a former Maidens of the Sea and the current Matriarch of the Oro family, possessed considerable strength. While she hadn't participated in any ring-making rituals, she was a trusted individual who wouldn't divulge secrets.

Lumian redirected the conversation, inquiring, "As the president of the Fisheries Guild, won't you be suspected if you don't wait for news of the successful sea prayer ritual with the other committee members?"

"No, I don't go every year. I can also wait for news at home, and my wife will pretend to be me," Juan Oro stated, pointing at Lie on his left ear and removing it.

After confirming the details, Lumian inquired further, "Have you investigated any of those who nearly died and came back to life, or have their personalities undergone a significant change?"

These individuals were key members of the Fisheries Guild familiar with the specific design of the Ring of the Sea Queen and the complete details of the sea prayer ritual.

According to Franca, every member of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society was a soul from another world, having "resurrected" in recently deceased human bodies. This information could help identify who might be Ultraman.

Juan Oro slowly shook his head.

"No, at least not in my memory. Time was tight, so I couldn't investigate them one by one."

The rejuvenated elder, now appearing in his prime, continued, "Remember, your name is Brian now. My name is Jorge. If you don't understand what others are saying later, it's fine. I'll hint at you. When you need to answer questions, I'll help you."

"Alright." Lumian maintained the pretense of not knowing Highlander.

In reality, having extensively studied under the effects of the Language Comprehension charm, he had already mastered more words and grammar. While still unable to fully comprehend others' words, he could grasp key words, tense, and the active and passive voice, allowing him to roughly understand the meaning. Expressing himself with short sentences and simple structures presented no challenge.

…

Clad in the dark-blue robe of a deputy host, Lumian entered the Governor of the Sea's residence, guided by Juan Oro, who no longer staggered. Passing through a hall adorned with sea creature statues, they reached the room where the Governor of the Sea maintained his vigil.

The current Governor of the Sea, Simon of the Guiaro family, was from a branch with a thin bloodline, unqualified to reside in the ancestral house.

At that moment, Simon sat cross-legged on the cold floor, suppressing his excitement. With half-closed eyes, he felt the moist air enveloping him.

Although Lumian refrained from activating his Spirit Vision, he sensed various sea spawn bustling in the shadows, the void, and the statues.

Juan Oro led Lumian out of the room, guiding him to the most secluded part of the building. Opening the wooden door to the servants' quarters, Juan Oro addressed the fake Governor of the Sea, Miguel, lying on the bed.

"Once the sea prayer ritual succeeds, you can leave, but you must depart Port Santa with the wealth you've amassed over the past year."

Miguel sat up excitedly. "Alright, alright!"

Though their conversation occurred in Highlander, Lumian grasped the essence.

After this exchange, Juan Oro translated the conversation for Lumian, emphasizing, "You can verify if I'm lying based on Miguel's expression."

Lumian silently pondered, thinking, So what if you're not lying? What you said might not be done… He then returned to the hall, assuming a cross-legged position opposite the other two deputy hosts.

As time passed, midnight arrived, marking the completion of the Ring of the Sea Queen. One of the deputy hosts retrieved it and guided it to the basement in the dim moonlight.

The moment had come to pay homage to their ancestors.

Lumian observed the scene in silence and suddenly had a thought.

Chapter 571: Key Details

571 Key Details

The Governor of the Sea's residence hall opened into a labyrinth of rooms, its scarcity of windows allowing only a trickle of light despite the crimson moon's glow. The dimness cast a cloak of silence over the place.

Even as the deputy host, clutching the coveted Ring of the Sea Queen, moved with caution, the floor still betrayed him with a faint echo.

Lumian observed him heading towards the basement staircase, a sudden realization dawning upon him.

Once in the basement, the deputy host could effortlessly switch the authentic Ring of the Sea Queen with a crafted counterfeit without alerting anyone.

The other deputies were occupied in the hall, and the Governor of the Sea, undergoing physical modifications, had the Maidens of the Sea by his side. The sea spawn were scattered elsewhere.

Frowning, Lumian shot a sidelong glance at another deputy host. He lowered his voice and addressed Jorge, the form Juan Oro had taken, in Intisian.

"Every year, during the vigil ritual, does a deputy host send the Ring of the Sea Queen alone to the basement, retrieving it an hour later?"

He stressed the word "alone."

Juan Oro nodded subtly.

"Yes. There's no need for extra protection in this building…"

But just as Juan Oro was about to continue, he halted abruptly.

This presented a golden opportunity to swap the Ring of the Sea Queen unnoticed.

The fact that external enemies couldn't breach the building didn't mean the deputy hosts within were without their own problems!

Lumian wasted no time and turned to Juan Oro, uttering, "Should I follow, or will you take charge?"

Juan Oro regarded the matter gravely, rising from his seat and responding, "I'll go."

Harnessing his abilities, he steadied himself and swiftly caught up with the deputy host. In a deep tone, he stated, "Let's go together. I want to seize the chance to pay my respects to my ancestors."

The other deputy host raised no objections.

As Lumian observed the two lighting their lanterns and descending into the basement, his mind instinctively filled in the upcoming sequence.

Place the Ring of the Sea Queen on the decrepit stone platform… Offer prayers to the ancestors… Return to the surface… Re-enter and retrieve it an hour later…

During that hour, the Ring of the Sea Queen sits unguarded in the basement, vulnerable to any opportunistic interference… If someone had concealed themselves there beforehand, swapping the genuine ring for a counterfeit would be a straightforward task…

Certainly, infiltrating and concealing oneself in this location is no simple feat. I can't even do it; I could last a mere two minutes before being detected by the sea spawn…

The Ring of the Sea Queen has to be positioned on that worn stone platform. Any deviations—deviations…

With these thoughts swirling in his mind, Lumian suddenly recalled the transformations in the Lie earring when it rested on the weathered stone platform in the basement.

The Seer pathway item had activated a pattern embodying an Apprentice and a Marauder, granting it the ability to siphon someone's power that lasted half a month!

Lie could accomplish this feat, but what about the Ring of the Sea Queen?

Though not an item of the Seer, Apprentice, or Marauder pathway, it had been meticulously crafted based on a ritual passed down by an Amon. Perhaps, over time, it could activate the unique characteristics of the basement, gradually assimilating with thieving qualities.

Yes! Considering that the essence of the sea sacrificial ritual involves extracting power from the seal at the bottom of the sea and claiming it, the Ring of the Sea Queen, being a key item, should not only be capable of loosening the seal to a certain extent but also possess the power-stealing ability. It could distribute the gains among various participants in the ritual—

the host receiving the most, followed by the Maidens of the Sea as assistant hosts, and the deputy hosts and sailors gaining some within the ritual's range, provided they possessed similar powers!

In essence, Juan Oro and his companions' understanding of the ring-making ritual is incomplete. The "paying homage to the ancestors" segment is integral and crucial. Without honoring the ancestors, the sea sacrificial ritual would merely open the seal without stealing the accumulated power. Instead, it would erupt and disperse… Lumian had just marveled at the mysticism's terrifying complexity when a sudden alarm gripped him.

He realized he had overlooked a pivotal detail.

According to Madam Magician's interpretation of the Ring of the Sea Queen's functions and her speculations about the essence of the entire sea prayer ritual, the substitution of the genuine Ring of the Sea Queen with the fake ring customized by April Fool's in Torres should have prevented the catastrophic phenomenon of the sea's fury consuming the Governor of the Sea, all the deputy hosts, and some sailors in the subsequent ritual!

The fake ring hadn't undergone the initial ring-making ritual, leaving its patterns, symbols, and structure devoid of the necessary mysticism characteristics. Even if the Governor of the Sea recited the prescribed words, he couldn't infuse energy into it to open the seal!

As a complete counterfeit, it shouldn't have triggered any phenomena. However, due to its incapacity to extract the amassed power, the sea area would experience more shipwrecks, and the weather would deteriorate.

To align with the events of the previous year, the fake ring thrown by the Governor of the Sea had to complete the first part of the ring-making ritual. Still, without being placed in the basement to honor the ancestor, it could only partially open the seal, unable to extract and monopolize the gathered power. This incomplete process led to a sudden eruption, causing the sea to "rage"!

Lumian's eyes narrowed slightly. As a Conspirer, he had seized the core of the matter.

Two Rings of the Sea Queen were on the ship, but both were fakes.

The ring brought by the deputy host to the ritual ship was also a forgery. In fact, the authentic Ring of the Sea Queen hadn't made an appearance during last year's sea prayer ritual!

The genuine Ring of the Sea Queen, which had undergone the entire ring-making ritual as per the Fisheries Guild's knowledge, hadn't been placed on the stone platform in the basement to fulfill the ritual of honoring the ancestors. Consequently, it was also a sham—a counterfeit ring lacking the most crucial effect!

The deputy host who had taken the Ring of the Sea Queen into the basement and retrieved it last year might also be part of the problem!

The peripheral members affiliated with April Fool's weren't considered trustworthy. Their actions likely didn't disrupt the overall plan. The fake ring concealed in the lamb's stomach and the Bard's performance likely served as preparations for subsequent investigations, camouflaging vital clues. As Lumian's thoughts raced, Juan Oro and the deputy host returned to the hall.

"It's on the stone platform," whispered the president of the Fisheries Guild, masquerading as Jorge, to Lumian.

Lumian refocused his attention and casually inquired, "Who was responsible for sending the Ring of the Sea Queen to the basement last year?"

"I don't know. Without any special arrangements, anyone can do it. The four deputy hosts in the hall last year died in the sea's rage when the ritual failed." Juan Oro, sensing Lumian's suspicion, clarified.

Dead? Unlikely… Lumian lacked the corresponding item for spirit channeling and didn't have time to search for it. All he could do was ask, "Which one of them was familiar with the ring-making ritual and knows the details of the Ring of the Sea Queen?"

"None of them; it was their first time serving as deputy hosts." Juan Oro shook his head. "Besides, as I said, those who know these secrets are still alive."

If the deputy host wasn't Ultraman… Then who was it? Lumian's mind raced as he arrived at a conclusion.

It was Mad Lady!

Similar to Bard, she utilized the same technique to alter her appearance. With Ultraman's assistance, she assumed the guise of a deputy host, completing the final step in creating the Ring of the Sea Queen. Then, she boarded the ceremonial ship with it.

Lumian had been puzzled by how Mad Lady could locate the special sea and rescue Bard accurately and in time. Now, he had the answer.

Mad Lady was present on the ceremonial ship, right beside Bard. There was no need for coordinated locations or timing!

Initially suspecting Mad Lady to collaborate with Bard, Lumian now realized that Bard worked with Mad Lady, providing assistance in case of unexpected developments and shouldering the responsibility of misleading investigations.

Dammit, Faceless abilities are so annoying. April Fool's is so annoying! Lumian's emotions fluctuated as he struggled to contain his emotions as he cursed. Relying on his Ascetic trait, he restrained himself from erupting.

More importantly, while he had unraveled the issues with the sea prayer ritual from last year, the identities of Ultraman and the forthcoming plans of April Fool's remained elusive.

…

The night passed in silence.

On an out-of-fashion sailboat in the harbor, Charname, sporting a short, round-rimmed felt hat, emerged from the cabin and approached Nolfi, who stood at the edge of the deck. Charname inquired, "Can we enter those special waters if we set off now?"

Nolfi nodded, responding, "Yes, the stars will align in a specific pattern after midnight."

Following Lumian's instructions, she and Batna had rented a boat for a few days from other ports along the same coastline.

Charname chuckled, saying, "Then let's set off!"

Observing the surprised and puzzled expressions of Nolfi and Batna, he explained, "If we follow the Governor of the Sea's ceremonial ship, we'll undoubtedly be discovered by the Fisheries Guild. Setting off an hour or two later would be meaningless. Therefore, we'll go ahead of time and hide there, patiently waiting for an opportunity!"

Although Nolfi didn't understand the nature of the opportunity Charname referred to, she didn't inquire. She responded with anticipation, "Okay."

Charname then turned to Batna.

"Are you joining us? It will be very dangerous."

Batna's expression fluctuated. After more than ten seconds, he declared, "I'm going!"

Charname clicked his tongue but remained silent.

At that moment, Nolfi frowned, glancing at other parts of the deck, and asked, "What about the sailors here? We can't leave the sea without them, and they can't handle too much danger."

Charname chuckled.

"Don't worry, we have sailors who can handle danger."

As soon as he finished speaking, he half-turned, raising his right hand to the third level of the cabin. He clasped his index finger and thumb into a ring and extended his other three fingers.

Soon, the captain, first mate, second mate, and all the sailors emerged,

their eyes tightly shut. Like sleepwalkers, they lined up and walked down the gangway toward the docks.

Batna and Nolfi's eyes froze, as if trapped in a terrifying dream.

Chapter 572: The Real Target

572 The Real Target

Under the crimson moonlight, the crew members stumbled towards the dock like the living dead, moving towards the various buildings concealed in the darkness.

In seven to eight minutes, their figures vanished from different spots.

Immediately after, Nolfi and Batna observed pitch-black shapes emerging at the edge of the cabin, and eerie pale-white or dark-green flames igniting across the deck.

Figures crawled out of the pitch-black flames.

Some wore tattered clothes, and their skin visibly rotted. Others were white bones with fragments of flesh hanging from them. Pale-white flames protruded from their eye sockets.

These were all corpses!

Soon, a half-rotted corpse in a dirty jacket hoisted the sail. The corpse with a missing breastbone stowed the heavy anchor. The other corpses took their positions, steering the sailboat slowly away from the port.

As they gazed at the decaying flesh, pale-white bones, and sinister flames of different hues, Batna and Nolfi felt as if they had stepped into a novel world.

Horror novels! Ghostly tales!

"Navigator, it's time for you to work." Charname's voice snapped Nolfi back to reality.

…

In the Governor of the Sea's residence.

Lumian leaned against the statue-less wall, surveying the other deputy hosts in the hall, including Juan Oro.

Uncertain if any of them were genuine, they could easily be impersonated by a Faceless.

In the upcoming operation, the only person he could unequivocally trust was himself.

An hour passed in an indescribable silence. This time, Lumian took the initiative, leading Juan Oro into the basement to retrieve the Ring of the Sea Queen, completing the "paying homage to the ancestors" segment.

The ring rested on the dilapidated stone platform, untouched. Lumian couldn't be certain if it was authentic, but the patterns, symbols, and structure seemed intact, and no one had lurked in the basement after inspection.

Maintaining his calm demeanor and a tense heart, Lumian patiently waited until 6 a.m., feeling both mental and physical fatigue dissipate.

Two hours later, the current Governor of the Sea, Simon, exited the vigil room with four Maidens of the Sea and approached the building's door.

Lumian, Juan Oro, and the other deputy hosts promptly stood up and followed.

The two-story sailboat, adorned with colorful flowers, docked at the Milo Village's docks. Villagers acted as guards, blocking anyone daring to approach.

Ascending the gangway to the deck, Lumian sensed an invisible gaze from every window, flower, and mast—a familiar feeling from when the statues in the Governor of the Sea's residence came to life.

He calmly navigated through the gazes, adhering to Juan Oro's instructions to stand at the left edge of the deck.

This was the designated spot for him, the deputy host named Brian.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

On the dock of Milo Village, vibrant paper fragments burst forth from ceremonial cannons, creating a colorful display.

Amid the festive atmosphere, the ship set sail gradually. It circled Port Santa, capturing the cheers and blessings of the people before venturing toward the distant sea.

As the navigator, Juan Oro guided the ship into a boundless azure sea with no discernible landmarks. They weaved between left and right turns, occasionally reversing direction.

Nearly an hour passed, and beneath the clear, bright sky, dense fog suddenly enveloped the ship.

Splash!

Within the fog's depths, waves surged like mountains. Any ship it touched would capsize or shatter.

The Governor of the Sea, the Maidens of the Sea, some sailors, and the two deputy hosts, participating in the sea sacrificial segment for the first time, were terror-stricken by the ominous scene, their faces paling.

For Juan Oro, a veteran of many sea sacrifices, it seemed like he was observing a child's plaything. He directed the sailors with no emotional fluctuations, guiding the ship along the only safe sea route through the thick fog and exaggerated waves.

After an unknown duration, the fog lifted, and the tidal waves miraculously subsided. An ocean resembling sapphires unfolded before Lumian's eyes.

The sea appeared limitless, but the distance and sky were gray, with only a hint of sunlight seeping through.

…

Port Santa, Solow Motel.

Lugano stood by the window, observing as the citizens formed celebratory teams, weaving through streets and alleys, spreading their joy.

Having already taken Ludwig to witness the Governor of the Sea's colorful flower boat ritual and participated in two spontaneous citizen-led celebrations, Lugano returned to the suite as teatime approached. There, he provided Ludwig with food he had purchased and prepared in advance.

I could still head out later. When the Governor of the Sea returns, another wave of celebrations will ensue. Unfortunately, I can't engage with the enthusiastic Feynapotter girls with such a child in tow… Lugano thought regretfully.

At that moment, a knock echoed on the door.

"Who is it?" Lugano, a seasoned bounty hunter, heightened his guard.

"It's me." A gentle voice emanated from outside the door.

Lugano recognized her as Rubió Paco's wife, Madame Giorgia.

She's here to see the boss? Has something happened to the Paco family again? Lugano glanced at Ludwig, who was eating earnestly, and quickly walked to the door and opened it.

Giorgia, not clad in her usual glamorous attire, wore a black dress akin to that of an old widowed matriarch.

Her long, disheveled brown hair was in disarray, and her thick azure eyes betrayed an unmistakable fear and panic.

"Where's Monsieur Louis Berry?" the lady inquired.

"He's participating in various celebrations for the sea prayer ritual," Lugano fabricated an excuse.

He observed the distressed Madame Giorgia and instinctively inquired with concern, "Did something happen?"

"H-h…" Giorgia stammered, panic and fear evident in her eyes. "I discovered the true identity of that humanoid lizard!"

That humanoid lizard? The one the boss killed? Amidst Lugano's confusion, Giorgia suddenly threw herself into his arms.

The fragrance permeated Lugano's senses, momentarily hindering him from immediately pushing the madam away.

Giorgia suppressed her voice but couldn't conceal her fear.

"That humanoid lizard was my husband, Rubió Paco!"

"Huh?" Lugano was both surprised and bewildered.

Giorgia gritted her teeth and explained, "The one you guys saw, it's fake!"

Fake? Someone impersonated Rubió Paco, and the real Rubió Paco had transformed into a humanoid lizard, killed by the boss? As this realization struck Lugano, his thoughts suddenly slowed down. The surroundings seemed coated in a glass-like layer.

He instinctively struggled, but Giorgia held him tightly, interrupting him with various subtle actions.

Ludwig, engrossed in devouring a skewer of roasted octopuses at the dining table, appeared oblivious to the unfolding silent drama at the door.

In a suite diagonally across the corridor, Rubió Paco sat quietly in a recliner, wearing a faint smile.

He had orchestrated the humanoid lizard incident and hired Louis Berry to resolve it intentionally. Firstly, he aimed to confirm the other party's identity. Secondly, he wanted to leave a vulnerability in the Paco family's handling of weak monsters, ensuring others wouldn't suspect a Faceless's involvement to confuse the target.

However, he abandoned the plan to deal with Louis Berry and refrained from triggering the corresponding trap.

This decision wasn't due to uncertainty about the target's identity; the Mysteries aura on Lumian Lee's chest couldn't escape his notice. He was unlike others. Instead, he had a new plan.

The overall April Fool's operation might not align with Loki's personal objectives!

His current focus shifted to the young boy, Ludwig.

To him, a sealed demigod-level powerhouse was a gift from the Celestial Worthy!

No ritualistic target could be more suitable.

Hence, he hinted at the sea anomaly, simultaneously confusing Lumian Lee and allowing him to connect the concepts of sealing and theft, understanding what occurred during last year's prank. He took the initiative to board the ship and head to the sea sacrifice grounds, enticing this formidable opponent away while another force restrained him.

Now, he was ready to execute a grand performance, captivating the attention of numerous Port Santa citizens!

…

The calm, gem-like sea held no waves. The four Maidens of the Sea engaged in a brief sacrificial dance, while sailors carried offerings—lambs, roosters, ox heads, and more—from the cabin, stacking them at the bow.

With the Ring of the Sea Queen in hand, Juan Oro approached the Governor of the Sea, awaiting the groom's gift for the proposed marriage.

Lumian, vigilant of everyone present, scanned his surroundings.

Any one of them could suddenly reveal themselves as Bard, Mad Lady, Ultraman, Loki, Hisoka, or a marionette.

The gentle, rhythmic dance concluded swiftly. Juan Oro produced the peculiar golden ring, passing it to the incumbent Governor of the Sea, Simon Guiaro.

At that moment, a person emerged openly from the cabin.

A woman in a black nun's uniform and matching hat, her expression calm yet tinged with sadness.

The surrounding sailors paid her no heed, as if she were invisible.

Seeing this, Lumian's pupils dilated, then constricted.

It was the source of Derangement!

The humanoid Sealed Artifact lost by the Eternal Blazing Sun Church!

In an instant, Lumian comprehended two things.

The Death Navigators, transformed Governors of the Sea, had coincidentally appeared near the Flying Bird, stirring colossal waves.

The humanoid Sealed Artifact had unconsciously set out to sea, coincidentally choosing the same destination as him—Port Santa.

There was a purpose behind this!

Chapter 573: Bard

573 Bard

The woman in the black nun's attire felt Lumian's gaze, turning her head slightly and locking eyes with him.

Lumian's gaze met hers, filled with indescribable colors, and the figure in his line of sight vanished.

Simultaneously, Lumian recognized the insignificance of this occurrence. It didn't warrant further consideration.

Beside the incumbent Governor of the Sea, Juan Oro noticed the once calm azure sea undulating. In the gray sky, stars barely visible to the naked eye underwent changes, stirring an inexplicable throbbing and emotional shift within him.

An anomaly? Juan Oro couldn't determine if it was good or bad. Given the circumstances, any change was treated as an accident, potentially caused by a hidden enemy.

Without hesitation, he forcefully thrust the Ring of the Sea Queen into the hands of the incoming Governor of the Sea, Simon, growling, "Hurry up and marry the sea!"

In a moment of desperation, the president of the Fisheries Guild unintentionally failed to alter his voice to sound like Jorge. However, his vocal cords had changed, making him sound younger than usual.

Simon, taken aback by the shout, didn't notice Juan Oro's voice shift.

He raised his hand, clutching the Ring of the Sea Queen, and recited, "I espouse thee, O sea, as a sign of true and perpetual dominion!" With that, he threw the unique golden ring. It trembled with light, its surface covered in a gentle glow.

As the Ring of the Sea Queen submerged, its glow intensified and expanded to the size of a baby before transforming into a cone of light, vanishing into the azure seawater.

In the next moment, Juan Oro, Lumian, and the rest heard a deafening boom.

Splash!

The sea boiled, unleashing huge waves that catapulted the colorful flower boat into the air. A destructive aura echoed in the surroundings.

Wh… The sea's fury! How could this happen? Juan Oro's pupils dilated in disbelief. He couldn't fathom that they had angered the sea again. It seemed like this year's sea prayer ritual had failed once more.

He had meticulously followed every step, witnessing the placement of the Ring of the Sea Queen on the dilapidated stone platform representing the ancestors. He personally retrieved and guarded it with utmost vigilance. Everything went smoothly!

How could this be?

As the bridal boat teetered on the verge of capsizing, Juan Oro clenched his fists, and crystalline scales resembling starlight manifested on his body.

His eyes darkened, resembling resplendent stars emerging within.

He melded with the "sea."

The crashing sound abruptly ceased, and the majestic, terrifying azure waves froze in midair, as if held tightly by an unseen hand.

…

In Milo Village, within the cathedral-like Governor of the Sea's building.

The imposter Governor of the Sea, Miguel, lay in the servant's room. Suddenly, he sat up and leisurely rose from the bed, a self-satisfied smile playing on his face.

Standing before a glass window overlooking the weeds outside, he muttered to himself, It's almost time…

I wonder how Juan Oro will react when he discovers the sea sacrifice has failed again. Heh heh, this is payback for all the 'care' he's given me over the past year.

What's Loki up to? Why the sudden deviation from the original plan? Isn't he concerned about potential accidents?

Miguel—a key member of April Fool's, Bard—had previously disguised himself as the sailor, Iru, and boarded the ship, escaping with Mad Lady when he jumped into the sea.

Their plan over the course of the past year was devised last year. They had selected locals from Port Santa who resembled the unfortunate governor. After disrupting the sea sacrifice and returning ashore, they promptly killed one of their targets, allowing Bard to assume the guise.

Their confidence in Miguel—disguised by Bard—becoming the false Governor of the Sea stemmed from Ultraman taking charge of the matter.

To prevent potential rebellion from peripheral April Fool's members, Bard, a former Swindler, intentionally wrote Emperor Roselle's Secret Chronicles and handed them to Loki. The latter discreetly distributed them in Trier, creating the illusion of Bard's activity in Intis. This tactic prevented others from connecting Miguel—obediently residing in the Governor of the Sea's residence—to Bard.

Writing about Emperor Roselle's romantic past indeed amused Bard, and witnessing Juan Oro's reactions, including the lashing with a crutch before intimate encounters with his granddaughter and the wives and daughters of relevant personnel, greatly satisfied Bard's mischievous tendencies.

However, pranks were secondary. Bard's main objective in assuming the disguise of the Governor of the Sea was clear:

He gained unrestricted access to the basement of the building, believed by Milo Village's inhabitants to be the sacrificial ground for their ancestors!

Despite being a fake Governor of the Sea under the watchful eyes of sea spawn in the house, he had free rein everywhere except the ring-making ritual grounds and the vigil room. Only those two areas were off-limits unless he crossed a line. Moreover, Ultraman confirmed that the basement of the Governor's residence held no value for the sea spawn. Except for two symbolic guards at the staircase, there were no monitors or protectors inside.

Villagers of Milo Village only visited occasionally, showing respect for the Governor of the Sea by not entering or leaving the building without permission.

This provided ample opportunities for Bard, the imposter Governor of the Sea.

Thinking about the expressions of Juan Oro and Lumian Lee when they witnessed the sea prayer ritual's failure again, Bard couldn't help but chuckle. He muttered in a mocking tone, You know the sea sacrifice, ring-making, and vigil happen once a year. Haven't you considered that the ancestral sacrificial ritual can only occur annually?

That dilapidated altar requires the slow accumulation of worshippers' spirituality. It takes almost twelve months to gather the necessary enchantment.

Over half a month before the basement gained serious attention, he had strategically placed an item related to one of the three pathways on the altar, openly siphoning the accumulated theft powers!

With this plan, Bard believed that, regardless of the success of the previous night's ring-making ritual, regardless of how closely Juan Oro and Lumian Lee guarded against the replacement of the Ring of the Sea Queen, it wouldn't possess the ability to steal power from the sea bottom.

Hence, the sea prayer ritual was destined to fail. The seal would further open, and the long-accumulated "volcano" inside would erupt!

Anyone attempting to stop it would perish!

Last year, the reason April Fool's took the risk of making Mad Lady a deputy host and deliberately replacing the Ring of the Sea Queen on the sacrificial ancestor's stone platform with another item arose because the theory that the high-level stealing power could only be used once a year wasn't entirely confirmed. Although Ultraman could analyze and experiment in the basement, he refrained from doing so too frequently to avoid suspicion.

Following the sea prayer ritual failure last year and the subsequent monthly experiments over the past eleven months, Bard, Ultraman, and Mad Lady were now certain that they didn't need to go through the trouble of replacing the real Ring of the Sea Queen. Instead, they could preemptively take away the theft power. Thus, they sneered at Lumian Lee's efforts, unconcerned about his actions or the need for destructive measures to avoid detection by the Earth Mother Church.

Despite their confidence, they still had to maintain appearances, including seeking help from Lumian Lee.

Bard shifted his gaze, averting it to his left hand.

There were signs of a ring being worn there.

This was, in fact, the item carrying the key functions of the Ring of the Sea Queen!

…

Port Santa, Solow Motel, at the entrance of the fifth-floor suite.

"Hugging" Madame Giorgia, Lugano's thoughts faltered, as if the iron gears were covered in yellow rust or lacking lubricant.

W-what's… going on?

Am I… under attack?

No… I have to hurry… I have to… get rid… of this state…

Lugano attempted to push away the woman in his arms, only to realize she had become surprisingly heavy. Using her joints subtly, Madame Giorgia prevented him from raising his arms and legs. The movements resembled a lovers' playful interaction.

Coupled with his disjointed thoughts, even a Planter like Lugano couldn't break free from Giorgia's restraints.

Panicking, Lugano opened his mouth, about to call for help.

Just then, Giorgia lifted her head, pressing her red lips against his.

Lugano was momentarily taken aback.

In the adjacent room, Jenna, disguised as a female mercenary, held a mirror to "reflect" the situation in Lumian's living room through the glass and other items.

Seeing Lugano and Giorgia embracing and flirting, Jenna couldn't help but curse under her breath, "Dammit, can you even go into heat at a time like this? And in front of a child!"

Considering that Franca would be joined by members of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society, Lumian tasked Jenna with secretly monitoring Lugano to figure out what was wrong with the interpreter.

As a former Showy Diva, Jenna had witnessed similar scenes and even more restrictive ones. She couldn't fathom why they chose to display such affection at the door.

At that moment, Anthony Reid, standing beside her, looked at the mirror and frowned.

"It doesn't seem like they're making out. Their actions and expressions aren't typical of people engaged in such activities."

Chapter 574: Heavy

574 Heavy

Their actions and expressions don't align with the typical behavior of people engaged in intimate moments?

Though Jenna had witnessed such scenes in the past, she hadn't delved into the intricacies of others' intimate interactions. Upon hearing Anthony's words, she promptly sided with the Spectator's perspective.

Anthony continued, "Lugano's body language indicates clear resistance. His current condition is highly abnormal."

Resisting, yet not breaking free… There's a lack of intense movements, even though Lugano is a Sequence 8 Beyonder with a strengthened physique. This situation is undeniably peculiar… What kind of Beyonder powers could cause this? Jenna swiftly sifted through the information about potential adversaries for this mission.

Most of it had been compiled by Franca, with a small section supplemented by Judgment and Madam Magician.

As these thoughts raced through Jenna's mind, a realization quickly dawned on her: Marionettist!

A Sequence 5 Marionettist from the Seer pathway!

According to Franca's description of Marionettists, these Beyonders could lurk in the shadows, silently transforming their targets into autonomous marionettes from a distance.

And Madam Magician's additional information included this: "A Marionettist manipulates a creature's Spirit Body Threads. A skilled Marionettist can establish initial control of the target's Spirit Body Threads in five to 10 seconds, slowing down thoughts, movements, and stiffening the body."

Lugano's current state perfectly matched the characteristics of a Marionettist's initial control over the Spirit Body Threads!

Jenna lowered her voice and said to Anthony, "Loki…"

The enemy with the codename Loki was none other than a Marionettist!

Anthony immediately grasped Jenna's conjecture and nodded affirmatively.

"No need to rush. It takes a Marionettist several minutes to completely transform the target into a marionette. We have a chance to rescue Lugano."

As per the information, forcibly taking Lugano away, pushing him beyond a certain limit, or triggering him could help him break free from the Spirit Body Threads or enhance his resistance to such manipulation.

Certainly, the most direct approach would be to locate Loki's true form and launch a direct attack on the enemy, preventing him from concentrating on controlling Lugano's Spirit Body Threads.

Jenna caught Anthony's implication.

Don't hurry to rescue Lugano. Find Loki's true form while Loki hasn't detected us!

The two of them had posed as a couple and checked into Solow Motel's suite the previous night.

Once Loki was identified, dealing with a peculiar, insidious adversary with formidable abilities might be beyond their capacity. However, they could create a significant disturbance and "report" to the Fertility Order, responsible for local Beyonder matters. Lumian had already coordinated with Noelia in advance.

Jenna nodded and reached for the fluorescent powder, preparing to conceal herself.

But in the next moment, she abandoned the idea.

She recalled the information's warning: Marionettists can directly perceive the Spirit Body Threads of different creatures. Most invisibility effects wouldn't work on them.

Moreover, Loki was currently manipulating Spirit Body Threads.

How to locate Loki? Jenna pondered with a strong sense of urgency.

…

In the sealed waters, aboard the betrothal ship.

Lumian first witnessed the mountain-like azure waves surging, only to realize that they had frozen in the air, as if subjected to a sudden freeze. The surroundings emitted a violent aura, obliterating everything in its path.

The sea's fury? Lumian's heart skipped a beat.

Similarly, he couldn't fathom what had gone awry. It seemed that the Ring of the Sea Queen had only unlocked the first half of the seal and hadn't manifested the second half of its stealing effect.

Nevertheless, following the completion of the ring-making ritual, the ring was indeed placed on the dilapidated stone platform. Lumian and Juan Oro had retrieved it together.

Previously uncertain if the Ring of the Sea Queen had been swapped, Lumian now knew it hadn't. This was evident as the Ring of the Sea Queen had further opened the seal. A counterfeit ring, lacking the previous ritual, wouldn't exhibit a similar function.

Could it be that someone moved the Ring of the Sea Queen during the hour in the basement, preventing it from completing the eroding power's duration? Or perhaps the critical stone platform in the basement was destroyed in advance, hindering the completion of the ancestral ritual? Unlikely. How could the first scenario elude the attention of Juan Oro, me, and the sea spawn surveillance? The second scenario shouldn't be inconspicuous. It would undoubtedly be discovered by the sea spawn… As Lumian's thoughts raced, he suddenly felt a slight erosion from the destructive aura surrounding him.

His mind instantly connected to something.

Vaguely, Lumian "saw" the dark-blue seabed, nearly pitch-black. He "saw" a peculiar object partially embedded in rocks and gravel.

The object was unnaturally massive, surpassing the Fertility Order's cloister and the Governor of the Sea's residence combined. It bore a silver-gray hue, with sleek lines resembling a colossal spindle missing its front segment. At that moment, the side of the object gleamed with a radiant starlight. Together, they appeared to form a circular, transparent door.

Through the door, Lumian "saw" a particular scene inside.

Silver-gray metal walls were densely covered with special holes, resembling hives.

In some nests, black foam bubbled as thin, bristle-covered Batings Black Insects crawled out. Some nests contained more than ten compartments, with a wrinkled Little Devil lying inside, seemingly deceased and disintegrating into various forms…

As this peculiar and horrifying scene etched into Lumian's mind, he snapped out of his stupor. He couldn't be bothered to ponder April Fool's actions. He swiftly deliberated on how to prevent the sealed object from going berserk and breaking free entirely.

The extracted power has yet to cause any harm…

It appears to be suppressed by Juan Oro at the expense of his life…

If I can seize this window of opportunity to steal the released power and distribute it to everyone with a sea bloodline, there's a chance of completing the sea sacrifice segment and allowing the sea prayer ritual to succeed…

Stealing…

In an instant, Lumian contemplated two solutions:

Firstly, he could immediately seek help from Mr. Fool, an expert in this area, with Termiboros as a precedent. Secondly, he could utilize the Lie earring, a mystical item that had gained the ability to steal others' powers on the stone platform meant to honor the ancestors.

Lumian swiftly discarded the first option, considering April Fool's involvement. With The Celestial Worthy of Heaven and Earth for Blessings backing them, seeking Mr. Fool's assistance might not yield a response. It could potentially be a time-consuming effort.

As for the second method, Lumian sensed a strong feeling of inevitability and an undeniable sense of coincidence.

Lie had recently acquired the ability to steal someone else's power—and here it was proving beneficial in a critical moment!

Without the luxury of time for careful analysis, Lumian made a swift decision.

Put aside coincidences and inevitability for now. Resolving the current predicament was the most pragmatic approach!

He then retrieved the silver Lie earring from his pocket.

Typically, such items couldn't be brought onto the betrothal ship—they would surely be discovered by the sea spawn. However, this time, Juan Oro had communicated with the sea spawn in advance, stating that he and his assistant intended to pose as deputy hosts and board the ship to guard against any potential mishaps.

The sea spawn placed their trust in the president of the Fisheries Guild more than anyone else while the traitors were still at large. Their intelligence wasn't particularly high, and they were especially protective of the sea prayer ritual.

Clutching the Lie earring, Lumian extended his spirituality.

He immediately perceived the surrounding starlight and sensed their presence.

Lumian subconsciously extended his hand and twisted his wrist.

A plethora of starlight cascaded down, rushing toward the Lie earring and enveloping him.

At that moment, a person materialized in front of him. She wore a black nun's uniform, her face expressing profound sorrow.

She appeared like a colossal whale suddenly leaping out of the sea without warning.

It's her? The source of Derangement? Lumian finally recollected something he had forgotten.

There was indeed such a person on the ship!

In the next instant, he sensed the humanoid Sealed Artifact becoming unusually weighty, so heavy that the surrounding void slightly bent. It was so heavy that all the starlight surged toward her like the sea. The weight was so immense that the betrothal ship began to sink, and the nearby seawater was pushed aside.

Silently, Lumian witnessed the sea around him morphing into a translucent azure mountain peak, looming over them as they descended to the seabed. It resembled the walls of a deep well, and the well mouth, formed by these walls, grew more distant with each passing moment.

…

Four hours ago, at the edge of the foggy sea, Nolfi said to Charname, "You have to listen to me completely from now on. Otherwise, it will be very dangerous."

"Sure." Charname nodded. "But before that, we need to communicate openly."

A smile gradually spread across his face.

Batna, who stood beside Nolfi, asked curiously, "What communication?"

Charname produced a metal canister and looked at Nolfi.

"This is an agent that can make people speak the truth. I want to know if you have a secret collaborator. If so, who is it? Don't worry, it's not poison."

Charname unscrewed the lid and took a sip to demonstrate his sincerity.

Nolfi fell silent.

"If I don't understand the corresponding details, it'll be challenging for me to follow your instructions," Charname began to instigate. "We're already here. We could enter those waters at any moment and destroy the underwater palace before the sea prayer ritual. Are you truly willing to give up?"

Nolfi remained silent for a moment before accepting the metal canister and taking a big gulp.

Charname's heart ached as he withdrew the bottle and patiently waited for the medicine to take effect.

Chapter 575: "Handover"

575 "Handover"

After a while, Charname reached his limit. He stared at Nolfi and questioned, "Do you have any secret collaborators?"

Nolfi gently nodded and admitted, "Yes."

Batna and Charname anticipated this response, but it failed to dampen Charname's excitement.

"Who is it?"

Nolfi hesitated for a moment before revealing, "It's, it's Juan Oro!"

Juan Oro? The president of the Fisheries Guild? Batna was caught off guard.

Charname shared the sentiment.

Could the spy be the boss? Despite his critique, he pressed on, "Are you sure it's Juan Oro?"

While instructing Juan Oro to investigate the core members of the Fisheries Guild, Lumian, who had uncovered the Earth Mother Church's true motives, sought similar information from Noelia of the Fertility Order, which included Juan Oro, the president.

Official reports indicated that Juan Oro's health had been relatively stable. He had never faced serious illness or severe injury. Moreover, he hadn't displayed any signs of losing control of his lizard form.

In essence, there was no indication that he had been possessed by Ultraman, a transmigrator.

Naturally, a definitive judgment couldn't be made based solely on this information. After all, when the original bodies of many Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society members met unfortunate fates, there were no witnesses.

Despite growing older, Juan Oro's personality remained relatively unchanged, sans the increasingly stubborn streak and a penchant for returning to the sea.

Crucially, if Juan Oro were Ultraman, many of April Fool's disruptive actions during the sea prayer ritual would be unnecessary. It could be executed in a simpler and more covert manner.

Considering these factors, Charname had previously concluded that Juan Oro wasn't a key member of April Fool's.

Nolfi pursed her lips and disclosed, "It's him. I met him six months ago in Port Rayak."

Rayak, located north of the Dariège mountain range, served as a port under the jurisdiction of the Riston Province in the Intis Republic.

"Met before?" Charname blurted out. "Your eyes can deceive you. What you perceive doesn't necessarily reflect reality."

Unable to hold back his desire to confide, he continued, "Just like now. The me you see isn't equivalent to the real me. The difference is quite significant."

"Are you suggesting that the Juan Oro I encountered was an imposter?" Nolfi expressed disbelief. "But, he also demonstrated the ability to control the waves!"

Charname chuckled.

"Many Fisheries Guild committee members possess such abilities. What if one of them impersonated Juan Oro?"

"But, but it's too similar…" Nolfi fell into self-doubt.

Charname spoke casually, "Based on the intel we gathered, Juan Oro hasn't left Port Santa for nearly a decade.

"He's the president of the Fisheries Guild. He frequents the association daily."

While this information was used to persuade Nolfi, it wasn't conclusive evidence. If Juan Oro were Ultraman, he could have enlisted Mad Lady's help to travel to Port Rayak and return in less than two hours.

Under such circumstances, hardly anyone would notice his brief absence.

Nolfi fell silent, pondering, and muttered, "Then, then who could it be?"

"How would I know?" Charname expressed his criticism.

Appearing slightly awkward, he shifted the conversation.

"What kind of collaboration did the imposter Juan Oro seek with you? Do you have any means to obliterate the underwater palace and put an end to the sea prayer ritual once and for all?"

Nolfi's body quivered, as if grappling with an innate urge.

After a brief pause, she struggled in response, "H-he'll help me cover my tracks and disregard my existence. He'll permit me to board a ship and infiltrate the sea sacrifice waters ahead of the Governor of the Sea's vessel and conceal myself.

"Then, as the Governor of the Sea unveils the Ring of the Sea Queen and utters the words of the marriage proposal, I'll deliver a line.

"My mother imparted that passage to me. It originated from her profound connection with the palace when she received the sea's blessing. Its—its purpose is to trigger a self-destruct sequence within the palace."

Nolfi's words flowed more effortlessly, signifying that she had given up on resisting.

"Self-destruction sequence? Are you certain? Do you comprehend that language from God knows where?" Charname wore an expression of skepticism.

"That's what my mother told me." Nolfi conveyed her lack of understanding of the language's meaning.

Charname pressed on, "Does your mother comprehend that language?"

"She doesn't, but she grasps its significance. Can you fathom it? It's a form of spiritual communication," Nolfi defended her mother with determination.

"Deceiving through soul-level communication isn't out of the realm of possibility. Moreover, it's always simpler to dupe the illiterate," Charname muttered his internal grievances once again.

He furrowed his brow and inquired, "Did the imposter Juan Oro inform you that the sea prayer ritual failed last year?"

"No. If he had, I wouldn't have chartered a boat at Port Santa," Nolfi expressed her frustration on the matter.

Had she known from the beginning that last year's sea prayer ritual had faltered, she would have anticipated heightened vigilance at Port Santa this year. Those attempting to rent a boat for a sea journey would undoubtedly be on a watch list.

Charname wore a perplexed expression.

"Wouldn't that mean the imposter Juan Oro was expecting you to be apprehended by Lato Guiaro…"

Half a year ago, neither April Fool's nor anyone with ulterior motives in Port Santa had foreseen Lumian's arrival to investigate the sea prayer ritual.

This suggested that Nolfi's original role wasn't designed to lure Lumian. It might have been part of April Fool's initial plan until they reconsidered, opting to exploit the great adventurer's investigations.

Under such circumstances, letting Nolfi be captured by Lato Guiaro was evidently not a mere oversight in April Fool's plan, unless that was their intention all along.

Is Nolfi being thrown into the mix to confuse the Fisheries Guild and sow suspicion among other committee members against Juan Oro? A rift between them would hinder their cooperation. But this strategy doesn't seem cunning enough…

Is it an attempt to divert the Earth Mother Church's attention from this year's sea prayer ritual and redirect it towards Nolfi?

Or… or…

Franca, posing as Charname, had a guess.

Or perhaps, Lato Guiaro is a member of April Fool's!

The moment Nolfi arrived at Port Santa and tried to rent a boat, she was apprehended. Not only does Lato Guiaro hold complete sway over this "collaborator," but he also offers corresponding protection… Could it be that when the sea prayer ritual is on the brink of commencing, he will feign a lapse in vigilance, allowing Nolfi to escape successfully and secure a boat?

With this speculation in mind, the more Franca considered Lato Guiaro, the more something felt awry.

Whether it was the intel provided by the Knight of Swords or information from the authorities, a consistent message emerged:

Lato Guiaro had slept in separate rooms from his wife many years ago!

For transmigrators, after taking over the original owner's body, their greatest apprehension was being exposed by those around them through various details. Among these people, the ones most likely to unveil their disguises were their deeply connected parents and spouses who shared the same bed. In particular, the latter were privy to many interaction habits unknown to others. In such circumstances, opting to sleep in separate rooms was evidently a form of self-protection for transmigrators.

Initially, Franca had a fleeting suspicion when she came across this information, but she promptly dismissed it. Firstly, it wasn't uncommon for a middle-aged man and his wife to have separate sleeping quarters. Lato Guiaro wasn't the sole Fisheries Guild committee member to adopt this practice. Secondly, Lato Guiaro had previously been forcibly controlled by the Knight of Swords and Lumian before being subjected to truth serum. During subsequent questioning, he displayed no indications of ties to April Fool's. He didn't even betray any signs of stifling laughter when discussing marrying the sea!

However, what if Lato Guiaro, who willingly transmitted Nolfi's information, had prepped in advance to elude the adventurer's detection and had cloaked a portion of his memories through Hypnosis?

The truth serum fundamentally heightened the inclination to share with others. Anything beyond the user's knowledge or comprehension remained veiled.

The pressing question now was: where did Lato Guiaro acquire Beyonders or items with similar capabilities through April Fool's channels?

Franca, increasingly convinced that Lato Guiaro was Ultraman, recalled a crucial detail: the current Governor of the Sea, Simon, belonged to the Guiaro family!

Previously, Juan Oro had heeded her advice to conduct a blood test on everyone, excluding Lumian, who boarded the ship. The aim was to confirm familial ties and unveil any outsiders attempting to infiltrate in disguise.

What if Simon Guiaro was Lato Guiaro in disguise?

This method would only affirm his identity!

…

On the betrothal ship, now resting on the seabed as if weighed down by a colossal boulder,

Simon Guiaro, positioned at the bow, appeared bewildered, his face a mixture of panic and confusion.

Yet, a faint curl formed at the corners of his mouth.

At that moment, the Governor of the Sea handover ritual from the previous night flashed in his mind.

Clad in a pristine blue suit, Simon Guiaro entered the hall, noting his predecessor, Governor of the Sea Miguel, clad in a retro white robe, observing him. Following the predetermined procedure, he uttered the prearranged words.

"I'll leave the sea to you."

"It's my honor," Simon Guiaro responded solemnly as he advanced toward the other party.

Miguel extended his right hand, and Simon Guiaro reached out for a handshake. This gesture symbolized the departure of the former Governor of the Sea and the commencement of Simon Guiaro's role as the present Governor of the Sea.

After the handshake, they passed each other by. As they turned their gazes in opposite directions, the corners of their lips subtly curled upwards.

Under the scrutiny of the numerous statues surrounding them, one advanced while the other exited the hall.

Chapter 576: Palace

576 Palace

Having transformed into Simon through a Seer pathway's Sealed Artifact, Lato Guiaro observed the illusory starlight surrounding them, akin to seawater caught in a vortex. It cascaded down, forming a massive funnel.

The origin of this vortex was the humanoid Sealed Artifact they had "abducted" from the Eternal Blazing Sun Church!

After the exposure of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society's internal affairs and the consecutive deaths of Loki and I Know Someone, one resurrected at the cost of a precious opportunity, while the other met a permanent end. They adjusted their initial sea sacrifice plan and activated a backup strategy to counter potential interference from the Research Society.

According to the revived Loki's warning, Hela, the society's vice president, had likely ascended to Sequence 4, reaching demigod status, and switched from the Death pathway to the Evernight pathway. Depending solely on Ultraman, Bard, and Mad Lady, their intricate plans would crumble before absolute strength.

Of course, they were confident if it were just Hela alone. Confidence wavered when considering President Gandalf, an enigma, and the other vice presidents, alongside the troublesome society members. Dealing with them now seemed an insurmountable challenge.

Starlight surged, revealing a sorrowful woman in black nun's attire to everyone on the ship. Her presence felt magnetic, as if attempting to absorb everything around her.

It was akin to an unusually heavy iron ball falling from the center of a taut fishing net, dragging objects down and pulling the surrounding net with it. In these circumstances, previously still items naturally slipped away.

The most impacted was Juan Oro, with a potent sea bloodline and formidable sea power. Resisting the sea's fury, he felt a spatial inversion, as if his front and back had switched to up and down. Like a lost person above an abyss, he involuntarily "fell" to the bottom at an accelerated speed, where the woman in black nun's attire awaited.

The deputy hosts, apart from Lumian, felt an unseen force tugging at them. Struggling, they staggered towards the humanoid Sealed Artifact. The sea's power within them wavered, propelling them to the surface, revealing sparkling starry scales that hinted at losing control.

The Maidens of the Sea and the sailors on the ship struggled against the terrifying suction force, swaying on the spot. Some experienced their skin smoothing, others felt scales emerging in their flesh, and a few shifted their feet intermittently.

Lumian, though relatively unscathed, exerted considerable strength to resist the relentless pull.

As an Ascetic, he vaguely sensed the river of fate for everyone present surging toward the humanoid Sealed Artifact. Future tributaries narrowed and converged, leading inevitably to one possibility—death.

In that moment, Lumian grasped why the humanoid Sealed Artifact could use words to curse someone to death.

Lato Guiaro reached out, gripping the shipboard to resist the invisible pull from the woman.

His gaze scanned the people on the ship, then returned to the sea's depths.

The ship descended, surrounded by a translucent wall of azure seawater. Sea creatures swam within, seemingly oblivious to the anomaly. In the distance, the spindle-shaped silver-gray object at the sea bottom, its tip embedded in rocks, came into view.

Lato Guiaro suppressed any sign of a smile.

He was nearing his destination.

The fools from the Fisheries Guild and the oblivious Earth Mother Church might never comprehend what lay sealed at the bottom of the sea here.

It wasn't a so-called "palace" but a spaceship!

A spacecraft that infiltrated during the Fourth Epoch!

It boasted a sci-fi dimension, housing advanced technology entwined with mystical Beyonder elements, forming the core of the entire spaceship.

A locator, a petri dish, a breeding box, a key component of a Stargate—a place where a Beyonder object slumbered.

The Ring of the Sea Queen, crafted by the sea spawn, served as the spacecraft's key. Only when the external seal weakened annually could it activate the spacecraft's internal power, merging the two to crack the core seal!

Lato Guiaro's gaze grew greedier as he stared at the faintly discernible silver-

gray behemoth.

His aim extended beyond temporary authority—to become the true Governor of the Sea and the spaceship's owner.

This would grant him immense power and the ability to accomplish unimaginable feats using the spaceship.

The azure sea, tinged with a hint of green, encircled the ship as if respectfully escorting them into the palace of the sea.

Seeing the sea's fury interrupted by the woman's sudden appearance, making her the most perilous element, Juan Oro wasted no time deepening his connection with the sea.

At that moment, he temporarily became the Governor of the Sea.

He resisted the terrifying suction force.

Abruptly, the humanoid Sealed Artifact "departed" from the ship, entering an empty darkness.

Resplendent stars flickered above, below, and to her left. Ahead stood Juan Oro, covered in starlight scales, deep-eyed, and with completely white hair.

Juan Oro raised his right hand, swiping his finger.

The "stars" plummeted with fiery tails, stirring up waves.

On the betrothal ship, everyone lost the momentum to rush to the same place. However, the power they used to resist the pull couldn't be withdrawn, causing them to fall in the opposite direction.

Lato Guiaro feigned a similar state, crashing into the bow of the ship.

Seeing the silver-gray behemoth approaching, his heart leaped with joy. He was about to recite a phrase he didn't comprehend but understood its purpose.

It was a coded order to completely open the spaceship's door and establish an energy passageway, allowing him to enter under protection!

April Fool's had been established for several years. Lato Guiaro's decision to target the sea prayer ritual last year was influenced by the resolution of other voices from the Governor of the Sea, Maidens of the Sea, and certain sea spawn. This allowed them to understand the significance of the three crucial passages.

"I espouse thee, O sea…" was one of the passages, its true meaning being to inject energy into the created key and enter a password. Lato Guiaro was about to recite the second paragraph, which served as an order to initiate the spaceship.

Initially, he and Bard planned to deceive the foolish Nolfi, tricking her into reciting the words to avoid danger. Once the spaceship activated and left these waters, the sea prayer ritual would naturally conclude. There wouldn't be any follow-up. Whether it involved self-destruction or not, it wasn't a concern for her; she had achieved her essential goal.

However, the situation changed drastically, especially when the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society learned about the sea prayer ritual. Ultraman and Bard modified their plans, roping in external aid and reducing Nolfi's role. Eventually, she became bait to lead troublemakers, represented by Lumian Lee and Hidden Blade.

Lato Guiaro opened his mouth and muttered the words.

As he finished speaking, he looked expectantly at the spaceship at the sea bottom.

But nothing happened!

How is this possible? Lato Guiaro's heart tightened, feeling a sudden sense of danger.

With a jolt, he saw everything disintegrate like a soap bubble, vanishing.

Lumian, transformed into Brian, had arrived near him at some point.

A dream!

He had been dreaming since Juan Oro pulled the humanoid Sealed Artifact into the Cosmic Void!

Hela! This name flashed through Lato Guiaro's mind.

He had paid attention to whether there were other ships lurking around!

As these thoughts raced through his mind, formless hands appeared around Lato Guiaro, pushing Lumian away.

Then, he saw a sailboat, clearly abandoned by time, outlined in the cavity surrounded by seawater beside the betrothal ship. Shadows clung to its canvas, and corpses stood on the observatory. The deck was littered with decaying or boneless undead creatures.

At the bow of the ship, a woman dressed as a black widow stood silently.

Hela!

…

Less than four hours ago, Franca, posing as Charname, signaled Nolfi and Batna to wait for further arrangements. Returning to the cabin, she entered the captain's cabin and addressed Hela, standing by the window.

"I've roughly guessed who Ultraman is, but I can't be sure."

"I guessed as much," Hela replied, having overheard Franca and Nolfi's conversation.

Franca gritted her teeth and said, "If it's really Lato Guiaro, there will definitely be variables on the ship. I have to quickly summon Lumian's messenger and inform him of our guess."

"Let's wait a little longer and time it well. We'll send the message when the deputy hosts leave the Governor of the Sea's residence but prior to boarding the ship," Hela advised.

Franca confirmed succinctly, "Got it."

She observed Hela, with her light-blond hair naturally cascading over her shoulders, and her dark eyes seemingly darker as she meticulously engraved patterns and arranged items on the captain's cabin desk. With curiosity, she promptly inquired, "What's this for?"

"Setting up a ritual to completely conceal the entire ship, preventing anyone from discovering it. It's impossible for me to do this on my own. I can only achieve it through a deity's help. And She should be very willing to help."

Without hesitation, Hela took off the pure silver ring embedded with a black diamond from her right hand and placed it in the center of the altar.

…

On the betrothal ship, Lumian scrutinized Lato Guiaro, his body quivering with excitement.

He couldn't comprehend how the other party had thwarted the sea prayer ritual once again. After all, he had been vigilantly observing this "old friend" of his and hadn't witnessed any ring-switching.

Nonetheless, it didn't matter. A well-devised plan was not a fragile creation that crumbled with the slightest mistake. It had to allow for enough margin for error!

Similarly, Lato Guiaro couldn't fathom how Hela and the ship had approached without triggering his detection.

But it didn't matter. If they hadn't prepared for the interference of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society and Hela, they wouldn't have taken action this time.

Lato Guiaro's eyes suddenly darkened, and specks of starlight illuminated.

The surrounding azure seawater froze once more.

Here, he surpassed the old-timer, Juan Oro. He had long amassed the power to temporarily become the Governor of the Sea!

In the upcoming period, he would ascend to become the god of these waters!

Chapter 577: Same Thoughts

577 Same Thoughts

On the flower ship, Lato Guiaro extended his arms, and sunlight erupted from his body.

The sky dimmed, and the sea approached nothingness. Illusory stars emerged among them, expanding like distant suns.

In the next moment, Lato Guiaro swiftly spoke a few words in ancient Hermes with a grave expression, "God says entering dreams is ineffective!"

With the reinforcement of the sea's power, he neared the status of a Sequence 4 demigod. This allowed him to employ the Notary's "God says" ability more precisely, diminishing Hela's capacity to compel people into entering dreams.

Without this intervention, if Hela used her ability to forcefully restrain him without guiding him into an easily interruptible dream to gather information, breaking free from such a demigod's dream would prove challenging in a short time. He would become like a feral dog under anesthesia, at Lumian Lee's mercy.

The choice of "entering dreams is ineffective" over "sleeping is ineffective" was deliberate. The former was more specific and avoided potential ambiguity related to various abilities. Additionally, the Evernight pathway's induced slumber originated from being forcefully drawn into a dream, not the other way around. Essentially, it was a dream, not sleep.

As Lato Guiaro pronounced the ancient Hermes phrase "entering dreams is ineffective," his body still felt as weighty as the humanoid Sealed Artifact, though not as exaggerated.

This stirred massive waves in the surrounding seawater, attempting to fill the void.

The sailboat manipulated by the undead creatures visibly swayed, nearly capsizing, severely impeding Hela's further movements.

Immediately after, Lato Guiaro reclined even further. A miniature, bright sun manifested in his eyes.

Simultaneously, the ethereal sky and the stars emerging from the sea emitted light of varying intensities. They interweaved, crafting a splendid and pure blazing pillar of light.

The majestic pillar of light descended, enveloping the front half of the sailboat, where Hela stood. It melted the undead creatures there as if they had evaporated, leaving no trace of darkness.

Hela became engulfed by the pillar of light.

This was the Light of Holiness, an ability of a Sequence 5 Priest of the Light of the Sun pathway. Despite not consuming a corresponding Sequence 4 potion and lacking demigod-level abilities after becoming the temporary Governor of the Sea, Lato Guiaro could elevate his acquired abilities to near Sequence 4.

Moreover, the Light of Holiness had undergone a mutation. It no longer emanated from a single sun. All the stars in the Cosmic Void contributed to its power. Coupled with the uniqueness of these waters, while not as potent as the Sequence 4 Flaring Sun of this pathway in purifying and destroying impure entities, its attack range and area of influence had significantly expanded.

Having transmigrated into a Child of the Sea and possessing substantial boons, Lato Guiaro had carefully considered the Sun pathway potion, believing it posed no risks and might integrate with his bloodline and original abilities, bringing about remarkable changes.

The outcome aligned with his expectations.

Suddenly, Lato Guiaro pivoted.

In the space behind him, Lumian's figure swiftly materialized.

He intended to exploit Lato Guiaro's engagement with Hela to "teleport" closer, followed by a Spell of Harrumph.

Gone from his eyes was any suppressed violence or madness. There was no fear whatsoever, as if he didn't concern himself with the consequences of failing to assail the Governor of the Sea at close range.

In Lato Guiaro's dark and profound eyes, resplendent stars reflected. Before Lumian could utter the harrumph, he plunged into the void, disappearing beneath the vast and distant cosmos.

Lato Guiaro withdrew his gaze and focused on the sailboat illuminated by the residual light.

He found an adversary like Lumian Lee repulsive. It wasn't that he couldn't be forcibly eliminated, but doing so might only exacerbate matters. He could potentially incur the indiscriminate wrath of a high-ranking individual.

His decision was to leverage the authority of the Governor of the Sea to banish his foe into a self-created Cosmic Void, leaving him disoriented and unable to find an exit for the time being.

Once he assumed control of the spaceship and became the true Governor of the Sea, he planned to return and calmly resolve the issue.

At that precise moment, Juan Oro, entangled in a battle with the humanoid Sealed Artifact in his Cosmic Void, suddenly detected an anomaly.

His strength rapidly waned, and his dominion over the sea gradually diminished!

It seemed like his temporary authority as Governor of the Sea was being usurped.

In the blink of an eye, the tidal wave capable of shattering ships vanished from the Cosmic Void, followed by the illusory cosmos itself.

Juan Oro "reappeared" on the ship once more and "saw" the azure sea around him, towering like a mountain peak. He "saw" Simon Guiaro, closely linked to the sea.

"It's you!" His roar coincided with an involuntary bend, as if an invisible force pressed him down to the floor.

The humanoid Sealed Artifact had also returned, reinstating a formidable weight.

Lato Guiaro gazed at her, his face covered in scales tinged with starlight. Then, he pointed at Hela's ship and spoke in a fluent language, "¥%…&*"

He didn't comprehend the exact meaning of the sentence, but he understood that it could prompt the other party to attack a designated target.

Although he harbored no fear of Hela in these waters, he remained vigilant of Gandalf and others who might be on the ship. Therefore, he had to give his utmost effort.

The humanoid Sealed Artifact's sorrow dissipated slightly, and it nodded blankly.

Her body pivoted towards the sailboat, which bobbed in the "underwater waves."

In an instant, Lato Guiaro bent down and grasped his throat.

Waa!

He ejected a slender, sticky blob of flesh.

The flesh contorted and writhed, swiftly taking on a human form.

Lato Guiaro promptly straightened up and seized the moment to command, "Mad Lady, open the passageway to the spaceship!"

He wasn't concerned that Mad Lady might usurp the position of the Governor of the Sea and become the owner of the spaceship because she lacked the sea bloodline.

In the Cosmic Void crafted by Lato Guiaro, Lumian showed no urgency to find an exit or ascertain his coordinates. He simply "teleported" out.

He clasped his throat.

Waa!

He ejected a slender, sticky blob of flesh.

The flesh contorted and writhed, swiftly taking on a human form.

…

Solow Motel, adjacent to Lumian's suite.

Recalling that Invisibility and Shadow Concealment were futile against Marionettists, Jenna pondered ways to locate Loki's true form.

Drawing on information from the Major Arcana card holders, she knew a Marionettist had to be within five meters of a target to transform individuals into marionettes. In other words, Loki was undoubtedly within a five-meter radius of Lugano.

Dammit, it's all walls. My sight is blocked. Otherwise, spotting Loki would be easier. At this hour, most guests are away, celebrating the sea prayer ritual…

Walls… If there are no walls…

An idea struck Jenna.

She glanced at Anthony and blurted out, "Did you bring enough money?"

"What money?" In a rare instance, Anthony couldn't decipher Jenna's true thoughts.

Only then did Jenna realize her words had been too abrupt.

"Money to compensate the motel owner.

"I plan to blow up the opposite side, diagonally opposite, and the rooms below. We confirmed they're empty. If anyone's there, it's Loki or his marionette!

"I'll place the detonators here. They affect rooms within a seven-meter radius. Lugano will likely be injured, but with the lady as a shield and being a Doctor, he can handle it.

"Right, the explosion will attract the Fertility Order's combat nuns!"

Jenna's train of thought gradually flowed smoothly as she spoke.

Are you a Hunter or a Demoness? Have you been influenced by Lumian… Anthony mused inwardly. "Do it. Time is running out. Lumian will cover the compensation; he's loaded."

Jenna hurriedly searched her backpack for detonators. Simultaneously, she noticed Anthony setting up a simple altar.

Her heart stirred as she asked, "Do you wish to contact Madam Justice, Madam Judgment, or Madam Magician?"

"Either one works," Anthony said seriously as he prepared for the ritual. "Although Madam Magician won't appear until the end to prevent Loki and his backer from noticing, she mentioned that at least two Major Arcana cards will arrive early and provide assistance at critical moments."

"Got it." Jenna had been uncertain about when to reach out for help and inform their Major Arcana cardholders, so she had been contemplating handling it herself.

Given Anthony's readiness to risk the disapproval of the Major Arcana cardholders, Jenna was naturally inclined to opt for the safest choice.

As Jenna stacked the detonators and other explosives near the adjacent door, Anthony Reid erected a spiritual barrier and summoned Madam Magician's messenger, briefing her on Loki's appearance.

Then, he swiftly took cover in the bathroom attached to the master bedroom, about six to seven meters away from the impending explosion.

Boom!

A fierce explosion tore through the fifth floor of Sauron Motel. Glass shattered, debris scattered, and crimson flames engulfed the surroundings.

Chapter 578: Marionettes

578 Marionettes

Amidst the thunderous explosion, the partition separating the two suites and the one facing the corridor crumbled simultaneously, wreaking havoc on nearby furniture, the ceiling above, the floor beneath their feet, and the rooms opposite, swiftly enveloping them in a surging inferno.

Jenna hadn't utilized all the explosives; otherwise, the entire fifth and fourth floors of Solow Motel would have collapsed in unison. Nevertheless, a section of the roof gave way, and the floor was strewn in chaos. The epicenter of the blast unveiled the room below.

As the walls of the adjacent rooms succumbed to the onslaught, the bricks and wood propelled by the shockwave slammed into Giorgia, causing her back to buckle, and her head to split open, unleashing a flow of vivid red blood. Lugano snapped out of his intermittent thoughts and bodily stiffness, regaining his composure.

Subsequently, he experienced searing pain as the violent shockwave, mixed with flames and debris, hurled him through the air.

Had it not been for Giorgia shielding him and with his robust Planter's physique, he likely would have faced severe injuries, teetering on the brink of death. Limbs could have been severed, or vital points struck. Despite this, he ended up a battered mess, with a few bones broken, nearly succumbing to unconsciousness.

Ludwig had sought refuge under the dining table at some point—along with his food. With the advantage of distance and the makeshift "shield," he only bore the impact of the collapsed table.

Simultaneously, Jenna and Anthony burst out of the master bedroom washroom in their suite, their gazes fixed on the adjacent rooms where walls had crumbled, filling the air with swirling dust.

They vaguely discerned a figure.

The figure, bearing a striking resemblance to Rubió Paco, stood beside the upturned recliner.

Loki! Jenna wasted no time. She condensed a dark, illusory flame and sent it hurtling towards her target.

Behind her, Anthony Reid's eyes took on a golden tint, pupils dilating. He was poised to lock onto Loki, ready to unleash Frenzy—a technique that would plunge Loki into an emotionally and psychologically triggered state, rendering him incapable of rational thought and effective response.

Just as Anthony and Jenna prepared to strike, their vision darkened, and Loki vanished.

They found themselves in a void, no blue sky or white clouds above, no solid ground below—just darkness embellished with a myriad of stars.

Cosmic Void!

This semi-real, semi-false illusion was a creation achievable by a Child of the Sea at a certain level.

In the void, Jenna and Anthony beheld a widowed woman in a black bonnet with subtle wrinkles in front of them.

Martha!

The Paco family's matriarch, now a marionette under Loki's control, was hidden in the room where Loki manipulated the Spirit Body Threads.

With sufficient preparation time, how could Loki not perform with his marionettes? He had two puppets with Beyonder powers, and this was one of them. Another remained concealed, with the last slot reserved for specific situations, adaptable at will. It could be switched once an enemy was under control.

When Loki posed as Rubió Paco, bringing Madam Martha to meet the Governor of the Sea, the family's matriarch was already a marionette. Thus, he had to ensure she stayed within his control range.

Lugano discerned Madam Martha's severe injuries primarily because a marionette was essentially comparable to a lifeless entity. A Marionettist's manipulation of her Spirit Body Threads allowed her to execute various actions, mimicking living characteristics. To a Sequence 8 Doctor, this appeared as grave injuries.

Had Lumian not infrequently observed others' luck without forming a habit, he would have realized that Madam Martha's fate was off. It was eerily still, resembling death.

Martha, a subtle smile on her face, lifted her right hand, a spectral green light coalescing at her fingertips.

The radiance morphed into a beam that streaked towards Jenna.

Having heard Lumian explain the sea bloodline's abilities, Jenna, at the sight of the spectral green light, rolled out of the Cosmic Void. Anthony followed suit. He refrained from using Frenzy on Martha since a marionette, essentially dead, wouldn't succumb to frenzy.

In the next moment, they both felt a weightiness, plummeting swiftly through the empty cosmos. They experienced the weightlessness Franca occasionally mentioned.

In the blink of an eye, Jenna and Anthony landed on the ground and steadied themselves, yet Martha was nowhere to be seen. The empty cosmos was shattering inch by inch.

They were still in Solow Motel, but they had descended from the fifth floor to the fourth.

This was because the mid- to low-level Cosmic Void resembled more of an illusion. There would be a barrier akin to a wall of spirituality around them. After falling into it, their bodies remained in reality. As they rolled and dodged, Martha nudged them forcefully with her formless power, causing them to plunge into the floor cavity created by the explosives.

Jenna didn't hesitate. She sprinted up the wall, seized a crack, and flipped back to the fifth floor where the explosion had occurred.

She saw Lugano tending to his injuries, and Loki and Madam Martha were absent from the room diagonally opposite.

Ludwig, who had hidden under the dining table, had vanished as well!

On Aquina Street, amid a lively folk celebration, Loki, having transformed into an inconspicuous passerby, carried Ludwig, who had "fallen asleep," through the crowd.

His other marionette, a Soul Assurer of the Evernight pathway, stayed concealed on the opposite side of Lumian's suite, ready to exert influence on the target.

Initially, Loki had dispatched his temporary marionette, Giorgia, to handle Lugano. He had manipulated the Doctor's Spirit Body Threads but refrained from deploying his more potent marionettes. It wasn't due to fear of alerting Ludwig, but rather a concern that an unseen adversary might be lurking in the shadows. After all, several lodgers in the motel hadn't left for the sea prayer ritual celebrations. A couple had returned before lunchtime next door, almost synchronizing with the target.

Moreover, a Marionettist's advancement ritual demanded a grand performance—a splendid and profound drama. Silent, unnoticed assassinations lacking a sufficient audience failed to meet the requirements.

Therefore, Loki intentionally singled out Lugano first. If there were no other foes lurking, it was akin to switching marionettes. If there were, he could draw them all to him and clandestinely manipulate the target with the other marionette nearby.

Aware that it was a sealed demigod, Loki knew its strength might be limited, but its essence remained unchanged. It was impervious to many influences. However, he believed the Evernight pathway's forced sleep would still be effective. Since this sealed demigod could experience exhaustion, hunger, and the need for rest, food, and sleep like a true child, it implied that the seal had impacted corresponding characteristics, making him akin to an ordinary person in those aspects. At most, he would awaken faster and require less rest time.

A few seconds would be ample time for Loki to relocate and conceal himself with the target before attempting to manipulate the other party's Spirit Body Threads.

His two marionettes would act independently, confusing both enemies and the Earth Mother Church clergyman rushing over. They would lead them on a chase spanning about 100 to 200 meters, completing the corresponding performance.

As the time approached, the enemies would pinpoint his hiding spot through the marionettes' trajectory, joyfully anticipating an encounter. However, what awaited them would be a demigod-level marionette, leading to a terrifying and grim outcome.

Under the watchful eyes of the surrounding citizens, the magnificent play would conclude. Loki could consume the potion and ascend to Sequence 4, becoming a Bizarro Sorcerer!

…

On the betrothal ship, within Lato Guiaro's Cosmic Void.

This was fundamentally different from lower-middle-level abilities. It was both an illusory realm and an alternate space that could cause people to lose themselves and become abnormally fragile. It was akin to the Bottle of Fiction augmented with hallucinations.

The sticky blob of flesh Lumian had expelled squirmed rapidly, stretching and expanding into a discernible figure.

Cloaked in blood-red fabric with a matching hood obscuring its face in shadows, the figure revealed itself as none other than Mr. K of the Aurora Order.

To counter April Fool's machinations, Lumian had chosen the strategy of overwhelming force. He accomplished this with overt and imposing power, complemented by meticulous arrangements.

This plan allowed for a fair margin of error. Even if Lumian made a miscalculation, as long as April Fool's didn't have Angel-level helpers or three or more Saints, he could salvage the situation by retaining at least one or two key members.

To enhance their odds, Franca extended invitations to Hela and Gandalf. The Fertility Order also notified the higher-ups, ensuring the presence of a Saint overseeing Port Santa during the sea prayer ritual. The Tarot Club had two Major Arcana card holders positioned nearby. When April Fool's key members felt secure, Madam Magician, the Angel of Stars, would cross a long distance and descend as they prepared to depart!

For extra precaution, Lumian utilized Mr. K's finger to get him to Port Santa. Morphing with the Rose Bishop's power, he turned into a fleshy blob, and was concealed in Lumian's stomach to infiltrate the betrothal ship.

Mr. K glanced up, his eyes taking on an otherworldly illusion, as if concealing hidden doors.

Swiftly scanning the Cosmic Void, he identified an escape route.

"Follow me," he said to Lumian in a hoarse voice.

Nodding, Lumian reached into the Traveler's Bag, extracting the Flog boxing gloves and preparing to don them.

If you guys still have a backup plan or if a few powerhouses don't appear in time, I'll draw the attention of the evil gods and create chaos. We'll all face the danger together. Early exits? Forget about it!

Chapter 579: Energy Passage

579 Energy Passage

On the betrothal boat, the humanoid Sealed Artifact ascended, her form suspended in the air. Striding through the atmosphere, she advanced toward the sailboat.

With the weight akin to a massive stone sphere, she manipulated the surrounding space, causing the target ship to shift automatically. The two factions drew near.

Concurrently, the vacant eyes of the humanoid Sealed Artifact, adorned in a black nun's attire, suddenly sparked with madness and chaos. Minute blood vessels protruded from the whites of its eyes, swiftly converging.

Accompanying her "affliction," the Maidens of the Sea, deputy hosts, and sailors on the betrothal ship, unaware of what transpired, stood motionless. Their expressions blank, eyes vacant, they succumbed to the same state as the humanoid Sealed Artifact.

In that moment, within the lingering Light of Holiness on the sailboat, which had traversed the void and approached the origin of Derangement, a light abruptly vanished, swallowed by the profound darkness.

In the darkness, a tranquil voice resonated, as if reciting a beautiful poem.

The expression of the humanoid Sealed Artifact softened significantly. The chaos and madness in her eyes dissipated, and her steps slowed.

The other individuals on the betrothal ship also entered a state of tranquility and drowsiness. Juan Oro felt the intangible force suppressing his body instantly dissipate.

Straightening up abruptly, he glared angrily at Simon Guiaro, positioned at the bow of the ship.

The president of the Fisheries Guild had a rough idea of the other party's identity. After all, not many comprehended the entire sea prayer ritual and knew the intricacies of the Ring of the Sea Queen. Combined with the fact that he hailed from the same family as Simon Guiaro, there was only one answer: Lato Guiaro!

"You traitor!" Even the distant chanting from the darkness couldn't pacify Juan Oro's anger. Although no longer the temporary Governor of the Sea, he still possessed considerable strength and could be deemed formidable at sea.

Splash!

The seawater at the bottom of the betrothal ship surged, part of it threatening to hurl everyone back to the surface, while others formed into towering peaks and crashed down on Lato Guiaro, masquerading as Simon Guiaro.

Lato abruptly pivoted, fixing his gaze on Juan Oro.

The azure "peak" poised to strike him froze in midair, its descent arrested. The water's attempt to push the betrothal ship out of this area also ceased its endeavors.

Reflected in Lato Guiaro's eyes was the figure of Juan Oro. The corners of his mouth curled up slightly as he stated a fact in a composed tone, "I am now the Governor of the Sea."

"Your abilities, especially those affecting these waters, are completely suppressed by me. They are useless!

The incantation from the darkness targeted the humanoid Sealed Artifact. Everything else was secondary. As the interim Governor of the Sea, Lato Guiaro couldn't help but be affected. However, thanks to the feedback from the sea and the sharing of the burden, it didn't reach a profound level. He only became more tranquil, devoid of the desire for intense combat and direct killing.

Compared to Juan Oro, he was more concerned about whether Gandalf was on the sailboat besides Hela. He was more concerned about whether Mad Lady had opened the spaceship's passageway in time.

Juan Oro's heart sank as he witnessed the azure wave suspended in midair and Lato Guiaro, seemingly indifferent to him.

At that moment, Lato turned to Mad Lady, who had reverted to her human form, and addressed his companion, clad in an unusually flamboyant blood-colored dress,

"Hurry up."

Mad Lady wasn't particularly tall, standing at over 1.6 meters. Her dark-blond hair was disheveled, influenced by the heaviness effect. None of it fluttered wantonly, pointing towards the seabed.

Her face concealed by pure flesh, making it challenging to discern her original appearance. She wore a ring on each hand.

On her left hand, there was a rose-gold ring embedded with a gem resembling crimson blood, and on her right, a simple, pure silver ring.

Mad Lady responded to Lato Guiaro with a smile, "So there are times when you're anxious."

Only then did she cast her gaze at the silver-gray behemoth embedded in the seabed not far away.

This lunatic… Lato Guiaro cursed inwardly.

I Know Someone had an extremely nasty personality and subsequently succumbed to mental illness due to other reasons and was admitted to an asylum, but in contrast, Mad Lady had displayed an abnormal state of mind from the very beginning. In the past, she relied on I Know Someone's regular treatment to barely maintain her rationality, but now, she was becoming more and more insane.

Lato Guiaro took a deep breath, focusing on the peculiar sounds emanating from within the spaceship, resisting the distant chants echoing in the darkness.

Swiftly regaining his will to fight, he redirected his gaze to the sailboat, raising his right arm.

Upon witnessing this, Juan Oro's sense of despair deepened.

The white-haired old man clenched his fist, slamming it against his chest.

With a snap, his sternum broke, and his flesh tore open, releasing a torrent of blood that painted his body and the betrothal ship's deck red.

As life ebbed away, Juan Oro's white hair defied the heaviness effect, floating upwards.

His steps grew burdensome, each movement pressing down like a mountain on the ground.

Just as Lato Guiaro was poised to unleash the surrounding seawater, submerging the sailboat, he suddenly realized that the sea wasn't as obedient as before.

His Governor of the Sea position teetered on the brink of collapse.

Lato Guiaro turned his head once more, narrowing his eyes at Juan Oro, now covered in blood.

"Traitor, the sea will punish you!" Juan Oro's dark-green eyes focused, emitting a beam of blue light.

Accompanying this attack, he also intensified Lato Guiaro's heaviness, rendering him unable to move normally.

Two beams struck Lato Guiaro simultaneously, penetrating him and sinking into the sea.

Lato Guiaro's aura weakened slightly, but he wasn't as severely injured as Juan Oro believed.

Sunlight burst forth from the April Fool key member who used "Ultraman" as his code name, eradicating the residual corrosive powers and altering his body structure.

He lifted his chin slightly and uttered three words with strange pronunciations.

"%%&("

This was also the language employed to activate the spaceship. The implication was likely akin to granting access, equivalent to obtaining a certain amount of Governor of the Sea power without "melding" with the sea after opening a crack in the seal. Lato Guiaro's usage now was to help him seize all authority back from Juan Oro.

Hmph, foolish fellow, a group of fools. They hadn't studied the sounds heard during every sea sacrifice after so many years. They guarded the treasure but failed to excavate it!

Sacrificing your life? Sacrificing yourself?

It's meaningless!

Brains and strength are the foundation!

Juan Oro, still bleeding from his chest, was surprised to discover that the authority of the Governor of the Sea had shifted again. He stared at Lato Guiaro in confusion and horror, as if looking at a true devil.

Why? Why does the sea favor him more?

Why does the sea favor this traitor more?

At that moment, Mad Lady, on the other side of the bow, completed reciting the incoherent order.

The silver-gray behemoth at the bottom of the sea trembled slightly, increasing in magnitude, causing the entire seabed and all the seawater to quake.

Inside, beams of pure light converged and shot out from the open entrance, landing at the edge of the betrothal ship, forming a transparent tunnel-like energy passageway.

Mad Lady didn't immediately leap into the pure light.

She understood that as the spaceship opened and activated further, the power accumulated in the depths of the seal would erupt. Everyone present, except the Governor of the Sea, would be torn apart.

But it didn't matter. She had a solution. The plain silver ring on her right hand, a gift from Bard, held the boon from honoring the ancestors. It could steal that power and distribute it, sharing the burden with all the Children of the Sea in Port Santa.

Of course, those present would receive more. Whether they could endure it or not depended on fate.

When the moment arrived, the Fisheries Guild members would believe the sea prayer ritual had succeeded, celebrating with joy. Little did they know that their "sea" had been stolen. The irony delighted Mad Lady.

Just as she was about to use the ring, a strong sense of Danger Premonition hit her.

In a flash, her figure vanished, reappearing a few steps away.

A shadow rose from the deck where she had stood, but it failed to envelop her.

Mad Lady then spotted Mr. K, draped in a blood-colored cloak and hood, and Lumian Lee, wearing the Lie earring but yet to revert to his original appearance.

…

Port Santa, Governor of the Sea's residence.

Bard stood by the window, gazing at the weeds outside. Silently calculating the time, he waited for the sea prayer ritual to progress.

If the sea's boon arrived with a delay and cheers erupted from Milo Village, he would openly leave this place, abandoning those who had been deceived.

When the moment arrived, anyone attempting to stop him would be torn apart by the power of the sea.

In the absence of a delayed collective boon, but with the sky and sea undergoing ominous changes, as if a catastrophe had struck, Bard could wait for the spaceship or Mad Lady to pick him up.

Of course, he wouldn't wait indefinitely. If there were no further developments from the sea prayer ritual within ten minutes, he would use his abilities to forcefully exit, shift positions, and conceal himself.

The early-stage abilities of the Marauder pathway weren't formidable. Bard had developed the habit of remaining vigilant as he advanced step by step.

As the weeds swayed in the bright sunlight and mild wind, Bard suddenly heard faint footsteps.

The sound emanated from the corridor outside, so subtle that it seemed almost like an illusion.

Chapter 580: Theft

580 Theft

Bard pivoted on his heels, fixing his eyes on the door.

A moment lingered in silence, but no one rapped against the wooden barrier. The once-present soft footsteps in the corridor had now faded into nothingness.

As a seasoned Beyonder, Bard dismissed the notion of hallucination. Returning to the servant's bed, he grabbed the backpack containing the spoils of the year, feigning an escape from the Governor of the Sea's residence before confirming the outcome of the sea prayer ritual.

Such precautions were only sensible. Not everyone placed full trust in Juan Oro's promises.

Bard slung the backpack over his shoulder and slyly opened the window, aiming to slip into the weeds below.

Suddenly, a figure, standing over a meter tall, emerged from the shadows in the corner. Its disproportionately large head and wrinkled face identified it as one of the Little Devils from the sea spawn.

The Little Devil gestured for Bard to close the glass window.

Just a bunch of creatures with low IQs, Bard thought, mocking them inwardly. Despite generations, they have yet to master Highlander and can only barely communicate like dogs…

Maintaining a timid expression, Bard closed the window.

Having tested the waters, he had a rough idea of where the sea spawn responsible for monitoring him were hiding.

None of them appeared to have any connection to the soft footsteps echoing in the corridor, nor did they seem aware of them.

…

On the betrothal boat, Mad Lady, draped in a blood-colored dress with a portion of her face showing pure flesh and blood, instantly vanished upon spotting Mr. K and Lumian. She swiftly changed her position.

Simultaneously, a figure materialized behind and to her side—Lumian and Mr. K.

Employing their teleportation abilities, they blocked Mad Lady.

After Mad Lady shifted to the opposite side of the deck, the corners of her mouth, made of pure flesh and blood, curled up. Her grayish-green eyes gleamed with anticipation and excitement.

Come and attack me. Chase me. This way, no one will use the item that honored the ancestors to steal the deep power about to erupt. Let's see who reacts the fastest and 'teleports' out of these waters when the time comes!

For those unable to escape in time, they would undoubtedly be torn to pieces by the violent power, much like the fate that befell others on the ship!

As these thoughts raced through her mind, Mad Lady swiftly turned transparent, evading Lumian's crimson near-white fireballs and Mr. K's light-green wind blades.

Amidst the rumbling explosion, Ultraman Lato Guiaro was equally infuriated by Mad Lady's actions. If he were still the temporary and complete Governor of the Sea, he wouldn't fear the impact of the potent power in the spaceship. He hadn't intended to release Mad Lady and use Bard's silver ring.

However, the situation had changed. Juan Oro, burning his life and sacrificing flesh and blood, had contested him for the authority of the Governor of the Sea.

In this state, Ultraman couldn't be certain if he was fully protected or if he would suffer some level of damage. Furthermore, not being a true demigod, he wasn't sure if he could withstand such a blow, one that left him only injured.

He couldn't help but urge Mad Lady with his eyes, but his companion was 'teleporting' and didn't have time to meet his gaze. The humanoid Sealed Artifact remained immersed in distant chanting in the darkness, oblivious to the impending sea's fury.

In the blink of an eye, corporeal starlight surged from the silver-gray behemoth at the bottom of the sea. It followed the condensed energy passageway and struck the betrothal ship with a tsunami-like sound, aiming to devour everything around it.

"Here it comes!" Mad Lady eagerly prepared for her extreme escape.

Confronted with the immense wave of starlight, Lumian's initial reaction was, Why is there another sea's fury?

Relying on his combat instincts, he immediately extended his spirituality to the Lie earring on his left ear, activating the high-level stealing power attached to the mystical item.

The starlight in his eyes took on a more tangible form, as if it had materialized.

Lumian's raised left hand subtly twisted his wrist.

The starlight surging from the silver-gray behemoth changed its course, rushing towards Lumian in waves, engulfing the sky and the sea.

This was even more terrifying than the previous sea's rage. At that moment, Lumian felt as if an apocalypse had descended.

He knew very well that he couldn't absorb all the stolen power himself. Doing so would render him unable to endure, crushed into rotten meat on the spot, indirectly aiding Termiboros in escaping His predicament. Fortunately, the stolen power linked to "honoring the ancestors" had the ability to disperse the boon obtained and share it with everyone present and all those with the sea bloodlines in Port Santa, similar to every successful sea prayer ritual.

Though a bit greedy and reluctant, Lumian restrained himself. Without hesitation, he opened his left hand, seemingly grasping something, and twisted his wrist in the opposite direction.

Suddenly, the starlight that had darkened the sky and sea seemed to explode from within, scattering radiant starlight in every direction.

"The stars are raining…" Franca, concealed in the cabin on the sailboat, lamented.

She tightly clutched the Major Arcana card belonging to Judgment in her hand.

This wasn't a plea for Madam Judgment to descend directly. After all, this wasn't within her jurisdiction. It was to signal the location for the Major Arcana card holders who had already gathered nearby.

The beams of starlight left dazzling trails as they penetrated the bodies of those nearby and soared towards the bloodline connections farther away.

Lumian couldn't control this process, so he could only sense a portion of the starlight landing on him, causing his left chest to burn and corrode his flesh. Simultaneously, he witnessed a significant amount of starlight being drawn towards the potent sea bloodline and the authority of the Governor of the Sea, surging towards Ultraman and Juan Oro.

Undoubtedly, the humanoid Sealed Artifact received the most boons.

Like the eye of a vortex, she incessantly absorbed the surrounding starlight. Even the starlight heading towards Hela's sailboat diminished noticeably.

Ultraman experienced a replenishment, breaking free from his weakened state after Juan Oro's two beams, swiftly reclaiming the authority of the Governor of the Sea.

In his moment of elation, Ultraman Lato Guiaro felt intense surprise and confusion.

Why can Lumian Lee also steal the spacecraft's power?

That requires a high-level stealing ability…

Hasn't Bard's ring already been placed on the altar to honor the ancestors? And we've confirmed its corresponding effects.

Isn't the enchantment only possible once a year?

Amidst the echoing shock, Lato Guiaro couldn't be bothered to ponder the answer. His instinctive reaction was to swiftly crush Juan Oro. Otherwise, who knew what he, now strengthened, would do!

At that moment, Juan Oro felt a surge of regained strength. He observed his cracked chest and hazy flesh, now covered in starlight scales, with blood flowing out dyed in a resplendent "color."

Gazing at Lato Guiaro, he suddenly smiled—a smile of relief, yearning, and evident anger.

His body underwent a rapid transformation, eyes turning vertical, scales growing, and limbs thickening. In the span of a breath, he morphed into a humanoid lizard.

During this process, Lato Guiaro condensed a dark-green light that descended on Juan Oro in a series of rays.

Juan Oro made no attempt to dodge; he endured it.

His aura rapidly weakened, precisely as he desired.

His lizard-like form faded, growing increasingly translucent, as if condensed from starlight.

Then, Juan Oro merged into the void representing the sea and spoke to Lato Guiaro with a complex expression, "I've returned to the sea. Come quickly too…"

At the last few words, Juan Oro gnashed his teeth, not concealing his deep-

seated hatred.

Every Child of the Sea was prepared to return to the sea, and Juan Oro was no exception. However, he hadn't anticipated doing so in this manner.

His sole desire now was for Lato Guiaro to join him!

Juan Oro's figure dissipated, becoming entirely a part of the "sea."

Ultraman Lato Guiaro immediately sensed a growing animosity between his title as Governor of the Sea and the waters. The harmony that once existed had given way to a resistance emanating from the Power of the Sea.

This indicated that the Governor of the Sea authority he had acquired wouldn't be complete for some time.

Damned old fellow! Lato Guiaro cursed inwardly, but he remained composed.

He had realized that Hela was the sole demigod on the sailboat. The humanoid Sealed Artifact, having received a boon from the sea and escaped the influence of the chanting, was sufficient to hold off the opposition for a while.

Though uncertain why Gandalf and the others hadn't arrived, Ultraman Lato Guiaro welcomed this turn of events.

It allowed him to focus on dealing with Lumian Lee and his ally!

Despite being an incomplete Governor of the Sea, he possessed enough strength to control adversaries below the demigod level briefly and gain entry to the spaceship first. Moreover, Mad Lady's assistance added to his advantage.

Having received the sea's boon, Lumian contemplated his newfound capabilities.

Now, I seem qualified to contend for the authority of the Governor of the Sea…

Although I can't be considered to possess the sea bloodline and only wield some power of the sea lasting a week, far inferior to Ultraman, my fake level is high enough. I'm at the Angel level!

Just as Ultraman Lato Guiaro and Lumian responded swiftly, the gray sky suddenly brightened.

Thick bluish-green vines descended, shrouding the two ships and the surrounding area in torrential rain. Soon, they intertwined into a giant-like forest growing above the sea.

Chapter 581: Gap

581 Gap

Upon witnessing the descent of the thick bluish-green vines, Lumian marveled as if a real carriage could traverse their expanse. It felt like a journey back to a scene from a few years ago when he would listen to his sister's nighttime fairy tales.

The dazzling, dreamlike scene and boundless imagination seemed to materialize in reality at that very moment.

Ultraman Lato Guiaro sensed imminent danger.

The individual capable of such an effect couldn't be a Low- or Mid-Sequence Beyonder; they had to be a Saint who had unlocked the door to godhood. Perhaps even beyond Sequence 4!

Another formidable demigod had entered the scene!

Who could it be? Where had they emerged from?

This certainly wasn't Gandalf. While others might be unaware, Loki had thoroughly investigated the president of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society, discovering he was a Beyonder of the Warrior pathway—a Warrior who had a penchant for research and mysticism.

In the blink of an eye, Lato Guiaro spotted a black shadow racing down the thick green vines. It was an enormous pumpkin drawn by numerous gray mice.

A hole atop the orange pumpkin resembled a coach. Within, a vaguely discernible woman sat, adorned in a purple robe, with crystalline heels adorning her feet.

A pumpkin coach, mice-drawn carriage, crystal heels—WHAT THE FUCK IS THAT!? Who could it be? Lato Guiaro's pupils dilated, and he couldn't help but inwardly curse with the same words he used most frequently before transmigration.

Isn't that Cinderella?

Did Roselle actually pen this fairy tale? Why hadn't it gained traction, remaining unknown to most?

For a fleeting moment, Lato Guiaro grappled with uncertainty, unable to discern whether the newcomer was a demigod aligned with another faction or a concealed powerhouse within the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society.

Regaining his composure, he cursed his ill fortune and prepared himself for a confrontation with the enigmatic demigod.

Luckily, being the Governor of the Sea, he could at least temporarily impede the other party in these aquatic surroundings.

Prior to the impending clash, Ultraman Lato Guiaro turned his gaze towards Mad Lady.

He didn't have time to speak, but his eyes expressed the unspoken message: "Hurry up! No time for games!"

Mad Lady swiftly grasped Ultraman's urgency and, with a blink, positioned herself at the entrance of the energy passageway. However, instead of materializing precisely there, she outlined her presence.

This decision was prompted by the sudden appearance of Mr. K and Lumian, seemingly having "teleported" nearby, with their sights set on the energy passageway's entrance.

Splash!

Whether from the imposing weight of the humanoid Sealed Artifact or Lato Guiaro raising his right arm, conjuring a mountainous azure wave, the water around the cave visibly swayed, teetering on the brink of collapse.

In that critical moment, "Cinderella," seated in the pumpkin carriage, pushed open the door and rose to her feet.

She extended her arms, and a massive iron-black cross materialized behind her.

The weight of the cross proved challenging for "Cinderella" to bear, as though it carried the concentrated sins of the entire world.

A cross? Ultraman Lato Guiaro was caught off guard as an empty room materialized before him.

Within the room, candlelight flickered, revealing a long table adorned with flesh and blood.

On either side of the table, three obscure figures hunched over, gnawing and feasting on a gruesome banquet.

Abruptly, the three figures turned their heads, fixing their gaze upon Lato Guiaro.

He stood frozen, as if their gazes had penetrated his deepest secrets, dismantling them into the essential components of spirit and flesh.

A chilling sensation surged from the depths of Lato Guiaro's heart, immediately alerting him to an intense and terrifying malice.

However, the source of this malevolence wasn't the newly arrived demigod but the silver-gray behemoth trapped at the sea's bottom—the very spaceship Lato Guiaro sought to obtain harbored ill intentions towards him!

In the blink of an eye, the silver-gray behemoth retracted its authority.

Lato Guiaro's status as the Governor of the Sea plummeted. Despite gaining a new boon, he couldn't ascend to the demigod level.

The spaceship had betrayed him.

This treachery was a result of the spell Cinderella had just unleashed—the Feast of Betrayal. Its purpose was to temporarily awaken or bestow intelligence on a target item, compelling it to commit an act of "betrayal."

Lato Guiaro had seamlessly melded with the surrounding waters, harnessing the authority of the Governor of the Sea on a temporary basis. The spaceship now stood as an entity he had yet to fully master.

Objects beyond his full control were prime candidates for betrayal!

"Cinderella" astutely sensed this vulnerability, initiating the Feast of Betrayal from the outset.

Simultaneously, the sealed environment provided the perfect conditions for her to unleash this magic—an act she might not dare attempt elsewhere.

In that moment, surprise and fear flooded Lato Guiaro. It felt as though a frigid cascade had drenched him, sending shivers through his entire being.

Since merging with the sea and gaining the Governor of the Sea's authority, Lato Guiaro had believed that ordinary Sequence 4 or even Sequence 3 demigods—commonly referred to as Saints—couldn't swiftly overpower him in this realm.

This belief created a sense of parity, but it hinged on him remaining within the waters to fully unleash his strength.

Yet, "Cinderella's" mere magic stripped him of the Governor of the Sea's authority, relegating him to Sequence 5. Without godhood, mastery over the sea slipped from his grasp.

Despite being a dual Sequence 5 of a potion and boon system with numerous unique abilities, Lato Guiaro harbored doubts about facing a genuine demigod.

A demigod temporarily shaped from an item proves fragile in the face of a true demigod. So brittle that, once targeted, they wouldn't endure even a breath… Lato Guiaro grappled with the stark realization of the fragility of a true demigod and sank into deep regret and despair.

At that moment, the silver-gray behemoth trembled violently, causing the energy passageway at the entrance to flicker and cast its luminance upon Lato Guiaro.

With a whoosh, Lato Guiaro found himself hurtling uncontrollably into the spaceship through the pure energy conduit.

This was a facet of the spaceship's calculated "betrayal," aiming to turn the recent "authority holder" into a mere nutritive substrate within a petri dish!

Lato Guiaro was initially startled, but soon a wave of joy washed over him.

An opportunity had presented itself!

It allowed him to infiltrate the spaceship, wrest control, and set it in motion

—a chance to escape!

His misfortune and despair had suddenly transformed into this golden opportunity!

Observing the unfolding scene, Lumian wasted no time. He employed Spirit World Traversal once more, reaching the entrance of the energy passageway. Stepping in, he soared into the silver-gray behemoth.

Mad Lady trailed closely behind, and Mr. K didn't intervene; instead, he followed suit.

…

Milo Village, Governor of the Sea's residence.

Bard, strategizing an escape plan, was abruptly interrupted by cheers.

Cheers… Bard's heart stirred, prompting him to dash out of the servant's room towards the nearest glass window overlooking the dock. There, he observed the gathered villagers.

Not a single sea spawn hindered the former Governor of the Sea during this process.

Many villagers raised their hands, seemingly welcoming the waves. As they praised the sea, an almost invisible glow descended, dispersing like water to different individuals.

The nearby children joyfully shouted, "The sea prayer ritual has succeeded! The sea prayer ritual has succeeded!"

That's right, it has "succeeded"… Bard smiled.

From the looks of it, Ultraman and Mad Lady have succeeded.

The April Fool's key member adjusted the collar of his crisp white shirt and hoisted a brown backpack onto his shoulders. With an unabashed smile, he strolled into the grand hall of the Governor of the Sea's residence, smoothly making his way out.

This time, he encountered no resistance. The guards stationed at the entrance knelt on the ground, expressing gratitude to the sea for its boon.

Bard took a detour to the docks, reveling in the genuine joy and praise for the sea. Every time he heard the townsfolk praising the sea and witnessed genuine smiles, his spirits lifted.

These fools!

They are treating a catastrophe as a cause for celebration!

This is a prank, a prank on everyone in Port Santa… Bard closed his eyes in satisfaction and weaved through the crowd, heading deeper into Milo Village. His ultimate destination: the peaks of the Pyraez mountain range.

As a former Swindler, Bard orchestrated the sea prayer ritual operation, serving as its main planner. The plan's success naturally brought him satisfaction.

Crucially, despite taking the most pivotal step in the entire operation, he assumed the least risk and exposure, avoiding direct confrontations.

Navigating through the mix of ancient and modern structures in Milo Village, Bard's brow furrowed slightly.

A sense of unease settled upon him.

Per the initial plan, Ultraman—unhindered by strong opposition—was supposed to use the second command to open the energy passageway. Relying on his temporary authority as the Governor of the Sea, he aimed to secure safety for himself and Mad Lady within him. Seizing the opportunity, he planned to eliminate all present and inflict severe injuries on potential demigod adversaries.

If powerhouses like Hela emerged and proved resistant to the humanoid Sealed Artifact, Ultraman—the interim Governor of the Sea—would leap into action, confronting the formidable foes head-on. Mad Lady, wielding her enchanted ring, would harness the potent energy emanating from the spaceship, transforming it into a boon for everyone present, extending its reach to all the Children of the Sea in Port Santa's vicinity. This strategic move not only allowed them to sidestep danger but also granted them access to the spaceship, enabling them to activate it.

Despite the fact that the people had already received the sea's boon and a few minutes had elapsed, the spaceship remained dormant, and the sky showed no signs of change.

What had transpired during this interval?

With this lingering question, Bard hastened his steps.

Tap, tap, tap.

Behind him, the faint sound of light footsteps echoed once again.

Chapter 582: Efficient Person-Locator

582 Efficient Person-Locator

Port Santa, in the city.

Loki and the unconscious Ludwig had already sought refuge in an apartment that Loki had rented many days earlier. He began manipulating the sealed demigod's Spirit Body Threads.

As for his two marionettes, they lurked within a radius of 100 to 200 meters, with Loki as the center, blending in with the various celebrating and passing crowds. They waited to be discovered by Lumian Lee's teammates and the clergyman of the Church of Earth Mother.

This was unavoidable. A Marionettist couldn't allow a marionette to wield their Faceless powers. As for the mystical item of the Seer pathway, it was in the possession of either Bard or Mad Lady.

In the partially destroyed suite of Solow Motel, Jenna and Anthony encountered Noelia, the combat nun, and her teammates, who had hurried over.

Before this, Lumian had covertly introduced the disguised Jenna and Anthony to Noelia. Hence, the nuns didn't unnecessarily question or apprehend them; they only carefully confirmed each other's identities.

"Rubió Paco is a fake. He's disguised by a Marionettist. He has captured Louis Berry's godson. He possesses two marionettes. One is Madame

Martha, the Paco family's matriarch. The other's identity and abilities are unknown," Jenna recounted the recent events.

She assumed that the Fertility Order was familiar with the term Marionettist and didn't delve into unnecessary explanations. Their primary duty was to guard against the Intis Republic to the north, and many official Beyonders of Bureau 8 in the Intis Republic belonged to the Seer pathway. The two sides must have had considerable interactions.

Marionettist… Indeed, upon hearing the Sequence name, Noelia frowned slightly. Is Intis sending spies to disrupt the sea prayer ritual?

"That's a traitor from Intis's Bureau 8," Jenna explained, her allegiance to Intis stronger than Lumian's.

Noelia understood that time was of the essence and she couldn't discuss unrelated matters. She asked the key question, "Why seize Louis Berry's godson? Is he held as a hostage, or does he possess some extraordinary significance?"

Jenna thought for a moment and revealed the limited information she had just learned.

"It's a sealed demigod, a creature.

"Loki will need substantial time to transform him into a marionette, not just a matter of minutes."

A demigod? A sealed demigod? That child with the insatiable appetite is a sealed demigod? Noelia's mouth hung open in surprise and astonishment. She almost questioned the reliability of her own ears.

The supposed godson of the adventurer Louis Berry is, in fact, a sealed demigod creature?

What's his backstory? Why is he wandering around with a sealed demigod creature?

Moreover, there's talk of a humanoid Sealed Artifact, rumored to be at Grade 1, that recently surfaced in Port Santa. It's on par with a sealed demigod creature. Despite extensive searching, no one has been able to locate it.

If not for the disparities in appearance, gender, and age, Noelia might have suspected Ludwig to be the humanoid Sealed Artifact that the Eternal Blazing Sun Church had "misplaced."

Now, an absurd idea echoed in her mind.

Is it the current trend to stroll around with sealed demigod creatures?

Regaining her composure, Noelia promptly addressed her team members, "Cemilie, quickly return to the Order and inform the dean. Ask her to deploy all available personnel to the city. Locate them as soon as possible. Yes, Madam Martha or Louis Berry's godson, Ludwig.

"After finding them, unless the situation is exceptionally urgent, refrain from acting recklessly. Report first and await assistance."

Considering that the Marionettist had likely altered his appearance and height, and the identity and appearance of his other marionette were unknown, Noelia concentrated her search on Madam Martha, who had become a marionette, and Ludwig, who had been abducted.

"Yes, Captain!" In a bid to save time, the brown-haired Cemilie darted through the shattered glass window. Utilizing the stone bricks and wood protruding from the outer wall, she leaped from the fifth floor to the street.

The dean Noelia referred to was the head of the local cloister, the clergyman overseeing the Fertility Order in Port Santa—the Fertility Order's headquarters in Torres, the capital of Gaia Province.

Just as Cemilie took a few steps and was about to explore the nearby streets, Jenna, Anthony, Noelia, and the others witnessed a massive bird soaring through the air.

The bird's body was grayish-black, its feathers were tough and lacked softness. Its eyes appeared to be adorned with two rubies.

The grayish-black bird flapped its wings and glided to the collapsed fifth-

floor outer wall of Solow Motel.

Only then did Jenna and Anthony realize that the grayish-black bird was sculpted from stone. It was weighty, substantial, and unyielding, yet it emanated a vibrant vitality.

Perched on the back of the lifelike grayish-black bird was a woman in a brown clergyman's robe. She wore a nun's wimple with wheat patterns and seemed to be in her thirties, but she exuded a maternal aura, as if she had nurtured many children.

The brown-haired, brown-eyed, mature, and stunning clergyman turned her gaze to Noelia and succinctly stated, "Details."

Noelia swiftly echoed Jenna's words. She positioned herself with a slight spread of her legs and raised her hands.

"Praise the Earth, praise the Mother of All Things!"

The clergyman was none other than the archbishop of the Church of Earth Mother's Gaia diocese, Agrippina.

Agrippina nodded gently and uttered, "I know Martha from the Paco family. I didn't expect her to meet such a fate. Sigh, may the Earth Mother embrace her soul, and may the flower symbolizing her bloom again next spring."

The archbishop delicately shifted her right foot, conveying a signal to the massive bird sculpted from grayish-black stone.

The stone bird, pulsating with vitality, flapped its wings and ascended dozens of meters into the air.

Agrippina extended her right hand and scattered a handful of dark-black seeds the size of rice grains.

With a flutter, the port's white-headed seabirds flocked in, covering the sky. Each one gripped a seed in its beak and circled around.

They formed a circle within a 300-meter radius.

Observing this spectacle, the jubilant citizens of Port Santa, assuming that the seabirds had joined in the celebration of the successful sea prayer ritual, erupted in cheers of delight.

After two to three minutes, a solitary combat nun spotted Madam Martha. The marionette was concealed on the other side of Aquina Street.

Upon receiving the information, Agrippina turned her head and fixed her gaze into the air.

Soon, the white-headed seabirds released the rice-sized seeds from their beaks.

Agrippina withdrew her gaze and folded her arms across her chest.

Each seed that touched the ground instantly sprouted and grew rapidly, morphing into thick dark-green vines.

Simultaneously, Jenna, Anthony, Noelia, and the others, who were scouring the street for Ludwig and Loki, witnessed the sky darken, as if night had prematurely descended or a colossal creature had eclipsed the sunlight.

Vaguely, they sensed the presence of a massive pitch-black wing covered in a membrane, casting an illusory aura.

In the next moment, a crimson full moon ascended from the night, hanging high in the sky. It seemed as though a tall, slender figure was slowly advancing.

Crimson moonlight bathed the area surrounded by the dark-green vines, captivating all the citizens like statues.

Nourished by the moonlight, the dark-green vines swiftly expanded, swiftly encasing the streets around Aquina Street in a "forest."

Dark-red flowers blossomed in the "forest," densely clustered and ubiquitous.

The flowers emitted a faint, sweet fragrance that intermingled, gradually intensifying the scent.

Upon inhaling this fragrance, the residents of Port Santa, as well as the rats and bedbugs in the corresponding area, entered a stupor, swaying and collapsing to the ground.

Dammit! Jenna understood that Archbishop Agrippina of the Church of Earth Mother was employing indiscriminate tactics to influence the area, aiming to locate and control Loki, but she still cursed internally.

This gaseous anesthetic jogged unpleasant memories.

In the past, she had nearly fallen victim to a similar gas used by that Bliss Society pervert.

Yet now, in the diffusing gas with a noticeable difference in smell but a similar effect, her head started to spin, and her body felt uneasy.

The same was true for Anthony and Noelia. One bore dragon-like scales on his skin, while the other held her breath.

At that moment, three white-headed seabirds descended from the sky, each clutching a metallic bottle, circling Jenna and the others.

Noelia glanced at Archbishop Agrippina, who was hovering in midair, and received a nod. Without hesitation, she took the bottle from a white-headed seabird's claw and gulped it down.

She swiftly regained consciousness, no longer affected by the gaseous anesthetic.

Observing this, Jenna and Anthony accepted the metal bottles and consumed the sour agent.

They no longer felt dizzy and weak.

The three white-headed seabirds weakly ascended again, landing by the roadside one after another, and dozed off.

In the area surrounded by the dark-green vine "forest," only a marionette remained standing at that moment, impervious to the gaseous anesthetic. Its presence was immediately exposed.

In the apartment he had pre-rented, Loki was taken aback to discover that controlling the sealed demigod's Spirit Body Threads was much more challenging than he had anticipated.

This wasn't a problem that could be resolved in ten minutes. According to his initial estimate, it would take at least an hour!

Given the time, the Church of Earth Mother could turn these streets upside down!

As the gaseous anesthetic created by the dark-green vines and dark-red flowers permeated the room, Loki's initial impulse was to craft an air straw nearly 30 meters long and extend it high into the air to breathe fresh air. However, he quickly dismissed the idea.

Perhaps the demigod of the Church of Earth Mother was waiting to detect similar traces to pinpoint his location!

Moreover, Loki had realized that there was more than one demigod in the sky!

If there was only one, he could rely on Sealed Artifacts, bestowments, and other means to concentrate. He could conceal himself in the shadows and contend with them to see if he could endure until the marionette-making process was completed. However, there were at least two demigods observing.

More importantly, he could endure for about ten minutes, but an hour was out of the question!

After weighing the pros and cons, Loki abandoned his original plan to conduct the ritual today and advance to Sequence 4 Bizarro Sorcerer.

In any case, as long as he could restrain the sealed demigod, he could find another opportunity in the future. There was no need for him to perform today!

Why would it take an hour or more? Is this a demigod's Spirit Body Threads? Amidst Loki's confusion, he didn't intend to recall the two marionettes. He planned on using the mystical item to "teleport" away.

From his pocket, he retrieved a bracelet made of different-colored gems.

Just as Loki was about to activate a diamond, he heard the sound of swallowing.

Loki instinctively lowered his head and looked into his arms, realizing that Ludwig had awakened at some point.

With a sincere expression, the boy spoke with a hint of eagerness, "I'm hungry…"

Chapter 583: Celestial Worthy's Revelation

583 Celestial Worthy's Revelation

Around the betrothal ship and sailboat, thick turquoise vines cascaded from the sky. They entwined, creating a "road" leading to various destinations.

"Cinderella" returned to the orange-yellow pumpkin coach, pulled by gray mice swiftly descending through the vines. They approached the energy passageway formed by pure light, as if about to enter the silver-gray behemoth embedded in the seabed.

Abruptly, the mischief of gray mice came to a halt. "Cinderella," adorned in a purple robe, wore a solemn expression, purple spots dancing in her pupils.

"Cinderella" sensed an unusually perilous presence deep within the silver-gray behemoth. It remained motionless, as if in a deep slumber or long dead. However, in either case, her intuition warned her not to approach, lest she suffer severe corruption or similar effects.

Staring at the energy passageway where Lumian and company had vanished, she deliberated for a few seconds before shifting her focus to the sailboat.

With Mr. Fool's seal on the Seven of Wands and the sealed evil god's angel, he didn't have to worry about the problem that even she had to be wary of—as long as he didn't directly see those things, hear its voice, or enter the core area.

As for the other one, he seemed to be a Shepherd, so he didn't mind being even crazier.

"Cinderella" observed the mast and shipboard of the sailboat cracking under the terrifying suction of the humanoid Sealed Artifact's "heaviness" characteristic. She was ready to make her move when she retrieved a Roselle chess piece from her dark-purple coin bag and hurled it at the target in the black nun's attire.

Amidst the howling wind, the Queen chess piece soared towards the humanoid Sealed Artifact, accompanied by various miscellaneous items.

As it descended, the humanoid Sealed Artifact's steps towards the sailboat slowed, as if time itself was warping around her.

This was one of the spells of "Cinderella"—the Chessboard of Ages.

It had the power to decelerate the target as if they had entered an area where time moved at a different speed.

Seizing the opportunity presented by the sluggish movement, "Cinderella" closed her eyes and transformed into a humanoid phantom, collapsing into the invisible coffin.

The eyelids of the humanoid Sealed Artifact drooped, as if she might succumb to sleep at any moment.

Sleeping Beauty magic!

Witnessing this, Hela, aboard the sailboat, once again activated the Evernight pathway's ability to forcibly drag people into a dream.

Although the notarization wouldn't immediately expire with Ultraman Lato Guiaro's loss of the Governor of the Sea authority, it would still last until the end. However, the ability to be invalidated by notarization wasn't entirely ineffective. It would only be weakened, and its effects would be significantly reduced. Now, the humanoid Sealed Artifact was already fatigued, swaying and on the verge of falling asleep.

In this state, entering a dream was undoubtedly much easier.

The humanoid Sealed Artifact, donned in a black nun's attire, finally closed her eyes and plunged into a deep slumber. She entered a somewhat sorrowful dream, causing her face to contort slightly as she frowned.

On the sailboat, a dense darkness surged once more, enveloping the humanoid Sealed Artifact, resonating with a distant voice that brought peace and tranquility.

It was akin to a mother reciting a poem to lull her child to sleep, fostering a serene slumber.

The humanoid Sealed Artifact, still in her black nun's attire, hovered in midair with her eyes tightly shut. She descended slowly, landing gracefully on the deck of the sailboat.

Her brows gradually relaxed, her face softened, and crystalline water droplets formed at the corners of her eyes.

The Maidens of the Sea, deputy hosts, and sailors, blessed by the sea and adorned with starlight scales, swiftly settled in the darkness, succumbing to sleep amidst the enchanting chanting.

Franca, within the sail cabin, was taken aback by the unfolding battle.

I-isn't that Cinderella?

I-isn't that Jack and the Beanstalk?

What manner of magic is this?

I-isn't that Sleeping Beauty?

Who is this? Have I arrived in a fairyland?

I have to admit, it's truly dreamlike…

Two demigods working together are undoubtedly formidable. They swiftly subdued the humanoid Sealed Artifact…

I also wish to become a demigod!

A Demoness demigod would do too…

Regaining her senses, Franca concealed herself and sprinted out of the sailboat. Utilizing her run-up and an Assassin's Feather Fall, she elegantly leaped onto the betrothal ship, intending to approach the energy passageway at the bow.

…

Within the silver-gray behemoth.

After Lumian traversed the energy passageway, he found himself not in the metal beehive he had seen before.

Walking on the silvery-white metal floor, he noticed a hall dozens of meters long and 20 to 30 meters wide ahead.

In the middle of the hall, Ultraman Lato Guiaro stood, donning Simon Guiaro's face, and shouted in delight, "*(…¥#)"

This represented the first half of the command to activate the spaceship by entering the password and gaining access.

However, there was no response from the spaceship.

Crap… It still holds ill intentions towards me and isn't willing to grant access… This malice stems from that demigod's ability. It shouldn't last long. As long as I can stall for time, I should be able to regain control… Can the humanoid Sealed Artifact hold back two demigods? Or can I rely on the spaceship's internal layout to play "hide and seek?" A series of thoughts raced through Ultraman's anxious mind.

At that moment, through the translucent metal wall to the side of the hall, he saw "Cinderella" in the pumpkin coach come to a halt near the energy passageway, seemingly apprehensive about something.

As expected!

She doesn't dare to enter!

Exhilaration surged from Ultraman Lato Guiaro's heart.

Before the mission kicked off, Loki had set up an altar and sought guidance from Celestial Worthy through divination. The response he got was: Contains a high risk from high-ranking individuals. Avoidable by entering the spaceship.

Loki decoded this as a warning about Hela and Gandalf from the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society, as well as the Saint from the Church of Earth Mother overlooking Port Santa. These high-ranking figures were the primary threats. However, if he could take the reins of the mystical sci-fi spaceship first, he believed he could outmaneuver these formidable opponents.

Now, Lato Guiaro noticed that even without absolute control of the spaceship, the new demigod hesitated, as if haunted by an unseen fear.

Facing something capable of unsettling a demigod left Lato Guiaro uneasy. However, armed with the spaceship's command and password, he could soon turn potential threats to his advantage. There was no need for fear.

As Lumian was on the brink of "teleporting" behind Ultraman Lato Guiaro, they both heard a metallic clang.

A silver metal door descended, sealing off the hall's entrance and exit completely.

The walls, ceiling, and floor transformed as metal surfaces shifted and revealed dark pipe openings.

Out gushed cerulean-blue gas.

Poison gas! Lato Guiaro's heart raced as he grasped the situation.

The spaceship, still imbued with malice, not only resisted control but also emanated lethal intent, seeking to eliminate him before its animosity subsided.

The magic of the demigod outside is malicious indeed!

Lumian perceived this as an instinctive strike from the silver-gray behemoth against intruders. Swiftly, he tapped into the power of the sea, aiming to invoke the temporary authority of the Governor of the Sea to counter the threat.

He could sense that Ultraman had lost the Governor of the Sea's position after the attack from the "Cinderella" demigod, with no immediate prospect of reclaiming it. With no contenders for the authority, Lumian anticipated an easy acquisition.

Yet, the "waters" resisted, refusing Lumian the temporary position of Governor of the Sea.

Its malice seemed directed at anyone attempting control!

Undeterred, Lumian shifted his focus back to Ultraman Lato Guiaro, a crucial member of April Fool's.

Lato Guiaro's heart stirred as he shouted, "Do you want to fight here? If we don't break out and waste no time, we'll all die!"

In this dire moment, a plan to escape the hall and relocate became paramount. The malice wouldn't linger for long.

Seek vengeance in a safe space. If we perish here, who will assist in eliminating the others?

Lumian nonchalantly flexed his wrists, donning the Flog boxing gloves, and grinned, stating,

"I don't care about my own death. All that matters now is one thing: Ending you!"

As the words left his lips, crimson flames, bordering on white, erupted from his entire being, as if he were cloaked in a fiery shroud.

…

Not far from Lumian and Lato Guiaro, Mad Lady and Mr. K found themselves in the beehive-like metal room, unable to enter the hall ahead.

Surveying the surroundings, Mr. K's gaze swept across the incubating Batings Black Insect, Little Devils, and other creatures. He nodded in satisfaction.

"It's indeed the power of an evil god, spawn of an evil god. Well done, Lumian! Well done! This is all part of God's arrangement!"

Amidst the hoarse voice, the Aurora Order Oracle turned his gaze back to Mad Lady.

Mad Lady wasn't intimidated. Instead, she applauded in agreement with Mr. K.

She spoke as if they were on different frequencies.

"That's right, it's cool, right? This is a spaceship!"

In the next moment, Mad Lady and Mr. K vanished simultaneously and reappeared behind where the other party had been standing, as if they had negotiated a position switch beforehand.

Chapter 584: "Helper"

584 "Helper"

Inside the underwater spaceship, in the silvery hall.

Lumian, enveloped by crimson, nearly white flames, transformed into a fireball and hurtled towards Ultraman Lato Guiaro.

The key April Fool's member remained composed. Holding his breath, he thrust forward with his left palm.

Lumian instantly sensed an invisible force resisting him, causing the blazing crimson fireball to decelerate abruptly, akin to a trapped insect in transparent amber.

Seizing the moment, Lato Guiaro raised his right hand, clenching it into a fist.

A ball of blazing white pure sunlight condensed and compressed, swiftly morphing into a thick, formidable laser aimed at Lumian, fused with the crimson near-white fireball.

This ability resulted from merging the Sun pathway and the Sea boon, utilizing the power of the Sun pathway to propel the Sea boon's Weakening Ray. Though it no longer altered the target's body gradually, causing various negative symptoms, its penetration and melting effects were significantly enhanced, capable of directly injuring or even killing the target.

In the enclosed, poisonous gas-filled environment with the constant threat of malice, Lato Guiaro sought to conclude the battle swiftly rather than wait for Lumian Lee to weaken gradually. Thus, he opted for Sun Ray instead of Weakening Ray.

At laser speed, Sun Ray struck the crimson fireball, melting a substantial hole into it.

The fireball lost its structural integrity and exploded, scattering like rain.

Yet, Lumian was nowhere among the remnants. He seemed to have vanished into thin air.

Simultaneously, behind Ultraman Lato Guiaro, Lumian's figure, adorned with the Lie earring, swiftly materialized.

Initially, Lumian transformed into a fireball and soared towards Lato Guiaro, intending to force him into using Beyonder powers and counterattack. This allowed him to "fix" his original location, not shifting prematurely, creating an opportunity to "teleport" behind the target in the fireball state for a surprise attack.

Having faced bestowed of the sea before, Lumian was aware of Lato Guiaro's ability to manipulate the weight or floatation of objects using the power of the land and stars, altering their speed.

To successfully use Spirit World Traversal in his fireball form, Lumian borrowed Lie's Flame Controlling ability.

As his figure materialized, he promptly opened his mouth and hissed at Ultraman Lato Guiaro, less than two meters away.

"Ha!"

A pale-yellow beam, resembling gas, shot towards the April Fool's key member.

Lato Guiaro didn't have time to turn around, sensing the impending danger through his fate perception, a skill obtained from deciphering the Language of the Stars Beyonder powers.

Specks of starlight emerged in his eyes. He identified several "passages" in the silver hall suffused with cerulean-blue gasses, imperceptible to ordinary humans. Hastily choosing one, he pounced over—a navigating ability bestowed by the sea.

Simultaneously, uncertain of evading the attack from behind, Lato Guiaro infused the surroundings with layers of golden light.

This was the Purification Halo of a Sequence 5 Priest of Light of the Sun pathway.

Amidst the harrumph, the pale-yellow beam swept past Lato Guiaro's back, hidden somewhere in the void.

The key member of April Fool's, code name Ultraman, fainted, but his momentum remained. He continued into the illusory passageway, hidden from ordinary eyes, traversing space and dimensions.

Lumian, within two meters, couldn't "teleport" away in time and was enveloped by the Purification Halo.

His heart ached, as if something sought to tear his body apart and crawl out.

Faintly, he heard the illusory ravings of the entity known as Inevitability, Mr. Fool, or both.

Unclear but unsettling, they made Lumian's brain feel pulled out of his skull by an invisible hand.

Despite an Ascetic's endurance, Lumian couldn't help but groan in pain. Collapsing to the ground, he curled up.

A similar experience occurred in his Cordu dream, a reaction after being sprinkled by Valentine's holy water. Lato Guiaro's Purification Halo, an advanced Sun Halo, had evolved from harmless to a partial Sun Holy Water effect. It could exorcize evil spirits and purify the evil power within a target's body.

As Lato Guiaro lay unconscious, the Purification Halo vanished in a flash, only partially dispelling the poisonous gas.

Similarly, the unconscious Lato Guiaro couldn't progress through the illusory passageway, breaking free and falling three to four meters in front of Lumian. The impact left him in pain, slowly regaining consciousness.

At that moment, Lumian slowly recovered from the intense pain induced by the Purification Halo.

Lato Guiaro, just waking up and still uncertain of the situation, instinctively re-entered the illusory passageway to increase the distance between himself and Lumian Lee. This move aimed to avoid another strike from Lumian's Psychic Piercing-like ability or any other unforeseen attacks.

Upon crawling back to the hall through the exit of the illusory passageway, Lumian had already raised his head and regained his composure, though his forehead was soaked in cold sweat.

Observing this, Lato Guiaro felt neither pity, disappointment, nor regret. Instead, he was pleasantly surprised.

It's effective!

Purification Halo is effective against Lumian Lee!

After confirming that the adventurer Louis Berry was indeed Lumian Lee, Lato Guiaro contemplated how to strategize if he were to engage in a battle with him.

It was simple with the authority of the Governor of the Sea. He could repeatedly cast the other party into the Cosmic Void, making him lose himself over and over. Without the Governor of the Sea's authority, he had to consider how to exploit Lumian Lee's vulnerabilities.

Lumian Lee's unique characteristics were clear—possessing a sealing power of the same origin as the Celestial Worthy, with a high-ranking creature sealed within him.

Beyonders in this state often had false high-level statuses and enjoyed numerous conveniences, but they were susceptible to the Sun pathway's abilities.

Lato Guiaro wasn't certain about the effectiveness of the Sun Halo, Cleave of Purification, and other abilities, nor was he sure of the Purification Halo's potency. The only certainty lay in the effectiveness of the Sun Holy Water he could create.

Therefore, if the Purification Halo proved ineffective against Lumian Lee, he would swiftly produce Sun Holy Water and sprinkle it on him.

Looking at Lumian, Lato Guiaro smiled, once again dyeing the surroundings golden as layer after layer spread out.

This sealed environment was ideal for employing the Purification Halo. It denied Lumian Lee a chance to distance himself or "teleport" closer. The entire hall was essentially enveloped by the Purification Halo!

Furthermore, in the spaceship, there was no fear of Lumian Lee losing control and transforming into a monster, unleashing the high-level creature within his body. An intruder at this level would inevitably trigger the spaceship's automatic defense system targeting him. Lato Guiaro might then seize control of the spaceship!

Didn't your sister tell you something Emperor Roselle once said?

If you rely on something to obtain specialness and become stronger, you will definitely be punished because of it!

Upon seeing the surging layers of golden light, Lumian raised his right hand and vanished.

Where is he "teleporting" to this time? As long as he's in the hall, he can't avoid the Purification Halo! Lato Guiaro watched the other party's struggle with certainty and a smile.

Unless Lumian Lee chose to leave the hall, it was impossible for him not to be affected by the Purification Halo. With the spaceship's barrier raised, the door closed, and the place sealed, and using the unique power of the sea, if he wanted to "teleport" out, he had to first destroy the surrounding walls or metal doors to create an exit.

This was also advantageous for Lato Guiaro.

No one knew what the spaceship would unleash in this hall next!

Layer after layer of Purification Halos rapidly "drowned" Lumian's original location, but nothing happened. Lumian's figure was nowhere to be seen in the silver-white hall.

Wh… Lato Guiaro's pupils constricted.

Where did Lumian Lee go?

Is his teleportation ability unaffected by the sealed interior of the spaceship?

Or has he gone into hiding?

Lato Guiaro's heart skipped a beat; he extended his right hand and pulled.

The void in the hall stirred, unveiling an abnormal area nestled between two walls, flanked by dark holes emitting cerulean-blue gas.

Creating an unstable space and hiding inside to avoid the Purification Halo? That's true. The Purification Halo's purpose is to exorcize, purify, warm, and provide courage. Without substantial offensive power, it can't destroy the structure of that space… Lumian Lee actually possesses such an ability. Lato Guiaro quickly saw through Lumian's trick. Calmly raising his right hand, he condensed a penetrating dark-green ray.

Simultaneously, he harnessed his basic control over gravity to pull at the fabricated space.

The dark-green ray struck the spot where it had been pulled, instantly penetrating and obliterating the structure.

Silently shattered, the dark-green ray continued forward, hitting a silver-white full-body armor with its back turned to Lato Guiaro.

The dark-green ray, now weakened to a certain extent, faded away.

The silver-white full-body armor suddenly pivoted, and two pairs of eyes appeared to lock onto Lato Guiaro from within the vacant helmet.

In the next moment, it charged toward the April Fool's key member, forming a broadsword of light in its hand.

As the silver-white full-body armor rushed out, Lumian's figure emerged in the corner.

He had utilized the terrain there to arrange a simple Bottle of Fiction, using the large hole that emitted poisonous gas as a symbolic window. His goal was twofold: first, to evade the influence of the Purification Halo, and second, to position the Pride Armor with its back facing Lato Guiaro.

Yes, this cursed armor might only target someone standing a certain distance behind it, but it might not. What if that person not only stood more than ten meters behind it but also attempted to attack it by stabbing it in the back?

The answer was clear!

Now, Lumian had a capable helper unafraid of the Purification Halo.

Chapter 585: Repeated "Betrayal"

585 Repeated "Betrayal"

At a distance of just over ten meters, the Pride Armor covered the ground in two powerful strides, positioning itself in front of Ultraman Lato Guiaro. A broadsword, condensed from radiant light, slashed down with deadly precision.

Lato Guiaro had a momentary opportunity to utilize his Navigator ability, escape through hidden passageways in the void and dimensions, and evade the impending attack. However, the sight of the silver-white full-body armor caught him off guard; he hadn't anticipated an aggressive move before Lumian Lee could even don the armor!

This momentary hesitation cost him. The silver-white full-body armor, resembling a relentless steam locomotive, collided with him before he could vanish into the hidden tunnel. By then, it was too late, and the looming threat of being cleaved apart became imminent—a grim fate of upper and lower halves separated.

In this dire circumstance, he was no earthworm with regenerative abilities; his fate seemed sealed.

Facing the approaching silver-white armor and its raised broadsword of light, scales formed from starlight protruded from various parts of Lato Guiaro's body.

The air quivered around him, as if an invisible tide were roaring, amplifying the tension.

As per the intel gathered on April Fool's, the power derived from the "sea" without the Governor of the Sea's authority corresponded to a Sequence 5 at most, known as Tidal Scholar—the current state of Lato Guiaro.

Enveloped by an ethereal tide, Lato Guiaro swung his fist, resembling a colossal wave crashing down.

Thud!

His formidable punch collided with the side of the broadsword of light, forcefully diverting its trajectory.

Simultaneously, Lumian materialized behind him, left hand raised.

Indeed! I knew you'd seize this chance to teleport behind me and launch a sneak attack! Lato Guiaro was ready. Evading the silver-white full-body armor's second strike, he imbued the surroundings in a warm golden hue.

Purification Halo!

As layers of golden light surged towards Lumian, he deftly twisted his left wrist.

Even before that, the silver-white Lie earring on his left earlobe emitted a subtle glow, revealing various blobs of light and colors on Ultraman's body. Among them, a golden ball emitted a warm glow—the representation of the Purification Halo ability.

With a flick of his wrist, the golden ball detached from Ultraman's body and swiftly flew to Lumian.

Steal!

Lumian successfully "stole" Ultraman's Purification Halo!

The number of times the Ring of the Sea Queen could "steal" after the standard process remained unknown to Lumian. However, he was certain that Lie's "stealing" effect persisted for half a month, unaffected by his "stealing" of the sea's power.

After Lie's transformation on the ancestral altar in Milo Village, Lumian diligently experimented with Steal, honing his proficiency to ensure he could deploy it effectively in critical moments. Thus, he had become relatively adept at stealing and dispersing the power of the sea.

Simultaneously, Ultraman's Beyonder powers of the Sun pathway were well-documented by the Tarot Club's information, making Lumian fully aware of what he aimed to Steal this time. With a solid foundation in mysticism knowledge, he felt prepared.

However, the challenge lay in his lack of experience "stealing" a Priest of Light's abilities. He feared that locating the corresponding symbols for Purification Halo and Holy Water Creation might take too long, leaving him vulnerable to Lato Guiaro's attacks.

Anticipating the Pride Armor's frontal assault, Lumian strategically teleported four to five meters behind Lato Guiaro, enticing him to use Purification Halo.

The distinction between the abilities Lumian used and those he refrained from was clear, providing him with instant recognition.

Before initiating the teleport, he activated the Lie earring and raised his left hand, ensuring he didn't linger in the dangerous area for a moment longer.

The Purification Halo, despite being "stolen," persisted and continued to surge, enveloping Lumian.

However, it didn't reach its intended target. A formidable formless force emanated from Lumian's body, acting as a barrier that thwarted the encroaching halo.

The power of the sea!

You have the power of the sea, and so do I!

During the Steal process, Lumian had reserved a portion of the sea's power for himself. Although not on par with Ultraman's, it proved sufficient to repel the Purification Halo for a brief moment.

Calmly activating the black mark on his right shoulder, Lumian vanished from the warm golden area, teleporting to the farthest corner from Lato Guiaro.

The Purification Halo pursued relentlessly, but it reached its limit, visibly weakening.

Reacting swiftly, Lumian harnessed the power of the sea once more, watching as the warm golden barrier rapidly dissipated.

Meanwhile, Lato Guiaro's heart skipped a beat.

Intuitively, he sensed the loss of his Purification Halo ability, suspecting it had been "stolen"!

Lumian Lee's item with the Steal effect is still operational? Lato Guiaro couldn't dwell on it. Dodging the Pride Armor's heavy slashes, he fell to the ground, rolling to evade the attacks. Facing the sky, he raised his right hand, clenching it.

Pure and blazing sunlight condensed rapidly, forming a thick ray that struck the silver-white armor's chest.

It paused momentarily, unable to penetrate, only burning and dissolving into tottering black marks.

Witnessing this and recognizing Lumian Lee as his adversary, Ultraman Lato Guiaro entertained the idea of fleeing. He decided to disengage, cease the confrontation, and seek an escape route.

At that critical moment, instead of launching a barrage of attacks, the Pride Armor shifted its focus toward Lumian.

Lumian, who had previously utilized Spirit World Traversal on the betrothal ship and within the hall, found himself affected once again by the

Purification Halo. His spirituality teetered on the brink of depletion, leaving him visibly fatigued and weakened.

Any ordinary human in such a state near the Pride Armor would face indiscriminate attacks.

Wh… Lato Guiaro keenly perceived the shift in dynamics.

Though unaware of the specifics, he sensed an advantage.

Rising abruptly, he directed his attention to Lumian.

In the next instant, the Pride Armor raised its radiant broadsword and charged towards Lumian.

Haha, your Sealed Artifact has betrayed you! Lato Guiaro mocked internally as he closed in, intending to exploit the silver-white full-body armor's attack to create Sun Holy Water and sprinkle it on Lumian Lee.

Undeterred, Lumian took a resolute step forward.

Tapping into his Ascetic powers, the accumulated strength and spirituality within his body surged, replenishing his drained spirit. His body underwent a sudden transformation, growing by seven to eight centimeters and bulking up by two sizes, causing his loosely fitting deputy host's robe to strain.

The advancing Pride Armor abruptly halted, pivoting to face Lato Guiaro, who had followed closely.

Lato Guiaro's pupils contracted, and an instant heaviness enveloped his body, bringing him to a natural halt.

Simultaneously, his gaze locked onto the unusually tall figure of Lumian Lee.

The enemy teleported right in front of him, mere inches away. Their eyes locked, reflecting each other in an intense confrontation.

With a swift whoosh, Lumian swung his right hand, adorned with the Flog boxing gloves, through the air.

Lato Guiaro's "heavy" state naturally exerted a suction force on his surroundings, a downgraded version of the humanoid Sealed Artifact's characteristic. Lumian's punch encountered no repulsion; instead, it accelerated towards its target.

Unperturbed by the close-range attacks, Lato Guiaro harbored concerns about Lumian's Psychic Piercing ability. Unable to dodge or employ other abilities in time, he unleashed a retaliatory fist resembling a thousand tonnes of seawater, causing the sound of surging tides to echo.

Bang!

Lato Guiaro blocked Lumian's attack and swiftly rolled to the side, evading a surprise assault from the Pride Armor.

At that moment, a strong sense of greed surged within him, overshadowing his initial plan to escape.

Seizing the opportunity, Lumian retreated and retrieved a black bone flute with red holes from his Traveler's Bag.

Symphony of Hatred!

While Lato Guiaro resisted the Pride Armor, Lumian brought the flute to his mouth and played a sharp, intense melody.

Lato Guiaro's mind buzzed, freezing him in place.

Bright blood oozed from the cracks in the starlight scales on his body.

Emotional Detonation!

Pfft! The Pride Armor struck Lato Guiaro's shoulder, splintering scales, bone, and flesh.

Closing the distance with two brisk strides, Lumian approached the nearly collapsed Lato Guiaro, his face twisted in pain. He raised the black bone flute in his hand.

In the moment that Lato Guiaro used the pain from the Pride Armor strike to break free from the detonated emotions, he witnessed Lumian Lee thrusting the bone flute toward him with a fierce expression.

Pfft!

The bone flute effortlessly pierced Lato Guiaro's left eye, akin to cutting through butter.

The eyeball of April Fool's key member exploded, and a gruesome mix of blood and other fluids streamed out through the gaps in the black bone flute.

Even if the Symphony of Hatred only struck an ordinary part, it was tantamount to hitting a vital point. Striking a true vital point meant either instant death or a prolonged period of social death. In this case, Lato Guiaro's left eye and brain were undeniably vital points.

His remaining eye widened and protruded, life force rapidly draining as he slumped to the ground.

Lumian seized Ultraman's neck, lifting him up. Releasing his right hand, which held the black bone flute, he delivered a heavy slap to Lato Guiaro's face. With a fierce expression, he growled in Intisian, "Did you go to Cordu Village to confirm the situation?"

Chapter 586: Gnawing

586 Gnawing

Ultraman Lato Guiaro, his life rapidly slipping away, fell into a daze. Even his thoughts of self-preservation became blurred.

In the haze, he vaguely saw Juan Oro, the wrinkled old man, standing in the middle of the sea, waving with a mix of joy and mockery.

At that moment, Lumian's voice resonated from the horizon, faint, ethereal, and elusive.

"Did you go to Cordu Village to confirm the situation?"

Cordu Village? The time Mad Lady and I visited Nolfi, and went there just out of convenience? Lato Guiaro lost focus, and Lumian's figure reflected in his closed eye.

With the intent to annoy, he spoke his last words in Highlander.

"I've been there… with Mad Lady. It was… simply for fun… but Loki… seemed to… have ulterior…"

Don't you want to know what happened back then? Sure, I'll speak in Highlander. It's your problem if you don't understand. Your fault for not taking this language seriously in the past!

Lato Guiaro knew his actions wouldn't practically affect Lumian Lee. This was because Lumian Lee could find someone to perform dream divination, hypnosis, or undergo a real dream when he returned. From there, he could memorize the Highlander he spoke and find a way to translate it into Intisian or ancient Feysac.

Still, he just wanted to annoy the other party. About to die, he couldn't care less about future developments.

"Motives…" Lato Guiaro uttered his last word as his life extinguished.

In that final moment, he seemed to hear Lumian Lee speaking to him in Highlander, "Thank you."

The "thank you" flowed naturally, carrying a strong sense of mockery.

Ultraman Lato Guiaro's intact eye bulged even more, his expression freezing on his face, his breath coming to a complete halt.

Lumian's right hand gripped the Symphony of Hatred once more. Simultaneously, he released his left hand, watching Ultraman's key member's head rapidly detach from the black bone flute with red holes, revealing a sinister and deep blood-red hole.

Thud!

Ultraman collapsed to the ground. The sticky blood on the black bone flute coalesced and dripped onto his body.

After the person who had backstabbed it suffered a fatal wound, Pride Armor stopped moving and stood nearby, resembling an ordinary silver-white full-body armor without any special characteristics.

Loki had ulterior motives? A motive other than helping the Sinners and pulling a prank? As Lumian recalled Ultraman's confession before his death, he bent down to check what items this April Fool's key member had.

Of course, he didn't hold much hope. Ultraman Lato Guiaro had disguised himself as the incoming Governor of the Sea, Simon Guiaro, to board the betrothal ship. Carrying no items, his belongings should have been handed over to Mad Lady, allowing her to conceal them using flesh and blood magic in his stomach. However, Mad Lady clearly didn't have the time or opportunity to return the items to Ultraman.

This was one of the reasons why Lumian could eliminate Ultraman, a powerful dual pathway Beyonder, in such a short period.

If Juan Oro hadn't tipped off the sea spawn on the bridal boat beforehand, Lumian would've been forced to stash his Traveler's Bag temporarily with Mr. K.

At that moment, Lumian observed a strange transformation in the corpse of Ultraman Lato Guiaro.

It swiftly faded, morphing into a semi-translucent, semi-flesh state. Then, like it was being disintegrated by countless tiny creatures, it oozed into the silver metal floor and gradually vanished.

Soon, the remnants of flesh, starlight, and sun-like fragments left by Lato Guiaro were absorbed by the silver metallic floor, leaving behind only a Sea Governor ceremonial robe, shrouded in a faint grayish-white fog.

In the blink of an eye, the grayish-white fog got absorbed by the silver metallic floor and the mysterious structure.

Lumian attempted unsuccessfully to "reclaim" something.

Is this what it means to return to the sea? But why did this peculiar structure absorb the Priest of Light's Beyonder characteristic? Just as Lumian pondered, the sound of metal grinding surrounded him.

The pitch-black holes in the surrounding walls, ceiling, and floor once again got concealed by rotating, protruding metal. No more cerulean-blue poisonous gas spewed out, saving Lumian the energy to engulf his body in a layer of crimson, almost white flames.

Amidst the clanking sounds, two metallic doors ascended, revealing two tunnels leading to different destinations.

With the target of the betrayal now gone, the silver-gray behemoth reverted to its "normal" state.

Lumian peered into the depths of the tunnel ahead, his heart involuntarily racing.

Badump! Badump! He felt inexplicably nervous and uneasy.

…

In Port Santa, the apartment Loki was hiding.

The moment Ludwig declared, "I'm hungry," he swiftly bowed his head and sank his teeth into Loki's hand, gripping the gemstone bracelet as if devouring the marrow from a chicken wing.

An intense wave of pain surged through Loki's mind. His immediate instinct was to deploy Paper Figurine Substitutes, a desperate attempt to break free from the current situation.

Yet, he hesitated, fearing that such a move might create an insurmountable distance between him and the sealed demigod, eliminating any chance of regaining control.

Amidst the gruesome symphony of bones crunching and flesh tearing, Loki snatched the falling gemstone bracelet with his free hand and forcibly pried open his mouth.

Bang!

A rush of air slammed into Ludwig's head, akin to a bullet fired from the latest steam rifle, ripping through flesh and hair to reveal a ghastly white skull.

However, Ludwig remained unfazed. Gnawing on Loki's left hand, he had already severed five fingers and devoured half of the palm.

Bang! Bang! Bang! Air Bullets relentlessly pounded the boy, leaving him mangled and disfigured. Yet, Ludwig persisted in his attentive nibbling on Loki.

Crack, crack.

He had already crunched down on the other party's wrist bone, a crisp sound echoing through their intertwined flesh.

As Loki nearly blacked out from the pain, he roughly grasped what was happening.

The sealed demigod possessed incredible vitality. Ordinary attacks and Beyonder powers couldn't cause significant harm. In simpler terms, he could put him to sleep or manipulate his Spirit Body Threads to knock him out, but killing him with regular means proved challenging. It couldn't even seriously injure him.

In such circumstances, even if the sealed demigod couldn't utilize any abilities, lacking sufficient strength and speed, merely devouring the other party's flesh and bones with all his might posed an abnormal challenge for many Mid-Sequence Beyonders.

Loki abandoned the idea of retrieving other mystical items and substituted himself with a paper figurine.

Swoosh! Swoosh! Swoosh! Ludwig, his head covered in signs of Air Bullet destruction and almost devoid of human form, raised his head. Beside his bloodstained mouth was a piece of white paper that quickly swept into his mouth alongside the blood-colored flesh.

Ludwig's eyes reflected Loki's outline in the corner of the room. Something beneath his torn skin and flesh seemed to squirm slowly, attempting to break free, but to no avail.

Loki assessed the situation and the items on him. With the Soul Assurer marionette unable to return in time, he sensibly chose not to confront the sealed demigod creature. He would flee first before considering the future.

At that moment, a crimson moonlight streamed through the window.

The moonlight bathed the apartment, wrapping around Loki.

Loki heard a fleeting voice.

"A strong smell of blood…"

As the moonlight faded, a grayish-white and pitch-black paper figurine appeared on the ground.

Loki's figure materialized a few hundred meters away, outside a vine forest.

It was a boon bestowed by the Celestial Worthy during a prayer some weeks before this operation. It had been attached to a pre-prepared paper figurine, forming such a potent substitute that bordered on godhood.

Drip, drip. Blood still dripped from Loki's bitten left wrist.

He activated the diamond on the bracelet and swiftly faded away, preparing to teleport.

…

Port Santa, Milo Village.

Tap, tap, tap.

The soft patter of footsteps reverberated in Bard's ears, causing him to tense.

Bard surveyed his surroundings, finding nothing amiss.

He sprinted, weaving through several buildings, yet the rhythmic tapping of footsteps persisted behind him.

Attempting to force open a door and seek refuge in a villager's house in Milo Village,

Bard was met with an unexpected sight. Instead of the familiar kitchen, tables, chairs, and household items, his eyes beheld a decrepit stone platform enveloped in darkness.

The stone platform! Bard's pupils widened, as if he had entered an unreal illusion.

He found himself back at the residence of the Governor of the Sea and the altar where Milo Village's inhabitants paid homage to their ancestor.

Something crawled out from a crack in the worn stone platform.

A translucent worm, adorned with multiple rings, swiftly expanded, transforming into a young man donned in the attire of a sea prayer ritual's deputy host, monocle in place.

Seated on the weathered stone platform, the man grinned at Bard.

"Do you comprehend?"

Bard suddenly grasped the meaning behind the question. Swallowing hard, he replied, "Understood."

Since the altar had an owner and Beyonder creatures residing there, the so-called rule that it could only be enchanted once a year for the Ring of the Sea Queen clearly didn't hold true!

The other party could affix the power as many times as desired!

The young man, clad in a dark-blue deputy host's sacrificial robe, toyed with the monocle in his right eye and smirked.

"Over a millennium, I've molded the rule that the Steal ability can only be conferred once a year. Little did I expect to deceive you all in the end."

Chapter 587: "Deceived"

587 "Deceived"

Upon hearing the young man's words, Bard felt his blood rush to his head.

Crafting a seemingly valid rule over a millennium to deceive others?

What kind of lame antique Swindler is this?

Bard blurted out, "The patterns on the altar and the surrounding arrangements are also fake?"

The young man in the dark-blue deputy host robe chuckled.

"If it wasn't real, would you have been deceived?

"Furthermore, I occasionally venture out. When I do, it grants Steal powers on my behalf. Of course, with the spirituality produced by the surrounding worshippers, it can indeed only bestow once a year."

As the young man spoke, the smile on his face widened.

Bard's forehead throbbed as he listened, feeling like he had been mocked.

According to the other party's claim that the Steal powers could be bestowed at will, the Ring of the Sea Queen should have been complete and equipped with all its functions. So, why did the success of the sea prayer ritual experience such a significant delay?

Unable to comprehend the situation, Bard turned around and sprinted towards the exit.

It wasn't that he hadn't considered begging for mercy and surrendering on the spot, but these things could be done later. For now, he wanted to take a gamble, betting that the other party's claim of occasionally venturing out was a lie. In essence, he believed he was trapped in the altar, unable to venture anywhere and influence the people around him. If he allowed himself to be intimidated and didn't dare to escape, he would fall into the other party's trap, cheated of his freedom and future.

Thud! Thud! Thud! Bard reached the staircase in a few steps and ran up.

The more he ran, the happier he became. The monocle-wearing young man didn't stop him.

I made the right bet!

He's the core of that altar. There's no way to leave!

Thud! Thud! Thud! Bard witnessed the scene on the first floor illuminated by sunlight.

Amidst his ecstasy, his thoughts suddenly shattered. He felt the darkness around him being pierced by the light, shattering into pieces.

Bard bolted upright, alarmed to find himself lying in the servant's room at the Governor of the Sea's residence. He hadn't left.

He surveyed his surroundings and heard cheers and crackers from outside.

I just had a dream? Did it stem from a spirituality warning, helping me discover a problem with the plan? As Bard pondered these thoughts, he immediately dismissed the corresponding judgment. No, how could I have fallen asleep during the sea prayer ritual? Did I start dreaming after hearing soft footsteps in my room?

Bard rolled to his feet, slung his backpack over his shoulders, and tentatively pushed open the door, entering the corridor.

No longer smug with the plan that required minimal risks or combat, Bard realized he couldn't share in the distribution of items. He couldn't teleport away directly, nor could he return to his original appearance or disguise himself as someone else.

Upon reaching the corridor, Bard noticed the Little Devils leaving the shadows and performing a strange celebratory dance.

He hadn't "communicated" with these sea spawn and knew their intelligence was roughly equivalent to that of ordinary dogs. They could be tamed and controlled, but direct communication was beyond them. However, the amazing thing was that Little Devils had the ability to record and recreate human words, even if they weren't sure of their meanings. Moreover, they could receive signals from their collaborators within a 100-meter radius.

The Little Devils ignored Bard as well. The sea prayer ritual had succeeded. According to their prior agreement, the fake Governor of the Sea could leave on his own.

Bard left the Governor of the Sea's residence and realized that the guards at the entrance weren't kneeling to thank the boon like before. The villagers of Milo Village at the docks were the same. Apart from a few who sincerely shouted that the sea prayer ritual had succeeded, the rest merely echoed what was happening and expressed their joy, with many preferring to release crackers.

Indeed, it was a dream. The villagers' reactions in the dream were too exaggerated… I should know that based on past experiences with sea prayer rituals, only the committee members of the Fisheries Guild and a few people with strong sea bloodlines can sense the arrival of the sea's boon. Others with sea bloodlines wouldn't have a tangible sense. They'd slowly realize they've become stronger, or the changes are too weak to detect. Otherwise, the failure of the sea prayer ritual last year wouldn't have escaped the notice of Port Santa's citizens and would have only circulated within the core circle. Bard used the environment to quickly confirm the essence of his previous encounter.

He didn't dare relax, nor did he "again" head to the docks to admire the villagers being fooled. Instead, he turned to the road leading to Port Santa's city district.

Just as he stepped out of the ancient village, Bard spotted a figure ahead.

The man stood over 2.4 meters tall, clad in a simple linen robe and a hood, holding a thick staff.

"Gandalf…" Bard's heart tightened as he shouted.

With the dream just now, he thought he had been exposed, so he didn't pull off any act.

Gandalf, the president of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society, was taken aback and let out a deep chuckle.

"You're really fake."

H-he's not sure of my identity? Bard was taken aback, wishing he could slap himself.

…

Inside the underwater spaceship, in a metallic room reminiscent of a beehive.

Having failed to capture Mad Lady twice in a row, Mr. K's body underwent a sudden transformation, expanding to nearly three meters in height.

Fortunately, he wasn't adorned in actual clothes. The blood-colored cloak draped over him had morphed from his flesh and blood. Otherwise, even the loose robe would have succumbed to the drastic change.

Concurrently, Mr. K's skin darkened, assuming the appearance of thick and formidable armor. Crooked goat horns adorned with sinister patterns sprouted from his head, and a pair of bat-like wings, encircled in crimson and blue flames, emerged from his back.

A pungent smell of sulfur hung in the air.

Being a Sequence 5 Shepherd of the Secrets Suppliant pathway, Mr. K possessed the core ability of Grazing. This allowed him to fuse other people's souls with Beyonder characteristics or boon powers and utilize them uniquely. It was akin to grazing lambs for a deity.

Each Shepherd could graze up to seven souls, controlling only one at a time. In this state, Shepherds could employ their Beyonder abilities and three abilities corresponding to the souls. These were chosen during Grazing and remained fixed thereafter.

The most formidable aspect of Shepherds was their ability to Graze demigod-

level spirits, enabling them to contend with Saints for a limited duration.

Presently, Mr. K was using a Grazed Devil. He had selected Devil Transformation, Sulphur Fireball, and Sword of Lava in the past.

Mr. K deliberately chose to forgo Devil's most distinctive Danger Premonition because he believed it to be effective only when commanding the Devil's spirit. Under normal circumstances, he couldn't activate Grazing continuously. In any case, if grave danger loomed, a divine revelation would be provided by God. Failure to receive such guidance indicated wrongdoing, warranting divine punishment.

As the expansive bat wings on Mr. K's back unfolded, light-blue fireballs condensed, numbering almost twenty.

They indiscriminately bombarded every corner of the metallic beehive, creating an all-encompassing barrage to counter Mad Lady's elusive "flashes" throughout the space.

Rumble!

The explosion, a mix of fire and poison, wreaked havoc on the metallic hive, tearing apart the incubating Batings Black Insect, Little Devils, and other creatures.

Mad Lady abruptly halted as the Sulfur Fireball condensed.

Cloaked in a blood-colored dress, with grotesque flesh lumps on her face, an illusory, slowly flipping book materialized in her eyes. Faint recitations echoed around her.

Drawing a dagger, she genuflected and drove it into the metal floor of the hive.

Dawn-like light ascended, forming an almost invisible wall around her.

Rumble!

The shockwaves from the Sulfur Fireball's explosion and the poisonous pale-blue fireball relentlessly struck the invisible barrier, causing it to sway, yet it stood resilient.

This was Protection of a Warrior Sequence 5.

Record, the core ability of a Sequence 6 Scribe of the Apprentice pathway, allowed the "recording" of others' abilities for use, each recording usable only once. Scribes could even record Beyonder powers with godhood effects, but the success rate was minimal.

After the explosion's aftershocks subsided, Mr. K, donned in a blood-colored cloak and resembling a colossal Devil, wielded a broadsword composed of crimson lava and pale-blue flames. He surged towards Mad Lady in two steps, slashing down.

The nearly invisible wall around Mad Lady couldn't withstand the onslaught and finally shattered. As the illusory book in her eyes flipped, a robust and sharp Sword of Dawn materialized in her hand.

Excitedly, she swung her two-handed light sword.

Clang!

Mr. K's strike sent Mad Lady, lacking a Warrior's physique and strength, flying.

Though Mr. K hadn't anticipated her determination to engage in close combat despite her limitations, the battle's tempo remained unaffected. He advanced, wielding the lava broadsword once again.

Poof! The Mad Lady he struck suddenly thinned, transforming into a paper figurine consumed by sulfurous flames.

Paper Figurine Substitutes!

Mad Lady reappeared beside a demolished metal hive, her illusory book flipping once more.

She then stretched her arms, allowing a pure and magnificent blazing pillar of light to descend from the sky and strike Mr. K, who had attacked the paper effigy.

Priest of Light's Light of Holiness!

Chapter 588: Degree of Madness

588 Degree of Madness

Mr. K shifted instantaneously, tapping into the Grazed Traveler's soul. His eyes took on an otherworldly glow, as if concealing doors to different realms.

His form faded, and in an instant, a luminous white column surrounded by flames emerged, shrouding him within its fiery embrace.

In the ensuing moment, Mr. K, stripped of his Devil guise, materialized in a corner of the metallic beehive. His form liquefied, his flesh resembling dripping candle wax.

The Secrets Suppliant pathway symbolized corruption, its influence curtailed by the Sun pathway's capabilities.

Half-melted flesh and blood cascaded onto the metal floor, seeping into it in a bizarre manner. Soon, it was absorbed by the spaceship Mad Lady had earlier detailed. Even Mr. K felt the weight of an unseen force, as if an invisible hand pressed him down. His attempts to extricate himself from the metallic floor proved futile, and he continued sinking gradually.

Mad Lady, with grayish-green eyes gleaming, teleported near Mr. K.

Despite his blood-colored wax-drenched visage, Mr. K faced Mad Lady without a trace of fear. His focus remained fixed on the evil god's aura emanating from the metal hive—his ultimate target.

He switched the Grazed soul to an Arbiter pathway Beyonder, with two bolts of lightning gathering in the depths of his darkened eyes.

Psychic Piercing!

Mad Lady refrained from teleporting. The illusory book within her eyes flipped open, revealing the kaleidoscope of colors on Mr. K's body and the shifting hues of light during his Grazed soul transitions.

Excitement illuminated Mad Lady's face. Raising her right hand, she prepared to delicately twist it clockwise.

Steal!

This was an ability she had Recorded from Bard.

A sudden, intriguing notion captivated Mad Lady's thoughts—she yearned to witness the aftermath of stealing the Grazing ability from a Shepherd.

It was crucial to understand that her Steal ability was limited to just one from a target, devoid of any connections to the abilities that came with it. In essence, after snatching the Grazing ability, the soul, characteristics, and powers under Grazing's influence would persist within Mr. K's body.

In this state, Mad Lady pondered whether Shepherds would grapple with internal conflicts, the fusion of characteristics, or a loss of control akin to the switching between non-adjacent pathways.

Excitement bubbled within Mad Lady as she deliberately Blinked near Mr. K, compelling him to switch Grazed souls. She observed keenly, eager to discern which light aligned with Grazing.

As for Mr. K's reaction, she cared little.

You continue your fight; I continue my steal. Whoever dies first loses!

Simultaneously, the metal floor, saturated with Mr. K's flesh, quivered unexpectedly. A previously concealed door within the metal hive withdrew, unveiling a passageway that hinted at a silver metallic hall beyond.

A formidable suction force emanated from that direction. While her attempt to steal Mr. K's Grazing ability was underway, Mad Lady—lacking the strength—was propelled into the air. Dark-blond hair whipped around wildly as she soared toward the origin of the anomaly.

Meanwhile, Mr. K remained "locked" to the metal floor. Though his body swayed precariously, on the verge of being pulled away, he held his ground, unsteady yet resilient.

The face of the blood-colored wax-streaked Aurora Order Oracle betrayed an anxious expression.

The enemy was on the verge of escape!

The source of the evil god corruption had revealed itself!

Mr. K swiftly switched back to the corresponding Devil spirit, summoning a broadsword forged from crimson lava and pale-blue flames. Targeting his body adhered to the metal floor, he executed a slashing motion.

Beneath his calf, flesh promptly separated from his main body, the incision undergoing a mesmerizing melding of half-melting and half-reforming.

Having relinquished a portion of his flesh, Mr. K allowed pale-white, moist, and freshly-formed limbs to squirm out from the severed stump. Concurrently, he harnessed the formidable suction force to pursue Mad Lady and draw closer to the source of corruption.

In midair, he witnessed Lumian, disguised, clutching the door frame in a struggle against the menacing suction. He observed the motionless silver-white full-body armor seamlessly blending with the floor.

Mad Lady surged ahead, on the verge of "flying" past Lumian.

With a wave of her right hand, she emitted a greeting-like "hello", her face radiating excitement and anticipation.

Lumian's pupils constricted. Disregarding his precarious state, he harrumphed.

Two beams of white light shot forth from his nostrils, accurately aimed at Mad Lady but influenced by the tangible and enigmatic suction force. They bent and "plunged" deeper into the tunnel.

At that moment, Lumian's grip on the silver metal door frame neared its breaking point, blood seeping from the strain.

Faintly, he sensed an abundance of flesh and skin deep within the tunnel, intertwining to shape a colossal structure resembling a pear-shaped bird's nest.

Suspended in midair, fleshy ropes, as thick as two or three adult arms and covered in a translucent membrane, extended, linking the distant wall, the ceiling above, and the metal on the ground.

Within these flesh and blood tendrils, specks of starlight and a mysterious dark substance flowed into the massive pear-shaped object.

The bird's nest-like structure was contracting inward, its various parts deeply sunken, delineating lines that hinted at a substantial disk.

The terrifying suction force, capable of manipulating both reality and mystery, emanated from this pear-shaped object composed of skin, flesh, and blood.

At that moment, the outlines on the pear-shaped object quivered, and all the indentations bulged and expanded.

With this transformation, fragments of starlight spilled from the fleshy bird's nest, rushing into every cabin within the spaceship.

This event resembled the prior two releases of the sea's power, yet lacked the grandeur and vastness, lacking the potential to rend apart anyone obstructing its path.

Lumian could already envision the repetitive expulsion, understanding that the silver-gray behemoth had amassed a power capable of threatening the seal. Year after year, it required the extraction of this accumulated pressure.

As the abundance of starlight scattered, the formidable suction force dissipated.

With two thuds, Mad Lady and Mr. K collided with the ground. One found herself in the tunnel leading to the fleshy "bird's nest," while the other lay in the silver hall where Lumian and Ultraman had previously battled.

Lumian released his grip, landing on the ground. His gaze swiftly fixated on the April Fool's key member, adorned with clumps of flesh and blood on her face.

Mad Lady sprang up, exclaiming to him and Mr. K, "Did you see that? Did you see that? That's an incubating deity. Yes, it should be a deity!"

Despite the intense fluctuations in Mad Lady's emotions, Mr. K discerned no sincerity in her tone.

Her mention of "deity" sounded more like "powerful and terrifying monster," a mere description.

In the next instant, Lumian materialized behind Mad Lady, who promptly vanished on the spot, "Blinking" closer to where the starlight had scattered.

Lumian, sensing danger instinctively, felt his heart quicken involuntarily.

He hesitated to delve too deeply into the tunnel, avoiding proximity to the flesh and blood "bird's nest" he had vaguely "seen" before. Unimaginable horrors were certain to unfold.

However, Mad Lady sprinted in that direction.

Let her venture deeper and potentially meet her end? Lumian's thoughts raced, torn between decisions.

Another second passed, and Mr. K teleported in front of Lumian, fervently pursuing Mad Lady.

In that moment, Lumian, who had often considered himself a bit eccentric, found himself yearning for a bit more normalcy from the duo ahead of him.

While he could comprehend Mr. K's choices and actions—rooted in unwavering faith in God and the pursuit of divine will, coupled with a hint of extremism—Mad Lady's conduct exceeded his expectations.

Drawing from I Know Someone's confession and Mad Lady's previous behavior, Lumian detected no signs of her fanatical devotion to the Celestial Worthy. Simultaneously, due to the ongoing conflict between the Celestial Worthy and Mr. Fool, she couldn't always rely on protection.

This raised a question for Lumian.

If Mad Lady consistently courted danger, how had she managed to survive to this day?

April Fool's lacked the strict hierarchy and coordination seen in the Aurora Order. Most of the time, members operated independently with minimal interaction. Protecting Mad Lady from the start, allowing her to grow steadily with such a mindset, seemed implausible.

Could it be that I Know Someone had once overseen the treatment of Mad Lady's mental and psychological issues? After his demise, did Mad Lady's problems exacerbate? Lumian quickly formulated a plausible explanation, but considering Mad Lady's conduct on the betrothal ship, her current state struck him as abnormal.

On the betrothal ship, faced with the impending release of the sea's power in the energy passageway, Mad Lady, though eager and seeking excitement, had an escape route. As long as she didn't delay until the last moment, she could teleport away, avoiding the actual risk of death.

Now, whatever lurked in the depths of the tunnel made Lumian, despite his feigned high level, intuitively uneasy. He believed it represented an almost certain death sentence. Yet, Mad Lady persisted in her attempt to approach!

Could there be a reason compelling her to make contact with that object? Lumian wondered. He suspected that Mad Lady's actions might be part of the Celestial Worthy's scheme, convincing her that she could confront the provocation head-on and escape in time.

I can't let her and that Celestial Worthy succeed… Besides, personally, I look forward to ending her myself rather than witnessing her being swallowed by that dangerous object… Lumian's eyes narrowed, the desire to teleport forward and intercept Mad Lady compelling him.

However, preventing a Traveler from reaching a specific location in such a manner was clearly impossible. Lumian hesitated, unwilling to genuinely approach the flesh-and-blood "bird's nest" deep within the tunnel.

Suddenly, an idea struck him.

The peculiar structure's rejection of outsiders seems to have lifted, and with Lato Guiaro, a person possessing a potent sea bloodline, deceased. Could I attempt to gain temporary authority as the Governor of the Sea to halt Mad Lady's progress?

With that in mind, Lumian embarked on his endeavor.

Activating the power of the sea within him, he allowed his Astral Projection to merge and swiftly expand outward.

Chapter 589: Object Within the Nest

589 Object Within the Nest

As Lumian's Astral Projection expanded with the power of the sea, he immediately sensed the presence of the "waters."

This wasn't a genuine ocean but a fantastical sea created by radiant starlight. At its core lay the projection of the silver-gray behemoth.

Empowered by an ample supply of the sea's power, Lumian's Astral Projection surged forward, merging seamlessly with the phantom.

A burning sensation radiated from the left side of his chest, as if some form of acknowledgment had been received.

His consciousness extended boundlessly, taking command of the dreamlike illusory sea.

In the course of this process, he glimpsed the phantoms of Juan Oro, Ultraman Lato Guiaro, and unfamiliar apparitions.

Those who have returned to the sea? They seem to have transformed into water droplets in the sea… Lumian withdrew his gaze from the joyful Juan Oro and the pained Lato Guiaro, redirecting it toward the depths of the tunnel ahead. From a considerable distance, he spotted Mad Lady.

The silver-gray behemoth harbored entities nurtured within the flesh and blood "bird's nest." With the Batings Black Insect, Little Devils, and other extraterrestrial life forms, it was inevitable that they coexisted in the spirit world. However, this spirit world was entirely severed from the external realm. Consequently, Beyonders skilled in summoning creatures from the spirit world for assistance found themselves bereft of their primary reliance. Teleportation executed through the spirit world, however, retained some semblance of normalcy. Departing directly, however, proved impossible. The only avenues were through the energy passageway at the entrance or by breaching the outer wall to connect the inner and outer spirit worlds.

Simultaneously, the closer one approached the flesh-and-blood "bird's nest," the more peculiar the spirit world became. It was as though the air gradually thickened, becoming almost tangible and impeding the approach of "birds."

In such an environment, coupled with the absence of a flesh-and-blood "bird's nest," Mad Lady found herself unable to teleport directly. Her only recourse was to Blink incrementally, expending her spirituality with each maneuver.

Having focused on Mad Lady and the space in front of her, Lumian suddenly extended his right hand and clenched it into a fist.

The air surrounding Mad Lady immediately grew dense, as if assuming a tangible form. This transformation caused the illusory curtain to bend, compressing the corresponding area into a dark and transparent sphere.

Once more, Mad Lady's form disappeared, but a formless force, shaped by the bending area, yanked her out and sent her plummeting.

Under the authority of the Governor of the Sea, the spirit world within the sphere and the spirit world within the silver-gray behemoth were forcibly separated!

However, this effect was contingent on the peculiar environment. In the external world, given Lumian's current level and mastery of the power of the sea, completely isolating an area from the expansive and genuine spirit world proved challenging. He could merely employ Cosmic Void to create an exit path and a door symbolizing an escape route, a tactic vulnerable to counteraction by a Traveler's abilities.

Mad Lady attempted another Blink, yet found herself unable to escape the dark sphere's confines.

She halted in place, seriously contemplating her Recorded abilities and the items in her possession that might alleviate her current predicament.

Observing her struggle, Lumian couldn't suppress his yearning for demigod-level powers.

As the temporary authority-wielding Governor of the Sea—essentially a faux demigod incapable of withstanding a single spell from the "Cinderella" demigod—Lumian had ensnared Mad Lady in an inescapable dilemma. She proved challenging even for Mr. K to subdue in a brief timeframe.

Mad Lady gazed into the depths of the metal tunnel, representing the flesh and blood "bird's nest," her face aglow with unrestrained eagerness, anticipation, and excitement.

Confined within the dark sphere, she yearned for escape, dissatisfied with her inability to reach the desired destination.

Head over there, quick! Head over there, quick!

I want to go over!

The longing in her heart intensified, nearly manifesting as a tangible desire.

The desire surged into her chest, seeking to rupture the restraints and liberate her from this predicament.

Mr. K, having switched to a Traveler's soul, swiftly caught up and saw Mad Lady.

Instinctively, an illusory book materialized in his dark eyes.

Positioned in front of Mr. K, the book flipped through its pages while chanting in a low voice, "I came, I saw, I record."

In an instant, Mr. K underwent a transformation, manifesting as a two to three-meter-tall half-giant donned in cold black armor, brandishing a dark, straight broadsword.

Having Grazed a Traveler, he had selected three Beyonder powers: Blink, Record, and the Traveler's Door, encompassing teleportation or travel. Additionally, with Record, he had acquired an ability capable of influencing godhood from a Saint of the Aurora Order. While only half as effective as the original, it proved sufficient to contend with Mad Lady, who had yet to approach the threshold of godhood.

Mr. K advanced confidently, wielding the dark, straight broadsword, prepared to strike.

At that moment, Mad Lady's chest was overwhelmed by an intense surge of desire.

Then, she experienced a sharp, piercing pain.

She didn't need to lower her head. From the corner of her eye, she witnessed the flesh on her chest tearing apart inch by inch, the white bones snapping one by one. A grayish-white fog, mingled with fragments of flesh, surged forth, coalescing into a humanoid figure resembling her. In an instant, it leaped out of the dark "sphere" created by Lumian and darted into the depths of the metal tunnel.

Don't be in a hurry to leave! Unfazed by the situation, Mad Lady's face reflected excitement and a hint of regret.

Pfft!

Mr. K's dark broadsword cleaved through the dark sphere, diagonally bisecting Mad Lady.

Wearing the ring imbued with flesh and blood magic, Mad Lady didn't succumb immediately. Her two halves of flesh and blood writhed, attempting to reunite, but all endeavors were obliterated by the profound darkness left in the wake of the broadsword. The flesh and blood failed to reestablish a connection.

Come on, come on… Mad Lady's relatively intact head sought to aid her body, but she swiftly perceived the annihilation of her soul.

Her vision darkened, and her unevenly separated bodies crumpled to the ground.

Unperturbed by the fate of the April Fool's key member, Mr. K and Lumian redirected their focus to the grayish-white figure hurtling into the depths of the metal tunnel.

Comprising half fog and half flesh, the figure existed in a realm between reality and illusion.

The temporary Governor of the Sea, Lumian, once again honed in on the target and its surroundings, intending to marshal every ounce of sea power at his disposal.

At that moment, the grayish-white figure collapsed to the ground.

The flesh and blood originally belonging to Mad Lady seeped into the metal floor, and the grayish-white fog was on the verge of being absorbed.

Abruptly, the entire tunnel trembled. Lumian once again "saw" the pear-shaped object fashioned from flesh and skin.

The flesh membrane on its surface buckled once more, outlining a disc-shaped contour.

A formidable suction force erupted. Whether Lumian—the temporary Governor of the Sea—or Mr. K, they found themselves irresistibly propelled into the depths of the metal tunnel, as if an invisible hand seized them and drew them toward the core of the silver-gray behemoth.

Mad Lady's dismembered corpse and her belongings soared into the air, propelled towards the destination she had fervently yearned for in life.

The humanoid form outlined by the grayish-white fog seeped deeper into the metal floor, absorbing a portion.

In that moment, Lumian, wielding the temporary authority of the Governor of the Sea, employed his enhanced perception to "see" the flesh-and-blood "bird's nest" deep within the metal tunnel more distinctly than before.

The pear-shaped object's flesh and skin caved in, and the starlight and dark matter emanating from the surrounding flesh ropes accelerated their flow.

Through the taut skin and flesh, Lumian vaguely sensed the object nurtured within the pear-shaped structure.

It resembled a pitch-black vortex capable of devouring all colors and light. While not overly large, it featured a disc-shaped outer edge.

Wh… Lumian instinctively recalled scientific concepts and simplified scenes his sister Aurore had once explained. He identified a term that matched his observations: A black hole!

Did the Abraham family's ancestor seal a black hole with Amon? A black hole that has yet to fully form and is still nurtured within a mother's body from a mystical standpoint? Lumian found the idea absurd, straddling the line between scientific and mystical.

Simultaneously, he sensed a connection between the "black hole"-like object and another place. A profound, weighty, dense, and terrifying aura loomed over the world.

With a buzzing sensation, Lumian teetered on the brink of losing consciousness. Not only was his physical form being drawn towards the flesh and blood "bird's nest," but even his thoughts, Spirit Body, and destiny converged in that direction.

It was the same for Mr. K.

One after another, Mad Lady's fragmented remains and a few belongings floated between them.

Beyond the silver-gray behemoth, Franca and the others felt an ominous suction emanating from the seabed. It seemed as though a colossal vortex was forming, ready to engulf everything in its vicinity.

Splash!

The mountainous azure waves and jade-green seawater collapsed, filling the seabed.

Abruptly, resplendent starlight descended from the sky.

Madam Magician materialized, adorned in a deep-black Warlock robe embroidered with shimmering silver stars.

The wielder of a Major Arcana card extended her right hand toward the silver-gray behemoth at the seabed. Her figure appeared in a state of overlap, intermittently clear and blurry.

Each radiant starlight transformed into an illusory door, seamlessly "melding" with the suction force, merging into the silver-gray behemoth.

Chapter 590: The Truth Behind the Seal

590 The Truth Behind the Seal

The surface of the massive silver-gray behemoth ignited with illusory doors, casting a star-like brilliance that darkened the sky above the sea.

This existing seal, triggered by Madam Magician, no longer resided in a nadir due to celestial shifts.

Starlight descended, swiftly repairing the temporary damage inflicted upon the seal.

Inside the behemoth, half of the grayish-white fog composing Mad Lady's human form was absorbed by the metal floor, appearing as if it would sink further.

In that crucial moment, starlight permeated the walls, floor, and ceiling, materializing resplendent doors of various shapes. These doors manipulated the void, thwarting the menacing suction and expelling the grayish-white fog.

Abruptly, Lumian felt the formidable suction force from the metal tunnel's depths dissipate.

He "saw" the dented flesh and blood "bird's nest" expanding again, releasing a copious amount of resplendent starlight.

The torrent surged through different parts of the silver-gray behemoth like a flood breaching a dam.

Lumian, Mr. K, Mad Lady's remains, and the items undulated with the sea's waves. As they were propelled forward, they encountered resistance and erosion from the sea's power.

Meanwhile, the fleshless, corporeal grayish-white phantom swayed in the vast starlight, growing fainter before gradually dissipating.

Unlike previous instances, the sea's power did not erupt from the ocean depths this time. Madam Magician had severed the energy passageway, successfully resealing and reinforcing the seal.

Madam Magician, her form seemingly illusory, raised her right hand and pointed at the betrothal ship and sailboat, her eyes mirroring the corresponding scene.

The two ships, along with Hela, Franca, the "Cinderella" demigod, the humanoid Sealed Artifact, the Maidens of the Sea, the remaining deputy hosts, and the sailors, vanished from the underwater cavity, instantly reappearing on the sunny, calm, turquoise sea beyond the seal.

Crash! Mountain-like azure waves and jade-green seawater resembling well walls slammed down, filling the underwater cavity.

Madam Magician's gaze then shifted to Lumian, Mr. K, Mad Lady's corpse, Pride Armor, and other items.

Just as she was about to relocate them, Lumian, still donning the Flog boxing gloves, suddenly felt a heavy, dense, terrifying, and brilliant aura "looking" at him from another place connected to the black hole in the flesh and blood "bird's nest."

Crack, crack. Lumian heard his bones shattering, his skull caving in, ribs snapping, and flesh compressing layer by layer.

After unleashing the Ascetic's accumulated strength, he, now taller, was instantly compressed into a short, thin, and dense form.

Intense pain flooded his mind, and his brain began to passively contract.

After a moment, Lumian broke free from the gaze and floated into the gradually calming air.

Before Madam Magician, an illusory book rapidly flipped, emitting a faint glow full of vitality. It bathed Lumian's body in light, reconstructing his broken bones and swiftly enlarging his compressed flesh, rescuing him from his near-death state.

Then, Madam Magician tossed Mad Lady's rose-gold ring embedded with the crimson gem to Lumian, allowing him to reassemble his flesh and blood and return to his original appearance. He was no longer a short, thin, and heavy peculiar human.

Simultaneously, in Port Santa, Loki's figure faded as he entered the spirit world, preparing to teleport away.

However, a dark, formless barrier appeared in front of him, blocking his path.

Loki's pupils dilated as he realized that at some point, he had been ensnared in a dark and transparent "sphere," seemingly bent from the void, with "walls" everywhere, and a hidden door.

High up in the spirit world—near the seven pure lights—Madam Magician hovered, adorned in a deep-black Warlock robe adorned with stars.

Loki's presence registered in her eyes, and an illusory book rapidly flipped before her.

She had strategically waited until the last moment to prevent Loki from receiving the Celestial Worthy's warning, providing her an opportunity to capture him alive.

Loki's lips curled into an exaggerated smile upon understanding the situation.

Rumble!

His body erupted from the inside out, as if a self-controlled bomb had been embedded in his flesh beforehand.

Loki's bizarre suicide succeeded; flesh and blood splattered, and his aura dissipated.

Madam Magician promptly lifted the seal on the area, capturing the information Loki had imprinted in the spirit world.

The spirit world served as a repository for all information. Divination often entailed revelations from the spirit world, and the matter of resurrection inevitably left corresponding information.

As long as she found relevant information in time, Madam Magician could trace Loki to his resurrection spot and pinpoint the ancient castle documented in the Secret Order records.

Soon, Madam Magician obtained something.

Her figure vanished from the spirit world's heights, navigating the endless darkness adorned with symbols.

In the next moment, a vast grayish-white fog materialized before her eyes.

Magician halted, gazing at the seemingly endless expanse of grayish-white fog.

…

Under the silent, dusky sky, above the calm blue sea.

Using Mad Lady's ring embedded with a crimson gem, Lumian adjusted his internal organs, flesh, and bones to their original state.

Treading on the corporeal wind, Lumian removed the ring that enabled the use of flesh and blood magic and anxiously inquired of Madam Magician, "How's the situation on the other two fronts?"

As he spoke, he sensed a mystical and indiscernible flicker from Madam Magician.

Magician smiled.

"Loki has just been killed by me, but I couldn't prevent his resurrection or seize the opportunity to locate his ancient castle.

"Bard has been captured by Gandalf, whom you intentionally sent to Milo Village. He's alive."

Phew… Lumian instinctively heaved a sigh of relief.

Though he hadn't captured Loki, wasting one more of Loki's resurrections meant he had achieved his objectives.

Furthermore, Ultraman and Mad Lady had been completely eliminated, and Bard had been captured alive. The results were satisfactory.

Initially, Lumian hadn't confirmed Bard's identity. He didn't even know if Bard had participated in the sea prayer ritual. However, he had a few suspects, including the fake Governor of the Sea and Juan Oro's grandson, Fernandez. Since most of the suspects were in Milo Village, he had Gandalf closely monitor them.

Madam Magician continued, "I relocated everyone else from these waters. I sent Mr. K of the Aurora Order back to his rented room in Port Santa. Mad Lady's corpse and items are floating here."

The Major Arcana card holder opened her palm, shrouded in darkness, forming a small box. Inside, Mad Lady's dismembered corpse and other items had "shrunk" to the size of mosquitoes, drifting as if in another world.

Lumian was taken aback. He looked at the bottom of the azure sea and asked, "Is it over?"

He had anticipated gaining control over the silver-gray behemoth eventually.

"Otherwise? Back then, even two Kings of Angels couldn't clean up the mess. How is our Tarot Club going to handle it—unless Mr. Fool awakens," Madam Magician replied in an amused tone.

Lumian recollected the items in the flesh and blood "bird's nest" and nodded in agreement.

He asked in confusion, "Is it true that sealed at the bottom is a black hole? Uh… Do you know what a black hole is?"

"I do," Madam Magician chuckled. "And I also know that the silver-gray thing down there is a spaceship."

Spaceship… Lumian was taken aback.

Upon reflection, he realized that the silver-gray behemoth bore a striking resemblance to the spaceship described in his sister's bedtime stories!

Madam Magician not only knew about spaceships but also grasped the concept of a black hole!

Never underestimate high-ranking individuals. The time-transcending knowledge possessed by transmigrators might not be foreign to them… Lumian sighed with emotion.

At that moment, he noticed that Madam Magician's mystical flickering had vanished.

The Major Arcana card holder gazed at the seabed and explained, "It's a black hole, ready to form, personally created by an evil god. Constantly absorbing surrounding matter and energy, it strengthens itself, eventually becoming a true black hole.

"In the Fourth Epoch, the evil god seized an opportunity to send the embryonic black hole through the spaceship at the bottom of the sea. The plan was for it to rapidly develop, tear apart, and devour our planet, causing the barrier to lose support and disintegrate prematurely. True gods and angels could escape, but without the barrier's protection, who knows what would happen.

"Fortunately, Mr. Door and Amon discovered the threat in time and took action. Yet, They couldn't obliterate the already developing black hole. Any attempts to destroy or destabilize it would only make it stronger. The only viable solution was to seal it and patiently wait for it to weaken through repeated radiations until it ultimately evaporates.

"Alternatively, they could transport it and the spaceship into the cosmos, abandoning it in desolate areas. However, this would require Mr. Door to leave the safety of the barrier and shadow the threat continuously to prevent accidents. Moreover, it remained under the vigilant gaze of that entity, which periodically replenished its energy through their connection. The danger was evident."

That explains it… Lumian finally grasped why it had been sealed rather than destroyed.

Intrigued, he echoed a term, "Mr. Door?"

It bore a striking resemblance to Mr. Fool.

Chapter 591: Information Gap

591 Information Gap

Upon hearing Lumian's inquiry, Madam Magician's tone carried a subtle emotion.

"Mr. Door is the ancestor of the Abraham family, the top duke among the five great nobles of the Tudor Empire. It was He who sealed this spaceship. Amon, on the other hand, designed the ritual that regularly siphoned power from the black hole to alleviate the pressure caused by the natural decay of the seal and hasten the black hole's demise."

Higher in rank than Amon… In the Tudor Empire, Mr. Door was second only to the Blood Emperor? He listened intently.

Madam Magician sighed softly at that moment.

"In a way, Mr. Door can be considered my mentor."

A mentor? Your mentor is a Fourth Epoch King of Angels and the top noble in the Tudor Empire? A figure from almost two thousand years ago… Lumian hadn't anticipated Madam Magician having such a profound background.

No wonder she earned the position of the Angel of Stars beside Mr. Fool's throne. No wonder she held a Major Arcana card in the Tarot Club!

Madam Magician glanced at Lumian, teasingly adding, "It's true that Mr. Door guided and 'supervised' me in advancing along the divine path, but the method wasn't as virtuous as you might imagine. It was far from good."

Far from good… Lumian was surprised before connecting the dots.

Combining his experiences, he made a guess.

Madam Magician had once fallen under the corruptive influence of Mr. Door but received assistance from Mr. Fool. Did she join the Tarot Club because of this?

However, from Madam Magician's words, it seems she reconciled with Mr. Door? Otherwise, she wouldn't refer to Him as her mentor. How intriguing and surreal. Just like how I might say in the future that the Angel of Inevitability, Termiboros, was my mentor, Lumian mused inwardly and probed, "Is Mr. Door still active?"

Is He as lively as His peer, Amon?

Madam Magician shook her head.

"He has perished."

I see… Lumian cast his gaze toward the deep, bottomless sea.

"April Fool's objective is to acquire that spaceship? But it seems they are unaware of the nascent black hole sealed inside…"

It was a formidable entity that not even a true god could completely neutralize. Once released from its seal and allowed to develop, it would compress and absorb everything in its vicinity. Why did the key members of April Fool's, who weren't even at the demigod level, believe they could confront it without fear?

Relying on the spaceship to contain it? That seemed improbable. Only the evil god who created the black hole or an entity at Mr. Fool's level could control it…

Mad Lady even believed that within the seal was an incubating deity or monster of a comparable magnitude…

With these thoughts in mind, Lumian's heart stirred as he inquired in a deep voice, "Were the key members of April Fool's misled? Is the Celestial

Worthy's objective to unleash the black hole and trigger an apocalyptic catastrophe ahead of schedule?

"As long as Beyonders corrupted by Him enter the spaceship, He stands a chance of achieving His goal?"

He really doesn't seem to value the lives of Ultraman, Mad Lady, Bard, and Loki…

However, that is also typical of April Fool's modus operandi. They don't take lives other than their own seriously!

Lumian suddenly felt like laughing. His satisfaction from finishing off Ultraman and Mad Lady intensified.

Madam Magician nodded thoughtfully and remarked, "If you hadn't used all your resources and handled this matter with absolute strength, or if I had arrived ten to twenty seconds later and the grayish-white fog from Mad Lady's body had fully permeated the spaceship, the outcome might have been entirely different. We wouldn't be able to be here and discuss this matter so calmly."

Lumian reflected on the events that had transpired and muttered thoughtfully to himself, "If I hadn't gained temporary authority as the Governor of the Sea and restricted Mad Lady's teleportation, she might have approached the flesh-and-blood 'bird's nest' incubating the black hole before your arrival. She wouldn't have manifested a humanoid form made of grayish-white fog to infiltrate the spacecraft. If that had occurred, the situation might have been even more challenging to handle…"

The reason he obtained temporary authority as the Governor of the Sea was because he utilized Lie to pilfer a portion of the sea's power. This allowed him to resonate with the sea and possess a counterfeit yet highly elevated status.

The ability to use Lie to steal a portion of the sea's power was granted by the Seer pathway's mystical item, which had been imbued with a high-level power of Steal when placed on the ancestor-honoring altar in Milo Village.

The altar could bestow high-level Steal powers on items because it was constructed by Amon… Constructed by Amon…

Lumian's thoughts suddenly cleared up. He grasped that it wasn't just him and the others sabotaging April Fool's; there were also influential figures in the shadows who didn't want the Celestial Worthy to succeed!

Madam Magician chuckled.

"Have you figured it out? I recognized what was happening when I saw Lie, now endowed with the power of Steal.

"Some time ago, I spied on the altar beneath Milo Village and confirmed its purpose—to gather the spirituality of worshippers and accumulate enough power to trigger the bestowment of the Steal ability. Given Milo Village's population and the number of individuals with the sea bloodline, it can only be bestowed once a year. It can't last more than half a month each time, and it can only be used once or twice.

"Lie's enhanced power far surpasses that."

Lumian furrowed his brow and asked, "Are you suggesting that the 'Steal' on Lie was directly granted by Amon?"

This hypothesis struck him as absurd, comical, and surreal.

In the past few months, Amon had been a source of terror, causing him mental distress. He nearly perished in the Samaritan Women's Spring. Subsequently, he informed the Tarot Club and aided the Angel of Time in eliminating most of the Amons in Trier. He also wrested a substantial debt from Amon's parasitic form.

Their relationship? It was one of deep-seated enmity! The sentiment was likely mutual.

Yet now, he was being told that Amon had covertly assisted him?

While Lumian understood that Amon's aid wasn't driven by benevolence but rather to thwart the Celestial Worthy's objectives, he couldn't shake the feeling that the world had taken a bizarre turn.

Madam Magician chuckled and explained, "Perhaps, back then, there was an Amon residing within the altar.

"Truth be told, I didn't anticipate that those who once instilled awe, fear, and vigilance in our discussions would occasionally collaborate with us. Of course, don't become complacent. While we may be teammates when facing the evil gods beyond the barrier, that doesn't extend to all matters. Even when dealing with the evil god's followers, it depends on the specific circumstances. They might believe they can handle it alone and use the opportunity to set a trap that could harm you."

"Alright…" Lumian resisted belief, but he had no choice but to acknowledge the reality before him. The truth was laid bare.

Having been briefed, Lumian mentally reconstructed the sea prayer ritual, refining the spiderweb-like thought pattern without any critical deficiencies.

The corresponding experiences and lessons surfaced in Lumian's mind:

April Fool's biggest failure was not knowing that Franca and I are also members of the Tarot Club, apart from being part of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society. Moreover, the Tarot Club places great importance on matters related to the Celestial Worthy…

There's also an information gap between them and the Celestial Worthy, leading to their downfall…

Have they not considered that their goals might not align with the Celestial Worthy's?

Despite me lacking information as well, I wasn't careless. I didn't underestimate any visible or hidden enemies. Even a lion uses its full strength to hunt a rabbit…

Of course, the crucial aspect is that those holding key information and concealing it are on my side in this operation. What if they become my enemies next time? How should I deal with them…

As these thoughts raced through his mind, Lumian sensed that his digestion of the Conspirer potion had significantly advanced, thanks to the successful hunt and the questions he had formulated. Seizing this opportunity, he summarized his third acting principle: "One of the keys to a conspiracy is information. A good Conspirer must be adept at exploiting information gaps and even take the initiative to create information gaps."

Closing his eyes to assess his body's condition, Lumian felt that another major, successful conspiracy and a period of daily accumulation should allow him to completely digest the Conspirer potion.

And that major conspiracy could be combined with the ritual to advance to Sequence 5 Reaper. No further planning was needed.

The Reaper ritual required a conspiracy to capture a target whose Sequence was higher than his—alive.

When Lumian opened his eyes, Madam Magician transmitted the darkness in her palm to him.

"You'll be in charge of distributing these items. This is something a Hunter needs to learn and do well to advance to a demigod."

"Alright." Lumian was accustomed to distributing spoils of war.

He then added, "But before that, I'd like to meet Bard."

That, too, was a spoil of war.

…

In the ancient and dilapidated palace in the Nation of the Evernight, Lumian, Franca, Hela, and Gandalf materialized one after another.

They were adorned in their usual attire for Gatherings, with Lumian now assuming the guise of Muggle Aurore.

Gandalf unceremoniously tossed Bard to the ground, not bothering to restrain him.

Bard surveyed the familiar surroundings, devoid of any notions of escape or resistance.

This was the concealed Nation of the Evernight, isolated from the outside world. How could he possibly flee?

And against two demigods, how could he even attempt resistance?

Bard swallowed hard and spoke preemptively, "I was also bewitched by Loki!"

All he could hope for now was that, leveraging his Sequence experience as a Swindler, he could successfully "convince" the two demigods.

Noticing the silence from Hela and Gandalf, Bard added, "I can lead you to Loki's ancient castle. I know a clue, really!"

At that moment, Lumian Lee, masquerading as Muggle, spoke in a deep voice, "Just kill him and channel his spirit."

Chapter 592: Bluff

592 Bluff

Kill him and channel his spirit?

Bard stared at Lumian Lee, masquerading as a Muggle, a chill running down his spine as his hair stood on end.

He sensed the unmistakable killing intent emanating from Lumian, causing fear to grip him.

However, a suspicion lingered in Bard's mind; he believed Lumian was trying to manipulate him, deliberately showcasing his anger and hatred to break his psychological defenses.

His suspicion arose because spirit channeling wasn't the optimal solution.

Celestial Worthy possessed a higher level than many evil gods, and the corruption of those evil gods could lead to a failed spirit channeling, what's more someone with the Celestial Worthy's bestowment.

Recognizing this, Bard's heart settled.

As a Swindler, he maintained a terrified expression, stepping back two paces as he looked at Lumian.

"I'll spill it all, no lies. You can verify it! Don't kill me!"

Lumian approached him step by step, brandishing a dagger.

Bard turned to Hela, Gandalf, and Franca, pleading in a "panicked" tone, "He's lost his mind, and you're just going to let him be? Spirit channeling isn't all-powerful!"

Bard deliberately used "him" as a pronoun, signaling that he knew Lumian wasn't Muggle, as if urging them not to play along.

In two steps, Lumian arrived in front of Bard, casting his gaze at the April Fool's key member, who couldn't temporarily change his appearance back. He raised the dagger in his hand.

Bard sneered inwardly, growing more convinced that Lumian Lee wouldn't actually end his life for spirit channeling—at least not yet.

If his current actions weren't an act, Gandalf and Hela would have intervened no matter what. They wouldn't just stand by!

Bard strained his throat and shouted, as if terrorized, "I'll genuinely cooperate with you! I'll assist you in locating Loki and his ancient castle! See, I didn't even use my powers to resist in such a situation!"

As Bard shouted, he fixed his gaze on Lumian and the dagger's tip, attempting to convey evasion and pleading through his eyes. The former conveyed fear, and the latter was a plea for mercy.

Throughout this process, Bard's heart was filled with mockery, almost void of panic.

Trying to deceive a Swindler?

What a ludicrous notion!

I bet you'll stop after I count to five!

Five, four, three…

Pfft!

Bard's vision suddenly turned blood-red as the dagger thrust into his left eye, piercing through the gap in the eye socket and into his brain.

Impossible!

Absolutely impossible!

Is he truly going to kill me?

Intense pain overwhelmed Bard's mind, prompting him to instinctively raise his right hand and press it against his face. He fought in the opposite direction, striving to put some distance between himself and the dagger, the source of the agonizing damage.

Lumian reached out with his left hand, pinning Bard in place and making his struggles futile.

Then, Lumian leaned forward slightly and whispered into the ear of the April Fool's key member.

Bard glimpsed Muggle's beautiful face, her rosy lips moving as she whispered

—a whisper filled with satisfaction and mockery, "My godson has gnawed on half of Loki's arm and knows a lot about him. I believe that knowledge surpasses yours…"

Surpasses mine… If I had known earlier, I would have utilized my powers… Even in the midst of pain and struggle, Bard was momentarily stunned, feeling frustration, despair, and embarrassment.

Soon, these emotions dissipated. Lumian gripped the dagger embedded in Bard's eye socket and twisted it a few times, crushing the frontal lobe.

Observing Bard, who had now calmed down, Lumian nodded in satisfaction. He withdrew his dagger and earnestly assisted the other party in stemming the bleeding and bandaging the wound, though he skipped the disinfectant.

Only then did Franca approach and click her tongue.

"I thought you were just scaring him."

That's why she didn't intervene. She had watched as Lumian advanced toward Bard, dagger in hand, witnessing Bard's pleas for mercy.

She believed Hela and Gandalf had similar expectations.

When the dagger pierced Bard's eye socket, Franca was taken aback. It was only then that she realized Lumian was serious!

No, Lumian didn't truly intend to kill Bard. Instead, he planned to employ the April Fool's created prank to deal with him, recreating the original state of I Know Someone.

Without waiting for Lumian's response, Franca asked curiously, "When did you master lobotomy?"

Lumian wiped the blood off the dagger with a white strap and smirked mockingly.

"I learned it from watching the doctor perform surgery on I Know Someone.

"It's such a simple procedure. As a Beyonder skilled in action, if I can't memorize and imitate it after watching it once, it only proves that my brain has been corrupted by the potion."

Impersonating Muggle, Lumian deliberately spoke in his sister's voice, as if she were still alive.

Franca looked at Aurore's face under the hood and listened to her voice. She wasn't angered by the mockery. She only muttered, "The surgery isn't just about inserting and stirring a few times. There are still many key points before and after the procedure. Even during the surgery, if you insert it just a bit deeper, the outcome will be entirely different."

"So be it. If he really dies, we'll commence the spirit channeling." Lumian casually poured the remaining truth serum into the mouth of the stunned Bard, who offered no resistance.

After completing this task, he added, "Madam Hela mentioned that this place can minimize the influence of evil gods."

"It's only minimal, not zero. Besides, what if the problem lies in his spirit, and he self-destructs?" Franca instinctively retorted. This was why Hela hadn't directly pulled Bard into a dream to extract his true answers. After all, the dream might present scenes that shouldn't be seen. This was even more dangerous than simple verbal descriptions.

Only then did Gandalf, draped in a linen robe and a hood, sigh softly.

He couldn't bear to witness Bard's suffering, but he didn't discourage the actions taken. He wasn't the one who had been harmed by April Fool's. He wasn't in a position to criticize the victim's family for their extreme actions.

Before this operation, Hela had briefed Gandalf on Muggle's demise and Lumian Lee's role. The president of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society sympathized with the siblings' plight, but he also blamed himself. He believed that the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society had been unrestrained. As president, he bore a heavy responsibility.

After a moment, Bard, who had undergone a "requiem" and gradually recovered from his pain, started addressing the queries of the people present.

The first to inquire was Gandalf. He peered down at the Dream Stealer and asked, "How did you come to believe in that Celestial Worthy?"

Gandalf and Hela had already gathered intel on Celestial Worthy from Franca and Lumian, and they deemed it crucial.

Bard responded calmly, "From the beginning. I used to be a cultural relic thief and acquired a batch of ancient items. While studying their history to ascertain their value, I deciphered the meaning of some inscriptions…"

Abruptly, Hela cut Bard's narration short and said coldly,

"You don't have to explain the full meaning. Just mention a few keywords."

Bard had no intention of arguing. He remained as docile as a sheep.

"Keywords include: Deception, Fooling, Door of All Doors, Lord of Mysteries…

As Bard finished speaking, the ancient palace they were in suddenly became misty and unclear.

Simultaneously, Lumian's left chest burned again.

In the next moment, the night sky outside the palace darkened even more, and all the mist vanished.

"Why did I feel like worms were growing in me just now?" Franca felt a lingering fear.

Merely a few names, incomplete honorific names, made her inexplicably uneasy. Every inch of her flesh seemed to come alive, about to transform into worms crawling out of her skin.

One of Bard's initial plans was to answer Lumian and company's questions dishonestly and without reservation. Then, he would take the initiative to reveal all the details regarding Celestial Worthy. He wanted to see if he could secretly corrupt his enemies and shake the Nation of the Evernight's concealments to create a "door" to escape.

"If I could really use this to corrupt Gandalf and Hela, why would they kill me when we're all Celestial Worthy believers? We would definitely work together to deal with Lumian Lee!"

Of course, Bard no longer harbored such thoughts. He had obtained an inevitable peace.

"Descriptions of high-level existences often indicate danger. In this world, ignorance might not be a bad thing." Gandalf sighed and assessed what had just happened.

He then inquired about the follow-up.

Bard's expression remained unchanged as he said, "After deciphering the words, I lost consciousness. When I woke up, I had already transmigrated to this world.

"After adapting to my new body, I instinctively recalled my previous encounters and the words I had deciphered. Then, I saw a thin gray fog emanating from my surroundings and received a revelation from the Celestial Worthy.

"In other words, you believed in that Celestial Worthy as soon as you transmigrated, before the establishment of the Research Society?" Gandalf probed further.

"Yes." Bard's emotions lacked any fluctuations. "Back then, I thought that if I didn't choose to submit, believe in Him, or follow Him, I might die on the spot. When that happened, I might not have a chance to transmigrate and revive. Later, I gradually realized His greatness. He could even fool the Nation of the Evernight and prevent our problems from being discovered."

Gandalf pondered for a moment and asked, "How did Loki come to believe in that Celestial Worthy?"

Chapter 593: Fooled

593 Fooled

In response to Gandalf's question, Bard recounted the past with a directness that left little room for ambiguity.

"I don't know. He didn't tell me. After the founding of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society, I began to notice the guy's actions and demeanor mirroring the influence of the Celestial Worthy. Likewise, he saw the same in me, prompting a mutual inquiry. Eventually, we confirmed each other's intentions, and assembled an April Fool's team."

Gandalf and Hela probed about the Celestial Worthy, but with no breakthroughs, Lumian, disguised as a Muggle, shifted his gaze to Bard and asked, "What was your crew's aim in disrupting the sea prayer ritual?"

"To control the underwater spaceship. It's our ticket to traversing the cosmos and holding our ground against Angels to some extent…" Bard revealed April Fool's plan.

Lumian's lips curved upward.

"Do you know what's sealed in the depths of that spaceship?"

At this revelation, Franca suddenly grasped the core issue.

Spaceship?

The thing at the bottom of Port Santa is a spaceship?

Isn't this too sci-fi and not mystical enough?

Does this world have everything?

To expedite the interrogation of Bard, a key member of April Fool's, Lumian and Franca had entered the Nation of the Evernight without much communication.

"Spaceship…" Gandalf echoed the term, his tone brimming with unmistakable yearning.

Hela maintained a silence akin to the depths of night.

Bard responded to Lumian's inquiry, "According to our interpretation of the language and the insights from the Celestial Worthy, that spacecraft functions as both a petri dish and an incubation chamber. It's nurturing a high-level creature. Control the spaceship, and you control it. Without that control, the spacecraft alone won't stand a chance against an Angel."

The smile of "Aurore" became even more alluring.

"Ever wondered why the ancient Angel who sealed the spaceship didn't take control of it? Why didn't They command the high-level creature or destroy it outright?"

Bard fell silent momentarily before articulating, "It might take a considerable time for the high-level creature to mature. Taking control of the spaceship would halt everything. Patience is required until the recent few years—just before the creature is due—before it can be managed."

Lumian's smile beneath the hood grew brighter.

"If that's the case, the ancient Angel who sealed the high-level creature will definitely reappear. Did you have the confidence to resist an Angel and win the spaceship? Or do you believe the Angel either didn't try to decipher or couldn't decipher the true meaning of those commands?"

"It's been so many years—They might have already perished…" Bard paused.

In his dream, a creature on the altar, potentially the avatar of an ancient Angel, hinted that the Angel might still be observing Milo Village and those waters.

"Why didn't we think to confirm it before embarking on the entire plan…" Bard voiced his doubts, his emotions showing no apparent shifts.

Lumian replied with a smile, "I can tell you that the spaceship isn't sealed with a high-level creature. It's an incomplete, nascent black hole. Once unsealed and piloted away, it will absorb the mystical body housing it, suck you guys in, and completely take shape, tearing apart and devouring the current world.

"Back then, the ancient Angels didn't attempt to control it because it was dangerous, idiot!"

Bard was once again taken aback, as if he had never considered such a possibility.

After a moment, he hesitated and said, "We… might have… been fooled…"

Though Bard's emotions remained unchanging, the blood-colored liquid that trickled from the simple bandage down the bridge of his nose painted a tragic and mournful picture.

Lumian burst into laughter, his back bending slightly.

"Do you only now realize that you've all been fooled by that Celestial Worthy? He provided revelations to mislead you. Through your deaths, He could open the seal and destroy this world to achieve His goals!

"Haha, April Fool's, indeed an organization of fools!"

Bard fell into silence once more, then candidly expressed his thoughts.

"We're fools, truly fools…"

Meanwhile, Gandalf and the others had varied reactions.

Dammit, a black hole? Destroy this world? Franca had thought the news of a spaceship was explosive enough, but she hadn't expected something even more terrifying to follow.

And an entity creating a black hole?

Franca, lacking direct understanding of top-level powers, realized the magnitude of such a great existence.

Previously, she felt she had a sufficient understanding of the world. Now, she admitted frankly, I'm still a f*cking elementary school student!

Gandalf took a deep breath and said, "If I become a god, it would be so convenient for me to conduct research… Black holes…"

Hela retrieved a metal flask from her black widow clothes and took a sip, her thoughts inscrutable.

Lumian's laughter echoed for a moment, providing a brief respite. However, underlying pain still gripped his heart, resonating in the shadows within. It couldn't be eradicated or dismissed.

In the presence of the key members of April Fool's, memories of his sister Aurore's tragic fate couldn't be ignored.

Bard stood there, a silent reminder of a fact deliberately overlooked.

Hence, Lumian couldn't help but utter, "kill him and channel his spirit," resorting to action in a half-truth manner.

Looking at Bard, Lumian inquired, "Do you know if Ultraman and Mad Lady have been to Cordu?"

"Yes," replied Bard. "Part of our original plan was to find Nolfi's child, the sea maid. She lived in Intis's Riston Province. A stopover at Cordu was intended to confirm Muggle's situation and the final outcome of the prank."

At the mention of "prank," a vein on Lumian's forehead throbbed.

"How could you be so sure that Muggle was already dead?"

Hearing Lumian, disguised as a Muggle, pose this question, Gandalf let out another inaudible sigh. Franca sighed inwardly.

Bard shook his head.

"I'm unsure. Mad Lady and Ultraman went. They informed me the village was wiped out. No chance for anyone to make it out alive. They might have even employed divination, spirit channeling, and such to be sure."

"Impossible for anyone to survive?" Lumian smiled. "Am I not human?"

Bard glanced at him and spoke his mind.

"You might not even pass as human anymore."

That's not wrong. I'm now a humanoid Sealed Artifact with self-awareness and fate… Lumian made a self-deprecating remark before adding, "The number of survivors is greater than you can imagine. A certain madame, her husband, butler, and maidservant had fled."

Without giving Bard a chance to respond, Lumian inquired further,

"What was Loki trying to achieve with the Muggle incident?"

"I wasn't deeply involved. Just tossed in a few ideas; not much in the loop," Bard admitted honestly. "Ultraman might have a clue. He and Loki teamed up in other ventures."

"In what ventures?" Lumian persisted.

Bard shook his head slowly.

"Not entirely sure about the specifics. It's tied to the Eternal Blazing Sun Church."

Connected to the Eternal Blazing Sun Church? Ultraman, a Sequence 5 Priest of Light on the Sun pathway… The humanoid Sealed Artifact lost by the church on the betrothal ship… Lumian's instincts kicked in.

"Any key April Fool's members that are not transmigrators?"

They had previously misconstrued April Fool's as a gang of degenerated transmigrators. Yet, as an organization, it naturally expanded.

After all these years, April Fool's likely harbored more key members!

Bard nodded.

"Yes."

As expected… Lumian shot a glance at Franca, garbed in Assassin attire, seeking confirmation from Bard.

"One of them is a Purifier from the Eternal Blazing Sun Church, and he holds a decent status?"

"Yes," Bard confirmed again. "Thanks to him, we got wind of a Grade 1 Sealed Artifact we could utilize when we altered our plan. He even assisted in its escape from the seal."

"And who might this person be?" Franca inquired, stepping in for the absent 007.

"It's a one-way line to Loki," Bard indicated, revealing his lack of knowledge about the member's true identity.

Franca chuckled, saying, "If the Eternal Blazing Sun Church launches an inquiry, they might stumble upon some leads."

Grade 1 Sealed Artifacts weren't just lying around. They couldn't be pilfered casually!

Lumian, noting Gandalf and Hela had no more queries, turned to Bard.

"What intel do you have on Loki's ancient castle?"

"It goes by the name Dylan—a charming name," Bard began. "Loki once told me it's a concealed ancient castle. Impossible to discover or see under normal circumstances. In simpler terms, you can't pinpoint its location through appearance or history.

"I've always envied Loki inheriting such a treasure after transmigration—an ancient castle. Later, he relied on the Celestial Worthy's revelation and the corresponding boon to succeed. I once tried to swindle Castle Dylan for myself, but I failed."

Chapter 594: Execution

594 Execution

Franca almost chuckled in exasperation at Bard's remark.

April Fool's not only deceived outsiders but also themselves. If they didn't believe in Celestial Worthy, cooperation wouldn't be on the table.

Bard delved into his knowledge about Castle Dylan.

"That ancient castle used to be the domain of a secret organization known as the Secret Order. Loki became a member of the organization when he transmigrated. The story goes that the initial leader of the Secret Order personally constructed the ancient castle and concealed it over a century ago."

Curious, Franca inquired, "Who's leading the Secret Order now?"

Bard shook his head slowly.

"Loki is in the dark about that too. Only those who've become Bizarro Sorcerers or Sequence 4 demigods within the Secret Order can meet the leader and establish a connection with him. Others merely follow the orders of their direct superiors.

"Loki once contemplated murdering his mentor, his immediate superior in the Secret Order, to gain the Bizarro Sorcerer Beyonder characteristic and stage a grand performance. Yet, due to his comprehension and fear of Bizarro Sorcerers, he never solidified this idea into a concrete plan. Eventually, he gathered all the Bizarro Sorcerer potion ingredients in Castle Dylan and entirely abandoned his initial scheme.

"Do you think a hidden place like Castle Dylan, with its long history, would be quiet, cold, and sinister? Contrary to expectations, Loki informed me that it's quite lively, featuring a grand performance every day."

A grand performance… Hela recalled the pitch-black ancient castle she had glimpsed in Loki's dream, along with the wax-statue-like guests inside.

Deep in thought, Lumian asked Bard, "How do you suggest we locate Castle Dylan?"

"I'm still missing crucial clues," Bard admitted sincerely. "If finding Castle Dylan were that straightforward, the current leader of the Secret Order would have seized it and ousted Loki. No, he would've turned Loki into his puppet."

Lumian intended to inquire more thoroughly with Ludwig later, seeking any information he might have gained after consuming half of Loki's arm.

"What about Hisoka? What insights do you have on Hisoka?" Lumian inquired.

Bard seemed to recollect something.

"That guy doesn't quite fit in. He prefers going solo. The rare instances of collaboration are mostly with Mad Lady.

"We all sense his emotions are pretty unpredictable, swinging between joy and anger. Mad Lady, however, remarked that he's not pure enough.

"He's highly dangerous—on par with Loki. His specific path remains a mystery. I've witnessed him using his abilities twice, both times involving mystical items. It's a poker card that can change its face, showcasing the attributes of Frost and Cut respectively. Word has it that Hisoka sought out an Artisan outside the Research Society to customize it after hunting a Beyonder."

Regrettably, Mad Lady is dead, and there's no means to commune with her spirit. She undoubtedly held more information about Hisoka… Does not being pure enough mean that Hisoka isn't as unhinged as he appears? Is his occasional madness a deliberate facade? Lumian pondered with a twinge of regret.

Even though Lumian had obtained Mad Lady's remains, her spirit had been severely corrupted by Celestial Worthy. Some of it had even been "washed away" by the power of the sea, completely obliterated.

Lumian sighed quietly and shifted the conversation to a different topic.

"Do you have insights into the sea's power on Ultraman?"

"Indeed." Bard shared his findings candidly. "I played a role in deciphering the extraterrestrial language, although the Celestial Worthy provided crucial revelations. Additionally, the power of the sea is not exclusive to the offspring of Port Santa. I once encountered two heretics in Lenburg with similar abilities, and I managed to extract corresponding knowledge from them.

"This information greatly aided my decryption efforts, revealing that this pathway is not solely tied to the sea. In fact, only a small portion of it involves the sea.

"The power primarily emanates from the stars and the land beneath our feet. As you all are aware, our world is, after all, a planet.

"The corresponding Sequence 9 is known as Astronomy Aficionado. It focuses on acquiring knowledge of the cosmos, related information, an initial perception of reality, and enhancing one's physique.

"Sequence 8, named Star Worshiper, can decipher the Star Language or the Language of the Stars and receive insights into fate.

"Sequence 7, called Star Sacrificer, gains true powers through sacrificial rituals involving the stars. This encompasses Gravity Abnormality, Weakening Ray, Electromagnetic Attraction, and Cosmic Void.

"Sequence 6 is Navigator. They possess a deeper understanding of space and dimensions, allowing them to locate hidden passageways in the void and navigate and adjust routes between the stars. Navigating ships at sea becomes a straightforward task for them.

"Sequence 5, Tidal Scholar, further masters gravity and can whip up massive waves capable of shattering ships and demolishing docks.

"As for Sequence 4, it's known as Heavybringer. Unfortunately, I'm not too certain about their specific abilities."

Lumian remained silent, taking a couple of steps back and signaling for Franca and the others to continue questioning.

His primary concern centered around Loki's connection to Hisoka; anything else seemed less crucial.

Franca studied Bard for a moment before inquiring, "Have you recruited other members into April Fool's?"

"Yes," Bard admitted without hesitation.

After detailing what he knew about the April Fool's members outside the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society, Franca asked with curiosity, "Why did you choose the nickname Bard? Considering your past identity and current class, wouldn't Kaitō or Kid be more fitting?"

Bard responded calmly, "My current body was a bard, a wandering artist who often dabbled in thievery and swindling. He met his end when discovered trying to cheat others out of their money, suffering a severe beating."

Cheat, swindle, and steal—Franca thought. You know everything; it suits you quite well.

Franca turned to Hela and Gandalf, stating, "I have no further questions."

"Neither do I," Gandalf acknowledged, recognizing that Bard's life was approaching its end.

Muggle's brother wouldn't let him off the hook!

"Neither do I," Hela added.

Lumian raised his right hand, generating a dark-green glow at his fingertips.

The light transformed into a strange ray, penetrating Bard's chest.

Weakening Ray!

Lumian still had access to a week's worth of sea power, approaching the level of Sequence 5.

Bard's face contorted, muscles and nerves reacting instinctively.

His chest, close to his neck, rapidly melted and peeled, exposing the flesh beneath.

Seeing this, Gandalf sighed again.

Gandalf sighed, condensing a straight sword with Sunrise Gleam and driving it towards Bard.

The light blade impaled Bard's head, and he crumpled to the ground with a thud, held down by the sword.

Bard writhed like a skinned insect, convulsing as life left his body.

Lumian observed in silence, refraining from intervening as Gandalf freed Bard.

When Bard's breath ceased, and he lay motionless, Lumian turned to Gandalf and Hela.

"Thank you for your assistance."

"It's our duty. We're all accountable for the harm April Fool's caused to the other members of the Research Society," Gandalf responded gravely.

Lumian didn't contest. Instead, he disclosed, "Before the operation, I mentioned joining a secret organization before assuming my sister's identity. To seek revenge, I invited members of that secret organization to assist. I believe you all have seen or sensed their presence."

He strategically linked the appearance of the Tarot Club to himself, safeguarding Franca's identity as a Minor Arcana card holder.

"And which organization is that?" Gandalf inquired curiously.

As per Hela's account, the secret organization exhibited Angel-level power, and the demigod "Cinderella" who appeared at sea was equally formidable.

"The Tarot Club," Lumian revealed truthfully.

"You're one of the Minor Arcana card holders?" Gandalf deduced.

He had heard about the Tarot Club.

Lumian nodded without denying it.

Curiosity piqued, Franca asked, "Which card represents that 'Cinderella' demigod? And why does her magic have such a dreamy quality? Moreover, it resembles fairy tales from before our transmigration!"

She maintained her role while genuinely expressing curiosity.

Lumian recalled Madam Magician's guidance and grinned.

"Major Arcana card, The Hermit."

Pausing momentarily, he added, "I'm uncertain about why she can transform your fairy tales into magic. What I do know is that she's closely tied to Emperor Roselle's descendant."

"Descendant of Emperor Roselle's eldest daughter, Bernadette?" Franca and the others, having read numerous entries from Roselle's diary, immediately speculated.

"Perhaps, but it's not Bernadette herself," Lumian honestly disclosed.

That was the extent of his knowledge.

"Is that so…" Franca, Gandalf, and Hela felt enlightened.

So, it was connected to Emperor Roselle's faction!

It made sense for the Emperor to create fairytale magic.

After a brief pause, Lumian suggested, "You should probably prevent the Research Society from disseminating those fairy tales."

"Understood," Gandalf agreed.

Lumian pondered for a moment before stating, "I've concluded my involvement with the Research Society and have joined another secret organization. It's no longer suitable for me to participate in the Research Society's gatherings. You may find an opportunity to reveal the truth to the other members."

Gandalf and Hela exchanged glances and proposed, "You can continue playing the role of Muggle and acquire resources and assistance from the Research Society. We owe it to your sister."

Chapter 595: Spoils of War

595 Spoils of War

Lumian wasted no time with pleasantries and accepted Gandalf's invitation without hesitation.

Firstly, within the vast expanse of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society were numerous pathways. Besides the relatively scarce Devils, he gained access to a wealth of knowledge and various items. While these might not surpass what he already possessed in strength, they held the potential to unexpectedly shine in specific situations.

Secondly, this decision provided him with a pretext to continue assuming the role of Aurore as a Muggle. It created the illusion that his sister still existed somewhere in the world.

After the quartet concluded their discussion about the events in the peculiar waters, Bard's lifeless body underwent a startling transformation. Ephemeral lights coalesced in the corpse's right hand, causing both flesh and bones to crumble simultaneously.

Eventually, the palm resembled that of a baby—small and pallid.

The pale hue swiftly shifted, adopting a darker shade reminiscent of the ancient palace's surroundings.

It was a Dream Stealer Beyonder characteristic.

Lumian focused his attention and detected a faint grayish-white fog within the shrunken palm.

He approached Bard's corpse, crouching down to search for additional items.

With this task accomplished, Lumian retrieved the spoils obtained from Mad Lady and Loki from his Traveler's Bag, placing them on the decrepit stone slabs of the ancient palace.

These included: a transparent, almost ethereal crystal, a bracelet with three diamonds flanked by four different-colored gems, a rose-gold ring adorned with crimson, blood-like gems, a simple silver ring, a dark-gold mask capable of concealing the entire face, a featureless small doll bound with white cloth, an intricate but exquisite mechanical music box, and a grayish-white brooch with a metallic gleam resembling lightning.

Accompanied by a relatively thin blank painting album and the Dream Stealer Beyonder characteristic, the total count reached ten items.

Lumian then looked up and addressed Hela and Gandalf, "You can choose—

one each."

"It's our duty," Gandalf asserted, signifying the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society's commitment to rectify past errors.

Speaking in Aurore's tone, Lumian, shrouded in his hood, remarked,

"Duty doesn't preclude the choice of spoils. Just because official Beyonders must protect citizens doesn't mean they can't receive rewards."

Gandalf pondered for a moment before turning to Hela. Seeing her lack of objection, he sighed and conceded, "Fine."

Lumian's lips formed a smile as he pointed to each item, providing a concise introduction.

"The illusory transparent stone is a Traveler Beyonder characteristic left behind by Mad Lady, but it's severely corrupted. The thin gray fog emanating from it serves as evidence of this.

"The Dream Stealer Beyonder characteristic is similarly corrupted by that Celestial Worthy, but the severity is not extreme. It's slightly less severe than the remains of most heretics after their deaths.

"That bracelet comes from Loki, known as the Seven-Stone Bracelet. Each diamond corresponds to a teleportation, and each colored gem corresponds to a ten-second Blink. Once used, it's gone. The drawback is that you hear random sounds when you wear it—ranging from a man having an affair to sounds from an unknown creature.

"This golden ring, named Blood Gold, bears an engraved inner loop with a brief sentence—'Controlling flesh and blood means controlling everything.' Its function enables the wearer to control their flesh and blood like a Rose Bishop. Additionally, they can employ three flesh and blood magics—Flesh Bomb, Flesh Cloak, and Flesh Blood Fusion. The drawback is repeated use may lead to dependence. Ceasing to wear it results in the body collapsing into a pile of flesh and blood, unable to maintain human form. Continual wear may lead to madness and loss of control.

"That silver ring is a semi-finished Ring of the Sea Queen, possessing a high-level Steal ability usable only once. The drawback is that an ancient Angel will take notice of you.

"The dark-gold mask, a possession of Loki, survived his self-destruction. Its exact function remains unknown. Sensing it, one might feel an intense desire to wear it, believing it would grant abnormal power. Let's call it the Demon Mask.

"This featureless white cloth doll, a creation of Mad Lady, corresponds to the Faceless of the Seer pathway. When affixed to your shoulder, adjusting its facial features and figure is akin to altering your own appearance. Simultaneously, it empowers the wearer to master the ability to create Paper Figurine Substitutes. However, only the first paper figurine proves effective. Beyond these functions, it allows the wearer to employ flames for a dynamic leap and develop a certain premonition of danger. Be warned, though—

carrying it around brings weak bad luck. Moreover, one day, you may realize that its face mirrors yours, and you will cease to be yourself."

"This mechanical music box, discovered on Loki's corpse, is from an unknown pathway or Sequence. It's rumored that the music it plays has the potential to either kill or drive anyone who hears it into madness. However, a prerequisite exists—you must hear the music for at least ten seconds."

"I just found this blank painting album from Bard. Its precise effects and drawbacks remain unknown, but based on my experience, the depictions on its pages may come to life or exhibit special effects. Notably, only nine pages remain, showing signs of tearing."

"This brooch, belonging to Mad Lady, appears crafted in anticipation of the loss of the Governor of the Sea's authority and the sea's berserk state. It grants the wearer fish scales, mitigating damage and enabling underwater breathing and movement akin to a fish. Each strike carries the effect of Electric Shock, with a near 100% probability of triggering natural lightning strikes in thunderstorms. Aligned with Sequence 6 or 5 of the Sailor pathway, the negative consequence is a heightened likelihood of being struck by lightning on rainy days, coupled with increased irritability and anxiety after wearing it."

Lumian concluded the introduction of the spoils of war, his knowledge derived from Madam Magician.

It was evident that for the success of the sea prayer ritual, April Fool's had entrusted most of their mystical items to Mad Lady. Bard had only left behind an ordinary-looking blank painting album. On the other hand, Loki, the leader of April Fool's, had seemingly retained his items privately. Whether it was his nature or a deliberate choice to retrieve them for hunting Ludwig remained unknown.

Gandalf looked at Hela. "Take your pick first."

Hela approached Lumian, carefully inspecting the ten items

before singling out Mad Lady's Traveler Beyonder characteristic.

"It's severely corrupted. Whether you decide to keep it or have an Artisan craft items, it's quite dangerous. Leave it to me."

In other words, she suggested that she had a method to handle it and mitigate potential harm.

"Alright." Lumian didn't object.

He respected the wishes of each individual and allowed them to choose whatever they wanted. Of course, the order of selection mattered too. His team would be last, and he would be last.

Hela extended her right hand, and the night outside the ancient palace seemed to stir.

The illusory crystal shrouded in grayish-white fog vanished.

After Hela returned to her spot, Gandalf made his selection.

Franca's heart skipped a beat as she observed the president scrutinizing the remaining nine items. She whispered,

Don't choose the Seven-Stone Bracelet, don't choose the Seven-Stone Bracelet…

That was the teleportation she had been longing for!

The Traveler Beyonder characteristic was too dangerous. She didn't dare to set her sights on it. Although the Seven-Stone Bracelet was an expendable item, its advantage lay in its many uses and its relatively manageable negative effects.

Gandalf's intense gaze fixed on the dark-gold mask, his mutterings barely audible,

"I've got a burning desire to delve into its powers and potential…

"But it's too risky. I'm itching to put it on now…

"Yes, the Blood Gold ring aids my experiments into dangerous matters. The blank painting album requires further exploration…

"The high-level Steal ability is also worth studying… But being noticed by an ancient Angel is no small matter…"

After thorough contemplation, Gandalf turned to Hela and spoke, "Can I leave the silver ring here? I want to arrive half an hour early to study it before every gathering."

"Alright," Hela agreed to Gandalf's request.

Thus, the president of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society opted for the half-finished Ring of the Sea Queen.

Franca let out a sigh of relief and grinned at Gandalf.

"President, you really should've gone down the Reader pathway. You suit their style perfectly."

Why did he have to pick Warrior just to live up to the title of Gandalf?

Gandalf, the half-giant in a linen robe, glanced at Franca, smiling without uttering a word.

Lumian stowed the remaining items back into his Traveler's Bag, not affording Franca an opportunity to choose first.

…

At Port Santa, near Solow Motel, inside Loki's rented room.

Lumian received a response from Madam Magician:

"Even I can't decipher the intricate abilities of that dark-gold mask, indicating its exceptional nature. Inquire with Mr. K if he desires it. If not, leave it in my care for now. I'll seal it and await the opportune moment. It might prove useful when the time comes.

"Ma'am Hermit has her eyes on the mechanical music box. Other items hold little significance for her, but this one, at least, is exquisite.

"Mr. Moon expresses interest in the faceless doll; as for the reason, I remain in the dark.

"I'll entrust you with distributing the rest."

Chapter 596: Lord's Revelation?

596 Lord's Revelation?

In Mr. K's temporary apartment in Port Santa,

Lumian unpacked the remaining spoils of war from his Traveler's Bag, placing them on the coffee table.

He shot a glance at Mr. K, who, now adorned in a black robe with a deep hood, spoke first, "These are the gains from the operation. Perhaps there's a revelation from the Lord among them."

Mr. K nodded subtly, diverting his attention to the items, his gaze fixating on the dark-gold mask.

In a deep, hoarse voice, he mused, "I sense something special about it. This should be a revelation from the Lord."

With a swift motion, Mr. K extended his right hand, pulling the strange dark-gold mask into his grasp amidst a sudden gust of wind.

However, the Aurora Order Oracle didn't put the mask on; instead, he discreetly stowed it away in a hidden pocket within his black robe.

Witnessing this, Lumian was momentarily taken aback.

He had been contemplating how to subtly carry out Madam Magician's instructions, aiming to inquire if Mr. K desired the dark-gold mask. Surprisingly, he had spontaneously fabricated a Lord-given revelation as an excuse. Before Lumian could specify which item it was, Mr. K had chosen the dark-gold mask himself.

Could it genuinely be a revelation from the Lord? Hiss… Lumian took a deep breath.

Had Madam Magician sent me to ask Mr. K because she foresaw something or glimpsed something?

These high-ranking figures always prefer to communicate through hints and revelations. Couldn't they be more direct?

Amidst his thoughts, Lumian stowed away the remaining items and earnestly addressed Mr. K,

"I didn't expect the matter to escalate like this. I initially believed that with you and my sister's friends from her past, it would suffice to seek vengeance. Yet, it spiraled into something of a much higher magnitude. Thankfully, my sister's allies were vigilant and leveraged their connections."

The sincerity in the first half of Lumian's statement contrasted with the second half, which explained the influx of demigods, even Angel-level forces, this time. He subtly shifted the blame to Franca and Aurore's associates.

Lumian sensed a high likelihood that Mr. K might not fully buy into his explanation. Disregarding the possibility of the Aurora Order's Oracle Grazing a relatively high Sequence Spectator, Lumian believed that the intentional arrangements and subtle traces left behind by the entity he believed in were sufficient evidence of constant watching, listening, and awareness. As for Sequence 8 of the Shepherd pathway, known as Listeners, they often received revelations from that figure.

Nevertheless, Lumian needed a plausible excuse. He couldn't just tell Mr. K outright, "Yes, I am a member of the Aurora Order, part of the Tarot Club, and also affiliated with the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society. My Major Arcana card holder is an Angel, and I know countless demigods who can lend a hand. Besides worshiping your Lord, I also believe in Mr. Fool. Occasionally, I praise the Sun and say By Steam…"

Wasn't this equivalent to provoking him in his face?

Unspoken truths didn't always need to be voiced.

Mr. K subtly nodded.

"Good job. Dealing with matters involving evil gods demands all your strength."

Then, he added, "After learning that your adversary is tied to an ancient evil god, I've already reported it to the higher-ups. At that time, our Aurora Order's Angels were likely keeping an eye. If anything truly occurred, one or more would have definitely descended."

"…" Lumian's expression froze.

Did the Aurora Order's Angel also observe the spaceship back then?

Isn't this setup too exaggerated? April Fool's isn't even an organization with a single demigod!

Is Celestial Worthy such a taboo when it comes to Madam Magician and the Aurora Order?

It's understandable for the Tarot Club to give it significance, especially considering its connection to Mr. Fool's awakening. But why does the Aurora Order behave as if they're confronting a formidable adversary…

Lumian pushed aside the issue of inviting an Angel and four demigods for his revenge. He couldn't help but sigh at the Aurora Order's exaggerated reaction.

Mr. K fixed his gaze on his subordinate and delivered a passionate lecture, "Just because high-ranking individuals are keeping an eye on us doesn't mean we can be lax and handle things half-heartedly. These individuals have numerous crucial matters to attend to. They might only cast an occasional glance our way. If we don't put in enough effort and work diligently, it could easily lead to complete failure. And in that scenario, death won't be sufficient to atone for our sins."

"Yes, yes, you're right," Lumian echoed Mr. K without any intention of arguing.

…

Upon returning to Loki's rented apartment, Lumian gathered the remaining five spoils of war and grinned at Franca, Jenna, and Anthony.

"It's finally our turn to choose."

Not wanting to tease the eager Franca any further, Lumian pointed to the dining table where the items were laid out.

"Take your pick first."

"Hehe." Franca smiled sheepishly, shamelessly picking up the Seven-Stone Bracelet. She exclaimed excitedly, "I can teleport too!"

"Aren't you afraid of overhearing something you shouldn't?" Lumian teased.

Franca had already considered this issue.

"It's not like I'll wear it forever. I'll only use it when I need it. And teleportation takes only a short time. If I really hear an unknown voice, the impact will be minimal. I should be fine if I remove it in time.

"Don't worry. The negative effects of Beyonder items similar to charms aren't strong. They can even be considered weak."

Lumian scoffed dismissively.

"Have you forgotten what you have on you?

"Primordial Demoness figurine! Mirror World Fragment!"

What if she heard the Primordial Demoness's ravings?

Franca cleared her throat and said, "I'm now a member of the Demoness Sect and a believer in the Primordial Demoness. What's wrong with listening to the voice of God? At most, it'll make me excited. When the time comes, heh heh…"

She glanced at Lumian and Jenna, keeping her thoughts to herself.

"I'll get your help!"

Franca immediately added, "Furthermore, my Primordial Demoness figurine and the Mirror World Fragment are stored in the Traveler's Bag. They won't be taken out unless absolutely necessary. It's as if they're sealed."

Lumian remained silent. He turned to Jenna and Anthony, asking, "Which one of you wants to go first?"

"Anthony. He played a more significant role than me this time," Jenna replied politely.

Anthony smiled.

"Are you disregarding me as an Intisian man? I still believe in 'lady's first.'"

Considering Jenna's usual Showy Diva demeanor, she might have typically responded with something like, "Those Intisian men who claim 'lady's first' only want to get them in bed. Are you having such thoughts about me too?"

Jenna, despite her lack of overt actions, had a knack for teasing in a crude manner.

However, at this moment, after exchanging glances with Lumian and Franca, she turned to Anthony with sincerity.

"I'm in a dilemma. I want you to help me eliminate an option."

Anthony didn't decline and assessed the remaining four items.

"The Blood Gold ring enhances my survivability and strengthens my direct attacks. However, whether it's dependency or madness, it's something a Psychiatrist should avoid. Furthermore, I'm now a Hypnotist. I can use Psychological Invisibility and have the protection of Dragon Scales.

"Apart from underwater mobility, this brooch can only be used in close combat. Why would a Hypnotist like me engage in close combat?

"The Dream Stealer Beyonder characteristics and blank painting album aren't bad. If the former is crafted into a mystical item with weak negative effects, it should be very useful. However, that's not a certainty for the moment unless I find a very good Artisan…"

Anthony decided on the blank painting album.

"As an information broker, I'm adept at sketching. Such an item that can create different effects is very suitable for a Hypnotist to observe first before taking action."

Without needing Madam Magician's explanation, Franca had already used Magic Mirror Divination to confirm the function of the blank painting album: "The objects drawn on it might become alive and stay so for a short period of time. They might also have different effects. The painting paper will lose its mystical effects after being used once. The negative effect is never to respond to the knocks coming from the painting paper."

Lumian and Jenna agreed that it was very similar to the abilities of Pixies.

After Anthony stored the painting paper, Jenna seized the Dream Stealer Beyonder characteristic without hesitation.

"Why?" Lumian inquired with amusement.

Jenna looked at him and grinned happily.

"It's the most valuable! Among the remaining three items, only it corresponds to a Sequence 5. Even if it fails to become a mystical item, it can be sold for a large sum of money."

I still owe Franca 45,000 verl d'or. In the future, I might even purchase the Demoness of Pleasure potion formula from her.

"An excellent reason." Lumian casually glanced at the remaining two items and placed the grayish-white lightning-shaped brooch on his chest. "I want this. In the future, call it the Fury of the Sea."

He chose the brooch over Blood Gold because, as an Ascetic, he could bear impatience and other emotions. Pure madness was too dangerous for him, given the darkness in his heart.

Lumian tossed the Blood Gold ring to Franca.

"Put it in your Traveler's Bag. Anyone can use it whenever needed. It shouldn't be used often."

"You won't give it to Madam Magician?" Franca asked in puzzlement.

"Do you think she'll take a fancy to it?" Lumian stuffed the Fury of the Sea into his Traveler's Bag and chuckled. "Her spoils of war are naturally the humanoid Sealed Artifact, but she might return it to the Eternal Blazing Sun Church."

With that, Lumian turned to Franca, Jenna, and Anthony, "Next, I'm going to do something unsuitable for others to see. Do you want to watch?"

Chapter 597: Too Dirty

597 Too Dirty

Franca's curiosity was piqued by Lumian's words.

"Is there anything we can't see?"

"Are you sure you want to watch? I'm afraid it will deal a strong blow to your mind," Lumian asked in a teasing tone.

Amused, Franca pointed at herself and retorted, "Me? I'm not a minor. My mind is very mature. Why wouldn't I dare to look? Heh, I'm much more knowledgeable than you, boy!"

Jenna nodded in agreement, silently endorsing Franca's claim.

Without further persuasion, Lumian left the apartment and headed to the room he had rented with a fake ID to monitor himself.

Lugano was staying there with Ludwig.

Franca followed with Jenna and Anthony, muttering, "I thought it was something major. Isn't it just going to your godson? What impact on the mind…"

Lumian signaled for Lugano to retreat temporarily. Then, he retrieved two gruesome items from his Traveler's Bag, forming a humanoid figure with them.

Maintaining an unchanged expression, Lumian looked at Ludwig and pointed at the two parts of Mad Lady's corpse.

"Is it edible?"

Edible… Franca was taken aback.

Her gaze shifted between the repulsive corpse parts and Ludwig's boyish appearance. Suddenly, she felt a wave of nausea, as if her mind had been corrupted by the imagined scene.

Indeed, Lumian's godson gained knowledge or abilities by consuming specific creatures, including humans. Memory, after all, was a form of knowledge!

Franca couldn't suppress her urge to retch, regretting her decision to witness the cannibalistic act.

To make matters worse, she knew the person who had been consumed—Mad Lady. She had interacted with her before.

Jenna's face contorted, clearly struggling to contain her churning stomach acid. Anthony, a seasoned veteran accustomed to witnessing scenes of gore, subconsciously frowned.

Ludwig scrutinized the two bloody corpse parts in Lumian's hands for a moment before slowly shaking his head.

"It's too dirty."

Dirty? Could it be a reference to the severe corruption of the Celestial Worthy? Even you won't dare to swallow it for fear of something happening? Lumian threw Mad Lady's two corpse parts to the ground with regret, summoning a crimson fireball that was nearly white.

Rather than exploding, the fireball adhered to Mad Lady's corpse, burning and compressing it into charred dust.

Amidst the dancing flames and the burning fragrance, Franca and Jenna breathed a sigh of relief.

Lumian pulled up a chair and sat down, addressing Ludwig, who was nonchalantly nibbling on a cupcake, "Wasn't that person's arm dirty?"

He was referring to Loki.

"Just a little. The dirtiest part isn't on the arm," Ludwig commented casually, as if discussing which fish were poisonous and how they should be consumed.

Only then did Lumian get to the point.

"What did you gain from that person's arm?"

"Some knowledge," Ludwig replied, nonchalantly nibbling on a sponge cake covered in light cream, as if he preferred not to be disturbed while eating.

Lumian, feigning indifference, asked bluntly, "What are they?"

Ludwig's voice alternated between clarity and muffled tones as he replied, "Sequence Knowledge about his pathway… There are two other terms… One is Dylan… and the other is Orville…"

Dylan? Is that the name of Loki's ancient castle? And what's Orville? Lumian's curiosity peaked, prompting him to interrupt Ludwig.

"Apart from the name itself, is there any relevant knowledge?"

Ludwig seized the opportunity to take another bite of cake. After chewing and swallowing, he said, "No, but… these two terms seem to be connected. Orville should be the name of a place, and Dylan is the castle's name."

Connected… Name of a place… Castle Dylan is in Orville? Where is Orville? Lumian turned to Franca, Jenna, and Anthony, realizing they were clueless, shaking their heads in ignorance.

After a moment of contemplation, Lumian spoke in a deep voice, "Our next priority is to find information about Orville and Dylan through our respective channels."

Getting nods of agreement from Franca and the others, Lumian asked Ludwig again, "Anything else?"

"His spirituality is quite abundant, and his quality isn't bad. He doesn't like hard liquor or drinking freely. He only drinks champagne and occasionally has coffee. He's a loyal advocate of tea leaves. He's healthy, has good bowel movement, and urinates normally. He hates the smell of the washroom…" Ludwig shared the information obtained from the half arm.

Franca listened with keen interest, and just as Lumian was about to interject, Ludwig divulged another piece of valuable information:

"He owns Castle Dylan, but he doesn't reside there. He only returns occasionally. He's not the sole proprietor yet. Many areas there aren't accessible to him. Recently, he unlocked a room and acquired a dark-gold mask.

"That mask will grant him immense power, but once he wears it, he'll face terrifying matters."

Could that dark-gold mask be a relic from the original owner of Castle Dylan? Perhaps a memento from the previous leader of the Secret Order? Lumian nodded thoughtfully.

To him, this information wasn't particularly crucial as the dark-gold mask had already been handed over to Mr. K. Thus, he had no reason to be concerned about it.

Franca, Jenna, and Anthony prepared to return to Trier after the Q&A session with Ludwig, having confirmed that they had gleaned all they could.

Of course, Lumian took responsibility for their return journey. Franca couldn't bring herself to use one of the Seven-Stone Bracelets at the moment.

"By the way," Lumian looked at Franca, pondering for a moment. "Contact the Eternal Blazing Sun Church and see if they're willing to exchange information about the humanoid Sealed Artifact and its corresponding story. We'll make efforts to facilitate this transaction."

Upon Bard's mention that he was uncertain about his human status, Lumian realized his resemblance to the humanoid Sealed Artifact. However, Bard retained his rationality and clarity, possessing a relatively independent fate. Otherwise, he could be deemed a walking Grade 0 humanoid Sealed Artifact. This sparked Lumian's curiosity about the humanoid Sealed Artifact, wanting to uncover what had happened to her and why she had transformed in such a manner.

Franca nodded and instinctively said, "But, uh, that lady only mentioned the possibility of returning it, nothing definite."

"We're merely striving to facilitate the transaction. It's not guaranteed either." Lumian chuckled.

He quickly sent Franca, Jenna, and Anthony back to Trier Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative before entering Aquina Street. Strolling among the citizens still immersed in the afterglow of the celebration, he made his way towards Solow Motel.

Half of the motel's fifth floor had collapsed, and the fourth floor was severely damaged. Otta, the owner, observed the scene with sorrow and helplessness. He wanted to cry, but the tears wouldn't come.

At a certain point, Noelia of the Fertility Order approached Louis Berry, the adventurer overseeing Solow Motel. She spoke in a formal tone, "Your partner said you'd be responsible for the compensation."

Lumian retrieved 10,000 gold risot from his Traveler's Bag and handed it to Noelia.

Noelia glanced at his black coin bag and sighed with emotion.

"That's good stuff."

The combat nun then counted the compensation.

"10,000 risot? That's enough to build two motels like this!"

"How generous. Just as expected from an adventurer who recently bagged a bounty of 300,000 gold risot."

Lumian brushed off Noelia's teasing and continued, "This is the reward from the Paco family's commission."

"The Paco family…" Noelia fell silent.

The Paco family's matriarch, the current family head, and his wife—all perished in this conflict.

Lumian pressed on, weaving through the crowd as if on a leisurely stroll.

In the dusk's afterglow, he heard singing, seabirds chirping, and citizens animatedly discussing the past few days.

"Did you see that? In the morning, seabirds came to pay their respects to the Governor of the Sea!

"Is this year's sea prayer ritual that successful?

"That's right. Back then, many vines grew crazily. Many people fainted from joy. This is Earth Mother's recognition of the sea prayer ritual!

"No, that's not right. It represents a bumper harvest. It means this year's fish harvest will fill ship after ship!

"Praise the Earth, praise the Mother of All Things!

"Praise the Governor of the Sea!

"…"

Though Lumian wasn't privy to the Church of Earth Mother's method to make citizens view the morning mysticism roundup as a miracle, he sensed joy and delight in everyone's hearts.

Leisurely, he thought, I wonder if the remaining committee members of the Fisheries Guild have finalized the choice for the fake Governor of the Sea. Sure, the real Simon Guiaro is the top contender. However, it doesn't matter who takes the role this year. The power leaked by the spaceship is now in my possession. In the next year or even two, there won't be frequent catastrophes in these waters. The sea creatures will reproduce faster thanks to the 'watering'…

Heh heh, from a certain perspective, I'm the true Governor of the Sea—for just a week…

In the midst of the lively parade and numerous street vendors, Lumian casually located a bar and ordered an undiluted Manzan and a large cup of locally brewed dark-gold malt beer.

Placing the Manzan glass across from the small round table, he lifted his beer, clinking it. Then, he muttered with a smile, "Did you see that? Did you hear that? Their dance, their singing, and the sound of fish multiplying.

"Isn't this the future you desire?"

With that said, Lumian downed a mouthful of dark-gold beer.

Chapter 598: Confrontation and Reconciliation

598 Confrontation and Reconciliation

The night draped the land in darkness, and stars adorned the sky above Port Santa. The festive crowd had dispersed, leaving behind the remnants of celebration—discarded litter and the lingering scent of alcohol.

With the official end of the holiday, the city would soon buzz with work again.

Lumian lingered at the bar until closing time. As he stepped out, the deserted streets welcomed him, illuminated only by sporadic gas lamps.

The late-night air hinted at the approaching winter's chill. Lumian breathed it in, feeling the crisp freshness entering his lungs. The rhythmic crash of waves against the shore added to the night's serenity.

In seemingly high spirits, Lumian, slightly tipsy, walked past the aftermath of the celebration with hands in his pockets, unnoticed in the silent surroundings.

He made his way back to the room rented under a false identity.

Upon opening the door, he found Lugano pacing anxiously in the living room.

"Still up?" Lumian raised an eyebrow.

Lugano, looking like he'd recovered from a serious injury, spoke with a complex expression, "An hour ago, Captain Noelia of the combat nuns paid you a visit. Not in armor, but a stunning dress. She has quite the figure…"

"And then?" Lumian inquired, a smirk on his face.

Lugano replied with envy, "She left disappointed when I told her you weren't around."

Lumian chuckled, "What's it got to do with you? Why are you still awake after an hour?"

Lugano coughed awkwardly, "I had a sudden contemplation about my future. Should I return to Trier and pursue a medical career, or should I opt for a different path?"

Ignoring the Doctor's musings, Lumian, with a smile, washed up briefly and retired to his room, succumbing to sleep.

In his dreams, recent events blended into a chaotic tapestry, weaving stranger and more bizarre stories.

At precisely 6 a.m., Lumian awoke and promptly sat up.

His thoughts sharpened as he recalled the dream. Suddenly, a detail struck him:

Disregarding the possibility of the Aurora Order having covertly observed the situation, the crucial aspect of the sea prayer ritual was Amon's utilization of the altar in Milo Village to discreetly imbue Lie with a "Steal" ability.

Without this intervention, the opening of the spaceship's energy passageway would have led to a reversal. Deprived of the sea's power, he couldn't have ensnared Mad Lady with the authority of the Governor of the Sea, delaying her until Madam Magician's arrival.

However, Celestial Worthy, positioned at the pinnacle of the Seer, Apprentice, and Marauder pathways, should possess an in-depth understanding of Marauder abilities. It seemed unlikely that He hadn't considered the possibility of an Amon hiding at the altar, granting "Steal" powers.

It made sense that He hadn't shared this knowledge with April Fool's; they were expendable tools, and excessive information might weaken their resolve during the operation. But the overall plan shouldn't have crumbled due to this.

Were Celestial Worthy's intentions more intricate than they seemed? Had He secretly achieved a goal, or did Amon and His unseen ally orchestrate events in advance?

Had Amon truly kept watch over the altar in Milo Village without pause, last year's sea prayer ritual might not have failed. There remains the prospect that He wanted to derive amusement from April Fool's antics.

The chaos wrought by April Fool's last year was perhaps understandable. Shouldn't the most straightforward approach this year involve discreetly allowing the completion of the Ring of the Sea Queen during the ancestor honoring ritual? Subsequently, events could unfold with Ultraman assuming the guise of the incoming Governor of the Sea, only to be dumbfounded when the sea sacrifice ritual succeeded!

Why the convoluted path? What was the purpose behind these seemingly unnecessary steps?

There must be something I'm missing…

Lumian massaged his temples and rose from the bed.

The revelation didn't surprise him. It would be abnormal if he quickly unraveled the true motives of every participant in such complex scenarios involving high-level entities.

Regardless, his goal was accomplished, and the perilous black hole in the spaceship remained sealed. The rest was not his concern. If he could decipher it, great. If not, he could always write to Madam Magician to provide a timely reminder.

After a jog around the still-slumbering Port Santa, Lumian penned a letter to Madam Magician, detailing his reflections.

As Lumian finished, Lugano, who had been out gathering breakfast for Ludwig, returned to his quarters.

Taking a moment to contemplate, Lumian handed over 1,000 gold risot to Lugano. With a composed tone, he stated, "I'll be away for a few days. Take care of Ludwig. When I return, this commission will be completely over."

When the time came, Lumian planned on taking a boat to the Southern Continent. Lumian intended to conspire and make preparations along the way. His aim was to be ready for the final conspiracy and advance to Sequence 5 upon reaching his destination in the Southern Continent.

Without prying into his employer's destination, Lugano nervously asked, "W-

will there be any danger in the next few days?"

"It's done," Lumian replied with a smile. "If any other danger arises, go to the Fertility Order and seek protection. Isn't that what you've been anticipating?"

Lugano grinned sheepishly, reassured by Lumian's demeanor.

Under the shining sun of Port Santa, with delicious food and passionate women, staying a few more days seemed like a pleasant prospect!

…

A two-story relay carriage raced through the village towns scattered across turquoise pastures, making its way towards the base of the Pyraez mountain range.

Maintaining his disguise as the adventurer Louis Berry, Lumian occupied a window seat in the carriage, silently observing the passing scenery.

Each turquoise pasture was adorned with flocks of sheep, resembling scattered clouds. Shepherds, clad in practical and mobile robes, strolled amidst the grazing animals.

Some had their own shacks, while others utilized small, wheeled shepherd's huts for mobility.

Occasionally, local villagers attempted to drive away the incoming shepherds, only to be met with sly smiles or placated with money and supplies.

Faced with determined locals, the shepherds, arriving from the mountain pass, reluctantly moved to more desolate areas, contending with the watchful eyes of wild wolves and other creatures…

The scenes spoken of by the Cordu shepherds presented themselves vividly to Lumian, searing a memory in his mind.

Two days later, the relay carriage halted at the foot of the Pyraez mountain range, pausing in a small town outside the mountain pass.

Lumian changed into a black tweed coat, preparing to venture into the mountain alone.

As he ascended the mountain ridge, the cold wind intensified, rendering the wilderness almost devoid of life.

Navigating the sparsely vegetated mountainous terrain, Lumian followed the trails left by shepherds and merchants. Under the birdless gray sky, the desolate landscape featured withered trees and a meager stream. Winter's solitude permeated the air.

In the cold solitude, it took him nearly three days to traverse the Dariège mountain range and reach the river outside Cordu.

Circling the towering forest, Lumian promptly spotted the blood-colored pillar, emanating the aura of a mountain peak despite its modest height.

As Lumian gazed, footsteps approached from ahead.

A middle-aged man, clad in a leather coat and clasping his hands together, appeared.

Trembling in the cold wind, the forest ranger shouted, "Don't go any further. That village is gone!"

Lumian's eyes moved beyond the ranger to the collapsed and burned structures in the distance.

After a brief pause, he inquired in a deep voice, "What happened to that village?"

The forest ranger glanced around and lowered his voice, "They said they believed in demons. The villagers went crazy, burned down their houses, and walked into the abyss.

"Look, would a normal village be like this?"

Lumian fell silent for a long time.

Seeing this, the forest ranger sincerely said, "In any case, those old men instructed me to prevent anyone from entering this village. They said that it's bad luck; it would provoke the demons."

Lumian remained silent, refraining from further inquiry.

Staring at the unfamiliar yet oddly familiar ruins, he turned away from the village entrance. Step by step, he approached the nearest alpine pasture, the wind howling around him.

The grass here had completely withered, blown away by the wind, leaving behind barren patches of brown soil.

Lumian surveyed the ruins of Cordu, then located a shack abandoned by the shepherds. Inside, he lay down, closing his eyes and remaining motionless.

If only everything that had transpired before could be dismissed as a dream.

When he woke, the alpine pasture was vibrant green once more, birds returned to the sky, and Ol' Tavern bustled with farmers and herdsmen. His sister persistently urged him to study, while Reimund, Ava, and the others pondered uncertain futures, unaware of the life awaiting them…

…

The sun shone brightly, yet the air in Port Santa had begun to carry a chill.

Abruptly, Lumian stood before Lugano and Ludwig.

"You're finally back!" Lugano exclaimed, relief evident in his voice, as if he had encountered a savior.

Ludwig's appetite had surged once more, and the 1,000 risot had disappeared faster than anticipated.

Another week, and Lugano would have to contemplate using his own funds.

He couldn't allow the child to go hungry; he might resort to eating him!

Lumian chuckled in response, saying, "The commission is over. I'll pay the balance now. Do you want my help to teleport back to Trier, or do you prefer taking a boat yourself or crossing the Dariège mountain range?"

Lugano fell silent, seemingly grappling with a decision.

Chapter 599: If You Have "Power," Use It

599 If You Have "Power," Use It

Lumian didn't hurry Lugano. He preferred to observe the Doctor's decision-making.

After a pause, Lugano gathered his courage and inquired, "Will you be bringing Ludwig along in the future?"

"Of course," Lumian replied, glancing sideways at Ludwig, who was devouring a roasted octopus.

Had he not received the 0-01 information from the Church of Knowledge, he wouldn't have considered keeping such a child around. However, Ludwig had proven his usefulness.

In the future, he might serve as another Loki trap.

Lugano swallowed and offered, "I can assist you in caring for Ludwig, so you won't need to factor him in when dealing with matters—unlike how you could simply leave whenever you pleased in the past."

As anticipated… Lumian wasn't taken aback by Lugano's proposal.

He raised his chin slightly and inquired, "Reason?"

Lugano smiled sheepishly and explained, "During this journey, I've witnessed much and faced attacks. It made me realize that Sequence 8s are still insignificant in the mysticism world. They're ill-equipped to handle risks. Yes, if I return to Trier and discreetly wield my Doctor powers, I'll undoubtedly attain middle-class status. It's not inconceivable to ascend to high society, but I fear that garnering too much fame will draw the attention of official Beyonders. Trier isn't as lenient as Port Santa, which is more accommodating to wild Beyonders.

"Furthermore, those dangerous Beyonders are always lurking around us. I refuse to be defenseless the next time I'm targeted."

"If you refrain from participating in mysticism gatherings and solely run a clinic as a doctor, you wouldn't be entangled in dangerous affairs. You could easily handle ordinary thieves and bandits," Lumian countered nonchalantly.

Lugano shook his head.

"The Beyonder who left me his relics, enabling me to become a Planter, once warned me that once I enter the mysticism world, escape is impossible. Beyonder incidents will always surround us. If I'm fortunate, I might survive until natural death, but if I'm unlucky, I'll end up like him.

"At first, I didn't fully believe it, but the events of the past six months have increasingly convinced me of its truth. I did nothing, yet Rue Anarchie collapsed, and a peculiar tree sprouted. Before you hired me, I dreamed of becoming a figure in a painting, unable to return to reality. Upon waking up, I found myself wanted. This time, all I did was care for Ludwig, staying clear of any involvement, yet I was still senselessly attacked…"

Mm… Lumian's expression grew more peculiar as he listened.

I seem to be the common denominator in all your tales…

Yet, you persist in following me…

Is this another instance of Beyonders encountering mysticism incidents? You didn't encounter those incidents, but me…

Lugano continued,"I've also witnessed Beyonder powers like teleportation and tsunamis. Being just a Sequence 8 no longer satisfies me. I believe I'll find more opportunities by following you."

Lumian gazed at Lugano, unsure if someone had influenced him to insist on following or if Ludwig had somehow "tamed" him to be his "nanny."

Initially, Lumian thought Lugano, as a Beyonder of the Planter pathway, had ties to the Church of Earth Mother. However, despite paying close attention, he hadn't observed any additional communication between his guide and the Fertility Order or the Church of Earth Mother's clergyman. Furthermore, Lugano seemed like a stranger.

Seeing Lumian stay silent, Lugano smiled ingratiatingly and proposed, "I have a gift for languages. I can self-learn Dutanese from the Southern Continent. As long as you pay me 300 verl d'or a month and promise me a share of the spoils, I can continue to be your guide, private doctor, child caregiver, and be half a fighter."

"Sure." Lumian handed over a total of 10,000 verl d'or. "This is the final 5,000 verl d'or from before. Additionally, you were attacked. As per our agreement, I'll pay you an extra 5,000 verl d'or, making it a total of 10,000."

Lugano gladly accepted the payment and began packing.

Lumian seized the moment to count his cash, confirming he still possessed 1,000 verl d'or in gold, 76,000 verl d'or in gold coins, along with other coins, banknotes, and the remaining 2,000 gold risot yet to be spent.

As long as he refrained from acquiring Beyonder characteristics, potion formulas, mystical items, or high-end mysticism knowledge, the money he carried could sustain him for a considerable time.

The following morning, Lumian boarded the ship bound for Feynapotter, adopting the guise of the adventurer Louis Berry. Approaching the first-class suite, he turned to Ludwig, posing a thoughtful question, "In your memories, or rather, Loki's memories, are there any peculiar creatures? They resemble lizards but are quite small. They can crawl into a human's mouth, appearing transparent and blurry, suspected to be Spirit Body. They have brownish-

green scales and dark-green eyes."

This description deviated significantly from the Starlight Lizards transformed by the Children of the Sea.

Ludwig shook his head.

"No, it's not in the Batings Black Insect's memories either."

Lumian fell silent, observing Lugano as he opened the suite door with the mannerisms of a servant.

Another hour passed, and amidst a whistle, the ship departed Port Santa.

After nearly two hours of sailing, the weather gradually worsened. The waves surged, and the strong winds compelled passengers on the deck to retreat to their cabins.

Observing the dusky sky, the dark clouds stirred by the wind, and the rising waves, many passengers, sailing for the first time, felt a sense of anxiety.

Noticing the confidence of the sailors beside them, they sought reassurance, "This is a common occurrence at sea. It's not dangerous, right?"

A Port Santa native, working as a sailor, replied with a smile, "It's relatively common, but it can be a bit dangerous. If the storm intensifies, we might need to seek shelter in a nearby port. But don't worry. This year's sea prayer ritual was a success. The current Governor of the Sea will protect us and prevent any shipwrecks!"

Governor of the Sea… The passengers became even more uneasy upon hearing the sailor's response.

They had taken part in various sea prayer rituals and celebrations in Port Santa. While enjoyable, they didn't truly believe that the Governor of the Sea could exert any significant influence on the waves.

Amidst their unease, they were astonished to find that the rising waves suddenly subsided.

Despite the dark clouds and strong winds, the seawater seemed to be pressed down by an invisible force, showing no noticeable fluctuations.

The Port Santa natives erupted in cheers.

"Long live the Governor! Praise the Governor of the Sea!"

Witnessing this, the passengers exchanged glances, momentarily speechless.

In the first-class suite, Lumian relaxed in a recliner, sipping undiluted Manzan. On his lap lay a Southern Continent Dutanese introductory textbook.

Clenching his right hand into a fist, he pulled it downward.

A section of the dark clouds in the sky descended, forming a formidable funnel.

Sunlight penetrated the massive hole, brightening the cabin and highlighting Lumian's book.

Retracting his right hand, Lumian flipped through a page of the book. He found the Governor of the Sea's abilities truly advantageous at sea.

Unfortunately, he could only use it for one more day.

…

Late at night in Trier, Angoulême returned to his residence and habitually switched on the radio transceiver.

Before long, a telegram arrived.

Upon seeing "Hidden Blade," Angoulême frowned.

"Two bits of good news and a spot of bad news. Which one do you want first?

"I know. You must want to hear the good news first. I'll get straight to it.

"The first piece of good news is that the humanoid Sealed Artifact has been located and secured. You don't have to worry about the business trip to Feynapotter. You can focus on investigating the Mirror People matter in peace.

"The second piece of good news is that after communication, we've confirmed that the faction controlling the humanoid Sealed Artifact might return it to you. We're willing to facilitate the matter, but you'll need to provide all the information about the humanoid Sealed Artifact in exchange. Of course, it's just a possibility, nothing set in stone. You won't need to make a substantial payment until we reach an agreement.

"Bad news. Heh heh, there's a traitor in your Church. The humanoid Sealed Artifact was lost because of a mole! We're certain of this.

"Go, 007. Your chance to render meritorious service has arrived!"

After reading it in one go, Angoulême felt a sense of relief. This was because after the humanoid Sealed Artifact was lost, the Church's upper echelons suspected a traitor and conducted an investigation, but to no avail. There was indeed an issue with the case leading to the loss of the humanoid Sealed Artifact, but the five Purifiers in charge of that case had been cleared of any wrongdoing during the investigation. They hadn't performed well back then and had merely encountered an accident.

It seems that the mole has concealed himself well… Angoulême muttered to himself.

…

Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative, Apartment 702, 9 Rue Orosai.

Franca sat by the bed and chatted in the telegram group, waiting for Jenna to return.

Her female companion would visit the Quartier de la Maison d'Opéra once a week to watch a theater performance and only return at midnight. However, the exact day she went was uncertain. Furthermore, she would disguise herself to prevent others from noticing her travel patterns.

Anthony, who lived nearby, had been busy infiltrating a circle of psychology enthusiasts, hoping to come into contact with a true Psychiatrist.

I seem to be the only one with time on my hands. I haven't received any feedback about Mirror People… Franca wasn't the kind of person who insisted on having something on her hands. She excelled in finding joy in life.

While Franca thought about Jenna, Jenna—who had just finished watching the last play—put on a hat with a black veil and stood up to leave the theater, where many spectators were still lingering.

At the exit, she patiently queued up and moved out.

Suddenly, Jenna sensed a slight tremor from one of the items on her.

Instinctively, she reached in and realized that it was the Mirror World Fragment from the Tamara family's tomb.

Chapter 600: Correct Reaction

600 Correct Reaction

Has something happened to the Mirror World Fragment? Jenna was taken aback for a moment before she tensed up.

This was unprecedented. The Mirror World Fragment had never exhibited such behavior before, leaving Jenna puzzled as to its sudden activity. Her mind raced, attempting to decipher its significance.

Could there be a disturbance in the special Mirror World itself?

Or perhaps someone in close proximity to me is closely involved with the special Mirror World?

Could this be a lead in Franca's Mirror People investigations?

Jenna's instincts urged her to scan her surroundings, searching for the source of the Mirror World Fragment's disturbance.

Jenna controlled herself just in time as a realization hit her: If this phenomenon was caused by someone closely tied to the special Mirror World, there was a high chance that the "sensation" was mutual. In simpler terms, while the fragment trembled slightly, there should be some anomaly on the person's body, detectable only by themselves. They, too, were searching for the source of the problem.

Under such circumstances, hastily surveying her surroundings might lead to discovery by the other party. A thunderous strike might follow.

Maintaining her composure, Jenna slowly moved out the door, her eyes fixed on the road ahead.

During this process, like many spectators, she turned her head slightly and glanced at the wall clock in the theater's foyer to confirm the time: 11:05 p.m.

After noting the time, Jenna returned to the foyer through the exit.

The spectators around her dispersed, and the place gradually became less crowded.

Jenna's Mirror World Fragment fell silent, no longer trembling abnormally.

Just now, there was no one in the foyer, and the Mirror World Fragment didn't tremble when I watched the theater performance… This means that for the abnormality to happen, both parties need to be close to each other, no more than five meters apart, like when we were squeezing for the exit in the foyer. Now, is everything back to normal because the distance between them has widened again? Jenna's thoughts raced as she fully displayed her theatrical acting skills. Like ordinary spectators, she left the foyer and arrived on the street. She boarded a rental carriage belonging to the Imperial Carriage Company and paid 2.5 verl d'or in advance, her heart aching.

If the subway and public carriages were still running at this hour, she wouldn't have taken a rental carriage back to Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative from Quartier de la Maison d'Opéra.

…

Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative, Apartment 702, 9 Rue Orosai.

Jenna recounted her encounter to Franca and asked, "Did the Mirror World Fragment on you tremble slightly around 11:05?"

"No," Franca replied with unusual certainty.

Without waiting for Jenna to make a judgment, she smiled awkwardly and quickly added, "I don't think so. As you know, my Mirror World Fragment is stored in my Traveler's Bag. Even if there's a tremor, I can't sense it."

As Jenna couldn't help but roll her eyes, Franca tersely acknowledged and said,"Do you suspect that the abnormality in the special Mirror World caused a general change? If that's the case, even if the item is in the Traveler's Bag, I should be able to sense it spiritually. It's impossible to completely ignore it."

"Besides, when we put these two fragments together, there's never been a tremor. The probability of me encountering a Mirror People is very high. Or is it a member of a specific branch of the Tamara family?" Jenna said as she walked to the full-body mirror in the living room. She stroked the surface and whispered the secret subject she wanted to inquire about.

The full-body mirror's surface quickly darkened, surging with illusory water waves.

Jenna began Magic Mirror Divination.

"At approximately 23:05 last night, the area within a ten-meter radius of me…

"At approximately 23:05 last night, the area within a ten-meter radius of me…

"…"

After repeating it three times, the deep, dark mirror lit up.

In the light, Jenna saw herself in a bonnet, the theater exit connected to the theater foyer, and the audience and attendants standing within ten meters of her.

The spirit world faithfully recorded all this information.

The reflection in the mirror held a dynamic quality, not static or rigid. Jenna swiftly observed a woman standing a few meters ahead, abruptly turning to survey the people around her.

Donned in a black veiled hat, the lady, seemingly in her thirties, sported light eyebrows, bright yellowish eyes, and a white complexion from makeup. While not conventionally beautiful, she exuded elegance through her well-chosen attire.

Despite her refined appearance, the lady appeared to lose her composure, scanning the surroundings as if searching for a lost lover.

"There's something off about her. She reacted to the Mirror World Fragment," Franca remarked as she joined Jenna, analyzing the image in the full-body mirror. "But it's been over an hour, and she hasn't initiated any counter-divination. Is she careless or utterly unfamiliar with the process?"

Jenna nodded.

"Can you discern anything else?"

"Nothing more." Franca suddenly slapped her forehead. "Gosh, we should've asked Anthony to take a look. A Spectator would surely glean more information."

"You're right…" Jenna was caught off guard.

They still weren't used to seeking Anthony's assistance.

Jenna suggested, "Let's get Anthony tomorrow morning. Calling him over this late might lead to misunderstandings. Besides, it's not an urgent matter."

"Yes, he might get the wrong idea," Franca quickly realized.

The next morning, after observing the scene through the Magic Mirror Divination, Anthony pondered and commented, "Her clothes were custom-made, suggesting a well-off family background… Despite looking a bit lost after surveying the surroundings, she may lack knowledge about the Mirror World and its corresponding fragments. This contradicts her ability to make the Mirror World Fragment tremble. The answer often lies in the point of contradiction… Her walking style indicates good etiquette training, but her status at home isn't particularly high."

Franca couldn't help but twitch her lips as she listened to the newly advanced Hypnotist dissect the target layer by layer. It felt like she had no secrets left from him.

Spectators are truly terrifying!

On the other hand, Jenna listened attentively, finding similarities with character analysis in drama acting class but more concrete and detailed.

In a daze, she felt transported back to Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons, listening to her teacher's lecture.

"These characteristics won't help us locate her directly. They can only offer certain clues," Anthony concluded.

"Understood. Character profiling," Franca replied in a professional tone.

Anthony took out a piece of paper, picked up a pencil, and began sketching based on his impressions, intending to track her through various channels.

Casually, Franca asked, "How did you deduce that the lady's clothes were custom-made?"

Having once been a man and transformed into a woman with a potion, she remained fixated on the beauty of clothing and dresses. She didn't care about the store or tailor.

Jenna couldn't tell either, as before becoming a Witch, she hadn't reached the level to customize her clothes.

Anthony looked up at the two Demonesses.

"After becoming a Spectator, especially as an information broker, I've deliberately honed my observation skills. I recognize the materials and characteristics of most of Trier's ready-to-wear shops and the styles of many famous tailors. The lady's dress clearly doesn't come from any ready-to-wear shops."

Franca and Jenna revealed somewhat embarrassed expressions. Fortunately, Anthony was engrossed in his sketch and hadn't noticed their reactions.

…

Port Santa.

Nolfi, clad in a blouse and a light-colored jacket, escorted Batna to the dock.

Batna, sporting a half top hat, adjusted his rapier and cautiously inquired, "Are you really planning to stay here?"

Nolfi calmly responded, "I'm already a combat nun of the Fertility Order.

"It's just now dawning on me that the sea prayer ritual isn't about gaining power and making a pact with an evil god. It's about protection. It's an act of self-sacrifice.

"In the past, members of the Fisheries Guild used their influence and wealth to entice others into becoming the Governor of the Sea and Maidens of the Sea. Now, they've pledged to the Earth Mother's Church and the Fertility Order. Going forward, they'll inform potential candidates of the possible challenges and consequences beforehand, allowing them to make their own choices. I want to stay here and oversee this."

"That's good too." Batna sighed. "Unfortunately, my destiny lies in sea adventures, and I can't remain in one place."

The lovely and endearing Nolfi nodded.

"I understand."

She asked sincerely, "Do you wish to have a child here?"

"No, n-never mind," Batna stammered. "I'm not mentally prepared to be someone else's father."

He didn't want his child to turn into a humanoid lizard in the future.

Nolfi expressed regretfully, "Alright."

Waving her hand, she turned around and walked away from the dock.

After a few steps, she abruptly turned back, revealing a bright and beautiful smile.

"Regardless, I'm grateful that you could accompany me out to sea."

Without waiting for Batna's response, Nolfi redirected her gaze and hastened her pace, leaving the dock.

Batna stood there, Nolfi's final smile lingering in his mind. Her words of joy echoed in his ears, and he suddenly felt a sense of loss.

After Nolfi's figure vanished from the dock, the adventurer slowly boarded the ship returning to Port Farim.

…

In the evening, inside the ship's bar, Lumian raised a glass of amber sugar wine and addressed the patrons at the bar counter, "Ladies and gentlemen, I'm actually a magician. I can showcase an illusionary magic trick for you right now."

He gestured towards the window.

"Look outside."

Instinctively, the patrons glanced out the window and noticed that the surrounding waves had surged to a height of more than ten meters at some point, resembling a mountain.

Just as they blinked, the terror-inspiring scene disappeared once again.

Clap! Clap! Clap! The patrons applauded Lumian's brilliant magic trick.

Chapter 601: Strange Patient

601 Strange Patient

Late at night, amidst another round of cheers for a magic trick, Lumian downed the candied wine in his hand and exited the bar with a smirk.

He could already picture Aurore—if she were around—scoffing, "You're so lame. You're actually using the Governor of the Sea's authority and power to pull off a magic trick. Deceiving those drunkards with the real thing. Is this your prank? You're sure having a blast."

Lumian responded silently, Being able to utilize superpowers and the Governor of the Sea's authority for such matters, rather than in battle, should be what you desire, right? Isn't this the joy and future you yearned for?

In the corridor, illuminated by kerosene wall lamps, Lumian stepped on the creaking floor, making his way back to the first-class suite in the silent, empty surroundings.

Snores and moans occasionally penetrated the walls on both sides. Near the stairs, a room stood open, reflecting the dim yellow light of the fire.

As Lumian passed by, he turned his head and observed the Sacred Emblem of Life, representing Earth Mother, engraved on the wall deep in the room. It portrayed a simple infant amidst wheat ears, flowers, spring water, and other symbols.

In front of the Sacred Emblem of Life stood a man in a brown clergyman's robe. He was less than 30 years old, with clean eyebrows and a light brown beard. Holding a thick book, he preached to the men and women seated in different parts of the room.

Lumian knew this was a prayer room, akin to a small, mobile cathedral with a dedicated clergyman in charge. Common in countries that believed in only one deity, be it on long-distance ships or steam locomotives, they considered the need for believers to quietly pray and listen to teachings.

Lumian, who could already understand Highlander, memorized the words, "Life's precious embrace, the harvest's grace." Retracting his gaze, he entered the corridor, ascending the stairs step by step.

Simultaneously, Lugano, having just finished attending to Ludwig's supper, heard a knock on the door.

"Who is it?" Lugano was surprised and intrigued.

This couldn't be his employer. He possessed the key and would simply open the door.

Moreover, it was nearly 11 p.m. Who would visit at such an hour?

Could it be that a woman overheard my boasting on the deck, believed me, and came to share a pleasant night?

As Lugano started to indulge in fantasies, he heard a feeble male voice.

"I'm here to see Dr. Lugano."

Seeking a doctor… Lugano couldn't help but frown, but he still opened the door.

Outside stood a man wrapped in a thick tweed coat, a stark contrast to Lugano's linen shirt and thin pants.

Lugano scrutinized the visitor.

"I'm Lugano. What's the matter?"

The man's face was pale, his eyes dark, revealing little vitality. Though young, in his early twenties, he exuded a lifeless aura.

The man took a deep breath and weakly said, "You can call me Enio. I heard that you helped several people on the deck discover the true cause of their illness and quickly improved their condition. I want you to treat me.

"I have the money to pay for the consultation."

Observing the fellow's sickly appearance, Lugano sighed and replied, "Come in. Keep your voice down. As you know, I'm the private doctor of a prominent figure. He doesn't appreciate strangers disturbing him."

Once Enio settled on the sofa, Lugano, out of habit, inquired about his condition to conceal his subsequent mystical diagnosis.

"What's wrong with your body?"

Enio paused for a moment before saying, "Since half a month ago, I've become sensitive to the cold and weak. No appetite. Runny nose, repeated coughing, and my condition is worsening."

"Mm…" Lugano nodded, raising his right hand and tapping his forehead, as if contemplating the significance of the patient's narrative.

In reality, he seized the opportunity to activate his Spirit Vision, preparing to discern the other party's illness from the color, brightness, and thickness of his Ether Body.

With a swift glance, Lugano nearly jumped out of his skin.

Is the patient sitting in front of me still alive?

In Lugano's eyes, the once white glow shrouding Enio's Ether Body, signifying overall balance, had turned a somber grayish-black. It was a dire indication of his severe illness, teetering on the edge of death.

Yet, it wasn't this revelation that left Lugano shocked and bewildered. What truly sent shivers down his spine was: the orange glow, symbolizing the health of excretion, detoxification, and other vital organs, had dimmed into complete darkness. No vestige of brightness remained, signaling the complete cessation of their functions!

Likewise, the yellow hue representing the digestive system, the green indicating the heart and regulatory system, and the blue denoting the throat and part of the nervous system had all dulled and lost their radiance.

Enio's remaining hues were red on his limbs and purple on the surface of his head.

W-what does this "diagnosis" imply?

This meant that Enio was a person with a silent heart, a dormant stomach, and internal organs that had relinquished their functions. Yet, he could still think, move, and speak!

Son of a bitch, where did this monstrosity come from! Lugano, facing such an unprecedented "patient," inwardly cursed, his frame trembling slightly.

He dreaded the moment when the other might unexpectedly utter, "Doctor, I'm cold. Let me borrow your skin. Doctor, I'm hungry. Let me borrow your stomach and intestines…"

Noticing Lugano's silence, Enio anxiously inquired, "Doctor, what illness am I suffering from?"

Illness? Lugano muttered to himself urgently, Snap out of it! Your heart has ceased beating; the absence of flowing blood naturally brings about a chilling sensation!

Those with non-agitating stomachs certainly won't have much of an appetite!

As these thoughts raced through his mind, Lugano pondered for a moment and declared,

"Your condition is grave. I require further analysis and observation to draw conclusions. Can you visit me tomorrow morning?

"Before that, I need to draw some of your blood for research."

"No problem." Despite Enio's lack of confidence in Lugano, he extended his right hand with the mindset that attempting something was better than nothing.

Armed with the necessary tools, Lugano extracted some blood from Enio's body using a needle, rubber hose, and a glass blood collection bottle. Despite their darkened hue, he noted a basic vitality still present. Subsequently, he listened to Enio's heartbeat and detected faint, but existing, beats.

Curious… Lugano seized the opportunity of the consultation and prescription to subtly cast a faint light upon his palm, providing Enio with a simple treatment.

Enio's spirits lifted, and a semblance of strength returned.

"Thank you, Doctor. Your massage and medicine are effective. I appreciate it!" Enio left the suite with a cheerful expression.

None of the previous doctors he had consulted had made the slightest improvement in his condition. This time, he intended to set sail to the south, take a steam locomotive to the Church of Earth Mother's headquarters for treatment.

Baffled, Lugano observed as Enio left. Soon after, his employer returned.

He quickly recounted the encounter to Lumian, concluding with, "I've secured his blood. Can you find someone to divine the truth?"

"Divination?" Lumian chuckled as he received the blood-filled bottle and knocked on Ludwig's child's room.

"Take a sip and see what knowledge you can glean." Lumian handed the bottle to Ludwig, ensuring no avenue of exploitation slipped by.

Ludwig's expression remained stoic, as if sipping bedtime milk. He drank down the liquid in the bottle without flinching.

Lugano was bewildered, his eyes reflecting surprise and confusion.

After tasting the blood, Ludwig spoke at an adequate pace, "Absent stomach, absent small and large intestine, absent lungs, absent liver and pancreas…

"It's akin to a deceased person relying on mystic forces to persist…

"He won't last a week…"

Wh… Lugano was taken aback that Ludwig not only imbibed human blood but also made somber judgments with a straight face. He was also shocked to learn that Enio truly lacked those organs.

Initially, he believed it was just a loss of corresponding function.

According to Ludwig, wasn't Enio essentially a dead man?

What had he stumbled upon?

"What should we do?" Lugano turned to Lumian.

Lumian couldn't help but chuckle softly.

"What can we do? Locate the captain, the ship's security supervisor, or the priest in the prayer room, and report this matter. They'll handle it."

Lugano nodded and tentatively asked, "But won't this expose me as a Beyonder?"

"Tell them you're Louis Berry's servant," Lumian advised calmly.

"Alright." Lugano was fine with being a servant. After a moment's thought, he asked in puzzlement, "Did you hear any strange sounds at night? I occasionally hear a baby crying."

"Baby?" Lumian asked, shaking his head. "I didn't hear it."

Lugano pondered aloud, "Is there a baby crying on this floor?"

Then, he looked at Lumian.

"Shall I go find the captain now?"

Lumian's eyes flickered as he smiled and said, "Tomorrow morning."

"Alright," Lugano agreed without hesitation.

He preferred waiting for dawn and sunlight before addressing such a peculiar issue. Reporting it at night made him sense an impending, unexpected event.

The sun provided a reassuring sense of security!

Lumian didn't question or provide further advice. He entered his room, freshened up, and went to bed.

However, sleep eluded him. Instead, he half-closed his eyes, anticipating something.

After an indeterminate period, Lumian heard a faint creak.

The door to one of the rooms opened softly.

Lumian swiftly sat up, silently approaching the door, cracking it open.

He saw a figure leisurely walk out of Lugano's servant's room.

It was Lugano, clad in a linen shirt. His eyes were open but oddly vacant and unfocused, his face devoid of expression.

As if sleepwalking, Lugano made his way to the suite's door.

Chapter 602: "Surgery"

602 "Surgery"

Lugano's eyes remained open as he swung open the door to the suite, his gaze vacant. He stepped into the deserted corridor, where only the sound of crashing waves reverberated.

In this moment, everyone, save for the sailor on night duty, succumbed to slumber.

Lugano moved forward, the kerosene wall lamps around him casting an ethereal glow that mingled with the encroaching darkness.

He reached the end of the floor and halted in front of a vivid vermilion wooden door.

Creak. The door groaned open, and the darkness within seemed to swallow every trace of light.

Lugano traversed the obscurity with a blank expression, entering the room. Behind him, the vermilion door was pulled shut by an imperceptible force.

It was a suite. The living and dining areas lay shrouded in darkness, devoid of any candlelit glow. The faint crimson moonlight filtered through the curtains, offering minimal visibility.

At the dining table stood two shadowy figures. One of them appeared aged, with mostly gray hair and dark, deep blue eyes that seemed to absorb the night.

Despite the wrinkles at the corners of his eyes, the elder's skin remained well-maintained, adorned in a loose, dark-black robe.

Beside him stood Enio, the brown-haired, brown-eyed patient who had intruded upon Lugano that night, his pale face devoid of life. His vacant gaze fixated on the unadorned table.

Lugano, as if sleepwalking, stood next to Enio, unusually quiet.

The elder in the loose black robe turned his head, fixing his gaze on Enio.

The patient ambled towards the dining table, climbed on it, and lay completely motionless.

The blond elder brandished a sharp scalpel, unfastening Enio's tweed coat, cashmere sweater, and cotton shirt. He pressed the razor-sharp blade against Enio's chest, producing a ripping sound as he sliced through layers of flesh, creating a long wound.

As Enio's chest and abdominal cavity lay exposed to the crimson moonlight, a void greeted the eye.

No stomach, no lungs, no small or large intestines, liver, or kidneys. Only a weakly beating bright red heart, accompanied by a few blood vessels extending from it.

With a swift motion, the old man in the dark-black robe manipulated the scalpel, his other hand flickering with a faint light as he pressed down.

In a sequence too rapid for the eye to follow, he withdrew the still-beating heart in his left hand.

Enio's chest and abdomen, now empty, displayed only a few non-bleeding blood vessels.

The old man closed the incision with a tight squeeze, sealing it with a flickering light.

Enio's stomach returned to its original state, devoid of any scars.

Throughout this extraordinary procedure, the special patient's eyes remained open, as if untouched by the surgical ordeal.

In that moment, he rolled off the dining table, ambled to the door, and exited the room.

The old man opened his suitcase, revealing glass jars containing pale amber liquid, each cradling various organs: spleen, lungs, liver, kidneys, stomach, and intestines…

Placing these items on the dining table in a peculiar order, surrounding the still gently beating scarlet heart, the old man in the loose black robe took a step back. He recited an ancient, malevolent, yet strangely intimate language.

As the unknown murmur resonated, the internal organs ascended slowly, upheld by an invisible force.

Their final positions varied, resembling the internal organs of a standing human.

The heart, liver, spleen, lungs, and kidneys emitted a faint glow simultaneously, outlining a form on the dining table. It lacked a head, limbs, or bones, merely a corporeal essence that grew more defined.

A baby's cry echoed, faint yet tangible.

However, the body distorted, squirmed, and disintegrated in the end.

The old man in the loose black robe sighed with regret.

Strangely, the wrinkles at the corners of his eyes were noticeably reduced, and much of his white hair had reverted to light gold.

In an instant, he appeared seven or eight years younger.

Sensing his good condition, the elder turned his attention to Lugano.

Lugano, seemingly summoned, approached the dining table and lay down, awaiting with open eyes.

The elder unbuttoned Lugano's linen shirt, took up the scalpel, and gestured as if deciding where to make the incision.

Suddenly, a loud bang reverberated.

The vermilion door swung open, crashing into the wall.

Crimson flames surged, illuminating the room, climbing the walls and ceiling, transforming the place into a fiery inferno.

Lumian, adorned in black hair, green eyes, a golden straw hat, a cotton shirt, a black vest, and dark pants, materialized at the door and entered the suite.

He calmly addressed the old man in the loose black robe, "Don't you know he's my servant?"

The elder's eyes narrowed as he readied the scalpel to descend towards Lugano's neck.

However, his right hand refused to budge, seemingly restrained by an invisible force pushing it upward.

In the midst of the rising crimson flames, Lumian paused, displaying no urgency to act. He spoke with intrigue,

"That surgery was quite fascinating—extracting internal organs while leaving the person alive, albeit gradually dying.

"And you used those organs for a ritual, rejuvenating yourself. Meanwhile, you nearly brought forth a peculiar lifeform."

Surprise flickered in the elder's dark-blue eyes.

"How do you know?"

Haven't you just arrived in pursuit of your servant?

And no one entered before you!

Lumian emitted a soft chuckle.

"You don't need to know."

I still have a few hours of Governor of the Sea authority. Isn't it easy to 'see' something in these waters?

Sensing Lumian's confidence, certainty, ease, and absence of hostility, the elder fell silent briefly before expressing, "Life is the most precious, so life becomes the finest sacrifice and ingredient."

He refrained from divulging details about the surgery or ritual, choosing instead to expound on his philosophy and the truth he sought.

Praising and blaspheming life simultaneously? Lumian arched his eyebrows, finding it vaguely reminiscent of Lady Moon, Madame Night, and the bestowed of the Great Mother.

Carefully assessing the black-robed elder behind the dining table, Lumian, upon confirming his gender, temporarily set aside his sudden anxiety.

Gazing down at the motionless Lugano on the dining table, Lumian casually inquired, "How did you control my servant?"

The elder fixed Lumian with a penetrating gaze, as if probing the depths of his intentions. He pondered, weighing the decision to preach the truth or engage in a confrontation to eradicate the issue.

After a brief silence, he spoke in a resonant voice,

"He's a Blessed of the Great Mother. He heard the cries of the Son of God."

Great Mother? Lumian's scalp tingled at the term.

Had it not been for the Sea Governor's authority, Lumian would have launched a full-scale attack without allowing the elder a moment to react or explain.

Regardless, even if he eliminated the elder, spirit channeling remained a viable option. Moreover, the elder could be fed to Ludwig!

Though taken aback by the elder's possible reference to Lugano as a Blessed of Earth Mother, Lumian swiftly dismissed the apparent meaning.

He was certain that Lugano was human and harbored no unusual bloodlines.

Following Lugano's injury at Solow Motel, Jenna collected his splattered blood and conducted Magic Mirror Divination according to Lumian's subsequent instructions.

In an instant, Lumian deciphered the elder's true meaning.

The Beyonders of the Planter pathway are all Blessed of the Great Mother?

Where does Earth Mother stand? Planter is the main pathway of the Church of Earth Mother…

Could it be… the Great Mother reigns over multiple pathways, akin to the Celestial Worthy and Mr. Fool? Planter and Sower? The names bear a striking connection…

As Lumian's thoughts raced, his focus intensified on the existence of the Son of God. Cordu's empty infant cradle and the honorific title of Lady Moon nurturing a deity flooded his mind.

Dammit, why is it that the Great Mother seems entwined with children, Sons of God, and babies? Does that entity have a penchant for offspring? Lumian smirked superficially.

"It seems your Son of God hasn't truly been born."

The old man in the loose black robe suddenly became fervent.

"He's already born in the spirit world, but He's yet to step into the real world.

"Don't you see? Just revealing His form made me a few years younger. If He were truly born, I'd instantly regain my youth!"

Who knows what malevolent creation you've unleashed… Lumian criticized and said, "You plan to shape the Son of God's body with just this fragment of life?"

The elder was taken aback.

"This is a ritual bestowed by the Great Mother's revelation. It's undeniably effective!"

Lumian smiled.

"That Enio is unmistakably an ordinary person. The ritual's effects won't bode well. If it were a Beyonder with a robust life force, the outcome might be entirely different."

The elder instinctively concurred, "Indeed. That's why I intended to examine your servant's internal organs…"

At this juncture, the elder halted, casting a wary glance at Lumian.

With a beaming smile, Lumian proposed, "Have you ever thought of sacrificing your own internal organs?

"If you don't offer yourself as a sacrifice, how can you showcase your devotion to the Great Mother and your reverence for the Son of God?

"Don't fret; the Son of God will revive you and bestow youth upon you!"

As he concluded his words, a dark-green light condensed in Lumian's right hand.

Chapter 603: Organs Again

The dark-green light morphed into a beam, slamming into the old man's chest and sinking into the loose black robe, akin to sunlight, unstoppable.

Already appearing seven to eight years younger, the old man's expression twisted, and every inch of exposed skin displayed signs of melting.

His aura rapidly waned.

Simultaneously, a burst of vigorous life force erupted from his body. Under the melting skin, flesh and blood writhed, resisting the mutation.

The black-robed old man's eyes darkened, and he abruptly faded away.

In an instant, a hazy face emerged from the armchair at the dining table, blending with the brown wood, about to gain clarity.

At that moment, a cascade of flames descended from the crimson-flame-covered ceiling, soaking the armchair and swiftly setting it ablaze.

Before the brown face could fully materialize, it succumbed to the raging flames, forced to retreat.

Lumian lost sight and sense of the black-robed elder subsequently.

While surveying the surroundings, Lugano, lying on the dining table, suddenly sat up and jumped down. He stared at Lumian with vacant eyes, like a wandering zombie.

Lumian chuckled, raising his right hand and pointing at Lugano.

With this gesture, specks of brilliance shimmered in his eyes, as if the cosmos had descended.

Lugano found himself in an empty night sky, surrounded by twinkling stars.

He stood rooted to the ground in a daze. Without any subsequent actions, he resembled a machine that had lost its energy and controller.

Having settled his servant, Lumian surveyed his surroundings once more.

Yet, his eyes brimmed with flowing and burning crimson flames, and the black-robed elder's figure remained elusive.

Lumian's expression remained stoic as he splayed the five fingers on his right hand, clenching them into a fist.

His body suddenly grew heavy, and the flames surrounding him surged towards him like a river converging into the sea, drawn by an invisible force.

Bottles, organs from various body parts, and lightweight items in the room soared towards Lumian.

On the wooden coat rack near the door, the transparent figure of the black-robed elder protruded, pulled away by an unseen force.

He fought with all his might, but he couldn't resist the pull towards Lumian. It was akin to a piece of wood caught in a flood or a thin leaf fluttering in a fierce wind.

Lumian's left hand was already raised, and the crimson, nearly white flame in his palm rapidly turned white under the intense suction force, forming a minuscule ball.

Layers of compressed white-hot fireballs were unleashed, and the weighty and fearsome suction force dissipated.

Pa! The black-robed elder finally landed on the floor, his vision completely engulfed by the blazing white fireball.

Rumble!

The blazing white fireball collided with the Beyonder conducting the sinister surgery and strange ritual. The explosion's sound echoed into the distance but was muffled by the darkness shrouding the room, preventing it from permeating.

In the midst of such a violent explosion, no one on the ship heard or sensed anything awry.

Rumble!

The black-robed elder's body was shredded by the devastating explosion. Countless corpse fragments were instantly charred or consumed by bright flames, scattering across every corner of the living room and dining room.

With spirit channeling at his disposal and Ludwig providing support, Lumian reveled in the authority of the Governor of the Sea and the nearly demigod-level power it bestowed. He cared not for what the enemy might transform into.

Incredible. Is this what it's like to be a demigod? Even if it's just an illusion… Sadly, it won't last beyond six in the morning… Lumian sighed, directing his gaze at the burning corpse fragments.

A quick inspection revealed that the black-robed elder's flesh had rapidly charred or turned to ashes. It was as if frost had met magma from a volcanic eruption.

In a matter of seconds, only the heart, liver, spleen, lungs, kidneys, intestines, and stomach remained in the room, along with a grayish-white half-charred brain.

Wh… Even with his feet, Lumian could tell that something was awry.

Except for the brain, the remnants of the enemy were all internal organs.

The malevolent surgery he had just completed involved extracting someone's internal organs to let them live as if nothing happened!

At the same time, the peculiar ritual he performed utilized the complete set of internal organs to attempt to reconstruct the so-called Child of God's body!

All internal organs—it was hard for Lumian not to draw a connection.

Could it be that this fellow's internal organs were extracted before, and he survived by piecing together others' internal organs, becoming a Beyonder? What's this called? Human alchemy? If it's true, who took his internal organs? Lumian pondered silently.

The stars in his eyes swiftly dissipated, and Lugano returned to the real world.

From a distance of four to five meters, Lumian raised his right hand and smoothly swung it.

Smack!

Lugano felt the impact of an invisible force against his face.

With a sudden jolt, his eyes gradually cleared of their blank stare.

The first sight that greeted Lugano was the crimson flames falling around him, extinguishing before causing any havoc.

Then, he noticed charred body parts, scattered internal organs, glass jars filled with light-amber liquid, and organs soaked in them.

Am I still dreaming? Is this a nightmare? Just as this thought crossed Lugano's mind, the image of his employer, Louis Berry, with black hair and green eyes, appeared before him.

Son of a bitch, this dream took an unexpected turn! Lugano shuddered and involuntarily inquired, "What happened?"

Lumian pondered for a moment and asked, "What dream did you just experience?"

What dream? Lugano confirmed his wakefulness and recollected, "I dreamed of my childhood. My mother stood at the door, urging me to come home for dinner. She even sang a nursery rhyme from my hometown…

"She's been gone for almost ten years. I miss her dearly. I kept walking towards the door, but I couldn't reach her…"

At that moment, Lugano realized that this wasn't their suite. He exclaimed in shock,

"What happened?"

With a smile, Lumian responded, "You slept until midnight and suddenly sleepwalked all the way here. An old man had plans to operate on you, remove your kidneys, and slowly turn you into a patient like Enio."

The more Lugano listened, the more fear gripped him. Earlier, he had wondered how someone like Enio, who had lost most of his internal organs, could still be alive, albeit turning weak—only to realize that he was so close to turning into a similar figure!

"Hiss…" Lugano gasped and asked with trepidation, "Where's that old man?"

"That's all that remains." Lumian gestured at the internal organs and the grayish-white, half-charred brain on the ground.

Without giving Lugano a chance to sigh, Lumian instructed, "Bring Ludwig here."

It was also almost time for his midnight snack.

Lugano hastily left the suite, grateful for choosing to follow Lumian to the Southern Continent.

Otherwise, he would be at the mercy of such situations elsewhere!

Lugano believed this matter had nothing to do with Lumian. He had brought it upon himself. If it were Trier, he might have encountered a similar patient who had lost internal organs.

Lumian watched him leave, raised his right hand, and stroked his chin.

Simply hearing the infant's cries from the failed ritual can influence Beyonders of the Planter pathway to sleep and act in a sleepwalking state, receiving corresponding orders?

Isn't this too exaggerated? It's an absolute suppression on the Planter pathway…

I could understand a similar phenomenon if that ritual had succeeded, and the Child of God was truly born. Yet, it's already this powerful despite being a failed product?

Even with the limitation of its range, it's still terrifying… Is there a key reason I don't know?

Moreover, can only Beyonders of the Planter or Sower pathways hear the Child of God's cries? Can the Apothecary pathway, which can interchange with the Planter pathway, also hear it?

Amidst Lumian's thoughts, Lugano led Ludwig into the suite.

Faced with this gruesome scene, Ludwig pressed his hand to his mouth and yawned.

"Where's the food?"

Lumian didn't make any immediate requests. Instead, he turned to Lugano.

"Guard the door."

With the prior experience of the blood-drinking incident, Lugano could vaguely guess what was about to happen. He didn't dare face it directly. Upon hearing Lumian's instructions, he heaved a sigh of relief and jogged to the corridor, closing the vermilion door behind him.

Only then did Lumian gesture towards the scattered internal organs on the ground.

"Do you need me to roast it for you?"

Ludwig shot a quick glance at Lumian.

"Don't you find it irksome? These are all human organs."

Lumian emitted a soft chuckle.

"In my eyes, this is already on par with a monster's insides."

He then wore a self-deprecating expression.

"Moreover, isn't directly consuming Beyonder characteristics to advance a Beyonder equivalent to eating someone?"

Ludwig remained silent, taking a few steps to the side. He squatted down, picked up the old man's heart, stuffed it into his mouth, and began to chew.

Crimson blood slowly trickled from the corner of his mouth.

Lumian pulled up a chair and sat down, patiently waiting for Ludwig to finish his meal and digest.

After seven to eight minutes, Ludwig retrieved a white handkerchief from his coat pocket and wiped his mouth.

"These internal organs belong to different people. Some are Beyonders, some are ordinary folks, some old, some teenagers…

"There are traces of human refinement. The aura of life is rather mixed and impure…

"They will be controlled and influenced by the refiner…

"Having been refined, the person doesn't know that he's been through this.

"He has complete memories of the past. This is something that can't be achieved by refining an ordinary body.

"He followed Enio on board, hoping to extract the remaining organs and complete the ritual before Enio reached his destination…"

Ludwig recounted the knowledge and memories he had absorbed in a straightforward tone.

Chapter 604: School of God's Descent

Under the glow of the crimson moon, Ludwig, clad in a two-piece pajama set and a small coat, recounted the memories and knowledge he had absorbed from the black-robed elder's half-charred brain and internal organs. He did so methodically, like an emotionless time-reporting machine.

"Only the brain belongs to him. His name is Prinpino.

"Due to his advanced age and weakened body, he delved into mysticism. Unwittingly, he drew the attention of the Great Mother and acquired a wealth of secret knowledge, evolving into a Beyonder…"

Upon hearing this, Lumian muttered with a mix of mockery and fear, Despite gaining the Great Mother's attention, did he not turn pregnant?

Are you truly a follower of the Great Mother?

Ludwig continued, "I'm uncertain when Prinpino started losing his internal organs. I failed to absorb the pertinent knowledge and memories.

"Similarly, the time he became a human refinement product remains unknown.

"His philosophy is:

"Humanity, once the favored and proudest children of the Great Mother, fell into folly, aging, and weakness due to their detachment from her.

"Only by allowing the divine son of the Great Mother to descend into the world can humanity be saved. They can enter Paramita and regain their original form.

"When the time arrives, the Great Mother will return to the real world she governs."

Using the gender-oriented pronoun "she" to refer to the Great Mother instead of "She"… This implies that, in the eyes of individuals like Prinpino, pregnancy and childbirth are still feminine matters. A mother must be a "she"… This differs from the Nightstalkers… Lumian glanced at Ludwig and nodded approvingly.

Ludwig calmly detailed Prinpino's attempts and some of his abilities.

"The birth of the Child of God requires a specific body composed of various people's internal organs…

"This isn't the entire descent ritual. It lacks a crucial component…

"Prinpino possesses potent self-healing abilities. As a product of human refinement, he's immune to the influence of many Beyonder powers.

"He can indirectly control humans corrupted by the Child of God or specific Pathway Beyonders who have had direct contact with special patients. The range is 100 meters, and they must be unconscious…"

Upon hearing this, Lumian suddenly recalled a Sequence 7 Vampire of the Apothecary pathway.

Such Beyonders wielded formidable self-healing abilities and could craft Blood Slaves resembling their own marionettes!

Lumian refrained from interrupting Ludwig, patiently awaiting further details.

"He's adept in surgery and can directly heal others. He knows a ritual enabling a human to survive for a period even without internal organs.

"He can merge with trees and wooden articles for concealment, acquire a sturdy shell, and evade detection.

"He can stimulate the growth and reproduction of creatures, including but not limited to rats, fleas, bedbugs, fungi, and various plants. However, it drains his vitality. His vitality can be replenished through an unsuccessful Child of God descent ritual. Every nine rituals necessitate a batch of internal organs to be replaced…

"He can also inflict curses upon others, summon malevolent creatures, consume his life for the casting of a few nefarious arts…"

As Ludwig concluded, Lumian realized Prinpino's Beyonder powers were diverse. He possessed partial Vampire abilities and embodied certain traits of the Earth pathway's Planter, Doctor, and other Sequences. Simultaneously, he wielded a limited grasp of dark arts, expending vitality for their execution.

It's akin to the amalgamation of the Apothecary, Planter, and Heretic Spellmaster pathways, yet it's not exhaustive… Such a boon exists? The Great Mother truly reigns at the apex of these three pathways… Lumian reflected momentarily before taking Ludwig's hand and departing the suite.

He instructed Lugano, stationed at the door, "Summon the priest from the prayer room and inform him of all pertinent details you are aware of."

After issuing his directive, Lumian deliberated before appending, "Locate the captain first, then seek out the priest."

"Alright," Lugano assented reflexively before inquiring, "And yourself?"

"Of course I'm going back to bed. Should they seek an audience with me, they may wait until tomorrow morning." Lumian gestured dismissively, guiding Ludwig along the dimly illuminated corridor to his suite.

Am I solely accountable? Lugano mused to himself.

He suddenly noticed he stood alone at the suite's threshold, surrounded by scattered internal organs. A shiver traversed his spine, prompting him to hasten toward the captain's quarters.

…

Ten minutes later, inside the black-robed old man's suite.

The priest named Montserrat and the captain, Pedro, scrutinized the situation while listening to Lugano's detailed account.

Nervously, Lugano disclosed to them that he was a Beyonder, a Doctor of the Planter pathway. Enio sought him out due to his exceptional skills in treating patients. Later, during the late night, he experienced a sleepwalking episode. When he reached the suite, he found his internal organs almost removed. Fortunately, he was rescued by his employer.

Throughout the entire narrative, Lugano only omitted Ludwig's consumption of blood, sharing everything else he knew.

Pedro, the captain with the handsome brown beard, quipped half-seriously,

"Could it be that your employer killed a passenger in this suite and deliberately scattered his internal organs everywhere, concocting such a sinister Warlock tale to deceive us?"

Uh… Lugano found himself momentarily speechless.

Indeed, this possibility couldn't be entirely dismissed!

Father Montserrat, garbed in a brown clergyman's attire, shook his head.

"After confirming Enio's physical condition, we'll determine the veracity of this story."

"I concur." Captain Pedro stroked his beard and gazed at Lugano. "What's your employer's name?"

"Louis Berry," Lugano truthfully replied.

"Louis Berry…" Pedro's eyes narrowed. "The adventurer who hunted down the Demon Warlock, Louis Berry?"

Montserrat's eyes widened slightly.

"The one collaborating with the Church in Port Santa to covertly thwart malevolent forces disrupting the sea prayer ritual, Adventurer Louis Berry?"

Wh… My boss' reputation is so renowned? Did the Church of Earth Mother inform all the clergy that Louis Berry is a friend and collaborator? Yes, this ship departed from Port Santa. The priest on board must have been the first to be informed… Lugano had considered it, but he hadn't expected his employer's name to be so impactful.

Without hesitation, he affirmed, "It's him, Adventurer Louis Berry."

Just as Lugano concluded his account, the entire ship was abruptly sent airborne, landing atop a wave dozens of meters tall.

No dark clouds or torrential rain accompanied the phenomenon, and there were no violent winds or lightning.

After vaulting between the pitch-black waves several times, the steamship gently descended onto the sea's surface, restoring calm to its surroundings.

Captain Pedro surveyed the wrecked suite and the sliding windows, then turned to Lugano with a deep inquiry, "Is this the power of your employer? I heard stories of someone practicing sea wave magic at the bar tonight. Was that a genuine wave?"

"Yes." Although Lugano was uncertain about the events unfolding, he attributed the display of nature's power to his employer.

He added, "He's extending his greeting."

Captain Pedro and Father Montserrat fell into contemplative silence.

After more than ten seconds, Pedro addressed Father Montserrat, who seemed to be in his thirties,"Does the Church possess knowledge of such surgeries and rituals?"

Montserrat glanced at Lugano, indicating that the conversation need not be private.

The priest reflected for a moment before responding in a solemn tone, "There exists a faction of misguided Mother believers who contend that the decline of the modern world and the debasement of humanity result from their estrangement from the Mother.

"They are determined to employ any means to usher in the so-

called Child of God into the real world and invoke the Mother's descent through the return of the Child of God.

"We refer to them as the School of God's Descent."

Unconvinced, Lugano inquired, "You can summon a Child of God simply by using the internal organs of ordinary people?"

While he lacked knowledge about the specific surgery and ritual, he could deduce that internal organs were a crucial component.

Montserrat contemplated the remaining human organs in the suite and responded gravely,

"The Child of God is the Mother's child, and humans are also Mother Goddess's children."

Does this imply that, fundamentally, no one is superior or inferior, and they can serve as ingredients with quantity compensating for any shortcomings? Lugano grasped the essence of the priest's statement, realizing how many rituals involving blood sacrifices could be explained by this theory.

Father Montserrat offered no further explanation and turned to Lugano.

"Convey to your employer that we will take charge from here. Assure him not to worry."

"Very well." Lugano sighed with relief.

…

The next morning, Lumian woke up promptly and realized he no longer possessed the power of the sea, preventing him from tapping into the Governor of the Sea's authority.

He took a regretful sip of his light beer and commenced writing to Madam Magician, detailing the issues with the School of God's Descent and the purported birth of the Child of God in the spirit world.

Swiftly, the messenger returned, carrying Madam Magician's response:

"Encountering the School of God's Descent—I can't ascertain whether the issue lies with you or Lugano.

"The so-called Child of God has already been born in the spirit world—it's merely propaganda, you understand? Similar to the Church of The Fool's Holy Bible—just listen but don't take it seriously.

"Nevertheless, comparable incidents are unfolding, and they are brewing and evolving. This actually ties back to you. It originated from Cordu's empty cradle, the child Madame Pualis 'lost.'

"Additionally, based on various sources, Madame Night didn't perish in Fourth Epoch Trier. She encountered or acquired something that advanced the matter of the Child of God.

"Besides her, the Sinners' Voisin Sanson managed to escape Fourth Epoch Trier for unknown reasons. What he encountered remains unknown…

Voisin Sanson is still alive? Lumian was initially taken aback by the revelation in the middle of the letter, but a smile soon crept across his face.

At that moment, a knock echoed on his bedroom door.

"Who is it?" Lumian, aware that it was Lugano outside, asked casually.

Lugano replied fearfully through the wooden door, "I-I heard a baby crying again!"

Chapter 605: Lingering Effects

Hearing the cries of a baby again? Is he pestered by the so-called Child of God? Lumian held Madam Magician's reply, unfinished, and adjusted his sitting posture with amusement. He gazed at the door and said, "Come in."

Lugano turned the handle and cautiously pushed open the door, uncomfortably stopping in front of Lumian.

His actions and demeanor, combined with his thick eyebrows, large eyes, and square face, made him appear rather comical.

"Isn't that evil Warlock, the old man n-named Prinpino, already dead? Why can I still hear the cries of a baby?" Lugano inquired with concern, his tone reflecting it.

Having consulted the just-awakened Ludwig, he had received an answer that he hadn't heard the baby's cries.

Lumian playfully shook the letter in his hand and chuckled.

"There are two possibilities. One is that Prinpino's accomplices on the ship also possess the ritual to summon the Child of God. The other possibility is…

Lugano pressed impatiently, "What is it?"

Lumian glanced at the Doctor and grinned.

"Perhaps the unborn Child of God has taken a liking to you and wants to choose you as his surrogate mother. Thus, even though Prinpino is already dead, he's unwilling to leave you and continues to linger by your side. Normally, he can't be seen or sensed."

Lugano's scalp tingled as he listened. Ignoring the question of why he was a mother and not a father, he stammered, "W-what should I do?"

"No rush." Lumian smiled.

"There's no need to hurry in such circumstances." Lugano felt like his internal organs might be devoured by the so-called Child of God at any moment, leaving only an empty cavity.

"Of course," Lumian said in a relaxed state. "Aren't you still alive? Since you're not dead, it means the situation isn't very serious. You can take it slow. There's no hurry."

That seems to be the case… Lugano, caught up in the conversation, nodded and asked in confusion, "Must I die before the problem becomes serious enough for it to become urgent?"

Lumian chuckled and said, "No, it means there's zero need to rush.

"If you're already dead, what's the hurry? Can I revive you?"

In short, there's no need to rush? Lugano was taken aback.

Though he harbored doubts, his employer's ability to crack jokes and play pranks reassured him.

Evidently, his employer didn't view the baby's cries as a grave concern!

Only then did Lumian unveil his true speculation.

"There's a third possibility. The corruption you suffered upon contact with Enio won't dissipate so quickly, and it's highly likely that it won't vanish naturally. Consequently, you'll still form a connection with the unborn Child of God."

"Then, how do I eliminate the corruption?" Lugano accepted this explanation and believed that a solution existed.

Lumian didn't immediately respond to his question. He let Lugano stand in front of him as he perused the rest of Madam Magician's reply.

"Considering your link to the Child of God and the evil god's angel sealed within you, encountering a member of the School of God's Descent isn't a mere coincidence.

"However, your interpreter and guide are of the Planter pathway—that raises other issues. It's only natural for you to encounter matters connected to the Great Mother.

"As for the problem, ponder it and inquire within yourself. I won't spoon-feed you the answer. Conspirers need to employ their brains more…"

Observing this, Lumian looked up at Lugano without uttering a word. The Doctor's body tensed, and a thin layer of sweat trickled down his back.

"Is—is there any other problem?" Lugano stammered.

Lumian reclined in his chair and said contemplatively, "Clearing corruption is an entirely separate course in mysticism. I need to grasp the specifics before providing an answer."

Having underscored the significance, he inquired, "Have you encountered similar situations before? Like peculiar infant cries, mystical occurrences linked to births, sorcery entwined with mothers, and so forth."

Lugano dared not be careless, fearing that if the corruption wasn't rectified promptly, he might end up as an organless being.

He meticulously sifted through his experiences over the years. After a moment, he tentatively said, "There's something I'm not sure if it's relevant…"

It was clear that he was reluctant to discuss the matter.

"How am I supposed to know if it's relevant if you don't tell me?" Lumian didn't care about privacy.

After a brief pause, Lugano cleared his throat and said, "Didn't I mention that I became a Beyonder by obtaining a friend's relic?"

"Yes, did you murder that friend?" Lumian inquired deliberately.

Lugano hastily shook his head.

"No, he committed suicide."

"Suicide?" Lumian raised his eyebrows, finding this matter intriguing.

Lugano finally gathered the courage and spilled it out in one go, "When I worked as a bounty hunter, I utilized the hidden mountain ranges in the Dariège mountain range for smuggling operations. I moved things back and forth, making a decent sum. I even aided some wanted criminals in escaping overseas. Tanko was one of them, but his escape wasn't from Intis to Feynapotter. Instead, he fled from Feynapotter to Intis.

"Eventually, he discovered a secluded valley deep within the mountain range and built a field of his own. He cultivated crops, tended to livestock, and kept to himself. I regularly visited, supplying him with essentials like salt, sugar, fabric, and other goods. In return, Tanko imparted mystic knowledge.

"I never imagined leading an ordinary life, with me out there adventuring and becoming a bounty hunter. Mysticism held a strong allure for me, and the teachings imparted by Tanko seemed invaluable at times.

"Tanko could be an enigma. Sometimes, he'd fall into brooding silence, his temper as hard and unyielding as stone, as if wrestling with inner demons. Other times, he'd be buoyant and loquacious, curious about everything around him.

"Every so often, he'd confess to straying from the Mother's teachings, descending into the depths of darkness. He'd lament how he drifted further from his true self, suffering the consequences. Occasionally, he'd voice suspicions about the Church, believing it to be deceptive, claiming the true Mother had departed long ago…"

In that moment, Lugano couldn't help but draw parallels between Tanko's cryptic musings and the philosophy of the School of God's Descent, as recounted by Father Montserrat.

Was this encounter a foreshadowing, planted in the past? Lugano drew in a deep breath, sensing an ominous shiver down his spine.

He rushed out his words.

"Last autumn, I revisited Tanko. We sipped his brew and discussed various things beyond the mountain.

"Out of the blue, he spilled that he couldn't endure his decadent, sinful self any longer. The demon lurking deep within him was gaining control. Tanko wanted to end his life before it consumed him entirely. His dying wish? I deliver his stuff to Torres, the capital of Gaia Province, and hand it over to a Church of Earth Mother clergyman, preferably a Blessed.

"I pretended to agree, talked him out of it, and thought he had abandoned the idea. But the next morning, I found him dead in the field where he'd harvested grain. Golden wheat ears sprouted from his body. And, get this, he had several female reproductive organs.

"I was freaked out. Felt like I was dealing with a monster.

"Now, for us bounty hunters, a dead monster is a good monster. It's material for a paycheck.

"Summoning courage, I went through Tanko's things. Found a golden blob, like a grain seed, but half the size of a fist, next to him.

"Based on Tanko's mystic know-how, I suspected this blob was the root of his Beyonder powers.

"After much internal wrestling, I debated whether to stick to our agreement and send this relic back to the Church. But in the end, greed got the better of me, and I devoured the blob.

"I'm a guilty man. Broke my promise. Hoping the Sun forgives me."

Lumian listened in silence, a chuckle escaping his lips.

"You just ate it like that?"

Lugano grinned sheepishly and explained, "Yep, that's right. I only learned potion formulas after becoming a Beyonder and diving into mysticism. I didn't want a repeat of that experience, so I got obsessed with buying formulas."

"You're lucky. A few years earlier, and surviving that would've been tough. We might've crossed paths in the Dariège mountain range, you as a monster and me as a monster hunter," Lumian recalled President Gandalf's research and mocked Lugano.

Internally, Lumian muttered, Emperor Roselle was right. The ignorant are fearless… Something's obviously off with Tanko. He probably got tangled with the evil god's faith, corrupting the Beyonder characteristic he left behind. Eating it directly… no wonder you encountered the School of God's Descent and heard baby cries. Easy to be corrupted and influenced, encountering patients like Enio.

Uneasy, Lugano asked, "Was the Planter ingredient I consumed the root of the problem?"

He had ingested it a year prior, and even advanced. Was there no resolution to the problem?

Lumian, seemingly avoiding Lugano's beseeching gaze, feigned deep consideration as he perused the concluding segment of Madam Magician's response.

"I've pondered your earlier caution and have some theories, but presently, I cannot divulge them to you. I can only hint that Amon and the person behind Him must have orchestrated something beforehand to divert the Celestial Worthy's attention from the pertinent issue.

"In essence, this situation seems advantageous for you and the rest of us. For now, it's best to feign ignorance and refrain from delving into it.

"If troubled by infantile cries, seek aid from a clergyman of the Church of Earth Mother."

Wh… Did Madam Magician anticipate Lugano's lingering effects in advance? It seems so. She could discern the root cause of Lugano's plight… Lumian looked up, offering Lugano a reassuring smile.

"The remedy to purge the corruption lies in seeking aid from Father Montserrat."

That's it? After all my exposition? If there's truly no alternative, I would've taken my chances with the priest… Lugano's lips twitched as he mustered a strained smile.

"Very well, thank you, sir."

Chapter 606: Faith Conversion

At 8 a.m., in the prayer room on the third floor of the cabin, Lugano stepped in. Father Montserrat, draped in a brown priest's robe, was already preaching. Five or six individuals were scattered in the rows of chairs before the Sacred Emblem of Life.

Without disturbing the sanctified ambiance, Lugano chose a spot at the front, near a supplicant.

As Father Montserrat concluded his sermon and closed the Holy Bible, the supplicants rose, spread their feet, and raised their palms high, chanting in unison, "Praise the Earth, praise the Mother of All Things!"

Lugano instinctively turned his head, noticing a tightly-wrapped up supplicant with brown eyes and a pale complexion in the same row—Enio, the special patient who had lost his internal organs.

H-he's not dead? Wait, isn't the evil warlock, Prinpino, supposed to be dead? Why is Enio, the special patient, still alive? Lugano was stunned, almost convinced he'd encountered a ghost.

Being a Sequence 8 of the Planter pathway, he was ill-equipped to handle ghosts.

But then, Lugano observed that Enio's face wasn't as deathly pale as before. The brilliance in his eyes had returned, and vitality coursed through him.

Wh… Lugano raised his hand, tapping his glabella to activate his Spirit Vision.

He observed Enio's Ether Body, no longer as ashen as before. Whether it be the yellow hue symbolizing the digestive system, the orange hue denoting detoxification and organ excretion, or other shades, they had reverted to a semblance of normalcy, albeit faint and thin.

Is that even possible? Hadn't he lost his heart, liver, spleen, lungs, intestines, stomach, and kidneys? Lugano stared at Enio as though he were an aberration until Enio pivoted and pleasantly recognized him.

"Doctor, your treatment works wonders. I feel like I'm recovering!" Enio exclaimed joyously.

And this was just the initial treatment sans pinpointing the specific cause!

Lugano's lips twitched stiffly.

"That's reassuring, indeed."

"Are you also a follower of Earth Mother?" Enio beamed, pleasantly surprised.

I'm not. Spare me the talk of Mother God or Mother… As an Intisian, how can I subscribe to the Earth Mother faith? Lugano gestured toward Montserrat, evading a direct response.

"I need to discuss matters with the priest."

Enio nodded.

"When can I seek further treatment in the morning?"

You don't require treatment anymore. It's time for recuperation and repose… Lugano grumbled, forcing a smile.

"In about an hour."

"Thank you, Doctor!" Enio waved, exiting the prayer room.

When only Lugano and Father Montserrat remained, Lugano hushed his voice, gesturing toward the door.

"H-how was he healed?"

Father Montserrat, still relatively youthful with sincere eyes, smiled and responded, "Thanks to Earth Mother, his fortune was favorable.

"As a Doctor yourself, you must be aware that internal organs can be transplanted as long as they maintain a certain level of vitality. For the ritual to succeed, Prinpino utilized his Beyonder powers to sustain the vitality of those internal organs. Moreover, the set he employed was extracted from Enio, eliminating the need to consider transplant rejection effects.

"Furthermore, Enio remained alive, relying on mystical power to uphold a certain level of vitality. This was a crucial factor."

"Did you perform surgery on him last night and transplant all his internal organs back?" Lugano was enlightened.

Father Montserrat nodded.

"For regular surgeons, this is an operation with nearly zero chances of success. Even if successful, keeping the patient alive long enough to navigate the most perilous stage is challenging. However, for us, it falls within our capabilities."

Indeed… Compared to ordinary surgeons, Beyonder Doctors like us wield mystical powers akin to miracle-workers… Lugano sighed, dismissing further concern about Enio. Turning to Montserrat, he inquired with worry, "Father, I heard a baby crying again.

"Has that so-called Child of God set his sights on me?"

Father Montserrat reassured him, "Fear not. It's an inevitable repercussion of the corresponding corruption. It will gradually dissipate over time. If you're concerned about any unforeseen events or accidents on your path, I can help you eliminate them now."

Is that so? You're merely a Sequence 8 Doctor. Do you possess the capability to rid me of the remaining corruption? Set up an altar and seek

Earth Mother's aid? Lugano remained skeptical.

"Thank you, Father!"

Montserrat gestured toward Lugano's previous spot.

"Follow the believers' example. Close your eyes, listen to my preaching, and simultaneously, pray to Earth Mother. Remember, it's specifically to Earth Mother, no other deity."

"Understood." Lugano resumed his seat, crossed his arms, and shut his eyes.

As Father Montserrat delivered his sermon, Lugano silently echoed the verses of the Holy Bible. Gradually, his thoughts blurred, and amidst the discourse, Lugano discerned a mother's gentle murmur and felt the comforting warmth of her embrace.

His tense heart eased, reminiscent of seeking solace in his mother's arms after childhood bullying.

It was a blend of dependency, reliance, and a sanctuary for the mind.

Unbeknownst to him, tears trickled down Lugano's cheeks, as if purifying his body and soul.

Slowly, his emotions settled, dispelling the fear and unease.

"Done." Father Montserrat's voice seemed to waft from the distance, reaching Lugano's ears.

Opening his eyes, Lugano raised his right hand, wiping away the tears.

Standing up, he lifted his hands.

"Praise the Earth, praise the Mother of All Things!"

It was an almost reflexive response.

In that moment, sunlight streamed through the window, casting a faint golden glow upon the prayer room, as if heralding forthcoming abundance.

Father Montserrat nodded in satisfaction.

"Earth Mother has purged the corruption from your body. Tonight, pay attention and see if you still hear the baby's cries."

"Alright, Father!" Lugano replied, his body and mind now at ease.

The next morning, he awoke with a sense of happiness.

Throughout the night, he experienced no dreams of a beckoning mother, nor did he hear the cries of the so-called Child of God.

Filled with joy, Lugano, after serving Ludwig breakfast, hurried to the prayer room to share the uplifting news with Father Montserrat.

Father Montserrat gazed at him for a moment and asked with a smile, "Are you interested in embracing Mother Earth?"

"Me?" Lugano hesitated before inquiring, "Are you willing to accept the conversion of a heretic?"

Father Montserrat smiled and replied, "In the Mother's eyes, there are no heretics. There are only children who are or are not willing to return home."

Lugano's heart wavered, reflecting on his past actions of merely going through the motions in cathedrals—praying, listening to preaching, and attending Mass. He hadn't truly believed in any deity, and the Church hadn't provided substantial assistance.

Moreover, if I truly become a believer in Earth Mother, I might gain access to subsequent potion formulas and Beyonder ingredients from the Church or the three Orders… Even if not, I'll surely receive corresponding mysticism guidance… Lugano hesitated, finding various excuses to convince himself.

Father Montserrat patiently waited, not pressuring him. He simply smiled, anticipating Lugano's decision.

Eventually, Lugano raised his hands.

"Praise the Earth, praise the Mother of All Things!"

He responded to Father Montserrat's proselytization in this manner.

Father Montserrat's smile broadened as he extended his arms.

"Welcome home."

Those words oddly warmed Lugano's heart. It felt as though, after years of wandering and adventuring, he had finally returned home.

Fatigue lifted, and a sense of grounding enveloped him.

"Praise Mother Earth." Lugano crossed his arms over his chest.

Father Montserrat nodded and commenced his true preaching.

"You believe in the source of life, the mother of all things, the propagation of the fertile land, the symbol of the crimson moon and reproduction, as well as the destination and the starting point of everything…"

Lugano listened attentively, committing the information to memory.

Though not devout yet, this might become his future sanctuary. He recognized the importance of presenting his good side at all times.

…

Upon returning to the first-class suite, Lugano glanced nervously at Lumian, who was engrossed in studying the Southern Continent's Dutanese, and stammered, "I-I've changed my faith to Earth Mother."

As a fellow Intisian, would he despise and scorn me?

Lumian looked up and chuckled.

"Then make sure to radiate maternal brilliance. Ludwig is counting on you for some fresh fish."

He doesn't mind at all… Lugano mumbled, not willing to let Ludwig go hungry. He embarked on a busy day.

Late at night, after tending to Ludwig until bedtime, Lugano pondered briefly and decided to visit the prayer room.

If the door was still ajar, he intended to offer a prayer before retiring for the night.

He had to make a good impression right from the beginning!

Lugano treaded the dimly lit stairs, approaching the prayer room with cautious steps on the creaking floor.

His footfalls grew hushed, wary of disturbing those engaged in prayer and potentially interrupting Father Montserrat's embodiment of Mother Earth's teachings through reproductive activities with a female believer.

Reaching the door quietly, Lugano extended his right hand, gently pushing it open.

The wooden door eased ajar, revealing a small gap without a sound.

It's not shut tight… Is he truly in the midst of reproduction? Lugano cautiously peered into the opening.

He observed the crimson moonlight enveloping the prayer room and Father Montserrat, draped in a brown priest's robe, standing before the Sacred Emblem of Life. Folding his arms, Father Montserrat swayed gently, as if cradling a newborn child.

However, there was nothing within his embrace.

Chapter 607: Smell of Food

Lugano's scalp tingled as he found himself in a surreal encounter with Father Montserrat, bathed in the glow of the crimson moonlight. The sight of the priest, cradling an invisible child in his arms, sent shivers down Lugano's spine.

Is he carrying a child?

An invisible child?

The so-called Child of God?

Frightened by the association, Lugano tried to quickly shut the door before the owner noticed, as if he had wandered into the wrong room. He slipped away without making a sound.

Suddenly, Father Montserrat's voice echoed in the air.

"Are you here for prayer?"

Lugano's eyes tightened, and like a startled wild cat, he swiftly turned and sprinted towards the staircase.

All he could think about at that moment was his formidable employer!

However, what met his eyes was utter darkness. No staircase with a wooden floor in sight.

In the shadows, clusters of pitch-black weeds, with plump wheat, swayed in eerie silence.

Lugano's body tensed, uncertain about the unknown that awaited him in this abyss of darkness.

"Why did you run?" The weeds parted, revealing Father Montserrat, holding an invisible baby. Behind him, an illusionary, unusually massive oak tree stood tall.

Next to the weeds, the oak tree was covered in abnormal growths, forming a chillingly simple and ominous Sacred Emblem of Life.

As Father Montserrat, clad in a brown priest's uniform, appeared less than three meters away, Lugano swallowed hard, offering a feeble excuse.

"It's late. I didn't want to disturb you."

Father Montserrat remained cradling his arms, wearing a faint smile.

"What did you see?"

Every hair on Lugano's neck stood on end, and cold sweat broke out on his back.

Struggling, Lugano pointed at Father Montserrat's empty embrace, asking with difficulty, "Why are you doing this?"

Father Montserrat responded with a significant tone, "We're all Mother's children."

Lugano didn't dare to delve further and nodded repeatedly.

"Yes, yes, yes. We're all Mother's children."

Father Montserrat didn't allow him to navigate through with platitudes. He deliberately added,

"The child of the Great Mother."

Great Mother… Although Lugano had anticipated this answer, his heart almost skipped a beat, and his mind went blank upon hearing it.

Seeing that Father Montserrat had made it explicit, Lugano had no choice but to inquire,

"Aren't… aren't you a follower of Earth Mother?"

Father Montserrat felt no remorse about betraying the Church of Earth Mother. He maintained a warm smile and explained, "Earth Mother is a facet of the Great Mother, a projection. In this role, she watches over the lands of betrayal and the children who have strayed from the Mother's embrace."

Gulp… Lugano instinctively swallowed, uncertain about how to counter Father Montserrat.

Having joined the Church of Earth Mother just a day ago and attended only two sermons, he lacked the profound theological knowledge to challenge such heretics.

He could, of course, outright deny it. After all, Montserrat's explanation sounded ominous. If the priest's words were true, with the Earth Mother Church's resources and factions, the so-called Child of God should have already been born in the real world, and the Great Mother would have returned. Yet, that hadn't happened.

The current scene and the invisible pressure silenced Lugano, refraining from outright denial.

What if he enraged Father Montserrat completely?

Father Montserrat continued, "All creatures in this world are the children of the Great Mother. Some were conceived by her, some are descendants of these deities, and some, like you and me, were directly transformed from the flesh and blood of the Great Mother. We share the strongest connection with her!"

Internally, Lugano couldn't help but retort, I was born by my mother, not transformed from the flesh and blood of the Great Mother… However, his smile remained, more grimacing than joyous.

"Don't you find the Great Mother's believers sinister and terrifying?"

Father Montserrat smiled and reassured, "There's no need to fear the return of the Great Mother. How can a mother hate her child?

"You might not know, but there are many worlds beyond ours. The creatures in those places flourish under the watch of the Great Mother, constantly reproducing and growing. I've never heard of any species being eradicated. Instead, their numbers are increasing.

"Moreover, it's the Great Mother who granted us life. It's her prerogative to reclaim the life she bestowed upon us. We should cooperate willingly."

Cooperate my rear end, you son of a sow! Lugano wasn't bewitched. Suddenly, he drew his concealed revolver and fired two shots at Father Montserrat.

Without confirming the effectiveness of the shots, he swiftly turned and sprinted toward the dark expanse filled with black weeds.

Though the destination within the dark depths was unknown, perhaps harboring great peril, staying here seemed even more hazardous!

"Waaa!"

Abruptly, Lugano heard an almost ethereal cry of an infant.

It was exactly the same as the sounds he had heard several times before.

Lugano's expression froze, and his pace slowed as he ran.

His eyes gradually filled with emptiness, and he turned around. Step by step, he approached Father Montserrat, who was cradling an invisible baby, and the illusory, colossal oak tree.

"That's our mother…

"The mother who gave us life…

"She's willing to accept anyone who repents, every child who returns home…

"If she wants to take back the life she bestowed upon us, then let her. She has the prerogative to reclaim what she gave…"

Listening to Father Montserrat's abnormally ethereal yet seemingly close voice, Lugano gradually developed a strong and heartfelt acceptance.

Yes, that's my mother…

Why would she harm me?

She can take back what she had given…

Lugano walked faster and faster until he stood beside Father Montserrat.

Instantly, he felt warmth and relief. It was the scent of a mother's embrace.

Gradually, he experienced an indescribable moist sensation, as if a kitten were being licked by a female cat.

How comforting… Lugano half-closed his eyes.

At that moment, he heard his mother's favorite nursery rhyme

—from behind him.

Why is Mom behind me? Shouldn't she be in front? Lugano wondered vaguely.

Then, he heard his mother shouting behind him, "Don't go over!

"Don't move forward!

"Danger!"

Don't go over… Don't move forward… Danger… Lugano shuddered, his vacant eyes regaining a certain vigor.

He saw where he was—the illusory colossal oak tree and moist, warm, squirming flesh petals sprouting from it. Half of his body was already enveloped in the flesh petals, slowly pulling inward.

This was the motherly embrace he had just experienced.

Lugano's pupils dilated, and a chill ran down his spine, causing his hair to stand on end.

He exerted strength against the viscous liquid-covered flesh with both hands, swiftly pulling away.

Father Montserrat, cradling an invisible baby, appeared beside Lugano, wearing a warm smile.

"Return. Return to the Mother's embrace and revert to our original form."

Despair gripped Lugano.

He wanted to confront the priest, but sadly, having consumed two potions—Planter and Doctor—he realized that, apart from enhanced strength and proficiency with farming tools and a scalpel, he lacked Beyonder powers directly applicable in combat. These powers included predicting the weather, identifying and nurturing seeds, treating ailments, healing wounds, stitching up souls, bestowing life, or possessing outstanding surgical abilities.

In the past, Lugano had relied on the combat techniques and marksmanship learned as a bounty hunter to match a Planter's strength and firearms.

Nevertheless, not resisting at a moment like this meant certain death. Lugano, an adventurer with a history of killing, faced immense fear as he fired at Father Montserrat and drew a sharp scalpel.

…

In Lumian's first-class cabin suite,Lumian, still engrossed in the Dutanese textbook under the kerosene wall lamp, heard a knock on the door.

Perplexed, he stood up, opened the door, and found Ludwig.

Ludwig, clad in grayish-white checkered pajamas top and pants, spoke gravely,

"Lugano has encountered an accident. Hurry up and save him."

An accident? Lumian arched his eyebrows.

Knowing that Lugano could still hear the baby's cries, Lumian had discreetly heightened his surveillance and attention on the servant, including just now.

But how could an accident occur when Lugano had entered the Earth Mother Church's prayer room?

Ludwig continued, "I couldn't sense his scent after he entered the prayer room."

"What scent?" Lumian inquired casually, already forming a vague suspicion.

Ludwig responded nonchalantly,"The smell of food."

Lumian stretched his neck and wrists, regarding Ludwig thoughtfully.

"You deliberately sniffed his scent."

Ludwig's chubby cheeks displayed an expression that said, "What's so odd about that?"

"If he perishes and you're busy elsewhere, who will assist me in gathering food?"

"That's a valid point." Lumian grinned.

…

In the darkness, enveloped by black weeds, Lugano's scalpel sliced through the air as he attempted to strike Father Montserrat.

"Waaa!"

The baby's cries echoed once more, leaving Lugano in a momentary daze, teetering on the edge of losing control.

With the invisible baby cradled in his arms, Montserrat manifested on the colossal illusory oak tree and smiled down at Lugano.

"Don't resist. We originated from the Mother, and we shall return to her."

Just as the priest, with clear eyes and a warm smile, finished speaking, a knock on the door reverberated in the seemingly endless darkness, echoing among the weeds with abundant wheat.

Upon hearing the polite knock on the door, Lugano had an inexplicable thought.

How polite—to knock at the door in such a situation…

Chapter 608: The Way to Find Prey

The rhythmic thumping echoed only three times before escalating into a resounding bang.

As the sturdy wooden door flung open, the corridor bathed in the glow of kerosene wall lamps revealed a darkness entwined with overgrown weeds. Crimson flames surged forth, casting an eerie illumination.

In Lugano's gaze, the illusion of the oak tree abruptly dissipated, along with Father Montserrat, cradling an unseen infant in his arms.

Amidst the fiery chaos, the weeds withered, and the shadows dispersed. Lugano found himself "returned" to the humble prayer room, now aglow with the crimson moonlight.

Lumian, sporting a golden straw hat, emerged at the entrance. His eyes scanned every nook, yet Father Montserrat remained elusive.

Powers akin to the Paramita world merged with other traits, albeit incapable of creating a sufficiently independent world separate from reality. It resembles Demon Warlock Burman gaining unique abilities through a forceful transition of pathways… Where is he hiding now? Drawing from Ludwig's knowledge from his food, Beyonders of the School of God's Descent can conceal themselves in woodwork. Although I can't confirm Father Montserrat's corrupted affiliation with the School, the influence of the Great Mother is evident… Lumian swiftly assessed the unfolding scenario.

The lack of resistance from Father Montserrat, who refrained from fleeing or hiding, didn't surprise Lumian.

Performing the wave magic in the ship's bar had been a casual display, not wanting to waste the temporary Governor of the Sea authority. However, the subsequent use of the colossal wave to "greet" Captain Pedro and Father Montserrat wasn't mere showmanship.

Unaware if the School of God's Descent incident had concluded or if hidden Great Mother devotees lingered on the ship, Lumian deliberately showcased the might of a demigod Governor of the Sea to instill fear!

If there were no other Great Mother adherents or lurking threats, his "greeting" actions could be seen as showmanship. But if danger lurked, it would make the elusive elements cautious, forcing them to retreat deeper into hiding. Lumian planned to let the ship reach the next port, leaving the Church of Earth Mother authorities to deal with them.

Father Montserrat, seemingly unwilling to face the adventurer Louis Berry head-on and his demigod prowess, opted for concealment, biding his time until the ship docked.

Had Lugano not luckily or unluckily stumbled upon the priest cradling the unseen infant, Father Montserrat might have continued portraying himself as a competent clergyman of the Church of Earth Mother, avoiding any confrontation with Louis Berry.

"F-Father Montserrat is a believer in the Great Mother! He was cradling an invisible baby!" Lugano hastily reported to Louis Berry, now realizing the gravity of the situation.

Cradling an invisible baby… He could be hiding within the ship's woodwork. Lumian scanned the surroundings, inspecting chairs, the floor, and the Sacred Emblem of Life adorning the wooden wall.

In an abrupt realization, he felt a stir in his heart as he approached the Sacred Emblem embodying Earth Mother.

Adorned with symbols of wheat, flowers, and spring water at the periphery, at its core lay a simple depiction of a baby.

A baby!

Advancing further, crimson flames radiated, setting the wooden floorboards and chairs ablaze.

Coming to a halt before the Sacred Emblem of Life, Lumian extended his right hand, gently caressing the baby's face.

The wood instantly deteriorated, exuding a yellowish pus.

It seemed that the depiction of a baby surrounded by wheat and flowers had long decayed, shedding tears of blood.

There's a huge problem with the Church of Earth Mother… Lumian narrowed his eyes.

While unable to pinpoint the elusive Father Montserrat, he unearthed decay and darkness lurking beneath the veneer of the Church of Earth Mother.

Observing the charred remains of the woodwork and finding no trace of Father Montserrat, with more wooden hiding spots on the steel steam ship, Lumian turned and addressed Lugano, "Take me to the captain's cabin."

"Alright." Lugano visibly relaxed.

Exiting the prayer room, the crimson flames within swiftly extinguished, ceasing their advance.

Inside the captain's cabin, Pedro, spotting a handsome brown beard, grimaced as adventurer Louis Berry approached.

Experienced as he was, he knew that there might be trouble on the ship.

During the School of God's Descent incident, Adventurer Louis Berry had only dispatched a servant to explain matters. Now, here he was personally visiting!

What did this signify?

It pointed to a more severe complication!

Without awaiting the captain's inquiry, Lumian calmly asserted, "Father Montserrat has succumbed, aligning himself with an evil deity. He likely colluded with the School of God's Descent's evil warlock."

Captain Pedro's mind jolted as if struck by a rod, momentarily buzzing and going blank.

After a brief pause, he cautiously inquired, "Have you already killed him?"

"Not yet," Lumian truthfully responded. "He escaped the prayer room and is now in hiding. Dispatch a telegram promptly, reporting this to the Church of Earth Mother and the Feynapotter government. My servant will provide the details."

In the face of Louis Berry's authoritative directive, Captain Pedro yielded without resistance. He shifted his attention to Lugano, absorbing the account of his conversion and Father Montserrat's description, cradling an invisible infant.

Upon hearing the revelation, Pedro wore a bitter expression and admitted, "I did sense something amiss with Father Montserrat, but I never anticipated it to be this grave."

"What's the issue?" Lumian inquired.

Pedro sighed, explaining, "He's a Favored, a Beyonder of the Earth pathway, the most orthodox clergyman. Typically, he needs a Blessed's help to conduct Mass, preach to believers, and guide others into the Church. However, he's the only Favored on this ship without a Blessed."

"I initially thought the shortage of staff in Port Santa was due to the sea prayer ritual, so I didn't pay much heed. But now, with Father Montserrat's fall…"

Only with the assistance of a Blessed can one conduct Mass and preach to believers. There's no Blessed following him… Lumian had previously learned that Favored of the Church of Earth Mother needs at least one second-in-command Blessed for their decisions to be considered valid. Otherwise, it risks being perceived as an influence of an evil god or a demon… An evil god… That Great Mother? Wh… Combined with recent events and his prior knowledge, Lumian suddenly grasped why the Church of Earth Mother maintained two distinct systems—

Blessed and Favored—rather than merging them.

Madam Magician of the Apprentice pathway had mentioned occasional influence from the Celestial Worthy, unsure if it was a revelation from Mr. Fool.

Similar to the Celestial Worthy of Heaven and Earth for Blessings overseeing the Apprentice, Seer, and Marauder pathways, the Great Mother likely stood atop the Planter, Apothecary, and Villain pathways.

As a result, Favored Beyonders of the Planter and Apothecary pathways would also be under the influence of the Great Mother. The origin of the revelation, whether from Earth Mother or the Great Mother, remained unclear. Confirmation required the input of Blessed from pathways outside these two. Simultaneously, Blessed monitored the status of the Favored!

That explains it… Indeed, there's a profound and serious reason behind this seemingly absurd, wasteful, and unreasonable system design, Lumian concluded. Without further words, he instructed Captain Pedro, "Send the telegram."

After the captain relayed Father Montserrat's situation to the Feynapotter government and the Church of Earth Mother, Lumian contemplated how to locate Father Montserrat.

Considering the vast sea surrounding them, unless Father Montserrat possessed teleportation or exceptional underwater travel abilities, he could only be hiding somewhere on the ship.

Lumian dismissed the idea of involving his Major Arcana card holder for such a trivial issue and resolved to devise a solution himself.

Could I use the ship's megaphone to insult the Great Mother, provoking Father Montserrat to reveal himself? The challenge lies in the inability to lock onto a target, potentially yielding less-than-optimal results…

Burning all the ship's woodwork? Seems like a last resort due to the presence of valuable goods in wooden crates…

Borrowing a bottle of Prophetic Concoction from Franca? It requires a fresh corpse. Additionally, if Franca is involved, I could get her to directly employ Magic Mirror Divination…

Playing the Symphony of Hatred bone flute and informing passengers to cover their ears prior to that? But it only reduces damage without averting the effects…

Right, ask Ludwig if he recalls Father Montserrat's small…

Also… Yes, I can give it a try!

Lumian quickly came up with several solutions and decided to systematically test each one, reserving seeking help as a final option.

He bid farewell to the captain and, under the cover of night, led Lugano back to the first-class cabin suite.

"Do you recall Father Montserrat's scent?" Lumian inquired of Ludwig.

Ludwig shook his head.

"No direct contact."

"Fair enough." Lumian turned around, offering a reassuring smile to Lugano. "I have an experiment in mind. Work with me."

"What kind of experiment?" Lugano asked, a tremor of fear evident.

Lumian gestured towards the window.

"Go to the deck. It's more open there."

Uneasily, Lugano descended to the deck, bathed in the crimson moonlight. His employer pulled out a full-body silver armor from his Traveler's Bag, revealing an inscrutable smile.

Lumian recalled the Pride Armor's particular disdain for items from the Earth and Evernight pathways.

What if it wasn't an item but a Beyonder?

How would it react?

Could this hatred be harnessed to pinpoint Father Montserrat's location, given he was at least a Doctor, at a certain distance?

Lumian wasn't entirely sure, but he intended to experiment with Lugano, a fellow Beyonder of the Earth pathway, to explore the possibilities.

Chapter 609: Useful Armor

Lumian shot a quick smile at Lugano and fixed his gaze on the Pride Armor, carefully observing its reaction.

"What experiment? To test the effects of this armor?" Lugano questioned, a mix of apprehension and confusion in his voice.

As soon as he finished speaking, the air on the dark deck, bathed in the crimson moonlight, suddenly solidified.

In the next instant, the empty armor produced a radiant broadsword, and an unseen force locked onto Lugano.

Wh… Before Lugano could react, the silver-white full-body armor surged forward, the gleaming broadsword poised to strike.

In a split second, Lumian positioned himself in front of Lugano. His body expanded abruptly, almost tearing his linen shirt and black pants.

Bang!

Lumian's massive fist collided with the Sword of Dawn, creating a metallic clang that resonated through the air.

Only then did Lugano shake off his bewilderment. Though unsure why the empty armor attacked him, he instinctively turned and sprinted away.

After covering some ground, the Pride Armor halted and stood silently.

The Sword of Dawn, fashioned from light, dissipated, turning into beams of light that dispersed the crimson moonlight, casting a dawn-like ambiance upon the dark deck.

This sensation vanished in the blink of an eye.

Lumian, not daring to turn his back on the Pride Armor, repositioned himself and gauged the distance between the armor and Lugano.

About 20 meters… factoring in Lugano's running speed, the sensing range is approximately 15 meters… Lumian swiftly concluded. His body reverted to its original form, and a confident smile returned to his face.

It was enough. A fifteen-meter range sufficed on the ship!

He stowed away the Pride Armor and addressed Lugano, who was still making his way to the bow, "The experiment is over."

Huh? Lugano came to a sudden halt, realizing that Lumian had already stashed the peculiar silver-white full-body armor back into the mystical item cleverly disguised as a coin bag.

Relieved, he jogged back, curiosity etched on his face as he inquired, "Did the experiment succeed?"

"Very successful," Lumian replied, sporting a radiant smile.

Though Lugano didn't grasp the experiment's significance, he had a hunch that Lumian might be exploring a way to locate Father Montserrat.

Upon reaching the first-class suite, Lumian promptly instructed Lugano, "Go to the captain and ask him to gather all the Beyonders of the Earth pathway on the ship. Oh, and the Beyonders of the Apothecary pathway. I'll be back after capturing Father Montserrat. It doesn't matter if they don't show up. They'll bear the risk themselves."

Unsure if Captain Pedro was aware of every unstable element on the ship and every Beyonder, Lumian planned to monitor the Pride Armor later to prevent it from targeting hidden wild Beyonders. Allowing Pedro to handle this process first would lighten his load.

As Lugano left the suite, Lumian turned to Ludwig, who had resumed his meal.

"Keep an eye out later and see if there's any 'food' secretly lurking here."

Ludwig, mouth full of cake, signaled his agreement.

Waiting for the captain's arrival, Lumian patrolled the cabin's top floor with the Pride Armor in his arms, but Father Montserrat remained elusive.

Before long, Pedro entered the suite with the suspected security supervisor and a passenger in a low hat.

Lumian didn't delve into details and gestured toward the sofa.

"Wait for me here."

Without waiting for a response, he pressed down on his golden straw hat and exited the room.

Upon reaching the staircase, Lumian "pulled" out his silver-white full-body armor. Gripping the Sealed Artifact's armpits firmly with both hands, he methodically patrolled each level of the cabin.

Whenever he approached a distance less than 15 meters from his suite, Lumian exercised extra caution, yet the Pride Armor refrained from attacking anyone.

Could it be that, beyond five meters and with several layers of obstruction, the armor wouldn't exhibit any additional reactions? Lumian speculated as he descended floor by floor.

After nearly half an hour, he descended to the cargo cabin at the bottom.

Before maneuvering past stacks of wooden crates, the Pride Armor in Lumian's grasp suddenly quivered, breaking free from his control.

The silver-white full-body armor morphed a radiant broadsword. Advancing in two strides, it swung at a wooden box tucked in the corner.

With a resounding clang, the wooden box splintered, and a handful of steel ingots spilled out.

At the same moment, Montserrat's clean, youthful visage emerged from the broken box, materializing his entire body.

Confronted by the gleaming broadsword of light once more, the priest's initially sturdy frame bulked up, as if transforming into a formidable brown bear.

Bang! With a powerful palm strike, he sent the Sword of Dawn hurtling, landing atop a wooden crate of goods behind him.

This strength rivaled that of a true giant bear!

As Father Montserrat skillfully parried the Pride Armor's onslaught, Lumian, donned in a linen shirt, black vest, and a golden straw hat, materialized swiftly beside a stack of wooden crates behind him.

"Hmph!"

Two beams of white light shot from Lumian's nostrils, hitting Father Montserrat before he could even react.

Instantly, the priest's gaze lost focus, and he crumpled to the ground, unconscious.

With this turn of events, vitality surged through his body like a steam engine operating at full throttle.

The robust vitality manifested as an incredibly potent self-healing ability, swiftly restoring Father Montserrat's spirit.

The Spell of Harrumph bore a resemblance to Psychic Piercing, both targeting the Spirit Body and proving challenging to defend against. However, while the latter induced uncontrollable pain, trapping the target, the former added a sleep-inducing or unconscious state to the Spirit Body—a different form of harm.

Since it was an injury, it could be healed.

Empowered by the vigorous vitality's transformation, Father Montserrat's closed eyelids twitched as his eyeballs moved beneath them.

He nearly woke up before hitting the ground!

Yet, for Lumian, a mere second of restraint from the Spell of Harrumph was sufficient.

Considering that Father Montserrat might also be a product of human refinement, some abilities might not be effective. Lumian lunged at him, extending his right hand.

In his open palm, crimson flames coiled and compressed, forming a solid-looking sphere.

Simultaneously, the Pride Armor raised the Sword of Dawn once more.

Just as Father Montserrat opened his eyes and instinctively regained balance, he caught sight of Louis Berry's jade-green eyes, the dangerous crimson fireball almost white, and the broadsword of light slashing toward his head from the corner of his vision.

With only a moment to react, he twisted to the side to evade the Sword of Dawn, but Lumian pressed the crimson, nearly white fireball against him.

Boom!

In a resounding explosion, Father Montserrat was sent hurtling through the air.

Flesh and blood erupted from his right shoulder to his abdomen, bones fractured, and squirming internal organs were laid bare.

His right arm dangled, on the verge of detachment.

Yet, the robust vitality within Father Montserrat persisted. Flesh and blood wriggled within the gaping wound, miraculously healing.

Thud!

Father Montserrat crashed to the ground, accompanied by the heavy footsteps of the Pride Armor and the luminous slash of the broadsword.

Lifting his finger, the blood and flesh expelled from his body during the explosion swiftly coalesced, transforming into a blurry, thin blood-colored figure.

This figure lunged at the silver-white full-body armor, enveloping it and infiltrating its form.

Abruptly, the cargo hold was bathed in Sunrise Gleam. The blood-colored figure dissolved, gradually fading away.

The Sunrise Gleam was gentle, sparing Father Montserrat the instinctive need to shut his eyes. Consequently, his gaze reflected crimson, nearly white flaming ravens.

A dozen or so Fire Ravens circled Lumian, who casually kept one hand in his pocket. Their eyes fixed on Montserrat, tracing distinct trajectories as they soared.

Their aim was clear—to shred the target's body and set each piece of flesh ablaze, preventing recovery even with his potent self-healing abilities.

When each fragment was spaced 20 to 30 centimeters apart, their self-healing powers struggled to reunite them!

This wasn't flesh and blood magic!

Father Montserrat's pupils dilated, and his mouth instinctively opened, emitting a sinister yet intimate voice.

With the accompanying voice, a dense darkness descended, and wheat-filled weeds sprouted, devouring the Sunrise Gleam that bathed the warehouse.

In the darkness, some of the crimson, nearly white Fire Ravens lost their way, unable to traverse the "distant" space. Gradually, they dissipated—only a fraction successfully reaching Father Montserrat.

Amidst thunderous explosions, Father Montserrat's form turned translucent, giving rise to a colossal illusory oak tree in its place.

The oak tree stood unscathed amid the explosion and flames, and amidst the aftermath, the mangled form of Father Montserrat materialized on a branch adorned with mistletoe. He cradled his arms, as if holding an invisible infant.

Gazing at Lumian, he wore a genuine smile.

So you're not a demigod…

"Waaa!"

For the first time, Lumian heard the ethereal, hollow cry of the baby.

"Wah wah wah!"

Amidst the relentless cries, Lumian felt his vitality draining away. Gradually weakening, even his consciousness began to waver.

The depleted vitality seemed to flow towards the invisible baby in Father Montserrat's embrace, transforming into its nourishment.

Chapter 610: "New Life"

In the face of the infant's cries, which gradually weakened him, Lumian teleported immediately to Father Montserrat's side, launching a powerful attack to disrupt the impending impact.

Yet, in that very moment, he observed the Pride Armor freezing in place upon hearing the infant's cry. Suddenly, it crouched down and plunged the Sword of Dawn into the ground covered in dark weeds.

Dammit! Directly employing Hurricane of Light? Lumian's scalp tingled. Without bothering to confirm, he shifted the teleportation destination, vanishing into the darkness of the illusory oak tree, and reappeared on the ship's deck.

He had long recognized that Father Montserrat's weed wilderness was inferior to the Madames' Paramita. It failed to sever the deep connection between the inside and outside, nor could it prevent teleportation. Its sole capability was restraining various sounds and the aftermath of battle, akin to the Bottle of Fiction, if not less. Nonetheless, this wilderness had unique abilities.

As Lumian's figure faded into the dark wilderness, the Sword of Dawn embedded in the ground by the Pride Armor shattered, transforming into countless light fragments, creating a formidable storm that engulfed the area.

The plump wheat-filled weeds were sliced into pieces, leaving the ground barren.

Father Montserrat, perched on the oak branch, couldn't dodge in time. He only managed to manifest his body into something resembling wood before being consumed by the Hurricane of Light.

The illusory, hollow cry of a baby abruptly ceased.

When the Hurricane of Light subsided, Father Montserrat stood frozen in place.

In the next moment, his wood-like body, covered in brown bark, split open, revealing deep crevices.

Pa, pa, pa. Father Montserrat's body fell to the bottom of the oak tree, piece by piece. The incisions were smooth, and blood seeped out.

Flesh and blood were instantly absorbed by the illusory oak tree's roots, leaving nothing behind.

In the middle section of the oak tree, the bark split open. Squirming, moist flesh grew out, expanding into a hole.

A human head appeared, squeezed and ejected.

In the blink of an eye, the naked human was "born" by the illusory oak tree. It was Father Montserrat.

He retained his adult form, his body wet and partially covered in a dirty, translucent white membrane.

New life!

With the aid of the weed-covered darkness, the illusionary oak tree, and the invisible baby, Father Montserrat found a new lease of life!

His brow smoothed, and his eyes regained a youthful gleam. Enormous bat-like wings, shrouded in dark skin, erupted from his back, propelling him from the heart of the colossal oak to his silver-white full-body armor.

The Pride Armor rose, summoning light into its hand, forging a sharp spear.

Launching the elongated lance with relentless force, it sliced through the air, embedding into Father Montserrat's chest.

Father Montserrat's bat-like wings enveloped him, and his form shattered into palm-sized black bats.

In a mesmerizing dance, the bats circled behind the Pride Armor, reforming into Father Montserrat, adorned with a grimy membrane.

Father Montserrat's body expanded, morphing into a colossal bear. From his palms sprouted sharp claws etched with enigmatic patterns.

With a forceful swipe, he etched five deep gouges onto the Pride Armor's back, unveiling its hollow interior.

The Pride Armor froze, and the air itself seemed to still.

Before Father Montserrat could launch another assault, he noticed the silver-white full-body armor pivoting without warning.

Condensing hammers, axes, and flails made of light, it slashed at Father Montserrat frenziedly.

Father Montserrat lowered himself, shrinking to the cleared ground, inching towards the illusionary oak tree.

The ground beneath him caved, forming a rift.

In that moment, Lumian, sensing the end of the Hurricane of Light, teleported back into the darkness.

To his surprise, Father Montserrat stood unscathed, devoid of the brown priest's attire.

Undeterred, Lumian retrieved the Symphony of Hatred bone flute from his Traveler's Bag.

Seizing the moment while the Pride Armor entangled Father Montserrat, preventing the transmission of sound to the outside world, Lumian aimed to play a melody learned from Port Santa's various celebrations—composed by a Church of Earth Mother Saint for a bountiful harvest.

Typically, Lumian would don the Flog boxing gloves, "teleport" closer, stimulate some desire or emotion in Father Montserrat through a punch, and then play the Symphony of Hatred to trigger Flog's aftereffects. However, Lumian abandoned this well-practiced routine.

The peculiar illusionary oak tree on the battlefield gave him pause. Father Montserrat had carried an invisible baby, possibly a Child of God. Wearing the Flog boxing gloves could attract attention and danger.

If the Great Mother perceived it and allowed the Child of God to breach the illusory-reality barrier to confront him, the consequences would be dire!

Moreover, Lumian suspected that heretics like Montserrat harbored evident psychological issues, making their mental states unpredictable. Playing the Symphony of Hatred directly could exploit this vulnerability, much like how he and Mr. K detested hearing others play the Symphony of Hatred.

Uncertain about which weakness might be triggered or the ensuing changes, Lumian planned to roll with the uncertainties.

Just as Lumian raised the Symphony of Hatred to his lips, an eerie chill crawled down his spine.

"Waaa!"

The spectral baby's cries reverberated, mere inches from him.

"Hehe, hehe."

The baby's cries morphed into laughter, as if engaged in an intriguing game with Lumian.

An inexplicable stiffness gripped Lumian, freezing him momentarily.

A cold aura infiltrated his body, spreading gradually to his abdomen.

As his life began to ebb away, merging with the cold aura, the baby in his ear oscillated between mournful wails and gleeful laughter.

Without hesitation, Lumian plunged his consciousness into his right hand, activating Blood Emperor Alista Tudor's residual brand.

A violent and frenzied aura erupted from Lumian, enlarging him without relying on his Compression strength. Tangible bloodlust filled the air.

The invisible baby's cries and laughter abruptly ceased, and the coldness invading Lumian's body dissipated under the searing sensation. The dark wilderness swayed, casting a faint glow.

Lumian, in control, terminated the activation and blew into the black bone flute with blood-colored holes.

A noticeably jubilant melody echoed, stunning Father Montserrat locked in battle with the Pride Armor.

His face twisted in indescribable agony.

Witnessing the silver armor wielding a staff of condensed light, Father Montserrat instinctively reached out, pointing at the adversary's feet.

Countless vines, weeds, and tree branches sprouted rapidly, entwining the Pride Armor and impeding its movements.

Amidst the cacophony of crashing branches and tearing vines, the Pride Armor advanced laboriously, slowed by the entanglement.

Father Montserrat locked eyes with Lumian and, in a pained plea, shouted,

"Run!

"The Child of God can't be killed!"

Run? Wh… Lumian realized Father Montserrat seemed more grounded than before. The warmth in his gaze, the familiarity of home, replaced by agony and conflict.

"Run!

"Repent to Mother Earth on my behalf!"

Father Montserrat screamed in hysteria.

His naked form underwent an abnormal transformation. Organs, symbolic of creation and incubation, sprouted under the translucent, filthy white membrane, intertwining in a horrific display.

Repent to Mother Earth? Lumian vaguely understood Father Montserrat's current state.

His corruption appeared incomplete, retaining a side that clung to faith in Earth Mother, resulting in a split personality. Typically, the normal persona remained suppressed by the corrupted one.

Is this the problem that the Symphony of Hatred triggered, allowing Father Montserrat's normal personality to temporarily gain an advantage and regain control of his body? Lumian sighed, but this didn't prevent him from condensing crimson fireballs that were nearly white, launching them towards the mutated Father Montserrat.

Montserrat's countenance shifted between frigidity and anguish. His body alternated between evasion and restraint.

With all his might, he exclaimed, "The Child of God cannot be killed, only banished!"

As Father Montserrat spoke, the crimson fireballs, nearly white, exploded upon him. The silver-white Pride Armor breached the obstruction of vines and branches, charging forward with a light-conjured staff.

Rumble!

Upon the fireball's detonation, the fallen Father Montserrat wrested control of his body, attempting to retreat underground.

In that instant, Lumian materialized behind him, brandishing the black bone flute.

Lumian teleported into the explosion's epicenter, unconcerned about the potentially severe injuries from the formidable shockwave!

The fireball was a decoy. The true lethal strike he primed was the Symphony of Hatred!

Pfft!

Lumian thrust the black bone flute with blood-colored holes into Father Montserrat's diminishing neck.

Rumble!

The expanding flames engulfed them both.

Chapter 611: True Name

Rumble!

As Lumian's body was ripped apart by the explosion, he drew upon an Ascetic's tolerance for pain and a Pyromaniac's resistance to burning, activating the black mark on his right shoulder once again.

Alongside Father Montserrat, whose neck had been pierced by the Symphony of Hatred, he vanished into the swirling flames, reappearing at the edge of the dark wilderness.

His linen shirt, black vest, and dark pants lay in tatters. The exposed parts were mangled and charred, revealing white bones in some places.

Father Montserrat, close to death, had the filthy, translucent white membrane on his body torn and burned away by the explosion. The mutated naked body with various organs below was dented and charred, with flesh and blood constantly peeling off.

Snap.

As the first piece of flesh landed on the edge of the weed-covered darkness, it suddenly seeped in, as if absorbed by the soil.

Witnessing this, Lumian's heart stirred. He grabbed Father Montserrat's body and activated teleportation once again.

They left the dark wilderness and materialized on the deck bathed in crimson moonlight.

Simultaneously, the illusory oak tree in the depths of the cargo hold shed its bark, revealing moist, slippery flesh.

The blood-filled flesh began to squirm, but only a palm-sized figure emerged.

The figure, nearly the same size as the blob of flesh that had dropped from Father Montserrat and been absorbed by the wilderness, had clear eyes and a youthful appearance, resembling Father Montserrat, who had shrunk countless times.

Father Montserrat's eyes were glazed, and his expression was rigid, showing no signs of intelligence.

The silver-white Pride Armor rushed over and swung the re-condensed light hammer down, flattening the pixie-like Father Montserrat and turning him into a bloody pulp.

Dawn lit up, melting the meat paste quickly.

The illusory colossal oak tree instantly became more transparent, and the black wilderness with weeds rapidly disintegrated.

In the blink of an eye, the abnormal scene vanished. The cargo hold returned to its original state, but many wooden boxes had shattered, and the steel walls and floor bore obvious depressions and deep marks.

Elsewhere, Lumian drew the Symphony of Hatred's black bone flute and observed as Father Montserrat's blood dripped onto the steel deck without soaking in.

Just as he breathed a sigh of relief, he heard Father Montserrat, who had fallen to the ground and entered a dying state, weakly but persistently shout, "To banish the… Child of God… you must grasp… His true name!

"His true name is…"

Suddenly, Father Montserrat's voice vanished, but his mouth continued opening and closing.

The illusory, hollow cry of a baby echoed in Lumian's ears once more.

Unlike before, the cries were distant, as if in another world. Lumian's body didn't stiffen or turn cold, rendering him immobile.

Is the invisible Child of God still wary of the Blood Emperor's aura? Is this instinctive fear? Lumian quickly surveyed the surroundings and realized that the crimson moonlight on the deck, or rather, around him, had vanished.

The area became abnormally dark, preventing even the sound of seawater splashing.

"Waa! Waa! Waa!"

The baby's cries persisted, growing louder and clearer.

Lumian abruptly lowered his head, fixing his gaze on the breathless Father Montserrat and the stomach of the corpse before him.

At some indeterminate moment, the stomach bulged, as if something writhed within. Despite the already gaping wounds, a demonic blood-red glow emanated from the belly.

Lumian's eyes narrowed slightly as he knelt on one knee. Extending his right hand, which grasped the Symphony of Hatred, towards Father Montserrat's distended stomach.

Slash!

A gentle stroke of the black bone flute cleaved open the blood-red stomach, revealing blood-stained intestines and internal organs. There was no sign of the so-called Child of God or a moist, filthy baby.

Poof! A substantial amount of transparent, pale-yellow liquid spewed out from the ruptured blood-colored stomach, splattering the surrounding deck.

"Waa! Waa! Waa!"

The baby's cries intensified, piercing and shrill, drawing closer to Lumian.

He seemed to be gradually overcoming His fear of the Blood Emperor's aura out of anger and hatred.

I need to find a professional to banish this invisible Child of God… Lumian, whose current spirituality allowed him two uses of Spirit World Traversal, planned on seeking assistance.

Hunters weren't experts in such matters!

Yet, after activating the black mark on his right shoulder, Lumian realized he couldn't sense the spirit world or the coordinates he had once held.

The abnormal darkness induced by the Child of God's cries appeared to seal off this area.

This was closer to Paramita!

I can't find help, summon a messenger, or pray to high-level existences… Lumian's eyes narrowed as his heart sank.

At that moment, the invisible Child of God's cries drew nearer, causing Lumian's body to stiffen and turn cold once again.

As panic surged, Lumian, a Conspirer, swiftly devised a new plan: Exorcism Spell!

One of the five ritualistic magics from Alms Monk, capable of dispelling wraiths and evil spirits.

The unborn Child of God, invisible in the real world, bore a resemblance to wraiths or evil spirits.

Lumian, untroubled by the need for a specific target in his Exorcism Spell, could firstly use his name. Secondly, he could pray to Mr. Fool. The proximity-based response of the seal on his chest, due to the severed connection with the outside world, would provide the necessary level and strength!

An Ascetic, Lumian could simplify parts of the Exorcism Spell for a quick completion.

The hitch was the requirement for the target's real name and an item frequently carried. Lumian lacked both.

His gaze shifted to Father Montserrat's open and deflated stomach, searching for something relevant.

If unsuccessful in a minute, he planned to unleash Blood Emperor Alista Tudor's aura, attempting to scare away the invisible Child of God and break through the abnormal darkness for an indirect banishment.

After scanning the area a few times, Lumian's gaze fixed on the chaotic, blood-stained intestines.

Amidst them lay a short, flesh-colored, bloodstained strip, clearly not fully developed.

Wh… An incomplete umbilical cord of the Child of God? If it's truly an umbilical cord, it's closely tied to the Child of God. Connected to His flesh and blood. I don't even need to know His true name to succeed in the Exorcism Spell… Lumian retracted the Symphony of Hatred and tore off the suspected incomplete umbilical cord.

The illusory baby's cries intensified.

Lumian shuddered and chuckled.

"Thank you for confirming it for me."

He held the incomplete umbilical cord and danced a rhythmic, distorted, primitive dance.

As Lumian danced, he constantly bent down, using the umbilical cord to draw corresponding symbols on the deck with Father Montserrat's blood.

He simplified the patterns he needed to complete, straightened his body, and pressed his left palm, creating a crimson, nearly white flame on the symbol.

Then, he placed the umbilical cord into the flames.

There was a strong symbolic meaning behind this, representing expulsion, incineration, and purification!

"Waaa!"

The baby's cries heightened, sending a shiver down Lumian's spine, causing his body to tremble slightly.

Swiftly, he positioned a lit candle atop the flame and umbilical cord. Stepping back, he recited in Hermes, "The Fool that doesn't belong to this era, the mysterious ruler above the gray fog; the King of Yellow and Black who wields good luck…"

As the honorific name of Mr. Fool echoed, a wispy gray fog enveloped the surroundings. The unseen baby's cries diminished, echoing in a haunting hollowness.

Feeling a burning sensation in his left chest, Lumian advanced two steps with a determined expression. He grasped the smoldering umbilical cord, flicked it thrice, and returned it to its place.

He continued, "I beseech your assistance. I implore you to banish the object connected to this umbilical cord…"

In an instant, the crimson, nearly white, flames tainted the gray fog, burning more intensely. The umbilical cord swiftly charred, revealing Father Montserrat's transparent face marked by explosions and blood. The hollow baby's cries faded into the distance.

Father Montserrat's spirit involuntarily retreated, relief evident on his pained face.

He was also connected to the umbilical cord, and he was now a ghost!

With difficulty, Father Montserrat raised his hands and shouted, "Life's precious embrace, the harvest's grace!

"Praise the Earth, praise the Mother of All Things!"

His transparent Spirit Body rapidly dissipated into the darkness. The invisible Child of God emitted a shrill cry filled with hatred and curses.

The cry echoed in Lumian's head, making him feel as if he had endured Psychic Piercings repeatedly. He became extremely weak, his thoughts consumed by the pain in his soul, losing perception of the outside world.

Upon recovery, the abnormal darkness on the deck had vanished, and the crimson moonlight returned.

The symbols on the ground and the gray fog-colored flames disappeared, leaving only the quietly burning candle and the charred umbilical cord.

After a brief pause, Lumian bent down to extinguish the candle flame. Pressing his hand to his chest, he whispered, "Thank you, Mr. Fool."

After stowing away the remnants of the umbilical cord and the ritual candle, Lumian cast a glance at Father Montserrat's still uncharacteristic corpse. He unleashed his Compression power.

His spirituality restored, weakness eased, Lumian finally felt confident enough to return to the cargo hold. Silently, he packed the Pride Armor into his Traveler's Bag.

Completing this task, he changed into tattered clothes and tended to his exposed wounds briefly.

Enduring the pain, he returned to his suite as if nothing had occurred. Addressing the captain, Pedro, and the others, he declared, "The problem has been resolved. Father Montserrat's corpse is on the deck. His belongings will be handed over to the Church of Earth Mother. Right, a Blessed."

Lumian harbored no intention of claiming the Church of Earth Mother's items.

Captain Pedro and the others departed in bewilderment to verify the deck situation. Lugano approached Lumian and whispered, "Is Father Montserrat really dead?"

"You can take a look at his corpse," Lumian replied with a "smile," intending to instruct the servant to provide treatment.

Lugano frowned and said, "But I vaguely heard his voice earlier. He seemed to be shouting the name of the so-called Child of God."

Shouting the so-called Child of God's name? Back then, Father Montserrat had indeed shouted the Child of God's true name, but due to special reasons, it hadn't reached the real world. Only Beyonders nearby corrupted by the Child of God could hear it? Lumian pondered and said to Lugano, "That was before Father Montserrat's death. What name did he call out?"

Lugano heaved a sigh of relief and recalled, "I think it was… I think it was…"

Finally, he remembered and recited the pronunciation.

"Yes, Omebella."

Chapter 612: Daybreak

"Omebella."

Termiboros's resonant voice reverberated in Lumian's ears as He echoed Lugano's words.

"You've heard of that?" Lumian hadn't anticipated Termiboros, who had maintained silence for a considerable time, mentioning a name that left no impression on him.

"No, I've never heard of it before today." Lugano thought it was a question directed at him.

Termiboros fell silent, offering no response.

From the looks of it, it seems there is something off about the Child of God's true name… And it sounds like a woman's name. Considering the Villain pathway's progression to Sequence 5 Banshee, where they transition to women, and the inherent female inclination of the Earth pathway's Sequence 0, Earth Mother, along with the influence of the Great Mother Herself, it's quite plausible that the Child of God is a woman. It's a logical deduction… Lumian glanced at Lugano and smiled.

"It's fortunate you weren't aware of this earlier. Otherwise, you might have found yourself linked to the so-called Child of God."

As Lumian spoke, his attention shifted to Ludwig, who had silently moved to the living room's balcony. Lumian approached him at a measured pace, his gaze following Ludwig's toward the deck where Captain Pedro and others were examining Father Montserrat's lifeless form.

Lumian asked thoughtfully, "Is it edible?"

He meant whether Father Montserrat's corpse was edible.

While Lumian had abstained from claiming the Church of Earth Mother's possessions, including Father Montserrat's Beyonder characteristics, he hadn't committed to preserving the corpse intact.

In the heat of battle, it was customary for bodies to sustain damage!

Ludwig shook his head. "Not yet."

"Very well," Lumian sighed, retracting his gaze with a tinge of regret.

Thus, the mystery of Father Montserrat's inexplicable connection with the invisible Child of God remained unsolved. A peculiar umbilical cord had even taken root in his stomach, leaving Lumian unable to confirm if Prinpino was a byproduct refined from Father Montserrat's remains.

Indeed, Father Montserrat bore signs of severe corruption, though Lumian hadn't anticipated his corruption to rival that of Mad Lady's.

Of course, it paled in comparison to the state of the Mad Lady's corpse; even Ludwig found it too dirty.

As for spirit channeling, Lumian understood that a spirit banished by the Exorcism Spell couldn't be summoned for a specific duration, rendering communication impossible. Once this period lapsed, spirit channeling became futile.

Upon returning to the living room, Lumian sank into a recliner, casually unbuttoning his black vest and linen shirt. Turning to Lugano, he remarked, "Come and treat me."

Lugano's eyes surveyed the makeshift bandages and the oozing wounds, expressing surprise.

"It's that serious?"

Lumian, with a hint of amusement, responded, "Do you think dealing with Father Montserrat is a walk in the park? If I hadn't taken risks, I might have been the one lying dead."

Lugano instinctively denied the suggestion, "Not what I meant. Why are your clothes and pants unscathed after such serious injuries?"

Lumian, enduring the pain, replied casually, "I obviously changed before coming back."

His Traveler's Bag proved invaluable, holding nearly a dozen identical shirts, vests, and pants, albeit varying in vest colors.

The only casualty was the golden straw hat, consumed in the explosion, now burnt to ashes.

However, this setback hardly fazed the great adventurer, Louis Berry, who had stocked up on identical replacements before leaving Port Farim.

This was the benefit of having a Traveler's Bag. Otherwise, how could he have the space to store so many useless items with just a suitcase?

Lugano, choosing not to pry further, focused on tending to his employer's injuries.

Originally considering a more intricate procedure, like cutting off charred skin, Lugano's plans were halted by Lumian, opting for a simpler approach.

Lumian had no intention of enduring the agony of anesthesia-free surgery, knowing that he would revert to his original state at 6 a.m.

With the pain and injuries now manageable and showing significant improvement, Lumian made his way back to his room. There, he unfolded a letter and began recounting the events involving Father Montserrat and the true name of the Child of God, diligently reporting to Madam Magician.

Lumian consistently regarded matters related to evil gods and the so-called Child of God with great gravity. He believed such concerns should be left to his superiors, acknowledging the importance of involving higher authorities.

Had Mr. K possessed a messenger, Lumian would have promptly dispatched a modified copy to inform the Aurora Order Oracle of the situation. The next course of action wasn't within the purview of an ordinary member like him or Minor Arcana; it was a concern for others to address.

Observing a shared stance between the Tarot Club and the Aurora Order in combating evil gods, especially those breaching the barrier, Lumian recognized his responsibility as both a minor Arcana card holder in the Tarot Club and an official member of the Aurora Order.

After meticulously recording the details, including Termiboros's reaction, Lumian summoned the "doll" messenger.

Engaged in a recent dispute with Ludwig and being in proximity to the other party, the "doll" messenger swiftly arrived and departed. It seldom lingered, avoiding casual conversations.

…

In a clean and refreshing bedroom of Loen Kingdom, Backlund, Madam Magician lay peacefully in bed, immersed in a restful slumber. Abruptly, she sat up, a puzzled expression crossing her face.

Spirituality warning?

Is something significant about to unfold?

Madam Magician, having just poured a glass of Sonia blood wine and not yet delved into her astromancy, was surprised to see the "doll" messenger materialize on her desk. It placed a folded letter next to a dark-red fountain pen.

Lumian's letter… Has he unearthed the issue with the Earth Mother Church's priest? I didn't guide him in vain… Madam Magician mused, letting the glass float in midair. She picked up the letter and unfolded it.

As she read, her expression underwent a sudden change, and she softly repeated the name,

"Omebella?"

The true name of the invisible Child of God is this? Was my spiritual warning connected to it?

This is something worth discussing at the Tarot Club's regular gathering…

After a moment, Madam Magician used astromancy to indirectly verify the information. She then seated herself and observed as the dark-red fountain pen levitated. Removing the cap, she began to inscribe her thoughts on the faux goatskin: "Omebella is a name shrouded in the fog of history. It carries a potent symbolic meaning in mysticism…"

…

"Using Omebella as the Child of God's true name. I don't know if it's tied to the mysteries of the Second Epoch when the ancient gods, predating the Ancient Sun God, ruled the land, or if the Great Mother is employing intense mystical symbolism to gradually erode Earth Mother's authority and even Earth Mother Herself.

"If we can unravel the secrets of the ancient era, we might find an answer.

"The one the Aurora Order believes in might know something."

As Lumian read the response inked on faux goatskin, he sensed a subtle suggestion from Madam Magician, hinting at him to inquire with the Aurora Order through Mr. K.

He continued reading.

"Simply put, Omebella belongs to the ancient giant race. Once known as the Goddess of Harvest during the era when ancient gods held sway. I can't divulge more at this time. No need to delve into this matter specifically. If you come across the Earth Mother Church's Favored, Nightstalkers, or members of the School of God's Descent, keep a vigilant eye. We'll handle the follow-up. Of course, when the time comes, we might assign you one or two minor missions."

The Goddess of Harvest… indeed linked to the Earth pathway… Lumian pondered as he burned the letter with crimson flames. Returning to bed, he feigned sleep, attuned to the ship's movements.

With the sunrise, his body swiftly healed, and the day unfolded without unexpected incidents.

Lumian returned to the living room and addressed Lugano, who had been awake for an hour, showing signs of a restless night.

"Still hearing the baby crying?"

"No," Lugano replied, a mix of joy and uncertainty evident in his response.

Lugano believed he needed more time to observe before drawing a final conclusion.

Lumian chuckled.

"As expected, seeking Father Montserrat's help is the only way to completely resolve your aftereffects."

Lugano nearly choked on his words.

So, that's why you wanted me to seek help from Father Montserrat?

Killing him is the equivalent of completely resolving the aftereffects I suffered?

Lumian approached the balcony and instructed Lugano, "Find Enio later and use a follow-up consultation as an excuse to confirm his condition."

Right, Enio was saved by Father Montserrat's surgery. Since there's something wrong with Father Montserrat, he, too, might be problematic… Lugano had concerns seeking the patient, fearing potential danger.

However, as he observed the sunlight gradually brightening and the horizon turning red, a sense of relief washed over him.

At 9 a.m., Lugano returned, informing Lumian that the special patient had recovered exceptionally well. There were no signs of surgery failure or hidden dangers, nor indications of corruption.

Around the same time, Captain Pedro approached Lumian, sharing news that the ship would temporarily dock to allow the Church of Earth Mother's personnel to collect Father Montserrat's corpse and relics and remove relevant individuals.

Notably, the adventurer and his servant were explicitly excluded from this directive by the Church of Earth Mother.

Lumian smiled, offering no response to the captain's words. His demeanor radiated confidence and certainty.

Around noon, several combat nuns and a priest in a brown robe boarded the ship, escorting Enio and others away.

On the balcony, Lugano observed Enio being "invited" off the ship, his expression a mix of daze and fear, powerless to resist. Lugano sighed.

"If he's fine, why capture him?"

Lumian emitted a soft chuckle.

"Do you think it's nonexistent just because you say so? Be optimistic—after the Church of Earth Mother confirms there's no issue, he might secure a clerical position within the Church, interacting with combat nuns daily."

Lugano fell silent, then after a few seconds, he remarked, "But that also means losing his freedom. He's a victim…"

"Freedom?" Lumian scoffed. "The prerequisite for freedom is not endangering others."

Despite his stance, as he witnessed the terrified and nervous Enio and recalled the deceased Father Montserrat in his normal persona, Lumian couldn't help but recall a peculiar phrase his sister would occasionally utter: "All living beings suffer."

Ooo!

With a whistle, the ship prepared to set sail once again.

Chapter 613: New Commission

A few days later, Lumian lounged on a recliner on the suite's balcony, soaking in the sea breeze, reveling in the sunlight, and sipping an undiluted Manzan. From his Traveler's Bag, he retrieved the incomplete umbilical cord from Father Montserrat.

The cord was completely charred, stripped of its spirituality. After Lumian's repeated confirmations, backed by Franca and Jenna's divination, a conclusion was reached:

After the Exorcism Spell, the umbilical cord lost its vitality. Moreover, lacking Beyonder characteristics, it couldn't function as a mystical item or a main ingredient for charms, agents, weapons, or any other artifacts.

All it retained now was its distinct uniqueness.

In simpler terms, it mirrored the mark left on Lumian by Blood Emperor Alista Tudor. Devoid of power and incapable of emitting the fearsome aura of the Great Mother's Child of God, Lumian couldn't wield it to intimidate and temporarily intimidate a specific target.

Lumian surmised that it could only play a role in two scenarios.

Firstly, it could act as a casting ingredient, enabling specific spells to wield power beyond ordinary standards or aiding Warlocks in utilizing special spells beyond their usual repertoire.

Secondly, it could serve as a supplementary ingredient incorporated during the crafting of mystical items, charms, agents, or Beyonder weapons, imparting unique effects to the final product.

Naturally, Lumian also believed that such an umbilical cord fragment could prove valuable in the presence of the Great Mother's bestowed. For instance, even without Provocation, he could provoke intense animosity from those individuals.

Regrettably, Witches share similarities with Pyromaniacs. They are restricted to utilizing various black magic bestowed by potions, unable to delve into spell study and master new incantations like Warlocks. Among these black magics, only one, the Bloodline Curse, can be paired with an umbilical cord as a casting ingredient. However, the invisible Child of God has yet to manifest in the real world, rendering the curse ineffective against Him. Cursing the Great Mother is also off the table, as Franca and Jenna might find themselves with giving birth right there and then…

Yes, at the next meeting at the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society or any other mysticism gathering, I could aim to acquire a mystical item tied to a Warlock Sequence, then amass potent spells that employ umbilical cords or high-level items as casting ingredients. Uh… isn't this creating several complications? In Aurore's terms, it's akin to raising a sheep for a plate of coarse salt—nurturing it only to be eventually slaughtered and roasted…

I've not needed to seek out an Artisan for crafting mystical items lately, and the absence of primary ingredients complicates matters. Alternatively, should I transform it into a Beyonder weapon with limited use?

This isn't ideal. There's a contamination risk if an insufficiently skilled Artisan incorporates it as a supplementary ingredient. It's not worthwhile enlisting the help of a high-level Artisan for what seems like a practically useless item…

What about fashioning charms and agents myself?

Lumian scrutinized the charred short umbilical cord for an extended period, grappling with indecision. Eventually, he returned it to his Traveler's Bag.

Then, Lumian reached into his pocket, where a finger from Mr. K sat.

In the past two days, he had undertaken a special "return" to Trier to brief Mr. K about Father Montserrat and the invisible Child of God. He received unreserved approval and praise from Mr. K.

The enthusiasm and fervor led Lumian to suspect that Mr. K might, in the next moment, sever his own arm and offer it to him.

His fingers seemed insufficient to convey the depth of his emotions!

Mr. K expressed great satisfaction with his decision to permit Lumian to leave Trier and pursue his adversaries. He perceived it as the Lord's revelation and commended Lumian's peculiar affinity for heretics and incidents involving evil gods, seeing him as a walking calamity for the fallen.

How could a Beyonder of such stature confine himself to Trier? It was imperative to explore various locations in the Northern and Southern Continents!

Regarding the name of the ancient Goddess of Harvest, Omebella, Mr. K didn't exhibit a notable reaction, nor did he seek an immediate revelation from his Lord. Lumian, failing to secure an answer, bid farewell and departed. Instead, he sought out Franca, Jenna, and Anthony to share the details of the surgical removal, human refinement, and Father Montserrat's near-conception of the Great Mother's Child of God as a man.

While Franca and Jenna were already acquainted with the Sowers of the Villain pathway, the connection with Father Montserrat left them feeling like they were hearing a horror story, traumatized by the bestowed of the Great Mother.

Anthony displayed no overt reaction, but he made a rare gesture.

Unconsciously, he gently stroked his stomach.

After conveying his sentiments, Lumian returned to the ship contentedly, resuming his journey to the southernmost part of the Feynapotter Kingdom.

Knock, knock, knock.

Lumian had just flipped through the Dutanese textbook for a few minutes when a series of knocks echoed on the suite's wooden door.

Lugano, ever diligent, played the role of a servant, making his way to the door and peering through the peephole.

In the past few days, the absence of baby cries had eased his anxious heart.

This incident only heightened his gratitude for choosing to stay with his employer rather than returning to Trier.

Lugano believed that if the issue stemmed from the Beyonder ingredients left behind by Tanko, even if he hadn't boarded this ship, he would have encountered a similar situation sooner or later. Moreover, the wait wouldn't be long — perhaps a year or even half a year. Without the aid of a powerful Beyonder like Lumian Lee, his fate would have been quite clear.

Spotting Captain Pedro outside, Lugano turned to Lumian, who was on the balcony, and informed him, "Boss, the captain is looking for you!"

Why would the captain seek me out? Shouldn't we tacitly overlook what happened? Lumian closed the Dutanese textbook and returned to the living room, bathed in bright sunlight.

Pedro, sporting a handsome brown beard, entered the suite and exchanged pleasantries. Clearing his throat, he said, "Mr. Berry, are you interested in taking on a commission? It's a straightforward one and won't consume much of your time."

Straightforward? I doubt it would remain so after being entrusted to me… After various experiences, he gained a better understanding of his unique constitution: As a Beyonder of the Hunter pathway, harboring an evil god's angel within him and concealed remnants of the Blood Emperor's aura, he naturally attracted calamities, prematurely unveiling problems that might have remained hidden.

Lumian couldn't foresee how a supposedly simple commission would unfold.

Seated in an armchair, Lumian smiled and responded, "What commission? I'll listen to the specifics before deciding whether to accept it."

Pedro sighed, beginning to explain, "The destination of this voyage is Port Colla, my hometown. My wife and children live there.

"At the start of the year, my beloved eldest daughter, Salah, fell in love with a young man. She was passionate and eager to marry him.

"As you're aware, in Feynapotter, marriage and family are held in high regard. We must approach marriage cautiously and maintain it responsibly. Blindly rushing into the cathedral isn't our way."

"Is that lad displeasing to you and your Matriarch? Are you hiring me to silence him?" Lumian teased. "Honestly, there's no need for such trouble. A captain like you surely has plenty of ways to handle inexperienced young people. For instance, give him an opportunity and entice him into the sea trade—only for him to never return."

Pedro chuckled dryly and responded, "I'm a law-abiding citizen. I won't resort to such measures."

A sea-faring captain with Beyonder abilities is a law-abiding citizen? Spare me the humor… Lumian criticized, smiling at Pedro, prompting him to continue.

"I probed the young man and sensed something amiss. I hired adventurers to investigate him, but the two adventurers never returned," Pedro explained earnestly. "This raised my alarm. I don't want my child involved with such a person. It's too risky."

Lumian nodded slightly.

"Is that why you've sought me out?"

"Yes," Pedro admitted, forcing a smile. "To you, this may seem trivial, but it's of utmost importance to me. I'm willing to pay 20,000 gold risot as compensation. All spoils are yours."

20,000 gold risot. Being a captain seems quite lucrative… Lumian pondered for a moment and asked, "Are you a Beyonder of the Planter or Apothecary pathway?

"Are there any Beyonders from these two pathways in your family?"

What kind of question is that… Pedro was taken aback.

"No."

"Why haven't you sought help from the Church?" Lumian inquired, posing a second question.

Pedro's expression darkened. After a brief silence, he sighed and replied, "As expected of an experienced adventurer.

"I didn't approach the Church because something is off with my daughter, Salah. Her infatuation with that young man is too intense, and she rejects reason. It's as if she's possessed by a demon. Seeking the Church could resolve the issue, but it might also lead to a negative encounter and outcome for Salah."

Lumian nodded thoughtfully.

"Do you suspect that Salah has been influenced or even possessed by an unknown entity?"

"Yes," Pedro admitted, appearing worried.

Lumian asked a few more questions and took a moment to reflect before stating, "Alright, I accept this commission."

He had to consistently pursue opportunities and work towards digesting the Conspirer potion to a level where he could conduct an advancement ritual upon reaching West Balam in the Southern Continent.

Of course, saving up funds for Ludwig's meals was another motivation.

…

A few days later, at 10 p.m., in Apartment 702, 9 Rue Orosai, Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative, Trier.

Franca and Jenna glanced at Anthony, who had just knocked and entered, puzzled.

"Why are you here at this time of day?"

Anthony nodded. "I've found that woman."

Huh? Jenna was momentarily surprised before questioning, "The woman who appeared in the Magic Mirror Divination?"

The woman whose presence caused the Mirror World Fragment on me to tremble slightly?

Anthony affirmed with certainty, "Yes."

Chapter 614: Under-the-table Transaction

Delilah Le Roy, daughter of a gem merchant, already wed with offspring—a boy and girl—indulges in opera, theater, and literature. Despite the prior incident in Quartier de la Maison d'Opéra, she persists in her activities, easily located by my informant within a week… Not one for bodyguards, she ventures out with only her lady's maid and a valet in tow…

Seated in a window booth at a street café, Jenna mentally reviewed the compiled data, observing the refined lady with makeup befitting her stature disembark from her carriage and enter Trier's esteemed Avenue du Boulevard's Bonnie department store.

Jenna redirected her attention, acknowledging Anthony Reid seated diagonally across from her.

"That's her."

Franca, positioned on the same side as Jenna, deliberated before speaking, "The issue at hand… Is she baiting us? If her reaction was merely surprise without understanding, we might glean little of value. Should she persist in her high-profile activities despite the resonance with the Mirror World Fragment, it's plausible that she or the person behind her seeks to draw out the Mirror World Fragment's holder."

Having assessed the scenario, Franca concluded, "Engaging with Delilah recklessly poses significant risks."

"But our Magic Mirror Divination assures the safety of today's operation," Jenna countered.

Franca smiled in response.

"Place not undue faith in divination. Moreover, the danger may not be immediate. Hastily engaging with Delilah could disrupt our future leads."

"So, we stand by? Wait a month or two until tensions ease before acting?" Jenna pondered briefly, then sat upright, revealing her plan, "I have an idea!"

"What is it?" Franca inquired, intrigued.

Jenna pursed her lips and smiled.

"Employ the mystical item—Authority Holder's Under-the-table Transaction. It grants us a discreet opportunity to interact with Delilah unnoticed.

"This way, if the issue stems from the person behind Delilah, our contact remains concealed, preserving the trail of clues. And if Delilah herself is the concern, we can swiftly transition from contact to control."

Franca contemplated the proposal with gravity for a brief moment.

"It's not implausible… I'm actually interested in testing the Authority Holder's Under-the-table Transaction myself. No need to contest it. I'm a Sequence higher than you, and my self-preservation capabilities surpass yours. Even if evil entities like demons seek a trade, I can invoke Madam Judgment, a formidable Arbiter, as my witness!"

The Demoness of Pleasure appeared eager to put the mystical item to the test.

Jenna remained silent for a few seconds before consenting, "Alright."

Anthony continued, "I'll handle the brief encounter. Using a Hypnotist ensures no lingering clues or traces for the person behind Delilah to discover."

"No issue." Franca dispensed with formalities, directing her gaze at Jenna, awaiting the retrieval of the Authority Holder's Under-the-table Transaction.

Dressed in grayish-white attire with brown leather armor, Jenna, like many female mercenaries, carried a leather brown backpack.

From the backpack, she retrieved a small, dark-painted wooden box adorned with a membrane curtain on each side, placing it on the table in the café's private room.

Franca weighed the terms of her request against the price of the Authority Holder's Bribe powers. Rolling up the sleeve of her lady's shirt, she reached through the membrane curtain on one side of the wooden box with a small cloth bag containing 100 Louis d'or in her right hand. Although the usage instructions didn't explicitly exclude banknotes, Franca, drawing on her extensive mystic experience, opted for gold coins, a more universally accepted form of currency.

In the next instant, she felt contact with wrinkled and moist skin, five fingers enclosing around the cloth bag containing the gold coins.

Suppressing a momentary surge of disgust, Franca articulated her request in Hermes.

"I desire an uninterrupted, unobserved, and highly discreet face-to-face encounter lasting over three minutes between my friend Anthony Reid, seated across from me, and Delilah, a member of the Le Roy gem merchant family in the nearby Bonnie department store."

Franca had included meticulous qualifiers, ensuring precision in the parties meeting and the manner of their encounter to avoid any distortion.

The object with the wrinkled and wet palm-like texture lifted the cloth bag containing the gold coins and withdrew.

This signified the agreement of the Authority Holder's Under-the-table Transaction.

Franca withdrew her right hand, using a white handkerchief to meticulously cleanse the touched area while expressing her discomfort with continuous spitting.

"Where should we position ourselves while waiting for the opportunity to meet?" Anthony inquired.

Franca stowed away her handkerchief, offering a smile.

"The request specified only two individuals: yourself and Delilah Le Roy. Consequently, your best chance is to shadow her until the opportunity arises."

"Fair enough…"

At this juncture, Franca retrieved the resplendent Seven-Stone Bracelet from her Traveler's Bag, extending it towards Anthony.

"In case of any complications, teleport away immediately."

Observing the seriousness in the Demoness of Pleasure's demeanor, Anthony swallowed his inclination to politely refuse and accepted the Seven-Stone Bracelet.

After a moment of contemplation, Franca suggested, "If you place trust in me, I can craft a Paper Figurine Substitute using your blood and hair."

Anthony remained silent for a few seconds before agreeing, "Okay."

…

Within the confines of the Bonnie department store, Anthony swiftly pinpointed Delilah Le Roy, exercising his keen observation skills as a Hypnotist.

Delilah stood amidst the first floor, accompanied by her lady's maid and the valet, engrossed in a magician's performance held by the department store to elevate the ambiance.

In the midst of the spectacle, the magician's assistant wheeled in a substantial wooden box capable of accommodating three to four individuals. The magician, with a theatrical flourish, removed his top hat and made an announcement.

"For my next act, I require the assistance of two fortunate members of the audience.

"Madame, would you do me the honor of joining me on stage?"

The magician's invitation was directed at Delilah Le Roy.

Though hesitant, Delilah couldn't muster a refusal and reluctantly ascended the wooden stage prepared for the magical performance.

A weak personality and a difficulty in declining others… Perhaps influenced by the Authority Holder's Under-the-table Transaction… Anthony vaguely anticipated the nature of the intended meeting as he observed Delilah's demeanor. With a calculated step forward, he drew the attention of the magician.

"This gentleman, please join us on stage as well."

Feigning reluctance, Anthony awkwardly made his way up onto the stage.

The magician gestured toward the wooden box, instructing, "Please take a seat inside."

Pursing her lips, Delilah sighed and, urged by the crowd, entered the wooden box.

Choosing a seat the furthest from her, Anthony, while there was still illumination, offered a smile and remarked, "Truth be told, I feel a bit embarrassed too."

His words were delivered with a calm and genial tone, causing Delilah's tense demeanor to ease.

Anthony continued, "Don't believe me? Look me in the eye."

He pointed to his eyes, inviting her gaze.

Delilah instinctively turned her gaze toward a pair of dark brown eyes reflecting her figure.

My figure… Delilah was caught off guard as her gaze seemed to descend into a spiraling depth.

In that moment, the magician closed the wooden box, enveloping it in darkness.

Seizing the opportune moment, Anthony posed a question, "Did you experience anything unusual in Quartier de la Maison d'Opéra a week ago?"

"Yes," Delilah responded truthfully, sensing a trustworthy demeanor.

"What was that sensation?" Anthony inquired as the magician recited his rehearsed lines.

"My heart started racing, and my blood felt like it was boiling," Delilah recounted her experience.

"Do you know what that means?" Anthony probed further.

In the darkness, Delilah shook her head.

"I'm not sure, but my real father instructed me to inform him immediately if I had similar sensations."

"Real father?" Anthony had a hunch.

Delilah chuckled self-deprecatingly, explaining, "My real father, my mother's lover, and the current government's Minister of Industry, Moran Avigny."

Moran Avigny… Sensing the magician's maneuvers with the wooden box, Anthony swiftly posed a final question. "What did he say upon learning about your reaction?"

"He told me not to worry and to continue living as usual," Delilah admitted, still harboring some concerns.

Anthony acknowledged her words succinctly.

"Lovely lady, I'm thrilled to share this magic moment with you. Can you provide me with something memorable? Perhaps a few strands of your hair."

His voice, deep and captivating, made Delilah feel that the request was entirely normal.

Consequently, she plucked a few strands of hair and handed them to Anthony.

Upon touching the hair, Anthony sighed in relief and continued in a resonant voice, "I don't want this to jeopardize your family. Once you step out of this wooden box and hear my snap, you'll forget our interaction here…"

As his compelling voice echoed, Delilah's thoughts blurred.

Smack!

The wooden box opened, revealing only Anthony. Delilah, on the other hand, had been gracefully pulled from behind the stage by the magician.

The audience erupted in excited applause.

Once the ovation died down, the magician, hand pressed to his chest, bowed in gratitude. Without casting a glance at Delilah, Anthony snapped his fingers.

Intent on engaging in conversation with the man who had established a connection with her, Delilah was jolted when she heard the snap. Her body shuddered slightly, her eyes momentarily glazed over before regaining awareness.

Turning on her heel, she descended the wooden platform, returning to her place between the lady's maid and valet.

Meanwhile, Anthony departed at a measured pace, seamlessly blending into the crowd.

…

In Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative, Apartment 702, 9 Rue Orosai.

Franca applied the ashes of Delilah's hair onto the surface of the makeup mirror using black flames, reciting the familiar incantation for the Magic Mirror Divination.

Amidst the splashing water and the dark luster, Franca posed the question, "Is the owner of this hair a Mirror Person?"

The aged voice responded, "No."

Chapter 615: Descendants

Based on Anthony's feedback, Franca had long suspected that Delilah wasn't a Mirror Person but had some connection to them. Otherwise, she wouldn't have reacted abnormally without knowing anything.

She raised the question during Magic Mirror Divination to ensure Delilah hadn't made preparations in advance or been hypnotized.

After a moment of contemplation, Franca posed her second question.

"Is the owner of this hair a descendant of the Tamara family?"

Amidst the splashing water in the dim mirror, an aged voice replied, "No."

Not a descendant of the Tamara family… Franca used the elimination method and chose a pre-prepared question.

"Is the owner of this hair a descendant of Mirror People?"

The aged voice replied in a calm and hoarse tone, "Yes."

Yes… Franca and Jenna were both shocked and delighted.

Though they had similar suspicions, confirming it stunned and terrified them.

How long had the Mirror People infiltrated Trier? Why did they have descendants in their thirties?

Moreover, they could marry, have children, and have descendants like ordinary people…

Aside from believing in the mirror's Primordial Demoness, who had a more extreme personality and naturally harbored resentment towards Her counterpart outside the mirror, what was the essential difference between them and ordinary people?

Franca and the others weren't sure if most Mirror People dissipated after death, leaving behind fragments of the mirror world, or if only a few special Mirror People like Mirror Gardner were like this.

Combined with Delilah's biological father, the current Minister of Industry, Moran Avigny, instructing her to pay attention to abnormal reactions, Franca concluded that the high-ranking official had been replaced by a Mirror Person many years ago.

"According to the information gathered, the municipal modifications in Underground Trier, particularly the catacombs, were implemented to address the leakage of the Fourth Epoch Trier's seal. Mirror People had already replaced the originals by then, making it reasonable for them to inhabit Trier," Anthony said after some thought. "The problem now is that Mirror People can actually have descendants normally."

Jenna's eyes flickered as she interjected, "One more thing. Did a descendant of the Tamara family bring the Mirror World Fragment into the tomb in recent decades? Or was it a special Mirror Person searching for something and ended up perishing in there?

"Or could it be that before Fourth Epoch Trier sank underground or was sealed, Mirror People were already active on this land?"

Franca hissed and said, "Your latter conjecture is a little terrifying.

"Our original deduction was that the special Mirror World stemmed from the War of the Four Emperors, which caused Fourth Epoch Trier to sink. It was closely related to the Primordial Demoness's divine descent, Blood Emperor Alista Tudor's counterattack before death, and the demise of the Demoness of Catastrophe, Krismona. However, if Mirror People had appeared in Fourth Epoch Trier before all of that, the root cause of the problem would be even more mysterious and terrifying."

Fear of the unknown.

Franca couldn't help but gaze at the makeup mirror in her hand and address the dark mirror, "Am I a descendant of Mirror People?"

She didn't expect an answer, knowing that Magic Mirror Divination usually allowed only three questions at most. She merely voiced her thoughts and was concluding the divination.

The mirror fell silent for a few seconds before resuming, "Your ancestor had nothing to do with Trier."

Oh, does that mean I can't be related to the Mirror People? Wait a moment… Franca's surprise reverberated in her voice. Then, a sudden realization struck her. "So, you're not an emotionless answering machine. You don't have to strictly adhere to the corresponding rules."

The darkness on the mirror's surface swiftly dissipated, and the aged voice ceased.

Franca was left speechless.

Jenna drew closer to Anthony, her words a hushed murmur, "Did you catch the helplessness in that answer?"

Anthony cast a subtle glance at Franca and nodded imperceptibly.

"Hey! Don't whisper in front of me. I can hear you!" Franca complained, her Assassin's keen senses picking up their conversation.

She swiftly shifted the topic, "Fortunately, it said no. If it was a yes, it would be terrifying.

"Hmm… Your grandfather or great-grandfather shouldn't be Trieriens, right?"

"I'm not even a Trierien myself," Anthony replied.

Jenna tersely acknowledged.

"The generation of my father's and mother's grandfathers came to Trier."

Franca breathed a sigh of relief, stating, "Now, the direction of the investigation is clear. The current Minister of Industry, Moran Avigny!"

She pondered whether to conduct a covert investigation to gather crucial information or to promptly inform 007 and let the Eternal Blazing Sun Church handle it. Opting for the latter meant potential constraints due to confidentiality principles, limiting her access to the specific details she could seek from 007.

…

Ooo!

Amidst a whistle, a ship steered into Port Colla on the southernmost coastline of the Feynapotter Kingdom.

It was already mid-November, and Trier was gripped by a cold winter. Although Port Santa demanded thick clothing due to plummeting temperatures, Port Colla retained a warm climate. Passersby adorned themselves in fancy short-sleeved shirts and loose pants, exposing their ankles.

Unlike Port Santa, Port Colla lacked the tradition of carrying sabers or swords, but Lumian, drawing from her knowledge, knew that the people here were still rambunctious, with large-scale armed conflicts being commonplace.

Port Colla differed significantly from Port Santa, which thrived on pastures, plains, and mountain range mines. With limited arable land and scarce pastures, the inhabitants originally depended on the sea for their livelihood.

Over generations, the Church of Earth Mother's advancements in land development, seed cultivation, and livestock breeding transformed Port Colla. While the region achieved a level of self-sufficiency in food production, the rambunctious folk customs endured.

Nevertheless, Port Colla continued to be a major importer of food, serving as one of the primary trade hubs between the Feynapotter Kingdom and the Southern Continent. The bustling port hosted numerous foreigners and stood as a key base for the Harvest Fleet.

Captain Pedro, standing beside Lumian, observed the lively port scene.

"It's the dry season, so the weather isn't as hot, and there's not much rain. It's the most comfortable period in Port Colla. You're welcome to visit."

These words, spoken out of courtesy, hung in the air.

Lumian, leaning against the shipboard, directed his gaze toward the distant sea, shrouded in what seemed like dark clouds.

"Is that the Berserk Sea?"

The Berserk Sea divided the Northern and Southern Continents. Only when Emperor Roselle found a safe sea route could the Northern Continent's countries cross the sea and reach the Southern Continent.

Pedro nodded, a hint of solemnity in his voice. "That's right. Without a captain and sailors familiar with those waters, a ship will undoubtedly be swallowed by the ever-changing and violent weather there. Shipwrecks occur around Port Colla every year, claiming lives."

When the majority of the passengers disembarked, Lumian guided Ludwig and Lugano to Captain Pedro's residence.

He intended to assess the situation of his eldest daughter, Salah, and her lover before deciding on his next course of action.

Carrying a suitcase and holding Ludwig's hand, Lugano trailed closely behind his employer.

It wasn't until they left the dock that he realized something startling.

His employer and the captain were conversing in Highlander!

Since departing from Port Santa, his employer and most of the ship's occupants had been using Highlander for communication.

When did he learn Highlander? How had he become proficient in it?

As Lugano observed his employer's retreating figure, he fell into a thoughtful silence, absorbing the relatively fluent Highlander being spoken.

Port Colla, 7 White Shark Street, Pedro's house.

A five-story building with a green front lawn and a charming garden in the rear, it was home to nearly thirty people under Pedro's mother's care.

Passing through the iron gates, Lumian spotted a couple strolling arm in arm on the lawn.

They were both very young. The woman, in her early twenties, possessed brown hair, brown eyes, and a naturally fair, now-tanned complexion. Although her appearance was remarkable, Lumian, accustomed to interacting with Demonesses and having a beautiful sister, deemed her merely decent.

The man, in his mid-twenties, had ordinary features, single eyelids, and curly brown hair. Clad in a white shirt and dark-gray pants, he had very average looks and demeanors that would be lost in a crowd.

"Salah, let me introduce you. This is the great adventurer, Louis Berry. His legendary experiences will soon reach Colla," Pedro joyfully introduced Lumian without a trace of gloominess.

Salah, sporting a fishnet hat to shield herself from the sun, approached with curiosity,

"What kind of legendary experiences?"

"Does earning 300,000 gold risot from a commission count?" Pedro replied, representing Lumian with a smile.

"300,000 gold risot?" Salah exclaimed.

This was a huge fortune for most people in Feynapotter.

Lumian observed the father-daughter interaction with a smile. In his peripheral vision, he detected a darkening expression on Salah's lover, a clear sign of displeasure.

Jealousy, vigilance, and worry? If there's truly something amiss with him, he should be more confident… Lumian mused, unfazed.

Pedro then introduced Salah's lover.

"Flores, Salah's fiancé. They met in Feynapotter City."

Feynapotter City, nestled in the highlands, stood as the capital of the Feynapotter Kingdom. Salah had encountered Flores there during her university studies, though Flores hailed from an ordinary family with modest educational qualifications. Having completed only elementary grammar school, he later established a grocery store near Highlander University.

"Greetings," Lumian nodded slightly, exuding the self-assured air of a great adventurer.

Following the welcoming banquet, Flores departed from Pedro's house.

He ventured into his favorite romantic bar, settling at the counter with a discontented expression.

While casually surveying the surroundings, he couldn't help but notice a woman seated two or three spots away.

Her flaxen-colored hair was elegantly tied up, and her lake-colored eyes held a crystalline glimmer. With a high nose bridge and rosy lips, even her side profile was breathtakingly beautiful.

Chapter 616: "Love"

For a moment, Flores found himself captivated by her presence. He couldn't resist leaning in to compliment her straightforwardly, a habit common among male Feynapotterians.

"Today is my lucky day to encounter such a beautiful lady. Could I be luckier to buy you a drink?"

The woman's eyes flickered, and a smile graced her lips. She gently shook her head, indicating that his offer wasn't accepted.

Undeterred, Flores wanted to say more, but he noticed the woman's expression cooling off, prompting him to retreat to his seat.

In the following moments, he alternated between stealing glances at the woman's figure, clad in a simple shirt and slender black pants, and observing the rim of her glass, watching it touched by her moist red lips.

Flores's body heated up, and his mouth grew dry. The more beer he drank, the harder it became to quench his thirst.

Eventually, the woman finished her light-gold Manzan, placed the tall glass on the bar counter, and gracefully left amid the soothing and elegant music.

Flores hurriedly approached, pulling out a soft tissue that had gained popularity in recent years. He wiped the edge of the wine glass, where the woman's lips had just touched.

Then, he folded the tissue, meticulously scanning the surroundings of the bar stool. He collected a few flaxen-colored long hairs, securing them in the tissue.

Completing this task, Flores became aware of the bartender and the nearly twenty male customers around him, all staring with a shared judgmental gaze: "Pervert!"

Flores wasn't the sole victim of the woman's enchantment—it extended to all the men and a few women in the bar. All of them had witnessed his perverted actions.

Despite the accusatory stares, Flores kept his composure and left as if nothing had transpired.

He vowed never to return to this bar again!

Yet, he harbored no regret for his actions.

On the way back to the apartment, Flores's heart pulsed with anticipation, fueled by the promise of gains. His pace quickened, though practicality dictated a more measured speed.

Upon reaching his residence, he drew the curtains and retrieved an old notebook with a yellowed cover from his suitcase compartment.

Inside, a mottled note held a complex vocabulary that didn't belong to any language from the Northern Continent, accompanied by numerous instructions in Highlander.

Flores eagerly placed the tissue containing the woman's hair and saliva on the notebook. He then took up the mottled note, reciting the intricate and peculiar words with marked pronunciation.

"Naboredisley…"

This was the love incantation Flores had chanced upon.

With the true name, date of birth, closely related items, or bodily fluids like flesh and blood, he could insert the medium in his notebook and recite the incantation seven times, compelling the target to fall irrevocably in love.

Flores had patiently waited for the opportune moment to orchestrate Pedro's daughter, Salah, to fall and be injured. His timely aid had not only garnered gratitude but also facilitated the collection of her blood, fulfilling the conditions for the love incantation.

Reality had validated the enchanting power of the love incantation!

Flores refrained from using it again, uncertain of how to dispel its effects. If pursued by multiple women before his marriage to Salah, provoking a conflict among them could jeopardize his standing within the large family and hinder access to resources and support.

However, today was different.

She was the most captivating woman he had ever encountered. He was ready to pay any price to make her his own!

Uncertainty lingered in Flores's mind about whether the saliva-stained tissue and the naturally fallen hair could truly serve as a medium for the love incantation, but the desire to find out overwhelmed any reservations.

Excitement and anticipation surged within him as he envisioned the possibility of witnessing such a beautiful scene, an uncontrollable smile gracing his face.

"Naboredisley…"

Flores continued reciting the love incantation with abnormal devotion and enthusiasm, his heart pulsating with desire and joy.

"Naboredisley!"

After repeating it seven times, Flores watched in amazement as the tissue and hair burst into flames, reflecting a rainbow before swiftly turning to ashes.

Success… Success! Flores couldn't initially believe it, but immense joy struck his heart.

Surprise lingered, but Flores cared little.

What mattered was that it worked!

That captivating woman is now in love with me!

Thoughts of what would unfold next raced through Flores's mind. He hastily closed the notebook, clipped the note, and dashed to the door without bothering to put them away.

He yearned to walk the streets, confident that the lovely person must be seeking him!

As Flores swung the door open, there she was—the woman from the bar, standing outside.

Flores's entire being went slack under the lake-colored crystalline gaze, his balance teetering on the edge of surrender. Every fiber of his being yearned to yield.

As the woman willingly stepped into Flores's embrace, he eagerly enveloped her in his arms, leaning in for a kiss.

Yet, the sensation he encountered was far from the warmth and softness he had imagined. Instead, it was cold and unyielding.

Wh… Flores's surprise turned to shock as he realized he was embracing a waist-high mirror. The mirror brushed against his chest, swaying back and forth, resisting his attempts to disengage.

Flores recoiled in unnatural fear. The lingering sensations from his earlier fantasies refused to dissipate. His heart froze while his body burned.

With mounting dread, he struck the mirror with increasing force.

Finally, retreating to his suitcase, Flores delivered a decisive blow, shattering the mirror with a resounding crack.

It shattered into countless fragments, piercing Flores's clothes, chest, stomach, and arms.

Agony surged through Flores's body, searing his senses, snapping the fraying nerve that was already on the brink.

In that moment, he tasted a euphoria unlike any other.

Collapsing to the ground, Flores lay motionless, caught between fear, longing, anguish, and ecstasy.

…

"It can truly assist in digesting the Pleasure potion…" Franca clicked her tongue, observing the scene unfold in the mirror of the apartment diagonally opposite Flores's room.

With her expertise, the spectacle before her could be deemed a novelty.

"I assured you I wouldn't deceive you," Lumian, sporting a golden straw hat, responded with a grin.

Upon accepting the commission and identifying Flores's primary problem of inexplicably garnering the fervent affection of a stunning girl, Lumian's initial instinct was to deploy a Demoness to test this individual.

Franca's saliva and hair served as part of the investigation. After all, mysticism likely played a role.

Naturally, for safety precautions, Franca had treated the saliva and hair beforehand. Thus, she devised a Mirror Substitution, a dark magic of Witches, which accurately connected to them.

Now, the results were in—splendid. Franca had subjected Flores to pleasure's torment, exposing him to the agony of chasing fleeting satisfaction.

"Curious, Flores managed to ensnare my mirror's affection with just a single-word incantation. No ritual or supplication to any entity," Franca mused with emotion. "Even I can't achieve that."

Lumian chuckled in response, remarking, "You can. No incantation or medium needed. Just unleash your charm."

"…" Franca was taken aback. "You're starting to resemble an Intisian. Or is this a result of your Feynapotter education?"

Pursing her lips, her gaze flickered.

Lumian continued, "There's another issue. Pedro previously tasked two adventurers with probing Flores, but they vanished. And it appears this fellow lacks Beyonder powers."

Franca suddenly smiled. "This is intriguing… If the Mirror Substitution failed, and I fell under the sway of that incantation, falling in love with Flores, what would you do?"

Lumian emitted a soft chuckle.

"Making someone vanish without a trace is simple. I don't even need to lift a finger."

Lumian was confident Ludwig could consume the fellow entirely, with counter-divination to top it off.

Without awaiting Franca's response, Lumian headed for the door.

"I'll pay that fellow a visit. Keep vigilant for any developments and beware of mishaps."

"Understood," Franca replied solemnly.

As Flores hadn't managed to close the door in time, Lumian found the entrance accessible without the need to pry it open.

Sensing the intrusion, Flores snapped out of his daze, hastily rising to his feet.

By this point, Lumian had already picked up the notebook, unfolding it to the two pages displaying the mottled note.

"W-what are you doing?" Flores asked, horror etched across his face.

He immediately recognized Lumian.

Louis Berry? The great adventurer Louis Berry?

"Did Pedro hire you to investigate me?"

Ignoring the inquiry, Lumian walked toward the window, ushering in a gust of fresh air.

"A love incantation can make a woman fall in love with you. All you need is to obtain her true name…" Lumian began reciting the Highlander annotation on the mottled note in front of Flores. "The incantation's pronunciation is…"

He abruptly halted without completing the recitation.

Flores's face had already turned a sickly grayish-white, as if he could foresee the impending demise of his reputation and his capture by the Church.

"Where did this come from?" Lumian pointed at the mottled note and the old notebook.

Cold sweat broke out on Flores's forehead, and his eyes gradually turned fierce.

Suddenly, he shouted, pronouncing the word in a rugged and awkward tone, "Naboredisley!"

This time, there was no target or corresponding medium.

Almost simultaneously, Lumian sensed his surroundings fall silent as an ominous aura rapidly enveloped the room.

Chapter 617: Transaction

Flores's demeanor suddenly shifted, his expression turning icy, and a malevolent smile curling upon his lips. His aura underwent a dramatic transformation.

He raised his gaze, Lumian's dark hair and green eyes reflecting in his now ominous stare.

Lumian's suppressed emotions, desires, and the haze surrounding him erupted like a volcano.

This was a force even an Ascetic's endurance couldn't withstand.

Crack!

Lumian's body cracked, shrinking into a palm-sized mirror.

The mirror shattered completely, fragments scattering across the ground.

In the room diagonally opposite, Lumian materialized beside Franca, wearing a solemn expression.

Had he not prepared Mirror Substitution beforehand, he might have endured a double explosion of emotions and desires. It resembled the same outcome when evil god bestowed heard the Symphony of Hatred's different melodies.

Of course, if Franca hadn't been lurking nearby, if he hadn't readied Mirror Substitution, he wouldn't have used himself as bait to "converse" with Flores.

Lumian seized Franca's shoulder, his voice deep as he uttered, "Let's leave this place first."

He promptly activated the black mark on his right shoulder, in an attempt to teleport away.

Confronted with an adversary capable of exploiting his weaknesses and latent dangers, Lumian's initial response was to switch to support, utilizing his corresponding abilities from a distance. Franca would assume the role of the main attacker. However, considering Franca, a Demoness of Pleasure, hadn't indulged herself for a long time, he feared she might not resist the explosion of desire. It seemed prudent to retreat, regroup with others, and return later.

At that moment, a voice alternating between masculinity and femininity echoed in Lumian and Franca's ears.

"There's no rush to escape. I've changed my mind. I want to make a deal with you."

A deal? Something jolted in Lumian's and Franca's minds. After some thought, they chose to stay put.

Simultaneously, Lumian sank his consciousness into his right hand, ready to activate the remnant aura of Blood Emperor Alista Tudor.

This wasn't meant to intimidate Flores, but if his emotions and desires were triggered again, Lumian could "alert the police" in time!

Being one of the Feynapotter Kingdom's primary ports for trade with the Southern Continent and a key base for the Harvest Fleet, Port Colla undoubtedly housed at least one Grade 1 Sealed Artifact even without a demigod.

Franca gazed at the wall and the air in front of her, questioning, "What deal?"

Flores, dressed in a floral shirt, casually pushed open the unlatched door of the apartment and spoke in a deep, cold, and dignified manner,

"Let me introduce myself. Naboredisley, a Demon."

A Demon? A genuine Demon... The cost of using the Authority Holder's Under-the-table Transaction actually materialized here--to make a deal with a Demon... However, Lumian's acceptance of the captain's mission and our pursuit of Delilah are distinct matters. If we had opted to patiently wait a month or two before engaging with Delilah instead of utilizing the Authority Holder's Under-the-table Transaction, what would have transpired today? Could there have been a so-called deal? Franca smiled in surprise, suspicion, and confusion.

"How can you reveal yourself as a Demon?

"Shouldn't a true Demon conceal their identity to lower our guard?"

The Demon, identifying himself as Naboredisley, clenched his right fist and pressed it against his lips. He smiled and replied, "A true Demon is both Demon in body and mind. I'll inform you that you're dealing with a Demon, but refusal isn't an option. I won't obscure my identity to achieve my goals like the foolish ones.

"For instance, this man named Flores is well aware of the consequences of repeatedly reciting my true name through the notebook. Heh heh, back then, that foolish Warlock labeled it the Love Incantation, but he still couldn't resist the temptation and couldn't control himself. Haha, for Demons, this gradually decaying soul that slowly descends into the Abyss is the most delectable feast. The sensation of resistance and constant decay is as unforgettable as the finest wine."

Lumian and Franca didn't disdain or ridicule Naboredisley's unabashed and alluring depravity.

Since a Demon had spoken, there had to be a deeper motive!

Moreover, Lumian couldn't be certain if Naboredisley was a genuine Demon or a self-proclaimed one. He couldn't verify if Naboredisley was his actual name or if he had a different origin.

Although the activation of desire aligned with the traits of a Sequence 5 Desire Apostle of the Demon pathway, it wasn't exclusive to Demons. Lumian's Symphony of Hatred could achieve a similar effect.

Franca grinned at the Demon's incessant narrative and remarked, "That foolish Warlock probably assumed your true name as a Love Incantation because of your cues. Is that really your true name?"

"That's why he's foolish," Naboredisley replied with a faint smile.

Lumian wasn't eager to rush into the transaction. Instead, he inquired, "How did you manage to convince Flores that the Love Incantation actually works?"

Naboredisley casually glanced back at Flores's rented apartment and assumed a relaxed posture.

"He tried some other incantations from the notebook, and some of them worked."

"He's just an ordinary person, yet he can cast an incantation like a Warlock?" Franca expressed disbelief.

Naboredisley grinned.

"I've heard a very reasonable saying: 'All things possess godhood.'

"No matter how ordinary a person is, as long as they're willing to pay the corresponding price, they can create Beyonder effects."

All things possess godhood… Mr. K often says this when preaching… Lumian observed Naboredisley, the self-

proclaimed Demon.

Franca seized the opportunity to ask, "What price did Flores pay?"

Naboredisley smiled meaningfully. "I already told you."

The part where the soul gradually decays and falls into the Abyss? Franca nodded thoughtfully.

Lumian suddenly grinned.

"If he hadn't paid the price, how could you communicate with us so easily using his body?"

Naboredisley smiled back but remained silent.

Lumian shifted the topic.

"Did you have a hand in the deaths of those two adventurers who were investigating Flores?"

"Consider it a bit of interest," Naboredisley replied, glancing around. He smiled and pulled a chair over, casually remarking, "You lack the necessary courtesy."

"Because we never considered making a deal with you," Franca deliberately stated. "I won't make a deal with a Demon."

Naboredisley chuckled and said, "Although it's amusing for a Demoness to claim she won't trade with a Demon, I can assure you that I won't force you into a deal. I won't even hinder you from informing the Church of Earth Mother about Flores later.

"I differ from my inept peers. I prefer transparent trade, avoiding the convoluted legalese of contracts where terms and conditions are twisted. I'll make you choose to trade with me, even knowing the content and price."

"I decline," Franca replied with a smile. "I refuse to entertain your deal."

Naboredisley narrowed his eyes dangerously but maintained his usual amiable demeanor.

"You can listen first before deciding if you want to accept this deal.

"I won't boast that I can fulfill any of your wishes, but I can help you fulfill most of them. This is a promise from an ancient Demon."

"Ancient?" Lumian looked curious. "Have you heard of the Ancient Sun God?"

Naboredisley's expression darkened subtly.

"I'm aware."

"Can you tell me about Him? The deity I believe in now seems to be the resurrected Him." Lumian's lips curled up, revealing two rows of pearly-white teeth. "This can be used as compensation for the transaction, but it has to be paid first before we fulfill the contract. Don't think of fabricating it. That would be blasphemy to my Lord."

Naboredisley fell silent. After a few seconds, he smiled and said, "As I mentioned earlier, I can't accomplish certain things and fulfill certain wishes. This is one of them."

When one's humble enough, it's really difficult to win a war of words… Lumian sighed inwardly and turned to Franca, silently inquiring if she wanted to seize this opportunity to the-table Transaction.

Franca hesitated for a moment before addressing Naboredisley. "Tell me about the deal first before I decide."

Naboredisley chuckled.

"A wise decision. I hope you can help me kill another Demon's descendant. He resides somewhere in the Berserk Sea. Don't worry, Demon descendants are cold, cruel, and bloodthirsty. He definitely meets the death penalty standard in your hearts."

"Then why don't you do it yourself?" Franca clicked her tongue. "You seem quite powerful."

Is it because you're sealed? Or could it be that he can't leave the Abyss and can only project himself onto a human like now, unable to maintain it for long?

Naboredisley replied calmly, "Any abnormal movements from me will attract the attention of the other Demon. The reward for this transaction is that I fulfill one of your wishes. It's a predetermined wish that I can fulfill."

"Can you help us digest the potion in our bodies?" Lumian probed.

Naboredisley shook his head.

"I won't lie to you. I can't do it. The digestion of the potion is a personal matter.

"Of course, I can create conditions and opportunities to indirectly help you digest the potion as soon as possible, but whether you can seize those opportunities depends on yourselves."

Quite honest… Franca muttered silently.

Suddenly, she revealed a bright smile.

"This deal tempts me, but I need a reliable and powerful witness."

Author's Note: The inspiration for the love incantation in the originated from the real world. I believe I've shared it on my public WeChat account before—Aphrodite's hidden name is Nepherieri, meaning "beautiful eyes." Repeating this incantation can win a woman's love. When I read about this, I found it a little sinister. I mainly changed the pronunciation.

Chapter 618: Divination Ritual

Franca's request met with a gentle shake of Naboredisley's head.

"You can request the deity you believe in to bear witness when signing the contract, but I don't want anyone else present."

A chuckle escaped Naboredisley's lips.

"I'm a Demon. I need to be careful to avoid becoming prey."

We can recite a god's name as a witness when signing the contract? The temptation loomed over them both.

For ordinary Beyonders who held faith in the Eternal Blazing Sun or the God of Steam and Machinery, invoking a deity's name as a witness might offer no more than psychological comfort. True gods rarely intervened in such trivial affairs of ordinary Beyonders without a proper ritual.

Yet, as Minor Arcana card holders of the Tarot Club, Lumian and Franca followed the great existence, Mr. Fool. Simply invoking his name could draw attention, a fact not lost on them.

Franca's heart raced with uncertainty. Should she strike a deal with the Demon under the watchful gaze of Mr. Fool, in exchange for elusive benefits?

Naboredisley reiterated his stance.

"This is a fair transaction. There's no coercion. It's the same for you and me. If you insist that there must be a powerful witness present, I choose to give up."

Just as Lumian contemplated the idea, Termiboros's resounding voice echoed within his mind, "It's best if you don't agree. Don't even make a false promise."

Lumian found himself taken aback as Termiboros, an Angel of Inevitability, unexpectedly warned him about the unfolding situation.

Alarmed, Lumian pushed aside thoughts of Termiboros's possible intentions, choosing instead to focus on scrutinizing Naboredisley's every move and assessing his own mental state.

The more Lumian delved into the matter, the more alarmed he became. Initially planning to teleport away immediately and seek help, he and Franca had gradually shifted their stance, considering Naboredisley's propositions and exploring potential exploitations. Their plan had evolved from seeking the presence of a powerful Arbiter like Madam Judgment as a witness to contemplating a deal without one. Now, all they hoped was to ensure their safety by invoking a god's name.

Compromising one step at a time, changing bit by bit… This is very similar to Naboredisley's description of degenerating bit by bit, slowly rotting one's soul before ultimately plunging into the Abyss… It also said that Demons aren't just about the body but also about the mind… Lumian swiftly snapped out of his reverie, sensing a possible influence from Naboredisley on both himself and Franca. It resembled the signs of a Spectator's presence. Similarly, he could glean insights through Anthony's self-examination technique.

Even in this state, Franca displayed remarkable control over her emotions. She turned to Lumian, seeking agreement. With thoughts racing, the corners of Lumian's mouth curled up slightly as he addressed Naboredisley.

"We don't require a witness, but I need to confirm something first."

"What is it?" Naboredisley's demeanor remained cold, yet his attitude was composed.

Lumian nodded at Franca, conveying that he would handle the situation.

Franca, in turn, silently acknowledged her understanding.

Turning back to Naboredisley, Lumian stated, "I need to verify that the name you're using now, the name you'll use in the contract later, is indeed your real name."

Deliberately avoiding the term "Naboredisley," Lumian exercised caution to mitigate potential risks.

Naboredisley pondered for a moment before responding, "Sure. As a Demon, I don't just dislike but also admire your caution."

Lumian maintained his smirk.

"The way to confirm is Magic Mirror Divination, a complete one. We'll set up a ritual and seek answers from a hidden entity. As you know, my friend is a Demoness. She's quite skilled at this."

Lumian pointed at Franca as he spoke.

Indeed… we should confirm if Naboredisley is the Demon's real name. Otherwise, the deal would be a joke… Franca suddenly became alert, realizing she had been too eager to conclude the deal and had overlooked many potentially problematic details.

Naboredisley pondered for a moment before agreeing, "Alright, but I have to observe from within the wall of spirituality where the ritual takes place.

"This is a Demon's caution. We're worried that you'll use Magic Mirror Divination to inform certain Demons' natural enemies."

"No problem," Lumian said with a bright smile. "To complete Magic Mirror Divination, I want you to write your real name on this note and bring over the ancient notebook from the opposite room. Together, they can act as a medium for divination."

Naboredisley, well-versed in the intricacies of complete Magic Mirror Divination, responded with a smile, "No problem."

He stood up, taking the note from Lumian's hand. Using Flores's fountain pen, he inscribed a complex word with the pronunciation "Naboredisley," its language unknown.

The self-proclaimed Demon then left for Flores's rented apartment, retrieving the ancient notebook and the note.

Lumian had already arranged a simple ritual, placing three candles and a mirror on an empty table.

Before Naboredisley returned, Franca approached him and whispered, "The usual Magic Mirror Divination target?"

Lumian shook his head, indicating they weren't. Softly uttering a single word, he said, "Him."

A pure male pronoun.

Franca's pupils dilated as she tacitly understood whom Lumian was referring to.

The implications were self-evident!

After Naboredisley handed her the ancient notebook, Franca smiled happily and said, "Demons are likely higher-level godhood creatures. I can't afford to be negligent. I plan to seek answers from a more special entity. Inevitably, my companion will need to assist me during the ritual. I hope you can understand what you'll see next. If you're unwilling, we'll abandon this transaction."

She didn't make it sound too firm, making the "abandon the transaction" option seem more like a negotiating strategy.

Naboredisley smiled and replied, "No problem. I've seen too many special rituals."

His implication was clear—if there was a problem with your ritual, I would be able to tell immediately.

Franca sanctified the ritual silver dagger and created a wall of spirituality. Lumian placed the ancient notebook and the note with the real name in front of the lit candle and mirror, using a small amount of Gardner Martin's spiritual blood to draw a few complicated and strange symbols.

Observing from a distance, Naboredisley muttered, "Seeking guidance from fate… Questioning an entity in this domain?"

Lumian seized the opportunity to turn around and ask, "What can I do to dispel Salah's infatuation with Flores?"

Naboredisley smiled meaningfully and said, "Either they both perish, or they seek my approval."

With the preparations complete, Franca stepped back, gazing at the three burning candles and the palm-sized makeup mirror. She recited an honorific name in ancient Hermes.

"The Fool that doesn't belong to this era…"

Upon hearing this, Naboredisley's expression changed.

His face turned icy, and his eyes revealed a chilling cruelty.

Just as he was about to project Lumian and Franca's figures in his eyes and ignite their desires and emotions, he realized that a thin gray fog emanated, making the two targets indistinct and challenging to lock onto.

Lumian gripped Franca's forearm.

In mysticism, this signified that the two people in the ritual were one.

Of course, the prerequisite was that the original ritual host didn't resist.

Lumian took over the ritual host's position and recited the last two paragraphs.

"The mysterious ruler above the gray fog; the King of Yellow and Black who wields good luck…"

The thick gray fog surged even more visibly, and Naboredisley, manipulating Flores's body, grew increasingly malevolent.

He tried to break free from the altar, attempting to shatter the wall of spirituality, but the gray fog stood as an impenetrable obstacle.

Lumian advanced two steps, presenting the note with the real name to the candle symbolizing the ritual's host. He ignited it and flicked it three times, dispersing ashes onto the ancient notebook.

After these preparations, Lumian spoke in a deep voice, "I beseech your assistance. I implore you to banish the creature named Naboredisley…"

Naboredisley, in control of Flores's body, opened his mouth, emitting a sharp cry.

Simultaneously, filth, depravity, and evil ravings echoed in Lumian and Franca's ears. Each word seemed to assault their minds, causing their bodies to contort and their souls to decay.

Yet, under the ritual's shield and the layers of gray fog, the words appeared distant, as if emanating from the horizon. Even if Lumian and Franca strained to listen, the specifics eluded them.

Amidst a faint shriek, pitch-black gas emanated from Flores's body, swiftly dissipating.

Faces emerged from the pitch-black gas, mouths opening and closing, cursing Lumian and Franca vehemently, only to dissolve into the gray fog.

In a matter of seconds, the pitch-black gas completely vanished, and Flores's demeanor and aura returned to normal.

Exorcism Spell!

In just a few days, Lumian had employed the Exorcism Spell once more!

From his perspective, Naboredisley, hiding his true form somewhere, had stealthily infiltrated Flores's breath for control. He was akin to a Wraith evil spirit possessing another.

Most surprising was the effectiveness of the name Naboredisley!

Of course, if this wasn't the true name, if the Exorcism Spell proved futile, Lumian could resort to Mr. Fool's complete honorific name to intimidate the Demon and drive it away with the gray fog and the gaze of a great existence.

This time, it wasn't Mr. Fool's seal on his chest that answered, but the great existence himself!

Lumian forced a smile and said to Franca, "This fellow is less formidable than the invisible Child of God of the Great Mother."

Despite Naboredisley's frenzied curse affecting his desires and emotions, requiring him to endure with his Ascetic powers, it still paled in comparison to the invisible Child of God's ability to partially breach the gray fog's protection of the ritual host, repeatedly creating a Psychic Piercing effect.

Franca remained silent, her gaze fixed on the makeup mirror serving as decoration.

In the mirror, a faint fog permeated the air, and a vague figure approached from a distance.

Chapter 619: Chronicles

Franca strained her eyes, attempting to discern the figure amidst the dimly lit surroundings. The tall buildings loomed mysteriously, their outlines blending with the fog, reminiscent of stars reflecting on a foggy night.

In the distance, lights flickered, accompanied by indistinct honking sounds.

Wh… Franca's pupils dilated, and her eyes widened in astonishment.

Her heart, previously gripped by the effects of Naboredisley's frenzied curse, now surged with shock.

Instinctively, she focused all her might on the figure, trying to pierce through the layers of gray fog and unravel its face and clothing. However, the thin fog grew hazier, dissipating along with the fleeting images it carried.

In just three to four seconds, the mirror on the altar reverted to its normal state.

"What's wrong?" Lumian turned to Flores, who lingered in the residual gray fog, seeking an update on Franca's condition.

Franca, still captivated by the mirror, fell silent for a moment before speaking.

"Did you see the scene reflected in the mirror?"

"I did." Lumian reflected briefly and suggested, "Perhaps it signifies Mr. Fool's divine kingdom."

Their prayers for the Exorcism Spell had been directed towards Mr. Fool. Therefore, the mirror used to deceive Naboredisley while being ineffective in actuality was likely related to Mr. Fool.

Franca stammered, "B-but the backdrop resembles the city before your sister and I transmigrated. It's like those foggy times—every building morphing into colossal creatures nestled in the fog, adorned with countless glowing eyes."

Lumian, understanding Franca's emotions, showed no surprise at the familiar street scenes.

Reminding his companion, he said, "Don't forget about the Celestial Worthy. He has a close connection to your homeland, and he and Mr. Fool have been engaged in a dream battle. It's quite conceivable that such dreamscapes can manifest in reality through rituals."

Franca fell into a momentary silence before releasing a sigh.

"You're right…"

She followed with a self-deprecating laugh.

"I got worked up for nothing."

Lumian mitigated the negative effects from Naboredisley and methodically extinguished the candle flames, concluding the ritual.

As Franca dispelled the wall of spirituality and the wind howled, clearing away the lingering gray fog, Flores seemed to snap back to reality, no longer lost in the confusion of searching for an exit.

However, upon seeing Lumian and Franca, his face turned an even more pallid shade.

Just as he was about to plead for mercy, a sharp pain shot through Flores's body.

Instinctively, he lowered his head and observed a black, almost ethereal, filthy liquid oozing from his body. Highly corrosive, it swiftly dissolved his blood, flesh, and bones.

"No!

"Save me!

"Save me!"

Flores unleashed a blood-curdling scream, repeatedly calling for help. Lumian, however, observed with interest, as though studying the toll exacted on those who made a deal with Demons.

In less than ten seconds, Flores's body succumbed to corrosion, collapsing with a resounding crash, immersed in the almost illusory black liquid.

Flores's head continued to wail, his voice gradually fading.

After a while, he breathed his last with wide-open eyes.

His relatively intact head swiftly disintegrated into the filthy liquid.

The once-illusory liquid lost its evil, mystical aura, revealing the remains of the corpse, now filled with a foul, noxious mud-like substance.

"Dealing with Demons doesn't end well.." Franca sighed, reflecting on her earlier temptation.

Her laughter echoed hollowly as she continued, "Thankfully, we didn't strike a deal with that self-proclaimed ancient Demon. Still, I missed an opportunity to eliminate the latent threat of using the Authority Holder's Under-the-table Transaction."

Lumian chuckled and remarked, "Consider this carefully.

"I remember Madam Magician's usage instructions, emphasizing the possibility of encountering transactions with evil entities like Demons.

"Recall, it was about encountering a transaction, not completing one.

"You've faced it; you simply chose not to accept it. That fellow didn't force you either."

Franca contemplated the situation and admitted, "You make a point. It does seem that way…"

She clicked her tongue and glanced at Lumian.

"If you had chosen the Lawyer path, you might be equally promising…

"In reality, I believe that's the norm. The Authority Holder's Under-the-table Transaction is, at most, equivalent to a Sequence 5. Every use means one less opportunity. How could the negative effects be a transaction with a Demon? From what I know, Demon is a High Sequence term within the Criminal path. What does it signify? It represents a demigod!

"Yes, it's merely encountering a transaction, not completing it. There's room for negotiation. Yet, it's also highly dangerous. Demons and other evil entities aren't known for their philanthropy. If we refuse to trade with them, why would they spare us indefinitely? Furthermore, predicting when we'll encounter them is impossible, making it challenging to prepare in advance."

Lumian smiled.

"If you can't predict it, try approaching it differently. After using the Authority Holder's Under-the-table Transaction, immediately prepare and take the initiative to create an opportunity to negotiate with Demons and other evil creatures. Set the pace and manage the risks. For instance, 'invite' Demons to Saint Viève Cathedral for a deal."

The Eternal Blazing Sun Church's main cathedral in Trier, Saint Viève Cathedral!

Franca chuckled.

"Demons aren't brainless zombies. Why would they willingly walk into Saint Viève Cathedral to meet their doom…"

Franca suddenly halted.

Saint Viève Cathedral might not be suitable, but they did have a few hidden locations with a similar atmosphere. It wasn't entirely impossible.

For example, the sacrificial square on the third level of the catacombs, Krismona Night Pillar…

"That's an interesting idea," Franca commended Lumian. "In the past, when facing the negative effects of mystical items, we always endured and waited passively. Taking the initiative is a different approach. Hunters indeed have their own unique styles."

Taking the initiative involved making preparations in advance and minimizing potential dangers.

Of course, taking the initiative didn't necessarily mean triggering the effects, but it required considering such possibilities.

Lumian glanced out the window.

"Flores's scream has likely attracted the attention of the nearby residents. Someone may have called the police. Let's vacate this place before examining the contents of this notebook."

He gathered the ancient notebook, candles, and other items from the dining table as he spoke.

"Agreed." Franca surveyed the room, and dark flames silently ignited in various spots.

As the flames flickered, Lumian teleported Franca away, returning to the guest room of Captain Pedro's five-story house.

"Go through the notebook and check if there's a way to dispel the love incantation. I'll verify Salah's condition and inform Pedro about Flores's situation and outcome. He can handle the Church of Earth Mother and liaise with the local police." Lumian handed the ancient notebook to Franca before opening the door and stepping into the corridor.

Franca settled into the recliner and opened the notebook.

Suddenly, she murmured to herself, Something feels off. Knowing Lumian's approach, shouldn't he have immediately perused the notebook after the ritual, searching for a solution to dispel the love incantation? Why did he hastily leave the moment the police were mentioned after discussing matters with me extensively?

He should be aware of the critical issue…

As these thoughts raced through her mind, Franca suddenly came to a moment of realization.

Naboredisley's chilling rants and wild curses had a disturbing impact on Lumian, stirring up his desires and emotions. Despite his attempts to endure the onslaught using his Ascetic powers, subtle signs of struggle manifested.

Franca's eyes darted around, a sly chuckle escaping her lips.

…

Lumian found Pedro in the small living room on the first floor.

Before he could delve into Flores's situation, the captain exclaimed in surprise,

"Mr. Berry, Salah came to me a few minutes ago. She was crying in fear and pain, saying she dreamt of falling in love with Flores and couldn't wake up. However, she suddenly woke up tonight, feeling like it was a nightmare, and she wishes to annul the engagement.

"May I know how you did it?"

Pedro spoke with a touch of unconscious politeness.

She's back to normal? Could it be because Flores is dead? No, more likely Naboredisley's expulsion through the Exorcism Spell has restored those affected by the devil to normal… Lumian guessed, smiling.

"Flores is already dead."

"Did you kill him?" Pedro, showing no aversion to the idea of killing, was even more intrigued by the fact that Flores's death seemed to have awakened his daughter.

"A Demon killed him." Lumian briefly recounted the events, avoiding mentioning Naboredisley by name. Instead, he handed Pedro the love incantation note tucked into an ancient notebook for a closer look.

Finally, he said, "You handle the rest. It's advisable to keep Salah in a cathedral or cloister for the next month or two. I'm uncertain if the Demon will revisit the former victim once he recovers."

"Understood." Pedro clenched his teeth, his expression somber.

After receiving the 20,000 gold risot bounty, Lumian returned to his guest room.

Franca, holding the ancient notebook, frowned as she said, "This doesn't seem like the notebook of an evil Warlock. It's more like a collection of a novelty hunter's chronicles. It contains various legends of Devils and Demons from the Northern and Southern Continents spanning the past thousand years. The last record appears to be over a hundred years ago.

"Mmm… There are peculiar incantations scattered within, as if fabricated.

"One of them mentions a legend of a Demon on Hanth Island in the Berserk Sea."

Lumian grasped Franca's concern.

Naboredisley had mentioned that the Demon descendant he sought to eliminate resided somewhere in the Berserk Sea!

Chapter 620: Abnormality in the Abyss

"Could it be that some of the Demon legends in this notebook are true?" Lumian held the yellowed notebook and flipped through a few pages.

Franca tersely acknowledged and said, "In a world where superpowers exist, where true Devils and Demons roam, many related legends must be true or have originated from the true prototype. Do you think Nabo—uh, the Demon who claimed to be ancient, might be the protagonist of one of these legends? And the Demon on Hanth Island is its archenemy, living in the real world disguised as a human. It lied, claiming the other party is a descendant of a Demon and tempted us into taking risks to achieve a certain goal?"

"Perhaps," Lumian smiled. "Let's not speculate about such matters involving high-level creatures. I'll just write to Madam Magician and report it to her."

Franca glanced at Lumian and chuckled.

"You're really proficient in dealing with management.

"However, it does make sense. We know very little about real Demons. Making wild guesses is a waste of time."

She then pointed at the notebook and said, "The handwriting differs from the note that wrote the Love Incantation. It's not the same author."

Lumian had already sat at his desk, unfolded a piece of paper, and wrote to Madam Magician. As he deliberated over his words, he responded to

Franca's words, "Does the notebook have the phrase that represents the Love Incantation?"

"I scanned through it. Nothing," Franca replied affirmatively.

Lumian contemplated for a moment and said, "There are two possibilities. The first is that the Demon used someone under its control to insert the Love Incantation into this notebook that records Devil and Demon legends, hoping that it could secretly spread and affect more people. The second possibility is that those who once read this notebook were unknowingly influenced by the demon and obtained a so-called revelation. They wrote this Love Incantation and provided commentary."

"Mysticism sure is dangerous…" Franca sighed with emotion.

Lumian swiftly composed the letter and dispatched the ancient notebook and the note with the Love Incantation to Madam Magician.

While awaiting a response, Franca and Lumian briefly delved into the Demon legend of Hanth Island in the Berserk Sea.

Thirty years after Emperor Roselle discovered a safe sea route to the Southern Continent, numerous mysterious deaths of colonists and natives plagued the newly colonized Hanth Island. Witnesses claimed to have seen a valley ablaze with sulfur flames in the island's forest. At night, pitch-black Demons with goat horns were suspected of circling the area.

After the authorities intervened, the mysterious deaths ceased. The owner of the notebook that chronicled the legend even attempted to explore the forest, but he failed to locate the alleged valley burning with sulfur flames.

As they conversed, time passed. The doll messenger arrived with Madam Magician's reply, the ancient notebook, and the Love Incantation note.

Lumian illuminated the gas wall lamp and began reading. Franca didn't hesitate and leaned in.

"It's impossible to determine its true name with just the fact that the name 'Naboredisley' could expel that fellow.

"This is because it admitted, in a short period of time, that it was its real name. Even if it's lying, sometimes, under certain circumstances, admitting something makes it the truth. It possesses the corresponding mysticism connection. This is one of Mr. Fool's authorities. Amon, too, could do it in the past.

"As you prayed directly to Mr. Fool and used his power to exorcize Naboredisley, it doesn't matter if it's its real name. It won't affect the final outcome.

"Do you understand? Termiboros's warning was correct. You have to be cautious even if it's a false promise.

"If it's truly a Demon and its true name is indeed Naboredisley, the problem ends up more complicated. Since the Fifth Epoch, Demons active in the human world have either taken the form of Sealed Artifacts or come from Andariel, Beria, or Nois. Demons without surnames in their true names are often ancient or come from the Abyss where Devils and Demons reside. As for the Abyss's current state, Emperor Roselle's diary has mentions of it."

Upon reading this, Lumian turned to Franca.

In the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society, he often observed others trading Emperor Roselle's diary. When the April Fool's members were still active, they would even recite the relatively comedic parts publicly. However, having joined the transmigrator organization only recently, he had no interaction with translations from the past. He had no way of knowing what Abyss-related matters the Emperor had recorded.

Franca said with a solemn expression, "Emperor Roselle once found the entrance to the Abyss and conducted a thorough exploration."

"As expected of Emperor Roselle," Lumian praised instinctively and sincerely.

There weren't many people he admired—in fact, very few—but Emperor Roselle was one of them.

Knowing that this emperor was a transmigrator like his sister made him feel an affinity with him.

Franca continued, "In the Abyss that Emperor Roselle explored, Devils and Demons had long perished. Not a single one remained.

"All he saw before him were either corpses or silence.

"This state made him feel fear. He left in a hurry without completing his exploration."

"All dead?" Lumian frowned slightly. "Is the Love Incantation fellow either not a Demon or an ancient Demon from the Abyss's core?"

Pausing momentarily, he added, "If it's really an ancient Demon, it might know why the Abyss underwent such an abnormality."

Franca nodded solemnly.

The duo cast their gazes at the back of Madam Magician's reply.

"I reckon you've already grasped the gist of the Abyss from the Two of Cups, so I won't dive deeper. Simply put, Naboredisley could be a potent Demon who slipped out of the Abyss's anomaly, or it might have roamed the Northern Continent before the three major Devil clans—Nois, Beria, and Andariel—held sway. It didn't pledge allegiance to any ancient gods, whichever way you slice it. But dealing with an ancient Devil King who's fled back to the Abyss isn't something the two of you are capable of, let alone striking a bargain with it.

"You can explore the Demon legends on Hanth Island if it's on your route, but stay cautious.

"Remember, the Abyss's corruption is potent. It can corrupt people without their awareness. During this time, be vigilant for changes in your thoughts, concepts, emotions, and desires. If you notice anything unusual, consult a

Psychiatrist for confirmation. If you're genuinely affected by the Abyss aura from Naboredisley, contact me or Judgment. Experts skilled in purifying such influences will assist you. Avoid burdening Mr. Fool unnecessarily.

"Thinking about the name 'Naboredisley' is okay, but refrain from writing or reading it."

After reading the letter, Lumian mumbled to himself, "Madam Magician seems more inclined to believe it's a Demon and not some other hidden entity."

"That's right," Franca echoed, puzzled. "Let's assume that fellow is a Demon, yet it doesn't even have Danger Premonition, allowing us to complete the preparations for the Exorcism Spell. If we say it isn't, it can create fluctuations and trigger our desires and emotions. I was just guessing that it's a secret entity that possesses a Grade 1 Sealed Artifact of the Demon pathway."

Lumian pondered for a few seconds and said, "Perhaps Madam Magician has seen more.

"That fellow probably doesn't have Danger Premonition because its true form isn't here. It only descended with a sliver of its aura and power. Or perhaps, the danger originated from Mr. Fool, so it couldn't sense it!"

"That makes sense," Franca agreed before saying with a strange expression, "Ever since we became Minor Arcana cards, we've increasingly come into contact with the depths of the mystic world. The Demoness Sect, the mirror world, the War of the Four Emperors, the Great Mother, and a Demon of the Abyss this time… In the past, when I read Emperor Roselle's diary, I often had the feeling that 'that's just how the world is.' But now, the contents of his diary have truly come to us."

Without waiting for Lumian to speak, Franca added in a self-deprecating manner, "For example, a Demoness does taste pretty good."

Lumian chuckled and remarked, "Think about it carefully. Did you encounter these things after becoming a Minor Arcana card holder, or after getting to know me?"

"Uh…" Franca's lips twitched. "You know yourself well."

…

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Two days later, Lumian, Ludwig, and Lugano boarded a long-distance ship set to pass by Hanth Island, en route to the Southern Continent's West Balam.

Lumian aimed to investigate the Demon's legend and seize an opportunity to fully digest the Conspirer potion.

After outsmarting Naboredisley and banishing it with the Exorcism Spell, Lumian realized that his potion digestion had made significant progress.

With another decent performance, he could advance the digestion further. This would eliminate the need for the final advancement ritual's aid, allowing him to plan the subsequent matters more calmly.

Captain Pedro, accompanied by his eldest daughter Salah, and a few Favored and Blessed, expressed sincere gratitude to Lumian. They watched as he ascended the gangway with his godson and servant, boarding the ship named 'Berries.'

Once the ship set sail, one of the Blessed appeared to sigh in relief and commented, "He's finally left Port Colla…"

Without waiting for Salah to inquire about the reason for the sigh, the Blessed, wearing a brown priest's robe, turned to her and Pedro and advised,

"The circumstances at the scene of Flores's death indicate that this matter involved a true, high-ranking Demon. Miss Salah, it's best if you stay in the cloister for a year to avoid any possible aftereffects."

Salah, aware of her awakening thanks to the adventurer Louis Berry's assistance, was horrified. However, lacking personal experience, she inquired, "A year? A real Demon… What kind of Demon is that?"

The Blessed, in a brown clergyman's attire, responded solemnly, "It's the Demons from the legends you've heard of, or something even more powerful."

"Wh…" Salah turned to her father with a face filled with fear, confusion, and disbelief.

Did you guys save me from such a Demon?

Pedro was equally surprised.

He had never imagined that his daughter's situation would involve such a terrifying existence.

And Louis Berry had only received 20,000 gold risot!

No, he actually succeeded!

Pedro, having witnessed the adventurer Louis Berry's strength through the colossal wave he created, could now grasp his power more vividly in this direct comparison.

…

In the first-class cabin suite aboard the Berries.

Lumian handed the ancient notebook and the note with Love Incantation to Ludwig and asked with a smile, "Is it edible?"

Chapter 621: Hanth Island

Ludwig, savoring succulent roasted lamb chops, cast a quick glance at the ancient notebook and the note containing the Love Incantation.

"I can only provide details about the paper's age, the raw materials, and the manufacturing process."

The knowledge and concealed content inscribed on it couldn't be extracted.

"Alright." Lumian withdrew his hand, his disappointment minimal.

He had approached Ludwig with the intention that it didn't harm asking.

Finding nothing else of interest, he settled into the recliner, immersing himself in the warm sunlight. Flipping through the ancient notebook filled with Demon legends,

Lumian found it composed entirely in Highlander. Flores, having only attended elementary grammar school, wouldn't have comprehended it otherwise.

Reading with enthusiasm, as if engrossed in a gripping novel, Lumian discovered that certain legends surpassed even the thrill of contemporary horror stories, sending shivers down his spine.

Occasionally, incantations emerged, some fabricated by the ignorant and subjected to numerous alterations. Others carried a subtle malevolence, bearing a resemblance to Naboredisley. Lumian refrained from uttering them aloud, silently reciting them instead.

The first day of the Berries' voyage unfolded in tranquil serenity.

Late at night, Lumian dreamt of enchanting scenes, weaving into blush-inducing stories that heightened his emotions.

Suddenly, Lumian awoke. Sunlight filtered through the window curtains, casting a faint glow.

It was 6 a.m.

Lying in bed, Lumian experienced a sense of loss.

He lacked the endurance of an Ascetic in dreams, causing certain scenes to be unusually poignant.

Phew… Lumian exhaled, emitting a self-deprecating laugh. Almost forgot, this isn't a boon; it's a curse.

Reverting to a physical state when Termiboros was newly sealed at 6 a.m. every morning brought benefits like fearlessness of serious injuries, no heed of energy consumption, and automatic healing.

Though thoughts of Cordu's catastrophe and his sister Aurore haunted him with each reset, the initial pain gradually dulled, becoming a bearable numbness after his psychiatric treatment. Occasionally, he felt a dull ache and emptiness.

Lumian rose from bed and drew open the curtains, revealing two contrasting scenes of the azure sea.

To the right, a crimson sun had just surfaced on the horizon. To the left, fog lingered, and waves surged, shrouding the situation 100 meters away.

Exiting the master bedroom, Lumian noticed that Lugano was already awake, captivated by the seascape.

"You're in a good mood," Lumian teased.

Lugano grinned sheepishly and replied, "It's my first time in the Berserk Sea. I'm a little excited and woke up early."

He added, "Besides, if I want to be your interpreter, I have to master Dutanese as soon as possible."

On the coffee table in the room lay numerous Dutanese books recently purchased by Lumian from Port Colla. Being a primary trading port for the Southern Continent, Port Colla's citizens had a practical need to learn Dutanese, resulting in a trend. Lumian easily acquired two sets of teaching materials covering elementary, intermediate, and advanced levels, along with practice materials, thanks to various teaching aids and Dutanese instructors. This was a stark contrast to Port Santa, where obtaining a few barely usable books required considerable effort.

Lumian applauded gently.

"Not bad."

Lugano pointed towards the foggy sea and explained, "Last night, I heard from a sailor on the ship that many vessels attempted to explore the sea in that direction, but they never returned. Occasionally, people would spot one of those ships quietly passing by at night with no lights or anyone on the deck.

"They say it's the Berserk Sea. Stick to the safe sea route; attempting unknown routes often leads to unknown and irresistible danger.

"See, the sun is rising over there, right? The sea seems calm, but venture beyond the safe route, and we might face a sudden hurricane, a lightning storm, or even get melted by the sun and evaporated. These are tales from sailors; I'm not sure if they're true."

Lumian nodded and suggested, "Look into more similar rumors."

With his employer's approval, Lugano's expression brightened, finding a purpose in his work.

The voyage through the Berserk Sea proved relatively uneventful. Lumian, Ludwig, and Lugano managed to avoid causing any disruptions.

Occasionally, they witnessed storms capable of city-wide destruction or forest-like lightning. Sometimes, they noticed the absence of fish throughout the entire sea, creating an eerie silence akin to the legendary Underworld.

Guided by the seasoned captain, first mate, and sailors, the Berries navigated through these regions along the safe sea route.

After a few days, the ocean-venturing steamship reached Hanth Island, the transit port. The crew replenished coal and water, conducted machine maintenance, restocked light beer, and replenished various food supplies over two days.

"There doesn't seem to be any specialties on this island," Lugano remarked, consulting the travel guide from Port Colla. "But due to its strategic geographical location and natural deepwater port, it's one of the main transit ports controlled by the Feynapotter Kingdom."

Specialties? Does that include Demons? Lumian critiqued silently, producing two gold risots and twirling them in his hand.

"I'm going to try the local self-brewed wine."

He made his way to the port's largest bar and ordered a glass of thick, pomegranate-colored local red wine, Paha.

Lumian struck up a conversation with a few patrons near the bar counter, deliberately approaching one with a local accent.

"I met a nice chick," he said with a sly wink and an ambiguous smile. "We're going on a date later—on a quiet night. Can you share a few local horror stories? They don't have to be well-known, just terrifying enough, preferably with a specific location. For instance, if there's a horrifying tale about an empty house on a certain street, heh heh, I plan to take her there for our date."

The local, his beard dampened with ale, set down his oak beer mug and chuckled.

"How devious, but I like you! It's a battle of wits between men and women. For victory, anything goes!"

After a brief pause, the local suggested, "You can take her on a date at the edge of the forest outside the city. You know, a forest at night is always chilling. Besides, there might be more than one Demon lurking in the woods on Hanth Island.

"As far back as I can remember, the priests have been warning everyone against venturing deep into the forest or even thinking about cutting wood in the middle of the island. There are many hidden dangers.

"What kind of dangers, you ask? The priests never specify, but someone always tells me about some random person encountering a Demon with goat horns and an unpleasant sulfuric smell in the forest.

"As for those who claim to have seen the Demon with their own eyes, it's said that they all met their demise—for some unknown reason.

"How about that? No woman isn't afraid of a Demon. Well, except my wife. She's even scarier than a Demon!"

Have the Demon stories on Hanth Island evolved to such an extent? It resembles the legend of the Montsouris ghost, but encountering a Montsouris ghost does result in the death of an entire family. Hanth Island doesn't have such an obvious characteristic… Lumian raised his glass of red wine, toasting the local before saying, "Though I'm quite charming, I doubt any chick would be willing to follow me to the edge of the forest outside the city on our first date, especially at night. Even if she's not afraid of me doing harm, she might worry that I'm a criminal with a penchant for harming young girls. How about this: Is there a legend of a serial killer? Ideally, one that haunts the city."

Drawing from Aurore's grimoires and the information gathered in recent months, Lumian discerned that Sequence 9 of the Demon pathway was

Criminal, Sequence 8 was Coldblooded, and Sequence 7 was Serial Killer.

The name of Sequence 7, Serial Killer, indicated that Beyonders, regardless of their grasp of the acting method, would actively or passively engage in serial killings.

Although the Demon on Hanth Island had clearly surpassed Sequence 7 and evolved beyond the Serial Killer stage, Lumian wondered whether, as a high-ranking individual who had progressed through the ranks, it retained certain preferences acquired during its Serial Killer phase.

Intelligent beings, be they human or of a certain creature, tended to maintain certain desires if not deliberately restrained or controlled.

Just as humans might occasionally indulge in a drink, Demons might occasionally engage in serial killings.

Moreover, if Naboredisley's commission wasn't concocted merely for a verbal agreement, the Demon of Hanth Island or its descendants should be concealed among humans.

The bearded local pondered for a moment before responding, "There haven't been any serial killers. In a small place like ours, if serial murders were happening, everyone in the city would know."

He paused, then added, "But what if someone goes missing in the forest outside the city every year? Would that count?"

…

In Trier, Franca, Jenna, and Anthony managed to gather sufficient information about Moran Avigny, the current Minister of Industry.

This information included a color photograph.

In the picture, Moran Avigny displayed a striking resemblance to an Intisian. Despite his age, he exuded an air of elegance.

In his late sixties, his once-black hair had transitioned into a distinguished gray. Refined facial features and dark gray eyes added to his overall presence, with the wrinkles on his face highlighting the passage of time.

"Dark gray eyes are rare in Intis…" Franca sighed.

Mid-sentence, she abruptly halted.

Another individual with dark-gray eyes in Intis crossed her mind—Demoness of Black Clarice.

Chapter 622: Smell of Death

Under normal circumstances, dark-gray eyes wouldn't usually grab one's attention. Such pupils were rare in Intis but not uncommon in places like the Loen Kingdom. However, Franca sensed that there was crucial information hidden within.

Moran Avigny was suspected to be a Mirror Person. The Demoness of Black Clarice pursued the Mirror People, and being a demigod of the Demoness pathway closely related to the Mirror World, they all shared those unusual dark gray eyes.

Too much of a coincidence, isn't it?

"What's wrong?" Jenna asked with concern when Franca paused.

Franca deliberated for a few seconds before revealing that the Demoness of Black shared the same eye color as Moran Avigny. Finally, she said, "None of the Mirror People we encountered previously had such characteristics."

"Only relatively special Mirror People have them? Is the Demoness of Black also a Mirror Person?" Jenna guessed, her thoughts wandering.

"Impossible," Franca subconsciously denied. "She even tasked me with investigating the Mirror People… Right, it's not impossible. Haven't we read enough stories of burglars calling the police to catch thieves?"

Anthony thought for a moment and said, "Could it be a symbol of being corrupted by the mirror's Primordial Demoness? Could special Mirror People at a certain level have such eye color? Could it be the same for a Demoness who has become a demigod and has been corrupted?

"No, Moran Avigny should have had dark gray eyes to begin with. It's impossible for the Mirror People who replaced him to change the color of his eyes without attracting suspicion," Franca pondered and deduced, "In other words, does the Demoness of Black come from the same family as the original Moran Avigny? I previously thought she belonged to the Sauron family and was Browns Sauron's elder. Otherwise, she wouldn't have nurtured such a simple-minded Demoness. Now, it doesn't seem so…"

"Not necessarily," Franca and Jenna said in unison.

Everyone had a paternal and maternal side of the family. Just because they were from the Sauron family didn't mean they weren't from a dark-gray-eyed family!

Franca hesitated for a few seconds before saying, "It's been a while since I updated the Demoness of Black on the Mirror People investigation. I plan to visit her this week and discuss Moran Avigny."

"Be careful," Jenna cautioned.

A gleaming smile played on Franca's lips as she replied, "Don't worry. She tasked me with the Mirror People inquiry, so she should anticipate some updates. If she has ties with Moran Avigny, we might see something unfolding for the Minister of Industry shortly. If not, we can seek her assistance!"

…

On Hanth Island, Lumian strolled through the dimly lit streets, relishing the cool sea breeze that replaced the earlier heat as he casually headed back to the Berries.

Hands tucked into his pockets, his mind raced with unusual activity. He sifted through the legends and stories he had recently gathered, attempting to uncover any hints about the elusive Demon.

Had Madam Magician not issued a cautious warning, and had Naboredisley not disclosed the Demon descendant's name and identity, Lumian might have considered using himself as bait. In such circumstances, he could have showcased his malice, devised a plan with a chance of success, triggering the Demon's Danger Premonition, luring it out to eliminate the perceived threat. A concealed trap would await it.

It's been a century or two. Numerous adventurers have ventured to unravel the Demon legend. Despite the Church of Earth Mother's relentless efforts to eradicate lingering issues, there's still no resolution. Relying on conventional methods to track down that elusive Demon seems impractical…

Looking at it from a different angle, why would the Demon choose to remain on Hanth Island?

The Church of Earth Mother already purged it once. Why take the risk to stay?

If it were me, I would have relocated ages ago. As a Demon, where couldn't I survive?

If I truly believed I was a highly intelligent criminal—a genuine Criminal—why use such a method to taunt the clergy of the Church of Earth Mother? It would become dull after all these years…

Could there be a reason for its persistence on Hanth Island?

Is it perhaps partially sealed? Or is there something profoundly significant buried on the island that cannot be moved?

The valley ablaze with sulfurous flames?

Moreover, Demons can live for centuries, but ordinary people cannot. If the Demon indeed concealed itself in human towns, it would have to change identities every few decades, potentially leaving traces.

Hanth Island serves as a transit port for trade routes between the Northern and Southern Continents. With numerous foreign settlers, the Demon can effortlessly forge a new identity. However, how can it smoothly exit the stage with its original identity?

The residents here all devoutly follow Earth Mother. Upon their demise, they are invariably sent to the cathedral for a wake. Would a Demon have the audacity to feign death and undergo Earth Mother's scrutiny and the purifying touch of holy water?

Yes, vanishing is the optimal solution. Whether through a sea adventure or disappearing into the forest, it effectively sidesteps corresponding problems.

Every year, people vanish in the forest outside the city… Did the Demon purposely orchestrate some accidents, concealing its 'death' among them? Lumian's thoughts raced as he gradually formulated deductions and speculations.

This was also a tempering of a Conspirer's powers and a method to digest the potion.

He had a vague understanding of the entire situation.

If I want to locate the Demon concealed among humans, I must find the mysterious valley ablaze with sulfur flames deep in the forest. To unravel the valley's secret, I must rely on that Demon. These two matters are likely intertwined and inseparable.

Lumian had a tentative plan for tomorrow's investigation.

I'll begin by exploring the forest, utilizing my Hunter powers to search for the remains of the missing. If I discover one or two, and they still retain some edible structure, I'll bring them back to Ludwig and determine who the deceased last encountered.

Throughout this process, without alerting the clergy of the Church of Earth Mother, I'll delve deeper into the island to identify any anomalies. If they exist, what kind of anomalies they are…

As he strolled leisurely, Lumian suddenly looked up and observed the stars in the sky veiled by dark clouds.

In an instant, torrential rain poured down.

Drops of rain misted in front of Lumian. Without an umbrella, he had no choice but to dash under the eaves of a three-story building on the street and seek refuge outside a café with its lights off. He waited for the storm to end impassively.

The few pedestrians on the road unfurled their umbrellas.

Lumian couldn't help but chuckle as he recalled the common depiction of the Berserk Sea's islands in the travel guide: The weather is highly erratic; remember to bring an umbrella or a hat when out.

Clearly, Lumian didn't take the reminder seriously.

He wasn't in a rush. Leaning against the café's two glass windows, he quietly observed the raindrops streak down and the people returning home late traverse different streets.

The sound of the rain masked all movement, and white mist veiled most of his vision, creating the sensation for Lumian as if he were in another world.

Observing this scene, Lumian reminisced about his wandering days.

Wanderers often struggled to predict the weather, making it challenging to secure refuge in cathedrals and other places in Directly support the authors on WebNovel!

advance. Consequently, he would occasionally huddle in a corner of a street, sheltered from the rain. He watched the rain with fear, worry, uneasiness, and gloom, praying that no other vagabond would snatch his temporary shelter.

But now, his mood was entirely different.

The heavy rain in the Berserk Sea ceased as swiftly as it had arrived. In less than half an hour, only stagnant water remained on the street.

Lumian chuckled and tucked his hands back into his pockets. He strolled along the wet street toward the harbor and boarded the Berries.

Just as Lumian pushed open the door and entered, he saw Lugano wiping Ludwig's dripping hair with a dry and fluffy towel. Ludwig looked as if he had taken an unexpected plunge.

"You didn't bring an umbrella?" Lumian asked with a smile.

Lugano replied awkwardly, "I thought I was a Planter and could predict changes in the weather in advance, so I didn't bring an umbrella and led Ludwig to the streets to buy supper. He said he didn't want to eat cakes and biscuits tonight. Sigh, who knew that even though I predicted a rainstorm, it only took tens of seconds before it arrived. At that time, I wanted to carry Ludwig and rush back to the ship before the rain started…"

Seeing that the Doctor didn't seek an objective reason and only complained about his lack of ability, Lumian kindly added,

"This is the weather in the Berserk Sea. Even Planters can't predict it."

This was also one of the reasons why the islands in the Berserk Sea, clearly under the rule of the Church of Earth Mother, didn't always experience bumper harvests like the Feynapotter Kingdom.

"Yes, yes, yes." Lugano heaved a sigh of relief.

Lumian turned to Ludwig, whose hair was now dry, and casually inquired, "Do you smell anything?"

Is there any particularly alluring "food" hidden nearby?

Ludwig nibbled on a tortilla and responded, "There's the smell of death."

Smell of death? Lumian frowned slightly.

"Did someone die near the night market?"

Ludwig shook his head.

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"When it rains, there's the smell of death everywhere."

What… what does this mean? Lumian probed, voicing his doubts.

Ludwig replied candidly, "I don't know. It disappeared later."

It happens when it rains, but not after… Is this an abnormality from the Berserk Sea, or is it the island's abnormality triggered by the Berserk Sea's weather? Lumian pondered for a moment, but he wasn't in a rush to write to Madam Magician and inquire.

This was a digestion opportunity for him. He felt that he should avoid relying on the power of a high-ranking person to digest it better unless it was crucial.

That night, Lumian fell asleep with a heavy heart.

In his hazy dream, he saw many familiar and unfamiliar things.

The pale-white Samaritan Women's Spring, the mountain- sized Blood Emperor's afterimage dripping with yellowish magma, and the unknown object protruding from the spring…

The scene suddenly changed, revealing Lumian wandering alone in the deep darkness underground.

It was as if he had become the Montsouris ghost.

Chapter 623: Grave Digging

In the endless darkness, cramped quarters, and jumbled thoughts, Lumian found himself unusually frustrated, even within the confines of his dreams. He longed to rip apart the cage around him and shatter everything in his path.

Slowly, the realization dawned upon him that he was dreaming. He struggled to open his eyes and wake up, but his efforts were in vain. Each time he thought he had finally awakened, in the blink of an eye, he plunged into a deeper darkness and a more profound dream.

After an unknown stretch of time, Lumian naturally awoke to some light seeping through the curtained window.

It was 6 a.m.

Lumian raised his right hand and wiped his forehead, sensing a layer of cold sweat.

Is this a spiritual warning, or had memories of the Samaritan Women's Spring and the afterimage of the Blood Emperor haunted me after I contemplated the smell of death on Hanth Island yesterday? Previously, I had drawn connections between the mysterious deaths of those who witnessed the Demon and the Montsouris ghost, possibly leading to a shallow corruption? Lumian couldn't accurately decipher the complete meaning of the dream. All he could do was remind himself to be cautious and stay focused on his original goal for coming to Hanth Island:

To investigate the Demon legends, not to eliminate the Demon.

Setting aside whether he possessed the strength to face the Demon or if he needed assistance, the fact that the Church of Earth Mother had operated on the island for over a century without completely eradicating the target suggested even the Tarot Club's Major Arcana card holders might not resolve this matter entirely.

Lumian got out of bed and retrieved the golden pocket watch from Salle de Bal Brise. Opening and glancing at it: 6:01 a.m.

Though early, Lumian felt a sense of urgency. The Berries would depart from Hanth Island the morning after tomorrow. He had only two days to delve into the Demon legends, unravel the truth, and identify potential suspects.

If he succeeded, his Conspirer potion might very well be digested.

Gathering, screening, and utilizing information were crucial aspects of a conspiracy!

And if Lumian were a Sequence 7 Detective of the Reader pathway, successfully solving a century-old unsolved case involving high-level powers in just two days would be a remarkable leap from initial digestion to complete digestion.

…

At 9 a.m., in the suburbs of Port Hanth, Return Cemetery.

Holding a bunch of yellow flowers, Lumian navigated through the tree-lined cemetery.

Armed with Ludwig's intel and the insights from the previous night's dream, he adjusted his plan. Instead of hastily venturing into the forest to search for the missing people's remains, he decided to dig up graves here!

His objective: to investigate the circumstances surrounding the mysterious death of someone who had glimpsed the Demon's figure in the forest depths. He aimed to discover if they would meet the same fate as those killed by the Montsouris ghost—exhibiting self-mutilation.

According to the gathered information, the last person to report the Demon's presence to the Church of Earth Mother rested in a quiet corner of Return Cemetery.

His name was Antonio Elias.

Before long, Lumian, clutching the bouquet of yellow flowers, reached the grave. Apart from the deceased's name, birth and death dates, a concise epitaph adorned the stone tombstone: "This wretched man's life was taken by a Demon."

Lumian stooped down, placing the bouquet before the tombstone. Then, he straightened up, silently studying the stone tomb.

Details about Antonio Elias flashed through his mind.

A local, not a foreigner, with parents, a wife, and children. Nine months ago, during a hunting trip in the forest, he encountered a wandering Demon. Fearing his imminent demise, he sought refuge in the cathedral and cloister of the Church of Earth Mother for a full five months. Afterwards, intending to serve as a crew member for three years, steering clear of Hanth Island and its hidden dangers, he was discovered dead at the bottom of the cabin on his second voyage…

Lumian scanned the surroundings, gathering ten to twenty withered branches from beneath nearby trees. He planted them around Antonio Elias's tomb, forming a short, makeshift, and somewhat futile barrier.

Lastly, he laid a withered branch flat on two adjacent branches, constructing a shaky door impassable to anyone.

With that completed, Lumian stepped over the "wall" and entered the grave.

He then bent down, extending his right hand to touch the makeshift door constructed of withered branches.

Simultaneously, a black mark activated on his body.

In the blink of an eye, Lumian's figure vanished. Antonio's tomb remained undisturbed, except for the added circle of withered branches.

In reality, Lumian had retrieved an iron pick, shovel, and other items from his just-purchased Traveler's Bag. He began prying open the stone slabs and digging into the soil.

Bottle of Fiction!

Lumian utilized the "wall" and "door" he had fashioned to employ the Bottle of Fiction contract ability.

In less than two minutes, relying on his understanding of the cemetery's layout and two precise explosions, Lumian cleared the soil from the coffin and pried open the black-painted wooden plank.

A pungent odor of decay wafted out, and Lumian casually ignited it.

After a brief wait, he squatted down, donned gloves, and examined the white bones, now devoid of flesh and blood.

The first item he picked up was Antonio Elias's skull. With a cursory glance, he noted cracks on the inside of the skull, while the exterior remained intact.

A brain explosion as the cause of death? Lumian pondered the force required to induce such damage. Regardless of the ability responsible, Antonio's cerebrum, cerebellum, and brain stem should have exploded into mush at the time of his demise. It seemed illogical for the hard inner cranium to crack while the soft brain remained unharmed.

Examining Antonio Elias's other bones yielded no additional injuries. The stains in the coffin offered no further clues.

Lumian concluded that Antonio's death resulted from an internal explosion in his head. The explosive force, while not physically strong enough to shatter his skull entirely, was sufficient to destroy his brain.

With Fire Infusion, I can precisely control the quantity and Directly support the authors on WebNovel!

quality of the flames. I should be able to achieve a similar effect. How did the Demon do it? Lumian's comprehension of the Demon pathway came from his sister's grimoires, information provided by the Tarot Club, and Franca's account. He had only truly interacted with a Demon above Sequence 6 once, and that was with Naboredisley.

He immediately recollected the sensations when Naboredisley stirred his desires and emotions. The echoes of the ranting transmitted through the gray fog during Naboredisley's expulsion and the tumult of his own desires replayed in his mind.

For ordinary people, inducing an upheaval in their desires before detonating them could lead to their brains exploding, given an increase in potency… It shouldn't be a challenging feat for a demigod creature like a Demon. Moreover, the Demon can use those ravings to achieve this remotely? As Lumian completed his deduction, he was convinced that a Demon was indeed concealed on Hanth Island. A Demon of the Criminal pathway, a Demon surpassing Sequences like Devil and Desire Apostle.

With this confirmation, Lumian believed it would be relatively straightforward to locate the Demon if he put his mind to it.

However, the prerequisite was finding it and not resolving the situation, all while risking his life.

Removing the glove, he reached into his Traveler's Bag and touched the Flog boxing gloves.

Following the incident with the Celestial Worthy of Heaven and Earth for Blessings and the Great Mother, Lumian had already speculated that the Mother Tree of Desire stood at the peak of the Prisoner, Criminal, and Scrooge pathways. Therefore, the Rose School of Thought's indulgence faction and some members of the Devil family believed in Her and followed Her.

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In that case, the Flog boxing gloves made from the branches of the Tree of Shadow, closely related to the Mother Tree of Desire, had a high chance of attracting the Demon's attention within a certain range. Just as its negative effects meant being observed by some hidden entities, influenced and attacked by dangerous creatures!

Phew, there are no useless items. Only Beyonders who don't know how to use them. Lumian chuckled self-

deprecatingly and withdrew his right hand from the Flog boxing gloves.

He abandoned the plan to directly lure out the Demon.

This decision stemmed from the realization that the Demon was still active on the island, claiming lives, yet the Church of Earth Mother hadn't eradicated it completely!

Having encountered various challenges, Lumian possessed a reasonable understanding of an orthodox Church's strength. He knew that if the Church of Earth Mother genuinely committed, it could eliminate all residents suspected to be Demons and obliterate the island, similar to what the Church of Storms had done to Bansy Harbor.

It wasn't that the Church of Earth Mother lacked the will, but there was a reason holding them back.

This brought Lumian's thoughts back to the valley burning with sulfurous flames deep in the forest. He believed that the Demon couldn't be slain under regular circumstances. It could only be sealed and constrained.

As the Church of Earth Mother couldn't achieve this, and Lumian doubted his ability to do so, enticing the Demon directly would be futile and perilous.

Lumian's current strategy involved leveraging his fake level and Directly support the authors on WebNovel!

his allure to evil gods to traverse the forest. During critical moments, he planned to use the Flog boxing gloves to see if he could converge on the mysterious valley burning with sulfur flames to investigate the source of the Demon legends.

…

In the heart of the forest, surrounded by towering trees, Lumian navigated a path untouched by human presence for years. He moved forward at a measured pace.

From time to time, he would extract the Flog boxing gloves, relying on intuition to guide his course. After ten to twenty seconds, he stowed them away.

After almost an hour, the dense forest unexpectedly cleared.

A menacing brown bear emerged from behind a tree, advancing toward Lumian with ponderous steps.

"Stop, foreigner!"

The bear's mouth emitted a buzzing human voice.

Chapter 624: More Than One?

Lumian remained unfazed as the brown bear uttered words in precise Highlander. Instead of fear, delight filled him--a clear sign that he had stumbled upon the correct location!

This was the Planter pathway, the main pathway of the Church of Earth Mother, known as a Druid at Sequence 5. Capable of transforming into a formidable three-meter-tall bear.

Encountering a human-speaking brown bear in the desolate forest of Hanth Island hinted at his proximity to the heavily guarded area, possibly the mysterious valley of sulfur flames from Demon legends.

Without the signature golden straw hat, Lumian studied the brown bear's furry visage openly, making no effort to conceal his extraordinary nature.

"Alright," he sighed with regret, turning on his heels and retracing his steps.

Twenty to thirty meters away, Lumian vanished from the brown bear's view, concealed by towering trees that had stood for over a century.

He halted, leaning against a tree trunk, and casually retrieved an item from his Traveler's Bag.

It was a pair of brown gold-rimmed glasses--the Mystery Prying Glasses!

Lumian had no intention of recklessly breaching the Church of Earth Mother's protective circle and venturing into the sealed-off region.

Perhaps it was no safer than confronting the hidden Demon on Hanth Island.

Without sufficient and effective information, Lumian wasn't inclined to take such risks.

What if it resembled Fourth Epoch Trier?

Lumian's strategy involved skirting the edges of the problem zone, wielding the Mystery Prying Glasses to shift his perspective and uncover hidden truths.

From Lumian's familiarity with the Mystery Prying Glasses from previous, the item's lower level hindered his ability to directly perceive various seals. In Trier, he had utilized them multiple times but couldn't catch a direct glimpse of Fourth Epoch Trier. Instead, he witnessed concealed elements beneath the ground, lurking in darkness, or disguised through distorted, overlooking, or prying angles.

This inherent flaw safeguarded Lumian from directly encountering the Church of Earth Mother's sealed artifact, thus averting potential catastrophe. Nonetheless, it allowed him to discern abnormal traces.

And that was sufficient!

More traces equaled more information, bringing Lumian closer to the elusive truth!

Ready to teleport at a moment's notice, Lumian positioned the brown gold-rimmed glasses on the bridge of his nose.

An unsettling dizziness gripped him, akin to being buried underground. Despite looking up at the soil, trees, and sky, he sensed an elevated vantage point, overseeing everything.

Withering tree bark, decaying leaves, crawling insects, and animals circling a water source--all these details and buried bones spun in Lumian's vision, inducing nausea from the depths of his soul.

Amidst the nausea creeping from the depths of his soul, Lumian's gaze fixated on a startling sight.

Silent blue flames devoured the entire landscape.

Whether above, below, or around the flames, the trees swiftly transformed into an inky black, dissolving into sewage. From the decaying remnants, new trees sprouted, rapidly expanding and flourishing.

In the midst of the blue inferno, Lumian vaguely discerned a crimson, colossal figure sprawled at the core. Submerged in pitch-black, viscous sewage, it sank gradually, only to be yanked upward by an invisible force.

This unseen power emanated from beyond the withering and burgeoning forest, from...

Abruptly, a pair of eyes materialized within Lumian's line of sight.

They were bloodshot, icy-blue eyes tinged with pain.

Without hesitation, Lumian removed the Mystery Prying Glasses and activated the black mark representing Spirit World Traversal.

Swiftly fading, he disappeared into the forest and reappeared outside the Church of Earth Mother Cathedral in Port Hanth, behind the familiar stone pillar observed earlier that morning.

After stashing the Mystery Prying Glasses back into his Traveler's Bag, Lumian departed the secluded spot. Blending in with believers, he entered the cathedral exuding scents of wheat and milk, occupying a pew closest to the Sacred Emblem of Life. With crossed arms, he mimicked the old man in a black formal suit, feigning prayer.

Only then did he exhale a sigh of relief, assured that those icy-blue eyes wouldn't target or lock onto him.

These Mystery Prying Glasses could pass through countless hands if not in my possession. Its negative effects are indeed unique and beneficial, but they're also very dangerous… Lumian couldn't help but sigh inwardly.

Then, he analyzed the scenes witnessed through the Mystery Prying Glasses.

There's a region engulfed in sulfur flames, but the Church of Earth Mother's trees seal it off, cycling between death and rebirth. It's nearly impossible to spot from the outside. Even with the Mystery Prying Glasses, I can only vaguely discern its outline.

It's akin to lurking outside a cage and surveying the interior through the gaps in the railing. Despite the Mystery Prying Glasses' capabilities, they shouldn't breach the seal.

That colossal, blood-colored figure resembles a small mountain, yet I can't discern any details… Could it be the true form of the Demon of Hanth Island? How can others see it when it's sealed inside, causing those who witness it to mysteriously vanish?

Could there be more than one Demon on Hanth Island? The ice-blue eyes staring at me may belong to another Demon. Is it utilizing the invisible connection between itself and the blood-colored Demon to prevent its descent into the pitch-black, viscous sewage?

If so, the Church of Earth Mother should eliminate the Demon active both outside and on the island. By doing so, the blood-colored Demon would lose its assistance.

Or does the Church of Earth Mother not want the blood-colored Demon to completely sink into the pitch-black sewage, letting the ice-blue-eyed Demon exist only to restrict its range and frequency?

If it's not entirely sealed, would the invisible connection between the two parties disappear? Is it because the ice-blue-eyed Demon will also be affected by the pitch-black sewage?

Lumian deepened his understanding and speculations regarding the Demon legends on Hanth Island. He sensed that his Conspirer potion had become active, showing signs of digestion, but it was still one step away.

He wasn't in a rush to succeed. Instead, he pondered the mission that Naboredisley hadn't entrusted to him and Franca.

Killing a Demon descendant from an island in the Berserk Sea…

That's correct, a descendant! The ice-blue-eyed Demon is a descendant of that blood-colored Demon. Is that why an invisible connection binds them?

Does Naboredisley desire the blood-colored Demon to fully submerge into the pitch-black sewage?

Is this beneficial or detrimental for the blood-colored Demon?

If it's beneficial, it makes sense why the Earth Mother Church impedes it. Why does the blood-colored Demon's descendant persist in pulling and preventing its descent?

Suppose the ice-blue-eyed Demon is under the control of the Church of Earth Mother, yet it can kill and cause disappearances. Conversely, why doesn't it flee Hanth Island? This implies that it's not in the ice-blue-eyed Demon's favor if the blood-colored Demon were to completely sink into the pitch-black sewage. It's even willing to forfeit its freedom to obstruct it.

If it's not favorable, perhaps Naboredisley isn't deceiving. It's an adversary of the blood-colored Demon, hoping for its complete submersion and assimilation by the pitch-black sewage. This might have a certain impact on Hanth Island, the Berserk Sea, or even the entire world. That's why the Church of Earth Mother seals and monitors it…

Can't they just kill it? Without the blood-colored Demon, the issue of it sinking completely into the pitch-black sewage would cease…

Can't be killed?

What Naboredisley feared wasn't that the blood-colored Demon might sense danger, but that the Church of Earth Mother might be alerted?

Lumian gradually understood the mentality and stance of the Church of Earth Mother, the local Demon, and Naboredisley, but he lacked sufficient evidence.

What he was most certain of now was: the pitch-black, viscous sewage wasn't simple!

Perhaps it was something akin to the Samaritan Women's Spring.

Furthermore, it bore a striking resemblance to the pitch-black form of the Montsouris ghost.

Trier's catacombs is a labyrinth of complexity, filled with corruption and unique monsters that defy easy elimination. It's the aftermath of Blood Emperor Alista Tudor's significant accomplishment, an act that nearly brought the gods down with Him. Ultimately, He perished. What could be the reason for Hanth Island? Could it be a divine battle and the demise of a deity?

That's not beyond the realm of possibility… While my knowledge of the Fourth Epoch's history is limited, I do know that the Berserk Sea was not as tumultuous back then. There were still interactions between the Northern and Southern Continents. Could it be that another emperor from the War of the Four Emperors or two emperors met Their end here, permanently reshaping the terrain and weather to give rise to the Berserk Sea?

Is this the manifestation of a deity's power? The Blood Emperor sank a colossal city underground, forcing over a million people to live above it to contain the subsequent effects. And the deity who perished here has been influencing the Berserk Sea for more than a thousand years. This surpasses the waters near Port Santa… As Lumian sighed, he prepared to stand up and return to the Berries to strategize his next move for gathering more information.

Sensing the quietude around him, his movements softened, cautious not to disturb the prayers of the Earth Mother believers.

Subconsciously scanning his surroundings, Lumian noticed that the believer beside him had also finished praying and retracted his arms.

A gray-haired old man in a black formal suit with a bow tie caught Lumian's eye. His face bore well-defined features, and his beard was meticulously shaved.

In the next moment, Lumian observed the elder turning his head—revealing bloodshot ice-blue eyes.

Chapter 625: Repentance

Ice-blue eyes!

That Demon!

It's lurking right there in the cathedral!

Lumian tensed. Without a second thought, he tried to teleport away.

This time, he chose Trier--the entrance to Saint ViÃ¨ve Cathedral!

In that moment, his reflection stared back at him in those chilling, ice-blue eyes.

His face twisted, expression sinister, eyes cold.

Soon, Lumians manifested, encircling him.

There was one Lumian, eyes intoxicated, breathing heavy, face flushed red. Another, trembling in fear. Another, expressionless and resolute. One, lost and sorrowful. Another, with no will to live. And one more, eyes filled with anger and hatred, red with intensity...

In an instant, Lumian seemed to multiply into countless versions, each appearing tangible.

This severely impacted his thoughts and actions, hindering him from activating the contract mark representing Spirit World Traversal.

Instinctively, he focused his remaining will on his right hand and the mark left by Blood Emperor Alista Tudor.

To escape this state and gain the strength to teleport away, he needed to terrify the ice-blue-eyed Demon!

Suddenly, Lumian heard ravings filled with intense madness and depravity.

His mind turned to mush, swelling dangerously.

The Blood Emperor's aura didn't activate in time.

Fragmented, emotional, and painful thoughts burst in Lumian's mind like fireworks before gradually descending.

An intense burning sensation in his chest anchored him, preventing complete loss of self.

After an unknown span of time, Lumian finally regained command of his thoughts.

His first thought was: I'm still alive?

It must have been a considerable duration since the onslaught of ravings and his subsequent awakening. The Demon's power could have easily ended him multiple times!

As Lumian concentrated on his right hand, he scrutinized the Demon with ice-blue eyes.

The white-haired Demon, adorned in a black formal suit and bow tie, sat upright once more, facing the Sacred Emblem of Life. It inclined slightly, crossing its arms over its chest.

Shutting its eyes, it whispered with a pained expression, "Oh, merciful Mother, I implore your mercy for my transgressions..."

Merciful Mother, I implore your mercy for my transgressions... Lumian's resolve wavered as he abandoned activating the Blood Emperor's aura.

He settled beside the Demon.

Observing the Sacred Emblem of Life on the altar, he waited silently, refraining from disrupting the Demon's repentance. Contemplating his encounter, he mused quietly.

The various selves I witnessed must be genuine illusions--not existing in the physical world but within my heart and mind...

Could this be a sophisticated manifestation of emotional and desire fluctuations, triggering individual emotions and desires to vie for control of the body without reaching the point of dissociation?

The subsequent ravings resembled Naboredisley's frenzied curse upon expulsion. Yet, this time, there was no shield from Mr. Fool's gray fog. Well, not entirely absent. Otherwise, the mad river of ravings would have capsized my identity. Even if I hadn't lost control, I would have succumbed completely before the Demon found its "conscience" and started repenting...

I believed the safest haven on Hanth Island was the cathedral of the Church of Earth Mother. I specifically chose it to evade the Demon. Surprisingly, it's praying here... Judging by this, blind trust in the orthodox Church's cathedrals might not be foolproof in the future. Without adequate information, nothing is absolute...

Yet, it was only within the cathedral that I survived. Anywhere else, it would be Termiboros grappling with the ice-blue-eyed Demon. Then, the Angels of the orthodox Churches and the Tarot Club would descend...

Lumian had formed some hypotheses and waited with assurance. He condensed his experiences and absorbed his lesson.

After a brief span, the white-haired, ice-blue-eyed Demon, donned in a black formal suit, concluded its repentance. Its expression regained composure, but the blood vessels in its eyes deepened.

Only then did Lumian observe the black leather gloves on both of its hands. Even during confession and prayer, they remained unremoved--a departure from devout believer behavior. In the human world, wearing gloves while praying was deemed disrespectful to a deity, except in emergencies or special circumstances. The same applied to wearing a hat.

The Demon cast a glance at Lumian and spoke in a deep but composed voice, "You haven't fled yet. Aren't you afraid of angering me again?"

Lumian gazed at the Sacred Emblem of Life and smiled.

"I'm not. This is Earth Mother's cathedral."

"Weren't we in the cathedral just now?" The Demon moderated its volume, not disturbing the other supplicants.

"Occasional accidents are understandable," Lumian replied unhurriedly. "Moreover, I believe you can certainly control yourself in a short period. It'll be more challenging beyond half a year."

The Demon also directed its gaze at the altar, its ice-blue eyes reflecting the Sacred Emblem of Life.

"Why do you think so?"

"I'm an experienced adventurer," Lumian said with a smile. "I know that orthodox Churches adhere to a common rule. Survivors entangled in a mysticism incident are often drawn into the Church if there's any hidden danger. They become civilian staff and receive long-term protection to prevent sudden deaths. However, those who witnessed the Demon's figure on Hanth Island didn't undergo this process. They only received a few months of protection before departing.

"Could it be that the Church fears prolonged stays might lead to deaths even within the cathedral or cloister?

"In such instances, it would undoubtedly tarnish the Church's reputation. One can't keep a constant watch on higher-level powers indefinitely."

The white-haired Demon fell silent for a few moments before confessing, "I didn't want to kill them, but I…"

At this point, its face twisted once more, icy-blue eyes filled with pain.

Once again, it crossed its arms over its chest, resuming a low-

voiced prayer.

This time, it swiftly regained its composure.

Lumian resumed the conversation with a smile.

"Don't tell me you penned all those epitaphs for those people?"

"That's correct." The Demon in the black suit maintained its slightly forward-leaning posture.

It seems this Demon has a rather amicable relationship with the Church of Earth Mother… Not strictly devout, but a believer nonetheless… Lumian understood that the ice-blue- eyed Demon wouldn't respond even if he inquired. Such questions might even provoke serious consequences. He had to capitalize on its stable emotions to seek some details.

Before Lumian could speak, the Demon posed a question.

"Foreigner, why did you come to Hanth Island?"

Lumian deliberately smiled.

"I previously encountered a Demon incident…"

Lumian briefly recounted Salah's encounter with the Love Incantation in Port Colla. While leading the investigation, the suspect's body had been suddenly commandeered by a Demon seeking a deal, which he rejected. Lumian, utilizing undisclosed official powers, had then expelled the other party.

Lumian omitted details about the Love Incantation's content and refrained from mentioning Naboredisley's name, fearing deep-seated animosity that might trigger intense agitation.

Concluding, he stated, "I read in the notebook about Demon legends on Hanth Island, connected to the deal the Demon sought. Intrigued, I decided to investigate. My intention wasn't to finish off anyone."

"You can't finish off anyone either," the Demon with ice-blue eyes remarked candidly.

It continued gazing at the Sacred Emblem of Life and added in a calm, deep voice, "Curiosity kills the cat."

Lumian chuckled.

"It's indeed risky, but finding you within a day and discovering the sealed valley indicates my capabilities."

Next time, I'll choose a safer "sanctuary."

The Demon with ice-blue eyes, with few wrinkles, smiled—an uncommon sight.

"Your methods are unconventional, but they align with the mysticism world's underlying laws.

"But had I not controlled myself and repented for past deeds, you would be dead. Such an investigation would have been futile."

Lumian didn't dispute. With the information he gathered, he knew there was no immediate danger in the cathedral of the Church of Earth Mother. The recent episode proved to be a false alarm.

He shifted the topic.

"Why did that inexplicable Demon target you?

"Moreover, with the strength of me and my companions, it's likely impossible to eradicate a so-called Demon descendant like you. Was it deliberately leading us to our demise?"

The Demon, clad in a black suit, kept its gaze fixed on the Sacred Emblem of Life and responded, "I'm not certain which one you encountered."

It refused to disclose more.

Lumian didn't dare press further, let alone provoke. His mind raced, searching for an alternate approach.

"You seem unrestricted. Why not leave Hanth Island?

"There appears to be some force influencing you here."

The Demon's expression twisted as it stated, "This is my duty and my atonement.

"Since converting to Earth Mother, there are times when I can't resist the urge to kill, accumulating profound sins."

Recalling his earlier deduction, Lumian inquired casually, "Then why not fully confine yourself?"

"Confinement won't suffice. I can't do it, and it can't be achieved that way." The Demon with ice-blue eyes displayed pain once again.

Indeed, closely tied to the blood-colored Demon in the valley… Yet, as a Coldblooded, why does the act of killing, and the subsequent "healing" by the Church of Earth Mother's reverence for life, still cause you pain? Lumian decided to steer the conversation to a less sensitive realm and soothe the other party.

In a relaxed tone, he said, "I apologize. I wasn't courteous earlier and failed to inquire about your preferred address."

The Demon with ice-blue eyes stared blankly for a moment before responding, "Naboredisley."

Chapter 626: Blatant Malice

Naboredisley? Lumian almost thought the ice-blue-eyed Demon was jesting with him.

However, he swiftly confirmed a crucial detail.

When it came to matters concerning the Love Incantation, he had never uttered the name Naboredisley!

Not only did he fear that Naboredisley and the ice-blue-eyed Demon were adversaries, but he also adhered to Madam Magician's instructions to abstain from writing or speaking this name.

If so, why did the ice-blue-eyed Demon identify itself as Naboredisley?

Could it truly be the genuine Naboredisley?

Then, why did the repeated chanting of "Naboredisley" summon a different Demon and not the ice-blue-eyed one?

Or were they equals? Was Naboredisley scheming to manipulate someone else into killing me?

Amidst Lumian's astonishment and confusion, a smile crept onto his face.

"I wouldn't dare utter that name."

He was testing the Demon with ice-blue eyes.

The Demon with ice-blue eyes turned towards Lumian.

"You've heard of Naboredisley and are aware of the concealed perils of uttering this name?"

"Yes," Lumian replied with a grin.

From the Demon's reaction, it seems unlikely to be the one propagating the Love Incantation... That's intriguing... Lumian pondered.

Though this might unveil greater horrors and deeper secrets, as a Hunter, fear and curiosity didn't contradict each other. It was akin to how everyone in the army feared death, yet it didn't deter them from banding together for combat.

The Demon with ice-blue eyes nodded slowly and spoke, "Here, within Earth Mother's cathedral, you needn't fret about uttering the name Naboredisley."

"That's evidently not the name you typically go by. Why don't you disclose your true name instead?" Lumian didn't reply. Instead, he posed a query.

He had a persistent feeling that the other party intended to harm him.

Had he not encountered the Love Incantation and received guidance from Madam Magician, he might have inadvertently mentioned the concealed Demon on Hanth Island, Naboredisley, after leaving Earth Mother's cathedral today. That could have been troublesome!

The Demon with ice-blue eyes fell silent for a few moments before stating, "The name I go by in human society holds no significance for you.

"Moreover, after learning the name Naboredisley and uttering it at least three times outside the cathedral...

At this juncture, the white-haired Demon's visage twitched, and a pained expression surfaced.

"I will establish a connection with you. When I can no longer control myself, I may choose to end your life. Ending the life of an uninformed adventurer like you, seeking to uncover the truth of Hanth Island's legend, would bring me greater satisfaction than harming ordinary people. I won't feel as regretful or guilty."

The ice-blue-eyed Demon gazed at the Sacred Emblem of Life once more, bowed its head, and expressed remorse.

"Oh, merciful Mother, I implore your mercy for my transgressions. I should not have harbored malevolent intentions..."

The corners of Lumian's mouth twitched, and his expression darkened.

Did you genuinely intend to harm me?

He couldn't afford to let his guard down for a moment when dealing with Demons. Vigilance was paramount, even if it was a Demon professing allegiance to Earth Mother!

Moreover, a seemingly innocuous conversation could clandestinely plant a time bomb. Any other adventurer would have fallen victim to it. Truly befitting the Criminal pathway, known for its high IQ crimes...

Cold, calculating, and overtly malicious...

After the ice-blue-eyed Demon, self-identified as Naboredisley, concluded its repentance, Lumian feigned a nonchalant smile and remarked,

"If you truly cannot control yourself and desire to take a life, target pirates. It aligns with a sense of justice."

The ice-blue-eyed Demon's expression darkened as it retorted, "This is my prison. I cannot depart until I have atoned. If any pirates enter Port Hanth, I will make them vanish into the forest outside the city."

Lumian nodded and redirected the conversation.

"The Love Incantation I mentioned earlier was the name you brought up. The Demon who proposed a deal with me also identified itself with that name."

The gray-haired, ice-blue-eyed Demon remained silent, gazing at the Sacred Emblem of Life for an extended period.

Rather than detecting anger and animosity, Lumian sensed surprise and bewilderment.

What... It can't pinpoint the Demon's true identity either? Is there no direct connection between the two parties? Lumian pondered inwardly.

After a while, the ice-blue-eyed Demon, self-dubbed Naboredisley, spoke,

"According to you, the Love Incantation has been clandestinely circulating for many years, yet I've never established a connection with anyone outside Hanth Island."

"I'm puzzled by that too. Could it be that someone can intercept the direction of the name? Is it conceivable to assume your identity in the future?" Lumian feigned curiosity as an adventurer.

He believed that, based on Madam Magician's words, Mr. Fool could accomplish such a feat. Amon was capable of it once too. Whether any Demon could do it remained unknown for now.

The ice-blue-eyed Demon fell silent once more. After a few seconds, it spoke with a deep voice,

"Foreigner, you've inquired enough. Let's conclude it here. Otherwise, you may meet your end unknowingly."

Clad in a formal black suit, the Demon self-dubbed Naboredisley slowly rose. It positioned its feet apart, raised its hands adorned with black leather gloves, and whispered,

"Praise the Earth, praise the Mother of All Things!"

Then, it turned around, picked up its cane, and shuffled towards the cathedral's door, bathed in the midday sun.

Lumian scrutinized the ice-blue-eyed Demon, realizing it wasn't tall and appeared rather thin. It emitted a withered and feeble aura, resembling that of an elderly ordinary human. It hardly resembled a terrifying and mighty Demon.

Observing closely, Lumian sensed a dark, blatant malice expanding and contracting beneath the thin human skin and aged flesh. The Demon struggled to maintain composure, refraining from tearing through its fragile facade.

The frightening inner core sharply contrasted with its frail appearance, yet the overall aura seemed feeble and commonplace.

This is reminiscent of Ludwig… One is a child concealing an unknown monster beneath the skin, while the other is a pitch-black Demon concealed within an old man's body… Lumian exerted great effort to refrain from fixating on scrutinizing the ice-blue-eyed Demon's luck.

The gray-haired elder in black leather gloves, wielding a cane, slowly departed from the cathedral.

Lumian wasn't in a rush to return to the Berries. He remained seated in the first row, contemplating the local Demon legends, which had recently become clearer yet were shrouded in numerous mysteries.

Suddenly, from the corner of his eye, he spotted a brown clergyman's uniform.

This was the attire of a clergyman from the Church of Earth Mother.

Lumian looked up and saw a middle-aged man with well-

defined facial features and thick eyebrows. He noticed a pair of bloodshot, ice-blue eyes filled with pain.

Ice-blue eyes?

Dammit! Lumian's hair stood on end as he cursed inwardly.

The ice-blue-eyed clergyman sat beside Lumian, where the Demon had been.

He smiled warmly and said, "Don't provoke Boselli or attempt his suggestions. His self-control diminishes with age."

"Boselli? Are you referring to the old gentleman with ice-blue eyes?" Lumian feigned ignorance.

"Yes." The ice-blue-eyed clergyman nodded slightly.

Lumian pondered for a moment and grinned.

"What about you? How's your self-control?"

"I'm much better than him. I lose control only once every few years," the ice-blue-eyed clergyman replied candidly.

Is he admitting that he's also a Demon? I'm not in Earth Mother's cathedral, but a Devil family's dining room… Lumian felt a chill and couldn't help but criticize.

Maintaining a composed smile, he said, "Are you acquainted with him? Are you from the same family?"

The ice-blue-eyed clergyman reflected for a moment and replied, "We're all born in the Port Hanth Cloister."

Children born in a cloister? The description made Lumian uneasy.

In other Churches, having a child in a cloister was a grave matter, deviating from the teachings of the deity, a symptom of succumbing to carnal desires and blaspheming faith.

Lumian pondered for a moment before reaching a realization.

This was the Church of Earth Mother. The more nuns and monks had children in the cloister, the more aligned with the doctrine!

He immediately understood why the ice-blue-eyed clergyman and Boselli were born in the cloister.

It would conceal their origins and identities well, preventing them from implicating ordinary families.

This shattered Lumian's previous deductions about the local Demons.

Demons didn't need to vanish to conceal their "corpses." The Church of Earth Mother would assist in concealing them. For instance, replacing genuine holy water with distilled water during a wake and later providing new identities and legal origins.

My earlier deduction was based on the assumption that the Church of Earth Mother and the local Demons weren't allies. No wonder there are so many errors… This is a factor I need to be mindful of when crafting conspiracies in the future. If I'm mistaken, any subsequent clever arrangements will lose their significance… It seems the Church of Earth Mother is directly offering protection to these ice-blue-eyed Demons, both resisting restrictions and cooperating to shield them? Lumian reflected on his investigations over the past two days.

This introspection couldn't enable him to digest the potion completely, but he felt it was more beneficial than a complete digestion.

Lumian gazed at the clergyman with ice-blue eyes and inquired with a smile, "Could it be that you're also using the name Boselli mentioned just now?"

The ice-blue-eyed clergyman responded with a warm smile.

"Yes, my name is also Naboredisley."

Without waiting for Lumian to probe further, it continued, "I don't know your background, but you can report Hanth Island to the other orthodox Churches. I believe they will advise you against delving into the truth of the Demon legends.

"Just as Boselli mentioned, Foreigner, let's conclude this here. Leave Hanth Island."

Lumian nodded, stood up, and departed from the cathedral.

Under the bright sunlight, he strolled along the street, his mind filled with pairs of icy-blue eyes and the name Naboredisley. He felt a little disoriented.

Chapter 627: Treatment Plan?

Lumian had initially theorized the presence of multiple Demons on Hanth Island, specifically the sealed blood-colored Demon and the ice-blue-eyed Demon. However, to his astonishment, he discovered various ice-blue-eyed Demons—in the cathedral!

How many Demons inhabit this island?

Are they all part of the same family with ice-blue eyes?

As expected of the Mother of All Things. Even a Demon can be Her child. A whole nest of them!

…

As thoughts swirled in Lumian's mind, accompanied by those piercing ice-blue eyes and the name Naboredisley, he felt that his previous investigations and speculations were completely off course.

The complexity and mystery surrounding the legend of the Demons on Hanth Island surpassed his initial imagination.

No, there are still gains and benefits…

Speculation involves bold assumptions and careful confirmation. It's normal for initial assumptions to be overturned. The elimination method is a crucial deduction tool…

How can there be unsolved cases that are guessed completely correct from the beginning? The crucial aspect lies in consistently refuting the incorrect path through falsification and integrating new information acquired during the investigation to uncover the right one…

Heh heh, if I were to take the Reader pathway, it should be relatively straightforward for me to act the role of a Detective. Discerning a conspiracy stands out as one of the primary duties of a Detective…

Lumian reassured himself, disentangling from the impact of the two ice-blue-eyed Demons. He regained his clarity and rationality, no longer feeling befuddled and disoriented.

Under the blistering sunlight, he swiftly identified an issue.

In the scene I witnessed through the Mystery Prying Glasses, the blood-colored Demon was pulled by an invisible force, but there was only one invisible force, and only a pair of ice-blue eyes gazed at me…

There's only one ice-blue-eyed Demon closely linked to the blood-colored Demon, and that's the elder Boselli who repented before the Sacred Emblem of Life. The others, including the ice-blue-eyed clergyman, are its descendants. Could they be the offspring it left behind with the nuns when it used the Hanth Island's cloister to 'restore its youth' and obtain a new identity?

However, when the ice-blue-eyed clergyman mentioned Boselli, it didn't sound like it was referring to its father, grandfather, or ancestor. It was as if it was discussing a friend with whom it didn't share an amicable relationship…

Moreover, it also identifies itself as Naboredisley…

Could this be a family name? A significant family name among the Abyss Demons?

Puzzled, Lumian boarded the Berries and returned to his first-class suite.

At that moment, Lugano and Ludwig were relishing a lavish lunch.

Upon spotting Lumian, the Doctor grinned sheepishly and said, "I thought you'd be indulging in the local delights on the island, so I didn't wait for you."

Lumian sat down and grabbed a wheat-flavored bun. As he chewed, he asked thoughtfully,

"What do you know about the abilities of the Planter pathway?"

Lugano hesitated for a moment before truthfully responding, "Sequence 9 Planter significantly boosts my strength. I can predict the weather to a certain extent by observing clouds, wind, and other natural phenomena. I'm adept at identifying seeds and nurturing them. Farming tools suit me more than knives and guns.

"Sequence 8 Doctor's primary abilities revolve around healing. They can discern the patient's specific situation through Spirit Vision. They possess outstanding surgical skills, such as suturing severed limbs and transplanting internal organs. Additionally, we gain Beyonder abilities like Evil Ailment Treatment, Trauma Treatment, Soul Suture, and Life-Giving.

"As far as I know, the next Sequence is called Harvest Priest. It mainly focuses on promoting the reproduction and growth of creatures and bringing about a bumper harvest with Beyonder powers…"

Upon hearing this, Lumian suddenly interrupted Lugano.

"Soul Suture?

"How is this implemented?"

Lugano grinned sheepishly and said, "I haven't really used this ability yet. It's used to treat soul injuries. As you know, some superpowers can attack the soul, making it difficult for it to heal on its own. At this moment, as long as the injured let go of their bodies and minds and don't resist, I can carry out a soul-level surgery to stitch up the corresponding wound."

Lumian's concern wasn't about stitching up a soul; it was another matter that provided him with a fresh perspective on the Demon legends of Hanth Island.

He downed the pre-meal bun and took a sip of the golden liqueur. After a moment of contemplation, he inquired, "Since you can suture souls, from a different standpoint, can you also sever souls?"

Lugano fell silent. After ten to twenty seconds, he responded, "Theoretically, yes, but it requires the corresponding person to completely open up their body and mind, leaving their soul unprotected. It would be even more effective if their physical body doesn't exist."

The Doctor hesitated for a moment before adding, "This can serve as an attack on the soul, but it could also be a treatment method. If a patient's soul is corrupted by a curse, they can address it by severing the depravity and allowing their soul to gradually heal."

Upon hearing this, Lumian smiled and applauded softly.

"Well said. Well said."

Lugano, being thick-skinned, couldn't help but feel a bit embarrassed by the praise. He blurted out, "That's just my speculation. I haven't tested it yet."

Lumian ignored him and proceeded to emulate what Ludwig had done. He forked a lamb chop onto his plate and began cutting with determination.

Simultaneously, the initial sensations when he faced the onslaught of the ice-blue-eyed Demon resurfaced in Lumian's mind.

He witnessed diverse versions of himself—a version brimming with hatred, another immersed in pain, one engrossed in lust, and another consumed by various desires and emotions…

As Lugano detailed the process of suturing and soul-severing, an idea sparked in Lumian's mind.

What if the High-Sequence abilities of the Planter pathway were employed to excise different aspects of the soul corresponding to various desires?

Could there truly be just one ice-blue-eyed Demon on Hanth Island, but its soul had been partitioned by the Saints and even Angels of the Church of

Earth Mother, each becoming an individual? On a mystical level, they remain a single entity. Hence, is there only one invisible force closely tied to the blood-colored Demon?

The question now is—why would the Church of Earth Mother undertake such an action?

Imposing restrictions or offering protection? Perhaps both?

Lumian swiftly linked this with the state of the blood-colored Demon. It consistently descended into the pitch-black sewage before being hoisted up by an unseen force.

Splitting the soul acted as a shield for the ice-blue Demon, preventing corruption from the power of the pitch-

black sewage?

Wait, could the ice-blue-eyed Demon be the untainted segment of the blood-colored Demon's soul? Is the Church of Earth Mother's approach based on deeming the entire body beyond salvation, but parts are still considered healthy? Is that why a healthy soul needs to be severed into different desires?

The forest sealing off the mysterious valley, pitch-black sewage, and the blood-colored Demon displayed characteristics of rebirth, growth, depravity, death, and rebirth again… The soul fragments of the blood-colored Demon were given new life, enabling them to utilize the cycle of rebirth, growth, aging, death, and rebirth again to resist the corruption spreading from their true bodies?

Simultaneously, relying on the existence of the healthy parts prevented the blood-colored Demon from sinking entirely?

Aging soul fragments are inherently more vulnerable to corruption from the main body, and newborns are the healthiest. This explains why the old Boselli and the ice-blue-eyed clergyman are in different states…

Such a newborn possesses a Demon's potent soul, but its human body is exceedingly frail. Yes, it aligns with my observations of Boselli. Its feeble and aged body encases a potent soul teeming with malevolence… This… This method of sealing and rescuing aligns with the Church of Earth Mother's unique abilities…

With these revelations, Lumian felt enlightened. Only then did he realize that he had been continuously cutting the lamb chop's bones, producing a grinding sound.

Lugano pretended not to notice or hear anything, focusing on enjoying his meal. Ludwig paid no attention to such trivial matters, wholly absorbed in the delicacies.

Lumian withdrew his gaze and happily poured himself a glass of Paha red wine. The confusion, disorder, loss, and disappointment he had previously experienced dissipated significantly.

As he drank, he leisurely pondered, This hypothesis aligns most with the current details. Unfortunately, it can't be verified, nor do I dare to. And without verification and results, there's no feedback for the potion's digestion…

Forget it. The experience and lessons I gained this time are much more important than the digestion I can still attempt in the future.

Why does the Church of Earth Mother want to protect the blood-colored Demon? Moreover, since a healthy soul has been separated and given new life, why not completely destroy and purify the corrupted true form to eliminate any hidden dangers?

There's a high chance that this involves the world's deep secrets…

Is that blood-colored Demon the true and largest Naboredisley?

Was the one seeking a deal to slay Hanth Island's Demon descendant it? Can it, in turn, affect a few soul fragments, allowing me and a Mid-Sequence Beyonder like Franca to slay a true Demon?

The more Lumian contemplated, the more curious he became about the truth. However, he eventually restrained himself.

For Beyonders at his level, this matter was concluded. After leaving Hanth Island, he would report his gains and speculations to Madam Magician and consult the Tarot Club's Major Arcana card holders.

Lumian, putting aside his investigative thoughts, felt a sense of relief. He spent the rest of his time leisurely strolling through Port Hanth.

To his surprise, he realized that the Berserk Sea island city, far from the Feynapotter Kingdom, didn't have a genuine casino. There were no criminal industries like human trafficking. It was as clean as if it had been purified by the Eternal Blazing Sun Church.

After engaging in Fighting Evil and other card games throughout the afternoon, Lumian, with wins and losses not exceeding 1 gold risot, finally grasped the reason.

Unable to control themselves, the ice-blue-eyed Demons prioritized the malevolent wrongdoers, making them vanish into the forest outside the city.

As time—a century or two—elapsed, Port Hanth could be deemed a city bathed in sunlight.

Certainly, there were innocents among them, like Antonio Elias.

Late at night, in the first-class cabin suite of the Berries.

In his slumber, Lumian vaguely witnessed the land shrouded in sulfurous flames, and the blood-colored Demon sprawled within the pitch-black liquid.

Chapter 628: Terrifying Dream

Lumian vaguely noticed bubbles emerging from the pitch-black liquid enveloping most of the blood-colored Demon's body. The brownish-green hue of the bubbles resembled tree warts.

In an instant, the bubbles burst, reflecting brilliant colors as they merged with the pitch-black liquid.

For some reason, Lumian sensed that something was wrong. He wished to shut his eyes and avoid these details, but trapped in a dream, he had no control.

In the depths of the pitch-black liquid, a figure lurked. It raised its head slightly, gazing at the blood-colored Demon.

Moist brownish-green or light brown tree warts protruded from the figure's body, reminding Lumian of Susanna Mattise in her Fallen Tree Spirit state.

The distinction lay in Susanna Mattise's tree warts, branches, and flower buds growing from her body, melding with her original form. The figure's tree warts, however, seemed to pierce out flamboyantly from the flesh and internal organs, tainted with blood.

In his dream, Lumian instinctively raised his right hand, wiping the corners of his eyes. The back of his hand was stained red.

At some point, blood had flowed from his eyes, turning his vision a blurry red.

The figure's overall outline appeared in the blur.

As if grown on a brownish-green tree, pierced by branches, overrun by tree warts, and covered in flower buds, dripping with a viscous liquid.

A burning sensation engulfed Lumian's chest, prompting him to instinctively close his eyes in the dream.

Yet, he was a step too slow.

Bang!

Lumian's eyes exploded, flooding his mind with searing pain.

He jolted awake, curling up in agony. His hands instinctively reached for his eyes, encountering a flat, sticky, and moist substance. The scent of blood hung heavily in the air.

As an Ascetic accustomed to severe injuries, Lumian took several minutes to overcome the pain that threatened to render him unconscious.

Struggling to sit up, he opened his eyes, only to be met with absolute darkness.

No crimson moonlight, no outlines of furniture in the bedroom--he couldn't see a thing.

Lumian raised his hand once more, gently touching his eye sockets. Both eyeballs had deflated, shattered beyond repair.

Is it because I glimpsed something I shouldn't have? Lumian chuckled in self-deprecation.

It was a vision from a dream, something he never wished to witness.

Upon reflection, he realized that if Mr. Fool's seal hadn't triggered or Termiboros hadn't activated it, his eyes might not have been the only casualties.

Wiping the tip of his nose, Lumian felt moistness and caught the unmistakable scent of rust.

In a surprisingly good mood, he quipped, "Luckily, it seems what's flowing down is blood, not brain matter."

He rejoiced in surviving the ordeal.

Despite the tragic state of his head, Lumian's body remained relatively unharmed, albeit a bit drained.

Gripping the edge of the bed, Lumian pulled himself up. In a state of blindness and impaired smell, he relied on the Hunter's instinct, navigating through his turf with a mental map. Bypassing furniture, he reached the living room and knocked on the servant's door.

"Yes, what's the matter?" Startled, Lugano hastily opened the door, dressed in a cotton shirt and underpants that served as makeshift pajamas, fearing a repeat of the terrifying encounter with Father Montserrat.

Under the crimson moonlight, he saw Lumian's blood-streaked face and empty blood-red eyes filled with shattered fragments.

"Wh-what happened?" Lugano stammered, bewildered.

Who had beaten his employer to such a state?

Who could inflict such harm upon his employer?

Why not teleport away from this perilous situation?

Lumian calmly pointed at his eyes.

"Treat them."

"Alright," Lugano responded subconsciously, then added awkwardly, "With the eyeballs in such a state, there's no way of treatment. We can only find a suitable transplant."

Lumian, enduring the pain, calmly stated, "No need. Just stop the bleeding and ease the pain."

"Alright." Lugano didn't dare argue, following his employer's instructions. He extended his shimmering left palm.

Upon contact and a simple use of a scalpel, Lumian felt a refreshing sensation in his eyes. The pain became more bearable, though his vision remained absent.

"You can go back to sleep," Lumian waved dismissively, as if his loss of vision was inconsequential. With one hand in his pocket, he strolled past the Dutanese textbook on the carpet, settled into a recliner, and rocked it gently.

Lugano watched in confusion and anxiety for a while before attempting to return to bed, unable to fall asleep.

When the morning sun bathed the sea's edge, the Doctor abruptly rose from his bed, deciding to grab a cup of coffee for a pick-me-up.

Upon leaving the room, he witnessed his employer in motion. Lumian's green eyes sparkled, showing no signs of injury.

"Y-you're alright?" Lugano was bewildered.

Lumian responded with a radiant smile, "That's right."

"..." Lugano was momentarily speechless.

How did my employer regenerate his eyeballs?

What kind of monster is this…

Is my role as his doctor merely to stop the bleeding and relieve the pain?

Lumian paid no heed to the servant's psychological turmoil. He returned to the master bedroom, drew back the curtains, laid out the paper, and picked up a dark-black fountain pen.

I'm still not cautious enough… He sighed suddenly.

After heeding the ice-blue-eyed Demons' warning and preparing to depart Hanth Island with the Berries, Lumian refrained from promptly writing to Madam Magician. He intended to observe the aftermath and wait until they were safely away from the port.

Unexpectedly, he had experienced such a terrifying and dangerous dream last night!

Initially suspecting that a Demon with ice-blue eyes had lost control and covertly influenced him, Lumian later speculated that he might have been subtly corrupted when he observed the blood-colored Demon and the pitch-black liquid through the Mystery Prying Glasses. The corruption lay dormant until he slept, manifesting fully in his dream.

Focusing his thoughts, he detailed everything witnessed and heard on Hanth Island. He replaced the name Naboredisley with the term Love Incantation.

Concluding the letter, Lumian wrote sincerely, "Perhaps I've encountered too many Demons recently. I feel like I've accumulated too much corruption and want to undergo treatment."

Following that, Lumian conducted a ritual, summoning the doll messenger, and handed over the folded letter.

Accepting the letter with its right hand, the doll messenger covered its nose with its left palm and exclaimed, "You stepped on the world's stinkiest thing!

"It stinks! It stinks!

"So dirty, so dirty!"

Swiftly grasping the letter between two fingers, the doll messenger vanished from the room.

Lumian waited briefly, but with no immediate response from Madam Magician, he decided to seek "treatment" elsewhere.

His destination was the cathedral of the Church of Earth Mother in Port Hanth, where he had visited the day before.

In the early morning, before the commencement of work, numerous believers gathered to listen to the preaching.

The preacher, the ice-blue-eyed clergyman from yesterday, expounded on a specific doctrine from the Holy Scripture. The concept that good and evil emanated from the same source, making them inseparable, was discussed. The sermon emphasized promoting good and suppressing evil.

Isn't it a little ironic to have this coming from a Demon like you? Lumian criticized and sat in the first row, listening casually.

He soon sensed the cathedral's vibrant vitality. Vegetation flourished, and mushrooms quietly sprouted. The scent of wheat and milk provided a calming atmosphere.

Unconsciously, Lumian realized that his life had gained intensity.

Each of the orthodox Churches has its own merits… he sighed silently.

After five to six minutes, the ice-blue-eyed clergyman concluded his preaching and approached Lumian with a warm smile.

"Young people who are willing to listen to advice always have a bright future.

"Praise the Earth, praise the Mother of All Things!"

Lumian observed the ice-blue-eyed clergyman retracting his raised hands. Is he hinting that it's "satisfied" that I stopped inquiring, exploring the forest, and searching for someone with ice-blue eyes since noon yesterday? Lumian considered, then looked at the clergyman before speaking.

"However, I had a terrifying dream last night and nearly died from it."

"What dream?" the ice-blue-eyed clergyman inquired warmly.

"Bishop, how should I address you?" Lumian asked, deferring from providing an immediate answer.

"Newman," the ice-blue-eyed clergyman announced its name in human society.

Lumian briefly recounted the blood-colored Demon in his dream, the pitch-black liquid, the blurry figure, and the branches and tree warts. He didn't delve into the final injuries he had suffered.

Bishop Newman listened quietly, gazing at Lumian for a few seconds.

"Are you willing to listen to my preaching?"

"Sure," Lumian agreed, curious about what the Ice-blue-eyed Demon had to say.

Newman flipped open the Holy Bible in his arms and spoke in a magnetic voice, "There are two Abysses. One is material, and the entrance is somewhere in the real world. The other is spiritual, and the entrance is deep in everyone's hearts.

"Sometimes, these two Abysses are separated, but most of the time, they're one.

"Good intentions and evil intentions come from the same source. It's inevitable for us to harbor evil thoughts like jealousy, hatred, destruction, greed, harm, and arrogance. This is normal, not sinful.

"However, if we act on jealousy, hatred, greed, and arrogance, killing someone—our souls will gradually sink into the Abyss.

"When the time comes, one can only repent to the Mother, just like this.

"Merciful Mother, I have fallen into the Abyss of evil…"

Lumian listened quietly, grasping the essence of Bishop Newman's words.

He acknowledged his mistake rooted in arrogance.

His earlier ventures, marked by a proactive approach and a lack of major problems, had led him to underestimate the concealed perils of high-level matters.

Standing up, Lumian raised his hands.

"I understand. Praise the Earth, praise the Mother of All Things!"

Newman nodded in satisfaction.

Returning to the Berries, Lumian read the reply, neatly folded into a square.

The letter contained spirit world coordinates and a concise directive: "Put an end to the matter on Hanth Island. Find time to seek treatment here."

Chapter 629: Corruption Removal

Madam Magician had not confirmed Lumian's speculation or delved into the deeper truth of Hanth Island's Demon legends. Lumian realized that this likely involved something he shouldn't pry into at the moment, or perhaps it was best not to understand until the accumulated corruption was eliminated.

Does "find time" imply that I can go whenever I want, disregarding the healer's schedule? Has Madam Magician foreseen that there won't be any issues? Lumian clutched the paper with the spirit world's coordinates and activated the black mark on his right shoulder.

His figure vanished from the Berries, navigating through the swirling chaos of colors. Occasionally, he felt inexplicable gazes and caught glimpses of indescribable forms.

After an unknown period, Lumian arrived at the location corresponding to the spirit world's coordinates and stepped out.

Before him stood a towering dome, illuminated by bright glass windows, with a mural depicting an epic scene.

In the midst of the hall, Lumian noticed a ball of sunlight.

Realization struck, prompting him to approach.

As he walked, the sunlight seemed to "spread" over, banishing shadows and darkness wherever it touched.

Soon, Lumian found himself enveloped in the sunlight.

Suddenly, it felt as if pure sunlight pierced through his skin, flesh, bones, and internal organs, exposing his soul.

Bits of illusory black gas were expelled from his soul by the sunlight, portraying various of Lumian's expressions--ferocious, pained, pleading, or intimidating.

Within seconds, the black gas dissipated under the purifying sunlight.

Simultaneously, Lumian felt his heart throb, and his left chest burned.

The blazing sunlight appeared to expel and purify everything in its path.

Amidst the agonizing heartache, Lumian sensed a change in the seal on his left chest, as if it was concealing itself, synchronizing with the sunlight.

However, before the attempt could fully succeed, the sunlight took the initiative to stop, receding like a tide into the depths of the hall.

Lumian swiftly returned to his usual state. Aside from the lingering discomfort in his heart, he felt significantly more at ease, as if he had suddenly caught the morning breeze and glimpsed the sunrise after an extended period of oppressive darkness.

His attention was drawn to a tall man in a simple white robe standing in the depths of the hall.

Observing the man, Lumian estimated him to be around 22 or 23 years old, towering at over two meters with an imposing aura. Despite his height, he exuded a calm temperament, and his brownish-yellow hair was neatly styled.

"The residual corruption on you has been cleared," the tall man spoke in ancient Feysac.

Lumian had a suspicion and inquired, "Are you Mr. Sun?"

"Yes," the young and tall man responded politely, devoid of arrogance or impatience.

He's actually so young, but one can't judge his age from his appearance... Lumian expressed his gratitude without delving into further questions.

Indicating towards the hall's exit, Lumian asked, "Can I go out for a walk?"

Though unaware of his location, the murals suggested it was an essential cathedral of the Church of The Fool.

Lumian deduced that the Major Arcana card holder, The Sun, held a prominent position in the Church, or perhaps even the top position.

"Sure." Major Arcana The Sun nodded.

Observing the Church of The Fool's etiquette, Lumian pressed his hand to his chest and bowed before turning to exit the hall.

Once outside, the world teemed with life. Voices and figures surrounded him.

His initial thought: Did I accidentally step into a land of giants?

The shortest individuals on the street were at least 1.89 meters tall, with occasional figures reaching three to four meters. Clad in white shirts, black trench coats, and half top hats, the men carried canes resembling spears, emitting an inexplicable sense of absurdity.

Even the ladies matched the towering height, mostly opting for flexibility in long pants rather than skirts.

Lumian surveyed the area, his gaze traversing doors exceeding four meters in height.

For a moment, he fell silent, feeling like a newborn in this peculiar environment.

However, this realization only briefly dampened his mood for exploration.

Of course, it was only a brief moment.

...

Trier, Trocadéro, at the entrance of a grape manor.

Franca clarified to the valet that her purpose was to visit Madame Clarice, and he stepped aside without guiding her. His stance implied that she knew the way and could proceed independently.

Undeterred, Franca followed the path ingrained in her memory, arriving at the circular pavilion nestled among the grape trees.

Demoness of Black Clarice, adorned in a black court dress, was seated there.

"Good morning, Your Excellency Clarice," Franca greeted warmly, openly admiring her beautiful face and slightly sorrowful demeanor.

Demoness of Black Clarice nodded slightly and inquired, "Has there been progress in the Mirror People investigation?"

Franca, not in a rush to respond, met Clarice's dark-gray eyes and remarked, "Is Browns not present?"

"She's not my lady's maid. She attends to her own matters," Demoness of Black Clarice replied succinctly.

"Not at the Red House Café or the hunting ground beside the forest either," Franca observed the air's fragrance and chose to engage in conversation with the Demoness of Black.

"She has other matters to attend to," Clarice evaded delving into Browns' affairs.

Reluctantly, Franca recounted the details of the Minister of Industry, Moran Avigny's situation, from the initial sensing of the Mirror World Fragment's tremors after the play, substituting herself as the person involved.

Clarice remained silent, her eyes lowered in contemplation.

Franca didn't rush the Demoness of Black. Her gaze flickered between the deep gray of her eyes, the fairness of her delicate skin, the curves that stirred the soul, and the unnaturally alluring red lips.

She knew this wasn't a good idea, but she couldn't rein in her impulses. Her heart gradually heated up, and her thoughts got a bit muddled. Her mouth dried, forcing her to purse her lips intermittently.

Dammit! Why am I feeling this way right now? While humans as animals can be susceptible to instincts, I've always maintained composure during serious discussions and encounters with high-ranking figures. At most, I've held admiration… Could it be that the Demoness of Black is intentionally radiating her charm to draw me in? Or is there another explanation? Yes, the lingering corruption from the Demon incident must be affecting me! Though it's subtle and doesn't manifest in my daily life, it's making it difficult for me to control my desires in the presence of a high-ranking Demoness known for her feminine allure. As a result, I find myself slipping into an aroused state… Franca gritted her teeth, refusing to succumb to the temptations of desire.

Clarice looked up at her.

"Has it been too long since you've experienced pleasure?"

"Not since my last lover passed away," Franca replied truthfully, aware that the Demoness of Black referred to a specific kind of pleasure. She explained, "As I mentioned earlier, to get close to Moran Avigny's illegitimate daughter, I used a mystical item. Unfortunately, it had a side effect, leading to encounters with Demons and other evil entities for a transaction. I was somewhat affected."

Clarice's voice turned icy.

"Endurance is not a sustainable solution. Indulge yourself. Otherwise, the Demon pathway will become your nemesis."

The Demoness of Black's aura instantly shifted to a holy and dignified state, becoming inviolable.

Franca also sensed that she couldn't entertain lascivious thoughts about such a captivating beauty. Her desires gradually subsided, and her mind cleared, breaking free from her aroused state.

Clarice redirected the conversation.

"You aim to deal with Moran Avigny?"

"He should be a crucial Mirror Person. If we can capture him or channel his spirit, we should uncover most of the Mirror People hidden in Trier. Madame, I seek your assistance," Franca stated, laying out her thoughts.

She avoided mentioning that Moran Avigny shared Clarice's dark-gray eyes and instead presented a color photo.

Clarice nodded slightly and said, "You can now strategize your operation. I'll assist during crucial moments, but for most scenarios, you must rely on yourself and the factions under your control."

"No problem." Franca didn't conceal her excitement.

As she exited the vine-surrounded circular pavilion, Demoness of Black Clarice's dark-gray eyes turned cold as she rose slowly.

…

In a brightly lit bar, Lumian clinked a beer glass, larger than his head, against the nearly three-meter-tall "giant" opposite him and gulped down the golden liquor.

Wiping the corners of his mouth, he chuckled.

"So, this is the New City of Silver in the Bible."

From the sermons he had heard, Lumian knew that the New City of Silver served as the headquarters of the Church of The Fool, situated in the Sonia Sea. It had been established by the surviving humans rescued by Gehrman Sparrow from the cursed continent of the Forsaken Land of the Gods.

Unexpectedly, the surviving humans were towering figures, almost like giants!

"That's right. All the warriors here are ready to defend Mr. Fool's Church at all times!" the nearly three-meter-tall giant expressed with satisfaction. "You're not bad. You worship the Angel of Redemption and believe in Mr. Fool. Just these two points alone makes us brothers!"

He extended his right palm and slapped Lumian, nearly toppling him. It felt like a child encountering a brown bear's paw.

Lumian forced a smile and inquired, "Can you share more about the Angel of Redemption's deeds in the Forsaken Land of the Gods?"

Chapter 630: Day Tour

The nearly three-meter-tall giant expressed regret, "The six-member council mandates that we can't discuss matters not mentioned in the Holy Bible. As a believer of Mr. Fool, you must be familiar with the sermons and official statements. I can't share anything beyond that, just as I can't claim to have personally seen the Angel of Redemption and received his assistance."

Attempting to tap Lumian on the shoulder, the "giant" found Lumian deftly dodging the gesture.

"How should I address you?" Lumian, feigning reverence, inquired, not fully convinced.

The "giant" responded, "Livalie.

"A toast to the newborn of the City of Silver!"

Lumian raised his massive beer glass, clinking it against the other party's. Then, he downed the remaining golden liquid.

Rubbing his bulging stomach, he gestured towards the washroom, indicating his need to relieve himself.

The beer in the New City of Silver wasn't extraordinary, but the cups were simply too large. After two glasses, Lumian's physique and alcohol tolerance reached their limit.

He wasn't drunk; he was just stuffed!

Entering the washroom, Lumian stood before one of the urinals, unbuckling his belt and narrowing his eyes.

Amidst the splashing sounds, a "giant" more than three meters tall entered and chose the urinal beside him.

Lumian subconsciously turned his head before slowly retracting his gaze.

Dazed, he stared at the wall in front of him until the pressure in his abdomen completely subsided. Only then did he leave the washroom, returning to his usual seat at the bar counter.

Livalie had already ordered a new glass of beer for Lumian. It was dark-black but not murky. Swirling in the mug, it revealed a hint of brown.

"Try it. It's a specialty of the New City of Silver, Black-Faced Beer!" the "giant," firmly believing himself to be human, introduced enthusiastically.

"Black-Faced Beer?" Lumian, holding the beer glass larger than his head, asked in puzzlement.

Livalie suddenly felt a pang of sadness.

"The Forsaken Land of the Gods lacked the sun and fertile soil. Only Black-Faced Grass grew. It was our staple, sustaining generations of City of Silver residents. Though always insufficient, it was better than nothing.

"Back then, brewing alcohol from Black-Faced Grass was impossible. It was too, too extravagant.

"Heh heh, now with food, meat, and milk in abundance, I've grown taller again. I'm 30 centimeters taller than before."

"Can Black-Faced Grass still be planted in the New City of Silver? Grown underground?" Although Lumian wasn't a Planter, having grown up in the countryside, he knew that in extreme environments, those plants might not survive under normal circumstances.

Livalie smiled.

"It can be planted! It can grow in any environment. Of course, we've had someone modify the Black-Faced Grass seeds to make them more suitable for the current conditions. Its texture is actually quite different from before. Even more flavorful. Give it a try. You won't find this beer elsewhere. We don't grow much ourselves. It's mainly to remember the past."

Lumian raised the beer glass to his lips with interest, taking a large gulp.

The first thing he tasted was the normal, faint fragrance of wheat. Then, he experienced a refreshing grass-like stimulation in the sweet alcohol. Finally, a subtle milky taste filled his mouth.

"Not bad. It's a special and wonderful experience." Lumian was generous with his praise.

Curious, he inquired, "Do you have any liquor brewed from Black-Faced Grass?"

Livalie's expression darkened as he shook his head.

"We in the New City of Silver consider alcoholism debased, indulgent, and a waste of food. That's why we reject liquor."

At this point, he paused.

"Besides, Black-Faced Grass doesn't seem suitable for brewing. Even if it's made into beer, drinking too much will cause hallucinations. I can only handle three glasses at a time."

Minor toxicity? In the Forsaken Land of the Gods, people from the New City of Silver relied on eating this plant to survive generation after generation. It wasn't easy... Lumian recalled his sister's occasional jokes and smirked.

"If you drink too much, will you see a group of little people dancing?"

Livalie pondered for a moment and replied, "No, hallucinations are usually different. Some see their wives slapping them, some hear the cries of their deceased relatives, and some find a baby lying by the roadside wailing..."

Lumian couldn't bear to hear about matters involving babies crying, so he lost interest and focused on the taste of the Black-Faced Beer.

After finishing the glass, he made another trip to the washroom before leaving the bar. He planned to take advantage of the afternoon sun to stroll around New Silver City and teleport back to the Berries docked at Port Hanth in the evening.

In the sparsely populated yet unusually towering buildings, half-giants roamed. Every now and then, one or two "giants" standing over three meters tall could be spotted. Those below 1.8 meters were a rarity, except for those with child-like faces.

Lumian's stature barely met the criteria, and his eyes quickly scanned the surroundings.

He observed turquoise vines snaking up the outer walls of certain houses. On these vines, numerous soft, large, white, and plump mushrooms thrived.

Mushrooms? Since when did vines yield mushrooms? Lumian furrowed his brow, questioning his botanical knowledge.

It occurred to him that this might be a unique plant brought from the Forsaken Land of the Gods by the New City of Silver, bringing a sense of relief.

He approached a roadside stall and glanced up.

"You're selling milk. Why don't I see a bucket of milk?"

The vendor, standing at 2.56 meters with slightly grayish-blue skin, smiled genuinely and replied, "The house behind me is mine. Want some milk?"

"I'll take a glass." Lumian, having already inquired, had no qualms about purchasing a glass of milk; money was not an issue.

Though verl d'or and gold risot weren't official currency in the New City of Silver, gold held value universally.

The vendor cheerfully grabbed a cup, turned around, and headed to his two-story house. He reached out and plucked a soft, white mushroom.

He aimed the mushroom at the cup and squeezed it.

Milk-white liquid gushed out, rapidly filling the cup.

Lumian's jaw dropped, confusion once again clouding his eyes.

This is what you guys call milk?

"It's ready." The half-giant vendor handed the milk to Lumian.

Lumian instinctively took it and asked in bewilderment, "Are those mushrooms?"

"Yes, milk mushrooms," the half-giant vendor replied earnestly.

You call that mushrooms? Lumian paid in a daze and left the stall with a cup in hand.

He couldn't recall how much he paid or even why he started the conversation about buying milk.

After walking more than ten meters, he brought the cup to his lips and took a sip.

It tasted like milk!

Lumian finished the glass with a frown, finding nothing peculiar.

Yet, the liquid came from mushrooms!

Just consider it a unique plant… Just consider it a unique plant… Lumian muttered, deciding not to try it again.

He feared that drinking too much might turn him into a milk producer himself!

He continued to wander aimlessly along streets twice as wide as those in Port Hanth.

Suddenly, another "half-giant" with slightly grayish-blue skin approached, holding a thick book and speaking with unusual enthusiasm, "My friend, would you be interested in hearing me introduce our beacon and savior…"

Lumian smiled, pressed his hand to his chest, and bowed.

"Praise The Fool!"

"Ah, a brother." The half-giant was both disappointed and delighted.

The two of them conversed in ancient Feysac, but Lumian had overheard New City of Silver residents occasionally speaking Jotun, a language that could stir supernatural powers.

"Are there usually foreigners here?" Lumian asked casually.

The half-giant smiled and replied, "We often have foreigners visiting, exploring, and sightseeing. In the early years, some chose to settle here, but most eventually moved away. Living with us proved challenging for them. Heh heh, we're too tall and not well-versed in the pleasures of life."

With that, the half-giant took something from his pocket and handed it to Lumian.

"I'm pleased to have you as a guest in the New City of Silver. Try our locally made candy."

It was a candy wrapped in thin blue-white paper.

Lumian didn't hesitate. He took it, tore off the wrapping, and popped the white candy into his mouth.

The rich milky aroma and smooth sweetness quickly unfolded on his tongue, creating a delightful experience.

Milk flavor… Lumian's curiosity sparked as he inquired with a peculiar expression, "Is this milk candy?"

"Yes," the proselytizing half-giant replied with a smile.

"What kind of milk did you use?" Lumian hadn't anticipated ever asking such a question.

The half-giant replied naturally, "Milk from the milk mushrooms."

"…" Lumian held the milk candy in his mouth, torn between spitting it out or swallowing it.

He sensed the genuine warmth and enthusiasm when the other party shared the milk candy.

As time passed, Lumian witnessed mushrooms with a cooked meat fragrance, mushrooms smelling like fish, and various peculiar mushrooms.

His gaze turned lost as he observed the half-giants and giants joyfully sharing their food.

Unconsciously, he arrived at a corner of the New City of Silver.

A towering building stood there.

It was split into two sections. On the left, a spire tower; on the right, a domed tower. The outer wall, standing 30 to 40 meters tall, was a grayish-white hue.

The Twin Towers? According to Livalie, the spire houses the library and other public facilities, while the domed tower serves as the council office for the ruling six-member council of the New City of Silver… There must be Sealed Artifacts and formidable individuals in such a place… Lumian stood nearby, examining the imposing structure before him.

His eyes moved across the domed tower and noticed black plants resembling hair growing from the cracks near the ground. They hung there, swaying occasionally in the wind.

Lumian diverted his attention and headed towards the spire, eager to explore the books passed down in the New City of Silver, a human settlement existing in the Forsaken Land of the Gods for thousands of years.

Chapter 631: Devilogy

631 Devilogy

The steeple's base was paved with black stone bricks, and a colossal pillar rose proudly. Lumian felt like a visitor in a giant's kingdom as he strode through the expansive and dimly lit space. The occasional tall residents who effortlessly towered over him only heightened this impression.

Guided by the signs on the wall, he ascended to the third floor, revealing rows of imposing bookshelves.

The custodian of the library, an elderly man draped in a linen robe, oversaw the space.

Even seated, he matched Lumian's height, and his slightly gray skin bore the marks of age.

Engrossed in a goatskin-bound book, the library administrator paid no heed to Lumian's entrance, his gaze firmly fixed on the text.

Lumian, not rushing to seek permission for his exploration, entered the library and followed the guidelines posted on each row of bookshelves leading to the section housing mythical books.

He ran his finger over the weathered leather-bound book and another with freshly copied pages, choosing a tome that chronicled creation myths.

Before the bookshelf, Lumian casually flipped through its pages, only to stuff the book back.

He couldn't comprehend it!

The words were in Jotun!

This ancient language, associated with the Beyonder race of giants, possessed the ability to manipulate the forces of nature. Ranked alongside Dragonese, Elvish, and ancient Hermes, Jotun held significant importance in mysticism.

Although Lumian had mastered ancient Hermes and Hermes, Jotun remained a language he recognized but hadn't fully mastered. He could barely decipher the title of the ancient book but couldn't comprehend its contents.

A sweep of his gaze revealed a corresponding copy of the ancient book, this time written in ancient Feysac—a human language devoid of supernatural influence.

Joy surged within Lumian as he retrieved the soft-covered book and settled into the reading area near the window.

Throughout the entire process, no one intervened or issued a warning.

<nulli>This library is entirely open to everyone. Even those not residing in the New City of Silver can peruse its contents, but borrowing seems to be off the table? Or perhaps, the knowledge on this level isn't deemed confidential, Lumian mused, maintaining a steady pace.

He strolled past the section dedicated to Beyonder creatures, and his keen eyes snagged a book titled "Devilology."

<nulli>Devilology… Recalling recent encounters, Lumian snagged the corresponding copy.

In the reading area, he chose a spot shielded from direct sunlight yet bathed in ample illumination. Seated, he delved into the pages of "Devilology."

As he read, Lumian's eyes widened, and his mouth hung slightly ajar.

He murmured to himself, <nulli>Is it really acceptable to have this kind of knowledge available to the public?

Each piece of information was invaluable!

The "Devilology" book meticulously outlined the traits and behaviors of creatures from various species after transforming into Devils. It also provided detailed analyses of Devils with distinct personalities within the same species.

For those potentially facing Beyonders of the Devil pathway in combat, the value of this book rivaled that of a potent Grade 2 Sealed Artifact or its corresponding mystical item.

<nulli>Moreover, how did the New City of Silver come by such knowledge? It's improbable they could compile creature illustrations without dispatching hundreds of Devils… Could it be that the half-giants and giants here are Devil Hunters? Perhaps, in ancient times, when Devils were more active, they shared information with other factions? Lumian grew more alarmed as he read on.

Midway through, he massaged his throbbing temples, sensing a rapid depletion of his spirituality.

Lumian temporarily closed "Devilology," intending to explore the creation myths of the New City of Silver and take a well-deserved break.

From the very outset, the creation myth read:

"The omnipotent and omniscient god created everything before slipping into a profound slumber.

"Among the mythical races He brought into being, Giant King Aurmir, Dragon of Imagination Ankewelt, Elf King Soniathrym, Vampire Ancestor Lilith, Devil King Farbauti, Phoenix Ancestor Gregrace, Mutant King Kvastir, and King of Demonic Wolves Flegrea emerged as potent and crazy beings. They partitioned the authority left by the Lord, transforming into ancient deities governing the sky, land, sea, reality, the spirit world, and the astral realm…"

Abruptly, a dull-skinned, slightly gray finger tapped a specific spot on the page.

An aged, raspy voice echoed.

"Do not utter this name in any Beyonder language."

Lumian looked up, surprised to find the library administrator, previously immersed in his books, standing beside him seemingly out of nowhere.

As a Hunter, Lumian remained oblivious!

Partly due to the lingering dizziness from reading "Devilology," it showcased the library administrator's proficiency in concealing both breath and movement, given his towering stature of more than three meters.

Lumian redirected his attention to the name indicated by the library administrator.

"Devil Monarch Farbauti."

Without awaiting Lumian's inquiry, the library administrator, bearing giant-like traits, shifted his finger a few centimeters and remarked, "It's advisable to avoid pronouncing this name in any Beyonder language as well."

Lumian followed the motion of the finger, silently noting the corresponding name in his mind.

"Vampire Ancestor Lilith."

"Why am I not allowed to read about it?" Lumian expressed his ignorance without reservation.

The library administrator spoke in a deep voice, "The Devil Monarch is still alive. This formidable ancient deity remains among the living.

"And the Vampire Ancestor is suspected to be alive as well. In recent times, an individual in the city experienced disturbances after uttering the name

'Lilith' in Jotun. Although their life wasn't at risk, they endured prolonged suffering."

<nulli>Ancient deities? Entities that once governed the world before the Ancient Sun God's era? Lumian recalled fragments of his limited knowledge and inquired thoughtfully, "Did the Ancient Sun God rescue humanity from the dominion of these ancient deities?"

The library administrator, towering at more than three meters, turned to the last page and pointed.

Lumian read the description:

"The omnipotent and omniscient god stirred from slumber, rising from the earth to vanquish the ancient deities and reclaim His authorities.

"Note: In the present era, the omnipotent and omniscient god is also known as the Ancient Sun God…"

<nulli>Indeed… Among the eight ancient deities, Devil Monarch Farbauti is still alive, Vampire Ancestor Lilith is suspected to be alive, and the rest have perished? Giant King Aurmir… Why does that name sound familiar? Ah, the provincial capital renowned for its red wine and champagne. What ties does it share with the Giant King? Lumian cautiously inquired, "Can these two names be pronounced in ordinary human language?"

"The Vampire Ancestor's is acceptable, but it's advisable to refrain from attempting the Devil Monarch's. You must exercise caution even in writing it," responded the colossal library administrator. "We are uncertain if the Devil Monarch possesses any special abilities."

<nulli>Exercise caution even in writing… Are all Demons like this? Yes, the deity of the Devil pathway remains alive, an ancient being since the Second Epoch… Lumian murmured, his heart stirred. He retrieved a note with the Love Incantation from his Traveler's Bag.

"Have you encountered this name before? I came across a Demon who identified itself as this. Much like the others, it cannot be spoken or written, only thought."

The library administrator accepted the note with a hand capable of engulfing Lumian's head. His gaze swept over the name "Naboredisley."

He lapsed into deep contemplation. After a minute or two, he silently retrieved a copy from a concealed location within the bookshelf.

The book's title read: "A Summary of Rumors and Hearsay Before the Cataclysm (1)"

<nulli>What a simple name… Lumian observed as the library administrator opened the newly-acquired book, pointing at a particular line of text.

"As anticipated, it's right here."

Lumian fixed his gaze and read silently.

"After the Devil Monarch Farbauti led the Devils back to the Abyss, occasional rumors persisted of Demons enticing humans.

"The Demons operated under the following names:

"Beelbubli, Almos, Samael, Lilatan, and Naboredisley.

"A high-ranking Demon Hunter speculated that these names conceal the aliases of Devil Monarch Farbauti…"

<nulli>The Devil Monarch Farbauti's alias? Lumian felt a jolt as a thin layer of sweat coated his back.

<nulli>Could Naboredisley be the Devil Monarch?

<nulli>The sealed blood-colored Demon was the Devil Monarch?

<nulli>No, it doesn't seem likely. If it were a genuine ancient deity, catching just a glimpse of His form wouldn't have resulted in my eyes exploding in a dream. I would have lost control immediately… Yes, perhaps Farbauti's pseudonym is among these names, but it doesn't necessarily mean

Naboredisley is Him… Lumian wiped his forehead with his right hand, forcing a smile as he addressed the library administrator, "As a foreigner, am I truly allowed to read these books? The knowledge they contain is exceedingly precious."

The library administrator responded calmly, "The Chief has already informed us that you are Mr. Fool's Blessed."

"Very well." Lumian found it amusing.

Apparently, not every foreigner could access this library.

The library administrator offered no further warnings. He took the book chronicling pre-Cataclysm rumors and departed from Lumian's vicinity.

Lumian continued to alternate between reading "Devilology" and "Creation Tales," taking breaks as needed.

As evening approached, he barely concluded both books and departed from the Twin Towers.

Releasing his compressed spirituality, Lumian teleported back to the Berries in Port Hanth.

Surveying the still-bright sky, Lumian confirmed that the investigation into Hanth Island's Demon legends had reached its conclusion.

The matter delved into complexities beyond his reach.

He no longer hesitated about his next steps and plans.

Since he hadn't fully digested the Conspirer potion, he resolved to head to West Balam and seek out Hisoka. There, he would hunt to digest the potion and complete the advancement ritual!

Chapter 632: Conspiracy

Late at night, in Trier, AngoulÃªme de François sat in front of a small analyzer and a radio transceiver, attentively listening to the clicks and observing as a "translated" telegram was produced by a mechanical typewriter.

The signature above simply read Hidden Blade.

Having exchanged a few messages, AngoulÃªme remained composed. He picked up the telegram and swiftly skimmed through its contents.

"Um, when you're protecting high-ranking government officials and members of parliament daily, do you tail them even during personal moments like affairs or trips to the washroom?"

A wry smile formed on AngoulÃªme's face. He contemplated responding to Hidden Blade with, "What occupies your thoughts all day?" However, in the blink of an eye, his eyes narrowed as he tapped away on the mechanical typewriter.

"Tell me, what crime do you intend to commit? Which high-ranking government official or member of parliament is your target for assassination?"

Dammit! Franca, seated in the master bedroom of her apartment, squirmed uncomfortably.

Why did it feel like she was undergoing police interrogation?

She dryly chuckled to herself and replied on the mechanical typewriter.

"I'm just curious. Following them would be awkward, and not doing so might expose a security vulnerability easily exploitable by others."

She refused to acknowledge any plans involving the Minister of Industry in the current government.

After a while, 007 sent a new telegram.

"I rarely undertake such missions. Initially, I dealt with Beyonder incidents and battled cultists. Later, I got promoted and no longer had to participate in daily protection operations.

"Based on my knowledge and limited experience, we have to follow the protectee wherever they go. If they choose to have an affair, at least one of us will discreetly stand by the coat rack, keeping a watchful eye. If time allows, we'll investigate and confirm the identity and background of the target in advance. If the protectee enters the washroom, one of us waits by their side, guarding against potential threats from sewers, ventilation pipes, and shadows.

"However, there's an exception. If the protectee strongly requests and writes an exemption, we can respect their privacy. After all, we're not their parents obligated to protect their every move. If they perish, someone else will take their place. It's not easy to find a three-legged toad, but those aspiring to be high-ranking government officials and members of parliament can fill Avenue du Boulevard. Moreover, such officials and MPs don't often possess exceptional foresight and wisdom. What matters is the position they hold, not the individual.

"Very few high-ranking officials and MPs choose to write exemptions for privacy, but they tend to do so when discussing confidential matters with their team."

007, did you work overtime so much that you harbor resentment? Franca chuckled inwardly.

She felt that 007 wasn't as laid back as she would have liked. If it were the two members from Loen, they would likely say, "It's fine if most high-ranking officials who don't deal with real matters or MPs who only give speeches are dead. Even curly-haired baboons in their positions would perform better. At least the baboons wouldn't smack their heads to formulate policies or work for personal gain. They wouldn't boast about their wisdom and desire to show off. They'd simply enjoy bananas and play happily. That's the least harmful thing for the entire country."

Franca read 007's telegram again and turned to Jenna, who was sitting by the bed.

"The protective measures are tight, and there are no loopholes to exploit."

"Yes, that's the case with the Purifiers. The Machinery Hivemind and Bureau 8 should be similar."

Franca, Jenna, and Anthony had been gathering information for a while and had devised several plans, but they still found it unsafe and uncertain. Hence, they consulted 007, seeking clarification on the security situation around Moran Avigny.

Being a Cabinet Minister of a country, Moran Avigny was not an easy target for assassination.

Moreover, Franca and the others' primary goal wasn't assassination. Even if they considered it, they had to factor in the time required for spirit channeling, making it even more troublesome.

Listening to Franca's summary of 007's response, Jenna pondered for a moment and said, "If it were any other Demoness, they might choose to sacrifice their established legitimate identity by seducing Moran Avigny and pretending to be shy to make the minister get an exemption from the protectors. However, I don't think that's feasible. Moran Avigny is likely a Mirror Person, and Mirror People have a close relationship with the Demoness pathway. They might be especially wary of a Demoness approaching them."

Franca had initially hesitated to involve Jenna in the operation against Moran Avigny because the Demoness of Black Clarice would secretly monitor and provide assistance at critical moments. It would be risky if she discovered Jenna using the Demoness pathway's abilities.

However, Jenna insisted on participating. Her reasoning was:

After Franca admitted to Clarice that she hadn't experienced pleasure for a long time, the Demoness of Black would likely suspect her relationship with Franca. After all, Franca had approached Browns Sauron under the guise of attending a female orgy.

Therefore, Jenna wanted to showcase a Vampire's abilities and combat style in front of the Demoness of Black. The mystical item she currently possessed would allow her to disguise herself effectively and maintain sufficient combat strength. The prerequisite was that she had to conceal the Arrow of the Bloodthirsty well and hide it under her clothes. As for Mirror Substitution, she could explain it away with Franca since Anthony had one too.

Franca had muttered, "Demonesses can also have pure love," but as she finished speaking, she awkwardly changed the topic and tacitly allowed Jenna to participate.

"Hmm." Franca, sitting cross-legged, nodded slightly and said, "Moran Avigny's strength is unknown. He might be very formidable. If we attempt to seduce him, we risk becoming his prey if he's vigilant, possibly even losing our lives. Sigh, I'd better write to Lumian and see what he thinks."

Franca chuckled self-deprecatingly.

"Ever since he left Trier, my brain seems to have gone on vacation."

She was mocking her past laziness, acknowledging that she often delegated the primary responsibility of thinking to Lumian while playing a supporting role.

Jenna chuckled and said, "You're really good at self-deprecating. That's what I admire most about you. You're open-minded and cheerful."

Franca chuckled.

"Teasing can liven up the atmosphere and foster closer relationships, but sometimes, if you can't gauge others' acceptance, teasing can easily turn into mockery. It's safer to make a self-deprecating remark."

As the two Demonesses conversed, a telegram clattered in. It was still from 007.

Franca's eyes lit up as she read the telegram.

The telegram read:

"Hidden Blade, if you disclose your target and provide sufficient reason, I might be able to offer assistance and discreetly cooperate with your actions."

Wow, what a bro! Franca praised inwardly as her fingers swiftly moved over the mechanical typewriter.

"Here's the deal. I currently possess ample evidence to believe that the Minister of Industry, Moran Avigny, is a Mirror Person who has infiltrated Trier and assumed the original owner's identity for decades. Haha, I didn't reveal this earlier because I needed to acquire crucial information from Moran Avigny. If he's captured by you, I can't guarantee that you'll gain access to pertinent information, so I plan to take action myself."

"Phew… There's hope!" Franca turned around and joyfully raised her right index and middle fingers to Jenna.

Before long, 007 responded:

"Gather the results of your previous investigations and Moran Avigny's information promptly and place it at the designated contact point. I'll verify it first and find an opportune moment. Await my further instructions."

Franca's face lit up with joy. She pursed her lips and sent a brief telegram:

"It's highly likely that a demigod of the Demoness Sect will be involved in this operation. Exercise caution."

Jenna read it quietly and asked thoughtfully, "Are we still seeking Lumian's opinion?"

"Yes," Franca replied without hesitation. "As the saying goes, 'three smelly cobblers are as good as Roselle.' With more people brainstorming, we may uncover better solutions."

"What kind of proverb is that? Why haven't I heard it before…" Jenna suspected that Franca was making it up.

…

The crimson moon remained unseen, with only the stars casting a faint glow.

Seated in the Berries' first-class suite, Lumian perused Dutanese textbooks when his messenger, Penitent Baynfel, abruptly materialized before him.

Baynfel, draped in a black clergyman's robe, resembling a charred corpse, handed over the letter.

Lumian caught it, inhaling the lingering fragrance on the paper.

Franca's letter… Jenna even held and read it… Lumian made a casual judgment as he observed his messenger curiously.

He had a persistent feeling that Penitent Baynfel harbored many untold stories, but every attempt to engage in conversation was met with stoic silence.

After Baynfel traversed into the spirit world, Lumian unfolded the letter, reclined in his chair, and leisurely read.

With 007's help, this shouldn't be difficult. Lumian smiled suddenly and whispered to himself, If it doesn't work out, they can force the bait. Focus on the Mirror Person's wariness of Demonesses and the potential strength they possess to lure him. When Moran Avigny believes the target is a bait from the Demoness Sect, with a demigod hiding behind her, planning to take the poison pill and retreat to deliver a bomb, he'll find himself facing one or two Angels, three to five demigods… However, this way, Franca's Demoness Sect mission will be finished…

Lumian's thoughts raced as he crafted and discarded one plan after another.

Tomorrow, the Berries would depart from the Berserk Sea, sailing into the Southern Continent's waters.

When the time came, the ship wouldn't need to navigate complex twists and turns to avoid storms, maelstroms, and mystical phenomena. It could head directly for its destination port in West Balam.

Suddenly, Lumian sensed something and stood up.

Approaching the window, he peered out. In the darkness not far away, an ancient three-masted sailboat sailed silently.

There were no lights on the ship, and no one strolled on the deck.

Chapter 633: West Balam

Lumian had heard from Lugano that ships deviating from the safe sea route might mysteriously disappear. In a few years, they would occasionally appear at night--with no lights or people.

This seemed to be the case now.

In the past, Lumian might have teleported over out of curiosity, taking advantage of the three-masted sailboat's reentry into a safe sea route to assess its internal condition. However, after encountering the Demon legends on Hanth Island, he felt that less curiosity was better. As long as the uninhabited ship traveling in the darkness didn't exhibit signs of attack or an imminent danger, he could treat it as a unique spectacle of the Berserk Sea and simply observe.

The brown ship gradually distanced itself, leaving only the billowing sails in its wake.

Abruptly, Lumian, utilizing his exceptional vision, spotted a face silently staring out of an open hole in the cabin's uppermost window.

The face, shriveled and pale-white, clung tightly to the bones, devoid of flesh and blood. Flaxen-colored hair cascaded like withered weeds. The eyeballs were absent, leaving only a void of deep darkness.

It resembled the head of a desiccated corpse, yet its lips were surprisingly vibrant, as if recently adorned with lipstick.

Lumian instinctively sensed the face belonged to a woman. At least, she had been a woman when alive.

He refrained from raising his right hand for a warm greeting. Instead, he quietly observed as the ancient three-masted sailboat sailed beyond the safe sea route and into the dark night. The desiccated face, with blood-red lips and pitch-black eyes, blended into the darkness.

Only then did Lumian wave his hand and offer a faint smile.

"Goodbye! You won't be missed!"

He then helped Franca and the others to devise a plan to confront Moran Avigny. Ultimately, he opted to await further information from 007 before finalizing their strategy.

Conspirer wasn't a visionary, known for conjuring conspiracies out of thin air; they required substantial information as a foundation.

When Lumian awoke at dawn, the Berries emerged from the dense, death-carrying fog of the Berserk Sea.

Before him stretched a clear blue sea, bathed in the intense sunlight of the high sky.

The next day, the Berries bypassed Behrens Harbor at the northernmost tip of West Balam. Instead, they continued southwest, reaching Port Pylos by 4 p.m.

Situated in Matani, the port was under the rule of Admiral Querarill.

Originally a colony of the Intis Republic, Port Pylos saw Intis colonists withdraw after the war a few years ago. Subsequently, various factions from the Feynapotter Kingdom, maintaining a favorable relationship with Admiral Querarill, took control.

Lumian's target, Hisoka, was yet to surface in Port Pylos, but Lumian knew that the two pranks he had engaged in were in Matani. One occurred in Tizamo Town, at the outskirts of Port Pylos, closest to the forest, and the other in Devise, the southernmost gold mine city in Matani.

As Lumian unbuttoned the second button on his linen shirt, he remarked to Lugano in a self-deprecating tone,

"I feel like I'm shunned by winter and have been living in a scorching environment."

Having arrived in Port Santa during late autumn, which was relatively hot and sunny, Lumian moved on to Port Colla as Port Santa began to cool. His journey continued through what his sister called the tropics, devoid of winter and maintaining a temperature of at least around 20 degrees Celsius.

While Trier was already in midwinter, the Southern Continent was experiencing the height of summer.

This made Lumian's specially prepared black tweed coat and Gehrman-styled trench coat impractical.

"Because we've been traveling south all autumn," Lugano declared authoritatively on matters of weather and seasons.

Lumian donned a golden straw hat and strolled down the gangway to the port, hand in hand with Ludwig.

He boldly embodied the traits of the adventurer Louis Berry.

Initially, Lumian had contemplated altering his strategy, adopting a new identity to discreetly investigate the two pranks in Matani and uncover Hisoka without drawing attention. However, after Franca vividly detailed Hisoka's usual characteristics to Anthony Reid, the Hypnotist's profiling revealed an exceptionally aggressive trait, ranking among the top.

As a result, Lumian reconsidered and returned to his role of casting out "bait."

Yet, he couldn't shake the feeling that success was a slim possibility. The sea sacrificial ritual and Loki's survival had likely provided Hisoka with a comprehensive understanding of the factions backing him. April Fool's, with its former display of resources and energy, seemed ill-equipped to challenge the might of the Tarot Club. And Lumian wasn't solely relying on the Tarot Club for support.

If he were in Hisoka's shoes, Lumian would opt for patience. He'd wait a month or two, allowing the vengeful enemy to grow restless and make mistakes. When the formidable forces behind him could no longer guarantee protection, he'd launch a surprise attack.

For now, let's not devise a plan. I'll consider it when I find clues, Lumian muttered to himself. Leaving the port alongside a throng of passengers, he reached the public carriage stop.

Numerous rental carriages and pitch-black or vermilion coffins were parked nearby.

Coffins? Despite having read many travelog books on West Balam's customs, Lumian found it absurd to witness coffins lining the roadside.

Before the invasion of the Northern Continent, before East and West Balam's division, the Balam Empire revered Death—

the Emperor of the Underworld from the War of the Four Emperors. Thus, the locals valued and loved coffins, considering them objects that brought peace, tranquility, and the blessing of Death. When traveling, they would lie inside, carried by people or pulled by horses and single-horned goats.

Of course, this form of transportation was reserved for those of a certain wealth level. Ordinary people couldn't even afford lying in a coffin.

After a momentary daze, Lumian addressed Lugano and Ludwig with interest, "Do you want to take the coffin? I plan to give it a try."

"I-I'll pass," Lugano replied, finding the idea of lying in a coffin unsettling.

Ludwig shifted his attention to the nearby street vendors.

The aroma of corn and potatoes intertwined, enticing every passerby and prompting increased saliva production.

"How lame," Lumian teased with a smile. Approaching the four locals with disheveled black hair and dark brown skin, he raised his right hand and pointed at the pitch-black coffin beneath the shade of a tree.

"How much?" Lugano inquired in fluent Dutanese before Lumian could.

"How much?" Lugano inquired in fluent Dutanese before Lumian could.

His linguistic talent was evident. Less than a month had passed since their departure from Port Santa to their arrival at Port Pylos, and he could already communicate with people in Dutanese. Of course, his proficiency was limited to basic words and short sentences.

A half-naked local in linen pants replied in Dutanese,

"Nearby, 40 coppet; faraway, 1 verl d'or."

Recognizing the foreigner's inquiry, he refrained from quoting the price in the local currency, Delexi, the Intisian term for copper coins.

Quite affordable. This coffin, carried by four people, should be considerably cheaper than the one carried by eight… Lumian mused, appreciating the direct use of verl d'or and coppet. It showcased the recent Intisian influence in the former colony, lost only a few years ago. Lumian's grasp of Dutanese surpassed Lugano's, thanks to the mid-level Language Comprehension charm he had used on the ship.

Learning Dutanese in this manner proved more efficient.

Regarding charm consumption, Lumian harbored no concerns. In his view, items served a purpose, and there was no concept of waste as long as they proved useful. He couldn't align with those miserly individuals who hoarded their wealth throughout life, only for it to benefit others after their demise. If he urgently needed Language Comprehension charms, he could acquire them from the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society. If their gathering didn't align with his schedule, teleporting to various cities in Lenburg would allow him to purchase them from the Church of Knowledge.

"Sure," Lumian nodded at Lugano and said, "Let's go to Hotel Orella."

After Lugano paid 1 verl d'or, the local who had quoted the price lifted the thin coffin lid, revealing the interior covered with thick dark-red cloth and a stiff neck pillow.

Excitedly, Lumian removed his golden straw hat and lay down, immediately feeling a cooling sensation enveloping his body.

In the hot season, the coffin effectively dispelled the humidity.

Is it the coffin's wood or the sun-screening black paint, or perhaps the shade of the tree? It feels like stepping into a morgue in the summer—surprisingly comfortable… Lumian observed the thin coffin lid closing, witnessing the shadows rapidly expanding until they dominated his world.

Outside, the voices became muffled in his ears.

The coffin was lifted, swaying slightly as it moved forward.

Within Lumian's view, everything was dark, and his surroundings exuded a sinister, cold ambiance. For some reason, it felt like he was walking toward death, touching it.

Setting aside the psychological discomfort, it isn't bad. The only downside is the tendency to easily fall asleep… Lumian evaluated the mode of transportation in a good mood. It's unsuitable for mixed-gender rides, which could be more awkward. Heh heh, I wonder if the "romantic" Intisians have ever engaged in an affair under such circumstances?

Nearly half an hour later, the coffin halted in front of Hotel Orella.

Lumian stepped out, finding himself in front of a small, man-made valley.

Rows of grayish-black stone rooms encircled the inner wall of the "deep valley" until reaching the bottom.

This was Port Pylos's most renowned Hotel Orella.

Originally belonging to a Balam royal family descendant, Orella Eggers, it had been constructed with the intent of approaching death. Later, it fell into the hands of Intis colonists.

Upon the Feynapotterians' arrival, they perceived it as a symbol of entering the earth and returning to the land, prompting its transformation into a sizable hotel.

Chapter 634: Fresh Off The Boat

In the well-lit lobby of Hotel Orella, aboveground, Lugano effortlessly balanced Ludwig, munching on a burrito, in one hand and clutched his suitcase in the other. His eyes darted around uneasily. From his adventurous beginnings to trailing Lumian south, he'd never lodged in a place proudly declaring itself a "hotel" instead of a "motel."

He'd only encountered Trier's renowned Grand Champs-Élysée in newspapers and magazines, learning that its construction cost a whopping 21 million verl d'or. With 800 rooms and 65 functional halls, even the most basic accommodations demanded 12 verl d'or per day in the off-season. A stark contrast to Lugano's usual frugal 3.5 verl d'or weekly motel stays.

The bustling metropolis of Trier had left an indelible mark on Lugano, urging him to rise above and recommend himself to Lumian.

Accumulating wealth, obtaining potion ingredients, and advancing to Doctor became his priorities.

He aspired to join the ranks of high society!

Only when he became a Doctor did he grasp the vastness of the Beyonder world. He had barely scratched its surface.

The male receptionist, sporting curly black hair, dark brown skin, and a keen countenance, addressed Lugano in fluent Intisian.

"Would you prefer a suite or a standard room? Are you inclined towards a coffin bed or a conventional one?"

Lugano glanced at his employer.

Lumian toyed with a caramel-colored East Balam cigarette wrapped in roasted tobacco leaves, bringing it to his nose for a gentle sniff. He savored the blend of tobacco leaves, internal spices, and assorted herbs.

The aroma was mildly invigorating and redolent, tempting one to inhale deeply.

"A suite. Standard, and closer to ground level." Lumian had sampled rental coffins for transportation and had no plans to continue sleeping in them.

It wasn't a traumatic experience, but it did alter his perception of his surroundings. In case of an attack, it could impede his initial response.

Lugano sighed in relief upon hearing Lumian's decision and conveyed the employer's request to the male receptionist.

"8 verl d'or a day. Three days' payment in advance," the native male receptionist stated the price.

After Lugano completed the payment, the receptionist, with a nod to his colleagues, said obsequiously, "I'll escort you down."

Three mechanical elevators stood at the back of the hall. Lumian and his group entered the middle door, pulling the brass handle to B3.

Chains tightened, gears clamped, and various metal parts started to operate with resonating sounds. In the distance, it resembled the roar of a boiler, and white steam billowed out.

As the mechanical elevator descended, the native receptionist glanced at Ludwig and smiled at Lumian.

"Settling down in Port Pylos, are you?

"If you need info on local grammar schools and rentals in different communities, feel free to approach me."

In his view, anyone bringing a seven- or eight-year-old child to the Southern Continent was likely moving, not merely traveling. After all, the child was too young for perilous long-distance journeys.

Moving meant finding a house—renting or buying—and choosing a good school. These were all opportunities to make money!

At the mention of "school," Ludwig, munching on a roasted corn cob, suddenly stopped chewing, as if the food had lost its fragrance.

Lumian wasn't oblivious to the native receptionist's thoughts but didn't mind. Instead, he admired the man's shrewdness.

He grinned and remarked, "I'll take a look first. We haven't confirmed if we would stay in Port Pylos."

At that moment, the mechanical elevator halted at B3.

Entering the room on the right, with a stone fence on one side and the cold valley aisle on the other, Lumian addressed the native receptionist, "Do you know Tizamo Town?"

The native receptionist, aiding Lugano with the suitcase, slightly bent and led the way.

"I do. Many gentlemen head to Tizamo on weekends for forest hunting.

"There are secret temples and mausoleums left behind by former nobles in the forest. If you want to have fun, don't venture too deep. The primitive tribes there are barbaric and savage."

Lumian nodded, not probing further. Upon reaching Suite 7 and entering the living room, he casually tossed a verl d'or silver coin to the native receptionist.

"What's your name?"

The receptionist, pleasantly surprised, responded, "You can call me Ron."

Lumian chuckled.

"I might have to trouble you often in the future. For example, what's the name of the nearest and better bars? Where is it?"

Ron touched the silver coin and smiled.

"It's my honor to assist you.

"Head to the Man-Eating Flower Bar. Intisian is used for communication there. It's on the street behind our hotel."

Lumian instructed Lugano and left the room with Ron, waiting for one of the mechanical elevators.

Inside, a man with a deathly pale face and vacant eyes stood.

The man's face was deathly pale, and his eyes were vacant. He wore a wrinkled shirt and pants.

Lumian glanced at him without a word.

Amidst the tightening of the chain and the relatively stable elevation, the mechanical lift returned to the ground.

Once the vacant-eyed man exited the lift and distanced himself from them, Ron leaned closer to Lumian and whispered, "I wanted to remind you to pretend not to see that customer."

"Who is he?" Lumian asked casually.

Ron glanced around and lowered his voice.

"He resides in a suite at B18, a servant of Mr. Iveljsta.

"That gentleman's servants don't seem normal."

Of course, it's not normal. They are walking corpses… Lumian criticized.

He had already observed the servant and realized his fate was dark and that of a deceased.

Lumian wasn't surprised to encounter such a situation in a country that once worshipped Death.

Having already seen the Blood Emperor's afterimage, encountering a zombie was hardly shocking.

…

In the sweltering evening, Lumian bypassed the artificial deep valley where Hotel Orella stood and entered a street with an unpronounceable name. He spotted a bar adorned with an exaggerated Man-Eating Flower.

Donning a golden straw hat, he lit the East Balam cigarette purchased from the hotel lobby and placed it between his lips.

Cough, cough, cough!

Lumian quickly coughed, emitting white smoke from his nose.

His intention was to showcase his experience as an experienced adventurer by smoking East Balam cigarettes, but he hadn't anticipated their potency. As someone who rarely smoked, he found it unbearable.

In Cordu, various cheap alcohols abounded, but cigarettes were scarce. Lumian had only witnessed Pons Bénet, Louis Lund, and a few others indulging in smoking.

After extinguishing the East Balam cigarette and tossing it into the trash can, Lumian entered the bar and skillfully approached the counter. He pulled up a barstool and settled in.

Sensing the lingering smoke in his mouth, he opted for something milder. He tapped the counter and spoke in Intisian, "A glass of kilju, the regular kind."

"Ten licks," replied the bartender, a local man in a white shirt and black vest, his Intisian tinged with a distinct accent.

Lumian settled the bill and awaited the bartender's pour. He discreetly surveyed the area, noticing nobody paying him any heed except for a dozen wanted posters adorning the bar's wall.

Thoughtfully accepting the amber-colored kilju, he adjusted his golden straw hat and addressed the bartender with a smile, "Do you know who I am?"

The bartender glanced at him and smiled back.

"Every now and then, a self-proclaimed renowned adventurer poses that question, but I'm sorry, I don't know you."

From the looks of it, the adventurer Louis Berry's exploits in hunting the Demon Warlock are primarily known in the Fog Sea. My rising fame was tied to activities within the Church of Earth Mother's sphere of influence. Louis Berry's reputation waned upon entering the Berserk Sea, and few in West Balam are familiar with him… If Hisoka isn't stationed at the docks every day, he likely doesn't know about my arrival in Port Pylos… Lumian refrained from erupting in rage at the bartender's words. He sipped his kilju, contemplating the situation.

Noticing Lumian's silence, the bartender casually smiled and remarked, "You just arrived in the Southern Continent, right?"

"Yes, I left the Berserk Sea this morning." Lumian seamlessly assumed the role of a regular at Ol' Tavern, recounting his story with a smile. "Encountered a ghost ship in the Berserk Sea, danced with dried corpses under the moon, and repelled a Demon's attack. Praise the Mother of All Things. You might never understand how magical and dangerous the Berserk Sea is…"

The bartender wiped the glass's inner wall and interrupted Lumian.

"I know. After all, that's where Death disappeared."

"Where Death disappeared?" Lumian asked in surprise.

While he had speculated about the dangers of the Berserk Sea and abnormal weather being linked to a deity's demise, he hadn't expected such an easy answer.

The bartender regarded Lumian with an expression that implied, "You're actually a rookie."

"Have you never heard of the legend of treasures at sea?

"At the top is Death's Key. It's said that at the end of the Fourth Epoch, Death, who had lost the Pale-White War, stirred violent waves to obstruct the returning enemy to Balam, creating insurmountable obstacles that severed the Northern and Southern Continents. However, He ultimately didn't return to His throne and vanished. Only those with the special key can find Him, discover the treasures He left behind, and gain His boon."

The bartender's tone was complicated.

Lumian fell silent.

He had embarked on the sea seeking revenge and held little interest in treasure legends. He hadn't anticipated missing such crucial information.

Just then, the heavy wooden door of the bar creaked open.

The once-noisy bar hushed in an instant.

Sensing the shift in atmosphere, Lumian turned his body, fixing his gaze upon the door.

Chapter 635: Man-Eating Flower

At the entrance of the Man-Eating Flower bar, a figure strode in.

A woman, neither towering nor petite, clad in a conservative, deep-black dress, caught everyone's attention. Her eyebrows were meticulously drawn, her skin thickly powdered, and her cheeks adorned with noticeable blush. Her lips shone gorgeously, and the area around her eyes sparkled with gem-like hues.

Despite the woman's excessive makeup and unconventional style, her captivating brown eyes, high nose bridge, luscious lips, and curvaceous figure emitted a potent charm.

Male patrons in the bar shifted their gazes to the door, momentarily silent. Only when the woman acknowledged a few customers with an aloof nod did the atmosphere spring to life. Some attempted conversation, while others raised their voices at their companions, trying to make an impression on her.

Without lingering, the woman navigated through the crowd and settled on the opposite side of the bar counter.

Unique. If Franca were here, she'd surely strike up a conversation… Lumian felt a twinge of regret for his companion and averted his gaze. He smiled at the bartender and commented,

"That lady seems quite popular."

The bartender wiped away the expression reserved for new adventurers and replied sternly,

"She's my boss."

Boss… Lumian suddenly recalled the bar's name and asked thoughtfully,

"Man-Eating Flower?"

"It's her," the bartender lowered his voice and approached the beautifully made-up woman of indeterminate age. He poured her a glass of some unknown brand of Black Rand.

After the bartender returned, Lumian asked curiously,

"Why does she have the nickname 'Man-Eating Flower?'

"She seems very popular."

The bartender instinctively turned his head, observing his boss as she focused on her drink and surveyed the patrons nearby. Leaning in, he whispered,

"In Port Pylos, women of her caliber often relish the pursuit and adulation of men but keep them at arm's length. Our boss, however, is different. If she takes a liking to you, she'll extend an invitation for a memorable night. Sometimes, we can hear her passion echoing through the halls upstairs…"

The bartender paused, a mix of nostalgia and desire evident on his face.

Pleasure? Lumian subtly frowned and inquired with a smile, "Have you ever been the object of her affections?"

The bartender fell silent.

For a moment, Lumian wondered if the other would smash his head with the cup in hand.

Changing the subject, Lumian asked, "Aren't there brash men who try to force themselves on your boss?"

The bartender sighed and replied, "Remember the name of our bar."

Man-Eating Flower… Is that what it means? Lumian grasped the meaning.

The bartender elaborated, "Those who tried to force themselves on our boss ended up badly. Some were severely injured or thrown down the stairs. Others simply vanished.

"Even those who caught her eye would be pale the next day, legs unsteady. They couldn't walk properly.

"That's why she's called 'Man-Eating Flower.' She embraces it. Eventually, she named the bar after it."

This is a departure from the Demonesses of Pleasure's style… But each demoness has her own unique approach. Franca, a Demoness of Pleasure, stands out from the rest… Lumian's curiosity sated, he didn't delve further into the bar owner. Instead, he retrieved an ordinary deck of poker cards from his Traveler's Bag and asked, "Have you come across anyone using poker cards as a weapon recently?"

According to Anthony Reid's analysis of Hisoka, a key member of April Fool's, Hisoka had a strong inclination towards self-expression. After successfully creating the poker card with the ability to change its face, possessing Frost and Cut characteristics, it was clear he wouldn't limit its use to mere April Fool's pranks. When engaged in combat or carrying out acts of violence, he wouldn't hesitate to employ the mystical item to end his target's life.

This information presented a promising lead for investigation.

Regarding the two pranks orchestrated by Hisoka, they revolved around Matani and were linked to relatively confidential or significant local affairs. Individuals who weren't locals or lacked prolonged residence wouldn't spontaneously choose this area unless they also possessed ample information to support their actions.

Lumian reasonably suspected that Hisoka's original sphere of activity centered on Matani and its neighboring regions.

This rationale prompted his journey to Matani, despite believing that Hisoka had likely heeded Loki's warning and evaded capture, concealing himself.

Understanding Hisoka's past was crucial to deciphering his present and ending his future!

The native bartender scoffed at Lumian's inquiry.

"Do you think I'd have that information?

"Consult the patrol team. Whether they choose to answer is another matter."

Patrol team… Lumian didn't mind and nodded slightly.

Established by Admiral Querarill, the ruler of Matani, the among Beyonders.

In this state, following the withdrawal of most Intis colonial forces, the Church of the Eternal Blazing Sun, the Church of God of Steam and Machinery, and the new Cathedral of the Church of Earth Mother lacked official authority to enforce the law.

While these churches maintained Beyonder teams in their cathedrals across different cities, their jurisdiction was limited to self-defense and safeguarding believers within the cathedral. They couldn't address matters akin to their usual spheres of influence or eliminate potential hidden dangers.

Admiral Querarill entrusted the corresponding authority to the newly formed patrol team.

Some of the patrol team's Beyonders were veterans from Admiral Querarill's army, while others were remnants of the former Balam Empire or former adventurers and bounty hunters.

What a simple name… Lumian pondered for a moment as he glanced at the few wanted posters on the wall.

"Admiral Querarill doesn't want adventurers turning Matani into a hunting paradise? He doesn't want them brawling on the streets under the guise of pursuing targets on wanted posters?"

The bartender shot Lumian a surprised look.

"You're quite sharp for an adventurer.

"In Matani, the wanted status is earned through crimes committed here. No one cares about your actions elsewhere."

As expected of one of the adventure paradises… Lumian lifted the kilju and finished it.

Just as he was about to switch to a glass of West Balam-

specific liquor to savor its distinct flavors, he felt a gaze upon him.

It was the owner of the Man-Eating Flower bar, the woman in the black dress with exquisite makeup.

Lumian nodded calmly and shifted his focus back to the bartender.

While this Man-Eating Flower was undoubtedly attractive, she couldn't match a Demoness in terms of feminine allure. Additionally, Lumian wasn't fond of heavy makeup.

At that moment, the woman rose from her seat and sauntered over to Lumian. She curled her lips and remarked, "I can sense that you're like me, a living volcano, but it hasn't erupted yet. You're still enduring and waiting in pain.

"Tonight, are you willing to feel my passion?"

Lumian raised his right hand and stroked his face.

You're taken with me just like that?

Come to think of it, I've been a hit with the ladies since my youth. Being a Hunter, I've often found myself surrounded by all sorts of beauties… Could this be the subtle influence of the True Men pathway? It doesn't add up.

According to The Adventurer series and recent sea rumors, Mr. Fool's Oracle, Danitz, is also from the Hunter pathway, yet his romantic endeavors were fruitless, and he doesn't boast any notable female companions…

Lumian muttered internally and stood up. He offered a smile and inquired, "How should I address you?"

"Bellotia." The woman's smile relaxed, making Lumian feel that she might appear even more stunning without her heavy makeup.

Lumian took off his golden straw hat, pressed it to his chest, and bowed slightly.

"Madam Bellotia, I appreciate your invitation, but there's someone else I hold dear."

As he spoke, he disregarded Bellotia's slightly stiffened expression and made his way past the Man-Eating Flower, heading for the bar's entrance with composed demeanor.

Bellotia didn't stop him. Like numerous patrons in the bar, she observed as he swung open the sturdy wooden door and stepped out.

As the wooden door thudded shut behind him, Lumian sneered and muttered to himself, I can resist even the charm of a Demoness of Pleasure. Why take the risk with a woman of unknown origins?

Using someone I like as an excuse is already preserving your dignity. If you still seek revenge, I won't hold back…

Having left the bar early, Lumian wandered through the nearby streets, exploring secluded alleys in hopes of stumbling upon incidents or criminals to gather information.

After turning a few corners, he suddenly heard a clanging sound emanating from a dark and deserted alley.

Silently, Lumian approached and delved into the alley. There, he witnessed an intense battle between two men.

One, with evident native characteristics, appeared in his twenties. His face was pallid, and he wielded a sharp but hefty dagger in his right hand. His left palm was slightly open, and a dark shadow hovered in it, creating a chilling atmosphere.

The other, in his early thirties, had ordinary facial features and an expressionless demeanor. Short, black hair framed his face, and his dark-green eyes were encircled by white.

Clad in a plain white shirt and black pants, he wielded longer, sharper weapons resembling scalpels in each hand.

At this moment, the two engaged in a fierce battle, their weapons clashing rapidly, resonating with metallic clangs.

Observing the skirmish, Lumian recognized that these weren't ordinary individuals. They both bore Beyonder characteristics.

Halting his advance, Lumian nonchalantly stood with his hands in his pockets, his right foot propped up against the wall. He unabashedly observed the close-quarters combat between these Beyonders.

Chapter 636: Catharsis

In just over ten seconds, the two Beyonders locked in combat sensed an observer and instinctively distanced themselves, fixing their gaze on Lumian.

Casually leaning against the alley wall, Lumian chuckled and remarked, "Go on, keep fighting. Don't mind me."

With a heavy dagger in hand, the young native, his left palm slightly open, eyed the black-haired, green-eyed, handsome, golden straw hat-donning Lumian with vigilance.

Who is this?

What is he up to?

The short-haired man, armed with two odd-shaped scalpels, was equally vigilant.

He, too, eyed Lumian and the vigilant young native. Suddenly, he crouched, arms hanging loose, and black, sulfurous smoke enveloped him completely.

Lumian's smile didn't waver; his right eyebrow arched in mild interest.

Unfazed, the young native extended his slightly open left hand, releasing a shadow that expanded into a distorted "black cloud."

This "black cloud" merged with the sulfurous smoke, swiftly clearing the alley. The crimson moon once again illuminated the scene.

However, the short-haired man, with dark-green eyes and an emotionless expression, had vanished.

Ran off? The young native was shocked, angry, and vexed.

As he sought clues, he instinctively turned his head to where Lumian had been.

No one stood before the wall.

When did he leave? Why didn't I sense it at all? the young native, holding the heavy dagger, pondered in bewilderment, uncertain whether to pursue his target.

...

Relying on his spell-like abilities, Bram skillfully escaped the alley, stowing away the two odd-shaped scalpels. He navigated the dark, unlit paths, frequently changing directions in an attempt to lose his imaginary pursuer.

In the process, he pried open a shoemaker's shop on the street, donned a pair of ill-fitting leather shoes, and discreetly handled any signs of his intrusion.

After circling three times, Bram returned to the alley, entering a simple apartment nearby, constructed from black stones and brown wood.

Bram opened his room and entered, closing the wooden door behind him.

He finally breathed a sigh of relief.

Then, he withdrew a transparent glass bottle from the grayish-white cloth bag hanging from his waist. The bottle held a nearly colorless liquid, faintly tinged with red. Suspended within, a blood-colored, well-defined mouth hung open, frozen in intense pain and fear.

As if admiring a masterpiece, Bram stared entranced at the glass bottle in his grasp.

After a moment, he averted his gaze, moved to the side of the room, and opened a cupboard.

Within the cupboard, seven or eight similar glass bottles awaited, each containing a unique lip. The hues varied, some slightly upturned, others in a pouting stance.

Bram positioned his newly acquired spoils in an empty spot, then used sticky blood-colored paint to draw an ominous symbol.

With the task complete, his fingers gently explored different lips through the glass bottles, as if assessing each piece in an art exhibition.

"How twisted."

A mocking sigh suddenly resonated in Bram's ears.

Startled, he whirled around, focusing on the source of the voice. A golden straw hat-donning young man with black hair and green eyes sat in an armchair by the table, the top two buttons of his white shirt now casually undone.

Him?

Bram's pupils dilated as he recognized the man who had witnessed his clash with the Numinous Episcopate member.

The person who had witnessed his battle with the Numinous Episcopate member!

When did he tail me?

How did he pinpoint my location without detection...

Lumian smiled and cordially responded to the other's unspoken queries,

"Hasn't anyone informed you that the preservative in those glass bottles is quite noticeable?

"Moreover, you reek of blood after killing someone."

Bram's heart tightened.

"Are you a Hunter?"

As he spoke, he moved slowly and quietly.

"You seem to know a lot," Lumian replied calmly. "So, why collect those lips, preserve them, and carry them with you? That doesn't sound like the work of a seasoned Serial Killer. I get it. You have the urge and the necessity to gather trophies. Is it for your own satisfaction or part of a ritual? Heh heh, desire can be destructive. Even the most Coldblooded are prone to errors, despite their calculated demeanor, often wagering that they won't be caught if they overlook the details."

Observing the twisted murderer summon black, sulfurous smoke, Lumian deduced that he was a Sequence 7 Serial Killer following the Criminal pathway.

In the Devilology book of the New City of Silver, it was noted that upon reaching Sequence 8 Coldblooded, also known as the Unwinged Angel, individuals underwent inhuman changes, acquiring two or three Devil spell-like abilities, varying from person to person. Some wielded poisonous flames, while others inflicted damaging curses. The creation of black smoke was one such ability.

Combining the target's actions in battle, Lumian concluded he was merely a Sequence 7 Serial Killer.

Bram's brow twitched at Lumian's mockery and sarcasm.

Maintaining his cool, he advanced and murmured, "Did you come here just to converse? What is it you seek from me?"

As soon as he finished speaking, dense black smoke billowed from the Serial Killer, carrying a pungent sulfuric aroma.

Within the shroud of the dark smoke, Bram's eyes deepened as he unleashed another Devil spell.

His body morphed, adopting the color of a chameleon, seamlessly blending with the spreading smoke.

Swift and silent, he approached the door, opened it with precision, and lunged outside.

Bram's vision distorted, and amidst the lingering black smoke, he glimpsed the green-eyed man in the armchair, grinning at him.

Suddenly, he found himself back in the room.

Contrary to his previous orientation, he now faced away from the door.

Bottle of Fiction!

Upon infiltrating the room, Lumian's initial action wasn't a pose but the creation of a Bottle of Fiction, one that prevented Beyonders from exiting!

Unfazed by the sudden wave of disappointment and frustration, Bram darted to the side within the obscurity of the black smoke obscuring his vision. Rolling to the bedside, he retrieved a six-barrel machine gun.

Raising the machine gun, he aimed it at Lumian and unleashed a barrage of bullets.

Amidst the rapid gunfire, Lumian disappeared from the armchair, the furniture torn apart by the storm of metal projectiles.

Gone? As this realization hit Bram, he instinctively glanced upward and witnessed the man in the golden straw hat descending from the ceiling. Surrounding him were numerous crimson, almost white, flaming ravens.

Swoosh! Swoosh! Swoosh! Fire Ravens assailed Bram before Lumian's arrival.

Caught within the encirclement, Bram reluctantly abandoned the six-barrel machine gun. Attempting to evade the impending explosion, he sought refuge under the bed.

However, the crimson, nearly white Fire Ravens dissipated on their own. Lumian landed before him, adorned with a grayish-

white lightning brooch. He smiled and said, "Didn't you just ask me what I wanted? What I want is simple. I haven't vented for too long. I'm in dire need of a humanoid sandbag."

As he finished speaking, Lumian swung his fist at the retreating Bram.

Instinctively, Bram raised his right arm to block.

With a resounding bang, a silver-white bolt of lightning surged from Lumian's fist into Bram's arm, coursing through his entire body.

Bram shuddered. Despite his inhuman transformation, a momentary paralysis gripped him.

Lumian's other fist followed suit, crashing into Bram's side profile.

Bang!

The Serial Killer's head tilted, and a spray of teeth accompanied by blood scattered.

Once more, silver-white lightning enveloped Bram's head.

Bam! Bam! Bam! Lumian unleashed a barrage of punches, turning the encounter into a tempest, making Bram feel like he was caught in a thunderstorm. The electric shocks made any form of retaliation or defense nearly impossible.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Lumian's expression remained icy as he relentlessly struck Bram's face, chest, arms, and head. The Criminal Pathway Beyonder's chest caved, ribs cracked, face swelled, and skull fractured. Charred marks covered his upper body after the brutal assault.

After the relentless beating, Lumian clenched his fists and raised his arm.

He crashed into Bram's left shoulder.

Bang!

Bram's left shoulder crumpled entirely.

Collapsed on the ground, twisted and gasping, Bram's breath weakened.

"That's it? It's fine. I can get my servant to treat you before continuing," Lumian remarked, wearing a devilish smile that Bram recognized all too well.

Without awaiting Bram's fearful response, Lumian removed the Fury of the Sea brooch, stowing it back into his Traveler's Bag. In a gentle tone, he inquired, "Tell me, which family are you from?"

Bram, undergoing the initial stages of dehumanization with a robust physique, realized Lumian had purposely avoided vital points in his attacks, leaving him far from unconsciousness. His mind still functioned, and thoughts raced before settling on Lumian's smile.

After a momentary silence, Bram weakly replied, "I'm a member of the Andariel family."

Chapter 637: Unexpected Information

Andariel, one of the three Devil families… Lumian recognized the last name from Madam Magician and asked with a warm smile, "What brings you to Port Pylos?"

If it weren't for the lineage running in Devil families for generations, with descendants naturally inclined towards the Criminal pathway, and the other option of the Prisoner pathway seemingly trouble-free, Bram Andariel couldn't shake the suspicion that the man before him carried the last name Nois or Beria. Why did he exude more of a Devil vibe than Bram himself?

Struggling, he lifted his right hand, wiping his swollen and cracked face, cleaning up the blood and flinging it to the ground.

With the task completed, Bram responded, "Firstly, it's to gather information about Matani for the family. Secondly, it's to find an opportunity to act as a Serial Killer. Do you know what acting is?"

He cooperated with Lumian by speaking in Intisian.

Lumian nonchalantly stood before Bram, who was curled up on the ground, and remarked with a smile,

"Your acting is subpar. You don't seem to be a criminal with a high IQ.

"Why would the Andariel family gather information about Matani?"

Bram had no intention of concealing the truth for the family.

"We're cooperating with the Rose School of Thought. They want information on this place."

The Rose School of Thought setting its sights on Matani? That's right. Matani, seemingly detached from any Northern Continent nation, holds ties to the Feynapotter Kingdom, but their influence is lacking. With Admiral Querarill's sway, even if the Rose School of Thought and the Andariel family dispatch only a handful of agents, resisting may prove challenging… Lumian perceived the stark contrast between the Southern and Northern Continents.

Whether in Trier, the Feynapotter Kingdom, or the maritime colonies, Lumian encountered criminal acts and mystical disasters driven by the pursuit of strength and faith. Encroachments on factions or cities were rare, but West Balam presented a different scenario on his first day.

If maritime disorder resulted from chaos, the Southern Continent teemed with factional conflicts, overt or covert, causing widespread chaos.

Lumian, observing Bram's wound clotting, questioned further, "What intel does the Rose School of Thought seek?"

Bram, reflecting, responded, "They want all kinds of information—cathedral locations, military camp details, patrol team compositions, port throughput, daily prices, and the locals' lives."

Are they preparing to rule this place in the future? Lumian inquired, puzzled.

"To whom will you hand over the information you gathered? Where?"

"It will be written and placed in the study of an empty house at 17 Aleg Street. My uncle, Devajo Andariel, will be responsible for retrieving it. We don't usually contact each other, and I don't know where he lives or under what identity," Bram explained in detail. "After becoming a Devil, his special ability is to completely skin humans and perform complicated processes to create Beyonder items with usage or time limitations. No matter who it is, as long as he wears the human skin as clothes, he can transform into the other person and complete the corresponding disguise."

As Bram spoke, he wiped the blood off his body and flung it to the ground, as if obsessed with cleanliness.

This was mentioned in Devilology… Lumian nodded thoughtfully.

He pondered for a moment and asked, "Are there any traces of other Devils in Matani?"

Perhaps Bram and his uncle weren't the only ones sent by the Rose School of Thought to gather information.

Bram shook his head.

"Not recently.

"However, during my investigation, I stumbled upon a string of serial murders around Port Pylos about four years back.

"The victims lay dissected, the scene steeped in blood and marked by the aftermath of a fierce battle. Moreover, the seven casualties were no ordinary individuals; they were Beyonders, ranging from Sequence 7 to Sequence 8."

Listening intently, Lumian felt a surge of intrigue.

As per Franca's explanation, the name "Hisoka" stemmed from a literary work hailing from the original world of transmigrators like themselves. One of the character's defining traits was an insatiable appetite for combat and the thrill of extinguishing formidable adversaries, reveling in the ecstasy and carnage of claiming lives. If the target was sufficiently potent, he'd patiently await their growth, perhaps even offer a nudge.

Hisoka, a key member in April Fool's, adopted this moniker as his code name, driven by an unmistakable urge for self-expression, mirroring this characteristic.

Hisoka is a Beyonder of the Devil pathway. Moreover, his targets are Beyonders while he was at the Serial Killer stage. Unlike other Serial Killers, he doesn't prey on the weak or ordinary people. If he had been a Serial Killer four years ago, he would likely be at least a Sequence 6 by now. There's a strong chance he's a Sequence 5… Yes, he's concealed his identity very effectively. No one in the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society knows his true pathway… Lumian listened attentively to Bram's account without interruption. He eagerly pondered the possibility that Hisoka was a Devil or even a Desire Apostle in his mind.

The curled-up Bram glanced up at him, propping his bloody palm on the ground, and straightening his body slightly.

"This seems like the work of a Serial Killer. Moreover, he's exceedingly confident in his strength and intellect, daring to target Beyonders. However, I noticed some discrepancies."

"What discrepancies?" Lumian concealed his joy behind a gentle smile.

Bram shifted his palm to support himself.

"Serial Killers' victims often exhibit degraded behaviors. For instance, those I've selected typically share a common trait: they enjoy inflicting verbal harm and curses upon others for extended periods. Thus, I'd remove their lips and preserve them. However, the seven slain Beyonders had varying identities, backgrounds, and behaviors, lacking the typical degeneracy."

"Perhaps he's merely a Beyonder with a fascination for serial killing, not necessarily acting out the Devil pathway,"

Lumian mused, masking his interest with a teasing tone. He added playfully, "Were you subjected to constant verbal violence as a child?"

And the Coldblooded and Serial Killer potions amplified corresponding resentments and psychological traumas?

Bram fell silent, his body gradually stretching out, no longer curled up.

Only then did Lumian steer the conversation back to the serial murder case from four years ago.

"Do you have detailed information about the seven Beyonders who were killed?

"Did you identify any suspects during the initial investigation?"

Bram shook his head slowly.

"I only had read the summary provided by the patrol team, not the full investigation files.

"Most of the patrol team members were seasoned Beyonders who had encountered Mutants and Devils before. Their judgment should be reliable."

Patrol team… Lumian grinned at Bram and remarked, "Is there any other information you deem crucial to share with me? If not, let's proceed."

"Yes, of course." Bram straightened his back abruptly.

In the next moment, he spat out foul words in a language Lumian had never heard before.

Devil Language!

As the Devil words reverberated, the blood, bloodstains, and bloody handprints that Bram had left on the ground were enveloped in a faint light.

A mystical connection seemed to form between them, linking them based on their location, creating sinister symbols and patterns.

In the room's far cupboard, glass bottles filled with lips and colorless liquid trembled suddenly, as if rocked by an earthquake.

This marked the initiation of a ritual to summon the projection of an Abyssal Devil!

Serial Killers executed serial murders not solely for the thrill but also to appease the Abyssal Devils. Once the killing spree concluded, Serial Killers could proceed to the final step of the ritual, summoning the projection of the corresponding Abyssal Devil. This granted them the assistance needed to fulfill their desires.

Though Bram's string of murders wasn't entirely finished and fell short by a few targets, he had met the minimum threshold. It satisfied the basic quantitative requirements, allowing him to expedite the ritual.

Understandably, this shortcut wouldn't yield the same effectiveness as the standard procedure. Yet, in the face of urgency and danger, Bram paid little heed.

He cooperated willingly, divulging information to divert the enemy's focus from his subtle actions. For instance, allowing blood to drip onto the ground in a specific pattern and pressing his blood-stained palm in a particular location. These marks replaced conspicuous evil and degenerate symbols with subtler, blood-stained alternatives.

With the preparations complete, Bram could utilize the Devil Language's "activate" to trigger the ritual, pleasing a high-level Devil and summoning its projection to confront the enemy!

Lumian silently observed Bram Andariel's "handiwork," feeling the room steeped in malevolence and tainted by corruption.

He raised his right hand, snapping his fingers.

Bram, coldly observing him while anticipating the ritual's protection, suddenly heard a rumbling emanate from within his body.

In confusion, he lowered his head and scrutinized his form. Crimson flames erupted from within, inflicting the agony of violent waves tearing through his internal organs, bones, and flesh.

Darkness gripped Bram's consciousness, accompanied by searing pain.

The last sight before losing consciousness: A black-haired young man with green eyes, sporting a golden straw hat, curved his lips, maintaining a warm smile. It was as though he watched a clown diligently tumble into a trap.

Rumble!

The ritual concluded prematurely. An explosion originating from Bram's body tore him into multiple fragments.

Fire Infusion and Delayed Explosion!

As Lumian adorned the Fury of the Sea brooch and ruthlessly assailed Bram, he not only released pent-up emotions but also covertly infused flames into Bram's body, triggering a Delayed Explosion.

This precaution aimed to avert any mishaps.

Moreover, there was no intention of granting forgiveness or negotiating a deal to spare Bram. Thus, there existed no psychological barrier to implanting a controlled time bomb within his body, ready to be activated.

Rumble!

Corpse fragments scattered across the room, some plastering the walls. Yet, this tumultuous event remained contained within the confines of the Bottle of Fiction.

Chapter 638: Possible Enemy

"My father bore the last name Andariel, cut down by a curse unleashed by a Devil's projection during a ritual gone awry.

"Inheriting his mantle, I became a Beyonder. My mother remains a mystery, perhaps just another name etched into my father's ledger of victims…

Upon the murky surface of a dark mirror, Bram Andariel's blood-drained visage recounted his origins with an impassive mask.

Franca, "invited" by Lumian, faced a full-body mirror, employing her unique magic mirror spirit channeling technique to delve into the Andariel family and the Rose School of Thought.

Regrettably, Bram lingered on the fringes of the secret organization and his Devilish family. His insights were scant. Moreover, to divert Lumian's scrutiny and covertly finalize the ritual preparations, he divulged truths without deceit.

With Spirit Channeling reaching its threshold, Franca posed a final query.

"Who leads the Andariel family now?"

Bram's increasingly translucent and sinister countenance contorted abruptly.

"He—he's dead.

"He became a sacrifice!"

Sacrifice… such theatricality? Before Franca could delve deeper, Bram's figure waned swiftly, dissipating into nothingness.

As the Demoness of Pleasure concluded the ritual, she clicked her tongue and addressed Lumian, "The Andariel family's state is dire. Even the patriarch can be offered as a sacrifice. Are they fully controlled by the Rose School of Thought?"

In light of the temperance faction's alignment with the Church of The Fool within the Rose School of Thought, Franca glossed over distinctions between factions. After all, the Rose School likely teemed with adherents of indulgence.

Lumian responded contemplatively, "The situation in the Abyss isn't quite right either…"

Whether Naboredisley was the pseudonym of Devil Monarch Farbauti or not, the plight of the blood-colored Demon deep within Hanth Island mirrored the Abyss's troubles to some extent.

With a scoff, Lumian remarked, "We're accustomed to damning others to hell and the Abyss. We believed it to be the worst place. Who knew the Abyss itself could decay? It's falling into its own abyss."

"A hellish jest indeed." Franca glanced at the pristine night sky, less tainted by industrial pollution. The crimson moon of the Southern Continent appeared clearer and brighter.

She steered the conversation back on track.

"If Hisoka truly is from the Devil pathway, his actions make sense.

"The Research Society was lax. Minimal filters or restrictions on its members…"

Franca and Lumian were aware that the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society operated in a way that there were no Devil pathway Beyonders, but nobody knew the truth. Membership didn't entail self-declaration of pathways or proof. Sequences were discerned through interactions at gatherings. Hisoka remained an enigma, his pathways and Sequence elusive even to key April Fool's members.

"Hisoka has always been a loner. He rarely participates in other April Fool's pranks. Is he afraid of being discovered as a Devil?" Lumian contemplated, adding, "He was most inclined to collaborate with Mad Lady, an unabashed lunatic who couldn't care less. She might even relish the prospect of testing if a Devil's blood runs cold…"

I sense a subtle mockery, insinuating my penchant for experimentation… Yet, despite being a Coldblooded, the remnant blood of the Serial Killer Bram retained a hint of warmth. Does Coldblooded mainly denote emotional detachment rather than literal coldness? Or could it be the Southern Continent's summer, heating up the blood of cold-blooded creatures… Franca's musings drifted.

Franca then cautioned Lumian, "If Hisoka is truly a Devil, he'll sense your malice the moment you uncover a key clue. He can decide whether to strike or flee, shifting to another country to hide.

"Dammit! Pursuing a Devil is a real hassle. When we can't beat him, he strikes first. When we can, he's nowhere to be found."

"We could use a Demon Hunter in times like these," Lumian half-jokingly remarked.

From Devilology, Lumian knew that Sequence 4 of the Warrior pathway was the Demon Hunter—an expert in hunting Devils. They were natural adversaries to Devils, Desire Apostles, and even Demons.

One of the Demon Hunters' crucial skills was concealing their actions and intentions, making it impossible for targets capable of sensing danger to detect them!

Franca concurred succinctly, "Now I see why Madam Magician sent you the spirit world's coordinates, instructing you to visit the New City of Silver and find Mr. Sun to eliminate the remaining corruption. It's dominated by the Warrior pathway and boasts many Demon Hunters.

"Though enlisting a Demon Hunter throughout the entire process might strain our resources."

That was a genuine demigod!

While dealing with Hisoka was Lumian's personal grudge, Major Arcana card holders would also take notice, given Hisoka's potential alignment with that Celestial Worthy.

Lumian chuckled.

"No need for a Demon Hunter to intervene directly. I wonder if they can craft charms, potions, or items concealing malice. If so, we can spend a hefty sum through the Tarot Club's connections to acquire them or engage in item exchange."

"Start inquiring soon," Franca advised. "If Hisoka is a Desire Apostle, be cautious. You carry too many random items, and some mystical items have adverse effects on emotions and desires. He could detonate them, injuring you instantly…"

As she spoke, Franca's lips trembled before she sealed them shut.

Lumian nodded solemnly, refraining from boasting about his Ascetic abilities.

Having recently endured an explosion of emotions and desires, he understood it was beyond the endurance of an Ascetic, causing physical damage to the brain.

Franca then said, "The one chasing the Serial Killer was from the Numinous Episcopate, not a regular patrol member. The currents in Matani run deep."

The Numinous Episcopate, a clandestine organization in the Southern Continent, was rumored to trace its origins to the former royal descendants of the Balam Empire and Beyonders unwilling to forsake Death as their faith. Their ultimate aim was to restore Death to His throne, ruling East and West Balam once more.

Lumian strolled to the window, gazing at the street. He grinned and commented,

"This is the chaotic Southern Continent.

"Actually, what piques my interest is why the Rose School of Thought is collecting information about the daily lives of Port Pylos residents. It seems like they want to govern this place.

"That's not their usual style."

Lumian had limited knowledge of the Rose School of Thought's past. All he knew was their recent spree of sacrifices, leaving bloodshed wherever they occupied. Running a city or port for extended periods didn't align with their usual behavior.

"Nothing is certain." Franca's mind was working overtime recently. After a moment's reflection, she added, "Regardless of the Rose School of Thought's motives, considering the sacrifices they've conducted in recent years, they should have gained substantial boons from the Mother Tree of Desire. Now, with Devil family members in the mix, encountering a significant Rose School of Thought member may mean dealing with a dual Bearer of potions and boons. Perhaps a Zombie Recipient, Wraith Tree Spirit, or Sex Addict Apostle? Similar to a Hunter Monk like you."

Franca, always more adept at nicknames and unconventional thoughts than Lumian, playfully referred to Beyonders who were both Zombies and Recipients as Zombie Recipients.

Her primary intention was to caution Lumian that certain Rose School of Thought members might exploit abilities like those of the Sex Addict to provoke his desires. Later, in their Desire Apostle form, they could detonate those desires, providing end-to-end service.

It would be a formidable challenge. In Lumian's condition, facing such Beyonders posed considerable danger.

Lumian chuckled, somewhat self-deprecatingly.

Why do I feel like a powder keg, ready to explode with the slightest touch?

"Nevertheless, I don't intend to meddle in the Rose School of Thought's affairs. I'll write to Madam Magician and report the traces of the Rose School of Thought in Port Pylos. Someone will investigate and handle it. Aren't Mr. Star and Mr. Moon among the Major Arcana card holders overseeing the Rose School of Thought?

"My sole focus is Hisoka. At least, we can be sure that even if he's of the Devil pathway, he likely has no connection to the Andariel family. Otherwise, the Rose School of Thought wouldn't have dispatched Bram and company for reconnaissance. Bram wouldn't have been oblivious if a family member had been active here."

Franca hesitated for a moment before adding, "Hmm, just be careful."

…

Having escorted Franca back to Trier, Lumian stowed away Bram's Serial Killer Beyonder characteristic.

It took the form of a sharp-edged, prismatic ice cube, enveloping faint wisps of thin black gas.

Upon reaching Hotel Orella, Lumian approached the trio of mechanical elevators, pulled the handle, and stood patiently.

With a creak, the double doors opened simultaneously.

Lumian's silhouette, elongated by the crystal chandelier behind him, was mirrored in the mechanical lift.

Beside him stood a slender human shadow.

Chapter 639: Bribe

Lumian stood before the open mechanical elevator door, casting a glance at the slender shadow beside him. With raised eyebrows, he calmly turned his head, noting the sudden presence diagonally behind him.

The figure appeared as a tall, thin man draped in a complex, layered black robe. His face bore a pale-white complexion, as though untouched by sunlight for an extended period. Atop his black hair sat a fluffy black hat, its edge adorned with a gently swaying white feather.

Lumian retracted his gaze and entered the mechanical elevator. The tall, thin man with dark brown eyes following suit in silence.

Gripping the brass handle within with his right hand, Lumian selected the desired floor, pressing it down to B3, a definitive click echoing in response.

After Lumian selected his intended floor, the lanky man mimicked his action, opting for B18.

As they awaited descent, the distant sound of steam hissing reached their ears. Gears whirred to life, chains tightened, and the luxurious mechanical elevator began its gradual descent.

Throughout the journey, both remained eerily silent, the atmosphere thick with unspoken tension.

Upon arrival at B3, Lumian departed without a backward glance, heading towards Suite 7 with purpose.

As the metal chains continued their retreat behind him, Lumian muttered thoughtfully to himself, Monsieur Iveljsta?

Iveljsta, residing in B18, harbored lifeless servants.

The peculiar appearance of Iveljsta and the condition of his servants led Lumian to suspect his association with a Wraith, a Sequence 5 Wraith of the Prisoner pathway.

The Prisoner pathway, controlled by the Rose School of Thought, held sway over temperance and indulgence factions, both intertwined with the secret organization. It seemed unlikely for a Wraith not to be affiliated with the Rose School of Thought.

Could it be a rare rogue Wraith, or perhaps the vanguard of the Rose School of Thought targeting Port Pylos? Lumian couldn't discount the possibility of a temperance faction member. Yet, in the past few minutes, he discerned no evidence of Iveljsta's protracted indulgence… Lumian resolved to detail his observations in Madam Magician's letter.

Whether something was good or bad would be determined by professionals!

Returning to Suite 7, Lumian noticed Ludwig seated at the dining table, indulging in a feast from a ceramic soup pot with a silver spoon.

Atop the dish, a layer of cheese infused with egg juice charred in spots. Through the substantial hole Ludwig had carved, Lumian glimpsed a medley of pork, beef, fish, shrimp, shells, potatoes, and tomatoes stewed together. The rich aroma of spices mingled with the meats' essence permeated the living and dining rooms, casting a spell that stirred his appetite.

Ludwig continued to eat in silence as Lugano stood up and asked, "Would you like some? This is the local Eseo. Different chefs choose different ingredients, and the taste will vary."

Ludwig, without uttering a word, simply turned his head at Lugano before resuming his meal, quickening his pace.

Taking a seat beside Ludwig, Lumian smiled at the cheese-filled boy and said, "I was going to bring you a better supper, but I thought better of it."

Confused, Lugano inquired, "What supper?"

"You don't want to know," Lumian responded with a Devil-like smile.

The supper he alluded to was Serial Killer Bram's corpse.

Originally intending to bring a few pieces back for Ludwig to sample and discern any "nutrients" and information, Lumian reconsidered, aware of Bram's limited knowledge about the Andariel family's peculiarities. Thus, he abandoned the idea of feeding Ludwig out of prudence.

From Lumian's observations, Ludwig could derive some strength from eating, releasing the seal. However, consuming a Sequence 7 Beyonder corpse might trigger a significant change. Lumian feared his own strength might not suffice to manage potential complications; Ludwig could potentially turn the tables and consume him as a delicacy.

Ludwig's silver spoon paused briefly before he remarked, "If you didn't bring it, why did you mention it?"

Oh, having a little tantrum? Lumian chuckled inwardly and said, "It's to inform you that we've reached an adventurer's paradise, a land of chaos. You'll have ample opportunities for fine dining in the future."

The implication was clear: do well, and I'll remember to reward you with delicacies.

Ludwig, spooning a soft potato stew into his mouth, responded vaguely, "I'm not going to school."

Does this mean that as long as he doesn't go to school, everything else is negotiable? Of course, the prerequisite is that I have to pay with enough delicacies… Satisfied, Lumian rose and made his way to the washroom adjoining the master bedroom, where he washed up.

The brass faucet delivered warm water at a comfortable temperature.

Lumian soaked a towel, relishing the refreshing steam that enveloped his face, invigorating him.

Hotel Orella's utilization of a steam engine to power its mechanical elevators and machinery ensured continuous hot water, a notable feature of its service.

…

The following morning, Lumian, sporting a golden straw hat, appeared on Cania Street beside Port Pylos's Resurrection Square.

Once the ruling center for Intis colonists in Matani, the area bore remnants of its history with road signs and shop names in the Intisian language. Lumian effortlessly traced the path beneath the Intis parasol trees, arriving at a four-story beige house showcasing Intis's opulent architectural style.

Signs adorned in Dutanese, Intisian, Highlander, Loen, and Feysac languages marked the building: "Port Pylos Patrol Team."

Below the sign, five lines had the same meaning: "Only deals with paranormal events."

Fully taking into account the needs of adventurers from different countries to report a case… Lumian playfully remarked as he entered the beige establishment.

Within the hall, devoid of occupants, Lumian found a receptionist casually perusing the day's local tabloid from a lounging position.

The native, in his thirties with dark brown skin and black hair, possessed a slender face and dark brown eyes.

Approaching, Lumian addressed him in Intisian, "I want to report a case."

The native glanced up, rising unsteadily. He opened a partition behind him, uttering a few incomprehensible words in Dutanese.

Lumian could barely understand him speaking in Dutanese.

"Someone who understands Intisian or Highlander…"

This won't do. Since you don't understand foreign languages, don't waste time reading the newspaper. Study diligently… Maintaining a genial smile, he patiently awaited other patrol team members to appear.

Within a mere minute or two, a young man with fluffy brown hair, appearing as if he had fallen asleep without washing his hair the night before, swung open the door from the depths of the hall.

Dressed in a white shirt and an unbuttoned yellow vest, he strolled towards Lumian, one hand casually tucked into his pocket. In fluent Intisian, he inquired, "What case are you filing?"

Lumian assessed the young man, unmistakably hailing from the Northern Continent, cigarette in hand, and brownish-

yellow eyes. With a reserved smile, Lumian responded, "I found a killer."

Amused, the well-defined young man gestured towards the door.

"For killers, go to the police on the opposite street."

Opposite the patrol team stood Port Pylos's police headquarters.

Maintaining his composure, Lumian reiterated, "He's a serial killer."

Serial killer… The young man with the cigarette muttered to himself, a shift in his demeanor indicating a sudden seriousness.

"How do you know?"

"I found many severed lips in his house—human lips," Lumian disclosed with a reserved smile.

"Cut off lips?" The young man, yet to fasten his yellow vest, pressed with urgency, "Where's his home?"

After a brief pause, Lumian replied, "I can't spell the street name, but I can take you to the scene. It's on a street near the Man-Eating Flower bar."

Forcing himself to calm down, the young man took a drag on his cigarette, asking, "What about the killer? Did you see his face?"

"He's dead," Lumian truthfully responded.

Taken aback for a moment, the brown-haired young man queried, "How did he die?"

Lumian's reserved smile transformed into a more open one.

"I killed him."

The young man's expression froze in disbelief.

He scrutinized Lumian for a few seconds before inquiring, "Are you an adventurer here to collect the bounty?"

Bram's serial murders had prompted a local wanted poster issued by Admiral Querarill. However, the poster lacked a corresponding name or appearance, featuring only a case description due to the suspect's unidentified status.

Smiling, Lumian replied, "Sort of, but you can also claim it."

The young man furrowed his brow.

"What do you mean?"

"The bounty can be yours," Lumian stated, making his intention to bribe clear.

The young man cast a glance at Lumian.

"What would you like in exchange?"

"I want the dossier on a serial murder case from four years ago and the relevant items you gathered," Lumian disclosed openly.

There might be something among them that Ludwig could consume.

The young man fell into contemplative silence, assessing the pros and cons.

Eventually, he scratched his brown hair and said, "I can show you the case dossier and related items, but you can't take them away. You can only copy them.

"Also, I need to confirm if it's a Serial Killer at the scene."

"Alright," Lumian agreed, extending his right hand with a smile. "Happy working with you."

The young man shook Lumian's hand.

"Nice working with you. You can call me Camus. What about you?"

Lumian smiled once more.

"Louis Berry."

As Camus entered the door deep in the hall, preparing to gather two teammates, he pondered, Louis Berry… Why does this name sound familiar…

Chapter 640: Commonality

On the street adorned with the words "Chilicasco" in Dutanese, Lumian led Camus and the rest of the patrol team into the apartment crafted from dark black stones and brown wood.

The moment he swung open the door to Bram's room, a blend of charred scent and the tang of blood wafted through the air.

Corpse fragments lay strewn across the floor, the walls tainted with a mixture of blood and flesh. Handprints, crimson and searing marks adorned every surface.

Camus's eyes widened, as if thrust back into the midst of a serial killing.

Yet, this was a level of devastation beyond even that.

Turning to Lumian, Camus, despite already anticipating the grim answer, habitually inquired, "Where's that person's body?"

Lumian gestured towards the scattered remains and minced meat, responding with a grim smile, "All of these."

Camus fell into a momentary silence before signaling his two stunned teammates to examine the scene.

He had promised to share a portion of the bounty with them, making them witnesses to his "merits."

Camus hadn't ventured alone, wary that this might be a trap set by Louis Berry, an assassination attempt by the Rose School of Thought, or other secret organizations targeting the patrol team.

In the Southern Continent, vigilance was a necessity!

Approaching a cupboard, Camus fixated his gaze on lips soaked in preservatives, the tragic fate of the victims replaying in his mind.

After a moment of silence, Louis Berry spoke calmly, "Bram is a member of the Devil family, Andariel. He was instructed by the Rose School of Thought to gather information in Port Pylos and carry out the serial murders. His uncle, Devajo, was supposed to be his contact, but they never actually met. Instead, he left the information he collected in the study of an empty house at 17 Aleg Street..."

Wh-- Camus and the others were initially startled, then deeply puzzled.

How does Louis Berry possess such detailed knowledge?

Camus couldn't help but glance at the scattered corpse pieces, the blood-soaked walls, the handprints on the ground, and the various charred marks.

Eventually, his gaze settled on Lumian's face.

Lumian responded with a warm smile curling his lips.

Camus and his two companions exchanged glances, refraining from questioning whether Louis Berry obtained the information through spirit channeling, torture, or if he had discerned Bram's motives from the start. Louis's pursuit of the serial murderer wasn't solely due to a criminal act.

"This intel is crucial," Camus nodded, gesturing towards the severely damaged six-barrel machine gun in the room. "We need to secure Bram's weapon."

"No problem," Lumian replied casually.

Being a Pyromaniac, firearms held little appeal for him. Fireballs proved far more potent than the rapid fire of a six-barrel machine gun--just not as swift.

...

Beside Resurrection Square, on Cania Street, on the second floor of the patrol team's four-story building.

Camus placed the dossier and related items on the table in front of Lumian, emphasizing, "You can only read and record. Taking it away or damaging it is not an option."

Lumian nodded subtly, taking one of the envelopes, unwinding the thread a few times, and carefully opening it.

Rather than hastily perusing the contents, he first extracted the dossier, giving it a thorough read.

The dense dossier meticulously outlined the identities, origins, possible pathways, Sequences, locations of death, the scene's conditions, and the varied speculations and investigations conducted by the patrol team.

It was clear the patrol team had been diligent in their investigations, especially when new victims kept emerging. Daily operations varied until the serial murders appeared to cease, leading to a slackening of efforts. They gradually reduced the frequency of case studies and large-scale visit trips. After six months, investigations reached a standstill, concluding the dossier.

In the final report, the vice-captain overseeing the matter concluded: "This is a classic serial murder case committed by the Devil pathway. Though Serial Killers seldom target only seven individuals, as more victims enhance the ritual's efficacy, this time, all victims are Beyonders, including Mid-Sequence Beyonders. Even with just seven deaths, they are more favored by Devils, pleasing them more than 14 or even 20 ordinary people.

"The main question in this mystic case is that, aside from being Beyonders, there's no common thread among the seven victims. This sets it apart from previous serial murders.

"We hypothesize that the seven victims were active Beyonders in West Balam, likely having committed some form of killing in the past. It can be seen as a manifestation of depravity..."

Lumian read it meticulously, concurring with the theory that seven Beyonders surpassed 14 ordinary individuals in Devil-pleasing rituals.

This wasn't new information to him. After all, ordinary people were only the third-best sacrifice, while creatures with Beyonder characteristics ranked second.

Similar situations arose in specific "acts," particularly those requiring feedback. It was akin to deciphering an Angel's conspiracy, allowing Lumian to assimilate a potion more effectively than an ordinary person's intrigue.

Having grasped a general understanding of the entire serial murder case, Lumian delved into gathering information about the seven Beyonders. Synthesizing Anthony's psychological profile of Hisoka, Franca's archetype summary and her speculations about the actor, he scoured for potential commonalities.

Among the Beyonders were both men and women, one under Admiral Querarill, while another was a Death believer residing in Port Pylos. Foreign adventurers, an Intis Republic spy stationed in Matani, a peripheral member of the Rose School of Thought, and a local clergyman of the God of Steam and Machinery Church were also among the list.

Judging by their identities and backgrounds, they seemingly had nothing in common.

Yet, for Lumian, who read with subjective conjectures, subtle details held significance.

All seven victims were young, with the oldest in his early thirties, widely praised for combat talent and outstanding intelligence. Lumian mused to himself,

Are the targets Beyonders who are young, filled with potential, and have already reached a certain level of maturity? Even the two who weren't particularly young bore the label of being famous, powerful, with limitless potential… Lumian gained a rough understanding of Hisoka's selection criteria.

If Franca were present, she might have noted that it matched the characteristics of the original archetype.

However, Lumian believed Hisoka would adhere to the archetype when it suited him, not letting it dictate his true motives. Mad Lady's evaluation of Hisoka as not being pure enough further supported Lumian's perspective.

Considering the selection criteria, Lumian thought, Louis Berry fits Hisoka's homicidal fetish. He clicked his tongue and retrieved items related to the case from the official envelopes.

Most were the victim's belongings, but there were also seven thin aluminum foils stained with blackish-brown substances that didn't belong to this group.

Described in the case file, they were wrappings for the local chocolate, left at each crime scene. It was suspected that the murderer would peel off the thin foil after success, indulging in a piece of chocolate before dissecting the corpse.

As the murderer used a gloved hand to extract and consume the chocolate, no corresponding traces were left on the thin foil. Such chocolates were common in Matani, making tracking difficult.

Lumian studied the thin aluminum foil before smiling at Camus, who supervised him.

"Can I take two or three?"

Camus, with his brown hair, furrowed his brow.

"If you want to use divination or other Beyonder methods, you can do it here."

"Just two. It won't hinder your future investigations," Lumian said enticingly. "If you agree to help, I'll give you an additional reward. For example, a very useful summoning incantation for a spirit world creature."

Camus fell silent briefly before agreeing, "Deal."

...

More than fifteen minutes later, Camus, having brought Lumian out to purchase chocolate-like items, observed with a bewildered expression as a rabbit-shaped spirit world creature adeptly copied the dossiers with a fountain pen.

After nearly a minute, Camus shifted his gaze to Lumian, leisurely sitting on the side, peeling off the thin aluminum foil and savoring a piece of dark-brown chocolate. He inquired in a deep voice, "Is this the very useful spirit world creature you mentioned?"

Lumian, chewing on the fragrant chocolate, responded with a smile, "Yes, it's one of the Rabbits of Knowledge. It can help you evade the labor of copying."

What do I need such a copying tool for!? Camus bellowed inwardly, but he restrained himself as he recalled the bounty for the serial murders and the grisly scene of Bram's demise.

Lumian added with a smile, "When you prefer to keep the origin of your words hidden, summon the Rabbit of Knowledge for assistance.

"Moreover, this is a growth-oriented spirit world creature. It evolves based on the knowledge it receives. Of course, it's ideal if you can secure a contract with the spirit world creature. Otherwise, each summoned Rabbit of Knowledge might differ, making nurturing impossible."

"Growth-oriented…" Camus echoed the term, his expression gradually softening.

…

Back at Hotel Orella, Lumian retrieved the two old aluminum foils from his pocket and handed one to Ludwig.

"Try eating these," he suggested with a smile.

Chapter 641: Information From Eating

Lugano, who had been observing from the sidelines, was taken aback when Lumian handed the thin aluminum foil to Ludwig and inquired if he wanted to eat it.

Despite Ludwig's previous display of abnormal eating habits, including drinking a tube of human blood in front of Lugano, revealing all the corresponding information, Lugano still harbored reservations about feeding Ludwig just anything, especially something as unconventional as aluminum foil.

After all, Ludwig was still a child!

In the blink of an eye, Lugano witnessed Ludwig silently accepting the old, thin aluminum foil, stuffing it into his mouth, chewing, and swallowing.

"..." Lugano found himself in a daze.

Once Ludwig finished consuming the aluminum foil, he calmly turned to Lumian and inquired, "Which details do you need--information on the cocoa beans used, the precise quantity, additional ingredients, the origin of the aluminum foil ingredients, the production factories, or the individuals most in contact with it?"

Lumian shook his head slowly.

"No need."

This information wouldn't help track down Hisoka. Hisoka had touched the thin aluminum foil while wearing gloves, leaving behind no corresponding personal details. The patrol team had already confirmed that the chocolate packaging was common in Port Pylos, and there was nothing distinctive about the taste.

As Lumian responded, a mix of amusement and surprise washed over him.

He can even extract such information from eating?

As expected of a monster capable of recovering just by eating and gradually breaking free from the seal's constraints!

Ludwig seemed to relish the delicacy. After a few moments, he remarked, "The residual chocolate has a hint of depravity."

Depravity? Could it be that Hisoka had carried it for an extended period, corrupting it? That doesn't make sense. Unless one was a demigod, Beyonder auras couldn't reach such a level. The only possibility was that they were on the brink of losing control, deep in a state of depravity. However, such a Beyonder's body would undoubtedly display various abnormal details. They wouldn't be able to leave the house; stepping out would lead to discovery and pursuit by law enforcers. Could he rely on the human skin Bram mentioned for disguise? Lumian was initially puzzled, but then he asked with anticipation, "A decadent aura from the Devil pathway?"

Ludwig licked his lips, savoring the taste of the chocolate residue.

"Yes, at least a Demon's."

"Demon's?" Lumian was taken aback and couldn't help but frown.

Having extensively studied Devilology, he knew that Sequence 4 of the Devil pathway was known as Demon, representing a demigod.

If the chocolate slightly tainted with a decadent aura came from a Demon, it clearly didn't belong to Hisoka.

Lumian wasn't arrogantly dismissing Hisoka's potential to have advanced to Sequence 4. Instead, the aluminum foil and chocolate marks represented the state four years ago. Hisoka couldn't have been a Demon back then, unless he had become a Desire Apostle upon transmigration. If that were the case, his targets for the serial murders should have been Sequence 6 or 5 Beyonders.

Although Beyonders at this level were rare in Matani, Devilology didn't specify that serial murders could only occur in one location.

"Are you certain?" Lumian looked at Ludwig for confirmation.

Ludwig replied earnestly, "A Demon's decadent aura has a completely different texture from Low- to Mid-Sequence Devils."

Upon hearing his godson's response, an image suddenly surfaced in Lumian's mind.

Hisoka standing within the wall of spirituality, engaged in a special ritual to establish a connection with a Demon. Throughout this process, a few pieces of chocolate wrapped in thin aluminum foil remained in his pocket. They were slightly tainted by the decadent aura permeating the altar, subtly and silently transforming...

Yes, when I perform a ritual, I don't remove all my belongings in advance and leave them outside the altar unless there's a specific mention in the ritual requirements that I should avoid... As a Conspirer, Lumian quickly made a guess and asked Ludwig, "Can you tell which Demon's decadent aura it belongs to?"

Lumian's current idea was that if Hisoka couldn't be found in the future, he would exhaust his resources and seek the help of the New City of Silver's Demon-Hunter experts. He would set up a ritual and summon the Demon who had established a connection with Hisoka. He would have it beaten up before interrogating it for information about Hisoka.

Ludwig shook his head.

"I can't absorb such subtle information yet. All I know is that the decadent aura belongs to a family called Nois."

Nois, one of the three Devil families... The Demon responding to Hisoka's special ritual is from the Nois family? That's peculiar. How can a Demon respond to a ritual remotely? It has to be at Sequence 3, or even at the Angel level... According to Devilology, Serial Killers can summon projections of Abyss Demons because those Devils can use the special properties of the Abyss to respond, not because they have reached the corresponding level. However, the Nois family is a Devil family active in the real world and hasn't entered the Abyss... Lumian made many connections from the Nois last name.

He concluded by listing three possibilities:

Firstly, the Demon responding to the Hisoka ritual was none other than the Nois family's Angel.

Secondly, it had reached Sequence 3 and was located in Port Pylos, near Hisoka.

Thirdly, the Nois family had a close connection to the Abyss. They could borrow the Abyss's properties to some extent. Even a Demon could respond to prayers from afar.

Lumian pondered for a moment and asked Ludwig, "Any other information?"

"No," Ludwig replied, disappointing Lumian.

Lumian handed over the remaining piece of aluminum foil.

"Try this one too."

Ludwig didn't hesitate. Like many children drawn to the sweetness lingering on wrappers, he popped the thin foil stained with chocolate into his mouth and chewed.

After a moment, while Lugano snapped back to reality, Ludwig looked at Lumian and remarked, "There's more to this one."

"What kind of information?" Lumian knew that Ludwig's special mention had to be of some value.

Ludwig responded with the air of a connoisseur, "This thin aluminum foil rested on a table marked by old blood and a splash of coffee. The blood belonged to a deceased male. The spirituality was initially potent, and the coffee was Fermo blend, unsweetened, distinctly bitter yet fragrant."

Upon hearing Ludwig's account, Lumian's mind painted another vivid scene.

A few pieces of chocolate wrapped in thin aluminum foil lay nonchalantly on a table, soaked in old blood and spilled coffee. They seemed to share an intimate connection for an extended period. Then, a hand reached out, snatched them up, and swiftly pocketed them before making a hasty exit.

Connecting the dots, Lumian strongly suspected that the table had served Hisoka in a dwelling he once occupied.

"Do you have detailed information on the male deceased?" Lumian probed Ludwig for more insights.

Ludwig shook his head once more.

"No, unless I consume the blood directly."

14:53

The bloodstains likely belonged to one of the victims, Lumian

surmised. He pondered whether this information was documented in the case file or elsewhere. Was Hisoka using "No, unless I consume the blood directly."

The bloodstains likely belonged to one of the victims, Lumian the table as an autopsy platform or perhaps an altar? Lumian mused inwardly, a tinge of disappointment clouding his thoughts. Nevertheless, he refocused his attention on the Fermo coffee.

He mumbled to himself, Does this mean that Hisoka has a penchant for coffee, specifically the Fermo blend from the Paz Valley…

The Paz Valley, nestled in the Southern Continent, boasted the renowned Fermo coffee, comparable to Feynapotter's highlander coffee and the Southern Continent's own version. It was a luxury enjoyed mainly by the middle class for extended periods.

In Matani, where both East and West Balam produced high-

quality coffee beans, such occurrences were rare. The locals had access to a plethora of excellent coffee beans. Those unfit for export were sold at affordable prices, favored by both colonists and natives.

Lugano, now fully attentive, cautiously added, "I've heard that those who frequent Fermo coffee appreciate its bitterness and fragrance. However, those who prefer it without sugar are a rare breed."

In essence, Hisoka's unique taste in coffee is uncommon here… Lumian smiled at Ludwig and remarked, "Well done. If I apprehend the target in the future, I'll give him to you."

When the time came, Lumian would likely be a Sequence 5. Moreover, he wouldn't give Ludwig the Beyonder characteristic. Lumian could ease his grip on the boy.

Give… The notion sent a chill down Lugano's spine, a hint that his imagination might have run too wild.

To others, gifting a Beyonder of the Devil's Pathway might relegate the recipient to a life of servitude or worse, becoming an ingredient. However, with Ludwig…

Lugano involuntarily shuddered.

He didn't dare to think about it!

Ludwig nodded, his eyes gleaming with anticipation.

Lumian turned to Lugano and said, "Don't you have a good grasp of Dutanese? Check Port Pylos this afternoon and find out which shops sell Fermo coffee. It's preferable if it's one that has been operating for four to five years or longer."

"Alright." Lugano suddenly felt a surge of usefulness.

In the evening, he returned to Suite 7 at B3 and reported to Lumian, "There are only three shops selling Fermo coffee. One is on Cania Street in Resurrection Square…"

"You mentioned Cania Street in Resurrection Square?" Lumian interjected.

"Yes, Unit 21 on that street. It's called Matani Import and Export Shop," Lugano confirmed.

Lumian fell silent.

Isn't it close to Port Pylos's patrol team?

...…

In Port Pylos, on the third floor of the building housing the patrol team.

Camus received the bounty and gave a fifth to his two companions.

He then entered the telegraph room and inquired of the telegrapher, "Do you have a telegram for me?"

He had previously sent a telegram to inquire with certain friends if they had any information on Louis Berry, the adventurer.

Since they were in collaboration, he needed to ascertain the other party's situation first!

The female telegrapher, wearing a sweet smile, straightened up and responded, "Yes! From Farim."

Chapter 642: Visit

Camus extended his thanks to the telegrapher, retrieved his telegram, and swiftly scanned its contents.

"Louis Berry, Intisian, hailed as the most renowned adventurer in the Fog Sea over the past six months. Sporting a distinctive golden straw hat, he successfully hunted down the Demon Warlock Burman, earning a hefty bounty of 600,000 verl d'or. Furthermore, he collaborated with the Earth Mother Church in Port Santa to address the crisis surrounding the Sea Prayer Ritual. However, the precise details remain elusive…"

Upon perusing the telegram, Camus released a silent sigh and remarked to himself, He's truly a great adventurer. It's no surprise he managed to handle that Serial Killer…

Camus couldn't gauge the Demon Warlock's true strength, but the substantial bounty spoke volumes. The sum of 600,000 verl d'or was a testament to the Demon Warlock's threat level. Even if Louis Berry's fame stemmed solely from his encounter with such a formidable adversary, he undeniably stood among the great adventurers.

It wasn't lost on Camus that Bram, the perpetrator of numerous murders that had kept the patrol team occupied for nearly two weeks, only carried a bounty of 50,000 verl d'or. Such figures tempted Camus to consider collaboration with Louis Berry.

Reflecting on the substantial 600,000 bounty and comprehending Louis Berry's generosity, Camus tucked away the telegram and graciously commended the female telegrapher with an exaggerated flying kiss.

Running his fingers through his tousled brown hair, Camus descended to the hall below.

The evening had descended, and it wasn't his night for duty. He could head home and take a break.

Out of the blue, Camus's gaze focused as he spotted the handsome Louis Berry, sporting black hair, green eyes, and a laid-back demeanor, seated on the sofa, casually playing with a golden straw hat.

Approaching cautiously, Camus inquired, "Is there anything else?"

Lumian ceased twirling the straw hat, sat up straight, and grinned.

"I've got something else to talk to you about."

Realizing that one of the three shops that could buy Fermo coffee was on Cania Street, not far from the patrol team, Lumian's immediate thought was:

Could Hisoka be hiding within the patrol team, perhaps as one of its members?

Is the most dangerous place the safest?

After careful consideration, Lumian considered it a possibility, though not particularly likely.

On the one hand, among the seven Beyonders who were killed, including the Death believer in Port Pylos, the Rose School of Thought's peripheral member, and the spy left behind in Matani by the Intis Republic, were secretive individuals, blending in with ordinary people. Without substantial information sources, it would be challenging for Hisoka to identify them as Beyonders and target them.

This suggested that either Hisoka had a unique ability to discern Beyonders from ordinary people or possessed a mystical item granting him such insight, or he had control over an extensive information network. The patrol team, being intimately familiar with Matani and Port Pylos, might have already detected something amiss with the Death believer, the Rose School of Thought's member, and the Intis spy and been conducting surveillance.

Hisoka's membership in the patrol team would explain his ability to uncover a Beyonder's hidden identity and carry out the murders.

On the other hand, if Hisoka, a Devil pathway Beyonder, had joined the patrol team, suspicions would undoubtedly arise once the serial murders occurred—unless he concealed his true pathway from the start. However, the patrol team differed from the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society. Hisoka would need to use his abilities frequently during daily missions, making it difficult to conceal them for months or years.

There was no room for mishaps. It wasn't feasible for him to meticulously prepare before each mission, adorning the corresponding mystical item solely to reveal his abilities in that specific situation, right?

Even as a Devil, he couldn't pull it off!

Given that many missions had no specific target, Devils couldn't foresee imminent danger.

Driven by suspicion and uncertainty, Lumian took a special trip to the patrol team, visiting Camus to unearth new clues or gain inspiration to either confirm or eliminate the corresponding possibilities.

"What do you want to discuss?" Camus furrowed his brow.

Is this guy scheming to use the morning's bribe as leverage to threaten me?

The dossier isn't particularly important. Even if I lose it, it's just a minor punishment!

Wearing his golden straw hat, Lumian rose with a smile. Pointing at the door, he suggested, "How about a cup of coffee?"

After a brief contemplation, Camus responded in a deep voice, "Fine."

Exiting the patrol team's entrance, Lumian made his way toward the Matani Import and Export Shop.

In the fading dusk, he immediately spotted Port Pylos's police headquarters diagonally opposite the patrol team.

Numerous individuals clad in dark-blue police uniforms moved in and out, some holding cups of coffee.

Wh— Lumian's heart stirred.

Could Hisoka not be a member of the patrol team but a high-ranking police officer at the police headquarters?

At a certain rank, the police collaborated with official Beyonders to access a wealth of information. Many official Beyonders' investigations were conducted through the police due to limited manpower.

If Hisoka held a significant position at Port Pylos's police headquarters, it was plausible for him to identify the three concealed Beyonders. Additionally, there would be no risk of exposing his pathway during routine missions, and acquiring his favored Fermo coffee beans would be a breeze.

On the other hand, it was precisely because the Matani Import and Export Shop offered a variety of coffee beans that Hisoka fell in love with the pure, bitter, and fragrant Fermo coffee without sugar.

However, this was just one possibility among Lumian's speculations. For instance, Hisoka, being a bold and self- assured individual, might have visited Cania Street specifically to buy Fermo coffee, relishing the incompetence and frustration of the patrol team. Alternatively, Hisoka might not be a Beyonder of the Devil pathway but simply possessed the corresponding Sealed Artifact and had mastered a unique ritual to appease Devils. There was also the chance that Lumian was mistaken—Hisoka might not be linked to the serial murders four years ago.

With these thoughts in mind, Lumian contained his excitement and entered the Matani Import and Export Shop alongside Camus. They reached the section where various coffee beans were on display and secured a seat in the attached coffee shop.

"Highlander coffee with milk and two cubes of sugar," Camus ordered from the waiter with a sense of familiarity.

Lumian, on the other hand, opted for a cup of fragrant Intis coffee.

While waiting, Lumian casually observed the coffee choices of other customers. Turning to Camus, he inquired, "Judging by the name, are you a Feynapotterian?"

Camus hesitated briefly before truthfully responding, "My full name is Don Givré Camus Castiya."

He was willing to share his full name as the telegram mentioned Louis Berry having a good working relationship with the Church of Earth Mother.

Lumian chuckled.

"So, you're a noble lord."

The name Castiya belonged to the royal family of the Feynapotter Kingdom, and "Don" at the beginning of Camus's name signified "Honorable," representing his noble status.

Camus smiled wryly and remarked, "If I were truly a nobleman, why would I join a local patrol team in the Southern Continent?

"Our branch has long dwindled, but I can't deny that this last name and the Don prefix have provided me with advantages beyond those of ordinary people. I received a potion upon reaching adulthood, achieving Sequence 9 Beyonder status. However, my subsequent advancements were the result of my own efforts."

Accepting my 50,000 verl d'or bribe is part of your efforts? Lumian teased inwardly. He glanced at the two cups of coffee brought by the waiter, feigning casualness as he asked, "Don't you want to try some other coffees? Is highlander coffee your only choice?"

Camus raised his cup and took a sip. "I'm accustomed to its taste."

Lumian removed his golden straw hat and took a sip, smiling as he replied, "Fair enough. Just like how I can never acclimate to Fermo coffee. It's too bitter with regular sugar, and too cloying with too much. Some people appreciate the bitterness and fragrance of Fermo coffee, opting for just a hint of sugar."

Lumian anticipated Camus to respond with, "Yes, some even drink Fermo coffee without sugar." However, Camus's reply didn't align with his expectations.

"That's how it goes. What's on your mind?"

Internally exhaling, Lumian spoke openly, "As you can tell, I'm deeply intrigued by the serial murder case from four years ago. It's my sole purpose in Port Pylos—a highly valuable assignment."

"Highly valuable? It's just a Serial Killer." Camus let out a sigh of relief upon realizing Louis Berry was interested in discussing this matter.

Even if he were blind, he could tell Louis Berry's genuine concern about the serial murders four years prior.

Lumian vaguely explained with a smile, "This case holds secrets beyond your wildest imagination."

For example, transmigrators, or that Celestial Worthy…

Camus took another sip of his highlander coffee and reflected.

"I arrived in Matani over five years ago. At that time, the Intisians had just departed, and the kingdom and the Church's forces had completed their initial infiltration. I sensed numerous opportunities, thinking I could leverage my last name to secure a prominent position. Hence, I took a ship across the Fog Sea. The outcome differed from my expectations, but it was still acceptable."

Camus, in his mid-twenties, sighed as he recounted the past.

He continued, "When the case unfolded, I was merely a Sequence 8. Alongside a few teammates, I followed Vice-Captain Reaza to investigate."

He paused, offering Lumian a smile that seemed to convey, "If you want more information, show more sincerity."

In that moment, Lumian was contemplating another question.

If Hisoka truly belongs to the Devil pathway and has joined the patrol team, is there a way for him to conceal his identity?

Putting himself in those shoes, Lumian realized that concealing the abilities of the Hunter pathway wouldn't pose a problem.

Most situations could be handled with the Ascetic pathway's abilities and a couple of items.

Of course, the usage of an Ascetic's abilities was suspicious.

Could it be that Hisoka is indeed a bestowed individual who typically exhibits powers from the boon pathway? Lumian raised his cup and took a sip of coffee, avoiding delving into the details of the serial murders. He gazed at Camus thoughtfully and inquired, "Do you have members in the patrol team skilled in divination or decryption?"

Chapter 643: Target Suspect

643 Target Suspect

Camus couldn't comprehend why Louis Berry had abruptly changed the topic and neglected to charge for the pertinent information. Recollecting, he mentioned, "Yes, there's a Magician. He was initially an officer of the Admiral Guard but later got transferred to the patrol team."

Later… Lumian frowned slightly.

"When did he transfer to the patrol team?"

"Why do you ask? Last year," replied Camus. He had no clue about Louis Berry's inquiry, making it unclear what information was vital.

Last year… It doesn't seem to be Hisoka, judging by appearances… Although possibilities can't be completely ruled out. Serving as an officer in Admiral Querarill's guard provides opportunities for gathering intel. Perhaps he didn't purchase Fermo coffee from this Import Export Shop. It could be one of the other two cafes… Even so, there's a logical reason for buying it here. Yes, to relish watching the incompetence and frustration of the patrol team… Lumian temporarily placed the Magician on his suspect list.

He didn't dismiss the possibility that the other party was Hisoka just because they were a Sequence 7. This was because the level of a boon might not be the same as the level brought about by potions.

Furthermore, Lumian had vaguely perceived changes beneath Matani's surface from the Magician's departure from Admiral Querarill's guard to joining the patrol team.

Beyonders of the Seer pathway either originated from the Church of The Fool or were associated with Intis's Bureau 8 or secret organizations supporting Bureau 8, like the Secret Order. While there were wild Beyonders, very few evolved into Magicians. Coupled with Matani's history as an Intis colony, Lumian reasonably deduced that the Magician had close ties to the Intis Republic, a fact well-known to Admiral Querarill.

He retained the Magician in the guards to maintain a specific connection with Intis and handle the new Feynapotter Kingdom. By achieving a balance of power, he could better sustain his rule.

The Magician's departure from the Admiral Guard last year might indicate that Admiral Querarill had truly gauged the Feynapotter Kingdom's stance after years of collaboration and had sided with them.

Lumian's speculation didn't eliminate the suspicion that the Magician might be Hisoka. Loki, from Intis and a Secret Order member, held a mid-management position in Bureau 8. It was entirely possible for him to use the proper channels to involve Hisoka in Bureau 8's overseas section and recruit him into the Secret Order.

After contemplating for a moment, Lumian inquired, "Does that Magician have a fondness for Fermo coffee?"

He didn't directly ask about the other party's name and characteristics.

Camus shook his head.

"He doesn't appreciate coffee. His preference leans towards sweet drinks like Gwadar."

Gwadar, a well-loved local beverage in West Balam, was crafted from locally grown berries and contained a certain amount of caffeine. It had the same impact as coffee in enhancing mental strength and combating fatigue. However, its hue was orange-yellow, with a hint of sweetness amidst the sourness. It served both to alleviate the sweltering heat and quench thirst.

Prefers sweetness… Lumian felt a sense of disappointment.

Four years ago, Hisoka had no inkling that he would confront a monster like Ludwig in the future. It was unlikely for him to deliberately splash some unsweetened Fermo coffee on the table with the chocolate. Lumian cautiously believed now that Hisoka truly enjoyed bitter coffee.

In that case, the Magician, with a sweet tooth, probably wasn't Hisoka. Unless Hisoka meticulously maintained the traits of each identity, consistently playing the role of a Magician who relished drinking Gwadar on a daily basis.

He wasn't an Actor who needed to meticulously perform every aspect of his daily life!

Moreover, he had no reason to digest Faceless!

As he contemplated, Lumian's heart skipped a beat.

Actor…

If Hisoka is genuinely a Beyonder of the Devil pathway, apart from his belief in the Celestial Worthy of Heaven and Earth for Blessings due to transmigration, he might also be influenced by the Mother Tree of Desire in his daily life.

Could it be that the boon of the Hisoka pathway doesn't come from one of the Celestial Worthy's Seer, Apprentice, or Marauder, but rather from the Mother Tree of Desire?

The current Celestial Worthy desires the invasion of evil gods into the world within the barrier. It's not implausible for Him to collaborate with the Mother Tree of Desire and tacitly permit Hisoka to exploit the Mother Tree of Desire…

With a fresh train of thought, Lumian observed the now-silent Camus and took a sip of Intis coffee, offering a smile as he changed the subject.

"Any Beyonders from the Prisoner pathway in the patrol team?"

He had long suspected that the Mother Tree of Desire was an evil deity at the pinnacle of the Criminal, Prisoner, and Scrooge pathways. The corresponding boons likely originated from one of them or were intertwined.

Lumian refrained from asking about the existence of the Scrooge pathway because it was even more suspicious than the Criminal pathway, also known as the Devil pathway. It didn't belong to the twenty-two paths of the divine.

It was akin to a thief being apprehended by the police and asking in confusion, "I clearly disguised myself and left no traces. How did you quickly lock onto me," only to receive the answer, "This isn't Trier. No ordinary person would disguise themselves as a turkey and hide in a secluded alley."

"Do you think there's a spy from the Rose School of Thought in the patrol team?" Camus believed Louis Berry was casually raising the issue of the Rose School of Thought's interest in Port Pylos. "No, definitely not. He adheres to temperance and doesn't indulge at all."

Lumian smiled.

"In other words, there really is a Beyonder from the Prisoner pathway?"

"Yes, a Sequence 6 Zombie…" Camus confirmed.

Lumian interjected suddenly, "Don't disclose who he is, what he looks like, or his characteristics. Answer a few questions first."

"What questions?" Camus, feeling a bit disoriented from the rapidly changing topics, planned to decide when to ask for benefits later.

Lumian held a porcelain cup filled with Intis coffee and casually said, "When did he join the patrol team?"

"Half a year after me," Camus recalled.

You arrived in Matani over five years ago and joined the patrol team shortly after. Half a year later means that the Prisoner was already on the patrol team when the serial murder case occurred four years ago… Lumian's spirits lifted as he pondered for a moment.

"Did he face a catastrophe in the past and nearly died?"

"No." Camus shook his head. "At least, I don't know."

Lumian maintained his smile, showing no signs of disappointment, and said, "Does he have a liking for Fermo coffee?"

"Yes, he adores Fermo coffee and is the type who doesn't add sugar," replied Camus without much thought. Then, he remembered Louis Berry's inquiry about the Magician's preference for Fermo coffee in the patrol team.

He quickly formed a guess.

"Is there an issue with the ones enjoying Fermo coffee? Does the culprit of the serial murders four years ago have a taste for Fermo coffee? There are very few places in Port Pylos where you can get Fermo coffee. This is one of them. Even cafes selling Fermo coffee procure the beans from here… Are you suspecting that the murderer from four years ago is part of the patrol team?"

Impressive. You reacted swiftly and identified the core issue… Lumian inwardly praised Camus.

Simultaneously, a surge of joy filled his heart.

In Matani, Fermo coffee was a rare commodity, and those who preferred it without sugar were even rarer. Moreover, this individual was on the patrol team and seemingly from the Prisoner pathway!

With so many conditions aligning, Lumian felt like he had caught Hisoka by the tail!

To avoid triggering any sense of malice and danger, Lumian refrained from asking about the patrol team member's name, appearance, identity, or characteristics.

Feigning ignorance about the enemy, Lumian casually asked, "Is he from around here?"

Observing Camus's silence, Lumian added with a smile, "I won't claim the official bounty."

Camus's expression eased.

"He's a local of Port Pylos, born in Tizamo Town, which is part of Port Pylos."

Though the patrol team wasn't as stringent in member recruitment as the various Churches and governments, they still gathered basic information and conducted verifications. Otherwise, Admiral Querarill might have to worry about being assassinated by a patrol team member investigating a Beyonder case one day.

Tizamo Town… the location of one of Hisoka's pranks… It fits! Lumian controlled his excitement, preventing the corners of his mouth from curling up. Regrettably, he told Camus,

"Unfortunately, that doesn't seem to be the target."

This was to prevent Camus from investigating the target.

This could potentially alert the other party to the corresponding malice!

"Alright." Camus shrugged.

Curious, he inquired, "How did you find out that the murderer from the serial killings four years ago liked Fermo coffee?"

"I was already aware of such a person before starting the investigation," Lumian replied with a meaningful tone.

He chose not to disclose that the information came from the thin aluminum foil wrapping of the chocolate. Revealing this might prompt Camus to believe he could uncover more clues and reignite the investigation, potentially drawing Hisoka's attention.

With this realization, Lumian understood something.

I should now be a target for Hisoka, but fishing has its benefits…

Louis Berry, adorned with a golden straw hat, had bribed members of the patrol team to examine the files of the serial murder case from four years ago. Other team members paid little attention, but if the Prisoner was indeed Hisoka, he would have detected Lumian—his adversary's investigation into the four-year-old serial murder case.

Hisoka refrained from taking action likely because Lumian openly presented himself as Louis Berry, making no effort to hide his identity. This led to the suspicion that Lumian was fishing, making Hisoka cautious of stepping into a potential trap. There was no sense of malice or danger perceived, as Lumian didn't possess details about the suspect's identity. Lumian was merely preparing for a potential surprise attack from a Devil or Desire Apostle.

Before, I fished to catch fish, but now my fishing is a bluff… Lumian's thoughts clarified as he looked at Camus and said,

"Keep an eye out for anyone at the police headquarters who enjoys Fermo coffee."

"Alright," Camus agreed, thinking that Louis Berry had identified the suspect as a member of the patrol team and the police through details he wasn't aware of. For now, the possibility of the patrol team members was tentatively ruled out.

After finishing the remaining Intis coffee and settling the bill with the corresponding verl d'or, Lumian donned the golden straw hat and maintained his smile. He left the Matani Import and Export Shop and Cania Street, step by step.

Passing by Port Pylos's police headquarters, he deliberately cast a few glances.

Chapter 644: Patrol Team

Camus stood at the entrance of the Matani Import and Export Shop, casually smoking a cigarette as he observed the passing customers. Despite his watchful eyes, he didn't spot anyone purchasing Fermo coffee.

As the gas street lamps gradually illuminated the surroundings, casting a dark blue hue across the sky, Camus extinguished his cigarette and tossed it into a nearby trash can. He then made his way back to the beige four-story building that housed the patrol team.

Originally planning to indulge in an Intis feast in a neighborhood frequented by foreigners to celebrate his unexpected windfall of 40,000 verl d'or, his plans were disrupted by Louis Berry. By the time he returned, it was already late, and he couldn't be bothered to wait for a top chef to prepare something special. Instead, he decided to return to the patrol team, pool money with his close teammates, and order takeout from a nearby restaurant. After satisfying his hunger, he intended to relax at a bar or dance hall.

While crossing the hall, Camus spotted a teammate with dark brown skin, thick lips, and a height exceeding 1.8 meters. Curious, he inquired, "Why did the guy in the straw hat come looking for you again?

"Heh, I heard you and the others caught a Serial Killer and got a bounty of 50,000 verl d'or?"

In Matani, the currency was commonly denoted in verl d'or and Delexi copper coins, a system ingrained during Intis colonization. Despite Admiral Querarill's control, there were no significant changes in this aspect. The only difference was a partnership with the Feynapotter Kingdom's bank that facilitated the free exchange of verl d'or and gold risot.

If he were one of the two teammates--either the Magician or the Zombie--whom Louis Berry had asked about, Camus would undoubtedly be on high alert. However, the person standing in front of him was Sow, a Sequence 8 Pugilist of the Warrior pathway. Sow had joined the patrol team as an adventurer just last year and was known for having a pleasant personality. Besides a bit of laziness and a love for enjoyment, there were no significant issues.

Camus laughed and said, "That's my informant. Without him, I wouldn't have received that much bounty."

Sow, with his single eyelids, had a realization.

"Did he come to you just now to get his share?"

Camus thought for a moment and replied, "That's one reason. The other reason is that he's still investigating the serial murders from four years ago and wanted to ask me for some details."

He had kept the case dossier hidden from the captain and vice-captains of the patrol team, but he couldn't keep it from his teammates. Therefore, he had no intention of concealing Louis Berry's investigation into the serial murders from four years ago. Moreover, he planned to monitor the police headquarters to identify anyone who enjoyed Fermo coffee and seemed suspicious. He would need his teammates' assistance to some extent.

"Any progress? Any chance of claiming the bounty?" Sow, dressed in a pleated shirt and carrying a broadsword, displayed visible interest.

Camus wasn't ready to provide detailed information at the moment. He vaguely responded, "He suspects that the murderer might be hiding at the police headquarters from four years ago. I plan to investigate discreetly."

"Why do you think the murderer is a police officer?" Sow looked puzzled.

Camus hadn't discussed this with Lumian earlier, so he pondered for a moment and explained, "Consider this. In the case four years ago, only Beyonders were targeted. Several of them usually concealed their identities.

How could the murderer accurately locate them and know that they were Beyonders?

"Only us or those from the police headquarters at a certain rank can access that kind of information. It's easier to verify if there are Beyonders of the Devil pathway on the patrol team."

Four years ago, during their investigation, Vice-Captain Reaza had proposed this idea. However, he only suspected that the Serial Killer was hiding within the patrol team and hadn't considered the police headquarters or the Admiral Guard. Subsequently, the patrol team conducted an investigation and found no suspicious individuals, leading them to shift their focus.

"I see a glimmer of hope and smell the fragrance of verl d'or," Sow said with anticipation. "If you need help, feel free to look for me. I heard that Kolobo and the others just followed you to the scene and each got 5,000 verl d'or!"

"No problem," Camus readily agreed.

Then, he walked past Sow and along the corridor toward his office.

At the door of his office, Kolobo poked his head out, observing the conversation between Camus and Sow.

Kolobo, about the same age as Camus, in his mid-twenties, had dark hair, azure eyes, and a slender figure. He held a pair of black sunglasses in his hand.

He lowered his voice and said to Camus, "Stay away from Sow for the time being."

"Why?" Camus asked, surprised.

Observing Sow vanish through the door leading to the hall, Kolobo averted his gaze and explained, "I have a feeling that something bad will happen if one interacts with him during this period."

"Then why didn't you warn him?" Camus frowned in confusion.

As a Sequence 8 Robot of the Monster pathway, Kolobo possessed formidable spiritual perception and could vaguely sense certain things.

"I warned him. He thinks everything's fine. I even reported it to the Captain." Kolobo shrugged.

As he spoke, the thin Beyonder recalled something.

"That adventurer, Louis Berry, is also dangerous. When I arrived at the scene this morning, I didn't dare to look directly at him. Occasionally, I would glance at him and see large amounts of blood, flames, and death.

"I didn't want to tell you at first. I felt that if I said it, fate would suffocate me. Phew, it actually seems okay to say it now. It seems I'm too sensitive."

That dangerous? As expected of a great adventurer who received a bounty of 600,000 verl d'or at once... While Camus, who knew about Louis Berry's deeds, wasn't overly shocked, this was the first time he had heard a Monster like Kolobo describe someone in such a way.

Camus patted Kolobo's shoulder.

"Thank you. I'll be careful."

With that settled, he asked curiously, "Was Louis Berry the first person to give you such a feeling?"

"No, there's another one." Kolobo shook his head.

"Who is it?" Camus was surprised.

Kolobo's expression suddenly turned serious.

"I can't say. I'll die if I say it. I'll die!"

With that, the thin Beyonder swiftly left Camus's office.

…

Upon returning to Hotel Orella, Lumian headed straight for the master bedroom.

In the subterranean suite, even during the scorching season, a refreshing coolness lingered in the air.

On the desk in the master bedroom, a neatly folded letter awaited Lumian.

Madam Magician's response… Lumian picked up the letter and began reading.

"Excellent. You have a good understanding of yourself.

"The Rose School of Thought and the Numinous Episcopate will be managed by dedicated personnel. No need for you to take unnecessary risks. Concentrate on dealing with Hisoka. If they request your help, you may cooperate.

"The Beyonder characteristics left behind by members of the Rose School of Thought, especially those of the Devil and Prisoner pathways, come with a certain level of troublesome corruption. It's advisable not to sell them or randomly seek out an Artisan to craft items. If you need to, you can sell them to me or let me find an Artisan. Keeping them in the Traveler's Bag is also fine. Compared to the Shadow Branch boxing gloves, Mr. Fool's seal, and the attention and influence of other items on you, they're as weak as an ordinary newborn baby."

Relieved by this response, Lumian took a breath and activated the black mark on his right shoulder, vanishing from the room.

After a while, he materialized atop a bell tower on Avenue du Boulevard in Trier.

Gazing at the luxurious Champs-Élysées in the distance and the already lit lamps, Lumian couldn't hold back any longer. He needed to carefully consider the information he had just obtained from Camus.

With the Berserk Sea, the Feynapotter Kingdom, and half of the Intis Republic between them, Lumian could devise a plan to hunt Hisoka without worrying about the enemy sensing malice and danger!

Perhaps only an Angel could sense over such a distance.

Though Lumian lacked specific information about his target or Hisoka's identity and had no concrete plan, caution was paramount when he had the ability to be cautious.

Relying on his Ascetic trait, he endured, putting aside thoughts of the corresponding matters. Only when far from Port Pylos and the Southern Continent did he carefully consider details, allowing his thoughts to run free.

After an indeterminate amount of time, Lumian vanished from the bell tower.

Clang! Clang! Clang!

The pendulum clock struck 7 p.m.

…

The next morning.

Upon entering the hall, Camus spotted Louis Berry, adorned in a golden straw hat, seated on a sofa in the reception area.

Why is he here again? Recalling Kolobo's warning, Camus frowned and approached with concern.

"What can I do for you this time?" he asked calmly, keeping his emotions in check.

Lumian chuckled.

"I need some information, but it won't be from you. Find a reliable teammate who isn't privy to our discussion yesterday evening. Meet me at the Matani Import and Export Shop.

"I can offer 5,000 verl d'or for this."

A peculiar request… 5,000 verl d'or. How generous… Is he trying to avoid a Devil's danger premonition? Camus, an experienced official Beyonder, quickly made the connection.

He refrained from overthinking and pondered for a moment before responding, "Agreed."

Heading into the office area, Lumian rose and departed, making his way to the Matani Import and Export Shop nearby.

Soon, a man sat opposite Lumian, who was savoring his coffee.

The man, with dark hair and a relatively thin build, was a member of the patrol team who had accompanied them to the scene yesterday. Today, he wore dark-black sunglasses, giving him the appearance of a blind individual.

"I'm Kolobo. Camus mentioned a chance to earn 5,000 verl d'or," the patrol team member introduced himself in fluent Intisian.

Amused, Lumian observed Kolobo's demeanor. Taking out a pen and paper, he counted out 5,000 verl d'or notes and slid them over.

"Write down the Prisoner pathway Beyonder's name and details from the patrol team. Ensure I don't catch sight of it. Fold it into a square after writing."

Kolobo, almost as if blind, fumbled for the banknotes.

He bent down and counted, nearly burying his head under the table.

"Why aren't you looking at me?" Lumian asked with curiosity.

Trembling, Kolobo replied, "I fear I might truly go blind."

Are you able to see something you shouldn't? From the Monster pathway? Lumian pondered but refrained from probing further.

Kolobo turned around and swiftly wrote down the corresponding information on the table behind him, folding the paper and passing it to Lumian.

Without a second glance, Lumian promptly received the information and stowed it in his Traveler's Bag.

After settling the bill for his coffee, he headed to the washroom.

His figure vanished once more.

Chapter 645: "Gifts"

After Louis Berry left the coffee area, Kolobo breathed a sigh of relief. He removed his sunglasses, retrieved the 5,000 verl d'or, and counted it again.

His gut told him this deal would work out. That's the only reason he dared to risk coming to the Matani Import and Export Shop. Still, his whole body had been trembling with fear. He couldn't even keep his eyes open most of the time, and his hands were shaking so badly that he was surprised it was legible.

Trouble always waits until it's ready to explode, he thought, clutching his sunglasses.

He stood up and headed for the door.

Something was wrong. He could feel it. His body tensed with some kind of danger sense he couldn't explain.

His heart raced as he scanned the place professionally, trying to pinpoint the danger. Kolobo's footsteps changed--sometimes fast, sometimes slow. He'd zip off in one direction only to stop short a few paces later.

Kolobo took in the morning sun, the quiet shop that had just opened its doors, and the handful of customers scattered about. Not a single pair of eyes seemed fixed on him, and there was no one lurking in the shadows, observing his every move.

Yet, following his instincts, his feet carried him back to the coffee shop area. That's where he finally stopped, in front of the bathroom sign.

Two years as a Beyonder taught Kolobo the most important lesson: trust your gut. Without thinking, he yanked open the heavy wooden door and walked inside.

The Matani Import and Export Shop wasn't some back-alley dive. This restroom was big. Three urinals, three stalls, and gas lamps flickered on the clean tile.

Kolobo headed to the sink to splash cold water on his face. Maybe that would shake this weird danger feeling that was creeping all over him.

As he looked up, a face stared back at him in the mirror.

But it wasn't his.

The face was freakishly white. The guy looked late twenties, with light brown skin and eyes that flashed a dark, sickly green. He stared at Kolobo with dead, cold eyes.

Kolobo's brain short-circuited as recognition hit.

Twanaku TupiÃ¡n, the only Prisoner pathway Beyonder on their patrol team. The guy had become a Sequence 6 Zombie last year.

He was also the first guy to ever make Kolobo's skin crawl. If he told anyone else, he gut told him he'd end up dead!

When Lumian asked Kolobo to spill the beans about the Prisoner pathway Beyonder on his team, something about it felt wrong. He'd almost bailed on the whole deal. He'd counted that huge 50,000 sum not out of distrust but because he needed time to think, to weigh the risk.

He decided to trust his gut, but he hadn't told Lumian about this feeling, this fear of TupiÃ¡n...

And now, here Twanaku TupiÃ¡n was, reflected in the mirror.

This is a Sequence 5 Wraith power. When did he advance? Kolobo could barely think over the growing horror. Suddenly, his body felt like it'd been dropped into an icy lake.

Twanaku Twanaku's face in the mirror vanished.

Kolobo could barely move. An icy coldness gripped him, the kind that chilled you to the bone.

It wasn't his own hands that were moving--they lifted without him wanting them to. A voice drifted through his ears, flat and emotionless.

"Looks like my cover is blown. You were actually asked to provide my information.

"I'll get out of Port Pylos, but I'm going to leave two gifts for Lumian Lee."

What did that even mean? What kind of gift? And who the heck was Lumian Lee? Kolobo's thoughts were a jumbled mess. His own hands were tightening around his neck.

Then, with a sickening jolt, he realized what "gift" the voice was talking about.

Twanaku TupiÃ¡n was going to kill him and leave a gift--his dead body!

But he said two gifts. What was the other one?

...

In the four-story beige building of the patrol team.

Camus sipped his Highlander coffee and read the West Balam Telegraph, contemplating the deal between Kolobo and Louis Berry.

If successful, as an intermediary, he would receive 20% of the amount.

Knock, knock, knock. A gentle rap echoed on Camus's office door.

"Please come in." Though not particularly young, Camus had ample experience, leading one of the patrol team's operations teams. If there were a vacancy for the vice-captain position, his only competition would be Twanaku TupiÃ¡n of the Prisoner pathway.

The Southern Continent was a chaotic place, especially in an area torn between multiple factions. Whether dealing with the bloodthirsty Rose School of Thought, the ominous Numinous Episcopate, ambitious adventurers, spies from various countries, or missionaries, danger lurked at every corner. Some would take the initiative to assassinate patrol team members, while others would rebel and escape. Meticulous planning was not uncommon, and even the patrol team members found themselves as targets. Consequently, the patrol team faced casualties every year, leading to a constant need for new recruits.

Encountering more attacks had its advantages. Victorious confrontations often yielded valuable items and Beyonder-related ingredients. Many of the patrol team's advancement formulas and potions were acquired in such situations, creating a noteworthy trend.

Compared to cities of similar size in the Northern Continent, Port Pylos had an even greater number of official Beyonders, especially Mid-Sequence Beyonders. However, they lacked higher levels of power or corresponding Sealed Artifacts.

Camus found himself in a tight spot financially due to his rapid advancement outpacing his cousins.

Arriving in Matani State and Port Pylos as a Sequence 9 Arbiter, he had swiftly climbed to a Sequence 7 Justiciar in just five years. His goal was to advance to Sequence 6 and become a Judge, and he had recently been gathering the funds to purchase the necessary materials. If the opportunity to become a vice-captain arose, the patrol team would certainly contribute resources to aid his advancement.

Spoils of war weren't always suitable for him; sometimes, he needed to trade with teammates or sell them to the patrol team for money. He patiently waited for the potion formulas and Beyonder ingredients corresponding to his pathway to appear.

The patrol team, being relatively new, hadn't accumulated substantial reserves. Camus needed to find a way to purchase practical mystical items, regularly replenish charms, potions, and other essentials to stay prepared against assassinations and conflicts.

In such a situation, money was naturally scarce.

Chaos was a path to hell but also a ladder to the top!

Pugilist Sow entered.

With his brown braids gently swaying, Sow, clad in a sky-blue shirt and beige pants, approached Camus with one hand in his pocket, smiling as he asked, "Have you seen Kolobo? I need to discuss something with him."

Camus had already prepared a reason.

"He went to the Import and Export Shop to buy coffee beans."

Sow tersely acknowledged, "Then I'll wait for him to return."

"What's up?" Camus asked casually.

Sow took two steps forward and smiled.

"There's an investigation we would like to involve him in. Maybe he can uncover clues that others can't."

"You bastards, aren't you concerned about Kolobo getting hurt?" Camus replied with amusement, lifting his coffee and taking a sip.

At that moment, Sow withdrew his right hand from his trouser pocket, holding a poker card flickering with a metallic gleam between his thumb and index finger.

The card portrayed a grayish-white clown.

With a swift motion, Sow hurled the poker card at Camus's head.

…

In the men's washroom of the Matani Import and Export Shop.

Kolobo finally caught his reflection in the mirror.

His skin had turned a sickly green, and his hands were locked around his own neck, the pressure making his bones crack. Twanaku Tupián stared back at him from his bright blue eyes.

Kolobo tried to scream, but nothing came out. He wanted to run, but his legs wouldn't move.

It was like his body wasn't his anymore—it was killing him.

Ugh… A choked sound finally escaped Kolobo's throat, too quiet for anyone to hear.

Fear and despair tightened around his heart.

Then, Kolobo's fingers slipped.

A figure emerged from the shadows by the bathroom vents.

Lumian—black hair, green eyes, all dressed in black and white with a golden straw hat.

A flicker of surprise crossed his face, then understanding. He held a black bone flute to his lips.

A hum resounded, accompanied by a melancholic tune echoing from the dark red holes.

Symphony of Hatred!

Why did I only sense malice and danger now… Just as this thought crossed Twanaku's mind, Twanaku's murderous intent exploded, fueled by the haunting melody.

Silently, a figure peeled away from Kolobo's body. It was Twanaku Tupián, his light brown skin gone deathly pale.

Blood vessels bulged in his yellow eyes, threatening to burst.

The Symphony of Hatred tore into Kolobo, already weak with fear.

His heart almost stopped. He crumpled to the floor, barely alive.

Lumian stopped the melody. Holding the black bone flute, he slid back into the shadows and under the vent.

A moment later, he reappeared behind Twanaku Tupián, who was practically vibrating with murderous intent. Lumian lifted the flute, its blood-colored holes gleaming ominously, and took a breath.

Finally, you're here!

Chapter 646: Indoor Fight

Twanaku Tupián's ears rang, his eyes stinging with blood. His mind burned, his thoughts scattering like sparks. For an agonizing moment, he couldn't process his situation, couldn't even think about the enemy closing in.

Blood, smelling strangely metallic, trickled from his eyes and nose. His pale skin darkened ominously.

"Ha!"

Lumian spat a blast of pale-yellow light, hitting the suspected Hisoka from barely two meters away.

Twanaku's eyes slammed shut, and he collapsed. Before he hit the ground, Lumian's Symphony of Hatred, a black bone flute, jabbed towards his neck.

Instantly, the tiled bathroom floor dissolved into a vast, muddy expanse of darkness. Arms burst upward.

Some were stripped of skin, all raw muscle and glistening tendon. Others twisted and ghostly, pale and transparent. Some bore bulging eyes that spun madly, others sprouted thick green growths…

The grotesque limbs tore at Lumian and Twanaku, clawing and dragging.

This was Twanaku's spell, a death-type enchantment once called Vengeful Wraith's Entanglement, meant to summon an undead horde to paralyze his targets.

But as a Mid-Sequence Beyonder of the Devil pathway, his power twisted the spell into something new—the Fallen Abyss!

He could alter a space in advance, allowing undead or fallen creatures to lurk beneath the surface. Anyone unfortunate enough to step inside would be grabbed by unseen arms and dragged into the muddy, pitch-black depths. The Abyss would slow and weaken its victims, the icy touch of the undead stealing their strength with agonizing speed. If they were pulled all the way under, they'd be corrupted and lost.

Twanaku had cast this spell in the bathroom before attacking Kolobo. He hadn't wanted any nosy employees or customers to stumble on the scene, but it turned out to be a lucky break. That's why he'd appeared in the mirror instead of right inside Kolobo's eyes.

Lumian's attack with the Symphony of Hatred came to an abrupt halt.

Countless arms wrapped around his ankles, calves, hips, and torso. A wave of icy stiffness washed over him, his movements turning sluggish.

It was the same for Twanaku. With the Wraith and Desire Apostle unconscious, the Fallen Abyss slipped from his control, leaving him vulnerable. His limp body was seized by the strange arms and dragged to the ground.

Nearby, Kolobo, badly injured and out for the count, was pulled into the muddy, pitch-black depths of the illusory Abyss.

A burst of crimson flames exploded from Lumian's body, surrounding him like a blazing cloak.

The flames roared, scorching most of the arms into retreat. Still, some remained unaffected, their grip relentless. A creeping coldness numbed Lumian's body, but he regained a sliver of his former agility.

Before, he could have simply lunged forward, thrusting the black bone flute towards his enemy's neck. But now, the target—the one he believed was Hisoka—was about to vanish into the ground.

Thud!

Twanaku slammed into the ground, the impact jarring him awake. The Spell of Harrumph's grip faded, and he finally regained his senses.

His toughest moment, that relentless surge of desire, was behind him.

Lumian lowered his head, a single scornful sound escaping him.

"Hmph!"

Twin beams of white light shot out while Lumian retracted his hands, fingers slipping back into his Traveler's Bag.

The beams missed their mark, but horrifying, bloody arms sprouted from the ground, a gruesome forest that blocked Twanaku from their path.

With a flash of awareness, Twanaku seized control of the Fallen Abyss spell, shielding himself and attacking his enemy.

The arms hit by the Spell of Harrumph softened, sinking back into the pitch-black mud as if drained.

Twanaku took his chance. His body twisted, morphing into a dark, oozing malevolence, a shape born from the darkest shadows of his heart.

Silently, Twanaku transformed into an illusory, viscous, and foul black liquid, merging with the muddy Abyss and vanishing.

The evil arms, unfazed by the flames, clung to Lumian, limiting his movement.

His hands flew to his Traveler's Bag, pulling out a suit of gleaming silver armor.

He set the armor beside him, sinking it firmly into the pitch-black mud.

Pride Armor!

Evil, writhing arms erupted from the illusory Abyss—and the corresponding spirit world. Guided by the spell, they lunged for the Pride

Armor, seizing its ankles, legs, torso, and back.

The Pride Armor struck back, a broadsword of pure light flashing in its hand. Blinding, holy light flooded the washroom.

The shadowy arms recoiled with hisses of black smoke, retreating into the depths.

The pitch-black mud dissolved, revealing the bathroom's stone tiles.

Kolobo, who'd been on the brink of sinking into the Abyss, lay unconscious on the floor.

Just meters away, near the washroom door, a figure of viscous black liquid prepared to flee.

Now free, Twanaku came to a swift decision.

He wouldn't waste time trying to possess Lumian Lee. Instead, he'd abandon the Matani Import and Export Shop—and Port Pylos!

It was a trap. He had to escape before it closed around him. Staying to fight back was foolish—he couldn't risk lingering just to satisfy his rage and murderous desire.

That would be far too dangerous!

Twanaku was glad he'd chosen to give Lumian Lee those two "gifts". He'd even divided his favorite mystical items to do it. The patrol team should be in chaos by now, focused on a false target.

The distraction would give him his chance to escape.

Before, Twanaku hadn't been focused on killing Camus. His priority was taking out Kolobo and escaping. If everything went smoothly, there shouldn't be problems for either side. Any chaos caused by Camus's death would be a bonus—

distracting the enemy by having the other passing off as the real deal.

He'd sent that extra "gift" as a precaution, not some bloodthirsty urge!

…

In Camus's office, nestled inside the patrol team's beige four-

story building, a poker card shimmered with metallic light as it hurtled towards him. Coffee was the last thing on his mind. He dove behind his desk with a surge of adrenaline, planning to send the table flying back at Sow before blasting him with Psychic Piercing.

The joker-faced card soared over Camus's head, missing its target.

But then, as if it had a mind of its own, the card swerved and plunged down, aiming for Camus's back.

It seemed to melt right into him, vanishing in a flash.

Sow's grin stretched wider. He strode to the desk, yanking the broadsword from his back.

…

Inside the men's bathroom of the Matani Import and Export Shop.

A figure made of thick, black liquid slipped through the crack under the door then strangely reformed in its original spot.

Bottle of Fiction!

The moment Lumian harbored malice and took out the Symphony of Hatred from the Traveler's Bag, Lumian had used this bathroom vent as a base, using the Bottle of Fiction to set one condition: only females could enter or exit!

That way, innocent customers wouldn't stumble into the dangerous Beyonder battle. And Hisoka couldn't escape without destroying the Bottle of Fiction first!

The black, liquid figure spread toward the vent, dodging the two white beams from Lumian.

Twanaku was done with dodging. His body swelled and warped, transforming into a monstrous giant almost three meters tall.

The monster's skin turned a dull, dark shade, and a pair of curved goat horns marked with strange patterns sprouted from his head. Colossal bat wings wreathed in blue and crimson flames lashed out, releasing a stinging, sulfurous stench.

Devil Transformation!

This was the signature power of a Sequence 6 Devil from the Prisoner pathway—a boost to strength, speed, defense… everything.

Lumian knew his target, the one he thought was Hisoka, was on high alert, braced to dodge his Spell of Harrumph. He stopped using it.

He decided against the Symphony of Hatred too. The situation was different.

Before, his enemy had been fueled by bloodlust in his murder attempt on Kolobo, a perfect trigger. Now, there was only a cold, emotionless focus.

With no guarantee that the Symphony of Hatred would work

—or that it wouldn't backfire—Lumian wasn't taking that chance.

Instead, a crimson spear sparked into existence. From a few meters away, he hurled it at the suspected Hisoka.

The second the spear left his hand, Lumian vanished.

He couldn't stay put. Possession by the Wraith, a mind-

shattering psychic blast from a Desire Apostle, some twisted desire spell—any of those were a risk!

Chapter 647: "Inexplicable Action"

In the face of the flaming spear, Twanaku's eyes, now crimson from the Devil Transformation, reflected dancing and burning crimson flames.

He remained unfazed. Instead, he conjured an aberration--a broadsword made of crimson magma and pale-blue flames.

Swiftly turning, Twanaku exposed his back to the flaming spear. With the magma broadsword in hand, he slashed at the foe who had seemingly teleported behind him, launching an attack.

The broadsword, adorned with crimson magma and pale-blue flames, sliced through the air but missed Lumian. It left only an exaggerated mark on the wall behind, a testament to its destructive force.

Had it not been for the Bottle of Fiction's protection, the bathroom wall would have been split in half. Even so, the bottle visibly trembled, bearing some damage.

The nearly white flaming spear also struck Twanaku's back, piercing a little before being halted by the elastic dark skin and sturdy flesh. It failed to penetrate the Devil's body, leaving only blackened traces from the resulting inferno.

Devils, armored in thick and tough natural protection, were resistant to flames, poison, and curses to a certain extent. Twanaku, in his Zombie state, possessed a steel-like body that could withstand bullets and cannonballs. Lumian's flaming spear and fireball attacks, as well as the Fire Ravens' onslaught, posed little threat. Standing still, Twanaku could endure repeated attacks without suffering severe injuries.

Additionally, his ability to transform into a Wraith allowed him to evade explosions effortlessly.

"Hisoka" Twanaku believed that, without the support of the Tarot Club, the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society, and powerful demigods, he could have tortured Lumian to death. Even with teleportation, spells rendering him temporarily unconscious, and mystical items, most of Lumian's attacks were ineffective against Wraiths and Desire Apostle Beyonders. The Psychic Shock and Desire Detonation further restrained him, leaving him vulnerable to the assaults of Wraiths and undead creatures.

Having missed his strike, Twanaku noticed Lumian's figure reappear in midair.

As anticipated, Lumian had chosen to teleport behind and launch an attack. However, there was a notable change compared to previous encounters.

Hovering near the ceiling and the vent, Lumian opened his mouth and emitted a harrumph.

The moment a pale-yellow light shot out, Hisoka Twanaku's figure faded and vanished.

In Lumian's pupils, a devilish figure materialized--dark skin, long goat horns, bat wings on its back, and no longer wielding the Sword of Lava.

Swiftly, Twanaku transformed into a Wraith, leaping into Lumian's eyes, deftly dodging the Spell of Harrumph's attack.

Devil Transformation didn't impede his Wraith abilities!

Lumian's face paled, a dark-green hue tinting his features. His hands involuntarily rose, reaching for his neck, and his body plummeted to the ground.

Prepared for such a situation, Lumian didn't resist. While he could still struggle, he didn't halt his hands or resist the Wraith's control. Instead, he sank his consciousness into his right hand.

The frenzied, bloody aura of superiority dissipated slightly, causing Twanaku to instinctively tremble.

He subconsciously detached from Lumian's body and leaped onto the sink.

Lumian activated the black mark on his right shoulder, vanishing before crashing to the ground.

This time, he appeared behind the motionless silver-white full-body armor.

Behind!

The Pride Armor spun around abruptly, raising the broadsword of light and slashing at Lumian in the not-too-small bathroom. Lumian employed Spirit World Traversal once more, vanishing from the silver armor's path.

Within the mirror, "Hisoka" Twanaku was somewhat bewildered.

Why did Lumian Lee provoke his Sealed Artifact and engage in combat with it?

Am I not his enemy target?

The negative effects of a Sealed Artifact?

Though he didn't understand what was going on, Twanaku sensed danger instinctively.

His Danger Premonition, along with a possible insight from Emperor Roselle--"If something shows signs of abnormality, there must be an abnormal factor hidden. Such factors often signify danger."

Without hesitation, Twanaku left the sink and leaped to the bathroom door in his colossal Devil form.

Conjuring a dozen or so light-blue Sulfur Fireballs, he directed them at the wooden door in unison.

Twanaku, who had shaken the Bottle of Fiction with his sword, knew that the current seal could be broken by brute force. There was no need to find the true exit or kill the enemy who had constructed the seal.

For this reason, he chose to forgo teaming up with the full-body armor to assail Lumian.

He reckoned that any further delay, even if Lumian Lee were to fall on the spot, would lead to him being surrounded, facing a lethal blow with no chance of escaping alive.

In such a scenario, killing Lumian Lee would render the effort meaningless!

Certainly, Twanaku wasn't about to let Lumian off easily. Following the Sulfur Fireball assault, he clenched his fists and spoke a word in Devil language filled with depravity and filth.

"Slow!"

This was a manifestation of the Language of Foulness, capable of stiffening and even halting the movements of targets within a seven- to eight-meter radius for approximately two seconds.

Considering the bathroom's size, this radius covered the entire area.

Lumian's form reappeared.

Once more, he teleported behind the Pride Armor, conjuring a crimson fireball almost white in his hand.

Influenced by the Language of Foulness, both Lumian and the Pride Armor moved sluggishly. One "slowly" launched a fireball, while the other struggled to turn around, as if its joints had rusted.

Rumble!

The Sulfur Fireballs erupted against the bathroom door.

A translucent, illusory membrane materialized on the bathroom's side. Like glass, it shattered inch by inch, leaving crisscrossing marks that teetered on the brink of collapse.

The wooden door appeared charred and pieced together, reminiscent of a child's broken toy hastily glued back together.

Observing this, "Hisoka" Twanaku grasped that another strike could completely shatter the seal.

This time, he gathered seven to eight light-blue Sulfur Fireballs.

On the opposite end, Lumian's fireball finally collided with the Pride Armor's back, assisted by the explosive waves.

Amidst the rumbling and clanging, the silver armor stiffened.

Lumian activated the black mark on his right shoulder once more and teleported away from his current location.

Almost simultaneously, the Pride Armor overcame the effects of Slow with abnormal swiftness, swiftly turning around.

However, it still couldn't lock onto its target.

Twanaku felt a surge of amusement bubbling within him but maintained an unusual vigilance. His only wish was that the relentless bombardment would shatter the seal completely, granting him an avenue for escape.

In the next moment, the Sulfur Fireballs collided with the wooden door at the bathroom entrance. Twanaku witnessed the silver-white full-body armor squat down, driving the broadsword of light into the ground.

Wh— Twanaku's pupils dilated as he instinctively readied himself to transform into a Wraith.

Yet, he held back, exercising restraint. Aware of the potential consequences within the Warrior pathway, he understood the risk of subjecting himself to even greater harm.

Rumble!

Simultaneously with the explosion of the Sulfur Fireballs, the Sword of Dawn, embedded in the crevice in the stone tiles by the Pride Armor, disintegrated into fragments of light. Densely packed, they formed a flickering, violent, and sharp hurricane that swept in all directions, filled with the intent to annihilate everything.

Hurricane of Light!

Since it couldn't lock onto the backstabber, it opted for a wide-ranging assault!

The sharp and terrifying storm of light enveloped Twanaku and Kolobo on the ground. Lumian materialized in front of the latter, crouched down, shielding vital points. He faced the formidable hurricane head-on.

The washroom bore the brunt of the assault. The urinal was wrecked, and the cubicles silently collapsed, shedding a layer of bricks.

As a depraved creature, Twanaku had nowhere to hide. All he could do was endure the damage, his eyes flickering with a sharp light.

In the radiant blades' storm, Lumian's figure cracked inch by inch, shattering into numerous mirror fragments.

Mirror Substitution!

With his obstruction, Kolobo avoided fatal injuries but couldn't escape multiple bleeding wounds.

…

In Camus's office, within the beige four-story building housing the patrol team.

Crouched behind a table, Camus's face turned pale, tinged with a dark-green hue. It was as if a grayish-white clown laughed exaggeratedly in his eyes.

Camus strained to ignite bolts of lightning in his eyes, piercing Sow's mind. His betraying teammate grimaced in pain, causing his broadsword to lose strength and direction, crashing into the desk and failing to hit Camus.

In that critical moment, Camus drew a silver revolver from his right hand, aiming it not at Sow but at himself.

Across the street, in a room facing Camus's office,

Jenna, holding a telescope, huddled by the curtain, closely monitored Camus's condition.

Seeing the other party under attack and struggling, she swiftly grabbed the loudspeaker she had prepared and brought it to her mouth.

"Camus has been attacked!

"Camus has been attacked by the Rose School of Thought!

"Camus is being attacked in his office!"

The loudspeaker's sound reverberated through every room of the patrol team.

Chapter 648: Teamwork

On the top floor of the beige building belonging to the patrol team, a middle-aged man in a thin black suit heard Jenna's voice.

Without bothering to trace the source of the shout, he stood up abruptly and retrieved a white human skull, seemingly carved from crystal, from his hidden pocket.

The man, a mix of Intis and West Balam lineage, held the crystal skull and recited a mysterious language with a strong sense of death.

In the next moment, a decaying palm extended from the void in front of him. Its joints were thick, and its skin was bleeding, revealing signs of decay.

The palm belonged to a corpse that looked vaguely human but, upon closer inspection, resembled a monster.

Over 1.8 meters tall, its face concealed by a rusty bronze mask, and its torso composed of corpses from various species, including lions, tigers, black wolves, baboons, giant serpents, vultures, and humans themselves--all in a severe state of rot.

The corpse's bronze mask flickered with dark-red lights in its eyes as it took a step forward, arriving in Camus's office.

Faced with Camus, who had a revolver in his right hand, staggering toward his forehead, the monstrous corpse removed its bronze mask.

Underneath the mask, there was no nose, flesh, or bones. Only two dark-red balls of light and a mouth that occupied four-fifths of the head.

The mouth opened wide, revealing a pitch-black interior.

A terrifying suction force emanated from the mouth, affecting Camus's spirit but having no effect on the documents, newspapers, and other items on the desk. It only caused Camus's spirit to surface, as if pulled by an invisible force, about to be plunged into hell.

As Camus's Spirit Body materialized, the grayish-white clown seeped out of his flesh, revealing its complete form--a magnified, illusory poker card.

The poker card had no body of its own and was swiftly drawn out by the pitch-black mouth beneath the bronze mask. Camus's Spirit Body struggled.

Smack!

The poker card materialized and fell to the ground, emitting the sound of a heavy object colliding with solid bricks, but there was no metallic sound.

...

In the Matani Import and Export Shop, the male bathroom lay in ruins. The door and the wall facing the corridor crumbled into fragments, scattering for several meters, as if a storm had passed through.

The Bottle of Fiction had lost its effect.

Amidst the residual fragments of light and the lingering sulfur smell, Twanaku rolled out in his Devil form.

His pitch-black skin bore hideous wounds, and his flesh seemed to evaporate. Half of the two curved goat horns on his head were gone, and viscous black liquid flowed from the cracks.

The bat-like wings on his back were tattered and drooping.

With Twanaku's formidable physical strength, the Hurricane of Light from the Pride Armor shouldn't have caused such tragic and severe damage, but he was a Devil.

The Hurricane of Light possessed the unique ability to destroy evil creatures and undead beings.

It was like Twanaku undergoing purification while being sliced by a fragmentary blade. What made it more potent was their collaboration. Purification weakened defense and inflicted harm on the evil creature's spirit and flesh, while the fragmentary blade utilized purification to weaken defense and cut through flesh. The more wounds and the deeper they were, the better the purification effect.

Had Twanaku not resisted in his Devil form and instead transformed into a Wraith, he might have faced severe injury, teetering on the brink of death, or even elimination.

The Hurricane of Light could vanquish Wraiths and injure evil spirits.

Despite being severely injured, Twanaku, still capable of combat, calmly suppressed his tyrannical and bloodthirsty emotions. Realizing he had escaped the seal, he prepared to transform into a Wraith and escape through the surrounding mirrors.

Just as he made this decision, a sudden sense of Danger Premonition struck him.

The malice came from behind, and in the shadows outside the bathroom, Franca, dressed in an Assassin suit, emerged, raising her left hand.

On her left thumb, she wore an iron-colored ring with a thick band and a surface covered in small spikes--Ring of Punishment!

Franca's lake-blue eyes flickered with lightning, moving many times faster than the fastest bullets, shooting out silently with

Psychic Piercing!

Hidden Blade... Why do I only sense her malice now... The severely injured Twanaku couldn't dodge in time and suddenly heard an illusory shattering sound.

The shattering sound echoed from Twanaku's Spirit Body, and intense pain flooded his mind, compelling him to raise his hands to cover his head.

Seizing the opportunity, Franca swiftly took out a mirror and reflected Twanaku in his Devil form.

Black flames ignited in her left palm as she smeared it across the mirror's surface--

Demoness's curse!

Black flames erupted from Twanaku's body, but nearly two-thirds were suppressed by his flesh and blood, leaving only a portion of the colossal Devil's Spirit Body to be incinerated.

Being a Devil, immune to curses to a certain extent, helped Twanaku endure the Demoness's curse better, given his already ravaged state from the Hurricane of Light.

Finally free from the influence of Psychic Piercing, Twanaku, with his Spirit Body engulfed in black flames, transformed into a pitch-black, viscous liquid.

These liquids seemed to originate from the darkest corners of the human heart, representing the most sinister and shadowy desires and emotions.

Twanaku abandoned Wraith Form, choosing Desire Apostle's Desire Incarnation because Demoness's black flames targeted the Spirit Body more.

Before the pitch-black viscous liquid could fully elongate into a human figure, he fled into the nearby darkness, sensing a strong Danger Premonition in his heart.

At the corridor's entrance, Anthony Reid, donned in military-

green attire, appeared in a blind spot.

His eyes took on a faint golden hue, transforming into vertical pupils—Psychological Invisibility!

Frenzy!

Twanaku's mind buzzed, instantly breaking free from his Desire Incarnation state. Bloodshot eyes and livor mortis appeared on his body, emitting sulfurous blood.

He entered a frenzied state. Already grievously injured and subjected to Psychic Piercing and the Demoness's curse, he was on the verge of losing control.

Rumble!

Light-blue sulfur fireballs pelted the surroundings, propelled by Twanaku's wild instincts.

Franca's form quickly shattered into mirror fragments, while Anthony's body sprouted grayish-white dragon scales. He leaped toward the wall for cover.

Rumble!

Using up Franca's Mirror Substitution, Lumian teleported behind the frenzied Twanaku.

Having already unleashed the accumulated spirituality and strength within him, Lumian's spirituality surged, no longer drained.

Enduring the scorching sulfur flames and the blast's impact, Lumian focused on the oblivious, frenzied Twanaku. He harrumphed.

Two beams of white light shot from his nose, hitting what appeared to be Hisoka.

Twanaku collapsed, and the signs of madness began to fade.

Lumian didn't allow him to reach the ground. Extending his right hand, he grabbed Twanaku by the shoulder and teleported him into the spirit world!

In seconds, Lumian materialized at the edge of the primitive forest near Port Pylos.

Even during this process, he let out a harrumph. The pale-

yellow light emitted from his mouth knocked Twanaku out again, preventing him from regaining consciousness.

At that moment, a woman stood at the edge of the primitive forest. It was Hela, dressed like a black widow but not as distant as before.

Observing Twanaku, no longer in his colossal Devil state but emitting a sulfuric scent, with dark patterns on his skin, Hela nodded at Lumian and said, "It should be Hisoka."

Every time Hisoka participated in the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society, he only disguised himself superficially. If Hisoka's true identity was targeted, Hela, who was responsible for providing the gathering venue and entrance method, could still recognize him.

"Ha!" Lumian chuckled and added a new Spell of Harrumph to Hisoka.

Hela seized his arm and chanted an incantation.

The two of them, along with Hisoka, vanished like pencil drawings erased by an eraser.

In the ancient and dilapidated palace of the Nation of the Evernight.

As Lumian emerged from his concealed state, he harrumphed.

Two beams of white light descended, and Hisoka remained unconscious.

Hela's tone chilled as she remarked, "I'll let you enter the same dream."

"Thank you." Lumian released Hisoka, reclining against a broken stone pillar.

Moments later, his thoughts blurred until he heard Hela's voice.

"It's done."

Lumian snapped back, gazing into the interrogation room where Hisoka sat opposite.

This member of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society, Twanaku Tupián, bore light-brown skin, a blend of Northern and Southern Continent descent. His eyes gleamed flaxen, his hair dark. While not unattractive, his demeanor exuded indifference to life.

At the sight, Lumian's lips curved into a smile.

He had sought Hela's assistance primarily to craft an environment where he could safely unveil his plans after capturing Hisoka alive.

Otherwise, restraining Hisoka's resistance would have posed a significant challenge. Communicating with him would have been impossible if he remained unconscious until his demise. Destroying Hisoka's frontal lobe would strip away frustration, pain, and resentment, making it difficult to fulfill the requirements of the Reaper ritual.

Upon spotting Lumian, Hisoka suddenly struggled, but an invisible force held him back, preventing his transformation into a Wraith.

This was a dream controlled by Hela.

Hisoka calmed down and gazed at Lumian, posing the greatest question on his mind, "How did you manage to evade my Danger Premonition?"

Lumian's smile deepened. He looked down at Hisoka and said casually, "No need for a Demon Hunter's assistance. A sufficient distance and a Hypnotist would do the trick."

Chapter 649: Conspiracy Showcase

Sufficient distance and a Hypnotist... Hisoka repeated Lumian's words as if he had realized something.

Lumian stood in front of him, looking down, and questioned, "Do you think that, apart from Demon Hunters and higher-level Beyonders of the corresponding pathway, Devils mainly get killed based on chance encounters in battles?"

Hisoka regarded Lumian with indifference and remained silent.

Lumian pulled up a chair and sat down, crossing his right foot over his left knee. Casually, he said, "I've read a mysticism book about Devils. It's filled with numerous cases of hunting Devils.

"It's clear that Beyonders of most pathways rely on chance encounters to kill specific Devils. That's what I believed back then. However, when I revisited the detailed description of Devil abilities, I found a contradiction.

"This is how the mysticism book describes your Danger Premonition:

"Danger Premonition, also known as Malicious Perception--if an enemy can soon cause lethal harm to a Devil and takes clear action to do so, a Devil can sense the danger in advance and grasp the source. They can target it, kill it, take revenge, or escape, but it's impossible to know the exact details of the plan. Different Devils have different intuition ranges--from a few minutes to a day, from a few kilometers to as wide as a city."

"What's the contradiction between this and a battle encounter?" Hisoka asked, sitting upright, cold and curious.

"According to this description, Devils can indeed sense a battle encounter," Lumian said with a smile. "For example, even though I only intended to have a cup of coffee today and suddenly encountered a Devil, and had no choice but to kill him. For that Devil, it's literal. He should have sensed that my coffee-drinking at the café would pose a fatal danger to him in advance and that it would happen, but that's not the case in reality."

Observing Hisoka's thoughtful expression, Lumian clasped his hands together.

"This means that a Devil's Danger Premonition doesn't stem from fate. If it were a powerful Beyonder of the Monster pathway, there's a high chance they would suddenly feel that coffee isn't suitable today and avoid danger. But you can't.

"Since a Devil's Danger Premonition doesn't stem from precognition of fate, where does it stem from?

"Once, a high-ranking Demon enlightened me about the concept of the Abyss. According to its perspective, the Abyss holds two dimensions. The first is physical, with an entrance hidden somewhere in the real world. The second is in the mind, with an entrance nestled deep within everyone's hearts.

"Considering this insight, I believe we need to tweak the foundation of a Devil's Danger Premonition.

"It kicks in only when an adversary has a well-defined plan capable of inflicting fatal harm on a Devil soon. That's when the Devil can sense it beforehand.

"Got it? A more distinct thought process or intent."

Lumian adopted the cadence of Madam Magician to taunt Hisoka, weaving the narrative of his conspiracy.

"In the beginning, I probed bit by bit and investigated step by step. When I stumbled upon crucial information, I purposely skirted around it, leaving me in the dark about who I was dealing with and without a rough plan to handle the target.

"In simpler terms, I didn't have clear thoughts or intentions, and there was no effective plan to cause lethal harm to you anytime soon. Everything was vague, chaotic, and uncommitted, filled with variation and accidents, ensuring you couldn't naturally sense danger.

"However, your position alerted you when I delved into the serial murder from four years ago. Since then, you've been using a Wraith's ability and the patrol team members under your control to keep a vigilant eye on this matter, right?"

Hisoka listened coldly, showing no intention of responding.

Lumian smiled and continued, "After figuring out that you were hiding in the patrol team as a Zombie Sequence Beyonder, I resisted my urges and tried my best not to dwell on such matters. When I returned to the hotel, I immediately teleported to Trier.

"At this distance, you won't be able to sense that I'm formulating a plan and putting it into practice.

"After coming up with a preliminary plan, I went to Hidden Blade and my two other companions to discuss a detailed plan. It was just past 7 p.m. Trier time.

"The next move involved assigning tasks. Each of us had a role to play. We underwent a Hypnotist's Hypnotism, erasing our true purpose from memory. Only when a Devil like you emerged would we recall the specific details.

"My mission was to use teleportation, making it seem like I left, only to return stealthily using shadow concealment. I trailed the patrol team member I interacted with, believing that I was checking if there was anything problematic with him.

"Hidden Blade's mission was to tail me, providing necessary vigilance and support. If I activated the Bottle of Fiction ability, she'd preemptively don the Ring of Punishment and lie in wait outside. The reason for her ambush eluded her until she laid eyes on you. With her combat prowess and intelligence, she instinctively knew what steps to take. No need for me to give detailed instructions.

"The Hypnotist's mission involved using Psychological Invisibility to wander the vicinity, just aimlessly wandering.

"As for the other Demoness, her duty was to monitor the patrol team and promptly report any issues to the authorities. Before your arrival, she too was unaware of the real reason behind her actions. She simply thought we had plans involving the patrol team.

"Before the Hypnotism wore off, none of us had intentions of confronting you. Our individual actions couldn't pose lethal harm to you, ensuring you couldn't foresee it.

"This was a premeditated encounter, a clash pitting you against multiple adversaries."

With that final sentence, Lumian suddenly heard an illusory shattering sound.

He sensed that his Conspirer potion had been fully digested.

He also felt Hisoka's seemingly cold expression, vexation, and regret growing, gnawing at his heart.

Lumian's smile widened. He stood up, leaned forward, and inched his head in front of Hisoka. He looked into Hisoka's bloodshot flaxen-colored eyes and said, "Your biggest mistake was not leaving Port Pylos ahead of time and sticking with the patrol team.

"Why are you so certain I won't track you down?"

"How do you know I enjoy Fermo coffee without sugar?" Hisoka inquired instead of answering.

Sensing his intense anger and killing intent, Lumian straightened up and replied with a smile, "My sister always says that wherever you go, you leave a trace, and I have an expert at finding traces with me.

"Heh heh, Emperor Roselle must have said something similar. You must know what it means."

Hisoka's hands tightened on the chair's armrests as he asked again, "Why were you so sure I'll kill Kolobo?"

Lumian replied with a sense of satisfaction, "I wasn't certain.

"Didn't I mention I had a Demoness companion monitoring the patrol team?

"Hidden Blade and I believed that if you ultimately choose to escape, you will definitely do something to vent your murderous desires. Otherwise, something might happen to you, considering your Devil and Prisoner pathways. And since you want to kill someone, it's either the patrol team member who traded with me or Camus who gave me the information. It's either at the Matani Shop or in the patrol team."

At this juncture, Lumian guessed with a smile, "You took the gamble of staying in Port Pylos and the patrol team because you wanted to seize an opportunity to kill me? Under the watchful eyes of the Tarot Club and Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society, finding a chance to eliminate a promising young man like me and escape unscathed can satisfy your twisted mind to the fullest extent?"

Hisoka subconsciously licked his lips.

"I initially planned to bide my time, waiting for your patience to wear thin and an opportune moment to present itself. But it seems you didn't seek the assistance of the demigods; you only reached out to Hela.

"I should have struck last night."

Hisoka didn't conceal his frustration.

Lumian didn't immediately address the topic. After a few moments of contemplation, he said,

"Waiting for an opportunity… You're quite confident in concealing your identity. Unafraid of normal investigations,

"Is it because the higher-ups of the patrol team allowed a Sequence 6 of the Prisoner pathway to join?"

Hisoka sealed his lips, responding with silence.

"Seems there's a significant secret lurking here." Lumian suddenly sensed a conspiracy. "Is the opportunity you're waiting for connected to this secret?"

Hisoka maintained silence, his eyes transformed, now bloodthirsty and filled with a desire to kill.

"Not willing to share?" Lumian chuckled. "No problem. Let's discuss something else first."

He bent down again, looking at Hisoka.

"In this operation, I sought only Hela. Firstly, to guard against the Nois family Demons who had made contact with you. Secondly, to create an environment for a quiet conversation with you."

At the mention of the Nois family's Demons, Hisoka's gaze subtly shifted.

"How do you know?"

Lumian didn't reply. The corners of his mouth curled up even more.

"I chose Hela because I wanted to capture you alive, relying on my own strength and that of my companions.

"Each of us is weaker than you, and each of us is someone you think you can easily kill. However, as a team, through teamwork, we've put you in a tight spot. You'll descend into hell."

Hisoka shattered the chair's armrest, but he couldn't attack Lumian.

Observing his bloodshot eyes, Lumian retrieved a golden straw hat from his Traveler's Bag, pressed it to his chest, and bowed.

"I'll excuse myself for a moment," he said with a smile.

In the next moment, Lumian left the dream.

Swiftly shifting his sitting position, he leaned against a broken stone pillar. From his Traveler's Bag, he retrieved Gardner Martin's Beyonder characteristic, teeth, blood, Colorful Bearded Horned Lizard's venom, hornbeam essential oil, and other items.

He had genuinely sensed Hisoka's fear, anger, and frustration. Although it occurred in a dream, it was reflected in Hisoka's brain and body, real and intense.

He was about to concoct the Reaper potion.

Chapter 650: Reaper

In the ancient, crumbling palace of the Nation of the Evernight, Lumian carefully poured Gardner Martin's blood into a measuring cylinder and added the unusually sharp, small white bone blade that emitted a cold light.

During this process, he moved swiftly, paying no attention to the bone-blade-shaped Beyonder characteristic slicing his fingers and causing blood to flow. Instead, he ignited crimson flames, helping the wounds contract and preventing the white bone blade from entering the potion with his blood.

The physical pain heightened Lumian's clarity and excitement. He added Gardner Martin's two teeth, the Colorful Bearded Horned Lizard's venom, and the hornbeam essential oil into the bright red blood.

Bloop! Bloop! Bubbles bubbled in the blood, and the items mysteriously dissolved.

Soon, black iron dregs emerged from the bright-red blood, as if an iron weapon had shattered inside.

Lumian glanced at the still-slumbering "Hisoka" Twanaku, picked up the measuring cylinder, and poured the liquid into his mouth.

The pungent smell of blood, the unfamiliar taste of rust, and the burning sensation instantly filled Lumian's mouth and pierced his brain.

It felt like being caught in a chaotic war, constantly facing blades, firearms, and relentless enemy assaults. Wounds appeared all over his body, throbbing with pain.

Son of a sow, am I being attacked by a potion? Lumian muttered, bewildered, as he found himself locked in combat with a swarm of oncoming adversaries.

Fireballs, Fire Ravens, and blazing white spears shattered, tore through, or impaled the enemies, turning them into torches that illuminated the battlefield.

After an unknown span of time, Lumian felt his strength waning, his spiritual energy on the brink of exhaustion. The accumulated spirituality of an Ascetic had long been unleashed.

In that moment, a colossal figure materialized before him, radiating a formidable and intimidating aura.

Despite Lumian's weakening state, he sensed the colossal figure's fear, hatred, and frustration.

He's afraid of me... Lumian realized suddenly. Summoning the last shreds of his courage, he condensed a blazing white flaming spear and hurled it at the colossal figure.

A blinding white flame erupted, piercing through the colossal figure's head.

Rumble. The giant figure exploded from within, shattering into countless fragments.

Rumble. The entire battlefield crumbled.

Lumian shook off the daze and found himself in front of a crumbling ancient palace, its stone bricks weathered by time. Hisoka Twanaku still slumbered, and Hela stood silently by his side.

Sweat dripped from Lumian's body, bursting into crimson sparks.

Eventually, the sweat returned to normal.

Phew... Lumian let out a relieved breath. His spirituality was rapidly recovering.

He had advanced to become a Reaper.

Having completed the ritual of capturing a higher Sequence enemy alive and revealing his conspiracy, Lumian had consumed the potion and advanced to Sequence 5, a Reaper of the Hunter pathway.

Compared to his previous Sequences, Reaper bestowed three additional abilities:

The first, Weakness Investigation, allowed Lumian to discern the target's vulnerabilities and weak points in their defenses from a mystic perspective.

The second, Cull, could be infused into any attack to harvest the target's life. Any part struck by Cull was akin to an assault on vital points and weaknesses, dealing significant damage.

If Cull hit a genuine weakness or vital point, it could deliver a fatal blow, making it challenging for the target to withstand three consecutive attacks.

It could even inflict real damage on demigod-level creatures, provided they didn't block or successfully evade, and refrained from using mystic defenses.

The third, Precision, enabled Lumian to precisely target a predetermined location and manipulate fireballs, Fire Ravens, and other spells that had left his body.

He could split a colossal fireball into hundreds, striking different targets with precision, achieving effective area-of-effect damage.

It was a far cry from a blanket explosion, being more efficient and effective.

Both Cull and Precision demanded a substantial amount of spirituality, rivaling Lumian's current usage of teleportation.

The exception was the combination of Precision and Fire Raven, as Fire Raven could allocate a bit of spirituality and was easily manipulated. Even with Precision, its consumption of spirituality wasn't significant.

Lumian also felt a significant enhancement in his spirituality. His mind cleared, and his life force intensified. He could compress flames to a blazing white state in an incredibly short time, merging with flaming spears and swiftly covering dozens to hundreds of meters. Ignoring the spirituality consumption, he could travel using this method.

While Lumian's strength, speed, and physique had improved, he was still not resilient enough to withstand a bullet with his body.

...

At the entrance of the mostly collapsed male bathroom in the Matani Import and Export Shop, the silver-white full-body armor burst out, wielding a light-condensed hammer in both hands.

It searched left and right but couldn't locate its target. Gradually, it seemed to "calm down."

From a nearby shadow, Franca emerged, her eyes assessing Kolobo within the half-collapsed bathroom. His life wasn't at risk, but his injuries were significant, and he appeared weakened.

He'll be Pride Armor's next target... Franca thought quickly. Seizing the moment while Pride Armor was still on the lookout for the backstabber and hadn't chosen a new target, she swiftly approached. Franca grabbed the motionless silver full-body armor and deftly stowed it into her Traveler's Bag.

"Meet up with Jenna!" Franca called out to Anthony, positioned outside the corridor.

In an instant, she melted into the shadows, disappearing from sight.

…

Surveying his newfound abilities, Lumian felt a surge of delight. Is this Reaper… If I were to confront Hisoka now, breaking through his defenses wouldn't be a concern. My craving for combat and slaughter has intensified… Having adapted to the changes in his body, Lumian turned to Hela and expressed his gratitude.

"Thank you."

Hela, not seeing any cause for gratitude, sighed and commented, "Your team's teamwork is impressive."

"Madame Hela, the ritual has succeeded, but I wish to enter Hisoka's dream again and inquire about something else," Lumian requested.

Hela nodded in agreement.

"The ritual requires him to remain lucid. He might lie, but the questioning doesn't need him to be lucid."

As she finished speaking, Lumian suddenly closed his eyes, slumping to the ground against a dilapidated stone pillar.

The corners of his mouth remained curled up, and his expression gradually turned calm.

In the dream's interrogation room, Lumian took a seat across from Hisoka and addressed the captive, whose malice and desire to kill were no longer concealed.

"Thank you for your help. I've become a Reaper."

Hisoka, leaning forward, seemed to forget that he could attack.

"So what if you're a Reaper? In a duel, I'd still kill you easily!

"If you hadn't joined forces with Hidden Blade and relied on numbers, you would have been dead!"

No longer lucid, he's finally revealing his true thoughts in the dream… Lumian chuckled and responded, "If I can create an opportunity to fight with numbers, why should I face you one-on-one?

"My companions are also a part of my strength."

Hisoka spoke with malice, "Do you truly trust that Hypnotist?

"It's very dangerous to open up your body and mind to a Hypnotist. Aren't you afraid that he'll take the opportunity to leave some hidden cues that will unknowingly bring you under his control?"

Lumian gazed at Hisoka for a moment before breaking into a smile.

"Perhaps that's why I defeated you. No wonder Mad Lady said you weren't pure enough.

"Firstly, I do trust him. We've been through life and death together.

"Secondly, I'm willing to take such a risk to kill all of you!"

Straightening up, Lumian locked eyes with Hisoka, enunciating each word, "Even if I plunge into the Abyss, even if I descend into hell, I shall witness your tragic demise!"

Hisoka fell silent.

Lumian eased back into his seat, composed himself, and casually inquired, "I learned from Devilology that a Devil requires a ritual to advance to Desire Apostle. It's best if it's a special serial killing ritual. However, other than the one four years ago, there's only been one in Port Pylos recently. Furthermore, I've already killed the murderer. How did you advance?

"With a boon? You couldn't have become a Desire Apostle four years ago, could you?"

Hisoka responded with a smile, "Just because you don't know doesn't mean it didn't happen."

Lumian's heart stirred.

"Was one of those two pranks to cover up your advancement ritual?"

Lumian ventured, drawing from the scattered information he had gleaned from the peripheral members of April Fool's. They were like scattered pieces of a puzzle, each offering a fragment of the truth but lacking the full picture.

The tales spoke of chaos unleashed: a disappearance of gold in the depths of Devise, and a clash between townsfolk and a primitive tribe in Tizamo Town, resulting in tragedy.

Lumian suspected that Hisoka's advancement ritual had been shrouded within the chaos of Tizamo's prank.

Hisoka's eyes sparkled with approval, his tone paternal.

"You're quite perceptive."

Lumian seized the moment to shift the conversation.

"What's up with the Nois family's Demon?"

He treaded cautiously, sidestepping the Celestial Worthy and the Mother Tree of Desire, for now.

Hisoka's expression turned cold.

"I aimed to utilize him to acquire something and carry out a ritual to appease him repeatedly, but he only formed a connection with me. He only granted me an opportunity two years ago."

Something… Two years ago… The pranks in the gold mine city and the town of Tizamo took place after this. One happened at the close of the preceding year, while the other unfolded at the close of last year… Lumian started suspecting that these two pranks might have motives beyond concealing the advancement ritual.

Before he could delve deeper, Hisoka asked vehemently and frenziedly, "Why didn't you seek the Tarot Club's assistance this time?"

Lumian arched his eyebrows and inquired with confusion, "Why does it matter to you? Even without the Tarot Club's aid, I could have successfully dealt with you."

Chapter 651: An Unfulfilled Conspiracy

In the beige, four-story patrol team building, Camus had managed to break free from the poker card's influence. He discovered Sow sprawled in a pool of blood, brutally torn apart by two zombie-like undead creatures.

In neighboring rooms, another patrol team member, under Twanaku's control, put up a stubborn resistance. His comrades had already fallen victim to the relentless assault.

Camus, catching his breath, hadn't anticipated stumbling upon an assassination plot within the patrol team, putting his own life at risk.

His gaze fixed on Deputy Captain Reaza, a middle-aged man in a sleek black suit controlling the undead creatures. Confused, Camus inquired, "How did Sow end up joining the Rose School of Thought?

"And why are so many members under their control?"

Despite Camus resisting the poker card's influence, Jenna's earlier shout lingered in his mind.

Reaza, surveying the scene of blood and undead, responded after a moment of contemplation, "It's likely Twanaku's doing."

Twanaku... Camus recalled the questions raised by Louis Berry.

Was Twanaku truly responsible for the serial murders four years ago?

Could he be a Devil in disguise?

Frowning, Camus grumbled, "Keeping a Zombie on the team was already a significant risk. Just because he can show restraint doesn't clear him from suspicion of being a Rose School of Thought member. He might indulge at specific times."

Reaza, with a stern demeanor, spoke in a deep voice, "We'd confirmed he defected from the Rose School of Thought. He believes in The Fool."

"The Fool, the temperance faction?" Camus asked in surprise,

not expecting such a revelation.

...

In the dream's interrogation room, housed within the ancient and crumbling palace of the Nation of the Evernight, Hisoka couldn't contain his amusement at Lumian's question.

"If you had sought the Tarot Club's assistance, I could have killed you!"

Hisoka's laughter reverberated, and his black shadow danced on the wall, morphing into curved goat horns and colossal bat wings.

Lumian caught a whiff of a conspiracy and asked in confusion and curiosity, "Why do you think so?"

Hisoka rose, a murderous glint materializing in his eyes.

"If you involve the Tarot Club, they'll undoubtedly seek my aid in your investigation."

At this point, Hisoka's lips curled into an unusually flamboyant smile.

No longer conscious in the dream, he revealed his innermost self.

Lumian raised an eyebrow, asking, "Are you a Minor Arcana card holder?"

Hisoka shook his head, replying with a radiant smile, "I'm a member of the temperance faction, a devotee of Mr. Fool."

The Devil burst into laughter, bowing and exclaiming, "Praise The Fool!"

Lumian, finding it absurd and amusing, instinctively analyzed the situation.

Hisoka is actually a member of the Rose School of Thought's temperance faction? A flamboyant and malicious Devil is actually a member of the temperance faction?

Logically speaking, this was clearly impossible!

Yet, in this dream crafted by Hela, unless Hisoka possessed unique abilities to deceive, lying was unlikely.

The only plausible explanation: he had infiltrated the temperance faction through deception and deceit!

On the surface, Hisoka seemed to be a Beyonder of the Prisoner pathway, displaying a level of restraint. As a non-core member of the temperance faction, he might have gone unnoticed with his issues.

Right, is this why the Matani patrol team allowed a Prisoner pathway Beyonder to join?

This was more than four years ago. Back then, Hisoka was merely a Sequence 8 Lunatic of the Prisoner pathway, not yet a Mid-Sequence Beyonder. As a peripheral member of the temperance faction, he likely operated without much scrutiny.

Moreover, he probably joined the temperance faction before this, when he was weaker and less noticeable.

Later, he faked receiving resources from the temperance faction and the Rose School of Thought's attack to advance. In reality, did he rely on the Mother Tree of Desire's boons? Where did those resources go? Were they secretly sold or crafted into a mystical item? That poker card?

Why did he infiltrate the temperance faction and worship Mr. Fool?

His main goal clearly isn't resources...

Faith in Mr. Fool…

With this in mind, Lumian suddenly had a guess.

Hisoka's true aim was to infiltrate the Church of The Fool through a certain pathway and have faith in Mr. Fool!

This revelation came from Celestial Worthy!

Hisoka genuinely believes in the Celestial Worthy of Heaven and Earth for Blessings. However, that Celestial Worthy is resisting Mr. Fool. He can clearly influence the Seer, Apprentice, and Marauder pathways…

Hisoka used a specific technique during prayer. On the surface, he seemed to be praying to Mr. Fool, but in reality, did he receive a message from that Celestial Worthy? This way, he wouldn't face the risk of a false premise…

That's very likely… Madam Magician mentioned that if I don't follow the procedures when praying to Mr. Fool, the response might not be from him, but from the Celestial Worthy…

Why did Celestial Worthy make Hisoka do this?

Marauder… Steal… Could It be that He intends to gradually steal Mr. Fool's identity and faith through this method?

When many believers genuinely believe in Mr. Fool, but they equate him as the Celestial Worthy, the Celestial Worthy becomes The Fool?

Hiss, the more I think about it, the more terrifying it becomes…

Hisoka can't do it alone. There must be many others who share similar beliefs…

Impressive. If the Celestial Worthy usually gathers followers, the Tarot Club would wipe them out at the slightest hint. Yet, if their followers outwardly professed faith in Mr. Fool, not only would they escape destruction, but they'd also gain protection…

How devious…

Lumian swiftly deduced the situation, sensing the ominous pressure from the hidden Celestial Worthy.

Once marked by Him, failure could creep in unnoticed and strike him down unexpectedly!

Considering this, Lumian recalled Port Pylos and grasped Hisoka's confidence. He also comprehended why Hisoka had opted to remain and wait patiently.

Freshly arrived in the Southern Continent and stepping into Port Pylos for the first time, Lumian lacked resources, companions, and even knowledge of Dutanese. There was a high likelihood that he'd seek aid from the Tarot Club standing behind him.

The Major Arcana card holders of the Tarot Club wouldn't personally intervene without a clear target due to the uncertain timeframe. They would likely dispatch a Minor Arcana card holder familiar with the Southern Continent or a faction member to assist.

Under these circumstances, who better to meet the requirements than Twanaku Tupián, a Church of The Fool's temperance faction member from Matani, well-versed in the local situation, holding the appropriate official status, and reaching Sequence 6.

In that scenario, Lumian and Hisoka would investigate Hisoka. The other party would gradually grasp the situation, assess potential traps and their effectiveness. Hisoka could then seize the opportunity for a surprise attack, assault the mind, and trigger desires!

Contemplating this, Lumian acknowledged that if he failed to detect Hisoka's malice during the investigation, the chances of succumbing to Hisoka's hands were 100%. He'd be a spectator as the Devil faced off against Termiboros in the form of a soul fragment.

Hisoka, informed by Loki, should have made preparations to deal with the dangerous creature within the seal. Perhaps relying on the Nois family's Demon or his status as a Blessed of the Mother Tree of Desire.

Thankfully, Madam Magician kept reminding me that a Hunter can't rely on high-ranking individuals behind an organization for everything. I need to hone my skills, familiarize myself with conspiracies and battles. Otherwise, I might have sought guidance from the Tarot Club as soon as I arrived in Port Pyro…

That would have been dangerous…

Grande Soeur and Emperor Roselle both mentioned that the most dangerous places are often the safest. Now, I must add that those who seem the safest and most reliable might pose the greatest risk…

It's not that they're no longer trustworthy, but the enemy will exploit this sense of security.

Yes, Madam Magician has also emphasized that if anything seems awry with her orders and suggestions, I should ignore them. Quickly contacting the other Major Arcana card holders to confirm the situation is crucial.

Lumian gazed at the flamboyant Hisoka and smiled.

"If I hadn't received help from a special trace expert, if Hidden Blade hadn't been more familiar with your persona, and if I hadn't had a Psychiatrist to profile you, and ultimately failed to find any clues or direction, I would have sought the Tarot Club's help and looked for a guide familiar with the local situation."

Hisoka fell into silence. After a few moments, he spoke up, "I get everything else, but why the sudden need for a special trace expert?"

Lumian chuckled.

"Because it's a gift from a true god."

The more time Lumian spent with Ludwig, the more he felt that letting such a dangerous individual escape the Church's control wasn't a decision a high-ranking member of the Church of Knowledge would make. There had to be a revelation from the God of Knowledge and Wisdom.

Certainly, Lumian couldn't be sure. As far as he knew, the Knowledge pathway, also known as the Reader pathway, excelled in prophecies at high Sequence.

Hisoka fell into silence for a moment before unleashing a roar, much like a wild wolf howling beneath the moon.

Lumian reviewed the entire incident, realizing that this revenge was a clash of conspiracies. Unfortunately, Hisoka didn't grasp his personality and style well enough, nor did he comprehend his companions. He could only rely on the sea prayer ritual and Loki's first death as a guide. Consequently, there was a deviation, shattering his expectations despite a high likelihood of success.

Phew… Lumian exhaled and inquired, "Who were the ones causing havoc on the patrol team's side?"

Chapter 652: "Extreme Joy Begets Sorrow"

Upon hearing Lumian's question, Hisoka's lips curved into a smile.

"Those are a few Fallen, under my control."

"Fallen?" Lumian could understand the literal meaning, but he didn't grasp the situation.

Simultaneously, he criticized Hisoka.

This is truly a dream. Emotions change so quickly.

Hisoka reminisced, "A Desire Apostle can plant a seed in others' hearts when their emotions and desires clearly fluctuate, causing corresponding problems to worsen. Gradually, they lose control and degenerate.

"When combined with my special abilities, I can make those humans unable to escape my control and obey only me for a long period through repeated depravities."

It's akin to injecting addictive psychiatric drugs, but more mystical? Lumian searched for analogous examples from an easy-to-understand perspective.

Suddenly, he recalled Naboredisley's description of Demons: "Demon in body, Demon in mind..."

Could this be a manifestation of the Demon within the mind? Is Hisoka's distinctiveness reflected in this aspect? Could it be that the individual from the temperance faction liaising with him has been tainted by his influence, causing them to withhold reporting any irregularities? Lumian gazed thoughtfully at Hisoka and inquired, "Indeed, as one would expect from an Apostle of Desire, a Demon that seduces the darkness of the mind. Is this a ritual for ascending to a Demon?"

"Just acclimating for now," Hisoka didn't refute, yet he sensed the current situation was far from ideal. It felt more like a rehearsal.

"You seem quite assured. Following the incident in Tizamo Town at year's end, you likely ascended to a Desire Apostle. It's only been a year, and you're already contemplating becoming a demigod?" Lumian mused briefly before questioning, "Is it because you finally appeased that Demon from the Nois family and acquired that thing?"

Even in his reverie, Hisoka appeared hesitant to disclose this matter. He responded with a hint of reluctance, "Yes."

Lumian refrained from provoking Hisoka for the time being, ensuring the dream didn't end prematurely. He altered his question.

"Where is that thing?"

When Hisoka transformed into a Devil, his attire ruptured, and nothing unusual dropped.

Hisoka's countenance contorted as he responded, "I-in Tizamo Town."

Concealed in his body's hometown, Tizamo Town... If it's significant, why doesn't he carry it with him? Lumian's curiosity about the two pranks orchestrated by Hisoka in Tizamo Town and the gold mine city, Devise, intensified.

After a brief pause of contemplation, Lumian inquired, "You staged a prank in Devise just to pilfer a batch of gold?"

"Yes," Hisoka affirmed.

Have you consumed too many novels like the Gold Heist? Were you in dire need of such a large sum of money back then? Yes, for criminals, it's quite normal to plan an operation to snatch gold when necessary. Unlike me, who relies on hunting and the gifts of villains... Just as Lumian thought it was trivial, he suddenly considered something.

Franca has been accumulating gold for future sacrifices to the Armored Shadow, Chen Tu...

Could Hisoka have orchestrated a prank to obtain a substantial amount of gold for a similar sacrifice? Lumian scrutinized Hisoka and probed, "Did you offer the gold as a sacrifice to the Nois family's Demon?"

Hisoka replied nonchalantly, "In Tizamo Town."

"What's in Tizamo Town?" Lumian asked.

Hisoka appeared to snap out of his daze and exclaimed with a contorted expression, "Dream Festival, Dream Festival!"

His shadow surged to life, leaping onto him and shrouding him.

Hisoka reverted to pitch-black, transforming into a viscous, repulsive, and malevolent liquid that spread swiftly in all directions, as if determined to corrupt the interrogation room, Lumian, and the entire dream.

Lumian promptly exited the dream and observed Hisoka, who lay asleep on the ground, displaying signs of Devilification once more. Furthermore, he seemed somewhat translucent.

This key member of April Fool's was teetering on the brink of losing control!

Without hesitation, Lumian materialized a longsword crafted from blazing white flames in his hand.

The Hisoka figure before him emitted a myriad of colors, with the pale-white mark on the bridge of his nose being the least conspicuous.

Weakness Investigation!

Paleness signified a vulnerability.

Lumian hoisted the flaming sword, gripping it with both hands, and thrust downward, vanishing into the pale-white hue.

The Devil-like armor, resilient flesh, and steel-like bones bestowed by Zombie endured only a second before being pierced.

Lumian withdrew his blazing-white flaming sword and thrust down again.

Pfft!

This time, it penetrated deeper.

Lumian extracted the blazing-white flaming sword once more and leaped up, adding his weight to the downward thrust.

Pfft!

Lumian genuflected, and the flaming sword plunged into Hisoka's brain, transforming into scattered flames that obliterated all weakness.

Lumian withdrew his hands and stood up.

Hisoka's body, displaying signs of Devilification, twitched a few times before settling.

Adjacent to the bridge of his nose, a two-finger-wide wound appeared grotesquely abnormal. Its surface was charred and contracted, while flames surged from within.

The Devil had lost his life.

How resilient. He managed to withstand three strikes like this… Lumian gazed at Hisoka's corpse and silently sighed.

In that moment, Hisoka's corpse swiftly turned transparent, and his light brown skin gradually faded to pale-white.

Wraith… Transforming into a genuine wraith after death? Just as these thoughts crossed Lumian's mind, his surroundings abruptly darkened.

In the depths of the darkness, a serene chant resonated, soothing one's body and mind, inducing a reluctance to do anything but lie still.

All escape was tranquility.

Hisoka's wraith form halted its transformation, gradually gaining a tangible quality.

Finally, he perished completely.

What a formidable adversary to vanquish… If his wraith transformation hadn't been halted, could he have endured as a true wraith, evolving into an evil spirit in the future? Lumian glanced at Hela beside him and spoke once more, "Thank you."

He refrained from elaborating his conversation with Hisoka, recognizing that they had spoken in the dream created by Hela. She must be aware of it.

"Loki is the only one left," Hela said coldly, her gaze fixed on Hisoka's lifeless form.

Lumian fell silent for a few seconds before stating, "He can't be resurrected more than a few times."

"At most one more time," Hela replied with certainty.

Another time… Lumian tersely acknowledged.

Before long, Hisoka's Beyonder characteristic manifested, blending with the remaining goat horns above his head, transforming into a whimsical and flamboyant cluster of black crystals.

Various crystals extended in all directions, sharp and crooked. Multiple illusory, translucent faces emerged from each black crystal, their expressions alternating between malevolence, pain, madness, and confusion.

A Desire Apostle Beyonder characteristic corrupted by a Wraith boon? Lumian perceived it as more corrupting and perilous than the Serial Killer

Beyonder characteristic from before.

He pointed at the Beyonder characteristic and Hisoka's lifeless body, addressing Hela, "Can I take them all?"

"Okay," Hela responded without objections.

…

In an old warehouse on an abandoned dock in Port Pylos, Franca, Anthony, and Jenna had already gathered, awaiting Lumian's return.

Amidst their conversation, a figure outlined itself in the sunlight streaming through a high window. It was Lumian, wearing a golden straw hat and disguised as Louis Berry.

Pa!

Lumian tossed Hisoka's corpse to the ground.

Immediately after, he retrieved the Beyonder characteristic from his Traveler's Bag and placed them near the corpse without touching them.

Only then did he smile at Franca, Jenna, and Anthony.

"It's settled."

"Is it really Hisoka?" Franca couldn't believe it could be so straightforward.

"It's him," Lumian briefly explained the situation. "He was overconfident and believed there's a high chance of killing me. He chose to stay and wait for an opportunity."

"What gave him the confidence?" Franca's eyes widened.

Since everyone present held a Minor Arcana card, Lumian didn't hold anything back. He recounted the situation, omitting the most perilous details.

"Can that really happen… Luckily, you didn't seek guidance from the Tarot Club." Jenna felt a lingering fear.

Franca sighed and commented, "I didn't think our collaboration alone would be sufficient."

Lumian pointed at the Beyonder characteristic and stated, "There's too much corruption, and it's very dangerous. I plan to seek Madam Magician's help and find a suitable Artisan to transform it into a Sealed Artifact. Everyone has the right to use it."

Lumian found it too sinister and corrupting. It couldn't become a mystical item with relatively mild negative effects. It could only be the kind that required sealing.

"Absolutely." Franca was filled with anticipation as she imagined the potential abilities of a Sealed Artifact.

She suddenly recalled something and quickly blurted out, "Your Pride Armor is still in my possession. Tsk, you've really gotten the most out of it."

Lumian chuckled.

"How can I face Devils without a Warrior? I've always wanted to use the Pride Armor, but I didn't expect Hisoka to choose the most convenient place like the bathroom."

It was a confined, tight space with a certain degree of flexibility.

Franca retrieved the Pride Armor from her Traveler's Bag and placed it on the ground.

Suddenly, the air in the old warehouse froze.

The silver-white full-body armor turned to face Lumian, condensing into a broadsword of light. Then, it knelt on one knee and thrust into the ground.

Wh— Lumian's pupils dilated as his figure abruptly faded, disappearing from his spot.

The broadsword of light split open, transforming into a devastating storm that engulfed the surroundings, obliterating numerous wooden crates.

Wh— Franca, Jenna, and Anthony couldn't dodge in time and were shattered into fragments by the Hurricane of Light, reflecting brilliance.

"Dammit! Isn't this too vengeful? How much time has passed?!" Franca cursed from a corner of the warehouse.

Chapter 653: Lumian's Choice

Franca emerged from the shadows, exhaling a sigh of relief as she saw the silver-white full-body armor return to silence following Lumian's departure from the warehouse and the absence of weak targets.

With caution, she approached, making sure not to position herself behind the Pride Armor, finally standing face to face with it.

The Pride Armor remained motionless.

Franca extended her hands, barely lifting the silver-white full-body armor and tucking it back into her Traveler's Bag. Only then did she relax and call out, "It's all right, it's all right."

Jenna emerged from a dark corner on the other side, and Anthony suddenly appeared at the warehouse door, seemingly prepared to roll and escape at any moment.

In a matter of seconds, Lumian somersaulted back from a high window, eliciting a chuckle from Franca.

"Damn it, we managed Hisoka just fine, but our own Sealed Artifact nearly wiped us out. Good thing we had substitutes. Otherwise, we might have been severely injured, if not dead," she remarked.

Jenna commented calmly, "This could be a funny story for Ghost Face."

Having moved out of the market district, she now had plenty of free time. Though she still owed Franca a large sum of money, she had enough assets to cover it. Thus, while completing the Tarot Club mission and trying to act, she could afford to watch a play once a week, buy magazines, newspapers, and books she had longed for but couldn't justify purchasing, and indulge in department stores and certain restaurants she had once yearned for.

Franca let out a hollow laugh.

"Who would have thought this armor would hold such a grudge? Hey Lumian, what did you do to it?"

she inquired, directing the subsequent questions to Lumian.

Lumian spread his hands.

"Wasn't it just a backstab?

"I thought it would be fine after disengaging and waiting for it to calm down."

Franca nodded repeatedly, offering him a way out.

"That's right, I thought so too.

"It's all because of that armor! It doesn't feel like armor at all!"

After a moment of pondering, Franca said, "I wonder when it will forget that you stabbed it in the back. For now, you'll have to leave it with me."

"Alright," Lumian said, feeling a twinge of regret. Such a useful Sealed Artifact was temporarily unusable.

He glanced at Hisoka's severely damaged corpse and the seemingly unscathed Beyonder characteristic, stowing them away in his Traveler's Bag. He said seriously, "I hope that the operation against the Minister of Industry will commence after the Sealed Artifact is completed. Though its negative effects will undoubtedly be severe, Desire Apostle and Wraith are definitely very useful, even if they can only unleash a portion of their abilities."

"Indeed," Franca replied, filled with anticipation.

She then turned to Lumian and asked, "Hisoka is already dead. You've achieved your goal in the Southern Continent. Where are you going next? Are you returning to Trier with us?"

Lumian shook his head, as if he had already considered the answer to this question.

"I plan to stay in the Southern Continent for a while longer."

"Why? To investigate Tizamo Town and the Hisoka matter? That doesn't seem necessary," Jenna expressed her confusion.

Lumian chuckled.

"This is a Hunter's paradise, don't you think?"

Without waiting for Franca and the others to inquire further, Lumian explained seriously, "After all that has transpired, I've come to realize something. For a Hunter to act well and digest swiftly, they must undergo diverse experiences.

"What I mean is, a Hunter's path is more straightforward compared to other paths. It's unlike Demonesses who must navigate pleasure, pain, while contemplating abstract and philosophical concepts which are often more intricate.

"As long as a Hunter is immersed in chaos, conflict, and constant combat, they can excel. Combat is akin to hunting. Chaos and conflict invariably breed numerous conspiracies. Provocation smoothens these conspiracies, arson secures victory in battle, and the aftermath of such incidents reaps the lives of enemies and the spoils of victory."

Observing Franca, Jenna, and Anthony's puzzled expressions, Lumian smiled and continued, "It's been just over half a year since I ascended from Sequence 9 to Sequence 5. Why?

"Because I've been either passively or actively embroiled in a series of events. Through perpetual chaos, disputes, and battles, I've grasped the principles of performance and found opportunities to act."

"In essence, a Hunter doesn't engage in elaborate acting before reaching High-Sequence Beyonder status. Though I possess some insight into fate due to my characteristics, it's also linked to determination and willpower. It's an integral part of combat.

"Hunters are forged in the crucible of blood and fire. They thrive amidst chaos and conflict. If I aim to grow stronger, I must pursue these elements. The Southern Continent offers precisely that."

Thus, Lumian could swiftly assimilate the Reaper potion and strive to become a Sequence 5 Fate Appropriator of the Inevitability pathway.

Only by truly mastering some of fate's abilities could Lumian hope to uncover any connection between Loki and the ancient castle when he next confronted him.

According to Franca, Lumian had to locate the respawn point of an enemy capable of resurrection and camp there!

Certainly, the path to becoming a Fate Appropriator came with its own set of risks. Lumian's chances of encountering Circle Inhabitant Voisin Sanson would significantly rise, whether due to the convergence of an Outer Deity's Blessed resulting from the world's rejection or the convergence of Inevitability powers.

Despite his yearning for such an encounter, Lumian was aware that he wasn't prepared to face a demigod, lacking the corresponding strength. A high-level Beyonder he could hire wouldn't be able to constantly keep an eye on him, and the moment of encounter was beyond his control.

Franca couldn't hide her envy upon hearing Lumian's plan.

If only the Demoness pathway's acting were that straightforward.

The early stages with Assassins and Instigators were relatively direct, but as time went on, it became more complicated.

Sigh. When I first met Lumian, I was clearly at a higher Sequence and stronger than him. It's only been half a year, but the tables have turned… Franca felt a mix of sorrow and impulsive emotions.

After sending Franca, Jenna, and Anthony back to Trier, Lumian entered Suite 7 on B3 of Hotel Orella, signaling for Lugano to leave.

Then, he carefully extracted Hisoka's lifeless body from his Traveler's Bag and positioned it in front of Ludwig. With a grin, he remarked, "Here's my end of the bargain. Is it edible?"

Ludwig, clutching a silver child's knife and fork with a steak laid out before him, sprung up from his seat. As he examined the torn, half-Devil-like, and bloodied remains, a mix of desire and hesitation played across his face.

It was clear he was tempted but wary.

After more than ten seconds, Ludwig delicately picked up the child's utensils and resolved himself.

"A tiny bit."

Without awaiting Lumian's reply, he crouched down and extended the child's knife and fork toward Hisoka's still open, flaxen-colored eyes.

Amidst the slicing sounds, Ludwig retrieved the Devil-like eyeballs, one on the fork and the other on the knife's tip.

Then, he poured a glass of orange Gwadar with one hand.

"There's caffeine in this. Not suitable for children," Lumian pointed out.

Ludwig glanced at the enticing beverage, then at the eyeballs on the child's utensils, and the half-Devil corpse on the ground. He fell silent.

Lumian also fell silent.

After a few moments, Ludwig submerged the eyeballs into the orange-yellow Gwadar, deliberately puncturing more holes with his fork to allow the liquid to seep out.

Then, he lifted the drink and squatted beside Hisoka's corpse, bringing the glass to a spot where some blood still dripped.

Bloop! Bloop! Bloop! Three drops of sulfur-scented blood fell into the fading orange beverage, swiftly tinting it with the color of blood.

Ludwig swirled the liquid in the glass and consumed it.

Lumian observed as Ludwig finished his drink, noting a clear boost in energy. Curious, he inquired, "What's the effect of this?"

Ludwig licked his lips and responded, "Permanently enhances my spirituality, allowing me to keenly sense the aura of the Abyss. I can also command a few lower-level undead creatures.

"Only the first glass has this effect. Subsequent drinks of a similar nature can only temporarily heighten my perception and restore some spirituality."

Ludwig's tone carried a maturity as he spoke on such matters.

Not bad… but only you would dare to consume such a messy thing… Lumian criticized inwardly. He stowed away Hisoka's remains and retreated to his bedroom, initiating a letter to Madam Magician. The focus was on reporting Hisoka's apparent identity, his speculations, and the issues with Tizamo Town. Additionally, he proposed that the reward for these unexpected discoveries should be the transformation of Hisoka's Beyonder characteristic into a Sealed Artifact.

Having neatly folded the letter, Lumian produced a jagged black crystal clump and arranged a ritual. He called forth Madam Magician's doll messenger.

Upon its emergence, the doll messenger emitted a disdainful sound, pinching its nose.

It pointed at Hisoka's Beyonder characteristic and remarked in a sharp voice, "Pack it into a box! It's filthy!"

Lumian retrieved a small paper box from his Traveler's Bag and stuffed the black crystal clump inside.

"Tie it up."

"Stuff it in another box."

"Use another box to contain them."

The doll messenger continued with its requests.

Finally, it begrudgingly picked up the box and carried the letter away.

…

Port Pylos's patrol team.

Reaza informed Camus, "All the problematic team members have been purged. The rest are undergoing individual reviews. You are part of it too."

"How's Kolobo?" Camus asked with concern.

"He's fine. We went to the Earth Mother Church to hire a Doctor," Reaza replied calmly. "The major issue now is that we haven't apprehended Twanaku. Moreover, we're certain that he's both a Wraith and a Desire Apostle."

"How? Isn't he too powerful?" Camus felt a twinge of fear at the thought of potential retaliation from Twanaku.

At that moment, a patrol team member entered the office and informed Reaza and Camus, "Captain Reaza, Boss, the straw hat guy is back!"

Chapter 654: Bounty

Louis Berry is back again? Camus's forehead twitched at the mention of the "straw hat guy."

Since encountering the adventurer, his life had taken a tumultuous turn. First, he had "captured" the murderer in a serial killing case, then he unearthed clues related to a four-year-old case. Subsequently, the suspect had emerged, attempting to harm him and Kolobo, throwing the patrol team into chaos.

And now, Louis Berry was making another appearance?

Camus felt the weight on his chest, and his heart raced.

"Where is Louis Berry?" Reaza was already familiar with Camus's account.

The patrol team member who had brought the report hastily answered, "Sitting in the hall."

Reaza nodded, and he and Camus left the office, descending the stairs.

As they walked, Camus gradually snapped out of his daze.

He recalled Louis Berry's suspicions about Twanaku the previous day, how he had abandoned his theories without delving into specifics, and how the adventurer had sought him out early in the morning, hoping to gather information indirectly. Shortly after Kolobo handed over Twanaku's information, the latter had been attacked, leading to a fierce battle.

Did Louis Berry employ such a cautious inquiry to avoid triggering the Devil's Danger Premonition? Was buying information from Kolobo a trap targeting Twanaku? No, hadn't Twanaku sensed the corresponding danger?

He could only sense it a minute or two in advance, and would it be too late by the time he discovered it? As a former Public Security Officer and now an Interrogator, Camus swiftly made connections and speculations.

He believed that Louis Berry had likely identified Twanaku after learning about his preference for sugarless Fermo coffee. He hinted at suspicions regarding the police headquarters but refrained from going into specifics, fearing that Twanaku might foresee danger!

As for how Louis Berry set a trap for Twanaku without detection, Camus couldn't puzzle it out for now.

Furthermore, he suspected that Louis Berry's operation hadn't been entirely successful. There were no signs from the Matani Import and Export Shop indicating Twanaku's demise.

This was a Sequence 5 Desire Apostle, wielding the power of a Sequence 5 Wraith. Unless a demigod personally intervened, they might require two or three battle teams of Mid-Sequence Beyonders from pathways like Sun and Warrior to handle him. Alternatively, they needed to mobilize Beyonders at the level of a Sequence 5 Pirate Admiral, armed with potent mystical items.

Soon, Camus and Reaza spotted Louis Berry seated on the sofa in the hall's guest area, his golden straw hat standing out in the sunlight.

"Monsieur Louis Berry, what brings you here again?" Camus inquired in deep Intisian.

Louis Berry gave Camus a deep look before smiling and addressing Reaza in fluent Dutanese, "I'm here to collect the bounty."

As he spoke, he retrieved Twanaku's head from his Traveler's Bag.

Camus and Reaza observed the blood-stained face, the head with the broken horn, the vacant eyes, and the gruesome wound on the bridge of the nose, along with ten to twenty deep cuts.

Despite the severe damage, Camus, a former Public Security Officer, recognized the owner at a glance.

Twanaku Tupián!

He succeeded? Had he truly set a trap for a Desire Apostle and managed to defeat him? Camus's gaze shifted up, scrutinizing Louis Berry, a young man with the title of a great adventurer in the Fog Sea.

Such strength could rival any Pirate Admiral in the Five Seas!

Of course, this assessment applied only to individual abilities, excluding the subordinates of Pirate Admirals.

Reaza silently ascertained from a spiritual level. He turned to Camus and asked in Dutanese,

"Is it Twanaku?"

"Yes," Camus confirmed, sighing inwardly.

The battle between Twanaku and Louis Berry had been fierce, resulting in his tragic demise. Not only were his eyes absent, but he was also covered in wounds, displaying signs of Devilification.

Reaza looked at Lumian and pondered for a moment before speaking in Dutanese, "I wonder if you've seen Twanaku's wanted poster. The bounty is only 70,000 verl d'or."

Back then, the bounty was set based on the criteria of a Serial Killer. It was only increased by 20,000 because this particular Serial Killer targeted Beyonders.

Lumian barely understood and switched to Intisian with a smile.

"If I wait two days to collect the bounty, will I be able to get more?"

Upon hearing this, Camus pondered for a moment and realized the validity of the statement.

In two days, their wanted posters would depict Desire Apostle and Wraith Twanaku, who had caused the deaths of several members of the patrol team, not the Serial Killer from the past!

Of course, with Matani's financial resources, it was impossible to significantly raise the bounty. At most, they could double it and report the danger to the Church of Earth Mother, the Eternal Blazing Sun Church, and other official organizations in the Northern Continent to see if they would be willing to increase the bounty.

After Camus translated Lumian's words into Dutanese, Reaza remained silent, unsure of how to respond.

For the patrol team, 70,000 to 80,000 verl d'or was a substantial sum!

Without waiting for a response, Lumian added with a smile, "But there's no need to add to the bounty. Just fulfill two of my requests. Two simple ones."

"What are they?" Reaza asked in a deep voice after hearing Camus's translation.

Lumian chuckled in response, stating, "Firstly, I want to see all the dossiers related to Tizamo Town. Secondly, I'm very curious about Twanaku's card and want to take a look. Of course, I'll just take a look."

"You want to investigate last year's incident in Tizamo Town? Isn't your sole purpose in Port Pylos to find Twanaku?" Camus asked, puzzled.

Lumian chuckled.

"Need I remind you? Twanaku's hometown is Tizamo Town."

Wh— Camus suddenly felt that the matter with Twanaku wouldn't conclude with the other party's death. There were still many secrets hidden behind it.

Louis Berry had mentioned this from the beginning.

After translating their conversation for Reaza, Camus sensed that the patrol team's previous investigation of the Tizamo Town incident might have concluded too hastily.

Eyeing Louis Berry, who had successfully taken down a Desire Apostle wielding Wraith powers, the chilly Reaza fell silent for a few seconds before uttering, "Who tasked you with looking into Twanaku?"

Without giving a direct response, Lumian inquired, "Did he declare himself a member of the temperance faction, a follower of The Fool?"

"It's not a self-proclamation. We verified it," Reaza confidently replied after hearing Camus's translation.

As anticipated… Just making confirmation, Lumian stood up for the Church of The Fool, stating, "Traitors can surface in any organization, and there'll be individuals with hidden agendas attempting to infiltrate."

"That's indeed our problem," Camus sincerely concluded. "We shouldn't solely rely on the organization they're affiliated with to determine a person's character or whether they can be recruited. We also need to observe their words and actions."

After careful consideration, Reaza agreed to Lumian's request.

While assigning another patrol team member to aid Lumian in the process and collect the bounty, he instructed Camus to show Lumian the poker card.

…

In the cold and silent underground corridor, Camus gazed at Lumian and cautiously asked, "What are you investigating?"

This had already led to the death of a Sequence 5 Desire Apostle!

Lumian emitted a soft chuckle.

"It's dangerous to know too much."

Camus fell silent, wisely choosing not to inquire further, drawing from past experiences.

As Lumian advanced, he casually asked, "How many members of the patrol team perished this time?"

"Four. All under Twanaku's control." Camus gave a self-deprecating smile. "We'll be recruiting new members before the end of the year. They're fortunate. Those with suitable pathways don't have to worry about subsequent Sequence potions. If they aren't from the correct pathways, they can use Sealed Artifacts."

This was how the resources of an official organization gradually accumulated.

Lumian nodded slightly.

"How's Kolobo?"

Camus's smile grew more relaxed.

"He's fine. He's almost healed."

As they conversed, they arrived at a room adorned with cold bones. A metallic poker card lay on the table in the middle.

"Be careful. It will burrow into your body and control you like a Wraith," Camus warned.

Lumian nodded slightly and approached, reaching out for the card with the ten of spades on its face.

A bone-like sensation entered his mind, accompanied by a chilling cold.

Lumian's right hand quickly became encased in a layer of frost.

The frost rapidly crystallized and extended towards his arm.

Simultaneously, the card's surface underwent a transformation, revealing a grayish-white joker.

It rapidly etherealized, poised to merge with Lumian's body.

Silently, Lumian's arm burst into brilliant white flames. With a swift flick of his palm, he accurately pressed his thumb onto the poker card that hadn't completely dissipated, right onto the joker's face.

The poker card fell into silence.

Frost detached from Lumian's arm, descended to the ground, and melted into water.

Zombie's Frost, Wraith's Possession… This is really a mystical item from the Prisoner pathway… Lumian swiftly made a basic assessment.

However, the transformation abilities displayed by the poker cards didn't align with his understanding of the Prisoner pathway. Instead, they resembled superficial applications of a Faceless.

Could it be corruption brought about by the Celestial Worthy? Also, when the temperance faction provides resources, it's impossible to directly give Wraith. They start from low Sequences and work their way up… Did this poker card strengthen time and time again? Does Hisoka have a permanent Artisan collaborator? Lumian withdrew his gaze from the poker card and slowly retreated to Camus's side.

"I'm done," he thought for a moment and said, "Be careful when using this item."

Camus nodded.

"We'll treat it as a Sealed Artifact rather than a mystical item."

Upon returning to the surface, Camus gathered all the dossiers related to Tizamo Town.

Lumian sorted through the items and picked up one of them.

Chapter 655: Pleasure

Lumian carefully examined the dossier on the Tizamo Town tragedy, which unfolded at the close of the previous year.

It detailed the incident as a gentleman and his servant's hunting expedition in Tizamo Town's primitive forest. Their actions provoked a large primitive tribe, leading to a retaliatory surprise attack on Tizamo Town. The assault resulted in numerous casualties, including the gentleman, his servant, several patrol team members responsible for Tizamo Town's security, and many innocent civilians.

In response, Admiral Querarill deployed additional troops to safeguard the area, prompting the primitive tribe to retreat into the depths of the forest.

There are quite a few formidable tribes inhabiting the Southern Continent's primitive forests... Lumian sighed from the bottom of his heart after reading the dossier.

This situation, a historical relic from the Balam Empire era, was emblematic of the challenges faced by the region.

While ancient empires boasted numerous powerful individuals in their ranks, along with a substantial number of Low- to Mid-Sequence Beyonders, effective management faced limitations. Technical constraints, population size, and the diversity of characteristics restricted governance to cities with favorable geographical conditions. These included towns and villages surrounding these cities, fertile plains, pastures, and valleys. The more challenging terrains, like primitive forests and mountains, remained largely unexplored due to these limitations, providing little incentive for the empires to eliminate potential threats.

When the Northern Continent invaded, causing the fragmentation of the Balam Empire and the destruction or replacement of other nations, many rebels sought refuge in these untouched areas, intensifying the dangers of the primitive forests and mountains.

In contrast, after Emperor Roselle initiated the Industrial Revolution, such challenges decreased in the Northern Continent. Currently, only a few remnants linger in the mountains of the south-central region.

The dossier offers no clues about April Fool's pranks or any Demon presence. Lumian, undeterred, set aside the dossier and turned his attention to something else.

He searched for keywords like "dream" and "festival."

Before his demise, Hisoka had mentioned the "Dream Festival."

Unfortunately, the patrol team had only been operational for six to seven years, with no recorded history of Tizamo Town's previous issues. During this period, there were no instances of dream-related or festival-related problems in Tizamo Town.

Lumian wasn't disheartened. He placed the dossiers down and addressed Camus, "Can I make a copy of everything?"

"No problem." Camus knew Louis Berry was about to summon the Rabbit of Knowledge again.

At that moment, Reaza entered with another member of the patrol team, placing a small but weighty cloth bag in front of Lumian.

"Your bounty. Confirm it," Reaza said in Dutanese.

Lumian lifted the cloth bag and spilled its contents onto the table.

Banknotes from Intis and a considerable number of gold coins lay before him. Lumian counted them, confirming everything was in order.

After Reaza and the other patrol team member departed, Lumian turned to Camus and pushed the cloth bag over with a smile.

"You..." Camus's eyes widened, asking hesitantly.

Lumian responded with a grin, "As I said, I'll waive the official bounty."

"But I didn't..." Camus subconsciously replied, maintaining his politeness.

Lumian chuckled.

"The information you provided was crucial, but you need to share it with Kolobo.

"Also, do me a favor."

This sum of money is for information and compensation based on the dangers we faced... Camus pressed down on the cloth bag, asking, "What is it?"

"Help me find a few people born and raised in Tizamo Town who are currently living in Port Pylos. Also, locate a few who have visited Tizamo Town multiple times but have no connection to it. Bring them to my place one by one," Lumian requested.

Camus listened attentively and breathed a sigh of relief.

"No problem."

This matter was straightforward!

Upon his return to Hotel Orella, Lumian had barely set down the Rabbit of Knowledge's copied dossier in his room, ready to delve into its details, when the doorbell chimed.

Amidst the tinkling sounds, Lugano rushed to open the door.

Shortly after, he called out, "Boss, Monsieur Iveljsta wishes to meet you."

Iveljsta? The one residing on B18 with numerous Zombie servants, suspected to be a Wraith? He's here for me? Lumian raised his eyebrows, set aside the dossier, and exited the master bedroom.

...

Trier, Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative.

In Franca and Jenna's rented apartment.

After seeing Anthony off, Franca returned to the master bedroom, contemplating the progress of digesting the Pleasure potion.

Even though Lumian's situation was unique, how could he digest the potion so quickly? How could he ascend to Sequence 5 in merely half a year? Despite this, Franca found herself triggered.

There lingered a sense of disappointment and frustration at being outpaced within seven months of watching over Lumian as an elder sister, or rather, an elder brother.

She longed to reach Sequence 5 and become a Demoness of Affliction at the earliest opportunity.

Truth be told, her digestion of the Pleasure potion surpassed that of most Demonesses. She had also gleaned substantial insights while delving into alternative interpretations and symbols of Pleasure. Patience was paramount, but blame fell upon the fellow with an absurdly rapid progression by her side!

Sigh, I must seek a partner for Pleasure. Both the ordinary and more profound forms of Pleasure are imperative. Only then can I digest it more rapidly. One is akin to my left foot, the other to my right--I must exert effort in both to move forward. I cannot jump on one foot alone... Franca's thoughts were lucid, yet she was uncertain how to proceed. Sigh, I cannot muster the courage to broach the subject... Should I seek help from Browns and her companions?

As Franca paced the room, she suddenly heard a knock on the bedroom door.

Jenna? Franca paused and turned towards the door.

"Enter, please."

Jenna, donned in a beige fluffy dress, stood before the door.

"Why the sudden politeness?" Franca inquired, feeling slightly uneasy.

Jenna chuckled in exasperation.

"Dammit! I've always been polite, okay? It's just that you never shut the door. You only close it when you sleep. How am I supposed to knock?"

With that remark, Jenna wore a vexed expression.

She regained composure and flashed a smile.

"Are you grappling with the Pleasure potion's digestion? Do you lack a target for its digestion?"

"Yes, but as I mentioned before…" Franca began to defend herself.

Jenna cut in, "What about me?"

"Huh?" Franca was caught off guard.

She questioned if she was imagining things.

Jenna's lovely face displayed a charming smile, reminiscent of her days as the Showy Diva, Little Minx.

She pushed aside strands of hair falling from her ears and grinned.

"Didn't you inform the Demoness of Black that we're lovers?

"Then why not turn to me for Pleasure potion digestion?"

"B-but…" Franca was bewildered. "Why are you doing this?"

Jenna approached Franca, maintaining her enticing smile.

"I want to experience pleasure. I'll become one in the future."

Surprise shifted to shock. Franca examined Jenna, wondering if she had undergone a sudden change.

Franca only snapped out of her reverie when Jenna halted in front of her, and a familiar fragrance filled her senses. She blurted out, "Are you trying to help me? Are you aiding me in this aspect because I've been without a partner for Pleasure digestion for so long?"

Jenna stopped and chuckled.

"That's one reason."

She gazed up at Franca's face and sincerely praised, "You're so beautiful…"

Franca fell silent for a moment before posing a serious question, "Do you like me?"

"I do," Jenna replied promptly. Her eyes glinted as she smiled and added, "You're so lively, interesting, and captivating. Why wouldn't I like you?"

Franca bit her red, moist lips.

"Then, do you love me? In a non-platonic sense."

Jenna fell silent.

She cast her gaze downward and pursed her lips.

"I don't want to deceive you. To me, you're a beacon of light that brightens my life, offering hope and warmth. You're the person I trust the most, my closest friend, and the perfect sister in my heart. However, I've never envisioned romantic love between us."

Franca's heart sank at the words "I don't want to deceive you," and an inexplicable ache surged within her.

A shiver ran down her spine.

She raised her right hand and shifted it slightly.

"Then, I can't…"

"Dammit! Why must you make things so complicated?" Jenna was already feeling bashful, embarrassed, and torn. She struggled to conceal it and convinced herself it was just an act. Upon hearing Franca's refusal, she finally erupted. "Can't we have sex without love? Are you truly a Demoness devoted solely to love?"

"I just feel…" Franca faltered. "I can handle others, but not you. I can't bear the thought of you sacrificing yourself…"

Before she could finish, Jenna's tender lips pressed against hers, exploring and nibbling with an unpracticed finesse.

Franca couldn't resist, swept away by Jenna's lips and tongue, fueled by long-awaited anticipation, months of restraint, the lingering influence of Demon corruption, and the effects of the Pleasure potion.

She succumbed to it until Jenna pulled back, panting.

"Sacrifice, my foot! Quit playing innocent. Haven't you always joked about letting me experience true pleasure? Get with it!" Jenna's cheeks flushed as she glared at Franca with moist eyes, resembling a fervent and assertive lion cub.

Franca suddenly felt that during Jenna's days in the market district as Little Minx, a small part of her personality might not have been an act but something she already possessed.

Jenna kissed her again, and Franca couldn't deny the allure.

As she relished the fragrant, sweet, and passionate pleasures, she couldn't shake off the realization that this was merely assistance, not love.

In that moment, a phrase echoed in her mind: In pain we find pleasure, in pleasure we drown.

Chapter 656: Choosing a Reward

Lumian once again encountered Monsieur Iveljsta, who resided in B18. He still wore a fluffy black hat adorned with a white feather and a complex black robe.

With a quick glance, Lumian had already covertly used Weakness Investigation to search for pale-white marks on Iveljsta's body, ready for potential assassinations and surprise attacks.

Aurore and Emperor Roselle had always emphasized the need to stay vigilant against others at all times!

Of course, Lumian felt that the two of them hadn't done a good job in this matter. Otherwise, they would still be active in the world.

At that moment, the pallor on Iveljsta's body concentrated on his dark-brown eyes, emitting an illusory quality that seemed unreal.

Does this mean he can quickly transform into a Wraith, and his eyes are no longer his weakness? As Lumian pondered, he gestured towards the divan in the living room.

"Let's chat there."

Ludwig, seated at the dining table, glanced at Iveljsta for a few seconds before lowering his head and continuing his meal with a succulent piece of beef.

Iveljsta nodded slightly and entered the living room quietly, taking a seat in a corner of the divan.

Are you a student at a primary school? So disciplined… Lumian criticized as he focused on observing Iverista's luck.

It was relatively normal and nothing special.

At that moment, Lumian suddenly had a few thoughts.

Luck Observation and Weakness Investigation require the eyes to determine the target's color. However, one focuses on the background color, while the other captures the various colors on the surface of the body. When I become a Fate Appropriator, could these two abilities fuse and mutate into a more special ability?

Why can I only use my eyes to observe these two abilities? Is a blind Reaper incapable of attacking a target's weakness? Similarly, is a blind Ascetic unqualified to observe others' luck? Can't they rely on their spirituality and ears and nose?

Or could it be done at a higher Sequence?

Lumian eased into the armchair, positioning himself at an angle across from Iveljsta. Flashing a friendly smile, he asked, "What's the matter?"

He spoke in Intisian.

Iveljsta, as silent as a corpse, straightened up. His eyes, deep as he spoke in ancient Feysac.

"Allow me to introduce myself. Iveljsta Eggers, a member of the Rose School of Thought and temperance faction under the Church of The Fool."

Lumian's nerves, already tense, heightened. Nevertheless, he maintained a relaxed demeanor, confirming, "Are you Twanaku's liaison?"

He switched to ancient Feysac.

"No," Iveljsta shook his head, "I've already eliminated that member fifteen minutes ago."

Fifteen minutes ago, when I was still with the patrol team… However, you can't expect me to believe you just because you say so… Lumian feigned curiosity and asked, "I recall that you arrived in Port Pylos before Twanaku was exposed. What was your original motive?"

"I'm investigating the primitive forest in this area. I'm still in the early stages of gathering more information," Iveljsta replied seriously. "Four days ago, I came into contact with Twanaku and obtained some information from him. He seemed fine and was very restrained."

He's indeed restrained. Otherwise, there wouldn't be a second serial murder case in Port Pylos only after four years… Going to the primitive forest to investigate… The primitive forest… On the surface, the incident in Tizamo Town was a sudden attack by a tribe in the primitive forest. Lumian quickly made many connections and said to Iveljsta thoughtfully, "Twanaku once did something in Tizamo Town that involved the tribes in the nearby primitive forest. Some of his important items seem to be hidden in Tizamo Town. It might also be related to a Nois family Demon of unknown Sequence."

Iveljsta listened in silence, lost in thought.

After a few seconds, he said to Lumian, "Thank you for providing this information. It might not be useful for my investigation, but it can let me know what to be wary of."

He didn't specify his mission. Clearly, he needed his superior's permission.

Lumian responded nonchalantly, "Even if I don't tell you now, you'll find out tonight or tomorrow."

Having already reported the matter to Madam Magician, the Major Arcana card holder would undoubtedly inform the Church of The Fool and the temperance faction in detail subsequently. It wouldn't only be a general outline that mentioned key personnel like before.

Iveljsta nodded with restraint and said, "I'm here to express my gratitude and to inform you that we're already investigating any potential problems and latent dangers.

"Also, if you need help in Matani, feel free to come to me."

"Alright." Lumian didn't stand on ceremony.

After delving into the more serious matters, Lumian, intrigued, asked Iveljsta, "Why did you add the Rose School of Thought prefix when you introduced yourself? You've already left the Rose School of Thought and joined the Church of The Fool. It sounds as if the Rose School of Thought is affiliated with the Church of The Fool."

"Our leader specifically requested this. She always believes that we are the true orthodox branch of the Rose School of Thought. Only we represent the Rose School of Thought. Those traitors should change the organization's name, not us," Iveljsta explained in detail.

Sounds quite stubborn… Aren't you from the temperance faction? Don't you restrain your emotions and desires in this aspect? Yes, Sequence 5 is Wraith, close to evil spirits, and evil spirits have an extreme side. Is this reflected in High-Sequence Beyonders of the temperance faction's corresponding pathway? Lumian didn't quite understand and tried to make a guess based on the available information.

He was just chatting and had no intention of inquiring further. Instead, he asked,

"Your last name is Eggers. Was your ancestor a member of the Balam Empire's royal family?"

"Yes," Iveljsta replied proudly, his emotions held in check. "And my mother's lineage is noble from the Highlands Kingdom."

For many in the Southern Continent, the surname Eggers bore unparalleled prestige. It was a symbol of a deity who had once trod the land, a representation of Death's dominion over the world.

But Lumian's curiosity wandered elsewhere.

"I've heard that the mausoleums of the Balam Empire's nobles are constructed upside down underground, much like this hotel. What mystical significance does that hold? Is it simply a way to confront death? And why is death associated with the underground? Shouldn't the Underworld exist in the spirit world?"

This was the question that piqued Lumian's interest upon learning about the matter.

His understanding of mysticism was limited.

Iveljsta pondered for a moment and then explained, "I didn't choose the Death pathway. The construction method originated from ancient times, passed down by all the Eggers ancestors, devoted to the deity who controlled death.

"He embodies the very concept of death. Emulating Him is a way to approach the source of death.

"This mystic explanation resonates with me the most. Over the years, I've heard various interpretations:

"Some see life and death as opposing mystical concepts. They argue that, just as we stand upright and grow upwards in life, burial upside down signifies the contradiction and connection between life and death.

"Others believe that true hell isn't in the spirit world or the Underworld, but deep underground. Descending further symbolizes reaching true hell and returning to the essence of death. Thus, mausoleums are built upside down, reflecting our intention to face hell, worship death, and return to the source. This is the essence and symbol of mysticism."

Some Beyonders of the Death pathway don't really approve of the Underworld… Can you discover true hell by delving deep underground? Heh heh, hasn't anyone informed you that the world we're on is essentially a planet? Does this extension reach underground magma and the core? Do they believe that's the genuine hell? Going deeper will traverse the core and the magma, but that'll merely be the other side of the planet, let alone true hell… Lumian found himself increasingly entertained as he listened.

Suddenly, he was taken aback.

What exists on the opposite side of the planet?

I only know of the Northern and Southern Continents. Considering the time difference, they're nearly on the same side…

If this world is genuinely a planet, there must be another side. But I've never heard of any continents—just an expansive sea?

Wait, how did those giant fellows from the New City of Silver emerge from the Forsaken Land of the Gods… Something must have occurred on the continent on the other side of the planet, abandoned by the deities. Could that be why it's known as the Forsaken Land of the Gods?

If I have a chance in the future, I could revisit the New City of Silver and explore the library for books related to the Forsaken Land of the Gods…

Lumian reined in his thoughts and continued conversing with Iveljsta for a while. Eventually, he escorted the former descendant of the Balam Empire's royal family, a member of the temperance faction, away from this floor.

Not long after returning to his room, the doll messenger arrived with a response from Madam Magician.

"The information and insights you've gathered this time are exceptionally valuable. It's no wonder my spiritual perception guided me to let you visit the New City of Silver after the Hanth Island Demon incident.

"Reflecting on it, your encounter with Naboredisley seemed almost coincidental. You followed the clues to Hanth Island. Hmm, you should grasp the significance, right?

"The situation in this matter both reassures me and intensifies my vigilance and anxiety. When that entity stands by our side, these details are incredibly useful. However, He won't always be with us. When our objectives clash, I can't fathom what challenges we'll face. The same goes for you and me.

"Therefore, Hunters must rely more on their personal growth amidst blood, fire, chaos, and conflict. Many Hunters meet their end, using their bones to forge the Red Priest who conquers all.

"We've already initiated an internal review. It involves a considerable number of individuals and will take a substantial amount of time to complete. Considering your contributions, besides converting the Beyonder characteristic into a Sealed Artifact, you have the option to choose a reward. Pick one out of two. Here are your choices.

"1: the potion formula for the Hunter pathway's Sequence 4 Iron-blooded Knight. 2: I'll assist you in divining clues about the remaining parts of the Abscessed Hand's body."

Chapter 657: Tizamo Town

Reading Madam Magician's two choices, Lumian fell into deep thought.

These were incredible rewards!

It had to be known that reaching Sequence 4 marked a crucial point for Beyonders, a moment of qualitative transformation. From then on, one could attain godhood and become a half-human, half-god entity. Most Beyonders would never get this far. This wasn't just about becoming a demigod; it also included seeing or obtaining related items firsthand.

A Sequence 4 potion formula was usually priceless!

Moreover, this was a Sequence 4 potion formula related to Lumian's own pathway.

As for the reward of divining clues about the rest of the Abscessed Hand's body, it symbolized the promise and assistance of an Angel. Ordinary Beyonders wouldn't even dream of such a chance, let alone receive an opportunity. They could only read about Angels gaining the Lord's permission and responding to believers' prayers in various Churches.

Furthermore, Lumian needed to address this issue.

After advancing to a Sequence 5 Reaper, his top priority was finding the remaining parts of the Abscessed Hand's body. Without completing this task, the formula, the ingredients, the digestion process, and the prepared ritual wouldn't give him a shot at becoming a demigod in time due to the unfulfilled promise and the oath's restrictions. Regret wouldn't even be an option.

Lumian had no clue how to locate it by himself. His only plan was to mimic the incantation for summoning the Abscessed Hand and craft a new series of summoning incantations. He hoped to summon the spirit world creature's legs, arms, body, and head.

However, this was a risky endeavor. In his dream, Lumian learned from his sister that when the summoning incantation lacked clarity and had no restrictions, the summoned entity could be unpredictable. It might be a demigod-level spirit world creature filled with malice, capable of killing the summoner instantly.

Lumian couldn't pinpoint the precise direction due to the unknown fragmentation of the Abscessed Hand's body. It could be a relatively intact body missing a hand, or it might have shattered into tiny, peanut-sized fragments. Describing it accurately was impossible. He could only experiment repeatedly, narrowing down the possibilities. It was akin to playing with his life.

More importantly, Lumian had already combed through the comprehensive information on common spirit world creatures provided by Madam Magician. Still, he found nothing that seemed to be other parts of the Abscessed Hand's body.

Lumian desired the Sequence 4 Iron-blooded Knight potion formula and clues about the rest of the Abscessed Hand's body.

This was the reason why he couldn't make a decision.

He pondered whether to teleport back to Trier now and seek Franca or Jenna's help in divination, hoping their spiritual insights would provide him with valuable hints.

As these thoughts raced through his mind, Lumian reached a decision.

The second option!

This was because he remembered something important. Mr. Hanged Man's reward had yet to materialize. It was an opportunity to explore the Blue

Avenger, a ghost ship that was a relic of the Tudor Empire.

Considering that the Blood Emperor Alista Tudor was once a true god of the Hunter pathway and a half-mad Red Priest, the Tudor Empire's inheritance contained the Sequence 4 potion formula of the Hunter pathway, along with Beyonder ingredients and characteristics. It was something to look forward to.

Lumian promptly sat down and penned a reply to Madam Magician, expressing his thoughts. He also informed her that he would be heading to Tizamo Town to investigate Hisoka's inheritance.

…

At 4 p.m., Camus Castiya, accompanied by three dark-brown Southern Continent natives, knocked on the door of Suite 7 on B3 of Hotel Orella.

"They all hail from Tizamo, born and bred. They only ventured to Port Pylos in search of opportunities upon reaching adulthood," Camus explained in Intisian, introducing the two men and one woman. "One is a supplier of Gwadar berries, another married a local and toils at the port, and the third took a less lawful path as a thief."

One is a relatively wealthy merchant, the other is a dockworker, and the other is a thief. They happen to be at three different social levels, and they are from both genders. This will allow me to understand the situation in Tizamo to the greatest extent and comprehensively. Camus is very professional in this aspect. As expected of a former Public Security Officer… Lumian nodded slightly and asked the three subjects in fluent Dutanese, "I'm a scholar of folklore en route to Tizamo. But before that, I'd like to learn more about the town. My Dutanese is a bit rusty, so Mr. Camus will assist in translation."

"We'll heed Officer Camus," responded the eldest merchant with a smile, quickly seconded by the others.

Lumian turned to Lugano and instructed, "I'll take one to the master bedroom for an exchange. You can entertain the other two."

"Alright," Lugano replied promptly.

Inside the master bedroom, Lumian courteously seated the merchant in an armchair, positioning himself at the edge of the bed. Speaking in Intisian, he inquired, "What's the primary produce of Tizamo?"

Camus, translating, wore a puzzled expression.

Is Louis Berry truly planning a journey to Tizamo?

It's evident he's tracing Twanaku's footsteps!

Camus assumed the role of an Interrogator, staring down at the seated merchant as he conveyed Lumian's words.

The merchant, filled with trepidation, responded, "Sir, we mainly cultivate Gwadar berries, spices, and forest fruits. Numerous plantations dot the surroundings, and we often venture into the forest for hunting, selling both meat and fur. Additionally, we cut down trees for crafting coffins.

"That's… that's about it. The remaining effort goes into planting corn and potatoes for our own consumption."

Lumian absorbed the information and refined his understanding of Dutanese through Camus's translation.

Engaging in casual conversation, Lumian explored the daily lives, sustenance, and leisure activities of the Tizamo residents.

From the merchant's account, Lumian painted a mental picture of Tizamo.

Its populace mainly consisted of locals, with outsiders being the proprietors of nearby plantations and some acquired slaves. Thanks to the hunting services provided to the Port Pylos gentry, Tizamo maintained a connection with the outside world, avoiding isolation and conservativism.

Although the faith in Death had been eradicated, traces of it lingered in daily life. The townspeople primarily believed in the Eternal Blazing Sun, yet remnants of Death faith were evident, such as frequent visits to the cemetery and the practice of not burying prematurely deceased children in coffins. Each adult prepared a coffin for themselves in advance, and the common means of travel involved using a coffin.

With keen interest, Lumian concluded the discussion and inquired, "Are you familiar with Twanaku Tupián?"

Finally getting into the meat… Camus exhaled quietly and conveyed the question to the merchant.

A warm smile appeared on the merchant's face.

"I do! He's well-known in town."

"Why?" Camus interjected.

The merchant, with an obsequious smile, responded, "Sir, he should be your colleague. Twanaku is the first person from Tizamo to join the patrol team. Moreover, he's rapidly advancing in rank. He's a source of pride for us."

Lumian couldn't help but emit a soft chuckle.

"I'm quite curious about Twanaku's past."

The merchant's expression shifted slightly as he glanced around.

"Sirs, did Twanaku commit a crime? Did he join an organization that believes in Death?"

Quite perceptive… Lumian thought, while Camus grumbled in a low voice, "Are we doing the questioning or are you? Just answer truthfully!"

Under the mental pressure of the Interrogator, the dark-skinned merchant replied with a trembling voice, "I've known for a long time that this young man, Twanaku, will surely become extraordinary, but I also know he'll one day tread the path of blasphemy against a deity."

Seeing Camus and Lumian awaiting further explanation, the merchant continued, "There was a fire in the Twanaku family. All his kin perished, and only he survived. According to our customs, he's favored by a deity, spared from death. Such individuals often go on to achieve great feats."

The deity's favor refers to Death here, right? Not succumbing to Death is considered receiving Death's favor? Lumian interjected thoughtfully.

"The fire happened about six years ago?"

"How did you know?" the surprised merchant asked. Then, slapping his forehead, he added, "I'm such a fool. You must have investigated it beforehand."

From the looks of it, the fire somehow brought Twanaku back to life, transforming him into Hisoka… Lumian nodded.

"Continue."

Recalling, the merchant said, "Since then, Twanaku fell silent, as if in shock. He no longer participated in Mass or entered the cathedral of God. Later, he left Tizamo for Port Pylos."

Was Twanaku unafraid of scrutiny for acting so unusually? Did he not bother to feign his faith? By then, Hisoka had already become a Beyonder of the Devil pathway, making it impossible for him to participate in the Eternal Blazing Sun Church's Mass? Where did his first potion come from? Lumian pondered while Camus translated and asked, "Does Twanaku frequently return to Tizamo?"

"He comes back to Tizamo every year. I'm not sure how often or for how long," the merchant truthfully replied.

"Where does he stay when he returns to Tizamo?" Lumian inquired further.

The merchant smoothly replied, "At his own place. After joining the patrol team and amassing wealth, he rebuilt the burnt-down house."

Rebuilt the house that was destroyed in the fire… Lumian contemplated for a moment and then asked, "Are there any special folklore festivals in Tizamo?"

Chapter 658: Deep Desire

The merchant responded cautiously to Camus's translation, "Sir, we don't really have any special folklore festivals. We only celebrate two festivals every year. One is the Sun Sacrifice in December, and the other is the New Sun Festival in June."

The Sun Sacrifice was a recurring festival for the Eternal Blazing Sun Church, marking the day with the longest daylight of the year when the sun reached its zenith at noon.

In the Northern Continent, it took place in mid-to-late June, while in the Southern Continent, due to the reversed seasons, it occurred in mid-to-late December.

The New Sun Festival, originating from the believers of the Southern Continent's Eternal Blazing Sun, involved celebrations during the longest night and shortest days, welcoming the return of the sun and anticipating more light and warmer weather.

This celebration often coincided with the New Year in many parts of the Southern Continent, gradually merging the two festivities.

The merchant explained that the citizens of Tizamo Town solely celebrated festivals connected to the Eternal Blazing Sun, having abandoned the traditions related to Death.

He reflected for a moment and added, "It's been like this for a long time—since my grandfather was born."

Matani, particularly Port Pylos and the gold mine city of Devise, had been Intis's colony for nearly a century. The native population was compelled to convert generations ago, becoming followers of the Eternal Blazing Sun.

This, however, was limited to areas effectively managed by colonial institutions in the past.

When Lumian arrived in Port Pylos, his first impression was: at the docks, in the heart of the city, it resembled the port cities of Intis. Yet, the workers' skin was darker and browner. The streets frequented by Intisians and Feynapotterians were sparsely populated and desolate. After passing Hotel Orella and exploring other areas of Port Pylos, various buildings with West Balam characteristics emerged. More pedestrians populated the streets, and the echoes of Dutanese filled the air.

Lumian sought further details, indirectly confirming the merchant's words. Interrogator Camus discerned no signs of deception.

"What things have left a deep impression on you since you were young that you still remember from time to time?" Lumian shifted the conversation.

Recalling, the merchant replied, "Grand funerals… Newly built coffins…

"The primitive tribe that clashes with us every year… The occasional scream at night because of them…

"Everyone's hardworking, calm, and well-educated. We get angry, but we don't argue on the spot or shout. We choose to find the padre, officers, and judges to determine who's right and who's wrong…"

Camus translated the merchant's words to Lumian, adding a few comments.

"That's indeed the case. I've been to Tizamo. The people there are very docile. Even if they're treated unfairly, they rarely resist violently. The manor owners of the surrounding plantations love to hire them, reducing the cost of buying slaves.

"Of course, it's not that they're emotionless and won't resist. Instead, they tend to abide by order and follow the official processes to resolve problems. I-I guess they can be considered outstanding believers of the Eternal Blazing Sun?"

The honorific name of the Eternal Blazing Sun contained the description "Embodiment of Order."

As a member of the Feynapotter royal lineage, Camus undoubtedly believed in the Earth Mother. He knew that Louis Berry hailed from the Intis Republic and was likely a believer of the Eternal Blazing Sun.

Lumian stood up, extending his arms with a smile. "Praise the Sun!"

"Praise the Sun!" The merchant hastily followed suit.

Lumian settled back into his seat, contemplating for a few fleeting moments.

"Have you experienced any strange dreams?"

The merchant nodded, then shook his head.

"Many, but they slip away from memory. Do you not encounter such dreams?"

Indeed. Dreams often elude the control of one's consciousness. They can reveal spiritual insights, mirror suppressed desires, or reflect events from the day. Sometimes, these elements intertwine, resulting in strange and unpredictable dreams. I, too, frequently encounter such dreams. In the past, when I battled the Demon corruption, they were even more bizarre and exaggerated… Lumian sensed that the merchant's response was impeccable.

If the other party could pinpoint a specific strange dream, that might raise suspicion.

Either the dream was exceptionally strange and unforgettable, or the merchant was abnormal and had prepared in advance before coming.

After discussing other matters, Lumian escorted the merchant out of the master bedroom.

The responses of the other two Tizamons were similar to the merchant's, only supplementing the details they observed at their level and sharing encounters with their own characteristics.

Lumian found no traces of the Dream Festival.

If the Dream Festival is genuinely linked to Tizamo, there's only one possibility: When the townsfolk fall asleep, they enter a dream world to celebrate the festival. Upon waking, they forget everything…

Or, there's another possibility. Two factions may be involved in Hisoka's Tizamo Town prank. First, the citizens of Tizamo. Second, the primitive tribe in the nearby forest. Could the Dream Festival be a celebration for that primitive tribe?

Hisoka's prank impacted the Dream Festival, leading the primitive tribe to suddenly attack Tizamo, resulting in significant casualties and concealing the traces of his advancement ritual to Desire Apostle. Lumian pondered as he walked Camus and the three Tizamons to the door.

Upon returning to the master bedroom, he stood before the desk and gazed at the stone wall in front of him. His eyes flickered with anticipation and unease.

His decision to stay in the Southern Continent and actively pursue Hisoka's inheritance was indeed to grow amid blood, fire, chaos, and conflict, securing more acting opportunities. He aimed to open the door to godhood and advance to Sequence 4 as soon as possible.

The reason for his impatience was: he saw a glimmer of hope in reviving his sister!

The state of the Naboredisleys on Hanth Island provided him with that glimmer of hope.

This hope stemmed from the belief that a high-ranking figure of the Earth Mother Church might possess the ability to divide another person's soul. This would allow each soul fragment to grow into a relatively separate individual through rebirth.

Aurore's soul fragment was sealed within Lumian's body.

Perhaps a high-ranking member of the Church of Earth Mother could use one or more soul fragments to resurrect Aurore in a new form!

Lumian wasn't certain if such a plan could be realized or if it constituted true "resurrection," but it was the most plausible method he had encountered so far. He was determined to give it a try.

Of course, he couldn't experiment with Aurore's soul fragment directly. His plan was to deliberately create some soul fragments in future cullings and seek help from the Church of Earth Mother to see if they could be reborn and if the person who returned was the same individual.

Once all the details were confirmed, he would revive Aurore.

Lumian didn't believe he had the qualifications to collaborate with the Church of Earth Mother. Only by becoming a demigod and relying on the secret organization, the Tarot Club, could he gain the Church of Earth Mother's attention and fulfill the transaction conditions proposed by the other party.

For this, Lumian couldn't wait to obtain godhood and advance to Sequence 4.

At times, Lumian wished his sister were also a Blessed of Celestial Worthy and had inherited the ancient castle. This way, her resurrection might be more straightforward.

Yes, to extract Aurore's soul fragment, I must undo Mr. Fool's seal. To undo his seal, I have to wait for Termiboros to become very weak. For Termiboros to weaken, I need to continuously extract his power at a higher level. And to withstand the power of a higher level, I have to possess godhood and advance step by step… Lumian's thoughts gradually clarified, and he unprecedentedly yearned for an advancement.

…

Trier, Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative, Apartment 702, 9 Rue Orosai.

Franca lay on the bed beneath a velvet blanket, her cheeks still flushed, eyes moist, and her expression unusually complicated.

Beside her, Jenna rested under the same velvet cover. She had slipped into a deep slumber, her brows furrowed with a mix of exhaustion, satisfaction, resistance, and nostalgia. Her outstretched arms and exposed fair skin still bore traces of the recent fervor.

Franca gazed at Jenna and let out a sudden sigh.

The experience had exceeded her expectations, yet a sense of emptiness lingered in her heart.

It was beautiful in the moment, but what would transpire after the digestion of the Pleasure potion?

Could physical intimacy and emotional distance coexist?

Did overwhelming pleasure pave the way for sorrow? Was it the agony of sinking into oblivion while resisting salvation?

Sigh… Franca released another soft sigh.

She sensed that her Pleasure potion had been substantially digested.

…

Matani State, Port Pylos.

Lumian, sipping a glass of Gwadar, looked up and spoke to Lugano as if discussing the weather.

"We're heading to Tizamo Town today. Will you join Ludwig and me, or will you stay here and wait for us?

"Let me warn you in advance. The situation in Tizamo Town might be very dangerous."

Very dangerous… He wanted to say he'd stay in Port Pylos, but memories of Father Montserrat flashed in his mind.

Gritting his teeth, he replied, "I'm with you."

If danger lurked in Tizamo Town, he could rely on his boss to bail him out. But here? Only himself!

Lumian nodded slightly and didn't say more.

After checking out and hitting the street, he chuckled at Lugano and Ludwig, "Do we take a coffin to Tizamo, or should we grab a carriage?"

Before Lugano and Ludwig could answer, a four-wheeled, four-seater carriage rolled up from under the shade.

The carriage's driver, a young man, kept his head low, not daring to look away.

Coming to a stop, Camus Castiya emerged. He forced a smile and said to Lumian, "Thanks for your help these past days. I'll escort you to Tizamo."

Chapter 659: Poor "Monster"

Observing Camus's expression, as if compelled to act at gunpoint, Lumian didn't hold back. He replied with a smile, "I'd like that."

It was evident to him that the brass of the patrol team, or even Admiral Querarill himself, was concerned about Louis Berry wandering around their territory. Tizamo, where he was headed, was located near the primitive forest and had close ties to a Sequence 5 Desire Apostle. Therefore, two additional patrol team members with a certain relationship with Louis Berry were sent to accompany him. Even if they couldn't prevent trouble, they could at least send word before it became a catastrophe.

As for why they didn't directly stop Louis Berry from heading to Tizamo Town, it was partly because Lumian had hinted at the faction backing him when he submitted Twanaku's head. Without a conflict of principles, Admiral Querarill likely wouldn't make things difficult for him. Secondly, Louis Berry's investigations and adventures seemed to bring calamity, but they had exposed hidden dangers ahead of time. If the problem remained concealed and continued to evolve, Matani and Admiral Querarill might not be able to handle it in a year or two. When the time came, blood might flow like a river.

Kolobo, acting as the carriage driver, gazed ahead stonily. He fumbled for a pair of sunglasses and slid them onto the bridge of his nose. There were no visible injuries on his body.

As Camus held the carriage door open, he watched Louis Berry board, leading a young boy by the hand.

"He's going to Tizamo too?" Camus blurted in surprise.

He had assumed Louis Berry would leave his servant and godson at Hotel Orella, joining them later after dealing with Tizamo Town's issues. However, the adventurer was now bringing a young child to Tizamo, and it was evident this wasn't a leisurely trip. It was very dangerous!

Lumian's left foot remained on the ground, and his right foot halted at the carriage's edge. He smiled and spoke, "My godson is fascinated by jungle fruits, the unique beasts I hunt, and various spices."

Earlier, the Tizamons had mentioned their hometown's specialties, highlighting the excellence of roasted meat. The blend of spices and the distinctive gamey flavor of wild beasts in the forest contributed to Tizamo Town's unique delicacies.

Ludwig, already settled in the carriage, swallowed, seemingly in sync with Lumian.

Aren't you worried about endangering your godson? Why are you so confident? Camus didn't press, simply signaling Lugano with his eyes to hurry up.

Lugano cast a glance at the peculiar carriage driver, who trembled slightly beneath his black sunglasses. He entered the carriage and took a seat across from Lumian and Ludwig.

Camus shut the carriage door and settled beside Kolobo. With a sigh, he remarked, "You can remove your sunglasses now. It's been hard on you."

"Alright, alright, alright." Kolobo seemed to shiver as if struck by an icy wind. His teeth chattered, and his tremors intensified.

Camus turned to him, surprised.

"Didn't you strike a deal face-to-face with Louis Berry? Why are you still so afraid?"

Not seeing him directly again!

"Alright, alright, alright." Kolobo removed his sunglasses, taking more than ten seconds to compose himself.

In a hushed tone, he confessed with fear, "I feel like my fingers, my arms, my insides, even my head… all eaten.

"That, that…"

"That what?" Camus struggled to comprehend why the Monster's demeanor had shifted so drastically, sensing that the issue might be significant.

Kolobo swallowed hard and continued, "That… that child… is also… very dangerous!

"Though I haven't laid eyes on him, I sense a looming threat, like facing a lion, a tiger, a python, ready to eat me at any moment."

"…" Camus was stunned, a hiss escaping his lips.

Until now, Kolobo had never exhibited such fear except in the presence of three individuals radiating danger: Desire Apostle Twanaku with Wraith powers, and Louis Berry, capable of hunting Twanaku. Could this boy match them?

Is he also a Beyonder, perhaps a Sequence 5 Beyonder?

No, it's not merely a Sequence 5 matter. Our patrol team's captain is a Sequence 5, yet Kolobo never mentioned feeling such foreboding in his presence.

There must be something unique about these three individuals!

Regardless, the boy is undoubtedly extraordinary and hazardous!

No wonder Louis Berry is bringing his godson to Tizamo without worry. Perhaps the child poses an even greater threat… Camus unraveled his earlier confusion, stifling his curiosity, refraining from probing further with Kolobo.

In the confines of the four-wheeled carriage, even with the barrier between them, Louis Berry caught wind of their hushed exchange!

Considering the intel gleaned from the Fog Sea, Camus harbored suspicions that Louis Berry was a Sequence 5 Beyonder following the Hunter pathway. Those of this pathway were renowned for their sharp senses—exceptional vision, acute sense of smell, and keen hearing.

A Beyonder of the Monster pathway is quite intriguing. Even without laying eyes on Ludwig or hearing his voice, Louis can sense his ominous aura, a being who devours everything… Lumian, leaning against the carriage wall, toyed with his golden straw hat, shooting Ludwig a knowing smile.

Could it be that this "little child" has truly taken a liking to Kolobo and Camus?

Indeed. These are two Beyonders who haven't succumbed to severe corruption. Ludwig likely had a momentary lapse in control… Heh heh, Camus may not have noticed, but Kolobo reacted instantly, sensing the danger? Lumian acknowledged Ludwig with a nod.

"Well done. Your restraint is admirable."

Praise was due when a child behaved correctly, fostering a healthy mindset and habits!

Ludwig remained silent, his expression conveying he was not to be treated as a child.

A faint smile graced his lips as he retrieved a box of biscuits from his crimson school bag, nibbling on them.

What restraint… What did he mean by "well done"… Lugano, seated across from him, found himself perplexed.

Tizamo stood as the most remote town in Port Pylos, nestled against the edge of the primitive forest. A full two hours' journey by carriage was required to reach it.

Of course, for those in a hurry, an alternative route existed: boarding a steam locomotive from the port to Cahert, the southernmost town. From there, a carriage or coffin could be hired to venture northeast, shaving the travel time to Tizamo down to just an hour. However, Lumian showed no inclination towards haste.

As they departed Port Pylos, the road gradually narrowed and deteriorated. Yet, the carriage pressed on steadily. Kolobo, the carriage driver, operated with precision akin to a well-oiled machine, guiding the horses and carriage without falter.

An hour slipped by, and the carriage wound its way through the forest.

Abruptly, Lumian, pretending to slumber, snapped open his eyes.

His body turned dark and spectral, melding with the shadows cast by the window.

Shadow Transformation!

In an instant, gunshots pierced the forest's tranquility.

Bullets whizzed from afar, some thudding into the earth, kicking up clouds of soil, while others took aim at Camus, the carriage, and the horse.

Amidst the chaos, the horse crumpled, bleeding profusely, and the carriage toppled to the ground.

Kolobo had already abandoned his perch as the driver, escaping unscathed from the barrage of gunfire. Camus leaped clear of the carriage in advance, crouching low, revolver in hand. He maneuvered with agility, at times rolling, at others slithering deeper into the undergrowth.

With each movement, he unleashed shots, seeking to suppress the unseen assailant. In this range, many of his abilities were restricted.

A handful of fiery crimson orbs, almost blindingly white, streaked past Camus, disappearing into the forest's depths.

Rumble!

Amidst the thunderous explosions, the gunfire abruptly ceased.

Soon after, curses in Dutanese rang out from the forest's depths.

"Go to hell, you Northern Continent bandits!

"Rot with your sons of bitches!

"Come after us if you have the guts!

"…"

Gradually, the curses faded into the forest's depths.

Lumian emerged from the shadows of the carriage, opting not to pursue.

"It's the Resistance! What are they doing in Matani…" Camus frowned, muttering to himself in confusion.

In the Southern Continent, numerous Resistance factions abounded. He couldn't discern which faction they belonged to or their motives. Typically, Matani, ostensibly independent from the Intis Republic and governed by Admiral Querarill, a Southern Continent native, saw little Resistance activity. Their primary demand was the expulsion of colonists.

Could it be a faction of the Resistance dedicated to Death, aiming to revive Death's influence in Matani? Please not the Rose School of Thought-backed Resistance. No, those lunatics… Camus returned to the carriage, puzzled.

Lumian mulled over another matter.

Despite attaining Sequence 5 status, life still felt fragile.

Vulnerable to being shot dead!

If a Resistance member possessed sharpshooting skills and remained beyond his observational range, sniping from over 100 meters, they could have ended his life.

Reapers lacked the resilient bodies of Devils. While lacking Malicious Perception, Devils might sustain only minor wounds from rifle shots. Their absence of long-range Danger Premonition characteristic of Seer pathways rendered them unable to preemptively evade.

Granted, Lumian's Ascetic traits bolstered his spiritual perception. Anticipating danger, he had foreseen the attack.

Yet, if the adversary could nullify his spiritual perception or manipulate it effectively, conventional rifles could indeed imperil Lumian.

Yes, Shadow Transformation can serve as a shield. Bullets lacking special effects pose no genuine threat to shadow beings… Lumian redirected his thoughts, instructing Lugano, emerging from the carriage, "Check on the horse."

If it survived, attend to its injuries promptly for carriage duty. If not, Ludwig would command the equine corpse to pull the carriage.

After all, Ludwig had gained the ability to command a handful of low-level undead from a concoction brewed from Hisoka's eyeballs.

Chapter 660: Across the Door

Without hesitation, Lugano pushed himself up and hurried to the fallen horse, carefully examining it.

After a few seconds, he exclaimed regretfully, "It's dead!"

The poor horse was unlucky. Despite being over a hundred meters away, it was hit twice by a flurry of gunshots. One bullet struck its side, and the other hit its head. It couldn't be any more dead.

In contrast, the carriage driver remained unscathed. At most, he had scraped his skin during the tumble.

Lumian glanced at Kolobo, who had his back turned to him and the others, seemingly on guard against any potential attacks from the depths of the forest. He led Ludwig, who had been thrown from the carriage, to the side of the motionless, bleeding horse corpse.

"Stop the bleeding," Lumian instructed Lugano.

Why stop it when the horse is already dead? Although Lugano didn't understand, he extended his shimmering palm.

After the dead horse's wounds closed, Lumian turned to Ludwig and said, "Your turn."

Ludwig, dressed in a child's formal attire, nodded slightly.

He extended his right palm, gripping the dead horse with his five fingers, and slowly raised it.

The blood-stained corpse of the horse suddenly stood up, causing the overturned carriage to shift slightly.

Upon seeing this, Camus gave a barely perceptible nod.

Is this child from the Death pathway or the Prisoner pathway?

However, there's no cold aura or corpse-like aura…

After Lugano righted the carriage, the undead horse corpse continued pulling the five of them towards Tizamo.

Just before noon, Lumian spotted their destination.

It was a small town half-encircled by rubber trees, acacia trees, laurels, and other vegetation. Several plantations dotted the muddy road, and the air was filled with different spice scents and the alluring smell of roasted meat.

Tizamo's buildings were unique. Apart from the Eternal Blazing Sun Church cathedral, which had a distinct northern style, the rest were propped up by wooden stakes and stone pillars. They were reminiscent of West Balam—the base deliberately left empty underneath.

This was due to the humid air and abundant rainfall in many West Balam areas. Water would often overflow and pool below.

Lumian climbed down from the four-wheeled, four-seater carriage, watching the people busy with their tasks in the plantation and the town.

…

Trier, Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative, Apartment 702, 9 Rue Orosai.

Franca reclined in the recliner, rocking gently as she recollected the previous day's events.

After Jenna woke up that morning, she went out to the streets to buy meat, vegetables, fruits, and bread, making Franca wonder if she had experienced a wet dream or hallucination.

Why did she suddenly volunteer to help me with digesting the potion? Compared to most Trieriens, she can definitely be considered conservative…

Moreover, she was so direct and straightforward that I almost lost my desires out of shock. Shouldn't she flirt first to set the mood? When the time comes, even if she doesn't initiate, I won't be able to control myself… The more Franca thought about it, the more puzzled she became. She felt Jenna wouldn't normally act that way.

After recalling Jenna's past experiences and actions, she realized there was no issue.

That was precisely what Jenna would do!

Jenna has a bold nature, or rather, a personality that allows her to act decisively…

After the Showy Diva singer who helped her was raped by Margot and became unstable, she was truly willing to go to extremes to assassinate Margot and avenge her friend. To that end, she even indebted herself to me for the Assassin potion and firmly became a Beyonder despite her finances…

At the Hugues Artois banquet, she faced the Member of Parliament protected by official Beyonders and evil gods' minions. She risked everything, disregarding her own fate. She killed the bastard who brought catastrophe to the market district and her family on the spot…

In her heart, I should still be more important than that Showy Diva friend of hers. Suddenly going to extremes and offering to help me with the potion's effects is indeed something she would do…

Besides, sigh, this definitely isn't a spur-of-the-moment idea. She has asked me several times about my progress digesting the Pleasure potion and if I have a new partner. She even recommended Lumian…

Realizing that I haven't found a new partner and that I'm only open-minded outwardly, she decided to act after being stirred by Lumian advancing to Sequence 5 yesterday…

That doesn't seem enough reason—Jenna wouldn't sacrifice her body because of just those things. Sigh, sacrifice…

Could it be that she had long realized I secretly liked her and didn't seek out a new partner because of her? Could she believe she affected my digesting the Pleasure potion, causing her to act?

Yes! That must be it. That's the only way she'd truly go to such extremes.

Ahhh! Why can't I find any hint of romantic love?

Franca wailed inwardly.

If she had known this would happen, she would have summoned her courage, toughened her resolve, and sought Lumian's help. That way, she wouldn't feel as conflicted and pained as she did now.

Of course, she didn't seek out a new intimate partner partly because she cared about Jenna's opinion.

She had become Gardner Martin's lover and shared his other lovers before meeting Jenna. There was no changing that history, so she continued on.

After Gardner Martin's demise, she had claimed she wanted Browns to experience true pleasure and participate in the Demoness's female orgies, but most of it was just talk. She was filled with anticipation only out of novelty. If Browns suddenly agreed, she might hesitate and make excuses.

She didn't want to leave an unrestrained image in Jenna or Lumian's minds.

To put it simply, her answer to the question "Is there really no one in this world you care about?" had changed, so she was hesitant to actively pursue a new intimate partner.

Jenna had no substantial intimate experience, so she didn't know how to set a mood for such situations. She could only revert to the straightforward seduction from when she was Little Minx, but she didn't want to deceive my feelings and make me fall deeper. That's why she acted that way yesterday.

Thankfully, she's relatively level-headed. She didn't seek a lover to make me give up, allowing me to truly find a new intimate partner. Yes, she might think that would be giving me prolonged pain and not prolonged pleasure. It would have hindered my digestion of the potion… Franca felt even more dejected after piecing together the entire situation.

...

On the stairs leading to Apartment 702.

Jenna held a bag of bread and a basket of beef, vegetables, and fruits, reluctant to go back inside.

Recalling yesterday's events made her blush, unsure of how to face Franca.

In her previous days as a Showy Diva singer, she had witnessed others' affection and felt it was just so-so. Although exciting, she thought she could endure it.

Unexpectedly, after experiencing it for real, she realized pleasure could make people become consumed by it.

Phew… Jenna took a few deep breaths to calm herself.

What troubled her now was how to interact with Franca.

Wait, should I pretend nothing happened and face her with my usual demeanor? Should I be more cheerful and take the initiative to mention yesterday, pretending it's no big deal so Franca doesn't mind?

But won't this upset her? She needs to digest the Pleasure potion…

Besides, one pleasure encounter is definitely not enough. I have to spend time with her as a couple…

Should I keep seducing her tonight like yesterday, or wait for her to initiate?

Dammit, how annoying!

Jenna found such matters more vexing than assassinating powerful figures. Whether avenging herself on Margot or killing Hugues Artois, she had always felt death was the worst outcome—no big deal. However, this situation clearly hadn't reached life-or-death stakes. The subsequent troubles would linger.

Jenna couldn't help but feel frustrated at the thought of maintaining an intimate physical relationship with Franca and all the complexities involved. She wished she could simply assassinate the Minister of Industry, Moran Avigny, instead.

Taking deep breaths to steady her emotions, Jenna analyzed how to approach this from an actress's perspective to make Franca more accepting of future intimacies.

She had already taken the first bold step. She definitely wasn't willing to give up now. She planned to continue their relationship until Franca finished digesting the Pleasure potion's effects.

After figuring out her next move, Jenna's lips curled into a faint smile.

Carrying bread and ingredients, she briskly climbed the stairs and returned to Apartment 702.

As soon as she opened the door, Franca jumped up from the recliner instinctively and forced a smile. She said nervously, "You're back?"

Amused by Franca's actions, Jenna chuckled and sighed inwardly.

How great would it be if you didn't want to become lovers…

Jenna calmly walked to the dining table and placed her items on it. Then, she glared at Franca.

"What are you waiting for? Help me!"

"Alright, alright." Franca hurried over.

Seeing that Jenna wasn't reserved or distant, nor reverted to her usual demeanor, she felt an inexplicable relief. She even began to anticipate the night's arrival.

…

Sizzle. Sizzle.

The juices from a piece of beef dripped onto the fire, transforming into smoke that swirled upwards, blending with the aroma of spices. This caused Ludwig to swallow a few mouthfuls of saliva.

However, the boy patiently waited, not rushing the cook until the beef roasted to its optimal state.

Lumian turned his body and gazed at a three-story building diagonally across from the restaurant.

The yellowish-brown house was the former residence rebuilt by Hisoka Twanaku.

Chapter 661: "Reconnaissance Tools"

During lunch, Lumian used the excuse of going to the washroom to make his way to Hisoka Twanaku's tawny house.

After ascending the wooden stairs and passing through the empty, open ground floor, he took out a new wire and picked the lock on the door.

This level was completely open-air, leaving only support pillars. At a glance, it was very spacious and simple.

Stepping onto the wooden floor, Lumian circled around but found signs that no one had lived here for a long time. He found nothing worth further investigating.

Suddenly, a voice came from behind him.

"What's the problem here?"

The voice belonged to Camus Castiya. When he saw Lumian enter Twanaku's rebuilt house from the dining room window, he found an excuse to leave the table and hurry over.

Lumian wasn't surprised at all. He looked around and said, "Nothing."

As he spoke, he ascended the stairs to the third floor.

Camus sighed silently and followed.

He felt his mentality had aged considerably when with Louis Berry, resembling someone Vice-Captain Reaza's age.

Oh, Mother Earth, I'm not even twenty-four years old!

Although I arrived in Matani at eighteen and joined the patrol team, dealing with numerous Beyonder incidents, participating in dangerous battles, and accumulating extensive experience, I am still a young man—a laidback young man who doesn't focus on appearances in daily life!

With a solemn, vigilant mindset, Camus followed Lumian through the third-floor rooms twice, searching through all the items.

"There's nothing out of place." After setting down a pen holder, Camus shared his assessment with Lumian.

Lumian hadn't gained anything either.

After a moment's contemplation, he responded, "Bring Kolobo here later and ask if there are any areas that make him uneasy, dangerous, or uncomfortable."

Having only collaborated once, he's already adept at utilizing Kolobo's uniqueness… Bringing Kolobo here… Why does it feel like a police officer asking a constable to bring a canine unit… Camus criticized inwardly and nodded.

"Understood."

As Lumian surveyed his surroundings again, he thought, I'll bring Ludwig over later and ask if he detects any fragrance of special ingredients.

Returning to the dining room with Camus, Lumian indulged in the Gwadar beverage, savoring the rich and intricate aroma of roasted beef, roasted chicken wings, roasted snake meat, roasted spiders, and roasted leeches…

After eating and drinking his fill, Lumian took Ludwig's hand and led him to "Hisoka" Twanaku's house. Camus, Lugano, and Kolobo—who wore sunglasses and walked sideways like a crab—followed closely behind.

After exploring every nook and cranny, Lumian looked at Ludwig and asked with a smile, "Is there anything edible here?"

Ludwig shook his head. "No."

Lumian led the boy down to the second level and looked at Kolobo, who had suddenly turned his back to them, and Camus.

"Do any of you sense anything unusual?"

The thin Kolobo hesitated for a moment and said, "This house feels a little cold. It doesn't sit well with me."

"Where exactly?" Lumian inquired with a calm expression.

Kolobo replied succinctly, "Everywhere."

There's something wrong with the entire house and even this land? Hisoka definitely didn't rebuild his previous home for nostalgia. He's not the original owner of that body, so he probably doesn't have much attachment to this place. He's also a true Coldblooded… Lumian pondered for over ten seconds and said to Lugano, Camus, and the others, "Stay here and guard against any mishaps."

He returned to the third floor and lay on a wooden bed with traces of someone having slept in it.

Large, black mosquitoes flew over with crackling sounds. However, in the flickering sparks, they were ignited one by one, turning into charred corpses that floated onto the bed.

Lumian quickly slipped into a deep slumber.

In his daze, he slowly awoke.

Pa! Lumian took out the golden pocket watch from Salle de Bal Brisé, opened it, and muttered to himself, "Slept for half an hour and didn't have any special dreams…"

He had always believed the Dream Festival was related to dreams, so he deliberately slept in Hisoka's house, but nothing happened.

Lumian gazed at the midday sun shining through the window and stood up thoughtfully.

Could the timing be off?

Must I sleep at a specific time and place to participate in the Dream Festival?

Therefore, most Tizamo Town residents are unaware of its existence…

When Lumian returned to the spacious but crude second level, he realized Camus and the others now had three more people with them.

One was a man in his thirties with a painted face. His light brown skin and thick lips gave him a relatively clean-cut look, and his black hair fell to his shoulders. A strong pungent smell wafted from him. The other was a young woman wearing dark leather armor. Her brown hair was tied in two strands draped over her shoulders. Her light brown skin and facial features exuded a wild beauty. She carried a hunting bow and a leather quiver of arrows on her back.

Another man, dressed similarly to Camus and the others in a shirt and thin pants, stood over 1.9 meters tall with an appearance leaning towards the Feysac Empire. He had short light-blond hair, light-blue eyes, and a face bearing signs of exposure to sun and rain.

"They're our colleagues, members of the Tizamo Town patrol team," Camus introduced.

He pointed at the man with the white paint pattern on his face and said, "Captain of the local patrol team, Maslow.

"His teammate…"

Camus turned to the wild-looking woman with a bow and arrows on her back and the tall Feysacian man and said, "Rhea.

"Loban, used to be an adventurer."

He spoke in Intisian the entire time.

Finally, Camus addressed the three local patrol team members, "This is the great adventurer, Louis Berry. The other two are his assistant and godson."

"This is the great adventurer, Louis Berry.

"The other two are his assistant and godson."

"Great adventurer…" Maslow repeated the term and cast his gaze at Loban.

Feysacian Loban shook his head, indicating he had never heard of him.

Maslow averted his gaze and asked Lumian, "Are you here to hunt?"

Tizamo Town had been a favorite hunting ground for Port Pylos's gentry for decades. There was no shortage of residents proficient in Intisian, and the patrol team had language requirements to handle the gentry's requests.

Lumian responded with a smile, "Something like that."

Hunting for Hisoka's inheritance and hidden issues was also a form of hunting.

Seeing the skeptical expressions on Maslow and the others' faces, Camus hurriedly explained, "Do you remember the telegram sent last night?"

"You mean…" With her hunting bow and arrows, Rhea couldn't help but glance at Lumian again.

Clearly, she, Maslow, and company had just arrived and hadn't had time to discuss the detailed situation with Camus and Kolobo. A telegram could only convey limited information.

Camus nodded solemnly.

"Monsieur Louis Berry is here to investigate the hidden issues behind Twanaku."

Using the excuse of inspecting the house again, he led the three local patrol team members upstairs.

Lugano glanced at the stairs and asked Kolobo, who had his back to them, "There's a local patrol team in Tizamo?"

Based on his experience, there shouldn't be any official Beyonder teams permanently stationed in the Northern Continent's small towns and villages like Port Pylos. They would typically send someone to handle issues as they arose.

Kolobo turned his back to Lumian and Ludwig, trembling as he replied, "Most other towns don't have them. This place is rather special and is often attacked by primitive tribes. Not only did our patrol team station a permanent team here, but the Admiral Guard also has Beyonders at the military camp outside town."

Lugano glanced at the strange official Beyonder who doubled as their carriage driver and couldn't hide his curiosity.

"Why do you always have your back to us and wear black sunglasses?"

Don't you want others to discover something's wrong with your eyes?"

Kolobo fell silent, unsure if he should answer.

At that moment, Camus led Maslow and the others back to the second floor.

When they looked at Lumian again, Maslow, Rhea, and Loban's expressions turned much more serious.

Lumian smiled and asked casually, "Did anything unusual happen with this house?"

"No," Maslow had already recalled the relevant details.

With a nod, Lumian replied, "Were you transferred to Tizamo after the attack last year?"

He recalled the dossier had mentioned the three Beyonders stationed here perished in the primitive tribe's attack.

"Yes," Loban, the former Feysacian adventurer, replied in a rough voice. "It's been nearly a year. It's been very peaceful here. No more attacks."

According to the records, the tribe in the primitive forest attacked two to three times a year in past years… Admiral Querarill's response of sending more guards and army deterred the primitive tribe from taking the risk. Did they really retreat into the forest depths? Or did the April Fool's prank cause something to change? Lumian sensed something amiss.

After conversing for a while, Lumian prepared to take Ludwig and Lugano to check into the motel.

Maslow took a few steps forward and retrieved two items from a small leather bag hanging from his waist.

There were brown candles and a glass bottle filled with a light-yellow liquid.

"Mosquito repellent candles and tranquil essential oil. I hope you get a good night's sleep," Maslow said in accented Intisian.

Camus chimed in, "What he means is that this place is close to the primitive forest, and mosquitoes and poisonous insects are everywhere. Although you're Beyonders, it won't be pleasant if you're accidentally bitten. Furthermore, you won't be able to sleep peacefully and will keep waking up."

"The mosquito repellent candles are made from plants that mosquitoes dislike. Tranquil essential oil comes from certain animals, making those damned buzzing fellows stay away from you."

At this point, Camus, Maslow, Rhea, and the others suddenly realized there were no mosquitoes on the entire second level.

Lumian turned to Ludwig and accepted the candle and oil with a smile.

Then, he gently pinched his nose to confirm the pungent smell on Maslow and the others came from the tranquil essential oil.

After Lumian, Ludwig, and Lugano left Twanaku's house, Maslow looked at Kolobo, who had his back to everyone, in confusion. He asked in Dutanese, "What's wrong?"

Chapter 662: Those Words

Kolobo finally turned around.

He took off his sunglasses and spoke in Dutanese with a weary look, "My gut tells me I shouldn't look directly at them. I can only take a quick glance at most."

"Why's that?" Rhea asked curiously, her wildness evident as she carried her hunting bow.

"Just intuition," Kolobo replied firmly, unsure of the reason but convinced he shouldn't stare.

Loban, the Feysacian, wore a pensive expression.

"What's on your mind?" Maslow, his face painted white, turned to him and asked.

The three had worked together in Tizamo Town for a year and understood each other well. Maslow could tell Loban had thought of something from his look.

Observing Camus and the others' gazes, Loban pondered for a moment before saying, "While adventuring across the Five Seas, I came across this saying: 'Don't look directly at God.'"

"Don't look directly at God…" Camus's forehead twitched as he whispered the phrase.

As a Castiya family descendant, albeit from a collateral branch, he had more extensive mystical knowledge than most Beyonders.

Could it be that Louis Berry and his godson were actual gods, unable to be gazed upon?

No, that couldn't be right. Kolobo avoided looking at Twanaku directly, yet Twanaku was merely a Sequence 5 Beyonder of the Prisoner and Criminal pathways—not even a demigod!

"I've heard that before during the padre's sermons. It's about respecting and worshiping God, right?" said Rhea, a devout Eternal Blazing Sun believer.

"No, it's not from the Church scriptures. It's recorded in a mystical text," Loban shook his head, rejecting her explanation.

Maslow let out a deep chuckle.

"Surely the great adventurer can't literally be a deity walking among us?"

"Maybe not a true deity," Loban recalled, "But the book's notes state it refers to a 'Mythical Creature'. I'm unsure what exactly that means, but if it contains the word 'god', it must have at least some level of godhood. Could that adventurer be a demigod?"

"It doesn't seem that way currently," Camus said, gradually forming a new idea. "Perhaps the adventurer is simply one of a deity's Blessed, carrying a divine item or aura bestowed upon him. So it's true we can't directly look at 'God', but that 'God' isn't referring to him, only something he possesses."

This could explain the situation with Twanaku very well.

"You mean like the most famous adventurer?" Loban the Feysacian realized.

Adventurers, treasure hunters, pirates and merchants across the Five Seas now knew Gehrman Sparrow had been The Fool's Oracle before becoming an Angel.

"Precisely." Camus nodded.

Simultaneously, he inwardly cursed.

Dogsh*t, why was I sent to watch over matters involving a deity's Blessed?

This was undoubtedly perilous. A moment of carelessness could lead to death!

Camus hadn't wanted to accept Vice-Captain Reaza's order the day before, but over the past five years, Reaza had saved him from the brink of death three times. He couldn't refuse.

Otherwise, with the prestigious "Don" prefix and Castiya family name, he could have declined his superior's orders. At worst, he could leave the patrol team and seek opportunities elsewhere. After all, he had already digested the Sequence 7 Interrogator potion. He had saved enough funds for his subsequent advancement thanks to Louis Berry's two commissions. Even returning to his family, he wouldn't be the type brushed aside.

But to repay Reaza's kindness, Camus reluctantly agreed to come to Tizamo Town and monitor Louis Berry's every move. Feeling upset, he couldn't help but inwardly curse.

As a devout and educated believer in Mother Earth, Camus wouldn't curse with vulgar phrases like "son of a…" From his view, mothers were great—birth and nurturing equally important, just as the earth nurtured all things' growth.

After discussing the adventurer Louis Berry, Loban the Feysacian turned to Camus and Kolobo, saying, "When we transferred to Tizamo, we were told we could return after a year, that we wouldn't stay forever. Now, nearly a year has passed, and you're here too. Does that mean we can return to Port Pylos?"

As a Feysacian, you appear tall, robust, boorish, and unintelligent, but you're actually dishonest… Did you discover that Louis Berry's matter might be a huge problem and want an excuse to slip away early? Camus acutely sensed Loban's hidden thoughts and joked, "There's still a week left! Don't even think about returning to Port Pylos early. We're not here for your rotation."

…

At the Brieu Motel.

This was the favorite accommodation for the gentlemen who came to Tizamo Town to hunt. Although it couldn't compare to Hotel Orella, it was at least relatively clean.

Lumian's sole reason for choosing this place was the availability of a suite.

Otherwise, he would have to rent two adjacent rooms and utilize his Hunter's precise grasp of structures to blast through the adjoining wall without affecting the overall load-bearing walls. When departing, he'd get Lugano to replace the stone bricks and repair the opening.

The ground floor was equally open, supported by stone pillars. However, the three-story building above bore a distinct Intisian flair. The beige walls, recessed statuary niches, arched windows, and venetian curtains made Lumian feel as if he had returned to Trier.

When Lugano lit the mosquito repellent candle and used its slightly pungent smell to chase away the poisonous insects and mosquitoes, it became even more reminiscent.

This is very similar to Trieriens using sulfur's smell to repel bedbugs… Lumian recalled his initial arrival in Trier.

After using sulfur's smell to chase the bedbugs into the neighboring room, playwright Gabriel ignited it and drove them back. After this back-and-forth, most bedbugs went elsewhere, leaving only a few that the doll messenger eliminated.

Lumian sighed silently, recalling Gabriel's death and the deceased tenants of the Auberge du Coq Doré.

He walked to the window and gazed at the street below.

The gentlemen in hunting attire and their servants on unicorns weaved through the dark-brown or light-brown townspeople, flowing into Brieu

Motel, jungle restaurants, and other establishments like rivers.

Under the noon sun, Tizamo Town was scorchingly humid this season, making it unsuitable for outdoor activities.

On the second floor, Lumian focused his attention and observed the passersby directly below.

He attempted to discern any potential issues with Tizamo Town from their fortunes.

He was prepared for backlash or corruption.

These passersby's fortunes are normal. Some seem to have romantic encounters looming, some would lose money, and some might encounter a bloody calamity, but nothing too serious…

Lumian averted his gaze and said to Lugano, "Take Ludwig to rest. I'll take a walk outside."

"Alright." Knowing the trip to Tizamo Town might be dangerous, Lugano had no intention of wandering out unless his boss asked him to prepare food for Ludwig.

He had no choice but to go along. Otherwise, he would be the one eaten!

Tizamo Town wasn't small with streets spanning out in two directions. Lumian strolled leisurely, hands in pockets, donning a golden straw hat.

He no longer wore the straw hat to enhance Louis Berry's persona, but to shield himself from the sunlight. He had intended to do so many times before.

This was because an adverse effect of Shadow Transformation was a greater fear of sunlight than ordinary people.

Although Lumian could endure relying on his Ascetic abilities, this would impact his condition to some extent. Why make things difficult when he could resolve it with a straw hat?

Moreover, with the appearance of Louis Berry wearing a golden straw hat, the enemy wouldn't think he was afraid of sunlight.

As his gaze casually shifted, Lumian spotted a girl.

She was a typical Northern Continent native, her black hair cascading down her back like a waterfall, a few sparkling bows adorning her head. Her azure-tinged eyes accentuated her sharp, delicate nose. An unmistakable youthful aura radiated between her brows.

The girl wore a light, lace-trimmed, pleated white dress, but instead of high heels, she donned a pair of brown leather boots. As she conversed and laughed with companions, she danced, seemingly unconcerned about passersby's opinions.

Lumian glanced at her again.

It wasn't because she was beautiful. Although quite lovely, her appearance and bearing couldn't compare to a Demoness or truly beautiful humans.

Lumian simply sensed her personality differed from Trier's ladies.

In Trier, no matter how open-minded respectable middle and upper-class women were in private, they still publicly cared about image and others' opinions—a product of their upbringing.

This girl exuded an air of freedom. She could laugh loudly or spin around whenever she pleased.

This was distinct from an improperly raised lower-class woman's demeanor. This girl's attire, speech and aura indicated good education and upbringing.

"Amandina, daughter of Palms Manor's Sir Petit, and Monsieur Robert's fiancée," Camus, resembling a specter, materialized from nowhere beside Lumian with the introduction.

Palms Manor was a plantation near Tizamo Town.

A Southern Continent girl raised without Trier's upper-middle-class societal constraints… As Lumian judged this, he thought of his sister Aurore.

Sometimes, Aurore displayed such a side.

However, the reasons were clearly different.

"Where are you headed?" Camus inquired.

Lumian retracted his gaze and replied with a smile, "The cathedral.

"Are you coming with me to praise the Sun?"

Chapter 663: Late Night

Like many cathedrals in Intis, Tizamo's had a golden dome, resembling the sun's reflection on the ground.

As Lumian passed through the door, he was dazzled by the walls, arches, gold leaf inlaid in the dome, a mural sprinkled with golden powder, and a golden statue. The sunlight streaming through the glass behind the altar made him instinctively raise his hand, wanting to press down his golden straw hat.

It was lunchtime, and many simply-dressed Tizamo residents sat in various pews, heads bowed in prayer.

They didn't mind the cathedral's dazzling, extravagant appearance at all.

This was not only because they had always believed in the Eternal Blazing Sun since childhood, but they also had numerous gold mines in the former Balam Empire. The people had a widespread fondness for gold, a hobby preserved to this day.

Lumian shared an affinity for gold, but didn't want to endure the scorching sunlight.

Beside him, Camus tried explaining, "I'm not monitoring you, nor am I saying I'll follow you everywhere to prevent accidents.

"I'm assisting you. You're still unfamiliar with Dutanese. You lack sufficient understanding of the situation in Tizamo and the people here. I can introduce you."

Lumian seized the opportunity to turn and ask with a smile, "Do you know it well?"

Camus ruffled his disheveled brown hair and replied without embarrassment, "If there's anything I don't understand, I can ask Maslow and the others to help."

Lumian didn't mind having an official Beyonder by his side. If anything happened, he could use the extra muscle.

He nodded slightly and said, "If you want to follow, go ahead."

As Lumian spoke, he walked towards the row of seats in front of the altar under the blazing sunlight.

Camus hesitated for a few seconds before finding a seat in the farthest corner of the cathedral.

As a believer of Earth Mother, he could freely enter and exit the cathedrals of all orthodox gods, but he couldn't participate in acts of worship.

He only knew that Louis Berry had a close connection to the Church of The Fool, but he wasn't sure if his faith was with The Fool.

Lumian used his Ascetic endurance to control the twitching of his facial muscles. He sat down under the sunlight as if nothing happened and lowered his head to pray in front of the preaching padre.

The padre, a native of Port Pylos named Cali, had standard dark brown skin, sunken eyes, and a chiseled face. He only had a thin layer of black hair, not wearing a clergyman's hat.

In his forties with a solemn expression, he preached in unaccented Intisian.

Lumian, feigning prayer, found himself distracted. Thoughts raced through his mind, making him feel as if he had returned to Cordu. Back then, even when attending Mass and praying in the cathedral, he was lost in his own thoughts. When it was almost over, he quickly praised the Sun and wished his sister would always be healthy and that he wouldn't need much homework or test prep to get into university.

None of that came true.

After the padre finished preaching, Lumian raised his head and narrowed his eyes in the sunlight, focusing on observing the padre's fortune.

There was nothing special about it.

On the surface, there's indeed nothing abnormal about Tizamo… Amidst sunburn-like pain, Lumian planned to avert his gaze, but his heart stirred as he activated his Reaper's Weakness Investigation ability.

He thought of Padre Guillaume Bénet and Father Montserrat of the Church of Earth Mother.

Who said clergymen from orthodox Churches wouldn't be problematic?

In that case, he could observe the padre's weaknesses in advance. If he truly encountered clerical depravity in the future, he could quickly resolve it.

Various colors appeared on the padre's body in Lumian's eyes.

However, there was no pale-white among them!

This meant the padre had no weaknesses!

Impossible. Even if this padre is a Beyonder, his Sequence shouldn't be too high. How can he have no weaknesses? The Sun pathway isn't known for toughness and imperviousness… Could he be from another pathway? No, all likely have weaknesses… Amidst surprise, Lumian observed more closely.

Finally, he noticed a faint pallor.

It wasn't on the padre's body, but in the depths of his Astral Projection.

Does this mean his weakness lies in his spirit, fearing attacks targeting his Spirit Body? How did he manage to have no bodily weaknesses… From the looks of it, I have to dismantle his body piece by piece to kill him if I'm not targeting his Spirit Body… Lumian's surprise quickly dissipated, replaced by joy and anticipation.

Regardless, discovering any abnormalities was a good thing!

This meant he was a step closer to the problem in Tizamo and the Dream Festival Hisoka had mentioned.

"Brother, what are you looking at?" Cali asked Lumian with a smile, clutching a Bible.

Lumian responded with a smile, "Looking at the sunlight on you.

"Praise the Sun!"

With that, Lumian stood up, spread his arms slightly, and turned to leave.

Now was not the time to delve into the abnormality in the padre's body.

Padre Cali was delighted by Lumian's response.

Firstly, the other party was subtly praising him for being bathed in sunlight, akin to a deity's blessings. Secondly, as a local clergyman without Northern blood, he had always yearned for Northern gentry's recognition.

After leaving the Saint-Sien Cathedral, Lumian casually had Camus circle the entirety of Tizamo twice with him, including the military camp, plantation, and the outskirts of the primitive forest.

Camus eagerly introduced everyone he knew.

As evening approached, Lumian made his way towards the Brieu Motel and asked, "What did you do with that dead horse?"

"I sold it to the butcher. I'm planning to buy a new one from a nearby planter," Camus replied matter-of-factly.

Lumian felt a twinge of disappointment for Ludwig. He remained silent and entered the motel.

Late at night.

In the shadows outside the Brieu Motel, Lumian emerged, no longer wearing his golden straw hat. He strolled towards the yellowish-brown house that "Hisoka" Twanaku had rebuilt.

It was nearly midnight, and Tizamo had grown very quiet. Apart from a few patrolling soldiers, drunk patrons, and their companions, no one else was walking outside.

Under the crimson moonlight, Lumian passed by the bar named Giant Boa and heard a commotion inside.

In the primitive forest a few hundred meters away, the howls of wild beasts echoed intermittently.

Lumian proceeded until he reached his destination. He ascended to the third level and found the wooden bed he had slept on earlier.

He busied himself for a while, making preparations. He wasn't in a hurry to lie down. He looked around and muttered to himself thoughtfully, "Termiboros, have you noticed anything unusual here?"

Termiboros's majestic voice reverberated within Lumian's body.

"I'm using your eyes, ears, nose, spirituality, and fate to observe the outside world—just slightly more than what you see."

Does this mean that what I see and discover will still be restricted by my body, spirituality, and level? Hold on, this fellow is becoming more and more like a riddler. He didn't directly answer if there's anything abnormal about this house or what's abnormal… Lumian scoffed.

"Are you truly an Angel of the Fate domain? I'm already a Sequence 5, and you can't use my eyes and spirituality to detect the problem here. Haven't you noticed that a Sequence 8 of the Monster pathway can sense that this place is cold?

"No way. Are Angels of the Inevitability pathway inferior to Sequence 8s of the Fate pathway?"

The Monster pathway was also known as the Fate pathway.

Lumian provoked Termiboros to see if he could extract any useful information from this Angel-level Ascetic.

He didn't hold out much hope, but at least he wouldn't lose anything.

Termiboros fell silent, as if He had vanished from Lumian's body.

"How tolerant. As expected of an Ascetic Angel," Lumian mocked. He took out the golden pocket watch he had obtained from Salle de Bal Brise and flipped it open to confirm the current time.

11:51 p.m.

Putting away his pocket watch, Lumian lay on the wooden bed in the room.

This time, he was here to see if sleeping in the house at night would trigger any abnormalities and if he could enter a special dream to participate in the Dream Festival.

To this end, Lumian had instructed Ludwig in advance to wake him up in the house rebuilt by Twanaku if he wasn't back by the time they had their second meal.

After Lumian promised there would be a feast the next day, Ludwig agreed.

With crackling sounds, the menacing spiders crawling on the outer walls of the house and the numerous mosquitoes in the room burned and fell, emitting a charred fragrance.

Relying on Cogitation, Lumian swiftly drifted into a deep slumber.

In a daze, he slowly woke up. He straightened up and realized that he was still on the wooden bed, in the master bedroom on the third floor of Hisoka's house.

It was late at night outside the window, and the crimson moonlight seemed to be obscured by clouds. Only a small amount of light filtered through, making it abnormally dim.

The howling of wild beasts in the primitive forest and the faint noise from the bar had completely ceased. The night had entered its most peaceful state, as silent as death.

There's no change… Lumian sighed in disappointment.

Just as he was about to take out his golden pocket watch to confirm the time and leave the house in the dark environment to return to the Brieu Motel, his pupils suddenly dilated and his eyes froze.

Under the dim crimson moonlight, Lumian swiftly scanned the room's floor.

He didn't see mosquito corpses!

The mosquitoes he had incinerated with his Pyromaniac powers before falling asleep should have been charred on the ground, but now, they were nowhere to be found. The floor was clean as if it had just been cleaned!

Could it be that someone came in while I was asleep and cleaned the room? I've planted several traps around me. They can't be easily bypassed… Wraith? Lumian instantly tensed up. He took out the golden pocket watch he had previously kept in his shirt pocket under his vest and flipped it open to check the time.

11:58 p.m.

Chapter 664: Confirming the Boundary

11:58?

Lumian's gaze fixated on the golden pocket watch, his suspicions heightened by the peculiar scent in the air.

He felt as though he had slumbered for more than an hour. Why then had only seven minutes elapsed?

Though the unreliability of his instincts were plausible, other anomalies lurked. The absence of mosquito corpses and the eerie silence hinted at peculiarities.

Lumian, drawing from his past encounters, murmured to himself, Could it be that I've entered a special dream?

In the dead of night, slumbering within this tawny house leads to a peculiar dream?

Did "Hisoka" Twanaku rebuild the house to make it look less suspicious for him to stay there?

But why would such a thing happen?

Lumian bowed his head and peered ahead. His gaze seemed to penetrate through wooden planks and various obstacles, revealing the corresponding underground area.

Uncertain about the origin of this anomaly, he could only speculate based on common sense and experience.

In the silent darkness, Lumian shuffled his feet, producing creaking sounds as he left the house that once belonged to "Hisoka" Twanaku.

The street lay deserted, and many of the livestock on the ground floor of the buildings seemed to blend into the night. It was impossible to discern if they still existed. The footsteps of patrolling soldiers had vanished completely.

A warm, humid night breeze swept through the unobstructed streets, surrounding Lumian as he headed towards the entrance of the Giant Boa bar.

Straining his ears, Lumian noticed that it was so quiet that even the rustling of insects and the buzzing of mosquitoes had ceased.

His expression remained unchanged as he extended his right hand, pushing open the heavy wooden door.

Darkness shrouded the interior. With the dim moonlight filtering through the window and Lumian's sharp eyesight as a Hunter, he could barely discern the outlines of the bar counter, liquor cabinet, small round table, chairs, candlestick wall lamps, and other items, but not a single human was in sight.

The bar seemed to have been closed for quite some time.

This is even more perplexing. Before I fell asleep, this bar was quite lively. It's impossible for them to clear out the customers and clean every corner in seven to eight minutes.

Based on my experience, even though countryside bars close earlier than those in the city and aren't bustling until two or three in the morning, they usually continue selling alcohol until midnight. Also, they usually ask those who are still drinking to leave after they're done. If they encounter a drunk who refuses to leave, it tends to cause some delay… Lumian, a regular at Cordu's Ol' Tavern, felt confident in making such judgments, drawing from his various experiences in different bars.

This conviction only strengthened his belief that he was caught in what seemed to be a very real dream.

Suddenly, memories of past events in Cordu flooded Lumian's mind, causing his grip on the heavy wooden door of the Giant Boa bar to freeze.

After a moment of contemplation, he decided to leave and headed back to the Brieu Motel.

Walking through the dark stairs and a corridor paved with aged planks, Lumian returned to his suite on the second floor at a moderate pace. He pushed open the wooden door to the child's room.

The dim crimson moonlight poured into the room, illuminating the sky-blue patterned blanket and bedsheets.

But no one was sleeping here.

Ludwig had disappeared too.

Combined with the strange sights on his way, Lumian strongly suspected that he was alone in this dream.

All the townsfolk, livestock, and outsiders had vanished, leaving him in solitude in Tizamo Town!

This can't be considered a festival unless it is named the Loneliness Festival… Lumian pondered for a few seconds before leaving the Brieu Motel and heading towards the Saint-Sien Cathedral near the cemetery.

In the dim moonlit night, the cathedral's golden dome and various decorations on the outer walls seemed to lose their glow, settling into a deep slumber.

Lumian didn't want to waste energy pushing open the front door. He pried open a stained glass window and jumped in.

In the night's darkness, the place was silent and empty. The dome above exuded an oppressive and cold aura that was absent during the day.

Lumian searched the area but couldn't find Padre Cali— who had exhibited abnormalities—the deputy padre, or any odd-job workers.

I'm truly alone…

Only those who sleep in Hisoka's house can enter this special dream?

Yes, and it has to be late at night.

How can the Dream Festival be held? One can't expect all the relevant people to line up at Hisoka's house to sleep at a specific time, right? Disregarding the question of whether we can squeeze in, how did such a widespread collective act deceive the patrol team and the army outside the town?

Moreover, it doesn't seem like everyone has been pulled into the dream. The Tizamons I previously found were completely unaware…

And the most crucial question: Since it's a dream, why am I lucid?

Lumian contemplated for a moment before reaching out his right hand to touch the wall adorned with the religious mural.

It felt cold and solid, a genuine stone.

Drawing on his extensive experience in realistic dreams, Lumian pushed aside these questions, opting to begin with the simplest reconnaissance.

He aimed to confirm the dimensions of this dream and its boundaries.

Activating the black mark on his right shoulder, Lumian connected with the spirit world. He "saw" every corner of Tizamo Town.

Through Spirit World Traversal, he disappeared and reappeared on the packed earth path leading from Tizamo Town to Port Pylos.

Teleportation is possible… That's true. Since it's a dream, nothing is impossible. As long as I believe it's feasible, I should be able to do it… Following the Cordu incident, Lumian delved into numerous dream-related books and sought counsel from Madam Justice, Madam Susie, Anthony Reid, and other Beyonders in the mind domain, gaining a profound understanding.

Slowing his pace, he headed towards Port Pylos. After walking for two to three hundred meters, the scenery ahead blurred, as if an ethereal fog was swirling. Beneath the faint moonlight, the fog appeared pitch-black.

Suddenly, Lumian's spiritual intuition warned him that entering the misty area, veiled in an illusionary fog, might be perilous. There was a high likelihood that something terrifying would occur.

There are indeed limitations. I can't directly reach the edge of the mind… Lumian decided against taking the risk. He swiftly returned to Tizamo and began searching for the other boundary.

This was the area near the primitive forest.

After covering a distance of 300 to 400 meters, Lumian reached the forest's edge. Rainforest-like vegetation stood silently in the night, resembling dense tombstones.

Noticing no blurry areas veiled in illusory fog, Lumian proceeded cautiously and decisively.

Passing through drooping vines and trees, he delved deeper into the primitive forest, walking on the thick, humus-covered ground.

Along the way, there were no dancing mosquitoes or venomous creatures concealed among the vegetation.

After another 700 to 800 meters, Lumian sensed his surroundings becoming more psychedelic.

Some areas became blurry, others distorted, and some became clearer. However, upon closer inspection, they couldn't be seen distinctly.

The conditions in these areas continued to fluctuate.

This feels more like a typical dream… With no warning from his spirituality, Lumian took a few more steps forward.

Suddenly, the entire world shattered into scenes that interweaved and materialized around him.

Lumian's lucidity wavered, leaving him slightly disoriented.

In the next moment, he witnessed scenes of black boulders and humans in dark robes.

One of the humans raised his head, revealing a pale-white face with a light brown base, flaxen-colored eyes tinged with dark green, and decent facial features.

Hisoka!

"Hisoka" Twanaku!

He was "Hisoka" Twanaku!

The human in the dark robe, embodying "Hisoka" Twanaku's visage, straightened up.

His gaze seemed to transcend various scenes and fixate on Lumian.

Amidst the illusory sound, the scenes around Lumian shattered.

Lumian sat up and found himself back in the tawny building that "Hisoka" Twanaku had rebuilt. He was in the dark room with the simple wooden bed.

Quickly surveying his surroundings, Lumian retrieved a golden pocket watch from the left breast pocket of his shirt. Clicking it open, he checked the time.

1:38 a.m.

The crimson moonlight outside the window wasn't too bright, but it wasn't dim either. The nearby Giant Boa bar had already closed, yet the howl of a wild beast echoed from the distant primitive forest.

The night was silent but not deathly still.

I'm awake? That's more like it. I slept for an hour or more than 40 minutes, quite close to my estimation… Lumian got out of bed and observed the ground. As expected, he saw charred mosquito corpses and numerous insects lingering outside the window, blocked by the smell of tranquil essential oil.

Phew. He breathed a sigh of relief and contemplated the appearance of "Hisoka" Twanaku in the special dream.

Since it's a festival, Dream Festival shouldn't be held just once—that's what a party is. Could Hisoka have participated in many Dream Festivals in the past few years and left some kind of mark in the dream?

Is Dream Festival indeed related to that primitive tribe? That's why I activated certain imprints and images recorded in the dream after venturing deep into the forest. That's how I saw Hisoka…

What purpose does Hisoka intend to achieve with the Dream Festival?

Dream Festival, Dream Festival. Since it's a festival, it must be held on a fixed date. At other times, if I enter a special dream, I won't encounter anything, just like me tonight?

What date could it be?

Lumian fell into deep thought.

He quickly deduced a direction.

On December 17th of last year, the primitive tribe attacked Tizamo Town, causing numerous casualties.

Lumian perked up and swiftly confirmed today's date. Dream Festival happens on December 17th, or two or three days before it, which is when April Fool's played their prank here?

It was past 1 a.m. on December 11th.

Chapter 665: Clues

If the Dream Festival has a fixed date, as I suspect, it should be one of the coming days or span a few days…

Recently, I came to Hisoka's house every night to sleep, trying not to miss the Dream Festival. I also need to figure out the basic patterns of the special dream as much as possible before it begins. For example, how to leave the dream normally without entering the primitive forest…

Lumian closed the golden pocket watch and slipped it into the breast pocket of his shirt, concealed by his vest.

He didn't continue sleeping there. Instead, he chose to descend the stairs and enter the streets of Tizamo. First, Ludwig would have his second supper in twenty minutes. According to their agreement, if Lumian didn't return in time, Ludwig would come over and forcefully wake him up. Second, he had to update Madam Magician on his discoveries.

Just as Lumian stepped out of Hisoka's house, a voice suddenly sounded from behind.

"What exactly are you investigating?"

In a dark corner where the crimson moonlight couldn't reach, Camus Castiya emerged, dressed in a white shirt and an unbuttoned yellow vest. His disheveled hair collapsed from staying up too late.

At some point, the young leader of the Port Pylos patrol team's combat team had been waiting here.

Lumian wasn't surprised at all, as if he had sensed Camus' presence. He evaded the question and said, "Many scenes display different states during the day and at night."

"Indeed." Camus had dealt with numerous mystical incidents that matched this description. The simplest and most common situation was that certain haunted houses appeared normal under the sunlight.

As Lumian walked towards the Brieu Motel, he teased Camus with a smile, "Have you been awake the entire time, squatting in the shadows outside the motel, observing my movements?

"That's tough. Careful not to suddenly drop dead."

If Camus hadn't known that Louis Berry had a close relationship with the Church of The Fool and didn't mind him tagging along, he would have thought Lumian's teasing was a warning.

Do you think I want that? Camus laughed self-deprecatingly.

"I'll be in charge of watching tonight. It's Maslow or Rhea's turn tomorrow."

Lumian didn't engage in further conversation. As if lost in thought, he made his way back to the Brieu Motel.

Camus wanted to inquire further, but he dared not.

He then saw the adventurer stop at the motel's entrance, his back toward Camus. Lumian said calmly, "Before Twanaku died, he mentioned a term—Dream Festival.

"I've just discovered some traces in his house and confirmed that there's a special dream happening in Tizamo Town.

"Gather all the folklore related to dreams in this area and bring it to me as soon as possible."

"Uh…" Camus was at a loss at first, but then his mind cleared, as if a bucket of ice-cold water had been poured over him on a scorching summer day.

As expected, there's more to the Twanaku incident. There's indeed a huge problem lurking here! Camus wasn't too surprised, but his heart pounded.

Instinctively, he replied, "Okay."

After agreeing, Camus realized that he had unknowingly followed Lumian's instructions, as if the other man were the captain of a patrol team.

After watching Lumian enter the Brieu Motel, Camus briefly analyzed his reaction.

He felt that this situation stemmed from both the intimidation brought about by Lumian's strength and the accumulated credibility and reliability of his previous deeds.

I have to send a telegram back to Port Pylos to request reinforcements…

In addition, I need to familiarize myself with Tizamo as soon as possible and strive to move jurisdiction here within a few days…

After considering his next steps, Camus let out another sigh.

Ever since encountering Louis Berry, problems had never ceased erupting!

I initially came to Tizamo to monitor his actions and prevent any accidents. Why am I now investigating the Dream Festival?

…

Up in the suite on the second floor of the Brieu Motel, Lumian greeted Ludwig shuffling to the dining table, having just woken up. He then returned to the master bedroom.

Before pondering his letter to Madam Magician, Lumian noticed a folded square of paper on the desk.

A reply after midnight—so typical of Madam Magician, he thought with an inward chuckle. He picked up the letter and conjured a blazing white fireball above his head for light, as Tizamo lacked gas lighting.

Under the fireball's incandescent glow, Lumian unfolded and read the letter:

"I've completed my astromancy and received a revelation about the rest of the Abscessed Hand's body.

"The remaining body is divided into three parts. One part is highly suspected to be located in the Underworld, and the other two parts have hints closely related to Lenburg's capital, Azshara, but they're not actually there. This reminds me of the City of Exiles, Morora, which seals 0-01. It has a similar situation, inside Lenburg, yet not truly being in Lenburg.

"My interpretation is that the two missing body parts of the Abscessed Hand are hidden away in the City of Exiles, Morora.

"Don't you find it too coincidental?

"No, it's not a coincidence at all. My astromancy results show that nearly three months ago, one of the two body parts was still located in the tombs of the Paz Kingdom in the Southern Continent, and the other part was related to some folklore in the south-central region.

"Get my drift?"

Wh— Almost three months ago… As a Conspirer, Lumian grasped Madam Magician's implication.

Accepting the information about the most terrifying Sealed Artifact 0-01, and masquerading as Ludwig's godfather, was akin to accepting an olive branch offered from the Church of Knowledge. Lumian had promised to pay a certain price for this knowledge…

It seemed the Church of Knowledge then dispatched high-ranking individuals to gather the two remaining body parts of the Abscessed Hand and hide them away in the City of Exiles, Morora.

What does this mean? It is clearly forcing me to journey to Morora, unless I choose to abandon my hopes of advancing to Sequence 4 and achieving the state of demi-godhood.

Heh heh, my agreement with the Abscessed Hand stated that until I found its full body, I would never be able to obtain true godhood. This blocks any idea of trying to become a demigod without consuming potions by relying on boons instead…

Thankfully, Lumian wasn't resistant to the idea of visiting the City of Exiles, Merora, before becoming a demigod. At that moment, he didn't feel stifled or vexed by this necessity. Instead, he felt it would actually save him a lot of trouble.

After some thought, he continued reading the rest of the letter:

"My astromancy results also tell me that once the Abscessed Hand's full body is gathered and reunited, something extremely dangerous will happen. It's best to complete this reunion step while you're in the City of Exiles, and use the existence of 0-01 to try to counteract this incoming risk.

"In other words, you need to find and retrieve the body part located in the Underworld first.

"Yes, you should have an opportunity to enter the Underworld itself within the next three months. Remember to seize this opportunity when it arises. Don't ask me what opportunity it is exactly—I don't know the specifics either."

Opportunity to enter the Underworld within the next three months… Lumian repeated this crucial piece of information to himself.

Amidst his elation, the words struck Lumian as peculiar. "Entering the Underworld" and "going to hell" were two distinct phrases that conveyed the same meaning. In this world, barring a small number of individuals, no one could readily accept the phrase "you have a chance to go to hell within three months." It was worth noting that many people would curse at each other, saying, "I wish you a swift descent into hell."

For the moment, Lumian didn't have time to ponder the opportunity to enter the Underworld. He burned Madam Magician's reply and jotted down his gains for the night and his guesses about the Dream Festival. He planned to send it to the Major Arcana card holder at noon the following day.

Although he couldn't shake the feeling that Madam Magician's "schedule" bore a resemblance to Franca's, he wasn't sure if it was convenient to send a letter at that time.

…

Northern Continent, Trier.

Winter sunlight poured through the glass, filling the living room with warmth that chased away the chill.

Franca lounged in the recliner, basking in the cozy glow with half-lidded eyes.

Suddenly, she sensed something and sat upright, pulling her legs in.

In the shadowy corner, a human skull made of pure glowing silver emerged. Pale white flames flickered in its vacant sockets.

Madame Hela's messenger… Why is she contacting me? Franca watched, puzzled, as the skull's jaws unhinged, releasing a single page that drifted towards her.

She snatched the letter and scanned it quickly.

"007 hasn't heard from you in four days. He wants to confirm you're okay."

Four days without checking the group… A dry chuckle escaped her lips.

What does this mean?

Early to bed and late to rise keeps the king fit to rule his realm! No more morning courts!

In the early morning hours, Franca manned the radio transceiver while Jenna roamed outside, seizing her opportunity to act as a Witch.

Tap tap tap! Her first telegram in days.

"Shurima! Your emperor has returned!"

Before long, 007's telegram was tapped out by the analyzer-powered mechanical typewriter.

"Hidden Blade, where have you been?"

Ahem. Franca cleared her throat.

"Late nights breed ill health. Have you no loved ones?"

"Don't bring up such sad topics…"

"Hidden Blade, have you mastered the assassination arts—sundering heart and soul?"

"…"

Protests arose from the other members.

At length, 007's message arrived.

"I have the intel on the last incident. Let's meet to discuss.

"The higher-ups also approved the item swap for the story you proposed."

Franca blinked, startled.

"How long did that take? I'd forgotten all about it…"

After all, understanding that humanoid Sealed Artifact's tale was Lumian's curiosity, not hers.

007's resigned telegram:

"Bureaucracy inertia. Unavoidable for any large, established organization."

"Tell me about it!" Another member, Moon King's amused agreement clattered out. "Whether public or secret, they're all bound by red tape."

After arranging to meet 007 that night with the Moran Avigny intel and initial assassination plan, Franca rose with a stretch.

She jotted down the two tasks before performing a ritual to summon Lumian's messenger, Penitent Baynfel.

…

Southern Continent, Tizamo Town.

Lumian was just about to head to Hisoka's house for a nap when his messenger materialized from the shadows, delivering a letter.

After taking the note, Lumian noticed Penitent Baynfel didn't immediately depart back to the spirit world as usual. Instead, he lingered, surveying their surroundings with a measured gaze.

Chapter 666: New Information

Lumian had rarely seen Penitent Baynfel act so abnormally. He asked with anticipation and curiosity, "What have you discovered?"

Baynfel, clad in a clergyman's black robe, his charred body partially tainted by black flames, averted his gaze and replied in a deep voice, "The night conceals the flowing sin."

With that, the Penitent stepped into the void and vanished from the room.

The night conceals the flowing sin… It's emphasizing the night because that allows entry into the special dream? What does the 'flowing sin' refer to? Can't you mysterious types speak plainly? Lumian criticized, then opened Franca's letter and quickly read it.

To be honest, after such a long time, his desire to understand the humanoid Sealed Artifact's past had significantly diminished. After all, he had mainly felt the other party's state was similar to his own, triggering his emotions back then. That was why he had suggested it. Now, those emotions had long settled.

Of course, they had only settled, not disappeared. Lumian tore open the letter and jotted down the entire incident, planning to send it to Madam Magician at noon the next day.

As for whether the Major Arcana card holder would agree to such an unequal trade, Lumian wasn't too confident. However, he intuitively felt that the Tarot Club's Major Arcana holders wouldn't simply take possession of important artifacts from the orthodox Churches. Using this opportunity to make a deal was more likely.

After leaving the Brieu Motel, Lumian calmly observed Camus, donned in a yellow vest, emerge from a dimly lit street corner. Beside him was Rhea, a member of the local patrol wearing leather armor and carrying a hunting bow.

"Why two people today?" Lumian chuckled and strode towards Hisoka's house.

Camus took a deep breath to calm his sudden surge of emotions. As he followed Louis Berry's left hand, he replied in a deep voice, "There are only a few days left until the 17th. An accident might happen at any moment. We can't act alone anymore."

Having consciously gathered various information, the patrol team had already noticed some abnormalities. This made Camus feel that staying in Tizamo was unwise. He was constantly on edge.

He felt a growing sense of being a middle-aged man burdened with heavy responsibilities.

Raising an eyebrow, Lumian queried, "Hey, you figuring out the 17th is a key date was pretty fast."

"We're not fools," Camus finally couldn't help but reply. "It's an obvious issue. Last year, Tizamo was attacked on December 17th, and in previous years…"

At this point, he fell silent.

He realized that when around Louis Berry, he constantly switched between his heavy middle-aged state and uncontrollable teenage emotions.

Lumian asked with interest, "What happened in previous years?"

Camus fell silent for a few seconds before saying, "We obtained the funeral registrations for nearly three decades in Tizamo from the Saint-Sien Cathedral and discovered a peculiar phenomenon. 80% of the annual deaths are recorded within the first three months starting mid-December.

"This place isn't like many Northern Continent places. Winters are bitterly cold there. It's difficult for the elderly and weak to survive. Even if they do, it's summer from late December to late March.

"This phenomenon is abnormal."

Lumian advanced slowly and nodded slightly.

"Is the mortality rate in Tizamo higher than elsewhere?"

"Significantly higher, but that's mainly due to attacks from the primitive forest tribe. Also, we discovered the tribe's attacks concentrated in the three months beginning mid-December. There have been two to three attacks annually, and since the one on December 17th last year, not a single one has occurred. The situation doesn't seem right." Camus was a little worried a major attack would occur in the next few days.

"Heh heh, it's understandable the tribe's attacks concentrated in those first three months. Any other abnormalities?" Lumian asked casually.

Rhea, who had been silently following, responded.

The brown-skinned, brown-haired woman, exuding a wild beauty, spoke in a raspy voice,

"In the first half of this year, many women in town and the plantations experienced symptoms of nausea, soreness, bloating—pregnancy symptoms. They believed they'd been victimized by a ghost and might birth evil fetuses, but they weren't actually pregnant. Just illusions. After Padre Cali held Mass and briefly purified them, they received psychological comfort and quickly returned to normal."

"We've also noticed similar incidents of perceived possession and attacks by evil spirits in Tizamo over the years, concentrated in that first half. It's not just pregnancy symptoms," Camus added.

Lumian halted in his tracks.

"Don't the townsfolk and the people in the surrounding plantations find it strange that mass hysteria occurs every year?"

As a member of the local patrol team, Rhea explained simply, "Everyone believes it's caused by the primitive tribe in the forest."

"Why?" Lumian resumed his nocturnal "stroll."

Rhea's vocal cords seemed damaged, and her voice was always a little hoarse.

"In the repeated attacks and conflicts, the primitive tribe displayed the ability to control corpses, ghosts, and shadows. Furthermore, some warriors seemed to continue protecting their tribe in their spirit form after their deaths."

Death domain… Heh, the entire matter seems logical on the surface. No wonder the Tizamons who left town didn't find anything amiss and didn't raise the issue… Lumian had seen records of the primitive tribe, but they weren't as specific as Rhea's description.

After inquiring about the recent information the patrol team had gathered, Lumian stopped in front of Hisoka's house and turned to glance at Rhea, who was carrying a hunting bow and arrows.

"You're from the Southern Continent, but not from Tizamo?"

Rhea nodded and calmly said, "I'm from the forest. I'm from one of the primitive tribes called Paca. We mainly live near the Paz Valley."

The rainforest of the Southern Continent spanned a vast expanse, encompassing numerous territories. From the area near the Paz Valley to the vicinity of Matani, the distance might be even greater than that between Cordu and Trier.

"Paca" meant "wind" in Dutanese.

"How did you come to Matani?" Lumian asked curiously.

Rhea let out a chuckle.

"I was sold here."

She paused for a moment before continuing, "Ten years ago, my tribe was attacked by the Loen Kingdom's army. I was captured and sold repeatedly before arriving in the Northern state. Later, I found a chance to escape and fled to Port Pylos. I received help from the Church and found work. Eventually, I was lucky enough to become a Beyonder."

The patrol team member calmly recounted her past, not dwelling on any pain or torture from those experiences, nor deliberately avoiding details.

No wonder you believe so devoutly in the Eternal Blazing Sun… Lumian ascended the stairs to the second floor and said in an even tone,

"Did you keep using a bow instead of firearms out of habit?"

"Yes. Tribes named for the wind excel at archery." Rhea's light-

brown face softened.

Lumian glanced back at her.

"Did you ever go back to take a look?"

Rhea fell silent for a few seconds.

"They're all dead…"

Lumian and Camus retreated their gazes in silence as they climbed the final stairs and entered the second floor of the house.

Lumian surveyed the spacious yet rudimentary surroundings, listening to the wild roars from the primitive forest. He sat cross-legged.

He had intended to tell Rhea, "It's impossible for your entire tribe to be wiped out. Some must have been captured and sold like you. They could still be alive on plantations, in mines, or seedy bars." But he held back.

He could tell Rhea had accepted her current life and gained the ability to live better. It seemed inappropriate to encourage her to risk traversing both continents seeking potential remaining clansmen.

Just the thought of such an endeavor was daunting. With so few clues and them likely scattered far, it could prove quite dangerous. Even spending a lifetime, one might never complete it. Not everyone with a similar experience would sacrifice a normal life for vengeance or seeking others.

Rhea likely realized some clansmen survived, but perhaps those most important to her had perished. She chose to stay in Port Pylos.

Everyone makes their own choices. I can't ask the same of others just because of my own obsessions… Lumian composed himself and smiled at Camus and Rhea, who were still standing.

"Would you like to explore the potential venue for the Dream Festival?"

"Where?" Rhea blurted out.

Camus furrowed his brow.

"Here?"

Quickly making a guess, he asked, "Do you come here every night to sleep and access the Dream Festival's location? Is it in a special dream?"

Quite smart… Lumian praised Camus inwardly for his quick thinking, but his smile remained unwavering.

"Care to experience it?"

Camus and Rhea exchanged glances and agreed, "I'll experience it. Rhea, keep an eye on the surroundings."

"I can set some traps," Lumian offered. He stood up and spent a few minutes setting up warning traps nearby.

Afterward, he lit a mosquito repellent candle, placing it in the middle of the spacious second floor.

Mosquitoes that hadn't flown away landed on the ground, emitting flames and smoke amidst crackling sounds.

"Sleep here," Lumian instructed Camus and Rhea as he sat cross-legged again.

He had confirmed that sleeping anywhere in Hisoka's house at night allowed him to enter the special dream. Sleeping outside or sleeping two hours earlier didn't have the same effect.

Perplexed, Camus and Rhea found seats and leaned against different wooden pillars, attempting to enter a deep slumber.

After an unknown period of time, Camus suddenly woke up.

Before him was the night and the crimson moonlight outside the window. Louis Berry stood behind the flickering mosquito repellent candle, wearing a golden straw hat. The adventurer playfully remarked, "Welcome to the Dream Festival."

Chapter 667: Approaching Gentleness

Camus's nerves tensed as he propped himself up on his left hand, surveying his surroundings warily.

He realized he was still on the second floor of Twanaku's house. Rhea, who had been leaning against a wooden pillar, stood up in a daze.

Everything around him seemed no different from before he had fallen asleep.

"Are you joking?" Camus asked Louis Berry cautiously.

What kind of Dream Festival is this?

This feels like a normal awakening after a nap!

Lumian turned and pointed out the window.

"Listen to the forest sounds."

Camus and Rhea instinctively listened, realizing that the nearby forest was eerily silent, as if all its inhabitants had fallen asleep in the night.

Wh— Rhea's eyes narrowed.

Born and raised in the primitive forest and having lived in Tizamo Town for nearly a year, she knew the forest wouldn't be in such absolute silence.

Lumian pointed at the floor beside the mosquito repellent candle.

"Look here again."

Camus and Rhea looked over, realizing that the mosquito corpses that should have been there were gone.

Lumian chuckled.

"Of course, you can also believe that I woke up early, cleaned up the environment, and secretly affected your hearing of distant voices. All of this was just a prank."

Camus pondered for a few seconds.

"I'm inclined to believe you, but I need to confirm something."

"Indeed," Rhea chimed in, carrying a hunting bow and arrows.

Lumian looked at them and nodded slightly. He calmly concluded, I can now determine that the reason I remain conscious in this peculiar dream stems from a hidden power within Hisoka's house, not any special traits of my own.

He had invited Camus and Rhea to slumber in Hisoka's house and enter the special dream not merely to share information with the patrol team and gather a few aides.

No, it was also an experiment to uncover key details!

Over the past few days, Lumian had conducted numerous similar trials, grasping the dream's nuanced patterns like a seasoned explorer mapping uncharted lands.

With hands tucked nonchalantly in his pockets, he trailed behind Camus and Rhea, who hurried downstairs. He wanted to witness how they would confirm whether this was indeed a dream.

After departing Twanaku's house, the two patrol members rushed to the nearest townsperson's abode.

Upon realizing the livestock had vanished from the ground floor, Rhea swiftly ascended to the second story and attempted to unlock the door with a simple iron-black key.

Camus opened his mouth as if to dissuade her, but in the end, remained silent.

Observing this, Lumian nodded thoughtfully and muttered to himself, A Beyonder of the Arbiter pathway will subconsciously maintain the current order, unwilling to disrupt its fabric. If such Beyonders also bear official identities, this tendency only intensifies…

Rhea rapped upon the door and entered the dwelling. She and Camus scoured each room, but the resident family had seemingly evaporated into thin air.

Then, the pair made their way to the police station near the Saint-Sien Cathedral's hallowed grounds.

The local patrol quarters held five rooms in total.

Kolobo, Maslow, and Loban were nowhere to be found, nor were the two officers meant to stand the night watch.

"I now believe this is a dream," Camus declared to Louis Berry, who leisurely trailed with hands tucked in pockets, a golden straw hat shading his features. "Yet I'm so utterly awake that it defies the very notion of a dream."

Before Lumian could respond, Rhea's light-brown face furrowed slightly.

"When I ran down the street and searched these rooms, it felt a little… familiar."

"Familiar?" Lumian asked calmly, his brows unfurrowed.

Could there be unexpected gains from this experiment?

Rhea pondered for a moment.

"I think I've had a similar dream before."

"In my dream, it was just as dark and quiet. The streets were empty, and I was alone. I ran around, searching…"

"Was it a mere fragment or a complete dream?" Lumian pressed.

Rhea thought for a few seconds.

"I don't know. I only remember a few such scenes."

"Do you often dream of this, or only occasionally?" Lumian guided her to confirm the details.

Rhea replied with certainty, "Occasionally."

"Occasionally…"

Even if the Tizamo residents don't slumber here on a specific date, they can occasionally enter this peculiar dream, yet remain unable to stay awake. Like a normal dream?

Perhaps it's not true immersion, but rather an unconscious development spiritually spawned from the crimson moon and other environmental elements, allowing them to vaguely interact. Unfortunately, Rhea clearly doesn't recall the moon, weather, and other situational details from those dreams. If I could employ Dream Divination, I could aid her recollection…

The few Tizamons I queried in Port Pylos made no mention of such dreams. Firstly, dreams so ordinary often slip the mind. Secondly, they've been away from Tizamo for years… As Lumian's thoughts raced, he turned to Camus to see if the Interrogator had any queries.

Camus pondered for a moment before asking Rhea, "What do you think is special about the residents of Tizamo?"

Very perceptive. Since this dream seems to affect the entire town and surrounding area, it's likely these people will display some abnormality in waking life… Lumian nodded inwardly.

Rhea thought for a moment.

"Nothing special. It's just that they're very… obedient."

At this, Rhea sighed.

"They're extremely polite to others. Gentle personalities, stable emotions, very obedient. Even when angered, they quickly calm down. When trouble arises, they tend to let the authorities handle it instead of fighting amongst themselves or causing public disturbances…"

These were all situations Lumian had heard Camus mention and seen in the corresponding intel. On the surface, nothing seemed amiss. It was a state of being tamed.

Rhea added, "Their only issue is a lack of enthusiasm. It's not that politeness masks an underlying coldness or hatred. They're simply… unenthusiastic, as if reluctant to openly display emotion."

Upon hearing this, Lumian recalled the Tizamons he'd interacted with over the past few days.

Apart from some gentlemen and ladies from the Northern Continent, the others were calm, gentle, and disinclined to argue. They always communicated politely.

Immediately after, he recalled the Tizamons questioned in Port Pylos—fear, worry, ingratiating expressions, vivid emotions.

Clearly different from the Tizamo townspeople!

Most of their emotions have been drawn away into the dream? Lumian finally pinpointed an abnormality about the Tizamons.

Their issue clearly didn't stem solely from attacks by the primitive forest tribe!

Upon hearing Lumian's guess, Camus couldn't help but hiss.

"I knew it. The Tizamons feel… strange. Too docile. Even livestock occasionally grow agitated, resists… Could the reason be…"

Rhea's heart skipped a beat as she said solemnly, voice laced with fear, "I've been here nearly a year, and I feel much gentler…

"My most intense emotions haven't dissipated. They're still in my heart, but most of the time, it's as if I'm… asleep…"

Rhea began analyzing herself. "From the looks of it, everyone in Tizamo will gradually be affected by this peculiar dream. After leaving, they can slowly escape its influence." Lumian glanced at Camus. "For outsiders like us, who've only been here a few days, there's no issue for now. Perhaps we'll also become unnaturally gentle if we linger too long."

Without waiting for Camus's response, Lumian inquired, "When will reinforcements from the patrol team and Admiral Guard arrive?"

At the mention of this, Camus's expression soured. He gritted his teeth and cursed, "Those selfish bastards! It's very likely there won't be much support."

"The Admiral Guard said they already have a Beyonder team here and an army. Only Captain Reaza expressed backing for the patrol team. Dammit, those dogsh*t!"

Lumian was taken aback for a moment before bursting into laughter. The newly formed organization under the aboriginal admiral was indeed different from the official Northern Continent organizations.

If this were the Eternal Blazing Sun Church or Church of Earth Mother, the official Beyonders would have already devised a plan and dispatched sufficient force to resolve the issue. They'd be prepared to obliterate Tizamo if anything went awry.

The current situation is Admiral Querarill believes that with me—a famed adventurer backed by the Church of The Fool, here—I'm able to use its power to resolve Tizamo's troubles. Is there a need to send more Beyonder subordinates to aid me?

That's true. Beyonders aren't commodities. If too many powerful ones perish, not only will Admiral Querarill feel the strain, but he won't be able to effectively rule Matani…

Recruitment alone can't quickly fill such a gap, and they won't be quick to trust newcomers. Even nurturing the remaining people with the retrieved Beyonder characteristics poses huge problems. Low-Sequence Beyonders are manageable, but Mid-Sequence advancement carries high failure risk. After all, most here haven't mastered the acting method… Lumian quickly grasped Admiral Querarill's mentality.

He said to the agitated Camus, "Let me show you around this dream realm and provide an introduction."

"Alright." Camus took a deep breath.

He and Rhea followed Lumian through the dark, silent, vacant town.

After a long while, Lumian led the two patrol members into the primitive forest. He informed them he'd seen Twanaku's image in the chaotic zone ahead, seemingly composed of dream fragments. He suspected there was a Desire Apostle mark present.

Walking amongst the trees, giants in the night, Camus felt increasingly oppressed.

Before he could inquire about Twanaku's image details, he suddenly heard a bowstring drawn taut.

Pa!

An arrow, entwined with lightning, flew from afar. Camus dodged just in time as it grazed past, piercing into a rubber tree behind him amidst crackling lightning and charred bark. Lumian, Camus, and Rhea gazed into the distance, spotting a woman standing on a huge tree branch.

The woman wore dark leather armor, holding a hunting bow and arrows. Her brown hair was tied in two strands draped over her shoulders.

Her light brown skin and wild, beautiful face couldn't hide the coldness and hatred behind her eyes.

Rhea!

It was Rhea!

Chapter 668: Dream Person?

Rhea gazed at the figure perched on the tree branch, a surreal scene playing out before her like a dream. Correction: This was a dream.

The other Rhea's frigid expression masked a deep-seated hatred as she drew the bowstring once more, causing the arrow to crackle with silver lightning.

As Lumian contemplated teleporting behind Rhea on the tree to probe her control in this eerily realistic dream and question her about her apparent "knowledge" of the situation, his surroundings quivered and fragmented into disjointed scenes.

The scenes overlapped and promptly shattered.

Simultaneously, Lumian, Rhea, and Camus opened their eyes. Crimson moonlight spilled through the window, accompanied by the primal roars of wild beasts from the nearby forest.

They found themselves still on the second floor of Hisoka's house.

Camus jolted upright, eyeing the mosquito repellent candle that had burned out, leaving behind a mere stub. Charred mosquito corpses littered the area.

"Are we awake? Have we returned to reality?" Camus questioned, uncertainty clouding his expression.

Leaning against a wooden pillar, Lumian chuckled.

"That should be the case, but I won't claim we're 100% out of the dream.

"We'll need to verify through various details in the coming period."

The simplest method involved checking Ludwig's whereabouts and state.

Although asking Termiboros could provide an accurate answer, there was no guarantee the fellow would answer or respond truthfully.

Camus nodded, his gaze shifting to Rhea, who had remained silent since waking up. After a brief pause, he spoke.

"We seem to have witnessed another version of you at the dream's boundary."

Another Rhea, embodying entirely different emotions and states.

Rhea stayed silent for a moment before admitting, "I saw it too.

"She appears much like the intense emotions I mentioned earlier—the ones slumbering in my heart."

Lumian adjusted his golden straw hat, standing up on his own legs. He spoke thoughtfully, "Could that dream absorb the intense emotions in Tizamo and give rise to the corresponding Dream Person—an even more extreme and emotional entity?"

"So, the longer one stays in Tizamo, the more subdued they become," Camus concurred with Louis Berry's hypothesis, and Rhea nodded in agreement.

Mirror People… Dream People… How many peculiar entities lingered in the shadows of this world? Lumian massaged his temples and strode towards the stairs leading to the surface.

"That concludes tonight's attempt," he casually declared.

Camus and Rhea followed closely, confirming their escape from the dream through the return of livestock and the commotion in the house.

They waited until Lumian entered the Brieu Motel before halting, concealing themselves in the shadows diagonally opposite.

…

Lumian pushed open the door to the suite, spotting Ludwig at the dining table, devouring a roasted banana with gusto. In his other hand, he wielded a child's fork, delving into a special salad crafted from the heart of a palm tree.

Observing this, Lumian was certain that this wasn't a dream.

He cast a glance at Lugano, who was dozing off, and nonchalantly inquired of Ludwig, "Do you dream when you sleep?"

Despite being occupied, Ludwig replied, "Yes."

Lumian nodded thoughtfully.

"Have you had any dreams in the past few days?"

Taking a moment between bites of grilled river fish, Ludwig responded, "Yes."

"What dreams did you have?" Lumian removed his golden straw hat, stowing it back into his Traveler's Bag.

Ludwig replied with a muffled voice, "Eat, eat, eat…"

Indeed, I shouldn't expect much… Lumian chuckled self-deprecatingly and turned his attention to Lugano.

"What dreams did you have?"

Is there something wrong with the dreams here? Lugano contemplated asking but decided to answer truthfully.

"All kinds of dreams…"

He paused before adding, "Perhaps it's been too long since I went out alone. Haha, I didn't have a chance to release my pent-up emotions. Occasionally, I'd dream of women and such matters, only to realize that something was amiss. Either the target transformed into a monster, or the initially alluring woman was covered in tree warts, wheat, and mushrooms… Then, I'd wake up in shock."

As an Intisian, he had no reservations discussing such topics.

According to the psychology taught by Anthony, your pent-up desires and fear of the dangers in Tizamo are a mix of unresolved factors… Lumian commented inwardly and smiled.

"You can explore the Giant Boa bar alone, find a local lady, or mingle with the ladies and maids in the plantation outside. As long as you ensure food for Ludwig, he'll manage on his own."

Initially, Lugano's heart raced, but the potential dangers outside soon came to mind.

Lumian headed towards the master bedroom, leaving a parting sentence with a smile.

"Of course, I can't guarantee those ladies won't turn into monsters or undergo anomalies after your little adventure."

"…" Lugano couldn't help but shudder at the imagined scenario.

He glanced at Ludwig, finding comfort in staying by the boy's side.

Until all the stored food was consumed, he considered himself safe!

…

In the shadows diagonally opposite the Brieu Motel, Rhea observed in silence for a while before suddenly speaking up.

"Since there won't be any new reinforcements from the Admiral Guard, and only Deputy Captain Reaza will come from the patrol team, why didn't you leave Tizamo directly? Why did you stay here and attempt to resolve the Dream Festival problem?"

As long as he escaped Matani, the Admiral Guard and patrol team wouldn't have the resources to track and punish them. At most, they could issue a wanted poster, but they wouldn't be able to pay a high bounty.

Camus scratched his disheveled brown hair, smiling wryly.

"As you know, my previous Sequence was a Public Security Officer. It tied seamlessly with the patrol team's usual work, making me yearn to maintain order in Matani and safeguard the lives of the people here.

"The potion not only brings strength but also affects you in many ways."

He exhaled and continued, "Besides, Captain Reaza is about to arrive. I have to help him. I have to repay what I owe him."

Camus didn't disclose another reason: his confidence in the adventurer Louis Berry and the Church of The Fool behind him. He believed that with Louis Berry present, the situation would be threatening but not perilous.

Rhea didn't press further, continuing to gaze diagonally at the Brieu Motel.

Camus glanced at her.

"What about you? Why don't you leave Tizamo with Loban and the others now? The three of you can form a team. Some local admirals will be willing to take you in."

Rhea's eyes remained fixed on Louis Berry's suite as she stayed silent.

After a prolonged silence, just as Camus thought she wouldn't answer, Rhea suddenly spoke.

"When I was in the most pain and despair, it was the Church who helped me. After that, it was the patrol team who gave me a new beginning and a new life."

Recalling the cold Rhea's face filled with hatred in the dream, Camus sighed sincerely and said, "It hasn't been easy for you."

The moment he finished speaking, Rhea sneered.

"You're the most contradictory person I've ever encountered. In the past, I've often heard you talk about which states and islands the Feynapotter Kingdom should invade, which mines and valleys they should seize, and how they should establish more colonies in the Southern Continent. But now, you're showing pity towards me.

"I can sense your sincerity. You genuinely feel pain for me, but that's why I can't help but want to say something."

Camus found himself at a loss for words.

Indeed, it was a contradiction.

He also realized that Rhea's emotions had become even more turbulent after encountering herself in the dream. She seemed more willing to open up.

Could this be the result of encountering extreme emotions? Or perhaps those who hadn't spent more than a year in Tizamo might resist the dream's influence to some extent if they grasped the truth of "obedience"? Camus quickly thought of the plantations outside the town and individuals like Sir Petit, Miss Amandina, Monsieur Robert, and the others.

These gentlemen and ladies weren't easily subdued.

The special dream had evidently encompassed both the out-of-town plantation and the garrison barracks.

Camus figured out the reason: These gentlemen and ladies spent at least half their time in Port Pylos each year.

This also explained why he was familiar with them.

…

At noon the next day, shortly after Lumian dispatched the letter, he received a prompt reply from Madam Magician:

"Did the Eternal Blazing Sun Church present this price, or was it your offer?

"Can a Grade 1 Sealed Artifact be exchanged for such trifles?

"If I didn't know the kind of person you are, I would suspect that you concealed more than half of the offer from the Eternal Blazing Sun Church.

"In addition to the information related to this Grade 1 Sealed Artifact, ensure the Eternal Blazing Sun Church provides an additional 50,000 pounds worth of gold at the highest exchange rate in the past three months.

"Don't worry, gold is the last thing they need."

Gold worth 50,000 pounds… That's approximately 1.2 million verl d'or worth of gold. Why would Madam Magician require such a substantial amount of gold? Recalling the importance of gold in mysticism, the Armored Shadow's need to reconstruct its golden body, and the widespread use of gold in Death-related domains, he swiftly arrived at a realization.

A subtle detail caught his attention.

Madam Magician used the Loen Kingdom's gold pound to express the value of gold.

Does this imply her recent activity in the Loen Kingdom? Lumian nodded thoughtfully, considering whether to summon Jenna's messenger, Rabbit Chasel, to convey Madam Magician's request, or to return to Trier personally for discussions on the Dream Festival with Franca, Jenna, and Anthony.

Chapter 669: Connivance

Recalling Franca's meeting with 007 tonight to discuss dealing with Moran Avigny, Lumian decided to summon Jenna's messenger, Rabbit Chasel, as he had to return to Trier tomorrow to discuss the division of labor and specific details.

After jotting down Madam Magician's request and folding it, Lumian set up a ritual, allowing the special Rabbit of Knowledge to emerge from the candle's flames.

The first thing Lumian noticed was the miniature half top hat snugly perched between the rabbit's ears. Next, he saw gold-rimmed glasses and a black trench coat that matched the vaguely rabbit-shaped creature's size. Finally, an iron-black revolver lay in the rabbit's palm.

The revolver gleamed with a metallic luster, its barrel unusually thick, and its cylinder unnaturally large and textured. It stood in stark contrast to the illusory appearance of the top hat, trench coat, and gold-rimmed glasses.

Upon seeing Rabbit Chasel, Lumian raised his eyebrows.

"Is this a real gun?"

Hidden behind the gold-rimmed glasses, Rabbit Chasel's eyes sharpened.

"Yes."

"Did Jenna customize it for you?" Lumian inquired.

Rabbit Chasel replied succinctly, "It's payment."

Quite a cold demeanor… Miss Celia Bello, have you considered the consequences of what you've done? You haven't! Because I don't know the consequences either unless I consult Madam Magician… Lumian criticized inwardly before handing the folded letter to Rabbit Chasel.

Seeing the human-like, rabbit-shaped creature preparing to turn and walk into the candle flame, Lumian, the Prankster King of Cordu, asked with interest, "Can you shoot?"

Rabbit Chasel fell silent for a moment, as if embarrassed.

"Not yet."

Oh, you're not as cold as Gehrman Sparrow anymore… Lumian chuckled and said, "Jenna and I are friends. I'll help her pay the postage fee this time.

"Do you want to learn shooting? It involves knowledge and guidance."

Rabbit Chasel, taller than an ordinary rabbit, replied without hesitation, "Sure thing."

Lumian's smile broadened.

After finding a secluded spot at the edge of the primitive forest and earnestly teaching Rabbit Chasel how to shoot for a considerable time, Lumian strolled back to Tizamo with his hands in his pockets, planning to visit the only café for afternoon tea.

The café bore the name "Bunia" after its owner, a man named Bunia.

He was under the age of 30. Having once served as a waiter and apprentice at a café in Port Pylos, Bunia, recalling the lack of a proper café in Tizamo Town, transformed the ground floor of his house into a semi-open café.

Lumian, weaving through the tables and chairs on the street, arrived at the kitchen counter, offering a smile to the proprietor and waiter, Bunia.

"Do you have Fermo coffee?"

Bunia's brown skin, not too dark, and his features resembling those of mixed blood, showcased his Tizamon heritage.

The man in his late twenties responded with an honest smile in fluent Intisian.

"Monsieur, there's no Fermo coffee."

Lumian, intending to playfully inquire, casually switched to a cup of Corsa coffee from Matani.

Sipping the bitter and sweet liquid at a table, he noticed Camus, adorned in a vest, and Rhea, clad in leather armor, entering the café. Each ordered an Intis coffee and a corn nutcake imbued with Tizamo flair.

Upon spotting Rhea, the single Bunia became even more bashful and busier, avoiding eye contact.

As Camus and Rhea, equipped with their coffee and corn nutcakes, sought a spot, Lumian raised his arm in greeting.

As Camus and Rhea reluctantly settled into their seats across from him, Lumian inquired with a smile, "Why do you look so tired?"

Glancing at the energetic adventurer, Camus took a deep breath and slowly exhaled.

"We just finished work. We can finally rest."

Yesterday, he had monitored the Brieu Motel late into the night!

"All I want now is a good night's sleep." After exploring the dream together last night, Rhea wasn't as reticent as before when facing Lumian.

"Then why are you still drinking coffee?" Lumian replied with amusement.

It was evident that Rhea and Camus lacked the energy of a Sleepless.

"I want to endure until dinner before sleeping," Camus said with a sigh.

Rhea shook her head.

"Coffee is useless to me."

After a brief chat, Rhea finished her corn nutcake and coffee, then headed back to the nearby police headquarters to rest. Camus continued to recline in the armchair, occasionally taking a sip of coffee.

"Has Reaza arrived?" Lumian inquired with a smile.

Camus fell silent for a moment.

"He's here. Tonight, one of the two—Maslow and Loban—will be following you with him."

As for Kolobo, there was no need for him to be on duty. If he didn't even dare to look, how could he do any monitoring?

While they conversed, Lumian noticed Miss Amandina from Palm Manor leading a short unicorn outside the Bunia café, exuding high spirits.

The blue-eyed girl was clad in off-white hunting attire today, her black hair fashioned into a half-height bun.

After entrusting the whip and reins to the brown-skinned valet, she strolled to the kitchen counter with her lady's maid, who also bore an Intisian appearance.

Along the way, she cheerfully greeted the patrons in the café and exchanged pleasantries with the locals sipping on inexpensive coffee.

Observing Camus's gaze fixed on the girl, Lumian teased, "Do you wish to engage in a duel with her fiancé?"

"No, I'm not that kind of person," Camus replied with a serious expression. "I admit that she's indeed very attractive to me, but she's already engaged to Monsieur Robert. This is a sign that she's starting a family. I can't allow myself to destroy someone else's family."

You Feynapotterians… Lumian didn't mock him but sighed with emotion.

Such values appealed to Feynapotter.

Of course, not every Feynapotterian possessed such values.

Seeing Lumian's lack of response, Camus said seriously, "Don't have any ideas about her."

Lumian regarded the young man surnamed Castiya with amusement, awaiting further "explanation."

Camus furrowed his brow slightly.

"I know you Intisians won't back down just because the other party has a fiancé or a husband. You might find it even more exciting, but you always pursue momentary pleasure. Very few are willing to take responsibility. You always satisfy yourself. When you're happy, you turn around and leave, leaving a lady to face everything that's been destroyed."

"Not every Intisian is like this," Lumian shook his head with a smile.

But most Trieriens are like that… However, neither party is innocent in such matters… he added inwardly.

The energetic and playful Amandina led the lady's maid past Camus and Lumian's table.

First, she greeted Camus, then sized up Lumian and said candidly, "I'm Amandina. What about you?"

"Louis Berry," Lumian replied with a smile.

Amandina nodded and suddenly laughed.

"You must have just arrived from Trier. You're different from the people here."

"No, I'm from a village in the south," Lumian switched to Intisian with a Dariège accent.

Amandina wasn't disappointed. She happily inquired about the folklore of the southern provinces of the Intis Republic before leading the lady's maid to a table in the corner.

Camus watched as the two of them conversed. He opened his mouth but closed it again.

…

Trier, Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative.

Jenna was curled up on the sofa, engrossed in the novels she had just bought, all with elements of Witches. Suddenly, Rabbit Chasel appeared in front of her and handed her a letter.

Observing the bizarre yet adorable rabbit-shaped creature, Jenna opened the letter and scanned its contents before asking earnestly, "Do you wish to select your payment, or shall I choose a random book for you?"

"Lumian Lee has already settled the payment on your behalf," Rabbit Chasel said in a deep yet sincere voice.

Witch Jenna suddenly felt a sense of foreboding.

"What has he paid?"

"He imparted shooting-related knowledge to me and guided me through the initial stage of my practice," Rabbit Chasel raised the special revolver in his hand, briefly aimed it at the door behind Jenna, and then swiftly lowered it.

Wh— Monsieur Lumian Lee, have you considered the consequences of what you've done? Jenna chided, feeling a mix of irritation and amusement.

However, the deed was done, and she was powerless to reverse it.

As these thoughts raced through her mind, Jenna's lips curved into a sweet smile.

"The next payment will be for a genuine underarm holster. And after that, custom-made bullets with special effects. How does that sound?"

Behind his glass glasses, Rabbit Chasel's eyes sparkled.

"Alright!"

…

In Tizamo Town, night had already fallen, and darkness shrouded the area.

Lumian stood in Hisoka's house, glancing at the stern vice-

captain of the Port Pylos patrol team, Reaza, and the local patrol team leader, Maslow, whose face was adorned with white paint. As though instructing Lugano, he said, "Watch out for any accidents."

This time, he spoke in Dutanese.

"Alright." It wasn't the first time Maslow had accompanied Louis Berry, the great adventurer, and he was already accustomed to his style.

Dressed in a sleek formal suit, Reaza remained silent, signaling that there was no issue.

Lumian retrieved the brown Mystery Prying Glasses from his Traveler's Bag.

Tonight, his first task was to use this magical item to observe Hisoka's house from various angles, hoping to unveil the source of its abnormality.

After confirming his condition and preparations, Lumian placed the brown gold-rimmed glasses on the bridge of his nose.

A familiar wave of dizziness washed over Lumian, as if his surroundings had been disrupted and reassembled.

He witnessed poisonous insects crawling in the "sky," two walls that seemed to dance in circles, and an underground water puddle deep in the soil that appeared to absorb all light.

Chapter 670: Sudden Arrival

Amidst the dizzying sensation that threatened to separate his spirit from his body, Lumian saw trees that seemed to slumber in the darkness and a pitch-black boulder…

Finally, he removed the brown glasses from his nose and arched his back slightly to alleviate the discomfort.

Even an Ascetic wouldn't be able to use the Mystery Prying Glasses for long.

Of course, this ensured his safety to a certain degree.

Through this "prying," Lumian confirmed two things.

First, the area beneath Hisoka's house was indeed unusual, but it seemed more like an illusory symbol than an actual entity. It indicated that this place had once been corrupted or influenced, with the most severe occurrence taking place underground.

Second, this influence was connected to the black boulder deep within the primitive forest.

"How did it go?" Maslow, his face painted white, asked.

Lumian stored the Mystery Prying Glasses back into his Traveler's Bag and smiled.

"The abnormality I 'saw' here originates from a black boulder deep in the primitive forest. Have you ever seen or heard of that black boulder?"

The pale-white Reaza and Maslow, his black hair falling over his shoulders, shook their heads in unison, indicating a negative answer.

Lumian wasn't in a rush to do the second thing he had planned for the night. He glanced at Reaza, who was wearing a thin formal suit and appeared to be a mix of Intisian and West Balam heritage. He casually said, "I thought that with your arrival, some people in Tizamo would gradually leave and stay in Port Pylos for a while.

"As you know, the Dream Festival should start within three days."

Reaza calmly replied, "Based on my experience, except for those who have only arrived in Tizamo in the past two weeks, it's best not to leave this place and go elsewhere to prevent any abnormalities from spreading.

"It should only be considered after the Dream Festival ends and the primitive tribe launches another attack."

Very standardized process… I thought you would consider the opinions of Intis, Feynapotter, and other Northern Continent countries, allowing people with corresponding nationalities to evacuate in advance and protect them. For example, the owners of the plantations outside the city and their families… Yes, this is likely because the Dream Festival has never shown direct harm. It only caused some townsfolk to suffer from hysteria and attracted an attack from the forest's primitive tribe. The first situation could be resolved by a simple Mass. The second problem could be guarded against and fended off… Lumian roughly understood the mentality of Admiral Querarill and the patrol team's leaders.

Since there wouldn't be any major issues, they would act as if the Dream Festival didn't exist, merely advising the local official Beyonders to be vigilant and guard against any mishaps while hoping that the Church of The Fool could resolve the hidden dangers!

If they were to do more, they might trigger something and worsen the situation.

After discussing the matter, Lumian recovered from the discomfort caused by the Mystery Prying Glasses. He took out the unique Eye of Truth and placed it in front of his face.

The relatively handsome Southern Continent native's eyelids twitched at the sight of the pale-white flesh, dark blood vessel-like earmuff and spectacle temple, as well as the blood-colored lens intertwined with transparent purple tubes.

How many glasses does Louis Berry own?

Moreover, each one is a mystical item!

After donning the single-lens Eye of Truth, Lumian surveyed his surroundings, seeking to uncover the truth behind reality.

As he did so, a voice gradually sounded in his ears, growing louder and more chaotic.

Each note and word seemed to materialize, flooding into Lumian's mind.

It made him feel as if his head was rapidly expanding like a balloon.

If the balloon continued to expand, there would only be one outcome: bursting with a resounding bang!

Lumian reached for his ear, ready to remove the Eye of Truth at any moment. He seized the opportunity to scrutinize Hisoka's house.

He believed that it was safer to take the risk of prying into the house's secrets before the Dream Festival, while not inside the special dream. It was safer than using the Eye of Truth and Mystery Prying Glasses within the dream itself.

Through the purple lens, Lumian couldn't discern much of the truth. Everything appeared similar to what he could see with his naked eye, but the night seemed even darker.

Without hesitation, his eye bulged, and blood vessels appeared on his body. He abruptly removed the Eye of Truth, and a slightly sharp explosion reverberated in his ears.

Phew, phew… Panting heavily, Lumian's mind was in disarray, overwhelmed by a barrage of strange knowledge. He couldn't think straight.

At that moment, even if someone were to ambush him, he wouldn't be able to react quickly.

After more than ten seconds, Lumian finally regained his ability to think clearly. He instinctively organized the knowledge that had been forcefully injected into his mind.

"The art of sophistry…

"How to cultivate superior wheat seeds…

"Canning techniques…

"How to roast pork that's crispy on the outside and tender on the inside…

"Music to soothe a sow's emotions…

"The Revelation of Evernight…

"Favorite Positions of Celebrities—Memoirs of Those Mistresses"

"…"

What's all this nonsense? Can't there be any useful knowledge? In the past, although Aurore had been tormented by the Hidden Sage's instillation of knowledge, she had at least stumbled upon valuable mysticism insights. Wait, had she also been corrupted by such knowledge? Is that why she always portrays a rich theoretical understanding in her books… Lumian rubbed his still throbbing head and said to Reaza and Maslow, "I'm going to the edge of the forest to take a look. Do you want to come with me?"

Reaza nodded, stingy with his words, while Maslow made his stance clear by walking towards the stairs.

If Camus were here, he would undoubtedly smile wryly and say, "Do I have a choice?" Lumian mused to himself. He left Hisoka's house and made his way towards the primitive forest near Tizamo Town.

After crossing the intersection and arriving at another street, Lumian noticed a four-wheeled, four-seater carriage parked at the entrance of the Brieu Motel.

An attendant and a lady's maid stepped out of the carriage, carrying their luggage, and followed a man and a woman towards the motel.

The man was attired in a dark-gray formal suit and a half top hat. His complexion resembled that of someone from the Northern Continent, and his side profile was well-defined, with striking dark green eyes. The woman wore a light-colored dress that allowed for ease of movement and a feathered hat adorned with pearls. She appeared to be in her late twenties, and her skin was delicate and radiant. One would easily determine that she was a beauty just from glimpsing her side profile.

Lumian averted his gaze and turned to Reaza and Maslow.

"Is it the weekend?"

"No," Maslow replied, understanding the implication behind Louis Berry's question. "Gentlemen and ladies often find time to hunt in Tizamo, not just on weekends."

Lumian turned to Reaza and inquired, "You didn't seal off this area?"

"That would only cause unnecessary panic," Reaza responded succinctly.

Lumian didn't press the matter further. He walked out of the town through the Brieu Motel and ventured into the primitive forest.

He delved deeper along the path he had become familiar with from the dream.

Finally, he arrived at the chaotic zone in reality, where various dream fragments intertwined.

It was an unremarkable place, indistinguishable from its surroundings.

Lumian found a palm tree and sat down. He turned to Reaza and Maslow and said, "Keep an eye on my surroundings. I'm going to sleep here."

He wanted to see what would happen if he fell asleep closer to the source of the abnormality, if he could enter that peculiar dream, and in what state.

Receiving affirmative responses from the two patrol team members, Lumian closed his eyes and attempted Cogitation.

At some point, he drifted off to sleep.

After an unknown period, he awoke.

Catching sight of Reaza and Maslow, Lumian rose to his feet and nodded thoughtfully.

This place doesn't work either… Is Hisoka's house the only effective location?

Or should I find that black boulder and sleep near it?

Lumian gazed into the pitch-black forest, contemplating for a few moments before turning to Reaza and Maslow.

"Let's head back."

The trio swiftly returned to Tizamo.

The late night had settled in, and the streets were devoid of any passersby. No lights or sounds emanated from the houses on either side. Occasionally, the snorts of livestock on the ground floor of the buildings could be heard, accentuating the pervading darkness and silence. The dim crimson moon's light seemed to emphasize the depths of the darkness.

On this dark night, Lumian walked along a muddy road, heading towards the Brieu Motel situated deep within the street. Reaza and Maslow followed quietly behind him.

Suddenly, Lumian's mind spun, and his vision momentarily blurred before clearing.

This is… His pupils dilated as he instinctively scanned his surroundings but found nothing amiss.

At that moment, in a vacant house on the ground floor diagonally ahead, a dim candlelight illuminated a room on the third floor.

Immediately after, glass windows on this street and throughout Tizamo Town were set aglow by the light of burning candles.

...

Rhea awoke to find that darkness had already descended, but the candles in many houses continued to burn.

This indicated that it wasn't too late.

Feeling lazy, Rhea had no desire to prepare her own food. Carrying her bow and arrows, she left the room and exited the police headquarters from the side, making her way towards the nearby Bunia café.

The streets were nearly deserted, as they were every night.

Rhea glanced at the tables and chairs still scattered along the street and approached the kitchen counter. In Dutanese, she said to the busy café owner and waiter, Bunia, who had his head lowered, "A glass of Cosa and a beef burrito."

Bunia paused in the midst of washing cups and looked up.

His naturally curly black hair gave him a mixed-blood appearance. He looked at Rhea and revealed an obvious, strange smile that made Rhea inexplicably uneasy.

Rhea knew Bunia well and was aware that he was a shy, kind, and adult man who wasn't particularly adept at communicating with women. He had never smiled like this before.

Bunia fixed his gaze on Rhea and chuckled in a deep voice.

"You've got big boobs."

Chapter 671: Beginning

Upon hearing Bunia's words, Rhea was so surprised that she forgot her anger.

It wasn't the first time she had encountered such a situation. She was shocked that a man who had left a good impression on her would show such an expression and say such words.

And this was when they weren't even friends!

At that moment, Rhea wondered if she was still half-asleep. She also questioned whether Bunia had suffered a mental illness or succumbed to hysteria as the Dream Festival drew near.

Amidst Rhea's bewilderment, Bunia's smile intensified.

He extended his hands across the kitchen counter and attempted to grab Rhea's chest.

Instinctively, Rhea leaned back, attempting to dodge.

After failing to touch her, Bunia retracted his hands, propped himself up on the kitchen counter, and leaped up. Amidst the clinking of coffee cups and glass jars, he lunged at Rhea, who was leaning back.

This reaction, this choice, and this display of power caught Rhea off guard. She didn't have time to remove the bow and arrow from her back. Her waist bent backward, and her right foot kicked up like the other end of a seesaw, sending the transformed Bunia café owner flying.

Simultaneously, a thought flashed through Rhea's mind.

Has he truly lost his mind?

Crash. Bunia crashed to the side of the kitchen counter.

Rhea exerted strength in her back and stood up straight again. Then, she took off her hunting bow, nocked an arrow, and aimed at Bunia, who had just stood up.

A look of fear crossed Bunia's face. He froze for a moment before pleading, "Don't—don't kill me!

"I suddenly lost control just now!"

Looking at Bunia's pleading and fearful face, Rhea found him both familiar and unfamiliar. The arrow on the bowstring was drawn back, but she didn't release it.

…

Entering the streets of Tizamo Town from the primitive forest, Lumian observed the illuminated houses on both sides and scoffed.

"Is this supposed to be terrifying and bizarre?"

This wasn't the first time he had encountered such a scene. In Fourth Epoch Trier, he had witnessed a similar occurrence. Not only had the dark town regained its lights, but the entire Fourth Epoch Trier had transitioned from silence to noisiness, returning to life.

Faced with this abnormality, Lumian was undoubtedly surprised and highly vigilant. However, he wasn't overwhelmed by intense emotions. On the surface, he observed his surroundings leisurely.

He realized that Reaza and Maslow had vanished. The two patrol team members who should have been following him were gone.

Since it can silently make two Beyonders disappear right under my nose, it can definitely make me vanish just like that… In other words, I must have been affected. There's a high chance that the trance was an external manifestation…

From a mysticism perspective, the town, which had already fallen into a deep slumber, relighting without any significant turn of events, signifies that I'm in another scene, one that is originally related but different…

Could it be that I've been forced into a dream?

Has the Dream Festival officially begun?

I didn't sleep in Hisoka's house. Why am I still awake?

Combined with the ongoing investigation, Lumian quickly deduced the current situation.

At that moment, he spotted a figure emerging from a glass window diagonally ahead, surrounded by wooden planks and weeds.

It was a local man in his early forties, with dark brown skin, brown eyes, black hair, and thick lips.

Lumian had seen him before. He was a hunting guide, responsible for leading gentlemen and ladies from Port Pylos and other places into the forest for hunting.

Lumian's impression of him was that he always wore a fawning smile. No matter what others said, he would respond with a string of affirmatives. He never showed anger, even when punished by the gentlemen and ladies he guided.

Upon seeing Lumian, the hunting guide's lips curled into a cruel smile.

He pushed open the window and raised his other hand, revealing a double-barreled shotgun.

"Die, you Northern Continent dog!"

As the hunting guide cursed, he aimed his double-barreled shotgun at Lumian and pulled the trigger without hesitation.

Bang!

A massive amount of lead spread out in a cone, enveloping the corresponding area.

As the hunting guide took aim, Lumian sidestepped and rolled to the other side of the street.

What greeted his eyes were the previously quiet cows, sheep, and horses.

At that moment, the eyes of these animals seemed to turn bloodshot.

Supporting himself with one hand, Lumian leaped up. Amidst the high-pitched mooing and the hunting guide's aim, he leaped to the middle of the stairs leading to the second floor.

"Ah!" A scream suddenly pierced the air, then stopped abruptly.

The door on the second floor swung open, and Lumian was confronted by a young man drenched in bright red blood. He held a massive axe dripping with the crimson liquid, and behind him lay the mangled corpse of an old man in his fifties, the wound carved deep into his chest.

Lumian, who had been wandering Tizamo Town for days, was no stranger to these two individuals.

Lying on the ground, his eyes wide open, was the leathersmith of Tizamo Town. He would purchase the hides of wild beasts brought back by gentlemen, ladies, and town hunters who didn't want to handle them themselves, processing them and selling the finished products.

The axe-wielding figure was his eldest son, who had studied nitrification, tanning, and other leather production techniques from him. He was known as an obedient young man, and his father wasn't an old-fashioned leathersmith who resorted to physical or verbal violence.

This was a characteristic of the people of Tizamo. They were docile, calm, and devoid of intense emotions.

And now, it appeared that the leathersmith's eldest son had just cleaved his father to death.

Upon seeing Lumian, the lad's eyes overflowed with a bloodthirsty smile.

With a shout, he swung his axe at Lumian. On the other side, the hunting guide began reloading his double-barreled shotgun with new lead rounds.

Lumian's body suddenly turned ethereal, merging with his shadow and vanishing into the darkness beside the steps.

Shadow Transformation!

After using this ability to sneak towards the police headquarters for a few seconds, Lumian suddenly heard someone pleading for mercy in fear.

He left the shadows and transformed back into a human. He saw Rhea aiming an arrow at the café owner, Bunia, but she didn't release it.

At that moment, a colossal anaconda, as thick as a barrel, emerged from the multi-layered hay at the top of the opposite house, hanging upside down.

It widened its cold eyes and foul-smelling mouth, the patterns on its scales seeming to expand and writhe.

This time, Lumian didn't dodge.

Facing the colossal boa attempting to devour him, his eyes darkened as he swung his fist upward.

In an instant, blazing white flames ignited from his fist, enveloping his entire forearm.

Bang!

Lumian's fist smashed into the colossal boa's gaping maw, tearing through the blood-colored flesh and delivering a devastating uppercut to its upper jaw.

Before it could devour its human prey, the colossal boa's cold eyes lost their luster. Its massive body plummeted due to inertia, but Lumian easily sidestepped the falling serpent and retracted his fist.

Clang!

The colossal boa crashed to the ground, its slippery scaled body engulfed in blazing white flames.

Weakness Investigation!

Lumian approached Rhea, noticing that the patrol team member was also regarding him with a vigilant and puzzled expression. He didn't attack immediately.

She… Lumian's heart stirred as a smile played across his lips.

"Looks like you're still lucid."

Wary of Bunia, Rhea observed Louis Berry for a moment, hesitating before speaking.

"Lucid, you say?"

"Yes." Lumian pointed at Bunia, who was glaring at him with undisguised hatred. "Did he attempt to attack you or even rape you?"

"Yes." Rhea didn't ask how he knew. Instead, she inquired, "What's going on?"

Lumian chuckled in response, stating, "Perhaps we've entered the dream once more, but this time, we're not alone."

He made a preliminary judgment based on Rhea's apparent lucidity.

Perhaps the reason for maintaining his own clarity of mind was falling asleep in Hisoka's house and entering the special dream recently!

He needed to find Camus for further confirmation.

Upon hearing Louis Berry's response, a term suddenly flashed through Rhea's mind.

Before she could voice her thoughts, the sound of three chimes suddenly rang out.

The bell's resonant tones reverberated through the streets of Tizamo, as if summoning the town's inhabitants.

Rhea listened intently, her expression shifting slightly.

"It's the cathedral's bell!"

Cathedral, the Saint-Sien Cathedral? Lumian's thoughts immediately turned to the unsettling Padre Cali. He glanced at Rhea.

"Let's go and investigate."

"Alright," Rhea replied without hesitation.

She lowered her bow, no longer aiming the arrow at the café owner, Bunia, and followed Lumian towards the Saint-Sien Cathedral, which was separated from their current location only by the police headquarters.

Bunia's expression fluctuated between longing and hatred, but he didn't dare to pursue them, held back by fear.

Lumian and Rhea sprinted at a breakneck pace. In mere seconds, they traversed the distance past the police headquarters and arrived at the small square in front of the cathedral.

Padre Cali was already standing at the cathedral's entrance.

However, he was no longer clad in the Eternal Blazing Sun Church clergyman's robe with its white and golden threads. Instead, he had donned a dark and intricately designed robe.

The padre, with his dark-brown skin, sunken eyes, and stiff facial features, gazed out at the empty square before his eyes settled on the newly arrived Lumian and Rhea. He held the Bible aloft and shouted with a frenzied expression, "I hereby declare the official commencement of the Dream Festival!

"During the Dream Festival, there are no taboos or restrictions. You are free to do as you wish, including harming and killing.

"Revel in it and unleash all your emotions and desires, everyone!"

Chapter 672: Greater Trouble

Upon hearing Padre Cali's shout, Rhea raised her hunting bow and aimed an arrow wrapped in silver lightning at the clergyman in the complicated black robe. Unlike when she had faced the café owner, Bunia, the anger in her eyes was even more pronounced now, and there was no hesitation. The padre was blaspheming and apostatizing!

At that moment, a slender and powerful palm appeared in front of Rhea's hunting bow, blocking the arrow.

"You…" Rhea turned to Louis Berry, puzzled as to why he had stopped her.

Lumian replied calmly, "Let's wait and see."

As the two of them conversed, Padre Cali revealed a wanton and flamboyant smile. He turned around and walked back to the cathedral with the Bible in his arms.

The golden dome at the cathedral's top and the statues and decorations on the outer walls dimmed under the crimson moonlight.

After Padre Cali's figure disappeared through the cathedral's open door, Rhea looked at Lumian with a dark expression.

"Why?"

Lumian chuckled in response.

"After realizing that this place is suspected to be a dream, I've been pondering a question."

As he spoke, screams and piercing cries reverberated through Tizamo and the surrounding plantations, echoing through the dark night sky.

"What question?" Rhea pressed.

Without giving a direct response, Lumian said, "It's almost certain that we're participating in the Dream Festival.

"Under such circumstances, if you succeed in attacking Padre Cali, what will happen when the Dream Festival concludes and everyone wakes up?"

Without waiting for Rhea's response, Lumian smiled again.

"If you shoot him in the arm, he'll wake up feeling phantom pain in the corresponding location, as if he's suffering from arthritis and his muscles are tearing.

"If you strike his head with a hammer and knock him out, there's a high chance that he'll have a headache, dizziness, and nervous twitches when he returns to reality.

"If you rape and impregnate him, he'll likely feel nauseous, reflux, and bloated, feeling like he might have a fetus in his stomach when he wakes up.

"If you tie him up, continuously electrocute him, and incinerate him with fire, will he feel those sensations in the real world, as if possessed by wraiths or shadows. He may always feel restrained, paralyzed, or in pain."

Rhea listened calmly, not bothering to question why Padre Cali could get pregnant. The more she listened, the more alarmed she became.

This was because Louis Berry's description matched the various manifestations of mass hysteria in Tizamo that the patrol team had gathered.

Lumian turned to Rhea and asked with a smile, "If you had killed Padre Cali with an arrow, what would happen when the dream recedes?"

"He'll die immediately? No…" Rhea denied it.

Tizamo had no incidents of multiple people suddenly dying in their dreams after a night.

Rhea immediately thought of an abnormality.

Between mid-December and mid-March, 80% of the annual deaths in Tizamo occurred, significantly surpassing those in Port Pylos and the surrounding towns.

She changed her words.

"They will gradually die in an irreversible manner within the next three months?"

With a nod, Lumian replied, "I even suspect that the primitive tribe in the forest launched several attacks in those three months mainly to eliminate those who had died in their dreams, allowing them to die reasonably in reality without revealing anything abnormal.

"From December of last year to this year, they only completed one attack. The reason should be that the attack was very successful. Those who should die are dead, and some who don't deserve to die are also dead. There's no need for them to take the risk and they also lost the motivation to come to Tizamo again."

Rhea listened attentively and pondered for a few seconds.

"The Dream Festival originates from that tribe?"

"It's possible. It's more likely that they guard or worship the source and act according to its revelations," Lumian replied simply.

Rhea nodded slightly.

"No wonder you stopped me from shooting Padre Cali. Everyone in Tizamo is likely a victim."

That's why I didn't counterattack the two assailants and only killed the colossal boa with a single punch, Lumian thought. When awoken from the dream, will the colossal boa crawl in front of me and die? If that's the case, I can add more food to Ludwig's plate…

Lumian surveyed the empty square slumbering in the night.

"Let's find Camus now and see if he's still lucid."

…

In Tizamo, on the third floor of the police headquarters, five rooms and one washroom belonged to the patrol team.

One room was used for day-to-day work, while another was used for storing documents and items. The remaining three apartments belonged to the local patrol team members, one for each person.

With the arrival of Camus and Kolobo, Maslow had temporarily moved to Loban's to vacate a room for his colleagues from Port Pylos.

Clang! Clang! Clang!

Amidst the reverberations of the bell, Camus jolted awake.

He glanced out the window into the deep night, illuminated by a faint crimson moonlight. Momentarily disoriented, he wondered about the hour.

Just as Camus reached for his pocket watch, intending to check the time, he noticed Kolobo's absence from the makeshift bed.

A sense of unease washed over him, urging him into action. With silent determination, he rose from his bed under the eerie crimson moonlight, securing his pocket watch and weapon.

Stepping cautiously into the corridor, Camus found it unusually still, cloaked in shadowy silence. Beyond the confines of the police headquarters, eerie cries and distant wails pierced the night, emanating from various corners of Tizamo and its surrounding plantations.

Drawing on his keen awareness honed through experience as a Public Security Officer, Camus sensed a disturbance in his Jurisdiction.

Suddenly, he instinctively dropped to the ground and rolled forward.

A deafening crack echoed through the corridor as a wooden door, which Camus would have passed by, splintered and burst outward.

In the blink of an eye, a broadsword slashed through the air, propelled by a savage force, slicing through the empty corridor.

As Camus swiftly evaded the attack, he turned to face his assailant.

It was Loban, the towering patrol member standing at over 1.9 meters, with short light-gold hair and piercing light-blue eyes.

A cruel smirk adorned the Feysacian's face, his eyes glinting with unmistakable greed.

In the dim moonlight, his features were obscured by shadows, emanating an eerie malevolence.

Upon spotting Loban, Camus's eyes sparked with determination.

Psychic Piercing!

Loban recoiled with a pained cry, instinctively shielding his head with his hands, relinquishing his grip on the broadsword.

Seizing the opportunity, Camus swiftly drew his revolver, taking aim at his teammate.

In a moment of hesitation, Camus faltered, then lowered his weapon.

Bang!

The bullet found its mark, striking Loban's knee with brutal force, tearing through flesh and shattering bone.

A Doctor from the Church of Earth Mother could mend such injuries!

Loban crumpled to the ground, writhing in agony, his attempts to curl up thwarted by the searing pain.

Camus lowered his revolver, rose to his feet, and pressed forward towards the end of the corridor.

As he descended the stairs, Camus passed by a cluttered cubicle, its contents scattered haphazardly, and caught faint murmurs from within.

His heart skipped a beat as he whispered, "Kolobo, is that you?"

A moment of tense silence followed before Kolobo's voice, tinged with panic and fear, replied, "Stay back! Don't come any closer! Spare me!"

Camus frowned, sensing that Kolobo's demeanor was far from his usual composed self.

Though prone to bouts of fear and unease, Kolobo typically pushed through his anxieties to fulfill his duties. This level of hysteria was unprecedented.

What's wrong with Kolobo? Camus wondered.

Choosing to stay put rather than risk exacerbating the situation, Camus observed as Kolobo fell into an uneasy silence, as if attempting to fade into obscurity.

After more than ten seconds, Camus contemplated assessing Kolobo's condition. If it proved dire, he resolved to retreat and seek out Louis Berry.

Suddenly, the sound of two sets of rapid footsteps echoed from below.

Camus swiftly pivoted, training his revolver down the stairs. There, he beheld Louis Berry, sporting a golden straw hat, accompanied by Rhea, armed with a hunting bow and arrow.

Gazing at the barrel aimed in their direction, Louis Berry chuckled lightly, his tone calm.

"Welcome to the Dream Festival."

The Dream Festival? It's the Dream Festival? Realization dawned on Camus. He glanced between the smiling Louis Berry and the serious Rhea, confusion etched on his features.

"Why are we still lucid?"

Observing their composed demeanor, Camus deduced that they hadn't succumbed to the overwhelming emotions and desires that often engulfed dreamers. Yet, he kept his revolver steady, wary of any sudden developments.

"Perhaps our early entry into this peculiar dream, thanks to Twanaku's house, has granted us this lucidity," Lumian proposed, offering his deduction.

Rhea seized the opportunity to suggest that encounters within the dream might hold sway over reality to some extent, sharing the conjecture with Camus.

Initially relieved that he hadn't resorted to lethal force against Loban, Camus's expression turned grave as he addressed his companions.

"The three of us aren't the only Beyonders in Tizamo. If we adhere to the notion that we can't retaliate when attacked, it will severely hamper our ability to defend ourselves."

Lumian smiled. "Who said we can't kill? If someone poses a threat to me, they shall be killed accordingly."

Rhea and Camus fell silent.

After a moment of contemplation, Camus nodded decisively, gesturing towards the sundry compartment nestled in the stairwell.

"Kolobo's extreme reaction stems from fear. He won't pose a threat to us. Let him seek refuge there, undisturbed."

As Rhea concurred, Lumian's expression suddenly shifted.

He asked, "Is Kolobo also in this dream?"

Kolobo, who has been in Tizamo for less than a week like me, has also been forced to participate in the Dream Festival?

"Yes." Camus asked in confusion, "Is there a problem?"

A shadow crossed Lumian's features as he responded gravely.

"This suggests there may be a larger problem at play."

Perhaps one more terrifying than the Dream Festival itself!

Before Camus and Rhea could inquire further, Lumian abruptly interjected.

"Wait here for me."

With that, he vanished from the stairway, utilizing Spirit World Traversal.

Lumian reappeared on the second floor of the Brieu Motel, just outside his suite.

In the next instant, a piercing scream echoed through the air, filled with agony and terror.

It was Lugano.

Chapter 673: "Sealing" Spell

Confirming his fears, Lumian slipped his key into the lock, easing the door to the suite open without a sound.

Now, he knew without a doubt that Ludwig, the terrifying sealed creature, would unleash his hunger and frenzy at the Dream Festival.

Beneath the crimson moonlight streaming through the window, Lugano thrashed wildly, his face twisted in agony.

Lurking at the end of his flailing arm was Ludwig, dressed in a child's nightcap and sky-blue pajamas dotted with yellow stars. The sickening sounds of bones crunching and flesh tearing filled the air.

Amidst the chaos, droplets of blood splattered onto the floor.

Suddenly, Ludwig lunged forward like a frenzied animal, his jaws closing in on Lugano's arm with a sickening crack.

"Ah!"

Lugano's scream pierced the air once more, threatening to blow the roof.

Instinctively, he tried to wrench his arm free from Ludwig's grasp and shove the creature away with his other hand. Pain seared through him, and he felt himself teetering on the edge of unconsciousness.

Observing Ludwig closely, Lumian darted behind him, his nostrils flaring.

Two beams of white light shot forth from his nose, enveloping Ludwig. Ludwig paused, shutting his eyes.

But before Lumian could react, the boy's mouth resumed its relentless assault on Lugano's arm, pulverizing bone and flesh alike.

His eyes snapped open.

The Spell of Harrumph can only daze Ludwig for a moment, and that's only if he's sealed… Lumian reminded himself, taking a deep breath to steady his nerves.

He glanced at Lugano, who had noticed him but was too consumed by agony to speak. Raising a hand, Lumian motioned for Lugano to remain patient.

Though Lugano's mind raced with curses and frustration, he remained unable to voice them.

As thoughts raced through his mind, Lumian gave an imperceptible nod.

Changing his focus, Lumian bypassed Ludwig, who was engrossed in devouring Lugano, and seized Lugano's shoulder.

In an instant, Lumian retrieved a sharp straight sword he had acquired from Port Santa, pulling it from his Traveler's Bag.

What is he trying to do? Amidst the throes of pain, Lugano's thoughts scattered.

With a swift motion, Lumian swung the sword, the blade bursting into white flames.

The fiery sword crashed down upon Lugano's arm, where Ludwig had been feasting, striking at the joint.

With a sharp sound, Lugano's forearm tore away from Ludwig's grasp, leaving behind a gory, truncated limb.

Simultaneously, Lumian's form began to fade, and even Lugano, whom he had grasped, vanished from sight.

Teleport!

But Lumian hadn't gone far. Both he and Lugano reappeared at the suite's doorway.

The agony persisted, but Lugano's momentary relief vanished as Ludwig's figure once again came into view. The sight of the boy, his mouth still bloody with Lugano's remaining forearm, sent a shiver down his spine.

The fear momentarily eclipsed the pain, and Lugano's mind raced with frantic questions.

Why not teleport away from Tizamo?

Why not teleport to Port Pylos?

Why are we still lingering in front of Ludwig?

Meanwhile, Ludwig had turned his attention to the doorway, his blond hair matted with blood, his brown eyes glinting with ravenous hunger.

With the speed of a child his age, he advanced toward Lumian and Lugano,

all the while chewing and swallowing what remained of Lugano's arm.

Unperturbed, Lumian calmly returned the straight sword to his Traveler's Bag.

Under Lugano's horrified gaze, Lumian conjured an entire almond pistachio cream thousand-layer cake and hurled it onto the floor beside Ludwig.

Ludwig's sprint slowed as he seemed to ponder which delicacy to indulge in first.

Ultimately, he turned his attention back to Lugano.

The sight of blood, flesh, and marrow infused with spiritual essence seemed to intoxicate him even further.

Capitalizing on Ludwig's momentary indecision, Lumian delved into his Traveler's Bag once more, extracting a fragment of Hisoka's corpse and tossing it aside.

Ludwig's gaze followed the offering, his lips instinctively moistening, yet he made no move to change course.

It seemed he found the offering beneath his tastes, too dirty to be his top choice.

Lumian systematically tossed out ingredients brimming with spiritual energy, one after the other, creating a barrier of tempting treats around Ludwig. Cream pancakes, fruit tarts, sandwiches oozing with cream, bouchée à la reine, chocolates infused with liquor, cookies, candied plums, éclairs, Charlotte desserts, and a myriad of other delicacies

formed a tempting ring around Ludwig, impeding his advance toward Lugano.

Turning to Lugano with a stern expression, Lumian's voice took on a commanding tone. "What are you waiting for? Stem the bleeding first!"

Startled, Lugano obeyed, his left palm emitting a faint glow as he applied pressure to the stump of his injured arm.

As Ludwig indulged in the feast laid out before him, his urgency waned. Though still concerned for Lugano, he no longer rushed forward.

In the final stages, Lumian threw out boxes of biscuits, sweets, beef jerky, and assorted provisions, encircling Ludwig with a haphazard yet effective "wall" of food.

Nearly all of Lumian's seven days' worth of rations for Ludwig had been deployed from his Traveler's Bag.

"What… what's the meaning of this?" Lugano, having successfully treated his wound and eased his pain, watched Lumian's actions with bewilderment. He couldn't fathom why his employer was so fixated on feeding Ludwig in the midst of their predicament.

"Sealing that fellow," Lumian replied calmly, his hands never ceasing their task.

"Sealing?" Lugano nearly doubted his hearing.

Isn't this too absurd?

Using food to seal a monster?

He couldn't recall ever encountering such a concept, not even in the most far-fetched novels on the market. No author would dream up such a peculiar method!

Wouldn't a conventional seal involve the use of spiritually potent materials to inscribe mystical symbols and patterns, followed by ritualistic magic or the employment of a mystical artifact?

What possible purpose could hurling food at the monster serve?

Lumian smiled and sighed.

"Once he's satiated, he won't have any appetite left for you or anyone else here.

"And there's enough food to keep him occupied until dawn, and possibly even beyond."

Lumian had devised this plan upon realizing that Ludwig's sole desire was to eat. Coupled with his behavior during the Dream Festival, Lumian was confident that Ludwig was now driven purely by his insatiable hunger—a unique trait exclusive to him in Tizamo.

In this scenario, as long as Ludwig's appetite was sated, he could remain confined within the suite, feasting without posing a threat to others.

What was the distinction between this and traditional sealing methods?

Of course, the success of this makeshift seal depended on the Dream Festival concluding before Ludwig depleted the seven days' worth of food.

Otherwise, Lumian's ability to hunt in the forest might not keep pace with Ludwig's voracious appetite.

Lugano's understanding dawned upon hearing Lumian's explanation.

Indeed, this method offered a practical means of temporarily restraining Ludwig.

Who said it couldn't be deemed a seal?

Understanding one's target's preferences and weaknesses allowed for the implementation of a seal without resorting to mysticism!

Observing Ludwig still attempting to approach the door amidst his feast, Lumian realized the creature's reluctance to part with Lugano. With a swift movement, he grasped Lugano's shoulder and teleported them both to a corner of the second-floor stairwell in the police headquarters.

Ludwig briefly glanced at the vacant doorway before refocusing on his culinary conquest within the suite.

…

"Are you certain everything's under control?" Lugano inquired anxiously, the moment he exited the spirit world.

Lumian chuckled in response.

"As long as no Beyonder happens to stroll by the door, he won't abandon his feast."

Relieved, Lugano exhaled deeply, casting a rueful glance at his remaining arm. Thoughts swirled in his mind as he contemplated his future.

At least I'm still alive. As long as I'm alive…

In the future, I'll see if I can save up enough money to afford a mechanical arm from the Church of Steam. That might bolster my combat strength.

The Doctor's expertise could only do so much, as transplanting another's limb was beyond the realm of possibility.

Camus and Rhea, observing Lugano's bloody limb, furrowed their brows, recalling Louis Berry's ominous warning of a greater issue.

"What happened?" Camus inquired.

Lumian smiled.

"It's a complication caused by that big problem, but I've managed to seal it temporarily. Just remember, stay away from the Brieu Motel, especially the door on the second-floor suite."

Relieved to hear that Louis Berry had intervened, Camus assured Lugano,

"Thankfully, it's all just a dream. You'll be fine once you wake up."

"A dream?" Lugano was perplexed.

Lumian offered no further explanation, simply remarking, "Indeed, it's a dream. But remember, if you perish in the dream, you perish in reality too."

Amid Lugano's bafflement, Lumian redirected said to Camus and Rhea, "Let's make our way to Twanaku's house now."

His primary objective in investigating the Dream Festival was to locate Hisoka's gold and the item acquired from the Nois family's Demon. He intended to assess any changes in their respective locations following the festival's commencement.

If nothing surfaced, Lumian planned to seek out Padre Cali at the Saint-Sien Cathedral.

The peculiar condition of "weakness in the depths of the Spirit Body" possessed by Padre Cali in reality set him apart from everyone else in

Tizamo. This hinted at something distinctly special about the padre. Additionally, it was Padre Cali who had officially inaugurated the Dream Festival.

Camus hesitated, his silence suggesting he might have pressing matters to attend to.

In that moment, Rhea regarded Lumian with confusion, gesturing towards Lugano.

"Why is he still lucid?"

Chapter 674: Manor

Upon hearing Rhea's question, Lumian snapped to his senses and turned to Lugano.

In his haste to save and "seal" Lugano, he had overlooked Lugano's condition!

Ever since this Doctor had gotten his injuries under control, he had been responding to Lumian's questions. He was lucid and rational, a stark contrast to the other participants in the Dream Festival.

It had to be known that even Ludwig, the monster himself, couldn't effectively control his appetite and had resorted to devouring humans!

Moreover, Lugano had never slept in Hisoka's house, nor had he entered this peculiar dream realm before!

Seeing Rhea, Camus, and his employer staring at him intently, Lugano, still grappling with the lingering pain, was utterly perplexed.

"Why wouldn't I be lucid?

"Aren't you all still in your right minds?"

Everyone seems to be in the same state. Why should I be the only one with an issue?

Lumian carefully observed Lugano's emotions and asked in a calm tone, "Have you ventured outside the motel recently?"

"I did. I assisted Ludwig in purchasing roasted meat and pastries made from palm tree cores," Lugano recalled.

Lumian smiled.

"Did you sleep anywhere other than the motel?"

"No, I wouldn't dare to engage with the women here." Lugano shook his head without hesitation.

He was evidently a little regretful about this, as there were numerous mixed-blood girls in Tizamo who possessed a different allure compared to those in the Northern Continent.

As the two men conversed, Camus and Rhea meticulously searched for any abnormalities in Lugano's body. However, apart from being sufficiently lucid and lacking excessive emotions and desires, Lugano appeared to be unaffected by the strange phenomenon.

Lumian looked at Lugano with a thoughtful smile and said, "We're being forced to participate in an event called the Dream Festival. Simply put, we're dreaming. We can do anything in this dream, but if we die here, we'll die in reality too.

"Aside from us, everyone in Tizamo is under the influence of intense emotions and desires, just like Ludwig.

"They're conscious—strictly speaking—but they've chosen to show their malice and express their long-suppressed desires. If we can subdue them, we might be able to communicate, but they'll instinctively try to deceive us."

Remembering how the café owner, Bunia, had immediately changed his attitude after being targeted by her arrow and begged for mercy, Rhea agreed with Louis Berry's judgment.

The Dream Festival participants weren't stupid or crazy. Their excessive desires and emotions were the main cause of their uncontrollable evil!

"I see…" Lugano finally understood.

Realizing what Rhea's question meant, he blurted out, "Why are we lucid and rational?"

After a pause, Lugano's voice lowered as he added, "W-why can I stay lucid and rational?"

Lumian smiled.

"We can stay lucid and rational because we entered this special dream before. We left marks and auras in certain places.

"As for you, I'm not sure why."

As he spoke, he watched Lugano's face closely, observing the change in his servant's expression.

Lugano said in a daze, his voice tinged with fear, "I don't know why this is happening either…"

Noticing that Lugano remained calm even after his issue was brought to light, Lumian seized the chance to glimpse into his servant's luck.

Currently amidst a bloody calamity, Lugano might fall victim to an ailment in the coming days… The first part makes sense, considering Ludwig has just eaten half his arm. But what does the second half imply? Could the Dream Festival span several days? Impossible. If it truly lasted that long, Tizamo's predicament would have been discovered much earlier… Does this suggest that Lugano would succumb to an illness during the Dream Festival itself? An illness similar to death in the waking world, one that wouldn't be instantly cured even if he awakens and receives the Mass's blessing? Lumian quietly pondered the meaning behind Lugano's revealed fate.

Shifting his gaze to Camus and Rhea, he realized that they, too, would soon face a grim and bloody ordeal. If they failed to navigate it properly, they risked slipping further into peril.

As these thoughts swirled in Lumian's mind, he turned to Camus and Rhea and declared, "I'm taking my servant with us."

It wasn't an act of kindness or generosity. Rather, Lumian feared that leaving Lugano to his own devices, given his inexplicable lucidity and rationality, might trigger the abnormality within him and alter the course of the Dream Festival in unpredictable ways.

Better to keep him close at hand, where he could be monitored and any potential accidents prevented. If Lugano truly unleashed a dire problem, Lumian could always end his life first, eliminating any future complications.

Camus and Rhea exchanged disgruntled glances before conceding, "It's your call to make."

"We must hurry to Twanaku's house," Lumian reiterated his earlier proposal.

Camus's gaze drifted toward the cubicle where Kolobo lay hidden, a hint of hesitation in his voice as he asked, "Any idea where Captain Reaza and the others might be?"

"They were supposed to appear beside me when the Dream Festival began, but they were nowhere to be seen," Lumian admitted, recounting the situation honestly.

Perhaps the dream's correspondence to reality was imperfect. The location where each person entered this peculiar dreamscape might be influenced by factors like their understanding, the dream's state, where they had slept, and myriad other variables.

Lumian mused that if he hadn't maintained his lucidity and rationality, he might have awoken in the master bedroom of the Brieu Motel's suite.

"Should we try to locate them first?" Camus proposed, a note of uncertainty in his tone.

Lumian let out a wry chuckle.

"Why? To engage them in combat?"

Neither Reaza nor Maslow had ever slept in Hisoka's house before. The likelihood of them lacking self-control and succumbing to malice and base desires was high.

When the time came, Lumian might not possess the strength to control the pace and intensity of the battle against such formidable Beyonders as he did with ordinary folk, not without the risk of causing deaths.

Camus and Rhea lapsed into a simultaneous silence, neither keen on the prospect of a life-and-death struggle with their own teammates.

Just as Lumian was about to signal the two patrol team members to approach, Camus gritted his teeth as he declared, "There's somewhere I need to go before I head to Twanaku's house."

"And where might that be?" Lumian inquired, raising an eyebrow.

Camus replied in a deep voice, "Palm Manor."

Lumian chuckled.

"You wish to rescue Miss Amandina?"

Camus nodded firmly, a hint of embarrassment tinging his features.

"Yes, that's right."

"You needn't worry. This is merely a dream. If one is violated within the dream, they'll only experience a touch of hysteria upon waking. No substantial harm will befall them," Lumian stated matter-of-factly, his intention not to provoke Camus.

Camus's expression remained unwavering.

"I'm aware. But I fear she may not be able to cope with it in her dream state and might resort to drastic measures. It could lead to her demise."

Without waiting for Lumian's response, Camus spoke gravely, "You can proceed to Twanaku's house first. I'll make my way to Palm Manor and rendezvous with you later."

"By the time you're done, we might not be at Twanaku's house anymore," Rhea cautioned him.

Camus nodded gently.

"I've made this decision of my own accord. I'm prepared to bear any consequences that may follow."

Lumian locked eyes with Camus, remaining silent for a stretch.

Camus felt an indescribable pressure weighing upon him, his mind conjuring the tragic outcomes he might face, but he pursed his lips and refused to retract his suggestion.

After more than ten seconds of silence, his expression unchanged, Lumian finally spoke.

"Let us head to Palm Manor now."

Huh? Before Camus could react, Lumian's hand firmly grasped his shoulder.

Simultaneously, Lumian's other hand darted out, reaching for Rhea's arm.

Rhea's instinctive reaction was to dodge, but the memory of how Lugano had been transported flashed through her mind.

Her tense shoulders relaxed a fraction.

With Camus and Rhea securely in his grasp, Lumian shot Lugano a meaningful look.

Lugano, displaying a practiced ease, approached and latched onto a corner of Lumian's vest.

In the next second, Lumian's figure blurred, the haziness rapidly spreading to engulf Camus, Rhea, and Lugano.

As Rhea and Camus found themselves surrounded by layers of indescribable colors and formless objects, intense emotions surged within their hearts.

Could this be the spirit world?

Is this what teleportation feels like?

Was this how the great adventurer, Gehrman Sparrow, managed to appear before any pirate at a moment's notice?

Having witnessed Louis Berry's abrupt disappearance and subsequent return with his servant in tow, Camus and Rhea had speculated that this might be the famed teleportation ability that had become the stuff of legend across the Five Seas, thanks to Gehrman Sparrow's extraordinary exploits.

It seemed their suspicions had been right on the mark!

Matani's patrol team boasted numerous adventurers among its ranks, and Camus and Rhea were well-versed in the myriad rumors that circulated the Five Seas.

The instant they experienced teleportation firsthand, their bodies departed the dream's spirit world, rematerializing before a four-story beige edifice.

This was none other than the main building of Palm Manor.

In the blink of an eye, Lumian, Camus, Rhea, and Lugano had reached their destination.

The manor was awash with cries, screams, sinister laughter, and high-pitched singing.

Just over ten meters from the main building, near a garden shrubbery, a mixed-blood lady's maid lay pinned to the ground by a group of slaves, her clothes half-stripped as she cried out in desperation.

She struggled with all her might, but how could she hope to resist the adult men? She was utterly helpless, pinned down and at their mercy.

Witnessing this scene, the former Public Security Officer, Camus, instinctively yearned to intervene, but he quickly reminded himself that this was a dream. Such events wouldn't truly impact reality. At most, they would result in a certain degree of curable hysteria.

It would be a waste of time to stop it, and it would only serve to delay my search for Amandina. Moreover, it would be pointless… Camus warned himself, forcibly averting his gaze as he ascended the steps into the main building.

At that moment, Rhea, who had been silent for a couple of seconds, turned from facing the manor's main building.

"You guys head in first."

With her back to Lumian, Camus, and Lugano, she spoke in a nonchalant tone. Leaning forward slightly, she strode purposefully towards the bushes at the garden's edge, making her way to the mixed-blood lady's maid who was being violated by the slaves.

Chapter 675: Evil

In a few swift strides, Rhea positioned herself behind the slaves, raised her right foot, and delivered a powerful kick.

With a resounding bang, the slave pressing down on the mixed-blood lady's maid was sent flying, landing unceremoniously in the bushes at the garden's edge.

The other three abruptly turned to face Rhea.

Before they could get a clear look at their assailant, Rhea followed up with a fluid roundhouse kick, knocking another one to the ground.

The remaining two, torn between greed, desire, and fear, took one look at Rhea and turned tail, fleeing to another part of the manor.

Rhea retracted her left foot and fixed a cold stare upon the two servants struggling to their feet. She raised her hunting bow, nocking an arrow with a smooth, practiced motion.

The two servants licked their lips in unison. Unwilling but fearful, they swiftly clambered over the bushes and vanished into the garden.

Only then did Rhea lower her gaze to the mixed-blood lady's maid, whose face was still streaked with tears and confusion.

"Are you all right?"

The mixed-blood lady's maid shook her head repeatedly. With trembling hands, she hastily tidied her half-torn dress and retrieved a dagger that had fallen beside her.

Seeing this, Rhea wasted no time.

"Find a secluded corner and hide until dawn."

With that, Rhea pivoted on her heel and prepared to dash back to where Louis Berry, Camus, and the others stood waiting at the door of the manor's main building.

As the mixed-blood lady's maid stood up, her expression darkened, and she raised the dagger clutched in her hand, plunging it towards Rhea's back.

Catching sight of the impending danger, Camus shouted, "Watch out!"

Though Rhea hadn't sensed the approaching threat, she instinctively heeded Camus's warning and reacted.

Surrendering to inertia, she fell forward and rolled to the side, narrowly evading the dagger's deadly path.

As she rolled, Rhea pivoted to face her attacker, eyes narrowing as she instinctively raised her bow, aiming at the mixed-blood lady's maid.

The mixed-blood lady's maid brandished her dagger, shouting in Intisian, her words laced with hatred, "Why can you join the patrol team, while I'm stuck as a mere lady's maid? Don't we both hail from the Southern Continent?

"Why? I even have Intisian blood coursing through my veins!"

Before she could complete her tirade, a crimson Fire Raven, its hue bordering on white, swooped in from nowhere, colliding with the steel dagger.

With a resounding clang, the dagger heated up, an explosive force wrenching it from the mixed-blood lady's maid's grasp, sending it flying several meters before clattering to the ground.

The mixed-blood lady's maid faltered, fear supplanting the hatred in her eyes.

Lumian, his black hair and green eyes striking, stood on the steps of the manor's main house, one hand casually tucked in his pocket. He called out, his voice carrying, "Where is Miss Amandina?"

Uh… A pang of embarrassment struck Camus.

In his haste to rescue Miss Amandina, he had acted with a distinct lack of professionalism!

He had been a guest at Palm Manor, but he had never been invited to visit Amandina's room upstairs. Consequently, he found himself unsure of which floor and room to search for her later.

If he were to search floor by floor, he would undoubtedly encounter countless obstacles amidst the current chaos.

The mixed-blood lady's maid's expression shifted, revealing a blatant desire and anticipation.

"She's sleeping in her room. Third floor, second room facing the rubber forest.

"Make haste. She's a vision of beauty, fragrant and pristine. Her figure is exquisite, her skin smooth as silk. She's a cut above the rest of us. Many a gentleman considers her their dream lover. Go, quickly!"

As she neared the end of her speech, the mixed-blood lady's maid gritted her teeth, her eyes alight with an illusory desire to witness something transpire.

Lugano's hair stood on end, a chill running down his spine as he confronted the stark malevolence of human nature.

Clap! Clap! Clap! Lumian shook his head, a smile playing on his lips as he applauded.

Rhea fell silent for a couple of seconds before rising to her feet and departing the area.

After a few steps, she paused, turning to regard the mixed-blood lady's maid. In a deep, solemn voice, she reiterated, "Find a secluded spot and hide until dawn."

With those parting words, Rhea turned away from the mixed-blood lady's maid and sprinted back to the steps at the main house's entrance.

Lumian averted his gaze and led the way through the open brown door.

As he, Camus, and the others entered, they were greeted by a startling sight in the living room. A middle-aged woman in a disheveled nightgown, her half-exposed body glistening with sweat and her black hair in disarray, sat astride a sturdy native slave. Her movements were intense, and she appeared utterly immersed, alternating between shouting and cursing. The native slave, clearly enjoying the experience, eagerly cooperated.

Near the staircase, a group of five or six servants and slaves, armed with an assortment of shotguns, rifles, and other weapons, intermittently fired bullets up the stairs. Occasional counterattacks emanated from the area leading to the second floor.

Camus stood frozen, his gaze fixed on the middle-aged woman's flushed face.

"You know her?" Lumian asked, a smile playing on his lips.

It was Rhea who replied, "She's Sir Petit's wife, Miss Amandina's mother, Madam Simona."

"I never imagined she would be like this…" Camus said, his voice low and somber.

Lumian smiled and applauded once more.

"Can't she indulge in her dreams?

"For the Dream Festival, this is something we should encourage. No one is being forced. How delightfully harmless."

Camus found himself momentarily at a loss for words.

Lumian then said to Rhea, "During the Dream Festival, there's a high likelihood that the person you save will also be a bad person and may even attack you."

Rhea fell silent for a few seconds before responding in a low voice, "Even if something like that happens again, I'll still save her."

Lumian dropped the subject and shifted his attention to Camus.

"Are you prepared to see the other side of Miss Amandina? Perhaps she will…"

Lumian left the sentence unfinished, instead casting a meaningful glance at Madam Simona, who was in the throes of fierce, foul-mouthed ecstasy.

Camus exhaled slowly, his voice resolute.

"I'm here to save her. It doesn't matter if she's good or bad, kind, malicious, chaste, or indulgent.

"After helping her find a safe hiding place and making sure she waits until dawn, we'll head to Twanaku's house."

I'm here to save her. It doesn't matter if she's good or bad, kind, malicious… Lumian quietly repeated the first half of the sentence, a smile playing on his lips as he regarded the servants and slaves attempting to occupy the staircase. He raised his voice, asking, "Has anyone seen Miss Amandina? Has she come downstairs?"

The servants and slaves turned their attention to Lumian and his companions, swiftly redirecting their firearms.

Lumian calmly extended his right hand, making a grabbing motion.

With this gesture, crimson flames, their hue bordering on white, ignited in the air, forming a curtain that Lumian seemed to snatch from the void.

With a deft grab and push, the fiery curtain abruptly split, transforming into Fire Birds that hurtled towards the shotguns, rifles, and revolvers before they could be properly aimed.

Amidst a series of muffled explosions, the guns dropped from the servants' and slaves' hands, clattering to the ground, damaged beyond use.

The servants and slaves themselves suffered only minor burns, their grip on their weapons faltering.

Since advancing to Reaper, Lumian's mastery over flames had grown. Even without the Lie earring, he could achieve this level of control.

Moreover, he hadn't unleashed his full power. He hadn't even summoned the blazing white flames in order to minimize the damage.

"Now, can we have a civilized conversation?" Lumian smiled at the servants and slaves.

Behind him, crimson Fire Ravens, their color nearly white, materialized, poised to strike at a moment's notice.

An Intisian valet, who seemed to hold some influence among the group, couldn't conceal his fear as he replied, "Amandina hasn't come down. Otherwise…"

He couldn't help but lick his lips.

"And who were you shooting at?" Lumian inquired.

"It's Petit, that bastard who deserves to rot in hell, and his butler, the one who's always wielding that damn whip!" A dark-skinned slave picked up the fallen firearm, only to discover that it was broken, just like everyone else's.

They had planned to retrieve more guns from another room on the first floor, but for now, they didn't dare make a move.

"Is that so?" Lumian nodded, a look of enlightenment crossing his features. "Carry on, then."

He turned around, leading the ten to twenty Fire Ravens that had gradually dispersed, and said to Camus and the others,

"Let's scale the side of the building to reach the third floor."

Teleportation wasn't an optimal option at this distance, not after having used it four times already.

Of course, since advancing to Reaper, Lumian could now perform 11 to 12 Spirit World Traversals without relying on the spirituality accumulated through his Ascetic abilities. It was a marked improvement from his previous limitations.

Camus and the others raised no objections. Lugano, however, trembled as he asked, "H-how am I supposed to climb?"

He swung the stump that was all that remained of his right arm.

Lumian glanced at him and said matter-of-factly, "Camus will assist you."

Me? Camus was momentarily taken aback before assessing his own skills and concluding that it was indeed feasible.

Before long, the four of them had ascended to the third floor, making use of the statues, decorations, metal pipes, and side balcony adorning the outer wall.

As soon as Camus pushed open the door leading to the corridor, he caught sight of a figure.

It was Amandina's personal maid, an Intisian lady's maid clad in a white cloth nightgown.

At that moment, the young lady's maid stood bathed in the dim moonlight, a bloody dagger clutched in her hand, her expression inscrutable.

Drip. Drip. The bright red blood from the dagger fell onto the corridor carpet, each drop a vivid splash of color.

Camus's heart clenched.

"What have you done?"

The lady's maid's face broke into a satisfied, carefree smile.

"I killed it. I've been annoyed by it for far too long!"

It? In Intisian, "she" and "it" were two entirely different words. Amidst his surprise, Camus followed the trail of dripping blood, his gaze falling upon Amandina's beloved pet dog, lying motionless at the door of the adjacent room.

Phew… Camus breathed a sigh of relief before asking in a deep, serious voice, "Where's Miss Amandina?"

The lady's maid's expression turned resentful.

"I'm looking for her too! She left an hour ago!"

An hour ago… Before the Dream Festival began? Camus pressed further, "Where did she go?"

The lady's maid, still holding the blood-stained dagger, replied with a contorted expression, "She went on a date with my Robert!"

Camus fell silent.

Lumian shook his head. Under the watchful eyes of the lady's maid, who yearned to kill but felt outnumbered, he swiftly searched the entire third floor with Rhea and the others, but found no trace of Amandina.

"Let's go." Lumian turned to Camus, his voice firm.

Camus had no choice but to concede defeat.

The four of them immediately teleported outside Hisoka's house.

Just as Lumian was about to proceed, he sensed something and looked up at the third floor.

A face appeared through the glass window of a room on the third floor.

The face was graced with a high nose bridge, piercing blue eyes, and thick black hair tied into a simple knot atop her head. Her brows exuded a youthful, vibrant aura.

Amandina!

It was said that Amandina had gone on a date with her fiancé, Robert!

Chapter 676: You Intisians

Camus was stunned to find Amandina here. His astonishment far outweighed any joy he might have felt.

From the window above, Amandina noticed the four figures below. Her face twisted in alarm, and she disappeared into the house's shadowy interior.

Taken aback, Camus called out, "Don't be scared! We're here to keep you safe!"

While shouting, he raced up the stairs to the second floor of Twanaku's residence.

His visit to Palm Manor had confirmed Louis Berry's theory. The Dream Festival participants had lost control of their actions, driven by hidden malevolence and desires. Yet, their minds remained lucid, allowing for communication.

Camus couldn't be sure if the possessed individuals would misinterpret others' words. Furthermore, this wasn't true clarity of thought. They wouldn't realize they were dreaming, and the experience would fade upon waking.

Thump! Thump! Thump! Camus and Rhea charged into the building, taking the steps two at a time.

Behind the house, out of sight, a glass window set in wooden planks swung open. Amandina, clad in black hunting gear, nimbly climbed out. She used the wall's protrusions and crevices to swiftly descend to the ground.

As her feet touched the earth, she noticed a figure watching her from the side.

It was Lugano, his right arm ending in a bloody stump, his face marred with crimson stains. He looked a frightful mess.

Amandina's heart clenched. She pressed her back against a pillar supporting Twanaku's house, fists tightening as she shut her eyes.

In the same instant, Lugano's eyelids drooped, his mind growing hazy.

He collapsed to the ground, falling into a deep sleep where he lay.

Amandina's eyes snapped open, no longer using her power to force the battle-worn man into slumber.

Doing so would trap her in a profound sleep, able to act only in her Nightmare form, her body immobile. And the man wasn't alone!

Before Lugano could wake naturally, Amandina turned to flee, seeking a safe haven to conceal herself.

At that moment, she heard a smirking voice.

"So you're a Beyonder too."

Amandina instinctively glanced over and saw the adventurer, Louis Berry, standing before another wooden pillar supporting Twanaku's house, not far from her.

The handsome Louis Berry, with his dark hair and emerald eyes, had one hand in his pocket as he leaned against the pillar. His feet were crossed behind him, and his lips curled into a playful smile as he looked her way.

The dim crimson moonlight of the night lent him an air of enigmatic and sinister allure.

Amandina tightened her fists once more and closed her eyes.

However, her spiritual senses told her that Louis Berry had vanished in an instant.

She couldn't find the target and couldn't use her corresponding abilities.

Moments later, Amandina, with her heightened spiritual perception, cast her gaze towards the shadows on the ground floor of the house.

She sensed something stirring there.

At the same time, Amandina heard an illusory and ethereal voice.

"We mean you no harm.

"We're not affected by the Dream Festival."

Amandina, who was about to use her spiritual perception to lock onto the formless presence in the shadow, was taken aback.

Just then, Camus and Rhea ran to the corresponding window and called out to Amandina,

"We're here to protect you!"

"We have enough self-control."

After assessing the number and strength of the two sides, Amandina asked skeptically, "Why aren't you affected?"

As she spoke, she locked onto the formless entity in the shadow, believing it to be the strongest among the opposing group—the adventurer, Louis Berry. If she discovered anything amiss and something went awry, controlling Louis Berry first would effectively increase her chances of escape.

Lumian's body emerged from the shadows.

He glanced at Lugano, who had regained consciousness and stood up, and inwardly praised Amandina's keen spiritual perception. Then, he smiled at Amandina and said, "Surely you've noticed that we've been entering and exiting this house frequently over the past few days?

"What about you? How are you able to maintain your normal self-control?"

Amandina glanced at the house beside her, no longer puzzled by Lumian and the others' ability to remain lucid and rational.

She pursed her lips and said, "Robert took me on a date to Twanaku's place. I spent half the night here."

Camus's heart ached as he blurted out, "Robert knows what's special about this place?"

Amandina nodded nimbly.

"He knows the Dream Festival very well."

"What's his relationship with Twanaku?" Lumian asked thoughtfully.

Amandina pondered for a moment.

"I don't know. At the very least, I haven't noticed any romantic tension between them or any interactions."

What do you mean by romantic tension? Lumian didn't directly inquire about Mr. Robert's knowledge of the Dream Festival. Instead, he asked something else.

"Are you a Beyonder of the Evernight pathway?"

Amandina blinked and hesitantly said, "In a way…"

Upstairs, Camus inquired with concern, "Where did you obtain the potion formula and the corresponding ingredients?"

As they conversed, various movements and shouts echoed from the plantations outside the town and throughout the town.

Amandina's eyes darted around as she grinned and said, "Can I choose not to answer?""What do you think?" Lumian smiled at her.

Amandina didn't back down. She raised her head slightly and stared into Lumian's eyes without flinching.

She noticed that his smile remained unchanged, and his emerald-green yet deep eyes remained emotionless.

After more than ten seconds, Amandina averted her gaze and tilted her head slightly.

"I obtained it in this dream."

Camus, who was on the third floor, was taken aback. "You obtained it during the Dream Festival?"

He could understand obtaining a potion formula during the Dream Festival. While knowledge gains could be replicated in reality, could Beyonder ingredients used to concoct potions be brought from the dream to reality?

Could it be that after consuming a potion during the Dream Festival, one could also remain a Beyonder upon waking?

This subverted much of mysticism's common sense!

Without waiting for Amandina's confirmation, Camus thought of a possibility.

He immediately asked Amandina, "Are you a Beyonder only in this dream?"

Amandina wanted to play dumb, but after glancing at Louis Berry, who was looking at her with a faint smile, she said gloomily, "It's the same in reality, but I don't have many chances to showcase it."

How is this possible? Camus gazed down at Amandina, suspecting that the mystical knowledge he had encountered since childhood was inaccurate.

He had considered the possibility that Amandina was lying, but he wasn't willing to doubt this girl who held a special place in his heart.

At that moment, Lumian spoke calmly to Amandina, his expression unperturbed, "You haven't consumed a potion, have you?"

Amandina's expression shifted slightly. She puffed up her cheeks and muttered, "Why are you still asking me if you already know…"

Haven't consumed a potion? Camus, Rhea, and Lugano were taken aback, but as they recalled their encounters, they gained a better understanding of Amandina's situation.

It's indeed a boon, but I'm not sure how it was accomplished… Lumian silently smiled as Camus nervously asked Amandina, "Which evil god deceived you?"

Amandina was bewildered. "Evil god? What evil god?"

Before Camus could explain, Lumian asked thoughtfully,

"How did you obtain these supernatural abilities?"

Amandina scoffed.

"Why should I tell you?"

In the next moment, she saw Louis Berry reveal a smile that inexplicably terrified her.

"It's—it's Robert," Amandina said with a shiver. "He took me into the forest outside and led me to a huge black stone. He asked me to place my hand on it."

"And then you became a Beyonder?" Lugano interrupted Amandina with surprise and curiosity, failing to abide by his duty as a servant.

Amandina shook her head.

"Then I fell asleep—in the dream. When I woke up, I had superpowers."

"Is Robert also a Beyonder? Did he obtain his powers through the same method?" Camus pressed.

Amandina let out a soft sigh and said, "He's a Beyonder, but I don't know if he obtained his abilities the same way. He brought me on a date here. Before entering this dream, he was already a Beyonder."

Black boulder… Lumian emerged from the ground floor of Hisoka's house and asked Amandina with a smile, "Where's Robert? He's not having a date with you here?"

Amandina's expression shifted between anger and amusement as she replied, "He wanted to visit his other lover before coming to me."

"He has another lover? Who?" Camus asked, suddenly angry.

Amandina's eyes darted around, and she hesitated for a moment with a strange expression.

"Padre Cali."

"Uh…" "Huh?" Camus, Rhea, and Lugano couldn't help but exclaim in shock and confusion.

Even someone as well-read as Lumian couldn't help but raise his eyebrows.

Amandina spread her hands and said, "He does like women, but he prefers men.

"He said he brought me into the dream to obtain superpowers because he felt guilty towards me. He was also grateful that I was willing to help him keep it a secret and not break off the engagement, continuing to go out with him, make out with him, protecting his image even after knowing his other side."

At that moment, Camus and Rhea remained silent, but Lumian sensed the same meaning in their eyes.

You Intisians…

Amused, Lumian asked Amandina, "And you can accept that?"

Amandina pondered seriously. "Why not? As a marriage partner, Robert excels in status, wealth, strength, looks, and skills. In the Southern Continent, there aren't many better choices. Besides, we did have a beautiful relationship. He does love me, but he also loves Padre Cali."

Amandina smiled at Lumian and said, "He also promised me more freedom."

Upon hearing Amandina's response and looking at the youthful and beautiful girl, Camus, who was on the third floor, suddenly felt a pang of sorrow.

A certain beauty in his heart shattered.

Lumian glanced up at him and scoffed inwardly.

Hadn't he been mentally prepared to see the other side of Amandina? Amandina managed to express herself succinctly in a very self-controlled manner without demonstrating it.

Perhaps Amandina had deliberately said so much in front of Camus to prevent him from loving her out of pity.

Lumian turned to Amandina.

"In other words, Robert is currently in Saint-Sien Cathedral?"

"Yes." Amandina nodded.

Lumian tersely acknowledged her words and spoke in a commanding tone, "Then let's pay him and Padre Cali a 'visit.'"

Chapter 677: Last Year's Dream Festival

Amandina hesitated for a few seconds before saying, "You've already cornered me. What choice do I have?"

Her eyes flickered with an inexplicable excitement and curiosity as she spoke.

Her words seemed to convey a different message: I didn't want to. I had no intention of doing so. You forced me to go to Saint-Sien Cathedral! Hurry, let's go!

Are you trying to "broaden your horizons?" Lumian criticized but didn't expose her.

He pointed at Hisoka's house and said, "Before heading to Saint-Sien Cathedral, let's check this place first."

Amandina tersely acknowledged his words.

"Are you trying to find the source of its uniqueness?

"Give up. I checked during the last Dream Festival and just now, but I found nothing."

As she spoke, she followed Lumian at a brisk pace, anticipating what this seemingly formidable adventurer would discover.

Lumian reached the second floor of Hisoka's house, where Camus and Rhea were already waiting.

Surveying every corner, Lumian casually asked Amandina, "Are you familiar with Twanaku?"

Amandina wasn't surprised by the question. Since she was searching for the source of the abnormality in Twanaku's residence, she couldn't avoid gaining a better understanding of his situation. She shook her head and said,

"I'm not familiar with him. I've only encountered him once or twice.

"I was just a child when he lived in Tizamo. Most of the time, I studied at the Iris Grammar School in Port Pylos. Later, he only returned to Tizamo two or three times a year—spending a week each time."

It was evident that Amandina had secretly learned about Twanaku. After all, she had only entered the special dream because she had slept in his house. She had even remained fully lucid during the Dream Festival.

Without waiting for Lumian to ask a new question, Amandina glanced at him and added, "Twanaku returns every year for the Dream Festival.

"Last year, during the Dream Festival, when Robert and I returned from the black stone, we noticed someone approaching. We hid behind giant trees on both sides of the path and saw that it was Twanaku."

Twanaku is indeed connected to the black boulder. There are even traces of him or marks formed by extreme emotions and desires there… Lumian turned to Camus, who was watching him and Amandina stroll around the second floor, and pondered for a moment.

"Which month did Twanaku's house burn down, killing all his family members?"

Without waiting for Camus's response, Amandina exclaimed excitedly, "I know, I know!"

Yes, I'm asking you. Do you think I don't know when Twanaku transmigrated? Lumian smiled at Amandina, signaling her to respond.

He had a clear and detailed understanding of Twanaku's matters on the surface. He had deliberately asked Camus to elicit Amandina's answer.

He wanted to see if she would lie and if she had any further information.

Amandina said smugly, "Late December. It should be a few days after the Dream Festival."

As far as they knew, the Twanaku family likely perished during the Dream Festival. Upon returning to reality, their fates began to unravel, and they were taken away by the fiery disaster. The question is, why did this house leave behind an abnormality? What happened to the Twanaku family back then, or what had they done? As the bestowed of the Inevitability domain, Lumian found a term that was very Inevitability-like to summarize the phenomenon of those who died for various reasons in the next three months after dying in the Dream Festival and returning to reality.

Reining in fate!

Of course, he couldn't be certain that death in the Dream Festival would lead to death in reality. However, judging from Amandina's expression and tone, Lumian believed that she thought the same.

After searching the second floor and finding no differences from reality, Lumian ascended the stairs to the third floor. Amandina followed closely, her excitement showing that she finally had a chance to do what a Beyonder should do.

Lumian glanced at her and casually asked, "What left an impression on you during last year's Dream Festival?"

Amandina's excited expression darkened, as if she had been reminded of something unpleasant.

She covered her mouth and nose. After a few seconds, she said, "Robert and I discovered numerous cruelly murdered individuals in the town and various plantations. Their stomachs were ripped open, and their internal organs were removed. They wore pained expressions, as if they had been tortured to death…"

"Serial Killer?" Camus, who had been listening intently to Louis Berry and Amandina's conversation, blurted out.

This reminded him of Twanaku.

Was this Desire Apostle venting his murderous desires during the Dream Festival to show restraint normally?

So that's how it is… Lumian roughly understood how Hisoka's advancement ritual had been completed.

Following the ritual, Hisoka had killed enough people in this realistic dream and devoured their internal organs. When he returned to reality, these people died one after another. From fate's perspective, they had indeed perished because of Hisoka's murder. This fulfilled the core requirements of the ritual. Hisoka only needed to truly devour a portion of the victims' internal organs before they were buried. He should be able to complete the ritual, consume the potion, and advance to Desire Apostle.

In reality, completing a series of murders and stealing a corpse's internal organs were two entirely different matters!

What puzzled Lumian was that according to Devilology, such an advancement ritual required a three-day interval between killings. Otherwise, it was easy to lose control. The maximum interval couldn't exceed nine days, or the ritual would reset.

Hisoka had clearly used the Dream Festival to complete all the killings in one night. When he returned to reality and the primitive tribe attacked, all the "condemned" people died on the same day. It didn't drag on until the next month. Lumian believed that it was due to the April Fool's prank. They had taken advantage of the chaos to send the deceased, whom the primitive tribe couldn't eliminate in time, to hell. This could be confirmed by the statements of the peripheral members of April Fool's.

In other words, the interval of no more than nine days was satisfied, but Lumian didn't know how Hisoka had achieved the criteria of exceeding three days.

Had he used the dream's uniqueness to avoid the three-day interval? When he killed someone in the dream, it hadn't been reflected in reality, so he wouldn't lose control so easily? As Lumian pondered Hisoka's advancement ritual, he circled the rooms on the third floor.

After searching the room where Twanaku slept, he smiled at Amandina and said, "Apart from the serial murders, what else did you encounter?"

Amandina pursed her lips and furrowed her brow. After a brief struggle, she grumbled, "If I cooperate, will I be awarded a medal when I return to reality?"

Her father, Petit, had once received the Legion of Honor medal from Intis, so he was made a knight.

Without waiting for Lumian's response, Amandina continued, "I also encountered a woman who seemed like a lunatic.

"Back then, I wanted to visit the Brieu Motel to see how the gentlemen and ladies hunting in Tizamo would react in such a dream. I was looking forward to seeing their other side.

"When I reached one of the rooms, I heard a few people singing a strange song. Then, the crazy woman appeared behind Robert and me. She remained lucid.

"She was quite beautiful, but she was very crazy. Back then, I was like a child with a new toy. I always wanted to test my abilities. I felt that with Robert's cooperation, I could easily deal with most Beyonders. One controlled, and the other attacked.

"In the end… she captured the two of us. Robert was knocked out, stripped naked, and hung from the bell tower with a bunch of mosquitoes released beside him. I-I was hung in a cesspit, descending bit by bit…"

At this point, Amandina appeared on the verge of vomiting.

In Tizamo, other than the Brieu Motel, Saint-Sien Cathedral, the police headquarters, and a few other places, no one used a flush toilet.

Camus couldn't help but sympathize with Amandina as he imagined such a scene.

Mad Lady? Were the ones singing the peripheral members of April Fool's who participated in the Tizamo prank? Lumian circled the third-floor rooms and smiled at Amandina.

"And then?"

Amandina took a deep breath and said, "She also asked me why I stayed lucid. After I told her about Robert and Padre Cali, she happily ran to Saint-Sien Cathedral and completely forgot about me. After that, I gradually escaped my predicament."

With a nod, Lumian replied, "Let's go to Saint-Sien Cathedral now."

He planned to consider using the Mystery Prying Glasses and the Eye of Truth in Hisoka's house in the dream after obtaining more information from Padre Cali and Robert.

"Alright." Amandina tried her best to appear less eager, but she really wanted to see how Robert, her fiancé, interacted with Padre Cali.

The five of them left Hisoka's house and hurried towards Saint-Sien Cathedral. Lumian didn't use teleportation because he didn't want to waste his spirituality. He couldn't carry anyone with him in his flaming spear form either.

Fortunately, Tizamo wasn't large. They quickly followed the shadows by the roadside and returned to the intersection where the Brieu Motel stood amidst various cries.

Lumian pointed at the Brieu Motel and warned Amandina, "Don't go to the second floor of the Brieu Motel. Trust me, it'll be even more terrifying than what that crazy woman put you through."

Amandina's eyes narrowed as she said, "Okay."

The five of them turned onto another street, passing through the Bunia café, the police headquarters, and a small square before arriving outside Saint-Sien Cathedral.

Lumian wasn't in a hurry to enter. He circled to the side, pried open a stained-glass window, and peered inside.

He and Amandina, who had gathered beside him, nearly went "blind."

In the cathedral's hall, a handful of naked men knelt before the Eternal Blazing Sun's altar. They were all from the Northern Continent, including Amandina's fiancé, Robert.

Padre Cali, also naked, paced back and forth between Robert and the others with an excited expression, reciting, "He walks in the light, He sheds warmth, He illuminates the world…"

With each line, Padre Cali seemed to grow more animated, exhilarated in various ways.

Chapter 678: Absurd Orgy

Amandina scrutinized the naked preacher, Cali, from head to toe. Her gaze eventually settled on Robert, her fiancé, kneeling beside him.

The lad with brownish-yellow hair, his skin pale-white as if he had not been exposed to the sun for a long time, had abandoned his usual cold demeanor. He was equally excited, but he controlled himself and patiently waited for the padre to complete his preaching.

The other naked men grew increasingly restless, gradually stirring.

However, it was evident that they held Padre Cali in high esteem. Despite their disintegrating self-control, they refrained from directly initiating the orgy, only occasionally making small movements.

If God were watching, He would have incinerated all of them… As a believer in the Eternal Blazing Sun, Amandina subconsciously wanted to kneel to the side and bow her head in repentance. What a blasphemous scene!

Holding the open Sun Bible, Padre Cali continued to impart the teachings of the Eternal Blazing Sun to the naked men with an abnormally excited expression.

"God says, the sun shines justly upon everyone…"

During the preaching, Padre Cali's gaze frequently swept across Robert and the other purebreds of the Northern Continent, their faces, chests, and lower bodies. His expression revealed uncontrollable satisfaction, pleasure, and enjoyment.

Lumian had always felt that he was well-read. In the past, he had disrupted the Church's holy operations, but the scene before him still exceeded his imagination, leaving him momentarily dumbfounded.

Are the padres of the Eternal Blazing Sun Church among the most "outstanding" Intisians?

In an instant, information about Padre Cali and the observations of the past few days appeared in Lumian's mind.

He's a native of Port Pylos, possessing pure West Balam bloodline and a lowly native of the Southern Continent. Starting as a cathedral servant, he had seized the opportunity to change his fate. Subsequently, he had worked diligently and eventually became the padre of Tizamo Town.

He yearns for higher status and more recognition, especially from those hailing from the Northern Continent…

Such long-standing desires have distorted the desires of Padre Cali. Is he secretly targeting men from various countries in the Northern Continent, attempting to subdue them and gain his sought-after recognition?

Robert and the others are clearly relatively young. If Padre Cali had started doing such things a few years ago, they would still have been minors with immature minds. Tsk, you padres… As Lumian analyzed the current situation, he thought of his sister Aurore.

In Cordu, he had not liked entering the cathedral, attending Mass, or praying often. On the one hand, Aurore did not like it herself and set an example. On the other hand, Aurore had always been worried that Lumian, who was only twelve or thirteen years old at the beginning, would be alone with the clergyman in the cathedral. From time to time, she would use words like "Boys have to protect themselves" and "Many padres like boys."

Suppressing his sudden longing, Lumian looked at Padre Cali, who was still engrossed in his preaching. The more he preached, the more excited he became. Lumian felt that his analysis should be correct.

A lengthy holy sermon before a male orgy was clearly not something an ordinary person could come up with and put into practice. It was abnormally absurd.

However, considering that Padre Cali yearned for the Northern Continent gentlemen's recognition, especially given his identity as the Eternal Blazing Sun Church's padre, all of this became self-explanatory!

Poor Eternal Blazing Sun and Saint Sien. They have become an important prop for Padre Cali's performance art… Just as Lumian thought this, Padre Cali finally completed his "exciting" sermon.

He spread his arms and shouted, "Praise the Sun!"

Robert and the other lads, equally excited and naked, knelt on the ground, spread their arms, and sang in unison, "Praise the Sun! Praise His Grace!"

The Sun does not wish to be praised by you… His Grace… Yes, it aligns with the aspirations of Padre Cali for higher status. In this male orgy, he made all participants view him as an archbishop and preached to them… Finally, he would bestow the boon of God's holy spirit on these people? Lumian seemed to be able to imagine the ensuing scene.

Padre Cali turned around in satisfaction and solemnly placed the Bible back on the altar.

Then, he approached Robert, resembling an archbishop bestowing grace upon his believers.

The other men tangled with each other.

Camus, Rhea, and Lugano, who were observing the cathedral through another stained-glass window, were equally stunned.

In particular, Rhea felt as if her eyes, brain, and soul had been tainted despite all her tragic experiences.

Upon regaining her senses, Rhea's anger surged.

Beside her, Lumian recalled a detail. He lowered his voice and asked Amandina, "When did Robert become lovers with Padre Cali?"

Amandina retracted her corrupted gaze and pondered for a moment.

"More than a year after Padre Cali arrived in Tizamo, about three years ago."

Lumian frowned and asked, "Did they become lovers in reality, or during the Dream Festival?"

"Of course in reality," Amandina replied without hesitation.

Something's off… Padre Cali had been in Tizamo for over a year. He should have mellowed, turned restrained, and been devoid of excessive desires and emotions. Why was he still targeting Robert and the other lads? From the looks of it, there is something abnormal about Padre Cali, and this abnormality should have been related to the source of the Dream Festival. That is why he had declared its beginning… Just as Lumian thought this, he saw Rhea raise her bow angrily and aim it at the cathedral, where the scene was becoming increasingly unbearable and foul.

Almost simultaneously, the energetic Padre Cali turned his body.

Suddenly, Lumian, with one hand in his pocket, saw the native padre with dark brown skin, sunken eyes, and thin black hair. His naked figure was reflected in Lumian's eyes.

He felt a chilling aura emanating from Padre Cali's body, attempting to completely freeze and replace his spirit.

Wraith Possession!

So, Padre Cali possesses the ability to transform into a Wraith. It is no wonder that when I investigated his weaknesses, I realized that it only existed deep within the body, within the spirit… Heh heh, a Wraith preaching in the Eternal Blazing Sun cathedral and under the sunlight… Who would have thought such a thing would happen? Padre Cali's Wraith powers definitely had not come from drinking potions. They would definitely have been discovered and purified… A boon? Lumian came to a realization.

Relying on the strength of his Sequence 5 Spirit Body, Lumian struggled to wrestle control of his body from Padre Cali.

He was not in a hurry to activate the Blood Emperor's aura brand. Instead, he looked at Amandina and said with difficulty, word by word, "Let… me… and… Cali… enter a dream…"

Lumian knew that Amandina's ability to forcefully pull people into a dream could only be used one-on-one. However, Padre Cali was currently attached to him and entangled with his Spirit Body. Perhaps she could treat them as a unit.

As for whether Wraiths dreamed, Lumian did not know for now. After all, he still had a backup plan.

With a resounding crash, Rhea's arrow shattered the stained-glass window, sending shards crashing to the ground.

The arrow, entwined with silver-white lightning, crossed a distance of more than ten meters, pierced the location where Padre Cali had been, and nailed it to the wooden table with the candlestick.

Amidst crackling lightning, the long wooden table shattered and collapsed to the ground, sending burning candles tumbling in all directions.

Robert, clearly taken aback by the sudden departure of Padre Cali, reacted. He opened his mouth and uttered strange words in a strange language.

Ooo! As if a cold wind from the Feysac Empire's extreme north blew, a blurry, strange, and inhuman figure materialized out of thin air and burrowed into Robert's body.

A layer of armor-like ice materialized on Robert's body, and a colossal, sharp, and crystalline frost scythe materialized in his hand.

Clutching the massive scythe, Robert sprinted toward Rhea, Camus, and the others.

Wherever he passed, the ground froze, and icicles materialized on the walls.

…

On the fourth floor of the Brieu Motel, in a room near the intersection, two figures emerged from behind the curtains as Lumian and his companions made their way to the street where Saint-Sien Cathedral stood.

One of them was a man with distinct Northern Continent features. His dark-green eyes stood out against his dark gray formal suit and black silk top hat. The other was a woman with delicate skin, exquisite facial features, and deep blue eyes. She wore a light-colored dress that allowed for easy movement and a feathered hat adorned with pearls. They were the couple Lumian had seen moving into the Brieu Motel late at night.

They had arrived in Tizamo a mere ten minutes before the official Dream Festival began.

At that moment, the man and woman's eyes were clear, devoid of any excessive emotions or actions.

"The patrol team's sudden arrival in Tizamo is indeed because they discovered the problem here," the beautiful woman said in a deep voice, gazing out the window at the street below. "From the looks of it, they've also found a way to remain lucid and rational in this special dream."

The man's expression was cold as he nodded slightly and said, "But they don't know much yet. They're moving in the wrong direction."

"Let's get moving." The woman in the feathered hat led the way to the door.

The two of them descended the stairs swiftly, one after the other.

As they passed the second floor, the woman in the light-colored dress suddenly stopped and whispered, "Do you hear something strange?"

The man in the half top hat listened intently for a few seconds before hearing faint chewing sounds coming from a room deep on the second floor.

The sound persisted without pause.

Chapter 679: Spirit Medium

Seeing Robert, clad in ice armor and dragging a frost scythe, sprinting towards the stained-glass window facing him, Rhea, and Lugano, Camus immediately drew his custom-made revolver and aimed it ahead.

At that moment, his feet turned cold, and his body froze, causing his joints to become sluggish and his wrists to tremble.

From the corner of his eye, Camus observed that although Robert hadn't truly approached, the frost on the ground and the icicles on the wall had already reached him.

Within a radius of ten to twenty meters, the chill intensified, resembling the extreme north.

With a swoosh, Rhea shot another arrow entwined with silver lightning.

Robert didn't dodge or evade. Exerting strength in his arms, he swung the frosty scythe forward.

Clang!

The scythe knocked away the arrow, leaving behind a small amount of lightning that raced towards Robert's body.

Amidst the sizzling sounds, Robert felt numb for a moment before continuing to sprint towards Rhea and the others.

Camus was taken aback.

He wasn't surprised that Robert could control the frost scythe so effortlessly and create a considerable frozen domain. Instead, he was surprised that

Robert had rushed up to him and was about to enter a five-meter range.

Doesn't he know about my Psychic Piercing ability?

Doesn't he realize that Psychic Piercing's effective range is five meters?

Could it be that he has never encountered or fought a Mid-Sequence Beyonder of the Arbiter pathway?

That's true, Camus thought. No one in the patrol team or the Admiral Guard knows that Robert and Miss Amandina are Beyonders. After obtaining Beyonder powers during the Dream Festival, they probably don't use them much in the outside world. They can only unleash their full potential during the annual Dream Festival. There aren't many Beyonder enemies to choose from...

As these thoughts raced through Camus's mind, he seized the opportunity. As Robert stepped within five meters, his eyes lit up with brilliant lightning.

Psychic Piercing!

Two bolts of lightning shot out and pierced Robert's head.

Robert let out a blood-curdling scream and tumbled forward, writhing in pain.

He had tossed the frost scythe aside.

Rhea's arrow was once again nocked to the bowstring, instinctively following Robert's roll. Fury blazed in her eyes, erupting from within her body, and her muscles bulged with the surge of power.

Raging Blow.

This was the Raging Blow Rhea had accumulated through her anger.

It came from Sequence 8 Folk of Rage from the Sailor pathway. By releasing accumulated anger, her attack was greatly enhanced.

Rhea was currently at this Sequence, but the hunting bow in her hand was a powerful Beyonder item. It was a formidable weapon she had spent all her savings on before arriving in Tizamo. It was called Thunderclap Explosion and could be used for two years.

Soon, Robert ceased his tumbling, but he couldn't shake off the intense pain caused by Psychic Piercing. He froze in place for a moment.

Without hesitation, Rhea watched the arrow, engulfed in dazzling lightning, and released her grip on the bowstring.

The arrow shot out, but the lightning on it strangely split into two. One continued to ensnare the arrow, while the other darted to the right.

Wh-- Rhea's pupils dilated, unable to comprehend why such a thing had occurred.

Instinctively, she turned her head and followed the separated bolt of lightning to its destination.

Then, she saw Louis Berry leaning against the window, his eyes tightly shut as he slid down.

A few seconds ago, upon hearing Louis Berry's words, Amandina had locked onto him with a mix of confusion and excitement.

Since you said it, I won't stand on ceremony!

In her spiritual perception, Louis Berry's soul was intertwined with the sinister soul, fiercely resisting while using various parts of his body as a battlefield. However, the owner of the body was clearly at a disadvantage.

Amandina couldn't separate them under such circumstances.

She vaguely understood why Louis Berry had instructed her to lock onto the other party's head and entangled soul with her spirituality.

Lumian, who had Amandina use her abilities, stammered as he struggled to move his left hand in his pocket.

His left hand wasn't in his trouser pocket or shirt pocket, but in his Traveler's Bag.

After arriving outside Saint-Sien Cathedral and prying open the stained-glass window, Lumian had inserted his left hand into his Traveler's Bag, ready to retrieve a suitable mystical item at any moment.

He was preparing for the impending battle.

If this wasn't a dream, he would likely have his hand in his left shirt pocket--where Mr. K's finger was.

Before being fully controlled by the Wraith, Lumian relied on the strength of a Reaper's soul to struggle and retrieve a brooch from his Traveler's Bag.

It was the grayish-white, lightning-shaped brooch known as Fury of the Sea!

Lumian gripped the brooch tightly and observed Amandina leaning against the wall. She clenched her fists and closed her eyes.

His thoughts suddenly blurred, and his eyelids grew heavy.

He fell asleep and slowly slid down the wall.

Padre Cali fell silent in his body.

The Wraith appeared to be asleep as well. It was unknown if he would fall asleep on his own or if he was affected by the negative effect of now possessing a body.

Amandina opened her eyes and was delighted to see this. She wanted to praise herself.

With a crackling sound, the bolt of lightning detached from Rhea's arrow struck Lumian, transforming into numerous tiny electric serpents that slithered around him.

This was the downside of the Fury of the Sea brooch!

Even if Lumian only carried it, there was a high chance of being struck by lightning when he went out in the rain. And if he wore it without attacking anyone else, the likelihood of encountering such a thing would significantly increase.

Lumian believed that since the Fury of the Sea brooch had a chance of attracting lightning strikes on a rainy day, it held a special allure for lightning.

In such a situation, although it wasn't raining, what if there was another source of lightning nearby? What would happen?

There was a high chance that it would attract a portion of someone else's lightning!

Stimulated by the pain of the electric shock, Lumian, no longer affected by the Nightmare ability, snapped out of his dream. He regained his senses, but his body remained numb.

He experienced this, as did Padre Cali.

As soon as the Wraith regained consciousness, he instinctively detached from Lumian's body to distance himself from the harm of the electric current.

His face materialized on the nearest pane of glass, his form indistinct.

Seizing the moment, Lumian donned the grayish-white, lightning-shaped brooch and retrieved his revolver from his Traveler's Bag.

He raised his right hand, aiming at Wraith Cali, who remained in a daze. The Wraith's various colors reflected in Lumian's determined eyes.

The pallor rapidly expanded in Lumian's line of sight.

Bang!

Lumian calmly pulled the trigger, firing a yellow bullet.

As he did so, silver-white lightning flickered on the Fury of the Sea brooch, instantly entering the bullet and wrapping around its surface.

This was one of the brooch's abilities. It could grant the wearer an Electric Shock effect with every strike!

After temporarily losing the Pride Armor, this had become one of Lumian's most effective methods against soul-type creatures.

The yellow bullet, engulfed in silver-white lightning, struck the stained glass, shattering it and sending tiny electric currents in all directions.

However, it missed Padre Cali. As Lumian pulled the trigger, the Wraith vanished from the glass and instantly leaped onto the glass-like surface of the crystal chandelier high above the cathedral.

Mirror Blink!

On the other side, Rhea's arrow struck Robert with precision, emitting a resounding bang like a heavy object colliding.

Crack!

The ice armor covering Robert's body instantly cracked, shattering into fragments that fell to the ground.

Under the assault of crackling electric serpents, the blurry shadow attached to his body broke free and vanished into the void.

With the ice armor shielding him from most of the damage, Robert remained relatively unaffected. However, his chest tightened, and his body briefly went numb.

At that moment, he regretted not wearing clothes. The various ingredients needed for his spirit channeling were hidden in his clothes, such as Full Moon Essence Oil or Corpse Incense Medication.

There were very few spirits that could allow him to communicate safely without the use of materials. The one just now was the most powerful.

Seeing Camus's special revolver and Rhea's arrows aimed at him, Robert grew anxious. He thought of a spirit channeling method that could be completed under such circumstances.

Frowning and fearing the pain, he bit the tip of his tongue.

Pfft!

He spat out the blood from the tip of his tongue mixed with his saliva, emitting a strange sound from his throat.

A pair of weathered, stone-like hands reached out from beneath the cathedral's stone bricks, seized Robert's body, and pulled him underground.

At some point in time, the ground had softened like a swamp, and the blood in the air abruptly vanished.

Camus's bullets and Rhea's arrows arrived one after another, but they only caused sparks on the stone bricks on the ground.

Spirit Medium? Camus used this opportunity to revise his judgment of Robert's pathway and Sequence.

He's actually not from the same pathway as Miss Amandina?

Hadn't he also obtained his superpowers from the black boulder?

Camus hastily took a few steps back, retrieved a cartridge bag, and began reloading the revolver.

As a member of Matani's authorities, obtaining Beyonder bullets with different effects was relatively easy, even though the patrol team wasn't wealthy or had much accumulation. After all, there was the Eternal Blazing Sun Church, the God of Steam and Machinery Church, the Church of Earth Mother, and numerous adventurers coming and going. Furthermore, the patrol team needed to be vigilant against certain branches of the Rose School of Thought and the Numinous Episcopate. They had to make targeted preparations.

Camus swiftly inserted the golden Purifying Bullets into the revolver's cylinder and snapped it shut.

At that moment, Padre Cali, who had leaped onto another stained glass window, reappeared.

He opened his mouth and emitted a piercing shriek that harmed one's eardrums and Spirit Body.

"Ah!"

Wraith Shriek!

Chapter 680: Combat Experience

Camus, who had just loaded the Purifying Bullets into his revolver cylinder, heard a sharp sound of static in his mind.

Before his eyes, the world seemed to separate from him, a chunk of transparent glass forming a barrier between him and reality. Under the Wraith's Shriek, cracks appeared on the glass, extending into the Spirit Body.

A faint shattering sound reverberated in the ears of Lumian, Rhea, Lugano, Amandina, Robert, who had just crawled out of the ground near the altar, and the other naked men frantically dodging. It brought sharp pain to their eardrums, blood to their noses, and agony from the depths of their souls.

Almost everyone froze in place, like fragile porcelain caught in an invisible storm.

The naked men, who appeared ordinary, fainted without a sound. Blood seeped from their eyes, nostrils, mouths, ears, and skin. However, Lumian, who had advanced to Sequence 5 Reaper, suffered the least damage and recovered the fastest.

Thin ice crystal arrows shot at him, their arrowheads flickering with a cold light.

In an instant, Lumian made a decision.

He didn't transform into a shadow creature or enter the shadows to dodge the damage, nor did he attempt to duck.

Instead, blazing white flames ignited over his body.

He transformed into a burning-white spear and hurled himself towards the stained-glass window closer to the door, facing the ice crystal arrows.

Padre Cali, with his dark brown skin and sinister expression, stood there.

Amandina was the second to recover from the Wraith's Shriek. She witnessed the majestic blazing-white flaming spear collide with the ice crystal arrows hurtling towards them.

Silently, a portion of the ice crystal arrows facing the blazing-white flaming spear evaporated into sizzling white gas, while the surrounding ones quickly melted and turned to steam.

White mist caused by water steam filled the air. Although the blazing white flaming spear had dimmed significantly and stopped burning violently, it still pierced through and headed straight for the stained glass that revealed Padre Cali's figure.

Similar ice crystal arrows pierced through the white mist, striking Amandina, Camus, Rhea, and Lugano. However, they either melted or shrunk significantly, reducing their speed.

Amandina and Camus, who had just escaped the Wraith's Shriek, easily dodged. Although Rhea and Lugano couldn't react in time and were hit by the ice crystal arrows, they only felt a slight pain, as if a child had hit them with a snowball. It was a little painful, but mostly wet and cold.

They seized the opportunity to snap out of their daze, almost at the same time as Robert at the altar.

Crack!

The blazing-white flaming spear struck the stained glass, shattering it into countless pieces. However, Padre Cali had already leaped onto the window that Lumian had pried open, narrowly escaping the attack.

As the flames of the burning white spear dissipated, Lumian's figure emerged from the fading light.

Without hesitation, he ignited white flames once more, transforming into a majestic spear that shot towards the window where Padre Cali had appeared, determined to pursue his enemy.

He deliberately refrained from teleporting and repeatedly transformed into a flaming spear, hoping to lull Padre Cali into overlooking such possibilities. Then, at a critical moment, he would unexpectedly appear beside him and use the Spell of Harrumph, catching the Wraith off guard.

Otherwise, it would be challenging to catch a Wraith that could constantly jump through mirrored objects, using them as portals to evade capture.

Furthermore, Lumian knew that Wraiths could be considered spirit world creatures to a certain extent. They could also use the spirit world to complete teleportation, although they couldn't compare to spirit world creatures specialized in this area. Nevertheless, it wasn't an ability to be underestimated.

As the fireball spear hurtled toward the window Lumian had pried open, Robert rolled to the side of the altar where their clothes were, intending to retrieve the ingredients used for spirit channeling.

Swoosh!

An arrow pierced the stone bricks in front of him, forcing him to change the direction of his roll at the last moment, narrowly avoiding the projectile.

As soon as Rhea regained her composure, she aimed at Robert and launched an attack.

Both she and Camus believed that Louis Berry could handle Padre Cali on his own, so their mission was to restrain Robert and capture this key figure, preventing him from interfering in the battle.

As a gunshot rang out, Padre Cali's figure vanished from the stained-glass window, leaving no trace of his presence.

The eyes of Amandina, who was nearby, reflected the image of the naked fallen padre.

Amandina wanted to resist, but her body quickly turned cold, gradually defying her will as an unknown force took control of her actions.

Amidst the sloshing sounds, Lumian's blazing-white flaming spear pierced through the stained glass and landed outside the cathedral, three to four meters away from Amandina, its heat radiating in the cool night air.

As the flames dissipated, Lumian appeared, clad in a golden straw hat, a white shirt, and a black vest.

At that moment, Amandina's hands had already "involuntarily" risen. The corners of her beautiful face curled into a sinister and smug smile.

Come on!

Attack me!

Amandina would be the first to be injured and die. If the body can't protect me, I can still jump and shift positions in time!

Padre Cali was wary of Amandina's ability to forcefully pull people into dreams, a power that could easily turn the tide of battle. This time, he chose to possess her instead of Louis Berry, an enemy at a higher Sequence, hoping to use her as a shield against Lumian's attacks.

As Padre Cali manipulated Amandina's body with a sinister and smug smile, he saw Louis Berry's lips curve into a radiant smile.

As a Wraith, Padre Cali had a strong spiritual premonition, and he suddenly sensed extreme danger.

"Ha!"

A pale-yellow light burst forth from Lumian's laughter and landed on Amandina, who stood three to four meters away, enveloping her spirit and Padre Cali, who couldn't use Mirror Blink in time.

Lumian honestly found it a pleasant surprise.

You know about Nightmare's abilities, but don't you know how to guard against the Spell of Harrumph?

Oh, you really don't. You don't know this ability, nor do you know that I'm capable of it.

However, as a Wraith, you can continuously "mirror- jump," yet you insist on attaching yourself to one of my teammates and remain within a few meters of me. What kind of belief is this?

Don't you have enough combat experience?

Even if you didn't know the Spell of Harrumph, you have to guard against abilities like Psychic Piercing!

Oh, you think Camus is far away, so there's no need to worry about it. As a Sequence 5 of the Hunter pathway, how would I know this? Are you hoping to use me to quickly kill Amandina?

Haven't you considered the existence of mystical items?

My original plan was if I failed to finish you off after using teleportation to deliver the Spell of Harrumph and Cull, I would feign a strategic retreat and find a small space to set up the Bottle of Fiction. Then, when you caught up, I would fight you in a cramped and sealed space, just like how I dealt with Hisoka back then. To my surprise, you delivered yourself to me…

As Lumian criticized wildly, Padre Cali and Amandina fainted and collapsed to the ground.

Had it been during his battle with Hisoka some time ago, Lumian would have hastened to follow through with the subsequent steps. This was because the Spell of Harrumph couldn't render a Sequence 5 enemy unconscious for long. However, now that he had advanced to Sequence 5, his Spell of Harrumph had become significantly stronger. The time he could control a Wraith had increased, although it was still limited to a few seconds.

Lumian retrieved a few special bullets from his Traveler's Bag. They had been purchased through Camus from the patrol team.

Two Exorcism and two Purification Bullets, both golden in color.

Lumian swiftly loaded the four bullets into the cylinder of his revolver and aimed at Amandina, who lay on the ground.

Catching sight of this from the corner of his eye, Camus jumped in fright and shouted, "What are you doing?"

"Saving her," Lumian replied calmly.

Then, he pulled the trigger.

Bang!

The golden Exorcism Bullet struck Amandina's shoulder, causing her to bleed and emit a golden sunlight.

Amandina woke up in pain, and the apparition of Padre Cali detached from her body, his face warped under the "sunlight."

Originally, with the strength of the Exorcism Bullets, it would have been impossible to expel a Wraith from the victim's body in an instant. However, Padre Cali was unconscious and unable to react effectively.

Lumian raised his gun, his eyes reflecting the color on the surface of Padre Cali's Spirit Body. He locked onto the pallor that had become evident.

Bang!

A golden Purifying Bullet, imbued with Cull's power, struck the Wraith's forehead.

The apparition of Padre Cali froze as he "saw" the bullet shatter on its own, transforming into balls of golden holy flames that spread throughout his body, igniting dust and his soul.

The bright, sun-like golden flames swiftly enveloped Padre Cali, causing him to let out a tragic scream.

This wasn't a Wraith Shriek, but it still made everyone's heads and ears hurt.

Lumian endured these sensations and calmly said to Amandina,

"Drag him into a dream and inquire about the source of the Dream Festival."

Padre Cali had already been subjected to Cull and was severely weakened, teetering on the brink of true death. Amandina could effectively restrain him!

"But…" Amandina's shoulder and head ached, but she didn't dare complain when she saw Louis Berry's cold and calm expression.

Lumian turned to Lugano and said, "Treat her gunshot wound."

"Alright." Lugano winced from the pain in his eardrums, but he still rushed over.

At that moment, Padre Cali, purified by the Cull, instinctively withdrew from his Wraith state and transformed back into a human to escape the ongoing damage.

Seeing this, Amandina took a deep breath, clenched her fists, and closed her eyes.

She and Padre Cali entered the dream at the same time.

Chapter 681: Tomb

Robert rejoiced that the two patrol team members dealing with him had also been affected by Padre Cali's scream.

He didn't know what had happened to his lover, nor could he confirm it. Enduring the swelling in his head and the pain in his eardrums, he rushed towards the altar.

Pfft!

Rhea's arrow struck the pile of clothes, but that wasn't Robert's destination—it was quite a distance away.

After landing on the ground, he rolled and hid behind the altar.

Rhea drew the bowstring again, but she didn't release the arrow immediately.

Robert's body was completely blocked by the altar, making it impossible for her to aim. As a devout believer of the Eternal Blazing Sun, it was also impossible for her to use the hunting bow's unique abilities together with Raging Blow to directly shatter the altar.

Witnessing this, Camus, knowing his revolver's power was insufficient, leaped over the shattered stained-glass window and sprinted towards the altar.

After a brief moment of hesitation, Rhea raised her hunting bow and shot an arrow wrapped in lightning into the air.

The arrow flew high into the air before swiftly descending, bypassing the altar's obstruction and landing behind it.

Since she hadn't been able to aim properly, the arrow grazed Robert's body and struck a crevice between two stone slabs. A sizzling electric current dissipated, creeping over Robert's body and temporarily paralyzing him.

After breaking free, Robert abandoned the idea of retrieving his spirit channeling ingredients. He had no intention of saving his lover, Padre Cali.

He planned to bite the tip of his tongue again and complete the spirit channeling. With the special ability of the natural spirit, he could escape back to his plantation, where he still had plenty of spirituality-rich ingredients for backup.

At that moment, from the corner of his eye, he caught sight of Camus's light-colored pants and leather shoes with holes. He felt a whip formed by electric currents appear in his mind.

The whip struck his soul,

and Robert, crouched behind the altar, felt his knees buckle, and he collapsed, trembling as extreme numbness and pain surged through him simultaneously.

Whip of Pain!

Interrogator's Whip of Pain!

Camus rushed to Robert's side, leaned down, and delivered a left hook—one that more or less bore a personal grudge.

Bang!

Camus, skilled in interrogation techniques, inflicted pain on Robert without going overboard. Robert fainted, yet suffered no substantial harm.

After restraining Robert, Camus glanced at the naked man and selected nearby clothes to cover his private parts.

He then picked up Robert and returned to where Lumian and the others were.

At that moment, Lugano had already retrieved the bullet that had struck Amandina's shoulder, allowing the wound to contract and heal.

…

Padre Cali was dreaming of the interior of Saint-Sien Cathedral.

Dressed in a white robe with golden threads, he knelt before the altar, muttering with a pained expression, as if repenting.

Amandina, clad in a black hunting suit, approached Padre Cali down the aisle between the pews. Remembering Louis Berry's instructions, she asked, "What's the origin of this special dream?"

Padre Cali looked up, his face contorted as he replied, "That… that strange tomb."

"Tomb?" Amandina suspected the Dream Festival she had just attended was a sham.

What tomb?

Suddenly, a flash of inspiration flickered.

"That colossal, black boulder?"

It's actually a tomb?

Padre Cali nodded.

"Yes."

It's really a tomb… Intrigued, Amandina asked proactively, "Whose tomb is that? Why is it so special?"

Padre Cali remained kneeling, shaking his head.

"I don't know. Even the gravekeepers don't know. They only know their mission is to guard that strange ancient tomb."

"Gravekeepers? Who are they?" The more Amandina asked, the more she felt she didn't know about the Dream Festival.

Padre Cali looked up at Amandina and said, "The elders of the forest tribe."

"I see…" Amandina's mind raced with questions. She picked one and asked, "Did you take Robert to Twanaku's house to sleep and allow him to maintain his lucidity? Then, you took him to the ancient tomb where he obtained superpowers?"

"Yes." Padre Cali lowered his head, facing the altar, his voice laced with pain. "I'm sinful."

Just as I thought… Amandina inquired further, "How did you know you could obtain superpowers there? And how did you maintain lucidity? You've only been in Tizamo for about five years, and I grew up here," Amandina inquired further.

Blood vessels bulged from Padre Cali's neck. "Twanaku, Twanaku, bewitched me."

"He used his body to tempt you?" Amandina suddenly felt a surge of excitement.

Padre Cali was taken aback.

"He saw through my desire for status and recognition and gradually demonstrated his abilities. He also told me there was a way for me to quickly and easily obtain strength. And with great strength, I could do more for the Church and receive more rewards and recognition… That demon!"

Amandina asked in disappointment, "You were bewitched just like that?"

Padre Cali nodded slowly. "That's right. Twanaku needed someone to help him monitor the changes in the dream and host the Dream Festival after he left Tizamo. First, he got me to sleep at his house. Then, during the Dream Festival, he took me to that strange ancient tomb."

"Did you also obtain superpowers by touching that tomb?" Amandina asked casually.

Padre Cali shook his head again. "No, Twanaku opened a crack in the tomb and let me reach in…"

"What did you touch?" Amandina couldn't help but urge upon seeing Padre Cali's pause.

"I touched a hand—a cold hand without temperature. Then, I fainted. When I woke up, I had superpowers. I did it three more times during the subsequent Dream Festivals, eventually becoming a Wraith." Padre Cali recalled the situation, his face filled with uncontrollable fear—both of the cold hand and the ease with which he had obtained superpowers.

"The hand of the corpse in the tomb?" Amandina quickly reviewed what Padre Cali had said and thought of a problem. "Didn't you say there were gravekeepers? Why weren't we stopped when Robert and I went?"

Padre Cali's voice deepened.

"People who have lived in Tizamo for a long time often have a projection formed by suppressed emotions and desires in this special dream. They usually hide in the chaotic area brought by the tomb, at the edge of the dream. They watch over the ancient tomb with the gravekeepers to protect it from others.

"When the Dream Festival begins, these projections will return to their true forms, forming complete Dream Festival participants who can no longer suppress their emotions and desires. As for the gravekeepers, it's unknown where they go."

Strange… Amandina was puzzled by the gravekeepers' whereabouts. She was a little worried.

After a moment of contemplation, she asked with concern, "Do I have a projection of emotions and desires in this dream?"

Padre Cali shook his head.

"No. You don't spend enough time in Tizamo every year. Even for those who originally formed a dream projection, once they leave this place long enough and stop suppressing themselves, the corresponding projection will gradually fade until it disappears.

"Those who can remain lucid in this dream will have their corresponding projections gradually dissipate over time. details."

"However, this lucidity isn't absolute. After the Dream Festival begins, everyone will have a tendency to flaunt their emotions and desires—including those who maintain their lucidity. However, they won't completely lose control like those who have fused with their dream self. They can continue restraining themselves like normal, their desires revealed in some details."

Amandina recalled her performance during the two Dream Festivals and revealed a look of enlightenment.

Initially, she believed that because this place was a dream, as long as no one died, it was equivalent to a game. That was why she appeared more self-centered and unrestrained than in reality. She didn't expect this to come from the effect of the Dream Festival.

Thankfully, I've always had self-control… Amandina had ticked off most of the questions that Louis Berry wanted clarified, leaving only those that the Padre Cali himself wasn't aware of. Thus, she changed the subject.

"You've already become a Wraith, yet you still dare to preach and host Mass…

"Aren't you concerned that God might notice you and unleash His wrath upon you, purifying you into ashes?"

Being in the Southern Continent, Amandina knew the power of the Eternal Blazing Sun Church better than many gentlemen and ladies in Trier. She had no doubts about the existence of God.

Moreover, over the past year, she had been diligently obtaining mysticism knowledge from Robert and the various sources she could come into contact with. She knew that the Rose School of Thought, the key characters of various terrifying rumors, was renowned for its numerous Wraiths, and Wraiths were most afraid of sunlight that came with purification.

Padre Cali sighed and said, "I had such concerns, but Twanaku told me he had a way to help me hide a Wraith's power. Unless God watches this place personally, I won't be discovered."

"What is it?" Amandina asked curiously.

Padre Cali replied truthfully, "After touching the corpse in the tomb and obtaining superpowers, don't rush to leave. Touch the tomb itself again, the black boulder.

"This concealed all my superpowers. The effect will last for more than a year."

That's possible? What would happen if I touched the black boulder and then touched the corpse's hand? Amandina pondered for a moment and asked a question of personal concern, "How did you entice Robert? Why did he become your lover?"

Amandina sized him up but couldn't find anything about Padre Cali that attracted Robert, other than his strength.

Could love truly be blind?

Padre Cali fell silent for a moment before saying, "I ignited his desires, dismantling his self-control."

"You've never displayed such abilities…" Amandina hadn't noticed Padre Cali arousing any desires in the battle before.

Padre Cali's voice was once again tinged with pain. "I'm sinful. I'm praying to the Demon Twanaku mentioned…"

Before Padre Cali could finish, the entire dream suddenly trembled and collapsed inch by inch.

Chapter 682: Cull

Unable to control the dream anymore, Amandina opened her eyes and woke up.

Beside her, Padre Cali snapped out of his slumber, his human form once again becoming hazy and indistinct.

Instinctively, he transformed into a Wraith, as if losing all restraint. Stiff black hair even sprouted from his body.

Reflected in Padre Cali's eyes was Lumian's figure—Louis Berry, with his black hair, green eyes, and golden straw hat, holding a revolver aimed directly at the Wraith's forehead.

Bang!

Lumian smiled and pulled the trigger, a golden Purifying Bullet exploding from the muzzle and instantly heading straight for the pallor in the Wraith's forehead.

Cull!

Simultaneously, Lumian waved his empty left hand at Padre Cali, as if to say, "Bye, you won't be missed!"

The Purifying Bullet exploded, and golden flames instantly ignited the ethereal Padre Cali's entire body.

Padre Cali couldn't even scream, his agonized thoughts manifesting as an invisible gale sweeping outwards.

Lumian endured the backlash, watching with a grim smile as the enemy was consumed by the purifying flames, reduced to scattered ashes.

Lumian felt his Reaper potion digest a little more.

Using Cull to reap a powerful foe's life was a core principle for Reapers—the higher their Sequence and strength, the more potent the acting effect.

With the addition of Cull, the relatively ordinary and common Purifying Bullet ended the life of a Wraith with just two strikes.

Lumian found it inexplicably amusing to witness the true incineration of the Padre Cali.

Why do I always encounter fallen Eternal Blazing Sun padres and cleanse and purify them?

Is this repayment for my past faith?

As these thoughts raced through his mind, Lumian glanced at the risen Amandina and asked with a smile, "What did he say?"

Amandina's first reaction was to check the wound on her shoulder. She exclaimed, "It's completely healed, not a trace left?"

If it weren't for her torn clothes and sore shoulder, she would have imagined herself to be uninjured.

Miss Amandina, don't act as if you've never seen the world. Although you're a believer in the Eternal Blazing Sun and won't seek treatment from the clergyman of the Church of Earth Mother unless you are particularly ill, there are many Feynapotterians in Matani. Haven't you come into close contact with them? Lumian criticized her and looked at Amandina coldly without responding.

Lugano, on the other hand, saw the beautiful girl's reaction and explained smugly,

"That's the power of a Doctor from the Planter pathway."

Amandina expressed her gratitude, then recounted her conversation with Padre Cali while massaging her shoulder to relieve the lingering sourness.

At the end, she spat at the spot where his ashes had fallen.

"He became the Demon's mouthpiece, using its power to violate Robert and the others.

"Luckily, he preferred men. Otherwise…"

Recalling how she had frequented Saint-Sien Cathedral over the years and had been a girl with limited knowledge, far from adulthood, Amandina shuddered inwardly. She sympathized with Robert and the others, but she also felt fortunate.

Lumian had another question in mind.

Could Hisoka's Wraith abilities also originate from the Dream Festival and the strange black tomb, rather than a direct boon from the Mother Tree of Desire?

That would explain a few things better.

As far as Lumian knew, when evil god believers prayed for boons, they needed to perform a ritual and offer sacrifices. The higher the level of the boon they prayed for, the higher the requirement for the sacrifice, and the larger the ritual.

As a member of Port Pylos's patrol team, Hisoka could cover up one or two sacrifices, but it was difficult to suppress all the sacrificial incidents. It was just like how Hisoka had only completed one serial murder case in Port Pylos.

Previously, Lumian had believed that he had relied on Mad Lady's help to complete the sacrificial rituals in the Southern Continent's even more chaotic places. But now, it seemed that there was no need for such trouble. He just needed to touch the cold corpse once a year during the Dream Festival.

Hisoka and Padre Cali have participated in at least five Dream Festivals and have become Wraiths for some time, but they haven't made a breakthrough since then… Is this because the cold corpse can only bestow a boon up to Sequence 5? Did Hisoka obtain the large amount of gold and something from the Nois family's Demon to wait for this year's Dream Festival to complete the corresponding matters and obtain a higher boon? Lumian turned to Robert, who had been dragged nearby, and asked for confirmation, "He's a Spirit Medium?"

"Yes," Amandina replied. "Padre Cali said Robert gained powers by touching that black boulder too. But why am I a Nightmare while he's a Spirit Medium?"

Higher-level, composite power… Just as the Great Mother can bestow three different powers, Apothecary, Planter, and Villain, respectively… Lumian wasn't surprised by this situation at all. Camus and Rhea were as puzzled as Amandina.

Lumian couldn't be bothered to explain this complicated and high-level problem. He turned around and said to Rhea,

"Your dream projection should still exist. Be careful from now on. The question now is whether the death of your dream projection will affect your life."

Rhea nodded thoughtfully.

Lumian shifted his gaze back to Robert, recalling the Demon that had assisted Padre Cali.

That should be the Nois family member who established a connection with Hisoka…

Demons don't do 'good deeds' for no reason. Whether it's establishing a connection with Hisoka or responding to the Padre Cali's ritual, it must have its own motives. Although witnessing a padre of the Eternal Blazing Sun Church gradually degenerate should be commendable and interesting for a Demon, this isn't a sufficient reason for its close involvement…

What does it want during the Dream Festival?

The cold corpse in the black ancient tomb can bestow a Prisoner pathway boon, and Prisoners are adjacent to the Criminal pathway which Demons are part of…

Lumian roughly grasped the situation and muttered to himself, "The crucial question now is, where do the gravekeepers go during the Dream Festival? Why aren't they protecting the black ancient tomb anymore?"

No one could answer him.

Seeing him staring at the unconscious Robert, Amandina hesitated before saying,

"Can you let him go? He's a victim too, don't kill him."

Am I a homicidal maniac in your eyes? Lumian replied with amusement, "As long as Robert doesn't seek revenge and try to kill me to avenge Padre Cali, I won't waste my spirituality on him."

Phew… Amandina sighed in relief, then muttered while rubbing her shoulder,

"You're so cold-blooded. I thought you'd kill me to deal with the padre. That shot hurt, you know!"

Lumian scoffed.

"Between being possessed by a Wraith until you die and getting shot, which would you have preferred?"

"I don't care what you think or the sacrifices—I made the right choice to save you, didn't I?"

Amandina, who was just grumbling out of habit, asked with interest upon hearing Lumian's response, "So you're willing to make big sacrifices and make correct choices to help important people?

"If, and I mean if, my desires were inflamed by a Demon and I'd become a monster without venting them, would you sacrifice yourself to help me?"

Lumian chuckled and said, "Don't have such unrealistic expectations of me. But don't worry, I'll find someone else willing to make that sacrifice for you."

His gaze swept over Camus, Lugano, and the unconscious Robert.

Amandina just muttered, "How lame…"

Camus inwardly sighed, feeling he'd escaped the beautiful dream world.

Lumian looked at Robert again and said to Amandina, "Wake him up and talk to him. I need a favor from him."

If Robert refused, Camus, the interrogation specialist, was there to persuade him.

"Alright," Amandina replied crisply, jolting Robert awake and informing her fiancé of their current predicament.

She consciously omitted mentioning Padre Cali's death to maintain the illusion that the Wraith had fled.

"Will you help if I let you go?" Robert asked warily as he struggled to his feet.

Lumian gestured to Camus and Rhea. "You may not trust me, but do you trust the patrol team?"

Robert fell silent for a moment before saying, "What's the favor?"

Lumian chuckled. "Go to Twanaku's house and do something for me."

…

Brieu Motel, second floor.

The man in the dark gray suit and the woman in the feathered hat heard soft chewing sounds coming from the corridor—a stark contrast to the shouts, cries, and moans echoing through the motel, as if it shouldn't be happening during the Dream Festival.

Suddenly, the chewing stopped.

Almost instantly, the man in the gray suit jumped up as if stabbed in the waist by a red-hot iron rod.

His face tense with sweat beading on his brow, he sprinted to the first floor, traversing the entire staircase in the blink of an eye.

He ran all the way out of the Brieu Motel to the intersection before stopping, his expression twisted with fear and lingering dread.

"What's wrong?" the woman in the light-colored dress asked, suddenly appearing beside him with confusion and seriousness.

The man in the dark gray suit panted heavily.

"Phew, phew, phew, didn't you feel it? That terrifying malice!

"The feeling of my heart being ripped out, my tongue torn away, my brain churned into thick soup…"

Chapter 683: Dance

Hearing her companion's words, the woman in the light-colored dress's expression turned solemn.

"I had a similar feeling, but it wasn't as specific as yours."

The man in the dark-gray suit visibly calmed down and glanced back over his shoulder.

"Let's hurry to our destination. There seem to be many abnormalities beyond our grasp here."

The woman in the light-colored dress gave a single nod of acknowledgment.

After ascertaining their direction, they quickened their pace and swiftly left the intersection behind them.

…

Lumian, wearing a golden straw hat, led Amandina, Robert, and the others back to the small square from the side of Saint-Sien Cathedral.

At that moment, Camus spotted figures lingering in the cemetery on the other side.

Startled, he focused his gaze and realized they were pale-white bones hung with tattered cloths and humanoid phantoms made of fine ashes. Many upright tombstones lay on the ground, and many graves had clearly suffered damage.

"The awakened dead?" Camus furrowed his brow and asked Amandina. "The Dream Festival can also awaken bones and ashes?"

Regardless of life or death, they had to celebrate the Dream Festival?

Amandina nodded nimbly.

"Isn't that normal? Robert obtained superpowers from the Corpse Collector pathway during the Dream Festival. That's the Death domain, so the Dream Festival itself has such—uh, characteristics."

Amandina was secretly pleased that her knowledge surpassed that of a seasoned patrol team member in this area. She consoled Camus, "Don't worry. The bones and shadows in the cemetery are very peaceful. They're completely different from the humans at the Dream Festival. As long as you don't approach them, they won't attack you. They'll only wander around their graves."

"Of course they're peaceful," Lumian, who was leading the way, chuckled. "They usually don't have emotions or desires to suppress. They won't form an intense projection in this dream."

The dead were emotionless!

Of course, excluding those who had perished with resentment and hatred, those buried in Saint-Sien Cathedral's cemetery must have undergone purification.

"That's not funny." Amandina wanted to console her silent fiancé, but she felt she didn't have the right after witnessing his indecency and being complicit in killing his lover. Everything she said seemed hypocritical, so she had no choice but to speak to Louis Berry instead.

She muttered inwardly, Hmph, as his fiancée notarized in the cathedral, it's my legitimate right to punish my fiancé's lover. It's a little overboard, but in the face of the blasphemer, the demon who preyed on a minor, being a little overboard is a revelation from God!

The more she thought about it, the more right she felt.

Lumian walked swiftly along the shadows beside the road. After some thought, he said, "Will those killed during the Dream Festival awaken and become undead?"

"Yes, but it takes a long time. I've only encountered them near the end of the Dream Festival. They're cold and aggressive," Amandina recalled.

Seizing the opportunity, Rhea asked, "When will the Dream Festival end?"

Amandina replied with a smile, "Haven't you noticed? The wall clocks and pocket watches are still ticking. The Dream Festival ends just before dawn."

"Is there a way to leave the Dream Festival early?" Lugano was concerned over this question.

Amandina glanced at Robert, who remained silent.

"There's no way. We can usually escape by sleeping in Twanaku's house and being stimulated at the edge of the dream. Once the Dream Festival begins, we can only wait for it to end naturally."

Lugano shut his mouth in disappointment and unconsciously took two steps closer to Lumian.

Camus observed Amandina's brisk strides and fell silent for a few seconds before asking, "Aren't you going back to Palm Manor to protect your parents? Aren't you worried they'll die during the Dream Festival?"

Amandina pursed her lips and said with a complicated smile, "During last year's Dream Festival, I rushed back to protect them. I didn't expect them to have a 'happy' time and not be in any danger…

"My mother prefers the lowest-class, filthiest, yet relatively muscular slaves to do the deed while she curses them. I don't know what mental issues that stems from or which areas that indulges, but this way, the male slaves definitely won't kill her. Instead, her jealous lady's maids and female slaves who get too close will be subdued and forced to join if they approach.

"As for my father, he relied on his career in the Southern Continent to obtain the Legion of Honor medal. When awake, he's always afraid of attacks and slave riots. He built several bunkers in the manor and stockpiled food and weapons. He constantly practices combat, shooting, and military tactics. Even during the Dream Festival, it would be very difficult for the servants and slaves to take him down. They'd have to break through layers of defenses until he retreats to a bunker."

"Unless a Beyonder deliberately goes after them, they'll be very safe. If I stayed to protect them, it might be more dangerous—I mean I'm more dangerous. I might not tolerate the 'love' of those men or the jealousy of those women. I don't wish to kill too many people either."

Could it be that she's more afraid of sensing the malice hidden in her family and friends' hearts during the unconstrained Dream Festival? She'd rather gallivant outside and see others' dark sides than experience that herself? Lumian could understand Amandina's rationale.

He dropped the subject and turned to the silent Robert. "How different is your spirit channeling during the Dream Festival from usual? Will those spirits become more violent and difficult to communicate with?"

Robert, now in a white shirt and black pants, was silent for a few seconds before saying, "It's no different."

Could the excessive emotions and desires of the special dream exclusively target living creatures, leaving spirits unaffected by their typical lack of self-control? Or is the spirit world and its denizens fake—part of the dream aligning with Robert's imagination? It's likely the latter possibility. Spirit Mediums don't just connect with local spirits to borrow power. Robert didn't say some channeling was impossible in the dream… As Lumian's thoughts raced, he made a speculation.

Lumian led Camus and the others through the intersection, quickly returning to Twanaku's house.

He had asked about spirit channeling because it closely related to what he planned to do.

Standing on the second floor of Hisoka's house, Lumian said to the cold and slightly effeminate Robert, "Have you ever completed a spirit channeling here?"

"I've tried. I can establish connections with surrounding spirits, but there's nothing special about it," Robert replied honestly.

Amandina chimed in, "He tried it in reality, in the dream, and during the Dream Festival.

"We're all curious about this place's uniqueness and want to figure out the reason, but those spirits don't know anything about it."

Lumian nodded, took out his golden pocket watch, glanced at it, and said, "Come up to me in two minutes and help me with a designated spirit channeling. All of you can come up."

Robert breathed a relieved sigh, realizing he wouldn't face this alone.

On the third floor, in Hisoka's bedroom, Lumian spread his arms and performed the Dancer's Summoning Dance once more.

Previously, using the Mystery Prying Glasses in the real world, he realized this place had a mysterious connection to the black boulder. Just now, Padre Cali had mentioned that the black boulder was actually an ancient tomb—the source of his, Robert's, Amandina's, and even "Hisoka" Twanaku's superpowers, as well as the Dream Festival itself.

In that case, performing the Summoning Dance in Hisoka's house might attract special, strange items connected to the black ancient tomb. Perhaps he could obtain important information about the tomb or the corpse inside.

It was much safer than using the Mystery Prying Glasses or dancing after reaching the tomb.

Furthermore, Lumian had no intention of directly attaching any summoned entity to himself. He had enlisted Robert's help to ensure safer, more effective spirit channeling.

A Spirit Medium could communicate with surrounding spirits or through specific directions and descriptions. However, they couldn't rely on the Summoning Dance and a location's uniqueness to attract more distant, hidden spirits like a Dancer could. A Spirit Medium could borrow spirits' power to achieve supernatural effects and communicate with them in detail. A Dancer could choose to obtain a trait, ability, or limited memory fragment.

Amidst Lumian's contorted, sonorous, bizarre dance, his spirituality combined with the environment's unique power, spreading in all directions. As the intense dance neared its climax, something finally emerged from underground and condensed on the glass-enclosed window.

A human-like shadow wore a black robe, strikingly resembling the tomb keeper Lumian encountered at the dream's edge, yet with differences.

The hooded face seemed fixated on Lumian, eager yet sensing The Fool's seal and the Blood Emperor's residual aura, not daring to truly possess him.

Lumian didn't force orders. He continued the Summoning Dance until Robert and the others arrived, then slowed to a halt.

During this, he pointed at the black-robed figure and told Robert, "Hurry up and communicate with it."

Robert nodded slightly, retrieving a bottle of Full Moon Essence Oil from his pocket.

Chapter 684: Two Answers

Observing Louis Berry's peculiar sacrificial dance drawing to a close, Robert wasted no time. He hastily poured some Full Moon Essence Oil into his palm, utilizing his abilities to fuse it with his spirituality and rapidly dissipate it.

Camus, Amandina, and the others immediately caught a refreshing, psychedelic fragrance. They felt their spirits were drunk, about to float out of their bodies.

Robert's voice echoed softly, distantly in their ears, causing their thoughts to drift farther and farther away. Fortunately, they weren't channeling targets, so they managed relative control.

The black-robed figure gradually left the glass window, approaching Robert.

Suddenly, the shadow vanished. Robert lowered his head, then slowly looked up, his face tainted by the night sky yet with an obvious sinister aura. His eyes were dark.

Observing this, Lumian ended the Summoning Dance, positioning himself three meters from Robert.

Although he'd intended for Robert to channel the spirit directly while he provided questions, the peculiar shadow had instead attached itself to Robert.

This too was a form of spirit channeling—many Spirit Mediums allowed a target's spirit to communicate through their mouth, answering certain people's questions.

Gazing at the sinister-looking Robert, Lumian pondered briefly, then said, "Do you know what happened to the people who lived here six years ago?"

He planned to start simple, least likely to cause anomalies, constantly adjusting direction, tone, and terminology based on the actual situation.

Robert opened his mouth, letting out a shrill voice unlike his own.

"Affected, performed a ritual, all perished."

This answer puzzled the others, including Camus, unsure if significant information was hidden.

Apart from Lugano, everyone guessed Louis asked about the fire engulfing the Twanaku family, with the spirit's answer implying a cult or evil gods' influence.

As a Conspirer, relevant information instantly surfaced in Lumian's mind.

The suppressed emotions and desires of everyone in Tizamo would be absorbed by the dream, gradually accumulating to form corresponding dream projections.

Like the gravekeepers, these projections would hide in the dream's chaotic zone, guarding the black ancient tomb.

In previous explorations, I saw the black-robed gravekeeper and projections surrounding the ancient tomb in dream fragments. One projection was the remaining figure of "Hisoka" Twanaku.

"Hisoka" Twanaku returned to Tizamo two or three times yearly for about a week.

After leaving, his corresponding projection would gradually fade until vanishing.

"Hisoka" Twanaku had become a Devil pathway Beyonder after the fire incident.

The Nois family's Demon…

This information appeared simultaneously in Lumian's mind, like disconnected nodes in a spider's web.

Soon, Lumian made a guess.

"Hisoka" Twanaku returned to Tizamo once or twice outside the Dream Festival, each visit lasting a week or more? Was this to ensure his dream projection didn't completely disappear, allowing the dream to absorb some of his malice?"

Do the projections and gravekeepers stay around the ancient tomb because it has something special that unknowingly affects them, like the tomb or the cold corpse inside?

If sacrificial rituals were part of the tomb's defense, when the Dream Festival commences and the projections return to their bodies, would some deeply affected humans attempt to imitate the gravekeeper's actions and perform a ritual? If they failed, would their entire family perish, corrupting the house and forming a subtle connection to the black ancient tomb?

Yes, that's a possibility, but I can't fit the Nois family's Demon or Hisoka becoming a Devil pathway Beyonder into this web of information…

What would happen if I inserted that?

Lumian's heart stirred as he considered another possibility.

It wasn't just the black ancient tomb or its cold corpse affecting the Twanaku family. The Nois family's Demon was also affected!

Perhaps the Demon had been coveting the corpse or the source of abnormality. For this reason, it secretly influenced the Twanaku family, giving them knowledge. Once the Dream Festival began, through its influence in the real world, it magnified their corresponding desires in the dream. Coupled with the loss of self-control and wild indulgence brought by the Dream Festival, the Twanaku family took the initiative to attempt the sacrificial process from the ritual or dream projection given by the Demon, leading to subsequent abnormalities?

Had the Demon discovered Hisoka's uniqueness and lured him to the Devil pathway?

Yes, this explains why only the Twanaku family did such a thing when everyone has a dream projection and why is this house unique enough to allow lucid dreaming…

The next crucial task is guarding against the Demon. It probably can't participate personally, but its minions would definitely appear…

As these thoughts raced, Lumian gained a deeper understanding of the situation.

He looked at the shadow possessing Robert and changed his question.

"Where are the gravekeepers? Where have they gone?"

Robert's shadowed face replied shrilly, "Dream Festival begins, the tomb opens. Need to hide."

Need to hide? After commencement, does the tomb become abnormally dangerous or pose a hidden danger to the gravekeepers? Lumian glanced at Amandina. This lady, Robert, and Padre Cali arrived at the black ancient tomb during the Dream Festival, easily obtaining powers through contact.

Where is this hidden danger? How is it dangerous? And where are the gravekeepers?

Something must be amiss.

Amandina felt inexplicable fear under Louis Berry's gaze. Her voice trembled as she asked, "Is there a problem with this answer?"

Lumian chuckled. "The gravekeepers need to hide. Why didn't you two?"

Before Amandina could delve deeper, she saw Robert's cold, dark face contort in agony.

Seeing this, Lumian sighed, "End the spirit channeling."

If it continued, something would happen to Robert.

Robert retained complete autonomy and a certain mobility level. He immediately uttered two words in ancient Hermes to make the spirit leave his body.

The shadow attached to him remained unresponsive, and the agony on his face intensified.

Slowly, Robert drew a dagger and stabbed his finger.

Drops of bright red blood, mixed with his Spirit Medium spirituality, sprayed towards the window like bead chains.

While doing so, Robert bellowed in ancient Hermes, "Leave!"

The black-robed shadow detached from Robert's body, chasing after the blood and vanishing from the glass window.

Witnessing this, Lumian retracted his consciousness from his right hand, no longer preparing any "snorting."

He breathed a relieved sigh and said to Camus, Amandina, and the others, "Wait for me on the second floor."

"What now…" Amandina muttered, turning to head downstairs.

In just over ten seconds, silence returned to the third floor.

Lumian retrieved ingredients from his Traveler's Bag and set up a ritual, attempting to summon Madam Magician's messenger.

Unfortunately, being a dream prevented success.

Having anticipated this, Lumian wasn't overly disappointed. Though the early Dream Festival arrival prevented reporting the latest situation to Madam Magician, adding significant risks, such problems were bound to arise. He was mentally prepared.

Though Hunters liked to plan ahead, they weren't afraid of battle.

Lumian was even a little excited, not just from the Dream Festival's faint influence.

After stowing his belongings, Lumian descended to the second floor and said directly to Robert and Amandina, "Which one of you will take me to the black boulder?"

He had analyzed their situations, realizing that Amandina, Robert, and Padre Cali had easily arrived at the black ancient tomb and obtained powers, all led by those who had touched it.

Of course, they shared more than one thing in common.

Robert fell silent, wanting to say "Didn't you promise to let me go after helping?" but not daring.

Amandina glanced at the silent Robert, pursed her lips and said to Lumian, "Me!"

Then, she added, "I want to see if I can obtain more superpowers."

Lumian nodded and told Robert, "You may leave."

Robert glanced at Lumian, then Amandina. Without a word, he walked out of Twanaku's house.

"Gosh, he might think I brought you to the cathedral to deal with Padre Cali and embarrass him. Gosh, I was the one who brought you there," Amandina exclaimed after Robert left.

Rhea, who had already picked up most arrows, earnestly consoled her, "But you purified the cathedral for God. Praise the Sun!"

Amandina spread her arms as well. "Praise the Sun!"

After their exchange, Lumian said to Camus and Rhea, "Next, I'm going to the black ancient tomb. It's up to you to decide if you want to go."

"I…"Lugano tried to speak, but Lumian interrupted with a smile. "You must go."

Lugano shut his mouth.

Camus and Rhea exchanged glances and spoke in unison, "I'm coming too."

Lumian didn't persuade them, simply nodding. "Then let's set off now."

Chapter 685: Illusion

Outside Tizamo, near the entrance to the forest, Lumian and his companions heard gunshots and shouts echoing from the direction of the military camp. The population was denser here compared to the town and plantations, and more heavily armed. Many lives were lost each year in this area.

Camus retracted his gaze and let out a sigh of resignation, like a world-weary middle-aged man. He knew he was powerless to stop the violence. His only hope was to find a way to end the Dream Festival as quickly as possible, so that more people might survive. This was why he had chosen to follow Louis Berry to the black ancient tomb.

If Camus were alone, the rational choice would be to find a secluded corner and hide until dawn, until the Dream Festival concluded—just like Kolobo planned to do. However, after witnessing Louis Berry's formidable strength and realizing the adventurer was willing to take the risk of approaching the black ancient tomb, Camus felt compelled to take action himself.

Lumian gazed ahead, trailing Amandina's light footsteps as she turned onto a narrow path threading into the forest. He harbored no illusions about single-handedly putting an end to the Dream Festival. His objectives for this mission had always been clear: Find the gold Hisoka had obtained, along with the item he had procured from the Nois family's Demon. Uncover what the key April Fool's member was scheming, to prevent Hisoka's legacy from materializing.

This was both the duty of a Tarot Club Minor Arcana card holder, and a reflection of Lumian's wariness towards Hisoka. After discovering the dream projection Hisoka had left behind, Lumian feared his adversary might exploit pre-arranged measures and the dream projection to resurrect himself to some degree during the Dream Festival, returning to the real world as a Wraith or evil spirit.

He was determined not to give Hisoka that chance.

After hearing Padre Cali's confession, Lumian's suspicions only intensified.

Hisoka returned to Tizamo each year to participate in the Dream Festival. He required no other host, and this unique dream usually proceeded without any abnormalities. It didn't appear that anyone needed to constantly monitor it.

It was important to note that prior to the fire that wiped out Hisoka's family, the special dream had existed for innumerable years. The Dream Festival had taken place countless times, yet no one had detected anything amiss. Under such conditions, the more individuals who knew the truth, the greater the danger of the information leaking out. Nevertheless, Hisoka still enticed Padre Cali and guided him to the black ancient tomb to acquire Beyonder powers.

This anomalous conduct led Lumian to surmise that Hisoka Twanaku had enlisted Padre Cali's aid in monitoring the dream to verify the status of his dream projection.

The dream projection would gradually dissipate as Hisoka departed Tizamo, ultimately vanishing altogether. If Hisoka desired its continued existence, he would need to return for a time after it had faded to a certain point. Given that the dreams surrounding the black boulder were typically in a state of disarray, the rate at which the dream projection dissipated might be erratic. This necessitated daily monitoring. As soon as the situation was deemed to have deteriorated, an urgent telegram would be dispatched to summon Hisoka back.

Naturally, as a Devil, Hisoka would never divulge his true intentions to Padre Cali. He would undoubtedly be on guard against Padre Cali exploiting the dream projection to eliminate this lurking threat. When instructing Padre Cali on what needed to be done, there was a high probability Hisoka was really having him monitor the shifting dynamics within the dream.

How could Padre Cali keep tabs on the evolving dream? Through the dream projections and the condition of the gravekeepers beside the black ancient tomb!

Regrettably, Lumian couldn't enter the dream himself. He could only entrust Amandina with questioning Padre Cali. The intelligence gleaned was superficial, not delving into the crux of the matter. It could merely aid in analysis.

If he had interrogated Padre Cali directly, he would have been able to roughly ascertain Hisoka's objective, rather than just harboring suspicions.

At present, the leads concerning the gold and the Demon's gift both pointed to the black ancient tomb. Lumian naturally had to investigate and do what he could. If the challenge truly proved insurmountable, he would decisively retreat to Tizamo and conceal himself on the third or fourth floor of the Brieu Motel, allowing the "danger" to confront Ludwig, whose appetite had grown voracious.

Amandina guided Lumian and the others through the rainforest, drawing near to the boundary of the dream.

Abruptly, Lumian raised his right hand and whispered, "Stop."

He sniffed the air, detecting the unmistakable scent of blood.

With a Reaper's keen sense of smell and meticulous nature, Lumian could discern that the blood didn't originate from jungle animals hunting each other. It was human blood, rich in spirituality.

"What's wrong?" Amandina asked, taken aback, as if recalling her first venture into this forest with Robert.

Camus quickly sensed the problem and pointed in the direction of the blood's scent.

"Something's not right over there."

Insects were gathering in that area.

Although Lumian was eager to reach the black ancient tomb to thwart Hisoka's plan, he knew that the more impatient he felt, the more cautious he needed to be. He had to remain vigilant of any abnormalities along the way to avoid walking into someone's trap or missing crucial information and rashly starting a conflict.

Aurore had once mentioned that Emperor Roselle might have said that haste makes waste.

Lumian walked towards the source of the blood's scent at a measured pace.

As he drew closer, he caught a whiff of the pungent odor of blood mingled with decay.

The latter originated from the tranquil essential oil used to repel mosquitoes.

Lumian circled a few more trees crawling with poisonous insects and saw a corpse lying face-up on the humus soil.

The corpse's eyes were wide open, and its black hair was disheveled. Its face was smeared with white paint. It was Maslow, the captain of the Tizamo patrol team!

At the beginning of the Dream Festival, Maslow, who had "disappeared" behind Lumian, had reappeared in the forest as a corpse!

"Maslow!" Camus and Rhea exclaimed in surprise.

Before they could fully process their grief, Lumian's gaze shifted downward as he examined Maslow's cause of death.

The captain of the local patrol team had deep wounds on his chest and abdomen, as if he had been attacked by spears, triangular blades, and other weapons, but the edges showed signs of tearing.

Large amounts of blood had already flowed into the ground, attracting lingering mosquitoes. There were obvious signs of decay on Maslow's body, and a yellowish-green liquid seeped out, as if he had been dead for two to three days.

After ascertaining the situation on the corpse's surface and examining the surrounding battle traces, Camus said in a somber voice, "Attacked by the power of the Death domain…"

Death domain? The image of a cold, middle-aged man in a thin suit suddenly surfaced in Lumian's mind.

Reaza, the vice-captain of Port Pylos's patrol team!

He was a Mid-Sequence Beyonder of the Death pathway!

At the beginning of the Dream Festival, Reaza had "disappeared" along with Maslow.

Camus glanced at Rhea, who wore a pained expression, and hesitantly said, "They were affected by the Dream Festival and lost control of themselves. They attacked each other. One died, and the other escaped?"

This was the most plausible conjecture for the Dream Festival.

Lumian imagined a similar scene, but he frowned in confusion and said, "Why are they in the jungle?"

Shouldn't they appear where they were in the real world?

In reality, Reaza and Maslow had already returned to Tizamo with me…

Did something lure them into the forest?

As the only member of the Port Pylos patrol team supporting Tizamo, Reaza had known from the beginning that something was amiss here. Was the true target the black ancient tomb?

Lumian looked at Camus and Rhea thoughtfully and casually asked, "Were Maslow and Reaza on good terms?"

"Excellent terms," Camus replied with a sigh. "Captain Reaza recruited Maslow into the patrol team and provided him with extensive guidance."

Lumian fell silent for a moment before saying to Amandina and the others, "Let's continue forward."

Rhea and Camus seized the moment to gather some branches to cover Maslow's corpse. Then, they quickly followed the team.

After walking along the forest path for a while, Amandina suddenly slowed her pace and pressed her hand to the side of her head.

"What's wrong?" Lumian asked keenly.

Amandina frowned and said, "My head feels a bit heavy, and I'm experiencing hallucinations."

"What kind of hallucinations?" Lumian raised his eyebrows.

Amandina replied in puzzlement, "I saw the black boulder I touched previously—no, the black ancient tomb. It felt like I had returned to the past. Do you understand? The past appeared in my mind in the form of an illusion, in front of my eyes, beside my ears."

Lumian pondered for a moment before saying, preempting Camus, "Let's go a little further and see what happens."

The hallucinations didn't incite Amandina's desire to retreat. With an experimental mindset, she followed the familiar jungle path for another few dozen meters.

"How is it?" Lumian, who was beside her, inquired.

Amandina organized her thoughts and said, "The hallucinations are becoming clearer and more pronounced."

"The closer you get to the black ancient tomb, the stronger the hallucinations become?" Lumian suggested a possibility before asking, "Did anything similar happen to Robert when he brought you here last time?"

"No," Amandina replied with certainty. "He was quite normal the entire time."

Camus speculated, "Perhaps he had already grown accustomed to the hallucinations after approaching more than once."

"Who knows…" Amandina muttered and looked at Louis Berry. "What should we do now?"

It's not a big deal if it's just hallucinations… Lumian pondered for a moment and said, "Let's continue forward."

"Alright." Amandina wasn't sure what the hallucinations represented. She endured the discomfort and said, "We'll reach the ancient tomb in a few minutes."

She continued forward.

As they walked, Amandina suddenly extended her right hand and pressed it against the forest trees beside her, bending her back.

Without waiting for Lumian to inquire, she recounted the changes in the hallucination and spoke intermittently, "I see myself… after touching the ancient tomb last time… I didn't… I didn't fall asleep immediately… I… I was still awake!"

"I… I see… someone ahead!"

Chapter 686: Illusion and Reality

"What kind of person?" Lumian perked up.

He hadn't expected Amandina's hallucination to yield unexpected insights.

"I can't see clearly, I can't. It's not that he isn't clear… It's just that I can't make out the details." Amandina straightened up again, as if she had recovered slightly.

She pondered for a moment and said, "So I didn't fall asleep immediately after touching the black boulder—no, the black ancient tomb. When I woke up, I realized that I had gained superpowers. There were still some events that transpired in between, but I don't remember them at all. It felt like I had fallen asleep.

"The hallucinations I'm experiencing might have originated from the depths of my subconscious, from forgotten memories. No, not forgotten. They're just in a deep slumber. They're starting to become active and awakening bit by bit…"

Amandina carefully assessed her condition, searching for the source of the abnormality.

Pretty smart with a good attitude. She managed to maintain basic composure... Lumian evaluated inwardly.

Amandina's behavior was unfamiliar to Camus.

In his impression, Amandina was not only beautiful but also cheerful, optimistic, and lively. She was the kind of girl who could infect those around her with joy. However, due to her young age, she still appeared naive, childish, and inexperienced.

Unexpectedly, after their encounter in the Dream Festival, she gradually displayed an openness, maturity, and calmness he hadn't anticipated.

Amandina was puzzled.

"Why didn't Robert mention any dormant memories or the fact that I didn't fall asleep immediately after touching the ancient tomb? Padre Cali also talked about fainting and awakening with superpowers.

"The number of times they have participated in the Dream Festival in their lucid state and visited the black ancient tomb must have been more than mine…"

Lumian understood what Amandina was trying to convey.

Firstly, why did Padre Cali and Robert, who had been to the black ancient tomb many times, still believe that they had fainted on the spot and regained superpowers upon waking up? Why didn't they experience hallucinations similar to Amandina's?

Secondly, Robert had seen Amandina touch the black ancient tomb. Didn't he know if she had fallen to the ground or not?

Lumian pondered for a few seconds and said, "Perhaps the person you see standing in front of you has caused the relevant memories to fall into a deep slumber. And you're from the Evernight pathway, a Nightmare. Therefore, there's something special about dreams and slumber. The closer you get to the black ancient tomb, the more likely it is to awaken the slumbering memories, causing the hallucination."

Amandina tersely acknowledged his hypothesis of her being special and proceeded with confidence.

After two minutes, Lumian suddenly raised his right hand and pressed it down. He lowered his voice and said, "Hide nearby."

He had heard soft footsteps.

Camus immediately rolled to the side and hid behind a palm tree. Rhea crawled to another tree and concealed herself among the leaves.

Lugano glanced at the forest, where countless poisonous insects and snakes lurked. He kept telling himself, "Don't be afraid, don't be afraid. I can heal myself if I'm bitten."

He quickly shrank behind a pile of huge, brightly colored mushrooms.

Amandina had experience hiding in such places. Back then, she had witnessed Twanaku heading to the black ancient tomb.

Using the cover of the night and relying on her spiritual perception, she nimbly weaved through the low green plants and hid behind a huge tree in the distance.

Suddenly, a thick vine hanging from the tree came to life and swung towards Amandina, opening its blood-stained mouth.

It was a dark-green python!

Amandina's eyes snapped shut, and she clenched her fists.

The python fell into a deep slumber, reverberating weakly. It swayed a few times before finally landing on the ground.

Seeing that his teammates had hidden themselves, Lumian's body suddenly vanished, blending into the shadows brought about by the night.

After ten to twenty seconds, a figure traversed the path ahead.

High above, through the gaps in the leaves, Rhea spotted the figure clad in an intricate black robe with obvious layers. A fluffy black hat rested on his hair, and a gently swaying white feather protruded from the edge.

Lumian, in his shadow creature form, also saw the rough appearance of the figure.

His mind suddenly tensed as confusion welled up within him.

Isn't that Iveljsta Eggers?

Why would this temperance faction member of the Church of The Fool appear in a dream and become a participant in the Dream Festival?

Over the past few days, Lumian had explored the interior of Tizamo, the surrounding plantations, and the military camps outside of town. He clearly knew which outsiders had recently arrived, and Iveljsta was not among them!

Did he arrive here after the Dream Festival began?

Yes, he once mentioned that his original mission was to investigate something in the primitive forest around Port Pylos. Then, he received a last-minute order to deal with Hisoka's contact… Could the matter he's investigating be related to the black ancient tomb? The temperance faction belongs to the Prisoner pathway, and the Eggers family is descended from Death. It's normal for the black ancient tomb and the cold corpse inside to attract the temperance faction's Eggers…

Did Iveljsta Eggers encounter the Dream Festival while searching for the primitive tribe in the forest?

As Lumian analyzed Iveljsta's appearance, he scrutinized his expression through the shadows.

He saw an indescribable ferocity on the temperance faction member's pale white face. His dark brown eyes emitted a ferocity reminiscent of a wild beast, tinged with blood under the dim crimson moon's glow.

Although he's not affected by the dream projection formed by extreme emotions and desires, it's still difficult to control oneself and be restrained during the Dream Festival… Lumian wasn't surprised.

Ludwig and Kolobo were examples.

Considering Iveljsta's current state, Lumian didn't emerge from the shadows. He patiently waited for him to leave the area as the footsteps gradually receded.

From the looks of it, he's also headed for the black ancient tomb… Lumian transformed back into a human and stood on a path overgrown with weeds, gazing at the spot where Iveljsta's back had disappeared.

He raised his right hand and snapped his fingers.

"You can come out now."

Camus, Rhea, and Lugano left their hiding spots one after another. Camus even went to wake Amandina.

Amandina looked at Lumian and asked, "Do we continue?"

Lumian replied without hesitation, "Yes."

This time, they proceeded cautiously, paying close attention to their surroundings.

After another three to four minutes, Lumian, having prepared to deal with Iveljsta and Reaza, followed Amandina's guidance and slipped through a gap between a few giant trees.

A black, colossal, and familiar boulder came into view.

At a glance, it looked like a house-sized boulder, but upon closer inspection, one could see patterns on it. There were abnormal protrusions and depressions, and thread-like cracks that ordinary eyes couldn't detect.

It was indeed not just a stone.

Around the black boulder, tree roots emerged from the ground, covering an area the size of a square, resembling the protruding blood vessels of every human. However, they had been dead for a long time and were withered.

At that moment, the place was empty, devoid of anyone.

Iveljsta didn't come here? Isn't Reaza's destination here? Did they get lost midway? Or could it be that only those who have received the boon of an ancient tomb or a corpse can truly reach this area? Lumian surveyed his surroundings in confusion.

Amandina's brows furrowed once more, and she couldn't help but press her hands against the sides of her head.

She said with a hint of pain, "Th-the hallucinations have become clearer. I-I see more.

"The figure approached me, extended his hand, and pressed it against the top of my head!

"He… He's wearing a strange hat…"

Camus, Rhea, and the others didn't interrupt Amandina to see if she could recall more or awaken more dormant memories.

Amandina muttered to herself, "Was this how I was given superpowers?"

As Lumian listened to Amandina's words, he fixed his gaze on the black boulder that was said to be an ancient tomb.

He felt a sense of familiarity.

As a Conspirer, Lumian quickly jogged his memories for the source of the familiarity.

Soon, he had an answer.

The black ancient tomb reminded him of the Samaritan Women's Spring when it wasn't pale white!

It's indeed closely related to the Death domain… Lumian examined the Blood Emperor's remnant aura in his right hand and confirmed that it wasn't affected or showing signs of activation.

At that moment, the surroundings fell into an abnormal silence.

The rustling in the forest, the cries of wild beasts, and the gunshots and screams from Tizamo seemed to have vanished. The deep night fell into complete silence.

Amandina looked up and shouted in horror, "I remember now. I remember now. When I obtained superpowers, this place was also this quiet. It didn't seem like the Dream Festival at all!"

In the next moment, Amandina's pupils dilated.

"He… He… That figure… That figure has appeared!"

Huh? Rhea, Camus, and Lugano looked at the black ancient tomb solemnly and blankly. They didn't see anyone or anything unusual.

Amandina's voice turned shrill.

"Can't you see? He… He's walking towards me… He's walking towards me!"

For a moment, Lumian and company couldn't determine if Amandina's illusion was so vivid that it was almost real, or if something had indeed happened.

"No! Don't come any closer!" Amandina shouted, her expression breaking down as she gazed at the empty area ahead.

With this shout, Lumian felt the entire area tremble slightly, and his surroundings blurred.

In the blurriness, scenes appeared, like different fragments of a dream.

These scenes centered on the black ancient tomb, but different people stood beside it.

In some scenes, Reaza stood in a thin black suit. In others, Iveljsta stood in a feathered hat. A man and a woman approached side by side, while others surrounded black-robed humans.

One of the black-robed humans turned to Lumian with a smile.

His skin was light brown, and his flaxen eyes were tinged with dark green. He was none other than "Hisoka" Twanaku.

Chapter 687: Gaining Immortality

Lumian raised his eyebrows and returned Hisoka's gaze with a radiant smile.

The two individuals in different scenes exchanged glances through the blurry void, each casting their eyes in opposite directions.

Reaza, Iveljsta, and the man and woman who had just arrived in Tizamo had clearly seen the people in the other scene. They were astonished and dumbfounded by this incomprehensible, bizarre situation, but they couldn't interact with each other.

The gravekeepers in the same scene as Hisoka appeared to be praying, oblivious to the changes in their surroundings or treating them as if nothing unusual had occurred.

Lumian surveyed the area and vaguely comprehended the situation.

Regardless of how real this place seems, various encounters will mirror reality to different degrees. At its core, it remains a dream. And under the influence of the black ancient tomb or the cold corpse within, this area has fragmented into multiple dream shards. Each time a new group arrives, a fresh fragment is generated…

If not for Amandina's or my arrival triggering some abnormality, it would be impossible for people in different scenes to interact. They wouldn't be able to attack each other, nor could they see, hear, or detect one another's presence.

This must be why the gravekeepers vanish every time the Dream Festival commences.

They don't disappear. They're simply in different dream fragments from the Dream Festival participants.

Based on the results of the previous spirit channeling, is this some kind of concealment?

But the black ancient tomb hasn't been unsealed yet…

As Lumian's thoughts raced, Amandina's voice grew increasingly shrill, filled with terror.

"He's right in front of me! Save me! Save me!"

Lumian stared at Amandina, who was retreating in an attempt to evade the invisible creature, but he couldn't perceive the figure she described.

In the brief span of more than ten seconds since Amandina's panic attack, Lumian had used his Spirit Vision, Weakness Investigation, Luck Observation, and other abilities, but he hadn't detected anything unusual.

He was on the verge of taking out the Mystery Prying Glasses and the Eye of Truth.

Lumian reached into his Traveler's Bag. Without a rough grasp of the situation, he didn't know how to rescue Amandina, who had broken down from fright.

Just as his fingers brushed against the Mystery Prying Glasses, Amandina was suddenly taken aback.

After a moment, she turned to Lumian and said in bewilderment, "He—he turned and left. He seems to have recognized me…"

"Recognized you?" Lumian felt compelled to confirm Amandina's mental state.

Amandina replied in confusion, "Yes, he nodded at me and left."

Is this why, after the Dream Festival begins, anyone who wishes to approach the black ancient tomb must be guided by someone who has received the boon of the ancient tomb or the corpse? Robert and Padre Cali likely played the same role in similar scenes, but they don't belong to the Evernight pathway and lack dream-related abilities, so they didn't notice… Did the people in the other dream fragments also receive the boon of the black ancient tomb or the cold corpse? Lumian's heart stirred as he asked Amandina, "Where did he go? Where did that figure go?"

Amandina's gaze shifted to the periphery of her surroundings.

Her eyes widened with lingering fear and excitement. She raised her palm and pointed at the dream fragment where the man and woman were.

"He went there.

"He's gone through! He's gone through!"

Amandina's explanation made Lumian and the others feel the black ancient tomb solidifying and becoming heavier. The entire area shook even more violently.

Simultaneously, Lumian sensed a familiar burning sensation on his left chest, but he didn't hear any ravings that seemed to come from an infinite distance.

In a daze, he saw a huge aqua-colored vortex, a dim village shrouded in gray fog, and figures within the village.

Shepherd Pierre Berry, who believed in Inevitability, and Lumian's friend, Azéma Lizier, raised their pale-white arms, as if silently shouting.

Lumian also spotted his semi-subterranean two-story house and Aurore, sitting quietly on the orange roof with her arms crossed.

Lumian no longer resisted the illusion.

He roughly understood what was happening.

As the figure entered other dream fragments, the black ancient tomb's abnormality intensified. It contained the power of the Death domain, "awakening" the Cordu villagers within the seal.

These villagers were already deceased, with only soul fragments remaining. Naturally, they would be affected by the power of the Death domain.

This realization made Lumian feel pain, sorrow, and bitterness that he hadn't experienced in a long time.

He "watched" Aurore, clad in a light-blue dress with thick, long blond hair and light-blue eyes. She didn't attempt to resist the invisible power of death.

"He walked to that woman," Amandina continued dutifully.

That woman? Camus, Rhea, and Lugano turned their attention to the corresponding dream fragment.

Having just arrived in Tizamo that night, the lady in the light-colored dress didn't hear Amandina's words. She only knew that the patrol team was looking at her.

Her spirituality gave her a sense of foreboding. She hurriedly turned to her companion and asked, "Devajo, do you sense any malice?"

The man named Devajo, dressed in a dark gray suit, slowly shook his head and said, "Nothing."

In the dream fragment where Lumian and the others were, Amandina explained in high spirits, "He… The figure… extended his hand! He pressed his hand… on that woman's head!"

Just as Amandina finished speaking, Devajo saw his companion, the lady in the light-colored dress, suddenly collapse to her knees. Her expression was stiff, and her face was abnormally pale-white.

Ooo!

In all the dream fragments, an ice-cold wind howled.

Lumian "saw" Aurore standing up on the orange roof, her expression dazed as she gazed into the sky, as if sensing something.

She opened her mouth and spoke almost instinctively.

Lumian didn't know the corresponding language, but he had heard something similar before.

It was the language used by Armored Shadow Chen Tu, a language that Franca occasionally uttered a word or two of!

Although he couldn't understand, Lumian vaguely grasped what his sister was talking about, perhaps due to the connection between them at the soul level.

She muttered to herself, "An immortal blessed my crown, bestowing upon me the gift of eternal life.

In the dream fragment where Devajo was, the light-colored lady's hat, which had unconsciously fallen to her knees, suddenly flew off.

On her neck, the backs of her hands, and the surface of her face, pores opened one by one, producing white feathers tainted with faint yellow stains.

Devajo observed this scene with a solemn expression. He didn't attempt to interrupt his companion's abnormality and instead took a few cautious steps back.

He couldn't comprehend what was happening. Although he hadn't sensed any malice directed at him, he prudently distanced himself from the anomaly.

The lady in the light-colored dress's azure eyes had lost focus, appearing abnormally vacant and lifeless.

In the blink of an eye, the white feathers, tainted with light-yellow oil stains, seemed to possess a consciousness and life of their own. They frantically emerged from the gaps in the fabric of the dress.

Within moments, the lady in the light-colored dress was enveloped by white feathers tainted with light-yellow oil stains.

Her body grew light and gradually floated, becoming increasingly illusory.

Her azure eyes fixed on Devajo as she shouted in a hollow and agitated voice, "I've become a god! I've achieved immortality!"

The white-feathered monster hovered above the black ancient tomb, incessantly shouting, "I've become a god! I've achieved immortality!"

In another dream fragment, Lumian heard Aurore change her words.

With a fearful expression, she whispered, "Immortal Ascension…"

In the next instant, the ethereal monster, covered in white feathers, flew towards the black ancient tomb in the dream fragment.

She passed through the stone wall on the tomb's surface and vanished.

Suddenly, the frigid wind ceased, freezing.

The black ancient tomb shook visibly, and the tomb door, outlined by hair-like cracks, emitted the sound of dull rubbing, as if someone was trying to push it open from within.

Aurore, "in front" of Lumian and the "surrounding" Cordu began to fade, as if erased by an eraser.

Lumian glanced at the slowly opening tomb door and turned to "Hisoka" Twanaku, who was in another dream fragment.

The dream projection wasn't surprised by the abnormality, nor did he show any fear. Instead, the silent gravekeepers around him rose to their feet.

Amidst the illusory sound of water, the tomb door of the black ancient tomb opened completely.

Accompanied by this change, all the dream fragments that appeared in the blur seemed to be pulled by an invisible force, fusing together.

Devajo, Reaza, Iveljsta, Hisoka Twanaku, and the gravekeepers materialized in front of the black ancient tomb, near Lumian and the others.

"Hisoka" Twanaku smiled, as if he had anticipated that one of the outsiders would transform into a "god" and that the ancient tomb's door would open at this very moment.

He retrieved a golden mask from his black robe.

The mask appeared to be crafted from pure gold, its eyes and face smeared with white and black paint, giving it an unsettling appearance.

Twanaku donned the golden mask and, unlike the other gravekeepers, didn't retreat. Instead, he sprinted towards the black ancient tomb and the open tomb door.

Thud! Thud! Thud!

Lumian heard a distinct heartbeat.

It emanated from within the black ancient tomb.

Chapter 688: Preparations

As Lumian heard his heartbeat, a palm reached out from the open door of the black ancient tomb.

The palm showed no signs of decay or yellow bandages. Its surface was covered in gold, shimmering with a mystical hue under the dim crimson moonlight.

Upon seeing the golden palm, Lumian felt an invisible force compress his soul, instantly severing its connection to his body.

Immediately after, he realized his body had transformed into a cold, solid wall, preventing his spirit from spreading or being controlled by his consciousness.

At that moment, Lumian's soul felt trapped in a cage, unable to escape. He could only see limited scenes through his eyes and hear relatively loud voices with his ears.

Everyone present turned into statues, frozen in place.

Faced with this situation, Lumian suddenly recalled a saying: The body is a cage for the heart, and the world is a cage for the body.

In the stillness, the only person still moving was "Hisoka" Twanaku.

The golden mask on his face emitted a hazy glow as he swiftly approached the black ancient tomb and the golden palm extending from it.

Although Lumian couldn't move or use his abilities, his soul was merely "imprisoned"—it didn't affect his thoughts.

Seeing that "Hisoka" Twanaku was almost unaffected by the golden palm, Lumian quickly deduced several things.

There's a high likelihood the gold Hisoka seized from Devise—the gold mine city—was used on the cold corpse in the black ancient tomb.

The item he obtained from the Nois family's Demon is likely the golden mask he now wears.

The former was an attempt to revive the cold corpse. It's equivalent to Franca's mention of creating a complete body. The latter ensures Hisoka can approach the target unaffected after the cold corpse's "resurrection" and achieve a certain goal.

Did Hisoka once plan to use this to control the cold corpse and attain demigod-level strength?

When I killed him in the real world, did the him in the dream attempt to "resurrect" through this?

Yes, Hisoka's Wraith power comes from the same source as the cold corpse. Perhaps there's a way to make the corpse believe he's its original spirit and accept his lead…

Based on the information I've gathered and what just transpired, humans who have received the boon of the black ancient tomb and the cold corpse can open the tomb without waking the corpse. To awaken it, an intruder must be bestowed with immortality by an invisible figure, ascend to godhood, and enter the ancient tomb.

And intruders will only be attacked by invisible figures without the Dream Festival's bestowed guides…

It's best for an intruder to remain lucid?

How did Hisoka know outsiders would participate in the Dream Festival this year and arrive at the black ancient tomb?

He didn't have such a plan to begin with? That's because he didn't know he was going to die. If he can't complete his plan during this year's Dream Festival, the dream projection will completely dissipate in the next few months, causing him to lose his last hope of revival…

The involvement of outsiders was a pleasant surprise for him?

No, it's too much of a coincidence. Reaza's rushing over can be explained by his discovery of me investigating the Dream Festival and his worry that he wouldn't have a chance to obtain what he wants after this year. But why did Iveljsta coincidentally come to this primitive forest to investigate something? Why did two Beyonders who can remain lucid in the special dream arrive just before the Dream Festival began?

Moreover, why did the Rose School of Thought send someone to Matani in the last few months of the year to gather detailed day-to-day information?

"Hisoka" Twanaku originally planned to complete his plan during this year's Dream Festival. He deliberately leaked some information and clues to attract different factions of interest.

The information these factions received wasn't detailed enough. They had no choice but to dispatch personnel in advance to conduct the corresponding investigations or bribe members of Matani's patrol teams…

This may very well be the truth, a truth that doesn't rely on coincidence. The only thing Hisoka didn't anticipate was his demise before the Dream Festival began.

Now, the Dream Festival is his last and only hope for resurrection.

If he fails to achieve his plan, he will die completely after today!

No wonder he's so secretive about Tizamo despite being honest about everything else in the dream…

Hisoka is truly a cunning Devil skilled at manipulating people's hearts. If he hadn't been bent on killing me and his identity had given him a good opportunity to choose to stay in Port Pylos, he wouldn't have been easy to kill. Yes, if I had played by the book and lacked the goodwill of a high-ranking entity, I might have died at his hands.

The Demon of the Nois family also has designs on the cold corpse in the black tomb and wants to use the Dream Festival. Therefore, when Hisoka mentioned the Dream Festival in his dream, he was immediately attacked by the shadow…

Among those present, who is the Demon's minion?

Or could it be that the Demon from the Nois family hasn't arrived yet and wants to wait until the end, when the situation is clear, before taking action and completing the harvest?

If it's just a dream projection, without the main body's cooperation, there should be a huge loophole in Hisoka's plan. Where is the loophole?

Trapped in his body, Lumian couldn't stop Hisoka. He watched helplessly as Hisoka ran to the open door of the black ancient tomb.

Wait…

Since the black ancient tomb reminds me of the Samaritan Women's Spring, I can try that method…

Lumian acted without hesitation, focusing his attention on his Spirit Body's right hand.

Alista Tudor's remnant aura didn't just permeate his body!

And the Blood Emperor was closely linked to the Samaritan Women's Spring!

Wearing a golden mask, Hisoka's body began to etherealize uncontrollably. Just as he was about to grasp the hand of the corpse protruding from the black ancient tomb, he suddenly sensed an extremely terrifying, frenzied, and violent aura appearing behind him. It soared into the sky explosively, sweeping through the surroundings.

The crimson moon's glow dimmed, and "Hisoka" Twanaku's body instinctively stiffened, trembling violently.

Splash!

An illusory sound of water echoed from the black ancient tomb, and the golden palm seemed to be dragged back into the tomb by some unknown force.

The feeling of their souls being imprisoned within their bodies dissipated. Lumian hurriedly halted the dissipation of the Blood Emperor's aura.

Although Amandina, Camus, Devajo, and the others instinctively felt fear, the confinement of their spirits and fixed line of sight prevented them from discovering the source of the aura that conquered everything.

Ignoring the search for the origin of the terrifying aura, the fierce-eyed Iveljsta followed his instinctive desire and retrieved an item from his hidden pocket.

It was a palm-sized rag doll, dressed in a black Gothic dress entwined with eerie vines. It had long golden hair and blood-red eyes.

The doll was sinister. Just the sight of it made Lumian's flesh crawl beneath his skin.

Thud! Thud! Thud!

The heartbeat in the black ancient tomb intensified, becoming resounding.

Beside the tomb door, "Hisoka" Twanaku felt a chill run down his spine, as if targeted by an evil being.

Instinctively, he recalled something.

Years ago, gravekeepers had found a half-withered evil heart near the black ancient tomb.

The gravekeepers believed that the ancient corpse in the tomb had been lost due to some mutation. After all, the characteristics of its power were the same, and the levels seemed similar. Therefore, they placed the heart back into the tomb.

Just a moment ago, the long-dead heart had begun to beat, but now it beat stronger and faster!

Not far from Iveljsta, Reaza also made a move.

He produced a mask.

The mask, also made of gold, bore a striking resemblance to the one worn by Hisoka. Varying shades of white and black paint adorned the eyes and face!

The difference between the two golden masks was that the one in Reaza's hand was darker, as if touched by death.

Then, Reaza produced a human skull carved from crystal.

He placed the dark golden mask on the crystal skull's face.

A frigid wind gusted, engulfing the crystal skull in a massive vortex. The crystal skull, adorned with the golden mask, levitated, as if it had grown an invisible body made of wind.

An intense coldness spread in all directions, condensing a layer of frost on the ground.

The man named Devajo reached behind his head and grasped something in his hair.

With a sudden tug, he ripped off his skin, along with his dark gray suit.

Devajo took on a different appearance. He had black hair, brown eyes, a cold expression, and high cheekbones. He was in his thirties or forties, dressed in a white shirt and black pants.

He flipped the human skin in his hand, revealing dense, dizzying blood embroidery beneath.

Devajo opened his mouth and spat out mouthfuls of blood, emitting a strong sulfuric smell.

The blood protruded from the human skin, forming a green-

eyed man in a dark gray suit.

With a playful smile, the "man" approached the black ancient tomb.

Lumian quickly scanned the area, his eyelids twitching three times.

He couldn't help but criticize, Do you all possess godhood-level powers that you can utilize? Although they all seem to be one-time use… Are you bullying me for not having any?

Despite Lumian's criticism, he quickly recited an honorific name in ancient Hermes.

It was Madam Magician's honorific name.

However, it failed to penetrate this special and hidden dream.

Lumian wasn't dejected. His goal wasn't the black ancient tomb, nor was it the cold corpse or its beating heart.

Now that he knew the whereabouts of Hisoka's gold, there was only one thing he wanted to do.

Eliminate Hisoka's dream projection, take away the golden mask, and let him perish completely!

Chapter 689: Precision

Although Lumian's target was clear, he didn't immediately attack Hisoka's dream projection. This was because his opponent was still beside the black ancient tomb, and under the gaze of three items with godhood power, Lumian might be targeted by all of them if he teleported over.

The three items hadn't reached the point where Lumian couldn't be under their gaze simultaneously, and they appeared to last only a few minutes. However, they displayed certain humanoid characteristics, as if they possessed the ability to think and make decisions on their own. If targeted by them, it would be no different from facing weakened Sequence 4 demigods.

Under such circumstances, Lumian naturally wouldn't take the initiative to enter the eye of the storm and help "Hisoka" Twanaku share the burden. He even felt that if his rival was killed by an outsider whom he had personally attracted, it would be cause for celebration. It was inevitable—after all, since he had already killed Hisoka once, he wasn't obsessed with obliterating the other party's resurrection. Having someone else "do it" for him could reduce his spirituality expenditure.

As Lumian gazed at the open tomb door, he retreated a few steps to the edge of the area. He quickly said to Amandina, Camus, Rhea, and Lugano, "Retreat to the edge!"

Upon hearing this order, Lugano's face lit up with happiness. He was the first to turn around and sprint away.

Rhea raised her hunting bow, aiming left and right, taking slow steps back to guard against any attacks. Camus's performance was similar to hers, but he held his custom revolver.

Amandina glanced at the sinister rag doll, the crystal skull adorned with a golden mask, and the green-eyed man with bulging human skin. She felt lightheaded, as if she was too exhausted to control her body.

She instantly realized that these were things she shouldn't come into contact with. What transpired beside the black tomb was beyond her ability to interfere.

She swiftly turned her back to the ancient black tomb and prepared to follow Lugano to the edge of the area.

At that moment, Lumian, wearing a grayish-white lightning-shaped brooch, glanced at the gravekeepers who were also hurriedly retreating and thoughtfully asked Amandina, "Where's that figure?"

Amandina ran nimbly, synchronizing her movements with her breathing as she replied, "I don't know! He's gone!"

As soon as she finished speaking, the illusory water reverberating in the black tomb ceased.

The palm-sized evil rag doll in the Gothic dress suddenly floated up, escaping Iveljsta's grasp.

It hovered in midair, with "Hisoka" Twanaku's figure reflected in its blood-red eyes.

Twanaku, who was about to reach into the ancient black tomb, suddenly felt the golden mask on his face come to life. It first pressed inward, as if it wanted to crush his skull, then pulled outward, as if trying to escape.

Hisoka instinctively raised his right hand to press the golden mask back, only to realize that his sleeve had tightly wrapped around his arm, immobilizing it, almost like it was tied up.

Remembering the fate of a godhoodless individual losing the golden mask at the tomb's entrance, Twanaku didn't hesitate. His body became completely ethereal as he transformed into a Wraith.

Then, he vanished from in front of the black tomb and reappeared in the pupil of one of the gravekeepers who had removed their golden mask.

Due to the untimely demise of Hisoka's physical body and his inability to get "assistance," Hisoka had no choice but to modify his plan and wait for the three factions vying for the cold corpse in the ancient black tomb to begin fighting.

When the chaos reached its peak and the corresponding items were nearly depleted, he would re-enter the fray and compete for the corpse.

As Hisoka temporarily retreated, the area in front of the ancient black tomb became vacant.

Just as the palm-sized evil rag doll was about to float over, the crystal skull, adorned with a golden mask, flew diagonally, enveloped by a vortex-shaped body formed by the cold wind.

Pale-white flames ignited in its eyes, with a hint of darkness at the center.

In response, illusory black water seeped out of the black tomb's walls, forming a silent river that blocked the entrance.

The river was clearly similar to a stream, but it gave Iveljsta, Devajo, Reaza, and the others a vast and expansive feeling.

Their bodies gradually turned cold, and their lives drained faster, irreversibly.

The evil rag doll, clad in a black Gothic dress, hovered in midair, not attempting to cross the silent river.

The crystal skull, adorned with a golden mask, descended into the river.

The wind vortex that constituted its colossal body howled and expanded, as if transforming into an invisible ferry that floated steadily on the surface of the silent river.

The crystal skull, adorned with a golden mask, steered the ferry against the current, slowly approaching the open door of the ancient black tomb.

The green-eyed man, dressed in a dark gray formal suit made of human skin and blood, stood at the back, observing the scene.

With a smile, he opened and closed his mouth, as if silently muttering to himself.

Almost simultaneously, the crystal skull on the invisible ferry emitted a cracking sound.

The pale-white flames in its eye sockets flickered violently, and tiny patterns appeared on its crystalline surface, causing invisible dust to fall.

The ferry itself alternated between expansion and contraction, becoming extremely unstable as it slowed down on the River of Death.

Lumian paid no attention to the battle unfolding in front of the ancient black tomb. With a single glance, his body ignited with intense white flames.

Swoosh!

He transformed into a flaming spear and crossed a distance of 20 to 30 meters, aiming at the gravekeeper whose body had been possessed by "Hisoka" Twanaku.

Hisoka raised his head, revealing a face with light-brown skin and wild beauty.

Rhea!

The gravekeeper whose body had been possessed by Hisoka was Rhea's dream projection!

Facing the rapidly expanding reflection, transforming from a speck of white light into a blazing white flaming spear with a burning tip, Hisoka didn't dodge. He assumed a stance allowing Lumian to attack.

The blazing-white flame spear was incredibly fast. He didn't have time to raise his hunting bow, aim, or shoot. He only slightly bent his arm.

He felt a searing pain, as if his body and soul were about to be pierced.

Hisoka showed no fear. Instead, he chuckled.

The blazing-white flaming spear passed over his shoulder and landed behind him, failing to strike him.

The flames dissipated, revealing Lumian.

The Hisoka in Rhea's dream projection's eyes vanished.

Rhea's dream projection spun around, her expression cold and filled with hatred. She raised her hunting bow, aimed at Lumian, and drew the bowstring.

She was a dream projection formed by excessive desires and emotions, unable to control herself.

"Hmph!"

Two beams of white light shot out from Lumian's nose. Before Rhea's dream projection could release an arrow wrapped in lightning, her eyes closed, and she fainted, collapsing to the ground.

Rhea, who had just arrived at the periphery, trembled.

Her eyes reflected the black-robed "Hisoka" Twanaku.

The strength of their souls differed significantly, and Hisoka easily possessed and seized control of Rhea's body.

Taking advantage of the fact that Camus, Amandina, and Lugano hadn't noticed Rhea's abnormality, he changed the direction of his bow and aimed it at Camus.

Sizzle, sizzle, sizzle. The arrowhead became engulfed in bright lightning.

As soon as Rhea aimed her bow and arrow at Camus, he sensed her incongruent state and noticed her abnormal behavior.

As a member of the patrol team with considerable combat experience, Camus looked at Rhea without hesitation, his eyes flashing with blinding lightning.

Simultaneously, Hisoka, who had anticipated this, detached from Rhea's body and leaped into Amandina's beautiful azure eyes.

Two blinding lightning bolts shot out of Camus's eyes and drilled into Rhea's head.

Rhea's eyes bulged, and her mouth gaped open. She leaned back, as if she had suffered a heavy blow, but she couldn't make a sound of pain.

Psychic Piercing!

Camus's Psychic Piercing struck her before her arrow could leave the bowstring, causing her to feel pain from the depths of her soul. Her mind went blank as she stood rooted to the ground.

Poof. The arrow, engulfed in bright lightning, shot out unsteadily, missing Camus and flying a short distance away.

Amandina, with "Hisoka" Twanaku's figure reflected in her azure eyes, felt a chill run down her spine. A dense coldness enveloped her, freezing her soul and rendering her unable to control her limbs.

Behind her, Lumian's figure swiftly materialized.

"Ha!"

Lumian opened his mouth and decisively spat out a faint yellow blob of light.

However, Hisoka had no intention of stopping. He shifted his position with another Mirror Jump.

Thud!

Amandina collapsed to the ground, unconscious.

Compared to Padre Cali, Hisoka clearly excelled in combat, possessing a wealth of experience and outstanding talent.

This time, Hisoka appeared on a water droplet on the surface of a leaf more than ten meters away. He leaped out and looked at Lumian and the others with a smile.

He wanted to use Wraith Shriek to attack Lumian Lee and his companions in a wide range, rendering some of them unable to fight and temporarily immobilizing the rest.

Upon realizing this, Lumian chose not to teleport outside Wraith Shriek's range. Instead, he withdrew his palms.

A blazing white fireball condensed, the size of the black tomb.

"Ah!"

Amidst a piercing howl of pain, the colossal white-hot fireball flew out.

With a smile, Hisoka vanished from the tree and leaped into Camus's pupils, where blood flowed from his eyes, nostrils, and ears.

At that moment, the colossal blazing white fireball split into dozens of smaller ones.

Accompanying this transformation, the grayish-white Fury of the Sea brooch on Lumian's chest erupted with bright, silver-white, and innumerable bolts of lightning after he was struck by Wraith Shriek.

The lightning coiled around the incandescent white fireballs and split into dozens, enveloping the area.

Rumble!

Amidst the consecutive explosions, Rhea, Lugano, Amandina, and Camus were sent flying by the wind and waves. They suffered burns and were struck by a net of lightning.

Camus's entire body went numb, and his gaze lost focus. Hisoka, who was attached to him, also suffered an electric shock. Due to his Wraith state, he was severely injured and couldn't undergo a new round of Mirror Jumps.

Lumian recovered from the Wraith Shriek's assault. He looked at Hisoka, who had emerged from Camus's body, and his lips curled up.

He was using Precision.

The goal was to attack every target indiscriminately and ensure the damage was acceptable.

And when he launched an attack, he didn't need to consciously control it. The Fury of the Sea would automatically add an electric shock to all his offensive fireballs!

Chapter 690: Death's Symphony

Lumian endured the pain in his soul and eardrums as he activated the black mark on his right shoulder.

His figure abruptly vanished, swiftly materializing beside Camus and Hisoka.

As the residual silver-white electric currents surged into the ground, Hisoka, in Wraith form, was about to escape the paralysis's effects. Lumian activated the black mark on his right chest.

This corresponded to the Spell of Harrumph.

Just as he was about to harrumph, a sudden premonition of danger struck him. He abruptly turned around and stepped back.

A spear condensed from the light of dawn hurtled from afar, spanning a distance of 30 to 40 meters. It flew past Lumian and plunged into the soil behind him, leaving a deep hole as thick as an arm.

Lumian saw his attacker--one of the gravekeepers on the verge of escaping to the periphery.

He was tall, and even in his black robe, his robust strength was evident. A broadsword of light had already condensed in his hand.

A Dawn Paladin? A gravekeeper who received a boon from the Warrior pathway from the black ancient tomb? Lumian wasn't surprised at all. Instead, it only confirmed his suspicions.

What made his scalp tingle was that the other gravekeepers had also turned to face him.

The dozen or so bestowed locked their gazes onto Lumian.

Hisoka had already broken free from the paralysis caused by the electric shock. Worried about the Spell of Harrumph's control, he endured the pain and leaped into the eyes of one of the gravekeepers. Then, he broke free and transformed back into a human.

He looked at Lumian, who was dozens of meters away, and his smile widened.

I'm also a gravekeeper now. Harming me means harming the gravekeepers!

Although they won't actively assist me and will try to escape once the tomb is opened using the current method, they will undoubtedly react if you threaten me.

This is one of the reasons I dared to "invite" outsiders to the Dream Festival and guide them here.

Unfortunately, my main body is dead, and I can't obtain the promised godhood item from the Celestial Worthy and Loki to resist the outsiders' high-level powers. For now, I can only wait patiently.

According to the original plan, if something went wrong, I could choose to abandon the corpse in the tomb and help the Nois family's Demon obtain it to aid the Rose School of Thought in exchange for other rewards. Now, I must obtain the corpse and become its "spirit."

Only then can I survive after the Dream Festival and maintain my consciousness and rationality as a demigod-level undead creature.

However, these matters don't concern you, Lumian. You have to face a Guardian and multiple Spirit Warlocks, Gatekeepers, Soul Assurers, Spirit Guides, and Dawn Paladins...

No one below Sequence 4 can withstand the assault of such a Beyonder "army!"

Lumian watched as the gravekeepers' gazes fell upon him. Some of them even condensed broadswords of light. As they charged forward, Lumian tensed up. He reached out, grabbed Camus's shoulder, and teleported away from his current position.

Not long after they vanished, the ground silently collapsed, and pale-white palms extended outward.

Lumian appeared beside the severely injured Rhea with Camus and grabbed her shoulder with his other hand.

Then, the trio swiftly vanished, reappearing beside Amandina, who had awakened from the electric shock.

The distance between them and the gravekeepers widened to nearly a hundred meters.

Lumian clamped his feet around Amandina's arm, releasing the accumulated spirituality and strength in his body.

His condition returned to normal, and he activated the black mark on his right shoulder once more.

This time, the four of them teleported to Lugano, who was self-healing.

As Lumian continued to flash, some of the gravekeepers' Beyonder powers failed to hit them. The remaining ones were forced to change directions repeatedly, preventing them from closing the distance.

Just as Lugano was about to tell his employer, "Let's escape quickly. Teleport us back to Tizamo," he saw Lumian toss Camus and Rhea towards him.

Thud!

The three of them collapsed together, followed by Amandina.

"Ha!"

Lumian spat out a pale-yellow light, enveloping the four of them.

Lugano, Amandina, and the others lost consciousness. With their souls' strength, it would take them at least a minute to regain consciousness without external stimulation.

With this done, Lumian teleported away once more, preventing himself from being targeted by the gravekeepers whose abilities were effective at this distance.

His body vanished, and the gravekeepers, including Hisoka, lost sight of him.

Lumian silently materialized behind the gravekeepers, appearing in front of a palm tree.

Leaning against the rough trees, he retrieved an item from his Traveler's Bag.

It was a blackened bone flute with blood-colored holes.

Symphony of Hatred!

Lumian's lips curled up as he brought the sinister bone flute to his lips with a smile.

Almost simultaneously, "Hisoka" Twanaku felt a strong premonition of danger. He abruptly turned around, spotted Lumian, and locked onto him. He activated his Devil form, transforming into a pitch-black monster nearly three meters tall with curved goat horns and bat-like wings.

Hisoka instinctively abandoned his Wraith form, forsaking the plan of possessing Lumian Lee and restraining him. He found it impossible to remain calm under the aura capable of conquering everything and reflexively fled from the other party.

Accompanied by Hisoka's movements, the gravekeepers also turned.

Lumian's lips touched the black bone flute, emitting a bloody scent, and he played the first note.

The smile on his face widened.

In the real world, facing such a large group of Sequence 7, 6, and 5 Beyonders, he could only teleport Lugano and the others back to Tizamo. However, this was the Dream Festival. Apart from the few who had recently arrived and could remain lucid, the others were either fused with their dream projections or allowed the corresponding dream projections to move independently.

Dream projections were formed from excessive desires and emotions, and they would lose control during the Dream Festival.

Realizing that Hisoka's dream projection could also become a gravekeeper and maintain a certain level of lucidity and rationality, Lumian believed that it wasn't that the gravekeepers didn't have dream projections, but that they had fused with them. Using their uniqueness and their self-control in their lucid state, they barely suppressed them.

Such targets were the Symphony of Hatred's favorite prey.

It could inflict an attack on the weakness of an enemy's mind or body who heard the corresponding melody. Those with unstable minds might experience symptoms akin to madness. Those with psychological issues might have latent problems triggered. There's even a chance that excessive desires could cause them to explode on the spot. Individuals with illnesses or old injuries would inevitably face severe consequences. Those less fortunate might find themselves trapped in extreme misfortune.

Faced with the dream projections—against the gravekeepers who might have fused with them, Lumian felt that the Symphony of Hatred could be miraculously effective, igniting 100% of the targets' excessive desires and emotions!

Therefore, he chose to make such an attempt. If it failed, he would teleport back to the unconscious Amandina and company, hold onto them, and return to Tizamo.

A melodious and sorrowful melody sounded, but "Hisoka" Twanaku, who was too late to stop Lumian, instinctively burned the two curved and mysterious goat horns on his head.

Mental Shock!

Lumian's emotions swelled, and the melody he played was filled with unmistakable pain and hatred.

He also saw many spirits, as well as the gravekeepers wielding broadswords of light, rushing towards him in various ways.

He continued playing the Symphony of Hatred.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Apart from the unconscious Rhea's dream projection, all the gravekeepers, including Hisoka, halted with contorted expressions.

They heard illusory explosions in their bodies and minds, and their eyes instantly turned bloodshot. They lost control of their bodies, and their ears were filled with buzzing sounds.

They couldn't see, hear, or think. Their bodies and souls had been severely injured.

The same went for "Hisoka" Twanaku. In essence, he remained a dream projection formed by extreme emotions and desires.

However, as he suffered the Symphony of Hatred's weakness attack, he also ignited Lumian's emotions and desires from the impact.

Lumian's mind buzzed, and blood vessels bulged in his green eyes. A viscous liquid reeking of blood flowed from his nose, and his internal organs seemed to suffer varying degrees of damage.

The Symphony of Hatred fell to the ground with a thud.

More than a hundred meters away from Lumian, near the forest, the unconscious Amandina, Lugano, and company's faces contorted, as if they were trapped in different nightmares.

Devajo, weakened by spitting out blood to the human skin, silently approached the edge of the forest, ready to escape at any moment. However, he heard the Symphony of Hatred's melody.

He froze, vomiting copious amounts of bright red blood that reeked of sulfur. His entire being weakened, and he nearly lost control.

Iveljsta watched as the evil rag doll emitted a silent shriek, transforming the crystal skull with its golden mask and its invisible "ferry" into a pale-white goat. Just as he was about to approach the silent river in front of the black ancient tomb in delight, his pale-white face instantly flushed red, and dark-red blood flowed from the corners of his eyes, nose, mouth, and ears.

He had also suffered the explosion of emotions and desires, but he wasn't a dream projection, nor had he fused with one. Therefore, he was only severely injured, unlike the gravekeepers and Devajo, who were pushed to the brink of death.

Reaza, who had maintained his lucidity and rationality without a dream projection, panted heavily, as if caught in a struggle of his own. His cold eyes became rather lost.

In the area where the black tomb resided, only the evil rag doll, the human skin man, and the pale-white goat with the golden mask remained unaffected by the Symphony of Hatred.

Relying on his Ascetic endurance, Lumian quickly recovered from the severe damage caused by the explosion of desire and emotions.

Gazing at Hisoka and the others, who had yet to recover, he smiled and extended his right palm.

A colossal white-hot fireball swiftly condensed, engulfed in silver-white lightning, and launched.

Upon reaching the gravekeepers' area, it split into nearly 20 smaller lightning fireballs that blasted at "Hisoka" Twanaku and the gravekeepers.

Precision!

Rumble!

Blazing white flames and silver-white lightning surged simultaneously. Lumian watched as the gravekeepers, already on the brink of death, collapsed like straw, their lives extinguished one after another.

This is what Culling means… Lumian closed his eyes and took it in.

Rumble!

Apart from the unconscious Rhea's dream projection and the Guardian struggling to hold on, the gravekeepers were all dead. Only "Hisoka" Twanaku, his body still emitting silver- white lightning, remained.

His eyes were bloodshot, on the verge of losing control.

At that moment, he saw a flaming spear wrapped in silver-

white lightning fly over and collide with the side of his nose.

Amidst a sizzling sound, the blazing white flaming spear pierced through his skull, igniting his brain and flying behind him, leaving behind raging silver-white electric snakes.

As the flames dissipated, Lumian's figure appeared, his back facing "Hisoka" Twanaku.

The Devil-form Hisoka's eyes glazed over. He swayed a few times before collapsing to the ground.

Weakness Investigation!

Cull!

Chapter 691: Pursuer

As the blazing white flames rapidly dissipated, Lumian turned his back on "Hisoka" Twanaku and fixed his gaze on the Guardian, who was swaying unsteadily more than ten meters away. With a chuckle, he declared, "Before, I needed my team's help to defeat you. But now, I can take you down alone."

His words were aimed squarely at Hisoka.

Collapsing to the ground, Hisoka's consciousness gradually faded as he caught Lumian's remark. He instinctively tried to clench his fists, but lacked the strength to do so.

A desperate gasp escaped his throat, his pupils dilating and losing focus.

Hisoka cursed himself for choosing Devil Transformation over Wraith Transformation when confronting Lumian Lee. If only he had opted for the latter, he could have disrupted Lumian's attempt to play the blackened bone flute with Wraith Shriek. Alas, he had no way of knowing the specifics, only able to sense the presence and source of a malicious intent. Given Lumian Lee's ability to infuse bullets, fireballs, and other attacks with electric shocks and target weaknesses with precision, Devil Transformation had seemed the more versatile choice, offering protection against various contingencies.

As for why he hadn't summoned a barrage of Sulfur Fireballs, even at the cost of mutual destruction—Hisoka sensed the considerable distance separating them. By the time he could conjure and launch ten to twenty fireballs, Lumian Lee would have already finished playing the flute. With teleportation at his disposal, Lumian could effortlessly evade the clustered assault. Moreover, spells like Language of Foulness had a limited range.

Left with no other recourse, "Hisoka" Twanaku could only resort to Emotional Shock and Desire Detonation, targeting Lumian Lee's weakness. He hoped that after both of them sustained grievous injuries, their recovery rates would be comparable, granting him an opportunity to mount a different response.

However, despite the pain, blood loss, and abnormal look in his eyes, Lumian Lee managed to maintain his balance. Fighting through the debilitating effects, he executed a precise area-of-effect bombardment enhanced with electric shocks. The effort inflicted fresh wounds upon himself and temporarily paralyzed him.

"Gasp…"

Hisoka Twanaku mustered his remaining strength to drag Lumian Lee down with him in a final, desperate gambit of losing control. But his life force had reached its limit. Darkness engulfed his vision as his consciousness slipped into oblivion, a maelstrom of indignation, resentment, and agony consuming him.

The colossal Devil's body spasmed a few times before falling still.

Hisoka's last glimmer of hope for revival was extinguished.

He was well and truly dead.

As Lumian spoke, he drew his revolver and trained it on the nearby Guardian.

Disoriented and reeling, the Guardian instinctively condensed a broadsword of light. Dropping to one knee, he plunged it into the ground before him.

The sword merged with the earth, erecting an impenetrable invisible wall.

As a gravekeeper merged with a dream projection, this Guardian had no effective defense against the Symphony of Hatred. His companions, the Spirit Warlocks and Soul Assurers, caught off guard by the attack, couldn't pull him into a dream in time to avoid the melody's direct impact. He could only rely on his own physical and spiritual fortitude to withstand the detonation of desire and emotion.

For Beyonders with dream projections, this assault posed a mortal threat.

Before the gravekeeper could regain his bearings, another incandescent white fireball wreathed in lightning struck him, triggering a violent explosion.

Fortunately, his boon as a Guardian spared him the fate of his companions, who were culled like stalks of wheat. Without it, he would have been unable to mount even a token defense on pure instinct.

Lumian's green eyes took on an iron-black cast as he stood tall and squeezed the trigger.

Bang! Bang!

Twin yellow bullets, trailing blazing white flames and silver lightning, slammed into a single point on the invisible wall.

Rumble!

The already destabilized wall shattered. The Guardian could only watch helplessly as a searing white spear enveloped in lightning hurtled towards him, piercing his chest and sending him flying.

Another Cull, another bout of digestion.

Clinging to the last shreds of consciousness, the Guardian scattered the broadsword of light into countless minuscule fragments.

These luminous shards coalesced into a hurricane that raged in all directions.

Hounded by the storm of light, the blazing white flaming spear soared twenty to thirty meters before finally coming to rest.

As the flames ebbed away, Lumian straightened his posture, clad in a white shirt, black vest, dark trousers, and a golden straw hat.

Behind him, the bright and terrifying Hurricane of Light gradually petered out, thinning the ground. The corpses of the fallen gravekeepers and "Hisoka" Twanaku lay broken and strewn about.

Reeling from the Symphony of Hatred's influence, his injuries abnormally severe, Devajo's gaze flicked from the bodies littering the ground to Lumian, who stood facing him from afar. His already pallid complexion turned even more ashen.

What in the world is happening?

Is he even human?

Devajo, in whom thoughts of vengeance had fleetingly stirred following the blow, swiftly abandoned any such notions. Igniting the sulfurous blood he had spat out with azure flames, he hastily retreated into the forest.

He wanted to escape!

In any case, he could offer no aid to the human skin the archduke had crafted through ritual. Lingering in the vicinity of the black ancient tomb would only expose him to greater peril.

Lumian paid no heed to Devajo's flight. Though weakened, his spirituality remained abundant. Transforming once more into a blazing white flaming spear, he traversed dozens, nearly a hundred meters in a blink, coming to rest beside Lugano, Amandina, and his companions.

The four Beyonders lay unconscious, spared the Symphony of Hatred's melody—the effects were minimal, a mere nightmare, but still wracked them with pain. Their contorted expressions gradually eased as they roused from their comatose state.

Seeing them open their eyes and regain their faculties, Lumian instructed, "Leave this place at once and return to Tizamo. Find somewhere to lay low."

The conflict unfolding before the black ancient tomb was not something Lugano and the others could influence. Lumian himself dared not approach, so he intended to send his four temporary allies to safety.

He had previously consented to Camus and Rhea accompanying him, believing the former's Psychic Piercing and the latter's Lightning Arrows could synergize effectively with his own abilities to counter Hisoka's dream projection, Reaza, and the others. Amandina's power to compel others into dreams was also quite useful. Moreover, following her was the only way to approach the black ancient tomb without falling prey to the invisible figure's attacks. To his surprise, Hisoka had displayed combat prowess far exceeding Padre Cali's. With the area unsealed and devoid of preset traps, not only had Camus, Amandina, and the rest failed to render aid, they had ended up hindering each other and becoming a liability.

Reflecting on his two prior battles—the attempt to capture Hisoka alive and the confrontation with Padre Cali—Lumian grasped a fundamental principle.

At times, there was strength in numbers. But in other situations, solitude was preferable. Facing different foes under varied circumstances demanded adaptability, lest one court disaster by adhering to a fixed approach.

Lumian recalled a maxim Emperor Roselle had once shared, as explained by his sister Aurore:

In warfare, as in the flow of water, there are no constant conditions.

"We can return to Tizamo? Even me?" Lugano couldn't contain his pleasant surprise. Instinctively, he extended his remaining hand, pressing the flickering light against Lumian's wounds.

As a Doctor, Lugano was unable to treat a patient's internal organs directly. He needed to open the cavity and make contact with the injured site. It was akin to performing surgery.

Lumian nodded and replied,"Indeed, but you'll need to remain under Camus and Rhea's supervision."

He planned to linger a while longer, to see if he could aid Iveljsta Eggers, a member of the Church of The Fool's temperance faction.

It was the duty of a Tarot Club's Minor Arcana card holder.

Of course, Lumian had no intention of venturing into the area immediately fronting the black ancient tomb. He might well perish before even realizing what had struck him. His aim was to ascertain whether he could sway Reaza and the others to interact with the corresponding godhood items, or utilize the golden mask upon Hisoka's corpse to some end.

At that moment, Devajo, who had only just arrived in Tizamo that very night, had already vanished back into the forest, retracing his steps.

Mustering his dwindling strength, he started sprinting.

As he ran, Devajo abruptly halted, casting a perplexed gaze towards the path's bend, obscured by the trees.

Beneath the dim, crimson moonlight, a short figure approached.

It was a boy of seven or eight years, garbed in blue pajamas speckled with yellow stars and a matching nightcap. His plump face and the short blond hair peeking out from under the cap were smeared with cream, blood, biscuit crumbs, cake fragments, and sundry other substances. His brown eyes blazed with intense hunger and desire.

In his mouth, a vibrant, cold, and slick viper's tail writhed and shook as he gulped it down, segment by segment.

The boy's cheeks bulged as he chomped vigorously.

In the next instant, he caught sight of Devajo.

A wave of intense, terrifying malice flooded Devajo's mind.

…

Lugano, having secured permission, was on the verge of informing Camus, Rhea, and Amandina of their impending return to Tizamo when a petrified scream rang out from the forest.

They froze in their tracks.

Mere seconds later, a pitch-black monstrosity, towering nearly three meters tall with curved goat horns, came barreling out of the forest. It charged from the direction of Tizamo, making a beeline for the black ancient tomb, panic etched in its every movement.

That man just now? He's a Devil too… A minion of the Nois family's Demon, perhaps? Could the green-eyed figure fashioned from human skin be a manifestation of the Nois family's Demon, projected into the Dream Festival? Lumian's gaze shifted to the shadowed forest at the Devil's back, an ominous feeling washing over him.

He made a snap decision and addressed Lugano, Amandina, and the others.

"Grab hold of me!"

Lugano swiftly returned to Lumian's side, seizing his arm.

Camus, Rhea, and Amandina followed suit, startled but mimicking Lugano's action.

The five of them winked out of existence, reappearing in close proximity to Hisoka's corpse.

The instant Amandina's form finished coalescing, her eyes flew wide.

Voice quavering, she turned to Lumian and said in a deep voice, "T-that figure… it's appeared once more…"

Chapter 692: Death before Rebirth

Appeared once more? Lumian motioned for Lugano and the others to loosen their hold and inquired of Amandina, "Where is he?"

Amandina's sky-blue eyes locked onto the entrance of the black ancient tomb situated at the terminus of the motionless river.

"He's sitting cross-legged over there."

As the words left her lips, Amandina shut her eyes and turned away. Minuscule protrusions emerged from her previously flawless and supple skin, each on the cusp of rupturing and giving rise to something unknown.

This reaction stemmed from her glimpse of the phantasmal, stagnant river and the ashen-white goat adorned with a golden mask, grappling to traverse the shallow waters.

The pallid goat's limbs, devoid of all fur, were extensively decomposed, exuding a nauseating yellow pus that swiftly encroached upon the remainder of its body.

Under the sway of the Symphony of Hatred, Reaza's wan and frigid countenance surrendered its final vestige of color.

The decay gradually consumed the back of his hand, neck, and cheeks, lending him the appearance of a long-deceased cadaver.

This decelerated the deterioration afflicting the pale goat's body.

Concurrently, the still river conjured by the black ancient tomb grew ever more illusory, its breadth and depth visibly diminishing.

The rag doll, shrouded in a sinister Gothic gown, drifted onward once more, shadowing the retreating river of quietude.

Abruptly, it pivoted to regard the green-eyed man composed of human flesh and blood, who, coincidentally, reciprocated its gaze.

Loathing, enmity, and lunacy erupted from the sinister cloth doll's crimson eyes. Its black Gothic attire, ensnared by baleful vines, ruptured into myriad holes, scattering fabric shreds and leaving it in tatters.

The green-eyed man in the dark gray suit seemed unscathed, yet as he advanced, he imprinted two footsteps saturated with vivid red blood, the aroma of sulfur swiftly dissipating.

One stride, two strides, three strides. Each step emblazoned bright red footprints, while dark fluid seeped from his human skin.

Iveljsta Eggers at last recovered from the onslaught of emotions and cravings unleashed by the Symphony of Hatred. He cast a glance at the tattered evil cloth doll and retrieved an object from his concealed pocket--a palm-sized puppet.

The puppet appeared to have been stitched together by a young child's hand. Its limbs were askew, its legs reaching its posterior, and its visage daubed with red, yellow, and white pigments, evoking the image of a circus clown.

Iveljsta infused the misshapen puppet with his spirituality.

It shimmered into intangibility and vanished from his grasp, materializing within the dark brown eyes of the Eggers family scion before vaulting into the green orbs of the man clad in human skin.

This caused the figure in the dark gray suit to stiffen and decelerate.

Lumian dared not prolong his gaze and hastily averted his eyes.

As Amandina closed her eyes and turned away, the minute protuberances adorning her skin receded.

Intrigued, she stole a glance at the monstrosity, suspected to be a Devil, hurtling towards the green-eyed man, seemingly on the precipice of succumbing to terror. She swiftly surveyed her environment.

Her eyes then fell upon the colossal Devil's incomplete carcass sprawled on the ground and a charred bone flute that had tumbled beneath a palm tree.

"There, there's something over there," she whispered, tugging at Lumian's sleeve.

Could it be a potent artifact discarded by a gravekeeper?

Lumian peered over and murmured to Amandina and the others, "Feign ignorance. Refrain from touching or even nearing it."

He had purposely abandoned the Symphony of Hatred there, deferring its retrieval.

In such circumstances, wielding it anew was far more prone to endangering his allies than exploiting an adversary's vulnerability. As a Reaper, he had no need to employ the Symphony of Hatred to pierce the target.

Thus, he feigned a lack of opportunity to reclaim it, hoping an enemy would attempt to turn it against him.

If a similar scenario unfolded, Lumian and the three godhood items would be the sole survivors capable of weathering the ensuing cataclysm unleashed by the Symphony of Hatred. At that juncture, he would whisk Amandina and her companions away via teleportation. Upon later return, he anticipated discovering the enemies' lifeless husks and acquiring fresh spoils of war.

It was a trap he had laid in passing.

As Devajo, transformed into a colossal Devil, retreated to the proximity of the human-skinned man and drew near the ebbing river of silence, a short silhouette walked out from the forest trail--a boy of seven or eight years old, clad in endearing sleepwear and a nightcap. His yellow hair and countenance were begrimed, besmirched with grease, dregs, and blood.

Catching sight of the boy, Lugano experienced a piercing agony in his absent right hand.

"Man... Man... Man...." He gnashed his teeth in dread.

Observing his abnormal reaction, Camus and the others inquired in astonishment, "What's wrong?"

Tracing Lugano's line of sight, Amandina, Camus, and Rhea spotted the boy.

The former swiveled to Lumian in bewilderment, "Isn't, isn't that your godson? Why is he here? It's very dangerous!"

"No, he's not in danger." Camus recollecting Kolobo's exaggerated reaction upon encountering Louis Berry and his godson. He recalled some of the words of his companion from the Fate pathway and said with a solemn expression, "We should be the ones in danger."

Without waiting for Amandina and Rhea's misgivings, Camus regarded Lumian and knitted his brow.

"What do we do?"

As a godfather, you should have a way to control your godson, right?

Lumian's gaze flitted to Ludwig pursuing the Devil, then to the corpses and Hisoka's Devil form strewn on the ground. He replied with a grin, "It's not a big problem."

There was ample food here to form an effective seal!

As to why Ludwig had trekked to the black ancient tomb, Lumian roughly had an idea.

The man and woman who had freshly arrived in Tizamo tonight and taken lodging at the Brieu Motel were likely minions of the Nois family's Demon. By some means, they maintained lucidity in this special dream. Once the Dream Festival commenced, they left the motel and hastened towards the black ancient tomb.

During this process, they passed the second floor, inducing Ludwig to catch wind of delicacies. He forsook the insipid fare and shadowed them closely, matching the pace of a seven- or eight-year-old child.

At that moment, Ludwig's brown eyes were fixed solely on Devajo, the Devil.

"Why isn't it a big problem?" Amandina wore a look of skepticism.

Lumian smiled and indicated the massive Devil who had fled in proximity to the green-eyed man.

"He's here to hunt down that monster."

"Hunt? Him?" Amandina glanced left and right in confusion.

A seven- or eight-year-old boy in azure star-spangled sleepwear, pursuing a pitch-black Devil almost three meters in height, with curved goat horns and bat wings sprouting from his back? This is indeed a dream, right?

As he neared the green-eyed man formed of human flesh and blood and the black ancient tomb, Devajo sensed a tinge of respite. Yet, his mind remained haunted by visions of his tongue roasting, his brain scooped out by a soup spoon, and his arms and legs gnawed by the boy.

What kind of monster is this? Devajo watched in abnormal fear as the boy strode towards him.

At that juncture, Amandina, who had stolen a glance their way, exclaimed, "That figure is looking at the man in the black robe."

Iveljsta? Lumian peered over but discerned nothing amiss with Iveljsta Eggers.

Amandina averted her gaze, taking a moment to regain her composure before looking again.

She quickly explained, "He's not looking at the man in the black robe. He's looking at the Devil!"

Amandina abruptly halted, withdrawing her gaze and furrowing her brow.

"That figure seems to utter something… I don't know the language, but I understand the meaning."

"What did he say?" Lumian pressed.

Amandina dared not look towards the black tomb. She organized her thoughts and said,

"Basically, it means:

"Everyone in the world knows that crawling insects can spin cocoons. After the cocoon fractures, butterflies take wing.

"A common insect can transform into a fluttering butterfly and alter its form of life. Why?"

Unknowingly, Amandina's voice shifted, as if swayed by some influence.

She paused for a moment before answering the question in a low, cold voice, "Death before rebirth. Ascension into godhood…"

Before Amandina could finish her sentence, Devajo, in his Devil state, stiffened.

He beheld his flesh swiftly decaying, fragments sloughing off to bare ghastly white bones.

Within seconds, the Devil lost consciousness and crumbled into a mound of putrefying flesh and bones.

The remains fused as if alive, intertwining to form a human-sized cocoon.

It rapidly shattered, and a human-headed avian monster draped in white plumage emerged.

After absorbing all the flesh and blood, the monster expanded significantly, its form undergoing a transformation.

The lower portion of its head rapidly elongated and expanded, as if possessing a body of its own. The flesh at its "waist" melded with the avian body, mantled in pale-yellow feathers.

"Hahaha!" Devajo, with innumerable white feathers sprouting from his eyes, nostrils, visage, and fingertips, erupted into laughter.

He slapped the white-feathered bird body below and soared skyward, as if riding it.

Devajo ascended higher and higher, gradually turning ethereal. Then he spiraled downward and entered the black ancient tomb.

Witnessing this, Lumian glanced once more at the entrance of the black ancient tomb but still could not perceive the unseen figure Amandina had mentioned.

His heart stirred as he took two steps forward and retrieved the peculiar golden mask from Hisoka's corpse.

Chapter 693: Golden Corpse

Lumian looked at the gold mask in his hand, white and black paint covering the eyes and face. Without hesitation, he put it on.

A cold sensation quickly seeped into his skin, and the weight of the gold felt unusually real.

His mind spun as he gazed through the mask at the entrance of the black ancient tomb and the end of the still river, which had mostly receded.

This time, he finally saw a slightly indistinct figure.

The figure wore a strange rusted iron crown and a dark robe with peculiar patterns. Its skin was milky-white, and its eyes were so dark they seemed to hold the entire night. A pale-white beard fluttered around its mouth and chin.

The old man sat cross-legged, hands tucked into his sleeves. He leaned against the open door of the black ancient tomb, his expression cold and impassive, like a statue.

As Lumian looked over, the old man met his gaze. His dark eyes seemed to reflect Lumian, as if numerous phantoms had appeared.

Splash!

Behind the old man, an even more illusory, nearly lightless water wave rippled in the void. The colossal figure in blood-stained armor roared angrily, attempting to approach.

Lumian's right palm instantly burned.

The old man in the rusted iron crown and strange robe withdrew his hands from his sleeves.

His hands had pale, dark skin that was still smooth. The backs were cracked, each crack either covered in white feathers stained with pale yellow oil or dripping with decaying yellow pus.

Upon seeing this, Lumian's thoughts vanished, and he felt as if he were descending into endless cold darkness.

A familiar burning sensation emanated from his left chest. Combined with the burning, frenzied, violent sensation in his right palm, it awakened Lumian's consciousness, allowing him to find a lifeline in the darkness.

Using this opportunity, Lumian regained the ability to think. He saw nearly black blood vessels protruding from the dark eyes that seemed to hide the entire night. They were tainted with madness that threatened to bury and end everything.

The eyes closed, and the illusory ripples and colossal figure behind the old man vanished.

Lumian's vision began to clear, and his perception of the outside world fully returned.

A sharp pain coursed through him.

Lumian glanced down at his right hand and realized disgusting bumps bulged from his wrist to the back of his hand. His hair seemed to have thickened and turned whiter.

He flipped his palm over and saw that the mark left by Blood Emperor Alista Tudor's remnant aura had completely surfaced. It was a vivid red.

Surrounding these marks was decaying flesh, seeping pus, and pale-white skin.

Lumian frowned.

Despite the Blood Emperor's remnant aura being fully activated, Amandina, Lugano, and the others around him didn't show any signs of panic or fear. He didn't sense any extremely frenzied or violent thoughts either!

Wait…

The figure in the blood-stained armor seems to be Blood Emperor Alista Tudor…

This place feels similar to the Samaritan Women's Spring… Could the figure sitting at the tomb's entrance be the Underworld Daoist mentioned by the Armored Shadow?

Why are he and the Blood Emperor appearing here again? Shouldn't they be at the source of the Samaritan Women's Spring? Are the two connected?

Did the Underworld Daoist discover the Blood Emperor's residual aura on me and conveniently seal it? Even if I fully activate it, I won't be able to unleash the crazy Red Priest's aura?

Uh, I don't know if it's because of Mr. Fool's seal or because I'm wearing Hisoka's golden mask, but the Underworld Daoist didn't directly allow me to undergo immortal ascension, nor did he force me to lose control…

Lumian quickly grasped his predicament. As the immortalized Devil entered the black ancient tomb, the situation inside changed once more.

The tomb, which had fallen silent, emitted a rustling sound, accompanied by the clang of metal colliding with stone.

The next instant, a golden figure materialized beside the Underworld Daoist at the tomb's entrance.

The figure was covered in gold, with long limbs and a golden mask streaked with white and black paint.

It belonged to the same type as the one on Lumian's face and the pale-white goat's head!

The golden-masked figure stiffened, as if its limbs were dead. Relying solely on the strength of its waist, it sat up from lying flat like a corpse.

Eyes closed, it turned its head towards the pale-white goat closest to it.

The pale-white goat's aura instantly turned ordinary, making it unable to walk on the still river. It rapidly decayed, sank, and quickly vanished.

The golden figure, eyes still closed, turned its head to the tattered, sinister cloth doll.

The eerie vines on the cloth doll's Gothic dress suddenly came alive, coiling around the doll, rendering it powerless and immobile.

The corpse's head turned to the slowly walking green-eyed man.

The green-eyed man, his eyes reflecting the ugly puppet, suddenly halted. With a bang, his body transformed into a bloody piglet.

The ugly puppet landed beside the piglet, motionless, as if it had turned into the most ordinary and common puppet.

Ludwig's eyes lit up as he jogged over.

He leaped up like a massive frog and pounced on the bloody piglet. He grabbed its head and bit down.

Amandina closed her eyes in shock.

Louis Berry's godson turned out to be such a monster?

The pig wailed fiercely. The golden-masked corpse closed its eyes, turned its head, and faced Iveljsta Eggers.

Lumian's forehead throbbed. He wanted to break through the sudden paralyzing pressure and teleport over to rescue Iveljsta, but he hesitated.

Previously, he had restricted himself from approaching the black ancient tomb. At most, he would take a glance or two. Now, he didn't want to break this self-imposed "rule." Violating it meant immense risk.

However, Iveljsta was from the Church of The Fool.

Just as Lumian made his decision, the golden corpse turned its head again, but Iveljsta remained unchanged. He was still severely injured, his aura weak.

What's going on? Why did the cold corpse in the ancient tomb spare Iveljsta? The Underworld Daoist didn't do anything to him when he looked at him… Lumian was puzzled as the corpse's golden mask faced Reaza.

After the pale-white goat vanished, Reaza summoned an undead creature to envelop him and blinked to the edge of the ancient tomb area. He was about to escape into the forest, but before he could do anything else, his body froze.

Pop, pop, pop. Huge, wet warts erupted from Reaza's face, neck, and the backs of his hands, accompanied by disgusting mucus.

The vice-captain of Port Pylos's patrol collapsed, rapidly disintegrating into countless bloody warts that squirmed in the gaps of his thin suit.

The undead creature summoned by Reaza transformed into thin human skin and gently landed.

Lumian's scalp tingled as he watched. Finally, he broke free from the paralysis caused by the corpse sitting up. He said to Lugano, Amandina, and the others,"Grab hold of me!"

He was about to teleport back to Tizamo!

At that moment, the corpse's golden-masked face turned towards him.

Lumian's body turned cold. Ignoring Camus and company, he immediately activated the black mark on his right shoulder.

Suddenly, he saw the cold corpse's face, its eyes peeking out from under the golden mask with white and black paint, open.

It was a pair of cold, icy-blue eyes.

Icy-blue eyes? Lumian was taken aback, finding them familiar.

These are…

These are Naboredisley's eyes!

Dammit, why is Naboredisley here? Why is he a cold corpse in the black ancient tomb?

What right does He have to bestow the Beyonder powers of the Prisoner pathway?

It can't be real. It's not Naboredisley, but its eyes resemble…

Amidst Lumian's thoughts, he saw a smile in the icy-blue eyes, a smile of playfulness, understanding, and certainty.

This was a stark contrast to the pained expressions in the icy-

blue eyes on Hanth Island.

Suddenly, a half-withered, violently beating dark-red heart soared from the golden corpse's hand and flew out of the completely disintegrated still river.

A short figure pounced on the heart like a frog and grabbed it. It was Ludwig, his mouth filled with blood.

The smile in the golden corpse's icy-blue eyes grew more relaxed.

He nodded at Lumian and willingly fell back to His original position. He had no intention of seizing the opportunity to leave the black ancient tomb.

With a splash of illusory water, the tomb's open door gradually closed.

Seated by the door, the figure suspected to be the Underworld Daoist vanished.

Wh— Naboredisley's corpse doesn't seem willing to leave the tomb… How did He end up lying in there? Lumian couldn't figure out the reason, so he looked at Ludwig and realized the boy was holding a half-withered dark-red heart to his mouth.

Lumian wanted to stop him but lacked the ability. The surrounding corpses didn't seem to attract Ludwig as much as the half-withered heart.

Clang!

The tomb door slammed shut, causing the entire area to tremble.

Lumian and the others witnessed dream fragments one after another, and their surroundings blurred.

After a brief daze, Lumian realized he was lying in the middle of an unlit street. The crimson moon was bright in the sky, casting its light.

This was inside Tizamo.

Chapter 694: A "Deal"

The Dream Festival came to an abrupt end? Lumian jolted upright, realizing he was holding the strange golden mask he had received from Hisoka.

For a moment, he couldn't tell if he was still dreaming or if the mask had somehow followed him from the dream into the waking world.

Lumian turned to look behind him.

Reaza and Maslow, who had died during the Dream Festival, were lying in the middle of the street, just starting to regain consciousness.

Taking advantage of the moment while they gathered their wits and slowly got to their feet, Lumian focused his attention on their luck.

He could see clear signs of death on both of them. Their fates were about to undergo a rapid transformation, irreversibly tainted by darkness.

Reaza's luck, in particular, was changing even more swiftly and dramatically, like a river suddenly plunging over a cliff to form a waterfall.

At that instant, Reaza remembered what had happened to him during the Dream Festival. Uncontrollable fear washed over his pale, cold face.

Pop, pop, pop. Huge, mucus-oozing warts erupted all over his body, just as Lumian had witnessed in the dream.

Seeing Reaza's eyes turn frenzied and his body start to disintegrate, Lumian raised his free right hand, pointing it at Reaza's mouth as if it were a gun.

A condensed bullet of blazing white flame shot from Lumian's fingertip, shattering Reaza's teeth as it entered his mouth.

Boom!

Reaza's head split apart inch by inch, engulfed in roaring flames.

The vice-captain of Port Pylos's patrol team collapsed heavily, his body covered in a thin black suit made up of countless slimy warts.

Lumian turned to Maslow, who was shocked by Reaza's grotesque transformation and terrified by the death he had experienced in the dream. Calmly, Lumian asked, "Who was he working for?"

As he spoke, Lumian tucked the golden mask into his Traveler's Bag and checked to make sure the Symphony of Hatred and his other belongings were still there.

Everything was accounted for, including the food he had thrown at Ludwig.

Maslow paused for a few seconds before answering, "We're all part of the Numinous Episcopate."

Numinous Episcopate… Lumian chuckled. "Do you still believe in Death?"

Wasn't Death already dead?

Maslow considered the question for a moment before saying, "Reaza told me that Death is on the verge of returning. There have been signs recently that prayers are being answered again."

Hearing Maslow's words, Lumian nodded pensively.

"Which faction of the Numinous Episcopate do you belong to?"

As far as he knew, the Numinous Episcopate was divided into numerous factions. There were the Royals, led by the descendants of the Eggers family, who sought to restore the Balam Empire's rule; the Artificial Death faction, which had somehow recreated Death itself; and the less influential Repose and Underworld factions.

"We're from the Royal faction," Maslow admitted.

"Did you infiltrate the patrol team on purpose?" Lumian asked nonchalantly.

Maslow shook his head.

"No, Admiral Querarill has been secretly working with us."

Admiral Querarill, the de facto ruler of Matani, is closely tied to the Numinous Episcopate's Royal faction… Combined with the Church of Earth Mother and the remaining Intis faction, this must be what Franca meant by dancing on three eggs. Judging by the situation, Reaza wasn't a traitor after all… It's no wonder Admiral Querarill didn't send backup. If the Numinous Episcopate and the Church of The Fool can't handle the problem, it won't matter how many people he sends… His mind now clear, Lumian asked, "Was participating in this Dream Festival a direct order from the Royal faction's upper ranks?"

"Yes." Maslow glanced at Reaza's body, now unrecognizable as human, and said, "Apparently the order came straight from the Empress."

Empress… The Pale Empress of the Numinous Episcopate's Royal faction? Lumian instinctively scanned his surroundings.

A sudden thought struck him. He drew the straight sword he had bought in Port Santa, picked up Reaza's clothes, and quickly searched through the items he had left behind.

There was no sign of the death-corroded golden mask or the crystal-like skull.

Even though the skull had turned into a goat in the dream and the golden mask had sunk into the tranquil river, Lumian reasoned that it had still been a dream, after all. No matter how unusual it was, it was ultimately just a dream. When someone died, they died in reality, but the same might not hold true for objects. It was similar to how some of the food Ludwig had eaten in the dream had reappeared in the Traveler's Bag.

Even if the items were going to disappear, it would have to happen later. For now, they should definitely return to the real world!

However, Reaza had nothing on him.

A chill ran down Lumian's spine. Lowering his voice, he asked, "Termiboros, did you notice anything?"

Termiboros's majestic voice echoed in Lumian's ears."Do you only now know fear?"

"Tch." Lumian felt a lingering sense of dread, but he didn't let it show. "Was the Pale Empress watching?"

Termiboros replied in a deep tone, "It's not just Her."

Her? The Pale Empress is an Angel? Lumian composed himself and turned his attention back to Maslow.

Just as Maslow was wondering why Louis Berry was talking to himself, the other party suddenly asked, "Why did Reaza kill you?"

Maslow stayed quiet, offering no response.

Lumian chuckled. "Did you betray him?"

Maslow's lips trembled, but he didn't say a word.

Lumian smiled casually and said, "It doesn't matter. If you don't want to answer, don't. You won't be alive much longer anyway."

Maslow's face turned ashen as he considered the ramifications of his death during the Dream Festival.

Lumian nodded, then added, "Go on and do whatever you want. Just don't do anything bad. It'll make you die sooner."

With that, Lumian glanced at Reaza's corpse, which was starting to produce the Beyonder characteristic. Greed welled up inside him, but he suppressed it with an Ascetic's self-

control.

He decided that regardless of whether Reaza had been a traitor or not, his Beyonder characteristics should be left for Camus and the Matani patrol team.

To stop himself from giving in to greed and with a grave matter coming to mind, Lumian's expression shifted subtly. He activated the black mark on his right shoulder and teleported away.

Maslow stared at the street that had been empty a moment before and the lights that had been stirred by the explosion, looking as though his soul had left his body. With a dazed and despondent expression, he turned and walked toward the forest outside Tizamo.

…

In the second-floor suite of the Brieu Motel.

The instant Lugano woke up, he noticed he couldn't move his right forearm.

It's okay, it's okay. I'll be fine after a psychiatric treatment or two. The people in Tizamo can be healed by Mass without needing Beyonder effects… Lugano tried to console himself as he endured the pain in his right forearm.

Just then, he heard hurried footsteps coming from the living room outside his door.

Crack!

The door to Lugano's bedroom flew open. In the crimson moonlight pouring through the window, Ludwig appeared, dressed in blue pajamas with yellow stars and a matching nightcap. He was clutching a half-withered, blood-stained, dark red heart.

Badump! Badump!

Lugano could hear his own heart pounding, and he felt like his soul was about to abandon his body out of sheer terror.

Had Ludwig come back for seconds because he had woken up early and hadn't gotten his fill during the dream?

A moment later, Lugano saw a figure float in through the doorway.

The figure was semi-transparent, wearing an elaborate, opulent, black dress. There was no head on its neck, just a clean cut. In its hand, it held four identical blonde heads with red eyes and beautiful features.

"Return…" "It"… "To"… "Me"…

The four heads uttered different words in ancient Feysac, forming a complete sentence.

Ludwig's image was reflected in their eight crimson eyes.

"Mine!" Ludwig ran to Lugano's bed and spun around, looking like he wanted to bring the heart to his mouth, but he seemed to hesitate.

The four heads held by the translucent figure spoke one by one, "Idiot"… "Eating"… "Your"… "Own"… "Brain"…

"That"… "Is"… "My"… "Heart"…

"If"… "You"… "Don't"… "Return"…

"I"… "Will"… "Turn"… "You"… "Into"… "Pig"…

Almost at the same moment, Lumian materialized next to Ludwig, taking in the scene and hearing the corresponding words.

Lumian glanced at the strange-looking lady, then at Ludwig, who wore a resolute expression as if he would defend his food to the death. After a moment's consideration, Lumian said, "Madam, perhaps you could try trading him other spiritually rich materials for it."

In Ludwig's current state, Lumian didn't dare try to take the item from him by force.

The lady in the intricate black dress, holding four blonde, red-

eyed heads, went silent.

After a short while, one of her heads spat out a gleaming gold coin and held it between its teeth.

A gold coin? You want to buy it with a gold coin? Ludwig doesn't care about money… Lumian was about to point this out to the lady when he suddenly realized the gold coin looked familiar.

It was a Loen gold coin, worth 1 pound.

Uh… Lumian glanced over at Ludwig.

Ludwig wavered.

After a few seconds, he finally held out his hands and gave the half-withered dark red heart to the woman's head.

The blonde, red-eyed head let go, dropping the gold coin into Ludwig's hand. Quickly, it sank its teeth into the half-withered dark red heart.

The translucent lady stepped back and vanished from Lugano's bedroom.

Ludwig hastily popped the Loen gold coin into his mouth, as if trying to hide it in his stomach. But then he seemed to think better of it and fished it back out. He wiped it off on his pajamas and carefully put it in his pocket.

Just as I thought, it's the same as Jenna's lucky gold coin… A Loen gold coin closely connected to Mr. Fool? Lumian nodded to himself, comprehension dawning.

A twinge of disappointment ran through him.

Two people close to me have gotten lucky gold coins. Why don't I have one?

Chapter 695: Kolobo's Worry

Lumian snapped out of his daze and glanced at Ludwig, who had regained his composure. Turning to Lugano, who was shrinking into a corner of the bed, he said, "We'll head back to Trier tomorrow and find a psychiatrist for you—a real, genuine one."

This decision wasn't made out of concern for Lugano, but rather something that had long been on Lumian's agenda. 007 should have already provided feedback in the early morning hours. Lumian, Franca, and the others would discuss how to handle the Mirror Person, Moran Avigny.

Moreover, Lumian intended to seize this opportunity to extract Termiboros's power and obtain a Fate Appropriator boon.

His most significant gain from the Dream Festival was the substantial digestion of the Reaper potion.

He knew the Southern Continent was filled with conflicts and combat opportunities, which would help him digest the Reaper potion. However, he never anticipated that less than two weeks after advancing, the potion's digestion progress would skyrocket, much like a mercury thermometer's column shooting up when touching a living person's armpit.

Culling Padre Cali, Hisoka's dream projection, and nearly 20 others bestowed with strength equivalent to Sequence 6 or Sequence 5 made Lumian acutely aware of life's fragility. It was like straw under a scythe, constantly collapsing with a simple cull and scattered by the wind.

Furthermore, after experiencing the acting of the first four Sequences, Lumian felt the Hunter pathway had a distinct characteristic of bringing calamity. Reapers were no exception.

With this acting, he believed the Reaper's destructive characteristics that brought calamity were more apparent.

At the same time, Lumian greatly benefited from an enemy's destruction.

As his mind raced, he summarized his first Reaper acting principle: "Culling is about destroying the target and reaping a harvest for yourself."

If I had three or four more similar culls, I wouldn't need to comprehend other acting principles and put them into practice to digest the Reaper potion. However, such good fortune is rare… Lumian sighed silently.

This required gathering more than ten Sequence 6 and Sequence 5 Beyonders with obvious flaws he could exploit without interference.

Meeting each of these conditions was challenging, let alone all of them simultaneously:

First and foremost, whether humans consumed potions or gained superpowers through boons, their pathways and Sequences differed in their flaws. They couldn't all be burdened by dream projections like the gravekeepers in the Dream Festival, where emotions and desires exploded at the slightest trigger. Even if the bestowed were deeply influenced by evil gods and had mental issues to some degree, exploding emotions and desires weren't inevitable. Some might simply have mutated personalities.

Secondly, Sequence 6 and Sequence 5 Beyonders were uncommon, especially the latter, who formed the backbone of various factions. Even without factions, they could create their own teams and dominate a region like the Pirate Admirals. Gathering more than ten to twenty such Beyonders was no easy task.

Moreover, if a major incident caused the first two conditions to be met, the Beyonders' common flaws might not be countered by Lumian and his mystical items.

Finally, during the battle, a Sequence 5 Beyonder, a key member of the various factions, might draw the attention of the corresponding demigod.

A mysticism event like the Dream Festival, with its inherent limitations and natural problems, was unusually suitable for Lumian. Perhaps there had only been one such event in the Northern and Southern Continents in nearly a millennium.

Sigh… Lumian couldn't help but sigh again.

At that moment, Lugano was thrilled to hear he could return to Trier at dawn. He quickly replied, "Alright, alright!"

Back in Trier, his boss had more trusted companions. He probably wouldn't need to take care of Ludwig anymore!

Lumian thought for a moment and glanced at the curtains emanating the crimson moonlight. Casually, he asked Lugano, "Have you saved enough for the Harvest Priest potion formula and the corresponding ingredients?"

Lugano was taken aback.

"No, I'm still a bit short of the potion formula's price."

Most of his current "savings" came from Lumian, amounting to around 15,000 verl d'or. Based on his knowledge, a Sequence 7 potion formula usually cost between 16,000 to 20,000 verl d'or.

Lumian nodded pensively.

"I'll keep an eye out for the Harvest Priest potion formula and the necessary ingredients for you. If you're short on funds, I'll help cover the difference. Consider it a share of the spoils from this adventure."

Lugano was stunned momentarily before tears welled up in his eyes, blurring his vision.

I made the right choice!

My future truly lies with the boss!

With a hint of unease, he asked, "But that was a dream adventure. Can the gains be brought back to the real world?"

Lumian didn't elaborate. He retrieved Hisoka's golden mask from his Traveler's Bag.

It's possible… Some special items are possible? Lugano felt a sense of relief.

Lumian turned to Ludwig, who seemed to have acquired a cherished toy, and nodded slightly.

"You may go back to sleep."

Ludwig, wearing a blue nightcap, blinked and reached out to touch his stomach.

Groan. Groan. His stomach churned violently.

Lumian laughed self-deprecatingly and took out the portion of food Ludwig had eaten in the dream, including almond pistachio cream cake, liquor-infused chocolate, éclairs, and more.

After Ludwig began his "quiet" meal, Lumian returned to his room and conjured a blazing white fireball. He unfolded the letter, picked up a fountain pen, and penned a letter to Madam Magician.

This took precedence over dealing with other matters.

As he wrote, Lumian pondered something.

If I killed all the elders of the gravekeepers, would the primitive tribe still possess the ability to attack and eliminate the dead?

Or are they still alive in the real world, waiting to drag those already dead down with them when they attack Tizamo?

Or would the deceased find another way out, like the fire that had engulfed the Twanaku family?

…

On the third floor of the police headquarters in Tizamo Town.

Camus snapped out of his reverie and instinctively glanced at the temporary bed opposite him. He noticed the blanket had been lifted, and Kolobo was nowhere to be found.

Am I still dreaming, still in the Dream Festival? Camus sat up cautiously and heard a sound near the door in the corner.

In the darkness, under the crimson moonlight seeping through the curtains, he saw Kolobo crouched there, curled up and trembling.

Camus lowered his voice and gently asked, "What's wrong?"

Kolobo's voice quivered as he replied, "The sky is falling! The sky is falling!"

The sky is falling? Camus found it amusing and looked at Kolobo.

"Did you misinterpret your premonition?"

How could the sky possibly fall?

…

Outside Tizamo, at the edge of the primitive forest.

Maslow, his face adorned with white paint, slowly advanced into the forest.

It was a terrible feeling to know about his impending yet unavoidable death.

He regretted betraying the Numinous Episcopate, but there had been no choice. Shortly after arriving in Tizamo, he had been secretly controlled by Twanaku, who had returned for a "vacation." He had become a fallen one monitoring the situation of Padre Cali and Tizamo.

Subsequently, although he knew Twanaku had been killed, the other party's dream projection appeared in his dream, telling him the matter wasn't over.

Maslow advanced step by step, yearning to return to the forest and become nourishment for a tree, just like his ancestors.

As he walked, he spotted nearly 20 people emerging from the nearby barracks.

The men seemed to sense something amiss and prepared to inspect their surroundings.

At that moment, Maslow felt the night suddenly brighten.

Subconsciously, he looked up at the sky and saw a burning boulder descending with a crimson flame tail.

In an instant, the burning boulder filled Maslow's vision.

It crashed into the area between the forest's edge and the barracks.

Rumble!

The wind and dust stirred by the meteorite swiftly filled the area, rising into the air and dissipating, obscuring the crimson moon and the starlight.

Rumble!

The entirety of Tizamo seemed to experience a violent earthquake. Buildings shook violently, and glass shattered.

Several houses with weak foundations quickly collapsed, burying their occupants.

With great difficulty, Camus regained his balance. Once the building stabilized, he rushed to the shattered window and looked out.

He saw the "sky" was gray and murky, so close he could touch it if he jumped up.

The "sky" has really fallen… For some inexplicable reason, this thought flashed through Camus's mind.

…

In the second-floor suite of the Brieu Motel.

Clutching the letter and fountain pen, Lumian watched the smoke and dust outside with amusement, sensing the "heavy blow" not far away.

"How direct…" he sighed sincerely.

A meteorite had descended from the sky!

From the looks of it, the catastrophe had likely eliminated most of the deceased.

Lumian turned to look at the door, which had swung open due to the building's shaking, and saw Ludwig still focused on eating.

Nothing from the pile of food had fallen to the ground.

After sending Lugano out to assist the injured, Lumian returned to his room and continued writing.

Upon completion, he immediately set up a ritual and summoned the "doll" messenger.

Just as the "doll" messenger emerged from the expanding candle flame, it suddenly shrank.

Slowly, she glanced to her left and then to her right. After confirming there was no problem, she tiptoed and cautiously approached Lumian's letter.

Lumian had never seen the "doll" messenger act like this before. He watched in confusion and amusement as she picked up the folded letter like a thief. She waved at him and quickly retreated into the candle flame.

Lumian chuckled and shook his head, no longer pondering the "doll" messenger's actions.

At the very least, it seemed harmless, and he had several things to do.

Lumian left the bedroom, entered the corridor, and went to the first floor. He grabbed the motel owner, who had come out to check on the situation after waking up, and asked, "Which room are the lady and her companion who arrived tonight staying in?"

Chapter 696: Feathers

In Twanaku's house in Tizamo Town, Amandina woke up amidst the violent shaking of the building.

She stood up groggily and looked out the window. The sky had turned gray and was pressing down, completely obscuring the crimson moon and stars.

In the near-absolute darkness, Amandina turned and cast her gaze not far away. Dressed neatly, Robert rose slowly, his sluggish movements suggesting he was struggling to adapt to the lightless environment.

When the tremors in the ground and buildings finally ceased, Robert used his Spirit Vision to spot Amandina. After a moment's hesitation, he asked, "Are we awake?"

He recalled that before entering the Dream Festival, he and Amandina had used a date as an excuse to rendezvous. When they ended up in the special dream, they temporarily parted ways—one stayed put while the other went to Saint-Sien Cathedral.

Glancing at the suddenly noisy street outside, Amandina thought for a few seconds before replying, "Probably… but I don't know what's going on."

As Robert recalled the dream encounters, both fell silent. Eventually, he asked in a deep voice, "What happened to you in the end?"

Amandina suddenly chuckled. "Nothing much."

Robert closed his mouth again. With her night vision, Amandina looked at him, smiling with mixed emotions. "Is there anything else you want to ask?"

After a long pause, Robert said, "What did you experience afterward?"

Taking in the silence of the house, Amandina finally whispered, "I saw the one who granted me powers."

"The one who granted you powers?" Robert asked, surprised.

Amandina laughed. "We didn't actually fall asleep after touching the black ancient tomb. We only truly fainted after receiving the powers."

"How is that possible…" Robert looked incredulous.

Amandina didn't try to convince him. Instead, she muttered, "Upon acquiring superpowers, one immediately falls into a coma or slumber. When they wake up, they completely grasp that power. Their spirit and flesh undergo a certain transformation…

"Is this considered a low-level death before rebirth?"

"What are you talking about?" Robert's confusion grew.

It was completely incomprehensible!

Amandina's eyes darted around as she smiled.

"That person told me. Perhaps it's a form of guidance."

"Guidance…" Using his Spirit Vision, the only way to ascertain her condition in the darkness, Robert gazed at Amandina.

He felt his fiancée was different, as if she had grown up overnight.

Amandina wanted to recount the encounter in detail as usual, but swallowed her words.

Sighing, she said, "Aren't you going to check on Padre Cali? He might not have long to live."

Snapping out of his reverie, Robert blurted out, "He fled to the ancient tomb and was killed?"

"He's indeed dead," Amandina confirmed.

Robert's expression shifted, but he didn't inquire about the murderer's identity. After a moment's thought, Amandina said, "Before you go to Padre Cali, I need to tell you something.

"The desire you felt when you first faced him didn't come from your heart. He prayed to a Demon through a ritual and obtained the power to influence you."

Robert's eyes widened, his mouth gaped, but no sound came out.

Without further ado, Amandina strode past him towards the staircase.

Pressing down on the railing, she paused and tersely acknowledged, "Let's find an excuse to annul the engagement. I can accept other things about you, but I can't accept how my fiancé allowed me to follow Louis Berry alone to find the black ancient tomb under those circumstances.

"Don't worry, I won't tell anyone about your matters. Those who knew in my dream won't tell either."

Robert spun around, his gaze fixed on the staircase as Amandina descended step by step, the darkness engulfing her spirituality's light.

Leaving Twanaku's house, Amandina stepped onto the street.

She glanced at the dark, low sky, the sporadic lights on both sides, and caught a whiff of the dusty air.

With her hand covering her nose, Amandina made her way towards the manor, her steps gradually quickening.

…

On the third floor of the police headquarters in Tizamo Town, just as Camus felt Kolobo's trembling subside, as if he had composed himself, painful curses echoed from the next room.

His heart stirred as he lit a candle and pushed open the slightly deformed wooden door. Inside, he saw the Feysacian, Loban, lying on the ground, clutching his knee and screaming in agony.

The member of the Tizamo patrol team had woken from the earthquake-like commotion and tried to get out of bed to find cover, but one leg strangely lost strength, accompanied by intense pain, causing him to collapse.

Before Camus could organize his thoughts, Rhea's voice echoed beside him.

"Don't worry. It's the mass hysteria mentioned in the investigations. You'll recover after going to the corresponding Mass."

Having cooperated with Camus to investigate the abnormalities in Tizamo, Loban quickly understood Rhea.

Cursing, he struggled to his feet, retrieved a military flask from under his pillow, and downed a few gulps of liquor.

After drinking until color returned to his face, Loban sighed with relief.

"I feel my knee has recovered a little. Sometimes, alcohol is more useful than Mass!"

Breathing a sigh of relief, Camus turned to Rhea, realizing his teammate's expression had turned colder.

After what just happened, her dream projection has completely vanished. Have the emotions and desires returned to her body? Will the special dreamscape still exist, and will there be a Dream Festival next year? Camus instantly made many connections.

At that moment, Rhea said to him, "Let's go out and see if we can save some people. Those who died during the Dream Festival shouldn't be the only ones injured."

Taken aback, Camus replied, "Okay."

Joy welled up in his heart, sensing Rhea hadn't undergone any fundamental changes due to the return of her emotions and desires.

…

Following the Brieu Motel owner's instructions, Lumian arrived on the fourth floor and opened the corresponding room's wooden door.

The near pitch-black darkness receded under a blazing white fireball's illumination, revealing everything to Lumian.

Some items had fallen due to the tremors, tables and chairs had shifted, and a small amount of dust had sprinkled from the ceiling. The window was tightly shut, but the glass had shattered. Apart from this, there was nothing noteworthy, and no sign of humans.

Scanning the area, Lumian found no trace of the man or woman.

Frowning, he muttered to himself, According to the original Dream Festival's rules, death in a dream doesn't equate to immediate death. Did they leave Tizamo after waking up? I planned to take care of their corpses and inherit their Beyonder characteristics…

Lumian didn't believe the man and woman couldn't leave just because the door and window were tightly shut. After all, they were two Mid-Sequence Beyonders, and one was even a Devil. Perhaps they had special abilities to resolve that problem.

As Lumian contemplated searching for traces and chasing after them to eliminate the deceased on behalf of the Dream Festival, he casually examined the room's various details. Suddenly, his pupils dilated, and his eyes froze.

He saw a feather lying quietly under the recliner by the window

—a white feather stained with light-yellow oil!

Lumian's scalp tingled as he silently took two steps back into the corridor.

Like Reaza, were the man and woman already dead and had undergone an abnormality? What about their corpses?

Disappeared?

Would humans who had ascended to godhood exhibit different behaviors after leaving the Dream Festival?

With a blazing white fireball floating behind him, Lumian scrutinized the room, filled with questions. Perhaps the man and woman's "corpses" were still here, but he couldn't see them.

Cautiously entering, he approached the recliner, sensing nothing unusual and discovering no signs of the formless object. Lumian retrieved the Mystery Prying Glasses and the Eye of Truth from his Traveler's Bag, donning them one by one.

He still couldn't see the man and woman. His vision was filled with chaotic darkness, a dark river, oily feathers, and imprisoning darkness.

Upon returning to reality, did they immediately undergo immortal ascension and leave this place? Lumian pondered for a few seconds before activating the black mark on his right shoulder, teleporting to a spot in the forest at the special dream's periphery.

As a Hunter, Lumian had memorized the correct route and environmental characteristics after Amandina led him to the black ancient tomb. After nearly fifteen minutes, he arrived at an area where numerous tree roots protruded from the ground, resembling blood vessels.

However, the place where the black stone-like ancient tomb should have stood was empty.

Does that black ancient tomb only exist in dreams and can't be encountered in reality? Lumian speculated seriously. So the Pale Empress and the other

Angels can't descend personally and can only send people to participate in the Dream Festival?

As his thoughts raced, Lumian's gaze darted back and forth across the land corresponding to the black ancient tomb. It was indeed a little different from its surroundings—no intertwined tree roots protruded from the ground, and it was flat and stoneless.

Approaching thoughtfully, Lumian took out his straight sword and used it as a shovel, attempting to dig into the soil. Just as he dug a small pit, his eyelids twitched.

Buried in the dark brown soil were two white feathers stained with light-yellow oil!

Taking a slow breath, Lumian dug deeper.

Before long, a palm-sized, dark, slightly moist, and sticky soil lump came into view.

Chapter 697: Madam Magician's Explanation

As Lumian gazed at the peculiar soil, he couldn't help but recall the scene of Hela retrieving the Samaritan Women's Spring.

After a moment of contemplation, he retrieved gold bars and coins from his Traveler's Bag and ignited a blazing white fireball in his palm.

As the flames surged, the gold gradually melted under the control of his spirituality, forming a small golden box.

Lumian then used the flames as a blade to fashion a cover for the box.

Once the gold had cooled and solidified, he used the straight sword as a shovel to transfer the palm-sized clump of soil into the box before closing the lid.

After stowing away the golden box, Lumian noticed that the straight sword in his hand had become rusty and decayed.

Rather than being alarmed, Lumian was delighted. He muttered to himself, "That soil is indeed magical…"

This was one of his gains from the Dream Festival.

Despite not obtaining the Beyonder characteristics of Reaza and Maslow, and the mysterious disappearance of the man and woman who served the Demon, Lumian had finally acquired something of value.

He continued searching the area but found no other traces. Left with no other option, he teleported back to the second floor of the Brieu Motel.

By then, much of the smoke and dust caused by the meteorite had dissipated. The crimson moon's light cast an eerie glow over Tizamo.

Lumian noticed a folded letter on the master bedroom's desk, with a thin brass-like metal sheet on top.

Madam Magician's response is swift tonight… Lumian picked up the brass plate and examined the mysterious patterns and words etched upon it, but he couldn't discern their meaning or purpose. He couldn't even sense the corresponding spirituality glow.

Shaking his head, Lumian temporarily set aside the brass sheet. With a gentle grab of his right hand, he conjured a floating incandescent white fireball.

Under its glow, he sat down and began reading Madam Magician's reply.

"There's no doubt about it. From what you've described, the corpse in the dream tomb belongs to Naboredisley.

"As for Naboredisley, there's a high likelihood that it's an alias of Devil Monarch Farbauti or a real name that can be used under certain circumstances.

"Don't you find it strange that Naboredisley, as a Devil Monarch and one of the eight ancient gods who once ruled the world, can bestow superpowers from the Prisoner pathway?

"This abnormality is quite normal for the ancient gods.

"They didn't advance according to the paths of the divine, but were born directly for some unknown reason. Their characteristics were a mix of Sequence 1 Beyonder characteristics from other pathways, or even more than one. Considering Demon Warlock Burman's situation, you can see how unhinged and violent the ancient gods were.

"There's a significant difference between ancient gods and subsequent true gods, but this doesn't mean that They are weak. They might even be stronger.

"Among them, although Farbauti is the Devil Monarch, He blends in Sequence 1 Abomination from a neighboring pathway. Therefore, His state is one of the best among the eight ancient gods. He has also become the only ancient god alive in Their original form.

"In fact, if Farbauti were to gather the ingredients of the Devil pathway as a Sequence 1 Abomination and complete the deity-ascension ritual to advance, He would be equivalent to a true god now—a stronger true god. He wouldn't be an ancient god described by words like madness, cruelty, violence, and bloodlust.

"Of course, as the Devil Monarch, even if He had done so, He will inevitably exhibit the characteristics of I am the Abyss, the Abyss is Me, experiencing strong influence from this pathway. As for the state of a Devil, you should be well aware. Therefore, Farbauti is also one of the two or three most unhinged ancient gods. This doesn't contradict His better state.

"That's all for the ancient gods. That's not my primary purpose in writing.

"In short, the one in the dream tomb is indeed Naboredisley, the other Naboredisley in the form of an Abomination."

Is that so… Ancient gods possess Beyonder characteristics of neighboring or non-neighboring pathways, and Naboredisley has already displayed the ability to separate different desires and emotions… Lumian no longer harbored any doubts about the cold corpse's ability to bestow Wraith powers.

After some thought, he reread Madam Magician's letter.

"You mentioned that Naboredisley took the initiative to lie back in the dream tomb and continue in a dead state. This is a very rational choice for Him.

"Furthermore, I must say it's a good death. Continue in this dead state until after the apocalypse!

"You don't need to know the exact reason. To put it simply, you can see that Naboredisley, or the Devil Monarch Farbauti, is in a terrible state. As an Abomination, His demise is more suitable than Him living. It's better for both Him and this world.

"Of course, this can't be a simple death. He chose a good place to die. This will allow His corpse to enjoy peace and tranquility, safe from the Mother Tree of Desire's harassment.

"Now, you should understand. That entity had written a story and created a coincidence, allowing you to come into contact with Naboredisley in the Feynapotter Kingdom. Then, you went to Hanth Island and the New City of Silver. His goal was to send information to Naboredisley in the dream ancient tomb, allowing Him to continue sleeping and be a corpse instead of being resurrected. Simultaneously, this also prevents various factions from trying to obtain the Sequence 1 Beyonder characteristic.

"Tsk, as expected of a remnant from ancient times. He's the protagonist who personally ended the rule of the ancient gods. The secrets and various key matters He knows perhaps exceed all of us combined.

"Apart from Him and the Evernight Goddess, who else would know about mysticism festivals like the Dream Festival, which you forget when you wake up? Who would have thought that the corpse was part of the Devil Monarch?

"The substantial digestion of the Reaper potion, the acquisition of the golden mask, and the formation of the corroded soil should be the rewards He promised.

"Remember to give me that corroded soil. It's useless to you, but I can help you exchange it for something. It might also present an opportunity, but I can't discern what it is for now.

"And with that golden mask, you can boldly venture into the Underworld when the opportunity arises in the future. Otherwise, the living won't be able to stay in the Underworld for even a second.

"Those golden masks come from the fallen Death, the ancestor of the Eggers family. They were originally created to assist Death's direct descendants in entering and exiting the Underworld and Death's kingdom.

"Their purpose is twofold. Firstly, to protect the wearer from the corrosion of the aura of death. Secondly, to transform the wearer into an undead creature. Their bodies no longer have vital points, while their minds and consciousness can maintain their living state.

"Do you understand why Naboredisley's corpse wore the Death mask? If it didn't, it would have died completely in the dream tomb, with no possibility of revival.

"Similarly, knowing the golden mask's functions and the state of the corpse, you should understand why Hisoka put on the golden mask. It allows a corpse to mistake Hisoka for one of its kind without affecting him. It also protects Hisoka from the corrosion of the tomb's aura of death.

"The first phantom that experienced an Ascension activated the corpse's sleeping spirit under the golden mask's protection, but without awakening His consciousness. In this state, Hisoka can use His resemblance to the corpse to make the corpse mistake Him for His spirit and accept His dominance. Isn't this style familiar? That Celestial Worthy is indeed the strongest god who seeks out errors and exploits loopholes.

"By the time the second phantom that underwent Ascension entered the dream ancient tomb, the corpse's consciousness would have been basically awakened. Even if Hisoka were still alive, he wouldn't be able to complete his grand plan.

"That's the gist of the matter. The Numinous Episcopate's purpose is the ancient tomb itself, the golden mask that has endured the corresponding corrosion in the tomb for over a millennium. The Nois family's archduke, a collaborator of the Rose School of Thought, desires Naboredisley's corpse, while the temperance faction seeks to retrieve Miss Messenger's heart. Their goals were actually different, yet they fought to the death. I have to say, it's quite humorous and ironic.

"Of course, this is mainly because they can't trust each other, and there's indeed a possibility that it's a situation where the winner takes all. Does Miss Messenger want to consume Naboredisley's Abomination body? Of course She does!"

Miss Messenger… The lady who used the lucky gold coin to buy the heart from Ludwig? Why is she called Miss Messenger? It's impossible for Her to be someone's messenger, right? She's an Angel! Uh… Mr. Fool's messenger? So that's why there's a lucky gold coin closely related to Mr. Fool… Lumian was sharp, and he quickly made a guess.

He continued reading the last part of the letter.

"I forgot to mention that wearing that golden mask also poses problems.

"As you can imagine, once you transform into an undead creature and don't have any vital points on your body, the purification of sunlight and lightning will be fatal to you. Moreover, if a living person wears that golden mask for too long, they will truly become deceased. When that time comes, once the mask is removed, their mind and consciousness will be unprotected and they will die immediately.

"Let me see what else I haven't mentioned…

"Yes, you said that the Underworld Daoist and Naboredisley's corpse had looked at Iveljsta Eggers without doing anything to him. That gave me some ideas.

"It's highly likely that the one who helped bury Naboredisley's Abomination corpse and construct the dream grave was the ancestor of the Eggers family, the deceased Death.

"After He went mad, perhaps He interacted with the Underworld Daoist, who guarded the river and the Blood Emperor's afterimage. And for some reason, He agreed to Naboredisley's request for help, causing His Abomination corpse to slumber in a special dream.

"Therefore, be it the Underworld Daoist or Naboredisley's corpse, even if they only have their instincts left, they will still treat the Eggers family's bloodline specially."

Chapter 698: Aftermath

Considering Madam Magician's conjecture, Lumian suddenly felt that the deceased Death, the ancestor of the Eggers family, was indeed legendary.

After becoming a true god, He seemed to have gone mad. He incited the Pale Disaster. His demise created the Berserk Sea, isolating the Northern and Southern Continents for more than a millennium. He had a connection to the mysterious Underworld Daoist. He buried the Abomination corpse of the Devil Monarch. He left behind the massive Balam Empire with numerous descendants. The golden mask He created for His descendants to enter and exit the Underworld is still being fought over to this day…

Lumian retrieved the golden mask he had obtained from Hisoka from his Traveler's Bag. He caressed its cold surface and sighed silently.

This is a true deity's creation…

With a sigh, Lumian read the last two pages of the lengthy letter.

"Back to yourself. The Underworld Daoist mark on you only seals the influence of the Blood Emperor's remnant aura on the outside world. It doesn't eliminate its existence.

"In other words, you can no longer use Alista Tudor's remnant aura to scare others. However, it can still be useful when you need to verify your corresponding 'identity.'

"There are pros and cons to this situation. Although you've lost your potent means of intimidating others, you don't have to worry about attracting the attention of certain high-ranking individuals by using the Blood Emperor's remnant aura. Furthermore, the Underworld Daoist mark might have a special effect in the future.

"Emperor Roselle once said that since you can't resist, try to enjoy yourself."

Lumian turned his right hand over and looked at his palm. Compared to the decay in his dream, only a small pale-white mark remained. Beneath the pale-whiteness, a faint red scarred mark could be seen.

What special use can it have? To intimidate the undead? Lumian muttered to himself in puzzlement, momentarily at a loss.

At the end of the letter, Madam Magician wrote:

"This year's Dream Festival may have ended, but the special dream and ancient tomb haven't disappeared. The Dream Festival will still happen next year.

"When the time comes, the Demon from the Nois family and His Rose School of Thought allies, who confirmed the ancient tomb's situation this year, might continue their attempts. They might even bring more targeted and powerful items, Beyonders, or projections.

"Not only do we have to stop them when the time comes, but we also have to make preparations in advance.

"Furthermore, for the special dream to still have dream projections as guardians, we can't relocate the entirety of Tizamo. Therefore, we have to do something for the people here.

"Of course, after completing the last task, the subsequent problems of the Dream Festival will have nothing to do with you unless you become an Angel by then. But isn't that too far-fetched?

"The last thing you need to do is enter that special dream with the half-finished brass charm I sent with the letter and perform the following ritual before the black ancient tomb.

"The complete process of the ritual is:

"…"

After carefully reading the ritual's description, Lumian assessed his spirituality and stowed away the half-finished brass charm.

Then, he retrieved the golden box containing the peculiar soil, unfolded the letter, and penned a reply:

"Honorable Madam Magician,

"I will follow your instructions and complete the ritual.

"This is that strange soil…"

Lumian paused and added:

"Remember to send back the box containing it."

It was made of gold!

Recalling Lugano's promise of compensation and Ludwig's growing appetite, Lumian, who was quite wealthy, felt the need to be frugal.

He didn't need to worry about the potion formula, Beyonder ingredients, or mystical items for the time being, but he needed to provide for two people now!

Furthermore, gold played an important role in mysticism. Franca had been accumulating gold in recent months, hoping to forge a golden body for "Armored Shadow" Chen Tu.

After writing the reply, Lumian set up a ritual and summoned the "doll" messenger.

The messenger remained cautious and furtive, not uttering a word.

What did it sense? Lumian was about to inquire when he suddenly thought of a possibility.

Could it be because Miss Messenger, whom Madam Magician mentioned, had been here?

They are both messengers, so they might know each other and be related. And that person is an Angel…

Lumian shut his mouth and watched as the "doll" messenger retreated into the candlelight with the golden box.

He extinguished the candle, stowed away the ritual-related items, and returned to the living room. He sat across from Ludwig, who still had half his food left untouched.

Lumian looked at Ludwig, who wore a blue pajama hat with yellow stars, and smiled.

"Lend me something."

Ludwig raised his head, his mouth moving as he inquired with his eyes.

Lumian maintained a friendly smile.

"The gold coin from earlier."

Ludwig lowered his head and focused on eating a piece of beef jerky, as if he hadn't heard Lumian.

"It'll only take half an hour. Yes, half an hour. I won't cause any harm. I'll definitely return it to you as it was," Lumian said with a sigh. "I've been providing for you for a long time, giving you food and drink…"

At this point, Lumian suddenly stopped. After a few seconds, he continued, "Isn't that worth lending me your lucky gold coin for half an hour? When have I ever lied to you?"

"Often," Ludwig mumbled.

He looked up at Lumian for a few seconds before retrieving the Loen gold coin from his pocket.

"Twenty minutes, tops."

"Deal!" Lumian swiftly accepted the lucky gold coin with a radiant smile.

To conserve his spirituality, he refrained from teleporting. Instead, he moved swiftly through the shadows and arrived at "Hisoka" Twanaku's house.

Robert and Amandina had already left.

Lumian found a spot and leaned against the wall. Using Cogitation, he quickly drifted off to sleep.

…

In the special dream, in the primitive forest.

Using the shadows in the darkness, Lumian reached the edge of the dream and found himself in the chaotic zone.

After some thought, he left the shadow and donned the golden mask crafted by Death.

Amidst the cold corrosion and heavy pressure, Lumian saw a dream fragment of a black ancient tomb and the path leading to it.

He quickly reached his destination. The corpses had vanished, leaving only the ancient tomb, resembling a black boulder, standing silently.

Lumian removed the mask and observed for a moment. Using a raised tree root as an altar, he placed candles, essential oil, herbal powder, a cauldron, and the half-finished brass charm on it. He followed the instructions in Madam Magician's letter and dealt with them one by one.

Finally, Lumian placed the lucky gold coin between the two candles corresponding to Mr. Fool.

Instead of creating a wall of spirituality, he lit the candles in the order from god to person, from left to right, and took two steps back.

Lumian gazed at the burning candle flame and recited in ancient Hermes, "The Fool that doesn't belong to this era, the mysterious ruler above the gray fog; the King of Yellow and Black who wields good luck…"

Silently, a thin gray fog emanated from the void, enveloping the area around the black ancient tomb and the entire special dream.

Lumian's left chest heated up slightly, preventing his thoughts from slowing down, and his body showed no signs of disintegrating.

He quickly took two steps forward and ignited the corresponding essential oil extract and herbal powder. He placed the half-finished brass charm in the center of the altar.

Then, Lumian straightened up and said in Hermes, "I implore you,

"I implore you to grant this charm power.

"I implore you to allow this power to control this dream…"

After reciting all the remaining incantations and completing the remaining steps of the ritual, Lumian saw the lucky gold coin emit a hazy glow. One of the candles representing Mr. Fool darkened, and the other took on a brass hue.

Immediately after, the darkness and brass candlelight entangled with the half-finished brass charm.

The brass charm emitted a blinding light, and Lumian couldn't help but close his eyes.

By the time he adjusted and opened his eyes, the brass charm had vanished. The soil, rocks, and tree roots in front of the black ancient tomb surged, forming a tombstone-like object.

Ancient Feysac words appeared on the tombstone one after another:

"All living beings are equal before the law. Even Angels can be killed by ordinary people.

"Lost items are regarded as abandonment.

"Anything can be done during the Dream Festival, but not killing or rape.

"Murderers shall die.

"Rapists shall die.

"…"

What… What pathway's power is this? It resembles the Arbiter pathway… Killing isn't allowed for the next Dream Festival? Even an Angel can be harmed by me? Lumian hadn't expected Madam Magician's preparations.

He swiftly packed his belongings and planned to leave the area.

Finally, Lumian had an idea when he saw the "tombstone."

With a smile, he retrieved a card from his Traveler's Bag, bent down, and placed it on the ground beneath the tombstone.

It was a tarot card depicting a man in green holding a wand against attacking wands at the foot of a mountain.

Minor Arcana card, Seven of Wands!

Lumian didn't know if the tarot cards representing him could remain in the dream or in front of the tombstone. He simply wanted to give it a try. After all, he hadn't done so since becoming a member of the Tarot Club.

…

Upon returning to the real world, Lumian reached into his Traveler's Bag and examined it.

As expected, the half-finished brass charm had vanished, as had the Minor Arcana card, the Seven of Wands.

The rules of the special dream are indeed a little different… Lumian nodded thoughtfully and returned the lucky gold coin to Ludwig at the Brieu Motel.

Then, Lumian stepped onto the street. In the darkness, he passed Camus, Rhea, Lugano, and the others, who were busy rescuing and treating people, and arrived at Saint-Sien Cathedral.

All the candles in the cathedral had been lit, but only Padre Cali was present.

Dressed in a white robe adorned with golden threads, he knelt before the altar and the Sacred Emblem, his head bowed in anguish.

Lumian walked in step by step and took a seat in the front row. He watched Padre Cali quietly without disturbing him.

Chapter 699: Who is to Blame?

The smoke and dust caused by the meteorite had mostly dissipated, and the commotion on the street had gradually subsided. The injured had largely escaped danger thanks to swift treatment, but some still perished, eliciting occasional cries of anguish.

Inside Saint-Sien Cathedral, Padre Cali completed his penance. He stood and turned to face Lumian, who sat silently in the front pew, observing him.

Lumian chuckled and asked casually, "Is repentance still of any use?"

Without waiting for a response, he added habitually, "You must know your fate is sealed. You won't survive more than a few days."

Paleness showed through Padre Cali's dark-brown complexion as he calmly replied, "If repentance worked, it wouldn't be true repentance."

This statement seemed to bring him a measure of peace.

"I repented because I wanted to, not to bargain for understanding or redemption. Looking back, I have indeed made many mistakes. I yearned for higher status and the approval of you Northerners. That desire blinded me, and I succumbed to the Demon's temptations."

Lumian scoffed upon hearing this.

"Is that truly the case? Did desire actually cloud your judgment?"

Noting the padre's bewildered expression, Lumian leaned back and gazed up at the Sun Sacred Emblem.

"Did your ambition for prestige and recognition from Northerners force you to collaborate with Twanaku, compel you to become a Wraith as an Eternal Blazing Sun padre, make you receptive to the Demon's allure, or drive you to exploit those boys? No, you chose this path of your own volition."

Padre Cali's lips quivered as if to object, but he couldn't find the words.

Lumian smiled and continued, "Many in this world still crave elevated status and the recognition of certain groups. Most of them simply work hard to contribute and combat evil with all their strength. They never consort with Demons, hoping to attain their goals through righteous means. Even in the face of repeated failure, they don't descend into the abyss.

"They share the same desires, yet they maintain self-control while you could not. Desire didn't cloud your mind—your mind chose depravity."

Padre Cali fell silent, at a loss for words.

Lumian sighed with a smile.

"A relative once told me, 'Intense desire fuels human progress, but it's also the demon that drags humans into the abyss. Good or bad, light or darkness—it all hinges on us, on that single thought in a pivotal moment.'"

His face growing ever paler, Padre Cali lowered his head and rasped, "I have sinned…"

Lumian pressed a hand to his chest, his expression settling.

He looked at Padre Cali and laughed self-deprecatingly.

"I too have strong desires. Everyone does. If harboring intense desire is a sin, then you are a sinner, and so am I. We are all guilty."

Padre Cali's expression froze momentarily before he slowly turned around.

Kneeling once more before the altar, he gazed up at the immense Sun Sacred Emblem and spoke in a deep voice, "You are innocent. Desire itself is not sinful, but I am a true sinner."

He bowed his head as his body gradually became ethereal and transparent.

Thus, Padre Cali manifested as a Wraith before the Sacred Emblem.

An icy, sinister aura emanated from him, triggering a reaction from the emblem and altar.

The entire cathedral trembled slightly. A brilliant, sunlight-

like radiance seeped from the altar, emblem, stained glass, and religious murals, rapidly converging at the domed ceiling.

A dazzling golden pillar of light, accompanied by a hymnal voice, descended upon Padre Cali.

The Wraith-form padre trembled faintly but did not evade.

Under the searing holy light, his body disintegrated into ashes.

Lumian observed this scene expressionlessly, feeling neither joy nor sorrow.

As the dome's holy glow dissipated, leaving only candlelight illuminating the cathedral, Lumian remained seated in the front pew, quietly contemplating the spot where Padre Cali had been purified.

After an indeterminate span, Camus and Rhea entered the cathedral, having finished their disaster relief efforts.

Camus sighed in relief upon seeing Louis Berry in the front row.

He smiled and said, "We still lack composure, prone to panic when calamity strikes. We were so focused on aiding the injured and trapped that we never anticipated a detestable man like Padre Cali suddenly going mad and trying to drag others down with him. It's fortunate you were here."

Rhea surveyed the surroundings and asked, "Where is Padre Cali?"

Lumian stared ahead at the altar and replied plainly, "After repenting, he utilized the cathedral's accumulated spirituality and the Sacred Emblem's unique properties to purify himself."

Rhea fell silent. After a few seconds, she spread her arms and proclaimed, "Praise the Sun!"

She then took a seat in the front pew on the opposite side, clasped her hands, bowed her head, and prayed fervently.

For a moment, Camus was unsure whether to sit or remain standing.

Lumian turned to him. "Have you recovered Reaza's Beyonder characteristic?"

Camus paused before responding, "Yes."

"And Maslow's?" Lumian shifted his gaze back to the Sacred Emblem.

"Its whereabouts are unknown," Camus replied.

Lumian stated calmly, "It should be in the meteorite impact zone."

Camus was taken aback. "Was the meteorite meant to claim most of the deceased? Is the Dream Festival's power truly that immense?"

"More potent than you realize," Lumian replied, as if discussing the next day's weather. "Reaza and Maslow belong to the Numinous Episcopate's Royal faction. Admiral Querarill is aware of their identities and that Reaza came to Tizamo to fulfill a mission assigned by the Royal faction's superiors."

Camus's expression shifted as he exhaled slowly.

"Even without you mentioning this, I wouldn't have harbored any ill will towards Captain Reaza. He did save me on multiple occasions, and this time, he didn't overtly betray me but rather the patrol team. My sense of belonging to the team isn't that strong.

"Now, I'm just relieved he's not a traitor."

Lumian smiled provocatively and said, "It benefits you as well. Port Pylos's patrol team now has a vacant vice-captain position, and your rival is already dead."

Camus didn't rise to the bait, smiling wryly instead.

"I plan to leave Matani.

"Thanks to your generosity, I've nearly saved enough to advance to Sequence 6. It's safer and simpler to return to my family and contact the main branch than to search the outside world.

"The patrol team is a small organization, after all. Sequence 6 is the limit. To reach Sequence 5, I'd need to forge close ties with the Numinous Episcopate, Rose School of Thought, Intis Bureau 8, the Eternal Blazing Sun Church, or the Church of Earth Mother, or become Admiral Querarill's trusted aide. Given my Castiya surname, the choice is clear."

If the Castiya royal family truly accepts you, your potential would be far greater… Lumian chuckled and said, "I thought you were leaving this place of sorrow due to a failed romance."

Camus abruptly choked on his saliva and coughed several times.

After Rhea concluded her prayers, she departed the cathedral with Camus.

Lumian lingered in the front pew, savoring the solitude.

After a while, Amandina appeared at the entrance, clad in black hunting attire.

"Why are you alone here?" the girl muttered, her gaze darting about as if searching for something.

"Why have you come?" Lumian asked nonchalantly.

Amandina sat beside him and chuckled.

"I wanted to see if Robert would come looking for the dying Padre Cali, but surprisingly, you're the only one here."

"Padre Cali purified himself. I doubt Robert has been here," Lumian answered truthfully.

"Is that so…" Amandina felt a pang of disappointment. "If he had really come to confront Padre Cali, it would mean he still is a man…"

Lumian remained silent.

Amandina faced the altar and Sacred Emblem, offering a brief prayer.

Her task complete, she glanced around eagerly and asked, "Will there be another Dream Festival next year?"

"Yes." Lumian didn't hide anything.

Joy instantly lit up Amandina's features.

"Is that black ancient tomb still there? Can I gain superpowers by touching it again?"

"Of course," Lumian turned to her, smiling. "But the outsiders participating in next year's Dream Festival will be even stronger and more terrifying, surpassing the evil cloth doll, crystal skull, and human skin man you encountered."

Amandina's expression fell.

"Really? In that case, I'll find an excuse to stay in Port Pylos during next year's festival and bring my parents along."

"Have you returned to Palm Manor?" Lumian inquired.

Amandina sighed and smiled.

"I went back briefly. Not wanting to disrupt their facade of love, I left again."

She paused, eyes sparkling with curiosity.

"Besides touching the black tomb, are there other ways for me to advance my Sequence?"

"You can buy formulas and drink potions to progress along one of three paths—Sleepless, Corpse Collector, or Warrior," Lumian divulged the relevant mystical knowledge without reservation. After some thought, he added, "Also, it wasn't the black tomb that granted you superpowers. It was that figure…"

Lumian was suddenly perplexed.

What was the connection between Amandina, Robert, and the Underworld Daoist?

Typically, boons were bestowed upon believers by deities or angels, but Amandina and Robert had no faith in the Underworld Daoist. They weren't even aware of His existence.

Considering the conventions of various secret organizations and the customs Franca occasionally mentioned, Amandina should have addressed the Underworld Daoist as "Teacher"!

Chapter 700: Return

In the special dream, Amandina mentioned that the figure, known as the Underworld Daoist, had nodded at her… "Armored Shadow" Chen Tu is suspected to be related to the Underworld Daoist… Franca is accumulating gold to create a golden body for Chen Tu to obtain more information… Lumian's mind raced with these thoughts.

He turned to Amandina with a smile.

"You won't only encounter that figure during the Dream Festival."

"It's possible normally?" Amandina asked, surprised.

What kind of smarts do you have… Lumian inwardly criticized, shaking his head and smiling.

"What I mean is, it's not just in Tizamo where you can encounter that figure on a specific date."

Amandina pondered for a few moments before grasping the underlying meaning behind Louis Berry's words.

"Have you seen that figure elsewhere?

"I thought you couldn't see him and could only observe through me?"

Thankfully, you're not that dense… Lumian retrieved the golden mask from his Traveler's Bag.

"I could see after putting this on."

Without waiting for Amandina's response, Lumian added with a smile, "I did encounter that figure elsewhere."

He used "encounter" instead of "meeting" to ensure his statement couldn't be more truthful.

He wanted to say, "I even know His name," but didn't feel like explaining to Amandina why he used the pronoun "He" to address the Underworld Daoist respectfully.

Amandina's expression turned excited. "Where?"

"In Trier," Lumian replied honestly.

This was the information he wanted the other party to know.

"Trier…" Amandina felt a mix of captivation and fear.

As an Intisian born and raised on the Southern Continent, she had heard countless rumors about the Capital of Joy and understood its vibrancy and prosperity. Trier had nearly become her dream paradise, but the furthest she had ventured was Port Pylos, never leaving Matani. If given the chance to visit Trier, fear was her initial reaction.

After all, she was still a girl under 18.

Lumian continued candidly, "In the future, I know someone who might interact with that figure. I hope you can provide her with some assistance—the non-combat kind.

"To that end, I can take you to Trier and help you enter the area where the figure might appear. I can also provide some protection.

"How about it? Do you want to strike such a deal?"

"I-I…" Amandina hesitated, instinctively seeking an excuse. "My parents won't allow me to leave Matani for Trier now. At the very least, I have to wait until I get a chance to attend university there."

Lumian found it amusing and remarked, "I'm not asking you to permanently relocate to Trier. You can go on Saturday and return on Sunday."

"Huh?" Amandina was taken aback.

She had imagined a long-distance voyage, hiking through mountains and wading across rivers, forever bidding farewell to her home.

Lumian arched an eyebrow.

"It's not like I haven't teleported you in the dream before."

"B-but isn't that just a small area?" Amandina's eyes lit up. "Can you really teleport directly from Matani to Trier?"

Lumian nodded slightly.

"Yes, I might need to make a transit once or twice along the way, but it will still allow you to reach Trier quickly."

"Quickly…" Amandina's interest was piqued. She yearned to experience such wonders.

However, she didn't make a decision immediately.

Lumian didn't rush her.

"No need to decide right away. Meeting that figure again is actually quite dangerous. You should first truly come into contact with Matani's mysticism circle and learn the basics about Beyonders from Rhea. Only then should you consider accepting this deal. It might take three months, half a year, or even a year."

Amandina breathed a sigh of relief. "Understood."

Curious, she asked, "Is your friend a woman?"

He had used the pronoun "she."

In our hearts and minds, she has always been one. As for how she identifies, sometimes yes, sometimes no… Lumian inwardly criticized Franca and nodded slightly.

"Yes."

Amandina asked excitedly, "Your lover?"

Lumian chuckled.

"Of course not. Why do you always fixate on such matters?"

As Lumian spoke, he retrieved a post-it note and fountain pen from his Traveler's Bag. He scribbled a few lines and handed them to Amandina.

Amandina took it and carefully read it under the cathedral's candlelight:

"A creature wandering above the world, the penitent who awakens from the flames of pain, a messenger that belongs solely to Lumian Lee."

"What's this?" Amandina was bewildered.

"My messenger. Set up a ritual once you've made up your mind. Use this incantation to summon my messenger and inform me of your decision," Lumian explained simply.

Amandina grew increasingly perplexed.

"What ritual? What summoning? This isn't a conventional messenger?"

Lumian raised his eyebrows again.

"Have you never heard of a messenger in the mysticism domain? Don't you know about summoning rituals?"

Amandina smiled sheepishly and said, "I came into contact with superpowers last year and gathered some information about the pathways of the divine through Robert and a few mysticism enthusiasts. I know about rituals, but I'm not sure about the details."

Then, her eyes lit up.

"You'll teach me, won't you? Otherwise, I wouldn't be able to summon your messenger.

"Also, is your real name not Louis Berry, but Lumian Lee?

"Y-you took a pen and paper from that coin bag. You also took your previous items from there. What kind of mystical item is this?

"…"

Lumian couldn't help but glance up at the golden spherical dome.

…

The following morning, Lumian left the Brieu Motel with Ludwig and Lugano. They passed through streets still strewn with ruins and arrived at Bunia's café.

The owner, Bunia, maintained his usual shyness and politely inquired about their needs.

Lumian ordered three cups of Cosa coffee and three servings of Matani's specialty breakfast, Ocapa.

Ocapa was made from rice, chicken, eggs, potatoes, and common local spices wrapped in leaves from the Ocapa trees. It was filling and fragrant, and one couldn't stop eating once they started.

Lumian gazed at the spread of Ocapa, picked up his cutlery, and scooped a spoonful into his mouth.

The fragrance of the leaves, the salted egg yolk, the weightiness of the rice, the tenderness of the chicken, the softness of the potatoes, and the strange rich aroma combined to create a unique texture.

As Lumian ate, he casually surveyed the pedestrians and café patrons on the street.

After the sorrow and fear of the previous night, they had become gentle again, no longer revealing excessive emotions. When they spoke to others, they always had a faint smile on their faces.

After Ludwig finished his second meal of the morning, Lumian found a secluded corner, changed into winter clothes, and disappeared from Tizamo with him and Lugano.

This time, Lumian refrained from teleporting directly to Franca, as Lugano, Ludwig, and the two Demonesses were unfamiliar with each other.

Lumian chose the rarely used entrance to Underground Trier in Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative. The trio swiftly outlined themselves on the steel steps.

Upon returning to the surface, Lumian spotted a few college students carrying carbide lamps and lanterns. They jested as they passed by the trio and entered Underground Trier.

As he turned onto the nearest main street, the first thing Lumian saw was a scantily clad man in chains. He crawled slowly along the street in a dog-like manner. If anyone dared to glance at him, he would glare back and bark twice.

In the next moment, the street artists on the corner played a rhythmic melody. Passersby more or less danced with relaxed and satisfied smiles on their faces. The man acting as a dog and trembling in the cold wind also raised his hind leg.

This was very different from the streets in the market district.

Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative was renowned for its numerous universities.

Lumian averted his gaze from the pedestrians' smiles and led Lugano and Ludwig to Anthony's nearby rented house.

It was on the fourth floor, near the end of the corridor.

Knock! Knock! Knock! Lumian knocked on the door without hesitation.

Soon, he saw Anthony, who was dressed differently from before.

In a white shirt, light gray cashmere sweater, black tweed coat, dark-red bow tie, gold-rimmed glasses, and a light-

yellow wig, his beard was cleanly shaven, and his face was no longer greasy. The black grime in his pores was gone. He had the air of a successful member of high society.

"Are you in a relationship?" Lumian jested.

Anthony replied with a smile, "I'm attending a banquet hosted by the Trier Psychiatrist Guild today."

This was a necessary prerequisite for completing Madam Justice's mission.

Lumian entered the room and asked casually, "Have you obtained a psychiatrist license?"

Anthony nodded.

"I acquired a genuine identity and educational background. During the interview, I successfully 'convinced' the examiner."

"A genuine identity? Where's its original owner?" Lumian asked thoughtfully.

Anthony glanced at Lugano and Ludwig but didn't directly answer Lumian's question.

"What can I do for you?"

Lumian understood Anthony's meaning and temporarily abandoned the question. He briefly mentioned the Dream Festival's situation and the aftereffects of Lugano losing his arm in the dream.

He didn't mention how Lugano had lost his arm.

Anthony listened attentively and looked at Lugano.

"Such hysteria is easily resolved. Do you need a faster solution, or do you want it to be slower and gentler?"

Lugano replied without hesitation, "The faster one."

He had lost control of his right forearm!

Anthony's gaze shifted to Lugano's left side, furrowing his brow.

Lugano subconsciously turned to his left and followed suit.

At that moment, Anthony produced a dagger from nowhere and thrust it at Lugano's right forearm.

Lugano swiftly retracted his hand and blurted out, "What are you doing!?"

Anthony sheathed his dagger and replied calmly, "The treatment is over."

"Huh?" Lugano looked at his right hand in confusion and realized that it had "retracted" to his chest without being impeded.

Lumian chuckled and said to Lugano, "Keep an eye on Ludwig. Remember to prepare food for him."

Without waiting for Lugano's response, Lumian turned to Anthony. "Let's go find Franca and Jenna now."

Anthony glanced at Lumian and adjusted the gold-rimmed glasses he was unaccustomed to. "Alright."

Chapter 701: The Cheerful Franca

In Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative, Apartment 702, 9 Rue Orosai.

Franca, dressed in a camel-colored cashmere coat, shivered and said to Lumian, "As soon as I have the money, I'm definitely renting a villa with underfloor heating!"

The concept of underfloor heating was proposed by Emperor Roselle. By laying metal pipes in the house during construction, boiling water could flow through them, providing summer-like warmth in confined spaces and keeping out the cold weather.

This was a must-have amenity for Trier's current upscale residences.

"Why would a Demoness like you be afraid of the cold?" Lumian scoffed.

He glanced at Jenna and noticed she was wearing a black cotton dress and dark makeup, as if portraying a Witch or Vampire in the little details of her daily life.

"I'm not a Pyromaniac. A Demoness's black flames have no temperature!" Franca retorted with a smile.

Lumian casually settled onto the divan.

"Aren't Demonesses skilled with ice? Don't they have resistance to frost and cold?"

Franca reclined in her recliner, pulled up a cashmere blanket, and chuckled.

"I admit my performance just now was a little exaggerated, but Trier's winters really are cold. It's mainly because it's so humid. It's like being soaked in a semi-frozen lake."

After the small talk, Franca sighed and said, "I've already obtained more information about Moran Avigny and the corresponding security detail. We can put the capture plan on the agenda. And you, my friend, are about to participate in the Dream Festival. Talk about a scheduling conflict."

Lumian's expression remained unchanged as he replied, "The Dream Festival is over."

"Huh?" Franca and Jenna were taken aback.

Already?

Lumian recounted everything that had transpired during the Dream Festival, including Madam Magician's subsequent explanation.

Of course, as the name Farbauti couldn't be pronounced in any language, Lumian referred to it as the Devil Monarch and replaced Naboredisley with "the Demon with a long name."

Franca's breathing quickened upon hearing that Lumian had donned a golden mask and spotted the suspected Underworld Daoist. Lumian's description of the Underworld Daoist's attire made her eyes light up like sunlight dancing on a lake.

Thankfully, her self-control was impressive. She endured until Lumian finished explaining the entire situation before asking anxiously, "Will there be another Dream Festival next year?"

"You want to participate in next year's Dream Festival and come into direct contact with the Underworld Daoist?" Lumian could guess Franca's thoughts.

Franca nodded emphatically.

"I believe that if the Underworld Daoist can bestow the Evernight pathway's power on Amandina, I, uh, a Demoness, shouldn't have any issues either. I wouldn't mind taking Him as my master!

"Don't worry. As long as I remain lucid, I won't unleash my bestial instincts during the Dream Festival."

She teased herself.

Originally, you wanted to say that you're from the same homeland and not a Demoness, right? Lumian chuckled and said, "It's not impossible, but you have to become an Angel first."

"…" Franca fell silent.

Jenna pondered and said, "There's something I don't understand. Isn't it the case that after obtaining the ability to stay lucid in the special dream, the corresponding dream projection will gradually dissipate? Why didn't Hisoka's?"

Lumian had already considered this question.

"Perhaps this is one of the reasons Hisoka had to leave Tizamo.

"The ability to stay lucid in the special dream shouldn't be permanent. Once you leave Tizamo, it will gradually fade. Therefore, Hisoka not only had to leave Tizamo, but also had to return two to three times a year for at least a week each time to maintain the existence of the dream projection."

After discussing the Dream Festival, Franca briefly recounted the information she had obtained from 007 the previous night.

"Moran Avigny's family has a long history. Members span the military, political, artistic, and business worlds. Combined with the information Madam Judgment gave us, I suspect this is a branch of the Tamara family. Their dark-gray eyes are one of the defining characteristics of the Tamara bloodline!

"Of course, not everyone with dark-gray eyes belongs to the Tamara family. It's more that members of the family are likely to have dark-gray eyes.

"Based on the close connection between a large branch of the Tamara family and the Demoness Sect, it's very likely that Demoness of Black Clarice also shares the Tamara family's bloodline.

"Following my hypothesis, the Demoness of Black might be a mixed-blood descendant of the Sauron family who pledged allegiance to the Demoness Sect and the Tamara family."

This was the only explanation for Demoness of Black Clarice's reaction when she heard about the Sauron family. It was also the only explanation for her indulging Browns Sauron!

Lumian didn't interrupt as Franca continued, "We need to face not only Moran Avigny but also the hidden Tamara family and the Mirror People faction. Moran Avigny might possess powerful Beyonder powers himself. Furthermore, Bureau 8, Purifiers, and Machinery Hivemind rotate daily, with a regular Beyonder team providing protection.

"What my friend means is that if we're unafraid of sacrifice, there's still a chance of assassinating Moran Avigny. However, capturing him alive or channeling his spirit is very difficult and dangerous."

What 007 truly meant was that the Purifiers wouldn't go easy on us or provide overt assistance. However, if Moran Avigny's true nature as a Mirror Person is exposed after his death, 007 would find a way to allow us—the captured assassins—an opportunity to escape, just like when Jenna killed Hugues Artois. However, if we didn't want to obtain more information about the Mirror People through Moran Avigny, wouldn't it be better to inform the authorities and let them handle the arrest? Lumian pondered for a moment and said to Franca, "Let's not rush into a plan. We'll discuss it tomorrow."

"Why wait until tomorrow?" Franca asked, holding the stack of papers 007 had given her.

Lumian chuckled.

"After I find a safe place to complete my advancement and become a Fate Appropriator, perhaps a special, mixed ability related to fate will appear. That might help us obtain new ideas and come up with more effective solutions."

In the current four-person team, it was no secret that Lumian possessed the power of the Inevitability pathway.

Franca blurted out in surprise, "You can obtain a new boon so quickly?"

"Didn't I just mention it?" Lumian smiled. "I culled nearly 20 Sequence 6 and Sequence 5 bestowed in one go, significantly digesting the potion."

Franca pursed her lips and signaled to Lumian with her eyes: Look, look into my eyes! They're filled with jealousy!

Lumian turned to Anthony and asked, "What did you mean by genuine identity?"

Anthony, who had been listening quietly and was on the verge of being forgotten, explained simply, "Actually, it was a hint from Madam Justice. That identity is very strange. His background, education, and experiences are all real, but there's actually no such person. And the people who might expose this are either long dead or out of town, the kind who won't return for years."

Franca made a judgment based on her experience. "It seems it was meticulously crafted years in advance as a disguise."

Since they weren't discussing a plan to deal with Moran Avigny today, Anthony didn't stay long. He had to prepare for tonight's banquet.

"Where do you plan to advance to Fate Appropriator?" Jenna asked Lumian. "The sacrificial square in the catacombs?"

It belonged to two orthodox gods and could protect advancers from additional interference.

"I'm afraid I'll trigger a taboo and be purified by sunlight," Lumian dismissed the suggestion with amusement. "Advancing to Conspirer is different from advancing to Fate Appropriator."

One belonged to the pathways of the divine, while the other belonged to an evil god's domain!

Lumian had already decided on a location to advance.

It was the Nation of the Evernight!

Termiboros's well-behaved nature kept Lumian concerned that He was waiting for an opportunity to stir up trouble. And as a Fate Appropriator began to involve core abilities in the Inevitability domain, it was very likely that Termiboros would tamper at this Sequence.

Therefore, Lumian had to be cautious. He planned to advance in a safe place that could eliminate many external influences.

Among them, the Nation of the Evernight was the best choice. Furthermore, Lumian had planned to contact Hela in the next two days to share information about the Underworld Daoist and the Dream Festival.

Franca looked at Lumian in enlightenment. "You want to advance at our mysticism gathering?"

"Yes." Lumian nodded slightly.

Franca, who was in a good mood, took the initiative to help. "I'll help you write the letter!"

After she entered the bedroom and closed the door, Lumian looked at Jenna and said, "You're very quiet today."

Jenna smiled. "An excellent theater actress must know how to act like a lady."

Lumian glanced at Franca's door.

"Madame Red Boots seems to be in high spirits today. She's cracking jokes left and right."

"It's true she's been in a good mood recently," Jenna replied truthfully.

Lumian nodded thoughtfully and didn't probe further.

Jenna's lips curled into a smile. "Why don't you keep asking?"

Lumian leaned back on the sofa and laughed self-deprecatingly.

"My sister once taught me that there's no need to inquire too deeply about certain matters. If I know too much, I might regret it. I might even have to face problems I'm unwilling to face."

Jenna listened attentively, placed her hand on her cheek, and asked with a smile, "What are you afraid of?"

Lumian strategically took a sip of black tea and said, "It's not fear; it's respect."

Jenna gazed at him and suddenly laughed.

She didn't press further and chatted with Lumian about the details of Tizamo.

Before long, Franca opened the door and exclaimed with a smile, "It's on for tonight!"

…

At 10 p.m., in the ancient and dilapidated palace of the Nation of the Evernight, Lumian and Franca swiftly materialized, and Hela was already waiting.

Chapter 702: Fate Appropriator

Before Lumian had a chance to say anything, Franca eagerly recounted the events involving the Underworld Daoist during the Dream Festival.

She said excitedly, "The interaction between our two worlds is even more intricate than I had imagined!"

"Who would have thought there was another point of interaction beyond the Samaritan Women's Spring, and it's all tied to that mysterious illusory river."

Silently, Franca mused, It's a shame we still haven't located the man believed to be from our world who was seen on the fourth level of the catacombs… Seriously, what's taking 007, no—the Eternal Blazing Sun Church so long? They haven't even tracked down the traitor who worked with April Fool's…

Once Franca had finished speaking, Lumian provided a concise explanation of the origins of the black ancient tomb and the ancient corpse.

Hela, still in her black widow attire, listened intently, gently nodding her head.

"It's now evident that the illusory river isn't a reference to the River Styx. It must be something far more significant than that."

"Absolutely." Lumian wasn't caught off guard by Hela's statement. "The black ancient tomb doesn't just embody the power of the Death pathway; it also represents the Evernight and Warrior pathways."

In the current world, all the legends surrounding the River Styx were connected to death.

Lumian speculated that this might involve beings such as the Celestial Worthy of Heaven and Earth for Blessings, the Mother Tree of Desire, and the Great Mother, who held multiple thrones linked to various pathways.

Hela glanced at Franca, falling silent for a moment before speaking.

"If the Armored Shadow is right, the Underworld Daoist is in a precarious state. If you intend to interact with Him, you must exercise extreme caution and ensure you have an escape route from the corresponding area."

The Armored Shadow had described the Underworld Daoist as having "sacrificed himself to enter the river," implying the sacrifice of one's physical form or life.

"I understand." Franca let out a sigh. "I'll give this matter more thought once I reach Sequence 5."

As she sighed, a smug thought crossed her mind, The Pleasure potion has been largely digested lately. Even without additional opportunities, I can start preparing for the Demoness of Affliction's advancement ritual within two to three months… I need to begin gathering the necessary potion ingredients now…

I can't mention it, I mustn't mention it—I can't let Lumian know. Bragging would make me seem crass and disrespectful to Jenna…

Lumian's curious gaze alternated between Hela and Franca a couple of times.

He sensed that Madame Hela had something crucial to tell Franca but refrained from doing so.

It was rare for Lumian to perceive Madame Hela as having something on her mind. Her glance at Franca and few seconds of silence gave him the impression of hesitancy.

Regrettably, Franca often has a carefree nature and doesn't pay much attention to details. Otherwise, she might be able to extract some information from her through direct questioning… Lumian's mind raced, and he concluded that if Madame Hela chose not to say anything at this point, she must have her reasons. Thus, he suppressed his curiosity and gestured towards the front of the dilapidated palace.

"I'll get the ritual ready."

"Sounds good," Franca responded with enthusiasm.

While she had witnessed Lumian acquire Ascetic powers, that had taken place in Fourth Epoch Trier. A myriad of dangers had intertwined, causing her to shudder with fear. She had to maintain constant vigilance of her surroundings, unable to "appreciate" the situation with the same level of ease as she could now.

After a moment of contemplation, Lumian retrieved a metal canister from a hidden pocket and tossed it to Franca.

"If things start going poorly for me later on, forcefully break through the wall of spirituality and throw this in front of me or on me."

"Should I unscrew the cap for you?" Franca asked, a smile playing on her lips.

"What do you think?" Lumian arched an eyebrow.

"Naturally," Franca replied, her smile unwavering. "I'm just trying to lighten the mood. I want you to feel at ease."

"I appreciate it!" Lumian turned and made his way to the massive stone chair in the depths of the ancient palace.

His intuition suggested that the huge, mottled stone chair might have a connection to Mr. Fool.

This would enable him to draw Mr. Fool's attention during the impending ritual.

As Franca and Hela watched Lumian arrange the corresponding items on the stone chair, setting it up as an altar and placing a Loen gold pound reverently in front of the grayish-white candle symbolizing the deity, Hela calmly remarked, "Don't be concerned about not receiving a response. The secrets will remain secret, while the rest will be revealed."

Lumian felt himself relax as he consecrated the ritual silver dagger, erecting a wall of spirituality.

The voices of Franca and Hela faded into the background, as if emanating from a great distance.

Rather than rushing into the ritual, Lumian lowered his voice and proactively provoked Termiboros.

"I'm about to extract your power once more. Any thoughts on the matter?"

He aimed to enrage Termiboros to a certain degree. Only then might Termiboros inadvertently expose any concealed issues in His response, allowing Lumian to discern whether this Inevitability Angel was secretly plotting something.

The sooner he uncovered it, the sooner he could address it and find a resolution!

Termiboros's imposing voice resonated.

"The further you venture, the closer you draw to the end. This is an inevitability—irreversible."

"Is that how you console yourself?" Lumian scoffed at Termiboros's enigmatic behavior.

Termiboros's voice reverberated within Lumian's body.

"Boons bring the recipient closer to the bestower. You may believe you're extracting my power, but in truth, you're steadily aligning your fate with mine, becoming more and more like me.

"This grants me glimpses through your eyes and your fate.

"You and I are merely bugs ensnared by fate. Apart from the greatest of existences, all living beings share this commonality.

"In the near future, you will come to understand: "Death is the end of all things, and madness is an eternal melody."

That's essentially the same as saying nothing… Is Termiboros implying that I will face a setback in the near future? Lumian chuckled and said, "Are you deliberately saying this to make me obtain the power of a Fate Appropriator while burdened with worry and fear, hoping I'll die here?

"Don't concern yourself. Death and madness won't deter me."

Without awaiting Termiboros's reply, Lumian fixed his gaze upon the candle flame and recited in a deep, resonant voice, "Power of Inevitability!

"You are the past, the present, and the future;

"You are the cause, the effect, and the process;

"…"

As the ritual progressed, Franca and Hela bore witness to the transformation of all the items on the altar. Stones softened, candles expanded, and the ground decayed into a swamp. Countless strange insects loomed in the void.

The darkness outside the dilapidated palace intensified. A silver-black liquid flowed from Lumian's chest, enveloping him like corrupted mercury.

Lumian writhed in agony. Throughout this process, his body alternated between contortion and normalcy, occasionally assuming postures that defied human anatomy. It was as though he were boneless, his skin and flesh infused with mercury.

Franca was startled and experienced an inexplicable, illusory pain.

Amidst the excruciating and familiar pain, Lumian caught sight of Aurore.

Aurore, with her thick, long blond hair, was attempting the Soul Summoning Spell!

Lumian stepped forward and intervened, stopping Aurore.

Just as he rejoiced in the belief that the problem had been nipped in the bud and Aurore wouldn't fracture into the evil personality of Roche Louise Sanson, he was horrified to discover that Aurore's body had undergone a drastic transformation. In a bloody state, she had expanded into a monster with three heads and six arms, sitting cross-legged.

Lumian witnessed Aurore seeking assistance from Hela. Reluctantly, he offered his help, preventing his sister from forgetting this matter. However, when Hela arrived, Aurore had already transformed into a colossal three-headed, six-armed monster, despite the final ritual not having been performed.

Aurore, at various stages of life, appeared before Lumian. They were on the verge of making pivotal choices.

Lumian desperately tried to alter the Aurores' fates and prevent them from descending into the abyss. However, each time, although he managed to redirect fate to another tributary, Aurore's spirit and flesh ultimately crumbled, transforming her into a three-headed, six-armed monster.

Is this inevitability? Is this an irreversible outcome? Lumian's eyes turned bloodshot as he made increasingly futile efforts.

At that instant, he caught a whiff of an elegant and sweet scent, and a soothing chant echoed in his ears.

Lumian quickly regained his senses and clarity of mind.

The Aurores before him abruptly vanished, leaving only the quietly burning candle flames.

Instinctively, Lumian glanced behind him and realized that Franca and Hela were nearby. The wall of spirituality had been shattered.

Simultaneously, Franca observed the flickering silver and iron-

black colors in Lumian's eyes before they merged and settled into a silvery-black hue.

Lumian exhaled, recognizing that he had evaded danger and successfully acquired the power of a Fate Appropriator.

Yet, a profound sense of frustration and disappointment lingered within him.

What he had just experienced in the illusion seemed to foretell the ultimate outcome of his desire to resurrect Aurore.

After ten to twenty seconds, Lumian finally broke free from those emotions and regained his determination.

How could anyone give up without even trying!

Franca breathed a sigh of relief, screwed the cap back on, and asked with a smile, "How did it go? Any new abilities?"

You really don't consider yourself an outsider. How can you nonchalantly inquire about someone's new Beyonder powers? Lumian silently criticized Franca as he meticulously observed his transformation.

His eyes, which had just returned to normal, once again turned silvery-black, reflecting the images of Franca and Hela.

Then, he perceived the mercury-colored illusory river that corresponded to the two ladies. He saw the sparkling light representing their past and present river trunks and the numerous tributaries that had branched off from the present.

The illusory river slowly advanced, devouring all the tributaries, leaving only one behind, transforming it into the main bulk. The main bulk continued to split into new tributaries…

Lumian noticed that one of the tributaries, regardless of whether it belonged to Franca or Hela, emitted a faint black hue.

Chapter 703: Fused Ability

Black… When it comes to luck, this color signifies they'll face a deadly calamity… If the hue isn't dense, could it mean the calamity is potentially fatal but avoidable—that there's a chance of overcoming it? Yes, I'll watch others going forward. I might spot dense black. Maybe that implies if the corresponding tributary is selected, a deadly fate is sealed… Lumian continued observing Franca and Hela's fates, forming a related hypothesis.

Since the tributaries constantly shifted, Lumian couldn't fully grasp a target's future fate. He could only catch glimpses of a few possibilities. The black "mark" let him pinpoint the critical junctures.

This wasn't covered in the mystical knowledge accompanying a Fate Appropriator's power. Lumian strongly suspected that once Luck Observation evolved into Fate Observation, it could merge with a Reaper's Weakness Investigation to create this unique ability.

It was like exposing a target's physical and spiritual weak points—the tributary leading to their demise!

As I suspected, the Hunter and Inevitability pathways' visual abilities have combined… Lumian used the chance to examine Hela and Franca's fate rivers, realizing he could perceive fragments of their past and present destinies, similar to when he used Fallen Mercury to discern others' fates.

The difference now was that he could see it directly, without extending his spirituality. With the right abilities, he could touch the ethereal river that shimmered with mercury-like ripples, woven from intricate symbols.

Put another way, he could "see" part of a target's fate without their awareness.

Naturally, compared to touching the corresponding fate river through abilities, there were clear limits to relying on eyesight. Most life scenes in the mercury river were quite hazy in such cases. The nearer to the present, the sharper they became. Likewise, the less they involved high-level matters, the clearer they appeared.

Franca and Hela's life scenes presented a vivid, striking contrast in this regard.

Past and present fragments manifesting in Hela's fate river's mercury ripples seemed veiled in fog, while others appeared cloaked in night, making them indiscernible. Only a handful could be perceived. Franca's was far clearer. Especially in the last week or two, Lumian could see everything except scenes with high-level entities like the Evernight Nation, Madam Judgment, and the Demoness of Black.

During his exploratory observation, Lumian was abruptly startled.

After a few seconds, he looked away, unsettled.

"What's the matter?" Franca inquired, curious and concerned. "If you prefer not to disclose your specific abilities, that's fine."

Only then did she realize she had been too eager to ask about the Fate Appropriator's situation and potential abilities in front of Madame Hela.

Lumian couldn't help swallowing hard. Composing himself, he met Hela's gaze.

"There's nothing I can't share.

"I can no longer just observe luck. I can directly perceive the fate river corresponding to each of you. It ranges from the main course to the tributaries, but most is indistinct. I can only clearly detect it when actively using my fate-hunting ability, and there's a time constraint.

"Indeed, among the fate river tributaries I saw, one likely leads to death…"

Lumian succinctly recounted his initial theory, the hue of his eyes gradually normalizing.

"If death isn't inevitable, it should be termed a death calamity," Franca remarked, focusing on the symbolic import of "black."

Death calamity? Lumian and Hela turned to Franca, awaiting clarification.

Franca laughed self-consciously.

"Simply put, if you navigate a catastrophe, crisis, or incident that could cause death, you might emerge alive."

I see… Lumian considered briefly before saying, "Then I'll dub this ability the Eye of Calamity—eyes that can perceive death calamities."

The name mattered little to him. Its utility was paramount.

Lumian then absorbed the mystical knowledge that had entered his body along with a Fate Appropriator's power.

A Fate Appropriator's core actually lay in fate appropriation, split into three abilities.

The first was Fate Appropriation. By touching the target's fate river, he could appropriate and extract the desired fate.

This differed somewhat from Fallen Mercury's abilities. One needn't kill the target to Appropriate their fate, but it required time. The less weighty the corresponding fate, the quicker the process, and vice-versa.

A fate fragment's weightiness denoted its significance to the target's overall fate.

Naturally, Lumian could also Appropriate a fragment of the target's fate by slaying them. Moreover, the target's overall fate would be locked without further changes. The time to complete the Appropriation was very brief.

As a Fate Appropriator, Lumian could compress two fate fragments within himself, surpassing Fallen Mercury's single one.

Usually, there could be three, but Lumian hadn't been a Dancer or acted as an Alms Monk. He hadn't even signed a full set of special contracts. Meaning, during the Inevitability domain's initial trio of stages, he had seldom neared the power bestower in daily life. The fusion with the powers was comparatively weak.

Had he not cultivated an Ascetic's core spirit, perhaps he could have stored merely one fate fragment.

The second ability was Fate Exchange, where one's accrued fate was traded for a specific fate of the target.

Ideally, the fate fragments' weightiness should match. Light for light, heavy for heavy. If not, the exchange would be quite slow, maybe taking five to six minutes.

The fate fragment's importance was one facet, while its importance to the individual was another. Together, they would influence the exchange speed. Still, generally, it was swifter than directly Appropriating the corresponding fate—

barring Appropriating from a slain target.

Be it Fate Appropriation or Fate Exchange, there were limits barring him from attacking targets until he finished them.

In this respect, it lacked Fallen Mercury's convenience and flexibility.

The third ability was Compelling Fate. It entailed expending an enormous amount of spirituality to directly compel the target's future toward a tributary.

Originally, this ability didn't function this way. It primarily swayed the target's future fate via rituals, curses, and other means. Yet, after fusing with the Reaper trait, it could directly compel fates.

This combination with the Eye of Calamity allowed Lumian to discern certain possibilities.

Naturally, after careful assessment, he deduced his dual spirituality as a Reaper and Fate Appropriator could only permit two compulsions.

A Fate Appropriator's core abilities are the deepening and streamlining of the Luck Transference Spell… Lumian gave an overall appraisal.

Upon becoming a Fate Appropriator, the ceiling of contracts he could withstand as a Contractee had hit twelve. The endurance stemming from being an Ascetic had also risen markedly.

This spurred Lumian to mull signing two to three more contractual abilities down the line to diversify his combat style and bolster his related trump cards.

However, he wouldn't truly sign all twelve, not even ten. That would surpass an Ascetic's endurance. Lumian had no wish to become a pseudo-inferior Beyonder like Padre Guillaume Bénet, whose weaknesses could be readily grasped and actions predicted.

Another notable shift in an Ascetic was the accumulation of external fate fragments. It had genuinely become a vital component of a Fate Appropriator.

As for rituals such as the Animal Creation Spell, they could be streamlined. For instance, Lumian previously had to drape the target with a ritual sheepskin to transform them into sheep by chanting the incantation. Now, he could use a more symbolic sheepskin to cover the other party to meet the prerequisite.

His flexibility as a Dancer had also grown. Lumian could now perform horrific and incredible actions. If ordinary folk merely glimpsed the corresponding shadows he cast, they would deem him a monster.

Furthermore, Lumian's spirituality had climbed substantially. The most basic yardstick was that he could employ up to 17 Spirit World Traversals.

Nonetheless, both a Fate Appropriator and a Reaper had scant impact on his physical prowess.

After verifying his transformation, Lumian thanked Madame Hela and asked when the next Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society meeting would be before returning to the real world with Franca.

Having returned The Fool's gold coin to Jenna, Lumian briefly outlined a Fate Appropriator's abilities and stated,

"Given my ability to directly perceive some fate fragments, I'll settle on the concrete plan after observing Moran Avigny up close."

"Okay." Franca thoroughly endorsed any step that could lessen the risk.

Lumian rose and said to Franca and Jenna,

"I'll head out first then. Don't forget to help me inquire at your mysticism gatherings if there's the Harvest Priest potion formula and the matching Beyonder ingredients."

"Got it." Seeing Lumian off, Franca turned to Jenna, puzzled. "Why is he acting a bit odd? Doesn't he usually rile people up and quip before leaving?"

Jenna also found this atypical and sank into deep thought.

Abruptly, her expression changed.

Jenna glanced down at the book in her hand, saying pensively, "Perhaps he just received the boon's power and isn't in a stable state. He needs to hurry back and rest."

Franca nodded, understanding. "Fair point."

She didn't linger on it or bother to. The night was lovely, and she couldn't squander it on such trivial matters.

…

Avenue du Boulevard, outside the Champs-Élysées' Rose Conference Room.

Numerous reporters stood before the hotel's signature indoor golden fountain, awaiting the arrival of Minister of Industry Moran Avigny, who had finished negotiations with the Loen Kingdom's delegation.

Lumian had switched into a pre-prepared black tweed coat and half top hat. He held a rented, new black-and-white camera without a tripod. With his unremarkable, passerby-like appearance, he mingled with these individuals as a fake reporter.

Chapter 704: Fragment of Fate

The reporters waiting outside the conference hall displayed no signs of impatience or dissatisfaction, despite the passing time. They were well accustomed to such situations.

At last, the heavy doors of the Rose Conference Hall opened, revealing the Minister of Industry, Moran Avigny. Dressed in a sharp formal suit, his dark-gray eyes and chiseled features stood out as he emerged alongside the leader of the Loen Kingdom's delegation.

Snap! Snap! A flurry of loud camera flashes illuminated the scene, and Moran Avigny responded with a graceful wave to the reporters.

Lumian refrained from pushing his way to the front, choosing instead to observe Moran Avigny from a distance, hidden among the crowd.

Shielded by the camera, his azure eyes rapidly shifted to a silver-black hue.

Eye of Calamity!

In Lumian's enhanced vision, a river of mercury materialized on Moran Avigny's body, composed of ethereal water droplets. Each droplet was adorned with intricate, interconnected symbols.

As Moran Avigny delivered a concise speech announcing various industrial cooperation agreements between the Intis Republic and the Loen Kingdom, Lumian meticulously analyzed the Minister of Industry's past, present, and future, uncovering the fragments of fate concealed within each mercurial droplet.

The more distant the past, the greater the ambiguity. Lumian concentrated on the events of the preceding two weeks.

He witnessed Moran Avigny residing in a government-provided villa, attending weekly gatherings at cafés to discuss matters of state, exemplifying Trier's café politics.

Furthermore, Lumian observed Moran Avigny's attendance at salons, balls, banquets, operas, concerts, theaters, and art exhibitions. The Minister indulged in polo, poker, hunting in the suburbs, and flirtations with courtesans. He leveraged his position to secure favors, such as appointing the husband of one of his lovers as the deputy general manager of the Intis Industrial Credit Bank's Southern Continent branch—a coveted role known for its prestige, generous compensation, and influence. The sole drawback was the necessity of leaving Trier for the Southern Continent for two to three years, initially without the companionship of spouse and children.

These observations aligned perfectly with Lumian's preconceived notions of Trier's elite society.

Amidst the hazy fragments, two particular instances captured Lumian's attention.

In one, Moran Avigny sat alone in his study, perusing a document. Abruptly, he jotted down a note and reached into a nearby mirror. His hand, seemingly incorporeal, passed through the glass surface, depositing the note within.

The other featured Moran Avigny's fleeting encounter with an unfamiliar individual during a hunting excursion in the West Lognes Forest. What piqued Lumian's interest was the thin, white fog enveloping this fragment, rendering it indistinct.

This peculiar obscurity differed from the typical vagueness of most fate fragments.

The first fragment confirmed Moran Avigny's identity as a Mirror Person. Among the 22 paths of the divine, Demonesses proficient in mirror magic could not transmit information or objects through mirrors until attaining the rank of Sequence 4 demigods. If Moran Avigny were a demigod-level Demoness, his existence as a man would be impossible.

Lumian could only surmise two possibilities:

First, Mirror People possessed an innate mastery over mirrors, surpassing even Demonesses in the realm of mirror magic.

Second, Moran Avigny had originally been a Demoness at the demigod level who later consumed a higher Sequence Hunter potion, successfully transforming into a man. This implied that the Minister of Industry was at least a Sequence 3 Saint, if not an Angel.

Considering the intelligence gathered by Franca and the others, the information provided by 007, and the clearer fate fragments, Lumian concluded that Moran Avigny had never exhibited any Hunter-related traits. He was undoubtedly a Mirror Person, albeit an extraordinary one.

The second fate fragment intrigued Lumian due to its relative uniqueness. It might contain crucial information, but deciphering it eluded him for the moment.

Shifting his focus to Moran Avigny's future, Lumian examined the myriad potential fate tributaries.

As anticipated, one tributary bore a faint black tinge.

This mercurial offshoot, like many others, "rehearsed" Moran Avigny's interview and subsequent return to the Ministry of Industry in a private carriage. However, it diverged when, upon entering his office and sitting for a while, Moran Avigny willingly stepped into the full-body mirror near the coat rack and vanished.

Lumian's foresight extended no further.

Based on his observations, Lumian deduced that if Moran Avigny ventured into the mirror world before noon, he would face a life-threatening calamity.

Yet, the probability of Moran Avigny taking such an action was minimal. Among the numerous fate tributaries, only one represented this possibility.

Certainly, if Lumian disregarded the risk of exposure, he could harness nearly half of his spirituality to manipulate Moran Avigny's future, steering it towards that specific tributary. However, such an act would be futile.

Moran Avigny's demise in the mirror world would merely prevent them from accessing his corpse and conducting the spirit channeling ritual.

The Demoness of Black likely possesses the ability to enter the mirror world as well. However, with her as the spirit channeler, obtaining the relevant information would prove impossible. Even if Franca has fully earned her trust, certain knowledge would remain undisclosed until she attains a specific Sequence… Lumian noticed Moran Avigny's posture signaling the conclusion of the interview, and his bodyguards began navigating through the reporters. Consequently, Lumian ceased using the Eye of Calamity and captured a black-and-white photograph, maintaining his façade.

Subsequently, he gradually retreated from the throng of reporters and made his way to the public washroom. He stashed the camera within his Traveler's Bag, donned Lie, and transformed back into Ciel Dubois. As a guest, he entered the annex restaurant of Champs-Élysées.

Franca awaited him there.

Following the waiter to his designated spot, Lumian noticed a man and a woman engaged in coffee.

The woman possessed black hair, brown eyes, and an alluring beauty. Her attire accentuated her slightly exaggerated aura. The man, by contrast, appeared ordinary, clad in a double-breasted flannel coat, wrinkled pants, buckled leather boots, and a top hat adorned with soft fur—the favored ensemble of Trier's bankers and financiers in recent times.

Lumian noticed that the man and woman weren't attracted by any aura of wealth. Instead, he recognized the beautiful woman with foreign features.

She, of course, had no knowledge of him. He had only glimpsed her photograph in Ghost Face.

She was Perle, a theater actress from Loen and a courtesan in Trier.

DuVar, the inventor of DuVar's broth and proprietor of the esteemed restaurant, had once lavished a substantial sum on her. He had even attempted suicide because of her, albeit unsuccessfully.

At present, Perle and the middle-aged man, presumed to be a banker, had not yet begun their meal. They were simply savoring their coffee.

The middle-aged man picked up Perle's empty coffee cup and gestured to the grounds, explaining something unknown to Lumian. The courtesan listened intently.

As he passed by, Lumian's keen senses allowed him to briefly eavesdrop. He swiftly grasped that the middle-aged man, believed to be a banker, was immersed in the art of coffee ground divination.

This popular divination method in high society was more akin to a game.

"If the remaining coffee grounds after drinking form a circle, it signifies recent signs of love…"

Upon hearing the middle-aged man's words, Lumian couldn't help but silently critique: Are you going to suggest that you'll be the love she's about to encounter?

Any other woman, even aware of the man's true intentions, would be secretly alarmed by divination results indicating traces of love. They might believe it to be fate's guidance. The various patterns naturally formed by the residual coffee grounds were thought to hold corresponding revelations about one's destiny, a notion widely accepted and impossible to manipulate.

However, given Perle's experience as a seasoned courtesan and her bold demeanor, Lumian had cause to suspect that she had deliberately manipulated the coffee grounds into a circular formation through her drinking technique.

After walking a short distance, Lumian spotted Franca.

The Demoness of Pleasure was dressed as a lady today, perfectly suited for the occasion. Lumian almost failed to recognize her.

Naturally, Franca still refrained from wearing a dress, opting instead for a pantsuit.

Observing Franca's elegantly styled hair, no longer in a ponytail, Lumian chuckled and remarked, "Jenna did your hair for you?"

"Indeed!" Franca responded, not with humiliated rage, but with a sense of smugness.

Before they could delve into their observations, a nearby waiter approached, presenting them with two identical menus.

Lowering her voice, Franca addressed Lumian in ancient Feysac, "The lunch set costs 7 verl d'or. If we order individually and indulge in some decent red wine, the bill for the two of us will amount to at least 50 verl d'or. That sum could easily feed your godson in the market district."

Franca found the restaurant at Grand Champs-Élysées not only expensive but also intriguing.

Switching to Intisian, Franca inquired of the waiter, "Any recommendations?"

The waiter, who had been sneaking glances at Franca, responded eagerly, "Would you like to try the Fürth fish?

"In Trier, apart from certain private banquets, we are the sole establishment that serves Fürth fish."

"What makes it so special?" Lumian asked, curiosity piqued.

Addressing Franca, the waiter explained, "Fürth fish appear semi-charred and can only be found in a specific section of Trier's underground river. Legend has it that long ago, they were ordinary fish. One day, an individual named Fürth caught one and set up a frying pan by the underground river, intending to cook it. Midway through the process, the fish managed to escape the frying pan and return to the river. It survived and spawned numerous descendants, all bearing the semi-charred appearance.

"The skin of this fish is fragrantly browned and oily, yet the flesh within is exceptionally tender…"

Trier's underground river… Half-burnt… Alive… Lumian extracted the keywords and suddenly speculated that this might be a consequence of the leakage of Fourth Epoch Trier's Hunter powers.

Smiling at Franca, he proposed, "Shall we each have one?"

"Very well." Franca had already been contemplating giving it a try.

Chapter 705: Past

After the waiter left their secluded table with the order, Lumian picked up his tri-colored liqueur—a vibrant mix of red, white, and blue—and clinked glasses with Franca before taking a sip.

Glancing around to ensure no one could overhear, he quietly recounted the detailed fate fragments of Moran Avigny. As Franca listened, her expression gradually morphed, a frown creasing her lovely brow.

"That white, thin fog you described… it reminds me of something," she said. "Does it have a mercurial, ever-shifting nature?"

Lumian considered briefly before nodding. "Yes, it does."

Franca let out a soft sigh. "It must be the same phenomenon then. You know how I told you about Jenna and I getting tailed by that entrustee of the vanished Deep Valley Cloister gatekeeper at the mysticism gathering? The one we ended up fighting?

"Well, when I channeled the guy's spirit and asked about his organizational ties, his physical form and spirit abruptly detonated. My mirror cracked from the blast, but right before shattering, it filled with that same thin, mercurial white mist."

Franca paused, collecting her thoughts.

"According to the intel I passed along, 007 ran into a similar fog during their investigation of Deep Valley Town. Albert Goncourt, the Carbonari's leader, was spotted there too.

"As you're aware, the Carbonari played a role in stoking the riots during the Hostel plan. Their other leader, operating under the alias General Philip, spearheaded that particular scheme."

Lumian swiftly connected the dots Franca was laying out.

"So you suspect the Carbonari is in league with multiple evil god cults, this peculiar white fog being tied to one of them—and that Moran Avigny is also entangled with this group. Meaning our supposedly chance encounter with him in the West Lognes Forest was anything but."

"Precisely." Franca took another sip of her liqueur. "And what's the ultimate endgame for these Mirror People? Surely not mere replacement of their originals."

The mirror version of Gardner Martin had failed to succeed the real one, understandably using the Hostel plan to deal with his counterpart. But Moran Avigny, also a Mirror Person, had quietly replaced the original for decades, even fathering an illegitimate daughter and living a cushy life. Why collaborate with cults?

Smiling, Lumian replied, "The goals of Mirror People as a whole versus as individuals are bound to differ. Investigating should reveal the former. Back in Fourth Epoch Trier, Mirror Gardner Martin mentioned their loyalty and service to someone who holds all the answers. Learning that person's identity should tell us the Mirror People's endgame."

Franca concurred succinctly, "We can plan our next moves around this strange fog. Deal with Moran Avigny to get more info on the Mirror People, which is already a lead. And capturing him or channeling his spirit could present other opportunities."

Franca smiled. "Looks like 007 will be busy again."

Their discussion of Moran Avigny complete, Lumian picked up some roasted pre-meal bread, chewing as he recounted his encounter with Courtesan Perle and the coffee ground divination he'd witnessed.

"She's unlikely to be a Demoness," Franca concluded, a hint of disappointment in her voice.

Based on Lumian's description and reaction to Perle's appearance, she could tell the courtesan wasn't a Demoness.

Unless deliberately feigning ugliness, a Demoness's charms were impossible to conceal. Even gay men couldn't resist sneaking a few extra glances.

"Definitely not…" Lumian suddenly paused, remembering something.

Shifting to casual conversation, he asked, "Does coffee ground divination actually hold mystical significance? Can it truly provide revelation?"

Franca finished her bread, took another sip of the colorful liqueur, and smiled. "Of course mysticism is involved."

Noting Lumian's lack of divination knowledge compared to his skill in reading fate, Franca explained with a smug grin.

"You don't need to put divination on some holy, unattainable pedestal.

"Our Astral Projections constantly interact with the spirit world, obtaining information and receiving revelations. These get reflected in reality through various forms.

"It's true for both Beyonders and ordinary people. But those unskilled in divination struggle to proactively obtain revelations or effectively interpret them.

"For example, if a Beyonder chokes on a fishbone while eating, they'll quickly realize it's a warning from their spirit, containing a revelation needing interpretation. But if regular folks have the same experience, they'll just think they were unlucky or careless. It won't stand out enough to warrant deeper consideration or deciphering.

"Of course, getting a stuck fishbone doesn't always indicate a spiritual warning. Usually it's just lack of care. Skilled diviners can tell the difference between a true revelation and a random occurrence. The unskilled tend to overthink, scaring themselves while ignoring what's truly concerning."

Given their upcoming fish course, Franca had used a relatable example.

Lumian nodded, gaining a clearer understanding of divination.

He asked thoughtfully, "So without deliberate control over the drinking method, coffee ground patterns can reveal something—but ordinary people's interpretations may be inaccurate?"

"Precisely!" Franca said excitedly. "In the most rational environment, the decades-popular coffee ground divination can come extremely close to reality. Each divination session can refine the standard interpretations until the meaning of every ground formation is definitively established. Then even regular people could interpret with reasonable accuracy.

"Sadly, reality is no bastion of pure rationality. Believers in coffee divination subconsciously work to make even mistaken interpretations come true. Non-believers plainly see the interpretations don't match up. These conflicting approaches get all tangled together, preventing the codification of standard, reliable answers. In the end, it's just a game."

As they conversed, the waiter served the various dishes, clearing used plates as part of the set procedure.

The fried Fürth fish arrived as a later main course.

Lumian cut a piece and tasted it—tender flesh with an intriguing blend of charred and oily notes, the pepper and salt seasoning just right.

"Delicious," Franca praised. "And warming too."

Lumian also felt a current of warmth spread through him as the Fürth fish reached his stomach.

"Some special ingredients indeed," he concluded, teasing Franca. "Just don't eat too fast—wouldn't want you choking on a bone."

Franca laughed. "You think a few bones can choke me?"

Glancing around to confirm the waiter's departure, she asked,

"I've been pondering something the last couple days. I still can't grasp the difference between using rituals and curses to influence a target's future fate versus directly compelling a fate change.

"I get the ritual part—it relies on the target's blood, close relatives, certain items, and mystically significant contact to alter their future fate. But how is that different from a curse?"

Lumian organized his thoughts before explaining.

"In the mysticism knowledge of Fate Appropriators, a curse is a curse of fate. Compared to rituals, curses are simpler, with fewer required conditions. But that significantly limits the ultimate effect. Nothing too outlandish can be achieved.

"Many bestowed of Inevitability like to call this type of curse Magnified Fate.

"It can only target fate tributaries within the next ten seconds, and must align with the current environment and circumstances. Meeting those prerequisites enables the fate curse to succeed. And the targeted fate tributary needs a certain probability of manifesting in the first place, or the success rate plummets.

"Simply put, one first uses or alters the environment to enable certain possibilities, then magnifies those possibilities—

assuming they weren't extremely unlikely to begin with."

Lumian looked at Franca, raising his right palm to gesture as he mischievously provided an example.

"For instance, while you're eating fish, I could use a curse to magnify the chance of you choking on a bone. But I couldn't magnify the chance of your chair suddenly collapsing, impaling you with wood splinters."

The moment he finished speaking, Franca froze, gasping twice as her throat worked. Within seconds, she spat out a bloody fishbone.

"You actually did it?" Franca grumbled. "Luckily my Sequence grants strong throat control. I handled it myself. Uh…" Franca suddenly paused. After a few seconds, she said, "Otherwise we'd be seeking a doctor's aid. How embarrassing would that be!"

Lumian chuckled. "I could've helped pull it out, magnifying the fate tributary of successful extraction."

Franca was briefly speechless.

After eating another bite of Fürth fish, she nodded.

"I understand the differences now.

"Curses, or Magnify, suit combat. They're mainly for interfering with and influencing enemies, not accomplishing anything too exaggerated.

"Rituals are done in advance. With the right items, they can largely steer a target's fate as desired."

"But only in a general direction," Lumian added. "No real precision. I could make someone have a bad day, but not dictate the exact flavor of misfortune."

Franca nodded.

"So compelling fate is like a streamlined ritual for live combat that still packs a punch?"

"Perhaps even stronger and more precise effects," Lumian mused. "Plus, many abilities transformed in unique ways when Fate Appropriator and Reaper fused, bringing with them the relevant mystical knowledge. I can't fully distinguish the inherent from the individualized—I only know the Eye of Calamity and Compelling Fate came from Reaper."

They enjoyed the rest of their lunch. As the meal concluded, Lumian pointed to the half-eaten Fürth fish, instructing the waiter, "I'd like this wrapped up to go."

The waiter complied respectfully without question. Franca smiled teasingly. "How frugal of you."

Lumian chuckled. "This is expected of a godfather. Besides, I'm curious what makes this fish so special."

Chapter 706: The Utility of Delicacies

In another apartment on Rue Orosay in the Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative, Lumian placed the cold Fürth fish in front of Ludwig.

Ludwig's eyes lit up when he saw the pan-fried fish in the exquisite wooden box. He quickly turned to Lugano, who understood his meaning and handed over a child's knife and fork he had found in the newly rented room.

Lumian leaned back in his chair and watched as Ludwig sliced the remaining half of the fish into pieces, chewing and swallowing the meat along with the bones.

Without waiting for Lumian to inquire, Ludwig narrowed his eyes, seemingly enjoying himself, and said, "The Fürth Firefish is a mutated fish resulting from the corruption leaking from Fourth Epoch Trier. Its breed stabilized 769 years ago and mainly resides in the Danro section of the underground Madar River. Its meat and blood can be concocted into a 'warm cocktail' with various sunflowers. After drinking it, one can resist the effects of the cold to a certain extent for half an hour.

"A Fürth Firefish that has lived for over a decade is an ingredient rich in spirituality. Using its meat, blood from a Mid-Sequence Beyonder of the Hunter pathway, ice, and lemon juice, one can cook Ice Lemon Fish fillets. After anyone eats them for the first time, they permanently enjoy reduced damage from flames. Eating them later will enhance the effect, but it only lasts for half an hour."

Lumian nodded in enlightenment. In Franca's words, the first time it's eaten, it adds some permanent fire resistance. The subsequent enhancements are temporary…

Lugano was taken aback.

Ludwig actually knows cooking?

Moreover, it involves cooking with superpowers!

Can I help him get ingredients rich in spirituality and have him make similar delicacies for me?

It seems capable of permanently enhancing some of my abilities!

After Ludwig finished his meal, Lumian suddenly thought of something.

Franca's ritual for advancing to the Demoness of Affliction involved being burned at the stake—without using a substitute—for fifteen minutes and surviving without going mad.

If Franca eats Fürth Firefish's Ice Lemon Fish fillet to increase her fire resistance, although the pain won't abate, her chances of surviving the incineration will greatly increase. When the time comes, she can eat some more temporarily before the ritual. Lumian's thoughts raced as he quickly made up his mind.

Today, he would head to Underground Trier to search for Fürth Firefish that had lived for over a decade!

From his Traveler's Bag, Lumian retrieved a map of Underground Trier reconstructed from his memories, derived from the one Gardner Martin had once displayed. He searched for the location of the Danro section of the Madar underground river.

As Lumian scrutinized the map, he asked Ludwig with a smile, "How do you know the precise name of the source? Do Fürth Firefish have knowledge of the rivers they inhabit?"

Ludwig licked his lips, unsatisfied.

"Indeed, they do. From years of fishing, humans inevitably mention the names of rivers and specific sections. Even if Fürth Firefish don't comprehend the meaning, they instinctively retain this information in their corresponding cells when repeatedly exposed to it."

"Interesting." Lumian had posed the question in jest, not anticipating such a serious response.

Pointing to himself, he inquired curiously, "Will consuming the Ice Lemon Fish fillet reduce the burn damage I sustain?"

As a Reaper, flames inflict relatively minimal damage to him.

Ludwig picked up a minuscule remnant of the fish, no larger than a grain of rice, from the exquisite wooden box and presented it to Lumian. "Only this much."

Without hesitation, the boy promptly popped the morsel into his mouth.

"Well, that's better than nothing," Lumian remarked with a smile and a sigh.

He intended to secure a special serving of Ice Lemon Fish fillet for himself, with additional portions for Jenna, Anthony, Lugano, and Ludwig!

To accomplish this task, Lumian proactively inquired, "How does a Fürth Firefish that has lived for over a decade differ from its ordinary counterparts?"

Ludwig's response sounded as if he were reciting from a textbook, "A Fürth Firefish that has survived for more than a decade can grow to nearly a meter in length and tends to reside in caves at the riverbed. They rarely approach the surface but exhibit a keen sensitivity to blood and spiritually rich food. These fish are highly aggressive and willing to take significant risks driven by their instincts.

"Their skin has hardened, rendering them impervious to fishing spears. Sharp teeth fill their mouths, enabling them to devour any humans who happen to fall into the river. Additionally, their blood possesses a distinct burning characteristic."

After attentively listening, Lumian calmly assessed the information.

Despite their longevity of over a decade, Fürth Firefish did not possess Beyonder characteristics or acquire supernatural abilities through boons. They belonged to a species that had undergone corruption but had since stabilized.

If they were to continue living in such an environment for tens of thousands of years, they might evolve into creatures with their own intricate society, akin to the Batings Black Insect.

As he put away the map and stood up, Lumian turned to Ludwig and asked thoughtfully before leaving,

"Apart from the permanent enhancements, does this special cooking method involve any adverse effects, such as corruption?"

Ludwig scrutinized Lumian and remained silent. Lumian suspected that Ludwig was internally mocking him.

For someone already deeply corrupted, the concern over a minuscule amount of additional corruption seemed trivial.

After a brief pause, Ludwig replied, "As a child, I lack understanding of such matters. What I do know is that if one desires to indulge in finer and more delectable cuisine, they must be willing to accept the associated risks. Those unwilling to take the risk can simply choose not to partake…"

Ludwig instinctively added, "If you don't wish to eat, you can always leave the food for me."

With a slight nod, Lumian opened the door and exited the apartment.

…

In the depths of Underground Trier, the Madar River flowed through a tranquil, deserted, and dimly lit cave, its gentle splashing echoing in the distance.

Emerging from the shadows, Lumian, Franca, and Jenna made their way to the riverbank. One carried a carbide lamp, while the other two traveled empty-handed.

Although ingredient suppliers seeking to monopolize Fürth Firefish guarded this section of the subterranean river, it posed no significant challenge for a Hunter and two Demonesses. Utilizing the shadows, they deftly navigated through the patrolled area and successfully reached the water's edge.

Raising his carbide lamp, Lumian discovered that the underground river was not only expansive but also incredibly deep. Submerged caves lined the riverbed, inhabited by peculiar fish.

After a quick survey, Lumian set the carbide lamp down, rolled up his sleeves, and crouched beside the river.

Without hesitation, he plunged his right arm into the frigid water.

"Is this your preferred method of fishing?" Franca inquired, well aware of Lumian's penchant for "fishing." However, she hadn't anticipated him employing the same technique when his prey was, quite literally, fish.

"What alternative do I have?" Lumian chuckled. "Would you prefer I strip down, dive into the underwater caves, and catch them with my bare hands?"

"That's not an impossibility," Franca replied with a playful smile. "It would provide an excellent opportunity to admire your physique."

Ignoring her comment, Lumian focused his spirituality, causing a thin layer of white flames to emanate from his thumb.

The flames, resistant to the water's extinguishing effect, took the form of a small knife and carefully sliced his index finger. A single drop of blood seeped out, rapidly dispersing into the surrounding water.

The Fürth Firefish swimming in the shallows seemed to detect an ominous presence and swiftly retreated from the area where the blood had spread.

Moments later, enormous Fürth Firefish, their skin charred and hardened, emerged from the caves along the riverbed.

One particularly swift specimen reached Lumian's right hand in a flash, its mouth wide open to reveal sharp, gleaming teeth. Before it could sink its teeth into his flesh, Lumian's palm abruptly clenched into a fist. Instead of withdrawing, he thrust his hand forward, punching directly into the fish's gaping maw.

With a resounding bang, Lumian grasped the creature's skull and hauled the colossal Fürth fish out of the river.

Silently, cold and sinister black flames ignited in the river, incinerating Lumian's blood that had merged with the water.

It was Jenna.

"We can return now," Lumian declared, tossing the massive Fürth fish to Franca.

As Franca caught the ingredient, freezing it and storing it in her Traveler's Bag, she appeared lost in thought.

Keenly observing her demeanor, Lumian asked, "What's on your mind?"

Pointing in a specific direction, Franca responded, "I remember that nearby, we entered a unique mirror world and acquired the classic silver mirror that granted Anthony and me access to Fourth Epoch Trier."

"Indeed," Lumian acknowledged, gesturing for Franca to continue.

Averting her gaze, Franca expressed her thoughts, "I'm contemplating whether we could utilize the mirror world to stage an ambush against Moran Avigny. Specifically, I'm referring to the conventional mirror world that interconnects all the mirrors in this world."

In the conventional sense, the mirror world functioned more akin to a conceptual amalgamation of doors rather than a tangible realm. It served as an intricate network of passageways linking various mirrors and enigmatic lands. In essence, if Franca could harness the mirror world and pinpoint the precise location, she could conceal herself behind the mirror frequently used by Moran Avigny and launch an attack the moment her target entered.

"What is it that you truly wish to convey?" Lumian raised his eyebrows.

Franca eagerly elaborated, "Considering that a portion of the corruption from Fourth Epoch Trier has seeped into this area, giving rise to unique creatures like Fürth Firefish and the extraordinary mirror world we previously explored, is it plausible that within this vast underground expanse, there exists a secluded corner influenced by the corruption of a select few high-level Demoness powers over an extended period?

"Could it be possible for one to traverse through the mirror and enter the mirror world without attaining the status of a demigod Demoness?"

After a moment of serious contemplation, Lumian replied, "It's a possibility."

Jenna's eyes darted around as she suggested, "Could it be the location where you discovered the special mirror? That area must have been corrupted by the power emanating from Fourth Epoch Trier's mirror world."

"We can investigate," Lumian said with a smile. "There's no need to rush. If it proves unsuccessful, we can bide our time. Once Hisoka's Beyonder characteristic is transformed into a Sealed Artifact, perhaps we can assume the form of Wraiths and conceal ourselves within the mirror. However, I'm uncertain whether Wraiths possess the ability to navigate the mirror world."

"Let's prioritize the search!" Franca declared, retrieving her Mirror World Fragment. She hoped that this item might provide some unique means of detection.

Lumian glanced at the fragment and, after a brief contemplation, advised seriously, "Holding the Mirror World Fragment is unlikely to yield any benefit. Instead, take out the Primordial Demoness figurine."

Chapter 707: Compulsion

In the dark, silent tunnel, Franca advanced slowly, holding the Primordial Demoness figurine made of bone. Her footsteps were so soft they were nearly inaudible.

Lumian, clutching his carbide lamp, and Jenna trailed silently behind her.

With a Hunter's keen understanding of the terrain and memories, the three had finished exploring the area where they had obtained the classic silver mirror. They had even expanded their search to include the nearby underground tunnels and connected quarry caves.

However, the Primordial Demoness figurine showed no abnormal reactions, and neither Franca nor Jenna sensed anything out of the ordinary.

Franca sighed. "Well, this is disappointing. Bold assumptions leading to a shameful failure!"

She had no intention of giving up, but wanted to return to the surface first and contact 007. She hoped to use the authorities' detailed records of underground abnormalities to search for any areas where a high-level Demoness's power might be seeping out.

Having experienced numerous mystical incidents, Lumian surveyed the area, pondering for a few seconds.

"Let's investigate again. This time, I'll extinguish the carbide lamp.

"In mysticism, Demonesses and the mirror world are always associated with darkness, evil, and quiet depth. Perhaps subtle reactions can occur in the absence of light."

"Subtle reactions… What is this, a chemistry experiment?" Franca scoffed, but chose to comply. She turned to Jenna. "Hold your Mirror World Fragment in your hand. If we're giving this a shot, we should try everything."

Jenna took out the Mirror World Fragment she had obtained from the Tamara family tomb, and Lumian turned the switch to extinguish the carbide lamp.

The silent tunnel plunged into absolute darkness. As a Hunter, Lumian couldn't see a thing.

"You can hold onto my sleeve," Jenna suggested calmly. "Or activate your Spirit Vision and follow our spiritual light."

Lumian replied with a smile, "That would make me look weak. I suspect you're deliberately showing off. Have you forgotten? I can gain night vision by changing my life form."

Jenna was silent for a moment before retorting, "Dammit! Would it kill you to be a bit nicer about it?"

"She's right," Franca agreed. "Jenna was just trying to help. It's fine if you don't want her assistance, but there's no need to mock her."

"That's a Hunter for you." Lumian chuckled as he activated the black mark on his body, transforming into a shadow creature.

He blended into the shadows and followed Franca and Jenna as they explored the area for the second time.

As Franca passed a corner of a quarry cave, she suddenly felt the bone figurine in her hand tremble slightly.

"There's a reaction! There's a reaction!" she exclaimed joyfully.

Lumian immediately left the shadows, transforming back into human form, his blue eyes tinged with silver-black.

In the absolute darkness, he saw the mercury rivers of fate belonging to Franca and Jenna.

As his spirituality rapidly depleted from the brief observation, Lumian found a possibility among the tributaries symbolizing Franca's future fate.

This was something that might happen in ten seconds or more. Furthermore, the probability of it occurring was extremely low—something Curse, or rather, Magnify, couldn't influence.

Without hesitation, Lumian extended his right palm toward Franca.

Franca, with her night vision, witnessed his actions and noticed his silver-black eyes. She jumped in fright.

"W-what are you doing?"

She didn't dodge, fully trusting Lumian.

Lumian roused his spirituality, transforming it into a violent illusory river that surged out of his palm.

Franca's fate was instantly thrust into a future by the mighty torrent.

Compelling Fate!

Franca suddenly had an idea.

"Are you influencing my future, allowing me to successfully utilize the corrupted fate fragments here to make it a reality?

"Dammit, I really do have an idea. Maybe I should give it a try!"

Lumian, his spirituality greatly depleted, chuckled. "Life is short, why not give it a try?"

"…" Franca could clearly detect the mockery in his tone. She gritted her teeth. "I'll deal with you later!"

As she spoke, Franca placed the Primordial Demoness's bone figurine on a protruding rock in a corner of the mine. Then she took out a mirror and placed it in front of the figurine.

Lumian conjured a blazing white fireball and observed as Franca retrieved essential oils, extracts, perfume, and herbal powder from her Traveler's Bag, preparing for the ritual.

Uh… Lumian turned to Jenna, who happened to look back at him.

Franca simultaneously turned to face them.

The three were taken aback for a moment before bursting into laughter.

"You two thought of it too?" Franca said happily. "Jenna shouldn't stay here. The Primordial Demoness might cast Her gaze here later."

As a pure female Demoness, it would definitely not bode well for Jenna to be noticed by the Primordial Demoness. It could even mean death.

Lumian replied with a smile, "I'll send Jenna back first and come back after the ritual."

With that, he reached out and grabbed Jenna's shoulder.

Jenna said to Franca, "Be careful."

"Don't worry, I'm a skilled worker," Franca replied, waving her hand cheerfully.

As a member of the Demoness Sect, she regularly prayed to the Primordial Demoness through the bone figurine, following the Demoness of Black's instructions. Occasionally, she even held a solo Mass.

Of course, this was the first time she would be praying to the Primordial Demoness through a ritual.

After Lumian teleported away with Jenna, the quarry cave returned to darkness.

With the bone figurine, Franca decided to use a dualistic ritual.

After lighting the candle representing herself, she drew her needs on a faux goatskin with the corresponding symbols and patterns, drawing upon her extensive mysticism knowledge.

Following that, she sanctified the ritual silver dagger and created a wall of spirituality. She dripped rose essential oil, musk, and perfume into the candle flame.

Franca's heart skipped a beat as the alluring, complex scent quickly entered her nostrils. She couldn't help but inhale deeply.

After completing all the preparations, Franca took two steps back and recited the Primordial Demoness's honorific name in Hermes.

"The source of all catastrophes, the symbol of destruction and the apocalypse, the Demoness who controls Chaos."

In the altar, a small amount of moss suddenly grew, entangling into vines that rose high, as if staring at Franca.

The ground softened, and a frigid wind blew, causing Franca to tremble.

Simultaneously, Franca sensed the fragrance in the area grow sweeter, carrying a warm charm that made her blush.

This invigorated her specific desires, and charming scenes surfaced in her mind.

Suppressing the heat in her body and shaking off her discomfort, Franca briefly recounted how Moran Avigny was a Mirror Person and how she wanted to capture him. Then, following the ritual's standard procedure, she said,

"I pray for the power of the mirror.

"I pray for the power of chaos.

"I pray for God's protection.

"I pray for a fixed entrance to the mirror world to appear here.

"Roses, a herb that belongs to the Demoness, please pass your power to my incantation.

"Musk, a herb that belongs to the Demoness, please pass your power to my incantation…"

After reciting the incantation, Franca ignited the faux goatskin and placed it on the mirror in front of the bone figurine.

As the faux goatskin burned away, Franca felt the candle flame dim, as if a layer of translucent mullioned glass had materialized around it.

A strange power was activated, gathering in the mirror.

The human-head-sized mirror suddenly darkened, turning shadowy and illusory.

It melded with the protruding rock where the figurine was placed and vanished.

In the next moment, the candle flame returned to normal, and the fragrance lingering in the air still unsettled Franca. Her thoughts raced, requiring immense strength to control herself.

After tidying up the bone figurine and other items, Franca took a deep breath and exhaled slowly.

Dammit, just the charm and pleasure emanating from the ritual nearly made me lose myself. All I wanted was to approach the source of the charm and enjoy the pleasures bestowed by Her.

As expected of the Primordial Demoness who controls pleasure and feminine charm…

Dammit! I'm an idiot. Why did I take a deep breath? The smell here hasn't dissipated!

I need to quickly confirm if there's an entrance to the mirror world before heading back to Jenna…

As these thoughts raced through Franca's mind, she saw Lumian's figure swiftly materialize at the edge of the quarry cave.

Franca jumped in fright. "Why are you back already?"

Lumian chuckled. "You're in pretty good shape. Didn't I say I'd return after your ritual…?"

As he spoke, Lumian noticed Franca's lake-blue eyes rippling under the dim candlelight, as if they could captivate one's soul.

Lumian's words faltered.

After a brief pause, he added, "Besides, Jenna was worried about you and asked me to come check on you.

"I believe the Primordial Demoness can understand that a Demoness of Pleasure has a friend who cares about her."

"Yeah." Franca nodded gently, bit her lip, and pointed at the protruding rock. "That spot seems to have become a fixed entrance to the mirror world. Let's see if we can enter."

Lumian didn't inquire further. He approached the protruding rock and, together with Franca, extended his right palm, pressing it against the cold stone.

A faint light flickered, and the two vanished on the spot.

After a brief moment of vertigo, a dark, illusory path appeared before Lumian and Franca's eyes. Surrounding them were numerous similar "tunnels," intertwining to form a complicated and mysterious colossal spiderweb.

Chapter 708: Remnant Influence

Is this an ordinary mirror world? Lumian gazed at the dark, illusory paths around him that resembled a mosquito landing on a complicated spiderweb. For some reason, he felt a surge of fear, as if a colossal, warped, pitch-black spider could crawl out from the depths of this strange land at any moment and drag him and Franca into the darkness that symbolized destruction.

"Is every illusory path connected to a mirror?" Franca's voice suddenly echoed in Lumian's ears, so close he could hear her breathing.

Simultaneously, Lumian caught a whiff of a warm, sweet fragrance. His blood vessels inexplicably pulsed, and his body and mind relaxed slightly.

At some point, Franca had moved to his side, her eyes flickering as she surveyed their surroundings.

Lumian nodded slightly. "In theory, yes."

"No!" Franca rejected her speculation. "They might also be connected to some mysterious alternate space."

"That's right…" Lumian recalled his understanding of the mirror world.

He exhaled and took a step forward.

"I believe those situations should also be connected to mirrors, mirrors that belong to those mysterious alternate spaces."

Without waiting for Franca's response, he pointed at the dark illusory path ahead and said, "Before understanding the mirror world's coordinates and location, recklessly traversing this place is likely very dangerous. If we're lucky, we might only end up at the wrong mirror and have no choice but to return to the real world. If we're unlucky, we'll reach a mirror representing a dangerous place. When we leave, we'll have to face terrifying enemies. If we're super unlucky…"

At this point, Lumian paused.

Franca squeezed to his side and asked in a soft voice, "What happens if we're super unlucky?"

"W-we'll vanish from this mirror world forever. We won't be seen alive, and if we're dead, our corpses will go missing." Lumian composed himself and took another step forward.

All of a sudden, he sensed the dark, illusory path morph into a massive vortex, tugging him into its depths.

Franca experienced a comparable sensation, her spirituality sending her a powerful warning.

They both stepped back in unison, evading the absorption of the fearsome vortex.

"How treacherous," Franca sighed. "Just getting close to these illusory paths without going further can make you plummet into an unknown mirror. Maybe we can only count on the luck of Winners in a situation like this. Let's hope our destination isn't too terrible. Uh, your Magnify or Compelling Fate abilities should come in handy."

Lumian nodded.

"I initially thought the mirror world was closely tied to the spirit world, and teleportation would work here too. But from what I can see, while there is a connection, it's not strong enough to enable my teleportation. It's not that I can't teleport, but it's way too risky. There's nearly a 100% chance of getting lost.

"Without comprehending the abilities associated with the mirror world, I don't suggest using this place to ambush Moran Avigny, unless we're aided by a high-level Demoness or a high-level Apprentice."

Noticing Franca nod pensively, Lumian sighed in relief and intentionally taunted, "Have you recovered?"

"Huh?" Franca was startled momentarily before her embarrassment morphed into anger. "What other option do I have? When I use a ritual to seek aid from the Primordial One, I'm inevitably impacted. Sometimes I'm lured, sometimes I'm in pain, and sometimes I'm dejected, as if I've temporarily developed a mental disorder. Sometimes I go rigid for a while, as if I've been petrified…"

Since officially joining the Demoness Sect, the Demoness of Black had shared extensive mysticism knowledge with Franca, particularly concerning prayers to the Primordial Demoness.

On such topics, the Demoness of Black explained: As the ritual's host, the ritual itself granted a degree of protection. The extent to which she was influenced by the Primordial One's overflowing presence was quite minimal. Once the ritual concluded, she would recover after withstanding it for ten to twenty seconds. The only thing to watch out for was the desires arising from their typical reaction to being entranced by the Primordial One. Their fading would be comparatively gradual, but what Demoness didn't have numerous lovers? There was no need to be overly concerned about this.

The longer Franca talked, the more forceful she became, even a tad aggrieved.

"That's a genuine deity. How can I possibly resist a genuine deity's overflowing influence?

"If I weren't the ritual's host, I would've been unable to restrain myself and would've unleashed my primal instincts."

Franca couldn't suppress a chuckle at the reference to her primal nature.

Within the mirror world, she had consistently called the Primordial Demoness the Primordial One to prevent blasphemy.

After pondering for a moment, Lumian replied, "Praying to a different genuine deity won't lead to anything comparable unless someone present is blasphemous."

"It's the Primordial One's fault for being in such a terrible state." Franca had already come up with the justification. "Don't assume you can withstand it simply because you're an Ascetic. If you had been there and not the ritual's host, I would've witnessed your primal nature erupt."

At this juncture, she appraised Lumian and grinned.

"It's not like you didn't react. Were you worried you couldn't restrain yourself, so you purposely exposed me and created an awkward situation?"

Subconsciously, Franca's breathing turned labored again.

Lumian scoffed.

"When I got there, the scene's lingering effects hadn't fully dissipated, and a peculiar fragrance permeated the air. That was a genuine deity. How could I withstand even the tiniest bit of a genuine deity's overflowing influence?"

He echoed Franca's words.

"Really? Is it merely due to the lingering aroma?" Franca's lake-blue eyes narrowed menacingly, as if challenged.

The aqueous light in her eyes resurfaced, glittering like shards of sunlight.

Lumian exhaled and stepped to the side, grasping Franca's upper arm.

"I'll send you back first. Jenna is waiting for you."

"We're heading back already?" Franca asked, surprised. "Won't you explore the mirror world further and consider how to utilize this place?"

"I have a plan." Lumian tugged Franca away from the illusory tunnel's spiderweb-like darkness.

As they returned to the quarry cave, Franca, her focus diverted, inquired, "What plan?"

While Lumian tried to activate the black mark on his right shoulder, he responded impassively, "Contract ability."

He intended to establish a contract with a Beyonder creature possessing a mirror world traversal ability to acquire the corresponding characteristics!

Regardless, he hadn't determined which three abilities to contract this time. This could be one of them.

"You're right, a contract ability…" Franca was thrilled.

She then noticed Lumian was still motionless. Comprehending, she murmured into his ear, "Didn't you want to teleport? Why haven't we departed? Does your Spirit World Traversal activation always take this long, or are you enduring something?"

As Franca completed her sentence, the pair vanished from the gloomy quarry cave.

…

That evening, in Lumian's rented apartment, the nearly one-

meter-long Fürth Firefish was set on the dining table. Ludwig used a child's table knife to break through the charred and tough fish skin, cutting the fair fish meat into pieces.

Lumian glanced at Franca, who had donned a light-colored hunting suit, and noticed the Demoness of Pleasure's gaze was elusive, brimming with embarrassment.

She appeared to be lamenting: Kill me! This is too mortifying. I don't want to live anymore!

Lumian, who had been feeling slightly embarrassed himself, smiled.

He mouthed to Franca,

"Post-nut clarity is truly remarkable."

Despite Franca's inability to lip-read, she still sensed Lumian's ridicule.

Pleasure is detrimental! Pleasure is detrimental! Irrespective of gender, when thoughts of pleasure dominate one's mind, one will invariably engage in various actions that result in their own ruin!

How humiliating!

I don't want to live!

In that instant, Franca longed for a crevice in the ground to conceal herself.

Anthony, sitting silently at the dining table, glanced at Lumian, then at Franca, before looking away.

At last, Ludwig removed the inedible parts and sliced the fish fillets into three soup pots.

Franca sealed one of the pots with ice and stored it in her Traveler's Bag for later use. Ludwig slid the other one to Lugano and spoke in a childish tone, "Can we have fish fillet and clam cream broth tonight?"

"Sure," Lugano promptly agreed.

He made an effort to avert his gaze from Franca and Jenna, the two Demonesses, believing it was disrespectful to his boss.

From his viewpoint, these two Demonesses were probably the boss's lovers.

He couldn't help but marvel inwardly.

As expected of the boss. He really has Demonesses as his lovers, and there are two of them!

Back then, Emperor Roselle only had one.

After adding a generous amount of lemon juice to the pot of fish fillets, Ludwig slid them toward Lumian.

His intention was evident. He required the blood of a Mid-

Sequence Beyonder of the Hunter pathway.

"How much do you need?" Lumian inquired.

"Enough to stir it up," Ludwig replied, acting as if this was the bare minimum.

Jenna frowned and asked, "How much does each person need to eat to gain that permanent effect?"

Ludwig answered innocently, "Different physiques and Sequences need different quantities. You'll only find out when you actually eat it."

Lumian raised his eyebrows and poured the rest of Gardner Martin's blood into the soup pot.

Noticing it was still insufficient, he used a ritual silver dagger to slice his hand and dripped 20 to 30 milliliters of blood into it.

Ludwig observed with anticipation.

"Aren't you concerned about corruption?" Lumian asked with a smirk.

Ludwig shook his head. "The quantity here isn't substantial."

Franca tried her best to act normally and remarked with amusement, "Discussing toxicity without considering dosage is just playing the rogue."

"Indeed." Ludwig concurred with Franca and stirred the fish slices in the soup with a spoon.

Gradually, the tender-white fish soaked up the seemingly searing blood, and the fish slowly started to brown.

"Add some ice," Ludwig instructed Franca and Jenna.

The two Demonesses rose in unison and extended their hands toward the soup pot.

Drops of white frost condensed and descended like rain, noticeably slowing the browning of the fish until it ceased.

Ludwig leaped off his chair and dashed into the kitchen, returning with a few silver plates. He distributed seven to eight Ice Lemon Fish fillets to each of them.

"Is that all?" Jenna asked with a surprised smile.

"If it's not enough, you can have two or three more," Ludwig replied earnestly.

Jenna instinctively wanted to say something, but she refrained when she saw Ludwig's childlike demeanor.

She pointed at their plates and said, "Did you request so much of Lumian's blood just to eat such a small portion of the fish?

"Why not prepare less and save the remaining half of the pot for tomorrow?"

Ludwig hugged the soup pot in front of him and shouted, "Mine!"

"…" Jenna suddenly felt like a witch stealing candy from a child.

He's definitely abusing his power… Lumian glanced at Ludwig and shook his head in amusement. "At least you have some sense when it comes to food."

With that, Lumian polished off all the Ice Lemon Fish fillets on his plate.

Chapter 709: "Chef"

The sour lemon flavor, tender fish texture, scorching aroma, and subtle sweetness with hints of fish and oil burst forth in Lumian's mouth. The taste exceeded his expectations.

He had anticipated dishes like this would be unpalatable and jarring, similar to a potion, but he never thought they would be considered delicious.

When given a choice, Ludwig has a genuine preference for delicacies and doesn't fool himself… Lumian chewed and swallowed the seven or eight fish slices.

A mild burning sensation spread from his throat to his stomach, reminiscent of drinking a glass of liquor.

The sensation quickly faded, and nothing unusual happened.

"That's it? It worked?" Lumian glanced at Ludwig.

Ludwig shook his head.

"Give it another two to three minutes for your stomach to absorb it."

"So fast?" Franca asked, surprised.

She respected mysticism, but having taken potions before, she knew they worked instantaneously. Ludwig's delicacies, however, seemed to require digestion and absorption by the stomach, contradicting how the organ typically functioned.

Plus, the stomach didn't absorb everything!

Ludwig responded seriously, "A Chef's creations can be rapidly absorbed by the stomach."

Chef… Lumian nodded, deep in thought.

He remembered Ludwig frequently commenting on various things like a food connoisseur.

Without further explanation, Ludwig buried his face in the soup pot before him and polished off the remaining Ice Lemon Fish fillets.

Jenna and the others promptly finished the fish slices on their own plates.

Two minutes later, Lumian felt his body growing warm, with a tingling sensation in his skin and flesh.

The effect on him was minimal. It paled in comparison to drinking a potion, let alone the pain of burning himself with flames.

Soon, Lumian returned to normal, his expression unaltered.

He glanced playfully at Franca, Jenna, and Anthony, waiting to see how the Ice Lemon Fish fillet would affect them.

A minute later, Jenna and the others suddenly flushed, as if they had eaten incredibly spicy food from the Feynapotter Kingdom highlands.

"Hiss…" Lugano let out a pained gasp, feeling a searing sensation in his breath.

Originating from within his body, he couldn't have treated it even if he wanted to.

Frost enveloped Franca's body, seemingly trying to soothe the pain in her skin and flesh.

It was futile.

Jenna and Anthony grimaced but made no unnecessary movements. They bore the discomfort, waiting for the Ice Lemon Fish fillet to finish transforming their bodies.

This lasted for ten to twenty seconds before the quartet's expressions relaxed.

"How does it feel?" Lumian asked with a smile.

Franca instinctively recalled the sensation and said, "It was like every inch of my skin and flesh had been burned. Hmm, not quite that intense—relatively mild…"

While speaking, she took a matchbox from her Traveler's Bag and experimentally lit two matches. She held them to the back of her left hand for a bit.

Franca's expression gradually contorted. She endured the pain in her left hand momentarily before pulling it back and shaking it.

The matchbox fell to the ground.

"It still hurts!" Franca reported the experiment results to Lumian and Jenna through gritted teeth.

Ludwig hastily replied, "It doesn't reduce pain."

"How's the wound?" Jenna asked, concerned.

Franca immediately checked the back of her left hand, seeing only slight burn marks on her pale skin with minimal physical damage.

"It works, even though the flame temperature wasn't that high, to begin with…" Franca's expression eased.

Across the dining table, Anthony carefully considered his words before saying, "I think I'm a bit more irritable than usual, but within reasonable limits."

Jenna added, "I'm grumpy too, but not drastically."

Franca and Lugano confirmed experiencing the same thing.

Swallowing the Ice Lemon Fish fillet, Ludwig explained, "That's to be expected. Effectiveness comes with corruption."

Jenna and Franca turned to Lumian.

Lumian spread his hands, smiling. "I don't feel any different."

For him, the Ice Lemon Fish fillet's corruption was negligible.

Franca wasn't sure whether to feel envious or sympathetic. After a moment's thought, she said, "This is like a milder version of being a Contractee—tolerating certain negative effects in exchange for corresponding Beyonder traits. Sure, the effects are noticeably weaker, but the upside is it's passive. Plus, the negative effects are minimal.

"Going forward, when you get similar ingredients, you need to clarify the permanent and negative effects. You can't just eat everything. Choices have to be made. Otherwise, things can easily go wrong."

Lumian glanced at Ludwig and said, "That depends on the individual."

Maybe a Chef, or the Gourmet pathway, had Sequences that mitigated the corresponding impact, akin to Alms Monks and Ascetics who were Contractees.

Franca grasped Lumian's implication and continued excitedly,

"Dishes and concoctions without permanent effects are like various Apothecary pathway agents.

"I've always envied Contractees. I wanted the freedom to mix and match abilities, creating a unique character build. Now, without accepting an evil god's boon, I finally have a chance, albeit a diluted one."

Jenna's heart raced, and the two Demonesses gazed at Ludwig, eyes shining.

To them, he was no longer the gluttonous monster child Lumian had described, but a Beyonder chef deserving of their care and attention.

Ludwig concentrated on eating the leftover Ice Lemon Fish fillet, not reacting further.

…

In a quarry cave in Underground Trier.

Franca, Jenna, and Anthony stood beyond the spirituality wall, observing Lumian conduct the ritual to acquire new contract abilities.

Having thoroughly reviewed Madam Magician's information on spirit world entities and possessing the strange creature knowledge granted by the boon, Lumian swiftly identified two potential contract targets with mirror travel abilities.

The first was a spirit world being called Bloody Jack. According to the information, in the Loen Kingdom's south, some mysticism enthusiasts and folklore academics were playing a divination game when they spotted a blurry figure in the mirror wielding a large axe, drenched in blood. This figure would emerge from the mirror, assaulting and slaughtering everyone present.

The second was the Daratra Diamond Maggots, mentioned in the Contractee's mysticism knowledge. They could grant Mirror Traversal in exchange for sacrificing a crystallized meteorite. The drawback was that one's body would become denser and shorter.

Lumian undeniably wanted to summon Bloody Jack but wasn't certain if it possessed an ability akin to Mirror Traversal.

Gazing at the three lit candles, Lumian stepped back twice and chanted in ancient Hermes, "The Fool that doesn't belong to this era;

"You are the ruler above the gray fog;

"You are the King of Yellow and Black who wields good luck.

"I beseech your shelter.

"I pray for your attention.

"I!

"In the name of the great Fool, I summon:

"The peculiar creature that wanders about the unfounded, the slaughterer hidden in the mirror, Jack from the bloody world…"

The bluish-black candle flame instantly swelled, forming an illusory door adorned with enigmatic patterns amidst the pervasive, eerie gray mist.

The door gradually opened, and darkness poured out, engulfing the mirror Lumian had placed on the altar.

The mirror abruptly levitated, pointing directly at Lumian. Within, an indistinct figure in a blood-stained old jacket dragged a massive axe.

Opening his mouth, Lumian made his throat and chest resonate as he spoke the Mystical Language of Fate.

Silver-black words akin to symbols materialized in midair, descending onto the faux goatskin at the altar's edge, forming a concise and ominous contract.

Upon the contract's formation, Lumian connected with Bloody Jack, comprehending its abilities and traits. He "listened" to its demands.

Bloody Jack possessed three mirror-related abilities and traits, which Lumian named Mirror Mark, Mirror Concealment, and Mirror Traversal.

Mirror Marks could invisibly mark a mirror, inverted from reality, to pinpoint a target. Mirror Concealment allowed the user to hide within the dark tunnels, avoiding being pulled into another mirror. Mirror Traversal enabled swift passage through the illusory tunnels.

Bloody Jack's demand was the sacrifice of 99 living humans.

Lumian pondered briefly, concluding that Mirror Mark was the optimal choice. Locating targets was paramount, and Mirror Traversal could be substituted with Spirit World Traversal. Rapid travel wasn't essential when he could arrive directly.

His eyes suddenly glinted silvery-black, mirroring Bloody Jack's river of fate.

He wasn't seeking information about Bloody Jack. Instead, under the ritual's protection, he aimed to verify something.

After a quick observation, Lumian switched to ancient Hermes and asked Bloody Jack, "Can I alter the request?"

He was unsure if Bloody Jack would comprehend or respond, but asking was harmless. If not, he would have to write to Madam Magician, inquiring about other suitable mirror entities.

Having asked, Lumian immediately employed Magnified Fate, gaining a sharper view of Bloody Jack's fate for the next ten seconds.

Feigning nervousness, he moved his right hand as if to touch his face.

He Magnified a fate tributary!

Two to three seconds later, Bloody Jack's thoughts reached Lumian through the connection forged by the Mystical Language of Fate.

"Pull me out of the mirror!"

Lumian raised his eyebrows and stepped forward twice, extending his right hand toward the mirror hovering above the altar.

The moment his finger touched the glass mirror, he felt it dissolve into nothingness.

As Lumian fully inserted his palm into the mirror, a cold, damp, and distinctly sticky hand abruptly grasped his wrist.

Chapter 710: "Communication"

Lumian wasn't surprised when his wrist was grabbed by the wet hand.

He even chuckled. "Not bad. You only stained my wrist, not corrupt my entire arm."

As he spoke, he pulled back with all his might, feeling the abnormally heavy force opposing him.

Lumian's muscles swelled, and his body appeared to grow slightly larger.

At last, he saw the bloody figure in the jacket being dragged out of the empty mirror.

A bluish-black mist materialized, permeating the faux goatskin containing the ominous contract.

The contract burst into flames on its own, morphing into silver-black symbols and words. They linked together from end to end, creating an intricate and illusory pattern that abruptly passed through his clothes and settled between Lumian's chest and abdomen.

Having pulled Bloody Jack out of the mirror, Lumian had fulfilled the other party's request, and the contract was automatically fulfilled!

At that instant, Bloody Jack, who had regained his footing in front of the altar, raised his head.

His mutilated face turned towards Lumian as he lifted the blood-dripping axe with both hands.

Lumian's eyes, tinged with an iron-black hue, mirrored a two-toned figure of Bloody Jack.

One was a vivid red, enveloping every crevice of Bloody Jack's body, permeating every inch of space. The other was a pale white, no larger than a thumb. It was located at Bloody Jack's abdomen, enveloped by layers of bright red.

Much like Padre Cali in his untransformed Wraith state, he has only one vulnerability from head to toe, but it's not in his Spirit Body; it's concealed within his physical form… This seems to be composed of viscous blood. Regardless of the extent of damage or blood loss it endures, as long as the core remains unharmed, it will be unaffected… It bears some resemblance to the Rose Bishop of the Secrets Suppliant pathway, but it possesses mirror-related capabilities… As Lumian observed, a succession of thoughts calmly raced through his mind.

Bloody Jack's red spiderweb-like eyes displayed a ruthless and bloodthirsty expression. He raised his axe and swung it at Lumian's body.

The deal is done. Now, I'm going to kill you!

Bang!

The axe missed Lumian and hit the ground of the quarry cave, creating a deep fissure and sending gravel and dirt flying.

With a twisted flexibility that exceeded human limits, Lumian maneuvered behind Bloody Jack.

With a swift motion of his arm, Lumian punched out with his right fist.

Blazing white flames surged forth, a bright tail enveloping his fist and wrapping around his forearm.

Pfft! Lumian's fist felt as if it had plunged into a swamp. The deeper he went, the more muddy and sticky it became.

Rumble! He detonated the blazing white flames surrounding his fist, blasting open a passageway.

His fist and forearm sank into Bloody Jack's cavity, halting at the pale-white spot.

Just as Bloody Jack was about to turn around and swing his axe, he froze. His body rapidly disintegrated, turning into congealed blood that fell to the ground.

The blood clots writhed and reassembled into Bloody Jack, but there was still a gap in his abdomen that couldn't be filled.

Seeing this, Lumian's body ignited with a blazing white flame, ready to attack with all his might.

Bloody Jack instantly turned ethereal and retreated into the mirror on the altar.

Lumian chuckled and abandoned the pursuit, ending the summoning ritual at a moderate pace.

His objective had been achieved. He had acquired the contracted ability—Mirror Mark!

Previously, he had observed Bloody Jack's river of fate not to gather information about it, but to verify if this strange creature from the bloody world possessed godhood!

If Bloody Jack didn't have godhood, Lumian could complete some risky transactions with him to circumvent the requirement of 99 living sacrifices. If Bloody Jack had godhood, he would undoubtedly suffer a backlash. However, he was protected by the ritual and under Mr. Fool's gray fog's supervision, so he wouldn't be significantly affected.

It was precisely because he was aware of this that Lumian dared to agree to drag Bloody Jack out of the mirror, allowing him to no longer be restricted by the ritual.

It turned out that as long as the contracted party could communicate normally, the price to pay when signing the contract would be significantly lower.

Of course, there was no way to avoid the negative effects entirely. Although Lumian obtained the Mirror Mark, it would also make him more susceptible to attracting abnormal events and strange dangers related to mirrors.

As the crack created by Bloody Jack spread to the wall of spirituality, causing it to gradually disintegrate, Franca took the opportunity to curiously inquire about what had just transpired.

Lumian gave a brief account of his "negotiation" with Bloody Jack and smiled.

"I worked hard to reach Sequence 5 so that these evil creatures would be able to communicate with me calmly."

Franca couldn't resist laughing. "You call that calm?"

With a sigh, she said, "If it weren't for dealing with Moran Avigny, the Mirror Mark wouldn't be a wise choice. You wouldn't have much use for it normally. It's like wasting a contract slot."

This was due to Lumian's lack of mirror-related abilities. Without a fixed mirror world entrance, he couldn't pass through mirrors, let alone use the Mirror Mark to locate his target.

Lumian wasn't bothered by it.

"The Sealed Artifact corresponding to the Hisoka Beyonder characteristic might have the ability to transform into a Wraith. The Mirror Mark could be used to complement it."

"Let's hope that's the case," Franca said, sighing. "This is why Contractees can't compare to Shepherds. Once you sign a contract and gain an ability, you're stuck with it. Even if that ability becomes useless, it still takes up a slot and brings the associated negative effects."

Many contracted abilities were acquired to fulfill specific needs for a limited time. After that period, they often became useless. For instance, Lumian's Niese Face could only be used occasionally as an illusion during combat after he obtained the Lie earring.

Lumian smiled. "Who says I can't get rid of it?"

"Uh…" Franca was caught off guard.

Lumian's lips curved into a bright smile.

"Kill the contract target, and the contract will automatically be nullified."

Franca and Jenna gasped inwardly.

After a moment, Franca joked, "Very good. Keep that smile. That's the smile of a homicidal maniac—no, a Reaper."

Jenna nodded thoughtfully. "No wonder you didn't kill Bloody Jack just now and only scared it away. You were worried that the newly acquired abilities would vanish instantly. Didn't you mention you were planning to contract three abilities this time? Have you thought about the other two?"

"Yes." Lumian wasn't in a rush to complete the second ritual. He casually chatted, "One is to boost my defense or substitution abilities, while the other is to handle undead creatures. However, I'll need to think about the latter later."

The former addressed his lack of physical defense, while the latter made up for his insufficient means to deal with Wraiths and undead creatures.

"Substitution abilities…" Franca said, smiling. "Just sign a contract with a Wraith or specter formed by a Demoness or a Mid-Sequence Seer Beyonder after their death."

Lumian scoffed.

"Do you think I haven't considered that? However, apart from the Demoness evil spirit suspected to be a Saint, there's nothing related to

Demonesses or Seers. I definitely can't handle the negative effects of a demigod contractor at my current level."

"Maybe it's manageable," Franca's eyes sparkled. "Maybe the adverse effects will only change your gender."

"What do you mean 'only'?" Lumian wanted to tease Franca for her "life is short, why not give it a shot" mindset, but he restrained himself in front of Jenna.

Franca suddenly had a thought. "Can you only sign contracts with spirit world creatures or strange creatures? Can you sign one with a human? I can share the Mirror Substitution ability with you."

This was the first time Lumian had considered this question. After thinking for a moment, he said, "The relevant mysticism knowledge doesn't forbid it… But never mind. The Inevitability contract might have some hidden corruption or influence."

"That's true." Franca was still rational.

As she responded, another question popped into her mind.

If I actually sign a contract with him, what kind of negative effects will I inflict on Lumian?

"Why does the ability to deal with the undead have to wait?" Jenna wasn't as quick-witted as Franca, so she could only focus on more practical matters.

Lumian chuckled. "Because spirit world creatures and strange creatures fear sunlight's purification and don't have similar abilities, I can only consider obtaining it from the death domain. There's a good contract target there."

"Armored Shadow?" Franca realized. "Are you worried that giving him too much gold will make future communication uncontrollable?"

Lumian nodded and replied,"Additionally, I'm also waiting for the Sealed Artifact made from the Hisoka Beyonder characteristic. If it's related to a

Wraith, I won't need the corresponding contract ability."

After chatting for a while, Lumian reconstructed the wall of spirituality and began his second summoning.

This time, he summoned: "A peculiar creature wandering above the world, an unimaginably sturdy being, a colossal creature that never rests."

After reciting the incantation, a "peak" made of layers of flesh appeared at the mysterious door.

Its height was unknown, but it couldn't fully emerge, causing the illusory and mysterious door to shake.

After speaking the Mystical Language of Fate, Lumian obtained the corresponding information.

This "mountain of flesh" indeed possessed the ability to enhance one's defense. It could toughen one's body to be like steel or rock, but the corresponding downside was having a movement speed as slow as that of an ordinary turtle.

Lumian had no choice but to give up.

His alternative target was his messenger, Penitent Baynfel.

According to the messenger information provided by Madam Magician, Baynfel had the ability to bring his shadow to life and switch positions with his body at critical moments.

Chapter 711: Choice

Since he was summoning his messenger, Lumian didn't perform the ritual in Mr. Fool's name. He simply called forth Penitent Baynfel, who was garbed in a black clergyman's robe, resembling a charred corpse with black flames clinging to his body.

"I wish to enter into another contract with you," Lumian requested with a smile.

He briefly recounted the power of Inevitability, the special contract, the sharing of abilities, the potential price, and the negative effects, awaiting Baynfel's decision.

Baynfel stayed silent for a few moments before responding in a deep voice, "If you're not worried about the downsides, I have no objections."

"What might the negative effects be?" Lumian inquired cautiously.

In Baynfel's empty, dark eye sockets, the dark flames that served as his eyes flickered twice.

"That hinges on your choice. I can let you finalize the contract. Once you know the specific negative effects, you can decide if you want to seal the deal."

Different choices lead to different negative effects? What choices? Lumian spoke the Mystical Language of Fate, filled with curiosity and puzzlement, allowing the silver-black symbols, words, and patterns to land on the faux goatskin, forming a short, powerful, mysterious, and sinister contract document.

Through the connection forged by the Mystical Language of Fate, Lumian sensed Baynfel's traits and abilities.

The Penitent's powers were intimately tied to shadows and darkness, but most of them seemed to be submerged in murky depths. Lumian could sense their presence, but he couldn't discern their nature.

The two abilities floating above the surface were Shadow Animation and Spirit World Traversal. Their characteristics were Ancient Corpse.

Perfect, Shadow Animation is just what I need… Baynfel probably showcased it specifically for me… He's quite unique, completely different from spirit world entities like Headless Bride, Abscessed Hand, and Human-Faced Mantis… It's much more straightforward to truly communicate with him… As Lumian mused, he gained a deeper understanding of Shadow Animation.

This was an active ability that could animate the shadows of oneself and others. The former could be used to swap places with the body and evade fatal damage when dodging was impossible. The latter would ensnare the corresponding target, hindering their movements, but it couldn't inflict much harm or completely restrain the opponent.

Activating it swiftly to produce instantaneous effects was its greatest strength. Otherwise, it couldn't shield from death or injury. Its drawback was that it could only maintain the activation of one shadow at a time.

As a substitute, if the animated shadow perished, Lumian would have to wait for the sun to rise or set before the shadow would reappear. Shadowless individuals would be deathly afraid of sunlight and instinctively dread it.

In the past, my emotions and desires were volatile, and now I'm piling on a fear of sunlight? If I really run into Mid-Sequence Beyonders of the Sun pathway in the future, won't I be too terrified to even open my eyes? Thankfully, this is a downside that only kicks in after losing the shadow substitute. It's not permanent… Lumian looked at Baynfel and asked sincerely, "What sacrifice do you require? Or rather, what price must I pay?"

So far, he still hadn't figured out the negative repercussions of signing a contract with Baynfel.

Penitent Baynfel, with only a thin layer of charred skin clinging to his bones, replied, "Any mystical item in your possession."

Any one… Is this the so-called choice? Picking a mystical item to offer directly shapes the ultimate negative effects? Lumian had an epiphany as he took stock of the mystical items he carried.

His knee-jerk thought was the Pride Armor. After all, he couldn't effectively use the Sealed Artifact at present. However, looking at Baynfel's charred corpse, he felt that he wasn't just sacrificing an item but attempting to off his messenger. Furthermore, while he couldn't use the Pride Armor for now, Franca, Jenna, and Anthony could. Lumian had already taught them the corresponding usage techniques.

At the crux of it all was a single mantra: Don't wear it yourself. Only utilize the negative effects by letting the target trigger them!

As for proactively triggering higher-level negative effects in exchange for indiscriminate area-of-effect damage, there was no way to teach that. It had to be improvised based on the environment and the enemy's traits. After all, Demonesses likely relished this method. It was brutally effective in bullying targets without substitute-type abilities!

Mystery Prying Glasses, Flog boxing gloves, Eye of Truth, Lie earring, Mr. K's finger, Symphony of Hatred bone flute, Fury of the Sea brooch, Traveler's Bag, Omebella's umbilical cord remains, expired misfortune gold coins and unlucky banknotes, Serial Killer Beyonder characteristic… Lumian went through these items one by one.

Excluding non-mystical items and ones that were very handy to him at the moment, Lumian ultimately decided to choose between the Mystery Prying Glasses and the Eye of Truth.

Their abilities overlapped to a degree. Keeping one sufficed.

After a brief moment of contemplation, Lumian opted to offer the Eye of Truth to Baynfel.

He believed that the Mystery Prying Glasses had fewer negative effects than the Eye of Truth when usage time was limited. Furthermore, the Eye of Truth could only see the truth. The Mystery Prying Glasses could at least be used to paint supernatural works and disguise himself. After Lumian became an Ascetic, he could effectively rein in the urge to paint while donning the Mystery Prying Glasses. He could paint as needed or abstain.

Lumian produced the peculiar Eye of Truth and handed it to Baynfel.

Just as Baynfel grasped the eyewear, which appeared entwined with flesh and blood vessels, Lumian suddenly sensed the downside of signing the contract.

In scenes closely tied to Baynfel's past, he would witness truths better left unseen.

However, it's fine if such effects only happen when it involves this messenger's enigmatic background. Otherwise, I would have cut today's ritual short and made a new choice after finding a suitable contract partner… In Aurore and Franca's words, seeing what shouldn't be seen is a death sentence… Lumian pondered for a moment and replied to Baynfel in a deep voice, "The contract stands."

As he finished speaking, the short and sinister contract spontaneously ignited without fire, transforming into silver-black symbols, words, and patterns that seared onto Lumian's arm.

Lumian glanced down at his shadow and saw it warp on its own, as if performing a powerful dance.

A smile spread across Lumian's face.

After about ten seconds, his shadow settled.

Lumian expressed his gratitude to Baynfel and ended the summoning, stowing away all the items on the altar.

"It's done?" Franca asked eagerly.

It wasn't that she doubted Lumian couldn't even handle his messenger, but she worried the nature of his abilities might not meet the requirements or come with too many strings attached.

Lumian nodded and briefly recounted the situation with Shadow Animation.

As he walked towards the quarry cave's exit, he said to Franca, Jenna, and Anthony, "Now, we can hatch a plan to deal with Moran Avigny.

"Franca, contact the Demoness of Black and let her know we're about to make our move. However, to avoid spooking the family and hidden forces behind Moran Avigny, she doesn't need to observe nearby for now. Just request an emergency help charm from her that can contact her through a mirror if the Mirror People have hidden allies. Yes, it's a golden opportunity to test the Demoness of Black's stance towards the Tamara family and the Mirror People. Also, inform the Eternal Blazing Sun Church that they can get ready to cut us some slack.

"Jenna, write to Madam Judgment and clue her in on our plan in the event the Demoness of Black is in bed with the Mirror People.

"Anthony…"

Lumian's mind raced as he considered various details and doled out missions to his companions.

Franca, Jenna, and Anthony didn't just passively accept their tasks. They actively chimed in with ideas and helped Lumian fill in gaps and polish his brainstorming.

Upon returning to Apartment 702 at 9 Rue Orosai, Anthony ducked out early to keep up appearances at the Trier Psychiatrist Guild. Jenna, meanwhile, changed into a dark black cloaked dress and seized the chance to play the part of a Witch.

Soon, only Lumian and Franca remained in the apartment's living room.

The atmosphere grew awkward, and a prolonged silence hung in the air.

Lumian broke the ice as if nothing had happened.

"How's Jenna coming along with digesting the Witch potion?"

Franca breathed a sigh of relief and said, "Not bad. She's found her groove acting as a Witch. Ask around the market district and you'll hear whispers of Witches appearing in the dead of night to punish rowdy drunkards. Some claim to have fallen into an icy river. Some wake up the next day aching all over, while others get splitting headaches come evening and don't dare drink anymore. What they have in common is they all ran into someone dressed as a Witch. Yes, some drunkards even vanished into thin air…"

Franca's voice trailed off, replaced by a tone fit for telling ghost stories.

"The missing ones committed serious offenses? The others are guilty of beating their families, harassing passersby, and groping women?" Lumian guessed with a smile, based on his read of Jenna.

"Bingo." Franca nodded with a bright smile.

Lumian pondered for a moment and asked, "Aren't you worried the Demoness of Black will catch wind of this rumor and send someone to investigate?"

Franca felt smug and pointed at herself.

"You're looking at her! Me! In the Demoness Sect, I'm the one handling matters tied to the market district!"

She then sighed and said, "Jenna is a natural. She whipped up a solid acting plan in under a month. Maybe she can digest the Witch potion before I advance to Affliction."

"If those incidents hadn't happened, she would've been a star actress. Acting is second nature to her," Lumian agreed.

The two fell silent again.

After a few seconds, Franca put on a brave face and said, "Um, um, you can't breathe a word to Jenna or anyone else about what I said or did near the altar in the mirror world!"

Lumian asked in confusion, "Did you say or do anything out of the ordinary back there?

"I don't recall…"

Franca was taken aback for a moment before flashing an understanding smile.

She stood up with a breezy grin and walked to Lumian's side. She patted his shoulder gratefully and said, "What a bro!"

She felt all the awkwardness had evaporated.

…

A few days later, as Moran Avigny attended an interministerial meeting, Lumian appeared near the government-provided villa.

Chapter 712: "Accusation"

Lumian stood beside Moran Avigny's villa, wearing a wide-brimmed round hat and a black tweed coat. He gazed at the garden, its few withered leaves rustling in the breeze, and said to Franca, "Keep your distance later."

As he spoke, Lumian's eyes turned silver-black once more, allowing him to observe the fate tributaries corresponding to Franca's future.

The tributary tainted with a faint black color was unrelated to their upcoming infiltration. Given the current circumstances, sneaking into Moran Avigny's villa and leaving a Mirror Mark on the full-body mirror in his study didn't seem to pose a high risk of death.

However, Lumian knew better than to let his guard down. After using the Eye of Calamity several times, he understood that a single black fate tributary didn't necessarily mean there was only one hidden death calamity lurking.

According to Franca, numerous death calamities were concealed further along the fate tributary, too blurry for Lumian to discern or differentiate.

In other words, even though there was presently just one faintly black-tainted fate tributary connected to their infiltration of Moran Avigny's villa, when Franca made her decision and tried to enter, transforming the harmless fate tributary into the main path, a black tributary symbolizing a deadly calamity might still emerge.

Lumian's profound realization about this was: The fate of the future was variable and ever-evolving.

Of course, certain aspects were destined to remain constant. For instance, death was the inevitable fate awaiting most humans.

"No need to worry, I'm not new to this," Franca assured him, confident in her infiltration skills.

Assassin 101: Infiltration!

Without another word, Lumian activated the mark and morphed into a shadow creature, melding into the shadows cast by the garden's plants.

Franca stepped forward and disappeared into the wind-stirred shadows.

The pair swiftly and stealthily made their way to the side of the villa.

At the same time, Moran Avigny was attending a ministerial meeting. His wife had gone to an art salon with her lady's maid, leaving only a handful of valets, maids, gardeners, and chefs in the villa.

The Avigny family didn't live there. Only the immediate family of the Minister of Industry was permitted to reside in the government-provided villa long-term. Moran Avigny's three children had either already married and moved out or were attending university in the Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative. They only returned home on weekends.

For Lumian and Franca, this was when the target location's security was at its most vulnerable. After all, Moran Avigny was the VIP. The covert protection detail would undoubtedly stick close to him.

Lumian emerged from the shadows in the corner and instructed Franca,

"Wait here and keep an eye out for any trouble."

"Got it!" Franca agreed without protest.

Lumian concentrated on the Demoness of Pleasure's fate tributary for a few moments before shifting back into a shadow creature and silently slipping into Moran Avigny's villa.

He couldn't view his own future fate, even with the aid of a mirror. His only option was to infer his fate by watching his companions.

Franca concealed herself in the shadows and patiently waited.

It wasn't long before Lumian reached Moran Avigny's study, navigating it as if it were his own home. He had witnessed Moran Avigny use the full-body mirror there to access the mirror world on multiple occasions.

As for his familiarity with the layout, that was thanks to the detailed security map provided by 007.

The winter sunlight around 4 p.m. was dim. The study was a mix of light and darkness, evoking a strong sense of dusk. The silence had long been a constant melody in this space.

Lumian meticulously searched the study from within the shadows but found no traps or hidden individuals.

Only then did he revert to his human form, breaking free from the shadows and reappearing in front of the full-body mirror.

As the black mark activated, Lumian reached out his right palm and pressed it against the cold, hard glass.

A blood-colored handprint instantly materialized, reversed from Lumian's right palm as if it belonged to someone else.

The inverted, sinister blood-colored palm print quickly faded, blending into the mirror and vanishing.

Just as Lumian was about to pull his right palm back and leave, a hand abruptly extended from the full-body mirror and seized his wrist.

The hand was a healthy white, with long, powerful fingers.

It yanked with tremendous force, catching Lumian off guard and sending him crashing into the glass mirror.

At some point, the mirror had turned ethereal, shedding its corporeal form. Lumian's vision went dark before illuminating to reveal numerous dark passageways resembling a spiderweb.

In the area corresponding to the current mirror, an ordinary-looking man stood at the edge. He raised his brass revolver, aimed it at Lumian, and pulled the trigger.

Clad in a dark tweed suit and a half top hat, with a glass-like cufflink fastened to his sleeve, he wore a faint smile, as if mocking Lumian for not anticipating the possibility of Moran Avigny's bodyguard hiding in the mirror.

Bang!

A bullet gleaming with ghostly green light shot towards Lumian.

Lumian's figure abruptly vanished. The bullet struck the afterimage he left behind and flew into one of the dark, empty tunnels.

In the next instant, Lumian swiftly materialized behind the ambusher and, without hesitation, harrumphed.

Two beams of white light shot out from his nose and struck the ambusher.

The ambusher's eyes snapped shut, and he crumpled to the ground.

Midway through, his eyes darted around and he snapped out of his daze.

Thud! He crashed to the ground, transforming his body into a shadow.

The shadows disintegrated and spread in all directions, entering various dark tunnels.

Immediately after, the ambusher stealthily materialized in an empty passageway, his form shrouded in faint white fog.

Lumian's figure was reflected in his misty eyes. Before Lumian could sense it and turn to look, the ambusher spoke in a strange language that could stir the forces of nature, "You're guilty!"

Lumian had never encountered this language, but he clearly understood its meaning. His body suddenly froze, as if under an invisible restriction.

The ambusher opened his mouth again.

"You blasphemer!"

Suddenly, the entire mirror world froze, and the dark, ethereal passageways transformed into tiny amber insects.

Once again, Lumian heard a terrifying voice that seemed to come from an infinite distance.

Vaguely, he "saw" three figures.

The three figures sat cross-legged, one facing left, one looking straight ahead, and the other looking right. Their hands were in different postures.

One was heavy, one real, and one ethereal. They were in three different states, constantly moving, changing, and interchanging around a silver circle.

A majestic and resounding voice reverberated, causing Lumian's mind to buzz as he lost consciousness.

Amidst the blurry, vivid pain, the dazed Lumian felt a familiar burning sensation on his left chest. His right palm alternated between burning and freezing.

Gradually, he regained consciousness.

In a dark tunnel that had solidified, the ambusher witnessed silver-black warts erupting from Lumian's body, emitting sinister patterns that resembled viscous liquid. At some point, a strange, cold wind swept through the surroundings. Darkness squirmed in the depths of the different tunnels, as if a monster was about to crawl out.

The ambusher's body stiffened, becoming increasingly sluggish, with a faint white fog barely discernible within.

After an unknown period of time, the man finally survived the most dangerous moment. He felt his body again and regained his vision and hearing.

As Lumian's warts and patterns faded, the ambusher instinctively felt a lingering fear.

How did he commit blasphemy?

Which deity did he blaspheme against?

Why didn't he lose control?

I've never encountered such a situation before!

The Beyonder powers possessed by the ambusher allowed him to discern the target's crimes and "accuse" him of various charges. The damage and effects of different crimes were completely different, and the accuser couldn't predict them beforehand. They could only make a guess based on their experience from previous "cases."

This was the first time the ambusher had encountered a situation where he nearly succumbed to the overflowing influence of the deity after the sinner was punished by a deity for blasphemy!

Fortunately, he recovered before the target.

The ambusher raised the brass revolver once more and aimed it at Lumian, who was hunched over in pain.

Just as he pulled the trigger, Lumian's head snapped up, his expression contorted with ferocity.

Bang!

A bullet shimmering with starlight shot out from the muzzle, locked onto the target's body.

Almost simultaneously, Lumian's shadow came to life and flipped upward.

Crack!

The black shadow shattered like a mirror. Along with the starlight, it caved in and was obliterated.

After briefly disappearing, Lumian materialized behind the ambusher and harrumphed once more.

He had used Shadow Animation in time, and the shadow had triggered Franca's Mirror Substitution!

This was why Lumian had Franca infiltrate the villa and stay outside. Relying on Mirror Substitution required maintaining a certain distance.

It turned out his shadow could also share Mirror Substitution!

Two beams of white light shot out, causing the ambusher to close his eyes again.

This time, Lumian didn't give the enemy a chance to quickly wake up. He extended his right foot and blocked the enemy, preventing him from falling.

Simultaneously, he drew his revolver and pressed it against the target's forehead.

The ambusher's eyes darted around, and he awoke to the terrifying pressure emanating from the muzzle.

He forced a smile, handed over his revolver, and whispered, "I'll give this to you. Can you let me go?"

Lumian's thoughts raced as he took the revolver and nodded. "Okay."

He then holstered his revolver.

The ambusher maintained a humble and ingratiating smile as he turned around and walked deeper into the dark tunnel.

Suddenly, Lumian heard Termiboros's magnificent voice.

"It's best not to let him go."

Uh… Lumian's eyes narrowed as he instantly sensed something was off.

Why did I agree to that deal just now?

Why would I let him go?

Chapter 713: Between White and Black

Warned by Termiboros, Lumian sensed something was off.

The ambusher was slowly making his exit, as if concerned that moving too fast would prematurely alert Lumian to the abnormality. Strangely, no massive vortex emerged from the dark, empty tunnel's depths, stopping the ambusher, who had already gone in, from getting pulled into another mirror.

As he watched him go, Lumian glanced at his restored shadow, put away the brass revolver taken from the enemy, and pulled out the Flog boxing gloves from his Traveler's Bag. He put them on at a measured pace.

A moment later, blazing white flames engulfed Lumian's body as he transformed into a fiery spear that hurtled towards the ambusher's back.

The ambusher's fears came to pass. He quickly evaded, ready to turn into a shadow and escape into the dark tunnel's depths with five decoys. Then he would trigger Mirror Traversal and get away entirely, returning to a pre-selected mirror.

Just then, as the flames making up the burning white spear dissipated, Lumian appeared.

The ambusher's shadow came alive, ensnaring the body that hadn't fully transformed into a shadow, briefly keeping it from dividing into six separate forms. It was forced to remain in place.

Lumian advanced and dashed in front of the terrified ambusher. He alternated punches, starting the Flogging.

Bang!

Lumian's initial punch heightened the ambusher's fear, and the target narrowly freed himself from his shadow's entanglement.

Bang!

Lumian's next punch instantly set off the enemy's already tense fear.

This wasn't chance; the ambusher's fear clearly exceeded normal levels in this situation. Lumian, his eyes silver-black, foresaw the corresponding future and exploited this vulnerability. Fear played out in his mind as he punched.

Thus, the first punch worsened the situation, and the second significantly raised the odds, successfully triggering the fear.

The ambusher went rigid, heart briefly ceasing from the detonating fear. His mind blanked, and blood poured from his nose.

Seeing this, Lumian took out the ritual sheepskin from his Traveler's Bag and threw it over the ambusher's head.

Right after, he spoke the activation incantation in Hermes: "Sheep!"

Amid a dark flash, the ambusher turned into a sheep with light white and gray wool.

Lumian stared at the fearful sheep with bloodshot eyes. Removing the Flog boxing gloves and returning them to his Traveler's Bag, he grinned and said,

"So, you think I'll release you for a measly gun?"

Lumian then stooped down, scooped up the limp sheep, and went back to the mirror in Moran Avigny's study, trying to exit.

Unable to enter or leave mirrors, he wasn't certain he could depart so simply. If not, he would utilize the pre-prepared Mirror Mark and Spirit World Traversal to go directly to the unique, permanent mirror world exit in

Underground Trier. Then he would teleport to locate Franca. This would avert any issues behind the mirror.

Lumian's vision faded and brightened as he emerged in Moran Avigny's study with the frightened sheep.

He rushed to the window and warily opened it. Sure enough, Franca had exited the shadows and waited by the small windowsill.

Realizing Lumian's Mirror Substitution had shattered, Franca quickly chose to investigate and check if her partner required aid.

You okay?" Franca whispered.

"We'll discuss it later." Lumian threw her the sheep.

Franca promptly caught the sheep and vanished into the shadows with it.

In no rush to go, Lumian donned gloves and took care of the various traces he had left behind.

Soon, Franca returned, using the Primordial Demoness figurine, her mirror, and Demoness black magic to handle the anti-divination and anti-prophecy part.

…

In an abandoned tunnel close to the permanent mirror world entrance in Underground Trier,

Franca, now fully briefed by Lumian, eyed the quivering sheep and said eagerly, "How should we question it? Should I ready a mechanical typewriter like last time?

"But we've run out of truth serum."

Anthony, sans gold-rimmed glasses and back in veteran garb, gazed at the sheep for a couple seconds before responding, "I'll talk with him."

"Should we step out first?" Jenna asked out of caution.

Anthony agreed with a nod.

"I don't mind you observing, but he'll feel more at ease with less people, facilitating communication."

Concerned our attendance will scare him and impact the Hypnotism? Lumian spun around pensively and exited the sealed dark tunnel alongside Franca and Jenna.

Soon, the sheep appeared with Anthony, no longer as scared and nervous.

"You may cancel the Animal Creation Spell," Anthony told Lumian, smiling. "He realizes we're acting in his best interest and wishes to assist. Provided we avoid topics that will impact his faith in a deity and directly affect his life, he'll speak honestly and amiably."

The sheep nodded gravely, confirming Anthony's words.

Lumian faced Franca and Jenna, seeing matching emotions in their eyes.

A Hypnotist is truly terrifying!

A Spectator is truly terrifying!

Indeed… Lumian reflected inwardly.

Looking at the sheep, he uttered the Hermes incantation: "His Grace."

With a dark flicker, the sheepskin automatically vanished, and the ambusher materialized before Lumian and the others, half-crouched.

Putting away the sheepskin, Lumian inquired with a smile, "What's your name?"

"Jebus Lata," the ambusher answered nonchalantly, like talking to a buddy.

Holding the carbide lamp, Lumian warmly asked, "Were you guarding Moran Avigny?"

"Yes," Jebus Lata replied frankly. "Mainly to conceal myself behind the mirror and watch the outside. Also to prevent mirror world mishaps and ensure Moran Avigny isn't found out and ambushed when he uses it to do specific things in various locations."

Security is fairly tight. No clear weak points… Franca muttered, taking the lead in displaying her Demoness of Pleasure charm. Grinning, she asked, "Which organization do you belong to?"

Jebus's eyes were drawn to Franca as he reflexively answered,

"The School of Truth."

"Truth?" Lumian arched an eyebrow.

Jebus didn't face him, gaze flitting between the two Demonesses.

"Yes, Truth."

Growing serious, he addressed Franca and Jenna in a proselytizing tone, "What do you believe this world's backdrop is?

Without waiting for the Demonesses' response, he continued, "It's not white or black. Not light or darkness.

"It's the gray between white and black, the mist between light and darkness. It's shadows, flux, and chaos!"

Traits of the corresponding pathway? Well-versed in mysticism, Lumian thoughtfully switched gears.

"Are you aware of Moran Avigny's identity?"

This was their top priority now.

Jebus nodded casually, as if conversing with a friend.

"I am. He's part of the Tamara family but was swapped with a Mirror Person from Underground Trier."

"Then why collaborate with him still?" Franca probed.

Jebus chuckled.

"Didn't I just say?

"This world's backdrop isn't white or black, but gray. If cooperating with Mirror People lets me reach my aim, why not?"

"What's the School of Truth after?" Lumian swiftly queried.

Jebus peered at Franca's face and lake-blue eyes, stating, "We seek to leverage Moran Avigny and other elites to slowly seize control of Intis's government, letting this nation have order yet shadows, plus a conduit for ordered communication and shadows.

"We honor the law, but that won't stop us from uncovering legal loopholes and employing select methods to settle matters pre-litigation.

"That's our ideology."

Jebus seemed to preach to the Demonesses.

How ambitious… Jenna sighed inwardly.

Smiling, Lumian asked, "Why control the government?"

"To practice and near the truth, a rite to please it," Jebus responded fanatically. "Plus, we must use Intis's government and others to locate three things."

"What three?" Franca inquired curiously.

Jebus gladly obliged her.

"One, clues to fallen heaven. It's in the underground ancient sealed city. Only by controlling Intis's government can we fully unseal it."

Fallen heaven… What's that? Lumian, Franca, Jenna, and Anthony shared looks, realizing none had heard the term.

Jebus went on, "Two, Roselle's final mausoleum."

Emperor Roselle's mausoleum? Lumian's pupils widened.

Franca asked eagerly, "Got any clues?"

"I don't know." Jebus shook his head honestly. "At minimum, I've got zero leads on Roselle's tomb. No idea if the Overseers have found anything."

Overseer… Lumian and the rest committed the title to memory.

Jebus glanced from Franca to Jenna, then back to Franca.

"Three, a lamp. The Magic Wishing Lamp."

Magic Wishing Lamp? Lumian checked Franca, seeing the Demoness of Pleasure also looked blank.

Smiling, Jebus added with a showy air, "The Magic Wishing Lamp is a Sealed Artifact. Its number is: 0-05!"

Chapter 714: The Fractured Tamara Family

Jebus eagerly observed Franca and Jenna after mentioning 0-05, hoping to witness expressions of shock and terror on their faces.

Considering the immense power demonstrated by this Beyonder team, they surely grasped the gravity of a Grade 0 Sealed Artifact!

It was a horrifying object capable of obliterating not just Trier, but potentially the whole world!

The higher the serial number of a Grade 0 Sealed Artifact, the more dangerous it would be.

And now, they were talking about 0-05!

While Franca and Jenna were intrigued and surprised, their reaction didn't match Jebus's expectations.

Instead of responding to Jebus, they turned their attention to Lumian.

Despite not having seen or dared to read the details, they had learned from Lumian that Ludwig, the monstrous child, had "stolen" Sealed Artifact information from the Church of Knowledge and given it to Lumian as payment for a deal.

The information pertained to 0-01!

0-05? Lumian raised an eyebrow.

To his knowledge, Sealed Artifacts probably didn't have serial numbers in ancient times. Even if they did, they were individual actions of different Churches. It wasn't until the end of the Fourth Epoch or the beginning of the Fifth Epoch that the seven ruling Churches established the current Sealed Artifact classification rules and numbered the ones under their control.

Among them, due to the immense danger posed by Grade 0 and Grade 1 Sealed Artifacts, the orthodox Churches had agreed to share general information with each other and unify their serial numbers without duplicates.

In other words, it was impossible for both the Eternal Blazing Sun Church and the Evernight Goddess Church to possess a 0-05 Sealed Artifact.

In the entire world, only the Magic Wishing Lamp could be called 0-05!

When the seven Churches first numbered their Grade 0 Sealed Artifacts, they undoubtedly ranked them according to the level of danger, time of appearance, and intrinsic uniqueness. Subsequent acquisitions would be named in the order they were sealed.

This way, there was a high likelihood that the dozens of Grade 0 Sealed Artifacts at the top of the list would adhere to posing greater danger and having greater uniqueness the lower the serial number. For 0-05 to be ranked fifth among the countless Grade 0 Sealed Artifacts spoke volumes about its terrifying power and significance!

Of course, based on these rules, the Grade 0 Sealed Artifacts with the lowest serial numbers might not necessarily be weaker than those with higher serial numbers.

Lumian looked at Jebus and said in a relatively calm tone, "0-05? A terrifying item ranked fifth among all Grade 0 Sealed Artifacts?"

"Indeed," Jebus replied, his desire to show off finally satisfied.

Lumian inquired curiously, "Does its name, Magic Wishing Lamp, imply that you can make wishes with it?"

At that moment, Lumian's heart swelled with anticipation that surpassed his outward expression.

Jebus nodded solemnly.

"Yes, it can grant the holder any ten wishes."

Before Lumian could probe further, Jebus added, "However, as far as I know, the fulfillment of those wishes often takes a distorted form or comes with horrifying consequences. Moreover, none of those who once possessed the divine lamp met a good end. Perhaps Roselle Gustav met his demise because of this."

Lumian fell silent upon hearing this revelation.

Franca glanced at Lumian and asked, "Did 0-05 once belong to Emperor Roselle?"

Jebus responded without hesitation, "Yes."

Franca inquired with interest, "What about now? Do you have any leads on 0-05's whereabouts?"

Jebus was eager to share what he knew.

"Yes, it should be with the leader of the secret organization, Element Dawn.

"That leader is believed to be Roselle's eldest daughter, Bernadette."

"Wow!" Franca exclaimed in admiration and relief, as if the child of an old friend was thriving after the latter's passing.

Although she and Lumian had learned after the sea prayer ritual that Emperor Roselle's eldest daughter, Bernadette, was alive and had invented fairytale magic, closely linked to the Tarot Club's Major Arcana card, The Hermit, they were unaware of her precise circumstances.

Now, she was pleasantly surprised to discover that Bernadette had become the leader of a secret organization.

Franca had long been familiar with Element Dawn. She knew they focused on studying mysticism and Beyonder alchemy, opposing another knowledge-seeking secret organization, the Moses Ascetic Order. They were primarily active in the Intis region, the south-central zone, and the sea.

"It's only natural for the Emperor's belongings to be with his eldest daughter," Lumian remarked, feeling somewhat pleased for Emperor Roselle.

Franca asked Jebus excitedly, "Are you planning to confront Bernadette?"

Jebus slowly shook his head.

"We don't have the necessary strength yet. That's one of the reasons we collaborate with the Mirror People.

"Only by embracing and pleasing the truth can the Overseers obtain more boons to resist Bernadette and her subordinates."

Controlling the government and embracing the truth to varying degrees is a boon-seeking ritual? Yes, Jebus himself mentioned that this is a ritual to please the truth… Their boon-receiving ritual differs from that of other evil god cults. Rather than primarily focusing on blood sacrifices, it emphasizes the influence, utilization, and transformation of order… Lumian summarized a key characteristic of the School of Truth based on Jebus's words.

After a moment of contemplation, he asked, "Overseer is both a position and a name? What's the Sequence equivalent in the potion pathway?"

"Sequence 4, having just attained godhood," Jebus replied concisely. It was unclear whether he was reluctant to disclose such matters or if he simply didn't know much.

Lumian continued, "We've already grasped your school's philosophy and objectives. What's the purpose of the Mirror People?"

Jebus pondered for a moment before responding, "They also want to break the seal of the ancient underground city. Only by breaking the seal can they enter the depths of the special mirror world where they originally resided and find something of great importance, but it has nothing to do with us.

"They've been allowing more Mirror People to sneak out and replace the originals.

"I'm not sure if they have any other motives."

"Apart from Moran Avigny, which other Mirror People do you know?" Franca didn't conceal her desire to know the answer.

Jebus shook his head.

"Ever since we reached a collaborative agreement with Moran Avigny, he's had the other Mirror People change their positions and identities. He's the only one who can contact them."

"How did you discover that Moran Avigny is a Mirror Person?" Lumian sought additional clues.

Jebus chuckled.

"Our School of Truth was founded with some members of the Tamara family as its core. Several of them had long suspected that something was off with Moran Avigny and other clansmen. After receiving the truth's revelation, they confirmed this suspicion."

"Which pathway does Moran Avigny's original body belong to?" Lumian frowned.

Jebus didn't conceal anything for Moran Avigny's sake.

"The Judgment pathway. Not only does he possess the power of the Judgment pathway, but he can also wield mirror-related powers."

"Are there any members of the Tamara family's Judgment lineage who don't follow the truth and aren't replaced by Mirror People?" Lumian inquired further.

"Yes, they've cut ties with our School of Truth and have been trying to deal with us," Jebus replied truthfully.

Wh— The Tamara family first split into two branches, Judgment and Apprentice. Then, the Judgment branch splintered into three parts: those who believe in the truth, those replaced by the Mirror People, and those who adhered to their original traditions… However, the ones with the connection between the Apprentice branch of the Tamara family and the Demoness Sect are more likely to be replaced by the Mirror People. Has that branch also fractured? Why is the Tamara family constantly splintering… Even if the Tamara family doesn't fracture, there's still the risk of being replaced by the Mirror People? Could this stem from some unresolved mysteries of the Fourth Epoch? Lumian analyzed and speculated based on the available information.

"What's Moran Avigny's approximate Sequence?" Jenna asked, noticing Lumian's silence.

"Sequence 5," Jebus answered Jenna's question with a smile.

Sequence 5 Disciplinary Paladin… Franca, under the guidance of Madam Judgment, a Major Arcana card holder, was well-versed in the Arbiter pathway.

Sequence 9 was Arbiter, Sequence 8 was Sheriff, Sequence 7 was Interrogator, and Sequence 6 was Judge.

Disciplinary Paladin with mirror magic and mirror world-

related abilities… Lumian looked at Jebus and asked with a smile,

"You're not a Mirror Person or a Demoness. Why can you freely enter and exit the mirror world without being affected by the dangers there?"

Jebus pointed at the glass cufflink on his sleeve.

"This is an item given to us by Moran Avigny. It allows us to enter and exit the mirror world and use the connections between mirrors to traverse without being absorbed into other mirrors.

"I can still use it five times."

Very good. It will be ours in the future… Yes, let's call them Mirror Cufflink… At that moment, Franca had already thought of a name for the cufflink.

Lumian nodded and replied, "If your abilities correspond to a potion pathway, what would Sequence 9 be called?"

Given the looming potential conflict with the School of Truth, Lumian didn't let the opportunity to understand the other party's Beyonder powers slip away.

A proud smile graced Jebus's face. "It's Broker. We are the gray between white and black, the fog between light and darkness. We are the bridge between order and shadows!"

"Could you say something more comprehensible…" Franca muttered under her breath.

Lumian smiled and asked without hesitation, "What abilities does Broker possess?"

Chapter 715: Shadow Merchant

Jebus reorganized his thoughts and said, "We can become more attuned to certain needs and find suitable candidates to fulfill them. We can also facilitate the corresponding transactions through our words and connections."

With his Conspirer's mind, Lumian pondered seriously for two seconds before fully grasping Jebus's true meaning. Amused, he said, "Put it in simpler terms that are closer to mysticism."

Jebus glanced at Franca and Jenna and eagerly explained, "I have two primary abilities. One is called Gray Perception. I can more acutely sense the gray areas between white and black, including my desire and need to enter that gray domain.

"The other is exceptional eloquence. This includes mastery of language and the ability to observe others' expressions and decipher their words."

"That's it?" Lumian asked, raising his eyebrows.

"That's it," Jebus replied candidly with a shake of his head.

"Don't Brokers charge fees for their services?" Lumian inquired with a smile.

"Before reaching a deal, we will agree on a price with both parties. Sometimes, we don't even ask for one. It's mainly to establish and maintain relationships," Jebus answered seriously. "None of this involves any superpowers."

I had thought a Broker's Beyonder powers could derive corresponding benefits from every transaction they facilitate, including Beyonder enhancements. However, this is clearly an exaggeration. It doesn't seem to belong to Sequence 9… The two abilities Jebus mentioned are very fitting for those at Sequence 9. From the looks of it, Brokers and Spectators are quite similar. They can hardly participate directly in Beyonder battles and are considered more supplementary support… Lumian nodded in enlightenment.

Franca asked with interest, "What's Sequence 8?"

"It's Shadow Merchant," Jebus replied with a smile as he gazed at the Demoness of Pleasure's face.

Without waiting for Franca to inquire further, he took the initiative to explain, "We can detect mysterious creatures and dangerous entities hidden in darkness and shadow while remaining safe from their attacks, thereby allowing us to reach certain deals with them."

Jenna couldn't help but ask, "Invulnerable to hidden mysterious creatures and dangerous entities?"

Isn't this ability too powerful?

Jebus replied with a smile, "That's usually the case, but you can't attack the other party first or secretly exert any influence that's disadvantageous to them. You can't harbor malice when striking a deal, lest the other party discovers it. Furthermore, you'll suffer indiscriminate damage if embroiled in a battlefield. You can't make creatures engaged in combat stand down."

"What if you see something you shouldn't?" Lumian asked after some thought.

"I will endure the corresponding corruption," Jebus answered without attempting to boast.

"So it seems a Shadow Merchant possesses an aura that prevents nearby creatures from harboring malice towards them?" Franca realized.

Jebus praised, "Madame, your summary is better than mine. However, it's not that you don't generate malice at all, but that you reduce their malice to a certain extent. The higher the other party's level, the weaker the effect. In other words, interacting with those mysterious creatures and dangerous entities to reach a deal is still risky and requires courage."

At this point, Jebus chuckled.

"Taking risks is a necessary quality for successful merchants."

"From the looks of it, you embody that?" Lumian deliberately provoked.

"Of course," Jebus replied proudly. "I've made deals with many dangerous creatures and obtained valuable items. Then, through new deals, I used them to exchange for more useful items from believers of the Great Mother, the Mother Tree of Desire, and other Beyonders. These include bullets that can absorb life, bullets that cause a target's implosion, and bullets that can impregnate a human, among other things."

Bullets that can impregnate a human… Lumian was suddenly traumatized. He was grateful he hadn't given Jebus a chance to fire that bullet.

Franca and Jenna felt an inexplicable fear, their bodies turning cold. Even Anthony's expression shifted slightly.

Jebus's gaze swept across Franca, Jenna, Lumian, and his friend Anthony. He said solemnly,

"Using our connections with various creatures, we Shadow Merchants can assist you in obtaining anything you desire, as long as you pay a sufficient price.

"Of course, we can't guarantee success in every transaction."

"I want the Sequence 4 potion formula of the Hunter pathway," Lumian said with a smile.

Jebus fell silent for a moment before saying, "It will take an extremely long time to find someone who can provide the corresponding formula through multiple intermediaries.

"The one who ultimately makes the deal with you might even pose a danger to you."

Lumian had only been joking. He deliberately sighed and said, "Then let's put that aside for now.

"What other abilities does a Shadow Merchant possess? Your abilities can't be limited to just reducing the malice of surrounding creatures and detecting hidden entities."

Jebus finally met Lumian's gaze.

"I've used some of them in my battles with you, including concealing myself in shadows, transforming into a shadow, and creating fake shadows. They're more protective abilities. I collectively call them 'Shadow Utilization.'"

Franca sighed with emotion. "Shadow Merchants can utilize not only symbolic shadows, but also shadows in reality."

Encouraged, Jebus continued, "We can also sign contracts with the shadows of both parties as witnesses, directly connected to each other's souls. If we violate the contract, the shadows will harm our spirits. It's like a powerful curse."

"I see…" Franca recalled the fellow she had encountered earlier.

The man, who also appeared to be a member of the School of Truth, had mentioned that he had a way to ensure the binding power of contracts on both parties.

"And then?" Jenna pressed.

Jebus suddenly felt a little embarrassed. He coughed twice and said, "We can also rely on symbolic shadow power to secretly modify key terms the moment the contract is signed, making the other party offer more or less."

"No wonder…" Franca finally understood how the man suspected of being a member of the School of Truth had deceived her and Jenna.

No wonder he had revealed an abnormality once she mentioned divining the contract in advance!

Shadow Merchants are well-suited for dealing with Beyonders of the Marauder pathway. I wonder which side will ultimately suffer… Lumian didn't give Franca a chance to criticize the Shadow Merchant. He chuckled and questioned, "What about Sequence 7?"

"Sequence 7 is Prosecutor," Jebus introduced, as if trying to compensate for the Shadow Merchant's dark image. "A Prosecutor has two abilities. One allows them to discern a target's crimes, but they can't witness the process. The other is based on the first ability. First, declare the other party guilty, then point out the specific crime…"

Franca turned puzzled.

"How can this crime be determined?

"It can't be based on Intis law, can it? If we meet in the Loen Kingdom, won't your abilities be useless?

"Do they automatically adapt to local laws?"

This seemed to be the first time Jebus had been asked this question. After more than ten seconds of thought, he replied,

"It's likely an act recognized as a crime by most humans. It includes blasphemy, murder, rape, fraud, theft, and so on. Nothing more detailed or categorized."

Franca remained unconvinced. "That's not right either. Suppose we enter a ridiculous world where we can do whatever we want, including murder and blasphemy. Wouldn't that prevent you from declaring the target guilty?"

She was thinking of the recently concluded Dream Festival.

Jebus fell silent for a moment before responding, "I don't know…"

"Perhaps the charges stem from something more fundamental," Lumian speculated.

Jebus couldn't be certain.

Franca could only look at him and say, "Continue."

Jebus took a moment to recall where he had left off.

"After pointing out the crime, the target will receive the corresponding punishment from the world itself or some entity. The exact punishment depends on the severity of the target's crime. We can't know in advance. In short, from my experience, the most terrifying punishments are immediate death and loss of control on the spot.

"In addition, for ongoing crimes, we can directly declare the target guilty. There's no need to specify the charges, effectively saving time."

Franca nodded slightly, gaining a new understanding of the battle.

"What language did you use when you announced the charge?" Lumian recalled the corresponding details.

"It's the Words of Order. I automatically learned it when I received the Prosecutor's boon," Jebus confessed.

Lumian offered a curt acknowledgment. "What about Sequence 6?"

"It's the Ambitionist," Jebus said, his eyes seeming to blaze with flames. "An inexhaustible ambition brings about a powerful physique, keen perception, and outstanding spirituality, driving us to constantly pursue improvements in our combat abilities. And our burning ambitions make us unwilling to rest for a moment. Unless we're prepared to sleep, no one can force us to sleep or faint…"

"In other words, it can effectively resist being forced into dreams, comas, and other debilitating states? Or is it outright immunity?" Lumian immediately understood why Jebus could wake up so quickly when facing the Spell of Harrumph.

"It's resistance," Jebus admitted candidly.

Lumian inquired further about Ambitionists before asking, "You should be at Sequence 5, right?"

"Yes." Jebus puffed out his chest in front of the two Demonesses.

Franca asked curiously, "What's Sequence 5?"

Jebus replied with a smile, "It's Under the Table."

Under the Table? Franca, Lumian, and the others simultaneously thought of the Authority Holder's Under-the-table Transaction they had obtained from General Philip.

Could it be formed by the power of a Sequence 5 boon of the Broker pathway?

Lumian gazed at Jebus, in no hurry to comprehend the hidden box's abilities. He asked thoughtfully, "What's your connection to the Carbonari?"

Chapter 716: Bullets

Jebus, who had been about to explain the meaning of "Under the Table," was caught off guard.

"We're putting in a lot of effort to keep the Carbonari in check and have made considerable headway."

The School of Truth member chuckled at that.

"They're attempting to topple the government and create their own system. That's precisely the outcome we hope to see."

Jenna thought Jebus's words didn't add up. "But don't you aim to slowly seize control of the government through high society individuals like Moran Avigny?"

Jebus laughed and adopted an instructive tone.

"A wise merchant wouldn't risk everything on a single venture. The same principle applies to exceptional Ambitionists."

Hearing this, Lumian abruptly shifted the topic.

"From what you've described, Ambitionists primarily enhance their bodies, perception, and spirituality. It doesn't appear to involve their intellect?"

Before Jebus could reply, Franca responded with a grin.

"Who says Ambitionists require intelligence? It's not the same as being a Conspirer. Ambitionists prioritize ambition over the capability to actually achieve it. Exceptional intelligence isn't a prerequisite for them. We've encountered many foolish ambitionists throughout history."

The pair's back-and-forth left Jebus speechless.

Fortunately, Lumian didn't dwell on the subject. He turned the conversation back to the Carbonari.

"Has Albert Goncourt already sided with you?"

"Most likely," Jebus answered uncertainly. "I don't handle the Carbonari."

"Was it because of you Brokers that the Dreamseekers charity group formed ties with the Carbonari?" Lumian thought of General Philip.

Jebus grinned again. "Philip was a man with grand aspirations who had long aimed to bring various secret organizations together. As Brokers, Shadow Merchants, and Ambitionists, we definitely had to help him. Regrettably, while his scheme was successful, others took advantage of him. He also disappeared in the ancient underground city. Incidentally, I'm not sure if you know, but it's actually Fourth Epoch Trier."

"You guys…" Franca had a thought but kept it to herself. She merely sighed.

Only then did Lumian inquire about Under the Table. "What extra capabilities do you gain at Sequence 5?"

Jebus kept his eyes fixed on the two Demonesses.

"Under the Table is the sole ability, but there are two ways to utilize it:

"The first is to establish an unseen and tranquil Under the Table atmosphere in combat and emergency scenarios. You can forcibly meet your demands by offering the enemy valuable items, but you can't injure them or impact their state in any other way. Additionally, you must behave normally. If not, the enemy who 'agreed' to the under-the-table deal can easily detect that something is amiss and snap out of it.

"Such Under the Table transactions aren't guaranteed to work. The target's inclination and experience in the gray domain determine the success rate. The Broker Sequence's Gray Perception ability can assess this. If you're up against an Unshadowed of the Sun pathway, success is nearly impossible even without the suppression of godhood."

Unshadowed referred to the Sun pathway's Sequence 4.

Lumian had a realization. "You previously made me release you through such an Under the Table transaction?"

"Correct," Jebus said frankly. "You have extensive experience with the gray domain and a strong inclination in that respect."

On Lumian's behalf, Franca complimented Jebus, saying, "You have a talent for reading people!"

"Gray Perception may be an ability acquired as a Sequence 9 Broker, but it's incredibly useful," Jebus bragged, seeming objective.

Jenna pressed, "And the other Under the Table transaction?"

Jebus answered with a smile, "That requires a certain amount of time. It's not suitable for combat or emergency situations.

"In simple terms, we'll utilize a barely sealed space as the operating target to create a genuine Under the Table scenario. We'll be on one side of the transaction under this table. The mysterious creature or dangerous entity concealed in the shadows and darkness will be on the other side, but we won't know their identity beforehand. We also won't be able to sense who the other party is during the transaction. It could be an entity we've previously dealt with or one from the unknown.

"Essentially, in this Under the Table state, where you don't know the counter-party or how your needs will be fulfilled through the transaction, you can achieve the desired result by stating your request and offering the item the other party desires. How this is accomplished isn't relevant."

"Can the transaction only involve two parties?" Jenna asked inquisitively.

"No, it can be a three-way deal, a four-way deal, or even more. Just follow the Under the Table transaction rules." Jebus didn't hold back on sharing his mysticism knowledge. "The transaction may not succeed either. It depends on the task's difficulty and the limitations of the provided traded items. Also, don't assume those mysterious creatures and dangerous entities will honor their promises. There's no lack of con artists among them who can find ways to circumvent Under the Table's restrictions."

"Are there additional risks after using Under the Table to complete a particularly challenging task?" Jenna thought of her Authority Holder's Under-the-table Transaction.

Jebus nodded gravely.

"Yes, it depends on which mysterious creature or dangerous entity helped you and if it has malicious intentions. I once had a week of misfortune and was almost caught by the Purifiers."

Jenna nodded pensively and pondered inwardly: It seems the Authority Holder's Under-the-table Transaction is a variant of the standard Under the Table ability. Instead of the counter-party making the requests, it's us offering something valuable. However, it can only simplify complex issues and ease difficult ones. It can't directly complete tasks. There are significant limitations…

The cost of using it is encountering a transaction involving Demons and other sinister beings…

"What information do you have about Overseers?" Lumian posed a new question when he noticed the Under the Table discussion was nearly over.

Jebus appeared troubled and didn't answer.

Seeing this, Lumian switched topics. "What items are you carrying?"

Jebus glanced at Franca and took out a few assorted items from his concealed pocket.

"This is a healing agent obtained from the Great Mother's believers. These are the Coma Gas, Awakening Gas, and Confession Concoction acquired from the Mother Tree of Desire's followers…"

Healing agents, sedatives, mysticism smelling salts, and truth serum. These are all precious items… Lumian gave a small nod at the four metal canisters with various labels.

His gaze then moved to Jebus's other palm, where six bullets rested.

The six bullets were brass, but their surface patterns and colors differed. One looked normal, one had a luminous tip, and one appeared to be corroded by potent acid. One flickered with a dark green light, one radiated a brilliant starlight, and another had a faint luster as if it had been matted many times.

Jebus introduced them with enthusiasm, "These are the Impregnating Bullet, Poison Bullet, Putrid Bullet, Weakening Bullet, Implosion Bullet, and Deprivation Bullet. I traded for them from various deity believers."

Intrigued, Franca pointed at the ordinary bullet from a distance. "Is this the Impregnating Bullet?"

"Indeed. People and animals shot by it will inevitably become pregnant, and the corresponding symptoms will swiftly manifest," Jebus said, a tinge of fear in his voice.

"It affects both males and females indiscriminately?" Franca inquired.

"Yes," Jebus said with certainty.

Huh… Franca made a sound conveying a mix of contempt, fear, and fascination.

Jenna asked worriedly, "It looks like a regular bullet. What if there's a mix-up?"

Jebus shook his head.

"You won't make that mistake. It's lightweight, as if made of wood or soil."

Phew… Lumian and Anthony let out a sigh of relief.

Lumian pointed at the matte bullet. "Is this the Deprivation Bullet? What does it do?"

The effects of the other bullets seemed straightforward, but Lumian wasn't sure about the Deprivation Bullet's purpose.

"Those struck or grazed by it will lose one Beyonder power within fifteen minutes. As for which one, it's unpredictable," Jebus answered honestly.

This can complement a Fate Appropriator's abilities of designating the Deprivation… Lumian appraised Jebus and asked, "Do you have any other items? As a Shadow Merchant, don't you possess any mystical objects?"

Jebus explained embarrassedly, "I recently received the Under the Table boon. To complete the corresponding ritual and please truth, I traded all the items I had acquired, leaving only these.

"A merchant's rule is that you can buy and sell anything!"

Poor slob… Franca mocked disappointedly.

She then said to Jebus, "Give us all these items. They're the very reason you've been repeatedly caught up in danger and deity-level conflicts. Hand them over, and you'll be free. Once you're safe, you can start anew."

Similar to Anthony's hypnotic words, Jebus chose to believe it and gave everything to Franca.

After Franca stowed away the items, Lumian surveyed the area and asked, "Where is the School of Truth's headquarters? Which Overseer do you report to?"

Hearing these two questions, Jenna, Franca, and Anthony quietly moved to Lumian's side.

Jebus hesitated for a few seconds and was about to respond when his expression suddenly twisted.

Seeing this, Lumian immediately said to Franca, "Toss the figurine over!"

Franca followed suit. She took out the Primordial Demoness's bone figurine from her Traveler's Bag and threw it to Jebus.

At the same time, she, Anthony, and Jenna grabbed Lumian's shoulders, arms, and other positions.

In the next instant, the four of them disappeared.

Boom!

Jebus exploded from the inside out, his shattered flesh merging with the pale-white fog, transforming into a peculiar blood mist.

The blood fog slowly descended, circling the Primordial Demoness's bone figurine before seeping into the soil.

After a few seconds, Lumian and the others teleported back.

Chapter 717: Supervision?

717 Supervision?

"Why did he just blow up like that?" Lumian muttered, frowning as he watched the blood slowly soaking into the soil. He gripped the carbide lamp tightly.

His two questions hadn't been intended to end Jebus's life. He had simply wanted to carefully test the limits, one step at a time.

Anthony calmly explained, "The fundamental rule of hypnosis is to never directly threaten the subject's life. So when Jebus was asked something that would seriously endanger him, he either would refuse to answer or the shock would jolt him awake, breaking the hypnotic hold."

"I was ready for the possibility of him breaking free from the hypnosis," Lumian said, having anticipated this outcome.

Jebus couldn't dodge the Spell of Harrumph at that range. Lumian also had three ritualistic dog skins and a cow hide in his Traveler's Bag.

Since becoming an Ascetic, he could now craft the mystical animal hides required for the Animal Creation Spell himself. So he had imbued extra powers into the ones he already possessed.

Thinking back on what had transpired, Jenna mused, "Jebus was going to answer at first… Meaning he didn't think those two questions would put his life at risk. Heh, guess things didn't play out like he expected."

Franca nodded."Exactly. If it was truly dangerous, he could've just stayed quiet.

"I assumed he was under some contract where revealing the School of Truth's headquarters or his direct Overseer's name would cause his shadow to attack his soul.

"Damn, what if his Overseer sneaked in extra terms when the contract was signed? Could that be why Jebus had no clue answering would be risky? Heavens, how tragic is that? Nothing but lies and trickery through and through—are we dealing with Swindlers or Brokers here?"

After Franca's lament, Lumian considered for a few moments.

"Overseer."

"Overseer?" Franca caught on immediately. "Overseeing subordinates is an Overseer ability, but Jebus didn't know that. Did he set off some forbidden conditions by answering key questions?"

Jenna snapped to attention.

"You think the Overseer spotted us already? Could they be on their way?"

"Unlikely. I had Franca leave the Primordial Demoness figurine here after noticing Jebus's strange reaction," Lumian said, smiling. "Even if we're right, the Overseer probably just detected an issue with Jebus, not our precise location. The real problem is we may need to change our plans going forward."

Jenna and Anthony understood what Lumian meant.

They weren't under imminent threat or at risk of the Overseer tracking them down. But something had happened to Jebus, who was guarding Moran Avigny in the mirror world. Once the Overseer realized, they would easily deduce that someone was after Moran Avigny and undoubtedly take action. The scheme they had so carefully devised probably no longer fit the new circumstances.

Franca sighed heavily, eyeing the bone figurine on the ground with genuine regret.

"I resisted when the Demoness of Black first gave me this figurine. Now I'm wishing she'd given me a dozen!"

Poking fun at herself, she stooped down to retrieve the Primordial Demoness figurine. She delicately cleaned it off and murmured appreciatively.

Lumian took stock of his own actions.

"I should've been watching how Jebus's fate tributary shifted using the Eye of Calamity. Maybe then I could've intervened in time to stop him from responding."

He hadn't anticipated Jebus being oblivious to which questions would violate a taboo. This wasn't about religious devotion or advanced mystical knowledge. Jebus ought to have known what he could and couldn't say. If not, his daily life would've been cut short many times over.

Franca remembered, "The School of Truth member Jenna and I ran into before had the same thing happen when we asked his organizational affiliation and why he was capitalizing on the gatekeeper vanishing.

"Based on Jebus's answer, stating 'the School of Truth' itself isn't forbidden. And I bet the guy who wasn't even an Ambitionist yet had no idea why he was exploiting the gatekeeper's absence.

"Seems it really is an Overseer ability after all. No wonder the taboos are fluid, with the context, mental state, and overall situation determining what crosses the line each time. The rules adapt to the circumstances. Heh, just like the ideology Jebus described."

Lumian gave a small nod and laughed.

"Well, at least we secured the spoils early on. Would've been a huge waste otherwise."

He thought for a bit.

"Franca, contact the Demoness of Black with the charm later. Inform her about the fixed mirror world entrance we made, what occurred, and how Jebus reacted. See what she thinks and advises.

"Right, she's likely a Tamara from the Apprentice branch. No love lost between her and Moran Avigny, who defected from the Judgement branch."

Franca concurred, and Lumian turned to Jenna next. "Head to the safehouse and send word to Madam Judgment. The Judgement pathway stands for order, so I feel we must alert her to the School of Truth situation at once. I'll take you there."

"Got it." Jenna was accustomed to Lumian delegating tasks in moments like these.

Finally, Lumian addressed Anthony.

"Join me at the Pleasure Pavilion to await Moran Avigny's arrival. Watch him closely for any unusual behavior."

Situated on Avenue du Boulevard, the opulent Pavilion of Pleasure functioned as the Intis Republic's presidential estate. Moran Avigny was due to attend a ministerial meeting convened by the president there.

Anthony inclined his head slightly to convey his assent.

Observation was a Spectator's forte, after all.

…

Inside the quarry cave housing the mirror world's fixed entryway,

Franca leaned against the wall, her night vision active. She produced a compact and a charm fashioned from ashen stone.

Clasping the charm, Franca infused it with her spirituality. Reciting the Hermes activation phrase, she intoned,

"Eyes!"

Wreathed in obsidian flames, the rock-like grayish charm flared to life. Franca touched it to the compact's glass,

causing the mirror to lose solidity and turn incorporeal.

The burning charm sank through without resistance, vanishing from sight.

Moments later, Franca sensed a presence surround her.

A mass of dark locks then rose from the makeup mirror's surface.

The rippling black tresses obscured her view.

As the hair fully emerged, Franca tightened her grasp, and Clarice took form before her.

The Demoness of Black's own hair remained immaculately tied up, with no trace of the ominous raven strands.

Even having met her prior, Franca couldn't suppress a rush of awe at Clarice's allure.

The woman possessed a breathtaking beauty that effortlessly ensnared any who beheld her.

Clarice regarded Franca, her melodic voice gentle as she inquired, "You have an update?"

Composing herself, Franca detailed her suspicion of corruption seeping out of Underground Trier. She had ventured to a particular sector bearing the Primordial Demoness figurine, ultimately pinpointing the target site. She elaborated on beseeching the Primordial One via the figurine, obtaining a reply, and securing a permanent gateway to the mirror plane.

A rare glimmer of approval showed on Clarice's face. "Your instincts are sharp and your mind keen. Impressive that you conceived of and accomplished this. Perhaps you too shall rise to be a colored Demoness one day."

Demoness of Yellow? Franca grumbled to herself.

She went on to outline the scheme she had hatched with Lumian's crew, withholding specifics about the Tarot Club and portraying the Mirror Mark power as an item.

Clarice listened attentively without comment.

Franca recounted the offensive against Lumian amid his probe, his triumph over Jebus, and the bounty of intel gleaned through a Spectator.

The Demoness of Black nodded. "Your lovers are quite capable, the Hunter in particular."

Here Clarice smirked. "The taste of a Hunter isn't bad either. The higher their Sequence, the more intense and brave they grow."

Wh— Emperor, even an elite Demoness has perused your clandestine annals… Every Demoness probably owns an edition! Franca wavered between finding Emperor Roselle's plight humorous or pitiable.

"It certainly has its perks," Franca played along, smiling and trying to mask her chagrin.

The Demoness of Black proceeded, "However, both you and he erred.

"Upon amassing adequate knowledge, you should have ceased questioning without delay. The wiser course was to first ambush Moran Avigny, seize him, then interrogate further."

"Agreed." Franca accepted the Demoness of Black's reproach.

In hindsight, the location of the School of Truth's headquarters and the presiding Overseer's identity were not essential facts for their immediate needs. They could have morphed Jebus into a dog and set Lugano and Ludwig to guard him. While the Overseer remained unaware, she and the rest could have lurked within the mirror, poised for Moran Avigny to unwittingly enter of his own accord. Ample chances to take a second captive would have presented themselves down the line.

However, this was Lumian's style.

It had long been apparent to Franca that Lumian was predisposed to extracting intelligence on the spot. Only extraordinary reasons would induce him to postpone. As if he feared the slightest delay might thwart him from procuring otherwise obtainable insight.

Demoness of Black Clarice refrained from belaboring the point. Nodding, she declared, "Abide here for my return. I'll look into these developments, but it may require some time."

"As you wish, Madame Clarice." Franca made no effort to conceal her gratified smile.

…

Outside the dazzling Pavilion of Pleasure on Avenue du Boulevard, Lumian and Anthony seamlessly rejoined the throng of journalists.

Chapter 718: Another Warning

Lumian and Anthony only had to wait briefly before the ministers began exiting the Pavilion of Pleasure one by one.

They quickly approached Moran Avigny, the Minister of Industry. While listening to the other reporters' questions, they employed their unique abilities to observe him closely.

After just over ten seconds, Lumian turned to Anthony and gave a small shake of his head,

indicating that, for now, there was nothing unusual about Moran's river of fate.

He trusted that Anthony, being a Spectator, would understand his unspoken message.

Anthony responded with a slight head shake of his own, confirming to Lumian that Moran Avigny's expression and behavior appeared normal.

Has the Overseer directly responsible for Jebus not reached out to Moran Avigny? Or could our assumption be incorrect? Is it possible that Jebus's death wasn't detected by the Overseer's monitoring? Have they not fully grasped the situation with Jebus? These thoughts raced through Lumian's mind as he continued his observation.

This was precisely why he had come in person to the Pavilion of Pleasure to await Moran Avigny's appearance.

Only by acquiring the most current and reliable information could he assess whether to move forward with the original plan, adjust it, or temporarily set it aside!

Indeed, within Moran Avigny's river of fate, a tributary of him entering the full-body mirror in the study still exists, shrouded in an intense black hue… Lumian, unconcerned about the drain on his spirituality, maintained his focus on any potential shifts in Moran Avigny's destiny.

Following a short interview, the debonair Minister of Industry, flanked by his bodyguards, descended the steps of the Pavilion of Pleasure and headed towards his stylish four-wheeled, four-seater carriage.

As the valet opened the carriage door, Moran Avigny pulled out a small hand mirror from his pocket, seemingly checking his appearance.

In Trier's high society, this was a typical occurrence. Men's cosmetics and grooming had long been in vogue.

Moran Avigny peered into the hand mirror, his dark-gray pupils abruptly widening as his expression subtly changed.

Nearly simultaneously, Lumian, with his silver-black eyes, detected a notable alteration in the Minister of Industry's fate tributary.

None of the tributaries suggested Moran Avigny's entry into the study's full-body mirror!

All relevant "choices" had vanished!

As a result, even if Lumian depleted nearly half of his spirituality and employed Compelling Fate, he would be unable to force Moran Avigny to "willingly" enter the study's full-body mirror.

Compelling Fate wasn't about creating destiny; choices had to exist before they could be compelled!

Taking advantage of the moment when the reporters had shifted their focus and the two of them were slowly trailing behind, Anthony quietly said to Lumian, "When Moran Avigny looked at himself in the hand mirror, he experienced a palpable sense of fear."

As Lumian followed the other reporters, he continued to assess Moran Avigny and formed a related hypothesis.

Someone was utilizing the mirror world and the hand mirror to convey a message to Moran Avigny!

The transmitted information likely pertained to the mysterious demise of Jebus Lata, who was tasked with guarding the study's full-body mirror, and the disappearance of his body.

For Moran Avigny, this implied that someone was conspiring against him. The shadow was already looming over him, its source and circumstances unknown.

Under such conditions, fear was inevitable. For the majority of people, emotions would inevitably manifest to some degree in their facial expressions and physical movements, making them readily apparent to Spectators.

Yes, given that Jebus possessed a Mirror Cufflink, it's reasonable to assume that the Overseer above him would have comparable items. They might even possess the additional capability to communicate via the mirror world… Lumian recalled, thinking of the glass cufflink now in Franca's possession. Moreover, Jebus had disclosed that Moran Avigny had instructed the other Mirror People from the Tamara family to assume new identities and relocate, leaving him as the sole contact with the School of Truth.

Consequently, when the Overseer discovered Jebus's unexplained disappearance and ultimate death, they would be unable to reach the other Mirror People. They could only await the conclusion of Moran Avigny's ministerial meeting to send him a warning.

Our prior conjectures have been validated. The Overseer did indeed detected Jebus's death. Whether the Overseer was limited by his abilities or hindered by the Primordial Demoness figurine is uncertain, but he was unable to immediately locate us and launch a counterattack…

We must abandon the original plan. Getting Moran Avigny to 'willingly' enter the study's full-body mirror is no longer feasible…

Lost in thought, Lumian watched as Moran Avigny tucked away the hand mirror, boarded the carriage, and headed home.

Taking advantage of the still somewhat chaotic scene, he and Anthony discreetly left the Pavilion of Pleasure.

At the periphery of a square adorned with statues and obelisks, Lumian scanned his surroundings. Confirming that no one was nearby, he murmured to Anthony, "What do you think frightened Moran Avigny?"

He had already shared his theory with Anthony.

Drawing on his Spectator perspective, Anthony endeavored to analyze the psychological states of the School of Truth and Moran Avigny.

"Without intel on the enemy, it's improbable that the School of Truth, a secret organization worshiping an evil deity, would dispatch additional demigod-level operatives to Moran Avigny's proximity to enhance protection for the Mirror People. Unlike an orthodox Church, they can't afford to act rashly and perpetually escalate their involvement. They must consider the possibility that the group that apprehended Jebus is equally formidable, potentially including a demigod in their ranks. They might even suspect that this could be a covert mission orchestrated by the Purifier, Machinery Hivemind, or an elite unit from Bureau 8.

"In essence, the Overseer will convey to Moran Avigny that he's now on his own. They'll offer indirect support but can't intervene directly.

"Other cults might react with insanity, extremism, and irrationality while still defending Moran Avigny. However, based on Jebus's ideology, the School of Truth will refrain from such actions."

"That explains why Moran Avigny couldn't conceal his fear. It's tantamount to being forsaken." Lumian gently nodded.

Anthony continued his analysis.

"We must also take into account Moran Avigny's unique characteristic as a Mirror Person.

"The Mirror People we've previously encountered not only pursued their own ambitions but also exhibited a certain zealotry towards their leader and overarching objectives.

"Based on my observations, while Moran Avigny is undeniably terrified, he managed to exercise some restraint. Upon entering the carriage, he appeared resolute and determined."

Lumian comprehended and remarked, "Is he contemplating self-sacrifice? He'll promptly alert the other Mirror People and urge them to swiftly conceal themselves. As for himself, he's under the strict protection of officials, rendering escape impossible. His only option is to remain in place, visible to the enemy faction, hoping that his fortune is sufficient and the official protection proves effective.

"Heh heh, in times like these, protection becomes another form of confinement."

Anthony shifted the topic. "Which tributary turned black following the change in Moran Avigny's fate?"

Lumian shook his head. "Nothing at present. This is an exceptionally unique situation. It signifies that it will manifest only when Moran Avigny makes a new choice, branching into a new fate tributary."

At this juncture, Lumian exhaled slowly and stated, "I don't perceive any other opportunities at the moment. It would have been good if the Overseer had acted rashly and protected Moran Avigny. The Demoness of Black should be awaiting him. Hmm, let's locate Jenna and Franca first."

…

In the quarry cave housing a permanent entrance to the mirror world, Franca, who had been patiently waiting, witnessed black hair reemerge from the mirror, descending strand by strand.

Demoness of Black Clarice materialized and spoke softly, "Currently, no Beyonders are concealed behind the relevant mirror. They must have abandoned Moran Avigny.

"I'm unable to provide assistance at this time. You must reevaluate your strategy and devise a means to capture Moran Avigny, who is under the robust protection of official Beyonders, without entering the mirror world."

Do you have a solution in mind? Franca wished to inquire but refrained out of concern for offending the Demoness of Black. Instead, she simply replied, "Understood."

…

In a secure safe house within the administrative district, Jenna informed Lumian and Anthony, "Madame Judgment has instructed us to halt further action for now. She needs to confer with the other Major Arcana card holders regarding the information obtained from Jebus."

With Ma'am Hermit? Lumian pondered silently, immersed in thought.

He gave a small nod and said, "Let's go find Franca."

After rendezvousing with Franca in the subterranean quarry cave and sharing their discoveries, Lumian sighed and declared, "For the time being, we have no choice but to abandon our efforts."

As Franca and the others nodded in agreement, Lumian suddenly heard a resounding voice.

"Don't you believe you're capitulating prematurely?

"Did you fail to notice any issues?"

Termiboros… Why is He offering me guidance? And it's not an urgent matter that threatens Him? Lumian couldn't help but furrow his brow.

Termiboros's profound voice persisted, "Consider this. If you were an Overseer, what actions would you take in such a scenario?"

"Naturally, they would reduce personnel and conceal themselves to prevent the enemy from discovering clues and pursuing them…" Lumian muttered under his breath. "Beyond this, what else can they do? How can they indirectly aid Moran Avigny?"

Franca, Jenna, and Anthony observed Lumian as he mumbled to himself, awaiting his ultimate explanation.

Abruptly, a possibility occurred to Lumian.

He gazed at his three companions and said in a low, serious tone, "Under the Table Transaction!"

"Safeguard Moran Avigny through a high-level Under the Table transaction!"

"That's why we each abandoned the plan for distinct reasons. Even the river of fate currently shows no death calamity for Moran Avigny!"

Chapter 719: Advancing

"We were under the influence of an Under the Table transaction?" Franca carefully reviewed the entire situation but couldn't find anything out of the ordinary. The only thing that stood out was that the Demoness of Black probably had a way to quickly extract Moran Avigny while he was under the protection of an official Beyonder team. She clearly knew how to exploit the mirror world, yet she burdened everything upon her.

Of course, her actions made sense when put into context. Even though Moran Avigny's security detail consisted of Mid-Sequence Beyonders, this was Trier, the capital of the Intis Republic. It was a diocese of great importance to both the Eternal Blazing Sun Church and the God of Steam and Machinery Church. Numerous demigods were posted there, ready to intervene at a moment's notice. If the Demoness of Black couldn't end the fight quickly and eliminate all witnesses, she would face severe repercussions. Official Beyonders might even track her using specialized Sealed Artifacts.

If something happened to her, the Demoness Sect's Trier branch would be dealt a crippling blow. In a situation like this, it would be wiser for her to assign a capable member of middling rank to handle the matter while she focused on damage control. If things went south, she could easily cut ties with Franca and her lovers.

This assumed, of course, that Moran Avigny wasn't valuable enough for the Demoness Sect to go to great lengths to eliminate him. If he were, the sect would have evacuated non-essential personnel beforehand and assembled high-ranking, color-named Demonesses in Trier.

"I think there's an issue here. It's not that we shouldn't or can't abandon the mission, but rather that we gave up far too readily and hastily," Anthony remarked, analyzing the situation from a human behavioral standpoint.

Franca nodded pensively and added, "Indeed. The Demoness of Black only briefly verified the absence of hidden Beyonders behind the mirror in question before concluding that Moran Avigny had been abandoned and would receive no further assistance."

"That's way too rushed and convenient," Jenna commented.

After a moment's hesitation, she asked, "Was Madam Judgment affected as well?"

"It's possible." Lumian glanced down at his chest.

Lowering his voice, he asked, "Termiboros, why weren't you impacted? Is it because you're an Angel?"

Termiboros's imposing voice echoed within Lumian's body.

"It's hard to say for certain. It could also be due to The Fool's seal. While the seal does limit me, it can also serve as a safeguard under certain circumstances."

Similar to Naboredisley's Abomination corpse? The Overseer's Under the Table transaction couldn't breach Mr. Fool's seal, so it had no effect on Termiboros? Lumian nodded in understanding and said to Jenna, "We need to inform Madam Judgment of our suspicions. If an Under the Table transaction is indeed at play, she'll undoubtedly break free of its influence and offer new guidance once alerted. If she's unaffected, the messenger will just have to put in a bit of extra effort.

"Got it." Jenna grasped Lumian's point. "Even though we suspect an Under the Table transaction, we can't act recklessly right now. We still require fresh directives from the Major Arcana cardholders."

As Franca waited for Madam Judgment's reply, she let out a sigh.

"Is something wrong?" Jenna inquired, her worry apparent.

Franca responded with a mix of sorrow and outrage, "This Under the Table transaction was exceptionally lavish. It impacted no fewer than two demigods. The Overseer of the School of Truth must have paid a steep price and offered up a considerable number of precious items."

Sure, that's all true, but what's it got to do with you? Why are you so worked up about it? Jenna blinked, struggling to grasp Franca's train of thought.

Franca elaborated, "Once Madam Judgment apprehends or eliminates him with our assistance, there won't be much left in terms of spoils of war for us to divvy up.

"We might end up with another penniless target like Jebus!"

Lumian, Jenna, and Anthony were momentarily at a loss for words.

You're already worrying about hypothetical future spoils?

Lumian shifted the topic and turned to Franca and Jenna.

"When I posed those final two questions to Jebus, why did you two lean in closer to me? Did you sense that something was about to go awry?"

"Naturally, it was a Demoness's intuitive premonition," Franca declared smugly. "While I couldn't pinpoint what exactly would happen, being nearer to you provided me with more options for dealing with potential threats."

Jenna gave a subtle nod, indicating that she felt the same way.

Lumian faced Anthony. "What about you?"

Anthony answered honestly, "I suspected that the last two questions would snap Jebus out of his hypnotic state. Franca and Jenna's reactions indirectly validated my concerns.

"Given that, it seemed prudent to take cover behind you two."

"So you're using us as human shields?" Franca remarked with a wry smile.

Anthony nodded earnestly. "You two have Mirror Substitution at your disposal."

"Fair point," Franca conceded.

After a short while, Madam Judgment's messenger delivered a response. The message was succinct: "Proceed with your course of action."

Does this imply that the Major Arcana cardholders will monitor the situation? Have they consulted with Ma'am Hermit? Lumian nodded thoughtfully and grinned at Franca and the others.

"Let's stick to our initial plan."

"The initial plan?" Franca started, taken aback.

"Precisely," Lumian confirmed, still smiling. "Over the next several hours, potentially even a full day, the Overseer and the other Mirror People certainly won't be guarding Moran Avigny from behind the full-length mirror in his study. That should be a necessary condition for the Under the Table transaction to succeed. The Demoness of Black has already inspected those locations, and the Overseer is unaware of when she might do so again. He needs to allow sufficient time.

"Put another way, if we conceal ourselves within that mirror, we'll be safe from disruption and harm."

Jenna's brow furrowed slightly.

"But doesn't the heart of the issue lie in the fact that Moran Avigny won't be entering the full-length mirror anytime soon? How can we ambush him..."

Jenna abruptly trailed off, as if a thought had just occurred to her.

Lumian's grin widened. "The Overseer may resort to an Under the Table transaction, but so can we!"

"Indeed, the Authority Holder's Under-the-table Transaction!" Franca immediately grasped Lumian's implication.

Lumian planned to harness the Authority Holder's Under-the-

table Transaction to plant the idea in Moran Avigny's mind to re-enter the full-length mirror!

As for how an Under the Table transaction would enable such an arrangement to work, that wasn't their concern. Even the Overseer probably didn't know the inner workings of the Under the Table transaction.

Under the Table dealings were, in a sense, a black box!

With Magic Mirror Divination verifying the level of risk, Lumian, Franca, Jenna, and Anthony ventured into the enigmatic and shadowy realm via the mirror world entrance affixed to the jutting rock.

Surveying the spiderweb-like void passageways stretching to unknown destinations, Lumian activated the Mirror Mark contract imprinted on him.

He then addressed Franca and the others, "I can detect the full-length mirror and determine its precise whereabouts."

"In that case, let's make our way there immediately." Franca pulled up her Assassin suit's hood once more and latched onto Lumian's arm.

She had already donned the Mirror Cufflink, but why squander one of its uses when other means were available?

As soon as Jenna and Anthony grabbed hold of him again, Lumian triggered the Spirit World Traversal mark and teleported through one of the dark, vacant passageways to a deep, black aqueous light.

The aqueous light signified a mirror with a corresponding hazy zone linked to myriad illusory tunnels akin to spiderwebs.

Lumian peered into the dark aqueous light and observed the scene through the glass mirror. It was undoubtedly Moran Avigny's study.

Franca likewise recognized the target's position and breathed a sigh of relief.

"I'll handle the Under the Table transaction."

"Allow me." Lumian smiled. "Given what transpired earlier, I might encounter Demons even without the Authority Holder's Under-the-table Transaction. In that case, I might as well use it freely."

He was alluding to the events surrounding Naboredisley.

"Very well." Franca yielded to Lumian's reasoning. "Then I'll cover the cost!"

She produced 5,000 verl d'or worth of gold from her Traveler's Bag.

Lumian accepted without protest and said to Jenna and the others, "The transaction I aim to complete is to instill in Moran Avigny the notion of entering the full-length mirror in his study. Then, I'll employ Compelling Fate to transform that notion into reality.

"This is far simpler than directly compelling Moran Avigny to enter the mirror. The price will undoubtedly be lower."

"Understood." Jenna retrieved the Authority Holder's Under-

the-table Transaction from her backpack.

The small, dark wooden box still had eight uses remaining.

Lumian grasped Franca's pouch of gold coins in his right hand and reached through the membrane-like "curtain."

He then felt five damp, wrinkled fingers. They swiftly closed around the pouch containing the gold coins.

Lumian's expression remained neutral as he articulated his request in Hermes.

After a brief pause, the wrinkled, moist palm returned the pouch of gold coins.

Wh— Lumian glanced up and apprised Franca and the others of the development.

Franca promptly understood. "It's demanding more money!"

Her heart sank as she produced additional banknotes and gold, but the slightly cold, wrinkled palm kept rejecting the payment.

Lumian contributed tens of thousands of verl d'or, yet the transaction still wouldn't go through.

"Could it be that Under the Table doesn't desire money or gold?" Jenna recalled Jebus's insights regarding the Broker pathway.

"Perhaps it requires a mystical item?" Lumian pondered, considering what he could offer.

Franca deliberated for a moment before suggesting, "What about the Blood Gold ring? It has considerable drawbacks, and we've hardly used it."

The Blood Gold ring had come from Mad Lady and corresponded to some of the capabilities of a Sequence 6 Rose Bishop of the Secrets Suppliant pathway.

The four of them conferred for a while before deciding to attempt the transaction with the Blood Gold ring.

The moment the Blood Gold ring touched Under the Table, the five fingers of the palm clenched firmly and withdrew, taking the ring with them.

This indicated that the deal had been finalized.

Phew… Lumian exhaled in relief and remarked, "I'm curious to see how the Under the Table transaction will unfold…"

Franca pressed a hand to her chest and prayed to Mr. Fool, "Please don't let us run into any swindlers. Praise The Fool!"

Chapter 720: Unexpected "Helper"

The word "swindler" hung in the air, leaving Lumian and the others in stunned silence as similar thoughts raced through their minds.

Surely they couldn't be that unlucky, right?

Jebus had warned them about the possibility of running into swindlers during an Under the Table deal, but Franca's previous experiences with Authority Holder's Under-the-table Transaction had always been reliable. Plus, the Blood Gold ring had been accepted this time around.

If Lumian hadn't been personally overseeing the transaction, he would've used the Eye of Calamity to assess the likelihood of it being finalized and look for ways to interfere.

But for now, the four of them had no choice but to wait patiently. Hidden behind the dark, watery light, they watched the scene unfolding in the study through the glass mirror.

As the night wore on, Lumian and his companions nibbled on the rations he'd packed for Ludwig in his Traveler's Bag to keep their hunger at bay.

Close to 10 p.m., Moran Avigny strode into the study, leaving the wooden door wide open. He sank into an armchair beneath the gas wall lamp, grabbed a book from a nearby pile, and began casually flipping through it.

The Purifier team tasked with his protection remained stationed at the door as usual, never setting foot inside.

Moran Avigny had always insisted on this arrangement. He'd even signed contracts with the Purifiers, Machinery Hivemind members, and Bureau 8 team, acknowledging that he was willing to take on the associated risks.

The security detail understood. A politician's study likely concealed all sorts of shady secrets. Keeping people with Beyonder powers from entering was a way for Moran Avigny to protect himself.

As was his custom, Moran Avigny left the study door open instead of shutting it, making it simpler for the Purifiers to keep an eye out for any potential trouble.

While perusing the books, Moran Avigny would occasionally glance up at the full-length mirror positioned just out of the Purifiers' line of sight, his thoughts seemingly far away.

At the same time, Lumian's eyes, hidden within the mirror, glinted a silvery-black.

Peering through the glass, he studied Moran Avigny's river of fate.

Looking closer, he confirmed that the Minister of Industry had indeed gained several new fate tributaries involving stepping into the full-length mirror. One of them was even cloaked in a thick, black hue.

Seizing the moment when Moran Avigny ducked his head to resume reading, Lumian slowly reached his right palm out from the mirror, pressing it firmly against the glass as if it were merely a reflection.

Then, he unleashed his remaining spirituality, transforming it into a raging, phantom river that surged toward the mercury stream symbolizing Moran Avigny's fate from a few meters away.

The main trunk of Moran Avigny's fate swallowed up the other tributaries and rushed into the dense, black one.

Compelling Fate!

Channeling the spirituality he'd accumulated using his Ascetic abilities, Lumian quickly withdrew his palm to avoid tipping off Moran Avigny.

He gave Franca and the others a nod, signaling that both the Under the Table deal and his Compelling of Fate had been successful.

As for the exact way Moran Avigny would embark on this fated path, Lumian couldn't say. The details were beyond his sight.

Franca and Jenna let out sighs of relief.

Not daring to speak lest they alert Moran Avigny, who possessed mirror-related abilities, they shared their understanding with Lumian through gratified smiles and relaxed nods.

They retreated to their positions, preparing for the upcoming ambush.

Just as fate was being compelled, Moran Avigny's spirituality abruptly sensed a warning, filling him with a feeling of impending danger.

The mirror message he'd received at dusk sprang to mind, and he started to suspect that the unknown enemy the Overseer had mentioned was plotting something that could put his life at risk.

Unable to resist, Moran Avigny glanced at the full-length mirror once more, debating whether to flee into it and abandon this place before the Purifiers had a chance to react. He yearned to shed his current identity and vanish completely from the hidden enemy's radar.

Fighting back his impulses, he turned his head to look at the Purifiers standing guard at the door.

There could be a trap lurking behind the mirror. His best bet was to pray that the official Beyonders would be able to shield him!

This is Trier, and I'm a minister of the country!

Right then, his valet appeared at the door, carrying a glass of warm milk.

Drinking warm milk before showering and brushing his teeth was part of Moran Avigny's nightly routine to help him sleep.

The Purifiers carried out their standard checks before permitting the valet to enter the study.

"Your milk, Sir," the valet said deferentially, extending a white porcelain cup brimming with the liquid.

Moran Avigny had made immense contributions to Intis's industrial growth and had been awarded the Legion of Honor medal, earning him the rank of Knight.

Nodding his head slightly, Moran Avigny reached out his right hand to accept the glass.

All of a sudden, he noticed his valet's eyes cloud over, an indescribable agony lurking in their depths.

A heartbeat later, the valet's mouth flew open and he vomited.

What he spat out was a solid, writhing chunk of blood-colored flesh, hurled directly at Moran Avigny!

The flesh swiftly ballooned, morphing into a cloak of flesh and blood that wrapped around Moran Avigny. It wriggled inward, seemingly trying to force its way into the Minister of Industry's body.

In the mirror, Lumian was stunned.

This aura…

It's Mr. K!

Why had he shown up out of nowhere to try to assassinate Moran Avigny?

With a sharp crack, Moran Avigny, cocooned in the flesh-and-blood cloak, transformed into a mirror and shattered.

Nearly simultaneously, the Purifiers at the door sprang into action. A column of pure light wreathed in flames plummeted from the sky, bathing the cloak and causing it to visibly start melting.

Witnessing this, Moran Avigny spun around without hesitation and lunged at the mirror nearest to him.

He had already revealed Mirror Substitution to the Purifiers. Short of eliminating every witness without a trace, he would undoubtedly face intense scrutiny later on and lose the protection of the contract.

His only option was to take advantage of this chance to escape through the mirror world while the Purifiers tangled with the assassin!

As he watched Moran Avigny's figure loom larger and nearer to the full-length mirror, a thought abruptly struck Lumian.

Could this be fate?

He instantly retreated and disappeared.

A moment later, Moran Avigny's figure passed through the mirror, emerging behind the hazy, shadowy, and nearly vacant looking glass.

The Purifiers outside were shocked to see this. At the same time, they grasped that something was seriously wrong with the target under their protection.

Their attention wavered briefly. Taking advantage of the distraction, Mr. K changed Grazing targets and teleported away from Moran Avigny's residence.

In the space behind the mirror, Moran Avigny didn't linger. He promptly activated Mirror Traversal, rapidly changing positions to throw off any would-be pursuers.

Just then, he felt his body grow inexplicably heavier, his movements oddly constricted, stopping him from successfully slipping into an empty, dark tunnel.

It was as though someone had seized him.

Right after that, Moran Avigny sensed invisible threads coiling around his limbs and torso, layer upon layer.

With his Sheriff powers, he pinpointed the source of the sinister threads. They were close by.

Moran Avigny angled his head marginally and peered at an empty corner. His eyes flashed with two blinding "lightning bolts."

Psychic Piercing!

The "lightning" lanced out, hitting the empty spot. A sharp cracking rang out, scattering shards of shattered mirrors.

At the same instant, Jenna, dressed in a black gown and veiled bonnet, materialized behind Moran Avigny, gripping a small, elegant revolver.

Bang!

She squeezed the trigger, targeting Moran Avigny's vest.

The yellow bullet, wreathed in silent black flames, struck the target's body with precision at close range.

Crack! Moran Avigny deployed Mirror Substitution yet again.

As broken mirrors rained down, his figure rematerialized in a different corner of the hazy space. Franca and Jenna vanished without a trace.

Feeling the intangible threads enveloping him, Moran Avigny thrust out his right palm and intoned in ancient Hermes, "Invisibility is prohibited here!"

The instant he uttered the final word, innumerable transparent spider silks undulated throughout the area, resembling seaweed blanketing a section of ocean. Franca, garbed as an Assassin, and Jenna, clad in dark attire, circled or advanced, respectively, poised to strike again.

Realizing that the two foes couldn't touch him for the moment and that the invisible spider silk hadn't constricted, Moran Avigny had no time for a counterattack. He immediately sought to use Mirror Traversal to flee the area.

Out of nowhere, Moran Avigny's eyes bulged, his expression contorting with viciousness.

His body shattered once more, assuming the shape of a mirror.

Not far off, Anthony Reid, dressed like a veteran, "appeared."

He had just cast Frenzy on Moran Avigny!

The Prohibition of Invisibility rule didn't constrain him since he wasn't invisible. However, Moran Avigny himself hadn't been looking in Anthony's direction!

After employing Mirror Substitution multiple times, Moran Avigny rematerialized on the far side of the space, putting distance between himself and Franca, Jenna, and Anthony.

Grasping that yet another enemy had entered the fray, he fled with intensified urgency.

Right as Moran Avigny was poised to activate Mirror Traversal, Franca lowered her hood, unveiling her radiant, refined features.

As she did, the diamond necklace adorning her neck emitted a subtle glow.

Beatrice's Necklace!

Moran Avigny's body flushed with heat, his gaze magnetized to Franca's lake-blue eyes, her high, delicate nose bridge, her fair, flawless skin, and her lush, crimson lips. For an instant, his desire to escape slipped his mind.

The activation of Beatrice's Necklace didn't pose a direct threat to Moran Avigny's life, so it failed to trigger Mirror Substitution. Moran Avigny lacked the time to deploy it himself. His cravings had already swelled beyond his control!

Chapter 721: Exhausting the Substitutes

A Demoness of Pleasure didn't possess an innately proactive charm, but she could maximize her allure to irresistible levels. Even under normal circumstances, her magnetism could make most men unable to shift their gazes away, their breathing growing labored as their minds raced with desire. Moran Avigny had certainly never been an Ascetic, and his lust was already inflamed by Beatrice's Necklace.

His focus was solely locked on Franca now, imagination running wild with tantalizing possibilities of what might happen next.

Heart pounding, blood surging, his movements were affected—swift but erratic.

A dawn-like glow emanated from Moran's body, marking Franca as the target of his righteous punishment. This enhanced his influence and offensive power against the tempting demoness.

As he selected her for punishment, Moran seemed to grow taller in Franca's eyes, striking fear into her heart. She sensed he was a formidable figure who could end her existence with a mere thought.

She broke invisibility and tried to quickly shift positions.

Seizing the opportunity, Moran thrust out his right hand, breathing hot and heavy, and spoke an ancient Hermes incantation: "Imprison!"

Viscous amber liquid surged forth, enveloping Franca and freezing the demoness in place within a colossal transparent prison.

Crack!

Franca's form shattered, transforming into a palm-sized makeup mirror.

This allowed her to escape the Disciplinary Paladin's Imprison.

Suddenly, powerful danger premonition gripped Moran. Straining his enhanced physique, he broke free of the intangible spider silk ensnaring him and dove to the side.

Jenna's ice spike wreathed in unholy black flames narrowly missed its mark as she struck with all her might from the diagonal flank.

Moran's eyes flicked to the Witch in her dark dress and bonnet. He couldn't help but think she was quite appealing too.

Why not have both?

Dropping to one knee, Moran reached out towards Jenna and bellowed another Hermes invocation: "Confinement!"

Wordlessly, an immaterial wall materialized around Jenna, impenetrable even to her Spirit Body.

Rather than adhering directly to her, it generated a transparent cell with her at its center, thwarting any attempt at Mirror Substitution.

Taking note of this, Jenna opted not to strike the unseen barrier. Instead, she enveloped herself in a layer of frost.

Beyond the frost was another layer of frost—a delicate vacuum formed, transforming Jenna into a frozen statue.

"Confinement!"

Moran Avigny didn't immediately press his advantage against Jenna. His bloodshot eyes fixed on Franca as he confined the space surrounding the Demoness of Pleasure.

Franca remained unresponsive as black flames surged forth from her form.

Outside the black blaze, strata of frost coalesced, fashioning a translucent, sturdy sarcophagus.

Transparent spider silk wound around her, cocooning the frost in spirals.

Wh— Moran Avigny, though perplexed by the Demoness of Pleasure's peculiar behavior, took satisfaction in the success of his Confinement, circumventing the effects of Mirror Substitution.

His movements somewhat warped, he lunged at Franca. His mind raced with the powers he would unleash next and the consequences of bringing her under his control.

He had almost forgotten the presence of the Spectator, but Anthony had slipped into a blind spot.

No matter, I'll subdue the two Demonesses first! The instant this notion crossed Moran Avigny's mind, a faintly piercing melody abruptly resounded in his ears.

Lumian stepped out from the corner shadows, the black Symphony of Hatred bone flute at his lips.

Prohibition of Invisibility hadn't compelled him to reveal himself, as he wasn't invisible to begin with. He had merely shape-shifted into a shadow being, blending with the shadows!

Lumian studied Moran Avigny's face, twisted by desire. Approaching with a grin, he played the melody with intensified vigor.

Given Moran Avigny's state, he was certain the Symphony of Hatred's exploitation of vulnerabilities would undeniably inflame the other's cravings. Employing his Fate Appropriator's abilities in tandem was unnecessary.

Amid the lively, cutting music, Moran Avigny's body abruptly went rigid.

With a cracking noise, he invoked Mirror Substitution to endure the nearly lethal assault on his behalf.

Moran Avigny's silhouette manifested behind Lumian, but Lumian's performance persisted, and the nigh-explosive lust gripping Moran Avigny remained unabated.

Crack! Crack! Crack!

Moran Avigny's form repeatedly fractured like a mirror, rematerializing in the ever-quickening melody. He couldn't flee the vicinity, nor could he spare a moment to obstruct his hearing.

The captivating strains of the Symphony of Hatred permeated every nook of the space behind the mirror.

Anthony crouched in a corner, employing a prop he had readied beforehand to shield his ears. He was set to bank on the mirror to induce a trance and plunge into deep sleep, thus evading Lumian's lethal melody that spared neither friend nor foe.

Despite his preparations, grayish-white dragon scales involuntarily surfaced on his skin.

Crack! Crack! Moran Avigny's Mirror Substitution had at last been exhausted.

His mind reeled, and he experienced overwhelming pleasure, a surge of euphoria.

His frame shuddered with pain and rapture.

Blood seeped from his nostrils, eyes, ears, and mouth. His saliva, mucus, and tears streamed all at once, as though he teetered on the brink of collapse.

Lumian appeared behind him, lowered the Symphony of Hatred, and snorted.

Twin beams of white light struck Moran Avigny, plunging the Disciplinary Paladin into unconsciousness.

Lumian afforded Moran Avigny no opportunity to harness his unique powers to rouse himself. He produced a ritualistic dog skin from his Traveler's Bag and draped it over the gradually crumpling foe's head.

"Dog!" Lumian declared in Hermes.

With a shadowy flash, Moran Avigny vanished, supplanted by an enormous dog with tawny fur.

Amid the intangible thud of the dog collapsing to the ground, it lay insensible on its flank.

Lumian smiled, stooped down, and scooped up the dog.

Witnessing this, Anthony dislodged the gag that had wholly covered his ears, and Jenna shed the dual layers of frost encasing her.

Franca lagged slightly. After a handful of seconds, the cocoon ruptured, and the ice coffin noiselessly dissipated, prompting the black flames to disperse.

She regarded Lumian and Jenna with astonishment and delight, stating, "My Pleasure potion underwent substantial digestion!"

No sooner had she concluded her statement than she pinched her nose and surveyed the spot where Moran Avigny had stood and the massive dog cradled in Lumian's arms.

"I know what's going on… He must have just savored genuine pleasure—utmost pleasure. Moreover, this 'pleasure' stemmed from me."

Lumian deliberated momentarily before replying, "He even staked his life to remain in pursuit of the pleasure you bestowed upon him, weathering the same excruciating agony. Ultimately, he attained the pleasure he coveted, albeit not in the manner he desired. He paid the steepest price for it."

"He's also a Beyonder on par with Sequence 5," Franca remarked with a wistful smile. "Regrettably, I wasn't the one wielding the Symphony of Hatred; otherwise, my Pleasure potion might have been fully digested. Pleasure begets pain, and pleasure lures people into depravity. Pleasure is akin to a candle flame to a moth…"

At this juncture, she lowered her voice and mumbled in an unfamiliar tongue, "Lust is a dangerous game…"

Franca harbored no excessive regrets. Among them, only Lumian could shoulder the adverse cost of the Symphony of Hatred.

Anthony scanned the environs and serenely prompted Franca, "Since we've succeeded, let's leave quickly."

Jenna had already drawn near to Lumian, who had likewise stowed away the Symphony of Hatred.

"Okay." Franca nodded and took several paces to Lumian's side, grasping his upper arm.

Concurrently, black flames ignited behind the mirror.

Within seconds, the quartet emerged from the fixed portal to the mirror world in the quarry cave. Franca finalized the anti-divination and anti-prophecy measures.

Subsequently, they teleported back to the secured residence in the administrative district.

Franca sighed. "Beatrice's Necklace can no longer trigger Lust…"

Beatrice's Necklace could only trigger such desires twice. The inaugural target of Lust was Gardner Martin.

For Demoness Franca, this signified the loss of a potent auxiliary means.

Jenna nodded slightly. "How unfortunate. It appears the Demoness of Pleasure and the Sex Addict of the Mother Tree of Desire pathway can forge an ideal and efficacious partnership."

"Indeed. Unfortunately, I cannot obtain the Mother Tree of Desire's boon. Otherwise…" Franca abruptly fell silent, and an identical phrase flitted through the minds of Lumian and the others: Sex Addict Demoness!

Clearing her throat twice, Franca said, "I can only hope that the bestowed of the Mother Tree of Desire will bestow comparable props."

She turned to the enfeebled dog, who had yet to stir, and contemplated briefly before proposing, "Administer truth serum to him first, then have Anthony befriend him as a two-pronged approach? Yes, employ the Magic Mirror Spirit Channeling Spell as a precautionary step…"

Lumian nodded, recollecting the "criticism" the Demoness of Black had leveled at Franca. Quelling his avarice, he said, "No need to rush. I'll question him after visiting Mr. K. Mr. K must have his motives for abruptly targeting Moran Avigny for assassination. Only by consulting him can we extract more pertinent intelligence later."

Franca and the others nodded in concurrence. "Agreed."

…

19 Rue Scheer, Psychic Magazine headquarters.

Lumian alighted from the carriage, attired in a light-blue cotton shirt following a change of clothing, and entered the six-story white luxurious residence.

Chapter 722: He Knows

In the basement of 19 Rue Scheer, Lumian encountered Mr. K.

If he hadn't witnessed Mr. K transform into flesh and blood to envelop Moran Avigny and subsequently suffer holy light damage from the Purifiers, Lumian wouldn't have believed that the energetic, black-hooded man before him had recently infiltrated the Intis Republic's Minister of Industry's residence and carried out an assassination.

"You're back from the Southern Continent?" Mr. K's voice was as deep and raspy as ever.

Instead of sitting in the red armchair, he stood directly in front of Lumian, in the shadows projected by the crystal chandelier.

Lumian didn't hide anything and smiled. "I'm back to do a favor for a friend. I'll be leaving again in the future. As you know, I can teleport."

Mr. K's expansive hood swayed gently, as if nodding.

He said with relief, "The fact that you still remember to come here and praise the Lord's glory after returning to Trier proves I didn't misjudge you."

Lumian, having just completed the prayer process with Mr. K, felt guilty and ashamed.

He cut to the chase.

"I saw you assassinate Moran Avigny."

Under his hood, Mr. K's gaze suddenly took on a tangible quality, and the shadows around him flickered.

After a few seconds, the Aurora Order Oracle asked in a hoarse voice, "You were there?"

Lumian maintained a relaxed demeanor as he replied, "Yes. Your assassination method bore the hallmarks of a Rose Bishop and was suspected of using Grazing to teleport. Even with just the Purifiers' information, it wouldn't be hard for me to guess it was you. But I admit, I was indeed present."

"Where were you hiding?" Mr. K inquired.

Lumian replied with a smile, "In the mirror Moran Avigny fled into."

At this, Mr. K's black robe fluttered despite the still air, as if countless flesh and blood were cheering beneath.

Unable to hide his excitement, he asked, "And now? Have you captured Moran Avigny?"

"Yes." Lumian nodded solemnly.

"Hahaha! Hahaha!" Mr. K half-raised his body, revealing his thin chin, and erupted into maniacal laughter.

His laughter made Lumian's ears ring. Light and shadows danced in the basement, the stench of blood permeating the air.

Finally, Mr. K stopped laughing and spoke with unnerving fanaticism,

"Just as the Lord arranged. Piousness is indeed the only way out!"

He began tracing a cross on his chest.

"Praise you for creating all. Praise you for bearing the world's sins!"

Lumian also praised the Aurora Order's True Creator.

Mr. K smiled and sighed.

"I had planned to assassinate Moran Avigny in the coming days, but hadn't set a date. However, when I saw him at the window this evening, gazing at the distant scenery, I sensed something off about his emotional state.

"Fearing something might go wrong, I hastily launched the operation and failed.

"I was about to repent to the Lord and shoulder my sins when you arrived and told me you had captured Moran Avigny.

"What does this signify?

"It means the Lord has prearranged everything. We need only pray, act, and do things with devotion. Nothing else matters.

"With piousness, failure is a stepping stone to success. Without it, even success leads to failure."

In previous conversations with Mr. K, Lumian had always felt a language barrier. He understood the words but couldn't truly grasp the fanatical state.

But this time, his heart raced and a chill ran down his spine.

Could the Under the Table transaction I initiated through the Authority Holder's Under-the-table Transaction be connected to the Aurora Order's Lord?

Is that why Moran Avigny suddenly risked leaving through the study mirror? Why he came to the study to assess the environment, weighing the risks as he feigned reading…

So, after I compelled Moran Avigny's fate, Mr. K hurried to the study to assassinate him, forcing him to flee to the nearest mirror—the full-body one we hid in…

During the transaction, we paid with the Blood Gold ring, derived from the Beyonder characteristic of a Sequence 6 Rose Bishop of the Secrets Suppliant pathway…

Lumian chose to share his feelings with Mr. K but concealed his fear and the power of Compelling Fate. He attributed all the developments to the Authority Holder's Under-the-table Transaction.

Despite his frenzied laughter, Mr. K remained composed. Solemnly and fanatically, he said, "The Lord watches, the Lord listens, and the Lord knows."

Lumian had heard Madam Magician say similar words before but hadn't felt their weight. He hadn't even been troubled, knowing it was futile. But now, every hair on his body stood on end, a chill running down his spine.

He sensed eyes watching him from every shadow.

The more he experienced and learned, the more acutely he felt the terror and oppression of those three short sentences.

After a few seconds, Lumian praised the True Creator again and asked, "Mr. K, why did you assassinate Moran Avigny? My friends and I dealt with him because the real Moran Avigny is dead. The active one is a Mirror Person. What about you?"

"Mirror Person? No wonder he has Mirror Substitution. That's precisely what I didn't anticipate—causing the assassination to fail," Mr. K sighed with realization.

Pacing back and forth, he told Lumian,

"Recent cases in Intis have led to an organization called the School of Truth. They used degenerates from cults and official organizations to achieve certain goals. For example, a descendant of Poli vanished mysteriously, and closely monitored pages from Roselle's diary disappeared."

Poli? One of Emperor Roselle's Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse? A descendant of his has vanished? Lumian's eyelids twitched at the thought.

Jebus Lata had mentioned the School of Truth's three goals: finding clues about the fallen heaven, Emperor Roselle's final mausoleum, and 0-05, the Magic Wishing Lamp.

The Fourth Epoch Trier's seal had just been breached. For now, Intis's official organizations were unlikely to overlook anything. As for 0-05, Emperor Roselle's eldest daughter Bernadette held it. The School of Truth admitted they couldn't handle the Element Dawn leader yet. They wanted more boons before trying.

In other words, two of the three targets required long-term planning from the School of Truth. That left clues about Emperor Roselle's final mausoleum. Jebus mentioned having no relevant clues himself. Whether the Overseer did was uncertain.

Combined with Mr. K's account, Lumian had a bad feeling.

Could the School of Truth already possess crucial clues about Emperor Roselle's final mausoleum?

Mr. K continued, "We're investigating these matters, as is Element Dawn.

"We recently discovered Moran Avigny's involvement in some cases. He seemed to be a key figure in the School of Truth."

"Then why assassinate him instead of capturing him?" Lumian felt Mr. K's previous actions aimed to kill Moran Avigny.

Mr. K chuckled raspily.

"Killing him is simpler than capture. And after his death, an abnormality will undoubtedly occur. The official Beyonders will find a way to communicate with his spirit. Then, the authorities will investigate the School of Truth to thwart their plan.

"Isn't that our goal?

"Plus, we can shadow the authorities to track down School of Truth members."

You, an Aurora Order Oracle, have also learned to "report" and exploit the authorities? Lumian found it amusing.

If not for needing more information about the Mirror People, he, Franca, and the others could have simply forced Moran Avigny to show signs of abnormality, avoiding so much trouble.

Lumian delved into more details with Mr. K, increasingly sensing the School of Truth was close to locating Emperor Roselle's final mausoleum.

Without delay, he expressed his urgency to return and interrogate Moran Avigny to prevent mishaps.

"Do you need my help?" Mr. K inquired.

Lumian responded with a smile, "Not for now. We have a Hypnotist, the Bliss Society's truth serum, and a Demoness skilled in spirit channeling."

He didn't mention also having Fate Appropriator abilities.

During Fate Appropriation, Lumian could "see" all of Moran Avigny's past and present fates, and most fate tributaries. But the duration was limited, only allowing extraction of the most pertinent information.

"Alright, let me know if you need anything." Mr. K sized up Lumian with admiration.

…

Finding a secluded spot to teleport back to the safe house, Lumian surveyed the area and said to Franca, "Use Mirror Cufflink's ability to take us back to the underground quarry cave."

This would prevent accidents from affecting the neighborhood.

Lumian had already teleported multiple times that day and even altered Moran Avigny's fate. Previously, he had played the Symphony of Hatred and triggered a series of weakness assaults. The immense expenditure left him with spirituality for only seven to eight more teleports and no further accumulation.

In this situation, using Beyonder items when possible was only natural.

Understanding Lumian's state, Franca didn't hold back on the Mirror Cufflink's charges. She only asked Lumian to carry the colossal dog and keep it from touching her.

She then made the glass cufflink on her blouse glow, leading Lumian and the others into the room's mirror. Through the dark, empty tunnel, they appeared in the quarry cave with a fixed entrance to the mirror world.

Franca took out the truth serum and tossed it to Anthony Reid with a friendly smile. "Feed some to Moran Avigny and have a good chat with him."

Chapter 723: Secret of Immortality

After some time had passed, Anthony Reid guided the shriveled brownish-yellow dog back to the quarry cave that housed a fixed entrance to the mirror world.

Turning to Lumian, he said, "You can dispel the Animal Creation Spell now."

Lumian glanced at the enormous dog, which had lost its ferocious and ruthless demeanor. With a smile, he recited the dispelling incantation in Hermes: "Monk!"

Lumian had personally crafted the ritualistic dog skin. While he had used Padre Guillaume Bénet's activation incantation, he had modified the dispelling incantation.

Initially, Lumian wanted to use the name of Gehrman Sparrow, one of his two idols, as the dispelling incantation. However, since Gehrman was Mr. Fool's Angel of Redemption, uttering his name in Hermes might have unusual consequences and seem blasphemous. Consequently, Lumian discarded that idea.

Since the first ritualistic hide he made was dog skin, Lumian drew inspiration from the phrase "Monks Chasing Dogs" and chose the word "Monk" for the dispelling incantation.

As a dark light flared, it revealed a pitiful-looking Moran Avigny.

Instinctively, Moran reached for a handkerchief in his chest pocket and wiped away the dried blood, tears, saliva, and mucus from his face.

Rather than getting directly to the point, Lumian decided to begin with trivial questions to bolster his credibility and optimize the hypnotic effect.

With a blend of derision and a sigh, he said, "I can't grasp why you Mirror People loathe your real world equivalents."

Moran Avigny sneered in response. "If you were perpetually confined to the cold, gloomy, sealed mirror, you'd also despise your counterpart who basks in the sun, savors fine food and drink, and revels in leisure and pleasure."

"But your existence wasn't a natural occurrence. It was an accident," Jenna pointed out, narrowly avoiding mentioning that they were monstrosities inhabiting a unique mirror world.

Chuckling, Moran Avigny retorted, "What bearing does that have on our envy and hatred?

"We didn't trigger the accident. As we were born and have been perpetuating our kind, we possess the right to seek a superior life."

Momentarily at a loss for words, Franca and Jenna fell silent.

Speaking in a friendly tone, Lumian said, "You indeed have that right. However, it cannot involve murder or injuring the original body. Why not collaborate with official organizations, such as the Church of The Fool? After fleeing Fourth Epoch Trier, you could depart this city and commence a new life elsewhere."

Moran Avigny scoffed. "You believe we can trust and cooperate with these sun-dwelling organizations?"

"Are you not already collaborating with the School of Truth?" Lumian exposed Moran Avigny's deception.

After a brief pause, Moran Avigny stated, "We have a mission. We desire the authentic restoration of this world."

"Authentic?" Lumian intentionally provoked. "How can authenticity exist in a mirror? You Mirror People merely resemble the genuine ones. Upon death, you will revert to mirror shards."

Following the provocation, Lumian's eyes turned silver-black as he examined Moran Avigny's fate tributary, aiming to deter him from providing a response that could endanger his life.

After a quick observation confirming that his question wouldn't pose a significant risk, Lumian deactivated the Eye of Calamity to preserve his spirituality.

With a meaningful smile, Moran Avigny said, "No, in a certain sense, what resides in the mirror is real.

"Upon completing our mission, we will fully return to reality!"

Intrigued by Moran Avigny's confidence, Franca asked, "Why do you say that?"

Moran Avigny's gaze swept over the two Demonesses. Now in his refractory period, he chuckled and said, "Even I cannot comprehend the most basic reason. All I can disclose is that it relates to the Chaos Demoness we revere deep within the mirror world. She is the true Primordial Demoness!

"Moreover, I can offer an example: After transforming into a Witch and interacting with mirror magic, every Demoness's true self dwells within the mirror."

Observing Franca and Jenna's skepticism, Moran Avigny, eager to express his thoughts, inquired with a smile,

"Are you aware of the Demoness pathway's Sequence 3 name?"

In unison, Franca and Jenna shook their heads. "No."

With a slight nod, Moran Avigny explained, "It's known as the Demoness of Unaging. Eternal youth, skilled in resurrection and rebirth.

"Why are they so challenging to kill, capable of resurrection and rebirth? It's because what they destroy is merely their external form. Their authentic selves have always been imprisoned and sealed within the mirror!

"If the false ones perish, they can swiftly be resurrected through the projection of their true selves in the mirror!

"Consider this: how can one's true self, imprisoned, sealed, and utilized as a source of resurrection, not despise the false one in reality? Why wouldn't they yearn to escape the mirror and reclaim what is rightfully theirs?"

Franca abruptly recalled the moment she first entered the unique mirror world.

At that time, she had encountered her body's original self, the one with thick brown eyebrows and short flaxen-colored hair before ingesting the Witch potion. His face was drenched in blood, and his eyes brimmed with malice and hatred.

Could it be that after drinking the Witch potion and transforming into a woman, her male self didn't disappear but was exiled to the mirror, unable to escape? Franca was both alarmed and suspicious.

Jenna also remembered something from her past.

During the process of becoming a Witch, she saw her other self in an illusion—her malevolent, mirror-like self. Both of them plummeted into the black flames, and she struggled to crawl out, returning to the ice above the black flames to complete her advancement. The malevolent self was dragged into the bottomless Abyss by the python-like black shadow.

Could it symbolize self-division?

Is a part of me truly suffering in the mirror?

Noticing his two Demoness companions' perplexed state, Lumian smiled at Moran Avigny and said, "It doesn't necessarily involve self-imprisonment. It's conceivable that during the Witch transformation process, they formed a profound connection with their mirror selves, enabling them to master mirror magic. To a degree, this also allows for their resurrection."

"The mirror self is tainted with blood, malice, hatred, and malevolence because they are perpetually in this state. They constantly envy their real selves, just like you Mirror People from a unique world."

Unable to uncover the truth at the moment, Lumian preferred not to linger on the subject and attempted to shift the blame to others.

Furthermore, as a Mirror Person, Moran Avigny had an innate inclination to take sides. His words needed to be cautiously accepted and analyzed from a different perspective.

Upon hearing Lumian's explanation, Franca and Jenna's expressions softened. Moran Avigny mocked, "Self-deception cannot conceal the truth."

Recognizing that the initial preparations were nearly complete, Lumian decided to redirect the conversation back to the main topic.

Originally, their objective was related to Mirror People, but now Lumian sensed that the matter involving the School of Truth was more relevant and pressing. He needed to inquire about it first.

His eyes turned silver-black once more as he gazed at Moran Avigny and asked, "Did you enter into a contract with the School of Truth's Overseer?"

"Of course we did. How else could we collaborate? We all value contracts," Moran Avigny replied with pride.

Lumian chuckled.

"He didn't surreptitiously modify the terms the instant you signed the contract, did he?"

"No, I am highly attentive to such matters. As you know, I am a Judge in the mystical sense," Moran Avigny responded confidently.

Lumian probed further, "Have you met the Overseer?"

Moran Avigny shook his head.

"He signed the contract first and then dispatched his subordinate to deliver it. We never actually met."

"What has the Overseer been up to lately?" Lumian inquired cautiously.

Moran Avigny chuckled.

"I am merely a cog of his immense Under the Table black net. I assist in completing specific matters through transactions. I am unaware of what those matters allude to or the motivations behind them.

"Yes, he once mentioned that he intended to use individuals like me to weave an invisible and massive vortex. He could infuse his strongest desires into it and achieve results.

"A few days ago, he casually remarked that the vortex is on the verge of taking shape."

The vortex is about to take shape… Lumian continued to monitor the changes in Moran Avigny's fate tributary and, after some contemplation, asked, "How do you and the Overseer typically communicate? Is there a special contingency plan in case of an emergency?"

This was something he needed to ascertain as quickly as possible. The abrupt attack on Intis's Minister of Industry, Moran Avigny, and his enigmatic disappearance was breaking news. It wouldn't take long for the news to spread. When that happened, the Overseer would undoubtedly learn about it and promptly sever his original communication channel.

…

In Moran Avigny's villa.

Angoulême de François, the captain of the Purifier mobile team directly under Trier's diocese, had been prepared and swiftly arrived at the scene.

After listening to the on-scene Purifiers' report and assessing the scene, Angoulême frowned.

"A member of the Aurora Order?"

Not Hidden Blade and the others?

What are they up to!

Following a moment of reflection, Angoulême issued an order,

"Let's first suppress the news of Moran Avigny's incident to avoid alerting the individuals and factions behind this abnormality. We may still have an opportunity to uncover clues and proceed with our investigation."

This was his experience and a process the Purifiers were already familiar with.

Chapter 724: Leader

The Purifier team from Saint Viève Cathedral soon arrived at Moran Avigny's study, carrying a nearly sealed wooden box.

They each wore white robes adorned with waxed golden threads, thin rubber gloves, and leather hoods. Their masks curved downward, forming a bird's beak in front of their mouths and noses.

Angoulême signaled the other Purifiers to withdraw from this floor and clear the adjacent ones. Donning a bird-beak mask and similar attire himself, he tightly bandaged his wrists and ankles.

Peering through the red glass lenses of his mask, Angoulême watched his colleagues open the wooden box.

Mirrors of the perfect size lined the inner layer of the box on all sides—top, bottom, left, right, front, and back.

In the center, surrounded by the mirrors, stood a milky-white stone statue half the height of a person. It portrayed a beautiful half-naked woman, her dress torn away to the waist.

Despite the female figurine's broken arm, her other hand alluringly covered her navel. Her captivating figure and exquisite facial features stirred an inexplicable heat within Angoulême. A sudden urge to kiss "her" flooded his mind, a desire for an intimate encounter with the stone statue.

Not daring to breathe deeply, he forced himself to maintain control.

He recognized this as a Grade 1 Sealed Artifact under the Trier diocese, serial number 82, known as the Ullamos Statue.

This Grade 1 Sealed Artifact could gradually entice nearby creatures to obsess over it, spreading various illnesses, some common and others mystical in nature.

Left unchecked, the statue's influence would transform its surroundings into a nightmarish landscape of agony—living beings wailing, writhing, and perishing in horrifying ways. The relentless plague would expand, unleashing a widening catastrophe.

Angoulême had requested 1-82 for its ability to guide other creatures into the mirror world. Strictly controlling exposure time was crucial to prevent the spread of illness and obsession.

The two Purifiers gently lifted the Ullamos Statue and carried it to the full-body mirror in the study.

Angoulême and his two other teammates approached, placing their palms on 1-82's shoulders.

In perfect synchronicity, they magically phased through the glass mirror, vanishing from Moran Avigny's study.

As soon as Angoulême laid eyes on the dark, hazy, almost illusory space behind the mirror, a tickle in his throat urged him to cough.

"Sigh…" A soft exhalation escaped his lips.

Their attire couldn't isolate the disease spread by the Ullamos Statue…

Its sole purpose was to minimize the rate at which they succumbed to genuine infection!

Weakened yet inexplicably excited, Angoulême and his teammates investigated the area behind the mirror. They quickly discovered numerous dim mirror fragments scattered about.

"A battle took place here. Moran Avigny had to use Mirror Substitution multiple times, but there's no sign of blood, bodily fluids, hair, or any other traces," one of the Purifiers concluded.

Angoulême's heart raced as he speculated. A battle? Someone ambushed Moran Avigny in the mirror?

Impressive, Hidden Blade!

"It seems Moran Avigny couldn't escape right away and multiple Mirror Substitutions were shattered. There's a high chance he was captured," Angoulême analyzed seriously before pivoting to misdirection. "I see. The Aurora Order never expected the assassination to succeed. The assassin's only objective was to drive Moran Avigny into this mirror, where the rest of the Aurora Order awaited him!"

The other Purifiers concurred with this theory, nodding in agreement.

"Definitely the Aurora Order."

"They even utilized a potent item capable of accessing the mirror world to confront Moran Avigny."

"The absence of gruesome scenes suggests the Aurora Order aimed to capture Moran Avigny alive and extract vital information."

"Over the past five to six years, the Aurora Order has grown more intelligent…"

Following a short discussion, one of the Purifiers glanced back at the Ullamos Statue at the entrance and gulped.

"We need to leave now. Return 1-82 to the mirror box. I can't endure it any longer."

Angoulême agreed.

Back in the real world, they sealed 1-82 once more and removed their cumbersome attire. At last, he sighed with relief, feeling utterly exhausted in both body and mind.

…

Inside the quarry cave with a stable mirror world entrance,illuminated by the carbide lamp under the Eye of Calamity's gaze, Moran Avigny smiled as he answered Lumian's question,

"Also through a mirror."

While speaking, he retrieved a makeup mirror from his pocket and elaborated, "Every mirror in the mirror world is unique, each with its own corresponding coordinates. I provided him with my mirror's coordinates, and he reciprocated with the coordinates of a mirror on his side. With this arrangement, I can harness my abilities and the mirror world to transmit information to his mirror for a set duration. He contacts me in the same manner but relies on the Beyonder item I gave him."

"An IP address, I suppose…" Franca muttered in a language unfamiliar to anyone present.

Lumian smiled warmly and inquired, "Would you be willing to share the Overseer's mirror coordinates with us?"

Moran Avigny shook his head.

"It's indescribable and impossible to write down. Only those like us from the mirror world can perceive it. Or Demonesses with godhood—Demonesses of Despair."

Sequence 4 Demoness of Despair? And Sequence 5 is Demoness of Affliction… These two Sequences sound unpleasant. Uncomfortable to act, but the subsequent Demoness of Unaging is quite impressive… Franca gleaned information about the Demoness pathway from Moran Avigny's words.

"How can the Overseer perceive it then?" Jenna asked.

Moran Avigny smiled.

"He can't perceive it either, but his Beyonder item can record and use it."

Franca smiled and raised her sleeve, revealing the glass-like Mirror Cufflink.

Taken aback, Moran Avigny's expression shifted to one of relief.

"You're the ones who killed Jebus."

"The Overseer killed him," Lumian clarified sincerely. "We had no intention of killing him. We even wanted to befriend him, but the Overseer used a mysterious power from afar to end his life. I fear you may suffer the same fate."

Moran Avigny fell silent for a few moments before stating, "It can record it."

He referred to the Mirror Cufflink's ability to record the Overseer mirror's coordinates.

Franca wasn't surprised at all. "I knew it would work."

When she had used the Mirror Cufflink earlier, she realized the mirrors in the mirror world gave her a crystal-clear sense of the mirror world's entrances in the vicinity. There was the full-body mirror in Moran Avigny's study and a few other unknown mirrors.

Franca suspected the Mirror Cufflink would instinctively record the corresponding coordinates of each mirror.

Moran Avigny continued, "You won't be able to find the Overseer directly through that mirror. I've long suspected the mirror is actually with one of the Overseer's subordinates. Naturally, that subordinate must be very close to the Overseer. Otherwise, it would hinder the transmission of information."

Just like many members of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society, the contact points reserved for Madame Hela's messenger are isolated from their real lives… Lumian nodded slightly and said, "That's not an issue. We can visit them one by one, as long as they're truly close. Can you provide us with those coordinates?"

Moran Avigny fell silent. The effects of hypnosis and truth serum battled fiercely against his resolve.

This was a Disciplinary Paladin's principle and corresponding restrictions.

Observing the shifts in his fate tributary, Lumian smiled and said, "You can think it over. Let's discuss something else first."

Having witnessed Moran Avigny's potential loss of control, he intended to inquire about other information. If the other party refused to divulge it later, he would kill him before channeling his spirit!

"Very well." Moran Avigny let out a lengthy sigh.

Lumian pondered briefly and asked,

"What deals did the Overseer make with you?"

Moran Avigny responded nonchalantly, "Primarily providing assistance to certain individuals. In turn, I received help through the Overseer. Consequently, we elevated our political status and acquired more resources.

"This is a common practice among politicians, but with the Overseer, it's even more covert, less detectable, and effective.

"Additionally, protecting specific individuals or indirectly granting benefits to non-high society members to fulfill the requirements on the other side of the Overseer's Under the Table transaction."

Lumian considered for a moment and asked, "Didn't that Overseer communicate with the leader of your Mirror People?"

Unsure if the Mirror People had a de facto leader, he said this to deceive Moran Avigny, implying they already possessed important information.

If the Mirror People truly lacked a de facto leader, Moran Avigny would see through the deception. With the truth serum and hypnosis, this wouldn't affect his subsequent answers.

Moran Avigny's expression shifted slightly. "He did communicate with our leader."

"How did they communicate?" Lumian asked calmly.

"Through a provided ritual. I don't know what was exchanged as I wasn't present," Moran Avigny replied honestly.

Franca asked curiously, "Is your leader in the real world or the mirror world of Fourth Epoch Trier?"

"In Fourth Epoch Trier," Moran Avigny said with a sigh. "Mirror People with powerful godhood can't escape through certain catastrophes via the leakage point."

Franca pondered for a moment and asked, "Does your leader have a corresponding self in reality?"

"Yes." Moran Avigny smiled. "You'll never guess who it is."

Chapter 725: The Mirror World's Third Level

"We'll never guess who it is?" Lumian and Franca scoffed simultaneously, pretending to be eager to speculate.

Of course, they didn't make any direct guesses immediately. They planned to gather some information indirectly first before making a targeted guess.

Lumian noticed the change in Moran Avigny's fate tributary and realized that as a Disciplinary Paladin, the man had his own principles and mystical limitations. He wouldn't willingly reveal details about the Mirror People's leader, yet he couldn't completely suppress a desire to share--unable to resist the hypnotic influence. So, he taunted them in a boastful way.

"You mentioned Mirror People with powerful godhood can't escape through catastrophes via leakage points, not just any Mirror People with godhood," Lumian pointed out with a smile, interpreting Moran Avigny's words. "So in other words, a Mirror Person corresponding to Sequence 4 has escaped, and your leader is a Mirror Person of at least Sequence 3 demigod level?"

Moran Avigny's face instantly showed annoyance as he regretted being too detailed, realizing he had inadvertently revealed critical information.

Encouraged by Lumian's astute observation, Franca smiled and asked, "Where are the escaped Sequence 4 Mirror People now? What are they doing?"

Moran Avigny's lips trembled with clear effort, but he stayed quiet.

Just as expected from a Sequence 5 Disciplinary Paladin. They're experts at resisting interrogation and prying... I wonder if destroying his frontal lobe would make him lose that last bit of self-control... Lumian wondered to himself and switched to a less sensitive subject.

"What are the requirements for Mirror People to appear?

"Does everyone who has lived in the real Trier for a long time automatically have a corresponding Mirror Person? Or do they need exposure to certain underground corruption first?"

This question was based on inferences from the Dream Festival incident.

Phew... Moran Avigny let out a relieved sigh, having almost lost control and spilled the most critical secrets moments earlier.

The current question let him relax a little. He answered smoothly, "If not for the seal specifically targeting Fourth Epoch Trier, the mirror world there would contain a complete reflection of the real Trier, including every resident. But under this seal, only those who frequently go into the underground areas and come into contact with specific corruption will leave an imprint in our mirror realm.

"Other than that, our kind has other origins too:

"The first type are descendants of a false deity. The corresponding Mirror People manifest from the moment of their birth, regardless of location or whether they've ever been to Trier.

"The second category comes from the bloodlines of certain noble families in Fourth Epoch Trier, like descendants of the Tamara family. That's how I came to be. This isn't limited by location or environment."

Lumian and the others understood that the false deity he was talking about was Primordial Demoness Cheek. As an evil deity overseeing the mirror world, it made sense that Her descendants would have close ties to that unique realm.

"Why do descendants of the Tamara family have a special connection to your mirror world?" Lumian asked curiously. "Did your ancestors suffer the relevant corruption during the War of the Four Emperors, or even earlier?"

Moran Avigny paused for a few moments before replying, "Earlier. I'm not sure of the specifics of the corruption or how it occurred, as it was too long ago. Maybe those Tamaras who follow the Judgment pathway without being Mirror People themselves, or those of the Door pathway, have records of it."

The Door pathway was another name for the Apprentice pathway.

Lumian nodded and asked on behalf of Franca and Jenna, "Does your kind exclude Mirror People of other Demonesses?"

"They are Mirror People, but not from our world," Moran Avigny answered with a smile. "Of course, if the conditions I mentioned earlier are met, a Mirror Person corresponding to a Demoness could be born in our realm too."

I see... Franca and Jenna nodded slightly as Lumian changed the topic.

"What are the Mirror People who left the underground doing?"

His question was broad, not specifically referring to the godhood-level Mirror People. Moran Avigny struggled for a moment before responding, "Most of them stay in Trier. They either use the original's identity to advance their status in various industries and organizations, or they hide in the shadows, secretly developing their factions. The goal is to eventually fully unseal Fourth Epoch Trier and access the third, deepest level of the mirror world.

"As for the rest..."

Moran Avigny paused and grinned at Franca and Jenna.

"Some infiltrated the Demoness Sect to locate the fake deity's real-world hiding place. Others went to Lenburg to search for an item, as instructed by the leader.

"Don't ask me about the progress of those in the Demoness Sect or what exactly the ones in Lenburg are looking for. That's not my area of responsibility. No one told me the details."

"I also want to find the Primordial Demoness's real-world hiding spot. Why not tell me about the infiltrators in the Demoness Sect? Maybe we could work together," Franca suggested with a lovely smile.

Moran Avigny's expression said it all: The more beautiful the woman, the more deceptive. I won't fall for it.

"I don't know their identities either. Only the leader has all the information."

"Alright then." Franca's eyes darted around as she continued, "What did you mean by the third level of the mirror world? We've all gone into Fourth Epoch Trier and entered your special mirror realm. But what we encountered there were Mirror People of the deceased citizens from that ancient era. They were reflections of that bygone city. Where does your kind live?"

Moran Avigny explained, "Back then, you must have accessed the second level of our mirror world. It only appears under specific conditions and preserves the scene of Fourth Epoch Trier's destruction. It's quite dangerous and holds many unknown secrets. As for our daily life, we live on the first level of the mirror world--a reflection of the present-day Trier."

"The first level mirrors the current Trier?" Jenna keenly noticed a discrepancy. "Didn't you say you Mirror People live in a dark, cold, confined environment?"

Trier was now a metropolis!

Moran Avigny sneered and said, "We may seem to live in a metropolis, but in reality, we are all restricted. We can only walk fixed paths, endlessly wandering between a handful of rooms and one or two streets. Without the help of godhood- level powerhouses, we can't even talk to each other. We can only observe what our counterparts are doing in the real world through mirrors. Plus, our realm has no reflection of the sun, moon, or stars. Imagine living in such an environment."

It's similar to the living conditions of the painting world's individuals, except the Mirror People have self- awareness and a clear understanding… No wonder they are in agony… Lumian thought of a question when he realized the mirror world's first level lacked the sun, moon, and stars.

"If a Sequence 4 Unshadowed of the Sun pathway comes into contact with the specific underground corruption, will a corresponding Mirror Person be born?"

"No," Moran Avigny stated firmly.

Lumian used this chance to eliminate several more possibilities regarding the real identity of the Mirror People's leader.

Franca sighed deeply. "The Sun pathway is truly exceptional. Befitting of the pathway that governs Purification."

She then remembered her earlier unanswered question and pressed, "What exists on the third level of the mirror world?"

Once again, Moran Avigny shook his head.

"No one has entered it. We only know it exists. We know our origins, traits, and the source of our power all point to that

level. As for the Chaos Demoness we revere and follow, who is also the Primordial Demoness, She is trapped there for some reason, guarding the truth."

Trapped there? More like sealed there… 'Protecting reality'—a nice way to spin it… Lumian pondered briefly before asking, "What truth are you referring to?"

"Truth is truth." Moran Avigny seemed confused, as if he had never seriously considered the matter.

Seeing that he lacked an answer, Jenna brought the conversation back to the Mirror People's connection to reality.

Puzzled, she asked, "If the original person in reality dies, what happens to the Mirror Person?

"And the other way around?"

Moran Avigny's lips twisted into a warped smile.

"Normally, if the me in reality dies, I'll die along with him. But if I send my real self into the mirror world beforehand, the impact of his death on me will be minimal.

"The reverse holds true too. When I was still in the mirror world, if an invader killed me, the me in reality would merely get sick and be weakened for a time. Going forward, if he didn't come into contact with the specific underground corruption again, no corresponding Mirror Person would exist.

"If I escape to the real world and am killed there, the real me won't be affected at all."

Franca hissed and said, "So instead of killing Moran Avigny directly, you found a way to drag him into the mirror world?"

"Exactly. I waited for him to 'savor' the darkness, coldness, isolation, and loneliness before ending him," Moran Avigny confirmed with a smile.

In short, the one in the mirror loses significance and won't impact the other's survival, regardless of whether they are a Mirror Person or a real individual… If both are in the real world, the Mirror Person is naturally at a disadvantage… Lumian nodded slightly as he started to deduce the identity of the Mirror People's leader mentioned by Moran Avigny.

Someone who ventures into Trier's underground often, exposed to specific corruptions.

Formidable godhood, at least Sequence 3.

He must still be alive…

With this in mind, Lumian couldn't narrow it down further.

He had no choice but to use his Conspirer abilities to upload all relevant information onto his mental network.

The Overseer of the School of Truth had performed a ritual and interacted with the Mirror People's leader.

The School of Truth was searching for Emperor Roselle's final mausoleum.

They had obtained something significant. The vortex was on the verge of taking shape…

Suddenly, a flash of insight hit Lumian, and an incredible guess raced through his mind.

He couldn't be certain, as one premise seemed questionable.

He took two steps forward and whispered a name into Moran Avigny's ear.

Moran Avigny's expression changed drastically, a mixture of shock and panic.

Lumian withdrew and exhaled solemnly.

"Have you figured out who the Mirror People's leader is?" Franca asked.

Lumian nodded gently and surveyed the surroundings. In a deep voice, he declared, "Yes, I know who He is. He's Roselle Gustav in the mirror!"

Chapter 726: Fragment of Fate

Roselle Gustav in the mirror?

When Franca, Jenna, and Anthony heard that the name of this dazzling figure, revered by every Intisian, was connected to the Mirror People, their minds went completely blank.

They instinctively wanted to question him further, but Moran Avigny's reaction and change in expression appeared to validate Lumian's conjecture.

"But the Emperor has been dead for over a century. How can there still be a corresponding Mirror Person?" Franca asked, finally composing herself.

It made sense that Emperor Roselle would have encountered Trier's underground corruption. He had, after all, lived in Trier for an extended period after reaching adulthood, and he was not one to easily settle down. He had seized control of Intis, reformed Trier, expanded the city, and initiated the patriotic health campaign, but hadn't he already met his end?

Lumian's serious expression softened a bit.

"Initially, I hesitated to make that guess, but then I recalled something. For someone of Emperor Roselle's stature, even if they perish, they might not be completely gone. There could even be a possibility of resurrection."

It was just like Naboredisley's Abomination corpse resting in the ancient tomb of the Dream Festival.

Franca made an odd remark. "Old institutions are hard to get rid of…"

With their experience dealing with the Devil Monarch's Abomination corpse, Franca, Jenna, and Anthony quickly accepted Lumian's explanation.

Lumian looked at Moran Avigny, whose face had turned ashen, and smiled.

"I made a bold hypothesis and meticulously verified it. When I shared my guess with him, he willingly confirmed it."

Moran Avigny's lips trembled, wanting to defend himself, but he held back.

He believed that the more he tried to explain, the more he would end up helping these people.

His urge to confide led him to add, "Now, do you understand that our Mirror People are also incredibly powerful?

"If we can fully break the seal of Fourth Epoch Trier, we will be as strong as any orthodox Church!"

Franca disregarded Moran Avigny's showy remark and muttered to herself, "No wonder the Church's demigods refuse to personally go underground and resolve the various abnormalities here unless the seal of Fourth Epoch Trier is badly damaged.

"This isn't about fixing abnormalities. It's about making more of them!"

Even though the demigods of the Eternal Blazing Sun Church didn't have to fear the birth of their corresponding Mirror People, Trier's underground corruption extended beyond just the mirror world!

Isn't the underground of Trier excessively vile and horrifying?

This was assuming that Fourth Epoch Trier was relatively well-sealed. What had the four Emperors, particularly Blood Emperor Alista Tudor, done during the War of the Four Emperors? The issues they left behind more than a thousand years ago were still incredibly terrifying!

We often venture into Trier's underground and have even entered Fourth Epoch Trier and the unique mirror world. Could there be a corresponding special Mirror Person?

No, it's not a matter of whether there is one, but rather that there definitely was one. They had encountered it before!

Lumian ignored Moran Avigny's boasting and turned to Jenna.

"Our investigation into the Mirror People has yielded significant progress. Combined with the Overseer, who evidently possesses godhood, what unfolds next is beyond our ability to intervene. As soon as we acquire the coordinates of the Overseer's mirror, promptly report the entire situation."

Jenna curtly acknowledged his words and laughed self-deprecatingly.

"Actually, I'm dying to report it now."

From her viewpoint, although she was unsure why the School of Truth was searching for Emperor Roselle's final mausoleum or what their intentions were, given the strong probability that they had already obtained vital information and collaborated with the mirror Roselle, the situation had obviously become very urgent, and it was certainly not a positive development.

"You can begin writing now." Lumian gave a slight nod and shifted his gaze to Moran Avigny.

He planned to appropriate the other party's fate.

Fate Appropriation was not his objective. By seizing the chance to interact with fate, his aim was to seek essential information from past fate fragments.

This was the penultimate segment of the "interrogation."

The final segment involved spirit channeling to forcibly obtain the coordinates of the Overseer's mirror!

Furthermore, Lumian wanted to take this opportunity to observe what would happen to the target if he seized one of their fate fragments without exchanging fates or directly causing their death.

This was not mentioned in the mystical knowledge possessed by a Fate Appropriator. The only thing Lumian knew for certain was that the past would not change, and what had already transpired would remain unchanged.

Initially, Lumian had wanted to inquire further about the Mirror People who maintained contact with Moran Avigny and their positions. However, the urgency of the situation led him to postpone this matter to the spirit channeling part. In any case, it wasn't particularly crucial.

From Lumian's perspective, it was more important to know the identities of the Mirror People who had infiltrated the Demoness Sect and who had gone to Lenburg in search of an item. However, Moran Avigny clearly had no knowledge of this.

Lumian suspected that the Mirror People who had gone to Lenburg were looking for clues about 0-01. After all, based on the information, this item likely had a close connection to Blood Emperor Alista Tudor. The method of sealing it was quite similar to sealing Fourth Epoch Trier. It might be of great significance to the Mirror People from the special mirror world in Fourth Epoch Trier.

Lumian extended his right palm and pressed it against Moran Avigny from a distance.

His blue eyes rapidly turned silver-black.

Moran Avigny was perplexed by Lumian's strange behavior.

Although he possessed the strength of a Sequence 5, he had been actively involved in politics for the past decade or so. He maintained a certain distance from the mysticism domain and the emerging cults. This was particularly true after becoming the Minister of Industry. He relied entirely on the connections within the Mirror People and the Brokers of the School of Truth to acquire the knowledge, information, and items he desired. Direct contact with wild Beyonders was uncommon, so he naturally couldn't discern Lumian's intentions. He only instinctively believed that Lumian had ulterior motives and wasn't simply acting.

Lumian's right palm "touched" the mercury illusory river corresponding to Moran Avigny.

The life of the Mirror Person flashed before his eyes, and various fate fragments surged along the river.

Lumian couldn't discern them in detail. Seizing the brief span of two to three seconds, he focused on observing two fate fragments.

One fate fragment depicted how Moran Avigny remotely instructed the School of Truth's Overseer to perform a ritual through the mirror, establishing a connection with the Mirror Roselle Gustav.

The other aspect was how this Mirror Person came into being.

In the previous fate segment, Lumian witnessed Moran Avigny stuffing a classic silver mirror into his makeup mirror and lending it to the Overseer.

At the source of the mercury river of fate, the 17- or 18-year-old Mirror Moran Avigny swiftly materialized in the dark and cold room, his expression naturally sinister.

The classic silver mirror bears a striking resemblance to the one Franca found at the overflow of corruption in the mirror world. She had relied on the latter to enter Fourth Epoch Trier during Operation Hostel… Could such a mirror be closely tied to the Mirror People?

Didn't Moran Avigny say that the descendants of the Tamara family naturally have a corresponding Mirror Person? Why wasn't he a baby when he was born as a Mirror Person? The descendants of the Tamara family must reach a certain age or have done something specific to produce the corresponding Mirror People? He doesn't seem to understand what's going on either…

As these thoughts raced through his mind, Lumian didn't allow the Fate Appropriation attempt to end naturally and result in failure. He seized the moment and grasped a fate fragment in his right hand. Through the spew of his spirituality, he slowly extracted the abnormally heavy target from the mercury-

colored illusory river.

The fate fragment corresponded to the scene of Moran Avigny's lust exploding under the Symphony of Hatred.

As time passed, Franca and Jenna asked about the other Mirror People to divert Moran Avigny's attention, and the fate fragment finally left the mercury river.

Consequently, the hole that had appeared was neither filled nor rewoven. Empty chaos occupied it, emitting a thin fog.

After storing the obtained fate fragments into his Spirit Body, Lumian carefully observed Moran Avigny's transformation.

As he waited, he muttered inwardly, The fact that we caught Moran Avigny remains unchanged…

Him drinking the truth serum and being hypnotized remain unchanged…

We haven't forgotten what he just said…

Yes, this Fate Appropriation took a total of three minutes. The fate fragment depicting his eruption of lust weighs heavily in Moran Avigny's entire life. After all, it caused his fate to take a sharp turn for the worse…

Appropriation requires a distance of 15 meters. Obtaining the target's blood is unnecessary…

While stirring fate and waiting for completion, I can't attack the target, but I can stay away…

It's more convenient to kill him directly. The Appropriation can be completed in a matter of seconds…

As Lumian reviewed, Moran Avigny's weakened aura gradually filled up, and his face flushed.

The bloodstains and tears on his face vanished.

Yes, there was no eruption of lust, so no severe injuries… Lumian harrumphed as Moran Avigny's face lit up with pleasant surprise.

Two beams of white light struck Moran Avigny, knocking him unconscious.

Simultaneously, Jenna and Franca, who had been closely monitoring Lumian's movements, aimed their revolvers at the yet-to-collapse Moran Avigny's head.

Amidst the gunshots, the Disciplinary Paladin's head exploded like blood-colored fireworks.

Lumian didn't complain about Franca and Jenna not giving him a chance to cull. He didn't want to waste his spirituality on Culling. When he appeared at the last moment and used the Symphony of Hatred to shatter Moran Avigny's remaining Mirror Substitution and capture him, he felt as if the potion had digested somewhat due to the successful cull.

Thud!

Moran Avigny's lifeless body crumpled to the ground, and Franca prepared to channel the spirit.

Chapter 727: Arrival

As Franca prepared the ritual, she considered her options and said to Lumian, "The Overseer's mirror coordinates are indescribable and can only be procured through mystical means. The Magic Mirror Spirit Channeling Spell isn't capable of that. I intend to use standard spirit channeling instead."

While the Magic Mirror Spirit Channeling Spell she had developed greatly extended the duration of the channeling and the number of questions the spirit would respond to, it was constrained by relying on the mirror as a medium, forfeiting the chance for other types of interaction.

"Regular spirit channeling drastically restricts the intel we can gather…" Lumian thought briefly and said, "For the first question, we should have him provide the coordinates of the Overseer's mirror. Second, ask about the whereabouts of the classic silver mirror utilized for the ritual and leader communication. Third, inquire about the identities and locations of the Mirror People in contact with him, ranked by importance."

Once the third question was answered, the spirit channeling ritual would come to its natural conclusion. Lumian suspected Moran Avigny might not have time to "introduce" every Mirror Person under his command. Hence, he asked for them to be prioritized based on the criticality of their role and responsibilities.

"A classic silver mirror?" Franca asked, puzzled.

"Yes, Moran Avigny has a mirror akin to the classic silver one you used to own. It's vital for communicating with Mirror Roselle," Lumian explained succinctly.

While speaking, he crouched and rummaged through Moran Avigny's pockets.

Unfortunately, the Minister of Industry carried only a handful of large bills and some loose change totaling 3,212 verl d'or.

Besides the money, there was an elegant golden mechanical pocket watch, a meticulously embroidered handkerchief, and a wallet crafted by a private designer and artisan.

But not a single item imbued with Beyonder powers!

Lumian couldn't resist mimicking Franca's inner thought: "Poor slob!"

He realized that as the sitting Minister of Industry, Moran Avigny was under the watchful eye of official Beyonders. He was unlikely to carry mystical items, Beyonder weapons, or anything that might reveal his abnormality.

As a Sequence 5 Disciplinary Paladin of the Judgment pathway, disclosing this to the two Churches would raise difficult questions about how he obtained the potion formula and Beyonder characteristics at that level. When signing the contract, he would at most acknowledge being a Beyonder of a related pathway without specifying the Sequence. This cost him the chance to procure items openly, forcing him to rely on Brokers—something official Beyonders couldn't be privy to.

Moran Avigny didn't require the Overseer's assistance with the Under the Table deal to access mystical items, as Mirror People could transfer objects through mirrors. If he genuinely needed an item for a specific purpose, he could reach out to his mirror world associates and have them "send" it over, returning it promptly after use.

Lumian sighed, pocketed the cash, watch, and other belongings, and rose to his feet.

With Franca's spirit channeling preparations complete, Lumian turned to Jenna, still composing her letter, and asked, "You shot without hesitation earlier. Did it weigh on you at all? This wasn't a battle. We'd been engaged in friendly conversation with Moran Avigny for a while now. I even started to feel like we were becoming friends."

Jenna glanced up at Lumian while writing on a protruding rock of the cave wall. She laughed softly.

"Worried I'll bottle up my emotional turmoil and cause issues down the line? Planning to play psychiatrist and offer me counseling?"

Anthony Reid, who had been observing silently, living up to his role as a Spectator, scratched his nose self-consciously.

That seemed to be his job.

However, he could discern that Jenna and Franca were not in need of counseling.

Lumian didn't tackle Jenna's question head-on. With a smile, he remarked, "You haven't taken many lives yourself."

"Had we not pulled the trigger, would you have taken action? Despite feeling you had befriended Moran Avigny, I think you wouldn't have flinched at blowing his head off," Jenna retorted, a smile playing on her lips.

Lumian let out a derisive snort. "I'm not like you. I've killed more people than I can count."

Jenna met his gaze again. "Moran Avigny admitted to his crimes. He lured the real Moran Avigny into the mirror, holding him captive before ruthlessly ending his life. I felt no qualms about carrying out the execution of a guilty man."

"You've changed…" Lumian let out an exaggerated sigh and quipped, "Once upon a time, you depended on the police and authorities to punish the bad guys."

Jenna didn't have a chance to respond, as Franca had finished her spirit channeling.

In the wavering dark-green candlelight, Moran Avigny's spirit took shape above his corpse, perceptible to those who had activated their Spirit Vision.

Franca acted swiftly. Withdrawing the glass-like Mirror Cufflink from her sleeve, she addressed Moran Avigny's spirit, "Give me the coordinates of the Overseer's mirror."

Moran Avigny's indistinct, menacing face twisted in anguish.

But stripped of life, he no longer had the ironclad self-control to resist the commanding pull of the spirit channeling. He stretched out his right hand, motioning for Franca to hand over the Mirror Cufflink.

Anticipating this, Franca passed him the Mirror Cufflink.

As Moran Avigny's spirit clutched the cufflink, a shadowy light shimmered across its form, drawn into the glass-like accessory.

Franca exhaled in relief upon the Mirror Cufflink's return.

Having achieved the primary objective, it was time to reap further rewards!

Her mood buoyed, Franca inquired of Moran Avigny with piqued interest, "Is there a functional classic silver mirror in your possession… Hold on…"

Abruptly realizing this constituted a question, she hastily rephrased."Where is the classic silver mirror the Overseer used to facilitate communication with your leader?"

Lumian had already ascertained Moran Avigny didn't have it on him.

Moran Avigny's spirit responded with cold rigidity, "Griffith has it. When I require it, I have him deliver it to me through the mirror."

Franca's initial elation quickly gave way to an exasperated curse.

"Dammit!"

It dawned on her that she couldn't extract Griffith's mirror coordinates from Moran Avigny.

The spirit channeling had but one question remaining. She needed to ask Moran Avigny about the Mirror People serving as their contacts and their true identities. Requesting mirror coordinates was out of the question!

Lumian and Anthony immediately grasped the reason for Franca's self-directed frustration, but they were powerless to intervene. Certain questions hinged on preceding answers, and mirror coordinates couldn't be conveyed through the Magic Mirror Spirit Channeling Spell.

Collecting herself, Franca fixed her gaze on Moran Avigny's spirit. Marshaling her thoughts, she articulated, "Name the Mirror People in contact with you. What roles do they play in the real world? Begin with those of the highest rank and responsibility."

Moran Avigny's ghostly, blurred visage contorted once more. Despite his resistance, he responded in a clipped tone, "First, there's Griffith, who serves as my second-in-command. Originally, he was a key figure in the Moses Ascetic Order. With our assistance, he's steadily elevating his position within the Order. His aspiration is for the secret organization to eventually join the alliance to open Fourth Epoch Trier's seal…"

The Moses Ascetic Order… The very group that clashed with Element Dawn, headed by the Emperor's firstborn, Bernadette? If memory serves, they primarily consist of Mystery Pryer pathway Beyonders… I can't help but wonder if the Research Society has members from either faction. There must be others like myself with multiple secret society affiliations… Franca listened intently, not daring to disrupt Moran Avigny's account.

Moran Avigny proceeded to the second Mirror Person.

"Caratanza Tamara, part of our branch's Tamara family. He enlisted in the military and now holds the rank of colonel. He legitimized his Beyonder powers by slaying a Loen Kingdom spy, seizing their potion formula and Judgment pathway characteristics…

"Palia, a ore scholar originally. She infiltrated the Trier Cave Association to mask our attempts at uncovering a vulnerability in the seal…

"Sport, Trier's Deputy Commissioner of Police and a member of the police commission. His original self was purposely corrupted during an operation. Subsequently, Griffith and Caratanza orchestrated an ambush, dragging him into the mirror and allowing the mirror world's Sport to emerge and assume his place…"

By this point, Moran Avigny's spirit had become increasingly insubstantial, on the brink of dissipation.

At that instant, Jenna concluded her letter and pivoted to face Lumian. "I'll now summon Madam Judgment's messenger."

The words had scarcely left her mouth when an ethereal voice, seemingly originating from a great distance, reverberated in the ears of Jenna, Lumian, and the others.

"Summoning won't be necessary."

A shared premonition compelled Lumian, Franca, Jenna, and Anthony to direct their attention to the side of the quarry cave.

In the chamber's dim illumination, supplied only by carbide lamps and candles, dazzling starlight coalesced in the void, rapidly tracing the outline of an enchanting door.

Noiselessly, the door swung open, revealing an enormous pumpkin carriage drawn by a multitude of gray rats.

Three women occupied the carriage's interior. One was Magician, resplendent in a beige gown with a high collar adorned with golden embroidery. Another was Judgment, her shoulder-length flaxen hair complementing her grayish-white knight's attire, accented by brown leather armor.

The third woman was clad in a purple dress bearing a cryptic pattern. A celestial globe and sundry items dangled from her waist, and refined spectacles perched upon her nose.

Clasped in her left hand was a peculiar lamp, its surface golden like a kettle and adorned with enigmatic designs.

Chapter 728: Tracking

Lumian, Franca, and Jenna's eyes widened as they caught sight of the strange golden lamp, making a bold conjecture.

Could it be 0-05, the Magic Wishing Lamp?

Yes, the pumpkin carriage is one of Major Arcana Ma'am Hermit's trademark symbols. She has close ties to Element Dawn's leader—Emperor Roselle's eldest daughter—and the current owner of 0-05, Bernadette. It isn't outside the realm of possibility that she might have borrowed the Magic Wishing Lamp…

As these thoughts raced through their minds, they heard Anthony's respectful greeting, "Good evening, Madam Magician, Madam Judgment."

Snapping out of their momentary trance, Lumian and the others quickly followed suit with their own greetings.

"And this is Ma'am Hermit," Magician added briefly.

Once the introductions were complete, the woman in the beige dress with a gold-embroidered high collar retrieved a bottle of dark-red wine from the void and said to Franca, "Hand over that cufflink. Once you do, you can all head home and get some rest."

Confronting the School of Truth's Overseer was clearly a battle at the demigod level. It wasn't something Lumian and company could get involved in.

Franca had no intention of forcing the issue. She handed the glass-like cufflink to Madam Magician.

In exchange, Madam Magician gave her the wine bottle containing a faint dark-red liquid.

"This is a mystical item that restores stamina and spirituality after drinking it. But remember, you can only have it once a day. Don't go turning into a drunkard."

Just one more sip and you'll become a drunkard? Franca and the others instantly understood the deeper meaning behind Madam Magician's final warning.

Seeing only a single sip of dark-red wine in the bottle, Franca turned to pass the old glass bottle to Lumian.

He had expended the most spirituality, after all.

Madam Magician rubbed the Mirror Cufflink between her fingers, a smile playing on her lips.

"Don't worry. You won't be able to finish it. It's called Bottomless Wine."

I see… Franca still wanted to give it a shot. She unscrewed the thin metal cap and downed the light dark-red wine.

As the slightly astringent and sweet alcohol slid down her throat, she felt refreshed, as if she'd just had a good night's sleep and hadn't been in a fierce battle with Moran Avigny.

At the same time, she noticed dark-red liquid seeping from the bottom of the old glass bottle, forming a thin layer of wine.

It really is bottomless… Franca sighed, handing the old glass bottle to Lumian.

But just as she reached out, a sudden sense of unease struck her.

Acting on instinct, she changed course, intending to let Jenna drink first.

Yet upon further reflection, she realized something was even more off!

Because she still had to pass it to Lumian afterward!

Never mind, never mind. No point getting caught up in trivial matters… Franca muttered in her native tongue.

Instead, she circled her finger around the bottle and managed to form a thin layer of frost.

As the frost naturally fell away, Franca passed the Bottomless Wine to Jenna.

Jenna drank the dark-red wine, mimicked Franca's actions, and then handed it to Lumian.

Franca breathed a sigh of relief.

Lumian paid no mind to the Demonesses' odd behavior. He was more concerned about the strange actions of Ma'am Hermit and Madam Magician.

Ma'am Hermit's eyes, obscured by lenses, grew dark but remained unfocused, as if staring into a vast expanse. Countless brilliant specks of light appeared around her, as if she had shrunk the universe and brought it down to the ground.

Performing divination or prophecy before tackling important matters? Lumian took the old glass bottle and drank the dark-red wine.

His spirituality rapidly recovered, as if he'd experienced six in the morning.

Of course, the portion of accumulated spirituality he had used didn't "return."

Phew, Lumian's anxiety over his spirituality deficiency had been alleviated.

After Anthony drank the Bottomless Wine and returned the mystical item to Madam Magician, the Mirror Cufflink's dark glow, mixed with starlight, flew out and landed on the Major Arcana card holder's eye.

Madam Magician sent Mirror Cufflink flying toward Franca while extending her hands, grasping the void, and pulling it apart on either side.

Without a sound, the void ripped open like a transparent membrane, revealing passageways formed by spiderwebs of emptiness and darkness.

This was a standard mirror world.

Magician had opened an illusory door to the mirror world without using a mirror!

Is this the advanced power of the Apprentice pathway? Lumian and company inwardly marveled. Madam Magician glanced at Ma'am Hermit beside her.

The Hermit, wearing a purple robe, held a vibrant, unreal ball of yarn in her right hand. She wound its thread around the peculiar golden lamp.

Then, the Major Arcana card holder tossed the vivid and illusory ball of yarn through the illusory door Magician had opened, into the mirror world's dark and ethereal tunnels.

The ball of yarn rolled into one of the passageways and quickly vanished into the depths, leaving only the thread connected to the golden lamp to mark its path.

Magician immediately led The Hermit and Judgment into the mirror world, chasing the ball of yarn.

After their figures disappeared from the mirror world, the forcibly torn void rapidly closed.

Franca muttered again, "I think I've heard the story about a yarn ball before, but I can't recall its name…"

Lumian turned his attention back to Moran Avigny's corpse.

"You want to bring him back for your godson to eat?" Franca said with contempt. "Let's not even discuss whether Ludwig should be eating humans in the first place. A Mirror Person's flesh will gradually turn back into mirror fragments. Do you really want Ludwig to be eating glass shards?"

Lumian shook his head.

"I'm considering whether I should take Moran Avigny's makeup mirror."

…

After tracking the vibrant yarn for a while, the three Major Arcana card holders reached a country villa matching the mirror's coordinates and spotted the target mirror on a desk.

It was also a makeup mirror.

They didn't pause. They followed the ball of yarn and walked through the spirit world.

In a mere two to three seconds, they returned to reality and saw the vivid and illusory ball of yarn come to a halt in a dark cathedral lacking a deity's statue.

Beneath the cathedral's dome, humans hung in the air, gently swaying in the wind.

Some were old, some were young, and some were gentlemen wearing half top hats. Some were beautiful ladies in vintage dresses, some were tall and muscular like giants, and some were covered in wet, sticky scales resembling fish…

What they all had in common was their firmly closed eyes, suspended by invisible ropes, looking like hanged corpses.

In the cathedral's depths, a man in his thirties with average facial features and dark hair sat in a wooden black armchair. His aura and soul felt both familiar and unfamiliar to Magician.

It was familiar because she recognized Loki, the head of April Fool's, who had been compelled to exhaust his resurrection times. It was unfamiliar because the other party had been stained with an odd sensation.

At that instant, a blurry female figure stood next to Loki, resembling a sketch. Her eyes were pitch-black, like a lake in the dim night.

He looked at Magician, The Hermit, and Judgment, a smile playing on his lips.

"It's all thanks to you that I found some hope of returning."

Before Loki could finish his sentence, the suspended corpses' eyes snapped open simultaneously.

Those eyes were pitch-black.

…

In the quarry cave with a fixed entrance to the mirror world.

"Taking away Moran Avigny's makeup mirror?" Jenna echoed Lumian's words before a realization struck her. "Do you want to see if any other Mirror People will try to contact Moran Avigny before news of his mysterious disappearance spreads?"

"Patience is a virtue," Lumian replied with a smile.

For a Hunter, this was an essential quality.

He stooped down and retrieved the makeup mirror from Moran Avigny's corpse's pocket.

At that moment, the makeup mirror snapped open.

It opened on its own!

Dark light surged from the palm-sized glass mirror, instantly filling the dimly lit quarry cave.

In the next instant, Lumian, Franca, and the others saw a figure quickly take shape beside the fixed entrance to the mirror world on the protruding rock.

It was a stunning woman with black hair and brown eyes. She wore a bright red dress with layers of embroidery and lace, revealing a large expanse of snow-white skin on her chest despite the cold winter. A friendly smile graced her face.

Perle?

The renowned courtesan in Trier, Perle, the theater actress from the Loen Kingdom?

Lumian was shocked and at a loss. He hadn't expected to encounter this flamboyant courtesan in such a setting.

Franca, Jenna, and Anthony also found the situation surreal and hard to believe.

Almost simultaneously, Lumian recalled two key facts related to Perle.

The first time he had observed Moran Avigny, Perle had been on a date with her new lover in the hotel's annex restaurant.

All courtesans were standard, textbook brokers—political brokers!

Combining these two points, a guess formed in Lumian's mind.

Could Perle also be a member of the School of Truth?

Could she be the Overseer that Jebus directly reported to, the bestowed of an evil god at the demigod level?

If that's the case, where did Madam Magician and the others end up? Who were they tracking?

Flee! We must flee immediately!

At that moment, Perle looked at Lumian and the others, a smile forming on her lips as she uttered the Words of Order.

"Your crimes remain unpunished!"

Chapter 729: Purpose

Franca had already concealed herself by the time she recognized Perle. Her plan was to circle around and use the mirror to reflect Perle's figure, hoping to curse her.

If the curse failed, it would at least create an opening for Jenna to sneak up from the shadows and assassinate the target.

Though not as cunning as Lumian the Conspirer, both Jenna and Franca instinctively sensed that the sudden assaulting Perle was incredibly dangerous, even more so than Moran Avigny. However, they didn't go so far as to suspect her of being an Overseer or demigod.

As Perle uttered the Words of Order, Franca felt slender, snake-like entities emerge from the surrounding shadows, enveloping her despite her invisibility.

Swoosh! Swoosh! Swoosh! Razor-sharp icicles burst from the ground like soldiers thrusting their spears.

Franca quickly leaped up, pressing one hand against an icicle to tumble out of the area.

She narrowly avoided impalement, hanging precariously from the icicle's tip.

Before Franca could regain her footing, black flames shot out from the shadows, hurtling directly towards her. The serpentine creatures around her constricted, binding her in layers.

Wh-- With no time to react, Franca could only watch helplessly as the black flames consumed her.

At the same moment, a figure stepped out from the shadows--Clarice, wearing an elegant black court dress with her hair in a sophisticated bun. However, the Demoness of Black's face was blurry and dark, unlike a living person.

My crime is cheating, deceit, and exploiting others, mainly in reference to the Demoness Sect. Is this punishment from a manifestation of the Demoness of Black? Franca's thoughts raced.

Her body shattered like glass.

Mirror Substitution!

Jenna, while stealthily hidden, also encountered a strange foe.

It was a clergyman from the Eternal Blazing Sun Church, dressed in a white robe adorned with golden threads. Not only were his facial features hazy and unrecognizable, but his physique was also constantly shifting in subtle ways.

A blaze of sunlight descended, banishing the shadows in the area and exposing Jenna's body.

Realization dawned on Jenna.

My crime is believing in multiple deities and betraying the Eternal Blazing Sun...

So, an abstract embodiment of the Church's clergyman is punishing me...

Jenna quickly rolled to the other side of the quarry cave, dodging the clergyman's attack.

Anthony was not forgotten.

Just as he prepared to use Psychological Invisibility to approach Perle and send her into a Frenzy, a whip wreathed in silver lightning lashed out at him.

A crackling sound echoed in Anthony's mind, both illusory and real, sending a sharp pain through his soul. Every hair on his body stood on end.

If not for his incredible self-control, he would have screamed.

Before him stood a middle-aged man in a black uniform and white shirt, dressed as a Trier police officer.

My crime stems from my transgressions as an information broker, so I'm up against Trier's police? Most Trier police officers lack Beyonder powers, yet this Punisher directly wields abilities in the Arbiter domain? As Anthony conjured grayish-white dragon scales on his body, he deftly ran and rolled, seeking a chance to use Psychological Invisibility.

The already dim surroundings around Lumian suddenly darkened further, as if something was about to take shape, filling him with a profound sense of dread.

Just as the terrifying entity was about to emerge, it abruptly disintegrated. Even the surrounding gloom and fear dissipated like melting snow.

Uh... Is my crime too severe for a Punisher to manifest directly? Lumian guessed, considering Franca and the others' situations.

Behind him, spears of blazing white flame materialized and shot towards the flamboyantly dressed Perle like a volley of arrows.

The flaming spears formed a majestic and fierce forest, providing cover for Lumian's true attack.

He had already drawn his revolver, gently flicking the cylinder with his finger.

Three of the six bullets he had obtained from Jebus were loaded.

Lumian needed to use Implosion Bullets now.

Only by employing these special bullets in combination with his Cull ability did he have a sliver of hope of injuring Perle, whom he suspected to be the

Overseer!

Bang!

Lumian's eyes blazed with an iron-black intensity as the starlight-shimmering bullets wove between the blazing white flame spears, speeding towards Perle's neck.

Perle stood beside the fixed entrance to the mirror world, her amiable smile unwavering.

The corners of her mouth curled up. "How dare you attack an Overseer?"

As the self-proclaimed Overseer uttered her first word, Lumian's starlight bullet abruptly changed course, hurtling towards his own neck.

Likewise, the blazing white flame spears strangely returned to Lumian's side, engulfing him.

Before Lumian could teleport, an Implosion Bullet struck him, causing his body to collapse bit by bit.

Crack!

He transformed into a mirror, shattering into countless fragments that vanished without a trace as they gathered uncontrollably.

After the battle with Jebus, Franca had provided Lumian with another Mirror Substitution!

Perle showed no surprise. She sighed and smiled. "Personally, I'd prefer you die now and release that Angel. It would greatly benefit our common cause. Unfortunately, the one who made the Under the Table transaction with me insisted on capturing you alive."

Lumian materialized in a corner of the quarry cave, catching Perle's words.

Instantly, numerous guesses flooded his mind.

Under the Table transaction?

Perle is the Overseer directly above Jebus. She evaded pursuit from the Major Arcana card holders by completing another high-level Under the Table transaction. And for this, she must capture me and take me somewhere?

When did she find out about Moran Avigny's situation? Was she monitoring his residence? Or did she receive information from other sources?

Surely the Purifiers are professional enough to keep the news under wraps, right?

Why capture me alive? Who wants me alive?

To use me as a sacrifice, like Susanna Mattise?

Or could the person engaging in Perle's Under the Table transaction be a Sufferer from the Sinners organization? Someone who doesn't want Termiboros to break free from the seal, but instead wants to control this Angel and use Him as an ingredient for advancement?

No, that's not right. If he were just a Sufferer, even if he could mislead Madam Magician and the others temporarily, he couldn't prevent them from returning to help. Yet, Perle remains calm and collected…

Could the other party in the Under the Table transaction be a faction of the Mother Tree of Desire or the Great Mother? Only they could organize a lineup in this world to deal with the Major Arcana card holders…

With his keen Conspirer's intuition, Lumian connected two problems.

First, the counter-party of Overseer Perle's Under the Table transaction. Second, how she discovered Moran Avigny's mishap so quickly and promptly convened a high-level Under the Table transaction.

As these questions intertwined, a thought struck Lumian.

In the Purifier team, a key member of April Fool's wasn't a transmigrator. Together with Loki, he single-handedly orchestrated the loss of the humanoid Sealed Artifact. To this day, the Eternal Blazing Sun Church hasn't discovered the perpetrator!

Could a Broker also be involved?

Indeed, only if a key April Fool's member lurking within the Church appears unrelated to the Purifier who lost the humanoid Sealed Artifact, and they don't even know each other, can the Eternal Blazing Sun Church, with its numerous Sealed Artifacts and demigods, investigate for so long without finding anything!

From the Eternal Blazing Sun Church's perspective, the Purifier who lost the humanoid Sealed Artifact truly committed a momentary "mistake." He had no motive for the crime and no links to April Fool's…

Has the School of Truth expanded the Broker business into the Eternal Blazing Sun Church?

It's true; only Unshadowed won't be embroiled in gray transactions, and most Purifiers can't reach Sequence 4. Similarly, not all Cardinals are from the Sun pathway…

It seems the School of Truth has long been connected to April Fool's and is collaborating…

Damn it, it really is a broker organization. It can be associated with any faction!

Could it be that the School of Truth's collaborator within the Eternal Blazing Sun Church urgently transmitted information about Moran Avigny's mishap to Overseer Perle?

Upon receiving the news, Perle immediately convened a high-level Under the Table transaction. Was the transaction with April Fool's? No, April

Fool's doesn't have that power. Could it be the Celestial Worthy backing them or other high-

ranking subordinates of the Celestial Worthy?

No wonder they want to capture me alive…

Perle might have intended to offer an item in exchange for severing her connection with Moran Avigny. However, the counter-party in the Under the Table transaction proposed a new plan, allowing her to switch from passive to active, seizing the opportunity to deceive and set a trap. How far it can go depends on her improvisation…

If it is indeed April Fool's and the Celestial Worthy's will is faintly discernible, it would explain why Madam Magician didn't sense anything amiss and walked right into the trap.

Realizing this, Lumian was alarmed.

Termiboros warned me twice about the School of Truth. Could it be that He foresaw the corresponding fate unfold and a chance for Him to break free from the seal? Is that why He was so eager, hoping to compel it into fruition?

Chapter 730: Struggle

Lumian's mind raced, unable to fully process the myriad details, but in the heat of battle, he couldn't afford to waste a single moment overthinking. Only a Conspirer could deduce a possible scenario within two seconds of Mirror Substitution taking effect. Based on Perle's words, Franca and the others would have concluded that she was the Overseer directly above Jebus. She had sidestepped danger through the Under the Table transaction but now had no choice but to confront them head-on. They couldn't let their focus waver, not even for a second.

Lumian cursed inwardly, frustrated that the Blood Emperor's residual aura had been sealed by Underworld Daoist's death mark. If not for that, his best bet would have been to activate the mark on his right palm with everything he had, allowing Alista Tudor to "descend" upon Trier once again. It would have drawn the attention of Angels from the Eternal Blazing Sun Church, the God of Steam and Machinery Church, and other powerhouses hiding in the city, pressuring Perle to retreat.

Without a second thought, Lumian triggered the black mark on his right shoulder.

His plan was to teleport out of there and into Saint ViÃ¨ve Cathedral.

Since Perle's goal was to capture him alive, he obtained a conclusion through simple deduction.

She would undoubtedly chase after him with all her might. There's no way she would stay put and risk failing the Under the Table transaction!

If that happened, Franca, Jenna, and Anthony would still have to deal with the conjured Punisher, but at least they wouldn't be facing a demigod. Their odds of survival would be significantly better. For any Mid-Sequence Beyonder, even a single Sequence 4 demigod--bestowed or not--was enough to make their hearts sink with despair.

Moreover, the two Demonesses and Anthony all possessed Mirror Substitution, as well as items like the Seven-Stone Bracelet. As long as they didn't become a demigod's target, they had a real shot at using the substitutes to escape to the Church of The Fool's cathedral at Lavigny Docks.

As Lumian's form swiftly dissipated, he reached into his pocket with his left hand, his mind crystal clear, and grasped Mr. K's finger.

He couldn't be sure if Perle was telling the truth about capturing him alive or if it was a lie. Was it just a demigod's nonchalance when dealing with a Mid-Sequence Beyonder, or a habit formed from a Broker's constant deception?

He had to be prepared for the possibility that Perle might not follow him and instead stay behind to take on Franca and the others.

His contingency plan was: Summon Mr. K!

While Mr. K, as a Shepherd, couldn't directly fight a demigod, he was the Aurora Order's Oracle. He could hear the True Creator's guidance at any time. His presence meant that the deity he believed in would surely cast His gaze upon them. There was a good chance it would trigger some miraculous turn of events in their favor.

And even without divine intervention, the Beyonder of the Apprentice pathway under Mr. K's Grazing appeared to have records of demigod abilities. It should be able to hold off Perle for a few seconds, giving Franca and the others a window to escape.

As Lumian activated his teleportation, Franca, who had been compelled to use Mirror Substitution, materialized in a corner of the quarry cave.

Clutching a makeup mirror, she decisively activated the Mirror Cufflink.

She already knew Perle was the Overseer and intended to escape via the mirror world.

Once concealed within the mirror world, she could jump to the mirrors on Jenna, Lumian, and Anthony. She could extend her hand and pull her companions into the mirror world, and they could all flee together!

The glass-like Mirror Cufflink emitted a dark light, but Franca didn't budge, unable to enter the makeup mirror in her grasp.

Wh-- Franca was stunned for a moment before a realization hit her.

Failing to enter the mirror world without any interference could only mean one thing:

This was a mirror world!

Except for certain unique mirror worlds, one couldn't enter the mirror world from within the mirror world itself. The only option was to use the mirror to jump!

Mirror worlds came in two varieties. The first was conventional and universal, not a true world. It was a concept of "doors" amalgamated into a dark void passageway linking all mirrors. Wherever mirrors and their surfaces existed, such mirror worlds with no discernible boundaries could be found. The second type was special mirror worlds. They relied on the conventional mirror world and leveraged specific corruption or corresponding abilities to take shape. Some were permanent, others temporary. Their characteristics closely mirrored the real world, projections of one facet of reality, but each had its own unique limitations and rules.

The mirror world in Fourth Epoch Trier belonged to the latter category. It contained only a projection of Trier, a sprawling metropolis, and excluded other regions. Moreover, it was split into three distinct levels.

This mirror world was also special, but on a smaller scale. It was merely a projection of the quarry cave, likely generated by some ability.

As a veteran Shadow Merchant, Perle had a long-established partnership with the Mirror People. It was perfectly normal for her to trade items capable of creating temporary special mirror worlds!

Recalling the dark light emanating from Moran Avigny's mirror just before Perle's arrival, Franca's suspicion was confirmed.

Just as she was about to warn Lumian and the others, she saw the Demoness of Black's Punishment projection seize the moment to reflect herself in a mirror.

Franca's pupils dilated as she activated Mirror Substitution.

In an instant, she transformed into a mirror, engulfed by pitch-black flames from within.

Smack!

The mirror slammed into the ground, shattering into countless fragments.

At the same time, Lumian's figure rematerialized in place.

His teleportation had failed.

This was indeed a special mirror world. Finding an exit was the only way out.

Mr. K's finger had already expanded, morphing into a mass of flesh and blood that enveloped Lumian's body, forming a vibrant red cloak that covered him from head to toe.

With a sickening sound, Lumian's body was pierced by grotesque wounds, as if struck by invisible arrows.

It was only thanks to the protection of the flesh-and-blood cloak, transformed from Mr. K's finger, that he managed to survive. Otherwise, he would have been forced to animate his shadow to absorb those fatal injuries on his behalf.

Of course, he still had one more Mirror Substitution up his sleeve—courtesy of Jenna.

Overseer Perle stood firm beside the jutting rock deep within the quarry cave. She flashed Lumian a smile and said, "Those who defy supervision and try to flee shall face punishment."

As Franca and Lumian's attempts failed in quick succession, Jenna tossed out a handful of fluorescent dust, whispered an incantation, and promptly vanished from the Punisher dressed as a clergyman of the Eternal Blazing Sun Church.

A golden light surged around the Punisher, clad in a white robe adorned with golden threads, spreading outward in layers.

As the golden light reached an empty space, it abruptly encountered an obstacle, staining it a faint golden hue.

Jenna felt a surge of warmth and courage, but her eyes reflected a pure and magnificent blazing pillar of light.

Crack!

The pillar of light struck her, transforming her into a mirror and shattering her into pieces.

Anthony seized the chance to activate Psychological Invisibility once more. However, the Trier police incarnation didn't overlook him, as if it could detect the scent of sin on him.

Two bolts of lightning shot forth from the Punisher's eyes, piercing Anthony's soul.

Anthony's eyes bulged, his mouth agape, but he couldn't even muster a scream. He stood paralyzed, rooted to the spot.

"Death!" Trier's police incarnation uttered a single ancient Hermes word.

Clenching his right hand into a fist, he lunged at Anthony, leaving an afterimage in his wake.

Bang!

Imbued with a peculiar force, the fist collided with Anthony's head in an inescapable blow.

Crack! Anthony shattered into countless glimmering mirror fragments.

Franca, dressed in an assassin suit, reappeared.

Confronted by a demigod's overwhelming power, the ethereal, non-godhood-possessing Demoness of Black, and the sealed special mirror world, she decisively retrieved an item from her Traveler's Bag.

It was a silver-white full-body armor, taller than Franca herself.

Pride Armor!

Franca positioned the Pride Armor in front of her, its back facing Overseer Perle.

She was convinced that the demigod was the crux of the problem, not the Punisher taking the form of the Demoness of Black. If Perle remained unscathed, another Punisher would emerge to eliminate even after dispatching the first. She might even face a direct "accusation."

Franca noticed Perle standing beside a protruding rock with a fixed entrance to the mirror world.

It led her to believe that Perle could harness the Fourth Epoch Trier's abundant corruption to request a fixed entrance to the mirror world created by the Primordial Demoness. Not only would it allow them to enter and exit the conventional mirror world without relying on their inherent characteristics and abilities, but it would also serve as the gateway to this special mirror world.

After all, it could be considered a gift from a true god!

The instant the Pride Armor's feet touched the ground, it suddenly spun around, fixing an invisible gaze upon Overseer Perle.

Franca swiftly leaped to the side and rolled, avoiding facing the Pride Armor's back.

Thud thud thud!

The silver-white full-body armor charged towards Overseer Perle, condensing a broadsword of light in its hand.

…

In the dark cathedral bereft of a deity's Sacred Emblem, a pea rapidly grew, transforming into a multitude of thick turquoise vines that converted the area into a lush paradise of plants and an otherworldly forest.

They separated the suspended corpses, preventing them from approaching The Hermit.

Judgment, who had remained silent, extended her right palm, her eyes glowing with a copper-gold luster.

She spoke gravely in ancient Hermes, "Marionettes are prohibited here!"

The animated corpses abruptly ceased their movements, and Magician tore open the void before her, tainting it with resplendent starlight, forming an enchanting door.

Beyond the door was the portrait of a woman—Loki, who had undergone a bizarre transformation.

Loki reached into the air and pulled out a figure.

The figure was a woman with a voluptuous build, dressed in a black gown. A golden crown encrusted with jewels adorned her head. She had curly chestnut hair, blue eyes, a high nose bridge, and slightly thin lips. She exuded a Demoness-like allure from the inside out.

Chapter 731: Another Good Job

In the depths of the shadowy cathedral, Loki conjured a figure out of thin air. The scene unfolding beside him was vividly reflected in the eyes of the Major Arcana card holders: Magician, Judgment, and Hermit.

On the wall of aqueous-black stone bricks, a painting depicted a woman in a bright red dress adorned with intricate embroidery and lace. Her black hair was styled in an elegant high bun, and her face bore a mysterious, frozen smile. Her brown eyes seemed transfixed on the vivid, illusory ball of yarn before the Hermit and the peculiar golden lamp connected to its other end.

The woman remained within the mural, silently observing the scene.

At the same time, the mature lady with a golden crown, exuding the allure of a Demoness, was pulled from the air by Loki. She turned her piercing blue eyes towards the Hermit, who had just entered the cathedral's depths through the starlight door.

As her long, chestnut hair billowed, each strand thickening, she too seemed fixated on the Hermit.

Prophesying a grim future, the Hermit quickly shielded herself with the Magic Wishing Lamp.

Then, arching her back slightly, she sprouted pure white, illusory feathers reminiscent of a swan's.

Fairytale magic, Ugly Duckling!

Even an ugly duckling could transform into a swan!

This power allowed Saints who had not yet reached the Angel level to reveal their incomplete Mythical Creature forms.

The pristine swan feathers abruptly turned a grayish-white and hardened into falling rocks. The Hermit's exposed skin split open, revealing grotesque, sinister crevices.

Within the crevices, flesh and blood writhed, giving rise to black and white eyeballs.

The eyeballs petrified and fell away, only to be replaced by new ones. Yet, the Magic Wishing Lamp before the Hermit remained untouched.

The black-clad empress's body suddenly became ethereal, her form dissipating into a torrent of knowledge that surged towards Magician, dressed in white with golden embroidery.

Magician appeared beside Loki in an instant, but a deluge of information immediately emerged from the void behind her.

Vanishing, the Magician reappeared "simultaneously" in nine different locations throughout the cathedral, her form flickering incessantly.

Upon realizing that their target was the woman in the wall painting, she attempted to escape the shadowy cathedral by force, but each effort led her back to where she began.

The black-clad empress's incarnation continued to pour forth information from behind the Magician's nine figures, seeking to infiltrate the target's mind and denying her the time to tear through the void.

Smiling, Loki rose from the black wooden armchair and reached into the void with his right hand, as if grasping someone's arm once more.

Seizing the moment, Judgment reached the cathedral's dome and pressed down with her right palm, like chaos descending from the heavens to the earth.

In ancient Hermes, she solemnly declared, "Mystery weakens here, while reality grows stronger!"

…

As the silver Pride Armor raced towards Overseer Perle, Franca activated the Seven-Stone Bracelet on her left wrist.

The crimson, blood-like gem on the bracelet, adorned with three diamonds and four uniquely colored gems, burned with a fierce light.

In a flash, Franca appeared behind the Demoness of Black.

She refrained from joining the Pride Armor in confronting Overseer Perle, having learned from Lumian's encounter that their attacks would have no effect on the Overseer and only invite proportional punishment.

Instead, she resolved to eliminate the Demoness of Black, a Punisher lacking godhood and exhibiting rigidity. The Demoness was merely equivalent to a stronger Sequence 5 Beyonder, making it possible for Franca to deal with her.

As for Overseer Perle, the outcome depended on the changes and effects brought about by the Pride Armor, a Sealed Artifact devoid of "sin" and pragmatic intelligence.

Materializing, Franca raised her left hand, already adorned with the Ring of Punishment.

In her lake-blue eyes, two bolts of lightning suddenly ignited and shot forth.

Crack!

The Demoness of Black's figure shattered into countless fragments.

Dammit! Mirror Substitution is such a nuisance! Franca couldn't help but curse inwardly.

At that instant, Lumian had just endured the punishment for attempting to escape, the flesh cloak transformed from Mr. K's finger shattering and splattering on the ground.

He watched as the silver-white Pride Armor rushed to Overseer Perle's side, raising a broadsword forged from pure light.

Perle maintained her friendly smile, undaunted by the imposing presence of the massive, heavy armor.

An Overseer was impervious to attacks from those lacking godhood!

This was the sacred significance of overseeing.

As for daring to strike an Overseer lifeform, the consequences would be dire!

Perle could already envision the armor-like Sealed Artifact turning on the Demoness who had summoned it in the next moment.

As the Overseer contemplated this, the silver-white Pride Armor swung the Sword of Dawn in its grasp.

It remained unaffected!

Perle's pupils dilated as her figure in the bright red dress transformed into a pitch-black shadow.

The broadsword of light descended, cleaving the shadow in two.

The divided shadows took form, replicating multiple similar shadows that scattered in all directions.

The Pride Armor genuflected and drove the Sword of Dawn into the ground.

The broadsword shattered, unleashing countless sharp fragments of light that swept across the area.

The entire quarry cave was bathed in illumination. To Franca's surprise, the Demoness of Black, whose outline had been visible nearby, rapidly faded and vanished.

Likewise, Jenna and Anthony, who had been cornered by the clergyman of the Eternal Blazing Sun Church and the Trier police incarnations, found themselves no longer under attack or pursuit.

Bewildered, they observed as the Punishers, who had exerted immense pressure upon them, melted away like frost under the sun's rays.

Lumian was astonished by the Pride Armor's performance.

He had harbored little faith in the Sealed Artifact's ability to challenge Overseer Perle. Yet, to his pleasant surprise, it had exceeded his expectations!

Furthermore, he had noticed several peculiar details since Perle's arrival.

The Overseer's feet had not shifted an inch!

She stood beside a protruding rock with a fixed entrance to the mirror world, never pursuing or approaching. Instead, she exerted her influence upon them from a distance.

Could this be an inherent trait of an Overseer? Might the Pride Armor's capacity to strike her stem from the abhorrence and hatred imbued within it by a deity before His demise? Were only attacks infused with godhood or a corresponding level of corruption capable of harming an Overseer? Lumian frowned, pondering these possibilities.

Snapping out of her daze, Franca shouted to him, "Moran Avigny's makeup mirror!"

She knew that the Pride Armor could not so easily vanquish Overseer Perle. They had to seize this fleeting, uninterrupted window to escape the extraordinary mirror world.

Before Overseer Perle's appearance, the dark light emanating from Moran Avigny's makeup mirror had led Franca to suspect it might be the exit!

Franca trusted that Lumian grasped the full import of her concise words and refrained from elaborating further. The blue gem on her Seven-Stone Bracelet emitted a sea-like glow.

In an instant, she materialized beside Jenna, grasping her arm.

A diamond on the Seven-Stone Bracelet illuminated.

Teleport!

Franca and Jenna teleported to Moran Avigny's corpse and the nearby makeup mirror.

Meanwhile, Lumian readily understood Franca's message.

He activated the black mark on his right shoulder and teleported to Anthony's side. Without hesitation, he grabbed his teammate's arm and teleported once more.

Their destination: Moran Avigny's already open makeup mirror!

However, upon appearing near Moran Avigny's corpse, Franca and Lumian were stunned to discover that the makeup mirror had become illusory and unreal, as if it were a mere projection of the original item.

At that moment, they heard Overseer Perle's voice once again.

"You stand guilty! You have harmed an Overseer!"

As her voice echoed, the silver-white full-body armor ascended, and the void behind it ruptured into darkness.

Propelled by an unseen force, the Pride Armor plummeted into a centipede-like crack resembling a void scar, falling into a pitch-black abyss that extended as far as the eye could see. It vanished entirely from Lumian and his companions' sight.

Judgment: Exile!

Fragmented shadows swiftly converged beside the protruding rock with the fixed entrance to the mirror world. Overseer Perle, garbed in her red dress, reappeared.

Holding a makeup mirror in her hand, she smiled and said, "Did you believe I would leave the exit intact? I replaced it with a counterfeit long ago!"

Lumian, Franca, Jenna, and Anthony's expressions shifted slightly.

As these thoughts raced through his mind, Lumian, already grasping Anthony's arm, swiftly activated the black mark on his right shoulder.

He and Anthony vanished in an instant beside Moran Avigny's corpse.

Franca made a similar effort, causing the emerald in her Seven-Stone Bracelet to emit a transparent green light.

However, just as she Blinked with Jenna to a corner of the quarry cave, Perle's Words of Order resounded in her ears.

"You stand guilty! You attacked an Overseer!"

Franca was the one who had unleashed the Pride Armor!

As Franca prepared to use the Seven-Stone Bracelet to depart her current location, she suddenly witnessed the surrounding void freeze and transform into layers of amber, encasing her and Jenna within.

This was a "cage" from which even teleportation could not provide escape.

It encompassed the entire area, and even if Franca and Jenna attempted to employ Mirror Substitution, they would remain confined within its boundaries.

Judgment: Confinement!

Overseer Perle averted her gaze, searching for Lumian and Anthony.

She surveyed the surroundings but found no trace of the two.

Chapter 732: Protection and Trust

Perle swiftly focused and took her Overseer position, carefully observing the different sections of the quarry cave.

The area was shrouded in darkness, with only a carbide lamp lying on its side providing a faint bluish-yellow light.

As she looked around, Perle spotted Lumian and Anthony.

They were both located at the quarry cave's exit, which marked the isolated boundary of this unique mirror world. It wasn't a viable escape route, leaving them trapped.

Lumian stood facing Perle, wearing the Flog boxing gloves with iron-black spikes. He gripped a brass revolver in his hand.

Anthony took cover behind him, their backs almost touching.

The Hypnotist, however, wasn't standing. He was down on one knee, using a blank sketchbook propped on his right thigh as a surface to quickly draw something with a short pencil.

Bottle of Fiction!

Lumian and Anthony found themselves inside a Bottle of Fiction, formed from the quarry cave's exit.

But this was pointless against Perle, who had a complete overview of the current mirror world. She could easily see where Lumian and Anthony were hiding.

As she watched the scene unfold, Overseer Perle felt a strange, unsettling aura, as if it involved a gray domain.

Lumian, as the team's leader and most powerful member, appeared to be buying the Spectator more time.

Whether he was gambling on her unwillingness to kill him, hoping to capture him alive, so he could be used as a shield, it was evident that the Spectator's actions were critical. Lumian believed it could either harm her—an Overseer—or help them evade an Overseer!

Without hesitation, Perle fixed her gaze on Lumian and Anthony within the Bottle of Fiction and declared in the Words of Order, "An Overseer sees all secrets!"

The moment she uttered those words, the Bottle of Fiction at the quarry cave's exit quietly disintegrated.

However, Perle noticed that while Lumian was no longer shielded by the Bottle of Fiction, Anthony still remained inside one. The Overseer's words had failed to dispel it!

Confirming this detail, Lumian smiled.

The Bottle of Fiction surrounding Anthony was created using him as a base.

His spread legs and the ground created a symbolic doorway.

Lumian's body arched slightly as he faced Overseer Perle. His smile twisted as he muttered under his breath, "Yes, Anthony is carrying out a crucial task under my guidance.

"But to break the Bottle of Fiction made from a living person like me, you must defeat me first. Anyone trying to harm Anthony will have to go through me!

"I am now Anthony's shield. I am the wall that protects him!"

Perle's smile diminished slightly as she regarded Lumian with a grave expression.

"You stand guilty!

"You murdered someone!"

Murder… Lumian's heart skipped a beat.

He wasn't surprised by the fact that he had killed someone, but he didn't expect Overseer Perle to charge him with such a crime.

No matter the form of the ensuing punishment, the ultimate outcome was set in stone.

A murderer met his end!

Doesn't she want to take me alive? Lumian had voluntarily become Anthony's shield, believing that Perle wouldn't risk killing him. This would limit many of her abilities. He hoped to buy time until Anthony finished the sketch on the Beyonder painting album he had gotten from Bard. The album's purpose was to bring drawings to life or manifest special effects for a period.

Unexpectedly, this plan fell apart from the start.

Of course, Lumian didn't bet everything on the possibility of the Overseer only wishing to capture him alive. It was impossible for him yo defeat a demigod, but he had some hope at buying time.

A muffled thunderclap resounded in the low ceiling of the quarry cave. Silver-white lightning serpents sprang forth, intertwining into a tree of lightning as wide as a barrel, aimed at Lumian.

Before the thunder echoed and the lightning struck, Lumian had already lifted his hand, pointing the brass revolver at the world's punishment.

His blue eyes turned iron-black, but he couldn't perceive any weakness in the terrifying lightning.

His only option was to channel blazing white flames into the revolver and the bullet about to be fired.

Bang!

As the threatening silver-white tree of lightning hurtled down, a bullet glowing with dark green flames shot from the muzzle, colliding with the immense lightning bolt.

Weakening Bullet!

This was the Weakening Bullet he had obtained from Jebus!

Instantly, the barrel-thick lightning bolt shattered the dark-green bullet and the blazing white flames encasing it. A blinding silver-white light engulfed Lumian.

Boom!

A horrifying roar assaulted Anthony's ears, causing his body to shudder involuntarily, nearly deafening him.

He remembered the night the cultists attacked the army camp. Gunfire, cannon blasts, screams, and shouts came from every direction, overwhelming him with panic and fear. It had left a profound psychological scar that took years to heal.

Now, he felt as if he had been transported back to that moment.

Anthony gathered himself and looked at the blank sketchbook before resuming his sketch. The pencil in his hand rustled as it moved.

He could still vividly recall Lumian's body language: "Unless I die and someone steps over my corpse, no one can harm you!"

Compared to the helplessness and terror of that night at the military camp, where everyone was in peril, Anthony felt the current situation wasn't as dire.

At the very least, I have a dependable companion!

At the very least, someone is willing to risk their life to protect me!

Amidst the innumerable silver lightning serpents, Lumian's body first fractured into mirror shards, then charred and crumbled into dust—the Mirror Substitution Jenna had provided him!

Lumian's figure reappeared, standing firm in his spot with his legs slightly parted.

Rumble. The thunder in the sky didn't fade with the previous punishment. A new round of execution was brewing.

Since the Overseer had prosecuted, the punishment would persist until the target was well and truly dead!

Lumian's scalp prickled, and his black hair stood on end from the lingering electricity in the air.

Seconds later, an even more magnificent and terrifying colossal lightning bolt silently descended.

Already clenching his teeth, Lumian tossed aside his revolver and raised his hands, allowing the Flog boxing gloves with iron-black thorns to precisely meet the lightning's tip. Blazing white fireballs materialized above him.

The Flog boxing gloves could withstand an attack imbued with godhood at the cost of shattering or cracking!

Boom!

Amidst the abrupt, devastating explosion, the silver-white tree of death, composed of lightning, stopped at Lumian's fist and the Flog boxing gloves.

Rumble. Blazing white flames burst forth, driving the tiny lightning serpents back.

The lightning punishment quickly subsided, but the muffled rumble in the air lingered.

With multiple resounding cracks, Lumian's Flog boxing gloves turned charred and cracked, shattering into countless pieces that rained down.

Seeing a fresh round of lightning about to form, Lumian knew he shouldn't, but he couldn't resist urging Anthony inwardly, Why isn't it done yet? I can only hold on a little longer!

After a brief, suffocating silence, a silver-white giant lightning serpent abruptly struck from midair, illuminating the entire quarry cave and the smile on Overseer Perle's face.

Lumian only had time for one thing.

He animated his shadow and switched places with it.

Boom!

Amid the sharp and urgent thunderstorm, the giant lightning serpent consumed the shadow, instantly vaporizing it without a trace.

At last, this round of punishment concluded, and Lumian reappeared in front of Anthony. His legs were slightly apart, and his back was somewhat hunched, but no shadow remained under his feet.

Why isn't it finished yet? Lumian thought anxiously.

He considered dismantling the Bottle of Fiction and teleporting Anthony around.

However, he could tell that the Overseer's prosecuted punishment wouldn't end simply because he changed positions. With the speed of lightning, he couldn't depend on teleportation to evade it.

It wasn't a matter of teleportation being too slow, but rather the time he needed to activate the black mark on his right shoulder.

Rumbling thunder resonated in Lumian's ears, heralding the impending punishment.

Behind Lumian, sweat the size of soybeans formed on Anthony's forehead as he crouched on one knee, drawing on his right thigh, which served as a table.

The sketch's first half was successful and completed quickly, but for some reason, the final stroke suddenly became challenging.

The painting album influenced the pencil, causing it to greedily absorb Anthony's spirituality. However, even this substantial amount of spirituality could only inch the black lines forward slowly.

At the same time, the edges of the blank drawing page gradually curled, igniting with transparent flames, as if struggling to contain what Anthony was about to draw.

Anthony was well aware that this painting album was not meant to display such a thing, but he had complete faith in Lumian's judgment and persevered.

Rumble!

The muffled thunder intensified, and Anthony, within the Bottle of Fiction, could hear it clearly.

Despite being a Psychiatrist, he found himself unable to control his emotions. Nervousness, impatience, anxiety, and panic surged within him.

He composed himself and continued the final stroke.

Seeing the terrifying silver lightning on the brink of taking shape and Anthony still silent behind him, Lumian felt a wave of despair.

Am I about to die?

Very well, I'd like to see what Termiboros looks like!

Death… Suddenly, a flash of inspiration illuminated Lumian's mind.

He retrieved an item from his Traveler's Bag.

It was a golden mask adorned with several dashes of oil paint.

He had obtained this golden mask from Hisoka, and it originated from Death!

Lumian swiftly put on the golden mask, his body rapidly growing cold as his aura gradually dissipated.

The terrifying lightning punishment brewing in midair abruptly came to a standstill.

Lumian gazed up at the silver-white electric serpents that no longer converged, his lips curling beneath the golden mask.

He had become an undead creature!

One of the golden mask's purposes was to transform the wearer into an undead being while preserving their intelligence!

Since Lumian was now "dead," the punishment had fulfilled its purpose. It naturally came to an end!

Witnessing this, the Overseer was momentarily taken aback before grasping the situation.

She chuckled, but her composure remained intact.

While the punishments descended, she had not sat idle and had prepared for any unforeseen circumstances.

She used a coin bag to execute an Under the Table transaction.

Her right hand was about to withdraw.

Behind Lumian, Anthony watched as the curled-up edge and invisible flames rapidly spread to the center of the painting page, intensifying his despair.

Even if he managed to complete the final stroke, the drawing paper would be rendered useless—nothing effective would come out of it.

Anthony gritted his teeth, choosing to trust his companion and Lumian.

He recalled Lumian's instructions: "Draw Monette first before drawing Madam Magician!"

Monette, the Islander swindler Monette… The instant this thought crossed Anthony's mind, he was astonished to see the painting paper's edge halt and the invisible flames temporarily freeze.

His pencil movements became smoother.

Mustering his spirituality, he finished drawing a monocle outlined by simple lines on the right eye of the thin-faced Islander with sunken eyes, thick lips, and slightly curly black hair.

Chapter 733: Praise You

Finishing the last stroke, Anthony sighed in relief, confirming he still lived.

Though unsure if Amon's incarnation--Monette's drawn form--could help turn the tables and find a way out of the mirror world, he had obeyed his partner's orders and done his part.

Almost at once, Anthony saw the corners of Monette's sketched mouth turn up, eyes appearing to come to life.

But the curling paper and translucent flames stirred once more.

In an instant, the drawing of Monette condensed into a ball, devoured by clear flames and absorbed into the dim Bottle of Fiction.

Wh-- Had it failed? Anthony's heart squeezed tight again.

Even a disciplined Hypnotist found it hard to stay calm in the face of this.

Right then, Overseer Perle, still next to the jutting rock, pulled her right hand from the Under the Table bag of coins.

The transaction was made; Lumian's group would teeter on the edge of sleep!

Perle looked back at her target. Lumian stood firm, wearing a gold mask painted black and white. His aura was gone, body radiating an icy breath of death.

But Lumian's now blue eyes stayed open.

As an Overseer, Perle knew something was wrong.

About to act, a thick darkness swallowed her, snuffing out the carbide lamp.

Perle's eyes shut as she swayed unsteadily.

She fell asleep.

Somehow, the sleep effect meant for Lumian's team had hit her instead, leaving them untouched.

Seeing this, Lumian felt shock, then immense joy.

He sensed a strange power pulsing from the Bottle of Fiction he had made with his body.

Did it work?

Had Anthony done it?

As expected, the entity's prior actions sought to help His father.

And His father is on our side against heretics!

Lumian quickly deactivated the Bottle of Fiction, ready to teleport to the sleeping Perle. He would get Moran Avigny's mirror and try to escape through the mirror world's set entrance.

If he could just get out, he could find help to make Perle leave.

Just then, Perle's coin bag and Moran Avigny's mirror fell to the ground.

Smack!

Moran Avigny's mirror broke, cracking the entire mirror world barrier. Perle, driven by flaming ambition, woke up with a start.

As Lumian's hopes sank, a shadow raced out of the shattered mirror.

It combined with strewn bits of flesh and blood, instantly reforming into Mr. K in his black robe.

When the mirror world took damage, the Aurora Order Oracle felt his finger and teleported on instinct, turning to shadow to slip through the cracks.

...

In the dark cathedral in an unknown location, Magician Blinked over and over, unable to shake off the flood of random information.

As she Blinked, starlight filled her eyes, solidifying into a weird, ancient stone wall clock.

Clang!

Grand, majestic chimes echoed in every nook of the cathedral.

An old, mottled phantom appeared in the air--a stone wall clock split into twelve sections, each crossing grayish-white or bluish-black symbols.

Clang!

The chimes carried an unspeakable, invisible torrent through long ages past, freezing all present.

The horrifying torrent of information froze. Hermit, changed into an incomplete Mythical Creature, stopped cold. Judgment, floating over the cathedral, turned to a statue.

Loki's hand, reaching into the void, also paused, failing to pull out a silhouette.

In this frozen state, the starlight in Magician's eyes changed again.

Countless complex mercury symbols appeared, quickly joining into a huge, unreal, scaleless serpent.

The silver-white giant snake, layered with dense patterns and symbols, made connected cylinders with different markings.

The next second, the mercury serpent bent to bite its tail before it began slowly turning.

The massive torrent of information started to reverse, going back the way it came until it turned back into the woman in the black dress with the gold crown.

The black-dressed woman faded, becoming a ghost and a floating, oddly captivating tarot card. In the end, both went back to the void and disappeared.

Fallen rocks flew back to Hermit's body, turning back to eyes or pure white. Hermit quickly lost her terrifying look that would make anyone go mad.

Judgment returned to the surface, going back past the "door" as the mystery-weakening limit faded.

Loki drew back his hand, settling into the pitch-black wooden chair.

…

In the fractured special mirror world, Overseer Perle saw the hooded, black-robed Mr. K and his many sins upon waking up.

Oddly, the criminal who had done worse things than Lumian only had a small gray spot.

This suggested that finishing an Under the Table transaction with Mr. K would be hard, as if it needed certain conditions.

It seems to come from extreme devotion. All Under the Table transactions can only keep going with the permission of the one he has faith in… As Perle's mind raced, she glared at Mr. K and said with the Words of Order, "You stand guilty! You murdered someone!"

The space over Mr. K went dark at once as something awful took shape.

Having heard Lumian talk about Jebus's powers, he knew a deadly punishment was coming. He quickly changed his Grazing target, using

Devil Transformation and Rose Bishop's flesh and blood magic to endure the unknown attack.

But in a flash, the growing penalties vanished, as if going to an unknown place.

The scary pressure, like thick smoke, blew away in fierce winds.

Mr. K was stunned for a moment before exploding in crazed laughter.

"Haha! Hahaha!

"I'm guilty, but the Lord carries my sins!"

"I'm innocent. I'm innocent to this world!"

Amid the laughter, Mr. K changed Grazing targets. Layers of unreal doors showed up in his eyes.

Many doors to different places came together, turning into ghostly books.

The book materialized in front of Mr. K, pages flipping fast.

"I came, I saw, I recorded."

As the ethereal voice rang out, the illusory book stopped on a page.

In an instant, Mr. K turned into a two- to three-meter-tall half-giant in cold black armor, holding a pitch-black sword.

He sprinted towards the Overseer.

"Praise you!" Mr. K roared, slicing down with the Sword of Darkness.

Perle's face went grim, seeing the prosecution had no effect on Mr. K.

Of course, as a demigod, though caught off guard, she knew what to do.

Amid Mr. K's wild laughter, she stressed with the Words of Order, "An Overseer is protected!"

The black-armored half-giant used all his might, slashing at Perle's head with the dark broadsword, but an unseen barrier blocked it.

The barrier cracked. Mr. K's body quietly fell apart. A clean cut took off his right arm and shoulder, dropping them to the ground.

Though Mr. K used recorded demigod powers and had a bit of godhood, he still faced punishment for attacking a "clearly" protected Overseer.

This was a freshly done crime, not yet borne!

The flesh on Mr. K's shoulder writhed, as if a new arm would grow. But he ignored it. His left hand grabbed the falling dark sword, yelling again, "Praise you for creating everything!"

As the rough voice echoed, the dark broadsword slashed at Overseer Perle.

With Perle's former protection, the dropped coin bag floated back to her hand.

She quickly made an Under the Table deal aimed at everyone there.

Crack!

As the dark broadsword swung, the unseen barrier guarding the Overseer fully shattered.

Mr. K's left arm came off his body, showing a huge cut.

In the cut, blood-colored flesh tendrils grew fast, as if alive, as if a new Mr. K would emerge.

Overseer Perle wasn't happy. Based on the Under the Table deal, Mr. K, Lumian, and the rest should have gotten much weaker.

But in truth, nothing changed!

Could it be that I'm unlucky? The person who made the deal was a fraud who never meant to keep their end? Perle's heart sank as she couldn't move for some reason.

Then she saw the armless Mr. K bow in an exaggerated way.

The Aurora Order Oracle's mouth opened as wide as it could, corners going to his ears. Blood churned where it tore, flesh tendrils thickly covering the spot.

Using his stretched mouth, the black-armored Mr. K bit the dark sword's handle.

He jumped high, voice ringing from his chest.

"Praise you for bearing the world's sins!"

Amid hoarse yells, Mr. K fell, a straight dark sword using himself as the grip, slashing at Overseer Perle.

Chapter 734: My Weapon

Lumian stood at the quarry cave's exit, wanting to work with Mr. K to take on Perle, but unsure of how to proceed.

Past experience had shown him that without godhood, any action against an Overseer would only come back to haunt him, without affecting the demigod at all.

With his golden mask removed, Lumian could only remain in place, considering what items he possessed that might be useful and effective. He was left with no option but to watch the fight between Mr. K and Perle unfold as a mere spectator.

At the same time, he scanned the area, looking for a way to utterly destroy the existing mirror world.

Anthony kept his posture and continued drawing on the blank painting album, which was missing a page.

His current subject was to be Madam Magician.

As he observed Mr. K's movements and listened to each slash, Lumian sensed a slight corruption creeping into his mind.

It surprised him that Mr. K could hold the Overseer at bay to some degree, unafraid of her accusations and armed with a means to harm her.

Lumian silently hoped that even if Mr. K couldn't defeat Perle, he would at least be able to drive her off.

Mustering strength from his waist and core, Mr. K swung his upper body as he descended, bringing the dark broadsword down on Overseer Perle's head for the third time.

Perle remained motionless, not using any Mirror Traversal-like ability to evade, nor rolling to the side. She stood firm beside the jutting rock, her body turning pitch-black and dissolving into a constantly dissipating shadow.

The dark, enigmatic broadsword plunged down abruptly, silently cleaving the shadows in two.

The shadows rapidly encircled the protruding rock, perpetually moving and merging once again. They writhed, striving to reassemble Overseer Perle's form.

Where the Sword of Darkness had cut through, the shadows struggled to form proper connections, barely managing to stack together into a humanoid shape riddled with cracks and misaligned parts.

Mr. K sprang up, ready to swing the dark broadsword gripped in the gaping crack of his mouth.

Suddenly, his body shrank rapidly, the cold black armor encasing him vanishing.

He reverted to his original form, dressed in a black hood and matching robe.

The precariously assembled shadow gradually shed its black color, revealing human skin and a vivid red dress inch by inch.

…

In the shadowy cathedral at an undisclosed location, the mercury giant serpent phantom hanging in midair slowly faded away.

The Reboot was finished.

Perched on a black wooden armchair, Loki abruptly thinned and shrank, transforming into a paper figurine.

The paper figurine and chair then crumbled, disintegrating into dust.

Loki materialized in a far corner of the cathedral. Magician, appearing to still be airborne, quickly conjured an alternate self behind him.

As Loki reached into the void to pull out an assistant, his jet-black eyes suddenly shifted to blue.

The blue rapidly stained black, then reverted to blue, the two colors continually alternating.

Loki was paralyzed, unable to summon an aide, allowing Magician to stretch out her right hand and grasp with all her might.

The dark void warped, swallowing Loki. Then, the two shattered into fragments, ultimately buried in a bottomless abyss.

Throughout this, Loki's body instantly became ethereal, unreal, as if he were a projection or puppet that had been swapped at some moment.

Hermit, Judgment, and Magician simultaneously heard a regretful sigh and witnessed the shadowy cathedral itself turn ethereal and slowly disintegrate.

It, too, seemed to be a projection.

An aged, ethereal voice then echoed from the distance.

"My wish is for all the demigods present to be lost for three minutes."

The shadowy cathedral fully collapsed, and darkness engulfed the surroundings, devoid of starlight or boundaries.

…

In the special mirror world, realizing Mr. K could no longer maintain his godhood-enhanced half-giant state and Overseer Perle was close to returning to her human form, Lumian's first instinct was to shape-shift into a shadow being and flee through the growing rift in the mirror world to find other allies.

However, he was unsure if Mr. K had employed any mystical items upon entry, and whether Shadow Transformation alone would allow passage through the mirror world's fissure.

As Lumian watched Overseer Perle's face gradually come into view, her eyes and nostrils both vertically misaligned, a sudden realization struck him.

I, too, can wound an Overseer…

If Mr. K can do it, so can I!

My fate is intertwined with Termiboros. To a degree, we can be considered one. I've long known I possess a fake angelic level!

The powers and items I wield won't hold godhood and can't touch an Overseer, but I should be able to do it myself.

I will become my own weapon!

These thoughts raced through Lumian's mind as a slightly manic grin spread across his face. His blood seemed to boil, as if set aflame.

In a flash, he disappeared and reappeared before Overseer Perle.

His eyes had already taken on an iron-black tint, revealing a few pale spots that marked Perle's vulnerabilities.

One such spot was just below the left side of her face!

Before Perle's shadows could fully reconstruct the Overseer, a multitude of incandescent white flames burst forth from Lumian's body.

Like a rushing current, they poured out from Lumian's eyes, ears, nostrils, mouth, skin, and pores, completely enveloping him, transforming him into a raging inferno.

Let's do this!

Let us burn as one!

Let us explode together!

Lumian, now one with the blazing white flames, swung his right fist at Perle's left cheek.

Perle's vertically-misaligned eyes betrayed a flicker of confusion before understanding dawned.

But it was too late for her to protest or react. She had not even fully returned.

Bang!

Lumian's right fist collided with Perle's left cheek, caving it in.

As he struck, a ghastly wound appeared on his own chest and abdomen, but it was quickly consumed by the blazing white flames.

Perle felt the pain, but it was not a mortal blow.

At that instant, Lumian's face, wreathed in blazing white flames, displayed a sinister and frenzied smile.

It actually works!

I can truly use myself as a weapon to strike an Overseer!

Boom!

He detonated his right arm, using the incandescent white flames he had pre-injected to make it explode.

His right fist, propelled by a fierce, blazing white wave of flames, pierced Perle's left cheek and penetrated her skull.

Cull!

Crack! The special mirror world, with its dark barrier and numerous cracks, let out a shattering sound. It rapidly disintegrated and fell apart.

Lumian's head took an invisible blow, his skull caving in and teeth falling out.

Deprived of his right arm, he was hurled through the air, his entire body wreathed in blazing white flames.

His face twisted in agony, yet his eyes shone with elation.

Success!

He beheld a horrific, blood-red wound on the left side of Overseer Perle's face. Within the wound, a pale-white fog intermingled with the grayish-white brain. The shattered fist had ripped it asunder and set it ablaze.

As the blazing white flames faded, Overseer Perle's remaining right eye dulled, and her body slowly crumpled.

The cage imprisoning Franca and Jenna quickly disintegrated.

Mr. K, observing this, nodded approvingly.

Lumian is like me!

The fighting style is quite alike!

The only shortcoming is that he did not loudly praise the Lord during the final blow.

At the same time, Lumian's head buzzed, and he nearly blacked out. He collapsed to the ground, on the verge of losing consciousness.

He managed to stay awake only because he had undergone significant digestion of the Reaper potion. It felt as if he had completed another massive cull by the ancient tomb during the Dream Festival.

Wh— Lumian was initially thrilled, but then he forced himself to stand, shocked and suspicious.

He knew the digestion must have resulted from his Culling of Overseer Perle, but shouldn't a demigod suffice for him to fully digest the Reaper potion?

Lumian extinguished the incandescent white flames burning within and without. With his left hand, he retrieved the healing agent and Lie earring obtained from Jebus from his Traveler's Bag, all while examining Overseer Perle's corpse.

Just then, the special mirror world completely collapsed, and they found themselves back in reality, inside the quarry cave with a fixed mirror world entrance.

Next to the protruding rock where Perle had stood, there was no corpse or white fog to be seen.

Lumian spotted an oil painting hanging on the corresponding rock wall.

The painting looked torn and ruined, but one could faintly discern that it had once portrayed a woman in a red dress.

Perle?

We weren't facing the true Overseer, but a painted figure she created using a Pixie pathway item?

This oil painting grants the depicted demigod a short lifespan, but no freedom of movement?

Is that why Perle never budged and always took the attacks head-on?

Amid his bewilderment, Lumian drank the healing agent Jebus had procured from the Great Mother's followers to ensure he would survive past 6 a.m.

At that moment, Perle's smiling voice resonated from the depths of the shattered oil painting.

"I didn't anticipate my painting person failing.

"But no matter. What's important is that the vortex is about to manifest. It won't be long before you're officially consumed.

"Everyone will be caught up in it…"

Perle's voice gradually faded into the depths of the oil painting, thwarting Mr. K's attempt to track her through teleportation.

Chapter 735: I Have Sinned

The healing agent's effects and the incineration of the original flames had largely stemmed the bleeding from Lumian's wounds. Flesh and blood had even started to regrow and form scabs over his skin.

Putting on the Lie earring, Lumian tried to shift the gruesome hole in his chest and abdomen to a less vital location. As he did so, he stared intently at the oil painting hanging on the rocky wall, his thoughts racing.

As an Overseer, Perle is unlikely to directly engage in combat herself?

Has her true form been lurking in the shadows this whole time to avoid any potential mishaps?

But if she had personally intervened, perhaps we would have been defeated long ago, with no chance for any slip-ups…

Furthermore, Perle doesn't appear overly concerned about capturing me alive. Doesn't the failure of her painting version indicate that the Under the Table deal she initiated didn't meet the requirements? She's bound to face severe consequences for that in the future.

It's not as if she's a fraud…

Coming to this realization, Lumian suddenly came up with a guess:

Perle was the sole person to mention capturing me alive. There's no other evidence to support it…

While this may indeed be a request from the other party in the Under the Table transaction, it's probably not the only one. It's likely one of multiple requests and the least critical. That's why, after creating the special mirror world, Perle immediately left this painting behind, allowing her painting version to handle us while she went off elsewhere.

Was she going to carry out the most vital and important requirement?

I can't fully trust a Broker's words either…

Based on her tone, she seems to have succeeded. This strongly suggests she's confident the vortex is on the brink of taking shape. It won't be long before it entraps everyone…

Apparently, she wasn't in the vicinity at all. She merely used the link to her painting self to briefly speak remotely before vanishing completely. We have no way to track her.

Lumian felt his theory could account for Perle's actions and certain details from the prior battle. This realization made his heart sink.

If his suspicions were correct, the School of Truth's vortex hadn't been successfully halted and was about to manifest!

What would transpire after some time had passed?

Right then, Mr. K approached Lumian, his gaze locked on the tattered oil painting.

In a hoarse voice, he spoke, "I have sinned. I failed to discover the School of Truth's scheme beforehand, letting the issue escalate until it was on the verge of erupting."

As he talked, the flesh on Mr. K's shoulders writhed, and two pale, slender, damp arms gradually grew out. The black robe, its sleeves severed, was beyond repair.

Not waiting for Lumian to respond, Mr. K turned his head and said, "The disturbance here will soon be noticed. We shouldn't stay. Meet me tomorrow morning."

"Got it." Lumian glanced at his companions, who had concealed themselves in the shadows or used Psychological Invisibility, and nodded subtly.

He also intended to head to the safe house as quickly as possible to avoid any accidental attacks by official Beyonders.

Once Mr. K teleported away, Franca, Jenna, and Anthony came out of hiding.

"We should get back to the safe house now," Lumian said decisively.

Franca nodded and said with regret and sorrow, "I wonder where Pride Armor was sent. It would be such a shame if we truly lost it."

If Pride Armor hadn't hit Overseer Perle's painted self, compelling her to alter her life form and indirectly making the transformed Punishers disappear, even if Lumian could have still found a way to lure out the Islander swindler, Monette, they wouldn't have survived the following stages. In that case, he would face not only Perle's punishment but also Anthony's Punisher.

For Lumian and the others, Pride Armor had performed exceptionally; it was a Sealed Artifact of tremendous value. Nobody wanted it to be lost.

"If it were human and smart, it could find its way back. But now…" Lumian sighed, grasping Anthony's shoulder with his left hand.

Suddenly, dazzling starlight emerged from the void, rapidly forming a dreamlike door.

The door opened, and out came Magician, Judgment, and Hermit.

Surveying the scene, Magician noticed Lumian's dire condition, one arm missing. With an odd expression, she asked, "You were attacked?"

As she spoke, the quarry cave, lit solely by the carbide lamp's glow, darkened, as if an unseen curtain had been pulled around it.

"Yes," Franca replied on behalf of Lumian, who had only gained enough reprieve from his injuries to avoid imminent death. She concisely recounted the whole situation.

"The one who attacked you came from Perle's painted self. Her true form departed to do something else?" Magician sought confirmation.

"That appears to be the case," Lumian responded.

Magician exchanged glances with Judgment and Hermit, their eyes meeting without hiding their bewilderment.

After a short pause, Magician offered no explanation. Starlight gathered in her eyes, as if tracing a pattern.

A gentle rain fell, soaking Lumian's body and fully healing his wounds.

Nourished by the rain, Franca and the others felt their weariness melt away.

It closely resembles the power Madame Night used in the dream… Lumian drew a connection.

Magician nodded and instructed, "Provide me the details in writing tomorrow."

With that, she disappeared along with Judgment and Hermit.

As the darkness around them lifted, Lumian realized they had returned to the safe house in the administrative district, where Jenna had summoned Judgment's messenger.

"Madam Magician and the others are perplexed that we were attacked by Perle's painting self," Anthony remarked while putting away the blank painting collection, voicing his thoughts.

Lumian nodded and replied, "What's perplexing shouldn't be Perle attacking us. It's not unusual for an Overseer with an Under the Table transaction at the heart of it all to do something like that."

"So what were they perplexed about?" Jenna and Franca couldn't figure out an answer.

Anthony tried to analyze the situation.

"They're not perplexed by Perle's attack itself, but why we were targeted by her painted self specifically.

"They seem to think we wouldn't be attacked by Perle directly. Whether she had such intentions or acted on them is irrelevant."

Lumian and the others became lost in thought.

Abruptly, Franca exclaimed.

Looking at Lumian and the others, she slowly withdrew her hand from her Traveler's Bag in astonishment.

"Pride Armor is in here. It's returned!"

"Did Madam Magician help locate it?" As this thought crossed Lumian's mind, he noticed Franca's actions.

He instantly shouted, "Stop!"

He couldn't allow Franca to retrieve the Pride Armor!

This is a confined room, and I'm present!

Franca's expression froze, and she immediately stopped moving her elbow.

…

In the mirror world created by dark void tunnels, Overseer Perle continuously moved from mirror to mirror, searching for her final destination.

Her expression stayed calm, thrilled that the calamity had instead accelerated the vortex's formation.

On the other side of the dark, vacant tunnel, a vibrant ball of yarn quietly trailed her, leaving a concealed path.

…

The next morning, having sent the letter to Magician, Lumian reached Psychic's headquarters and met Mr. K in the basement.

Both their limbs had been restored.

Clad in an enormous hood and black robe, Mr. K disregarded this. In a grating voice, he told Lumian, "Come with me somewhere."

"For what purpose?" Lumian's demeanor toward Mr. K had become more at ease after their collaboration the previous night.

Mr. K nodded and explained, "First, I wish to atone for this incident. Second, through the idol, I want to notify the Lord that you've grown and can serve as His envoy. He will make preparations when the moment is right. Have faith in the Lord, and trust Him completely."

Just going to a location with the True Creator's idol? That's okay… It would be problematic if I actually had to encounter a god… Lumian bowed his head humbly and said, "It would be my honor."

Mr. K came up to him, grasped his arm, and transported him into the spirit world via teleportation.

Traversing dense layers of colors and innumerable indescribable transparent beings, the pair arrived at a cathedral.

The cathedral seemed to be located in a deep valley. Its surface was a watery black, decorated with many human bones. The top resembled the Eternal Blazing Sun Church's cathedral, forming a hemispherical shape.

Mr. K silently entered through the open door, his back slightly hunched.

Lumian followed closely behind.

Then, he saw the vast but dimly lit prayer hall and an enormous, pitch-black cross standing in the cathedral's depths.

A naked male idol hung upside down from the cross. Rust-colored iron nails jutted out from various parts of its body, each nail stained with vivid red blood.

Is this the True Creator's idol? Lumian's heart raced as he quickly averted his gaze.

What he had seen in the Church of The Fool, the Eternal Blazing Sun Church, and the God of Steam and Machinery Church were merely Sacred Emblems. There were no idols. He had assumed Mr. K was referring to the Sacred Emblem as an idol.

Mr. K walked until he was four to five meters from the idol and halted.

Lumian trailed slightly behind and stopped.

As he made his way from the entrance, he got a clear look at the hanging idol's face.

Its nose, mouth, and ears were quite blurry, with only a rough outline. However, its eyes were very distinct and tightly closed, as if enduring all the pain and guilt.

Mr. K drew a cross on his chest and cried out in a raspy voice, "Praise you! Praise you for creating everything! Praise you for shouldering the world's sins!"

Lumian followed suit in offering praise.

Abruptly, his head spun, and his eyes burned with a sense of familiarity.

Wh— Lumian's spiritual intuition alerted him that the negative effects of the Baynfel contract had been triggered. The effect was: In scenes intimately connected to Baynfel's past, he would witness truths better left unknown.

This place is closely tied to Baynfel's past? Was he once a clergyman of the True Creator? Lumian suppressed his curiosity as he continued to focus on the ground.

Suddenly, his eyes froze.

He spotted a blurry, lizard-like creature.

It was the lizard-like elf that had appeared in his dream about Cordu. The same one that had crawled out of Aurore's mouth!

It might have influenced Aurore, stopping her from seeking Hela's help in time!

At the conclusion of the Tree of Shadow incident, the lizard-

like elf had also made an appearance.

Why was it present now, in the True Creator's cathedral?

As Mr. K sprawled on the ground, pressing his face firmly against the watery black stone bricks, Lumian instinctively looked up.

He witnessed the huge pitch-black cross transform into an illusory shape, as if it loomed over a mountain range's peak. On the indistinct figure hanging upside down, lizard-like elves crawled in and out, circling and dancing…

Lumian watched the scene in a daze as Mr. K's slightly muffled voice resounded in his ears.

"Oh, merciful Father, I implore your mercy for the transgressions I've made."

End of Volume—Sinner

Chapter 736: Night

Can you accept such an outcome?

Inside an empty house in Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative, Angoulême de François, wearing a lion headdress, stood by the window, gazing down at the gas streetlamps below, patiently waiting.

After losing contact, he and Hidden Blade had switched emergency communication methods. They aimed to quickly re-establish contact, even without Madame Hela's messenger.

Early the previous morning, as soon as he had wrapped up the Moran Avigny case, he immediately tried to locate Hidden Blade.

Finally, Hidden Blade Franca, dressed in her assassin outfit, emerged from the shadows.

Angoulême cut right to it and asked, "Did you take down Moran Avigny?"

"Otherwise?" Franca replied with a smile.

Although Overseer Perle's vortex warning hung over Franca's head like a sharp blade, preventing her from relaxing just because Moran Avigny was dead and she had the intel, Franca wouldn't let it ruin her mood or make her solemn or anxious.

The Major Arcana card holders would naturally worry about something so serious, and she and the others just needed to follow orders and complete the missions. No point fretting.

Plus, the intel they obtained was crucial and valuable. Either the Eternal Blazing Sun Church or the Demoness Sect would definitely be grateful!

Franca was filled with anticipation over this.

"It really was you guys…" Angoulême couldn't help but sigh.

Hidden Blade and her team really acted fast. They had mentioned dealing with a government minister, and not long after, they actually attacked and succeeded.

Franca covered for Lumian, saying, "We were waiting for Moran Avigny to walk into the mirror himself. Surprisingly, the Aurora Order suddenly assassinated him, forcing him into our trap early."

Combined with the scene details, Angoulême slightly nodded and said, "So it was just a coincidence…"

This aligned with what the Purifiers had confirmed.

Angoulême then asked, "So where's Moran Avigny now?"

"Dead," Franca said with a tongue click. "He was definitely a Mirror Person, and gave us lots of important intel."

"What intel?" Angoulême quickly asked.

Franca chuckled and raised her right hand, gently rubbing her thumb and index finger together. "Where's my informant fee?"

Angoulême said in exasperated amusement, "Don't forget I contributed a lot to the Moran Avigny operation. Even if I don't get spoils, it's no problem to hear the intel, right?"

Franca, who always prided herself on fairly "splitting loot," awkwardly cleared her throat.

"Just kidding. Just kidding. But that intel is super important. Your superior will definitely reward you. Don't forget to help me collect my fee!"

"Get to the point," Angoulême replied in a deep voice.

It wasn't that he was stingy about the fee, but Hidden Blade had twice emphasized how crucial the intel was, making him eager.

Franca omitted Tarot Club and Aurora Order details, but started from capturing Jebus to Overseer Perle's painted self appearing and Lumian's theory about the whole situation.

Initially, Angoulême stayed relatively composed. Mirror People problems barely factored into Purifier expectations. But when Moran Avigny was tricked into revealing Roselle Gustav led the Mirror People, Angoulême's head started buzzing louder and louder.

Why do Hidden Blade and the others always get mixed up in such major situations?

How long has it been since the Hostel incident? Why is there another "vortex"?

After Franca finished, Angoulême couldn't help but raise his right hand and pinch his throbbing, headdress-concealed forehead. His emotions were so scrambled he was speechless.

Franca smugly asked, "How's that? Project Vortex, the Mirror People, and intel about a hidden traitor—pretty important stuff, right?"

Noticing Angoulême's grave gaze and slightly moving, teeth-grinding mouth, Franca instinctively added, "Don't blame me! We're not causing these problems, Trier's just uniquely prone to all kinds of chaos. We're victims too!"

Angoulême slowly exhaled and said, "I'll… submit this intel… tonight. I won't forget to pass along my informant's reward request. What do you want?"

At the mention of "tonight," Angoulême's emotions surged and he paused a moment.

He had just finished his workday an hour ago and left Saint Viève Cathedral. Now he had to return!

I'm Agent 007, not some societal slave working from midnight to midnight every damn day! Angoulême inwardly cursed, but still appeared calm, reliable, and emotionally stable.

Franca deeply pondered and said, "All the Pleasure potion ingredients."

She had considered her Affliction potion could be rewarded by the Demoness Sect, but not Jenna's. She could only rely on the authorities.

"Aren't you already at Pleasure?" Angoulême muttered, giving up asking. He nodded, "I'll help get it."

He didn't ask about Hidden Blade's Pleasure potion preparations, just as he didn't ask how she and her crew survived facing a demigod's painted self.

Franca was overjoyed at 007's promise.

Getting Pleasure from the Church and Affliction from the Demoness Sect, surely Madam Judgment would reward me too. I sold this one intel three times… I can now understand Lumian's glee at triple-dipping mission rewards!

Angoulême rubbed his temples and muttered, "There are Cardinals not from the Sun pathway, and way more diocese bishops. I really don't know what we'll uncover next. I just hope the impact isn't too massive."

He meant the April Fool's insider in the Eternal Church. With a clear lead, it wouldn't be hard for that party to be discovered, even if they worked through a Broker.

Without waiting for Franca's reply, Angoulême pondered a moment and said, "The humanoid Sealed Artifact transaction is approved. Let me know the transaction details anytime."

"It's finally approved…" Franca criticized the bureaucracy and curiously asked, "What's the story with that humanoid Artifact?"

She had encountered the humanoid Sealed Artifact during the sea prayer ritual and knew its abnormal power.

Angoulême shook his head. "I'm not cleared for that intel. All I know is she used to be a Sequence 4 Spectator demigod. Later she suddenly went insane, but I don't know if she went mad before an evil god corrupted her, or because of the corruption."

"It was probably the latter," Franca said thoughtfully. "Aren't Spectator Beyonders usually emotionally stable and hard to lose control?"

Angoulême rejected Franca's statement. "From what I know, Spectators normally don't have issues. But when they do, it gets really messy."

"True," Franca thought of I Know Someone.

After chatting a while, Angoulême bid Hidden Blade farewell and left the empty room.

Before leaving, he quickly reviewed the intel, then inwardly sighed with a heavy heart.

Aren't there way too many mystical incidents in Trier?

…

In the market district, Jenna seized a chance to act as a Witch again.

Wearing a black cloak and dark dress, she walked the shadowed street, pondering new acting directions as she looked for an opportunity.

I can't just equate Witches with bad deeds. Sinister, dark acts aren't necessarily bad…

Among the Witch legends I've gathered so far, many focused on Witches using mystical and sinister dark powers to help others fulfill desires, tempting them to stumble…

These legends likely contain remnants of acts by Demonesses posing as Witches. I could try imitating them. Plus, tempting others into depravity is a deeper way for an Instigator. Pleasure's acting also corrupts the target…

Yes, the mystical powers of sinisterness and darkness, tempting depravity and depravity brings calamity…

Jenna's thoughts gradually became more clear.

With these in mind, she turned onto Rue Anarchie, intending to find a chance to act as a Witch on this chaotic street.

After a few steps, Jenna suddenly heard someone singing hysterically,
"Trier, a city dressed in gold,

"A ball that endures 'til dawn unfolds;

"Chicken roasted, dripping with oil's grace,

"A castle cake to fill each eager embrace.

"A bow-tied attendant glides 'mongst the guests,

"Merrily dancing with joy and delight.

"My beloved, hidden 'midst the crowd,

"Among them, my love resides,

"In the Capital of Joy, forever Trier!"

This voice… Jenna peered from the shadows at Auberge du Coq Doré and saw Lumian, in a thick brown jacket, sitting on the third floor windowsill, holding a green liquid-filled bottle.

Hadn't he gone to the Aurora Order and never returned? Jenna frowned and stepped out of the shadow.

Lumian noticed her and smiled. He leaped down from the third floor, landing steadily before her.

"Why are you here?" Jenna asked with concern.

Lumian smiled casually. "I suddenly missed this place. Came back for a drink."

Sensing Lumian's strange excitement, Jenna pondered a moment then asked, "Did something happen?"

"No," Lumian denied quickly. He emphasized, "I'm fine."

With an absinthe bottle in hand, he headed towards Rue Anarchie's exit. Jenna trailed closely behind, not inquiring further.

Under the crimson moonlight and scattered gas lamps, the silent Lumian suddenly smiled and announced, "I'm about to start blaspheming. No, it's already begun."

He didn't turn around and kept walking.

"Haven't you been blaspheming all this while?" Jenna cautiously probed with Lumian's usual self-deprecation.

Lumian's gaze stayed fixed ahead as he smiled. "It's different this time."

He quickened his pace and didn't mention it again.

Jenna glanced at Lumian's muddy leather boots and the dirty but dry surroundings. She pursed her lips and didn't press further.

Lumian continued walking, occasionally humming a tune, occasionally chatting with Jenna and joking with a smile.

He made his way back to his rented apartment and entered his room.

Jenna stood quietly in the living room, watching Lumian close the bedroom's wooden door.

In the dark room, lit only by crimson moonlight, Lumian sat at his desk, unfolded a piece of paper, and picked up a fountain pen.

He didn't light the gas wall lamp, nor create a blazing fireball. In the pitch-black, he positioned the pen under the faint light.

Amidst paper rustling, Lumian's smile faded, and his wrist slowed.

Finally, he penned the unusually brief letter: "Honorable Madam Magician, I'd like to meet you."

Chapter 737: Opinion

After having the messenger dispatched to deliver the letter, Lumian sat at his desk, gazing at the dark curtains that seeped in the crimson moonlight, patiently awaiting Madam Magician's arrival.

After an indeterminate period of time, a resplendent starlight emerged from the dark room, coalescing into the figure of Magician.

She had changed into a brownish-yellow cotton dress with white trimmings.

"Good evening, Madam Magician," Lumian said with a glance around. "I have something important to discuss."

Magician grasped his meaning and immediately condensed the surrounding darkness into an illusory glass barrier, curling up to block out the infiltration of the crimson moonlight and the sounds from outside.

"What's so important?" Madam Magician inquired once secrecy was ensured.

Lumian conjured a blazing white flame to use as a chandelier. After a few moments of silence, he said, "I've confirmed the origins of the lizard-like elf."

"It's not an evil god from outside the barrier?" Madam Magician wore a thoughtful expression.

Lumian's lips curled into a slight smile. "An evil god in a way, but one not from outside the barrier."

Magician frowned and said, "Give me the details."

Lumian recounted in his deep voice his pact with Penitent Baynfel and the corresponding negative effects. He described seeing the True Creator idol and a lizard-like elf in the secret cathedral of the Aurora Order, as well as the illusory scene suspected to be a divine kingdom.

Madam Magician didn't interrupt him, listening attentively. Then, she let out a long sigh and said, "In fact, I had suspected that the lizard-like elf was related to Him, but whether it was the Spectator pathway's Mythical Creature form or the Hanged Man pathway's Mythical Creature form, they were clearly different from that elf. Nothing similar had manifested in the past five to six years. Additionally, the two experts at decrypting and deciphering dreams were more inclined to believe that the elf came from an evil god outside the barrier. This led me to abandon that guess.

"From the looks of it, that entity had been involved in Cordu's catastrophe for a long time.

"That's the only explanation that's complete. How could He, who's been listening and watching, not notice such a major incident that has been unfolding for so long and involves members of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society? How could He not take advantage of the situation?"

"What does He want?" Lumian's expression subtly contorted.

Magician stared at Lumian for a few seconds before sighing again.

"I can only confirm one goal. That is to create a Beyonder capable of rapid digestion and rapid advancement along the Hunter pathway.

"Think about it. It's been just over half a year since you became a Hunter. You're already a Sequence 5 Beyonder, and your Reaper potion has been greatly digested. Perhaps in two to three months, you can consider breaking through to godhood and advancing to Sequence 4, becoming a demigod.

"On this 'journey,' whether it was the fake Angel status brought about by sealing Termiboros, the obtained boons of the Inevitability pathway, or some tempering and digestion opportunities filled with calculated arrangements, they all contributed significantly to your growth.

"He wants a Red Priest and is pushing for a decisive battle between the Red Priest and the Primordial Demoness.

"I was worried that your advancement might be going too smoothly, but now it seems that a price has already been exacted for what fate bestowed, and a deposit has been paid."

Under the blazing white flames, Lumian spoke in a deep, raspy voice, "I'd rather remain an ordinary person."

Madam Magician shook her head with a complex smile.

"As the apocalypse approaches, with Aurore's background and condition, even if no catastrophe had occurred in Cordu, it's inevitable that you'll encounter one eventually. Have you forgotten the helplessness and pain of being an ordinary person in that catastrophe?"

Lumian clenched his fists involuntarily and lowered his head. "I-I just don't want to obtain power this way."

Madam Magician didn't dwell on the topic and said, "He definitely has ulterior motives. For example, a humanoid Sealed Artifact like you can effectively gather evil god influences around you wherever you go, exposing their schemes in advance and giving us more time to deal with them."

Lumian remained silent and didn't respond.

Madam Magician glanced at him and asked with an obvious sigh, "What's your next move?"

Lumian's body trembled slightly, as if he couldn't suppress his emotions.

Gritting his teeth, he said, "I want to punch Him!"

Upon saying this, Lumian's eyes turned bloodshot.

To be honest, he had never harbored a firm desire to seek revenge on a deity. His original plan was to eliminate the key members of April Fool's and the Sanson family of the Sinners organization. Then, he would work hard to become an Angel and extract most of Termiboros's strength. Then, he would release the weak Angel of Inevitability and kill Him.

He knew that the source of Cordu's catastrophe was actually the entity known as Inevitability. However, due to the vast disparity between them and his natural fear of deities, he had only occasionally cursed and spoken harsh words. He hadn't truly put the other party on his revenge list.

And now, he wanted those damned deities to fall from heaven, like meteors streaking through the night sky!

Madam Magician looked at Lumian with a serious expression and asked, "Do you know what you mean by that?"

"I know," Lumian nodded slowly. "I've been waiting all day before requesting to meet you because I've been questioning myself seriously."

He had questioned himself again and again, sometimes in anger, sometimes in sorrow. When he calmed down a little, he questioned himself again.

Madam Magician regarded him with a familiar pity in her eyes.

This time, Lumian knew clearly what she was pitying.

A human yearning to punch a deity.

Lumian gazed back at the Major Arcana card holder, his gaze unwavering.

After a while, Magician nodded slightly and said, "You're telling me the target because you want me to provide effective advice on your idea and make it a little more feasible?

"Yes, my suggestion is that before Mr. Fool awakens to some extent, endure your impulses and work hard to improve yourself. Only by becoming a demigod can you have a chance to sit at that table of cards—of course, that depends on whether you appear there in the form of cards or chips. Don't be disheartened. It's the same for you, me, and the other demigods. Our will and choices can also play an important role at critical moments. We can also exploit the card players."

Lumian asked in a deep voice, "Will Mr. Fool—will he help me?"

Madam Magician nodded solemnly. "Yes."

Unknowingly, her eyes grew brighter. "Mr. Fool will protect us. All of us are willing to make sacrifices for this world, but we can't be sacrificed."

Lumian suddenly let out a sigh of relief, as if he had lost all strength. He couldn't stand steadily, and his body swayed slightly.

He had been suppressing his emotions with all his might until now.

Madam Magician looked at him and pondered for a moment before saying, "I must remind you that that entity should already be aware of your thoughts. This is because you displayed an abnormality in front of His idol.

"I'm not criticizing you; I'm just stating a fact. In that situation, even Clowns and Spectators would find it difficult to control their emotions and expressions, let alone an Ascetic like you."

"I know…" Lumian replied with difficulty.

Before Madam Magician exposed him, he had harbored a glimmer of hope.

Magician chuckled and said, "That's also a positive thing. The fact that you're still alive suggests that you're still useful to Him and can be used. You haven't repaid the full price that fate has exacted of you. As long as you don't give up on yourself or participate in actions that can disrupt His important plans, He will ignore your hatred. He might even continue to allow you to encounter opportunities and obtain things until you step onto the stage He has decided for you.

"It's frustrating, but that's the reality. In the eyes of an existence like Him, you are currently just a speck of dust. He can reduce you to dust at any time without worrying about your thoughts."

After a long silence, Lumian asked in a slightly hoarse voice, "You mean, before Mr. Fool awakens, I'm to make full use of that entity's arrangements?"

Magician nodded slightly and said, "Using an enemy's resources to strengthen yourself is also a way of seeking revenge. Of course, this requires greater caution and restraint. As I mentioned earlier, a price is always exacted for what fate has bestowed. You have to weigh whether you're willing to pay the corresponding price in the future."

Lumian looked down at the floor illuminated by the incandescent white light and said, "Okay."

He then asked, "When will Mr. Fool begin awakening?"

"No one knows," Madam Magician replied with a smile. "But there's no need to be disheartened by this answer. I foresee that we tarot card holders will play an important role in this matter. Let's work hard together."

"How do we?" Lumian pressed.

Madam Magician pondered for a moment and said, "First, focus on yourself. Then, wait patiently for the right opportunity."

The right opportunity? Lumian couldn't fathom how they, the Minor Arcana card holders, were involved in awakening Mr. Fool. All he could do was cautiously ask, "Madam, did you deliberately place Penitent on the messenger list?"

Without Baynfel's negative influence, he wouldn't have had a chance to see the lizard-like elf in the True Creator's hidden cathedral.

"Yes and no," Madam Magician replied. "I know he has a certain connection to that entity. I believe our collaboration with the Aurora Order is fragile. You were sent as an undercover agent, not a true member. You might encounter certain problems in the future, and there's a chance that he will bring about new possibilities. That's why I placed him on the messenger list to see if fate will allow you to choose him. I never expected this to unveil a very important mystery."

Lumian had long grown accustomed to Madam Magician's cryptic responses. He swiftly filtered through her thoughts.

He spoke in a deep voice, "Madam, I wish to explore Mr. Hanged Man's Blue Avenger soon."

Chapter 738: Original Arrangement

Magician concurred tersely. "No problem. I understand the urgency. I'll bring you there once Mr. Hanged Man and I confirm the time."

Lumian fell silent for a moment before saying, "Thank you."

Madam Magician pondered for a moment and reminded him, "But don't be too hasty. Emperor Roselle once said, 'More haste, less speed.'

"It's not just because impatience blinds you and affects your judgment, causing you to make wrong choices in many matters. It's also because consuming the potion to advance has a requirement on your mental state. You should be well aware of this."

"I understand," Lumian said with a sigh.

Madam Magician glanced around and joked, "You were really tense just now. We've been talking this whole time, but you didn't even remember to invite me to sit down.

"Yes, the School of Truth's vortex clearly involves higher-level forces. We'll take over the subsequent investigations. Your primary mission is to locate the relatively important Mirror People according to what Moran Avigny had shared. I suspect that something in the special mirror world is an important part of the vortex.

"This time, you've obtained crucial information. We Major Arcana card holders won't be stingy with the rewards. Of course, it's for your team, not just you. The exact distribution is up to you."

Upon hearing the last sentence, Lumian suddenly fell into a daze. He muttered to himself, "Again…

"Is this also what fate has bestowed?"

"I can't say for sure that's not the case," Madam Magician replied with a self-deprecating smile. "Your psychological and mental state are better than I expected. You haven't reached the point where you need treatment again, but you seem to have suffered from the aftereffects of the trauma known as Fate's Bestowment. Everything you see seems arranged as if by fate's hand."

Without waiting for Lumian's response, she added, "Actually, there's no problem with that. It's good to be vigilant, but don't put too much pressure on yourself. Your mind is like an eraser. If you're too tense, it'll snap. You can be vigilant about details, but you have to relax. Think about it. You can't resist a real arrangement anyway. Why make yourself unable to sleep well, eat well, and become more and more neurotic?"

"Yes." Lumian had to admit that Madam Magician had a point.

Magician expressed satisfaction at Lumian's ability to self-regulate.

"Of course, once you discover any arrangements that are clearly problematic, remember to inform me immediately by reciting the honorific name.

"For the reward this time, I'll include the Sequence 4 potion formula of the Hunter pathway, facilitating your quest for items on the Blue Avenger. As for the rewards for the Two of Cups, Seven of Cups, and Four of Swords, I don't know either. It mainly depends on what Judgment, The Hermit, and the others will offer."

Lumian had no objections to this arrangement. Even if Madam Magician didn't mention it or believed that the information about the vortex and the Mirror People wasn't worth the demigod-level potion formula, he would take the initiative to request that the other party provide it first before making up for the missing contributions.

As Lumian regained his composure, a question crossed his mind.

"Madam, Mr. K of the Aurora Order has already divulged my contributions in front of the True Creator's idol, requesting Him to put me up as a candidate Oracle. When an official Oracle falls into danger, I will become the prime candidate to replace them. When the time comes, will I truly become a certain Mr. of the Aurora Order?

"In addition, Mr. K also promised material rewards in the next few days."

Magician nodded slightly and said, "The Aurora Order's organizational structure is quite peculiar. Although Oracles have a Saint directly above them, most Oracles can directly hear the ravings of that entity and His instructions, giving them strong autonomy. Yes, they still follow the orders of their Saint superiors and report to them on most matters, but there are a few matters that completely bypass their superiors. Recommending a candidate Oracle is one of them.

"An oracle of God can only come from God's revelation."

After a brief sigh, Magician chuckled and said, "As long as there's no major problem with the screening, feel free to accept the material rewards. You've already received enough of fate's bestowments. Any more and there won't be any substantial changes.

"I don't think being an Oracle will happen. The Aurora Order's Oracles have a fixed preaching area. It can't beat letting you run around and trigger various hidden dangers of evil gods. It will help you digest the potion. Uh…"

At this point, Magician's expression gradually turned odd.

Lumian wasn't in a hurry to inquire. He waited for the Major Arcana card holder to take the initiative to explain.

After a few seconds, Magician maintained her expression and hesitantly said, "Perhaps, that person's original arrangement was for you to be a certain Mr. for a while.

"The Hunter pathway's Sequence 4 is known as Iron-blooded Knight. It makes all consumers transform into men. Its ritual requires the formation of a team of at least 30 people. They should be able to comprehend your intentions based on your gaze and actions after long periods of nurturing—as though all of you are nearly one. The higher the team's strength and tacit understanding, the better the effect of the ritual." Think about it. What's the most striking characteristic of the Aurora Order? It's fanaticism.

"After becoming a certain Mr., you will undoubtedly have your own jurisdiction and a large number of subordinates. They are fanatical and will completely follow the orders of a deity's oracle like you. With some training, they can fulfill the requirements of the ritual. What you need to worry about is how to increase their strength and tacit understanding to make the ritual more effective."

Wh— The original plan was for me to become an Oracle after digesting the Reaper potion, allowing me to establish a team to complete the ritual as quickly as possible. How can I carry out this ritual now? Franca and the others are without a problem, but there are too few of them… Lumian couldn't help but frown.

Upon seeing this, Madam Magician chuckled and said, "The Church of Knowledge, well-versed in the Hunter path, offered an alternative."

"Of course, the prerequisite is that you can tame Ludwig. Angels can offset most quantity requirements."

"Angel level?" Lumian finally obtained information about Ludwig's power from Madam Magician.

"Yes." Madam Magician didn't elaborate further.

Taming Ludwig? All I can do now is "bribe" him and give simple commands… Lumian fell deep into thought.

Madam Magician glanced at him and said, "You can wait until you digest the Reaper potion and visit the City of Exiles, Morora, before deciding which method to use to meet the ritual's requirements."

"Right, let's discuss the vortex details through letters."

Lumian nodded and watched as Madam Magician vanished into thin air.

Gazing at the gradually expanding dark border, he closed his eyes and recalled everything he had seen and heard that day.

Unbeknownst to him, he clenched his fists tightly, and blazing white flames surged from his fists, burning fiercely.

Jenna sat in an armchair in the living room, quietly waiting for Lumian to open the door and leave. The sound of gnawing and chewing echoed from the dining room.

Lumian carried the unfinished bottle of absinthe to the balcony, settled into a chair, and took a sip.

Jenna approached him with light footsteps and observed him for a few seconds. "You're in better shape."

"You can tell that too?" Lumian asked nonchalantly without turning his head.

Jenna pulled up a chair and sat down, sneering.

"Your silent and reserved demeanor makes me feel more at ease than your previously excited and talkative demeanor."

Lumian gazed at the night outside the balcony and remained silent for a long time. Jenna didn't ask any questions either.

Suddenly, Lumian spoke in a deep voice, "I saw that lizard-like elf."

Jenna had heard him talk about Cordu and understood what it meant. She said in surprise, "Didn't you go to the Aurora Order to meet Mr. K? Why… Is that lizard-like elf related to the Aurora Order?"

"It stems from the one they believe in," Lumian's voice seemed to emerge from the depths of darkness.

"No wonder…" Jenna suddenly understood Lumian's previous state. "Madam Judgment mentioned that the one the Aurora Order believes in is close to Mr. Fool in power…"

It wasn't something mortals could face directly, let alone exact revenge on!

After a brief silence, Jenna understood and said, "Did you just meet Madam Magician?"

"You've grown quite smart after drinking the Witch potion," Lumian turned to Jenna.

Jenna couldn't help but ask, "Can't Hunters speak nicely?"

She paused for a moment before adding, "What did Madam Magician say?"

"She said to endure it for now and wait for Mr. Fool to wake up before considering what to do next," Lumian replied simply.

Jenna tersely acknowledged, momentarily at a loss for words.

After a moment, she stood up and went to Ludwig's side in the dining room to retrieve a glass from the balcony. She snatched the bottle of absinthe from Lumian's hand and poured a third of it for herself.

Jenna had just taken a sip of the dreamy green liquid when her face instinctively furrowed.

"Heck, why do you people like to drink absinthe? It tastes awful!" As a former Showy Diva, Jenna had drunk plenty of alcohol, but she still couldn't accept the taste of absinthe.

Lumian scoffed but didn't offer an explanation.

Jenna casually chatted, "I once read a book about a writer whose name I can't remember. He said that those who enjoy absinthe either use it to pretend they are experienced or use it to reminisce about their experiences…"

Lumian listened quietly, picked up the bottle, and took another mouthful.

The slightly burning alcohol slid down his throat, leaving behind a familiar bitterness.

Chapter 739: Reminder

In the Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative, Apartment 702 on 9 Rue Orosai.

Franca waited a while for Jenna to return.

She sniffed and asked in confusion, "Have you been drinking?"

Didn't Jenna say she was going to the market district to find an opportunity to act as a Witch?

Could it be that she had been deliberately drinking and engaging in sting operations to carry out law enforcement?

Jenna removed her black cloak and said to Franca with a solemn expression, "I ran into Lumian."

"Huh?" Franca was taken aback. "He's in the market district? Didn't he go to the Aurora Order to meet Mr. K? I thought he hadn't returned because he was being tested and preparing to choose a reward…"

Jenna didn't hold back and recounted Lumian's condition and words in almost complete detail.

"Is that so…" Franca's emotions became complicated.

She understood Lumian's current feelings and sympathized with the plight of Muggle Aurore. She still remembered that the Ancient Sun God, suspected to be from the Third Epoch and whom the Aurora Order believed in, had returned in some form. There was a high chance that the Ancient Sun God was an earlier transmigrator, a transmigrator like them!

Transmigrators harming transmigrators… It's the way of the April Fool's group; likewise for the Ancient Sun God… Franca sighed silently and decided to summon Madame Hela's messenger later. She would inform the vice president of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society about the School of Truth's vortex operation and the True Creator's role in the catastrophe at Cordu, and request a gathering of all members soon.

It wasn't that she wanted to publicly warn all members of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society at the gathering about the True Creator and the Ancient Sun God. Certain matters could become catastrophic if people below a certain level knew about them. After all, that entity possessed the ability to know whenever He was mentioned.

Franca hoped to raise the vigilance of Hela and the other organizers of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society before indirectly alerting the other members through them.

Furthermore, Franca found the Overseer of the School of Truth formidable, but that wasn't the most terrifying aspect about her and her accomplices.

Franca's greatest unease stemmed from the Broker's ability and willingness to unite the evil god sects, which had been in disarray, fighting independently and even attacking each other. The Hostel plan was the embryonic form of such a change, and perhaps the vortex incident represented the outcome in a stepped sequence.

Facing the evil god cults that had begun to collaborate, Franca wanted the factions she associated herself with to take action and collaborate as well. To this end, she was willing to share information about the vortex and the Mirror People with Madame Hela, a demigod likely backed by the Evernight Church, free of charge.

She had already written and sought Madam Judgment's opinion on this matter, and her response was affirmative.

"How is he now?" Franca asked with concern, contemplating whether to drink with Lumian until dawn to express her support and comfort him.

"He's fine for now," Jenna replied after a few seconds of contemplation. "Perhaps it's also because the one the Aurora Order believes in is far superior to him. Although the hatred is real, it's very intangible and can't be acted upon for a long time."

She had authority to speak on such matters.

Franca tersely acknowledged her words and contemplated her next move.

At dawn, Franca visited Clarice immediately and reported her encounter to the Demoness of Black. The latter expressed her approval and inquired about Franca's recent needs. Franca didn't stand on ceremony and mentioned her desire for the ingredients for the Affliction potion.

Back then, the Demoness of Black didn't agree or reject her request. She only instructed Franca to visit in two days and to find the Mirror People that Moran Avigny had mentioned as soon as possible. She could provide any assistance Franca needed.

As for the Mirror People that Moran Avigny had mentioned—Griffith, Palia, and Caratanza Tamara—none of them used their real names in reality. They could only rely on their unclear identities to investigate. Franca hoped to obtain official "assistance" through 007, and she also wanted to see if there were any members of the Moses Ascetic Order in the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society. This was one of the reasons why she had requested a full-scale gathering soon.

The only Mirror Person who could be identified was Trier's Deputy Commissioner of Police, Sport. Franca had investigated the situation before dawn and realized that the Mirror Person had vanished. It appeared that the fleeing Overseer had used some method to alert the Mirror People. For example, news of Moran Avigny's accident had quickly spread.

…

After downing the last of the absinthe and saying goodbye to Jenna, Lumian rubbed his temples and headed back to his bedroom.

Under the crimson moonlight pouring through the curtains, he noticed a folded letter on the table.

Madam Magician? Didn't she just leave not too long ago? Lumian frowned and picked up the letter.

It was indeed from Madam Magician, with a few short paragraphs:

"I forgot to mention we ran into Loki while tracking the School of Truth's Overseer.

"His condition has changed significantly. It seems something went wrong during his resurrection after the sea prayer ritual. This led to the owner of Castle Dylan, the former Secret Order leader, being resurrected inside him somehow.

"Zaratul has come back from the dead and become the Celestial Worthy's attendant. Right, but He hasn't fully taken over Loki's body, and Loki hasn't died completely. This has turned them into an unstable, stitched-together monster in mind and soul.

"For now, don't try finding Castle Dylan and expending Loki's remaining resurrection. It's best to avoid any situations where he could track you down."

Zaratul… Franca had said the former Secret Order leader played a major role in Emperor Roselle's rise, but ultimately betrayed the Emperor… The Sauron family's Vermonda Sauron seemed to have gone insane from His and the Emperor's schemes, prompting Him to enter Fourth Epoch Trier alone… Is Loki considered half-dead now? When Zaratul fully controls his body, he should be completely dead. What a shame… Lumian regretted not finishing off Loki's final life himself, but didn't feel too disappointed or indignant.

He had already caused Loki's demise twice, after all!

After burning the letter, Lumian pondered for a moment, then left the bedroom. He sat across from Ludwig, who wore yellow cotton pajamas and a matching nightcap, watching the boy quickly nibble on a cold bone-in steak.

Ludwig stayed unfazed by Lumian's gaze, continuing his feast.

After nearly a minute, Lumian probed, "Are you willing to call me Godfather?"

Ludwig glanced up at him, then lowered his head, scooped up some banana puree, and spooned it into his mouth.

Lumian changed the question. "Are you willing to follow my orders, accept my commands, and build a tacit understanding here?"

This time, Ludwig didn't even look up, his mouth constantly moving.

Lumian silently watched as he slowly took something out of his Traveler's Bag.

It was a mercury eyeball in a glass jar—a Sequence 7 Lucky One Beyonder characteristic of the Monster pathway. It had re-condensed after the Flog boxing gloves shattered.

Ludwig immediately looked up.

Ignoring Ludwig's gaze, Lumian leisurely pulled out the Serial Killer Beyonder characteristic and a few other items, placing them on the dining table in front of him.

Then, he smiled at Ludwig, who wore the yellow cotton nightcap, and said, "Are you willing to call me Godfather?"

Ludwig fell silent for a few seconds before saying in a low voice, "Godfather."

Lumian probed further, "Are you willing to follow my orders, accept my commands, and build a tacit understanding here?"

Without hesitation, Ludwig replied, "I am."

As he spoke, his eyes were fixed on the pile of items before Lumian.

Sigh… Lumian sighed silently.

He could rely on "food" to control someone, but couldn't rely solely on "food." Otherwise, it'd be so easy for Ludwig to ignore him when there was no "food" around. This likely didn't meet an Iron-blooded Knight's ritual requirements.

Deep in thought, Lumian pointed at the pile and smiled.

"Since you've admitted to being my godson, you can choose one item.

"But there's a condition. You have to answer two or three of my questions."

Ludwig hesitated a moment, then spoke with a stern look, "Okay."

"Which one do you want?" Lumian asked kindly.

Looking around, Ludwig yearned for every item, but was reluctant to abandon any.

Finally overcoming himself, he pointed at the Serial Killer Beyonder characteristic and said, "That one!"

You really want that Beyonder characteristic… Can it be turned into some magical dish or cocktail? Lumian put away the other items and smiled at Ludwig.

"First question:

"What pathway does your Beyonder power belong to? What are its characteristics? What's your rough Sequence level?"

He hoped to gain inspiration for taming the sealed Angel based on Ludwig's Beyonder pathway information.

Ludwig muttered under his breath, "That's three questions."

Lumian pretended not to hear.

Seeing his protests were futile, Ludwig could only pick up some beef and mutton to munch on. He mumbled, "Yes, yes…"

It seemed he couldn't recall the original name, so he had to find another term for it.

"It's the Gourmet pathway."

Lumian wasn't surprised at all. "No wonder you're always acting like you're savoring delicacies and ingredients."

Ludwig added earnestly, "To put it simply, it's a way to get superpowers by being hungry and eating.

"What corresponds to your Sequence 9 is Tramp. You lose everything and are always searching for food, barely surviving."

Could you be the ultimate Tramp embodiment? You'd even lost your mind, only never forgetting to eat… From that description, I can't tell what abilities a Tramp has… But Lumian didn't mock him.

Rather than detail the Tramp Sequence, Ludwig said, "Sequence 8 is Glutton."

Chapter 740: Depriver

740 Depriver

"Glutton?" Lumian said approvingly, "Quite the image."

Ludwig ignored Lumian's mockery and continued with the brief introduction, "At this Sequence, hunger truly becomes ingrained in our bodies, allowing us to evolve around it."

"What kinds of evolutions are there?” Lumian was concerned that Ludwig would only mention this about Gluttons, just as he had described the Tramp Sequence. Therefore, he took the initiative to inquire.

Ludwig paused for a few seconds to swallow his food.

Then, he stuffed a small piece of lemon cake into his mouth and replied in a muffled manner, "Internal organs that are better suited for digesting food and absorbing energy. Stronger, more powerful teeth, a bite force and appetite that exceed normal limits...

"This will help us obtain different abilities from food more efficiently. We won't have to worry about being affected by the toxins, viruses, and bacteria that food brings."

“In other words, even if it's highly toxic, as long as you consume it with your mouth and treat it as food, you won't die from the poison?" Lumian suddenly felt that Ludwig would make a suitable assistant for Apothecaries.

Ludwig took a sip of milk and shook his head.

"We can't exceed a certain limit. Many Gluttons die from eating random stuff."

And you're not eating random stuff? Lumian scoffed inwardly.

At the same time, he inwardly sighed.

This guy is quite honest. He's indeed like a child most of the time. He actually forgot to protest that I had asked additional questions.

Ludwig set down the milk bottle and picked up a box of cookies.

Amidst the munching sounds, he continued, "The corresponding Sequence 7 is Gourmet.

"At this level, our digestion and eating abilities will improve further. We can discern which ingredients are edible, which are inedible, which ingredients can bring about special effects, and which ingredients need to be combined with others."

Lumian thought seriously before asking, "Is extracting the corresponding information from the consumed food one of a Gourmet's abilities?"

This ability had helped Lumian a great deal.

Ludwig, donning a thick yellow cotton nightcap, nodded obediently. "Yes."

He didn't elaborate on the corresponding abilities.

"Although a Gourmet is useful, I can sense that at this Sequence, you lack sufficient combat strength. Yes, perhaps Tramp will grant you a certain level of street fighting abilities," Lumian commented from his own perspective.

Ludwig didn't argue, nor did he bother to. How could delicacies already in his mouth or subsequent delicacies be less important than what he was talking about?

He peeled a lollipop and placed it in his mouth, a hint of enjoyment on his face.

"Beyond that is what you call Sequence 6—Chef."

"I thought it was Bartender," Lumian teased.

Ludwig pondered seriously and said, "Chefs cover a wider range. It's not like they can only make cocktails."

Lumian nodded pensively.

“Is a Chef's ability to use special ingredients to create mystical dishes, pastries, drinks, and cocktails?"

Ludwig had displayed this ability numerous times.

Ludwig couldn't help but reveal a smug expression.

"That's right. Every Chef has different characteristics and abilities due to the ingredients they've obtained and the food they've prepared.

"Chefs have one thing in common: they have excellent skills in processing ingredients. This includes finding weaknesses and techniques like cutting, chopping, and slicing."

Only at this Sequence would one from the Gourmet pathway truly possess combat strength...

However, a Chef is similar to a Contractee. Their actual combat strength depends on their synergy of abilities. The upper limit is very high, and the lower limit is very low... Lumian, thinking of a Contractee, asked curiously, "Is there a limit to the number of permanent effects a Chef can obtain through various mystical foods?"

As for the negative effects, Lumian, who had eaten Ice Lemon Fish fillet before, had a deep understanding.

Depending on the ingredients and finished products, mystical dishes or cocktails brought different negative effects, but they were significantly weaker than those a Contractee experienced.

"No." Ludwig quickly shook his head. "As long as you fully embrace hunger and greed, there won't be an upper limit."

This upper limit is a little crazy... However, this also means that there's no limit to the number of negative effects. Even if each one is far inferior to the ones brought about by a Contractee, they will undergo a qualitative change after stacking... Lumian pondered for a moment and looked at Ludwig, who had roughly finished his meal.

"That first time we met, when I saw you chowing down on rats, were you just a Glutton or a Gourmet?"

Ludwig didn't try to hide anything.

"Gourmet."

Indeed, he'd been critiquing the dishes I served him.. Lumian pondered for a moment, then said, "Did you recover to Chef status during that Batings Black Insect incident?"

Ludwig curtly confirmed it.

“I was just short to begin with. Eating a Batings Black Insect was all it took to advance."

"What's the next Sequence?" Lumian steered the conversation back on track.

Ludwig dredged up the memories.

"It's Depriver."

"Depriver?" Lumian immediately thought of the Deprivation Bullet he'd gotten from Jebus.

Could this be a transaction from the cult of the Gourmet pathway?

Ludwig thought Lumian wanted him to explain the Depriver's abilities. He recounted, "A Depriver can strip one to three abilities from a target for a period of time. If they then consume part of the target's flesh, they permanently gain one of those abilities, and the target permanently loses it unless they drink a potion again or kill me—no, the corresponding Depriver.

"At Depriver, our recipes get way more range. A ton of formerly inedible things become food.

We can consume things we previously couldn't.”

"Give me an example?" Lumian wasn't sure his interpretation matched Ludwig's intentions.

Ludwig looked at him and offered two examples.

"Corruption to a certain degree, as well as fireballs, lightning, and other energy forms.”

They can eat way more dangerous stuff and consume things that shouldn't even be considered food... Lumian thought of an enemy he'd faced at the Hostel and something Ludwig just mentioned. He asked for confirmation, "So that ability to process ingredients includes those ingredients too?"

"Yes," Ludwig admitted candidly.

Lumian pulled the matte Deprivation Bullet from his Traveler's Bag and set it on the dining table.

"This is from a Depriver?"

Ludwig's eyes lit up.

"Yes."

He said anxiously, "Can I... can I use it as a prize? I don't want that Beyonder characteristic anymore!"

"I think Beyonder characteristics are way more valuable," Lumian deliberately provoked him.

Ludwig looked sad and said reluctantly, "But I can only choose one.

"I can't actually consume Beyonder characteristics yet. I can only use them as ingredients for now." Is that right... Lumian eyed Ludwig and organized his thoughts.

“How much more do you need to eat to recover to Depriver?"

"The further along I go, the harder it gets. I can't just eat a ton. I need higher quality, higher energy foods." Ludwig pointed at the Deprivation Bullet. "I'd need at least 200 of these bullets to reach Depriver."

Lumian chuckled and whispered devilishly, "What if you ate the Depriver who made this bullet?"

"I could recover immediately!" Ludwig's eyes lit up.

Lumian’s smile widened.

"You don't seem to have strong offensive abilities. I can help you get the stuff to capture the corresponding Beyonders, but you gotta listen to me and do what I say before I become a demigod. We need to be totally in sync.

"That's my promise. You gonna hold up your end of the deal?"

Ludwig hesitated a moment before reluctantly nodding.

"Deal."

Phew, stay calm... This is just the start of the "taming," not the end. Long process ahead...

Lumian suppressed his smile and asked curiously, "Who were you following back then?

"No need for the full title. Just call them something like 'the Great Mother."

Ludwig was caught off guard.

His expression shifted a few times before tears streamed down his face. He wailed like a child.

"I-I don't remember!

"I've forgotten. I've forgotten everything!”

Hearing his cries, Lugano emerged from the guest room in a thick coat.

The Doctor immediately noticed Lumian and asked in confusion, "Why is he crying?"

Is this really the terrifying cannibal from the Dream Festival?

Lumian chuckled in response.

"I showed him delicacies but didn't give him any."

"Alright..." Lugano looked between them in confusion before retreating back to his room.

Lugano's brief appearance made Lumian remember an item, and he had a dangerous thought.

He pulled the remains of Omebella's umbilical cord from his Traveler's Bag and "consulted" Ludwig, who'd gradually stopped sobbing.

"What dishes and cocktails could you make with this?"

That umbilical cord left behind by the Great Mother's Child of God was thought to be just an ingredient for charms, mystical items, and Beyonder weapons. But now Lumian figured a Gourmet might see it differently.

Looking at Omebella's umbilical cord remains, Ludwig licked his lips.

"It could make three types of food with different mystical effects.

"One food would completely cure infertility.”

"Don't need that," Lumian said in amusement. "What about the other two foods?"

Ludwig said professionally, "One grants potent self-healing abilities, though inferior to a Vampire's.

"And another..."

Chapter 741: “Appraisal”

741 “Appraisal”

"What else does it do?"

Lumian, seeing Ludwig pause as if he had concerns, pressed for an answer.

Ludwig stared at the piece of umbilical cord in front of Lumian and hesitated before replying, "It could somewhat alter your aura and lineage, making certain creatures without the necessary wisdom perceive you as a divine child of the ‘Great Mother."

Lumian's expression grew more solemn.

"So, you're saying it could actually integrate the Child of God's lineage into mine, even if it's almost negligible?"

And this would fool creatures of low intelligence or those acting purely on instinct?

"Yes." Ludwig nodded earnestly. "That bit of lineage won't change anything for you, and only creatures directly created by the ‘Great Mother’ or those who have received Her boons could sense it."

This doesn't sound very useful, but in special circumstances, it could be incredibly crucial.

Compared to curing infertility or enhancing self-healing, it has more room for imagination...

Lumian weighed his words and asked, "What are the side effects?"

Could it change my gender? After all, the Great Mother's' Child of God, Omebella, seems to have been female.

Ludwig's greedy gaze shifted from the umbilical cord back to Lumian, and he said regretfully, “For someone else, it might cause the ‘Great Mother's’ Child of God to start developing inside them, but not for you. You just have to worry about the ‘Great Mother’ setting Her sights on you, really watching you."

Lumian was silent for a good twenty seconds before slowly stowing Omebella's umbilical cord remains back into his Traveler's Bag.

He wasn't in a hurry to have Ludwig use the remains to create food with special effects, planning instead to consult Madam Magician's opinion before deciding.

He was willing to take risks, but he wasn't reckless.

"Can I have it now?" Ludwig looked eagerly at the matte Deprivation Bullet.

"One last question." Lumian smiled again, pulling out another item from his Traveler's Bag.

It was a small glass vial containing ancient bloodstain powder.

This came from Demon Warlock Burman, who was guided by a visitor from Resurrection Island named Harrison. He summoned a spirit named Arden from the depths of death and easily killed it, collecting its blood for a future ritual. Lumian got some of this bloodstain powder from his room.

Previously, Lumian had Franca conduct an investigation using Magic Mirror Divination, confirming that it truly came from the depths of the spirit world but yielded no further insights. Now, he wanted the Gourmet to taste it, to see if he could glean more important information.

He remembered clearly; the people of Resurrection Island claimed they could die and revive repeatedly, never aging, and the secret was in their control over the markings from the depths of death.

This might truly be a way to revive the dead.

"Is it edible?" Lumian maintained his smile as he pushed the glass vial with the ancient bloodstain powder towards Ludwig.

Ludwig carefully examined the powder for a while and then opened the bottle cap, touching it a few times with his fingers.

"Yes," he replied, not too eagerly.

"Then eat half of it." Lumian watched expectantly as Ludwig sprinkled a small amount of the ancient bloodstain powder into his mouth, leaving just a bit behind.

Ludwig chewed and tasted it for a while before starting his "gourmet review': "It has a rich aroma of death and eternal rest, originating from the depths of the spirit world.

"It comes from a man in his thirties, with traits of both the Mystery Pryer and Death pathways, in poor mental state, highly prone to emotional instability..."

Hearing this, Lumian raised an eyebrow.

This sounds like it's describing Demon Warlock Burman himself!

But this bloodstain powder is from the evil spirit Arden killed by Burman, right?

"From Intis's Winter Province?" Lumian confirmed his guess.

"Yes." Ludwig smacked his lips.

He shared other insights drawn from the bloodstain powder, each aligning with the Demon Warlock's situation.

This couldn't possibly mean that Burman summoned himself, killed himself, and then collected his own blood, could it? Lumian felt an eerie thrill.

The ancient bloodstain powder surely wasn't left by Burman due to some other issues, as both Franca and Ludwig had confirmed the blood was closely linked to death and the spirit world. Lumian had fought the Demon Warlock twice, believing him to still be alive at those times.

Using the method taught by Resurrection Island's Harrison, Burman summoned an evil spirit from the depths of death that was himself, er, his own marking?

He killed his own marking in the depths of death and found it very weak?

This is hard to believe...

What exactly does Harrison from Resurrection Island want, and what hidden truths lie behind the islanders' resurrections?

Lumian's thoughts raced, feeling that the mysteries of Resurrection Island were no less profound than the high-level events he had experienced before.

"Can you give it to me now?" Ludwig looked again at the Deprivation Bullet, very eagerly.

He handed back the small glass vial with the remaining bit of ancient bloodstain powder to Lumian.

"Yes." Lumian tossed the Deprivation Bullet to Ludwig.

Ludwig caught it, and stuffed the matte bullet into his mouth.

"Eating it directly?" Lumian asked with a chuckle, "Aren't you going to cook it first? Maybe mix a cocktail?"

Ludwig replied with a muffled voice, "No need for that, I can absorb it directly."

As he spoke, he sucked on the Deprivation Bullet like it was an ice pop, pulling it from his mouth again.

Compared to before, the bullet's matte metal casing had noticeably thinned, the intricate symbols etched into its surface now pitted and marked with teeth impressions.

Ludwig sucked on it three times, then finally, when the inside gunpowder was vaguely visible, he put the bullet in his mouth, chewed it with a crackling sound, and swallowed.

Lumian watched with a grimace, gaining a deeper understanding of the various changes hunger could bring.

After eating the Deprivation Bullet, Ludwig closed his eyes, savoring the taste and longing for more.

Lumian felt a pang of regret for the extraordinary bullet he had obtained from Jebus.

The Weakening Bullet, Deprivation Bullet, and Implosion Bullet had not served their intended purposes, while the Poison Bullet, Putrid Bullet, and Impregnating Bullet had been given to Franca.

"How do you feel?" Lumian inquired.

"Delicious, a familiar taste," Ludwig responded, half-closing his eyes.

After reflecting for a moment, he snapped his eyes open, their gaze sharp and alert.

"G-Godfather, can you quickly find out who made that bullet?”

You little rascal, that's the cult following your deity... But I can't blame you, you're brainless now.. And for an evil god, sacrificing any number of bestowed is worthwhile if it frees an angel from its bonds, returning to an Angel's belly is like returning to the deity’s heaven...

Lumian muttered silently to himself, nodded slightly in agreement, and slowly stood up, heading back to his bedroom.

Lying in bed, he stared at the dark ceiling adorned with a chandelier, feeling no trace of sleepiness despite the lingering scent of absinthe.

After staring silently for who knows how long, Lumian chuckled self-deprecatingly, trying to use Cogitation to help himself fall asleep.

He slowly visualized a crossed-out sphere that grew an eye in his mind.

His state settled, and drowsiness began to creep up.

Just then, Lumian was taken aback.

Cogitation was taught by his sister, and the Cogitation pattern was also casually drawn by her...

Lumian laughed softly to himself, his laughter shaking.

Minutes later, he indulged in reminiscing about his life in Cordu, including those interactions in the dream.

Even those, now looking back, carried a certain indescribable warmth.

As his thoughts wandered, Lumian remembered his sister's contracted creature, White Paper.

I wonder what state White Paper is in...

Strictly speaking, Aurore isn't completely dead, so her contract with White Paper should still exist...

Pity, contract creatures aren't messengers, only the contractee can summon them, otherwise, I'd summon White Paper to see its condition...

Using Aurore's words, seeing something left behind makes you think of that person? Or, liking someone so much you even like their pets?

Eh, it's not that I can't summon, since the Termiboros sealed inside me and I are one, Aurore's soul shard must be too, my summoning is as if Aurore is doing it... Thinking this, Lumian abruptly sat up.

In the darkness, he set up an altar and chanted the spell in the appropriate language: "I!

“I summon in my name: "The spirit that wanders about the unfounded, a friendly creature that can be subordinated, the weak ball that can telepathically connect with me..."

As the incantation echoed, the candlelight flickered gently, but nothing happened.

With Spirit Vision active, Lumian didn't see White Paper that had appeared in his dreams.

Sigh... He lay back down, disappointed.

As time ticked by, the sleepless Lumian suddenly became alert, feeling not the slightest fatigue.

It was six in the morning.

Lumian got up silently and began to clean up the altar.

Just then, a “doll" messenger in a light-gold dress emerged from the void, dropping a dark coin pouch and a folded square letter onto the table.

Is this the reward from Miss Magician? One of them is a Traveler's Bag? Lumian perked up, grabbing the dark coin pouch.

The "doll" messenger glanced at him, pinched her nose and said, "Drunkard! Your clothes stink!"

Uh... Lumian, who hadn't bathed or changed clothes last night, cleared his throat awkwardly in embarrassment and thanked her.

After the "doll" messenger left, he continued to check the rewards.

Chapter 742: Rewards

742 Rewards

That dark coin pouch was indeed a Traveler's Bag, containing three items: One was a sheepskin parchment of a brownish hue, another was a nearly invisible triangular spike, and the last was a mechanically intricate black revolver.

Lumian didn't rush to take out the rewards but instead unfolded the folded square letter.

“Prize Descriptions: “Ironblood Knight potion formula: See for yourself.

"Traveler's Bag: No need for further introduction, right?

‘Wintry Blade: A mystical item crafted from the dust of ancient vengeful spirits and residual spirituality.

“Any creature pierced by it, even without a visible wound, will fall into an icy rigidity and uncontrollable thoughts, as if possessed by a Wraith.

“Moreover, as the battle persists, the targets of the Wintry Blade, even without direct contact, will gradually find their thoughts slowing and movements becoming stiff and awkward.

"The downside is that the bearer gradually loses body heat, turning toward a necrotic state.

If this exceeds the necessary time limit, the process becomes irreversible.

“Placing it in the Traveler's Bag effectively avoids the negative effects of carrying it. You only need to ensure the battle doesn't exceed three hours.

Of course, as a Sequence 5 of the Hunter pathway, a burning Reaper, you could endure the negative effects for at least four hours without other countermeasures."

Reading this, Lumian immediately thought of the Eggers family's golden mask.

That mask could also turn the wearer into a dead being, providing protection for the spirit and consciousness to remain alive until the mask was removed, allowing the wearer to easily revert to their original state.

While wearing Death's golden mask, could I use the Wintry Blade completely unaffected?

I'm already an undead, so the gradual necrosis doesn't apply... No, wearing that golden mask for too long means real death once removed, resulting in instant death... Lumian found no exploitable loophole and sighed in disappointment.

He continued reading the last part of the letter: “Winter is Coming: This revolver was found at the site of a secret but failed ritual while investigating the Order of All Extinction cult. It was meant to be a collectible firearm, but it became a formidable weapon with a limited number of uses due to corruption during the ritual.

"The bullets it fires carry that corruption, producing two effects: “One ensures the bullet hits its target; even Saints, unless they use special abilities to dodge, will be hit. For beings below demigods, unless they switch with a substitute or the shooter is under an illusion and unable to aim, the shot will hit its intended target, and any substitutes will fail.

"Two, ensures death; even Saints, lacking certain traits and abilities, once hit, will suffer great trauma and gradually die. For beings below demigods, a hit means certain death.

"These two effects cannot coexist; a choice is made for each shot.

“The number of times it can still carry these effects is four. Once used up, Winter is Coming will revert to a normal revolver and begin rusting and deteriorating. However, until then, its normal shots will also spread ailments with each wound, with the type of disease being unpredictable.

“After each use of Winter is Coming, you must seek treatment from an Apothecary or Doctor within the following week, even if no symptoms appear.

"If not treated in time, you will inevitably contract a terminal illness that lower-sequence Apothecaries and Doctors cannot cure due to mystical factors.”

This is a weapon that can harm demigods...? After the Overseer Perle's painted self incident, are Miss Magician and her peers consciously providing us with items that can affect demigods, with bearable side effects? Doctor... Lumian half-turned his body, casting his gaze toward the door.

Lugano had already woken up and was preparing Ludwig's first breakfast.

After confirming the rewards, Lumian reached into the Traveler's Bag and pulled out the brownish sheepskin parchment, written on in dark red ink:

“Potion name: Iron-blooded Knight; "Sequence: 4;

"Main ingredient: Magma Giant's core, Stone of Catastrophe;
“Supplementary ingredients: 80 milliliters of boiling magma, 20 grams of flora powder corrupted by a Stone of Catastrophe, 20 grams of soil soaked in soldier's blood from a large battlefield, one acorn; “Ritual: Form a team of at least 30 people, cultivate deep comradeship with them, allowing them to grow stronger together with perfect synergy, understanding the leader's intent through eye contact and gestures, nearly as one entity, then have them perform the ritual (the stronger and more cohesive the team, the better the ritual's effect)."

While reading, Lumian felt a strong burning sensation from the dark red inked words and thought he could smell rust and blood.

Phew... Lumian had just finished reading the Iron-blooded Knight potion formula and quickly set it down on the table, feeling as if he was sinking into a hell of flames and blood.

Such a strong mental impact...

Is it because the Sequence 4 potion formula inherently possesses such traits, or because it was written by an Angel, or perhaps a combination of both?

Boiling magma... Does this mean drinking magma directly, and if you don't advance, you die?

Lumian memorized the Iron-blooded Knight potion formula in his mind, occasionally opening the parchment to ensure there were no mistakes.

…

In the morning, at 702 Apartment, 9 Rue Orosai.

Lumian placed the new Traveler's Bag and the two weapons on the coffee table and went into detail about the latter two.

“Only three items?" Franca asked, puzzled.

Lumian chuckled.

"There's also the Iron-blooded Knight Sequence 4 potion formula for the Hunter pathway, but that's meaningless for you."

“Who says so? At Sequence 4, a Demoness can switch to the Hunter pathway!" Franca retorted, her eyes sparkling.

She almost said that before joining the Demoness Sect, her dream was to obtain the Iron-blooded Knight potion formula to turn herself back into a male.

Before Lumian could respond, Franca eagerly pleaded, "May I see it? It's not like you'll lose anything" This way, if I become a Demoness of

Affliction and something forces me out of the Demoness Sect, I could consider advancing to Iron-blooded Knight!

“Sure.” Lumian replied nonchalantly.

He knew what Franca truly desired.

He then took the brownish parchment out of his Traveler's Bag.

Seeing this, Jenna asked, curious yet hopeful, "May I have a look too?"

This was a potion formula that could unlock the gates of godhood!

"Uh..." Franca turned to Jenna, wanting to stop her but finding no suitable excuse.

Is it really appropriate for a female Demoness to look at the Iron-blooded Knight potion formula?

Lumian didn't help Franca dissuade Jenna, and freely unfolded the brown parchment, placing it on the coffee table surface, and casually cautioned, “For every paragraph, take a look then close your eyes and rest for a few seconds—it has a strong mental impact."

After a while, Franca, Jenna, and Anthony felt as though they had been roasted by a fire all night long, their sweat long since dried.

"It requires at least thirty people... That's a bit difficult," Franca said, empathizing with Lumian's challenge.

Lumian chuckled.

The stronger the team members, the better the effect. And if you have members with godhood in the team, the number required can be significantly reduced."

Franca and Jenna thought of a name simultaneously and said in unison, "Ludwig?"

“I'm trying to teach him." Lumian gave a godfatherly smile.

Franca said no more and turned her attention to the three items: the Wintry Blade, Winter is Coming, and the Traveler's Bag.

She generously smiled and said, "Jenna, Anthony, you pick first. Just don't leave the Traveler's Bag for me—I already have one."

She was worried about lacking a powerful or special effect item. Both the Wintry Blade and Winter is Coming perfectly met her needs—any would do. As an Assassin, her hidden blade was a normal weapon that could rely on Witch powers to attach black flames, while the Cannon Gun was akin to a portable mini-cannon, nothing special.

Anthony immediately looked at Jenna, signaling her to choose first.

This was not out of courtesy—he wanted the Traveler's Bag, and he wanted the other two items as well.

Jenna looked at the Hypnotist, lacking direct attack capability, then at Franca, whose gaze moved back and forth between the Wintry Blade and Winter is Coming. She picked up the ark coin pouch and said with a smile, “I‘ve always wanted a Traveler's Bag."

This wasn't a lie—many Witch spells required casting materials, and some items, even just by carrying them, could have negative effects, which could be barely avoided by placing them in the Traveler's Bag, such as the Beyonder characteristic of the Dream Stealer.

Once Jenna took the Traveler's Bag, Anthony quickly made his decision.

“I’ll take Winter is Coming.”

Without a Traveler's Bag, carrying the Wintry Blade would be a significant burden.

Franca looked at the nearly transparent triangular spike and smiled broadly.

“I’ll see if I can have it made into a hidden blade."

These are all suitable rewards for us. Madam Judgment and company are so thoughtful...

Lumian watched his companions distribute the rewards, nodding thoughtfully.

That evening, back in the rented apartment, he met Madam Magician again.

This Major Arcana card holder spoke bluntly, “Head to the Blue Avenger now."

Chapter 743: Exploration

743 Exploration

On the dark expanse of the sea, the antiquated Blue Avenger bobbed gently with the undulations of the waves, enveloped by an unending mist.

Lumian once again came face to face with Alger, the Stormbringer.

The bearer of The Hanged Man card stood on deck, his deep blue hair a wild mess, seemingly under constant assault from the sea winds. His attire had changed from his previous sailor's garb to a captain's coat adorned with golden embroidery on a blue background.

"Explore it yourself," Alger said to Lumian, who was standing beside Magician, nodding firmly.

"I don't have any wisdom to impart that would help; if I did, I'd have already uncovered all the secrets of this ghost ship."

These matters had been confirmed by Madam Magician, leaving Lumian without doubts. He

thanked Alger and began walking forward, his steps echoing on the wooden deck.

He triggered the residual aura of the Blood Emperor in his right palm without hesitation, but felt no ominous sensation spill forth.

Instead, his palm felt ice-cold, while deep within was a pain like fire scorching his flesh.

Lumian lifted his right hand and noticed that the faint red scar had brightened slightly, but the skin covering it had turned paler, more deathlike.

I wonder whether the Underworld Daoist's seal would prevent activating the key special characteristics of this ghost ship... Lumian circled the Blue Avenger's cabin with a mix of anxiety and trepidation.

During his exploration, he encountered no attacks from ropes or any other disturbances.

It seems the residual aura of the Blood Emperor still serves some purpose, or else it wouldn't be this tranquil... Lumian muttered to himself as he stepped into the cabin, exploring each room in turn.

The Hanged Man, Alger, did not follow but stayed at the front of the deck, watching from afar.

As Lumian's figure disappeared deeper into the ship, Magician raised her right hand and drew a circle in mid-air with her index finger.

A sprinkle of brilliant starlight emerged, initially forming a transparent crystal orb, then expanding into a circular, dreamlike veil.

On the veil, Lumian's figure appeared, wandering around the captain's cabin, occasionally extending his right palm to touch various objects.

"There should be some findings," Magician stated with a charlatan-like tone.

The Hanged Man nodded slightly, not asking what might be found or what changes it could bring, since even Magician could not divine a certain future, and Ma'am Hermit could only see vague images.

After Mr. Fool's slumber, the Major Arcana card holders had explored the Blue Avenger multiple times but had not unraveled the ghost ship's core secrets or located the treasures left by the Tudor dynasty.

With the Apprentice pathway's speciality, Magician only managed to help The Hanged Man uncover other secrets, unable to reach the deepest level.

Mr. Star's explanation was:

"The Blue Avenger is not only influenced by the Lawyer pathway's Distortion authority but also possesses notable traits of errors, spatial transposition, and grafting.

And this aligned with the actual circumstances of the Tudor dynasty: Under Blood Emperor Alista Tudor, among the five great nobles, Amon was the Marauder, the King of Angels of the Error pathway, later becoming a true god; the ancestor of the Abraham family, Mr. Door, was the King of Angels of the Apprentice pathway; and the ancestor of the Antigonus family was the King of Angels of the Seer pathway. The Jacob and Tamara families had one Angel from the Error pathway and one who had been an Angel of the Apprentice pathway.

They clearly possessed strong abilities to utilize errors, alter positions, and graft spaces.

If not ensuring the preservation of the Blue Avenger and its treasures unharmed and intact, Magician felt she could unravel the ghost ship's deepest secrets, but doing so would reduce the Blue Avenger to irreparable fragments.

Under the watchful eyes of two Major Arcana card holders, Lumian searched every room on the upper deck without triggering any anomalies.

He intermittently came across seven or eight sailors, all instructed by the captain not to interfere with his exploration.

Approaching the stairs leading to the lower decks, Lumian glanced down into the pitch-black abyss below, maintaining the stimulated aura of the Blood Emperor as he descended the creaking stairs.

As he walked, he suddenly detected an unusual scent.

He had been descending for thirty to forty seconds, which under normal circumstances should have brought him to the lower deck's floor.

The distance between the Blue Avenger's upper and lower decks couldn't possibly be so vast that a Reaper couldn't traverse it in dozens of seconds!

To this, Lumian responded not with alarm, but with elation.

An anomaly was exactly what he needed!

Had there been no anomaly, it would have meant the sealed residual aura of the Blood Emperor could no longer function properly!

Lumian exhaled, calming his nerves while maintaining a steady but unhurried pace, continuing the creaky descent into the darkness.

After an indeterminate amount of time, he saw no more wooden steps ahead; his feet now touched cold, black stone slabs radiating a metallic chill.

Have I arrived? Just as this thought flickered through Lumian's mind, his vision was flooded with blazing white light.

He saw a barrage of white-hot flame spears flying densely toward him, obscuring everything above.

It was like facing an army, each soldier hurling a flame spear from their hands.

There was nowhere to hide, no way to dodge.

Instinctively, Lumian was about to swap places with his shadow, hoping to use this rapid ability to survive the initial volley and then seek a chance to teleport away.

But just then, he had an idea—an extremely daring idea.

Lumian's expression took on a tinge of madness as he faced the overwhelming barrage of flame spears, not using any abilities and not even attempting to dodge.

He straightened his back and thrust forward his right palm.

The right palm, sealed by the Underworld Daoist and carrying the residual aura of the Blood Emperor—both were fully activated.

The dense, rain-like barrage of white-hot flame spears instantly froze in mid-air.

They stopped, neither advancing nor falling.

Seeing this, Lumian let out an uncontrollable sigh of relief.

He had made the right bet!

Gradually, the white-hot flame spears began to extinguish, slowly fading until they completely disappeared.

Before Lumian could take a closer look, clusters of bright flames lit up on both sides.

They resembled wall-mounted lamps, piercing the dense darkness and revealing the surroundings.

He found himself in a deep, wide hall that was smaller than he had imagined.

When the white-hot flame spears were hurled at him like a flock of endless crows, it felt as though he stood on an ancient battlefield, vast enough to be measured in kilometers. However, the hall before him was merely the size of the grand prayer hall of the Saint Vive Cathedral.

At a glance, Lumian's gaze froze, and his heart seemed to stop beating.

At the far end of the hall, there stood a colossal throne made of black iron.

The surface of the throne bore patches of red, either from the corrosion of ages or from old bloodstains.

There was a figure on the throne!

This figure was giant-like, draped in a deep red ceremonial robe and wearing an iron-black crown, with its right elbow resting on the armrest, supporting its bowed head.

The flickering blood-red long hair draped down, hiding the figure's face.

Lumian was familiar with this figure; he had seen it at the Samaritan Women's Spring, though the attire was somewhat different now.

It was the figure of Blood Emperor Alista Tudor!

However, this figure lacked the terror, violence, and madness seen at the Samaritan Women's Spring, devoid of the aura of war and destruction, and the tangible oppressiveness and sense of conquest; if it weren't visible, Lumian would have believed there was nothing on the iron throne.

A phantom? Lumian closed his eyes, relying solely on his other senses and intuition to feel.

In this perception, there was nothing above the iron throne marked with red stains.

Lumian's heartbeat gradually normalized, and he reopened his eyes to look at the iron throne.

The figure remained motionless.

Lumian resisted the urge to observe any weaknesses in the figure or to activate the Eye of Calamity. Instead, he shifted his gaze and surveyed the rest of the hall.

Below the nine steps leading up to the iron throne were five mottled stone chairs—two on the left and three on the right.

Why couldn't there be one more, for symmetry? Lumian couldn't help but criticize to himself.

He knew these five stone chairs likely represented the five great nobles of the Tudor dynasty.

These ancient, mottled chairs appeared smashed by someone; some were completely split by cracks, some shattered into countless pieces yet barely holding their original shape, some had broken backrests, some were missing their seats, and others seemed melted by intense flames as if burnt for a long time.

Had there been a battle here? Lumian tried to find corresponding marks on the black stone floor, the giant supporting columns, and the surrounding walls, but found nothing.

No objects either... Weren't there supposed to be treasures from the Tudor dynasty hidden here? Had they been stolen? Hmm, Termiboros had said earlier that if I'm not of high enough level, forcibly exploring the Blue Avenger could lead to the resurrection of Alista Tudor within me... This suggests there should be something here, or some arrangement... Lumian started walking forward again.

All the while, he kept his eyes on the figure on the iron throne, observing every detail.

Suddenly, he saw a pair of eyes, iron-black and cold.

The figure on the iron throne slowly raised its head.

Chapter 744: Approach

744 Approach

The moment Lumian saw those iron-black eyes, his mind went completely blank.

When he came to, he was shocked to find himself walking step by step toward the massive iron throne without any intention to do so.

He could feel his body trembling uncontrollably, yet he was powerless to stop his legs from moving.

It seemed as though his body was no longer his own, obeying unknown commands and directed by someone else!

This scene, coupled with the figure on the iron throne possibly being Blood Emperor Alista Tudor, instantly reminded Lumian of two past incidents: One was at the Samaritan Women's Spring, where both he and Hela lost consciousness due to the violent reactions of the Blood Emperor's apparition, walking back to the edge of the spring as if they were puppets being manipulated or soldiers absolutely obeying orders.

The other was in the depths of the Red Swan Castle's underground labyrinth, where he, Albus, and Elros lost consciousness after hearing a phantom roar from Vermonda Sauron in Fourth Epoch Trier, and they all wandered away from the core area, each towards a different wax sculptors.

Could this be a similar situation now? Is this a capability at the Hunter's angelic level? Lumian forced himself to calm down to find a way out of his current predicament.

Compared to those two times, at least his consciousness recovered quickly this time!

Right, why did my consciousness awaken first this time, while my body still accepts control?

Is the figure of Alista Tudor here weaker and less powerful, or is there another reason?

Perhaps this anomaly holds the key to overcoming the control.

Lumian strained to extend his will towards his limbs, trying to regain control over them.

This had some effect; his steps toward the iron throne began to slow.

He also took the opportunity to get a clearer look at the figure of Alista Tudor on the throne: The Blood Emperor had a stern face with sharp, chiseled features, resolute lips, a prominent nose, and long hair gleaming with a faint blood-light, his iron-black eyes cold yet filled with ultimate madness.

Suddenly, Lumian felt an urge to submit, to give up resistance.

This impulse did not fade quickly but instead swelled rapidly, filling his mind.

No, I can't resist...

There's no way to resist...

Submit, submission will grant everything…

If He becomes angry, I will be destroyed, and Franca and Jenna will also be destroyed…

Give up, give up, kneel down and beg for forgiveness, accept the command...

Such thoughts surged in Lumian's mind, turning into violent waves that battered his clarity, rationality, and will.

He clenched his teeth, as if any relaxation would break the final dam, and the food would completely drown his will and soul.

His previously slowed steps quickened again.

On the deck of the Blue Avenger.

Magician and The Hanged Man were both staring at the dreamlike veil suspended in midair.

Against a backdrop of starlight, Lumian's figure on the translucent curtain had already become blurred, the surrounding darkness rendering everything else invisible.

This obscurity compared to the previous clarity indicated that something unusual was happening.

The eyes of Magician and The Hanged Man saw Lumian's body growing increasingly rigid, yet his pace quickening.

They also noticed his black hair slowly lengthening, tinted with a blood-like glow.

"Something's off," The Hanged Man Alger, said, turning to Madam Magician beside him.

Magician nodded slightly, preparing to pull out a Sealed Artifact.

This would help her precisely locate Lumian and allow her direct entry into the hidden extradimensional space.

In the dim surroundings, Lumian walked forward with a blank, rigid expression.

Yet his soul was struggling, crying out in pain:

I can't give up...

J mustn't give up...

If1 lose my resolve, I will no longer be myself...

Dogsh*t...

Son of a sow...

…

Lumian exerted all his strength, but felt an increasing desire to submit.

Suddenly, the dam holding his will collapsed, and surrender and submission completely overtook him.

Lumian's mind went blank again.

In this state, he had no concept of how much time had passed, until a deathly cold and rot-like pain shot through his right palm.

Death... cold...

Rot... pain...

Pain...

Lumian was jolted awake, suddenly regaining his thoughts and a measure of control over his body.

Before him was not the nine-stepped dais or the huge iron throne marked with red, but a mirror.

An antique full-length mirror, framed with elaborate silver designs!

The mirror reflected Lumian's figure.

In the mirror, Lumian saw his face contorted with pain, looking like he might give up at any moment, while his facial contours slowly sharpened and his nose became unnaturally prominent.

At the same time, his black hair grew inch by inch, dyed with a bloody glow, and his blue eyes turned colder, edging toward iron-black.

Jam turning into Alista Tudor...

This realization dawned on Lumian.

Without thinking further, while his body still somewhat obeyed his commands, he immediately lunged to the side, trying to escape the reflection of the silver mirror.

A dive followed by a roll quickly took him out of the mirror's reflective range.

The next second, he heard a phantom roar, a mad scream.

His mind blanked out again.

As his thoughts gradually returned, he found himself still crouched on the ground, the endpoint of his roll.

His body hadn't moved toward the mirror on its own, but it couldn't stop shaking, as if his blood had frozen.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

It seemed as if something inside the mirror was madly pounding, making the mirror clatter as if it were about to shatter and release a monster.

And with each bang against the mirror, Lumian's mind felt the impact, over and over.

This gripped him with fear, nearly solidifying his thoughts.

After a while, the pounding inside the mirror gradually subsided, and the surroundings became eerily quiet.

Lumian's body stopped shaking, and he began to understand and reflect on his current situation and recent ordeal: If had really approached that full-length mirror, and the reflection had completed the transformation, would that mean that Blood Emperor Alista Tudor would be resurrected within me?

But as long as I'm not reflected in that mirror, and my image isn't cast upon it, the impact will be minimal, and neither my will nor my body will lose command...

Is the trigger for this transformation entering the range of the full-length mirror's reflection?

It seems calm now...

Lumian slowly supported himself up, cautiously observing his surroundings.

He realized he was not in a somber hall, but in a bizarre starlight-formed space where the floor appeared semi-transparent, revealing endless darkness below, and no dome above, only twinkling yet ethereal stars.

On either side were doors of starlight, erect in the darkness, forming a wide, somber corridor that ended with the silver full-body mirror.

At this moment, Lumian had reached deep into this corridor, only about fifteen meters from the mirror.

Was the hall I saw earlier, the stone chair, the iron throne, and the figure of the Blood Emperor all illusions?

Was their purpose to make me submit?

No, if I had been reflected in the mirror, the one emitting the roar I just heard would have achieved their goal...

In a flash of insight, Lumian guessed: Perhaps, the illusions I saw earlier—the iron throne, the figure of Tudor, the broken stone chair— were resonances caused by the residual aura of the Blood Emperor within me and that silver full-length mirror, which also triggered a response trom the Underworld Daoist's brand, helping me briefly escape the controlled state and the mirror's reflective range.

Thinking this, Lumian raised his right hand, looking at his palm.

There, the pale red scar was vibrant as if just entered into his body, while the pale skin around it showed clear signs of decay, leaking a pale yellow fluid, and revealing the bones beneath.

This preliminary confirmed Lumian's suspicion.

He once again turned his gaze toward the silver full-length mirror facing him.

Having dealt with the Mirror People multiple times, he slightly furrowed his brows: Does the Blood Emperor want to use that mirror and His residual aura within me for resurrection?

There must be something hidden inside that mirror.

The Blood Emperor's s resurrection setup actually involves the mirror world...

Yeah, that’s not unusual, whether it's the special mirror world itself or the Mirror People from that world, they are all related to this Blood Emperor's Fourth Epoch Trier...

I had thought the special mirror world was a relic of the War of the Four Emperors, but Moran Avigny from the Tamara family said their connection to the special mirror world was established before the War of the Four Emperors...

Dammit, that special mirror world couldn't have been created by the Blood Emperor, could it?

How many problems has He left for this world?

As expected of the Blood Emperor known for His madness…

But clearly, the special mirror world can't avoid the Primordial Demoness...

Could it be that the Demoness Sect secretly lured the Tamara family, trying to subtly influence the Blood Emperor through the special mirror world?

In the end, it was used by the Blood Emperor?

Fourth Epoch Trier is indeed full of mysteries...

As Lumian pondered, he suddenly understood why Termiboros had initially prevented him from exploring the Blue Avenger.

To explore here, one would need either the Underworld Daoist's brand to seal the Blood Emperor's residual essence or some corresponding artifact or authority to counteract that domination; otherwise, one would become a puppet of Alista Tudor, allowing Him to resurrect within.

For Termiboros, this was definitely not a good thing.

Lumian's gaze shifted, focusing on the doors of starlight.

Did they represent different treasures?

Chapter 745: Three Items

745 Three Items

Having checked his physical condition, Lumian slowly moved along the wall of the spacious corridor.

During this, he almost cleared his mind, not thinking or analyzing, focusing solely on whether he would be caught by the silver full-length mirror at the end of the deep corridor.

Finally, following his instincts, Lumian stopped.

He hoped to use the Law of Beyonder Characteristics Convergence and a Fate Appropriator's sensitivity to fate to find the most "suitable" room among the doors of starlight.

There might be high-level items from the Hunter's path there, even the main ingredient for the Iron-blooded Knight potion!

Looking at the translucent door formed by brilliant starlight beside him, Lumian, in a hushed tone, asked, "Termiboros, do you think there's great danger inside?"

After the ordeal with the School of Truth, Lumian grew more cautious and vigilant towards the Angel of Inevitability, but that didn't mean he wouldn't seek His opinion under the right circumstances and conditions, as Termiboros could still offer valuable advice.

As it was now, with Madam Magician outside, Termiboros had little hope of breaking His seal; his death or mutation would only worsen His situation, likely prompting Him to warn of any danger.

Lumian couldn't see changes in his own fate, but Termiboros could!

Termiboros remained silent, not answering Lumian's question.

Unfazed, Lumian placed his right hand, still pulsing with the Blood Emperor's residual essence, on the handle of the starlight door before him.

He slowly turned the handle, poised to push the door open, waiting for any reaction from Termiboros.

The door of starlight gradually opened, and Termiboros gave no warning.

No response is also a response! It means the danger inside is bearable, or likely manageable...

Lumian calmly pushed the door wide open and walked into the room dominated by shadows.

Suddenly, a bluish-white blaze lit up, and an iron-black sword engulfed in terrifying flames struck down towards his head.

Prepared for such surprises, Lumian quickly activated the black mark on his shoulder and teleported to the side of the room.

Bang!

The black sword, covered in bluish-white flames, struck the translucent starlight floor, leaving a deep crack.

Inside the crack, some of the starlight melted, appearing like flowing magma.

Using the sparks, Lumian saw who his assailant was.

It was a nearly 2.5-meter tall suit of iron-black armor, the interior of its visor a swath of darkness, as if uninhabited, with no fiery glow of an undead's eyes.

With a swift motion, the iron-black armor turned and faced Lumian, raising the large sword covered in bluish-white flames once more.

Before it could strike, Lumian's blue eyes had turned iron-black.

He spotted the weak points in the half-giant armor, the pale-white spots at its joints.

As the black sword struck with its fiery blade, Lumian teleported away again.

With a bang, the bluish-white flames scattered, and Lumian's figure outlined behind the iron-black armor.

He leaped up, his right fist igniting with white flames.

A resounding clang echoed as Lumian punched the joint between the helmet and body armor of the iron-black armor.

Cull!

After landing the punch, Lumian immediately teleported away, dodging a waist-high slash from the half-turned iron-black armor.

In this manner, using the high mobility of teleport, he continuously appeared behind his target, striking the same spot with Cull, never overreaching, completing a single hit with each teleport.

Clang! Clang! Clang!

After five consecutive Culls, the iron-black armor stood frozen in place.

Gnarly cracks spread rapidly from the joint between its helmet and body armor, soon covering its entire body.

Crack!

The iron-black armor completely shattered, its metal fragments falling like rain onto the starlight-condensed floor, making a pattering sound.

Clang. The large sword covered in bluish-white flames followed, hitting the ground.

It has no intelligence, moves stiffly, and is stronger than a Sequence 6 but weaker than a Sequence 5. However, that sword hits incredibly hard. If it struck me, unless I substituted with an animated shadow, I would've been killed instantly or lost limbs. That's only because it didn't hit my torso. And yes, it's very durable, even more so than the Guardians I encountered at the Dream Festival, Lumian mused, glancing at the shattered armor while using the remaining light from the black sword to scan the room for other dangers.

The room was quite empty, featuring only an altar-like stone platform with a small, transparent glass bottle on it, containing a semi-solid yellowish-red substance, topped with a thick black wick.

A mystical candle? Lumian speculated roughly. I wonder what it's used for...

By now, he was fairly certain there were no other surprises, and he turned his attention back to the pile of fragments from the shattered iron-black armor.

Among the debris, he found a peculiar piece of leather.

The leather was about the size of half a towel, creamy white, and finely textured, appearing so enticing that even from a distance, Lumian felt it must have belonged to a beautiful woman.

Human skin? he muttered, frowning as he approached.

He didn't immediately pick up the black sword, whose flames had mostly died down, or the alluring piece of leather. Instead, he drew a dagger from his Traveler's Bag.

Using the dagger, Lumian picked out the leather, holding it up before him.

The first thing he saw was a few words in ancient Hermes script:

“Despair…

"Sequence 4..."

Suddenly, Lumian's breathing grew belabored, his head spun, and his physical condition visibly worsened.

He quickly looked away and used the dagger to lift the delicate white leather, stuffing it into his Traveler's Bag.

His discomfort gradually subsided.

A potion formula for the Demoness of Despair? Lumian mused over what he had just seen.

And the leather it's written on was peeled right off a Demoness of Despair, hence its special and dangerous nature? Truly a relic from the Tudor dynasty, harboring such items...

Lost in thought, Lumian’s gaze shifted to the black sword, whose bluish-white flame was dimming, no longer as brilliant as before.

He pondered for a moment, deciding not to risk determining the item's abilities, effects, and negative impacts just yet. Instead, he placed it into the Traveler's Bag, setting it aside in a corner clear of other items.

Using the same method, Lumian also packed the strange candle in the glass bottle into the Traveler's Bag.

He planned to consult Madam Magician about these items once outside, rather than experimenting on his own!

After ensuring the room had nothing else of interest, Lumian returned through the door of starlight to the deep, spacious corridor.

Just as he was about to continue using the Law of Beyonder Characteristics Convergence and a Fate Appropriator's sensitivity to fate to choose the next room to explore, a faint, distant voice suddenly echoed in his ears: “For you, the other rooms are too dangerous..."

This was the voice of Madam Magician.

Mr. Hanged Man and her are indeed watching... Did her words mean that the exploration is to pause here? This confirmation steadied Lumian considerably.

He thought for a few seconds, deciding to do one more thing before leaving this extradimensional space.

Slowly, bit by bit, he circled towards the silver full-length mirror at the end of the corridor, his focus intense, ready to turn and leave at the first word of discouragement from Madam Magician.

Until he reached the side of the silver full-length mirror, Madam Magician had not spoken out to stop him.

Lumian took a deep breath and carefully moved his right palm towards the front of the silver full-length mirror.

He didn't know whether the mirror would react again when reflecting only a palm.

As his palm moved slowly, Lumian’s nerves were taut.

Finally, he touched the surface of the mirror, feeling its brittle yet firm coldness.

Immediately after, Lumian activated a power from his contract with Bloody Jack—Mirror Markl He wanted to test whether he could still sense the mark left in this hidden space once he returned to the outside world.

Blood seeped from his palm into the mirror, forming an inverted image.

While waiting, Lumian suddenly had a thought: Did my recent encounters stack on negative effects from the Mirror Mark contract? This does indeed pertain to mirror-related anomalies and bizarre dangers...

In the blink of an eye, Lumian had set the Mirror Mark.

Having done this, he began to retrace his steps, avoiding areas where the silver full-length mirror could reflect him, and walked up the wooden stairs.

Before long, Lumian's path brightened as he saw the wall lamps on either side of the ship's cabin and the dim firelight.

He had returned to the Blue Avenger.

Upon reaching the front deck, before Lumian could ask Madam Magician to retrieve the three items from his Traveler's Bag and perform their appraisal, he heard the Major Arcana card holder chuckle and say, "As expected of a Hunter with the status of a fake Angel and Tudor's remnant aura. You obtained three items closely related to Hunters and Demonesses in an instant.

“That sword is what you were hoping for—it's made from the Iron-blooded Knight Beyonder characteristic.”

Chapter 746: Corpse Wax Candle

746 Corpse Wax Candle

A mystical item made from an Iron-blooded Knight Beyonder characteristic? The Law of Beyonder Characteristics Convergence sure is handy... A Fate Appropriator's sensitivity to fate must have contributed a bit... Or, could it be the result of some arrangement? Lumian was first surprised, then felt the aftereffects of a traumatic bestowment.

Madam Magician seemed to sense his thoughts and chuckled, saying, “I don't know if this is a bestowment from fate, but even if it is, it's the kind we were hoping for and can certainly accept.”

Lumian silently nodded.

Mr. Hanged Man, speaking calmly, said, "Don't overcomplicate your thoughts, just consider two things: “First, you now have no ability to escape this arrangement. Sometimes, what you think of as resistance or rebellion might actually be a predetermined part of the process, and Mr. Fool's Angels aren't always available to protect you. Remember, accepting reality isn't a sign of weakness; finding opportunities within such realities is a true act of courage.

“Second, maximize the benefits that this bestowment of fate brings. Work hard to improve yourself. This doesn't mean giving up but rather tests your wisdom and determination.

When you sense danger or anything unusual, remember, we will always stand by you.

Remember, Mr. Fool can interfere with those plans, but as you know, He isn't fully awake and can't frequently provide protection—only at critical moments.”

After listening intently, Lumian slowly nodded, finding a different kind of resonance and persuasiveness in hearing these ideas voiced by someone else.

Mr. Hanged Man thought for a moment, then added, "What you need to be most wary of is the attempt to resurrect the Blood Emperor through you. You must be extra cautious in similar situations going forward.”

"I'll remember that, thank you, Mr. Hanged Man," Lumian replied sincerely.

Madam Magician then steered the conversation back on track.

“You can take out the items you've gathered, and I'll help you evaluate their powers and any negative effects.”

With the promise of support, Lumian reached into the Traveler's Bag and grasped the hilt of the dark, iron-black broadsword.

Suddenly, his inner worries, like clouds in the sky, were scattered by a terrifying wind, vanishing in an instant.

Why fear a bestowment from fate?

Why fear the arrangements of the gods?

To hell with them all!

May they all go to hell!

In that moment, Lumian was filled with courage, feeling as though he could swing his broadsword at the True Creator Himself if He appeared before him right then.

He drew the black broadsword, its flames extinguished yet still radiating intense heat, and handed it to Madam Magician.

Madam Magician looked at him, took the sword, and joked, "How about we call it the ‘Sword of Courage’?"

“The Sword of Courage..." Lumian paused for a moment.

As the black broadsword left his grasp and was taken by Madam Magician, he shivered violently.

What was I thinking?

I nearly blasphemed His sacred name...

How could I believe I was capable of deicide?

In a moment of fright, Lumian's eyes returned to the black broadsword in Madam Magician's hands.

Could it be its negative influence?

Could it really inspire the courage to commit deicide?

Stars sparkled in Madam Magician's eyes as she gazed at the sword and explained, "This sword fills its bearer with courage, ensuring they are not knocked down by fear or paralyzed by fright. If you had held this sword earlier, even if you were ultimately ‘conquered, you could have endured a bit longer.

“It's extremely durable and sharp, capable of blocking direct attacks from demigods and significantly impacting their defenses. It can also enable you to perform Cull at the level of an lron-blooded Knight, but this will consume a great deal of your spirituality, roughly two-thirds of it in one go.

“The sword can also absorb half of the damage for you. That is, even if you fail to block an attack and suffer a fatal wound, it can reduce the severity of that wound from fatal to grave.

“Each strike carries high-temperature flames, and depending on your will, these flames can spread from your weapon to your enemy's body upon contact, and each strike can cause massive explosion.

"If the sword is coated with your target's blood or if they've been scorched by its flames, you can throw it up to five kilometers into the sky. It will wrap itself in flames, fly toward the target like a live artillery shell, lock on, and then crash down, creating a violent explosion that can destroy everything in a typical public square.

“The maximum range is five kilometers, and it won't return to you on its own; you'll need to retrieve it.

"There are two drawbacks. First, excessive courage is a lethal poison. Human fear and apprehension are among the key reasons humans have survived to this era. A person who only knows courage and not fear will likely lose their ability to judge and analyze, leading to a swift demise.

"Second, it needs companions. You'll need to prepare at least thirty ordinary broadswords to place around it to complete the sealing process. Otherwise, within about fifteen minutes, it will start attacking everyone nearby indiscriminately, including you. Don't think about using the residual aura of the Blood Emperor to avoid or deter this, as this sword doesn't have living characteristics; it's a manifestation of its destructive godhood.

"It also constantly emits high temperatures, causing ordinary broadswords around it to gradually melt. So, you'll need to regularly replace its companions. Similarly, for you as the Reaper, it means enduring a progressively intensifying burn injury.

"That's about it. If you don't mind, we can call it the ‘Sword of Courage.”

Lumian nodded and replied, "Can the negative effects of being filled with courage be avoided if it's carried in the Traveler's Bag?"

"Yes," Madam Magician nodded gently.

Lumian pondered further and asked, "In the room where I found this sword, there was only one piece of armor, an altar, and two other items. Why didn't it destroy those things?"

"That suit of armor is its companion,” Madam Magician replied promptly.

Lumian did not inquire further and began to consider how to use the Sword of Courage: / must fully assess the situation and make the right judgment before drawing the sword...

This isn't a commander's scepter; it's a bugle for the charge...

/ts use must not exceed fifteen minutes...

While thinking, Lumian reached out and took hold of the Sword of Courage.

In the next second, he felt he didn't need to overthink: Fear of this, fear of that—all of that only leads to failure!

One should not be overly cautious or indecisive, just do it!

What is there to fear?

Madam Magician reached into the void and, from nowhere, produced dozens of broadswords with slight variations in design, letting them fly towards Lumian.

After placing the Sword of Courage among these broadswords and stuffing it back into the Traveler's Bag, Lumian snapped back to his senses.

He couldn't help but silently scoff at himself.

An Ascetic's abilities don't work in this case...

Then, he took out a piece of pristine, fine leather and a half-solid, pale yellowish-red candle housed in a transparent glass vial.

Stars again twinkled in Madam Magician's eyes as she took the two items and examined them for several seconds.

“This is indeed the potion formula of the Demoness of Despair, but the human skin carrying it comes from an ancient Demoness of Despair and contains strong, mystically powerful viruses, bacteria, and fungi. It causes those who touch or gaze upon it to gradually contract various diseases. If contact and observation don't exceed ten seconds, recovery will occur on its own,” Madam Magician briefly explained about the pristine leather.

Her gaze then shifted to the peculiar candle.

“This is a corpse wax candle, made from the corpse oils of an Iron-blooded Knight and a Demoness of Despair mixed with other substances.”

Corpse wax candle... And from two demigods' corpse oils... Although Lumian had seen much of the world, he still found the candle somewhat eerie and terrifying when he looked at it again.

“What is its use?" he asked, more concerned with this issue while feeling strangely uneasy.

Madam Magician deliberated before responding, "Once lit and used in pacts and Cogitation, it should probably be paired with a ritual, but the specific details and ultimate effect are unclear. Hmm, you have the residual aura of the Blood Emperor, maybe you can try it directly without a ritual.”

Lumian didn't hesitate. "Alright, I'll try it now."

With an Angel and Saint watching over him, if anything went wrong, they could save him.

Why wait to try it alone when he got back?

Neither Magician nor The Hanged Man stopped him.

Lumian took the corpse wax candle from the glass jar and sat cross-legged on the deck.

Snap-his fingers produced a blazing white flame, and he immediately lit the black wick of the corpse wax candle.

Then, he closed his eyes, visualized a pattern, and began to Cogitate.

In the tranquil state of dispersion, a hint of dark fragrance entered his nostrils, causing his marrow to itch as if it were about to ignite.

Lumian didn't try to endure this sensation; he simply concentrated on maintaining his cogitative state.

After some time, a dark mist suddenly appeared "before" his eyes.

He seemed to be standing in this mist, on the edge of a barely visible street.

Across the street, various not-too-tall buildings appeared as if they were mere shadows.

Ding-ding—a vehicle resembling a steam train came from the other end of the street. It had few segments, just two, with no distinctive chimney but a strangely shaped bracket extending from the top, connecting to something in midair.

Wh—Lumian's memory was instantly triggered.

He had seen a similar scene in Fourth Epoch Trier!

It heralded the appearance of the second level in that special mirror world.

Chapter 747: Pact Experience

747 Pact Experience

Ding-ding.

The object resembling a steam train whizzed past Lumian, its presence nearly obscured by the thick, dark mist. Yet, Lumian managed to discern some details: both carriages were blue and seemed to be crammed with passengers standing and facing the street, their expressions blurred and their forms lacking clear outlines.

This is more than what I had witnessed in Fourth Epoch Trier—it isn't powered by steam. As these thoughts flashed through his mind, Lumian noticed someone at the other end of the street, hunched over, pulling a black, two-wheeled cart with a canopy.

A lady sitting in the cart, holding a round fan and dressed in a long skirt, was hidden by the thick mist, which obscured the finer details of her and the puller's attire.

Lumian found himself staring as the black cart approached.

At that moment, the lady in the cart lifted her fan to her face, turned slowly, and looked back at Lumian.

As if the mist had thinned, Lumian could see the back of the lady's hand holding the fan: swollen and shiny with dark, bluish patches.

The puller, with a towel around his neck, stopped, and the lady, who seemed about to step down from the peculiar cart, looked towards Lumian.

A wave of fear washed over him, instinctively repelling any contact with the lady.

Then, he heard a panicked whisper—it was his own voice, although he harbored no such thoughts!

Standing on the edge of the street, enveloped in the dark mist, Lumian felt a sharp tension as if his true self wasn't entirely present.

Lumian’s heart tightened as he attempted to step back.

He suddenly found himself floating up, soaring into midair.

He saw the core of the dense mist, a vast city with a bizarre, shadowy high tower beneath which lay unspeakable horrors and gloom.

Unwillingly, he flew towards it.

Almost at the same time, he saw specks of starlight appear.

Lumian abruptly exited his Cogitative state; the city and tower wrapped in the dark mist, the segmented train, and the lady with the floral fan vanished from his “vision.”

He opened his eyes to see Madam Magician and Mr. Hanged Man.

"You were a bit off just now, showing signs of losing control, so I had to wake you," Madam Magician briefly explained.

Lumian thanked her, extinguished the enticingly fragrant corpse wax candle, and detailed the scenes and characters he had witnessed during his meditation.

Madam Magician nodded thoughtfully and remarked, "It’s similar to a pact-making ritual.

"This has established a connection between you and some unknown entity, progressively aligning with it. However, unlike a true pact ritual that is directed towards deities, angels, demons, or evil spirits, your pact seems to be with a city.

“If I hadn't interrupted the process earlier, you might have accessed some higher knowledge or power through this pact experience, though it likely wouldn't have been somethingpositive."

Lumian, no novice in mysticism, understood the nature and implications of such rituals.

He pondered and then countered, "So, you're saying that the city in the fog, closely related to Fourth Epoch Trier and very special, has formed a connection with me through this corpse wax candle, despite the vast distances and the layers of seals between us?"

"Yes, it's not an illusion," Madam Magician replied, looking towards the candle encased in a small glass vial with a light yellow and red hue. “Besides the corpse oils of the lron-blooded Knight and Demoness of Despair, this candle likely contains some special materials to which its origins I'm not aware of. There are two other locations where it could be more effective, allowing you to see and experience more. But those are far too dangerous; you already showed signs of losing control, so I wouldn't recommend trying it now.”

“The other two locations..." Lumian's curiosity piqued. "Is one of them Fourth Epoch Trier?"

In Fourth Epoch Trier, he could already partially see that misty city. Lighting the candle and entering a Cogitative state would surely reveal much more sights and experiences!

"Yes," Madam Magician affirmed Lumian's guess.

“And where is the other place?" Lumian inquired further.

Unless the School of Truth’s vortex project could unlock Fourth Epoch Trier's seals, it would be a long time before he could re-enter that version of Trier.

Madam Magician eyed Lumian for a few seconds before simply stating, "Bansy.”

Bansy... Bansy Harbor? The harbor that had been destroyed by the Church of Storms due to some corruption, where no one had escaped? That was also the former home of Red Angel Medici... Lumian nodded almost imperceptibly.

Considering the Red Angel's gains in Fourth Epoch Trier and the pathways He took, Lumian had no doubts about the special nature of Bansy Harbor being akin to that of Fourth Epoch Trier.

“Of course, it must be a specific place in Bansy Harbor, not just anywhere,” Madam Magician added, then continued, "There's another place I'm not sure about for the candle's efficacy.”

“Which place?" Lumian asked, then had a sudden insight, "City of Exiles, Morora?"

“Correct, you're now clearly seeing the connections between things,” Madam Magician praised him, sternly advising, "If you do decide to venture to those places and use the corpse wax candle to aid your Cogitation and complete the pact, make sure someone is with you at all times to monitor your condition and wake you immediately if anything unusual occurs."

"I'll remember that," Lumian promised earnestly.

As Madam Magician gestured for Lumian to pack away the candle, she thought for a moment and said, "Use the Sword of Courage as a Sealed Artifact for now. When it's time to concoct the Iron-blooded Knight potion, I'll revert it into a Beyonder characteristic.

“By the way, the Sealed Artifact crafted by Hisoka’s Beyonder characteristics should be completed in a few days.”

“Thank you, Madam Magician," Lumian expressed his gratitude sincerely.

Although obtaining the lron-blooded Knight main ingredient so easily felt somewhat unreal, when he thought about how the Blood Emperor's residual aura came to be, which played a key role in it, and the issue of the Underworld Daoist's seal, he realized it wasn't that "easy" after all.

Lumian then discussed the remains of Omebella’s umbilical cord and Ludwig's three processing methods, finally asking, "Can I consume that piece of umbilical cord to gain some of the Great Mother's Child of God's bloodline?"

Madam Magician's expression turned slightly strange as she looked towards The Hanged Man Alger, seemingly seeking his opinion on the matter.

The Hanged Man looked at Lumian and asked seriously, "This will indeed bring you some opportunities, but with them, corresponding risks as well. We can help you, but we can't be there every moment. You need to consider whether you're willing to take this risk and if it's worth it."

Madam Magician added, "While the Great Mother's attention might sound nebulous and not tangible enough to have a real effect—after all, you're already under the scrutiny of the being known as Inevitability-having one more such entity's attention might not seem like a big deal. However, remember, the Great Mother's interference and permeation in our world far exceed those of the Inevitability entity. If you do consume Omebella's umbilical cord remnants, you might face unknown influences or attract special enemies without even realizing it.

“Of course, there's only a potential risk, not a certainty.”

What concerned Lumian more was another point.

“Madam Magician, Mr. Hanged Man, it seems you've already confirmed that consuming Omebella's umbilical cord will bring some opportunities?”

This must be a significantly useful opportunity; otherwise, Madam Magician's expression wouldn't have become strange, nor would she have consulted Mr. Hanged Man.

There's no need to hesitate on matters with only downsides; it's the presence of significantpotential benefits that causes Madam Magician to pause!

Madam Magician weighed her words carefully before responding, "The vortex project might involve a location tainted by the Great Mother's power, teeming with monsters spawned from this corruption. If you possess the bloodline of the Great Mother's Child of God, theoretically, you wouldn't need to worry about attacks from them, and you might even be able to command them simply.

“That's one aspect. Another is that once you meet two other prerequisite conditions, you should be able to touch and briefly use a Grade O Sealed Artifact.”

Grade 0 Sealed Artifact... Extremely Dangerous. Not to be inquired, disseminated, described, or spied; capable of destroying a country or even the whole world... Lumian's spirit lifted at the mention.

So far, he had indirectly encountered two Grade 0 Sealed Artifacts: 0-01 and 0-05.

“What's the number of that Grade O Sealed Artifact?” Lumian curiously asked. "Why would having the Great Mother's Child of God bloodline allow me to touch and briefly use it?"

Madam Magician glanced at Lumian and said, "I can't tell you the details yet. All I can say is, it's not the Child of God bloodline of the Great Mother that allows you to touch it, but rather the integration of Omebella’s umbilical cord remnants with you that helps you access it without facing severe danger, because it originated from Omebella’s remains.”

Omebella's remains... Omebella had remains before being born? No, that's normal, as there are already remnants of the umbilical cord before She was born... Ah, the one that shares the same name? No, obviously, it's more than just sharing names... Lumian pondered and then asked, "Are you referring to the remnants of the Goddess of Harvest from ancient times?"

times?"

Chapter 748: Despair Ritual

748 Despair Ritual

Madam Magician confirmed Lumian’s guess, "Yes, the remains of Omebella, the Goddess of Harvest."

The remains of the Goddess of Harvest... a Grade O Sealed Artifact... contact should be possible and briefly usable... Lumian asked eagerly, "What are the other two prerequisites, besides merging with the remnants of Omebella’s umbilical cord?”

Magician laughed self-deprecatingly and said, "I really shouldn't have told you this; it's spurred you to truly consider taking risks.

“Of course, as a high-ranking Astromancer, I can't say I didn't foresee this. Telling you everything and letting you decide is my choice.

"The two prerequisites are: “First, you must have been betrayed by a direct relative; second, you must be female.”

Wh-—This clearly disappointed Lumian.

He felt he met the betrayal requirement, as his biological father had abandoned him and his mother, leading to his grandfather's bankruptcy. But why did he have to be a woman?

Madam Magician seemed to guess his thoughts.

"You barely meet the betrayal criterion. As for being female, in the world of mysticism, there are ways to temporarily transform you into a woman, such as a special mystical item from the Demoness pathway, which doesn't necessarily require a high Sequence.

“That's true..." Lumian thought of the Lie earring.

Although it couldn't change his gender, its ability to alter appearances or adjust height was equally magical.

If such items existed, then surely there must be artifacts that could change one's gender, which, given Lumian’s understanding of the Demoness path, he believed to be almost certainly existent, albeit rare and special.

Lumian's hope was rekindled about accessing Omebella's remains.

That was a Grade O Sealed Artifact!

Madam Magician, with a quirky expression, gave another reminder. "If you truly consume Omebella’s umbilical cord remnants and possess the bloodline of the Great Mother, you will forever be unable to approach Pride Armor.

“Your backstabbing of it would fade over time, but once you become a false Omebella, it will target you first and always, unless there's someone more special present who's worth targeting.”

Is this a manifestation of Pride Armor's hatred for the Earth pathway? In future battles, if I'm nearby, Franca and the others won't be able to use Pride Armor... However, between Pride Armor and a Grade O Sealed Artifact, any sane person knows which to choose, even if the latter is only for temporary use... Lumian nodded, indicating he understood.

Madam Magician didn't continue the topic.

“The deal with the Eternal Blazing Sun Church can move forward. Let me know the agreed time and place for the transaction.

"That Sealed Artifact can't be transferred by you; it's too dangerous. Have the Purifiers prepare to seal it on-site; she will appear herself."

“Alright.” Lumian took this opportunity to relay other information he had gathered in the past few days.

Hearing that the Demon Warlock Burman was influenced by Harrison from Resurrection Island, wanting to touch the mark of deep death, and the evil spirit he summoned and killed was suspected to be himself, Madam Magician turned her head towards Mr. Hanged Man.

Lumian had previously heard from Madam Magician that the Tarot Club was already investigating Resurrection Island, specifically Mr. Hanged Man and Ma‘am Hermit.

The one known as the ‘Stormbringer’ among the Major Arcana cards thoughtfully said, "This is related to something I'm investigating.

“I can't reveal the specifics yet, but you should know Harrison is likely to appear in places closely linked to death, darkness, dusk, and decay. If you encounter someone of unknown origin in such scenarios, remember to tell me.”

Death, darkness, dusk, decay.. Truly someone from Resurrection Island... Lumian wasn't surprised by Mr. Hanged Man's hint.

He was more concerned about whether Resurrection Island's ‘resurrection’ was indeed a true resurrection.

Madam Magician could read what he was pondering.

“I've said before, we aren't Beyonders of the Death pathway, so we don't fundamentally understand the situation on Resurrection Island, and it's difficult to have a precise view of their so-called ‘resurrection.’ Maybe a direct encounter with Harrison or another islander will provide the insights you're seeking.

"The only thing I can say now is, think about Demon Warlock Burman. His condition had clearly worsened since Harrison led him to kill what seemed to be his own evil spirit. The

inhabitants of Resurrection Island likely have issues.

“Heh, I was right last time when I said the Arden evil spirit might still be alive after the related ritual."

Lumian fell silent.

Upon returning to Trier, Lumian promptly made his way to 9 Rue Orosai and knocked on the door of Room 702.

“Why are you here again?” Franca opened the door with a look of disdain.

He had left less than an hour ago!

Fortunately, it was daytime. She hadn't been planning anything yet—what if she had been scared out of her wits?

Lumian glanced at Jenna, who was curled up on the living room sofa with a book, propping herself up to look at him. He smiled at the two Demonesses and said, "I've managed to obtain the potion formula of the Demoness of Despair.”

"Ah?" Franca looked puzzled.

Hadn't he just acquired the Iron-blooded Knight potion formula?

Or had he accomplished something significant in the few minutes since he left?

Jenna was equally baffled, thinking Lumian was joking at first.

Despair was a Sequence 4 potion formula that contained the method humans used to pry open the gates to godhood. How could it be obtained so easily?

In a flash of thought, Franca and Jenna asked in unison: "Did you go to the Blue Avenger?”

“Have you finished exploring the Blue Avenger?”

“Just a preliminary exploration,” Lumian squeezed past Franca, smiling as he spoke.

“You got the Demoness of Despair potion formula from just a preliminary exploration?"

Jenna asked, somewhat incredulously.

Lumian chuckled.

"That's one of the Blood Emperor's legacies. A Sequence 4 potion formula should be considered pretty normal among the treasures.”

“What else did you find?" Franca asked curiously after closing the door.

Lumian casually took a seat on an armchair and recounted his adventure aboard the Blue Avenger, including his interactions with Madam Magician and Mr. Hanged Man from start to finish.

“That corpse wax candle sounds rather sinister,” Franca genuinely exclaimed.

Jenna nodded in agreement, feeling like she had just heard a horror story.

As a Beyonder of the Demoness pathway, friend of a Hunter, hearing that the candle was made from the corpse oils of an Iron-blooded Knight and a Demoness of Despair always made her inadvertently think of herself, Franca, and Lumian.

Just as Jenna felt Franca had voiced her own thoughts, she heard her female companion eagerly propose, “Last time in Fourth Epoch Trier, I barely saw what that misty city looked like. You didn't describe it clearly enough. Can I use that candle to make a pact and see the misty city from inside or from the air?

"You guys be my guardians!"

“That candle burns very quickly. I only tried it once, and it used up a fifth of it," Lumian thought aloud, "Let's wait for a chance to visit Bansy Harbor or enter Fourth Epoch Trier, then you can try it. Besides, Madam Magician said that without the Blood Emperor's residual aura, a specific ritual is needed to assist, and no one knows yet what that ritual is like.

Maybe once we're in Bansy or Fourth Epoch Trier, influenced by the environment, we won't need the ritual anymore.”

“That'll do," Franca relented.

A corpse wax candle that could only be used four more times obviously needed to be reserved for the best occasions.

Franca turned to Lumian. Franca, brimming with enthusiasm, said to Lumian, “Let's see the Demoness of Despair's potion formula.”

“What's my reward?" Lumian joked.

Franca clicked her tongue.

"I'll keep an eye out at the Demoness Sect for any mystical items that can change gender and give it to you for free.”

With that, Franca’s smile grew even brighter, her eyes sparkling.

“I really look forward to that day.”

Jenna imagined it for a moment and found herself also a bit excited.

Considering the potential consequences of debating over this topic, Lumian pretended to be at a loss for words and quickly took out a sheet of delicate human skin from his Traveler's Bag and laid it on the coffee table.

The three only glanced at the potion formula before swiftly moving away, taking a moment before returning to continue.

After a few repeats, the contents of the Sequence 4 potion formula fully emerged in their minds: “Name: Despair; "Sequence: 4; “Main ingredients: Plague Mother Serpent's venom sac; Silver Hunter's crystal; “Supplementary ingredients: 10 milliliters of Plague Mother Serpent's bile, three fragments of the Silver Hunter, a fresh branch of mistletoe, and 10 milliliters of blood from seven victims who died from different plagues.

“Ritual: Involve over thirty thousand people in a severe plague. The more who die, the stronger the despair and suffering, the better the ritual effect."

In a brief silence, Franca hissed, "Isn't this ritual too evil? I can't do such a thing!"

She felt that if she succumbed to the urge to advance, to become a demigod, and caused such a plague, she would truly fall and truly become a Demoness!

Jenna shook her head, her face full of fear.

She couldn't imagine becoming that kind of person.

She would rather stay forever at the Demoness of Affliction Sequence!

"It's not just about being evil, it's obviously more difficult than the Iron-blooded Knight's ascension ritual,” Lumian said from another angle.

Using the capabilities of the Demoness of Affliction along with auxiliary media and items, turning a contagion into a plague that swept through thirty thousand people wasn't too challenging. However, in any city with such a large population, official organizations existed, and they would likely notice the outbreak soon after it began. That would lead to targeted interventions and possibly even identification of the disease's source—the Demoness of Affliction herself—leading to her elimination.

If she avoided cities and spread the disease from one small town or village to another, it would take an exceedingly long time. The longer the process dragged on, the greater the chance of various mishaps that could cause the ritual to fail. For example, discovery by the official Beyonders, natural containment of the disease, or other unforeseen events.

Compared to this, the Southern Continent might be more suitable for the Demoness of Affliction to advance.

"Yes," Franca said with a pained expression, "Is there no way to bypass this ritual? Or is there an equivalent, less evil ritual?”

Jenna racked her brain but couldn't think of any shortcuts that didn't involve killing innocents.

Lumian, with a carefree smile, said, "It's simple. After you reach Sequence 5, you could switch to Iron-blooded Knight. If you care—or rather, prefer to remain a Demoness—you can then check whether the ritual of the Demoness of Unaging is evil. If it isn't, you could switch back."

"Uh..." Franca and Jenna were stunned.

Chapter 749: Conjugate Captain and Members

749 Conjugate Captain and Members

After her initial shock, Franca pondered thoughtfully, Maybe this idea isn't so bad after all...

Wasn't I originally aiming to become an Iron-blooded Knight? But then there's Jenna...

Seeing Franca silent, Lumian said with a meaningful smile, "There's no need to take some things too seriously. We've all used Lie before and changed our appearances, adapting quite well, haven't we? I once even turned into a dog without any lingering trauma. As long as it's not permanent and you can change back, occasionally switching things up can actually be quite fun. Remember, you're just acting."

Lumian knew Jenna was already aware that the Demoness pathway led to changes from male to female, whereas the Hunter's pathway did the opposite, occurring at Sequence 7 Witch and Sequence 4 Iron-blooded Knight.

He also knew Franca suspected Jenna was aware of this.

But since the Demoness of Pleasure wanted to continue deceiving herself, he didn't mind helping a bit by keeping his words vague.

"Temporarily... If the ritual of the Demoness of Unaging isn't evil, I can switch back... A

Demoness of Unaging doesn't sound so evil..." Jenna muttered to herself before saying, "!

think Lumian’s suggestion is worth considering.”

Franca nodded in agreement, on the verge of saying more but stopping herself.

Jenna chuckled self-deprecatingly, "I'm only at Sequence 7, just a Witch. Why am I even considering becoming a demigod and switching back and forth?

“Dammit, it feels like when I first became Showy Diva. Though I was always saving money topay off debts, it didn't stop me from dreaming of becoming a famous actress, earning thousands of verl d'or a year, and wondering how I'd spend all that money..."

“Me too, me too,” Franca echoed, attempting to explore the feasibility, "If we switch, how do we complete the ritual for a thirty-person Iron-blooded Knight team?”

Lumian clicked his tongue and continued, “You'd better pray that by then I've become an Iron-blooded Knight. Having an Iron-blooded Knight as a team member can significantly reduce the number of people required. Besides, we already work well together.”

"Is that possible?" Franca first instinctively felt there was a problem, then muttered to herself, "A ritual is just a ritual. After it's done, there's really no need to maintain the previous state, meaning the captain and team members could swap places and form anew team again. What do you call that? That's called recycling, sustainable development!"

The more Franca thought about it, the more excited she became.

“Once I also become an Iron-blooded Knight, Jenna will have two demigod teammates, plus Anthony and Lugano. She shouldn't need to look for anyone else.

“If Ludwig is still with us by then, not having broken his seal, things will be even simpler; we could be his godmothers!"

We'd be Ludwig's godmothers, and Lumian would be his godfather... Although this isn't anything amazing, there are many similar examples, but still.. Jenna glanced at Franca, wanting to remind her of something, but ultimately decided against it.

The more they discussed the details, the more awkward it got, so it was best to leave them be.

With a new strategy to avoid the Demoness of Despair's ritual, Franca and Jenna felt much better.

The former said to Lumian, "There's a mysticism gathering in a few days. Touch base with the Professor and others to probe whether any members of the Moses Ascetic Order are among them. It's not too urgent since Madam Judgement told me that the Tarot Club has informants inside the Moses Ascetic Order who can provide the necessary information. But I'm not sure if that informant belongs to the Trier region and knows the local circumstances, while the Mirror Person, Griffith, is definitely in Trier.”

Lumian nodded and replied, "I also need to ask about the Harvest Priest potion formula and corresponding materials. Boosting the team's strength will help us complete the ritual later.

Jenna listened quietly for a while before interjecting, "Can you help sell that Dream Stealer Beyonder characteristic for me? The level of the mysticism gatherings I attend aren't high enough; nobody can afford an item of that Sequence."

She was thinking about the Demoness of Pleasure potion materials she was about to receive from the Eternal Blazing Sun Church. Franca's Pleasure was almost digested, and it wasn't too good to still owe her companion money. After all, she couldn't use the Dream Stealer Beyonder characteristic herself.

Lumian could probably guess Jenna's thoughts, subtly gesturing towards his Traveler's Bag.

His implication was clear: you've seen my Iron-blooded Knight and Demoness of Despair potion formulas; how come you haven't thought about owing me a substantial debt?

Lumian hoped this approach would make Jenna worry less about owing money, suggesting she borrow more and hire an Artisan to turn the Dream Stealer Beyonder characteristic into a mystical item for use.

The stronger you are, the easier it is to repay debts!

Sitting on the sofa, Jenna scoffed at Franca, gesturing towards Lumian.

Her message was clear: when I need to use those two potion formulas to advance, I'll pay you back!

"I'll keep an eye out," Franca said, unaware of the silent conversation between Lumian and Jenna.

She then said, "We can start gathering some supplementary ingredients for Iron-blooded Knight and Demoness of Despair now, like the mud soaked with soldiers’ blood from a major battlefield and the blood of seven victims of the plague, just to be prepared in case we're short on time later. Who knows, by then, we might find another way to bypass the plague ritual. Let's get ready now."

Hearing about the preparations for the potion, Lumian nodded and then remembered something.

He stood up and walked over to the full-length mirror in the room, pressing his right hand against it.

He then activated the contract ability from Bloody Jack, sensing the mirror imprints he had left behind.

Soon, Lumian used the mirror and its otherworldly connection to detect two imprints from afar—one clear and one blurry.

The clear one belonged to the full-length mirror in Moran Avigny's study, while the blurry one changed on its own, shifting positions and making it hard to track.

I can sense it... That must be the imprint on the mirror inside the Blue Avenger's vault... Using the link between the imprint and myself, no matter how it blurs or shifts, I can teleport directly to it, as long as I can step through the mirror, Lumian pondered for a while but decided not to borrow Franca's Mirror Cufflink for an experiment.

This was because his spiritual intuition and a warning from fate told him that if he teleported to that imprint now, he might never return, or he might return as Alista Tudor.

Withdrawing his hand, Lumian shared the results of his attempt with Franca and Jenna.

Afterward, Jenna left to visit various hospital morgues. This was both to look for opportunities to act as a Witch and to see if there were any bodies that had died from severe contagious diseases.

With the Order of All Extinction and the Sick Church not yet eradicated in Trier, there definitely were deaths from the plague, just not many that could cause a widespread outbreak.

Standing by the window, Lumian saw Jenna appear on the street and turned to Franca, saying, “You might have to become a Demoness of Despair, so it would be good to think about how to find an alternative to that ritual.”

“Why must I?" Franca responded, clearly astonished.

Lumian chuckled. "Have you noticed that all the high-ranking members of the Demoness Sect are Demonesses? Do you think it's because they can't get their hands on the Iron-blooded Knight potion formula and Beyonder characteristics?”

“But the Demoness Sect doesn't prohibit Demonesses from switching to the Hunter pathway..."

"That's indeed a contradiction," Lumian speculated. "I suspect that those angelic-tier Demonesses can't find higher Sequence Hunter pathway Beyonder characteristics to change back into men, so they're not keen on seeing their subordinates regain themselves.

It has become an unspoken rule. You know, most of the high-ranking Demonesses are twisted in spirit, psychopathic, and enjoy seeing others in pain while hating to see them happy."

According to the intelligence Lumian and Franca received from Madam Magician and Madam Judgement, starting from Sequence 4, Hunters and Demonesses could switch pathways, with gender determined by the highest Sequence attained, and consuming potions of the same Sequence but from neighboring pathways to enhance one's strength could cause significant problems.

Franca was silent for a long moment before saying, "If I digest the Affliction potion and still haven't found an alternative to the Despair ritual, I'll request to end my mission with the Demoness Sect from Madam Judgement. She should understand and wouldn't allow me to carry out something like spreading a horrific plague."

After saying this, Franca relaxed and muttered, "Besides, wouldn't it be odd if Jenna becomes an Iron-blooded Knight and I remain a Demoness by then?"

“Life is short, why not give it a try?” Lumian jested.

Before Franca could react, Lumian leaped over the sofa with a stride and headed out the door.

Bursts of black flames shot through the wooden door, chasing after Lumian’s back but gradually veering off target and dissipating into the air.

Franca's curse still rang clear in Lumian’s ears, "If you have what it takes, try it yourself!"

With a grin, Lumian stepped out into the street.

Watching Ludwig eat, he pulled up a chair opposite him and casually asked, "What ingredients or spices are needed for the third method of cooking those umbilical remains?"

By the side, Lugano was taken aback. "What umbilical remains?"

Lumian smiled. "The umbilical remnant of the Child of God that Father Montserrat was carrying."

Lugano's expression froze.

Chapter 750: Source of Life

750 Source of Life

After a few seconds, Lugano stuttered, "Can you actually eat that?”

What happens if you do eat it? What are the changes?

Does it cause the Child of God to be born?

Lumian glanced at Lugano's arm and said, "What can't be eaten?"

Lugano suddenly felt a sharp phantom pain and shook his head vigorously. "No, never mind!"

He wanted to get away from Ludwig and Lumian but couldn't think of an excuse on the spot.

After Ludwig swallowed a mouthful of cheese bread, he spoke slowly, “Top-tier ingredients don't need much accompaniment or seasoning. We just need to give it a symbol. That includes nine main staple ingredients: wheat, oats, rye, rice, potatoes, sweet potatoes, corn, cassava, and any other kind of bean. Cook them with the umbilical remains in cow's or sheep's milk for half an hour, and it's ready to eat. This dish is called ‘Source of Life.”

Are you cooking or performing a mystical rite? Lumian muttered under his breath.

Of course, a Gourmet pathway’s Chef, who concocted alcoholic beverages and cooked various dishes, was essentially conducting corresponding mystical rites.

Thoughtfully, Lumian asked, “Actually, it doesn't have to be these nine ingredients, right? As long as the concept of main ingredients and their quantity is satisfied? Likewise, other kinds of milk would work too?"

Ludwig shook his head. "No, this way tastes the best."

So, what you're saying is, the method I mentioned would work but won't taste as good? No

wonder it's the Gourmet pathway, always chasing culinary perfection... Lumian stood up and instructed Lugano to buy some of the ingredients.

Lumian’s Traveler's Bag only contained dry rations that could be eaten right out of the package.

For Trier, a leading global metropolis, the ingredients Ludwig needed were easily collected, and by noon, Lumian and Lugano had returned to see Ludwig placing the main ingredients along with the umbilical remnant into a stew pot filled with several hundred milliliters of milk.

These steps had to be completed by a Chef himself, to endow them with mysticism, to coax out the designated uniqueness of the ingredients and maintain them to a degree conducive to absorption. Done by anyone else, the dish might have no effect or turn into poison.

After simmering for a while, Lumian smelled the starchy aroma mixed with the milk and saw dense milky white steam rising above the pot.

The steam did not disperse but condensed in midair and slowly settled back into the pot, carrying a tantalizing scent tinged with blood.

At that moment, Ludwig turned to Lumian and licked his lips, asking, "Do you want to add sugar or salt?"

“What differences do they bring?” Lumian asked cautiously.

Ludwig responded seriously, "The taste, one is sweet, the other is salty. Which do you prefer?"

Lumian, sensing the choice, relaxed and asked with a smile, "Which do you prefer?"

“I can't eat it..." Ludwig said regretfully, mumbling, “Sweet is tasty, salty is good too. If only it could be split into two parts, one sweet, one salty..."

As he spoke, the young boy, seemingly agitated, sprinkled some salt and then tossed in some sugar.

Lumian watched amusedly, not stopping him.

For him, the taste of the Source of Life was not important; its effect was.

Finally, Ludwig instructed Lugano to extinguish the flame and removed the contents of the pot.

It was a palm-sized piece of starchy congealment, white and soft, sticky and gooey.

The surface of the food was covered with red spots, as if blood had seeped out from within.

“It's ready to eat." Ludwig tried hard not to drool.

“Will it be effective with just one bite, or do I need to eat it all?" Lumian asked, his curiosity reminiscent of his days learning various experiments, which often frustrated Aurore with his questions.

“All of it," Ludwig said with a look of disappointment.

Lumian picked up the steaming, slightly scalding food, brought it to his mouth, and took a bite.

The sweet and salty flavors melded together, offsetting each other's intensity in a unique way that relieved Lumian of any mental burden. He quickly devoured the Source of Life.

“Will it work right away?" an eager Lumian asked, already resolute in his intentions.

Ludwig pointed to the master bedroom.

“You'll need to sleep first.”

Sleep? With a slight sigh, Lumian left the dining table, returned to his room, and lay down on his bed.

Closing his eyes, he felt his body gradually warm up, his consciousness becoming heavier and heavier...

In the darkness, Lumian heard soft sobs.

He turned his head, carefully discerning the sound.

It was of a little girl whispering, "Mommy... Mommy...”

The voice grew louder, more mature, and more piercing.

“Mommy! Mommy!"

The cries drew closer, as if they were right beside Lumian, resonating within him.

“Mommy! Mommy!"

Inside my body... Lumian suddenly jolted awake, regaining his senses.

The darkness shattered, and sunlight pierced his eyes.

He sat up abruptly, freeing himself from the dream.

The cries of “mommy, mommy" still echoed faintly in his mind.

Did I hear the Child of God crying? Lumian looked down at himself.

He undressed and found nothing unusual, but he knew something about him was different now, an indescribable change.

He didn't feel the Great Mother's gaze, which made him even more cautious.

Dressed again, he left his room to find Lugano sneaking glances his way.

"Are—are you alright?" Lugano, who had been caught red-handed, asked instinctively.

Lumian chuckled. "It's okay, I won't become the Child of God of the Great Mother."

Seeing Lugano eyeing his stomach, Lumian added, "Nor have I conceived Her."

After speaking, he left the still-concerned Lugano behind and walked out of the apartment.

The afternoon sun was perfect, and with nothing much to do in the next couple of days, Lumian decided to stake out a particular spot.

That place was the Trier catacombs.

Knowing that Harrison from Resurrection Island might appear at places associated with death, darkness, dusk, and decay, Lumian's first thoughts were of the Dream Festival and the Trier catacombs-—locations rife with death and dark mysticism.

In the first level of the catacombs, by the "Entrance to the Old Ossuary" leading deeper below, Lumian sat next to a withered, scattered skeleton with a lit white candle, quietly observing each visitor descending into or returning from the depths.

Soon, a group of students passed by, spotting Lumian sitting alongside the catacombs bones.

The leader, a tall, thin man with glasses, asked Lumian curiously, "Why are you sitting here?"

Lumian casually responded, "I've been down to the lower levels many times and lost interest. Now, I just want to sit here quietly and watch everyone and everybody that comes and goes, to see who never leaves."

"That sounds interesting," the students said, holding their white candles. They decided to sit down too and observe if any of those returning from the depths showed signs of fear.

The tall, bespectacled man chose to sit beside Lumian and struck up a conversation.

"Do you really think not lighting a white candle here could lead to mishaps?"

Lumian glanced at him and chuckled, "You could try it, and we'd all see what happens."

Before the students could respond, Lumian spoke in a relaxed tone, "I didn't believe in these things before, but then..."

He suddenly lowered his voice.

Two of the female students blurted out, "What happened?"

"Then..." Lumian wore a reminiscent expression, "I met someone who had encountered the Montsouris ghost. You know the legend of the Montsouris ghost, right?"

The students nodded together.

You really know Trier's spooky tales well... Typical of Underground Trier creatures—students...

Lumian sighed, "His immediate family all died, and he thought he could escape it. But one day, when I went to see him, I found him hanged from a window frame.

"Since then, I've been strictly following every rule of Underground Trier."

The students looked at each other, a bit frightened by the tale told by a peer.

"It seems we really shouldn't extinguish this candle," the tall student with glasses said regretfully.

Lumian lowered his voice again, "Have you ever encountered such a thing? There are extra books, blankets, and clothes in your dorm—none which belong to you—but the administrator tells you that no one else lives there."

Two students turned pale, as if hearing the most terrifying ghost story.

As if they were seeking a lifeline, they asked, "Yes, that happens, do you know why?"

Lumian shook his head and sighed, "I heard those are the people who extinguished their candles here. They completely vanished, with no one remembering them."

Hearing this, the tall student shivered instinctively.

Suddenly, he felt something tap his shoulder.

He turned to look and saw a ghastly pale skeletal hand.

"Ah!" He screamed, jumping up.

Lumian pulled back the bone hand he had picked up somewhere, his smile mocking. "You're really scaredy-cats! Scared already?"

The students were stunned, and after a while, they forcefully said, "No! That was just a reflex!"

As they seriously considered whether to beat up the prankster, someone came up the stone steps to the second level.

He wore a blue top and yellow pants, his face deeply wrinkled and his white hair sparse and dry, holding a short lit white candle.

It was an elderly catacombs administrator.

Lumian slightly frowned.

He had seen this catacombs administrator before in the giant tomb chamber housing the Samaritan Women's Spring, but the administrator hadn't used a white candle then.

Chapter 751: "Help"

751 "Help"

Lumian had always assumed that the catacombs administrator, marked with light brown age spots, had been assimilated by the catacombs themselves, becoming part of this peculiar place, and would over time become more corpse-like, losing all semblance of life and forever sleeping within an upright, decaying coffin.

Yet, here he was, able to leave the massive tomb chamber that housed the Samaritan Women's Spring, still carrying a burning white candle.

Taking turns guarding the entrance to the Samaritan Women's Spring, the longer you stay, the deeper the catacombs' peculiar erosion takes hold, making you less and less like the living until finally, you no longer need a lit white candle to prevent being consumed by the catacombs? Can one slowly recover once they rotate out? Lumian speculated as he watched the elderly catacombs administrator ascend the steps.

As he drew closer and the candlelight illuminated his features, the group of students also got a clearer look at the newcomer.

They recognized the uniform of the catacombs administrator but had never met one so aged he seemed nearly decomposed.

His face, speckled with light brown age spots and his eyes black and icy, coupled with his faint, almost non-existent breath, instilled an involuntary fear in them, prompting them to huddle together for warmth and courage.

With each soft step echoing, the elderly caretaker stopped at the Entrance to the Old Ossuary.

He then turned, casting his chilling gaze upon Lumian.

“I need to speak with you," the catacombs administrator said in a hoarse, matter-of-fact tone.

Me? Do we know each other? Plus, I came here on a whim, driven by impulse and didn't inform anyone of my plans. Why would you need to see me? Lumian was taken aback, as were the university students.

They hadn't expected this intriguing, skilled prankster to be acquainted with such a frightening catacombs administrator.

Had he really explored the catacombs so often that he had befriended the administrators?

Perplexed, Lumian stood up and followed the elderly administrator to the side of the Entrance to the Old Ossuary.

He wanted to hear what this was all about and why he was being sought out.

In the dense darkness, with just a stub of a white candle making his face appear more ghastly, the emotionless caretaker said, "There's been an anomaly with a corpse on the fourth level's southwest corner. Handle it.”

“Me?" Lumian pointed to himself with his empty right hand.

Why are you asking me to deal with this? There are other catacombs administrators, official Beyonders for this sort of thing. Why me?

And you're ordering me around as if I'm a mercenary paid to handle such matters, without even discussing compensation...

“Correct.” The elderly administrator nodded gently. "My body and spirit are nearing decay, and I can no longer engage in combat.”

Lumian eyed the administrator with curiosity, probing, "Do you know me?"

The deep wrinkles on the administrator's face unfolded into a strange smile. "You are one of our kind.”

One of our kind... Lumian mused, a guess forming in his mind.

"Deal with it now. The longer you wait, the more troublesome it becomes." The administrator turned and headed back towards the “Entrance to the Old Ossuary.”

! came to stake out Harrison from Resurrection Island, not to work for you... Lumian muttered silently, his curiosity piqued as he followed the more corpse-like than living administrator down the stone steps.

During this, he flashed a smile and waved at the students, frightening them into silence; none dared to respond.

Once Lumian and the elderly administrator's figures had disappeared deep into the stone stairway, with only a flicker of candlelight remaining, the students finally relaxed and exhaled in relief.

That guy really knew the catacombs administrator well!

He must be extremely familiar with this place!

Were the rumors he shared actually true?

Recalling Lumian’s description of the dorm anomalies and the consequences of extinguishing a candle, the students shivered in unison, pulling their candles closer to their bodies.

Descending layer by layer, past François' Tomb and the Blood Order Hall, Lumian followed the old administrator, quickly reaching the southwest corner of the catacombs’ fourth level.

Using the remaining third of his white candle, Lumian saw a giant skeleton, about three to four meters tall, composed of bones from different corpses and shaped like a human with seven or eight heads, all eye sockets dark, void of any colored flame.

At that moment, the giant skeleton was opening tomb doors, extracting sharp bones, and adding them to its massive bone sword.

The candlelight spread only slightly, illuminating the area minimally as darkness flowed like water, bringing an indescribable chill and horror.

Even without getting close, Lumian involuntarily felt fear and resistance, as if he were walking towards death.

His blue eyes darkened to iron-black, reflecting the ghastly pallor of the aberrant skeleton.

Deep within its chest, it felt as if he had to cleave through layers of white bones to reach it.

"You see it? Take care of it," the old caretaker commanded again, as if ordering a subordinate.

"What abilities does it have?" Lumian wasn't averse to lending a hand—he had just acquired a powerful item and was eager to use it, but he couldn't just rush into battle without understanding the monster's capabilities and planning his strategy.

The candle in the administrator's hand was now just a stub, its dim flame stubbornly clinging on.

He shook his head and said, "I'm not sure, but it's being suppressed by the catacombs, unable to show much of its potential. Once it gets dark outside, we might not have that advantage. We must clear it out now."

The catacombs are suppressing it... Lumian mused aloud, "How often have these anomalies occurred recently? Is it frequent?"

"It's normal, once or twice a month," the elderly catacombs administrator replied in a raspy voice.

Even if it's broadly sealed, some abnormalities still occur? That's similar to other areas of the Underground Trier... As Lumian was about to ask more questions, the giant, mud-and-mold-covered skeletal aberration seemed to notice them, suddenly turning around and raising its massive bone sword.

The surface of the giant sword burst into pale-white flames.

Thud, thud, thud, the skeleton with several heads moved stiffly but quickly charged toward Lumian and the catacombs administrator.

The surrounding darkness surged over, bringing with it a bone-chilling cold and a terror that seemed to reach into their souls.

Without hesitation, Lumian reached into the Traveler's Bag and grasped the Sword of Courage.

A warm rush quickly spread through his body.

What's there to fear?

Fight, fight, fight!

Lumian drew the iron-black greatsword and charged toward the giant skeleton and its terrifying bone sword.

Then, he swung the Sword of Courage upwards.

A bright white flame with a hint of blue burst forth from the blade.

Bang!

The iron-black greatsword collided with the bone sword, made of numerous sharp bones, in midair.

Lumian’s knees bent as his feet sank into the mud.

The skeleton's force was immense, and the bright white-blue flames tangled with the pale-white flames, mutually extinguishing each other.

Lumian was not afraid.

His eyes excited, he tightened his thighs, straightened his knees, and advanced rather than retreated, slashing with his iron-black greatsword toward the colossal creature.

The bone sword responded with the force of a falling boulder.

Boom!

The collision triggered a violent explosion, and the fierce shockwave, carrying the bright white-blue flames, struck the giant skeleton's surface, pushing it back two steps.

Lumian pursued, slashing again with the Sword of Courage.

Rumble! Rumble! Rumble!

With each clash of the huge swords and in every massive explosion, a large number of bones fell from the skeleton, charred, and even the bone sword itself thinned significantly.

Finally, Lumian broke through its defense, cleaving into its chest with one strike.

Boom!

The bright white-blue fireball expanded there, penetrating its entire body.

The giant skeleton froze instantly.

Crash! collapsed entirely, like a stacked block castle knocked over.

Lumian withdrew his iron-black greatsword, turned halfway to the elderly catacombs administrator, and smiled, saying, “Neutralized.”"

As he spoke, he returned the Sword of Courage to the Traveler's Bag.

Just after this action, Lumian suddenly sobered up.

Was that it?

Although I had planned to engage in direct combat before drawing the sword, I hadn't considered just a head-on attack...

Truly the Sword of Courage...

Hearing Lumian’s words, the elderly catacombs administrator, holding the nearly extinguished white candle, slowly approached.

Lumian, taking advantage of having just provided help, casually asked, “Has anyone visited the Samaritan Women's Spring in the past few months?"

That was supposedly the strongest point of death energy in the entire catacombs, and Harrison might be drawn there.

The elderly catacombs administrator looked at Lumian in slow motion, his voice hoarse as he said, “Extinguish the candle."

What? Extinguish the candle? Are you trying to kill me? Lumian’s first reaction was that the catacombs administrator in front of him meant him harm.

Without a lit white candle here, one would be eerily erased and forgotten by all!

At that moment, the candle in the administrator's hand burned down to the end, flickered once, and was completely extinguished.

Darkness surged toward the old man, seemingly engulfing him in deathly silence.

He did not disappear.

In that instant, Lumian recalled many things, including the catacombs administrator considering him one of their own and his own guess about it.

He hadn't made his final, crazy decision when the darkness around the administrator viciously spread, enveloping him.

His white candle suddenly went out.

Chapter 752: In the Darkness

752 In the Darkness

Dammit!

Though Lumian had toyed with the idea of taking risks, he hadn't truly made up his mind.

The sudden extinguishing of his white candle prompted him to swear under his breath, instinctively preparing to activate the black mark on his shoulder and teleport out of the catacombs.

At that moment, a bone-chilling cold tinged with slight pain surged through the palm of his right hand.

This snap of pain brought him to his senses, thankfully without any further unpleasant changes to his body.

Indeed... Lumian instantly calmed down, abandoning the idea of using his Spirit World Traversal ability.

His suspicions were confirmed!

He clenched his right hand discreetly, ensuring the prominently-marked Underworld Daoist seal wasn't visible to anything lurking in the darkness.

After the elderly, decaying, and clearly unwell catacombs administrator mistook him for a kindred spirit, Lumian suspected it was due to the Underworld Daoist seal.

Given that the Samaritan Women's Spring was closely related to the Underworld Daoist and the catacombs of Trier were likely built to contain its overflowing influence, the administrators took turns guarding the massive tomb chamber leading to the spring.

Since catacombs administrators affected by anomalies could navigate the dark catacombs without a lit white candle and not disappear, theoretically, he should be able to as well, given his Underworld Daoist seal!

Of course, this was extremely risky. A wrong guess could mean dying without leaving a trace, causing Lumian to hesitate despite his wild impulse.

In the pure darkness, where his eyes saw nothing, Lumian felt as if he were in Trier's subterranean river, immersed in cold, damp, heavy, and silent waters.

Yet, he breathed easily; his body and soul strangely drawing air from the dense, dark "waters," sustaining his existence.

He seemed like a fish in the deep sea.

The darkness, like flowing water, layered and pressed down, isolating this space from the surrounding areas and the outside world.

The next moment, Lumian heard the old administrator's raspy, indifferent voice.

“Recently, three people tried to approach the spring, but I stopped them."

Three people... Lumian's spirit lifted as he asked, "Who were they?”

“One time it was a Blessed of darkness and death with a Hunter,” the old administrator described in his own way.

A Blessed of darkness and death with a Hunter.. Isn't that Madame Hela and me? You still remember us... Lumian realized, followed by muttered criticisms.

He had thought this elderly administrator, unlike the more active ones like Kendall and nearing a corpse-like state, didn't recognize people by sight but by sensing their presence— Lumian had encountered two catacombs administrators guiding visitors when he arrived at the Entrance to the Old Ossuary, and they didn’t see him as one of their own. Instead, they advised him not to wander alone and always keep a white candle burning for light.

“Who was the third?” Lumian pressed on.

Was it Harrison, or Monette, the incarnation of Amon active in these subterranean catacombs?

The old catacombs administrator responded in a monotone, husky voice, “An outsider, he felt similar to us but also different, so I stopped him."

Similar yet different... an outsider... Lumian pondered these key descriptions and surmised it was probably Harrison from Resurrection Island!

"What did he look like?" Lumian asked, controlling his emotions, seemingly calm.

He couldn't see through the darkness, not even the outline of the old administrator, but he sensed the other was right in front of him, no more than two meters away.

He then heard the old administrator reply: “I've been an administrator for so long, I've forgotten many things. Even death itself vanishes here, let alone our memories. I can’t remember what he looked like, only that he didn't resemble an Intisian, nor a Loenese or Feysacian."

After a brief pause, the catacombs administrator continued in his flat tone, "I should go back to rest now..."

Lumian did not try to stop him, nor did he ask further questions.

Although he hadn't heard any footsteps, nor sensed any movement ahead, a very clear thought suddenly struck him: The person has already left.

He didn't look like an Intisian, a Loenese, or a Feysacian... An outsider... Someone who had been to the fourth level of the catacombs in recent months... Lumian replayed thecatacombs administrator's responses in his mind over and over.

Suddenly, he remembered something: Franca had mentioned that she encountered a man in the catacombs who she suspected came from the world of the Celestial Master—the world they had transmigrated from. Her judgment was based on the man's appearance, which closely resembled the people from that world and was distinctly different from those of the Intisians, Loenese, Feynapotterians, and Feysacians!

So, the person Franca met was the one the elderly administrator persuaded to leave? And

that person could very well be Harrison from Resurrection Island...

/s Resurrection Island actually a node where two worlds converge?

The reason the nautical chart leading to Resurrection Island is incorrect is because it lacks mystical details; even if one reaches the designated sea area, only danger is encountered, with no sight of the goal?

This would nicely explain Franca's divination result that the "chart is genuine" and why adventurers have failed to locate Resurrection Island. The charts are indeed accurate, but they don't record the method to open the "Island's Door"!

If this is the case, there should be a deeper explanation for why Franca and the others were transmigrated, and for the purpose of the Resurrection Islanders appearing on the North and South Continents...

The good thing now is, Franca has seen someone who might be Harrison and has drawn a corresponding portrait through a ritual, which will help us in our future search.

Heh heh, Franca and Jenna's exploration yielded quite a lot of crucial information about many important matters, filled with a sense of being arranged.

This might not have been that entity's doing, but it's highly likely related to Monette, who often haunts this place...

Lumian was particularly puzzled about why the True Creator or Amon valued this matter so much. Their previous "help" was mainly about combating the evil gods beyond the barrier and didn't involve issues from another world.

Hmm, would that Celestial Worthy be counted as one of the evil gods beyond the barrier?

Does He come from the Celestial Master's world?

/s this also considered a part of the evil gods' invasion?"

Lumian speculated briefly before pondering another question: Whether to inform Franca, 007, Madame Hela, and other members of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society about this.

Lumian could already picture what would happen: Including Franca, some members of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society would desperately set out to sea, searching for Resurrection Island marked on the sea chart, failing to find the island, but finding it being even more dangerous!

But Lumian preferred to see Franca remain as she was: conflicted about her gender but generally happy.

After a moment of silence, Lumian laughed a bit out of character, whispering self-mockingly in the environment like the dark depths of the sea, "Would you avoid seeking a way to resurrect Aurore because of danger and others' expectations?

"Would you give up resisting because of danger and others' expectations?

"Would you refuse to merge with the bloodline of Omebella because of danger and others' expectations?

"No!"

Lumian made up his mind and began to focus on his surroundings.

He couldn't see anything but faintly sensed figures wandering in the darkness, felt hands reaching out to him, grabbing his arms, ankles, neck, and body, yet not having any tangible effect.

No, there was one thing—Lumian felt distinctly colder, to the point where, with the physical traits of a Reaper, he almost couldn't help but constrict his pores and shiver lightly.

He also heard faint, painful, despairing cries but couldn't discern their specific directions.

Are these the people who vanished in the catacombs before? Lumian tried to listen closely, to find one or two of the missing, to understand their current state, but it was to no avail.

Suddenly, he shivered.

The cold and the dead silence seeped into his mind.

His thoughts became slightly sluggish, and his memories of certain things grew a bit fuzzy.

The Underworld Daoists seal just prevents me from disappearing on the spot, from even dying without a trace, but it can't stop me from being slowly eroded by the abnormalities here, like those catacombs administrators? And, my erosion is clearly faster than theirs...

Lumian snapped a flame into existence, lighting the white candle in his hand.

The darkness, cold, weight, silence, and dampness retreated as the light spread.

Lumian glanced at the candle in his hand, nodding and muttering to himself, "I just interpreted the Underworld Daoist's seal as a kind of alternative white candlelight, but now it seems, they're not the same, fundamentally different. One stems from an anomaly being sealed, the other leverages the power sealing this place?"

As thoughts swirled, Lumian, holding the burning white candle, made his way back along the original route.

Upon returning to the Entrance of the Old Ossuary, he saw that the few university students who had been there were gone.

“Scared off, just like that?" Lumian scoffed softly, leisurely leaving the catacombs and returning to Place du Purgatoire.

In the Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative, Apartment 702 on 9 Rue Orosai.

Franca, who was about to go out to gather information on the Mirror People, saw Lumian again.

“You're here again? It's the third time today!" the Demoness of Pleasure asked, her lips twitching slightly.

Chapter 753: Rational Franca

753 Rational Franca

Facing Franca's probing, Lumian raised an eyebrow and said, "I've again come across something important that I need to tell you."

Franca eyed Lumian suspiciously, unsure whether he was playing a prank or had actually discovered something new.

Given the frequency of his discoveries, it seemed a bit much, didn't it?

Just this morning, he had returned from the Blue Avenger, having completed an initial exploration that yielded the formula for the Demoness of Despair potion, a Sword of Courage equivalent to a Grade 1 Sealed Artifact, and a specially significant corpse wax candle-all important findings. And now he had more gains in the afternoon?

Ultimately, Franca chose to believe Lumian; after all, he had proven himself a harbinger of chaos on multiple occasions.

She stepped aside to let him into the living room.

"What's it about this time?" Franca asked gravely as she closed the door.

Lumian stood by the window, back to the outside, and said seriously, "Do you remember Mr.

Hanged Man's description of Harrison?"

"I remember-he might appear in places closely linked to darkness, death, dusk, and decay," Franca replied, the oppressive atmosphere stifling her usual retort of not having forgotten what was discussed just that morning.

Lumian nodded and continued, "I had some free time, so I went to the catacombs. I met with the administrator guarding the Samaritan Women's Spring area. He told me that recently, an outsider tried to approach the spring but was stopped by him. This outsider's features are quite different from anyone from the Northern Continent..."

Franca, initially confused, shivered instinctively and blurted out, "Harrison? Was the man with the Eastern features that Jenna and I met actually Harrison?"

She immediately recalled her and Jenna's adventure at the Krismona Night Pillar.

In her urgency, she replaced the more complex description of non-North-Continent-bearing features with "Eastern features".

"It's very likely." Lumian nodded slowly.

Franca was taken aback. "Resurrection Island... Resurrection Island!"

Her lake-blue eyes sparkled with excitement and anticipation.

She asked for confirmation, "Could Resurrection Island be a node where the two worlds converge?"

"Even if it's not, it's probably closely related to your world," Lumian said, not wanting to dampen her spirits.

Franca paced back and forth excitedly, then wailed, "Why didn't I recognize him then? Why didn't I capture him? Now he's gone and we don't even have a starting point! The Eternal Blazing Sun Church is too slow, not a single piece of feedback!"

After Franca vented her frustration, Lumian calmly said, "You can't blame 007 and the others for being slow; Harrison might no longer be in Trier."

"Mmm," Franca pondered aloud. "I'll announce this at the research society meeting so members in different areas can watch out for anyone resembling Harrison."

Before Lumian could caution her, Franca muttered to herself, "I'll tell them not to seek the island until we find Harrison and obtain detailed information about Resurrection Island. It's too dangerous. If they spot Harrison, they shouldn't rush to recognize him or approach him; pretend they haven't seen him and notify President Gandalf, the chairman, Madame Hela, and us..."

Lumian listened intently and then playfully complimented her, "I thought you'd be too excited to think straight. But surprisingly, you, who usually seem carefree and not too thoughtful, have considered everything quite thoroughly."

Franca wasn't provoked; she replied with a smug grin, "What do you call that? LÃ¼ Duan is never muddled in major matters! If I have to think hard all the time, wouldn't that negate the point of relaxing?"

That made some sense... Lumian asked, puzzled, "Who's LÃ¼ Duan?"

"No need to know!" Franca answered decisively.

Lumian guessed the reason and didn't press further, simply nodding. "We'll share this at the gathering in two days."

Franca hummed in agreement, then her excitement and joy vanished, her body trembling slightly.

"What's wrong?" Lumian asked with concern.

Franca pressed her lips together, speaking softly, "I'm excited about the truth and what the future might hold, but I'm also afraid it won't meet my expectations. I'm scared of facing an answer I can't handle."

After speaking, Franca leaned on the windowsill as if drained of strength.

Lumian offered no comfort, his look one and the same as that Madam Magician had when she looked at him: pity.

He too feared that the hope for resurrection he so desperately pursued might just be an unattainable illusion.

After a moment, Lumian asked, "Want to have a drink?"

"Sure," Franca responded with a complex smile. "Getting drunk might help me forget these worries. Ah, typical brotherly comfort-offering a drink."

Two days later.

Franca met with Demoness of Black Clarice, at a hunting ground on the edge of the East Lognes Forest, as agreed.

The demigod-level Demoness had swapped her usual black court gown for dark hunting attire and a black hat that covered her long hair, giving her an air of dashing elegance and freshness.

Compared to her previously melancholic beauty, Madame Clarice now radiated a different kind of allure, equally captivating and splendid. Franca eyed the Demoness of Black with appreciation, suppressing the desires that instinctively arose, and relayed the intelligence on the Mirror People that 007 had provided in detail.

Clarice nodded gently, her smile bright as she took a wooden, burgundy-colored briefcase from her horse.

"This is your reward," said the Demoness of Black as she handed the case to Franca.

Franca did not hesitate, thanking her as she unlatched the metal fasteners and opened the modest-sized wooden briefcase.

Inside, the case was divided by pristine ice blocks showing no signs of melting, each compartment containing a bat's head with colorful markings, a gallbladder oozing blood and green bile, a bifurcated tail covered with sleek, sinister scales, and two types of dark red blood in glass vials.

"Affliction's main ingredient and most of the supplementary ingredients are here. If you're not ready to advance, don't try to break the ice I've crafted. That would only infect the bearer with various diseases and lead to a slow death," warned the Demoness of Black."

"Thank you, Madame," Franca quickly counted what supplementary ingredients were still needed.

All that was missing was the fairly common Enfinitas Eucalyptus.

Demoness of Black Clarice commented, "You're very efficient and effective in your tasks.

Perhaps in another year or two, you'll be ready to attempt opening the gate to godhood. But then, we won't reward you with the formula and ingredients for Despair. Instead, we'll inform you of the advancement ritual in advance. Once you're nearly ready, we'll simply give you the Despair potion."

"Is this to prevent High-Sequence potion formulas from being leaked?" Franca asked, understanding dawning on her.

The Demoness of Black nodded.

"Once you earn the right to have a color precede your title, you'll truly access the High-Sequence potion formulas and some of the sect's secrets."

I also want to obtain the Demoness of Unaging potion formula from you all, but without becoming a Demoness of Unaging, I probably can't have a color precede my name... No matter, having prior knowledge of the ritual to see if it's wicked or not is sufficient... Franca didn't hide the anticipation in her expression.

She then steered the conversation back to the investigation of the Mirror People.

"Madame, to what extent should we pursue the Mirror People? Is it enough to thwart their plans and eliminate those who have escaped from the special mirror world?

"We couldn't possibly enter that special mirror world and eradicate their leaders and their foundation while Fourth Epoch Trier's seal remains intact, could we?"

Franca was probing the Demoness Sect's ultimate goal regarding the Mirror People, trying to gauge the state and thoughts of the Primordial Demoness.

Clarice looked at her and said with a refreshing smile, "Let's do what we can for now. When you've advanced to Affliction, we'll tell you more."

Becoming a Demoness of Affliction means entering the core circle of the Demoness Sect, eligible to learn some secrets? Franca was both excited to be drawing closer to the secrets of the Demoness Sect and completing tasks, and somewhat anxious.

Late at night, in a quarry cave in Underground Trier.

AngoulÃªme de François, dressed in a brown woolen coat and wearing a gold brooch, entered this dormant area carrying a carbide lamp.

His right sleeve was rolled up, revealing a glass syringe tied around his elbow filled with a cloudy white liquid.

Behind him followed four or five Purifiers, each with a similar syringe on their arms.

Surrounded by the Purifiers were four tall iron-gray steam robots, responsible for carrying an item over two meters long and about six feet wide.

The item was covered with a red flannel cloth, hiding any details.

AngoulÃªme stopped in the middle of the quarry, gesturing for his teammates to halt as well.

The iron-gray steam robots then set the item on the ground.

As the flannel cover was lifted, a beautifully crafted, classical-looking bed was revealed, making AngoulÃªme and his team feel tired and drawn to its inviting comfort, wanting to lie down for a good sleep.

AngoulÃªme quickly looked away and, using the hand holding the carbide lamp, pushed the plunger of the syringe, injecting more of the liquid into his body.

Following similar actions from the other Purifiers, a figure in a black nun's outfit suddenly emerged from the other side of the quarry.

Chapter 754: Two Spirits

754 Two Spirits

When the feminine silhouette emerged from the darkness, AngoulÃªme and his companions instantly tensed up.

They were still unsure how to make the humanoid Sealed Artifact move towards the bed on its own; they could only hope that the bed, also a Grade 1 Sealed Artifact, would exert its allure to entice beings to lie upon it.

Of course, the Eternal Blazing Sun Church wouldn't send merely a team of highest-ranking Purifiers for a transaction involving a Grade 1 Sealed Artifact. Undoubtedly, a demigod was overseeing from the shadows, but in the event of an incident, how many could be saved from the clash of two Grade 1 Sealed Artifacts was an uncertainty.

As soon as the somber yet serene-looking woman appeared, she moved toward the elegant, classical bed as if summoned or commanded.

AngoulÃªme and the others remained perfectly still, almost like statues, fearing any sudden movement might startle their target and hinder the positive development of the situation.

Finally, the figure in the black nun's attire lay down on the bed.

She yawned slightly, then closed her eyes, her whole being radiating profound exhaustion, as if she had spent her life's energy.

She fell asleep.

Several Purifiers stepped forward, placing their differently colored leather cases on the ground.

They then pulled up the red flannel cloth to cover both the humanoid Sealed Artifact and the classical bed together.

The iron-gray steam robots also set down another leather case they were carrying.

They lifted the bed and, along with the Purifiers, left the quarry at a measured pace.

Soon, only AngoulÃªme and the nine cases on the ground behind him remained.

At the edge of the quarry, enveloped in deep darkness, a figure dressed in assassin's garb emerged.

She did not speak to AngoulÃªme but moved past the Purifier deacon to inspect the cases one by one.

Eight of the cases were either filled with shimmering gold bars or packed with numerous gold coins, all quite heavy, making Franca's gaze seem disrupted by the gleam of gold.

I've never seen so much gold in my two lifetimes combined... shame it's not mine, Franca thought regretfully as she stowed the gold, valued at 1.2 million verl d'or, along with the cases into her Traveler's Bag.

Another case contained the main and supplementary ingredients for the Pleasure potion and two folded scrolls.

After verifying everything was correct, Franca nodded to AngoulÃªme in a cold, businesslike tone befitting their professional relationship.

"You keep your promises well. I will continue to provide you with intel.

"Praise the Sun, you are the God of Deeds!" AngoulÃªme exclaimed, spreading his arms slightly in homage, attributing all glory and success to the deity.

Franca then left the quarry, continuously circling around and using her Demoness powers to erase any traces, countering any potential divination or prophecy.

After about seven or eight minutes, she met with Lumian in a secret tunnel in Underground Trier and was transported away by teleportation.

Inside Apartment 702 at 9 Rue Orosai.

Franca handed over the ingredients related to the Pleasure potion along with the leather case to Jenna, while Lumian was already seated on the armchair, engrossed in a reorganized dossier of the Sealed Artifact which wasn't written in a fixed format.

"Number: 1-147 "Original Name: Clémence Athana.

"This Sealed Artifact was born in a magistrate's family in Spahm Village, Zamet region of Upper Hornacis. She was sent to the Zamet Cloister upon reaching adulthood and, two years later, entered Suhit University to study paleobiology. After graduation, she stayed on as a faculty member.

"Her research in paleobiology primarily focused on tracing the remnants of mythical creatures to prove their existence. At the age of twenty-nine, she abruptly resigned from her academic post and returned to her native village, where she secluded herself in her room.

"Over the next two years, her family suffered a series of misfortunes: "Her father, intoxicated, fell into a cesspit at night and drowned; her mother, overcome with grief, hanged herself; her siblings killed each other over inheritance disputes; and her sister, who had gone home to intervene, went missing and was never found...

"The villagers of Spahm blamed her for bringing misfortune and sought to expel her. Not long after, a strange mental plague broke out in the village. By the time the Purifiers realized the issue, it was beyond redemption, and they had to purify all the infected...

"Further research indicated that Clémence Athana harbored two spirits within her, with her soul appearing stitched together.

"It is believed that one spirit orchestrated the tragedies of her family and the village's infection, while the other, unable to cope, became muddleheaded yet fought back instinctively, eventually going mad...

"Additionally, she carried another kind of corruption, distinct from her abilities to manipulate minds and spirits.

"It remains unclear when this corruption first appeared, whether before her return to her hometown or after the death of her parents...

"Sealed two years and four months ago."

"She was sealed not long ago. Among all Grade 1 Sealed Artifacts, her number must be one of the latest," Franca remarked, having appeared behind Lumian at some point, her elbows resting on the back of the armchair as she finished reading the dossier.

Lumian chuckled softly after a pause. "Perhaps one day, this will be my fate."

He could faintly sense Clémence Athana's struggle and resistance, but she ultimately failed and became a monster.

Franca opened her mouth, unsure of what to say.

After a few seconds, she patted Lumian on the shoulder and said, "Look on the bright side, in the grand scheme of things, we're all going to die. What matters is what we do on the path to death."

Lumian folded up the dossier, nodded solemnly, and responded, "Until death!"

At 10 p.m., in the ancient and dilapidated palace of the Nation of the Evernight, members of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society materialized in various locations.

Franca immediately spotted 007, who was wearing the lion headgear. She adjusted her hood and approached, asking curiously, "We've received our reward. What's yours?"

"007" AngoulÃªme replied with mixed emotions, "I can now wield a Grade 1 Sealed Artifact with less severe adverse effects."

"Wow, you're basically on reserve for demigod status!" Franca exclaimed enviously.

Her thoughts then turned to Lumian, who also possessed a Grade 1 Sealed Artifact with minor negative effects, essentially putting him in the same reserve category.

Before Lumian embarked on the paths of the divine, 007 had already been a Sequence 5 Beyonder. He was just too busy to serve as vice president of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society, so he had never shared this with others.

Thinking about it, 007 wasn't really that enviable after all.

007 glanced at Franca and said, "I used to dream of advancing to Sequence 4 and becoming a demigod, but as I handled more and more Beyonder events, I started to think that it might not be such a good thing. Sigh, fate has pushed me to this point; I can only keep moving forward."

"Right," Franca replied, feeling a sense of kinship. "I have a very important announcement to make soon."

"What is it?" 007 couldn't help but ask impulsively.

Why is Hidden Blade involved in an important matter again?

What is it this time?

So far, the news she brought was crazier and more shocking one after the other!

"You'll find out soon enough." Franca sighed.

She then looked towards Lumian, who was now disguised as Aurore, donning a warlock robe and a black hood, heading towards the Academy group's gathering place.

Lumian, in disguise, nodded gently at Franca.

Seeing that the members of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society had nearly all arrived, Franca walked directly to the massive stone chair.

Dressed in a plain white robe and resembling a half-giant, Gandalf was nearby. He whispered, "Are you going to warn everyone about the Mirror People?"

"No," Franca looked at Madame Hela standing on the other side and conjured a simple megaphone from the cold air.

"Ladies and gentlemen, I have an announcement to make," Franca's voice echoed through the ancient and dilapidated palace.

Members like Isotope, Bear, and Cerberus of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society turned their attention towards the depth of the palace to see who was speaking.

They suddenly felt uneasy.

The news Hidden Blade had brought before was never good!

Although she helped the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society clean up its internal saboteurs and established more reliable rules, avoiding foreseeable harm, the surging tide still left every participant unnerved.

As everyone ceased their discussions and looked towards her, Franca cleared her throat and started from the rumors about Resurrection Island, recounting her encounter in the catacombs of Trier with a man bearing Eastern looks in their original world.

So, it's about this... There's a continuation of that incident? 007 relaxed slightly.

A humming sound arose in different parts of the old palace, and members of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society couldn't help whispering among themselves.

For most of them, they had already accepted reality, adapted to their current lives, and even had different pursuits. But now, someone was telling them that the matter of transmigration still had secrets; maybe they could even go home!

Franca then spoke about Harrison of Resurrection Island, involved with death and dark forces, searching for something across the Northern and Southern Continents, but she didn't mention Demon Warlock Burman-it was too easy to link that to the great adventurer Louis Berry.

In the sudden silence inside the palace, Franca shared her and Lumian's speculation, "Resurrection Island might be a nexus where the two worlds converge.

"We must find Harrison and get information about Resurrection Island from him!"

After speaking in one breath, Franca's gaze slowly moved from the somewhat dazed faces of the audience to Madame Hela nearby.

She noticed an indescribable emotion in the dark pupils visible behind Madame Hela's black latticed veil.

Chapter 755: Different Attitudes

755 Different Attitudes

Despite Madame Hela's usual restraint and calm, there are clear emotional ripples this time...

Franca thoughtfully withdrew her gaze.

By then, many members of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society had regained their composure from the shock, voicing their opinions with both excitement and urgency.

Someone shouted, "Hidden Blade, you can't make such assumptions so lightly!"

Franca roared back immediately, "Whether or not Resurrection Island is a nexus between two worlds, we still need to find Harrison! This isn't a conclusion; it's a direction for our investigation!"

Another person yelled, "How can we find someone just based on a name?"

"I have his portrait!" Franca responded instantly.

As members expressed their expectations, posed questions, and sought answers, a voice, slightly out of control, shouted, "Why can't you just live peacefully in the present?"

Franca looked towards the source of the sound and saw a male member known as Mole.

After Mole spoke up, several members loudly said, "I don't want to risk everything for a slim hope."

"Why can't you give up these fantasies?"

"I have no interest in returning to our previous world!"

In response to the dissenting voices, Franca wasn't surprised but internally sighed, People vary so much when you gather a hundred of them...

She sincerely responded, "Searching for Harrison and verifying the situation on Resurrection Island are both entirely voluntary. Those who want to uncover the truth about our transmigration can decide if it's worth the risk. Those who aren't interested can continue as before, but please don't stop others from participating."

Mole and others were clearly still worried that investigating Resurrection Island might disrupt their current lives, but with Franca offering the choice of "free will," they could only mutter and retreat to the fringes.

Seizing the opportunity, Franca added, "For now, our investigation into Resurrection Island is limited to gathering information. Do not go looking for it-it's very dangerous. Once we obtain key information from Harrison, we'll discuss whether or not to go to the island and how to approach it. Right now, let me show you Harrison's portrait."

Cheers erupted from some of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society members who had grasped the situation: "Hidden Blade is awesome!"

"Hidden Blade, I love you!"

"Praise be to Hidden Blade!"

Franca chuckled and tilted her head, her worries and fears somewhat alleviated by the emotions of the crowd.

She knew that these members were not without fear of the unknown results of the investigation and the potentially disappointing truths it might reveal, but they had waited too long and desired too much. Even a small glimmer of hope could temporarily relieve their pain and sorrow, releasing their excitement and joy.

Franca then took a deep breath, pulled out Harrison's portrait, and affixed it to the back of the massive stone chair.

"Everyone, take turns to come and take a look!" Franca called out, stepping back from the area around the speckled stone chair.

"Do you really think that's a nexus between two worlds?" Gandalf stopped Franca, asking fervently.

Franca smiled awkwardly. "It's just a theory, still."

Gandalf nodded with satisfaction.

"That's no problem. Make bold assumptions, but verify them carefully."

"What, in your opinion, is the relationship between Resurrection Island and our world?"

Franca asked Gandalf, both hopeful and nervous.

Gandalf chuckled. "I don't have any predetermined conclusions yet; I need more information to study."

Franca glanced around and lowered her voice.

She shared the existence of the Samaritan Women's Spring, Underworld Daoist, and Celestial Master with President Gandalf, whom she and Lumian had decided to inform before attending this meeting-previously, they had only shared this with Hela. After all, they had worked together in the real world before.

Gandalf listened attentively and made a judgment.

"The relationship between the two worlds might be closer than we anticipated.

"The phenomenon of transmigration may have started even earlier."

Before Hidden Blade Franca could respond, the president of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society mused to himself, "With so many signs and traces, it's incredible we haven't encountered them, while you frequently do."

This probably requires your praise for the True Creator.. Franca barely held back a sarcastic remark.

After parting from the half-giant Gandalf, she was cornered by the tall 007.

"We've yet to find the person who might be Harrison," 007 simply reported on the previous "person-finding" efforts.

"Maybe he's no longer in Trier." Franca refrained from complaining about the Purifiers' inefficiency.

She glanced at "007" in lion headgear and cautiously asked, "Would you want to return to our original world?"

007 paused for a few seconds before replying, "Of course, but I'm afraid everything has changed.

"Although the era from which Emperor Roselle transmigrated isn't far from ours-if we returned now, we'd only miss a few days of life-no one has gone back yet, so we can't be certain. Maybe the rules for coming and going are fundamentally different."

Franca fell silent.

007 glanced at Gandalf sitting on the steps, scribbling in a notebook, and asked Franca, "What did you discuss with the president? He seemed quite stirred."

Franca, managing her emotions, took the opportunity to share with 007 what she had told Gandalf.

"007" AngoulÃªme was stunned for a moment, then clenched his teeth and said, "Why didn't you share this information sooner? What else haven't you told us?"

"I was just afraid you would really go all 007?" Franca joked, only to be met by a stern look from 007, which made her chuckle awkwardly. "Sometimes, it's not that I don't want to share; it's either not the right time or I don't have the permission."

I'm not Lumian, who has to squeeze out information like toothpaste-if I could tell, I would share everything... Franca added in her mind.

007 knew that Hidden Blade might have joined a secret organization and understood her predicament. He took a couple of deep breaths to calm himself.

He mumbled to himself, "You all have found so many traces of another world beneath Trier; I can't believe the two major churches that have watched over Trier for over a thousand years haven't discovered anything.

"When I become a demigod, a senior deacon, maybe I'll be allowed to look at those dossiers, right?"

"Mmm, mmm," Franca agreed repeatedly.

In the corner where the Academy group gathered, Professor, Associate Professor, Principal, Isotope and others had all viewed Franca's portrait of Harrison posted on the stone chair and were eagerly discussing related matters.

A woman with the periodic table painted on her face in washable paints asked those around her, "If we really find a way and a path back to our world, would you want to return?"

Professor and Associate Professor looked at each other and said, "If we can bring our children without having to leave anyone behind, we definitely hope to go back."

Principal, suspected of being a Sanguine, laughed.

"If I could keep my Beyonder abilities, then I'd be willing to go back."

Isotope, with fake heads on each shoulder and wearing a mannequin headgear, chuckled.

"I have no attachments or affairs that a mere modern life could replace with the sense of accomplishment I've gained in this world; I don't want to go back."

"What about you, Muggle?" asked Periodic Table, turning to the quietly listening Lumian.

Lumian paused for a moment and said in the voice of Aurore, "That's the place I long for day and night.

"But I'd also like to take some people who are close to me with me."

After much discussion, the topics of "going home" and "Resurrection Island" finally cooled down, and as everyone naturally fell silent, Lumian lifted his beautifully curved chin and looked around, asking, "Does anyone know someone from the Moses Ascetic Order" Suddenly, most members of the Academy group turned their gaze toward Muggle, observing her rosy lips and pale skin exposed outside her hoodie.

"Why are you asking this all of a sudden?" asked Professor wearing a butterfly bow tie.

The Academy group had many Warlocks and had exchanged information about the Moses Ascetic Order, so it wasn't surprising that "Muggle" knew about this secret organization.

Lumian responded with a smile, "I want to pass a message to the Moses Ascetic Order that there's a traitor among them."

"A traitor?" Isotope and company listened, somewhat bewildered.

Without giving a direct response, Lumian said, "Have you heard of 'Mirror People'?"

According to Madame Hela's latest statement, the members of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society who could enter the Nation of the

Evernight through the spell were at most mentally disrupted or harbored corruption inside; it was unlikely that their life forms had changed without detection, so it could preliminarily be ruled out that there were any Mirror People lurking here.

"I've heard of it," said Professor in a black half-face mask, nodding solemnly. "There have been occasional incidents of original hosts being replaced by their Mirror People, but why these Mirror People appear is still unknown, and perhaps the official Beyonders have the relevant information."

You seem to know quite a bit about the mystical world... Lumian's lips curled up with a smile.

"I know a Mirror Person named Griffith who has replaced his original host, and his host was a member of the Moses Ascetic Order; of course, Griffith certainly isn't the name he used in the Moses Ascetic Order."

Members of the "Academy" group remained silent, simply nodding their heads.

Lumian did not continue the topic.

Professor looked at her and ventured to ask, "Muggle, are you still in Trier?"

"Yes," Lumian responded with a smile.

Professor looked around and said, "I'm planning to organize a real-world gathering for members in Trier soon; do you want to join? It will primarily involve our Academy group."

Lumian's eyes flickered, and he smiled coyly. "Okay."

Chapter 756: "Farm" Team

756 "Farm" Team

After finalizing the details of the real-world gathering through Madame Hela's messenger, including the time, place, password, and method of the meeting, Lumian quietly listened to the members of the Academy group exchanging ideas, occasionally joining in the discussion.

With his current mastery of mysticism, he no longer needed to hide his ignorance.

After a while, Lumian asked if anyone had the potion formula and related ingredients for the Harvest Priest, but the answer was no.

He then walked over to another group near the ancient palace's gate.

Called the “Farm,” it was a group of Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society members who enjoyed planting and accumulating wealth. Lumian had once overheard their everyday conversations about how many hectares they had purchased, their plans to save for a ranch, their forest harvests, the effectiveness of their compost, the Church of Earth Mother's batch of modified wheat seeds suitable for arid regions, their growing savings, and how work brought them joy.

After that, Lumian never eavesdropped again.

As he approached the Farm members, he smelled the earthy scents of soil, fertilizer, grass, grains, and livestock—a familiar and comforting aroma that transported him back to Cordu Village, back to his sister's side.

The experienced Lumian instantly became alert.

This... reminds me of life in Cordu for one thing, but on another level, the acts of farming, herding, and harvesting resonate with the Omebella bloodline within me. The Goddess of Harvest is indeed living up to Her name; as expected of the Great Mother's Child of God...

Lumian quickly figured out the reason.

Although consuming the remnants of Omebella’s umbilical cord hadn't enhanced his powers or abilities, it had attracted the Great Mother's gaze, allowing creatures She had created or blessed to sense his bloodline, though it hadn't been without effect.

Omebella's residual bloodline subtly altered his perceptions of certain things, indirectly affecting his psyche.

As Lumian listened to the Farm group members discussing, he keenly observed each person's reactions.

Although only creatures lacking necessary intellect would mistake him for a child of the Great Mother, those who had received the Great Mother's boons or were directly created by Her could sense the Omebella bloodline in him, though they wouldn't misidentify him.

This would help Lumian determine through any unusual reactions among the Farm group members whether they covertly worshiped the Great Mother.

After a few minutes, Lumian tentatively confirmed that none of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society members in this area were problematic.

He then mimicked Aurore's voice when she pressed her voice down, looked around, and asked, "Does anyone have the Harvest Priest's potion formula or related ingredients? If you're unwilling to disclose the formula, you could sell me a ready-made Harvest Priest potion.”

"Muggle, I thought you were a 'Warlock,’” a Farm group member called "Breeder Master" asked, puzzled.

He was tall with a rugged, wild demeanor and wore a primitive tribal mask made from animal fur.

“I Know someone who needs it,” Lumian laughed, “and I thought I might make a small profit while helping out.”

Breeder Master further inquired, "You should know that a ready-made potion needs to be consumed quickly before it is absorbed by the container and becomes a Sealed Artifact with strong negative effects. Moreover, trading through Madame Hela’s messenger would delay things. You have to drink it immediately upon receipt. Will there be no issues?"

Madame Hela's messenger sure is busy... Lumian teased inwardly. "No problem.”

After questioning and observing, he was sure that the Doctor potion from Lugano had been fully digested.

This was a Doctor who had treated an Angel and fake Angel!

After Ludwig was brutally beaten by Loki, it was Lugano who had treated and healed his wounds. Lumian himself had received Lugano's treatments on multiple occasions.

After contemplating for a moment, Breeder Master said, "20,000 gold risot for a ready-made Harvest Priest potion.

"It's pricier than just buying the ingredients separately, but we have to respect intellectual property rights. Normally, I'd charge between 30,000 and 35,000, but since we're all members of the society...”

About 40,000 verl d'or, Lumian nodded slightly in agreement.

“No problem."

He already had 19,000 gold risot in bills and coins on him, so he made an upfront payment of 10,000, agreeing to pay the balance upon receipt of the potion.

They brought in 007 from the Sanctuary group to notarize the agreement.

“Pleasure doing business,” said Breeder Master with a smile to Muggle as he pocketed the deposit.

He then turned to other members of the Farm group and exclaimed, "Now I have the funds for more experiments! I've been studying those mushrooms created by the legendary Druid Frank Lee. I find his philosophy intriguing and worth following.

"Given the myriad supernatural beings in this world, including Beyonders, why not merge the blood, flesh, milk of these beings with ordinary plants? Whether through hybridization or genetic modification, with the aid of mystical powers, it can be done relatively easily, and after several generations, the traits stabilize, resulting in plants with magical effects but no Beyonder characteristics..."

As Lumian listened, a strange unease began to form within him.

He never felt this way even when discussing death-related topics with the Purgatory group!

The first time he heard the name Frank Lee was in the Cordu Village dream, where an official Beyonder named Ryan mentioned a saying that circulated at sea: "I'd rather come face to face with Pirate Admirals or even Kings than run into a bloke named Frank Lee.”

Later, when Lumian was at sea, he heard no rumors about Frank Lee, nor did he know if Ryan was exaggerating in the dream or if those who knew of Frank Lee's deeds dared not or chose not to mention him again.

Sanctuary team.

Franca looked towards a member nicknamed "Someone" and asked with a smile, "Weren't you looking for the Marauder pathway Sequence 5 Dream Stealer's Beyonder characteristic? Still need it? I just got one from a friend.

“If you don't want it, I'll go to an Artisan to craft a mystical item with that Beyonder characteristic."

Someone, wearing an eyepatch-style black half-face mask, sized up Franca and replied, “It seems your friend isn't you.

"I don't need it anymore, but wouldn't mind another.

“One flat rate, 5000 pounds.”

That's about 120,000 verl d'or... Franca laughed and said, "200,000 verl d'or, not a coin less."

"Someone" calculated for a moment and countered, "150,000 verl d'or at best, or forget it.”

Franca thought for a few seconds and said, "You can pay in two installments, the first right now of 120,000 verl d'or, and the second of 60,000 within three months of receiving the Beyonder characteristic, secured by 007's notarization to enforce the contract.”

Someone paused to think, then asked with a smile, "Aren't you worried I'll default after getting the Beyonder characteristic? A Notary's notarization isn't foolproof, remember, I was once a renowned Swindler.”

Franca smiled. "Who's better, you or Bard?"

Someone fell silent.

“Bard has already been dealt with by me and my comrades. Unless you're willing to give up a very useful trading platform over 60,000 verl d'or, I'm not worried about you defaulting, your Beyonder characteristics are also quite valuable." Franca, who had mafia ties, made her intimidating remark as casually as discussing what's for dinner.

“It won't be long before I surpass him," replied Someone after a few seconds, “Deal!”

“No rush,” Franca said with a smile, "The final payment must be in gold.”

…

In the following days, Lumian had no particular business and wandered around Trier, tracking several Mirror People and looking for Harrison's whereabouts based on intelligence provided by 007.

He was supposed to collect a reward from Mr. K, but his heart resisted, and he kept delaying.

Franca completed her transaction with Someone from the Sanctuary group, receiving a down payment composed of bills and coins totaling 5000 pounds.

She also gave Jenna 15,000 verl d'or in bills, stipulating that the remaining payment of 60,000 verl d'or in gold belonged entirely to her.

Jenna lost the Dream Stealer Beyonder characteristic but also paid off the 45,000 verl d'or she owed Franca, now possessing 16,000 verl d'or and gold Loen pound worth 120,000 verl dor.

She had never been so wealthy before.

She always knew that potion formulas and Beyonder characteristics were valuable and even knew their approximate price range, but she had never paid in full in one go nor truly sold any until now. Now she was experiencing what it felt like to earn money like the Pirate Hunter Gehrman Sparrow.

That evening, just as Lumian returned to his rented apartment planning to change his clothes and muster the courage to see Mr. K, the wall lamp in his room suddenly tinged with eerie green and pale colors.

They blended bizarrely together.

Then, Lumian saw his messenger, the mummified Penitent in a black clergy robe, emerge from the void.

Almost simultaneously, Madame Hela’s messenger, a skull made of pure silver, appeared shrouded in darkness.

Shortly after, the silhouette of a doll messenger rapidly took shape.

"...” Lumian was somewhat stunned.

Would the messengers fight each other?

Do! have three letters?

One should be for the Harvest Priest potion, another likely a Sealed Artifact made from the Beyonder characteristics of Hisoka, but what about the third?

Chapter 757: Harvest Priest

757 Harvest Priest

As Penitent Baynfel and the pure silver skull appeared, the doll messenger, dressed in a pale gold mini dress, instantly floated beside Lumian as if confronting the other two messengers.

The pure silver skull set down a burlap bag on the desk from its mouth amidst the surrounding darkness, then fixed its burning pale eyes on Lumian.

Penitent Baynfel dropped a folded letter and silently returned to the spirit world, vanishing from the room.

Lumian wanted to take this opportunity to chat with his messenger about his past and ask about his relationship with the True Creator, but given the circumstances, he had to suppress his curiosity and focus on the pure silver skull instead.

Lumian picked up the burlap bag, which resembled a book bag, and pulled out an aluminum flask.

Behind him, the doll messenger floated closer, curiously looking on.

Lumian unscrewed the grayish-white flask to find a golden liquid inside, brimming with white foam.

If it weren't for the lack of a malty scent, he would have thought it was beer.

He took out a piece of paper from the burlap bag, written in ancient Feysac by Madame Hela: "It is indeed the Harvest Priest potion.

"It needs to be drunk within 15 minutes, or you will end up with a alcohol flask that could bring harvests."

Seeing that Madame Hela had helped with the identification and there was a notarized contract in place, Lumian immediately took out the remaining 9000 gold risot from his Traveler's Bag and the 1000 gold risot notes he had exchanged in the last two days.

"This is the final payment.” Lumian put the gold risot into the burlap bag and handed it to the skull made of pure silver.

The pure silver skull bit down on the burlap bag, merged with the surrounding darkness, and disappeared in an instant.

Lumian then turned his head and said with a smile to the doll messenger, "What's your take?"

The doll messenger snorted.

"I will surpass them eventually!

“I will become the first, no, the second most powerful messenger in this world!"

“Quite ambitious,” Lumian replied, half-seriously, half in jest.

He wasn't surprised by the doll messenger's response; he already knew about the special nature of Penitent Baynfel and the pure silver skull.

The doll messenger then hurled a dark, translucent orb, resembling a crystal ball but more ethereal, towards Lumian, who easily caught it. Inside the bent, transparent barrier, a glossy black bone ring floated, its surface carved with the twisted, agonizing face of a demon, whose eyes contained two vague shadows.

After letting the folded letter fall to the surface of the desk, the doll messenger also left Lumian's room.

It is indeed a Sealed Artifact made from Hisoka's Beyonder characteristics... Lumian couldn't afford to check the artifact's effects and impacts right away, so he stored the dark transparent orb and the folded letter first, and then began to read the letter brought by his messenger.

The letter was very brief: “Seven of Wands: "Do you still remember your promise? We now need your help.

“If you don't have other important matters recently, please meet us at the following coordinates, where I will tell you the details."

“Knight of Swords.”

Knight of Swords needs help... Lumian came to a realization.

In the incident of the sea prayer ritual, he had asked this Minor Arcana card holder, working under Ma‘am Hermit, for help. At the time, he did not ask for a payment but mentioned that he might need a bit of help if he went to the Southern Continent, to which he readily agreed.

Fortunately, I'm relatively free lately. Lumian put away the letter from the Knight of Swords, screwed the cap back on the grayish-white flask, and walked out of the room with it in hand.

Lugano was cleaning up the plates and cutlery that Ludwig had left behind.

“Your Harvest Priest potion has arrived," Lumian stated calmly.

Lugano froze, a look of confusion washing over his face.

After a few seconds, he pointed to the flask in his employer's hand and asked, "This?"

“Yes, it looks more drinkable than the potions from the Hunter pathway,” Lumian chuckled as he shook the flask. "You have ten minutes to decide whether you want to drink it.”

"Ten minutes?" Lugano exclaimed, startled.

Lumian nodded.

“No, eight minutes.

"If you haven't made up your mind in eight minutes, I'll find a stray dog downstairs or catch a rat and feed it this potion."

“Don't I need to prepare mentally and physically?” Fear was written all over Lugano's face.

This seems too casual, doesn't it?

This is a potion, after all!

If his mental and physical state weren't right, he could either turn into a monster or die on the spot!

“Only seven minutes left now," Lumian reminded with a smile. "Your condition is fine; you just need to relax and remember that you are Ludwig's nanny and family doctor.”

“Is that really okay?" Lugano still couldn't believe it.

"Six minutes,” Lumian said coldly.

".." Lugano was stunned.

How could time pass so quickly?

Gritting his teeth, he replied, "Alright!

But I need to drink it in Underground Trier.”

"Hmm?" Lumian raised an eyebrow.

Lugano quickly explained, "I feel that standing on the earth helps me maintain my state while drinking the potion.”

“The Earth pathway, huh..." Carrying the grayish-white flask, Lumian turned and walked out of the room.

Lugano followed, pulling out a bunch of banknotes from his pocket.

“This is all my savings, 15,000 verl d'or.

“You said before, the rest would be covered by you."

Lumian nodded nonchalantly and accepted the 15,000 verl d'or without hesitation.

He still had 86,000 verl d'or, including a few coins and gold bars.

Once on the street, Lumian headed directly to the nearest entrance to Underground Trier. A stray dog passed by, barking as if to threaten them.

Lumian chuckled and “tested” Lugano, "Can you understand what it's saying?"

With his mind full of thoughts about the Harvest Priest potion, Lugano asked in astonishment, "Y-you can understand? Do you have a mystical item from a Beast Tamer?"

Lumian laughed to himself. "It says, ‘I heard you're going to feed me a portion of the Harvest Priest potion; why haven't you given it to me yet?”

“.." Lugano then realized his employer was joking.

On second thought, Lugano felt like he was being mocked by his employer.

He's implying that I'm a stray dog!

I was indeed wondering why he hasn't given me the Harvest Priest potion yet...

Once in Underground Trier, Lumian expertly navigated to a deserted tunnel and tossed the grayish-white flask at Lugano.

As Lugano fumbled to catch the flask, Lumian coldly reminded, "Two minutes left.”

Lugano took a deep breath, unscrewed the cap, and saw the potion inside that looked like beer.

He began to recall how he had cared for and treated Ludwig, using this memory to slightly relax his tense spirit.

After a few seconds and two deep breaths, Lugano raised the grayish-white flask and gulped down the potion.

Lumian, who made a ball of bright white flame as a light source, silently watched, observing the various changes in Lugano's body.

He had not forgotten that his "servant" was quite unusual; he could stay conscious during the Dream Festival!

Lugano's face quickly twisted in agony, as if experiencing the pain of Ludwig biting off his arm again.

Lumian saw his feet slowly sinking into the soil, the hairs on his exposed skin visibly thickening and lengthening, and his brown hair doing the same, his brown eyes losing focus.

After a while, the transformations stopped, and Lugano's expression gradually eased.

It went smoothly... He fits the Planter pathway well... I'm not sure if this is due to his own anomalies... Lumian muttered silently, watching as Lugano’s eyes slowly regained clarity and reason.

He asked in a relaxed posture, "What abilities have you gained?"

Although it was frowned upon in the mystical world to inquire about the details of someone's Beyonder abilities, who could be blamed because the person across from him was his "servant"?

Lugano saw no problem with this, checking his condition while savoring the acquired mystical knowledge.

“My healing capabilities have expanded. I can now cure diseases in plants and fields...

"I can also catalyze seeds, making them grow or reproduce faster.

“This divides into two scenarios: the first is placing both hands on the earth, which allows seeds and plants within a thirty-meter radius to grow or reproduce much faster than normal, though not instantaneously complete their lifecycle from gestation to returning to the land in a few seconds or minutes. The second is directly holding some seeds or plants and fully catalyzing the life contained within them.

"The latter scenario allows me, in a very short time, to create a large amount of vines, which can be used to entangle and control enemies.”

Hearing this, Lumian thoughtfully asked, "So you can only fully catalyze the life contained within plants, and it can't be used on humans?"

"No." Lugano shook his head.

Lumian continued, "If you encounter a creature that is essentially a plant but has intelligence, could you, by direct contact, cause all of its life to burst forth in seconds or tens of seconds, completing its entire life cycle?"

“First, I'd need to be able to touch it..." Lugano indicated that this was dangerous and not something he, not specialized in combat, could manage.

He added, "Plus, I'm not sure it would have the effect you're imagining.”

Lumian nodded almost imperceptibly, signaling Lugano to continue.

Lugano gathered his thoughts and said, "If I could obtain seeds of different mutant plants, my catalytic abilities could play a significant role in combat.

“I can also command plants and insects within a thirty-meter radius to provide me with appropriate support, as long as it does not exceed their species limitations. However, intelligent ones won't work.

"I've also gained a few ritual spells, mainly for summoning rain or clearing the skies."

Chapter 758: Devil's Whispers

758 Devil's Whispers

This really leans towards the concept of harvest... If I could obtain seeds from magical plants or be in an environment dominated by magical plants and special insects, the Harvest Priest's combative abilities using mystical means wouldn't be too bad; they might even be impressively effective...

The Beyonder ability to directly catalyze plants to unleash their full life force has vast imaginative possibilities. Unfortunately, a Harvest Priest's direct combat ability is limited. If Lugano were a Sealed Artifact and I were to use it, things would be completely different...

Amid these thoughts, Lumian looked at Lugano and asked, "Have there been any enhancements to your body?"

"There are some, but not many," Lugano replied honestly.

Lumian nodded and pulled out a letter from his pocket sent along with Hisoka's Sealed Artifact from Madam Magician, reading it with the aid of the bright white light orb floating above his head.

"Temporarily named: Devil's Whisper.

"Positive effects:

"1. Devil's Arm:

"To minimize the negative effects and make it easy to use, the Beyonder ability of this bone ring is reduced. Originally Devil Transformation targets the entire body, it now only affects the arm wearing Devil's Whisper.

"It causes the arm to swell, darken, and sprout sinister patterns, as if covered with a thick layer of armor. The flesh becomes highly elastic and resistant, minimizing damage.

"The arm in question becomes immune to most poisons, resistant to curses and fire to a certain degree, and significantly stronger.

"2. Malice Perception:

"For the same reason, Malice Perception granted by this ring only helps you sense whether people around you bear ill will towards you, not to detect looming dangers. Make do with it.

"3. Desire Incarnation:

"This is a power I specifically requested the Artisan to emphasize, sacrificing the chance to obtain other powerful effects. Moreover, to ensure its full manifestation, I agreed to slightly increase the rings negative effects.

"It can transform your body into a shadowy black liquid composed of various emotions and desires, helping you avoid damage, conceal your movements, and affect your enemies.

"This sounds quite useful, but is it worth my special request to the Artisan? You'll understand why once you use it."

Upon reading this, Lumian muttered to himself, 'So, by suppressing the reduced negative impacts of the first two positive effects, some of the impact has returned in the Desire Incarnation ability? What makes it so special for Madam Magician to do this?'

Lumian didn't rush to experiment and continued reading.

"4. Wraith Shriek

"By rubbing the demon relief on the ring's face and emitting a loud sound, you can create an effect similar to Wraith Shriek that can rupture the eardrums of living beings and harm their spirits. The closer they are to you, the better the effect.

"Negative effects:

"After wearing it, your malice will become more pronounced. If you can't control yourself and indulge in malice, you'll gradually slip into the Abyss and eventually be controlled by the malice of this ring, meaning, if you indulge in malice while wearing it, you will become its puppet, and it will be the driver, you the driven.

"While it's not that a single indulgence in malice will result in being controlled, it's hard for humans who have tasted the sweet lure of malice not to continue.

"According to my estimates, the conspicuous malice combined with the existing negative effects of the contract ability will negate all your endurance from Ascetic and your own willpower, making you unable to withstand further emotional and desire stimuli.

"Moreover, whether worn or not, just carrying it will cause your body to suffer burns from sulfur flames, both internally and externally. Placing it in the Traveler's Bag can effectively mitigate this effect. As a Pyromaniac who has reached Sequence 5, you can withstand these burns for a longer period, but be mindful of the sulfur's toxic effects and treat it promptly.

"Furthermore, including yourself, people within a hundred meters radius will be subtly influenced by the Devil's Whisper, more prone to ill thoughts and impulsive actions. This can also be mitigated by placing it in the Traveler's Bag."

The rest is okay, but after wearing Devil's Whisper, my emotions and desires will become my greatest weaknesses... Lumian assessed this Sealed Artifact from Hisoka.

Its sealing is relatively simple, requiring only spatial isolation. Combined with Lumian's strong endurance, he could totally use it as a mystical item.

Lumian then pulled out the pitch-black bone ring, wrapped in a dark transparent barrier, from another pocket. He pressed his hand against the sphere and slowly reached inside.

His right hand felt like it was moving through a dense swamp, struggling to touch the ring.

At the same time, the dark sphere silently crumbled, unfolded on its own, and merged with the surrounding void.

Lumian then slipped Devil's Whisper onto his left index finger.

His body suddenly liquefied and became ethereal.

He turned into a pool of thick black liquid. Lugano, who only glanced at him, shivered uncontrollably, chilled to the bone as if he had seen the most sinister and hidden desires and emotions deep within the human heart.

The newly-advanced Harvest Priest impulsively asked Lumian, who had just returned to human form from a black liquid state, "When can we return to the surface?"

Lumian gave him an icy glance, his blue eyes seemingly harboring a darkness that no light could penetrate.

Lugano shuddered violently, a familiar fear creeping back as he stuttered, "J-just asking."

Lumian cracked a slightly mad smile and slowly removed the Devil's Whisper, placing it back into the Traveler's Bag.

He now understood why Madam Magician had specifically requested this ability.

His desires and emotions were not entirely his own!

A smaller part of his emotions and desires stemmed from his fate linked to Termiboros, from the residual aura of the Blood Emperor, and from the bloodline of Omebella. Normally, these would only affect him, but using Desire Incarnation, these emotions and desires could be materialized and thus exert some influence on the outside world and his enemies.

If I were to envelop a Sequence 4 Saint in the Desire Incarnation form, that demigod would likely suffer from the corresponding emotional and desire corruption... But this method of attack means I'm forgoing evasion to face the backlash head-on, Lumian mused briefly, fairly satisfied with this Sealed Artifact.

Facing a demigod, evasion was sometimes futile-better to fight it out!

And both the Sword of Courage and Devil's Whisper gave him that chance.

When night fully descended, Lumian arrived at the headquarters of the Psychic magazine, located at 19 Rue Scheer in Avenue du Boulevard, and met Mr. K in the basement.

Mr. K, wearing a wide hood, warmly said, "Let us pray to the Lord first."

Lumian nodded slightly and closed his eyes.

His thoughts tightly wrapped, not drifting outward.

After a while, he and Mr. K opened their eyes simultaneously.

Mr. K, with a hoarse but fervent voice, said, "Congratulations, you are now a candidate Oracle.

"This is the greatest reward, being closer to the Lord is the greatest reward for us!

"Afterwards, wherever you go, you can contact the local Oracles or members of the Aurora Order, followers of the Lord, to request their help.

"If there are no Saints or Oracles locally, you have the authority to call upon all resources there, including personnel, money, intelligence, and materials."

Is this the Aurora Order's reward, elevating my authority and status? Lumian made the sign of the cross over his chest and said in a hoarse voice, "Praise you for creating all. Praise you for bearing the world's sins!"

Mr. K nodded in satisfaction.

"There are no other rewards for now, let's continue to investigate the matter of the vortex."

"Okay," Lumian quietly breathed a sigh of relief.

If Mr. K had offered material rewards, he would have hesitated to accept them.

It's not that he was worried about the items themselves being marked by that entity; after all, he was already under surveillance, so a little more wouldn't make a difference. His reluctance was more psychological.

Lumian pondered for a moment and then informed Mr. K, "I might be heading to the Southern Continent again soon to wrap up some previous matters, not sure how long I'll need."

"Alright," Mr. K nodded gently, "Which area specifically?"

"Not sure yet," Lumian answered truthfully.

He really didn't know.

Mr. K didn't inquire further.

"We have Saints and Oracles on the Southern Continent, and many followers of the Lord operating secretly there. Once you determine the specific location, I can help you contact the person responsible for that area."

"Thank you, Mr. K," Lumian said, expressing his gratitude.

Mr. K corrected him, "No need for thanks; we are all Oracles now, not being equals is disrespectful to the Lord."

Lumian was momentarily speechless.

He casually asked, "Mr. K, that cathedral you took me to last time, does it have any significant meaning within our Aurora Order?"

Mr. K replied fervently, "That was the first cathedral established by our Aurora Order."

Is it related to Baynfel? Lumian asked a few more indirect questions from different angles, then took his leave.

Returning to Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative, he informed Franca and Jenna about the Knight of Swords' request and then activated the black mark on his right shoulder, beginning the teleportation.

He moved between layers of pure color blocks and indescribable bizarre creatures, not knowing how long it took, but he finally arrived at the location indicated in the Knight of Swords's letter.

The first thing that caught Lumian's eyes were several pale-faced men and women, like bodyguards, surrounding the Knight of Swords with somewhat disheveled brown hair, a suppressed look in his eyes, dressed in a white shirt and black vest.

Chapter 759: Spiritual Intuition

759 Spiritual Intuition

Beside the Knight of Swords lay a boundless lake, its quiet crimson waters shimmering under the moonlight of the night, occasionally stirred by a breeze.

Lumian couldn't help but lift his head to gaze upward, feeling the night sky, hung with a crimson moon, seemed closer and much clearer than usual. Even the stars, obscured by the moonlight, were faintly visible, dense as if forming a brilliant, vast river.

A chilly wind blew past, and Lumian, dressed in a thick jacket, turned his attention back to the Knight of Swords and asked, "Aren't you cold?"

Although it was summer in the Southern Continent, their high altitude and thin air made it feel significantly colder, especially at night, with temperatures likely below 15 degrees Celsius.

Originally gazing at the highland lake, the Knight of Swords turned to Lumian and said, "For me, temperature has lost its meaning, and besides, the cold suits me better."

"Is that so? Then, extreme temperatures over 100 degrees Celsius or close to absolute zero don't affect you?" Lumian replied, his tone relaxed.

The Knight of Swords fell silent, his gaze dark, seemingly suppressing something, before Lumian steered the conversation back on track. "What exactly is the matter?"

Without asking the pale-faced, simply dressed men and women around him to leave, the Knight of Swords spoke in a low voice, "This is the Raklev area of the former Highlands Kingdom. I would like you to help find someone here."

The Highlands Kingdom, known for its mummies across the Northern and Southern Continents? Lumian did not hide his confusion. "What can you not find that I can?"

Having worked together before, Lumian knew that the Knight of Swords, a holder of a Minor Arcana card and a Sequence 5 Wraith of the Prisoner pathway-mainly controlled by the Rose School of Thought with its splinter group, the temperance faction, joining the Church of The Fool-must have his reasons.

Combining this information, Lumian guessed that the Knight of Swords was a member of the temperance faction, representing his faction within the Tarot Club, also serving Mr. Fool.

Moreover, having seen a temperance faction Angel suspected of being a messenger of Mr. Fool, Lumian knew this organization was not weak, but rather strong, especially in divination, endowed with potent spiritual intuition.

Considering these, if the Knight of Swords truly needed to find a person, it would be simpler to request assistance directly from the temperance faction.

Is he thinking that it's a waste of my promise if it's not used?

Or, like me, do you prefer to rely on your own abilities and the goodwill you've accumulated to complete tasks, as a way to hone yourself?

Ah, it's more likely you're relying on my mystical ability to attract evil god bestowed to locate the target...

While Lumian made these guesses, the Knight of Swords, his voice suppressing his emotions and desires, said, "Someone's spiritual intuition tells her that you can solve our current problem and provide the most effective help."

A Wraith becomes a charlatan after becoming skilled at divination? Lumian thought sarcastically but didn't inquire further. "What do you need me to do?"

The Knight of Swords took a few steps forward.

"Please allow me to introduce myself.

"My name is Maric, the 'Knight of Swords' of the Tarot Club's Minor Arcana, and also a member of the temperance faction of the Church of The Fool.

"You're aware of the origin of the temperance faction aren't you?"

Lumian nodded and pointed at himself. "Lumian Lee."

The Knight of Swords continued, "We are looking for an important member of the Primordial Moon faction within the indulgence faction."

We... Lumian's first reaction was to look around for any companions the Knight of Swords, Maric, might have.

But he found no one.

As for the pale-faced men and women, he didn't use his Eye of Calamity, simply observing their weaknesses and confirming they were all zombies.

Lumian retracted his gaze and frowned.

"The Primordial Moon faction?"

Wasn't the Rose School of Thought only known for the split between the indulgence and temperance factions? Where did the Primordial Moon faction come from?

Hmm, from the series of events involving Hisoka and the Dream Festival, perhaps there was also a Devil faction within the Rose School of Thought...

Is this something learned from the Tamara family? Infinitely divisible...

The Knight of Swords earnestly explained, "The Primordial Moon faction joined the indulgence faction later, originally a branch of the Life School of Thought; they grasp the Apothecary, which is also the Moon pathway. Later, guided by the Primordial Moon, they defected from the Life School of Thought and joined the Rose School of Thought.

Life School of Thought... Lumian's head throbbed.

Why does this keep getting more complicated?

And which secret organization is this now?

Seemingly sensing his thoughts, the Knight of Swords, Maric, spoke succinctly, "The Life School of Thought primarily follows the Fate pathway and is now an ally of the Tarot Club. This matter has nothing to do with our current search."

Lumian nodded, signaling the Knight of Swords to stick to the main issue.

Aurore once said, "Do not add unnecessarily entities; if irrelevant, best leave it be to save energy."

Glancing at the pristine, boundless lake, the Knight of Swords, Maric, said, "The member of the 'Primordial Moon' faction we're looking for possesses a very important item-that is our target."

"How are you so sure they are in, uh, the Raklev area?" Lumian engaged more seriously now.

The Knight of Swords paused for a few seconds before responding, "Two incidents here and some residual traces point to him, but we haven't found him yet. Meanwhile, another event occurred that proves he's still here, possibly right in Raklev City."

"Is he from the Apothecary pathway?" Lumian asked cautiously.

The Knight of Swords gave a slight nod. "Yes."

"Which evil god is their Primordial Moon?" Lumian didn't rush to ask about the incidents and the traces left behind.

The Knight of Swords' expression turned grave for a moment.

"It's likely an incarnation of the Great Mother, sometimes also known as the Mother Tree of Desire."

"The Great Mother..." Lumian's eyelids twitched, "Has the Primordial Moon's important follower received a boon from the Primordial Moon, or should I say, the Great Mother?"

"Possibly." The Knight of Swords wasn't too certain.

A follower of the Great Mother receiving Her blessing would mean they could sense my Child of God lineage within a certain distance... The Knight of Swords hadn't thought of asking for my help before; I had only recently received the lineage of Omebella, and his companion then had a strong spiritual intuition... Are they trying to lure out the target using my Child of God lineage? Lumian's understanding of the situation became instantly clear.

That person's spiritual intuition is spot on!

The Knight of Swords regained his composure.

"That person is named Oxyto, a Sequence 4 Shaman King of the Apothecary pathway, a demigod. Don't worry, we will discreetly provide you with protection."

While speaking, the Minor Arcana card holder bent down to pick up an oil painting from the ground, depicting a handsome young man in his twenties, his skin pale as if he hadn't been exposed to sunlight for a long time, with deep features and slightly curly black hair cascading to his shoulders.

"This is a portrait of Oxyto," the Knight of Swords briefly introduced.

"If there's a boon, the target's current appearance and gender might be uncertain..." Lumian pondered aloud, "Tell me about the incidents that occurred in the Raklev area and the significant traces left behind."

The Knight of Swords pulled out a stack of papers from under his vest and handed them to Lumian, saying, "We first heard from some merchants about several occurrences of a full moon in Raklev City at times it shouldn't appear...

"At the edge of Lake Dalsh, we discovered a buried ritual site where dozens of humans had become nourishment for the earth. Their abdomens had been torn open, and it seemed something had crawled out, but no related traces were found at the scene..."

Hearing this, Lumian suddenly recalled several scenes he had seen in Madame Pualis's castle.

He grimaced as he asked, "Were these humans both men and women?"

"Yes," the Knight of Swords seemed to anticipate his question and added proactively, "The males' abdomens were also torn open."

He then pointed to the stack of papers in Lumian's hands.

"More detailed information is in the documents."

Lumian hummed in acknowledgment, pondering for a moment.

"I might need my companions to assist me, can you protect them too?"

"No problem, as long as you all stay within five kilometers of each other," the Knight of Swords assured.

Lumian smiled.

"Then I'll go back first to study the materials and make some preparations."

...

In the Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative, Apartment 702 on 9 Rue Orosai.

After listening to the Knight of Swords' request, Franca scratched her head, puzzled.

"Forget the risk of searching for a demigod for a moment; I think you alone should be able to handle it. There's limited help we can provide, as we don't have the lineage of Omebella."

Anthony, who had been called over, thought for a moment and said, "I could help cover up traces of the investigation, making those questioned forget they were ever asked."

Jenna glanced at Lumian and said, "I think your real purpose isn't to get our help."

Hearing this, Franca realized.

"You want to use this opportunity to train the team? You want to prepare this early?"

"Not too shabby." Lumian chuckled, "The earlier you prepare for these things, the better, in case I'm forced to advance earlier than planned."

Franca thoughtfully said, "Then I'll pass Jenna's messenger summoning method to 007. When there are Mirror People clues, we'll go back to Trier to follow up. And don't forget the most important team member."

"How could I forget?" Lumian laughed.

Ludwig, who was enjoying a late-night snack, saw his godfather enter the room and sit down across the dining table, flashing a smile at him.

Suddenly, the bread in his hands didn't taste as good anymore.

Chapter 760: Second Day

760 Second Day

In the Southern Continent, Raklev region, the day revealed Lake Dalsh in all its clarity, the serene waters reflecting the azure sky and distant snow-capped mountains in a scene almost dreamlike in its beauty.

Lumian, devoid of any mood to appreciate the scenery, was strolling around a pit at the forest's edge with Ludwig, who was smartly dressed in a tweed blazer, and Lugano, who wore a light cotton coat.

The pit contained highly decayed bodies, half-melted into the surrounding soil as if merging with it, decomposing in a unique way that returned nutrients to the earth.

Seeing this, Lumian understood why Oxyto, a Shaman King, didn't destroy the bodies after his rituals, leaving behind evidence and traces: burying the bodies and allowing them to return to the land was likely part of the ritual!

Last night, after reviewing the documents provided by the Knight of Swords, Lumian had a clearer idea of how to find Oxyto, a fervent disciple of the Primordial Moon.

Clearly, conventional methods like Magic Mirror Divination wouldn't work; otherwise, the Knight of Swords' companion, a member of the temperance faction with sharp spiritual intuition, would have already located Oxyto.

Lumian had three plans:

First, since Oxyto was a member of the Rose School of Thought and often mingled with the indulgence faction, he started by sending Franca and Jenna, both Demonesses, to casually stroll through Raklev City in full regalia, hoping to encounter Oxyto. This Shaman King, who never resisted his desires, might approach them, all under the watchful protection of the temperance faction.

Additionally, Anthony would use Psychological Invisibility or disguise himself as a commoner to follow them and observe the reactions of those around the Demonesses to discern any malice before Oxyto made a move.

Whether or not Oxyto had received the Great Mother's boons and transformed into a woman was a detail that didn't affect the Demonesses' ability to seduce him. Lumian deduced from Madame Pualis's and Franca's experiences that Oxyto would still be attracted to women, and might as well have an interest in men.

Second, using his own lineage from Omebella, and the unique ability of the Great Mother's blessed to sense others within a certain distance, he planned to roam the Raklev area in hopes of drawing out Oxyto. Similarly, Lugano, who also bore an anomaly possibly linked to the Great Mother, would serve as excellent bait.

Third, he considered revisiting the sites Oxyto had been before to see what could be eaten.

Pinching his nose, Lumian carefully inspected the traces around and inside the pit along with the numerous bodies for a while, then turned his head to ask Ludwig, "Is it dirty?"

"Very dirty," Ludwig nodded emphatically.

"Dirty from the Great Mother?" Lumian pressed further.

Ludwig hummed affirmatively, his expression filled with conflict.

Unsurprisingly, he heard his godfather ask, "Is it edible?"

At this question, Lugano couldn't help but gag, while the usually stoic Knight of Swords, Maric, slightly raised his eyebrows.

Ludwig replied reluctantly, "Yes."

"Can you sense the child born from these corpses after eating?" Lumian further inquired.

Based on his experience, these bodies had likely been impregnated during the ritual, carrying rapidly growing clawed bird-like creatures in their wombs, which then tore through their parents' abdomens, absorbing the remnants and emerging on their own.

From a mysticism standpoint, whether voluntarily or forcibly, the clawed bird-like creatures and the corpses shared a deep blood connection, making it easy to trace one from the other, or even cast curses across distances.

However, according to the Knight of Swords' documents, divinations utilizing this blood connection had been fruitless, as if the creatures that had emerged from these corpses had vanished from this world.

This could be due to a high-ranking individual casting a counter-divination or a change in the creatures' state. Lumian's only hope was that Ludwig might glean different information by consuming the flesh.

Ludwig, with a sullen face, said, "You can extract a bit of the bloodline from the corpses through a certain cooking method. While this won't allow me to sense the child's position and condition from a great distance, I should be able to detect its presence within a thirty-meter radius."

"Okay," Lumian felt the results were better than expected.

Then, he watched as Ludwig squatted down and used a child's silver knife and fork to separate a piece of half-melted, half-rotten flesh from one of the corpses.

The flowing yellow pus and the grotesque state of the flesh made Lugano turn away, looking out towards Lake Dalsh and Raklev City on the other side of the water.

Ludwig then had Lumian retrieve a cast-iron skillet, a stand, wheat flour, liqueur, various spices, and a chunk of solidified lard from the Traveler's Bag.

Lumian took on the role of the Chef's assistant, mainly responsible for starting the fire.

Ludwig first melted the lard, then added a bit of liqueur and some spices, frying them until the mixture was richly aromatic.

Next, he wrapped the rotten flesh in wheat flour and tossed it into the skillet, frying it in the deeply colored, fragrant lard.

The odors of fragrance and foul mingled together, gradually spreading.

Finally, Ludwig finished cooking and forked up the fried, golden-brown flour-coated meatball, stuffing it into his mouth.

He chewed, tears seemingly welling up in his eyes, looking pitiful as if wronged.

"You didn't complain when you ate Loki raw," Lumian joked.

Ludwig muttered as he spoke, "Rotten doesn't taste good, and there's no spirituality in it."

After swallowing the fried meatball that looked rather appealing, Ludwig continued thoughtfully as he savored it, "The deceased's birthday is on the second day of every year."

"Is there something special about that?" Lumian asked.

Stuffing candy into his mouth, Ludwig responded offhandedly, "In myths, on the first day, the Oldest One created the world; on the second, the Great Mother was born."

"I've never heard of such a myth..." Lugano murmured to himself, puzzled, with his back to Ludwig.

Lumian, deep in thought, shifted his gaze to another body.

"Their birthdays couldn't all be on the second day of each year, could they?

"I remember that the new year for many tribes on the Southern Continent isn't the same as on the Northern Continent; it's not necessarily January 1st. So, which day is the second day, and which calendar are we using?"

Ludwig, with candy in his mouth, said, "Any would do, as long as it's the second day of the new year according to the calendar one believes in."

Purely symbolic, then... Lumian turned towards the Knight of Swords. "Have you confirmed the identities and birthdays of these bodies?"

Raklev in the Star Highlands was a relatively prosperous area with a significant population, similar to the City of White Rapus, where Lumian had been before. It was one of the ancient Highlands Kingdom's support points ruling over the entire Star Highlands.

This area was known for its rich mines, but interestingly, all mining sites were far from Lake Dalsh, preserving the sanctity of this highland lake in the hearts of its people.

In the past, the Star Highlands were primarily a battleground between the Intis Republic and the Feysac Empire. After the war a few years ago, the Feysac Empire's influence waned, and the Loen Kingdom began to extend its reach. Even the Evernight Goddess Church of Loen Kingdom seemed to be spreading its teachings in this area-a fact Lumian had heard about while in Rapus.

And throughout the Star Highlands, the city atop the mines, Raklev, had the largest Loenese population.

Knight of Swords Maric nodded slowly and said, "We've confirmed 90% of the bodies; their birthdays, according to the Northern Continent's calendar, are mostly on January 2nd. For the rest, using local calendars, their birthdays also fall on the second day of the new year.

"For those whose identities remain uncertain, they seem to be foreigners, who may have come here either voluntarily or involuntarily. Give us a bit more time, and we'll surely determine who they are."

With a sufficiently large sample, the findings mostly align with Ludwig's explanation that the ritual required a strong symbol of the Great Mother... Lumian didn't stop the more temperance faction members from wasting energy verifying the remaining deceased's identities-what if there was something else peculiar?

Looking across the lake at Raklev City, Lumian said, "Let's head back to the city now and walk around."

Let's see which of the three are more effective-Omebella's bloodline, the anomaly of the Earth pathway, or the blood connection with the bird-clawed babies!

Walking towards the city, made of numerous gray and white stone houses, along the shimmering lake as blue as the sky, Lumian suddenly had a thought.

He asked the quiet Knight of Swords walking beside him, "In the Rose School of Thought, was Oxyto in charge of the Raklev area?"

"Not previously, and now it's uncertain," replied the Knight of Swords succinctly.

Lumian nodded, musing to himself, "If he isn't in charge of Raklev and merely initiated a ritual here on a whim, he should have left after it ended. Why is he still here?

"Does he have a deeper purpose in the Raklev area?

"Or perhaps, the Rose School of Thought is planning something for this place?"

The Knight of Swords paused for a few seconds before responding, "We suspect there might be a deeper purpose."

Pausing momentarily, he added, "Before the Highlands Kingdom was established, many areas of the Star Highlands worshiped Death, and Raklev was one of the places most influenced by this belief. Even today, some local customs still carry remnants of this death worship."

As they spoke, the three adults and one child arrived outside Raklev City.

Raklev, compared to the refined City of White Rapus, the architecture here was much more rugged. Although there were people in dark red robes and bright dresses, most wore more durable canvas work clothes.

Before even reaching the city gates, Lumian could already sense the hustle and bustle.

Chapter 761: The Blessings Festival

761 The Blessings Festival

Beside a segment of the old city wall, now merely a relic for admiration, Lumian's gaze passed between the tall and short gray-white stone buildings and landed on a majestic temple standing near the mountain range.

It towered thirty meters high, made up of several turrets, reminiscent of an ancient war fortress left over from bygone eras.

At this moment, influenced by both the mountains and the clouds, the near-noon sunlight cast a dim hue, cloaking the grand temple in a dusk-like veil.

"Is that a temple of the God of Combat?" Lumian didn't turn his head as he asked the Knight of Swords beside him.

The God of Combat Church was the only state religion of the Feysac Empire, but following their defeat in the war a few years ago, the Evernight Goddess Church had gained a certain right to preach within the empire, although they seemed unenthusiastic about this role.

The Knight of Swords replied succinctly, "It's a cathedral."

Not a temple, but a cathedral? True to the Feysacians, who suffer from a fascination with enormity, and their taste is not bad... For some reason, Lumian suddenly recalled a phrase he had heard at the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society: More is beautiful, bigger is better.

He then asked, "Is this a Feysac colony?"

"Yes," the Knight of Swords replied in a deep voice, "but now, the Loenese have the right to trade here."

Lumian nodded slightly, saying nothing further as he followed the road into Raklev City.

Along the way, it was easy for him to distinguish people from different countries among the crowd:

The Feysacians, tall in stature-men typically over six feet three inches, women nearly six feet-matched Lumian's stereotype of them: descendants of giants, even including many half-giants. Their dressing tended to be casual, with either unbuttoned jackets or no jackets at all;

The Loenese, predominantly with black hair, cared much about their appearance, always impeccably dressed. The ladies favored round-brimmed bonnets and carried sun-blocking parasols, while the gentlemen were decked out in top hats and carried canes;

The locals of Raklev were darker-skinned and wiry. The men often wore durable canvas work clothes, and the women dressed for labor, with only a few in brightly colored dresses, herding cattle, sheep, and horses.

Lumian watched a dwarf horse and several long-haired cattle pass by, spotting a local man in a dark red robe with a stark white skull topped with a wool-knit gray and white hat on his head.

"Is this the remnant of Death worship you mentioned in the local customs?" Lumian didn't choose his path deliberately but followed his instincts.

The Knight of Swords nodded slightly and said, "Yes, the people of Raklev keep the skulls of their deceased relatives at home, believing they protect them, bring good luck, and help fend off dangers lurking in the night. The more skulls a family has, the more prosperous and developed it is considered."

This is similar to the practice in Cordu where relatives' hair and nails are kept... but here, the Death worship is much stronger, hence the choice of skulls, making it more extreme...

Lumian suddenly felt a pang of melancholy.

The Knight of Swords continued, "Some even make amulets from the skulls of their deceased kin to carry with them at all times. What you saw earlier was just such a case.

During the annual Blessing Festival, all the locals in Raklev take the skulls from their homes into the streets, dress them solemnly, and join in the revelry and prayers together."

"Blessing Festival?" Lumian perked up, asking with gravity.

Having experienced Lent, Sea Prayer Festival, and Dream Festival, he felt like he had developed a sort of festival-induced PTSD, with a headache starting whenever he heard of another special day.

Oxyto, a Shaman King of the Rose School of Thought and a key follower of the Primordial Moon, couldn't be staying in Raklev just for the Blessing Festival, could he?

The Knight of Swords responded somberly, "The Blessing Festival has long since passed; it was in November last year, more than a month before the Dream Festival."

You know about the Dream Festival... Lumian first breathed a sigh of relief, then asked anxiously, "Did Oxyto first appear in the Raklev area before or after the Blessing Festival?"

The Knight of Swords thought for a moment before replying, "Before."

"So during the Blessing Festival, he was likely still in the Raklev area?" Lumian furrowed his brow slightly.

"That seems to be the case," the Knight of Swords answered, very cautiously.

...

Franca's gaze drifted away from a local woman with colorful skulls sewn onto her shoulder, and she turned to a tall, blond, blue-eyed woman from Feysac with a smile. "Sorry, I already have a lady companion!"

Isn't this Feysacian a bit too forthright?

Flirting with me and Jenna, and to think, aside from men, there were also beautiful women inviting us over!

The Feysacian chuckled. "I don't mind if you both come over to my place."

"I mind," Jenna spoke up for Franca.

They had been wandering around Raklev City for nearly two hours. Although Franca hadn't actively unleashed the Demoness of Pleasure's charm-to avoid suspicion of fishing purposefully-their carefully styled Demoness appearance alone, in terms of looks, demeanor, and figure, was enough to draw plenty of attention.

Here, the Feysacians were bold and direct, both men and women, while the Loenese were conservative and reserved, only daring to approach after finding a good reason. The locals mostly just watched from a distance, quietly following, with a few gathering the courage to speak up, but only in the guise of offering guidance.

"Alright then." The female Feysacian, a bit taller than Franca, waved her hand in disappointment and turned to enter a nearby café.

Franca and Jenna were now in the heart of Raklev City, on a street that boasted the grand and elegant architectural style typical of Feysac.

"It's almost noon, how about trying some Feysac cuisine?" Franca looked up at the sun, bright but not warm.

She was referring to the St. Millom Restaurant diagonally across from them.

St. Millom was the capital of the Feysac Empire, and naming a restaurant after it seemed an attempt to offer an "authentic" experience.

"Sure." Jenna nodded gently.

As the two Demonesses stepped into the grand and intricately decorated restaurant, Anthony sat down on a bench across the street and quietly started on his lunch-a corn tortilla wrapped around beef and lamb, seasoned with various spices.

...

Lumian walked with Ludwig and Lugano until they reached the temple-like Holy Lake Cathedral.

But once they truly entered the city, the Knight of Swords, Maric, disappeared. However, Lumian's instincts told him that this Minor Arcana card holder was still nearby.

"Feeling anything unusual?" Lumian inquired of Ludwig.

"No," Ludwig shook his head.

Lumian then turned to Lugano. "What about you?"

"Me?" Lugano looked baffled.

Isn't it Ludwig's job to locate people?

What does this have to do with me?

"Do you sense anything unusual?" Lumian calmly repeated the question.

For some reason, Lugano felt that his employer had become more approachable lately, so he honestly replied, "No."

Gurgle, gurgle, a strange noise sounded next to both him and Lumian.

Both turned their gaze to Ludwig.

Touching his stomach, Ludwig looked eager and said, "It's time for lunch."

"Alright," Lumian agreed readily.

His philosophy was to never let a child go hungry, especially since the starving child might resort to cannibalism.

He looked around and pointed towards a bustling street to the northwest of Holy Lake Square. "There seem to be quite a few restaurants there."

This time, Ludwig didn't need Lugano's hand-holding; he scampered ahead with short strides, while Lumian followed at a leisurely pace, and Lugano trailed close behind.

The street bore a very typical Feysac characteristic, complete with trees and benches, resembling a streetscape in the Northern Continent countries.

Lumian glanced around briefly and pointed with his chin to St. Millom Restaurant not far away. "Let's try some Feysac cuisine."

"Okay." Ludwig wiped his mouth.

Suddenly, his eager expression turned to confusion, and his head moved left and right as if searching for something.

Lumian noticed this unusual behavior.

"Why? Want an ice cream too?" he teased Ludwig.

Imitating Lugano's usual demeanor, Ludwig pressed his voice down and said, "I think I sensed that child from the body, but it's vague."

Sensed the bird-clawed baby? Lumian looked around; there were no other children in sight, just Feysacians and locals, with a few from Loen scattered among them.

There weren't even any pregnant women around.

Then, Ludwig added, "I can't sense it anymore."

Had it moved beyond a thirty-meter range? Lumian thoughtfully withdrew his gaze.

If what we had just encountered was related to the bird-clawed baby, then my own Omebella bloodline might have been sensed by the other...

Lumian nodded and smiled at Ludwig. "Let's eat first, nothing's more important than filling our bellies."

"Right!" For the first time, Ludwig felt that the godfather's words resonated deeply with him.

Upon entering St. Millom Restaurant, Lumian immediately noticed Franca and Jenna sitting in a conspicuous spot.

The carefully dressed Demonesses caught Lumian's attention for an extra second.

Meanwhile, he wondered to himself, Is this the Law of Beyonder Characteristics Convergence?

How coincidental for us to choose the same restaurant...

(Reader note: A reasonable development)

Franca and Jenna, noticing his gaze, looked back at him-one with a mouth agape in surprise, the other stifling a laugh.

They quickly composed themselves and turned their attention back to the beet soup in front of them.

With the waiter's guidance, Lumian, Ludwig, and Lugano took a seat in the corner.

"Sir, what would you like to order?" The waiter offered a menu designed like a book.

Lumian glanced at it, chose not to browse through, and simply said, "One set of everything but the drinks."

Chapter 762: The Flirting Showcase

762 The Flirting Showcase

Although limited by the variety of local ingredients, St. Millom Restaurant's menu appeared thick, yet it didn't offer an extensive variety of dishes. However, relatively speaking, a whole book's worth of menu items couldn't possibly be too few-it was enough to make a dozen adults feel stuffed.

The restaurant's waiter was a local, but he spoke fluent Feysacian, Loenese, and Intisian,

completely understanding Lumian's order without any confusion.

He was about to double-check when he saw the customer from Intis bring out a thick stack of gold hoorn.

This was the currency of the Feysac Empire, commonly used in the Raklev area-before teleporting to the Southern Continent that morning, Lumian had specifically gone to a nearby bank to exchange some cash at a higher rate of 4.4 verl d'or for one gold hoorn, but the cash he now produced wasn't his own; it was activity funds provided by the Knight of Swords, Maric.

"All of it?" The waiter, diligent and thorough, made one last inquiry.

"All of it," Lumian confirmed, earning Ludwig's approval.

After a while, dishes like beet soup, red wine beef stew, cream-fried cod, caviar, grilled meat skewers, appetizer salad, thick-cut steaks, and Feysac pies were served one by one.

Ludwig was utterly immersed in a sea of flavors, and Lumian, too, let himself indulge.

As a Sequence 5 Reaper, his appetite was already not small, and similarly, Harvest Priest Lugano, starting as a Planter, was eating more and more.

After nearly filling their stomachs, as Lumian savored the salty, fishy burst of the caviar in his mouth and awaited the arrival of dessert, he pondered over the recent events.

Why did Ludwig just vaguely sense the presence of the bird-clawed baby, and then in the blink of an eye, it vanished?

Could it be that we were exactly thirty meters apart, and just one step further would break the range of perception?

This is too coincidental... If it were arranged, they would have let Ludwig keep sensing it...

If Ludwig could sense the bird-clawed baby, could the baby also sense its 'mother' approaching? Did it detect the deceased 'mother' appearing in an unnatural way and immediately leave the area or hide, severing the connection between them?

This explanation is more reasonable, not reliant on coincidence...

Now the question arises, if it wasn't a coincidence, why did the bird-clawed baby appear on this street?

It couldn't possibly just be passing by and happened to bump into us, right? If it truly is the law of convergence, it's still unclear whether it's due to a bloodline connection or a law of repulsion...

Lumian picked up the napkin that was on his lap, folded it neatly, and stood up, pushing the stack of gold hoorn to Lugano.

"I'll take a walk nearby to see if there's anything worth buying; you take care of Ludwig and remember to pay for the meal."

"Sure," Lugano was happy to remain seated without moving.

Lumian left St. Millom Restaurant with a leisurely gait, taking in all the shops and pedestrians along the street.

There were banks, candy stores, cafés, and shops selling Feysacian imported goods, with no suspicious individuals in sight.

The passersby were mostly Feysacians and Raklev locals, the latter often carrying talismans made from their relatives' skulls-some wore them as hats, others strung them into necklaces, and some sewed them onto their clothing at the shoulder.

It is not apparent who might attract the bird-clawed baby and its associates here, nor which building might harbor something unusual... Lumian pondered as he walked along the street, hoping for a "chance encounter."

Unfortunately, this did not happen.

Finally, he finished his stroll along the street and returned to St. Millom Restaurant.

The two Demonesses leisurely enjoyed a lavish Feysacian meal, their prominent position and striking looks drawing the gaze of everyone who came and went. Some even made a point of passing by their table repeatedly.

Lumian took the opportunity to admire the Demonesses' beauty.

Suddenly, a thought struck him:

Ludwig only sensed the bird-clawed baby near St. Millom Restaurant...

Franca and Jenna were right here in the restaurant...

Could it be that they truly attracted the attention of Oxyto, the Shaman King, who personally brought or sent the bird-clawed baby to track them, looking for an opportunity to strike?

Upon discovering the scent of a deceased 'mother' on Ludwig and sensing my Child of God bloodline, did Oxyto abandon his original plan, temporarily leaving this area or completely hiding?

This logic flows smoothly; there's no issue, but how could the guardian demigod of the temperance faction completely miss Oxyto's presence?

A Shaman King is adept at concocting various magical agents and conducting rituals, perhaps using one to evade normal premonitions and intuitions?

Or could it be some other method?

Lumian quickly reviewed the intelligence provided by the temperance faction about the Shaman King.

His steps slowed, seemingly captivated by the beauty and charm of the two Demonesses, reluctant to look away.

After analyzing the information on the Apothecary pathway up to Sequence 4 Shaman King, Lumian considered that Oxyto might have also received a boon, transitioning to female, and he recalled the information he knew about the Heretic Spellmaster pathway.

In a flash of thought, a term came to mind: Paramita!

(Reader's Note: Sequence 4 of the Villain Pathway (boon) allows you to establish a new small world called "Paramita". In this world, when humans die, their souls return to the earth and roam the wilderness. On special occasions, they can return home, be reborn and emerge from the Mother's womb as human foetuses. Also, this sequence turns you into a woman.)

Paramita exists in its own right, dependent on the land, and its activities cannot be detected from the outside...

Did Oxyto use some application of Paramita to evade the gaze of the temperance faction's demigod and follow Franca and Jenna undetected?

Hmm, were those bird-clawed babies taken into Paramita after they crawled out of their 'mothers'?

With Paramita clearly involving the domain of death, were these 'mothers' dead before the bird-clawed babies tore out?

In that case, from birth, they bear a strong taint of death, seamlessly blending into Paramita...

Just now, Paramita was unfolding, watching Franca and Jenna, waiting to make a move, and upon sensing the presence of the deceased 'mother' and the bloodline of a Child of God,

Paramita immediately retracted, cutting off this close connection?

No wonder Ludwig's sensing of the bird-clawed baby was so vague... it was because it was inside Paramita!

Moreover, the local Skull Blessing Festival clearly reveres death, which can be linked to Paramita... Could Oxyto's deep-seated purpose for coming to the Raklev region be hidden in this?

With his speculation, Lumian approached Franca and Jenna's table with a genuine smile and politely asked in Intisian-like any real Intisian would do,

"May I have the honor of sitting here for a few minutes, beautiful ladies?"

Franca replied in amusement, "Are you also from Intis?"

She knew Lumian's approach wasn't simply to chat her up; he must have another purpose, so she played along very cooperatively.

"Yes, which is why I felt a connection as soon as I saw you," Lumian fully utilized the pickup lines he'd learned from everyday life in Trier.

At a nearby table, several men who were covertly listening in thought simultaneously:

Damn Intisians!

Curse those Intisian playboys!

Jenna's response was natural, tinged with a hint of wariness and surprise. "Are you here in Raklev for travel or business?"

As she spoke, Jenna signaled the waiter, who brought over a chair for Lumian beside their table.

Lumian sat down and said to the two Demonesses, "Your beauty is like something out of a dream. No, even in my dreams, I haven't seen anyone as beautiful as you. You must have caught many an eye along the way?"

Dammit, these sweet nothings are giving me goosebumps! At this moment, Franca would have preferred if Lumian mocked her.

Of course, she was still secretly pleased; after all, she had heard from Browns Sauron that every Demoness who had transitioned from male would have a bit of narcissism-fond of and proud of her feminine self.

Jenna felt both discomfort and amusement, much like encountering a pretentious drunkard while playing a Witch.

Her acting was good; she showed no oddity and smiled mockingly. "Really? Would you dare to look into my eyes and say that again?"

Seeing the handsome young man genuinely sit beside the beautiful ladies and engage in pleasant conversation, seemingly stirring emotions, the surrounding men lamented, How can they be so superficial, only considering looks? That's how you get deceived!

Lumian laughed, looking into Jenna's eyes and said, "The moment I saw you, I knew what true beauty was."

"..." How can this guy say such things without feeling nauseous? Jenna avoided Lumian's gaze, answering his earlier question, "You know, some gazes make one feel uncomfortable."

"Any gaze more peculiar than others?" Lumian asked with a smile.

Franca, understanding what he was probing for, shook her head. "No."

Lumian nodded pensively.

"The weather here is rather cold; did you feel something similar earlier?"

Franca recalled for a moment, pursed her lips, and said, "It started a bit on Chapin Street and lasted until just before the beet soup was served; the soup was warm and made us no longer feel cold."

Paramita that involves the realm of death made the surroundings feel a bit colder? Lumian said with a smile to Franca, "Perhaps that's the lack of a reliable man's warmth."

Franca's face twitched, and she communicated with Lumian using her eyes and lips.

Please, no more playing the playboy!

As the three conversed, the image of a woman wearing a petite black cap and light golden bun appeared faintly on the surface of a gold-leaf mirror embedded in the wall.

She rested her chin in her hand, her gaze occasionally focused on Lumian and Jenna, then shifting between Lumian and Franca, and assessing Franca and Jenna.

Chapter 763: Folklore Origins

763 Folklore Origins

Lumian "kept his promise" and sat at the table with the two Demonesses for only a few minutes before politely taking his leave, leaving the nearby men somewhat perplexed and puzzled.

Shouldn't he have seized the opportunity to pursue further?

Could this be the advanced technique of an Intisian playboy and Dandyist?

Walking back to his own table, Lumian saw waiters carrying a towering stack of plates, their faces a mix of confusion, shock, and fear as they walked away.

All the dishes on the menu had really been devoured!

The look in their eyes towards Ludwig and Lugano was as if they were staring at monsters who had crawled out of the abyss.

If you knew that two-thirds of those dishes and mains were consumed by Ludwig, and Lugano and I only shared the remaining third, you'd be even more scared, worried you might be eaten too. Well, that worry would be justified... Lumian muttered silently as he sat down.

Before him, Ludwig, and Lugano, there was now a slice of apple cake and a cup of richly flavored ice cream.

Ludwig's face was unmasked in satisfaction, the most fulfilled he had felt in a long time.

This was not only because the Feysacian meals were generous in portion and tasty but also because it didn't hurt Lumian to spend someone else's money.

Lumian pushed his slice of apple cake towards Ludwig and appeared to concentrate as he scooped up the milky ice cream with a spoon and placed it in his mouth.

As he savored the melting frost and the spreading taste of milk, he whispered to himself, "Have any of you noticed anything unusual around Two of Cups and Seven of Cups?"

After a brief silence, a faint, ethereal voice echoed in Lumian's ear.

It was from the Knight of Swords Maric.

"We did notice something, from Chaban Street until you approached St. Millom Restaurant, but only a slight abnormality was detected, and we couldn't pinpoint its origin."

This matches Franca's description and my speculation, confirming each other... The temperance faction's demigod is unable to catch Oxyto even though they have started tracking Franca and Jenna... Can we only wait for Oxyto to make a move? Lumian thought for a few seconds and pulled out a pair of non-prescription, plain gold-rimmed glasses for disguise from his Traveler's Bag, placing them on his nose.

He immediately saw the image of the Knight of Swords dressed in a shirt and vest highlighted in the lenses, then disappearing.

The voice of Maric became clearer.

"We occasionally find such slight abnormalities and corresponding traces too, and that is also one of the main reasons we are sure that Oxyto is still in the Raklev area."

Can Paramita alone achieve this, managing to move undetected under the nose of a demigod with strong spiritual intuition? Lumian, lacking a deep understanding of Paramita, could only speculate based on his past experiences.

He had entered Paramita more than once!

In Cordu, whether in reality or in dreams, he had entered Paramita several times, but at that time, without high-level forces involved, he couldn't judge the normal state of Paramita and whether it could deceive a demigod's senses and intuition when it unfolded; In Trier, during the Tree of Shadow catastrophe, he was involuntarily drawn into Lady Moon's Paramita, which effectively isolated the inside from the outside, preventing Trier's demigods from detecting the growth of the Tree of Shadow and the fighting in that area. It was only through Franca's use of the Judgment card and the unique properties of Madam Judgment that they managed to establish a connection with the outside world, allowing the Tarot Club's demigods to pinpoint and descend into Paramita. At that time, the demigods of Trier were far from Rue Anarchie, unaware of anything hidden there, which could be understood and accepted...

Memories flashed through Lumian's mind, and he always felt that Paramita could not reach the current extent.

When Paramita closed, it was normal that the temperance faction's demigod couldn't sense it even if nearby, but how could it remain undetected after unfolding right under the nose of the temperance faction's demigod?

Is it that powerful?

I think even Lady Moon's Paramita couldn't achieve that, only capable of masking activities and protecting itself through distance from being detected...

Lumian turned his gaze to the window, seeing two locals among the passersby; one had a human skull painted purple hanging on his chest, and the other tied a bleached white human skull on top of his head.

Death worship...

Paramita...

Perhaps, Shaman King Oxyto has developed a special aspect of his Paramita in the Raklev area, which allows him to unfold it in front of a demigod without being detected, at least until there's substantial interaction... Lumian speculated, piecing together Madame Pualis's plan to use the folklore of Cordu to enhance her own Paramita.

Lumian took another spoonful of milky ice cream and lowered his voice again.

"Tell me more about the origins and circumstances of the Skull Blessing Festival."

Knight of Swords Maric replied clearly in his ear, "It dates back to the fall of Death, when the situation on the Southern Continent fundamentally changed.

"The fall of Death caused disturbances in the Underworld, leaving most spirits unable to sense or enter it, forced instead to wander its periphery, between the spirit world and the real world.

"As a result, when sentient beings die, they are very likely to become undead, wraiths, or evil spirits-a grave threat to the living, leading to one disaster after another.

"The response of the Northern Continent nations has been Church-sanctioned purification combined with compulsory cremation. Here, the Eternal Blazing Sun Church and the God of Combat Church have had notable success with purification, making cremation unnecessary for those who have been purified."

Hearing this, Lumian truly understood and appreciated the various measures taken before and after death, including consoling the dying, purifying the dead, encouraging cremation, and rewarding the discovery of deceased vagrants.

The origins of all these practices was the fall of Death and the subsequent anomalies in the Underworld!

No wonder the old bones in the lower layers of the underground tombs are still bones, not ashes... During the Fourth Epoch, the Underworld hadn't yet been disturbed, and the spirits had a place to return to... Some mysticism knowledge suggests that bodies are prone to transform at the end of the Fourth Epoch during the Pale Disaster, caused by Death's invasion of the Northern Continent. Indeed, it is the legacy of the Pale Disaster; Death perished during that disaster, leading to the anomaly in the Underworld... Lumian suddenly realized, gaining a deeper understanding of certain mysticism knowledge.

The Knight of Swords continued, "The same issues arose on the Southern Continent, but the Balam Empire, home to many Beyonders following the Death pathway, swiftly devised several solutions that quelled the undead outbreaks in certain areas without resorting to mandatory cremation, thus restoring normalcy.

"In other regions, however, due to ongoing independence efforts from countries like Haagenti, Paz, and the Highlands, faith in Death began to wane, leading to a period of rampant undead plagues and a power vacuum. The people in these areas had no choice but to fend for themselves."

Lumian nodded slightly.

"Is the Skull Blessing Festival a solution for the Raklev area?"

"The Skull Blessing Festival is just one manifestation," explained the Knight of Swords simply. "According to records left by the Highlands Kingdom, it appears that the people of Raklev, with the help of a former official from the Balam Empire, established a mini-state for the spirits, allowing the dead to enter and rest there without emerging again.

"However, this isn't the Underworld; it cannot truly offer rest, nor can it completely bind the spirits. They just have to gradually fade away.

"The annual Skull Blessing Festival is a day for the spirits to emerge, revel, and be liberated.

Keeping the skulls of loved ones at home helps to protect the family from any spirits that might stray from this mini-state, preventing them from causing harm."

In essence, they created a rudimentary, localized version of the Underworld for spirits to return to...

A place to return to... The concept of Paramita is similar, where souls return to the earth and wander the wilderness...

Moreover, in Paramita, spirits can return home on special days to enjoy the joy of reunion, much like the Raklev area's Skull Blessing Festival...

The only difference is that here, the spirits have no path to rebirth; they can only slowly fade away... Lumian compared the local state for the deceased to Paramita and grasped something subtle.

He recalled something Louis Lund once relayed from Madame Pualis: What's been established is merely a small, caricature Paramita, a part of the complete Paramita...

Hmm... Lumian inhaled sharply, muttering under his breath, "Could Oxyto be planning to merge this local spirit realm into his own Paramita, to make it more complete?

"Has he, no, she already partially succeeded, which is why you haven't detected her?"

Knight of Swords Maric paused for a moment before responding, "It's a possibility."

After a brief pause, he added proactively, "We also haven't seen that spirit realm."

Seen... Lumian was initially startled but then understood what the Knight of Swords meant.

The Prisoner pathway could directly turn into wraiths, and they should have been able to see the spirit realm, but they found nothing in Raklev this time.

Lumian didn't respond but considered another issue.

If Oxyto has indeed begun to merge with that mini-spirit realm, she essentially becomes a local version of Death, and she must have sensed the Omebella bloodline in me...

What would her reaction be?

Instant anger, or seeing it as something to be exploited?

Why didn't she act directly? Right, she also used the bird-clawed monster baby to discover that Ludwig nearby had the aura of a corpse 'mother,' adding up to what clearly looked like bait, obviously a trap!

That's why she, accustomed to indulgence, held back. What she needs to do now is, seek assistance?

With that thought, Lumian removed his glasses and abruptly stood up.

Chapter 764: There's Always a Corruption That Can Be Used

764 There's Always a Corruption That Can Be Used

Lumian took off his glasses and whispered, "The target should have noticed something unusual about me, but Ludwig is right beside me, giving off the 'mother' aura from that corpse. With both of these factors together, the target will surely be highly suspicious and may seek assistance. Be prepared."

If it were just the Omebella bloodline alone, Oxyto might think it was merely the law of convergence at work, bringing the blasphemer of the Child of God into her presence.

Similarly, if it were just the 'mother' aura from the corpse, she might become wary or suspect that the corpse's return to the earth had contaminated the local water, leading to the corruption of certain individuals.

But put together, anyone who could sense these would immediately see there was a big problem.

This couldn't just be a coincidence; there was clearly a dangerous trap!

Knight of Swords Maric's voice seemed to come from farther away.

"We're already ready."

Sensing the hidden danger and preparing even before I thought through everything and issued a reminder? They have strong spiritual intuition and rich experience... Lumian mused as he noticed Lugano, startled by his movements and deep voice, also standing up.

Ludwig wasted no time in pulling the ice cream they had abandoned closer to him and happily ate away, completely unconcerned about what might happen next.

Lumian's gaze swept over Lugano and Ludwig before moving to Franca and Jenna, who were enjoying their dessert.

He was now considering a critical question:

Should they act together, or separate like they did in the morning?

If the earlier speculations were broadly accurate, then the bait phase to lure out Oxyto should already be over. What lay ahead would likely be probing attacks from the Shaman King and her companions.

In that case, moving together would allow them to better receive protection from the temperance faction, without worrying that Oxyto might strike at a less guarded spot and capture one or two as hostages. But if the attack was fierce enough to force the temperance faction's hidden forces into a defensive position, staying together could lead to total annihilation.

Which choice was safer and more reasonable in this environment was a decision the team leader needed to make.

Lumian walked slowly toward the restaurant's entrance, mentally filtering through the questions and speculations he'd considered earlier.

He thought of his own description of the spirit realm in Raklev:

A rudimentary, localized Underworld.

Underworld... Lumian's eyelids twitched, and he quietly asked again, "Can any of you see or sense the Underworld?"

He was asking whether Zombies and Wraiths could detect the Underworld.

Knight of Swords Maric quickly answered, "No, unless someone directly opens the door to the Underworld or is already from there. Otherwise, it can only be sensed through certain traces.

"Before the Underworld anomaly, it was possible."

It was possible before the Underworld anomaly? Is this inferred from ancient records?

Lumian wasn't particularly concerned about this; instead, he was more interested in something else: If Oxyto has indeed begun integrating the local spirit realm into her Paramita, does that mean her Paramita qualifies as a small-scale Underworld?

Moreover, it had to be a small-scale Underworld that was still bound to this region.

Otherwise, based on Lumian's understanding of Paramita, Oxyto could have easily taken her Paramita away and left the area.

Of course, it's also possible that she hadn't achieved another goal yet.

A small-scale Underworld... Lumian muttered to himself and then walked toward Franca and Jenna, smiling as he said, "I heard Chaban Street is unique to this area. Would you two lovely ladies like to be my guides?"

Chaban Street was where Franca and Jenna had first noticed the temperature drop slightly, indicating that they might have encountered Oxyto there.

In the eyes of the nearby customers, Lumian's invitation was a blatant attempt to arrange a date. However, Franca and Jenna exchanged a glance and understood that Lumian was suggesting they should act together, with Chaban Street as their destination.

"Sure." Franca and Jenna smiled in unison and stood up.

This left those around them somewhat stunned:

Are they that easy to invite?

If I'd known, I would have plucked up the courage to ask!

Together, Lumian, Franca, Jenna, and the others strolled toward Chaban Street, exchanging relaxed remarks about their impressions of the city.

About fifteen minutes later, they reached the street predominantly occupied by locals.

Gray-white stone houses stood in rows, appearing rugged yet solid. Outside each house, strips of wool hung, adding a vibrant, exotic touch that distinguished it from the Star Highlands.

Compared to other streets in Raklev City, the locals here were more likely to wear traditional clothing: dark red woolen robes for men and brightly colored skirts for women.

Similarly, many of them carried skull amulets of various designs, some mottled and brown with wool wigs, some painted purple, green, and red, and some holding caramel-colored tobacco from East Balam between their teeth. Others appeared as white as jade, with dark eye sockets and insects crawling in and out.

Standing at the entrance to Chaban Street, Lumian paused instead of moving forward, signaling Franca and Jenna to stay slightly behind him.

He then took something out of his Traveler's Bag.

It was a golden mask, with the area around the eyes and the face painted in either black or white.

It was an Eggers family mask crafted by Death Himself!

Since this pure gold mask was initially designed to help the living sense and enter the Underworld and was directly created by the deity who ruled over death and the Underworld, wearing it might reveal something related to the Underworld within a certain range. In the Raklev region, the local spirit realm was akin to a small, rudimentary Underworld.

If the local spirit realm had really been integrated into Oxyto's Paramita, seeing it would be equivalent to seeing that Paramita, revealing Shaman

King Oxyto!

Without hesitation, Lumian donned the golden Eggers family mask.

His breath rapidly cooled, becoming increasingly still. His body went cold in an instant, losing the sensation of life, and his blood ceased to flow.

Through the golden mask, Lumian noticed the surroundings dimming slightly, with the colors fading and the temperature dropping a little.

Apart from that, everything appeared normal.

So, this is the world through the eyes of the undead? I can't see any trace of that spirit realm... Is it hidden deeper due to being integrated into Paramita? Hmm, I can sense the spirit world directly but can't detect the Underworld... No wonder one has to wait for an opportunity to enter the Underworld instead of simply locating it and teleporting there after wearing the Eggers family mask... Lumian muttered silently, not giving up on his original theory, and tried to stimulate the lingering aura of the Blood Emperor.

The purpose of activating Alista Tudor's lingering aura was to highlight the seal left by the Underworld Daoist.

This powerful being from Franca's world was clearly related to the pathways of Death, Darkness, and Warrior. According to Madam Magician, He might have also had contact with the deranged Death and made some agreements. His seals could potentially enhance the Eggers family's masks.

As a slight pain pricked his right palm and the cold, rotten sensation spread, Lumian's vision abruptly changed.

Along the entire Chaban Street, the fabric strips hanging from the walls lost their color and turned gray, while the people walking there became inexplicably blurry, as if shrouded in thick fog.

However, the skull amulets they wore remained unusually clear, their colors even more vivid by contrast.

Lumian also saw pale or dark red flames ignite in the hollow sockets of those human skulls, flickering and exuding an eerie chill of death.

In that instant, Lumian realized he was "seeing" the spirit realm of Raklev.

It overlapped with the entire Raklev area, where spirits wandered in the shadows while humans lived openly.

Standing on the edge of the spirit realm, Lumian didn't attempt to step inside but instead searched from a distance for any signs of Paramita's presence.

He saw a vast black cloud hanging over the sky in the direction of Lake Dalsh, saw some skulls floating mid-air on the streets with ghostly child-like figures flickering within their burning sockets, and saw how the wilderness below the mountains seemed to have encroached directly, blending into the city seamlessly.

As expected... Lumian immediately had a clear realization:

Oxyto is inside this Paramita, which has merged with the spirit realm!

With this understanding, the first thought that flashed through Lumian's mind was: My mission ends here. Next, I'll lend the Eggers family's golden mask to the Knight of Swords and the temperance faction, leaving them to organize their forces to enter Paramita and fight Oxyto, while we return to Trier to avoid the potential danger.

But on second thought, Lumian realized that wouldn't work.

Because if they only had the Eggers family's golden mask and not the Underworld Daoist's seal, even a Wraith wearing it wouldn't be able to directly "see" Oxyto's mutated Paramita!

A possibility vaguely came to Lumian's mind.

He said in a low voice to the hidden Knight of Swords Maric, "I've found Oxyto's Paramita. First, take the Two of Cups and the others to safety. Then, as Wraiths, attach yourselves to me, and I'll lead all of you into Paramita!"

"Alright." The Knight of Swords somewhat ethereal voice couldn't conceal his joy and malice.

It was directed at Oxyto.

Chapter 765: Howl

765 Howl

Lumian thought for a moment and then specifically reminded, "Don't forget the Four of Swords."

To be honest, he almost overlooked Anthony's presence, but because he was constantly thinking about what his teammates were doing and how to coordinate with them, he didn't forget entirely.

When he invited the two Demonesses to Chaban Street at St. Millom Restaurant, Lumian didn't think of Anthony right away. It was only when he reached the street that he remembered their teammate. But he couldn't find the Hypnotist, who had used Psychological Invisibility. He could only trust that Anthony, with his rich experience, would realize that once the rest of the team had gathered together, it was clear the next actions weren't suited to splitting up, and he would follow.

Anthony's habits as an information broker combined well with Psychological Invisibility.

After a two-second pause following Lumian's reminder, the Knight of Swords said, "We won't forget."

It seems like you already did... but the temperance faction's demigod shouldn't be affected much by Anthony's Psychological Invisibility, so when sending Franca and Jenna away, they shouldn't really forget about Anthony... If that's the case, one major cause of death for a Hypnotist would definitely be that Psychological Invisibility works too well, causing teammates to forget or overlook them... As Lumian mused to himself, the special Paramita before him suddenly changed.

A deafening crash sounded from Lake Dalsh as gray-white water surged upward like a tsunami, reaching into the air. The wilderness, already intertwined with the city of Raklev, began to dominate. In an instant, it crossed squares and streets, swallowing Lumian, who had not yet reached Chaban Street, while avoiding Franca and the others.

Oxyto, blessed by the Great Mother, seemed to realize she had been exposed.

Her choice was to use the nature of Paramita to temporarily separate the blasphemer of the Child of God from the temperance faction's demigods, then exploit the brief time difference to achieve her desired goal regarding Lumian.

Almost simultaneously, Lumian, wearing the Eggers family's golden mask and transformed into an undead, felt his body grow "heavier," as if cold masses had taken residence inside him.

In the next second, he saw the indistinct human figures on Chaban Street vanish, along with Franca, Jenna, Ludwig, Lugano, and possibly Anthony behind him. It was as if they were in two separate worlds.

The human skulls in various states became increasingly distinct, their eye sockets burning with pale or dark red flames as they all turned to face Lumian.

At the end of Chaban Street, at the city's edge where it blended more deeply with the wilderness, swaying figures crawled out from unknown places and began walking toward Lumian.

There were rotting long-haired oxen with only a few pieces of pus-oozing flesh left, giant birds with exposed bones flying low, pythons dragging half-melted threads of flesh between their decaying tissues, and monstrous hills made of multiple headless skeletons.

Human skulls from all corners of the city were also swiftly converging on Chaban Street, floating in the air and covering the sky, blocking out the pale, dim, and heatless "sunlight."

Lumian appeared stunned, as if he had encountered something terrifying, or was like an undead creature facing a higher-ranked and more terrifying kindred spirit. For a brief moment, he stood frozen, unable to move.

Just then, a wretched howl, filled with pain, echoed from Lake Dalsh.

The terrifying and piercing sound was like a high-speed spinning drill that bored directly into Lumian's soul. His vision went dark, and he lost consciousness.

When Lumian regained his thoughts and awareness of his body, he found himself midway along Chaban Street, accompanied by the Knight of Swords Maric, who had appeared at some point, dressed in a black vest and white shirt.

All around him, crystalline cold had frozen human skulls of varying states in mid-air, on the ground, and on the surfaces of gray-white stone buildings.

The surreal frozen scene stretched all the way to the wilderness on the outskirts of the city.

In the staggering army of undead creatures, the rotting monsters shed flesh onto the ground, leaving only bones-yellowed, brown, or bleached white. The skeletal remains sank into the soil, and droplets of crimson blood, not their own, oozed from the surface.

Meanwhile, the wraiths and evil spirits swelled like balloons and burst silently, turning into strange dust.

Although Lumian didn't fully understand what was happening, two thoughts sprang to mind: Have they all been cursed?

Even the fleshless bones were cursed to bleed?

With that thought, Lumian couldn't help but raise his right hand and wipe his nose.

He immediately noticed some blackened bloodstains on the back of his hand.

This came from within his body, blood that had long since stopped flowing.

In the banshee's wail just now, not only was his soul wounded, but his undead body seemed to have suffered physical damage too. Some capillaries had ruptured, causing the blackened blood to seep out.

Terrifying... Lumian had roughly figured out what had just happened.

Oxyto screamed from a distance, using the Banshee's Howl enhanced by Paramita, and!

instantly lost consciousness.

Did the temperance faction's demigods attach themselves to me as wraiths before Paramita expanded, pulling me into Paramita right away? Then, they took over my body and used their abilities to deal with the swarming army of human skulls and undead?

The Knight of Swords also attached himself to me, which is why he's now in Paramita?

After grasping the recent encounter, Lumian had a clearer and more accurate understanding of the terror of demigods: Oxyto isn't even a full Angel but just a Banshee's Howl knocked me unconscious, robbing me of my ability to fight. It took me over ten seconds to wake up... Without the presence of temperance faction demigods, those ten seconds would have been more than enough for Oxyto to kill me ten times over...

This isn't something a drawn demigod can compare to. Facing a real demigod, if I don't seize the initiative, I won't even have the chance to draw the Sword of Courage or use Desire Incarnation!

There's no time for the animated shadow to take the damage for me unless I anticipate it in advance...

With these thoughts swirling, Lumian regained control of his body.

Then, he heard the Knight of Swords, Maric, mutter softly, "Oxyto has retreated. She should be near Lake Dalsh.

"We still don't know what kind of help she's seeking."

"Lake Dalsh?" Lumian asked in mild surprise.

That serene, beautiful, sacred lake?

On second thought, it makes sense. All mining operations in the Raklev region have avoided Lake Dalsh, leaving it entirely unpolluted...

The Knight of Swords surveyed the surroundings but didn't immediately dash off into the wilderness toward Lake Dalsh.

He nodded slightly and said, "Lake Dalsh itself is special, connected to the fallen Death. The establishment of this small spirit realm in the Raklev region was made possible due to Lake Dalsh.

"That former Balam Empire official even used an Undying's skull from the Church of Death and, using his Gatekeeper powers, opened a door to the Underworld and fixed it onto the Undying's skull. This prevented it from completely closing too quickly, allowing a bit of the Underworld's aura to leak out."

"The skull of an Undying? Undying can die too?" Lumian instinctively asked.

The Knight of Swords started walking towards the edge of the frozen world.

He glanced at Lumian and said, "An Undying is only Sequence 4 in the Death pathway. They can still die if killed."

I see... Lumian nodded almost imperceptibly.

The Knight of Swords continued, "The aura leaking from the Underworld, the unique traits of the Undying's skull, and the special nature of Lake Dalsh all worked together to sustain this spirit realm, drawing the souls of dead creatures in the region and letting them gradually wither away."

After listening, Lumian froze for a moment.

"You seem to know a lot about the local spirit realm..."

The Knight of Swords replied, "The Rose School of Thought ruled here for over a thousand years. Apart from the uniqueness of Lake Dalsh, everything else was long understood."

"Then why didn't you say so earlier?" Lumian blurted out.

If you'd told me sooner, I might have guessed Oxyto's intentions earlier!

"We didn't initially connect Oxyto to the spirit realm, so that intelligence wasn't included in the information," explained the Knight of Swords. "After that, I answered whenever you asked, but didn't elaborate. Speaking is also a desire that requires temperance."

"..." Lumian suddenly understood how Franca felt every time she heard him say, "I'll have to start with the events at the Samaritan Women's Spring, where Madame Hela and 1..."

While talking, he and Maric reached the edge of the city, where the frozen world met the desolate wilderness.

Lumian instinctively glanced at the thick layer of ice encasing the gray-white buildings.

Using the reflective surface, he was astonished to see a blurry figure in each of his eyes.

One wore a small black bonnet and a court dress of the same color; the other had no head and was dressed in a dark, intricately patterned, sinister gown.

Lumian then noticed translucent-ringed insects crawling in and out of his mouth, yet he felt nothing.

...

At the entrance to Chaban Street, Franca, Jenna, and the others felt a sudden chill engulf them and saw Lumian vanish before their eyes.

Before they could communicate or react, a voice, slightly magnetic and ethereal like a dream, echoed in their ears: "I'll send you back to Trier first."

Franca, Jenna, and Lugano instinctively turned their bodies and discovered that a young-looking man had appeared next to them at some point.

He wore a white shirt, draped in a thin black trench coat. With black hair and green eyes, he had a night-like, handsome quality, and wore a pair of red gloves on both hands.

Chapter 766: Early Labor

766 Early Labor

Gazing at the young man wearing red gloves, Franca cautiously asked, "Who might you be?"

She wasn't about to trust a stranger just because of what he said unless influenced by some Beyonder power.

"Two of Cups, Seven of Cups. You don't need to be involved in what's coming next," said the young man in red gloves directly, calling Franca and Jenna by their Minor Arcana names.

His voice carried the natural authority of someone used to leading many people, instilling a faint sense of fear in Franca and the others.

He knows our Tarot Club codenames... A member of the Tarot Club? One of the Knight of Swords' helpers? His outfit looks like those "Red Gloves" from the Church of Evernight Goddess... As Franca pondered, she didn't sense any warning from her spiritual intuition.

Before she could respond, the young man in red gloves pulled out a tarot card.

The card's front depicted a goddess pouring holy water under a sky full of stars.

Major Arcana, The Star!

So, it's Mr. Star... Franca and Jenna hesitated no longer and nodded in unison, saying, "Okay."

Lugano stood there, a bit dazed.

Why did he take out a card?

I think I've heard of something like this, but I can't remember...

Almost simultaneously, Anthony appeared out of nowhere and squeezed in beside Franca and Jenna.

Franca was startled for a moment, muttering to herself, "I really did forget about you..."

Mr. Star didn't say much more. He opened his mouth slightly.

In an instant, Franca and the others were enveloped by a vast, invisible spirit, and then they ascended into the layered, colorful spirit world, like they were traveling in a hot air balloon.

...

Along the city's periphery, covered in crystalline ice, Lumian, wearing the Eggers family's golden mask, withdrew his gaze.

He could roughly guess that the blurry figures in his eyes were the temperance faction's demigods responsible for this operation. One of them, headless, seemed to resemble the temperance faction's Angel he had seen before. The translucent insects crawling in and out of his mouth were likely helpers invited by the temperance faction.

How many people have taken residence in my body just now? Lumian grumbled internally as he followed the Knight of Swords, Maric, in a mad dash.

They entered the wilderness outside Raklev under the pale, cold "sunlight," heading swiftly toward Lake Dalsh.

Due to the unique influence of Paramita, Lumian couldn't teleport anywhere beyond his line of sight. He had to use a visual lock to establish a position, which made it challenging to appear instantly at the edge of Lake Dalsh.

After running some distance, he reached out and grabbed the Knight of Swords' shoulder.

Almost simultaneously, blazing white flames surged from within him, instantly covering his entire body.

The Knight of Swords understood his intent without asking and promptly dematerialized into a wraith, attaching himself to Lumian.

Lumian transformed into a white-hot spear and shot off into the distance in a brilliant display.

The flaming spear streaked through the sky, crossing vast distances to arrive at the edge of Lake Dalsh in no time.

As Lumian detached from the blazing white spear, he noticed that even in Paramita, intertwined with the spirit realm, this lake remained tranquil, clear, sacred, and beautiful.

In the dim surroundings, the gray-white water seemed weightless, stretching upwards like a giant curtain, perhaps drawn to some high-altitude entity.

In front of the water curtain, countless human skulls formed a mountainous head.

Among the skulls of various colors, one stood out the most. It was at the very top, crystal clear as if carved from crystal, and significantly larger than a normal human skull.

Instead of pale or dark red flames, the eye sockets of this crystal skull reflected a mysterious, intricately patterned, ancient bronze door.

The door was slightly ajar, revealing endless darkness within. In that darkness were countless indescribable eyes, staring out yet unable to emerge.

Along the edges of the bronze door, strange, grotesque, and sometimes revolting hands grasped the frame as if trying to squeeze through but unable to. They only managed to scratch out piercing noises that seemed to tear at the human eardrum.

Many spirits and human skulls were drawn to this place, gradually becoming part of the massive head.

Is that crystal skull the Undying's skull used back then? Is the bronze door in its eye sockets the Death Sequence 5's Gatekeeper's door to the Underworld? Hmm, a Sequence 5 can't keep the Underworld door open for long, so they used the Undying's skull and the unique properties of Lake Dalsh to fix it... But where has Oxyto, the Shaman King, gone? As this thought crossed Lumian's mind, he saw the countless human skulls forming the massive head in the air open and close their bony teeth, speaking in unison in various voices: "Why couldn't you give me a little more time?

"If I can't have it, I'll destroy this place and see how many of you can survive the calamity of this collapsing Paramita!

"And I have already abandoned this place and left the Raklev region using my prior preparations!

"Hahaha, hahaha!"

Amid the sharp, hoarse, old, and deep laughter of the human skulls, Lumian felt the massive shadow in the sky descend toward his head. Cracks appeared in the ground below, growing deeper and revealing a dark void.

All the skulls, including the crystal one, developed tiny cracks, seemingly ready to shatter completely in no time.

At that moment, Lumian felt a chill leave his body, and all the skulls stopped cracking as if temporarily held back by an invisible external force.

This also halted the process of Paramita's collapse and destruction. Although it didn't reverse, it wasn't going to happen immediately.

Is this the temperance faction's demigod or their invited helper using their ability? It seems Oxyto really escaped. After testing the waters with the

Banshee's Howl, she decisively abandoned this Paramita, clearly stronger than other Madames, and used her prior arrangements and the unique properties of this place to escape before the temperance faction could act... A series of thoughts flashed through Lumian's mind as he took in the scene before him.

An ancient voice suddenly echoed in his ears: "Don't just listen to what Oxyto says.

"In my experience, anyone who leaves behind so many words before running away is either already insane or trying to cover up something.

"Oxyto did indeed flee here decisively before we locked onto her and planned to destroy this Paramita, but why would she tell us her objectives? Purely to vent her emotions?

"That may be one reason, but there should be a more important one: she wants us to focus on the collapse and destruction of this Paramita and overlook something else."

Lumian hadn't entirely dismissed his doubts after Oxyto's proclamations through those human skulls, but such behavior wasn't unusual for the indulgence faction of the Rose School of Thought.

Those accustomed to indulgence were always eager to express their emotions.

The ancient voice finally said, "Time will provide us the answer."

As soon as these words fell, Lumian saw the insects with translucent rings flying out.

Suddenly, everything around him slowed down.

A grayish-white fog settled over everything Lumian saw, making it all look surreal.

Soon after, everything projected on the foggy "curtain" started to rewind. The human skulls were no longer cracked in countless places, the ground returned to smoothness, and the thick shadows receded into the sky.

Time wasn't moving backward; rather, recent history and events were being displayed.

Lumian then saw a pair of brown wings that could blot out the sky, leaving the current shadow behind.

Between the wings, each feather as large as a human head, stood a female figure with an exposed abdomen.

The woman was as beautiful as the moon at night, her face radiating maternal brilliance, but her hands and feet were arched, with sharp nails that gleamed coldly.

This was the Shaman King, Oxyto.

Having seen her male form, Lumian recognized her instantly. Her features were softer now, and her facial details were more delicate.

Her belly was swollen, stretched taut with black veins visible on the surface. The skin was so thin that it was almost transparent, revealing the merging forms of numerous bird-clawed monster infants inside.

She... stuffed all those corpse-born bird-clawed infants into her belly... What kind of monster is she nurturing? No wonder the bloodline connection didn't work directly, only indirectly within a certain range... As Lumian came to this realization, Oxyto reached for her belly in the scene from the past.

With a tearing sound, she ripped her abdomen open, blood pouring out.

Oxyto forcefully pulled out an infant slightly smaller than Ludwig. Its skin was pale, its flesh decayed, and remnants of four or five heads and seven or eight bird claws remained on its surface. A pure, clear membrane, seemingly from Lake Dalsh, covered the baby's body.

Oxyto let out a cry of agony as she threw the infant into the eye socket of the crystal skull.

The rotten, multi-headed infant was clearly much larger than the eye socket and the bronze door within it, yet it mysteriously shrank smaller and smaller until it squeezed through a gap barely wide enough for a hand, disappearing into the boundless darkness behind the door.

Is Oxyto's ultimate goal to send that monster infant into the Underworld, making some terrifying thing a reality? And now she's been forced into early labor? As Lumian had this thought, he realized the coldness inside him had vanished.

The figure in the small black bonnet and the Knight of Swords in the vest and shirt simultaneously appeared in front of the crystal skull.

But they seemed unable to pass through the crack in the bronze door and were trying to open it a little more.

The Underworld... Wearing the Eggers family's golden mask, Lumian felt a stirring inside.

Seizing the opportunity provided by the temperance faction demigods stalling Paramita's collapse, he activated the black mark on his right shoulder, teleporting to the front of the crystal skull.

In his eyes, the bronze door loomed abnormally large.

He stretched out both hands and pressed them on either side of the bronze door.

A hollow, muffled buzzing filled the air as the bronze door opened a little wider.

Lumian immediately felt a terrifying suction, and with a swish, he was pulled through the crack, flung deep into the darkness.

Inside him, two more cold masses joined him.

Chapter 767: Underworld

767 Underworld

With Lumian vanishing before the crystal skull, the human skulls, already covered in countless cracks, lost their support.

They shattered with a thunderous crash, bringing down the shadows from above and splitting the grassy wilderness into fragments.

Oxyto's Paramita crumbled toward the cracked crystal skull, and everything there silently turned to dust.

The spirits dissipated, the light vanished, and the void of darkness swallowed everything.

No one knew how much time had passed before a gentle light began to glow in the absolute blackness, revealing a barren, dim, pale, and almost frozen wilderness.

In the center of the wasteland lay the tranquil and sacred Lake Dalsh.

The headless lady, draped in a dark-black dress and carrying four heads, swiftly appeared beside the lake, quietly gazing at its serene, transparent surface.

...

As soon as Lumian was pulled through the bronze door, he felt countless eyes upon him, chilling his body further and numbing him.

Meanwhile, arms of unknown origin reached out, grabbing at his head, neck, torso, and legs.

Some had dull skin with white, bony teeth; others were so decayed that their flesh was falling off, slowly wriggling with equally decayed worms; some lacked skin altogether; others were merely illusory Spirit Bodies...

What they all shared was a bone-chilling cold that could freeze the soul.

On Lumian's face, the golden mask painted with black and white oil sparkled with a faint yet pure light. The reaching arms halted momentarily before retracting.

The eyes watching him from the darkness also withdrew their gaze.

Lumian regained his thoughts and his sense of his body.

Below him, he discovered a deep pit with no visible bottom or boundaries.

The edge of the pit was made up of layers of blurry worlds, spiraling downward to the limits of his vision.

These jumbled worlds layered atop each other, and Lumian couldn't make out what lay within them, only knowing that each was vaster than the Star Highlands, with all previous watching eyes stemming from the pit's bottomless dark.

Lumian plummeted suddenly, falling into one of these blurry worlds in the blink of an eye.

Miraculously, he stood on a barren wilderness exposed with gray-white rocks, surrounded by heaps of bleached bones, densely packed and stretching toward various distant places.

At this moment, these bones lay still, as if slumbering through time.

Is this the Underworld? I wonder where the Abscessed Hand's body part might be. Lumian looked around, muttering to himself in silence.

(Amonoculus' note: It is the contracted creature that gave him the traverse the Spirit World. Lumian must find its body parts or else he cannot achieve godhood. According to Fors, one of the body parts is located in the Underworld.)

It was the chance to enter the Underworld that had prompted him to help voluntarily, using the Eggers family's golden mask and the Underworld Daoist's seal to push open the bronze door inside the crystal skull.

Now, the problem was that the Underworld was much more vast than he had anticipated, and he had no idea where to start looking.

Similarly, the whereabouts and intentions of the decaying infant that Oxyto had sent were unknown.

Perhaps I could rely on the contract I had signed with the Abscessed Hand. Essentially being part of the same body, they are mystically connected. The contract I had signed is, to some extent, also with the rest of its body... Lumian quickly formulated a plan and spoke in a cold, hoarse voice, "Knight of Swords, have all of you entered as well?"

"Yes," came the faint voice of the Knight of Swords, Maric.

Pausing momentarily, he added, "A companion of mine has also entered."

Lumian nodded. "Why aren't both of you coming out? You are now in a wraith state, so there's no need to worry about dying instantly in the Underworld."

You're essentially undead beings now; what's there to fear about the Underworld's unique conditions?

The Knight of Swords responded, "But we are fundamentally still living beings. If we stay in the Underworld as wraiths for too long, we won't be able to revert to human form and will forever exist as wraiths or evil spirits. By using your body, we can temporarily avoid the influence of the Underworld, emerging only when it's crucial."

"I see..." Lumian looked up at the pale, dim sky, "I also can't wear this Eggers family's mask for too long. We have about three hours."

As he spoke, Lumian tried to activate without using the black mark on his right shoulder, which was the Abscessed Hand's Spirit World Traversal ability.

With this mark, he faintly sensed something at the end of the wilderness on his right calling to him.

Is that the body part of the Abscessed Hand in the Underworld? Just as Lumian had this thought, a figure appeared ahead.

It was an extremely delicate-looking young woman with an unnaturally pale complexion. Her deep blue eyes were profound and devoid of any emotional fluctuation; her light golden hair was tied in astern bun adorned with a small black bonnet with a fine black veil, and she wore a complicated, exquisite black Gothic court dress.

Is this the temperance faction demigod that was attached to me earlier? Lumian recalled the two blurry figures he saw through the crystalline ice.

One of them matched the lady before him perfectly!

The temperance faction's demigod floated in mid-air, slowly turned around, and then pointed in a direction, nodding at Lumian.

She was pointing toward the end of the wilderness on the right.

"Do you mean that Oxyto's prematurely born, decayed child might be over there?" Lumian asked for confirmation.

The lady in the black bonnet nodded gently in affirmation.

She then vanished into thin air, and Lumian felt another chill inside him.

It's all in that direction, huh... A coincidence? No, not a coincidence, it's more likely that something in that direction is drawing them there... Lumian turned his body, ready to teleport to the edge of his vision.

As soon as Lumian started to become transparent, his body was suddenly grabbed by pale hands that appeared out of nowhere, seizing his arms.

Lumian felt a paralyzing sensation throughout his body, as if his soul was being torn apart by an invisible force.

This time, the faint glow from the golden mask had no effect.

Lumian attempted to ignite a blazing white flame to ward off the cold, stiffness, and numbness, but he was overwhelmed by an invisible terror, trembling uncontrollably, unable to respond effectively.

When he regained his clarity and composure, he found himself still standing in the same spot, but surrounding layers of bleached bones had all risen up, encircling him as if to protect him.

At the same time, Lumian heard the voice of the Knight of Swords, Maric: "Once you put on the Eggers family's mask and become a pure undead being, you will also possess all the traits of an undead, one of which is being suppressed by higher beings of the Death pathway, making it difficult to resist and your body and mind willing to accept enslavement.

"In contrast, we wraiths, who aren't pure and can switch states freely, are less affected."

Was this why I couldn't resist just now? I wonder if the Sword of Courage can counteract this effect. It theoretically should... Lumian realized with a start. "Did both of you save me just now?"

The Knight of Swords didn't continue on this topic but instead reminded Lumian, "It seems that in the Underworld, you can teleport but not teleport freely, as that is considered a desecration of Death and attracts the punishment of the Underworld" According to the mystic knowledge mentioned by Madam Magician, teleporting should be normal in the Underworld since it stems from the spirit world, but considering it as desecration of Death seems a bit too strict, typical of the oppression by higher-ranking beings of the Death pathway... Lumian pondered for a few seconds, slightly bending his back.

A blazing white, radiant spear of flame immediately shot forth, illuminating the pale, dim half-sky, casting towards the far reaches of the wilderness.

As the white and red trail of the flame spear disappeared inch by inch, Lumian, transformed into the spear, hurled himself forward at the fastest speed he could achieve.

During this process, he noticed the wilderness sloped downwards, and the destination he, the Knight of Swords, and the temperance faction demigod aimed for was at the bottom of this 'hillside'.

After a while, the blazing white light scattered in all directions, and Lumian, now clad in a thick jacket, descended toward the ground.

Ahead of him lay a wide, surreal black river, so vast he couldn't see the other side.

The river flowed silently from the edge of the sky to its limits, exceptionally quiet.

"Is this the River Styx?" Lumian inquired of the temperance faction demigod within him.

Responding to Lumian was still the Knight of Swords, Maric: "It should be. It spans every layer of the Underworld. Crossing it is like entering the depths of the Underworld. If you hadn't stopped earlier and ended up flying above it, you would have fallen straight into the river, and no one would have been able to pull you out."

Good thing the issue with teleporting just now gave me a warning: it's best to pause in uncertain environments... Lumian glanced left and right, noticing the wilderness was dotted with withered blood flowers, each concealing a multitude of corpses, bones, and shadows.

"How do I cross?" Lumian sensed that the missing part of the Abscessed Hand's body was on the other side of the River Styx.

No sooner had he asked, and before the Knight of Swords could respond, a dilapidated, gloomy black boat suddenly appeared on the shadowy river.

A figure draped in fragments stood on the boat, rowing with a long oar, guiding the vessel to Lumian's side before stopping at the river's edge.

Peering closely, Lumian saw that the ferryman was a severely decayed male corpse. Large portions of his body were exposed, and his eyes appeared gouged out, leaving hollow sockets entwined with thick blood vessels oozing yellow pus.

"Take this boat across?" Lumian asked, lowering his voice to consult the temperance faction member inside him.

Knight of Swords Maric replied in an ethereal but slightly grave tone, "It's the only way... But be careful of the boatman. The Underworld has mutated, and it could be affected too."

Chapter 768: Ferryman

768 Ferryman

Lumian nodded, his right hand naturally falling on the Traveler's Bag.

He then walked over to the dilapidated, gloomy boat, noticing the severely decayed boatman turning aside to make way, as if signaling for him to hurry aboard.

"Can you ferry me across the Styx?" Lumian asked politely in Dutanese.

Given that the former Death hailed from the Southern Continent, Lumian figured that speaking Dutanese might be more readily accepted by "all parties" in the Underworld.

After all, in an environment so rich with the stench of death that a living person couldn't last a second, using mystical languages like ancient Hermes, which could manipulate natural forces, might have unexpected effects. For instance, merely uttering the words "River Styx" could forge a strong connection with the dark, ethereal river before him, possibly causing it to whip up a massive wave and sweep him away.

The boatman, its eye sockets filled with thick blood vessels and oozing yellow pus, faced the river, wide enough that the opposite bank was out of sight, and remained motionless.

It seemed it was answering Lumian with his actions:

Why would you try to communicate with a corpse?

I can't hear you, nor can I make a sound.

It seems ordinary language won't do... I've heard that the Death pathway includes a Language of the Dead, but unfortunately, I don't speak it... Lumian muttered to himself quietly as he let his eyes take on a silver-black hue and slowly stepped onto the rickety, gloomy boat.

In his Eye of Calamity, the boatman's destiny was pure black, dead and void, showing no signs of change.

Does this mean no matter how much the boatman struggles, it can't change its status as a corpse, and its only fate is to wither away with time until even its existence vanishes?

But that doesn't mean the boatman can't do anything during this time before its demise. Its actions can still affect the fates of others, including mine and other undead beings. From this perspective, the boatman, or rather the summoned undead, should still have a destiny, only that the outcome cannot be changed...

Indeed, they have destinies, but my current rank isn't high enough to see them, is it? After all, objects have destinies too, but I can't see them now...

It might also be that the destinies of the dead need to interact with others to manifest in the destinies of those others...

Perhaps because he had temporarily become an undead himself, Lumian couldn't help but ponder the destinies of these "residents" of the Underworld.

With the mystical knowledge he currently possessed, he couldn't define destiny precisely, nor did he know how much the mercury river of fate encompassed, or whether there were unseen aspects or hidden parts he wasn't aware of yet.

He felt there must be, which stemmed from a few simple questions:

Could it be that by donning the Eggers family's golden mask and becoming an undead, the river of fate that still existed for me simply disappears, turning utterly black and void?

And when I take off the mask, does the river of fate instantly return?

What then is the river of fate? A plaything at our disposal?

Although the golden mask of the Eggers family was made by Death, it didn't contain Beyonder characteristics and was only of a higher rank.

It surely wasn't simple enough to manipulate the river of fate so easily!

Later on, if there's a chance, I should have a Monster pathway Beyonder observe my fate to see the changes before and after donning the golden mask...

Uh... never mind, unless I find a demigod-level Monster pathway Beyonder, otherwise it would only harm them. Even when I had only Mr. Fool's seal, the false angelic rank, and the residual aura of the Blood Emperor, the patrol team's 'machine' Kolobo from Port Pylos was already too afraid to look at me, thinking it would bring him great danger. Now, I have also added the Underworld Daoist's seal and Omebella's bloodline...

Lumian positioned himself at the center of the battered boat, allowing the golden mask to turn his eyes iron-black.

He wanted to preemptively spot the boatman's weaknesses to prepare for any potential mishaps.

At that moment, the highly decayed boatman began to row, slowly steering the dark boat towards the other side of the surreal, shadowy river.

His body was entirely cloaked in dark colors, and Lumian struggled to find any sign of a vulnerable pale spot amid the black.

Of course, these dark colors also meant that the boatman was completely vulnerable to sunlight and lightning.

The next second, Knight of Swords Maric's voice rang in Lumian's ears: "Its weaknesses might not be here."

Not here? What do you mean they're not here? Can weaknesses be separated from the person? Just as Lumian was filled with intense curiosity, he remembered several stories his sister had once told him.

In those stories, a type of monster called a lich would create phylacteries and hide them in heavily protected, secret places. As long as the phylacteries were not found and destroyed, the lich would not truly die, effectively separating its fatal weakness from itself.

(Amonoculus' note: phylactery ⌜€ either of two small square leather boxes containing slips inscribed with scriptural passages and traditionally worn on the left arm and on the head by observant Jewish men and especially adherents of Orthodox Judaism during morning weekday prayers.)

And in the twenty-two paths of the divine, such things were hardly surprising.

The Knight of Swords continued, "Were you trying to discern its fate earlier?"

"It holds a considerable rank; this is a dangerous endeavor."

A considerable rank? Lumian glanced at the boatman, draped in tattered clothes and highly decayed flesh, unable to see anything particularly formidable about it.

However, the fact that it could ferry across the River Styx without sinking into it certainly suggested something extraordinary.

Lumian diverted his gaze, closely watching the boatman's every move, patiently waiting as the dilapidated boat made its way across the River Styx to the opposite shore.

The battered boat rocked slowly, as if it might fall apart at any moment, taking what felt like an eternity to reach the middle of the river.

Suddenly, the highly decayed boatman raised its long oar and turned toward Lumian.

As the gloomy boat came to a halt, the boatman's mouth abruptly opened, splitting down to its decayed chest, its hollowed-out navel, and further down to its groin.

Its body unfolded like a coat unbuttoning, stretching out to the sides, revealing no darkened organs or bones of its own, but rather a heap of half-melted, decayed limbs.

Once again, Lumian felt a chill that made him shudder, daring not to harbor any thoughts of resistance.

He clenched his right hand, which had been ready.

He grasped the Sword of Courage from the Traveler's Bag, holding the hilt of the iron-black broadsword.

Courage swiftly filled Lumian's body, prompting a manic smile on his face.

What is there to fear from a mere boatman?

Even if Death Himself stood before me, I would strike Him down with my sword!

Lumian drew his broadsword, now ablaze with white-blue flames, and slashed fiercely at the boatman, who was lunging at him with its skin peeled open.

With a thud, the Sword of Courage cut through the pile of melting limbs in the boatman's stomach and struck the layer of rotting skin riddled with holes behind its chest.

But the broadsword failed to split the seemingly fragile, decayed skin.

As Lumian readied a second strike, one accompanied by a massive explosion, the boatman swiftly recoiled, slowly closing its opened chest and abdomen.

At the same time, the voice of the Knight of Swords rang in Lumian's ears: "Stop. We've got it under control"

"This is our chance to finish it off!" Lumian responded without hesitation.

He and the Knight of Swords were communicating in Intis.

The Knight of Swords paused for a second and said, "I know, you're not afraid of it, and you could kill it, but if it dies, we can't cross the River Styx."

Seeing Lumian calm down a bit, the Knight of Swords added, "Besides, killing it won't grant you any Beyonder characteristics. It's merely the skin of the true Ferryman. It seems to have been consuming other corpses, trying to regain a body but never succeeding."

Lumian accepted the Knight of Swords' explanation.

Having courage didn't mean being deaf to others' words, it's just selectively ignoring dangerous warnings.

He then placed the Sword of Courage back among the ordinary straight swords in the Traveler's Bag.

This time, he didn't feel the post-event fear because this was the purpose of using the Sword of Courage. The only thing he feared was:

A demigod's skin has been peeled off? What in hell happened in the Underworld back then?

Lumian watched as the boatman slowly and struggle-fully pinched together the split skin and rotting flesh on its chest, like buttoning up a coat.

Following this, the boatman plunged its long, dark, decayed oar into the surreal shadowy River Styx, moving it at an even slower pace as if resisting something.

Has the demigod of the temperance faction possessed the boatman, forcefully taking control and making it continue to row? It looks like this control is met with strong resistance... Lumian remained ready to draw the Sword of Courage again in case of any unforeseen incidents.

As the gloomy boat rocked its way towards the opposite shore of the Styx, Lumian, having nothing better to do, started a conversation with the Knight of Swords.

"I saw the entire Underworld as a series of descending layers earlier. Crossing the Styx should just get us to the other side of this layer, so why did you say it's like entering deep into the Underworld?"

The Knight of Swords simply replied, "The geography of the Underworld doesn't completely align with the real world. According to the many notes of the Eggers family, there are two ways to enter the depths of the Underworld. The first is to descend layer by layer through the worlds encircling the Styx, which are used to punish sinners, ultimately arriving at the realm where the Blessed of Death reside. The second is to cross the Styx directly."

"Is that so..." Lumian mused aloud, "So, our destination is the realm once inhabited by the Blessed of Death?"

The Knight of Swords paused for a second and said, "Death's palace should be there as well."

The palace of the former Death? Lumian's eyelids twitched at the thought.

As he and the Knight of Swords alternated between silence and conversation, the boundary on the other side of the Styx finally came into view.

Chapter 769: Incomplete Corpse

769 Incomplete Corpse

Unlike the wilderness Lumian and company had passed through earlier, strewn with grayish-white rocks, the soil on this side of the River Styx was pitch black. There were no withered blood-colored flowers, no ghostly skeletons, and no decaying corpses to be seen.

The sky above was no longer lit by pale, dim, cold "sunlight." Instead, a rich darkness dominated this boundless world.

Deep within the darkness, clusters of pale-white, greenish-hued flames hung quietly in mid-air, spaced far apart as if serving as street lamps.

Using the illumination from the nearest pale flame, Lumian quickly leaped from the gloomy boat to the shore.

Once his feet hit solid ground, his heart steadied considerably. As he crossed the River Styx, the scent of death in his undead body became more intense and evident, while his spirit and consciousness, tightly protected by the Eggers family's golden mask, felt a slight chill.

Following that, a sinister coldness pervaded his body, but the highly decayed boatman, with its hollow eyes, simply reinserted its long oar back into the river's current.

It made no new move to attack Lumian.

It seemed incapable of attacking targets on the shore.

Watching the gloomy boat and the boatman, now facing away from him, slowly drift away, Lumian mused, "Not going to finish it off? With its rank, that decayed human skin would match your messenger quite well" This referred to the Knight of Swords' messenger, the Half-Fairy, a spirit being missing the outer half of her body, meaning she was precisely lacking human skin, while the boatman was just the peeled skin of a demigod from the Death pathway.

The Knight of Swords was silent for a few seconds, letting his voice echo in Lumian's ears: "She only lacks her own skin."

This reply was curt and restrained, yet Lumian almost heard the Knight of Swords roar: Don't just find any skin for my messenger to wear!

Pausing for a second, the Knight of Swords continued, "We might need to return across the River Styx, and we don't know how many Ferryman are left there."

A need to return across the Styx? Lumian then pondered a very serious and important question.

"After dealing with Oxyto's child, how do we leave the Underworld?"

Clearly, this was not something that could be solved by teleportation.

"Our allies in the outside world should be seeking help from the Death pathway's Sequence 5 Gatekeeper or a corresponding demigod, which might necessitate our return to the peripheral areas of the Underworld we were in before, to access the bronze doors of the Underworld."

Lumian nodded, following a vague sensation brought on by the black mark on his right shoulder, and took a step forward.

He didn't ask the Knight of Swords and the temperance faction demigod if he was veering off the path to find Oxyto's child.

If he were wrong, they would inform him.

Reaching the nearest pale flame, Lumian realized it truly served as a street lamp.

It was crafted from gold, shaped like a kneeling figure with hands bound behind its back, its head tilted back and torso bent outward.

A dark, sinister wick protruded from the statue's mouth, coated in a layer of pale yellow translucent grease. The pale-white flame burned quietly, seemingly for thousands of years without a hint of extinguishing.

From this human-shaped lamp onward, the ground was covered with dark, cracked stone slabs.

Lumian could imagine just how solemn and solemn the path to Death's palace must have been.

(Amonoculus' note: Not sure why the official translation has used the word solemn twice here.)

He walked along the path, which was inexplicably cracked and shattered, quickly but cautiously heading deeper into the darkness, towards the place suspected to hold the Abscessed Hand's body part.

The path also presented a slightly downward trajectory.

This reminded Lumian of Hotel Orella he had once stayed in, recalling the words spoken by Iveljsta, a descendant of Death-many believed that the true hell and the origin of death lay deep underground, so one had to continually descend, delving deeper and deeper.

This is reflected in the Underworld too... After walking for a while, Lumian suddenly conjured a large, blazing white flame in his hand.

The bright light quickly dispelled the darkness further away, allowing Lumian to clearly see the surroundings: Mausoleum-style buildings were either completely collapsed or half fallen, deathly quiet, with no bones or bodies. These buildings varied in color, not just black, but also pale-white, golden, dark red, and sinister green.

"Did the Blessed of Death once live in these houses?" Lumian asked the Knight of Swords, who was well-versed in the history of the Southern

Continent and the legends of the Underworld.

The Knight of Swords replied succinctly, "I don't know" He then added, "Only by finding a creature that entered and exited the Underworld before the fall of Death can we be sure."

"Alright..." Lumian didn't press further and quickened his pace.

This was because he felt that the body part of the Abscessed Hand was not far ahead!

His right hand went back into the Traveler's Bag, ready to draw the Sword of Courage at any moment.

As for the Devil's Whispers ring, he didn't plan to wear it yet; he didn't think becoming undead would immunize him against the malevolent effects unleashed by that Sealed Artifact.

Undead beings could harbor malice too!

After all, undead beings such as wraiths and evil spirits were formed around the core of their own obsessions and residual malice.

Moreover, Lumian's spirit and consciousness were still protected by the golden mask of the Eggers family, remaining in a living state.

After a quick jog, guided by the pale-white flame of the human-shaped street lamps and the blazing white orb above, Lumian discovered a grand structure along the side of the cracked stone slabs.

It appeared to be a cathedral, entirely black and about fifty to sixty meters tall, but its upper half had already collapsed into the lower part.

Lumian concentrated, listening intently, and heard faint, strange sounds emanating from the grand but ruined cathedral.

It was as if someone was using a blunt sword to slice through flesh and saw through bones, causing a headache to the listener.

"I have another matter to resolve inside this cathedral," Lumian finally disclosed his intent to the Knight of Swords and the temperance faction demigod.

He then firmly added, "It should be quick."

He remembered what Madam Magician had said: the true danger of the Abscessed Hand would only manifest once all its parts were assembled, and currently, two parts were still in the City of Exiles Morora, so there was no need to worry about that.

The enemy he might face next could be the undead being creating the sound just heard.

"Alright," the Knight of Swords did not inquire about the specifics.

"Thank you," Lumian responded sincerely.

The Knight of Swords and the temperance faction demigod neither objected nor disengaged from Lumian's body, indicating their tacit approval to provide the necessary assistance when needed.

Lumian extinguished the blazing white orb hovering above his head to avoid provoking the undead within the dilapidated cathedral.

He transformed into a shadow, blending into the areas not illuminated by the pale-white flames, and silently infiltrated the building whose upper half had entirely collapsed inward.

From the shadows, Lumian saw columns thrust into the ground, a dome shattered into pieces, and a bird statue broken in half.

After winding through the ruins for a while, Lumian's path brightened suddenly.

Ten meters ahead on a crumbling wall, several bone torches burning with pale green flames were inserted, the dense darkness above streaming through a large hole created by the collapsed dome, blocked outside by this dim light.

Beneath the bone torches, a long table made of grayish-white stone was set up, upon which lay a half-corpse, head severed and vertically split open.

The corpse wore no clothes, its body bluish-black and swollen with decay, oozing yellowish-red pus everywhere.

It appeared significantly larger than a normal human, unclear whether it was a half-giant in life or merely bloated by post-mortem gasses.

Lumian recognized it instantly-this was the body of the Abscessed Hand!

It comprised the left half, including one hand and one foot.

In front of the Abscessed Hand's corpse stood a towering figure, about four meters tall. The figure's skin was pitch-black, etched with numerous sinister patterns, most of which had decayed, exposing bare, ghostly white bones or appearing as half-melted, viscous tissue.

At that moment, this figure, bent over, was slowly cutting into the half-corpse of the Abscessed Hand with an even larger pale-white leg bone, likely from another unknown source.

Lumian noticed two curved, tattered black goat horns growing from the figure's head, its profile resembling a fusion of human and goat features, becoming increasingly terrifying the longer he looked.

An undead being transformed from a Beyonder of the Devil pathway after death? Just as Lumian had this thought, he saw the goat-faced giant slice off a chunk of bluish-black decaying flesh and stuff it into its mouth, chewing vigorously, causing pale yellow pus to splatter.

On the half-corpse of the Abscessed Hand, the decaying flesh writhed and grew, filling in the cuts made.

A cycle of one eating, the other growing? Lumian was pondering a plan to take the Abscessed Hand's corpse when the Devil-like undead suddenly turned around, looked towards the shadows where he was hiding, and spoke in an unintelligible language using a hollow, decayed voice.

Though he couldn't understand the words, Lumian felt a strange pulsation in his flesh, compelling him to leave his shadow form and revert to his undead appearance with the golden mask.

However, the decaying, goat-faced Devil did not take the opportunity to attack.

After two seconds, the voice of the Knight of Swords reached Lumian's ears: "It's asking: 'Do you need flesh?'"

Do you need flesh? Lumian was first stunned, then relieved that he had a translator.

Looking at the hunched-over, Devil-like giant undead, Lumian suddenly had a strange thought: Is this considered making a deal with a Demon?

Has the aftereffects from using the Authority Holder's Under-the-table Transaction finally caught up with me?

Chapter 770: Egg

710 Egg

For a moment, Lumian was unsure whether the Authority Holder's Under-the-table Transaction, a Beyonder item from the Broker pathway, actually had negative effects.

On the one hand, encountering a deal with Demons and other evil beings surprisingly prevented a potential battle. Without this "negative effect," Lumian suspected he would have been attacked the instant he was spotted by the goat-faced Demon, instead of being asked if he needed flesh. This seemed like a manifestation of how a Shadow Merchant could reduce the malice from dangerous creatures and mysterious entities.

However, it was definitely wrong if this wasn't considered a negative effect. Dealing with a Demon wouldn't be simple or easy. It might even be very dangerous, even if the Demon was already dead.

After a few seconds of deliberation, Lumian, pointing to the half-body of the Abscessed Hand on the grayish-white stone table, asked, "I want it all. What must I give in return?"

He planned to gauge the difficulty of the transaction first. If it proved too challenging, he would ask for help from the temperance faction demigod to confront and collectively eliminate this decaying goat-faced Demon!

Having a deal offered by a Demon didn't mean you had to accept it!

As soon as Lumian spoke, he felt his body stiffen and a coldness spread within him.

He understood what was happening and didn't resist or struggle, then found himself involuntarily speaking in a gravelly, metallic voice, as if using dead vocal cords.

His words were repeated in an unknown language by the goat-faced giant, and every word struck a chill into Lumian's spirit, feeling as though they were piercing his Spirit Body.

Bent over and goat-faced, the black-skinned decaying Demon responded in the same hollow language, its voice echoing ominously.

One of the words seemed to grasp Lumian's Spirit Body and body as if by a giant hand.

If it weren't for his "dead" state and the protection of the Eggers family's golden mask, just this interaction alone could have severely harmed him.

Soon, the ethereal voice of the Knight of Swords resonated in his mind: "I want Farbauti dead!"

Farbauti? The Devil Monarch, Farbauti, the true form of Naboredisley?

The terms of the deal require me to kill an ancient god? Lumian narrowed his eyes at the towering goat-faced devil, regaining control of his voice to say, "That's an ancient god. I can't do it. Change the terms."

If the goat-faced devil refused to change the terms, then there was no need for negotiation!

Facing an ancient god might be beyond me, but taking you down certainly wasn't!

It was just a matter of owing a favor to a demigod!

That debt could be repaid slowly over time!

It was unclear whether it was the Knight of Swords or the temperance faction demigod who then took control of Lumian's body, translating his words into a language the goat-faced Demon could understand.

This also brought Lumian a strange sensation.

The goat-faced Demon, capable of standing four to five meters tall but appearing only a bit over three meters due to its bent back, fell silent for a moment before speaking in a deep, hollow tone, "I want that egg."

Egg? Lumian muttered to himself in confusion.

He understood directly because the Knight of Swords had already translated it synchronously.

"Where is this egg?" Lumian inquired.

As a member of the temperance faction took control of his mouth to relay the question, the decaying goat-faced Demon let the massive thigh bone in its hand drop to the ground with a loud thud.

"In the palace," the goat-faced Demon answered simply, making the Knight of Swords' job of translating much easier.

This also made the Knight of Swords' translation job much easier.

Lumian asked, seeking confirmation, "The palace of Death?"

Could a former divine residence be extremely dangerous?

The goat-faced Demon's eyes, oozing blood and pus, shifted slightly.

"Yes."

An egg within Death's palace... Lumian hesitated between agreeing to the deal or just seizing it.

As he surveyed his surroundings, he further inquired, "What does this egg look like?"

While waiting for the member of the temperance faction to translate, Lumian noticed a broken statue by a half-buried stone pillar, with only parts of its body remaining.

It was vaguely recognizable as an avian statue, its feathers seemingly woven from mystical patterns, pale-white and dim.

An avian statue... Lumian thought, connecting this with the egg the goat-faced Demon wanted.

Once the translation was finished and control of his mouth returned, he added, "A bird's egg?"

After about ten seconds, the goat-faced Demon dragged its pale thigh bone forward a few steps, which scraped against the ground, producing a grating sound.

The goat-faced Demon spoke slowly and intermittently, "Yes. It's large. Black, within flames."

It really is a bird's egg, and obviously from an abnormal mother...

Birds... Lumian suddenly remembered the prematurely born child they were tracking, associated with the Banshees in their full might.

They resembled birds, with claws and wings!

Although there are clear differences from this bird statue, they are at least all birds... Moreover, since there is an abnormal bird's egg inside Death's palace, it implies the existence of a mother, a mother in the mystical sense... Lumian vaguely grasped the reason Oxyto had conceived such a stillborn and cast it into the Underworld.

Was her goal also this egg, to use it to do something to the Underworld?

Whether integrating the realm of the dead in the Raklev region into her own Paramita or conducting a ritual to impregnate corpses and bear children, was it all for this purpose?

Sheesh, does she intend to merge the Underworld with her own Paramita?

That's quite ambitious, isn't it?

This is a legacy of a true god, a former divine kingdom!

But if Oxyto really succeeds, wouldn't the Great Mother be able to descend directly?

Even if she can't fully merge the Underworld just yet, just planting a seed is still a very dangerous thing for our world!

Lumian immediately asked the goat-faced Demon, "Have you seen a giant baby with bird claws?"

The decaying goat-faced Demon looked at Lumian but did not respond. It was unclear whether it hadn't seen such a thing, or if the influence of the Broker pathway was limited to the transaction itself.

Lumian fell silent for a few seconds before stating, "Deal!"

The goat-faced Demon's head moved almost imperceptibly. It turned and began dragging its pale thigh bone, step by step, back to the grayish-white stone table where the half-body of the Abscessed Hand lay.

Lumian, lowering his voice, shared his recent thoughts with the Knight of Swords and the temperance faction demigod.

Knight of Swords Maric quickly responded, "Let's head to Death's palace right now.'

Seemingly to reassure Lumian, the Knight of Swords added, "You're wearing the Eggers family's mask. Many dangers in the Underworld will naturally avoid you. We only need to worry about anomalies like the boatman. And if Oxyto's monstrous child can get close to Death's palace, close to that bird's egg, then we should be able to as well. Even with the premature birth and the powers inherited from Oxyto, it's at most equivalent to a Sequence 4."

Upon hearing the Knight of Swords say so much in one breath, Lumian pondered and said, "Its state of existence and birth ritual are quite unique. It might be able to harness some of the Underworld's power. Even if it hasn't reached the Angelic level due to being premature, we must treat it as a Sequence 3 demigod in the corresponding environment.'

After all, this was a baby born through the integration of Paramita and the spirit realm, facilitated by Lake Dalsh. And this baby had undergone gestation within a corpse, birth post-mortem, and then returned to its original form through a process of mutation and integration.

It absolutely couldn't be considered a living creature, for living beings would instantly die in the Underworld.

"Yes," the Knight of Swords answered succinctly.

Under the pale glow of a few bone torches mounted on the broken wall, Lumian asked the two members of the temperance faction within him, "If we continue along the path we were on, into the depths of the darkness, will we reach Death's palace?"

Lumian remembered that the Knight of Swords had mentioned reading many notes from the descendants of Death.

Before the Knight of Swords could reply, the goat-faced Demon standing at the gray stone table suddenly lifted the large pale thigh bone.

It used the bone to point toward a dark, deep hole that had been smashed open by a dome-shaped stone block near the broken statue.

That seemed to lead to the dark cathedral's basement.

Lumian paused, then blurted out, "You mean, this leads directly to Death's palace?"

Based on the Knight of Swords' explanations and what he had seen earlier, Lumian believed Death's palace was situated at the bottom of the dark Underworld. One would have to keep heading downward, deep into the ground, to reach it.

But since it was a descent, jumping directly into the seemingly bottomless "basement" might also be feasible.

Emperor Roselle once said, "All roads lead to Trier!"

The decaying goat-faced Demon nodded slowly.

It was only then that Lumian realized: This fellow understands my Intis language! Why did I even bother getting a translator? Is a Demon still a Demon even after death?

Lumian didn't waste any time confronting the decaying goat-faced Demon. He ran a few steps to the edge of the dark, vast hole.

He formed a clump of blazing white flame and placed it at the edge of the hole, illuminating some of the interior: massive stone pillars, blackened wood racks, collapsed stone slabs, and a winding staircase extending downward, disappearing into the darkness.

"No problem," the Knight of Swords conveyed the judgment on behalf of the temperance faction demigod. "It leads to Death's palace."

Without hesitation, Lumian jumped onto the partially collapsed staircase.

Instead of running down the stairs in the usual way, he jumped back and forth between stone pillars, wood racks, staircases, and walls in a linear free-fall.

During this process, Lumian occasionally transformed into a blazing white flame spear to leap over completely collapsed parts without footholds and at other times turned into a shadow creature to navigate around special areas.

The surrounding darkness seemed to hide something, something even the blazing white light couldn't illuminate, but Lumian ignored it, pretending not to notice.

After descending for an indeterminate amount of time, Lumian's feet finally touched the ground.

In the light of the blazing white flame, he saw that the area was littered with broken bones, some white, some yellow-brown, and some dark brown.

Not too far from Lumian, a deep black stone wall stood, set with a heavy wooden door large enough for a giant to pass through.

Lumian walked up to the door, bent over, and extended his palms, beginning to push outward with all his strength.

His instincts told him that beyond this door lay Death's palace.

Chapter 771: Pale-White Nation

771 Pale-White Nation

Amidst the heavy tearing sound of a long-unmoved wooden board, the chestnut-brown door slowly opened outward.

The first thing Lumian noticed was the dim light, unlike the darkness typical of the deeper parts of the Underworld, emanating not from golden humanoid streetlamps but from all objects ahead.

He then got a clear view of the exterior.

There lay a cluster of palaces half-sunken into the void, with a majestic main hall, several high towers, and aerial corridors connecting them.

Deeper into the palace complex, the structures seemed to sink further into the void, while those on the periphery stood solidly on a barren wilderness.

Even so, the main hall in the core area towered much higher than the rest of the buildings.

Now, most of the structures were completely collapsed, leaving only ruins and broken walls. The relatively intact palaces and towers were concentrated on the periphery, with the only visibly towering structure in the core area being the main hall and its four attached spires.

At this moment, whether it was the broken palace complex or the surrounding wilderness and the sky above, all had faded to a dim, pale white, enveloping and infusing the entire world with pallor.

They brought light.

This pale-white world still retained a few other colors-gold embedded on the surfaces of buildings and the black at the bottom of the palace complex representing the void.

The latter had two other sources: one was the silently falling illusory dark River Styx from above, cascading behind the main hall, and the other was a creature long enough to be described in hundreds of meters, nestled among the four spires atop the grand main hall.

It was an exaggeratedly large bird, its wings woven from pale-white flames and mystical patterns, quietly sprawling on the roof of the main hall. Many of its pale-white fiery feathers had shed, revealing the black, decaying skin underneath.

Despite the considerable distance, and even with just a few fleeting glances, Lumian couldn't help but feel his "death" accelerating.

He lowered his head to look at his hands and found his already pale, dull, and withered undead skin now marked with spreading patches of blue-black decay.

These marks moved slowly, deepening continuously.

Moreover, his clothes were also beginning to be "infected" by the pallor of this world, all colors turning dim.

"What kind of monster is that?" Lumian dared not gaze at the distant giant bird anymore and could only look directly at the palace complex itself.

After a few seconds, the increasingly ethereal voice of the Knight of Swords, Maric, rang out: "It might be the corpse of Gregrace."

Gregrace? The Phoenix Ancestor, the ancient Death among the eight ancient gods of the Second Epoch? Lumian blurted out in astonishment, "Why would Her body be here?"

After posing the question, Lumian felt it was somewhat meaningless.

This was the Underworld, and it was not strange for any deceased's body to appear here. The Phoenix Ancestor-ancient Death-had perished before the Underworld anomaly.

On the other hand, the absence of the Eggers family's Death's corpse, hidden somewhere, was an anomaly.

Lumian didn't expect the Knight of Swords to actually answer his question.

"It might be that the ancestor of the Eggers family, the former Death, placed it here."

Uh... Does that mean the Eggers family's Death not only acquired the Beyonder characteristics of the Phoenix Ancestor Gregrace but also brought Her body back to the Underworld, hiding it somewhere in the palace complex? How did She, no-it end up on top of the palace? Is it just a corpse? Was it placed there initially? Or did the anomaly in the Underworld come from this ancient god's corpse? With the reigning Death dead, has the ancient god's corpse reanimated?

Lumian suddenly had some thoughts.

At that moment, he heard the Knight of Swords add, "Sharron just saw the egg."

The egg? The one the goat-faced Demon wants? Is Sharron referring to the temperance faction demigod within me? Lumian's heart leaped with joy before he quickly asked, "Where is the egg?"

"Below the belly of what seems to be the corpse of the Phoenix Ancestor. It has a pitch-black shell and is engulfed in pale-white flames, about a meter in diameter,' the Knight of Swords briefly described the egg.

Protected by the corpse of the ancient Death? Lumian's scalp tingled at the thought.

How am I supposed to retrieve it?

This might as well be no different from slaying the Devil Monarch, Farbauti!

Of course, for those of high stature, a living ancient god and a Beyonder-characteristic-lacking one reduced to a decaying corpse were not on the same level; the difficulty of these tasks was as different as heaven and the abyss. But for Lumian, they were equally insurmountable, both falling under the category of "impossible even with self-sacrifice."

Son of a sow, that goat-faced fellow really is a Demon turned undead!

Fine, if it can't be completed, then so be it. Just finish off the contractor as if there was no task at all!

As malicious thoughts spread throughout his body, the Knight of Swords added, "It's not entirely impossible to retrieve the egg. The state of the Phoenix Ancestor's corpse is somewhat strange."

Strange state of the corpse? Aren't there only two states for a corpse, eternal rest and reanimation? Lumian dared not use his own eyes to inspect the decaying corpse of the ancient Death, Gregrace, and could only inquire of Sharron, the only one present who could withstand looking at the body of an ancient god to some extent, "What's strange about it?"

The one responding was still the Knight of Swords.

"It's asleep, the kind of deep sleep that's hard to awaken from.

"This doesn't align with the current state of this Pale-White Nation."

Asleep? Dead and transformed, yet still needing sleep? Lumian frowned slightly and asked, "Why does that not align with the current state here?"

The Knight of Swords paused a few seconds before explaining, "From what we've seen, one of the reasons for the original anomaly in the Underworld was the reanimation of the Phoenix Ancestor. It destroyed Death's palace, killed all of Death's Blessed present, and turned this place into a pale-white nation.

"We've encountered a few demigods from the Death domain. Since the Underworld anomaly, they could still manage some affairs in the Underworld, even enter directly, but none dared to venture deep into the Underworld to search for the treasures within Death's palace. Their instincts told them it was too dangerous, absolutely not to be approached.

"But Sharron didn't have such a premonition for danger, so she agreed to come here."

That means, for a long time after the Underworld anomaly, the body of the Phoenix Ancestor still roamed this pale-white nation, keeping the high-ranked beings of the Death domain at bay, but now, it lies asleep... Lumian found the oddity from Maric's description.

"When was the last time a high-ranking Beyonder of the Death pathway felt danger approaching deep into the Underworld?" Lumian tried to determine the approximate timeframe.

"I don't know," the Knight of Swords answered promptly.

Don't know... It seems then, that the Phoenix Ancestor's body has only fallen asleep in recent years. Otherwise, the high-ranked Beyonders of the Death pathway entering the Underworld would have discovered that it's not so dangerous here anymore, and might have attempted exploration, not leaving without a trace nor without any news spreading... What happened in recent years? Lumian thought, unable to suppress his complaint.

"Why did the Eggers family's Death bring back the Phoenix Ancestor's corpse, leaving such a huge risk? As a true god, He could have directly destroyed this corpse!"

The Knight of Swords responded to Lumian's complaint, "The Underworld was established by the ancient Death in the spirit world, and as an ancient god, She wasn't limited to the powers of the Death pathway when She created the Underworld.

"It might not have been easy for the Eggers family's Death to initially take control of the Underworld; He might have needed to use the corpse of the

Phoenix Ancestor. By the time He truly took control, His state might have changed, no longer concerned with such trivial matters."

Does this mean the Eggers family's Death went mad later? The Underworld wasn't naturally formed, it was created by the ancient Death, Gregrace... Such a powerful ancient god, no wonder She could have undergone reanimation... Lumian reflected inwardly.

The Knight of Swords, sensing his sigh, simply said, "It's said that even among those mad ancient gods, the Phoenix Ancestor, Gregrace, was particularly fond of stirring things up, much like the Blood Emperor Alista Tudor of the Fourth Epoch."

Now that you put it that way, I can understand perfectly... Lumian's gaze continuously shifted among the pale sky, the wilderness, and the collapsed palace complex, pondering whether to seize the opportunity of the ancient god's corpse being asleep to steal the enormous black egg burning with pale-white flames.

Suddenly, he spotted a figure still capable of movement.

It was a creature with a human head but the body of a giant bird.

The creature's limbs were bent, with nails that flickered with a cold light; its back sported wings covered in half pale-white, half chestnut-brown feathers. The development of its head seemed incomplete, resembling several infant heads slowly merging together.

"Oxyto's premature child? It's indeed here!" Lumian recognized the creature's identity.

That was the target he and the members of the temperance faction had been tracking!

At that moment, Oxyto's monstrous child was flapping its wings, continuously circling and stealthily drawing closer to the sleeping ancient god's corpse.

Its target appeared to be the enormous black egg pressed beneath the corpse!

"We must stop it! Sharron will handle cursing and controlling it, and we'll take care of the attack!"

The voice of the Knight of Swords echoed in Lumian's mind. "Okay."

This time, Lumian didn't hesitate and sprinted out from the base of the pitch-black cathedral.

As soon as he stepped into that pale-white nation, his entire being was dyed pale-white, devoid of any additional colors.

This caused him to shiver both body and soul, wanting nothing more than to kneel down on the ground, lying prostrate and motionless.

Silently, Lumian drew the Sword of Courage.

The blade, now color-eroded by the pale-whiteness, suddenly ignited with a bright white flame tinged with blue.

Chapter 772: Curse

772 Curse

Filled with the courage to battle against the heavens and to strike at true gods, Lumian stood straight and tall, unflinchingly facing the ruined palaces within the Pale-White Nation.

Just then, his eyelids dropped uncontrollably, shielding his eyes.

Almost simultaneously, the voice of the Knight of Swords resonated once more in his ear: "Our target is Oxyto's child, not the ancient god's corpse."

This was to prevent Lumian from looking directly across the pale-white wilderness at the corpse of the ancient death god.

"There's nothing to fear!" Lumian quickly responded.

His voice, once it left his mouth, was also "infected" by the pallor governing this world, becoming weak, hollow, and devoid of emotion.

The Knight of Swords earnestly advised, "But this will affect our battle with Oxyto's child; we must resolve it quickly. Once that's done, you can do whatever you want."

Lumian fell momentarily quiet before responding, "Okay."

Honestly, wearing the Eggers family's golden mask and in his undead state, Lumian felt a bloodline-based fear and an awe towards the Phoenix Ancestor's corpse atop Death's palace, which the courage did not dispel and even somewhat weakened, creating a balance.

Otherwise, Lumian, wielding the Sword of Courage, would not have been so agreeable!

Immediately, Lumian ignited into a bright white flame, transforming into a long spear of light, hurling towards the still-intact buildings at the edge of the palace complex.

As the fiery spear cut through the sky, it too was eroded by the pallor, dissipating and dimming even faster, which meant Lumian only managed half the intended distance.

Finally, as the pale-white light extinguished, Lumian appeared mid-air, plummeting straight towards the ground.

He landed softly on the wilderness, making only a slight sound, and all around was deadly silence.

The bright, blazing spear of flame took to the air once again.

After repeating this five times, Lumian finally reached a high tower adorned with numerous golden patterns and stood at its top, with the figure of Oxyto's monstrous child becoming clearer in his sight.

Although the other did not display the potentially incomplete Mythical Creature form, merely seeing the bent human limbs, a head formed from several merged infant heads, and wings stretching from the torso with half pale-white, half chestnut-brown feathers, Lumian felt dizzy, accompanied by spasmodic pain.

Additionally, something inside him seemed to be calling, slowly gathering towards his abdomen.

It was the bloodline of Omebella!

Lumian felt no fear from this.

Wasn't this inevitable?

In the next instant, two figures materialized before him.

One figure wore a black Gothic-style court dress, complete with a matching petite bonnet and her light golden hair neatly bundled up; the other, slightly disheveled, donned a traditional black vest over a white shirt.

Temperance faction demigod Sharron and a member of the temperance faction, the holder of the Knight of Swords Minor Arcana tarot card, Maric!

As they approached their primary target, they finally detached from Lumian's body, ready to battle.

Indeed, both Sharron and Maric bore colors derived from the impressions left by Lumian, not truly manifested, appearing pale-white and dim.

Moreover, their bodies were transparent and ghostly, in a state of Wraiths.

If not so, they would have instantly died, becoming real undead creatures devoid of consciousness.

The monstrous child of Oxyto, hovering close to the belly of the ancient death god's corpse, sensed the proximity of Lumian and the others. From a distance of two or three kilometers, it half-turned its body and looked over with its twelve clustered eyes.

Lumian immediately felt the protective essence of his mind and consciousness, shielded by the Eggers family's golden mask, along with the life force deep within, showing signs of disintegration.

In his eyes, the temperance faction demigod named Sharron, using the reflective mirror effect of the pure gold surface, flickered twice between the crumbling palace and the high tower, coming within three to four hundred meters of the Phoenix Ancestor's corpse.

She opened her mouth towards Oxyto's child and emitted a piercing scream.

This was Lumian's first time hearing Sharron's voice.

Eroded by the pallor during its journey of over two thousand meters, the sound reached Lumian's ears as a faint echo, almost like an illusion.

Oxyto's child didn't see it that way. The feathers on its wings-half pale-white, half chestnut-brown-rapidly fell off. One by one, the eyes on its face burst open, the flesh on its uncovered body festering down to the bone, as if struck by a potent curse!

Seeing this, Lumian, fearless, transformed once again into the fiery spear of flame and hurled himself at the creature. Meanwhile, the Knight of Swords flickered forward on various reflective surfaces.

Oxyto's child let out a mournful howl.

Though distant and further muted by the dense pallor within Death's palace, the sound was soft when it reached Lumian, yet it still made him dizzy for a moment, a bloody stench of decay filling his nostrils, involuntarily causing him to revert from his fiery spear form.

With this howl, Oxyto's monstrous child morphed into a writhing, twisted, huge pale-white bud. The exploded eyeballs, festering flesh, and fallen feathers were all absorbed into the bud.

In a blink, the bud blossomed, sopping wet, and produced two children.

One was intertwined in pitch black and dark red, its sores festering rapidly until it stilled, turned pale, and fell to the ground; the other was an unscathed, massive bird-clawed monstrosity.

Through this transformation, Oxyto's monstrous child shed the curse and was reborn.

But Sharron seized the moment, her figure reflected within its clustered twelve eyes.

Oxyto's monstrous child froze mid-air, just a few dozen meters from the Death's main hall where the Phoenix Ancestor's corpse lay.

In its twelve gleaming beautiful eyes, the figure of Sharron, wearing her petite bonnet, flickered in and out of view, soon illuminated by intense, bright white light.

A flamboyant spear of flame shot forth, striking an ancient, partially collapsed tower nearby.

As the light dispersed, Lumian, single-handedly wielding the Sword of Courage, appeared.

He did not hesitate or feel fear. Despite the dizziness and pain in his head, his eyes turned an iron-black.

This iron-black shade emerged only to be eroded by the pallor, harmonizing completely with this nation.

This did not impede Lumian's observation of his target's weaknesses, though all he saw was pallor.

Compelled, Lumian relied on his Hunter kin senses to detect weaknesses, picking the most appealing and battle-raging spot among those pale hues.

Once again, he became the increasingly pale and dimming fiery spear of flame, positioning himself above Oxyto's monstrous child.

His figure outlined; he grasped the Sword of Courage, blazing with bright white and blue flames, and plummeted like a boulder towards the body of Oxyto's monstrous child.

As they drew close, Lumian struck at the monstrous bird-clawed infant's abdomen with his broadsword, now tainted with pallor.

He was using his Cull.

Before this, the Knight of Swords, Maric, appeared atop the half-collapsed tower, slipping on a ring carved in the shape of the sun god's bird.

In his hands, he quickly formed a lance as clear as pure sunlight.

This caused the nearby pallor to fade slightly, erasing shadows and causing the Wraith-like state of the Knight of Swords to melt inch by inch. Droplets of dim liquid fell like wax in a fire.

The droplets evaporated quickly, leaving behind a bit of dust that slowly dispersed.

Enduring the melting of his right side, Maric's expression twisted into one of madness as he hurled the lance of sunlight towards Oxyto's monstrous child.

Considering that Oxyto was a Shaman King of the Moon pathway, the temperance faction had prepared a Sun pathway Sealed Artifact in advance, which unexpectedly proved useful at this time!

This Sealed Artifact, both in effect and trait, would bring significant harm to the Wraiths.

The clean and bright spear of flame became an anomaly in this pale world.

It too was being eroded, but it was also dispersing the pallor, appearing to be able to strike the body of the monster child before Lumian's Sword of Courage could.

Although the monstrous child of Oxyto was possessed by the demigod Sharron and forcibly controlled, it wasn't completely turned into a statue to be slaughtered at will.

It struggled against the influence of the Wraith, as its "reborn" body slowly contracted, seemingly returning to an embryonic state, seeking the comfort of its mother's embrace, while unleashing its own Paramita.

The pale-white wilderness quickly engulfed the surrounding ruined palaces and the half-collapsed tower, also drawing the bodies of a few Blessed of Death who had died in this area into its scope.

In the deathly silence, a horrific giant snake, bearing only bones and some rotting flesh with exaggerated wings, sprung from the collapsed palace into the air, blocking the path of the Knight of Swords' spear of sunlight.

The blinding sunlight burst forth, filling Lumian's eyes.

His strike with the Sword of Courage did not slow down; he firmly slashed downwards.

The sunlight blackened his pale, dim skin, sparking a burning smoke.

A soft "clang" sounded as Lumian's Sword of Courage struck the head of the winged giant snake, splitting the target, which had become exceptionally fragile after absorbing most of the sunlight damage.

In a barely audible silence, the snake's bones either evaporated or shattered, completely losing their support and falling like rain to the ground.

With the help of the giant bone snake blocking a strike for him, Oxyto's monstrous child controlled by Sharron contracted even more fiercely.

Its half pale-white, half chestnut-brown wings and bent limbs had merged with its body, forming a sphere, with only its head, formed from several merged infant heads, still visible.

Its Paramita then encompassed the entire main hall of Death and the corpse of the Phoenix Ancestor.

Chapter 773: Cries

773 Cries

The pale-white light quickly engulfed the bird-clawed infant's Paramita, rendering the spread-out wilderness dull and indistinguishable from the surrounding ruined palaces, towers, and corridors.

This Paramita lost the features distinguishing the interior from the exterior, effectively withering and dying.

As the bone serpent collapsed, Lumian fell straight down, landing amidst the broken walls and debris scattered across the wilderness.

With a forceful bend of his waist and a forward flip, he landed firmly, not relying on his burning-white spear form to avoid the damage from such a fall.

In this pale-white nation, even the rules of the world seemed corrupted; falling from fifty meters felt no different than jumping from a five-meter building.

At this moment, the monstrous child of Oxyto retracted its head into the pale-white flesh sphere, forcing the temperance faction demigod Sharron to detach and hover in mid-air.

In the area near the main hall of Death, five or six terrifying undead creatures, influenced by Paramita, shakily rose to their feet.

Among them were two giant serpents with feathered wings and hairy corpses, a bloated, rotten giant, a humanoid mountain of white bones, and a woman with hair like thick snakes and a face two-thirds decayed.

Each of these risen dead, summoned by the bird-clawed infant, exerted immense pressure on Knight of Swords Maric.

As a Sequence 5 of the Prisoner pathway, he knew he couldn't control these corpses; attempting to wake them would only result in his own immediate dismemberment.

The undead, immense and horrifying, locked onto the temperance faction demigod, Sharron, but their movements were sluggish, as if hindered by an unseen force, unable to attack immediately.

Sharron, too, could control corpses and command the dead, and she was a true demigod with a higher rank than the premature bird-clawed infant!

Sharron's divided focus to influence the former Blessed of Death gave Oxyto's monstrous child a chance for rebirth. The pale-white flesh sphere bloomed like a flower, revealing a giant baby cleansed by pure water, while the sphere itself withered rapidly, turning pale and decaying as it fell to the ground.

Just as the giant baby spread its half-pale, half-chestnut wings, Sharron abandoned her control over the corpses.

In her pale-white eyes, the floating bird-clawed infant was reflected.

She opened her mouth and let out a scream that seemed to come from the depths of her soul.

The giant baby froze, instantly transforming into a lamb covered in pale fur. Unable to fly or use any Beyonder abilities, it plummeted towards the ground, towards Lumian, who stood with the Sword of Courage.

Transfiguration Curse!

Without the monstrous child's support, Paramita began to collapse.

The risen dead lost the foundation of their existence, gradually halting their movements and toppling over in the ruins.

The lamb covered in pale-white fur seemed corrupted from within; as it fell, its skin split, sprouting half-pale, half-chestnut feathers, and its belly swelled, as if nurturing new life.

No creature could escape the fate of being corrupted and nurturing new life, not even an ordinary lamb!

This was a trait of the Madame pathway, and the Transfiguration Curse could not strip corresponding Beyonders of these traits!

Sharron never expected to resolve Oxyto's premature child with just the Transfiguration Curse. Seizing the opportunity, she let her pale-white figure reflect in the mutated lamb's eyes.

The lamb's swelling belly began to slow, and the mutation caused by the corruption became less rapid.

It continued to plummet towards the ground.

Lumian, standing on the ground, looked up with a smile, raising the blue-hued blazing white Sword of Courage.

As the lamb entered his attack range, a spear of pure, intense sunlight shot from the half-collapsed tower.

Knight of Swords Maric, enduring significant pain and damage, once again projected the spear that illuminated the pale-white world.

This time. the bird-clawed infant. still in lamb form. could not evade or find a helper to block the spear. It could only watch as the golden spear of sunlight pierced its abdomen and exploded.

At this moment, as the scorching white sunlight engulfed the target, Sharron used Lumian's eyes and the pure gold in the nearby ruins to Mirror Jump away from the bright, sunlit, and fading pale area.

Although the lamb's body shielded her from the direct harm of the sunlight explosion, she, as a spirit-like Beyonder, still suffered significant impact.

When she reappeared in a golden pattern embedded in a wall hundreds of meters away, her figure had thinned noticeably, dripping waxy liquid like sweat.

Lumian stood close to the pale-white lamb, filled with courage, not dodging, but standing firmly, welcoming the spreading sunlight.

Wearing the Eggers family's golden mask, his entire body ignited, blackening and melting like a candle, bringing extreme pain.

Fortunately, he was not at the explosion's core, most of the damage falling on the bird-clawed infant, with Sharron taking some as well.

Otherwise, the sunlight spear might have purified him in one blow.

The Sword of Courage also absorbed half the damage, making his injuries not as severe as they appeared.

Clenching his teeth, Lumian advanced instead of retreating, running towards the falling bird-clawed infant with the eroded white broadsword in hand.

With a faint thud, the half-melted, ghastly pale lamb crashed onto the shattered stones.

Lumian arrived a second later, his eyes turning from iron-black to pale-white.

He swung the Sword of Courage with both hands.

Bright white and blue flames flared, the sharp sword striking the lamb's chest and abdomen.

The explosion was not loud, but the flames and the violent shockwave lifted the surrounding rubble, tearing a jagged hole in the lamb's chest and abdomen.

Boom! Boom!

Lumian swung the sword twice more, splitting the bird-clawed infant's lamb form into charred fragments.

The charred pieces were immediately eroded by the pale-white color, bringing a sense of dark, dead silence.

Just as Lumian was about to strike again, the pale lamb's abdomen exploded, scattering rotten flesh and liquid with a strange aura.

Instinctively, Lumian slashed the void ahead with the Sword of Courage, cutting through everything there.

Boom! Bright white flames and a violent shockwave formed a solid wall, blocking the rotten flesh and evil liquid.

As the pale lamb's abdomen exploded, a small, phantom figure with bird claws and wings, covered in a layer of pure water, flew out, heading straight for the black bird egg beneath the ancient Death's corpse.

This time, the bird-clawed infant, reduced to a phantom, was no longer cautious, no longer circling.

Knight of Swords Maric could not throw the spear of sunlight again, as it would cause his severely injured body to dissolve in the light.

Instead, he opened his arms, summoning a divine pillar of clean flame from the sky, aiming at the phantom heading for the main hall of Death.

The bird-clawed infant's figure first disappeared, then reappeared, evading the divine pillar's attack, but was immediately locked by Sharron's pale-white eyes.

Sharron transformed into a dim, stiff doll, encasing herself in layers of ice.

Simultaneously, layers of crystalline ice emerged around the bird-clawed infant, briefly fixing it in place, preventing its disappearance or progress.

The bird-clawed infant raised its head, letting out a howling wail within the ice cage.

The ice cage silently shattered.

The bird-clawed infant's body, covered in clear, pure water, splashed towards the ancient Death's corpse, forming droplets of faint golden liquid.

These droplets, drawn by an unseen force, converged into a river, carrying the bird-clawed infant towards the black bird egg burning with pale-white flames.

Seeing this, Lumian instinctively wanted to avoid the Phoenix Ancestor's corpse. He leaned back, raised his arm, and hurled the Sword of Courage.

The broadsword, eroded to pale but blazing with white and blue flames, flew like a conscious missile, covering hundreds of meters, leaving a trail of flames in the air, and striking the bird-clawed infant.

Locked on!

Rumble!

The sky near the black bird egg erupted with expanding white flames, forming a mushroom cloud.

Silently, charred shadowy fragments fell from the expanding flames and cloud, like a rain of dust.

The dust turned pale before touching the ground, some blown by the wind onto the black bird egg.

At that moment, Lumian heard an illusory shattering sound and felt his Reaper potion fully digest.

He had no time to rejoice as his mind and consciousness, protected by the Eggers family golden mask, were overwhelmed by fear and dread.

He lowered his head, knelt to the ground, and hugged himself, trembling.

He only wanted to obey the orders of the Phoenix Ancestor's corpse.

As an undead, he lost his courage, his vision darkening.

Thump, splash... In extreme fear, Lumian heard the sound of a heartbeat and flowing blood.

It came from nearby, within this Pale-White Nation.

It resonated strangely with Lumian.

Faintly, Lumian heard a mournful cry: "Child!

"My child!"

Who is your child? Who are you? Lumian instinctively wondered.

The mournful cry continued:

"My child, where are you?"

The voice paused and then rose slightly:

"Omebella, where are you?"

Chapter 774: Resonance

774 Resonance

The mournful cry seemed to draw closer: "My child, Omebella, where are you?"

Hearing the name "Omebella," Lumian shuddered violently, snapping out of his fear-induced daze.

Who? Who is looking for Omebella? Why are they looking for Omebella?

As he wondered, Lumian noticed the surrounding area growing darker, with a sense of confinement and imprisonment.

He reached out, his hands brushing against a cold, hard "wall."

He pressed himself against it, trying to peer through its cracks.

The "wall" was pitch black but semi-transparent, and Lumian could faintly see the pale-white sky, the collapsed towers, and the shattered palaces.

He also saw Sharron, the temperance faction demigod dressed in a small bonnet and a Gothic dress, floating nearby. She extended her hand, summoning the Sword of Courage, now pale from erosion.

Beyond Sharron, he looked down at the rubble-strewn ruins. A pale figure in tattered clothes was kneeling, bent over as if to crawl.

The figure was trembling all over, struggling to raise its head and straighten up.

It was a face wearing a golden mask-his own face!

Me?

If I'm outside, then who is here?

Already half-conscious, Lumian felt even more bewildered.

Almost simultaneously, he saw his outside self, with charred skin peeling off, sprouting half-pale, half-chestnut feathers. His belly writhed visibly, while wheat, mushrooms, and flowers grew from the sunlit wounds.

Silently, Sharron leaped onto the golden mask and appeared before Lumian, placing the Sword of Courage into his hands.

The surge of courage instantly dispelled the fear suppressing his mind and consciousness, making his vision pale-white and no longer pitch black.

The sense of confinement and entrapment around him also dissipated.

He raised his head higher, no longer seeing himself or using a top-down perspective.

His gaze fell on the black egg under the ancient Death's corpse at the top of the main hall.

He instinctively believed he had just been inside the egg, observing the outside through its shell!

No, it wasn't me inside the black egg, but the part of me that lost courage and was subdued by the ancient god's aura resonating with the creature inside the egg, sharing its senses.

So, I "saw" the scene outside the shell, "heard" the mournful cry for Omebella, and showed signs of corruption!

Thinking this, Lumian quickly looked down at his body, seeing the feathers falling off, mixed with wheat, mushrooms, and flowers.

They had all lost their color, turning pale and dim.

Lumian also saw his belly flattening, feeling his blood, meant to be solid as a deceased, flowing throughout his body.

Suddenly, he understood why Oxyto risked so much to nurture a fetus with undead traits and an aura of the Underworld.

Even with just a bit of Omebella's bloodline, suppressed by the ancient god's corpse, he could resonate and interact with the creature inside the black egg. How much more could the bird-clawed infant, with more of the Great Mother's gifts, fused with Paramita and the Underworld, and perhaps also with Omebella's bloodline!

If we hadn't taken out Oxyto's premature child in time, it might have used the resonance and interaction to merge with the creature inside the black egg, controlling it from the source, or completing its catalysis!

Hmm, the premature birth meant the bird-clawed infant lacked the rank and traits, requiring extreme caution. Even if it reached the final step, there was a high chance of failure...

Now, the question is, why could the creature inside the black egg hear the 'Mother's' call for Omebella...

Who exactly is Omebella's 'Mother'? It can't really be the Great Mother, can it? Isn't She always outside the barrier?

What is the relationship between the creature inside the black egg and Omebella?

As these thoughts raced through his mind, Lumian suddenly heard a faint cracking sound.

He looked up in astonishment, seeing the pale-white flames burning on the black egg dim significantly and peel away. The black egg itself developed a noticeable fissure.

It seemed to be disintegrating to some extent.

The next second, the entire Pale-White Nation began to tremble. A deathly aura from the black egg, where the ancient Death's corpse lay, started to emerge.

Even with the Sword of Courage in hand, Lumian couldn't help but freeze, trembling.

The surrounding palaces and towers, whether in ruins or half-collapsed, began to shake violently as if struck by an earthquake.

A thought flashed through Lumian's mind: The Phoenix Ancestor Gregrace's corpse is awakening... Run! Escape!

He shouted this in his mind but couldn't turn his body or take a single step.

The temperance faction demigod Sharron grabbed him, and in his eyes reflected the dim figure of the Knight of Swords, who looked much fainter than before.

Cracks appeared in the pale-white sky, extending towards the trembling ground. An overwhelming sense of dread was rapidly accumulating at the top of the main hall of Death.

Sharron, holding Lumian, initiated Spirit World Traversal.

This could be used in the Underworld but would trigger retribution.

Countless indescribable limbs reached out from the void, grabbing at the swiftly moving Sharron.

Sharron endured the damage from these limbs, continuing to head towards the pitch-black cathedral at the edge of the Pale-white Nation.

Her body ignited with pale-white flames, directly burning her spirit, causing clumps of powder to fall continuously.

Sharron could no longer sustain it any more than three seconds, interrupting the Spirit World Traversal and falling onto the pale-white wilderness outside the palace of Death, nearly a kilometer from the pitch-black cathedral.

Holding the Sword of Courage, Lumian, now outside Death's palace complex, no longer felt as afraid. He immediately pointed at himself, indicating for Sharron to possess him.

At the same time, he saw numerous jagged cracks rapidly spreading from behind, revealing a bottomless darkness, spheres wrapped in blood-red substance, and mountains filled with tombs...

Feeling achill within him, Lumian quickly ignited in blazing white flames, transforming into a magnificent spear, and launched towards the edge of the Pale-White Nation.

Above, below, and on all sides, countless cracks chased after him like shattered glass. Behind him, from the direction of the palace, a heavy sound emerged.

Amid the pale erosion, the flaming spear disappeared and reappeared twice.

Finally, Lumian escaped the Pale-White Nation, landing in front of the towering pitch-black cathedral.

Here, only the underground portion of the cathedral was visible, resembling a massive mountain.

Lumian passed through the heavy wooden doors, once again transforming into a flaming spear and launched upwards.

When the flames dispersed, he sheathed the Sword of Courage, climbing upwards using the collapsed stairs, peeling walls, and broken pillars, repeatedly jumping between them, sometimes leaping across support-less areas as a flaming spear.

Before long, the pitch-black cathedral began to shake violently. The already precarious corridors, stairs, walls, and pillars started to crack and fall.

Seeing himself about to be crushed and buried by the collapsing building, Lumian prepared to draw the Sword of Courage to carve out an escape route.

At this moment, he was surprised to find the stones and pillars above him seemed to have a life of their own, avoiding him and continuing to fall past his sides.

In such a dangerous situation, Lumian remained unharmed.

He guessed Sharron provided some help, not wasting any time, and continued his ascent, repeating the process.

After an unknown amount of time, the violent shaking abruptly stopped.

Lumian didn't relax, maintaining his pace and rhythm until he sawa pale green light above.

A blazing white spear shot out from the dark hole within the half-collapsed church.

With the flames dispersing, Lumian's figure appeared, standing firmly on the cracked stone slab.

Next to a broken wall embedded with several bone torches, a tall Demon with a human-goat hybrid face slowly turned, dragging a white bone leg.

At that moment, Lumian realized he hadn't retrieved the black egg, failing the Demon's commission.

Instantly, anger surged within him: Was this a task I could complete?

You were sending me to my death! Truly a Demon's commission! Fine, since completing the task is no longer an option, I have only one choice: destroy the commissioner!

Despite these thoughts, Lumian only reached into the Traveler's Bag, preparing to draw the Sword of Courage, without intending to fight immediately.

He was concerned that the ancient Death's corpse's awakening would cause mutations to spread here, preferring to leave the depths of the Underworld as soon as possible, especially given the unknown strength of the goat-faced Demon.

Hunched over, the goat-faced Demon staggered in front of Lumian.

It stared at Lumian silently before speaking in a hollow, decayed voice.

This time, it used Dutanese: "You've taken that egg for yourself!"

Before it finished speaking, the goat-faced Demon straightened its four or five-meter-tall body and swung the white bone leg at Lumian.

Chapter 775: Cunning

775 Cunning

As the goat-faced Devil approached and stared at him, Lumian's hand was already gripping the hilt of the Sword of Courage.

When the white bone leg came crashing down, he swiftly drew the iron-black sword, burning with a bright white and blue flame, and met the attack head-on.

Clang!

The clash echoed loudly, and Lumian's palm split open, spilling blackened, coagulated blood.

The immense force from the goat-faced Demon's strike made him lose his grip on the Sword of Courage, sending him flying and crashing into a pile of rubble.

The goat-faced Demon stepped over the fallen sword in two strides, standing before Lumian and raising the bone leg again.

Suddenly, in its blood- and pus-filled eyes, the figure of Sharron, the temperance faction demigod, appeared. Its raised hands froze in midair.

Seeing the goat-faced Demon's movements slow down as if struggling against something, Lumian ignited with white flames, transforming into a spear and darting past the high-ranking undead to where the Sword of Courage had fallen.

Perhaps because the goat-faced Demon wasn't an undead created by the Death pathway, its intimidating effect on Lumian was weak. It lacked the ability to enslave his body and mind, allowing Lumian to muster the courage to fight back.

While retrieving the iron-black broadsword, Lumian released the spirituality he had accumulated using his Ascetic ability.

At the same time, his eyes turned iron-black, reflecting the many colors on the goat-faced Demon.

He quickly found a patch of pallor, took two steps towards the goat-faced Demon, and leaped high.

In midair, Lumian adjusted his posture, gripping the Sword of Courage with both hands and descending towards the slow-moving Demon, still battling Sharron.

This time, he used the Sword of Courage's Cull ability!

His spirituality surged into the iron-black broadsword, causing the bright white and blue flames to flare up and then condense inward.

With a heavy thud, Lumian landed on the Demon's back, stabbing the Sword of Courage into the junction of its neck and body. The blade sliced into the decayed flesh like butter.

As pus splattered, the flames on the broadsword poured into the goat-faced Demon's body.

Boom! A muffled explosion echoed, and Sharron quickly withdrew from the Demon's body.

The Demon disintegrated into a puddle of sticky black liquid, condensed from evil thoughts.

The liquid, scattered by the expanding flames and shockwaves, swiftly flowed into the dark hole leading to the Pale-white Nation, seemingly to reassemble itself.

Holding the Sword of Courage, Lumian felt his released spirituality deplete by two-thirds. He wanted to chase and fight the Demon again but felt his body stiffen and his soul trapped in an invisible cage.

"Retrieve your target item first," the faint voice of the Knight of Swords echoed in his ears.

Right... Lumian agreed with the Knight of Swords' reasoning.

I don't fear the goat-faced Demon. I can totally grab the Abscessed Hand's body before it reassembles!

He transformed into a burning-white spear, darting to the bone torches. To better move the Abscessed Hand's body, he temporarily stashed the Sword of Courage in the Traveler's Bag.

Moments later, Lumian felt a pang of fear: I only have a third of my spirituality left, yet I was thinking of a life-or-death fight with the Demon?

And Sharron is clearly in poor condition!

Now isn't the time for that. Shouldn't I grab the target item and leave the collapsing cathedral before the Demon reassembles?

Thankfully, the Knight of Swords acted as a valve for my courage and found a convincing reason!

Without hesitation, Lumian grasped the Abscessed Hand's half-body, trying to lift it.

It was extremely heavy, like metal. Fortunately, Lumian was now a Sequence 5 Beyonder, from a pathway known for their strength.

During this process, Lumian worried the body might suddenly reanimate and deliver a fatal blow. However, the Abscessed Hand's half-body, after enduring years of cutting by the goat-faced Demon, seemed lifeless with no abnormal reaction.

Lumian placed the half-corpse into the Traveler's Bag, relieved to see it "sink" inside.

Living flesh couldn't be stored in the Traveler's Bag, and the Abscessed Hand's body had shown self-healing traits earlier. Lumian had thought if he couldn't store it, he'd carry it or have the Knight of Swords or Sharron possess it to make it move.

With the body stored, Lumian heard creaking sounds from the dark hole.

He immediately transformed into a blazing spear, darting out of the half-collapsed pitch-black cathedral.

With a swoosh, the white flames left a burning trail in the dark, spreading quickly into the distance.

Without the Pale-White Nation's erosion, Lumian flew far in one breath.

Under the golden humanoid lamplights, he repeatedly transformed into a blazing spear, finally reaching the shadowy River Styx.

He saw the gloomy, tattered boat reappear, slowly approaching as the boatman rowed.

Lumian waited anxiously, not daring to fly onto the boat as a spear.

According to the Knight of Swords Maric, doing so would make him sink into the river's depths, never to be saved.

Behind him, pale green flames burned quietly, sometimes swaying with the ground's tremors, sometimes shaking with some vibrations.

Lumian tensed, feeling an increasing danger, unsure if it was from the ancient Death's corpse awakening or the goat-faced Demon's pursuit.

He looked at the slow-moving boat, using a Hunter's method to calm his emotions.

He chuckled and spoke to the Knight of Swords Maric within him, "I thought the goat-faced Demon was powerful, just below the ancient gods, holding a grudge against the Devil Monarch and desiring the egg beneath the ancient Death's corpse. But now, it seems it's just at the Saint level, with only a corpse left, lacking Beyonder characteristics."

The Knight of Swords didn't respond.

Lumian continued, "The goat-faced Demon's initial request to kill the Devil Monarch was likely a bluff, making us more likely to accept the second condition, thinking it reasonable. If Oxyto's premature child hadn't interfered, we might have stolen the egg, only to face the ancient Death's wrath, unrelated to the goat-faced Demon.

"It also used the request to kill the Devil Monarch to build its image, making us think it was formidable, of high rank, preventing us from attacking it or abandoning the egg task.

"What a cunning Demon..."

Lumian then remembered the demon's accusation: "You've taken that egg for yourself!"

When did I take the egg? It's still under the Phoenix Ancestor's corpse. I only resonated with the creature inside, hearing and seeing what it did... Did the Demon mistake this resonance for me taking and breaking the egg? As an undead, even if it was a Saint-level Demon in life, it might have little brain left, acting on its cunning Demonic instinct... As Lumian pondered, the tattered boat finally reached the shore.

He jumped aboard, standing behind the boatman.

Though the boatman might attack later, compared to the goat-faced Demon's pursuit and the ancient Death's corpse's awakening, it was "friendly."

This was manageable.

The rickety boat shook as it left the dark shore, slowly heading towards the middle of the shadowy river.

Lumian looked back at the depths of the Underworld, seeing the intense darkness calm down, no more tremors or heavy sounds.

Everything was serene again.

Lumian relaxed a bit, instinctively sighing.

This Underworld trip was indeed "intense"...

Only now did he ponder the huge black egg issue: The creature inside seemed related to Omebella!

From this, Lumian felt the Great Mother naming Her Child of God after the ancient god, Omebella, wasn't just for symbolic reasons to erode the Earth Mother's authority. The fallen Goddess of Harvest held significant secrets.

But Omebella wasn't one of the eight ancient gods ruling the sky and land, just the Giant King's queen, akin to an Angel. How can Her secrets affect the current era?

Ah, many key pieces of information are obscured by history's fog. Only a few high-ranking beings from the Second Epoch know a bit...

Lumian mused as he watched the dark land of the Underworld recede, until only the shadowy River Styx water filled his view.

He suddenly felt the matter had finally come to an end.

Chapter 776: Secrets

776 Secrets

This time, the boatman didn't attack Lumian. Instead, he rowed the gloomy boat to the opposite shore.

Jumping onto the wasteland covered in withered blood flowers, Lumian, whose spirituality was nearly exhausted, ran towards the pile of bones and corpses on higher ground.

After running for a few minutes, he saw faint starlight piercing through the dim sky.

Next, the void tore open like transparent paper.

The tear blended with the starlight, forming a door of shimmering light.

Standing beyond the door was Madam Magician, dressed in a loose orange dress.

Madam Magician did not enter the Underworld but floated in the void outside the door, smiling at Lumian and the others.

Madam Magician... Lumian had expected another demigod from the temperance faction, bringing a Beyonder of the Death pathway to open the door to the Underworld to fetch him, Sharron, and Maric. But it was the Major Arcana card holder, Madam Magician.

She can find the Underworld?

She can tear through its barrier and create a door?

Suppressing his curiosity, Lumian took a running start and jumped through the starlit door.

He felt a wave of dizziness and his vision darkened before he saw the clear, pure Lake Dalsh and felt the thin air of the highlands.

He reflexively removed the golden mask of the Eggers family from his face to avoid becoming a true undead from wearing it too long.

During this, the figures of Sharron and the Knight of Swords Maric appeared beside him.

"Thank you," the Knight of Swords politely addressed Madam Magician.

Wearing a small black and Gothic dress, Sharron nodded silently.

"It's only right," Madam Magician replied with a smile. "It's a pity we couldn't catch Oxyto. The Great Mother's Bestowed are very vigilant and skilled at rebirth, making them extremely hard to catch."

After a few pleasantries, the Knight of Swords said goodbye.

Before leaving, he and Sharron both nodded to Lumian, showing their approval.

Although the Knight of Swords' request was only to help find Oxyto, Lumian had far exceeded that by chasing Oxyto's premature child into the Underworld and eliminating it. In return, Sharron, despite being injured, helped Lumian control the goat-faced Demon, giving him a chance to defeat it and take the Abscessed Hand's half-body. Thus, neither owed the other, and no additional payment was necessary.

Of course, establishing a friendship and deepening his connection with the Knight of Swords was an added bonus.

After Sharron and the Knight of Swords left, Madam Magician looked at Lumian with a teasing smile.

"Wondering how I found the Underworld?

"For a high-ranking member of the Apprentice pathway, the Underworld is just there. There's no question of finding it. Even if hidden, we can easily locate it by observing the Gatekeepers and master the ability to summon a door to the Underworld. But I didn't summon it; I just opened a door."

"Then why did you say I had to wait for an opportunity to enter the Underworld?" Lumian asked reflexively.

As Mr. Fool's Angel of Stars, couldn't you just open a door to the Underworld for me?

What opportunity was there to wait for?

Madam Magician chuckled.

"Could you have retrieved part of the Abscessed Hand's body if I had sent you to the Underworld back then?"

"No..." Lumian answered softly.

Not only would he fail, but he might also die instantly from illegal teleportation.

This time, with guidance from the temperance faction and the help of a demigod, he had a chance to take the Abscessed Hand's body from the goat-faced Demon.

Of course, the risks had also increased significantly.

"I sensed an opportunity and advised you to wait," Madam Magician said sincerely. "Not all abilities can be repeated; not using them and using them to change one's state directly is very difficult."

Lumian didn't dwell on it, recounting his experiences in the Underworld with Sharron and the Knight of Swords.

Madam Magician listened attentively without interrupting, sometimes showing a thoughtful expression.

"What secrets are hidden in the body of the Second Epoch's Goddess of Harvest?" Lumian asked at the end.

Madam Magician replied, shaking her head, "I don't know."

She paused for a moment before adding, "There are things I hadn't planned to tell you so early because it's not good for you. But since you've merged with Omebella's bloodline and experienced the Underworld, I can share a bit. Do you remember the relic of Omebella I mentioned?"

"Yes," Lumian said, one of his reasons for merging with Omebella's bloodline being the hope of briefly using the Grade 0 Sealed Artifact formed from the relic.

Madam Magician continued, "Do you know where it is?"

Before Lumian could shake his head, she answered herself, "It's in the New City of Silver."

New City of Silver? The Church of The Fool's headquarters? Lumian thought of the giant-like beings that made him feel like a dwarf.

Omebella's relic is a Grade 0 Sealed Artifact of the Church of The Fool's in New City of Silver?

Madam Magician pondered for a few seconds before saying, "First, you need to understand a piece of mystical knowledge. Marauders, the Angels of the Error pathway, can steal others' identities and destinies.

In other words, someone whose identity and destiny are stolen will no longer be recognized by their parents, spouse, or children, gradually becoming rejected by fate."

Lumian recalled the Substitution Spell in the Inevitability domain, which also involved one's identity and fate.

Though different from Madam Magician's description and on a much lower level, it helped Lumian understand her words.

Seeing he had no questions, Madam Magician continued, "According to what we know, I suspect the Goddess of Harvest Omebella had Her identity and destiny stolen by a high-ranking member of the Error pathway and was killed by Her direct relatives.

"Up to this point, it sounds like nothing more than a horrific consOriginal, but think about it. Why would the body of the Goddess of Harvest, killed by Her direct relatives and robbed of Her identity and destiny, end up in the former City of Silver, not silently in a battlefield corner?

"And more strangely, the ancestors of the City of Silver knew it was Omebella's body and Her true identity. At the time, the Steal effect was still present!"

Lumian sensed something amiss and frowned, "What's the City of Silver's records or speculations on this? Does Omebella's body contain Beyonder characteristics?"

"None," Madam Magician answered firmly. "The City of Silver's records are sparse due to the Ancient Sun God's rule in the Third Epoch. But their ancestors mentioned that the Goddess of Harvest walked to the City of Silver on Her own. Heh heh. Strange, right? You'll understand more when you can temporarily use that Grade O Sealed Artifact. Now is not the time."

This confirms that Omebella held significant mysteries... Lumian asked cautiously, "What did the goat-faced Demon mean when it said I had taken the egg for myself?"

Madam Magician gazed at Lumian for a moment before saying, "There's no change in your body, but I temporarily can't confirm whether it's the same for the egg. It'll need some observation."

Lumian tersely acknowledged her words and pointed to the clear, serene Lake Dalsh. "What's special about this lake? How is it related to the Underworld?"

Madam Magician laughed.

"The temperance faction had a King of Angels and Angels ruling here for a thousand years, but they couldn't uncover the lake's secrets. Why would I find out in a short time?

"Even the direct descendants of the Eggers family don't know why Lake Dalsh is special.

"From your Underworld trip, it seems the lake's uniqueness predates the Eggers' ancestor becoming Death."

"Related to the ancient Death, Phoenix Ancestor Gregrace?" Lumian inferred from Madam Magician's words.

Thinking of the huge black egg beneath the ancient Death's corpse, he found this explanation plausible for why Oxyto wanted the bird-clawed creature to be born with Lake Dalsh's help.

"Perhaps," Madam Magician replied uncertainly.

Lumian was silent for a few seconds before changing the topic.

"Madam Magician, now that we have part of the Abscessed Hand's body, I want to go to Lenburg soon to find the City of Exiles, Morora."

"You're feeling a sense of urgency, rather impatient as well," Madam Magician remarked. "Relax for a few days, calm your mind, then go.

We'll follow up on the vortex matter. Your companions will investigate the Mirror People. You probably can't take your companions into the City of Exiles. Also, focus on learning languages. After dealing with the City of Exiles, prepare your team for the advancement."

"Alright," Lumian agreed, feeling he needed to adjust his state.

...

Trier, Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative, Apartment 702, 9 Rue Orosai.

Lumian reunited with Franca, Jenna, and Anthony.

After recounting his experiences in the Underworld, Franca said with genuine emotion, "So that's what the Underworld is like. The River Styx really exists..."

Then she frowned immediately.

"You've fully digested your Reaper potion, but I'm still a bit short on my Pleasure..."

In this digestion, Lumian credited eighty percent to Madame Sharron, ten percent to the Knight of Swords, and only ten percent to himself.

Without pride and after some thought, he said to Franca, "Maybe I can help you quickly digest Pleasure."

"Huh..." Franca raised an eyebrow while Jenna looked puzzled.

Lumian smiled and explained, "I've accumulated fate fragments from Moran Avigny's lust outburst. If we find a powerful Beyonder to take this fate, wouldn't it allow you to digest Pleasure significantly?

"Hmm, Pirate Admirals out at sea would be perfect for this."

Chapter 777: Traitor

777 Traitor

Franca was dumbfounded. "Is that even possible?"

This can be recycled?

It's not like it's water!

I've already digested a lot of my Pleasure potion because of Moran Avigny...

"Why not?" Lumian said with a smile. "It's like wanting a powerful target to experience pleasure but needing my help to get close enough.

Pleasure doesn't have to be one-on-one, otherwise Browns Sauron's female orgies wouldn't make sense. What we're doing is like dealing with Moran Avigny while also affecting another target."

"This... but..." Franca had to admit that Lumian had a point, and it was possible, but it felt like exploiting a loophole, like using a bug ina game.

At the same time, Franca complained to herself about Lumian, Have you been reading too many illegal books or watching too many orgies?

How can you talk about one-to-many so naturally... Also, borrowing your help for other things is fine, but when it comes to pleasure, this description is just too strange...

Under the watchful eyes of Anthony and the still somewhat puzzled Jenna, Lumian turned to Franca and asked, "Let's imagine a scenario:

You're experiencing pleasure with someone, and another person passes by and sees the scene, getting strongly aroused and experiencing pleasure themselves. Would that help you digest your Pleasure potion?"

"Yes," Franca answered with some certainty.

Based on her experience, pleasure didn't have to involve direct contact or a fixed method. As long as it met the basic condition of the target experiencing pleasure because of her, it worked. It was even better if it left the target deeply immersed and unable to extricate themselves.

Realizing this, Franca suddenly paused.

If this were my world before I transmigrated over, as long as one could abandon decency, shame, and morality, digesting the Pleasure potion would be incredibly easy. After the preparations, it might only take a few days or even hours to fully digest it.

Lumian responded with a smile, "What's the fundamental difference between the scenario I described and transferring Moran Avigny's fate fragment to a Pirate Admiral, causing a lust outburst?"

"None..." Franca was convinced.

She then sighed and said, "You're really good at exploiting bugs."

"What's a bug here?" Jenna asked, confused.

Lumian, having heard this strange word from his sister Aurore, helped explain, "Exploiting a bug means taking advantage of a loophole."

Franca clicked her tongue and nodded.

"You know, sometimes I think you'd be better suited for the Error pathway."

"Then I'd probably become an Amon by now," Lumian replied with self-awareness, laughing.

Franca, being an individual of action—otherwise, she wouldn't have drunk the Witch potion—immediately asked, "Which Pirate Admiral should we target?

"Isn't it too dangerous? Each Pirate Admiral has their own fleet with many Beyonders and backing from powerful forces."

"We're just giving him pleasure, not doing anything else. What's there to worry about?" Lumian replied casually. "Even if we can't hold back and kill him, so what? We've already offended plenty of powerful forces.

These Pirate Admirals aren't exactly law-abiding citizens."

Seeing Franca still wanting to say something, Lumian added, "This will also be a good test for our team. Trust me, the few of us together are as good as any Pirate Admiral's crew. Plus, we can find opportunities for Jenna to digest her Witch potion and for Anthony to digest his Hypnotist potion."

"Alright." Franca nodded. "Let's gather intelligence on the Pirate Admirals and see who we can locate."

First, they needed to find someone!

Having settled that, Franca once again commented on Lumian's Underworld trip, "That ended so quickly. I couldn't contact 007 last night to give him Jenna's messenger summoning method. I thought I'd return to Trier tonight to complete this task. Who knew the whole mission would end so soon? We don't need to go to the Southern Continent or give 007 the summoning method."

She had expected the mission to last several days, maybe a week or two, but it was done in one morning.

In Saint Viève Cathedral.

Angoulême, wearing a brown wool coat, stood at the door of the room, gazing up the stairs leading to the higher floor.

Yesterday, he and several colleagues were ordered to stay on night duty without being given a reason.

Angoulême could vaguely guess the reason, as he had provided the relevant information to the higher-ups.

As time slowly passed, a middle-aged man in a white robe with golden threads came up the grand staircase.

The man had black hair and brown eyes, an authoritative presence, and neatly trimmed mustache.

Angoulême recognized him. They had interacted a few times while handling some occult cases in the Trier region.

This was Peacock, Senior Deacon of the Purifiers and one of the heads of the Inquisition.

He wasn't Angoulême's direct superior, as he was in charge of the surrounding areas of Trier, essentially the entire Trier district except for Trier itself.

He was not a demigod of the Sun pathway but a Sequence 4 of the Lawyer pathway, a Earl of The Fallen.

Seeing Peacock, Angoulême averted his gaze and retreated further into the room.

He suspected that Peacock was a core member of April Fool's outside the Curly-Haired Baboon Research Society, who had orchestrated the release of the humanoid Sealed Artifact 1-147 from church control.

Angoulême's reasoning was simple: The April Fool's core member within the church had used a Broker's Under the Table transaction to get other Purifiers to release 1-147 for various purposes. The Lawyer pathway was similar to the Broker pathway, adept at twisting terms in deals and agreements to achieve their goals.

This pathway's demigods had been involved in numerous shady transactions, making them most likely to come into contact with or be contacted by a Broker.

Before Overseer Perle was discovered, Peacock wasn't on the Eternal Blazing Sun Church's investigation list because 1-147 wasn't in his jurisdiction, and he hadn't left his Inquisition during that time. Despite knowing the location and information of most Grade 1 Sealed Artifacts as a Senior Deacon, he wasn't suspected.

Today, Peacock was at Saint Viève Cathedral for a meeting.

The official reason was to discuss disrupting the Mirror People's plans and eliminating these hidden rats. The demigods of the Trier district needed to meet face-to-face to finalize their strategy.

After Peacock's figure in the white robe with golden threads disappeared up the stairs, Angoulême slowly exhaled and became more vigilant about what might happen.

A minute or two later, Angoulême felt the whole cathedral gently tremble.

This lasted only a few seconds before stopping. Few noticed except those already on alert for such occurrences.

In a sunlit room near the dome.

Cardinal of the Eternal Blazing Sun Church and Archbishop of Trier, Plessy, with high cheekbones and blond hair turning white, stood beside a woman in a white robe, beautiful yet sacred.

She was Saint Viève, Trier's guardian angel!

Opposite them, near the door, Peacock's body twisted, mostly melted, revealing an interior seemingly filled with white wax.

The Senior Deacon of the Purifiers laughed heartily. "The Overseer informed me immediately that she was compromised. I've been using this wax figure to act for days!"

His real body hid in the shadows, observing without interacting with anyone from the Eternal Blazing Sun Church.

"Just as expected..." Trier Archbishop Plessy sighed.

This had been anticipated. The Overseer's escape made this development inevitable.

Though the church had kept the Overseer's escape secret, they hadn't held much hope.

The wax figure of the Earl of The Fallen Peacock quickly melted. Looking at Saint Viève's impassive face, his voice turned sharp as he laughed again.

"I made the only right choice.

"The Crimson will come. Only by submitting to the great existences can we Survive the apocalypse!

"The Crimson will come!"

After shouting, Peacock's wax figure completely melted into a half-solidified, half-liquid mess.

Saint Viève, dressed in a white robe with golden threads and no other ornaments, watched silently before speaking a few seconds later, "Who made this wax figure for him?"

"Probably acquired through a Broker," Trier Archbishop Plessy replied gravely.

Saint Viève, Her tone unchanged, said, "Few Beyonders can make such a wax figure."

"Yes, that's a lead to follow." Plessy nodded.

A wax figure that could initially fool an Angel's senses wasn't simple.

Finding its maker might lead to uncovering the Broker and the hidden Overseer.

Saint Viève continued, "Inform all bishops, padres, and Purifiers about Peacock's fall, but don't issue a wanted notice."

"Yes." Plessy agreed that a wanted notice for a demigod would be useless and might damage the Church's image among the public.

A few days later, Franca, Anthony, and the others used different channels to gather the latest sightings and rumored whereabouts of the Pirate Admirals.

Looking at the information, Franca patted the top sheet and said to Lumian, "How about this one?"

Lumian glanced at the name and read it silently: Admiral Deep Sea, Howl Constantine.

Chapter 778: Method of Arrival

778 Method of Arrival

Lumian had already looked through the information Franca had gathered and could guess her reasoning for this choice: Howl Constantine-Admiral Deep Sea-with rumored sea monster blood, often went to an island called "Banamo" west of the Fog Sea for supplies. A few days ago, someone spotted Howl Constantine's flagship, the Newins, surfacing on a route to Banamo, allowing the crew to breathe fresh air and enjoy their precious freedom.

Based on the distance, speed, route conditions, and weather in the Fog Sea, it was estimated that the Newins would reach Banamo in about two to three days.

Among all the Pirate Admirals, he was the only one with a predictable trajectory in the near future!

"We can give it a try," Lumian responded nonchalantly to Franca's suggestion.

Having participated in battles at the demigod level and played a significant role, he felt that which Pirate Admiral they targeted didn't matter much as long as they could locate him.

Franca glanced at Lumian and mumbled, "I think there's something wrong with your attitude. You can't underestimate the best of the Sequence 5s. You're not a demigod yet, and your body is still fragile.

Underestimating Admiral Deep Sea could cost you dearly. There's a saying from my homeland: Strategically, you can underestimate your enemy, but tactically, you must respect them."

"I know. Aurore used to remind me of that, telling me not to underestimate the villagers' intelligence and think my pranks would always succeed without problems. After being chased by them a few times, I understood it well." Lumian said earnestly, "Your homeland also has another saying: Weakness and ignorance aren't barriers to survival, but arrogance is."

"Stop!" Franca grumbled. "As long as you know it; don't turn this into an exchange of famous sayings."

Seeing they had decided on the target, Jenna spoke up, "The problem now is, how do we get to Banamo Island?"

Banamo, located in the northwest of the Fog Sea, was once a Feysac Empire colony. Later, as the Feysac Empire declined and the natives of Banamo resisted actively, the island gained independence.

It helped that Banamo lacked valuable resources and was only a base for exploring the Fog Sea's end. Giving it up wasn't a big loss.

After gaining independence, Banamo developed into a pirate haven, offering a place for pirates to trade and resupply.

Jenna's point was clear: Even with clear routes and good weather, it would take two to three weeks to sail from Trier to Banamo. Any issues requiring detours or delays could stretch the journey to a month. By then, Admiral Deep Sea would likely have left Banamo, and finding a Pirate Admiral on the open sea would be almost impossible without a stroke of fate.

Given the circumstances, only teleportation could ensure the team reached Banamo in time to wait for Admiral Deep Sea Howl Constantine. However, neither Lumian nor Franca had the spirit world coordinates for Banamo Island, making long-distance teleportation impossible without getting lost in the spirit world.

Lumian thought for a moment and asked Franca, "Can we contact anyone on Banamo Island?"

"We should be able to. There's a telegraph office on Banamo Island," Franca answered thoughtfully. "We can ask adventurers who've been to Banamo to send a telegram to their friends on the island."

Lumian chuckled. "Good. If everything goes well, we can arrive at Banamo Island tonight."

...

Banamo Island in the Fog Sea, shrouded in perennial fog and gloomy weather.

In the island's only port, Mason, carrying a bundle of items, navigated through the bustling pirates and entered an abandoned warehouse.

The warehouse had been destroyed in a pirate skirmish and never repaired, becoming a desolate spot.

Mason was an adventurer who despised the brutal and ruthless pirates but couldn't leave Banamo because the pirate haven was full of opportunities.

Even if he didn't hunt down solitary, bounty-carrying pirates, he could wait for pirate feuds to end and take the remaining goods from the losers.

This was how he became a Beyonder, now a Sequence 8 Pugilist.

(Amonoculus' note: From the Twilight Giant Pathway)

Today, Mason took on a task supposedly very simple but with a reward of 1,000 verl d'or, seeking a secluded place to complete it.

He quickly cleared the pile of broken wooden crates, stacking them to form an altar.

Following the task description, he placed candles, incense, and essential oils on the altar.

After the preparations, Mason took out the neatly folded task description and read the next steps, "The most challenging part of this task is the necessary knowledge, including basic ancient Hermes and proficient Hermes. If you don't meet these conditions, don't take the commission..."

Fortunately, I learned some ancient Hermes and enough Hermes from other adventurers... Mason felt lucky for his past decision when taking this task.

It wasn't that he was more studious than other adventurers, but the items he had previously acquired involved Hermes. To understand their true value, he had paid an adventurer proficient in Hermes to teach him for a while.

After quickly reading the second half of the task description, Mason assessed the potential dangers and felt confident it wouldn't be a big problem.

He then arduously created a wall of spirituality, lit the candles, dripped the incense, and took two steps back, chanting in ancient Hermes, "I!"

This was one of the few words he knew in ancient Hermes.

He then switched to Hermes:

"I summon in my name:

"A creature wandering above the world, the penitent who awakens from the flames of pain, a messenger that belongs solely to Lumian Lee..."

As Mason finished, the candle flames surged, turning a deep green, almost black.

In the firelight, a tall figure in a black clergyman's robe emerged.

Mason took a step back in fear at the sight.

The figure's exposed parts seemed long scorched by flames, with blackened flesh and skin clinging to the bones. Its eye sockets were dark, burning with deep-colored flames, and its body was oozing a viscous black fluid like water.

It looked like an undead creature!

Mason had seen similar beings in Banamo Port, as some pirates were adept at communicating with corpses. However, the summoned Penitent made Mason instinctively fearful, sensing it was fundamentally different from ordinary undead.

Even the Pirate Admirals who had visited Banamo Port hadn't given Mason this feeling!

Seeing the dried corpse in a black clergyman's robe looking at him, Mason shakily handed over the letter.

His task was to deliver a letter to someone named Lumian Lee!

The blackened, burning corpse messenger took the letter and disappeared into the dark-green candlelight.

The abandoned warehouse returned to normal.

Mason wiped his cold sweat and muttered to himself, "This seems more complicated than I thought... I've heard of people being lured into special rituals, summoning evil gods or devils, destroying themselves and their towns... Was that what just happened? Is a catastrophe coming to Banamo Port? Is Lumian Lee the true name of an evil god or demon?"

won Mason had previously seen that the ritual only summoned a messenger, unrelated to evil gods or demons. As a Sequence 8 Beyonder, he had taken the risk, but the messenger made him uneasy.

Muttering to himself, Mason cleaned up the items on the altar.

Suddenly, he stopped and frowned.

"I think I've heard the name Lumian Lee somewhere before..."

He tried to recall but couldn't remember.

Before leaving the abandoned warehouse, Mason glanced back at the makeshift altar, seeing shadows shifting within the broken crates.

His heart tightened. Pretending he hadn't seen anything, Mason quickly left the warehouse.

In Trier, within Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative, in the apartment rented by Franca and Jenna.

Lumian saw Penitent Baynfel step out of the void and hand hima letter.

He didn't even open it, knowing it contained only blank paper.

He asked his messenger, "Can you deliver a reply to the sender?"

"I can," Penitent Baynfel answered in a low voice.

Lumian smiled and pointed to himself.

"Lam the reply."

In the foggy Banamo Port, Lumian leaned against the outer wall of the abandoned warehouse, watching the sender walk out with a fearful expression and quickly leave.

He smiled, took a golden straw hat from the Traveler's Backpack, looked at it for a moment, and put it back.

Having the famous adventurer Louis Berry appear here would arouse unnecessary suspicion and might cause Admiral Deep Sea Howl Constantine to change his destination and avoid Banamo Port.

Lumian straightened up, tightened his thick jacket, and walked slowly along the streets of Banamo Port, his hands in his pockets.

He planned to take a look around before returning to fetch Franca and the others.

Trier, late at night.

AngoulÃªme arrived at the agreed-upon empty house to retrieve emergency contact information from Hidden Blade.

He quickly found the note and read its contents: "In case of emergency, summon my friend's messenger: "Rabbit-shaped spirit that wanders about the unfounded, a runner who pursues knowledge, a messenger that belongs solely to the Seven of Cups."

Seven of Cups... From the Tarot Club? Hidden Blade, your friend is you, right? AngoulÃªme muttered to himself.

He felt he understood why Hidden Blade always had so many troublesome matters.

Chapter 779: Pirate Haven

779 Pirate Haven

Banamo Port.

As Lumian strolled along the streets, he couldn't shake the feeling that he had arrived in Backlund, the capital of the Loen Kingdom. Although he had never been there, the foggy sky and damp, cold environment mirrored Trier's newspapers and magazines' mockery of Backlund.

Of course, the architectural style here was distinctly different from Backlund's. There were two main types: one was large yet not crude, with typical Feysac characteristics, and the other was a mix of stone and wood, simple and rough, often crowded together without any clear planning.

Most of the people on the streets were dressed like typical pirates, with short knives strapped to their waists and guns tucked into their belts, not bothering to conceal their weapons. In contrast, the locals with dark-brown skin always wore smiles, their faces full of deference.

Lumian fully understood the mindset of the natives. After all, angering a pirate could result in being dragged into a corner and killed, or having someone sneak into their home at night to murder them. The killer would then sail away on their pirate ship without a care.

The current rulers of Banamo Island were trying to recruit pirates and adventurers to maintain order and hoped the great pirates would agree on a pirate code to regulate behavior in the port. However, these measures had limited effectiveness.

This was because seasoned pirates couldn't suddenly start obeying laws and strict rules, even if they became sheriffs or police officers.

Moreover, there wasn't a strong enough force on the island to keep them in check. As a result, it was common for sheriffs to break the law and accept bribes to shield criminals.

The pirate code, agreed upon by the great pirates, wasn't mandatory.

Even if someone broke it, they would only face minor punishment within their own crew. No one would hand over their own men to be dealt with by others.

These measures' greatest effect was making Banamo Port appear somewhat orderly. As Lumian admired the bustling street scenes, he occasionally heard screams or gunshots from the alleys.

This place is perfect for a Hunter, he thought, genuinely appreciating it.

When two groups of pirates started a brawl in the middle of the street, Lumian had a sudden idea: A Iarge-scale plague for a Demoness of Despair advancement ritual could work here...

But I would need to develop medicine to prevent infection or severe illness and secretly distribute it to the locals...

The only problem is that there aren't 30,000 pirates here. However, there are quite a few Beyonders among them. Infecting them and causing them suffering and despair should significantly reduce the number needed for the ritual...

As Lumian watched the pirate brawl with interest, he pondered the feasibility of holding the Demoness of Despair ritual in Banamo Port.

When the fight was almost over, the sheriffs finally arrived, dispersing the two groups and symbolically arresting a few people.

They were just waiting for the respective pirate crews to pay the fines!

As for the grievances between the two groups, the sheriffs didn't care. If they wanted revenge, they would have to settle it out at sea.

Meanwhile, adventurers and locals quietly dragged away some of the pirate corpses left on the street.

Lumian felt like applauding this kind of order.

Taking advantage of the remaining daylight and the sun filtering through the fog, he continued his leisurely stroll through Banamo Port.

Passing a stone house with a small square, he saw a dozen or so people gathered, mostly locals. A pirate wearing a bicorne hat and blue woolen clothes stood on a stone platform in front of them.

The pirate was shouting in Feysac, "You're just a bunch of pups fresh from your mother's embrace. If you want to become proper pirates, you need training. Today, I'll give you your first lesson: who you can and can't mess with at sea..."

Feysac was the language with the least difference from ancient Feysac.

Lumian, skilled in ancient Feysac, barely understood what the pirate was Saying. He realized that the pirate crew was recruiting newcomers and providing basic training.

Why does this feel like a big company in Trier hiring new employees...

Lumian grumbled to himself as he watched the pirate display wanted posters and portraits, introducing the six kings, nine admirals, and notable adventurers.

This was exactly the information Lumian needed. He stopped and listened from a distance.

As expected, he saw a portrait and detailed introduction of Louis Berry.

At the end, the pirate with the bicorne hat pointed to a portrait and said, "His bounty isn't high, but you must never underestimate him, or even have any contact with him."

No contact at alI? Lumian focused on the portrait, seeing a burly man in his thirties with thick brown body hair, wearing suspenders and a white shirt.

The pirate's tone became serious as he introduced the man to the new pirates, "His name is Frank Lee, the first mate of the Queen of Stars. He's a Druid.

"What is a Druid? I'll explain when we cover Beyonder knowledge. For now, just know that a Druid is Sequence 5, on par with the Pirate Admirals. So, understand how terrifying Frank Lee is?

"But that's not the main reason adventurers and pirates fear him. I don't know the exact reason either. I only know that every pirate and adventurer who's encountered Frank Lee acts like they've gone mad. They jump out of their chairs and sometimes vomit when his name is mentioned. They always warn me to stay away from Frank Lee and not to leave any blood near him or eat anything found around him..."

So, the legendary Druid Frank Lee is the first mate of the Pirate King...

But why are so many pirates and adventurers so terrified of him? Even if he has the strength of a Pirate Admiral and is ruthless, it shouldn't cause this reaction... Lumian silently mused as he listened to the pirate's introduction.

He was curious about what made Frank Lee so special.

After watching the pirate crew's recruitment, Lumian headed to the nearby Carnival Bar.

He pushed through the unapologetically pirate crowd and sat on a high stool at the bar, ordering a Lanti Proof.

The common language in Banamo Port was Feysac, but pirates spoke various languages, and few were multilingual. Those who spoke Feysac formed one circle, those who spoke Intisian another, and so on. Lumian chose the Carnival Bar because all its signage was in Intisian.

In the noisy, lively environment, Lumian took two sips of his drink, put down his glass, and asked the bartender loudly in Intisian, "Do you have detailed information on the nine Pirate Admirals? Something beyond the wanted posters."

Suddenly, the entire bar went silent. Every pirate turned to look at Lumian at the bar.

It became so quiet that the sound of someone swallowing could be heard.

The bartender's expression turned awkward and amused. He asked Lumian, "Are you an adventurer?"

An adventurer coming to a pirate bar to ask for detailed information on the Pirate Admirals!

Lumian didn't answer the bartender. He half-turned to look at the staring pirates.

Around him, one by one, crimson-white fireballs began to form and float in the air.

Lumian smiled, raising his chin slightly. "Even though your bounties are low and I don't want to bother, if anyone wants to give me money voluntarily, I won't mind accepting it."

The pirates' expressions changed, but Lumian's gaze remained steady.

He scanned their faces and sneered. "Anyone want to try?"

Silence. The entire Carnival Bar remained silent.

Everyone could feel the danger in those crimson-white fireballs.

Lumian stopped provoking them, pointing to a chair a few meters behind him.

"Don't appear behind me. Don't think about using the crowd to get close and assassinate me.

"If anyone crosses that chair, I'll kill them."

After speaking, Lumian turned back, smiling at the bartender amid the fireballs.

"Now, you can answer my question."

Seeing this adventurer not introduce himself or boast about his exploits, but show absolute confidence and a nonchalant attitude toward killing, the bartender forced a smile.

"We know about the same as the wanted posters. If you want more hidden details, ask the enemies of the Pirate Admirals. Emperor Roselle once said the person who knows you best is your enemy."

"Tell me about each Pirate Admiral's enemies," Lumian said, taking another sip of his Lanti Proof.

In the bar, the pirates resumed their conversations, while some quietly left, seemingly to find help upon seeing the adventurer easily maintain the fireballs.

Lumian didn't stop them or even look their way.

When the bartender finished, Lumian had a general understanding of who Admiral Deep Sea Howl Constantine's enemies were. This Pirate Admiral with sea monster blood was usually low-key and mysterious.

Besides doing pirate work in a bloody and brutal manner, he rarely clashed with other Pirate Admirals or major forces. However, the former Vice Admiral Dusk, now the King of Dusk, Bulatov Ivan, suspected Howl Constantine's two "submarine ships" came from a legendary sea treasure, the Lost Newins. He targeted Admiral Deep Sea, seeking information on the Newins, leading to multiple conflicts.

When Bulatov became a king over the seas, Admiral Deep Sea Howl Constantine had no choice but to avoid this powerhouse and his fleet.

Chapter 780: Primary Job

780 Primary Job

Lumian listened to the bartender recount the rivalries and grudges of the Pirate Admirals while the pirates behind him grew increasingly restless.

They were all hoping someone would make the first move, either by shooting or stabbing the arrogant adventurer, so they could all rush him at once.

But the threat of those crimson-white fireballs deterred them. They looked at each other, but no one dared cross the chair Lumian had designated.

They figured anyone this brazen had to be pretty strong, and the Carnival Bar was low-tier, with no high-profile pirates around. They could only hope those who had left would return with someone more formidable.

After about ten minutes, one of the pirates who had left pushed open the heavy wooden door.

Behind him was a middle-aged man wearing a tricorne hat and dressed in dark blue.

The pirates in the bar immediately straightened up, holding their breath. The noisy, lively atmosphere quickly returned to silence.

Some of them recognized the man, knowing him as Captain Flying Hadmagk of the Rosemary, a well-known pirate just below the Pirate Admirals, active on the Five Seas for over a decade.

The pirate who opened the door flashed a flattering smile and pointed at Lumian's back. "Captain, that's the adventurer I mentioned! He dared to provoke all the pirates in Banamo Port!"

Hadmagk, with his thick, dark hair and imposing presence, stared at Lumian's back for a few seconds. He paused before asking, "How long has he been maintaining those fireballs?"

"I don't know. They were there when I left the bar, but he might not have kept them up the whole time," the pirate replied. He grabbed a young pirate sitting by the door, pointing at Lumian and growling, "How long has he been keeping those fireballs up?"

The young pirate, a bit flustered, glanced at the old clock on the wall and stammered, "Almost... almost fifteen minutes."

Fifteen minutes? Flying Hadmagk's eyelid twitched, and he suddenly looked like he remembered something important.

He immediately cursed at his sailor, "Did you forget about our important deal at the docks? Bastard, is your brain filled with nothing but booze, women, and pride?"

Cursing, Flying Haddock turned and walked out of the Carnival Bar.

His sailor, though dumbfounded, instinctively followed him.

The captain is always right!

The Carnival Bar remained quiet as Lumian finished his Lanti Proof and stood up.

With those crimson-white fireballs still floating around him, he swept his gaze over the pirates once more.

Then he smiled, raised his right hand, brought his index and middle fingers to his lips, and blew softly.

It was like he was blowing away the smoke from a gun after shooting everyone in the bar.

As the pirates' eyes and expressions shifted, Lumian leisurely walked towards the door with his hands in his pockets.

One by one, the pirates instinctively moved out of his way.

Some felt aggrieved, some ground their teeth, and others consoled themselves with thoughts like, It's not fear; those fireballs are just too blinding!

Lumian seemed utterly unafraid of being ambushed as he walked out of the Carnival Bar, almost like he was receiving their admiration and welcome.

...

Late at night, in an inconspicuous hotel room in Banamo Port.

Leaning back in his chair, Lumian said to Franca, "Disguise yourself and spread the word that an unknown adventurer has been provoking all the pirates, claiming they're cowards with no real strength, and that he could crush any pirate's head under his boot."

Franca's mouth twitched slightly. "Fishing again? You're quite the expert at this..."

Lumian chuckled in response. "According to the information we've gathered, Admiral Deep Sea prefers to stay out of the public eye because of his sea monster bloodline. Even if he comes to Banamo Port, he'll likely stay on his flagship, the Newins. If he wants women or food, someone will bring it to him.

"In this situation, we'll have to risk sneaking onto the Newins. It's an alchemical ship from some ancient ruins, and we have no idea what traps or mechanisms it might have. Plus, there are bound to be many Beyonder pirates on board. As a Hunter, we should avoid fighting on someone else's turf.

"I deliberately provoked the pirates in Banamo Port because I know no Pirate Admirals are here right now. I have enough confidence to handle the other notable pirates. They should soon figure this out too. Expecting pirate crews to work together against me overestimates their trust in each other. Who would they rather rob?

"I don't expect the pirates to have collective pride, but they definitely want to show off their abilities and earn more fear and respect. The pirates in Banamo Port are waiting for a pirate strong enough to deal with me. At that point, when the Newins arrives and Admiral Deep Sea is here, what do you think will happen?"

Jenna suddenly understood.

"If Admiral Deep Sea leaves the Newins and takes action himself, that would be the best outcome. We would be fighting on our terms. Even if he isn't interested, his top men won't miss the chance. With Admiral Deep Sea as their backup, they won't fear failure and will be more willing to challenge you. This will reduce the number of Beyonders on the Newins, giving us our chance."

"Good psychological analysis," Lumian teased.

Jenna shot him a look.

"A good actor needs to understand people's minds."

"And then perform for the 'spectators'?" Lumian joked.

Anthony didn't react.

Franca scoffed. "What if a Pirate King's fleet arrives before the Newins?"

Lumian spread his hands and said, "That's why the adventurer is 'unknown. ' The benefit is that he can disappear without a trace. Change his face and appearance, and we can execute another plan."

"A Conspirer is really an outright schemer..." Franca muttered. "Alright, let's do it."

Lumian then discussed the possibility of using a large-scale plague in Banamo Port, emphasizing the need to secretly distribute preventive medicine to the locals beforehand.

Franca was stunned.

After a few seconds, she said, "You even thought of that... How about we start a plague company? Just kidding, there's some plausibility in this, but in this day and age, there are no vaccines-uh, preventive medicine?"

"Normally, we wouldn't have it, but we can turn to mysticism," Lumian replied. "The Apothecary path specializes in this. We just need to provide them with a number of infected individuals for observation, research, and experimentation. They should be able to create effective preventive or curative medicine. We won't have trouble finding an Apothecary. The Fool Pharmaceutical Company has plenty of them."

Lumian knew from Miss Magician that The Fool Pharmaceutical Company had many ties to the Tarot Club.

Jenna began to calculate.

"A medicine with mystical effects would cost at least 100 verl d'or per bottle. There are probably over ten thousand non-pirate residents in Banamo Port. We'd need to prepare at least a million verl d'or. We can't expect the Apothecaries from The Fool Pharmaceutical Company to work for free or cover the material costs."

One million verl d'or wasn't a small sum. Even a Sequence 5 Beyonder characteristic only cost around 200,000 verl d'or.

"A million verl d'or to become a demigod is a good deal," Lumian suddenly laughed. "A million verl d'or is just an Admiral Deep Sea. Even if we can't kill him, his top men are valuable too."

Franca sighed and replied, "You're starting to sound a bit like Gehrman Sparrow. But while Gehrman Sparrow treated pirates as his piggy bank, only targeting high-bounty ones, you're aiming to eradicate them completely!"

A plague like that would likely affect thousands, if not tens of thousands, of pirates.

Before Lumian could respond, Franca self-mockingly laughed.

"Poor Admiral Deep Sea. Just sitting on his flagship, doing nothing, and suddenly he's our target."

Lumian chuckled, and said with some realization, "Nothing to pity. A Hunter's job is to create chaos and strife. And your primary job as a Demoness is to bring catastrophe and affliction. It's better to inflict these on pirates than innocent people."

Franca and Jenna fell silent for a moment.

...

Achoo!

Banamo Port, Mason, sitting at the docks with a bottle of rye beer, suddenly sneezed.

He immediately thought of the messenger summoning ritual he had completed that afternoon and the unsettling messenger it had summoned, muttering to himself, "Could that sneeze be some kind of spirituality warning?

"Am I really going to be the protagonist of some occult event, the fool who makes a mistake and attracts an evil god or devil?

"Did the ritual I performed bring some kind of catastrophe to Banamo Port?

"Have hidden dangers and problems started quietly spreading in the shadows?"

Gulping down a large swig of beer, Mason tried to reassure himself that he was just scaring himself.

From afternoon until now, there had been no signs of calamity or reports of strange phenomena!

It was just a messenger summoning. It should be fine!

Chapter 781: Individual Missions

781 Individual Missions

Two days later, at a quiet spot on the docks of Banamo Port.

Jenna, dressed in a black outfit that looked like a cross between a dress and a robe, gazed out over the blue ocean shrouded in a thin fog.

Her task was to monitor the docks and be the first to spot Admiral Deep Sea's flagship, the Newins.

Of course, this was just one of her responsibilities. The most critical part was to ensure no Pirate King's fleet arrived at Banamo Port before the Newins. If that happened, she had to quickly inform Lumian so the unknown adventurer could disappear.

Jenna paced back and forth or found a spot to sit, patiently waiting for her target.

Suddenly, she saw a colossal shape break the surface of the water, emerging from the depths.

The massive object was jet black and metallic, with seawater cascading off its surface. It resembled an elongated, inflated spindle with a thin, curved metal tube extending from its top like a snail's eye stalk.

In the next moment, the metal tube retracted, and the upper half of the behemoth split open, unfolding outward to reveal a broad deck, numerous cannons, and hundreds of pirates. Masts and sails were raised.

Jenna was momentarily mesmerized. Though Lumian had described how Bone Splitter Basil's Black Octopus submerged, surfaced, and unfolded, seeing it in person was stunning.

There was a strong sense of mechanical beauty!

Moreover, the behemoth was no smaller than the latest steam-powered ocean liners, vastly superior to traditional sailing pirate ships.

Jenna didn't need further confirmation to know this was Admiral Deep Sea Howl Constantine's flagship, the Newins.

She quickly deduced that the Newins had arrived alone, without the Black Octopus.

Since Vice Admiral Dusk Bulatov Ivan became the King of Dusk, other ships in Admiral Deep Sea's fleet rarely traveled with the flagship. The Newins and the Black Octopus could submerge and travel secretly, which other ships couldn't do. Forcing them to follow would only expose Howl Constantine's movements.

This was one reason Franca had targeted Admiral Deep Sea.

What a beautiful piece of alchemical machinery... Jenna thought, staring at the Newins.

Her father had been a worker, and his appreciation for machinery had deeply influenced her and her brother Julien.

With Trier full of all sorts of useful and odd machines, Julien had almost given up his faith in the Eternal Blazing Sun in his youth to join the God of Steam and Machinery's Church.

Jenna withdrew her gaze and walked away from the dock, somewhat worried about something else.

Her brother Julien would return to Trier in just over a month after his exchange studies. She didn't want him to continue living in this dangerous city built on a "caldera." She wanted Julien to settle in a place with strong official forces but not as dangerous as Trier. Port LeSeur, where he was currently staying, or another similar town would be ideal.

Jenna knew she couldn't persuade Julien. He would worry about her unless she found a reliable person to marry. Besides, Julien had grown up in Trier, and it offered him more opportunities. How could he leave his hometown?

I need to find a way, something temporary to convince him. Permanent relocation is something Julien would never accept. As Franca said, maybe try for three years, then another three... Jenna didn't consider having Anthony directly "hypnotize" Julian.

Just then, two drunken pirates stumbled onto the dock and spotted Jenna in her hooded, dress-like outfit.

They looked her up and down for a few seconds, exchanged glances, and blocked her path.

"Hey lady, name your price."

"If you don't want to, we'll just decide for ourselves!"

As they spoke, the pirates reached out to grab Jenna.

In Banamo Port, this wasn't uncommon. Local women either worked as streetwalkers in protected places like bars or stayed home to avoid attracting pirates. The best outcome would be the arrival of the sheriff and receive compensation, and the worst would be being killed on the spot by pirates unwilling to pay, their bodies thrown into the sea or taken aboard a ship and sold elsewhere.

Before the pirates could touch her, they suddenly found themselves engulfed in silent, evil black flames.

They felt a surge of fear and pain, sobering up instantly, and turned to flee in terror.

As they ran, they screamed, "Witch!"

"Witch!"

Jenna felt a bit of her Witch potion digest from their fear and pain. She watched them weaken under the black flames, collapsing and dying as they ran.

Jenna then faced a dilemma.

Should I maintain the mysterious and evil image of a Witch or follow my instincts and take the money from their corpses...

...

In a bar in Banamo Port.

Anthony sat on a barstool with a mug of beer, listening to a pirate across from him boast.

His task for the past two days had been to blend in with the pirates, monitor, and guide the "public opinion."

Although Lumian had analyzed a lot, he wasn't entirely sure how the pirate community would react. Human nature was unpredictable, and among so many pirates, it was normal for some to act in ways that defied logic.

A Conspirer couldn't predict events with certainty like a high-ranked Seer, Prophet, or Spectator. They needed to prepare extra measures to ensure things went as planned and not fall apart at the first deviation.

So, Anthony frequented the pirates' favorite bars, making as many friends as possible to understand their reactions to the unknown adventurer's provocations. He identified voices that could significantly influence the outcome and used his Hypnotist abilities to quietly guide and change the attitudes of a few influential pirates, ensuring the public opinion matched Lumian's goals.

This large-scale, covert guidance helped Anthony digest a good portion of his Hypnotist potion.

It involved actual hypnosis and seemed to indirectly guide the collective psyche of the pirates in Banamo Port.

Gulping down golden beer, the pirate beside Anthony admired his new friend.

To him, this new friend was not only amiable but also a good listener among pirates, not interrupting to show off during others' stories.

Holy Lord of Storms, it's rare to meet a pirate like this. I finally got to finish my story! The pirate Stilwell praised the god in his heart and asked Anthony, "Interested in joining our crew?"

Anthony smiled and replied, "I don't think I'm skilled enough to be one of you."

"Haha." Stilwell laughed proudly.

Anthony glanced around and lowered his voice, "Have you heard about the unknown adventurer?"

Stilwell's smile vanished instantly. "Yeah, I heard. There's so many pirate captains here, but none have taught that adventurer a lesson!

What are they waiting for? This is their chance to gain more fame. They might even become the tenth Pirate Admiral!"

In his rant, Stilwell never mentioned challenging the arrogant adventurer himself.

Suddenly, a commotion erupted in the bar.

"What's happening?" Stilwell picked up his beer and mumbled, heading towards the table.

After a while, he returned to the bar, excitedly telling Anthony, "Admiral Deep Sea is in Banamo!"

"Admiral Deep Sea is here?" Anthony looked delighted.

"Yes, someone will teach that bastard a lesson!" Stilwell sat back on his stool, enthusiastically, "That's a Pirate Admiral! Every Pirate Admiral earned their title through real battles, not just boasting. They could kill all the adventurers here if they wanted to!"

When Stilwell finished, Anthony echoed, "I'm already looking forward to it."

Gulp. Stilwell picked up his beer mug again and took a sip.

He boasted, "I thought Admiral Deep Sea would come to end the humiliation caused by those so-called notable pirates."

"Why do you say that?" Anthony asked curiously.

Stilwell glanced at him. "You don't know?"

Anthony smiled and explained, "Although I'm from Intis, our boss often intercepts ships in the Berserk Sea and rarely comes to the Fog Sea."

"That explains it." Stilwell nodded understandingly. He lowered his voice, "We suspect Admiral Deep Sea comes to Banamo Port every year to find that legendary treasure."

"Treasure? The Lost Newins?" Anthony acted like a genuine pirate.

The Lost Newins was one of the most famous treasure legends on the Five Seas, rumored to be at the bottom of a certain part of the Fog Sea.

It was said to be the site of an ancient civilization of intelligent beings, long destroyed. Strange items often appeared in the area, all pointing to the ancient Newins.

"Yes." Stilwell nodded emphatically. "Think about it. Admiral Deep Sea's flagship was found in some ruins and named the Newins. Anyone would suspect those ruins are the Lost Newins! Besides, the area where the Newins supposedly sank isn't far from here."

Chapter 782: Clamor

782 Clamor

Banamo Port, Carnival Bar.

Adventurer Mason had donned the loose pants and thick jacket favored by pirates. He looked toward the unknown adventurer drinking strong liquor with his back to him, feeling a constant tension.

He wasn't worried about being hurt but was anxious about when this kind of life would end.

Pirates were never reasonable; they would always vent their anger on others. After no one stepped up to respond to the arrogant unknown adventurer, many pirates tried to take their anger out on other adventurers in Banamo Port.

Frequent adventurers in Banamo Port were used to a life of hiding. They would never openly identify as adventurers, disguising themselves as other professions instead. Otherwise, bodies would be found in alleys or floating near the docks.

In this pirate-dominated port, being an adventurer was clearly a dangerous and elusive profession. People like Mason had regular identities to disguise themselves, sometimes even joining pirate crews to help gather supplies while stationed in Banamo Port.

Taking on commissions wouldn't expose an adventurer's identity because many pirates also took jobs for rewards. For example, if they killed a rival pirate, they could collect a bounty through connections.

Who wouldn't want that?

Pirates approached tasks differently from adventurers. They would first identify the mission issuer and decide if they could kill the client directly. Some adventurers would naturally turn into bandits in lawless areas.

Mason had recently lost his job at a trading company. With his distinct, non-native features, he had to dress as a pirate to avoid trouble.

His thoughts drifted to a corner of the Carnival Bar near the window.

The walls were charred, the glass cracked, and overturned tables and chairs lay amidst two charred bodies that had been burning for a long time.

These were two pirates.

Earlier that afternoon, they had recognized an adventurer they had encountered before and decided to vent their malice on him. The unknown adventurer at the bar counter didn't even turn his head, summoning one fiery raven after another, blasting the pirates apart and burning them.

This convinced the watching pirates that the unknown adventurer was a man of his word.

If he said he would kill, he would kill. If he promised punishment for crossing the line, there would be punishment, even in a pirate port watched by thousands of pirates and many Beyonders.

And the pirates' captain didn't dare retaliate.

Mason had witnessed the entire scene. He noticed that the two pirates were familiar with the Pyromaniac's abilities and were quite skilled, with one being a Low-Sequence Beyonder. Despite their precautions, they couldn't escape the ravens. They were covered in flames by the window before they could escape from the center of the bar.

This filled Mason with admiration and longing.

When will I have such power?

When can I become an adventurer who can intimidate so many pirates?

Mason had intended to "kindly" help the pirates deal with the bodies, but to his regret, their captain and first mate quickly arrived and collected their "inheritance."

I should stick close to this adventurer. If I'm recognized, I'm done for...

Mason muttered, gulping down his dark beer. How did my life change so drastically?

Though he hadn't been harmed, he felt implicated.

This heightened his fear that he might have brought disaster to Banamo Port, though it didn't seem like a disaster yet. He hoped it would end when the unknown adventurer left or a Pirate Admiral or King arrived.

Never perform rituals you don't fully understand... Mason warned himself.

He then raised his glass to his reflection on the wall, toasting to his resolution.

...

In the shadow, Franca was intently observing the Carnival Bar inside and out.

This was her task.

Even though Lumian was vigilant and prepared, he could still be ambushed. The Beyonder world had many strange, unpredictable, and hard-to-defend abilities, rituals, and spells. Thus, Franca stayed hidden, monitoring the surroundings from another angle, ready to intervene or provide a Mirror Substitution.

In the past few days of wandering around Banamo Port with Lumian, Franca had seen pirates drinking, chatting, joking, eating, gambling, venting, and sleeping, making them seem no different from ordinary people. She felt a bit guilty about the possible plague plan. But after witnessing pirate battles and hearing about killings, kidnappings, bullying, robbery, and rape, she genuinely felt that letting these scum die from the plague would purify the world and be a good deed.

Ignoring her hunger, Franca grumbled about Lumian, This guy, doesn't he know it's been an hour past lunch? You get to eat, but I don't! Based on our previous understanding, shouldn't we shake off potential trackers, hide back at the inn, and let me rest and eat something?

Despite her complaints, Franca continued to dutifully monitor the surroundings.

At that moment, a few pirates entered, bringing a lively, joyful, and excited atmosphere to different tables.

Hmm... Franca melded into the shadows, sticking to the wall, and stealthily approached a group of pirates to listen in.

"Admiral Deep Sea is really here?"

"The Newins has already docked!"

"Do they know about the adventurer?"

"..."

Oh, Admiral Deep Sea is finally here... Franca silently confirmed with a guess.

Since Jenna hadn't issued a warning, it meant no Pirate King had arrived in Banamo Port. Franca began to anticipate Admiral Deep Sea's reaction and actions.

She was sure Admiral Deep Sea and his key subordinates were aware of the unknown adventurer's provocation.

It was a simple deduction.

Since Admiral Deep Sea was avoiding the King of Dusk, he would first confirm the situation in Banamo Port before coming to resupply.

The common practice was to send lesser-known pirates from the fleet on other ships to scout Banamo Port. If Banamo Port was a regular stop, trusted subordinates might be stationed there long-term, reporting back promptly.

Of course, local forces could also provide warnings. In any case, Admiral Deep Sea would be well aware of recent events in Banamo Port; otherwise, he wouldn't surface the Newins.

Franca calmed herself, no longer distracted by hunger.

But like the pirates, she waited half an hour without seeing Admiral Deep Sea or his key subordinates, growing puzzled.

Why haven't they shown up?

Could it be that Admiral Deep Sea is also a cautious person? But Lumian is only showing the strength of a strong Sequence 6. This crafty guy is using crimson-white flames, not the Reaper's white flames...

Franca thought carefully and understood the reason.

If she were in his shoes, targeted by the King of Dusk, she wouldn't cause trouble right after arriving at a port. She would complete the resupply first and prepare for another dive. That way, even if something unexpected happened, they could leave Banamo Port immediately and not complete their primary objective here.

Also, Lumian, the unknown adventurer, had been in Banamo Port for two or three days. He didn't seem to be hunting bounties of lesser known pirates, as if he were waiting for something.

This could make people suspicious of his true intentions. Admiral Deep Sea would naturally be cautious.

Phew... Franca sighed silently.

Her gaze continued to sweep across the Carnival Bar, wary of any surprises.

In the process, her eyes inevitably swept over Lumian, noticing her companion's slight smile and good mood, holding a cup of amber-colored Lanti Proof mixed with something unknown.

...

Lumian played with his glass, using his Hunter's exceptional hearing to roughly understand why the pirates were suddenly excited and anxious.

His target had arrived!

Lumian wasn't surprised since he already knew-Jenna had come by earlier and left a note under his hand, concealed by shadows.

Knowing Admiral Deep Sea wouldn't come looking for him immediately, Lumian remained calm, acting unaware of the commotion behind him.

He glanced at the bartender trying to control his expression and smiled.

"The wind is quite noisy today," Lumian said.

The bartender didn't know how to respond, forcing a stiff smile. "True."

Lumian said nothing more, feeling his emotions and state change.

To be honest, he felt a bit nervous about facing a Pirate Admiral with his fleet. But it also made his blood boil slightly.

He had never been one to shy away from challenges. Since becoming a Hunter, he had tasted the allure of challenges even more.

With that thought, Lumian raised his cup of Lumian to his lips, tilted his head back, and drank it all in one go.

Chapter 783: Boarding the Ship

783 Boarding the Ship

Banamo Port, near the docks.

Jenna hid in the shadows, watching Anthony mingle with the crowd, blending in with the pirates.

She didn't deliberately track the famous pirates who arrived on the Newins when it docked. On the one hand, she feared being discovered, which would alert Admiral Deep Sea to a grand consOriginal awaiting him at Banamo Port. On the other hand, she didn't need to follow them to know the whereabouts of the Newins' first mate, second mate, and boatswain.

The pirates in Banamo Port were eagerly anticipating Admiral Deep Sea or his capable subordinates to teach the unknown adventurer a lesson.

Naturally, they kept an eye on these individuals and shared information with their companions and friends!

In other words, with so much attention on the situation, most of the pirates in Banamo Port had become unofficial reporters. Admiral Deep Sea's key subordinates couldn't go anywhere without being noticed and widely discussed.

If they used stealth abilities or invisibility, they might avoid the curious eyes spread throughout Banamo Port. However, they were currently gathering supplies, which meant they couldn't hide the large quantities of goods.

Thus, information flowed swiftly into Anthony's ears: "Great Shark is at Firth Trading Company."

"Ship Destroyer is heading towards the Carnival Bar!"

"Holy Lord of Storms, those guys are meeting at Blackstone Square!"

"They're one street away from the Carnival Bar!"

"They've stopped for now, discussing something!"

"They seem to be heading to Old Dante's for large barrels of pale ale!"

"..."

Anthony sensed the commotion among the pirates, watching them leave the current street and head towards the Carnival Bar.

He stood up as well to avoid standing out.

During this, he gave Jenna's hidden shadow a look.

Jenna understood immediately, using the shadows along the street to slip through the growing crowd towards the Carnival Bar.

...

Lumian sipped the freshly poured amber-colored Lanti Proof, nodding to himself.

He then looked at the bartender behind the counter, smiling as he said, "You might want to move the valuable liquor and items out of here for now. It's probably best if no one stays inside."

The bartender froze for a few seconds before responding hastily, "Alright!"

No one wanted to alert Lumian by passing on messages that might affect the plan, but he guessed something was brewing from the pirates gathering outside the bar.

He was both excited and nervous, knowing the impending conflict would take place in the Carnival Bar, where he was.

Watching the bartender instruct the waiters to move valuable items out the back door, Lumian pulled out a blank sketchbook and an ink pen, casually sketching as he asked, "How much is your bar worth, including this two-story building?"

"Uh..." The bartender was stunned again.

What does this mean?

Is he implying the bar might get destroyed in the upcoming conflict, collapsing the whole building?

Recalling the powerful crimson-white fireballs, the bartender grew even more anxious, forcing a smile as he said, "Are you offering compensation? You decide, or let the loser pay..."

"This building is a simple structure built by locals. It's definitely cheap. Your bar caters to low-level pirates, so the furniture and décor are all the cheapest kind..." Lumian continued his assessment without looking up, still sketching in the blank book.

"Yes, that's right." The bartender nodded quickly, agreeing.

Lumian looked up, shaking his head with a smile. "Whatever I say, you agree. It's making things difficult for me."

"..." The bartender closed his mouth, unsure how to respond.

Lumian lowered his head again. "How about 2,000 verl d'or?"

"Okay." The bartender used a different word, not even trying to bargain.

Lumian didn't pause his sketching, his tone calm.

"Payment will be after assessing the damage. If the big pirates coming later want to help compensate, that works too."

"Alright." The bartender responded quickly.

He looked around, wishing he could sprout wings and fly out of the Carnival Bar.

From their conversation, he feared staying could lead to him becoming a mangled corpse.

A few minutes later, the waiters had moved the few valuable items out, leaving only the cheap goods in the bar.

The bartender left through the back door, and the other patrons, including Mason, exited to wait and watch outside.

They didn't dare stay in this anticipated battlefield.

This was the lesson of experience.

Lumian sketched for a while, then put down his pen and slowly sipped the remaining Lanti Proof.

A few minutes later, Franca sneaked into the shadows near the bar and whispered, "Admiral Deep Sea didn't come, but his first mate, Great Shark, and others are almost here. They'll be here in about two minutes."

Lumian picked up the ink pen again and continued sketching in the book.

He chuckled and said, "Remember to prepare the 2,000 verl d'or compensation, and when we get back, return the 1,000 verl d'or bounty for summoning the messenger."

"Ah?" Franca was a bit surprised.

Lumian chuckled and said, "All of this is to help you digest Pleasure. You should cover all expenses, including consumed Beyonder items."

"No problem." Franca wasn't resisting; she was just surprised Lumian brought it up suddenly.

She watched Lumian finish his sketch on the blank page, curious as she asked, "Why not just take out the Pride Armor, disguise it as a person with a robe, and have it sit in this chair facing away from the incoming pirates?"

With Lumian present, the Pride Armor couldn't be used, so it might as well serve some purpose by being placed here.

"Do you really want this building destroyed?" Lumian chuckled. "Besides, the Pride Armor can't use Lie and can't disguise itself as me. The subordinates of Admiral Deep Sea would notice something's wrong before even entering."

As he spoke, Lumian finished the last stroke on the blank page.

It was a sketch outlined in deep blue ink, depicting Lumian himself.

The paper gradually turned translucent, and the sketch of Lumian suddenly came to life, thickening and expanding like a balloon.

In an instant, a stoic-faced Lumian appeared before the bar counter, blocked by Lumian's body.

It had the instinct to complete a few minutes of combat and possessed some of Lumian's abilities, obeying the sketcher's commands.

As the sketched Lumian sat in a chair facing away from the bar door, Lumian transformed into a shadow creature, disappearing from the bar.

Soon, Great Shark, the first mate of the Newins, arrived at the Carnival Bar with a few companions of similar strength, surrounded by a crowd of pirates.

The tall, muscular, bald Great Shark glanced at the unknown adventurer calmly sitting at the bar and gestured, leading the way through the door.

As the Beyonders from the Newins entered the bar, Lumian, disguised and watching from the window, placed his right hand on the glass.

A black mark hidden under his clothes glowed.

Bottle of Fiction!

He trapped the Carnival Bar inside the Bottle of Fiction, setting the condition for exit to be non-Beyonders.

Lumian turned, and in the chaos of the pirates losing sight of the bar's interior, he squeezed through the crowd and headed to a nearby alley, teleporting to the docks with Franca.

They met Jenna and Anthony at the designated spot, using shadows and Psychological Invisibility to remain hidden as they boarded the alchemical ship Newins.

Compared to when they arrived, there were fewer pirates on the ship, just enough to maintain basic vigilance.

Lumian wasn't worried their actions would alert Admiral Deep Sea.

According to gathered intel, Howl Constantine wasn't a Beyonder of the Devil pathway and couldn't sense malice. His abilities resembled a Sequence 5 Ocean Songster of the Storm pathway, and according to the Tarot Club, Admiral Deep Sea had no ties to the Church of Storms.

Thus, Lumian had Jenna confirm if the Black Octopus had followed the Newins to Banamo Port-the Black Octopus's captain, Bone Splitter Basil, was a Devil.

Considering the changing situation at the Carnival Bar might alert Admiral Deep Sea, Lumian and his team didn't waste time, swiftly sneaking into the ship's hold.

Within a minute, they found a lone pirate in a corridor room.

Franca checked the surrounding mechanical devices for alarms, then whispered to shadow-form Lumian, "It's show time."

Lumian immediately slipped into the room, moving behind the lone pirate and emerging, giving a harrumph.

Two flashes of white light, and the pirate fell unconscious.

Anthony entered the room quickly, beginning hypnosis.

Jenna and Franca guarded the door from the shadows, soon hearing friendly conversation inside, "Where's the Admiral?"

"In the captain's cabin."

"The Admiral must have a powerful backer to be one of the most famous pirates, right?"

"I don't know, but the Admiral is indeed mysterious."

"..."

After a brief inquiry, Anthony made the pirate forget he had such a friend on board.

They then sneaked to the upper deck, stopping outside the captain's cabin.

Lumian's eyes twitched as he gazed at the silver-white metal door.

He realized Admiral Deep Sea's possible pathway and sequence.

On an alchemical ship like this, an Ocean Songster's power might not be inferior to being in the deep sea or the air!

While Lumian pondered, two pirates pushed a food cart to the captain's cabin using a mechanical lift.

Chapter 784: Mask

784 Mask

Lumian immediately retreated into the nearby shadows, closely watching the slowly opening metal door of the captain's cabin.

As the cart filled with various foods was pushed in, he finally saw their target, Admiral Deep Sea, Howl Constantine.

Though he had heard many rumors and seen the wanted posters, nothing compared to witnessing the reality of his sea monster lineage firsthand.

Admiral Deep Sea, Howl Constantine's face looked as if a translucent, palm-sized octopus clung to it, with numerous slimy tentacles hanging down to his chest. His deep blue, almost black hair was thick and coarse, falling to his shoulders, and his body was entirely wrapped in a black cloak, even his hands hidden within.

He was nothing like a normal human.

Lumian couldn't help but feel this was unusual.

His face, fused with an octopus, was exposed, so what was there to hide about his body?

Even if he was truly an octopus beneath the cloak, no one around would be surprised!

The only reason to cover his body so tightly was if there was something even more unpresentable there.

Puzzled, Lumian carefully observed Howl Constantine's fate.

Being in shadow form didn't prevent him from doing this since shadow beings could still "see" the real world, though the perspective was slightly different.

As the two pirates arranged the food on the long table in the captain's cabin, Lumian's eyes reflected the illusory river of fate composed of complex mercury symbols.

Given that they were less than fifteen meters apart, Lumian extended his right palm, letting it stay at the edge of the shadow, and remotely touched Howl Constantine's river of fate.

Most of Admiral Deep Sea's fate fragments instantly materialized, flowing turbulently.

Knowing time was limited, Lumian could only browse briefly.

He saw Howl Constantine diving in the dark, lightless ocean depths, fighting a half-giant over two and a half meters tall wielding a huge sword. He watched as Admiral Deep Sea passed through ruins filled with bizarre buildings and saw his future self removing the translucent octopus from his face...

Removing the octopus clinging to his face? It isn't Howl Constantine's face; it's a mask? He isn't a descendant of sea monsters? Lumian was stunned. Reflexively, he decided on the fate fragment he would exchange.

It was a fragment of Howl Constantine being injured on the seabed.

In this fate fragment, back when he was only Sequence 7 or 6, Howl Constantine failed to return to the surface in time, suffering the crushing pressure of deep water and the suffocating sensation of liquid flooding his lungs.

This was different in severity from Moran Admiral Deep Sea's fate fragment of lust outburst, which had irrevocably changed Moran's fate, forcing him to an early death. In contrast, this fragment merely influenced Howl Constantine's subsequent exploration style, making him more cautious. However, Lumian couldn't find a more suitable fragment in such a short time.

As fate began to swap, Howl Constantine, who was seeing off the two pirates, suddenly turned his gaze towards Lumian's hiding spot.

His spirituality had warned him!

Almost simultaneously, Admiral Deep Sea's eyes lit up with intense lightning.

With a crackling sound, thick lightning struck Lumian's hiding spot, hitting the wall and shattering into countless tiny electric serpents, which spread out, covering the area with their fierce and erratic energy, using the properties of the metal door, walls, and floor to launch indiscriminate attacks inside and outside the captain's cabin.

The two food-delivering pirates were hit first, their bodies trembling and convulsing as if performing a grotesque dance.

Their skin quickly charred.

Amid the cracking sound, mirrors hidden in the shadows where Franca and Jenna were hiding shattered, but the Demonesses' figures did not appear.

...

At the Carnival Bar, Great Shark Jorg and his companions, including Ship Destroyer, had just entered the hall and were staring at the unknown adventurer's back. Before they could speak, the noisy surroundings abruptly fell silent. The pirates' chatter and conversations seemed muffled, vanishing instantly.

Wh- Great Shark Jorg instinctively looked towards the window, seeing the dim sunlight through the fog replaced by deep darkness.

At that moment, Lumian, sitting at the bar, turned on his stool. His expression was indifferent, his gaze calm, looking at the few big pirates as if they were dead men.

A huge crimson-white fireball shot out.

Boom!

Amidst the flames and wind from the explosion, the pirates either used their agility or abilities to dodge in different directions.

Behind Ship Destroyer, Lumian's figure swiftly emerged in the chaos, letting out a hum.

Two beams of white light shot from his nose, causing Ship Destroyer to faint instantly.

Witnessing this, Great Shark Jorg felt a chill down his spine, instinctively muttering to himself, "Formidable..."

...

Aboard the Newins.

Having used the Lightning Strike ability and created an area attack effect utilizing the current environment, Admiral Deep Sea, Howl Constantine, had a figure suddenly appear behind him.

It was Franca, dressed in an assassin's suit.

Franca gripped an almost invisible triangular spike in her right hand while raising her left palm, with an iron-black spiked ring targeting Howl Constantine.

Lightning flickered in her eyes.

As Franca used Psychic Piercing on Howl Constantine, Jenna appeared by the door, throwing a Louis d'or at Admiral Deep Sea, seemingly to distract him and make him momentarily ignore Franca's assassination attempt.

A golden brooch carved into a gorse flower was pinned to her chest.

Covered in gray-white scales, Anthony appeared in the corridor, with tiny electric serpents still crawling over his body, paralyzing him and preventing rapid movement.

But this didn't stop Anthony from using his ability.

Staring at Admiral Deep Sea, with a translucent octopus clinging to his face, his pupils turned vertical, glowing golden.

Awe!

This ability made the target feel as if they encountered a true dragon, panicking instantly.

As fate began to swap and Howl Constantine noticed the anomaly, he struck out lightning. At that moment, Lumian teleported into the captain's cabin, landing on a wooden chair by the window.

Soon, tiny electric serpents covered the area, but they didn't last long due to the wooden chair's material.

This caused Lumian's body to show signs of paralysis.

However, he didn't reveal himself because he was now a true shadow creature, and no shadow being would leave the shadows due to a mild electric shock.

Lumian chose to stay in the shadow provided by the wooden chair, quietly watching the upcoming battle.

During the fate exchange, he couldn't attack Howl Constantine, which would interrupt the process.

So, the next step was to see if Franca, Jenna, and Anthony, three Beyonders below Sequence 5, could hold off Admiral Deep Sea for at least two minutes!

Of course, if they really needed to kill Howl Constantine, Anthony could do it quickly with the Winter is Coming revolver, but that was impractical and went against their original goal.

Awe and Psychic Piercing hit Howl Constantine, but the Admiral's face, fused with the translucent octopus, glowed faintly, protecting his soul and spirit, causing only minor effects.

As his octopus-like face dimmed slightly, Howl Constantine, puzzled by the unfamiliar assassins, suspected some adventurer group wanted to make a name for themselves and earn a huge bounty. Enduring the dizziness, he grabbed an obsidian trident from the nearby weapon rack and thrust it at Franca.

The trident immediately surged with violently flickering silver-white lightning, its heavy tip seemingly trying to pull Franca onto itself.

Crack!

Franca's body, clad in the assassin's suit, shattered into numerous mirror fragments, while Jenna threw a silent black flame at Howl Constantine before hiding in the shadows again.

Anthony also pulled out the exquisite Winter is Coming revolver, aiming at Admiral Deep Sea for a standard shot.

The gunshot had just sounded when a sharp wind pierced everyone's ears.

Howl Constantine, wrapped in a whirlwind, flew into the air, avoiding the yellow bullet and eerie black flame.

He then pointed the obsidian trident at Anthony.

The silver-white currents on the trident converged into thick lightning, shooting out.

Anthony, experienced as ever, immediately dove away from the door, changing his position and avoiding the direct hit from the lightning, though the resulting tiny electric serpents still affected him, causing his body to tremble and paralyze.

The two pirates, just recovering from the previous shock, were struck by the new wave, falling unconscious and twitching on the ground.

Franca and Jenna were also affected by the indiscriminate attack, revealing themselves from their hidden states.

Admiral Deep Sea, Howl Constantine, showed no joy or bloodthirsty emotion but grew more vigilant, his octopus-like face showing doubt.

There should be one more assassin!

Why hasn't he appeared?

What is he preparing?

At that moment, out of the corner of his eye, How! Constantine saw a figure leisurely sitting on the wooden chair near the window.

The figure had black hair, blue eyes, a handsome face, and wore a thick dark jacket, reclining against the chair with his right foot resting on his left knee, a mocking smile on his face.

Chapter 785: Performance

785 Performance

Seeing the assassin who had been hiding suddenly sit openly on a chair by the window, calmly watching him as if he didn't care about the ongoing battle, Admiral Deep Sea, Howl Constantine, felt a sudden heavy weight in his heart.

Such a posture and expression suggested that the opponent didn't consider him a threat and was absolutely confident in dealing with him.

That's why he didn't attack immediately to support his companions but instead sat there, arrogantly smiling and observing.

Without any hesitation, Howl Constantine instinctively aimed his obsidian trident at Lumian.

A bolt of silver-white lightning formed in his hand, amplified by the trident's tip, and shot out like a raging thunder serpent towards Lumian.

Lumian kept his right foot on his left knee, his face bearing a mocking smile as if Howl Constantine's desperate counterattack was just child's play, incapable of changing the outcome at all.

Of course, this was just a front he put on.

In reality, he couldn't attack Howl Constantine or leave the hundred-meter range, or else the Fate Exchange would be interrupted.

But not being able to attack didn't mean he couldn't influence the current battle. Lumian left his shadow form and deliberately revealed his presence to Howl Constantine, using himself as bait to attract most of Admiral Deep

Sea's attention and create a sense of pressure and fear, forcing him to react hastily and increase the chance of making mistakes.

Even a Hunter who couldn't strike, speak, or communicate could still provoke, scheme, and set traps!

The thick silver-white thunder serpent struck Lumian.

With a crack, Lumian's figure shattered like a mirror, leaving only the quickly charred wooden chair behind in the ravaging lightning.

He disappeared again, and the thunder serpent, constrained by the chair's material, didn't dissipate much.

This made Howl Constantine anxious, considering whether to break through the window and dive into the sea.

Underwater, he feared no Beyonder below demigod level!

Even many Saints couldn't dive into the depths to fight him!

Just then, he felt his limbs and body being bound layer by layer, making it difficult to move or turn the obsidian trident quickly.

The bindings tightened rapidly.

Taking advantage of Lumian drawing away most of Howl Constantine's attention and caution, Franca had set up the spider silk of a Demoness of Pleasure, entangling Admiral Deep Sea layer by layer.

Faced with this restricted situation, Howl Constantine stopped and let the translucent octopus on his face glow with dawn-like brilliance.

The light suddenly exploded into countless fragments, sweeping through the captain's cabin like a storm.

The long table with food shattered into pieces, the metal walls were marked with deep scratches, and Franca and Jenna's figures shattered into countless mirror fragments again, while the invisible spider silk broke inch by inch, unable to restrain Howl Constantine any longer.

In the corridor, away from the captain's cabin door, Anthony was unaffected by the light storm, as was Lumian outlined beside him.

Lumian placed his hand on the metal sliding door of the staircase, using his contractual ability.

He enclosed the area within the Bottle of Fiction, with the entry and exit condition being female.

This effectively blocked any rescue attempts by the pirates, preventing interference in their battle. Except for teams with female captains, most pirate ships had very few female Beyonders, if any at all. The non-Beyonder women on board were merely ship prostitutes, incapable of becoming regular pirates.

...

Outside the Carnival Bar.

The real pirates, the disguised Mason, and the rest simultaneously noticed that the glass windows no longer reflected the scene of Great Shark Jörg and the others fighting the unknown adventurer.

The glass appeared dim, showing the bar's interior with no bartender or customers.

"What happened?" a pirate asked loudly, uncertainly.

"What ability was used?" Similar questions echoed.

They all suspected the unknown adventurer was behind the changes, as Great Shark and his crew wouldn't hide their fight; they would want to showcase their strength to more pirates.

Within the Bottle of Fiction.

Great Shark Jörg, wearing black gloves, was surrounded by signs of explosions and charred marks.

He had timely distorted the unknown adventurer's attack intent, avoiding injury in the recent bombardment.

However, his companion, Ship Destroyer, another Beyonder of the Hunter pathway, had long been unconscious from a combination of Beyonder powers and explosion damage.

The other pirates were also scattered, none unscathed.

Gazing at the unknown black-haired, blue-eyed adventurer several meters away, Great Shark Jörg cursed the teleportation ability.

Just as he was about to shift positions and attempt a Bribe, the handsome adventurer's figure rapidly faded like a projection and disappeared.

Worried it was another teleportation, Great Shark Jörg dove to the side, turning to look behind him.

Nothing happened.

Jörg and the remaining pirates, suspicious and tense, maneuvered cautiously multiple times, but the adventurer never reappeared.

Finally, the bald Great Shark began to grasp the situation.

That was just an illusion?

We fought an illusion and nearly lost?

Where did the real one go?

Realizing this, Great Shark Jörg blurted out, "Sh*t! The Newins!"

The unknown adventurer's real target was the Newins and the Admiral!

Jörg and the others grew anxious but were trapped in the Bottle of Fiction, unable to get out.

After trying several methods and abilities without success, they resorted to violent disassembly.

...

Aboard the Newins.

As the light storm began to subside, Jenna quickly appeared behind Admiral Deep Sea, in a blind spot created by his own body.

Then, using all her strength, she stabbed a dagger covered in silent black flames into Howl Constantine's back.

Although he couldn't turn or redirect the trident in time, Howl Constantine remained unfazed.

From his cloak emerged a silver-white lightning bolt that struck Jenna at a speed too fast to dodge.

Countless tiny electric serpents coursed over Jenna's body, but she seemed largely unharmed and only slightly slowed.

Pfft!

The dagger covered in black flames pierced Howl Constantine's black cloak.

At the beginning of the fight, Jenna had thrown a Louis d'or at Howl Constantine, not to seek luck but to activate the Decency brooch, completing a Bribe that significantly weakened his attacks, defenses, and controls against her for a while!

Since then, neither the rampaging lightning nor the light storm had affected her as much as she let on.

Her frantic dodging and use of the Mirror Substitution were meant to psychologically deceive Admiral Deep Sea!

She didn't expect Howl Constantine to be unaware of the Bribe ability, given that his deputy was likely a Briber. Instead, she performed as if the Bribe had failed, leading him to attribute the Louis d'or toss to another ability.

At the start, Howl Constantine might still have guarded against the Bribe, but in the heat of battle, and with time running short, he instinctively responded without caution.

Thus, he ignored the Bribe from before and didn't stop Jenna's assassination!

With a pfft, the black-flamed dagger pierced Howl Constantine's cloak and flesh.

Acting was for a better assassination!

After the successful strike, Jenna felt a strong resistance and wriggling flesh as if alive, preventing further progress with the dagger despite her full strength.

She abandoned force, instead channeling the black flames into Howl Constantine's body.

As the black flames surged, Admiral Deep Sea howled in pain.

Franca seized the opportunity to reach Howl Constantine's side, stabbing the transparent Wintry Blade into Admiral Deep Sea.

The Wintry Blade pierced the skin and flesh but couldn't go deeper into Howl Constantine's body.

But it was enough.

Howl Constantine's body stiffened as if frozen, and his thoughts became sluggish.

Franca slid to Jenna's side, retracting the Wintry Blade.

Simultaneously, she flipped out a compact mirror with her left hand, reflecting Howl Constantine's body.

Then, with her right hand, she smeared black flames on the mirror's surface.

Demoness' curse!

Black flames erupted from Howl Constantine's body, burning it but not touching the octopus on his face.

Howl Constantine let out a pained shriek, breaking free from the stiffness and mental fog, slamming the obsidian trident onto the metal floor.

Blinding lightning burst forth.

Chapter 786: Face

786 Face

Arcs of silver lightning shot from the obsidian trident, turning the entire captain's cabin into a hell of electricity.

Despite having Bribed Howl Constantine and weakened his attacks, Jenna didn't dare risk her fragile body against the powerful lightning at such close range.

She and Franca shattered into pieces amid the dancing arcs, reflecting the blinding light.

Their figures reappeared at the cabin door, where lightning still raged.

Franca didn't hesitate. She grabbed Jenna's arm and activated the last gem on her Seven-Stone Bracelet before the paralysis set in.

Blink!

They vanished from the cabin door, blinking to a wooden table in a room diagonally opposite.

During this process, Franca and Jenna saw metal panels sliding open on the cabin ceiling, revealing several dark holes.

With a splash, blue seawater poured into the captain's cabin like a waterfall, and the metal door shut tight.

When Franca and Jenna's figures reappeared, their bodies still crackled with residual electricity, and they trembled uncontrollably.

Immediately, the last gem on the Seven-Stone Bracelet shattered, leaving only the two diamonds representing Teleport.

In the corridor near the stairwell, Lumian and Anthony remained unharmed by the electric storm.

It wasn't because the lightning hadn't spread through the metal floor and walls but because Lumian had taken out the gray-white lightning-shaped brooch Fury of the Sea from his Traveler's Bag and thrown it ahead.

One of its side effects was that it had a high chance of attracting lightning during storms.

This meant that it greatly attracted lightning!

As expected, most of the small electric arcs converged on Fury of the Sea, making it bloom like a bright silver flower.

Thus, Lumian and Anthony only felt a mild tingling, retaining their ability to move.

Looking at the now-closed cabin door, Lumian raised an eyebrow and murmured, "Did Howl Constantine get seriously injured in the last attack and decide to seal the cabin to recover?"

To Lumian, Admiral Deep Sea's response wasn't wrong. If possible, it was indeed one of the best choices under the circumstances, especially since Howl Constantine couldn't gauge the strength of Lumian, who had been merely watching and not acting, nor did he know the full extent of Franca, Jenna, and Anthony's abilities. If faced with something like a Banshee's terrifying scream, Howl Constantine-having been weakened by a Demoness's black flames-would likely die instantly.

But sealing the cabin to recover was precisely what Lumian and his companions hoped for. They hadn't planned to kill Howl Constantine before the Fate Exchange was complete. This quiet waiting scenario was exactly what they wanted.

"Watch out for secret passages in the cabin. Howl Constantine might escape or jump into the sea," Franca cautioned Lumian as she recovered.

She had rich experience in assassinations.

"I'm keeping an eye on it," Lumian replied concisely, picking up the Fury of the Sea.

He was monitoring the Fate Exchange situation and his own senses and spirituality.

If Admiral Deep Sea showed any signs of fleeing, Lumian would immediately blow open the cabin door.

As long as he didn't directly attack Howl Constantine, the Fate Exchange wouldn't be interrupted!

Franca's hands still trembled slightly, and she exuded a faint burnt smell as she remarked, "Howl Constantine's lightning strikes and Spirit Body and mental protection from items almost ruined all our efforts, along with this unique environment.

"If not for our abundance of mystical items and our good teamwork, we might have been forced to give up the plan and have you join the battle personally.

"What's the phrase? 'An unstoppable force overcomes all obstacles.' No matter what supernatural abilities you use, I'll counter with lightning and turn it into a weaker version of a lightning storm using the environment."

Jenna, who was also trembling and smelled burnt but was in better shape, nodded slightly in agreement.

As the one fighting on the front lines, she deeply understood this.

Outside the Carnival Bar, the pirates and disguised pirates saw the heavy wooden door suddenly swell and shatter.

Boom!

An explosion followed, sending the doorframe and fragments flying.

The figures of Great Shark Jorg and his men finally appeared to the onlookers.

Most of them were injured to varying degrees, their expressions grim, as they sprinted towards the dock without bothering to disguise themselves.

Seeing this, both real and fake pirates had similar thoughts.

They lost?

Even with all of Admiral Deep Sea's top men, they lost?

Are they running to seek help from Admiral Deep Sea?

They're fleeing in such a sorry state...

As thoughts raced through their minds, the onlookers turned their gaze back to the inside of the Carnival Bar. They saw broken tables and chairs, exploded barrels, and the mingling scents of alcohol and scorch, but no sign of the unknown adventurer.

This left the pirates and impostors bewildered, unsure of what it meant.

In the sealed captain's cabin, now filled with blue seawater, Howl Constantine's cloaked body floated, bubbles constantly rising.

His face, with the translucent octopus, hung slightly down, gazing at the submerged metal floor, feeling his soul being nourished, quickly shaking off his weakened state.

After several seconds, Howl Constantine slowly but steadily raised his head, looking at the closed metal door.

Outside, Lumian turned to Franca and said, "It's almost done. Stand by the door and show your face. If Howl Constantine sees the real face of a Demoness of Pleasure, he might feel extreme pleasure, which will help with the digestion."

"This is so weird..." Franca muttered as she moved to stand opposite the captain's cabin door, leaning against the metal wall.

She pulled down her hood, revealing her radiant and beautiful face.

She wanted to strike a pose but couldn't bring herself to do it under everyone's eyes!

Lumian, calculating the progress, walked to the door of the captain's cabin and placed his hands on the metal.

White-hot flames instantly gathered, compressing layer by layer into the metal door.

Rumble!

The metal door rapidly caved inwards and then exploded.

With a splash, the blue seawater gushed out, momentarily driven back by the explosion's shockwave.

Howl Constantine's figure emerged before Lumian, Franca, and the others, a hopeful smile playing on his lips.

Taking advantage of the respite, he had activated the Newins' defense system. He was ready to fight the four assassins with the help of this alchemical ship.

In that state, he was confident he could hold his own against even a demigod for a while!

This was the main reason he hadn't jumped into the sea when the cabin door closed.

Suddenly, he saw an exceptionally beautiful face and a figure-despite partially covered by leather armor-that radiated allure.

He was momentarily stunned.

At that moment, Howl Constantine's mind buzzed, going blank.

That emptiness was immediately filled with extreme pleasure, which erupted, seemingly shattering his soul and scattering it in all directions.

He froze in place, his blood staining the blue seawater that hadn't yet flowed out of the cabin.

Tears streamed from his eyes, mixing with the seawater.

They were tears of pain and tears of joy.

Silently, the translucent octopus fell from Howl Constantine's face, revealing his true visage.

It was a handsome face, but the features were not deep, rather soft.

Seeing this, Franca's heart suddenly raced.

This face bore a striking resemblance to the man she had encountered in the Trier catacombs, Harrison, who was suspected to be from Resurrection Island.

Not in detailed appearance, but in style.

It was an "Eastern-style" face, but not purely so, more like a mixed heritage!

Stunned, Franca heard an illusory sound of something shattering and felt the complete digestion of the Pleasure potion.

She saw an illusory starry sky filled with twinkling stars.

Lumian was about to kill the severely injured Howl Constantine when he suddenly sensed the environment becoming extremely dangerous. He heard the mechanical sounds of the entire Newins' mechanism activating.

It was like a killing machine awakening.

Lumian didn't hesitate. He reached out, grabbing Franca and Jenna's shoulders, and lifted the Bottle of Fiction.

Anthony stepped forward, grabbing Lumian's clothes.

The four of them quickly disappeared from the corridor outside the captain's cabin.

They teleported back to the motel in Banamo Port.

Soon, the pirates near the dock noticed the Newins retract its masts and sails, sealing itself up and submerging into the sea.

Great Shark Jorg and his men hadn't even reached the dock!

Fleeing?

Admiral Deep Sea just fled?

He didn't even fight the adventurer, just ran, leaving behind his first mate, second mate, and boatswain?

Various thoughts surged in the minds of the pirates near the dock.

Chapter 787: Magic Mirror Divination's Answers

787 Magic Mirror Divination's Answers

When Great Shark Jörg and his men arrived at the dock, the spot where the Newins had been moored was now empty, with only the gentle ripples of blue water moving softly in the light fog.

At that moment, Jörg and the other pirates stood frozen, as if they were staring at a surreal painting beyond their imagination.

Soon, a deep panic gripped them.

The Admiral fled on the Newins. What do we do now?

If that unknown adventurer couldn't kill the Admiral and let him escape, will he turn his attention to us for revenge?

He used illusions to deal with us; he must have really come to hunt the Admiral...

Their thoughts raced, and Great Shark Jörg and his men turned and ran, fleeing the dock area.

They needed to find the Newins' contacts in Banamo Port, relying on their local knowledge to find a secret place to hide and then contact Admiral Deep Sea to decide their next steps.

...

Inside the captain's cabin of the Newins.

Howl Constantine, having donned his translucent octopus mask again, stared at the nearly lightless, swaying seawater outside the thick glass window, feeling his internal and external wounds gradually healing with the help of medicinal potions.

He couldn't help but recall his recent encounter. Though it was extremely painful, it brought him an unprecedented pleasure, leaving his soul almost completely blank.

The joy it gave him far surpassed that of the women brought to the ship, making him want to experience it again despite his strong will.

Phew... Howl Constantine exhaled, grateful that he had activated the Newins' defense system in time. Otherwise, under the influence of that extreme pleasure, he would have been easily killed in the next second.

He believed the assassins had felt the Newins become extremely dangerous, leading them to retreat and flee the alchemical ship without pursuing him further.

He did not regret not activating the defense system earlier; being caught off guard, he had no time to do so.

What puzzled Howl Constantine now was when the seed of pleasure had been planted in him, causing an explosive reaction upon seeing the true face and figure of that Demoness.

He muttered to himself, Is that why the male assassin never attacked?

Not that he didn't want to, but he couldn't, not until the pleasure seed had fully rooted in my soul?

What are their true intentions beyond assassinating me? Are they after the secrets of the Newins and the Lost Newins?

Lacking the necessary clues, Admiral Deep Sea found it hard to make a decisive judgment and could only suppress his emotions for now, planning to contact his subordinates in Banamo Port once his body and soul had fully recovered to check if they had noticed anything unusual.

Instinctively, he reviewed the recent events, trying to find investigative details. But removing the true intentions of the assassins made the whole affair seem like a deliberate setup by two Demonesses and their companions to give him an ultimate pleasure, with the near-death experience being a normal part of it. In this world, many have died from pleasure without being attacked.

Reflecting on this, Howl Constantine noticed a shiny gold Louis d'or at the cabin door.

It was left by the two Demonesses.

Staring at the water at the doorstep and the gold coin, which had clearly been treated to prevent tracking, Howl Constantine suddenly had a ridiculous thought and fell into an indescribable silence.

...

In the motel room rented by Lumian and company in Banamo Port.

Jenna quickly removed the Scotch Broom-like Decency brooch and submerged it in the aluminum military flask Lumian had given her.

Almost simultaneously, Jenna felt the eyes of Lumian, Franca, and Anthony change significantly.

Their gazes now held undisguised disgust, aversion, and malice.

Jenna had felt malice from some people in the bars and dance halls of Trier's Rue Pasteur, but it was often mixed with desire and longing, unlike the pure hatred and loathing now directed at her.

Of course, Jenna also noticed a certain amount of desire in Franca's disgust and aversion, as if she wanted to satisfy herself by domineering over Jenna.

Lumian, though his expression remained relatively normal, had a change in his eyes, reflecting an Ascetic's endurance.

He nodded at Jenna and said, "The Decency brooch's negative effect has taken hold. Go to the next room for an hour."

"I know." Jenna glanced at Lumian, recalling past events.

Back then, she had been tasked with protecting Lumian under the negative effect of the Decency brooch, and she had felt the urge to beat him up.

She regretted not taking the chance to draw piles of dogsh*t on his face.

Recalling these memories, Jenna smiled slightly, left the room, and went to wait for the negative effect to wear off in the next room.

"Phew, the Decency brooch's negative effect is really strong..." Franca commented sincerely.

Lumian gave her a sidelong glance and laughed.

"I think your hatred and disgust weren't pure enough."

Franca immediately felt embarrassed, awkwardly smiling as she said, "Sometimes, hatred and disgust can also spark desire. Just ask Anthony!"

Before Lumian could turn to him, Anthony spoke up, "It's true. The human brain and soul are complex. Different people might develop the same desire from different stimuli.

"Some get pleasure from pain, others from jealousy, breaking taboos, being scolded or tortured, or sharing with others, gaining their affection. The possibilities are endless."

"In simple terms, the world is full of perverts?" Lumian mocked Franca.

Franca didn't take the bait, her expression growing serious as she frowned slightly.

Once free from the Decency brooch's negative effect, she recalled the scene she had witnessed earlier.

After some thought, she said, "Do you think Admiral Deep Sea's real appearance resembles Harrison from Resurrection Island?"

Lumian recalled and said, "You mean they both have noticeable Eastern features?"

He had seen Franca's drawing of Harrison.

"Yes, but more like a mix of someone like Harrison and an Intisian or person from the North Continent," Franca said thoughtfully.

Because Anthony was present, she didn't mention the transmigration matter, instead steering towards Resurrection Island.

With a nod, Lumian replied, "Draw Howl Constantine's portrait, and we'll write to the Tarot Club Major Arcana card holders."

"No need to ask Madam Judgment or Madam Magician yet; I'll try with Magic Mirror Divination first," Franca responded immediately.

She began preparing the ritual in the room, sketching Howl Constantine's features from memory. This included an appearance similar to Resurrection Island residents, slightly pointed ears, dark blue near-black thick hair, and the tentacle-like dark veins on his hands when holding the obsidian trident.

Some details Franca hadn't noticed during the fight were now retrieved from her memory through the ritual.

Lumian examined the portrait for a moment and said, "It does have an Eastern style."

Franca nodded, then busied herself with the Magic Mirror Divination.

Soon, the mirror on the desk turned dark, with faint sounds of water echoing within.

Franca picked up the portrait of Admiral Deep Sea and asked the target of the Magic Mirror Divination, "What does this appearance signify?"

She didn't directly ask about Howl Constantine's origins, fearing it was beyond the Magic Mirror Divination's knowledge.

A hoarse, elderly voice emerged from the mirror: "This is an elf."

An elf? Lumian's temples throbbed.

This was a legendary Beyonder race!

Previously, Lumian had only known of elves as a mythical race from ancient times, living on the Sonia Sea's Sonia Island. He learned they were powerful, with their queen, Soniathrym, being one of the eight ancient gods, ruling the sky and sea.

In the real world, encountering a true elf since the Fifth Epoch was rare, only seeing occasional descendants with diluted bloodlines.

Franca was equally shocked, blurting out, "An elf, or a half-elf mixed with humans?"

"Half-elf," the hoarse voice responded.

Though a half-elf, Howl Constantine's features show a strong elven bloodline... In theory, the Sequence 5 Ocean Songster shouldn't cause such changes... A half-elf? Could the elves be descendants of transmigrators, living and thriving in this world? Elf legends date back to the Second Epoch... Franca thought deeply, almost forgetting to ask the third question.

Gathering her thoughts, she pondered for a few seconds and asked, "Is the Lost Newins an ancient elven relic?"

Though elves supposedly lived on Sonia Island in ancient times, they once ruled the seas, so leaving relics in other seas was plausible.

Yes, if Howl Constantine is a pure-blooded half-elf, it makes sense he wore a mask to disguise as a sea monster. The Church of the Lord of Storms supposedly hates pure-blooded elves...

The elderly voice in the mirror answered Franca's third question, "I don't know."

"Alright..." Franca ended the Magic Mirror Divination and fell into a long silence.

She suddenly regretted using Admiral Deep Sea Howl Constantine merely to digest the Pleasure potion this time. Instead of training the team and exchanging fate, they should have gotten Lumian to strike fully with their support to see if they could capture the elf alive.

Chapter 788: Realizations

788 Realizations

Seeing the Magic Mirror Divination come to an end, Lumian turned his gaze to Anthony.

"The Newins has definitely fled. Go out and gather information from the pirates. Find out if Great Shark Jörg and the key crew members managed to board the ship. If they didn't, find out where they are now."

"Understood." Anthony knew Lumian wanted to quickly determine the whereabouts of Great Shark Jörg and his men to see if they could use them to "visit" the Newins again and learn about the elves and the true nature of the Lost Newins.

Lumian couldn't go himself; the pirates would avoid him, and even if he forced the information out of them, it would alert Great Shark Jörg and his men if they were still in Banamo Port, making them hide deeper.

Disguising himself wouldn't work either; the pirates wouldn't be friendly or forthcoming.

The same applied to Franca.

Only Anthony, who had befriended many pirates, could naturally obtain the needed intel.

After watching Anthony leave the room, Franca sat down at the desk with a sigh and said, "This whole transmigration thing keeps getting more complicated."

"You used to treat it too simply," Lumian scoffed.

Franca didn't argue, staying silent for a moment before changing the subject.

"I've fully digested the Pleasure potion. After a few days of rest, I'll be ready to attempt the Demoness of Affliction ritual."

"Honestly, it feels like a dream. Have I really digested it?"

She still seemed somewhat incredulous.

Lumian chuckled in response.

"What else were you expecting? If Admiral Deep Sea knew our main goal was to help you digest the Pleasure potion, he'd think the world was absurd. He'd wonder if it was necessary and suggest that with a Demoness of Pleasure's conditions, we could have just asked for his help with a notarized agreement to prevent harm, and he'd happily assist."

"It's just hard for me to accept..." Franca muttered. "And I know what you mean. In our world, plenty would say, 'Helping a Demoness of Pleasure digest a potion is too wicked-please let me help,' but that's superficial pleasure and low-quality digestion. Real pleasure comes from experiencing it in pain and sinking into it. Targeting people like Moran Avigny and Howl Constantine aligns more with the essence of the Demoness path."

Lumian was just joking and didn't continue the topic.

Franca was silent for a while, then looked at Lumian and carefully said, "About your plan to spread a plague among the pirates in Banamo Port -I don't think it's viable."

"Why?" Lumian raised an eyebrow, amused.

Franca straightened, her gaze unwavering.

"I don't think we can completely separate the guilty pirates from innocent bystanders. The plague would inevitably affect the latter, causing them to die in despair."

Lumian chuckled. "It was just a concept, a direction. We can refine the plan to address those concerns, and if it's not feasible, we can abandon it. We can't limit our thinking right from the start.

"For example, by then, I might be a demigod and find a high-level replacement for the Bottle of Fiction, capable of containing all of Banamo Port with conditions allowing only pirates to enter or exit."

"No," Franca shook her head. "There are adventurers who moonlight as pirates, and many of them haven't committed crimes deserving death."

Lumian smiled and sighed.

"Then we'll collaborate with the Aurora Order or find a Sequence 5 artifact from the Broker path to identify guilty targets."

Franca seriously thought for a moment.

"That won't work either. We have our own crimes. Many adventurers have killed pirates. Does that count as guilty?"

Lumian was momentarily speechless, then laughed.

"You really are suited for switching to Provoker.

"I was just raising examples; my point being that a plan shouldn't be dismissed outright. We need to analyze its feasibility and consider future changes."

"Okay." Franca expressed her opinion and sighed quietly.

After some thought, she decided to speak frankly to Lumian, "Since discovering the vortex plan, you've become more aggressive, like when you first came to Trier. Or is it the Devil's Whispers from Hisoka that's constantly stirring your malice? The Traveler's Bag only mitigates its influence; it doesn't completely eliminate the negative effects."

Lumian chuckled, somewhat self-deprecatingly. "It's a bit of both."

He then grew serious.

"But more importantly, I've come to some realizations."

"What realizations?" Franca asked, puzzled.

Lumian nodded. "I was going to remind you anyway. You've been a Demoness for a long time. Haven't you noticed the inherent nature of this pathway?"

Franca fell silent.

Lumian continued in a low voice. "Like the Hunter pathway, it inevitably brings catastrophe and calamity. We are destined to belong to darkness and represent destruction.

"Think about it. What's the general perception of Hunters and Demonesses among Beyonders? Danger. Hunters are seen as bloody dangers, and Demonesses as evil dangers. We can't escape this impression, nor can we deny it.

"The subsequent potion digestion and advancement rituals will push us deeper into darkness unless you choose to stop advancing and remain where you are. Otherwise, we'll face challenges that test our very souls.

"You could consider switching paths, but your only option would be the Hunter pathway."

Seeing Franca's expression change but still remaining silent, Lumian suddenly laughed.

"What I'm trying to say is, give up on purity; don't shy away from darkness and evil. We need to confront these things. Only then can we find ways to avoid evil and discover the light within the darkness. We will all be tainted by darkness.

"We are stained black; we must strive not to fall, not to betray our inner principles."

Franca was silent for a while before sighing deeply.

"Affliction and Despair give me bad premonitions. But walking in darkness, seeking light within it-won't we be corrupted bit by bit and eventually fall completely?"

Lumian chuckled. "Do we have any other choice? We can only keep fighting our own darkness and evil until we die."

Franca tersely acknowledged his words and expressed her thoughts, "Actually, all Beyonders are like this. The paths of gods are inherently dangerous and inevitably lead to madness. Hunters and Demonesses just make it more obvious and direct."

She couldn't imagine the struggles and pain if she had chosen the Devil pathway.

When the negative effects of Jenna's Decency brooch wore off, Anthony returned and briefed Lumian and the others on the current situation in Banamo Port.

The Newins had indeed fled, and Great Shark Jörg and his men hadn't boarded and were now missing.

In the following two days, Lumian and his team disguised themselves and searched Banamo Port for the first mate, second mate, and boatswain of the Newins. However, they found no significant leads, whether through social investigation or mystical tracking. Instead, they discovered some suspected associates of Admiral Deep Sea had also disappeared.

Lumian suspected Great Shark Jörg and his men had left Banamo Port through some secret means. Whether they returned to the Newins remained unknown.

...

In Trier, in an apartment in Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative.

Angoulême de Francois set up a ritual and summoned the messenger of the Seven of Cups.

He saw a rabbit-shaped Spirit Body emerge from the flames, dressed in an odd manner: a miniature silk top hat between its ears, tiny gold-rimmed glasses on its nose, a black trench coat clearly not meant for a rabbit, and holding an iron-black revolver sized for a large rabbit.

The messenger of Hidden Blade is quite cute, with a unique style... Who knew she would dress her messenger like this... Angoulême picked up the prewritten letter and handed it to the adorably dressed rabbit messenger.

The rabbit gave him a cold, sharp glance.

Um... Angoulême retracted his previous thoughts.

...

In one of the motel rooms rented by Lumian and company in Banamo Harbor, Franca read Angoulême's letter and said with some difficulty, "007 has a lead on the Mirror People and wants us to follow up, but we still haven't found Great Shark Jörg."

She was more interested in the secrets of the elves than the Mirror People.

Lumian leaned back, relaxed, and said, "The worst-case scenario is that Great Shark Jörg and his men have already returned to the Newins through secret means. We won't get any results staying here.

"So, let's leave. Once the alert is lifted, those people might come out.

Meanwhile, we can make long-term plans to keep an eye on Banamo Port. Maybe the Newins will return for supplies."

"Agreed," Franca accepted reality.

At that moment, Jenna noticed a problem: Rabbit Chasel was still in the room.

She hadn't paid it for delivering the message.

Chapter 789: At the Stake

789 At the Stake

Jenna observed Rabbit Chasel, who increasingly resembled Gehrman Sparrow, and carefully asked, "What do you need this time?"

One of the later volumes of The Great Adventurer? Or something else?

Luckily, few people knew about her messenger, and Rabbit Chasel didn't deliver messages frequently. Otherwise, Jenna would have to consider providing different knowledge.

Rabbit Chasel lowered its paw holding the revolver and said in a thoughtful tone, "Get me a pair of boxing gloves that a rabbit can wear."

What kind of request is that? Lumian said with a chuckle, "I don't remember Gehrman Sparrow ever wearing boxing gloves."

This imitation doesn't quite fit the persona!

"True, but Gehrman Sparrow has Blazing Danitz. I need my own Danitz. I want to develop one in our community," Rabbit Chasel explained earnestly. "Danitz uses boxing gloves."

For a moment, Franca, Jenna, and Lumian didn't know how to respond.

After several seconds, Jenna nodded and said, "I'll have a pair custom-made for you. Mm, normal Rabbit of Knowledge size, not your size?"

"That's right." Rabbit Chasel raised its right hand, blew on the small revolver's muzzle, satisfied.

But... this gesture isn't fitting for the current scene... Franca noticed that Rabbit Chasel was still an immature Rabbit of Knowledge, mimicking and repeating much without truly mastering it.

...

In the darkness of Banamo Port, only a few street lamps with candles flickered. Pirates gathered in bars, drinking heavily or going upstairs with women, enjoying pleasures unavailable at sea.

With the Newins gone and the unknown adventurer disappeared, the pirates gradually put the incident behind them. After all, everyone felt embarrassed; no one would ridicule another.

As pirates, they knew they might die in a storm, during a robbery, or in a mutiny on their next voyage. Dwelling on past problems was meaningless; indulging in the present was the only option.

Of course, they also talked about the unknown adventurer's strength and what had happened inside the Newins, wondering why Admiral Deep Sea fled in such a hurry.

"I think that adventurer was waiting for Admiral Deep Sea!"

"Does he want to recreate Gehrman Sparrow's great feats?"

"Pui! Son of a bitch. What great feats? We're pirates!"

"He succeeded but didn't completely succeed? He defeated Admiral Deep Sea but let him escape?"

"Is he close to the power of the Kings?"

"What's happening on the sea? Every so often, a powerful adventurer appears! There was that Louis Berry before, too."

"..."

Disguised as a non-pirate, Mason mingled in several bars, listening to the pirates discuss recent events, hoping they'd start a fight.

On his way to the next bar, Mason turned into a quieter alley and saw a figure standing ahead, seemingly waiting for him.

The figure had black hair and blue eyes, with sharp features and a handsome face. It was the same unknown adventurer who had challenged all the pirates in Banamo Port and forced Admiral Deep Sea to flee.

Mason suddenly heard his heart pounding and blurted out, "I'm not a pirate!"

Lumian strolled forward and smiled. "I have a task for you."

Hearing this, Mason relaxed a bit and carefully said, "What can I do for you? I'm not sure if my abilities can meet your needs."

He feared that while completing the task might be easy, the aftermath could be problematic-pirates might hack him to pieces once the adventurer left.

Lumian said bluntly, "It's a simple and secret task. Keep an eye on Banamo Port. As soon as the Newins returns or you spot Great Shark Jörg and his men, summon my messenger immediately."

Hearing "messenger," Mason was suddenly struck by a thought.

He remembered his last task: summoning a terrifying messenger through a ritual!

Unable to control his expression, Mason asked in slight terror, "Are you Lumian Lee, sir?"

The master of that terrifying messenger?

"Perceptive," Lumian replied, not too sincerely.

Mason connected the recent events in his mind: Was the reaI purpose of that task to bring Lumian Lee to Banamo Port?

And Lumian Lee's goal was to deal with Admiral Deep Sea, Howl Constantine, for the Lost Newins?

My spiritual intuition was partly correct; the ritual indeed brought something bad to Banamo Port, though it didn't turn into a catastrophe...

Lumian continued, "The payment is 5000 verl d'or."

The task is indeed simple, and I likely wouldn't be discovered by the pirates. The reward is generous... If I refused, knowing the task details might bring trouble... After weighing it for over ten seconds, Mason said, "No problem, I think I can handle this task."

Lumian nodded slightly, paid a 1000-verl d'or deposit, and turned to leave the quiet alley.

Watching Lumian's figure disappear into the darkness, Mason silently repeated his name, "Lumian Lee, Lumian Lee..."

Mason finally remembered where he had heard the name: on a wanted poster aboard a ship!

The poster described Lumian Lee as a survivor of a sacrificial ritual to an evil god that destroyed a village, severely corrupted by the evil god.

...

In Trier, in the prison district, at the Rois Comprehensive Execution Ground.

Returning to Trier for two days, Franca, feeling ready for the Demoness of Affliction advancement ritual, decided to proceed.

007's lead on the Mirror People came from an ore scholar of the Trier Cave Association. The Purifiers had planned to investigate all the association's ore scholars, but one had mysteriously disappeared before they could visit. Recently, someone had seen her in Underground Trier, suspected to be Palia, a Mirror Person.

Franca looked at the stake and sighed sincerely, "When I became a witch, I wondered if I'd end up burned at the stake. Who knew, I have to tie myself up here."

As she spoke, she took out the brown-red wooden suitcase given by Demoness of Black Clarice from the Traveler's Bag and unlocked the metal clasp.

Next, she retrieved a red wine glass, crushed the crystalline ice containing potion ingredients, and poured in Flower-Faced Bat blood and human blood from a seriously ill person. Both were dark red, and when combined, they turned almost black.

She then added the Flower-Faced Bat's head, a Two-Tailed Black Snake's gallbladder and tail tip, and ten drops of Enfinitas Eucalyptus essential oil.

As the ingredients were added, the dark red blood in the glass turned pitch black, with occasional nauseating green bubbles.

"It's like a cup of untreated sewage," Lumian commented honestly.

"Dammit! Shut up!" Franca grew more disgusted as she looked at the Demoness of Affliction potion.

She handed the potion to Lumian and lightly jumped onto the stake, tying herself up with Jenna's help.

During this, Franca muttered, "Damn, this feels so weird..."

She adjusted her mindset for several seconds and nodded to Lumian, "I'm ready."

Lumian handed the potion to Jenna and extended his right palm.

A ball of crimson-white flames flew out, landing on Franca, who immediately felt pain. Her body instinctively wanted to dodge and contract, but the ropes held her firmly.

Jenna quickly jumped to her side, one hand holding the ropes and the other bringing the potion to her mouth.

Franca forced herself to gulp down the pathogen-like dark-green potion.

Whether from the flames or the potion, her head quickly grew hot, and her mind became fuzzy from the heat.

She involuntarily recalled past pleasures, including her own experiences and the feedback from her partners.

At that moment, Franca was both the giver and receiver of pleasure, drowning in it from body to soul, almost dissolving like spring water.

Her thoughts drifted, her will sank, and her self was lost in various intense pleasures.

However, the pain accompanying those pleasures kept her slightly conscious. It was the mental resistance and spiritual conflict with Gardner Martin, the emotional gap with Jenna, as if they could never truly unite body and soul...

The extreme pain from the burning flames on her body was like invisible threads pulling her self and consciousness, making her sway like a kite in a storm, not completely out of control.

Swaying, Franca instinctively cursed in her mind:

Damn, it hurts so much!

This ritual is trying to kill me, isn't it?

Cough, cough, hot smoke in my throat and lungs, so uncomfortable. Am I dying...

Dammit, I can say I smell good now, like food, the scent of roasted meat...

Lumian, Jenna, and Anthony stood before the stake, watching Franca's body gradually turn black and her expression twist beyond beauty.

Even Lugano, ready to provide medical help, felt a bit heated, their minds wandering with certain thoughts and urges.

Facing this horrifying scene, they had inappropriate desires.

Fortunately, it wasn't severe and was bearable.

After several more seconds, the crimson flames on Franca's body turned pitch black, then into crystalline ice shards, falling off in pieces.

The shards took the charred skin with them, revealing Franca's new, tender, and glistening skin underneath.

Even with his Ascetic's endurance, Lumian instinctively looked away.

Chapter 790: Charm

790 Charm

Not only did Lumian avoid looking at Franca, but Jenna and Anthony also instinctively turned their heads, as if evading a temptation that could pierce their hearts.

"Dammit, my clothes almost got burned up!

"Just one step away from running around naked!

"Thankfully, thankfully..."

Franca's cursing reached Lumian and the others' ears, bringing a sense of familiarity and dispelling the earlier temptations.

Franca then disappeared from sight, took out a set of clothes from the Traveler's Bag, and changed in a nearby secluded corner.

She then deactivated her invisibility, tied up her ponytail, and walked back to Lumian and the others.

"The beautifying effect is really impressive..." Franca took out a mirror, examined herself, and poked her cheek as if testing her skin's elasticity and smoothness.

Lumian chuckled and said, "Is that the only change the Affliction potion brought?"

Franca was about to speak when she suddenly remembered something and glanced at Lugano.

Lugano immediately said, "I need to go back and prepare dinner for Ludwig."

"Okay." Lumian nodded.

After Lugano left, Franca felt the changes in her body and spoke slowly, "Enhancing appearance, figure, and charm is just one aspect, and it's the least important. No, it's not unimportant, but it has little to do with becoming stronger. No, I remember someone saying beauty is part of a woman's power, just like handsomeness is part of a man's. Anyway, you get the idea. The other changes include Charm becoming an active ability instead of a passive state."

As a Beyonder in the Demoness pathway, Jenna easily understood Franca's meaning.

"Before, you showcased your appearance, figure, and aura, naturally enchanting anyone who saw you. Now, a glance, a gesture, a word can completely charm someone?"

"Yes," Franca said with a smile, "But combined with showcasing my appearance, figure, and aura, the active Charm ability will be more effective. Charmed enemies will hesitate to harm us, unable to use their full strength. Some might even give up resisting just to get closer to us.

In daily interactions, if Charm is used repeatedly on someone, they will truly fall in love with us over time."

Franca glanced at Lumian, her eyes twinkling.

She wanted to test the effect of Charm and see how it compared to the endurance of an Ascetic.

Lumian suddenly felt Franca's lake-blue eyes deepen, as if hiding countless words, and her fair, smooth skin seemed delicate enough to break with a touch.

An indescribable feeling surged within Lumian, causing him to curse aloud, "Dammit! Stop experimenting with your abilities here!"

Charm works well if it can make an Ascetic curse... Franca thought to herself, then said seriously, "It's just that I've just advanced, and the potion's power is leaking out, making it hard to control."

"Do you think I'll believe that?" Lumian retorted, realizing he felt unusually agitated.

For a Provoker, staying calm while provoking others was crucial.

Franca withdrew her gaze and continued explaining the Affliction potion's abilities, "The core ability is Plague. It can create various pathogens within a 30-meter range. Once I get used to the Affliction potion and truly master its power, this range can expand beyond 40 meters and eventually to 50 meters as the potion is digested.

"A Demoness of Affliction can create multiple pathogens, accelerating their infection and the onset of diseases. The initial ten seconds are the incubation period, followed by mild symptoms like allergies, fever, cough, and sneezing. The symptoms quickly worsen, leading to severe illnesses like pneumonia. In two to three minutes, the disease will become critical, potentially causing sudden death or incapacitation."

Done with explaining Plague, Franca excitedly envisioned, "This pairs well with an Assassin.

"Stealthily get within a few dozen meters of the target, silently spread pathogens to cover the area. When the target shows mild symptoms and realizes something is wrong, strike as their strength decreases, their state affected, and many abilities disrupted. If the first strike fails, reposition and keep trying, dragging the target into severe illness.

"Plague should be something a Guardian's abilities can't defend against.

Their invisible barriers don't seem to block air. The people they protect can still breathe normally. I'm not sure if the barriers have a sterilizing function..."

"Heh heh, next time I face Admiral Deep Sea, I won't worry about his octopus mask. It seems to only protect the spirit and mind, maybe also making the body tougher and more resilient."

"It's indeed well-suited for assassination and prolonged fights," Lumian evaluated from a Hunter's perspective.

He pondered and asked, "Does the infection and onset time of Plague vary based on the target's constitution? Can the pathogens you create be burned by a Hunter's flames?"

He was recalling his battle with a bestowed from the Order of All Extinction.

"Of course, there's a difference. Undead creatures won't be infected unless I become a Demoness of Despair," Franca said introspectively. "I'm not sure if the pathogens can be burned by a Hunter's flames. Want to test it?"

"Sure." Lumian also wanted to confirm.

This could be useful if he ever faced a Demoness of Affliction.

Jenna and Anthony immediately distanced themselves, moving to the edge of the Rois Comprehensive Execution Ground.

In the early winter night, Lumian's body suddenly ignited with brilliant white flames, spreading around and burning the air within a seven-to-eight-meter radius.

Franca stood over ten meters away, her lake-blue eyes deepening.

As the flames crackled, time passed, and Lumian gradually felt a discomfort in his throat, as if swallowing a foreign object, making him want to cough it out. His nose also felt sore and itchy.

Franca stopped the experiment and concluded, "Hunter's flames can indeed kill many pathogens created by a Demoness of Affliction, reducing the disease's impact. It took me about a minute to give you mild symptoms."

Lumian sneezed, coughed twice, and the white flames quickly dissipated.

When Jenna and Anthony returned, Franca continued, "A Demoness's webs have also been significantly enhanced. As a Demoness of Pleasure, I could only roughly control them to entangle and bind targets. Now, they're like extensions of my arms, capable of more precise actions, like..."

Franca suddenly smiled.

"Tickling you!"

As she spoke, Lumian and Jenna felt something soft and invisible tickling their waists, causing a tingling sensation.

"Immature, haven't you grown up?" Lumian mocked, then added, "But it's useful in combat."

Franca withdrew the invisible webs, untied her ponytail, and let her hair fall.

Her flaxen-colored hair didn't drop but floated, each strand distinct and lively.

"Now, my hair is also a weapon," Franca proudly announced, "It can pierce skin, inject black flames, and cause stiffness in the contacted area, effective in close combat."

She let her hair down, tied it again, and took out a mirror.

"My curses are also stronger and more targeted. Before, I had to reflect the target's full image in a mirror to curse them with black flames. Now, I can reflect just a part of the body, affecting the corresponding area.

"My other abilities have also been enhanced, including black magic and mirror magic."

Jenna listened quietly and sincerely remarked, "Compared to a Demoness of Pleasure, this is a significant improvement."

"After all, it's Sequence 5," Franca said, feeling extremely pleased.

Seeing this, Lumian nodded slightly. "I won't be participating in the Mirror People investigation for now. I plan to leave for Lenburg tomorrow."

To find the City of Exiles, Morora!

He had been studying the Lenburg language and discovered it was essentially the same as the Feynapotter Kingdom's Highlander, with some dialectal differences-Lenburg split from Feynapotter after the Battle of the Violated Oath in the Fifth Epoch.

So, having learned Highlander, Lumian quickly mastered the Lenburg language in a few days.

"So soon? Well, you've digested the Reaper potion and need to consider advancing to demigod." Franca suddenly felt wistful.

Lumian glanced outside the Rois Comprehensive Execution Ground and said to Franca, Jenna, and Anthony, "Take care of Ludwig for me and keep an eye on Lugano."

Based on the information from 0-01 and Madam Magician's hints, it was best for Lumian to go to Morora alone.

Initially, he considered taking Ludwig, his godson, but given his angelic nature and divinity, he might cause unnecessary changes in Morora. So, he abandoned the idea.

In comparison, Termiboros, sealed by Mr. Fool, could be temporarily ignored. Theoretically, He wouldn't trigger 0-01.

"Okay," Franca and the others responded to Lumian.

Chapter 791: Capture

791 Capture

After dinner, Franca and Jenna returned to 9 Rue Orosai's Apartment 702.

"Finally, it worked." Franca raised her hands and stretched lazily. "Next, should we find Palia the Mirror Person first, report to the Demoness of Black, or tell her tomorrow morning that I've become a Demoness of Affliction? She said that once I advanced to Affliction, she would share some secrets of the Demoness Sect with me."

Franca was curious but also a bit fearful about knowing these secrets.

Additionally, she felt that her progress in digesting the Pleasure potion was much faster than expected, which might arouse the Demoness of Pleasure's suspicion. She didn't want to report anything related to Admiral Deep Sea yet.

This involved the secret of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society's transmigration!

So far, Franca and Lumian had only mentioned Admiral Deep Sea's suspected connection to elves to their respective Arcana cards and had yet to receive any response.

Jenna thought for a moment and then said, "Even if you don't go to the Demoness of Black tomorrow, you should do it soon. The sooner we understand the Demoness Sect's secrets, the better we can plan our actions and avoid potential pitfalls."

Understanding Franca's concerns, she added with a smile, "Just tell the Demoness of Black that Lumian has become a Reaper and he helped you digest the Pleasure potion."

"Uh..." Franca was taken aback. "That's true, but the way you put it doesn't feel right..."

"That's exactly the kind of misunderstanding we need," Jenna replied with a soft smile.

She glanced out at the night sky and said, "Finding Palia should be enough with just you and Anthony. I want to visit Julien in Port LeSeur in the next few days. We haven't seen each other for almost two months, and I want to gauge his intentions, see if he really plans to return to Trier."

"Sure." Franca understood Jenna's concerns.

Jenna nodded. "I'll go home tonight, pack some things for him, and try to leave tomorrow morning. The sooner I go, the sooner I can come back."

There were plenty of steam locomotives and riverboats heading to Port LeSeur, so she didn't worry about not getting a ticket on the spot.

After a brief conversation, Jenna packed her luggage, took her suitcase, and left the apartment.

She hadn't followed Julien's instructions to cancel the lease on the Rue Pasteur apartment while he was away for his exchange program in Port LeSeur, saving money. She still occasionally stayed there, as if she had never left.

Watching Jenna leave, Franca felt a pang of disappointment and muttered, "I was hoping we could celebrate tonight..."

She walked slowly back to her bedroom and saw that some of Jenna's clothes and belongings had been taken away.

As she looked at the now tidier and cleaner bedroom, Franca seemed to understand something.

She fell silent.

She felt that the Affliction potion had been somewhat digested.

...

Chug, chug, chug.

A cream-colored steam train with brass patterns sped along the tracks, heading towards the capital of Lenburg, Azshara, nestled among the mountains.

Lumian sat in a second-class carriage, looking around leisurely.

Without coordinates for Azshara and unwilling to go through the messenger hassle again, he chose to teleport back to the Riston Province, take a steam train to the border, and then smuggle himself across the mountains.

With pre-exchanged Lenburg currency, knowledge of black market traders, and intermediaries, Lumian easily obtained new identification and bought a ticket to Azshara.

Lenburg was a small country, so he would reach his destination by the evening.

As Lumian observed, he noticed that Lenburg residents favored light-colored clothes and brass accessories, each carrying a book to read quietly during the journey. Even those who conversed did so in hushed tones.

At stops, passengers were eager to help elderly people or those dressed as scholars, showing heartfelt respect.

No wonder this is the land of the God of Knowledge and Wisdom, Lumian silently mused.

Lenburg was a nation of single faith without a royal family, where the Church of Knowledge exerted strong control and influence over the country.

Perhaps sensing his gaze, the young man next to him, holding a book, glanced at Lumian's "Lenburg Travel Guide" and asked with a low laugh, "Are you a foreigner?"

He spoke in Lenburg, then switched to Highlander, Loenese, Intisian, and Feysac.

Lumian was a bit surprised.

A typical Lenburg second-class passenger knew so many languages?

Moreover, it felt like the man was showing off.

"Yes, I'm from Intis, and I speak Lenburg," Lumian replied cooperatively.

"What's your name? It's impressive you know all the North Continent languages."

The young man adjusted his light-framed glasses and smiled. "My name is Sallent, and I'm just a small company employee.

"Actually, once you learn one language from the North Continent, the others are easy. If you start with ancient Feysac, it's even simpler. We Lenburgers begin learning ancient Feysac in our compulsory education."

Sallent's tone carried a hint of pride, almost looking down on other countries still plagued by illiteracy and people who didn't know foreign languages.

In theory, yes, otherwise, I wouldn't have mastered Highlander so quickly. My Dutanese is just barely passable... Lumian didn't mind Sallent's slight arrogance.

The Lenburgers he met this morning all had a similar attitude.

Keeping his voice low, Lumian said with a smile, "You're quite civilized, showing great respect for the elderly and scholars, and reading on the train instead of chatting or playing."

Sallent replied with restrained pride, "In Lenburg, knowledge is the most precious, and scholars have more knowledge. Elders, throughout their lives, accumulate a lot of experiential knowledge."

Sallent let out a self-deprecating laugh. "Reading is a habit from childhood and a necessity. You wouldn't know that our lives are filled with exams and evaluations-in school, in companies, and even in church, where we take theological tests during grand masses to show our piety and respect for the God of Knowledge."

Lumian suddenly felt this wasn't necessarily a good thing.

No wonder Ludwig is reluctant to return to the Church of Knowledge...

But Aurore would love it here. She wouldn't want to live here herself, but she'd certainly want to send me here to study...

Seeing the foreigner beside him fall silent, Sallent sighed and said, "That's why I didn't stay in Azshara after graduating. The pressure is overwhelming-qualification exams, annual competency reviews, monthly company evaluations, job training exams, and so on."

Lumian couldn't help but hiss internally.

So this is the daily life of Lenburgers, especially those in Azshara?

Ludwig's vague descriptions didn't prepare me for this. I thought only students had it hard...

Thank goodness Aurore took me in and not some Lenburger...

Talking about this made Sallent feel melancholic, prompting him to lower his head and return to his book.

Judging by the time, Lumian realized they were close to Azshara, so he started pondering the issue of the City of Exiles, Morora.

He hesitated and then asked Sallent, "Have you heard of a city called Morora?"

Sallent thought carefully and then replied, "No, neither in reality nor in any legends."

Lumian gave a noncommittal grunt and turned his gaze back to the quickly receding mountain scenery outside, as if their conversation was just casual small talk.

If Madam Magician couldn't find it, I probably can't either, unless I kidnap a demigod of the Church of Knowledge...

Since the Church of Knowledge placed parts of the Abscessed Hand in Morora, can I use the connection between the body parts to find the city?

The Church of Knowledge expects and allows me to go to Morora, perhaps even hoping for it. Will they give me a hint?

...

With these thoughts, Lumian grew more determined.

As dusk fell, the steam locomotive stopped at a platform paved with gray and white stone slabs.

Lumian, carrying a small suitcase, walked with Sallent through the station decorated with book sculptures and brass patterns.

The wind howled through the mountains, bringing cold but refreshing air.

As they approached the entrance of Azshara Steam Train Station, Lumian saw several clergy members from the Church of Knowledge in white robes trimmed with brass blocking the way, checking the documents of passengers.

"What's going on?" Lumian asked.

Sallent glanced over and casually replied, "Routine exit checks, done alternately by the Church and the government."

"I thought they might randomly stop people to test their knowledge," Lumian joked.

Sallent turned his head sharply, eyes filled with fear, as if to say: Are you a devil? Even the Church bishops wouldn't think of that!

Lumian shrugged and stepped forward to have his documents checked by the clergy.

The elder leading the group scrutinized Lumian, glanced at his documents, then signaled to the others.

Lumian was quickly surrounded by the clergy, all poised for action.

The elder stared at him and said sternly, "We've found a wanted criminal. Take him away!"

Uh... Lumian raised an eyebrow.

In a split second, he decided not to resist, extending his hands to let the clergy cuff him with silver handcuffs.

Chapter 792: Judgment

792 Judgment

Inside the slow-moving carriage, Lumian, handcuffed and shackled, stared at the window with iron bars welded and covered with thick cloth.

His belief in his own judgment grew stronger.

When the clergy from the Church of Knowledge accused him of being a wanted criminal, his first reaction wasn't to be on guard but to feel a wave of confusion.

He sensed that those performing the routine exit check were there specifically for him. But apart from Ludwig and the 0-01 incident, he had no interaction with the Church of Knowledge and hadn't harmed their interests.

Why are you Lenburgers so enthusiastic about catching an Intisian criminal? Did you even verify the details and the target's current abilities?

As thoughts raced through his mind, Lumian, noticing Sallent's surprised, fearful yet relieved gaze, thought of a possibility, Is this the hint from the Church of Knowledge?

No, this isn't just a hint. They're directly escorting me to the destination!

The City of Exiles, as the name suggests, is a place for exiling criminals.

When I'm arrested as a wanted criminal and sentenced to exile, I'll naturally be sent to Morora...

Isn't this method a bit too straightforward?

How did they know I was coming? Although I didn't disguise myself, I kept a low profile the entire way...

Are High-Sequence Beyonders of the Reader pathway adept at prophecy or divination?

Lumian glanced at his waist, looking at the Traveler's Bag that hadn't been confiscated. He couldn't help but silently grumble, They didn't confiscate a wanted criminal's belongings or take measures against potential dangerous criminals to restrict the use of Beyonder powers...

This performance is too unconvincing. Are they afraid I won't notice and might resist, causing losses?

Lumian silently took the Traveler's Bag from his belt and tucked it into the inner pocket of his thick jacket.

He didn't want to make things difficult for the clergy of the Church of Knowledge.

Their poor acting doesn't matter, but I can't be equally patronizing. What if other serious offenders, nearby Azshara citizens, or assisting police officers see the Traveler's Bag?

They'd think the clergy of the Church of Knowledge are unprofessional!

After driving for a while, the vehicle finally stopped.

Under the strict guard of several clergy members in white robes trimmed with brass, Lumian was escorted to a massive white tower.

Before he could take a good look at the tower's full appearance or even see its spire to confirm its grandeur, he was "pushed" through a side door, down a stone staircase, through a dim corridor lit by several gas wall lamps, and into a cell made of black iron.

Lumian glanced around and saw about eight people already inside, all handcuffed and shackled. Some were even chained through their collarbones, fixed in place.

Such restraints would be effective even against Beyonders, but they couldn't suppress those with more mystical abilities... If it were me, being locked up like this would render my Hunter combat skills useless, but it wouldn't stop me from starting fires, provoking, scouting for weaknesses, swapping fates, or teleporting to escape. Come on, can't you be more professional? This performance is too fake... Lumian thought as he watched the elder who had arrested him open the iron cell door.

The slightly aged clergyman stepped aside and said to Lumian, "Stay here and await your judgment."

Judgment? You haven't even done the judgment yet? Have you given up on pretending? Lumian cooperatively shuffled into the cell.

Clang! The iron cell door was closed and locked.

Lumian looked around, found a metal chair fixed to the ground, and sat down, casting his gaze at the serious offenders who were sizing him up.

A young man with glasses, sitting opposite him, raised his chin and said, "Didn't expect someone younger than me to arrive. Brother, what crime did you commit?"

Without answering, Lumian asked in return, "What about you?"

The young man with glasses smiled and said, "Murder. Most people here are murderers."

"How many did you kill?" a middle-aged man with a sturdy build and chains through his collarbones asked curiously.

"Seven or eight. I'm not sure if one of them died in the end," the young man replied with a reminiscent look. "Ending a human life with my own hands, feeling their pain, struggle, and despair, having their warm blood splatter on my face, is intoxicating. At that moment, I felt like their god, their lord."

A Serial Killer? Lumian silently watched, not interrupting the exchange among these serious offenders.

The young man sighed in the end.

"Unfortunately, Azshara has too many detectives. They eventually found me. What about you? How many did you kill, and why?" he asked the middle-aged man with chained collarbones.

The man replied indifferently, as if describing his breakfast, "Don't know. Too many. Do you keep count of how many slices of bread you eat in a month?"

"That's a quote from Emperor Roselle of Intis, right? I read it in a biography," the young man replied with a smile. "I remember eating 123 slices last month."

The middle-aged man was silent for a few seconds and then said, "I kill because they deserve to die. And the more deserving they are, the tastier their flesh."

"You eat the people you kill?" the young man's expression changed slightly.

"Depending on how much they deserve it, there are different cooking methods," the middle-aged man replied seriously.

"You two are both freaks," a sullen man in his thirties snorted.

The young man didn't get angry and asked curiously, "Why did you kill?"

"I didn't kill for the sake of killing. I just wanted to rape them. Blame them on resisting too much," the sullen man answered with a look of disdain, as if saying he was different from these perverts.

The young man laughed and pointed to a woman with disheveled brown hair and collarbone chains, "She also rapes and kills, but that's incidental.

Her main purpose is collecting reproductive organs."

Sitting quietly on a metal chair, slightly leaning forward, Lumian couldn't help but shake his head.

Does Lenburg have too many murderers? On average, each has a few body counts...

The gentlemanly young man looked at Lumian again.

"What about you? What major crime did you commit?"

Lumian thought seriously for a moment and said, "Murder, blasphemy, arson, kidnapping, extortion, intimidation, deceit, causing explosions, inducing miscarriages, worshiping evil gods, attacking government officials, blackmailing the orthodox Churches..."

The young man was stunned for a few seconds and then laughed.

"Brother, haven't you committed too many crimes?"

"Why else would I be here?" Lumian replied casually.

"True." The young man and the other serious offenders looked at Lumian with more respect.

"How many did you kill exactly?" the young man asked, as if he could immerse himself in the details.

Lumian shook his head and said in a low voice, "I didn't count and don't want to answer. It's not something to boast about. It's like a farmer culling wheat-I'm just doing my job. Would you be happy doing your daily job well?"

The young man was silent for a moment and then said, "What's your name? I'm Guei. Maybe we'll meet again in the land of Death."

Lumian simply replied, "Louis."

He didn't want to use his real name among these people or in the City of Exiles. In mysticism, knowing someone's real name could lead to curses.

The Inevitability pathway had similar contract abilities.

"What about you guys?" Guei asked the others.

"Lez," the middle-aged man replied.

The sullen man hesitated but answered, "Vijepan."

"Julie," said the woman with disheveled brown hair, her gaze lingering greedily on Guei and the others' crotches.

After the serious offenders introduced themselves, Lumian smiled and said, "I didn't expect Lenburg's security to be so bad, with so many serial killers. Right, I'm from Intis. I haven't been in Lenburg long."

Guei, the most talkative, raised his handcuffed hands, adjusted his glasses, and said with a smile, "Actually, it's not bad, even quite good, because Lenburg has the most and best detectives in the world.

"But there are still many people like us-twisted personalities combined with a lot of knowledge easily create a batch of formidable criminals.

"And criminals from other countries come here, wanting to challenge Lenburg's detectives."

Detectives are Sequence 7 of the Reader pathway, which belongs to the Church of Knowledge. There are indeed many here... Could there be real Criminals and Serial Killers among these criminals, using the Detectives for their own role-play? But then again, if the detectives catch the Devil pathway criminals, they can better and faster digest their own potions...

Lumian thought, nodding slightly and replying with a smile, "Am I one of them?

"You have a clear understanding of your own personality. The more knowledge you have, the more dangerous you become."

Guei coughed and said, "Yes, I now regret not having more knowledge."

As the serious offenders alternated between silence and idle chatter, time seemed to pass without notice.

Finally, the clergy from before escorted a woman to the cell.

She wore a shirt with white lace flowers at the collar, a beige coat with brass trim, a dark knee-length skirt, and brown boots. Her face was oval, her light blue eyes like spring water, her nose high and straight, and her brown hair simply tied back with a bun-a very beautiful woman.

Seeing her, Vijepan's eyes lit up.

"You have been judged, and I will announce the verdict." The beautiful woman said before turning and walking toward the end of the dim corridor. The other clergy opened the cell and escorted Lumian, Guei, and the others behind her.

They descended stone stairs, going deeper and deeper underground, until they reached a large, double brass door.

The beautiful woman with the oval face stopped and turned to face Lumian and the others, her expression serious.

"Your verdict is:

"Exile, never to return!"

"Exile to where?" Guei asked, both surprised and confused.

Not a death sentence?

The woman pointed to the brass double doors behind her.

"Exile beyond these doors."

As soon as she finished speaking, a chilling, indistinct sound came from behind the doors.

Chapter 793: Morora

793 Morora

Hearing the sounds from behind the door, the faces of all the serious offenders changed, except for Lumian.

Guei blurted out, "What's behind the door?"

Could exile actually mean being sent to some monster to be its food?

"Behind the door is a path leading to your place of exile," the beautiful woman with the oval face answered simply. "There are no monsters waiting to eat you, but it is indeed dangerous. I don't know the specifics, but there's definitely a chance for you to survive. It's much better than being hanged or shot."

Guei, Lez, and the others exchanged glances, then looked at the clergy in white robes trimmed with brass. They were tempted but eventually suppressed their urge.

They believed they were no match for the clergy of the Church of Knowledge, especially the beautiful woman who clearly held a higher status.

Guei glanced at Lumian and saw that the wanted criminal, who claimed to have committed various serious crimes, looked calm and unafraid.

"I will open the door in a moment. You will enter on your own. Anyone who stays behind will have an additional charge tagged on, and be sentenced to death on the spot," the beautiful woman said, raising her hands. In her light blue eyes, countless illusory lights seemed to float.

Dark, dim rain fell silently from a height of about four meters, drenching Lumian and the others.

Lumian immediately felt irritated, a wave of violent emotions surging within him.

It seemed like the blood of Omebella was stirring.

"What did you do to us?" Guei asked, unsure and alarmed.

The beautiful woman in the beige coat with brass trim explained in a teaching tone,

"This is a mystic technique called 'Harps' Rain of Sterility.' It renders you infertile but can be reversed with the corresponding mystic technique or by a professional doctor.

"We don't want babies born in the place of exile. They are innocent."

Rain of Sterility... No wonder Omebella's blood reacted so strongly... I wonder if this secret technique will affect me or if the special properties of Omebella's bloodline will neutralize it... If it works, would it prevent embryos from implanting if I were influenced by the Great Mother in the future? It probably depends on the rank of the influence... Lumian thought that the Rain of Sterility might not be a bad thing.

The other serious offenders didn't see it as a problem either. Some already had children, while others were too cold-blooded or twisted to think much about offspring.

The beautiful woman stepped back a few paces, faced the brass doors, and pressed her hands in the air.

The doors emitted a heavy, metallic creaking sound and slowly opened.

For some reason, Guei and the others felt an urge to go through the doors, stepping into the dim passage beyond.

They didn't notice that, except for the beautiful woman, the clergy of the Church of Knowledge had retreated to the edge of the corridor, standing on the steps when the doors opened.

Lumian felt the same urge, sensing something familiar yet unknown calling to him from deep within the passage.

He walked in the middle of the group, hearing the clang of the closing doors behind them.

The passage dimmed significantly, illuminated only by glowing gems embedded in the walls.

How extravagant... Lumian instinctively thought.

Guei glanced around and whispered, "Should we stay here and wait until there are fewer guards outside, then find a way to escape?"

"Do you think the exiled people before us didn't think of that?" Vijepan sneered. "And we're still shackled. How do we escape?"

Lumian watched coldly, noticing that Guei could somewhat resist the urge to flee while the other serious offenders were finding excuses to reject his suggestion.

After they argued for two or three minutes, Lumian casually asked, "Do we have any food? What if the guards only have a lapse every few days?"

Without waiting for Guei to answer, Lumian continued, "Actually, there is food. Each one of you is food."

He turned to Lez, the human chef, and asked with a smile, "How would you prepare us?"

"Suitable for stewing and pickling. You need the right spices to prevent the taste from turning sour," Lez replied, his face lighting up.

Guei fell silent for a few seconds, then, handcuffed and shackled, began to walk slowly down the passage. Lumian followed at the same pace.

They walked for what felt like seven or eight hours, though Lumian suspected his sense of time was distorted.

During this time, no one chose to stop. It seemed like they were heading not for a City of Exiles but a Land of Hope.

They frequently heard the indescribable terrifying sounds, prompting the human chef, Lez, to comment, "It's like we're walking down a monster's long esophagus, heading for its stomach. The sounds are its digestive movements."

Lumian agreed, while the others felt their hair stand on end.

Finally, they saw stone steps leading upwards.

This seemed to signify that the end was near.

Climbing the steps and pushing open a heavy wooden door, Lumian and the others were momentarily blinded by the bright sunlight, causing them to instinctively close their eyes. The indescribable, chilling sounds ceased.

Almost simultaneously, a gentle voice said, "Welcome to the City of Exiles, Morora."

Just as I thought... Lumian sighed silently, opened his eyes, and looked around.

They were in a grand prayer hall of a cathedral. Sunlight streamed through stained glass windows, creating a sacred and radiant scene.

The walls without windows were adorned with murals depicting mythical stories, while below stood brass bookshelves filled with various books and scrolls.

It felt more like a library than a church.

The speaker was an old man in a white robe trimmed with brass. He was in his sixties or seventies, with graying hair, gentle and clear amber eyes, and no trace of cloudiness. He held a thick book in his left hand, a standard scholar-clergyman of the Church of Knowledge.

Yet Lumian felt he wasn't a real person, suspecting he was a specially crafted puppet.

"Morora? This place is called Morora?" Guei asked curiously, opening his eyes.

The old man nodded. "I am Heraberg, responsible for all theological affairs in Morora."

As he spoke, he extended his right hand, pointing at Lumian and the others.

The shackles, handcuffs, and chains through their collarbones softened instantly, as if made of mud.

With a clatter, they fell from the bodies of the serious offenders, hitting the gray and white stone floor with metallic thuds.

The serious offenders' hearts sank, abandoning any bad thoughts.

Heraberg handed out the thick book and a brass-cased pen.

"Register your names. This signifies your official status as residents of Morora."

Lumian complied, taking the book and writing "Louis."

Next was Guei. He took the book and pen and tentatively asked Heraberg, "How do you know we're writing our real names?"

Heraberg replied calmly, "The past is not important. In Morora, the present and the future matter."

Guei pondered for a while, unsure of the clergyman, Heraberg's meaning.

Considering that the Church of Knowledge could exchange information via telegram, he didn't use a fake name but wrote his real name honestly.

After all the serious offenders finished registering, Heraberg looked at them and said, "You must follow the rules here. Most laws are the same as in other cities in Lenburg, but dueling is legal if both parties agree. Non-violent protests are also allowed. We have a dedicated team to maintain order in Morora."

The honest-looking, middle-aged Lez asked, "Can we join the enforcement team?"

"The enforcement team is made up entirely of experimental personnel," Heraberg replied warmly.

Guei asked, "How do we become experimental personnel?"

Vijepan asked grimly, "What happens if we break the law here? Jail time or death penalty?"

Heraberg smiled.

"The worst punishment for breaking the law here is becoming an experimental personnel."

"Wouldn't that make us enforcers?" Guei was stunned.

Isn't that encouraging us to break the law?

Lumian recalled the term "experimental personnel" frequently appearing in the 0-01 sealed information.

Just from that, he knew becoming experimental personnel was definitely not a good thing.

Heraberg's expression remained unchanged.

"Yes, but remember, besides the church's overseers, at least two experimental personnel are discarded daily."

Discarded... Guei and the others found this term strangely terrifying.

"How many people are in Morora now?" Lumian asked a peculiar question.

Heraberg replied with a smile, "Nearly 200,000. The city has farms, mines, and factories around it, all part of Morora."

"Nearly 200,000? Does Lenburg have that many serious offenders?"

Lumian was slightly surprised.

Heraberg professionally explained, "It's accumulated over generations, and we also spend money to import serious offenders from abroad."

Import... makes it sound like importing talent... Lumian pondered for a few seconds, not in a hurry to "commit a crime," planning to apply to become experimental personnel, hoping to get close to the sealed 0-01.

He bade farewell to Heraberg and headed for the exit of the library-like cathedral, intending to first find the two parts of the Abscessed Hand.

Chapter 794: The Price of Meddling

794 The Price of Meddling

Behind Lumian, Vijepan continued questioning Heraberg, the clergy of the Church of Knowledge, "In a legal duel, can I do anything to the other party without facing punishment?"

"Yes," Heraberg confirmed.

Vijepan's eyes lit up, feeling as if he had found paradise.

He excitedly swallowed.

Gulp... He heard a similar sound next to him.

He turned his head and saw that the sound came from a woman with long brown hair, Julie.

The "collector" was also excited, while the human chef, Lez, licked his lips.

He was already hungry.

Lumian didn't bother watching the other offenders' performances. He left the library-like cathedral and surveyed the surroundings.

The buildings in this area were ancient, reminiscent of early Fifth Epoch styles with their heavy columns and arches, giving a sense of grandeur and simplicity.

Behind the cathedral was a seemingly endless graveyard. Tombstones stood amidst the trees, with many raised graves dotting the landscape.

This reminded Lumian of a line from the 0-01 sealed information: "Place it in an underground mausoleum with a large number of soldier mannequins. Construct a cemetery with more than a million corpses above it..."

Is the underground mausoleum sealing 0-01 right below? Just as Lumian withdrew his gaze, the previously sunny sky darkened. Thick clouds gathered, and the sound of thunder rumbled.

The weather changes so quickly... No wonder the information mentioned Morora frequently experiencing extreme weather... Lumian sighed as he looked into the distance, seeing mountain ranges resembling giant beasts lying at the horizon, blocking anyone who might want to leave secretly.

Of course, this was just a metaphor, as the residents of Morora never thought of leaving the city.

Lumian felt a slight reluctance too.

The underground was calling to him.

"We need to find a place to settle down quickly, or we'll get soaked," Guei's voice came from beside Lumian.

He had also left the cathedral, and as a local of Azshara, his words were quite formal.

"Yeah," Lumian replied with a smile as he walked into the large square in front of the cathedral.

Guei followed, glancing back and saying in surprise, "There's such a large graveyard here?"

"A graveyard with over a million, even tens of millions of corpses," Lumian replied casually.

Guei nodded thoughtfully.

"History books record a large-scale grave relocation in the early Fifth Epoch in the Lenburg region to address the aftermath of the Pale Disaster. Was it moved here?"

"Perhaps," Lumian said as they crossed the square. He quietly activated the black mark representing the Abscessed Hand, but did not actually use it.

He was sensing the approximate location of the other two parts of the Abscessed Hand.

To his surprise, he sensed more than two parts. Different directions within the City of Exiles had subtle responses.

Hand Bro's body parts got dismembered? Lumian silently muttered.

He chose the direction with the strongest response.

After walking about a street's length, he heard the clashing of metal and saw two men fiercely fighting with sharp swords as a crowd watched.

Duels with fatalities happen daily... Lumian reviewed the 0-01 sealed information. He didn't hurry, deciding to watch for a while.

Guei did the same, seemingly assessing the strength of Morora's residents.

The fight lasted two or three minutes, ending with a man in a black jacket being slashed across the chest and stomach, his intestines spilling out as he convulsed and died.

A team of men and women in black robes, their expressions indifferent, appeared, silently dragging the stripped corpse away and cleaning the blood from the street, like machines following a set procedure.

The onlookers dispersed. A small man in a brown-green cap, smiling kindly, walked past Lumian and Guei, glancing at them.

"New here?" the small man asked warmly.

"How can you tell?" Guei asked curiously.

The small man laughed.

"You still have that new look, not yet fully integrated into Morora!"

His voice suddenly turned sharp, as if possessed by something unknown.

Lumian watched the small man in silence, observing his changes.

The small man waved.

"Haha, I'm Worms. Let's have a drink sometime."

As Worms walked down another street, Guei suddenly spoke to Lumian, "Don't you feel like you're missing something?"

"I noticed," Lumian replied nonchalantly. "He's quick."

He had only noticed his Traveler's Bag was about to be taken when Worms withdrew his hand.

He must be a real Beyonder, a true Marauder. That sudden state change was likely a performance to distract attention.

"Why didn't you expose him if you noticed? Afraid of retaliation?" Guei didn't understand Lumian's reaction.

"I wanted to see what he would do," Lumian replied with a smile, hands in his pockets, slowly following the route Worms had taken.

Guei watched his back for a while, then decided to find a place to stay first.

...

Once out of Lumian and Guei's sight, Worms quickened his pace, darting through several alleys in a circuitous route.

After confirming he had shaken off any potential pursuers, he stopped in a secluded alley and took out a dark black coin pouch from inside his clothes.

It was Lumian's Traveler's Bag.

"Haha, these new fools are so careless. Let's see what's inside..." Worms reached into the Traveler's Bag.

His expression changed slightly, filled with intense surprise.

He could "see" the pouch's value, sensing many items with spirituality inside, but he hadn't expected it to be a rare spatial item, holding what felt like a small room.

What a pleasant surprise... Worms pulled out one of the items.

What greeted his eyes was a half-decomposed, dark blue swollen corpse, dripping yellowish-red pus.

Smack!

Worms recoiled, letting the half-corpse fall to the ground.

Wh- His face turned horrified.

Who carries a half-decomposed corpse around?

And a highly decayed corpse at that!

Even in Morora, filled with countless murderers, this is the most twisted thing!

No wonder he was exiled here!

Steadying himself, Worms reached into the Traveler's Bag again, pulling out a piece of smooth, white leather.

He couldn't take his eyes off it, as if staring at the skin of a dream lover.

He quickly noticed some black words on the leather that he didn't recognize.

Seems to be words that can trigger Beyonder powers. This leather must be very valuable. I should copy it and find someone to decipher it without arousing suspicion, Worms thought in delight, caressing the leather, unwilling to let go.

Suddenly, he felt his throat itch.

Cough, cough, cough!

He started coughing, more and more violently.

Within seconds, he coughed so hard it felt like his heart would tear apart.

Pfft!

Worms spat out a mouthful of blood.

This isn't right! How did I suddenly get so sick? Worms, vaguely understanding, threw the leather to the ground.

But his coughing continued, even more violently.

While coughing, he thought of a way to save himself: That guy put such dangerous leather in his pocket, he must have prepared a cure...

Yes, there must be one!

Worms reached into the Traveler's Bag again.

He first pulled out a gray-white lightning-shaped brooch.

A thick, silvery-white lightning bolt suddenly descended from the stacked clouds, striking him.

Boom!

The thunder echoed, and Worms fell, his body charred and twitching.

Already gravely ill, the lightning strike left him near death.

How... how could I suddenly be struck... by lightning... I, I... Worms's vision darkened, his confusion and regret lingering as he closed his eyes.

He soon stopped breathing.

About ten seconds later, Lumian turned into the alley, walked to Worms, looked down at his body, and shook his head with a smile.

"Rummaging through others' belongings is very dangerous."

After a pause, Lumian regrettably sighed.

"I wanted to follow you and get in touch with Morora's Beyonders. You let me down.

"And you didn't even get to the more dangerous items."

As he spoke, Lumian picked up the Traveler's Bag, placing the items back inside in their compressed form: the Fury of the Sea brooch, the Demoness of Despair human leather, and the half-corpse of the Abscessed Hand.

"I guess being a generous soul is all you can do," Lumian muttered, extracting 537 sassen gold from Worms.

That was about 2863 verl d'or.

Pocketing the generous soul's gift, Lumian waited for Worms's Beyonder characteristics to manifest.

About two minutes later, a team of black-robed enforcers entered the alley. The leader looked at Lumian expressionlessly and said, "Did you kill him?"

"No, he was struck by lightning. Maybe he did too many bad things," Lumian replied with a smile, explaining earnestly. "He was a thief and stole my stuff, so I chased him here."

The enforcers stared at Lumian as if verifying his truthfulness.

After a moment, the leader nodded. "You may leave."

Lumian didn't move, smiling as he said, "His belongings should be mine, right?"

Chapter 795: "Old Friend"

795 "Old Friend"

The leader of the enforcers was around forty, clean-shaven, with dark brown eyes.

He responded to Lumian's question without any expression, "There's no such rule."

He meant there was no rule stating that all items on a thief's body should go to the victim.

Lumian smiled and asked, "But there's also no law specifically prohibiting it, right?"

"Right." The leader of the enforcers nodded slowly.

Lumian's smile broadened. "Coming to Morora means cutting all ties with the past, right?"

This was inferred from what the clergyman Heraberg had said in the cathedral.

"Yes." The enforcer did not deny it.

Lumian probed further, "And this thief doesn't have any other heirs in Morora, does he?"

Before being sent to Morora, serious criminals were sterilized. Unless they were part of a criminal family or found a partner with similar criminal interests here, no one in Morora had legal heirs.

The enforcer didn't answer Lumian immediately. He pulled a thick book from under his black robe and started searching for the relevant records.

"Do you know this thief's name?" Lumian asked thoughtfully.

The enforcer nodded. "His name is Worms."

Soon, the records were found. The enforcer read in a flat voice, "His parents and siblings are not in Morora, and he hasn't married here, at least not officially registered."

"So, according to the laws from where I come from, a thief's possessions go to the person who caught them if there are no other heirs or claimants," Lumian began to explain, "Just like in a legal duel, the victor can take the spoils."

The enforcer stared at Lumian for a few seconds before saying, "Okay."

He and his team stood patiently as Worms's Beyonder characteristics manifested, merging with one of his fingers, which then broke off, turning semi-transparent black.

Lumian put away the Beyonder characteristics but didn't leave immediately. Instead, he stayed, watching as the enforcers dragged away the body and cleaned the blood and scorch marks from the alley.

The clouds above thickened, and lightning and thunder grew more frequent.

Finally, the alley was clean and quiet, with only Lumian remaining.

Lumian nodded thoughtfully, murmuring to himself, The enforcers seem to remember the appearance and names of every Morora resident...

After becoming enforcers, they are still human but not quite human anymore...

He felt that the so-called enforcers, who were actually experimental personnel, acted like puppets following set procedures, lacking self-awareness and deep thinking.

He had deliberately asked if Worms's belongings were his, not out of greed for the Beyonder characteristics, although that played a small part, as Beyonder characteristics were valuable. He had long figured that Worms wasn't a Sequence 7 Marauder, as a Sequence 7 called Cryptologist would have deciphered some of the secrets of the items in the Traveler's Bag and understood their dangers, not dying just after examining three items.

Lumian even doubted Worms had reached Sequence 8 Swindler, because the thief didn't seem smart enough.

Lumian's questions to the enforcers were not to showcase his talent in being a negotiator or exploit loopholes but to test the enforcers' state.

And he had his answer.

He felt that after becoming enforcers, these serious criminals became like the wax figures in the Sauron family's Red Swan Castle or a combination of the Iron and Blood Cross Order Supervisor Olson, but without the violent madness, instead exhibiting a gentle indifference.

Is this the combined effect of the 0-01 corruption and Morora's sealing influence? Lumian was unsure if he would retain his self-awareness if he joined the enforcers, or end up just following Morora's rules, becoming a puppet of the City of Exiles or 0-01.

This made him waver in his original plan to approach 0-01 as an enforcer.

He laughed softly, asking in a low voice, "Termiboros, do you want to be Morora's puppet?"

Termiboros ignored him.

Whoosh!

The downpour finally arrived, shrouding Morora in a mist of rain and a doomsday-like gloom.

Lumian followed the shelter of the huge buildings, avoiding the rain as he headed to the place where the strongest feedback from the Abscessed

Hand's missing parts came from.

When he reached his destination, his clothes were half-soaked by the wind and rain, and the water on the street was nearly up to the steps.

Lumian glanced to the side, seeing a sign by the door depicting a knife, fork, and wine glass, with the words in Lenburg: "Carnivore"

A bar serving food? Carnivore... Lumian pondered the bar's name, suddenly having a strange guess, The feedback indicated that parts of Hand Bro's body are scattered across Morora, but originally there were only two pieces...

The demon with the goat face in the Underworld cut and ate Hand Bro's rotten flesh daily, and it regenerated...

This bar is called "Carnivore"...

Could it be that one piece of Hand Bro's body was obtained by the bar's owner, saving them the cost of buying meat and using it as a substitute?

Other bar owners in different cities might not do this, but in Morora, they likely would, since they were exiled here for serious crimes. The bar owner might even be a perverted butcher who killed people and sold their meat...

If that's true, things will be troublesome. Who knows how many people have eaten and integrated Hand Bro's rotten flesh, and what impact that might have...

Can I merge the remaining parts once I find the original two pieces?

Lumian muttered silently for a while, then ran through the rain and pushed open the heavy wooden door of the Carnivore bar.

Upon arriving in Morora, after almost reassembling the Abscessed Hand's body, he had started referring to it as Hand Bro, half-jokingly and half to show "closeness," hoping it wouldn't attack him when fully restored, as there might be other dangers then.

Just as he entered the bar, bringing in the rain, Lumian saw a familiar figure.

That figure sat on a high stool in front of the bar, their hair tinged with red, eyebrows and eyes leaning towards brown, looking handsome yet unlikable due to their overly sharp features.

Albus!

Albus Medici!

Lumian tensed, though his expression remained calm as he smiled and walked towards the bar.

He used to think Albus Medici was mysterious and possibly involved in some consOriginal. Later, he learned about the existence of the Red Angel Medici, realizing this former King of Angels had orchestrated a massive plot and successfully obtained the Sequence 1 Beyonder characteristic of the Hunter pathway from Vermonda Sauron in Fourth Epoch Trier.

This made Lumian associate Albus Medici with the Red Angel, suspecting Albus was the King of Angels' agent, sent to Morora to find a way to get close to 0-01.

For Lumian, this was bad news, as Medici was close to ascending to the Red Priest's divine throne!

Albus Medici noticed Lumian's gaze and turned, looking back at Lumian, who had made no effort to disguise himself beyond restoring his hair color.

"What brings you here?" Lumian smiled as if meeting an old friend.

Albus returned the smile. "What brings you here?"

"Of course, I was captured," Lumian laughed, sitting beside Albus and tapping the bar counter, "Give me a steak, tenderloin, medium-rare," he told the bartender, who looked as if he had lost his parents.

"Are you mimicking me? Also being randomly captured and ordering a tenderloin steak," Albus said, one foot on the stool's footrest, the other resting on his knee.

Before Lumian could respond, he relaxed and asked with a smile, "What crime did you commit?"

"Murder, blasphemy, arson, causing explosions, kidnapping..." Lumian repeated the crimes he had told Guei and others before, but not in the same order.

He was relaxed as he asked, "What about you?"

"Me?" Albus jiggled his foot resting on his knee, "Murder, arson, inciting riots, attempting to overthrow the government."

"Which government?" Lumian asked in a tone of old friends reuniting.

"Intis." Albus shrugged, "Don't ask me why I tried to overthrow the Intis government and ended up in this strange city in Lenburg. I don't know either."

That's such a patronizing answer... Lumian nodded in agreement. "Yeah, I didn't commit crimes in Lenburg either."

As the two former Iron and Blood Cross Order members "chatted," two steaks were served.

Looking at the steaks on white porcelain plates, slightly bloody and with a good-looking texture, Lumian remained silent and didn't pick up his knife and fork.

He sensed a connection.

This was indeed the Abscessed Hand's rotten flesh, cut from the body!

After a few seconds, Lumian glanced to the side and found Albus Medici also staring at the "steak" without moving.

Lumian smiled and asked, "Why aren't you eating?"

Albus responded with a radiant smile. "Why aren't you?"

Chapter 796: "Duel"

796 "Duel"

In response to Albus's question, Lumian let out a soft laugh and muttered to himself, This guy seems pretty sharp...

No idea when he was exiled to Morora, but this must be his first time eating here...

Did he come here because he noticed some people in Morora behaving strangely after eating at this bar?

As these thoughts raced through his mind, Lumian slapped the bar counter.

He jumped off the stool and coldly said to the bartender, whose expression had remained grim.

"Serving this kind of meat as steak to me? Get your boss out here!"

The bartender was taken aback. "Are you certain?"

He wasn't embarrassed or angry at Lumian's attitude; instead, there seemed to be a slight hint of pleasant surprise.

Lumian didn't answer but conveyed with his eyes that he wanted the boss to hurry up and come out.

The bartender immediately shouted, "Boss! Boss! Someone's about to wreck your bar!"

Within seconds, a figure rushed out from the kitchen.

The figure had messy, fluffy hair and a very fat face, layered with flesh that made his eyes appear small, yet his body was quite standard, showing no sign of obesity.

At this moment, he was wearing a white apron and holding a cleaver, glaring angrily at the two customers near the bar, shouting in Lenburg, "Who? Who's going to wreck my bar?"

Lumian pointed at the steak on the white porcelain plate and sneered, "You think I can't tell what kind of meat this is?"

"If I say it's steak, it's steak," the fat-faced boss retorted without backing down.

Lumian didn't argue further. He took out a black glove from the Traveler's Bag and tossed it in front of him.

"I challenge you to a duel," Lumian said calmly.

Throwing down a glove was a customary way to issue a duel challenge in Intis.

The boss glanced at the black glove on the ground, his layers of fat shifting to reveal a light yellow beard.

He was laughing.

He responded to Lumian's challenge, "Okay."

As soon as he spoke, he raised the cleaver and swung it down at Lumian.

Lumian sidestepped the blow, but suddenly felt he couldn't use his teleportation ability.

The contract ability from the Abscessed Hand seemed to be stripped away by some strange power!

Lumian recalled Ludwig's description of the Sequence 5 Depriver of the Gourmet pathway and suspected this boss-cum-chef was a blessed one of this pathway.

No wonder he can make Hand Bro's rotten flesh look and smell like real steak...

A bestowed not executed but exiled to Morora?

Stop dumping all the trash in Morora...

Is it because they fear Morora's population decline, risking the seal on 0-01?

As these thoughts flashed through his mind, Lumian swung his shoulder, his arm swelling, and punched out with his right fist.

His fist burst into bright, blazing-white flames, like a peacock's tail, heading straight for the bartender.

Boom!

As his fist struck the side of the heavy cleaver, a violent explosion occurred.

The blazing-white light lit up the entire bar, the violent blast overturning nearby stools and throwing the fat-faced boss away.

Albus reacted quickly, jumping off his stool and perching on the bar counter far from the blast area.

He pulled one foot up, resting it on the bar, watching Lumian's duel with interest.

The bartender was also caught in the blast, thrown against the liquor shelf, doused in the fragrant liquid from shattered bottles.

He was nearly set on fire.

The bar owner, who took the brunt of the explosion, had his chest clothes torn, revealing blood, charred flesh, and white bones.

His face had similar wounds, but the layers of fat kept it from affecting his skull.

The wounds were writhing and healing rapidly in an unnatural, inhuman way, as if they would soon be completely healed.

This isn't a power or trait typical of a Depriver. None of the middle or low Sequences in the Gourmet pathway have this ability. Did he gain this from a special kind of food as a Chef? It's similar to how Hand Bro's rotten flesh can regenerate after being eaten... Lumian retreated a few steps from the bar owner, putting distance between them.

As he noticed the other party's peculiarity, he also realized he had lost another ability-Spell of Harrumph.

Can a Depriver sense which of my abilities and traits are most dangerous to them? Even if they don't know exactly what those abilities and traits are, can they still deprive me of them based on the level of danger they pose? Lumian calmly formed a massive, blazing-white fireball and shot it at the bar owner.

The bar owner didn't dodge. He raised his nearly shattered cleaver and slashed at the blazing-white fireball.

The fireball split in two, losing its momentum and destructive aura. The bar owner opened his mouth wide and sucked it in like a whale swallowing water, remaining unharmed.

At that moment, Lumian laughed.

More blazing-white fireballs rapidly formed around him, whistling through the air toward the bar owner.

Behind him, blazing-white fire crows appeared one after another, flying in wide arcs to flank the bar owner.

Lumian wanted to see how many fireballs the Depriver could handle and if he could eat them all without getting overwhelmed.

The bar owner's eyes narrowed, and he immediately spewed the blazing-white flames from his stomach, transforming them into a torrent to meet the incoming fireballs.

Seeing this, Albus flipped over the bar counter.

Rumble!

The fireballs exploded one after another upon contact with the flames.

The counter was flattened, the liquor shelves collapsed silently, and the mixed liquor burned in a fierce blaze.

The bartender, who had escaped to Albus's position, felt very fortunate he had reacted in time.

Other patrons either shrank to the edges of the room or escaped the hall, showing a wealth of experience.

Swoosh! Swoosh! Swoosh! The blazing-white Fire Ravens, which had deliberately avoided the front, fell on the bar owner's back one after another.

By then, the bar owner was covered in a semi-transparent crimson glow, like solidified moonlight.

Rumble!

Despite the explosions and flames from the Fire Ravens, the bar owner's crimson glow didn't dim. Instead, it brightened with the fire's reflection.

When the flames finally subsided, the bar owner returned to his normal appearance. He lifted his cleaver and looked at where Lumian had been standing.

No one was there.

Lumian was nowhere to be seen in the hall either.

The bar owner was momentarily stunned.

Almost simultaneously, a figure emerged from his shadow.

Lumian, his eyes iron-black, struck the bar owner's crotch with his blazing-white flame-covered right fist.

Amid the rumbling, Lumian's fist hit its mark, penetrating the Depriver's intestines with blazing-white flames.

Standing up straight, Lumian lifted the bar owner, letting the flames surge into his stomach.

Then, Lumian withdrew his right fist and threw the bar owner to the ground.

With a thud, the bar owner's crotch split open, intestines spilling out, and his stomach, though intact, was scorched and oozing yellow-green fluid.

Lumian looked at the bar owner's pained, shrunken eyes and mocked, "Did you turn your brain into food too? You blocked one round of attacks, then stayed in the same spot without moving. Did you not consider that I might use your shadow?"

The bar owner's face twisted as he murmured, "Turning... my own... brain into... food... Is it possible?"

His voice faded, and he died, lying motionless on the ground.

Lumian stared at the Depriver's corpse, not thinking about his opponent's response, but noting something unusual about the battle.

Deprivers sure have a variety of abilities. Though each one is basic and crude, their combat applications are quite formidable...

If this guy hadn't reacted so sluggishly after I vanished, I wouldn't have attacked his weak spot so easily. I might have needed to use one of the mystical items from the Traveler's Bag...

In comparison, Worms the Marauder didn't have this problem...

As he thought, Lumian shook his hand, revealing painful corrosive wounds caused by the stomach acid of the bar owner when he delivered the strike at his stomach.

His hand had been protected by the blazing-white flames at the time.

Despite knowing he couldn't prevent the bar owner's boons from returning to their source, Lumian squatted down, pulled a plain sword from the Traveler's Bag, and used his flames to separate the stomach from the corpse.

He planned to ask Ludwig if this could be made into a dish with special effects or if it could be used as a unique material by an Artisan.

Finished with this task, Lumian stood and asked the bartender, who had just emerged from hiding and was severely injured, "How many years has your boss been exiled in Morora?"

"Five or six years, I think," the bartender answered with an uncertain look.

Five or six years... That thief looked younger, probably only exiled for a year or two... The longer one stays in Morora, the more likely they are to show symptoms of experimental personnel-symptoms of 0-01 corruption. No, the sealing information didn't mention this, and it doesn't happen in Trier... Did the bar owner do something in Morora that caused him to start turning into an experimental subject? Lumian pondered as he looked around and smiled. "Don't take my spoils."

He referred to the bar owner's money.

Lumian then walked towards the corridor beside the bar.

Based on the origin of the "steak" and the Chef's position, he suspected the Abscessed Hand's body part was in the kitchen.

Entering the kitchen, he saw a half-decayed, swollen, blue-black corpse openly displayed on the cooking counter.

Chapter 797: Determining the Situation

797 Determining the Situation

Looking at the swollen, blue-black corpse on the counter, Lumian chuckled to himself, They're not even trying to hide it, are they? Classic Morora, the City of Exiles...

Lumian did a quick inspection, confirming that the highly decayed corpse was indeed the other body part of the Abscessed Hand. Besides missing the left half, the corresponding part of the head, and the Abscessed Hand's body itself, it was fairly intact.

If it weren't for the rotting flesh at the spine writhing and trying to regenerate, Lumian might have doubted that the two steaks served to him and Albus had come from this corpse, let alone that dozens, perhaps hundreds, of such "steaks" had been sold.

This made Lumian frown slightly, a question he had pondered earlier resurfacing in his mind: Must I do a recall of all the steaks sold?

Judging by the corpse's completeness, it doesn't seem necessary...

Moreover, the residents of Morora had been eating such steaks for some time. Who knows if they've actually digested and absorbed the rotten flesh...

From what I sense about the subtle connections between the corpse, even if digested, the rotten flesh likely just changes form without fundamentally altering...

As he pondered, Lumian quickly stuffed the half-decayed corpse into the Traveler's Bag, using the Sword of Courage and other plain swords to separate it from the other half to prevent unwanted fusion before finding the head.

"So we were served this stuff, and it looked pretty appetizing," Albus's voice came from the kitchen doorway as Lumian put away the half of the Abscessed Hand.

Albus, the former member of the Iron and Blood Cross Order and Medici family member, wore a black jacket with dark red patterns, one hand in his pocket, marveling.

He didn't seem disgusted by almost eating rotten flesh steak.

Lumian turned and responded with a smile, "I was looking forward to seeing what changes you'd undergo after eating it."

"Gradually gain some self-healing ability, become stronger on moonlit nights, and learn some dark spells," Albus replied in a report-like tone.

"But in return, self-control would significantly decrease, intelligence would regress, and nightmares would be frequent."

"So, you came to investigate after noticing the odd behavior of those guys?" Lumian asked with a smile.

He wasn't really seeking confirmation; he had already determined it. He was using this question to indicate that he was also investigating and hadn't come specifically for the half-corpse.

"A Hunter must conceal their true purpose to avoid traps set by others." The red-haired Albus smiled. "They tried to keep this a secret, hoping only they and their collaborators could enjoy this bar's special food."

"Who in Morora isn't selfish?" Lumian asked, changing the topic. "How did you notice their intelligence regression?"

Albus raised his right hand, palm up. "If their intelligence hadn't regressed, how could they have revealed their secret to me so easily, leading me to this bar?"

Lumian nodded slightly, looking thoughtful. "So, should I kill you to keep this secret from spreading?"

Albus met Lumian's gaze calmly, smiling. "Do you think those idiots can keep a secret?"

With that, the Medici family member turned and walked towards the bar hall, exposing his back to Lumian.

Lumian stood still, watching him leave, as if deep in thought.

For a moment, he had the urge to kill.

He considered using this chance to eliminate Albus Medici to prevent him from interfering with his approach to 0-01, or even marking it for the Red Angel before him.

Ultimately, Lumian resisted this impulse.

For two reasons: First, he judged that becoming an experimental subject would severely impact his self-awareness. Unless it was his only option, he didn't want to try it. In that case, having an extra person, a "cannon fodder" to help navigate the dangers, was a viable strategy.

Second, he wasn't confident he could kill Albus Medici. If Albus was still in the same state as when they explored the Red Swan Castle, he would be easily dealt with, but several months had passed. He had become a Reaper and had even fully digested the corresponding potion. It was unlikely the other party hadn't made any progress.

Moreover, if Albus was indeed representing the Red Angel in approaching 0-01, the King of Angels would likely enhance His descendant's strength, providing powerful items to ensure he was among the apex below demigods, capable of handling Morora's dangers.

Lumian didn't leave the kitchen immediately. He checked around again.

He was looking for any other special ingredients-the bar owner's slightly sluggish behavior made him suspect it was caused by randomly eating something in Morora, a common cause of death for Beyonders of the Gourmet pathway.

Unfortunately, Lumian only found ordinary ingredients like flour, butter, and milk.

He then went up to the second floor of the Carnivore bar, entering the Depriver's bedroom.

He planned to stay here as the duel winner for the time being.

The bedroom was cleaner than Lumian expected-no grease stains, no cockroaches, mice, or insects. Aside from being slightly messy, it was fine.

Lumian walked around the bedroom, trying to activate the black mark on his right shoulder to see if he could teleport out of Morora.

He couldn't sense any of the places he had been to.

As expected, I can't leave. I can only teleport within this mountainous area... But it's not like Morora residents want to leave... I wonder if Albus has such thoughts... Lumian muttered silently, taking out ritual materials from the Traveler's Bag.

He conducted his second experiment: Summoning a messenger!

But neither the doll messenger nor his own messenger responded to his call.

Disconnected from the spirit world? At least to some extent... As expected from a place sealing 0-01... Lumian stood at the window, gazing at the dim environment and the slightly less intense rain, feeling the cold dampness seeping in.

He proceeded with the third experiment according to his plan.

He walked to the full-length mirror in the room, placed his right hand on it, and activated a black mark on his body.

He was using the contractual ability from Bloody Jack to sense the mirror marks he had left elsewhere!

In the blink of an eye, Lumian sensed three faint marks through the mirror.

They were in Moron Avigny's study, the Blue Avenger's treasury, and Franca and Jenna's rented apartment.

This meant that if Lumian could enter the mirror, he might be able to use his teleportation ability to reach the mirrors corresponding to these marks. Even if not, he should be able to exchange information with the outside world through them!

Lumian was both pleasantly surprised and satisfied that his hypothesis was confirmed.

Having read the 0-01 data, he knew its origin and its connection to Fourth Epoch Trier. Given the similar sealing methods, many details should also be consistent-Trier had a special mirror world, so this place likely did too. Trier had Mirror People, so this place likely had them too!

The experimental subjects' detail, "if not blindfolded, the one who leaves the mausoleum will be a monster resembling him," was evidence of the Mirror People and the special mirror world's existence.

Based on these premises, Lumian thought using the mirror world's abilities might establish some contact with the outside world.

With this hypothesis, he borrowed the Mirror Cufflink from Franca, who had become a Demoness of Affliction. In a few days, she could use the pretext of investigating Mirror People to request charms from the Demoness Sect that would allow her to use the mirror world for teleportation.

Lumian reached into the Traveler's Bag and took out the glass-like cufflink.

He didn't rush to confirm if it could be used to leave directly or only to transmit information, as the Mirror Cufflink had only four uses left. He'd wait for important information or urgent matters to test it.

Grr, grr... At that moment, Lumian's stomach growled with hunger.

He couldn't help but gripe internally, Seriously, the Church of Knowledge is so stingy. Not even a meal or a sip of water before sending me into Morora. I'm not Ludwig, who can finish all the prison food...

Muttering, Lumian descended to the first floor, intending to cook something in the kitchen and wait for the rain to stop before looking for the Abscessed Hand's head.

By now, the bar owner's body had been taken away by the enforcers, and the bloodstains on the floor had been cleaned, but the destroyed bar counter and the hall's scorched remains hadn't been dealt with. Glass shards and wood splinters mixed with the scents of liquor and charred wood.

Just as Lumian picked up the bar owner's legacy left by the enforcers- 420 sassen gold-someone walked in from the doorway.

It was the humble-looking human meat chef, Lez.

Lez was soaked, glanced around, and asked Lumian, "Are you hiring a chef here?"

The Law of Beyonder Characteristics Convergence? Lumian suddenly laughed. "Sure, go to the kitchen and make something. I'll try it and see how it tastes."

Chapter 798: Hire

798 Hire

Lez looked at Lumian with confusion and asked, "Can you make decisions for the owner here?"

"Yes, because I am the owner now," Lumian replied with a smile, pointing to himself.

The human meat chef, Lez, was even more perplexed. "Weren't we just exiled to Morora together?"

It had been less than an hour since they arrived.

Lumian tilted his head and pointed his chin towards the destroyed bar area. "I had a duel with the previous owner and won this bar from him."

Lez's eyes suddenly lit up. "Is he dead? Where's his body?"

"The enforcers took it away, probably to be buried in the cemetery," Lumian said, walking to the edge of the hall and picking up a relatively intact chair, placing it next to the ruined bar.

Lez sighed regretfully but followed Lumian's suggestion and went into the kitchen to start cooking.

Lumian wandered to the bar area, searching for the two "steaks" he and Albus hadn't eaten.

They were torn to pieces in the violent explosion, scattered among the debris, completely charred and carbonized.

After examining them for a while, Lumian noticed that the steak fragments showed no signs of writhing or regeneration. The fire had destroyed any subtle connection to the corpse, making them seem entirely dead and no longer part of the Abscessed Hand.

These probably don't need to be recalled...

High-temperature flames can restrain the self-healing ability of the separated rotten flesh, but it's unclear how much it affects the corpse itself...

Besides, the separated rotten flesh must only have a limited self-healing ability; otherwise, each piece could grow into a new Hand Bro, and there'd be no need for Hand Bro to find the whole corpse...

After pondering for a while, Lumian brought over a small overturned round table from the edge of the hall and placed it next to the chair.

He sat down, patiently waiting for Lez to prepare lunch.

As time passed, Lez brought out a mixed salad, creamy mashed potatoes, and other dishes.

Lumian took a spoonful of mashed potatoes and tasted it, finding the texture unusually smooth and the flavors of starch, cream, and fat deliciously combined.

"Not bad," Lumian said, raising his left hand and giving a thumbs up.

Lez stood beside him, smiling humbly.

"I used to own a restaurant."

"A restaurant specializing in human meat?" Lumian teased provocatively.

Lez shook his head.

"Back then, I was a normal chef with excellent, but still human, cooking skills."

"Then why did you start eating people?" Lumian didn't directly ask when he started worshiping an evil god.

He didn't know which evil god corresponded to the Gourmet pathway.

Lez's expression gradually darkened.

"My wife had a friend who always filled her head with the idea of a luxurious lifestyle, introducing her to so-called high society members, even encouraging her to have affairs and squander money. She secretly mortgaged our restaurant; her goal was our restaurant from the start.

"After losing the restaurant, that friend stopped associating with my wife. My wife finally came to her senses but was too weak. She burned down the restaurant, killing herself in the process.

"Then a regular customer, who admired my cooking skills, approached me and asked if I wanted revenge. He offered to help, saying someone with my high-level cooking skills should worship the God of Cuisine, the great 'Devouring Whirlpool.'

"After that, I received a boon and slowly grew stronger.

"After becoming a true Chef, I found that woman and made her into the most satisfying meal of my life.

"From that day on, I enjoyed eating the flesh of the damned and gained the ability to discern who deserved to die."

"Was that woman also a follower of an evil god?" Hearing this, Lumian strongly suspected that the first person Lez ate was a bestowed of the Broker pathway.

Perhaps Lez's restaurant was part of a transaction.

"Yes," Lez confirmed, "She worshiped the so-called Truth. When she met my wife, she was still weak."

As expected... Lumian smiled.

The ability to discern who deserves to die is quite useful. When I capture a Broker pathway Sequence 7 or higher, I'll leave it to Ludwig to handle.

After finishing the meal Lez prepared, Lumian nodded in satisfaction.

"I'm willing to hire you as the chef for this bar. Let's discuss your compensation and responsibilities."

"Alright," Lez said, assuming a listening posture.

Lumian picked up a white napkin and wiped his mouth.

"There's quite a bit of wine left in the cellar. Clean up the bar, rebuild it, and display the wine. After that, you'll be responsible for hiring and managing bartenders and waitstaff, as well as reestablishing contact with suppliers."

"That's the job of a manager," Lez noted, having run a restaurant before.

Lumian chuckled in response.

"Yes, chef and manager.

"The bar's revenue, after costs, will all be yours."

"What about you?" Lez had never seen such an owner.

Not even wanting the money?

Lumian stood up, stretching his body, and casually said, "You'll be responsible for my meals, cleaning my room, and if there are special ingredients, making dishes or cocktails that give me the corresponding traits. Also, I don't eat human meat."

Lez stared at Lumian for a few seconds and said in a deep voice, "You seem to know a lot about a Chef's abilities."

Lumian glanced at the now-stopped rain outside and walked towards the bar's entrance, smiling.

"The previous owner of this bar was a Depriver, but unfortunately, I deprived him of his life, so he can't share his culinary skills with you."

Moreover, my godson is an Angel of your pathway.

Lez fell silent. As Lumian was about to leave the bar, he finally spoke, "I'll take good care of this bar."

Lumian didn't look back, raising his right hand and waving lightly in acknowledgment.

There were still some deep pools of water on the street outside, with pedestrians mainly walking on the sidewalks. The sky was now bright and sunny, as if there hadn't been a heavy rainstorm.

Following the subtle connection from the contract mark, Lumian walked towards the suspected location of the Abscessed Hand's head.

Turning a corner, he saw a drenched corpse lying under a book-engraved obelisk. It was Vijepan, the gloomy rapist-murderer who had been exiled to Morora with Lumian and others.

At this moment, his hands and feet were severed at the joints, his pants stripped off, and his groin a bloody mess with the most important part missing.

His eyes were wide open, frozen in pain and despair.

Lost the duel, huh? Lumian murmured with a silent laugh.

He almost whistled in admiration for the duel he hadn't witnessed.

It must have been exciting; whoever died deserved a toast.

Looks like that collector named Julie is stronger... Both she and Vijepan had ulterior motives, no, open intentions to provoke a duel... Lumian thought Julie was likely a Beyonder. Such knife skills weren't something an ordinary person could possess.

As for whether Vijepan was a Beyonder, Lumian couldn't tell for now.

Even if he was, his Beyonder characteristic should have been taken.

"That woman is formidable," a voice suddenly said beside Lumian.

A gentleman had come from the side of the small square.

He wore a half-high silk hat, a white shirt, a cashmere sweater, and a woolen suit jacket, with a bow tie and a cane in hand.

He looked just over thirty, with a thin face and gentle blue eyes, like a well-educated upper-class person.

Of course, in Morora, there were no good people, only bad people and worse people.

"Did you see their fight?" Lumian asked casually.

The gentleman smiled. "They initially wanted to borrow revolvers for a duel from the restaurant over there, but the waiter told them that there were too many duels today and all the guns were borrowed, leaving only two long swords.

"That woman was very skilled. This man blocked three strikes before being knocked down, having his hands and feet cut off, and his pants removed."

So Vijepan wasn't likely a Beyonder... Lumian shifted his gaze from the corpse to the gentleman and asked with a smile, "What's your name?"

The gentleman placed a hand on his chest and bowed.

"You can call me Gusain, or Count. I heard you killed Worms?"

"Worms, the thief?" Lumian laughed. "He was struck by lightning, nothing to do with me. If I had killed him, the enforcers would have arrested me."

Gusain smiled slightly. "There are ways to deceive the enforcers."

So you've noticed their rigidity and procedural nature too? Lumian thought for a few seconds before deciding to be "honest."

"Worms died because he wasn't lucky enough. The item he stole from me attracts lightning during rain."

"Then you can't be blamed," Gusain said understandingly.

He asked warmly, "How should I address you, and where are you staying now?"

"Louis, staying at the Carnivore bar," Lumian replied truthfully.

Gusain nodded slightly.

"Be wary of Bainar, the bar's owner and chef. He's dangerous and cannibalistic."

Lumian smiled. "He's already dead."

Gusain paused for a moment before smiling. "You're more interesting than I expected. I hope you bring long-lost vitality to Morora."

Lumian didn't continue the topic, instead taking the opportunity to gather information.

"In Morora, apart from Heraberg from the Church of Knowledge, who else should I watch out for?"

Without hesitation, Gusain replied, "Wanak, the owner of Dades Agricultural Company, has a monopoly on the grain supply from the surrounding farms to Morora. He had become an experimental subject but suddenly escaped and now behaves like a normal person.

"He is the most dangerous one in Morora."

Can someone really return to normal after becoming an experimental subject? And the Church of Knowledge didn't do anything about Wanak leaving the experimental group? This is exactly what I need... Lumian thought to himself and nodded. "Who is the second most dangerous person in Morora?"

Gusain's smile remained unchanged as he answered, "They say it's me."

Chapter 799: Provocation

799 Provocation

Lumian wasn't surprised that Gusain indirectly referred to himself as the second most dangerous person in Morora. Instead, he smiled and asked, "What have you done? I mean, what have you done in Morora?"

Gusain's smile faded as he spoke seriously.

"Organized uprisings.

"We're already in the City of Exiles. Why should we still accept the rule of the Church of Knowledge? We should unite and drive them out of Morora. Then, we'll make our own rules and govern ourselves!"

Ignoring other factors, your words do make some sense. But the issue is, if we overthrow the Church's rule, why stay in Morora? Is this the influence of 0-01? The residents of Morora never consider leaving the city... Fortunately, I have a false Angel rank and all sorts of random items, so I'm only somewhat reluctant to leave, not entirely devoid of such thoughts... Lumian first confirmed the abnormalities of Morora from Gusain's response, then understood why people considered Gusain the second most dangerous person in Morora.

Uprisings were something the Church of Knowledge wouldn't allow, and given the information on 0-01, Gusain must have organized multiple uprisings and still hadn't been caught and added to the experimental subjects!

This was enough to show that this gentleman-like mature man was not simple.

Seeing that Louis wasn't scared by his words and didn't show obvious resistance, Gusain extended an invitation, "Would you like to join our group?"

"I'll think about it," Lumian replied with a smile.

He really intended to consider it. This might be a way to approach 0-01 without becoming an experimental subject.

He believed that this ragtag group, unable to resist the influence of 0-01, couldn't truly overthrow the Church's rule in Morora, but he needed chaos and opportunity.

These exiles could die, and the Church of Knowledge personnel here seemed to be puppets.

Gusain smiled in satisfaction.

"Being a prisoner in this open-air prison or becoming its ruler, being perpetually oppressed or pursuing freedom, it indeed requires careful consideration."

With that, Gusain glanced at the other side of the small square and said, "I must take my leave now. If you decide, hang a red cloth, the kind used to taunt bulls, at the door of the Carnivore bar."

With that, Gusain removed his hat, placed a hand on his chest, and bowed.

Watching him walk into a nearby alley at a leisurely pace, Lumian saw a group of black-robed enforcers hurrying from the opposite side of the small square.

"Did you see Gusain just now? He looks like a gentleman with a hat," the leader asked Lumian.

Lumian's smile widened, and he casually pointed to the alley Gusain had entered.

"Yes, he went that way."

The enforcers stared at Lumian for a couple of seconds before continuing to pursue Gusain.

Lumian raised his right hand, rubbed his chin, and murmured to himself, Gusain sensed the enforcers' arrival in advance, but I didn't...

Is that why he's managed to organize multiple uprisings without being caught?

Is it his ability, an item, or the special corruption from 0-01?

Lumian didn't linger in the small square, bidding farewell to Vijepan's corpse, and continued towards the possible location of the Abscessed Hand's head.

After turning into another street, he suddenly had a premonition and looked towards the edge of the city of Morora.

The ground shook violently, earth and stones surged up, swallowing several buildings and forming a mountain about ten meters high.

At the mountain's peak, thick dust mixed with smoke erupted, red lava flowed, emitting heat that Lumian could clearly feel even in the city center.

At the same time, the screams of humans from that direction echoed far and wide.

A volcanic eruption? Lumian was stunned.

He had thought the volcanic eruptions described in the 0-01 information came from the surrounding mountains, not from within the city on flat ground!

After a few seconds, the dust obscured the sky, plunging Morora back into darkness.

Passersby showed no extra reaction, merely covering their noses to block the dust, treating it as just another heavy rain.

Lumian shook his head as he watched.

In such living conditions, Gusain and his people hadn't thought of escaping, only planning to overthrow the Church's rule and replace it. No wonder this is a Grade 0 Sealed Artifact...

Lumian, who restored himself at six every morning, remained unafraid of the dust and resumed his steps.

He crossed the street and arrived at a square with multiple obelisks. In the dusty environment, he moved along the buildings around the square towards his destination.

Suddenly, he felt a resonance, a connection from his special powers.

Lumian quickly turned and looked at the classical building made of gray-white stones beside him.

At the top hung a large sign with words written in Lenburg: Dades Agricultural Company Below the sign, two glass windows suddenly opened, revealing a figure.

The figure, wearing a thin white shirt with the top two buttons undone despite the cold winter, had hair like it was stained with fresh blood, iron-black eyes, and sharp facial features, exuding a fierce aura.

No introduction was needed; Lumian identified the figure from the sign and the resonating aura.

The most dangerous criminal in Morora, former experimental subject Wanak!

Did the resonance just now come from the direct corruption of 0-01?

Did the law of convergence lead to this encounter?

Did Wanak escape the status of an experimental subject because he completely submitted to 0-01?

Is he now 0-01's proxy in Morora?

This Sealed Artifact, despite lacking wisdom, instinctively seeks opportunities to break free from its seal?

As Lumian's thoughts raced, the suspected Wanak suddenly transformed into a blazing-white flame spear, filled with destructive energy, and flew at him.

Lumian's figure instantly disappeared without reappearing.

He directly teleported closer to the Abscessed Hand's head. In his ears echoed the taunting voice of the suspected Wanak, "Coward! Chicken!"

Lumian snorted, not turning back to fight the man.

I'Ill first gather the Abscessed Hand's body!

He feared the intense battle might lead to unforeseen events, making contact with 0-01 before he collected all the body parts, resulting in uncontrollable consequences.

Moreover, the aura and the flame spear the suspected Wanak displayed suggested he might have a trace of godhood. Even if not truly Sequence 4, he had fundamentally differed from a Sequence 5 Beyonder.

Demigods couldn't approach 0-01, but maybe pseudo-demigod proxies created by 0-01 weren't subject to this rule!

Lumian looked ahead, finding himself in the boundless cemetery behind the Church of Knowledge, surrounded by gravestones and trees.

Uh... Lumian was momentarily stunned, then felt it made sense.

The bar owner-cum-chef having half of the Abscessed Hand's body and using it was an anomaly. Normally, anyone, even a felon, encountering a rotting corpse split into multiple parts would first call the enforcers to clean up the scene. The enforcers would then bury the body in this cemetery as part of the seal.

Of course, this was a normal assumption, excluding those with a penchant for corpses.

Lumian moved forward, approaching the source of the subtle connection.

During this, he remembered something.

Madam Magician said dangerous things might happen once the Abscessed Hand's body is gathered. It's best to complete this step within the City of Exiles to offset the corresponding risks with the presence of 0-01...

If I get the Hand Bro's head later, does that count as gathering the body?

Will that cause dangerous events?

Maybe I should wait a bit longer? Wait for dangerous and difficult-to-handle situations before teleporting back to gather Hand Bro's body to create unknown risks and muddy the waters?

I can't face the dangers of the Hand Bro alone; sharing is caring...

Also, Madam Magician implied that the Hand Bro might break the seal and enter Morora once its body is gathered?

Otherwise, how could it be considered complete...

Normally, not even a messenger can be summoned, nor a contract creature...

This might help me escape Morora...

As Lumian pondered, he stopped at a recently filled pit without a tombstone.

His contract mark told him a part of the Abscessed Hand's body was in this pit.

Seeing the unusually fresh marks on the pit's surface, Lumian felt a tightness in his chest. He crouched down, extended his hands, and performed a directional blast.

With the rumbling sound of explosions, he blew away a large amount of soil and unearthed a black wooden box from the bottom of the pit.

Opening the box, Lumian saw a highly decomposed, blue-black, swollen ear and a folded white paper.

Lumian unfolded the paper, seeing words written in Intisian:

"As expected, you want this rotten head.

"But unfortunately, I got it before you went to the Carnivore bar and hid it.

"Maybe you can ask me for it.

"Albus Medici."

Chapter 800: New Waitress

800 New Waitress

Lumian admitted that he felt a bit provoked.

However, it was still acceptable. If his guess was right, he and Albus would eventually cross paths again regarding 0-01. It was better for the Abscessed Hand's head to be in Albus's possession than lost or hidden by some unknown person.

Lumian now regretted not acting against Albus at the Carnivore Bar. He had hesitated and wanted to use him.

At that time, it was hard to predict that Albus had already obtained the Abscessed Hand's head.

Silently, Lumian activated the black mark representing Spirit World Traversal, sensing the subtle connection between himself and the Abscessed Hand's body parts again.

He intended to use this to find Albus.

The feedback is all similar, no way to distinguish which is stronger, which might be Hand Bro's head... Did Albus do something to suppress the feedback? Or completely block it? Lumian slowly exhaled, taking the Abscessed Hand's ear from the black wooden box and placing it in his Traveler's Bag.

He carefully examined the area around the grave, hoping to find clues to Albus's whereabouts.

Unfortunately, Albus was also an experienced Hunter, very adept at covering his tracks.

Containing his emotions, Lumian turned back to the Carnivore Bar amidst the dust and clouds from the volcanic eruption.

As he stepped through the door, Lez, the human cook, who had found some wood to repair the shelves and bar counter, stopped working, hammer in hand, and turned to him.

"I hired a waitress."

"You can decide on that yourself," Lumian said, uninterested in the bar's operation. He only cared about getting three meals and free lodging under the guise of being the boss.

Lez, ever diligent, added, "You know her. Julie, who came in with us."

The "collector"? Lumian almost choked on his own saliva.

Why would a man hire such a "collector" as a waitress?

Won't he feel a chill down there?

Before Lumian could ask Lez's reasoning, Julie descended from upstairs.

She had changed into a dark slit dress she found from somewhere, with her chest barely concealed under a thin veil.

Her previously dirty face was now clean, and her long brown hair was simply tied up, her features clear in Lumian's eyes.

Despite having been around two Demonesses for a long time, Lumian found himself impressed.

This female convict didn't look perverse or mad, with slender brown eyebrows and brown eyes that seemed to hold a gentle autumn water, her skin delicate and white, her demeanor gentle and elegant, contrasting sharply with her enticing figure.

She was a uniquely beautiful woman, exuding an allure beyond normal.

Like a Demoness... Lumian had to admit Julie's previous disguise with dirt and loose hair was quite effective.

Another case of the Law of Beyonder Characteristics Convergence...

Lumian sighed, responding to Julie's tender, affectionate gaze, "Why do you want to be a waitress at my bar?"

"I need a job to support myself," Julie smiled gently, as if they were in some city instead of Morora.

Lumian suddenly changed the topic.

"Why do you like collecting that part of men?"

Julie's gentle brown eyes suddenly showed an indescribable madness.

She smiled and answered with a tone of longing, "I just want to reclaim what's mine."

Uh... another victim of the Demoness Sect? Now turned perpetrator...

She must have transformed from a man to a woman like Franca, but unlike Franca, she had severe psychological issues, resulting in her abnormal hobby? Lumian guessed while confirming that Julie was likely a Demoness, and not a low-level one, at least a Sequence 6 Demoness of Pleasure.

Lumian then murmured, Your way of digesting Pleasure is to rape men and then cut it off at the climax to make them experience the fall from heaven to hell?

That fits the nature of a Demoness of Pleasure, but it's too direct and brutal, lacking the beauty of self-struggle...

How did the Church of Knowledge send a Demoness here as an ordinary rapist-murderer?

Was it intentional?

Right, based on my current mysticism knowledge, each god's pathway top has one to three great beings holding all the sequence powers, like Mr. Fool, The Celestial Worthy of Heaven and Earth for Blessings, the Great Mother, and the Mother Tree of Desire...

From this perspective, the Primordial Demoness-being adjacent to the Hunter pathway-trying to scheme 0-01 is understandable, perhaps inevitable. According to Madam Magician, 0-01 is the key to ascending to Red Priest and becoming the true god of the Hunter pathway...

In this case, once the Demoness Sect discovers Morora, they will definitely send witches below the demigod level to infiltrate here...

Why didn't they send anyone before, waiting until Julie and I were exiled together?

Perhaps the Primordial Demoness's revelation told them only by following me could they enter Morora, given I was specially sent by the Church of Knowledge without any checks?

No, more likely, Julie isn't the first or even the second Demoness to infiltrate Morora. The previous ones didn't complete their mission and gradually lost contact with the Demoness Sect...

If that's true, the Demonesses controlling the mirror world have it easier than me using the Mirror Cufflink and Mirror Mark to connect with the outside. Julie must have a lot of accumulated intelligence and plans...

From her, I might find opportunities and ways to approach 0-01 and leave a mark...

With these thoughts, Lumian smiled at Julie, who still had a hint of madness in her eyes, "I don't care what you want to reclaim or why, but since you chose to be my bar's waitress, you must follow my rules. First, no harassing customers during business hours."

Julie looked a bit aggrieved but her eyes shone brightly, full of anticipation.

"What if they harass me?"

"Lez will throw them out. If they dare fight back, Lez knows how to cook them and will leave you the parts you want," Lumian said casually. "Or you can wait until the bar closes and find them yourself."

Julie licked her lips. "What's the second rule?"

"No harassing the boss." Lumian headed for the stairs to the second floor. "Lez will discuss your pay."

Julie seemed slightly disappointed. "I wanted to see if what I lost is with you."

Before Lumian could respond, she asked again, "Is it harassment if I invite you to view my collection?"

"Not interested," Lumian replied curtly.

He confirmed Julie's crimes weren't intentional to get exiled to Morora.

She had a genuine hobby, looking gentle and beautiful but twisted and mad inside.

After dark, Julie finished Lez's meticulously prepared dinner and praised it, "I've decided to seduce you last."

Her seduction was lethal.

Lez seemed a bit disappointed but sincerely asked, "If you're ever killed, can I have your body?"

"Sure," Julie agreed nonchalantly, her movements graceful and smile reserved.

She then looked at Lumian, blinking. "Boss, the bar hasn't reopened. Can I go out tonight?"

"That's your freedom." Lumian drank some wheat ale to suppress the sudden restlessness inside him.

He was now sure Julie was a Demoness of Affliction, having just used Charm on him.

If she approached again, he planned to Cull her without mercy.

Only by intimidating this Demoness of Affliction with strength and ferocity could he keep her in check.

Julie wiped her mouth with a white napkin, stood up, and left the Carnivore Bar.

After a few seconds, Lumian vanished from the table.

He first teleported then turned into a shadow creature, silently following Julie.

Julie walked elegantly, approaching a square where exiles gathered, feigning drunkenness.

The exiles couldn't take their eyes off this Demoness. A muscular man eagerly approached and chatted with Julie.

Julie drunkenly waggled her finger.

"I want to duel you."

"Sure," the man said joyfully, helping Julie leave for his home.

The other exiles didn't react in time, losing sight of the two.

Lumian didn't lose track, hiding outside the man's window.

He heard Julie's kitten-like moans, unlike the rough madness he imagined.

With an Ascetic's endurance, Lumian showed no abnormality until the man shouted loudly, nearing climax.

The next second, a piercing scream of intense pain erupted from the room.

Soon, Julie emerged, face flushed, eyes bright, her beauty overwhelming.

She held a bloody object, freezing it in crystal-clear ice, placing it in a small bag.

Lumian continued following Julie, who didn't attempt any counter-surveillance, arriving at the large square outside the Church of Knowledge.

She seemed to be waiting for something.

After a while, a team of black-robed enforcers emerged from the church, led by a tall, fair-skinned, restrained, beautiful woman.

Julie's eyes lit up, her face glowing with joy.

She approached the enforcers excitedly, shouting at the leader, "Celeste!

The tall woman in the black robe glanced at Julie indifferently, asking emotionlessly, "Who are you?"

Julie's expression froze.

Chapter 801: Pretending

801 Pretending

Seeing Julie remain silent, the black-robed female enforcer led her team across the square, continuing their patrol of Morora.

Julie stood there, staring at her back, as if turned to stone.

Hidden in the shadows, Lumian watched silently, musing to himself, An old lover?

That enforcer had a certain Demoness-like charm...

Was she the last Demoness to infiltrate Morora, Julie's lover, but ultimately became an experimental subject and forgot her past?

Yes, the Knowledge Cathedral's Heraberg mentioned that in Morora, the past isn't important, only the present and future matter. Is this implying that after becoming an experimental subject or spending enough time here, ties to the past will gradually disappear, even memories can't be retained?

This is somewhat like the people who disappeared in the Trier's catacombs, who were forgotten by everyone who knew them, but the effect is opposite and not as strong...

Lumian felt he understood Julie's emotions better now.

She might have willingly taken on the task of infiltrating Morora, hoping to find and rescue her lover, only to discover her lover had completely forgotten her, not betraying her but simply not remembering who she is...

Besides the two untainted Demonesses around me, there's actually another who believes in true love... Julie must have another purpose in seeking Celeste, confirming her situation, obtaining untransmitted information, and perhaps items prepared for seizing 0-01... Lumian seriously considered the feasibility of attacking the enforcers without facing punitive consequences.

After a while, Julie trudged back towards the Carnivore bar, her face plain and her expression sorrowful, like a white Jimsonweed swaying gently in the cold night wind.

Lumian stayed vigilant, following Julie until she reached the Carnivore bar before reappearing in his room using the shadows.

A while later, lying in bed listening to the wind, Lumian's thoughts wandered aimlessly.

Suddenly, he opened his eyes, noticing a troubling detail.

Having become an experimental subject, Celeste's reaction just now was wrong!

From previous tests, Lumian knew the enforcers strangely recognized every resident of Morora. Celeste should have asked "Who are you calling?" or "What do you want?" instead of "Who are you?"

Whether in a normal state or not, she most likely still recognized Julie but pretended not to.

Lumian sat up, narrowing his eyes.

ls Celeste not a complete experimental subject yet?

Is she pretending not to recognize Julie to protect her or to keep her secrets safe, ensuring the plan continues?

What is she using to maintain some clarity and self-awareness, not becoming a complete puppet-like experimental subject?

Is it something the Demoness Sect prepared based on previous infiltrators' experiences, or has Celeste had some fortuitous encounter, discovering part of the secret?

Lumian decided it was necessary to "contact" Celeste.

Of course, he would first see if Celeste would secretly approach Julie.

...

In Trier's arts district, Franca waited outside an art gallery, as agreed, for the Demoness of Black.

Before long, a four-seater carriage pulled up, and Clarice, wearing a black hat and thin veil over a dark court dress, looked out from the window and nodded at her.

Franca opened the door, stepped lightly up, and sat opposite her.

As the carriage moved slowly through the bustling city, she smiled at the Demoness of Black.

"Madame, I've ascended to Affliction."

"Faster than I expected," Clarice said, her doubt evident.

Franca smiled slyly. "Because Ciel became a Reaper."

"He's Sequence 5 too? His advancement seems even quicker than yours..." Clarice slightly raised her head, her eyes seeming to shift. "After Gardner Martin's death, he should have left the Iron and Blood Cross Order, right?"

Franca spoke the absolute truth.

"Yes, he used Gardner Martin's Beyonder characteristics to concoct the potion, so he owes him for the quick advancement."

The Demoness of Black smiled in understanding, her demeanor much warmer than usual.

"Even in death, Gardner Martin helps you."

That was a hell of a joke... Franca felt slightly awkward.

She quickly changed the subject.

"Madame, you said you'd tell me some secrets of the sect once I became a Demoness of Affliction."

Clarice, with a slight smile behind her thin black veil, replied, "Yes, you're now considered a core member of our sect. Hmm, where should I start..."

Seeing the Demoness of Black unconsciously reveal a hint of innocent girlishness, Franca couldn't help but be momentarily moved, marveling at the high-level Demoness's overwhelming charm.

After a few seconds, Clarice's expression turned serious and a bit melancholic as she began, "I'll start with the specifics of our sect.

"We originally were a family, all members descendants of the Primordial One, but since the Fifth Epoch, such an organizational structure couldn't sustain our influence. We began to incorporate Beyonders of the Assassin pathway who also believed in the Primordial One as members."

"Are you also a descendant of the Primordial One?" Franca, having learned this from the Tarot Club, still showed appropriate surprise and curiosity.

This was a performance learned from Jenna, honed with a Spectator's feedback.

The Demoness of Black nodded slightly.

"My mother is a descendant of the Primordial One."

Wait, according to our deductions, you should have Sauron and Tamara blood... Does this mean your mother was of Primordial One and Tamara bloodlines? Franca hesitated, then pitifully asked, "Does that mean I can never join the brass in the sect? I'm not a descendant of the Primordial One..."

"It doesn't matter. You can marry a descendant, and your spouse will count as a family member," Clarice smiled again. "Moreover, in the future, you might truly become a child of the Primordial One. We are always getting closer to the Primordial One."

"What do you mean?" Franca expressed her confusion.

She felt a sudden inexplicable fear.

"You'll understand in time," the Demoness of Black did not elaborate.

I hate people who speak unclearly... Franca silently grumbled, waiting for the Demoness of Black to continue.

Clarice returned to the previous topic.

"After the Pale-White War, the Primordial One fell into slumber, occasionally waking. All sect affairs are handled by high-ranking Demonesses titled by color. Currently, there are thirteen, including myself, some of whom are Angels, others powerful Saints."

"Is there a pope, a pontiff, or a matriarch?" Franca asked.

Clarice nodded.

"Yes, the Primordial One's child, our Matriarch, the Demoness of Gray.

She likes to be called the Saintess of Gray."

"The Primordial One's child... What is Her relation to Krismona? Browns told me Krismona is also a child of the Primordial One," Franca openly expressed her curiosity.

The Demoness of Black replied emotionlessly, "They are twins, but our Matriarch was born as a male Sequence 9 and later became a Demoness."

Twins... It seems the Demoness of Gray might know some secrets of the Krismona Night Pillar... Franca felt a strange sense of history merging with reality.

The Demoness of Gray must have witnessed the Fourth Epoch.

Clarice continued, "Each high-ranking Demoness titled by color handles specific affairs, directly reporting to our Matriarch. They do not have clear subordination among themselves, and we sometimes receive revelations from the Primordial One, allowing us considerable autonomy.

"I came to Trier to manage sect members here, maintain contact with local collaborators, and clean up the Mirror People."

Franca seized the opportunity to ask, "Is our approach to the Mirror People complete eradication? No intention to use them?"

The Demoness of Black smiled sadly. "How do you plan to use them?"

If I knew, why would I ask you? Franca awkwardly smiled. "To help us control that special mirror world. I think it's quite useful."

The Demoness of Black glanced at Franca, her eyes shimmering, and laughed softly.

"Why do you think we haven't mastered that special mirror world?"

"Uh..." Franca was genuinely confused.

It wasn't an act.

The Demoness of Black resumed her melancholy, elegant demeanor, smiling faintly.

"All mirror worlds are under our Demoness control. That special mirror world was originally used to fight the Primordial One, but ultimately, the Primordial One took control of it.

"Of course, after the War of the Four Emperors, we lost partial control of that special mirror world. After the Pale-White War, we could only exert limited influence."

"Why?" Franca felt there must be a significant secret.

The Demoness of Black smiled.

"Perhaps the Matriarch and other high-ranking Demonesses who survived the Fourth Epoch know, but not me.

"From the Mirror People's state and their confessions, I guess the Primordial One's projection in the mirror experienced some changes or, the Primordial One's projection separated part of Her characteristics, affected by the Fourth Epoch Trier's seal, unable to return, unable to reunite with the Primordial One.

"But this doesn't explain why we lost further control after the Pale-White War. Fourth Epoch Trier's seal hasn't strengthened.

"Moreover, a true god is unique."

Chapter 802: The Most Special Point

802 The Most Special Point

A true god is unique... What does that mean? Is it impossible for another Primordial Demoness to exist, whether in a mirror or a painting? Franca pondered over the Demoness of Black's final words, sensing they held critical mysticism knowledge.

As for Clarice's speculation about the Primordial Demoness's projection in the mirror undergoing some changes, Franca had thought the same before. When the Demoness of Black obtained the black Primordial Demoness figurine, she had nonchalantly mentioned, "The Mirror People believe in the mirrored Primordial One, but it's actually just a projection of the Primordial One in the mirror." She didn't explain further, and at that time, Franca had already guessed that perhaps the projection had undergone some changes.

But the problem was that if one continued this line of reasoning, it could explain why the Demonesses lost further control over the special mirror world after the Pale-White War. According to Franca's limited knowledge, in the Pale Disaster, Death fell, and the Primordial Demoness was heavily injured. Such a weakened Primordial Demoness couldn't prevent the projection in the mirror from changing further, thus losing control over that special mirror world and failing to recover from the injuries for millennia.

Franca thought that if she, with her limited understanding of the Pale Disaster, could come to such a conclusion, the Demoness of Black wouldn't say it couldn't be explained. Unless she was completely unaware of the outcomes of the Pale Disaster or had already obtained other strong evidence that ruled out the possibility that the Primordial Demoness's injuries during the divine war led to the Demonesses' further loss of control over the special mirror world.

After some thought, Franca carefully asked, "Is the black figurine I handed over evidence of the Primordial One's projection changing in the mirror?"

The Demoness of Black neither nodded nor shook her head. Instead, she explained mysticism, "Our Assassin pathway's most unique node is Sequence 7, Witch. This isn't just because it changes our gender but also because it leaves a strong, distinct imprint in the mirror world. This imprint is what allows us to use mirror magic."

This is about the Mirror Person for each Demoness... Franca suddenly had an epiphany and took the opportunity to say, "Previously, Moran Avigny said the one in the mirror is our true self, our exiled and sealed self..."

Clarice shook her head with a hint of melancholy.

"I believe Moran Avigny didn't lie to you. The Mirror People indeed believe they are the true selves, but can you completely trust conclusions made from their own perspective?

"Have you ever forgotten your past self, that indelible pain?"

"No," Franca answered sincerely, "I often think back to my past self and life, imagining if I hadn't chosen the Assassin potion, would things have turned out differently."

The Demoness of Black nodded sympathetically.

"We still remember, we haven't forgotten, so it's impossible for our true self to be exiled. If one day, we no longer feel pain from our losses, forget the past, and immerse ourselves in the present state, the strong imprint we left in the mirror might activate in a mystical sense, leading to cognitive confusion and gradual loss of control.

"In this regard, having once been male and constantly reminiscing about our male self is a major advantage in maintaining our identity and avoiding loss of control."

"Then purely female Demonesses must be very dangerous?" Franca feigned sudden realization; in truth, she was worried about Jenna.

"There won't be purely female Demonesses," Clarice coldly replied.

If you encountered one, you would kill her? Without the sacrificial square in the catacombs, Jenna would have lost control and died when ascending to Witch... Franca didn't delve further, fearing to arouse the Demoness of Black's suspicion.

Clarice continued, "Aside from the product of the special mirror world, everyone has a Mirror Person. Each time we look into a mirror, a Mirror Person is created. For non-Demoness pathway individuals, these Mirror People are temporary projections, quickly dissipating after the person leaves the mirror.

"But we Demonesses are different. The strong imprint creates a Mirror Person that always exists and grows stronger as we advance in Sequence. At the divine stage, because a true god is unique, the imprint returns to the body, merging with the self. From then on, one exists both in reality and in the mirror, embodying both states."

There's some similarity to what Moran Avigny said. The Demoness of Black didn't deny our strong imprint in the mirror could be called Mirror People... Both their words likely contain parts of the truth but not the whole truth. Perhaps piecing them together could reveal some reliable facts... Franca nodded thoughtfully. "So the appearance of the black figurine is abnormal. It should have merged with the self?"

"That's why we suspect the Primordial One lost part of Her characteristics, causing changes in the mirror projection," Clarice confirmed Franca's statement.

But according to this logic, the white figurines each sect member carries shouldn't exist either... The Primordial Demoness, also known as the Chaos Demoness, shouldn't be purely black or white. Unless the white and black figurines represent something other than the real and mirror selves... Franca didn't dare voice these emerging thoughts.

The Demoness of Black further explained, "Black figurines are rare. Not every special Mirror Person has one, not even someone as significant as Moran Avigny.

"Which specific ones possess it is currently unknown."

That's right... Franca felt a pang of regret for not asking Moran Avigny about the black Primordial Demoness figurine back then.

She and Lumian had previously thought it didn't warrant further investigation: wasn't it just a special entity the Mirror People worshiped?

Asking directly for the deity's honorific name and related information seemed enough, with no need to focus on the figurine's origin...

Franca showed her frustration, then tentatively asked, "Shouldn't we be trying to destroy the Fourth Epoch Trier's seal to lift the restrictions on that special mirror world, letting the Primordial One regain control and complete the fusion?

"Why are we still cleaning up Mirror People?"

The Demoness of Black replied seriously, "Opening it ourselves and them opening it are completely different."

Which one dominates the white or black figurines? Franca, a voracious reader and imaginative transmigrator, had a vivid imagination.

The Demoness of Black didn't give her a chance to ask further.

"What we need to do now is clean up the Mirror People in Trier, disrupt their plans, and, if possible, collect vital information from the deepest Darts of the special mirror world."

Yes, Madame," Franca seized the moment to request, "I'm tracking a Mirror Person and need items that can traverse the mirror world and send messages through mirrors. My Mirror Cufflink is running out of uses," Demoness of Black Clarice nodded lightly.

"Alright, I'll prepare it for you."

She paused for a moment before adding, "Remember, the mirror world is both mysterious and dangerous. It is also a source of our strength as Demonesses. Don't resist approaching it, but don't underestimate it either.

"Compared to the Hunter pathway, the mirror world is our most unique feature."

The most unique feature... Franca suddenly felt that the Demoness of Black was hinting at the mirror world's importance far beyond what she imagined.

After exchanging more mysticism knowledge about the sect and the Assassin pathway, Franca asked one last question, "Madame, can the Plague of an Affliction Witch expand the types of pathogens?"

"What do you mean?" The Demoness of Black frowned slightly, evoking pity.

"I mean, can we find special pathogens and incorporate them into our Plague ability? Simple illnesses like pneumonia, strokes, and heart attacks are powerful but lack imagination. I remember some pathogens cause narcolepsy or complete muscle weakness..." Franca elaborated on her idea.

The Demoness of Black was silent for several seconds before saying, "When you become a Demoness of Despair, you can create mystical pathogens with different effects. For now, the range of Plague is fixed by the Beyonder characteristics unless..."

"Unless what?" Franca asked curiously.

The Demoness of Black spoke with longing and admiration, "Unless the Primordial One modifies the scope of Plague as a true god of the Demoness pathway."

So that's possible? This is what being a deity means, influencing one's pathway... Franca was genuinely shocked, realizing the true meaning of the word "true god."

...

Morora, in the Carnivore bar.

Lumian lay on the bed, eyes closed, appearing asleep but actually closely monitoring Julie's movements.

He suspected that Celeste, the seemingly fully converted experimental subject, might secretly visit Julie at night to share vital information about Morora.

As the night deepened, Lumian felt a sudden restlessness, as if the air was filled with amorous energy.

His mind couldn't help but recall scenes of temptation he'd witnessed before.

Chapter 803: Transmitting Information

803 Transmitting Information

Similar experiences were not new to Lumian; he had felt this way before.

Whenever Franca prayed to the Primordial Demoness figurine made of bone, Lumian would sometimes be nearby. Even through doors and walls, through the wall of spirituality, he couldn't help but feel sensations.

Is Julie praying to the Primordial Demoness figurine? Lumian, still with his eyes closed, made a guess about the current situation.

It wasn't necessarily due to Julie's extreme piety; it was a daily ritual for members of the Demoness Sect. Even a believer of Mr. Fool, like Franca, had to do it regularly.

Before long, the amorous energy in the air dissipated, and Lumian's state returned to normal.

Suddenly, he remembered something: Where did Julie get a Primordial Demoness figurine?

During the exile to Morora, Lumian noticed that neither Lez nor Julie seemed to carry personal belongings. This meant that, except for Lumian, who had special treatment and wasn't searched, all other exiles were handled by the standard procedure.

So, Julie shouldn't have a standard-issue figurine from the Demoness sect. Even if she wanted to make one herself, she would need to buy materials and set up a ritual, and Lumian's tracking today showed she hadn't done any preparations.

So, where did her Primordial Demoness figurine come from? Or did she directly use the language that can invoke natural forces to recite the Primordial Demoness's honorific name? But if that were the case, the influence of the power overflow on me would be too weak. Even if it was not as strong as the residual divine power Franca experienced, it shouldn't be just a bit of restlessness... Lumian became extremely alert.

He quickly had a hypothesis.

Celeste had visited!

It must have been this Demoness, who had become an experimental subject, who gave Julie the Primordial Demoness figurine or something similar!

Why didn't I notice?

II was monitoring the room Julie was in all along...

With that thought, Lumian suddenly sat up and looked at the full-length mirror in his bedroom.

Yes!

Celeste must have come through the mirror world!

She must have communicated with Julie through the mirror, which is why I didn't detect anything unusual until Julie started praying!

It's normal for the Demoness Sect to have items like the Mirror Cufflink!

Silently, Lumian got out of bed and walked to the full-length mirror in his room.

He felt it was time to use the Mirror Cufflink.

He put on the glass-like cufflink and pressed his hand against the mirror surface.

The button-like accessory lit up with a faint glow, and Lumian's figure immediately penetrated the mirror's surface, entering the deep, dark mirror world.

Before the dark, web-like tunnels spread out before him, Lumian clearly sensed the three mirror imprints he had left in the outside world and the few he had set up in Julie's and Lez's rooms.

He didn't rush to the mirror in Julie's room. Instead, he took out an unfinished letter from the Traveler's Bag.

It was a letter to Franca, Jenna, and Anthony.

Lumian then activated the black mark on his right shoulder, attempting to teleport to the full-length mirror in Franca and Jenna's apartment.

It felt distant and had an invisible barrier. Even if he penetrated the barrier, there was a vast, silent void of darkness that Lumian instinctively believed contained indescribable danger and terror.

Does this represent that special mirror world?

To leave Morora and return to the outside world, I must pass through it?

Even Angels would find it dangerous...

With these thoughts, Lumian stretched out his right hand, holding the letter, using the already activated Mirror Cufflink to give the paper a reflective, glass-like hue, and sent it out.

The light stuck to the invisible barrier's surface, slowly permeating it, falling into the dead silence, and heading toward the distant target mirror.

It works... Lumian breathed a sigh of relief and used the contracted ability of Spirit World Traversal to shift to the mirror in Julie's room.

The mirror was pitch black with no traces left.

Lumian sniffed slightly, catching a lingering scent.

It smelled like a human hormone, coupled with the influence of mystical power, faintly sweet, amorous, and warm.

Not Julie's scent... Lumian nodded slightly. Celeste indeed visited.

Now the question was, did Celeste use an item to traverse the mirror world and reach Julie's room, an item that escaped the Church of Knowledge's search, or did she use the special connection of the mirror world to send it through a ritual?

Or, did she conduct a ritual to ask the Primordial Demoness for it? Or is she no longer the original Celeste but her corresponding special Mirror Person? This could explain why she retained some self-awareness after becoming an experimental subject, but it's not the only explanation...

Lumian, an experienced handler of mystical events with much knowledge, naturally linked it to the special Mirror People.

He didn't peek into Julie's current situation through the mirror, fearing Celeste had given Julie some mirror-related items, making her more sensitive to the gaze from the mirror.

Moreover, Julie had just finished praying, and the Primordial Demoness figurine's residual effects lingered. Lumian didn't know if this would affect his spying.

Of course, he could roughly guess what Julie was doing.

Because he could hear Julie's suppressed, soft moans through the mirror.

Lovers reunited, getting what they wanted, relaxing and celebrating. Yes, and the sensations brought by praying to the Primordial Demoness figurine. She hasn't gone out to add to her collection, which is already quite restrained. Lumian silently chuckled.

He teleported back to his bedroom mirror, stepped out of the glass surface, and lay back on the bed.

...

Trier.

Lonely, empty, cold... Franca, used to go early to bed and early to rise, sighed, lying in bed, unable to sleep.

She felt she needed a few more days to adapt.

At this moment, she sensed something, sat up, walked out of the room, and went to the living room.

She looked at the full-length mirror in the living room and saw a water-like light wave on the glass surface, reflecting a neatly folded letter.

Is it from Lumian or the Demoness of Black? Franca walked over and pressed her hand against the mirror's surface.

Her right hand felt slightly cold, as if penetrating a lake mixed with ice, touching the now ethereal, intangible paper.

The paper quickly "dispersed," forming lines of Intisian words on the mirror surface: "I have arrived in Morora..."

Lumian briefly described his experiences and the results of the experiment but didn't mention the specific situation in Morora.

It was a kind of corruption!

A corruption Franca and the others might not withstand!

At the end of the letter, Lumian reminded: "I've already told my messenger and Madame Hela that if anyone writes to me but can't find me, they should send it to you to handle. Yes, I'm talking about you, Franca. Now you temporarily have a messenger."

Dammit, he still has to mock me in the end! Franca cursed in a mix of anger and amusement, grinding her teeth.

She thought for a moment and began writing a reply: "Nothing much to say, just a reminder: The Demoness of Black told me that Demonesses with color titles occasionally receive revelations from the Primordial One and have strong autonomy. If they are like this, won't the Demonesses of Affliction sent to Morora for important tasks also receive revelations, or even some divine power from the figurine?

"You should take this issue seriously. Also, it's time to test your Ascetic endurance. If you get bewitched and lose your manhood, even if it grows back every morning, I'll laugh at you for the rest of your life."

After finishing, Franca folded the paper and took out a rectangular amulet from the Traveler's Bag that looked like it was made of ice.

The amulet was entirely transparent, with patterns and motifs like bubbles inside, flowing and gathering continuously.

It was the Ice Amulet given to Franca by the Demoness of Black, allowing seven traversals through the mirror world or fourteen transmissions of information.

Franca put on the amulet, held the letter, and returned to the full-length mirror.

With a flash of cold light, she pressed the letter into the mirror surface, letting it fall toward the place the previous message came from.

...

Morora.

After reading the letter on the mirror's surface, Lumian lay back on the bed again.

He anticipated possible surprises.

Like Wanak, the owner of Dades Agricultural Company, coming to kill him at night.

This most dangerous criminal in Morora should soon figure out who the exile he confronted in the afternoon was. He must already know that Lumian killed the Carnivore bar owner and took over the place.

Given his attitude, he couldn't wait to kill Lumian on the spot. Now that he had identified his target and locked in his whereabouts, he would act quickly.

Lumian hadn't slept all night, only pretending to, not just to monitor Julie but also for this reason.

Now, he hoped Wanak would come soon. Then, he would teleport away, leaving Julie, the Demoness, for Wanak, letting them have an intense duel. That way, he could see what cards Julie had, what items she got from Celeste, and whether Wanak could further use the power of 0-01.

To Lumian's disappointment, Wanak didn't show up all night.

Is there a need to be this cautious? Just come straight here... Lumian muttered, getting out of bed and heading downstairs.

Chef Lez was already up, preparing breakfast with the kitchen ingredients.

"We can resume operations by noon today," Lez said, glancing at Lumian. "But we don't have any beef, lamb, or pork in stock."

"I'll give you some startup funds," Lumian replied, just about to leave the kitchen when he suddenly heard Julie's footsteps coming down the stairs.

An idea crossed his mind, and he casually said to Lez, "By the way, let me tell you about a few people you need to be cautious of. Whatever you do, don't provoke them.

"First, there's Wanak, the owner of Dades Agricultural Company..."

Lumian relayed all of Gusain's warnings to Lez and then added, "And another one, named Albus Medici..."

As soon as he mentioned the name, Lumian heard Julie's footsteps pause momentarily.

Chapter 804: Consultation

804 Consultation

"He might not use that name in Morora. I knew him before and saw him again yesterday when he came to the bar to duel with the owner. He has red hair. In Morora, anyone with red hair, no matter the shade, is trouble..." Lumian described Albus Medici's appearance in detail.

Chef Lez nodded. "I'll keep that in mind."

"Are you sure? Do you need me to sketch them for you?" Lumian asked earnestly.

He wasn't just asking Lez but also Julie, who was coming down the stairs slowly.

He wanted to give the Demoness something to focus on, hoping she'd be aware of Wanak and Albus Medici soon enough, letting trouble collide with trouble to see who was the bigger problem.

Lez shook his head slowly. "No need. I'll remember them like different ingredients with distinct features."

"Different ingredients, like a turkey?" Lumian imagined Albus Medici looking like a turkey and laughed.

He then handed Lez 200 sassen gold coins to restock the bar with meat and drinks.

As he turned to leave the kitchen, he saw Julie reaching the bottom of the stairs.

The Demoness had changed into fresh, clean clothes-an elegant white blouse paired with an ankle-length green skirt, highlighting her gentle and graceful demeanor.

Lumian suddenly recalled the sounds he heard last night, which contrasted sharply with Julie's current serene appearance.

His mouth went dry.

Dammit, this Demoness is subtly using Charm on me! It was normal to react, but this strong reaction wasn't right for an Ascetic like Lumian.

He looked at Julie and raised an eyebrow. "Do you remember the second rule of the bar?"

Julie, looking more radiant than yesterday, seemed to glow with inner joy.

Lumian felt an urge to rub his forehead.

Hey gal, are you really not worried about exposing that Celeste visited you last night?

Although you don't know that I witnessed you sprinting to Celeste yesterday and suffered a huge blow...

Julie smiled gently. "Don't harass the boss."

"You were Charming me just now," Lumian stated flatly.

Julie shrank back, feigning fear. "What... what are you going to do to punish me?"

She acted scared but her eyes sparkled with amusement, as if she was teasing Lumian.

Lumian sighed, half-genuine, half-deliberate. "First-time offense can be forgiven. But don't let it happen again, or else..."

He didn't finish the sentence, leaving an ominous silence.

"Yes, boss!" Julie beamed.

She glanced at the door.

"The bar won't open until noon. Can I go out for a bit?"

"Sure," Lumian teased. "Planning to add to your collection? Do you have a morning exercise routine?"

"No," Julie shook her head lightly. "Just want to explore the city more."

As she left the bar, Lumian immediately teleported ahead, transforming into a shadow creature to follow her.

But Julie vanished.

Invisibility, then wiped her tracks, and did anti-divination? Lumian emerged from the shadows, frowning slightly.

This meant what Julie was doing this morning was very important. She didn't want anyone to know!

Also, having finally met her lover and found solace, she was more professional now, unlike her near-breakdown last night.

This was the normal behavior of a Sequence 5 Demoness of Affliction.

Lumian wasn't too disappointed. At least Julie now knew about Wanak and Albus Medici.

Following the nearest path, he walked towards the cemetery but didn't dig any graves or sneak underground. Instead, he went straight into the library-like Knowledge Cathedral.

Today, he was not merely tracking Julie. His main goal was to visit Archbishop Heraberg of Morora.

The title of Morora's Archbishop was Lumian's creation. After all, this puppet-like clergy member of the Church of Knowledge claimed to oversee all theological affairs in Morora.

Lumian felt that since the Church of Knowledge had 'recommended' him into Morora without confiscating his mystical items, direct inquiry about the underground mausoleum might be surprisingly effective rather than probing indirectly.

This was also a test. Lumian wanted to see if the sealing information about 0-01 was given only to him or distributed to all eligible individuals.

Did the Church of Knowledge place its bet solely on him, or did it hedge its bets across multiple candidates?

Inside the radiant holy cathedral, Lumian found Heraberg, with his graying hair, kind eyes, and white robe with brass embroidery, standing by a brass bookshelf, quietly reading a thick book.

"Archbishop," Lumian called tentatively.

Heraberg looked up and asked warmly, "What puzzles you?"

Lumian chose his words carefully.

"If I want to enter the cemetery's underground section to find something, how can I avoid the dangers?"

Heraberg smiled and pointed to the brass bookshelf beside him.

"This one, this one, and this one... read them all thoroughly."

Lumian followed his gesture, mentally noting the book titles:

"Morora Residents' Code,"

"Doll Crafting and Maintenance,"

"Examples of Mausoleum Construction,"

"Principles of Sealing"...

What use is this for a Hunter like me? I'm not a Reader who can wield knowledge directly. Does this mean that by absorbing the knowledge in these books, I can grasp the layout of the underground mausoleum, understand the sealing mechanisms, and find a way to leave my mark on 0-01? Lumian thought deeply as he withdrew his gaze.

Heraberg continued, "Once you've read those, complete these test papers. You must score perfectly on each one."

Lumian looked at the stack of test papers filling a shelf. His forehead twitched, recalling some unpleasant memories.

He maintained a neutral expression, confirming, "So, once I finish reading and acing these tests, I can avoid the underground dangers?"

Heraberg pointed to another brass bookshelf.

"That one, that one, and that one. Master all the knowledge on those shelves, and you'll be well-prepared."

Three shelves? Lumian's lips twitched slightly.

That's about two or three hundred books, plus thousands of test papers, right?

Heraberg smiled and sighed. "Remember, knowledge equals power, and knowledge equals wealth. All the answers you seek lie within."

Lumian's expression shifted as he bit his lip and said, "I'll start with these."

He pulled out the initial books Heraberg pointed out.

Heraberg nodded approvingly.

"A Hunter who learns and pursues knowledge is the most powerful Hunter.

"It's been years since another Hunter came to me, willing to patiently read the designated books. The others, with red or thick hair, won't even step into the Holy Temple of Knowledge, let alone approach these bookshelves."

It's because Aurore instilled a reading habit in me from a young age...

Lumian thought, feeling a pang of sadness.

He placed the books into his Traveler's Bag, bid farewell to Heraberg, and walked towards the Knowledge Cathedral's entrance.

Along the way, he saw a familiar figure-Guei, who had been exiled to Merora with him.

The scholarly-looking Guei, now dressed in thick, cotton clothing, stood by a brass bookshelf, engrossed in a book by the light of the stained glass window.

After a few seconds, Lumian walked over, smiling. "What a coincidence. Why are you here reading?"

Guei smiled faintly. "Didn't I tell you yesterday? I regret not knowing enough. Now, with such a vast library, how could I pass up the chance to learn? What brings you here?"

"To ask if it's too late to convert to the God of Knowledge and Wisdom," Lumian joked, then changed the topic. "Have you found a job yet?"

"Not yet," Guei shook his head. "I don't want to work on a farm or in a factory as some exile's slave. I'm planning to study for a while. Fortunately, I had some luck yesterday and earned some money, so I don't have to worry about going hungry."

Lumian chatted with Guei for a bit before waving goodbye to the secretive serial killer and returning to the Carnivore bar. He found a spot by the window and began reading the borrowed books in a comfortable position.

Morora's sunlight alternated between bright and hidden by storm clouds, but it didn't affect Lumian's reading as he had his radiant fireball lamp.

Near noon, Julie returned, her steps light, her face smiling, exuding a charm that even made Chef Lez steal a few glances at her.

Julie gave Lumian a curious look. "You're reading?"

"Not much else to do," Lumian replied casually.

Julie had no interest in the books; she withdrew her gaze and went upstairs, likely looking for waitress attire.

Lumian clicked his tongue silently.

Really, knowledge is power, and knowledge is wealth. Aren't you curious about what I'm reading?

Lez approached and said, "Boss, lunch is ready."

Lumian nodded, put away the books, and stood up.

He thought for a moment and said to Lez, "Find a red cloth and hang it at the door."

Chapter 805: Test

805 Test

Lez didn't ask why. He went upstairs, found a piece of red cloth, and hung it at the entrance of the Carnivore bar.

Lumian then sat at the newly rebuilt bar, enjoying the spiced, marinated roast beef with soft, delicious bread.

As time passed, more and more customers entered the Carnivore bar.

Lez had put up a wooden stand outside with a new menu and corresponding prices.

Of course, this wasn't the main reason for the influx of customers.

The primary reason was the incredibly low prices on the menu. After all, there was no owner to take a cut.

The customers came in with a sense of skepticism. They didn't have much faith in the bar under new ownership, repeatedly checking if the prices were real, if there were any hidden costs, and if the portions and quality of the food were as advertised.

This skepticism stemmed from being frequently deceived by Morora's unscrupulous merchants.

Those merchants had a point, though: "We've been exiled here for serious crimes. You can't expect us to run honest businesses, can you? Besides, the Morora Resident Code doesn't prohibit false pricing or inferior goods, and the enforcers won't check the kitchen's hygiene."

Most customers were angry but helpless. Those merchants they could deal with had already been eliminated. The remaining ones were too powerful to confront.

They often regretted not keeping a few manageable merchants around to ensure food quality and fair pricing through regular supervision.

Sometimes, killing wasn't the best solution.

"If I had understood that, I wouldn't have been exiled to Morora!" A man in his forties voiced his opinion while holding a beer with white foam.

His gaze kept shifting to Julie, temporarily acting as the bartender, hoping to catch her attention with his words and demeanor.

Low prices drew them in, but the pretty bartender made them stay for another drink.

Lumian forked a piece of perfectly roasted beef, savoring the combination of Lez's secret spices and the tender meat.

He wondered if, after leaving Morora, he should have Ludwig become a head chef.

Can't waste a Chef's talent!

After finishing lunch, Lumian took a glass of strong liquor and walked around the hall as the bar owner, piecing together the current situation in Morora from different customers.

Not long after the establishment of this City of Exiles, a class division emerged, mainly based on power.

Today, the Beyonders firmly controlled all key positions in Morora, holding the resources like food, meat, vegetables, dairy products, various minerals, factory goods, sales channels, and street shops. Ordinary criminals without supernatural powers could only serve them, working on farms, in mines, ranches, factories, etc. The better-off were employees; the worse-off were nearly slaves.

For these ordinary criminals, the ultimate dream was to gain the trust of a powerful Beyonder and receive unwanted Beyonder characteristics as rewards after a duel.

This is exactly what the Iron and Blood Cross Order dreamed of, Lumian mused with a chuckle after returning to his seat at the bar.

As a former member of the Iron and Blood Cross Order, he often mocked the awkward "preaching" and "rituals," but it helped him grasp the core ideology of the Iron and Blood Cross Order:

They wanted to establish a world where Beyonders no longer hid but gained status through power.

Morora seemed to embody this vision.

Lumian was about to finish his drink and find a quiet place upstairs to study when he noticed Gusain, the gentleman, entering the bar.

You came quickly... Someone's been watching this place? Lumian played with his glass.

Gusain sat beside him, removed his top hat, and addressed Julie, who wore a white blouse, black vest, and a dark tie with a unique charm, "A Lanti Proof."

In Morora, the most popular drinks were rye beer, Lanti Proof, and red wine.

Lumian took out paper and pen from his Traveler's Bag and started sketching on the bar counter.

Gusain waited until Julie handed him the Lanti Proof, took a sip, and then smiled ahead.

"You made your decision faster than I expected."

"I don't want to be tied down like this," Lumian replied with a hidden meaning-his true intention was that he didn't want to stay in Morora long, while Gusain interpreted it as him not wanting to remain under the Church of Knowledge's rule.

"That's a choice all strong people make. Eagles don't mingle with sparrows," Gusain praised.

Lumian, still sketching, laughed.

"Now, you need to convince me that you have a promising future. I won't stand with losers."

"I've incited dozens of riots and haven't been caught by the Church of Knowledge. Isn't that reason enough?" Gusain sipped his Lanti Proof.

Lumian shook his head.

"In my hometown, there's a saying, 'One swallow doesn't make a summer.' It means that a single event can't predict a season. Making hasty judgments based on isolated incidents is unwise."

"What do you need to be convinced?" Gusain tilted his head.

Lumian chuckled in response.

"Pass my test."

Gusain paused for a moment, then laughed.

"Normally, wouldn't it be our organization testing new members to see if they're qualified. How did it become the other way around?"

"It depends on the new member's strength and importance, not past experiences," Lumian said, with an expression suggesting he didn't need them to stir up trouble-he could form his own team.

Gusain drank his Lanti Proof, then said, "What do you want us to do?"

Lumian remained silent until he finished his sketch, then pushed the paper toward Gusain.

"Find this person."

The drawing was of Albus Medici.

Although Lumian's drawing skills weren't high, his precise control as a Hunter, his deep memory of the subject, and mental reconstruction made Albus Medici's likeness vivid, capturing his aggressive, unpleasant aura.

"Him?" Gusain asked, confirming as he held the drawing.

Lumian nodded slightly.

"His real name is Albus Medici. I don't know if he's using an alias in Morora."

"Medici..." Gusain repeated the last name softly.

He folded the drawing, tucked it into his pocket, then picked up his drink.

"You can test us, but we need to test you too.

"You must prove your capabilities."

"Killing the original owner of this bar isn't enough?" Lumian smiled. "Or do you want to duel me?"

Gusain, maintaining his gentlemanly demeanor, shook his head.

"We acknowledge your strength. Now we need to test other aspects."

Lumian, holding his glass, turned to Gusain, waiting for him to elaborate.

Gusain glanced around, his eyes resting on the irresistibly charming Julie for a moment.

Lowering his voice, he said, "The Church of Knowledge's control over Morora relies on something in the underground mausoleum of the cemetery. Our ultimate goal is to break in and take control of it.

"It's very dangerous. We found a similar place to train our members. Your test is to enter that fog-covered underground area, overcome the challenges, and reach the marked location."

The goal is still 0-01? Lumian thought for a few seconds and said, "Alright, when do we start?"

"Tonight," Gussin finished his Lanti Proof, paid, and left the Carnivore bar.

Lumian glanced at Julie, noticing she was dealing with customers politely and reservedly, seemingly unaware of his conversation with Gusain.

Heh... Lumian smirked inwardly, set down his glass, and headed upstairs.

...

Trier, Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative, Apartment 702, 9 Rue Orosai.

"Jenna should be back the day after tomorrow, right?" Franca murmured, standing by the living room window, a bit wistful and fearful.

Her face alternated between light and shadow against the deep night and streetlights, like an enchanting dream.

Suddenly, she saw Penitent Baynfel, dressed in black clerical robes and looking like a charred corpse, emerge from the void, holding a letter.

A letter? Who's writing to Lumian? Hmm, Baynfel's appearance here means messengers can't locate Morora, even those with special contracts... Franca accepted the letter with a polite smile.

"Thank you."

Baynfel nodded, turned, and vanished into the night outside the window. Franca sighed and mumbled, "I wanted to build a relationship and ask you to introduce me to a messenger..."

She raised her right hand, catching a mixed scent of powder, perfume, grass, flowers, and spices from the letter.

A letter from a woman? Franca, entrusted by Lumian, muttered as she opened the letter and read it.

"Not sure if I should call you Monsieur Louis Berry or Monsieur Lumian Lee.

"Through Rhea, I've delved into Matani's mysticism circle, learning much about the mysticism and realizing I'm not weak-just inexperienced and unable to show it. For real.

"Of course, I've also realized the gap between us and how vast the world is beyond Matani.

"I'm willing to help your friend and hope you'll keep your promise.

"Amandina."

Chapter 806: Expressing Goodwill

806 Expressing Goodwill

Amandina? If it were anyone else, Franca might not have remembered, but she couldn't forget this participant of the Dream Festival, a girl who called the Underworld Daoist her teacher. Franca later summoned the Armored Shadow Chen Tu for more information, and she might even need Amandina's help.

With this in mind, Franca reached into her Traveler's Bag and counted her accumulated gold.

Including the final payment from a member of the Curly-Haired Baboon Research Society, she now had gold worth 82,000 verl d'or and nearly 20,000 verl d'or in cash. With a little exchange, it would be enough to meet the requirements of the Armored Shadow, Chen Tu, for a conversation.

Of course, Franca didn't plan to do this anytime soon.

First, Lumian was in Morora. Without using his special connection with the contract target, even knowing the Armored Shadow's name as Chen Tu, Franca wasn't sure she could summon the spirit from the original world. After all, that might not be its true name, and translating it into ancient Hermes or other mystical languages might correspond to different spirit world creatures.

Secondly, facing the Armored Shadow without a demigod present would likely be extremely dangerous.

Amandina's presence might partially substitute for a demigod, intimidating the Armored Shadow.

Should we wait for Lumian to return from Morora before summoning Chen Tu again? Franca felt a mix of excitement and apprehension, a state known as "near-home anxiety."

After a moment, she exhaled slowly, deciding to respond to Amandina on Lumian's behalf.

Hmm, Lumian promised to take Amandina to the area around the Samaritan Woman's Spring, giving her a chance to meet the Underworld Daoist outside of the Dream Festival.

This is beneficial for us, but it's too dangerous with my current strength.

Besides, I'm not sure if the power brought by The Celestial Worthy of Heaven and Earth for Blessings combined with the Tarot Club's Minor Arcana identity can penetrate the fog around the Samaritan Woman's Spring.

We should wait until Lumian is out of Morora. For now, I'll show Amandina some goodwill to lay the groundwork for future cooperation...

Hmm, I'll organize some important mysticism knowledge and give it to Amandina for free. Show some respect for the higher authority, if not for me. If the Underworld Daoist sees how well I treat His disciple, maybe His attitude will change...

Also, I'll ask Amandina which path of the divine she wants to take besides the power of the boons and help her get the corresponding potion formulas and materials. This won't be free. Giving everything for free would make us look too humble and lead to disrespect. Too much kindness can turn into resentment...

Amandina should choose between the paths of Darkness, Death, and Warrior. The potion formulas and characteristics for the mid-to-low Sequences of the Warrior path are relatively easy to find. Maybe we can ask Madam Justice to get help from Mr. Star for the Darkness path. He seems to be a high-ranking member of the Evernight Goddess Church; last time, he wore red gloves...

Perfect timing, I was about to report the secrets of the Demoness Sect taught by the Demoness of Black and mention Amandina's situation to see what mysticism knowledge can be shared and what can't be leaked...

Having sorted her thoughts, Franca returned to her bedroom, sat at her desk, and began writing her report.

...

South Continent, Port Port Pylos of Matani, in a three-story white marble villa.

Having finally made up her mind and sent out that letter, Amandina grew more awake as the night went on, pacing back and forth in her soft, girlish bedroom, waiting for Lumian's reply.

The more she learned about mysticism and Beyonders, the more she realized the gap between herself and Lumian and how ignorant she had been.

Though she felt she could continue living as she had, maintaining the appearance of a normal high-society person with certain supernatural abilities, the events during the Dream Festival and the rumors she had heard from various mysticism circles made her feel a sense of crisis and urgency.

Living in the South Continent in an era of increasing disasters, her Sequence 7 Nightmare powers and current situation of facing everything alone made her truly afraid that one day her entire family would become sacrifices in a Rose School of Thought blood ritual or that the hidden problems of the Dream Festival would suddenly erupt and engulf her.

The more she knew, the more afraid she became.

Amandina felt she could never return to her previous state of ignorance and recklessness, and she had a strong desire for higher Sequences and more extraordinary power.

That would mean she could do more and see more.

Suddenly, she saw the same cool-looking charred messenger from before emerge from the void, handing her a small dressing mirror.

A mirror? What does Lumian Lee mean by giving me a mirror? Amandina accepted the mirror with curiosity and confusion, feeling it was quite ordinary.

She was about to ask the Penitent Baynfel when she noticed a dark, aqueous light spreading across the mirror's surface.

As the light flowed, the mirror gradually brightened, revealing a figure.

A mystic telegraph? And one where you can see and talk to the other person? How fascinating... Amandina didn't notice the messenger leaving, her attention entirely captivated by the mirror.

She soon realized that the figure in the mirror wasn't Lumian Lee but a stranger, a woman.

The woman had lake-colored eyes, both bright and deep, as if hiding countless words that made one want to explore them. Her nose was delicate and straight, her lips a tempting combination of red and tender white skin, and her eyebrows extended to her temples, with her flaxen hair tied into a ponytail, giving her an air of elegance.

So beautiful... Amandina stared blankly, instinctively admiring the woman in her mind.

She herself was a girl of outstanding appearance and had always been proud of it, but this time, she felt no sense of competition, entirely immersed in a beauty she had never seen before.

Her gaze naturally lowered, seeing the smooth, slender neck and the lace flowers around the shirt collar.

For some reason, Amandina felt an urge to see the entire body of the woman in the mirror, to see how beautiful she would look naked.

She felt this wasn't her own problem. Even Padre Cali who only liked men would surely have a similar urge!

Using a bit of Charm to enhance goodwill for easier communication, Franca also observed Amandina.

This girl had a waterfall of black hair and blue eyes, exuding a youthful energy of free self-expression.

All of Lumian's female acquaintances are quite beautiful... Is this a Hunter's talent? Franca smiled sweetly through the glass mirror.

"Lumian is busy right now and can't leave, so he asked me to communicate with you."

Amandina snapped out of her daze, shaking off the spell of the woman's beauty.

She looked at Franca in the mirror, curiosity and a desire to explore igniting within her.

"You're Lumian... Eh... Monsieur Lumian Lee's friend? The one who might need my help in the future?"

"Yes." Franca smiled and nodded.

Hmph, and you say you're not lovers. Such a beautiful woman makes even me, who likes men, want to sleep with her. How much more for a man who doesn't like men... Amandina felt she had seen through Lumian's lie.

She straightened her waterfall-like hair and asked brightly, "I'm willing to help you. Can you keep your promise?"

"That might have to wait until Lumian finishes his current tasks, and you're not strong enough yet," Franca said succinctly. "Do you want to advance through potions besides the power of boons? Which path do you want: Death, Darkness, or Warrior?"

Franca spoke quickly because the power of the Ice Amulet was limited in time.

After posing the question, she suddenly thought of something.

It is said that the Warrior path's potions has a significant height-enhancing effect, even turning the drinker into a giant at higher levels...

Hmm, turning such a pretty girl into a three or four-meter-tall giant beauty seems odd... Franca wasn't sure if she was worried or looking forward to it.

Amandina had discussed with Lumian which paths she could take and had thought seriously about it, so she quickly made her decision.

"Darkness."

As a girl who had always been good at understanding her parents' thoughts and was adored by her elders, Amandina felt that since the figure during the Dream Festival had only given her the power of Darkness and not the Death power given to Robert or the Warrior power given to some gravekeepers, it might mean that He wanted her to be pure and focus on the path of Darkness.

She also planned to go to the ancient tomb during the next Dream Festival to receive more gifts, naturally not wanting to disappoint that figure.

I still want to see what happens when the power of the Death or Warrior path is mixed with the Darkness boon... Franca said seriously, "I will inquire and gather the necessary things for you, but you need to pay for it or complete tasks I assign."

Amandina was no longer the naive girl she used to be and understood the value of potion formulas and Beyonder ingredients. She nodded.

"Okay."

Franca smiled in the mirror.

"Also, I appreciate you agreeing to help. No matter what Lumian promised you, I will provide you with some extra mysticism knowledge for free."

"Really?" Amandina was delighted.

This beautiful lady is truly generous!

And it's not a trap. The potion formulas and Beyonder ingredients come at a cost.

Franca didn't answer directly but smiled and said, "Remember, my name is Franca."

As she spoke, she raised her right hand and pushed a stack of stapled papers forward.

In Amandina's eyes, the stack grew larger, eventually penetrating the glass and falling into her hands, while Franca's image disappeared from the mirror.

Franca... Lumian Lee and she make a good match... Amandina imagined Lumian and Franca together, suddenly having some romantic thoughts.

She whispered to herself, That must be beautiful. I'd love to see it...

Suppressing the images in her mind, Amandina looked at the papers in her hand, glancing over a line of words: "Law of Beyonder Characteristics Convergence..."

Wh- Amandina was both bewildered and deeply impressed.

...

Morora, late night.

After the Carnivore bar closed, Lumian exited through the back door and saw Gusain wearing a top silk hat.

Gusain slowly smiled. "I'll take you to the place for your test now."

Chapter 807: Overlooked

807 Overlooked

Morora's night was devoid of streetlights, relying solely on the crimson moon high above to provide light, casting deep darkness and dense shadows everywhere.

Gusain, dressed like a gentleman, carried a lantern as he led Lumian to a neighborhood near the edge of the city.

The area had been completely abandoned due to a small volcano that had erupted, swallowing several houses and leaving a charred wasteland in its wake.

"The place you mentioned isn't at the base of the volcano, is it?" Lumian glanced around, adjusted his cuff, and smiled.

Gusain nodded slightly.

"Yes, the volcanic eruption affected the underground part of the cemetery, allowing its power to seep out. The lava receded quickly, leaving behind an empty void.

"If you can find the right path through the void filled with the fog of war and reach the designated spot, it will prove you have the qualifications to join us in penetrating the underground part of the cemetery."

Fog of war... Gusain had been using this term to describe the underground fog, which seemed to have leaked from the mausoleum containing 0-01, which represents the Red Priest... Lumian didn't conjure a bright white fireball for illumination. Instead, he followed Gusain, who carried the lantern, into a building on the edge of the volcanic area.

Inside the house, filled with solidified volcanic rock, they descended a precarious staircase into a partially collapsed basement.

The basement walls had a gaping crack leading to a void filled with dense fog.

"You need to reach this point near the cemetery's underground section and light the oil lamp between four stone statues. Remember, there are four statues facing each other in pairs." Gusain hung the lantern on a protruding stone brick in the wall crack and took out a simple map, pointing to the destination.

Lumian studied the map for a minute, then turned his gaze to the dense fog outside the crack. "What's special about this fog?"

Gusain pressed his top hat and smiled.

"It significantly reduces your visibility, affects your hearing and smell, suppresses your Astral Projection's interaction with the spirit world, and dulls your spiritual warning and intuition."

"And?" Lumian asked, seemingly relaxed.

Gusain thought for a few seconds.

"The fog of war envelops the corresponding spirit world area. Some Beyonders, even if they can enter the spirit world, can't locate themselves or escape the fog. If they try to teleport out, they might get lost somewhere in Morora and never return to reality."

Seeing means being able to teleport there? With my Hunter's vision, I can only see five or six meters... Lumian roughly understood the fog's effects and laughed.

"If I could create a hurricane, could I blow it away?"

"We've tried. You can, but once the wind stops, the fog comes back, and the dispersal is limited to reality, not affecting the part seeping into the spirit world," Gusain explained the previous experiment's results.

Lumian asked a few more details, then conjured a bright white flame to hover above his head.

He stepped forward, through the crack, and into the dense fog.

Unlike normal fog, this one felt like it had been scorched by fire. As Lumian inhaled, his airways stung with a fiery pain, and his mind filled with the smell of burning, blood, and rust.

The dense fog churned, and the ground trembled slightly.

Lumian saw tall figures emerging from the fog five or six meters away.

These figures were made of black iron, covered in dark red rust, like neglected metal puppets.

Some lacked arms, others had disjointed bodies, and some had gaping holes in their chests. They staggered towards Lumian, wielding giant swords that gleamed coldly.

Lumian chuckled. "Who dug you out of the trash heap? Recycling, huh?"

Before he finished speaking, he disappeared from his spot, reappearing behind one of the iron puppets.

His eyes turned iron-black, and his right fist ignited with bright white flames, crashing down on the puppet's waist.

Suddenly, a bright white flame spear shot from the crack in the wall, hurtling towards Lumian.

Lumian couldn't dodge or use Spirit World Traversal in time. He could only fall to the ground, following the momentum of his right punch.

At the same time, he prepared to swap places with his shadow.

Bang!

His flaming right fist struck the puppet's waist, creating a spiderweb of cracks.

Then, his fist brushed against the metal surface, pulling his body to the ground, narrowly avoiding the white flame spear, though a lock of his hair caught fire.

With a clatter, the white flame spear pierced the puppet and landed two meters away, revealing Gusain in his top hat.

The invigilator was the attacker!

The second most dangerous person in Morora!

Creak! Creak! The puppet took a step forward out of inertia, then collapsed into a heap of scrap metal.

Lumian, lying on the ground, didn't roll away. Since he hadn't gone far from the basement, he teleported to the crack covered in dense fog, moving as far as his vision allowed to escape the fog of war.

Once outside, he could either counterattack Gusain or find a chance to escape, both better options than fighting in a preset scenario.

Whenever possible, avoid fighting in someone else's setup!

As Lumian's figure appeared in the dense fog near the basement crack, he saw a bright white flaming metal spear rushing towards his heart as if waiting for him to come.

Besides Gusain, there was another ambusher!

Gusain's attack seemed to lure Lumian to teleport towards the exit, stepping into a trap!

At this moment, Lumian, in Morora, far from Franca and Jenna, couldn't use their Mirror Substitution. He could only swap places with his shadow in a flash of light.

Pfft!

The bright white flaming spear pierced Lumian's chest, setting him ablaze.

But Lumian's figure turned thin and black, dissolving like a shadow in the firelight.

The spear-wielding man stepped through the crack into the fog of war.

His hair was tinged with blood, his features aggressive, and he wore a black and red jacket. He was Albus Medici.

Albus Medici, whom Gusain was supposed to be looking for, was here!

Lumian's figure reappeared in another direction, but due to the fog of war, he was still within six meters of Albus, Gusain, and the remaining iron puppets.

He saw Gusain's forehead glow red, something about to emerge. Albus's hair was covered in red flames, lengthening as it spread.

"Traitor," Gusain whispered, sentencing him.

He then created several bright white fireballs, hurling them at Lumian to cover every corner.

He seemed unafraid of affecting himself or Albus, though they were only five or six meters apart, and the fireballs could flatten the Carnivore bar.

Hearing Gusain's words and seeing Albus's stance, Lumian understood why he was attacked: He had overlooked the Iron and Blood Cross Order!

This secret organization, primarily following the Hunter path, was also searching for 0-01. Over the years, someone had likely infiltrated Morora.

One of them was Gusain!

With the core members of the Iron and Blood Cross Order's strange connection to Fourth Epoch Trier, they could maintain some self-awareness in Morora. Using 0-01 to sense the approaching enforcement team made sense, fitting Gusain's behavior!

Now, it seemed Albus Medici was still cooperating with the Iron and Blood Cross Order, using the secret organization. Lumian's attempt to use Gusain's power to find Albus had been turned into a trap.

Seeing the incoming bright white fireballs and Albus blocking the exit, Lumian didn't hesitate. His sleeve flashed, and he disappeared again.

This time, he left behind a makeup mirror.

The mirror fell through the dense fog, cracking as it hit the ground.

Rumble!

Gusain's fireballs exploded, only affecting a six-meter range, unable to disperse the dense fog of war, confined to a small area.

The mirror shattered into countless pieces, some turning to dust, others melting and reforming.

Albus, feeling the impact and heat, muttered in confusion, "Using the mirror world?"

Behind the dark void of the mirror, Lumian used the Mirror Cufflink again, quickly looking forward and finding the fog of war hadn't invaded the dark, web-like tunnels.

Indeed, in Morora, the mirror world is special... Lumian dared to trust Gusain and enter the fog of war for the test because he had the Mirror Cufflink.

Of course, with items like the Sword of Courage, he wasn't without fighting strength, but he didn't want to risk it in an enemy's prepared battlefield without knowing Albus's full capabilities.

Lumian chose a mirror mark in Morora and used Spirit World Traversal to leave.

As he vanished, the dark void behind the mirror silently collapsed with its shattering.

Lumian's destination was Julie's room mirror.

Upon arrival, he looked through the glass, finding Julie, the Demoness, nowhere to be seen, not even asleep in bed.

Lumian's lips curled into a smile.

Chapter 808: Return

808 Return

Not far from the abandoned neighborhood, Albus Medici, who had parted ways with Gusain, walked along the shadows by the roadside toward the cemetery.

Suddenly, he stopped, as if sensing an undercurrent in the nearby darkness.

Albus chuckled, and a dense fog immediately surged out, covering his figure and half the street.

After several seconds, the fog gradually dispersed, but Albus was no longer there.

He had vanished.

From the shadow that had just been enveloped by the fog, Julie, with her hair tied up and wearing a slit dress, emerged, staring at the spot where Albus had stood for several seconds.

A golden ring with a blue gemstone adorned her left middle finger.

Julie looked away, her expression somewhat grim, and headed toward the few blocks where the exiles gathered.

Some time later, in the deep darkness of the night, the sharp, painful screams of a man echoed from a room.

...

Lumian returned to the full-length mirror in his room and stepped out, lying down on the bed.

After discovering that Julie had quietly left the Carnivore bar, he knew the Demoness had been secretly following him and Gusain.

This was one of his intended outcomes.

Otherwise, he wouldn't have discussed searching for Albus Medici and accepting the corresponding test with Gusain at the bar.

He had done it to ensure that Julie, temporarily acting as a bartender, would hear it!

Although he and Gusain had lowered their voices, the Demoness was close enough to catch the crucial information with her enhanced hearing.

Of course, Lumian hadn't initially considered Julie as a contingency plan because Gusain had witnessed the Demoness castrate Vijepan and had clearly noticed her beauty and charm when she became a bartender.

In such a situation, Gusain would likely guess Julie's identity as a Demoness and remain cautious, knowing she might have overheard their conversation.

Lumian's primary goal was to gauge the progress of the Demoness Sect regarding 0-01 based on Julie's reaction.

If the Demoness Sect, through the long-term investigation of Celeste and other Demonesses, had completed preparations and was only waiting for the final opportunity to act, Julie would avoid creating extra trouble and patiently maintain the status quo. In that case, Lumian would have to closely monitor Julie and Celeste to prevent them from taking the lead.

If the Demoness Sect wasn't confident and still lacked information, Julie would likely use this opportunity to gather more intelligence from Gusain and the rebels connected to him, making her actions more comprehensive.

Lumian wouldn't need to be as urgent and could allocate time and effort to other investigations.

In this regard, he had perfectly achieved his goal.

Now, Lumian was more curious about Julie's reaction after discovering Albus Medici while following him and Gusain. What would she try to do?

Will she attempt an assassination on the spot, wait patiently to challenge Albus alone after he and Gusain part ways, or go find Celeste to discuss it first? It's a pity I don't know where they'll encounter each other, so I can't observe the battle and see what cards they hold. If I'm lucky, I might even eliminate them both if they end up badly injured... Lumian sighed regretfully on the bed.

After a while, he sensed some movement from Julie's room.

The Demoness had returned.

Lumian sniffed the air and detected a faint smell of blood.

He chuckled inwardly and mocked, Albus, did you lose your prized possession? I wonder if you can regrow it as an Iron-blooded Knight...

There wasn't much commotion in Morora just now, not like there was a fierce battle... So, did Julie fail to locate Albus and vent her frustration on some random guy?

Lumian waited patiently, ensuring the City of Exiles, Morora, fell into a deep slumber, then transformed into a shadow creature and blended into the darkness of the room.

He moved swiftly, returning to the abandoned neighborhood with the volcano, and arrived at the crack in the basement, once again gazing into the void filled with dense fog.

He felt it was necessary to investigate this area thoroughly to better understand some details in the 0-01 sealing information and gain further insight into the underground mausoleum.

Neither Gusain nor Albus would expect him to return here, especially after the possibility of facing Julie's attack!

The fog isn't as dense as before. The visibility range is about thirteen or fourteen meters... Was it Albus and Gusain enhancing the fog of war with their abilities or items earlier? Lumian observed the fog for a few seconds, making a preliminary judgment.

He then conjured a bright white fireball for illumination and slowly walked into the fog of war.

The fog felt similar to before, with no other changes. Lumian dripped a few drops of perfume on the ground every so often to mark his path for the return journey.

He was heading to the area marked with statues on the map Gusain had shown.

In the dead silence, only the faint sound of footsteps echoed in the fog as Lumian discerned the terrain, passing several iron puppets hidden in the fog.

Finally, relying on his Hunter abilities and the memorized map, he reached his destination.

There, against the rock wall, stood four statues made of gray-white stone, each over two meters tall.

These statues faced each other in pairs, their faces blurred, dressed in peculiar clothing, with square scarves wrapped around their heads.

In the middle of the statues stood a half-height stone platform with an unlit oil lamp on it.

Who made these statues? They weren't originally here. According to the 0-01 sealing information, this place isn't part of the underground mausoleum, it's just normal underground... After the volcanic eruption, some of the mausoleum's power leaked out, and someone built these four statues and placed the oil lamp here. What's the purpose? Lumian mused silently, staring at the bright white fireball.

Judging by the style of the statues and the overall arrangement, he doubted the Church of Knowledge had set them up to reinforce the seal.

It was more likely the work of the Iron and Blood Cross Order, which explained Gusain's familiarity with the area.

Meanwhile, Lumian felt the call from underground growing stronger.

It seemed to be just behind the rock wall, waiting for him to approach.

Lumian took a deep breath, suppressing his inner urge.

He circled the statues and the oil lamp on the stone platform several times, finding nothing unusual.

Lumian pondered for a moment and had two ideas.

One was to light the oil lamp and see what happened; the other was to take this opportunity to destroy something and trigger a possible change.

Lighting the oil lamp is too risky. It's not necessary yet... Lumian decided on the second idea after some thought.

Destruction is always easier than construction!

And if something went wrong, leaving a mess behind would be more meaningful than keeping the place intact.

Lumian conjured a bright white fireball, placing it at the base of one of the statues, setting it to explode with a delay.

After setting up five time bombs, Lumian moved about ten meters away, hiding in the dense fog, and snapped his fingers.

Rumble!

The four statues and the stone platform simultaneously underwent a violent explosion, cracking from the base and collapsing into piles of rubble.

The explosion dissipated some of the dense fog, allowing Lumian to see the statues and the platform.

No anomalies or dangers appeared... Good. Now, let's see if Gusain or Albus notice the commotion and come to check it out. I'll be hiding here, ready to strike a fatal blow... Lumian grew more puzzled about the statues and the platform, planning to set a simple trap for Gusain that might be overlooked due to its subtlety.

If the statues and the platform were crucial, Gusain would rush to confirm the situation, instinctively thinking the destroyer had already escaped to avoid an ambush.

Just as Lumian was about to retreat further into the fog, he noticed the five piles of rubble starting to wriggle.

They collided and quickly reformed, rising back into their original statue and platform shapes.

Identical to before.

Wh- Lumian's eyes froze.

The stone statues and the platform can restore themselves?

No wonder the Iron and Blood Cross Order didn't station guards here...

They aren't afraid of these things being destroyed!

Lumian quickly recovered and tried a new approach.

This time, after blowing up the statues and the platform, he used his Traveler's Bag to collect some of the rubble, waiting a few meters away.

The stone statues and the platform restored themselves again, drawing materials from the earth, while the rubble in Lumian's pouch became ordinary stones.

Lumian temporarily gave up on destruction, emptied the pouch of rubble, and returned to the statues, picking up the oil lamp with the glass cover.

Inside the lamp was a semi-solid, semi-liquid yellowish grease, with a wick seemingly woven from black hair.

The more Lumian looked at it, the more familiar it seemed.

He began to recall the source of this familiarity.

After over ten seconds, he suddenly reached into his Traveler's Bag and took out an item.

It was a pale yellowish-red, semi-solid substance in a transparent glass bottle, with a thick black wick on top.

Corpse wax candle!

A candle made from the corpse oils of an Iron-blooded Knight and a Demoness of Despair mixed with other substances!

The oil lamp on the stone platform resembled it somewhat.

Lumian muttered to himself, Magician Magician said that Fourth Epoch Trier and a place in Bansy Harbor were the best scenes for the corpse wax candle...

What about the underground mausoleum in Morora, which is very similar to Fourth Epoch Trier?

Chapter 809: Additive

809 Additive

In the dense fog, Lumian stared at the oil lamp, feeling an urge to light it and see what would happen.

Eventually, he controlled himself and refrained from taking the risk.

With everything still in a state of chaos and uncertainty, Lumian believed that making any high-risk decisions would be unwise.

He also had no intention of taking the oil lamp to trade with Albus Medici for the head of the Abscessed Hand. Since the Iron and Blood Cross Order placed the oil lamp here without guarding it, they probably weren't worried about losing it or had many similar lamps.

Based on his observations, Lumian deduced that the pale yellow grease in the lamp likely didn't come from Iron-blooded Knights and Demonesses of Despair. It was different from corpse wax candles and seemed to be a mixture of mid-sequence Hunters and Demonesses.

Though it's less effective than a corpse wax candle, it should still work in the underground of Morora, which is similar to Fourth Epoch Trier...

Lumian reached into his Traveler's Bag.

Just because he couldn't light it or take it didn't mean he couldn't do anything.

He planned to add something extra to the oil lamp, ensuring the Iron and Blood Cross Order would face unforeseen complications during their rituals!

Lumian took out some old blood powder from the Demon Warlock, Ice Lemon Fish fillets, a Berserk Agent from the Nightstalkers, and another Bark Agent from the same source.

He placed them on the half-height stone platform, mixed a bit of each into a brown lump the size of a human finger joint.

What do you call this? A cocktail! Lumian chuckled, putting all the materials back into his Traveler's Bag. He then took out Mr. K's finger, sliced off some flesh, and wrapped it around the brown lump.

This was a precaution against the Iron and Blood Cross Order's inspection-Hunters from the Order would undoubtedly check the oil lamp for any issues before use, as it wasn't always under their strict watch.

In Morora, Lumian didn't worry that using Mr. K's finger this way would be detected.

Looking at the blood-stained lump, Lumian reluctantly scooped a bit of the semi-solid, yellowish-red substance from his corpse wax candle and smeared it on the lump.

A double disguise, combined with a higher-Sequence, godhood-possessing item, should fool the Hunters' noses and eyes!

Once the lump was coated with the yellowish-red substance, Lumian examined the candle, reassuring himself, Just a little bit, it shouldn't affect the number of uses...

After putting away the corpse wax candle, Lumian picked up the oil lamp, removed the wick made of woven black hair, and carefully submerged the yellowish-red lump into the semi-solid grease, ensuring it stayed in the desired position.

Seeing the lump's yellowish-red color blend with the surrounding grease, leaving only faint traces hidden inside, Lumian breathed in relief and slowly inserted the wick back into the semi-solid grease.

After several adjustments, the wick's position and condition finally met Lumian's requirements.

He could already imagine the scene:

The oil lamp would initially burn normally, with the corpse wax having perhaps a hint of godhood, enhancing the ritual's effect and immersing the Iron and Blood Cross Order members in the sensory experience.

This would last for twenty or thirty seconds, after which the corpse wax part would burn.

This would bring an intense pact-like experience, potentially fatal for some Order members with weaker wills.

Of course, this might also benefit some members, causing positive mutations, but the corpse wax portion was minimal, and the burn would soon reach the random materials wrapped in Mr. K's flesh.

Lumian wasn't sure what the impact would be, but he was confident it would worsen the situation.

Just suck on this one; it hits strong. Lumian recalled how South Continent people described East Balam cigarettes, smiling as he addressed the imaginary Order members.

Then, he cleaned up the traces on the oil lamp and tidied the scattered rubble.

Following the faint scent of various perfumes, Lumian found his way back to the basement crack through the dense fog, leaving the area slowly.

He transformed into a shadow creature, silently returned to the Carnivore bar, and pretended to sleep to avoid an ambush by Albus Medici, Gusain, and others.

At six in the morning, Lumian felt refreshed.

He rolled out of bed, stretched his neck, and laughed softly.

"Didn't come? Albus and the others didn't come, neither did Wanak. Do they think I have teleportation abilities, making it hard to kill me outside a special battlefield or without special items?

"Heh heh, you're too hesitant, too cautious. Now I have shadows again, no longer afraid of sunlight, and can block another fatal attack..."

Lumian drew the curtains, gazing at the brightening dawn, his eyes falling on the books from the Church of Knowledge on his desk.

He instinctively felt a headache, frowning.

He resisted reading and learning, struggling with an indescribable inner turmoil.

If there were only a few books, Lumian would be highly motivated, reading diligently and focusing intently, but knowing there were three whole shelves of books and thousands of scrolls left him feeling defeated, unwilling to start.

After several seconds, Lumian rubbed his temples, sighed, and muttered to himself,

Well, since 0-01 was sealed by the Church of Knowledge, I should respect knowledge.

There's nothing else to do now, just waiting for Albus and Julie to take further action, hoping to seize an opportunity and direction...

Lumian sat down, leaning back in his chair, placing his feet on the edge of the desk, reading the books specified by Heraberg in a comfortable but precarious position.

He had read the first two or three chapters before and found nothing noteworthy, but this time he planned to study in depth.

As he read, Lumian's expression gradually changed.

He became engrossed in the reading, almost forgetting the time until Lez knocked on the door, telling him breakfast was ready.

"Okay." Lumian nodded, setting down the book without any visible changes and heading out of the room.

Almost at the door, he saw Lez turning towards the stairs and half-turned back, glancing at the books on the desk with a puzzled expression.

These books indeed contained important knowledge!

He was currently reading one thoroughly and had skimmed through the others, already finding similarities with the details in the 0-01 sealing information, along with more detailed explanations!

If I read through the three bookshelves and pass the exam, I might find a way to approach 0-01 through the overall sealing operation and use the sealing principles to protect myself when touching the artifact...

Knowledge is power, knowledge is wealth, knowledge holds all the answers... Lumian withdrew his gaze, his eyes flashing with thoughts as he entered the hallway and turned towards the stairs.

The problem now was that this kind of knowledge brought noticeable corruption, just like the 0-01 sealing information. Lumian worried that the more he learned, the closer he got to 0-01, the more likely he would become its puppet.

Also, if I focus too much on reading these books, Albus, Julie, Gusain, and Wanak might get suspicious and also borrow a few books from the Church of Knowledge. Then I would lose my advantage... I need to wander aimlessly every day, set traps for them, outsmart them, and make it seem like I'm just reading out of boredom... Lumian's smile gradually widened.

He finished the flight of stairs and glanced at Julie sitting on a bar stool at the counter.

The Demoness wore a white shirt and black skirt, looking quite demure, but she swayed her waist gently, making the stool spin.

She glanced back at Lumian and continued talking to Lez, "I only think about finding what I lost from other men when I'm in a terrible mood. Normally, I just feel jealous and resentful, wondering why I lost it and they still have it?

"And you, your cooking has conquered me. I acknowledge your right to keep that thing, as long as you don't come to me when I'm in a bad mood, I won't do anything to you."

Is that why you Demonesses like turning lovers into Witches? Lumian sat beside Julie, smiling at Lez. "What are you guys talking about?"

Lez licked his lips and replied, "She asked if I was curious about the taste of Demoness meat and cut a small piece for me. Grilled, it was delicious, rich in fat and very chewy. Then we got to the topic we were discussing."

Lumian glanced at Julie and noticed the bandage marks on her left shoulder, with some bloodstains on her shirt.

She really cut it... One daring to cut and the other daring to cook, your mental states and inner worlds are beyond me... Lumian snorted and directly asked Julie, "What are you up to?"

Julie smiled, showing two shallow dimples.

"I want to learn cooking from Lez."

Her face was full of longing and expectation.

To cook for Celeste? You Demonesses... Lumian shook his head and focused on his breakfast.

...

Trier, Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative, Apartment 702, 9 Rue Orosai.

Franca received a reply from Madam Judgment. The letter began:

"Mr. Star agrees to provide potion formulas and Beyonder ingredients in stages for Amandina's matter, but he doesn't need money or resources. He only hopes you can help with some matters."

Me? What can I help Mr. Star with? Franca pondered deeply.

Chapter 810: Learning is my Hobby

810 Learning is my Hobby

Thinking that if it were truly dangerous and beyond her ability to help, Madam Judgment would surely protect her, Franca pulled out a sheet of pure white paper and began her reply: "Dear Madam Judgment, "If Mr. Star's requests are within reason, I have no problem with them."

After writing this, Franca read the rest of Madam Judgment's letter:

"The Demoness of Black's description and speculation about the Primordial Demoness are a common view within the Demoness Sect. However, if it were that simple, things wouldn't be this complicated.

"Many high-ranking witches believe the mirror world is vital for the Demoness pathway. This isn't entirely inaccurate, but as a collective concept of 'doors', the mirror world seems incapable of bearing such importance.

"These are things we need to understand further.

"Two of Cups, I know this may be harsh, but you still need to continue infiltrating the Demoness Sect for a while. You are currently our highest-ranked member within the sect.

"Due to the peculiarities of the Demoness pathway, we cannot actively cultivate male Assassins, and the existing Demoness Sect members are mentally twisted, longing to approach the Primordial One. We can only passively wait and find people like you who inadvertently enter the Assassin pathway..."

Suddenly feeling a heavy sense of responsibility... Franca muttered to herself, sighed, and continued writing her reply.

She wasn't too disappointed, still hoping to obtain the main ingredients for the Demoness of Despair within the sect, provided she found a way to bypass the cruel requirements of the advancement ritual.

After sending her reply, Franca leaned back in her chair, gazing idly out the window at the night sky.

Suddenly, the area in front of her grew extremely dark, and a silver skull emerged from the void, holding a letter in its mouth.

Another letter? What's going on? Franca took it, thanked the messenger, and watched it leave before opening the letter, inhaling its subtle, enduring fragrance:

"Dear Muggle,

"Do you remember the previous invitation?

"We're having an offline gathering in Trier this Saturday at 10 p.m. Are you still interested in attending? If so, please reply promptly, and I'll inform you of the location and participation details.

"Professor."

An offline meeting of the Academy team? Lumian's life is so eventful! I've barely been his proxy for a few days, and I'm already swamped with tasks, one after another... Should he be called 007? Even 007 needs sleep; he doesn't! Franca couldn't help but lampoon.

She had already noticed that wherever Lumian went, hidden catastrophes erupted one after another. But since she hadn't been directly involved in most of them, the impact hadn't been as apparent.

Now, as his liaison, she felt it keenly.

After a while, Franca sighed.

She'd have to use the Ice Amulet to contact Lumian again!

Since obtaining it from the Demoness of Black, she hadn't used it for investigating the Mirror People, spending it all on Lumian-related matters.

She needed to ask Lumian if he wanted to attend the offline gathering of the Academy team, which might include members of the Moses Ascetic Order. If he did, he'd need to designate a substitute and try to send out the Lie earrings.

Franca quickly wrote a letter regarding the matter, wrapping a copper coin, some wraith dust, and her rarely used Beatrice's Necklace in the paper.

She had noticed that after passing through the seal of Morora, Lumian's letters lost their physical form, leaving only pure information. So, she planned to experiment, seeing if ordinary items, highly spiritual items, and Beyonder items could all pass through the seal and in what state they would exist.

The experiment's results would determine if the Lie earrings could be sent out.

If it weren't for the fact that each mystical item was precious and useful, Franca would have included items containing Beyonder characteristics in this experiment.

After preparing the small package, Franca walked to the full-length mirror in the living room, putting on the Ice Amulet.

As it flashed with crystalline cold light, Franca pressed the package into the glass surface.

...

Late at night in Morora, on the second floor of the Carnivore bar.

Lumian sat under a glowing white fireball, focused on reading "Examples of Underground Mausoleum Construction."

Suddenly, he looked up, his eyes bloodshot, and glanced at the mirror in the room.

The mirror's surface had turned dark, with ripples moving within it.

Lumian reluctantly set down his book, approached the mirror, and placed his right hand on it.

He saw Intisian words appearing on the mirror's surface, line after line, densely packed.

Professor's invitation... Academy team's offline gathering... experiment with transferring items...

Lumian's thoughts raced. Taking advantage of the Ice Amulet's active effect, he reached into the mirror and pulled out an item.

It was a diamond necklace.

Beatrice's Necklace!

The copper coin and wraith dust mentioned in Franca's letter were gone.

Lumian looked back at the mirror, seeing an image of the coin and wraith dust around the densely packed words, with a ghostly presence.

As the Ice Amulet's power waned, and the words faded, the items gradually disappeared.

Only pure information and items with Beyonder power can pass through that special mirror world, through the seal, and reach here? Hmm, items with godhood shouldn't work either, only something made within Morora... Lumian played with Beatrice's Necklace, using the Ice Amulet's remaining power to send Franca two words: "Necklace, okay."

The aqueous glow within the mirror quickly receded, and the dark glass returned to normal.

Soon, the mirror showed another anomaly.

This time, Franca sent the Ice Amulet through.

This helped Lumian conserve the use of the Mirror Cufflink-only two uses left.

Holding the icy talisman, Lumian began writing his reply.

He detailed the experiment results and his observations on the item transfer process, then instructed Franca to attend the Academy team's offline gathering in Trier as Muggle on his behalf.

After folding the letter and enclosing the Lie earrings and Ice Amulet, Lumian activated the latter, pressing the package into the glass mirror, sending it to Franca's apartment mirror.

Franca received the items, read Lumian's letter carefully, and murmured to herself, both expectant and anxious.

Do I really have to pretend to be Muggle?

Sigh, the Ice Amulet can only transmit information nine more times...

Meanwhile, Lumian returned to his desk and resumed reading "Examples of Underground Mausoleum Construction."

He was reluctant to rest; the more he read, the more compelling the books became.

Of course, Lumian knew this was a sign of slight corruption.

Just then, he heard a loud explosion.

It came from a few blocks away!

Explosion? Lumian used his Ascetic endurance to break free from the compulsion, extinguished the fireball, and moved to the window to observe outside.

The explosions continued, with brilliant flames illuminating the streets hundreds of meters away.

It was on the route from the Carnivore bar to the Church of Knowledge.

Lumian saw Julie jump out of her room, landing lightly like a feather, then blending into the shadows, disappearing.

Hunters causing explosions and fires? Lumian rubbed his temples, looking reluctant.

He grumbled to himself, I really don't want to get involved in your schemes and fights; I just want to study peacefully.

Since discovering the important knowledge in the books specified by Heraberg, he had become increasingly focused, spending all his time reading except when "acting" outside.

If not for the risk of exposing the books' importance, he would have used his special abilities to study all night.

The more seriously he studied, the less he wanted to do anything else, often relying on sheer willpower and even his Ascetic abilities to break free from that mental state.

After a moment, Lumian's expression calmed, and he muttered to himself, When I find the opportunity to eliminate you all, I can finally study in peace...

Suppressing his abnormal emotions, Lumian transformed into a shadow creature, slipping into the darkness between buildings and heading toward the explosion site.

Soon, he reached the destination and saw a half-collapsed building- Dades Agricultural Company.

Wanak's Dades Agricultural Company? Someone attacked Wanak?

Lumian snapped out of his study-induced haze, his mind suddenly alert.

He saw two giant figures emerge from the building.

They were three to four meters tall, with iron-like skin and blue paint depicting clothing, each holding a giant broadsword.

Iron soldiers? Giant iron soldiers? Lumian immediately recalled the iron soldiers he had seen deep in the Sauron family's Red Swan Castle crypt.

The next moment, one of the iron soldiers smashed through the collapsed wall and fixed its cold gaze on the shadow Lumian was hiding in.

It charged at Lumian, raising its giant broadsword.

Chapter 811: Combination?

811 Combination?

Discovered? How did it find me? I'm currently a real shadow creature...

Lumian wondered as he emerged from the shadows.

He instantly teleported to the side of the iron soldier.

The iron soldier ran past him, realizing too late that its target had moved.

It had to slow down forcefully, half-turning to sweep its giant sword.

Lumian, well-prepared, leaped high into the air. His fist, blazing with white-hot flames, struck the iron soldier's neck.

Clang!

The sound echoed like a church bell. The tall, heavy, and hard iron soldier was pushed back a step.

A fist-sized dent appeared on its metal-covered neck, surrounded by spiderweb-like cracks.

Lumian's strike was purely a Cull, without probing for weaknesses. He didn't need to.

Having thoroughly studied "Doll Crafting and Maintenance," he knew exactly where the weak points of such iron soldiers were!

Of course, he had also observed beforehand to confirm that this iron soldier was of the regular type and hadn't been modified.

The iron soldier, enraged by the Cull attack, swung its giant sword in a storm of slashes, cutting and chopping within a five to six meter radius.

Lumian teleported several meters away, watched the iron soldier, and raised his right palm, still with one hand in his pocket.

One after another, white-hot fireballs formed and flew towards the iron soldier.

The dark red glow in the iron soldier's eyes brightened as it locked onto Lumian and charged at him.

Rumble!

It cleaved through the fireballs in its path, enduring the rest as it advanced through the smoke and flames.

Almost simultaneously, Lumian vanished from its sight again.

Lumian reappeared on the soldier's shoulder, half-crouched, and delivered a powerful punch to the previous dent.

Whoosh! White-hot flames erupted from his fist.

Clang!

The sound was like a hammer striking a large bell.

Lumian's figure quickly faded, dodging the iron soldier's left hand as it released its giant sword to grab him.

A moment later, the dent in the iron soldier's neck shattered completely.

The cracks spread rapidly to its head and body.

The iron soldier staggered forward, its metal fragments falling piece by piece, like an iron rain.

Lumian's figure swiftly outlined not far away. He scoffed and said, "Didn't you learn from the last time? Making the same mistake again. Oh, I forgot, you don't have a brain."

As Lumian finished speaking, the struggling iron soldier collapsed into a pile of metal debris.

Lumian then turned his attention to the other side of the Dades Agricultural Company.

The remaining iron soldier was silently burning with pitch-black flames, moving slower and accumulating more rust.

Clang! It fell to the ground, motionless, losing its oppressive aura.

Julie, wearing a cotton nightgown with a hint of spring, stood leisurely beside it. She watched as the iron soldier quickly shrank back to the size of a children's toy.

The metal fragments near Lumian were also shrinking, soon reduced to mere scraps.

Julie looked at him, smiling gracefully, "Boss, you're even more impressive than I imagined."

Compliment me all you want, but why stare at my crotch... Lumian scoffed, "You're not bad yourself."

Julie blinked and said, "But why don't you look at me when you speak?"

"Because you don't have anything down there," Lumian replied, ignoring Julie and heading towards the Dades Agricultural Company.

Julie's expression turned dark, her face flickering in the firelight.

After a few seconds, she muttered through gritted teeth, "Soon you won't have anything either."

By then, Lumian had reached the half-collapsed building and started inspecting the battle traces.

Explosions, high temperatures, fire, attacks directly hitting key structures... Definitely a battle between Hunters... Multiple injuries, more than one, but all blood traces burnt to scorches... Lumian quickly circled the explosion site, discovering several corpses.

Some were ordinary, like night shift employees caught in the blast, suffocated by smoke, burned by flames, or crushed by debris. Others were mangled, reduced to chunks of flesh, or dismembered as if violently torn apart.

Lumian noticed one corpse with a somewhat intact head, a faint red mark on its forehead, with something wriggling under the skin, trying to emerge.

I've seen a similar mark on Gusian's forehead...

So, the Iron and Blood Cross Order is indeed trying to assassinate Wanak...

With Albus Medici joining them, they've grown bold enough to eliminate potential rivals and disruptors?

But it seems they failed... Wanak is formidable, facing an Iron and Blood Cross Order assault, possibly with Albus and Gusian present, yet still managing to counterattack and escape...

The Iron and Blood Cross Order is really cooperating with Albus Medici?

Do they truly believe this Medici descendant? Does Gusian not know what the Medici name represents?

Hmm, they know but intend to use Albus Medici, a collaboration full of mutual conspiracies?

As these thoughts raced through Lumian's mind, Julie approached and stopped beside him.

"Have you figured anything out?" Julie asked.

Lumian chuckled.

"Shouldn't I be asking you that? You Demonesses are good at divination, unlike me."

Julie's expression had returned to normal, her eyes bright as she said, "I tried, but got nothing. Some of them might be carrying items with high rank."

Before Lumian could respond, she glanced at her boss and said, "It seems that the Albus you're wary of has formed an alliance with Gusian's group."

Lumian nodded, then added, "They're probably trying to eliminate Wanak."

"Next, they'll try to eliminate me, you, and all the Hunters and Demonesses in Mororа," Julie said with a slight smile. "Boss, I know you don't trust me, and I can't trust you either, unless all that's left is a shlong. But against the threat of Albus and Gusian, can we temporarily cooperate?"

You? A Demoness who doesn't like to study and only knows how to do twisted things, wanting to cooperate with me? I just want to study quietly and diligently... Lumian criticized, then chuckled and said, "Sure."

His goal was the information accumulated by the Demoness Sect and their preparations. "Cooperation" would make it easier to access them.

Julie was about to say more when she suddenly saw a group of black-robed enforcers running over from the direction of the Knowledge Cathedral.

Her eyes flickered, and she said to Lumian, "I have to leave now. Let's talk tomorrow morning."

Lumian glanced at the leading enforcer and noticed it wasn't Celeste.

He replied thoughtfully, "Alright."

Julie immediately stepped into the nearby shadows and vanished from his sight.

Lumian stared at the corpses in the ruins for a few seconds before turning and leaving Dades Agricultural Company, heading into the nearest alley.

In the darkness, he walked at a steady pace, pondering a troubling question: Aren't there too many Iron and Blood Cross Order members infiltrating Morora?

Just to deal with Wanak, four or five have already died!

It's not just about whether they could infiltrate so many members or if the Church of Knowledge is being too lenient, but no secret organization would want to suffer such heavy losses among its members.

Morora is the place where 0-01 is sealed. Every Beyonder sent here must be prepared for a high likelihood of sacrifice.

The Demoness Sect only sent one Sequence 5 Beyonder at a time.

Unless the previous Demoness lost contact and no longer responded, they wouldn't send another. Does the Iron and Blood Cross Order really not care about mid-to-low-level Beyonders, treating them as cannon fodder?

For a war, that's not too strange, but a sensible commander would only sacrifice soldiers at critical moments, not let them die on the way. Or has Gusian developed a large number of new Hunters in Morora... Lumian suddenly thought of Gusian, the bloody mark on that corpse's forehead, the stone statue, and the oil lamp in the depths of the underground fog.

Or are the true Iron and Blood Cross Order members only Gusian and a few others, while the rest are mass-produced through a special secret ritual?

As he pondered this, Lumian smiled.

If that's true, when Gusian and the others hold their next ritual to create soldiers, something very interesting might happen. The oil lamp I tampered with should bring about a different outcome...

I wonder what kind of soldiers will appear...

Lumian's pace quickened, and soon he returned to the Carnivore bar. He sat at his desk, forming a white-hot fireball to serve as a gas lamp.

He wanted to finish reading "Examples of Mausoleum Construction" so he could take the exam at the Knowledge Cathedral tomorrow morning and borrow more books.

"Don't let anything interrupt my studying again..." Lumian muttered as he buried himself in his reading.

Amidst the occasional sound of flipping pages, he suddenly turned his head, his sharp gaze focusing on the mirror in the room.

The surface of the mirror rippled, revealing a figure with iron-black eyes, bright red hair, and a chiseled face.

Wanak? The same Wanak who was attacked earlier? Lumian narrowed his eyes slightly, waiting for the figure to speak.

The figure of Wanak swayed lightly, as if affected by water waves.

He asked in a deep voice, "Do you want to kill Gusian and Albus Medici?"

Chapter 812: Strange Test Script

812 Strange Test Script

Hearing Wanak's question, Lumian, who was already a bit irritated from having his study interrupted, laughed out loud. "Can you find them?"

"No," Wanak admitted frankly.

Unlike Lumian and Wanak, who had fixed residences, Gusian and Medici moved around in secrecy, making it hard to pinpoint their exact locations.

Wanak continued, "But I can use myself as bait to lure them out."

Lure them out? What kind of Hunter path is this? It sounds more like the path of a Fishing Master... Lumian mocked both Wanak and himself internally, gradually calming down.

He looked at the man with iron-black eyes, chiseled face, and suspected 0-01 corruption who had tried to kill him at their first meeting, and sneered.

"Bait? If you dare to wander the streets of Morora, Albus and Gusian would likely think it's a trap and not make a move.

"Of course, they might send someone to test if you're bluffing, but that won't help you ambush them."

Wanak's eyes remained sharp as he replied in a metallic tone, "I won't treat them as fools. I'll leave some traces, give them clues, let them find my hiding place on their own. They must act within these few days. They can't wait for me to recover, or it'll be a headache for them."

Lumian, using a Hunter's tone, laughed. "Confident, aren't you? Why not wait until you're fully healed to seek revenge one by one? Why take the risk now and set traps, even choosing to cooperate with me?"

"In five days, if they don't find me, those two rats will scurry back into the sewers and hide. I can kill any one of them, but finding them is still difficult," Wanak said, his tone full of murderous intent.

Lumian didn't ask more questions, pondering a few things.

This most dangerous figure in Morora, who seemed to have submitted to 0-01 and gained boons along with the corruption, has the power of a pseudo-demigod.

Does his current attitude imply 0-01 dislikes Red Angel Medici and the Iron and Blood Cross Order?

Or does 0-01 resist anyone trying to control it, as evidenced by Wanak's initial hostility towards me? But under current circumstances, he wants to target Albus and Gusian first and is willing to temporarily cooperate with the weaker side?

Wanak has pseudo-demigod strength and is in his home turf of Morora, yet he was severely wounded by Albus, Gusian, and a few Iron and Blood Cross Order members, forcing him to flee...

Albus is indeed not simple, and Gusian must be formidable too. It was right not to go all out and ambush them earlier...

0-01 has some connection to that special mirror world, allowing Wanak to traverse through mirrors...

Lumian looked at Wanak, who was patiently waiting for his answer, and smiled. "Why me?"

Since arriving in Morora, he hadn't gone all out or used any powerful items.

"We're the same kind of people," Wanak said, his iron-black eyes cold.

"And I can clearly sense you're not simple."

Of course, I'm not simple, with so much corruption and so many things mixed together. Simple would be strange... Lumian raised his right hand, rubbing his chin, and asked, "Aren't you worried I'll take this chance to eliminate you, Albus, and Gusian together? You should always be wary of others."

"You don't have the capability," Wanak stated bluntly. "And in Morora, truly killing me isn't easy."

Lumian leaned back in his chair, half-closing his eyes. After a few seconds, he said, "Time and place."

"The timing is uncertain. It depends on Albus and Gusian's investigation progress. I'll inform you of the approximate time and location in advance," Wanak, his sharp, chiseled face showing a rare smile, said.

Lumian opened his eyes and sat up straight.

"With your strength, you were severely wounded by them. What special abilities did they show in battle?"

"Not severely wounded, just nearly," Wanak emphasized. "That Albus has special powers or items that can create war fog, a high-rank Hunter ability... Gusian, besides being a powerful Hunter, has some Demoness pathway abilities and can utilize the mirror world to some extent..."

Lumian listened intently, his smile gradually widening. "Pleasure working with you."

Wanak nodded slightly, his figure gradually fading in the rippling mirror.

Lumian sat quietly in his chair, muttering to himself, Is this a trap?

Wanak, Albus, and Gusian are using people as pawns in a drama to ambush me?

Or is Wanak using this chance to eliminate Albus, Gusian, and me together?

...

Lumian thought about many things, until his head hurt.

Forget it, I'll think about these conspiracies in a few days. Facing Hunters is troublesome. For now, focus on reading... Lumian turned his attention back to "Examples of Mausoleum Construction."

After another hour, he closed the book, satisfied.

After nearly a week of effort, he had finally finished the first batch of books specified by Heraberg, and could take the exam at the Knowledge Cathedral tomorrow!

Lumian lay back on his bed and fell asleep.

In a hazy state, he saw an army.

The soldiers were clad in iron-black armor, marching across a reddish plain, with something drifting in the distance.

Sensing Lumian's gaze, they turned their heads simultaneously, their eyes piercing.

Lumian saw their faces: Under the iron-black helmets, their skin was pale and shriveled, like all moisture and flesh had been drained, tightly clinging to their skulls. Dark red flames burned in their eye sockets.

Mummies...

An army of undead?

As this realization dawned on Lumian, immense fear surged from his heart, urging him to submit to some unknown entity.

He struggled against this feeling, finally waking up.

He opened his eyes to find it was just a dream. Outside, the sky was dim, with no sign of dawn.

Too much knowledge about 0-01 might be increasing the corruption? Lumian pondered for a few seconds, then forced himself to sleep a bit more until six in the morning.

Julie hadn't returned overnight. After breakfast, Lumian packed the books into his Traveler's Bag and headed straight to the Knowledge Cathedral.

Heraberg, in a white robe lined with brass, was explaining things to a group of new exiles. Lumian waited until the new exiles left the cathedral, then smiled and presented the books to Heraberg. "Your Grace, I've finished reading these books."

"Adding 'Your Grace' this time?" Heraberg teased with a smile, taking the books and pointing to the corresponding brass bookshelf. "Go there and pick a paper to do."

Prepared for this, Lumian walked to the bookshelf and randomly picked a paper.

As he searched for a table and chair, he glanced at the questions on the paper.

Suddenly, his gaze froze.

The first question was: "Have you had any nightmares recently?"

The second question was: "Please describe the content of the nightmare in detail."

Is this an exam on knowledge points? Doesn't seem like it... more like those psychological test questions Anthony brought back from the Psychiatrist Guild... Lumian thought, writing his answers on the brass bookshelf's protrusions.

He answered the entire paper truthfully.

"Done." Lumian felt like he was back in Cordu, reporting to his sister that he'd finished his test.

"Let me see." Heraberg extended his right hand.

After reviewing Lumian's answers from start to finish, he nodded slightly.

"You don't need to read all the books on these three shelves. Just this, this, and this..."

Heraberg pointed out eight books with a smile. "Finish these, and that'll be enough."

Huh? Don't need to read all three shelves? Just these eight books?

Lumian was momentarily puzzled, not understanding the basis for Heraberg's judgment.

Were the remaining books on those shelves suddenly unimportant?

Thinking about the test paper's content, Lumian had some guesses.

He thoughtfully responded to Heraberg, "Alright, Your Grace."

As he placed the books into the Traveler's Bag, Lumian roughly estimated the time needed.

If he focused without any interruptions, he could finish one book a day, but that would be suspicious.

About two weeks, maybe a bit more... But according to Heraberg, finishing these is enough, much better than my initial plan of taking six months to read all three shelves... Lumian quietly breathed a sigh of relief, feeling much better.

He mimicked his sister Aurora and Franca's occasional crazy talk, thinking with a smile.

Albus, Julie, Gusian, and Wanak, wait two weeks. Once I'm done studying, I'll kill you all!

Hmm, for now, I'll take advantage of Wanak's "invitation" to find clues from Albus about Hand Bro's head...

And gather intelligence on the Demoness as well...

...

Saturday night, Trier, Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative.

Franca looked at Jenna, who had naturally moved into the guest room after returning from Port LeSeur, and didn't ask why. Feeling a bit upset, she said, "You don't seem very happy. Is Julien insisting on returning to Trier?"

"Yes, he's so stubborn." Jenna sighed deeply.

Actually, so are you, and your mother too... Franca muttered internally, saying, "Don't worry, there's still about a month to figure something out."

"Yeah." Jenna glanced at Franca, who had changed into a warlock's cloak. "Are you filling in for Lumian at that mysticism gathering?"

"Yes." Franca tossed the silver Lie earring into the air and caught it again.

Compared to her initial reluctance and anxiety, now she felt more anticipation.

It's quite exciting, isn't it?

Chapter 813: The Abnormality of Warlocks

813 The Abnormality of Warlocks

Franca walked to the full-length mirror and put the silver Lie earring on her left ear.

Her skin immediately turned semi-transparent, and tiny meat tendrils seemed to grow beneath it.

These meat tendrils squirmed and shifted, gathering together again.

In just twenty to thirty seconds, Franca transformed into the appearance Lumian used to disguise as Aurore.

After adjusting herself a bit, she smoothed down her blonde hair and looked at her reflection, saying, "Aurore is really beautiful... Lie is amazing, it can do this much."

"You've never used Lie before?" Jenna, standing nearby, asked in confusion.

She remembered Franca using it more than once.

Franca chuckled and explained, "It's been a while. Just feeling nostalgic.

Plus, after becoming a Demoness of Pleasure and using Lie to tweak my appearance, I didn't dare do it again. Afraid I'd fall in love with myself and get lost in my own beauty.

"Now I've just made a slight adjustment to Aurore's face, and she looks so beautiful. A natural beauty like her taking the Demoness pathway, I can't imagine how stunning she'd become. Lie and the Demoness, they're a perfect match, but it's too easy to lose oneself, preferring to live in lies than face the truth."

Seeing Franca still able to joke around, Jenna quietly breathed a sigh of relief and nodded with a smile. "For us Demonesses, Lie is the most delicious poison."

Franca murmured in agreement and turned back to the full-length mirror to adjust her height.

Before leaving, she looked at Jenna and thoughtfully asked, "You need a few more good acts to fully digest your Witch potion, right?"

"Yes, if I rely on similar performances as before, it will take time and repetition," Jenna replied, knowing what Franca was about to say.

Just like she often did, Franca was about to impart some life, no, digestion experience.

With Aurore's enhanced beauty, Franca smiled.

"I think your acts have overlooked the black magic aspect of a Witch. Think about it, isn't black magic an essential part of many Witch legends? And many of those legends were likely left by real Witches.

"You could try finding a scoundrel, someone who deserves to be hanged, collect their hair and flesh, and as a Witch, predict their doom. Use black magic to torment them daily until they die."

Jenna pondered for a moment. "I can give it a shot."

But... I do hope you becoming a Demoness of Pleasure would change things... Franca sighed inwardly but maintained her smile, pulled up her hood, walked out the door, and disappeared into the hallway shadows.

The scheduled offline gathering was at 6 Rue Belfort on Avenue du Boulevard, a four-story mansion with a garden, located in a luxurious area.

Despite its opulence, it was always rented out for 15,000 verl d'or a year, having housed dukes, bankers, and diplomats.

Now, it had no long-term tenants and was temporarily rented for a week by the gathering's organizer, Professor.

Passing through the garden lit by gas lamps and circling a fountain with statues, Franca reached the mansion's entrance, where a table with a sign-in book was placed.

This was the simplest form of identity verification to prevent some odd Trieriens from wandering in.

Franca recalled Aurore's notes, mimicked the handwriting, and signed Muggle with a deliberate slant.

It felt like an unseen gaze lingered on the sign-in book for two seconds.

Silently, the mansion door opened, and Franca stepped inside.

She slowed her pace, seriously recalling the mannerisms of Muggle from the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society gatherings.

Franca, highly professional in her role-playing, had previously used dream divination to retrieve those buried memories. Now, she quickly captured Aurore's walking style.

She shortened her steps and lightened her waist movements.

The mansion's living room was homely, with red and yellow decorations bringing an indescribable warmth.

Eight members of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society were disguised as they had been in the Nation of the Evernight to indicate their identities. Some sat in the sofa area, drinking and chatting, while others played darts in a corner.

Professor, wearing a black butterfly mask, left the sofa with an orange cocktail in hand and approached Franca.

With a faint smile on her lips, she said, "Let's chat first, catch up on recent events, then we can drink, play board games, sing, and play cards. How does that sound?"

Great! If offline gatherings were just for trading items and exchanging mystical knowledge without any entertainment, what's the point? One reason Franca was willing to attend was that it had been a while since she had fun with her "fellow countrymen"-teaching Lumian and Jenna to fully understand certain things was too troublesome.

Franca gracefully pulled up a high stool and sat next to Professor, casting a glance at familiar faces like Periodic Table and Isotope, wondering if there were any hidden Moses Ascetic Order members.

"Muggle, are you settled in Trier?" The Academy team member with a periodic table painted on his face curiously asked Franca.

Franca restrained her overly active side, showing just a bit to match Muggle's usual behavior, smiling as she answered, "For now, yes. But considering Trier's situation, I don't plan to stay long. I might move in a while."

She subtly reminded her "countrymen" that Trier was dangerous, like living on an active volcano that could erupt anytime.

"Why do you say that?" Professor keenly asked the question Franca hoped for.

Franca curved her lips into a smile and pointed to the floor. "I encountered some things in Underground Trier that made me think great dangers are brewing below. They could erupt at any time."

"Like the Mirror People?" Professor asked thoughtfully.

Franca nodded gently. "Yes."

She didn't say much; it was confidential, and even if she did, others might not believe it without evidence.

Professor, Isotope, and others fell silent, pondering something. Associate Professor and others playing darts returned to the sofa area, steering the conversation elsewhere.

During the exchange, Franca was more active than Lumian had been, understanding many codes and familiar with many things, not afraid of making mistakes or missing memes.

Professor glanced at her, pleased. "It seems you've recovered from the April Fool's incident, back to your usual self, not as silent as before, mostly just observing."

Uh... Franca suddenly felt she might have messed up.

Not that her disguise as Muggle was bad, but rather too good.

If Lumian returned, the Academy members would surely wonder why she seemed post-traumatic again.

Can't just say she was hurt again, right?

Franca's mind raced, quickly finding a reason. "Actually, I haven't fully recovered. Some wounds might never heal. But chatting with everyone just now made me feel like I was back in the past."

Professor expressed her understanding. She was about to say more when her face, not covered by the black butterfly mask, suddenly twisted in pain, her eyes bulging as if enduring great agony.

She bent over, clutching her head.

Franca paused, quickly scanning the others, noticing Associate Professor, Isotope, and Periodic Table with similar reactions. Only two non-Warlock members were unaffected.

Oh, I'm a Warlock now too... Franca mimicked their reactions, recalling the pain from her advancement ritual, displaying a headache-like state.

After two or three minutes, Professor straightened up, slowly exhaling.

The non-Warlock member code-named Griffin asked, "What happened to you all?"

Then, a realization struck Griffin. "The evil god Hidden Sage was injecting knowledge again?"

Associate Professor in the brown paper bag laughed bitterly. "Yes."

"In broadcast format? I thought it was one-on-one," Griffin marveled.

"Both happen." Periodic Table massaged her head, addressing Franca and the others, "Have you noticed the Hidden Sage has been injecting knowledge more frequently since that terrifying rainstorm?"

"Yes." Periodic Table nodded solemnly.

Seeing the Warlocks agree, Franca nodded too.

She pondered, Could this anomaly be related to the Celestial Master?

When Fourth Epoch Trier's seal was briefly opened, some powers leaked out, making the already insane Hidden Sage even crazier?

Franca knew the "terrifying rainstorm" referred to the time when the Hostel Project briefly opened the Fourth Epoch Trier's seal.

Chapter 814: Missing "Ten Pillars"

814 Missing "Ten Pillars"

Franca couldn't talk about the Celestial Master at the moment, nor could she ask the Professors what knowledge the Hidden Sage had imparted.

She could only note this anomaly silently and planned to report it to Madam Judgment later, so the Major Arcana card holders could determine what was wrong.

After a moment of silence, Isotope spoke heavily, "Everyone here understands the pain of being force-fed knowledge by the Hidden Sage.

So far, we can barely endure it, but if the frequency increases, or the intensity goes up, it won't be long before our brains explode with knowledge, turning us into monsters."

Professor sighed slowly. "I agree. We must have a sense of crisis."

Periodic Table seemed a bit unstable. "I do feel a sense of crisis, but does it help? Can we unite and kill the Hidden Sage? I used to have such fantasies, but now... heh heh."

Franca could understand the last two sentences from Periodic Table. In the first two or three years after transmigrating into this world, as an atheist who had read many novels, she initially regarded the Seven Gods as more powerful Beyonders. She believed that as someone on the path of the divine, she might one day have a chance to slay deities and prove her way. But after witnessing more, gaining more knowledge in mysticism, she deeply understood the gap between Low- and Mid-Sequence Beyonders and demigods.

And that was just demigods, not true gods.

According to the Demoness of Black, true gods could modify and adjust the Sequence abilities within their pathways to some extent!

Meanwhile, Franca recalled the past and noticed that during their gatherings in the Nation of the Evernight, the Warlocks rarely expressed such intense negative emotions. Now, they were no longer hiding their pain and struggle, showing it very directly.

The Academy group has too many non-Warlock members, and those here today are a small circle who know each other well, so they can be more genuine? But I-no, Muggle-am not part of your circle. Are these intense emotions partly an act? What's the purpose? Franca didn't know if Lumian had infected her with paranoia or if her experiences with the Savoie Mob and the Demoness Sect had made her cautious.

"Yeah, what can we do..." she echoed Periodic Table's sentiment, seemingly touched.

Professor, steady as usual, said gently, "At least we can look for items or methods to reduce the negative effects of the Knowledge Pursuer.

Periodic Table was silent for a moment, then sighed deeply. "That's all we can do for now."

The Warlocks, along with Griffin and Eagle, discussed this issue, proposing various ideas and rejecting most, leaving a few for further verification.

Franca also used her imagination. Eventually, she said thoughtfully, "It's a pity we can't predict exactly when the Hidden Sage will go mad.

Otherwise, I know a place that might effectively reduce the impact."

"What place?" Associate Professor asked quickly.

Franca didn't intend to hide it. She felt that if Lumian were here, he would definitely reveal that location to the Professors.

Based on her understanding of Lumian: She had long noticed that Lumian was especially empathetic towards those with similar experiences and sufferings as his. Although he spoke harshly, he couldn't help but provide some assistance. Similarly, he also empathized with those who had similar experiences to Aurore, often putting himself in his sister's shoes.

Franca sighed slightly. "The small sacrificial square at the entrance of the third level of the catacombs. It seems to have remnants of the powers of the Eternal Blazing Sun and the God of Steam and Machinery, which can shield most of the external influences."

Professor's eyes brightened slightly under the butterfly mask. "I've been there, but I didn't know there were remnants of divine power."

She paused, adding, "This is actually very useful. When we are on the brink of breaking, I will take a box of white candles and enough food, stay at the sacrificial square until the accumulated effects dissipate and my body and soul recover, then come back up."

"Exactly!" Franca was happy for these Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society members.

Professor continued to say to Periodic Table and the others, "We can also seek help from Beyonders of the Apothecary pathway to produce medicine that quickly restores the body and soul."

"Temporary enhancement of brain capacity, learning ability, and soul strength would also work," Isotope and the others chimed in.

Their spirits finally lifted a bit.

After another half-hour of chatting, Professor and Associate Professor called a few people to fetch the board games from the study, while Franca stood up and went to the small bar in the opposite living room to get a drink.

As she hesitated between fruit beer and soda, Periodic Table came to her side, looking over the drinks and lowering his voice, "Muggle, weren't you looking for members of the Moses Ascetic Order?"

Seeing Muggle with her hood pulled up turning to him, Periodic Table's chemical symbols on his face shifted as he smiled. "I am one."

So, finally, you're admitting? Franca wasn't surprised at all.

She even suspected all the Warlocks in this small circle were members, and Griffin and Eagle, who were not Warlocks, might be as well.

"You guessed it a long time ago?" Periodic Table noticed Muggle had no emotional fluctuation.

Franca chuckled softly. "It's not strange. I'm also a member of another secret organization. Many in the Research Society should have backgrounds in secret organizations or orthodox churches. It's not a problem as long as it doesn't violate our contract."

Periodic Table smiled. "That's true. You mentioned a Mirror Person named Griffith secretly replacing one of our members? I have a suspect now."

Franca had been tracking the whereabouts of the ore scholar, Jasmine-suspected to be Mirror People Palia-but had no leads. She didn't expect a clue about the more important Mirror Person, Griffith.

"Who is it?" she asked directly.

Period Table organized his thoughts. "Normally, I should report this to the higher-ups of the Ascetic Order for confirmation and handling, but I can't contact my direct Pillar lately."

"Pillar?" Franca asked, puzzled.

"The brass of our Moses Ascetic Order consists of the Ten Pillars, ten powerful demigods, maybe more. The one responsible for the Trier greater region and my direct superior is Kmerolo. After the terrifying rainstorm, his orders have lessened, and recently, we've had no response from our attempts to contact him," Periodic Table explained heavily.

After the Hostel Project, the brass of the Moses Ascetic Order in Trier had anomalies and then disappeared? This information is crucial and must be reported quickly... Franca looked at Periodic Table and asked, "No emergency contact with other Pillars?"

Period Table sighed. "No. Normally, we should pray to the Hidden Sage, report the anomaly, and He would give a revelation. But we tried, and there was no revelation, nor did any other Pillar contact us."

Because the Hidden Sage has gone crazier? Franca nodded. "Go on."

Periodic Table laughed bitterly. "This situation isn't bad. Though lacking high-level guidance and resources, we also don't have dangerous tasks - unless Nikila is the Mirror Person Griffith."

"Nikila?" Franca pressed.

Periodic Table tersely acknowledged. "He's Kmerolo's deputy. Recently, his behavior makes me suspect he might be a Mirror Person."

"What behavior?" Franca asked in confirmation.

Periodic Table thought and said, "He gets angry more easily, has more negative emotions, and I noticed he seems awkward using his right hand, though he's right-handed."

"What's his real identity?" Franca's eyes lit up.

Periodic Table hesitated. "I can't be sure he's a Mirror Person. It's normal to have uncontrolled negative emotions after prolonged knowledge infusion. Before telling you his identity and possible residence, I hope to sign a notarized document with you, ensuring if he's not the Mirror Person, you won't kill him and must let him go."

As he spoke, he took out an expensive notarized document from a hidden pocket.

Seeing Muggle's slightly surprised look, Periodic Table laughed self-deprecatingly.

"Blame it on us following the maxim, 'do as you wish, but do no harm."

"Sure, no problem," Franca agreed readily.

She wasn't one to kill innocents.

...

Late at night in Morora.

Lumian put down his book, rubbed his aching head, and decided to rest by thinking of something else.

As he considered if he had missed any enemies or competitors, the mirror in the room glowed with water.

Wanak, with iron-black eyes and blood-red hair, appeared again, saying in a deep voice, "Gusain and Albus are about to step into the trap. I'll tell you my 'hiding place' now."

Is it starting? Lumian's mind immediately focused.

Chapter 815: Super Augmentation

815 Super Augmentation

As Wanak's figure faded from the mirror's surface, Lumian reluctantly stowed the books on his desk into his Traveler's Bag.

He stood up, left the room, and walked to Julie's door, knocking lightly twice.

Julie quickly opened the door, hugging a blanket to her chest, her bare shoulders glowing like twin mounds of snow under the moonlight.

"I wasn't trying to harass you!" she said with a hint of anticipation.

Lumian spoke as if to himself, "Wanak has invited me to deal with Gusain and Albus together, right in the ruins of Dades Agricultural Company."

Without waiting for Julie's response, Lumian turned and walked down the stairs, merging into the darkness that enveloped the night.

...

Inside a fog-filled hollow, in front of four statues facing each other, Gusain, wearing a silk top hat, said to Albus, who was clad in a black jacket with red stripes, "We can't be sure if the clues about Wanak are bait. We might step into a trap later."

Albus, hands in his pockets, chuckled. "That's why we're here. Whether there's a trap or not, as long as we're strong enough, we can invalidate their schemes and make them swallow the bitter fruit of their failure."

Gusain nodded lightly. "Yes, I've heard a saying: no matter how many eggs band together, they can't break a stone. What we need to do now is become that stone. Last time, we weren't sure if we could pinpoint Wanak, so we didn't risk activating the altar's full power to avoid wasting it. Now, we can give Wanak a 'surprise'."

Albus chuckled. "Not using it last time was good. The illusion might have made Wanak gather all our targets together, allowing us to deal with them all at once."

Looking around, Albus sneered. "I thought Lumian would return here these days, so I had you leave the Lamp of Calamity on the altar to lure him into using it. I didn't expect him to be such a coward."

"He should have been here," Gusain said, showing detailed knowledge of the altar's surroundings. "He tried multiple times to destroy the statues but failed. This led the altar to draw some power from the earth to repair itself, causing slight changes in the details. I didn't expect him to resist the urge and call of the Lamp of Calamity and not light it on the spot. For the Hunter pathway, such self-control is rare."

Albus lifted his chin. "You'd better perform the ritual now. Heh heh, and check the Lamp of Calamity to see if it's been tampered with or has had something added to it. A Hunter not causing some damage would be unworthy of the pathway's name."

"Are you underestimating my caution?" Gusain laughed, approaching the pedestal and picking up the lamp containing a semi-solid, semi-liquid pale yellow grease.

He carefully inspected it, sniffed its scent, and finally dipped his fingers into the lamp, touching the wick twice.

Gusain immediately withdrew his fingers, letting the white-hot flame ignite the pale yellow grease on them.

The scent of warmth, allure, dark fragrance, and rust quickly filled his nostrils. He half-closed his eyes, nodding slightly. "No problem."

Albus laughed. "Where did you learn the method to create the Lamp of Calamity and the corresponding secret ritual? It's quite fascinating."

"You'll find out later. Once we finish this, we'll be true companions," Gusain replied with a smile.

He turned, facing the four statues and the Lamp of Calamity, and took a small blue iron soldier from a hidden pocket, placing it on the pedestal.

Isn't it just the Fourth Epoch Trier? What's so hard to guess? Still keeping secrets... Companions, heh heh... Albus began to back away from Gusain, instinctively keeping a distance out of caution.

Finally, Albus stopped about fifteen meters away, watching through the thick fog as Gusain lit the lamp, sat cross-legged on the ground, and entered Cogitation to complete the secret ritual.

In just over ten seconds, Gusain, surrounded by a seductive dark fragrance, "saw" a dense fog.

Unlike the war fog in the hollow, this fog was tinged with a ghostly black hue, covering a city with no visible boundaries, only faint outlines.

Half-dazed, half-awake, Gusain floated to a familiar place.

After some time, he reached a tall shadow-like tower and descended rapidly, entering its eerie, sinister base.

Here, it seemed there was a well, blending into the darkness.

Gusain repeated the purpose of the ritual to fight off the increasing drowsiness.

He neared the well, gazing into it.

He then "saw" moss-covered stones and iron-black chains attached to the well's walls. The engravings on the chains were blurred, hard to discern.

I can now see the inside of the well's walls?

Never could before...

The ritual's effectiveness is due to my proximity to the great existence?

Gusain felt a surge of joy.

He excitedly looked at the dark water in the well.

The water rippled lightly, gradually forming a figure.

Gusain strained to see, suddenly spotting patches of brown bark.

The bark was embedded in a face, bringing an indescribable horror.

Bark... Gusain was simultaneously frightened and puzzled.

Why would bark appear here?

Shouldn't it be steel and blood?

Instinctively, Gusain looked at his hands, finding patches of brown bark rising on his skin.

Wh- Gusain's pupils dilated as he looked back at the well's dark water surface.

He saw the reflected figure clearly.

It was himself!

His face was covered with mottled bark!

The next moment, the bark squirmed, sinking inward and turning flesh-colored.

They became wet spores embedded in flesh, blooming to release countless tiny naked figures.

Gusain's terror broke its limits. He abruptly opened his eyes, breaking free from the ritual experience.

Huff... Panting heavily, he saw the iron soldier on the pedestal rapidly expanding to three or four meters tall, its eyes iron-black instead of the burning dark-red.

The iron soldier's spear was quickly covered in white-blue flames.

"Success..." Gusain steadied himself, no longer tense.

He thought the anomaly was due to his proximity to the great existence, deepening the ritual experience, thus showing more details.

"I'm stronger now..." Gusain stood up, extinguishing the Lamp of Calamity.

"This is a soldier puppet with some of the Iron-blooded Knight's power and status?" Albus walked back from a distance.

"Yes, treat it as a weakened Iron-blooded Knight. It's not something Wanak can compare to," Gusain answered confidently.

He hadn't yet examined the benefits and knowledge gained from the ritual.

Albus took a few steps and then stopped, looking at Gusain with a playful smile. "Your hair has grown."

My hair has grown? Gusain turned his head, seeing his brown hair had grown to his cheeks from above his ears.

He suddenly had a guess:

Did this ritual bring me closer to the Demoness pathway?

With this suspicion, he lowered his head.

Sure enough, his chest was slowly bulging, stretching his shirt, sweater, and coat.

At the same time, Gusain smelled a faint milky scent.

Milky scent... Gusain was stunned.

Does the Demoness mutation cause this?

He was about to ask Albus about his changes when he saw his collaborator backing away.

Immediately, Gusain felt the iron soldier behind him bending over, its head lowering to his ear with the sound of metal clashing and rubbing.

The iron soldier spoke with a metallic voice, softly calling, "Mother."

"Mother... Me?" Gusain, confused, looked down to see his abdomen swelling visibly.

Seeing this, his mind buzzed, feeling as if he was reborn.

Albus, retreating slowly to avoid triggering anomalies, saw Gusain looking at him, smiling with maternal radiance, his blue eyes icy and sinister.

...

Rumble!

A massive explosion occurred in a district with a volcanic crater, sending a white fireball rolling into the sky, turning red, creating thick smoke.

In the ruins of Dades Agricultural Company, hidden in the underground chamber, Lumian and Wanak felt the near-earthquake-like disturbance.

From the direction of the tremor, Lumian quickly guessed:

The hollow filled with war fog?

A fierce explosion happened there?

Did Albus and Gusain make some preparations before dealing with Wanak, lighting the lamp I tampered with, causing an accident?

Lumian immediately shouted to Wanak, "The situation has changed!"

Then, he left the shadow state, teleporting to the corresponding district.

He didn't choose the hollow entrance with war fog as his destination, fearing the explosion was a bait by Albus and Gusain!

Only a Hunter knew how treacherous a Hunter could be!

Chapter 816: Dark Forest

816 Dark Forest

On the edge of the district destroyed by the volcanic eruption, Lumian's figure swiftly emerged, his gaze fixed on the site of the violent explosion.

The ground had collapsed into a massive crater, thin wisps of fog rising from it, though not yet dense.

Albus Medici leaped out of the crater, followed closely by a three-to-four-meter-tall iron soldier wielding a white-blue flaming spear.

Lumian transformed into a shadowy creature again, blending into the darkness untouched by the firelight.

He decided to observe the scene before taking action.

Almost simultaneously, he saw a figure emerge from the crater, half blending into the night, half illuminated by the firelight: long hair draping over shoulders, a chest protruding prominently, and a stomach appearing swollen as if from excessive beer.

At a glance, Lumian recognized the figure from its now feminine, motherly face-Gusain.

Gusain turned into a woman? And is pregnant? Lumian was initially stunned, then quickly pieced together what had likely happened.

He remembered adding a bit of Berserk Agent and Bark Agent to the altar's oil lamp, both sourced from the Nightstalkers which were imbued with the power of the Great Mother.

So Gusain was the one who performed the ritual using the lamp? He already had some abilities linked to the mirror world, indicating his previous ritual knowledge and power were partly from the Demoness pathway. The Demoness pathway is closely tied to femininity in mysticism. So, with the divine effects of the corpse wax candle amplifying the Demoness experience, the Berserk Agent and Bark Agent linked his ritual to the Great Mother, resulting in this mutation?

Fascinating...

Lumian watched Albus Medici battle the motherly version of Gusain and the iron soldier, which was much stronger than previous soldier puppets.

He had no intention of helping either side at the moment.

A Hunter only struck at the most critical moment!

Frankly, if Albus Medici hadn't taken the head of the Abscessed Hand, Lumian wouldn't want to eliminate him right now. Even if Wanak's bait plan was a great success, trapping Albus and Gusain, he might still find an opportunity to let Albus escape.

This was to maintain a balance.

Until he finished his studies, Lumian didn't want any one competitor to dominate completely.

That would likely cause a sudden change in circumstances, forcing him to prematurely enter the underground mausoleum before finishing the books Archbishop Heraberg provided.

So, Lumian observed the fight, patiently waiting for an opportunity to get clues about the Abscessed Hand's head from Albus Medici, while casually admiring Gusain's transformation and the terrifying iron soldier.

Rumble! Rumble! Rumble!

Hunter battles were always marked by violent explosions. Buildings, their foundations already hollowed out and walls damaged by the volcanic eruption, collapsed one after another, raising thick dust clouds.

Seizing an opportunity, Albus Medici leaped into the air, forming a white-blue flaming longsword and slashing it at the iron soldier's head.

Boom!

The sword exploded, splitting the iron soldier's head open.

But the iron soldier didn't collapse. Instead, Gusain's right cheek instantly dented and deformed grotesquely.

In the next moment, Gusain's skull and muscles quickly writhed and expanded, restoring themselves.

With this change, the iron soldier's head also rapidly healed.

Wh- self-healing power from the Great Mother pathway, combined with the Sword of Courage's trait of sharing damage? Not only can they endure damage but they can also share abilities? Lumian felt a chill down his spine.

What kind of monster did my additives create?

Seeing this, Albus turned into a white flaming spear, shooting past the collapsing buildings to distance himself from the iron soldier and Gusain.

Thick fog enveloped the area around him, covering the streets for dozens of meters.

Seeing this, Lumian's eyelid twitched slightly.

He sensed that Albus Medici intended to flee.

He would too!

Facing the mutated Gusain and a near-demigod iron soldier, a slight misstep could result in severe injuries or death on the spot. Even if he fought hard and won, he wouldn't emerge unscathed and would likely have to face villains attracted by the commotion. It was better to leave the two monsters for the enforcers or the Church of Knowledge to handle.

An enemy's death was a good outcome, no matter who killed them.

As the war fog formed, Lumian saw a figure appear atop the nearby ruins.

It was Wanak, with iron-black eyes and blood-red hair.

He took a step forward, raised his hands, and lifted his head as if praying to a deity.

Ooo! Morora's already volatile weather suddenly whipped into a hurricane, uprooting trees and forming a vortex connecting the sky nearby.

Whoosh! The hurricane blew away the war fog, revealing Albus Medici's position to Lumian and the others.

A citywide hurricane? Only a demigod could manage that, and not even all demigods... Right, given Morora's extreme weather, and considering Wanak's connection to 0-01, it's not as terrifying as I thought... Lumian's gaze sharpened as he noticed Julie, clad in a cotton nightgown, appearing in the shadows about ten meters from Albus.

The Demoness held a mirror, reflecting part of Albus's image.

Julie's acting now, perfectly coordinating with Wanak? Lumian was initially surprised, then understood why.

Everyone present sensed Albus was in trouble. Without prior agreement, they all made the same choice:

To ambush Albus-to nail his coffin shut!

This is the game's rule, the rule of Hunter and Demoness conflicts: without powerful constraints like notarized documents, alliances are fluid, constantly shifting. But if someone shows weakness, everyone else will target them, giving no chance for recovery... Enlightened, Lumian saw Julie raise her right hand covered in demoness black flames, wiping it across the mirror reflecting Albus.

Almost simultaneously, Albus burst into flames, turning into crimson fire that shot out in all directions.

Some of the flames turned black, becoming calm from blazing, ultimately falling into the underground hollow still emitting war fog.

The remaining crimson flames regrouped about ten meters away, reforming Albus's body.

His aura weakened significantly.

In his eyes appeared a blazing white flame.

A white flaming spear shot from the shadows.

Lumian had joined in, attacking the downed dog.

Seeing this, Albus's short red hair instantly ignited, extending downward, as if turning into shoulder-length hair.

His face took on a faint iron-black hue.

Boom!

The white flaming spear exploded before hitting him, like a bursting firework.

Lumian's figure appeared behind Albus, his eyes shining silver-black.

He swung a fist at Albus.

The fist slowed, as if bearing a heavy fate.

Lumian was attempting to exchange Albus's fate.

Of course, he didn't expect success. He aimed to quickly browse Albus's fate, finding fragments related to the Abscessed Hand's head to locate it.

This was the most crucial task for him.

The silver illusory river of complex symbols quickly filled Lumian's vision, materializing countless fate fragments flowing forward.

Ignoring the rest, Lumian searched swiftly for his target by the approximate timeline.

In a blink, a fate fragment enlarged before him: Albus holding the rotten blue-black Abscessed Hand's head, walking to the underground mausoleum entrance, tossing it in from a distance, hearing it bounce around inside like a ball...

In the underground mausoleum? No wonder I couldn't sense it... Quite the hiding spot... Quite the provocation... At that moment, Lumian felt it wasn't a bad idea to kill Albus here.

This guy really knows how to annoy people!

The next second, before the fate exchange, he lost sight of Albus's silver river of fate.

The Medici descendant, realizing Lumian was behind him, turned into a blazing white flaming spear, shooting out of the ruins.

The iron soldier created white-blue Fire Ravens, chasing the spear like living creatures. Gusain raised his head, preparing to emit a shrill screech, friend and foe alike be damned.

Julie disappeared into the shadows again, but gray-white threads of spider silk appeared before and beside Albus's flaming spear, forming a resilient web waiting for him.

The hurricane hadn't stopped. Wanak leaped into the air, forming a massive white-blue flaming broadsword, ready to slash at Albus.

Chapter 817: Lightning Strikes

817 Lightning Strikes

Albus's blazing-white flaming spear was about to crash into the layered gray-white web but suddenly disintegrated in mid-air.

Within the raindrop-like flaming fragments, Albus's figure emerged, rapidly falling to the ground to avoid the Demoness's web.

The white-blue Fire Ravens created by the iron soldier curved in the air, corrected their flight paths, and locked onto Albus again. Wanak, who had leaped up using the hurricane, descended, raising his flaming broadsword to strike heavily at his target.

The explosions and the sound of metal clashing erupted simultaneously.

The swarm of Fire Ravens surrounded Albus before he could touch the ground, attacking him relentlessly, individually and in groups.

The blast wave and spreading white-blue flames threw Albus upward, right into Wanak's descending broadsword.

Clang!

The broadsword struck as if hitting metal, producing a cracking sound.

The resulting force slammed Albus to the ground from a height of two or three meters.

Boom!

The impact caused the ground to cave in, revealing the underground hollow filled with thick fog.

Albus fell in.

As soon as Wanak landed, he prepared to jump into the hollow to prevent Albus from escaping or recovering.

Suddenly, he hesitated and didn't make the jump.

He could only create hurricanes in Morora's unique environment and let them wreak havoc in the City of Exiles, unable to direct them precisely underground.

Fighting another special Hunter in the fog-filled, low-visibility hollow wasn't wise; it would put him in danger.

By this time, Lumian had finished attempting the Fate Exchange and withdrew his fist.

He deeply suspected that Albus's intended escape destination was either outside the ruins or the underground hollow covered in war fog.

The Medici descendant had never planned to easily break through the obstacles set by the Hunters, Demoness, and monster. Instead, he deliberately showed this tendency, using their obstruction to forcefully break through the already unstable ground during the previous battle and fall into his real destination.

That way, he could rely on the environment to escape the encirclement, try to hide, and find other possible exits.

Disguising his true intentions to confuse his enemies? No wonder he's a Medici... Lumian nodded thoughtfully.

Meanwhile, he also noticed Albus's astounding defense.

Not only had he withstood the Fire Ravens' bombardment, but he had also blocked Wanak's Cull strike, emerging with only minor injuries.

Simply metallizing his body to some extent couldn't achieve this. Lumian suspected Albus had an item or companion similar to the Sword of Courage that shared at least half the damage.

Considering Albus's abilities surpassing Sequence 5 and some beyond Sequence 5's capabilities, Lumian reasonably deduced a special connection with the Red Angel, allowing him to share some of the latter's power and endure some of the damage-an ability Hunters gained and deepened starting at the demigod level.

If not for being in Morora, the land sealing 0-01, Lumian believed Albus could have borrowed true demigod power, not facing so many limitations.

As the iron soldier prepared to jump into the fog-filled hollow to chase Albus, the motherly Gusain raised his head and let out a sharp, piercing howl.

Lumian and Wanak's minds buzzed simultaneously, their thoughts shattered, life force rapidly draining, causing weakness in the very depths of their souls.

Crack!

In the darkness at the edge of the district, a mirror shattered on the ground, revealing Julie's figure.

In the next second, Gusain fixed his gaze on Lumian, completely ignoring Wanak and Julie.

He caressed his increasingly swollen belly, his blue eyes turning vicious.

Under his will, the near Sequence 4 iron soldier abandoned the pursuit of Albus, turning to target Lumian.

Seeing this, Lumian, enduring the throbbing headache and buzzing in his ears, smiled and waved at Gusain and the iron soldier.

His figure then disappeared, leaving Gusain and the iron soldier to Wanak and Julie.

Bye-bye!

Lumian teleported to the entrance of the Church of Knowledge, just as two teams of black-robed enforcers rushed out.

He walked into the cathedral, found a corner, and sat on the floor, pulling out a borrowed book from the Traveler's Bag, leaning against the brass bookshelf, and began studying.

He was concerned that the child Gusain carried might pose a significant threat and target him, so he sought the Knowledge Cathedral's protection.

I'm studying so diligently, shouldn't you show some appreciation, Church of Knowledge?

In the ruins of the mostly collapsed buildings, Wanak noticed Gusain's belly had swollen even more, looking increasingly like a woman about to give birth.

The belly started writhing as if something inside was trying to break free.

Wanak's gaze froze, immediately raising his hands and head towards the cloudy sky.

Dark clouds gathered quickly, and Morora's weather changed again.

Silver lightning snakes darted through the clouds, converging into a tree-like lightning bolt as thick as a bucket, striking down.

The terrifying lightning targeted Gusain and the baby inside him!

Gusain vanished, hiding in a ghostly wasteland.

But the silver "giant python" pursued him relentlessly, piercing through the void, striking his belly with unavoidable speed.

Bang!

The thunderclap woke the city's exiles.

The wasteland shattered like a mirror, revealing Gusain's blackened belly, emitting a burnt smell as he reappeared in the ruins.

Thud! A charred lump of flesh fell from his belly, struggled briefly, and then lay still.

Gusain froze, life force completely drained, and collapsed.

His flesh rapidly shriveled, turning him into a charred mummy, with large blood-colored blisters appearing on his body.

Another bolt of lightning, formed by countless silver snakes, struck the blistering Gusain.

Boom!

Gusain twitched a few times and died completely.

"Mom!" the iron soldier cried, running to Gusain, crouching down, and picking him up.

Julie seized the opportunity, reflecting the iron soldier in her mirror and covering it with Demoness black flames.

The iron soldier was instantly engulfed in black flames, burning from the inside out.

It stood up, wielding its white flaming spear, and charged at Wanak and Julie in a frenzy.

For a while, fireballs, Fire Ravens, mirror fragments, burning-white spears, and burning rain appeared continuously, with explosions echoing non-stop.

As Julie prepared to escape using the Mirror Substitution, leaving Wanak to face the iron soldier alone, the iron soldier began to tremble.

Still burning with Demoness black flames, its legs seemed unable to support its body, showing signs of rust and melting.

Clang! Clang! Clang! Metal parts covered in black flames fell off its body.

Soon, the iron soldier turned into a pile of scrap metal.

Wanak, who had been struggling, sighed in relief and sneered at the iron soldier's remains. "All strength and no brains."

With that said, the most dangerous person in Morora then turned his head, looking at Julie a few meters away.

Julie's gaze first fell on his face, then moved down to his crotch.

The Demoness shook her head in disappointment, regretting adding the black flame curse to the iron soldier too early, missing the chance to see Wanak weakened.

Wanak squinted slightly as Julie smiled and retreated into the shadows.

At this moment, the enforcers finally arrived in the district.

...

In the fog-filled hollow, Albus stood in a corner, leaning against the brown rock wall, hair disheveled, clothes tattered, a white cigarette in his mouth.

The Medici descendant took a deep drag and muttered regretfully, "Nobody followed. I was hoping to give you a surprise..."

...

After the explosions subsided and the enforcers returned to the Church of Knowledge, Lumian left and headed for the Carnivore bar.

Archbishop Heraberg of Morora hadn't appeared, seemingly not on duty.

Lumian didn't hurry to sleep. He conjured a white flaming ball and continued reading the books related to 0-01 at a desk.

Soon, Julie returned and knocked on his door.

Lumian, suspending the white flaming ball, opened the shabby wooden door, seeing the neighboring Demoness with moist eyes and flushed cheeks, as if she had just finished some R21 activity.

She held a blood-colored object frozen in ice.

"Wanak's?" Lumian asked with a smile.

Julie sighed and shook her head. "No, I didn't get the chance."

She then accused Lumian, which was her reason for knocking in the middle of the night. "Why did you leave early? Together, we could have cut off Wanak's thing!"

If I hadn't left, something you wouldn't want to see might have happened... Lumian chuckled. "I'm in a partnership with Wanak."

"Pui!" Julie scoffed in disbelief.

She turned and walked towards her room.

After a few steps, she turned back, smiling slyly at Lumian. "Hope you don't regret today's choice."

Chapter 818: Instigation

818 Instigation

Don't regret today's choice... Lumian watched Julie's back as she entered her room, and he could guess what she meant by her earlier words:

You'll regret not killing Wanak today!

Julie must really place a lot of weight on Wanak... Does she think he'll affect the outcome of the underground mausoleum raid? Lumian muttered to himself, closing the door and returning to his desk.

He understood Julie's concern about Wanak. Earlier, Wanak had demonstrated his unique ability to manipulate Morora's weather, creating a hurricane powerful enough to disperse the war fog covering the entire district. From Lumian's later observations, Wanak had even summoned terrifying lightning strikes.

Although Lumian wasn't sure if these abilities had limitations, possibly relying on the current weather and only being able to guide it to similar conditions without causing drastic changes, Wanak's display still proved he was, in some ways, akin to a demigod.

Most importantly, with Lumian's understanding of 0-01's sealing information, if Wanak had truly submitted to 0-01, he should have exhibited some special abilities yet to be seen.

I remember the night Wanak was ambushed by Albus and Gusain, the weather was clear, while tonight it's very cloudy, suitable for wind, rain, thunder, and lightning... Lumian held a book borrowed from the Church of Knowledge but didn't read it as attentively as before. Instead, he thought carefully about the hidden details in Wanak's behavior.

After a while, Lumian silently laughed at Julie.

In the Demoness's eyes, tonight was indeed the best chance to hunt Wanak-he was severely injured, the iron soldier had near-demigod strength to engage in direct combat, Gusain had undergone a terrifying mutation with unknown abilities, and with Julie, the Demoness of Affliction, and Lumian himself, they had a good chance to permanently take Wanak down in the ruins.

But the problem was, if Lumian hadn't teleported away, he might have become the primary target of Gusain and the iron soldier. In that case, Julie would likely see it as a great opportunity to kill her boss and choose to collaborate with Wanak, assisting Gusain and the iron soldier.

Do you really think I'm that foolish? If Wanak is killed, with Medici heavily wounded and Gusain and the iron soldier destined to be cleaned up by the enforcers or the Church of Knowledge, wouldn't the Demonesses become the sole dominant force? Then, facing their coercion or attacks, I wouldn't be able to find any temporary allies... Such a situation that could drastically change the power dynamics should wait until I finish reading the remaining books... Lumian muttered, adjusting the white flaming ball above his head so it wouldn't cast shadows on the pages.

After determining the whereabouts of the Abscessed Hand, he could focus more on his studies.

Before that, he thought about what Albus Medici and Julie intended to achieve in Morora.

With backing from gods or a King of Angels, they likely weren't just aiming to leave a mark on the terrifying Sealed Artifact, 0-01.

Internal and external coordination to directly steal 0-01? The Church of Knowledge is one of the seven major orthodox churches, it shouldn't be so easy to take their most important Grade 0 Sealed Artifact unless they intend to let it happen...

Relying solely on violent means is probably not feasible, or the Primordial Demoness and the Red Angel would have acted already...

Do they need 0-01 to undergo some change?

And while I have some clues on how to get close to 0-01, I have no idea how to leave a mark and gain its favor... Do I need to rely on the remnants of Alista Tudor's aura?

Or is it related to one of my previous speculations?

Lumian ended his thoughts and read for nearly another hour before lying down to sleep.

In Morora, he slept lightly, always on guard against potential attacks and the neighboring Demoness's "plague."

If he experienced symptoms like fever or cough, he would wake immediately and teleport to the Knowledge Cathedral to check his condition!

If it weren't for the accumulated negative effects of not sleeping for several days, he would rely on the automatic fatigue removal and spirituality restoration at six in the morning to stay up all night.

At the same time, this misled Julie and others-if they discovered he could stay energized without sleep, they might infer the changes occurring at six in the morning, preventing Lumian from utilizing this special refresh state to turn the tide at critical moments.

The next morning, Lumian deliberately lingered in bed for half an hour before waking up, brushing his teeth, washing up, and heading downstairs to enjoy the breakfast prepared by Lez.

Seven or eight minutes later, Julie returned from outside the bar.

Went out again last night? The Demoness is really good at hiding her movements and whereabouts, it's impossible to track her or even know when she leaves her room... Lumian shifted his gaze back and sipped his milk.

Julie lightly went over to a high stool two seats away from Lumian and remained silent.

Lez glanced at her face, took out a small cake, and added some cream.

"Sweet food can help improve your mood," the Chef said simply, pushing the cream cake towards Julie.

Julie's expression twisted. "I don't need to improve my mood! I'm in a great mood!"

Oh, you're in a bad mood... Last night, you were in a good mood when you knocked on my door... Did something happen when you went out late at night? Lumian openly observed Julie for a few moments.

Lez said, "As a chef, I must accurately judge the current state of the ingredients to choose the most suitable cooking method."

Julie's eyes narrowed, losing any semblance of elegance.

She seemed ready to kill at any moment.

Based on previous observations, only Celeste, the other Demoness, can make Julie's state deteriorate rapidly and her emotions nearly lose control... Did the lovers have a fight? Hmm, my basic psychology knowledge tells me Julie seems more worried than sad. She didn't hide this... Worrying... Lumian placed his right hand on the Traveler's Bag, ready for the Demoness to lose control.

Almost simultaneously, he thought of a possibility.

As a member of the enforcers and a listed experimental subject, Celeste was sure to take shifts in the underground tomb or rotate to replace the puppet. For Celeste, who still retained some self-awareness, this was both an opportunity and a danger!

Julie went out to meet Celeste last night and learned that she would be entering the underground mausoleum soon, possibly returning as a fully controlled experimental subject without self-awareness? No wonder Julie is so worried, her mood deteriorating... Lumian chuckled with understanding.

"What are you laughing at?" Julie glared at him coldly.

Lumian smiled and sighed. "It might be fine this time, but what about next time, or the time after? If you don't solve the root of the problem, one day you'll face an outcome you don't want to accept."

Julie's eyes flickered as she stared at the cream cake, silent for a long time.

When Lumian wiped his mouth and prepared to leave, she frowned slightly and asked, "How much do you know?"

Lumian responded with a smile, "Why don't you take a guess? Maybe I know nothing, and your expression gave me the answer."

With that, Lumian climbed the stairs, leaving Julie staring blankly.

...

Trier, Avenue du Boulevard, 6 Rue Belfort.

In the four-story townhouse late at night, after Muggle left, Periodic Table and others circled back, reuniting with the Associate Professor couple in the living room.

Glancing at the darkness outside the window, Periodic Table sighed. "Is it really okay to put on such an act in front of Muggle?"

"We didn't deceive her; we just hoped to elicit her sympathy." Professor sighed. "The disappearance of Pillar Kmerolo, Nikila suspected of being the Mirror Person, and the increasingly erratic actions of the Hidden Sage have trapped us in a predicament, difficult to escape on our own.

After surviving the April Fool's plot, Muggle has become increasingly mysterious, clearly backed by a powerful force.

"Fortunately, she's still kind. Even though she might have noticed something off, she still informed us that divine power lingers in the underground catacombs and agreed to deal with Nikila."

Associate Professor patted his wife's shoulder to comfort her.

Casting a sweeping glance around, he said, "Not just for ourselves, but for those we care about, we must survive."

Periodic Table gave a self-mocking smile. "Half a year ago, I never thought we'd end up like this. How did the powerful and secretive Moses Ascetic Order end up in such a state?"

...

The next morning, Franca received a reply from Madam Judgment after breakfast.

"The operation against Nikila of the Moses Ascetic Order can commence as soon as possible.

"The high-ranking members of the Moses Ascetic Order are already aware of Kmerolos disappearance. Another Pillar will arrive in Trier soon to handle this, but it won't affect your mission against Nikila, if he is indeed the Mirror Person, Griffith."

The Moses Ascetic Order knows Kmerolo is missing? How did they find out so quickly? Was it because of my report or did they just notice something? Hmm, our Tarot Club's mole in the Moses Ascetic Order seems to be quite high-ranking, able to provide intel about the arrival of a Pillar and the judgment that it won't affect our mission against Nikila...

Such a certain judgment... Could that Pillar be one of our Tarot Club members? Hmm... Franca pondered, growing more curious the more she thought about it.

Chapter 819: Subteam Operation

819 Subteam Operation

In the evening, in Trier, at 35 Rue Saint-Nornez in Quartier 20, known for its public cemetery.

In different states of invisibility, Franca, Jenna, and Anthony stood outside Room 6 on the fifth floor, checking the details of the environment and making final preparations for their operation.

According to the information provided by Periodic Table, Nikila, a suspected member of the Moses Ascetic Order and possibly a Mirror Person, was an ordinary employee of a grain company, living a very regular life, leaving home punctually every day and returning on time.

The only unusual thing about Nikila was that, despite being in his mid-thirties, he was still unmarried, citing severe intermittent migraines as the reason why women found him unappealing.

When Franca read this information, she immediately thought, This matches the characteristic of Mystery Pryers continuously influenced by the evil god, Hidden Sage... Could it be that Mirror People of the Mystery Pryer pathway are also infused with knowledge by the Hidden Sage?

Recalling the content of the dossier, Franca emerged from her invisibility state and created a layer of frost, making it seep into the keyhole and freeze solid.

As a result, she produced a crystalline key and easily opened Nikila's door.

Taking advantage of the fact that this ordinary employee hadn't yet returned home from work, Franca took out a mirror and began divination to avoid any traps or warning setups that might be in the apartment.

"Bedroom, living room, and guest room all have full-length mirrors, and there are up to fifteen or sixteen portable mirrors. If you're not a Mirror Person, who would believe that?" Franca mumbled to herself, checking the room twice.

She was also conveying the collected information to Jenna and Anthony outside the door.

Of course, there was another possibility for so many mirrors, which was that Nikila was a Demoness. However, it was obvious that this individual was not an exceptionally attractive female, nor even a female at all.

Franca went to the full-length mirror in the living room, looked at Jenna and Anthony's figures in the hallway, and said, "I'll ambush behind this mirror. Follow the plan to force the target into this mirror. If he can use the mirror world, we can confirm he's the Mirror Person, Griffith."

As she spoke, black flames quietly burned around the room, erasing traces left by the previous search.

Jenna nodded slightly and specifically reminded, "Be careful of an ambush behind the mirror, like the one Lumian encountered before."

"Don't worry. Magic Mirror Divination told me there's no ambush. Of course, I won't fully trust and rely on divination. I'll stay vigilant." Franca felt Jenna's concern, smiling as she took out the Seven-Stone Bracelet from the Traveler's Bag, now with only two diamonds left, and tossed it outside.

As she threw it, she couldn't help but mutter in her heart, Out with the old, in with the new, out with the old, in with the new...

Once Jenna caught the Seven-Stone Bracelet, Franca reiterated, "After confirming Nikila enters this mirror, you both immediately teleport away, using that fixed entrance to the mirror world to assist me."

"No problem," Anthony replied, wearing gloves, closing the apartment door, and warming the lock area, which had become icy from the cold key.

This was to prevent Nikila from sensing the residual cold and suspecting anything amiss when he opened the door.

Once Jenna and Anthony left, Franca took out the Ice Amulet, hanging it around her neck.

Then she placed her palm against the full-length mirror in the living room.

With a flash of cold light, she silently passed through the glass.

Behind the mirror was void, a spider-web-like deep dark tunnel filled Franca's vision.

Keeping a close watch on the surroundings, Franca breathed a sigh of relief and murmured, No ambush.

Confirming this, she leaned closer to the mirror, peering through the glass into the apartment's living room: Nikila had not yet returned, and outside, the dusk was eerily quiet.

Franca's nerves instinctively tightened. She raised her right hand, rubbed her temples, and sighed.

It would be great if Lumian were here...

This operation was proposed and perfected by her, killing many of her brain cells and making her responsible for achieving the goal without severely harming Jenna and Anthony. She couldn't relax at all.

In the past, Lumian bore these burdens and responsibilities. She only needed to question and use her imagination to complete her part of the task.

Sigh, being a team leader is exhausting, no chance to slack off... Franca composed herself and patiently waited.

In the café diagonally across from 35 Rue Saint-Nornez.

Jenna, now a girl in a black dress with her hood removed, sat by the window, chatting with Anthony about various Trier anecdotes.

Suddenly, she propped her left elbow on the table, using her palm to press down her original flaxen hair, her voice dropping slightly. "The target is back."

Anthony, while acting attracted to the beautiful woman opposite, glanced with his peripheral vision at the apartment building.

A double-decker public carriage had stopped by the roadside, and a man in his thirties wearing a black wool coat and a half-high silk top hat got off.

The man was nearly six feet tall, walked steadily, had a thin face with distinct features, and rare deep black eyes.

It's definitely Nikila... Anthony nodded slightly to Jenna, confirming she hadn't mistaken the target.

Jenna then straightened her head, withdrew her left hand, and glanced at the cuckoo clock on the café wall.

She smiled lightly at Anthony and said, "Three minutes to go."

She meant that in three minutes, the operation would officially start.

The reason for waiting three more minutes in the café was to avoid Nikila's instinctual investigation as a Mystery Pryer after returning home.

This was a detail discussed and decided by Franca, Jenna, and Anthony.

...

Nikila, wearing a half-high silk top hat, walked step by step up to the fifth floor and stopped outside Room 6.

He didn't open the door immediately but raised his right hand and rubbed his temples.

Then he closed his eyes briefly and reopened them, his pupils now a deep purple with a mysterious aura.

Eye of Mystery Prying!

Usually, Nikila used special Warlock spells to weaken the effect of the Eye of Mystery Prying to avoid sudden death, but it couldn't be completely sealed. Now, he was using it to its full potential to observe the surroundings inside and outside the room.

Bugs on the ceiling, hairs in the cracks, the neighbor cooking in front of the coal stove, dust floating in the air, children running up and down the stairs, rats hiding in the shadows, pedestrians passing by on the streets -all these scenes overlapped in Nikila's deep purple eyes.

At the same time, he saw shadowy curtains around him and dark aqueous light on the surfaces of all mirrors.

Before the gaze behind the shadowy curtain could become more pronounced, Nikila ended his observation abruptly, closing his eyes.

He knew if he continued looking, something unpredictable might happen, filling him with fear.

Phew... The Eye of Mystery Prying is truly dangerous. Listeners on the Secrets Suppliant pathway hear things, we see things, and both are equally likely to encounter the forbidden and die mysteriously... Nikila muttered, pulling out a brown leather scroll from an inner pocket of his black wool coat, softly chanting a word in Hermes-"Myopia."

The scroll immediately ignited with black flames, quickly turning to ash.

The mysterious deep purple in Nikila's eyes faded into the black depths of his pupils.

After doing this, Nikila took out his key and opened the door.

He had confirmed there were no suspicious individuals or enemies hiding in the shadows, nor were there any signs of abnormalities around the apartment or the street.

Entering the living room, closing the door behind him, Nikila unbuttoned the top of his wool coat and white shirt, relaxing on the sofa with his arms stretched out.

Franca, watching from behind the full-length mirror, took advantage of Nikila's forward movement to grab a beer from the coffee table, extending her right hand slightly through the mirror, pressing it tightly against the glass.

When Nikila sat back on the sofa, Franca immediately withdrew her hand.

Gulping beer, Nikila read the newspapers he had brought back, behaving like any ordinary employee.

Time passed slowly, and as three minutes elapsed, Jenna and Anthony left the café, turning into a nearby secluded alley, preparing both their shadow hiding and Psychological Invisibility techniques.

They quickly returned to the target apartment and hid in their prearranged positions.

At this time, Nikila was still reading the newspapers, considering whether to go out for dinner or cook something simple.

Suddenly, Nikila's throat felt dry and itchy, as if he hadn't drunk water for a long time.

He coughed once and thought, I drank half a bottle of beer, why is my throat so dry?

As this thought crossed his mind, he couldn't help but cough again.

Immediately, a strong sense of unease washed over him.

Something's wrong!

Just as Nikila became alert, Jenna, hearing two consecutive coughs from the target through the wall, emerged from the shadows without hesitation. With her hood still on, she inserted the Arrow of the Bloodthirsty into her own heart.

Her flaxen hair seemed to lengthen slightly, her contours became more refined, and her facial features more stunning.

Previously, Jenna's beauty highlighted her feminine charm, an expression of femininity. Now, her beauty seemed to become a more independent concept, alluring by sheer virtue of its existence.

Through the door, she made the shadows beneath Nikila's feet and the surrounding darkness coalesce into illusory yet solid black chains, wrapping around the target.

Chapter 820: Walking into a Trap

820 Walking into a Trap

As Jenna used the Abyss Shackles spell from the Arrow of the Bloodthirsty, shadows and darkness came to life beside the coughing Nikila. Under the yellowish light of the gas wall lamp, they coalesced into black chains that wrapped around the Moses Ascetic Order member, binding him firmly in place, even sealing his mouth.

Nikila, experienced in combat, immediately formed a slowly rotating mass of stardust in his right palm. The light in the room dimmed as if night had fallen outside.

In the dimness, numerous bright stars appeared, not densely packed but numerous enough.

They cast beams of light that converged into a thick column, illuminating the entire room and enveloping Nikila.

The black chains formed by the Abyss Shackles disintegrated like shadows meeting sunlight, and Nikila dissolved rapidly in the light column, shattering into countless glass shards.

Mirror Substitution!

Using his unique abilities, Nikila escaped the Abyss Shackles by attacking himself. As a Mystery Pryer pathway Beyonder, many of his spells required incantations. With his mouth sealed, his abilities were significantly limited.

As a result, Jenna confirmed that Nikila was a Mirror Person.

Black fog emanated from her back, growing into a pair of large, illusory bat wings.

These Wings of Darkness transformed into a swarm of palm-sized, insubstantial vampire bats that flew through the walls and door towards the newly freed Nikila.

Meanwhile, Anthony ended his Psychological Invisibility, kicking open the door while aiming a complex, mechanically beautiful black revolver at Nikila.

Winter is Coming!

Anthony was preparing to use the Certain Death effect of this Beyonder weapon.

He didn't intend to actually use it because Nikila's Mirror Substitution ability could prematurely activate, causing the deadly bullet to hit the mirror instead.

Anthony's current objective was to use a Warlock's acute spirituality warnings and mystery-prying eyes to make Nikila feel his life was in danger, forcing him to escape through the mirror world.

According to Franca, Nikila, likely a Sequence 5 Constellations Master from the Mystery Pryer pathway and possibly a Mirror Person, would undoubtedly sense the danger of the Winter is Coming revolver and recognize its godhood-possessing attack.

To genuinely trigger the target's spirituality warning, Anthony needed to complete a psychological suggestion on himself, a simple task for a Hypnotist.

Thus, Anthony was genuinely planning to shoot, fully intending to use the Certain Death effect. However, when his finger began to pull the trigger, it would activate the preset psychological warning, canceling the suggestion and allowing him to fire a normal bullet.

Just as Franca predicted, the moment Nikila saw the Winter is Coming revolver, a hint of deep purple appeared in his pitch-black eyes, reflecting the weapon's decaying aura.

He instantly felt a creeping sense of death, his throat itching more intensely, and a weakness spreading through his body.

This wasn't an effect of Winter is Coming but a backlash from seeing the secret of the Beyonder weapon, combined perfectly with the pathogen Franca spread when she extended her hand through the mirror, worsening Nikila's condition.

Without considering further, Nikila immediately let a mirror substitute himself.

Bang!

Anthony pulled the trigger, firing a yellow bullet with only a disease effect, which, along with the swarm of vampire bats, hit Nikila, causing a shattering sound.

Nikila, now visible in another corner of the room, had no intention of counterattacking. His only thought was to flee immediately.

This was partly because he was unsure if there were more attackers and partly because the gun's danger kept him on high alert.

Unable to assess the situation clearly and knowing the enemy had a demigod-level weapon, he had no choice but to escape.

Nikila quickly lunged towards the nearest mirror, aiming to use the mirror world to escape the battle.

Noticing his move, Jenna slowed her attacks, while Anthony's eyes turned gold, displaying spiraling whirlpools that seemed to penetrate the soul.

Battle Hypnotism!

This spell forcibly hypnotized an enemy during combat, making them perform abnormal actions, but it could not directly harm the hypnotized and didn't last long.

Anthony's intent was only to make Nikila switch mirrors, delaying his escape without directly endangering him.

Nikila hesitated, suddenly feeling the mirror might hide a dangerous trap.

He quickly pulled out a scroll with gold foil from the inside pocket of his black wool coat and softly chanted a Hermes word, "Sun!"

The scroll was instantly consumed by golden flames, erupting into blinding sunlight that turned all the vampire bats to smoke.

This severely affected Jenna and Anthony's vision, their eyes filled with dazzling sunlight.

Nikila seized the moment, rolling towards the full-length mirror in the living room and diving in.

From the start of Battle Hypnotism to his escape, it took only two or three seconds.

The sunlight quickly faded, and Anthony nodded at Jenna.

Jenna immediately grabbed her companion's shoulder, activating the Seven-Stone Bracelet on her left wrist.

One of the two remaining diamonds burst into clear light, enveloping them both.

In the next second, Jenna and Anthony teleported to the quarry chamber with the fixed mirror world entrance, pressing their hands against the protruding rock.

...

Nikila, just entering the void and dark area behind the mirror, couldn't help but cough.

The disease he had contracted couldn't be removed by Mirror Substitution.

Cough! Cough! Cough! As he coughed violently, he felt invisible threads binding his body layer by layer.

Spider webs from a Demoness? Nikila shuddered.

Jenna had been deliberately using the Arrow of the Bloodthirsty to attack this Mirror Person to hide her identity as a Demoness, preventing Nikila from suspecting he was being targeted by Demonesses.

Otherwise, he would suspect a trap behind the mirror, abandoning the mirror world escape plan and rendering Anthony's Battle Hypnotism ineffective.

As his pupils dilated, Nikila reflexively formed a slowly rotating mass of stardust in his right palm.

Before he could use his Constellations Master abilities to destroy himself and the Demoness webs in this area, he felt invisible threads lightly caressing him, from his ears and face to his chest and inner thighs, teasing and scratching with seductive touches.

This instantly sent his blood surging, his thoughts sinking deep to his nether regions.

As he struggled to regain control and use his abilities, he saw a figure at the edge of the web-like tunnel.

The figure wore a black robe with leather armor, the hood askew, revealing a pair of heroic and beautiful eyebrows, clear bright eyes like lake water, and moist red lips.

This indescribable beauty and soul-stirring charm made Nikila instinctively hold his breath, forgetting to resist, forgetting to break free.

Demoness of Affliction's Charm!

The intense danger warning allowed Nikila to barely break free from this bewitching beauty. Clenching his teeth, suppressing the desire from the teasing and seductive touches, he was about to activate the stardust whirlpool in his hand.

Franca continued her Charm, a slight smile on her lips, stunning Nikila while changing the action of some webs. They started tickling him!

"Ha... ha... ha!" Sensitive spots on his neck, armpits, and waist were attacked, making him laugh uncontrollably, tears streaming down his face.

If not for the invisible threads binding him tightly, he would have retreated, twisted his body, or rolled on the ground.

In this state, it was nearly impossible for Nikila to use any of his abilities.

Of course, his desire also faded because of this.

Right now, I really do feel like a black widow spider, methodically dealing with prey caught in its web... At the Demoness of Affliction stage, if the prey is truly ensnared without help, they'll be constantly affected, unable to escape by their own means... It's a pity this doesn't work on Hunters; they can ignite flames to burn the web... I wonder when I'll be able to directly transmit genuine pleasure through the webs... Franca maintained her vigilance, watching the frantically laughing Nikila, muttering to herself.

Her strategy was clear: restrain the enemy, continually interfere with his efforts, and delay him until his illness flared up or he was completely charmed.

During this process, even if Nikila used Mirror Substitution, he would be limited by the distance, with his body reappearing within the area covered by the Demoness webs, repeating the initial experience.

Previously, Franca had already turned this place into a Demoness's nest.

On one side, he was continuously tickled, while on the other, his desire was stoked by teasing touches. Nikila oscillated between hell and paradise, in extreme agony.

The beautiful figure, seemingly forever out of reach, became a symbol of all his hopes and dreams.

Nikila knew he couldn't continue like this. Resolving to endure the laughter, he bit his tongue hard.

The pain pierced his mind, momentarily freeing him from all influences.

He tightened his grip on the stardust whirlpool.

In the void and darkness behind the mirror, one brilliant star after another lit up.

Chapter 821: Infatuation

821 Infatuation

Above the dark and low void of the mirror world, numerous brilliant stars shed beams of clear light.

These beams converged into a column of light, illuminating the mirror world and engulfing Franca, the Demoness webs, and Nikila himself.

Franca and Nikila both shattered into countless mirror fragments. These shards, along with the invisible webs, quickly dissolved into nothing under the starlight.

The starlight quickly faded, and Nikila and Franca's figures reappeared in different corners of the mirror world.

Seeing the entrance to the tunnel of webs now unobstructed, Nikila felt a surge of joy. He pulled out a dark gray scroll from the inner pocket of his black wool coat.

Suppressing the urge to cough, he whispered a Hermes word, "Wind!"

The dark gray scroll instantly ignited with cyan flames, a roaring wind gathering around Nikila, pushing his feverish and muddled thoughts forward at the speed of the wind toward one of the dark tunnels.

Nikila, seizing the moment before Franca could intervene, followed the wind into the tunnel entrance.

However, he didn't feel the familiar pull from other mirrors.

He was back where he started.

The dark, illusory tunnel wasn't open to him!

Mirror Maze!

After becoming a Demoness of Affliction, Franca's mirror magic had evolved, allowing her to create scene illusions with pre-set mirrors.

While waiting for Jenna and Anthony to act, she had woven invisible webs, spread pathogens, and placed mirrors at multiple tunnel entrances.

These mirrors, influenced by Beyonder powers, reflected each other, creating a mirror maze that hid the real tunnel entrances, showing only their reflections.

Nikila had chosen a false target, the reflection of a real tunnel, and naturally couldn't escape.

Taking advantage of this gap, Franca wove another web, ensnaring Nikila, wrapping him in layers, either making him blush or laugh uncontrollably.

Having experienced this before, Nikila didn't let himself get completely entangled. Using his abilities as a Constellations Master, he broke free once again.

In the following time, amidst increasing fever and violent coughing, he barely managed to fend off Franca using scrolls and attempted to destroy the mirrors creating the maze, seeking the real exit.

Under Warlock attacks and interference from spells like wind blades, lightning, flashes, purification, freezing, and paralysis, Franca kept changing positions, sometimes using Mirror Substitution to block an attack, showing great patience and restraint.

Her focus was on maintaining the Demoness webs and spreading pathogens, using her Demoness of Affliction's Charm to buy time.

Gradually, Nikila felt he shouldn't resist or harm the beautiful lady.

His breath grew hot, his heart racing either from the pathogens or her every move, pounding as if to leap from his chest.

The immense pressure made him suspect he might suffer a heart attack any second.

Without hesitation, he pulled out a scroll etched with lightning patterns from his coat's inner pocket.

It was a powerful item he bought from a Broker.

"Storm!" Just as he finished chanting, Nikila started coughing violently, and the scroll erupted into a dazzling silver light.

The silver light expanded, filling the mirror world with a thunderstorm, the accompanying wind pushing lightning into the tunnel entrances, shattering the mirrors Franca had placed.

With the sound of breaking glass, Franca's figure shattered, the mirror maze collapsed, revealing the true dark tunnels.

Nikila had no time to celebrate. Aided by the scroll's spell, dragging his sick body, he dashed toward the nearest tunnel entrance.

He had scrolls with some healing effects but didn't want to miss the chance to escape.

Seeing the tunnel entrance within reach and the attacking Demoness reappearing in another corner, Nikila's heart surged with hope.

At that moment, he saw two figures in the tunnel entrance out of the corner of his eye.

Jenna and Anthony, who had teleported using the last diamond of the Seven-Stone Bracelet, had arrived and been lying in wait.

During the brief and weakened storm, both had been struck by lightning but evaded the worst damage using Mirror Substitution-one from her own ability, the other from the Mirror Substitution created by the two Demonesses.

Seizing this chance, Anthony's eyes turned gold, radiating a dragon-like aura.

Awe!

Fear and panic surged in Nikila's heart, leaving him disoriented, as if facing an unbeatable predator.

Seeing the target pause and turn in circles, Jenna threw a handful of black powder and chanted a few Hermes words.

It was one of a Witch's black magic spells.

Due to their need for materials and incantations, Jenna rarely used these in combat, opting for the convenience of frost and black flames.

The black powder ignited, and a cold wind rose, surrounding Nikila with ghostly figures pressing against him, covering his mouth and nose.

With this dual interference, Franca's Demoness webs wove again, sticking Nikila in place.

Franca smiled sincerely at the Mirror Person.

With a buzz, Nikila felt his blood split, half surging upward, half downward, his heart seeming to stop.

Under repeated Charms and his severe illness, he could no longer resist Franca's allure.

In a daze, Nikila saw the woman, whose every detail fit his aesthetic, beckon to him and offer a transparent triangular spike symbolizing goodwill and control.

I wholeheartedly accept... With this thought, Nikila didn't question why the webs no longer restricted him. He reached out and grasped the triangular spike, feeling a slight sting.

His thoughts froze completely, becoming as sluggish and stiff as rusted machine parts.

Wintry Blade!

With Nikila under control, Franca glanced at Jenna, signaling her to find and destroy the remaining mirrors on him.

Then, Franca could form an ice spike and perform a lobotomy on Nikila.

With Lumian absent, there was no one to use the ritual leather for the Animal Creation Spell to turn Nikila into a large hound.

Jenna nodded slightly, cutting off the lower half of Nikila's right sleeve, and quickly took off his black wool coat. She swiftly found the remaining five mirrors and smashed them one by one.

During this process, Nikila did not resist. He looked at Franca with a mixture of obsession and pain, coughing intermittently.

He still held the Wintry Blade, blood trickling from his hand.

Franca's left hand formed a long, thin ice spike.

Suddenly, Nikila's expression twisted.

Knowledge infusion from the Hidden Sage? Dammit, why now? Franca was first stunned, then understood the reason.

In his severely ill and dying state, Nikila was unlikely to withstand this.

He might lose control on the spot!

In a flash, Franca discarded the ice spike and the Wintry Blade, taking out a mirror that reflected Nikila's image. She then wiped the glass surface with her right hand, covered in eerie black flames.

Nikila's exposed skin was marked with numerous blood-red cracks, with strange things forming inside them.

At that moment, pitch-black flames erupted from his body, burning his soul.

Using the blood dripping from Nikila's hand, Jenna began a curse, while Anthony aimed the Winter is Coming revolver at Nikila, ready to use the Certain Death effect at any moment.

Soon, the two Demonesses acted before Nikila could lose control, ending his life completely.

Silently, Nikila fell to the void and dark ground of the mirror world, becoming a corpse.

The eye-like objects hidden within his flesh stopped moving, unable to emerge.

Franca quickly set up a ritual, completing the Magic Mirror Divination.

In her makeup mirror, Nikila's eerie, pale figure appeared, showing only slight signs of losing control.

The ghost's eyes still held a trace of obsession with Franca but now included the pain and despair of being killed by her.

A Demoness of Affliction's Charm is terrifying... I wonder if Baby Cupid from the Scrooge pathway can make someone fall hopelessly in love with them too... Franca mused with a sigh and then asked, "Are you Griffith?"

"Yes, I am very pleased you know and remember my true name." The mirror's Nikila smiled joyfully.

".." Franca was momentarily speechless.

She paused for a second before asking, "Do you know what happened to your superior, Kmerolo, one of the Ten Pillars?"

Chapter 822: Wilderness

822 Wilderness

Nikila looked at Franca with an obsession and said, "He should be feeling the call of the wilderness."

"Wilderness?" Franca didn't hide her confusion.

Nikila eagerly and thoroughly explained, "In Fourth Epoch Trier, near the ruined palace of Alista Tudor, beside His remains-no, on His remains, no, under them-well, there's a wilderness there. All Mystery Pryers and Savants will eventually return to that wilderness."

All Mystery Pryers and Savants... The only thing powerful enough to influence both pathways must be the Celestial Master. Professor and Assistant Professor had dreams about the wilderness before... Franca perked up and asked, "What else do you know about this wilderness?"

Nikila shook his head slightly, looking a bit annoyed but very honest.

"Nothing else. According to our leader, the higher the sequence of a Mystery Pryer or Savant, the more likely they are to hear the call of the wilderness."

The Hidden Sage should stand atop the Mystery Pryer pathway, so during the Hostel incident, when the seal of Fourth Epoch Trier was broken, the leak of wilderness power greatly affected Him, driving Him madder. Is Kmerolo in a similar situation? After all, he's in Trier... The demigods of the Church of the God of Steam and Machinery in Trier might also be affected? Franca swallowed and asked, "Has Kmerolo returned to that wilderness?"

Nikila smiled gently but painfully.

"Not yet. He's probably just deteriorating, unable to maintain himself well, and resisting the call in some extreme way. If he were to return, he'd have to pass through our mirror world. It wouldn't escape our leader's notice. If our leader knew, so would I."

For Trier, Kmerolo returning to the wilderness might not be a bad thing. According to Nikila-no, Griffith-Kmerolo is like a powerful bomb that could go off at any time... Franca thought for a moment and asked, "Do you know where he's hiding now?"

Nikila sighed and said, "He hasn't contacted me for a while. The last time we met was near the catacombs."

Near the catacombs... Franca then asked, "Griffith, what was your goal in infiltrating the Moses Ascetic Order?"

Nikila emphasized seriously, "I am the original. Our goal was to make the higher-ups of the Moses Ascetic Order gradually aware of the wilderness and help us unseal Fourth Epoch Trier at a critical moment."

Franca had an epiphany and asked, "Did Kmerolo, with your 'help,' already know about the wilderness and its exact location?"

Was it knowing too much and possessing godhood that made Kmerolo lose control gradually, becoming unable to resist the wilderness call?

The Church of the God of Steam and Machinery hasn't shown similar issues, at least not as severe...

"Yes." Nikila shared his feelings with his dream lover. "So, this is both good and bad for me. It took me a lot to gain Kmerolo's trust and interest in the wilderness without arousing suspicion, but now all that effort is wasted. I have to figure out how to gain the trust of another of the Ten Pillars."

"Why is it also a good thing?" Franca was puzzled.

Nikila smiled and said, "If Kmerolo returns to the wilderness, I might get the Mysticologist Beyonder characteristic someday."

"Mysticologist is Sequence 4 of the Mystery Pryer pathway? Can you Mirror People ascend by drinking potions?" Franca quickly asked two questions.

Nikila nodded. "Yes, I can ascend to Mysticologist by drinking the potion. I am the original."

"Have you ever drunk a potion?" Franca glanced at Griffith's body, which had not produced any Beyonder characteristics.

"No," Nikila replied candidly.

Meh, no Beyonder characteristic drops... Franca cursed inwardly in pre-transmigration gaming terms and then said, "Moran Avigny has been dead for a while. Your leader can't leave the seal and frequently get feedback or give orders. Who's handling day-to-day matters and contacting the Mirror People in Trier?"

"It's Palia. She received instructions and information from the leader," Nikila replied but didn't elaborate like before.

The mineralogist, Jasmine, I'm tracking... No wonder she appeared twice in Underground Trier despite being wanted... She's rebuilding the Mirror People network in Trier? Franca asked quickly, "Can you contact Palia?"

Nikila shook his head again. "She contacts us one-way for now. This way, if any one of us is exposed, it doesn't affect the others. According to the previous arrangement, Palia contacts me through the mirror world once a week to check on my situation and exchange new information, usually on Sunday evenings between eight and ten."

Don't you find this troublesome and inconvenient? Well, it is quite safe...

Franca criticized silently and saw Nikila's image fading, about to disappear, and quickly asked the last question, "Besides Fourth Epoch Trier and current Trier, where else does your mirror world connect to?"

This question came from Lumian's letter.

He confirmed Morora exchanged information with the outside world through this special mirror world.

Nikila thought for a moment and said, "A strange place, much like Fourth Epoch Trier, also sealed, with many living people inside, but we can't enter."

Mirror People can't use the special mirror world to go directly to Morora...

Franca nodded slightly and asked, "Did some of your companions go to Lenburg to find that sealed strange place?"

"Yes, although we can't go directly, if we can enter normally, we can use the mirror world's power..." Nikila said as he began to lose his soul's integrity.

He looked at Franca, lingeringly and painfully scanning her beautiful face.

Franca's skin prickled with goosebumps.

Watching Nikila-the Mirror Person Griffith-disappear completely, Franca sighed inwardly.

Short-term, high-intensity, high-frequency Charm can last so long. It might take a day or two to fade...

Repeated Charm in daily life, maintained long-term, can indeed make someone fall deeply in love with me... I wonder how long this love lasts without supernatural influence. A year should be fine, but it's hard to say for the seven-year itch...

Heh, Hunters can form teams, and so can Demonesses. But the loyalty and rapport will be higher. The only issue is team members might not truly cooperate and could hate each other... What a mess...

Franca put away the mirror and said to Jenna and Anthony, "No need to wait. This guy doesn't have any Beyonder characteristics."

By then, Jenna had finished collecting the loot, getting 460 verl d'or and nine scrolls from Nikila.

The scrolls' effects and incantations required Magic Mirror Divination to reveal.

Anthony glanced at Nikila's body and the nine scrolls, considering.

"Should we have someone use Lie to disguise as Nikila and wait for that Mirror Person Palia to contact?"

"We can, but it's unlikely," Franca said after some thought. "We can bury the body and carry out anti-divination and anti-prophecy measures, but there are many days until Sunday. The Mirror People leader might notice something wrong. Still, it's worth a try."

After carrying out anti-divination and anti-prophecy measures and seeing Nikila's body turn into a few broken mirror shards, Jenna frowned slightly. "Still none of those special mirror world shards."

Moran Avigny didn't leave any either.

The shards in Jenna and Franca's possession came from Gardner Martin and the Tamara family's crypt.

"What kind of Mirror Person leaves special mirror world shards? What's special about the fake Martin? Next time we catch a Mirror Person, we must ask..." Franca muttered to herself.

The three quickly tidied up the scene, and Franca activated the Ice Amulet to teleport to the fixed mirror world entrance.

During this process, Franca used the amulet's power to send Lumian the intelligence gathered from this operation.

...

Morora, second floor of the Carnivore bar.

Reading a book comfortably, Lumian glanced at the room's mirror, seeing water ripple and a line of Intisian appear.

Reading it, Lumian suddenly froze.

He realized he had overlooked something.

At this moment, could the Mirror People sent to Lenburg to investigate the whereabouts of 0-01 have infiltrated Morora?

And the Mirror People produced by the underground mausoleum's incident could use that special mirror world unlike him!

Chapter 823: Advice

823 Advice

If the Mirror People have infiltrated Morora, what would they do? Lumian pondered for a while, placed the book back in the Traveler's Bag, and stepped down the stairs to the hall.

It was dinner time, and the bar was bustling. Julie flitted between tables like a butterfly, serving drinks and meals to the customers.

The patrons were well-behaved; no one tried to act inappropriately by grabbing Julie's ass or touching her chest.

They weren't being moral or civilized. None of them had clean hands; those who entered Morora were all hardened criminals. Their compliance was because someone had made a fatal mistake not long ago: Julie had been unstable lately, often in a daze. Unlike her usual self, she couldn't always gracefully avoid wandering hands and arms amidst the laughter and noise. One evening, someone found an opportunity to give her a hard pinch in the ass.

Julie's suppressed fury and rage exploded instantly.

If Lumian hadn't intervened in time, reminding her it wasn't a legal duel, that drunkard would have ended up in the kitchen missing a vital part of his anatomy.

In the end, since the drunkard refused Julie's duel challenge, after much "negotiation," he "voluntarily" chopped off his hand as an apology.

Otherwise, he might have lost control and attacked the repugnant bar owner, forcing him into self-defense.

Lumian glanced at Julie, whose face was devoid of smiles, and walked into the kitchen, where Lez was finally taking a break, enjoying his dinner.

He picked up a caramelized finger, put it in his mouth, and chewed noisily.

Lumian sighed quietly and said, "I need to step out for a bit. Keep an eye on Julie."

"No problem," Lez replied, pointing to the plate of now-missing fingers.

"Boss, want some? I've found a new cooking method-first deep-fry, then steam in a seasoned broth for twenty minutes."

"No, thanks." Lumian turned and left the Carnivore bar, walking through the dark, unlit streets to the Knowledge Cathedral.

He found a corner where he could see the graveyard and the entrance to the underground mausoleum through a window. Pulling over a wooden chair, he sighed and patted the backrest.

The Church of Knowledge is getting more considerate...

There hadn't been chairs by the brass bookshelves before.

Too bad there's nowhere to rest my feet. Lumian sat down, gazing at the graveyard through the stained glass, using the crimson moonlight to observe the entrance to the underground mausoleum.

According to his information, Celeste, who had been on duty in the underground mausoleum for two days, would return to the surface at nine tonight.

Lumian's goal was to make others believe he was at the Knowledge Cathedral to study while actually observing the mausoleum's entrance and the experimental subjects' activities.

His true purpose was simple: to mask his love of studying with the guise of observing the mausoleum and experimental subjects.

With this excuse, he wouldn't have to waste time idling around the bar, drinking and boasting. He could finish the remaining books sooner.

By the cathedral's bright candlelight, Lumian read for a while, then forced himself to lift his head and observe the mausoleum's entrance for a couple of minutes.

After repeating this several times, he suddenly thought of his sister.

Back then, Aurore always urged him to study but would occasionally drag him from his desk, forcing him to look at the trees outside the window and the distant mountain pastures.

Now, he had to rely on himself.

Time passed, and the cathedral's clock chimed loudly.

A group of black-robed enforcers left the Knowledge Cathedral, crossed the graveyard, and reached the mausoleum's entrance.

Soon, the previous group of enforcers emerged from the gray-white stone steps leading to the mausoleum, moving in an orderly fashion.

With his Hunter's vision and the crimson moonlight, Lumian saw that the leader was Celeste, wearing a black robe and a blindfold.

The Demoness emerged from the entrance area slowly and expressionlessly, removing her blindfold.

The line behind her was long, each person carrying a lantern.

At that moment, Lumian felt a sudden, eerie sensation as if the deep darkness at the mausoleum's entrance had come to life.

The darkness instantly swallowed the last experimental subject in line.

Lumian blinked, seeing no movement in the darkness. The anomaly seemed like an illusion.

Frowning slightly, he counted Celeste's team members again.

Quickly, he concluded, One person is missing... and one lantern...

Lumian watched Celeste's team until they returned to the Knowledge Cathedral.

Near the stairs, Celeste turned her head slightly, glancing in Lumian's direction.

Lumian crossed his right leg over his left knee, leaning back in the chair, calmly meeting her gaze.

He felt Celeste had likely noticed his observation.

This meant she probably still retained some self-awareness.

Phew, no need to worry about Julie losing control for now... Lumian sighed quietly, watching Celeste and the enforcers disappear at the stairwell.

He had been worried that Celeste's issues might trigger Julie to lose control before they were fully prepared.

That would interfere with his studying!

Reading for a while longer, Lumian noticed Morora's Archbishop Heraberg patrolling the brass bookshelves.

Thinking for a few seconds, he spoke as Heraberg neared, "Your Grace, I have a question."

Dressed in a plain white robe with brass threads, Heraberg smiled kindly.

"Ask away."

Holding his book, Lumian sincerely asked, "The mausoleum's taboos seem to target the living. What if an undead or an immortal creature enters?"

Heraberg gave Lumian a deep look and smiled. "The dead should remain in eternal slumber. What do you think?"

Meaning, an undead would fall into eternal sleep upon entering the mausoleum? As expected, 0-01 has death and darkness characteristics...

So, I can't exploit any loophole with the Eggers family's golden mask...

Lumian sighed regretfully. "I think so too."

Heraberg, with his white hair and beard, spoke like a teacher. "While studying, remember to take care of your health and stay mentally sharp. Don't stay up late reading. Maintain your usual pace."

Wh- Is he worried I'll degrade and succumb to the books' inherent corruption? Need to control the corruption rate? Lumian pondered, then stood up and responded, "Yes, Your Grace."

He immediately tucked the book into his Traveler's Bag and left the cathedral under Heraberg's approving gaze.

Crossing the square outside, Lumian saw Julie stepping lightly out the cathedral's side door, looking relaxed.

Here to check the situation first, huh... Lumian watched her disappear into another alley, heading back to the Carnivore bar.

Approaching the bar, he heard a pained, agonized scream not far away.

Julie's doing? Lumian chuckled to himself. Feeling bad, cut a finger.

Feeling good, cut another. Can't she find another hobby?

Luckily, there were enough exiles in Morora.

Still, Lumian knew their presence had tripled the daily death toll since they arrived.

They couldn't stay long, or the exiles' replenishment wouldn't keep up, and Morora would face a shortage crisis.

The bar was closed. Lumian went behind the counter, poured himself a glass of liquor, and sipped it slowly, as if waiting for something.

After a while, Julie appeared at the door in a shirt and skirt, her cheeks still flushed. She glanced at Lumian and smiled. "Boss, were you waiting for me?"

She played with a frosty, bloody object in her hand.

Lumian took a sip of Lanti Proof and asked, "Do you know my name?"

Julie approached the counter, shook her head, and smiled. "I only know you're my boss."

"Celeste, as an enforcer, should know the names of every Morora resident," Lumian said directly.

Julie's expression changed slightly, then she sighed and smiled. "But she said Louis must be a fake name."

"I don't believe you didn't ask someone on the outside to investigate my real identity," Lumian said, leaning on the counter and sipping his drink.

Julie pouted, not answering directly, only saying, "It doesn't matter."

"True." Lumian nodded with a smile. "I caught a Mirror Person from Underground Trier who told me his companions went to Lenburg to find Morora. Now, new intel suggests they might be here."

Julie's smile faded, replaced by a serious look.

Lumian finished his Lanti Proof, set the glass down, and headed upstairs.

Julie sat in silence for a while, then left the Carnivore bar.

In an empty house in Morora.

The Demoness put on a gold ring set with blue gems and sat before a half-length mirror.

The reflection wavered slightly, showing some changes.

Chapter 824: Nightmare Changes

824 Nightmare Changes

Julie watched her reflection in the mirror gradually become bloodstained, her expression turning cold and her eyes filling with malice.

She wasn't surprised. Instead, she smirked with a hint of sarcasm.

The reflection became agitated, clawing at the glass as if trying to scratch out an escape.

Her face twisted quickly, and the malice in her eyes seemed almost tangible.

Before long, another figure appeared behind her-a man with short brown hair, bearing a strong resemblance to Julie, also covered in blood and exuding a sinister aura.

Julie rubbed the blue gem-encrusted gold ring on her thumb, watching as the female and male versions of herself shrank and faded, revealing their current surroundings.

It was a dark, almost lightless world.

Beyond this world, countless points of light representing different mirrors dotted the surroundings. Most were affected by Morora's seal, appearing hazy and unreachable.

Julie's gaze swept across the few clearer points of light, her intuition as a Demoness guiding her to one particular mirror.

Inside that mirror, a shadowy figure appeared.

Sensing Julie's gaze, the figure recoiled and left the mirror.

Julie immediately reached into the mirror, pulling herself through it.

Ignoring the curses and anger from her two reflections, she directly transported to the mirror that had shown the shadow.

She emerged from a small mirror into a long-abandoned room, the traces of occupancy wiped clean.

Julie turned to the window beside the mirror, observing the outside environment.

She saw a graveyard bathed in crimson moonlight, a cathedral-like library, and the clearly visible entrance to the underground mausoleum.

After a brief silence, Julie muttered to herself, "The Mirror People have indeed infiltrated..."

...

Upstairs in the Carnivore Bar, Lumian reclined in his chair, feet propped up, engrossed in his book.

There was still time to study!

He had told Julie about the Mirror People to leverage the Demoness Sect's power to confirm and search for them. As a Hunter, he couldn't utilize the mirror world on his own, and the Mirror Cufflink could only be used twice more.

Remembering Archbishop Heraberg's advice to not overextend himself, Lumian decided to end his studies early and get some extra sleep tonight. Just as he was about to close his book, someone knocked on his door.

It was Julie.

She nodded slightly at Lumian, saying, "I found a Mirror Person spying on the mausoleum but couldn't catch them."

"Only one?" Lumian asked for confirmation.

Julie tersely acknowledged his words. "Only one."

She turned and headed to her room.

Lumian chuckled and said, "Not only did you not catch them, but you didn't even see what they looked like?"

His voice was low, almost to himself, but loud enough for Julie to hear.

Julie turned around and sneered. "At least I found traces of the Mirror People. Better than someone who needs me to confirm it."

Lumian pretended to be stung, retorting, "I was just letting you fulfill your pitiful, insignificant purpose."

Julie ignored him and went into her room.

Lumian smirked to himself and closed the wooden door.

Now, Julie should be less wary about him being capable of using the mirror world, right?

...

In a daze, Lumian saw a blood-stained land, collapsed grand structures, and towering iron-black pillars, many of which were broken.

Driven by instinct, he walked forward, passing through burning palaces, torrential rain, and a forest of lightning striking the ground.

He stopped before a corpse.

The body was charred black, the face flayed to reveal a scorched skull.

Behind it lay a mountain of bodies and bones, piled hundreds of meters high.

Lumian's gaze followed the corpses upward, sometimes meeting their eye sockets, which burned with pale or dark red flames.

Finally, he was about to see the top of the "mountain."

Suddenly, intense fear and a compulsion to stop thinking and follow orders overwhelmed him.

He jerked awake, gasping for breath.

Another nightmare...

The nightmares are becoming clearer and more frequent...

Lumian glanced towards the ground, instinctively reaching out as if to touch something.

He grasped only air.

Quickly calming himself, he murmured, At this rate, when I finish reading the remaining books, these nightmares caused by the corruption might transform drastically...

What will that bring?

If the nightmares get clearer and the feeling stronger, I might lose control in my sleep. Then Albus, Julie, and Wanak would have the chance to challenge an Angel. No, the Church of Knowledge would eliminate the problem first. Having sealed Ludwig, they wouldn't hesitate to seal another...

Lumian rubbed his temples, agreeing more with Archbishop Heraberg's advice:

Don't rush; maintain physical health and mental clarity!

Even if corrupted, proceed gradually!

Sighing, Lumian believed that in five or six days, when he finished the borrowed books, the situation would change significantly in his favor.

But can the situation remain stable until I finish studying?

Since the last injury, Albus hasn't appeared for days, secretly plotting...

Wanak regained control of Dades Agricultural Company but no longer has fixed offices or residences...

Celeste's duty in the mausoleum is both a risk and an opportunity. She might have advanced the Demoness Sect's plans, and Julie's opportunity could be coming soon...

Will they let me study until I finish the books?

Probably not...

Lumian mused that Albus, Wanak, or the Demoness Sect would likely make a big move involving the mausoleum soon.

They might not know the importance of studying or that Lumian was diligently studying, but they must sense that delaying further would worsen their situation!

Never underestimate the intuition of Demonesses or the instincts of those backing Albus and Wanak!

...

Trier, Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative, Apartment 702, 9 Rue Orosai.

Franca was smug about successfully planning and executing an ambush on a powerful Mirror Person.

This felt more rewarding than leading a team raid in her pre-transmigration games.

She pointed to the cash and scrolls on the coffee table, saying, "Let's split the spoils. You two go first."

Using Magic Mirror divination, the two Demonesses had identified the effects and incantations for the scrolls.

There was a Sun scroll, a Healing scroll, and one each of Lightning, Burning, Flash, Wind, Freezing, Paralysis, and Secret Voice.

Anthony gestured for Jenna to pick first.

Jenna, not wasting time with politeness, took the Sun, Lightning, and Flash scrolls after a few seconds of thought.

Anthony chose Healing, Paralysis, and Freezing, leaving 460 verl d'or and the remaining three scrolls for Franca.

Franca picked up the Secret Voice scroll, smiling. "This is perfect for coordinating operations. Surprised you didn't want it."

The Secret Voice scroll created a secret channel linking three to five people within fifty meters, allowing them to communicate without being overheard or blocked by obstacles.

You could leave it for Lumian... Jenna thought but didn't say, not wanting to dampen Franca's spirits.

As they chatted, a messenger from Madam Judgment delivered a reply:

"The Moses Ascetic Order will handle the abnormality in Kmerolo. You don't need to follow up."

...

In Trier, in a room with overturned furniture and papers scattered everywhere.

The Hermit, a Major Arcana card from the Tarot Club whom Franca and her team had met before, stood before a wall covered in meaningless lines. She wore black-framed glasses and a deep black robe adorned with eye-shaped purple patterns, examining faint traces of dried blackened blood, tears, and saliva.

A nearly transparent, eyelash-less, and indifferent eye hovered before her, silently observing. Its gaze seemed to contain countless stars and various scenes.

After a while, The Hermit ignored the blackened blood, taking a small amount of the powder stained with tears and saliva.

A dreamlike pumpkin carriage appeared before her, altering her appearance, aura, and physique.

The Hermit calmly sat in the carriage.

A group of mice pulled the pumpkin carriage into a tunnel outside the Trier catacombs.

Still seated in the pumpkin carriage, The Hermit conjured a vibrant, slightly unreal ball of yarn.

She infused the powder from before into the yarn and threw it into the tunnel's depths, leaving a bright thread on the ground, pointing the way forward.

Chapter 825: The Final Seduction

825 The Final Seduction

The Hermit followed the vibrant thread of yarn through the dark tunnel in her pumpkin carriage.

She didn't know how long she had been descending when she arrived at a naturally formed cave.

The vibrant yarn ball had stopped here.

The swarm of mice and the pumpkin carriage vanished, and The Hermit floated down, her feet touching the ground.

She didn't need to remove her glasses to see the pools of pus-like blood on the ground, eroding the soil in the extreme darkness.

For a moment, The Hermit seemed to see a scene from the past: A blurry figure staggered towards the cave, each step leaving a splatter of pus-like blood that sizzled as it corroded the rocks and soil.

The Hermit weaved through the pools of blood and entered the cave, but it was empty. The trail of pus-like blood ended abruptly.

It was as if the figure had exhausted all its flesh and blood, leaving no trace, or had evaporated entirely.

He had vanished.

Has Kmerolo disappeared like this... The Hermit immediately conjured nine blazing suns.

The intense heat caused the pools of blood to show signs of evaporation.

Then, the Major Arcana cardholder removed her glasses.

The pus-like blood changed immediately.

It wasn't blood but dense, intertwined, complex symbols or letters.

These symbols or letters were grouped together, eroding various rocks and soil, bright red and dazzling.

Even with her knowledge of mysticism, The Hermit couldn't identify what they represented.

Kmerolo's flesh and blood transformed into this? The Hermit pondered for a moment and decided to strip away all the bloody symbols and letters and take them to a high-ranking Cryptologist.

...

Morora, Carnivore bar, second floor.

Lumian had another nightmare, but this time, he was clearly aware that he was dreaming.

He dreamed of walking through a dark, lightless tunnel, with stone slabs beneath his feet and bricks in the walls, with rusty iron wall lamps every so often, none of them lit.

Lumian wandered aimlessly, sometimes turning right, sometimes descending stairs, and sometimes resting against the wall.

Suddenly, he saw yellowish light ahead.

In the glow, figures in black robes appeared, carrying quietly burning lanterns, their eyes covered with thick black cloth.

Law enforcement... Experimental subjects... Lumian instantly understood.

Am I dreaming of the mausoleum?

This matches the sealing information of 0-01 and the books' descriptions...

Using my knowledge and the corruption I've suffered, did I recreate a tunnel of the mausoleum in my dream?

The experimental subjects, despite being blindfolded, walked steadily, maintaining a straight line forward.

I don't seem to be blindfolded... Will something abnormal happen? No, I'm just dreaming... Although lucid dreaming, Lumian's thoughts were sluggish, seemingly influenced by the dream.

As he was about to pass by the experimental subjects with lanterns, his gaze naturally fell on one of the lanterns.

The lantern's glass case, framed in bronze, reflected a black shadow.

The shadow, human-like in shape, flickered and leaped to another lantern.

That shadow isn't mine... nor the lantern-bearer's... It's... it's one of those Mirror People corrupted by the mausoleum's power? Or perhaps the Mirror Person that infiltrated Morora? Lumian shivered, feeling more awake than ever.

He focused his gaze and saw the slightly distorted, human-like black shadow pause and look back at him from the lantern's glass, illuminated by firelight.

As their eyes met, the shadow vanished instantly.

Lumian's vision wavered, the entire tunnel, lit by the lanterns, shaking violently.

Within seconds, Lumian woke up, his eyes snapping open.

The shaking continued, and his bed creaked while the house clattered.

An earthquake? Lumian judged calmly.

In Morora, he had already experienced four earthquakes, one volcanic eruption, five torrential rains, four hurricanes, three tornadoes, two hailstorms, and two snowstorms... Often, more than one extreme weather event occurred in a single day, though sometimes it was just ordinary weather fluctuations.

Based on his physical assessment and experience, Lumian judged that this earthquake wouldn't collapse the sturdy Carnivore bar building, so he lay there calmly, with no intention of getting out of bed and escaping to the street.

If worse came to worst, he could still teleport to the Knowledge Cathedral.

Staring at the still-swaying ceiling, Lumian recalled the nightmare: Was I woken up by the earthquake, or did my nightmare trigger the earthquake?

After pondering for a while, Lumian believed it was the latter.

But this meant his nightmare had truly connected to the underground mausoleum!

Earlier, was I wandering through the mausoleum in some peculiar form, not needing to be blindfolded or carry a lantern?

Was everything I saw and experienced real, actually happening in real time?

Was the Mirror Person on the lantern real too?

Right, that didn't look like the lantern-bearer's Mirror Person, their physical condition was noticeably different.

Could it be the Mirror Person from Trier? Did he use the special power of the mirror world to start exploring the mausoleum before Albus, Julie, and I?

If so, he may have been at it for many days, and might be close to succeeding...

When he saw me, did he see what I look like, my state, my form?

Yes, if one enters the mausoleum without being blindfolded, the experimental subjects will see the corresponding Mirror Person in their own eyes and be replaced?

A series of questions flashed through Lumian's mind, creating a sense of urgency.

He sat up and looked towards the window.

The earthquake had already subsided, and outside the not-so-thick curtains, the sky seemed to be getting slightly brighter.

Lumian sighed, suppressing his negative emotions, and decided to sleep a bit more, until six in the morning.

He needed to be in his best condition to complete the remaining three days of study, otherwise, he might lose control or even die from it.

After waking up naturally, Lumian had breakfast prepared by Lez and then went directly to the Knowledge Cathedral, sitting in his usual spot, reading and monitoring the entrance to the underground mausoleum.

This way, if there was an anomaly, he could teleport there immediately and enter the underground.

After alternating between thunderstorms and clear skies, Lumian finished his morning studies and headed back to the Carnivore bar for lunch.

About a third of the way back, he heard a painful yet slightly pleasurable scream from the direction of the bar.

Is Julie at it again? She wasn't in a bad or good mood today...

And it's the bar's busy time... Did someone bother her? Lumian shook his head, thinking Julie was quite unprofessional.

Soon, he returned to the Carnivore bar and found the area in front of the bar and inside the hall empty, with tables and chairs overturned, broken glasses scattered, and spilled liquor on the floor, some of it already frozen.

It looks like Julie went berserk, attacked all the patrons, and drove them away... What happened? Lumian became highly alert.

As the owner of the Carnivore bar, he felt both distressed over the wasted liquor and keenly aware of the unusual situation.

He remembered that Julie had seemed fine when he left in the morning, even proactively helping Lez prepare the ingredients for the day.

Lumian sniffed the air, detecting a faint smell of blood and a hint of something resembling chestnut flowers.

To most men, the latter scent was very familiar.

Something's off. Based on my observations, Julie usually finishes her collection before the target reaches the peak of pleasure. This time, the scent is quite noticeable... Did she let the original owner of the collection enjoy themselves? Lumian frowned and followed the smell of blood upstairs, pushing open Julie's door.

On Julie's bed lay Lez, naked, eyes wide open, mouth half-puffed, with his legs a bloody mess.

He was dead.

Julie attacked Lez? Lumian looked into Lez's eyes, seeing extreme pleasure, relaxation, and evident pain, with no signs of a supernatural battle in the room, only splattered blood and a few sources of the chestnut flower scent telling the story.

This made Lumian suspect that Lez had willingly gone to bed with Julie.

And this culinary artist knew well what Julie would do.

Similarly, Julie's behavior was different this time, seemingly allowing Lez to complete his climax.

Did Lez seek liberation? Or did he make a preemptive move and fail?

Lumian wasn't shocked by this but found it too sudden.

Lumian's gaze fell on the lifeless bloodstain at Lez's mouth.

After a few seconds, he suddenly recalled something Julie had once said to Lez: "I've decided to seduce you last."

Last... Lumian's eyes narrowed sharply.

To Julie, now was the final moment?

Was she about to take her last action?

Where had she gone now?

Chapter 826: Entry

826 Entry

Lumian directly activated the black mark on his right shoulder and teleported to the edge of the boundless cemetery, right at the entrance to the underground mausoleum.

This place looked like the mouth of a giant beast, with gray-white stone steps stretching down into the dark, deep throat.

Lumian suspected Julie had already entered the mausoleum.

Whatever the Demoness Sect's plan was, it ultimately had to involve the sealed 0-01 deep within the mausoleum!

Lumian sniffed around the entrance, detecting only the scents of grass, trees, and the earthy smell after rain. There was no trace of Julie's fragrance.

At the same time, he scrutinized the gray-white stone steps descending into the darkness, looking for fresh footprints-there had been a thunderstorm earlier.

No signs of Julie... Lumian turned and transformed into a blazing white spear, shooting across hundreds of meters and landing beside the Knowledge Cathedral.

He didn't take a detour, opening the nearest stained glass window and jumping into the church, quickly running to Heraberg, who was dressed in a plain white robe with brass thread.

"Your Grace, do you know which room Celeste is staying in?" Lumian's breath was steady, but he spoke quickly.

Heraberg, the archbishop of Morora, smiled and replied, "The third floor, the room closest to the cemetery, with a view of the mausoleum entrance."

Lumian was taken aback.

You knew all along...

He didn't waste time asking further, igniting white flames on his body and darting like a javelin towards the staircase.

After a few turns, Lumian reached Celeste's room.

He grasped the brass handle, gently twisted it, and pushed open the wooden door.

The room was tidy, with minimal furnishings-a single bed, a desk, a chair, and a shelf for books and miscellaneous items, giving off a monastic austerity.

Indeed, Celeste is gone as well... Lumian confirmed his suspicion.

He didn't immediately enter the room, sensing it was filled with invisible, pathogen-laden webs, like a poisonous spider's nest.

While preparing to burn the unseen webs, he observed further.

He noticed Celeste might have been playing the part of a corrupted experiment subject, as the room lacked any unnecessary items. With her disappearance, even the spare black robes were gone, leaving the room empty, save for a mirror on the desk by the window.

The mirror was a common dressing mirror, not unusual in a Demoness's room.

But it sparked a thought in Lumian: Did Celeste leave through the mirror world?

The law enforcers usually entered and exited together. She couldn't have bet on the Knowledge Cathedral turning a blind eye and walked out alone...

Is she meeting Julie somewhere in the mirror world?

Did Julie and Celeste use the mirror world to enter the mausoleum, leaving no traces at the entrance?

With this in mind, Lumian's thoughts raced, forming a web of connections from various bits of information and ideas.

He quickly made a guess: Did Celeste patrol the mausoleum as an experiment subject several times to place mirrors at key points or obtain coordinates of similar reflective items?

When I used the Mirror Cufflink before, I couldn't identify which mirrors were in the mausoleum or if they were dangerous...

This was the Demoness Sect's preparation, and now, Celeste has control over the mirrors in the mausoleum and can start the operation?

Why not act immediately after her last patrol?

Were a few days needed for other preparations?

As his thoughts raced, Lumian whispered, "Termiboros, do you think I should enter the mausoleum now or continue my studies, hoping Julie and Celeste fail?"

Before Termiboros could respond, Lumian laughed and said, "I won't rely on others to fail."

He had made his decision.

He would enter the mausoleum to disrupt and stop the Demoness Sect's actions, buying a few more days!

The only issue was that in the mausoleum, he had to be blindfolded and couldn't read or study during the downtime.

Is there a way to convert text to sound? Aurore's grimoires mentioned related ideas and preliminary results, but I'm not a Warlock... Lumian sighed internally, then heard Termiboros's layered, majestic voice: "It's very dangerous."

You're actually answering... Is this a genuine warning or a hidden plot?

He only mentioned the danger, without strongly dissuading me... No matter, whether Termiboros opposes or tempts me, I'm going... Lumian quickly calmed himself, chuckled, and said, "Maybe we'll both become 0-01's puppets."

"Not including me," Termiboros responded in a powerful voice.

Is that so? Lumian once again transformed into a flaming spear and swiftly returned to the cathedral hall.

He approached Heraberg, holding three books, and smiled. "Your Grace, I still have two and a half books left to read. Do you have a way to convert the remaining knowledge into sound so I can study while exploring the mausoleum?"

Heraberg's wrinkles smoothed out, and his expression became even gentler. "Good, good, this is the attitude needed for study."

He took out a brass sheet and accepted the books from Lumian.

In Heraberg's amber eyes, countless symbols and words swirled and spun.

Lumian saw tiny glimmers rising from the books, converging into a river that flowed into the brass sheet.

What kind of mystic art is this... Lumian was mesmerized.

Before coming to Lenburg, he had gathered detailed information about the Church of Knowledge, including some details about the Reader pathway.

He knew the Sequence 5 of the Reader pathway was called Mysticism Magister, capable of inventing and creating unique spells.

Soon, the glimmers vanished, and the brass sheet became more lustrous, with its symbols and patterns gaining more depth.

With two snaps, Heraberg broke off two corners from the brass sheet and molded them into cylindrical shapes.

Lumian watched, jaw dropping.

Without the aid of fire, breaking off two pieces of brass with just my hands is quite difficult, let alone molding them like clay with my fingers...

Your Grace, are all Readers this strong, or is it unique to you as a puppet?

Your fingers could probably crush my bones to dust...

Or is this a side effect of the mystic art?

"Insert them into your ears. The activation spell is 'listen' in ancient Hermes, as I know you only speak this language and haven't mastered Jotun or Elvish yet. The deactivation spell is 'stop.'" Heraberg handed the brass sheet and the two cylindrical brass earplugs to Lumian.

Lumian instinctively argued, "I know Hermes too."

He understood Heraberg was referring to languages capable of invoking supernatural powers.

"Hermes?" Heraberg laughed.

Lumian sensed contempt for the Hermes language in his laughter and expression.

With time running out, Lumian didn't ask further, inserting one brass earplug and pocketing the rest. He then transformed into a blazing white spear and flew from the open stained glass window to the mausoleum entrance.

Lumian calmed his breathing, took a carbide lamp and white bandages from the Traveler's Bag.

After lighting the carbide lamp, he wrapped the bandages around his head, covering his eyes.

Lumian's vision gradually turned pitch black.

For a Hunter who relied heavily on sight, this was far from a pleasant experience.

Feeling his way, he picked up the carbide lamp and cautiously descended the gray-white stone steps.

He focused on maintaining his balance, worried about stepping wrong and tumbling down like a wheel into the mausoleum.

He wasn't afraid of getting hurt but feared extinguishing the lamp.

Being blind is no fun... Lumian muttered, constructing a mental map.

Most of the map's content came from the 0-01 sealing information and the book Examples of Mausoleum Construction, with some from his nightmares over the past few days.

Using the mental map, his heightened senses, and his control over his body, Lumian gradually adapted to the darkness, descending more steadily.

Finally, he reached the bottom of the stairs and officially entered the mausoleum.

He felt the surrounding darkness surge like a tide, eroding his skin, bringing a chill and a slow drain of life force.

Almost simultaneously, his right palm turned icy cold.

The abnormal life force drain stopped.

The Underworld Daoist's mark activated? Lumian silently mused, In this situation, even without a lit carbide lamp, I shouldn't encounter any issues in the mausoleum's darkness. Hehe, when I find Julie and Celeste, I could use my Hunter ability to extinguish their lamps directly. But Julie is special, and Celeste likely is too. It might not be easy to have the darkness engulf them...

Blindfolded, Lumian turned and sensed the Abscessed Hand's head location using the semi-activated black mark on his right shoulder.

He planned to find this thing first, then stop Julie and Celeste.

Then, he could toss the separated Abscessed Hand parts together and see what mutation occurs, giving the enemies a "surprise."

Perhaps because they were in the same mausoleum, Lumian quickly sensed the summoning and special connection from Hand Bro.

It was not far!

Chapter 827: Blind Battle

827 Blind Battle

Morora, fifth floor of the Knowledge Cathedral.

A law enforcer in a black robe stood at the window, looking at the entrance to the underground mausoleum, which resembled the mouth of a giant beast.

In his eyes, Lumian's figure could be seen descending the gray-white stone steps one by one.

Elsewhere in Morora, Albus Medici stood by another window.

However, his gaze was not on the nearby buildings but on the cemetery and Lumian, neither of which could be seen from this street.

Is it starting? the descendant of the Red Angel chuckled.

...

Blindfolded, Lumian moved steadily through the darkness, guided by the mental map in his mind, approaching the location of the Abscessed Hand's head.

This is the end. I need to turn left... It's exactly like the diagram in the book... Lumian reached out his right hand, not holding the carbide lamp, and touched something cold and hard.

It was likely a wall.

He then turned left, walked a bit further, and stopped.

He sensed the Abscessed Hand's head was just a few meters to his right, while the surroundings were eerily silent.

Lumian turned, extending his right hand in that direction, but he only felt an equally cold, hard wall.

Behind the wall? According to the diagram, there should be a room behind here, and the door is about five meters ahead...

Even though he couldn't see, the importance of knowledge became evident in this situation.

Counting his steps, he reached what should be the door and felt around, finding the wooden board.

He fumbled for the handle, gently twisted it, and pushed open the slightly ajar door.

Meanwhile, he mused internally, Albus casually threw it, and the Hand Bro's head ended up here?

Even if it bounced around, it shouldn't have gotten this far...

Even though it's not very far from the entrance, there were two turns, and the door is even closed.

Did the door close afterward?

Growing more cautious, Lumian listened for any sounds beyond the door.

It was completely silent.

He slowly entered the room, moving towards the corner from which the rotten stench emanated, his connection to the Abscessed Hand growing clearer.

His right hand was ready to draw the Sword of Courage from the Traveler's Bag at any moment, while his left, holding the carbide lamp, reached for Abscessed Hand's head.

The head was higher than he expected, placed on a shelf rather than the ground.

Suddenly, his fist brushed against something slimy and damp, which wriggled slightly.

Five cold, finger-like things instantly grabbed Lumian's left fist.

A chill ran down his spine.

Encountering such a thing while blindfolded was many times more terrifying.

He couldn't tell what it was!

But he was certain it wasn't the Abscessed Hand's head, as that was just a head!

In a flash, Lumian's left fist ignited with blazing white flames.

His fist moved forward, accelerating suddenly, snapping sharply between the finger-like things.

Boom!

The explosion scattered the slimy fingers, and Lumian used the semi-activated black mark on his right shoulder to teleport behind what he presumed was the Abscessed Hand's head.

"Hmph!"

Lumian exhaled two beams of white light from his nostrils.

He felt he had hit his target.

Without waiting for his opponent to fall, he swung his left fist, burning with intense flames, while his right hand stayed ready to draw the Sword of Courage.

Bang!

It felt like hitting an elastic, dead wood. He unleashed his accumulated flaming forces.

Boom!

The violent blast pushed the slimy "wood" forward a bit.

Then, there was silence, with no sound of something hitting the ground.

Cautiously, Lumian transformed into a blazing-white spear and charged.

He felt himself piercing through a withered tree filled with rust and flesh, landing in front of the Abscessed Hand's head amidst a strong, pungent odor.

There was no resistance, no real counterattack.

Is it over? Lumian, still blindfolded, felt uneasy.

He kept his right hand in the Traveler's Bag, holding the carbide lamp's handle with his mouth, reaching up with his left hand, prepared to use the Spirit World Traversal if needed.

In the still atmosphere, Lumian touched the slimy, foul-smelling, limp flesh and greasy, disgusting "weeds."

This should be Hand Bro's hair... No other abnormalities...

Lumian mustered his courage and continued feeling around.

Soon, he touched a decaying neck, then a wounded "shoulder."

A shoulder... Despite being mentally prepared, Lumian was still startled.

The Abscessed Hand's head couldn't have grown a body, right?

After waiting a few seconds with no sudden attack, Lumian grabbed the greasy "weeds" that were likely the hair and pulled.

As he applied force, there was a reluctant, cork-popping "plop" sound.

His center of gravity wavered as if he had pulled something free.

He had torn off the head!

Almost simultaneously, Lumian sensed the Abscessed Hand's body parts inside the Traveler's Bag moving, but they couldn't breach the spatial barrier, only wriggling closer, pushing away other items.

This is Hand Bro's head... Then who tried to 'shake hands' with me? Scenes flashed through Lumian's mind: A head dragging a bloody spine flying through the air, a headless body chasing it...

In the mausoleum sealing 0-01, there must be similar headless bodies, and one of them took Hand Bro's head, attaching it to its neck? No wonder Albus's casual toss brought Hand Bro's head all the way here... Lumian quickly guessed, finding the situation both amusing and horrifying.

If the headless body and the Abscessed Hand's head stayed together for months, something terrifying might happen...

Lumian didn't dare put the head in the Traveler's Bag, which would inevitably cause the body parts to reunite, summoning the Abscessed Hand. He wanted to wait until he encountered Julie, Celeste, Albus, or Wanak.

Holding the head and the lamp, Lumian prepared to leave the room.

Suddenly, Lumian felt something and flinched his right shoulder.

He sensed that something was trying to pat him.

But when he moved away, everything returned to normal, silent and still.

Lumian's body ignited with blazing-white flames that expanded outward in a spherical shape, pushing in all directions.

The flames only ignited the object that had originally held the Abscessed Hand's head.

Unable to see, Lumian didn't dwell on what had tried to pat his shoulder. Recalling the earlier battle, he quickly determined his position and direction.

Then, he walked steadily back to the door and exited, acting as if he could see every detail around him.

Finally obtaining the Abscessed Hand's head gave Lumian a bit of confidence. Using the mental map he had formed, he made his way to the lowest level of the underground mausoleum, filled with puppet soldiers.

Blindfolded with layers of white bandages, he occasionally turned right, walked forward, descended stairs, and fumbled to open heavy or simple doors.

He didn't forget to activate the brass amulet in ancient Hermes, listening with one ear and monitoring his surroundings with the other.

As he walked, Lumian suddenly conjured a flame in his right palm and flung it ahead, forming a burning straight sword.

It seemed to hit something, but it could have just been an illusion.

Lumian didn't maintain the flaming sword, letting it extinguish.

He didn't investigate whether he had encountered something real or if it was just a reaction from his tense, sightless state.

Though his knowledge didn't explicitly cover it, his past experiences hinted at a key point: In the underground mausoleum, if you believe something is real, it likely becomes real! As long as it doesn't pose a direct threat, it's best to ignore potential dangers!

After descending another staircase, Lumian suddenly felt like he was being watched by numerous eyes.

At that moment, he had the urge to tear off his bandages and see what was happening.

Plop! A cold drop of liquid fell on the back of his left hand.

It felt sticky, but there was no smell of blood.

Plop, plop, plop! The cold "droplets" increased, falling faster and faster, like a sudden downpour.

Inside the mausoleum, 20 to 30 meters underground, it started to "rain."

What the hell is going on? What's around me... The book only mentioned a hall here, straight ahead to the exit, but it didn't provide a detailed layout or mention anything special inside...

Lumian endured the soaking "rain" and, under countless watching eyes, stepped forward with his right foot.

Thud!

A drumbeat suddenly sounded, as if striking Lumian's heart, making him feel like he wanted to spit out blood.

Thud! Thud! Thud!

The drumming grew clearer and more intense.

Lumian also faintly heard a soft, scratching chuckle.

Chapter 828: Same Kind?

828 Same Kind?

Drumming echoed continuously, each beat resonating with Lumian's heartbeat, making him feel like he was about to vomit blood.

Enduring the discomfort, Lumian pushed through the cold liquid like a sudden downpour, under countless watching eyes and strange, soft chuckles, steadfastly moving forward.

One step, two steps, three steps, suddenly a blood-red color lit up his bandage-wrapped vision.

It was a reddish plain, with an army of undead in iron-black armor advancing.

My first nightmare after I started studying? The thought flashed through Lumian's mind. He then noticed the scene before him fracturing, overlaid with images of burning palaces, forests of thunder, mountains of corpses, and rows of blindfolded experimental subjects marching.

These were all from his recent nightmares.

Lumian realized it wasn't the bandages losing their effect but a powerful hallucination induced by something, blending reality and illusion.

Meanwhile, the monotone voice in his left ear stopped reciting knowledge from books and became sharp and raspy, shouting something unintelligible.

Lumian's right palm suddenly felt hot, with a slight burning sensation.

The residual aura of Blood Emperor Alista Tudor had been triggered!

Simultaneously, the mark from the Underworld Daoist grew colder, suppressing the emerging violence and madness, while a slight burning sensation appeared on Lumian's left chest.

Is this a mishmash of everything? Lumian mentally mocked himself.

With these changes, the cold liquid droplets softened, like cold, wet hands brushing against his body.

The war drumbeats no longer synchronized with his heartbeat, the mysterious gazes lost their unnerving power, and the scratching chuckles turned into soft, alluring singing.

Lumian paused, guessing at what was happening.

He maintained a steady pace, heading deeper into the hall marked on his mental map.

The "raindrops," drumming, gazes, and singing remained unchanged, allowing him to proceed smoothly.

This must be the corruption from the 0-01 sealing information and knowledge I've learned, triggering hallucinations and making the dangers here see me as one of their own, similarly corrupted?

This also triggered the Blood Emperor's residual aura, causing a chain reaction with the Underworld Daoist's mark and Mr. Fool's seal. Without these, I might have truly become a puppet like the others here, a real experimental subject...

Hmm, did Mr. Fool's seal also passively confuse perceptions?

Deciding based on similar levels of corruption could be a mysticism principle or an exploit...

As his thoughts cleared, Lumian raised his right hand, pressing it to his left chest, silently muttering and joking with himself, Praise Mr. Fool!

Thanks to Archbishop Heraberg, thanks to the power of knowledge!

Learning brings me joy!

While listening to the strange roars in his earplugs, Lumian tried to discern any hidden information, maintaining his quick pace to avoid provoking unseen dangers.

Estimating his steps and distance, comparing it with his mental map, Lumian finally reached what should be the hall's exit.

At that moment, the nightmare scenes in his vision changed.

He seemed to be at a high place, looking down at a mountain of corpses and bones.

His gaze moved down, past the burning pale flames and dark-red lights in the eye sockets of the skeletons, past the rotting flesh and pale bones, to the dark red near-black ground, and the iron-black armor.

The metallic surface of the armor reflected a single black figure.

Lumian saw it clearly: It was the bespectacled, scholarly-looking serial killer Guei!

This exile, sent to Morora with Lumian, Julie, and Lez, had vanished after spending some time in the Knowledge Cathedral.

The reflections of Guei on the armor seemed to sense Lumian's gaze, suddenly looking up, but quickly lowering his head again, as if realizing it was a mistake.

The fragmented scenes vanished.

Guei?

His reflection on the iron-black armot... like mirrors...

Is he the Mirror Person who infiltrated Morora?

Lumian's eyes widened behind the white bandages.

He quickly compared Guei's figure with the Mirror Person from his nightmares: Highly likely the same!

So it's him... and he even knows to study in the Knowledge Cathedral... He's now around that mountain of corpses? Lumian suddenly felt that Guei might be as troublesome and dangerous as Albus Medici, Julie, Celeste, or Wanak.

Recalling the recent scene, Lumian thought his perspective was odd:

At the top of the mountain of corpses?

Overlooking everything...

Did I share the perspective of 0-01?

Right, being heavily corrupted means becoming its puppet, and it seems high-level Hunters can share power, damage, vision, hearing, and feelings with their team...

0-01 just considered me one of its own?

It didn't give me power like Wanak, probably not fully 'accepted'... If I read all the remaining books and mastered the knowledge, would the corruption reach a critical point, making 0-01 see me as a fully submissive puppet, while I'm not? In such a case, I could approach it and find a way to leave a mark.

This matches my earlier guess. The purpose of the test is to gauge the level of corruption, my body's endurance, and the balance of the various corruptions within me.

I really needed to ace it. If I hid anything and colored Archbishop Heraberg's judgment, I'd have been the one suffering. I would either become a true puppet of 0-01 or die here due to insufficient corruption.

Knowledge is indeed power; knowledge indeed holds wealth!

Lumian couldn't help but curse Julie and Celeste. Those two Demonesses raised by pigs had prevented him from completing his studies!

Since it had already happened, he could only keep cursing while passing through the hall's exit.

After walking a few dozen meters along the marked passage, Lumian suddenly felt a disturbance to the side, hearing the sound of something heavy moving through the air.

Holding his carbide lamp and the head of the Abscessed Hand, he lunged forward and rolled away.

Thud!

The sound of something heavy hitting the ground echoed.

Using the sound, Lumian quickly sketched an image of the "enemy" in his mind: a giant sword!

In the underground mausoleum, the only beings carrying giant swords without feeling alive that Lumian could think of were the puppet soldiers.

Am I being attacked by a puppet soldier in this passage?

Hey, we're on the same side! We're both 0-01's soldiers!

Surprised, Lumian heard a whooshing sound as the giant sword swung down again.

Completely blind, Lumian activated the black mark on his right shoulder, teleporting behind the suspected puppet soldier attacker.

Simultaneously, knowledge from the Doll Crafting and Maintenance book flashed in his mind: "The puppet soldiers used in the underground tomb are uniformly two meters tall, made of iron...

"Their weapons come in four types: giant swords, hammers, spears, and bows...

"The weakest point of the puppet soldiers is their neck, due to mechanical structure issues and the inevitable development brought by the mausoleum's corrupting forces..."

As this knowledge flashed by, Lumian leaped, tensed his chest muscles, spread his arms, raised his right fist, and aimed at the back of the puppet soldier's neck, as constructed in his mind.

His fist ignited with layers of compressed white-hot flames, finally striking something hard and cold.

With a clang, the compressed flames were injected into the puppet soldier's neck.

Using the force, Lumian flipped back in midair, while an explosive sound echoed from within the puppet soldier.

A Cull completed with Fire Infusion!

The sound of heavy metal fragments hitting the ground followed.

As Lumian steadied himself, he heard Albus's voice in his ear:

"You can see?"

This member of the Medici family had a peculiar metallic quality in his voice.

Albus is here too? Did he witness me precisely dismantling the puppet soldier? Lumian's right hand stealthily reached into the Traveler's Bag, as he responded with a smile, "Can you see too?"

Albus's metallic voice came from another direction:

"I can't see by myself; I'm blindfolded like you. But I can share the vision of the puppet soldiers here."

This is an example of the power of high-level Hunters... A gift from the Red Angel? This gift can even piggyback on 0-01's puppets... According to

Madam Magician, that King of Angels once held 0-01... Lumian deliberately harrumphed and said, "Did you make the puppet soldier attack me?"

Albus switched locations again, seemingly using different puppet soldiers to speak.

"This was a test. Only those who pass the test are qualified to cooperate with me."

"You think you're worthy of cooperating with me? Why would you think I want to work with you?" Lumian said disdainfully.

Albus laughed. "That Demoness has a very dangerous item. If we don't work together, she could take us out one by one."

Chapter 829: Deception and Betrayal

829 Deception and Betrayal

Cooperate? You just want to use me as cannon fodder, right?

Well, let's see if I can find out what item Julie has... With his eyes covered by white bandages, Lumian wore an expression of skepticism. "How dangerous could it be?"

Albus, also blindfolded and holding a lantern, leaned against the wall of a burial chamber, watching Lumian through the eyes of the iron puppet soldiers twenty meters away.

He chuckled inwardly. You didn't put that ragged head in your bag but carried it in your hand. Not afraid of trouble, or are you planning something?

And your right hand has been in that bag made by a high-level Apprentice...

The half-body should already be inside. You don't want to reunite the head and body now, fearing unforeseen consequences. You plan to use it as an indiscriminate weapon at a crucial moment, don't you?

Perfect for surprising Julie and the others. I won't try it myself to avoid unnecessary consumption.

Cooperation is great; it gathers the dangers together, letting them cancel each other out...

Albus made an iron puppet's mouth move, its metallic voice saying, "The item on that Demoness is one of five created by the Primordial Demoness before Her slumber after the Pale Disaster of the Fourth Epoch. It can make the bearer a vessel for the Primordial Demoness's descent."

"A vessel for a deity's descent..." Lumian repeated.

The Demoness Sect plays high-stake games, don't they?

He had thought Julie's item could only temporarily grant her the power of a Sequence 4 Demoness of Despair, not that she could briefly become the Primordial Demoness herself!

Even a fraction of a true god's power was immense!

Albus's laughter echoed in the metal cavity.

"Yes, a vessel.

"Fortunately, Julie isn't sturdy enough as a vessel. If she were an Angel-level Demoness, she could sustain the descent for a minute or two without dying. A Saint-level Demoness could hold it for a few seconds, but her soul and body would collapse. Julie, as a Demoness of Affliction, can't maintain the state for more than three seconds and that's with the cost of complete annihilation.

"Even without invoking the descent, the item grants her various special abilities, temporarily allowing her to use Sequence 4 powers.

"If we don't cooperate, facing Julie's normal state alone is tough but not hopeless. But if she's pushed to the brink and tries the descent, we won't last three seconds.

"By working together and using all our trump cards, we might last until her descent ends. Then, we rely on our skills."

Last three seconds in front of a Demoness... Such ambiguous words would be a field day for the scandal reporters on Trier's Avenue du Boulevard. They'd twist your words into questioning your prowess... Influenced by vulgar jokes from Trier's Ghost Face and other tabloids and Franca's quips, Lumian mentally criticized.

He didn't believe in Albus's sincere cooperation. He thought this Red Angel's descendant would throw him out as a shield at the critical moment to endure Julie's deity's descent. This might be Albus's ultimate plan to survive.

Like Emperor Roselle's parable: in a forest, you don't need to outrun a bear, just your companion.

Franca often joked that in adventures, companions were the best shields.

But Julie and Celeste likely know my true identity, that I'm a lover of one of their peers, and that I was once an Iron and Blood Cross Order member. They wouldn't place as much importance on me as much as they'd be wary of a Medici. So it's still a question who's the primary target and who's the shield... In a hesitant, distrustful tone, Lumian said, "I can sense Julie's danger but didn't expect it to be this severe.

"Of course, I still don't trust you."

"Cooperation and mutual vigilance are not contradictory. I can't truly trust you either," Albus replied with a hint of amusement.

"When there's a common interest, even enemies who killed one's parents can temporarily cooperate. How much more so for us?"

While speaking, Albus thought to himself, Working together against those two Demonesses is better than fighting you now and facing your hidden trump cards head-on. Even if I win, the cost would be high, and how would I deal with the Demonesses and Wanak afterward?

Heh heh, in a real fight with the Demonesses, you won't be able to hide your trump cards. The situation will become chaotic, everyone will go all out, and the dangers will cancel each other out. I'm best at winning in chaos...

After a moment of contemplation, Lumian gritted his teeth and said, "Let's cooperate until we deal with the two Demonesses."

"A very wise choice." Albus did not hide his joy.

Lumian, holding the carbide lamp and the Abscessed Hand's head, began to walk slowly.

With a posture of "I am trying to show sincerity," he said, "Besides the two Demonesses and Wanak, we have another enemy.

"That's the Mirror Person from the special mirror world from Fourth Epoch Trier. His name in Morora is Guei."

"Mirror Person..." The iron puppet ahead repeated the term, then laughed. "I'm not surprised. It's a problem left by that lunatic Alista Tudor."

"What do you mean?" Lumian took the opportunity to ask.

Albus, with a tone of clear reverence, said, "You should know my ancestor was a King of Angels. He told me that the special mirror world was likely created by Tudor."

"Red Angel? Wasn't He killed before Alista Tudor became the Blood Emperor? How did He know the origin of the special mirror world?" Lumian expressed his doubts.

"What do you mean 'killed'?" Albus sighed. "That's why I dislike working with Hunters. If it weren't for today's necessity, I wouldn't have sought you out. Hunters really have a way with words."

"I also dislike working with Hunters, like you," Lumian agreed.

Albus switched to another iron puppet: "My ancestor entered the Fourth Epoch Trier and confirmed its various problems. He said the special mirror world might not be a product of those problems but the cause of them."

The Red Angel meant that the special mirror world wasn't created by the fall of the Blood Emperor and the destruction of Fourth Epoch Trier, but existed before and led to the need for a new Trier to seal it after Fourth Epoch Trier's fall? Could the Red Angel be deliberately spreading false information for some consOriginal?

But this matches what I found in the Blue Avenger's treasure vault-the Blood Emperor might have been using the mirror world for His resurrection arrangements before His fall.

Similarly, the Tamara family's connection with the special mirror world was also before the War of the Four Emperors...

Lumian stopped, thought for a few seconds, and said, "'Alista Tudor left too many problems behind, didn't He?"

Though the Knight of Swords said that among the crazy ancient gods of the Second Epoch, the Undying Phoenix Ancestor Gregrace was the most troublesome, causing many issues, and was quite similar to the Fourth Epoch's Blood Emperor Alista Tudor, Lumian had only encountered problems related to the Underworld from the Phoenix Ancestor. In contrast, he encountered troubles from the Blood Emperor frequently. So, in his mind, the Blood Emperor was the most troublesome, much more so than the Phoenix Ancestor.

Albus seemed to share a similar sentiment. Using the iron puppet's mouth, he said, "Because He is the symbol of calamity."

Wh- Lumian suddenly had a deeper understanding of the Hunter pathway.

Albus then asked, "As temporary collaborators, do you need me to share the puppet's vision with you? That way, you won't have to pretend to be blind."

Such a good thing? Lumian instantly became wary.

Thinking about how Wanak had to fully submit to 0-01 to share a bit of power, and considering that all the puppets here were 0-01's minions, Lumian pondered for a few seconds and said, "No need."

In a situation where he was not truly part of Albus's team, he worried that sharing vision might gradually turn him into a puppet.

"Sometimes, being too cautious isn't good," Albus Medici said without further persuasion, his tone containing a hint of undisguised regret.

For the next while, Lumian followed his mental map, winding through the underground tombs. Albus occasionally used the iron puppets scattered around the area to remind him he wasn't left behind.

After a while, Lumian slowed his steps, mumbling to himself, In the Examples of Mausoleum Construction, there's nothing marked ahead...

This is where Albus comes in, isn't it?

Without hesitation, Lumian walked past what seemed to be a gate and entered the blank area on his mental map.

The next second, he felt his skin prickling, as if approaching a fierce lightning bolt yet not touching it.

Lumian immediately recalled the forest of lightning from his previous nightmare.

His ears then caught Albus's voice through the iron puppet:

"Wanak is coming. Just a dozen meters ahead."

Wanak? Lumian's mind immediately pictured the most dangerous figure in Morora, with blood-red hair and iron-black eyes, and his spirit instantly tensed up.

Chapter 830: Destination

830 Destination

Lumian had always thought Wanak, who could draw power from 0-01, was more dangerous than Albus and Julie. This lightning-filled area was perfect for Wanak to unleash his potential.

No matter if Wanak could only change the weather slightly or if he was on par with Julie and Celeste, who could become vessels for a deity's descent, in this forest of lightning, he was as powerful as a true demigod.

Together, Albus and I would get beaten up by the thunderstorm...

Lumian's first instinct was to exit this area and find another path to 0-01.

That way, even if Wanak pursued him, outside his optimal environment, he wouldn't be invincible.

In a flash, Lumian remembered the nightmares he had.

After the forest of lightning, there were mountains of corpses and bones, with 0-01 possibly at the peak.

This meant this was the only way to the core sealing area-there was no way around it!

This fact was hinted at in "Examples of Mausoleum Construction," even if it wasn't clearly marked.

Or, I could pretend to retreat, draw Wanak out, and avoid fighting him in the lightning forest...

Wait a minute...

Lumian suddenly had a bold idea.

Since previous dangers saw him as one of their own, would Wanak, a puppet of 0-01, make the same judgment?

Wanak wasn't a fully intelligent human but more like a sentient puppet.

Such a target could likely be deceived!

When I first arrived in Morora, I had little corruption from 0-01, with a mix of other influences, so it made sense for Wanak to see me as an enemy. But now, after much learning, the corruption is approaching a critical point.

! should try.

If it fails, I'll use Shadow Animation to withstand the lightning attack and seize the chance to teleport out of the forest, avoiding a direct fight with Wanak...

Lumian made his decision and stepped forward.

As he walked, he recalled the nightmares he had since arriving in Morora, listening to the brass earplugs recounting knowledge to align himself with the corruption. At the same time, he thought aimlessly about various significant and insignificant questions to relax and prevent his body from being too tense.

This could prevent Wanak from noticing anything unusual!

Why did I end up in the forest of lightning?

According to the nightmare, there should be burning palaces and waterfall-like downpours ahead.

Are they on a different route?

...

Lumian endured the increasing prickling sensation, mentally calculating his distance.

Three or four more steps to meet Wanak...

As soon as this thought crossed Lumian's mind, he heard slow but steady breathing, masked by the rolling thunder, just a few meters away.

Lumian's back tensed involuntarily, and his right hand reached into the Traveler's Bag, ready to pull out the headless corpse of the Abscessed Hand.

After its previous writhing approach, they had fused together but were temporarily unable to break through the Traveler's Bag's seal and reunite with the head.

As he got closer to Wanak, Lumian, unable to see his expression, instinctively wanted to hold his breath.

He quickly adjusted, forcing himself to remain calm.

The next second, he felt a gaze fall upon him, making the skin on his face break out in barely noticeable bumps.

It was Wanak's gaze.

At this moment, Lumian wished he were a Hypnotist, but he could only keep telling himself, I am an experimental subject, I am an experimental subject...

He maintained the same pace as the black-robed experimental subjects, walking straight ahead.

Two steps... one step... Lumian tried to clear his mind.

He walked past the imagined figure of Wanak.

One step... two steps... three steps... Lumian didn't dare relax, feeling cold sweat on his back.

Outside the lightning forest, Albus Medici, through a guardian puppet's eyes, watched Lumian holding the carbide lamp and the ragged head, step by step, approaching Wanak, who had unbuttoned two buttons of his shirt.

He saw Wanak's gaze fall on Lumian, follow him for seven or eight seconds, then slowly shift away, watching Lumian pass the most dangerous person in Morora and head towards the end of the lightning forest.

Wh- Albus squinted his eyes, then laughed. So that's how he gets through dangerous areas, no wonder he's been reading and studying these past weeks... When we reach the destination, I'll have to guard against him using this trick...

Lumian walked a bit further, feeling the prickling sensation fade as faint echoes of sound from the brass earplugs leaked out, indicating he had left the lightning forest and entered a narrow corridor.

After this corridor, I should reach the area around the mountain of corpses...

Should I wait for Albus to catch up, or go face Julie and the others alone?

Heh heh, I wonder how Albus will get past Wanak...

Lumian stopped and listened for sounds from the direction of the lightning forest.

Thud, thud, thud. He heard slow, steady footsteps.

"Why did you stop?" Wanak's sharp voice suddenly rang in his ears.

A chill ran up Lumian's spine to the back of his head, making him almost pull out the headless corpse of the Abscessed Hand.

He stiffly wanted to "explain," but after a moment's thought, he chose to remain silent and continued walking.

In the nearly frozen air, Lumian heard the thudding footsteps pass him and head towards the end of the corridor.

Phew... He quietly exhaled.

He didn't stop again but slowed his pace, moving like a snail.

Soon, he felt countless eyes on him.

Seeing Wanak rush towards 0-01, Albus Medici laughed at Lumian's pointless risk-taking as he leisurely passed through the lightning forest.

Using the guardian puppets in the corridor, Albus saw the walls made of square iron plates, with surfaces as smooth as mirrors.

At this moment, twisted, pale faces appeared in these "mirrors."

These faces belonged to the residents of Morora, silently staring at Lumian. Occasionally, someone would cautiously extend a hand from the metal surface, quietly reaching for Lumian's body.

Lumian merely swung a fireball in that direction, not making any aggressive moves.

Seeing the pale hand retract into the iron wall, Albus made a puppet speak: "I see Wanak didn't blindfold himself. Do you want to try it too?"

In the underground mausoleum, puppets of Wanak's level don't need to blindfold themselves, not fearing replacement by a Mirror Person.

Theoretically, I should be able to do the same, given I'm almost like him now... Albus must have noticed Wanak didn't attack me and is suspecting my condition... Lumian calmly responded to Albus, "! don't want to die yet."

He then asked, "Should we wait here for a while, let Wanak and the two Demonesses fight it out, and then take advantage?"

Wanak rushing to the mountain of corpses must be to stop Julie and Celeste from doing something to 0-01!

Albus replied through a puppet: "I haven't seen the two Demonesses ahead."

Julie and Celeste haven't arrived yet? Did you two Demonesses get lost?

You were the first to enter the underground mausoleum! Or have you arrived but are hiding, waiting for the right moment? Lumian's thoughts raced, and he resumed his normal pace.

As he walked, he smiled at Albus. "You must have noticed Wanak won't attack me. So, will you let me go ahead unimpeded, join me, or rush ahead of me?"

Lumian worried Albus might lag behind, letting him face any unexpected dangers around the mountain of corpses alone. So he pointed out his unusual condition, making Albus cautious.

The next dangers, of course, should be faced together. No one should think of hanging back to reap the benefits after the fact!

Albus's laugh came from Lumian's side.

"Since we've agreed to cooperate, we'll go in together."

"That colors you in a different light," Lumian responded insincerely.

After several more steps, Lumian suddenly stopped, feeling he was about to reach the mountain of corpses.

"Why did you stop?" Albus asked through a puppet at the entrance.

"Why did you stop?" Lumian retorted.

"You still don't trust me," Albus sighed.

Lumian chuckled in amusement and replied, "Aren't you the same?"

Suddenly, he sped up, as if trying to leave Albus behind and rush to the foot of the mountain of corpses.

Moments later, he heard a swooshing sound, the noise of a flaming spear piercing the air.

Lumian scoffed and left the corridor completely.

The next second, he felt an intense sense of danger.

This wasn't a premonition but a Hunter's instinct to dodge an attack aimed at his head.

"Are you here to die too?" Julie's cold, indifferent voice echoed in Lumian's ears.

Lumian quickly activated the black mark on his right shoulder and withdrew his hand from the Traveler's Bag.

He pulled out a bluish-black, swollen, headless corpse!

...

Trier, in the apartment Franca and Jenna rented.

Jenna said to Franca, "Your suggestion worked. I've digested the Witch potion. Turns out, getting close to mystical dangers was the key."

Franca's face lit up with joy.

"Are you going to take a couple of days to adjust before going to the sacrificial square in the underground catacombs for the advancement, or do it now?"

Jenna pursed her lips and said, "My spiritual intuition tells me it's best to do it now."

Chapter 831: Something's Wrong

831 Something's Wrong

When Lumian withdrew the headless corpse of the Abscessed Hand and activated the black mark on his right shoulder, he heard Julie's voice along with the sharp, exaggerated sound of a heavy object falling rapidly.

Instinctively, he chose the farthest place he could sense as his teleportation destination.

Just as Lumian's figure vanished, Albus entered the area with two iron puppets.

He hadn't been influenced by Lumian's feigned attempt to rush towards the mountain of corpses. Instead, he took advantage of Lumian's blindness, conjuring a blazing-white flame spear and manually hurling it forward to drive Lumian out of the corridor, forcing him to face potential dangers and possible concentrated attacks.

Albus himself lagged two to three meters behind, allowing him ample time to react—if Lumian were to be surrounded or controlled, Albus could avoid the dangerous zone and approach the mountain of corpses from the side.

Of course, Albus couldn't afford to fall too far behind. Lumian had just proven he could prevent Wanak from attacking him, potentially reaching the destination quickly and unhindered. If Albus delayed for more than ten to twenty seconds before entering the area, Lumian might have already made direct contact with 0-01!

In war, acting too quickly or too slowly can both lead to failure... As this thought crossed Albus's mind, he heard the terrifying explosion of something hitting the ground.

One of his iron puppets looked up, seeing a massive meteor engulfed in bright flames, illuminating the entire area. It plummeted towards the armored soldiers and countless corpses in the wasteland, heading towards the entrance area where Albus and Wanak were.

The meteor fell faster and faster, soon surpassing the speed of sound.

Further away, Julie, wearing a slit low-cut dress, stood in midair with the help of icy steps, holding a lantern.

With a sapphire ring on her left hand, she drew a downward arc, pointing at where Wanak and Albus were.

"Son of a bitch!"

For the first time since entering Morora, Albus cursed uncontrollably in his mind.

Isn't she supposed to not have invoked divine descent yet?

Isn't she not in a state of divine descent?

How could this sow summon a meteor?

What about Morora's rules? What about 0-01? Shouldn't there be some restrictions? This is the ability of a Demoness of Catastrophe!

And this Demoness isn't even blindfolded!

Something's wrong!

Although the meteor hadn't reached the level to destroy a city, or the true power of a Demoness of Catastrophe, Albus still felt genuine fear at that moment.

As a member of the Red of War rebuilt by the ancestor, he could concentrate his power towards the King of Angels, share some of the power in return, and distribute part of the damage he received. However, in Morora, within the core area of sealing 0-01, this special interaction was significantly weakened. Albus could at most temporarily use Sequence 4 powers and some weakened higher abilities, but could only transfer a third of the damage at most.

Now, even if he could transfer half or two-thirds of the damage, the remaining part would still be more than his current body could bear.

If the meteor had fallen instantly, Albus would have already turned into a charred corpse.

Wearing a black blindfold, he leaned back slightly, his hair igniting with red flames extending to his back.

Beneath his skin, his bones and flesh faintly glowed with an iron-black hue.

Next, he transformed into a blazing white flame spear, carrying the two iron puppets rapidly to the right.

He had borrowed the Red Angel's power. The plan was to first avoid the meteor's impact zone, then use the ancestor's damage sharing, his temporary metal transformation, and the two iron puppets as shields to survive the subsequent impact.

Yes, Albus didn't bring the iron puppets because he was fond of them or because he didn't want to lose his "eyes."

They made excellent shields!

As the primary target, Wanak made the same choice as Albus, but without the final protection of the iron puppets, and was hindered by layers of invisible webs around him.

As the strands of web became visible, turning grayish-white, Wanak's blazing white flame spear slowed down.

Bang!

The blazing meteor hit the ground about ten meters behind Wanak.

Boom!

Rolling dust, intense flames, and terrifying shockwaves engulfed Wanak.

The metal-colored body of Morora's most dangerous person cracked instantly, turning into a charred corpse.

Albus, who had fled some distance, was slammed into the white flame spear by the rushing shockwave, driving it to the ground.

With a clanging sound, the first iron puppet, acting as a shield, quickly dented and partially shattered, instantly losing its puppet-like feel and becoming scrap metal.

Next, the second iron puppet suffered severe damage, and then Albus Medici, who emerged from the flame spear state, spat a mouthful of blazing blood, his metalized body sustaining damage.

Not knowing where he had teleported to, Lumian first heard the explosion, then felt the tangible shockwave slam into him, followed by the burning flames.

His ears momentarily deafened, unable to draw knowledge from the brass earplugs. His whole body was flung out, but the shockwave's intensity had dropped to a level a Reaper could withstand.

As for the flames carried by the shockwave, they could only ignite clothes, bandages, and hair, barely causing significant burns to his body, and were quickly extinguished by his flame control ability.

Thua!

Lumian landed heavily, almost dropping the carbide lamp in his hand.

The burnt bandages on his face fell off, but fortunately, he kept his eyes shut.

At the same time, Lumian felt the headless corpse of the Abscessed Hand in his right hand and the rotting head in his left hand become agitated, each dragging his body towards the other with terrifying force.

Lumian didn't stop them; instead, he released his grip.

He once again activated the black mark on his right shoulder, teleporting to the limit of his current sensing range.

He needed to distance himself from the merging parts of the Abscessed Hand to avoid becoming the first target of attack. Otherwise, he might find himself surrounded and attacked!

When choosing a teleportation destination, Lumian deliberately avoided the impact zone and the place where Julie's voice had come from.

In the thick, smoky environment, Lumian's figure disappeared, and the two rotting parts of the Abscessed Hand moved towards each other.

The headless corpse grasped the tangled-haired head with its only hand, urgently placing it on its neck.

But this attempt was hindered by some force, as if an unspoken rule in the underground mausoleum required the head and body to remain separate.

Of course, the obstruction didn't truly prevent the head from reattaching; it only increased the difficulty and slowed the reassembly process.

On the other side, the rolling flames and scattered dust calmed down a bit. Julie, standing on the icy steps, saw that Wanak had lost his life force, lying on the ground with deep cracks and charred marks all over his body.

She quietly sighed in relief.

Wanak had always been her most dreaded opponent. She regretted that Lumian fled early, missing the chance to team up and kill Wanak.

Just then, Wanak's charred body moved.

The most dangerous person in Morora leaped up, with two dark red flames burning in his eye sockets.

He had become an undead creature!

For Wanak, who was a special puppet of 0-01, being alive or existing as an undead made little difference.

Moreover, as an undead, he could tap into additional powers!

He spread his arms, tilted his head back slightly, and let out a roar like a battle cry.

Suddenly, the lantern Julie held went out, and the flames around the mountain of corpses were extinguished. Only the lantern in Albus's hand and the carbide lamp Lumian held, protected by their Hunter powers, flickered but continued to burn.

Darkness surged back but failed to engulf Julie.

Nothing? Using the last iron puppet as his eyes, Albus couldn't help but frown upon seeing this scene.

That sapphire ring can protect Julie from the underground mausoleum's dark corrosion and dissolution?

That doesn't make sense!

Even if it could, why did Julie carry the lantern before? To mislead us?

And, there shouldn't be a Demoness of Catastrophe's ability, even if it's a weakened version...

Something's definitely wrong!

At this moment, Julie let out a low, soul-scratching laugh and pointed her left hand skyward again.

In the darkness above, faint light appeared as sharp icicles formed, raining down like a storm towards the wasteland, targeting Wanak, Albus, and Lumian.

Wanak roared again.

It was like a battle drum, striking Julie's heart and causing her to stiffen momentarily.

Next, a tornado connecting heaven and earth formed, sweeping all the icicles and reversing towards Julie.

At that moment, whether it was Lumian with his eyes shut, Albus with his eyes covered, or Julie and Wanak with normal vision, they all felt the world shake and heard the creaking sound of the void around them.

The rotting corpse of the Abscessed Hand had finally reattached its head to its neck.

Chapter 832: Reunion

832 Reunion

The rotting chunks of flesh on the blue-black corpse's neck and head began to wriggle and merge back together.

It felt as if the whole world started to shake, with the void around them creaking.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

It was as if something outside the void was pounding forcefully, trying to get in.

Crack! A strange, ethereal breaking sound came from afar, piercing Lumian's ears.

Is Hand Bro trying to get in and reunite with its body?

Is the breaking sound a sign that the seal is temporarily broken?

Lumian, with his eyes still tightly shut, could only speculate from the sounds he heard and the movements he felt.

Just as these thoughts crossed his mind, he heard the metallic, scraping voice of an iron puppet several meters away: "Next to the assembled corpse, the space is cracking like glass."

This was Albus, relaying to Lumian what he saw through the iron puppet and the detail he thought was most important.

Unable to see, Lumian had teleported near Albus-he had to avoid the impact zone and Julie's location while staying away from the Abscessed Hand's corpse. The choices were limited, making an encounter with Albus likely.

Cracking like glass... Hearing Albus's description, Lumian suddenly had a realization.

He had been puzzled by Julie's display of confidence and the terrifying commotion she created.

He felt that if he hadn't teleported away in time, he would surely have died from such an attack.

This exceeded his assessment of Julie's strength, making him suspect she was in a state of divine descent, though it clearly didn't seem that way.

Now, Lumian had a vague guess.

Amid the intense shaking of the ground, Albus stopped using the iron puppet's voice and spoke directly, "Do you think it looks like a mirror shattering?"

A mirror... Yes! Lumian instantly understood the situation.

This is the mirror world!

This is an extension or projection of that special mirror world around 0-01!

After Julie and Celeste reached their destination, they set a trap, creating an entrance to the mirror world at the corpse mountain's entrance. So, whether it was Wanak, Albus, or himself, none of them saw the two Demonesses when they peered into the corridor, but were attacked after entering.

The Demoness of Black had told Franca that the Demoness Sect once controlled that special mirror world, losing some control after the War of the Four Emperors, and further diminishing after the Pale Disaster.

At this moment, Julie must have already worn the divine artifact left by the Primordial Demoness, possessing various special powers. One of these might be the limited use of the special mirror world's power.

With the special mirror world's support, she could launch such a terrifying attack!

If my guess is correct, and this really is the mirror world... Lumian felt the world's shaking, listened to the sounds of the void breaking, and the commotion caused by Julie and Wanak attacking the Abscessed Hand's corpse. He suddenly turned his head towards Albus.

He asked in a deep voice, "Is Julie blindfolded?"

"No," Albus replied firmly.

As expected! Lumian decisively opened his eyes.

If this truly was the mirror world, there was no need to worry about 0-01's power leaking out and creating a corresponding Mirror Person through the eyes, the mystical window of the soul.

In the next second, scenes filled Lumian's vision: Fallen soldiers in iron-black armor like stalks of straw, the corpse mountain several hundred meters to the side, Julie standing on icy steps with an unlit lantern by her feet, and Wanak with dark red flames burning in his eye sockets.

At this moment, Julie and Wanak both saw the bluish-black corpse of the Abscessed Hand as the primary target, launching rounds of attacks. To them, it seemed more dangerous than each other, Lumian, or Albus.

"Indeed..." Albus's voice carried a hint of laughter.

He even sighed in relief without hiding it when Lumian looked over.

Lumian's thoughts raced, quickly understanding what Albus meant by "indeed": This guy was also guessing this is the mirror world but couldn't be sure, so he encouraged me to open my eyes to verify?

Dammit! That's so sneaky!

Good thing I was certain before I opened my eyes!

In Lumian's sight, Albus, in his black jacket with red patterns and hair like burning flames, removed the burned blindfold and laughed.

"No wonder that Demoness kept carrying a lit lantern, to mislead us into not thinking this was the mirror world.

"No wonder nothing happened when her lantern went out. Truly insidious."

"Are you any less insidious?" Lumian replied just as the Abscessed Hand's corpse experienced a sudden change.

The surrounding void cracked like glass struck by a fist, dense white cracks spreading outward, becoming sparse and transparent.

Crack!

The cluster of dense white cracks shattered, and a rotting, pus-dripping, bluish-black swollen hand flew in.

The Abscessed Hand finally broke through the barriers and arrived here!

As soon as it appeared, it used Spirit World Traversal to place itself directly at the severed wrist.

Seeing this, Julie had a strong sense of foreboding.

She immediately let the sapphire ring on her left hand emit a faint light.

Next, she let her hands fall and then lifted them from below.

The ground shook violently, and a small volcano quickly formed under the bluish-black corpse of the Abscessed Hand, spewing out red-white lava and clouds of dust.

This immediately engulfed the bluish-black rotting corpse, melting its flesh and attempting to solidify it within the volcanic rock.

Wanak, with dark red flames in his eye sockets, had blood slowly oozing from his brow, twisting into a strange pattern.

As this change occurred, Wanak raised his right hand.

The dead soldiers in iron-black armor lying on the ground stood up again, their eye sockets rekindling with pale or dark red flames.

Wanak then formed an almost entirely green flame spear with a hint of blazing white, hurling it at the bluish-black corpse struggling in the fierce lava.

The undead soldiers followed suit, creating blazing-white flame spears, mimicking Wanak's action, and throwing them at the target.

Swoosh! Swoosh! Swoosh!

The flame spears nearly obscured half the sky.

Seeing this, Albus moved towards the entrance, with Lumian silently following.

Soon, the flame spears covered the bluish-black corpse of the Abscessed Hand, tearing it into countless small chunks of rotting flesh.

These pieces ignited, falling into the red-white lava.

Suddenly, a part of the lava unexpectedly caved in, and the flaming rotting flesh seemed to be drawn by an invisible force, gathering together.

In the blink of an eye, the bluish-black corpse reappeared in the lava and flames.

The rotting flesh on its surface peeled off in pieces with flames, revealing fresh, vibrant flesh and pale skin as healthy as if it hadn't seen sunlight for a long time.

Julie and Wanak's attacks continued, with hailstones like cannonballs, black flames, lightning strikes, and flying fireballs, but the damage couldn't keep up with the reassembly and healing speed of the Abscessed Hand's complete body.

Within seconds, the charred skin and rotting flesh on the Abscessed Hand's face also fell off, revealing a delicate, handsome face.

Thick, long black eyelashes fluttered, and beneath the soft, pale eyelids, the eyes began to move slowly.

Whether living in the Demonesses' circle like Julie, frequently dealing with Demonesses like Lumian, or the deeply rooted Albus Medici, as well as the uniquely conditioned Wanak, they all held their breath at this moment, briefly entranced by the indescribable beauty.

It was like admiring a perfect, timeless work of art.

They didn't notice their hair growing visibly, previous injuries healing rapidly, and consumed spirituality replenishing as if a rainstorm had filled numerous evaporated lakes.

They saw that on the flawless but slightly feminine face, under the high nose bridge, the just-right lips parted slightly, revealing clean white teeth. The entirely white yet clearly muscular and perfectly proportioned body was completely exposed.

Seeing what was between the Abscessed Hand's legs, Julie instinctively swallowed, clenching her right hand.

The perfect body leaned back slightly, seemingly in some pain.

His chest began to swell, his nether region shrinking rapidly, and his body's lines softened.

He grew increasingly beautiful, nearing the limit of perfection.

But this transformation was stalled, as if missing some crucial element to succeed.

Taking advantage of this stall, Albus broke free from the stunning beauty's shock and immersion, touched the stubble around his mouth, burned it off with flames, and slightly frowned at Lumian. "What kind of monster did you put together?"

Lumian, barely recovering, chuckled. "I don't know either."

"..." Albus was momentarily speechless.

Lumian's gaze lingered on the complete corpse of the Abscessed Hand.

Indeed, it was a bro, but he seemed to be turning into a sister.

But if this change is due to Beyonder characteristics, like a Witch's, the gender should be fixed, not reverting to male after death and then turning female upon resurrection...

This feels more like corruption... He was killed and sealed in pieces before the corruption could fully change his body? To prevent his reassembly and revival, and the return of the corruption?

Now, what's stopping that corruption from fully transforming him? Is it an issue with the source of the corruption, or something special about Morora?

Just as Lumian made some guesses based on his limited mystical knowledge, he saw the white eyelids of the Abscessed Hand twitch and slowly open.

They revealed a pair of beautiful, crystalline scarlet eyes.

Chapter 833: Activation

833 Activation

Lumian and the others were all captivated by those beautiful, crystalline eyes, feeling as if their very souls were being drawn into the depths of that scarlet.

But those eyes soon filled with irrational rage, madness, and chaos, creating a vortex of indescribable emptiness at their core.

It made all who saw it feel a deep discomfort, as if a flawless object had suddenly cracked.

Just as Lumian broke free from the trance, he saw the scarlet eyes of the Abscessed Hand focusing on him.

It first noticed its own contractee.

It showed no hesitation, displaying a ruthless, bloodthirsty impulse.

Lumian's heart skipped a beat, and his body hair stood on end.

Damn, it's going to attack me first! Lumian immediately prepared to teleport to the side of the corpse mountain in the mirror world, to avoid the impending attack from the Abscessed Hand.

He felt it was unfair-he had only been watching and hadn't tried to interfere with the reassembly of Hand Bro, yet he was being targeted.

The real culprits were Julie and Wanak!

And I went through all that trouble to gather your body. I don't expect you to thank me, but at least don't kill me first! Lumian grumbled internally while activating the black mark on his right shoulder, following his Hunter instincts and personality.

At this moment, both Julie and Wanak sensed that the body, which had transformed from a rotting mess to near perfection, had become even more dangerous.

Taking advantage of the Abscessed Hand's focus on Lumian, they each prepared their most powerful and effective attacks.

Julie raised her left hand and pointed to the sky.

High above, dark clouds swirled into a massive vortex, driven by a violent wind. At the center of the vortex, an iron-black meteor began to take shape, heavy and ominous.

The Abscessed Hand's gaze shifted from Lumian's disappearing figure to Julie.

In those crystalline, scarlet eyes, Julie's figure in her slit dress was reflected, followed by the image of the Abscessed Hand raising its white palm.

That hand clenched into a fist.

Julie's neck made a cracking sound, visibly indenting inward.

Crack, crack, the mirrors on her body shattered, but she couldn't escape her predicament.

She floated upward slowly, her face contorted in pain as if someone were lifting her by the neck.

Her hands instinctively pulled back, trying to pry open the invisible hand strangling her.

The forming iron-black meteor disintegrated, the wind stopped, and the clouds dispersed.

Lumian, who had just appeared at the side of the corpse mountain, saw this and genuinely marveled at the terror of the Abscessed Hand.

If this had happened outside, carrying out the contract without having Madam Magician as a safeguard would be suicide.

At this moment, Lumian felt a strange sense of relief, as if an invisible shackle within him had been broken.

He had completed the pact and was no longer barred from acquiring godhood.

Lumian's gaze swept over Julie, whose mouth was opening and her face turning a darker shade of blue and purple. He frowned in confusion.

Where is Celeste?

Julie is responsible for blocking and interfering with intruders in the mirror world. Is Celeste targeting 0-01?

His thoughts raced as he looked towards Albus Medici, now several hundred meters away.

This guy is also suspicious...

He could influence and use the iron puppets in the underground tomb.

Why did he wait until Julie and Celeste took action to enter here?

Was he preparing something or afraid he couldn't get past Wanak, waiting for a chaotic opportunity?

Just as Julie's eyes began to bulge and she resolved to unleash the full power of her sapphire ring, the mirror world shook violently again, and clear cracks appeared all around.

From within these cracks, nearly invisible flames emerged and seeped through.

In an instant, the sky and ground began to burn.

Lumian suddenly felt an urge to submit, his body instinctively avoiding the nearly invisible, flower-like flames and the melting earth, rocks, and void.

He realized his resistance to burning damage was useless against these flames; contact would surely reduce him to ashes.

At the same time, his right palm became unbearably hot, and a violent, crazed aura surged within him, unable to break free from the icy, deathly stillness of the Underworld Daoist mark's restraints.

The residual aura of Blood Emperor Alista Tudor had fully activated, completely triggered!

This left Lumian feeling like an overinflated balloon, pushed to its limit and still being pumped.

The pain was excruciating.

The area around the Abscessed Hand, where the mirror cracks were most numerous and the flames most dense, became a burning hell. Its head lowered, and the hand squeezing Julie's neck loosened.

Witnessing this change and feeling an indescribable pain, Lumian recalled a passage from the 0-01 sealing information: "Beyonders with strength surpassing Sequence 5 are forbidden from approaching.

Warning, Beyonders with strength surpassing Sequence 5 are forbidden from approaching!"

Now, the reassembled and revived Abscessed Hand clearly possessed strong godhood.

0-01 has detected the presence of a demigod level Beyonder and is forcibly breaking the mirror world's barrier?

My Blood Emperor mark was stimulated by 0-01's aura and triggered uncontrollably? Lumian thought painfully, his thoughts disjointed.

Albus Medici also lowered his head, his flaming hair growing another inch.

Julie fell to the top of the frosty steps, finally escaping a near-death state.

Her long, pale neck was swollen and bruised, marked by deep, blood-embedded finger imprints.

Julie exhaled, raising her left hand once more.

She intended to seize this chance while the enemy, who nearly killed her, was restrained by 0-01's power and eradicate it completely.

On the other side, Wanak ignited nearly blue flames.

He stretched out his right palm, directing the flames forward to form a giant fireball.

The fireball attracted the nearly invisible flames around it, drawing them in layer by layer.

Behind Wanak, his undead army was ignited by the flames seeping through the cracks, but instead of turning to ash, they merged with these flames, one by one flying into Wanak's fireball.

The fireball grew larger, its color gradually turning purple.

Wanak, his eye sockets burning with dark red flames, bit his lips tightly, reaching his limit.

He then pushed the enormous, pale purple fireball towards the Abscessed Hand.

As the fireball touched the Abscessed Hand's perfect body, a meteor ignited by air friction fell from the sky.

The meteor fell faster and faster, hitting the immobilized target directly.

Struggling against the residual aura of the Blood Emperor, Lumian first saw the explosion of light, then the rising dust, and finally heard the deafening boom, feeling the earth shake wildly.

The world turned colorless and dark.

Did it work? Julie eagerly looked towards the area where the meteor had fallen.

Though it was filled with dust, smoke, and invisible wind, Julie used her connection with the mirror world to make her eyes like mirrors, reflecting the scene at the explosion's core.

The perfect body had been blown to pieces, its flesh either charred or vaporized, leaving only a broken, black skeleton standing.

But on that skeleton, new tender flesh was growing, and the bone was slowly shedding its charred appearance.

It's still not dead? The weakened Julie felt an immense heaviness in her heart.

In the next second, Julie's forehead throbbed with pain, as if the flesh there had a will of its own, trying to break free from her skin.

Her ears buzzed, and her mind was filled with images of lofty, gently floating scarlet flags.

Her face twisted in pain, she thought with difficulty, H-has 0-01 noticed me?

I-I can't hold on any longer...

I'm going to become its puppet...

Julie's body bent forward under the invisible weight, her eyes turning black with visible veins.

She looked at Wanak on the wasteland, at the rising dust, her gaze growing crazed, resembling her state when first entering Morora.

Clenching her teeth, she whispered, "I will take everyone here with me!

Celeste, the rest is up to you! Remember the famous line from 'Eternal Love'? Stupid, live well!"

Live well! Julie silently screamed, and her sapphire ring burst into blinding light.

She was invoking the Primordial One's divine descent!

In the light, the bloody mark on Julie's forehead faded quickly, her hair floated and grew longer and thicker.

Gray-white quickly spread around her, turning the entire wasteland gray-white.

Lumian stiffened as if turned to stone, the residual aura of the Blood Emperor in his right palm causing endless burning pain.

Then he saw Julie, transformed by the gray-white, suddenly turn towards him.

...

Trier, in the sacrificial square at the entrance to the third level of the underground catacombs.

Franca had finished checking the surroundings, ensuring no one else was present, and had set up a mirror maze.

"You can drink the potion now." She nodded at Jenna.

Jenna took out the necessary materials from her Traveler's Bag and mixed the Pleasure potion in a crystal glass.

Without hesitation, she raised the glass and gulped it down.

She felt herself float as if walking on clouds, her body pricked by tiny, needle-like pains. Her hair, influenced by an unseen force, defied gravity, extending away.

Jenna vaguely saw snakes slithering through the surrounding gloom, rising up.

Each snake had a strange eye on its head, giving Jenna a strong sense of danger, as if she would be torn apart any second.

The hallucination quickly faded, and Jenna saw a blurry, holy figure in a plain white robe.

The figure sighed in a hollow, ethereal voice. "As a woman, do you know how dangerous this path is?"

"I have no choice," Jenna replied, half-awake and dazed.

The holy figure was silent for a moment and then said,"Make peace with your mirror self, for you were always one. Any other questions?"

The figure started to fade as if about to disappear.

Jenna blurted out, "Are you Lady Krismona? Who is your father?"

As soon as she asked, Jenna wanted to slap herself.

Had she gotten into the habit of discussing nonsense with Lumian and Franca? There were so many important things to ask, yet she asked such an irrelevant question!

The holy figure in the plain white robe was silent for a moment and then said, "My father is Alista Tudor."

Chapter 834: Divine Descent

834 Divine Descent

The entire world seemed to turn gray and white, even the almost blue flames on Wanak's body solidifying into stone.

Lumian's first instinct was to reach into his Traveler's Bag to retrieve the mirror cufflink. He intended to use the opportunity, created by 0-01 breaking through the mirror world's barrier and Julie being too preoccupied to intervene, to escape the mirror world and return to the real corpse mountain, avoiding the impending divine battle.

He realized Julie had been praying for a divine descent.

And now, a fragment of the Primordial Demoness's power had descended!

Lumian couldn't avoid the influence. His body turned gray and stiff. The burning pain from the residual aura of the Blood Emperor in his right palm was the only thing keeping him moving, allowing him to slowly reach into his bag and grab the glass-like cufflink.

Just as he withdrew his hand, before he could activate the mirror cufflink, Julie, with her hair floating in the air, turned to look at him.

Her hair had turned raven black like thick, long serpents, and her eyes were now a brilliant, crystalline blue.

In that brief moment of eye contact, Lumian lost control of his body.

He saw the grayness spreading around him, climbing from his feet. Every inch of skin and flesh it touched turned to real stone.

Why am I the first target?

Wanak and Albus are far more dangerous, and the Abscessed Hand isn't completely dead. Why target the weakest one first?

Shouldn't I be caught in a broad attack instead?

Then I'd have a chance to escape the mirror world and wait out the divine descent!

Facing this hopeless situation, Lumian, as an Ascetic, couldn't help but feel intense anger and frustration.

Despite his limbs turning to stone, he tried to channel his spirituality to activate the Mirror Cufflink and other contract marks on his body.

But as his spirituality approached the grayness, it solidified, turning to stone and falling like rain to the ground.

His neck turned to stone, then his face and brain began to gray.

His last effort was to look toward Albus Medici's position.

The wasteland was empty.

The descendant of the Red Angel was gone.

He had disappeared or escaped somehow!

Son of a sow... Lumian couldn't help but curse.

In the next moment, his thoughts seemed to turn to stone.

His gray eyes saw Julie, transformed and radiating charm even to stone, floating in mid-air, engulfed in black flames.

The Demoness descended like a giant bird, trailing black flames that twisted and branched like countless serpents, their long tails gently swaying.

Silently, the mirror world began to collapse, dark voids mingling with black flames, swallowing the still skeletal Abscessed Hand, the immovable Wanak, and the petrified Lumian...

The end of this world had come.

Silent darkness filled every void.

After an indeterminate time, a violent, invisible flame flickered to life, illuminating Lumian's mind.

He felt the burning pain and icy rot in his right palm, the heat in his left chest.

He snapped his eyes open and saw a hundred-meter-high mountain of corpses and bones.

I'm... alive? Lumian was bewildered.

His last memory was turning to stone and the destruction of the mirror world by Julie.

He instinctively looked down, seeing the grayness rapidly recede from his body.

This confirmed it wasn't a nightmare or hallucination.

How did I survive?

Did someone help me?

Lumian doubted he could have survived such an apocalypse alone.

At that moment, he heard Albus Medici's voice, tinged with amusement.

"You can traverse the mirror world too, just like my escape plan, and you did it while partially petrified. Impressive. Did you rely on that cufflink in your hand?"

Lumian turned to see Albus, in a tattered black and red jacket, a crystal necklace around his wrist.

Albus had his eyes closed but was surrounded by undead soldiers in iron-black armor, their eyes burning with pale or dark red flames.

Lumian remembered he should also close his eyes.

This is likely the real area around the corpse mountain. Keeping his eyes open might result in being silently replaced by his mirror self!

Nothing happened... Just as I expected, I'm now Wanak's ally, one of the dangers, a puppet of 0-01. No need to fear any forbidden rules anymore... If only I'd realized it earlier, instead of being stunned and confused by my survival, I could have closed my eyes before Albus looked over, taking advantage of the situation to trick him... Lumian regretted this missed opportunity but also started to understand how Albus avoided the divine descent of the Primordial Demoness.

Like him, he took advantage of 0-01 breaking through the mirror world's barrier and Julie being too preoccupied with her prayer to notice them.

He used an item that allowed him to traverse the mirror world and escape back to the real mausoleum.

The only difference was, Julie, who hadn't fully completed her divine descent, targeted Lumian instead of Albus, allowing him to escape while he couldn't.

Why were you watching me? You should've focused on sealing the entire world. Then no one could've escaped! Lumian mentally cursed Julie, realizing that he must have activated the Mirror Cufflink just before his thoughts completely turned to stone, which saved him.

But as he checked, he realized something was wrong.

The Mirror Cufflink still had two uses left!

He hadn't used the Beyonder item at all!

Wh- Could Archbishop Heraberg secretly have helped me? After all, gods need special arrangements to descend a fraction of their power into Morola's underground mausoleum. It's unlikely an external entity intervened suddenly... It couldn't be Julie, who suddenly felt how kind I was as a boss and pushed me out of the mirror world at the last moment, could it? Lumian decided to put these thoughts aside for now.

Now wasn't the time to seek the truth!

There were still many dangers ahead!

He glanced at Albus, noticing the Red Angel's descendant studying him through the eyes of the surrounding undead soldiers.

Indeed, Albus didn't attack me just now, not because he didn't want to, but because he had concerns. My actions exceeded his expectations, and my escape was full of mysteries. He feared acting rashly might trigger a trap... Lumian's thoughts were interrupted by a sudden change in the sky.

Julie, wearing a long slit dress, appeared in the dimly lit sky.

Lumian's scalp tingled.

She's still alive and in the divine descent state?

He quickly noticed Julie's figure was unusually transparent, and the sapphire ring on her left hand was gone.

Phew... He heard Albus Medici sigh in relief.

Julie lowered her head and gazed at the top of the corpse mountain.

Following her gaze, Lumian saw a two to three meter tall iron-black metal pole with a charred banner at the top. The banner was covered in dark red and black bloodstains.

Just a glance made Lumian feel dizzy, his neck inexplicably stinging, and the smell of blood seeped from various parts of his face and forehead.

0-01? Salinger's Blood Banner? My corruption has deepened... It seems I don't need to finish reading all the remaining books. Mastering the current one should be enough... I can't rely on such direct corruption to save time; it's easy to surpass the critical point... Lumian quickly averted his gaze, noticing Celeste standing not far from the banner.

The Demoness, wearing a black robe, was looking down at the spot where the iron-black metal pole was embedded in the top of the corpse mountain.

The next second, she sensed something, raised her head, and looked at Julie in the sky.

Julie's lips curled into a beautiful and radiant smile.

She parted her moist lips as if to say, "I'll leave it to you."

In an instant, Lumian saw Julie's figure rapidly fade and shrink, turning into a puddle of filthy blood.

The blood, only palm-sized, fell straight down.

Its target was the charred banner of 0-01, seemingly to become one of the many bloodstains on it.

Celeste finally snapped out of her daze and shouted in pain, "Julie!"

At that moment, Albus's expression changed slightly. He transformed into a long spear of blazing white with a hint of blue flames, shooting towards the banner in mid-air.

He seemed unwilling to let Julie's remaining blood stain the charred banner.

You're finally putting in some effort... Lumian muttered, not rushing to follow Albus to the top of the corpse mountain to leave a mark or stop him and Celeste.

He planned to "join" after Albus and Celeste had fought for a while.

Of course, Lumian could see that Albus valued Julie's blood and didn't want it to become a mark on the 0-01 banner. If Albus didn't perform well and failed to stop the blood from reaching its intended spot, Lumian would teleport to help in time.

Seizing this rare opportunity, Lumian took an item from his Traveler's Bag.

It wasn't the Sword of Courage but the Devil's Whispers bone ring from Hisoka.

Chapter 835: Source of Corruption

835 Source of Corruption

As soon as Lumian's fingers touched the glossy black bone ring, he felt searing pain spread from the point of contact throughout his entire body.

He looked down to see thin wisps of purple-blue sulfur flames emerging from every pore, charring the surrounding skin bit by bit and giving off a pungent odor.

This pain was so familiar to Lumian that he merely furrowed his brow slightly, gritted his teeth, his expression barely changing.

He then took out the Devil's Whispers bone ring, slipping it onto his right ring finger with the twisted, agonized Devil's face facing up.

Lumian's gaze turned icy cold, a deep blackness forming in his blue irises that no light could penetrate.

The malice within him rapidly swelled, overwhelming the Ascetic's tolerance and clashing fiercely with his own will in a fragile balance, the excess spilling outward.

Lumian took out some Ice Lemon Fish fillets from his Traveler's Bag, stuffing them into his mouth and chewing to temporarily boost his fire resistance a bit. At the same time, he sensed the surrounding malice.

He was searching for the Mirror Person Guei!

One negative effect of the Devil's Whispers was that it made the wearer and anyone within a hundred meters more prone to malicious thoughts and impulsive actions. And since Mirror People tended toward extremism and distortion to begin with, they would be even more obviously affected.

With this premise, the Devil's Whispers also granted the Malice Perception ability, allowing the wearer to sense if those around them harbored ill intent. It could not detect dangers in their brewing stages like a true Devil, but it was still a mystical form of perception.

As long as the Mirror Person developed malicious intentions toward him within a certain distance, Lumian believed he could use Malice Perception to pinpoint their location!

Sulfur flames slowly burning across his body, Lumian's icy gaze swept the surrounding area littered with corpses clad in iron-black full-body armor amid smoldering fires, remnants of some recent slaughter.

Faint, nearly invisible flames also flickered at various points on the corpse mountain itself.

They illuminated the wasteland and sky, preventing total darkness from taking hold and allowing Lumian, Albus, and Celeste to remain visible despite no longer holding their carbide lamps or lanterns.

After just a second or two, the corners of Lumian's mouth curled into a cruel, cold smile.

He sensed intense malice directed at him from about ten meters behind and to the side!

It emanated from a corpse-no, from the smooth, mirror-black breastplate on the corpse.

Found you... Without turning around, Lumian abruptly teleported to the corpse's side amid his slow movements and activated the Mirror Cufflink.

Through the metal mirror's surface, Mirror Person Guei peered outward from within the black breastplate.

After discovering the two Demonesses had used the mirror world to reach this area, he had slipped out quietly, leaving it to Julie and Celeste.

He wasn't worried they would beat him to 0-01, since based on his knowledge and on-site investigations, he believed no one could gain 0-01's approval before its agent Wanak was eliminated. Brute force or exploiting loopholes would achieve nothing until the "throne" was vacant and chaos ensued, giving others an opportunity.

Guei felt relieved he had made this wise choice, having directly experienced the mirror world projection's destruction just now.

A mere aftershock of that apocalyptic scene could have vaporized him instantly.

Confirming Wanak's death, he then slipped back through an ordinary mirror world to the corpse mountain's vicinity, seeking a chance to gain 0-01's approval and take it for himself.

He saw Julie turning to filthy blood and fall, Albus Medici transforming into a fiery spear to stop it, Celeste screaming Albus's name in anguish, and Lumian Lee calmly putting on the ring, preparing to make his entrance and reap the spoils of victory.

An intense malice welled up within Guei: You're all obstructing me from completing my mission!

After entering Morora as one of the rare Readers turned Mirror Person, Guei had initially felt confident, supplementing his knowledge at the Knowledge Cathedral while conducting field investigations to gather intel for his final operation.

But after covertly observing the capabilities of Albus Medici, Wanak, Julie, and Lumian Lee, Guei began doubting himself.

Which of them could I actually defeat one-on-one by exploiting the special mirror world's power? Probably only Lumian Lee, the one my superior warned me to watch out for...

And when it comes to learning speed, although I far outpace Lumian, it seems I can't handle nearly as much corruption as him...

Am I really the one with the least hope among these people?

Shaken by these doubts, Guei devised a plan to lurk in the shadows, using his special nature to emerge once the heavyweights had clashed and weakened each other, then sweep up the remains.

So far, his plan had progressed smoothly.

The biggest obstacle, Wanak, and the most dangerous threat, Julie, were dead, their souls completely extinguished with no chance of revival through 0-01's leaking power as undead beings!

Once Albus Medici and Celeste decide the winner between them, I can join the fray, kill the survivor, and take on the weakest Lumian Lee alone...

Should I, should I ambush Lumian while he's off-guard? He's no Demoness or Mirror Person, with no substitute active, a single hit could kill him for real...

These malicious thoughts grew clearer and stronger in Guei's mind.

But before he could decide, Lumian's figure abruptly enlarged, appearing right before his eyes.

Then Lumian vanished from his sight.

In his place, a viscous pool of black liquid emerged underfoot, as if the deepest, most vile desires of the human heart had taken physical form.

Desire Incarnation!

The black liquid suddenly surged upward, enveloping Guei.

Crack!

The sound of shattering glass came from within the inky fluid as Guei's silhouette appeared on the edge of the dim, empty space behind the metal mirror.

He saw the liquid rapidly coalescing into Lumian's form, chuckling coldly with a fondness of teaching others. "Didn't know I had a Mirror Substitution, did you?"

A direct attack like this only costs me one mirror.

Before the words had left his mouth, an exceptionally violent emotion welled up within Guei.

He instinctively reached for his neck, feeling warm blood.

Pain immediately lanced into his mind.

Crack!

Guei deliberately triggered his own Mirror Substitution, shattering countless shards of glass that rained to the ground.

His silhouette now flickered in another corner behind the mirror, but a thin, deep bloody gash remained on his neck.

His emotions had become completely frenzied, vicious, and insane. His facial skin rapidly aged and withered like patches of brown tree bark. The words "my child, my child" echoed in his ears as flesh rippled on either shoulder, seeming to sprout additional heads.

His abdomen slowly swelled while his eyes took on a silvery-white with streaks of black. His aura rapidly dissipated as his body visibly decayed, chunks of flesh sloughing off and wriggling like maggots...

Lumian saw the various corruptions afflicting him directly manifested in this stark way.

It was a veritable smorgasbord!

When he used Desire Incarnation, that inky black pool didn't just contain his own emotions and desires, but also those from the corruptive emotions and desires deeply influencing him.

These higher-level corruptions would be difficult for any non-godhood being to resist-even Saints would suffer serious effects!

Facing such potent corruption, failure to proactively trigger one's Mirror Substitution immediately would be too late once the viscous fluid made contact. By then, it would already have tainted the target!

Now Guei was a horrifically corrupted monstrosity.

Seeing the Mirror Person degenerating toward an unspeakable form, Lumian had the intuition that continuing to observe might catalyze a similar transformation within himself.

He immediately stepped back, leaving the metal mirror surface to return to the corpse and surrounding wasteland at the base of the corpse mountain.

He then saw the smooth mirror-like surface of his chest plate, with tendrils of black mist seeping out, like illusory shadows seeming to try and grasp him.

Lumian swiftly turned his body and sprinted toward the corpse mountain peak.

Sometimes transforming into a blazing-white flaming spear to propel himself forward, sometimes teleporting dozens of meters, he continually climbed upward through the mountain formed of corpses and bones, scattered with lingering embers.

He aimed to lead the out-of-control, collapsing Mirror Person Guei, corrupted into monstrosity, to Albus Medici and Celeste, telling them "you're welcome."

Whether climbing by hand and foot, using his contracted abilities for short-range teleports, or ascending in flaming spear form, Lumian felt an immense oppressive presence behind him. An indescribable, constantly shifting black shadow was cast onto him and his path ahead, inevitably filling him with fear.

He now had no way to know what horrific form the pursuing monster had taken or what state it was in-he only knew for certain it was not something a normal human should observe or discern.

Suddenly, Guei's deep voice rang in his ears: "Mommy..."

Mommy... Lumian's mouth twitched, realizing that even with all the strange corruptions on himself, the one from the Great Mother, from the Omebella bloodline, still stood out as the most exceptional-after all, Mr. Fool had left behind a seal, not a corruption.

Lumian fled even faster.

Finally, he saw the summit of the corpse mountain peak, Celeste and Albus Medici.

Chapter 836: Unorthodox Feint

836 Unorthodox Feint

Albus transformed into a blazing-white, blue-tinged flaming spear, flying to the peak of the corpse mountain, toward Julie's filthy blood descending onto the charred 0-01 banner.

But in the blink of an eye, he lost his target, reverting from his fiery state to land beside the corpse where 0-01 should have been embedded.

At the peak, opening his eyes no longer seemed an issue, but Albus Medici's vision no longer contained the charred banner, Julie's filthy blood, or Celeste.

With his past experience, Albus quickly understood what was happening: This was the mirror world, or a Mirror Maze!

After waiting so long at the peak, Celeste must have made some preparations!

As Albus guessed, this was a Mirror Maze created by multiple mirrors reflecting each other. Celeste stood outside, her gaze pained and distant as she watched the filthy blood race towards the charred flag.

For some reason, the filthy blood slowed its descent, as if repelled by 0-01, but it still sank inexorably, just at a reduced pace.

Albus tried using the crystal necklace coiled around his wrist but found no mirror world to traverse or escape through, confirming he was trapped in the Mirror Maze. He immediately condensed blazing white, blue-tinged fireballs, sending them in all directions to blast the hidden mirrors forming the maze.

As its name implied, the Mirror Maze was just a maze, not a true barrier with defenses!

Thunderous explosions erupted almost simultaneously, yet Albus still could not break through the Mirror Maze.

Not a single mirror had been damaged!

With a slight narrowing of his eyes, Albus decisively abandoned any further such attempts.

Outside the Mirror Maze, Celeste felt the explosive winds and inwardly scoffed.

In other locations, widespread bombardment might overwhelm a Mirror Maze meant to trap Hunters. But here at the corpse mountain's peak, the heart of 0-01's seal, it would not be so easy.

As a Demoness of Affliction corrupted by 0-01 to some degree like Julie, Celeste could wield traces of that special mirror world's power!

The Mirror Maze's mirrors were not at the peak itself, but scattered among the corpses and bones below, their reflections then projected around 0-01's vicinity through that special mirror world, forming the Mirror Maze.

Seeing Julie's filthy blood nearing the charred banner, Celeste felt a mix of elation and confusion, underlaid by anguish.

From somewhere, she produced a black teardrop-like ornament and affixed it to between her brows.

Inside the Mirror Maze, Albus calmly lowered his head and half-closed his eyes, preparing to do what would inevitably be required.

He murmured in ancient Hermes, "The great God of War, the symbol of iron and blood, the ruler of chaos and strife."

With this three-passage invocation of the honorific name, the iron-black metal flagpole suspending the charred banner shuddered slightly, its drooping flag fully unfurling with a rattling sound despite the stillness, each bloody stain growing vivid.

Julie's filthy bloody halted, hovering a couple meters from 0-01, as if grasped by an unseen hand.

High above, clouds rapidly swirled into an immense vortex tinged with faint purple firelight, larger than the mountain itself, its far end suggesting some vast entity straining against an invisible barrier.

Cracks spread from the Salinger's Blood Banner with snapping sounds, the special mirror world over the peak shattering.

The Mirror Maze dissipated as its special mirror world projection broke apart.

Albus's head snapped up, his irises now flecked with iron-black, a bloody mark stark on his brow.

His gaze fell on Celeste, now adorned with her own black teardrop ornament, meeting her eyes.

Before combat could erupt, Lumian nonchalantly climbed over the peak's edge, a mere seven or eight meters from 0-01.

No communication was needed as Albus and Celeste simultaneously attacked Lumian.

Albus casually thrust out a fist expelling a massive blue-tinged fireball, while frost coalesced around Celeste's head into mirrors, each preceding an eerie, smoldering black flame.

But just as Celeste's icy mirrors would have reflected Lumian, his figure faded, vanishing with a mocking smile.

Behind him, an immense silhouette suddenly loomed into Albus and Celeste's view.

Already over five or six meters tall yet still growing, twisting appendages sprouting, it was covered in patches of brown bark and sickening knobs that oozed clear fluid from the gaps.

For now, the monstrosity cradled a blood-stained, vertebrae-trailing head in one hand, its silvery-black empty eyes dead and sunken.

On either shoulder was a fleshy, head-sized bulge, the surface rippling with some contained liquid.

The next second, the monster leaped to the peak, shedding puddles of wriggling maggot-flesh.

Countless black gaseous tendrils dragged at it from behind, trying to pull it back into the sleek, iron-black breastplate mirror.

The mere sight catalyzed a visceral sensation of corruption in Albus and Celeste.

Celeste's hair billowed outward, rapidly thickening and coarsening, while Albus's face became mapped with protruding black veins.

Boom!

Albus's immense blue-tinged fireball with white remnants exploded against the monstrosity as Celeste's flickering array of frost-mirrors reflected its figure, engulfing it in roiling black flames.

Crack!

The monster shattered mirror-like, its silhouette immediately reappearing beside 0-01, making Albus and Celeste's scalps prickle-it could use Mirror Substitution too.

Raising its severed head, the monstrosity emitted a sound like it came from another world.

Celeste felt herself plunged into cloying, frozen blackness, constrained on all sides in inescapable oppression.

Albus likewise found himself surrounded by stifling darkness.

This was a mystic technique inspired by the Mirror Person's state of being.

At that moment, Lumian, having teleported away to avoid the earlier clash, reappeared at the corpse peak's base.

His silhouette flickered behind Albus in the darkness, mouth opening to harrumph, sending a pale-yellow gaseous breath that washed over him.

For an instant, Albus's eyes went blank, his body swaying before he recovered his senses.

The Red Angel had helped him resist part of the Spell of Harrumph's effects.

Seizing Albus's momentary disorientation, Lumian's left fist blazed with white flames as he struck at his vulnerable point-the neck connecting head and body.

Cull!

As Lumian's fist neared Albus's neck, the member of the Medici family transformed into a humanoid blaze of white, blue-tinged fire.

Not the merger with a flaming spear, but transmutation into living flame itself.

In this fiery state, his neck was no longer a weakness!

Bang!

Lumian's punch only made the flaming figure waver and dim slightly.

In the next instant, Albus became a roaring blue-tinged flaming spear, bursting through the black icy shackles into the air.

Wheeling about like a javelin cast from the high vortex's hidden depths, he unleashed dozens of blue-streaked white fireballs in a thunderous barrage toward the peak.

Boom! Rumble! Boom boom!

Horrific explosions engulfed the area in relentless succession.

The indescribable monstrosity repeatedly used Mirror Substitution yet could not escape the bombardment's range.

Meanwhile, Lumian had teleported pre-emptively back to the mountain's base.

Still teleporting? Hand Bro isn't dead yet? As a chill ran down Lumian's back, he saw Celeste's face reflected in a nearby corpse's smooth breastplate.

The Demoness had not met Albus's assault with Mirror Substitution, instead deploying a mirror to swiftly traverse the mirror world to the wasteland-one of Lumian's backup plans.

Seeing she did not immediately attack him, Lumian turned his gaze back toward the peak.

He did not regret missing the opportunity to eliminate Albus earlier, as that was the outcome he wanted.

If he had intended to kill Albus with that strike, he would not have used only his Cull ability-he would have surely drawn the Sword of Courage or attacked in his Desire Incarnation form instead.

If I killed Albus now, who would help me deal with Celeste and that monster? Just me alone? Lumian inwardly muttered with obvious malice.

His earlier attack had a hidden purpose: to deceive Albus into thinking his defenses were ineffective against Lumian, to make him believe the pitch-black bone ring on his hand could not target him.

Then, at the crucial moment, he could "surprise" Albus by exploiting this misconception!

The thunderous explosions finally subsided. The corpses and bones atop the peak had suffered severe damage, and Julie's filthy blood had dissipated somewhat.

The indescribable monster no longer had Mirror Substitution, its surface charred and tattered.

Albus reappeared, his iron-black eyes lifting his right hand to push forward.

A spiraling storm of white-blue Fire Ravens flocked relentlessly toward the monster's exposed abdomen in overwhelming numbers.

Rumble!

Its weak point battered, the staggering monster collapsed into fragments.

Seeing this, Lumian instantly drew a straight sword resembling the Sword of Courage and teleported to the peak, while Celeste also raced toward it.

Chapter 837: Each With Their Own Schemes

837 Each With Their Own Schemes

Lumian did not directly teleport behind Albus Medici, nor did he approach the fragmented corpse of the monster Guei. Instead, his figure quickly materialized at the edge of the peak area.

Earlier, while observing the battle from the mountain's base, he had already stopped the knowledge recitation from the brass talisman made by Archbishop Heraberg and removed the corresponding earplugs, placing them in the Traveler's Bag. This was out of concern that the upcoming intense battle might cause devastating damage to them.

Similarly, he wore the Mirror Cufflink on his cuff, preparing to use it.

As soon as Lumian appeared at the mountain peak, he saw the pus flowing from Guei's corpse fragments seep into the bodies and bones forming the ground, igniting nearly invisible and colorless flames.

Those flames instantly engulfed Guei's dismembered body, burning it to ashes, giving no chance for it to writhe and grow.

At the same time, Lumian noticed that the almost invisible remnant flames that had existed at the peak had mostly extinguished, with the remaining ones about to burn out completely.

He had also noticed earlier from the mountain base that the scattered remnant flames on the wasteland were successively extinguishing.

Of course, this did not affect the illumination of the corpse mountain and its surrounding areas. Light came from the purple fiery glow seeping through the massive vortex high in the sky, from the corpses, bones, and different parts of the wasteland ignited during the battle between Albus Medici, Celeste, and the monster Guei, and from the charred banner that was shaking and vibrating with increasing frequency.

The original remnant flames are extinguishing? Were they not always present, but rather created by 0-01 in response to the appearance of Hand Bro, a being with godhood? As this thought struck Lumian, he gripped the ordinary straight sword resembling the Sword of Courage with both hands and ran towards Albus Medici, who was about a dozen meters away.

With a whoosh, the straight sword burst into blazing-white flames.

Albus, with his brow mark vivid and seemingly about to drip, bent down, letting his hands touch the corpses and bones forming the mountain.

The flesh of some corpses suddenly melted, becoming viscous, while bones rapidly gathered.

Albus then straightened up, forcibly pulling from the corpse-and-bone ground a huge white sword temporarily formed from countless spines and neck bones, with melted viscous flesh entwined around it, bringing a bloody and bizarre appearance.

Albus dragged this bizarrely shaped, horrifying giant sword to meet Lumian.

Crack! The giant sword of bones protruding through waxy flesh split Lumian's blazing white flame sword in two with a single strike.

Lumian's figure vanished, rapidly reappearing behind Albus.

He swiftly drew another iron-black straight sword resembling the Sword of Courage from the Traveler's Bag and struck heavily at the neck of this Medici family member before him.

Albus swiftly turned, swinging his monstrous giant sword horizontally, once again shattering Lumian's weapon.

Lumian teleported once more, again flashing behind his enemy.

But as soon as his figure began to materialize, sharp icy spears condensed in mid-air, raining down like a storm.

Celeste, who had concealed herself and circled to an unknown location, launched an area attack targeting both Albus and Lumian.

Lumian then saw dense fog.

It surged out from around Albus, instantly enveloping the area, reducing visibility to ten meters and preventing Lumian from sensing spirit world coordinates beyond the fog, making it difficult to directly teleport out.

Fog of War!

Immediately after, Albus, now out of Lumian and Celeste's sight, pressed a layered, compressed, yet still massive blue fireball towards the ground of the corpse mountain.

Boom!

A terrifying explosion that temporarily deafened swept across the area, dispersing the dense Fog of War, vaporizing the falling icy spears, destroying part of the corpses and bones, and igniting others.

Almost simultaneously, Lumian's figure was reflected in the black breastplate of a corpse on the wasteland.

Earlier, when his teleportation was restricted, he had immediately taken out a mirror from the Traveler's Bag and activated the Mirror Cufflink on his left cuff.

Using this Beyonder item, Lumian had entered the mirror world just before Albus created the indiscriminate explosion and the dense icy spears fell, escaping from the peak of the corpse mountain.

This was similar to his choice when escaping from Albus and Gusain's encirclement in that underground cavern filled with the fog of war.

Lumian jumped out of the smooth black metal breastplate, and the glass-like ornament on his cuff instantly turned grayish-white, crumbling into dust that scattered to the ground.

The Mirror Cufflink had been used for the last time.

At the peak of the corpse mountain, Albus had already turned and was rushing towards the increasingly violently shaking 0-01.

At this point, Julie's pool of filthy blood was only about a meter away from the surface of the charred banner.

Since Albus's battle with the monster Guei began, the blood no longer felt as if it was being held up by an invisible hand and continued to fall, albeit at an increasingly slower pace.

Seeing 0-01 within reach, a mirror of ice and snow, two to three people tall, suddenly rose in front of Albus.

The mirror instantly reflected Albus's figure.

Similar ice mirrors abruptly appeared to Albus's sides and behind him, reflecting different angles of this Red Angel descendant.

As these giant ice mirrors formed, thick, snake-like strands of blackened hair emerged from the edge of the mountain, carrying the quiet and eerie Demoness's black flames, rapidly extending towards those mirrors.

Celeste intended to curse Albus with this!

Albus swiftly turned sideways, facing the source of those snake-like black hairs, and saw Celeste, cloaked in a black robe with an oddly flushed face.

Boom!

Multiple blazing white, blue-tinged fireballs quickly condensed, shattering those four huge ice mirrors into pieces. However, these fragments melted slowly, continuing to reflect Albus's image from different angles, densely awaiting the arrival of the snake-like hairs carrying the Demoness's flames.

Holding the bizarre giant sword, Albus suddenly transformed into a blazing white, blue-tinged fire person, expanding to three to four meters tall.

This brought continuous high temperatures, completely melting those ice mirror fragments.

Silently, Celeste withdrew those long hairs covered in black flames, once again concealing her form, moving to an unknown location.

Lumian teleported over.

This time, he drew the iron-black Sword of Courage from the Traveler's Bag-the true Sword of Courage!

Enduring the continuous burning pain of sulfurous flames, Lumian was instantly filled with courage.

What's there to fear from just a Sequence 5 who can borrow some power from the Red Angel?

Why hide?

Lumian swung the Sword of Courage at Albus Medici, only igniting the godhood-possessing straight sword with blazing white, blue-tinged flames just before it was about to clash with Albus's bizarre bone and flesh sword.

Having courage didn't mean not using schemes and tricks!

Albus's now iron-black eyes showed no surprise; instead, a smile curled at the corners of his mouth.

His bizarre bone and flesh sword suddenly burst into near-blue flames.

You've been pretending to be weak all along, only using ordinary straight swords. How could I not be prepared for you to suddenly use a godhood-possessing attack?

Albus's body abruptly metallized, instantly boosting his strength to its peak.

Boom!

The two swords collided, creating a sound like an exploding shell.

The blast of wind failed to shake Albus, whose skin now had an iron-black tinge, pushing Lumian and his Sword of Courage back.

Suddenly, Lumian melted into a viscous black liquid that seemed to be formed from the most sinister desires deep within the human heart.

He disintegrated on the ground, rapidly flowing to the bottom of Albus's feet, covering him like a shadow.

Crack! The illusory, viscous, chilling black liquid suddenly dispersed, and a mirror tinged with silvery-black fell onto the corpses and bones, shattering into pieces.

Mirror Substitution? Lumian was shocked.

Albus has Mirror Substitution too?

No, he hadn't used it in several dangerous situations before!

Albus's figure emerged from a mirror near the peak of the corpse mountain, smiling as he transformed into a blazing-white, blue-tinged flame spear, flying back to the battlefield-that mirror was a remnant of Celeste's Mirror Maze.

He didn't have Mirror Substitution, but he could still traverse the mirror world using the crystal necklace coiled around his wrist. During Lumian's first attack, he had prepared a mirror in advance, hiding it at his waist under his tattered jacket.

The indescribable monster appeared so abruptly and strangely, pursuing you. How could I not be prepared for you in this aspect?

As for how to quickly escape combat without Mirror Substitution and avoid being affected, you've demonstrated it twice already!

Seeing the flame spear flying towards him, Lumian, still in his viscous black liquid state, immediately seeped into the gaps between the corpses and bones, using this to leave the mountain peak.

Filled with courage, he didn't intend to flee. To avoid being trapped by the Fog of War again without the Mirror Cufflink, he planned to circle around to the other side, seeking new opportunities to corrupt Albus Medici.

Fleeing was definitely not an option!

At this moment, Lumian suddenly felt a rather intense weakness.

Has my spirituality dried up prematurely? No, it's not just a matter of spirituality... Lumian thought as he reverted to human form and released his accumulated spirituality.

Clang!

His right hand inexplicably lost strength, making it difficult to hold onto the Sword of Courage. He could only watch helplessly as the iron-black straight sword fell to the ground, clanging against a stark white skeleton.

Why didn't I teleport to create distance first?

I... I seem to be sick...

Lumian was suddenly alarmed and immediately activated the black mark on his right shoulder, disappearing from near the peak of the corpse mountain.

He left the Sword of Courage there, not retrieving it for the moment.

He was hoping the opponent would trigger one of its negative effects- in about ten minutes, if the Sword of Courage wasn't sealed away, it would indiscriminately attack nearby people.

And now, the people around the Sword of Courage were Albus Medici and Celeste.

As soon as Lumian's figure materialized on the wasteland, Albus at the peak of the corpse mountain slightly furrowed his brow.

This descendant of the Red Angel swayed slightly, noticeably weaker than before.

He seemed to have fallen ill as well.

Chapter 838: Bluffing

838 Bluffing

Albus's right hand holding the weapon drooped down, seemingly too weak to bear the weight of the bone and flesh sword. He planted it on the ground made of corpses and bones, but compared to Lumian directly dropping the Sword of Courage, he was clearly much better off.

At the same time, Celeste's voice, filled with anticipation and cruel amusement, emanated from various mirrors and mirror-like objects scattered across the corpse mountain and wasteland, "How are you feeling? Confused about when you got infected with the plague?"

Sure enough, it's a Demoness's Plague... Standing on the wasteland, Lumian took advantage of the moment before his muscles completely lost strength, when he could still lift light objects, to quickly remove the Devil's Whispers bone ring from his finger and stuff it back into the Traveler's Bag.

Wearing this ring would cause Lumian to be constantly burned by sulfurous flames, inside and out, continuously weakening his resistance and tolerance to Plague. Although he was already poisoned by sulfur and had some degree of burns, stopping the damage in time was still very important.

After putting away the Devil's Whispers bone ring, Lumian took out the brass talisman and matching earplugs given by Archbishop Heraberg, gripping one in his left palm and putting the other back into his left ear.

"Listen!" Lumian again uttered this ancient Hermes word, continuing his learning process.

Meanwhile, Celeste's voice continued to emanate from various mirror surfaces and mirror-like objects: "We were certain that the operation targeting 0-01 would face interference and competition from Beyonders of the Hunter pathway, and we would inevitably have to confront Wanak. So, we prepared a Grade 1 Sealed Artifact in advance. The mystical pathogen it produces has a very notable characteristic-it can survive in high-temperature flames for a period of time.

"And I can use the power of the special mirror world to let those pathogens spread quietly through different mirror surfaces, silently dispersing throughout this wasteland and corpse mountain.

"You've been setting fires all along, but I've also been continuously releasing frost, pretending to attack and curse. This actually freezes those mystical pathogens inside, allowing them to survive longer in high temperatures. Combined with their own special nature, it's enough for you to be contaminated partially, slowly seeping into your bodies..."

Celeste explained in great detail, as if wanting to bring pain and savor despair.

This might be her hobby, or perhaps a negative influence brought by certain items.

Albus Medici, leaning on that bone and flesh sword, kept turning his body, looking in different directions, seemingly trying to quickly pinpoint Celeste's true form and drag her out of the mirror world.

However, it was impossible to discern which mirror Celeste was in just from the source of the sound. She might have been constantly moving through the mirror world without stopping.

Similarly, even if Albus recited those three passages of the honorific name again, he could only affect the special mirror world in this area at the peak of the corpse mountain. He couldn't damage the "mirrors" in the middle and lower parts of the corpse mountain and on the wasteland.

Celeste's voice gradually became shrill, both painful and pleasurable.

"This pathogen also has flaws. It's not the type that will have fatal effects in a short time. It can only make you quickly lose your physical strength, accelerate the dissipation of spirituality, and eventually make you lie on the ground, unable to move, desperately listening to your own heart gradually weakening and stop beating."

Hearing this, Lumian teleported to change his position, avoiding being assassinated by Celeste taking advantage of the situation.

Some thoughts flashed through his mind: Could I wear the Eggers family's golden mask to counteract the damage from this mystical pathogen?

If I stop my heart from beating in advance, I won't have to worry about it losing strength!

No, this mystical pathogen seems to affect the Spirit Body as well. Perhaps, after physical death, the Spirit Body will gradually lose the power to maintain its own existence...

Moreover, Archbishop Heraberg said that becoming a deceased here would only lead to eternal slumber... Well, perhaps in the future, one might be 'awakened' as a puppet of 0-01...

Albus Medici at the peak of the corpse mountain suddenly laughed.

"So that's how it is. I do feel weakened.

"Even with my ancestor helping me share the impact, in three or four minutes I should completely lose my fighting ability, barely able to crawl.

"But I don't remember if I told you what I was going to do in the underground mausoleum, or if you noticed that the abnormality had already occurred?"

As he spoke, Albus's smile gradually brightened.

His demeanor was composed, appearing very confident and assured, not panicked at all.

Celeste, who had been emitting sounds from different mirrors and mirror-like objects to delay time until the effects of the mystical pathogen deepened, suddenly fell silent.

She seemed to be observing her surroundings, trying to find the abnormality Albus mentioned.

Albus moved his neck and said with an upturned corner of his mouth,

"I only have three things to accomplish here:

"First is to kill Wanak, so that 0-01 no longer has a proxy of this level;

"Second is to recite my ancestor's honorific names around 0-01, causing it to resonate and gradually awaken;

"Third, heh heh, is to delay time, waiting for 0-01 to break free from this corpse mountain on its own.

"Haven't you noticed that the frequency and amplitude of 0-01's trembling and shaking are getting higher and larger?

"Haven't you noticed that 0-01 is about to break free from the corpse mountain?"

Wh- Celeste, hidden near the peak of the corpse mountain, concealed in one of the components of the previous Mirror Maze to closely observe Albus's movements and ready to interfere with the target's self-rescue at any time, tensed up and instinctively looked towards the violently shaking and trembling 0-01.

She then saw that charred banner with the dangerous blood spots densely covering it.

Her head suddenly buzzed, and her neck ached.

She was further corrupted!

Crack!

The mirror where Celeste was hiding instantly shattered, revealing her figure, with a blank expression, her head trying to separate from her neck.

Now! Albus seized the opportunity, discarding the heavy bone and flesh sword, transforming into a blazing white, blue-tinged flame spear, swooshing down near Celeste.

Then, he created a dense Fog of War, enveloping Celeste and the area within about ten meters around this Demoness.

After completing this, Albus didn't give Celeste a chance to break free from her corrupted state and escape the Fog of War through the mirror world. Mustering his remaining strength, he condensed several blue fireballs and sent them crashing into the Fog of War one after another.

Rumble!

Relatively violent explosions occurred, and pale blue flames rose up. Celeste's Mirror Substitution was passively triggered.

But affected and misled by the Fog of War, her figure reappeared still within the blast range, still covered by shock waves powerful enough to destroy a Demoness's body.

Albus controlled the power of the fireballs, ensuring the Fog of War was never dispersed, causing Celeste's Mirror Substitutions to shatter one after another.

Similarly, he also controlled the frequency of fireballs bombarding that small area of fog, not giving Celeste even a slight chance to recover and enter the mirror world.

Finally, Celeste's shadow froze. That beautiful and seductive body blackened and disintegrated, falling to the ground in the form of corpse fragments.

Plop, the black teardrop-shaped ornament she had been wearing on her brow fell onto a corpse.

Albus stopped maintaining the Fog of War and looked at the dead Celeste, laughing mockingly.

"Oh, I forgot to tell you, my calmness just now was feigned. I needed to delay for five to six minutes to wait for 0-01 to resonate with my ancestor to the extreme, initially awaken, and break free from the constraints of the corpse mountain.

"Why were you in such a hurry? So hurried that you forgot direct eye contact with 0-01 would lead to corruption, and you were already corrupted to some extent.

"Remember, being too hasty or too slow are both major taboos in war."

While mocking the dead, Albus didn't go to pick up that black teardrop-shaped ornament which clearly possessed Beyonder power, fearing it might trigger corresponding negative effects and impact subsequent matters, especially since he was already considerably weakened.

At this point, his hands and feet had become powerless, running had become difficult, so he could only transform again into a blazing white, blue-tinged flame spear, flying back near 0-01.

He glanced at Julie's filthy blood slowly falling in mid-air, estimating it was only about 30-40 centimeters away from the target.

Albus then threw a blue fireball at it, burning that pool of filthy blood, causing it to slowly evaporate and dissipate without triggering any additional changes.

After closing his eyes to sense the frequency and amplitude of 0-01's shaking and trembling, Albus silently said to himself, It seems to be progressing faster than expected, two or three more minutes should be enough.

Heh heh, Celeste, I lied about one thing earlier. In the end, 0-01 still can't break free on its own, it needs me to help it with Medici family blood...

I didn't mock your corpse earlier because I had too much time, some words needed to be heard by Lumian Lee, to make him overlook the part where I lied...

Albus Medici then turned to look at the wasteland, at Lumian who had just completed a teleportation to change his position to avoid being locked onto, and said loudly with a laugh, "You're very alert. In such a pressing situation, you actually didn't follow that fool Celeste to observe the abnormalities of 0-01."

Lumian raised his hand to scratch his right ear, telling a lie that couldn't be more obvious, "Sorry, I was learning, I didn't hear your conversation just now. Alright, I admit, I was thinking Celeste would help me confirm the current situation of 0-01."

Albus looked at this guy and said thoughtfully, "You're very calm. Your physical combat ability should be almost depleted by now. As for me, with my ancestor sharing the burden, I can definitely hold out longer than you."

Lumian laughed, laughing with composure and confidence, exuding the brilliance of atop student. "Haven't you noticed that there are other abnormalities here?"

Chapter 839: The "Hidden" Taboo

839 The "Hidden" Taboo

Other abnormalities? Albus's first reaction was that Lumian was imitating him, trying to trick him into looking at something he shouldn't.

He cautiously scanned the wasteland below the corpse mountain, only seeing undead soldiers fallen in different places and nearly extinguished colorless embers.

During this process, Albus also listened for any movements around him, but apart from the increasingly violent trembling and shaking of 0-01, he received no other information.

"Are you trying to delay time this way? I think this is more advantageous for me," Albus replied to Lumian with a smile.

The image of this competitor was reflected in his iron-black eyes as he quickly estimated the probability of launching a successful surprise attack in his mind.

He wanted to eliminate the last hidden danger before losing his close combat ability.

Lumian didn't give Albus this opportunity. Although his arms had weakened to the point where he could only pick up relatively light objects, and his legs were so weak he could barely walk, the accumulated spirituality he released was still quite abundant, enough to support him in completing many teleportations.

His figure disappeared from Albus's sight, then reappeared on the side of the corpse mountain.

Before Albus could find him, Lumian said with a smile, "It's understandable that you didn't notice other abnormalities here. After all, you don't seem to be someone who enjoys studying. And your ancestor, that Red Angel, although having a very thorough understanding of 0-01, the current 0-01 is no longer the same as before.

"From the Sealed Artifact information, I know that after your ancestor was killed by the Blood Emperor, 0-01 changed hands twice-once to Alista Tudor, and once to Death from the Southern Continent. Therefore, it has been corrupted by other, equally high-level corruptions."

Seeing Albus's gaze turn towards him, seemingly listening and discerning the truth of his words without immediate intention to launch an attack, Lumian stayed in place and continued, "Of course, your ancestor visited Fourth Epoch Trier and understood the various details of the corresponding seal. Morora's seal was modeled after Trier's, so you definitely wouldn't lack understanding of the situation here. But the seals on both sides are only mostly similar, with many details still having critical differences.

"The book 'Principles of Sealing' tells me that this is because 0-01 and its corruption are purer compared to Fourth Epoch Trier; it's less complex, can form fewer balances and constraints, and many characteristic issues are more prominent.

"If your ancestor were to come in person, take a turn in the underground mausoleum, no, just take a few glances, He would definitely understand what abnormality I'm talking about. But unfortunately, He can't descend to Morora, and probably can't see or hear directly through the seal using your eyes and ears. He can only give you power, help you share the damage, and listen to your reports periodically.

"Under these circumstances, heh heh, it's indeed understandable that you didn't notice other abnormalities here."

Albus Medici stared down at Lumian, listening to his narrative with a smile on his face, while pondering where the problem actually lay.

Rambling on and on about irrelevant things, it does seem like he's trying to buy time.

But buying time is more beneficial to me... The resonance between 0-01 and my ancestor is getting stronger and stronger. In two or three more minutes, I'll be able to approach and drip some Medici family blood...

His condition will only deteriorate faster than mine, the longer we delay, the weaker he'll become...

Is he waiting for reinforcements? But unless the Archbishop of the Church of Knowledge personally intervenes, there should be no one in Morora who can participate in this struggle, and those outside Morora can't come in... The Church of Knowledge currently appears quite neutral, at most with a slight inclination in secret, they won't directly get involved. Hehe, I need to be vigilant about this point, so-called scholars are more treacherous than us Hunters, the more knowledge they have, the more treacherous they become...

It's a pity, this trash can is very alert, he'll teleport away at the slightest sign of trouble, while I need to get close to release the Fog of War... No wonder my ancestor said that before Alista Tudor became a god, he found Bethel Abraham more troublesome...

Continuously feinting attacks, forcing him to use teleport repeatedly, draining his Spirituality? That's one way. If we really go on according to his pace, by the time his spirituality is insufficient to support teleport, I'll also be almost unable to complete the battle, even standing will be difficult, only able to rely on Fire Ravens-scatter shots-like a blind man shooting birds...

But if feints are to be convincing, they need to consume a lot of spirituality, and if they're not convincing, they can't bluff anyone...

Why does this dog shit-like pathogen target the physical body first, then affect the Spirit Body? If the rate of spirituality dissipation could be as fast as the loss of muscle strength, the problem would be simple. In that case, I wouldn't need to hold out for too long, just longer than this trash can.

As Albus's thoughts raced, Lumian smiled and said, "Do you need me to give you a hint?

"I don't know if you've seen the sealing information for 0-01, but you must be very familiar with the various taboos here. Haven't you noticed that two sections of the content, or rather, two of the taboos, hide problems?"

Two taboos hiding problems? Albus suddenly had a dangerous intuition, he began to believe that some of what Lumian said might be true.

Lumian said with a mocking tone, "Haven't figured it out yet? See, this is the consequence of not studying. I didn't notice it at first either, but after reading a large amount of related books and materials in Morora, I gradually developed doubts.

"Let me give you another hint. The first problematic taboo is that experimental subjects must cover their eyes and carry a lamp, and if the lamp goes out, that experimental personnel will directly disappear, and everyone who knows him will simultaneously believe that he died long ago."

"What's wrong with that? I've already had people verify the authenticity of this taboo. Hehe, it's only because there are many light sources here, otherwise we would have all disappeared by now," Albus quickly thought about the details he might have overlooked.

At this moment, Lumian's figure suddenly disappeared.

He teleported to change his position, appearing near the top of the corpse mountain, next to the Sword of Courage.

Taking advantage of the fact that he could still move the Traveler's Bag, he crouched down and slipped the bag he had been holding in advance over the Sword of Courage, returning it to its companions.

At this time, Albus, not expecting Lumian to appear so close to the top of the corpse mountain, was still searching for the target with his gaze across the wasteland.

By the time he reacted and condensed blue fireballs to bombard downwards, Lumian had already activated the black mark on his right shoulder and truly teleported to somewhere in the wasteland.

He risked picking up the Sword of Courage because he now realized that he might be the one facing its indiscriminate attacks later.

As the rumbling explosions just began to subside, Lumian's voice sounded again:

"Haven't you figured it out yet?

"After I arrived at the real corpse mountain, I actually doubted my guess and completely abandoned it, but the later results made me more certain, and allowed me to figure out more problems along the way."

Lumian spoke to Albus Medici from afar in the tone of a teacher, "The answer is, why must it be experimental subjects carrying lit lamps to enter, why not place burning wall lamps at intervals inside the underground mausoleum and replace the lamp oil regularly? Although this would consume more resources, it would be more convenient and safer. The Church of Knowledge's financial power couldn't possibly be unable to support such an arrangement.

"Is it to make the seal seem mysterious and terrifying? Obviously not, there are clearly deeper reasons."

Albus Medici's eyes flickered slightly, vaguely having some guesses.

He cast his gaze towards the embers scattered across the corpse mountain.

Lumian's figure disappeared again, appearing among Celeste's corpse fragments.

He then inverted the Traveler's Bag over the black teardrop-shaped forehead ornament, collecting it.

This time, Albus tracked Lumian's figure in time, but he didn't make a move, nor did he transform into a flame spear to throw himself over.

This was firstly because the other could teleport away at any time, and secondly because what Lumian was doing now was also beneficial to him.

Albus was almost certain that the forehead ornament was the "source" of the current mystical pathogen. After placing it in another space, the concentration of pathogens here would gradually decrease, preventing their conditions from rapidly deteriorating, allowing them to hold out longer.

After putting away the forehead ornament, Lumian immediately teleported to the wasteland on the other side of the corpse mountain, smiling at Albus.

"The second problematic taboo is 'Beyonders with strength surpassing Sequence 5 are forbidden from approaching. Warning, Beyonders with strength surpassing Sequence 5 are forbidden from approaching.'"

Albus immediately understood Lumian's line of thought and asked in a deep voice, "You mean there's no need to specifically emphasize that Beyonders above Sequence 5 cannot approach?

"Indeed, in reality, as long as they're not already corrupted experimental subjects or special people like us, whether they're above Sequence 5 or not, they shouldn't approach 0-01."

Lumian wanted to applaud, but even adjusting the Traveler's Bag was quite strenuous for him now.

He said with a tone that approved his educatability, "Yes, so why specifically emphasize that Beyonders above Sequence 5 cannot approach?

"Probably because when Beyonders above Sequence 5 approach 0-01, besides bringing danger to themselves, it would also trigger additional, more terrifying abnormalities. Therefore, it must be specially warned!

"Just now, the appearance of Hand Bro brought about an attack from 0-01, leaving embers all over this wasteland and corpse mountain. And from my observation, these embers will extinguish on their own.

"What does this indicate? It indicates that before we came in, this place was in darkness, without any firelight.

"Combining this with the first problematic taboo I mentioned, and with what the book 'Principles of Sealing' says about self-balance and self-sealing, the potential hidden danger becomes very clear."

Albus's expression changed slightly, obviously realizing what the possible abnormality might be.

Lumian once again changed his position using teleportation and continued, "That hidden danger is that there's a latent taboo:

"The underground mausoleum needs eternal, deathly darkness. It can occasionally have light, but there can't be continuous light in the same place. And when Beyonders above Sequence 5 with godhood approach, it instinctively causes 0-01 to burn this area, bringing embers that can last for a period of time."

At this point, Lumian's smile grew even brighter.

"Now, the embers have been burning for a while, and you're still continuously creating firelight.

"I'm very curious about what will happen next."

What will happen? Albus Medici's gaze instantly froze, his back suddenly tensing.

He knew where the problem lay now!

The frequency and amplitude of 0-01's trembling and shaking were more violent than he had anticipated, progressing faster!

At this moment, the entire sky suddenly took on the color of burning.

Chapter 840: The Importance of Knowledge

840 The Importance of Knowledge

Inside Morora.

Two exiles who were dueling suddenly dropped their swords and clutched their necks with their hands.

Blood seeped through their fingers.

Nearby onlookers and pedestrians also experienced a stuttering effect, as if their heads were being grabbed by invisible hands and forcefully pulled upwards, causing the muscles in their necks to gradually tear.

In the endless graveyard near the Knowledge Cathedral, all the trees suddenly burst into bright red flames. The soil in the corresponding graves writhed as if something was trying to crawl out.

More and more clouds gathered in the sky, taking on the color of burning fire.

At the top of the corpse mountain.

Albus Medici's neck also stung with pain. He raised his hand with great difficulty and weakness, trying to press down on it.

He already understood what was happening. He didn't hastily turn his head to look directly at 0-01, as that would not only result in considerable corruption, but could also break his neck, causing his head to detach!

Albus slowly turned his body to face 0-01, but closed his eyes.

At the same time, he heard rustling and clanging sounds from the wasteland.

Lumian saw those undead soldiers in iron-black full body armor standing up one after another, the dark red or pale flames in their eye sockets clearly flickering.

The huge cloud vortex in the sky tinged with purple firelight was being torn apart and smoothed by an invisible force.

The abnormality had finally manifested.

Albus didn't hesitate. He immediately let his skin take on an iron-black hue, his entire body seeming to transform into a metal-cast puppet.

Keeping his eyes tightly shut, he approached 0-01 step by step.

During this process, his neck was noticeably stretched, causing the iron membrane that made up his skin to be torn into countless tiny metal threads.

Deep, chilling cut marks appeared on his iron-black flesh and bones, with bright red blood visibly oozing out.

In just a few seconds, Albus Medici walked to 0-01's side. He released his right palm that had been weakly pressing on his neck, letting it extend towards the charred flag, carrying his own blood.

As a fellow Hunter, Albus also had very strong spatial perception and positioning abilities. Moreover, 0-01's flag was violently shaking, fluttering loudly, with sounds entering Albus's ears, making it easy for him to determine the target's location.

Of course, if he directly touched 0-01's main body, the corruption would truly occur. This couldn't be avoided just by not looking. But Albus now had no other choice.

Just as he reached out towards that charred flag, Albus heard a "snap" sound- the sound of the iron skin on his metal neck being completely torn apart.

He immediately changed his form, transforming from an iron-black metal-cast puppet into a blue human-shaped flame.

This caused the blood on his palm to evaporate rapidly.

While guarding against a sudden attack from Lumian, Albus quickened his movements, continuously flicking the mostly evaporated bright red blood towards the front.

On the wasteland, Lumian was mingling among the undead soldiers, his palm both scorching hot and ice-cold.

He didn't dare to look towards 0-01, so he naturally didn't know Albus's current actions, but he could roughly guess that the other was making a final gamble.

It's useless, the situation has already spiraled out of your control... Lumian muttered, not moving to stop him.

He was more worried that if he really teleported next to Salinger's Blood Banner to stop Albus Medici from dripping blood on it, he might step into a trap set by the other.

Given the current situation, Albus could completely change his approach- since he couldn't achieve his intended goal, he might as well eliminate all competitors, making his side the more advantageous camp, and then use this to reorganize.

So, Albus was likely pretending to drip Medici family blood onto 0-01's flag, but actually trying to lure Lumian to stop him, thus seizing the opportunity to kill the last competitor.

At the top of the corpse mountain, the human-shaped flame that Albus had transformed into was severely stretched, with the upper and lower parts seeming about to separate.

At the same time, the flaming light he emitted dimmed considerably, like ordinary flames doused with a bucket of ice-cold fresh blood.

Plop, Albus heard the tiny sound of liquid hitting the flag.

After thousands of years, the Medici family's blood finally fell on 0-01's charred flag again.

However, there was no additional change.

This was also within Albus's expectations, after all, the degree of resonance had not yet reached its limit, and 0-01's awakening situation had significantly exceeded any threshold.

Albus's desperate attempt to leave blood on the charred flag was more about reserving a chess piece for the future, making some preparations.

The next second, Albus, existing in the form of a human-shaped flame, felt an intense pain between his eyebrows.

Some strange force extended from 0-01, seeming to want to assimilate him, turning him into its own flame.

Albus suddenly turned around, opened his eyes, and looked towards the wasteland.

He wanted to kill Lumian before being absorbed by 0-01, eliminating the last competitor!

That trash can actually managed to stay calm and didn't come to stop me from smearing blood on 0-01's surface... Amidst Albus's regret, Lumian's figure was "reflected" in his flaming eyes.

Lumian smiled at him, activated the black mark on his right shoulder, and disappeared from his spot.

Albus didn't hide his disappointment and regret, reverting to his human form.

His neck was already torn open, revealing white bones and blackened blood vessels.

He then activated the crystal necklace wrapped around his wrist, causing it to explode directly.

Bang bang bang, the consecutively exploding crystals formed a deep vortex in front of Albus, with a deep, dark world covered by a glass-like barrier at the bottom of the vortex-that special mirror world.

Under extremely urgent circumstances and unable to directly leave Morora, Albus Medici chose to jump into the dark vortex in front of him, falling towards that special mirror world.

At this moment, his neck was about to break, with his cervical vertebrae exposed.

He fell into that special mirror world, disappearing into the deep darkness.

The dark vortex next to 0-01 was immediately ignited by invisible, colorless flames and dissipated completely.

In midair, the blue flame that had lost Albus's maintenance quickly extinguished, with the remaining tiny bit of Julie's filthy blood continuing to fall, touching the charred flag.

All over Morora.

Nearly ten thousand heads dragging white, blood-stained spines flew in the sky, while their headless bodies ran wildly through the streets.

In the graveyard, countless skeletons crawled out from underground, with dark red or pale flames burning in their eye sockets.

Red "rainwater" that could ignite buildings and humans began to fall from the sky.

Inside the Knowledge Cathedral, Archbishop Heraberg of Morora, wearing a plain white robe trimmed with brass wire, stood in front of the open stained glass window, feeling the walls faintly showing signs of melting.

He sighed lightly and raised his palm.

...

In the underground mausoleum, on that anomalous wasteland.

Lumian teleported to the side of the corpse mountain.

Just as he was about to sit down against the corpses and skeletons, his legs already unable to support his body weight, he was suddenly pulled by an invisible force, slowly standing up again and walking towards the group of undead soldiers.

This required no effort from him-he had no strength to use anyway.

Lumian didn't resist or struggle, as if only his self-consciousness still belonged to him.

The burning pain and icy rotting sensation in his right palm kept him basically alert.

As long as my head isn't torn off my neck, everything else is fine... Lumian muttered to himself while listening to the knowledge narrated by the brass talisman, continuing to walk towards the gathering troops in the wasteland as 0-01's puppet with the help of the external force.

The current situation was basically consistent with his expectations.

If he had read even a little less earlier, his head and body would have already gone separate ways by now.

Knowledge is power, knowledge is wealth!

After about ten seconds, the sky suddenly dimmed, and darkness surged back into this area.

0-01 seemed to be gripped by an invisible hand, with its trembling and shaking starting to calm down.

The flames in this area extinguished one after another, and the deathly silent, cold darkness once again ruled this place.

The Church of Knowledge has finally suppressed 0-01's disturbance. If it kept up a while longer, I'd really have become a puppet... Lumian secretly breathed a sigh of relief, feeling the darkness invade his body like an invisible, eerie, cold flow of water.

The Underworld Daoist mark on his right palm emitted an even stronger sense of decay than before, helping him resist this invasion.

Lumian teleported back to the position he had chosen earlier, weakly sitting down against the corpses and skeletons that made up the mountain.

He closed his eyes, focusing on listening to the knowledge transmitted from his ear plugs in this lightless, pure darkness.

...

In Trier, on the sacrificial square at the entrance of the third level of the underground catacombs.

After answering Jenna's question, that blurry and holy female figure disappeared from Jenna's sight, as if it was just part of an illusion.

Jenna shook her head, her gaze returning to reality, seeing Franca's concerned face.

"D-during my advancement, I seemed to sense Lady Krismona again, and even had a few words of dialogue with Her," Jenna carefully told her companion about her recent experience.

Hiss, do Angel-level high-rank beings truly not die? Franca asked curiously, "What did She say?"

Jenna suddenly felt a bit embarrassed. "She said to reconcile with my mirror self, because we are originally one. Sh-She said Her father was... was that 'Blood Emperor'..."

"Huh?" Franca was both shocked and confused, "Why did She tell you this?"

Jenna felt even more embarrassed. "I asked, I asked without thinking..."

"Is it really the 'Blood Emperor'? Then it shouldn't be your hallucination. You couldn't have come up with such an answer even in a hallucination." Franca whispered, gradually getting excited.

"Dammit, what do you mean I couldn't have come up with it even in a hallucination? Well, indeed, who could have thought of that?" Jenna reflexively retorted.

Franca then clapped her hands together.

"That was a good question, a good question indeed! This information is extremely, extremely important!"

Her eyes sparkling, she said, "Lumian previously suspected that the special mirror world was created by the Blood Emperor Alista Tudor to deal with the Primordial Demoness, and the Tamara family might have played a very important role in this matter.

"Now it seems this guess needs to be abandoned. Perhaps that special mirror world was jointly created by the Blood Emperor Alista Tudor and the Primordial Demoness!

"Otherwise, how could a true god of the Hunter pathway without mirror magic create such a special mirror world?"

Chapter 841: The Brand

841 The Brand

Jenna paused before responding, "True."

Initially, they believed the special mirror world was a result of the War of the Four Emperors, created in the aftermath of fierce battles among beings like the Primordial Demoness and the Blood Emperor. However, after Lumian explored the treasury of the Blue Avenger, he uncovered new information suggesting the special mirror world existed before the War of the Four Emperors. He speculated it was a tool crafted by Blood Emperor Alista Tudor to counter the Primordial Demoness and a means for resurrection.

Their greatest confusion at the time was why Alista Tudor, a true god of the Hunter pathway, could create such a uniquely bizarre mirror world. Did high-rank beings of the Apprentice pathway under Him participate?

Franca then remarked wistfully, "According to Lumian's theory and our experience, both Hunters and Demonesses bring calamity. Wouldn't a true god of the Hunter pathway combined with one from the Demoness pathway essentially epitomize the concept of disaster? No wonder Fourth Epoch Trier ended up the way it did...

"However, is it possible for true deities from neighboring pathways to cooperate amicably, instead of immediately succumbing to the urge to converge and battle for dominance?"

Jenna, puzzled by this question, pursed her lips in thought before asking, "Is there a way to control that urge to converge?"

"That's beyond my knowledge for now, at least until I come into contact with the corresponding mystical knowledge after becoming an Angel," Franca self-deprecatingly said, her thoughts wandering. "Perhaps the Primordial Demoness could, but definitely not the Blood Emperor. Given our understanding of the history of the Fourth Epoch, He was a violent, bloodthirsty madman. How could He control Himself unless someone helped Him? Who could that be?"

Jenna paused thoughtfully and then said, "The Tamara family..."

"Uh..." Franca's eyes lit up. "Right, the Tamara family at that time was primarily known for the Apprentice pathway. High-rank beings of the Apprentice pathway excel at sealing and controlling space, and could utilize the mirror world to a certain extent. Yes, this explains why the Tamara family was involved in the creation of the special mirror world."

One of the two Special Mirror World Fragments they held came from a tomb of the Tamara family.

Growing more excited, Franca said, "The Tamara family must have been the bridge between the Blood Emperor and the Primordial Demoness, carrying out a secret mission! And since they had long been exposed to the Demoness Sect, it makes sense that some of their members sided with them after the split.

"And, moreover, since Lady Krismona is a descendant of the Blood Emperor, then Her twin brother, the current Demoness of Gray, probably is too. The Apprentice lineage of the Tamara family has borne many humiliations over the past thousand years, willingly becoming women to continue serving the direct descendants of the Blood Emperor. Such loyalty, such loyalty!"

As she spoke, Franca mockingly wiped away a tear, moved by her own words.

Jenna, long accustomed to her companion's boundless digressions and jokes, raised her own question, "Could a Sequence 2 Apprentice pathway

Angel from the Tamara family really seal the Blood Emperor's urge to converge?"

"If the Tamara family can't, what about Mr. Door?" Franca turned serious, pondering. "Lumian said He is the foremost noble of the Tudor Empire, and ranked behind Him, Amon, is a confirmed King of Angels. Then it's likely He is one too. A King of Angels of the Apprentice pathway might be able to temporarily seal the Blood Emperor's urge to converge, right? Was Mr. Door also involved in the matter of the special mirror world?"

"Possibly," Jenna agreed.

The normal mirror world was essentially an embodiment of the concept of "doors."

Franca's thoughts suddenly took a playful turn, chuckling softly. "There's also a possibility that the convergence behavior of the true deities of the Hunter and Demoness pathways differs from other pathways. First, they attract each other, dancing around each other, and only after reaching a certain climax do they start to devour each other, deciding the ultimate victor."

Jenna couldn't help but roll her eyes.

Franca was at it with her crude jokes again.

Of course, for Jenna, who had once frequented bars and dance halls in the market district, living as a Showy Diva for a long period, such coarse humor was hardly adult-only material.

Franca then composed herself. "I can now truly understand what the Demoness of Black meant. No wonder she asked me why I thought the Demoness Sect didn't control the special mirror world. She said it had been under the Primordial One's control until the end of the War of the Four Emperors.

"But she also believed that the special mirror world was initially created to combat the Primordial One, only later controlled by Her. Is she unaware of the secrets of those times and the Demoness of Gray's lineage, or is she just deceiving me, trying to mislead me? Or, did the Blood Emperor indeed initially want to combat the Primordial One, but She then took control of the nascent special mirror world, leading to Their cooperation?

"Or, was their cooperation aimed at combating something else?

"Ah, what was their purpose in creating such a special mirror world?"

Jenna shook her head honestly. "I don't know."

Franca thoughtfully stroked her ponytail.

"The Demoness of Black is both a descendant of the Primordial One and has the Tamara family's bloodline. She probably knows more about the special mirror world than I imagined."

Jenna hummed in response, rubbing her temples. "Either way, we need to report this information quickly."

Franca glanced at Jenna and cleared her throat. "You also need to go back and rest, adapting to the changes the potion has made to your body."

...

At the foot of the corpse mountain, Lumian sat with his eyes closed, his back against the piles of bodies and skeletons, intently listening to the monotonous voice emanating from the brass earplugs.

He was completing his studies.

He no longer needed to listen to all the remaining books; mastering this one would likely suffice. Yet, even so, it would still take over ten hours.

As time ticked away, Lumian's body grew weaker. Even with the support of the corpses and skeletons, he could no longer sit upright, relying solely on external forces to keep from collapsing.

His spirituality was evaporating faster, rendering him unable to use his teleportation ability anymore.

Fortunately, he had stowed away the artifact left by Celeste and the mystic pathogens had been dissipated completely by 0-01's activation; his condition hadn't worsened to the point where his heart was too weak to beat or his Spirit Body began to disintegrate, allowing him to barely keep at it.

After an indeterminate period, Lumian suddenly felt invigorated, his body regained strength, and his spirituality was replenished.

It was six in the morning based on Cordu time.

His body refreshed and free from illness, Lumian sat up straight and resumed the final part of his study.

Nearly 45 minutes later, he uttered an ancient Hermes word in a deep voice, "Stop!"

He felt he was on the brink of corruption and could not accumulate any more!

Just as the brass talisman finished transmitting the knowledge, Lumian's mind became hazy.

Vaguely, he "saw" the charred flag dotted with dangerous blood spots, surrounded by dense darkness, gently swaying.

Lumian also "saw" the ground covered in corpses, a vast army marching, the earth soaked in blood, countless severed arms and limbs...

A strong smell of blood and rust pierced his nose, as if coming from himself.

Lumian felt a certain call, not just from the charred flag but also from the dense darkness enveloping it.

The burning heat and icy cold in the palm of his right hand became more distinct.

They originated from the residual aura of the Blood Emperor and the seal left by the Underworld Daoist.

At that moment, Lumian suddenly realized another, deeper purpose of the Aurora Order's arrangement of the Dream Festival: With the Underworld Daoist's seal, I truly share a mystical similarity with 0-01...

0-01 once belonged to Blood Emperor Alista Tudor, then fell under the control of Death and suffered the corruption of the Death pathway's powers, which were also utilized by the Church of Knowledge to seal 0-01 itself. And now, I carry the residual aura of the Blood Emperor and the seal left by the Underworld Daoist, bearing powers of the Death, Evernight, and Warrior pathways...

With these thoughts flashing through his mind, Lumian combined the knowledge he had learned with the behavior of Albus and Julie, and amidst the strange and dangerous summons, he stood up and teleported to the top of the corpse mountain.

He didn't open his eyes. In the deathly silent, icy darkness, he couldn't see anything even if he did.

But as he drew closer, a sharp pain developed between Lumian's eyebrows, and his blood-or something else-seemed to want to burst through his pores and flesh.

Lumian didn't resist, enduring the pain.

Finally, a droplet, resembling blood, tore through his forehead and flew towards where 0-01 was located.

With a plop, the residual aura of the Blood Emperor inside Lumian suddenly boiled over, turning into a raging river of flames that ravaged between his Spirit Body, organs, and flesh.

The icy, rotting sensation in his palm intensified, preventing this river of flame from carrying away all his flesh and breaking the seal.

Lumian soon suffered so intensely he nearly lost consciousness; only when the residual aura of the Blood Emperor gradually subsided did he slowly regain his thoughts.

He let out a long breath and whispered to himself, I should be the proxy for 0-01 now...

If it weren't for the Underworld Daoist seal, I would definitely have become another Wanak, no, not another Wanak, but Blood Emperor Alista Tudor, who would have used my body to return.

Lumian didn't dare to linger near 0-01, afraid that the Sealed Artifact might detect a flaw in its new proxy, a defect with a will of his own that still persisted.

And Lumian knew that with his current status and power, it was impossible to take 0-01 out of Morora; even if the Church of Knowledge agreed to let him do so, it would only lead to his own destruction.

Leaving a mark and becoming a proxy is enough to complete this task.

Unfortunately, 0-01 is tightly sealed, and a proxy's special abilities can only be fully manifested in Morora... Lumian muttered a few words and teleported back to the wasteland.

He immediately sensed a team of undead soldiers and iron puppets patrolling silently in the darkness, seemingly eternal in their movements.

Suddenly, Lumian felt a stir in his heart.

The connection between contractors told him that the leader was the Abscessed Hand!

This mysterious being had regrown bones and flesh after being subjected to the bombardment of divine descent, but it seemed to have been conquered by 0-01, becoming its guard.

Is Hand Bro's unique trait being indestructible? Lumian turned his body, letting the Abscessed Hand and its puppets pass by.

Unexpectedly, the Abscessed Hand stopped in front of Lumian and uttered in a low voice, "Omebella..."

Chapter 842: Departure

842 Departure

"Omebella..."

Hearing the voice of the Abscessed Hand and the name it shouted, a chill ran up Lumian's spine, making his hair stand on end and cold sweat break out.

He didn't know when the Abscessed Hand had regrown bones and flesh from the ashes, returning to its original form, but he was prepared for any abnormalities when it passed by him, given the contract stemming from the Inevitability pathway's powers between them.

Lumian wasn't overly worried; they were "colleagues" now, and the situation shouldn't turn dangerous. What he didn't expect was that the Abscessed Hand would call out "Omebella."

It was like a horror story!

For a moment, Lumian couldn't help but wonder if he had already been subtly eroded by the Great Mother's Child of God, Omebella, to the extent that he was gradually being replaced.

Standing in the pure darkness, the unseen Abscessed Hand paused for a few seconds, then continued moving forward with the group of iron puppets and undead soldiers, marching mechanically.

Only then did Lumian snap back to reality, pondering the reason for what had just happened.

According to Ludwig, some beings created directly by the Great Mother or granted her boon, lacking necessary intelligence, can sense the trace of Omebella's bloodline in me and regard me as the Great Mother's Child of God...

Hand Bro was first revived and interrupted by divine descent, then controlled by 0-01, becoming its puppet. The feminine transformation trend seemed to have stopped, meaning it hasn't fully revived and lost its self-awareness, truly lacking necessary intelligence.

Was it directly created by the Great Mother, or did it receive Her boon? The corruption turning it into a woman and pushing it to the limit of beauty likely originated from the Great Mother...

That does seem plausible. Even a single drop of blood can regrow a complete body, evoking a sense of rebirth...

But something's off. By this logic, the Abscessed Hand should call me an Honorable Child of God and show some subservience. Heh heh, to directly call the Child of God's name is blasphemy!

Lumian grumbled to himself, growing more puzzled.

Also, if Omebella itself is a title, the Abscessed Hand should only know I'm a Child of God, not a specific name. The Great Mother likely has multiple Children ot God, perhaps continuously created. How could the unwise Hand Bro distinguish who is who and what their name is...

Unless, Omebella is the most special Child of God, or Hand Bro knew Omebella- the Giant Queen-in its previous life?

Lumian raised his right hand, rubbing his chin, thinking he should quickly report this to Madam Magician after leaving and see if they could uncover the Abscessed Hand's original identity. Perhaps the ancient records in the New City of Silver contained some clues.

After a few seconds, Lumian vanished from the spot, teleporting back near the top of the corpse mountain.

Distracted by the Abscessed Hand incident, he remembered he still had spoils to collect.

That was the Beyonder characteristic of the Demoness of Affliction from Celeste, which could later be used by Jenna.

As for Julie's characteristic, after the divine descent and filthy blood incident, Lumian had no idea where it was.

In the deathly silent darkness, Lumian stored the shapeless Demoness of Affliction Beyonder characteristic in his Traveler's Bag.

He even placed two chunks of Celeste's corpse inside.

Maybe they can be used as supplementary ingredients. If not, I can give them to Ludwig. With me as godfather away for so long; I should bring him a gift. But will he consider this dirty... Lumian mumbled and teleported to the edge of the wasteland, leaving the area steeped in deathly darkness.

As 0-01's proxy, he quickly and smoothly exited the underground mausoleum, returning to the entrance area.

Lumian then opened his eyes, seeing the blue sky.

At that moment, the morning sun was bright but not harsh, the air fresh and carrying a slight burnt scent after the rain.

Having spent over ten hours in the eternal darkness of the underground tomb, Lumian felt as if a lifetime had passed.

Then, he saw numerous heads, each trailing a bloodstained, pale spine, hovering in the air.

They were countless, thousands, all staring at the entrance of the tomb, at Lumian.

Among them were faces Lumian recognized, regulars at the Carnivore bar.

The aftermath of 0-01's activation?

There must be thousands, if not tens of thousands...

Is this a form of sacrifice?

Red Priest...

Thoughts flashing through his mind, Lumian raised his hands.

His forehead became hot, with a slight prickling pain.

Ooo!

A violent gale suddenly blew, scattering the thousands of heads with trailing spines back into the city.

The flying heads seemed to sense Lumian's will, drifting with the wind, and landed back on their headless bodies.

So this is the special power of a proxy? Unfortunately, it can only be used in Morora... Lumian lowered his hands, feeling regretful, and walked out of the cemetery.

At the cemetery gate, an exile was twisting his own returned head back in place.

Crack!

His head turned from facing his spine back to the front.

Seeing Lumian watching him, he smiled and spoke normally, "Today's... weather...

is really nice..."

"Yeah," Lumian responded with a relaxed smile.

He teleported directly to the Carnivore bar, appearing at the door of Julie's room.

The corpse of Lez was gone from the bed, along with Julie's collections.

The enforcers have been here... Did they bury Lez's body in the cemetery?

Lumian mused and vanished from the spot.

This time, he appeared at the door of the Knowledge Cathedral.

He walked inside, up to Heraberg in his plain white robe with brass threads, and smiling, took out the books he had borrowed from the Traveler's Bag.

"Archbishop, I've finished them all."

As he spoke, Lumian felt Heraberg looked slightly older.

"Finished them all, really?" Heraberg asked with a smile.

Lumian made a sound and honestly replied, "There are two books I didn't listen to, but I can't continue anymore."

Heraberg nodded approvingly. "If you know, you know. If you don't know, you don't know; there's no need to pretend."

As he took the books, he said, "There's indeed no need to read these anymore. I must remind you, these books are infected with a plague, as are the other items in your bag. You need to handle them properly, burn or purify them to prevent the plague from spreading."

"Celeste's Grade 1 Sealed Artifact is so potent? It continues to produce a Plague even inside the Traveler's Bag..." Lumian said sincerely, "I'll be careful. Thank you, Archbishop. Archbishop, how do I seal an object that spreads a deadly plague?"

Heraberg looked at Lumian for a few seconds, then laughed.

He pointed to another brass bookshelf. "That one, that one, and that one, take a look and learn."

Indeed, teachers never give direct answers... Lumian didn't resist continuing his studies. He pulled out the books and placed them in his Traveler's Bag.

Then he smiled and asked, "Your Grace, what should I do to leave Morora?"

The white-haired Heraberg said meaningfully, "No one has ever forbidden the residents here from leaving Morora, they simply don't want to leave."

Lumian was momentarily stunned, then asked with sudden realization, "Leave the way you came?"

Heraberg showed a look of approval, then pointed to Lumian's clothes. "Do you want a change of clothes?"

Lumian looked down and saw his clothes, pants, and shoes had become tattered from the previous intense battle.

He was about to take out spare clothes from the Traveler's Bag but remembered they were also infected with the mystical plague.

Heraberg pointed to a room near the stairs.

"There are clothes you can change into."

"Thank you, Your Grace." Lumian sighed in relief and quickly entered the room, finding several plain white robes with brass threads hanging inside.

These were the vestments of the Church of Knowledge clergy.

Lumian glanced back thoughtfully at Heraberg, who had resumed reading, and swiftly changed into a robe that fit his size.

He then opened the cathedral's heavy, ajar wooden door and descended the stone steps layer by layer, deep into the underground.

The passageway hadn't changed since he came; the glowing gems embedded in the walls still provided some illumination.

That indescribable terrifying sound echoed in Lumian's ears again.

Lumian walked at a steady pace towards the exit. As 0-01's proxy, the more he walked, the more he felt this might indeed be a long esophagus.

What kind of creature would have such an esophagus? Lumian pondered but couldn't find an answer.

Alert to this possibility, he neither transformed into a flaming spear nor teleported, instead walking obediently for several hours until he reached the double bronze doors.

He extended his hands and pulled, making the door emit a heavy sound as it slowly opened.

Outside, no one was guarding it.

Lumian sneered silently and stepped out.

He didn't forget to close the door behind him.

Wearing the plain white robe with brass threads, he walked back, feeling unseen, unknown gazes upon him.

Reaching the prison where he had been held, Lumian activated the black mark on his right shoulder.

He chose to teleport back to Trier, to the apartment he rented.

His body and spirit were in decent shape, but he felt a strong sense of fatigue, wanting to rest.

Just as his figure materialized, he saw Ludwig enjoying afternoon tea.

Ludwig looked up and froze.

Clang!

The silver fork in the boy's hand fell onto the dessert plate.

Chapter 843: Black Tear

843 Black Tear

Seeing the genuine fear in Ludwig's eyes, Lumian looked down at himself and noticed the plain white robe with brass threads he was wearing.

He laughed and reassured his godson, "Don't be afraid. There's no exam, and no study."

Ludwig's eyes lit up, and his expression gradually relaxed.

For a moment, he had feared that his godfather had joined the Church of the God of Knowledge and Wisdom, thinking the sky was falling.

Lumian glanced at Lugano, who had hurriedly stood up. He took the former Carnivore bar owner's stomach from the Traveler's Bag and tossed it to Ludwig.

"This is a gift for you."

Having completed his journey to Morora, Lumian was no longer bound by his promises and could now obtain godhood. He decided to accelerate the formation of his hunter team, with Ludwig being the most important member.

Taming this sealed Angel involved granting favors.

Ludwig's expression turned ecstatic, as if he had just ascended from the abyss to heaven.

He eagerly prepared to devour the stomach of the Depriver on the spot.

Lumian rubbed his temples and cautioned, "That's infected with a mystical pathogen. You'd better handle it properly to prevent the disease from spreading."

"A mystical pathogen..." Lugano exclaimed, instinctively distancing himself from Ludwig.

As a professional Doctor, Lugano activated his Spirit Vision, focusing on the stomach for two seconds before confirming the presence of the disease.

Ludwig took a bite at the stomach's pylorus and mumbled, "Once it's in my stomach, the plague won't spread."

"And what about you?" Lumian asked, amused.

"At most, I'll have an upset stomach for a while," Ludwig answered nonchalantly.

Should I skip purifying the food in my Traveler's Bag? Since it wouldn't hurt you...

Lumian mumbled and turned toward his bedroom.

After taking a few more bites, Ludwig lifted his head and hesitantly said, "Thank you. Thank you, godfather."

Lumian smiled, nodding in satisfaction. "Not bad. Your manners have improved a lot."

Ludwig shivered suddenly.

His godfather's tone and expression now resembled those of his most feared people-his teachers!

Lumian said nothing more, heading to his bedroom. He spread out a letter paper and wrote down the key points of his journey to Morora, detailing the problems he had encountered.

Then he summoned the "doll" messenger, handing over the letter along with the Traveler's Bag.

The "doll" messenger disdainfully picked up the Traveler's Bag with two fingers, complaining, "Don't put everything in here! It's too dirty! It's too dirty! It's a trash can now!"

Lumian smiled sheepishly. "I had no other choice."

I can't carry those Sealed Artifacts directly, right?

Their negative effects combined could kill me instantly.

After sending off the "doll" messenger, Lumian collapsed onto his bed without cleaning up the makeshift altar on his desk. He closed his eyes, letting his body relax.

In Morora, he had stayed up late reading and couldn't sleep soundly with a mad Demoness living next door and other enemies possibly ambushing him at any moment, keeping his mind on high alert.

Now, he finally felt a long-lost sense of safety.

Lumian quickly fell into a deep sleep. When he woke, it was already six in the morning of a new day.

Ah, refreshing and comfortable. Lumian sat up, stretched, and saw his Traveler's Bag and a letter on his desk.

"The messenger came without me awakening... This means I trust her quite a bit..." Lumian muttered as he walked to his desk and drew the curtains.

In the morning light, he sat down and read Madam Magician's reply: "For now, leaving a mark to become a proxy is enough. Other matters can be dealt with later. In short, regarding 0-01, you've at least gotten ahead of the Demoness Sect and the Red Angel.

"However, no matter how beneficial something seems, it always has its drawbacks. This means you've officially stepped onto the stage vying for the Red Priest position. You will face more attention and danger. Previously, the Demoness Sect might have seen you as a potential ally, and the Red Angel might have considered using you. Now, eliminating you to vacate the proxy position will be a practical option for them.

"You should also remind Two of Cups to be cautious to avoid being exploited by the Demoness Sect.

"Of course, since both the Demoness Sect and the Red Angel have gained something from this, each leaving a bit of blood on 0-01, their immediate urgency to target you is not very high.

"Regarding the Abscessed Hand, due to significant catastrophes in the Fourth, Third, and Second Epochs, many folklore and legends have not survived. The high-level corruption from the Great Mother on the Abscessed Hand prevents us from direct divination, requiring indirect methods, making it hard to obtain the most effective information. We haven't determined when the related legends first appeared but can confirm their existence at the beginning of the Fifth Epoch.

"From your description of its appearance and state, we reasonably suspect that the Abscessed Hand was a Vampire of Angel rank before its death. According to information from the Sanguine, one of the three dukes, an ancient being born in the Second Epoch, Round Moon Duke Olmer, has no memory of such a kin.

"Note that a Sequence 2 Angel is equivalent to a duke among the Sanguine. Even in the long history of the Sanguine, the number of dukes is very limited, and it's impossible for them not to recognize or remember each other.

"The New City of Silver is currently searching through historical texts related to Omebella for possible clues. I will inform you if they find anything."

Hand Bro isn't a Sanguine. No wonder Madam Magician calls him a vampire.

High-level beings of the Moon pathway are not equivalent to the Sanguine, just like the followers of the Primordial Moon in the Rose School of Thought are not considered Sanguine but are referred to as Artificial Vampires or something...

Lumian leaned back in his chair and continued reading.

"You can also try to get information from the Aurora Order. The secrets the one they believe in holds are among the top even among true gods.

"According to my divination, Albus Medici is still alive. His ancestor, the Red Angel, reached some sort of tacit agreement with someone or something in the special mirror world after entering Fourth Epoch Trier through the Hostel plan. This had significantly reduced the danger for Albus to escape from Morora through the special mirror world.

"No need for regrets. This is good news. At least we know the Red Angel might be cooperating with powerful beings in the special mirror world.

"The Grade 1 Sealed Artifact is called Black Tear, created from the tear of a Demoness of Despair after her death, fusing with her Beyonder characteristics.

"Black Tear continuously produces the mystical pathogen that infected you, spreading it around without stopping.

"Wearing Black Tear significantly enhances your charm, with a slight feminine touch, but it won't change your gender.

"Black Tear can help you master some mirror magic, including passing messages through the mirror world, Mirror Traversal, and mirror illusions.

"It also makes your Cull more lethal, allowing you to infuse all your power into a single Cull.

"In places with a special mirror world, Black Tear can help you utilize its special characteristics and power.

"Those were the effects. The negative effects are:

"The wearer also gets infected with the mystical pathogen, with Demonesses of Affliction being less affected and more resistant;

"The wearer experiences intermittent Pleasure, every 45 to 90 seconds;

"Even just carrying it makes you more emotional, more easily moved, and persuaded;

"Having Black Tear also increases the likelihood of unwanted romantic encounters, based on the curse from the Demoness of Despair before her death."

Reading this, Lumian couldn't help but raise an eyebrow.

This Sealed Artifact seems more suitable for a forbidden book like Monks Chasing Dogs.

Pleasure every 45 to 90 seconds is a major problem in battle!

Franca can't use it either, unless it's a quick fight. The mystical plague takes time.

For now, I can only treat it as an unlimited Mirror Cufflink, using it briefly and then sealing it... Lumian pondered and continued reading Madam Magician's sealing methods.

"The most versatile solution is to find a Sealed Artifact of the Sun pathway that continuously purifies the surrounding area, placing it with Black Tear. How to mitigate the Sun pathway Sealed Artifact's negative effects is another matter.

"The simplest but most demanding solution is to place Black Tear in a mirror, confining the pathogen to the area behind the mirror. Don't worry, the Plague can't travel through the mirror. The issue is that without other items to interact with the mirror world, you can't retrieve Black Tear. If the mirror sealing it breaks, Black Tear will be lost in the mirror world, wandering who knows where.

"The custom solution is that I've isolated a separate space in your Traveler's Bag. Regularly throw in a flame that can burn for over half an hour to incinerate the mystical pathogen.

"I've also purified the other items in your Traveler's Bag. No need to worry about infection."

Lumian finished reading the letter and exhaled deeply.

This is the benefit of the Tarot Club!

After burning the letter, he checked the Traveler's Bag, confirming that Celeste's Demoness of Affliction Beyonder characteristic was a beautiful eye, stored with the corpse chunks in the isolated space with Black Tear. To use it later, he would need to purify or "disinfect" it first.

Hanging the Traveler's Bag, Lumian walked to the full-length mirror in the room.

Chapter 844: Changes in the Body

844 Changes in the Body

Lumian placed his hand on the mirror's surface, activating the contract ability that represented the Mirror Mark.

Immediately, he sensed multiple marks he had left behind. Some were clear, others blurred, and some were like distant glimmers on the horizon.

The clear ones came from Moran Avigny's study and Franca's rented apartment.

The blurry ones, which often changed locations, originated from the treasury of the Blue Avenger. The distant glimmers gave Lumian a feeling of being separated by a vast night, unreachable-they were the marks he had left on various mirrors in Morora.

At the same time, Lumian felt a strong calling. He sensed a unique, solid, and tight connection between himself and the City of Exiles.

In his mind's eye, a dark, illusory world and the mountain of corpses appeared.

The scent of rust and blood filled his nostrils, and his forehead tingled slightly.

If I want, I can use Black Tear now, enter the mirror, and teleport back to Morora...

Lumian suddenly realized.

Of course, such a teleportation had to pass through the special mirror world, which was extremely dangerous for Lumian.

He refocused, examining the changes in his body after becoming a proxy for 0-01.

It didn't take long for him to reach a conclusion.

In Morora, 0-01 will help me absorb some of the damage. I can influence the weather, either making it similar or turning it into a disaster. I can create a small area of Fog of War, use abilities like War Cry and War Song to enhance myself and my team, and weaken enemies...

Additionally, I can temporarily become equivalent to a Sequence 4 Iron-blooded Knight, lacking only godhood and an incomplete mythical form. Otherwise, I possess all the qualities, albeit slightly weaker than a true Iron-blooded Knight.

It's like receiving a Sequence 4 boon, although high-level boons also come with godhood...

If I abandon my sense of self, I can momentarily approach Sequence 3...

However, all this can only be realized in Morora. With 0-01 sealed, it cannot exert influence outside Morora.

But the changes to my body as a proxy, or rather the corruption, are real and irreversible.

My physical resistance to damage has significantly improved. Although it's not as good as a Dawn Paladin in full armor, I'm no longer at risk of instant death from a headshot. Without targeting weaknesses or using Cull, it takes two to three shots to crack my skull...

My strength, speed, reflexes, constitution, and agility have also improved. My body is becoming more robust and masculine. Luckily, I can use flame shaving.

Otherwise, half a day would leave me scruffy...

My spirituality has increased by about forty to fifty percent. Now, with regular accumulation and storage, I no longer suffer from anxiety due to a lack of spirituality...

According to Grande Soeur's and Franca's terminology, my resistance to flames has also increased significantly. Flames not hot enough won't hurt me. At least Sequence 5 blazing-white flames are needed for any effect. When using Devil's Whispers in the future, the damage and pain from the sulfurous flames will be much lower... Huh, I've also grown three to four centimeters taller...

Lumian felt like an oversized, reinforced Reaper.

My long studies weren't in vain... He sighed, opening his bedroom door and stepping out.

Ludwig had just woken up, wearing a blue hat with yellow stars and energetically drinking milk.

Lumian glanced at Lugano busy in the kitchen and asked his godson with a smile, "What did you make with the Depriver's stomach yesterday, and how much is left?"

Ludwig was stunned for a second. "I ate it all."

"..." Lumian raised an eyebrow. "I thought you'd save some to make a special dish and share it with us."

Ludwig was silent for a few seconds, then honestly replied, "I couldn't resist its allure."

Lumian stared at the boy until he looked down guiltily.

"I'll let it go this time. I understand your desire, but know your mistake and correct it, understood?" Lumian's expression softened.

He wasn't angry about Ludwig eating the entire Depriver's stomach, missing out on his share. To him, it was no big deal. His sternness was part of the education.

As a godfather and the team leader, he was responsible for this. Only by doing so could he quickly complete the ritual and advance to an Iron-blooded Knight.

"Yes, godfather," Ludwig whispered.

Lumian sat down, waiting for his breakfast, and asked Ludwig, "Have you advanced to Depriver yet?"

"Almost, but I can use some Depriver abilities," Ludwig said, gulping down more milk.

Lumian nodded lightly, not asking further questions.

...

Trier, Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative, 9 Rue Orosai, Apartment 702.

After breakfast, Lumian went to see Franca and Jenna.

He politely rang the doorbell, mindful that at this hour, the two Demonesses might be scantily clad.

With winter over, the Demonesses could wear only light clothes indoors thanks to their resistance to the cold.

Ding-dong, ding-dong. Wearing a woman's shirt, fitted trousers, and fluffy slippers, Franca opened the door.

She looked at Lumian in surprise. "You're back from the City of Exiles?"

That's too fast!

Last time they contacted, he was still studying!

Lumian walked past Franca, saying with a smile, "I used up your Mirror Cufflink."

"That's fine." With her new Ice Amulet, Franca generously waved it off.

Lumian was about to speak when he saw Jenna at the dining table. Her facial skin looked deeply cleansed, smooth and delicate. Her crystalline eyes were like autumn streams, hiding a thousand emotions and words, inviting immersion. The simple, light-colored dress outlined a perfect but not exaggerated figure. Her exposed skin radiated indescribable charm.

Lumian's throat tightened, and he felt an uncontrollable heat.

After a few seconds, he averted his gaze and asked Jenna thoughtfully, "Did you advance to Pleasure?"

"Yes," Jenna replied with a mischievous smile. "Looks like that potion wasn't fake."

Lumian let out a derisive snort.

"Were you showcasing your charm just now?"

"No," Jenna laughed softly. "Maybe the potion's power is still leaking after my recent advancement. But, your self-control isn't as strong as I thought."

Um... Lumian thought his reaction was uncharacteristic of an Ascetic. He suspected residual malice from using Devil's Whispers, needing time to dissipate.

And the Traveler's Bag now held Black Tear-though isolated, the bag couldn't fully block the Grade 1 Sealed Artifact's influence. Some negative effects would always seep out.

That's why he needed to burn the mystical pathogen in the isolated space regularly.

Finding an excuse, Lumian scoffed.

"That's because I'm still weak, with noticeable emotional and desire fluctuations."

Watching their interaction, Franca felt a pang of jealousy for some reason. She quickly changed the subject, excitedly sharing, "When Jenna advanced, we got some crucial, unexpected intel. Guess what it is."

Lumian pulled up a chair and sat down, thinking."Related to Krismona?"

Franca sat nearby and clicked her tongue.

"Sharp. Guess who Krismona's father is."

Lumian wanted to observe Franca and Jenna's expressions, but their combined beauty made him instinctively look away.

After some consideration, he guessed, "With your tone and attitude... I'll go with the least likely option: Blood Emperor Alista Tudor!"

Franca and Jenna's expressions froze.

Lumian asked in slight disbelief, "I got it right?"

"Yes, congratulations." Franca nodded solemnly.

"Th-this isn't mystical..." Lumian echoed their earlier doubts.

The two Demonesses then recounted their discussion.

As Lumian listened, he frowned slightly.

"What's wrong?" Jenna asked perceptively.

Lumian stroked his chin.

"I remembered something from my time in Morora."

"What?" Franca had been curious about Lumian's experiences in Morora.

Considering the corruption from knowledge related to 0-01, Lumian focused on his conflicts with Albus, Julie, and Wanak, emphasizing the importance of books and knowledge.

"In short, I'm now the proxy for 0-01, but this power only works in Morora."

Lumian pondered. "What puzzles me is why I escaped after being petrified by Julie's divine descent and didn't die."

Franca clicked her tongue.

"You Hunters, always fighting with schemes and layers of plans, not straightforward at all!"

She then laughed.

"I think the Primordial One threw you out to save the Blood Emperor's last hope of resurrection during the divine descent. What's this? True love!"

Lumian didn't immediately refute her near-joking statement. After a few seconds, he thoughtfully said, "Maybe it's not true love, but a practical need. Maybe the purpose of the Primordial Demoness and Blood Emperor creating the special mirror world can only proceed after the Blood Emperor's resurrection..."

Chapter 845: Busy Franca

845 Busy Franca

Jenna agreed with Lumian, "Whether it's true love or not, there must be a specific purpose behind creating that special mirror world, and it seems that purpose hasn't been achieved yet."

"What could that purpose be?" Franca pondered.

Lumian thought for a few seconds, then pulled out the corpse wax candle he had obtained from the Blue Avenger from his Traveler's Bag, and mused aloud, "That special mirror world might have been jointly created by a true god of the Hunter pathway and a true god of the Demoness pathway. This corpse wax candle was crafted from the corpse wax of demigods from both pathways, mixed with other substances. According to the Law of Similarity in mysticism, there might be a connection between the two.

"When I become a demigod, I'll visit Bansy, find the specific location mentioned by Madam Magician, light the corpse wax candle, and complete a secret deed ritual to see what I can discover. This might help us uncover the secrets of the special mirror world."

As for Fourth Epoch Trier, entering the sealed area after the Hostel plan would be a true god-level difficulty.

"At that time, apply for a Major Arcana card holder to watch over the matter."

Franca had no objections, just reminding Lumian to be cautious.

After exchanging experiences over the recent period, Franca relaxed, leaned back in her chair, and said with bright eyes, "You went to Morora and didn't gain much on the Hunter side, only becoming the proxy for 0-01. But you got a lot from the Demoness pathway, like the Beyonder characteristic of a Demoness of Affliction, a Grade 1 Sealed Artifact equivalent to that of a Demoness of Despair."

"What are you implying?" Lumian asked with a smile.

Franca chuckled. "I don't need it. I should be able to get what I need from the Demoness Sect. The only concern is how to complete the ritual. I wish I could go to Morora. It's perfect for the Demoness of Despair ritual-no guilt involved. Just hearing your examples, I know that place is full of talent, criminal talent, people exploring the limits of human evil!

"I mean, Jenna's Beyonder characteristics up to Sequence 4 are in our full possession. You don't plan to sell them, do you?"

Jenna said instinctively, "But I still haven't saved enough money for the Demoness of Affliction Beyonder characteristic. I'm still short by tens of thousands of verl d'or..."

Lumian chuckled. "No need to worry. From now on, you two are officially part of my team. As the team leader, I'll reward you based on your contributions. It could be money or items."

He made it clear-these things were meant for Jenna. It's not like he could consume them himself. But since they were a team, there had to be clear rewards and punishments, not giving away things for free.

Even giving Ludwig the Depriver's stomach was under the pretense of a godfather returning from a trip and bringing a gift for his godson.

Jenna's expression relaxed, and she teased with a smile in her eyes, "Should we call you Captain now?"

"No need. A good team can address each other by names or nicknames." Lumian turned his gaze to Franca, revisiting the old topic. "I used up your Mirror Cufflink. What compensation do you want?"

"No need to be so polite." With her Ice Amulet, Franca waved it off generously.

"If I need to use Black Tear or the Sword of Courage in the future, I'll borrow them from you. Don't worry, I'm thick-skinned and won't feel embarrassed."

As she spoke, she took out the Lie earring and tossed it back to Lumian. "You should keep this. I'm afraid I'll be tempted to permanently alter my face and body, getting addicted to Lie."

Lumian knew Franca wasn't pretending to be generous. He caught Lie and reminded her, "Be extra careful when dealing with the Demoness of Black. She'll soon learn about my involvement in the 0-01 battle in Morora and suspect I was the one who persisted till the end."

"Understood." Franca nodded solemnly.

Jenna's eyes flickered, and she thoughtfully said, "Should I move out for a while?"

Seeing Franca's puzzled look and Lumian's approving nod, Jenna explained carefully, "The Demoness of Black might secretly monitor you to gather information about Lumian. If I continue living with you, I'll inevitably attract her attention. Facing prolonged observation from a high-ranking Demoness, I don't think I can keep my secrets.

"Think about it. I now have the charm of a Demoness of Pleasure, different from the beauty of a Vampire. A few more glances from the Demoness of Black, and she'll notice something's wrong. If I live elsewhere, I can disguise this charm before visiting you with makeup or using Lie."

Lie couldn't be worn all the time, and maintaining makeup even while sleeping would also arouse suspicion from the Demoness of Black!

"Alright." Franca was convinced by Jenna's reasoning.

She glanced at Lumian with some resentment, thinking, You really do bring trouble. With the Demoness of Black watching me, how can I help Jenna digest the Pleasure potion?

Franca sighed and asked Lumian, "When will you take Amandina to the Samaritan Women's Spring?"

"You came back too quickly. I haven't had time to get to know her better yet," Franca complained.

Lumian pondered for a few seconds. "When my condition stabilizes."

The rest of the time, Jenna packed her personal belongings and went out to find an apartment in the surrounding area that she could move into that day, while Lumian returned to his place to continue "taming" Ludwig.

Franca continued to track the whereabouts of the Mirror Person, Jasmine, until nightfall.

Looking at the empty and cold apartment, she sighed inwardly and threw herself onto the long sofa.

After a while, the surface of the full-length mirror in the living room suddenly shimmered with a dark light. The face of the Demoness of Black faintly appeared.

Franca stood up abruptly and respectfully bowed. "Good evening, Madame Clarice."

At the same time, she mumbled in her heart, The Demoness of Black really knows where I live...

The Demoness of Black, Clarice, looked at Franca outside the mirror, her expression somewhat detached, and asked, "Has your lover, Ciel, returned to Trier?"

"He has." Franca had prepared for this and answered honestly.

The Demoness of Black scrutinized Franca for a moment, then chuckled softly.

"You've been apart for several weeks. You must be thoroughly enjoying each other's company upon reuniting. Has he become more vigorous?"

You're asking me? Whom should I ask? How would I know... What's the point of this question? Franca silently grumbled.

Such a question was entirely outside her and Lumian's expectations!

At that moment, cold sweat appeared on Franca's back as her mind raced, pushing her thinking ability to its limits.

Vigorous...

The Demoness of Black once said that the taste of a Hunter isn't bad either-the higher their Sequence, the more vigorous they become...

Is the Demoness of Black trying to confirm Lumian's current state from this detail, to see if he has become the proxy for 0-01?

If Lumian and I were truly lovers, such a detail would be easily overlooked, and it's normal for Demonesses to discuss such things. In that case, I would naturally reveal the answer the Demoness of Black is looking for.

Should I hide it for Lumian? No, he's already highly suspicious. Hiding it would mean dragging myself into suspicion. Though I might already be suspected...

Lumian said this morning not to lie about it, but not to be too clear...

Within two or three seconds, Franca raised her right hand, covered her mouth, and let out a small yawn.

Then, she said with a mix of shyness and pride, "Although he hasn't advanced yet and is quite far from it, he has indeed become much more vigorous. I almost feel conquered..."

As she spoke, Franca's words carried a bit of longing, as if dreaming of becoming equally vigorous.

This was part of her "acting training" from Jenna and Anthony-performance needing layers.

The Demoness of Black in the mirror nodded and said with a smile, "Truly enviable."

Franca's eyes moved slightly, and she said, reminiscing, "Whether it's due to the long separation or his many hidden secrets, I feel he's become a lot more unfamiliar. Sometimes, when he looks at me, I think, 'Who is he?' and feel like I don't recognize him..."

The Demoness of Black nodded slightly.

"He might have undergone some kind of corruption. Keep your current relationship. If he shows any unusual behavior, let me know immediately. I might be able to help.

"Heh heh, this might also be one of your opportunities to digest the Affliction potion."

"Yes, Madame Clarice." Franca displayed the sense of security that came from having a powerful backer.

The Demoness of Black glanced around the mirror and asked with a smile, "Where's your Vampire lover?"

"Her brother is returning to Trier soon, so she's embarrassed to continue living with me." Franca recited her lines.

The Demoness of Black asked no more questions, gave some instructions regarding the Mirror People, and disappeared into the dark light.

Once the full-length mirror returned to normal, Franca quietly breathed a sigh of relief and prepared to "date" Lumian.

She hadn't even had time to open the door when a soft light appeared before her -a transparent, crystalline ice-blue jellyfish with many tentacles quickly materialized.

One of the jellyfish's tentacles was wrapped around a letter.

Franca recognized the jellyfish as Ongla, the messenger of Madam Judgment.

Every time she saw Ongla, Franca instinctively felt a sense of fear, believing it to be very powerful. However, Ongla the jellyfish, unlike the intelligent puppet messenger of Madam Magician, often acted purely on instinct.

Receiving the letter, Franca silently grumbled, I'm feeling swarmed... I was already busy helping Lumian with his affairs, and even now that he's back, I'm still so busy.

Thanking Ongla the jellyfish, Franca opened the letter: "Mr. Star has confirmed the first task that requires your help."

Chapter 846: "Negotiation"

846 "Negotiation"

Upon reading the first line of the letter, Franca felt a sense that the moment had finally arrived.

She had been waiting, waiting for Mr. Star to make a request, so she could exchange it for Mid-to-Low Sequence potions from the Evernight pathway for Amandina.

Franca read the rest with a mix of anticipation and nervousness: "He hopes you can help him decipher the text in the attached materials. They are somewhat similar to those in Emperor Roselle's diary.

"He hasn't set a time limit, so you can take your time.

"The information you provided about Krismona's father possibly being Blood Emperor Alista Tudor is very useful and important.

"Now, we suspect that the entity in the deepest part of the special mirror world, the one worshiped by the Mirror People, may not be the Primordial Demoness in the complete sense. Rather, it could be connected to the creation of the special mirror world by the Blood Emperor and the Primordial Demoness. It seems to have gone out of their control, and this might be why the Primordial Demoness is in a bad state.

"Your main tasks with Seven of Cups are to find the Mirror Person, Jasmine, and probe the Demoness of Black to see if she has a deep understanding of the special mirror world. Of course, your safety must be ensured.

"If you encounter any anomalies, you can ask me for help."

Madam Judgment sure goes straight to the point... Franca turned to the next page of the letter.

The rest were the attached materials.

Franca's pupils dilated upon seeing them: This wasn't anything like the text from Emperor Roselle's diary!

It was either oracle bone script or bronze script, one of the oldest forms of writing from her and Emperor Roselle's country pre-transmigration!

Where did this come from?

Who the hell knows this stuff...

Not sure if it's genuine oracle bone script or bronze script, since I don't understand it either. I'm illiterate in this...

Is it a mysticism language unknown to this world, just similar to oracle bone script?

But it does look like hieroglyphics!

Franca began to examine it carefully.

Although she hadn't studied oracle bone script or bronze script, as a young person growing up in the internet age, she had seen a few and remembered the meanings of some of the simplest characters, like "person."

Before long, she found several similar pictographic characters.

A bit different from what I remember, but mostly the same...

Let's treat it as oracle bone script or bronze script first... Where did Mr. Star get this from? Did they find Harrison of Resurrection Island? No, if they did, they would have told me...

Or, when the Major Arcana card holder of the Moses Ascetic Order was tracking the missing Ten Pillars Kmerolo, they encountered something related to the Celestial Master?

Very possible! No wonder the preface of this material told me that the order of the text had been disrupted to prevent corruption during interpretation. As expected from the Celestial Master, who oversees the Mystery Pryer and Savant pathways!

But without context, the difficulty of interpretation is more than doubled...

Chen Tu! Armored Shadow Chen Tu might know, but I can only ask three or four questions per summoning... Don't know if I can directly ask what the general meaning of this material is...

Franca's mind raced, deciding to seek help from the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society first.

Many members of the society came from the same country as her, and there were quite a few highly educated ones, some of whom might have studied oracle bone script or bronze script.

Franca didn't need them to be masters in oracle bone script or bronze script, just being able to recognize the commonly used characters would be enough. The rest could be guessed by the Major Arcana card holders based on the original context.

With this decision, Franca enthusiastically began writing a letter, planning to summon Madame Hela's messenger to request a gathering soon.

She was too lazy to head out to go on a "date" with Lumian and discuss the Demoness of Black. After eating a cream bun, she sat at her desk and carefully selected the characters she barely recognized, studying them repeatedly.

...

In the apartment Lumian rented in Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative.

Lumian sat on the sofa, watching Ludwig read the Ghost Face magazine, and pondered the next steps of "taming."

After a few minutes, he smiled at Ludwig.

"You've been pretty free lately, haven't you? Besides eating, you have nothing else to do.

"Let me give you an assignment."

The key to "taming" was to make the other party follow orders, even forcing themselves to do things they didn't want to do.

Of course, pure intimidation and suppression wouldn't work. Once or twice was fine, but more than that, Ludwig would definitely run away again.

Ludwig's expression turned to horror, as if saying: "See, you have indeed been corrupted by the Church of Knowledge!"

Without giving him a chance to speak, Lumian continued, "This assignment is to taste Trier's famous meat pies. Gather information yourself, plan the route yourself, and finally compile a food report."

The first step in following orders was to make the orders acceptable to the child, something he could and would do, then gradually increase the difficulty.

Ludwig's eyes lit up.

He licked his lips and said, "Alright!"

The little boy glanced out the window and eagerly stood up. "I'll go right now!"

Lumian chuckled. "It's already dark, and it's too dangerous outside. You're just a child."

Too dangerous... just a child... Lugano couldn't help but glance at Ludwig, his face full of disapproval.

Lumian sighed and said, "I mean, you're just a child with insufficient self-control. It's more dangerous for the citizens of Trier walking at night."

He then told Ludwig, "Tonight, gather information from newspapers and magazines, make a plan, and go out tomorrow morning."

"Mm-hmm!" Ludwig jumped off the single sofa and started flipping through the newspapers and magazines they had subscribed to, taking it very seriously.

Satisfied, Lumian nodded, returned to his bedroom, and placed a continuously burning incandescent white flame in the separate space of his Traveler's Bag.

After a while, he took out the completely charred, deformed piece of Celeste's corpse, examining it for a few moments.

According to Franca's Magic Mirror Divination, this could be refined and extracted to replace the tail tip of the Two-Tailed Black Snake in the Affliction potion's supplementary ingredients.

The supplementary ingredients' Flower-Faced Bat blood also didn't need to be collected. Franca's blood was a better substitute.

Lumian stuffed the corpse piece back into the Traveler's Bag and took out the books he had borrowed from the Morora Knowledge Cathedral.

Although Madam Magician had already sealed Black Tear for him, useful knowledge was always welcome.

Of course, the more useful the knowledge, the more likely it was heavily corrupted, requiring careful consideration and trade-offs.

Lumian lit the gas wall lamp, picked a book titled "Entering the Mysterious Hall," and leisurely began to read.

As time passed, he suddenly turned his head to look at the door.

His door creaked open, and a figure emerged from the shadows.

It was Jenna, wearing a white shirt and a light gauze skirt. Her slightly darker flaxen hair was pinned up, her blue eyes bright and large, with a faint layer of powder on her face and a small black mole on the bridge of her nose.

Her white blouse, adorned with floral decorations, wasn't revealing, yet its nearly perfect curves made one's mind wander and mouth dry.

At that moment, Lumian felt as if he saw the past Showy Diva Jenna and actress apprentice Celia Bello overlapping, exuding an indescribable allure beneath her fresh appearance.

"I need your help with something," Jenna said with a slight smile as she closed the door.

Lumian suddenly felt a sense of danger-not to his life, but a different kind of unease.

"I'm afraid I can't help you," Lumian said calmly, relying on the traits of an Ascetic.

Jenna lowered her eyes, hiding the brilliance in her blue eyes.

She walked to the bedside, sat down, looked at Lumian again, and said with a smile, "Listen to me first, hear my reasons."

Lumian fell silent for a few seconds before stating, "Go ahead."

Jenna propped her hands on either side, leaning forward slightly in a somewhat playful manner. "It seems you've guessed it. Yes, I want you to help me digest the Pleasure potion."

As expected... Lumian said with a headache, "Why not ask Franca?"

"Two reasons, one superficial, one genuine. Which do you want to hear?" Jenna asked with a smile.

Lumian rubbed his forehead. "The superficial one."

Jenna pursed her lips and smiled self-deprecatingly. "She's very willing to help me digest the Pleasure potion, with no internal resistance, causing little pain. This wouldn't comply with the acting principle of pleasure bringing pain, slowing my potion digestion.

"But you, I know you're unwilling, resistant to this. The more so, the quicker I can digest the potion by making you experience pleasure, ultimately even feeling a bit reluctant, and the self-blame that follows. Also, a very important point is, you have a false Angelic rank. If everything goes smoothly, I might be able to digest the potion within two or three weeks and consider advancing to Demoness of Affliction.

"As team leader, isn't this the best choice? It can effectively help you improve the team's quality and enhance the ritual's effect.

"You don't have to recommend Black Tear to me. Digesting the Pleasure potion requires a target."

Lumian remained silent.

Jenna couldn't help but scoff. "Just think of it as teleporting a teammate, lending strength to a teammate. I'm not seeking your emotions or soul. Without emotions, you've never cared about these things, always thinking you have no morals, right? Hey, do you have a cleanliness obsession? It's just helping out!"

After a few seconds, Lumian asked, "What about you?"

Jenna lowered her eyes and softly laughed. "I'll also experience pleasure in pain and feel pain in pleasure, very much in line with the acting principles."

Lumian remained silent for a while before asking, "What about Franca?"

Jenna bit her lip, her eyes deep. "If she finds out, it'll help her digest the Affliction potion."

Lumian sighed deeply. "I thought you'd try to seduce me, ignite my desires to achieve your goal. Didn't expect you to negotiate and reason with me."

Jenna wrinkled her nose and grumbled, "If I tried to seduce you, you'd teleport away!

"It's better to explain the pros and cons, tell you it's as normal as drinking water or having a meal. No guilt involved, no emotions needed. This is very common in Intis!"

Chapter 847: Pleasure in Pain

847 Pleasure in Pain

Seeing Lumian remain silent, Jenna smiled and said, "Doesn't a good team leader need to care about the personal needs of the team members and balance internal conflicts? Sure, when you Hunters reach a high sequence, you can easily subdue people and turn them into puppets without worrying about these things. But now, you can't do that yet."

Jenna's eyes flickered slightly as she added with a smile, "This benefits you as well. You once said that the emotions and desires suppressed by the Ascetic won't disappear completely. Some will accumulate little by little, and if they reach a certain level, they must be vented, or they'll become a hidden danger. And it seems you haven't vented in a long time.

"Killing people isn't enough to fully release these emotions, and there aren't enough bad guys for you to kill all at once."

At this point, Jenna looked at Lumian with clear eyes, teasing, "Alright, I've finished explaining my reasons, the benefits, and possible consequences of this. Captain, you need to make a decision."

Without waiting for Lumian to speak, Jenna pursed her lips and added in a low voice, "Also, there's another reason. We've been through many dangerous things. We don't know when we'll die or lose each other. I-I don't want to bid farewell with regrets."

After a moment of silence, Lumian sighed and said, "You've become quite an excellent Instigator."

Jenna blinked. "Does that mean you agree?"

Lumian nodded solemnly. "Only while you're a Demoness of Pleasure."

Jenna's slightly leaning body suddenly pulled back, and her shoulders, supported by her hands, dropped a little.

The emotions she had been suppressing finally released a little.

She lowered her gaze to her knees and smiled, half self-mockingly, half wistfully.

"When that happens, I can digest the Affliction potion."

Lumian remained silent.

After a few seconds, he said, "I'll find an opportunity to inform Franca about this as a sign of respect."

Jenna fell silent for a moment before saying with a smile, "I thought you'd seek Franca's opinion before making a decision."

Lumian sighed again.

"This is a sign of respect towards you."

He had sighed, having sensed the true emotions hidden in Jenna's words. Jenna knew that Franca was an unavoidable issue in this matter, but she hoped that whatever the outcome-good or bad-it would only concern herself and her partner. As for Franca, she would deal with that separately. That's why when she was asked about Franca earlier, she suddenly became angry and irritated, spitefully saying it would help her digest the Affliction potion. Lumian only realized this through her response, and in that moment understood the mood behind their current banter.

Lumian changed the subject. "You are one of the most proactive people I've ever met."

"The good way of putting it is 'decisive and courageous,' the bad way is 'impulsive and reckless," Jenna said, her eyes like the waters of an autumn lake, now fully exhibiting the charm of a Demoness of Pleasure, smiling slightly, "Now, shouldn't we talk about something else?"

She removed the fake mole from the bridge of her nose and asked Lumian with a smile, "Do you remember what I told you about the different meanings of the fake mole when we first met?"

Lumian smiled wryly. "That was our second meeting."

"I didn't see you the first time, so it doesn't count," Jenna said, her hand holding the fake mole slowly sliding down, past her beautifully curved jaw, her long white neck, and the floral decorations on her chest, stopping at the second button of her blouse.

She smiled brightly and asked, "What does this mean?"

Lumian's gaze involuntarily followed Jenna's hand. He closed his eyes and said, "It means secrets."

Jenna laughed. She stood up slowly and walked over to Lumian, who was sitting at the desk.

Her voice turned low, as if it was scratching Lumian's ear.

"I know it's hard for you to take the initiative right now, that you're hesitating to take that step. It's okay, I'll guide you.

"As expected, you're still a virgin..."

Jenna chuckled softly and walked up to Lumian, placing her hands on his shoulders.

After a second, she lowered her head and pressed her lips against Lumian's.

Lumian smelled the fragrance and felt the softness and sweetness, along with the slight coolness and trembling of her lips, and the nervousness and apprehension.

...

Inside Apartment 702 at 9 Rue Orosai.

Franca studied those characters late into the night and finally received a reply from Madame Hela, who agreed to convene a full gathering of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society soon.

Phew, Franca entered the room, sat at the small analyzer, and shared with the telegraph group members that she had come across some ancient characters that seemed to predate their transmigration. She then chatted with 007 and the others until after one in the morning.

The next day, she woke up around eight.

The habits she had developed recently and the matters on her mind kept her from sleeping in.

After washing up and having breakfast, Franca hesitated about her next move.

Should I find Lumian first to tell him about the Demoness of Black and the oracle bone script, or should I find Anthony to see if he's heard anything about the mineralogist, Jasmine, from the adventurers and smugglers who frequently enter Underground Trier?

After a few seconds of deliberation, Franca decided to find Anthony first because the Hypnotist usually left early and returned late, busy collecting intelligence and advancing his membership in the Psychology Alchemists. If she missed him now, she'd have to wait until the evening.

Besides, proactively seeking out Lumian could expose his current residence to the Demoness of Black. She planned to wait until the evening when Lumian would come to her.

...

With the curtains slightly parted, Lumian stood there shirtless, silently gazing at Ludwig who was savoring a meat pie from the shop across the street. He seemed somewhat refreshed and invigorated.

To his side and slightly behind him, Jenna lay on her stomach in bed, the covers draped diagonally across her. Her lower legs were drawn up and swaying gently in the air, while her face still bore a faint flush.

She gazed at Lumian's side profile and chuckled softly. "Are you embarrassed?"

Lumian let out a derisive snort. "Last night, who was the one embarrassed in the end? First, you insisted on drawing the curtains, then you wanted me to create a wall of spirituality to block the noise, then you said the wall of spirituality wasn't enough and demanded a Bottle of Fiction, then you suddenly got scared and wanted to do a rain check, perhaps another time..."

Jenna laughed softly. "That was to make you eager, to unleash the emotions and desires you've been suppressing with the Ascetic's tolerance.

"I must say, you performed well yesterday, much better than I expected. Of course, at first, your performance was quite in line with your state of innocence."

Lumian chuckled in amusement and replied, "Are all you Demonesses so stubborn with words, insistent on getting the last word?"

"Learned from the best, you." Jenna nodded emphatically, indicating that it was true.

She then laughed. "Why won't you look at me? Are you really embarrassed?"

She seemed to have regained the feeling she had when she first faced Lumian.

Lumian tsked. "I have serious business to do. I need to keep an eye on Ludwig and secretly follow him later."

"Why?" Jenna asked in confusion, "Didn't you let Lugano take Ludwig around when we were in places like Port Santa?"

"Back then, I didn't know he was a sealed Angel, and there are many heretics in Trier," Lumian explained in detail, "When I went to Morora, I made sure Ludwig stayed indoors as much as possible. As long as there was food, he could stay at home. My concern is that if he wanders around Trier, he might run into other followers of the Devouring Whirlpool. Lugano is only a Sequence 7 and not particularly good at combat."

"In that case, Ludwig might follow the Devouring Whirlpool's followers, and he's crucial for you to complete the ritual soon." Jenna suddenly understood.

Lumian withdrew his gaze, bent over, and tried to pick up his clothes from the floor.

After scanning the area, he decided to take out a new set from the Traveler's Bag.

Jenna watched him change clothes with a grin, then walk to the door.

Lumian paused at the door, hesitated to turn around, then held back, and said with a hum, "Ludwig is about to leave this street. You should rest well."

Jenna laughed. "Can you say that while looking at me?"

Seeing Lumian open the door and walk out, she laughed even more wantonly.

"Are you afraid to look at me because you can't resist, don't want to leave, and will be delayed?"

Jenna laughed happily the entire time until Lumian transformed into a shadow and left the apartment when tears seemed to well up in the corners of her eyes.

She looked at the full-length mirror in the room and saw a beautiful, enchanting woman with a smile on her lips and sadness in her eyes.

...

Franca found Anthony in the café below his apartment.

Anthony took a sip of strong black coffee, raised his head, and said, "I was just about to find you."

"Got something?" Franca's eyes lit up as she sat down.

She habitually glanced around and noticed many people looking her way, but no one dared approach to overhear her conversation with Anthony.

I might need to disguise myself and go out looking less attractive at times. Each Sequence in the Demoness pathway significantly enhances feminine charm...

Sequence 4 onwards, the greatest increase in charm is from Demoness of Pleasure... Franca withdrew her gaze and looked at Anthony thoughtfully.

Anthony took out a stack of papers and said, "Based on the time and place you provided about mineralogist Jasmine's recent appearances in Underground Trier, I've been searching for adventurers, smugglers, and students who passed through those areas during the corresponding times. In the past few days, I finally made some progress.

"There are three people who fit the conditions, but they didn't encounter Jasmine nearby. However, they did meet someone else. Based on their descriptions, I made corresponding sketches and found they all seemed to have met the same person, who happens to be someone you're looking for."

"Someone else I'm looking for? Another Mirror Person?" Franca was puzzled.

Anthony unfolded three sheets of drawing paper and pushed them to Franca.

Franca received it and turned it around, quickly glancing at them.

Just one look, and her eyes froze.

Although the sketches on the three sheets had differences, it was clear they depicted the same person:

That person had short hair, soft facial contours, and features that weren't deep.

They had a distinctive appearance, not resembling anyone from any Northern Continent country, nor the darker-skinned people of the Southern Continent.

Franca recognized this person: It was indeed someone she was looking for!

He was suspected to be Harrison from Resurrection Island!

Chapter 848: Project Fishing

848 Project Fishing

Harrison?

He's still in Trier?

007, how come you haven't found him yet? Is your Eternal Blazing Sun Church even capable?

As Franca's spirits lifted, feelings of joy and excitement welled up inside her.

She had mobilized members of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society to keep an eye out for Harrison worldwide, but it turned out the target was still in Trier. Of course, he may have just returned recently.

While inwardly criticizing the Purifiers' work capabilities, Franca also sensed something unusual about this situation.

She lowered her voice and said thoughtfully, "Recently, Jasmine has appeared in Underground Trier twice, and people in the vicinity have encountered Harrison both times. This can't be a coincidence.

"Is Harrison collaborating with the Mirror People?"

Anthony ate the last cream puff and took a sip of coffee before saying, "This can actually be deduced.

"Mr. Hanged Man said that Harrison is likely to appear in places closely related to death, darkness, dusk, and decay, like the Samaritan Women's Spring deep in the fourth level of the underground catacombs. Based on the information we currently have, the appearance of the Samaritan Women's Spring originated from the War of the Four Emperors, from Fourth Epoch Trier.

"So, Harrison has a motive to open the seal and enter Fourth Epoch Trier, which aligns with the Mirror People's goals. Although it's unclear how they got in touch, don't forget that the Mirror People have deep cooperation with those Brokers."

"Those Brokers are more annoying than buzzing flies." Franca sighed sincerely.

She then turned to Anthony and said, "You can go take care of your own business now. I'll discuss with Jenna and Lumian how to use this to find Harrison."

"Alright." Anthony had already done his best in gathering intelligence.

After saying goodbye to Anthony, Franca went straight back to Rue Orosai.

Not wanting to expose Lumian's current residence, she planned to use a summoning messenger to have her two companions come over themselves.

I'll summon Rabbit Chasel first. What reward should I give it this time? I can't let Jenna have her way; I feel like she's training Rabbit Chasel in a very dangerous direction... Franca thought for a few seconds, then turned her gaze to the coffee table.

There lay a book-after several months of delay, the sixth volume of Fors Wall's The Adventurer series was finally out!

This volume was titled "The Adventurer 6: The Future" Franca had just bought it yesterday and hadn't read it yet. She had only flipped through the afterword, seeing that the great writer Fors Wall said she had originally wanted to name this volume "Admiral of Stars" or "Biologist", but ultimately abandoned these ideas based on a sudden inspiration.

Soon, Franca summoned Rabbit Chasel.

Behind this coolly dressed Rabbit of Knowledge, a timid rabbit-shaped Spirit Body wearing boxing gloves faintly appeared in the void.

Tsk, putting on a show, are we? Franca smiled as she handed the letter paper and "The Adventurer 6" to Rabbit Chasel, instructing, "Remember to return it to me after reading."

It wasn't that she couldn't part with such a book, but maintaining a give-and-take relationship with Rabbit Chasel would help build a good rapport. In the future, she might be able to ask it to introduce other special "talents" from the Rabbits of Knowledge who could also serve as messengers.

Rabbit Chasel's eyes lit up. "Absolutely no problem!"

After sending off Rabbit Chasel, Franca summoned Penitent Baynfel.

After completing these two tasks, she lay down in the armchair and pondered her next moves.

I need to notify 007 in the telegram group tonight...

Should I try to contact Professor and the others, mobilize the power of the Mystery Pryers to search for Harrison together?

Sigh, now we've only confirmed Harrison is in Trier, lacking substantial clues to investigate. We can't even go all out even if we wanted to...

We can't just wander around Underground Trier every day, waiting for the right opportunity, can we?

Magic Mirror Divination can't provide answers...

Hmm, I still need to report this quickly. Mr. Hanged Man and the other Major Arcana card holders are also looking for Harrison themselves...

Franca sat up abruptly and continued her busy work.

During this process, she also contemplated her own situation.

If we still can't find him, I might end up digesting some of my Affliction potion...

Well, after dealing with the Mirror Person Nikila, I've already digested a bit. The first rule of the Demoness of Affliction's acting principle is quite easy to summarize: Bring pain to the target, not just physical, but also mental.

The second acting principle should be closely related to oneself. ls pain the foundation of a Demoness?

I should strive to summarize all the acting principles soon, digest the potion quickly. Lumian is already preparing for the ritual to advance to Sequence 4 Iron-blooded Knight, I can't let him leave me too far behind...

Just as she thought of this, Franca felt the wind at the open window pause for a second.

Then, Jenna's figure quickly materialized.

This newly advanced Demoness of Pleasure hadn't made herself ugly through makeup techniques, but had adjusted the "direction" of her charm's diffusion- she wore a black robe, concealing her attractive figure. At the same time, she used makeup to give her skin a sickly pale look, as if she hadn't seen sunlight for a long time. Her lips were painted very red, forming a stark contrast with her skin...

This made Jenna look more like a Vampire, with her charm mainly concentrated on the intricateness of her features and overall beauty, rather than sexual attraction.

So it can be done this way... Not bad, Vampire Jenna is beautiful too... Franca smiled as she examined her for a few moments until Jenna hesitated for a moment before asking, "What important intelligence did you obtain?"

Franca sat back in the armchair, crossed her legs, and explained the Harrison situation in detail.

Jenna, already seated in the single sofa, wasn't as excited as Franca, after all, she knew too little to experience that deep and complex emotion.

She pondered for a moment and said, "At this point in time, Harrison is suspected to be cooperating with the Mirror People... Is this also part of the vortex?"

"It's possible." Franca nodded heavily and mumbled, "Why hasn't Lumian arrived yet?"

"He went out," Jenna paused before saying, "Probably."

Franca blurted out in surprise, "How do you know?"

Jenna smiled and answered, "He told me yesterday that his first step in taming Ludwig was to assign him homework related to food, which required Ludwig to go out and complete on his own. Hmm... according to you, it's like creating a food guide for Trier Meat Pie."

"Gradually ramping up the gaslighting, huh..." Franca muttered, "Did you discuss this when you left yesterday? He plans to follow Ludwig?"

"He's afraid Ludwig might converge with other believers of the Devouring Whirlpool, and Lugano is only Sequence 7, unable to stop it." Jenna first briefly explained Lumian's concerns, then her eyes flickered slightly as she said, "This should only be one of the reasons."

"Are there other reasons?" Franca tucked her hair and tried to understand the Hunter's countless hidden intentions.

A smile appeared on Jenna's face.

"Yes, although he didn't say it, that's what I think. His hidden purpose should be to engage in his favorite activity: Fishing!"

Franca was enlightened. "Using Ludwig to fish for other believers of the Devouring Whirlpool?"

Jenna nodded and further added, "Judging from the style of Overseer Perle, no matter what plans the Brokers make, they will most likely gather different forces and people through covert transactions, maximizing the advantages of their own pathway. So, there's a good chance that believers of the Devouring Whirlpool and other heretics have been brought onto the vortex plan.

"If we can catch higher-level believers of the Devouring Whirlpool, we might be able to further understand the situation of the vortex matter and discover its key points."

Franca inwardly hissed. "This is Lumian's style, on the surface he's training Ludwig, but in reality, he's fishing for heretics, investigating the vortex matter.

The most infuriating thing is, his surface goal is indeed very real and important!"

After this exclamation, Franca looked at Jenna and praised with a smile, "You're getting smarter and smarter!"

"Dammit, when you suddenly praise me like this, I don't know whether to accept it gracefully or be modest. If it were Lumian, he would definitely say 'You've barely caught up to my train of thought'." The latter half of Jenna's sentence imitated Lumian's tone.

Franca pondered for a moment, her lips slowly curling into a smile.

"Fishing is indeed a good method.

"We can use the same approach to find Harrison.

"Harrison has a deep understanding and very sinister application of death, and is also looking for scenarios closely related to death, darkness, dusk, and other such powers. Does this mean he can be converged by Beyonders of these pathways?

"This could be convergence from high-ranking individuals, and should also include certain special convergences, such as the Underworld Daoist seal on Lumian, or the Samaritan Women's Spring. Hmm, Amandina's power comes directly from the Underworld Daoist, and the Underworld Daoist seems to possess powers of death, darkness, and dusk simultaneously. Amandina might be able to converge on Harrison as well..."

At this point, Franca's eyes became exceptionally bright.

"I choose all of the above!

"Once Lumian's condition stabilizes, we'll have him take Amandina to the Samaritan Women's Spring to meet the Underworld Daoist. We'll ambush nearby to see if Harrison will converge!"

...

Quartier de la Republic, Rue Richelieu.

Standing in the shadows at the side of the street, Lumian rubbed his nose, feeling as if aromantic scent still lingered.

The emotions and desires he had accumulated since becoming an Ascetic were finally released to a large extent through last night's events, making his condition quite good.

But his mood was very heavy, stemming both from feeling torn and guilty, as well as concern for others' feelings.

True "pleasure" indeed makes one want to indulge, hmm, just want to, but it really does bring pain... Dammit, I'll go back and mock Jenna harshly to vent these emotions... Lumian exhaled slowly, turning his gaze towards Ludwig, who was savoring a red fish hot beef pie not far away.

Chapter 849: Intercontinental Travel

849 Intercontinental Travel

Ludwig had finished eating the red fish hot beef pie in his hand. He squatted in front of a street bench, took out a pen and a notebook from his red hard book bag, and began writing his post-meal impressions with focus and seriousness.

Watching in the shadows, Lumian pursed his lips.

You say you're afraid, but your body instinctively repeats the habits formed in the Church of Knowledge...

If there weren't so many exams and studies, you might have become a qualified believer of the God of Knowledge and Wisdom...

While mocking Ludwig, Lumian surveyed the surrounding citizens.

His gaze passed over a young man quietly reading a book in the café across the street, over a middle-aged scholar standing at the intersection observing passersby and carriages without crossing, and landed on a painter who had set up his easel under an Intis parasol tree, blankly painting the street scene.

Lumian left the shadows, walked a few steps, and came to stand behind the painter, peering at his work like the previous passersby.

The painting was ordinary, and he didn't detect any supernatural powers.

Lumian continued walking, inwardly sighing, It seems to be a normal painter for now, just with a somewhat off mental state...

Is this what Trier's painters are like? Sometimes they seem more like heretics than actual heretics...

Sigh, in Trier, it's too difficult to identify heretics based on behavioral abnormalities. As Franca would say, many citizens' mental states are quite beautiful... In this matter, Fourth Epoch Trier and the overall seal are half responsible, and they themselves are responsible for the other half...

As Lumian was thinking, he saw a completely naked man walking towards him, with the only piece of cloth on him being a black top hat positioned in front of his lower abdomen.

This man walked with his head held high, looking around proudly, not at all embarrassed by his current appearance, as if he had done something very worthy of pride.

After passing Lumian by seven or eight meters, his palm was suddenly scalded.

He instinctively withdrew his hand and saw that his black top hat had burst into bright red flames, slowly falling to the ground.

He lost his last piece of cover.

Lumian, his back to him as he continued forward, silently moved his lips.

You're welcome, just letting you show off more thoroughly.

You dare to streak with just that little bit? Next time, I'll send you to the New City of Silver for a free tour.

Lumian walked on with his hands in his pockets, stepping into the shadows, and turned his attention back to Ludwig.

He had been following for a long time but still hadn't found anyone suspicious of being a Devouring Whirlpool believer.

However, considering that since knowing Ludwig, the little boy had never converged with heretics of the same pathway, Lumian suspected that the seal on him must have some restrictions on this. Otherwise, with an evil deity's Angel running around everywhere, who knows how many mystical disasters would have been triggered by now.

There might be another reason. Many evil deities' bestowed, even if they've gained godhood, can disguise themselves as normal humans as long as they haven't lost control or gone half-mad. But those of the Devouring Whirlpool might not be able to. Ludwig, not yet recovered to Depriver, can already eat so much in one meal. The corresponding Sequence 4 demigod, even without letting loose their appetite, would surely have an eating capacity that would alarm the Purifiers and Machinery Hivemind...

Forget it, the main purpose is to 'tame' Ludwig anyway. Fishing out other believers of the Devouring Whirlpool is just an additional idea. It doesn't matter if I don't find any... Lumian had been watching for so long but hadn't found any citizens with problematic eating behaviors.

...

After receiving Franca's second letter, Lumian arrived at Apartment 702, 9 Rue Orosai after dinner.

Jenna had arrived two or three minutes earlier, still wearing Vampire makeup and dressed in an old-fashioned, conservative black robe.

Lumian glanced at Jenna, opened his mouth, then closed it again.

Seeing this, Jenna immediately raised her chin slightly and said, "Were you going to mock my current appearance?"

Lumian chuckled and said, "I just recalled a joke. Once there was a duke who, in order to whiten his skin, followed the advice of a quack doctor and took arsenic-containing pills for a long time. He did successfully improve his complexion, but he also experienced a side effect-he died."

"Where did you read that joke?" Jenna asked curiously.

"In Ghost Face. Not long before I saw that joke, a guest at the Auberge du Coq Doré told me you can make your face look rosy and healthy by slapping your cheeks, to help find a job more easily." Lumian laughed. "You coarse-haired folks need to read more books and magazines. Don't be illiterate, or you'll be looked down upon by the clergy of the Church of Knowledge."

I just wanted you to act normal and wait for an opportunity, not keep mocking...

Jenna suddenly felt an urge to grind her teeth.

"Do you think I'm like you? Having not even finished compulsory education..."

At this point, Jenna trailed off.

Meanwhile, Franca, who had been furtively writing something at the coffee table, stood up and said, "You two, don't lose sight of the important matters."

Lumian, who already knew from the second letter about Harrison the visitor from Resurrection Island reappearing and Franca wanting to quickly take Amandina to the edge of the Samaritan Women's Spring area, nodded gently and said, "My condition has basically recovered."

"That was fast..." Franca was a bit surprised.

Jenna's gaze briefly shifted away before returning to Lumian as she nodded slightly and said, "Indeed, faster than I expected."

Lumian tsked. "Isn't that a good thing? We can ask Amandina about her thoughts right now."

"Mm-hmm." Franca excitedly moved to take out the Ice Amulet.

Before coming over, Lumian had already burned the independent space containing Black Tear for over half an hour. He took out this Grade 1 Sealed Artifact Level 1.

"Let's use this. It won't consume any charges."

As he spoke, his gaze swept across the full-length mirror in the living room, the glass windows revealing the night, and the metal-surfaced decorations.

Using Black Tear's mirror magic, he found no abnormalities in these reflective objects and didn't sense any gazes directed at them from within.

He then tossed Black Tear to Franca, giving a slight nod to indicate that the Demoness of Black likely wasn't watching them at the moment.

"I've written down everything I want to tell Amandina to prevent eavesdropping..." Franca put on Black Tear, held the letter paper in her hand, covered it with black flames, and pressed it into the glass surface of the full-length mirror in the living room.

She needed to act quickly and finish this before Black Tear's negative effects took hold!

...

South Continent, Matani, Port Pylos.

Amandina lit the gas wall lamp and sat at her desk, once again reading the mysticism materials provided by Ms. Franca.

Each time she read this knowledge, she was genuinely surprised, respectful, longing, and fearful.

Over the past two to three weeks, she had met with her acquaintances from the patrol team several times and attended two mystical studies gatherings. She discovered that the mysticism knowledge recorded in these materials was actually unknown to the vast majority of Beyonders, whether official or not.

This is truly a gift... Just as Amandina had this thought, she saw the dressing mirror given to her by Ms. Franca, which she had specially placed nearby, become dark and ripple with an aqueous light.

Within the aqueous light, Intisian characters were outlined: "Lam Franca. Lumian has returned.

"He asked me to inquire when you plan to come to Trier. He will take you to the area where that shadow might appear..."

Louis Berry has returned to Trier... Amandina thought for a few seconds, then said to the mirror, "Tonight works."

She had originally planned not to see anyone tonight, to focus on studying the remaining mysticism knowledge.

She had already instructed her maid in advance and locked her bedroom door.

As soon as Amandina gave her answer, Franca's slightly urgent voice came from the mirror.

"Put your hand on the mirror."

Feeling a bit nervous yet quite excited and curious, Amandina reached her palm towards the surface of the dressing mirror.

She felt the hard, cold glass lose its solid feel, like a layer of water without temperature.

Amandina's right hand passed completely through the glass surface, and suddenly a terrifying suction force erupted from within.

Her entire body was yanked in, falling into a dark, empty tunnel, plummeting towards the end of a vortex.

Before Amandina could react, she felt dizzy and disoriented.

When she regained her senses, she found herself standing in a small living room, facing Ms. Franca whom she had met before.

This lady was as beautiful as last time, and with the closer distance and no mirror barrier, her charm was clearly stronger, making even Amandina, a woman, feel a bit embarrassed to look too much but unable to resist.

As Amandina's gaze moved, she saw a beautiful woman with pale skin and bright red lips who looked more girlish, and Lumian Lee sitting in an armchair, wearing a shirt and jacket, with his right foot crossed over his left leg.

Are all the women around this guy so beautiful? He seems to have become a bit more handsome... Amandina suddenly felt a little insecure about her own appearance.

She then looked around, examining this unfamiliar place.

Meanwhile, Franca quickly removed Black Tear and tossed it back to Lumian.

How amazing... Amandina finally came to her senses and asked with sparkling eyes, "Did I come here through the mirror? Is this Trier?"

Lumian tucked Black Tear back into that separate space in the Traveler's Bag and smiled as he corrected, "It was through the mirror world."

"Mirror world..." Amandina pondered this term, "Then, do I have a way to travel to different places through the mirror world like you?"

Lumian scoffed. "Don't you know that non-adjacent pathways can't be interchanged? Don't you know about the existence of mystical items?"

As he spoke, Lumian stood up and walked towards the door. "We're leaving now."

"Aren't they coming?" Amandina pointed at Franca and Jenna.

She hadn't even had a chance to exchange pleasantries yet!

"No need." Lumian opened the front door.

Chapter 850: Slow and Steady Wins the Race

850 Slow and Steady Wins the Race

Inside a four-wheeled, four-seater carriage.

Amandina sat across from Lumian, excitedly looking out at the Intis parasol trees along the road, the still brightly lit shops, the magnificent arcaded streets, gentlemen and ladies walking their turtles, and some citizens in strange attire.

She sincerely praised, "Trier truly lives up to its reputation. It's even more wonderful than I imagined."

"I hope you won't take back that assessment after staying here for a while," Lumian wanted to make a sarcastic remark, but there were so many things worth mocking about Trier that he couldn't find the most representative one at the moment, so he could only respond to Amandina in this way.

Amandina turned her gaze away from the carriage window, saying with some regret, "It's a pity I have to return to Port Pylos at dawn."

She planned to apply for entrance exams to some universities in Trier after graduating from grammar school.

Amandina glanced at the coachman's seat in front, and lowered her voice to ask Lumian, "Why don't we just... just teleport there directly?"

Lumian smiled leisurely.

"You're a guest. Of course I should show you around Trier."

Amandina scrutinized Lumian for a moment.

"I feel like you're deceiving me."

"Your feeling is not wrong." Lumian laughed without concealing anything. "Going slowly allows the Law of Beyonder Characteristics Convergence to take effect."

If he had teleported with Amandina to the entrance of the underground catacombs and rushed to the Samaritan Women's Spring at the fastest speed to complete what needed to be done, Harrison, the visitor from Resurrection Island, might not have reacted in time, might not have been affected by the law of convergence, and might not have made the decision to sneak into the Samaritan Women's Spring again at night. Everything would have ended without achieving the expected goal.

He had to leave enough time for the Law of Beyonder Characteristics Convergence to take effect!

Sometimes, slow and steady wins the race.

"What... what are you trying to converge with?" Amandina, having witnessed Lumian's performance during the Dream Festival, became nervous all of a sudden.

"A target I'm currently tracking," Lumian leaned back against the carriage wall and answered with a smile. "Don't worry, your safety is absolutely guaranteed."

Hearing this, Amandina quietly breathed a sigh of relief.

Louis Berry was indeed a trustworthy person; he had fulfilled all the promises he made.

What she didn't know was that if Franca or Jenna were here, they would definitely ask in return, "Is only safety guaranteed? Won't there be any injuries, torture, or impacts on the mind and spirit during the process?"

Amandina glanced at the coachman's seat again through the carriage wall and said softly, "Aren't you afraid the coachman will overhear what you're saying?"

You weren't lowering your voice at all just now!

Lumian chuckled.

"He can't hear us."

Amandina was stunned for a moment, trying to understand with her mysticism knowledge.

"Did you... did you quickly create a wall of spirituality?"

"You can think of it that way," Lumian couldn't be bothered to explain to Amandina what a Bottle of Fiction was.

Amandina relaxed and asked with a smile, "Are those two ladies just now your lovers?"

Lumian let out a derisive snort.

"Shouldn't you ask that question in front of them?"

"That would be so embarrassing! They would definitely get angry!" Amandina's emotional intelligence was quite good.

"And I wouldn't get angry?" Lumian asked amusedly.

Amandina giggled.

"You don't seem like someone who would get angry over something like this."

She suddenly pointed out the window.

"Is that the Trier Normal University?"

"Your technique for changing the subject is quite clumsy," Lumian mocked Amandina without mercy.

And so, the four-wheeled, four-seater rental carriage arrived at Place du Purgatoire at a normal speed.

As Lumian descended the stairs, he took out a white candle and tossed it to Amandina, telling her about the various taboos inside the underground catacombs.

Amandina listened very carefully and lit one of the candles by rubbing it with spirituality.

"I've seen some of these in magazines, but never as detailed as what you've told me today.

"Do these taboos really have to be followed? What happens if they're not followed? For example, what if I hadn't lit a candle?"

As they spoke, the two had already arrived at the giant stone archway inscribed with the warning "Stop! The Death Empire lies ahead!"

The catacombs administrator behind the door, with graying hair and wearing a blue vest and yellow trousers, glanced at Lumian but did not stop the two from entering the underground catacombs at night.

Lumian looked straight ahead, walking forward through the piles of skeletons along the sides of the path, and said in a calm tone, "In that case, you would disappear from this world. Your parents would forget they had such a daughter, your former fiancé would forget he once had such a fiancée, your friends would forget you, your servants would forget you, and perhaps only I would remember you."

Although Amandina was a Beyonder equivalent to Sequence 7 and had witnessed some of the tragedies that occurred during the Dream Festival, and her former fiancé was particularly skilled at summoning the dead, being in the underground catacombs-a gloomy, dark place full of skeletons and permeated with the aura of death-she couldn't help but feel a bit frightened and uneasy.

This, combined with Lumian's explanation, made the hair on the back of her neck stand up, and she gripped the white candle even tighter.

"The first time I entered the underground catacombs, I thought this was truly a perfect place for telling horror stories. Unfortunately, until now, such opportunities have been rare." A smile appeared on Lumian's face.

Amandina was stunned for a moment. "Were you just telling a horror story?"

"Yes, and the most terrifying part of this horror story is that every word of it is true," Lumian replied with a smile.

"_." Amandina was scared once again.

She quickened her pace, afraid of being left behind by Lumian.

As the two made their way to the fourth level of the underground catacombs, there were no shortage of skeletons suddenly moving, trying to trip Amandina, nearly causing the young lady to cry out in alarm.

Finally, Lumian led Amandina to the huge, decaying, and mottled tomb chamber that housed the Samaritan Women's Spring.

He looked left and right and silently said to himself, We didn't encounter the shadow resembling Krismona this time... Was She wandering around the fourth level of the catacombs before to find a female Demoness, and no longer has such an obsession after achieving Her goal?

Lumian shifted his gaze back and tossed a mirror to Amandina.

"Hold this and wait for me here."

"Wait here?" Amandina looked around, slightly panicked.

The surroundings were pitch black, with numerous tombs, decaying and dilapidated, with unknown things lurking in the shadows.

"It'll be quick," Lumian didn't offer any comfort, but went straight through the half-open stone door into the tomb chamber.

After walking a few steps, he encountered the deeply wrinkled catacombs administrator who looked more like a corpse than a living person.

The elderly administrator, also wearing a blue vest and yellow trousers, did not stop Lumian but stood silently in place, allowing him to pass.

After reaching the gentle downward slope, Lumian took out a mirror and the Black Tear accessory that had been burned for over half an hour from the Traveler's Bag.

Outside the huge tomb chamber, Amandina saw Lumian's face appear on the surface of the mirror by the yellowish light of the white candle, and heard his voice.

"Press your hand against the mirror."

With experience, Amandina quickly pressed her hand holding the white candle against the mirror surface.

Again, she passed through the familiar cold water flow, experienced the familiar terrifying suction force and weightless falling sensation, and soon found herself appearing beside Lumian.

Lumian put away the Black Tear and the mirror, pointing to the depths of the slope. "It's down there."

...

In the gap between two ancient tomb chambers, twenty to thirty meters away from the huge tomb chamber housing the Samaritan Women's Spring.

Franca, holding a white candle, carefully peeked out and glanced towards the target location.

She then withdrew and muttered to Jenna, "This candle is really annoying. We can't hide well at all. How are we supposed to ambush Harrison like this?"

The dim yellow light of the white candle was quite conspicuous in the deep, pure darkness.

Jenna looked at Franca and smiled. "It works both ways. Harrison also can't approach silently without us noticing. Besides, hiding in this corner can effectively reduce the impact of the candlelight. It won't travel that far."

Franca knew all this and was just complaining casually.

She suddenly remembered something and asked with a twitching corner of her mouth, "Have you seen Anthony?"

"Uh..." Jenna was also stunned.

At this moment, Anthony's voice came from outside the gap.

"I've been here all along."

Along with his voice, Franca and Jenna finally saw their companion.

He was standing openly on the path outside, holding a lit white candle, and the two Demonesses hadn't noticed him before.

"Psychological Invisibility is really great..." Franca praised enviously.

Psychological Invisibility worked on a completely different principle from other invisibility abilities. It mainly involved placing oneself in the psychological blind spots and cognitive dead angles of the surrounding people, making them ignore the situation here. Therefore, whether Anthony was holding a lit candle or not did not affect his ability to become invisible.

Anthony simply replied, "Candlelight is a powerful attention-drawing element here. It also reduces the effectiveness of my Psychological Invisibility. I need to be very focused to maintain it."

Franca and Jenna stopped talking and hid in the gap between the tomb chambers, listening to the sounds around them.

...

In front of the faintly contracting and expanding thin grayish-white fog.

Lumian once again examined his own state.

That cold emanating from within his heart occupied his body, causing most of his emotions and desires to wither, but the malice and irritability resulting from the negative effects of the contract still existed and were growing stronger.

He was in a very good state now, having endured without much reliance on the abilities of the Ascetic.

Amandina had a similar reaction, one side of her face turning deathly pale from the "freeze", while she gritted her teeth to prevent an unfamiliar version of herself from emerging.

Lumian grabbed her arm and extended his left palm holding the white candle towards the grayish-white fog.

As his chest warmed, the two successfully walked into the mist.

Everything became even more silent.

Chapter 851: A Marvelous Experience

851 A Marvelous Experience

Lumian let go of her hand, pressed his left chest, silently praised Mr. Fool, then led Amandina towards the bottom of the slope through the grayish-white fog.

The further Amandina walked, the more uncomfortable she became with her current state. The icy coldness emanating from within made her feel as if she had already died and become a corpse, while it seemed like another version of herself inside her body was trying to tear its way out.

"Shall we... go back?" she hesitantly said to Lumian.

"We're almost at our destination," Lumian pointed in the direction where the faint, illusory sound of water could barely be heard, then added, "If you really decide to go back now, I can fulfill your request."

Amandina hesitated for a few seconds. "We're already at the edge..."

Wouldn't it be a waste to go back now?

Lumian chuckled. "Don't worry, if it really gets to the point where we can't bear it, I'll definitely run faster than you."

"You saying that makes me even more worried..." Amandina replied softly.

Lumian continued forward, thinking for a moment before saying, "When I tell you to close your eyes, close them. When I tell you to open them, open them immediately."

"Alright." In such an environment, Amandina could only choose to trust Lumian.

Soon, the gray fog in front of them became very thin, revealing a spring the size of a pond.

Pale-white water flowed in the spring, surrounded by deep, dark objects of indescribable color.

Amandina saw a wet, seaweed-like black hair floating in the water, and at the bottom, there seemed to be multiple faint figures hidden, struggling as if they had just drowned and were trying to crawl out.

At the same time, she noticed a lady wandering beside the spring water, wearing a white robe, with black hair, exquisitely perfect features, and a holy aura that seemed out of place in the catacombs.

Amandina was immediately attracted, and if it weren't for the lady's blank and cold gaze, lacking necessary charm, and if the spring water hadn't suddenly retracted into a pitch-black hole that light couldn't penetrate, she might have been unable to pull herself away.

Lumian also saw Krismona's figure, and several thoughts flashed through his mind, I could bring Jenna here to meet Amandina directly, without having to wait until an advancement every time...

The Krismona here is more like a wandering ghost, bound to the area around the Samaritan Women's Spring. Whether she can communicate normally, whether she would indiscriminately attack approaching Demonesses, whether this would cause any abnormalities, is still unknown...

I need to find a way to confirm before bringing Jenna in...

Seeing that Krismona's shadow didn't even glance at him, Lumian turned his head to Amandina and said, "You can close your eyes now."

"Okay." Amandina felt a certain fear and obediently closed her eyes.

Lumian then took two steps forward, reaching the edge of the Samaritan Women's Spring.

The next second, Amandina heard the sound of gushing spring water and felt a violent, frenzied aura descend upon her.

She couldn't help but tremble, her knees weakening.

At the same time, she had hallucinations, believing that multiple figures were approaching her, each extremely terrifying-the kind that would cause nightmares if seen and lead to a tragic death if encountered.

Amandina cried out in fear, "Let's go back! I want to go back!"

As she screamed, the violent and frenzied aura subsided, and the multiple figures in her hallucination retreated.

She heard Lumian's deep voice in her ear. "You can open your eyes now."

Amandina broke free from the extreme fear, relaxing a little.

She didn't hesitate and opened her eyes.

She saw that familiar figure, wearing a strange, rust-spotted iron crown, skin as crystalline as jade, with a white beard gently floating, already quite elderly.

At this moment, the old man's figure was sitting cross-legged at the deep hole, which was violently shaking as if some unknown entity was trying to squeeze out.

Amandina's gaze fell on those deep eyes that seemed like the night sky.

Her thoughts suddenly became blurred, as if she saw a rotting, pus-oozing hand with strange feathers reaching out and pressing on her head.

She also heard an old, blank, cold, and hollow voice ringing in her ear.

But she couldn't understand what the voice was saying.

After an unknown amount of time, Amandina came to her senses. The old man's figure was no longer in her sight, only the dark soil that had lost the pale-white spring water, and Lumian crouching beside the spring, holding a small golden bottle to collect the seeping water droplets.

Of course, Lumian and the others had reported Amandina's situation to the Major Arcana card holders before daring to bring her into the area around the Samaritan Women's Spring, and Madam Magician had also asked him to collect some more spring water.

"What's the use of this water?" Amandina, no longer so nervous and scared, asked curiously.

"If you make your enemy drink it, they will die instantly," Lumian patronizingly replied.

Amandina's eyes lit up, but she asked in confusion, "But how can I make my enemy drink it..."

Lumian put away the small golden bottle, stood up and said, "What did you see just now? What did you experience?"

Amandina recalled and recounted all the details, then self-examined.

"But I couldn't understand what was being said, the pronunciation was %¥...

"It seems like I've gained a new ability, I can placate souls, calm emotions and desires..."

Lumian carefully remembered the few pronunciations Amandina had relayed, walked back to the young lady's side and said, "You've received a new boon, Soul Assurer."

"Yes." Amandina smiled, "I feel like my body has even changed a little..."

Lumian chuckled.

"Maybe you'll slowly grow a white beard, develop wrinkles. I've heard that boons gradually make the blessed ones resemble the high-level beings who granted them power, both mentally and physically."

Amandina was startled. "Can I... not have that?"

"Try consuming corresponding pathway potions to see if it can counteract it," Lumian said as he passed by Amandina and walked up the slope leading to the tomb chamber.

Amandina followed closely behind, lost in thought.

...

Even until Lumian and Amandina left the underground catacombs, Franca, Jenna, and Anthony had not encountered Harrison, the visitor from Resurrection Island.

"He didn't show up?" Franca frowned and said, "Was my deduction wrong? Is relying on the traits of characteristics alone not enough to achieve such powerful convergence? Or is it that only Angel-level high-sequence Beyonders can actively utilize the law of convergence?"

Jenna's eyes shifted slightly as she thought for a moment before saying, "Maybe Harrison can sense this deliberate convergence and actively avoided it...

Maybe, maybe he's not from the Death, Darkness, or Twilight pathways. He has a deep understanding of death and is pursuing corresponding things and scenes, but that doesn't mean he's a Beyonder of these pathways. What if he's a scholar studying death?"

"It's possible." Franca sighed, "Let's wait five more minutes, then we'll go after Lumian and Amandina."

...

Even until they all gathered at 9 Rue Orosai Apartment 702, Harrison from Resurrection Island still hadn't appeared.

"Thank you all, I can provide help for you now," Amandina said, looking at Franca.

Franca looked at the young girl who appeared somewhat tired from her terrifying experience and smiled, saying, "There's no rush. You should go back first. Once you've adapted to your newly gained power and regained your body's balance, we'll come again.

"Besides, it's quite convenient to travel from Port Pylos to Trier."

How is it convenient? Without using the mirror world or teleportation, it might take two or three months to arrive... Amandina grumbled silently, but accepted Franca's suggestion.

Then, she was sent back by Lumian and the others using Black Tear to the mirror Franca had given her, and she emerged from it.

At this moment, it was still night outside, with servants occasionally passing by in the corridor.

Looking at her familiar bedroom, at the fountain pen on the desk and the pile of books, Amandina suddenly felt as if she had been away for many days and experienced too many things.

But it had only been half a night.

In this half night, she had completed a round trip using the mirror world, toured the prosperous Trier that was farther than any distant place, explored the underground catacombs featured in magazines, and witnessed the terrifying area around the Samaritan Women's Spring.

After savoring the experience for a while, Amandina sincerely sighed.

"How amazing... A marvelous journey..."

...

Inside Apartment 702 at 9 Rue Orosai.

Lumian tried to repeat the sounds Amandina had heard.

Franca listened intently, hesitating before saying, "It seems to be... 'Be careful, Penglai'..."

"Be careful of Penglai? The Penglai divine mountain mentioned by the Armored Shadow? This doesn't have much practical meaning for us..." Lumian said thoughtfully.

Jenna and Anthony both nodded.

"Indeed." Franca quickly adjusted her mindset, "But we've at least achieved one of our goals. In a few days, we can bring Amandina to summon Armored Shadow!"

At that time, she planned to first try asking if it could understand the meaning of the text on Mr. Star's information.

Just thinking about it was quite exciting!

After chatting idly for a while, Anthony, seeing that it was getting late, bid farewell and left to return to his own home.

Jenna looked at Franca pacing back and forth, then turned to Lumian and quietly pointed at herself.

Lumian slowly shook his head and pointed at himself.

After exchanging glances several times, Jenna, wearing her Vampire makeup, pursed her lips and said to Franca, "I'll make a move first."

"Mm." Franca didn't say much, as she wanted to talk to Lumian alone about those ancient texts and the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society.

After Jenna left, she sat down in the armchair and comfortably stretched her limbs.

She glanced at Lumian and asked curiously, "Why don't you sit down?"

Lumian looked at Franca, unable to hold back another sigh. "I have something to tell you."

Franca scrutinized Lumian's expression suspiciously.

"Are you playing a prank? You're the type of person who would warn everyone in a joking tone even if a disaster was about to happen. No, you're... you're serious? Is it something very serious?"

Lumian had already used Black Tear to sense the various mirrors in the room, roughly confirming that the Demoness of Black wasn't watching.

He looked at Franca, instinctively wanting to force a smile to make himself seem a bit more relaxed, but he couldn't manage it.

Franca unconsciously sat up straight.

Lumian spoke in a low voice, "Jenna asked me to help her digest the Pleasure potion."

Chapter 852: Two Choices

852 Two Choices

Franca was initially stunned, then her expression turned to one of obvious shock.

She opened her mouth, instinctively wanting to say something, but her red lips quivered uncontrollably.

Her face gradually turned pale, and her eyes flickered between emptiness and confusion.

Lumian quietly watched Franca without saying a word.

After a while, Franca asked hoarsely and with difficulty, "You agreed?"

Her voice sounded like it was being squeezed out of her throat, her eyes holding a glimmer of hope.

Lumian nodded slowly.

The light in Franca's eyes dimmed instantly.

She lowered her head bit by bit, staring at her legs resting on the armchair.

After a few seconds, she muttered as if in a dream, "I knew... Jenna's affection and regard for me were never love. I was just fantasizing... Fantasizing that she couldn't find anyone suitable to help digest the Pleasure potion and had to reluctantly choose me. And maybe, over time, physical entanglement would lead to emotional closeness...

"I knew... Jenna was in a hurry to digest the potion because her brother would soon return to Trier...

"I knew... the female Demoness path is very dangerous. Jenna is very aware of this too...

"I knew... her sexual orientation is men...

"I knew... she's decisive and good at making bold moves...

"lL... Lean accept Jenna choosing someone else. I can accept... accept that she likes someone else. She's free. She's independent. She's not my appendage. Just because I like her doesn't mean she must like me or can't get close to others... I've been mentally preparing myself for this, even comforting myself that maybe this could help me digest the Affliction potion...

"But, but..."

Franca suddenly looked up, her eyes burning with anger. "Why you? Damn it, why you?"

Lumian felt like he was being stared at by a beautiful yet dangerous leopard, but he remained silent.

The answer didn't need to be spoken. It had already been spoken.

Franca and Lumian locked eyes, her gaze gradually turning sorrowful.

She laughed at herself bitterly, then asked in frustration and anger, "Why did you agree?"

"For two reasons: one superficial and one real. Which do you want to hear?"

Lumian replied with a bitter smile.

"I want to hear both!" Franca said without hesitation, her voice firm.

She stood up, trying to make herself appear more imposing.

Lumian sighed and said, "The superficial reason is that Jenna had already come to me. Whether I refused or avoided her, it would hurt her, affect her state, and leave hidden dangers. If I agreed to help her, it would hurt you. I had to choose the option where the aftermath was relatively easier to deal with. You are optimistic and have a good nature; you should be able to gradually let go..."

"Dammit! So because I have a good nature, I deserve to be bullied?" Franca interrupted angrily, laughing bitterly.

She walked to the window, placing her hands on the window frame, staring at the night outside as if to calm herself down.

Lumian came up beside her, also gazing into the deep night.

After a few seconds, without turning her head, Franca asked, as if talking to herself, "And the real reason?"

Lumian was silent for a moment before saying, "From the moment you didn't want to lose your image in front of someone you truly loved-at the moment you began digesting the Pleasure potion-and Jenna took the initiative to approach you, your relationship entered a vortex, spiraling downward, and sooner or later it would erupt. The longer it dragged on, the more hurtful and severe the consequences. It's better to have a conclusion sooner.

"For me, the optimal choice in this matter would actually be to delay until preparations for the Iron-blooded Knight advancement ritual were complete. If things went smoothly, that would only be a matter of three or four weeks. By then, I would have gained godhood, becoming a demigod of Sequence 4.

Whatever emotional issues you two had, it wouldn't affect me even if it completely shattered our team's harmony and unity.

"Even if the subsequent Sequence 3 also required a team, I would have enough time to reorganize."

Franca listened quietly, then turned her head to look at Lumian's face. "And your emotions?"

Lumian gazed into the darkness outside, remaining silent.

Franca followed suit, remaining silent for a while before saying expressionlessly, "You should go now. I'm a mess. I want some peace."

Lumian hesitated, not moving.

Seeing this, Franca said with a complex smile, "Don't worry, I won't leave. I still have a mission.

"Why aren't you leaving yet? Do you want me to beat you up?

"Let me tell you, once I figure things out, I might end up like that Demoness in Morora and cut off your manhood! Anyway, you can grow it back; I'll cut it every day!

"Go on, get out!

"Get lost!"

Seeing Franca's emotions gradually intensify and her grabbing something to throw at him, Lumian sighed softly, walked towards the door, opened it, and stepped into the stairwell.

Bang!

The sound of the door slamming shut echoed behind him.

Lumian descended the stairs and soon saw Jenna standing silently in the shadows.

She hadn't really left. She had been waiting quietly in the building, head slightly lowered.

"How did it go?" Jenna raised her head, asking Lumian.

Lumian recounted his conversation with Franca and her reactions, focusing on the key points.

Jenna pursed her lips and said to Lumian, "You should go back. I'll wait outside in case of any accidents."

Lumian glanced back at the dark hallway, then said, "I'll wait here too."

Jenna shook her head. "One person is enough. If she calms down, she might want to talk to me. Your presence might provoke her further."

After a moment of thought, Lumian said, "Okay."

He looked at Jenna's deep eyes, filled with a hint of pain, and sighed, saying, "In this world, most people are selfish most of the time. Like you...

Lumian paused and pointed at himself. "And like me."

Jenna's gaze softened a bit, and she smiled self-deprecatingly. "Sometimes, I really want to drag you into the abyss with me."

...

Returning to his rented apartment, Lumian lay on his bed, staring at the dark ceiling, unable to sleep.

He didn't want to rely on Cogitation to calm himself down either.

After an unknown amount of time, he suddenly had a premonition and sat up abruptly, directing his gaze towards the bedroom window.

With a creak, the window opened, and Franca, wearing a woman's shirt and fitted trousers but sporting fuzzy slippers, jumped in.

In the crimson moonlight, her eyes appeared red, and she held a dagger in her hand.

"Thanks to you, I've digested quite a bit of the Affliction potion!" Franca said through gritted teeth, looking at Lumian sitting on the bed. "Damn it, the more I think about it, the angrier I get!"

Lumian stared at Franca's face for a few seconds, his gaze slowly shifting to the dagger in her hand.

He waited for Franca to continue speaking.

Franca ground her teeth and said, "I can accept Jenna making this choice.

Although I would be sad, sorrowful, and in pain, I am willing to accept it and even encourage her.

"But you, you hurt your bro! You should be cut into pieces for this!

"Do you know how much this hurt me? We were so close, so in sync, always thinking of each other. Why, why did you break this beautiful state?

"You ended up making me feel abandoned, like you two are close and intimate, while I'm left out, the unnecessary one...

"I feel betrayed..."

As she spoke, the gnashing tone in Franca's voice diminished, and a trace of confusion appeared in her voice.

She paused, then threw the dagger, which embedded itself accurately in Lumian's bed.

Franca then took two steps forward, glaring at Lumian.

"You now have two choices!

"One, as I said before, if you dare touch Jenna, I'll make you drink the Witch potion and turn you into a woman. Now, your choice is to switch pathways and become a Demoness of Despair!

"Two, I screw you, or you screw mel!"

Lumian had anticipated many possible developments, but he hadn't expected these choices.

Seeing his shocked, bewildered expression, Franca added angrily, "I want to join you two!"

"Wh-" Lumian finally said a word, carefully observing Franca's state.

After speaking, Franca let out a long sigh, revealing her usual smile.

"Let me ask you, do you, uh, care about me?"

"Yes," Lumian answered without hesitation.

Franca nodded in satisfaction. "Do you care about Jenna?"

"Yes," Lumian also didn't hesitate.

Franca pursed her lips and asked further, "Does Jenna care about you?"

"Yes," Lumian had no doubts.

Franca then asked, "Do I care about you?"

"Yes." Lumian nodded solemnly.

Franca continued, "And do I care about Jenna?"

"Very much," Lumian added an adjective.

Franca hesitated and asked again, "And does Jenna care about me?"

"Very much. You're her family and her best friend," Lumian answered seriously.

Franca then raised her hand slightly.

"There you have it! We all care about each other, and we never know when we might die suddenly. So let's stay together. No one abandons anyone. It's just sleeping together. Love is a pain in the ass! To hell with love!"

Lumian was rendered speechless for a moment. He looked at Franca and sincerely remarked, "You look quite beautiful in your current state of mind."

Franca chuckled. "What else would I be doing?"

As she said this, she suddenly half-turned her head and looked to the side, her voice growing louder.

"Should I give up? Should I leave?"

Tears, long in the making, slowly trickled down her cheeks.

Lumian remained silent.

After a few seconds, Franca turned her head back, her gaze deep as she looked at Lumian. In a hoarse voice, she said, "Because in this world, you two are the most important people to me.

"The only two..."

Under the crimson moonlight, her face was already streaked with tears.

Chapter 853: Confession

853 Confession

Seeing the sparkling tears and streaks on Franca's face, Lumian suddenly thought of his sister Aurore. He recalled the loneliness that always emanated from her when she gazed at the stars from the rooftop.

He also remembered the life he and Aurore had depended on each other in Cordu, the excruciating pain when his sister died and Cordu was destroyed, and the self-destructive impulses he had when he first arrived in Trier. Overcoming those emotions and rebuilding his social connections had started with Franca, Jenna, Charlie, and many tenants at the Auberge du Coq Doré.

In this world, there aren't many people I care about anymore... Lumian sighed deeply.

Back in Morora, he had engaged in mutual scheming against Julie, Albus Medici, and the others. Even when facing various dangers and conspiracies, he hadn't sighed as much as he had in the past few days.

He often felt so troubled that he wanted to burn the world down.

Franca's words had struck a chord in him. He already knew what his answer would be, but he wanted to struggle a bit more.

Looking at Franca, Lumian said with a bitter smile, "Caring doesn't have to manifest in that way. Apart from Aurore, you and Jenna are the people I care about most."

Franca shook her head without hesitation. "No way! I would feel resentful, like an outsider!

"You agreed to Jenna, so you have to agree to me too. Once you started this, you can't take it back! You should have realized this when you made that decision. If you don't balance the bowl filled with water, it will spill out!

"As the leader of a team, you must remember three things when dealing with each member: "Fairness! Fairness! And damn fairness!"

"But for this kind of matter..." Lumian responded instinctively, "If Anthony wants to sleep with me, do I have to agree too?"

"You must agree!" Franca walked to the bed and looked down at Lumian sitting there, her voice fierce. "Who told you to sleep with Jenna first, unless Anthony doesn't want to or you consider him a dispensable member of the team!"

Lumian rubbed his temples, feeling a headache coming on.

What kind of strange logic is this...

Why does Franca always have so many bizarre ideas...

Lumian looked at Franca and said with a bitter smile, "Is this how you digested the Instigator potion?"

Before Franca could respond, he sighed again. "I agree."

He added, "But I'm only speaking for myself. You'll have to talk to Jenna about it yourself."

He was referring to the threesome.

Franca's body suddenly swayed, as if she had briefly lost strength.

Her expression slowly relaxed, and she said with a chuckle, "We'll talk about it later. For now, I just want your agreement."

"And Jenna and I..." Lumian initially wanted to say that he and Jenna had only agreed until the Pleasure potion was digested, but he felt it wasn't the right time to say this now.

Franca, looking a bit tired, showed a teasing smile. "You haven't said which choice you agreed to. I'm more looking forward to you becoming a Demoness of Despair, or me screwing you."

"The remaining choice," Lumian answered helplessly.

Franca let out a long breath. "That works too."

She seemed to have lost her hard exterior, looking quite weak.

She waved her hand. "I'll go rest now."

"I thought..." Lumian was slightly surprised.

Franca rolled her eyes at him. "What did you think? I've been so shocked and hurt, feeling down for so long, my emotions and state are all over the place. How could I be in the mood for the deed? You've agreed, so just keep it in mind, and we'll talk about it when I feel better."

My mind and spirit need a break too... Lumian sighed silently.

After watching Franca leave through the window, disappearing into the night outside, Lumian walked to the bedroom door and opened it.

Jenna was quietly sitting in the dark area of the living room.

Lumian wasn't surprised by Jenna's appearance; she had been watching Franca's door, and Franca's intense emotions made it hard not to be noticed or followed when she left.

"I didn't expect it to turn out this way." Lumian sighed to Jenna.

Jenna stood up, smiling. "Although I didn't expect it either, I thought about it for a while and felt like, maybe I could accept it. Just you and her, it's much better than I anticipated."

"What did you anticipate?" Lumian quietly sighed with relief.

Jenna's eyes held a mix of sadness, guilt, and pain as she said, "Franca losing her mind and trying to kill us.

"I would agree but hide for a while, waiting until I have arranged Julien's future before seeing her again."

Lumian looked at Jenna for a few seconds, then sighed.

"Since your mother's death, you've had quite a bit of self-destructive tendencies. We thought we'd completely helped you overcome them, but it turns out a bit still lingered."

Jenna's eyes glistened as she looked at Lumian. "Aren't you the same?"

Lumian met her gaze and after two seconds, couldn't help but laugh. "Is this a support group for the broken?"

"Yes." Jenna pointed to the door. "I'll go talk to Franca. We'll exchange our ailments in a few days."

"Okay." Lumian nodded gently.

...

Inside Apartment 702 at 9 Rue Orosai.

Franca lay back in the armchair, her eyes open, gently rocking with the chair's movement.

Knock! Knock! Knock!

She heard the knocking and realized someone was outside.

In this state, I could easily be assassinated... Franca reflected on herself, stood up, and walked to the door.

She could guess who was outside.

Sure enough, she saw Jenna with her Vampire makeup.

Franca opened her mouth, unsure what to say, and just stepped aside to let Jenna in.

After Jenna sat on the single sofa, she smiled at Franca, who had returned to the armchair.

"I heard your conversation with Lumian."

Franca's face, which had been somewhat pale, quickly turned red.

Embarrassing!

How embarrassing!

So embarrassing she wanted to crawl into a hole!

Jenna laughed softly. "Actually, I also looked forward to those other two choices more."

Franca could only give a sheepish chuckle.

Jenna looked at her seriously. "I can tell there were other thoughts behind that last choice. Can you tell me what they were?"

Franca remained silent for a few seconds before speaking up, "That bastard Lumian must have told you it was only until the Pleasure potion was digested. I know him!"

As she spoke, Franca felt a bit indignant on Jenna's behalf.

Then, she sighed. "If I joined now, in this state, Lumian would definitely feel awkward and not set a time limit. For fairness, he shouldn't propose one to you either."

Jenna closed her eyes briefly, as if being blown by the wind.

She looked at Franca with unusually gentle eyes and said with a bitter smile, "But that's just a false realization. I can't deceive myself."

"False is better than nothing. If it lasts long enough, it might become real," Franca showed a self-mocking smile, "For a long time, even knowing it's false is better, it helps us digest the potion."

Looking at Jenna, Franca suddenly felt a surge of emotion and had a lot to say, "Maybe I'm a coward. I've liked you for a long time, but I've never dared to truly pursue you or express my feelings. I've always been indecisive about this, retreating every day."

In the current atmosphere, Franca suddenly found it wasn't hard to say the words "I like you."

This unexpected ease made her even sadder.

Jenna looked at Franca without any anger or words.

She could feel that what Franca truly wanted to say was yet to come.

After a brief pause, Franca clenched her teeth and uttered, "I've been hiding something from you. I-I was originally a man."

"I know," Jenna replied calmly, her eyes showing some encouragement, "The Witch potion."

"You did know." Franca wasn't surprised. She mustered her courage and continued, "There's something else. I-I'm not from this world. I transmigrated from another world. I-I took over this body."

Jenna exclaimed in surprise, "Another world?"

A thought suddenly struck her. "The one with the Underworld Daoist and the Celestial Master?"

Having worked together for so long, Franca often forgot whether she had told Jenna about these things, so Jenna knew these terms but didn't understand what they represented, considering them as powerful beings.

"Yes, and also Resurrection Island." After revealing this secret, Franca felt much lighter.

Jenna had a look of sudden realization. "No wonder you were so agitated when you got Harrison's information..."

"So, you understand why I've been eager to summon the Armored Shadow?"

Franca asked nervously, "You, you don't mind that I took someone else's body, do you?"

"Why should I mind? Unless it's the Franca I know being replaced," Jenna responded with amusement, clearly expressing her stance.

Franca relaxed completely, almost collapsing into the armchair.

Jenna thought for a moment and probed, "Lumian's sister and those mysticism gathering attendees with strange codenames, are they from your world too?"

"Yes, but I can't tell you more. I can only talk about my part," Franca said with a sigh. "I used to dream of going home, returning to my world. So every time I had the impulse to step towards you, I couldn't help but ask myself, can you bear her future? When there's a chance to go home, would you stay for her? Taking her to an unfamiliar world, wouldn't that be too cruel? Would she be willing to go, could she go..."

"Each time I asked those questions, I retreated...

"I was always so conflicted, never taking any real action."

Jenna listened gently, and when Franca finished, she smiled and said, "You're one of the kindest people I've ever met. I'm glad you were with me through the toughest times."

She looked at Franca and hesitated for a moment before asking, "Do you still think about going home now?"

Franca fell silent. The crimson moonlight outside had dimmed at some point.

After a few seconds, Franca answered in a low voice, "Yes."

Chapter 854: Translation

854 Translation

Hearing Franca's answer, Jenna bit her lip and said, "Was that choice you just made also influenced by this factor?"

"Maybe," Franca said with a bitter smile. "I felt that if I didn't do this, there would always be that lingering resentment in my heart. We would definitely grow apart over time. Once the mission is completed, once there's no external force keeping us together, we might just drift apart. But I don't want that..."

"When I left with a dagger just now, I genuinely wanted to castrate Lumian once to vent my anger. But walking in the shadows of the street, the cold wind sobered me up a lot. Then I thought, love is such a nuisance. Without it, the three of us could still be together happily like before.

"With that thought, I suddenly felt that if I could exclude love, and the possessiveness and jealousy it brings, maybe, just maybe, it could work...

"Madam Judgment has always told us that the end is near, coming in a few years or decades. We must prepare ourselves mentally and in terms of strength. Although there are no signs of the apocalypse yet, and we often forget this matter to maintain a good mindset and avoid going mad from stress, we've already experienced two major catastrophes in Trier alone. The Tree of Shadow incident and the Hostel plan, no matter how we try to avoid or ignore them, we can't escape their impact.

"Under such circumstances, any one of us might leave, say goodbye, or die at any time. So why care so much? Although that choice is strange, and even I find it hard to accept, why not give it a try?

"After trying, our future might be better and we'll become closer, even more caring for one another, or it might get worse, gradually drifting apart and becoming familiar strangers or even enemies. But how will we know the result without trying? It won't get much worse anyway.

"Of course, human emotions are uncontrollable. Even if our future gets better, the hidden love and possessiveness and jealousy it brings can't be completely eliminated. Pain and pleasure will coexist for a long time. Perhaps that's the essence of a Demoness.

"But no matter what, I still like that saying:

"Life is short, why not give it a try?"

Jenna listened intently to Franca's statement, then said with a gentle gaze, "That's why I feel such a strong sense of urgency and sometimes make selfish choices."

She then chuckled."I've heard Lumian tease you with 'Life is short, why not give it a try'. Was it because you did something strange with that saying in mind?"

Franca smiled awkwardly. "I was quite hesitant and conflicted about drinking the Witch potion. Then someone said that phrase to me."

Jenna understood and, instead of mocking Franca, asked curiously, "Was it also that saying that encouraged you to be with Gardner Martin?"

"Yes... I hadn't met you all then, and I didn't have anyone I particularly cared about," Franca replied even more awkwardly.

Seeing this, Jenna chuckled softly. "Did you ever think about trying it with Lumian?"

"Well..." Franca felt like running away, "Oh, come on, you pure-hearted girl, let's not talk about such inappropriate topics!"

Jenna deliberately swore, "Dammit! The dirty jokes and obscene scenes I heard and saw while singing in bars and dance halls were far more shocking than this. Not just between men and women, even between men and men."

The atmosphere became less sad and heavy, and Jenna stood up.

"You look very tired. Emotional upheaval does that. I'll go back now. Get some rest."

"Okay." Franca stood up as well.

She opened her mouth, seemingly wanting to ask something, but ultimately didn't.

Sensitive to details, Jenna smiled. "Ask whatever you want. You've already made that decision, what else could you hesitate to ask?"

Franca hesitated for a moment, then looked into Jenna's eyes and asked, "If I had told you from the start that I was originally a man, and after spending some time together, genuinely pursued you, would you have fallen for me?"

Jenna thought seriously for a moment, then replied, "I can't answer such a hypothetical question. All I can say is maybe."

She looked back into Franca's eyes, saying, "I've told you before, during that period, you were a light in my life. To me, you were both my best friend and the older sister who always protected me, despite not being related by blood. After my mother died, I even projected some of my feelings for her onto you. Maybe that's why I sometimes thought I shouldn't give you any false hopes and it was better to cut things off early."

Jenna smiled. "In my heart, if I were to rank the three people I care about most, Julien would be first, you second, and Lumian third. Love might fade one day, but the bond we share won't."

Franca felt relieved and said with a smile, "You have a great way with words."

"Of course, I studied hard back then!" Jenna walked towards the door.

After a few steps, she turned back to Franca and hesitated, "I can't accept the idea of joining right now. Just speaking for myself."

She then laughed. "But who knows what the future holds?"

Franca smiled. "It's just a saying."

Jenna turned back to the door, opened it, and held the brass handle, pausing once more. She turned her body and looked at Franca standing in the center of the living room, asking quietly, "If one day you find a way home, and both Lumian and I want you to stay, would you?"

Franca stood with her back to the crimson moonlight, her face hidden in deep shadow.

After a long silence, she answered slowly, "I don't know..."

Her voice seemed to be squeezed out from her heart, light and weak.

...

Two days later, in an underground quarry in Trier.

Franca, Jenna, and Amandina, who had just arrived from Matani in the Southern Continent, stood inside a wall of spirituality, watching Lumian set up an altar.

Anthony, who Amandina hadn't noticed, was responsible for guarding the perimeter.

Lumian calmly completed the preparations, lit the candles, dripped the essential oil, and stepped back two steps, standing next to Franca.

He wasn't worried about the lack of demigod protection. Firstly, Amandina was present. Secondly, when he sent the bottle of Samaria Woman Spring water to Madam Magician, he mentioned this matter.

Seeing the candle flames flicker, Franca suddenly became nervous, while Amandina looked puzzled. She had no idea what she was supposed to help with or could help with.

Once Franca nodded, indicating she was ready, Lumian recited in ancient Hermes, "I!"

Then, switching to Hermes:

"I summon in my name:

"The spirit that wanders about the unfounded, a combination of numerous shadows, Lumian Lee's contracted creature..."

This was a familiar part of the process to Amandina, similar to summoning a messenger. So she didn't pay much attention, curious about the incantation's description while observing Franca, the lady whose name she had just learned, and Lumian's eye interactions, looking for any signs of intimacy.

To her disappointment, Franca, Jenna, and Lumian were all focused on the ritual.

Soon, a blurry shadow in fish-scale armor emerged from the candle flame, its black scales stained with pure gold, appearing solemn and sacred.

The transparent faces on the scales were clearer than before, more twisted and fierce like evil spirits.

They silently screamed, displaying hatred and malice.

Amandina was startled.

It wasn't the appearance of Armored Shadow that scared her; such horror couldn't intimidate someone who had experienced the Dream Festival, summoned Baynfel, and been to the underground catacombs.

What shocked her was Armored Shadow and the ghostly faces on its scales simultaneously looking at her!

She almost stopped breathing, her body enveloped in icy coldness.

Armored Shadow spoke in a strange language.

Only Franca could barely understand it, hearing: "Disciple of the Underworld Gate..."

It really recognizes Amandina's boon... Franca murmured, noticing Armored Shadow's malice had lessened, indicating a more peaceful interaction was possible.

Lumian also noticed the change and quickly had Franca place the 100,000 verl d'or worth of gold on the altar, then spoke in Hermes, "I offer this sacrifice, please complete a simple task and answer two questions."

Armored Shadow conveyed agreement, its scales' transparent faces greedily eyeing the gold.

Lumian immediately placed the documents Franca handed him on the altar.

These weren't the documents Mr. Star gave Franca, nor the original documents.

The former had its order completely scrambled, making it difficult to interpret through a question and answer format, and the latter could corrupt Armored Shadow, leading the ritual to unforeseen dangers.

So, after Franca expressed her intention, Mr. Star provided new documents through Madam Judgment.

The new documents extracted several complete sentences from the original, containing hundreds of frequently used words from the rest of the text.

"The task is to translate these documents." Franca listened to Lumian's request with anticipation and anxiety.

She wasn't sure if Armored Shadow would accept the deal.

With a whooshing sound, the two pages floated up, hovering before Armored Shadow.

After a few seconds, the armored shadow spoke again in an incomprehensible language.

Franca's ears perked up.

"Pure yin does not last, pure yang does not grow, yin contains yang, yang contains yin, the union of yin and yang gives rise to everything, this is the way of heaven..."

That's it? Franca's lips twitched.

Although she hadn't truly done the deed, she suspected Armored Shadow was insinuating something about herself, Jenna, and Lumian.

Chapter 855: That Corpse

855 That Corpse

To Franca, the sentence Armored Shadow Chen Tu had just translated was quite ordinary. It was something she often read before her transmigration. She couldn't understand why the Major Arcana card holders thought such words could bring corruption.

Could it be the words themselves?

Just like the word "I," which can have entirely different meanings in Intis and ancient Hermes!

However, isn't there a phrase that seems a bit off? Yin and yang unite to create all things... shouldn't it be yin and yang unite to produce all things? Franca had been an avid internet user before her transmigration, and one of her hobbies was reading novels and watching anime. She had only seen "Yin and yang unite to produce all things" and never heard of "Yin and yang unite to create all things."

Of course, after thinking carefully, she found it understandable:

Yin and yang unite to nurture all things, all things grow and weave together to form matter!

In that case, the logic remains sound, just omitting the 'all things' as the bridge...

While Franca was distracted by her thoughts, she continued to listen seriously to the rest of the sentences translated by Armored Shadow.

She didn't write down the corresponding content. As a Demoness proficient in divination, she could easily recall the full content in her dreams later.

The subsequent sentences were similar to the first, all about the opposition, contradiction, conflict, reflection, harmonization, and unity of yin and yang. They were all broad principles without in-depth explanations or practical details, making Franca feel like yawning.

The only thing she felt was worth pondering was the last half sentence of the document: "To approach the way of heaven."

From her understanding of this phrase, Franca naturally linked it to the knowledge that boons made the recipient gradually closer to the giver, and the way Underworld Daoist granted power to Amandina was indeed through a boon.

To approach the way of heaven... is this document actually about how to use mind and body harmoniously, balancing yin and yang to synchronize with the so-called way of heaven, thereby gaining power? Is this a way of seeking boons?

Franca saw that Armored Shadow Chen Tu had finished translating and let the documents float back. She quickly gathered her thoughts and prepared to ask her questions.

After catching the documents, she immediately asked in her true, native language, "The first question, have you heard of anyone traveling from the world you and Underworld Daoist to another world?"

Franca didn't translate this question into Intisian for Lumian to ask, fearing Amandina would learn about the transmigration. Though they could later have Anthony hypnotize Amandina to make her forget, why not use a simpler method?

Armored Shadow Chen Tu turned its gaze towards Franca, who spoke a similar language.

After a few seconds, it looked back at Lumian, conveying the thought of "Should I answer?"

As the host of the current ritual, Lumian had to approve, or Armored Shadow and Franca wouldn't be able to communicate. Otherwise, Armored Shadow, unless using force, couldn't take the gold on the altar even if it didn't fulfill the agreement.

Lumian nodded."This is the first question."

Armored Shadow replied in a deep, hoarse voice, "Unknown."

It still used the language close to Franca's mother tongue.

Amandina grew increasingly confused.

She couldn't understand anything!

Throughout the process, she could only understand Lumian's part!

Amandina glanced at Jenna beside her and, lowering her voice, asked as though they knew each other well, "What are they talking about? What language are they using?"

Jenna chuckled softly. "Even though I look very serious and focused, I actually can't understand either."

Amandina couldn't help but sigh.

"I'll tell you secretly, Lumian doesn't understand either," Jenna smiled, glancing at Lumian who was closely watching Armored Shadow, and whispered to Amandina.

Amandina looked at Jenna, then at Lumian, and recalled the expression, tone, and wording of that sentence just now, giving a silent "wow" in her mind.

Some things are unintentionally revealed!

She curiously asked, "Why don't you learn that language from Franca?"

"We've just started in the past two days; it's tough." Jenna unconsciously frowned.

It's really tough!

At this time, hearing Armored Shadow's answer, Franca couldn't help but feel disappointed but maintained her normal demeanor and asked in her native tongue, "The second question, can you use an illusion or a similar method to show the corpse that floated from Penglai to the river earlier?"

This question came to Franca's mind in the past two days, directly prompted by Amandina hearing the Underworld Daoist say "Beware Penglai," and Armored Shadow Chen Tu mentioning before that the mysteriously vanished Penglai had reappeared, with a corpse from there floating to the river.

Franca thought that matters related to Penglai might be important and possibly linked to their hope of returning home.

Just after asking this question, Franca suddenly realized her mistake and wanted to slap herself.

It wasn't that she shouldn't have asked this question but that the way she phrased it was problematic!

According to her current phrasing, even if the Armored Shadow agreed, it only needed to say "yes" without showing the specific appearance of the corpse. The question didn't have a corresponding mandatory requirement!

Should I prepare another 100,000 verl d'or of gold? I'm almost broke, with only a bit over 2,000 ver! d'or left... Franca regretted it deeply.

Fortunately, Armored Shadow Chen Tu was honest. Once the question was approved by Lumian, it immediately made countless transparent faces on its scales protrude frantically.

This made the surroundings instantly eerie green, with cold wind blowing.

Water droplets quickly condensed on the altar surface, gathering into a water surface, reflecting a figure.

The figure floated in the deep darkness, unable to show a specific form as if it had been hollowed out. The black robe and body were highly decayed, oozing pus.

Its face was relatively intact. Through the deep-to-the-bone rotting marks, one could still see the pale and dim skin, soft contours, and thin layer of black hair...

Franca was stunned.

I-isn't this the visitor from Resurrection Island, Harrison?

He had long died, turned into a decaying corpse floating on what seems like the River Styx, so why was he still active in Trier?

Moreover, the corpse appeared on the river a few years ago, and only then did the Demon Warlock encounter Harrison!

Though Lumian didn't understand Franca's question, he roughly guessed why Franca was so shocked from the key details of "floating," "corpse," and "Harrison's appearance."

He turned his head to look at Franca, seeing surprise, astonishment, and confusion in those lake-blue eyes.

Lumian nodded to reassure her, then said to Armored Shadow Chen Tu, "Thank you for your answers."

The gold on the altar disintegrated, turning into pure light, flowing like water onto Armored Shadow's surface.

Seeing the fish-scale armor mostly turned golden, sacred, and heavy, Lumian frowned slightly and ended the ritual.

After extinguishing the candles, he immediately said to Franca, "Another two times, and Armored Shadow should fully restore its golden body. We can only summon it once more at most."

"Yeah." Franca finally snapped out of the shock of seeing Harrison's past corpse.

As Lumian cleaned up the altar, she smiled at Amandina and said, "We can leave now."

"Huh?" Amandina was puzzled, "Wasn't I supposed to help? I haven't done anything yet..."

"You already provided help." Franca grinned.

Amandina was even more confused."When did this happen?"

Jenna helped clarify, "Don't you feel that the language Franca and Armored Shadow spoke was similar to what the figure whispered in your ear?"

Amandina thought carefully. "It does seem similar."

After tidying up the altar, Lumian returned and casually said, "The shadow just now was likely sealed by your teacher, hmm-the figure. You being here could mislead it, making it think this represents the figure's attitude, reducing the difficulty of our communication and preventing its attack.

"That's your help, just standing by and observing."

Amandina suddenly recalled Armored Shadow's gaze and reactive response when it first appeared, understanding."Is that so... Well, um, what is my teacher's name?"

Though we all know this question is normal, it still sounds weird... who doesn't know their teacher's name and needs to ask someone else... Jenna grumbled inwardly.

Franca answered with a smile in Intisian, "Underworld Daoist.

"Also, you should call him Master, not Teacher."

"Underworld Daoist..." Amandina softly repeated the title described in Intisian.

After a few seconds, she contentedly asked, "What's the difference between Master and Teacher?"

"A Master includes a paternalistic meaning," Franca explained with some effort.

Amandina didn't ask further, her eyes sparkling as she said, "I can provide help again in the future!

"Can you help me collect the Mid-to-Low Sequence potion formulas and Beyonder characteristics of the Evernight pathway?"

"No problem." Franca didn't tell Amandina those would be available soon.

Lumian smiled and said, "I thought you'd ask to visit the Samaritan Women's Spring again."

Amandina smiled a bit reluctantly. "I'll adapt for a while longer, and go after my own Sequence matches my boon level."

After speaking, she muttered softly, "I don't want to turn into an old man with a white beard..."

...

After sending Amandina off, Lumian, Jenna, and Anthony sat in the living room of Apartment 702 at 9 Rue Orosai, listening to Franca recounting the sentences translated by Armored Shadow.

"What do they mean?" Jenna felt like she somewhat understood but also didn't understand at all.

Franca had to translate in her own words what "Pure yin does not last, pure yang does not grow..." meant.

As Jenna listened, she gradually didn't know how to position her body and avoided moving her gaze.

Lumian took a tactical sip of water, and Anthony's expression remained unchanged.

"I think these sentences are too ordinary, not worth such high regard," Franca concluded.

Lumian pondered for a few seconds and slowly said, "No, they might be very important."

Chapter 856: The So-called Way of Heaven

856 The So-called Way of Heaven

Franca looked at Lumian, asking expectantly, "What do you mean?"

Lumian, now completely comfortable, glanced at Anthony and Jenna before focusing back on Franca's recliner.

"We all know that there are great existences occupying several adjacent pathways in this world, like Mr. Fool and the Celestial Worthy at the top of the Apprentice, Seer, and Marauder pathways. Then there's the Great Mother, who is at the top of the Moon, Earth, and Villain pathways.

"So, if the phrase 'to approach the way of heaven' indeed means adjusting oneself to get closer to the bestower and actively seeking boons, then in this context, what does the 'way of heaven' represent? Top of which pathways?"

Franca pondered for a moment before replying, "From our current understanding of the twenty-two pathways, the Hunter pathway definitely represents 'yang,' while the Demoness pathway might represent 'yin.' It could also be the Earth or Moon pathway. Considering the symbol of 'yang,' 'yin' here likely refers to the Demoness pathway."

Franca only knew that the Hunter pathway could transform a woman into a man.

She was unsure if the Earth or Moon pathways could turn a man into a woman, classifying them as 'yin' based on their association with nurturing, reproduction, and growth.

"So, in these sentences, the 'way of heaven' refers to the top of the Hunter and Demoness pathways?" Jenna asked, following Lumian and Franca's train of thought.

"Probably," Franca nodded emphatically. "The knowledge in Mr. Star's document might explain how to correctly understand the contradiction, opposition, transformation, and unity of 'yin' and 'yang.' Then, through one's behavior and necessary external help, harmonize yin and yang to the greatest extent to approach the corresponding way of heaven, that is, the great existences at the top of the Demoness and Hunter pathways, and obtain boons."

Lumian chuckled. "Having reached this point in the analysis, what comes to mind?"

Jenna was momentarily stunned and blurted out, "The joining of the Blood Emperor and the Primordial Demoness?"

"Barely keeping up with my thoughts," Lumian half-praised, half-mocked. "We've always wondered why the Blood Emperor and the Primordial Demoness would cooperate. As true gods of adjacent pathways, shouldn't They be mortal enemies? Madam Magician told me that choosing a pathway determines your enemies and friends."

Aren't you two from adjacent pathways and still not enemies? Haven't you shared a bed? Franca glanced at Lumian and Jenna, feeling a slight twinge of jealousy as she lampooned.

During such moments, she often felt that her Affliction potion had digested a bit.

Of course, she knew that this enmity mainly applied to the higher levels.

Lumian continued, "The seal on the convergence effect from Mr. Door might just be a technical detail on how it's done, not the cause or purpose."

"The goal of the Blood Emperor and the Primordial Demoness is to join the body with the way of heaven?" Franca expanded her thoughts from "to approach the way of heaven," using a concept from her previous life that she felt was more appropriate.

Lumian, Jenna, and Anthony looked at Franca, more or less confused.

What does merging the body with the way of heaven mean?

Sensing her companions' confusion, Franca scratched her ponytail and tried to explain, "It means uniting with the so-called way of heaven... Uh, an imprecise analogy would be usurping a true god's position, not replacing a true god but the great existence represented by the way of heaven."

"Then why don't the Primordial Demoness and Blood Emperor directly kill each other and devour the other's Beyonder characteristics to unify yin and yang?"

Anthony questioned.

There's no need for them to consummate to give birth to two children!

Franca thought for a few seconds. "Maybe they need to harmonize before unifying? At least that's what the sentences suggest...

"In other words, the Blood Emperor and Primordial Demoness had to combine first, adjust their state, get close to the way of heaven, and then enter the unification stage. So, They had to temporarily cooperate while preparing to betray each other once they achieved Their goals...

"What do they call this? The first sword upon reaching the shore cuts down those around you!"

Lumian and the others were used to Franca's sudden nonsensical remarks and patiently waited for her to continue.

Franca suddenly laughed. "It's also possible that the Blood Emperor and Primordial Demoness came across similar knowledge but, due to a lack of proper training and understanding, They naively thought combining yin and yang meant the Hunter and Demoness pathways had to be physically united; this resulted in Them producing some children.

"What do they call this? This is what happens when cultures don't communicate well! Uh, it's not exactly wrong, just somewhat narrow-minded, overlooking other possible approaches."

As Jenna started to feel uneasy, relating to her own experience, Lumian sarcastically remarked, "I've always said that redheads and thick-heads need to read more and study hard."

As soon as Lumian finished speaking, Franca and Jenna glared at him furiously.

"I don't think it's a misunderstanding. Even if the Blood Emperor, being half-mad, didn't fully grasp the meaning of unifying yin and yang, He had top-tier Cryptologists around Him," Anthony expressed a different view, referring to Amon, the grand duke of the Tudor Empire and Angel of the Marauder pathway.

Lumian mused aloud,"Did you forget that one of Amon's titles is the 'God of Mischief'?

"Maybe He wanted to see such a development."

"Do you resonate with Amon's mindset because you're a trickster too..." Franca muttered softly.

Jenna nodded."So, the special mirror world is a byproduct of the Blood Emperor and Primordial Demoness's attempt to unify yin and yang to approach the way of heaven?

"Or a necessary creation for occupying the way of heaven, similar to High-Sequence advancement rituals?"

"We can't draw conclusions yet, but the direction seems right." Franca took out a dark red fountain pen from her Traveler's Bag and wrote the translated sentences under different headings on her thigh.

She thoughtfully interpreted individual characters based on sentence structure, text shape, and reasonable assumptions. Finally, she organized their discussion into a report, appended it to the document, and sent it to the Major Arcana card holder as a reference instead of a conclusion.

Phew... Having completed this task, Franca breathed a sigh of relief.

"The gains from summoning Armored Shadow this time were greater than I expected. Now we can confirm that Resurrection Island is Penglai divine mountain, and Harrison is the corpse that drifted from Penglai!"

Franca was somewhat disappointed that there was still no definitive evidence proving that Underworld Daoist and Harrison's world was the same as the one they had transmigrated from-similar language, culture, and appearance were not sufficient premises for inference.

She planned to ask Armored Shadow directly next time if it had heard of the Celestial Worthy of Heaven and Earth for Blessings, the culprit behind their transmigration!

Anthony, who knew little about Armored Shadow, Penglai, and the so-called river, was confused but understood the importance of Resurrection Island and Harrison, which the Major Arcana card holders were also interested in.

"Harrison died and was resurrected? As expected from someone from Resurrection Island... Why did Resurrection Island disappear from Underworld Daoist's world?

"Based on Harrison's words to the Demon Warlock, people from Resurrection Island have been active in our world for a long time...

"Did Resurrection Island disappear from its original world because it transmigrated here? Can it now communicate with its original world?" Jenna finally understood Franca's shock at seeing the corresponding illusion after asking the second question.

She suddenly froze, feeling she shouldn't analyze in this direction.

Franca's eyes lit up. "It's possible!"

She then left the armchair, paced back and forth, and said angrily, "Damn, why didn't we lure Harrison out this time!"

Although she realized that the visitor from Resurrection Island might be more dangerous than expected, they had Madam Magician overseeing their visit to the Samaritan Women's Spring this time.

"Our main task now is to find Harrison or the Mirror Person, Palia." Lumian stood up and spoke with the demeanor of a team leader.

Mirror Person Palia was the mineralogist, Jasmine.

Before Franca and the others could respond, he added, "I also need to start gathering supplementary ingredients for the Iron-blooded Knight."

"We can also gather ingredients for the Demoness of Despair. With no clear leads to track for now, we have plenty of free time," Franca agreed.

Anthony said, "I'll do my best on this task, but I have another one as well."

"Joining the Psychology Alchemists?" Franca asked curiously.

"That's a long-term task," Anthony explained briefly. "Ma'am Hermit's Minor Arcana card, the Knight of Swords, is in Trier and needs help from a Beyonder of the Spectator pathway. Madam Justice recommended me."

"What kind of help?" Lumian asked.

Anthony shook his head. "We haven't met yet."

Lumian nodded. "Feel free to ask for help if needed."

...

In a wooden house on the Southern Continent.

The Star leaned back in his chair, staring blankly at the paper and pen on the table.

Suddenly, a brilliant starry light appeared before him, forming a dazzling door.

The door opened, and Madam Magician stepped out, holding a letter from Franca.

Chapter 857: Inklings of That Individual

857 Inklings of That Individual

"The translation you asked for has arrived." Madam Magician tossed the stack of papers onto the table in front of The Star, then pulled up a chair and sat down.

Mr. Star didn't change his posture, merely extending his hand forward.

The stack of papers floated up, held by an invisible force, and landed in The Star's hand.

The Star began to read through the pages with focused eyes, the soft sound of pages turning filling the quiet room.

After a while, he looked up at The Magician across the desk. "What do you think of their speculation?"

Madam Magician replied with a smile, "From a writer's perspective, there's no better speculation than this. Of course, I actually believe it's likely true. What about you, Mr. Pallez?"

Mr. Star's eyes darkened, and an aged voice emerged from his mouth. "Back then, we only sensed that Alista Tudor was doing something very dangerous in Trier, but we didn't know the specifics.

"If this is true, one question remains: where did Alista Tudor acquire the knowledge to undertake these actions?"

The Magician had long considered this question. "One possibility is that the Uniqueness of the Red Priest, already somewhat tainted, combined with Alista Tudor's forceful switch to a non-adjacent pathway, ascending at the cost of madness, caused Him to sense the situation over there when He became a god, resulting in a wondrous resonance and acquisition of relevant knowledge.

"Another possibility is that it was given to him by you know who through some method."

At this point, The Magician, following her spiritual intuition, asked, "Are you saying that there are inklings of that individual in this matter?"

The aged voice responded from The Star once more, "Hasn't He always been interfering in history, steering it toward His envisioned direction?

"Of course, this might not be predestined history but rather an experiment of His.

"I never fully understood why He would help Alista Tudor forcibly ascend to Red Priest, stabilizing him to prevent immediate loss of control. Now, I have some idea: "At that time, He was only a King of Angels, making it difficult to influence and arrange events involving true gods. But what if the true god was already in a poor state, acting on instinct most of the time? It would be much easier.

"With the participation of the mad Blood Emperor Alista Tudor, the Primordial Demoness might indeed be drawn into this matter.

"In the end, He likely confirmed His hypothesis, gaining valuable experience, though it led to the unexpected eruption of the War of the Four Emperors."

The Star's voice suddenly reverted to its usual slightly magnetic tone. "How many years passed from Alista Tudor's ascension to Red Priest to the outbreak of the War of the Four Emperors?"

He immediately answered his own question with an aged voice, "Five hundred and thirty-seven years."

"Enough to verify some things." The Star remarked with a magnetic tone.

The Magician nodded slightly and said, "If this is the truth, He must be very aware of the latent issues in the special mirror world.

"Ha, if Mr. Fool were awake now, He would definitely go to the Forsaken Land of the Gods, grab Him by the collar, and demand to know what's hidden in the depths of the special mirror world!"

The Star subconsciously sighed. "'He-Mr. Fool-isn't so violent and crude."

Madam Magician chuckled. "Do you know what fantasy means?

"You have to distinguish between fantasy, truth, lies, the real emotions behind lies, and the deep-seated feelings, tendencies, impulses, and conflicts expressed through the most impossible scenarios imagined in fantasies. Also, what's said as truth, thought as truth, and even actions taken don't necessarily represent the true attitude.

"Once you distinguish these..." She glanced at the papers and pens on the desk, laughing softly. "You'll have a preliminary grasp of the art of poetry."

Mr. Star was silent for a few seconds.

"The knowledge gained this time pertains to the Hunter and Demoness pathways, also arranged by Him?"

"I think it's more likely done by the Celestial Master," The Magician pondered.

"We don't know the current state of the Celestial Master, but judging by Underworld Daoist, even if He couldn't prevent the Moses Ascetic Order's Kmerolo from being corrupted, He could deeply influence the knowledge comprising the corruption. In the Hostel incident, He noticed the Seven of Wands."

Mr. Star nodded.

"Is it His arrangement that the Hunter and Demoness among your Minor Arcana card holders got entangled? Trying to replicate the findings from the Blood Emperor and Primordial Demoness with them?"

Madam Magician chuckled and responded, "It's more than just entanglement. Though I haven't witnessed it myself, my spiritual intuition and writer's sense tell me something must have happened.

"I pity them but can't help being curious about the details..."

Clearing her throat, she shifted the topic back.

"The current development is the inevitable result of their fate entanglement, emotional interactions, personal character, and inner growth, likely unrelated to Him.

"But!"

Madam Magician emphasized the word "but."

"I now suspect that their initial meeting was arranged by Him, and then He let things develop naturally.

"Do you understand? A top-level writer sets the stage, constructs events, and lets the characters express, demonstrate, interact, and conflict on the stage to create the most wonderful story."

The Star initially wanted to mock the writers but glanced at the paper and pen on the desk and remained silent.

The Magician sighed and then said, "We should be able to decrypt more of that information now.

"What about the payment? What's the payment for the Two of Cups?"

As he took out one Beyonder ingredient after another from a silver box, The Star spoke.

"They have been prepared long ago.

"These are the potion formulas and ingredients from Sequence 9 Sleepless to Sequence 7 Nightmare."

Madam Magician looked and smiled. "Not giving that gold coin?"

"Although the Two of Cups is our chosen guide for that dream, she can't be given it too easily, even if she's trustworthy and knowledgeable about the environment. I'll give her another task and tell her that besides the Sequence 6 Soul Assurer potion formula and corresponding ingredients, she will receive a special reward." The Star brushed his slightly messy hair and smiled.

The Magician nodded slightly, then asked another question, "I've always wanted to ask, Mr. Pallez, why do you remain with Mr. Star even after advancing to Sequence 1?"

The Star's eyes darkened again, and the aged voice returned.

"When you get old, you desire stability and don't want to change your accustomed environment."

The Magician smiled in response. "I want to hear the truth."

The Star sighed and said in an aged voice, "When you become a Sequence 1 Archangel, you'll understand. You'll feel the terrifying impact of Mr. Fool and the Celestial Worthy's conflict, forcing me to stay within the Church of the Evernight Goddess for some protection."

Madam Magician nodded, then gathered the potion formulas and ingredients from the table.

After a moment of thought, she asked Mr. Star, "Where did you obtain these ingredients?"

The Star smiled. "Sent an application to the Pope."

Madam Magician pondered and asked further, "Her Holiness didn't ask why and just gave them to you?"

"Yes, just given to me like that." Mr. Star smiled calmly.

Madam Magician seemed to have an epiphany.

She then stood up, opened a starry door in the void, and left the wooden house.

...

The night was just receding, and dawn had not yet broken at Lumian's rented apartment.

Jenna lay under the covers, her white shoulders exposed, leaning beside Lumian.

She stretched out her right hand, trying to pry open his eyelids.

"What are you doing?" Lumian asked, both amused and exasperated.

Jenna pouted. "You're not looking at me with your eyes closed. I have to be proactive and help you open them."

Reluctantly, Lumian opened his eyes, meeting her blue eyes, which sparkled with a hidden darkness.

After a few seconds of staring, Lumian remarked thoughtfully, "Your mental state seems much better than before."

Jenna withdrew her hand, propping her chin up with a smile as she gazed at Lumian's face and eyes. "Yeah, I felt much better after that talk with Franca."

Lumian let out a scoff. "Who was it that said the worst-case scenario was Franca coming to kill me, and you'd agree? You knew Franca wouldn't do such a thing."

"That was just a fantasy, a projection of inner emotions, self-conflict, and self-destructive tendencies. Didn't you catch that?" Jenna retorted.

Lumian chortled."Of course I did. That's why I said it was best to confront the issues between you early."

He instinctively reached out to pat Jenna's head but hesitated midway, his hand freezing.

Seeing this, Jenna's gaze dimmed slightly. She pursed her lips and grabbed his hand, forcing it to the back of her head.

Lumian slowly started to pat her, transitioning from awkwardness to naturalness.

Jenna watched him with a smile. "What about yours?"

Lumian fell silent.

Jenna didn't press further, instead asking cheerfully, "Did you and Franca...?"

Lumian sighed. "I try not to talk about my relationship with her in front of you."

Jenna smiled. "Before my talk with Franca, it would have made me sad, conflicted, and miserable, even if I tried to hide it. Now, though I still have those emotions, I feel more hopeful and even relieved when you mention it. Do you understand this contradictory feeling?

"Many of my previous choices were also like that."

Lumian nodded slowly. "You know Franca. Although she might have made up her mind, she still hesitates when it comes to the final step. Lately, I've noticed her being awkward whenever we see each other. Anthony probably noticed too but didn't say anything.

"I can't be the one to initiate, right?"

"Yes, you should. Go to her now, this morning!" Jenna said without hesitation.

Lumian looked deeply at her. "Are you trying to create stronger bonds to keep her in critical moments?"

Jenna grunted. "I will try to keep her, but I'll also respect her final decision."

Chapter 858: Taking the Initiative

858 Taking the Initiative

Lumian stroked Jenna's hair once more. "Actually, Franca going home might not be a bad thing. If their world doesn't face an apocalypse or dangerous situations like ours, I could help you knock your brother out so you could take him and Franca there together."

Jenna gazed at Lumian with her clear blue eyes. "What about you?"

Lumian fell silent for a moment before responding, "I'll see how things go."

Jenna opened her mouth as if to say something but then closed it again.

After a few seconds, she didn't press for details. Instead, she spoke seriously, "On the one hand, I want to keep her here. On the other hand, I'm afraid that the bigger Franca's hope, the bigger her disappointment will be. If she finally confirms that returning home is impossible, she'll definitely break down. For a Beyonder, that's very dangerous, especially the higher the Sequence.

"She mentioned, or maybe it was Emperor Roselle who said it, that a person is the sum of their social relationships. Anthony also talked to me about the importance of social relationships for a person. I know he saw that I still had some psychological issues and wanted to help me through this. When you sought treatment from Madam Susie and Madam Justice, didn't they also emphasize the importance of rebuilding social relationships? For Franca, the most important relationships are with you and me. The closer we are now, the more it will help stabilize her in the future. Just me alone might not be enough."

Lumian withdrew his hand, looking at Jenna for a few seconds.

"Since finding out Franca's true origins, you've been thinking a lot, haven't you?

"Why do you think she might not be able to go back home?"

Jenna's eyes flickered, and she said provocatively, "Franca later told me that Emperor Roselle and she came from the same world and the same country. I was thinking-the Emperor was at least an Angel, maybe even close to becoming a true god, and he couldn't go back.

"Don't you think that means it's either hopeless or impossible?"

Lumian sighed with a smile. "But Franca and the others believe that either the Emperor didn't have time to find a way back before something unexpected happened, or he faked his death and already transmigrated back."

Jenna shook her head. "It's definitely not the latter. If it were, the Emperor would have destroyed parts of his diary before crossing back."

"You're quite sharp," Lumian remarked thoughtfully. "From the Emperor's diary that Franca shared, it's clear he encountered something terrifying in his later years. But what confuses me is that during that period, he never seemed to consider going back. Also, he valued his eldest daughter highly, and Queen Mystic Bernadette is still active in our world. These are the reasons I think Franca's hopes are slim. They probably have similar thoughts but just don't want to believe it."

Lumian's voice suddenly grew somber. "People need hope to live..."

Jenna chuckled, tracing circles on Lumian's bare chest. "You're doing much better too, being able to say something like that."

Before Lumian could respond, she lifted her head and looked at him. "Go see Franca this morning, okay?"

"Is this something I can do alone?" Lumian smiled. "If she doesn't want to, I can't force her, can I?"

Jenna couldn't help but laugh. "She's inclined to agree deep down. She's just feeling a bit awkward after the initial emotions have calmed. Especially since she has to face you, her friend's brother who knows her true state."

"You know Franca," Lumian teased. "When she's impulsive, she'll try anything, but when she calms down, she might turn into an ostrich."

"Take the initiative. Maybe she's just waiting for you to make the first move," Jenna suggested, feeling a mix of jealousy and anticipation.

Lumian spread his hands. "How do I take the initiative? I've never been the one to make the first move in such matters. I can't just go up to Franca and say I'm here to fulfill our agreement, right?"

Jenna's eyes sparkled as she thought for a moment.

"Show your guilt in front of her, help her out as much as you can, and then ask if she needs a massage for her head, shoulders, and back. If she doesn't object and there's physical contact, you can gradually... gradually..." Jenna trailed off, quickly concluding, "Got it?"

"You seem quite experienced," Lumian said, amused.

Jenna reminisced. "When I was a Showy Diva, I saw some things. Also, the dancers under Franca liked to read novels about love and interactions between men and women. A single book could be passed around by dozens to hundreds of people. Thanks to Emperor Roselle and some remaining compulsory education, some of them could understand simple stories, and those who couldn't would listen to others. It was one of the few bright spots in their lives.

"I read a few as well and learned how those playboys and Dandyists behaved."

Lumian laughed, moving closer to Jenna and placing his hands on her smooth, bare shoulders. "Like this?"

"Yes." Jenna rolled her eyes. "Now you think of giving me a massage? I'm nearly falling apart because of you. You start reluctantly and then..."

As Jenna teased him, her words caught in her throat.

Lumian leaned in with a teasing smile. "It's six in the morning..."

Jenna swiftly pulled the covers over herself and nimbly jumped out of bed like a deer.

Wrapped in the blanket, she looked at Lumian and laughed softly.

"Go find Franca now and use your Conspirer skills."

Before Lumian could respond, Jenna grabbed her Traveler's Bag and disappeared into the shadows of the room.

Lumian stood still for a moment, sighing. "Couldn't you at least leave the blanket?"

After a while, the blanket was thrown from the shadows, landing on Lumian.

Lumian shook his head with a smile, mimicking Franca's voice in his mind.

Ascetic, activate!

...

Inside Apartment 702 at 9 Rue Orosai.

Franca opened the door and saw Lumian. She instantly felt uncomfortable and wished she could slam the door in his face.

As she turned to walk to the armchair, she asked, "Jenna didn't come with you?"

"She went back to rest," Lumian said thoughtfully.

Franca suddenly understood, her expression turning complicated.

She stood by the armchair, momentarily forgetting to sit down.

Lumian glanced at her and asked intentionally, "Did you digest more of your Affliction potion?"

"Dammit!" Franca gritted her teeth, conjuring several crystalline ice spikes and hurling them at Lumian.

Lumian dodged easily and moved to the sofa area, looking back at the fuming Franca.

See, now we can forget the awkwardness and talk properly.

But Franca's reaction was a bit too strong. We need to make that agreement a reality soon, or she might get tangled up again...

Lumian put on a placating smile and said to Franca, "It's a habitual taunt. You know how Hunters are."

Franca snorted and sat in the recliner.

Today, she wore a fitted white shirt with ruffled cuffs and a lace flower at the neck, paired with cream-colored trousers and her usual fluffy slippers.

Following Miss Celia Bello's guidance, Lumian feigned guilt and asked, "How's your Affliction potion digestion going?"

Franca puffed up her cheeks. "About a third."

"Hmm, you've got the self-inflicted pain down, but you're still lacking in causing pain to others," Lumian said cautiously.

Then, he proactively poured her a glass of water and asked with a smile, "Want a shoulder and leg massage? You must be tired after running around for clues on Harrison these days."

"Massage?" Franca was stunned, then wary, eyeing Lumian suspiciously.

After a few moments, she took the glass of water and drank. "No need."

Eh... Great theorist of male-female interaction, master of theory Miss Celia Bello, your method doesn't work... I have to rely on my own improvisation as a Conspirer... Lumian quickly sat down on the single sofa.

He opened his mouth as if to say something, then closed it, taking out the Black Tear headpiece from his Traveler's Bag.

Franca realized Lumian was checking if the Demoness of Black was observing through the mirror.

Well, perfect timing... Franca was about to mention the potion formula and ingredients for Amandina when she saw Lumian quickly put away the Black Tear and give her a look.

Wh- The Demoness of Black is watching... Franca swallowed her words.

The next second, she saw Lumian get up, walk over to her, and squeeze into the armchair with a smile.

Hey... Hey, hey! Franca was stunned.

Her first reaction was to teach this space-invader a lesson, but then she realized Lumian's purpose.

In the Demoness of Black's eyes, we're lovers. If we don't show any intimacy, it'll be suspicious...

Okay, let's put on a show...

Franca felt Lumian's arm wrap around her waist.

Her body stiffened before she forced herself to relax.

Then, Lumian turned her around, and she found herself looking into his deep blue eyes and chiseled face.

"I'm here to fulfill my promise," Lumian said, giving her another look.

He chuckled softly and slowly lowered his head.

Franca's eyes widened.

Hey! Are you doing it for real?

She instinctively wanted to break free but remembered the Demoness of Black was watching and Lumian's hint to cooperate.

You little brat, are you taking advantage of me? Franca thought angrily. Then she remembered the previous agreement and sighed inwardly. Fine, it was bound to happen anyway...

Her long eyelashes fluttered, and her eyes slowly closed as her body softened.

Then, she felt Lumian's lips, warm and firm, breaking through her defenses.

In a daze, Franca thought, No, no! The Demoness of Black is still watching! How shameful!

Almost simultaneously, she heard Lumian's husky voice in her ear. "Let's go to the bedroom."

You're quite considerate... Once we're in the bedroom, covered by the blanket, the Demoness of Black can't see... It'll also solidify our relationship... Franca vaguely nodded, feeling herself lifted into the air.

...

In the warm and intimate bedroom.

With a lingering blush on her cheeks, Franca turned to Lumian and said, "I just remembered something I need to tell you..."

She asked with her eyes if the Demoness of Black was still watching.

Lumian chuckled. "The Demoness of Black left a while ago."

Franca was stunned for a moment, her foggy mind realizing something was off.

"You didn't check... How do you know?"

Lumian looked sincere. "The Demoness of Black didn't come today."

"...?" Franca was speechless.

She quickly understood, and in a fit of embarrassment and anger, she pounced on Lumian, hitting him.

"You tricked me! You tricked me!"

"..."

"You can't use something like this to deceive teammates, understand?"

"I understand."

"This makes it hard for me to trust your hints in the future. What if next time I think you're lying, but the Demoness of Black really shows up?"

"I'm sorry."

"Alright, I'll trust you one more time, but don't let it happen again! Don't let it happen again!"

"..."

Chapter 859: Ingenious Plan

859 "Ingenious" Plan

After Franca vented her anger and lay back down, Lumian finally asked, "What were you saying earlier?"

Franca glanced at the curtained bedroom window, making it clear: Check if the Demoness of Black is watching!

Lumian replied casually, "We're inside a Bottle of Fiction."

"..." Franca blinked. "When did that happen?"

"When I closed the door. I didn't want to disturb the neighbors," Lumian answered earnestly.

"..." Franca felt another surge of anger. She snapped, "You still need to check! What if the Demoness of Black can penetrate the Bottle of Fiction without you noticing?"

"Yes, yes." Lumian admitted his fault and took out the Black Tear headpiece from his Traveler's Bag, quickly sensing for a few seconds before putting it back.

Franca finally relaxed and nodded in satisfaction. "The thing is, Mr. Star gave me another task. He said, in addition to the Affliction potion formula and the materials, there will be a special reward."

"What task?" Lumian asked cooperatively.

Franca looked puzzled and said, "To get some water from the Samaritan Woman's Spring."

Lumian's first reaction was to consider the purpose of the task, but he quickly remembered that Franca had said Mr. Star was likely a high-ranking Red Glove from the Church of Evernight, and the Underworld Daoist who could grant others Beyonder powers from the Darkness pathway.

"It's understandable that Mr. Star, or rather the Church of Evernight behind him, needs water from the Samaritan Woman's Spring. But this task is too simple for us right now. And yet he wants to give you a special reward. Doesn't that seem a bit strange?" Lumian pondered aloud.

Franca thought for a moment and spoke, "I agree. It feels like he designed this task just to give me the special reward. It doesn't make sense. We've only met once."

Compared to other Demonesses in the Demoness Sect, one of Franca's greatest strengths was not assuming that every man she met would be infatuated with her or want to please her.

Lumian considered for a few seconds and said, "Maybe that special reward will bring a lot of trouble. It also represents something Mr. Star truly wants you to do."

Franca nodded in understanding. "Free rewards are the most expensive. What appears 'free' often comes with hidden costs."

Understanding this, she felt less worried.

She thought the potential problems with the special reward, even if they brought significant trouble, should be something she and her companions could handle.

Otherwise, the Major Arcana card holders wouldn't make such a choice.

She then turned to Lumian and asked, "How's your collection of the supplementary ingredients going?"

This should have been a daily concern, but hadn't she been feeling uncomfortable every time she saw Lumian these past few days?

Lumian reflected for a moment before answering, "I found a large battlefield from the war a few years ago and got a bag of blood-stained soil."

"I thought you'd go to the camp where Anthony and his comrades were attacked," Franca teased.

Lumian responded with amusement, "Am I that much of a devil? Besides, that's not a large battlefield and might be polluted by an evil god's worship."

Franca concurred succinctly, "What about the others?"

"I confirmed that there's active lava at the bottom of the volcano on Saint Tick Island, but it's unnecessary to collect it now. It will solidify quickly in the Traveler's Bag. I'll teleport it when it's needed." Lumian had been using his teleportation ability to travel around the world these days. "I plan to make the powder of plants and trees polluted by the Stone of Catastrophe myself."

As for acorns, that was too simple.

"Make it yourself?" Franca was surprised. "Is that possible?"

"It should be theoretically feasible. Certain parts of a Beyonder creature can replace such supplementary ingredients. And I have the Sword of Courage. I can place it and its companions on a pile of plants and trees, monitoring and replacing consumables. In about a few days, I should be able to create polluted plants and trees. Of course, this pollution will be more complex and severe than simple Stone of Catastrophe pollution. I'll consult Madam Magician in advance to see if the amount should be reduced."

"Indeed," Franca's eyes brightened, then dimmed slightly. "But the Plague Mother Serpent bile and Silver Hunter's fragments for the supplementary ingredients of the Demoness of Despair can't be made by the Black Tear."

"No rush. Jenna hasn't fully digested the Pleasure potion yet. It will take a few more days or even a week or two to become a Demoness of Affliction."

Lumian thought and said, "I have collected the blood of seven different plague victims."

Although there was no widespread plague at the moment, many places on the Northern and Southern Continents had sporadic outbreaks. They were either quickly contained or limited to small, isolated areas without spreading.

With the Magic Mirror Divination of the two Demonesses, Lumian pinpointed eight or nine similar locations, then teleported there with Lugano.

If the authorities had already noticed the outbreak and were working to control it, he would leave after collecting the blood of the plague victims. If the plague was still quietly spreading, he would attempt to heal it with Lugano's help. If it couldn't be solved, he would find a way to inform the authorities.

After these few days of hard work, Lumian had basically achieved his goals.

Franca breathed a sigh of relief, stating, "Remember to use the Black Tear to deliver the potion formula and all the materials Mr. Star gave to Amandina.

"Sigh... When will I completely digest the Affliction potion?"

Although her current digestion progress could be considered very fast, she still felt it wasn't enough. The person next to her was just one step away from the final domestication step, ready to hold the ceremony and become a Sequence 4 demigod.

Lumian turned his head to Franca and laughed.

"I just told you, you're still lacking in the part about causing others pain. And the target should be of high Sequence, otherwise, it has to be replaced with numbers."

Franca didn't link it to her own pain this time and started thinking seriously.

Causing others pain, high Sequence... Causing others pain, high Sequence...

Muttering to herself, Franca suddenly turned her head, her eyes shining brightly at Lumian.

Lumian's smile faded as he raised an eyebrow and asked, "Do you have a bold idea?"

Franca chuckled. "You have a false Angel rank. If I can make you feel pain, wouldn't the digestion speed be incredibly fast?"

"But it has to be real pain." Lumian didn't dismiss Franca's suggestion outright.

"For example, castration?" Franca glanced at the blanket with a growing smile.

Lumian fell silent for a moment before responding, "We can try."

"Wait, you're actually agreeing?" Franca was startled. She had only been joking with the suggestion of "castration."

"If it can really help you quickly digest the Affliction potion." Lumian shrugged. "It can grow back anyway."

"Forget it, that's too painful. It would leave you with serious psychological trauma and issues." Franca said, ruffling her tousled hair.

Suddenly, her eyes lit up. "I have a better plan. An ingenious plan!"

Lumian felt uneasy, sensing that Franca's new plan might be even harder to endure than "castration."

Franca's smile turned wicked.

"I thought of that Julie from the castration, and her digestion method. She would seize the moment when the target was about to reach ultimate satisfaction, then cut it off, plunging them from extreme pleasure into extreme pain.

"I can be gentler, not cutting it off, but preventing you from reaching ultimate satisfaction. Let you yearn and suffer without fulfillment, which is also a kind of intense pain..."

Lumian raised an eyebrow, unable to speak.

Franca's smile grew more sinister, having found a prank to pull.

"For this, I need to bind you with the Demoness's spider silk, prepare more tools, and to enhance the stimulation, you need to use your Ascetic abilities to refrain from burning the silk...

"Although it won't compare to Julie's method, your false Angel rank should help me digest it quickly."

Saying this, Franca clicked her tongue. "I never thought I'd do something like this, and be the one doing the tormenting."

In the past, Lumian might have lacked a concrete concept of this pain, but after experiencing the two Demonesses, he could now imagine how unbearable that torment would be.

"This is the hell of pain." Lumian couldn't help but sigh.

"That's the Demoness, bringing pleasure and pain," Franca said with a smile.

Lumian jumped out of bed and picked up his clothes.

"Eh?" Franca looked puzzled.

Lumian responded in a deep voice, "We're going to the Samaritan Woman's Spring now."

Franca was first stunned, then burst into laughter, rolling on the bed.

She had regained her normal control over her desires after passing the Pleasure stage, so even after being with Lumian, tasting long-lost pleasure, and achieving unprecedented satisfaction, she still felt weird because it was someone she knew well, who also knew her original gender. But now, she suddenly found it amusing and interesting, making her feel much less uncomfortable.

"Give it a try, give it a try." She lay on the bed, her eyes bright as she continued with her prank.

Lumian sighed again.

"We'll talk after we get the water from the Samaritan Woman's Spring."

...

Beside the Samaritan Woman's Spring, shrouded in gray-white fog.

Since Lumian didn't approach and trigger any anomalies, Franca patiently waited for a while and then used the golden vial given by Mr. Star to collect half a vial of water from the Samaritan Woman's Spring.

They didn't bring Jenna, fearing that her encounter with Krismona's shadow might lead to uncontrollable changes. Lumian planned to bring Jenna here after becoming an Iron-blooded Knight with a certain level of self-protection.

The high-ranking Major Arcana card holders seemed to dislike entering the underground or underground catacombs. But Lumian, marked and branded, felt that even as a demigod, he should still be able to enter the area of the Samaritan Woman's Spring.

Not long after, Franca put away the golden vial, and the two walked shoulder to shoulder towards the edge of the gray fog.

As they approached the edge of the fog on the slope, Lumian and Franca simultaneously noticed a blurry figure outside the fog slowly approaching.

Franca first darted to the side, then stared intently for two seconds.

Her expression suddenly became excited, and she said in a hushed voice to Lumian, "Harrison!"

The visitor from Resurrection Island, Harrison!

They had failed to converge with him last time, and now they coincidentally ran into him!

Chapter 860: The True Meaning of Those Words

860 The True Meaning of Those Words

When Franca uttered the name, Lumian also saw the approximate outline of the figure outside: Dressed in a black robe, with light hair, pale skin, and dark brown eyes, he didn't look like an Intisian.

Although Lumian had never seen Harrison in person, he had seen the image Franca had depicted using dream divination and a corresponding ritual, so it wasn't hard to identify the person outside the gray fog.

Seeing Franca's excitement, Lumian raised his right hand and gestured downward, signaling his companion to control her emotions.

Franca, an experienced Beyonder in combat, quickly composed herself and nodded at Lumian.

She understood Lumian's intention not to act rashly but to observe and see what Harrison intended to do. By understanding his actions, they could determine his Sequence, ability characteristics, and primary intentions.

This way, whatever response they made afterward would be more composed.

Franca shrank further to the side of the slope, using the gray fog as cover, and observed Harrison, who was holding a white candle.

Meanwhile, she couldn't help but muse, The Law of Beyonder Characteristics Convergence really works!

We gave up too soon after just one try. It was our fault for not respecting science -no, mysticism. If we had tried a few more times, wouldn't he have come?

Franca felt at ease, knowing that only Beyonders like Lumian, marked by Mr. Fool, could enter the area around the Samaritan Woman's Spring, while others could only see a gray-white fog and found it difficult to pass through.

She had tried earlier and found she couldn't penetrate the fog on her own, prompting Lumian to mock her, saying, "Even Madame Hela couldn't do it. Where did you get the confidence that you could?" This only strengthened her resolve to have Lumian help her digest the Affliction potion.

Lumian stood beside Franca, observing every move of the figure outside while recalling his encounters with Beyonders of the Death, Darkness, and Warrior pathways, hoping to quickly formulate the most effective strategy against Harrison based on their combat characteristics and abilities.

Holding the white candle, Harrison took a few steps outside the gray fog, glanced around, and then continued forward.

He walked into the gray fog as if passing through a curtain of water!

He can pass through the gray fog barrier?

How?

Franca's sky-blue eyes widened in shock, disbelief, and reluctance.

Lumian was equally surprised.

But he hadn't ruled out the possibility that Harrison could break through the fog barrier and enter the area around the Samaritan Woman's Spring. He just hadn't expected it to be so easy for him.

Based on Harrison's constant search for scenes closely related to death, darkness, and dusk, and his drifting as a corpse on the River Styx in Underworld Daoist and company's world, Lumian reasonably suspected that he might have a way or an item to penetrate the fog barrier.

Lumian had expected to see Harrison perform a strange ritual or take out an item with an otherworldly style. Instead, like himself, Harrison had simply walked into the area around the Samaritan Woman's Spring, covered by gray fog!

Seeing that the fog no longer served as a barrier, leaving only the fog to interfere with their vision, Lumian made a decisive move and extinguished the white candle in his hand.

As he expected, the surrounding darkness silently surged in, activating the Underworld Daoist's mark on his right palm without corroding his body.

He had kept the candle lit to maintain this state, partly because it couldn't last long in the current situation without risking turning into a catacombs administrator and partly to mislead any potential enemies, setting a trap.

As Lumian extinguished the candle, Franca quickly took action.

Unable to borrow the Black Tear from Lumian, she directly took out an Ice Amulet and a mirror from her Traveler's Bag.

With a flash of crystalline cold light, Franca, illuminated by the candle's yellowish flame, entered the mirror in her hand.

As her figure disappeared, the unheld mirror fell to the ground, only to be accurately caught by Lumian.

Holding the mirror, Lumian immediately activated the contract mark, transforming into a shadow creature and blending completely into the darkness enveloped by the gray fog.

Before Harrison could get closer, they had completed their concealment.

In the void behind the mirror, Franca, holding the burning white candle, quickly surveyed her surroundings.

She found that the area was filled with the same gray-white fog as outside, permeating every corner.

The illusory dark tunnels, like spider webs, were excluded by the fog, appearing blurry and hard to see.

Sure enough... Franca wasn't surprised by this situation.

Lumian had already told her that this area was isolated from the spirit world, making spirit world traversal unusable here.

With even the spirit world being isolated, the mirror world would certainly be no exception!

Because the mirror had been brought into the fog-covered area, Franca could enter the mirrored region to hide but couldn't traverse to any mirror outside the underground catacombs-this was the principle that allowed the Traveler's Bag to continue being used.

Franca couldn't even reach the mirrors on Lumian's person, let alone those outside the catacombs!

Of course, Franca hadn't intended to use the mirror world for anything other than hiding, preventing the yellowish glow of the white candle from being seen by Harrison.

During their previous ambush on Harrison, she hadn't done this because the area she could monitor through the mirror was too small, and all senses, including vision, would be severely weakened.

Franca approached the glass mirror and found that Lumian had thoughtfully turned it towards Harrison, allowing her to see their target.

Seeing Harrison, illuminated by the yellowish glow of the white candle, slowly moving down the slope, Franca grew even more puzzled.

How did he get through the fog barrier?

Could he also bear Mr. Fool's mark?

But Madam Judgment and the other Major Arcana card holders didn't know!

He hadn't used an item or performed a ritual earlier, relying on his own ability?

But whether it was the Apprentice pathway's mastery of seals or the Marauder pathway's exploitation of loopholes, they are all within Mr. Fool's domain. It doesn't make sense to bypass the fog barrier...

Mr. Fool's mark...

At this thought, Franca's heart skipped a beat, and a title flashed in her mind: The Celestial Worthy of Heaven and Earth for Blessings!

Harrison bears the mark of the Celestial Worthy, allowing him to penetrate the fog barrier? Franca made this startling and shocking guess.

She found it quite reasonable.

Based on the current information, it seemed that the Celestial Worthy was the culprit behind their transmigration into this world, and Resurrection Island was Mount Penglai, a node where the two worlds intersected or a transmigration point. If this was true, it was natural for Harrison, from Resurrection Island or Mount Penglai, to have a close relationship with the Celestial Worthy.

They had been misled by Harrison's pursuit of death, darkness, and dusk-related scenes and his mastery of the depths of death, overlooking this point!

Perhaps, as Jenna had speculated, Harrison's deep research into death didn't necessarily mean he was a Beyonder of that pathway!

This could better explain why they couldn't converge with him last time. Why had they coincidentally encountered him this time?

As a shadow creature, Lumian also thought of the Celestial Worthy, the great being competing with Mr. Fool for the apex powers of the Seer, Apprentice, and Marauder pathways.

He watched Harrison's slow advance and thought of more things.

Previously, Harrison seemingly met the Mirror Person, Jasmine, leading us to speculate that he was also involved in Project Vortex...

Now it's almost certain. Madam Magician mentioned encountering the Celestial Worthy's followers while dealing with Overseer Perle, who was one of the initiators of Project Vortex...

This background can explain why an outsider like Harrison can frequently appear in Underground Trier without being found by the Purifiers...

Lumian didn't rush to act. He was unsure of Harrison's level and wanted to see what Harrison intended to do by repeatedly coming to the Samaritan Woman's Spring. This might reveal a lot of important information.

As he followed Harrison's movements, Lumian suddenly understood why the Underworld Daoist had warned Amandina to "beware of Penglai."

He had previously thought that the reappearance of Mount Penglai and the bodies floating on the river had alerted the Underworld Daoist. But given his dire state, closer to a wraith, he couldn't discern Amandina's exact location and situation, so he had instinctively issued a warning.

Now it seemed the message was to tell Amandina that someone from Penglai had been to the Samaritan Woman's Spring and to be cautious!

Just as Lumian sighed internally at their earlier oversight, Harrison suddenly turned his head and looked towards their hiding spot.

Almost simultaneously, the grand, layered voice of Termiboros echoed in his ear:

"Protect your Traveler's Bag."

Uh... Lumian didn't have time to discern the purpose behind Termiboros' suggestion. He quickly reached for his waist and grabbed the Traveler's Bag.

The next moment, Harrison raised his right hand.

Lumian felt the Traveler's Bag being tugged by an invisible force, but he held it tightly.

Marauder? Not a power of the Death pathway? A special boon from the Celestial Worthy? Puzzled, Lumian immediately shifted his position using the shadows.

Behind Harrison, darkness surged, outlining Lumian's form.

Chapter 861: Marauder?

861 Marauder?

As soon as Lumian exited his shadow creature state, he let out a grunt.

Two beams of white light shot from his nostrils, flying towards Harrison, who had no time to dodge.

Almost simultaneously, Lumian sensed a dense aura of death emanating from Harrison. His spirit abruptly contracted, transforming into a tiny, golden millet-like particle, hiding in the deepest void of his body, unreachable.

The two beams of white light hit Harrison's body, but it was like striking a piece of decayed wood or a lifeless corpse, producing no effect.

Harrison turned swiftly towards Lumian, and his contracted spirit expanded instantly, filling his body once more.

With this change, a root wrapped in white cloth swiftly formed in Harrison's right palm.

He swung this semi-illusory root at Lumian.

The white cloth strips on the root fluttered gently, stirring up cries that were either mournful or wailing.

They drilled into Lumian's ears, causing him to falter just as he was about to change his position, unable to dodge in time.

Smack!

The root wrapped in white cloth struck Lumian's body.

His skin quickly turned pale, and a sense of death deepened rapidly.

Crack!

Lumian's body cracked like a mirror, shattering into dull fragments that fell to the ground.

Immediately after, he reappeared at the side of the slope, shaking the mirror that held Franca.

Franca understood his intention, immediately exiting the mirror with the burning white candle and landing not far from him.

Lumian, with his other hand, reached into the Traveler's Bag, took out the Black Tear accessory, and tossed it to Franca.

Here, there was no worry about the mystical plague attached to the Black Tear spreading, and the Demoness of Affliction could withstand the corresponding mystical pathogens for longer!

Lumian even suspected that, due to the special nature of the Samaritan Woman's Spring, the mystical pathogens created by the Black Tear would only survive for a limited time before perishing.

As for what to do during that time, Lumian had already considered it-after throwing out the Black Tear accessory, he quickly reached into the Traveler's Bag again, grasping the hilt of the Sword of Courage.

He intended to have the sword share half the damage and effects with him!

Lumian wasn't overly concerned about the excess courage issue:

With Franca around, she would guide and correct the Warrior's choices in a more subtle way that the Warrior would accept, like occupying a better position, making the Warrior throw the sword to her for brief use, and then not catching it when it was thrown back, preventing both from being affected by the courage.

As Franca put it, with an external brain, they could be bolder in using the Sword of Courage.

Of course, this could only effectively reduce the influence of courage, not completely avoid it.

Harrison didn't just stand by and watch Lumian and Franca prepare. He threw the root wrapped in white cloth towards them.

The root rapidly became illusory in midair, disintegrating into intertwined pale and greenish light, merging into the darkness.

Immediately, several translucent, eerie pale-white hands emerged from the ground beneath Lumian and Franca, cold and sinister, grasping at their ankles and calves.

These seemed to induce some kind of paralysis.

At the same time, Harrison's mouth moved, chanting an incantation in a strange language.

With a whoosh, blazing-white flames ignited beside Lumian's feet, bringing high temperatures to counter the chill, cold, and paralysis created by the pale-white hands.

Franca, with the Black Tear accessory wrapped around her wrist, silently let the eerie, quiet black flames of the Demoness flow like water, engulfing the transparent hands trying to affect her, setting them ablaze.

Lumian finally grasped the Sword of Courage, instantly becoming fearless.

He drew the iron-black straight sword and slashed forward.

A huge fireball, blazing white with a hint of blue, formed and shot straight at Harrison, whose black hair was only a thin layer.

Harrison, seeing this, did not move. He quickly finished the last two sentences of the incantation and pointed his right hand towards the Samaritan Woman's Spring.

Franca, just breaking free from the pale-white hands, finally deciphered what the enemy was chanting.

One sentence was "Steal the secrets of heaven," and the other was unclear at the beginning, ending with "Swift as a decree, be driven."

Below, at the Samaritan Woman's Spring, the pale-white water began to bubble, reflecting a figure of a woman, serene as the night but rotting and oozing pus.

The figure silently gazed at the outside world without any movement.

But in front of Harrison, a similar yet more illusory and flickering figure appeared.

As Lumian's fireball-cleaved out from the Sword of Courage-approached this figure, it gradually dimmed, quickly becoming illusory, and mostly vanished.

The remaining bit exploded on the spot, forcing Harrison back two steps.

Seeing this, Lumian didn't hesitate to activate the residual aura of the Blood Emperor in his right palm.

Want to compete?

Fine!

Let's see who can exert more influence on the Samaritan Woman's Spring!

Nothing to fear!

Splash!

The pale-white water retreated into the dark, bottomless spring, and a sense of wild frenzy instantly descended.

At that moment, whether it was Harrison, Lumian, or Franca, they all felt a shock to their minds and bodies, wanting to submit, temporarily losing their ability to think, their minds blank.

The cold, rotting sensation in Lumian's right palm emerged, suppressing the residual aura of the Blood Emperor.

The frenzied, violent feeling from the spring quickly receded.

Lumian was the first to regain his thoughts. He raised the iron-black Sword of Courage and rushed to Harrison, slashing at his head.

Bang!

Amidst the sound of an explosion and scattered flames, Harrison's body reverted to a sinister, deathly paper figurine.

The paper figurine lightly adhered to the blade of the Sword of Courage, torn to pieces by the violent shockwaves and set ablaze by the white-blue flames.

Multiple similar paper figurines appeared around Lumian, all exuding a sinister, pale, deathly aura, with facial features painted in a horrifying and maliciously humorous manner.

The next second, black flames flew from Franca, landing on these paper figurines, burning the spirituality and mysticism that sustained them.

In the blink of an eye, these sinister paper figurines fell in a series of wailing cries, turning to ashes.

"Harrison has fled!" Franca judged quickly after a glance.

Lumian, holding the Sword of Courage, sprinted up the slope, chasing to the edge of the gray fog.

The fog swayed gently, seemingly indicating that the enemy had just escaped.

Lumian was about to pursue when Franca's voice reached his ears, "Let's switch Sealed Artifacts; mine is almost at its limit."

Lumian, undeterred by the Black Tear's negative effects, immediately threw the Sword of Courage over.

As soon as the iron-black straight sword left his hand, rationality and clarity reclaimed his mind:

Almost forgot that Franca can't leave the gray fog...

If I go out alone, even if I catch up with Harrison, without an external brain and a pre-planned strategy, the Sword of Courage would be my biggest problem...

Franca, though eager to catch Harrison, remained rational enough to quickly analyze the situation and make an accurate judgment...

Once Lumian caught the Black Tear, he immediately placed it back in its isolated space within the Traveler's Bag, then, with Franca's help, stored the Sword of Courage as well.

He then pulled Franca through the gray fog, returning to the slope leading to the ancient burial chamber.

As Lumian used his Hunter tracking abilities to search for Harrison, Franca employed divination methods for clues.

But after leaving the large burial chamber housing the Samaritan Woman's Spring, the visitor from Resurrection Island completely disappeared and managed to thwart their divination.

They stopped at the Krismona Night Pillar on the third level, exchanging glances.

Franca's lake-blue eyes revealed undisguised disappointment and regret. She sighed. "If I had known, I would have called Jenna to ambush him outside the chamber."

Lumian comforted Franca, "Given Harrison's displayed strength, we should be glad Jenna wasn't outside alone. She could have been discovered, attacked, and might not have lasted until we left the Samaritan Woman's Spring."

"That's true..." Franca sighed deeply.

Holding the white candle, she glanced around and translated the two lines of incantation for Lumian.

As Lumian lit a new candle, he pondered aloud, "Steal the secrets of heaven... He tried to steal my Traveler's Bag... Did he sense valuable items and thus saw through my concealment?

"It seems Harrison is more like a Beyonder of the Marauder pathway, yet he clearly uses powers of the Death pathway, and quite powerful ones at that.

"The Marauders we've encountered before, even at Sequence 5 Dream Stealer, didn't show such capabilities, and Harrison obviously lacks godhood... A boost from the Celestial Worthy's mark?"

Franca thoughtfully said, "After the Demoness of Black told me the Primordial One can modify the abilities of different Sequences in the Demoness pathway to some extent, I wrote to Madam Judgment about it. She said it's not only true gods who can do such things; certain Kings of Angels can too. Amon, for instance, once altered the mystical knowledge and some abilities acquired in different Sequences of the Marauder pathway.

"Is Harrison exhibiting the original, full version?"

"That might be a reason, but I think some of his actions just now have surpassed Sequence 5. Even a full version Dream Stealer shouldn't manage that... The Resurrection Island's method of utilizing power and its manifestation differ significantly from the paths of the divine?" Lumian pondered aloud.

Chapter 862: Help

862 Help

Holding the white candle, Franca thought for a while but couldn't figure out the situation. She walked towards the area outside the Krismona Night Pillar, saying solemnly, "No matter if it's because Resurrection Island has a special way of utilizing and manifesting power, or if Harrison is a Beyonder of the Marauder pathway, using the secrets of heaven to wield the Death pathway's power, or if he belongs to the Death pathway and uses the Celestial Worthy's mark or boons to display stealing abilities, we can't underestimate him. We need to report this immediately."

Lumian walked beside Franca, nodding. "If I don't use Sealed Artifacts, I'm not confident I can beat him. At the very least, I'm not sure I can capture or kill him, and he might also possess a Grade 1 Sealed Artifact."

"Fortunately, we encountered him today. If it were another time, when I was alone, a chance meeting would be much more dangerous." Franca sighed and changed the subject, "Does this mean the followers of the Celestial Worthy are truly involved in Project Vortex? What benefit could they gain?"

"The descent of an evil god?" Lumian speculated based on his knowledge and intelligence. "Or bringing about the apocalypse earlier?"

Franca's expression flickered in the dim candlelight, and she could only let out a long sigh.

Lumian moved forward, kicking away a silent, bony hand that reached out.

He exclaimed with excitement, "This is undoubtedly a very big vortex. We can't just rely on the Major Arcana card holders for help. We need to quickly improve our own strength to avoid being swept up and rendered powerless."

"Exactly," Franca agreed.

Lumian continued to look straight ahead, his voice unwavering, "You need to digest the Affliction potion as soon as possible, and I need to quickly bring Ludwig fully into the team."

Franca was taken aback and couldn't help but glance at Lumian's profile.

She hesitated for a moment, then asked carefully, "Are you saying this out of guilt? There's no need; we can think of other ways."

"Guilt is part of it, but it's not the main reason." Lumian continued forward without much change in expression.

Franca frowned slightly, looking at Lumian, and raised a question she had before meeting Harrison, "Why did you suddenly come to find me today and be so proactive? I thought I would have to endure our awkward relationship until I couldn't take it anymore and had to seek you out."

Lumian chuckled."If I told you Jenna asked me to find you, would you believe it?"

Franca suddenly felt a bit stifled, not even sure why she felt this way or if it was for multiple reasons.

She muttered, "She asked, and you just came?"

Lumian smiled as if talking about something ordinary. "If I absolutely don't want to do something-sans the influence of mystical powers-there's only one person in this world who can force me to do it."

Franca knew who Lumian was referring to and understood what he meant.

The blockage in her heart eased a lot, but recalling certain things made her expression quite complicated. There was anger, bitterness, and a bit of joy.

She clenched her right fist, the one not holding the white candle, and punched Lumian's shoulder with considerable force, "You brat, you gave it away!"

Lumian took the punch stoically, as if he had anticipated it.

They walked in silence for a while. Franca, having adjusted her mood, curiously asked, "Actually, I wanted to ask earlier. Jenna had already found you and expressed her thoughts, and you said the best response was to delay until you became an Iron-blooded Knight. But in that situation, how could you delay? There was no way to delay anymore!"

Lumian glanced at Franca. "Find Anthony. Did you forget we have a Psychiatrist in our team?"

Franca chuckled awkwardly. "How can you discuss such matters with a Psychiatrist teammate you meet every day? It's too awkward! Jenna and I definitely can't talk to Anthony about this."

Lumian ignored Franca's excuse and continued, "With the help of a Psychiatrist, or even a Hypnotist's abilities, the issue could be delayed for a while. But fundamentally, this is an emotional problem, not a psychological or mental issue.

Using a Psychiatrist can delay it, but it can't be postponed forever. It will eventually erupt, so it's better to resolve it sooner."

Franca tersely responded.

After a few more steps, she looked at the darkness ahead and said in a calm but slightly joyful tone, "Do you know why I only punched you once?"

"No," Lumian replied frankly.

Franca smiled, feeling quite gratified.

"Previously, you always gave me a feeling that goals, power, and close relationships were important, but you didn't care much about yourself, as if you didn't matter.

"This time, I originally thought you made all these decisions in that same mindset, but when you said you weren't entirely passive and had your own thoughts, even if just a bit, I was very happy."

Lumian did not respond but did not refute her either.

...

In Trier, Quartier de la Maison d'Opéra, in an underground room.

Anthony met with the Knight of Swords.

The Minor Arcana card holder still wore a white shirt and black vest, his brown hair slightly disheveled, and his eyes looked quite repressed.

At this moment, the Knight of Swords sat at a long table, with several playing cards covering different chairs.

After glancing at what seemed like the aftermath of a card game, Anthony, who had met the Knight of Swords in the Raklev region of the Southern Continent, politely greeted him.

The Knight of Swords responded briefly. After Anthony found a chair without cards in front of it and sat down, he spoke in a low voice, "I need your help with two things. One is to provide psychological treatment for a while to help stabilize my mental state."

"No problem." Anthony nodded gently.

He knew that Madam Justice and Madam Susie were not in Trier recently. It seemed they had left because there were traces of a dragon on the West Midseashire Coast, and a member of the Tamara family's Judgment branch in the Loen Kingdom had surfaced and expressed a desire to cooperate. Both ladies had been away for some time and wouldn't return soon. Among the Minor Arcana card holders in Trier, only he could provide psychological treatment to the Knight of Swords.

Maintaining his repressed state, the Knight of Swords continued, "The second thing is that we discovered some members of the indulgence faction seem to have brought a significant item to Trier. There are traces of a demigod among them.

"We have confirmed where these indulgence faction members are staying, but without knowing what the item is or if there are other powerful individuals hidden, we don't want to launch a rash attack.

"It's best not to involve the authorities in this. If the item is useful to us but falls into official hands, it would be quite troublesome.

"Every two or three days, a servant from their villa comes out to buy supplies. Of course, there's likely an indulgence faction member watching secretly, whose strength and level are uncertain.

"We will handle distracting the indulgence faction member watching the servant.

You will find an opportunity to hypnotize the servant, ask two or three questions, and then hypnotize him to forget being questioned.

"The questioning time is short, and the risk is high. We can't guarantee your absolute safety, only that your safety will be our top priority.

"You can refuse, but if you agree, we will give you sufficient or exceptionally special compensation."

"Exceptionally special?" Anthony asked, slightly puzzled.

The Knight of Swords, Maric, took a shiny Loen gold pound from his pocket and said in a low voice, "I believe you recognize it."

Anthony immediately remembered the lucky coin Jenna and Ludwig had obtained.

After a moment's thought, he decided, "Alright, I will hypnotize the servant and handle the questioning, but you need to design the questions. I don't know what concerns you."

"Deal." The Knight of Swords showed a slight smile, but his eyes remained repressed.

Anthony looked at him and said, "Shall we start the first psychological treatment now?"

"Okay." The Knight of Swords nodded gently.

Anthony smiled peacefully.

"First, I must clarify that a Psychiatrist is not omnipotent. Sometimes, I can only help you find the right path. Other times, I can only provide some emotional relief, allowing you to view troubling matters more normally.

"Just as restraint is for crucial moments of release, if you never release, I can only help delay it for a while. Eventually, it will be uncontrollable."

...

Two days later, in a bustling market.

Anthony spotted his target, a man with evident Southern Continent ancestry.

Pretending to select fresh meat, he slowly approached the target.

According to the plan, the Knight of Swords and his team would now start distracting the indulgence faction member watching the servant. If they failed, they would use Wraith possession to inform him that today's mission was urgently canceled.

Soon, Anthony reached the target's side.

Suddenly, his eyes brightened as he bent down to pick up a Louis d'or from the ground.

After a moment's hesitation, he asked the servant beside him, "Sir, did you drop this?"

The servant looked over blankly, the gold coin's shine making him squint. At the same time, Anthony's eyes subtly turned vertical, tinged with a light gold hue.

The servant, completely focused on the gold coin, swallowed and said, "Yes, it's mine."

Thus, Anthony completed the hypnosis.

He handed the coin to the servant and asked casually, "What are they doing in the villa, never coming out?"

The servant hesitated, then replied, "They're in an orgy, all together. They're making babies, making babies!"

Chapter 863: Dancing with the Devil

863 Dancing with the Devil

Making babies? Anthony suddenly had a strong sense of foreboding.

He immediately abandoned the second question preset by the Knight of Swords and straightforwardly asked, "Who is making babies?"

The servant replied, his confusion tinged with fear. "Everyone is! The women are giving birth, and so are the men!"

Men are giving birth too... Anthony felt a shiver run down his spine and nearly used Placate himself.

He took another gold coin from his pocket and smiled at the servant.

"Did you forget you dropped another Louis d'or?"

The servant thought the Louis d'or's shine had entered the other man's eyes.

He assumed the man was trying to bribe him and hastily nodded.

"Yes, yes, I forgot."

As he spoke, the servant's thoughts became fuzzy, as if he heard something but also didn't.

When he came to his senses, he had forgotten what had just happened, and the Louis d'or in his hand was gone.

In an alley two streets away from the market, Anthony saw Maric, the Knight of Swords, reflected in a puddle left by last night's sudden rain.

Before the Knight of Swords could speak, Anthony quickly relayed the information he had gathered and then said, "The indulgence faction only indulges desires, not making babies. That's not their hallmark, right?"

The repression in the Knight of Swords' eyes had lessened slightly. He said gravely, "Followers of the Primordial Moon within the indulgence faction do occasionally, but not to the extent where even men give birth."

Anthony said in a serious tone, "Based on the behavior of those indulgence faction members, their bringing a significant item to Trier, the brewing of Project Vortex, and the fact that its leaders are Brokers who worship an evil god, I suspect that the Mother Tree of Desire worshiped by the indulgence faction and the Great Mother worshiped by the Nightstalkers have started collaborating on something, which is a crucial part of Project Vortex!"

Since the Knight of Swords had come to Trier, he naturally knew about Project Vortex from his Major Arcana card holder. He replied in a low voice, "Your suspicion is alarming. I will immediately report this to Ma'am Hermit and the higher-ups of our faction. If necessary, we will take decisive action."

Anthony nodded. "It would be best to inform the authorities as well. In Trier, no one is better suited to handle this than them. I need to return to my companions and warn them to be on guard against the coming vortex!"

With that, Anthony was about to leave the alley. "My companion will take you to find the Seven of Wands; it will be faster this way," the Knight of Swords called out to Anthony. "We will give you the promised reward once the situation stabilizes."

The Minor Arcana card holder quickly vanished from the puddle's surface.

He was eager to write to his Major Arcana card holder, The Hermit.

...

In the Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative, Apartment 702 on 9 Rue Orosai.

Franca and Jenna were squeezed together on the sofa, comparing the Loen gold pounds in their hands.

"I can feel they are somewhat special, but I don't know what makes them special," Franca said happily.

She then looked up at Lumian, who had taken her spot.

"Mr. Star's reward is this, haha, now you're the only one without one!"

Lumian found it amusing and remarked, "Did you forget about Anthony? And Lugano doesn't have one either."

Jenna glanced at Franca, who was leaning on her, and said thoughtfully, "When I first got the lucky coin, I thought it was a gift, but after you and Ludwig got yours, I began to suspect they might be symbols or tokens. We might all experience something together in the future.

"Lumian is special in many ways; he will get involved sooner or later, and he will get a coin eventually."

"At least he doesn't have one now," Franca said, showing off her lucky coin.

After discussing this for a while, Franca put away her lucky coin and asked Lumian about the serious matter, "How is Ludwig's 'training' going?"

"He follows my orders well now. The next step is to go through some experiences together to build rapport with you all," Lumian thought for a moment. "I'll design tasks accordingly. With a small team, it should take two or three weeks to achieve this."

"I'll probably finish digesting the Affliction potion before your advancement. The main issue now is convincing the Demoness of Black that I can digest it so quickly." In the past few days, Franca's progress in digesting the Affliction potion had advanced significantly, and she estimated she needed only about a week more.

Jenna fell silent for a moment before saying, "My Pleasure potion is fully digested. I just need a couple of days to prepare for the ritual to become a Demoness of Affliction."

"So soon?" Franca exclaimed in surprise.

Jenna looked at Franca with a complex expression but did not answer.

Franca was stunned for a moment, then said, "Oh."

She understood why, which made her feelings even more complicated, with a mix of bitterness, sadness, joy, and smugness.

"I have given Jenna the potion ingredients and the remaining Ice Lemon Fish fillet," Lumian added.

"Okay." Franca quickly adjusted her mindset.

Feeling Jenna leaning against her, smelling her fragrance, and looking at Lumian, who had taken her spot and was mimicking her sitting posture, Franca suddenly felt that the past couple of days had been quite enjoyable and reassuring. Except for occasional pain and sadness, everything was great. Lumian was even expressing his importance to her more actively, though not much.

Since her transmigration, it was the first time Franca had felt this way.

Well, well, let's just say I've built a harem, except... Franca sighed inwardly.

She hoped these times would last longer, and that the vortex and the apocalypse would never come.

At that moment, Lumian turned his head and looked towards the side door of the living room.

Anthony's figure quickly took shape there.

"I have important information," Anthony said directly.

Lumian stood up from the armchair and gestured for Anthony to continue.

Anthony quickly relayed the information he had gathered from the servant and his own speculations.

During this, Jenna and Franca, the two Demonesses, both had a premonition of danger from their spirituality.

Lumian said without hesitation, "I'll inform Madam Magician immediately, then meet up with Ludwig and Lugano and move to a new safe house. We'll wait for instructions from the Major Arcana card holders."

...

Above the endless gray fog, in an ancient and majestic palace.

On either side of a mottled bronze table, figures shrouded in gray fog quickly formed.

There were eight of them.

The seats at the head and foot of the table were empty.

Miss Justice stood up, looked around, and said, "This is an emergency meeting with Mr. Fool's permission."

Madam Magician did not waste time. Once Miss Justice sat down, she immediately asked Mr. Star across from her, "Was it your idea or a hint from the Church of Evernight to send the Two of Cups to fetch water from the Samaritan Woman's Spring?"

Mr. Star sat upright this time.

"It was a revelation I received in a dream."

"A dream... Is the Evernight Goddess reminding us to pay attention to Harrison?

Yes, She should know that Harrison has entered and exited the Samaritan Woman's Spring several times and mastered the pattern..." Madam Magician did not ask further and turned to Ma'am Hermit on her side, "Has Queen Mystic conveyed any information?"

Ma'am Hermit shook her head, then said after recalling, "She hasn't contacted me for a while. I tried to reach her a couple of days ago but received no response..."

As she spoke, Ma'am Hermit suddenly paused, foreseeing a scene.

Then, she saw the gaze of Mr. Hanged Man, Mr. Moon, Mr. Sun, and Madam Judgment all fall on her, their expressions solemn and their eyes full of undisguised vigilance.

...

Tossed high into the air by a storm, then slammed back into the vortex of the sea, the Dawn struggled to maintain its balance, like a toy thrown into the ocean.

There was not a single sailor on its deck; the sails and ropes moved on their own as if controlled by invisible hands.

After a long time, the storm finally subsided, and the Dawn, the flagship of Queen Mystic, soon stabilized.

Ahead, an island covered in dark green, nearly black, giant trees slowly emerged under the blue sky and white clouds.

Wearing a floral shirt and a brown captain's coat, Queen Mystic-Bernadette-stepped out of the cabin and walked to the bow.

Her blue eyes were as deep as the ocean, her straight eyebrows extended gracefully, and her naturally flowing chestnut hair reached her waist. She wore pants and boots for ease of movement.

Empty-handed, Queen Mystic gazed at the island, her eyes darkening, her face expressionless.

As the island drew nearer, another person emerged from the cabin.

This person was also a woman, with black hair and brown eyes, a pretty face, and the typical appearance of a Loenese. She wore a dark robe with many pockets and different flowers embroidered on it, a favorite outfit of ancient merchants.

Overseer Perle!

This evil god worshiper and initiator of Project Vortex appeared on Queen Mystic's ship!

Perle walked to the bow and stood beside Bernadette, also gazing at the island, a clear smile on her face.

Chapter 864: Center of the Vortex

864 Center of the Vortex

Quartier 14, within the botanical garden, there stood a wooden cabin belonging to the caretaker.

Lumian had prepared this safe house before heading to Morora. He hadn't rented it; instead, he used money to persuade the garden caretaker to vacate the place whenever needed and to pretend he still lived there.

Franca glanced at the lush trees surrounding them, then turned her gaze back to Ludwig, who was sitting at a small wooden table, munching on a donut. She asked with a playful smile, "How about I give you some homework?"

Ludwig looked up quickly, eyeing Franca warily and instinctively scooting back.

Franca laughed immediately, muttering to herself, I feel an Angel's pain, and my Affliction potion has digested a bit more!

"Why are you bullying a child?" Jenna asked, amused by the scene.

"What child?" Franca explained with a grin, "I had suspected that making Ludwig experience the pain of studying and doing homework might help me digest the potion, but I didn't try it for fear of ruining Lumian's 'training' and making Ludwig want to run away from home. Now, with the vortex possibly approaching, I need to digest as much as I can. Besides, it's not like Ludwig will bond with us that quickly anyway."

Ludwig's brown eyes clearly conveyed one message as he looked at Franca: You Demoness!

Jenna thought carefully and realized Franca's reasoning made sense. Once Lumian completed his advancement and she herself reached the stage of the Demoness of Affliction, this could be one of the ways to digest the potion.

Ludwig's gaze flicked between Franca and Jenna before he spoke in a determined tone, "I will do my best to build rapport with you all!"

"Not bad," Lumian clapped his hands, then said to Franca and Jenna, "You two have the potential to be Conspirers. Now Ludwig doesn't mind teaming up with you."

I didn't expect it to turn out this way... Franca looked around, sensing that Lugano and Anthony's gazes seemed to say, "Look, you've driven the kid to this point."

Lumian tossed a chocolate coin to Ludwig and asked thoughtfully, "After eating that Chef's stomach, you should have recalled quite a bit of knowledge, right?"

Ludwig quickly unwrapped the chocolate and answered honestly, "Yes!"

This training is quite effective... Franca was a little surprised and looked at Lumian with admiration.

Lumian pulled up a chair and asked in a coaxing tone, "Do you know anything about the Broker pathway? What do they mean by 'vortex'?"

Busy with training Ludwig and giving him tasks, Lumian had nearly overlooked that Ludwig was an Angel from beyond the barrier and might know something about the Broker pathway.

After learning about Project Vortex, Lumian had asked Ludwig a similar question before going to Morora, but Ludwig had shaken his head, saying he had no recollection. Now, he had recovered some memories and was much more obedient.

Chewing on the chocolate, Ludwig fell into deep thought.

After a few seconds, he said uncertainly, "It seems to involve more complex transactions, with multiple traders, not just one-on-one deals."

As he spoke, Ludwig took a stack of bread slices from the side and laid them out on the table, representing different traders.

He then pointed to the bread slices and said, "Transactions can occur between any of these groups, or there can be three-way, four-way, or even more parties involved. Connecting the corresponding lines creates a web or a vortex, involving many people."

Lumian understood Ludwig's meaning and pondered, "It seems the transaction between the Mother Tree of Desire and the Great Mother is just one part of the vortex. So where is the center of the vortex?"

...

In the square district, outside a villa where several members of the Rose School of Thought's indulgence faction lived.

Angoulême de Frangois and a group of Purifiers had arrived nearby.

For this mission, he had borrowed a Sealed Artifact from the Inquisition in the market district-his preferred Grade 1 Sealed Artifact, the Sword of the Sun, which was now embedded in the spine of a gray-white humanoid mechanical creation.

Angoulême looked up at the sky, where white clouds floated and the sun wasn't too intense. He glanced around and said, "Squad A, enter with me. Squad B, ambush underground. Squad C, go to the back door..."

After instructing his team, he spread his arms slightly and said, "Saint Vieve and Saint Plessy are watching us. We will surely be victorious! Praise the Sun!"

"Praise the Sun!" every Purifier responded.

Once the squads were in position, Angoulême, wearing a brown wool coat, moved from stillness to motion and charged towards the villa, with the gray-white humanoid mechanical creation following closely.

For this mission, which might involve a demigod from the Rose School of Thought, Angoulême was not too worried. The Archbishop of Trier, Saint Plessy, and the Guardian Angel of Trier, Saint Vive, were not just watching but were also nearby, ready to purify the evil. The main goal was to force the bloody members of the Rose School of Thought out of hiding. If necessary, They could destroy the entire villa, purifying both the Beyonders and the ordinary people who worshiped evil gods together.

Although Angoulême believed that some of the ordinary people might still have a chance to be saved-some might not be deeply devoted to the Mother Tree of Desire-their rescue depended on ensuring the safety of his team.

As the captain, his primary responsibility was to his subordinates!

Angoulême was the first to rush through the garden and reach the front door of the villa.

Just then, he saw a white, thin mist rising inside, twisting and turning to form faces of agony that seemed almost real on the glass windows and walls.

Angoulême stopped and prepared to summon Light of Holiness to purify the mist.

Suddenly, deep within the thin white mist, in a room on the second floor of the villa, crimson moonlight began to glow.

It quickly outlined a stiff, sluggish, twisted, and blurry figure.

For some reason, upon seeing the crimson figure, Angoulême and his team felt a sense of awe at an ultimate beauty.

They gazed obsessively at the crimson figure slowly approaching the window, completely forgetting their mission.

They heard the cries of babies in their ears.

Along with the cries came a sinister, genderless voice: "You're just in time."

...

In the depths of a primitive island, where the trees suddenly disappeared.

Relying on the help of someone to circumvent her father's "ban," Queen Mystic Bernadette once again saw the black mausoleum built into the hollowed-out mountain.

Most of the mausoleum was part of the mountain itself, with some artificial traces. There were no weeds or vines on its surface. It stood over a hundred meters tall, majestic and grand.

This was where Bernadette's father, the former Emperor of the Intis Empire, Roselle Gustav, who had created an era, lay in eternal rest.

Engraved on the mausoleum's surface were the Civil Code established and promulgated by Roselle, along with his new social customs and inventions.

In his later years, Roselle had forcefully switched from the Mystery Pryer pathway to the Lawyer pathway, attempting to become the Black Emperor of Sequence 0, but had perished during the apotheosis ritual.

This was an intentional outcome because he had suffered severe, hidden corruption after visiting the moon in his later years. He considered using the Black Emperor's characteristics of eternal tombs and undying order to escape the corruption.

However, after his death, the Beyonder characteristics belonging to the Mystery Pryer and Savant pathways would completely separate, and if he were to be resurrected, only the pure Black Emperor characteristics would be summoned back to his body, preventing him from becoming a half-mad entity like the Blood Emperor of the Fourth Epoch who had forcibly switched pathways.

Unfortunately, despite completing the Black Emperor ritual and gaining the rank of a true god, Roselle found that the hidden corruption could not be escaped even in death.

It kept regenerating.

Thus, Roselle, neither fully dead nor truly alive, sealed himself to prevent being completely altered by the corruption.

Bernadette had visited this Black Emperor mausoleum once before, using the abilities of a Grade 0 Sealed Artifact and Mr. Fool's help to further seal and protect her father.

She came today to use the method of multiple corruptions entangling each other to achieve balance, hoping to free her father from his current state and revive him. Afterward, she could wait for Mr. Fool to awaken and perform the best seal on the corruption. This way, even if it wasn't Mr. Fool who awakened but rather The Celestial Worthy of Heaven and Earth for Blessings, her father could barely maintain himself through his own balance.

For this, she was willing to push some gray transactions. She had also prepared extensively based on her foresight to prevent the situation from deteriorating.

This time, Bernadette encountered no obstacles or attacks like before and smoothly reached her father's mausoleum.

This confirmed one of the traders the Broker Perle had roped in.

And this trade might involve more than two parties!

"You can now perform the ritual to let the desired corruption enter the mausoleum," Overseer Perle said with a smile to Queen Mystic Bernadette. "But I need the Magic Wishing Lamp as a medium."

0-05, the Magic Wishing Lamp!

Bernadette replied calmly, "That wasn't part of the deal."

Perle sighed with a smile.

"It would make the ritual simpler and more effective.

"But it's okay. The trade you facilitated to bring me here has pleased my master, and I have received a new boon. I can try to complete the ritual on my own with the corresponding items."

As she spoke, Perle spread her arms, her body gradually turning into white mist.

The mist expanded, slowly rotating to form a vortex.

Chapter 865: The Traders

865 The Traders

As clusters of gray-white crystals were enveloped by the mist and disintegrated, blending into it, Perle's white mist expanded rapidly into a gigantic, peculiar vortex.

Within the vortex, the Overseer's face flickered in and out of view, sometimes distorted, sometimes normal.

She looked up at the sky, her voice becoming ethereal, and spoke using the Words of Order, "Bernadette offers the location of Roselle's mausoleum on the primitive island, the place for the vortex ritual, and some materials in exchange for a gray trade. She requests that the great Uncertain Mist bestow a blessing upon Roselle, bringing balance to the corruption within Him."

As soon as Perle finished speaking, a light appeared within the white vortex.

Within the light was a deep, dark void, at the center of which was a solid, massive planet shrouded in layers of ever-changing white mist.

Suddenly, a wisp of white mist that could envelop the planet detached itself and moved towards the edge of the light, as if encountering an invisible barrier.

That wisp of white mist spread out, becoming intangible, and then, using the power of the ritual, a medium containing the truth, and the cracks in the invisible barrier, it penetrated magically, merging with the white mist that Perle had become, landing on her sometimes grim, sometimes smiling, blurred face.

The two fused into one.

Then, a large part of the white mist that Perle had transformed into separated and flowed like a river towards the black mausoleum built into the hollowed-out mountain, seeping inside continuously.

Queen Mystic Bernadette turned her back on the mausoleum.

Her chestnut hair suddenly parted, and a pair of cold, merciless, transparent eyes grew at the back of her head. Other facial features slowly formed around these eyes, blurring together.

It seemed like another her was emerging.

Through this, Bernadette glimpsed several scenes inside the black mausoleum, confirming that her father, Roselle, was being enveloped by the white mist.

The mist slowly eroded Roselle's body, beginning to distort the constantly regenerating corruption, slowing it down.

Likewise, it distorted the force that rapidly killed the new corruption.

Due to the difference in quantity between the white mist corruption and the original corruption, it would take some time to maintain the ritual to achieve true balance.

At this moment, the mid-morning sun in the blue sky with white clouds suddenly blazed intensely, as if sensing the dangerous gray trade happening on this primitive island.

With the white mist strengthened by the wisp from the light, Perle's face became more blurred and abstract, the corresponding mist expanding to completely envelop the treeless area, though it did not approach Bernadette or the black mausoleum.

One by one, points of light appeared within the mist.

Perle's distorted face turned to one of these points of light and, in an even more ethereal and elusive voice, said, "The great Supernova Dominator agrees to intervene fully, suppressing the barrier so that all true gods in the astral world cannot interfere with the matters inside the barrier..."

Before Perle could finish speaking, a blinding light suddenly emerged within the point of light she was gazing at, bright enough to devour all darkness and blind an Angel.

With this change, the sky was illuminated as if a flashbang had been thrown into a dark room.

Even Perle, protected by the ritual, had to close her eyes.

Neither she nor Queen Mystic Bernadette could see the high sky becoming void, with a transparent barrier full of cracks deep within the void.

Within that void, there was a drawn sun, a gigantic entity shrouded in dense darkness, a terrifying figure surrounded by a storm of lightning, a pair of brass-colored eyes opening within the cracks, a corner filled with wheat, flowers, and springs, and a faint glow presenting vague scenes of civilization...

A massive, heavy, and profound "fireball" crashed heavily onto the invisible barrier with many cracks, exploding with a dazzling light that illuminated the void completely, making the abstract patterns seem nearly transparent.

This didn't cause widespread earthquakes within the barrier; it merely temporarily blinded people.

In the white mist, Perle's face, with closed eyes, continued speaking with the Words of Order, "What He needs in return is for the seal on the ship beneath Port Santa to be broken."

As soon as Perle finished speaking, one of the points of light grew slightly, showing a scene of the deep blue sea.

Finally, the bright light penetrating the barrier became less dazzling, and Perle opened her eyes, looking at the deep blue sea within the point of light. In an ethereal voice, she said, "Topsy of the School of Deliciousness is willing to pay this price..."

As Perle spoke, a terrifying vortex suddenly formed in the deep blue sea.

A monster emerged from the vortex, towering dozens or hundreds of meters high, with a lower body resembling a giant snake covered in shark-like skin with hidden evil patterns. The upper body split into nine necks, each with a different head-some resembling snakes, some like giant sharks, some with wet black wolf heads, some possibly of legendary dragons...

The most bizarre central head appeared human but had only a mouth left, with teeth sharp enough to crush anything.

This head lunged at the invisible force sealing the sea, biting it furiously, while the other heads either devoured the fish in the sea, spewed venom at the seal, or tried to use their abilities to affect the seal...

"What he needs is..." Perle's voice reached Queen Mystic Bernadette's ears through the white mist, "for the Angel of the great Primordial Hunger to return!"

Outside the white mist, Bernadette had conjured an ancient-style spear. This spear had appeared in ancient times and was stained with the blood of a great being, covered in dark red spots and stains, seemingly capable of harming true gods.

Mystical Re-enactment, Spear of Longinus!

Bernadette hurled the spear emitting a destructive aura into the white mist, not targeting Perle but the point of light that had grown larger.

She intended to stop the subsequent gray trades, preventing the vortex from spinning further and causing real harm. After all, she had achieved her goal, and maintaining it for a while longer would suffice!

The Spear of Longinus pierced the white mist, hitting the point of light showing the deep blue sea.

However, it didn't dim or extinguish the point of light, as if it had struck a phantom.

As the ancient spear dissipated, Perle's exaggeratedly smiling face turned towards Bernadette.

"The vortex has formed; unless you kill me, it won't stop.

"And if I die now, Roselle won't achieve true balance, and the broken fragile balance won't be restored."

Bernadette froze.

Perle then looked at another point of light and, in an ethereal voice, said, "Offering help to Topsy of the School of Deliciousness is Mr. Higdon of the Order of All Extinction."

The point of light Perle was gazing at grew slightly, revealing a luxurious room.

In the room, an elderly man with neatly combed graying hair sat quietly on an antique armchair.

He wore a crisp white shirt and black suit with a gray bow tie, his handsome but stern face showing intermittent festering and oozing from exposed skin, with maggots crawling out occasionally.

His deep, magnetic voice reached the white mist and Perle's face: "But I don't know where the target is in Trier."

Perle's twisted smile widened, her gaze shifting to another point of light at an angle above.

That point of light grew, revealing a dimly lit room with closed doors and windows.

Sunlight streamed in through the glass windows, illuminating countless dust particles floating in the air.

Below the dust was an old wooden loom, with a black-haired woman sitting beside it, her hair reaching her waist.

The woman had an ethereal demeanor and delicate features but kept her eyes shut, constantly pulling out her hair and weaving it into the threads on the loom.

Tears of pus-laden blood streamed from her eyes, her left arm severed and fallen to the ground, her skirt covering her empty legs, with a graceful female statue standing behind her. The statue, originally faceless, gradually grew features resembling the woman's.

The hair-threads on the loom shimmered with faint light, containing a wealth of information.

Seemingly hearing Overseer Perle's question, the woman brushed her fingers over several black hair-threads on the loom.

The threads she touched lit up, revealing the corresponding information: "The indulgence faction of the Rose School of Thought brought the Shadow of the Beauty Goddess to Trier, trying to get as close as possible to Fourth Epoch Trier. They did it covertly, avoiding detection by Trier's demigods..."

"The temperance faction of the Church of The Fool discovered the indulgence faction's movements and the presence of an important item early but hesitated to act immediately. They waited for the right moment to complete their investigation, missing the opportunity..."

"Lumian Lee and Ludwig moved to a safe house in District 14's botanical garden in Trier. If he knew how immense this vortex would be, he would have regretted not teleporting directly to the New City of Silver with his companions. But how could he have known?"

These intertwined destinies formed a foreseeable future.

Overseer Perle's ethereal voice echoed in the room, "The founder of the Dreamseekers, Fate's Attendant, Héloise, is responsible for weaving the entire matter, ensuring it progresses smoothly without alerting higher beings. She will also provide the locations of two Angels..."

As Perle spoke, the woman named Héloise plucked a strand of destiny thread representing Lumian and Ludwig moving to the new safe house.

A bit of light jumped out, splitting into three fragments that entered the white mist transformed by Perle and flew in different directions.

Chapter 866: The Painting

866 The Painting

In Trier, within the botanical garden, inside the wooden house.

Lumian and the others were blinded by the sudden bright light from the sky, unable to open their eyes for a full minute.

Ludwig was the first to recover. He ran to the window and looked out at the plants, as if searching for something.

Lumian was the second to recover. He frowned and said to Franca, Jenna, and Anthony, "Is this the start of the vortex? It's quite a commotion."

"I wonder if it will affect us," Franca said just as a strong sense of danger washed over her.

In such matters, Demonesses always had keen intuition.

Almost simultaneously, Jenna exclaimed, "It will definitely affect us! I have a feeling we can't stay here any longer!"

Lumian paused for a moment, then quickly whispered, "Termiboros, you didn't warn me because what's about to happen is something you want to see?"

As he spoke, Lumian signaled to Franca, Jenna, Anthony, and Lugano to come closer. They each grabbed his arm, shoulder, and vest.

The only one who lacked the tacit understanding was Ludwig.

Lumian looked at the young boy and said sternly, "Do you want to be punished with homework? Get over here!"

Ludwig's face showed fear, and he instinctively turned his body. But the next second, he reluctantly looked back out the window.

He didn't know what he was waiting for; he just felt he should stay here, waiting for something very important.

"Hmm?" Lumian urged again.

Ludwig's expression changed, and he finally couldn't resist the authority of his godfather and his fear of schoolwork and exams. He ran over to Lumian, grabbing his black vest.

Still lacking tacit understanding, the ritual can't be considered complete... Lumian sighed inwardly and activated the black mark on his right shoulder.

He needed to teleport this large group to the New City of Silver, to the headquarters of the Church of The Fool!

Lumian saw layers of dense colors and countless transparent, strange figures, along with the seven pure, bright lights always far overhead.

He was about to travel through the familiar spirit world to the coordinates representing the New City of Silver when his body suddenly felt heavy, pulling him away from this fantastical, mysterious, mad, and illusory world.

Lumian found himself and the others back in the wooden house within the botanical garden, in the same state as when Ludwig had just grabbed his vest.

With his extensive experience, Lumian's eyes narrowed, and he warned his companions, Franca and Jenna, "Circle Inhabitant!"

...

Outside Emperor Roselle's mausoleum on the primitive island, in the area in front of the tomb shrouded in thin white mist.

The three pieces of information that flew out from the point of light where Fate's Attendant Héloise was located landed on three different points of light.

One was where Higdon of the Order of All Extinction was, another seemed to be inside a tunnel under Trier, where a figure holding a carbide lamp, dressed in a black robe, and looking different from those from the Northern and Southern Continents, was the visitor from Easter Island named Harrison.

The third point of light first showed darkness, then outlined a figure. This figure was in his fifties, with a thick head of hair with a hint of white, and clear, deep lake-blue eyes.

He was a man with neatly trimmed facial hair, and his features were well-defined.

Even at his age, he could be considered handsome.

Voisin Sanson!

Circle Inhabitant of the Sinners, Voisin Sanson!

The father of Roche Louise Sanson, the original identity of Aurore, a follower of Inevitability, Voisin Sanson!

As soon as Voisin Sanson, dressed in a black suit, received the information about Lumian, Ludwig, and the others' location, he disappeared into the darkness of the expanding point of light.

Higdon of the Order of All Extinction also quickly left his room, no longer participating in this real-time, complex trade without physical distance.

Overseer Perle showed no surprise at this. With her ethereal voice, she announced the progress of the trade, "Voisin Sanson of the Sinners has obtained crucial information about the recovery of the Inevitability Angel. The corresponding price will be paid by the great Circle of Inevitability.

"Mr. Higdon of the Order of All Extinction has begun his actions. The reward will be given after he completes the recovery of the Angel of Primordial Hunger and provides some assistance to Voisin Sanson, paid by Loki of April Fool's..."

As Perle's words spread, and with the invocation of those honorific names, the area around the white mist grew increasingly dim and uncertain, shadows rising as if a terrifying will was about to descend.

Normally, Perle shouldn't have known or spoken of information regarding great beings, as it would bring extremely terrible and severe consequences. After all, after convincing the gray-leaning Queen Mystic Bernadette with previous events, she had only received a new blessing through a substantial sacrifice, becoming a true Vortex Weaver, but not yet reaching the rank of an Angel.

However, she was currently under the protection of the vortex ritual and had just accepted a wisp of mist transmitted by her faith's truth, the Uncertain Mist, allowing her to remain unaffected. Her understanding of those great beings came from that wisp of mist, previously only contacting corresponding secret organizations and underground cults to reach relatively certain agreements.

At this moment, Bernadette disintegrated herself into strands of information, surging towards Perle's face within the gray mist in a vast torrent.

She hoped to influence the other party in this way, preventing the subsequent trades from progressing but without destroying the current ritual.

Perle's face, composed of mist, suddenly dispersed, disappearing from Bernadette's perception.

The vast torrent of information surged forward, seemingly lost in the white mist, unable to find the true location of the target.

Soon, the torrent of information separated from the white mist and reformed Bernadette's body. Perle's face then reappeared in different parts of the white mist, sometimes smiling, sometimes cursing, sometimes pretending to be friendly, sometimes babbling.

These faces converged inward, once again forming Perle's sometimes distorted, sometimes normal blurred face within the depths of the white mist.

Perle continued speaking with the Words of Order, "Harrison from Easter Island has received information about Lumian Lee's location. After the vortex ritual ends, he will use the special mirror world to visit Fourth Epoch Trier, paying a special item of the Fate pathway as a reward.

"This is the item Fate's Attendant Madam Héloise wishes to obtain..."

As Perle announced the new trade, a half-body figure that was nearly transparent and quite ethereal grew from Bernadette's back.

This figure looked identical to Bernadette, even in clothing. She held a pale mask with only holes for the eyes, shining with a metallic luster, and quickly put it on.

Pale Death!

Another Grade 0 Sealed Artifact Sealed Artifact owned by Bernadette, Pale Death!

She intended to use this to control Perle.

At that moment, Bernadette's vision blurred suddenly, and the surrounding environment and distances became exceptionally chaotic.

She was passively shifted in position, hearing an unusually familiar deep voice in her ear: "Bernadette..."

...

Outside the Black Emperor's mausoleum, within the increasingly dense and varied white mist.

In an underground location somewhere in Trier, within his corresponding point of light, Harrison took out an item.

It was a thumb-sized, colorful bead with a glass-like texture, exuding a calming aura.

Harrison then threw the bead into the surrounding white mist.

Under Overseer Perle's gaze, the bead passed through Harrison's corresponding point of light, through the dense white mist, and into the point of light where Dreamseeker founder-Héloise-was.

The delicate woman weaving fate caught the colorful, glass-like bead with her remaining right hand.

Her tightly shut eyes suddenly saw a scene: A bald man in a yellow robe with a strange cape sat cross-legged on a bed, a halo of pure light behind his head. Deep within the halo seemed to lead to the unknown, hiding many things.

Héloise put down the bead, pulled out another strand of hair, and completed the last bit of her task.

It was a blessing.

A blessing from fate!

"Project Vortex will be successfully completed."

Héloise's black hair carried this message, woven into the previous threads.

With a swish, a large piece of skin on the right half of Héloise's face was torn off by an invisible force, revealing the bloody, wriggling flesh beneath.

She had not yet become an Angel and could not normally weave such far-reaching fate. She could only forcefully complete it with the goddess's statue, but each weave brought severe damage. Her eyes had gone blind in the process, and her feet, legs, left arm, and fingers had also been broken.

Of course, as long as she did not die on the spot, she could obtain special medicine for treatment through transactions with Brokers.

Overseer Perle's face in the white mist turned her gaze to another point of light.

This point of light showed a scene of an altar inside an ancient castle, surrounded by intact but lifeless bodies, their flesh and bones made into brushes and paints.

A man with long hair, empty eyes, and a frenzied expression had completed the preliminary preparations at the center of the altar.

It was a nearly finished, eerie oil painting, just two strokes away from completion.

The painting depicted an endless, dark starry sky with blood-red circles on the left, resembling a special tunnel or a creature's mouth. On the right, numerous silver-white and black flickered from bone powder, just short of forming a ring.

Overseer Perle's voice resonated.

"The string believer, Mr. Sage of the Fantasy Association, has sacrificed many bestowed and followers and is about to complete a magnificent and outstanding painting!

"Next, we will witness the unveiling of that painting. Mr. Sage's reward will be personally given by the great Uncertain Mist at the end of the vortex ritual, which is also what the great being he believes in wants to see."

Chapter 867: Exerting Influence

867 Exerting Influence

The man known as Mr. Sage used a brush made of bone and hair, dipped it into the paint made from flesh and blood, and painstakingly applied it to the depths of the blood-red circles.

Perle's ethereal voice sounded once again.

"This is an outstanding painting representing the endless cosmos. Once completed, it will allow two great beings to transmit a bit of Their power into the barrier. Although this cannot be used for targeted attacks or corruption, it can exert more universal influence according to predetermined rules..."

Before Perle could finish speaking, Mr. Sage, with his long hair and vacant eyes, finally pressed the human hair and bone brush onto the predetermined spot.

His right side suddenly melted like a candle, with flesh flowing towards the brush, racing into the depths of the blood-red circles. It seemed as though it really connected to the endless cosmos, where no matter how much flesh accumulated, it eventually vanished.

Mr. Sage, left with only half a body and half a head, still had not died. He caught the falling brush with his left hand.

On the oil painting, a pin-sized dot appeared in the depths of the blood-red circles.

It was dark, as if a sound was emanating from it.

Perle's face in the white mist announced the results of the trade with the Words of Order, "The great Inextinguishable Ravings has transmitted the First Philosophy, allowing the Immortal Voice to penetrate the barrier in small amounts. These will be received by all who can hear unknown and mystical voices. The higher the Sequence, the greater the impact!

"And some faithful followers of the First Philosophy will, after the vortex ritual is truly over, approach the remnants of the Knowledge Moor in Fourth Epoch Trier with the help of the Mirror People..."

...

Trier, at the real residence of Professor and Associate Professor.

Just recovering from the sudden burst of brilliant light and barely able to see their surroundings, Professor and Associate Professor were worried about the current anomalies. They discussed whether to take the children to the small sacrificial square in the underground catacombs, their expressions changing.

Instinctively, they raised their hands to cover their ears, but their facial muscles still twisted, and the veins on their temples bulged and throbbed.

They heard an indescribable strange sound, causing both physical and mental anguish.

In their pain, Professor and Associate Professor exchanged glances, seeing the confusion in each other's eyes.

This wasn't the voice of the Hidden Sage!

This was an unprecedented situation for Professor and Associate Professor.

Although they occasionally discovered some mysterious sounds while researching Warlock spells and exploring certain special scenarios, aside from the indoctrination by the Hidden Sage, they had never encountered such unannounced sounds. Moreover, even without carefully distinguishing the content of the sounds, they suffered severe effects.

Fortunately, compared to the indoctrination of the Hidden Sage, this seemed more bearable and did not push them to the brink of losing control.

Most Beyonders of the Mystery Pryer pathway, upon hearing these mysterious terrifying sounds, witnessed a phantom light composed of complex information writhing madly like a shedding giant snake in an unknown place.

...

In the basement of the house where the Psychic magazine was located.

Mr. K, wearing a black robe and hood, suddenly stood up from the red-backed chair.

The veins on the back of his exposed hands had turned black, writhing like insects.

"No, no..." Mr. K muttered in pain, "It's not the Lord's voice!"

He suddenly shouted, pulling off his hood and sticking his fingers into his ears.

Mr. K's face had completely twisted, making his original appearance unrecognizable. He continually muttered in a voice filled with more mental agony than physical pain: "It's not the Lord's voice! It's not the Lord's voice!"

Amidst the grating sound, Mr. K used both hands to tear off his ears, the ripped flesh grotesque and terrifying.

It wasn't enough!

Mr. K forcefully inserted his fingers into his ear canals, puncturing his eardrums and clogging his ear passages.

Yet, he still heard the sound.

He prostrated, lying on the ground, and tearfully repented to his Lord.

As he repented, he vomited clumps of blood-stained organs.

Similar to Mr. K, some Angels, Saints, and Oracles of the Aurora Order also suffered intense and painful effects, making it difficult to follow the Lord's commands to stop something.

...

In the Forsaken Land of the Gods.

A majestic mountain range was surrounded by strange light, with dense darkness at its core.

At the edge of the light, various twisted shadows continued to form, rushing madly like moths into the darkness at the center.

The darkness occasionally split open, revealing a gaze from behind the veil.

...

On the bloody altar in the ancient castle, Mr. Sage pressed the human hair and bone brush into a pile of silver-black bone powder made from some unknown substance.

The painter, now only half a body and half a head, twisted the brush forcefully, then raised it, aiming it at the last unfinished part of the "Endless Cosmos" oil painting.

As the brush fell, Mr. Sage's remaining half-body and half-head also began to melt like a candle.

Soon, the brush, carrying the painter, completed the silver-black ring.

Almost simultaneously, the ring became ethereal, as if scratched, and seemed to merge into the air.

Three faint figures appeared on the silver-black ring, constantly changing positions as if eternally chasing each other.

The "Endless Cosmos" oil painting was completed, but Mr. Sage would never see this work.

Overseer Perle's voice sounded once more: "The great Circle of Inevitability has gazed upon this. All external forces attempting to interfere with Project Vortex will inevitably fail, except for the participants themselves."

...

Above the blue sea, in the sky where the strong light had driven away the white clouds.

Madam Magician, dressed in a women's shirt and brown ankle-length skirt, appeared with Miss Justice and Ma'am Hermit.

The latter not only wore her usual glasses but also had layers of dazzling starlight covering her ears.

When the mysterious, terrifying, and unknown sound appeared earlier, Madam Magician had sealed Ma'am Hermit's listening abilities in both the literal and mystical senses.

Although this could not completely isolate the sound's influence, it significantly reduced its effect, allowing Ma'am Hermit to perform basic actions and Warlock spells.

Gazing at the blue sea below, Madam Magician frowned slightly and said, "I clearly pinpointed the island where the Emperor slumbers.

"This is the third failure, a failed wandering...

"Inevitable failure?"

Only Miss Justice, wearing a white dress with golden patterns, could hear The Magician's voice.

Miss Justice was about to relay the question to Ma'am Hermit through mental communication when The Hermit, dressed in a patterned purple robe, foresaw a certain scene.

Enduring the pain, The Hermit used Fairytale Magic to create a brightly colored, somewhat unrealistic ball of yarn in her palm.

Ma'am Hermit threw the yarn forward, watching it roll into the void, leaving only a thread in the air to guide the direction.

In the blink of an eye, the ethereal yarn rolled back from the void to Ma'am Hermit's feet.

...

In Trier, the villa where several members of the Rose School were hiding was enveloped in holy and pure light, forming a slowly shaping golden sun.

There was no shadow or darkness here.

Angoulême de Francois and his team were awakened by Saint Viève's attack on the villa.

They immediately received Saint Plessy's order to evacuate the area.

But before they could turn around, they were nearly blinded by the brilliant light exploding from above, their bodies and minds in shock.

When the light subsided, they recovered and ran frantically towards the street away from the villa.

Angoulême was most grateful that the surrounding residents had already been evacuated.

After running for a while, his vision blurred, and his thoughts became hazy.

He found himself and his team back where they had been standing, affecting Saint Viève's performance.

...

In Trier, high above the city.

Mr. Hanged Man, Mr. Star, and Mr. Moon's figures quickly appeared.

"We can't find Seven of Wands and Two of Cups, or rather, we can't reach the safe house they're hiding in," said Mr. Hanged Man, dressed as a captain and riding a storm. He quickly understood the situation and spoke to Mr. Star, wearing a white shirt, black coat, and red gloves, and Mr. Moon, dressed in a tailcoat.

Mr. Moon, with his handsome face, crimson eyes, and large bat wings gently flapping behind him, did not respond.

He turned his head, looking towards a place in the plaza district where bright light had erupted, and murmured in confusion, "The Ancestor's summoning?"

Mr. Star, with an elderly voice, said, "It's the influence of the power of Inevitability."

"Yes," said the Madam Judgment in knight's training clothes, emerging from the void. "I sensed the calls of Two of Cups and Seven of Cups, but I can't descend to them."

Mr. Star continued in his elderly voice, "There are only two ways to solve this problem. One is to find the medium allowing the power of Inevitability to seep through and destroy it. The other is to discover flaws in the operation of Inevitability's power and use them to escape the predicament. Of course, this all assumes that the being named Inevitability is only exerting a slight influence through a medium and has not descended into our world."

"Find the medium..." Madam Judgment murmured, then said, "I'll ask Will for help!"

As she spoke, a diamond on her gemstone bracelet lit up with pure light.

At the same time, worms made of intertwined transparent and opaque segments, seemingly ringed, crawled out of Mr. Star's eye sockets, ears, and nostrils.

Chapter 868: Confrontation

868 Confrontation

High above Trier, an ancient, mottled, gigantic shadow emerged. It resembled a stone-carved wall clock, divided into twelve segments. Each segment was either gray-white or dark green, intermixed yet distinct, each marked with different symbols.

Clang!

The ethereal chime seemed to traverse through ages, making all of Trier appear frozen in time.

In this brief stasis, transparent and opaque worms with twelve rings crawled frantically, burrowing into various places, seeking patterns to deceive and escape the influence of fate.

Lumian and the others were also momentarily immobilized by the ancient-sounding chime.

Not long ago, upon hearing Lumian mention the term "Circle Inhabitant," Franca and Jenna both took out a tarot card from the Traveler's Bag.

The tarot card depicted an angel sounding a trumpet to guide the departed.

Major Arcana card, Judgment!

Next, the two Demonesses softly chanted in Hermes, "Rain judgment!"

They felt Madam Judgment's response, but it was faint, unable to establish a true connection.

The two Demonesses instantly understood that this botanical garden or the surrounding area of the cabin was under more severe restrictions, not just the influence of the Circle Inhabitant's abilities.

While they sought Madam Judgment's descent, Lumian, Anthony, and Lugano watched as their cabin rapidly decayed and collapsed, like a long-buried tree trunk disintegrating into the soil.

Boom!

A blazing-white fireball shot upward, blasting apart the collapsing ceiling, preventing the rotting wood from touching anyone present.

As the cabin decayed and collapsed, Lumian saw two figures appear several dozen meters ahead.

One figure was slender, of medium height, wearing a crisp white shirt and black suit, with a gray bow tie. His features were sharp and pronounced.

Although he appeared elderly, it was clear he had been quite handsome in his youth. His hair was now graying but meticulously groomed, and his face bore brown age spots that seemed ready to fester and ooze.

The other figure was also dressed formally, in his fifties, with thick blond hair flecked with white, eyes as clear as a lake, and a meticulously trimmed beard.

Despite his age, he was still strikingly handsome.

Seeing the latter figure, Lumian, though prepared, still forced a hoarse voice from his throat. "Voisin Sanson!"

This was the leader of the Sinner's Organization, the father of Aurore's original body, a follower of fate who had brought tragedy to Aurore!

"Sanson, leave those two Demonesses to me," the man with the age spots said, his eyes brightening at the sight of Franca and Jenna, addressing Circle Inhabitant Voisin Sanson.

It wasn't just a lust for beauty, but a deep-seated attraction from more profound factors.

Voisin Sanson gazed at Lumian, chuckling lightly as he responded to his collaborator, "No problem, Higdon."

Lumian suppressed his urge to rush forward for revenge, quickly instructing Ludwig, "You handle the blonde one!"

Last time, Lumian had relied on the residual aura of the Blood Emperor to intimidate Voisin Sanson, causing the Circle Inhabitant's effect in the painting world to shatter, allowing him to escape. This time, the residual aura of the Blood Emperor was sealed by the Underworld Daoist, and having suffered once, Voisin Sanson would surely be on guard.

So, Lumian hoped that Ludwig, with his angelic body and rank, could forcibly break the Circle Inhabitant's influence through brute strength and rank suppression.

If they didn't break free from the Circle Inhabitant, no matter how much effort he, Franca, Jenna, and the others put in, they would be reset to the current moment, achieving nothing.

Ludwig hesitated, as if saying to Lumian, "Me? Fight that powerful old man? I'm just child!"

On the one hand, Ludwig hadn't expected to be part of a battle, and on the other, he felt he shouldn't fight, believing it best to cooperate with the two elders in front of him and let them take him away.

Vaguely, Lumian heard the chime again, his thoughts briefly blurred.

Franca, Jenna, Anthony, and the opposing Voisin Sanson and Higdon all had similar feelings.

Quickly regaining his composure, Lumian swiftly took out Black Tear from the Traveler's Bag and tossed it to Franca.

From Higdon's tone and attitude toward Voisin Sanson, Lumian believed he must be a Saint, a true demigod. Thus, Franca could only rely on Black Tear to hold off the opponent long enough to break the Circle Inhabitant's effect.

Tossing Black Tear to Franca, Lumian urged Ludwig again, "Go! I'll prepare a grand feast for you later!"

Ludwig hesitated, but his feet remained firmly planted.

At this moment, Voisin Sanson and Higdon, lacking angelic rank, seemed sluggish under some strange influence, not attacking swiftly.

Lumian's voice grew imposing, roaring, "Do you want to be sent back to the Church of Knowledge?"

Ludwig, startled, turned immediately towards Voisin Sanson.

"Don't you enjoy your current life?" Lumian added, based on his understanding of Ludwig.

Ludwig pursed his lips, then stuffed a piece of chocolate into his mouth, sprinting towards Voisin Sanson.

Lumian signaled Franca and Jenna, who had just shaken off the sluggishness.

He meant for Franca to engage Higdon, stalling him, with Jenna assisting Franca but avoiding direct combat.

Franca and Jenna nodded solemnly.

Franca wrapped the Black Tear accessory around her wrist, her figure swiftly disappearing.

Jenna also vanished from sight.

Without hesitation, Lumian retrieved the Devil's Whispers bone ring and slipped it onto his right middle finger.

His body instantly ignited with blue-purple flames, exuding a strong sulfuric scent, and malice surged forth.

He was grateful that he had vented most of his pent-up desires and emotions during this period, feeling much better than when he used the Hisoka relic in Morora.

He then grasped the hilt of the Sword of Courage and drew it from the Traveler's Bag.

Courage filled Lumian's body as he stared at Voisin Sanson, who sought to control Ludwig's insignificant fate, transforming into a long spear of blazing white-blue flame, and hurled it forward.

Revenge! Revenge!

I won't back down!

Before using the Sword of Courage, Lumian had devised a strategy: Franca and Jenna would stall Higdon, while he and Ludwig launched a strong assault on Voisin Sanson, attempting to break the Circle Inhabitant's influence. Anthony would support both sides and act as an external brain.

As for Lugano, he wouldn't participate in the battle, instead finding opportunities to provide healing.

...

Inside the dim "Black Emperor" mausoleum, dark walls surrounded a central black platform.

Atop the platform was a giant chair that appeared to be made of black iron, engraved with complex, twisted patterns. The top of the chair back extended into the shape of a crown.

A massive black shadow sat on the heavy chair, its facial features gradually becoming clear: Blue eyes, a high nose, thin lips, and well-groomed mustache...

The shadow's body also became clearer, seemingly clad in black armor and a luxurious cloak.

Roselle Gustav.

The Intis Emperor who named an era after himself!

He was constantly being reborn and dying, but both processes were distorted and slowed, allowing him to awaken and partially manifest.

Seeing Roselle like this, Bernadette's eyes welled up, and she cried out in both pain and joy, "Dad!"

Roselle's eyes turned blood-red, and his face cracked open to reveal glowing red slits.

But these vanished after another round of death and rebirth.

Regardless of whether he was dying or being reborn, both processes slowed even further.

Roselle looked at his eldest daughter and sighed. "Didn't I tell you never to come back?"

Bernadette, her expression resolute, replied, "Dad, I want to save you!

"I don't dare gamble on whether the one who wakes up is Mr. Fool or The Celestial Worthy of Heaven and Earth for Blessings. At the very least, I want to ensure you can stay conscious and stable without Their help."

Queen Mystic paused, her voice heavy before adding, "Moreover, I can't predict when the apocalypse will come or what the outcome will be. I don't want to wait any longer."

Roselle sighed with a hint of relief.

"Silly child...

"Who helped you bypass my restrictions and return here?"

"It was that individual." Bernadette didn't hide anything from her father.

"Adam? The current True Creator?" Roselle wasn't surprised at all.

Bernadette nodded lightly.

Roselle sneered, then looked at Bernadette with a complicated expression.

"You chose to collaborate with the believers of the Uncertain Mist. Do you know how dangerous that is?"

Bernadette was silent for a moment, then said, "It's exploitation.

"The forces capable of balancing your corruption are all outside the barrier.

Among them, only the power of the Uncertain Mist can relatively easily penetrate the barrier and transmit some of it inside.

"I've also made some preparations to prevent the vortex from progressing further.

"I deliberately didn't respond to Cattleya's letter, so she would participate in the Tarot Club. When she is above the gray fog, she will quickly become aware, and with the strength of the Tarot Club and its connections, once the problem is identified, they can respond effectively...

"I've also predicted some of Perle's trade partners, discovered the movements of the indulgence faction of the Rose School of Thought, and arranged for my subordinates to leak it to the temperance faction...

"I've also foreseen the outcome of this matter, and the situation hasn't deteriorated.

"That individual also hinted at the same."

Roselle shook his head, his tone slightly grave as he said to Bernadette in a teaching manner, "Perhaps the situation hasn't deteriorated because many people have sacrificed themselves.

"To Adam, this might be necessary.

"But what about you?"

Chapter 869: The Final Lesson

869 The Final Lesson

Trier, inside the botanical garden.

Higdon from the Order of All Extinction saw the two Demonesses disappear. He immediately raised his right hand and scratched at the dark brown age spots on his face.

The spots instantly festered, releasing maggots similar to those that crawl through corpses, oozing a greenish-yellow pus.

The disgusting pus evaporated upon contact with the air, dispersing without a trace.

Jenna had just circled to Higdon's side, ready to assist Franca in launching an attack. Suddenly, she felt a wave of lethargy, as if stricken by a sickness called "laziness."

It felt as if her desires were wilting, showing signs of decay, and as if parts of her brain were beginning to malfunction.

Following her instinct, Jenna immediately used her Mirror Substitution, not waiting for the problem to worsen and trigger it passively.

The sound of two simultaneous cracks echoed. Franca, who had been sneaking up on Higdon under the cover of Invisibility to release the Black Tear plague, reacted the same way.

Their figures first materialized and then quickly transformed into mirrors.

During this process, as Franca and Jenna's Mirror Substitutes were still forming, their internal organs sprouted noticeable tumors, autonomously drawing nutrients. Blood vessels around the heart and within the brain rapidly became fragile.

If the Demonesses used pathogens to control diseases, then Higdon's pathway seemed to represent the pathogens themselves, the very essence of disease.

If Franca and Jenna hadn't actively triggered their Mirror Substitution, it would have been much more difficult to deal with the actual tissue changes in their bodies. They would need to perform a ritual, praying to the Primordial Demoness or a corresponding Angel to transfer the disease to a designated mirror, or one would need to stick to the target while the other left the area, allowing Lugano to perform surgery combined with the Doctor's abilities for treatment.

Meanwhile, the disease had not yet spread. Voisin Sanson, with his blond hair flecked with white, had already found several manipulable fragments within Ludwig's mercury-like river of fate.

As long as he didn't touch the most critical parts of the Angel's fate, he needn't fear backlash or losing control on the spot.

Similarly, his godhood allowed him to observe most of Ludwig's fate without peering into fragments containing dangerous scenes or knowledge.

Midway through his dash, Ludwig opened his mouth and extended his hand, intending to strip away the Circle Inhabitant's power from his target. At this moment, Voisin Sanson, who had already raised his arm, gently pressed down, magnifying a specific tributary of fate from a distance.

Thud!

Ludwig, the little boy, tripped over a protruding stone and fell flat on his face.

Simultaneously manipulating fate, Voisin Sanson directed his gaze towards Lumian, who had transformed into a blazing white-blue flame spear.

His eyes glowed, instantly emitting two ghostly green beams.

This was a newly contracted ability Voisin Sanson had recently acquired.

The main issue with the Inevitability pathway's Contractee was that the strength of contracted abilities could not surpass the contracted creature's potential. This meant that early-stage contracted abilities were hard to enhance unless the initial contract was with a demigod-level creature, constrained only by one's own spirit and flesh from utilizing the ability to its fullest. This could potentially enhance the contracted ability with each sequence advancement.

Below Sequence 4, without the qualitative factor of godhood, even Sequence 7 or 8 level contracted abilities could participate in Sequence 5 level battles and play significant roles. However, at Sequence 4, facing opponents of the same level, most of these abilities would struggle to be effective, necessitating new suitable contracted creatures.

The ghostly green beams struck the blazing white-blue flame spear directly, giving Lumian no time to dodge.

Yet, the spear contained no trace of Lumian.

As the fiery spear rapidly withered and extinguished, only scattered flames remained within.

As the figures of the two Demonesses reappeared within the cabin's ruins, Lumian, wielding the Sword of Courage, materialized behind Voisin Sanson.

Teleport!

After the Abscessed Hand regained a complete body, Lumian's Spirit World Traversal ability had significantly enhanced!

At this moment, a translucent figure climbed out from Voisin Sanson's back.

The figure resembled Voisin Sanson but was colder and more indifferent.

This was another ability Voisin Sanson had contracted after becoming a Circle Inhabitant, belonging to the domain of death.

He had always guarded against Lumian's teleportation sneak attacks from behind!

Although this would likely trigger the Circle Inhabitant's effect, he still had to guard against the unexpected. Moreover, it could be used as a trap.

As the cold, indifferent Voisin Sanson specter rushed towards him, Lumian's thoughts began to sink, his body cooling. The blazing white-blue flames on the Sword of Courage gradually dimmed.

...

On the primitive island housing the Black Emperor mausoleum, within the thick white fog.

Perle's ever-changing face cast its gaze on three light points.

The next phase was the most crucial part of Project Vortex.

As Perle's face shifted, two of the three light points suddenly expanded.

One revealed a villa shrouded in white fog, permeated with a blood-red figure yet enveloped in divine light; The other was hazy, as if a figure hung suspended in mid-air, wrapped in yellowing bandages, pierced entirely by countless brownish branches, with thorns and rosebushes entwined. Though constantly intertwining, the roses and thorns continuously wilted and fell.

The suspended figure's belly occasionally swelled and deflated, as if new life was stirring within.

Beside the figure stood a massive tree covered in black tar-like substance. Its limbs, serving as branches, sprouted eerie, terrifying hands, with countless bloodshot black and white eyes rolling over its surface.

Another light point had already expanded, revealing a member of the School of Deliciousness, Topsy, devouring an invisible seal over the ocean.

...

Inside the dim Black Emperor mausoleum.

Hearing her father's question, Bernadette remained silent for two seconds before saying, "I will do my best to prevent it."

Roselle looked at his eldest daughter and smiled with a sigh. "Everyone makes mistakes. In my youth, no, even until I was trapped here, afraid to resurrect, I kept making mistakes, doing many wrong things, some even bad. Only when I resided in this mausoleum, occasionally gaining some peace and clarity, did I finally reflect seriously on my past life, realizing some of my choices caused a lot of unnecessary harm. Of course, I also did many right things, many good things."

Seeing Bernadette's expression turn gloomy yet stubborn, Roselle affectionately raised his right hand, pressing down. "Don't blame yourself too much. I'm actually very happy and relieved about your choices and actions. Seeing my little princess willing to defy her long-held principle of 'do as you wish, but do no harm,' willing to risk falling into the abyss to save her old father, makes me genuinely happy and relieved. It shows I didn't love you in vain, that my family life wasn't such a failure!"

The increasingly clear figure stood up from the massive black iron chair.

He descended the platform, walking to Bernadette, opening his arms.

Bernadette, momentarily dazed, felt like a child again, instinctively throwing herself into her father's embrace, feeling that familiar yet no longer warm broad chest.

After a brief hug, Roselle stroked Bernadette's chestnut hair, then walked past her, heading towards the mausoleum's entrance, his figure growing larger.

"Dad?" Bernadette turned, calling out instinctively.

Roselle turned his head, smiling. "The vortex ritual has already begun. Due to the unique characteristics of the Uncertain Mist's pathway, it will be hard to stop the subsequent transactions from proceeding. Even if you want to kill that woman, it's unlikely to be accomplished.

"But it doesn't matter, Dad will handle it."

Bernadette suddenly understood her father's intention. She took a step forward, trying to catch up, but found the distance between them unbridgeable.

Meanwhile, she urgently shouted, "Dad, your corruption isn't balanced yet! If the vortex ritual is disrupted, you won't be able to return to your previous state!"

Roselle stopped at the mausoleum's entrance, smiling at his anxious, panicked, and pained daughter.

Raising his arm, he said with spirited enthusiasm, "I was an emperor for many years, stood at the pinnacle of human power. I faced true gods, fought Angels, had followers willing to die for me.

"I brought the light of civilization to that era. Even after a century of death, countless people still recite my name. I slept with many beautiful women and controlled countless destinies. Even after my downfall, no longer an emperor, my daughter is still willing to sacrifice everything to save me, to revive me!

"What regrets could I possibly have in this life?"

Bernadette heard the finality in her father's tone, her eyes reddening, her voice choking, "Dad!"

She used every ability to close the distance, but it was as insurmountable as the separation of heaven and earth.

Roselle's nearly clear face showed a gentle smile. "Bernadette, do you remember when you were little, and Dad often gave you lessons?"

Tears welled up in Bernadette's eyes, her vision blurring. "I remember. You taught me words, filled my mind with knowledge, told me many, many fairy tales..."

Queen Mystic's face was streaked with glistening tears.

Roselle nodded in satisfaction. "I remember too."

He continued with a slight smile, "Today, Dad will give you one last lesson."

Roselle's expression grew solemn as he looked at Bernadette and declared, "A true gentleman knows what to do and what not to do!"

With that, Roselle turned away, no longer looking at Bernadette.

The Black Emperor mausoleum's doors swung open instantly.

The outside light shone in, illuminating Roselle's giant figure, his black armor, and luxurious cloak.

Bright and radiant.

Chapter 870: Hidden Trap

870 Hidden Trap

As soon as Franca's figure materialized within the cabin's ruins, she saw Lumian, behind Voisin Sanson, turning pale. His eyes gradually became hollow, and only the Sword of Courage prevented him from turning into a corpse or triggering his Mirror Substitution. Voisin Sanson, despite having his back to Lumian, raised his left hand, and an indescribable radiance quickly gathered within his fist.

Franca knew she couldn't passively wait for the Mirror Substitution to trigger.

Perhaps Voisin Sanson's impending attack could bypass the connection between the substitute and the original, rendering it ineffective.

At their current distance, neither she, Jenna, nor Anthony could awaken Lumian or stop Voisin Sanson in time.

Even if they could, the threat from Higdon was even more imminent and closing in fast!

At this moment, Ludwig was the closest to Lumian and Voisin Sanson. He had just gotten up but still had twenty to thirty meters to cover before reaching them.

In a flash, Franca took a mirror out of her Traveler's Bag and instantly vanished.

Relying on Black Tear, she appeared in the mirror world, traversing a dark, void-like tunnel into the distance.

Meanwhile, Jenna watched as Franca's mirror fell to the ground, her attention shifting to Higdon, who was now only a few steps away. His face, mostly rotting and oozing pus, had reached her.

She felt that all the Demoness spider threads she had released had withered and decayed, losing their effectiveness.

At this moment, everyone except Ludwig experienced a moment of disorientation.

When Lumian, Franca, Jenna, and Anthony regained clarity, they found themselves back inside the cabin-intact and uncollapsed.

Franca felt a surge of joy seeing this.

Her "retreat in the face of battle" wasn't to escape but to trigger the Circle Inhabitant's effect, resetting the battle and freeing Lumian from Voisin Sanson's secret power and Jenna from Higdon's grip!

Enemy abilities could be used to their advantage!

Finding the trigger point, reverting an adverse situation instantly, meant any dangerous or fatal scenario could be retried. Of course, this was only if they had time to trigger it.

Never thought you could use the enemy's abilities like this... Jenna, momentarily stunned by this realization, saw the cabin decaying and collapsing again, revealing Voisin Sanson and Higdon approaching from a distance.

Lumian wasn't surprised. He had actively triggered the Circle Inhabitant effect back in Cordu Village, seeking a reset.

He quickly reached into the Traveler's Bag, retrieving the Black Tear forehead accessory and tossing it to Franca.

Franca shouted, "Stall!"

She had a plan for the current predicament: delay until circumstances changed!

Since they couldn't break Voisin Sanson's Circle Inhabitant in a short time, they could use it fully. If things went wrong, they could restart, delaying until the authorities in Trier noticed the anomaly or the Tarot Club's Major Arcana card holders found a solution and approached.

As long as the evil gods hadn't fully invaded this world and the apocalypse hadn't arrived prematurely, delaying would surely bring assistance to cleanse the heretics!

After all, this was the capital of Intis, Trier!

Franca thought this and acted accordingly. She caught the Black Tear forehead accessory and threw her Ice Talisman to Jenna.

This way, three people in the group could try to leave the area in different ways to trigger the Circle Inhabitant effect, without worrying about Voisin Sanson and Higdon each locking onto one of them, thus greatly increasing their margin for error.

When Franca suggested this, Lumian was about to retrieve the Sword of Courage, and Ludwig was already instinctively charging towards Voisin Sanson.

Lumian noticed that Voisin Sanson's expression remained unchanged, despite Franca discovering the weakness of the Circle Inhabitant and planning to delay until the end of the Project Vortex.

He suddenly had a thought. Combining his understanding of the Inevitability pathway, he formed an initial judgment: Voisin Sanson couldn't allow the Circle Inhabitant to loop infinitely. He likely set a predetermined end for it. Each reset would push everyone closer to that conclusion until it became unavoidable.

From the fact that they could retain their memories after the reset, it was clear that the Inevitability power attached to the Circle Inhabitant effect wasn't strong.

This endpoint wasn't far away.

Lumian immediately reminded Franca, "Only one more time!"

In the Inevitability pathway, the number "three" was sacred, with strong mystical symbolism. It represented the past, present, and future, and pointed to the beginning, process, and end. Additionally, the initial number of abilities gained by a Contractee fluctuates around three. Lumian suspected that after three activations of the Circle Inhabitant effect, the fourth reset would lead them directly to the predetermined end, with no way to reverse it.

In other words, three times was the limit, and the fourth would bring the final result. They had already triggered the Circle Inhabitant effect twice.

Franca didn't understand why Lumian was denying her proposal, why he said they could only use the Circle Inhabitant effect one more time. But she knew Lumian understood the Inevitability pathway better than she did; he was the expert in this area, so she should heed his advice.

Thud!

As Ludwig fell again, Higdon, whose age spots had not yet festered, slowly raised his arms.

He clearly remembered the battle from the last loop and chose a different approach this time.

Higdon's aura suddenly weakened, as if he was on the brink of death but not quite there yet.

The age spots on his face festered, and his body emitted a strong smell of decay.

He was quickly covered in a thick, disgusting, greenish-yellow pus.

Higdon then vanished, seemingly disintegrating into countless pathogens.

Seeing this, Lumian gripped the Sword of Courage, and blazing white-blue flames ignited around him.

The flames quickly spread, circling Franca, Jenna, and the others, protecting them in the center.

Meanwhile, Anthony, who had been observing, solemnly reminded his companions, "Higdon feels very similar to the 'Winter is Coming' revolver."

"Winter is Coming?" Franca and Jenna both tensed.

They remembered very clearly that the Winter is Coming revolver had two very powerful abilities: Certain Death and Sure Hit.

The former meant that if hit, even a Saint-level Beyonder would be critically injured and gradually die, while those below demigod level would die instantly unless they had a substitute. The latter meant that unless they used a substitute before the attack or had a special ability, they would be inevitably hit, and the substitute would fail.

If Higdon was indeed as Anthony described and similar to Winter is Coming, the two Demonesses had to be wary of the Sure Hit ability. After all, their physical strength was certainly not comparable to a Hunter of the same sequence. If the substitute failed, even if the attack wasn't Certain Death, it would severely injure them!

Protected by the white-blue flames, Franca raised her guard and came up with a new plan.

She glanced at Lumian, who was ready to charge at Voisin Sanson, and quickly told Anthony, "Work with him! Certain Death!"

Franca meant that, with Lumian and Ludwig distracting Voisin Sanson, they should find an opportunity to use the Certain Death ability of Winter is Coming on the Inevitability believer, to see if it could kill him outright, or if the Certain Death effect would be reset by the Circle Inhabitant ability.

As soon as Voisin Sanson died, the Circle Inhabitant effect would naturally be nullified, removing any hidden dangers!

Just as Franca finished speaking, behind her, a greenish-yellow glow quickly condensed within the white-blue flames, forming Higdon covered in thick, disgusting liquid.

The old man was ignited, but he still lashed out at Franca with his arm like a whip.

Sure Hit!

As Franca's spirituality warning triggered, she immediately used her Mirror Substitution.

Smack!

Her body transformed into a mirror, struck by Higdon's thick arm, quickly darkening and shattering, falling to the ground with no trace of light, as if buried in soil for a hundred years.

As Lumian prepared to charge at Voisin Sanson, he suddenly pulled back and swung the Sword of Courage at Higdon.

Courage could be strategic too!

Lumian wasn't afraid of Higdon; he was just concerned that the enemy would flee too quickly, leaving no time to hit his body, so he feigned an attack on Voisin Sanson.

Boom!

As Ludwig fell again, Higdon's arm, unable to escape, was severed by the explosive and sharp sword. The thick, greenish-yellow liquid covering his body was engulfed by the blazing white-blue flames.

Smack!

The severed arm fell to the ground, wriggling and growing rapidly, turning into another Higdon.

Now, there were two Higdons.

The flames covering them quickly dimmed, decayed, and extinguished!

The two Higdons pounced on Franca and Jenna.

Meanwhile, Voisin Sanson, who had planned to magnify a tributary of Franca's fate to make her substitution fail, suddenly felt a ripple of destiny.

He instantly had an epiphany: No more delays, time is running out!

Voisin Sanson frowned.

He didn't want to do what came next; it would be extremely painful.

Let it be an accumulation for the Sufferer stage... Voisin Sanson raised his right hand, pressing it to his temple, gathering an indescribable radiance.

As the source of the Circle Inhabitant effect, he couldn't trigger a reset by leaving the area; that would mean truly leaving. He had to kill himself!

Seeing this, Franca and the others felt a strong sense of foreboding.

At that moment, the radiance in Voisin Sanson's hand strangely dissipated, as if twisted out of its composition.

Similarly, the two Higdons missed their targets, and Lumian's Sword of Courage struck nothing.

The sky darkened, and a majestic voice echoed in everyone's ears: "People of Intis, your emperor has returned!"

Chapter 871: The Critical Part

871 The Critical Part

Deep within the primitive island, amid the pervasive white mist, Perle's twisted face saw the gates of the Black Emperor mausoleum swing open.

A giant figure clad in black armor and a magnificent cloak emerged with majesty, with a torrent of white mist flowing between Perle and the figure.

Roselle Gustav... Perle's face instinctively tensed, causing the mist that formed her body to collapse inward slightly.

Roselle didn't spare a glance at the Vortex Weaver. He floated step by step into the air, reaching the edge of an abstract and ethereal strange world, like a rising mountain.

During this process, the sky dimmed, and the remaining clouds twisted as if something had begun to come alive.

Roselle gazed into the distance, raised his arms, and in a grand voice, he proclaimed, "People of Intis, your emperor has returned!"

Suddenly, the clouds above were pushed together by an invisible force, swirling downwards to form another terrifying vortex.

The center of this vortex was Roselle Gustav.

Meanwhile, across Intis, those who still followed the order Roselle had established heard the voice of the returning emperor. Most were bewildered, questioning their ears after the recent burst of intense light, while a few turned pale, unable to believe their suspicions.

To the eastern reaches of the sky, a beam of light flared up, trembling wildly as if striving to cross the vast distance and reach Roselle's embrace, causing various distortions. Behind this beam, three more beams appeared, as if pushed by an invisible force, forced to advance prematurely.

In different parts of the world, some people found themselves back home despite having just left, others saw their bright cathedrals turn dark and silent, and some were habitually drinking milk but didn't notice they were using their nostrils, suffering no harm.

Long-abandoned compulsory education schools strangely lit up, as if filled with students quietly attending classes.

Using his Worms of Time to search for a flaw in Inevitability's watch, Pallez found an exploitable point, but the Worms of Time he sent out disobeyed His commands.

Madam Magician, who was wandering again with Ma'am Hermit and Miss Justice, found herself away from the target location, instead of the sea, and in front of her appeared Madam Judgment and the little boy Will Auceptin holding her hand.

The light dots within the white mist remained largely unaffected, only dimming slightly. Perle, the Vortex Weaver, was first startled, then showed a joyous expression.

She hadn't expected Roselle to step forward, forcibly reviving himself before the ceremony's end to reclaim the Black Emperor's divine throne. Such an outcome was beyond her wildest dreams, and she hadn't even considered having Héloise, the Fate's Attendant, weave it, but this was undoubtedly a good thing for her and the great entity she worshiped, the Uncertain Mist.

The rewards this time will be immense! Perle had just formed this thought when the Uncertain Mist she was linked to through the ritual conveyed an emotion, tightening their connection and thickening the swirling mist.

Perle sharply turned her gaze towards the villa in Trier, towards the twisted blood shadow emerging from the sacred glow and white mist.

In a drifting voice, she spoke, "The payment for the indulgence faction of the Rose School of Thought is the Shadow of the Beauty Goddess, a Sealed Artifact derived from the Sequence 1 Beyonder characteristic of the Moon pathway. The one willing to offer a price for it is Madam Hart of the Nightstalkers."

As Perle's Words of Order echoed, another light dot rapidly expanded.

This light dot revealed a secret chamber, where a vague female statue stood in the center, the walls covered with childlike figures with bird-clawed limbs, and the floor piled with expressionless humans.

At that moment, a figure stood before the statue, her belly swollen, face full and beautiful, with emerald eyes sparkling like gems, and brown hair neatly tied up, wearing a simple and loose white robe-a pregnant woman.

The lady who nurtured a deity!

The twisted blood shadow from the villa in Trier, using the white mist, pierced through the corresponding light dot and appeared beside Perle, then moved towards the light dot where Madam Hart was.

It walked slowly, influenced and twisted by Roselle's resurrection.

"Madam, you may begin." Perle couldn't change the situation of the Shadow of the Beauty Goddess and could only ask Madam Hart of the Nightstalkers to provide the price in advance.

Hart nodded gently, turned to face the statue in the chamber, and chanted incantations in a low, indistinct voice.

As the incantation neared its end, the childlike figures on the walls became illusory, transforming into beams of light that entered the statue's belly. The dazed humans on the floor exploded one by one, returning as flesh and blood to the great mother.

The female statue gradually took on a crimson glow, transforming into a humanoid crimson moon.

Madam Hart then turned and made a cradling motion towards Emperor Roselle in the air.

She called out in ancient Jotun, "Come back, child of the mother!"

Blood-red moonlight seeped from Roselle's body, leaving him and heading towards the light dot where the female deity statue stood.

These were the pollutants that forced Roselle to seek godhood and death but failed to free himself from.

Now, they were all drawn out, no longer affecting Roselle, no longer attempting to corrupt him.

Roselle's century-old problem was thus effortlessly solved, but his current state required the corruption of the Uncertain Mist to balance the corruption of the Great Mother. Removing either would break the balance!

In the blink of an eye, Roselle was filled with white mist, twisting the speed of passing and the distance between two points, gradually eroding the emperor to completely corrupt him.

Inside the Black Emperor mausoleum, Bernadette saw this and, no longer calm like outside the mausoleum, anxiously shouted, "Adam, where is your promise?"

Roselle remained unaffected by his state change, as if it was within his expectations. He continued to spread his arms, awaiting the return of the Black Emperor's Uniqueness and three Sequence 1 Beyonder characteristics.

These were traits unique to the Black Emperor's true deity. Once revived, regardless of who held the Uniqueness and the three Sequence 1 Beyonder characteristics, they would forcibly return, merging with him without the need for extra rituals or potions!

Crimson moonlight rose from various parts of the primitive island, coalescing with the pollutants drawn from Roselle into a miniature crimson moon-like object.

Perle's ethereal voice rang out in time, "Madam Hart requested the Great Mother to reclaim the corruption from Roselle Gustav. This corruption will be exchanged for the Shadow of the Beauty Goddess and given to the indulgence faction of the Rose School of Thought..."

Madam Hart caught the miniature crimson moon trying to return to the mother's embrace and pushed it out of her light dot.

The miniature crimson moon entered the white mist created by Perle, slowly flying towards another light dot.

This wasn't the light dot the Shadow of the Beauty Goddess emerged from but one guarded by a peculiar giant tree with a vague figure hanging above it.

The Vortex Weaver, Perle, suppressed her excitement and once again scrutinized the scene of Topsy of the School of Deliciousness destroying the seal in the sea.

In the next second, wisps of thin gray fog seeped from the seabed, cooperating with the hydra-like Topsy.

...

Trier, botanical garden.

Hearing the emperor's return across space, Franca's lake-blue eyes widened in astonishment and confusion, with a hint of uncontrollable joy.

At the same time, her spiritual intuition told her that the order here had been distorted, including the Circle Inhabitant effect.

And wherever there was a distortion, it meant they could escape without triggering the Circle Inhabitant effect!

Where is the distortion? Franca had just this thought when she saw Jenna take out a mirror and quickly perform a Magic Mirror Divination.

Jenna had a similar intuition.

Meanwhile, the two Higdons, ignoring the unusual surroundings, madly attacked Lumian, who wielded the Sword of Courage, unable to focus on the two Demonesses.

Likewise, before Voisin Sanson stood only Ludwig, still short-legged and short-statured, unable to reach him to interfere.

The Circle Inhabitant made a quick decision, pressing his temple, letting the gathered strange light pierce through his head.

In excruciating pain unbearable even for an Ascetic, he was instantly near death.

The Circle Inhabitant effect triggered once more.

Lumian and Anthony's thoughts blurred, and they found themselves back in the intact cabin, before taking out the Sword of Courage and Black Tear forehead accessory.

Franca and Jenna couldn't complete their Magic Mirror Divination in time.

Lumian instinctively took out the Black Tear forehead accessory, intending to throw it to Franca, but upon grasping it, he sensed the mirror world, particularly the special one, feeling the summons of 0-01 from Morora.

Is it possible to sense this way? Not before...

The earlier anomaly distorted the order here and the Circle Inhabitant effect, causing this change? Meaning they could escape through the mirror world without triggering the Circle Inhabitant? Lumian instantly judged.

He acted before Voisin Sanson could commit suicide again and bring the inevitable end, shouting to Franca and the others, "Grab hold of me!"

Time was tight; he couldn't explain and hoped his teammates would trust him.

Despite their doubts, Franca and the others, including Ludwig, grabbed Lumian's body again.

In the next second, Lumian used the Black Tear forehead accessory and the cabin's window to enter the void-dark mirror world, randomly choosing a tunnel to traverse.

As expected, they didn't trigger the Circle Inhabitant effect this time.

As joy surged in Lugano's heart, everything blurred in a topsy-turvy manner, and they found themselves in an almost completely dark world, facing Harrison from Resurrection Island.

Around Harrison were four lit candles and four servings of staple food, including two loaves of bread, Feynapotter noodles and rice, all moldy.

Harrison looked at Lumian with a slight smile. "The Celestial Worthy's Oracle states you carry the key part of this matter. Capturing you will eliminate any surprises."

As Harrison spoke, Voisin Sanson and Higdon appeared in the darkness beside him.

Voisin Sanson also looked at Lumian, smiling. "Didn't you know I escaped from Fourth Epoch Trier through the special mirror world?"

Chapter 872: Courage

872 Courage

Lumian didn't waste time engaging with Harrison, Voisin Sanson, and the others.

This confirmed that the Mirror People were deeply involved in Project Vortex, and this was indeed the special mirror world, though its specific layer was unknown.

Lumian immediately activated the black mark on his right shoulder. He needed to transport Franca and the others away from this area before Voisin Sanson could use his Circle Inhabitant ability.

This time, his destination was Morora, the City of Exiles!

Since they had already entered the special mirror world and the worst-case scenario had occurred, there was no need to hold back. They could attempt to navigate the hidden dangers here and reach Morora.

If they didn't take risks, facing Voisin Sanson and Higdon, two demigods, plus the strange and special abilities of Harrison, Lumian doubted they had any chance of survival. All of them dying was only a matter of time. It was better to take a gamble and see if they could get through the dangers of the special mirror world and reach Morora.

In Morora, Lumian was the proxy of 0-01. He could borrow significant power, enough to counter a Sequence 4 demigod. If necessary, he could even temporarily exert the strength of Sequence 3. With the cooperation of Franca, Jenna, and the others, and the "help" of Morora's archbishop and hundreds of thousands of residents, they might repel or even kill Voisin Sanson and Higdon.

More importantly, 0-01 repelled the approach of demigods above Sequence 5, likely causing terrifying mutations. The first targets would inevitably be those two Saints!

Lumian used his Spirit World Traversal ability obtained from the Abscessed Hand, leveraging his special connection with 0-01. Holding on to Jenna, Anthony, and the others who hadn't let go, he disappeared from the spot, "transporting" to some deep part of the special mirror world.

Suddenly, he felt the world rejecting him, as if an invisible barrier had appeared ahead.

He was forced out of the Spirit World Traversal state, and several figures simultaneously materialized in a gloomy, dark town ruin.

The path to Morora was blocked.

It seemed the higher powers within the Mirror People did this. Their control over the special mirror world was clearly superior to the Black Tear.

Lumian thought for a moment, seeing that Voisin Sanson and the others hadn't caught up yet. He immediately tossed the Black Tear forehead accessory to Franca, speaking calmly, "You lead them through the mirrors, constantly shifting locations. Wait for a change in the outside world. There has already been a distortion of order; there will surely be similar anomalies soon. When that happens, seize the opportunity to use the mirrors to return to the surface, back to Trier."

"What about you?" Jenna blurted out.

Lumian chuckled. "Of course, I'll stay and play with them.

"If I go with you, they'll definitely chase us relentlessly, giving you no chance to escape the special mirror world. Wouldn't that mean no one could find reinforcements?"

Jenna's eyes reddened, and she was about to say something when Lumian sternly interrupted, "Have you forgotten your brother?"

Jenna's mouth opened slightly, but no words came out.

Lumian nodded and smiled again.

"You need to find Madam Magician and Madam Judgment for me, and provide accurate coordinates.

"Also, you should be able to distract one demigod."

He didn't hold back, smiling at Jenna, Franca, and Anthony.

"If I die, remember to avenge me."

Jenna's vision blurred with tears. She bit her lip, nodded with difficulty, and squeezed out a word from her throat, "Okay..."

She would avenge Lumian just as she avenged her mother!

Lumian turned to Franca, his expression calm. "Everything else is up to you."

Franca's eyes shimmered, her voice hoarse. "Okay."

Lumian put on the Devil's Whispers bone ring again and continued speaking to Franca, Jenna, and the others, "You are not the main target, not even secondary. While shifting locations through the mirrors, if Higdon catches up, leave Ludwig somewhere along the way. Let him hide on his own, which should buy you more time.

"Do you have any objections?" he asked Ludwig.

Ludwig shook his head, feeling this was something he had hoped for.

He made one request.

"Can you give me more food?"

With his body burning with blue-purple sulfur flames, Lumian tossed some chocolate and cookies over, then spoke to Anthony, "If Higdon keeps chasing, you can separate from the group."

Seeing Anthony about to refuse, Lumian smiled.

"Someone has to stay alive to avenge us.

"The one who lives suffers the most. I believe you understand that."

Anthony cast a Placate spell on himself. "Okay."

Lumian didn't say more and urged them, "Go quickly."

Franca threw the Black Tear back to Lumian. "The Ice Talisman is enough if we're just shifting locations through mirrors. The Black Tear can leverage the power of the special mirror world and should help you last longer."

The Demoness of Affliction's voice choked, feeling the potion digesting rapidly.

Lumian didn't refuse and quickly wrapped the Black Tear around his left wrist.

Franca immediately took out the ice-crystal-like amulet from the Traveler's Bag.

Without hesitation, she gritted her teeth. "Hold on to me."

Jenna looked at Lumian with watery eyes and grabbed Franca's arm. Lugano eagerly moved to Franca's back.

With a flash of icy light, they disappeared, leaving a falling mirror.

Lumian turned his gaze to the three approaching figures.

The enemies were closing in.

Looking at Voisin Sanson, Higdon, and Harrison, with the Black Tear on his left wrist and the Devil's Whispers on his right hand, Lumian drew the Sword of Courage from the Traveler's Bag.

The blue-purple sulfur flames on him immediately turned a bright white with a tinge of green. His back slightly arched.

His eyes deepened in color, locking onto the blonde-haired Voisin Sanson, a clear smile on his face.

He uttered from his throat. "Actually, I've been waiting for you for a long time."

...

Madam Magician, unexpectedly reunited with Madam Judgment and Will Auceptin due to the distortion effect, straightforwardly asked the little boy, "Can you lead us to the medium through which the power of Inevitability is seeping?"

Will Auceptin, chubby-faced and dressed in a child's suit, showed a troubled expression.

"Given the current situation, anyone not involved in Project Vortex will be influenced by the power of Inevitability, leading to inevitable failure. If I use that die, I might still be able to help you find the target, but it will drain all my accumulated luck. When I get home, I might see Ouroboros waiting for me.

"Do you have any special items that can save my luck or replace the die? I think you should."

Hearing the archangel of Fate say "should," The Magician, Justice, and Hermit began to examine their possessions-the latter understanding Will's words through Miss Justice's mental communication.

Suddenly, Ma'am Hermit remembered something and produced an iron cigar case from somewhere.

"This was given to me by Queen Mystic. She said she foresaw that this item would provide critical help in the future."

Madam Magician glanced at it and murmured, "It carries the aura of Mr. Fool."

Hearing this, Miss Justice made many connections.

She sought confirmation, "Did the Celestial Worthy send subordinates to participate in Project Vortex?"

"Yes," Madam Magician vaguely understood what Miss Justice meant.

Receiving confirmation, Miss Justice smiled. "The Celestial Worthy participating in Project Vortex means Mr. Fool is involved too, doesn't it? So..."

She looked at the iron cigar case in Ma'am Hermit's hand, her voice synchronously echoing in the mind of the Major Arcana card holder.

Ma'am Hermit immediately handed the item to Will.

Will smiled broadly. "It will do!"

The boy then addressed Madam Magician and Miss Justice, "I'll lead the way."

Though leading, Will closed His eyes.

Starlight sprinkled down as Madam Magician led everyone present, following Will's intuition to begin wandering.

...

Deep within the primitive island, amid the pervasive white mist.

Vortex Weaver Perle occasionally glanced at the slowly approaching Shadow of the Beauty Goddess and the miniature crimson moon-like corruption, sometimes at the loosening seal in the waters near Port Santa under coordinated efforts, and sometimes upward at the towering figure of Roselle Gustav in mid-air.

The four beams of light on the horizon, one after another, drew closer.

Perle anticipated that Roselle would perfectly resurrect and return as the Black Emperor. In that case, the great Uncertain Mist would reclaim one of His possessions and have a Sequence 0 true deity as a puppet.

According to Perle's original plan, the end of the vortex ritual and the completion of the transaction between the Nightstalkers and the Rose School of Thought would allow the great Uncertain Mist to thoroughly corrupt Roselle Gustav. Only then could the deceased Black Emperor be driven to resurrect. At that time, with all transactions concluded and no other forces providing assistance, the resurrection of the Black Emperor would face numerous obstructions, necessitating another vortex.

But now, Roselle Gustav had walked out of the Black Emperor's mausoleum himself, choosing to resurrect before the vortex ritual ended!

In midair, the first beam finally landed on Roselle, who was in the strange and abstract world, followed by the other three.

An indescribable light suddenly burst forth.

Chapter 873: The Predestined Battle

873 The Predestined Battle

In the special mirror world, seeing that only Lumian was ahead, Higdon immediately looked towards Voisin Sanson.

Voisin Sanson took off a ring that looked like it was made of glass and tossed it to the demigod of the Order of All Extinction.

Harrison, standing to the side, spoke in somewhat awkward Intisian, "This world will guide you."

At this moment, Lumian, engulfed in blazing white-blue flames, charged forward with the Sword of Courage in hand.

After catching the glass-like ring, Higdon immediately activated it.

In this almost completely dark town ruin, as if covered by something from above, various mirror-like objects suddenly lit up. Higdon's figure was then enveloped in a transparent light and thrown into one of the mirrors, chasing after Ludwig and the others.

Lumian had only taken a few steps before he suddenly disappeared from the spot.

Behind Voisin Sanson, a ball of blazing white-blue flame quickly appeared, expanding rapidly and forming into a burning figure wielding a giant flaming sword.

The Circle Inhabitant was not surprised. A semi-transparent figure resembling him but colder and more indifferent emerged from behind him.

This was Voisin Sanson's new contract ability, "Death's Summon!"

The blazing white-blue figure quickly dimmed as the semi-transparent upper body approached, extinguishing the flames one by one.

However, Lumian himself was not within this figure.

At Voisin Sanson's feet, the shadows cast by the flames came to life eerily, transforming into a sticky black liquid that seemed to condense from the darkest desires and emotions of the human heart, surging upwards.

It first wrapped around Voisin Sanson's legs, then quickly spread to his torso.

Desire Incarnation!

Lumian's previous attack from behind was merely a distraction for Voisin Sanson.

The real killing move was the Desire Incarnation from the Devil's Whispers bone ring. This allowed the various chaotic corruptions and seals within him to play a significant role in battle.

So, when he teleported behind Voisin Sanson, he used the flaming figure he had created as a cover, turned into a shadow creature, and slipped into the shadows under the target's feet, activating the Devil's Whispers bone ring from Hisoka.

As for the other enemy present, the courageous Lumian did not pay him any mind.

Before drawing the Sword of Courage, he had already planned his battle strategy: With Ludwig, Franca and the others should be able to divert Higdon.

Lumian only needed to deal with Voisin Sanson and Harrison. Though Harrison was not a demigod and lacked godhood, his abilities were strange and varied, making it just as difficult to kill him quickly as to severely injure Voisin Sanson.

Thus, the primary target had to be the Circle Inhabitant Voisin Sanson. Lumian would rely on the quicker and more frequently usable Spirit World Traversal to constantly flash around, avoiding being caught by Harrison, who might steal his items or crucial abilities.

During this process, the mystical plague from the Black Tear forehead accessory would naturally spread, covering the area. Lumian believed it would be highly effective against Harrison's Paper Figurine Substitutes. Harrison might use the Paper Figurine Substitutes to avoid the occult diseases, but as long as he stayed on the battlefield, he would continue to be infected. The Paper Figurine Substitutes would eventually be exhausted, and over time, the damage rate would increase dramatically.

Just as the sticky black liquid covered Voisin Sanson, his body suddenly became blurry.

Lumian's mind fogged momentarily, and by the time he cleared up, Voisin Sanson had already put several meters between them, showing no signs of the Desire Incarnation's terrifying corruption affecting him.

This was another application of the Circle Inhabitant's ability.

This time, Voisin Sanson hadn't included the entire town ruin in the Circle Inhabitant effect, only treating his own body. Just like Lumian resetting his physical and spiritual state every morning at six o'clock, Voisin Sanson's trigger was Set to near-death or when suffering a fatal attack.

The Desire Incarnation attack had triggered the Circle Inhabitant effect, allowing Voisin Sanson to recover and use the brief moment of Lumian's distraction to create distance. Otherwise, he would have continued to be engulfed by the sticky black liquid.

Next, a ghostly green light condensed in Voisin Sanson's eyes and shot towards the recovering black liquid.

Lumian didn't have time to teleport and could only swiftly animate his shadow, swapping places with it.

As soon as the beam appeared, it hit the shadow, causing it to disintegrate instantly with no room for struggle.

Almost simultaneously, Voisin Sanson extended his right hand.

His eyes were dyed with a silver-black hue, reflecting a silently flowing mercury river.

This was the River of Fate, belonging to Lumian.

Voisin Sanson, the Circle Inhabitant, intended to exchange a segment of Lumian's fate.

After dodging the green beam, Lumian fearlessly teleported to Voisin Sanson's side once more.

Heh, trying Fate Exchange?

No problem!

As long as I knock you into a reset, your attempt will fail!

Lumian raised the iron-black straight sword, blazing with white-blue flames, and slashed heavily at Voisin Sanson.

Cull!

At that moment, Harrison finally found an opportunity. He reached out his right hand and lightly grabbed, Stealing this attack.

Blazing white-blue flames appeared on his body, and a giant flaming sword formed in his hand.

Bang!

From over ten meters away, Harrison slashed the flaming giant sword at Lumian, producing a fierce explosion.

Lumian, undaunted, turned to face the roaring flames and swung the Sword of Courage once more.

Another Cull!

Rumble!

The white-blue flames and the terrifying shockwave clashed, the violent windstorm wreaking havoc in the ruins, lifting stones and igniting wood.

Harrison was engulfed by the returning flaming windstorm, his body quickly degenerating into a sinister paper figurine with drawn features.

This paper figurine's surface was marked with red and yellow rust, which quickly burned to ash in the white-blue flames.

As Harrison's figure reappeared at the edge of the storm, Lumian, with his enhanced physique from 0-01 and the Sword of Courage absorbing damage, did not retreat a single step and locked onto Voisin Sanson again.

His eyes turned iron-black, searching for the weak point on Voisin Sanson.

He raised the Sword of Courage once more, conjuring several white-blue Fire Ravens behind him.

At this moment, thanks to Harrison's delay, Voisin Sanson completed all the prerequisites for the Fate Exchange. Soon, he would just wait for the time to pass and welcome the final outcome. If Lumian hadn't possessed a false Angel rank, Voisin Sanson could have started the exchange directly after choosing the desired segment from the River of Destiny without taking extra time.

Bang!

Lumian slashed the Sword of Courage down on Voisin Sanson's head, and the white-blue Fire Ravens circled, covering the surrounding area.

You can use the Circle Inhabitant ability to restore your state, but I can target you with area attacks and delayed assaults right after you recover!

A few more resets, and you will reach your inevitable end!

Boom!

Voisin Sanson's body blurred again, causing Lumian's thoughts to become hazy.

Using the Circle Inhabitant effect, Voisin Sanson recovered from the damage caused by the Sword of Courage. However, the white-blue Fire Ravens continued to follow their predetermined paths, landing in different spots.

Suddenly, Voisin Sanson's figure vanished from the spot.

As the crows exploded one after another, the Circle Inhabitant's figure reappeared about forty meters away.

You may be able to teleport, but I also have teleportation from my contract!

Lumian's figure quickly appeared beside Voisin Sanson, relentlessly pursuing him.

His eyes turned silver-black, reflecting Voisin Sanson's mercurial River of Fate.

He extended his left hand, pushing the illusory River of Destiny towards the tributary where Voisin Sanson couldn't escape the subsequent attacks, while slashing with the Sword of Courage, creating more white-blue fireballs.

Had he found the right choice, Lumian would have used Compelling Fate to directly disrupt Voisin Sanson's Circle Inhabitant effect.

Rumble!

Lumian's spirituality was drained by the continuous attacks, forcing him to urgently release the accumulated spirituality. Voisin Sanson was hit by the Sword of Courage and, after recovering, couldn't teleport away in time, suffering from the barrage of white-blue fireballs.

The Circle Inhabitant effect triggered for the fourth time.

Voisin Sanson recovered and teleported to another location.

However, the Fate Exchange did not stop, as only Voisin Sanson's body and spirituality were included in the Circle Inhabitant effect, not his fate or actions.

This was similar to Lumian's daily reset at six o'clock, which didn't undo previous actions or invalidate their results.

Lumian relentlessly pursued Voisin Sanson, blinking to his side again.

Voisin Sanson no longer chose to resist head-on. He used his contracted teleportation ability to change his position.

On the other side, Harrison had reverted to a thin, sinister paper figurine, sensing an impending infection.

Lumian continued chasing Voisin Sanson and overtook him with the time gap between teleportation and speed, finding two more opportunities to attack.

However, Voisin Sanson either used special abilities to neutralize the attacks or triggered the Circle Inhabitant effect.

Voisin Sanson's Circle Inhabitant seemed far from reaching its predetermined conclusion.

Even with the Sword of Courage, Lumian felt a certain level of despair-knowing that the Fate Exchange would lead to a very bad outcome, having opportunities to attack the enemy, but unable to stop the exchange and change the impending result.

This might be the meaning of inevitability.

Perhaps a Fate Appropriator needed a Circle Inhabitant to unleash its true horror.

Despair was fleeting; courage once again took hold of Lumian.

Chapter 874: Unsealing

874 Unsealing

After a while, Voisin Sanson stopped passively waiting for the fate exchange to complete and began actively using various strange abilities, suppressing Lumian's attacks.

On the other side, Harrison increasingly relied on his Paper Figurine Substitutes to avoid the mystical plague spreading through the ruins of the town.

He had little time left to interfere with Lumian and kept trying to remove the densely packed mythical pathogens in the air with various methods he could think of, but to little avail.

Lumian felt the fate exchange nearing completion. Although he wasn't afraid, he decided to take a gamble.

Mimicking the Beyonders of a Warrior, he unleashed a Hurricane of Light, holding the Sword of Courage upside down and stabbing it forcefully into the ground.

With him and the Sword of Courage at the center, blazing white-blue fireballs spread layer upon layer, covering the ruins of the town.

Rumble!

Explosions erupted one after another, destroying the already crumbling ancient buildings and igniting every corner of the ruins.

Harrison used his Paper Figurine Substitute again. As he was always on the edge of the town ruins, his figure reappeared in the dark tunnel they had pursued through earlier.

Voisin Sanson, who was closer to Lumian, was inevitably affected. His attempt to teleport was interrupted by the violent shockwave.

His body caught fire again, but the injuries were not fatal. With the resilience of an Ascetic, he only instinctively twisted his face in pain.

Seizing this opportunity, Lumian teleported in front of Voisin Sanson.

Voisin Sanson's eyes immediately filled with ghostly green light.

Almost simultaneously, Lumian, anticipating Voisin Sanson's habit and method of using the terrifying beam, half-turned the Sword of Courage, holding it horizontally in front of his chest.

The ghostly green beam, upon completion, shot towards Lumian at unavoidable speed, striking the Sword of Courage. The blazing white-blue flames on its iron-black blade were instantly extinguished, and its metallic luster dimmed significantly.

Successfully blocking Voisin Sanson's beam, Lumian released his left hand, aiming to deliver a fatal blow.

He sensed that Voisin Sanson's current Circle Inhabitant cycle was nearing its end. Perhaps two or three more triggers would lead to the inevitable conclusion, possibly even death.

At this moment, Lumian's hair stood on end, his mind nearly blank.

The negative effects of the Black Tear forehead accessory manifested.

If not for the Sword of Courage sharing the burden, he would have been utterly overwhelmed by Pleasure, rather than just briefly dazed.

Taking advantage of this moment of distraction, Voisin Sanson teleported away from the emptied ruins but did not extend the distance beyond the Fate Exchange limit.

Lumian quickly regained his senses and prepared to pursue Voisin Sanson.

Suddenly, his thoughts slowed, becoming sluggish as if he had been rapidly frozen.

His body became rigid, and even moving a finger was extremely difficult.

The fate exchange had completed.

Clang! The Sword of Courage fell to the ground, as Lumian no longer had the strength to hold it.

Lumian slowly collapsed to the ground, his eyes vacant, his expression blank, leaning against a pile of rubble.

No longer controlled by Courage, he instinctively tried to activate the Blood Emperor's residual mark on his right palm, hoping the rampant frenzy might help him break free from his current state, but he couldn't manage it.

His ability to think coherently was rapidly slipping away.

This was the outcome Voisin Sanson had wanted from the Fate Exchange.

Voisin Sanson smiled, teleporting back to Lumian, and whispered, "If not for your false Angel rank, the fate exchange would have been completed long ago.

"You probably don't know that the maximum limit for the Circle Inhabitant's cycles is nine. You're still several cycles short of dealing real damage to me.

"You're not truly a demigod. There's a fundamental difference between you and someone with godhood."

As Voisin Sanson spoke, he pulled out an incomplete ritual sheepskin, just large enough to cover a head, intending to turn Lumian into a sheep and completely control him.

In the next second, Lumian felt the stiffness in his body and the sluggishness of his thoughts easing, their effects seemingly distorted.

Opportunity! Lumian immediately tried to activate the black mark on his right shoulder, hoping to teleport out of the special mirror world.

Voisin Sanson's face changed, then he activated a contract mark, shouting in a deep voice, "Lumian Lee!"

As Lumian's figure was still fading away, his mind buzzed, his head spinning, making it difficult to maintain the teleportation effect.

Voisin Sanson then placed the sheepskin over Lumian's head, chanting in Hermes, "Sheep!"

A flash of dark light transformed Lumian into a grayish-white sheep.

Most of his abilities were sealed, and the earlier state of sluggish thoughts and stiff body returned, preventing him from using the Black Tear forehead accessory or the Devil's Whispers bone ring.

Seeing this, Voisin Sanson felt the weakness and spirituality exhaustion in his own body but believed he could endure the mystical plague for a while longer, waiting for the Circle Inhabitant effect to passively activate.

A sinister paper figurine with drawn features entered the still-burning ruins from the tunnel, its surface accumulating rust at a visible rate.

It looked at Lumian and spoke in Harrison's voice, "Your companions don't seem to have escaped either."

As he spoke, the paper figurine made a gesture, and the edges of the dark world illuminated by the flames began to turn transparent, revealing the states of Franca and the others-not through Harrison's magic, but through the Mirror People watching in the shadows.

In the mirror-like scene, Franca led the others, except Ludwia, trying to traverse out of the special mirror world.

Above them, a figure in a black dress and gold crown appeared.

Surrounded by white mist, a light seemed to emanate from in front of her.

She glanced down, causing Franca and the others to fall back into the area they had just left, unable to escape the special mirror world.

Higdon, having split into two and covered in green-yellow slime, blocked Franca and the others' escape route in the scene.

After using it three more times, Franca's Ice Talisman only had one Mirror Traversal left.

She did not attempt to flee again. She pulled out a set of silver-white full-body armor from the Traveler's Bag and placed it in front of herself. Anthony also drew the Winter is Coming revolver.

In another scene, another Higdon was searching for Ludwig.

Seeing this, the increasingly ragged paper figurine of Harrison spoke to Lumian with a laugh, "Your companions will likely all die before you. Their Mirror Substitutes aren't as numerous as my paper figurines. You still have time to mourn them.

"Actually, you've done quite well. If it weren't for me and Higdon, your team might have been able to escape or even win against Voisin Sanson on their own."

With double control over him, Lumian had almost no ability to think deeply, leaving only his emotions to resonate.

His heart was ablaze with anger, indignation, and hatred, filling the sheep's eyes with bloodshot rage.

Voisin Sanson turned to Harrison's paper figurine and asked, "Can I kill him now to bring back Lord Termiboros?"

Harrison's paper figurine shook its head slowly, "The Celestial Worthy's revelation is to imprison."

Voisin Sanson thought for a moment and said, "Indeed, killing this trash might trigger unforeseen changes due to the high-level powers within him, potentially affecting the entire Project Vortex.

"Can I attempt to unseal his chest and bring back Lord Termiboros?"

Harrison's paper figurine paused for two seconds and said, "Yes."

This did not violate the Celestial Worthy's revelation.

Voisin Sanson smiled and said, "I'll need you to use that Celestial Worthy's boon for the final part. Otherwise, I'd have to bring Lumian Lee to the brink of death to unseal him, which is too risky."

The method to unseal Lumian Lee's The Fool seal wasn't devised by Voisin Sanson himself but given through a ritual by the great Circle of Inevitability.

"Okay." Harrison agreed.

Voisin Sanson immediately took out a black metal box and opened it.

Inside were thumb-sized mercury beads, their surfaces tinged with black and inscribed with complex, fear-inducing patterns and symbols.

Voisin Sanson's voice became low and his words eerily ethereal.

The black-tinged mercury beads floated up, spinning rapidly in mid-air, forming a continuous river.

With barely any coherent thoughts, Lumian heard Voisin Sanson and Harrison's conversation and saw the scene unfold but felt no despair or regret.

At this point, despair and regret were meaningless.

Lumian was only filled with anger, indignation, and hatred. The sheep's eyes bulged with fury.

Son of a sow!

Within ten to twenty seconds, Voisin Sanson completed his chant, sending the silver-black river towards Lumian's chest.

In the tunnel, Harrison had lit four candles and placed four pieces of bread in front of each, reciting incantations while taking special footsteps and gestures.

Lumian quickly fell into a dark state, his thoughts gradually clearing.

But before he could form any other thoughts, his chest grew hot, the familiar heat rapidly dissipating, turning cold.

In an instant, silver-black light beams burst from his body, weaving together in front of him to form a figure.

Chapter 875: Response

875 Response

Madam Magician and the other Major Arcana card holders were again affected by the distortion of order, abruptly emerging from their starry roaming state and floating in midair.

What met their eyes was an unusually bloody altar and countless mutilated corpses.

On the altar, there was also an oil painting depicting a strange cosmos.

Ma'am Hermit, whose hearing was sealed, had a twisted expression and whispered with difficulty, "It's here, it's that painting..."

She felt the terrifying voice influencing her growing louder, originating from that oil painting!

"It really works..." The Magician cast her gaze towards the boy, Will Auceptin, who was holding the iron cigar case. It was unclear whether the praise was for the item imbued with Mr. Fool's aura or the luck she had always envied.

The boy, Will, shrugged and said, "I didn't expect it to be this effective either."

As he spoke, Ma'am Hermit forced an ancient spear stained with mottled blood into existence, sending it with destructive intent towards the painting.

But the Spear of Longinus, born of Fairytale Magic, disintegrated into points of light before it could reach the altar.

In Madam Magician's eyes, brilliant starlight shone.

Around the altar, faint glows outlined a pair of dreamlike doors, attempting to transfer the painting along with the altar outside the barrier, into the deep, dark cosmos.

However, the starlight doors remained motionless, unable to open.

"Those who are not participants in the vortex ritual cannot affect the painting," Miss Justice said, eying the iron cigar case in Will's hand, eager to take it and use it as a medium to showcase her physical strength and see if she could damage the painting.

Madam Judgment took the lead, receiving the iron cigar case from Will and holding it in her hand, making it part of her fist.

Immediately, the Major Arcana card holder shouted in ancient Hermes, "Execution!"

Accompanied by this command, Judgment swung her right fist, the iron cigar case gripped in her hand.

Bang!

The altar dented slightly, but the painting showed no obvious signs of damage.

"There's some effect, but not much," Madam Magician accurately assessed.

She took the iron cigar case and tried various abilities herself, but could only cause minor damage to the painting, unable to shake its core effect, as they were not participants in the vortex ritual and could only influence it through the medium-the iron cigar case-which lacked destructive power.

Watching the painting still affecting her and many high-level individuals, Ma'am Hermit could not help but feel anxious.

...

Deep in the primitive island, in the dense white mist before the Black Emperor mausoleum.

As the four beams of light merged into Roselle's body in midair, Perle's face was suddenly stretched wide, presenting a comical yet terrifying appearance. The blood-red figure and the miniature crimson moon in the mist retreated strangely, as if going in the wrong direction.

From the light point where the Shadow of the Beauty Goddess emerged, the white mist, which had been nearly purified by the holy pillar, filled again. Saint Viève in midair and the Purifiers outside the villa, including Angoulême, felt an impending collapse of the current order.

The lightless domain instantly twisted, with some darkness seeping in, forming a shadowed side.

Discovering the presence of the Shadow of the Beauty Goddess, Mr. Moon was about to turn into crimson moonlight and illuminate the white mist but found himself rushing into the sky. The Worms of Time split by Pallez, just deciding to return, assess the situation, and unite in deception, got lost in life's path.

Mr. Hanged Man, riding the gale, suddenly plummeted, nearly losing his flying ability and falling to the ground.

As distortion phenomena appeared to varying degrees worldwide, at the core of the vortex ritual, Perle struggled to raise her head and look up.

At the edge of the abstract, fantastical world, Roselle's figure, clad in black armor and a luxurious cape, grew larger and clearer, with a crown set with dark gems forming swiftly atop his head.

The surrounding white mist mostly invaded His body, distorting His face, with His eyes a deep blue almost black, a slow-expanding mist.

The Black Emperor had revived in the astral world.

Roselle lowered His head slightly, gazing down, focusing on the white mist before His mausoleum, the torrent connecting Him and the mist, and the face of Perle in the depths of the mist, exuding majesty and depth.

The next moment, the Black Emperor raised His right hand, forming a fist, and gently twisted His wrist.

Distortion!

He forcefully completed a distortion using His authority, the Black Emperor pathway, the special connection with the Uncertain Mist, and the corruption deeply eroding His body and soul, relying on the invisible barrier blocking the Outer Deities.

Perle, deep in the white mist, briefly lost focus, then discovered in shock that the great Uncertain Mist was no longer closely connected with her through the vortex ritual but had shifted to the Black Emperor.

Her object of faith, her ritual foundation, had all been Distorted to Emperor Roselle!

After her initial confusion, Perle quickly felt a surge of fear and despair.

Not only her, but all the Uncertain Mist believers across the continents also saw a thin white mist before their eyes, with a majestic, indistinct figure standing within.

That figure, wearing a crown and black armor, quietly looked down at them.

The Black Emperor's first act upon revival was to temporarily "take over" all faith directed at the Uncertain Mist!

Of course, this also exposed Him more directly to the Outer Deity outside the barrier.

Another wisp of white mist separated from the surface of a planet, reaching the site of an intense divine battle, using the special environment and its symbolism to penetrate the barrier again, falling upon Emperor Roselle at the edge of the astral world, like a fishing line finally controlling its target.

Roselle's expression became increasingly distorted.

He continued to gaze at Perle and the Uncertain Mist believers worldwide, speaking in a majestic voice, "The Broker can unite the Outer Deities and has acted, posing a great threat, a crime beyond pardon!"

As He spoke, the Black Emperor's outstretched right hand opened, as if to grasp something.

After declaring the crime, His right hand clenched abruptly.

Bang! Bang! Bang! On the Northern and Southern Continents, the Uncertain Mist believers exploded into blood mist.

This was not the ability of the Judgment domain but the control granted by the boon system, the control of an evil god over His followers!

Temporarily distorting the Uncertain Mist faith, Black Emperor Roselle used this to purge the evil god's followers, making them feel the wrath of a god, aiming to eliminate them all.

A single Broker might not be dangerous, but their ability to weave all dangers together made them the greatest threat!

"No!" Despite her desperate resistance, Perle exploded uncontrollably within the white mist.

Her face split into different parts like the nose, eyes, mouth, and ears, scattered into the white mist, staining it with a noticeable blood color.

Yet the vortex ritual had not ceased. The Shadow of the Beauty Goddess and the miniature crimson moon continued to approach their target light point, even faster than before.

Silently, the exploded Uncertain Mist believers, in blood mist form, crossed the void, merging into the vortex mist that Perle had become. This accelerated the advance of the Shadow of the Beauty Goddess and the miniature crimson moon, sustaining the ongoing transaction as if other forces were maintaining the ritual.

A characteristic of the Vortex was that all participants contributed power to maintain the ritual until their part of the transaction was complete.

Thus, once the Vortex was formed, destroying it would become increasingly difficult!

Roselle glanced at the white mist connecting Him and the outside barrier, His expression of pain growing more apparent.

He shouted lowly, "Adam! Where are you?

"The Uncertain Mist has made a heavy bet. If you don't reveal your cards, we're all doomed!"

Seeing no change around, Roselle paused and continued to roar angrily, "Adam!

Are you really waiting for a chance to devour the Eternal Blazing Sun and others?"

Just after Roselle's low roar, a distant yet gentle voice echoed in His mind, "I"m here."

...

In the special mirror world,

Voisin Sanson watched expectantly and reverently as silver-black light beams shot from the gray-white sheep that Lumian had become, waiting for Lord Termiboros to be completely freed.

The beams wove together in front of him, quickly forming a figure.

The figure was slightly hunched, wearing a black classical robe and a pointed hat of the same color, with a thin face, slightly curly black hair, a broad forehead, and pitch-black eyes.

Just as Lumian was about to activate the Blood Emperor's residual aura to try and escape the sheep state, he froze upon seeing this figure.

Wh- Voisin Sanson and Harrison's bodies trembled, also becoming stunned.

The figure slowly straightened, not even glancing at Voisin Sanson and Harrison, but turned to look at Lumian.

Without any warning, the sheep's wool covering Lumian's body fell off, shrinking back to its original head-covering size.

Lumian remained in shock and bewilderment.

The figure took out a monocle made of crystal and leisurely placed it over his right eye, revealing a slight smile at Lumian, "You can call me Amon, or..."

The figure's voice grew majestic and layered, the smile on his face more evident.

"Termiboros."

Chapter 876: The Patient

876 The Patient

Lumian knew that the figure before him was Amon. Although Amon's appearance differed somewhat from Monette and the other Amons, the monocle over his right eye and his overall demeanor and aura unmistakably confirmed his identity.

But why was Amon here? And why did he call himself Termiboros?

Lumian clearly saw those silver and black beams of light emerging from within himself, from the shattered seal of Mr. Fool. How did they transform into Amon?

This was why Lumian had frozen in place earlier.

Could it be that during their previous encounters, Amon had secretly bypassed Mr. Fool's seal, hidden inside him, and replaced Termiboros?

If so, what had Mr. Fool's seal actually been for?

Despite his shock and confusion, Lumian suppressed these emotions because he had more urgent matters to attend to.

He stood up, ready to pick up the Sword of Courage and use the Mirror Traversal ability of the Black Tear to reach Franca, Jenna, and the others, to help them fight Higdon.

Meanwhile, Voisin Sanson and Harrison stood frozen like statues.

Amon, who claimed to be Termiboros, raised His hand to stop Lumian.

He glanced at the transparent boundary showing the battle between Franca, the others, and Higdon, and smiled, saying, "I've fixed their fate for the next ten minutes so they won't die. You still have some time. As for what happens after ten minutes, that's up to your choices."

Lumian refocused on Amon, removing the Black Tear forehead accessory and tucking it into the separate space within his Traveler's Bag to prevent any further negative effects. In a low voice, he asked, "What choices?"

Without waiting for Amon's response, he couldn't help but ask another question, "When did you become Termiboros?"

As he spoke, Lumian temporarily put away the Devil's Whispers bone ring.

Amon's lips curled slightly. "A long, long time ago. By the time you first learned that name, Termiboros was already me."

At this, the former King of Angels' smile took on a hint of mockery.

"In that dream in Cordu Village, the Warlock symbolized the power of inevitability. The Warlock's death and burial in the tomb symbolized the loss of the true owner of that power-the real Termiboros. The owl guarding the tomb and the Warlock's body symbolized an outsider seeking this power. The other you, accompanying the owl, symbolized the inherent depravity within everyone.

"Pallez couldn't even decipher this, yet he calls himself a Cryptologist? Just because I changed my symbolic form, He couldn't recognize me?

"Has he already begun aging prematurely at such a young age?"

Lumian didn't know who Pallez was, but he understood the implications of Amon's explanation.

The first time he had heard about depravity was from a Secrets Suppliant. That knowledge came with the potion. The second time was in the honorific name of the True Creator worshiped by the Aurora Order.

And Amon had a very close relationship with that individual.

This meant the True Creator's influence on the Cordu incident was much deeper than Lumian had imagined. It wasn't just a matter of sending a few lizard-like elves to nudge events along!

Rage that even an Ascetic couldn't suppress burned within Lumian. He squeezed out a hoarse voice from his throat, "Was the Cordu disaster the plan formulated by you two?"

Amon pinched His right eye's monocle, not directly answering Lumian's question.

He pulled a piece of paper from the void and read it in the tone of a report, "Patient: Lumian Lee, male, claims to be born on September 26, 1340, a native of Cordu in Riston Province, Intis Republic.

"Diagnosis: Strong self-destructive tendencies, loss of ability to respond to others' emotions.

"Cause Analysis: Experiences as a street urchin made the patient distrustful of his surroundings, developing habits of self-neglect to survive, abandoning certain societal morals. Aurore Lee's care, sympathy, love, supervision, and interdependent life helped the patient initially heal from that phase, reestablishing social connections and gradually becoming a normal person.

"The disaster at Cordu Village and Aurore's death shattered the patient's rebuilt life, bringing more severe pain and despair, making him afraid to desire or respond to others' emotions, fearing loss again, thus fostering strong self-destructive tendencies.

"First Phase Treatment Plan:

"Step 1: Emphasize the possibility of Aurore Lee's resurrection to give the patient motivation to live.

"Step 2: Arrange for the patient to stay at the Auberge du Coq Doré in the Trier market district, where many people at the bottom of society can effectively evoke the patient's empathy.

"Step 3: Force the patient to form connections with Celia Bello and others through events, preparing to rebuild social connections.

"Step 4: Use the undercover mission in the Iron and Blood Cross Order to make the patient meet Franca Roland. Franca Roland's background is similar to Aurore's, and her cheerful personality can effectively lower the psychological walls the patient has built, making her the most important candidate for re-establishing social connections.

"Step 5: Coordinate with the Tarot Club's Justice and Susie for treatment, reasonably allowing certain events to happen to aid in improving psychological conditions:

"Early Stage: Use the patient's sympathy for the unemployed Charlie and the street girls Ethans allow his help to yield positive results, giving him positive feedback.

"Mid Stage: Ensure the patient encounters Celia Bello after setbacks, receiving companionship and comfort, and using the self-indulgent yet unintentional behavior he chooses to relieve accumulated emotions.

"Late Stage: Bring inevitable events forward at the most appropriate time, with some events potentially occurring before mid-stage treatment:

"These include:

"1. Susanna Mattise targeting Charlie again, having the Bliss Society abduct him to Underground Trier. This would allow the patient to vaguely sense the Sufferer's presence, feel anger, and through these events, strengthen his connections with Franca, Celia, and Charlie, initially rebuilding social ties;

"2. The madman Flameng, whose situation most resembles the patient's, hangs himself after losing all hope and motivation for life despite the patient's help. This strongly resonates with the patient, giving him a huge shock, triggering his rebellious spirit and stubbornness;

"3. Scavenger Ruhr, unfortunately getting affected by the indiscriminate influence of cultists, contracts a severe illness. The patient's efforts to help end in failure, with Ruhr's wife, Michel, losing hope and choosing to indulge once by having a hearty meal and singing loudly before hanging herself at dawn. This similar fate and predestined outcome thoroughly ignite the patient's emotions, making him want to fight against the unfairness of fate, wanting to challenge everything.

"4. The explosion at the chemical plant where Celia Bello's mother worked, acting as the final catalyst.

"First Phase Treatment Result: The patient's self-destructive tendencies significantly reduced, re-established social connections, regained some motivation to live, and can now handle more events."

As Amon read the "report" in an even tone, Lumian felt his heart sink, growing colder with each word.

It was like being doused with cold water as a street urchin, the chill spreading from his head to his toes, extinguishing all his hope and pride like a candle flame.

His indignation, his rebellion against fate-all of them seemed like a joke, shattered into pieces and ground into the dirt by those in power.

At this moment, Lumian felt completely numb.

Half of him burned with uncontrollable anger and the self-destructive urge to drag the report writer to death with him. The other half once again felt the despair and pain from when Aurore had pushed him away to face death alone.

Amon finally finished reading the first phase treatment report and looked at Lumian with a smile, seemingly waiting for a response.

Lumian's body hunched slightly, and his voice erupted from the depths of his soul, filled with agony, "Why? Why me?"

Amon smiled and said, "The Fool's aura and Aurore's foolish choice made you a good test subject, capable of bearing many things and verifying the initial experimental results.

"That's one reason. The other is if you truly self-destruct, won't my role as Termiboros be exposed? How can I deceive those outside and make Them place heavy bets?

"Only by slowly absorbing and digesting Termiboros' Sequence 1 Beyonder characteristics within The Fool's seal and changing pathways will it be most hidden and least likely to be discovered."

Lumian's mind was in chaos, his emotions exploding, even the Conspirer's abilities were hard to use. He could only ask instinctively, "In that large ceremony with the padre, did not only Termiboros descend but also you? Did you intentionally seal yourself with the injured Termiboros into my body?"

Amon nodded lightly and smiled. "Thanks to your gifts, it helped me open the return path and gave me such a present."

Lumian fell silent, involuntarily breathing heavily as if the air here was too thin, and he had to force himself to breathe deeply. "Previously, the Sufferer hidden around me, who was it?"

Amon shook His head. "Haven't you guessed it yet? You should have heard His name, the Angel of Fate, Ouroboros."

The Angel of Fate, Ouroboros... Lumian was stunned, but it seemed to make sense.

This was the King of Angels who had once followed the Ancient Sun God and was currently serving the True Creator as mentioned by Mr. K during his preaching.

Lumian instinctively gritted his teeth, his voice squeezing out through the gaps, "Did you have a chance to save Aurore back then?"

Amon smiled. "Do you want to hear the answer?"

He glanced at the paper in His hand, seemingly preparing to read new content that might contain all the answers.

Chapter 877: Promised Matters

Chapter 877 Promised Matters

Amon began reading again in a flat tone, "When the anomaly at Cordu Village was discovered, the corruption and personality distortion in Aurore Lee had already become quite severe. If the most skilled Psychologist provided treatment and any true god offered a seal, it might have been possible to save her. But why save her?

"If the situation at Cordu Village had continued to develop, it would indeed have caused a significant catastrophe. However, if intervened, it could bring substantial benefits and play an important role at a critical moment in the future.

"The lizard-shaped elves entered Cordu Village, quietly maintaining the balance. They wanted the outcome to follow the heretics' original plan but not actually succeed. At the same time, they ensured that Aurore Lee retained a slight chance of resurrection.

"In the end, their goal was achieved. Before the Sinners' organization sent someone, Guillaume Bénet conducted the grand sacrifice himself, opening a temporary passage above the barrier, allowing Termiboros to descend.

"Amon had already been waiting nearby, deceiving the ritual, utilizing the barrier, and secretly following Termiboros back into this world.

"Aurore Lee pushing Lumian Lee away in the end brought a bit of an unexpected twist, but it did not change the overall outcome. The Fool's aura on Lumian Lee, stimulated by the surrounding environment and his intense emotional fluctuations, successfully attracted The Fool's attention…"

Hearing this, Lumian's hands unconsciously clenched into fists, his heart burning with rage, overpowering the numbness and despair.

Amon, as if not noticing his emotional change, continued to read, "As a result, Termiboros was severely wounded, and together with the soul fragments of Aurore Lee and the villagers of Cordu, was sealed into Lumian Lee's body. During this process, Amon voluntarily joined them, stealing Termiboros' fate and identity before He could recover, killing Him and reducing Him to a Sequence 1 Beyonder characteristic of the Inevitability pathway.

"Before Lumian Lee became an Ascetic, Amon had already absorbed the Beyonder characteristic, completing the pathway switch, fully replacing Termiboros, only lacking the final ritual.

"This is very important. Whether it's the vortex ritual now or another plan, it doesn't change. Lumian Lee will understand why soon."

At this point, Amon looked up at the dark sky covered with a thick glass-like layer, smiled, and said, "Next, I will only read the key parts, otherwise, I'm afraid Roselle won't last that long."

Lumian didn't respond to Him, using all his strength to suppress his emotions.

He wanted to uncover the truth behind many previous events!

Amon lowered His head again, looking at the paper in His hand. "After the first phase of psychological treatment ended, the hidden dangers of the Tree of Shadow were prematurely triggered, forcing Lumian Lee to face Susanna Mattise's sacrifice.

"The Amon sealed within him indeed couldn't bear the weight and complexity of the Tree of Shadow's fate torrent, nor could He rapidly evolve the fate fragments of encountering the Montsouris ghost into an attack by the Montsouris ghost. However, the Angel of Fate, Ouroboros, had always been watching from nearby. This was His specialty, and in this regard, He was far superior to the Sufferer of the Inevitability pathway.

"With Ouroboros's covert assistance, Lumian Lee successfully swapped the fate of being attacked by the Montsouris ghost with the fate of the Tree of Shadow having its roots burned by the Fourth Epoch Trier's invisible flames. This would play a crucial role in Lumian Lee and Susanna Mattise's upcoming battle.

"Between the two battles, Amon didn't miss the opportunity, deliberately describing Lumian as the unfortunate one to strike at him. This was a deception; if it were the real Termiboros, He would have said similar words in such a situation.

"At the end of the Tree of Shadow incident, the lizard-like elf deliberately let Lumian Lee see it, giving him a strong desire and motivation to continue exploring the truth behind the Cordu disaster."

Hearing this, Lumian was stunned again.

My desire, my anger, is that what that individual wanted too?

Amon seemed to skip parts and started reading the next key point,

"The madman Flameng, driven insane by encountering the Montsouris ghost, coincidentally stayed at the Auberge du Coq Doré. His experiences and ending resonated with Lumian Lee. The Earth Blood stone he left behind gave Lumian Lee the chance to obtain the residual aura of the Blood Emperor.

"At this time, due to the convergence of Amon's main body, more and more Amons noticed Lumian Lee's existence and obtained corresponding information.

"To bring out the hidden value of the Earth Blood stone, one of the Amons chose to steal it. Coincidentally, a lady from the Church of Evernight asked Lumian Lee for help to obtain water from the Samaritan Women's Spring leading them into the underground catacombs.

"With the enthusiastic help of the Amons, Lumian Lee ultimately used the Earth Blood stone to gain the residual aura of the Blood Emperor. This was the first step in his mystical similarity to 0-01 which could provide him help in critical moments.

…

"The Hostel plan was initiated as expected. Some participants were killed, some achieved their goals, and those outside who could not observe Fourth Epoch Trier received guidance, while Lumian Lee and others obtained a fragment of the special mirror world for the first time.

…

"After leaving Trier, Lumian Lee inevitably converged to Port Santa, where the seal was reinforced early. Though it left hidden dangers, it could at least last longer…

"On the subsequent journey, Lumian Lee encountered Father Montserrat and obtained Omebella's burned umbilical cord. He also got involved in matters related to Naboredisley, laying the foundation for meeting Farbauti's avatar in the tomb at the end of the Dream Festival…

"During the Dream Festival, Lumian Lee successfully obtained the seal of the Underworld Daoist, truly gaining mystical similarity to 0-01…

"During the journey, Lumian Lee also met several people with experiences similar to his but with different choices and outcomes, which touched him, firming his ideas, and further improving his psychological state. The second phase of psychological treatment was successfully completed.

…

"After asking Mr. K for help to solve Perle's painting person, Lumian Lee went to the first cathedral built by the Aurora Order for the True Creator. There, he coincidentally saw the lizard-like elves crawling in and out of the god.

"This dealt him a huge blow, worsening his psychological state, but also made his desire and determination for revenge stronger and firmer.

…

"After returning to Trier from Morora, Lumian Lee began preparing for his advancement to Iron-blooded Knight. What he didn't realize was that his psychological state and emotional condition had not met the requirements to become a demigod. Even with the sealed angel as a teammate, there was a significant probability that he would lose control after consuming the Iron-blooded Knight potion.

"Fortunately, the presence of the Black Tear and Celia Bello becoming a Demoness of Pleasure prematurely triggered the emotional issues within Lumian's team. After much entanglement and pain, Lumian chose to face his thoughts and tried to respond to others' attention to him. Although his response was twisted, he at least took the first step, no longer passively accepting but placing himself in a position of importance. This mindset change was crucial for his subsequent advancement ritual.

"As a result, Lumian Lee's emotions and desires were vented, and his importance was no longer suppressed by his fear of loss. His connections with Franca Roland and Celia Bello became stronger and closer, providing him with two strong anchors during his advancement to demigod, helping him stabilize his consciousness.

"The third and final phase of psychological treatment ended, and Lumian Lee could now withstand new blows.

…

"During the vortex ritual, Lumian's team fell into a desperate situation. All his teammates, except him, were about to be killed or taken away by Higdon of the Order of All Extinction in a few minutes.

"Lumian Lee wanted to ask Amon for help, but Amon chose to refuse because He wasn't Lumian Lee's godfather and had no obligation, even though Lumian Lee had indeed become more like Amon, using loopholes more skillfully after repeatedly receiving boons from Amon.

"Relying solely on himself and those few Grade 1 Sealed Artifacts, Lumian Lee couldn't save his teammates because Voisin Sanson and others would also assist Higdon shortly.

"Lumian Lee now has only one choice, to ascend to demigod on the spot. But Amon is unwilling to help him shatter the Sword of Courage, returning the Sword of Courage to a Beyonder characteristic, and his Iron-blooded Knight ritual is still incomplete.

"Amon tells him that the only help He would provide is to shatter the Black Tear, give him the supplementary ingredients missing for the Despair potion, and send him to Morora to complete the ritual using the exiles there, ascending to Demoness of Despair.

"Becoming a Demoness of Despair, Lumian Lee, wielding the Sword of Courage, successfully saves his teammates. Then, he would switch between the Demoness and Hunter pathways, spiraling upwards. This doesn't need to be symmetrical, depending on the situation, aiming to fulfill the phrase 'pure yin does not last, pure yang does not grow, yin contains yang, yang contains yin, the union of yin and yang gives rise to everything.'

"This is the only correct way to approach the peak power of the two calamity pathways. Alista Tudor and Cheek's attempts failed; not only did They fail to succeed, but They also created a big trouble.

"In this process, Aurore Lee's soul fragments will gradually revive when Lumian Lee is in the Demoness state.

"If Lumian Lee can ultimately defeat Red Angel Medici and Primordial Demoness Cheek, mastering the peak power of the two calamity pathways, Aurore Lee's personality and soul fragments can rely on Lumian's own spirit and flesh to resurrect. Then, they can merge with his consciousness, suppressing the corruption of inevitability, and become his female form, controlling the feminine side of calamity. This is the true union of yin and yang, similar to the Medici evil spirit's current state but closer to the peak.

"This is also the only way to truly revive Aurore Lee."

Amon paused, looking at Lumian, who seemed to have turned into a statue, raised His chin slightly, revealed a faint smile, and recited the final sentence, "Can you accept such an outcome?"

Chapter 878: "Sinner"

Chapter 878 "Sinner"

Hearing Amon's question, Lumian seemed to break free from a long nightmare, only to find reality was an even more despairing abyss.

His body trembled slightly as he used all his strength to squeeze out a sound from his throat.

"Isn't He afraid? Afraid that after I truly master the peak power of calamity, I'll seek revenge against Him?"

Amon laughed. "By making such a choice, He shows He's willing to face all possible futures and accept the worst outcome.

"It makes no difference to Him whether it's you or Medici, whether you submit, give up, be angry, or hate. If either of you manages to master the peak power of calamity, seek revenge against Him, disrupt His plans, or even pull Him down from His divine throne, He would still not regret it and would acknowledge the result."

At this point, Amon paused before continuing, "Because He was born to bear all sins."

Lumian fell silent, his fists clenched tightly, with thin streams of bright red blood seeping through the gaps.

Amon glanced at the transparent but dark sky. "Time is running out. You must make your choice."

Lumian's lips moved a few times before he suddenly laughed, a mixture of anger and self-mockery.

His voice was hoarse and low as he said, "I'm willing to go—to Morora. I will try all possible ways to revive Aurore, including the only method He mentioned, but I will not accept the outcome He predetermined!"

Amon chuckled, adjusting His monocle on His right eye.

"You don't need to tell me the second half of your sentence. My task is only to send you to Morora and make you a Demoness of Despair. Whether you accept that ending, you'll have to face Him and tell Him yourself."

With that, Amon raised His right hand and gently grasped, making the Black Tear forehead accessory magically detach from the Traveler's Bag and appear in His palm.

The black, tear-shaped Sealed Artifact silently shattered, transforming into specks of faint light. These lights quickly converged into a shrunken, withered, blackened, translucent heart.

Amon then reached towards Voisin Sanson, grabbing two items.

One was a small glass vial containing dark green liquid, and the other, three silver fragments.

After making his decision, Lumian's emotions finally settled a bit. He no longer felt as out of control as before—his body had been trembling uncontrollably, and his thoughts had been fixated on destruction.

Seeing the two items in Amon's hand, Lumian suddenly paused.

Voisin Sanson had the supplementary ingredients for the Demoness of Despair?

He was also the one who suggested lifting the seal earlier…

Amon mentioned that some participants in the Hostel plan received hidden guidance in Fourth Epoch Trier's unique environment without being noticed by the evil gods… Was Voisin Sanson one of them?

Voisin Sanson himself probably didn't remember being guided, thinking he escaped Fourth Epoch Trier purely with the help of the Mirror People, and later unknowingly did some seemingly unimportant abnormal things?

Amon couldn't break out of Mr. Fool's seal on His own, so there had to be a role to accomplish the unsealing task without killing me—the test subject… Voisin Sanson's stated goal allowed him to do this without suspicion…

That individual tacitly allowed the Hostel plan to happen, without much interference or obstruction, and didn't ruin Red Angel's plan, all to prepare for now?

Realizing this, Lumian instinctively scoffed to ease his emotions. "So He can't accept just any outcome after all."

He did so much to ensure the expected result!

Amon smiled. "Willing to accept the worst outcome doesn't mean not striving for the best. And now, would you refuse to go to Morora and become a Demoness of Despair?"

Lumian fell silent again.

Amon let the Demoness of Despair Beyonder characteristic and the two supplementary materials fly towards Lumian, casually remarking, "This Beyonder characteristic will continuously spread plagues, both mundane and mystical, and you'll also be infected."

After Lumian caught them, Amon smiled again. "Do you know what the Sequence 2 of the Inevitability pathway is?"

"Sinner," Lumian replied, determined to go to Morora and complete his task no matter how painful or reluctant he felt.

"And Sequence 1?" Amon continued to quiz him unhurriedly.

Lumian shook his head.

He really didn't know.

Amon explained with a smile, "Sequence 1 is Angel of Redemption, but to me, it's not as useful as Sinner.

"The past Sinner, the present Sufferer, and the future Angel of Redemption form the trinity of the Inevitability pathway."

Amon adjusted His monocle, smiling more prominently.

"And a Sinner has the ability to revert their state to any past moment, with the duration depending on specific circumstances."

Revert to any past moment… Lumian suddenly remembered that Madam Magician mentioned Amon, the King of Angels from ancient times, once briefly became a god!

Amon turned, smiling. "Of course, involving the uniqueness and power of a true god requires the current holder's consent. That Celestial Worthy has already diverted most of His attention to influence Project Vortex, so He certainly can't interfere with The Fool on this matter, and The Fool you believe in shouldn't object."

As He spoke, Amon spread His arms as if embracing returning power.

The monocle on His right eye shone brilliantly.

Before Lumian could react, he saw the obstacles and barriers blocking access to Morora in the special mirror world disappear, allowing him to enter the City of Exiles smoothly and without hindrance.

High above in the special mirror world, the figure wearing a golden crown and black dress nodded at Amon, not attempting to interfere with Lumian.

She was mirror Roselle. In this matter, She had placed bets on both sides, ensuring that the real Roselle wouldn't completely perish. Whether the real Roselle became a puppet of the Uncertain Mist or died to await another resurrection opportunity, it wouldn't affect Her existence and would even gradually make Her the main body.

In the next second, Amon's figure vanished from Lumian's sight.

The paper He had been reading silently floated down, completely blank—a sheet of white paper.

…

Before the bloody altar in the ancient castle.

Ma'am Hermit suddenly spoke, "The voice from that painting has weakened."

Madam Magician looked up, slightly puzzled and apprehensive. "The sealing power of the barrier has strengthened. The true god of the Door pathway has returned… No, it's not Mr. Fool, it's more like… more like Amon!"

Using her angelic intuition about the true god of her pathway, Madam Magician quickly made a judgment.

"How could Amon become the true god of the Door pathway again?" Miss Justice's heart stirred. "Did Mr. Fool or that Celestial Worthy lend Him power?"

If it was the former, it would be great news for disrupting the vortex ritual. If it was the latter, it would be serious.

"Based on current developments, it should be Mr. Fool," Madam Magician said thoughtfully.

At this moment, the Ma'am Hermit, receiving Miss Justice's report, moved her eyes slightly.

"Since the influence of the mysterious voice has weakened, the power of fate must have lessened too. Now, there should be a chance to destroy this painting!"

As she spoke, the holder of the Major Arcana card holder reached out to Madam Magician, asking for the iron cigar case.

…

In the sea near Port Santa, the seal, previously weakened by internal gray fog and external gnawing, instantly became as strong as before.

The School of Deliciousness's previous efforts were all in vain.

Deep in the primitive island, before the Black Emperor mausoleum.

The thick, pervasive white mist abruptly contracted towards the core as if squeezed by an invisible force.

The mark left by The Fool inside Roselle strengthened, alleviating some of the corruption caused by the Uncertain Mist.

Roselle's twisted, painful expression improved somewhat.

The eyes of Perle, scattered in different parts of the mist, saw a figure suddenly appear in midair. The figure wore a black robe, a matching pointed hat, and a monocle on His right eye.

He is… Isn't it said that external forces can't interfere with the vortex's operation? Perle, still barely alive, had this question when she saw the figure in mid-air look down at her, smiling happily as He introduced Himself, "Is this our first meeting? I am Termiboros."

"…" Perle suddenly felt as if her intelligence had been stolen.

How could it be Termiboros?

However, my spiritual intuition tells me that He is indeed Termiboros…

…

In the special mirror world,

Seeing Amon's figure soar upwards and vanish from sight, Lumian finally understood why He had said that whether it was the vortex ritual or another plan, it didn't matter compared to consuming Termiboros and becoming an Angel of the Inevitability pathway.

This meant there would always be a high-ranking being capable of temporarily exerting a true god's power, lurking in the shadows, waiting to strike at a crucial moment!

Lumian glanced at the white paper on the ground, then looked at Franca, Jenna, and the others struggling against Higdon with the help of the Pride Armor and the Demoness's black flames. He quickly put away the Sword of Courage, gripping the Beyonder characteristic and supplementary ingredients of the Demoness of Despair, and activated the black mark on his right shoulder.

He traversed the special mirror world and returned to Morora, the City of Exiles.

Immediately, he reconnected with 0-01, using the Grade 0 Sealed Artifact to help bear the damage and influence of the Demoness' plague.

Then, Lumian stood on the steps before the Knowledge Cathedral, gazing at the wide, deserted square. He began summoning the exiles most affected by 0-01 to gather quickly, aiming to save time.

Chapter 879: Demoness of Despair

Chapter 879 Demoness of Despair

In the next two to three minutes, a large number of exiles poured into the square in front of the Knowledge Cathedral. Some, accidentally bumped into, chose to duel on the spot. Others quietly straightened their necks so they wouldn't be too crooked. Some sang loudly out of boredom, while others played a game of slapping each other…

Lumian stood on the steps, holding the Beyonder characteristic of the Demoness of Despair, expressionless as he watched these exiled felons.

Time is running out… Lumian silently whispered to himself, turning to look at the Knowledge Cathedral once more, but still did not see Archbishop Heraberg of Morora.

Finally resigned, he turned his gaze back to the exiles, who almost filled the square.

There were definitely more than thirty thousand.

Lumian suddenly started laughing, his body trembling with mirth.

Though he seemed to have many choices, considering environmental factors, time constraints, the current situation, and his own obsessions, only one path remained.

The only road before him.

After laughing for over ten seconds, Lumian, dressed in a white shirt, black vest, dark trousers, and laced shoes, stepped down from the steps and walked into the crowd.

The exiles near the Knowledge Cathedral began to feel something was wrong. Their bodies weakened, and when they tried to slap their opponents, it felt more like caressing their faces.

Some instinctively wanted to flee but found their legs powerless, their bodies heavy, moving only slowly.

Whoosh, whoosh, whoosh. White-blue fireballs shot out from around Lumian, flying over the exiles infected with mystical diseases and landing at the edges of the square, which the exiles strangely ignored.

Rumble!

The fireballs exploded simultaneously, surrounding the square in a hell of white flames. The temperature soared, and thick smoke billowed.

Thud, thud, thud. Countless exiles, whose conditions had worsened, fell to the ground, watching as other felons with some strength left trampled over them. They stared at the white flames lighting up the sky, inching closer to them.

Pain and despair quickly filled their hearts, consuming their sanity.

Some wanted to call for help but could only make weak sounds.

Rumble!

Amid continuous explosions, Lumian walked out of the square, into the spreading sea of flames, and into the nearest street.

Rumble!

The houses on both sides of the street either collapsed under the white-blue fireballs or were directly ignited, rising into fierce flames like torches.

The felons in the square fell one by one, feeling helpless against the disease, experiencing pain and despair, waiting for death.

Lumian took out a glass bottle, placing the Beyonder characteristic of the Demoness of Despair, Plague Mother Serpent's bile, fragments of a Silver Hunter, blood of various plague victims, and fresh mistletoe into it one by one.

Bubbles gurgled up, and the dark purple potion shimmered with a rosy light.

Lumian gazed at the potion, laughing hoarsely. "Don't worry, I already know my insignificance. I will embrace despair and the path of the Demoness.

"But this is to avoid being manipulated in the future, to choose my own ending!"

With that, he walked forward, raising the bottle to his lips and tilting his head back to drink.

The exiles still standing in the square suddenly felt their pain and despair condense into something tangible, turning into invisible threads extending toward the burning street, toward the figure with his back to them.

They finally "awoke," but were too sick to fight the perpetrator. Some were even already engulfed by flames, burning their bodies.

They saw the figure walking step by step among the burning buildings, walking through the hellish streets, under the bright red sky. His hair floated up, growing longer, blacker, and thicker.

In the air, two stars seemed to light up, and the white-blue flames in the area suddenly turned pitch black.

This blackness spread like a flood, quickly drowning all light, making the fiery hell quiet, deep, and dark.

…

In the special mirror world, in the dark scene of the abandoned park where Franca and others fought against Higdon of the Order of All Extinction.

Covered in greenish-yellow mucus, Higdon had split into four, each seeking different targets, while black flames of the Demoness burned quietly around Franca and Jenna.

The black flames burned the spirituality of the disease but were dimmed by the decaying power, eventually extinguishing.

If it weren't for discovering that Higdon's disease, having some spirituality, could be ignited by the Demoness's black flames to slow its spread and intensity, Franca believed she and Jenna would have already exhausted their Mirror Substitutes and awaited death.

Meanwhile, the Pride Armor played a crucial role, almost unaffected by Higdon's diseases, and not corroded by the decaying power. It remained energetic, chasing down Higdon whenever he dared to attack from behind, occasionally unleashing a Hurricane of Light.

During the battle, Franca and Jenna noticed another problem.

They couldn't tell if it was because Higdon had no brain or if the demigod was just unlucky, but his Certain Death attacks often missed.

Combined, the two Demonesses and Anthony, who used his Psychological Invisibility to stay out of the decaying range, barely managed to hold on for nearly nine minutes before Higdon—a demigod. Occasionally, they even felt that Higdon lacked the oppressive presence of a true demigod, seeming like a poor-quality product.

But even so, they couldn't find an opportunity to escape and discovered that their enemies were multiplying—from two at the start to four now, with one splitting off to find Ludwig.

Moreover, although individual Higdon fragments seemed weaker than a true demigod, each fragment retained the same level of power, making them collectively terrifying. Franca guessed the number of splits should have a limit, but not too many.

I have two Mirror Substitutes left. Jenna probably has one… Anthony, although attacked less and outside the range, only had two to begin with and has used one… Franca analyzed the situation quickly while constantly repositioning to avoid Higdon's sudden Sure Hit attacks.

As for Lugano, when Higdon blocked him at the start, Franca signaled him to run as far as he could and hide.

It proved to be the right call. Higdon's targets were Ludwig and the two Demonesses, making no effort to stop Lugano from fleeing and not splitting more Higdons to chase him.

Continuous use of black flames is also draining our spirituality. Jenna and I can't hold on much longer… Franca considered whether to use the last Mirror Traversal of the Ice Amulet now to delay for a while and see if there would be a turning point.

It could also give Anthony a chance to survive.

The Hypnotist was also not Higdon's target and had Psychological Invisibility.

Just as Franca was about to signal Jenna to approach, she suddenly saw greenish-yellow drops forming behind Jenna, quickly condensing into Higdon.

Almost simultaneously, Franca noticed from Jenna's worried expression that something was happening behind her too.

Without hesitation, both Demonesses activated Mirror Substitution.

The next second, two Higdons spread out like dirty, slimy "blankets," wrapping Franca and Jenna in a Sure Hit.

A cracking sound followed.

Meanwhile, Anthony, quietly lurking at the edge of the park, leaning against a half-wall, suddenly saw a greenish-yellow mucus-covered Higdon appear beside him.

He had been discovered after all.

Higdon pushed with both hands, sending a greenish-black light ball towards Anthony.

Crack!

Anthony used his last Mirror Substitution, his figure appearing behind this Higdon.

Seeing this, Anthony had an epiphany.

An opportunity!

He didn't flee but raised his Winter is Coming revolver, aimed at Higdon, and pulled the trigger.

Certain Death!

A yellowish bullet, tinged with dim green, crossed the short distance, hitting Higdon.

Covered in greenish-yellow mucus, Higdon froze, his body quickly disintegrating into small drops, falling to the ground without any spirituality.

This Higdon was dead.

But the other three Higdons remained unaffected.

After confirming this, Franca and Jenna felt utter despair.

Their previous plan involved the two Demonesses as bait, giving Anthony a chance to shoot one Higdon with the Certain Death bullet, hoping to kill all Higdons.

Unexpectedly, the Certain Death effect only worked on the one hit.

Moments later, they saw the Pride Armor hit by a Certain Death attack, metal fragments falling from its chest, standing still.

Jenna gritted her teeth, ready to forgo the ritual and gamble on forcibly advancing by consuming the ingredients of the Demoness of Affliction.

At least it would restore her spirituality.

Even if she failed, she could turn into a monster, giving Franca a chance to escape.

Before Jenna could reach into her Traveler's Bag, another figure appeared at the edge of the area.

It was Voisin Sanson, with his blond hair turning white, who had chased them here!

Jenna and Franca's hearts sank rapidly. Jenna no longer hesitated.

At this moment, above one of the Higdons, a black iron sword, burning with white-blue flames, suddenly fell from the sky, accurately piercing the top of this Higdon's head.

Boom!

This Higdon exploded into fragments, the spreading white-blue flames turning into silent blackness, engulfing each piece.

The fragments never reappeared, and a figure quickly appeared in the eyes of Franca, Jenna, and Anthony.

Chapter 880: Walking Destruction

Chapter 880 Walking Destruction

In an instant, the figure became clear.

Everyone present, including Higdon and Voisin Sanson, was stunned.

The person had a slim face, light blue eyes resembling clear and dreamy lakes up in the highlands, a perfectly shaped nose, and lips neither too thick nor too thin. Her features were striking and graceful, with a peculiar sharpness that seemed to pierce through any defense of body and mind, straight to the soul, hitting its weakest spot.

At the same time, she had a cold demeanor, her face void of any smile, as if she had just killed thousands of people. Her long, straight black hair gently floated in the aftermath of the explosion.

At this moment, Franca recalled a description she had read before her transmigration: "Her beauty is aggressive…"

As she pondered, Franca felt a strong sense of familiarity.

Why does she look a bit like Lumian?

No, not a bit, a lot—like Lumian feminized and beautified, with some Photoshopped editing…

Right, she's holding the Sword of Courage!

My spiritual intuition tells me she is Lumian!

Demoness of Despair! Lumian escaped Voisin Sanson's pursuit, entered Morora, and without enough teammates to perform the Iron-blooded Knight ritual, chose to use the exiles there to advance to Demoness of Despair?

That's ruthless… something Lumian would do…

No, did he choose all the options I gave him?

I must admit—more beautiful than I imagined…

Uh, who helped him shatter the Black Tear?

As Franca's thoughts raced, Jenna shouted in pleasant surprise, "Lumian!"

The enchanted Higdon and Voisin Sanson snapped back to reality.

Lumian's figure disappeared again, reappearing behind another Higdon.

The Higdon covered in greenish-yellow mucus was prepared, instantly disintegrating into countless droplets.

However, around him, an almost impermeable invisible web suddenly appeared.

The web covered an area of about thirty meters, decaying rapidly while trapping and binding Higdon's greenish-yellow droplets.

Silent, destructive black flames surged from the Demoness-form Lumian, igniting the nearly decayed web and engulfing every greenish-yellow fragment, stripping them of all spirituality.

"Idiot!" Lumian cursed expressionlessly, his figure disappearing once more.

I didn't continue attacking but used Charm to buy time to weave this web, anticipating your escape!

Though Lumian used teleportation and invisibility, the black flames from his body did not extinguish.

After burning the web and the trapped Higdon fragments, the flames quickly spread across most of the park-like ruins, igniting the pervasive disease in the air.

Feeling the power of the disease and decay significantly diminishing, Franca didn't search for Lumian. Instead, she tacitly charged at Voisin Sanson.

She sensed Lumian wanted to eliminate Higdon first, so they needed to hold off Voisin Sanson, the Circle Inhabitant, to prevent him from interfering in Lumian and Higdon's battle.

Every moment counted!

Jenna had a similar feeling, quickly hiding and circling around Voisin Sanson, ready to support Franca and Anthony.

Among them, Anthony could inflict the most damage on a demigod!

Anthony used Psychological Invisibility again, cautiously approaching Voisin Sanson.

Voisin Sanson was still confused and fearful—he couldn't figure out where he went wrong trying to unseal and release Lord Termiboros, which allowed Lumian Lee to escape.

For a devout follower of Inevitability, this was a mistake redeemable only by death.

As soon as he regained control, Voisin Sanson hurried to the battlefield of Higdon and Lumian's companions, hoping to capture Lumian's teammates and force him back to save them, thus regaining control over him.

Unexpectedly, Lumian had indeed returned, but as a Demoness, a demigod-level Demoness!

If not for the fact that his lust-enhancing contract wasn't with a demigod creature and he had become a demigod-level Ascetic, he would have already lost control under that soul-piercing Charm.

Quickly, Voisin Sanson spotted Lumian's figure, emerging behind the last Higdon.

Voisin Sanson was about to teleport over and hunt him down when Franca's figure appeared behind him.

Franca raised her left hand, adorned with a black iron spiked ring, her eyes glowing with two streaks of lightning.

Psychic Piercing!

Voisin Sanson's body shook slightly, his soul feeling a brief pain.

Immediately, a transparent figure resembling him grew from his back, coldly gazing at Franca.

Crack!

Franca used her last Mirror Substitution, the fragments falling lifelessly to the ground.

Simultaneously, Jenna appeared several meters to the side.

She held a brown leather scroll, chanting a word in Hermes, "Sun!"

The scroll burst into radiant sunlight, enveloping Voisin Sanson in its holy and fiery light.

Though the power of Inevitability was not evil, corrupt, or dark, it contained a will that, for Sanson, was foreign and had to be expelled.

Of course, after reaching the demigod level, Voisin Sanson's consciousness had been corrupted and influenced by that will, aligning more closely with its master, so the purification effect wouldn't be too significant. However, his contracted creatures included dark, evil, and corrupt types, some of which feared purification. So, under the sunlight, Voisin Sanson couldn't help but close his eyes, raise his right hand to shield his face, and black smoke sizzled from his body.

As a demigod, Voisin Sanson wouldn't suffer severe damage from such Purification and would soon recover, but this gave Anthony a chance.

Anthony stopped, raised his Winter is Coming revolver, and pulled the trigger after a simple aim.

Bang!

A dark yellow bullet flew toward Voisin Sanson.

Sure Hit!

Anthony wasn't sure if Voisin Sanson had a substitute ability, so he chose Sure Hit instead of Certain Death.

Clang!

The bullet hit Voisin Sanson, producing a metallic sound, tearing his clothes, and causing his skin and flesh to rupture.

In the instant he was enveloped by sunlight, unsure of what he might encounter if he teleported away, Voisin Sanson activated a contract ability to metallize himself, enhancing his defense without amplifying the effect of the sunlight.

If the next attack couldn't be stopped even with metallization, Voisin Sanson could trigger the Circle Inhabitant effect, resetting his body state.

During the desperate blockade by Franca, Jenna, and Anthony, the last Higdon, seemingly foreseeing this, suddenly grew two greenish-yellow mucus-covered arms from his back, pushing out a dim green light at the Demoness of Despair, Lumian.

Certain Death!

The light hit Lumian's tall, perfect body but passed through.

The figure wavered like ripples, quickly shattering—just an illusion.

At this moment, multiple Lumian figures with black hair lightly floating appeared around Higdon, all wielding the Sword of Courage, slashing at the Sequence 4 demigod of the Order of All Extinction.

This was the demigod-level Demoness's utilization of the special mirror world, with each figure possibly being a mirror illusion or the real Lumian hidden among them!

Higdon's body suddenly disintegrated into dim greenish light, indiscriminately using the Certain Death effect.

This was both an area attack and an escape!

At this moment, another Lumian appeared in midair.

He held the Sword of Courage with both hands, descending heavily and stabbing the ground.

Rumble!

White-blue flames followed the violent explosion, quickly engulfing the area, consuming the dim greenish light striking the various Lumian figures, not giving them a chance to split into more Higdons.

Immediately, the white-blue flames turned into silent black, igniting and devouring all spirituality in the area with a destructive presence.

Smack!

As the black flames receded, a fist-sized lump of greenish-yellow mucus fell to the ground.

This was deliberately left by Lumian.

He grabbed the mucus without fearing infection, holding it in his hand and smearing it on a mirror.

His hand, covered in black flames, pressed onto it.

The greenish-yellow mucus let out a shrill scream.

In another dark ruin, another Higdon had just found Ludwig and was about to reach for the little boy with a ravenous expression when silent black flames bizarrely erupted from within him.

He was quickly engulfed by the black flames, turning into lifeless liquid, dripping to the ground.

After dealing with Higdon, Lumian teleported directly in front of Voisin Sanson, signaling Franca, Jenna, and Anthony, who had no Mirror Substitutes left, to retreat.

In Voisin Sanson's eyes, just recovering from the fierce sunlight, the coldly beautiful Demoness curled her lips into a soul-capturing smile.

Voisin Sanson froze for a moment, hearing a slightly magnetic, pleasant voice in his ear: "Hope your Circle Inhabitant effect still works; I don't want to kill you just once."

Chapter 881: Three Times

Chapter 881 Three Times

Voisin Sanson felt there was no warmth in the voice's laughter, and he suddenly shuddered, snapping back to reality.

His first reaction was to quickly teleport out of this area, because Lumian had become a potion pathway demigod, and still had three companions assisting him. Meanwhile, Sanson's ally, the other demigod Higdon, had been completely killed by Lumian in a very short time.

No matter how devoutly he believed in the great Circle of Inevitability, no matter how urgently he longed to rescue Lord Termiboros, the Angel of Inevitability, today, Voisin Sanson was not so blind as to misread the current situation.

He knew he only had two choices: stay and fight to the death, or flee quickly and wait for another opportunity.

At this moment, it was not difficult to decide which to choose.

As the black mark on his body activated, Voisin Sanson's figure disappeared from where he stood.

The next second, he appeared dozens of meters away, facing a dark, transparent, almost glass-like barrier ahead.

The barrier flickered in and out of visibility, sealing off an area the size of a plaza.

Lumian, his body now slightly slimmer, held the huge iron-black straight sword and did not stop Voisin Sanson's attempt. He only said in a slightly mocking tone, "This is the special mirror world, and a demigod-level Demoness can utilize the power of this world to some extent.

"If you want to break the mirror barrier and 'teleport' out, there's only one way—defeat me, kill me."

Voisin Sanson struggled for a moment but failed to succeed. He had no choice but to turn around and face Lumian.

Then he saw the other reveal a beautiful but dangerous smile.

Lumian did not act immediately, because he was listening to the beating of his own heart.

The seal of Mr. Fool on him had lost its effect, but Amon had left some power in the original position, preventing the soul fragments of Aurore and others from leaking out and perishing completely.

Of course, this was only a temporary restriction. In two or three days at most, the seal would completely dissipate.

And because of the vast difference in strength between the two seals, Lumian felt that the distance between himself and his sister had shortened considerably, as if he could hear her voice and receive her thoughts.

Thump, thump, thump.

That heartbeat was familiar and warm.

"Do you see? Voisin Sanson is right in front of us, that heretic who always made you have nightmares, who scared you into fleeing Trier.

"Do you see? He's afraid."

Lumian whispered these two sentences with a gentle expression, then raised his head and cast his gaze toward Voisin Sanson.

During this process, he teleported several times in succession, changing his position to prevent Voisin Sanson's attacks from affecting him.

Lumian slightly arched his back and gripped the Sword of Courage with both hands.

The next second, his figure suddenly faded, blinking to the front of Voisin Sanson, seemingly intending to ignore the other's counterattack and forcibly cleave the target in two.

Voisin Sanson did not hesitate because of how beautiful this image was or how alluring this figure was. Relying on the endurance ability of an Ascetic, he concentrated dark green light in his eyes.

As the beam surged forth, Lumian had already become transparent, turning into a mirror.

Smack!

Just as the mirror shattered, Lumian's figure appeared behind Voisin Sanson, maintaining the downward slashing motion with the iron-black straight sword.

Voisin Sanson quickly let the semi-transparent figure resembling himself emerge, staring at Lumian.

But Lumian's figure suddenly became illusory, as if reflected in a mirror.

At the same time, Lumian materialized above Voisin Sanson's head, holding the iron-black straight sword burning with white-blue flames; he completed the last motion of this attack with a jumping slash.

Clang!

The Sword of Courage struck the junction between Voisin Sanson's neck and shoulder, directly cleaving open the skin and flesh gleaming with metallic luster, staining it with bright red blood.

Immediately after, a violent explosion occurred, and Voisin Sanson's body was about to be torn apart.

At this moment, Lumian was slightly dazed, while Voisin Sanson instantly returned to his original state, teleporting to the other side of the sealed area.

Lumian did not pursue closely, but turned his body to face the white-haired fatalist and said with a smile, "First time."

Voisin Sanson immediately felt his scalp tingle, understanding that the other meant he had already killed him once, with many more times to come.

He immediately activated a contract ability called "Phantom".

He suddenly split into dozens of copies of himself, and each Voisin Sanson seemed capable of teleporting, appearing in different positions and corners of the sealed area.

They simultaneously raised their right hands, their eyes reflecting the corresponding mercury-colored illusory river of Lumian.

This could be either Magnified Fate or Fate Exchange!

And Lumian seemed unable to distinguish which Voisin Sanson was real, unable to effectively prevent it.

Lumian's light blue eyes smiled without mirth.

He glanced at the Sword of Courage and found that Voisin Sanson's blood, which should have stained it, had disappeared, as if returning to the body of that Circle Inhabitant.

Lumian was not surprised. He suddenly threw the Sword of Courage, hurling it towards the center of the sealed area.

The huge iron-black straight sword fell to the ground like a cannonball.

Rumble!

A massive explosion suddenly occurred, shaking even the special mirror world, and white-blue flames quickly covered every inch of ground and every bit of air in the sealed area.

This was why Lumian had limited the battlefield to the size of a plaza.

The phantoms created by Voisin Sanson were quickly destroyed. After struggling to resist for two seconds, his true body shattered, triggering the Circle Inhabitant effect.

Lumian himself was also engulfed by the explosion, the flames scorching his skin, the shockwave tearing at his body.

Then, he turned into a mirror.

The mirror immediately shattered.

As the explosion quickly subsided, Lumian looked at Voisin Sanson, who was far away from him, and smiled more obviously.

"Second time."

His clear light blue eyes, like highland lakes, still held no mirth.

As he spoke, invisible spider silk extended from Lumian's body, binding the hilt of the Sword of Courage and dragging it back.

Realizing that the area-of-effect attack of the iron-black straight sword could completely cover this area, and that none of his contract abilities were sufficient to withstand such an explosion, Voisin Sanson was overcome with a feeling called despair.

Although before chasing here, he had already canceled the previous Circle Inhabitant effect and waited for the restriction to end, resetting the same Circle Inhabitant with nine more chances to trigger, now with seven left, if Lumian were to throw that iron-black straight sword again and again, repeating the area-of-effect explosion from earlier, he didn't think seven Circle Inhabitant effects would have much significance.

Unless that iron-black straight sword needed some time between such attacks.

Voisin Sanson dared not gamble. He chose to end the Circle Inhabitant effect on himself.

His right hand pressed towards Lumian's approaching figure from a distance, and silver-white lines with black edges appeared in his eyes.

These lines twisted like snakes, framing Lumian's figure in the middle, then quickly connected head to tail.

Voisin Sanson wanted to make Lumian a Circle Inhabitant!

Different types of Circle Inhabitant effects didn't need to wait for restrictions to end.

And in the same time period, Voisin Sanson, at only Sequence 4, could maintain only one "Circle".

His preset condition now was that if Lumian made any move to attack him, it would trigger the Circle Inhabitant effect, resetting the state of this Demoness of Despair—such harsh conditions couldn't be placed on an area-of-effect Circle Inhabitant, and would be suppressed by the target's level, not achieving the best effect, unlike the area-of-effect Circle Inhabitant which could affect even Angel-level Beyonders.

The Inevitability power Voisin Sanson attached to this Circle Inhabitant could only maintain three cycles. Once it exceeded three times and started the fourth, the destined fate would arrive.

Of course, what exactly this destined fate would be needed to be chosen by Voisin Sanson himself.

Because he had to complete this "Circle" quickly, otherwise Lumian could launch an attack first, Voisin Sanson had no time to discern carefully. He just glanced and chose a tributary from Lumian's illusory mercury-colored long river, placing it into the circle.

It was the tributary of the Mirror People being hostile to this Demoness of Despair, which could help Voisin Sanson destroy the surrounding mirror barriers, giving him a chance to teleport and escape.

The worse the destined fate, the worse the final result, the more Inevitability power Voisin Sanson had to invest, and the longer it would take to complete the Circle Inhabitant, which was not suitable for the current situation.

As soon as this "circle" was completed, Lumian immediately had a spiritual intuition and put down the Sword of Courage in his hand, no longer advancing.

Seeing this, Voisin Sanson instinctively concentrated dark green light in his eyes.

Those two beams shot out like light, instantly falling on Lumian, who once again turned into a mirror, his body materializing not far from his original position.

Seeing this, Voisin Sanson suddenly froze.

Why didn't Harrison and I think of using this method to trap Lumian when facing his attacks?

That way we could have resolved the battle faster, without needing to be killed several times…

And now, he still had who knows how many Mirror Substitutions.

Voisin Sanson quickly decided to provoke Lumian to attack. His eyes once again lit up with a dark green hue.

Just then, even with the endurance of an Ascetic, Voisin Sanson couldn't help but cough once, causing the dark green beam in his eyes to deviate from its target and fall on the distant mirror barrier.

The barrier was slightly damaged but instantly repaired itself.

Voisin Sanson began to feel his body weakening, each breath feeling like his airways were being scorched by flames.

His spirituality was also rapidly depleting.

Disease… I've been infected by the Demoness's disease! Voisin Sanson suddenly raised his head, just in time to see Lumian reveal a mocking but beautiful smile.

"Why did you think the explosion and incineration from earlier could directly kill my mystical pathogens?

"They can persist for quite a while longer."

Voisin Sanson's heart tightened, and he frantically attacked Lumian, but only managed to shatter three or four mirrors.

And with each ineffective attack, Voisin Sanson grew more desperate. He seemed to already see the worst outcome approaching, yet was powerless to reverse it, only able to watch helplessly as the bell of death tolled.

He even tried to metallize his body, but the disease could still infect him, eating into him.

Cough, cough, cough!

After many more attempts, Voisin Sanson finally lost the strength to stand. He collapsed to the ground, coughing violently as he fell.

He no longer had the power to maintain the Circle Inhabitant effect on Lumian.

Lumian walked step by step to the front of this Circle Inhabitant, looking down at him from above, and said with a mocking smile, "Only three times?"

Voisin Sanson raised his head with difficulty, looking at that beautiful and cold face, feeling as if he was rapidly falling into a bottomless abyss.

That feeling was the epitome of despair.

Lumian bound Voisin Sanson with a spider web, suspending him in the air, then formed a sharp, thick ice pillar beneath him.

"Goodbye, give my regards to your master," Lumian said softly, retracting all the spider silk.

Pfft!

Voisin Sanson fell heavily, impaled by the ice pillar.

His eyes bulged, and blood flowed beneath him.

Chapter 882: The True Purpose

Chapter 882 The True Purpose

Seeing Voisin Sanson's eyes bulge, his breath gradually fading, his face twisted in pain and palpable despair, Lumian reached behind into the Traveler's Bag and took out the silver Lie earring, putting it on his left ear.

The dying Voisin Sanson suddenly saw a familiar figure.

That figure had light blue eyes, beautiful features, and long, thick golden hair.

It was Aurore.

But this time, there was no longer fear or terror on Aurore's face, only a faint smile.

"Gasp…" Voisin Sanson uttered his final sound.

He died like that, with his eyes bulging.

Lumian returned to his original appearance, casually saying as he removed the Lie earring, "You died so quickly? I wanted to thank you for helping me digest the Despair potion."

When he had just advanced, the Despair potion was already mostly digested, and now it had progressed even further.

Lumian wasn't surprised by this. According to the mystical knowledge he had learned from Madam Magician, the essence of the acting method was actually to gradually align one's mental and spiritual state with the core symbolism of the potion through acting, thereby bypassing restrictions and completing digestion step by step. His state before and after taking the Despair potion could be said to be very close to the name "Despair".

Lumian wasn't despairing about having to become a Demoness. For faster advancement, better handling of possible apocalyptic scenarios, and earlier resurrection of his sister, he had considered similar things more than once. After all, he would have the chance to switch to the Hunter pathway and become a man again later.

He despaired that he was forced to do this and had no way to refuse. He despaired that his previous efforts, struggles, and anger were all under someone else's arrangements, and that he would have to follow someone else's arrangements to walk the path of the Demoness afterwards.

Of course, when despair reached its peak, the desire and belief in his heart to become strong and change all this also intensified to the extreme.

"Is this what you wanted too?" Lumian whispered self-mockingly as he unsealed the area and let the remaining mystical pathogens dissipate completely.

Franca, Jenna, and Anthony had already hurried over after Voisin Sanson was impaled on the ice pillar.

Lumian suddenly sensed something and turned his gaze to a certain spot in this dark ruin.

It was where the Order of All Extinction demigod Higdon had finally died.

There, points of green light with yellow tinges appeared out of thin air, rising upwards, only to be blocked by the barrier of the special mirror world.

This place preliminarily cuts off connections, preventing some bestowed power from returning? Lumian, with his experience, immediately made the corresponding judgment.

By this time, Franca and the others had run up to him.

Looking at that familiar yet beautiful and cold face, Franca opened her mouth, wanting to say something, but swallowed it back.

Jenna examined Lumian's current appearance, with only one thought in mind: It's good that he's still alive; it's best that everyone is still alive!

As for the rest, there was nothing to worry about.

Lumian pointed to those green lights with yellow tinges that were being blocked, his voice slightly magnetic and distinctly feminine as he said, "You can take a weapon over there and place it there."

This was actively creating a Beyonder weapon.

After Franca exchanged glances with Jenna and Anthony, she very proactively said without any modesty, "I'll go; I'm just in need of a weapon that can harm demigods."

She was the second highest Sequence Beyonder in the team—not counting Ludwig.

If she had had a similar weapon earlier, she might not have been so desperate when facing Higdon.

"Alright," Jenna expressed her attitude.

Anthony also nodded.

This didn't mean that if he put the Winter is Coming revolver under those light spots, this Beyonder weapon would reset its usage count. Given its own material composition, doing so would likely cause the corruption to exceed the limit, making it disintegrate directly.

Franca took out her Cannon Gun and ran towards the area permeated with green light spots with yellow tinges.

Lumian withdrew his gaze, looked at Jenna, and said with a slight smile, "Do you have any ring-shaped items?"

Jenna, looking at that smile that seemed to radiate its own light, was a bit surprised, but felt that now was not the time to ask.

She found a cheap silver bracelet and handed it to Lumian.

After taking it, Lumian placed the bracelet on top of Voisin Sanson's corpse, waiting for the Inevitability power to be intercepted.

He then looked towards the distant transparent boundary that was like a mirror, seeing his own figure and face.

He made an effort to bring a smile to the corners of his mouth.

Because Aurore was just such a person who excelled at finding joy in suffering.

…

In front of the bloody altar, Ma'am Hermit was trying to find a way to combine the iron cigar case bearing Mr. Fool's aura with the Spear of Longinus to directly attack that oil painting depicting endless starry skies. Madam Magician, based on her rich knowledge of seals and powerful sealing abilities, carefully said, "The power of Inevitability is to make the interference of non-vortex ritual participants fail, while that terrifying voice affects all Beyonders similar to Listeners and Mystery Pryers. We may be able to solve them separately.

"The power of Inevitability is most likely dissipating from that circular ring on the oil painting. If we can plug it, shield it, we should be able to break free from the fate of interference being destined to fail, directly destroy the painting, and interrupt that terrifying voice."

"Plug it…" Ma'am Hermit immediately had an idea upon hearing Miss Justice's relay.

Taking advantage of the opportunity when the barrier seal was strengthened and the power of inevitability was significantly weakened, she cast a Warlock's spell, throwing that iron cigar case towards the oil painting on the altar, making it land accurately on the area painted with the silver-white ring with black edges.

The iron cigar case directly pressed down on that ring, shielding it, without leaving any trace exposed.

The little boy, Will, immediately said, "The power of Inevitability has decreased a lot more!"

Hearing this, Madam Magician quickly raised both arms, making the void around that oil painting bend, becoming dark and deep.

That space subsequently collapsed, shattering inch by inch, along with obvious cracks appearing on the oil painting and altar.

Miss Justice's face then protruded with patches of grayish-white scales, her body seeming to swell.

Similarly, Madam Judgment once again made a judgment.

Seeing her companions all launching attacks, Ma'am Hermit once again condensed that ancient spear stained with strange blood, throwing it towards the oil painting.

The oil painting, already in tatters under continuous attacks, was completely pierced by this Spear of Longinus, nailed to the altar.

Immediately after, flames that seemed to encompass all colors erupted from the spear tip, completely igniting the oil painting that still had terrifying sounds leaking out, gradually burning it to ashes.

…

Above Trier, one Worm of Time after another crawled back into Mr. Star's body.

This Major Arcana card holder wearing red gloves said to Mr. Hanged Man in his original magnetic voice, "Amon has returned, and briefly regained the true god powers of the Error and Door pathways. I must return to the Cathedral of Serenity immediately."

As soon as he finished speaking, Mr. Star instantly disappeared.

Mr. Hanged Man cast his gaze downward, seeing the "Moon" transformed into crimson moonlight fall into the extremely compressed villa mist, while Saint Viève of the Eternal Blazing Sun Church shone into it in the form of sunlight.

…

Deep in the primitive island, outside the Black Emperor mausoleum.

Amon, at the edge of the astral world, looked down at Perle, at the Shadow of the Beauty Goddess and the miniature crimson moon still struggling to approach the corresponding light spots in the white mist, without any action.

"What are you still waiting for?" Roselle, his face gradually deepening in pain, asked.

"The same as what you're thinking now, the most arrogant thought you've ever had." Amon pinched the monocle on his right eye and smiled in response. "If it was just to eliminate the believers of Uncertain Mist, there would be no need for such trouble, nor would it be worth us revealing our trump cards."

Roselle glanced at the transaction still ongoing below and said, "That could bring great hidden dangers."

"When you make a decision, you have to accept the corresponding consequences. How can you accomplish something big without taking any risks or bearing any losses?" Amon said with a smile, then added, "This wasn't said by me, nor by you."

Before Roselle, who was being eroded more and more deeply and painfully by the white mist, could respond, Amon looked into the distance and said, "Those few from the Tarot Club are not bad, they don't need me to personally descend to destroy that oil painting."

Saying this, Amon, wearing a monocle, showed an eager expression. "Now, it's time."

He cast his gaze towards the Black Emperor mausoleum, towards Bernadette who was being restricted by Roselle and unable to come out.

That Queen Mystic suddenly recalled something, feeling as if a certain memory had parted the mist and revealed itself.

She immediately stretched out her right hand, quickly sketching out one word after another bearing starlight in front of her.

These words, seemingly the source of all languages in the Northern and Southern Continents, quickly intertwined into strange symbols, opening a secret door that seemed to lead to the depths of the spirit world.

That secret door opened silently, and a gust of wind blew out, transforming into a man with a human upper body and an airflow lower body, wrapped in white cloth.

"The Magic Wishing Lamp and that item," Bernadette commanded in an authoritative voice.

That man with an airflow lower body respectfully responded, then took out two items from the white cloth wrapped around his body.

One looked like a miniature kettle, golden in color, covered with mysterious and complex symbols, with something like a wick protruding from the spout. This was 0-05—the Magic Wishing Lamp that the believers of Uncertain Mist wanted to obtain.

The other was a gray stone tablet, also engraved with those words that seemed to be the source of all languages in the Northern and Southern Continents, with numerous traces on its surface, mottled and ancient.

Chapter 883: The Poor Genie

Chapter 883 The Poor Genie

After receiving those two items, Bernadette had fully remembered what she and the former Angel of Imagination, now the True Creator—Adam—were cooperating on.

Now, it was the final step of this transaction. The gray stone tablet she held in her hand was the second Blasphemy Slate transformed from the remains of the Ancient Sun God, the predecessor of the True Creator, recording the names, potion formulas, and related rituals for each Sequence of the twenty-two paths of the divine!

Bernadette originally didn't want to push the transaction to this step, hoping to resolve the corruption issue on her father's body before this, thereby ending the vortex ritual, but ultimately, she had to face the current situation.

Many of her efforts had failed, and several of her backup plans either didn't have time to take effect, or lost their effect because she was restricted by her father in the mausoleum and unable to leave. She could only hope that the proclaimed inevitable outcome would come to pass.

Bernadette raised both hands, pushing the Magic Wishing Lamp and the second Blasphemy Slate towards midair.

The moment He saw these two items, Emperor Roselle fully understood all of True Creator Adam's arrangements and ultimate purpose.

He reached out His hand, distorting the distance between the Magic Wishing Lamp and Himself, making it fall directly into His palm.

The Blasphemy Slate first disappeared, then appeared in the hands of Amon, who was wearing a black pointed soft hat.

Holding the Magic Wishing Lamp, Roselle smiled calmly at Amon and said, "Now that I am the true Black Emperor, and deeply corrupted by the Uncertain Mist, I indeed might be able to do something with this Magic Wishing Lamp and the Genie inside it as a medium."

"It's not 'might', it's 'certainly'," Amon adjusted the monocle on His right eye, smiling as He corrected.

Roselle didn't say more. Holding the Magic Wishing Lamp, He half-closed His eyes, extending His consciousness to this golden object.

This brought along some of the white mist that had begun to erode His consciousness.

Vaguely, Roselle seemed to see another barrier standing between heaven and earth.

That barrier was wrapped in thin grayish-white fog, its specific appearance indiscernible.

Soon, Roselle sensed a gap in the grayish-white fog, on that invisible barrier, but couldn't lock onto it.

At this moment, Amon pressed His right hand against the crystal monocle wedged in His eye socket.

That monocle suddenly lit up with a brilliance that seemed to illuminate the entire world.

Roselle's consciousness, preliminarily combined with the Uncertain Mist's corruption, instantly floated into the corresponding gap.

A haze immediately appeared before His "eyes".

Deep within that swirling smoke seemed to be hidden thirty-three layers of sky, each layer with numerous buildings faintly visible.

Roselle's consciousness quickly ascended, arriving at the highest layer of sky, coming to a majestic and grand palace.

He "saw" an incredibly enormous imperial figure, "saw" that the figure's face was masked by strings of jade, and beneath the jade strings seemed to be nothing, a void.

Roselle inexplicably felt that this enormous imperial figure was very similar to Himself, born from the same source, yet encompassing Him. A close connection was quickly established between the two.

This connection swiftly eroded Roselle's consciousness, yet was blocked by the corruption of the Uncertain Mist. They both merged and opposed each other.

Roselle momentarily regained some clarity.

A flash of inspiration struck Him, and using that close connection, He lowered His stance and said in His true mother tongue, "Imperial brother, please lend me your strength!"

That emperor with a face shielded by jade strings attached to a tall oriental crown suddenly stood up.

Behind Him, several similar imperial figures appeared, these figures each with different external appearances, but similarly with faces covered in jade strings, lacking faces, a complete void.

At the same time, all thirty-three layers of the sky deep within the haze lit up, revealing magnificent buildings and sacred figures.

Roselle's vision was instantly filled with azure light.

His consciousness suddenly returned to the Black Emperor divine body, seeing bursts of azure light erupting from within, dispersing and dissolving the white mist that had deeply eroded Him. Yet as time passed, the azure light and white mist began to show signs of merging in some places.

During this process, the Uncertain Mist did not withdraw its white mist. On the one hand, this was due to the barrier's obstruction and the influence of the True Creator and Amon; on the other hand, the Uncertain Mist was following its own chaotic madness, following its instinctive desires and cravings, wanting to truly merge with the azure light.

Roselle increasingly felt as if He was another facet of the Uncertain Mist, the connection established between Them through the white mist quickly becoming unusually solid.

At this point, even if the Uncertain Mist wanted to recall that white mist, it couldn't be done instantly, requiring some time, unless Roselle agreed.

The ball of white mist from the vortex ritual involuntarily rose, flying towards Roselle's body. This terrified Perle, who was currently only able to survive with the help of this mist, while the Shadow of the Beauty Goddess and the miniature crimson moon in the mist both stopped advancing, standing still.

Roselle once again cast His gaze towards Amon, who was holding the Blasphemy Slate, and said with some emotion, "As expected of a Visionary…"

To dare to imagine this, to dare to arrange this!

Amon's previous answer had confirmed Roselle's initial and boldest guess was correct.

The true purpose of the True Creator using the vortex ritual was to deal with the Uncertain Mist, that great existence peering at the current world!

Normally, even if that True Creator and the six true gods in the astral world put aside Their grudges and fully cooperated, They couldn't accomplish such a thing, at most forcing the Uncertain Mist to retreat. But now, He had used the vortex ritual, used the Uncertain Mist's craving for the Black Emperor true god, allowing the Uncertain Mist to establish a firm and close connection with Himself, making Himself increasingly similar to the Uncertain Mist, thus creating a certain opportunity.

Of course, the so-called opportunity certainly wasn't to use this connection to transfer power over and directly attack the Uncertain Mist; that wouldn't lead to a very good effect. But in the mystical world, there were some underlying rules that could be exploited, many ways to defeat powerful existences by harming the weak, which was the basis of many curses.

As this thought flashed, Roselle began to rub His fingers over the golden surface of the Magic Wishing Lamp, covered in mysterious and complex symbols, muttering, "Genie!"

The wick at the spout suddenly ignited, emitting light that looked like viscous water, spurting upwards to form a blurred and distorted pale golden figure.

As soon as that pale golden figure appeared, He turned His head, about to dive back into the Magic Wishing Lamp, but the white mist and azure light eroding Roselle's Black Emperor divine body suddenly split off a large portion, like a bear smelling honey or a vampire placed next to a pool of fresh, healthy blood, violently surging around this pale golden figure, binding it layer upon layer, as if submerging it.

Genie twisted and struggled desperately, trying to escape this predicament and shrink back into the Magic Wishing Lamp, but couldn't succeed no matter what. His pale golden figure gradually showed signs of merging with the white mist and azure light.

Genie's mouth kept opening and closing, as if frantically cursing Amon and Roselle, but restrained by the white mist and azure light, He couldn't even make a sound.

Roselle raised the Magic Wishing Lamp and Genie to His chest level, distorting the relationship between the main body and external items, briefly making Himself an appendage of Genie.

In an instant, Genie, originally one with the Uncertain Mist and completely of the same source, seemed to become another facet of the Uncertain Mist again, yet was subjected to sealing, unable to exert His power, appearing quite weak!

Roselle looked at Amon again.

Now, before your authority over loopholes as a true god of the Error pathway, under this firm and close connection, from a mystical perspective, the weak Genie can completely equal the powerful Uncertain Mist. Severely injuring Genie would be equivalent to severely injuring the Uncertain Mist and making Genie fall asleep would be equivalent to making the Uncertain Mist fall asleep!

What happens next is up to the two of you!

Amon smiled and raised the Blasphemy Slate in His hand.

In the Forsaken Land of the Gods, atop the majestic and stretching mountain range, before a huge blood-stained cross.

The True Creator—Adam—who had shaken off the influence of the Outer God's ravings, was already waiting here.

He wore a simple white robe, had a thick golden beard, eyes as clear as a child's, and beneath His feet was a dense shadow, different from Him, with five heads. It seemed to be His, yet not His.

Adam opened His mouth and said solemnly and sacredly, "I am One, and also Infinity, the Beginning and the End."

As soon as He finished speaking, True Creator Adam's clear eyes instantly became illusory, and around His body appeared a strange sea that seemed to encompass all colors and all possibilities.

Immediately after, Adam grasped the silver cross pendant hanging on His chest.

Above His head, a blazing yet illusory sun leaped out. To His left, lightning, gale winds, and sea waves interwove to form an overlooking phantom. To His right, a white tower with numerous brass eyes rose from the ground.

These illusory, seemingly imagined authorities and symbols, along with Adam's own shadow, driven by the chaotic sea, merged into Adam's body one after another.

With a thunderous sound, that strange sea encompassing all colors and all possibilities surged up, submerging the entire mountain range, while Adam expanded into a huge figure of light that seemed capable of supporting heaven and earth.

This True Creator briefly returned to His peak state, and that human savior who had battled ancient gods appeared in the world once again!

He walked slowly on the chaotic and pitch-black "water surface", pointing His finger towards the sea that was both real and illusory.

With this pointing, the surface of the second Blasphemy Slate in Amon's hand quickly surged with chaotic seawater encompassing all colors and all possibilities.

Amon no longer held it directly, letting this mottled and ancient stone tablet float in front of His body.

He then looked towards the pale golden Genie that was frantically twisting while seemingly cursing Him, revealing a smile that made the other even more furious.

Then, He let that Blasphemy Slate rise up.

Chapter 884: The Future He Proclaimed

Chapter 884 The Future He Proclaimed

As the Blasphemy Slate in front of Amon rose up, the white mist corroding Roselle and Genie suddenly reacted, trying to break free and retreat back to the endless cosmos. But Roselle forcibly "held" it down, only allowing it to withdraw bit by bit.

Similarly, the pale golden Genie struggled desperately, trying to dive back into the Magic Wishing Lamp through the spout, but Roselle gave Him no such opportunity, firmly binding Him in front using the white mist and azure light.

Roselle turned His head to look down at the Black Emperor mausoleum, Distorting the distinction between inside and outside, and gave His eldest daughter Bernadette a smile that was both pained and satisfied.

He called out loudly, "Enjoy this world for me for a while!"

"Dad!" Queen Mystic Bernadette cried out, her cheeks glistening with tears.

Roselle said no more, turning His gaze back and standing upright.

He continued to resist the retraction of the white mist, tightly gripping Genie, then raised His chin and said to Amon in an authoritative and firm voice, "Do it."

Amon's monocle on His right eye instantly lit up with a strange radiance. He pressed down with both hands, causing the floating Blasphemy Slate before Him to heavily smash towards the pale golden Genie and Roselle who was "embracing" Genie.

The chaotic seawater encompassing all colors and possibilities transformed into a torrent, surging over mightily.

Drawn by this, the ball of white mist representing the vortex ritual, along with Perle, the Shadow of the Beauty Goddess, and the miniature crimson moon inside it, also rushed rapidly towards Genie and Roselle.

At this moment, within the vortex's white mist, a previously unexpanded point of light rapidly enlarged, revealing a dim and dark scene that seemed to correspond to both Fourth Epoch Trier and some unknown place.

From this scene, a delicate, slender, and beautiful white hand suddenly reached out, grabbing the distorted arm of the Shadow of the Beauty Goddess, and swiftly dragged this Grade 0 Sealed Artifact into its own light point. Both disappeared into the deep, blackish gloom.

Affected by the completion of this transaction, the miniature crimson moon formed by the Great Mother's corruption instantly arrived before the light point where a blurred figure was suspended, about to permeate into it.

Amon was fully utilizing loopholes while also having to control that Blasphemy Slate and maintain its stability, so He could only barely spare a bit of attention to interfere.

He couldn't prevent the disappearance of the Shadow of the Beauty Goddess, only causing the miniature crimson moon to autonomously crumble and dissipate by nearly half.

The remaining miniature crimson moon drilled into the corresponding light point, entering the blurred human figure suspended in midair.

That figure wrapped in bandages, thorns, and roses suddenly had its belly swell up enormously, with obvious cracks appearing. From these crevices, arms covered in black tar-like liquid and protruding with scarlet eyeballs, skull heads, and mouths with teeth and tongues suddenly stretched out, tearing at the blurred figure's abdomen.

The next second, the white mist representing the vortex ritual covered the pale golden Genie, with all the light points within simultaneously extinguishing.

Genie cursed frantically and silently, but could only watch helplessly as the chaotic torrent encompassing all colors and possibilities surged towards Him along with the mottled, ancient, and gray stone tablet.

He was instantly submerged.

His body composed of pale golden viscous lamplight quickly disintegrated, reverting to tiny golden fragments.

These fine, pure gold light points were rapidly washed away and eliminated by the chaotic torrent, leaving not a trace behind.

In the blink of an eye, only an extremely dim blue-tinged white light remained of Genie.

This light, not completely decomposed by the chaotic torrent, pathetically shrank back into the golden Magic Wishing Lamp.

At this point, Roselle no longer needed to restrain Genie, nor did He need to arduously maintain the close connection between Himself and the Uncertain Mist.

He looked at the chaotic torrent surging before Him, raised His chin again, and opened His arms, as if an emperor embracing His own world.

In an instant, the chaotic torrent encompassing all colors and possibilities submerged Roselle's figure as well.

This resurrected Black Emperor's body quickly disintegrated, rapidly becoming ethereal.

"Dad…" Bernadette in the mausoleum below called out once more, but this time her voice was very low, like sleep-talking.

Almost simultaneously, outside the barrier, the white mist covering a certain planet suddenly contracted to its core, as if directly struck by the second Blasphemy Slate along with the chaotic torrent, revealing the weathered earth and dried-up seabed once again.

Immediately after, uncertain, dense white mist spread out again, with indescribable sounds echoing throughout the cosmos.

This caused even the extremely bright astral world to be covered by thin mist, making the entire world dim and dark.

The next second, the white mist, whose size and state were indescribable, detached from the previous planet.

That planet shattered silently, with various rocks and gasses ejecting outwards in waves.

Then, a chaotic sense encompassing all colors appeared on the surface of the dense, uncertain, and unviewable white mist.

It suddenly shrank, rapidly disappearing into the depths of the endless, dead, and dark cosmos.

…

On the streets of Trier, citizens saw the mist in the sky gradually dissipate, and the sun returned to normal—neither bright enough to blind human eyes nor dim as if at dusk.

The series of strange events that had just occurred were not forgotten by them, and the voice proclaiming "Emperor has returned" still lingered in their hearts.

"What exactly is happening to this world?" Many citizens had similar questions.

With these doubts and lingering fear, they turned their gaze to newsstands and nearby cathedrals.

On this day, mystical magazines like Psychic, Arcane, and Lotus sold out in Trier. Whether it was the Eternal Blazing Sun's cathedrals, God of Steam and Machinery's cathedrals, or The Fool's cathedral, all were packed with people.

Similarly, in cities large and small across the Northern and Southern Continents, like Backlund and Port Pylos, corresponding magazines were in short supply, and every cathedral was filled with believers.

…

Above the primitive island, Amon descended to a height level with the top of the Black Emperor mausoleum.

He looked at Queen Mystic Bernadette, who had just walked out of the mausoleum, and said in a deliberately indifferent tone, "For sixty years, the Uncertain Mist will not be able to come again. There will be one less danger to face at the time of the apocalypse.

"And as long as no new Black Emperor is born, as long as the order of human society has not completely collapsed, or this mausoleum has not been completely destroyed, Roselle will be able to resurrect from nothingness after a hundred years. At that time, with three types of corruption on Him, He will achieve a basic balance and be able to maintain basic humanity and clarity."

At this point, Amon laughed and changed His tone. "This is the future He claims, and also His promise to you."

Without waiting for Bernadette to respond, Amon grabbed at the air and tossed a crown inlaid with many dark gems that had just appeared, along with the Magic Wishing Lamp, to Queen Mystic.

"As a guarantee of the promise, the Black Emperor's Uniqueness shall be given to you.

"As long as you don't die, no new Black Emperor will appear."

Bernadette caught the dimly glowing crown and said in a low voice, "I hope the future He claims will inevitably unfold."

Amon pinched the monocle on His right eye and chuckled softly.

"This is not something I can answer on His behalf. Anyway, I've received my payment, and the ritual was completed just now."

As soon as He finished speaking, Amon, who no longer had the status of a true god, languidly took back the Blasphemy Slate and three other rays of light, disappearing into midair.

…

In front of the destroyed bloody altar.

After the world's darkness and mist at high altitudes retreated, Madam Magician cast her gaze towards the western sky.

As an Angel closely connected to the spirit world, she had already learned from the spirit world about what had just happened and the fate of her Minor Arcana cards.

"What's wrong?" Miss Justice asked.

Madam Magician's expression was very complex, and her tone carried a slight sigh.

"That evil god who preached in the name of Truth has suffered a heavy blow and must sleep for decades.

"This is good news. There's one less major danger for humanity to face during the apocalypse, and there won't be any Brokers running around making connections before the apocalypse.

"But Emperor Roselle has perished because of this. He may only have a chance to resurrect and return after a hundred years, and also…"

Madam Magician didn't continue.

Ma'am Hermit, who had lifted her hearing seal, and other Major Arcana card holders like Miss Justice and Madam Judgment also had rather complex expressions.

…

In a room five or six meters high in the New City of Silver.

Lumian had already brought Franca, Jenna, Anthony, and the subsequently recovered Ludwig, Lugano, and others to this place that could guarantee their safety.

Looking at Lumian with his black hair scattered and delicate features, Franca wanted to tease him a bit, but felt that his mood wasn't quite right.

She had always known that Lumian had considered switching to the Demoness pathway. For faster advancement, as long as he maintained his sense of self, he could completely switch back to the Hunter pathway later and become a man again. So Franca originally thought Lumian had made the decision to switch to Demoness this time to deal with the dangerous situation, but after careful observation, she felt it wasn't like that.

If it had been his own choice, Lumian wouldn't have hidden suppression and pain under his calmness!

Thinking of this, Franca glanced at the sky outside that had returned to azure, and deliberately said, "The vortex event seems to have ended. Very good, very good. The apocalypse didn't come, this world wasn't destroyed, and we're all still alive!"

As long as we're still alive, there's still hope!

Jenna also pondered for a moment before asking Lumian, "Do you want a change of clothes?"

Lumian looked at the two Demonesses and Anthony, then at Ludwig who was eating frantically without caring that his godfather had become a woman, and Lugano who occasionally stole glances at him. He said in a slightly low voice, "I'll explain the specifics later. I'm going somewhere now."

"By yourself?" Jenna asked.

Lumian nodded gently.

Franca didn't try to persuade him. She took out a black cloak she had bought when disguising as a Witch from the Traveler's Bag and threw it to Lumian.

Lumian put on the cloak and activated the black mark on his right shoulder.

He teleported to a deep valley where an ancient church stood, its surface water-black and carved with human skulls.

This was the first cathedral built by the Aurora Order for that True Creator.

Lumian entered this deep black church, walking step by step to the huge black cross inside. Along the way, there were no human presences, nor any unknown things blocking him.

After stopping, Lumian, wearing the black cloak, looked at the male deity statue hanging upside down on the cross. His gaze moved from the rusty iron nails piercing the deity's body and the fresh red blood rendered around them, all the way down to the face where all features were blurred except for the eyes, which were very clear, tightly closed, as if bearing all pain and guilt.

After staring for a few seconds, Lumian said in a low voice with a hint of magnetism, "One day, I will truly walk before you and tell you my answer."

After saying this, Lumian in his black cloak turned around and walked towards the outside of the cathedral.

At the same time, incandescent fireballs shot out from around him, flying towards different parts of this cathedral, flying towards the male deity statue hanging upside down on the black cross.

Rumble!

Pillars collapsed inside the cathedral, windows shattered, and corners were set ablaze.

Rumble!

The huge black cross was blasted to pieces, and the inverted statue crashed down, smashing into many fragments on the ground.

The statue's head separated from its neck, rolling a few times and becoming covered in dust.

Its face happened to face towards the silhouette of Lumian walking through the collapsing cathedral and raging flames, his black hair and cloak fluttering. The eyes remained tightly closed, as if bearing all pain and guilt.

God loves the world.

(End of Volume—Demoness)

Chapter 885: The Corrupted Cannon Gun

Chapter 885 The Corrupted Cannon Gun

Dreams are reality, despair is hope

The sunset light shone through the window, casting a dim golden-red glow in the room.

Except for Lugano who had taken Ludwig to explore local cuisine in the New City of Silver, Franca, Jenna and Anthony remained in the living room, listening to Lumian recount what had happened to him after they parted ways.

Lumian recounted the key points of Termiboros becoming Amon, the psychological treatment report Amon had read out, and the subsequent "story" script, all in a detached manner as if he were an outside observer, without concealing anything.

That low and indifferent voice entered Franca and Jenna's ears, gradually making them feel a suffocating pain and despair, as if they had experienced it themselves.

This was not physical pain, nor the kind of despair when facing death. It came from one's own insignificance, one's own powerlessness, from the realization that one's beliefs, emotions, and decisions were actually products arranged by someone else.

Franca couldn't help but think of the lab mice she used to work with frequently.

She finally understood why Lumian, despite not being averse to switching to the Demoness pathway, was still in pain over advancing to demigod status, his emotions constantly suppressed.

Looking at that familiar yet strange face, that expressionless beautiful visage, Franca felt an inexplicable heartache and pity.

After Lumian finished recounting his final choice, the room fell into silence.

After a moment, Franca took the initiative to change the subject, sighing. "I never imagined that Black Tear was also arranged by that individual. Wasn't that something from the Demoness Sect?"

"If not Black Tear, there would be White Tear or Gray Tear. If they can't arrange the vessel for the Primordial Demoness's divine descent, can't they arrange for other Demonesses?" Lumian responded calmly.

Seeing him in this state, Jenna felt a wave of sadness and heartache. With her experience, she would rather Lumian be in a state of rage, or directly show the pain hidden deep in his heart, instead of being like a dried-up well now, with all emotions pressed down to the bottom.

Franca had a similar feeling. She almost instinctively made a self-deprecating remark, "I never thought Jenna and I would have a place in the script, even if our role was just to stabilize your mental state, providing a stable anchor point when you advance to become the Demoness of Despair."

The word "anchor" was something she had encountered a few times with Madam Judgment, suspecting it was related to how High-Sequence Beyonders stabilized their own state—the higher the Sequence, the easier it was to go mad, and anchors seemed to be external help to strengthen self-awareness and resist the tendency to lose control.

"It's not just that," Lumian, still wearing the black cloak, said in a matter-of-fact tone. "It's also a means to prevent me from becoming addicted to the feeling of Aurore's soul fragments gradually reviving, unwilling to switch back to the Hunter pathway, and gradually abandoning my self-identification as a male."

Jenna and Franca fell silent, both feeling an indescribable pain in their hearts.

The latter stood up from the large, high-backed chair that she could curl up in, looked at Lumian, and said straightforwardly, "I don't like the way you put it, as if Jenna and I have really become tools.

"Black Tear only made the problem erupt earlier; it doesn't mean the problem didn't exist, it doesn't mean that the emotions and thoughts in our hearts were created out of thin air, that they appeared because of that individual's arrangements!

"I-I only speak for myself, my attitude is that I won't persuade you to definitely switch back to the Hunter pathway, nor will I care whether you're a Demoness or a Hunter. I'm also very glad that Aurore still has hope of resurrection, and I'm looking forward to seeing her come back to life, but what I value more is you, Lumian Lee, the one who has gone through so many things with us and shared so many beautiful memories…"

At this point, Franca was at a loss for words, not knowing how to express the thoughts she hadn't yet spoken.

Jenna also stood up, pursing her lips before saying, "I would be happy to see Aurore resurrect through you, but I don't want to see you give up on yourself because of it.

"In this world, there are people who care about Lumian Lee, who like him, who value him!"

"Yes!" Franca echoed Jenna's words.

Lumian's blue eyes, now a lighter shade, looked at the two Demonesses, with a faint light flickering in their depths.

He didn't respond to Franca and Jenna's words, but he didn't object to or mock their statements either.

Just as Franca and Jenna were about to say something more, they suddenly saw Anthony give them a look, indicating that this was just right, and that Lumian should be left alone to calm down and think for a while. Too much comfort, encouragement, and confession would only bring about the opposite effect.

Uh… Franca closed her mouth.

She then realized a fact:

Anthony was here… Doesn't that mean he heard everything I said earlier?

Embarrassing!

EMBARRASSING!

Jenna sat back in her original position, trusting the Psychiatrist's judgment in this matter.

As for her own emotional outburst just now, she didn't feel shy about it. She knew Anthony had seen through it long ago.

Anthony sighed inwardly. As a normal, almost middle-aged man, he was very grateful to be a Psychiatrist, a Hypnotist. Otherwise, facing two Demonesses each with their own unique charm every day, and later adding a captain whose beauty was breathtaking, he would definitely be naturally enchanted and unknowingly lose his heart.

He felt that with this kind of training, even if he hadn't become a demigod yet, he could resist the Charm of an enemy Demoness of Despair for a longer time.

The embarrassed Franca instinctively searched for a topic. She let out an "Ah" and said, "That individual's arrangements are truly terrifying. It's not something we can escape or choose not to accept."

Jenna nodded in deep agreement.

Both Demonesses had been in significant situations before. They had personally experienced the celestial changes that Red Angel Medici had created in Fourth Epoch Trier. But the True Creator's arrangements, which came without warning and left no trace, completely surpassed their imagination. Just thinking about it a little would cause nightmares or sleepless nights.

Lumian responded in a low voice, "That being is a true god. I even suspect He's more than just a true god. At least Madam Magician's attitude towards Him is more respectful and fearful than towards true gods like the Eternal Blazing Sun.

"The Tarot Club, the Church of The Fool, and other related forces combined might not be able to prevent His arrangements. At most, they could detect anomalies a bit earlier and give warnings."

"Yeah, although there are many Angels around Mr. Fool's divine throne, they're still not enough to face a true god. Damn, why would a true god focus on someone who wasn't even a demigod before?" Franca sighed and cursed.

She originally wanted to add, "With such a large gap in status, resistance is mostly futile. We can only make do for now, not letting this matter weigh on our minds, and try to use His arrangements to strengthen ourselves as much as possible." But after considering Lumian's current state, she swallowed these thoughts that arose from her own personality.

"Perhaps we'll only stop worrying about being arranged by that individual when Mr. Fool wakes up," Jenna said carefully.

"Yeah, when will Mr. Fool wake up?" Franca echoed with a sigh.

Suddenly, with her rich gaming experience, she had an idea.

She sat up straight and looked at Lumian, saying, "The lucky coins in my, Jenna's, and Ludwig's possession all seem to come from Mr. Fool's past bestowal, carrying his aura. Could it be… could it be that gathering all the lucky coins might awaken Mr. Fool?"

"If it were that simple, the Major Arcana card holders would have already collected the lucky coins and awakened Mr. Fool," Lumian pondered for a few seconds before saying, "Perhaps gathering the lucky coins is just a prerequisite, and there are still some things to be done afterward."

At this point, Anthony interjected, "I'm about to get a lucky coin too. The Knight of Swords promised to use it as payment."

"Four coins now…" Franca couldn't help but glance at Lumian.

In the past, she would definitely have teased him, but now, facing Lumian in this state, how could she bear to?

Lumian didn't show any disappointment. He looked out the window and said, "Madam Magician should be coming to me soon. I'll ask her about the true significance of the lucky coins."

"Mm." Franca touched her Traveler's Bag. "By the way, I want to ask Madam Magician to create an independent space in my Traveler's Bag to store that revolver. I can feel that it, like Black Tears, is continuously creating diseases and constantly spreading outward."

Her Cannon Gun had already combined with part of the boon power from Higdon that was intercepted in the special mirror world, and had not yet been renamed.

After saying this, Franca asked Lumian to place the entire room into the Bottle of Fiction, while she took out the corrupted Cannon Gun and used Magic Mirror Divination method to grasp its corresponding effects and negative impacts.

15:50

Before long, Franca obtained a relatively detailed answer:

"The corrupted Cannon Gun will continuously spread disease and decay within a three-kilometer radius, with random types of diseases;

"The corrupted Cannon Gun can add either the Certain Death or Sure Hit effect to fired bullets, for a total of thirteen times, which can be stacked with the original Heavy Strike effect;

"If either the Certain Death or Sure Hit effect is triggered, the user will inevitably fall seriously ill for a period of time afterward. If a suitable healer isn't found, they might even die from it. If found, the severe illness state would last from a few hours to a day.

"After all the Certain Death and Sure Hit uses are exhausted, the negative effect of continuously spreading disease and decay will still exist, lasting for about a year."

As soon as she got the answer, Franca immediately stuffed the corrupted Cannon Gun back into the Traveler's Bag. Then, deliberately trying to liven up the atmosphere, she smiled and said, "If I were to use Impregnating Bullets with the Sure Hit effect, how would the enemy deal with that?"

Chapter 886: Conditions Met

Regarding Franca's question, Jenna and Anthony were amused but didn't know how to respond.

Lumian, however, seriously discussed the possible consequences. "Is pregnancy a big problem for Beyonders? It's not something they want, they can lose it immediately through intense combat."

Seeing that Lumian was willing to discuss the issue, Franca chuckled and said, "It's not that simple. After getting the Impregnating Bullet, I seriously researched related issues and consulted Madam Judgment.

"It's been confirmed that these Impregnating Bullets originate from the Great Mother's boon. Even demigods can't escape it. Once pregnant, it's very difficult to terminate without special abilities. And we all know that one way for Beyonders to eliminate excess Beyonder characteristics is to have others or themselves become pregnant, using the child's birth to take away corresponding Beyonder characteristics, though the result is uncontrollable.

"In other words, the target hit by this Impregnating Bullet, regardless of whether they're male or female, human or dog, will immediately become pregnant. The fetus will grow rapidly, tearing away part of the Beyonder characteristics or boon powers, thus causing instability in the target's state and a decline in strength."

"This, combined with the Sure Hit effect, is a bit terrifying…" Jenna spoke her mind. "One can only stay vigilant and preemptively replace oneself with a substitute."

Franca originally wanted to take the opportunity to tell Lumian, "If you don't want to be a Demoness, we can ask Mr. Sun for help through the Tarot Club, or I can give you a shot with an Impregnating Bullet to see if there's a way for you to give birth to a Demoness of Despair, hehehe." But considering her companion's emotional state, she gave up on this joke.

Moreover, she felt that Lumian would likely insist on being a Demoness for a while to see if there were truly signs of Aurore's soul fragments reviving.

"I've decided, the Cannon Gun will now be renamed the Inevitable Gun," Franca said after careful consideration, abandoning the name "Execution Gun" which she liked more and found more fun. She then asked Lumian, "What abilities does your bracelet have? By the way, I'll tell you about some Magic Mirror Divination targets that have been verified as safe."

"Including the one you mentioned that would cause social death but gives the most accurate divination results?" Jenna asked curiously.

Franca nodded solemnly. "Yes, but you'd better not pray to that one, otherwise… otherwise… Ah, I am the experience and lesson itself."

As she spoke, Franca couldn't help but glance at Anthony, finding that this Hypnotist showed no change in expression, as if he had already forgotten about the incident from back then.

With Franca's guidance, Lumian successfully completed his first Magic Mirror Divination, obtaining key information about the cheap silver bracelet:

"…Can use the Circle Inhabitant effect nine times, each Circle Inhabitant lasting no fewer than three times and no more than nine times.

"Circle Inhabitant can be used within a one-kilometer range, or targeted at a single individual, or applied to oneself. The range-type Circle Inhabitant trigger conditions cannot be harsh and can affect Angels in the corresponding area. The individual-type Circle Inhabitant can set some relatively harsh trigger conditions, but if the target's status is higher than one's own, the effect will be significantly reduced, even to the point of ineffectiveness.

"There are no restrictions on using Circle Inhabitant on oneself, and it can be restarted even if killed by an Angel.

"Only one 'Circle' can be maintained at the same time, and the same type of 'Circle' needs to cool down for three minutes before it can be created again.

"The Circle Inhabitant effect can last for a long time, unless the number of times is reached or the user actively removes it. For example, if a 'Circle' attached to oneself is set to restart near death, and there's no chance to trigger it afterward, it can last up to a year at most.

"Whether or not the Circle Inhabitant uses are exhausted, this bracelet contaminated by Inevitability powers will enhance the abilities of Fate Appropriation, Fate Exchange, Magnified Fate, and Compelling Fate to the Circle Inhabitant level. After about a year, the corresponding boon power will completely dissipate, turning this silver bracelet back into an ordinary accessory with curse remnants.

"Even just carrying this silver bracelet will unknowingly attract Inevitability boon recipients and be viewed with hostility by them.

"Each use of Circle Inhabitant will result in a period of bad luck, the specifics varying depending on the user's status."

Lumian held the cheap silver bracelet, repeatedly admiring it, as if waiting for the arrival of Inevitability boon recipients.

His pleasant voice, with a hint of magnetism, echoed, "If it's me, the bad luck would probably last about three hours. For you all, it might be close to two days. For Anthony, it should be three days."

"Indeed, it suits you best," Franca said. "Along with the Sword of Courage, you're equivalent to a demigod of the Hunter, Demoness, and Inevitability pathways, and your abilities have even become mixed without much conflict."

At Sequence 4, this could definitely be considered outstanding!

"What should we name it?" Lumian looked down at the cheap silver-black bracelet.

"Circle of Fate?" Franca eagerly offered her opinion.

"Circle of Binding?" Jenna suggested, her eyes flickering slightly.

"Then let's call it the 'Circle of Binding'. It's more fitting for my current psychological and emotional state," Lumian said with a self-mocking tone.

Before Franca could express her disappointment, he put away the Circle of Binding and said carefully, "The topic of Impregnating Bullets reminded me of something."

"What is it?" Franca asked curiously.

Lumian's light blue and clear eyes lit up.

"When I first learned that the name of the Great Mother's Invisible Child of God was Omebella, the Termiboros inside me seemed a bit surprised.

"I originally thought it was because this evil god Angel had heard of this name in the endless cosmos and didn't expect Omebella to enter our world and become an Invisible Child of God. But now, the situation is that the Termiboros inside me was equivalent to Amon's true form.

"In other words, this had nothing to do with any knowledge or legends from the endless cosmos.

"Currently, there are only two possibilities. One is that Amon is deceiving me, preparing for when I investigate this matter in the future. The second is that He truly didn't expect it, and what He didn't expect was that the name of Omebella, the giant queen and Goddess of Harvest from the Second Epoch, would appear on the Great Mother's Invisible Child of God."

"Does Amon not expecting it mean that that individual also didn't expect it?" Jenna understood what Lumian was really trying to express.

Lumian's beautifully curved chin nodded slowly.

"My encounter with Father Montserrat was definitely His arrangement, to grasp the situation of the Great Mother's Invisible Child of God. But the name of the Great Mother's Invisible Child of God might not have been part of the arrangement. It was an accident, something He might not have expected either."

"You want to start from this incident to find a path with fewer arrangements?" Anthony roughly understood Lumian's idea.

Lumian curled his lips into a smile, laughing once, causing Franca and others to feel a bit dazzled.

"His former identity was the Ancient Sun God who ended the era of ancient gods' rule. There are very few ancient secrets not grasped by Him, and this might be one of them."

Hearing this, Franca suddenly remembered that the True Creator worshiped by the Aurora Order was formerly the Ancient Sun God, the savior of humanity.

And according to intelligence gathered by the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society, the Ancient Sun God was very likely also a transmigrator!

Dammit, how could a transmigrator do such a thing as arranging an innocent person's life! After cursing inwardly, Franca said to Lumian, "Do you now meet all the conditions to come into contact with Omebella's remains and use them briefly?"

After Lumian consumed Omebella's umbilical cord remnants and achieved a slight fusion with it, he only needed to meet two more conditions—"having experienced betrayal by a direct relative" and "being female"—to be able to touch and briefly use the Grade 0 Sealed Artifact formed from Omebella's remains.

Lumian, abandoned by his playboy father, had long met the first condition, and now, he was truly female.

Lumian offered a curt acknowledgment.

"Moreover, Omebella's remains are in the New City of Silver, in this very city.

"I wonder what useful secrets I can discover from New Silver City's records and direct contact with the remains…"

Before Jenna and the others could respond, points of starlight appeared, and Madam Magician's figure was instantly outlined in the room.

This Major Arcana card holder seemed to have already foreseen the difficulty Franca was currently facing and directly extended her hand, saying, "Give me your Traveler's Bag."

…

It was early spring, and in the fields outside the New City of Silver, patches of wheat seedlings were still lush green in the twilight.

Madam Magician walked with Lumian on the path between the fields, breathing in the scent of soil and plants, feeling the cool breeze.

Having already obtained most of the information from the spirit world, she still patiently waited for Lumian to finish recounting his experiences before sighing.

"We've always said to be careful of that individual's arrangements, to pay attention to coincidences around us, but what we didn't expect was that the arrangement happened from the very beginning, and gave many seemingly reasonable explanations, to the extent that we could only see traces of arrangements in specific events, completely overlooking the overall problem."

Lumian was still wearing the black cloak given by Franca, with his hair hidden in the attached hood.

He didn't blame the Major Arcana card holders for their thoughts, after all, that being was a true god.

Looking at the patches of green wheat seedlings tinged with golden red, he said in a low voice,

"Is it only when Mr. Fool awakens that we won't have to worry about every detail of our lives being arranged?"

"Yes, or quickly become an Angel. Although that won't exempt you from arrangements, you'll be able to detect many arrangements that rely too much on coincidence in a timely manner," Madam Magician tried hard not to let her eyes reveal emotions of pity.

Lumian fell silent for a moment before responding, "Are those lucky coins devices to awaken Mr. Fool?"

"Yes," Madam Magician didn't deny it. "You should have one too."

Lumian turned his head, using his eyes to express his question.

Madam Magician smiled and said, "That's the reward for the water from the Samaritan Women's Spring and the soil from in front of the ancient tomb of the Dream Festival.

"However, this needs to wait a few more days. There are time intervals for using these items."

Chapter 887: The Function of the Lucky Coins

Lumian roughly understood the meaning of Madam Magician's words.

The water he had previously taken from the Samaritan Woman's Spring and the soil from the area of the Dream Festival ancient tomb did have a reward, which was another lucky coin. However, the one giving the reward needed to wait until all of that water and soil had been used up and the effects confirmed before actually paying. Using these items needed to be done in batches, with time intervals between uses, rather than consuming them all at once—which might actually lead to unfavorable results.

"We still need to wait a few more days?" Lumian cast his gaze towards the golden-red tinted horizon and nodded gently, "I understand."

He wasn't impatient. Having been arranged for so long already, a few more days didn't matter.

Lumian probed further, "How many lucky coins need to be gathered in total to awaken Mr. Fool?"

"The lucky coins are tools, mediums, not the awakening itself. There are only five such coins in total," Madam Magician answered clearly, no longer speaking in riddles. "Once you get the last lucky coin, the five of you will be able to use your respective coins to enter Mr. Fool's dream and attempt to awaken him. Understand? The lucky coins are mediums to help you participate in Mr. Fool's dream.

"Of course, given your Sequences, even with the lucky coins, you can't decide when you can enter that dream or what you can do once inside. We'll need to assist you to ensure you can all go at the same time and maintain sufficient clarity and rationality."

Lumian listened quietly, his eyes slightly turning as he pursed his lips lightly.

"Mr. Fool's dream? We're responsible for awakening Mr. Fool?"

"Yes," Madam Magician answered with just one word.

She surveyed Lumian's profile, which took on a dreamlike beauty in the twilight glow, and inwardly sighed.

Lumian furrowed his brow slightly. "What do we need to do to awaken Mr. Fool? Haven't the previous holders of the lucky coins entered Mr. Fool's dream before? Haven't they made any attempts?"

Why does it have to be us?

"I don't know exactly what needs to be done to awaken Mr. Fool," Madam Magician said very frankly. "That's for you to figure out. We'll give you some suggestions based on your feedback."

She paused, then said in a teasing tone, "The previous holders of the lucky coins did indeed enter Mr. Fool's dream and made quite a few attempts, but they were successively discovered by that Celestial Worthy's spirit, either kicked out of the dream or had their actions restricted, unable to do much. One of them, after being kicked out of the dream the first time, would be kicked out again within a minute of re-entering the dream, regardless of whether they disguised themselves or behaved.

"You need to be careful too. The early stages are fine, but if you're later discovered and locked onto by that Celestial Worthy's spirit, you'll also be kicked out of the dream, or become mute, blind, or foolish."

After pondering for a moment, Lumian asked, "Are we the destined ones to awaken Mr. Fool?"

"Perhaps, perhaps not. We can't be sure yet," Madam Magician explained simply. "We can only say that the previous holders of the lucky coins would suddenly feel at some moment or in some scenario that they should trade away the lucky coin to someone else. This might be a hint from fate."

Lumian didn't ask any more questions. Instead, he mentioned that he now met all the conditions to come into contact with Omebella's remains, and finally asked, "Can I apply to the New City of Silver now?"

"I'll help you inform Mr. Sun. You just need to be prepared," Madam Magician said with a laugh. "Of course, you won't be able to actually take away Omebella's remains. That belongs to the New City of Silver. Grade 0 Sealed Artifacts are extremely precious anywhere. No one will gift it to you without appropriate compensation.

"What you'll be allowed to do is to review the relevant records of the City of Silver, come into contact with and study the item that the remains have become within the New City of Silver. If you encounter difficulties, with the approval of the New City of Silver's six-member council, you may be able to borrow that Grade 0 Sealed Artifact for a short time, to be returned within a certain period."

"That's already very good," Lumian said sincerely.

According to 007, an official Beyonder, even to use a Grade 1 Sealed Artifact, he had to submit a report in advance, obtain approval, and meet the corresponding conditions. As for Grade 0 Sealed Artifacts, that was something he couldn't even dream of.

And now, the New City of Silver might actually allow him to borrow Omebella's remains for a period of time!

Lumian "habitually" smoothed his hair and told Madam Magician about Termiboros's, that is, Amon's true form's reaction when he first learned that the name of the Great Mother's Invisible Child of God was Omebella, along with his own speculations.

"This might indeed hide a very big and important secret, with some connection to that bird egg deep in the Underworld and the missing Madame Night Pualis," Madam Magician said, slightly raising both hands as if feeling the freshness and vigor of the early spring wheat seedlings.

Lumian stopped in front of a pond used for water storage and after a few seconds of silence, asked, "Madam, what is the true purpose and final result of Project Vortex?"

Madam Magician recounted in detail all the transactions and developments she understood, but because Lumian no longer had a false Angel status and had lost Mr. Fool's seal, unable to bear certain knowledge, she uniformly used descriptions like the evil gods outside the barrier, the one worshiped by the Brokers, and the Great Mother to refer to those great existences.

Upon hearing that Emperor Roselle had been resurrected as the Black Emperor, and then chose to die again to severely damage the great existence preaching in the name of "Truth", Lumian's expression changed several times, but in the end, he didn't say a word.

"I understand how you feel," Madam Magician comforted her feminized Minor Arcana card in a self-mocking tone. "I don't like that individual, and I really dislike His methods, but I have to admit, He is indeed preparing for our world to face the apocalypse, not just doing things that only benefit Him under the guise of a banner. So my feelings are very torn."

Lumian's expression remained cold, maintaining his silence.

Madam Magician didn't continue discussing this matter. She raised her right hand, letting points of starlight appear and fall towards Lumian's left chest, forming an illusory symbol composed of layers upon layers of doors.

This Major Arcana card holder said simply, "Since there's no need to seal an Angel, my power alone is enough to simply protect Aurore and the others' soul fragments. We don't need to trouble Mr. Fool, and besides, if Mr. Fool were to seal it, it might actually affect the gradual revival of Aurore's soul fragments through your female state.

"Well, if you're unwilling to take the lucky coin into Mr. Fool's dream, we won't force you. I'll still help reinforce the seal periodically."

Lumian smiled bitterly. "That individual has already made the choice for me."

He remained silent for a while, his slightly paler lips moving a few times.

"Can being in the Demoness state really allow Aurore's soul fragments to gradually revive? Is this truly the only way to resurrect Aurore?"

"It may not be the only way. At least, I can't give you an accurate judgment. Only Mr. Fool could provide the corresponding answer," Madam Magician neither denied nor confirmed that individual's statement.

Her current knowledge and abilities were not sufficient to support her refutation.

The only thing she could be certain of was: "This is indeed a way to resurrect Aurore, just that the final resurrection won't be completely whole."

"Why must it be Aurore's soul fragments gradually reviving, and not the soul fragments of other villagers? There are many soul fragments sealed within me, why is Aurore the most special one?" This was now Lumian's greatest concern.

Madam Magician said, "Aurore's soul fragments simultaneously meet three conditions. First, she was a Beyonder, having undergone the transformation of Beyonder characteristics on her spirit. Second, she was corrupted by Inevitability powers. Third, at the end of the ritual, her soul fragments received protection from that individual or several ones, so they're in relatively better condition, the kind that can gradually revive.

"Therefore, her soul fragments are indeed the most special among all the soul fragments within you. The remaining soul fragments might only be able to exist in the form of half-human, half-object puppet soldiers when you become an Angel of the Hunter pathway in the future."

Lumian thought for a while and said, "If I were now a Beyonder of those three pathways of the Great Mother, I wouldn't doubt that Aurore's soul fragments could gradually revive within me, but a Demoness doesn't have the symbol of new life…"

"But the Demoness has the authority of resurrection. Have you forgotten that one of the descriptions of the Demoness of Unaging is that she's bizarrely hard to kill, skilled in resurrection and rebirth?" Madam Magician reminded him.

Lumian quietly exhaled and said, "If I continue to advance to become a Demoness of Unaging, would the revival effect of Aurore's soul fragments be better?"

Madam Magician smiled and said, "There's no need to deliberately pursue that. When you later jump to Sequence 2 of the Demoness pathway, you'll similarly gain all the abilities and characteristics of the Demoness of Unaging, unless you find a way to separate out the corresponding Unaging Beyonder characteristic yourself."

Seeing Lumian nod slightly, Madam Magician smiled and asked, "As a demigod who has switched pathways, you should have some special, mixed abilities now, right?"

Lumian offered a curt acknowledgment and said, "The most special ability is the application of fire.

"On the one hand, I can use a Hunter's blazing-white flames and the Demoness's inherent black flames separately. On the other hand, I can fuse them together for an explosive effect. This can both physically destroy human bodies and objects, and ignite spirituality, burning spiritual bodies, comprehensively damaging and destroying a target.

"Yes, after the fusion of the Demoness of Despair Beyonder characteristic and the Hunter pathway Beyonder characteristic, new mystical knowledge appeared, calling this black flame that suppresses irritability and madness the 'Fire of Destruction'."

Chapter 888: Changes in Abilities from Pathway Switching

After describing the Fire of Destruction, Lumian frowned and said, "I've heard that members of the Demoness sect have a tradition of turning their lovers into females. Are there no Beyonders of the Hunter pathway among their lovers?"

This question was essentially still asking "Why me?"

Couldn't they just find any Sequence 5 of the Hunter pathway, seduce them to jump to Demoness of Despair, and satisfy the requirement of "yin contains yang, yang contains yin"? Why did I have to be arranged?

"Perhaps only you could very easily enter the area around the Samaritan Woman's Spring and obtain the remnant aura of the Blood Emperor, thus having mystical similarity with 0-01." Madam Magician fully understood what Lumian was concerned about.

Lumian continued asking, as if talking to himself, "The Red Angel has ways to control 0-01 without relying on mystical similarity. Since that individual has no selfish motives and isn't afraid of the Red Angel's revenge, why not directly reinvest in Him, instead of grooming a 'weakling' like me?"

Isn't this a waste of time?

Madam Magician glanced at the field ridge under her feet.

"I can answer this for you. First, the Red Angel can't get as close to the top powers of the two Calamity pathways as you can, unless His next step isn't to reclaim 0-01 and become the Red Priest, but to find a way to replace the

Primordial Demoness. Second, the birth of a Red Priest is inevitably accompanied by competition, chaos, and disaster. Only through multi-party competition can a Red Priest emerge in the shortest time in the best way. If only the Red Angel were to walk this path, it wouldn't go smoothly."

"Am I competing with Him?" Lumian curled his lips in a self-mocking smile. "Then I should thank that individual for giving me this qualification."

As for ability, that was still far off.

Madam Magician continued, "Many members of the Demoness sect indeed have lovers from the Hunter pathway, but they rarely let these male lovers switch pathways and become female at Sequence 5. On the one hand, there are very few members of the Demoness sect who can get their hands on two Demoness of Despair Beyonder characteristics. On the other hand, they seem to be avoiding similar things. As far as I know, among the demigod-level Demonesses, only one was formerly a Hunter."

"Who?" Lumian immediately became alert like a Hunter.

Madam Magician smiled and said, "The Demoness of Cyan, Yalenna.

"She is a Sequence 3 Demoness of Unaging. Her mother is the leader of the Demoness sect, the Demoness of Gray Judith. Her father was a Hunter, who later went missing, suspected to have been killed by the Demoness of Gray."

Lumian pondered for a moment and said, "Could the Demoness of Gray have also been a Hunter before?

"Her twin sister Krismona was born female, born a Demoness. As a contrast, is it possible that She was born male, born a Hunter, until She transformed into a Demoness at Sequence 4?

"The Demoness of Black only mentioned that the Demoness of Black was Sequence 9 at birth, but never said that her Sequence 9 equaled Assassin."

"It's possible, but currently unverifiable. The Demoness of Gray is older than all of our Tarot Club's Major Arcana card holders combined. We don't know much about Her," Madam Magician said, a hint of a smile appearing on her face as if she had thought of something.

Is that so? I thought you were an Angel from the early Fifth Epoch, given that your teacher was Mr. Door, the strongest King of Angels of the Fourth Epoch… Lumian didn't voice these words about a woman's age.

He began to walk slowly again, pondering as he spoke, "Is the Demoness sect, or rather the Primordial Demoness's hatred for pure female Demonesses really due to inner distortion? Is there no other mystical reason?"

Pure female Demonesses apparently wouldn't have the chance to touch the power at the top of the two Calamity pathways, so they should pose the least threat to the Primordial Demoness.

"Inner distortion is one reason, but my intuition tells me it's not the whole reason," Madam Magician said, turning her head to look at the New City of Silver where lights were gradually coming on. "The Seven of Cups is about to advance to Demoness of Affliction. You can try to get some intelligence on this from Krismona's remnant projection."

Lumian didn't continue this topic, instead returning to discuss the changes in his abilities after becoming a Demoness of Despair.

This was also something he had to do after his condition initially stabilized.

"At the Demoness of Despair stage, Disease has evolved into Plague that can cover a range of three kilometers. I currently have mastered three types of plagues. One is derived from the original Disease, targeting the flesh of relatively common creatures, mainly infecting organs such as the heart, brain, and lungs. From the incubation period to the outbreak of symptoms to becoming severe, it only takes about ten seconds, and then within another minute, it can cause the target to deteriorate to near death. The specific time varies depending on the enemy's status and constitution.

"The second type of plague is Weakening, originating from the mystical pathogen inherent in Black Tear. It can gradually strip away the target's strength until even their heart is too weak to beat. At the same time, it causes a gradual loss of spirituality. In other words, it can not only target relatively common creatures but also affect special creatures and even the dead. Any target with spirituality or relying on spirituality will gradually weaken because of it.

"The third type of plague is Rigidity. Over time, it causes even zombies to become rigid and stiff, becoming inflexible. This is a more mystically oriented plague.

"The fusion of Hunter traits with the plagues has given these mystical pathogens a certain resistance to fire. They won't quickly wither away under fire burning conditions and can persist for a longer time. Among them, the Weakening plague can inherently survive in high temperatures for a period, and its current fire resistance is the strongest among the three plagues.

"For dealing with these plagues, the burning of Demoness black flames and freezing over a certain range are better methods.

"I can also create my own unique plague varieties by combining my own traits, corresponding mystical knowledge, specific ideas and experiments, and possibly required special materials. This takes a long time and can't yield results quickly. But regardless, a Demoness's Plague can only target things with spirituality and cannot cause rocks or metals to weather, rust, or decay like the demigods of the Order of All Extinction.

"In using Precision, a Hunter's Precision can help me maintain two types of plagues simultaneously, but it requires three to four times the spirituality consumption of maintaining a single plague."

Madam Magician nodded lightly, not interrupting Lumian's self-analysis.

"The Demoness of Despair's mastery of the mirror world and mirror magic has reached a considerably deep stage. I can locate mirrors within a five-kilometer range and mirrors I've visited before. I can traverse freely in the mirror world and transmit information through the mirror world to those located mirrors, displaying it. This is much more convenient than messengers, but there's a possibility of the information being intercepted by mirror world creatures. Some curses need to be attached to the information to avoid most troubles.

"I can also use located mirrors to project myself there, looking just like the real thing. Currently, this projection has distance limitations and cannot exceed a city.

"A Hunter's Precision has also fused with this Mirror Projection ability, allowing me to complete three to five projections simultaneously, with each projection having some power and able to accomplish some things, though they cannot leave the range reflected by the corresponding mirror."

When fighting against the Order of All Extinction demigod, Higdon, Lumian had used the power of the special mirror world to create many Mirror Projections. If Higdon had ignored them at that time, these illusions and projections could have caused a certain degree of damage!

"Other mirror magic, such as Mirror Maze, Mirror Substitution, and Magic Mirror Divination, have also reached the level of Sequence 4. Among them, curses completed through mirrors include normal types, those fused with Cull that can erupt fiercely in an extremely short time, and those mixed with the power of Inevitability that can complete fate-related curses," Lumian pondered as he spoke. "Fate-related curses can put the target in a state of misfortune for a period of time. This is not easily noticed by them and is used against enemies who inherently have strong curse prevention abilities."

Lumian paused, then continued, "Like other Demonesses of Despair, if enemies can't replace themselves with a substitution before I lock onto them and complete the curse, they won't be able to transfer or share the damage even if they have a Mirror Substitution or Paper Figurine Substitute.

"The Demoness's spider silk has also changed, becoming more solid, more tough, able to complete more tasks, including restraining, binding, interfering, transmitting pleasure, black flames, and curses. At the same time, the fusion of Hunter traits has made these spider silks sharper, able to directly cause a certain degree of damage.

"My hair is the source of spider silk. If an enemy's body is touched by my hair, the corresponding part will experience some petrification symptoms.

"Weakness Investigation is no longer limited to discovering weaknesses and vulnerabilities in the flesh, soul, and defenses, as well as fate streams that can lead to death, but also includes the target's emotional and desire weaknesses and trigger points.

"Cull has fused with the Demoness pathway's Mighty Blow, capable of bringing more terrifying damage. I can take out some physically fragile demigods in one strike."

"Physically fragile demigods often have many mystically oriented life-saving abilities, or make it impossible for you to find their true form," Madam Magician reminded at this point.

Lumian nodded, indicating he would remember.

"Other abilities include black magic like Invisibility, the ability to manipulate frost, Wand Substitution, basic divination abilities, which are all the same as a normal Demoness of Despair.

"Instigation and Provocation have fused together, granting me the ability to use language and attached mystical power to stir up the target's emotions and desires, making them do what I anticipate.

"Pleasure can be combined with Cull and Precision…

"…

"That's about it."

Madam Magician nodded thoughtfully and remarked, "Jumping to a neighboring pathway indeed brings many strange changes and mixed abilities. This is not something that can be achieved by using the neighboring pathways' Sealed Artifacts."

Lumian gave an affirmative sound, then asked, "Should we still have Franca continue undercover in the Demoness sect?"

Chapter 889: Intelligence on the Demoness Sect

Faced with Lumian's question, Madam Magician pondered for a few seconds before saying, "Whether it's investigating the state of the Primordial Demoness, exploring the secrets of the deepest layer of the special mirror world, uncovering the essence of the mirror self, or mastering the secret of resurrection and rebirth of the Demoness of Unaging, it's impossible to bypass the Demoness Sect.

"These are equally important for you now.

"So, my opinion is to let the Two of Cups continue to contact the Demoness of Black, while you lurk in the shadows to prevent accidents.

"The Demoness Sect has probably already suspected the Two of Cups' background and intentions, but I'm not sure what countermeasures they will take. If they want to use the Two of Cups to do some things and achieve certain goals, we can take advantage of such arrangements to peek into the secrets of the Demoness Sect and the special mirror world, and incidentally obtain subsequent resources for the Demoness pathway. If they prepare to eliminate hidden dangers and wipe out the Two of Cups, you, lurking in the shadows, must immediately act and quickly rescue the Two of Cups. The mission with the Demoness Sect shall then end there.

"This is indeed already a fairly high-risk matter. Both the Two of Cups and you have the right to refuse."

Lumian listened attentively and then smiled and said, "I think the Demoness Sect won't do anything to Franca for the time being. It's more likely they'll use her. Otherwise, in the underground mausoleum of Morora, Julie in her divine descent state wouldn't have thrown me out of the special mirror world. And after I achieved my goal, obtained the Black Tear, and returned from Morora, the Demoness of Black wouldn't have been so easily patronized by Franca."

Madam Magician nodded almost imperceptibly.

"If this isn't that individual's arrangement, it means the Primordial Demoness also hopes for a Beyonder who harbors hope for Tudor's resurrection and is closer to the top powers of the two Calamity pathways than Her to grow up according to the method currently considered closest to the correct answer, in order to achieve a goal that is very important and crucial to Her."

Lumian twisted his mouth and said in a self-mocking tone, "One of the ways to counter a true god's arrangement is to place oneself in the plans of another or several true gods, whether those plans are good or bad."

"The principle is the same as balancing the corruption on oneself." Madam Magician shook her head and smiled. "But you should remember that before Mr. Fool awakens, no true god can compete with that individual in arranging this matter, even if several Sequence 0 true gods unite. Of course, this can indeed interfere with and influence that individual's arrangements, giving you a chance to detect anomalies in a timely manner or in advance."

Lumian nodded solemnly. "Whether Franca continues the Demoness Sect mission or not, I will follow up on these matters. Madam, can you give me more intelligence about the Demoness Sect? The Demoness of Black only reveals very little to Franca each time."

Madam Magician said in an appreciative tone, "You now indeed have the ability and mindset to independently handle one aspect of affairs. If Mr. Fool wakes up, you are completely qualified to draw a Major Arcana card.

"From now on, matters concerning the Demoness Sect will be consolidated under you. If you need assistance or want to mobilize resources from other Major Arcana card holders, you can find me or Judgment at any time.

"Well, because the Demoness of Unaging can be resurrected, can be reborn, is difficult to kill completely, and stays forever young without aging, she can live for many, many years, even longer than the lifespan of Angels from many pathways. So, if we don't count Sequence 4 Demonesses of Despair, and only consider the accumulated number of currently living Sequence 3 and Sequence 2 Beyonders, the Demoness Sect has more than any orthodox god church.

"In this regard, only Sanguine, whose lives are equally long, can compare with them, but still fall short.

"Of course, a large part of the high-level power of orthodox god churches is in Grade 0 and Grade 1 Sealed Artifacts and Holy Artifacts. If encountering major disasters, those Sealed Artifacts and Holy Artifacts can also play the role of corresponding high-level beings to some extent, and a large part of them can be relatively smoothly converted into Beyonder characteristics that rapidly strengthen reserve forces."

Lumian recalled and said, "According to the Demoness of Black, at Sequence 3, one can name oneself with a color. There are thirteen such 'Color Demonesses' in total."

"Among them, four are Angels, Sequence 2 Angels. In this respect, the Demoness Sect is inferior to orthodox god churches, because their high-level members must be Demonesses, and there are no angels from other pathways. Orthodox god churches, on the other hand, can potentially use Grade 0 Sealed Artifacts or Sequence 1 Beyonder characteristics of other pathways they possess to create Sequence 1 Archangels." Madam Magician gave a detailed introduction.

"Why can't there be Sequence 1 Demonesses?" Lumian expressed his confusion.

Madam Magician chuckled. "What I'm about to say is one of the highest-level mystical knowledge of the paths of the divine.

"Each pathway has its own distinct Uniqueness. Occupying and accommodating the Uniqueness is the key to becoming a true god, but it's not the only condition. A true Sequence 0 also needs all the Sequence 1 Beyonder characteristics of its pathway to support the Uniqueness, which is three in total. So, with the Sequence 0 Primordial Demoness, there can't be Sequence 1 Demonesses of Apocalypse, only Sequence 2 Demonesses of Catastrophe.

"Similarly, orthodox god churches can't have Sequence 1 Archangels corresponding to their own deities. Well, except for some pathways with special abilities."

As Lumian suddenly came to a realization, he very keenly asked,

"I can't advance to Sequence 1 of the Demoness pathway and become a Demoness of Apocalypse unless the Primordial Demoness falls before that?"

"Correct." Madam Magician specifically reminded, "There's only one Sequence 1 Beyonder characteristic left for the Hunter pathway. The Red Angel has already occupied two, which is why He can become a King of Angels again."

"Is the definition of a King of Angels occupying multiple Sequence 1 Beyonder characteristics or accommodating the Uniqueness?" Lumian had some understanding of the concept of King of Angels before, but today was the first time he clearly recognized what this title represented.

Magician nodded. "Yes, whether it's occupying two Sequence 1 Beyonder characteristics, or three Sequence 1 Beyonder characteristics, or accommodating the Uniqueness, as well as the Uniqueness plus one Sequence 1 Beyonder characteristic, the Uniqueness plus two Sequence 1 Beyonder characteristics, they are all Kings of Angels.

"The only King of Angels composed of the Uniqueness plus three Sequence 1 Beyonder characteristics was my mentor, Mr. Door, but He used His own sealing authority to resist the tendency to converge. If not for this, after three Sequence 1 Beyonder characteristics and the Uniqueness are placed in the same Beyonder's body, they would inevitably converge rapidly, and the possessor would either immediately become a god, lose control on the spot, or die directly."

No wonder Mr. Door was the highest-ranking nobleman in the Tudor Empire… Lumian asked with undisguised concern, "Where is the last Sequence 1 Beyonder characteristic of the Hunter pathway?"

Is Red Angel Medici about to get it?

"It's rumored to be with the Primordial Demoness." Madam Magician didn't conceal this intelligence, "And the one who reportedly brought that Sequence 1 Beyonder characteristic to the Primordial Demoness was the Demoness of Black, Clarice."

Lumian nodded thoughtfully.

Madam Magician continued to introduce the situation of the Demoness Sect, "Besides the Demoness of Gray Judith, the Demoness Sect has three other Sequence 2 Demonesses of Catastrophe, namely the Demoness of Yellow, the Demoness of Blue, and the Demoness of Purple.

"There are currently nine Sequence 3 Demonesses of Unaging. Besides the Demoness of Black and the Demoness of Cyan that you know, there are also White, Scarlet, Silver, Green, Gold, Brown, Orange…"

After hearing this, Lumian keenly noticed a problem. "Trier with its special mirror world should be one of the most important areas in the eyes of the Demoness Sect, yet they didn't send a Demoness of Catastrophe to be in charge, leaving all affairs to the Demoness of Black…"

This doesn't seem normal.

Or, is one of the Yellow, Blue, or Purple Demonesses of Catastrophe hiding in Trier?

"Moreover, the one responsible for keeping the Sequence 1 Beyonder characteristic of the Hunter pathway and using methods like sacrifice to give it to the Primordial Demoness was also only the Sequence 3 Demoness of Black, not any Demoness of Catastrophe. Wasn't the Demoness Sect worried at the time that the Demoness of Black's status wasn't high enough, her strength wasn't enough, and something might go wrong?" Madam Magician reminded Lumian that there was another detail that was problematic.

After exchanging intelligence about the Demoness Sect for a while longer, Madam Magician looked at the sky that had completely darkened and said, "Tomorrow, Mr. Sun will send someone to take you to the Twin Towers to read the records the City of Silver has on Omebella's remains and to make contact with that Grade 0 Sealed Artifact.

"After that, you decide for yourselves when to return to Trier."

"Yes, Madam Magician." Lumian replied, watching as this holder of a Major Arcana card turned into points of starlight and disappeared before his eyes.

…

As the night settled in, Franca paced in the living room, muttering to herself, "Why hasn't Lumian come back yet?"

Wasn't he just reporting his encounter to Madam Magician and exchanging intelligence?

It's been so long!

Jenna was also a bit worried. She walked to the window and looked out at the street.

Suddenly, her gaze froze.

"There." She pointed to the top of the bell tower attached to The Fool's cathedral.

Franca took a few steps over and saw at the top of the bell tower, in a place without any railings, sat a woman wearing a black cloak, with some black hair falling down, delicate and fine features, and a grand and radiant face.

It was Lumian.

At this moment, Lumian was sitting there, legs dangling outside, gaze quietly looking down.

Franca and Jenna exchanged a glance and quickly rushed to The Fool's cathedral, climbing up the bell tower.

Seeing Lumian's back, they didn't immediately inquire about the situation, but remained quiet, each walking to one side, following Lumian's line of sight to gaze at what he was intently watching.

It was the giant buildings that had lit up with yellowish lights in the dark night, the various mushrooms that were faintly visible in the streetlight glow, the silhouettes of giants and half-giants behind glass windows, raised wine glasses, wisps of cooking smoke, songs from nearby squares, the noise spilling out from bars, and the faint sounds of joy and laughter from different houses.

Chapter 890: Murder

The next morning.

Lumian and the others had just finished breakfast in their room and were waiting for Ludwig to clean up the rest when they heard the doorbell ring.

Outside the door was a half-giant youth about two meters tall, with slightly longer arms and legs, short curly brown hair that looked fluffy.

He had thick eyebrows and big eyes, with a square face. After his gaze swept over Lumian, Franca and Jenna, it involuntarily lowered to look at his own toes as he said, "I'm here to find Lumian Lee, uh, possibly Ms. Lumina Lee."

He spoke in ancient Feysac.

"That's me," Lumian understood this was probably the messenger sent by Mr. Sun to take him to the Twin Towers of the New City of Silver.

That Major Arcana card holder seemed to have deliberately found a youth, to ensure the height difference wouldn't be too dramatic.

The youth let out a sigh of relief and said awkwardly, "I've been ordered by the six-member council to take you to see Elder Derrick Berg at the Twin Towers."

"Alright," Lumian nodded to Jenna and Franca, then followed the youth out of the hotel towards the Twin Towers located in a corner of the New City of Silver.

Along the way, the half-giant youth walked slightly ahead to the side, his back somewhat stiff, occasionally showing a tendency to swing the same arm and leg together, as if he had almost forgotten how to walk normally.

He would turn his head to glance at Lumian from time to time, but not knowing what to say, he could only quickly turn his head back.

Halfway through the journey, he finally thought of a suitable topic. Half turning his body, he asked Lumian, "Aren't, aren't you worried that I might be a bad person? Maybe what I said about the six-member council's order and going to see Elder Derrick Berg at the Twin Towers is all a lie to trick you?"

I could kill thirty of your kind in one breath… Lumian only thought to himself, without saying it out loud.

On the one hand, they were both followers of Mr. Fool and not too familiar, so there was no need to mock. On the other hand, Lumian felt that if his sister Aurore was here, she definitely wouldn't answer in a similar way.

He smiled lightly and said, "I'm not worried, because this is the New City of Silver."

The half-giant youth suddenly became very happy and said in a tone of heartfelt pride,

"Yes, the Lord has always taught us to be kind and restrained. Our New City of Silver strictly cracks down on all kinds of crimes, especially guarding against theft, fraud and other such behaviors…"

12:12

"Yes, the Lord has always taught us to be kind and restrained. Our New City of Silver strictly cracks down on all kinds of crimes, especially guarding against theft, fraud and other such behaviors…"

The half-giant youth opened up and began to talk endlessly about how Mr. Fool originally sent an Angel to save the City of Silver, how he gave the City of Silver this promised land, and how they, the people of the City of Silver, built the New City of Silver.

Lumian had heard these stories repeatedly when drinking in the New City of Silver before, but he wasn't impatient now, letting the half-giant youth continue his smooth narration.

He heard happiness of peace and tranquility in the other's description.

In this exchange, the two arrived at the Twin Towers, the core buildings of the New City of Silver. The left tower had a pointed top and housed public facilities such as the library, while the right tower had a round top and was where the six-member council that governed the New City of Silver worked.

Lumian instinctively turned his gaze towards the round tower and noticed that in the cracks between the bricks near the ground, tufts of black hair-like plants had grown out, sometimes drooping, sometimes swaying lightly as if blown by a gentle breeze.

When he came last time, Lumian had also noticed these black plants but didn't pay much attention. This time, however, he felt a kind of blood connection.

We are all parts or rather continuations of the life of the Goddess of Harvest, Omebella!

Even when sealed, does a Grade 0 Sealed Artifact still have some influence on the outside world? Lumian withdrew his gaze and followed the half-giant youth into the pointed tower.

They walked on large black stone slabs, passing huge pillars, and came to the library on the third floor.

In front of the intimidating bookshelves stood a tall man wearing a simple white robe.

The man was over two meters tall, with neatly combed brownish-yellow hair. He looked only about 22 or 23 years old, but had a very calm demeanor and an overwhelming aura. He was clearly Mr. Sun, whom Lumian had met last time, one of the top figures of the Church of The Fool.

"Elder Berg, Ms. Lumina is here," the half-giant youth said respectfully.

Mr. Sun, whose name was Derrick Berg, looked at Lumian and nodded, saying, "Follow me."

Lumian politely replied, "Thank you."

The half-giant youth then waved and walked towards the door. After a few steps, he turned around and called out to Lumian's back, "My name is Rugest!"

After saying this, Rugest quickly turned and ran down the stairs.

Lumian followed Mr. Sun deep into the New City of Silver library, entering the innermost secret room where a stack of documents made up of scattered records was placed.

"These are all the records regarding the 'Gift of the Land'. I have already translated them into ancient Feysac for you," Mr. Sun said simply, sitting down in a position against the wall and falling silent, as if he had turned into a statue.

Lumian understood this was to guard against any accidents that might occur while he was reading the materials, so he nodded lightly, sat down at the table, and picked up the stack of new papers.

He read very slowly, taking nearly half an hour to roughly understand the relationship between the Goddess of Harvest, Omebella, and the City of Silver.

In the Second Epoch, in the era when the ancient gods ruled the earth and sky, the City of Silver belonged to the Giant King's Court, and all its people were slaves to the giants.

But unlike other human vassal powers of the Giant King's Court, the City of Silver's situation was considerably better, because they believed in and followed the subsidiary god of the Giant King, the ancient god, the Giant Queen, the Goddess of Harvest—Omebella.

According to the City of Silver's records, the Giant Queen Omebella had descended to their city multiple times, displaying two images.

One image corresponded to light and goodness, with "the harvest's grace, life's precious embrace" as the core of faith, viewing the people of the City of Silver as Her own children, always ensuring bountiful harvests, abundant reproduction of livestock and poultry, and rapid population growth. This was the main reason why the people of City of Silver rarely suffered innocent slaughter and did not lack food.

The other would bring desolation and death. At that time, all the people of Certain Death knew phrases like "extreme harvest is inevitably accompanied by extreme desolation", "only life can quell the land's wrath", "death, like new life, is a common and beautiful thing, not to be feared", "we have accepted the land's gifts, so we must pay the corresponding price".

If Omebella descended in this form, She would inevitably demand bloody sacrifices, with large numbers of humans as offerings. Even if the people of the City of Silver did these things, sacrificing their own relatives, they would sometimes still suffer famines lasting up to a year—if they didn't do so, the famine might last three to five years.

Is this what the era ruled by ancient gods was like? Even the City of Silver, which was relatively well off, was like this… Lumian turned to the next page.

This page recorded the Giant King's Court's words of praise for the Giant Queen Omebella. What caught Lumian's attention most was one sentence: "The noble Queen used Her maternal nature to help the great King calm His emotions…"

What does this mean? Maternal nature… helping the Giant King—this ancient god—expel excess Beyonder characteristics and regain some sanity by giving birth to children? Lumian pondered as he continued reading.

After another fifteen minutes, he turned to the stage of the Giant King's Court's rapid decline.

The City of Silver, which had obtained another divine-level Sealed Artifact, had learned of the fall of the ancient god, the Giant King and feared falling into the hands of the more brutal Devil Monarch.

In such anxiety and unease, on a night without the crimson moon, the Giant Queen Omebella appeared outside the City of Silver.

This time, She did not descend directly, but walked over step by step.

She was in poor condition. She asked the believers of the City of Silver to perform a ritual, sacrificing half of their people to help Her replenish Her life force.

The record of the subsequent situation was vague, but the result was clear: "That night, man slew god, subject slew ruler, child slew mother."

In other words, the bizarrely resurrected Omebella finally died at the hands of the betraying believers of the City of Silver? Lumian wasn't too surprised.

After that day, the City of Silver discovered that Omebella's remains didn't have Beyonder characteristics in the true sense, but still possessed powerful force and terrifying authority. They completely buried this history, hid this secret, and even after converting to belief in the Ancient Sun God, they didn't tell that Lord the true origin of the divine-level Sealed Artifact, Gift of the Land, until Mr. Fool's Angel of Redemption came to save them.

At this point, all records of Omebella—the Goddess of Harvest—ended. Next came information about the Sealed Artifact—Gift of the Land.

"Gift of the Land can naturally create an edible plant in any environment and promote its growth, reproduction, and abundant harvest within a fifty-kilometer range.

"Gift of the Land will turn all dead humans within a fifty-kilometer range into terrible evil spirits, unless that human died by being murdered by a direct relative. Those who have eaten the food it creates and have a strong connection with it will turn into evil spirits within three hundred kilometers…"

Seeing this record different from the official Sealed Artifact description, Lumian suddenly raised his head and looked at Mr. Sun sitting by the wall.

He asked in confusion, "Every dead human will turn into an evil spirit?

"Even those who were below Sequence 5 in life?"

As far as Lumian knew, evil spirits were the strongest among soul creatures. Even the weakest should be at the level of Sequence 5, while the strong ones could be equivalent to demigods.

"Yes." Mr. Sun nodded steadily.

Wh— the ability of the Gift of the Land is terrifying. This is equivalent to being able to mass-produce Sequence 5 Beyonders, some of whom should even be demigods… Is this what a Grade 0 Sealed Artifact is? Lumian subconsciously began to evaluate from a combat power perspective.

He probed, "What's the maximum number of dead humans that can turn into evil spirits at one time?"

"We've never tried," Mr. Sun replied with a solemn expression.

Lumian suddenly realized and quickly apologized, "I apologize for my rudeness."

He continued reading the materials about the divine-level Sealed Artifact; in the New City of Silver, Grade 0 Sealed Artifacts were called divine-level Sealed Artifacts.

Chapter 891: Gift of the Land

"The Gift of the Land can make the soil fertile within a 300-kilometer range, make water flow abundant, increase the tendency for life to reproduce, and prevent even the most unfavorable environmental conditions from stopping life from bearing offspring, only reducing the quantity and frequency…

"The Gift of the Land will randomly cause the land within a 300-kilometer range to become desolate, crops to fail completely, and plants to wither. Unless the desolation effect ends, this land will not become fertile again. This can be suppressed by Angel-level abilities similar to purification, limiting the desolation to a very small area, unable to spread…

"If actively used, the Gift of the Land can cause all life within a 30-kilometer range to rapidly drain away until death. Similar abilities outside this domain will also gradually wither and be weakened because of this. Lifeless dead who enter this domain will quickly return to the earth…

"The Gift of the Land can also fill a 50-kilometer range with various toxins, grow various Beyonder plants beneficial to itself. Similarly, it can tame all animals without higher intelligence in this area, and strengthen the tendency for every Beyonder to lose control…

"Through contact, the Gift of the Land can create dolls from soil, plants, lava, ores, and metals, and give them some life and power. The strongest dolls do not exceed Sequence 3, with a maximum of nine demigod-level dolls…

"The Gift of the Land can transform the environment, making even the Abyss suitable for human survival…

"The wielder of the Gift of the Land will truly become one with the land, forests, water flows, mountains, ores, etc. within range, and can use them to traverse, with varying speeds…

"Every time one is hit by the Gift of the Land, they will face a test of losing control, as well as a test of death. If unable to pass, they will either lose control on the spot or die directly…

"The Gift of the Land can temporarily turn the wielder into a mythical creature, but requires the wielder to be able to withstand the impact of mystical knowledge and mad thoughts brought by the corresponding Mythical Creature form…

"The Gift of the Land can give the wielder all female characteristics…

"Life that comes into contact with the Gift of the Land will either be cured of all injuries and diseases, or die instantly. Which outcome occurs cannot be divined beforehand. According to prophecy, females with Omebella's bloodline who have suffered betrayal by direct relatives will not experience the instant death outcome…

"Those who do not meet the above conditions, even if lucky enough to receive the healing effect, cannot use the Gift of the Land for more than one minute afterwards, otherwise they will lose control or die…

"Those who meet the conditions will still suffer other negative effects…

"Those who understand the above information, if they do not possess godhood, are likely to become pregnant in the coming period, conceiving an unknown creature…

"Note: Except for the prophecy part, all descriptions are based on the City of Silver's experience, lessons, and understanding."

After reading the information about the Gift of the Land, Lumian finally understood why only females with Omebella's bloodline who had suffered betrayal by direct relatives could touch, pick up, and briefly use this Grade 0 Sealed Artifact. For others, it was purely gambling with their lives, unless they had no other way to heal their injuries and diseases, or faced a crisis they couldn't normally overcome. Otherwise, no one would try.

But it's truly very powerful, worthy of being a Grade 0 Sealed Artifact. And if used briefly, the negative effects are not completely unacceptable. It's just necessary to suppress the desolation effect and guard against enemies turning into even more terrifying evil spirits after death… Lumian silently mused to himself, focusing his attention on the most crucial content.

That was the part about Omebella, in poor condition, walking to the City of Silver seeking sacrifice.

According to Madam Magician, at this time Omebella had already had Her identity and destiny stolen. The people of the City of Silver shouldn't have been able to know that the female giant before them was the Goddess of Harvest, Omebella.

But in the records, the residents of the City of Silver undoubtedly knew it was Omebella, without even a hint of doubt or raising any objections.

They considered it a fact that needed no verification, reflected in the record as just two short sentences, with the purpose of describing that Omebella arrived at the City of Silver by walking.

Lumian raised his head, looking at Mr. Sun seated against the wall, and asked thoughtfully, "Which image did the Goddess of Harvest Omebella have when she walked to the City of Silver?"

He remembered the previous records mentioning that Omebella had descended to the City of Silver multiple times, mainly presenting two images, one representing harvest and reproduction, the other symbolizing desolation and death.

This made Lumian suspect whether Omebella had two identities, with "harvest and reproduction" having its destiny stolen, while "desolation and death" walked to the City of Silver seeking sacrifice.

Mr. Sun shook his head. "There was no record at the time."

Lumian supported his cheek with his hand, pondering silently.

Judging from the demand for the City of Silver to sacrifice half of its people, it does seem closer to the 'desolation and death' image…

But if the 'harvest and reproduction' image was severely damaged, it's also possible to demand life to help oneself recover…

Moreover, two images can be understood, but how can two identities be concentrated in one person… Surely the Goddess of Harvest Omebella didn't steal the identity and destiny of another Omebella before? She's not from the Marauder pathway, and there's no legend indicating She possessed similar items…

Lumian deliberated for a moment, then stood up and said, "I want to touch the Gift of the Land."

To see what resonance Omebella's bloodline could bring, what information could be obtained.

Mr. Sun, Derrick Berg, also stood up. "Okay."

Wearing a simple white robe, he walked steadily in front, entering the round tower from the second-floor connection, then descended all the way, passing through the deep dark dungeon, arriving at a pair of heavy stone doors.

Behind the stone doors was a mottled staircase extending downwards, with points of light like dawn seeping from the depths, bringing some visibility.

Lumian found that the walls on both sides of the staircase were damp, seemingly oozing many water droplets, and tufts of hair-like black plants had grown out of the cracks, hanging there.

The further down the staircase they went, the brighter the dawn-like light became, and between the damp walls and the hair-like black plants grew mushrooms of various colors, golden wheat ears, the unique Black-Faced

Grass, and other things. The spirituality in the air also became increasingly lively and vigorous.

Lumian's heart gradually palpitated, as if returning to a mother's embrace, or finding his past self.

He heard the sound of blood flowing, seemingly from within his body, yet also originating from the bottom of the staircase.

"It really is Omebella… The Invisible Child of God is indeed Omebella…" Lumian sighed a couple of times, calming his own state.

His hair was growing inch by inch inside his cloak, his skin becoming more delicate and elastic.

After descending for a while longer, Lumian saw sunlight, coming from Mr. Sun.

Pure, warm, sacred golden light quickly filled this area, causing the forces of desolation and the aura of death to retreat to the edges.

Seeing this scene, Lumian instinctively associated it with a Demoness's Disease and Plague.

In such a domain of sunlight, the vast majority of mystical pathogens would quickly perish, while a few ordinary pathogens might survive…

Finally, The Sun Derrick Berg and Lumian arrived at a large room filled with points of dawn-like light.

The room was permeated with the smell of soil, the scent of grass, and the fragrance of flowers. The ceiling, floor, and surrounding walls were covered with those hair-like black things, growing all kinds of plants and mushrooms.

In the center of this room, brown soil was piled up, with a withered, giant tree trunk inserted at the top.

The tree trunk was just short of touching the ceiling, about seven or eight meters high, requiring three or four people's arm span to encircle it. Most of the bark on its surface had fallen off, with the remaining parts a grayish-brown color.

Its core had become hollow, and the exposed wood parts facing Lumian and Mr. Sun were partly protruding and partly sunken, outlining a legless, human-like pattern.

That silhouette used the branches on the trunk as hands, its face extremely distorted, with two huge crimson flowers serving as eyes.

Within the wood grain texture of its "body surface", traces of blood color were faintly visible.

"This is the Gift of the Land." The patches of sacred sunlight created by Mr. Sun merged with the points of dawn-like light in the room.

Lumian already felt his blood stirring, feeling an unusually close, blood-based connection with that withered tree trunk.

The two were originally one.

Lumian seemed to receive a call, subconsciously walking forward, his elegant and clean face seeming to emit its own radiance in the dawn-like light mixed with sunlight.

One step, two steps, three steps… He came to the top of the pile of brown soil, stopping in front of the withered giant tree.

The Sun Derrick Berg did not stop her.

Lumian took a breath, adjusted his state, prepared to use Mirror Substitution, and then extended his right palm with evenly proportioned bones and flesh and long fingers, touching towards the withered tree trunk with streaks of blood seeping out.

As soon as his fingers touched the dull-colored wood, a scene suddenly flashed in his mind:

The sky was hazy, seemingly shrouded in dark mist, a huge light shadow that seemed able to support heaven and earth appeared in front, while behind were strange silhouettes outlined by blurred lines…

This scene flashed by, followed immediately by darkness without a hint of light, an utterly quiet stillness.

After an unknown time, in the darkness and stillness, a shrill cry faintly came:

"My child, Omebella…

"My child, Omebella…"

Lumian suddenly broke free from the illusion, as if forcibly pushed away from the Gift of the Land by an invisible force.

He immediately felt a stinging pain in his right shoulder, with a bit of coolness like moonlight shining.

That was the contract mark from the Abscessed Hand being activated, but without producing any effect, bringing teleportation and Blink.

Chapter 892: That Name

Lumian turned his gaze to his right shoulder.

Before this, he had anticipated many scenarios, but he hadn't expected that the contract mark corresponding to the Abscessed Hand would have an abnormal reaction when he touched the Gift of the Land, bringing a stinging pain and coolness.

Is this because the complete Abscessed Hand has corruption from the Great Mother, or does Hand Bro himself have some connection to the Goddess of Harvest Omebella? When He became 0-01's puppet and encountered me, He called out Omebella… Lumian frowned imperceptibly, forming a rough guess.

It was very strange that despite the Abscessed Hand being an Angel, no high-level being remembered His original form!

Combining this with some thoughts from reading the records about Omebella earlier, Lumian suspected whether Hand Bro might also be an Angel whose identity and destiny were stolen by enemies, and who was even brutally dismembered and sealed in various places to prevent His resurrection.

However, this suspicion couldn't explain one issue—judging from how the Abscessed Hand evolved towards femininity when all parts of its body were assembled, showing characteristics related to Sequence 1 Beauty Goddess of the Moon pathway, He must have either been deeply contaminated by the Great Mother or received corresponding boons. Who would dare to bear such a destiny?

Perhaps Hand Bro both satisfies the conditions of lacking necessary wisdom and receiving high-level boons from the Great Mother, naturally reacting to matters of the Child of God, and also has intricate connections with Omebella… He should be an Angel of the Moon pathway, which is adjacent to the Goddess of Harvest Omebella's pathway…

I wonder how many high-level beings from the Second Epoch have survived… But they may not know about these matters, just like the Round Moon Duke of the Sanguine… Lumian suppressed the doubts in his heart and looked again at the Gift of the Land existing in the form of a withered tree trunk.

After the first contact, he had confirmed that he wouldn't die on the spot because of this, so he tried to press his right palm again on the grayish-brown tree trunk with both protrusions and depressions.

The fragrance of flowers and the fishy smell of blood pierced his nostrils. Before his eyes again appeared the hazy sky shrouded in dark mist, the huge light shadow that could support heaven and earth, and the strange silhouettes outlined by blurred lines.

This time, Lumian felt pain, felt terror, and also felt the madness of wanting all things to return to the earth.

He fell into familiar darkness, without a hint of light, quiet to the point of deathly stillness.

As time passed second by second, a shrill cry gradually sounded in his ears, calling for her child Omebella.

This made Lumian slowly come to his senses, and then he felt the stinging pain and coolness in his right shoulder.

He endured this feeling, not being pushed out of the illusion.

The darkness quickly shattered, and Lumian saw the light of dawn, saw faces full of determination, and felt anger, pain, and hatred in his heart.

At this moment, he heard a voice, gentle yet painful, a woman's voice: "Zedus…"

Lumian "woke up", and what entered his eyes was the distorted face outlined by protrusions and depressions on the withered tree trunk, and the two huge crimson flowers serving as the face's eyes.

His palm was still pressed against the tree trunk.

What I just saw and heard, were they Omebella's last obsessions, the scenes that left the deepest impression on Her? Combining the corresponding emotions, does the world shrouded in dark mist correspond to Her first death? Are the huge light shadow and one of the blurred figures the high-level being who stole Her identity and destiny?

What do that deathly silent darkness and the shrill cry represent? I've heard similar cries in the depths of the Underworld, when I shared the senses of the creature inside the bird egg… The bird egg represents gestation… Does that deathly silent darkness correspond to Omebella's state before birth, or the state before regaining new life? Did that voice crying out for her child pull Omebella back from the depths of death, giving Her new life?

Would this new life also reset identity and destiny, making the theft ineffective?

The protagonists of the third scene are the dawn and human faces, with emotions of anger and hatred. Does this correspond to Omebella being killed by the City of Silver?

Yes, these can all be called obsessions, having a crucial impact on Omebella's fate…

Who was that 'Zedus' at the end?

As these thoughts flashed through his mind, Lumian turned his head to look at the tall and steady Mr. Sun beside him. "May I know if you have heard of the name Zedus?"

"You can just speak casually. In the church, no one is nobler than another." The Sun Derrick Berg first corrected, then shook his head and said, "I haven't heard this name."

"Was there no one called Zedus among the brass of the City of Silver when the Goddess of Harvest Omebella last came to the City of Silver?" Lumian pursued.

Mr. Sun answered in a very certain tone, "No."

Zedus wasn't the person who killed Omebella… Who could it be? Thinking of this, Lumian suddenly had a flash of insight.

Could this be Hand Bro's name?

Since Hand Bro could call out Omebella to me, causing the contract to mutate when I touched the Gift of the Land, theoretically, Omebella's remnant consciousness in the Gift of the Land should also be able to detect the Abscessed Hand's contract mark on me and call out His name!

Lumian withdrew his right hand, waited for several tens of seconds, and pressed his palm to the withered tree trunk for the third time.

The previous illusions and auditory hallucinations reappeared, but there was no additional content.

Lumian sighed inwardly, crouched down slightly, adjusted his cloak, and pressed his other hand to the surface of the Gift of the Land, grasping the most solid and obvious protrusion.

Then, he gritted his teeth, the blood vessels on his neck bulged, and his temples throbbed with a blue tint.

This made Mr. Sun's eyelids twitch, as if he hadn't expected a beautiful lady with a cold expression to show such a side.

Soon, the brown soil began to loosen, and Lumian forcefully pulled up that withered, giant tree trunk.

The entire New City of Silver inexplicably trembled—a gentle shake.

Lumian half-lifted the seven or eight-meter-high withered tree trunk, trying to swing it.

It can barely be used to smash people, but it would reduce agility to the lowest level, and speed would also significantly decrease… Lumian made a judgment on whether he could use the Gift of the Land to fight in the future, then inserted the huge withered tree trunk back into the pile of brown soil.

Almost simultaneously, he felt a certain power in his bloodline surge towards his abdomen, causing a slight stinging pain there, as if something was gestating.

Lumian raised his right hand, pressing it towards the corresponding position on his stomach with quiet and eerie black flames.

For a moment, he experienced maternal emotions of reluctance and pity, but this couldn't stop him from infusing the Demoness's black flames into his abdomen in the manner of Fire Infusion.

Indescribable pain, loss, and sadness surged into his heart simultaneously, his face suddenly turned pale, and his light-colored lips involuntarily trembled slightly.

This made The Sun Derrick Berg can't help but ask, "Do you need my help to dispel the negative effects, or find a Beyonder to provide treatment?"

Lumian shook his head, curled his lips, and said in a low voice, "A small matter."

He turned to remind Mr. Sun, "Even Beyonders with godhood might conceive after touching the Gift of the Land, and those with Omebella's bloodline are more likely to encounter this."

"We don't have any records of this. Historically, the City of Silver has needed to actively use this Sealed Artifact very rarely, and each time, the user quickly died." Mr. Sun nodded slightly.

Lumian didn't say anything more, turned around, and walked step by step towards the outside of this huge room, towards the mottled stairs leading to the upper part of the round tower, with Mr. Sun quietly trailing behind.

…

In the hotel room.

Lumian wrote down the gains and questions from reading the records related to Omebella and touching the Gift of the Land in a letter.

He then summoned the "doll" messenger and handed over this letter and a mirror—with this marked mirror, he could later directly transmit information to Madam Magician through the mirror world.

The "doll" messenger took the letter and mirror but didn't leave immediately. Wearing a light golden dress, it leaned against the window frame, carefully and attentively examining Lumian.

Lumian arched an eyebrow. "What are you looking at?"

The "doll" messenger suddenly jumped up, floating in mid-air, and said with an indignant look, "Don't you know how beautiful you look right now?

"Beautiful enough for me to ignore that you're still wearing men's clothes, beautiful enough for me to forgive why you haven't made yourself tidier!"

Lumian was momentarily at a loss for words.

The "doll" messenger waved its hand and said reluctantly, "See you next time!"

"See you next time," Lumian politely replied.

After about fifteen minutes, the "doll" messenger emerged from the void, holding a bulging envelope, and said joyfully, "We meet again!"

"Indeed." Lumian was a bit helpless.

He took the envelope, opened it, and found that the letter itself was very thin, mainly containing an additional green gemstone.

The gemstone was deep and alluring, with a dreamy crystalline green color.

Lumian only looked at it for a moment, but felt as if his vision and soul were sinking into it.

He quickly forced himself to look away, unfolded the letter paper with confusion, and began to read:

"The theft of Omebella's identity and destiny had not become ineffective before the Fifth Epoch…

"We will inquire about the name 'Zedus' from the ancient beings who survived from the Second Epoch, including seeking revelation from even higher beings.

"The origin of this name might solve the mysteries surrounding Omebella…

"That green gemstone was made at my request by Miss Justice, with the purpose of helping you seal part of the knowledge related to the great existences. Although you still have a lot of corruption and seals, as long as you don't recall that knowledge, there shouldn't be any problems. But we can't guarantee that you won't encounter situations where you need to recall it. Before you possess a true or false Angel rank, this hypnotic effect won't be lifted."

Lumian understood the reason and looked at the green gemstone again, allowing his mind to sink into it.

When he came to his senses, the green gemstone had become ordinary, and he had forgotten part of his knowledge.

But it's still worth quite a bit of money. Lumian put away the green gemstone and said to the "doll" messenger still lingering over the desk, "See you next time."

The "doll" messenger waved in response."See you next time!"

Leaving the room, Lumian said to Franca, Jenna, Ludwig, and others, "We're going back to Trier now."

Chapter 893: A Terrifying Matter

Inside the newly rented apartment of Lumian and others on Rue de la Gauche in Quartier de l'Observatoire.

"We're going to the catacombs now," Lumian said to Jenna and Franca in the living room, after glancing out the window at the passing carriages, bicycles, and various mechanical creations.

Before Franca contacted the Demoness of Black again, he wanted to get more intelligence from Krismona's shadow to guard against possible accidents. This required Jenna to advance to Demoness of Affliction at the sacrificial square on the third level of the catacombs.

Jenna looked at the black cloak Lumian was wearing and asked carefully, "Do you need to change your clothes underneath? At least that would make you more comfortable."

Lumian fell silent for a few seconds before stating, "Okay."

Now it was Jenna's turn to be surprised. She had thought Lumian would be more resistant and would need to be persuaded with sufficient reasons.

Franca was equally astonished. When she had drunk the Witch potion, she hadn't accepted such things so quickly.

Her lake-blue eyes flickered slightly, and she quickly made some guesses, her emotions becoming rather complex.

Except for height, Lumian's figure was now similar to Jenna's. After receiving a few pieces of clothing from her, he walked into the bedroom, not completely letting go despite the more intimate relationship between the three of them.

Seeing this, Jenna vaguely understood and turned her head to look at Franca.

"Sigh…" Franca sighed.

Jenna followed by pursing her lips.

Soon after, Lumian came out, wearing the linen men's shirt and dark trousers with a spirited and dashing air.

Franca looked him over and said, "You're too tall. You'll need to find a tailor to make custom-fitted women's clothes."

Lumian tersely acknowledged and walked to the full-length mirror in the living room, looking at himself with his black hair simply tied back.

The stunningly beautiful yet cold-expressionless woman in the reflection made him feel a moment of disorientation. He unconsciously reached into the Traveler's Bag and took out the Lie earring.

His right hand hovered in midair, not immediately putting on the earring.

Franca quickly stepped forward, trying to make her tone sound natural. "I don't think you should force it now. The premise for Aurore's true resurrection is that you always maintain your sense of self and reach the top of the two Calamity pathways. During this process, the fragments of her soul should gradually revive according to your progress. You don't need to deliberately act or imitate her."

"Moreover, Madam Magician guesses that the key part of Aurore's resurrection lies with the Demoness of Unaging. It may not be a good thing for you to let her manifest in you now, just like switching to an adjacent pathway before the Sequence 4 node," Jenna also said in a soft voice.

"Yes, I don't know if your sister ever taught you this phrase: 'Too much of a good thing'. It means that even good things can become bad if taken to excess," Franca added.

Lumian was silent for a moment, then put the Lie earring back into the Traveler's Bag.

Franca quietly let out a sigh of relief and said with a smile, "Do you need a hat with a veil or will you continue to wear the cloak? Looking like this, you'll quickly become the center of attention for everyone on the street."

As fellow Demonesses, she and Jenna both had deep experience with similar situations, and Lumian was now a Demoness with godhood.

Lumian picked up the cloak draped over the back of a nearby chair and put it on again.

As the hood gradually covered his delicate and fine features and simply tied black hair, Lumian turned around and walked towards the door.

Jenna put on a round ladies' hat with a black veil hanging down, while Franca prepared a baseball cap for herself, lowering the brim.

…

On the third level of the catacombs, inside the sacrificial square.

Lumian threw out several mirrors, setting up a Mirror Maze. This way, even if other people came to this level to explore and adventure, they wouldn't be able to see the three Demonesses and their companions, and would pass through normally.

As Jenna adjusted her state and prepared the potion, Franca looked towards the boundary of the maze, which showed no sign of abnormality, and exclaimed in admiration,

"As expected of a demigod. Even though I know the real surrounding area has been hidden by a Mirror Maze, I can't see any problems at all."

In comparison, her own Mirror Maze couldn't achieve this level.

Before Lumian could respond, she asked curiously, "When do you plan to give Voisin Sanson's corpse to Ludwig?"

After Voisin Sanson's death, because he had already been deeply corrupted by the power of Inevitability, and continuing to stay in the special mirror world was quite dangerous, Lumian and the others didn't channel his spirit, but only took away his corpse.

Lumian thought for a moment, then smiled slightly and said, "There's no rush. By stringing him along bit by bit, perhaps the ritual to advance to Sequence 3 of the Hunter pathway will also require team cooperation. Having an Angel team member like this could greatly reduce the number requirement.

"Besides, whether it's you digesting the remaining Affliction potion or Jenna digesting the Affliction potion, we can make use of Ludwig. If we give him all the benefits at once now, how can we make him reluctant to leave?"

Seeing Lumian seriously considering returning to Sequence 3 of the Hunter pathway, Franca felt a wave of joy and was quite gratified, her arms involuntarily swaying twice.

"Anthony is also about to become Sequence 5, just waiting for the final ritual preparation," Lumian suddenly said.

"Uh…" Franca was stunned for a moment. "When did this happen?"

"He told me yesterday. While you were advancing matters related to the Demoness Sect, he was also completing Madam Justice's tasks. He's already established initial contact with the Psychology Alchemists and naturally received corresponding rewards. He's been applying his Hypnosis ability all along, including helping me, and completed the digestion some time ago," Lumian briefly explained. "What he currently needs is to go to the spirit world to contract a certain creature, gaining the characteristic of maintaining clarity in dreams. This can also be substituted by other methods, and Ludwig's dishes might be able to help."

Franca smacked her lips. "We haven't been caring enough about Anthony…"

"For a Spectator, he might not want you to care too much about him or pay attention to him," Lumian glanced at a corner of the Mirror Maze. "Just like he's here now too, ready to Placate Jenna immediately if the situation goes wrong."

He's here too? Franca felt as if she had heard a ghost story.

At this time, Jenna, who had already eaten the Ice Lemon Fish fillet, had prepared the Affliction potion, which was black-based with green foam on top.

Lumian immediately raised both arms.

Behind Jenna, a crystal-clear ice pillar with multiple protrusions rose from the ground, ready to serve as a stake.

Then, Jenna handed the Affliction potion to Lumian and climbed to the top of the ice pillar on her own, allowing Franca to tightly bind her body, restricting her movement.

Bright white Fire Ravens lit up around Lumian. They circled and flew out, landing on Jenna's body surface.

Jenna was quickly set on fire, her expression uncontrollably twisting.

Lumian stepped on layers of frost-condensed stairs, coming to Jenna's front, and poured that bottle of potion into his companion's mouth.

Jenna's mind began to blur, the pain in her body pulling at her, keeping her last bit of clarity.

Lumian then floated lightly from the top of the frost stairs to the ground, focusing on sensing the surroundings.

He was waiting for Krismona's shadow to arrive. Having lost Mr. Fool's seal, he currently couldn't enter the area around the Samaritan Women's Spring.

Franca kept watching Jenna, seeing her skin quickly blacken, her face twist to deformation, contorted in pain, her teeth no longer able to bite, emitting painful sounds.

This made Franca extremely distressed, seemingly more tormented than when she herself had performed this ritual.

Suddenly, Lumian's light blue eyes first took on an iron-black color, then became silver-white with black.

He felt that Krismona's shadow, or rather her residual consciousness, had descended within the Mirror Maze, yet he couldn't see her at all.

Jenna's thoughts continued to drift, her sense of self gradually losing itself. She recalled the pain and joy of her time with Lumian, and also remembered the experience of helping Franca find pleasure and her inner emotions during that period—addicted because of enjoyment, awakened because of pain.

In this state, Jenna had no way of knowing whether she had been noticed by the Primordial Demoness. By the time she regained some of her thoughts, a sacred figure wearing a plain white robe, blurry and hard to see clearly, had appeared before her eyes.

"Lady Krismona," Jenna called out the other's name, and learning from last time's lesson, she quickly and directly asked, "Why does the Primordial One hate pure females who walk the Demoness pathway?"

Krismona answered in an ethereal voice, "My mother hates those Demonesses who don't experience the pain of gender change, and She's also guarding against them."

"Why guard against them?" Jenna further inquired.

Krismona spoke in an extremely hollow tone, "Pure female Demonesses, after becoming Angels, or perhaps after becoming Demonesses of Unaging, might encounter a very terrifying matter. They might overcome it, or they might not. If they can't, it's a very big problem for my mother. She can't let it happen."

Jenna was stunned for a moment, then blurted out, "What about you?"

Strands of blood color suddenly appeared on the surface of Krismona's blurry face. Her previously hollow voice suddenly carried a hint of suppression and pain. "So, I died…"

Before the words faded, this former Demoness of Catastrophe, a true Child of God, rapidly faded away.

"What exactly is that terrifying matter?" Jenna rushed to ask.

Krismona's shadow quickly dissipated, leaving only half a sentence: "That mirror world…"

Jenna suddenly came to her senses, seeing the charred skin on her body surface falling off in pieces, while the ropes had been burned through at some unknown time.

She immediately concealed her form and sought a corner to change her clothes.

Phew… Seeing this, Franca instinctively let out the worry and torment pent up in her heart.

At the same time, she seemed to hear Lumian also quietly let out a sigh of relief.

Chapter 894: Value

After Jenna changed into her dress, she recounted in full her current state and the information she had just obtained from Krismona.

She said with regret, "The time was still not enough. I could only see Lady Krismona for that very short period between fully enduring the potion and regaining complete consciousness.

"However, next time I'll be able to clearly ask what that terrifying matter is."

Lumian looked around and said, "Just now I could only sense Krismona's residual consciousness appear, but I couldn't directly see or make contact with her. This may be because she is one with the seal of the catacombs itself, or because she possesses some special quality that allows her to exert more precise influence on Demonesses."

"I think it's all of the above," Franca said to Jenna with considerable concern. "I always thought the greatest danger for female Demonesses was the Primordial One's hatred, that we would be interfered with during advancement, and even if we could struggle through, we would be hunted down by the Demoness Sect afterwards. I didn't expect there was also this hidden problem. The terrifying matter Krismona spoke of even makes the Primordial Demoness wary. It's very likely related to the deepest secrets of the special mirror world. Do you want to consider switching to the Hunter pathway, then jumping back to the Demoness pathway later?"

Jenna fell silent for a moment before saying, "I want to wait until I understand what that terrifying matter is before deciding whether or not to abandon my identity as a pure female Demoness."

After Lumian's experience, she actually wasn't as averse to changing gender for just a period of time rather than permanently.

Jenna paused, then said with a self-deprecating smile that was half sighing and half intended to comfort Lumian, "I've lived in Quartier du Jardin Botanique and the market district for so many years, and I've seen many tragic things. One thing I've learned is that if you don't even have value to be used by others, it's very difficult to break free from the mire.

"As a pure female Demoness, possibly linked to the deepest secrets of the special mirror world, this is the key reason I was able to receive a warning from Lady Krismona. And later, unable to join the Demoness Sect, if I want to digest potions faster, advance better, resist the tendency towards madness and loss of control, and truly possess the ability to protect family and friends, this should also be a very important factor. There will always be high-level figures who want to use female Demonesses to do certain things, to touch the deepest secrets of the special mirror world, so they'll need to give me certain 'benefits'.

"Relying on the Major Arcana card holders is one way, but it can't be the only way."

Lumian fell silent for a few seconds before stating, "Before encountering that terrifying matter, you should still have opportunities to question Krismona's shadow.

"We'll decide whether or not to take the risk after we understand the nature of the problem."

"Right," Franca agreed with Lumian. "When advancing to Demoness of Despair, you should be able to contact Krismona once more. Anyway, that terrifying matter won't appear until at least the Demoness of Unaging stage."

Lumian, wearing a black cloak and holding a white candle, shook his head.

"This is the last option. We can't assume Krismona is necessarily good and telling the whole truth. Perhaps pure female Demonesses encounter that matter at the Demoness of Despair stage, and Krismona is waiting for this accident.

"The opportunity I'm talking about is that in a few days, we should be able to enter Mr. Fool's dream, with a good chance of being imbued with Mr. Fool's aura. That way, we can pass through the seal and directly face Krismona's shadow near the Samaritan Women's Spring.

"Moreover, the most acceptable method for the Demoness of Despair ritual currently is to go to Morora, which definitely won't allow time to return to Trier and advance here."

Lumian continued with very clear reasoning, "There's another method using those Mirror People in the special mirror world as ritual objects, but this is only suitable for Franca. If Jenna, as a female Demoness, were to use this method to complete the ritual, it might cause that terrifying matter to arrive prematurely."

After all, it was very closely related to the deepest secrets of the special mirror world.

"Mm." Both Jenna and Franca agreed with Lumian's explanation.

Lumian called out to Anthony standing in the corner, dispelled the Mirror Maze, retrieved the mirrors, and holding a burning white candle, headed towards the upper levels of the catacombs.

Franca walked alongside him and said after some thought, "By the way, the Despair potion you drank should include portions from Sequence 9 to Sequence 5, right? When I was considering switching to the Hunter pathway before, I consulted Madam Judgment about related matters. She said one issue with switching to adjacent pathways is that all the preceding potions have to be fully digested, otherwise it will affect one's state and significantly increase risks for future advancements."

This is unlike advancing within the same pathway, where the mental and spiritual state has already been adjusted to suit digestion of preceding potions, so it doesn't take long to stabilize one's condition.

Lumian chuckled softly, seeming to bring a touch of color to the dark and gloomy catacombs.

"I've already digested most of the Despair potion.

"Given my mental and spiritual state then and afterwards, Affliction isn't a concern. It's very compatible and took just a few days to digest.

"The same goes for Pleasure. My experiences during that period changed my mental and spiritual state, and we even had that experience that very morning. So it's not like my state gradually reverted back due to being away from that condition for too long. This doesn't need to be specially digested again.

"Instigator is similar. Don't you often say I'm an excellent Instigator?

"Comparatively, I've been more engaged in direct combat and killing enemies recently. Using Fate Exchange to harm targets was just one of my methods before, not the main approach. So I'll need to seriously act and digest the Assassin and Witch potions once. But as they're in the minority now, they can't really affect my state much and are more of a hidden danger for future advancements."

"I see…" Franca nodded, not saying anything more.

Afterwards, since Jenna needed to go back to rest, stabilize her condition, and contain the spillover effects of the potion, only Lumian and Franca took a four-wheeled, four-seater carriage to Rue Orosai in Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative.

Before going to Trocadéro to find the Demoness of Black, they planned to return to their originally rented apartment to see if the Demoness of Black had sought out Franca and left any messages.

As for choosing a rental carriage instead of public transport or the metro, it was because the two Demonesses, even wearing hats and loose clothing, would inevitably encounter some harassment incidents.

Although Franca and Lumian weren't afraid, they felt there was no need to make themselves uncomfortable. They weren't the type of Demonesses who played extremely extreme roles.

Quartier de l'Observatoire and Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative were adjacent, so it didn't take long for the two Demonesses to return to Apartment 702 at 9 Rue Orosai and open the door.

Although they had only been gone for a few days, and Franca hadn't even had time to tell the landlord about ending the lease early and not needing the deposit back, when they saw the interior layout and the armchair, they felt as if an era had passed.

Various memories flashed through Franca's mind. At times she felt sweet, at times she couldn't help but silently sigh.

After Lumian concealed himself and hid, Franca entered the room alone, closed the wooden door, and carefully examined every detail of the place, focusing on all items with glass mirror surfaces.

"No messages, no traces, but I feel like someone's been here…" Franca muttered to herself as she withdrew her palm from the full-length mirror in the living room.

She turned around and walked towards the master bedroom.

At that moment, the full-length mirror suddenly became dim, as if it had been placed in a lightless environment.

In this dimness, a figure was quickly outlined.

She wore a black court dress, her black hair neatly coiled up, lightly covered by a hat with a dark veil hanging down. Her indescribably beautiful face was slightly pale, her deep gray eyes misty like smoky rain, emitting a noticeable brightness, naturally exuding a pitiable quality.

This was the Demoness of Black, Clarice!

At this moment, the Demoness of Black's face was expressionless, her deep gray eyes reflecting the tall, soft silhouette of Franca's back.

The corner of her mouth curved up slightly, and a few naturally falling strands of her hair drilled out from the mirror into the outside world, extending silently towards Franca's back as if they had a life of their own.

Franca suddenly received a warning, a warning from her companion.

Without thinking, she actively triggered Mirror Substitution.

The next second, her body was touched by those few strands of black hair. First, it turned into a mirror, then became grayish-white, and fell to the ground with a thud.

The mirror had become stone.

Almost simultaneously, the Demoness of Black Clarice in the full-length mirror saw a figure leap down from above.

That figure wore a black cloak, with light blue eyes, pale lips, a clean and elegant face, stunningly beautiful features, a cold and calm expression, standing over 1.8 meters tall, body slightly bent, both hands holding a huge iron-black straight sword.

That huge straight sword burned with intense white-blue flames, slamming onto the ground with a bang.

This didn't shatter or pierce the floor, but hit an invisible barrier. As the entire space gently shook, it triggered a fierce fire snake of intense white-blue, rapidly pouncing towards that full-length mirror, igniting the tea table and wooden boards along the way, quickly reducing them to ashes.

Bottle of Fiction!

When the Demoness of Black's hair strands stabbed out from the mirror, Lumian was already prepared to act to save Franca!

He hadn't expected the Demoness of Black to be so direct and decisive in trying to petrify Franca without saying a word, but this didn't hinder him from following his combat instincts and quickly responding.

The Demoness of Black in the full-length mirror still had that pitiable appearance, but her eyes reflecting Lumian's figure suddenly became covered with a layer of grayish-white, cold color.

Chapter 895: A Brief Battle

The Demoness of Black slightly raised her chin and let out a piercing shriek.

Invisible sound waves instantly caused the mirror to take on a grayish-white, dim color. Along with this, Clarice's hair broke free from its constraints, knocking off her hat and floating upwards. Each strand became thick, as if carved from stone.

This grayish-white spread out from the full-length mirror, causing the intense white-blue fire snake that had rushed to the mirror's front to freeze in place, turning into a statue. It failed to explode the mirror as Lumian had expected, destroying the Demoness of Black's medium for interfering with the interior of the Bottle of Fiction.

The grayish-white created by Clarice continued to spread, like surging tides, quickly engulfing the nearby armchair, sofa set, and cabinets, causing them to lose their luster, take on a grayish-white color, and appear much harder.

This grayish-white "tide" rapidly covered the entire room, enveloping both Lumian and Franca.

Under the constraints of the Bottle of Fiction, facing such a wide-range attack, Mirror Substitution seemed to have lost its effect, because after using a substitute, one would still appear in a petrifying area.

The next second, Lumian and Franca, covered in thick dust-like particles, regressed into grayish-white stone mirrors, but their figures did not appear anywhere within the Bottle of Fiction.

The Bottle of Fiction itself seemed to have undergone petrification, turning into a grayish-white, completely sealed cage.

Seeing this scene, the Demoness of Black in the full-length mirror murmured to herself, "Did they escape?"

The current situation indicated that Lumian, relying on the abilities of a Demoness of Despair, and Franca, using the power of the Ice Amulet, had managed to hide in a mirror just before being petrified, then traversed and escaped.

The current problem was that, given the Demoness of Black's control over the mirror world, she could easily intercept the two in some illusory, dark tunnel, but she hadn't sensed any movement.

At this moment, the Demoness of Black Clarice received a warning from her spirituality and suddenly turned around, casting her gaze towards the dense, illusory spider web behind her.

In one of those dim, unreal tunnels, Lumian, wearing a black cloak and very tall, held up an exaggeratedly shaped iron-black straight sword with one hand, descending from above to slash at the Demoness of Black.

Escape?

Someone holding the Sword of Courage wouldn't consider this option!

If they were to escape, it would be using the retreat as a feint for advancing by setting a trap!

The intense white-blue flames on the Sword of Courage instantly surged into intense black, like boiling pitch, carrying the violence and madness to destroy all things, spirit and flesh.

Simultaneously, Lumian's naturally hanging left palm imperceptibly pressed towards the Demoness of Black from a distance.

On his wrist, which was like a work of art, he wore a silver-white and black bracelet that looked cheap. His crystal-clear, light blue eyes took on a silver-black hue.

Boom!

The black flames, suppressing intensity and madness, exploded in mid-air. Fierce shock waves carrying countless black fires surged towards the Demoness of Black Clarice.

This ageless Demoness didn't use Petrification to respond. Her body rapidly thinned and shrank, flashing a faint light.

She became a mirror.

Crack! That mirror shattered in the explosion, its spirituality completely exhausted in the black flames.

The Fire of Destruction mixed in the terrifying explosion further engulfed the entire area behind the mirror, extinguishing all signs of life.

But when the Fire of Destruction extinguished and the explosion's aftermath ended, the figure of the Demoness of Black outlined in one corner of the void black area behind the mirror.

She seemed able to control the timing of her return to reality after using Mirror Substitution, avoiding appearing in the fire while the Fire of Destruction was still burning.

Suddenly, behind the Demoness of Black, a mirror hidden in the darkness appeared. It directly reflected Clarice's figure, and in the mirror was also Lumian, his clean face tinged with a dark hue from the remaining firelight.

Mirror Projection!

As soon as this Lumian appeared, he immediately transformed into quiet, evil black flames, enveloping the Demoness of Black's figure in the mirror.

Only at this moment did the Demoness of Black seem to sense the danger, actively using Mirror Substitution.

But she was still a beat too slow. Her appearance in this corner, in front of this mirror with Lumian's Mirror Projection, wasn't coincidental, but a carefully designed outcome!

Lumian's earlier apparent frontal attack with the Sword of Courage was actually focused on his left palm that wasn't holding the sword.

He wore the Circle of Binding to elevate his ability to Compelling Fate to Sequence 4 level!

And he had just consumed nearly a third of his spirituality to make the fate of where the Demoness of Black would appear after using Mirror Substitution predetermined, making the corresponding tributary become part of the main stream.

Thus, the Demoness of Black "actively" walked into the trap, standing in front of the mirror with Lumian's Mirror Projection.

At the same time, to prevent the Demoness of Black from detecting the danger in time, Lumian had, on one hand, applied anti-divination treatment to that mirror before launching the attack, and on the other hand, deliberately let the Fire of Destruction cover the entire area behind the mirror, making every corner look like there was no ambush—even if there was, it would obviously be destroyed by the Fire of Destruction. But in reality, relying on his Precision ability, he had covertly made some Fire of Destruction bypass the pre-placed mirror.

Under these various schemes, the Demoness of Black failed to use Mirror Substitution before Lumian's Mirror Projection launched the Demoness's curse.

The Demoness of Black's deep gray eyes, seemingly hiding rain and mist, suddenly widened, and quiet, evil black flames burst forth from within her body.

These black flames burned fiercely, quickly igniting the soul of the Demoness of Black Clarice, accompanied by a silent explosion.

Curse plus Cull!

Crack, crack, the figure of the Demoness of Black kept flashing, turning into mirror after mirror.

Those mirrors successively lost their luster, becoming dim, but unable to extinguish the black flames burning the Demoness of Black from the inside out.

After a few seconds, the Demoness of Black Clarice, too weak to use Mirror Substitution, saw Lumian's figure walk up to her.

This beautiful girl wearing a black cloak, making her face appear even fairer, raised the huge straight sword burning with intense white-blue flames.

That iron-black giant sword came down with a thunderous sound, chopping at the Demoness of Black's neck.

Boom!

This pitiable lady was torn to pieces, scattering around in the form of corpse pieces carrying black flames.

Franca's figure returned from another void dark tunnel, looking at the large number of corpse pieces on the ground, and said with a stunned expression, "Is it resolved just like that?"

This was the Demoness of Black, a Demoness titled by color!

Previously, Franca had only hoped that Lumian could briefly suppress the Demoness of Black, not giving Clarice a chance to interfere with her action of escaping through the mirror world. If she successfully escaped, it would be much easier for Lumian, as a Sequence 4 demigod, to disengage from the battle afterwards.

Of course, Franca would inevitably hope to find an opportunity to use the Certain Death effect of the Inevitable Gun to accomplish the feat of slaying a demigod. If that failed, she could still use Sure Hit plus Impregnating Bullet to give Lumian a chance to destroy the enemy.

Lumian didn't put away the Sword of Courage, staring at the still-burning corpse pieces, and said carefully, "She showed Sequence 3 level in some abilities, but overall seemed stiff and inexperienced. Not only did she not seem like an experienced Demoness of Unaging, but she also seemed a bit weaker than a normal Demoness of Despair. She didn't even notice when I was placing mirrors while invisible…"

Before Lumian finished speaking, as the Demoness's black flames finished burning, those corpse pieces began to fade, gradually dissolving, as if returning to formlessness.

"Not the normal Demoness of Black." Franca quickly made a judgment.

"This also means we have no spoils," Lumian laughed, saying to Franca who had already used up the last Mirror Traversal ability of the Ice Amulet, "Let's return to the real world first, and I'll come back later to check what's left in the end."

Franca understood that Lumian was worried that the abnormal state of the Demoness of Black might lead to a corpse transformation or bring other accidents. If only he came to check, it would be much safer.

Without being reckless, Franca pressed her hand behind the mirror, leaving this area and returning with Lumian to the living room of apartment 702.

Everything here had turned to stone, and with the removal of the Bottle of Fiction, grayish-white powder fell like rain.

Franca covered her mouth and nose, muttering, "This is severe pollution."

She reached into the Traveler's Bag, intending to take out the remaining verl d'or and leave it here as compensation for the damaged furniture.

At this moment, Lumian suddenly had a premonition. His figure disappeared in an instant, melting into the shadows, hiding in the bedroom where Jenna had originally lived.

The next second, Franca also sensed something with her spirituality, casting her gaze towards the glass window that had been protected by the Bottle of Fiction and had not yet petrified.

The left part of the double-opening glass window suddenly darkened, quickly outlining a figure as if reflecting an image on water.

That figure wore a black, elegant court dress, with black hair coiled up, wearing a hat with a dark veil hanging down. Her face was indescribably beautiful, her deep gray eyes bright but revealing undisguisable sorrow, her red lips slightly curved, her chin beautifully arched. Not only men but also women who saw her would instinctively feel pity.

Demoness of Black!

Demoness of Black Clarice!

At this moment, Franca was a bit stunned.

Did the Demoness of Black get reanimated?

No, even if it was a reanimation, it should have appeared on the full-length mirror in the living room!

If it isn't reanimation, who is this now, and who was that earlier?

As Franca's mind instantly tensed, the Demoness of Black on the glass window gently nodded and asked in a soft voice, "What exactly happened a few days ago that made you only return now?"

This attitude… it's very amiable… Franca, who had initially thought of drawing her gun and attacking, suddenly felt confused.

Chapter 896: Charm

Seeing that the Demoness of Black had no immediate intention to attack her, and didn't seem to be secretly releasing Plague, Franca steadied herself and began reciting her pre-rehearsed words, "That day, Lumian suddenly said that the Rose School of Thought had brought a very important item to Trier, which could potentially cause chaos and affect us, so we needed to quickly move to another safe house…"

This time, Franca pushed all the problems and abnormalities onto Lumian, saying she didn't know why this lover she met through the Iron and Blood Cross Order was hiding so many secrets. Despite not being very powerful, he seemed to have a very high status, to the extent that after a dazzling light suddenly burst in the sky over Trier, it attracted the attack of two bestowed demigods.

Franca truthfully recounted her role in the subsequent battle, only omitting Jenna's abilities and Anthony's revolver. Finally, she said, "At the most critical moment, Lumian came back. He had actually become a Demoness of Despair and quickly killed Higdon, then dealt with Voisin Sanson."

"And then?" the Demoness of Black in the glass window asked.

"She left," Franca answered simply, without further explanation.

She originally felt that although her description was reasonably fabricated, as someone who wasn't a descendant of the Demoness family, with an origin that only seemed clear, having long shared a bed with someone carrying many secrets and special qualities, experiencing many things together, was inherently suspicious. Who could guarantee she hadn't developed some issues because of this?

After the brief battle earlier, she had completely lost confidence in her ability to deceive the Demoness of Black, and was merely giving her a reason to pretend.

"Lumian Lee indeed has quite a few issues. Once exposed, he certainly wouldn't dare stay here anymore," the Demoness of Black said in a very calm tone.

Then, she chuckled softly. "The only pity is that you've lost the most valiant lover below demigod level. The few times I came to look, you were always enjoying yourself immensely, it was enviable."

"…" Franca was stunned for a moment, instinctively cursing in her heart, Dammit! When did she see that? Wasn't there a Bottle of Fiction?

Thinking about the Demoness of Black seeing her in that state, her face nearly turned green.

She carefully recalled and realized this couldn't really be blamed on Lumian, it was all her own doing—after the first two or three times, she had gotten used to it and found an entertaining point, which was to tease and Charm Lumian until he became urgent, to the point where even the Ascetic couldn't remind him to create the Bottle of Fiction.

What is this called? It's called bringing a calamity upon oneself! I hope the Demoness of Black hadn't seen what I did later to digest the Affliction potion… I hope… Mr. Fool, please protect your devout believer from social death! Franca laughed dryly. "Indeed, he was much more impressive than I had anticipated, but I don't want to mention him anymore. No, her. This bastard not only kept so many secrets from me, but also seduced my other lover Jenna, cuckolding me. I've even digested half of the Affliction potion because of this."

She was laying the groundwork for her rapid digestion of the Affliction potion.

Of course, as said before, giving the Demoness of Black a reason to keep pretending.

"There was such a thing?" The Demoness of Black's face, white to the point of slight transparency, revealed a slight smile, as if she had long guessed that a Sequence 5 Beyonder of the manly pathway like Lumian Lee, frequently in contact with Franca's female lover, would inevitably have a day when he couldn't resist.

"Yes." Franca dug up her true feelings from that time and gritted her teeth.

"You didn't cut off his thing, or force-feed him a potion from the Demoness pathway?" The Demoness of Black relaxed her expression, rarely making a joke. "Well, his sequence is too high, you couldn't make him advance to become a Demoness of Despair.

"Among my lovers, if any male lover is destined to become a Demoness, I don't mind him sleeping with my female lovers, since he'll lose it sooner or later and become a female lover. If I hadn't originally planned for him to walk the Demoness pathway, I would have let him know what pain really is."

You real Demonesses sure play a perverted game… Franca inwardly criticized before saying, "I initially had thoughts of revenge, but later gave up. As an adult, I don't make choices—I take everything!"

At this point, Franca deliberately hesitated. "Moreover, I sensed some issues at the time. He seemed to have a false high status, and torturing him would make my Affliction potion digest rapidly, but before I could probe the real reason, everything exploded."

The Demoness of Black nodded slightly, looking at Franca with an appreciative gaze for two seconds. "No wonder you played that kind of game. It's very interesting, very suitable for a Demoness."

"…" Franca's toes were already constantly scratching the ground inside her boots.

"However, your endurance isn't too good," the Demoness of Black said in an instructive tone.

Franca smiled sheepishly and said, "I only made him endure, not myself…"

"Endurance is also a form of pain. This would allow you to digest the potion from another aspect," the Demoness of Black said seriously, suppressing the smile on her face.

"That's true…" Franca blinked her eyes.

Why didn't I think of that at the time? Otherwise, I would have completely digested the Affliction potion by now!

Ah, I was too focused on having fun!

But Beyonders can't think about "acting" every moment, right? One needs to learn to relax, to learn to use pure entertainment to relieve mental pressure and accumulated tendencies towards losing control!

Franca really didn't want to continue this embarrassing topic, so she took the initiative to say, "But I'll be able to completely digest the Affliction potion in at most two or three weeks."

She had recently been recalling previously learned knowledge, purchasing general-purpose textbooks, and trying to create exam papers for Ludwig.

She believed that just once would be enough to achieve her goal.

This would only take a few days.

The Demoness of Black didn't mention anything about subsequent advancement, which Franca didn't find strange—her current self was highly suspicious, and if the Demoness of Black were to promise to provide the formula and ingredients for the Demoness of Despair, it would mean that the subsequent arrangements would inevitably involve very dangerous traps.

What a situation this is… I know I'm lying, the Demoness of Black knows I'm lying, and I also know that the Demoness of Black knows I'm lying… Franca sighed inwardly, and according to the Demoness of Black's questions, she detailed Lumian's appearance and abilities after he became a Demoness of Despair.

The Demoness of Black listened quietly, then suddenly walked out of the glass window into the grayish-white dominated living room.

Seeing this, alarm bells immediately rang in Franca's heart.

The current situation was clearly the result of Petrification, an ability unique to high-ranking members of the Demoness pathway, yet the Demoness of Black hadn't asked a single question about what had happened!

The Demoness of Black looked at Franca, her lips gently blossoming into a smile that seemed to cast a glow over the stone room.

Franca found herself uncontrollably drawn in, completely unable to look away.

The Demoness of Black extended her right hand and said in a gentle voice, "You only have one lover left now, but you can become my lover."

Franca suddenly felt that the Demoness of Black was filled with a sacred aura, making her want to protect and also ravish her.

Then, a watery gleam appeared in the Demoness of Black's eyes, taking on a soft and sorrowful quality that made Franca want to merge with her out of pity.

The Demoness of Black walked step by step towards Franca, her right hand still extended, like a queen waiting for her knight to kiss it.

Franca was suddenly overwhelmed by a strong desire to conquer.

In this way, the Demoness of Black continuously changed her aura, as if searching for the one that would most captivate Franca.

Franca's breathing had already become belabored, and she instinctively blurted out, "No need."

This sentence was like a spell, instantly dispelling the current romantic atmosphere. The Demoness of Black returned to her original appearance, stopping just two steps away from Franca.

"Give me a reason," the Demoness of Black asked very calmly, showing no signs of disappointment or anger.

Franca's cheeks had become flushed at some point, her body trembling slightly, as if that refusal had used up all her strength.

Her mind raced, quickly finding a very good reason.

"Madame, you said that endurance is also a form of pain. I want to take the opportunity of losing a lover to practice abstinence for a while, to accelerate the complete digestion of the Affliction potion."

A faint smile reappeared on the Demoness of Black's face.

"Your willpower is stronger than I expected. Although I wasn't using my full Charm on you just now, the fact that you could still refuse my proposal without me deliberately suppressing the Charm shows that your willpower is among the best among Sequence 5 Beyonders."

Is that so… What was I thinking of that made me refuse such a great temptation… Franca recalled, her expression changing slightly.

At that moment, she had thought of Jenna, and also of Lumian.

This both surprised and didn't surprise her.

The lack of surprise referred to thinking of Jenna at the critical moment of being Charmed, while the surprise was that she had also thought of Lumian!

The Demoness of Black looked around and said, "I'll wait for you to completely digest the Affliction potion. During this time, I have a task for you. Make contact with the core members of the Emperor Party. You should have heard the voice saying 'Your emperor has returned' that day. Those fantasists who worship Roselle and want to restore the empire seem to have new ideas because of this. Perhaps we can use them to do something.

"The specific situation will be told to you by Niceea. She was originally a spy employed by the government, specifically monitoring the Emperor Party. She has just become a Witch not long ago.

"This is her contact information…

"If you want to obtain the formula and ingredients for the Demoness of Despair from me, you need to make good contributions to the sect."

Franca took the paper handed over by the Demoness of Black and "sincerely" responded, "Yes, Madame Clarice."

The Demoness of Black didn't say anything more. Layers of dark spaces appeared in her eyes.

Her figure then disappeared from the room. She hadn't mentioned a single word about the complete grayish-white state of the scene.

Not long after, Lumian walked out of Jenna's bedroom, grabbed Franca's arm, and entered the full-length mirror in the living room.

The corpse pieces of the Demoness of Black in the area behind the mirror had completely disappeared.

Chapter 897: The Demoness of Black's Peculiarity

Lumian didn't rely entirely on his spirituality, but carefully searched the area behind the mirror, finding nothing.

"Could this have been the Demoness of Black's Mirror Person?" Franca asked doubtfully.

"The Demoness of Black's Mirror Person shouldn't be this weak." Lumian shook his head.

The two tried using Magic Mirror Divination, but received no effective revelation.

"Should we try asking the one with the most accurate divination results?" Franca suggested, barely concealing her fear and aversion.

After pondering for a moment, Lumian said, "Let's wait until we've consulted Madam Magician and the others before considering that option."

Perhaps Madam Magician could learn from the spirit world what exactly the dead Demoness of Black was.

Franca sighed in relief, turning her gaze to the mirror exit, saying with lingering fear, "Just now, the Demoness of Black completely ignoring the petrified state of the room nearly scared me to death. Such a glaring anomaly was right in front of her eyes, yet she acted as if she were blind. She could have at least pretended to notice!"

Even though I knew the reason I gave wouldn't convince you, I still acted professionally until the end, didn't I?

Lumian pondered for a moment before saying, "Perhaps she really didn't notice."

"Wh— You're even better at telling horror stories than I am!" Franca shuddered.

"It's possible that the death of this Demoness of Black will lead to a partial loss of sensory or spiritual perception in the real Demoness of Black, making her unable to perceive corresponding signs for a short time," Lumian speculated thoughtfully.

Franca nodded pensively. "So you're saying the Demoness of Black you killed was a part of the real Demoness of Black, split off for unknown reasons?"

"If we could master all the mystical knowledge related to the Demoness of Unaging, we should be able to find the answer to this question," Lumian affirmed.

"Not necessarily," Franca refuted, her thoughts jumping as usual. "Maybe this isn't a characteristic of the Demoness of Unaging, but rather a peculiarity of the Demoness of Black herself. Didn't you say her position and role in the Demoness Sect don't quite match her Sequence?"

"That's a possibility," Lumian agreed with Franca's statement. "Whether it's you, or me and Jenna, if we want to go further on the Demoness pathway in the future, these secrets are something we must understand and master. This is also why we can't bypass the Demoness Sect and must interact with them."

But I want to switch to Hunter in the future… Well, Sequence 4 has to be Demoness of Despair, and maybe by Sequence 3 I can leave the Demoness Sect. But the Demoness of Unaging sounds very appealing—eternally youthful, hard to kill, skilled at resurrection, basically both tenacious and long-lived, without aging… Switch pathways at Sequence 2? But becoming an Angel is certainly very difficult, I only know of Madam Magician among the Angels in the Major Arcana… Franca hesitated and struggled internally.

She glanced at Lumian, suddenly grinning and saying, "I resisted the Demoness of Black's Charm just now!"

Her eyebrows and eyes seemed to be saying "Praise me quickly".

Lumian glanced at her. "I remember when I first met you, you were mature, dashing, charming, and had determination. You were a reliable older sister. But now…"

"No, a reliable older brother," Franca instinctively retorted. "Everyone has different facets. Can you act the same way with strangers as you do with brothers you can entrust your life to? Can you handle daily trivial matters in the same style as sudden crises? That would be exhausting."

She became smug again. "That was a Sequence 3 Demoness of Unaging. Although she didn't directly use Charm, just based on her beauty, the innate allure of a high-sequence Demoness, and her constantly changing aura, not many men could refuse her. But I did it!"

Lumian walked towards the dark exit leading back to the living room, casually saying, "Being able to refuse is a good thing. Although becoming the Demoness of Black's lover would indeed allow you to enjoy the body of a High-Sequence Demoness and the pleasure she brings, and gradually gain her true trust, it would also make you gradually become addicted, ultimately unable to extricate yourself, becoming twisted and corrupted, abandoning everything you originally valued."

"Right," Franca responded instinctively, then grabbed her ponytail and said, "That's not the point! Do you know why I was able to refuse the Demoness of Black's proposal?"

"You thought of Jenna at that moment?" Lumian pondered briefly.

Franca nodded with satisfaction, speaking in a tone that suggested her bro understood her best, "That's right!"

Lumian didn't ask for details and continued forward, preparing to return to the real world.

At this moment, Franca, both struck by inspiration and suddenly impulsive, added, "I also thought of you…"

As soon as the words left her mouth, the Demoness of Affliction froze, as if struck by lightning.

Dammit, why did I say that out loud?

Franca instantly wanted to dig a hole and crawl into it. At the same time, she quickly examined her previous state to determine if she had been manipulated or if it was truly a moment of impulse.

Seeing Lumian stop in his tracks, his expression becoming somewhat complicated, Franca finally confirmed that it was her spirituality's inspiration that made her impulsive, making her try this.

Just as Jenna had said before, Lumian needed to clearly know that he as a person was still valued, liked, and needed.

Since I've already said it, I might as well continue! Franca looked at the dazed Lumian, deliberately using a stubborn tone. "I don't know why I thought of you at that moment either. I thought we only had a purely physical relationship. Maybe it's because you were watching from the guest room."

This made Lumian instinctively scoff, as if wanting to refute.

He didn't say similar words, instead asking in a slightly lower voice, "What did you think about me?"

Dammit, you're really asking? Bro, who could say those things out loud!? While Franca was inwardly cursing, she smiled and looked Lumian up and down.

"I don't know why, but I feel like you've become even more beautiful after coming into contact with the Sealed Artifact formed by Omebella's remains. You can even rival the Sequence 3 Demoness of Black now. Well, at least in one of her auras."

Normally, beauty and prettiness couldn't be quantified and compared, but in the Demoness pathway, they could. Higher Sequences would have more feminine charm than lower Sequences, and were generally more beautiful, unless the lower Sequence Demoness was originally very attractive or improved her appearance through other means, such as using the Lie earring or coming into contact with the extreme corruption of beauty. Lumian satisfied both conditions.

Without waiting for Lumian to respond, Franca deliberately sighed, "At that time, I should have recalled you, whose charm could rival the Demoness of Black, but strangely, I remembered the initial you who always liked to act tough, like a little brother. Maybe I didn't want to perform an improper act in front of a bro."

After a few seconds, Lumian glanced at Franca. "Perhaps Jenna and I have also become your anchors."

Hey, don't say it so seriously and textbook-like… Franca grumbled, then asked, "The Demoness of Black asked me to contact the core members of the Emperor Party. Could there be any hidden risks?"

"I thought she would make me deal with the special mirror world-related… uh, she doesn't seem to have withdrawn those tasks from earlier investigations of the Mirror People."

"The Emperor Party's new scheme might be related to the special mirror world," Lumian said in a flat tone.

"Ah?" Franca looked puzzled.

How are these connected?

Lumian explained simply, "Have you forgotten who the leader of the Mirror People is?"

"The mirror Emperor Roselle… the Emperor Party… I understand now!" Franca suddenly realized.

She immediately looked Lumian up and down. "Why do I feel like you've become smarter?"

"This is the result of blending the Demoness and Hunter pathways," Lumian said with a slight smirk. "Before, I used the Conspirer's ability to gather clues, study details, and deduce conclusions. Now, I first get some inspiration, come up with a few ideas, and then rely on Conspirer to analyze possibilities. This saves a lot of time. Just now, when the Demoness of Black mentioned the Emperor Party believing in Emperor Roselle and wanting to restore the empire, I naturally associated it with the mirror Roselle, and then connected the two."

"You're making me want to switch pathways…" Franca muttered as she followed Lumian back to the still grayish-white Apartment 702.

She took out 300 verl d'or from the Traveler's Bag and placed them under a small "stone".

This was compensation for the landlord.

After doing this, Franca looked back at the full-length mirror with a slight grayish tint and said in a disappointed tone,

"The Mirror Traversal ability of the Ice Amulet has been used up, and the Demoness of Black didn't give me another one…"

"You'll have a new one soon, although it can only be used about five or six times," Lumian said seemingly casually.

"What?" Franca looked at her companion in confusion. "Where is the new charm coming from?"

Lumian pointed at himself. "From me. Have you forgotten that I'm a Demoness of Despair and can make similar charms by praying to myself?"

"Oh, right," Franca was a bit captivated by Lumian's tone and expression just now.

Who could resist such a beautiful girl saying such things and making such gestures!

As Lumian opened the door to leave, Franca suddenly realized.

This guy's mood seems to have improved a bit; he can even occasionally answer my questions in a relatively light tone!

Hehe… Franca quickly caught up, her steps feeling light and airy.

…

At night, in Underground Trier, in a cavern of a certain quarry.

Lumian and Ludwig watched as Anthony successfully summoned a human-headed bird demon in the name of Mr. Fool, but failed to gain its acknowledgment and successfully sign a contract.

The human-headed bird demon, a creature from the spirit world, was part of the advancement ritual for Sequence 5 Dreamwalker of the Spectator pathway.

"If you had summoned it through normal means, I could force it to sign a contract with you," Lumian casually remarked as he saw Anthony dissolve the wall of spirituality and walk out.

But now it was summoned in the name of Mr. Fool, and both parties of the ritual were communicating in a peaceful state.

Anthony agreed with a nod.

"But it won't respond to normal summoning methods.

"I plan to pray to Mr. Fool again next month, hoping to receive the protection of his Angel. This is another method provided by Madam Justice, but such prayers should preferably be made after some time has passed."

"Next month, huh… In a few more days, we should be entering Mr. Fool's dream. Having a Dreamwalker would be much better…" Lumian's eyes shifted slightly as he turned his head to look at Ludwig beside him and asked, "Are there any ingredients that can help Anthony stay lucid in the dream? Even if it's just for a short time."

Chapter 898: Selecting "Ingredients"

Ludwig, dressed in children's formal wear, looked at the freshly cleaned "altar" and licked his lips somewhat regretfully, saying, "If we had caught that bird with a human head just now and stewed it together with a fat duck, we could have gained the ability to control our fear emotions in dreams, possibly gaining lucidity through fear…

"Additionally…"

The seven or eight-year-old boy began counting on his fingers, one by one.

"The gray beast from Planet Darbilla, cooked by roasting, can prevent one from getting lost in most dreams for seven days…

"The Black Dream Tapir, a spirit world creature that feeds on joy, happiness, excitement, desire, and other emotions in human dreams. Using its residual dust to make a cocktail can prevent the drinker from being deceived by the beauty of dreams, sinking into them, and refusing to wake up. At the same time, each time you drink that wine, you can clearly distinguish between reality and dreams for the next ten days…

"The King of Nightmares, an Angel-level creature that rules Planet Four Snake in the Y star system. Eating its gallbladder directly can permanently gain the trait of dream lucidity…

"…"

As Ludwig spoke, he grew hungrier and couldn't help but ask his now-female godfather for a few sandwich cookies to fill his stomach.

After he finished listing the ingredients he could currently remember, Anthony pondered and said, "Perhaps I've encountered a Black Dream Tapir before."

Seeing Lumian look at him, Anthony carefully said, "I met a patient at the psychiatric clinic a while ago. He had been having nightmares for three consecutive weeks, was mentally drained, emotionally numb, and very pessimistic.

"I tried regular psychological treatment on him, and also attempted to solve the problem using Beyonder abilities like Hypnosis, but these only prevented him from having nightmares for two or three days before reverting back to his original state.

"I couldn't figure out why it failed before, but now I suspect he might have been targeted by a Black Dream Tapir."

"Psychiatric clinic?" Lumian nodded while casually asking.

Anthony briefly explained, "To join the Psychology Alchemists, one needs to fully integrate into the circle of psychiatrists. I'm now officially a practicing physician at a psychiatric clinic."

Lumian made an affirmative sound and thoughtfully said, "The higher the Sequence of new members, the less likely they are to be trusted by those secret organizations. Sequences 9 to 7 are still okay, within the realm of wild Beyonders that ordinary people have a chance to reach. Sequence 6 is barely acceptable, but Sequence 5 involves rituals. Very few purely wild Beyonders can reach this level. Aren't you worried that becoming a Dreamwalker now will affect your subsequent joining of the Psychology Alchemists?"

Lumian made an affirmative sound and thoughtfully said, "The higher the Sequence of new members, the less likely they are to be trusted by those secret organizations. Sequences 9 to 7 are still okay, within the realm of wild Beyonders that ordinary people have a chance to reach. Sequence 6 is barely acceptable, but Sequence 5 involves rituals. Very few purely wild Beyonders can reach this level. Aren't you worried that becoming a

Dreamwalker now will affect your subsequent joining of the Psychology Alchemists?"

Anthony smiled peacefully. "I bought the Dreamwalker potion formula and corresponding ingredients in batches from a member of the Psychology Alchemists. Madam Justice mainly provided financial rewards."

"I see…" Lumian turned to ask Ludwig, "What level of power does a Black Dream Tapir have approximately?"

"The strong ones have weak godhood, while the weak ones are equivalent to Sequence 7," Ludwig said with an expectant look.

"Going to the spirit world to find harpies or Black Dream Tapirs is not something we can accomplish, unless we ask Madam Magician or the Angel of the Holy Spirit who manages the spirit world on behalf of Mr. Fool for help," Lumian said to Anthony. "Do you have a way for me to enter that patient's dream? I want to confirm if it's a Black Dream Tapir and if there's a chance to capture it."

"I bought two dream entry charms from the Psychology Alchemists, and Madam Justice also gave me one," Anthony answered truthfully.

Lumian smiled, pulling up his cloak to cover his face. "Then let's 'visit' that patient tonight."

Anthony suppressed the disappointment of having that extremely beautiful face hidden, nodded, and followed behind Lumian, who was holding Ludwig's hand, as they headed towards the surface.

After walking several dozen meters, Ludwig turned his head to look at Lumian and said, "Mother…"

He simply felt that since his godfather had become female, the address should be changed.

Mother… Lumian's heart skipped a beat, and his voice became stern.

"It's better you keep calling me godfather."

"Yes, Godfather," Ludwig readily agreed. "I've been having some bad premonitions lately."

"Bad premonitions?" Lumian asked as if pondering, "About yourself, or all of us?"

Ludwig answered quite honestly, "About myself."

Lumian nodded slightly and chuckled. "I think I know what it is. It's not a big problem, just endure it and it will pass.

"When the time comes, you'll have the opportunity to accumulate contributions to exchange for different parts of a demigod blessed's corpse."

Ludwig's eyes immediately lit up, forgetting that his premonition was leaning towards bad. "Alright, Godfather!"

…

In Quartier de la Maison d'Opéra, on Rue du Chapeau Noir, inside an apartment with drawn curtains.

Niceya, nearly 1.7 meters tall, stood in front of a full-length mirror, gazing at her reflection.

My face is fair and clean, my brown hair naturally wavy and hanging loose, my brown eyes deep yet clear, my lips red and moist, slightly parted to reveal two rows of white teeth. My figure is curvy, neither too tall nor too short, just right…

What an enchanting young lady.

Niceea gazed at herself in fascination, her right hand falling to her rosy lips, then slowly moving down towards her prominent chest.

She hadn't expected that the Beyonder power promised by that Demoness would be obtained in this way. When she was immersed in and proud of the various abilities brought by the Assassin potion, committing numerous crimes, her fate was already sealed.

She was forced to drink the Witch potion, becoming a woman, which strongly conflicted with and opposed her male identity of over twenty years.

Now she seemed to be split into two people: one angry, in pain, wanting to take revenge on those Demonesses and this world; the other conquered by her charming beauty, flawless figure, and a happiness different from before, falling in love with her current self, even wanting to drink higher Sequence potions to make herself more perfect and charming.

Suddenly, following her spiritual intuition, Niceea lowered her hand from her chest and abruptly turned around, looking towards an armchair near the window.

There was someone there, who hadn't been there before.

The person had their arms resting on both armrests, body comfortably leaning against the chair back. A faintly visible ponytail of flaxen-colored long hair, brown eyebrows flying into the temples bringing both heroic beauty and seeming to pierce into the hearts of all onlookers, while those seemingly clear and tranquil lake-colored eyes held depths, as if hiding many emotions and thoughts, making one want to use all their passion to explore.

These features, along with the high and delicate nose, moist and rosy lips, smooth and slender neck, and the figure that made the lace flower shirt bulge, suddenly gave Niceea an urge to submit and kiss the back of the other's hand.

So beautiful… As beautiful as the few Demonesses I've seen before, but with a different aura, a more attractive aura and facial details… Niceea greedily looked at the beauty before her, surprisingly not questioning who the other was, nor making any defensive or attacking moves.

Is this what a newly advanced Witch is like… Franca, sitting in the armchair, silently shook her head.

She had already sneaked into this room since Niceea started admiring her mirror image, but Niceea was so indulged in her own beauty that she completely failed to notice, even wanting to perform an intense act.

Back then, when Franca drank the Witch potion, she was also stunned by her own beauty, feeling it was the anima in her heart, the woman she had always dreamed of. Fortunately, her personality was very cheerful, and being a transmigrator who had already switched bodies once, she didn't reject her current female body or consider it as another person. So she was only a bit narcissistic, not to the extent of truly falling in love with her female self.

After getting busy with the Tarot Club's tasks and meeting Jenna and Lumian, Franca's issues in this aspect became increasingly faint. However, being so beautiful, how could she not admire herself?

Although she was sitting and Niceea was standing, Franca smiled with a condescending attitude.

"I don't know if the Demoness of Black has told you, but for a long time to come, you will be my subordinate."

"Madame Clarice mentioned it. You must be Madame Franca?" Niceea's gaze was still roaming over Franca's body, with an urge to tear off the other's clothes and beg for pleasure, but she looked at her own chest and felt a wave of sadness.

She no longer had that ability now…

"Your vigilance is not high enough. If I were an enemy, you would have died several times already," Franca said, her red lips parting slightly. "Mirror Substitution is very important, but you can't rely on it completely."

Niceea was first startled, then broke out in a cold sweat. "Yes, Madame Franca."

Franca showed a slight smile, making Niceea's eyes light up.

"Give me the information on the core members of the Emperor Party."

Niceea nodded instinctively. "Understood."

She quickly walked towards the safe in the room.

…

In the administrative district, on Rue Lviv.

Wearing cotton pajamas and sleep pants, Kewell held a glass of red wine, sitting on the edge of the bed, reluctant to lie down and sleep for a long time.

He knew it would be the beginning of another long torment and endless pain.

Finally, he couldn't resist fatigue and sleepiness. After drinking that glass of red wine, he fell into a deep sleep.

In the hazy dream, Kewell was running, terrified to the point of near collapse, with a huge monster chasing him from behind.

Ahead was a cliff, and he didn't have time to stop, falling directly off it.

If it were a normal dream, Kewell would definitely wake up at this moment due to the free fall or directly switch scenes, but he didn't now. He crashed to the ground with a bang, seeing his body shattered into pieces everywhere in indescribable pain.

He let out a shrill scream.

At this moment, a bear-like shadow walked out of the darkness and began to lick the brain matter that had splattered out of Kewell, causing him to freeze, feeling even more pain and fear.

Suddenly, he saw the crimson moon rise in the sky, and a slender figure carrying a huge iron-black straight sword descended from the heavens.

The figure's hood was flipped up, black long hair illuminated by the crimson moon as if in a dream, seeming to pierce directly into the moon.

Chapter 899: Hunting in Dreams

When Lumian saw the bear-like shadow, he immediately confirmed it was a Black Dream Tapir based on his spiritual intuition.

He instantly drew the Sword of Courage, and under the illumination of the crimson moon in the dream, jumped down from the cliff top. The hood attached to his cloak flipped up, revealing black long hair, delicate features, and light blue yet deep eyes.

Boom!

Intense white-blue flames pinned the black bear-like shadow to the ground, blasting it into pieces.

Those shadow fragments quickly scattered and recombined into the shape of a tapir in the distance.

This wasn't a real dream. Most damage couldn't be reflected on the physical body, so it couldn't cause direct death, at most causing mental damage and turning one into a vegetable!

The bear-like Black Dream Tapir turned towards Lumian and let out a low growl.

With this growl, the scenery around Lumian changed, transforming from the primitive forest at the bottom of the cliff to Cordu under blue skies and white clouds, near green grasslands.

Lumian returned to Ol' Tavern, with a glass of absinthe floating with a dreamlike green color in front of him, surrounded by many Guillaumes and Pierres.

They were telling crude jokes and slandering people from other villages.

The familiar scent of alcohol pierced Lumian's nostrils. Outside the tavern window, Aurore's house was magically reflected, with a figure in a light blue dress and thick golden hair sitting on the roof, hugging her knees and gazing at the sky.

One of the Black Dream Tapir's abilities was to use the happy, joyful, and pleasant emotions it had absorbed to trap its target in the most nostalgic and beautiful scene, making it difficult to break free.

Seeing the female figure holding the iron-black giant sword freeze, the Black Dream Tapir ran over on all fours.

It wanted to devour this entire scene and all the positive emotions the other person generated from it.

At this moment, it felt something burning behind it and instinctively turned around.

It saw another Lumian, with invisible flames of anger burning in his eyes and intense black flames covering his sword.

The Lumian indulging in memories of Cordu quickly dissipated, leaving only a mirror.

Lumian raised the Sword of Courage burning with the Flames of Destruction, cleaving the Black Dream Tapir in two from top to bottom.

The more he longed for the beautiful life in Cordu, knowing it could never return, the more agitated and pained he felt, with anger surging!

In a slight explosion, black flames suppressing madness and violence clung to the two halves of the Black Dream Tapir's shadow, continuously burning them, making them noticeably fainter.

The Black Dream Tapir's shadow rejoined dozens of meters away, but was much weaker than before. Lumian's Flames of Destruction seemed to have truly damaged the part of its consciousness that had penetrated this dream.

Fear appeared in the eyes of this spirit world creature. It suddenly stood upright, its dark eyes tinged with blood-red.

It wanted to use the dream to transform into one of the target's most feared and terrifying forms, thereby intimidating the opponent and creating an opportunity for its consciousness to escape the dream and successfully return to the spirit world.

In the blink of an eye, the Black Dream Tapir's body swelled to an abnormal size, emanating an extremely insane, cruel, bloody, and violent aura.

It also created nearly invisible flames.

In the next second, the Black Dream Tapir itself let out an extremely terrified and agonized scream.

It was ignited by the invisible fire it had created, and its body was filled with the terrifying aura it had imitated, almost losing itself.

Seeing this scene, even Lumian was stunned for a moment, then curved his lips into a smile and said softly, "It's not so easy to imitate an image that can make me fear and dread."

"You think you can imitate the Blood Emperor?"

Imitating a true god inevitably means suffering backlash!

The Black Dream Tapir was already rolling in agony in the dream, unable to extinguish the invisible flames burning it.

It struggled extremely hard to detach from the dream. Lumian didn't stop it, but instead activated the black mark on his right shoulder and followed it to the spirit world.

The dream's owner, Kewell, in the form of dismembered corpse pieces, saw the girl who descended like the crimson moon falling twice slash the bear-like shadow monster and set it completely ablaze. His heart gradually became less fearful and afraid.

He stared blankly at that elegant and clean profile, at those slightly pursed light red lips, at the bright and beautiful face so different from the giant sword she wielded, feeling as if he were dreaming.

No, this really was a dream.

Lumian chased to a certain place in the spirit world and saw the Black Dream Tapir's true form already burning itself. Its agonized wails made the strange creatures around choose to stay away.

Lumian watched quietly and flicked a black flame bound with agitation and intensity towards it, letting it fall onto the Black Dream Tapir's body.

In just a few seconds, the spirit world creature burned to ashes, turning into a tiny amount of dark black powder.

Lumian reached out his palm and caught this powder.

…

In the apartment Lumian had rented for Lugano and Ludwig in Quartier de l'Observatoire.

The little boy dressed in children's formal wear with a small bow tie poured nearly 100 milliliters of Lanti Proof into a glass, then added the Black Dream Tapir's powder, lemon juice, ice cubes, a type of kilju, and other ingredients.

In the end, that full glass of strong liquor had a golden base, with green and black intertwining colors on top, looking quite beautiful.

"Wow, that drink looks very tempting," Franca exclaimed with an expectant look.

She sat very close to Lumian, while Jenna was on Lumian's other side.

Ludwig suddenly picked up that glass of "cocktail" and hid it behind his back.

He said very firmly, "There's only enough for two people to drink!"

"You and Anthony drink it." Lumian made the decision directly.

While Franca felt slightly disappointed, Ludwig beamed with joy. He took another glass and poured nearly half of the "cocktail" into it, handing it to Anthony.

"This cocktail is called 'The Color of Dreams'.

"It takes effect one minute after drinking."

After Anthony took The Color of Dreams, Ludwig began gulping down the portion in his hand.

Franca deliberately said, "Isn't it not so good for someone so young to drink hard liquor? He should be properly educated."

She had already prepared her test papers, just waiting for Anthony to finish advancing to "test" Ludwig.

As Ludwig inexplicably shuddered, Anthony adjusted his state and drank that glass of The Color of Dreams.

It was both bitter and sweet, both strong and mild, both igniting the esophagus, mouth, and stomach, while bringing an intoxicating feeling.

This was a dreamscape.

While waiting for "The Color of Dreams" to take effect, Anthony began preparing the potion.

Franca took the opportunity to say to Lumian and Jenna, "The leader of the Emperor Party is a man called Louis. He claims to have blood from the Gustav family and to be a descendant of Emperor Roselle.

"According to Niceea's intelligence, some core members of the Emperor Party feel that on that day, after the Vortex incident, Louis Gustav became somewhat strange, more mysterious and more majestic.

"He's secretly planning something, and only a very few of his confidants in the entire Emperor Party know what it is.

"Niceea has a strong desire to express herself and take revenge on society. She volunteered to make contact with one of Louis Gustav's confidants. I plan to ask 007's side to cooperate and create an opportunity for her…"

Louis was as common a name in Trier and Intis as Pierre, Guillaume, and others.

Lumian nodded slightly, but before he could say anything, Anthony had finished preparing the potion and drank the dark liquid speckled with grayish-white light.

The taste of Dreamwalker was very similar to The Color of Dreams, both complex and chaotic, containing many elements.

Lumian and the others stopped talking, focusing intently on Anthony to guard against any accidents.

They saw their teammate's face sometimes covered with grayish-white scales, sometimes becoming bloodless, as if his soul had left his body, while his eyes were empty and lifeless, having lost self-awareness.

After a while, Anthony's eyes first became dark, then lit up with light.

"It succeeded," Anthony said, showing rare outward emotion. "That feeling of looking down on the world, on everyone's dreams, is truly addictive. I almost didn't want to wake up."

After this exclamation, he composed himself and briefly described the abilities brought by the Dreamwalker potion.

"I can directly see the appearance of the spirit world, see the sea of collective subconscious, and can 'guide' the target step by step to reveal their inner secrets through changes in dreams…

"I can also gradually influence the target by 'modifying' dreams, making them do things they wouldn't normally do. This is equivalent to a gentler, more hidden form of Hypnosis that's less likely to be detected by higher-level targets, but it takes quite a long time to complete…

"Now I can directly enter dreams, hide in dreams, and jump from one dream to another, but the distance between two dreams can't exceed 500 meters…"

"A form of teleportation whose use is limited by environment and distance," Lumian commented briefly.

Anthony agreed with a nod."It's called 'Dream Traversal', and for me, the spirituality consumption is very small."

Lumian smiled and stood up, saying, "Now, every member of our team is at Sequence 5 or above."

…

A few days later, Anthony was working normally at Green Tree Clinic.

Near noon, a nurse brought in a patient.

It was Kewell, the young man aspiring to enter politics, currently serving as a staff member in the National Convention.

"Dr. Reid, I've been much better recently. I haven't had nightmares for several days," Kewell said happily to Anthony.

He still trusted Anthony quite a bit, after all, this psychiatrist had indeed improved his condition before.

"This is your own victory. You've passed through that stage," Anthony congratulated him without showing any abnormality.

Kewell touched his golden sideburns and hesitated before saying, "My condition improved four days ago. That night, I was having a nightmare again, but in the dream, a young girl descended under the illumination of a huge red moon and saved me.

"Sh-she was the most beautiful and charismatic girl I've ever seen, but my memory of that dream is becoming increasingly blurry. Mr. Reid, can you find a way for me to remember her permanently, to not forget her? Or let me draw her? Maybe there's a girl as beautiful as her in reality…"

Anthony looked at Kewell and said carefully, "I'm sorry, but I can't help you with this. Indulging in dreams will lead you to another extreme. As your psychiatrist, I can't push you towards an abyss. I must tell you, that's an illusion you can't reach."

Kewell was silent for a while, then let out a sigh of extreme disappointment. "Alright."

…

Quartier de l'Observatoire, Rue de la Gauche.

Alone in the apartment, Lumian stood by the window, pondering what he needed to do recently.

The treasure vault of the Blue Avenger… But Mr. Hanged Man only agreed to let me explore once…

Go to Bansy Harbor to find that potentially problematic place, use the corpse wax candle…

Just as Lumian thought of this, he instinctively half-turned his body and saw Madam Magician appear with starlight.

This Major Arcana card holder said with a smile, "Your reward should be ready to collect today. I'll take you to a place."

Chapter 900: History

Outside an abandoned ancient castle.

Madam Magician waited with Lumian for a while, then following the guidance of spirituality, took a step and arrived at a place inside, stopping in front of a vermilion door.

Knock knock knock, knock knock knock, knock knock knock. The Major Arcana card holder knocked three times in succession.

After a few seconds, a relaxed voice came from inside, "Enter, please."

With these words, the vermilion door slowly opened inward.

Lumian immediately saw heavy curtains, with sunlight struggling to shine through the gaps, bringing golden light that revealed floating dust to parts of the room.

On the other side, unaffected by sunlight, a black coffin was quietly placed instead of a common bed.

Opposite the coffin, near the sunlight, the desk was piled with letters.

At this moment, a man wearing loose pajamas was sitting in front of the desk, having just put down a fountain pen with a gold nib and black barrel, and folded a paper filled with words.

The man stood up, walked towards the door, with his back to the sunlight.

Lumian, having gained dark vision through the Demoness pathway, clearly saw the man's appearance: about 40 years old, average build, bronze skin, clean-shaven, black hair and brown eyes, soft features, with an indescribable sense of world-weariness in his eyes, and a small black mole below his right ear that was only visible upon close inspection…

"Good afternoon, Mr. Azik," Madam Magician greeted the gentleman respectfully.

Lumian also said similar words.

They spoke in ancient Feysac.

The middle-aged man called Azik suddenly seemed dazed for a moment, as if instantly receiving a large amount of information from the spirit world and His own subconscious.

He nodded and said in a gentle voice, "Thank you for your help, allowing me to wake up early and my soul to be healed to some extent."

"It was mainly this young friend who made the contribution." Madam Magician pointed to Lumian beside her.

She then introduced to Lumian, "This is Mr. Azik Eggers, the son of the Death from the Fourth Epoch, and former Consul of the Balam Empire."

Son of Death, former Death Consul of the Balam Empire… Lumian suddenly recalled part of the content from the Fool's Church canon: The Angel of Death has followed our Lord for the longest period of time and is the consul of the Underworld…

Could this be the Angel of Death beside Mr. Fool's divine throne? Lumian greeted him again.

"A Demoness." Azik glanced at Lumian and nodded slightly, "You have the aura of the source of the River Styx."

The Angel of Death refers to the river connecting two worlds as the source of the River Styx? Lumian was stunned for a moment and said, "That's the seal of the Underworld Daoist."

"Underworld Daoist…" Azik muttered softly, as if He had never heard of this existence.

Madam Magician smiled and changed the subject. "Mr. Azik, we came to visit you today mainly to inquire about some matters."

Azik looked at the corridor outside. "Let's take a walk around the castle, talk as we go. This is an important memory from a period of my life."

"Alright." Madam Magician made way.

Lumian and she followed behind Mr. Azik, who was presumably the Angel of Death, through the corridor, along the stairs, step by step upwards.

Along the way, ancient wall lamps embedded in the walls lit up one after another, burning with a cold and pale-white flame.

Lumian saw oil paintings hanging on both sides of the corridor, some of Azik Himself, but with more lively expressions, even smiling, and some of beautiful ladies with their hair tied up and children playing with wild deer.

Azik's gaze slowly swept over these paintings, occasionally lingering. After quite a while, He asked Madam Magician and Lumian, "What do you want to ask?"

Madam Magician, wearing a purplish magician's robe today, asked straightforwardly, "Mr. Azik, do you know why the Primordial Demoness sought cooperation with your father, the Death of the Fourth Epoch, after the War of the Four Emperors? Did you notice any problems with the Primordial Demoness?"

Hearing this question, Lumian was stunned for a moment, then realized. Indeed, who better to ask than someone who personally experienced those events of the late Fourth Epoch?

He is indeed an ancient Angel who has lived for over a thousand years…

Madam Magician should be about the same, but my spiritual intuition tells me she's still quite young…

Azik recalled for a few seconds and said, "There was a gap of over a hundred years between the end of the War of the Four Emperors and the beginning of the Pale Disaster. The Primordial Demoness's arrival was probably in the middle of this period. We don't know exactly what She discussed with my father; I only know that She declared to us Her intention to avenge the Blood Emperor, to make all seven gods of the Northern Continent perish, and to bring the Blood Emperor's deity corpse back to the surface from Underground Trier."

Is this true love? Despite it being two against seven, She wanted to avenge the Blood Emperor…

No, if the Primordial Demoness had achieved Her goal then, it would have meant that the special mirror world would no longer be sealed, able to reveal all its problems, but the current Demoness Sect doesn't seem to have such ideas, and even intends to nail the coffin lid more firmly, not letting those Mirror People achieve their goals…

Also, was it really not the Emperor of the Underworld, that Death, who delivered the final blow to the Blood Emperor? The Uniqueness of the Red Priest fell into the hands of Death, and there's also something like the Samaritan Women's Spring under Trier… Lumian was filled with strong doubts, but didn't interrupt Mr. Azik's narration.

Azik said, "Without a doubt, the Primordial Demoness is the most charming woman in this world. Every living being who sees Her will inevitably be fascinated by Her, including me, my brothers and sisters, and even the undead in the Underworld. Even our father was inevitably attracted to some degree."

"Even the undead are attracted to the Primordial Demoness? This is already a charm at the level of concepts and authorities…" Madam Magician sighed and asked, "Was your father, the Death of the Fourth Epoch, bewitched by the Primordial Demoness when he finally decided to forcibly accommodate the Uniqueness of the Red Priest?"

Lumian had gained some understanding of the connection between Death and the Uniqueness of the Red Priest when reading the 0-01 sealing information, but this was the first time he clearly encountered the essence of the matter.

As thoughts raced through His mind, Azik shook His head slightly and said, "The Primordial Demoness's instigation should be one of the reasons, but I don't think it was the main one, otherwise my father wouldn't have waited decades to do that."

Madam Magician made a terse sound and repeated her previous question, "Did you notice anything unusual about the Primordial Demoness?"

Azik passed by an oil painting, lightly running His finger over it. "Every time I encountered the Primordial Demoness, I would lose my senses. How could I possibly notice any problems with Her?

"If there was anything unusual, it was that on a few occasions, Her charm was a bit weaker than normal. That should have been Her deliberately restraining Her charm."

As a Demoness, Lumian knew that a Demoness naturally emanating charm and deliberately restraining charm would indeed present two different states, but after experiencing the false Demoness of Black incident, he suspected there might be other possibilities.

Madam Magician thought for a moment and changed the subject. "Mr. Azik, do you know about the body of the Phoenix Ancestor in the depths of the Underworld?"

Azik turned His head to look at the two women.

"My father thought it would be a waste to just destroy the body of an ancient god like that. He believed it could serve a more important purpose, such as helping my father better and more completely control the Underworld, or enabling Him, as Death, to possess stronger power.

"Those in the death domain will never reject powerful corpses that can be controlled by themselves."

Before Madam Magician could ask further, Mr. Azik added, "My father also mentioned that the body of the Phoenix Ancestor, this ancient god, held some secrets."

"Secrets?" Madam Magician asked curiously.

Azik paced forward and said, "He never told me the specifics, only that the story of the Ancient Sun God killing the Phoenix Ancestor at the end of the Second Epoch was false. Well, more accurately, the process was correct, but the result was wrong. The Phoenix Ancestor was only severely wounded by the Ancient Sun God, not dying on the spot. She escaped to the Southern Continent and went into hiding."

"Yes, if the Phoenix Ancestor was truly killed by the Ancient Sun God, that divine corpse wouldn't likely have been obtained by Death and appeared in the Underworld, unless it was His arrangements again." Madam Magician expressed agreement.

Azik continued, "Similarly, the Giant King Aurmir didn't perish on the spot either, supposedly escaping and managing to pass on his power to his eldest son, the later God of Combat, Badheil, before dying."

Is there any connection to the Omebella matter? Hmm, the two ancient gods who weren't killed on the spot by the Ancient Sun God seem to be related to Omebella—one's corpse is laying eggs, currently incubating Omebella, while the other is Omebella's husband… Lumian glanced at Madam Magician, and after obtaining her consent, asked, "Mr. Azik, what is the relationship between the Phoenix Ancestor and the Goddess of Harvest Omebella?"

Azik shook His head.

"I was born in the Fourth Epoch. All I know about the history of the Second Epoch is what my father occasionally mentioned."

Saying this, He smiled at Lumian and said, "Speaking of which, I should give you some reward."

As He gently raised His right hand, a large number of white bones gushed out from the ground, forming a giant skeleton.

The skeleton respectfully handed a shiny Loen gold pound to Mr. Azik.

Azik took the gold coin and presented it to Lumian. "Is this acceptable as a reward?"

"Thank you," Lumian said sincerely, accepting the lucky coin that bore Mr. Fool's aura.

Chapter 901: The Final Inquiry

Madam Magician silently breathed a sigh of relief when she saw Lumian receive the last lucky coin.

Although the Major Arcana card holder had roughly confirmed through prophecy, divination, and psychological analysis that things would develop this way, the subject involved was an Ancient angel, the son of a true god. No one could be certain the result would necessarily unfold as expected. If there had been a deviation, they would have had to formulate a new plan.

Madam Magician produced a small golden bottle inscribed with mysterious symbols from somewhere and smiled at Azik Eggers, saying, "Mr. Azik, this is some excess water from the Samaritan Women's Spring. It's something produced by corruption from the power at the source of the River Styx. It has multiple effects including repairing souls, inducing sleep, bringing complete death or true dreams, and granting lucidity in dreams. We'd like to ask for your help in making it manifest only one of two qualities—either 'inducing sleep' or 'granting lucidity in dreams'—and enhancing that effect."

Repairing souls… Lumian paid no attention to the fact that there was leftover Samaritan Women's Spring water from what he had previously collected. His focus was entirely on the "repairing souls" effect.

Could this gradually make Aurore's soul fragments whole again?

"No problem," said Azik, taking the small golden bottle containing the Samaritan Women's Spring water.

Madam Magician, seeming to sense Lumian's thoughts, casually explained to him, "The Samaritan Women's Spring water does indeed have the effect of repairing souls, but it's limited to repair only. Just as 'limb regeneration' abilities can regrow lost arms and legs, but can't grow a whole new person from an arm or leg. That falls under the domain of the Great Mother."

She had previously answered the question of what exactly the fake Demoness of Black was, believing that neither she nor the one with the most accurate divination results knew the precise answer. This implied that the relevant secrets must involve the special mirror world.

"Even some repair effects are good," Lumian said softly after a moment of silence.

At this point, a blurry, upright, terrifying giant snake appeared behind Azik, almost touching the illusory sky.

Pale-white flames burned in the giant snake's eye sockets. It seemed to have a pair of thick, exaggerated wings on its back. Its body was covered in large dark green scales that appeared black, with what looked like white feathers protruding from between the scales.

Although Lumian couldn't clearly see the appearance of each feather and scale or the strange symbols they bore, just directly gazing at this phantom image gave him the sensation of rapidly dying, his skin withering and shriveling.

This was damage that Mirror Substitution couldn't transfer.

Fortunately, the illusory winged giant snake quickly coiled itself, wrapping layer upon layer around the golden bottle that couldn't even fill one of its eye sockets.

Then, the terrifying giant snake rapidly faded, instantly shrinking into the golden bottle.

Lumian gradually returned to normal.

Azik handed the golden bottle back to The Magician. "Anyone who touches the spring water in the bottle will fall into a long sleep, myself included.

"It will have a slight effect on true gods, but not much, unless that deity is already very weak or in a state of slumber.

"If you want someone who has fallen asleep because of this to wake up, you'll need to collect some more water from the Samaritan Women's Spring and process it in a similar way but with the opposite effect, or seek help from a true god with the corresponding authority."

Lumian was not surprised that the processed Samaritan Women's Spring water would only have a weak effect on true gods.

Even the remnant soul of the Blood Emperor could occasionally wake up and cause trouble in the mysterious river that was the source of the Samaritan Women's Spring, let alone this secondary derivative!

Madam Magician handed the golden bottle to Lumian. "This might be useful in the dream, but it's uncertain."

Lumian nodded slightly and placed the bottle of processed Samaritan Women's Spring water into his Traveler's Bag.

Madam Magician then turned to Azik and curtsied. "Thank you for your help. We have achieved all our objectives today. Is there anything you need us to do?"

Azik cast His gaze towards the oil paintings on both sides of the corridor and said with a somewhat dazed expression, "Nothing at present. I've been asleep for several years. I want to walk around and see the changes in this world."

Madam Magician didn't say more, and left with Lumian after bidding farewell.

Before being enveloped by starlight, Lumian turned his head for a glance and saw the former Death Consul, with eyes full of world-weariness, standing silently in front of an oil painting, wordlessly caressing its surface with His fingers.

…

In the evening.

Except for Lugano, who was informed he would have a period of vacation to arrange freely, Lumian, Franca, Jenna, Anthony, and Ludwig all gathered in the apartment on Rue de la Gauche in Quartier de l'Observatoire.

Madam Magician, wearing a cream-colored high-collar dress with gold embroidery and a wide-brimmed hat for sun protection, stood by the window and said to the five lucky coin holders,

"I must emphasize once again the potential risks.

"In Mr. Fool's dream, if you die, you will die in reality. If you lose control or go mad, you will lose control or go mad in reality. If you are directly corrupted by that Celestial Worthy or some other entity, you will also suffer corruption in reality. If you develop psychological illnesses or experience intense emotional fluctuations, your sleeping body in reality will bear corresponding problems.

"Mere injury or fatigue has very little effect on reality. You can quickly recover by leaving the dream and briefly waking up, or by spending time healing within the dream.

"In that dream world, you can use all your abilities, but their effects will be limited to the level of Sequence 7. The essence of this limitation is that Mr. Fool's self-awareness has not yet recovered. In other words, if the Mr. Fool in the dream realizes that Beyonder abilities can achieve effects corresponding to Sequence 6, your levels will recover to that Sequence accordingly.

"Similarly, except for special items like the Samaritan Women's Spring water, your other equipment in the dream is essentially derived from your consciousness and is also limited.

"The good news is that those hostile entities and Beyonders driven by the Celestial Worthy who enter Mr. Fool's dream through other methods will be subject to similar restrictions. However, that Celestial Worthy can manage the dream to some extent and in certain aspects. Unless it's the final moment, you'd better avoid the Celestial Worthy and have no contact with Him."

At this point, Lumian raised a question, "In Mr. Fool's dream, what identity and form does the Celestial Worthy exist in?"

If this could be clarified, they could effectively avoid that Celestial Worthy.

Madam Magician shook her head.

"If we knew that, the previous lucky coin holders wouldn't have been kicked out of the dream so quickly or had their actions restricted.

"Confirming the Celestial Worthy's identity in the dream is a key point of your mission this time."

Madam Magician spoke about other matters related to the dream, and finally asked seriously,

"Now, you can make your own choices. Are you willing to hold Mr. Fool's coins and enter his true dream, attempting to awaken him?

"If you're unwilling, we won't force you, but you'll need to follow the guidance of spirituality and pass on the lucky coins in your possession as soon as possible.

"If you're willing, after the matter is concluded, whether Mr. Fool is successfully awakened or not, we will reward you generously."

"I have no problem with it," Lumian, wearing a cloak but without the hood, was the first to answer.

"Me too." Jenna was the second.

Franca and Anthony followed, also willing.

The only one hesitating was Ludwig. This little boy with a red bow tie's expression changed several times, resisting something unknown.

Finally, he looked at Franca and Jenna, and said through gritted teeth, "I'm willing to go into the dream."

Although the food eaten in the dream is fake and illusory, at least there's no studying and exams!

Franca, who had already digested the Affliction potion, glanced amusingly at Ludwig and whispered in Jenna's ear, "This child really isn't smart enough. As soon as I heard Madam Magician's descriptions earlier, I clearly came to a conclusion: If you digest a potion in Mr. Fool's dream, it will happen in reality too!"

Jenna responded quietly, "Let's tell Ludwig this fact after we enter Mr. Fool's dream."

At this moment, Madam Magician nodded slightly and said, "I'm very glad you've made this choice. Let me remind you one last time, try to delay being kicked out of the dream as much as possible. Once you've been kicked out more than three times, subsequent entries will either result in immediate ejection or complete restriction, leaving you as mere observers."

"Yes, Madam Magician," Lumian and the others stood up one after another.

Specks of brilliant starlight fell, enveloping them.

In the blink of an eye, the five appeared inside a luxurious villa.

"This is also in Trier. Choose your own rooms, but don't be next to each other, in case one person is discovered and affects the others nearby," Madam Magician briefly introduced.

"Alright." Having made the decision, Franca was no longer hesitant and eager to try.

After Lumian and the others had settled on their rooms, Madam Magician said to them as they returned to the corridor, "Now go to bed and sleep while holding your lucky coins."

"Is that all it takes?" Franca asked in confusion.

Isn't that too simple?

Madam Magician chuckled. "No, this is just the first step. Miss Justice will need to intervene later."

"Mm." Lumian and the others didn't ask further. They returned to their chosen rooms, gripped their shiny lucky coins, lay down on the firm yet springy beds, and covered themselves with soft blankets that smelled of sunshine.

Chapter 902: The Platform

902 The Platform

Before Lumian had a chance to fall asleep through Cogitation, his vision suddenly went dark. His consciousness felt as if it was being pulled by an invisible force, plummeting straight into the depths of the earth.

He instinctively resisted for a moment, then experienced a sensation of leaping out of a dark seabed to the surface.

His vision was immediately illuminated by a twilight-like radiance, shining through a giant glass pane divided into countless small squares, bringing limited light to the darkness.

In this dim light, Lumian saw a black steam locomotive with two oil lamps hanging from it, a domed platform, and at the edge of the platform near the steam train stood Madam Magician in her cream-colored dress with gold embroidery and wide-brimmed sun hat.

Beside Madam Magician stood a lady in a simple green dress, with a golden retriever crouching at her feet.

Upon seeing the lady in green, Lumian felt surprise and confusion. Another Demoness? Does the Tarot Club have other Demonesses?

"She's so beautiful," Lumian heard Franca whisper in admiration. "But she doesn't seem like a Demoness. Her aura is different, unless she's already a Sequence 3 Demoness of Unaging…"

Hearing this, Lumian noticed similar issues: The lady in green had lustrous golden hair, partly tied up in a bun with the rest flowing smoothly down. Her emerald eyes were like the most beautiful gems, yet deep enough to seemingly reflect the innermost consciousness of all who beheld them. Her features were exceptionally delicate, her beauty comparable to the Demonesses, with an elegant air tinged with a girl's purity and clarity.

Such an aura was very rare among Demonesses below Sequence 3—at least neither Lumian nor Franca had ever seen it before.

Moreover, Lumian found that looking at this lady didn't invoke the desire he usually felt when facing Demonesses. Instead, he felt a sense of peace, warmth, and steadiness.

This familiar feeling triggered Lumian's spiritual intuition, evoking certain memories.

Combined with what Madam Magician had said earlier, he quickly came to a conclusion. "Good evening, Madam Justice!"

The elegant green-clad lady with a hint of girlishness must be the Major Arcana card Justice, one of his Psychiatrists!

"Good evening, Madam Justice." Anthony was the second to speak.

After Franca and Jenna politely greeted Madam Justice, Franca's eyes suddenly widened.

She pointed at Lumian and said, "H-how did you turn back into a man?"

Uh… Lumian reflexively examined himself and found he wasn't wearing the black cloak, the swells in his chest had subsided, and his white shirt, black vest, and dark trousers fit as they used to.

Meanwhile, Franca was still wearing her lace-flowered blouse and cream-colored riding pants, with a small red jacket. Her chest was prominent and her ponytail swayed gently—she looked every bit a Demoness.

At this moment, Madam Justice said with a soft laugh, "This is entering a true dream, which is different from normal dreaming.

"Using a Dream Charm causes the body to dematerialize and directly enter the dream. Whatever you look like in reality is how you appear in the dream. Normal dreams depend on real-time perception—your dream image might be your current self, your past self, or even an altered self. But in a true dream, if you can maintain consciousness, what appears will be your subconscious self-perception.

"In other words, Seven of Wands's subconscious still considers himself male."

I see… Lumian felt a mix of joy and disappointment.

Franca blurted out, "Then what about me? Why am I still…"

She suddenly closed her mouth, looking as if she had been struck by lightning, losing part of her soul.

Madam Justice gently comforted her, "Accepting the present doesn't mean forgetting the past. As long as you remember who your past self was and what kind of life that self lived, reconciling with your current body won't lead you to lose control. The acting principles of the Demoness Sect may not suit everyone; it depends on one's personality and experiences.

"Remember, everyone is special."

Franca opened her mouth but couldn't speak, her emotions still somewhat dejected and low.

Jenna quietly reached out her right hand and grasped Franca's palm.

Even if this had been Lumian not long after arriving in Trier, he wouldn't have mocked Franca for claiming to be a man while unconsciously considering herself a woman. Let alone now. He turned his attention to survey the platform.

It wasn't much different from a typical steam train station, with an overpass high above and stairs leading to different platforms.

At the edge of the overpass, a tall figure leaned against the railing, gazing this way. His black trench coat fluttered slightly, and he seemed to be wearing red gloves.

On the stairs leading to this platform, the lady in the gloomy, intricate dress carrying four heads was openly observing below. In contrast, halfway up the stairs to another platform stood a little boy with a mercury-colored bow tie. At the end of those stairs, Mr. Azik Eggers, whom Lumian had met not long ago, held His hat in hand, silently watching the black steam locomotive.

17:00

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On the waiting chairs of Mr. Azik Eggers' platform sat the Knight of Swords Maric and the temperance faction demigod Sharron, facing Lumian and the others, motionless like puppets brought in to serve as an audience.

Lumian brought his gaze back and noticed that the golden retriever beside Madam Justice was wearing glasses and carrying a small brown bag, looking very gentle and scholarly.

Lumian suddenly recalled the dog and female figure he had seen after his first psychological treatment at Mason Café.

So that was Madam Justice… It's a pity Madame Susie isn't participating in this mission to Mr. Fool's dream, otherwise I could thank her in person… Lumian regretfully returned his gaze to Madam Justice and Madam Magician.

Madam Justice smiled at him and said, "Because you've actually become a Demoness of Despair, and your subconscious knows this, you can freely switch between your subconscious self-image and your current true appearance. This might help you create perfect disguises in the dream and play a crucial role in key scenes."

Why can't I do that… Franca silently wailed.

Lumian nodded with understanding. "Lie can't create good disguises? Because it can only perform at a Sequence 7 level, and the Sequence 6 Faceless of the Seer pathway is needed to adjust appearance and physique?"

"Yes, Lie at Sequence 7 level can only modify appearances to a certain extent, equivalent to the best makeup techniques," Madam Justice nodded slightly, then turned her head to the golden retriever beside her. "Susie, do you have anything you want to tell them?"

Susie… Lumian's eyebrows twitched as he suddenly shifted his gaze to the bespectacled golden retriever with the small bag.

The dog spoke in a voice familiar to him, "What I need to tell you is that Mr. Fool is very vigilant and cautious. He's not easily trusting of others."

Hearing the golden retriever speak, everyone except Anthony and Ludwig looked shocked and surprised—if the golden retriever hadn't been called "Susie", Lumian certainly wouldn't have been so astonished by an animal speaking human language.

After a brief silence, Lumian adjusted his mindset and said sincerely, "Thank you for your reminder, and also for your previous treatment, Madam Susie. And thank you too, Madam Justice."

Having seen a child eating Devil eyeballs, what's so strange about a talking dog?

If they were Trierien, this might not even be unusual—maybe they just liked being dogs and found a way to transform themselves into dogs!

Lumian then asked Madam Magician and Madam Justice, "I have one more question. What is Mr. Fool's identity in the dream?"

Awakening Mr. Fool would surely require interacting with him in the dream!

Madam Justice and Madam Magician exchanged a glance before producing a brownish-yellow envelope tied with thin cotton string. "This contains information about Mr. Fool's dream identity, but you can only open it once you've truly entered that dream.

"It also contains cash, identity documents, and maps prepared for you."

Lumian took the envelope and pointed at the iron-black steam locomotive stopped beside their platform. "We take this?"

"Yes, after you board, I'll have it travel to the edge of this dream world. You must hold tightly to your lucky coins. When the train reaches the edge of the dream world, they will help you enter Mr. Fool's dream. The first time must be this complicated, but afterwards you'll be able to enter and exit that dream normally using the lucky coins," Madam Justice explained briefly.

Lumian looked at Jenna, Franca, Anthony, and Ludwig, then nodded to the two Major Arcana card holders.

"We can board now."

The black steam locomotive was no different from the common types seen in Trier. Lumian and the other four occupied two rows of seats on the same side, while the other passengers around them were blurry and indistinct shadows, as if the creator of this dream had been too lazy to elaborate on them.

Through the window, they saw Madam Magician, Madam Justice, and the others waving to them.

As they instinctively waved back, Lumian and the others heard a shrill sound: Ooo!

With the whistle's cry, a clanking noise began, slow at first then quickening, changing from gentle to frequent. The scenery outside the window gradually receded.

The iron-black steam locomotive carrying Lumian, Franca, Jenna, Anthony, and Ludwig left the platform, heading towards a distant horizon shrouded in dream-like fog.

Chapter 903: Everything's Familiar

After the platform had disappeared from view, Lumian observed the conditions inside the train carriage.

The seats were made of wood, the windows were narrow, and the lighting was insufficient. The other passengers seemed to be conversing, but there was no sound, as if they were performing a silent play.

Jenna and Anthony, experiencing something like this for the first time, were also quietly examining their surroundings. Ludwig was painfully yet intently eating imaginary delicious snacks, while Franca was in low spirits, leaning against the carriage and gazing at the scenery outside.

Vast pastures and lush fields were quickly receding, interspersed with old castles and quaint villages, beautiful like an oil painting.

Gradually, Franca saw palaces formed of frost, houses flying above the clouds, and pairs of crystal shoes dancing in a distant square…

The scenery outside the steam train began to become dreamlike, as if various fairy tales were merging together.

Before long, the iron-black steam locomotive entered the fog, and nothing could be seen clearly outside the windows.

Lumian, Franca, and the others instinctively gripped their lucky coins tightly. No one spoke, maintaining silence, worried that any unnecessary movement might prevent them from entering Mr. Fool's dream.

In the thick, dream-like fog, the iron-black steam locomotive that had emerged from fantasy continued to race forward with a clanking sound.

At some point, Lumian felt the clanking of the train wheels hitting the rail joints grow fainter and fainter until it disappeared.

Suddenly, they heard a female voice: "Does anyone want anything? Boxed meals, snacks, ice cream, beverages, local specialties, beef jerky…"

Franca sat up straight, her expression both shocked and bewildered.

She abruptly stood up, turned around, and looked towards the entrance of the carriage. She saw a woman wearing a white shirt and a purple-red long dress, with a small purple-red soft hat, pushing a multi-layered metal cart towards them.

The cart had colorful items arranged on different levels, beverages in peculiar bottles, and stacked boxed meals.

Wh— Franca's gaze instinctively swept to both sides of the multi-layered cart, finding that the previously shadowy passengers had become very clear. They were wearing clothes that often appeared in her dreams, either quietly spending time on different brands of phones or conversing softly with companions, with occasional sounds of children crying.

This was a scene Franca had dreamed of seeing again, but encountering it at this moment, in this setting, made her shiver with an inexplicable fear.

Is this, is this Mr. Fool's dream?

"What's wrong?" Lumian stood up as well, asking in a low voice.

He had already noticed the changes in the carriage, even the seats and backrests had become soft, as if wrapped in thick, blue-dyed cotton.

He also noticed that the passengers' clothing, style, and way of speaking were distinctly different from his group.

But this wasn't the reason for Franca's dramatic change in expression.

This is a dream, after all. Nothing should be surprising!

Franca's lips quivered a few times. She looked back at Anthony, who was sitting in the row in front with Ludwig, then lowered her voice and said to Lumian and Jenna, "It's exactly the same as a similar scene from my world…"

Lumian immediately understood why Franca had reacted that way earlier. He deliberately said in a nonchalant tone, "Have you forgotten about the Celestial Worthy? He also comes from that world. Isn't it normal for corresponding scenes to appear in a dream He's involved in?"

"You're right…" Franca showed a self-deprecating smile. "I was too excited, too scared, and overlooked this point."

Indeed, this is very normal!

This is also the sleeping dream of that Celestial Worthy!

Jenna also stood up, looked around for a few seconds, and said, "So, does this mean we've entered Mr. Fool's dream?"

As she spoke, she opened her right palm and found that beneath the shiny lucky coin was a train ticket that read: "Ningbei—Yangdu"

Although Jenna only recognized the numbers on the ticket, it didn't prevent her from understanding the meaning of those strange characters. Similarly, the passengers sitting across the aisle understood her Intisian, turning their heads to look at them curiously. However, upon noticing their strange attire, they seemed to find it normal and turned away.

According to Madam Magician's previous explanation, in Mr. Fool's dream, there was no need to worry about language barriers or unfamiliar text. This was essentially communicating with Mr. Fool's subconscious, and Mr. Fool knew all languages.

Of course, being able to intuitively understand the meaning of unfamiliar text didn't mean one could comprehend it deeply. Jenna had been worried about this issue before, but Madam Magician had reassured them. Now, Jenna finally understood why Madam Magician wasn't concerned about this problem:

These characters were familiar to Franca, and she could serve as the most reliable translator!

"It should be," Lumian cautiously put away the lucky coin, holding only the train ticket.

After noticing that other passengers could understand their speech, Jenna asked Franca in a very low voice, "What are those things the people are holding?"

They look very strange…

Lumian immediately used the Bottle of Fiction to enclose their two rows of seats, using the window as support, but keeping the barrier transparent.

Franca suddenly became energetic, completely forgetting her previous dejection and shock. She introduced with a smile,

"Those are cell phones, products of scientific development. They integrate telegraph communication, theatrical performance, mirror messaging, and other effects. They have even more functions that you can't imagine. Later, I'll get a few and teach you how to use them in detail. It's too difficult to explain clearly now!"

As she spoke, Franca's face was full of pride. "That's a T-shirt, those are jeans, those are sneakers…"

Just as she said this, Ludwig started shouting, "I want a boxed meal, I want snacks, I want ice cream, I want beverages, I want beef jerky!"

The little boy was salivating, completely forgetting the fact that food in dreams was all imaginary.

"Uh, Madam Magician reminded us to try to obey the law," Franca looked at Lumian. "I remember there was cash in the envelope Madam Justice gave us."

Lumian opened the envelope and took out a stack of brand new, bright red banknotes, and deactivated the Bottle of Fiction.

"Two thousand per person," he told his companions.

"That's okay." Franca nodded, then looked at Ludwig with a worried expression. "This child's meal expenses for one day would probably be over a thousand…"

And that's assuming he didn't eat anything good!

"There will always be ways to make money." Lumian spent two hundred to get five boxed meals.

Franca hesitated for a moment and said, "Let's give them all to Ludwig. Although I'd love to relive the taste of familiar food, we shouldn't waste money here. There will be better choices later."

After piling all five boxed meals in front of Ludwig, Jenna asked in a low voice, "Can we look at Mr. Fool's identity information in the dream now?"

She noticed that many passengers around were sneaking glances at her and Franca, so she sat back down.

Lumian considered for a moment and said, "We haven't reached our destination yet. Let's wait a bit longer. We'll look at it after we get off at our destination station."

Caution is paramount!

As he spoke, Lumian took out a mirror and tossed it into the gap between Ludwig and the backrest.

He was using mirror illusion magic to conceal the exaggerated situation of Ludwig being able to eat five boxed meals in one go and still only be half full.

He had noticed earlier that someone was secretly pointing what Franca called a phone in their direction. His spiritual intuition told him it would be better not to let abnormal matters appear in front of the public.

"Doesn't this train make any clanking noises?" Jenna and Franca started chatting casually.

Franca said with a boastful tone, "Of course not, this is the latest train model, and it's incredibly fast!"

She pointed to the display screen at the front of the carriage, which showed the real-time speed using numbers and symbols familiar to Jenna.

Thank you, Emperor Roselle!

Franca enthusiastically explained all the details that confused Lumian, Jenna, and Anthony, occasionally correcting their misconceptions, such as:

"Is this place even more open than Trier? I see people can expose their arms and legs…"

"No, no, no, we're far behind Trier. This is just freedom of dressing, and it doesn't offend others in public places. It's a manifestation of being cultured and civilized. In private, it's not as open as Trier at all!"

"Won't our current appearance be too strange?"

"Don't worry, just say we're going to a comic convention!"

"What's a comic convention?"

"…"

During this exchange, the train finally emerged from the fog, and a magnificent city with countless towering buildings appeared ahead. Each of these buildings seemed to rival mountains in height, their surfaces covered with glass curtain walls that gleamed golden in the sunlight.

Lumian and Jenna instinctively held their breath, as if approaching the realm of gods.

It was a miracle on earth, a city on the mountain top!

Franca also stopped her explanation, her lake-blue eyes fixed on the city, her expression a mix of nostalgia and sadness.

The train gradually slowed down, entered the city, and finally stopped at a clean, bright, and spacious platform.

The other passengers in this carriage suddenly disappeared, as if the dream weaver could no longer maintain them. Lumian and Franca exchanged glances with the others, then led Ludwig off the train, followed by the "strangely dressed" Jenna, Franca, and Anthony.

Along with the numerous passengers from other carriages, they took self-operating escalators to leave the platform. Under the guidance of their "guide" Franca, they made their way out of the station to the square outside, with no one speaking along the way.

Seeing the surrounding people gradually dispersing and the area becoming more open, Lumian took out the brownish-yellow envelope given by Madam Justice. He extracted the documents related to Mr. Fool's dream identity and spread them out for his companions to see.

Franca immediately saw a name written in her native language at the top of the document: "Zhou Mingrui."

Chapter 904: The Driver

After quickly reading through the information, Jenna remarked in disbelief, "Mr. Fool's identity in the dream is so ordinary."

There's no sign at all of him being a great existence!

"What should we do next?" Franca looked at Lumian. "Find an opportunity to make contact with Mr. Fool?"

The document had already roughly outlined Zhou Mingrui's, that is, Mr. Fool's dream identity's daily routine. As long as Lumian and the others weren't too unlucky, they could soon see and interact with Mr. Fool.

Earlier, when she saw the name Zhou Mingrui, Franca's heart had suddenly skipped a beat.

She hadn't expected that the name Mr. Fool used in the dream wasn't in the style of the Northern and Southern Continents, but rather very close to the style of her country before she transmigrated.

Of course, this was consistent with the current city's situation. But if the name "Zhou Mingrui" belonged to the Celestial Worthy rather than Mr. Fool, Franca would understand and accept it more easily, because the title "The Celestial Worthy of Heaven and Earth for Blessings" itself was in the style of her country before her transmigration.

Could it be that the Celestial Worthy has gained the upper hand, to the extent that Mr. Fool's dream city is the same as my motherland, and even took a name like "Zhou Mingrui"? As Franca muttered internally, Lumian thought for a few seconds and said, "Let's not contact Mr. Fool yet. We'll observe the people and events around him for a few days."

As the team leader, Lumian didn't just give orders; he briefly explained, "Mr. Fool himself is certainly under close monitoring by that Celestial Worthy. If we rashly contact him, it would be easy for the Celestial Worthy to detect anomalies, lock onto our identities, and kick us out of the dream.

"Additionally, although Madam Justice's information includes Mr. Fool's daily routine and the people he frequently interacts with, I still want to observe for a while myself. This isn't about distrusting the abilities and intellect of the Major Arcana card holders, but I feel they know too much background information, which might interfere with their judgment, preventing them from discovering subtle hidden issues."

"Mm, cognitive bias," Franca summarized Lumian's meaning using a term very much in the style of the current dream world.

Lumian nodded.

"Some people mentioned in the information might no longer be in contact with Mr. Fool, but I'll still observe them to look for possible commonalities and differences."

"Then let's first go rent a place to settle down in one of these areas marked on the map," Jenna said, holding a city map taken from the brownish-yellow envelope.

The marked locations were all residential areas close enough to Mr. Fool's current residence to overlook that area, but not too close.

"I have no objections," Franca said instinctively. "Then I'll get a taxi first."

As she spoke, she reached into the pocket of her red jacket, fumbling for a few moments before realizing something. "No phone…"

She immediately suggested, "Let's buy five phones nearby for a few hundred each, no, four phones and one children's smartwatch.

"Without phones, life in this city will be very difficult and inconvenient. Sometimes, what can be done with a phone doesn't need to be done with

Beyonder abilities. The latter is more likely to lead to our identities being exposed. I think the previous lucky coin holders might not have paid attention to this aspect and were in a hurry to contact Mr. Fool, which is why they were quickly discovered by the Celestial Worthy and kicked out of the dream."

"Alright," Lumian nodded slightly, holding Ludwig's hand as the boy ate a sausage.

He looked around and asked, "So, where should we go to buy them?"

Franca chuckled. "Lend me the Lie earring for a moment."

After putting on the silver-white earring, she adjusted her hair color and eye color, slightly modifying her nose bridge and facial contours. In an instant, she blended in with the passersby around her, though still with a hint of mixed-race features.

At this moment, a slightly chubby young man passed by. Franca approached him in a few steps and smiled, "Could you help me with something?"

The young man, dazzled by her bright smile and beautiful face, blurted out, "What is it?"

Franca said a bit embarrassedly, "I lost my phone, could you…"

The chubby young man instinctively took out his own phone, then came to his senses and asked warily, "You're not going to ask to borrow my phone to make a call, are you?"

Such an old scam!

Franca sighed and replied, "I just wanted to borrow some money for food."

Before the man could respond, she smiled again. "Just kidding, how could I use such a cliché scam?

"I just wanted to ask if there's a mall or phone store nearby. If you don't know, could you help me check on your phone?"

Sounds harmless, with the phone in my hands the entire time… The man cautiously searched and earnestly gave Franca directions.

Franca waved with a smile. "Thanks!"

The man's eyes glazed over again, and he asked as if struck by inspiration, "Do you want to be a celebrity, or maybe a live streamer?"

"Are you a talent scout or from a Multi-Channel Network (MCN) company?" Franca asked curiously.

It had been a long time since she had chatted with someone like this.

The man came to his senses and said with an awkward smile, "Neither, but if I could sign you, I'd become a talent scout or start an MCN company! Beautiful, can I get your number?"

Franca finally understood that this guy was indirectly complimenting her looks. Everything before was just a setup; this was the real point.

Tsk tsk, people these days… Even when I used to play murder mystery games, there weren't so many tricks… Franca inwardly sighed and said with a sincere face, "Didn't I tell you? I lost my phone, so I'll have to change my number later too."

With that, she didn't give him a chance to harbor any hopes, waved goodbye, and jogged back to where Lumian and the others were.

The chubby young man watched her go and muttered to himself enviously, "A group of otakus…"

Half an hour later, Franca led Lumian and the others out of the nearest mall to the roadside.

They had used the ID documents and cash provided by Madam Justice to buy four phones, one off-brand children's smartwatch, and five SIM cards, spending a total of 2,400.

But except for Franca, who was constantly tapping her screen, and Ludwig, who occasionally licked his children's smartwatch, Lumian, Jenna, and Anthony were just holding theirs like bricks, not knowing how to use them yet.

"I'll teach you once we've settled in!" Franca said, having linked the ID documents and associated bank cards with the corresponding apps. Instead of going to a nearby branch or ATM to deposit money, she directly took out a micro-loan and started to call a car.

Just then, a motorcycle roared past, almost grazing her, the wind from its passing slapping her face.

Franca angrily looked at the motorcycle, cursing under her breath, "Racing on the street? Are you in a hurry to be reborn?"

As soon as she finished speaking, the motorcycle swerved to avoid a light truck from a moving company, only to find a hole dug for road repairs ahead, surrounded by yellow metal barriers.

The motorcycle desperately swung its tail and crashed into a nearby utility pole, making the concrete pillar visibly shake.

With this commotion, motorcycle parts flew in all directions.

Franca watched in astonishment, murmuring, "It's not my fault…"

Although Demonesses were indeed skilled at curses, they didn't work through mere words!

Just as she was about to call for an ambulance to see if the motorcyclist could be saved, the helmetless rider stood up without a scratch, pushing the severely deformed motorcycle away from the scene.

"He's fine after that?" Franca blurted out in shock.

A thought immediately flashed through her mind, and she whispered in unison with Lumian, "A Beyonder?"

Lumian immediately said to Jenna and the others, "Let's go take a look."

Taking advantage of the green light, they crossed the intersection to the accident site, seeing that even the utility pole was slightly deformed and cracked.

Lumian cast his gaze to the ground, crouched down, and pulled out a rather ordinary-looking white paper figurine from a nearby flower bed.

The paper figurine was already tattered.

"Paper Figurine Substitutes? Was that motorcyclist from the Seer pathway?" Franca quickly deduced.

Jenna frowned slightly and said, "One of the Celestial Worthy's subordinates?"

"Possibly. Let's use Dream Divination later to recall his appearance," Lumian nodded, stuffing the paper figurine back into its original position and quietly using a Demoness's black flame to erase any traces he might have left.

Franca grumbled, "That guy didn't look anything like a Beyonder from the Seer pathway, racing on the street and even crashing. All the Seers I know are cautious and cunning, full of schemes."

As she complained, she used her phone to book a car.

Soon, a white sedan stopped in front of them.

Although Franca had already explained what internal combustion engine cars and electric cars were, when they actually got in, Jenna and Lumian were still a bit shocked.

The ordinary electric car, similar to a hired carriage, felt luxurious, as if the words "civilization" and "technology" were written everywhere.

Anthony sat in the front passenger seat, while Jenna, Franca, and Lumian holding Ludwig squeezed into the back. Even so, the space didn't feel too cramped.

The cold air from the air conditioner dispersed the summer heat as the vehicle carried Franca, who couldn't conveniently explain things in such a setting, and the silent Lumian and others to their destination in just over twenty minutes.

As they got out of the car, Anthony gave Lumian a meaningful look, gesturing for him to look at the driver.

Lumian walked to the front door of the vehicle and peered in, noticing that the driver had a wide forehead, a gaunt face, slightly curly black hair, nearly pure black eyes, and a monocle that looked as if it were carved from crystal in his right eye socket.

Amon!

The driver, who resembled Amon, seemed to recognize Lumian. He smiled and waved, then started the car and vanished at the end of the road.

"Amon?" Franca and Jenna had also seen the driver's appearance. "How did he get in? Is it a false image created by Mr. Fool in the dream?"

"It should be real. He clearly recognized me," Lumian replied gravely.

Franca exhaled and said reassuringly, "It's okay. Madam Magician said that in the matter of putting the Celestial Worthy to sleep and awakening Mr. Fool, that individual is on the same side as us."

Lumian looked at the intersection where the car had disappeared and said in a low voice, "But Madam Magician also said that that individual probably doesn't want Mr. Fool to wake up too early."

Chapter 905: New Arrival

On the top floor of an old building without an elevator, Franca looked at the slightly musty rental apartment and grumbled, "In this location, for such a rundown place, even renting the entire unit costs 2200…"

The rental apartment had three bedrooms, two bathrooms, a kitchen, and a living room that doubled as a dining room. Each room was very small. The master bedroom had a balcony, and the building was over 30 years old.

Even for such a rental, Franca had to use a Demoness's Instigation and leverage her social skills to negotiate the price down to under 2,500 from the female landlord, with only one month's deposit and rent instead of the usual three months'.

"It's fine," Jenna said, fairly satisfied with their current accommodation.

It was much better than where her family lived before her mother passed away.

Lumian glanced at the cash in his hand and said to Franca, "We only have 3,000 left. Even with what you borrowed, it's not even 6,000. And we still need to buy some ordinary clothes—we can't go out looking so eye-catching every day."

"It's okay," said Franca, now in a familiar environment and no longer as worried as before. She smiled calmly and confidently, "I can borrow again from each app, and so can you all. Added up, it's enough to support Ludwig for several months. Given such a long time, are you afraid we can't earn money?"

"Is borrowing money so easy here?" Jenna asked in surprise.

In Trier, whether pawning items at a pawn shop or borrowing from loan sharks, it wasn't a simple matter. The corresponding items or people had to have some value. But just now, she saw Franca tap her phone a few times and successfully borrow a sum of money.

Was it like this for everyone, or did the beautiful Demoness get special treatment?

Franca pursed her lips and remarked, "It is quite easy. Even the poorest people have some remaining value. If all else fails, they can be taken to have their organs sold…"

Obviously, she didn't like how easy online loans were, but now she had to take out a bunch of micro-loans to support Ludwig and the whole team, so she couldn't say the rest of what she was thinking.

Lumian took out the golden box that Madam Magician had returned from the Traveler's Bag and asked thoughtfully, "Are there places here that buy gold?"

The space contained in his Traveler's Bag had also significantly shrunk, now only equivalent to a storage room. He couldn't stock up too much food for Ludwig.

"There are, but they're strictly regulated. We'll see if there are any illegal channels later," said Franca, who was well-read and had some understanding of gold trading.

"Illegal channels?" Lumian said pensively, "When we try to sell gold through such channels, won't they see us as outsiders, easy to bully, afraid to report to the police on such matters, and just take our gold without paying?"

Franca gave Lumian the side-eye. "You want to fish again?"

"This is called receiving gifts from kind-hearted people." Lumian smiled. "For this kind of black-on-black crime, they probably won't report to the police. It shouldn't affect our law-abiding image, right?"

Through long-term daily influence from Aurore and Franca, and being in the corresponding environment, Lumian had gradually become proficient in using certain words and sentences.

"Can't you just find a proper job?" Franca said with a laugh.

"A job would only interfere with our observation of the people and events around Mr. Fool," Lumian reasoned.

"That's not necessarily true," Franca instinctively retorted. "What if that job could help you become Mr. Fool's colleague? Wouldn't that make observation more convenient?"

"That's true…" Lumian's gaze moved from Franca's face to Jenna and Anthony, as if considering who should apply for the corresponding job.

"Speaking of which, the company Mr. Fool works for was started by Emperor Roselle," Franca recalled the contents of the document. "The Emperor's real name wouldn't happen to be Huang Tao, would it? According to the Major Arcana card holders, it would occasionally be the Emperor's own projection, but most of the time it's a fake person woven by Mr. Fool in the dream. Well, now only the latter possibility remains. Who knows how long it will be before the Emperor gets a chance to resurrect…"

As she spoke, Franca suddenly laughed. "The Emperor's eldest daughter, Princess Bernadette, is named Bernie Huang in Mr. Fool's dream. Haha, what a cute name. Is this Mr. Fool's sense of humor?"

"You should restrain yourself a bit. Bernie Huang, no, Princess Bernadette often projects Her consciousness here. She seems to have an item similar to the lucky coin," Jenna reminded Franca with a smile. She had just read the corresponding description in the document.

By now, Lumian had made his decision.

"I or Anthony will apply for the job. If a Demoness enters the Emperor's company, it might cause quite a few troubles and make it hard to keep a low profile."

Franca and Jenna nodded heavily, both remembering the Emperor's words of wisdom.

Lumian brought the topic back to the gold matter.

"If I sell this golden box in the dream, will my golden box in reality disappear?

"If not, couldn't we sell it over and over by leaving the dream and returning?"

"…" Franca, Jenna, and Anthony were momentarily speechless.

Is this the influence of Amon's boon?

After a few seconds, Lumian mused, "It probably won't work. Mr. Fool is a great existence who controls errors and loopholes. He wouldn't leave such an obvious problem. I suspect selling gold in the dream is equivalent to sacrificing it to him…"

"I think so too," Franca agreed.

As they spoke, dozens of quiet and eerie black flames gathered around the two Demonesses and the male-appearing Lumian.

These twenty to thirty black flames flew to various parts of the room, burning away any possible insects.

Originally, Lumian could have engulfed the entire house in the Demoness's black flames to complete the cleaning, but now he could only exert the standard of a Sequence 7.

After finishing the cleaning, Franca began teaching Lumian and the others how to use their phones, and guiding Ludwig on how to play with his children's smartwatch.

Unknowingly, the sky gradually darkened.

"I'm hungry!" Ludwig's voice suddenly rang out.

Franca lifted her gaze from her phone, looked at the sky that had already turned to dusk, and sincerely exclaimed, "Phones are so much fun…"

Time flies so fast!

The amazed Lumian, Jenna, and the others put away their phones and went out to find a restaurant to avoid Ludwig causing trouble out of extreme hunger.

They hadn't even allocated who would sleep in which room yet.

After leaving the old residential complex, Franca glanced at the row of shops by the roadside and said with a smile, "Based on my previous observations, this city's prototype is one I once toured. The cooking standards of these street-side small shops might be even higher than big restaurants, and more suitable for people like us who can't afford high-end places.

"Let's eat at this one first, lest Ludwig can't wait."

She was pointing to a small restaurant just to the left of the residential complex. Business seemed decent, with several tables set up on the sidewalk.

Before going out, Lumian and the others had already adjusted their hair color and eye color using the Lie earring, and modified their facial features. Although they still attracted hidden or bold glances as handsome men and beautiful women, at least they didn't stand out as obviously foreign to their surroundings.

Franca chose one of the tables on the sidewalk, took the menu, and asked with a smile, "The specialty is spicy food. Can you handle it?"

"Didn't you say before that the essence of spiciness is a kind of pain? What's there to not handle?" Lumian replied nonchalantly.

Franca gave him a challenging look, then turned to Jenna with a smile and said, "Not everything is spicy. There are sweet and sour dishes, and some that focus on umami flavors. Two dishes I really like, Kung Pao Chicken and Yu Xiang Shredded Pork, can be made non-spicy. The proportion of sour, sweet, and other flavors might be different in each restaurant. It takes luck to find the type that suits your taste best. The two most satisfying times I've had were once in a time-honored restaurant and once in a hole-in-the-wall place like this.

"The Kung Pao Chicken in the time-honored restaurant was adjusted to a lychee paste flavor, using only chicken thigh meat, tender and not dry. The Yu Xiang Shredded Pork in that hole-in-the-wall place only used chopped scallions as a side vegetable, with sweet, sour, salty, and pickled pepper flavors all mixed into the sauce and stir-fried with the meat. This is different from the common practice, but very appetizing and delicious…

"Uh, should we order a few bottles of beer? We rarely have a full team dinner like this. Although I don't like bottled beer, I can make do with it…"

Ever since introducing phones on the train, Franca had maintained an excited state as if back on her home turf, constantly introducing and sharing, with a gleam in her eyes like a hint of sunlight.

Lumian didn't mind this fellow showing such enthusiastic host-like attitude, taking over all the things a team leader should say. Instead, he was infected with a sense of calm, relaxation, and joy because of it.

Summer nights darkened late, and even now, just after 7 o'clock, the sky was still somewhat bright. The breeze blowing past the tables and chairs on the roadside brought a hint of coolness from inside the restaurant and other shops, making the eating and drinking crowd increasingly lively. Some were laughing loudly, some were eating while fiddling with their phones, completely without the restraint of sitting on the sidewalk.

Jenna observed intently for a while, then said softly to Franca, "There's a strange sense of relaxation…"

She had seen people eating by the roadside in Quartier du Jardin Botanique and the market district before, but never had a similar feeling.

"This is one of the things I miss about the past," said Franca, her eyes bright, having already ordered the food.

At this moment, a woman with smooth, glossy black hair tied in a simple ponytail, wearing a short-sleeved T-shirt and fitness shorts, dragging sandals, came to the entrance of the small restaurant and said to the busy owner, "How long do I have to wait for takeout?"

"Sia, you're late today," the owner commented in a familiar tone.

Before Ms. Sia could answer, someone suddenly shouted from nearby, "Catch the thief! Catch the thief!"

A figure ran past the tables and chairs, tightly gripping a diamond necklace.

As he ran past Ms. Sia, she suddenly raised her foot and delivered a side kick.

Bang!

The thief was kicked several meters away, falling to the ground in pain, momentarily unable to get up.

"This gal is quite fierce," Franca said, her eyes full of admiration.

Lumian looked at Ms. Sia's profile and said in a low voice, "Is that Sia Tas, the one who shares an apartment with Mr. Fool?"

Chapter 906: Suspicious Details

Sia Tas? Franca quickly examined the face and ears of the woman surnamed Sia, partially hidden by her glossy black hair.

According to information provided by the Major Arcana card holders, Sia Tas, who currently rented the same apartment as Mr. Fool, was an ancient elf in reality. Her boyfriend Mobet was a viscount from the Fourth Epoch's Solomon Empire and a member of the Zoroast family. Both of them have been dead for many years.

Franca quickly withdrew her gaze, not letting Sia Tas notice her observation.

This was the professionalism of an Assassin.

As for her previous blatant staring, she wasn't worried about being suspected at all. Sia Tas's action of kicking away the thief had drawn everyone's attention.

Franca lowered her voice and said to Lumian and the others, "Her ears are slightly pointed, and her facial features are consistent with local residents. It should be Sia Tas."

Damn it, could the ancestors of the elven race really be transmigrators? Except for a few minor details, Sia Tas could pass as a local in this city without any flaws!

She even wanted to chat with Sia Tas!

Lumian glanced at Ludwig, who was gnawing on the end of his chopsticks, and said thoughtfully, "Could Sia Tas be that Celestial Worthy? Or could she be a Beyonder subordinate of that Celestial Worthy?"

"…" Both Franca and Jenna were stunned by this question.

"It doesn't seem likely…" Franca resisted the urge to look at Sia Tas again.

Jenna pondered for a moment and then suggested, "The Sia Tas in the dream should be a fake person woven by Mr. Fool's subconscious based on memories."

"A fake person could also be that Celestial Worthy, or could be used by that Celestial Worthy," Lumian said with a smile.

For some reason, seeing his smile, both Franca and Jenna's hearts beat a little faster. They felt that his male form had lost some of its handsome aura compared to before, but gained more beauty. When he smiled, it was like sunlight shining on his face.

Oh right, although Lumian's subconscious is still male, the modifications to his body by the potion has long been recognized and remembered by his subconscious. In situations not involving gender identity, the enhancement of appearance and increase in charm from the Demoness pathway would definitely be reflected in the dream… What should this be called, an Incubus? Franca first had a sudden realization, then started complaining internally.

Lumian continued, "Sia Tas is one of the closest people to Mr. Fool, living in another room in the same rental apartment. Why couldn't such a person be that Celestial Worthy? Why couldn't she be controlled by that Celestial Worthy in some way, becoming His puppet, being used by Him?

"The closer someone is to Mr. Fool, the more suspicious they are."

"Right," Anthony rarely took the initiative to share his own views. "In the information, the Oracle mentioned that Sia Tas and Mobet only had contact with Mr. Fool's Angel of Redemption, the incarnation walking on earth, that great adventurer Gehrman Sparrow, and they are already dead. To Mr. Fool, they are neither important nor special. Why would the ones living with Mr. Fool, so close to him, be these two, and not other fake people, such as the dream counterparts of some Major Arcana card holders?"

"It is indeed worth suspecting." Franca and Jenna both nodded slowly.

Lumian immediately added, "I mainly wanted to make one point clear: at this stage, we should focus on observation, supplemented by analyzing the contents of the information and collecting information. We absolutely must not contact Mr. Fool, and we should try not to contact these people around Mr. Fool. The closer they are to Mr. Fool, the less we should contact them."

"But if we don't make contact, how can we conduct further investigations later? How can we determine the identity of the Celestial Worthy? How can we gradually awaken Mr. Fool?" Franca raised a question.

Lumian chuckled. "We're just not making contact at this stage. After we complete the observation work, we will make contact with purpose and plan. That will also be a form of probing."

"Probing…" Jenna and Franca vaguely grasped Lumian's idea.

They were about to inquire further when the cold dishes were ready and brought to their table along with several bottles of beer.

After the waiter left, Franca picked up her chopsticks, easily opened the bottle caps, and poured a glass for everyone except Ludwig.

Children can only drink soda and dairy products!

Franca tapped her glass full of golden liquid on the table and said with a smile, "The past cannot be retrieved, the future cannot be known. Let's toast to the fact that we're all still together now and can enjoy life!"

Lumian shook his head with a smile, but still clinked glasses with Franca, Jenna, and Anthony. Then, he tilted his head back and gulped down the glass of beer.

Franca was the first to finish drinking. She wiped her mouth and saw Lumian's Adam's apple moving as he drank, with a little beer seeping from the corner of his mouth. She suddenly froze.

Damn, why do I find his Adam's apple movement so sexy…

Is this what an Incubus is like?

Anthony glanced at Franca and Jenna drinking boldly and their unconscious small movements, then at the men and women around furtively looking at them and Lumian. He silently sighed and tried to make himself even less noticeable.

Ludwig had already started quickly eating the cold dishes like garlic pork slices, cold sliced pork head meat, spicy shredded pig ears, smashed cucumber, and mixed shredded vegetables.

Lumian took an inconspicuous mirror from his pocket and placed it in a corner of the table.

Franca quickly came to her senses and once again filled up the beer for each team member, except for the child.

She raised her glass again and said, "Cheers to past experiences and future hopes!"

Her passionate tone and high spirits gave Jenna and Lumian a slightly tipsy feeling, while Anthony felt like he was back in his military camp days.

Amidst the crisp clinking sounds, they temporarily set aside their inner depression and worries about this mission, just enjoying the present moment.

…

In the rental apartment.

"We spent six hundred?" Jenna asked, sounding a bit pained.

They had spent one-tenth of their funds in just one meal!

"It's actually not expensive. This fellow eats like ten people or more, and we also drank alcohol." Franca waved her hand. "It's fine, I'll arrange a few more micro loans as backup, and you should each get one too. We still need to go out and buy some T-shirts, casual pants, jeans, sneakers. How about we find time to go to the wholesale market tomorrow?"

At times like this, brand, fit, and design didn't matter—cost-effectiveness was the top priority!

Lumian took out the remaining food from the Traveler's Bag, which had shrunk in space, and while placing them on the dining table, he said, "We also need to replenish food for Ludwig. He needs to eat every two to three hours."

"Mm." Franca pointed to the rooms. "Anthony, you choose first."

Anthony didn't hesitate and chose the smallest bedroom, which was also not on the same side as the other two.

Franca turned to Lumian. "You'll sleep in the master bedroom with Ludwig?"

"The second bedroom will do. Except for his big appetite, he's a normal kid in other aspects. He won't be cramped sleeping in the second bedroom's bed," Lumian understood that one of his tasks was to keep an eye on Ludwig, not letting him leave the dream prematurely out of fear and refusing to come back.

"Alright, Jenna and I will sleep in the master bedroom." Franca smiled.

In the time that followed, she borrowed another 10,000 in micro-loans, with Lumian, Jenna, and Anthony each getting 3,000.

After doing this, Franca, with great willpower, put down her phone, turned on the light, and carefully read the information related to Mr. Fool, which she had only quickly browsed before. Lumian and the others each occupied a position, equally focused on reading.

Before they knew it, the night grew deeper.

Ludwig's another cry of hunger brought them back to alertness, and they stopped reading and discussing.

"Even just reading the information about Mr. Fool provided by the Major Arcana card holders, I feel like my head is in a daze, gradually losing myself… Is this the status of a great existence?" Lumian seriously assessed his previous state and solemnly said, "When we study this information again later, we shouldn't exceed half an hour each time."

He raised his right hand and rubbed his temples, finding that the consumption of spirituality was also significant.

"Mm." Franca stood up and looked out the window. "Let's go eat barbecue outside Mr. Fool's neighborhood. Although Mr. Fool doesn't come out for late-night snacks every day, at least we can observe the people who frequently appear around the neighborhood."

Jenna was about to respond when she suddenly noticed the scenery outside the balcony.

She unconsciously walked over and gazed out beyond the residential area, across the street.

The bright and warm lights shone out from countless buildings and windows, like the Milky Way had fallen to the ground, but with an added human touch.

This night view was more vast and dreamlike than that of Trier and the New City of Silver, seeming to carry more dreams.

Lumian also focused his gaze for a while, until Ludwig tugged at the sleeve of his shirt.

"Let's go." He withdrew his gaze and headed towards the door.

Franca said to Jenna, "Later, we'll find a tall building with a good view to take another look."

After leaving the neighborhood, they followed the map and circled around to the outside of Mr. Fool's neighborhood. They casually chose a barbecue stand and inconspicuously observed the people and events around them.

Just as the grilled beef arrived, Franca noticed that Lumian's gaze was fixed in one direction for a long time, not moving.

"What's wrong?" she asked curiously.

Lumian pointed with his chin in that direction. "I see the Oracle."

The Oracle? Franca and Jenna looked in that direction and saw a hooligan with yellowish eyebrows and hair color.

The man was holding a stack of flyers.

"Oracle Danitz?" Jenna asked for confirmation.

Lumian nodded slowly. "I don't know if it's a consciousness projection or a fake person in the dream…"

Seemingly sensing their gaze, Mr. Fool's Oracle Danitz suddenly turned around and looked over.

Then, he quickly walked up to Lumian and the others, glanced at Ludwig, and asked with a smile, "Would you be interested in Dream Tutoring Classes?"

Tutoring classes… Ludwig's pupils suddenly dilated.

Crack!

He bit through the bamboo skewer.

Chapter 907: Corpse

Lumian examined Oracle Danitz's deep blue eyes for a few seconds, then gave Jenna a meaningful look.

Now, Franca no longer needed to digest the Affliction potion.

Jenna instantly understood Lumian's intention and asked Oracle Danitz with a smile, "Do you have any courses suitable for children?"

She pointed at Ludwig, causing him to tremble and turn pale.

This made Jenna feel the obvious digestion of the Affliction potion.

Danitz's eyes lit up, and he said with a big smile, "Of course we do! From foreign language education and logic courses for 3-year-olds to vocational training for adults, we have it all!"

As he spoke, his gaze couldn't help but move back and forth between Jenna and Franca's faces a few times, seemingly stunned by their beauty.

Many celebrities with makeup and photo editing might not be this beautiful!

Jenna took the flyer and looked at it carefully, then said with a smile, "When we have time, I'll bring the child to take a look."

She kept in mind the plan Lumian had made, focusing on observation for now and not rushing to make contact.

Hearing Jenna's words, Ludwig's face showed obvious bitterness. He could only grab a handful of grilled beef skewers and fiercely tear off more than a dozen pieces of meat sprinkled with chili powder and cumin to soothe his inner wounds.

"Alright, remember to mention my name for a discount!" Danitz marveled at how such a young beauty already had such a big child, assuming she must have not studied well in high school and was taken home by some hooligan to have a child before finishing school. He then gave his name, "My surname is Da, and my given name is Nizi."

After saying this, his gaze lingered on Jenna and Franca's faces before he unhesitatingly turned around to continue looking for targets to distribute flyers.

"He should be a fake person in the dream woven by Mr. Fool's subconscious." Anthony, who had been observing silently, made his judgment.

Lumian nodded, then added, "Indeed, he didn't show any special qualities an Oracle should have, and he obviously didn't recognize me."

At this point, Lumian smiled. "Since he's woven by Mr. Fool's subconscious, it shows that in Mr. Fool's perception, the Oracle is someone who likes women but won't be confused by them, with relatively strong willpower in this aspect."

This conclusion was drawn from Danitz's behavior of being attracted by the beauty of the two Demonesses yet not flirting, not lingering, and not talking too much.

"It might not be strong willpower, but professional ethics that prevent him from flirting with women while working, or he might have someone he likes and is willing to restrain himself for," Franca said, eventually showing an ambiguous smile. "Does this mean what's written in the Adventurer series is true?"

"The rumors at sea say the same," Lumian confirmed Franca's guess.

In the time that followed, the four of them mainly observed and didn't eat much, while Ludwig turned his grief into appetite, eventually causing them to spend 400.

Franca put the last piece of grilled eggplant into her mouth, chewed a few times, and stood up somewhat reluctantly, saying, "It's time to go back."

This was truly a nostalgic taste.

As they circled back to their own neighborhood, Jenna glanced at the bright street lamps on both sides, then at the pedestrians walking in the summer night breeze in the dark night. She had the illusion that it wasn't near dawn now, but just the beginning of the night.

In Trier, before becoming a Beyonder, she only dared to walk on the streets at midnight relying on her reputation as the Red Boots' mistress and her concealed revolver. Even so, she didn't dare to walk too far home and usually had to stay at Franca's place. But in this metropolis in Mr. Fool's dream, people seemed accustomed to enjoying the deep night on the streets.

Franca had already integrated into such an environment, as if returning to her past life.

She was looking around quite comfortably when she suddenly noticed a human figure hanging on the outer wall of a building at the edge of an alley leading to an old neighborhood, gently swaying in a place where the street lamps couldn't illuminate.

With a Demoness's super vision and Night Vision, Franca instantly saw the appearance of that figure clearly:

Yellowish eyebrows, hair of the same color, a red headband wrapped around the forehead, deep blue eyes bulging out, frozen in pain and despair, not very deep facial features already distorted, mouth half-open, tongue sticking out.

Danitz!

Oracle Danitz!

He was hanging on the outer wall of the building, with a brownish-yellow hemp rope around his neck!

He had been hanged.

The man who was distributing tutoring flyers to Lumian and the others just over an hour ago had been hanged!

As Franca's pupils suddenly dilated, Lumian and Jenna also noticed the corpse hanging in mid-air, gently swaying.

"The Oracle is dead? Murdered?" Jenna blurted out in confusion.

Who did this?

Was it a natural development of the dream, or was it done by that Celestial Worthy's subordinates?

After confirming that the corpse was indeed Oracle Danitz, Franca exhaled and said, "It's good that he's just a fake person in the dream, so the Oracle in reality won't die along with him."

Hearing these words, Lumian's heart stirred. He walked into the alley and came to the front of Danitz's suspended corpse.

During the process, he continuously observed his surroundings and took out a mirror to perform a quick and simple divination to confirm whether the murderer had already left and if anyone was paying attention to this place.

Before he got really close, he could already smell the stench of loss of bowel and bladder control.

Combined with other details, he determined that the Oracle had indeed been hanged to death.

Lumian condensed ice blocks on the wall to create protrusions, then nimbly climbed up to reach the same height as Danitz's corpse. He then put the Oracle, along with the hemp rope, into the mirror he had just used for divination.

"You want to bury the Oracle?" Franca asked curiously after Lumian jumped down from the wall, melted all the ice blocks, and dried the wet marks with crimson flames.

Lumian looked around and said in a lowered voice, "To conduct an experiment."

"What experiment?" Jenna, holding the depressed Ludwig's hand, asked curiously.

Lumian chuckled. "Based on the contents of the information and the details we've observed so far, we all know that this dream evolved from Mr. Fool's subconscious. If we hide the Oracle's corpse and don't let Mr. Fool discover or hear about such an incident, does that mean the Oracle's death doesn't exist, and tomorrow night, the Oracle will still be distributing flyers in that area with many night food stalls?"

"Come to think of it, it's really possible!" Franca quickly recalled the dream-themed movies and novels she had seen before her transmigration.

"If that's the case, we can find ways to use this point: major events that Mr. Fool's dream identity doesn't know about or hasn't heard of are equivalent to non-existent, never having happened!" Lumian said with a smile.

"But what if the Oracle doesn't appear tomorrow night, or if the police have obtained information about his disappearance?" Jenna knew Lumian wouldn't have overlooked this question, after all, there were only two possible outcomes for the experiment.

Lumian said with a smile on his lips, "There might be two reasons:

"First, each fake person in the dream, besides coming from Mr. Fool's memories and cognition, also has his subconscious integrated into them, so any event that happens in the dream will be known and recorded by Mr. Fool's subconscious."

Seeing that Franca and the others seemed unable to grasp the point he wanted to make, Lumian gave an example: "The information mentions that Mr. Fool was an ancient existence awakening from slumber, collecting power and secrets through his incarnation walking on earth, gradually reviving. His incarnation experienced the advancement from Sequence 2 Miracle Invoker to Sequence 1 Attendant of Mysteries. To prepare for the ritual, he established a town called Utopia, where every resident was Mr. Fool's marionette. Each marionette had its own destiny trajectory, all played by Mr. Fool, interacting with each other, portraying reality.

"Isn't this very similar to the current real dream? Except for the consciousness projections from the outside, the remaining dream fake people are likely Mr. Fool's subdivided subconscious, combined with the images from his memories to portray.

"In other words, except for us, every person and every animal in the dream might be Mr. Fool. If we really want to contact Mr. Fool, we might not need to find his dream identity. This could be one of our approaches to contact Mr. Fool in the future while bypassing the Celestial Worthy's monitoring."

"Was Utopia mentioned in that information?" Franca was stunned for a moment.

Did Mr. Fool use this term?

She raised her hand to rub her head, showing slight pain and confusion.

"It might have been there, but by the time I reached the later parts, I was already dazed. I seemed to be communicating with you, but I actually had no idea what I was saying…"

"It was indeed there, and the approach I just mentioned wasn't thought up by me either, it was proposed by the Major Arcana card holders, but they no longer have the chance to verify it." Lumian nodded.

"Everyone is Mr. Fool…" Jenna recalled the sea of people they encountered after leaving the train carriage and the bustling scenes they had seen before, finding it hard to believe for a moment.

Lumian continued, "As for the second reason, if the Oracle's death was carried out by the Celestial Worthy's subordinates, that Celestial Worthy can also control and influence the dream, and would certainly let Mr. Fool's subconscious know about this incident. But the question is, what's the point of dealing with such a fake person?

"Even if they wanted to shake Mr. Fool's will by targeting his emotional weak points, they shouldn't have chosen the Oracle. From the information, the Oracle hasn't established any close relationship with Mr. Fool in the dream, not even qualifying as a friend."

"Strange," Franca murmured in agreement.

They quickly dealt with the scene using the Demoness's black flames, left the alley, and walked towards the old neighborhood where they were renting.

As they approached the main gate, they suddenly heard someone frantically calling out in a low voice from the side near some green trees, "Spare me, please spare me…

"Don't come any closer, don't come any closer!"

Lumian turned his gaze towards the source and saw that it was a local man, not someone with Northern Continent facial features like Oracle Danitz.

Chapter 908: Hospital

Seeing the local man curled up by the green trees, crying out in a near-breakdown state, Franca seriously considered whether to help call the police.

Lumian pondered for a few seconds, then gave Anthony a meaningful look.

Anthony immediately walked into the shadowed area and used Placate on the target.

The local man in his forties finally calmed down, as if emerging from a nightmare that had tormented him for a long time.

Lumian approached and asked pointedly, "What happened?"

Having encountered the strange death of Oracle Danitz not long ago and now meeting a mentally collapsed man, he intuitively felt this shouldn't be simple either, and might hide some crucial information.

The man raised his head and looked at Lumian and the others.

He was about to speak when he suddenly saw Franca and Jenna. His expression twisted and he cried out in extreme terror,

"Female ghost! A female ghost!"

His voice was exceptionally shrill, filled with fear, alerting even the security guard at the entrance of the old neighborhood, who came over with a flashlight to check.

Lumian quickly threw out his mirror, creating his own Mirror Maze.

Franca glanced at him, seeing that he had reacted in time, and withdrew her right hand from her pocket.

At the same time, Franca muttered to herself, "How do I look like a female ghost?

"How do Jenna and I look like female ghosts?"

The security guard, holding a brightly shining flashlight, came over and circled the green trees twice, saying with a puzzled face, "The sound was clearly coming from here, why can't I see anyone…"

He listened carefully again, feeling that the voice shouting "female ghost" had become somewhat distant, unable to discern exactly where it was coming from.

The security guard suddenly shuddered.

Could there really be female ghosts?

He decided not to deal with this matter anymore, only to help report it to the police.

As soon as he had this new idea, he immediately ran back towards the security room at the entrance.

Although the Mirror Maze was only at Sequence 7 level, the current dark environment with few people still allowed Lumian to successfully deceive the security guard.

05:47

He had Franca and Jenna retreat to the edge of the Mirror Maze, not to be seen by the collapsed man, and signaled Anthony to do another round of Placate.

Although the Mirror Maze was only at Sequence 7 level, the current dark environment with few people still allowed Lumian to successfully deceive the security guard.

He had Franca and Jenna retreat to the edge of the Mirror Maze, not to be seen by the collapsed man, and signaled Anthony to do another round of Placate.

The mentally broken local man calmed down once again, and Anthony asked gently and calmly, "What happened? Perhaps I can help you."

For some reason, the man felt that Anthony before him was very trustworthy, making him feel very at ease. He took a breath and said, "I-I encountered a jiangshi!"

"A jiangshi?" Lumian could roughly understand this belonged to a type of undead creature, perhaps a unique term for zombies in this dream world.

The man was silent for a few seconds, looked at Anthony, and received an affirmative nod from him.

He gathered his courage and stammered, "I-I'm a hospital orderly, I just took a corpse to the morgue.

"That corpse was too beautiful, unbelievably beautiful. Her ears were a bit small, very cute, enchanting, just like those expensive jewelry in gold shops. She wasn't wearing any clothes, I couldn't resist, I told my coworker to go ahead, then I climbed on top, bit her ear, and had my way with her for quite a while."

Hearing this, Franca couldn't help but raise her right hand to face palm.

Bringing shame to the motherland!

Perverts are everywhere, it's about relative proportions!

"It didn't feel like a dead person at all…" the man rambled on, as if still savoring the experience.

Gradually, his eyes bulged. "Just as I pulled up my pants, she, that corpse's eyes opened!

"They opened!

"Female ghost! A female ghost!"

After listening intently, Lumian turned his head and said to Franca and Jenna, "If even a corpse has such great allure, could it be a Demoness?"

"It's possible." Franca nodded.

Jenna then proposed another possibility, "The corpse of a Sex Addict or a Baby Cupid might also have this effect."

She had a very deep impression of the Scrooge pathway.

Lumian looked outside the Mirror Maze, seeing no sign of police yet, so he had Anthony Placate the orderly once more, then used Dream Divination to draw a sketch.

The woman in the sketch was clearly not a local, more like someone from the Northern Continent, with striking features but a sacred aura, not feeling like a corpse at all.

Additionally, it was evident that the orderly had the strongest impression of the female corpse's small, delicate ears and long, beautiful neck, mixed with intense desire.

"She does look a bit like a Demoness," said Franca, standing at the edge of the Mirror Maze with rich experience in identifying Demonesses.

Lumian pondered for a moment, then asked the male orderly, "Which hospital do you work at?"

The male orderly didn't hide anything from Anthony,

"I live nearby, but I work at Mushu Hospital."

"Mushu Hospital…" Franca's eyelid twitched.

"What's wrong?" Lumian, Jenna, and Anthony didn't understand why Franca would react this way.

The hospital's name seemed normal, doesn't it mean gazing at the dawn in the distance?

Franca organized her thoughts and said, "This is one of the manifestations of you being able to understand the meaning of corresponding words, but not truly grasping what they symbolize.

"In my native language, 'Mushu' and 'Mother Tree' are near-homophones, and you should know very well what 'Mother Tree' represents."

Without waiting for Lumian and the others to respond, Franca said in a deep voice, "Mother Tree of Desire!"

"Can the Mother Tree of Desire also infiltrate its power into this dream a bit?" Lumian slightly furrowed his brow.

If the Mother Tree has appeared, how far away is the Mother?

Jenna obviously thought of this aspect too, and after a few seconds of silence, she said, "Then the possibility of it being a Baby Cupid corpse has increased…"

Lumian had Anthony further question the male orderly about any unusual occurrences at Mushu Hospital, but didn't get any useful answers.

They didn't waste any more time. Anthony used Hypnosis to make the male orderly forget about the recent soothing and questioning, and had him walk out of the Mirror Maze on his own, heading towards another street.

Dispelling the Mirror Maze and watching the orderly's retreating figure, Lumian thoughtfully said, "That corpse definitely has issues, but it doesn't mean he doesn't have problems, nor does it mean everything else at Mushu Hospital is normal."

Jenna strongly agreed, "That intense desire to violate even a female corpse seems very much like the corruption of a Sex Addict.

"Of course, it could also be that he was enchanted by the female corpse to the point of losing control."

The group discussed the recent events as they walked into their rented apartment complex.

Franca suddenly sighed. "We've only been here half a day and already encountered two bizarre incidents not mentioned in the information, right?"

"Correct," Lumian confirmed.

He then smiled and said, "Perhaps this is how much weight the two Calamity pathways carry.

"When I switch back to the 'Hunter' pathway, I could almost be an incomplete human-shaped corpse wax candle. Maybe I could complete the corresponding secret deed rituals without relying on anything.

"Hmm, my spiritual intuition tells me that we might encounter that resurrected female corpse before long."

"Then we should take turns keeping watch starting tonight," Franca immediately said.

Dying in the dream could mean real death!

"It's indeed worth being so vigilant," Lumian nodded approvingly. "Tomorrow morning, we'll secretly observe outside Mr. Fool's company to recognize people first."

…

Late at night, in the master bedroom.

Jenna suddenly woke up and saw Franca hugging a thin blanket she had taken out of the Traveler's Bag, sitting against the headboard in the darkness, as if she had turned into a statue.

"What are you thinking about?" Jenna slowly sat up and asked carefully.

Franca gazed at the wall opposite, which had been "painted" by darkness, and answered in a voice like sleep-talking, "Why would Mr. Fool name his marionette town Utopia…"

"Is there something wrong with this name?" Jenna didn't quite understand what Franca was concerned about.

After a few seconds of silence, Franca said, "That's a term specific to the world I transmigrated from, meaning a non-existent country, an imaginary country… Why would Mr. Fool use it…"

Jenna roughly understood Franca's thoughts. She said in a gentle voice, "The Major Arcana card holders mentioned in the information that Mr. Fool has been collecting Emperor Roselle's diaries. Maybe this term was in one of the diaries, or maybe Mr. Fool learned about this term during his long-term confrontation with the Celestial Worthy. Or, well, didn't you say the Ancient Sun God might also be a transmigrator? Why couldn't Mr. Fool be one?"

"That's what I'm suspecting. The more I think about Mr. Fool's origins mentioned in the information and the experiences of his avatars, the more I suspect…" Franca's voice became so low it lost its weight.

"Don't suspect, verify," Jenna comforted Franca in her own way. "When we awaken Mr. Fool, you can ask this question. Whether he's a transmigrator or not, after confronting the Celestial Worthy for so many years, he must know the secret of your transmigration. He might even be able to help you return. For now, don't think too much about it, focus on awakening Mr. Fool."

Franca slowly exhaled and said, "Right, thinking too much now is useless, we can't verify anything for the time being.

"Hmm… For me, awakening Mr. Fool is no longer just a task from the Tarot Club, no longer just something that must be done to survive the apocalypse…"

After chatting for a while longer, Franca lay back down, inhaling Jenna's scent, and fell into a deep sleep, both mentally and physically exhausted.

After Franca was completely asleep, Jenna carefully got up, opened the master bedroom door, and walked into the living room that doubled as a dining room.

Lumian, wearing a white shirt and black trousers, was sitting by the wooden dining table, staring blankly at the window in the direction of the shoe cabinet.

"It's my turn to keep watch, you can go rest now," Jenna said with a smile.

Lumian withdrew his gaze and stood up.

"What were you and Franca talking about just now?"

Jenna summarized the key points of Franca's doubts and her own comfort. Lumian nodded slightly and said, "Right, give her a goal, motivate her to act, and not think too much for now.

"When it's daylight, I'll find a chance to consult Anthony again to see if we need to do anything else."

Jenna turned her gaze to the window in the direction of the shoe cabinet and asked curiously, "What were you thinking about just now?"

Lumian looked in that direction as well. What met his eyes was the scene inside the neighborhood. At this moment, only two or three households in each building still had light spilling out, while the rest were in darkness.

Lumian's thoughts seemed to drift away again. He answered in a low voice, "I was wondering if Aurore used to live in a city like this…"

Chapter 909: Case Investigation

The next morning.

After cleaning up in the master bedroom bathroom, Franca walked into the living room and immediately saw plastic bags piled on the wooden dining table. Those semi-transparent white plastic bags contained various foods like fried dough sticks, sesame balls, steamed dumplings, xiaolongbao, and regular steamed buns. Next to them were cups of soy milk and bottles of milk.

The aroma permeating the air felt both familiar and tempting to Franca. She blurted out in surprise, "Who bought all this?"

Don't you need me as a guide to help with communication anymore?

Is this really a "foreigner" who's been here for less than 24 hours?

Lumian smiled and pointed to himself. "Of course it was me."

Franca looked him up and down. "You bought so much breakfast at once, didn't the shopkeeper find it strange?"

"It's not like I bought them all from one place," Lumian said, glancing at Ludwig who had bitten off half a sesame ball, revealing some of the red bean paste filling inside. He smiled and continued, "Later, one shopkeeper did ask when he saw me carrying so much food."

"How did you answer?" Franca asked vigilantly.

Lumian chuckled. "I said I was doing multi-level marketing."

"…" Franca's mouth gaped slightly, at a loss for words.

"The shopkeeper had the same reaction, then asked if I was joking." Lumian maintained his smile. "I said yes, I was actually preparing breakfast for a company team-building event."

"Where did you learn these terms?" Franca asked, looking slightly bewildered.

Lumian chuckled in response. "Aurore mentioned them before, and I asked about them, but I still didn't understand what they meant. Last night I finally figured it out online."

"Your learning ability is quite amazing…" Franca said, her lip twitching slightly.

He's already surfing the internet so quickly!

Good thing this guy hasn't learned to use food delivery apps to order breakfast directly yet, otherwise what use would I be as a guide?

Lumian said in an Aurore-like smug tone, "I've already applied for a QQ number and a backup WeChat account. Once we finish the observation phase of our work, I'll try adding Mr. Fool."

14:37

"…" Franca thought about how this guy was now essentially a genuine beauty who could switch to a beautiful female form at any time. She couldn't help but quip, "Mr. Fool will think you're selling tea leaves and won't add you at all."

Lumian said in an Aurore-like smug tone, "I've already applied for a QQ number and a backup WeChat account. Once we finish the observation phase of our work, I'll try adding Mr. Fool."

"…" Franca thought about how this guy was now essentially a genuine beauty who could switch to a beautiful female form at any time. She couldn't help but quip, "Mr. Fool will think you're selling tea leaves and won't add you at all."

"What?" Lumian was a bit confused.

Finally something you don't know! Franca pulled out a chair and sat down, then tore open the soy milk seal, broke off half a dough stick, and dropped it in to soak.

After doing this, she began "educating" Lumian and Anthony, who was silently eating breakfast, on some Internet common sense—Jenna had taken the second half of the night watch and was still catching up on sleep.

Towards the end, Franca pondered for a moment and said to Lumian, "Although you're adapting and integrating very well, I still don't think you should have made that kind of joke when buying breakfast. That kind of joke leaves a strong impression, and you're quite handsome now, so the breakfast shop owner has definitely remembered you. This isn't very conducive to our current plan of hiding our identities and observing quietly."

"If we weren't concerned about this, afraid of becoming too famous and attracting the Celestial Worthy's attention, we could even start a livestream to make money, and take Ludwig to eat at buffets!"

Lumian thought about it seriously, "Indeed, I'll be more careful. We'll have Anthony go buy things from now on."

At this point, Lumian sincerely praised Franca, "You're even more attentive than me when it comes to these things."

Franca used chopsticks to pick up a section of dough sticks soaked in sweet soy milk, stuffed it in her mouth, chewed and swallowed, then half-closed her eyes and sighed with both intoxication and satisfaction. "This is it…"

She paused, then said proudly, "Of course, I've seriously acted as an Assassin before. I'm definitely not the kind of assassin who thinks 'killing everyone who sees me equals successful stealth'!"

They chatted idly for a while, and Jenna also got up and started eating the breakfast Lumian had put in the Traveler's Bag earlier, which Ludwig hadn't discovered.

Just then, there was a knock at the door.

Lumian and Franca went to open the door one after the other, and saw two people in police uniforms standing outside. The leader had a receding hairline and gray eyes, while the one behind him had black hair and green eyes, looking very handsome but with a lazy, carefree air about him.

Franca's pupils suddenly dilated.

She recognized the young police officer with emerald eyes.

It was the Major Arcana card holder, Mr. Star!

Franca was about to greet him happily when she suddenly realized.

Mr. Star had been locked onto by the Celestial Worthy and would be kicked out shortly after entering the dream each time. The one before her should only be the dream image of Mr. Star woven by Mr. Fool's subconscious.

"Good morning, my name is Deng, I'm the police officer responsible for this area," the gray-eyed policeman smiled and asked. "You just moved in yesterday, right?"

"Yes," Lumian didn't hide it.

The police here even know we just arrived yesterday?

The police in Trier were never this efficient…

Officer Deng said amiably, "Do you have a temporary residence permit…"

"Captain, it's called a residence permit now," the young police officer behind him with black hair and green eyes, who was suspected to be the dream image of the Major Arcana card holder, Mr. Star, reminded him helplessly.

He seemed to have reminded him many times before.

"Haha, I forgot, I forgot." Officer Deng laughed self-deprecatingly.

"We haven't had time to get one yet," Franca quickly answered, afraid that Lumian wouldn't know what a residence permit was.

"Then when you have time, go to the police station across from New City Garden to get one. If you young lovers get married later and have children, you'll need this to enroll them in public kindergartens," Officer Deng reminded them in a casual manner.

Fast-forwarding to marriage and children already… Franca found it both amusing and helpless.

"Captain…" Mr. Star behind Officer Deng reminded him once again.

Officer Deng smiled."I almost forgot, we came to ask you something today. Call all your friends over."

When Jenna came to the entrance area holding Ludwig's hand, along with Anthony, Officer Deng took out a photo. "Have you seen this person?"

The man in the photo had dyed his hair and eyebrows a burnt yellow color, with unremarkable facial features. It was clearly Oracle Danitz.

"We've seen him," Lumian answered, pretending to think. "He handed out fliers to us last night. What was his name again?"

He turned his gaze to Jenna.

Jenna, holding Ludwig's hand, said, "His surname was Da, I don't remember his full name. He wanted to recommend a suitable tutoring class for children. I was planning to go check it out when I have time."

Seeing Lumian and Jenna speaking like an old married couple with a child, Officer Deng's gaze swept back and forth between the two of them, and between Lumian and Franca.

Young people these days…

"Did something happen to him?" Lumian asked curiously, taking the initiative.

Officer Deng explained briefly, "He didn't return to his residence last night. His roommate reported him missing, and we're investigating everyone he had contact with last night."

Franca and Jenna resisted the urge to look at Lumian, while Lumian spoke the truest words, "He gave us fliers, chatted for a bit, then left."

Officer Deng and Mr. Star asked a few more details and made notes.

After they left and everyone sat back at the dining table, Franca looked at Lumian and asked with concern, "Is the Oracle's body still in that mirror?"

Lumian took out the corresponding mirror and checked. "It's still there."

There was still a mirror world here, and Lumian could still freely enter and exit, but he could now directly narrow the range of different mirrors to within 500 meters. For mirrors he had already mastered locating, the distance between them couldn't exceed ten kilometers when wanting to traverse, otherwise there was a risk of getting lost in the void tunnel.

Jenna nodded. "Then we can rule out the first guess from yesterday.

"Critical things that Mr. Fool's dream identity doesn't know about or hasn't heard of will also become real and evolve further."

The remaining two guesses were that all the NPCs in the dream had part of Mr. Fool's subconscious integrated into them, and that the Oracle's death was done by the Celestial Worthy's subordinates.

These two were not completely opposed and could both be true.

Lumian offered a curt acknowledgment. "If it was done by the Celestial Worthy's subordinates, the disappearance of the body would puzzle them as well. Besides the police, there should be people investigating the Oracle's whereabouts, we need to be careful."

After discussing this for a while, Lumian looked at the long-stopped wall clock, then at the sky outside.

"It seems to be getting late."

Franca took out her phone, lit up the screen, looked at it and said, "It's time to go out, Mr. Fool should be heading to the company soon."

Lumian thought for a moment and said to Franca, "I'm worried we'll encounter Amon again if we take a taxi. Last night I found out online that there's also the option of renting a car. Although it will cost more, it's safer and more discreet.

"Do you know how to drive?"

"I have a driver's license," Franca blinked and said, "The identity documents provided by Madam Justice also include a driver's license."

"I'm asking if you know how to drive," Lumian emphasized, amused.

Franca flew into a rage out of humiliation. "I got my license in college, but before I graduated, uh, I came to Intis. Where would I have had a car to drive?

"If you ask me if I know how to drive, I can only answer that I have a license."

She felt that Anthony, who was currently experiencing the dream world, should have already guessed that she came from a different world.

Before Lumian could ask again, she said confidently, "With a Beyonder's eyesight, hearing, reaction time, and physical coordination, plus my driving knowledge, I don't think driving will be a problem. Didn't you quickly master how to use chopsticks yesterday?"

"Then let's rent a car." Lumian made the decision.

Although Franca felt the pain of spending money, thinking that she could borrow more, she suppressed that feeling.

By the due date, we might have completed the mission and left the dream!

…

In a temporary parking spot across from a large building.

Sitting in a gray sedan, Lumian and the others intently observed the white-collar workers entering the building, some hurried and some leisurely, through the tinted car windows.

Chapter 910: First Encounter

When it came to observation, although Lumian was already a demigod, all his abilities were suppressed to the Sequence 7 level. He felt he wasn't as professional as a Spectator, so he gave the back seat position closest to the target building to Anthony. Lumian relied on his eagle-like vision from the Demoness pathway and a Hunter's sensitivity to visual clues to observe from afar.

In the front seat, Franca had finally managed to complete her parallel parking. She rested her elbow on the car door, watching the target area while secretly feeling proud. Jenna turned around, leaning forward and squeezing her head above Franca's shoulder, also watching intently.

As time passed minute by minute, Franca suddenly smelled the aroma of meat stewed with spices until tender.

She turned her head and saw Ludwig quietly munching on a meat sandwich in the far corner of the back seat.

"It hasn't been two hours since breakfast, right?" Franca blurted out.

Why is he eating again?

Lumian simply replied, "No, it hasn't."

"I'm thinking, is this his eating frequency and portion size in reality too…" Franca muttered.

She didn't have a direct understanding of how much Ludwig could eat before, only a financial concept. But in the days before entering the dream, she often helped Jenna supervise Ludwig's homework and test papers. The two Demonesses got to witness what it meant to be a Glutton, leaving an extremely deep impression.

Franca continued, "In the dream, aren't all special abilities limited to Sequence 7 level? But he doesn't seem to be eating any less…"

Hearing this, Lumian, Jenna, and Anthony's gazes suddenly turned to Ludwig.

Ludwig quickly stuffed the entire meat sandwich in his mouth and mumbled, "Because it's delicious!"

"You'd rather be stuffed than not eat?" Lumian raised an eyebrow.

"Mmhmm." Ludwig nodded vigorously.

Seeing Ludwig like this, Jenna couldn't help but laugh.

"It is really delicious."

Lumian thought for a moment and decided to indulge Ludwig for a couple of days, as he himself was eating more than usual.

"It's really good, isn't it?" Franca became proud again, "What I can't figure out is how none of you got diarrhea. Jenna and Anthony were even clamoring that it was spicy while eating!"

"My digestive system has endured the burning of flames, and Ascetic has strong resistance to extreme environments." Lumian indicated that spiciness was no trouble for a Hunter who liked self-harm like him.

"Swallowing a ball of fire" was an exaggeration for others, but for him it was an occasional objective description.

Anthony continued observing the entrance and exit of the building, calmly saying, "The Mythical Creature form of Spectator is a mind dragon."

Although there wasn't much improvement in combat abilities, one's physical toughness would significantly increase.

Just as Jenna was about to describe her feelings, Anthony and Lumian said in unison, "Mr. Fool is here."

Jenna hurriedly returned to her previous posture, turning her gaze to the dark-tinted car window.

She saw a young man wearing a black short-sleeved polo shirt, light-colored casual pants, and a pair of brownish sneakers. He was holding a cup of soy milk and carrying a bag of steamed buns, taking a few steps up the stairs towards the building.

This man had short black hair that was simply styled, deep brown eyes behind a pair of non-prescription glasses. His face was much thinner compared to the portrait in their files, with soft contours, giving him a somewhat handsome appearance.

He was precisely Lumian and the others' target, the dream image of Mr. Fool, Zhou Mingrui!

After Zhou Mingrui's figure disappeared into the building lobby, Franca took a breath and said, "Compared to the original sketch, Mr. Fool has lost quite a bit of weight and become a little better looking…

"Could the Major Arcana card holders' speculation be correct, that he was somehow misled by the Celestial Worthy into drinking the Assassin potion?

"Is the Celestial Worthy trying to use gender change to cause cognitive issues for Mr. Fool and thereby achieve victory?"

The Major Arcana card holders mentioned in the files that one of the most important phase goals for Lumian's team was to prevent Zhou Mingrui, who was suspected to have drunk the Assassin potion, from truly becoming a Witch!

"Does the Assassin potion also improve appearance?" Lumian asked Franca and Jenna.

He had switched from the Hunter pathway to the Demoness pathway and hadn't experienced the Assassin sequence in detail.

"It mainly adjusts body shape to make the user more suitable as an assassin, which brings about a slight change in appearance, but very little," Franca recalled. "Mr. Fool, uh, Zhou Mingrui probably succeeded in passive weight loss, becoming better looking mainly due to slimming down, and secondarily due to the minor improvements from the Assassin potion."

She felt it was better to refer to the target as Zhou Mingrui for now. Constantly using "Mr. Fool" made her nervous and afraid to discuss.

Lumian nodded and asked Anthony, "Did you notice anything?"

Anthony said, "Mr. Fool's steps up the stairs were very light, consistent with the description of the Assassin potion…

"Mr. Fool is wearing non-prescription glasses to conceal eyes that are no longer nearsighted, indicating he doesn't want to change his life in the short term and will continue working…

"Mr. Fool's emotional state seems good, he probably hasn't encountered any major incidents yet…

"Can't tell if he's taken the Instigator potion yet…"

After hearing Anthony's observations, Lumian thoughtfully said, "Continue observing and recording the people mentioned in our files and those showing certain abnormalities…"

"Okay," Jenna responded first, then pointed across the street. "That's Rozanne, in reality she's a civilian staff member of the Church of Evernight, married with children. In the dream, she's Zhou Mingrui's colleague. Currently uncertain if there's anything abnormal…"

Franca followed up, "That one wearing a white tailcoat with a bowtie and long silver hair in 30-degree heat is Vice President Wu from the company next to Zhou Mingrui's, suspected to be…"

At this point, Franca glanced sideways at Lumian and saw that his expression remained calm, his gaze not changing much.

Only then did she continue, "Suspected to be Ouroboros, the Angel of Fate of the Aurora Order, a king from ancient times."

According to their files, the company next to Mr. Fool's should be a projection of the Aurora Order in the dream.

Until 10 a.m., Lumian and the others finished their first round of observation, matching many people with the information in their files, but not discovering any truly suspicious individuals.

"Roselle Emperor, uh, CEO Huang didn't come," Franca said with some disappointment.

Roselle Emperor's image in the dream was the CEO of the Intis Group where Mr. Fool worked, a business tycoon, a domineering boss.

Before Lumian could respond, Franca chuckled to herself. "He's probably still in bed with some actress, streamer, or singer."

Lumian was also a bit disappointed, but there would be plenty of opportunities in the future.

He, who had never attended university, was already preparing to apply for a security guard position at the Intis Group.

"Now let's go buy clothes," Lumian said, looking down at his still normal shirt and trousers, then glancing at Jenna's blue waist-cinching long dress with classical charm.

At this point, Ludwig raised a question, "What's for lunch?"

Franca, currently responsible for the entire team's income, immediately said, "Who eats out every day?

"Later we'll go to a large supermarket and buy dozens of kilos of noodles and some side dishes. I'll cook noodles for you, all you can eat!"

As soon as she finished speaking, Franca saw the smile and anticipation disappear from Ludwig's face, replaced by a slightly aggrieved expression.

She felt no pity or guilt, but instead secretly patted her thigh.

Damn, I should have let Jenna say those two sentences! What a great opportunity to digest the Affliction potion!

After finalizing their itinerary, Franca carefully drove the car out onto the wide road.

…

Inside a large shopping mall.

Lumian and the others, with their appearance completely transformed, took the elevator from the underground parking lot to the first floor.

Franca looked at Jenna again, feeling that the simple combination of a white patterned T-shirt, light blue jeans, white sneakers, and ankle-length socks of the same color gave her a fresh and clean look. It retained a youthful, student-like air while adding a hint of natural allure in her glances, attracting the gaze of many passersby.

It's the type I used to like, no, still like! And Jenna with heavy makeup is another style altogether… Franca didn't hide her admiration.

Her tall stature and striking features made the ordinary black T-shirt and wide-leg pants look mature and confident, causing many people to only dare steal quick glances.

Lumian still wore a shirt with black pants, but with a more casual and relaxed feel. Walking together with the two Demonesses, they looked as beautiful as a painting.

Their clothes were all very cheap. Franca had given up on the bulk-priced ones and opted for the 10-yuan items, buying a lot.

Lumian's gaze swept every corner of the mall, feeling it was spacious, bright, and clean, even more impressive than the most luxurious department store in Trier.

Franca had no intention of letting Lumian, Jenna, Anthony, and Ludwig wander around here. She headed straight for the escalator going down to the basement, planning to enter the supermarket.

Money needs to be saved!

As soon as Lumian, Jenna, and Anthony arrived at the entrance of the supermarket, they were dazzled by the wide array of goods inside, the artistic displays, and the soft yet bright lighting.

Franca suddenly paused, instinctively turning her head towards Ludwig. She found the little boy's gaze already fixed, his eyes filled with burning desire.

"Let's go back!" Franca blurted out. "I'll buy the stuff online and have it delivered!"

In a place like a supermarket, kids simply can't control themselves!

Hearing Franca's words, Ludwig's expression immediately fell.

After learning the reason, Lumian and Jenna both agreed with Franca's decision.

Turning around and walking a few steps, Lumian's peripheral vision suddenly caught a figure.

The figure had their head slightly lowered, black hair hanging down, faintly revealing small and delicate ears.

She quickly disappeared into the depths of the supermarket.

Lumian suddenly stopped and said in a low voice to Franca, Jenna, and Anthony, "I may have seen that reanimated female corpse."

Chapter 911: A Way to Make Money

Reanimated female corpse? Franca and the others were all startled.

Last night, Lumian had said he intuitively believed that before long, they would encounter that reanimated female corpse. As a result, they ran into her today?

"Where?" Jenna asked in a lowered voice.

Lumian looked towards the escalator without showing any outward sign of abnormality. "In the supermarket."

He didn't immediately turn around to track the reanimated female corpse, because Franca casually glanced at a corner of the ceiling, then carelessly looked around.

The first action was to remind Lumian that there were multiple cameras here, while the latter behavior implied that there were many people around, many phones, and if he were to cause any commotion, it would likely be filmed as a short video, uploaded online, and become a trending topic. If that happened, it would likely catch the Celestial Worthy's attention!

Although Lumian could use Mirror Maze and other illusions to affect cameras and phones, this wasn't a scenario he had preset. He would have to chase all the way, and couldn't use mirror magic every few steps.

It was only because they lived in a rather dilapidated area of the old town that there were quite a few cameras on the main roads and at the entrances of various residential areas. Once in quiet alleys that few people usually walked, there wasn't much surveillance. Otherwise, Lumian's act of moving Oracle Danitz's corpse would have been recorded long ago. Franca would certainly have stopped him first at that time, telling him to find a blind spot in the surveillance to take out the mirror, create a Mirror Maze step by step before approaching the corpse.

Hearing his godfather's answer that the reanimated female corpse was in the supermarket, Ludwig's eyes lit up, and he raised his short arm. "Let's go chase her!"

Kid, you have gotten a bit smarter, even knowing how to take advantage of this situation! I can't tell if you want to use this as an excuse to go into the supermarket to get food, or if you think that female corpse might be more delicious… Franca silently grumbled, turning her gaze to Jenna.

Jenna intuitively understood Franca's hint and said with a smile, "We can't track with so many people. Anthony and I will take Ludwig back to the car first. You and Lumian go into the supermarket to find her."

The expression of expectation and desire on Ludwig's face suddenly froze.

"Alright." Franca took out the car keys and tossed them to Jenna.

"I also want to contribute to the team…" Ludwig hadn't finished speaking before being dragged away by Jenna, disappointment and pain evident in his expression.

Franca quickly turned around, grabbed a shopping cart from nearby, and pushed it towards the supermarket. Lumian followed beside her, his gaze naturally sweeping over the displays and rows of shelves.

While searching for traces of the reanimated female corpse, Franca began picking out items.

"Grab that can of lard, and get some light soy sauce, dark soy sauce, salt, MSG, chili oil…" She ordered Lumian around without hesitation, while also constantly putting some kitchen items into the shopping cart herself.

Although cooking at home wastes time, it saves a lot of money!

Later they could go to the frozen goods wholesale market to buy some cheap items. The only problem was that the refrigerator in the rental apartment was too small, unable to hold more than a few days' worth of food.

So you can buy things this way… Lumian experienced for the first time the joy of picking up goods himself without needing to find a salesperson. He interestedly placed a bottle of alcohol into the shopping cart.

"This is cooking wine! Well, we need it anyway." Franca glanced amusedly at this regular customer of Ol' Tavern.

The two chatted and laughed, moving through the supermarket in a harmonious atmosphere, no different from other families shopping around them.

Under this disguise, Lumian and Franca confirmed the situation in every corner of the supermarket, but found no trace of the reanimated female corpse.

"She may have already left. Let's check out first." Franca looked at the dozens of pounds of freshly made noodles and a ten-kilogram bag of rice on top of the shopping cart, genuinely delighted at how much money they could save on meals in the coming days.

Lumian nodded. "We'll take turns cooking later."

Franca patted Lumian's shoulder with a smile. "I'm looking forward to your culinary skills."

This trip, the two bought nearly 500 yuan worth of goods, most of which were inexpensive ingredients that could fill stomachs.

After leaving the supermarket exit, Lumian and Franca quickly scanned around but still didn't see any sign of the reanimated female corpse.

Almost simultaneously, Franca noticed a shop with the words "Lottery" written on it.

Her heart suddenly stirred, and she turned her head to look at Lumian, asking with full expectation, "Can you still use your abilities to Magnified Fate and Compelling Fate?"

"Of course." Lumian cast his gaze towards the shop Franca had just been looking at. "But only at the Sequence 7 level. I can't influence relatively crucial and important fates unless their probability of occurrence is already very high."

A smile gradually blossomed on Franca's face, attracting the gazes of several passersby, both men and women.

"Let's go buy some lottery tickets!" She said with a firm tone, concealing her joy.

Is she wanting me to magnify the fate stream of her winning, or forcibly compel fate in that direction? Lumian had long known what lottery meant. In the past, Aurore would occasionally give him gifts in the form of lottery tickets on major holidays, with a 100% win rate.

"Let's give it a try." Lumian's subtext was to buy a small amount first, and even if Compelling Fate was ineffective in Mr. Fool's dream, they wouldn't lose too much.

Franca rubbed her hands together and walked towards the lottery booth with a bright and clear smile.

Before transmigrating, she would buy ten to twenty yuan worth of lottery tickets every week or two, purely for entertainment, but never had returns exceeding the principal.

Now, I've come with good luck!

She didn't directly buy lottery tickets like the Double Color Ball, but instead spent fifty yuan on different versions of scratch cards.

As she paid and made her selections, Lumian's eyes took on a silver-white color with black.

He reached out to Franca, embracing her shoulders in a couple-like gesture, using this to complete his touch on the River of Fate.

The corresponding stream was magnified.

Franca instinctively twisted her body, not quite comfortable with such an embrace, especially in public.

But she quickly returned to a normal state, allowing Lumian to embrace her shoulders.

Her eyes had already lit up.

She scratched off the corresponding numbers!

This is worth 50 yuan!

While Lumian was paying attention to the various grand prize information being announced at the lottery booth, Franca finished scratching all the lottery tickets, winning a total of two thousand.

"Haha!" She laughed silently and smugly.

Finally made a profit!

Beyonder powers are great!

After cashing in the prizes, Franca said to Lumian in an exceptionally cheerful mood, "I'm going to buy a few Double Color Ball tickets."

At this point, she lowered her voice, "Don't worry about those fate streams for the grand prize, a third or second prize would be fine."

Lumian nodded gently.

Franca immediately thought of some numbers and bought 5 entries.

As they walked towards the nearest direct elevator, Lumian asked Franca with a smile, "Why don't you want to win the first prize? I see the first prize money is worth a lot, and you could even win dozens at once."

Franca wrinkled her nose and said, "Didn't you say that currently you can only influence fates that aren't too crucial or important? That kind of overnight wealth probably can't be achieved.

"Besides, even if you could really make me win, the final result might not be what I bought. 'Fate' has long been predetermined."

After complaining a bit, Franca asked with concern, "Did Magnified Fate just now succeed?"

Lumian chuckled. "No."

"…My money!" Franca blurted out, then immediately comforted herself, "Good thing it wasn't much."

Lumian explained simply, "I only realized this wasn't an instant-win lottery when you were buying. The results won't come out for several days. The corresponding fate streams are complex and intricate, with too many variables. I couldn't clearly see which one led to the winning fate, I could only magnify the one with special characteristics. What the final result will be, I don't know either.

"We can only pray for Mr. Fool's blessing." Franca expressed understanding.

Seeing that the direct elevator was about to arrive, Lumian looked left and right and asked thoughtfully,

"We're under surveillance, so that reanimated female corpse should be too.

"Is there any way to check the mall's surveillance footage to see what she came here to do?"

"We're not the police; we don't have that authority." Franca instinctively replied.

"Sneak in at night and look through it ourselves?" Lumian suggested.

Franca said with amusement, "The Major Arcana card holders told us to obey the law as much as possible. Why do you always want to dance on the edge of breaking the law?"

"It's fine if we don't get caught." Lumian said with a smile, "We can't just report it to the police and let them investigate, can we? Wouldn't that turn it back into a confrontation between Mr. Fool and the Celestial Worthy? We need to use the police, not rely on them."

Franca thought for a few seconds and said, "We'll see how it goes tonight."

…

In the rented apartment on the sixth floor.

Franca looked at Ludwig, his head buried in a large bowl, chopsticks constantly moving, and proudly boasted to Lumian and the others, "My cooking skills aren't bad, right?"

This child is quite easy to feed. Noodles, seasonings, and a topping with a bit of minced meat satisfied him. He doesn't have to go out to eat good food!

"It's quite good, but I hope you're not only capable of making noodles." Lumian took a sip of the noodle soup and put down his chopsticks.

"I also hope your culinary skills are as good as you say." Franca responded with a smile.

Just as Lumian was about to say something, his expression suddenly changed slightly.

He quickly took out a mirror from his pocket, the mirror that contained Oracle Danitz's corpse!

At this moment, a pale hand without luster was reflected on the surface of the mirror.

This hand was reaching out from the darkness towards the outside of the mirror.

Black flames restraining madness and violence immediately condensed on both sides of Lumian. They fell onto that mirror like meteors.

With a slight explosive sound, the mirror suddenly shattered into pieces, enveloped by the black flames, rapidly losing its limited spirituality.

Crackling sounds continued to ring out as the mirror fragments fell to the ground, breaking into even smaller pieces.

The pale hand was no longer visible on the surface of these fragments.

"Has the Oracle's corpse reanimated?" Jenna looked at this scene and asked in astonishment.

Chapter 912: Tracking

Lumian looked at the dull, dark mirror fragments on the ground, relying on his spiritual perception for a few seconds before saying, "There's a problem with the Oracle's corpse, but I don't know why."

Franca asked uncertainly, "Now that the mirror is broken, has the Oracle's corpse fallen into the depths of the mirror world, lost in its turbulent flows?"

Each mirror had a corresponding area behind it. They were connected by illusory, dark tunnels, forming the mirror world.

Once a mirror broke, the corresponding area behind it immediately disintegrated. If things placed there couldn't escape in time through the spider web-like tunnels, they would be swallowed by the turbulent flows of the mirror world and dragged into its depths. The environment and hidden dangers there were fatal to Beyonders without a complete Mythical Creature form.

When a mirror broke, it essentially formed more but smaller mirrors. However, from a mystical concept, it had been destroyed as a whole, completely losing its original symbolism and function. The new mirrors produced needed time to evolve their own areas behind them, connect with the vast mirror world, and become mirrors with complete concepts in mysticism.

In other words, for a period of time, these mirror fragments could not be used to reflect enemies, transmit curses, or traverse the mirror world, though this doesn't affect Wraiths using them for mirror jumps.

Of course, Lumian just destroyed the mirror with the Fire of Destruction, so the fragments formed had been completely destroyed in a mystical sense and could not evolve areas behind them. This prevented potential enemies from locating and pinpointing Lumian and the others' specific location.

Lumian carefully said, "The Oracle's corpse has indeed been carried away by the spatial turbulence of the mirror world. Even Angels would find it difficult to delve deep into the mirror world to find and bring it out, unless they're angels of the Door pathway like Madam Magician or Demoness Angels with deep mastery of the mirror world.

"But doesn't this mean the Oracle's corpse will drift in the depths of the mirror world forever until it's completely torn apart and annihilated by the dangers there. There's a chance that after some time, it could be thrown out of the mirror world by spatial turbulence, emerging from a random mirror."

"Mr. Fool's dream world is mainly this city. If the Oracle's corpse comes out of a mirror, do we have a way to find it and confirm what problem it had?" Jenna understood what Lumian wanted to express.

Lumian smiled. "Yes. Let's wait patiently for now, until spiritual intuition gives us a hint."

The corpse of Oracle Danitz was hidden by him and had a close mystical connection with him.

Franca nodded, took out her phone, and started browsing trending topics, sometimes laughing out loud and sharing the joy with Lumian, Jenna, and Anthony, sometimes discussing with them whether certain news items had symbolic meaning in the dream or were related to Mr. Fool's current state.

By the time Ludwig had finished his sixth bowl of noodles and was also looking at his phone, Lumian, who occasionally showed a smile, raised his head and said in a deep voice, "The Oracle's corpse should have left the mirror world."

"Hmm, quickly use Magic Mirror Divination to confirm its specific location." Franca took out a mirror.

Lumian shook his head and chuckled softly. "There's no need to go through so much trouble."

He turned his gaze towards Ludwig.

Ludwig put his right hand in his mouth, retched a few times, and vomited out a small clump of yellowish hair.

"We can directly determine the location using the Oracle's hair with follicles," Lumian explained.

"When did you take a clump of hair from the corpse and hide it in Ludwig's stomach?" Franca asked in astonishment.

Lumian responded with a smile, "Last night before bed, when Anthony was on night watch.

"The Oracle died so suddenly and bizarrely, of course I had to guard against his corpse reanimating. Hiding some of his hair in Ludwig's body can counter divination and prophecy."

Saying this, Lumian held the small clump of slightly damp yellowish hair and stood up, saying, "Let's go."

Almost simultaneously, he burned part of the hair and smeared the residue onto the surface of a mirror.

As the residue seeped in, the mirror emanated a dark, watery light, reflecting a scene.

There were oil-stained walls, a very spacious area, a floor covered in dust and rat droppings, quite dirty large glass windows, and Oracle Danitz's corpse lying on the ground in front of a glass pane.

"Looks like an abandoned factory, the machines have been moved away…" Franca commented after a glance.

"In the suburbs, less than ten kilometers from us," Lumian added more information.

"Teleport over?" Jenna asked.

Lumian could rely on Mirror Traversal to directly go to another mirror within ten kilometers that he had located, and he had now locked onto the glass window that had ejected the Oracle's corpse—even without knowing the position, he could sense mirrors within 500 meters and jump to them in segments.

Moreover, his Teleportation could still be used, but was restricted to positioning within one kilometer; beyond that, he needed to have been there before or have correct coordinates, with the farthest reach being the edge of the dream world.

Lumian nodded slightly, letting his teammates grab onto him, and took them into the mirror Franca had placed on the table.

Passing through a dark, illusory tunnel, they suddenly plunged into the depths of the mirror world, falling towards the glass window they had located.

Amidst Anthony's dizziness, the five figures simultaneously appeared on the dirty glass of the abandoned factory.

Lumian didn't linger, quickly sensing other mirrors within a 500-meter range and jumping over.

They appeared on the top floor of the office building beside the abandoned factory, left the glass window serving as a mirror, each hiding themselves, and gazed towards the target location.

From this angle, they could just see Oracle Danitz's corpse.

"Don't chew, just hold it in your mouth," Lumian handed a lollipop to Ludwig to keep him quiet.

Franca and Jenna were already carefully examining the Oracle's corpse, finding that because it had been hidden in the mirror world, there were no signs of decay yet. But whether it was the bloodless face, the eyes frozen in fear, or other details, all indicated that the Oracle had been dead for over ten hours.

"Nothing unusual…" Franca muttered silently.

Lumian remained motionless, patiently observing.

After nearly five minutes, in their line of sight, the Oracle's corpse's fingers suddenly twitched.

Dammit, amazing, back from the dead? Franca instinctively "admired" in her heart while being startled.

The corpse of Oracle Danitz first moved its fingers, then raised its arm.

Finally, it slowly stood up, its expression wooden, its deep blue eyes no longer overflowing with any emotion.

Really reanimated? Goosebumps rose on Jenna's arms.

The reanimated Danitz corpse walked towards the outside of the abandoned factory, neither fast nor slow.

It walked all the way out of the deserted factory area, towards the roadside, standing there blankly.

Before long, an empty green taxi passed by, and Danitz's corpse raised its right arm, hailing it.

When the taxi stopped in front of him, he slowly opened the door and sat in the back.

Franca rubbed her cheeks with both hands.

"How does this feel even more horrifying than the real world… Is the Death pathway manipulating the corpse?"

Lumian didn't immediately lead his team members to track the taxi, because the mirror infused with Danitz's hair residue was still showing the current state of the Oracle's corpse.

Franca and Jenna tried Magic Mirror Divination to determine what was going on with the Oracle's corpse reanimation.

"It's not working, those beings who know a lot and are relatively safe aren't responding; they're not in Mr. Fool's dream!" Franca found she could only do a simplified version, which was asking her own spirituality in Magic Mirror Divination.

Jenna confirmed her discovery. "Yes, my Magic Mirror Divination failed too."

Lumian took a moment to contemplate before responding,

"In Mr. Fool's dream world, the subjects of inquiry for Magic Mirror Divination, apart from one's own spirituality, should only be those true gods who can directly project Themselves in. But we must ensure that the corresponding projection exists at the time of divination, and that the recited honorific name is not wrong.

"Inquiring of other creatures existing in the local spirit world might be equivalent to asking Mr. Fool or that Celestial Worthy. We might get the best revelation, or we might be directly kicked out of the dream. Hmm, we also don't have the correct descriptions of those creatures."

"Who dares to inquire of true gods…" Franca said softly.

Lumian suddenly grinned. "There's still one choice, the one with the most accurate divination results. The Major Arcana card holders mentioned it in the information, it's a magic mirror belonging to Mr. Fool."

"It hasn't come to that point yet, has it…" Franca was quite resistant.

Lumian tersely responded, his gaze still fixed on the mirror showing the Oracle's corpse's situation.

After more than twenty minutes, the taxi stopped at the entrance of a hospital with excellent landscaping and a very well-designed building.

Lumian and the others immediately saw the hospital's sign: "Mushu Hospital."

"Mushu Hospital… Is the Oracle's death related to the Mother Tree of Desire?" Franca murmured in confusion.

Lumian didn't answer her, watching as the reanimated corpse of Oracle Danitz took out a phone with multiple missed calls from his pocket, scanned a code to pay the fare, and slowly walked towards the outpatient building of Mushu Hospital.

As soon as the corpse passed through the gate, Lumian's mirror rippled with waves, emanating darkness, and quickly returned to normal, no longer showing the Oracle's current position.

"I want to teleport near Mushu Hospital, go in and see where the Oracle's corpse will go," Lumian said, withdrawing his gaze.

Franca quietly commented, "Shouldn't a corpse go to the morgue?"

Jenna then said to Lumian, "You'd better change your appearance before going in. It might be easier to expose yourself inside Mushu Hospital, and we can't affect your current identity. Hmm, Lie alone might not be enough."

Lumian pondered briefly, not wasting any more time. "Okay."

As he answered, his black hair began to grow longer.

Chapter 913: A Kind of Symbol

Seeing this, Anthony didn't try to test himself and proactively left the office.

In just about 10-20 seconds, he heard Lumian's feminized voice. "You can come in now."

Compared to before, this female voice wasn't as low and subdued, with a hint of clarity added.

Anthony pushed open the office door and saw that Lumian had changed into a slightly waist-cinching white shirt bought earlier for the female identity, paired with bluish jeans, accentuating a slender waist and long, straight legs. She also wore deep rose-colored sunglasses on the bridge of her nose. Though these were just cheap street goods, Lumian wore them with a beautiful, radiant, and sharp air.

Lumian slightly gathered the glossy black hair falling on both sides, covering most of her cheeks, and said to Anthony, "Let's go back to the rental apartment first."

Anthony carefully grabbed the sleeve of Lumian's shirt, while Franca and Jenna each took hold of an arm. Ludwig, still with a lollipop in his mouth, chose to tug at his godfather's clothes.

The group's figures soon faded and disappeared from this long-abandoned office building without cameras, reappearing in the rental apartment where dishes had not yet been washed.

Lumian said to Franca, "You drive to Mushu Hospital and wait for me outside. We may not have the chance to teleport to escape later."

This didn't mean he couldn't teleport, but rather that if he used teleport or Mirror Traversal in front of a large crowd of citizens, it would inevitably become a trending topic and might be directly locked onto by the Celestial Worthy.

"Okay," Franca tossed her lip balm and lipstick to Lumian. "Once inside the hospital, if you need to frequently look in the mirror, pretend you're touching up your makeup."

In this matter, a female appearance had a natural advantage, making it less likely for people in the dream to notice anything unusual.

Lumian caught the lipstick and lip balm, and based on the location he had obtained while monitoring the Oracle's corpse with the mirror earlier, he teleported to the plant-filled edge of Mushu Hospital. He walked out from behind several trees and turned into the crowd.

His supermodel-like height and the skin condition, contour details, and lip curve revealed between his black hair and sunglasses made passersby and patients, even without seeing his exact appearance, look twice. They seemed to want to use their brains to fill in the blanks and reconstruct the possibly world-class beauty hidden behind the sunglasses.

Some people accidentally bumped into others, some missed a step and nearly fell.

Their only regret was that this tall beauty wearing sunglasses didn't walk gracefully enough, striding fiercely like a man.

Lumian gradually slowed his pace, as if trying to recall how Aurore usually walked.

After passing through security and entering the outpatient building, he temporarily stopped, took out a makeup mirror and lip balm, and added some shine and moisture to his pale lips.

During this process, he found that the mirror that had once been smeared with the Oracle's hair residue could again reflect some scenes.

These included Danitz's back, the medicine collection window, passing patients, and family members caring for them.

Lumian discerned the direction and walked towards the medicine collection window.

He didn't walk fast, his gaze seemingly casually surveying the people around him and the layout of the hospital's first floor.

Everything seemed normal, without any scenes of desire outbursts.

Vaguely, Lumian had a sense of familiarity.

It wasn't that he had been to a similar place before, but it came from the depths of his soul.

Lumian pursed his lips, lost in thought, Is it Aurore's memory?

Did she frequent this kind of large hospital before her transmigration? Well, everyone gets sick sometimes…

Did her soul fragments become a bit more active after I changed into a female form? Hmm, it must also be because Mr. Fool's dream city is very similar to her hometown, stimulating her soul fragments…

Lumian quickly suppressed the emotions in his heart, remembering that he had entered Mushu Hospital to track the whereabouts of the Oracle's corpse and observe the situation here.

His gaze swept over faces, some wearing masks, some with hidden worry, feeling that this shouldn't be much different from the situation in a normal hospital.

Suddenly, he saw a familiar figure.

It was the male orderly who had mentally broken down last night due to the female corpse coming back to life.

This orderly was wearing a mask, pushing a transfer bed as he passed by, with no fear or worry in his eyes, almost identical to the expressions of his colleagues.

He still dares to work at this hospital? Lumian's eyebrows twitched slightly.

The orderly seemed to have forgotten about his desecration of the corpse, and had also forgotten the horror of the corpse suddenly waking up.

It was as if someone had told him that the female corpse wasn't actually dead, and his misconduct had actually helped her escape from a state of apparent death, avoiding cremation, so she had decided to forgive him.

Lumian slowly shook his head, took out the lip balm and makeup mirror, and once again tracked the whereabouts of the Oracle's corpse.

The scene presented in the mirror was an area with eight elevators. The back of Oracle Danitz had just passed through the elevator doors, with the outside button lit up with a downward arrow.

Is this going to B1? Is the destination really the morgue? Lumian passed by the front of the medicine collection window and turned towards the nearby stairwell.

There were patients and family members waiting here.

Lumian looked left and right, thinking that he should prepare some masks for him and the other Demonesses. This could more effectively conceal their faces without becoming the focus of others' attention.

The elevator came rather slowly. It took Lumian two to three minutes to wait for an elevator that was continuing downwards.

The people inside poured out, leaving only a patient sitting in a wheelchair and an orderly in green clothes pushing the wheelchair.

The orderly wore a mask, and the patient was quite elderly, with graying hair and beard.

Their gazes simultaneously turned to Lumian, with something unsettling hidden in the depths of their deep brown eyes.

Lumian, who was about to step in, suddenly stopped.

He felt that the elevator lacked light, as if it had become a giant mouth about to close.

The elevator's double doors slowly closed, the interior growing darker, as if falling into an abyss.

Lumian watched expressionlessly, abandoning his intention to enter.

He sensed intense danger.

And his spiritual intuition, coupled with the slight activity of Aurore's soul fragments, made him vaguely aware of what was hidden in the eyes of those two people in the elevator just now.

It was an intense desire.

It was the intense desire to tear off his clothes and vent their inner cravings!

The elevator doors finally closed, the downward arrow went out, and the numbers began to change.

Going to B1, to the morgue, would be extremely dangerous… Lumian watched for a few more seconds, silently musing to himself.

After some consideration, he gave up the impulse to go down the stairs to investigate, and had a new idea,

Should I call the police? Just say I saw the missing Danitz enter Mushu Hospital and go down to the basement…

Just as Lumian had this thought, his phone began to vibrate.

He took out his phone and saw it was from "Luo Fu".

On the ID card given by Madam Justice, Franca's name was "Luo Fu".

Lumian answered the phone somewhat awkwardly yet habitually, tentatively saying, "Hello?"

Franca, driving the vehicle and wearing earphones, looked ahead and said, "You'd better not delve deeper into Mushu Hospital now. Wait a bit longer, wait for the police to investigate."

"Why do you say that?" Lumian didn't think Franca had sensed his earlier thoughts.

Franca turned the steering wheel and said, "I was shocked by the Oracle's corpse coming back to life earlier and didn't notice some details. It only dawned on me after getting in the car.

"When the Oracle's corpse got off at Mushu Hospital's entrance, did it use a phone to scan and pay?"

"Yes." Lumian had a very deep impression of the scan-to-pay incident, as Franca had been telling them they could do this and had personally demonstrated several times.

Wearing earphones and driving the car, Franca showed a slightly proud smile.

"The Oracle has already been classified as missing by the police, and when a missing person's phone account suddenly makes a payment, don't you think it would attract the police's attention and allow them to track his movements?

"The police should be arriving at Mushu Hospital soon. If you sneak into places with secrets now, you might run into them."

"Can it work like that? The efficiency is really high…" Lumian muttered softly.

Now, he didn't need to find a way to call the police!

The police in this dream city were far more efficient than those in Trier, able to grasp key clues without his reminders.

Lumian held his phone, pretending to have received an urgent call, and left this stairwell.

He made his way back to the medicine collection area and hid among the waiting crowd.

Before long, he saw Officer Deng and the dream projection of Mr. Star leading a team of police rushing towards the previous stairwell.

Lumian played the role of a spectator watching the commotion, patiently waiting for nearly twenty minutes until the police team returned.

They were carrying a stretcher, with the person on it completely covered by a white cloth, only vaguely revealing yellowish hair.

The Oracle's corpse… Lumian made a definitive judgment using the makeup mirror in his hand.

He immediately became puzzled.

They found the reanimated corpse just like that?

Nothing happened?

…

Back in the car driven by Franca, Lumian recounted what had just happened.

Franca also had the same confusion.

"The people at Mushu Hospital didn't resist the police?

"Theoretically, Mushu Hospital should be a force formed by the infiltration of the great existence, Mother Tree of Desire, or at least operated by a Sequence 0 true god subordinate to Her…"

Lumian expressed his thoughts, "There are two possibilities:

"One, Mushu Hospital is not an external projection, but originates from Mr. Fool's impression of the Mother Tree of Desire and Her subordinates.

"Two, this is a symbol, representing an external projection. Even if it originates from great existences, it cannot directly confront the main consciousness of the dream. In this city, the official power, the police department, symbolizes the dream's main consciousness.

"In other words, individual police officers can be targeted and influenced, but confronting the entire police department is equivalent to confronting the dream itself, confronting Mr. Fool plus that Celestial Worthy."

Chapter 914: Surveillance

After stating his two guesses, Lumian added, "I felt earlier that entering the basement of Mushu Hospital would be very dangerous. If the problem there was woven by the dream's subconscious, originating from Mr. Fool's impression of the Mother Tree of Desire and Her subordinates, it shouldn't have reached this level."

His meaning was that he was more inclined towards the inference that the dream's main consciousness symbol could not directly confront it.

Jenna, sitting in the passenger seat, glanced at the gradually receding Mushu Hospital and said with a slightly furrowed brow, "But the police, represented by Mr. Star, only found the Oracle's corpse. They don't seem to have discovered any other anomalies existing in Mushu Hospital."

"This indicates that although the dream's main consciousness cannot confront directly, it has ways to conceal and deceive," Anthony expressed his opinion.

"There might also be a mole." Franca, who was driving, had read many novels and watched many movies about undercover agents and traitors, muttered. "Part of the dream's main consciousness must belong to the Celestial Worthy. He should be quite pleased to see the force infiltrated by the Mother Tree of Desire doing something, so He deliberately ignored some details."

"This also shows that regardless of whether it's Mr. Fool or that Celestial Worthy, they are actually in a state of slumber, their true consciousness blurred, only able to react to a certain extent when directly stimulated. Usually, they only occasionally provide some inspiration based on received prayers or spirituality warnings. Otherwise, we would have been discovered and kicked out long ago when interacting with ordinary people in the dream," Lumian concluded based on various events experienced over the past two days and many details mentioned in the materials provided by the Major Arcana card holders.

Franca took the opportunity to warn her teammates, "So don't think about live streaming, don't do anything in public that would become a trending topic. If we do that, as soon as the Celestial Worthy's dream identity scrolls to the corresponding video, He will immediately be stimulated and kick us out of the dream.

"Well, even if the Celestial Worthy doesn't scroll to it, His subordinates will notice it."

After a brief silence, Jenna asked, "What is live streaming?"

Anthony was equally confused.

"Will this be seen by many people?

"Similar to the front page headlines of a newspaper?"

You guys really haven't adapted as well as Lumian… Franca sighed, and while driving, she briefly explained,

"Open your phones, click on the app with the black background and white pattern I downloaded for you earlier…

"The hottest thing recently is 'True Death Metal'…"

Jenna and the others all became focused and serious, continuing to receive their Internet education.

…

Near midnight.

Lumian brought Franca through the mirror world to the Moon Plaza they had visited at noon, arriving behind a mirror in the surveillance room.

Hidden in the area behind the mirror, they saw through the mirror surface a large display screen split into multiple scenes, showing various areas of the mall, and two security guards sitting in front of the display screen for night duty.

At this time, Moon Plaza had long since closed for business, and many of the scenes shown on the surveillance were pitch black, with only parts covered by clear moonlight.

In this dream city, the moon was not crimson, but showed a faint silvery white, occasionally tinged with yellow.

Franca, both eager and cautious, stretched her right hand out of the mirror surface, grasping a slightly larger makeup mirror.

The makeup mirror immediately reflected the large screen, showing different scenes framed in individual squares.

Then, the surface of the makeup mirror rippled with illusory light invisible to the naked eye.

Mirror Maze!

The surveillance areas seen by the two security guards and the images captured by several cameras in the room were instantly replaced by mirrored illusions.

Franca had previously imagined being able to use her Beyonder powers after returning home, and now it felt like a rehearsal of her dream.

She walked out openly from behind the mirror object, put down the makeup mirror, adjusted its angle, and came to the surveillance console with Lumian.

The two security guards had no reaction to their actions, as if they hadn't seen them at all.

The scenes in their eyes were still the same as before when no outsiders had entered.

Lumian turned his gaze to Franca and said in a low voice, "Make haste."

He didn't know how to operate this surveillance system, otherwise he would have done it himself.

Franca adjusted the mirrored images to ensure they weren't completely static, while studying the mall's surveillance system.

Thanks to researching information online and making plans beforehand, it only took her two or three minutes to bring up the surveillance footage of the supermarket area from noon.

Soon, the image froze on the scene where she and Lumian and others were returning from the supermarket entrance.

In the distance of this image, where imported goods were stacked, a figure in a white dress was walking out of the frame.

This figure had beautiful features, small and delicate ears, a fair and slender neck, and an aura so clean it seemed untouched by dust. Her hair was loosely tied up, giving a somewhat languid feeling.

"It's indeed that reanimated female corpse," Franca took out the sketch completed with the help of Dream Divination and carefully compared it.

Before Lumian could respond, she added, "This appearance, temperament, and charm are more like a demigod-level Demoness rather than a Baby Cupid of the Scrooge pathway.

"How could a Demoness be resurrected in Mushu Hospital?"

Lumian nodded slightly, refraining from making conjectures for the moment, and instead asked Franca, "Can you find out the entire activity trajectory of this female corpse in the mall?"

"Yes," Franca busily operated the surveillance system.

Soon, each scene on the large screen showed the figure of that female corpse, corresponding to different scenarios.

While searching for the female corpse's traces based on the timeline and scene conditions, Franca had already browsed through these surveillances once. She glanced at Lumian, who was focusing on observing details, and pondered,

"It feels like she's wandering aimlessly, not buying anything, entering a store for a few minutes and then leaving. Hmm, it doesn't look like she's following anyone or searching for a specific item."

Lumian compared all the passersby in each surveillance image and didn't find anyone else appearing in all of them besides the female corpse.

"Is she experiencing and touring a city like this for the first time?" Lumian thought of himself and his companions.

"And then because she has no money, she doesn't dare to buy anything?" Franca joked with a smile.

Lumian immediately shook his head.

"It shouldn't be that simple.

"We almost encountered this female corpse at noon, and after lunch, the Oracle's corpse showed anomalies. The resurrected Oracle corpse went to Mushu Hospital, which is where this female corpse was reanimated.

"If it's not arranged by that individual, not His script, such a coincidence is enough to indicate a close connection between the two."

Franca pondered for a moment and said, "If this female corpse is really a Demoness, then I've had similar situations before.

"When I first became a Witch, I received effective revelations from divination about something, but it was only revelations about time and place. So, I aimlessly wandered back and forth in an arcade street in Trier for a day, and finally encountered the thing I wanted to encounter."

Lumian, who had just become a Demoness for a short time and hadn't had similar experiences, nodded slowly and said, "You mean the reanimated female corpse received revelations through divination and came to wander in this mall?"

At this point, Lumian's eyes became dark.

"Her gain was getting closer to us, discovering clues about which mirror the Oracle's corpse was hidden behind, so that's why the Oracle's corpse showed anomalies right after lunch ended?

"Is she a subordinate of that Celestial Worthy, searching for the Oracle's corpse?

"Are the Celestial Worthy and the Mother Tree of Desire cooperating, using Mushu Hospital to obtain subordinates they can command, to harm certain dream characters?"

Franca concurred succinctly, "The fact that she could indirectly come into contact with us, on the surface it's inspiration from divination, but in reality, it should be the Law of Beyonder Characteristics Convergence at work.

"Only High-Sequence Beyonders of the Demoness and Door pathways could possibly influence the mirror world from a distance, causing the Oracle's corpse hidden in the mirror area to show anomalies.

"That female corpse might fit both situations."

Franca meant that the female corpse might be a demigod-level Demoness who had received boons from the Door pathway.

Lumian acknowledged Franca's statement and pondered for a few seconds before saying,

"But the reanimation of this female corpse was definitely not for finding the Oracle's corpse. From what that orderly confessed, she had already been resurrected before the Oracle was killed.

"She must have a more important role, carrying out a key task?"

Franca hissed and said, "In the next few days, besides observing the people and events around Mr. Fool, we need to find a way to locate this female corpse, see if we can eliminate her covertly without the Celestial Worthy noticing."

If this were in the real world, Franca definitely wouldn't say this, because she wouldn't be sure whether that reanimated female corpse was Sequence 4, Sequence 3, or even higher. She would only suggest asking the Major Arcana card holders for help. But in the dream city, everyone was currently suppressed to the Sequence 7 level. A demigod-level Demoness would only have some more special abilities than her, with no essential difference in strength. Lumian was also a demigod-level Demoness, and their team had the number advantage, capable of ganging up.

Lumian thought for a moment and said, "There should be surveillance on the streets outside too, right? Can we find out where this female corpse ultimately went from the surveillance?"

"We could, but that would require infiltrating government departments. If discovered, it would be equivalent to confronting the dream's main consciousness." Franca didn't agree with taking such a risk now. There was still so much information they hadn't gathered!

Lumian suppressed the impulse in his heart and worked with Franca to restore the surveillance footage, erase their own traces, and retreat back into the mirror object. Then, Franca ended the Mirror Maze and took away that makeup mirror.

The two security guards only felt that the surveillance screens flickered briefly, but they quickly returned to normal.

Franca and Lumian returned to the car parked on the adjacent street, meeting up with Jenna and others who were responsible for backup.

As the vehicle drove towards the old town, Lumian and Franca, who was driving, told their teammates about the findings from watching the surveillance and their own conjectures.

As they were talking, Lumian suddenly fell silent.

"What's wrong?" Jenna asked.

Lumian said in a deep voice, "We thought of going to the mall to check the surveillance to find that female corpse. Would that female corpse also think of checking the surveillance to see if any women with outstanding appearances had passed by?"

Those who could hide a corpse behind a mirror were likely to be Demonesses too!

Franca's expression changed, and she blurted out, "The surveillance room!"

Chapter 915: Mysticism Must Keep Up with the Times

Moon Plaza, inside the surveillance room.

Lumian brought Franca, Jenna, Anthony, and Ludwig back behind that mirror-like object, gazing through the mirror surface at the two security guards and the large screen.

Compared to when they left earlier, nothing had changed here. Everything looked normal.

Franca pondered for two seconds and said, "Has she not come yet, or has she already been here, ahead of us?"

If that female corpse had already checked the surveillance earlier, she would likely have discovered Lumian and the others. After all, the characteristics of Demonesses were quite distinctive, and beautiful women plus a handsome man were even more eye-catching. As long as the reanimated female corpse was willing to spend enough time checking segment by segment, frame by frame, with the reminders of spiritual intuition, she shouldn't miss the corresponding footage.

In that case, Lumian and the others would have to consider changing identities, modifying appearances, and changing residences.

For an already impoverished family, this could truly be an exacerbation.

Franca could only pray to Mr. Fool, hoping that the female corpse would come only at midnight. After all, unlike them, she didn't have a specific time and corresponding location, and couldn't purposefully check the surveillance in just a few minutes or even tens of seconds to lock onto the people she wanted to find. She would have to check all the surveillance videos covering the entire mall for ten to fifteen minutes before and after. If unlucky, the time spent could be measured in hours.

The spiritual intuition of Demonesses was also suppressed to the Sequence 7 level. That female corpse obviously couldn't rely on this for very precise screening.

"Both are possible," Lumian stared outside the mirror.

Separated by a layer of mirror surface and in different spaces, he couldn't directly see whether there was a Mirror Maze in the surveillance room at this moment.

And the reanimated female corpse indeed seemed very much like a demigod of the Demoness pathway, likely possessing anti-divination abilities.

Jenna was also observing the situation in the surveillance room and asked puzzledly, "Does the reanimated female corpse also know about things like surveillance, and understand how to operate surveillance systems?"

She felt that the reanimated female corpse was a projection of some external force, probably similar to themselves, just with a different method of entry. She and Lumian and the others only learned what surveillance was, what it was used for, and how to avoid it after Franca's reminders and explanations. And except for Franca, none of them knew how to operate a surveillance system!

If we can't do it, how can a newly reanimated female corpse?

Franca pondered and answered,

"Perhaps the reanimated female corpse is also part of the dream, a Demoness that one of Mr. Fool's avatars once encountered. And the Celestial Worthy, using Mushu Hospital, made this Demoness go through a process of death and resurrection, turning her into a completely obedient subordinate, or rather, puppet."

As part of the dream, except for those set as children, fools, lunatics, or illiterates, everyone "innately" knew the concept and existence of surveillance.

"Even if she's part of the dream, she wouldn't naturally master how to manipulate surveillance systems, unless she was previously engaged in this industry, or had studied it in advance like you," Jenna objected.

"That's true," Franca suddenly had a flash of inspiration and took out her phone, intending to search on apps like Weibo, Zhihu, and various circles to see if there were any similar questions recently. Perhaps the reanimated female corpse was looking at her phone while using "currently waiting online" rhetoric to urge netizens to answer how to operate a certain company's surveillance system, while trying to bring up the desired video based on the netizens' suggestions.

To Franca's disappointment, there was no signal in the mirror world, and she couldn't get online!

Lumian then said, "There's another possibility. That female corpse also has a guide, a guide like Franca."

"Uh…" Franca stuffed her phone back into her pants pocket.

She understood what Lumian was saying: A member of April Fool's, the not-yet-dead Loki!

Wasn't it said that Loki could have been reborn through possession by an Angel of the Seer pathway?

Well, whether it was Loki or that Angel of the Seer pathway, they were both subordinates of the Celestial Worthy!

"When we checked the surveillance earlier, we didn't find anyone like Loki around the reanimated female corpse," Franca recalled.

"The Faceless ability at Sequence 7 level," Lumian had already considered this issue. "And this is inside a mall, he could change outfits from time to time."

Franca nodded slowly and continued to observe the surveillance room outside the mirror, hoping to wait for the reanimated female corpse and the possible existence of Loki.

After watching for a few seconds, she suddenly asked out of curiosity, "Does this kind of screen, this kind of surveillance scenario, count as a mirror world?"

"From a mystical concept, I don't think so. It's not a reflection or inversion of the current scene," Lumian answered instinctively.

Jenna and Anthony were somewhat confused by Franca's question.

"Mystical concepts also need to keep up with the times to match the social scenarios of the new era," Franca muttered before saying, "Although surveillance is not a reflection or inversion of the current scene, it belongs to the reflection of scenes elsewhere. It has some of the functions and characteristics of mirrors, just with the reflection and display separated in different places."

Lumian didn't know how to refute for a moment and could only directly express his view, "I think it's closer to the world within paintings, perhaps even incorporating the informatized characteristics of the Mystery Pryer pathway at high levels."

"Then it's a hybrid product of the mirror world, the world within paintings, and the information world!" Franca's main energy was on observing the situation in the surveillance room, and she was unwilling to delve deeper into issues that couldn't yield accurate answers at the moment, so she quickly made a guess.

Lumian half-closed his eyes, sensed for a moment, and said, "Indeed, it has a bit of the qualities of the mirror world. We can traverse through it."

As soon as he finished speaking, Anthony, who had been silent all along, said in a deep voice, "Don't you think those two security guards outside are a bit strange?

"It's been two or three minutes, and they haven't moved at all, like they've turned into statues…"

Statues? Franca's heart stirred, and she took out a mirror, carefully extending it beyond the current mirror surface.

She quickly adjusted the angle, and using the reflection of light and the most basic function of the mirror, she saw the side profile of one of the security guards.

On the slightly dark makeup mirror, only illuminated by the reflection of the screen's light, that half-face had no expression, partly hidden in the dim environment, partly slightly illuminated, the two intertwining and sometimes changing.

His eyes were constantly fixed on the surveillance screen, with a hint of cold gray seemingly hidden in the depths of his pupils.

He looked alive, still with spirituality, but that was all—just alive, just with spirituality.

"Partial petrification of organs?" Franca frowned and whispered.

Lumian didn't answer, but looked around.

"The reanimated female corpse has indeed been here, after Franca and I finished watching the surveillance and left.

"I'll go out and search to see if there are any clues left. You guard against unexpected situations."

Jenna and the others nodded, without objection.

Lumian pressed his hand against the mirror surface and walked out as if passing through a layer of water curtain.

In his male form, he circled to the front of the two security guards and found that they had both turned into warmth-carrying statues, expressionlessly looking ahead, motionless, which seemed exceptionally eerie in the surveillance room where only the screen's light flickered.

Lumian's gaze moved away from the gray-white hidden in the eyes of the two security guards and turned to the large screen displaying dozens or hundreds of scenes simultaneously.

There was nothing unusual about that, but the human-machine interface below was frozen on a certain operation.

And Lumian remembered that Franca had restored it to its initial state before leaving.

Fleeing in a hurry?

Did that female corpse sense the disturbance in the mirror world and urgently traverse away through the large screen itself?

Will she circle back to see who infiltrated the surveillance room?

As these thoughts flashed through his mind, Lumian suddenly turned sideways, looking towards the mirror object he had come out from.

Almost simultaneously, on the surveillance footage, in a dark corner, a pale but alluring hand stretched out, extending beyond the screen.

In the area behind the mirror, while Lumian was investigating the surveillance system, Franca suddenly heard Ludwig making smacking sounds.

What is he eating now? Franca instinctively turned to look at the little boy.

She saw Ludwig opening his mouth, constantly sucking in air, chewing and swallowing.

Uh… Franca suddenly felt a bit guilty.

"Why are you eating air?" she asked.

Ludwig answered with a satisfied expression, "Delicious, there are many things with spirituality."

Many things with spirituality in the air? Franca was stunned for a moment, then suddenly had a strong sense of danger.

The mystical pathogen of Demonesses?

"Mirror Substitution!" she called out directly, actively triggering her own Mirror Substitution.

After hearing Ludwig's answer, Jenna's spiritual intuition also received a dangerous signal.

Without Franca's reminder, she followed and triggered her Mirror Substitution.

Anthony was a second slower than the two of them.

At this moment, at the edge of the spider web-like illusory tunnel, a figure was quickly outlined. She wore a white dress, had a loose bun, with beautiful features and a clean aura—clearly the reanimated female corpse.

This female corpse held a mirror in her hand, which had already reflected Franca's figure. Her other hand was burning with quiet black flames, quickly covering the mirror surface.

Silently, Franca's figure, which had just degenerated into a mirror, burst into eerie black flames from the inside out, quickly losing spirituality, falling to the ground, and shattering into pieces.

Seeing that the assassination attempt had failed and that there were four enemies, the reanimated female corpse immediately stepped back and disappeared at the edge of the illusory dark tunnel.

This caused the seven Demoness black flames created by Jenna and the Frenzy used by Anthony to all miss their target.

Inside the surveillance room, Lumian suddenly turned around, with a straight sword already condensed from frost in his hand.

He swung this crystal-clear straight sword towards the hand reaching out from inside the surveillance screen.

That hand suddenly retracted, and Lumian's frost straight sword consequently fell onto the surface of the screen.

It bizarrely dematerialized, bringing Lumian along as it melted into the large screen, diving in.

Chapter 916: Real and Fake

After the reanimated female corpse retreated into the dark tunnel, Franca's first reaction as her figure was just being outlined was to use the Ice Amulet that Lumian had remade, bringing Jenna and Anthony to chase after the enemy before she completely left this mirror world.

She gripped the crystal-clear charm that she had already taken out of the Traveler's Bag, but her spiritual intuition made her pause.

The destination of the reanimated female corpse's Mirror Traversal was unknown, and there might be her companions waiting. Rashly chasing after her could likely lead them into a trap!

Moreover, chasing after her meant separating from Lumian, making it easy for them to be defeated one by one.

Franca gazed for two seconds, then immediately said to Jenna, Anthony, and Ludwig, who was still eating "air" in big gulps, "Leave here, go to the surveillance room!"

Who knew how long the reanimated female corpse had been hiding at the edge of the tunnel, producing how many mystical pathogens. Staying in this area would lead to increasingly severe infection, until they fell ill!

And relying solely on Ludwig eating like this, mouthful by mouthful, who knew how long it would take to clear out the mystical pathogens that could continuously reproduce. More importantly, this sealed Angel's physical condition had also been lowered to the Sequence 7 level. The mystical pathogens he ate wouldn't affect him, but those that invaded his skin, eyes, and respiratory tract could definitely infect him.

At that point, it would be a race to see whether Ludwig finished eating the mystical pathogens first, or the mystical pathogens defeated him first.

Additionally, Franca and Jenna's Demoness black flames were also restricted by the dream, only able to be produced a few at a time—cluster after cluster—unable to burn large areas of surrounding mystical pathogens to create a sufficiently safe environment.

However, the dream's restrictions had both disadvantages and advantages. The Plague ability of the reanimated female corpse was also suppressed to the Sequence 7 level, preventing Franca and the others from becoming infected and falling ill too quickly.

Jenna and Anthony didn't question Franca's decision, only Ludwig was reluctant to leave.

He wanted to eat even if he got sick!

He wanted to eat even if he died!

Jenna grabbed the little boy, forcibly dragging him out of the area behind the mirror, as his physical qualities had been comprehensively reduced to Sequence 7.

At such an urgent moment, Jenna actually felt another digestion of the Affliction potion.

"Let me go! Let go…" Before Ludwig could finish speaking, he had already passed through the mirror surface and arrived in the surveillance room.

But they didn't see Lumian.

"Was Lumian also attacked?" Franca quickly looked around with a solemn expression.

Or had he gone chasing after an enemy?

Just as Franca finished speaking, she saw that every surveillance scene on the large screen had changed.

They once again displayed the scenes from noon when the reanimated female corpse had appeared.

In those scenes arranged in a crisscrossing matrix, the reanimated female corpses that originally belonged to the surveillance footage either raised their heads or half-turned their bodies, all staring uniformly towards the outside of the screen.

Wearing white dresses and loose buns, they instantly had the same expression change, their fair and delicate hands reaching towards the camera one after another, extending out of the surveillance screen, reaching for Franca, Jenna, and the others outside.

They crawled out of the screen one by one, their faces dark, with occasional flashes of light.

Seeing this scene, Franca, relying only on spiritual intuition and Demoness vision, briefly couldn't distinguish which of these many reanimated female corpses were real and which were fake.

For a moment, she even doubted whether they were all real, or all fake.

She took out the Cannon Gun that had become the Inevitable Gun, aiming at the surveillance footage, intending to shatter that screen, so that the reanimated female corpses that hadn't fully crawled out would be thrown into the depths of the "surveillance world" with the shattering of the area behind the screen, making it difficult to reach reality.

Franca's finger was on the trigger, but she didn't pull it.

She felt that Lumian's disappearance might be because he had entered the "surveillance world", and if she shattered the screen, and the "surveillance world" truly had some characteristics of the mirror world, Lumian would also be swallowed by the turbulent flow, which would be very dangerous.

Although Franca couldn't respond in time, she still had companions.

Anthony stepped forward, his eyes vertical, tinged with a pale golden color.

He immediately emanated a terrifying aura as if standing at the top of the food chain.

Awe!

He used a range-type Awe targeting that surveillance screen!

The reanimated female corpses crawling out of the surveillance footage one after another froze for a moment, but quickly returned to normal.

It was as if they hadn't been resurrected, still corpses, naturally not afraid or panicked due to the awe!

Jenna quickly turned her head, pointing at those reanimated female corpses, and asked Ludwig, "Which one tastes the best?"

The one that tastes the best should be the real body!

And judging whether food tasted good or not was Ludwig's specialty!

Ludwig swallowed his saliva and pointed to the surveillance footage in the bottom right corner.

"I want that one!

"That one tastes the best!"

Before Ludwig could answer, Franca had already concealed her figure. When he pointed out the food he wanted most, Franca's figure, wearing a black T-shirt and women's pantaloons, quickly outlined at the side of the reanimated female corpse in the bottom right corner.

She held the Inevitable Gun in one hand and the nearly invisible Wintry Blade in the other, stabbing the latter towards the target that hadn't fully crawled out of the screen, towards the temple next to the delicate ear.

Crack, that reanimated female corpse shattered like a mirror, along with the figures of other female corpses becoming illusory, disappearing simultaneously in front of the surveillance screen.

The next second, beside the mirror decorative item that Franca and the others had crawled out from, the reanimated female corpse with beautiful features, a slender neck, wearing a white dress and a loose bun, silently emerged.

She gripped an ice crystal dagger covered in black flames in one hand, suddenly stabbing towards Anthony's chest.

…

After passing through the surveillance screen, Lumian appeared in a dark and silent empty mall.

At this time, the escalators had stopped running, and all the shops had pulled down their shutters.

Lumian quickly scanned around and saw a figure in a white dress flash past the passage leading to the men's and women's restrooms.

The black mark on Lumian's right shoulder lit up, allowing him to directly teleport over.

As his figure was just being outlined at the entrance of the passage, his left palm had already taken out his phone.

Lumian quickly glanced at the phone screen that had lit up and found no signal.

This was exactly what he wanted to confirm.

Is this an alternate space formed by surveillance footage, an illusory world? It's very similar to the mirror world, and also very similar to the world within paintings… As thoughts flashed through Lumian's mind, he stuffed the phone into the Traveler's Bag instead of his pants pocket.

He was worried that the upcoming battle might damage the phone.

For an already impoverished family, this would be a major loss!

In Lumian's blue eyes, that female figure in a white dress had already run to the corner.

Seeing was believing. Almost simultaneously, Lumian blinked behind the target, thrusting the ice crystal straight sword.

Just as the ice sword touched that female figure, the target suddenly wavered like water ripples and disappeared without a trace.

An illusion—just an illusion.

An illusion created using the mirror of the sink outside the men's and women's restrooms!

At this moment, in the dark corner at the entrance of the men's restroom, a vague figure quickly emerged, holding a medium-sized mirror, reflecting Lumian's male form wearing a shirt and trousers.

Taking advantage of the opportunity when Lumian's attention was completely on the illusion, this vague figure pressed its hand covered in Demoness black flames towards the mirror surface.

Black flames suddenly erupted from Lumian's eyes, nose, mouth, and other places, but his figure began to fade inch by inch, gradually dissipating.

This was also an illusion!

Behind the vague figure in the dark corner at the entrance of the restroom, Lumian's body outlined, his eyes iron-black, his right hand clenched into a fist, in a posture of muscles swelling and enlarging, suddenly striking towards the junction of the enemy's neck and back.

Cull plus Mighty Blow!

You can use mirrors to create illusions, so can I!

Bang!

This punch shattered the vague figure into pieces, scattering around like glass shards.

Immediately after, Lumian felt invisible spider silk wrapping around him from all directions, trying to bind his hands, feet, and torso, and intending to interfere with his movements in different ways.

Lumian immediately grunted, and bursts of black flames binding madness and danger spontaneously appeared, falling onto several invisible spider silks.

The Flames of Destruction ignited those spider silks instantly, just like real Hunter flames, then quickly spread, devouring all the combustibles around, and burning the mystical pathogens permeating the air.

In just the blink of an eye, Lumian had rid himself of the influence of the Demoness spider web and the hidden Plague.

And at the entrance of this passage, a female figure clearly appeared in the light of the burning spider web.

She wore a white dress, had a loose bun, beautiful features, delicate ears, and a slender neck—it was the reanimated female corpse.

…

Inside the surveillance room.

As Franca's strike failed to succeed, the experienced Jenna and Anthony changed their positions.

The latter thus avoided the ice crystal dagger assassination of the reanimated female corpse.

But this also gathered the three of them in a small area within the not-so-large surveillance room.

The reanimated female corpse's gaze then turned to the two security guards sitting motionlessly in their positions.

One of the security guards immediately broke free from his statue-like state and suddenly stood up.

The next second, his body was like it had been filled with a large amount of gas, rapidly swelling into a ball.

During this process, the gray-white in the depths of his eyes was tinged with a yellow-green light.

Boom!

This security guard exploded like a balloon stretched to its limit. His flesh and internal organs were torn into pieces, carrying yellow-green pus, enveloped in the impact storm, sweeping towards every corner of the surveillance room, covering Franca, Jenna, and the others.

A virus bomb? Franca's pupils suddenly dilated.

That reanimated female corpse was also within the range of the exploding body, but she was prepared, taking a step back and hiding in the mirror decorative item.

Chapter 917: Disease Bomb

Chapter 917 Disease Bomb

The flesh and blood oozing yellow-green pus sprayed like sudden rain towards everyone in the surveillance room, accompanied by the sudden explosion.

Franca had no time to use the Ice Amulet, nor to grab Jenna and the others to bring them into the compact mirror in her hand. She could only face the explosion, which wasn't too powerful, and the obviously dangerous flesh, blood, and viscous fluid.

Crack! Crack! Crack!

In this situation, the three of them could only actively trigger their Mirror Substitutions, first being shattered by the impact wave, then being coated with sticky flesh and still-writhing yellow-green pus.

Ludwig, who had also been given a Mirror Substitution by each of the three Demonesses, didn't use it himself. Instead, he crouched down, hugging his body tightly to minimize his "exposed area".

During this process, he opened his mouth.

His mouth corners stretched without any restriction, extending all the way to the back of his head. His upper lip pushed his eyes, nose, forehead, and other parts to face the ceiling directly, while his lower lip nearly touched his chest.

Splat, splat, splat, the yellow-green flesh mixed in the explosion's blast rushed into Ludwig's enormous mouth, heading straight for his stomach.

Unfortunately, Ludwig, enjoying this buffet, only lasted two seconds before involuntarily triggering his Mirror Substitution, shattering into pieces.

This abnormally terrifying giant mouth shape seemed to be all appearance without sufficient strength, only at the Sequence 7 level.

The explosive blast subsided in an instant, and the figures of Franca, Jenna, and the others were reoutlined in the surveillance room, which was now covered everywhere with viscous flesh and yellow-green pus.

As Demonesses of Affliction, Franca and Jenna both instinctively believed that this place was now full of dangerous diseases, rapidly infecting them.

Without hesitation, Franca raised her right hand, revealing the Ice Amulet she was gripping tightly.

This crystal-clear charm had been remade by Lumian and could now be used for Mirror Traversal four times.

As soon as they saw Franca reveal the Ice Amulet, Jenna and Anthony immediately moved closer to her, grabbing her arm and sleeve. Ludwig hesitated for a moment but still joined the vile Demonesses.

The next second, the four figures blurred and entered the compact mirror in Franca's other hand.

Franca didn't linger at all, bringing her companions to traverse into another metal decorative item with a mirror effect in the surveillance room.

Smack!

The compact mirror, no longer held by anyone, fell to the ground and shattered into pieces, causing the corresponding area behind the mirror to collapse.

These shards would take different amounts of time to become mirrors again in the mystical sense—without considering other factors, the larger the shard and the better the mirror effect, the shorter the time needed to regenerate the area behind the mirror. Conversely, smaller shards would take longer, and if too small, they might risk never becoming mystical mirrors again.

After transferring to the interior of the mirrored decorative item, Franca spoke rapidly while remaining vigilant against a sudden attack from the reanimated female corpse, "A Demoness of Despair doesn't have the ability to make people half-dead and turn them into plague bombs…

"Could it be a Demoness of Unaging?"

"It could also be with help from the Order of All Extinction or possession of a similar item," Jenna suggested another possibility based on her own feelings.

"Is Mushu Hospital not just home to the Mother Tree of Desire?" Franca suddenly had an inspiration. "The hospital as a whole should simultaneously possess the healing abilities related to the Great Mother pathway, the influence of the Mother Tree of Desire pathway on spirit, desire, corpses, and hospital urban legends, as well as control over diseases and pathogens from the one the Order of All Extinction believes in or the Demoness pathway!"

As Franca spoke without any embellishment, she observed the situation in the surveillance room and attempted to use the Ice Amulet's ability to transmit information through mirrors to send simple intelligence to a certain mirror on Lumian.

As long as Lumian hadn't left the current Huafeng District, he would definitely receive it!

Jenna guarded against the direction of the illusory tunnel that resembled a spider web, while Anthony said carefully, "That reanimated female corpse is almost unaffected by Awe, making me feel she's more like a dead person than a living one."

Franca's thoughts raced, and she immediately had two guesses.

"Is she an awakened Zombie, with a Mother Tree of Desire believer hiding nearby controlling her?

"Or, didn't we guess earlier that she might have a companion, possibly Loki? Is it possible that she's actually a marionette, with the Marionettist hiding somewhere nearby controlling her?"

Franca had confronted Loki before and had contact with spies from the Bureau 8 of Intis, so she was quite familiar with the antics of Marionettists.

"But according to the information provided by the Major Arcana card holders, even normal Marionettists can only control marionettes within a range of about 100 meters. Now, with their abilities suppressed to Sequence 7 level, I believe their maximum distance from the marionettes won't exceed 40 meters. Before we came to the surveillance room, we checked the surroundings and there was no one…" Jenna raised an objection.

At this point, she suddenly paused.

It wasn't that there was no one; in fact, there were two people!

Franca and Anthony also realized the issue and simultaneously turned their gaze towards the front of the surveillance screen.

There were indeed people within a 50-meter range—those two security guards!

One of the security guards had been turned into a plague bomb and had already disintegrated into disease-spreading flesh, but the other security guard was still sitting in his position, his eyes concealing a gray-white deep inside, staring motionlessly at the large screen!

Franca and Anthony's gaze fell on that security guard.

The security guard seemed to sense something and suddenly turned his body.

His clothes were now tattered, his body pitted and uneven, different areas of his face either missing skin, suffering abrasions, or with flesh split open and festering.

These were the "aftereffects" of being directly hit by the explosion of the other security guard.

The security guard, with half his face almost unrecognizable as human, reflected the flickering light from the surveillance screen, curled his lips, and revealed an exaggerated, terrifying, and sinister smile.

As his smile bloomed, his body rapidly swelled, becoming a human-shaped balloon like his colleague.

Bang!

The balloon burst, and countless viscous flesh and yellow-green pus splattered onto the surface of the metal decorative item where Franca and the others were hiding, smearing it into a mess and preventing Franca and Anthony from seeing the outside situation clearly.

"Let's change positions," Franca said, turning to Jenna and Ludwig, seizing the opportunity while they still had a few more Mirror Traversal charges.

…

In the Moon Plaza formed by the surveillance footage.

Lumian bent his back, drew the Sword of Courage, and sprinted from outside the men's and women's restrooms towards the reanimated female corpse at the entrance of the passage.

Behind him, on the wash basin mirror between the two restrooms, a female figure wearing a white dress with a loose bun suddenly appeared.

This was a projection created by the Demoness of Despair using the mirror!

Although it only possessed a fraction of the original body's power, it was still capable of assassination. It aimed to deliver a fatal blow to Lumian from behind!

Almost simultaneously, another figure emerged behind this female figure.

That figure had black hair, beautiful features, and a cold expression—it was Lumian's feminized image.

This projection, completed with the help of Precision, instantly turned into a ball of black flames brewing extreme destruction in silence, completely enveloping the mirror image projection of the reanimated female corpse, causing her to be thoroughly ignited amid painful wails.

Thud! Thud! Thud! Lumian, wielding the Sword of Courage, continued without any pause, charging towards the reanimated female corpse without looking back.

At this moment, in front of the reanimated female corpse, crystal-clear but sharp frost spears suddenly condensed, like a beautiful and clean hedgehog showing its spines.

Such a forest of ice spears couldn't be accomplished by a Sequence 7 Witch. Only a Beyonder who had reached the Demoness of Despair level and gained further control over frost, but was currently restricted to Sequence 7 level, could do this. It was equivalent to the Ice Spear Condensation ability evolving into Ice Spear Forest at Sequence 4, but now the Ice Spear Forest was only at the Sequence 7 level.

If Lumian didn't stop in time, he would crash into this forest of ice spears, being pierced through and creating multiple bloody holes.

At this moment, Lumian's figure suddenly became blurry and distorted, like an image displayed through electromagnetic signals suffering from strong interference.

It took only the blink of an eye from becoming blurry and distorted to completely disappearing. Lumian's body quickly outlined behind the reanimated female corpse.

He swung the Sword of Courage diagonally, chopping towards the target's shoulder.

With a whoosh, crimson flames ignited on the surface of the Sword of Courage.

Boom, Lumian's single stroke cleaved the reanimated female corpse into two pieces, exploding her into mirror shards.

The reanimated female corpse, having used a substitute, didn't appear immediately, seemingly disappearing into the dark, empty fourth floor of the mall.

Lumian's expression didn't change at all as he pressed the Sword of Courage downwards in one smooth motion.

Boom! Crimson fireballs flew out from the sword, indiscriminately covering this area, collapsing walls and igniting merchandise.

The crimson fire hell quickly engulfed nearly half a floor in continuously rising high temperatures.

Under such a wide-range indiscriminate attack, the figure of the reanimated female corpse was affected, forced out of her invisible state, and appeared to Lumian's side and rear.

…

Inside the surveillance room.

The reanimated female corpse who had previously fought with Franca and the others left her hiding place in the mirrored object and appeared in the room now covered everywhere with viscous flesh and yellow-green pus.

Taking advantage of the opportunity that various pathogens and decay forces were permeating this place, which would quickly infect and affect Franca and the others once they entered, she condensed a long ice spear covered in white frost in her hand and thrust it towards the surveillance screen, which already had multiple dents and was covered with flesh and pus.

The power of the two previous Disease Bombs wasn't strong, mainly focused on spreading pathogens and decay forces, so they couldn't directly destroy the large screen that was at a certain distance from them.

Now, the reanimated female corpse wanted to personally destroy the surveillance screen, causing the corresponding alternate space to collapse, making the enemies fighting there and her other "self" fall into the chaotic flow together, to be torn into pieces!

Chapter 918: Tacit Cooperation

Just as the reanimated female corpse's frost-covered ice crystal spear was about to pierce the surveillance screen, a gunshot rang out. A bright yellow bullet arrived first, striking the middle of the ice crystal spear and causing it to suddenly shatter and break apart piece by piece.

After transferring to another mirrored decorative item, Franca immediately understood the opponent's intentions upon seeing the reanimated female corpse's actions. She quickly took out the Inevitable Gun, extended it through the mirror surface, and pulled the trigger.

Having successfully prevented the ice crystal spear's strike, she immediately moved to withdraw her hands, pretending to traverse to other mirrors with Jenna, Anthony, and Ludwig in order to lure the reanimated female corpse in to surround this enemy.

However, the reanimated female corpse didn't even glance in her direction. Sharp frost spears suddenly condensed in front of her body, all thrusting towards the large screen simultaneously.

It was like a huge ice flower carved out of ice was blooming.

Franca's pupils dilated instantly. Taking advantage of her hands not yet having returned to the area behind the mirror, she pulled the Inevitable Gun's trigger once again.

Bang!

That classically styled brass-colored revolver fired an iron-black bullet, which created a small explosion upon striking one of the frost spears.

The explosion covered all the frost spears, tearing them apart and scattering them in all directions.

Heavy Strike!

Splat splat splat, some ice crystal fragments inevitably hit the surveillance screen, creating multiple dead pixels and areas where colors bled together on the large screen.

Franca was nearly scared to death—the large screen had almost been completely damaged!

She immediately left the mirrored decorative item and returned to the surveillance room, launching an all-out attack against the reanimated female corpse.

In this situation, the best strategy was to use offense to suppress the opponent and prevent her from destroying the surveillance screen. Pure defense wouldn't last long, as the item that needed protection was a relatively fragile technological product.

One can be a thief for a thousand days, but how can you guard against a thief for a thousand days? There will always be gaps in defenses!

Bang! Bang! Bang! Franca continuously pulled the trigger, firing bullets to force the reanimated female corpse away from the area closer to the large screen.

Jenna also left the area behind the mirror, directly guarding in front of the surveillance console to prevent stray bullets from damaging the screen.

Almost simultaneously, Jenna felt herself collide with an invisible spider web, with transparent thin threads constricting her body.

Some of these threads bound her limbs, while others stirred up her condition, striving to restrict her movements and interfere with her casting of black magic.

Fortunately, Jenna now had relatively rich combat experience. As soon as she left the mirrored decorative item, she condensed several bizarre Demoness black flames around herself. Now she immediately let them fall, burning the spirituality of the transparent spider silk and spreading out.

The intense feeling of constriction instantly lessened somewhat. Jenna quickly sidestepped, shielding the large screen.

Crack!

She used a Mirror Substitution to block both the reanimated female corpse's opportunistic attack on the surveillance screen and the stray bullets created by Franca's continuous shooting.

During this process, Franca emptied six ordinary bullets, hitting the reanimated female corpse once and consuming one of her Mirror Substitutions.

She then retreated to the front of the large screen, using a special loader to reload bullets, while Jenna instinctively lunged forward, replacing Franca, using her own gun, frost, and black magic to attack furiously, suppressing the enemy.

With everyone currently at the Sequence 7 level, a short-term reckless outburst was still very effective!

In this way, Franca and Jenna continuously rotated, one defending, one attacking, one reloading bullets, the other firing rapidly as if unconcerned about running out of ammunition. They temporarily restricted the reanimated female corpse to the area near the door. However, because the opponent had Mirror Substitutions and strong spiritual intuition, Franca had not yet used bullets like Impregnating Bullet or triggered effects like Sure Hit or Certain Death.

She was waiting for an opportunity, because a Sequence 7 Demoness shouldn't be able to use many Mirror Substitutions!

Even if the reanimated female corpse had once reached the demigod level and gained the characteristic of reduced Mirror Substitution consumption, allowing her to use a few more Mirror Substitutions than Franca and the others who were currently at the same Sequence 7 level, it certainly wouldn't be many more.

After fighting intensely for dozens of seconds, both Franca and Jenna felt weakened, their lungs like hot bellows continuously exhaling fiery breaths.

At the same time, they felt varying degrees of pain throughout their bodies.

They were well aware that this was caused by the diseases and decay spread by the two plague bombs earlier. Due to the viscous flesh and yellow-green pus covering every part of the surveillance room, the mystical pathogens and decay forces were continuously strengthening. The infection had finally occurred in the two Demonesses of Affliction who had disease resistance, and it was gradually worsening.

Neither Franca nor Jenna were willing to immediately use a Mirror Substitution to resolve the disease and decay. Their Mirror Substitutions were now very limited in number, and they wanted to conserve them to protect the large screen.

What puzzled Franca was that although her Inevitable Gun was also continuously spreading disease and decay, the reanimated female corpse didn't seem to be significantly affected, only slightly weaker than before.

Could she really be a zombie or a marionette, immune to most mystical pathogens and with strong resistance to decay forces? She only initially affected Jenna with the spider web, then abandoned this strategy. Was it because the spider web was a flammable object with spirituality, which would cause the Demoness black flames—which could only be produced one by one or in small clusters—to spread, burning the mystical pathogens and decay forces in the air, slowing down the speed of our onset of illness and the progress of symptom severity? As this thought flashed through Franca's mind, she actively began to create a spider web.

The invisible spider silk entangled both the reanimated female corpse and Jenna, forcing the former to use her own Demoness black flames to evade, and reminding Jenna that she could produce and consume her own, letting this area fall completely into the burning of Demoness black flames, thereby clearing out the mystical pathogens and reducing the intensity of the decay forces!

…

Inside Moon Plaza in the surveillance footage.

Lumian was suppressing the reanimated female corpse in all aspects, but due to her Mirror Substitutions, strong spiritual intuition, and rich combat experience, he couldn't achieve a quick victory.

By now, the flames had spread, turning most of the fourth floor of the mall into a crimson sea. Lumian released his accumulated spirituality and once again flashed behind the "reanimated" female corpse.

Instead of directly swinging the Sword of Courage, he pushed his left palm forward.

At some point, his palm had already been gripping a cheap silver and black bracelet, while his eyes showed a silver-black hue, with what seemed like an illusory long river flowing slowly inside.

The reanimated female corpse didn't hesitate. Following the prompting of her spiritual intuition, she was about to actively trigger a Mirror Substitution.

At this moment, the toxic thick smoke produced by the burning entered her throat, while the high temperature caused her black hair to start self-igniting.

These environmentally-induced problems made the reanimated female corpse instinctively shrink her body, slowing her down by a beat.

Magnified Fate!

Lumian had already used Magnified Fate twice before, without achieving satisfactory results. The Weakening pathogen he had secretly spread, which could survive for a longer time in high-temperature flames, also hadn't worked as he had expected, only imperceptibly accelerating the rate of the reanimated female corpse's spirituality consumption.

Now, taking advantage of the environmental changes brought by the long-burning fierce flames, he finally grasped the opportunity, successfully turning the corresponding stream of fate into the main trunk.

As the reanimated female corpse slightly shrank her body, the crimson flames covering the surface of the Sword of Courage suddenly extinguished, revealing the iron-black metal blade beneath.

Parts of this blade were smooth and flat, reflecting the silhouette of the reanimated female corpse.

In the next second, the black Flames of Destruction that Lumian had condensed in advance fell onto the metal "mirror surface" and drilled into it.

Unable to use a Mirror Substitution in time, the reanimated female corpse let out a painful sound. Her body shattered with a crack, re-outlining at the edge of the crimson hell. However, the black flames that erupted from inside to outside, hiding ferocity and terror, continued to burn her, only partially extinguished.

Once a Demoness of Despair's curse succeeded, the characteristic that it couldn't be transferred by substitutes when suppressed to Sequence 7 level became a situation where a substitute could only transfer part of the curse damage.

Crack! Crack! Crack!

The reanimated female corpse consecutively triggered Mirror Substitutions, finally escaping Lumian's curse.

But at this moment, Lumian directly teleported in front of her and asked with a smile, "How many Mirror Substitutions do you have left?"

As he spoke, he had already swung the Sword of Courage.

The reanimated female corpse was dazzled by that charming smile, only reacting when the Sword of Courage was near. She quickly lunged to the side.

She had no more Mirror Substitutions left!

She was fast, but Lumian was faster. His wrist paused, and the Sword of Courage cleaved the air, creating an explosive sound.

Boom!

Crimson flames burst open, directly engulfing the reanimated female corpse.

Although this explosion only had Sequence 7 power, it was enough to severely injure a Demoness without Mirror Substitutions!

Bang! The reanimated female corpse was slammed heavily against the wall, her bones breaking and blood spurting from her mouth.

Water-like waves rippled over her body, stripping away her beautiful appearance and revealing an expressionless, ordinary-looking young man.

Lumian frowned slightly and swung his sword down again.

With a rolling sound, the young man's head tumbled to the side amid a spray of blood.

His body, along with his head and the splattered blood, instantly vanished like an illusion, never to appear again.

"A deep mirror image of the real female corpse?" Lumian had seen similar gender-reversed Mirror People in Fourth Epoch Trier.

The special mirror world fragments in Franca and Jenna's possession could also create similar deep mirror images, with strength nearly perfectly replicated and certain special characteristics.

Thinking of this, Lumian suddenly raised his head, looking towards the surveillance camera obscured by smoke.

He suspected that the reanimated female corpse also had a special mirror world fragment!

…

Inside the surveillance room.

The infected Franca and Jenna were growing increasingly weak, their movements inevitably affected to some extent.

Just as the reanimated female corpse was about to seize the opportunity to destroy the surveillance screen, she suddenly felt something leap towards her from the side.

It was Ludwig, crouched like a frog.

He had emerged from the mirror world at some unknown time.

The reanimated female corpse instinctively thrust an ice crystal spear towards Ludwig.

Ludwig suddenly opened his mouth wide, his mouth corners splitting to the back of his head.

His two rows of sharp teeth then closed, biting the tip of the spear.

Immediately after, he quickly sucked in a breath through his mouth.

He completed a Deprivation through the ice crystal spear connecting him and the reanimated female corpse.

What he Deprived was the Mirror Substitution!

Currently only at Sequence 7 level, he could only Deprive one ability from the enemy, and only for one minute, so Anthony had him choose Mirror Substitution.

"Attack with full force," Anthony's voice then sounded in Franca and Jenna's ears.

Franca didn't ask why, immediately raising the Inevitable Gun, aiming at the reanimated female corpse, and pulling the trigger.

A dark yellow bullet flew out with a bang.

Sure Hit!

Chapter 919: Certain Death

The dark yellow bullet flew instantly, striking the reanimated female corpse.

However, it passed right through, merely causing the silhouette to waver, become illusory, and disappear.

After being deprived of her Mirror Substitution, the reanimated female corpse's first reaction was to use the mirrored objects in the surveillance room to create a mirror projection, supplemented by mirror illusions, while she quietly changed her position.

So, what Franca had locked onto was just the mirror projection, and what Sure Hit would hit was also just the mirror projection, not the real reanimated female corpse.

Having evaded the fatal strike, the silhouette of the reanimated female corpse immediately became ethereal, projecting onto the nearest mirrored object.

She intended to use the mirror world to temporarily leave the battlefield, wait for her Mirror Substitution ability to recover, and then decide based on the situation whether to wait for the next opportunity, attack Franca and the others again immediately, or quietly follow them to determine their identities and whereabouts, so they could be directly locked onto and kicked out of the dream.

Just as the reanimated female corpse's silhouette became prominent on the surface of that mirrored object, a person suddenly appeared in the void dark area behind the mirror.

It was Anthony, wearing a black T-shirt.

Anthony held a charm similar to the Ice Amulet in one hand and the Winter is Coming revolver in the other, aiming at the reanimated female corpse who was about to enter the mirror surface.

He had used the Mirror Traversal ability in time to intercept the reanimated female corpse!

Since Lumian could make his own charms to help Beyonders traverse the mirror world, he certainly wouldn't make just one, only for Franca.

Besides himself, everyone in the team had one, and each could be used four times!

They had relied on Franca's Ice Amulet to transfer positions earlier, partly because since everyone was close together, there was no need to waste the uses of the other charms. After all, in the dream, Lumian was restricted to the Sequence 7 level, and making similar charms again had a high probability of failure. On the other hand, it was also following Lumian's Conspirer approach and Franca's occasional mutterings after entering the dream about "appearing weak when you are strong", deliberately setting a trap for the enemy.

By demonstrating that they could only hide in the mirror world and transfer positions by holding onto Lumian and Franca's clothes, they led the reanimated female corpse to believe that the others couldn't perform Mirror Traversal. So, after evading Franca's attack, the reanimated female corpse confidently used the mirror world to escape.

By demonstrating that they could only hide in the mirror world and transfer positions by holding onto Lumian and Franca's clothes, they led the reanimated female corpse to believe that the others couldn't perform Mirror Traversal. So, after evading Franca's attack, the reanimated female corpse confidently used the mirror world to escape.

This led her right into the gun barrel of Anthony, who had forcibly concealed his presence earlier.

Anthony pulled the trigger with a calm expression.

Another bullet tinged with a dark yellow glow flew out, heading towards the reanimated female corpse who was about to enter this area behind the mirror.

Sure Hit!

Bang!

As the gunshot rang out, the reanimated female corpse, who hadn't had time to retract her black flames, frost, and spider silk to protect herself, had blood blossoming on her chest, her flesh and bones splitting.

She was truly hit by the bullet, shot out of the mirror surface, and fell back into the surveillance room.

Seeing this, Franca aimed at the target once again.

Now, she was going to use the Certain Death bullet.

Meanwhile, Jenna still guarded the surveillance screen, having intention to steal credit, to prevent stray bullets from destroying the object that needed protection.

She only quietly extended invisible spider silk, intending to touch the blood splattered by the reanimated female corpse, to use it as a medium for curses.

At this moment, the reanimated female corpse suddenly raised her head and let out a painful scream.

Her hair rose strand by strand, instantly becoming long and thick, like venomous snakes.

The tips of this slimy, bizarre black hair were each inlaid with black and white eyeballs and heads that stuck out forked tongues like snakes.

Jenna instinctively closed her eyes, but still felt her thoughts becoming chaotic, pain and pleasure arising simultaneously, her body inexplicably stiffening as if turning to stone.

In this instant, she suddenly understood what the enemy was doing.

The reanimated female corpse seemed to have sensed that she was about to suffer a fatal blow, and with no way to avoid it or protect herself by forming a huge cocoon, she actively indulged in her own madness, displaying an incomplete Mythical Creature form that only Saints should possess.

For most Saints, displaying an incomplete Mythical Creature form was extremely dangerous, leading to a loss of control. Unless there were no other options or they intended to drag the enemy down with them, no one would use it.

For Beyonders without godhood, directly viewing an incomplete Mythical Creature form would result in intense corruption and terrible mental shock, likely leading to madness and loss of control. Even if they didn't look directly and closed their eyes, being within range would still cause some corruption.

Saints with godhood would still be affected to some degree by the incomplete Mythical Creature form, and would continue to be affected afterwards while facing the frenzied attacks of the incomplete Mythical Creature—the incomplete Mythical Creature form was a Saint's most powerful and dangerous state.

As the horrifying transformation of the reanimated female corpse reflected in Franca's eyes, she gritted her teeth and resolutely pulled the trigger of the Inevitable Gun.

Bang!

A dull green bullet flew from the muzzle, heading straight for the reanimated female corpse's body hidden by the slimy, thick hair.

Franca then let out a painful cry.

She instinctively tilted her head back, her black hair tied in a ponytail and modified by Lie broke free from its restraints, becoming wild and distinct, seemingly growing thicker.

Her face took on a grayish-white tinge, her chest felt somewhat swollen, and her mind felt as if it had been hit by a storm, all thoughts blown about, becoming mad, twisted, and dark.

She felt intense pleasure and also extreme pain. This, combined with her body's state already infected by disease and decay forces, caused her to passively trigger a Mirror Substitution.

With a cracking sound, Franca regressed into a mirror and shattered into pieces.

But when her silhouette was outlined in the corner, while she no longer felt the effects of disease and decay, her hair still floated in mid-air, still growing thicker. Her face was extremely pale and twisted to the extreme, yet presenting a strange beauty, her eyes full of madness and malice.

Corruption couldn't be transferred by Mirror Substitution, nor could the tendency towards losing control.

At the same time, the Certain Death bullet fired by Franca hit the mass of slimy, bizarre black hair of the "reanimated female corpse".

Although the effect of Certain Death was suppressed to Sequence 7 level, only certainly fatal to ordinary people, it was still deadly to the already severely injured reanimated female corpse. Moreover, the reanimated female corpse's incomplete Mythical Creature form was also limited to Sequence 7, only possessing defensive capabilities at this level!

The bullet glowing with a dull green light penetrated through layers of thick hair, entering the brain of the reanimated female corpse in her incomplete Mythical Creature form.

Smack!

The reanimated female corpse's head split open, blood and white matter splattering outwards.

The slimy, bizarre thick hair with black and white eyeballs fell in succession, returning to their original state to varying degrees.

Only then did Anthony dare to jump out from the mirror-like object, turning his back to the corpse with its strange charm and mental corruption. From a not-too-distant position, he began to perform Psychoanalysis on Franca, which was essentially throwing a Placate her way.

Franca's painful and mad chaotic thoughts calmed, and the symptoms of losing control in her body began to subside.

Seeing this, Anthony quietly let out a sigh of relief.

Fortunately, the reanimated female corpse's incomplete Mythical Creature form was also only at the Sequence 7 level, so the corruption and impact on Franca were at this level. Otherwise, he really wouldn't have known if she could be saved; that might have depended on Franca's own willpower.

As Anthony began the second Placate, Lumian jumped out of the surveillance screen.

He instinctively looked towards Franca and Jenna, checking their conditions.

Seeing that the problems were all within an acceptable range, Lumian then turned his gaze to the reanimated female corpse on the ground with its split head and bizarre hair.

As a fellow Saint, he only experienced a slight emotional fluctuation, without any other reaction.

Their joint efforts had actually taken down a Demoness of Despair with Mirror Substitution… Lumian was surprised and quite gratified.

He unconsciously looked towards Ludwig, finding that the little boy was staring at the Demoness's corpse with blazing eyes, completely unconcerned about possibly being corrupted.

Indeed, Ludwig wouldn't be affected by the incomplete Mythical Creature form. Moreover, the corpse had already left the incomplete Mythical Creature form, with only some characteristics remaining.

While repeatedly creating seven clusters at a time of deep black Flames of Destruction to burn the patches of viscous flesh and yellow-green pus in the surveillance room, Lumian took out a mirror, bent down, and put the reanimated female corpse with its burst head inside.

They couldn't let this corpse continue to corrupt the surveillance room, affecting Jenna and Franca who were recovering!

During this process, a black, irregularly shaped mirror fragment fell from the corpse.

As expected, she has a fragment of a special mirror world… Lumian stuffed the black fragment into the Traveler's Bag, planning to compare it with Franca's and the others' later.

By this time, about a third of the viscous flesh and yellow-green pus in the surveillance room had caught fire, and the black flames began to spread to the surroundings, seeking other combustible materials.

"Phew…" Franca let out a long breath, her mental state finally stabilizing, the abnormalities on her body having subsided.

Anthony moved to Jenna's side, performing Psychoanalysis on her, who had not been much corrupted.

After putting the Inevitable Gun back into the Traveler's Bag, Franca was about to proudly tell Lumian "We took down a Demoness of Despair" when her eyes suddenly caught sight of the several cameras in the surveillance room.

She immediately changed her words. "I'll check if our fight just now was caught on the cameras."

"Couldn't we just completely destroy the surveillance equipment with the Flames of Destruction?" Lumian thought it wasn't necessary to be so troublesome.

"What if this mall's surveillance footage is stored on a cloud server?" Franca wasn't too sure, but felt it necessary to guard against this possibility.

Lumian didn't stop Franca further, because he didn't understand what a cloud server was.

Franca quickly manipulated the surveillance system, and after a while said, "It's fine, the reanimated female corpse probably destroyed the cameras in this room when she came to check the surveillance."

As she spoke, she used another Mirror Substitution, because Lumian couldn't make the entire room be engulfed by the Flames of Destruction. He could only create clusters of flames and burn areas bit by bit, with mystical pathogens and decay forces still lingering in the air.

Lumian nodded and continued, "Check if my battle in the surveillance world has become part of the surveillance footage. If there's no problem, let's hurry back for the spirit channeling."

"Can it work like that?" Franca said in surprise.

This was equivalent to the actions of a dummy in a painted world changing the painting itself.

Chapter 920: Like Reality

Following Lumian's suggestion, Franca quickly reviewed the surveillance footage from the 4th floor of the mall in the past three minutes.

During this process, Jenna and Anthony hid in the area being burned by the Flames of Destruction, to avoid the remaining mystical pathogens and decay forces.

The former also had clusters of quiet black flames flare up in other parts of the surveillance room, assisting Lumian in eliminating necessary traces, though she could only create six to seven clusters at a time.

Taking advantage of the fact that he still had an unused Mirror Substitution, Ludwig took the opportunity to eat some snacks—the flesh and blood carrying mystical pathogens and decay forces.

Soon, Franca pulled up the corresponding surveillance footage.

The scene, which should have been dark, quiet, and empty, now showed two figures engaged in a fierce battle, with red flames quickly igniting the area and dense smoke billowing up.

However, the fighting scene and the original background seemed somewhat out of sync, as if forcibly edited in with outdated special effects technology. Both Lumian and his opponent's figures were quite blurred, showing signs of interference.

"Your battle in the surveillance world did become part of the surveillance footage, but nothing like that actually happened in the real world, the 4th floor of the mall is perfectly fine…" Franca pulled up the current camera feed from the 4th floor to make the comparison.

She took a deep breath and said, "Wh— The surveillance world is clearly not just the mirror world, it has the characteristics of an information world as well…"

"The pathway good at summoning should also have some understanding of parallel spaces and illusory worlds." Franca half-turned her body and said, "This surveillance footage can't be used by the police and Celestial Immortal's subordinates to recreate your image, so we don't need to deliberately destroy the surveillance equipment."

Lumian nodded slightly and added, "Our mystical knowledge of parallel spaces and illusory worlds is still quite superficial. The abilities, authorities, and knowledge in this area seem to be scattered across Demonesses, Mystery Pryers, Apprentices, Painters and other pathways, with Apprentices being the main line, and I'm not sure if the Painter pathway can match Apprentices."

"The pathway good at summoning should also have some understanding of parallel spaces and illusory worlds." Franca half-turned her body and said, "This surveillance footage can't be used by the police and Celestial Immortal's subordinates to recreate your image, so we don't need to deliberately destroy the surveillance equipment."

At this point, with Jenna's assistance, Lumian had already erased the various traces they had left in the surveillance room, and Franca also began to use the Demoness's black flames to clean up the fingerprints she had left on the equipment.

"Let's head back, we need to hurry with the spirit channeling." Lumian withdrew his gaze.

"Okay." Franca retracted her hand covered in black flames.

Lumian immediately led his teammates back through the mirror world to the rented car, and as soon as Franca fastened her seatbelt, preparing to start the engine, she suddenly shivered.

She began to feel cold, as if all the heat in her body had been drained away. Her head became dizzy, her vision occasionally darkening and sparking with golden stars, almost fainting.

Franca understood that this was the negative effect of the Inevitable Gun—if the Certain Death and Sure Hit effects were triggered, the user would inevitably fall gravely ill, and without effective treatment, could even die. Even if treated, the severe illness would persist for some time.

Similarly, every time Anthony used the Winter is Coming revolver, he had to find an Apothecary or Doctor for treatment, otherwise he would contract an intractable disease that Low- to Mid-Sequence Beyonders were powerless against.

Seeing Franca's face turn nearly transparent, Lumian reached into the Traveler's Bag and took out two vials of healing agents.

These were supply resources provided by the Tarot Club, reportedly extremely rare items not sold publicly, produced by The Fool Pharmaceutical Company.

For this mission, the Major Arcana card holders had given Lumian's group a total of twenty-five general-purpose healing agents, with the majority kept with Lumian as the team leader, while Jenna, Franca, and Anthony each carried two, but Ludwig had none.

Children needed supervision, otherwise he would secretly drink them all!

Franca's trembling hands opened the cap of the healing agent and gulped it down.

The icy liquid slid down her throat and into her stomach.

Soon, the chilled feeling rapidly disappeared, and a light sweat broke out on her skin.

"Much better…" Franca exhaled, "Just a bit dizzy in the head, my forehead is a bit hot, and my body feels weak."

Anthony, who had yet to suffer symptoms, had also finished his healing agent.

"I'll drive." Lumian said.

"You can, can drive?" Franca really didn't feel confident in her current state to be driving, but Lumian, who had never learned, made her even more worried. "Should we just take a taxi?"

Lumian chuckled. "I carefully observed you driving today, I've basically mastered the basic operations. And now it's late at night, there aren't many cars.

"And more importantly, I also have the driver's license that Madam Justice gave."

"Alright, Li Ming." Franca weakly unbuckled her seatbelt and pushed open the door.

Li Ming was Lumian's alias in the dream world.

As soon as Franca's feet touched the ground, her knees buckled, nearly causing her to fall. Luckily, Lumian was waiting outside the driver's seat and quickly grabbed her arm.

"So this is what being severely ill feels like… and this is with the negative effects suppressed to Sequence 7…" Franca leaned on Lumian as she slowly walked to the passenger seat, muttering while preparing to provide guidance later.

Lumian chuckled."If this were the real world, I'd probably have to carry you."

Franca imagined such a scene and suddenly said, "No, let's go with a piggyback ride!"

Lumian glanced at her but didn't say anything further.

Jenna, who had already come out of the passenger side, looked at the two approaching, her gaze slightly dark but also with a hint of relief as she listened to their conversation.

After everyone was seated and the doors closed, Franca gave a simple explanation,

"This is the steering wheel, you turn it in the direction you want to go. This is the accelerator, to control the speed. This is the brake, to stop the car or decelerate in an emergency… Basically, don't overtake, change lanes only when there are no other cars, stop at red lights, go at green, turn when you need to… It's very simple with an automatic transmission…"

Lumian stepped on the brake, released the parking brake, and shifted the lever to the appropriate gear.

The gray sedan slowly started moving, gradually picking up speed.

After passing two traffic light intersections, Lumian already had a very skilled driving technique.

Franca looked at him with her mouth slightly open, weakly saying, "You've learned it just like that?

No need for me to guide you on the side?

"It's very simple." Lumian chuckled, using Franca's own words to respond.

He then released one hand, pointing to his head. "You have to trust the spatial awareness and hand-eye coordination of a Hunter."

Franca suddenly felt that being the one who could drive in the team was no longer something to be proud of.

In this way, Lumian successfully drove the car back to the rented old neighborhood, and then, with Jenna's guidance, after spending quite some time, finally parked the car, allowing Franca to feel proud again.

They had rented an older model car to save money, without any parking assist systems.

Back in the rental unit, Lumian led the team into the mirror containing the reanimated female corpse.

Except for Lumian and Ludwig, the others didn't dare to look closely, fearing new corruption, but even with just a brief glance, they all noticed that a faint dark glow was slowly emanating from the decrepit corpse, gradually converging towards the right eye.

"Evocation of Beyonder characteristics?" Jenna blurted out.

Franca, being weaker, was a step slower in her reaction, saying in amazement, "This dream is too realistic!"

Beyonders will also evoke their characteristics?

Before Lumian and the others could respond, Franca had a sudden idea.

"If I obtain Beyonder characteristics in this dream, concoct them into a potion, and perform a ritual to drink them, will I be able to successfully advance in the real world?"

At this question, the area behind the mirror fell into an unusual silence.

"I can't answer that for you." Lumian pondered for a few seconds. "Maybe you should consult the Major Arcana card holders, or take these Beyonder characteristics and exit the dream to see if it 'follows' you to reality."

After arriving in this city, Lumian's group no longer needed Madam Justice's help to exit and re-enter the dream. They could simply take the train, and use lucky coins to complete the task directly.

"Frequent entering and exiting of the dream might also draw the attention of the Celestial Immortal," Anthony reminded Lumian.

Lumian offered a curt acknowledgment.

"There are other ways, let's try to avoid exiting as much as possible. We'll contact the Major Arcana card holders early tomorrow morning."

Although the Major Arcana card holders were subject to various restrictions in the dream, with some unable to even enter this place, there were still ways to communicate through the dream.

As they were talking, the dark Beyonder characteristics had gathered in the reanimated female corpse's right eye, dyeing it a blackish-blue hue.

During this process, Lumian, Franca, and Jenna—the three Demonesses—had already created multiple clusters of black flames to incinerate the corpse and the mystical pathogens spread from the characteristics.

According to the Demoness of Despair's potion formula, Lumian collected the black eyeball, the corpse's bile, and a strand of the coarse, partially restored gray-white hair, and handed them to Franca to put in the Traveler's Bag.

Having endured all this time, Ludwig finally found an opportunity, pointing at the corpse and asking, "Can I have a few bites?"

He had already obtained the Mirror Substitution ability through Deprivation, and by eating a few more pieces of the corpse's flesh and blood, he would have a chance to permanently fix this ability to himself.

Of course, limited by the dream and the current Sequence 7 level of Deprivation, he could only use Mirror Substitution for two to three weeks, unable to gain it permanently.

"Go ahead." Lumian nodded.

Ludwig excitedly ran over, crouching next to the corpse's head, targeting the delicate, small ear.

"After her death, the Demoness's charm is concentrated in the ear, to the point that even Ludwig is attracted?" Lumian had just had this thought when he saw Ludwig lean down and bite off the ear with a crunch, chewing it noisily, his mouth covered in blood.

"…" Franca and the others fell silent, turning their bodies away, no longer looking.

After Ludwig finished eating both of the Demoness's ears, reluctantly returning to Jenna's side, Lumian began to set up the ritual.

Due to the lack of a subject to pray to, he could only perform the spirit channeling in the simplest way, carefully guarding against the strong corruption from the Celestial Immortal on the target.

Soon, the vague silhouette of the female corpse appeared.

Lumian asked in a deep voice,"What were you trying to do, waking up in the morgue of Mushu Hospital?"

Chapter 921: Character Script

The pale-faced ghostly figure of the female corpse replied in a wavering voice, "To forge a good identity, pass the Intis Group's interview, and become an employee of the company and a colleague of Zhou Mingrui.

"Interacting with Zhou Mingrui daily, starting off polite and distant, then gradually getting familiar, subtly seducing him in our daily interactions until he falls in love with me.

"I will become his girlfriend, and in the future, enter the marital hall with him. Through prosperity or adversity, wealth or poverty, health or sickness, whether he is male or female, I will always accompany him, never leaving, forever and ever."

Listening with a slightly agape mouth, the sickly Franca gradually felt bewildered.

Isn't this character script a bit off?

This is neither an urban fantasy nor a suspense-horror, it's turned into a pure romance novel…

Is this intended to immerse Mr. Fool in a blissful, sweet love life and a peaceful, warm urban environment, unwilling to wake up?

Is the Celestial Worthy being this down-to-earth?

Is this a large-scale Truman Show for Mr. Fool, isolating him from reality?

When she heard the part about "whether he is male or female", Franca suddenly snapped awake.

There is a conspiracy here!

There are sinister plots hidden within, with another purpose!

Lumian and Franca had similar thoughts, but Franca's mind was more active. Lumian was more concerned about another aspect.

The task of the reanimated female corpse did not include inducing Mr. Fool to drink the Witch potion. Does this mean someone else is responsible for turning Mr. Fool into a Demoness?

At this point, Franca quietly said, "The method in the script does seem feasible… To influence Mr. Fool, or Zhou Mingrui, a person so cautious and careful, the only way is to work on 'falling in love over time', only through the calm, genuine, day-by-day interaction can connections and trust be built.

"And for this kind of task, the most suitable executor is indeed a Demoness, secondly a Baby Cupid. No wonder they need to revive or awaken this female corpse, Charm can blend into many little details of daily life without being detected…"

"Indeed, following Madam Susie's reminder, we also seem to be able to only gain Mr. Fool's trust through similar means, only we don't need to use Charm, but then the risk of exposure would be too great." Jenna weighed her words in agreement.

Prolonged, repeated contact with Mr. Fool would easily be noticed by the Celestial Worthy.

Lumian did not respond to Franca and Jenna. He needed to hurry up with the spirit channeling.

Looking at the floating female corpse illusion, he carefully asked, "Are you a marionette?"

Lumian had not experienced the battle with the female corpse's physical body, the two disease bombs' explosions, or the discussion about a

Marionettist with Franca and the others, so at the time he did not search the 30-40 meter area around the surveillance room to see if there were any Beyonders hiding, until on the way back in the car, after exchanging details of the battle with his teammates, did he consider the possibility of a marionette.

However, not actively searching the 30-40 meter area around the surveillance room did not mean he was not wary of other enemies lurking nearby—that was a basic quality of a Hunter. At the time, he simply did not detect anyone hiding in the vicinity.

This made him uncertain about Franca and the others' suspicions. Their doubts might not be true, just as the reanimated female corpse did not have powers granted by the Door pathway.

The ghostly female corpse with its sinister black hair replied in a hollow voice, "Yes."

Yes? She's really a marionette? Lumian was stunned for a moment, then urgently asked, "Who is your manipulator, and where are they?"

This time, the female corpse illusion did not respond, but slowly raised her head, gazing towards the vast, dark "sky" of the mirror realm.

Lumian and the others may have been influenced by the remnant spirit of the corpse, or perhaps stimulated by the change in the mystical environment caused by this action, and they actually experienced a slight hallucination.

Vaguely, they seemed to see ethereal, dense threads emerging from the corpse's body, extending upwards towards the heights, and similar illusory threads floating from their own bodies too, also drifting up into the dark, cloud-shrouded night sky.

They also seemed to see the individuals in the city, each of them sprouting numerous, dense illusory threads, connecting to somewhere in the night sky where the moon and stars were obscured by clouds.

Lumian was greatly shocked in both mind and spirit by this scene, but his observational abilities as a Hunter still allowed him to notice one detail.

The illusory threads emerging from themselves and the female corpse had a fairly obvious difference: theirs floated and swayed, as if only attracted and drawn towards some unseen thing high above, without actually deeply integrating into the darkness, while the female corpse's threads were taut, seeming to merge into the unfathomable blackness.

As for the threads of the other people in the city, Lumian could only vaguely sense them, unable to see them clearly.

Combining the currently available information on The Fool pathway provided by the Major Arcana card holders, Lumian, Franca, Jenna, and Anthony immediately came to the same judgment: the heights represented Mr. Fool, as well as the Celestial Worthy, and the resurrected female corpse was the Celestial Worthy's marionette!

"No wonder we couldn't find the Marionettist controlling her in the vicinity…" Jenna had just had this thought when she quickly realized a problem. "No, that can't be right! If it were like that, we would have already been locked on to by the Celestial Worthy and kicked out of the dream, and even if we weren't kicked out, we would definitely be under restrictions…"

Shifting gears, Jenna came up with a possibility, "The Celestial Worthy is also in a slumbering state, largely in a dazed, unconscious condition, controlling the marionette, only becoming aware of the corresponding situation when stimulated or when the marionette actively reports back.

"But can an unconsciously controlled marionette exhibit the kind of behavior we saw earlier? Apart from being a bit extreme, obsessed with dealing with us, not leaving in advance, the reanimated female corpse is no different from the real person…"

At this moment, the female corpse illusion began to fade, about to disappear.

The spirit channeling was almost over.

Grasping the last bit of time, Lumian asked in an urgent tone, "Who gave you humanity?"

Jenna immediately understood that Lumian had the same thoughts as her.

He was also very curious about the humanized behavior of the reanimated female corpse or marionette!

The pale-faced female corpse illusion grew fainter and fainter, only the empty voice echoing, "It was Mr. Fool and the Great Mother…"

"Ah?" In her weakened state, Franca's self-control slipped, the exclamation escaping her lips.

This sounded as if Mr. Fool and the 'Great Mother had given birth to her, like she was their child…

Lumian ended the spirit channeling and turned to his teammates, saying thoughtfully, "I think I can understand the meaning of that last sentence.

"She should have previously made contact with Mr. Fool or one of his incarnations, a Demoness of Despair. Mr. Fool's subconscious would instinctively weave an identity, appearance and personality for her based on the image in his memory, and with the Great Mother's awakening, or rather, giving her new life, she naturally acquired humanity and became a unique marionette capable of autonomous action according to the mission assignment.

"The Oracle's corpse being sent to the Mushu Hospital morgue is also to create a similar marionette?

"Does Mushu Hospital not only have the Mother Tree of Desire, but also the presence of the Great Mother?"

"I knew it!" Franca had wanted to clap her hands, but after raising them, she had no strength left. "Mushu Hospital may also have the power of the Order of All Extinction."

Turning his gaze to the tattered yet enchanting female corpse, Lumian observed for a few seconds and said, "No powers from the Door pathway dissipating, nor any decay boons dissipating…"

"I don't know how they did it… She didn't show any corresponding abilities in the battle, were those two disease bombs pre-made with some kind of tool? Too bad we didn't get to ask about the marionette transformation of one of the disease bombs…" Franca grew increasingly fearful of Mushu Hospital.

She didn't even dare imagine what Lumian would have encountered if he had gone down to the B1 of Mushu Hospital!

Searching the body, Lumian found no other items, then stood up and said to Ludwig, "If you promise to listen to Jenna's orders from now on, I'll reward you with this corpse!"

"Okay, I promise!" Ludwig had a completely carefree expression, not caring at all about the future.

Lumian's true purpose was actually to destroy the body and eliminate any trace, as this was the Celestial Worthy's marionette. It had to be completely destroyed before the Celestial Worthy's intermittent awakening, leaving no evidence to avoid drawing attention and anomalies.

Seeing Ludwig rush towards the female corpse, Jenna supported the sickly Franca, and along with Anthony, quickly exited the mirror realm and returned to the rental unit.

Standing beside Ludwig, Lumian asked in a flat tone, "If this corpse is real, would you be able to restore to Sequence 4 after eating it?"

"No, unless you give me the other one too." Ludwig looked at Lumian with longing.

He was referring to Voisin Sanson's body. A few days ago, he had received an arm as a reward for his good performance in studying, exams, and homework, so he had fully recovered to the Sequence 5 Depriver level before entering the dream.

Ignoring Ludwig's plea, Lumian asked instead, "What is your Sequence 4 called?"

Ludwig began gnawing on an arm, answering in a muffled voice, "Sea Monster."

…

The next morning, Franca found that her severe illness had not yet recovered. Her forehead still felt feverish; her body weak, and she almost couldn't get out of bed.

Lumian used the simplest Magic Mirror Divination method to confirm that this was just the lingering effect of the negative effect, and she would be ill for about half a day, not because the healing agent had not worked as it should. He then told Jenna, "We'll take turns. You take care of her and Ludwig in the morning, I'll do it in the afternoon.

"Now I'll drive with Anthony to contact the Major Arcana card holders."

"Okay." Jenna had also been somewhat corrupted the night before and needed more rest as well.

Downstairs, getting into the car, Lumian, mimicking Franca, placed his phone on a specially bought holder and opened the navigation app.

Then, under Anthony's gaze, he used voice input to enter the destination: "Star Dream Provisions Store."

Chapter 922: News

In the rental apartment.

Jenna cleaned up the table, picked up the soy milk and meat buns she had specially left for Franca, and said to Ludwig beside her, "You can start studying now."

Ludwig's expression changed a few times before he argued, "What's the point of me studying?

"If you want to gain knowledge, eat scientists. If you want to gain abilities, eat Beyonders!"

Jenna smiled faintly and said, "Studying may not be important for you, but it's very important for us that you study."

"…" Ludwig, already inarticulate, was left completely speechless by Jenna's frankness.

After some consideration, Jenna added, "Although we don't know the exact process, and you've probably forgotten too, the fact that you were sealed by the Church of Knowledge is as solid as steel. And what's the biggest difference between you and the clergy of the Church of Knowledge? It's the attitude towards learning!"

Ludwig was left feeling a bit confused. Reluctantly but resignedly, he sat down at the table and opened his textbook.

Jenna returned to the master bedroom, casually closing the door behind her.

Franca struggled to sit up halfway, stuffing a pillow behind her back, and said in a low voice, "You're deceiving Ludwig again. Trying to defeat the

Church of Knowledge through studying is like competing against them on their home turf, under their favorite rules. How can we win that way? The best approach is to play to our own strengths.

"Hehe, Demonesses are indeed supposed to be good at deceiving people."

Many Demonesses had experience deceiving others' feelings to digest the Witch potion, and some of them even became emotionally invested themselves, ultimately having to force themselves to separate. So they also had their share of pain.

Jenna laughed. "We have to give him some reason, and he's just looking for a reason too."

Jenna paused, then said thoughtfully, "Besides, I think studying does have an effect on Ludwig. You saw him during last night's battle—he was completely monstrous. But in our daily interactions, I feel that apart from his ability to eat, love of eating, and need to eat, he's just like a normal little boy in every other way.

"This is partly due to the Church of Knowledge's seal, but it's also likely because he's learned rules, morals, and common sense about human society through studying."

As she spoke, Jenna brought the plastic cup of soy milk to Franca's lips, letting her take a sip, then handed her the meat bun, watching as she bit into it until she reached the filling.

Franca had never enjoyed such treatment before, and her heart was instantly filled with warmth.

She nodded thoughtfully. "You mean studying is one of the ways for Ludwig to integrate into human society? That studying has given him some humanity?"

"Yup." Jenna continued to feed Franca her breakfast while casually chatting with her. At the end, she even used a wet wipe to clean Franca's mouth and washed her face.

After finishing these tasks, Jenna took the trash and left the master bedroom.

After bustling about for several dozen seconds, she sat down next to Ludwig, as if supervising a child's study.

After watching for a while, she took out two packages from the Traveler's Bag and placed them on the table.

They were two bags of simply packaged rice crisps.

As Ludwig looked over in surprise, Jenna said with a smile, "If you can pass my test later, these will be yours.

"Do you prefer spicy or original flavor?"

"I like both!" Ludwig lowered his head again, his gaze unusually focused.

"I prefer the original flavor." Jenna tore open the packaging and popped two pieces into her mouth, chewing.

Ludwig's head snapped up to look at her, his mouth half-open, expression bewildered.

Isn't this my reward?

"I'll eat a bit while you're studying. Don't worry, I'll save some for you," Jenna said with a smile.

Franca, lying on the bed in the master bedroom, couldn't help but laugh when she heard this conversation.

She suddenly realized that although Jenna usually seemed very mature, she was actually just a girl fresh out of college by her real age. It was perfectly normal for such a girl to enjoy snacks, and now she finally had the opportunity.

The smile on Franca's face gradually softened as new dialogue drifted in from the living room outside.

"This is a corn soup flavored puffed snack."

"These are cucumber flavored potato chips."

"These are chocolate wafer cookies."

"…"

"These snacks aren't plentiful because they're not as cheap as staple foods, but they're all prepared for you, as rewards for studying hard and doing well on tests."

"You… you eat less! I'll work hard!"

Leaning against the pillow, Franca slowly developed a strange feeling: She was the sick father, and outside were the gluttonous, study-averse child and the mother supervising the child's homework.

If one ignored phrases like "the corpse's finger is also your reward for today," it was really such a warm and beautiful day-to-day life for a family of three.

…

Beep! Beep! Beep!

The sound of horns blared constantly behind and beside the gray sedan, urging Lumian to drive faster, but Lumian remained calm and completely ignored the noise around him, keeping the vehicle moving steadily at the lowest speed allowed on the current road section.

As a new driver—safety first!

Anthony sat in the passenger seat, constantly scrolling through his phone, looking at local news.

"What are you looking for?" Lumian glanced at his companion out of the corner of his eye.

Anthony shouldn't have reached the stage of being addicted to the Internet yet; after all, he had only just learned how to use it.

Anthony turned his head and said solemnly, "I still feel that several details from last night's battle seem increasingly odd the more I think about them."

"Such as?" Lumian focused on driving.

Anthony said carefully, "The second security guard who self-destructed, his state before the explosion was very similar to that of a Marionettist himself, but he just exploded like that."

"The ability to swap positions between a marionette and its master? You suspect that there was indeed a demigod-level Marionettist assisting the Celestial Worthy's marionette at the scene?" Lumian understood what Anthony was trying to express. "But we were aware of the situation within a range of several dozen meters and found no traces. Could it be that this demigod-level Marionettist was in a state where we couldn't see, hear, or touch them?"

"That's the most terrifying part. And if there really was such a Marionettist present, why didn't he save the reanimated female corpse afterward, and why hasn't he spread information about our appearances and characteristics since then?" Anthony returned his gaze to his phone.

Lumian nodded slowly and replied, "You're scrolling through reports and private rumors related to last night's incident, checking if any of our information has leaked?"

"Yes," Anthony said, his finger constantly sliding across the screen. "The current circulating story is that workplace conflicts led one of the security guards to bring in detonators, killing his colleague and himself in the explosion…"

Anthony stopped mid-sentence.

He frowned slightly.

"I've come across a strange local news item. This morning, a madman was found near the garbage collection point close to Moon Plaza, a completely irrational madman unable to communicate. Then, he was sent to the hospital for treatment."

"Near the mall? A madman?" Lumian also noticed the oddity of this news and keenly asked, "Which hospital was he sent to?"

Could this madman be the Marionettist who was hidden last night?

Did he not intervene in the later battle because something happened to him?

What happened? Why did something happen?

"The news doesn't say," Anthony continued scrolling through reports on this matter.

Lumian maintained his speed and took another ten minutes or so to reach their destination.

After finding a parking spot and struggling to park the car, he and Anthony walked towards Star Dream Provisions Store located at the corner of the street.

The shop had no lights on, and it was narrow and dim inside. The moment Lumian entered, it felt like he had gone from morning to night.

He glanced at the tall, long shelves on both sides filled with peculiar goods, and walked to the cashier counter at the very back.

Behind the counter sat a woman wearing a black dress. She leaned against the wooden cabinet behind her, head lowered as she played with her phone. In front of her was a tablet playing a TV series.

Lumian politely said, "Hello, I'd like to send a letter."

He was actually saying he wanted to send a letter in a provisions store.

The woman in the black dress playing with her phone didn't find it strange. Without raising her head, she asked, "Where to, and to whom?"

"To the Cathedral of Serenity, to High-ranking Deacon Leonard Mitchell," Lumian took out the letter for the Major Arcana card holders.

The woman in the black dress still looked at her phone, her voice gentle and calming as she said, "There's a silver-rimmed black mailbox on the third shelf to the right. You can put your letter in there.

"Come back tomorrow to collect the reply."

"Thank you," Lumian quietly sighed in relief and turned towards the shelf.

What caught his eye wasn't a toy mailbox, but a brass-like book and a silver mirror with black pupil-like orbs on both sides.

Lumian quickly scanned the shelves and also found classic quill pens, various strange dice, and other items. If it weren't for the shop owner being on her phone and watching a tablet, he would have thought he had returned to the real world, back to Trier.

The style of these items was quite different from the dream city, more like things from the Northern Continent!

After placing the letter in the silver-rimmed toy mailbox, Lumian turned to the side and asked the shop owner, "May I look at the goods here?"

The shop owner's voice carried a hint of amusement. "These are all for sale."

For sale? As a Demoness, Lumian first picked up the silver mirror with ancient patterns and a black gem on each side.

In the mirror, Lumian's face quickly appeared.

Light blue eyes, clear and deep, a slightly thin face, almost perfect, lips neither thick nor thin, pale in color yet moist, with a hint of radiance…

This was his female form.

It directly shows my Demoness state… This mirror indeed has magical properties… Just as Lumian had this thought, he saw the surface of the mirror ripple like water, outlining rows of blood-colored words in ancient Feysac: "I am the great Arrodes. I can answer any question you ask, but you must also answer an equal number of questions from me, in the presence of at least one witness.

"If you refuse to answer, or if you lie, you will face punishment."

Arrodes, the great Arrodes? Lumian knew this name.

Franca had mentioned it before. This was Mr. Fool's magic mirror, most accurate in answering questions, but each of its questions would cause the diviner to suffer social death.

Mr. Fool's magic mirror is actually in this provisions store in the dream? What does this represent, what does it symbolize? Lumian couldn't help but glance again at the shop owner, the woman in the black dress playing with her phone.

After brief consideration, Lumian calmly said, "My question is, regarding the matter of awakening Mr. Fool, what do you want to warn us about?"

Chapter 923: Prices

The surface of the magic mirror claiming to be Arrodes rippled with aqueous light, and the surrounding darkness became hazy.

One by one, ancient Feysac words that seemed to be dripping blood quickly appeared on the mirror: "Beware of the night."

Beware of the night? Lumian repeated this answer while instinctively looking outside the Star Dream Provisions Store.

At this time, the August sunlight was bright and brilliant, reflecting golden light off many glass windows across the street, unconsciously making people feel certain and secure, while also instinctively dreading the heat.

Lumian quickly recalled his experiences of the past two nights, realizing that neither night had been peaceful: The first night, the dream image of Oracle Danitz was murdered, and the orderly at Mushu Hospital revived the corpse of a Demoness of Despair;

The second night, they encountered the reanimated female corpse in the monitoring room, a fierce battle ensued, and they nearly made the local news headlines as a major case involving guns, explosives, and biochemical toxins. Fortunately, to avoid causing panic, the police did not disclose specific details and only launched a secret investigation.

In comparison, nothing major had happened during the two daytimes. The only anomaly was the revival of the Oracle's corpse, which had walked into Mushu Hospital without causing much commotion.

Daytime is relatively safe, while night is more dangerous? During the day, Mr. Fool's power is dominant, while at night, the Celestial Worthy's consciousness is more active? Lumian briefly analyzed the answer from the magic mirror Arrodes.

At this point, the blood-colored words on the silver mirror's surface twisted and writhed to form new content: "Based on the principle of reciprocity, it's my turn to ask a question.

"If you answer incorrectly or lie, you will be punished."

Lumian nodded fearlessly, while Anthony beside him remained silent.

On the magic mirror, new words began to form one by one: "Regarding your sister Aurore…"

Lumian's eyebrows suddenly twitched, and at the same time, the words on the mirror's surface suddenly blurred, rearranging into new content: "After becoming a Demoness, do you want to be fucked by men?"

"No," Lumian answered briefly and decisively.

No punishment appeared.

Lumian murmured in confusion, "The question is so simple?"

First, it suddenly changed the question, then asked one that he currently had a clear conscience about. How could this create social death?

On the mirror's surface, waves of light floated, and several lines of ancient Feysac words that seemed to be dripping blood appeared:

"The great Arrodes is very friendly to everyone who enters the dream and wants to awaken Mr. Fool!"

I see… This magic mirror is very loyal… Just as Lumian finished this thought, he saw the words on the mirror change: "Based on the principle of reciprocity, it's my turn to ask a question.

"If you answer incorrectly or lie, you will be punished."

That also counted as a question? Lumian hadn't expected his mutterings to become a question.

He hadn't even demanded that the magic mirror Arrodes answer!

On the surface of the antique silver mirror, a bloody question appeared before Lumian's eyes:

"What does it feel like to wear women's underwear?"

Still quite friendly indeed… Lumian answered expressionlessly, "Constricting, a bit tight, not very comfortable, but it gives a sense of stability and security."

Considering that the magic mirror Arrodes had only answered "Beware of the night" for the first question, Lumian felt that asking more questions now wouldn't yield much more information. So he put the antique silver mirror with black eye-like gems on both sides back in its original place.

He thoughtfully looked towards the cashier counter and asked the shop owner, "How much is this mirror?"

If the price was right, perhaps he could buy it. As Mr. Fool's personal item, the magic mirror might provide important information at crucial moments later on.

The shop owner in the black dress finally raised her head.

For some reason, Lumian felt the sunlight outside suddenly dim a little, as if large clouds had drifted by.

The interior of Star Dream Provisions Store became even darker.

In this environment, Lumian, with his Night Vision, could still clearly see the shop owner's appearance.

Her eyes were a rare pure black, her face extraordinarily beautiful, but she didn't look like a local.

The shop owner smiled and answered Lumian's question, "5 million."

"How much?" Lumian blurted out, and even Anthony's expression changed slightly.

"5 million," the shop owner repeated the price.

I have to think twice even about spending 50 now, and you're quoting me 5 million… Lumian abandoned the idea of buying the magic mirror Arrodes.

He knew that this price was actually very cheap. This was Mr. Fool's personal item, the great Arrodes, its true value definitely worth 5 million, or even far exceeding this price, but one had to allow those without money to grumble a bit.

With an attitude of gaining knowledge, Lumian pointed to the brass-like book. "How much is this?"

"9 million," the shop owner answered politely.

Lumian couldn't ask further.

He now only knew one thing, this brass book was more valuable than the magic mirror Arrodes!

The shop owner added with a smile, "Most of the items in the store are antiques, and related to mysticism, so they're not cheap. But you can choose to rent them, calculated by the day."

"Rent?" Lumian pointed at the magic mirror Arrodes in surprise. "How much to rent for one day?"

"220,000," the shop owner's voice was as gentle as a serenade.

220,000… This isn't much different from buying it for 5 million, we can't afford it either way… Lumian first grumbled to himself, then based on his rich dream experience and a Demoness's spiritual intuition, he muttered softly, "Saving up 5 million to buy the magic mirror, and saving up 220,000 to rent it for a day, both have corresponding symbolic meanings?"

The shop owner didn't seem to expect Lumian to rent or purchase, and lowered her head again to focus on her phone.

Lumian indeed didn't have the ability to rent or buy now, so he and Anthony walked towards the door of Star Dream Provisions Store.

After a few steps, he suddenly thought of something and turned back to ask, "Has anyone rented the magic mirror before?"

The shop owner raised her head again, a smile appearing on her beautiful face. "Yes."

Lumian's pupils suddenly dilated. "Who?"

Someone really rented the magic mirror Arrodes in the dream city?

What did they use it for?

The shop owner answered with a faint smile, "It's my duty to keep my clients' privacy and secrets."

In Lumian's mind, thoughts flashed like lightning.

He finally didn't pursue the question further and turned to walk out of Star Dream Provisions Store.

Just as they approached where they had parked, Lumian and Anthony saw a foreign man with brownish-yellow hair crouching beside the gray sedan their team had rented, looking left and right, occasionally taking a photo.

Seeing the car owners return, this foreign man slowly stood up.

He was about the same height as Lumian, wearing a pair of plain glasses on his nose bridge, with some light yellow stubble on his face. His chest muscles were developed, his arms were thick, stretching his blue shirt to near bursting point. He wore faded jeans and carried a black travel backpack on his back.

"Why are you photographing our car?" Lumian asked cautiously.

He now had a kind of illness where he felt that every person in the dream had a corresponding identity and symbolic meaning.

The foreign man said, "Such a vintage car is rare to see; it fills a gap in my knowledge."

"Knowledge?" Lumian asked puzzledly.

Is this guy studying cars?

The foreign man smiled and said, "I'm an international student, studying at the university here. I really like this city, I like everything here, so when I don't have classes, I carry my bag and phone, walk around and take photos everywhere, recording every detail that makes up this civilization."

"I see…" Lumian felt this guy was a bit strange, but as he was still in the first stage of observation, he didn't want to have too much contact with him.

At this point, Anthony suddenly asked, "What's your name?"

The foreign man glanced at Anthony and smiled as he answered, "Stiano. What about you guys?"

"Li Ming," Lumian gave his fake name for the dream city.

Anthony also introduced himself, "An Ruide."

After chatting for a few more sentences, Stiano, this foreign man, continued to wander aimlessly with his backpack and phone.

Once in the car, Lumian fastened his seatbelt and looked at Anthony.

"Why did you ask for his name?"

Anthony rarely took such initiative.

Anthony thought for a moment and said, "He gives me a strange sense of familiarity.

"I'll use hypnosis to ask my subconscious later, to see where this sense of familiarity comes from."

Lumian nodded and started the car.

Halfway through the drive, Anthony suddenly came out of hypnosis and said to Lumian, "I've found the source of the familiarity. I get a similar feeling every time I enter a Church of Steam cathedral."

He was originally a Steam believer.

"The corresponding dream image of a high-level figure in the Church of Steam?" Although Lumian had disguised himself as a Steam believer before, he had hardly ever entered a Church of Steam, so he didn't have the same feeling as Anthony.

"Maybe," Anthony wasn't too sure.

…

At noon, in the rental apartment.

Lumian said to Jenna, who was supporting Franca as she came out to eat, "This afternoon, you and Anthony take Ludwig to check out Dream Tutoring Classes in person. I'll stay home to take care of Franca.

"According to the information provided by the Major Arcana cards, Mr. Fool also enrolled in this tutoring center. This is one of the best ways for us to naturally and normally come into contact with Mr. Fool.

"Moreover, we can observe the impact of the Oracle's death on this tutoring center."

"Mm," Franca spoke up. "It seems a bit strange that the Oracle, as an adult man, was reported missing after just one night of not returning."

Jenna thought for a moment and said, "Maybe Mr. Fool's subconscious thinks this matter is urgent."

"There might be other reasons," Lumian glanced at Ludwig, whose face had soured upon hearing about the tutoring center, and said, "Jenna is responsible for communication and probing, Anthony for observation. I'll leave this matter to you guys."

Chapter 924: Tutoring Class

Unable to drive, Jenna and Anthony chose to take public transportation with the child to Dream Tutoring Classes. They made a comprehensive travel plan and prepared spare change for unexpected situations, rather than relying solely on mobile payments.

After they left, Lumian helped Franca back to the master bedroom and glanced at the large ice blocks in four basins, chuckling. "This isn't much worse than air conditioning."

The only issue was needing to refreeze the water periodically, which consumed some spirituality. But for Demonesses, creating frost was an ability that used very little spirituality.

Plus, it effectively solved the problem of limited refrigerator space.

"Yeah, air conditioning is so expensive," Franca leaned against the pillow and sighed sincerely. "I never imagined being a Demoness would be so practical in daily life."

Lumian sat on the edge of the bed and casually asked, "How are you feeling now?"

"Much better. This morning I was so weak I could only walk slowly," Franca answered honestly. "Since becoming a Beyonder, this is the first time I've been so seriously ill. As expected of the negative effects of a demigod-level item."

Lumian tsked. "But I heard from Jenna that she had to feed you breakfast, and when you needed to go to the washroom, er, restroom, you called her to support you."

Where was the slow walking?

Franca wasn't embarrassed at being exposed, and chuckled. "Can't I enjoy being carefully looked after as a patient?"

Lumian pressed his hand to his own forehead, then felt Franca's.

"Your temperature has indeed come down, but you can continue enjoying being cared for until you're fully recovered."

"Does that mean I can boss you around?" Franca suddenly got excited.

She recalled her university days, when every day a lucky roommate would be ordered to get food for the whole dorm, and she was the luckiest one.

Seeing Franca's eager expression, Lumian smiled and took out a yellow peach from the Traveler's Bag.

"Didn't you say yesterday that you missed the taste of yellow peaches? I happened to pass by a fruit wholesale market on my way back and bought a bag."

"I just mentioned it casually…" Franca was a bit surprised, her eyes curving slightly.

Lumian formed a small fruit knife from frost, and swiftly peeled the yellow peach clean over the bedside trash can. He then cut off a piece, skewered it with the ice knife, and held it to Franca's lips.

Looking at the juicy and tempting flesh, the crystal clear fruit knife, and Lumian's slightly smiling face, Franca suddenly felt the atmosphere was different from when Jenna cared for her in the morning.

The morning felt like a sick father watching a gentle mother urging a gluttonous child to study, while now it feels like a sick wife…

"You're not eating? If you don't eat it, I will." Lumian appeared to take back the piece of peach and put it in his own mouth, with the attitude of brotherly interaction.

Franca snorted and quickly opened her mouth to bite the piece of peach.

She chewed and swallowed, then said rather nostalgically, "It's the taste from my memories."

As she ate the peach Lumian fed her, she brought up their previous topic.

"What do you think is hidden in B1 of Mushu Hospital?"

Lumian considered carefully before saying, "My contact with Naboredisley and other Devils left me a deep impression of one sentence—the entrance to the Abyss is not only in some place in the real world, but also in everyone's heart. We can all fall into the Abyss and become devils not on the Devil pathway. So I suspect the Mother Tree of Desire, standing at the top of the Devil, Wraith, and Baby Cupid pathways, is using Her control over the Abyss to turn Mr. Fool's psychological dark side into Mushu Hospital.

"Then, the Great Mother and the deity worshiped by Order of All Extinction used the psychological dark side to infiltrate a bit of Their power, gradually eroding the dream. The influence of the Abyss is from bottom to top, from the depths of the heart to the surface. Reflected in the specific symbol of Mushu Hospital, this means remodeling from the underground floors to the ground level."

"You mean the underground floors of Mushu Hospital have become a small-scale Abyss, a more complex and terrifying Abyss?" Franca swallowed the peach in her mouth and asked thoughtfully.

Lumian nodded, skillfully cutting another piece of peach and bringing it to Franca's lips.

"Currently we can see the power of the Mother Tree of Desire, the Great Mother, and that deity of Order of All Extinction. The others are unknown for now."

"These evil gods should only be able to influence part of the dream. It seems they intend to help the Celestial Worthy?" Franca bit the piece of peach with her teeth and asked puzzledly.

Lumian considered for a moment before saying, "That's how it is now, but it may not be the case later.

"Madam Magician told me privately that these evil gods don't actually like the Celestial Worthy that much. If given a choice, Their instinctive desire is to use the Celestial Worthy to pass through the barrier, but not let the Celestial Worthy truly awaken. Perhaps in this dream battle, if Mr. Fool is strong, They will definitely help the Celestial Worthy. If the Celestial Worthy gains a big advantage, they might secretly sabotage the Celestial Worthy's plans.

"Moreover, They Themselves are chaotic and insane, and may do things we can't understand at any time. The Marionettist who should have appeared last night didn't truly show up, perhaps for this reason. In short, what the evil gods would most like to see is both Mr. Fool and the Celestial Worthy continuing to sleep, indulging in this dream city."

Hearing this, Franca was suddenly moved.

She cast her gaze towards the window filled with brilliant sunlight, towards the distant high-rise buildings, and said in a low voice with self-mockery, "If my dream was like this, if the people I care about were all here, I might also indulge in it, not wanting to wake up…"

…

At Dream Tutoring Classes, in front of the reception desk.

Jenna held Ludwig's hand and handed the flier given by Oracle Danitz to the dark-skinned male receptionist.

"I'd like to know more details about your courses."

The dark-skinned male receptionist's eyes lit up and he put on a smile. "Ma'am, what does your child want to learn?"

"Could you first introduce all the courses?" Jenna hadn't decided yet what class to enroll Ludwig in.

The male receptionist was stunned for a moment, then muttered,

"Before, I would introduce first, then ask the customer what they wanted to learn, but I was criticized by several customers. They told me to ask about their needs first, then give targeted introductions… How is this wrong again…"

Without needing Anthony's observation results, Jenna began to feel this receptionist wasn't very bright, and seemed a bit stupid.

She pondered for a moment and said, "Our child only has time on weekends. Please introduce the weekend courses."

According to the information, Mr. Fool had enrolled in this tutoring center's weekend Business English course!

The male receptionist breathed a sigh of relief, took out some materials, and began detailing the weekend courses his company offered.

After listening for a while, Jenna found that only the Beginner English class had a similar schedule to the Business English class.

She turned her head to look at Ludwig's pained expression, then picked up the Beginner English class materials and said, "It's still 6,666 after the discount? Can it be cheaper?"

Even at just 6,666, it was a very large expense for Jenna and the others. They had borrowed some more money through another app yesterday to scrape together enough without affecting their daily lives.

"Well, only our principal has the authority to give further discounts. I'll get her." The dark-skinned receptionist hurriedly went down the hallway to the office to fetch the principal.

She was a beautiful woman with dyed brown hair, an oval face, and clear blue eyes like spring water. She wore an elegant women's blouse paired with a dark pleated knee-length skirt, exposing her fair, long, and straight calves.

"Principal Ai is exceptionally learned and talented. Not only is she good at English, but also French. She can also paint, appraise antiques, play various musical instruments…" the dark-skinned receptionist went on and on with his introduction.

Jenna could see that Principal Ai was a bit embarrassed and uncomfortable with the praise. At the same time, she noticed Ludwig's expression change, as if he had encountered a natural enemy.

"You want to take the Beginner English class?" Principal Ai interrupted the receptionist's introduction and turned her gaze to Ludwig.

"Yes." Jenna nodded sincerely.

Principal Ai looked at Ludwig and said, "Starting at this age has already missed the best phase for language acquisition, but as long as you're willing to learn, any time is a good time. It's never too late.

"Hmm, 5,000—the lowest cost price. We can't delay the child's education."

This should have been a sales pitch to get people to enroll, but Jenna actually heard sincerity in it. She felt Principal Ai was genuinely considering the child's education.

As expected of an archbishop of the Church of Knowledge, former treasure hunter and Pirate Admiral… Jenna recalled the contents of the file and nodded painfully.

"Alright, we'll enroll in the class at this time slot."

Seeing what Jenna was pointing at, Principal Ai couldn't help but frown. "Anderson's class…"

"Is there a problem?" Jenna asked curiously.

"Anderson is very suitable for teaching young children, but he tends to let them develop bad study habits. If we weren't short-staffed, I wouldn't let him teach the beginner class…" Before Principal Ai could finish speaking, a man turned into the hallway.

He had blonde hair and blue eyes, wearing a white shirt and black vest, with his hands in his pockets.

He smiled at Principal Ai and said, "Edwina, did you just mention my name?"

In the dream city, Edwina was Principal Ai's English name.

Principal Ai composed herself and pointed at Ludwig.

"This little friend wants to enroll in your beginner class."

"Is that so?" Anderson walked up to Ludwig and squatted down without concern for his image, questioning his potential student, "Do you like learning English?"

"No." Ludwig shook his head quickly.

Anderson continued asking, "Then do you like learning French?"

"No." Ludwig continued shaking his head.

"How about Mauritian Creole?" Anderson persisted.

Ludwig shook his head again. "No."

"Then do you like learning to paint?" Anderson changed the question.

Ludwig shook his head without hesitation. "No."

"So what do you like?" Anderson wasn't upset at all.

"I like eating." Ludwig was very honest.

Anderson smiled and stood up, saying, "How about this—study cooking with me, and at least you can be a chef in the future."

If it were someone else, they would definitely think Anderson was mocking their child for having no talent for studying. But Jenna just wanted to say he had a keen eye, immediately seeing Ludwig's essence.

"You know how to cook?" the dark-skinned receptionist asked very hostilely.

Anderson laughed. "I'm very good at roasting rabbit. Danitz originally wanted me to teach him, but…"

At this point, Anderson sighed.

He's the Oracle's roommate, the first to discover the Oracle's disappearance? Jenna's spirits suddenly lifted.

Chapter 925: Hidden Meaning

Jenna, holding Ludwig's hand, deliberately fixed her gaze on Anderson's face. "I heard that Mr. Da who gave us the flier has gone missing. Is there any news?"

Principal Ai, whose English name was Edwina, suddenly looked gloomy. "He was killed."

"Oh my goodness, did something really happen to him?" Jenna had already rehearsed how she should react when inquiring about such matters, and even used the catchphrases popular among ordinary people in the dream city.

Before leaving home, she had deliberately applied makeup to make herself less attractive, to avoid becoming the focus of passersby.

The dark-skinned receptionist nodded gravely.

"We went to the police station to identify the body. Although he liked to show off, was a bit impulsive, and loved attention, he was truly a very, very good person. Why would someone murder him?"

"Robbery?" Jenna offered a guess.

"His phone and valuable belongings were still on him." Principal Ai denied this possibility. "Let's wait for the police investigation results. Hopefully, the murderer will be brought to justice soon."

Her expression was a bit sorrowful, obviously not wanting to discuss this matter further.

The foreign teacher, Anderson, then said, "The night before last, before he went out, he told me he'd ask me how to pursue girls when he got back. I waited for him until dawn, sent him messages but he didn't reply, called him but he didn't answer. I thought at the time, he shouldn't have had a romantic encounter, unless he paid for it, but he was very stingy and saved all his money, saying he wanted to buy a house…"

"You felt something was wrong, so you called the police?" Jenna showed a look of sudden realization.

At the same time, she couldn't help but grumble inwardly, Even though you're talking about a sad event, why do I feel like you're mocking the deceased? Is this really Anderson Hood, once the strongest Hunter of the Fog Sea?

The information provided by the Major Arcana cards mentioned that the principal of Dream Tutoring Classes, Ai Nana, corresponded to the Pirate Admiral Vice Admiral Iceberg Edwina from a few years ago, and the foreign teacher Anderson Hood corresponded to Anderson Hood, the strongest Hunter of the Fog Sea in reality. Of course, this title was now disputed, with Louis Berry having quite a few supporters.

Anderson nodded. "Yes, reporting to the police must be timely. If he really encountered problems, the police might have been able to save him in time. If he was indeed just fooling around with paid women, the police could have caught him in bed. Who knew… sigh…"

Are you really concerned about the Oracle, or do you have a grudge against him… Jenna couldn't tell for a moment whether Anderson was joking or not.

Moreover, it's not appropriate to joke about such a tragedy!

Jenna asked a few more questions indirectly, roughly confirming that Anderson had reported to the police less than an hour after the Oracle's death, and the police had taken it seriously, not dismissing it with the usual "adult males must be out of contact for 48 hours" excuse. They had started searching near the late-night food stalls just after midnight.

This is close to what we speculated. Mr. Fool's subconscious probably considered this matter very important, or in his subconscious, the Oracle was quite important, so the police acted unusually and started the investigation immediately… Jenna didn't dwell on the Oracle's death, and began paying and filling out forms to enroll Ludwig in the weekend Beginner English class.

She knew that in such scenarios, one should avoid touching on or asking about others' sorrowful matters, especially those involving death, unless the other person was willing to talk about it.

After leaving Dream Tutoring Classes, on the way to the bus stop, Jenna looked at Anthony, who hadn't said much and seemed to have gone unnoticed by Principal Ai, Anderson Hood, and others. "Did you observe any unusual details?"

"The key figures at Dream Tutoring Classes basically match the descriptions in the file, and their attitudes towards the Oracle's death are normal." Anthony had prepared his thoughts. "But I felt that some of Anderson Hood's words just now were a bit over the top, hiding some subtext, as if he wanted to tell us something…"

Before Anthony could finish, a voice suddenly sounded from behind. "I heard you mention my name."

Jenna and Anthony turned around simultaneously to find that Anderson Hood had somehow also left Dream Tutoring Classes and was only four or five meters away from them.

Jenna thought for two seconds and deliberately said, "We were discussing how you don't seem to be very sad about Mr. Da's death, and even seem to be mocking him."

Anderson smiled and looked around before saying, "Because I feel that the people around me have been acting a bit strange lately."

"Strange?" Jenna asked puzzledly.

Anderson lowered his voice. "Don't you suddenly have this feeling at some point?

"The people around seem to be acting out different scripts to cooperate with you, but occasionally they overdo it or are not meticulous enough, making you notice something is off, making you feel terrified, like it's not real enough.

"Before, they all performed very well, but recently, the flaws have increased significantly."

Wh— Has Anderson Hood perceived the essence of this dream city? But he's just a dream image, not a real person's projection. The Major Arcana card holders said that the real Anderson Hood doesn't have any special items or connections, so he can't enter Mr. Fool's dream…

He now seems like a character in a book who discovers that he's just a character in a story… Jenna was shocked and found it incredible.

Seeing Jenna stunned, Anderson laughed. "You believed it? Looks like the story I made up isn't bad, and my acting isn't bad either…"

After saying this, Anderson waved his hand and walked towards the nearby convenience store.

Behind him, a group of students who had finished class poured out of Dream Tutoring Classes.

Jenna and Anthony exchanged glances, neither angered by Anderson's prank, but rather feeling that he really had something unsaid.

This person, who should only be a dream image, seemed a bit special.

Looking at the students leaving the building where Dream Tutoring Classes was located, Jenna withdrew her gaze and continued walking towards the bus stop.

While waiting for the bus, she curiously asked Ludwig, "You seemed a bit scared when you saw Principal Ai?"

Ludwig mumbled, "She was one of my former teachers."

Ah, Ludwig's teacher from the Church of Knowledge, no wonder… Jenna suddenly understood.

…

In the rental apartment.

After listening to Jenna and Anthony's account, Lumian considered for a moment and said, "Currently, we're still in the observation stage of key figures. Don't further contact Anderson for now. After we finish the observation phase, we'll find an opportunity when there are no other teachers or students from Dream Tutoring Classes around him to probe him."

Franca, who had recovered her health, also regained her normal thinking ability.

"You suspect that Mr. Fool enrolling in Dream Tutoring Classes caused problems for some of the teachers and students there, and the Oracle's death is a continuation of these problems rather than the beginning? And Anderson also became suspicious because he noticed some small inconsistencies?"

"This possibility is quite high." Lumian stood up and said, "I'm going to cook now."

He walked towards the kitchen, and Jenna naturally followed to assist.

Lumian had already steamed a pot of rice in the rice cooker. Now, he put the rice into several large bowls and added spicy sauces like Lao Gan Ma.

"After Ludwig finishes these, he'll be about 70-80% full, and then he can eat dinner normally with us," Lumian casually said to Jenna.

Jenna helped carry two bowls of rice, nodding seriously. "Yes, the food for Ludwig should be divided into two types: one for filling his stomach and one for tasting delicious flavors. It can't just be for filling his stomach."

"You seem quite concerned about him?" Lumian picked up the remaining bowls and chuckled.

Jenna laughed self-mockingly. "I feel a bit guilty, I guess."

After delivering these bowls of rice to Ludwig, Lumian washed the rice cooker clean and steamed another pot for himself and the others, using the quick mode.

"When we have money, we should buy another rice cooker…" Lumian muttered as he took out vegetables and meat from the refrigerator.

Jenna took them over, washed the vegetables under the tap, and used her Demoness powers to control frost to defrost the meat.

She washed one item and passed it to Lumian, who used knives formed from frost to chop and slice.

The two chatted casually, occasionally falling silent to listen to how Franca was teaching Ludwig to watch cartoons in the living room, without slowing down their food preparation.

Jenna glanced at the sky outside, tinged with golden-red afterglow, and said, "We probably won't go out at night for now. What's the plan for tomorrow?"

During the observation phase, they had to be extremely careful. Since the magic mirror Arrodes had hinted that there were problems at night, they wouldn't go out after dark for now.

While quickly slicing with his ice knife, Lumian looked down at the increasing pile of shredded meat and said without hesitation, "In the morning, we'll go to Star Dream Provisions Store to get the reply from the Major Arcana card holders, and observe the police station nearby while we're at it.

"In the afternoon, we'll observe one of the most important targets."

"Mr. Fool's friend Peng Deng?" Jenna knew who Lumian was referring to.

Peng Deng was a very special person in the dream city. He was a good friend of Mr. Fool, that is, Zhou Mingrui, but there was no corresponding person for him in reality.

Following the logic that characters closer to Mr. Fool should be more important, Peng Deng should have a high status and position in the real world. However, the Major Arcana card holders and other coin holders had never found out who he represented or symbolized.

At the same time, they hadn't found any problems with Peng Deng in the dream.

Lumian nodded and continued, "Based on my experience, a character in such a position must have a strong symbolic meaning. We just haven't found the approach or method to interpret it yet.

"One reason why Mr. Star became a key focus and was kicked out of the dream by the Celestial Worthy might be his strong connection to Mr. Fool's Angel of Time—a decryption expert. If He truly came into contact with Peng Deng, He might see something."

"Right." Jenna finished washing all the vegetables, shook her hands, and let the water droplets turn into frost and float down.

…

The next morning, at the entrance of Star Dream Provisions Store.

Franca, feeling a bit fearful yet somewhat expectant, followed Lumian inside.

The magic mirror Arrodes had indeed left some psychological trauma on her, but she was also quite curious about the brass book, which was much more expensive than the mirror, and the true identity of the shop owner.

Chapter 926: Turning Fantasy into Reality

At first glance, Franca noticed that Star Dream Provisions Store really did resemble an antique shop from the Northern Continent, with very obvious mystical elements added.

The only things that didn't fit this style were the shelves themselves and the mobile phone the shopkeeper was fiddling with, along with the tablet placed in front of her.

"Good morning, ma'am. We're here to pick up a reply," Lumian said very politely as he approached the counter.

The shopkeeper, dressed in a black dress and fiddling with her phone, pulled out a letter from under the counter and placed it on top.

"Thank you," Lumian said as he took it, without opening the letter on the spot.

Franca then pointed to the brass book. "Ma'am, may I flip through that book?"

"Go ahead," replied the black-dressed shopkeeper without looking up, and without cautioning Franca not to damage the antique.

Franca walked briskly to the shelf on the right and picked up the book that looked as if it were forged from brass.

The cover was cold and hard to the touch, clearly made of metal.

Franca quickly flipped through it, finding that the inside pages were still paper, but completely blank.

Nothing special… Franca muttered to herself.

No sooner had the thought crossed her mind than she suddenly saw lines of text appear on the blank pages. But these words vanished in an instant, too fast for even a Demoness's eyesight to capture the specific content.

Am I seeing things? Franca patiently waited for 20-30 seconds, and again saw new text appear in the brass book. But she still couldn't make out a single word before the corresponding content disappeared.

In this situation, even the Dream Divination method couldn't be used afterwards to recall the specific images.

There's definitely something strange about this… Franca thought to herself as she returned the brass book to its original place.

At the same time, out of the corner of her eye, she glimpsed a dark greenish-black figure flash by behind the shelf.

It was a snake that had grown white feathers and small wings!

Franca was startled and instinctively took two steps back, turning to warn the shopkeeper, "Ma'am, there's a snake in your shop!"

Be careful!

"No need to be afraid," the black-dressed shopkeeper raised her head, revealing her beautiful face. "That's my pet."

"I see…" Franca let out a sigh of relief. Along with Jenna and Anthony, who were browsing around the store, she followed Lumian out and back to the gray sedan parked nearby. They used frost to forcibly lower the high temperature inside the car caused by the sun.

After sitting in the driver's seat, Franca frowned slightly and said, "The snake I just saw looked a lot like a feathered serpent from the Death pathway. Well, a miniature harmless version.

"The shopkeeper couldn't be keeping a Mythical Creature from the Death pathway as a pet, could she?"

A complete Mythical Creature would represent an Angel level!

Lumian calmly said as he opened the letter in his hand, "It's not impossible. Besides those with special items and connections, those that can enter the dream are at least true gods."

Wh— Were we just dealing with a true god? And she even answered my question? As Franca was still in shock, she saw a person carrying many bags walk up to the driver's side and knock on the window.

"Can I help you?" Franca cautiously rolled down the window.

The person had an ordinary appearance and wore a smile, holding out what was in his hand to Franca. "Wanna buy something? The latest models of bugs and pinhole cameras."

"…" Franca's mouth twitched. "Bro, that's illegal."

The man tried to continue his sales pitch, but Franca put on a stern face and firmly refused.

After closing the window, Franca started the car, while Lumian began examining the reply from the Major Arcana card holders, mainly written by Madam Magician.

At this point, Franca suddenly paused. "Don't rush, let's first make sure there are no bugs or pinhole cameras installed in the car."

With everyone suppressed to Sequence 7, relying on the Demonesses' spirituality and divination could indeed effectively prevent mystical eavesdropping and peeping, but they had completely overlooked the scientific aspect before!

Lumian and Jenna could understand what bugs and pinhole cameras were used for. One relied on a Hunter's observation skills to quickly search for unusual traces, while the other used Magic Mirror Divination to check on the situation by questioning her own spirituality.

"There aren't any," Jenna reported her divination results.

"That's good." Franca breathed a sigh of relief. "From now on, we must remember to guard against scientific methods. It's fortunate that the dude selling contraband items reminded me, otherwise we might have been caught off guard at some point! Uh…"

At this point, Franca turned her gaze to the rearview mirror.

She saw the man who had been selling bugs and pinhole cameras turn a corner at the end of the street and disappear.

"Could he be an ally? Deliberately coming to warn us?" Franca mused perceptively.

Lumian pondered for a moment before stating, "Probably."

"Who could it be?" Franca asked, focusing more on driving as she looked at the road ahead.

Soon, she parked the car in a roadside spot diagonally across from the police station.

Lumian created a medium-sized screen out of frost and displayed the reply from the Major Arcana card holders on this mirror for easy viewing.

"After confirmation, the Demoness of Despair Beyonder characteristics, related materials, and special mirror world fragments you obtained are all real.

"Don't get excited yet. This doesn't mean every Beyonder in the dream city can produce Beyonder characteristics. It must be someone like you whose consciousness directly enters.

"In other words, if you die in the dream city, affected by Fooling, your bodies in the real world will also die, producing Beyonder characteristics. This feedback to the dream city will then Graft the Beyonder characteristics onto the recipient, achieving the effect of turning fantasy into reality and reality into fantasy.

"You should already understand my meaning—the resurrected female corpse is roughly equivalent to a real consciousness entering.

"As for her name and background, you should ask Ludwig. I'll just briefly explain that she was once equivalent to the Celestial Worthy's marionette, so she still is now. Don't ask why—don't ask about high-level matters of the Seer and Marauder pathways. In any case, through this connection, and through the identity Mr. Fool's subconscious wove for her in the dream, she entered this dream and was given new life by the Great Mother, gaining humanity and consciousness that are unlike a marionette.

"Back to the issue of the Beyonder characteristics—if you use it to concoct potions and perform rituals to advance to demigod in the dream city, your bodies in the real world will also become demigods. Remember, under the influence of abilities like Fooling, false dreams may become true reality, and what you consider real may become false.

"Moreover, the dream city is currently restricted to Sequence 7, so the mental effects of potions and the minimum requirements for rituals will also be suppressed to this level. For example, a plague that originally needed to infect 30,000 people and bring them pain and despair might now only need 300 infected. Taking a risk in B1 of Mushu Hospital might be enough to complete the ritual.

"Doesn't this make you think 'that works?' But I must tell you, a price has already been exacted for what fate bestowed. Advancing to Demoness of Despair through this method carries extremely large hidden dangers. Subsequently, extremely great difficulties will need to be overcome to truly count as a Sequence 4 demigod.

"Think about it—in the dream city, all the various problems brought about by consuming a demigod potion are actually restricted to Sequence 7, so they can be endured relatively easily, and Sequence 7 level rituals can be used to assist advancement. But upon leaving the dream and returning to reality, those problems suppressed to Sequence 7 will break free from the Fooling and instantly return to Sequence 4 levels. At that time, the corresponding person will likely lose control immediately.

"Of course, this is not unsolvable, just very difficult—not as simple as performing a complete ritual in reality.

"The only method we can think of now is to fully digest that Sequence 4 potion before leaving the dream, before this dream is no longer maintained. This digestion will be grafted onto reality, allowing the vast majority of hidden dangers suppressed to Sequence 7 to be resolved in advance. When the person returns to reality, they will be a Sequence 4 demigod in good condition—reality will have been truly fooled at this moment.

"The difficulty with this method lies in the fact that how long the dream can be maintained and when you will be locked onto by the Celestial Worthy and directly kicked out are not things you can decide for yourselves. It's full of unknown risks, and it's extremely difficult to obtain a good opportunity and enough time to digest the potion."

Reading to this point, Franca, Lumian, and the others looked at each other, speechless.

Is that even allowed?

They had originally thought that using false Angel qualifications and sealed Angels to simply act out roles and quickly digest potions was already the limit of exploiting rule loopholes. Who knew that after reading all these words about Fooling and Grafting, they felt their brains had been fooled.

You can really truly advance in the dream…

The potion can be fooled, the ritual can be fooled, the mind can be fooled, even the boundary between fantasy and reality can be fooled…

Of course, it's also possible that only we ourselves are fooled, believing we've truly completed the advancement and become demigods when in reality we've just developed a mental disorder…

Haha, everyone's been fooled! Everyone's been fooled! Franca couldn't help but go a little crazy in her mind.

"Is this the terrifying aspect of great existences?" Jenna took a small breath.

Lumian chuckled. "Many things we consider unbreakable and unchangeable may just be playthings for great existences."

"They can make them round if They want, or flat if They want…" Franca mumbled along.

Through this letter, they truly and concretely felt what it meant to be a great existence.

They continued reading the letter displayed on the ice crystal screen.

"After reading the previous part, haven't you had this thought:

"In the future, after Mr. Fool wakes up, couldn't we ask him to use similar dreams to help lower the difficulty of rituals and advancements, allowing those in need to become demigods and giving them enough time to digest potions in the dream?

"First, we must be clear that Mr. Fool alone would find it difficult to accomplish this, because such a real dream, a dream that allows Fooling to blur fantasy and reality, comes from other domains.

"Second, not every demigod will eventually be able to digest their own potion. They will live their entire lives in a dream, and if the dream cognition is not restored to Sequence 4 levels, their lifespan will also be suppressed to the corresponding mid to low Sequences. But if the dream cognition is restored to Sequence 4, those problems hidden by Fooling will erupt again.

"Third, is it really appropriate to cause Mr. Fool to sleep for several years, over ten years, or even centuries to help one Beyonder advance?

"Finally, the acting out of many potions will tend towards evil. If you really want to create a large-scale plague in Mr. Fool's dream, not to mention how easily the Celestial Worthy would notice, Mr. Fool would be the first to kick you out."

Why do I feel like Madam Magician is hinting at me… I really hadn't thought of that. This dream is just like reality, not at all like a game. How could I have antisocial thoughts? Even in games, I only stopped being humane after getting bored with normal gameplay… Franca muttered to herself.

Chapter 927: Misfortune?

After discussing matters related to the reanimated female corpse, Madam Magician affirmed Lumian and the others' current strategy. She said one major reason why previous gold coin holders failed to find a way to awaken Mr. Fool was that they were too eager to contact the target person, resulting in being locked onto by the Celestial Worthy and kicked out of the dream, or fully restricted, only able to make some contributions in accumulating intelligence.

At the end of the letter, Madam Magician told Lumian and the others that some gold coin holders could still enter this dream city, but they could not communicate with Mr. Fool or intervene in any events. However, they could act as human cameras, helping to collect information on certain occasions.

The content displayed on the ice crystal screen ended here. Lumian flicked his wrist, burning the letter, and turned to Ludwig. "The background of the reanimated female corpse."

Ludwig was staring longingly at a snack shop on the street, and reluctantly recounted the information he obtained from the corpse:

"Panatiya, a member of the Demoness Sect, nicknamed Nation of 'Despair Nightingale', was one of the perpetrators of the Great Smog of Backlund incident. She became the marionette of Antigonus, a great noble of the Tudor Empire, in a secret town on the way to the Nation of the Evernight. At that time, Antigonus was in a state of madness, mentally closer to the Celestial Worthy you guys talk about…"

"For the top level of the Marauder pathway, the Despair Nightingale is indeed equivalent to the Celestial Worthy's marionette." Lumian nodded slowly after carefully listening to Ludwig's statement.

His gaze turned to outside the car window, watching people coming and going at the entrance of the police station, and he said as he pondered, "Fooling, Grafting, dreams, reality—I don't fully understand these concepts, so I can only trust Madam Magician's explanation for now. What puzzles me is why the Celestial Worthy had to bring the Despair Nightingale marionette into the dream city, rather than using her virtual image here?

"It couldn't be just to give us Beyonder characteristics and special mirror world fragments, could it?"

"Indeed," Franca agreed, also finding the Celestial Worthy's choice in this matter incomprehensible.

Since Panatiya was the Celestial Worthy's marionette, her corresponding dream image should also easily become the Celestial Worthy's marionette again. In her subsequent tasks, the role she played did not require her to be a real Demoness-judging from Panatiya's reenacted script alone, an illusory Demoness belonging to the dream city could equally fulfill the corresponding responsibilities.

The Celestial Worthy chose a more complicated method over a simpler one, which had to imply hidden reasons.

These reasons might be crucial.

Anthony, sitting in the back, followed up with his analysis of the character's psychological state.

"If the description in the information and Madam Susie's reminder are correct, Mr. Fool's dream image is very cautious and careful. So sending a Demoness to approach him with reasonable excuses and in a gradual manner, cultivating feelings through daily, moderate interactions to dissolve unfamiliarity and wariness, might not be the best choice. Because Demonesses are too beautiful, it would instinctively make someone who considers themselves ordinary draw a line in their heart, feeling that it's not something they could obtain."

Lumian, Jenna, and Franca—the three Demonesses—all looked at Anthony simultaneously.

Anthony paused for two seconds before continuing, "If I were to arrange it, I would find a way to turn one of Zhou Mingrui's current female colleagues into a marionette. That colleague should preferably be very ordinary, not a Beyonder, and not particularly pretty, but still have her own charm from certain angles or expressions.

"After she becomes familiar with Zhou Mingrui, arrange for her to drink the Assassin potion, gradually and unobtrusively enhancing her charm, allowing love to develop slowly…"

Lumian's eyes flickered a few times, but he remained silent.

"You Spectators…" Franca sighed sincerely.

Indeed, better at writing scripts than the Celestial Worthy.

She had just seriously thought about it and felt that if it were her former self before transmigrating, she definitely wouldn't be able to resist!

"Then why did the Celestial Worthy have to bring His own Demoness marionette into the dream city, and even use the power of the Great Mother to give her new life?" Jenna repeated Lumian and Franca's previous confusion.

After a brief silence in the car, Lumian thoughtfully said, "Don't you think there are too many Demonesses appearing in this matter?"

"What do you mean?" Jenna vaguely guessed what Lumian wanted to say.

It was the dream symbolism he had been emphasizing several times every day recently.

Lumian slightly curled his lips.

"As a team coming to the dream to awaken Mr. Fool, the number of Demonesses among us is abnormally high, exceeding half. And the main opponent abandoned the simple approach, chose the complicated one, and even brought a Demoness marionette belonging to Himself here.

"The Major Arcana card holders have said that Mr. Fool has authority over fate, and that Celestial Worthy must have it too.

"The lucky coins ultimately gathered in our hands, bringing us to this dream city—doesn't this symbolize the choice of fate, symbolizing that it will be a Demoness who awakens Mr. Fool? Similarly, it will also be a Demoness who helps the Celestial Worthy achieve victory?

"I had previously felt that the pathways chosen by the lucky coins this time were too monotonous, and the appearance of the reanimated female corpse deepened my suspicion."

"Then why must it be a Demoness? And why must it be an external Demoness with real consciousness?" Jenna mused along this line of thought.

Perhaps figuring out this question would reveal how to awaken Mr. Fool.

Lumian chuckled.

"For now, I can only think of two reasons:

"First, a real Demoness symbolizes real calamity, and real calamity will bring great changes to the dream city. Where there's change, there's opportunity—maybe good, maybe bad. But this doesn't explain why there aren't as many Hunters, as Hunters are also symbols of calamity.

"Second, some crucial thing, a path leading to Mr. Fool's awakening, can only be completed by a Demoness of a not-low Sequence."

"It could be both reasons," Franca said, while worrying about the air conditioning costs and considering switching to ice blocks for cooling, but also concerned about being detected by Beyonders in the police force. She continued observing people entering and leaving the police station.

Thus, they observed and discussed intermittently until noon.

During this process, Lumian and the others saw Officer Deng and his fiancée Daly leave hand in hand to find a restaurant for lunch, and also saw key figures like Old Neil who bore the title of Interpol officer.

Their observations largely matched the descriptions in their information.

"Didn't see Mr. Star…" Franca withdrew her gaze, preparing to drive onto the road.

"He's probably out investigating the case at the mall's surveillance room," Lumian had noticed this information while scrolling through his phone earlier.

Franca didn't say more and drove the car to the new urban district, full of high-rise buildings and a modern atmosphere, parking opposite a building over a hundred meters tall.

Their next observation target, also a key suspect, Peng Deng, worked here.

Just as Franca parked the car, Lumian and the others saw the target approaching from a distance.

He was a young man with an unremarkable appearance, holding an iced coffee and looking down at his phone.

Every time Jenna thought he would bump into pedestrians or obstacles on the road, Peng Deng, without raising his head, would skillfully maneuver around them.

Almost simultaneously, Peng Deng's information flashed through Lumian and the others' minds:

"Peng Deng, 24 years old, from the same hometown as Zhou Mingrui, classmate from kindergarten, elementary school, and middle school, schoolmate in high school, currently an interior designer, living in Herun Community next to New City Garden.

"He has a girlfriend named Nie Zhen, living in the High-Tech Zone, planning to move in with Peng Deng after their current lease expires.

"Currently sharing rent with a foreign worker named Grisha, who has an eccentric personality, is paranoid, and has crude manners…"

Lumian carefully observed Peng Deng, who was wearing a light-colored shirt with sweat seeping through the back, not missing any of his movements or facial expression details.

Only after Peng Deng walked back into the building did Lumian withdraw his gaze and ask Anthony, "Did you notice anything?"

Anthony shook his head.

"That's normal. If it were that simple to discover problems, the Major Arcana card holders would have had results long ago," Lumian wasn't disappointed.

He said to all team members, "We're not sure if Peng Deng will go out in the afternoon. Let's go observe his girlfriend and his roommate for a while first. Tomorrow is the weekend, and there's a possibility of contacting Mr. Fool at the tutoring class in the afternoon. We need to quickly go through all the listed personnel that need observation."

Jenna and the others had no objections.

Franca tried to start the car but couldn't complete the ignition no matter what.

The rumbling sound failed to transform into a steady hum.

"Dammit! The car broke down…" Franca slapped the steering wheel, unable to hide her frustration.

At this moment, only one thought appeared in Lumian and Jenna's minds:

We'll have to pay for repairs…

Immediately after, Lumian furrowed his brow.

"Isn't this too coincidental?

"The car breaks down right after we observe Peng Deng…"

"Indeed, there were no signs of trouble before." Franca also began to find this suspicious.

Would approaching Peng Deng with ill intentions lead to misfortune?

But the Major Arcana card holders who had previously observed Peng Deng hadn't mentioned any similar situations.

"This is an anomaly, let's record it…" Lumian said to Anthony.

He opened the door and got out of the car, habitually wanting to check it himself to see if he could repair it. But after standing in the sun-scorched area, he remembered that he had no understanding of the structure of internal combustion engine cars. The only thing he could do was bang on the hood a few times, hoping that vibration and luck might somehow make the vehicle fix itself.

"I'll call the car rental company," Franca said, picking up her phone from the holder.

Just then, an enthusiastic voice came from the roadside.

"Hello, Li, and An, what's wrong?"

Lumian and Anthony, who had also gotten out of the car, looked towards the street and saw it was Stiano, the foreign exchange student they had met yesterday, who was suspected to be the dream image corresponding to a high-ranking member of the Church of Steam.

"The car broke down." Lumian pointed at the gray sedan.

Stiano, carrying a travel backpack, brightened up.

"Maybe I can help you fix it."

Chapter 928: Adding a Friend

When Stiano volunteered to help, Lumian's thoughts raced. He smiled and said, "Thank you so much!"

Stiano took off his backpack and, like a magician, pulled out one car repair tool after another. He opened the hood of the gray sedan.

Seeing this, Franca couldn't help but wail inwardly, No!

It was only going to cost one or two thousand to fix before, but now it might cost several thousand after he's done!

She could guess why Lumian was willing to let Stiano help. The information provided by the Major Arcana card holders didn't mention this high-ranking Church of Steam member's projection in the dream city. He didn't seem very important or related to Mr. Fool's awakening, yet he had encountered the team twice by chance. This indicated either an arrangement of fate or that he himself harbored something special. Observing him more at this stage might provide useful guidance at a crucial moment in the future.

For the Demonesses, this was both a conclusion from logical reasoning and a prompt from spiritual intuition.

Never mind, this is just a dream, not reality. As long as Mr. Fool believes that the Church of Steam and Machinery's high-ranking members are good at repairing machines, then Stiano should be able to fix the car… Franca comforted herself, quietly producing ice cubes to dispel the heat invading the car.

Soon after, Stiano raised his face, with traces of light yellow beard, avoiding his oil-stained palms, and used the back of his hand to push up the plain glasses perched on the bridge of his nose. He said to Franca inside the car and Lumian outside, "It's fixed."

Really? Don't lie to me… Franca tried it and found that the vehicle could indeed start again, very smoothly.

Lumian took out a bottle of mineral water filled with "Hunter-Demoness" branded boiled water and provided a stream of water for Stiano to wash his hands and tools at the roadside sewer opening.

After the other party had cleaned his hands and put away his tools, Lumian expressed his thanks again and took out his phone, unlocked the screen, and said with a smile, "Let's add each other on WeChat. If you need any help in the future, you can always find us. Haha, as long as it's within our capabilities."

Stiano looked at Lumian seriously, then smiled and said, "Okay."

He then took out his own phone, allowing Lumian to add him as a WeChat friend by scanning the code.

After scanning, Lumian found that the other party's nickname was "Electric Power Energy and Information Technology".

Feels weird… Lumian waved goodbye to Stiano, returned to the gray sedan, and showed this gentleman's WeChat to Jenna and the others.

Franca glanced at it and said amusingly, "This nickname sounds like a university course.

"Check out his Moments!"

This was the first non-team member friend Lumian had added on WeChat, completely forgetting that Franca had mentioned they could look at Moments to gather information.

He quickly tapped on Stiano's avatar and then went to his Moments:

"Today: The professor's understanding of the concept of information is rather biased. Information is also energy, and energy also contains information. One of the essences of each existence is the aggregation of corresponding information.

"Yesterday: Found an old car, the mechanical aesthetics fascinated me.

"August 13: I created a wonderful machine.

"—Only 3 days of Moments are visible—"

"A wonderful machine?" Lumian murmured puzzledly, "How wonderful can it be? As a local in the dream city, no matter how wonderful the machine he creates, it shouldn't be able to exceed the limitations of the dream itself."

"He does indeed seem like a high-ranking member of the Church of Steam, and also shows a state of striving to learn and think after coming into contact with more advanced civilizations. This should be the underlying logic when Mr. Fool's subconscious wove this image," Franca casually said as she drove the car back onto the road.

In the time that followed, they observed key targets such as Peng Deng's girlfriend Nie Zhen, Peng Deng's roommate Grisha, Zhou Mingrui's roommate Mobet, and others.

As it was nearing the end of the workday, they returned to the building where Peng Deng worked, patiently waiting for him to finish his day's work.

Peng Deng appeared just after 6 p.m. and chose to take the subway back to Herun Community where he rented.

Franca drove the car with Jenna and Ludwig to wait at the destination in advance, while Lumian and Anthony followed into the subway station.

Along the way, many women cast glances at Lumian, seemingly struck by his handsomeness, even though Lumian had made himself look a bit uglier before going out.

Of course, a few men were also sneaking peeks.

Meanwhile, Peng Deng was focused on his phone, not caring at all whether there were any beautiful women around, let alone someone of the same sex who was merely charming.

A normal level of handsomeness isn't enough to be approached or attract too much attention. Unless there's an added gimmick, it won't become a trending search or headline… Lumian felt a bit relieved.

Anthony, beside him, was naturally ignored by those around them.

Thanks to the Hunter's tracking skills and the Demoness's ability to hide in shadows at any time, Lumian easily followed Peng Deng to the vicinity of Herun Community.

The latter didn't go home immediately but turned towards Ankang North Road, walked to near New City Garden, and entered a restaurant called "Yuzhou Small Dishes".

Lumian looked left and right and saw Franca roll down the car window and wave to him and Anthony.

After they got in the car, Franca asked with concern, "Did you gain anything?"

Lumian first shook his head, then muttered puzzledly, "Now I'm more curious about what's on his phone that he can keep looking at it constantly."

He was looking at it while riding the subway, while on the escalator, and even while walking.

"You don't understand." Franca sighed.

Jenna, looking at the "Yuzhou Small Dishes" restaurant, recalled, "This is the restaurant where Mr. Fool and Peng Deng often eat. If we wait a bit longer, Mr. Fool might come too.

"Should we observe their interaction?"

Lumian glanced at the sky outside. "We can."

It wouldn't get dark until after 8 p.m. in this dream city's summer.

Jenna tersely acknowledged. "Then I'll buy a roast duck for Ludwig, so he stops complaining about being hungry."

She had already found dinner for Ludwig earlier, at a "Fruit Wood Roast Duck" shop on the same side as the car, with a paper sign saying "30 yuan each".

Lumian looked at Ludwig, whose mouth was dripping with suspicious liquid, and said with a smile, "Make it two; we'll try some too."

Time ticked by minute by minute. Lumian and the others had tried the roast duck and eaten steamed buns, but they still hadn't seen Mr. Fool's dream incarnation, Zhou Mingrui. Meanwhile, Peng Deng had finished his meal and was returning towards Herun Community.

"Maybe Mr. Fool wanted to try something different tonight?" Franca dipped the last piece of duck meat wrapped in pancake into sweet bean sauce and brought it towards her mouth.

Gulp!

She heard a clear swallowing sound.

Glancing at Ludwig's face full of desire, Franca sighed and handed over the food in her hand.

Lumian withdrew his gaze from outside the window.

"He might have gone to do something else. I didn't see him return to New City Garden."

"Should we continue tailing?" Jenna pointed at Peng Deng's retreating figure.

Lumian shook his head. "It's getting dark. If we keep following, something unexpected might happen."

Franca said in an agreeing tone, "The Major Arcana card holders also mentioned that one of the most likely signs of Peng Deng being problematic is that he has never met with Mr. Fool, that is, Zhou Mingrui, after dark.

"They're childhood friends, so it's very normal to have a late-night snack together or watch a movie. Mr. Fool has initiated invitations many times, and Peng Deng himself has also invited Mr. Fool, but they never managed to meet up in the end. Every time it was because Peng Deng had something come up—either his girlfriend wouldn't allow it, or his girlfriend suddenly got sick, or his roommate broke the door lock and they had to wait for a locksmith to come open the door…

"But when they choose to have meals or go out during the day, they always succeed, and that girlfriend who always obstructs Peng Deng occasionally participates too."

"Combined with the magic mirror's hint to 'beware of the night', these details seem very strange." Lumian nodded.

Back at the rented apartment.

Seeing Lumian staring at the increasingly dark sky outside and falling into deep thought, Franca asked curiously, "What's on your mind?"

"I'm thinking of going out tonight, to move around like ordinary people, to see if we encounter any more anomalies or problems," Lumian said consideringly.

He wanted to test the boundaries of the "night problem" a bit before officially contacting Zhou Mingrui tomorrow afternoon.

They hadn't gone out last night, and everything was normal.

"Like ordinary people…" Franca's eyes twinkled slightly, and she said to Lumian and Jenna with a smile, "Let's go watch a movie!"

Lumian and the others already knew the concept of movies and were curious about it, so Franca's suggestion was unanimously approved.

Franca immediately smiled like a fox who had stolen a hen. "Let's go to a different mall. We can also scratch some more lottery tickets. Then we'll have money for tonight's movie tickets and popcorn, right?"

We can't go to the same place, it would attract attention!

Hearing the word "popcorn", Ludwig, who had been uninterested before, suddenly brightened up.

…

In another mall.

Franca, satisfied with winning over two thousand in prizes again, led her teammates towards the cinema on the fourth floor.

Passing by the third floor, they saw a long queue forming at the entrance of a very artistic-looking bookstore.

"A book signing event?" Franca, who was curious about everything and interested in everything since coming to the dream city, pulled Jenna over to see which author it was.

"Romance novel queen… Salted Fish Without Dreams… author of the original Great Pirate series novels…" Franca read out the key words on the pull-up banner.

"That pen name is so strange," Jenna expressed her feelings.

Franca smiled and said, "This is only ordinarily strange. Later, I'll help you download an app and show you how the pen names of those web novel authors are each stranger than the last!"

As she spoke, Franca tried hard to stand on tiptoe to look at the author who was signing books. Lumian walked to her side and also cast his gaze into the bookstore.

A few seconds later, as the author raised her head, Lumian and Franca's expressions froze simultaneously.

"What's wrong?" Jenna noticed their abnormality.

Franca answered with a strange expression, "I don't think my eyes are playing tricks on me…

"How can she be a romance novel queen…"

"Who?" Jenna asked puzzledly.

"Madam Magician," answered Lumian in a suppressed voice.

Chapter 929: Movie

"What?" Jenna was shocked by Lumian's answer.

Madam Magician's image in Mr. Fool's dream is the romance novelist "Salted Fish Without Dreams"?

Although Jenna had previously seen characters like Emperor Roselle as a company CEO (in news reports) and Vice Admiral Iceberg as a cram school principal, she had never actually interacted with those famous figures in reality. But Madam Magician was someone she had truly met, talked to, and sought advice from.

How could such a powerful Angel, a holder of a Major Arcana card, and one of Mr. Fool's followers, be a romance novelist here?

This suddenly highlighted the absurdity, distortion, and ridiculousness of the dream.

Jenna's position didn't allow her to see through the crowd to the author's appearance, so she turned her gaze to the inside of the bookstore's glass wall, where the silhouette of the person signing books was faintly reflected.

Jenna's eyes, disguised as deep brown by Lie, instantly became profound, as if hiding mirror after mirror within.

Through the mirrors, she clearly saw the author's figure: long, slightly curled hair dyed brown, wearing a colorful spaghetti strap dress with layered fabric, tassels, and batik, exuding a strong exotic style. Combined with her beautiful face, it gave off a free and casual aura. It was unmistakably the Major Arcana card holder, Madam Magician!

"It really is her…" Jenna whispered.

Lumian stepped back a few paces, distancing himself from the crowd queuing for autographs.

Hiding a mirror in his hand and speaking in a low voice, he muttered as if to himself, "Based on our observations and the information provided by the Major Arcana card holders, when Mr. Fool's subconscious weaves dream images, it significantly references the characteristics of the corresponding real-world figures. Emperor Roselle was the ruler of a country, so in the dream city he became the boss of a large company. Vice Admiral Iceberg is a demigod of the Church of Knowledge, fond of teaching, and long educated pirates on the Golden Dream. So in the dream city, she became the principal of a cram school…"

"Are you suggesting that Madam Magician's real identity is more or less related to being an author?" Franca, also in the Mirror Maze, quickly understood what Lumian was trying to express.

Lumian's gaze swept across the banners reflected in the Mirror Maze, stopping on a description.

He asked Franca and Jenna in a low voice, "What is the Great Pirate series about?"

"I'll search it up," Franca said, taking out her phone and tapping on the screen.

As she searched, Franca's expression gradually became strange.

Jenna, suppressing the urge to search for related content on her own phone, asked curiously, "Got anything?"

"The Great Pirate series is about legendary pirates active at sea. Each volume has a different theme. The volume of the third part is 'Crazy Adventurer', and the story takes place between the adventurer Gehrman Sparrow and three beautiful female pirates: Admiral of Stars, Vice Admiral Iceberg, and Vice Admiral Ailment…" Franca summarized the key points to her companions with complex emotions.

Jenna was stunned upon hearing this. Although Lumian had some guesses and suspicions before, he couldn't help but interrupt Franca, "Isn't this part of the content of The Great Adventurer series?"

"Apparently so," Franca agreed.

Lumian looked again at the banners reflected in the Mirror Maze and the queuing crowd, saying as if in thought,

"Mr. Fool's subconscious has woven Madam Magician's dream identity as the original author of the Great Pirate series, specializing in romance…

"The Great Adventurer series from the real world is partially reflected in the Great Pirate series in the dream…

"The Great Adventurer series has a strong romantic element, with the interactions between Gehrman Sparrow and the female pirate admirals described rather ambiguously, but left unclear…

"The Great Adventurer series has turned many famous pirates into comic characters or protagonists of sensational rumors, and even includes introductions to mystical knowledge and the privacy of two Oracles. Yet the author Fors Wall has never been visited by any pirate or warned by the Church…"

Hearing this, Franca had already drawn a conclusion and said softly, "How would the pirates dare…"

Seeking out the Angel of Stars for an explanation would be like delivering oneself for a bounty.

"Madam Magician is Fors Wall, the author of The Great Adventurer series?" Jenna asked herself incredulously, then answered her own question, "I always thought she didn't do book signings for fear of exposing her whereabouts and being revenged upon by pirates…"

Jenna suddenly turned to Lumian. "Didn't you say Madam Magician was an Angel from the early Fifth Epoch, over a thousand years old? Why would she suddenly decide to write novels?"

"That was just my guess. Perhaps Mr. Door lived long enough and only perished in recent years, and Madam Magician was His youngest student," Lumian said, finding this both shocking and strangely amusing. He continued carefully, "Also, haven't you noticed? Because of the popularity of the Great Adventurer series, Mr. Fool's avatar Gehrman Sparrow has gained a large number of worshipers. To use a term I heard before, Gehrman Sparrow has acquired many anchors."

"Was The Great Adventurer series written by Madam Magician at the behest of the Church of The Fool, as a form of evangelism?" Franca had a sudden realization.

Lumian nodded. "And perhaps Madam Magician's current sequence requires her to play the role of an 'author'."

"It's possible," Franca suddenly became excited, "Next time we meet Madam Magician, we should ask for her autograph. Wow, would an Angel's signature have some special effects…"

Before she finished speaking, Franca and Jenna simultaneously turned to Lumian and asked in unison, "What about those letters from before?"

"…" Lumian said with considerable regret, "I burned them."

Jenna shared his regret but said with anticipation, "When we return to the real world, we can ask Madam Magician about the future developments of The Great Adventurer, when the next book will be out, and if Frank Lee, the first mate of the Admiral of Stars, is really that exaggerated…"

As they chatted, Lumian dispelled the Mirror Maze.

The three of them glanced at the long queue for the book signing, then turned with Anthony and Ludwig to the nearest escalator and went up to the fourth floor.

"What movie should we watch?" Franca scanned the promotional posters, her eyes suddenly lighting up, "Let's watch 'The Great Pirate 3'!"

"Alright," Lumian agreed immediately.

It would be a good opportunity to see what Gehrman Sparrow looks like in Mr. Fool's dream!

Franca, who had just won a significant amount from lottery tickets, generously bought five seats in a row, three buckets of caramel popcorn, and five cups of iced cola.

Ludwig had a bucket of popcorn to himself, Franca, Jenna, and Lumian shared one, and Anthony and Ludwig shared another.

After entering the cinema and finding their corresponding seats, before Franca could allocate, she found that Lumian and Jenna had left a space between them for her.

I thought Lumian would sit in the middle himself… Franca sat down happily between Lumian and Jenna. Ludwig sat right next to Lumian, with Anthony on Ludwig's other side.

Crunch, crunch, Ludwig kept tossing popcorn into his mouth, occasionally sipping his iced cola, completely ignoring the images on the screen.

After a few minutes, the opening credits began: howling winds, a dark sea surface, waves sometimes rising high enough to seemingly touch the sky, sometimes sinking into huge maelstroms.

Jenna's gaze was immediately captivated, as if she herself were in this terrifying scene showcasing the power of nature.

"The special effects are not bad," Franca commented briefly.

She wasn't as impressed as Jenna because she had seen many blockbusters before her transmigration. Moreover, during the Marriage of the Sea ceremony in Port Santa, she and Lumian had personally witnessed and experienced an even more exaggerated maelstrom than a shipwreck, which was beyond comparison to these special effects.

Lumian's gaze focused on the three pirate ships sailing out of the storm and the female pirates standing at the bow.

"That Vice Admiral Iceberg looks about seventy to eighty percent like Principal Ai from Dream Tutoring Classes…" Jenna recognized one of the female pirates, as she seemed to be modeled after Principal Ai Nana from Dream Tutoring Classes.

Hearing Jenna's words, Lumian slightly furrowed his brow.

The Vice Admiral Iceberg in the movie looked very similar to the demigod he had seen in the dungeon of the Church of Knowledge!

Was that the former Vice Admiral Iceberg—Edwina? Lumian suddenly realized.

"The casting for this movie is quite true to the original," Franca sighed.

Then, her gaze froze, and she pointed at another female pirate, saying in a low voice, "Who do you think she resembles?"

Lumian fell momentarily quiet before responding, "Ma'am Hermit."

"Ma'am Hermit's true identity is the Admiral of Stars, no, Queen of Stars Cattleya? No wonder the latest installment of 'The Great Adventurer' described the events between her and Gehrman Sparrow so cautiously…" Jenna murmured.

They all fell into silence again.

At this moment, the scene changed, and a man appeared amidst the storm and lightning.

The man wore a black trench coat and a half-top hat, standing on the surging waves, slowly raising his previously lowered head.

In Lumian's eyes, this man seemed to be carved from Zhou Mingrui as the original prototype, but sharper and colder. Even wearing gold-rimmed glasses, he could make people involuntarily close their mouths.

Gehrman Sparrow!

The protagonist of this installment of the Great Pirate series, Gehrman Sparrow!

With this, the opening credits ended, and the main feature began.

The initial close-up focused on a fish being roasted, with various spices being sprinkled on it.

Ludwig, who had spared a glance at the movie, suddenly raised his arm, pointing at the roasted fish on the screen, and said to his godfather, "I want to eat that!"

"Heh, ordering a meal now?" Lumian chuckled, grabbed a few pieces of popcorn, and stuffed them into Ludwig's mouth.

Chapter 930: Weekend Arrives

"Not bad, a qualified popcorn flick," Franca remarked sincerely after exiting the cinema, savoring the experience for a few seconds.

Beside her, the dispersing crowd poured into the now-closed mall, walking towards the still-operating elevators under dim lighting.

Jenna remained silent for a moment, then said with a mix of longing and dejection, "With movies now, will anyone still watch plays…"

Understanding why Jenna would say this, Franca replied in a comforting tone, "People still watch them. Plays and operas have different characteristics and charms compared to movies and TV shows. A large portion of people will still appreciate them, they just won't be the mainstream of society anymore.

"And besides…" Franca deliberately lightened her tone. "Theater actors are actors, and TV and film actors are actors too."

Jenna immediately fell into contemplation.

"That's true, but the performance setting has changed, and many acting techniques need to be altered, otherwise they'll seem exaggerated…"

As the dispersing crowd thinned out, Lumian thoughtfully said, "If the power of the Mother Tree of Desire can penetrate Mushu Hospital, wouldn't actors be easily influenced?"

"Uh…" Franca hesitated for a moment, then sighed, "It's possible. Some of them live lives of debauchery and overflowing desires."

Lumian nodded, holding Ludwig's hand as he followed the audience ahead towards the elevators still operating for cinema-goers to leave after the mall's closure.

Along the way, Franca found the environment very dim, with the few lights still on only illuminating the path and obstacles enough to prevent tripping and collisions.

"It has the atmosphere of a bizarre story," Franca hadn't forgotten that their outing tonight was to test the boundaries of the phrase "beware of the night". From the information provided by the Major Arcana card holders, she knew that Sequence 4 of the Seer pathway, which was also the The Fool pathway, was called Bizarro Sorcerer. So, she deliberately used "bizarre" to describe the story rather than "ghost".

Hearing this, Jenna, already highly alert, became even more vigilant.

Lumian, acting as if nothing was wrong, led Ludwig into the elevator. But when Franca and Jenna followed, he kept pressing the door open button and turned to smile at the others in the elevator.

"Sorry, I still have a companion who hasn't come in yet."

The departing audience instinctively looked outside the door, finding the elevator lobby empty and no footsteps approaching from afar.

Their hearts suddenly suspended.

Lumian released the button and smiled at everyone. "Alright, he's in now."

The gazes of others in the elevator suddenly froze.

They hadn't seen anyone enter the elevator.

Slap! Franca patted Lumian's shoulder, saying amusedly, "Feeling happy about playing a prank, aren't you?"

After entering the dream city, influenced by online information and daily environment, she gradually recovered the tone and manner of speaking of a "local".

After the playful scolding, she quickly apologized to the others in the elevator, "I'm sorry, I'm sorry, my friend's brain often has spasms; please forgive his poor mental state."

The initially angered audience members, seeing such a beautiful woman sincerely apologize, felt embarrassed to make a fuss, but still turned their gaze towards Lumian.

He should apologize himself!

Lumian immediately bowed slightly.

"I'm sorry, my joke went too far."

The people in the elevator looked over Franca and Lumian, some feeling sorry that such a flower had found a mentally unstable young man, others thinking the young man's face was wasted and wanting to crowdfund treatment for his brain.

At this moment, the elevator doors slowly closed, descending.

Suddenly, the lights inside the elevator started flickering.

Everyone's hearts leaped to their throats.

Franca and Jenna were reminded of the phrase "beware of the night", while others recalled Lumian's prank earlier.

Fortunately, the flickering lights didn't affect the elevator's operation. Some audience members left on the first floor, while others, along with Lumian's group, went to the underground parking lot.

Back in the rented gray sedan, Franca didn't remark that "everything was still normal, it was just an interlude within an interlude".

She firmly resisted any behavior that might raise flags.

She turned to Lumian and asked curiously, "Why did you suddenly pull that prank earlier?"

Lumian chuckled.

"At that moment, I suddenly thought, what if Anthony's Psychological Invisibility' became uncontrollable, wouldn't something similar happen? So I tried it out."

Hearing Anthony's name, Franca and Jenna quickly turned to look at the back seat.

Seeing Anthony, they both quietly sighed in relief.

Thank goodness, he did get in the car.

I remember him getting in!

Lumian continued, "Besides, a not-too-excessive prank like that in a relatively enclosed environment like an elevator, combined with the night factor, might allow us to experiment with some things without drawing too much attention."

"Did you find out anything?" Franca pressed.

"I'm not sure if the subsequent flickering of the elevator lights was a product of the experiment," Lumian replied thoughtfully.

"Does that count?" Jenna felt it was just a simple mechanical failure that didn't lead to anything unusual afterward.

Lumian chuckled.

"Don't you think the elevator light flickering made it feel more like a bizarre story?

"The prank I pulled was also intentionally developing in the direction of a bizarre story."

Franca, who had driven the car out of the parking space, suddenly realized.

"Is this based on the description of Bizarro Sorcerer in the materials, to see if it could trigger the instincts of the dream subconscious and bring about certain controllable changes?"

"This is more likely to happen at night, which belongs to the more evil and unpleasant side of the dream." Lumian had similar thoughts before going out.

They didn't dare to do more experiments and returned to their rented community by car, fearing to stimulate the Celestial Worthy and draw His gaze.

Nothing happened along the way.

Back in the rental apartment, Lumian looked around and said, "Preliminarily, it seems that if we don't interact with Mr. Fool and important dream figures, or investigate mystical issues, it doesn't seem likely for us to encounter anomalies even if we head out at night.

"Of course, this is just the result of one night's experiment and can't be turned into a conclusion yet. It needs to be repeated multiple times for verification."

Franca and Jenna sighed in relief, their spirits less tense.

Ludwig's face showed joy. "Does that mean we can go out for barbecue now?"

Franca glanced at the naive little boy and grumbled inwardly,

The main reason we don't take you out for barbecue at night isn't "beware of the night", it's poverty!

…

Weekend, in the rental apartment.

A blackboard formed of frost was attached to the wall, its surface pinned with sketches and photos, each surrounded by sticky notes of different colors with words and descriptions.

These sketches and photos corresponded to different target personnel. White sticky notes contained the squad's observations, and for comparison, relevant content from the materials provided by the Major Arcana card holders was excerpted and recorded on light green sticky notes, placed adjacent to the white ones on the frost board.

Having his Conspirer ability suppressed to Sequence 7, Lumian stood before this frost blackboard in order to reduce the burden on his brain, rubbing his chin and looking back and forth, trying to find potentially problematic details that the Major Arcana card holders might have missed.

"No particularly valuable findings, except for that unfortunate incident," Franca shook her head after reviewing seven or eight times.

Anthony nodded in agreement.

Jenna looked at her phone and said, "We should go to Dream Tutoring Classes now."

Ludwig, who was watching cartoons and constantly "ordering" based on the cartoon content, immediately looked crestfallen.

"Mm." Lumian withdrew his gaze and stuffed the frost blackboard into Jenna's Traveler's Bag.

After parking the car diagonally opposite Dream Tutoring Classes, Lumian led Ludwig out of the car.

He said to Franca, Jenna, and Anthony, "From now on, keep your distance from me and Ludwig. Don't call, don't send messages. Ludwig and I won't be coming back tonight either. We'll regroup with you tomorrow morning after confirming there are no issues."

Franca and the others nodded solemnly, without objection.

This was because Lumian might soon encounter Mr. Fool's dream image, Zhou Mingrui, at Dream Tutoring Classes and have a brief exchange, which could potentially be discovered by the Celestial Worthy and result in being kicked out of the dream. Therefore, the team had to split up to avoid one person's ejection affecting the entire team.

Each person could only be kicked out of the dream three times, absolutely no waste allowed!

After closing the car door, Lumian held Ludwig's hand as they crossed the street at the pedestrian crossing and entered Dream Tutoring Classes.

"Welcome, Li Lu," said the dark-skinned receptionist, recognizing Ludwig.

He didn't have a strong impression of the little boy, but rather of his mother.

Ludwig's face darkened, and he didn't respond.

The dark-skinned receptionist turned to look at Lumian. "He needs to sign in. You are?"

"I'm Li Lu's father," Lumian replied calmly.

The dark-skinned receptionist was stunned.

It's one thing for Li Lu's mother to look young, but how is his father also so young?

Early love, early marriage, early childbirth, right?

After signing in, Lumian was led by the receptionist to the door of the Beginner English class.

The foreign teacher, Anderson, was already standing at the front of the classroom, a handkerchief covering his left fist, smiling at the room full of children.

"Guess what I can make appear?"

"A flower!" "A ping pong ball!" "A panda!" The children happily played along.

Anderson removed the handkerchief, revealing nothing.

"I made air appear!" he announced loudly.

The children let out mocking sounds, but Anderson remained smiling.

He saw Lumian and Ludwig at the door and walked over, saying to Lumian, "Are you here for the Beginner English class too?

"Although you're a bit old and your brain might be set, it doesn't matter. Wanting to learn is always a good thing, of course, good things don't necessarily lead to good results."

"I'm Li Lu's father," Lumian pointed at Ludwig, not at all provoked.

He took the opportunity to say, "Mr. Anderson, can I add you on WeChat? If Li Lu doesn't behave well, you can contact me anytime."

Anderson looked at Lumian for a few seconds, then smiled. "Okay."

Through scanning the code, Lumian added Anderson Hood's WeChat.

The foreign teacher's WeChat name was "A name that leaves a deep impression on you".

Chapter 931: Inquiry

Lumian stepped back two paces and sat down on the waiting bench outside the classroom across the hall.

His fingers moved deftly as he accessed Anderson Hood's Moments feed.

"Yesterday: Other people's failures are my successes.

"August 14: Everyone has different talents. Some have a talent for language, some for art, some for being ordinary.

"August 13: My roommate really died. He got Game Over in this game called life.

"August 12: Love is also a kind of war. Hunters can also cull. To Da Nizi.

"August 11: As long as you don't get angry, others will get angry.

…

"August 2: Friend, you really scrolled down this far? Respect my privacy a bit!"

Lumian continued scrolling down expressionlessly, with no further content afterwards. Then, he saw a familiar yet slightly different prompt:

"—Only 30 days of Moments are visible—"

Lumian chuckled, brought the phone close to his mouth, and sent Anderson a voice message, briefly introducing himself to see if Anderson would respond and whether his reply might have a hidden meaning.

After sitting for another two minutes, he saw someone approaching from the direction of the reception desk.

The person was wearing a white T-shirt, blue jeans, and light-colored sneakers. His short black hair was neatly combed, and he had deep brown eyes behind a pair of half-rimmed, light gold glasses. His facial features were gentle, with a hint of handsomeness. He was carrying a black shoulder bag and was the main target of Lumian and his team's journey into the dream—Zhou Mingrui, the dream manifestation of Mr. Fool.

Lumian looked up as if he had just noticed the footsteps, directing his gaze towards Zhou Mingrui.

He realized that the current Zhou Mingrui was more distinct from Gehrman Sparrow: both had originally come from the same Zhou Mingrui, but their paths had diverged significantly—one leaning towards a gentle and handsome style, the other emphasizing sharpness and coldness.

Zhou Mingrui noticed Lumian's gaze and looked in his direction.

Lumian smiled and nodded slightly.

Zhou Mingrui paused, unsure why this stranger was greeting him, but he politely nodded back.

Lumian withdrew his gaze and refocused his attention on the still-dark phone screen.

He noticed that while his reflection could still be considered handsome, it no longer had the kind of allure that would attract a celebrity scout's attention.

He had adjusted his appearance with Lie, toning down his looks to blend in more naturally.

Zhou Mingrui gave him a puzzled glance before turning and entering the Business English class.

After a few more minutes, Ai Nana, the principal of Dream Tutoring Classes, entered the Business English classroom with her lesson plan, while a man wearing a floral bow tie went to the Beginner English class to assist Anderson Hood.

Lumian glanced at the camera on the ceiling, then, like most of the parents waiting in different areas of the hallway, he spent time on his phone.

A few of the parents who knew each other chatted.

"My Zihan can have conversations in English now."

"Really? Ours started Beginner classes too late; still working hard on it."

"Look at that kid; he hasn't stopped talking."

"Probably his first day of class. It happens. My Zihan was a bit unsettled at first too. This is when parents need to step in more."

"…"

Lumian paid no attention to these conversations, focusing intently on the photos he had taken of the frost-covered blackboard, once again immersing himself in the conspiratorial world of analyzing details.

Occasionally, he also checked local news and trending videos to stay updated on major changes in the dream city.

The Beginner English class took two breaks, during which Ludwig took the opportunity to come over and replenish his food supplies, soothing his wounded spirit.

The Business English class only took one break, but Lumian didn't approach Zhou Mingrui, merely watching him from the corner of his eye as he briefly went to the restroom and returned.

The Business English class ended ten minutes earlier than the Beginner class, and Lumian quickly stood up, blocking Zhou Mingrui's path.

With a smile, he said, "Hello, how do you find the Business English class? I'm curious."

Seeing the confusion on Zhou Mingrui's face, Lumian explained further, "I'm here for my kid's Beginner English class, but after listening in on your Business English class from outside, I thought it was pretty good. I'm considering joining too, so I won't waste time waiting."

"Here with your kid?" Zhou Mingrui instinctively questioned.

No matter how he looked, this man appeared much younger than him, like a college student.

And he already has a kid?

"Yes, my son," Lumian replied with a smile.

Son… a son old enough for a Beginner English class… Zhou Mingrui resisted the urge to twitch the corner of his mouth.

He had been out of college and in the workforce for two or three years now, and he didn't even have a girlfriend yet. Meanwhile, this guy who looked like a college student already had a four or five-year-old son!

Did he have a high school romance that led to a child?

Indeed, good-looking people have all the luck…

Zhou Mingrui sincerely replied, "Principal Ai is highly skilled, but the Business English class itself requires a certain foundation."

He suspected that this young man across from him might have dropped out of high school to get married and never attended college, so he kindly reminded him that the Business English class required some background knowledge.

"I see…" Lumian nodded thoughtfully, then sincerely said, "Thank you."

He took a step back and didn't ask Zhou Mingrui anything else.

For a first encounter, moderation was key!

Then, he would observe any subsequent developments.

Zhou Mingrui was curious but wasn't one to pry into others' private lives. He stood at the doors of different classrooms, observing.

After a while, the Beginner English class ended, and Lumian quickly handed Ludwig a lollipop, taking his hand and leading him out of Dream Tutoring Classes.

Ludwig looked to be around seven or eight years old. If Zhou Mingrui saw him, he would definitely be left with a deep impression—an eight-year-old son with a father who seemed to be in his early twenties. Someone in this family must have broken the law!

Leaving a deep impression on Mr. Fool's dream manifestation wasn't part of Lumian's plan today; it wouldn't help in ruling out options.

After buying a bunch of steamed buns and pickled vegetables to fill Ludwig's stomach, Lumian had a proper dinner with the boy and then checked into a cheap hotel.

He turned on the TV for Ludwig, randomly picked a cartoon, and scrolled his phone, his thumb hovering over Anderson Hood's WeChat avatar.

Ultimately, he didn't send another message to this "foreign teacher" who seemed to perceive the true nature of the dream, opting to see if Anderson would take the initiative to contact him and provide any clues.

…

In the rental apartment.

Franca was leaning against the bed, scrolling through her phone, but her thoughts weren't entirely focused on it. She was worried about how things were going on Lumian's end.

Formally engaging Zhou Mingrui could bring about unwanted changes!

Jenna felt the same, pacing back and forth in the room from time to time.

Suddenly, Franca sat up straight, frowning.

"I keep feeling like I've forgotten something…

"Is this my spiritual intuition reminding me?"

The next second, without needing divination, she quickly remembered what she had forgotten.

"Right! Today's the day for the Double Color Ball lottery draw!

"I completely forgot!"

She hurriedly checked the results, her mouth slowly opening in disbelief.

"We won?" Jenna asked, both curious and excited.

"We won… we won!" Franca was first dazed, then overjoyed. "We won the second prize which had twenty bets, with a total prize of more than 150,000 yuan."

She then rubbed her face.

"Do I really have this kind of luck?

"No, could Lumian's ability to influence fate still have this effect?"

"Over 150,000?" Jenna was stunned.

These past few days of living frugally had made her quite content with even a few thousand yuan, and now, all of a sudden, it was in the tens of thousands, with two digits in front of those zeros!

Franca got off the bed and started pacing.

"If we save a bit more, we could rent some of those intriguing items from Star Dream Provisions Store."

"Shouldn't we first think about paying off the micro-loans?" Jenna reminded Franca.

"We haven't reached the due date yet." Franca's excitement was tinged with worry. "Winning such a large sum at once, won't it attract the lottery department's attention? Or even the Celestial Worthy's gaze…"

Before Jenna could respond, Franca continued speaking to herself.

"It's only a little over 100,000. What is that? The person who won the first prize had made more than thirty bets, each worth 5 million! We're just nibbling on the crumbs that slipped through someone else's fingers…"

…

In Binzhi Hotel.

After supper, Ludwig had fallen asleep on the other bed, while Lumian lay awake, leaning against the pillow, silently watching the dark screen and the room faintly illuminated by moonlight.

So far, Anderson hadn't sent him any messages, and directly interacting with Zhou Mingrui hadn't led to any noticeable abnormalities—his actions were unrestricted, and he hadn't been ejected from the dream.

As time ticked by, Lumian suddenly heard a booming thunderclap and saw the night sky outside the curtains briefly illuminated by a flash of silver lightning.

The thunder rumbled continuously, and rain poured down all night, only easing at dawn.

Lumian stayed awake the whole night, greeting the daylight with a clear mind.

He checked his phone and saw numerous reports of flooding and waterlogged areas, with some subway lines suspended for the day.

Is this symbolic? And if so, what does it symbolize? After stuffing Ludwig with a bunch of steamed buns, Lumian took him out for noodles nearby.

He ordered pea paste noodles for himself and tomato and egg noodles for Ludwig.

The peas were stewed until soft and tender, absorbing the sauce, making the noodles fragrant and flavorful. Lumian ordered two small bowls, ate one and a half, and left the remaining half for Ludwig.

After breakfast, he leisurely took public transportation back to the rental apartment with Ludwig.

Seeing that Lumian and Ludwig were fine, Franca, Jenna, and Anthony sighed in relief.

Lumian smiled and said, "The preliminary result of the experiment is that simple daytime contact with Mr. Fool's dream manifestation, Zhou Mingrui, without leaving a strong impression, doesn't attract the Celestial Worthy's attention, result in being ejected from the dream, or impose restrictions.

"Of course, maybe I've been deceived, and the Celestial Worthy is deliberately not targeting me, waiting for me to regroup with you before kicking us all out of the dream."

Chapter 932: Dreamscape Tendencies

Hearing Lumian's words, Franca and the others couldn't help but tense up slightly, as if they were already witnessing the arrival of something terrifying.

Lumian pulled up a chair and sat down, casually scanning every corner of the room. With a smile playing at the corners of his mouth, he said, "I wonder what it feels like to be kicked out of a dream. The Major Arcana card holders didn't provide any details.

"Will it be like leaping out of the deep sea, or getting booted into an endless spiral tunnel…"

He mused about how he might be ejected from the dream, his tone light, as if he were simply describing what he had for breakfast.

Franca suddenly felt a bit sentimental.

"Are all you Hunters like this? Facing danger without fear, and even joking about it?"

"Of course, I'm scared, but what good is pure fear?" Lumian chuckled. "No matter how frightened I am inside, I'll act like it's no big deal, and I certainly won't let my words betray any weakness."

Franca laughed.

"No wonder they say the toughest thing about a Hunter is their mouth."

Both Lumian and Jenna turned to look at Franca without saying a word.

"…" Franca froze.

Damn it, I didn't mean to make a crude joke!

She quickly added, "In this dream city, they say that those who can keep their composure amid great turmoil are worthy of being generals!"

Lumian's lighthearted comments eased the tension in the group.

Then, Lumian smiled again.

"Getting kicked out of the dreamscape isn't scary. We can try again. What's frightening is if the Celestial Worthy restricts us, sends his subordinates, and kills us in the dream. Then there's nothing left."

Jenna pondered his words and asked, "So you're saying that if things really go wrong, we should leave the dream early?"

"Pretty smart." Lumian leaned back in his chair, took out his phone, and swiped the screen twice before stopping, staring at it for a long time without moving.

Franca glanced at the screen and noticed it displayed the WeChat friend request interface.

"Thinking of adding Mr. Fool's QQ and WeChat with an alternate account?" she guessed immediately.

Lumian smiled wryly. "Yeah, but I can't think of a good reason. I'd be rejected instantly.

"Maybe I should use, 'Do you want to learn the truth about the world and the secrets of supernatural powers?' as a request?

"Mr. Fool—or rather, Zhou Mingrui—right now is just an ordinary person who's recently taken the Assassin potion. He's felt the allure of supernatural power but doesn't know much about mysticism. He desperately needs guidance."

Anthony, who had also taken a seat, shook his head.

"If Zhou Mingrui discovers on his own that you can teach him real occult knowledge, even if it costs him money, he might add you. But if you actively and enthusiastically try to guide him, it'll have the opposite effect."

"Exactly." Franca nodded emphatically. "He might block you immediately. He could even call the police, like, 'Hello, officer? There's someone here promoting superstitions. Might be a cult member.'"

Lumian fell silent, deep in thought, muttering to himself, "Maybe I should create a mystery-themed video account, build a reputation, and wait for Zhou Mingrui to come to me.

"But that would risk exposure to the Celestial Worthy's gaze. If the account gets too popular, we'll be targeted. If it's too obscure, Mr. Fool won't notice. Unless… we use targeted ads?"

Franca twitched slightly.

This guy's adapting to the dream city and online society faster than I expected!

She spread her hands. "I don't have the technical know-how."

Lumian continued brainstorming. "Maybe we could stage a minor mysticism incident involving Mr. Fool's friends or colleagues, then solve it ourselves. Word would get back to Zhou Mingrui through them.

"It's also a way to test the Celestial Worthy's surveillance patterns. But we'd need to prepare for the person responsible for this to be detected and targeted. We should have them move out in advance and maintain contact with us using more discreet methods.

"Hmm, it's feasible. Worth a try."

Instead of assigning a specific team member to carry out the plan, Lumian turned to Franca.

"Time to submit our resumes."

To the Intis Group.

"Okay." Franca pulled out her phone.

She'd already prepared the resumes.

She applied for an administrative role, while Lumian applied for security.

Among the four of them, Franca was the only one with formal qualifications, but her field was far removed from Zhou Mingrui's, so she couldn't apply to the same department. She had to choose a position that would allow frequent contact with him.

The other three? Anthony's cover was that of a retired soldier, Jenna was an arts student majoring in drama, and Lumian was a high school dropout who had learned some martial arts.

It wasn't that Madam Justice didn't want to forge academic credentials that could be verified online; even if she did, they'd be exposed during the interview.

They wouldn't be able to answer professional questions, and they might not even understand the questions!

For that reason, Franca chose to apply herself instead of sending Jenna, who, in theory, would have a better shot at an administrative position as an arts student.

After submitting the resumes, Franca looked at Lumian with a smile and asked, "I've got some good news. Can you guess what it is?

"Stop! No eye color changes!"

Lumian pondered for a few seconds.

"Did we win the lottery?"

There weren't many things that could be considered good news and could be shared in front of Anthony, so it had to be that.

"Guess how much?" Franca wasn't disappointed that Lumian had guessed it right away.

Lumian couldn't help but laugh.

"Miss, you bought so many tickets with the same number, and I've already looked up the minimum for the second prize. What do you think? Can I guess how much you won?"

Franca smiled sheepishly and said, "That's not the point. The point is, didn't you notice anything strange?

"When we fought the revived corpse, the hidden Marionettist didn't intervene. When we were outside Star Dream Provisions Store, someone warned us about technological methods of eavesdropping like devices and hidden cameras. And now, we've won a lottery ticket we staked twenty-plus times on.

"What's this called? Some force is helping us!"

Jenna, who had already discussed this with Franca, added, "We think it's an expression of Mr. Fool's subconscious tendencies within the dream. It's symbolic.

"Neither he nor the Celestial Worthy holds absolute dominance right now. During the day, he's stronger; at night, the Celestial Worthy is more powerful. But even at night, he's not entirely powerless."

Lumian nodded slowly.

"I did notice that fate thread was special but didn't think it would lead to a lottery win. Maybe 'special' itself was the hint from fate."

He found nothing in Franca and Jenna's theory that needed correction.

"Praise The Fool!" Franca stood up abruptly, placing her hand over her heart in a gesture of sincere reverence.

She continued, "Who's going to claim the prize today?"

She had already looked up the prize collection process online.

Lumian and Jenna both looked at Anthony, who nodded calmly.

If it were the three Demonesses, they would have to put on more disguises, but Anthony didn't need any.

Anthony nodded calmly. "I'll go."

At ten in the morning, when none of them had encountered any abnormalities, Lumian headed to the bedroom to catch up on sleep.

Franca drove the gray sedan, with Jenna, Anthony, and Ludwig in tow, following the navigation to the lottery center in the dream city.

As she drove, Franca gradually grew agitated, muttering, "Why do we hit a red light at every intersection?"

Jenna, in the passenger seat, pondered for a moment,

"Could this be the Celestial Worthy's dream tendency manifesting, symbolizing that our actions won't go smoothly?"

Franca calmed down, focusing more intently on her driving. She even relied on her Demoness's spiritual intuition to avoid accidents on the way to the lottery center, determined to avoid a "misadventure on the way."

Due to the unfortunate timing of red lights and traffic jams, they arrived nearly half an hour later than planned.

Before Franca could hand the lottery ticket to Anthony, she saw a figure leap from the rooftop of the lottery center and crash onto the ground with a sickening splat, blood pooling everywhere.

"Was that really necessary? All I won was the second prize…" Franca was dumbfounded.

Anthony got out of the car and mingled with the crowd to find out what had happened.

He returned shortly after and reported what he'd learned to his companions, "The person who jumped was the head of the lottery center. Fifteen minutes ago, the anti-corruption department showed up."

"To stop me from claiming the second prize, they sacrificed the head of the lottery center?" Franca didn't know what expression to make.

Undeterred, Franca sent Anthony into the center with the lottery ticket, but the staff informed him that prize claims were suspended for the day and to return tomorrow.

Back in the gray sedan, after a brief silence, Franca gritted her teeth. "I was this close to winning big, and now they won't let me cash in!

"We'll bring Lumian tomorrow. Maybe we'll need to influence fate!"

When they returned to the rental apartment, Lumian was already awake.

After Franca recounted their ordeal, she asked concernedly, "Why are you up before noon? Shouldn't you sleep a bit longer?"

Lumian chuckled. "I was woken up by a phone call."

"Wow, you just got this number a few days ago, and you're already getting spam calls?" Franca joked knowingly.

Lumian shook his head. "No, it was from the Intis Group. They want me to come in for an interview tomorrow morning."

"An interview call this quickly?" Franca blurted out in surprise.

Why haven't I gotten one yet?

My resume is way better than Lumian's!

Lumian took out his phone, unlocked the screen, and handed it to Franca. "Maybe this is why."

Franca took the phone curiously, only to find a news article on the screen.

"During last night's thunderstorm, a car was struck by lightning, leaving one dead and three injured…

"The deceased and injured were all security personnel from the Intis Group…"

Chapter 933: New Residence

"What the hell? Can it really be this much of a coincidence?" Franca blurted out after extracting the key points from the news article.

Yesterday afternoon, Lumian made his first contact with the dream manifestation of Mr. Fool, Zhou Mingrui, and last night, during a thunderstorm, the Intis Group's security department suddenly lost four people?

Was this a chain reaction caused by the contact, or was someone pulling the strings behind the scenes?

"I wonder if this is a good sign or a bad one…" Jenna whispered worriedly after reading the news.

Lumian was quite composed. "Whether it's good or bad, becoming employees of the Intis Group and Zhou Mingrui's colleagues is something we have to do. If there's no problem, we go; if there is, we still go!"

Since the interview with the Intis Group was imminent, Lumian and the others went out after lunch to find a real estate agent and started looking for a new place to stay.

According to their plan, the next steps would involve working individually or in pairs to avoid interference and minimize risk. That way, if one of them was compromised, the others wouldn't be dragged down.

During the observation phase, the risks were minimal, so they could act together. However, once they entered the contact and probing stages, every move could draw the Celestial Worthy's attention.

This time, Lumian and his team chose Dechuang Garden, a community district three bus stops away from their current location. Only five years old, the complex had new facilities, and the area boasted a mix of well-known brands and trendy stores.

They picked this place because the information provided by the Major Arcana card holders indicated that Luo Shan, an employee in the Intis Group's administrative department with a real-world counterpart, lived here.

She was also a target for contact and probing.

The lobby of the community district had a clean, bright, and slightly luxurious feel, with sunlight reflecting off the marble floor and a few gray sofas arranged tastefully.

"A one-bedroom apartment costs two thousand a month," Jenna grumbled, heart aching, after the real estate agent and landlord left.

That's nearly as much as what they were paying for their current three-bedroom unit.

The rent differences between various locations and building ages were staggering!

"It's expensive, but we have to rent it!" Franca gritted her teeth.

Tomorrow, we must claim that lottery prize!

This will be another six thousand in expenses!

Although both the landlord and the real estate agent were men, Jenna hadn't used Charm during negotiations. Instead, she relied on Lie and makeup to make herself appear more ordinary. With only a bit of help from her Instigation ability, she managed to negotiate two hundred off the rent and a prepayment of one month.

Lumian nodded slightly, agreeing with Franca's attitude.

In his view, as long as it was within their abilities, any necessary expenses should be made. No matter how much it hurt, they couldn't be stingy!

As his gaze swept the lobby, he noticed a vending machine in the corner. The bottles inside had a particularly sleek design.

Recalling the hints in their information, Lumian walked over and saw that aside from a few displayed bottles, the rest of the items were in gacha boxes.

And the names of these new drinks were all too familiar:

Seer, Assassin, Bard, Sleepless…

"They're all potion names…" Franca followed him over, inhaling sharply. "Do you think they're the real thing?"

She also recalled the dossier's mention of the Fully Automated Vending Machine and Fully Automatic Wishing Machine.

Lumian studied the vending machine for a few seconds, then chuckled.

"The highest is only Sequence 7, and the selection isn't vast. If there were something like War Bishop or Demoness of Unaging, I'd be tempted to empty this machine for a few thousand."

"Even if they were available, you couldn't digest them." Franca pulled out her phone, ready to scan the QR code on the screen.

She eagerly said, "Let's see what I get."

"Based on the Law of Beyonder Characteristics Convergence, you'll probably get something related to Demoness or Hunter." Jenna calmly reminded her.

Franca laughed. "The point isn't what I get but pulling one out to test on a rat to see if it's a real potion."

As she spoke, Franca completed the scan and paid five yuan.

With a click, a gacha box was ejected into the pickup slot.

Franca retrieved and opened it, revealing a bottle with a deep black surface and raised areas outlining a snarling wolf's face: "Sleepless!"

"Huh, one from the Evernight pathway?" Franca was surprised. "It's neither Hunter nor Demoness?"

She quickly figured out the reason.

"My Sequence isn't high enough, nor do I possess godhood. The convergence effect isn't that strong."

After storing the Sleepless drink in her Traveler's Bag, Franca suddenly burst into laughter.

"You know, a Sleepless drink could probably be made with enough caffeine and theophylline!"

The group didn't linger by the vending machine. They crossed the lobby and headed towards Building 5—where their new apartment was located.

Before leaving the lobby, Lumian had a sudden impulse and instinctively glanced back at the vending machine.

The corner it occupied was now empty.

The vending machine that sold potion beverages had vanished!

"As expected…" He wasn't surprised at all.

Franca and the others followed his gaze and shared the feeling that the inevitable conclusion had finally arrived.

…

In the evening, after settling into Dechang Garden, Jenna sat in the lobby of Building 5, patiently waiting for their target to appear.

She didn't know how long it took, but eventually, through the glass entrance, she spotted the figure she'd been observing earlier.

Jenna stood up naturally, tucking a stray lock of hair behind her ear.

She paced back and forth until a twenty-plus girl walked in. She had brown hair and a pleasant face, wearing a light green dress and carrying a white handbag.

Jenna "coincidentally" found herself face-to-face with her and asked, feigning a shy and surprised expression, "Hello, do you know how to get to the activity room in this district?"

The girl in the green dress was indeed Luo Shan, Zhou Mingrui's colleague and an employee of the Intis Group's administrative department. She kindly pointed in a direction. "Go out the East Gate, and it's on the left."

"Thank you." Jenna expressed her gratitude sincerely with a slight smile.

She had removed her previous makeup and used Charm, suppressed to a Sequence 7 level, to enhance her appearance.

The smile, like a bloom of flowers, caught Luo Shan's eye.

Luo Shan blinked, showing an expression of admiration. "You're so beautiful…"

Before Jenna could modestly decline, Luo Shan asked enthusiastically, "Would you model for me?

"I'm learning to paint in my spare time, and I'm pretty good at it. I especially love painting beautiful people and landscapes.

"I'll pay you!"

Painting… Jenna's temples throbbed, stirring unpleasant memories.

To her, a "painter" was a terrifying occupation.

She had once killed her painted self in a painting world.

Has Luo Shan in this dream been corrupted or influenced by that evil god of the Fantasy Association? Jenna instinctively shook her head.

"Sorry, I'm not interested in modeling at the moment."

"That's such a shame. I'm pretty good, you know. I'll show you my work sometime, and maybe you'll change your mind." Luo Shan pulled out her phone, smiling as she asked, "You just moved in, right? I've lived here for years and never met anyone as beautiful as you. Can I add you on WeChat?"

Jenna had planned to find an excuse to add Luo Shan on WeChat, but not this quickly. Moving this fast seemed off!

After a few seconds of deliberation, she said with hesitation, "I'm just a tenant."

"So what? I was a tenant too." Luo Shan didn't mind.

"Alright." Jenna deliberately made herself appear a bit meek, someone who wasn't good at rejecting others' kindness or enthusiasm.

When adding her on WeChat, Jenna selected the "Chat Only" option.

This was to make it seem like she wasn't too willing to add strangers, avoiding giving the impression that she was actively seeking out Luo Shan.

After taking a walk around the activity room outside the East Gate and grabbing a meal at a nearby restaurant, Jenna noticed that it had grown dark.

She returned to the 23rd-floor apartment and locked the door.

For the next day or two, she would be staying there alone.

After turning on the star-shaped main light, Jenna's gaze swept over the gray and orange sofa, the minimalist yet stylish decor, the metallic sheen of the window frames, and the bed with light-colored sheets, just visible through the bedroom door.

Compared to the three-bedroom unit Lumian and the others were renting, this one-bedroom apartment was obviously newer, better furnished, and simpler in design yet still elegant.

Jenna walked towards the window, her fingers brushing over the white dining table, the textured wallpaper on the walls, the artistic table lamp, the tall vase with plastic flowers, and the cold edge of the window. She gazed outside.

Buildings of varying heights dotted the crisscrossing roads, with most windows glowing warmly, blending with the lights from the endless stream of cars on the streets below.

"How beautiful…" Jenna admired the view from above with heartfelt appreciation.

She returned to the sofa area, her steps a little lighter.

When we have more money, let's rent a place like this for Lumian, Franca, and the others!

Jenna sat down, peacefully waiting for any anomalies that might arise from her contact with Luo Shan.

Time ticked by as she scrolled through her phone.

She came across a review of the movie The Great Pirate 3: "Three beautiful female pirates surrounding him, each with some history of flirtation, yet he only took the dumb sailor with him? What the hell! I want my money back!"

Jenna was momentarily puzzled by the comment.

She didn't see anything wrong with that scene.

From the start, she knew how it would end: Gehrman Sparrow was an incarnation of Mr. Fool, his Oracle, who naturally met up with Mr. Fool's other Oracle, Danitz, before leaving together. Wasn't that the logical conclusion?

Besides, in reality, Gehrman Sparrow didn't end up with any of the three female Pirate Admirals!

Jenna felt the real flaw in that scene was how Danitz, the Oracle, didn't play a significant role, as if he were a mere side character.

After spending nearly two hours on her phone with no sign of anything unusual, Jenna checked the time and stood up, heading towards the bathroom to freshen up.

As soon as she switched on the bathroom light, a buzzing sound suddenly filled the room.

The entire apartment was plunged into darkness.

All the lights went out.

Chapter 934: Guardian

Faced with the sudden darkness, Jenna's first instinct was to conceal herself or hide in the shadows. But ultimately, she controlled herself and refrained from immediately displaying her Beyonder powers when an anomaly occurred after nightfall.

Utilizing her acting skills, she pretended to be an ordinary person. Despite being able to see clearly, she groped her way out of the bathroom and towards the window.

Upon reaching the living room, thanks to the light pollution seeping in from outside, the outlines of the coffee table, sofa, and other furniture became visible. Jenna immediately quickened her pace, reaching the window in seconds. Looking outside, she found that not only were the distant buildings of varying heights still brightly lit, but the other buildings in the same complex had not been completely engulfed by darkness either.

Jenna glanced downwards, feeling that the other floors seemed to have their lights on as well.

"Is it just my place with the problem? Hmm, a power outage?" Jenna took out her phone from her jeans pocket, intending to call Franca to ask how to handle this situation.

She then remembered that she was supposed to act independently for these two days and couldn't contact her teammates. So instead of making a call, she decided to search online.

Somewhat clumsily, she used voice-to-text to input the phrase "what to do if there's a power outage at home" and pressed the search option.

Then, remembering Franca's advice, she skipped the first few search results and went straight to the ones further down.

"First, check the fuse box during a power outage…

"The steps are as follows…"

Jenna read for a while, her brow gradually furrowing.

This is so difficult!

These were all areas she didn't understand.

As she scrolled, she came across an answer: "Contact property management!"

"…" Jenna was stunned. "You can do that?"

She had registered with property management when she moved in that afternoon and added their number to her contacts list.

She tried calling, reported her room number and the issue. The on-duty property management staff immediately said that an engineering department employee would come to address the problem right away.

Soon after, the doorbell rang. The property management staff from the engineering department arrived on this floor, carrying a toolbox.

Upon seeing Jenna, the staff member's eyes lit up, and his attitude became quite enthusiastic.

Jenna, extremely vigilant, let him into the room.

She remained on guard for any anomalies.

After a quick inspection, the property staff said, "It was just a tripped circuit breaker."

With that, he flipped the switch, and light was instantly restored to the room.

That simple? Jenna didn't let her lack of knowledge show.

After seeing off the property staff and closing the door again, she couldn't help but remark, "Life in this dream city is so convenient… Just that the property management fees aren't cheap…"

Jenna quickly washed up and lay down on the bed, falling asleep like an ordinary person would, but that string in her spirit remained taut, never relaxing.

In her hazy state, her spiritual intuition brought a warning.

She suddenly became alert and found herself floating above the residential complex in her Spirit Body form.

Many spirits were wandering around, seemingly residents of Dechuang Garden. Layer upon layer of storms were frozen in the high air, completely enveloping this area, forming a semi-transparent barrier around the perimeter.

Near the barrier stood a figure—it was Luo Shan, wearing her light green casual dress with dyed brown hair. In front of Luo Shan, strange figures emerged one after another from the depths of darkness, constantly lunging at the frozen storms and semi-transparent barrier, trying to enter the "residential district".

Some of these figures were half-human, half-snake, with the upper body of an alluring woman and the lower body a thick python tail covered in slick scales. Some looked like miniature humans embedded between an owl's wings, growing sharp talons. Others were young, naked women with long hair, freely displaying their voluptuous figures…

Facing the invasion of these strange creatures, Luo Shan took out a rather thick oil painting brush and quickly began sketching patterns on the semi-transparent barrier.

She was drawing suns surrounded by flying birds.

As soon as this simple painting took shape, the suns within lit up with a golden, brilliant radiance, causing all the monsters to simultaneously close their eyes.

Then, each of the birds burst into golden flames, flying out of the semi-transparent barrier towards different monsters.

Seeing this scene, Jenna was shocked and deeply puzzled.

The current situation was quite different from what she had imagined.

Luo Shan seemed to be fighting against those strange creatures, preventing them from entering the spirit world corresponding to Dechuang Garden. She looked like a guardian.

But the abilities she displayed clearly belonged to a Painter, which was a boon from that evil god of the Fantasy Association!

Luo Shan should be cooperating with those strange creatures to invade the spirit world of the residential district, so why is she protecting the barrier instead?

Moreover, back at Xinhong District, neither I, Lumian, Franca, nor Anthony discovered anything like strange creatures invading… Is this a change brought about by Lumian's formal contact with Mr. Fool's dream manifestation, or does Dechuang Garden itself have some special properties? Amidst her confusion, seeing that Luo Shan was guarding steadily enough, Jenna suppressed the idea of offering help and pretended to wander aimlessly within the barrier like the astral projections of other residents.

This continued until daybreak.

…

At Xinhong District, in a rented apartment.

Franca, who had woken up early out of concern for Jenna, saw Lumian, who had been on night watch, bring a small cage from atop the shoe cabinet to the dining table. Inside was a gray and white rat.

Ludwig's presence had eradicated rats, cockroaches, and other such creatures from the apartment. To test the effects of the potion beverage, Lumian and the others had specifically wandered around the complex before dark yesterday and finally caught one.

Franca sat down and watched as Lumian put on gloves and grabbed the rat, which was cowering in fear under Ludwig's predatory gaze, and began to pour the Sleepless beverage into it.

The rat only took one sip before the rest of the drink flooded into its body, completely disregarding whether it could contain that much.

In the blink of an eye, the rat suddenly swelled up, its short gray-white fur standing on end like a hedgehog's quills and turning black.

In its armpits and across its chest and belly, flesh writhed as if new limbs were about to sprout.

Has it lost control? This thought flashed simultaneously through Lumian and Franca's minds.

Ludwig opened his mouth in delight and swallowed the mutated rat in one gulp.

Chew, chew, chew. He squinted his eyes in satisfaction.

"Is it okay to eat it like that?" Franca looked at Ludwig with some concern.

This food has Beyonder characteristics!

Ludwig replied with a muffled voice, "No problem, digesting characteristics, for now, just storing them…"

Lumian nodded, picking up the now empty Sleepless drink bottle and said, "This really is a potion."

Franca sighed emotively. "It's only at times like these that I truly feel this is a dream."

Everyday life is too real!

Looking up at the morning sky, Franca carefully asked Lumian, "You'll go for the interview in the morning, and we'll go claim the lottery prize together in the afternoon?"

"You go claim it in the morning," Lumian said with a smile, cutting off Franca before she could voice her question. "But I'll keep the lottery ticket."

Franca was enlightened.

"You mean, the bad luck of difficulty in claiming the prize, or rather the dream's resistance to this, is focused on the ticket itself, not on us?

"That makes sense. If the Celestial Worthy's resistance could precisely target us, we'd have been kicked out of the dream already.

"I see, Anthony and I will go to the lottery center without the ticket, as if we're just visiting. When we get to the step where we need to provide the ticket, you'll send it over through the mirror world, completing the claim before any resistance event occurs?"

"Exactly, and this is also to verify whether your speculation about the dream's tendencies really exists, and if it does, what are the rules of its operation." Lumian nodded lightly.

…

After breakfast, Lumian changed into a white shirt and black trousers, took the resume and other documents he had printed out yesterday, along with the lottery ticket, and took public transport to the Tech Building where the Intis Group was located. Franca drove Anthony and Ludwig to the lottery center.

In front of the Tech Building, Lumian looked up at the somewhat old-fashioned sixteen-story building, mixed in with the white-collar workers heading to work, and walked in openly.

His journey had been smooth, with no accidents like bus breakdowns or traffic jams due to carrying the lottery ticket—his destination was in the opposite direction from the lottery center.

Lumian didn't rush to go up for the interview. He came to the display board showing information for different floors and surveyed the company composition of this building.

The property rights of this building belonged to the Intis Group. The first to fifth floors were allocated to some subsidiaries of the Intis Group. The sixth to ninth floors were rented out to other companies. Half of the tenth floor belonged to the Intis Group's headquarters, while the other half was leased to Aurora Company. The eleventh and twelfth floors were also rented out. The thirteenth to fifteenth floors were other departments of the Intis Group's headquarters. The sixteenth floor was exclusively for Mr. Huang, the dream manifestation of Emperor Roselle.

It's indeed as Franca said, this building has obvious issues… The Intis Group could have recalled some departments and subsidiaries to occupy all sixteen floors, so why rent out some of them? Moreover, the headquarters' administrative and technical departments actually share a floor with the Aurora Company… In Franca's words, it's not right; a 120% chance of things being not right… Lumian pondered seriously.

When she got the information about this Tech Building, Franca had sensed the abnormality after just one look.

This didn't quite match the situation in her memory.

Lumian mulled it over for a dozen seconds, then silently said to himself, Is this a symbol?

Does this building symbolize the Intis Republic, with some floors being rented out symbolizing the infiltration of cults and different forces into the Intis Republic? Is this Mr. Fool's impression of the Intis Republic?

Lumian didn't linger too long. He withdrew his gaze and walked into the elevator area.

He occasionally glanced at the mirrored metal surface, waiting for Franca or Anthony to ring his phone a few times.

As the numbers indicating the elevator's floor slowly changed, someone else joined Lumian.

It was a very handsome and trendy middle-aged man with chestnut-dyed hair.

Mr. Huang? Lumian caught sight of the figure from the corner of his eye and recognized who it was.

It was the dream manifestation of Emperor Roselle, the boss of the Intis Group, Mr. Huang Tao, who often chose not to use his private elevator and instead joined the crowds in the employee elevator!

Chapter 935: Interview

Lumian didn't try to greet Huang Tao, still looking ahead until one of the elevators opened its doors.

The rush hour had already passed, and only a handful of people were waiting in the elevator area, entering in sequence.

Today, Lumian only wanted to succeed in the interview, hoping for no other incidents. He didn't plan to observe Mr. Huang or make further contact, so he chose the position furthest from Huang Tao, only politely nodding when their eyes met.

Mr. Huang was a celebrity among celebrities. It was impossible for those working or planning to work in this building not to recognize him. The others in the elevator had already greeted him in various ways, so Lumian couldn't completely ignore him.

Huang Tao, hands in his pockets, was casually chatting with a middle-aged man who seemed to be a department head from the Intis Group headquarters, showing no air of authority as a big boss.

As the elevator ascended, the others, including Lumian, got off at their respective floors, while Huang Tao went to the sixteenth floor.

His CEO office was actually near the administrative department on the tenth floor. The sixteenth floor had been arranged as a luxurious club for entertaining VIP guests and for his own relaxation.

There was even an indoor swimming pool there.

The beautiful secretary standing guard at the private elevator turned and said with a helpless smile, "Mr. Huang, why are you competing with the employees for the elevator again?"

The four employee elevators generally couldn't reach the sixteenth floor, but Huang Tao could make them go up using card swipes, fingerprint recognition, or facial recognition.

Huang Tao didn't speak, smiling as he looked at the mature and beautiful female secretary, his gaze sweeping over every detail of her face.

The female secretary's heart trembled, and her voice lowered as she asked,

"Mr. Huang, is my makeup not done well?"

Huang Tao smiled.

"Beautiful things are worth appreciating."

Without waiting for the secretary's response, he walked directly towards the swimming pool, silently saying to himself,

My aesthetic taste hasn't changed, yet I actually thought a man looked quite good just now…

…

Parking lot attached to the lottery center.

Franca, who was five minutes late due to traffic, turned to Anthony and said,

"No accidents so far."

She didn't say things like "This time it's really going smoothly" or "We should be able to claim the prize successfully today."

It's not too late to be happy when the money is in the account!

Anthony, who had been repeatedly educated by Franca about the prize-claiming process seven or eight times, nodded, opened the door, got out of the car, and walked towards the lottery center.

Franca, feeling a bit uneasy, tossed a lollipop to Ludwig.

"You wait for me in the car, don't go anywhere."

"Mm!" Ludwig bit down on the lollipop, first gnawing off the outer wrapper and swallowing it.

Franca left the vehicle in a running state to ensure the air conditioning continued to work.

She got out of the car, muttering,

"This is not good behavior. Parents, please don't learn from this. Don't leave children alone in the car. It's dangerous if you take out the key, and even more dangerous if you don't…"

But with Ludwig left in the car, it wasn't the child who was in danger, but the car and the surrounding pedestrians.

Franca then used the shadows cast by the morning sun to sneak into the lottery center, hiding behind an obstruction not far from Anthony.

She listened intently to the conversation between Anthony and the staff member, holding her phone, ready to call and correct his statements at any moment.

The staff member said to Anthony,

"First prize can't be claimed yet, but other prizes can be."

Is it really possible? The method of separating the ticket from the person really works… Or maybe the dream's tendency is actually targeting the person who won the first prize? Franca, hiding in the shadows, felt a surge of excitement as she listened.

After a few more exchanges, when the staff member asked for the lottery ticket, Anthony pretended to have something to do and took out his phone to call Lumian.

Tenth floor of the Tech Building, Intis Group headquarters, outside the "West Lognes" conference room.

Lumian sat on a chair with three other job applicants, waiting for the interview.

Suddenly, his phone rang.

Seeing that the caller was "An Ruide", he rejected the call and put his right hand into his trouser pocket.

There was a mirror about half the size of a palm and the second-prize winning lottery ticket.

Lumian first wrapped the ticket in layers of spider silk, then formed a layer of frost on the outside of the silk, and finally ignited Flames of Destruction on the surface of the frost.

After quickly completing these preparations, he pressed the ticket into the mirror.

The lottery ticket immediately fell into a tunnel of void darkness, plummeting towards the corresponding mirror.

Along the way, the quietly burning black flames, constraining destruction, slightly illuminated the depths of the mirror world, as if warning all unknown entities that dared to set their sights on the lottery ticket.

When the ticket reached the mirror carried by Anthony, the Flames of Destruction had already extinguished, melting the frost and the spider silk.

The intact lottery ticket emerged from inside the mirror, just as Anthony's extended hand pressed against it.

Anthony took out this lottery ticket and handed it to the staff member.

After receiving it, the staff member's hand retracted slightly, and he muttered to himself,

"It's been kept in a fridge all this time?"

…

Tenth floor of the Tech Building, outside the West Lognes conference room.

Lumian quietly breathed a sigh of relief.

It seems now that the dream tendency interfering with our prize claiming indeed comes from the Celestial Worthy. If Mr. Fool thought this matter was problematic and wanted to prevent Franca from claiming the prize, with the lucky coin for positioning, he wouldn't have been bypassed so easily…

After a while, Lumian's phone vibrated a few times.

He picked it up and saw that a friend with the WeChat name "True Hidden Blade" had sent several messages in a row:

"Successfully claimed the prize!

"We're rich now!

"Oh, by the way, the first prize can't be claimed yet."

First prize can't be claimed yet… Lumian suddenly felt puzzled, Is the first prize winner an ally or an enemy? Does the dream's obstructing tendency come from the Celestial Worthy or Mr. Fool?

His previous deductions suddenly became less certain.

Because it was also possible that Mr. Fool was obstructing Franca's prize claiming, but the purpose was to affect the person who won the first prize. He and his team were just caught in the crossfire. Today, whether the lottery ticket was separated from the claimer or not, it would have succeeded anyway.

As Lumian pondered, from the corner of his eye, he saw Zhou Mingrui passing by from afar, but Zhou Mingrui didn't pay attention to the interview here, engrossed in discussing something with Luo Shan.

"Next, Li Ming," the interviewer called Lumian into the conference room at this time.

Lumian entered calmly, politely greeted the two interviewers, one male and one female, and sat down in the chair designated for interviewees.

After asking a few routine questions, the female interviewer, about thirty years old, looked Lumian over.

"Why did you drop out of high school?"

"Puppy love," Lumian answered without any shame.

"Puppy love shouldn't lead to dropping out, right?" the male interviewer, who had also experienced puppy love, asked puzzledly.

"We had a child," Lumian calmly added.

The two interviewers were momentarily speechless, both lowering their heads to write down a paragraph about this with their pens, for later evaluation reference.

Lumian's eyes suddenly took on a silver-black hue.

He discreetly extended both hands, touching and amplifying the streams of fate favorable to him.

The two interviewers then wrote down similar words:

"Decent image, height exceeds standard, young and strong, married and had a child early, needs to support a family, values money quite highly…"

After writing this, the female interviewer further asked,

"How old is your child?"

"7 years old," Lumian answered truthfully.

"7 years old? Aren't you only about 22?" the male interviewer blurted out in surprise, "Didn't you say you had puppy love in high school?"

"I only said I dropped out of high school because of puppy love, not that the puppy love started in high school," Lumian explained seriously. "I had a child in the third year of junior high. By the second year of high school, both my parents had passed away, and I needed to support myself, my girlfriend, and our child, so I had to drop out."

The two interviewers looked at each other, not knowing how to evaluate this situation.

After about ten seconds, the male interviewer asked,

"Have you learned martial arts?"

"Do you need me to demonstrate?" Lumian inquired sincerely.

As he asked, his whole demeanor became slightly sharper.

"No need, I can sense it," the male interviewer felt that the applicant looked quite capable of fighting.

After asking about expected salary and other questions, the female interviewer said to Lumian,

"That will be all. Wait for our notification. If you don't receive a call in the next day or two, it means you haven't passed."

She spoke very frankly because this young man seemed approachable. Although he had dropped out of high school and had puppy love and a child early, he was very polite and had the looks for the job.

Lumian, who had lightly used Charm, stood up and politely said goodbye.

…

"La la la, la la la, I'm a little newspaper seller…"

Franca hummed a nursery rhyme cheerfully as she drove.

She had received the prize money of over 156,000 yuan, and because each bet didn't exceed 10,000 yuan, no tax was required.

Now, the team temporarily had no financial worries. Next, apart from contacting and probing relevant individuals, they would find ways to earn more money to rent one or two items from the Star Dream Provisions Store.

However, the idea of buying similar lottery tickets would have to be postponed for a while, as the hidden struggle behind winning and claiming prizes seemed quite intense!

Of course, they could continue to buy scratch cards, but they would have to frequently change lottery stores.

While envisioning the future, Franca's phone suddenly rang.

Wearing earphones, she chose to answer.

The call was from the human resources department of the Intis Group, asking Franca to come for an interview tomorrow morning.

Haha, when things go well, everything goes smoothly! Franca muttered to herself, extremely happy.

Later, she would have to use Lie and makeup techniques to make herself moderately less attractive, to avoid catching Mr. Huang's attention and being forced to resign and leave, unable to complete the task of contacting Zhou Mingrui.

But making herself less attractive didn't mean becoming truly ugly, just reducing her beauty to a certain extent. Otherwise, if the appearance-focused Mr. Huang happened to wander into the administrative department one day and felt this employee wasn't good-looking, he might fire her on the spot. What then?

…

Dechuang Garden, Building 5, 23rd floor.

Jenna, who hadn't encountered any abnormal situations all day, leaned against the window, watching Luo Shan return to her residence wearing a women's shirt, pencil skirt with stockings and high heels, change into a casual dress, and leave the building again carrying a white handbag.

Chapter 936: Contradictions

Jenna didn't follow Luo Shan, knowing she would call a ride-hailing service. Whether using shadow stealth or invisibility, Jenna couldn't keep up with a car by running for long—unless the target encountered repeated traffic jams. In this respect, Demonesses excelled at bursts of speed but lacked endurance.

As for taking a taxi herself and having the driver follow the target, leaving aside whether a taxi would happen to pass by or if a booked ride could arrive within a minute, the biggest problem was finding a reasonable excuse.

Jenna believed that if Franca were here, with her understanding and familiarity with the dream city, she could easily find a convincing reason. But Jenna herself couldn't yet—she might say the wrong thing and cause the driver to call the police on the spot.

Of course, this problem could be solved using Charm, but after she got out of the car and the effect gradually faded, the driver would recall what happened and likely feel something was off, possibly reporting it to the police. Jenna couldn't repeatedly Charm someone over such a small matter, making them fall in love with her for an extended period.

Leaving the window, Jenna made a bowl of noodles and enjoyed eating it completely, drinking all the soup.

When night truly fell, she took out the Ice Mirror Charm made by Lumian and held it in her palm.

As she uttered the word "mirror" in ancient Hermes, the mystical charm carved from frost lit up with a somewhat dim glow.

Jenna placed her hand on the mirror she had put on the coffee table earlier. Her entire body suddenly dematerialized and entered it.

Using the Ice Mirror Charm's ability to sense surrounding mirrors, she quickly locked onto a mirror-like object in Luo Shan's home and traversed through a dark, illusory tunnel.

She wanted to take advantage of Luo Shan being out to search her home from within the mirror, seeing if she could discover anything.

The reason she didn't do this while Luo Shan was at work during the day was that such probing had to be gradual. She first needed to confirm whether last evening's level of contact with Luo Shan would attract the Celestial Worthy's attention or provoke investigation by hostile forces.

After waiting a day and night, she now tentatively confirmed it wouldn't, so she could proceed with further contact and investigation.

Jenna didn't leave the dark, illusory area behind the mirror. Through the hard, cold glass, she surveyed Luo Shan's home.

This apartment was also a one-bedroom, with the same layout as the one she rented. She was currently positioned at the living room window immersed in the night.

Above the window, Jenna's face faintly and indistinctly appeared, her gaze sweeping over the coffee table, TV, refrigerator, and other items.

She quickly noticed easels, canvases, paper, palettes, paint tubes, various brushes, and small palette knives scattered in different places. Paintings hung on the walls—vibrant oil paintings, pencil sketches, and black and white freehand landscapes.

Jenna's gaze suddenly stopped on one of the oil paintings.

It depicted a strange half-human, half-snake creature—the upper body a voluptuous woman, the lower body a giant snake with lifelike scales.

The monster I saw last night… Jenna's heart tightened as she successively recognized other paintings depicting bizarre creatures she had seen invading the "spirit residential district" woven from psychic energy during her astral projection last night.

Almost simultaneously, she noticed a common element in these paintings: All the strange creatures were confined in iron-barred cages.

What does this represent? Does it symbolize these monsters being kept out of the world? This is close to the scene I saw during my astral projection walk last night… Did Luo Shan paint the iron-barred cages, while the monsters came from someone else's hand? Or did Luo Shan paint these monsters but then lock them up? As Jenna pondered seriously, her gaze fell on a sketch.

It was Luo Shan's self-portrait, her face smiling, eyes spirited, quite charming.

For some reason, Jenna felt the Luo Shan in this self-portrait was intently observing the dark living room.

This made her abandon the idea of leaving the window glass and truly entering the room.

As Jenna continued observing, the fingerprint lock on the front door made a sound, and Luo Shan returned home carrying her white handbag.

After placing the handbag on the dining table, Luo Shan walked lightly to her sketch self-portrait and looked at it for a few seconds.

Then, she picked up a brush, dipped it in some silver paint, and walked towards the living room window.

Jenna had retreated a bit before the door opened, allowing the glass window reflecting the night to return completely to normal.

Luo Shan stared at the glass window for a while, then raised her brush and outlined a simple door on its surface.

In the area behind the mirror, Jenna suddenly saw a silver light shine on the hard glass surface, forming a very real, strange door connecting reality and the mirror world.

She immediately left a few Demoness black flames to burn away any residual traces, then traversed the illusory dark tunnel herself, returning to her rented place and emerging from the mirror.

Where Jenna had originally been hiding, the not-quite-real silver door was pushed open, and Luo Shan entered the area behind the mirror.

The girl in a casual long dress looked around with a gloomy expression, finding nothing unusual in the area.

Luo Shan gazed at the dense spider web-like tunnels in the mirror, unable to think of what to paint to utilize them.

After two or three minutes, she exited the area behind the mirror and wiped away the silver door outlined on the glass window's surface with her palm.

…

23rd floor, Room 3.

Jenna sat on the sofa and silently muttered to herself, Luo Shan is indeed a Beyonder of the Painter pathway… Has the deity worshiped by the Fantasy Association also infused some power?

Is He also at Mu Shu Hospital, or does He have His own stronghold?

Did He give Luo Shan Beyonder power to control this colleague of Zhou Mingrui and contact Mr. Fool's dream image?

Just as she thought of this, Jenna's phone on the coffee table began to vibrate.

Jenna picked it up and saw that Luo Shan had sent her a message with an image.

This girl, whose WeChat nickname was "Always Wanting to Go on Vacation", said with a smiley face emoji: "This is my work, you can take a look."

The content of that image was precisely the sketch self-portrait Jenna had seen earlier in Luo Shan's home.

Jenna opened the image and suddenly had the illusion that Luo Shan had come to life on her phone screen.

She had an idea and just left her phone on the coffee table without locking the screen.

Then, she stood up, walked to the bathroom, and closed the door.

As soon as Jenna sat on the toilet, she immediately turned her gaze to the vanity mirror.

Using a Demoness's mirror magic and the mirror on the coffee table, she peered at her phone's situation.

A few seconds later, Jenna saw the sketch portrait displayed on the screen seem to make a tiny movement. The Luo Shan outlined in pencil lines tentatively reached out a hand beyond the screen, then withdrew it.

As expected… Jenna pressed the toilet's flush button, washed her hands amid the rushing sound, and exited the bathroom.

She picked up her phone again, closed the image, and used voice-to-text to reply to Luo Shan: "It looks so lifelike!"

She hadn't checked Luo Shan's Moments last night because they were set to "Chat Only".

"Want me to sketch you too?" Luo Shan quickly replied to Jenna's praise.

I wouldn't dare let you Painters draw me… Jenna silently muttered, using voice input to respond to Luo Shan: "No need, no need."

She quickly changed the subject.

"You might not believe this, but I had a very strange dream yesterday, and you were in it.

"You seemed to be guarding the neighborhood, fighting a group of monsters, while we couldn't help at all."

If a man had said something similar to her, Jenna would definitely think he was trying to flirt, feeling their relationship was too shallow for such intimate talk, clearly inappropriate. But now, relying on the fact of both being women, she dared to probe a little.

"Did I leave such a deep impression on you?" Luo Shan sent a "smug" emoji.

After a few seconds, she sent a second message: "Your dream is very interesting. I'm also very happy to play such a role in your dream—really, extremely happy."

Just as Jenna was about to reply, Luo Shan sent a third message: "Because my father was a true guardian, as were his colleagues."

Jenna suddenly recalled the background introduction of Luo Shan in the files:

In reality, Luo Shan's father was a Nighthawk of the Church of Evernight Goddess, who died in an accident brought about by a mystical case. His father's colleagues included the Nighthawk team captain Dunn corresponding to Officer Deng, Officer Deng's fiancée Miss Daly, Old Neil from Interpol, and others. They all died in disasters brought by Beyonder powers but also protected their corresponding cities.

One of Mr. Fool's incarnations is Klein Moretti, a member of that Nighthawk team back then, so when Mr. Fool subconsciously wove his dream image, did he add a similar background to Luo Shan, making her admire and aspire to the spirit of protection?

Although Luo Shan has now been influenced by that evil god of the Fantasy Association and received an illusory boon, has the protective obsession deep in her heart not been completely erased by the contamination? Is this the reason for her many contradictory behaviors currently?

Painting strange creatures on one hand, wanting to make them real, while adding cages to these invaders on the other… Constantly creating monsters on one hand, while guarding at the barrier on the other, not letting those monsters in…

Could this be considered Mr. Fool's subconscious projection onto Luo Shan fighting against the corruption of that evil god of the Fantasy Association?

If this is really the case, in a sense, this is a confrontation between a small part of Mr. Fool's subconscious and that evil god of the Fantasy Association… Jenna pondered with some understanding how to reply to Luo Shan.

After about ten seconds, she used voice input to say: "Have you ever created any paintings with a protective theme?"

It took Luo Shan twenty to thirty minutes to reply to this message: "Not yet. Failed."

If you haven't, then why did you fail? This answer is too contradictory… Jenna's pupils suddenly froze.

Chapter 937: Another Night

Jenna held her phone, wanting to reply to Luo Shan several times, but not knowing what to say.

Although she felt she should respond with something, to avoid appearing impolite, her spiritual intuition told her that saying the wrong thing at this moment could lead to unexpected consequences she didn't want to face.

In the end, Jenna put down her phone and watched TV, pretending not to have noticed Luo Shan's new message.

She alternated between immersing herself in the TV drama's story and instinctively criticizing some of the actors' performances.

This continued until eleven o'clock, when Jenna took a shower and washed her hair. She froze her wet hair with frost, then let the frost crack and fall to the bathroom floor, quickly drying her thick long hair this way.

Finally, she used a hairdryer to make her hair a bit fluffier, lay down on the bed, turned off all the lights, and slowly drifted off to sleep.

She wasn't used to falling asleep quickly through Cogitation. She preferred to let her thoughts wander freely before sleep, allowing them to fly unrestrained, to reminisce, to imagine.

In the dark room, Jenna's breathing finally became long and gentle.

The screen of her phone placed beside her pillow suddenly lit up.

The lit screen showed no incoming calls, messages, or system updates to run.

It only lit up for two or three seconds before going dark again, not triggering Jenna's spiritual intuition.

Not long after, the phone screen lit up again, still without any information displayed.

After alternating between lighting up and going dark three or four times, Jenna's phone returned to normal, with no more unusual activity.

Jenna's astral body once again saw the layers of frozen storms and the semi-transparent barrier formed by the storms. She saw numerous human shadows wandering in the virtual image of Dechuang Garden district, and strange creatures trying to enter this "spirit world residential district".

Like last night, Luo Shan guarded the semi-transparent barrier, sometimes using painting to create different supernatural effects to repel invaders, sometimes creating totem-like objects combined with strange chanting to directly affect various strange creatures…

After a while, the strange creatures retreated into the darkness. Luo Shan sighed in relief and flew to the area where Jenna and other astral bodies were wandering.

Jenna tensed mentally, employing her acting skills to make her eyes show obvious bewilderment, losing their proper focus.

She allowed herself to be guided by spirituality, drifting about like a kite.

Luo Shan quietly observed her for twenty to thirty seconds, then descended beside her, following her unconscious "wandering" and said casually, "The monster with a human upper body and a python lower body is called Lamotte. They prey on humans, feeding on human spirits, internal organs, and blood…

"The monsters that look like offspring of owls and humans are called Morna. They like to kill children, especially human children…

"Those naked women and men are also monsters, subordinates of the Spirits of Lust, who like to suck the energy and life force of the opposite sex…

…

"Those Spirit Bodies also murder humans because they particularly love to cook and eat human internal organs…"

After introducing them one by one, Luo Shan's voice became low, as if talking to herself, "Don't ask me why I know these things…"

Jenna maintained her performance but took note of these words.

Luo Shan exhaled slowly and deeply, with a sense of relief from finally speaking out some of the things weighing on her heart, no longer as tormented as before, and not having to worry about revealing her own secrets. She flew back to the barrier, waiting for a possible second wave of invaders.

…

At Xinhong District, in a rented apartment.

Franca looked at Ludwig, who had changed into bear pajamas, and asked curiously, "What abilities did you gain after eating that Sleepless mouse?"

Ludwig yawned. "I can see things clearly in pitch darkness, sense dangers hidden in the dark, and my spirituality and strength have increased…"

"You didn't gain the ability to be energetic with only two hours of sleep each day?" Franca asked for confirmation.

Ludwig shook his head. "No."

That's good, that's good. Sleepless hunger sounds terrifying… Not sleeping and being bored, you can only eat… Well, you could also preview, study, review… Franca sighed in relief without hiding it, then said thoughtfully to Ludwig, "Because you haven't digested the Beyonder characteristics and truly completed the absorption, your utilization of the Beyonder characteristics is still very rough, with great limitations?"

Ludwig nodded. "That should be the case."

"Then do you think you'll still have these changes when you return to reality?" What Franca really wanted to ask was whether the dream potions, represented by the Sleepless drink, contained real Beyonder characteristics that had been "grafted" over.

Ludwig answered honestly, "I don't know."

"If you get kicked out of the dream, remember to confirm this point," Lumian reminded Ludwig.

The authenticity of potions was related to some of their subsequent strategies.

Ludwig reluctantly agreed.

Lumian thought for two seconds and asked again, "If I don't force you, compel you to stay in this dream, would you want to leave now, and would you be willing to enter again if you were kicked out of the dream?"

Ludwig hesitated for a moment and said, "I-I quite like it here."

Your attitude wasn't like this before, especially after knowing you still have to study, do homework, and take exams constantly in the dream… Franca grumbled inwardly.

"What do you like about this place?" Lumian asked with interest.

Ludwig pondered seriously and said, "The food tastes good, and some of it is real. I can also watch cartoons, and all of you have become a bit nicer to me…"

As if we were terribly abusing you before… Franca didn't say this out loud.

After Ludwig entered the second bedroom and lay down on the bed, Lumian turned his head towards Franca and chuckled. "Still not asleep at this time?"

"Can't I be nervous? Tomorrow is the interview, the first real interview in my life, and I can't fail!" Franca paced back and forth anxiously, muttering, "Normal makeup won't do, but looking too ugly won't work either. How do I strike the right balance… When to use Charm during the interview, shallow Charm or full Charm, then have Anthony find a chance to Hypnotize the interviewers to make them forget about it… Thinking about all this keeps me awake…"

Lumian chuckled in response. "It's not a big deal if you fail; you can find other opportunities.

"Besides, if you're already thinking about having Anthony Hypnotize the interviewers to make them forget about being Charmed, why not have Anthony directly induce the interviewers to choose you?"

"Wouldn't that make me seem useless?" Franca mumbled quietly.

After Lumian's consolation, thinking about how her companions would back her up, she finally calmed some of her anxiety and nervousness. She clenched her fist and cheered herself on, "It's just a try, no big deal!

"It doesn't matter if I fail, failure is the mother of success!"

Seeing Franca's behavior, Lumian suddenly recalled his younger self.

He stood up, walked in front of Franca, and gave her a hug.

"Hey…" Franca was startled.

Lumian said with a smile, his voice slightly low, "Aurore used to often tell me, just go for it, whether you succeed or fail, I'll give you a hug…"

Franca's expression changed, she opened her mouth, then closed it.

After two seconds, she smiled and said, "Shouldn't I, as the older sister—no, older brother, be saying these words to you?"

She broke away from Lumian's embrace and chuckled.

"Next time, when you're nervous, I'll say this to you too, and I'll give you a hug."

"A Hunter's nervousness won't show." Lumian shrugged.

"Tch!" Franca made a disdainful sound and entered the master bedroom.

Rest well to face the interview!

…

The next morning, on the tenth floor of the Tech Building, outside the "White Maple" conference room.

Franca found that nearly twenty people had come for the interview, each a stylishly dressed, attractive female urbanite.

Of course, with a Demoness's beauty, even at just Sequence 7 level, she was much more beautiful than these women. But today, Franca wore slightly old-fashioned black-framed glasses, hiding her bright eyes, and had let down her ponytail to fall naturally, appearing less carefree.

She also used the Lie earring, combined with makeup techniques, to modify some details of her features, making herself look like a conservative, average-level beauty.

"Next, Luo Fu."

Hearing her name, Franca straightened her fitted white women's shirt and loose-legged gray trousers, and walked into the White Maple conference room.

Inside the conference room were three interviewers, one man and two women, with an impressively beautiful woman sitting to the side.

That woman wore azure-colored contact lenses, her slightly curled long hair dyed chestnut brown. Her features had a somewhat exotic feel. She appeared to be only eighteen or nineteen years old, her face showing a hint of youthfulness, like a freshman or sophomore college student, yet she had an air of long-standing authority.

Princess Bernadette, Emperor Roselle's eldest daughter? No, now she's Miss Huang Beibei… Why has she come to observe Intis Group's interview? What does she want to do… What does she dislike, what does she like… As thoughts raced through her mind, Franca decided to abandon her plan to naturally Charm the interviewers later.

She answered the interviewers' questions normally according to her background setting, without standing out in any way or revealing her true personality.

After all candidates had been interviewed, the male interviewer looked towards Huang Beibei and asked flatteringly, "Young Miss, do you have any preferred candidates?"

"Just call me Miss Huang," Huang Beibei said in an even tone. "Some of those interviewees were too showy, some dressed too revealingly, some put all their energy into makeup and dressing up. How can they work like that?"

But Mr. Huang likes that… The male interviewer didn't dare say this out loud.

Huang Beibei continued, "I choose the most conservative one, Luo Fu."

"Got it." The interviewer didn't dare oppose Miss Huang.

Even if Mr. Huang himself were here, he would say, "Right, right, right, my daughter has such good judgment!"

Chapter 938: Salary

At noon, Zhang Qing, the deputy director of the administrative department who had overseen the earlier interview, walked out of the Tech Building, heading to a nearby mall to meet a friend.

Inside a gray sedan parked by the roadside, Franca turned her body slightly and nodded seriously at Anthony, her expression stern.

Anthony immediately got out of the car, mingled with the crowd, and hurriedly approached Zhang Qing from the side.

Bump! He "accidentally" bumped into the man in his thirties, causing Zhang Qing's phone to fall to the ground.

"Sorry, sorry," Anthony apologized repeatedly, bending down to pick up the phone. He wiped it on his clothes a few times before handing it back to Zhang Qing.

Zhang Qing, with a dark expression, angrily scolded Anthony, "Are you blind? How can you walk like that?"

"Sorry, really sorry," Anthony responded sincerely, with an attitude full of remorse.

Zhang Qing stared into Anthony's eyes, which had been adjusted to a deep brown color using the Lie earring, as if trying to determine whether the apology was genuine or just a perfunctory excuse.

After a few seconds, he took back his phone and suddenly felt a moment of confusion.

Zhang Qing shook his head and carefully inspected his phone, finding no significant damage.

"Forget it, just watch your step next time!" The deputy director of the administrative department of Intis Group's headquarters, showing some class, waved his phone dismissively, no longer pursuing the matter.

"Really, I'm sorry. How about I buy you an iced coffee to make up for it?" Anthony suggested, pointing to a coffee shop in the corner of the Tech Building's first floor.

Zhang Qing's expression softened. "No need. I'm in a hurry.

"You look around my age; be more careful in the future," Zhang Qing added before heading towards the mall at the intersection, braving the scorching sun.

Anthony noticed that there was a long line at the coffee shop, so he quickly ran into the convenience store next to the Tech Building's main entrance and bought a canned coffee.

Holding the coffee, he jogged to catch up with Zhang Qing. "I'm really sorry about earlier. This is to show my apology."

He handed over the coffee.

Zhang Qing glanced at Anthony with some suspicion, met his eyes for a couple of seconds, then took the canned coffee and said, "You're pretty considerate."

Zhang Qing didn't intend to drink the beverage from a stranger, but he felt it was acceptable to accept the apology.

Just as he took the coffee, Zhang Qing had another brief moment of confusion. Then, he felt that Anthony's apology was incredibly sincere, and with his proactive actions, combined with the fact that they seemed to be around the same age, Zhang Qing suddenly felt a sense of closeness.

Seeing this, Anthony felt a bit of relief.

This was his second attempt at Hypnosis, and it finally succeeded.

The first attempt was when he returned Zhang Qing's phone, but unfortunately, it failed.

After becoming a Sequence 6 Hypnotist, Anthony's Psychological Cue" or Hypnosis, no longer required the assistance of candles, extract, or other mediums. He only needed the target's attention to be genuinely focused on something, especially his own eyes, to open the door to their Body of Heart and Mind. If the process involved actions of giving and receiving, the effect would be even better, and the success rate would be higher.

Later, when Anthony advanced to Sequence 5, his application of Hypnosis improved even further.

But now, he was suppressed to Sequence 7 in the dream, so while he could still perform Hypnosis without the help of candles, extract, or pocket watches, the success rate was much lower. It was rare for him to fail when hypnotizing an ordinary person, so he had to urgently make up for it.

"I just finished an interview and was in a hurry to get to the next one, so I was rushing," Anthony explained further.

"Just finished an interview?" Zhang Qing, who had been influenced, smiled and said, "I just finished one too, but I was the interviewer."

"Are you with Intis Group?" Anthony pretended to be curious.

Seventy percent of the office workers coming out of the Tech Building were likely from Intis Group.

"Yes, with the headquarters. We were hiring for an administrative position." Zhang Qing, for some reason, felt unusually relaxed and ended up saying what was on his mind, "We've chosen someone, but I don't know if Mr. Huang will reject it later. Although hiring for an administrative role doesn't require a report to him, the HR Director can decide, but he likes to visit the administrative department…"

At this point, Zhang Qing suddenly shut his mouth, realizing he shouldn't be gossiping about Mr. Huang in front of an outsider.

"Your boss, Mr. Huang? He's well-known nationwide," Anthony said, pretending to suddenly realize.

Zhang Qing smiled.

"Yes, well, the person we hired this time doesn't quite fit Mr. Huang's aesthetic. Uh, mainly in style, though her figure is up to standard. But since Miss Huang personally selected her, it's a done deal.

"Actually, this is a good thing. Half of the employees in the administrative department spend their days focused on makeup and gossip, waiting for Mr. Huang to drop by. Sometimes, I feel like a head eunuch—no, the assistant to a head eunuch—managing the emperor's harem, like something out of Empresses in the Palace. But now, with a capable person joining, my stress will be much less. Otherwise, I'd consider that slacker Luo Shan a model worker…"

Talking about these things, Zhang Qing was full of complaints.

Anthony played along perfectly, letting Zhang Qing vent a bunch of frustrations, making him feel completely at ease.

After a while, Zhang Qing checked his watch.

"I have to go. I'm in a hurry."

He hesitated whether to add Anthony on WeChat, thinking it was rare to meet someone he could chat with so effortlessly at this stage in life.

In the end, Zhang Qing decided not to, out of a sense of self-importance.

Anthony hesitated as well. Adding Zhang Qing on WeChat could provide significant convenience for Franca and Lumian's operations within Intis Group.

But in the end, Anthony refrained, feeling that it was unwise to tie all their connections to Intis Group, as it might be easier for the Celestial Worthy or His subordinates to catch them all at once.

After parting ways with Zhang Qing and waiting for him to walk away, Anthony turned and walked towards the gray sedan parked by the roadside.

He didn't get in but, as he approached the car, subtly raised his right hand and made an "OK" gesture.

Then, he walked past the gray sedan and headed towards another intersection.

From now on, he would have to stay alone until tomorrow.

This was because he had closely interacted with Zhang Qing and used Beyonder powers on him. And Zhang Qing was someone close to the dream manifestation of Mr. Fool, even if not directly.

Seeing Anthony's gesture, Franca slowly nodded, then calmly drove the gray sedan onto the road.

Once they were far from the Tech Building, she allowed herself a satisfied smile and, feeling triumphant, said to Lumian in the passenger seat, "The moment I saw Miss Huang in the conference room, I knew we had to scrap all our original plans.

"In a flash, I figured out exactly what to do!

"What do you call that? Quick thinking, the ability to adapt!"

After Franca finished boasting, Lumian chuckled and said, "Maybe that was the real Princess Bernadette, who entered the dream specifically to help you infiltrate Intis Group."

"…" Franca quickly adjusted her mindset and said doubtfully, "Can Princess Bernadette actually enter the dream and control Huang Beibei's dream manifestation? How many times has she been kicked out?"

"The Major Arcana card holders are unsure. They only know that she was kicked out once after commissioning Zhou Mingrui to investigate the quality of Dream Tutoring Classes. Whether she had been kicked out before that or how many times, she hasn't told anyone," Lumian recounted from the data. "What is certain is that the Major Arcana card holders have synchronized our situation with her and believe she's trustworthy and willing to help."

Franca concurred succinctly, "I hope it's true. If Mr. Huang really has an eye for talent and comes to bother me, I can ask her to rein her dad in."

Neither Franca nor Lumian had any faith in Emperor Roselle's or his dream manifestation's restraint when it came to women.

…

Xinhong District, in the rented apartment, afternoon.

Lumian received a phone call.

After finishing the conversation, he turned to Franca with a smile and said, "I got the job!"

"Phew…" Franca exhaled in visible relief.

With this, even if her own job offer ended up being vetoed by Mr. Huang, they could still move forward with their plan to access the dream manifestation of Mr. Fool, Zhou Mingrui, through the Intis Group—though it would be more challenging.

Franca, now curious, asked, "What's the salary?"

"It's 3,500 yuan a month during probation, and once confirmed, it's 4,500. For now, it's just rotating between guarding the front and back entrances of the building, patrolling different floors, and monitoring the surveillance cameras. If I get assigned to a more important post in the security department, the pay will go up significantly," Lumian repeated the details from the call. "Plus, the job comes with two uniforms."

"The Intis Group is quite generous. Given the salary standards in this city, that's decent for a security job," Franca said, feeling happier now that their team would have a stable source of income.

Before she could start worrying about her own offer, her phone rang.

After listening for a few moments, Franca's smile slowly blossomed. She raised her free hand and gave Lumian a thumbs-up, signaling success.

Her offer had come through too!

"Yes, yes. No problem." After a series of confirmations, Franca's smile suddenly froze.

After she hung up, Lumian, who had heard the conversation clearly thanks to his Hunter's hearing, remained silent, waiting for her to speak.

With a wooden expression, Franca said, "The probation is also one month, with a salary of 6,000, and once confirmed, it's 7,000, plus an allowance for clothing. The Intis Group is indeed generous.

"But…"

She paused, her lips moving slightly, her expression turning a bit dazed, before continuing, "But there's a dress code: summer attire requires a blouse, skirt, stockings, and heels…"

"Can you opt out of that?" Lumian asked, keeping his laughter in check.

"No." Franca shook her head. "This must be one of Mr. Huang's rules."

After a moment of silence, she quietly asked, "Can I not go? Maybe Jenna can apply instead."

"Do you think she'd get the job?" Lumian countered.

Franca thought for a few seconds and said, "No."

Immediately, she gnashed her teeth. "I can't let Mr. Huang harass her!"

…

Dechuang Garden, Building 5, 23rd floor, Room 3.

Jenna stood by the window, contemplating whether to sneak into Luo Shan's room tonight for a more thorough search.

She hesitated for a while before deciding to wait. Luo Shan's current state was odd, still retaining her role as the neighborhood's guardian. Jenna worried that her actions might provoke Luo Shan, shattering that balance and causing her to lose her protective instincts entirely.

Even though Luo Shan was merely a dream image, Jenna couldn't bring herself to destroy the last traces of goodness within her.

That dedication to protection had touched her.

Maybe she can still be saved? Maybe, as long as she doesn't advance further and endure more severe pollution, she can retain her sense of self? Hmm, having a boon from an evil god doesn't necessarily mean turning bad, just like Lumian… Jenna mused as these thoughts crossed her mind.

Chapter 939: Virus

Jenna left the window and sat back on the couch, temporarily pushing thoughts of Luo Shan out of her mind.

If the interview went well today, Lumian or Franca would move in with her, and their group would proceed with subsequent actions in pairs—Ludwig was temporarily an accessory.

Sometimes Jenna hoped it would be Lumian, other times she prayed it would be Franca. During their time in the dream city, she wanted to spend more time with Franca, to encourage her, treat her better, and show how much she valued her, making her feel needed, not alone.

Though Jenna hadn't explicitly discussed this with Lumian, she felt they shared an unspoken understanding, as some of their daily behaviors were very similar.

As her thoughts wandered, Jenna suddenly chuckled at herself.

Actually, the best option would be for Lumian and Franca to live here together.

That way, Franca wouldn't lack the feeling of being needed, Lumian could do more, and Jenna would inevitably find herself wondering what Lumian and Franca were talking about, how they were interacting, whether they had grown closer, or if their relationship had evolved.

This made her feel a little bitter, a bit uncomfortable, but it also helped her further digest her Affliction potion.

When it came to causing others pain, Jenna's potion digestion was progressing rapidly thanks to Ludwig's presence; it wouldn't be long before she completed it. But when it came to her own pain, she still had a long way to go.

She murmured softly, "Imagination and suspicion are more painful than reality, and they eat at the soul even more."

This was a principle she had developed for her role-playing, more refined than "causing others pain" or "causing herself pain." If she were an evil Demoness, she could use this principle to subtly manipulate someone, appearing normal on the surface while fostering jealousy in their wife or girlfriend, gradually driving them both into a pit of pain.

Of course, she also hoped that Lumian and Franca's relationship would improve, that they could save each other to some extent.

She was all for it, as long as she wasn't left out.

Jenna gradually reined in her thoughts, unlocked her phone, and opened her photo gallery.

She looked at the sketch of a self-portrait Luo Shan had sent her yesterday, zoomed in on it, and selected the "Delete" button.

She felt that keeping a Painter's artwork on her phone was risky.

She hadn't deleted it yesterday because she wanted to see if anything would happen, but nothing did. However, she couldn't stay on alert about the picture on her phone forever; she still needed her phone to contact Lumian, Franca, and Anthony!

After deleting the photo, Jenna idly scrolled through her phone, flipping through news stories, novels, funny videos, and shopping tips.

Time passed quickly. Jenna straightened her back slightly and stretched without moving her hands.

She felt it might be a good time to message Franca and check on their situation. But before that, she cautiously checked her phone for any strange apps or statuses.

Suddenly, Jenna froze.

She found Luo Shan's sketch still sitting quietly in its original spot in the gallery, lifelike, with a smile on its lips and eyes full of spirit!

For a moment, Jenna felt uncertain.

Did I really delete it earlier?

Was I influenced and hallucinating?

Jenna quickly calmed herself down and deleted the photo again.

She spent the next few minutes staring at the gallery, watching to see if Luo Shan's sketch would reappear.

After a while, the phone screen naturally dimmed, and Jenna quickly reached out to reactivate it.

The photo with Luo Shan's sketch was back in its original spot.

Jenna confirmed there was a problem but didn't know how to solve it. She didn't even dare to use her phone to search for a solution online.

At that moment, she heard the doorbell ring.

Startled, Jenna quietly stepped behind the door and looked out through the peephole.

She saw Lumian and Franca.

With a sigh of relief, Jenna opened the door.

During this process, she remained somewhat cautious until Lumian and Franca appeared vividly before her eyes, with no warning from her spiritual intuition.

"Perfect timing," Jenna said in a hushed voice.

Franca immediately showed concern, slipping the key card into her loose pants pocket as she walked into the room and asked in a serious tone, "What's going on?"

The elevator in the Dechuang Garden required a card to access, and the landlord had provided two cards. Jenna kept one, and Franca had the other.

Once Lumian closed the door and set up the Bottle of Fiction, Jenna carefully recounted everything about Luo Shan.

She concluded, "I remember the Purifiers telling me that one of their colleagues once encountered a painter undergoing mental treatment. The painter always claimed to Spirit Body walk at night, entering a space similar to but distinct from the spirit world, where they fought monsters and enemies trying to invade reality from that space, protecting the peace of their neighborhood.

"This is very similar to what I saw with my Astral Projection when I was asleep."

"You mean Luo Shan's protective actions might just be another aspect of her corruption by the boon?" Franca understood what Jenna was getting at.

Jenna tersely acknowledged. "That was my initial guess. But after talking to Luo Shan and hearing her describe those monsters to my Astral Projection, I think she genuinely holds a belief in protection. This likely stems from Mr. Fool's subconscious perception and expectations of her."

"So you think Luo Shan's protective behavior is not only a requirement of the boon but also a reflection of her humanity and will, a result of Mr. Fool's subconscious clashing with the Fantasy Association's evil god's influence?" Lumian's gaze flickered as he made the connection with his own experience.

Jenna nodded. "What I'm worried about now is that if our investigation agitates Luo Shan, it might push her into complete corruption, plunging her into the abyss. And that could also signify a small defeat for Mr. Fool in this particular matter. The loss is minor, but if enough minor losses accumulate, it could irreversibly tip the scales."

Lumian agreed, "Our priority now is to delete that photo."

"Right. If it stays on your phone, it's like a ticking time bomb," Franca said as she took Jenna's phone and focused on trying to delete the sketch, but it stubbornly reappeared.

Franca frowned. "Do we really need to use one of those nuclear-option antivirus programs?"

Lumian glanced at the gallery on the phone, reached out, and tried to enter the screen to see if he could find Luo Shan's sketch in the world behind the screen and destroy it in both physical and mystical senses.

At that moment, Franca stopped him.

"Hold on. Even if you can enter the phone's internal world, that would be like facing Luo Shan's sketch head-on. It would likely alert Luo Shan, agitate her, and confirm our suspicions."

Franca then smiled. "Didn't you add that Stiano on WeChat? Since he's a dream manifestation of a high-ranking member of the Church of Steam, and his WeChat nickname has 'Information Technology' in it, and he's studying at a university, maybe he knows how to delete a mystically infected photo."

"I'll ask." Lumian nodded thoughtfully.

He dismissed the Bottle of Fiction and had Jenna send Luo Shan's sketch to his WeChat.

Then, Lumian messaged Stiano:

"Can you help? My phone has a weird virus."

Within seconds, Stiano, whose nickname was "Electric Power Energy and Information Technology," replied: "Send me a screenshot."

"He responded quickly. Does that mean he's interested in this kind of thing?" Franca muttered.

Lumian opened the photo, had Franca take a screenshot, and sent it to Stiano.

"This photo won't delete; it keeps reappearing."

A moment later, "Electric Power and Information Technology" sent back a compressed file.

"There's a small program inside. Use it to load the image and delete it, and you should be fine."

Is there really a way to solve this? Franca and Jenna both wondered as Lumian followed the instructions, extracting the file and launching a program called "Information Shredder."

He used the program to load Luo Shan's sketch, pressed the built-in "Delete" button, and then exited the program, locked his phone for a couple of seconds, and reopened it.

He saw that the photo was gone from the gallery, not reappearing.

After testing it several times, Lumian sent the compressed file to Jenna.

Jenna also successfully deleted Luo Shan's sketch, without it returning to her gallery.

"He's really an expert…" Franca said, gazing at Lumian's WeChat contact, "Electric Power and Information Technology," with genuine admiration.

Lumian used voice input to thank Stiano.

"Electric Power and Information Technology" replied: "This virus is worth studying. If you encounter similar problems again, feel free to contact me."

Only with similar problems? Lumian mused as he sent a nodding emoji in response.

Finally, Jenna relaxed.

Suddenly, Franca hissed, "In modern society, or rather, in the dream city, some Sequences and Beyonder powers have become even more terrifying and harder to guard against…

"As we've seen, if a Painter's artwork has mystical powers, then the corresponding photo can carry some of that too. And if it spreads online, seen and downloaded by thousands, how horrifying would that be…

"Even the surveillance world we encountered before isn't something we'd face in reality."

Before Lumian and Jenna could respond, Franca had another idea.

"Computer viruses and phone viruses are still viruses. Can they be controlled by a Demoness?

"Probably not… But a higher Sequence of the Mystery Pryer pathway should definitely be able to."

Chapter 940: Repaying the Loan

Lumian and Jenna could deeply relate to Franca's concerns.

They had encountered a Pixie in reality before, a higher Sequence Beyonder of the Painter pathway, but they had never imagined that something as simple as a photo sent through the information network could carry such terrifying supernatural power.

"Yes." Jenna nodded. "We need to think more about what different pathways of Beyonders can achieve in the dream city that they couldn't in reality and prepare accordingly."

Though the dream city suppressed all Beyonder powers to the level of Sequence 7, its unique characteristics and the details of its social functioning had brought about possibilities that exceeded their previous expectations.

Of course, Lumian and the others had already begun to discuss how certain Beyonder powers from the Demoness and Hunter pathways could interact with the dream city in unexpected ways. However, they had yet to thoroughly explore the potential changes other pathways might undergo as a result.

Their current conclusions were:

The Hunter and Demoness pathways, which symbolized calamity, could exploit the unique features of the dream city positively, like using the abundance of mirrors to set up Mirror Mazes and cast different mirror spells at any time and place, or utilizing screens as a medium to access previously unreachable or nonexistent surveillance worlds and other dimensional spaces.

On the negative side, there were many more uses, which, as Franca put it, involved actions that would violate criminal laws, and not just any violations, but those that would warrant severe penalties. Examples included using the Internet to seduce others and spread pleasure, amplifying the destructive power of a Pyromaniac by triggering natural gas explosions, or leveraging the dense buildings and population to better and faster spread diseases, among others.

There were countless other more detailed and everyday uses as well.

After discussing this for a while, Lumian said to Jenna, "For now, Franca will stay here for a while. She can observe Luo Shan during the day and approach her as a colleague."

Jenna had already had a hunch, and she looked at Franca with a delighted expression, asking, "Have you joined the Intis Group?"

Franca smiled nonchalantly. "Of course."

She then recounted how she had prepared for the interview and how she had adjusted her plan upon seeing Miss Huang also participating.

"When do you both start officially?" Jenna asked with concern.

Franca replied with a hint of pride, "I have three days to sort out my affairs. Lumian has to report tomorrow."

The identity that Madam Justice had created for Franca was that of a 25-year-old white-collar worker with three years of experience, someone who had changed fields right after graduation and no longer worked in her original profession.

Franca had been worried that the work experience on her resume might be an issue since it was fabricated. However, when she pretended to be a background checker from a certain company and made a phone call, she was surprised to find that there really was someone named "Luo Fu" who matched her profile closely.

This led her to suspect that the company might be secretly connected to Madam Justice or other Major Arcana card holders in the dream city. Alternatively, before Madam Justice was expelled, she might have used her ability to weave the dream and pre-embedded some identities that could be utilized. After identifying the bearer of the five lucky coins, she might have painstakingly and time-consumingly altered the names, appearances, and other information.

"Anything you need to prepare?" Jenna asked, intending to find out if she could help in any way.

Franca's expression suddenly fell. "I need to buy a skirt, stockings, and high heels…"

It had been a long time since she had consumed the Witch potion, and the most she had worn was a skirt-pants combination. She had never actually worn a skirt, let alone the other items!

"It's part of the dress code," Lumian explained on her behalf.

Jenna understood Franca's reluctance and, with a flicker of her eyes, said, "Have you forgotten the acting method? Forgotten the roles you've played before?

"This is just another form of acting. It's not about digesting the potion this time but about getting close to Mr. Fool's dream manifestation and secretly dealing with the lurking subordinates of the Celestial Worthy and the evil gods' followers, thwarting their schemes.

"Remember, you're just acting."

Franca had already made up her mind, and now she was just finding more reasons to justify it. So, Jenna's Instigation easily worked, and Franca's expression softened.

Jenna looked at her and smiled slightly. "I'll wear the same kind of outfit as you. If we're all dressed the same, there won't be any awkwardness or shame."

Franca's eyes lit up. "Sure!"

Since she had decided to make this sacrifice, getting some perks was a welcome bonus!

Lumian stayed silent, letting Franca and Jenna continue their conversation, wary of being roped into making a similar promise.

He checked the time on his phone and reminded the two Demonesses, "Even though we didn't confront Luo Shan's sketch directly, the fact that we managed to delete that kind of photo itself is suspicious. If Luo Shan notices it's gone, she'll likely test us again or even take more drastic action. You two need to stay vigilant."

"Mm, I was thinking the same thing just now," Franca and Jenna responded almost in unison.

Lumian waved them off and left.

Once he was gone, Franca plopped down on the couch, relaxing as she smiled at Jenna.

"Let's go shopping for clothes tomorrow. We have money now; the lottery winnings are in!"

Jenna visibly breathed a sigh of relief at this news.

She cautiously suggested, "Should we pay off those micro loans first?"

She had seen many people in Quartier du Jardin Botanique and Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman who borrowed from loan sharks, only to eventually destroy themselves and their families, dragging down the ones they loved most. So, even after entering the dream city, she was always extremely cautious when it came to taking out micro loans.

"I was hoping to save up some money to rent those good items from Star Dream Provisions Store…" Franca hesitated for two seconds before saying, "Fine, let's pay off the loans first. This might even increase the credit limit, which could come in handy at critical moments when we need to go all in."

Before transmigrating, she had seen many cases of people borrowing micro loans and having their lives ruined as a result.

Now, as a fairly experienced Beyonder, she knew that money could be used to rent the magic mirror Arrodes, and she understood that in the dream city, money was likely a symbol representing valuable resources. The "offense-defense battle" that occurred during the prize redemption process further solidified this theory.

From this perspective, carrying outstanding micro loans indeed seemed risky. While it could serve as an emergency solution in the short term, dragging it out over a long period or relying on them to sustain daily life was not a wise choice.

Jenna also sat down on the couch and urged Franca to repay the online loan on the spot. She then transferred some money to her teammates to help them repay their loans as well.

"Only 120,000 left…" Franca sighed.

Jenna changed the subject, and the two of them chatted about their recent experiences, sharing their thoughts on daily life.

In the end, Jenna couldn't help but ask again, "How exactly can we awaken Mr. Fool?"

They had discussed this question many times before, but still had no concrete ideas. They could only observe and make contact, hoping to find clues and inspiration.

Franca shook her head and sighed.

"I don't know. The Major Arcana have tried everything they could think of, from directly reminding him of the existence of Beyonder powers to filming a movie that fully depicted his experiences in the hope of triggering his memory. None of it worked, and they were quickly expelled from the dream as a result…"

She hadn't known before, but now she understood that the movie they shot was The Great Pirate 3.

"It seems like no one has tried directly telling Zhou Mingrui the truth…" Jenna recalled.

"We're not sure if that would work, but it would certainly lead to being expelled from the dream quickly," Franca replied with a self-deprecating smile. "Still, if we have enough attempts left, we could isolate someone and let them give it a shot."

Late at night, the two Demonesses washed up and went to bed, each occupying a pillow.

They had already discussed how to deal with any probes Luo Shan might carry out next. Now, without saying much, they exchanged a glance and tacitly pulled up their blankets, closing their eyes in the cool air brought by the air conditioner.

Using ice to cool the room would be too easily detected by any potential watchers as an indication of Beyonder powers.

…

Once again, Jenna's Astral Projection ventured out and saw many spirits wandering around, along with the blurry, illusory buildings, the frozen storm, and the semi-transparent barrier.

She didn't immediately check on Luo Shan's situation. Instead, she kept her eyes unfocused and her gaze blank, floating and moving back and forth naturally under the guidance of her spirituality.

During this process, she saw Franca, who was also in a similar state.

Finally, Jenna's body turned toward the semi-transparent barrier adjacent to the deep darkness.

There was no one there.

Luo Shan wasn't there fighting off the monsters trying to invade!

Jenna's heart tightened, but she maintained her previous state, continuing to wander in her Astral Projection.

After a while, her gaze naturally rose, and she saw Luo Shan.

Luo Shan, dressed in a pale yellow skirt-pants combination, was floating high up, quietly watching her and Franca with deep eyes. It was impossible to tell how long she had been watching.

Jenna's nerves instantly tightened, but thanks to her acting skills, she showed no signs of abnormality. Franca remained just as natural.

After a long, intense stare, Luo Shan flew toward the area where strange creatures were attempting to invade. From behind the semi-transparent barrier, she blocked their attacks and drove them back repeatedly.

Neither Franca nor Jenna let their guard down. Like background characters, they dutifully repeated simple actions and irregular movements.

Suddenly, both felt a sense of danger and woke up instantly from their sleep.

They smelled a sickening, foul odor and saw a pair of brown-yellow eyes staring at them from the night clinging to the ceiling.

In the darkness, a pair of wings covered in brown feathers, like those of a giant owl, spread out.

Chapter 941: Recognition

It was a human being seemingly embedded within an owl. His eyes were perfectly round, with pupils that gleamed in brown and yellow, filled with undisguised malice.

Anyone who made eye contact with those eyes would inevitably experience a jumbled mind, tense emotions, and a soul-deep fear.

The half-owl, half-human abomination flapped its wings and, with a foul stench, swooped down toward Jenna and Franca, who were lying in bed.

Its mouth opened, releasing nearly tangible sound waves.

The sound waves struck the two Demonesses, passed through them, and hit the bedsheets, dispersing in all directions.

The bed was now empty. The air conditioner panel's screen, the glass top of the bedside table, and the dark glass embedded in the wardrobe doors all flickered with a dim, eerie light.

Behind the half-owl, half-human abomination, Franca's figure sprang up, clutching an almost invisible Wintry Blade and stabbing at the target with the speed of a gust of wind.

The transparent triangular spike pierced the abomination's body with precision, freezing it in an instant as if it had encountered an icy spell.

At the bedroom door, Jenna's figure appeared, holding a mirror that reflected the enemy's now stuttering movements.

With her other hand, she ignited a silent black flame and quickly ran it across the surface of the mirror.

The half-owl, half-human abomination ignited with an evil black flame from the inside out, but due to the Wintry Blade's effects, it couldn't even let out a wail or scream.

Soon, the abomination burned to ashes, leaving nothing behind.

"A type of spirit creature…" Franca understood that a Demoness's black flame mainly targeted spirituality and life, making it difficult to ignite a physical entity.

She gently descended from midair, as weightless as a feather.

Jenna quickly and quietly said, "That was a Morna, the creature from Luo Shan's painting, and the invader Luo Shan has been fighting."

"Luo Shan's aggressive probe?" Franca responded without hesitation. "We need to go to Luo Shan's room now and try to subdue her as soon as possible, or we might be kicked out of the dream."

Jenna had clearly considered this as well. She nodded and said, "You head to Luo Shan's room. I'll go to that spirit-world-like space. If necessary, I'll take Luo Shan's place and guard the barrier to prevent those invaders from getting through."

She thought Luo Shan might not be in her room and could still be at the semi-transparent barrier. She was also worried that without Luo Shan's protection, the invaders might break through the defense line and cause a disaster.

Franca didn't waste time and, with a slight nod, slipped to the other side of the curtains, opened the master bedroom window, and jumped down to the 15th floor.

She didn't use the Ice Amulet to cross through the mirror world, fearing that Luo Shan, who had sensed Jenna's previous probe, might have set some traps afterward.

Franca's body was as light as a feather, yet the wind didn't push her off course. She landed precisely on Luo Shan's bedroom windowsill and pried open the window with a thin layer of frost.

Franca didn't rush in. Using the faint pre-dawn light, she quickly scanned the room.

The bed was empty, and paintings of various subjects hung everywhere.

Hiding? Franca pulled out a mirror from the Traveler's Bag.

She intended to divine the level of danger and create an illusion of herself using the mirrors inside and outside the room to see if she could lure Luo Shan into making a move.

In the spirit-world-like space shrouded by the frozen storm, Jenna's Astral Projection emerged and immediately looked toward the nearby semi-transparent barrier adjacent to the deep darkness.

Luo Shan wasn't there.

Mornas and other bizarre creatures were attacking the barrier, gradually thinning it and causing the frozen storm to show signs of disintegration.

Jenna looked around, scanning up and down, but still didn't spot Luo Shan.

She sighed inwardly and floated to the area under heavy assault by the monsters. Dangerous black flames and crystalline ice spears formed around her, shooting outward and smashing many of the invaders.

After holding the line for fifteen minutes, the monsters retreated into the depths of the darkness, their attack fully repelled.

After a while, sunlight began to filter into the area, and both the frozen storm and the wandering spirits and illusory buildings faded away.

Jenna's Astral Projection also returned to her body.

Morning had arrived.

Franca had already returned, her expression serious as she told Jenna, "I couldn't find Luo Shan. She either hid early or left."

"Could she have hidden inside one of the paintings?" Jenna quickly suggested a possibility.

Franca gently shook her head in response. "I checked all the paintings. None of them had any human shadows, but the sketch portrait you mentioned is missing.

"There's a painting of a bridge that stretches from the edge of a cliff near the foreground over a bottomless dark abyss to another cliff in the distance, where there's a black forest.

"I suspect Luo Shan entered the painting and escaped into the black forest via the bridge. I couldn't pursue her, and I have a strong sense of danger about that painting. It probably wasn't painted by Luo Shan herself."

Jenna was about to say something when she suddenly realized. "We haven't been kicked out of the dream!"

"Nor have we been restricted," Franca noted, having kept an eye on this matter.

She mused, "Luo Shan was corrupted by that evil god from the Fantasy Association, not controlled by the Celestial Worthy. While that evil god might assist the Celestial Worthy in some matters, it certainly has His own agenda and won't help with everything.

"Perhaps He wants us to stay in the dream to hinder the Celestial Worthy at a critical moment, so it's concealing this matter?"

"This is what Lumian meant when he said that the goals of the evil gods and the Celestial Worthy sometimes align, but sometimes they don't," Jenna agreed with a nod. She then added, "It's also possible that Luo Shan hasn't been completely corrupted and hasn't fully fallen, choosing to deal with us on her own without informing that evil god."

"Struggling and resisting…" Franca sighed before saying, "Let's wait a bit longer and see what happens."

After waiting for more than an hour, the two Demonesses saw Luo Shan leave Building 5, dressed in the standard Intis Group administrative department uniform, heading off to work as usual. It seemed as if everything that happened last night had been just a dream.

Franca and Jenna still hadn't been kicked out of the dream, nor had they faced any restrictions.

"She must have hidden in that painting with the bridge," Franca concluded, withdrawing her gaze. "I'll send a message to Lumian, letting him know what happened last night and that we might be at risk of being kicked out of the dream soon."

"Won't that get him kicked out too?" Jenna worried that contacting Lumian now might leave a hidden danger.

Franca let out a soft laugh. "Isn't there that little app Stiano gave us? The 'Information Shredder.'

"I figure WeChat messages are also information, so they should be shreddable without leaving a trace. I'll shred the message when sending it, and Lumian will shred it when receiving it.

"Although I can't be sure the Information Shredder will definitely fool the Celestial Worthy's subconscious tracking, I think it's worth a try. If it really works as we hope, we'll have more room to maneuver in certain situations."

Jenna pondered for a moment and then said, "Okay."

Franca immediately composed a WeChat message, detailing Luo Shan's probe, her and Jenna's response, and the subsequent developments, finally reminding Lumian to use the Information Shredder to delete the chat record.

…

At the entrance of the Tech Building.

Lumian stood in the lobby, casually reading the message from Franca.

Then he made his way to the first-floor restroom, entered the men's section, and found a stall where he activated a Bottle of Fiction.

He then brought his phone close to his mouth and whispered, "You can try more probes. Franca should also start work as early as possible and get in touch with Zhou Mingrui.

"We can't rely entirely on Luo Shan's struggle or the selfishness of that evil god from the Fantasy Association. They could change their minds in half a day or a day, so you need to gather more information before that happens to prepare for the second or third time we enter the dream."

After sending the message, Lumian waited a few seconds before pulling up the Information Shredder app and selecting the chat history with Franca and Jenna, then clicked delete.

Once he finished, he terminated the Bottle of Fiction and took the elevator to the 13th floor, where the Intis Group's security department was located.

After completing the necessary paperwork, he was led into the security department chief's office.

The office was large, almost the size of a private gym, with space for practicing boxing.

The security department chief was a foreigner with black hair and blue eyes, of medium height, and a muscular build that seemed understated but exuded power.

His name was Grimm. According to the Major Arcana card holders, he had been one of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse who served Emperor Roselle faithfully. He died early, before he could witness Roselle's great achievements, and this was his dream manifestation.

"Have you practiced martial arts?" Grimm asked in broken local dialect.

"Yes." Lumian nodded sincerely.

"Then let's have a sparring match," Grimm pointed to the boxing ring on the other side of the office.

Still not in his security uniform, Lumian didn't refuse. He entered the ring and waited for Grimm to approach.

Grimm took off his light suit jacket, rolled up his sleeves, and stood in front of Lumian.

Suddenly, he threw a punch, the wind whistling as it cut through the air.

Lumian, appearing nonchalant, seemed to have anticipated the move. He sidestepped, avoiding the punch.

Snapping his waist back, he swiftly closed in on Grimm, unleashing a barrage of attacks with his elbows, fists, knees, and toes in a relentless onslaught.

Grimm maintained a tight guard, blocking Lumian's fast but underpowered strikes without allowing them to break his defense or land on his body.

Bang! Bang! Bang! After a few dozen seconds of furious assault, Lumian suddenly stepped back, panting heavily as he raised his hand in surrender.

"I'm out of strength."

Of course, he couldn't knock out his department head on his first day at work. It wasn't just a matter of workplace etiquette—he was concerned that revealing his combat prowess would expose him as a Beyonder.

"Not bad." Grimm nodded.

He walked straight to his desk.

As he passed Lumian, he suddenly lowered his voice as if not wanting the others waiting in the office to overhear and said, "Give my regards to the Mother."

Mother… Lumian's pupils dilated.

Grimm then added in a hushed tone, "I've recognized you, Honorable Child of God."

Chapter 942: Storm in a Teacup

Child of God… Has he sensed the Omebella bloodline in me? This dream of a great existence is truly remarkable, even capturing the smallest details… Lumian had now realized the truth, and he gently nodded in response to Grimm's greeting.

He turned and took a few steps, then said to Grimm, "Director, I'll be heading out first."

Grimm's full title was "Director of Security for the Intis Group."

Grimm's face broke into a satisfied smile as he gave a barely perceptible nod.

"I'm quite pleased with your fighting skills. You should now follow Team Lead Xu to familiarize yourself with the different positions and procedures in the security department."

This was his way of subtly indicating to Xu Xinyang, the current team lead of Security Team 2 who was also in the office, that he valued this young man and did not want Xu to give him a hard time.

"Yes, Director." Lumian responded with a slightly excited tone.

As he followed Xu Xinyang out of the office, his expression gradually settled, and thoughts about Grimm flashed through his mind.

As one of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse who served Emperor Roselle, Grimm had died on a primitive island in the Fog Sea, but later seemed to have been corrupted by the power of the Great Mother, and his corpse had been revived in a strange state…

The Omebella bloodline in me can only be sensed by those directly created by the Great Mother or obtained Her boon, and they would have to be ones that lack the necessary intelligence to mistake me as a Child of God…

The Grimm in the dream city is constructed based on Mr. Fool's subconscious perception, so the Great Mother's corruption hidden within him is understandable, but why did he mistake me for a Child of God? Is it because, as a dream manifestation, he fundamentally lacks the necessary intelligence?

I wonder if the Great Mother has truly, covertly corrupted the dream Grimm and is using this connection to have him help with her own matters…

Lumian found the situation somewhat amusing.

He truly was like a detonator for calamity, having triggered some issues that the Major Arcana card holders had been unable to uncover, and he had only been here for a few days.

After changing into the navy-blue security uniform, Lumian was assigned by Security Team 2's Team Lead Xu Xinyang to guard the main entrance, with the primary duty of maintaining order in the lobby, preventing suspicious individuals from entering the building, and stopping delivery personnel from taking the elevator, instead directing them to leave packages in the drop-off area.

Lumian and two colleagues replaced the previous security guards responsible for these tasks, standing at the entrance with their backs ramrod straight.

At this time, it was still before the official start of the workday, and employees from various companies were still arriving.

Some of them had a surprised reaction.

The new security guard is quite good-looking…

Is he new?

With that appearance, he shouldn't be a security guard, he should go do live streaming, auditions, or be an extra in movies!

Soon, a male employee from an MCN company on the 7th floor and a female employee from an Intis Group subsidiary company consecutively walked up the stairs and headed toward the entrance.

The latter's eyes suddenly lit up.

The security guard at the door is so handsome…

She picked up her phone, intending to take a photo and share it with her best friends.

The former, on the other hand, immediately became excited.

A handsome security guard, not at all sleazy… Handsome… Security guard… That's great material! It might even become a hot topic and miraculously attract eyeballs!

While a level of handsomeness that would only be considered average or slightly above average for regular people, when contrasted with identities in the lower strata of society, such as security guards, beggars, farmers, herdsmen, delivery workers, or construction laborers, it had the potential to generate a lot of attention online.

The MCN company employee quickly grabbed their phone, intending to record a video.

Sensing their actions, Lumian stepped forward, blocking their phones with his hand, and said sternly, "Please don't take photos of me without permission. Please respect others' privacy!"

The man and woman were both taken aback, not expecting to be stopped.

The male employee blurted out, "I think you have the potential to go viral, and I want to post a video online."

"No need." Lumian stopped them, not wanting to become an Internet celebrity.

The MCN company employee was dumbfounded.

Who doesn't want to go viral these days?

Lumian said seriously, "Did you happen to take any photos just now? If so, please delete them."

Hearing his words, Lumian felt the surrounding office workers all looking towards them, and the man and woman's faces flushed red, feeling a bit indignant.

"What right do you have to tell me to show you my phone? If you've got the guts, call the cops!" the woman retorted angrily.

The male MCN company employee suddenly had an idea and began shouting, "The security guard is beating me up! The security guard is trying to take my phone!"

I'll make you go viral in another way!

Lumian seemed amused by their actions, a smile appearing on his face.

This smile immediately calmed the man and woman, making them feel guilty for having yelled at someone so pleasant.

Maintaining his Charm, Lumian said sincerely, "I appreciate that you want me to go viral, but I really don't need that. Could you please delete the photos or video?"

The man and woman, forgetting about the people around them, dazedly showed Lumian their phones and deleted the photo and video in front of him.

"Thank you." Lumian kept smiling.

The man and woman reluctantly left for the elevators, glancing back at him every few steps.

Once they entered their own company and gradually regained their composure, one felt the security guard was handsome and cool, as well as polite, while the other suspected they might have awakened some remarkable inclination.

At the lobby entrance, many white-collar workers were looking towards Lumian due to the recent incident.

Lumian spotted Zhou Mingrui, who had changed into a dark polo shirt and was carrying a black briefcase.

Zhou Mingrui also seemed to recognize him, with a hint of surprise on his expression.

Lumian gave him a slight smile and gestured towards his security uniform.

Zhou Mingrui composed his expression and politely nodded.

Beneath his calm exterior, his heart was racing with shock and suspicion.

Why is it him, that young man who had an early romance and became a father at a young age?

How did he end up as a security guard at my company?

I only saw him a couple of days ago, and now he's a security guard… Isn't that too coincidental?

Is it because of the incident with the vending machine?

After becoming an Assassin, I feel like there's been someone secretly observing me…

Is this person trying to investigate my anomaly?

Zhou Mingrui maintained his usual expression as he stepped into the elevator, waiting for it.

He began to feel like he should resign and move away from his current residence, completely escaping the hidden observers…

The reason he hadn't done so before was that his acquisition of Beyonder powers had not been discovered, and the Intis Group's salary was quite plush, at the top tier in Yangdu. If he resigned, it would be very difficult to find a similar good job.

I'll observe for a little longer. If there really is a problem, I'll have to resign and move. If that doesn't work, I'll go look for jobs in Beijing or Shanghai…

Will it implicate my family and friends…

Thinking of this, Zhou Mingrui shuddered, not daring to imagine the worst-case scenario.

He could hide, but his family and friends couldn't.

And without any evidence, even calling the police might not do any good.

Reaching the 10th floor, Zhou Mingrui, still carrying his black briefcase, did not immediately head to the tech department, but instead turned towards the administrative department across the hall.

He wanted to find Luo Shan, the administrative staff member he was most familiar with, and ask about the new security guard.

Luo Shan was not at her desk, seeming to have gone to the restroom. After greeting a few other administrative staff, Zhou Mingrui made an excuse and stood by Luo Shan's desk, waiting for her.

His gaze swept over her desk, finding some familiar items but also a sense of unfamiliarity.

In addition to the cute decorations she had before, there were now strange paintings adorning the divider, the surface of her water cup, and the outer layer of her snack bags.

Next to the computer screen was an empty bottle of a beverage that seemed to have been kept as a decorative item due to its attractive design.

Zhou Mingrui's gaze landed on that beverage bottle, looking past the colorful and diverse abstract packaging to the two words that stood out: Painter.

Painter… Zhou Mingrui's eyes narrowed slightly.

"What are you looking at?" Luo Shan's voice suddenly came from behind him.

As an Assassin, he had failed to sense her approach in advance.

Zhou Mingrui quickly put on a smile and turned to face Luo Shan, acting casual.

"I have something to discuss with you.

"I saw a new security guard downstairs just now, and he was arguing with two people, saying they were taking photos of him without permission…"

Zhou Mingrui recounted the situation he had observed, without adding any speculation.

Finally, he asked, "Is he one of our company's security guards?"

"Yes, he just started today." Luo Shan had a look of sudden realization. "I heard from Feifei in HR that they hired a really handsome security guard, and I was thinking of finding an excuse to go check out the security department."

Lowering her voice, Luo Shan continued, "I'll tell you a secret, but don't tell anyone else—that security guard is only 22 years old and already has a child…"

I know that; he looks younger than his actual age… Zhou Mingrui murmured inwardly.

Luo Shan continued, "Guess how old the child is? 7 years old!"

"7 years old?" Zhou Mingrui doubted if he had heard correctly.

"7 years old, a junior high school student with a child. Tsk tsk." Luo Shan clucked her tongue.

Having a child at 15; so he did 'that' at 14… He's right on the edge of being illegal and criminal… I don't know how old the mother is… Zhou Mingrui suddenly felt the new security guard might not be after him.

If he had some scheme, why would he expose such an earth-shattering and attention-grabbing background?

How would he be able to carry out his covert operations?

That doesn't fit the logic of trying to be discreet!

Luo Shan rambled on, finally saying, "But he has a very ordinary, average name—Li Ming."

Li Ming… Why not Li Hua… Zhou Mingrui muttered as he left Luo Shan's desk and headed towards the exit of the administrative department.

He didn't look back, because he felt Luo Shan might also have some issues.

She might have already become a Painter.

Zhou Mingrui remembered Luo Shan previously bringing a bunch of beverages for everyone to draw, and at that time, he had drawn Instigator and fed it to the mushrooms, while Luo Shan had drunk Reporter.

Back then, he hadn't detected anything unusual about Luo Shan or the other colleagues who had drunk similar beverages in the office.

Now, the Painter beverage and the paintings that had appeared on Luo Shan's desk were making him suspicious.

Chapter 943: A New Fabrication

At 4:30 pm, Lumian gathered his personal belongings, changed out of the security uniform, and prepared to leave work.

This job surprisingly had an 8-hour shift system, but he would have to take turns on night shifts later.

It had to be said that Mr. Huang Tao was not too strict in his treatment of employees, and was quite generous with the pay, even if some departments did require frequent overtime, for which Mr. Huang still provided overtime pay, and at a fairly high standard. If the overtime was too late, there were also reimbursements for late-night snacks and transportation.

So, although Mr. Huang was notorious for his womanizing, and some of the company's policies were not very friendly or respectful towards certain female employees, there were still many who were eager to join the Intis Group.

Today, Lumian had been stationed at the main entrance, not assigned to patrol the floors or monitor the security cameras. He had only encountered Zhou Mingrui once in the morning, and had not seen him since.

He was not disappointed about this, nor was he impatient—the pace was just right.

He walked towards the bus stop, braving the scorching sun, and along the way, he took out his phone to send a voice message to Franca: "I think I've left a rather strong impression on Zhou Mingrui today. Although I didn't notice any obvious changes in his expression, if I were in his shoes, I would certainly suspect that it's not a coincidence that I just happened to meet him at Dream Tutoring Classes and then immediately started working at the Intis Group—that I must be tracking him, with some hidden, sinister purpose.

"Given Zhou Mingrui's caution and prudence, he will most likely think this way.

"Since he has formed such a deep impression, I won't be going back to Xinhong District tonight. I'll find a cheap motel to stay at, and see if there are any developments at night, whether it might lead to me being kicked out of the dream."

"Ludwig is being taken care of by Anthony."

Soon, True Hidden Blade replied: "Doesn't this risk Zhou Mingrui resigning? That's bound to be a contingency plan for such a cautious person.

"I haven't even started the job yet! I've already bought several sets of clothes, and spent quite a bit of money!"

Sensing Franca's concern about the money potentially going to waste, Lumian chuckled and replied: "It shouldn't lead to that for now. I deliberately didn't go and tamper with my background information or try to forge a fake identity before the interview, so that my personal life would be outrageous enough to not seem like I'm coming to investigate.

"Sometimes, a moderate degree of high-profile behavior can actually reduce others' suspicions of you.

"And even if Zhou Mingrui does end up resigning, you can still join the company normally. There's no rule that says Intis Group employees can't investigate Zhou Mingrui's movements after work. Plus, the Intis Group has a lot of issues hidden, like Luo Shan, and Grimm. If we can uncover them, it might give us some inspiration to find a way to awaken Mr. Fool."

He had informed Franca and the others about the problem with Grimm earlier that day.

Finally, Lumian added: "Remember to use the Information Shredder to delete the chat log."

He reached the bus stop and carried out the operation to eliminate any traces.

Soon, the bus arrived. Since it was not the usual rush hour, there weren't many passengers.

Lumian relaxed a bit.

When he had taken the subway earlier, there had been an incident where a man had tried to grope him in the crowded environment, nearly having his wrist twisted off by Lumian.

He wasn't afraid of such things, he just found it annoying and a waste of his time and energy.

If he was experiencing this as a male, what would happen if he switched to his Demoness state?

…

Dechuang Garden.

Franca played Lumian's voice message so that Jenna could hear it.

As Jenna was using the Information Shredder to delete the chat log, she was either folding the new clothes one by one or hanging them directly in the closet.

They had gone to the garment wholesale market again that morning, but this time they chose higher quality and more expensive items, spending nearly two thousand.

After washing, "baking dry", and ironing, the clothes were now ready to wear.

"I've already applied to start work tomorrow," Franca said contemplatively as she helped fold the clothes.

In her previous life, she hadn't even finished university, never getting the chance to experience work. After her transmigration, she had lived off the original body's savings for a while, then by chance became an Assassin, bidding farewell to a regular job.

Jenna smiled. "Just remember that you're going there to investigate the issues and interact with Mr. Fool's dream manifestations, not because you actually want the job. Then you won't care about how others view your work performance."

"Mm, I wonder when Zhou Mingrui will resign." Franca chuckled. "I hope I can at least get one month's salary!"

After tidying up the clothes, the two Demonesses leaned against pillows on the bed and started scrolling on their phones.

After browsing for a while, Franca clicked her tongue and said, "Mr. Huang really does have a lot of rumors surrounding him…"

Huang Tao himself rarely posted anything on social media, but it was impossible to avoid the many ex-girlfriends he had had, numbering in the hundreds, of all kinds—from famous actresses and singers to wannabe Internet celebrities who wanted to gain attention by sharing their love stories with the big company president, and even some who staged and acted out their own stories, despite having no real connection to Huang Tao.

So no matter what Franca and the others browsed, they would come across stories about Mr. Huang and his women every now and then, reinforcing the impressions they had formed from Roselle's diary and the corresponding legends.

However, Franca still wanted to say that Mr. Huang was truly generous with his money, and would not set traps to reclaim the gifts he had given, or have the women thrown in jail.

It was precisely because Huang Tao's many mistresses were verifiably from the administrative department of the Intis Group that Franca had discovered during her job interview that not many people were applying for the positions for the sake of the job itself.

Of course, she herself was not applying for the job for the sake of the job either, but to get close to Mr. Fool's dream manifestation.

Before Jenna could respond, Franca sighed again. "I can't even imagine what the state of the administrative department at the Intis Group must be, and for Mr. Huang to be able to manage such an administrative department and still have the company thrive, he must be really capable…"

Jenna also shared some of the other rumors she had come across about Mr. Huang, and by 11 o'clock at night, the two Demonesses put down their phones, turned off the lights, and fell asleep.

They once again found themselves in the strange space shrouded by a frozen storm, seeing Luo Shan, now in casual attire, floating at the edge of the semi-transparent barrier, having just pushed back the invasion of the bizarre creatures into the dark depths. Luo Shan turned and looked at them.

Franca and Jenna's planning had anticipated this scenario, so they did not immediately make a move, but instead returned Luo Shan's gaze.

Their eyes met, and Luo Shan's low voice spoke, "Are you also people with Beyonder powers?

"Are you here to investigate me?"

Her expression was full of wariness.

"Yes, and no." Franca responded in an ambiguous way.

Jenna used a touch of Charm and smiled amiably.

"You haven't left, and you're even willing to meet with us."

Luo Shan was silent for a few seconds before speaking, "Last night, I hid away, and discovered that you had taken my place, guarding the barrier and dealing with those monsters.

"I feel, I feel, that you must be a good person, and perhaps we can talk."

Before Jenna could respond, Luo Shan pressed on, "What do you mean, 'yes, and no'?"

Franca organized her thoughts and said seriously, "We want to approach you, to figure out the issues with you, and eliminate the hidden dangers, but we are not here to deal with you. The real target is not you."

Luo Shan became a bit confused.

Franca further explained, "We are from the future, using a time machine to return to the present, in order to find that Messiah."

"Messiah?" Luo Shan was bewildered.

What the hell are you talking about?

Franca nodded solemnly.

"In the not-too-distant future, humanity is under attack by evil forces and is on the verge of extinction. That's when a Messiah suddenly appears and rescues us, mitigating the dire situation.

"The evil forces, through some means, have created a time machine and sent some monster-disguised creatures to the present in this city, trying to eliminate the Messiah while they are still weak.

"Fortunately, the future Messiah detected this and found a way for us to also utilize the time machine.

"He exhausted the machine's last bit of power to send us back here, so that we can find and eliminate those monsters, and help the young Messiah overcome the interference and obstacles, truly awakening them.

"Our contact with you is actually to get closer to the young Messiah."

Jenna listened to Franca's narrative and was momentarily dumbfounded.

Although they had briefly discussed the general storyline beforehand, she never expected Franca to be able to present it so convincingly.

The story seemed to align quite well with the actual situation, yet there was a fundamental difference.

Luo Shan's expression fluctuated for a while, finding Franca's story too far-fetched to be true, yet strangely familiar.

As her thoughts raced, she suddenly recalled something and blurted out, "Is that future Messiah Zhou Mingrui?"

Franca was not startled. She had fabricated this story precisely to probe how much Luo Shan knew and what information she had access to.

She didn't expect Luo Shan to readily accept the ridiculous plot, but to accurately guess that the target was Zhou Mingrui.

Knowing she needs to deal with Mr. Fool's dream manifestations, but not understanding why? Jenna pondered and nodded, while Franca countered, "Why do you think so?"

Luo Shan's expression suddenly twisted in anguish.

"That voice, that voice made me give Zhou Mingrui the real Instigator beverage.

"That was the first time it made a clear demand, and promised to reward me with the Painter beverage afterwards.

"I felt having Beyonder powers was great at the time, and thought if Zhou Mingrui could also obtain them, it might not be too bad…"

At this point, Luo Shan's voice suddenly choked up.

"I-I didn't mean to harm him, I really didn't…"

Franca tensed up.

"Did Zhou Mingrui drink the Instigator potion, I mean, beverage?"

The information provided by the Major Arcana card holders did not mention Luo Shan giving Zhou Mingrui the Instigator beverage.

"I don't know." Luo Shan shook her head. "But there was some incident at the neighboring company that day, I'm not sure if it's related to this or not, I'm not sure…"

Seeing Luo Shan's mental state becoming unstable, Jenna changed the subject.

"How many times have you had those beverages?"

Chapter 944: "Shaman"

As Jenna asked the question, she glanced at Franca.

Franca nodded slightly.

Luo Shan recalled her past experiences, her emotions calming a bit. "Thrice."

"When and where was the first time?" Jenna asked in a friendly manner.

Luo Shan cast her gaze towards the slightly ethereal buildings around them, seeing the glass windows representing each household glimmering in the faint light from the frozen storm.

"It was in the lobby of the apartment complex. A vending machine suddenly appeared there, filled with beautifully designed beverages. I got a random one, and it turned out to be…"

Seeing Luo Shan suddenly pause, Franca, floating in front of a building, took a step forward with an eager expression, wanting to probe further.

Several Spirit Bodies of the apartment residents were wandering beside her, some wearing glasses, some with beautiful watches, some with shiny accessories on their clothes.

Jenna grabbed Franca's arm, giving her a look to not be hasty, and asked softly herself, "What did you get?"

"Shaman," Luo Shan named the beverage.

"Shaman… What abilities did it give you?" Jenna asked casually.

Luo Shan's mood lifted a bit.

"It allows me to choose an area and, by setting up totems and performing rituals, establish it as my domain. Then I can communicate with the sky, earth, water, trees, and creatures there, borrowing power from their spirituality to cast various spells."

That sounds so powerful… It's more impressive than any Sequence 9 I know of, almost on par with some Sequence 7 pathways… Jenna thought in amazement.

She curiously asked, "Can a Shaman only fight within their fixed domain? Can't they change territories?"

"They can change, but it requires a complex process and takes a long time, about three days," Luo Shan explained enthusiastically. "Outside their domain, a Shaman's power rapidly weakens, becoming weaker the further they are from their territory."

There are still significant limitations… Is the personal domain a manifestation of spatial authority? Jenna further inquired, "You guard the barrier to prevent those monsters from invading because they would destroy your domain?"

"That's part of it," Luo Shan sighed. "Another aspect is that a Shaman's power allows me to sense different spaces, higher worlds, letting my spirit make initial contact with them. This causes my soul to be noticed by the monsters, becoming a target for their invasion.

"This place you're in now is a unique space formed by the fusion of my spiritual world, the Shaman's domain concept, and the corresponding spirit world of Dechuang Garden. Those monsters want to use it as a stepping stone to invade reality, while also attacking my spirit and mind. If the barrier is breached, my soul will be controlled or even replaced by them."

A Sequence 9 has such high risks? No wonder Shaman sounds so powerful… Xinhong District doesn't have this issue while Dechuang Garden does because a Shaman lives here… Does Shaman essentially act as a beacon for those monsters to invade reality? Jenna roughly understood the basic situation of the Shaman sequence.

Luo Shan added with a self-deprecating smile, "I'm no longer just a Shaman. Now, even if this barrier is breached, it won't affect me much.

"The only problem is that everyone living in Dechuang Garden would be killed in their dreams, their abdomens torn open, their internal organs ripped out…"

As she spoke, Luo Shan fell silent.

After several seconds, she whispered, "This is my doing. I have to take responsibility…"

"If this wasn't a problem you brought about, and you encountered this situation, would you choose to guard the barrier in place of the Beyonder who fled?" Jenna deliberately used this question to reinforce Luo Shan's sense of guardianship.

Luo Shan's lips moved slightly. "I don't know… Maybe… Probably…"

Jenna didn't press Luo Shan for a definite answer, instead asking with concern, "You have to guard the barrier every night and still work during the day. Isn't it too exhausting?"

"No, you can think of this as my mind world or my dreamscape. Being busy here doesn't affect my physical rest. I just need to take a nap during the day," Luo Shan smiled.

This state made her feel like the protagonist of a novel or comic, saving humanity in an inner world at night while continuing to be a corporate drone during the day.

Jenna exchanged another glance with Franca before asking, "What was the name of the second beverage you drank? Was it also from the vending machine?"

"The second one I drank was Reporter," Luo Shan recalled. "Once, after being injured while guarding the barrier, I woke up feeling like I had a bad cold, coughing severely. I took a day off and went to Mushu Hospital. The doctor prescribed cough syrup, but the pharmacy gave me the Reporter beverage instead. I suddenly felt it must be the follow-up beverage to Shaman, so I didn't tell the pharmacist they'd given me the wrong medicine…

"Later I drank Reporter again, but that one was fake. Among that batch of drinks, only the Instigator for Zhou Mingrui was real… I shouldn't have listened to that voice…"

Mentioning this incident, Luo Shan's expression twisted, seeming very regretful.

Jenna didn't immediately inquire about the origin of that voice, instead discussing less sensitive matters. "What are the abilities of Reporter?"

"Observing, investigating, and uncovering the truth of the world, along with extreme speed," Luo Shan's mood became low again, speaking vaguely without giving specific examples.

She slowly raised both hands to cover her ears, mumbling as if in a trance, "After drinking the Reporter beverage, I sometimes felt I had changed. I began to hate this world, hate the details that didn't match my imagination, hate the people and things I was dissatisfied with. I wanted them all to explode, wanted to remake them, make everything here conform to my fantasies.

"And to remake these things, I had to pray for help from the truth of the world, from the true world above…

"Then, I heard that voice…"

Jenna pursed her lips, changing the subject once again. "After Reporter is Painter, what comes after Painter?"

"After Painter should be Literature Enthusiast, someone skilled in imagination. I haven't gotten that one yet…" Luo Shan briefly answered Jenna's question, then moved her hands up to pull at her hair. "That voice made me malicious, fierce, cruel…"

As she spoke, Luo Shan suddenly burst out, crying as if her heart was being torn apart, "I don't want to be like this! I'm not this kind of person!"

Crystalline tears were already streaming down her cheeks.

Seeing this, Jenna floated closer and said in a gentle voice, "I know you're not that kind of person.

"That kind of person wouldn't continue to guard the barrier, preventing monsters from invading Dechuang Garden and killing the adults and children here…"

"No, many of these monsters were drawn by me. Originally, they weren't so powerful…" Luo Shan was still in painful self-reproach.

She tugged at the collar of her shirt, seeming unable to breathe.

Jenna moved in front of her and continued, "Everyone makes mistakes. The difference between good people and bad people is that good people know how to make amends…"

Suddenly, Luo Shan raised her head.

The top two buttons of her shirt were undone, clearly revealing the painting on her neck and chest.

The painting looked like a tattoo, a vibrant, colorful flower.

The flower suddenly enlarged, opening its petals in a spectral form, revealing dense teeth and hidden pus inside.

The invisible scent it had been emitting, combined with the manifestation of its true form, made Jenna freeze, too dizzy to control her body.

The colossal flower suddenly enveloped Jenna's body.

Seeing this, Luo Shan's face showed a cold smile, silently mouthing, "That fool is just right for making people like you let your guard down…"

Just then, there was a cracking sound, like a mirror shattering.

Luo Shan's expression changed slightly. She was about to attack Franca and find out where the real Jenna was, when her body suddenly stiffened, as if frozen.

Stuttering, her Astral Projection quickly faded, leaving this space.

In reality, in room 1502.

Franca stood by Luo Shan's bed, thrusting the Wintry Blade into the sleeping Luo Shan's shoulder.

She had already actively left that spirit world-like space earlier, when Luo Shan answered that she had drunk the beverage three times.

The version of her before and after that moment was created and manipulated by Jenna using mirror magic, utilizing the surrounding glass windows, eyeglass lenses, and other mirror-like objects!

Upon realizing that Luo Shan's mental state was truly unstable and that she had acted against Zhou Mingrui, Franca and Jenna decided to initiate their contingency plan: one creating illusions to occupy Luo Shan, the other returning to the real world to find Luo Shan's body and fundamentally control her!

This might also eliminate the risk of them being kicked out of the dream.

After stabbing Luo Shan with the Wintry Blade, Franca immediately took out her phone and called Anthony: "Come to Dechuang Garden, Building 5, Room 1502 now. We need you to treat someone with personality alteration due to corruption.

"Remember to bring Ludwig."

Although the current plan was for Jenna, Franca, and Lumian, Anthony to operate in two separate groups with minimal contact, deleting chat and call records with the Information Shredder at all times, urgent situations called for flexibility. Anthony was the only person they could trust to treat Luo Shan now.

Of course, Franca or Jenna could use repeated Charm to make Luo Shan fall in love with them for a period of time, following their will, and do the same to her altered personality, thus controlling the stability of her mental state. But with other options available, there was no need for such distortion, which might lead to a "the disease is cured, but the patient 'died'" outcome.

After Anthony replied "Understood", Franca sighed in relief and used invisible spider silk to bind Luo Shan, who was struggling to wake up.

Then, she removed her hair tie, letting her long hair cascade down and strangely extend, touching Luo Shan's body.

This brought about a stone-like rigidity at the points of contact.

Chapter 945: New Hostel?

After a while, Jenna also came to Room 1502 by climbing through the window, and saw Luo Shan controlled by three methods.

"Were the invading monsters driven back again?" Franca asked with concern.

Jenna tersely acknowledged.

"By the time dawn breaks, they should attack again."

She then summarized the key points of what Luo Shan had said after Franca left that space.

Hearing that becoming a Shaman would cause one's own psyche to sense another space and higher realms, thereby attracting all sorts of strange creatures to invade, Franca couldn't help but mutter, "What kind of extraterrestrial demons is this…"

Jenna could understand every word Franca said, but did not grasp the specific meaning. However, she was already accustomed to Franca occasionally blurting out some strange words, especially after entering the dream city, so she did not ask further, and continued to relay the information she had gathered from Luo Shan.

As soon as she finished, the doorbell rang.

Jenna walked to the bedroom door, and cautiously, without approaching the main entrance, took out a hand mirror to reflect the view outside the peephole.

It was Anthony and only Ludwig's head visible in the image.

Jenna then opened the door, pointed to the bedroom, and said in a low voice, "The patient is inside."

Anthony had driven himself to Dechuang Garden—after a few days of observation, he had learned how to drive to some extent.

Then, he "persuaded" the patrolling property management to help with parking and card swiping, and pressed the button for the 15th floor.

As Anthony walked towards the bedroom, Ludwig's gaze fell on the paintings Luo Shan had done.

"Can I… eat them?" he licked his lips, looking at Jenna with longing.

Jenna hadn't seen the child in several days, and seeing him still the same, she felt a warm affection and smiled.

"These are just paintings."

"But they still represent a certain reality." When it came to eating, Ludwig was always mature.

Jenna thought for two seconds and replied, "Okay."

She felt that these paintings were done by Luo Shan previously, and Luo Shan's condition at the time was unknown. There might be some contamination or hints left on the paintings. If Anthony managed to help Luo Shan recover, but the patient then saw some of her old paintings and the problem resurfaced, it would be a waste of her companions' efforts.

With the permission granted, Ludwig cheered and crumpled the unframed paintings, stuffing them into his mouth.

"Will eating these give you different qualities or abilities?" Jenna asked curiously.

Ludwig replied with a muffled voice, "I can temporarily acquire them, but the duration is very short, and I don't have anyone to deal with right now.

"Eating these is mainly to increase my spirituality limit…"

Jenna nodded in understanding, then looked at the back of Ludwig devouring the paintings and asked lightly,

"How have your studies been these past few days?"

Ludwig's back suddenly stiffened for a second.

Inside the bedroom.

Anthony had learned the full situation from Franca, lit some candles, and dripped on some pure dew.

After completing all the preparations, he signaled to Franca that she could retract the Wintry Blade.

Franca, who had been holding the almost invisible triangular spike for too long, had lost a lot of body temperature, and her lips were even a little pale. Upon hearing this, she hurriedly put the weapon back into the Traveler's Bag.

Of course, she was still far from becoming an undead. The negative effects of the Wintry Blade were also suppressed to Sequence 7 in the dream.

As the Wintry Blade was put away, Luo Shan's eyeballs rolled slightly under her eyelids and slowly opened.

She quickly recalled her ordeal, her expression twisting into an extremely hideous grimace.

Then she saw a pair of deep brown eyes, like a deep lake, and the flickering yellowish candlelight reflected in them.

At the same time, she smelled a soothing aroma.

Luo Shan immediately became calm.

Seeing this, Franca clicked to enlarge the words she had previously written on a memo and showed them to Anthony.

"Do not try to guide or suppress the corruption hidden in the patient's Beyonder powers. Trying to completely eradicate them is unrealistic and very dangerous for us now.

"What you need to do is treat the patient's mental problems, resolve the personality alteration, or reduce the impact of the personality alteration.

"If the patient relapses later, we will still handle it according to the current plan, until we find a way to thoroughly solve the corruption problem or find help."

Anthony gave an almost imperceptible nod and began to communicate with Luo Shan's mental self.

Franca stood by, ready to intervene if anything went wrong with Anthony.

After Ludwig finished eating even the paintings in the bedroom, leaving only the one with the bridge, precipice, abyss, and dark forest, Anthony finally completed the treatment, extinguished the candles, and led Ludwig out of the bedroom, leaving Room 1502.

After another dozen seconds, Luo Shan's long eyelashes fluttered, and her gaze gradually recovered its normalcy.

She looked at Franca and Jenna, her expression a mix of bewilderment and as if she understood everything, and said, "I feel like I've just woken up from a long nightmare…"

"We found a professional doctor and cured the problems caused by the corruption in the potion beverage you had to some extent. Of course, this is just the end of the first treatment course, and whether there will be more courses will depend on the situation," Franca explained vaguely, retracting her long hair and releasing the invisible spider silk bindings.

"I knew you guys would help me, even if you can't cure me, you'll deal with that demon properly." Luo Shan's spirit and mind had returned to the lively state before she drank the Reporter beverage. She smiled at Franca and said, "Actually, I noticed at the time that you seemed to have become less real, but I suppressed that feeling and deliberately didn't look at you again, so that she wouldn't find out."

She? Luo Shan had already started referring to the altered personality as "she"… Hmm, that altered personality also called her that… The situation seems to be more serious than we had anticipated previously, but at least we managed to control her and provide treatment in time… Franca nodded with relief.

Jenna then asked curiously, "You could tell that eh… Luo Fu became a mirror illusion, relying on the Reporter's ability to observe, investigate, and uncover the true world, right?"

They had not fully understood the Painter pathway beforehand, and their plan almost failed.

"Yes," Luo Shan quickly nodded, looking at Franca, "Your name is Luo Fu? It's so beautiful, even nicer than my name. You're all so beautiful!"

"We all have the surname Luo, maybe we were from the same family five hundred years ago," Franca joked.

Jenna thought for a moment, looking at Luo Shan.

"Why do you go out every evening?"

"Sometimes I go to find tasty food to treat myself, sometimes I go shopping with friends, and sometimes…" At this point, Luo Shan's expression changed slightly, "Sometimes I go to a hostel that's still under renovation and hasn't opened yet. That's the latest demand of that voice. It said that after the hotel officially opens, it will bestow the Literature Enthusiast beverage on me."

Hearing that the voice demanded opening a hotel, Franca and Jenna simultaneously thought of a term: Hostel!

For that evil god of the Fantasy Association, the concept of a hostel has strong symbolic meaning? Reflected in the dream, it's wanting to open a hotel? Franca asked, "Is the money for opening the motel from you, or is there another source?"

"I put in part of it, spending all my savings. Fortunately, I had already bought this apartment before, so the remaining money wasn't much. But lately I've been seriously considering mortgaging the house to get a loan and get the hotel open as soon as possible." As she spoke, Luo Shan had a look of lingering fear on her face.

Money… opening a hotel requires money… That evil god of the Fantasy Association didn't directly give money, but made the bestowed offer it themselves… In Mr. Fool's dream city, money indeed has a strong symbolic meaning, and the evil gods have to worry about it… Franca asked thoughtfully, "You only put in part of it, who provided the rest?"

"It's people similar to me, but I haven't met them. Different people go to oversee the hotel renovation every day, not contacting each other, and they're not even on the shareholder list. I'm not on it either. The hotel is owned by someone called Anderson."

"Anderson? Anderson Hood?" Franca and Jenna asked in unison.

"How do you know?" Luo Shan was surprised.

Franca laughed. "We know a lot more than you think."

She asked for the name of the hostel, opened her phone, searched it, and then saw the name "Colorful Hostel" with Anderson Hood's name clearly listed as a shareholder.

This was too direct and conspicuous, making Franca feel that the other party was challenging or boasting about a successful prank.

This needs to be told to Lumian, let him probe Anderson… Speaking of which, he hasn't had an excuse to communicate with Anderson… The Hunter hasn't been sending messages either… Jenna took out her phone, hesitating whether to contact Lumian now.

She was afraid of waking the other party.

After a brief consideration, Jenna still chose to step out of the bedroom and use the text input method to report the information about the Colorful Hostel to Lumian.

She couldn't let the softness in her heart hinder the communication of key issues. Perhaps it wouldn't be long before dawn, and she and Franca would be kicked out of the dream!

Luo Shan followed and came to the living room.

She looked around and asked, "Where are my paintings?"

"We've taken care of them all," Jenna honestly expressed her previous concerns.

"Okay." Luo Shan nodded in agreement, then pointed to the remaining painting and said, "What about this one? It's the most dangerous!"

Seeing Franca and Jenna both looking at her, Luo Shan's expression changed a bit as she said,

"It's not a painting I did. Soon after I drank the Reporter potion, I suddenly received this painting, I don't know who sent it. I feel that the other me, in my heart, is also in the dark forest in this painting!"

"Conventional methods can't get rid of it." Jenna did not hide anything from Luo Shan.

Franca changed the subject thoughtfully. "What about the self-portrait?"

"When you deleted all the photos, it self-combusted, so I knew you had a problem," Luo Shan said, worried and curious.

Franca immediately became eager to try, pointing to the painting with elements like the dark forest, precipice, and bridge, and asked Luo Shan, "Have you tried taking a photo of this painting? Did anything unusual happen at the time?"

If she could take a photo and the abnormality wouldn't immediately manifest, they could consider using the Information Shredder to handle it!

"I couldn't, the photos would turn out blank. I even tried throwing it away, but it mysteriously came back," Luo Shan shook her head.

As expected… Franca was not too surprised by this. She pondered and said, "Can you give us this painting? We have a way to deal with it, but we'll have to wait until morning."

Chapter 946: Five-Star Rating

After returning to Room 2303 with that painting, Jenna asked Franca, "Should we have Lumian contact Stiano? He should be very interested in how to deal with this kind of painting."

The previous self-portrait sketch of Luo Shan could be photographed but not deleted, while this precipice bridge painting couldn't be photographed at all.

Franca pondered for a few seconds, then smiled and said, "That's one of the backup plans, but not the first choice.

"We currently only know that Stiano is interested in mystical photos that can spread online and can't be deleted. We're not sure if he has the desire to research paintings that can't be uploaded to the Internet. Besides, always owing favors to someone or owing too many may not be a good thing. It will have to be repaid eventually. There's no such thing as a free lunch.

"It's similar to taking out micro loans. Do it appropriately and moderately, and be prepared to repay from the beginning."

With the analogy of micro loans, Jenna immediately accepted Franca's reasoning.

"Then how do we deal with it?" she asked.

Franca's smile widened.

"Wait until dawn, then take this painting to the Star Dream Provisions Store after the morning rush hour."

"Huh?" Jenna couldn't quite follow Franca's train of thought.

Franca, who had read extensively before her transmigration, always had a broad perspective. She chuckled softly.

"When you get to the Star Dream Provisions Store, ask the shopkeeper if She'd buy items with mystical elements, and how much She would offer.

"If She's willing to buy it, this painting probably won't be able to come back on its own."

Can it be done like this? Jenna thought carefully and found it quite feasible.

Based on the premise that only true gods could enter Mr. Fool's dream besides those who possessed medium items or had special connections, as well as details like contacting the Major Arcana card holders by sending letters to the Church of the Evernight Goddess's high-ranking deacons through the Star Dream Provisions Store, and the dim environment of the store itself, Lumian's team could actually guess the shopkeeper's identity in reality, but they tacitly agreed not to mention it.

If the shopkeeper agreed to buy this strange painting, it meant She definitely had a way to control the corresponding anomalies and truly transfer ownership to Her hands.

Moreover, wasn't it normal for a provisions store focusing on mystical elements to purchase items with mystical elements?

After pondering for a few seconds, Jenna asked, "What if the shopkeeper doesn't want to buy it?"

"Then ask if we can put this painting in Her store for consignment. We'll pay a storage fee and give Her a cut of the final sale. It's equivalent to paying Her to handle the anomaly," Franca said with a smile. "If She still doesn't agree, we'll contact Stiano through Lumian. If Stiano doesn't accept, you can take advantage of the daytime to find an opportunity to throw this painting at the police station. Remember to hide your identity well."

At this point, Franca's expression suddenly turned serious. "My spiritual intuition and mystical experience tell me that your process of dealing with this painting won't be very smooth. There will be dangers. If the danger is too great, you should actively exit the dream. We still have two more chances later, there's no need to risk your life now."

"Understood." Jenna nodded solemnly.

Afterwards, she and Franca entered that strange space again and found Luo Shan once more guarding by the semi-transparent barrier, in quite good condition.

Franca revealed her identity as a colleague and started chatting casually with Luo Shan, learning more details about Zhou Mingrui's situation and which employees in various departments of the Intis Group were worth noting.

The results of the conversation left Franca and Jenna very satisfied, feeling that saving Luo Shan was not only a choice of emotion and stance but also a very correct decision in the course of completing their mission.

The information obtained from Luo Shan might have taken Franca and Lumian one or two months to slowly collect on their own.

"Later on, we'll need your help to convince Zhou Mingrui that he is the future messiah," Franca said to Luo Shan with a flattering smile. "We can't directly tell him the truth; he definitely wouldn't believe it."

"He absolutely wouldn't believe it. No normal person would. They would just think it's a prank or a scam," Luo Shan nodded, then added in a small voice, "I don't fully believe it myself now…"

Franca pretended not to hear Luo Shan's mumbling and changed the subject.

When dawn broke and they automatically left that strange space, Franca got out of bed and took out the clothes she was going to wear today from the wardrobe, with a heavy expression.

Before Jenna could speak, she took the initiative to say, "There's a good chance you'll encounter danger and anomalies today, so it's better to dress in a way that allows for easier movement."

Jenna nodded lightly, not refusing.

Franca quickly finished washing up, took off her pajamas, and while slowly changing her clothes, she muttered, "After I became a Witch and adapted, sometimes when walking on the street, I would feel pleased and happy with people's gazes, thinking how charming I am. This might be a manifestation of a Demoness's narcissism.

"But there's a difference between enjoying it yourself and being forced by others. And if you're not used to it yourself, you definitely won't like it. It's like when I was in school, they always required us to wear uniforms on Mondays, and there would always be some rebellious kids in each class who didn't want to, preferring to accept punishment instead…"

Franca rambled on, as if trying to distract herself and reduce the sense of embarrassment.

She bent over, clumsily putting on the most conservative flesh-colored stockings, stepped into brand new low-heeled shoes, then stood up and, using the full-length mirror embedded in the wardrobe, adjusted her blouse and light gray skirt that reached just above her knees.

Looking at herself in the mirror, Franca pursed her lips, feeling quite complex.

Jenna watched the whole time without saying a word.

After applying makeup that made her look a bit less attractive, tying up her long hair, putting on glasses, and picking up a high-quality branded replica handbag, Franca walked steadily towards the door.

Just before leaving, she turned back and smiled at Jenna.

"Thank you for not saying 'you look beautiful in this outfit' or 'this really suits you'. However, you seemed a little bit amazed just now. Hmm, that made me feel a bit better."

"Yes," Jenna returned with an affirming smile.

Franca waved and walked out the door.

She really is someone who's good at self-regulating her emotions and staying optimistic… Jenna sighed inwardly, turning her gaze away and patiently waiting for the morning rush hour to pass.

Close to 9 o'clock, she carried the painting and left Building 5, coming to the residential district's lobby.

She chose to take a ride-hailing car to the Star Dream Provisions Store instead of taking the subway and then switching to a bus. She was afraid that the painting's anomalies might affect more people. If that happened, the latent dangers might not do much to her, but the widespread commotion could bring about more serious problems.

After a while, Jenna walked out of the lobby and came to the roadside, seeing a white sedan already waiting for her.

After opening the car door with one hand, she glanced towards the driver's seat, confirming that the driver wasn't wearing a monocle and had no other obvious features. It was someone she didn't recognize and didn't trigger her spiritual intuition.

Jenna sat in the back, placing the painting on her lap and holding it to her chest.

After verifying the last digits of her phone number, the driver started the vehicle.

Jenna was highly focused, vigilantly guarding against possible accidents.

Suddenly, she felt her breathing become difficult, while there was no anomaly around her.

It was as if another her was being pushed into the sea, and the feeling of drowning was transmitted through a mystical connection.

Without hesitation, Jenna took out a mirror, plucked two strands of hair, trying to stick them to the mirror's surface and burn them with a Demoness's black flames.

She was attempting to cast a black magic related to the Mirror Substitution, actively trying to transfer that mystical connection to the mirror.

At this moment, Jenna had a hallucination. She saw gently swaying emerald-green waves and her own hands flailing uncontrollably, as if struggling to swim to the surface.

However, there was a force pulling at her legs, trying to drag her to the bottom of the sea.

Almost simultaneously, a pale, swollen hand reached out from nowhere and covered her mouth.

"Mmph, mmph, mmph…

"Glug, glug, glug…"

Jenna showed obvious signs of drowning, her nose, respiratory tract, and lungs becoming extremely uncomfortable.

She wanted to use her substitutes but couldn't sense those mirrors. She seemed to be separated from them in different worlds—even the mystical connection cut off.

Suddenly, silent black flames flowed out from Jenna's eyeballs, nostrils, mouth, ears, and other places. These black flames burned her body from the inside out, burning all the invisible things trying to influence her.

Outside the black flames, frost condensed, encasing Jenna in a thick ball of ice and snow.

On the surface of the sphere, countless invisible spider silk retracted, wrapping layer by layer, forming a huge "cocoon".

Jenna finally no longer felt the agony of nearly drowning, but she still couldn't sense her body or substitutes.

The next second, she found herself walking on a bridge.

On the other side of the bridge was a steep cliff and a dark forest at the far end of the cliff.

Have I entered that painting? Jenna tried to turn around and return to the starting point of the bridge, to escape the world inside the painting from the entrance, but she couldn't control her body and watched helplessly as "she" continued forward along the bridge.

At this time, two people walked out of the dark forest.

One was Luo Shan with a malicious face, and the other was Jenna herself.

A Jenna with a seductive smile!

Crack!

The bridge suddenly broke, and Jenna fell towards the dark abyss whose bottom couldn't be seen.

Great fear and despair invaded Jenna's mind, her consciousness rapidly blurring, unable to save herself.

She seemed to already see the image of herself smashed into bloody pieces.

Taking advantage of her consciousness not yet completely falling into darkness, before the unimaginable pain arrived, she mustered her last clarity, about to actively exit the dream.

But it didn't work.

It didn't work!

Useless… Jenna's gaze suddenly froze.

She didn't give up; she was still trying to save herself, gritting her teeth, struggling to regain control of her body to use the Demoness's feather-fall technique.

At this moment, a ray of sunlight shone into the dark abyss, illuminating the cliff high above.

All the scenes before Jenna's eyes instantly shattered and fragmented in the brilliant sunlight.

She suddenly opened her eyes and found herself still sitting in the car, hugging that painting.

"We've arrived," the driver turned halfway, reminding Jenna.

I arrived so quickly? Jenna felt as if she had been walking for an entire morning in a stuffy environment, her clothes soaked with sweat.

She looked out the window somewhat bewilderedly and saw the Star Dream Provisions Store.

Jenna instinctively pushed open the door and got out of the car, wanting to rush into that shop to avoid other possible anomalies that might come later.

"Remember to give me a five-star rating!" the driver called out to her retreating figure.

Jenna unconsciously turned her body sideways, looking back at the driver.

The driver had a smile at the corner of his mouth and somehow produced a crystal monocle, putting it on his right eye.

Chapter 947: Equivalent Exchange

Amon? Jenna, standing beside the car, was stunned.

She vaguely understood why she had been able to arrive at the Star Dream Provisions Store early and escape that deadly "hallucination" at the most critical moment.

In this matter, Amon had provided help, otherwise the consequences would have been unimaginable!

She and Franca had already estimated the risks to the greatest extent possible, but they still hadn't anticipated that the real situation would be so terrifying that she wouldn't even have a chance to exit the dream!

This was even with her being a Demoness, with survival abilities and life-saving skills among the top of same-Sequence Beyonders.

Indeed, Amon and His father are on the same side as us in awakening Mr. Fool, just with different desired paces of progress, so He only provided help once until now. Hmm, this help was aimed at that evil god of the Fantasy Association. If I had failed my mission today and died, would the painting have returned to Luo Shan on its own, leading to developments that Amon and His father don't want to see? In an instant, Jenna thought of many things, not even having time to feel fear in hindsight.

"Please help close the car door," Amon, with the monocle clasped in His right eye socket, reminded Jenna with a smile, just like a real ride-hailing driver.

Only then did Jenna return to normal, closing the car door with her free hand.

Watching the white sedan drive smoothly away from the street, Jenna, hugging the precipice painting, rushed into the Star Dream Provisions Store without any regard for her image.

Feeling the light suddenly dim considerably, Jenna immediately relaxed.

Only then did she feel a surge of confusion.

How could Amon accurately accept my order?

How did He know we had obtained this painting and were going to send it to the Star Dream Provisions Store today?

With everyone being suppressed to Sequence 7, it's impossible to be so precise with prophecies and divinations…

Could it be that true gods are a bit more special in the Dream City, subject to different restrictions than us?

So, did Amon "coincidentally" save me with the help of His father?

This could also explain why this painting was so difficult for me to resist, not even giving me a chance to save myself. If we were all at the Sequence 7 level, it shouldn't have been like this. Or perhaps I actually had a chance to break free from its influence, but being my first encounter with this type of attack, I made mistakes in my response and failed to notice details that could have been utilized? Jenna looked at the oil painting in her arms, suppressing her thoughts, and walked to the cashier at the very back of the Star Dream Provisions Store.

This could also explain why this painting was so difficult for me to resist, not even giving me a chance to save myself. If we were all at the Sequence 7 level, it shouldn't have been like this. Or perhaps I actually had a chance to break free from its influence, but being my first encounter with this type of attack, I made mistakes in my response and failed to notice details that could have been utilized? Jenna looked at the oil painting in her arms, suppressing her thoughts, and walked to the cashier at the very back of the Star Dream Provisions Store.

"Do you buy items with mystical elements?" Jenna politely asked the shopkeeper who was playing with her phone.

The shopkeeper slowly raised her head, and the blazing sunlight outside suddenly appeared to be obscured by clouds.

"Yes, we do," she said with a slight smile at Jenna.

They really buy them? Jenna's heart leapt with joy, and she quickly placed the oil painting on the counter.

"Could you take a look and see if it meets your requirements? How much is it worth?"

The shopkeeper reached out a hand, bringing the painting in front of her, and after looking at it for a few seconds, said, "Thirty thousand."

How much? Jenna instinctively doubted her ears.

It wasn't that she thought this bizarre oil painting had no mystical value or wasn't worth thirty thousand dollars, but rather that for her and Franca, this painting was a burden, a danger, something they would pay to get rid of.

If the shopkeeper had said she would take the painting for thirty thousand, Jenna thought that after discussing with Franca, they would grit their teeth and pay.

As thoughts raced through her mind, Jenna considered a possibility.

The shopkeeper of the Star Dream Provisions Store was clearly an ally, and her current behavior was to provide more funds for their team!

And money had a very important symbolic meaning in the dream city.

Not giving it directly, but using this opportunity of buying mystical items as the method… Is this because certain rules of the dream city have to be satisfied, rules that even gods can't violate? Equivalent exchange? If that's the case, it must have been quite difficult for the Major Arcana card holders to provide two thousand in startup funds for each person… As Jenna pondered this, she subconsciously thought about whether she should haggle and try to raise the price a bit.

Since they were allies, they should be happy to see such behavior, as it meant they could provide more help.

After brief consideration, Jenna abandoned this idea.

The person across from her was the manifestation or projection of a true god. The price She quoted must have been carefully considered to be the most suitable, appropriate, and least likely to cause anomalies.

In terms of dream consciousness, every item has an estimated price. If the transaction price is too high, it would be considered problematic and might involve illegal activities, inevitably leading to reactive changes later? Thinking of this, Jenna responded to the shopkeeper, "Alright."

When the shopkeeper actually transferred thirty thousand yuan to her, she suddenly regretted letting Ludwig eat all the other paintings.

Those might have been worth some money too!

However, those were just painted by Luo Shan, probably not worth much, maybe just equivalent to Ludwig's late-night snack fee…

"Thank you," Jenna thanked the shopkeeper again and turned to walk out of the Star Dream Provisions Store.

The bright and brilliant sunlight from high above fell on her, finally giving her the feeling that the danger had completely passed.

Only then did she begin to feel fear in hindsight.

She still had many things she wanted to do, and several people she couldn't bear to part with.

…

At the entrance of the Tech Building.

Franca, wearing low-heeled shoes, carefully ascended the steps.

Her current attire was something she had never worn before, instinctively giving her a sense of insecurity and embarrassment.

This also made her more sensitive to the gazes and appraisals around her. She felt that the admiring ones were still acceptable, but those she previously considered impolite and a bit disgusting seemed to have increased, or perhaps she just noticed them more. Some people hurried past her, then turned back to look after taking a few steps, thinking they were being discreet, revealing slightly disappointed expressions.

This seemed to be because her makeup, attire, and appearance didn't quite match what they had imagined after seeing her figure and clothes.

Why are you being disappointed, asshole!? Franca secretly gave the middle finger and cursed under her breath.

She finished climbing the stairs and looked towards the security guard at the entrance, but didn't see Lumian.

I thought we could communicate with eye contact at the entrance, pretending not to know each other on the surface, just like in some spy dramas… Franca muttered silently, entering the lobby and walking towards the elevator area.

Inside the surveillance room.

Lumian sat in front of several large screens divided into multiple scenes, carefully scrutinizing each image from a not-so-short distance—yesterday's minor incident had given the security director Grimm an excuse to arrange for him to watch the surveillance cameras and patrol floors on rotation, no longer needing him to guard the main entrance.

Lumian quickly noticed Franca in the elevator area.

Although she had deliberately made herself less attractive, wearing old-fashioned black-framed glasses and clothes she had never worn before, he still recognized her.

It's a pity that Lie now only equates to top-level makeup skills and can't adjust height and figure to a certain extent, otherwise the disguise effect would be better. As it is now, it's still too eye-catching… Lumian commented inwardly.

Seeing him watching so intently, the security guard sitting next to him rolled his eyes and said, clutching his stomach, "Li, my stomach hurts. I'm going to take a dump. Keep an eye on things yourself."

Is this what they call getting paid to poop online? Lumian chuckled inwardly and said, "Okay."

This couldn't be better, maybe there's even a chance to check yesterday's surveillance footage and see how Zhou Mingrui reacted to my employment in private, what he did!

After his colleague had really gone to the bathroom outside the surveillance room, Lumian saw that Franca had finally managed to squeeze into an elevator after two failed attempts.

Suddenly, on the big screen, several images showing the situation inside the surveillance room went black.

Wh— Lumian didn't move.

Just two or three seconds later, there was an additional person beside him.

It was security director Grimm, wearing a thin blue suit.

Grimm, looking at the big screen, said in an seemingly casual manner, "Be careful of Huang Tao."

Be careful of Huang Tao? What relationship could Mr. Huang have with me, a male security guard? Lumian was puzzled and asked calmly, "Why?"

Maintaining his posture of watching the surveillance footage, Grimm explained briefly, "He has betrayed Mother and is no longer Mother's child."

No longer… He was before, but not now? Madam Magician mentioned that in the Vortex event, although Emperor Roselle perished, he also severely injured the strongest Broker, breaking free from the corruption of the Great Mother and retaining hope for resurrection… This and Amon obtaining Mr. Fool's consent to reborrow power from His past self are different components of the same event… So, Mr. Fool learned about Emperor Roselle's status, his subconscious cognition changed accordingly, causing Huang Tao in the dream city to no longer secretly harbor the corruption of the Great Mother? Lumian preliminarily sorted out the logic.

This also made him realize a problem.

Previously, he only knew that accidents and encounters in the dream might reflect in reality, bringing about real death or problematic advancements, but at this moment, he believed that changes in reality could also affect the dream, provided that Mr. Fool truly perceived it.

The dream and reality are not one-way, they can interact… Lumian remembered this discovery, then turned to smile at Grimm.

"Don't you find it strange that as a Child of God, I'm not female?"

Grimm showed a confused expression.

"Mother's children can be of any gender, or even genderless, or multiple genders.

"These are not important. What's important is the ability to procreate and bring new life.

"Child of God, why do you ask such a question?"

Grimm's brow furrowed slightly.

Of course, it's to test you! Lumian laughed inwardly in response.

He was testing whether Grimm only sensed that he was a Child of God, or if he knew more specifically that the current Child of God was Omebella, like Hand Bro.

If Grimm knew that he "was" Omebella, he would be confused about the gender discrepancy. Otherwise, it would indicate that he indeed lacked the necessary wisdom and was more like an NPC as Franca had said, but influenced by the Great Mother.

This also proved from another angle that there was a big problem with Hand Bro being able to call out the name Omebella.

Lumian smiled and said to Grimm, "I thought Mother had already let you know my true identity."

As he spoke, his hair gradually lengthened, and the lines of his face quickly softened.

Chapter 948: New Employee Orientation

Grimm's eyes suddenly reflected an indescribably beautiful face, but it vanished in an instant, like an intoxicating yet elusive dream.

Lumian had already transformed back into his male state, his gaze returning to the surveillance screens.

After a few seconds, Grimm remarked with some emotion, "When I was looking at the files transferred from HR, I was thinking that a 22-year-old with a 7-year-old son would be very suitable to be Mother's child, and could definitely be developed. I didn't expect… hehe, truly worthy of being a Child of God."

I didn't alter my background information and it still had this benefit… Who could have imagined this before… Lumian had to admit that some things were beyond even the Conspirer's expectations.

Suddenly, Grimm stood up and left the surveillance room.

In just a few seconds, the cameras inside the surveillance room resumed their normal operation.

Not long after, the security guard who had gone to defecate came back swaying and sat down next to Lumian.

He asked in a low voice, "The team lead didn't come, did he?"

This referred to Xu Xinyang, the team lead of Security Team 2.

"No," Lumian answered honestly.

Simultaneously, he silently added, The team leader indeed didn't come, but the director did.

Just then, Lumian's phone vibrated.

He turned his body, facing away from his colleague, discreetly took out his phone, unlocked the screen, and looked.

The vibration was caused by a WeChat friend request, the applicant was "Intis Group Grimm".

After Lumian accepted, he took the opportunity to look at Grimm's Moments.

The most recent post from this Intis Group security director was: "Children are more important than money, offspring are more important than work."

This was accompanied by nine photos, each with a different child.

Lumian quickly scrolled down and found that Grimm's Moments had only one theme, which was sharing about his children.

As expected of Mother's chosen… Mr. Fool's subconscious cognition is still too conservative, only giving Grimm nine children. Well, it also has to conform to the daily situations of the dream city… Lumian locked the screen, put the phone back in his pants pocket, and thought about how to use Grimm's connection in the future.

He planned to inquire about what Grimm had been doing recently and how well he had been doing it, under the pretext of a superior's assessment next time.

…

Tenth floor, Intis Group Administrative Department, in a separate small office.

Franca, led by an HR employee, met Zhang Qing, the deputy director of the Administrative Department.

He was also one of the interviewers at the time.

Zhang Qing looked Franca over a few times, and actually felt somewhat amazed, of course, this was based on her state during the interview as a reference.

He could only say that her figure was indeed very good and suited this outfit well.

While feeling slightly amazed, Zhang Qing also started to feel a headache coming on.

He worried that this new employee, Luo Fu, might be blindly arrogant and set her sights on Mr. Huang. He hoped she would honestly and diligently do her job and share the work between himself and the others.

Thinking of this, Zhang Qing couldn't help but sigh inwardly.

This was his daily state—facing beautiful women of various styles every day. As a man, it was inevitable to have some emotional and desire fluctuations, but thinking that any of these beauties might become Mr. Huang's mistress at any time, he had to restrain himself and not show any abnormality. Moreover, these beauties would occasionally quarrel and fight, coming to his office crying to complain, requiring him to spend a lot of energy mediating.

This made him physically and mentally exhausted every day, feeling a sense of spiritual impotence.

Namo Amitabha… After Zhang Qing muttered to himself, he began to explain the daily work and precautions of the office to Franca according to the procedure. Finally, he said,

"I'll find an experienced employee to guide you. Your position will be arranged near that experienced employee."

Franca took the initiative to say, "Can you ask Luo Shan to guide me? I live very close to her, we knew each other before, and it was she who made me full of longing for the company."

Before officially starting work, Franca had already thought about what image she wanted to establish in the Intis Group—a newcomer without much scheming, rather frank and cheerful, sometimes speaking without thinking.

She felt that as long as she didn't deliberately think about problems, following her daily life state, she could play this role well.

Zhang Qing nodded slightly, his expression relaxing considerably.

"Alright."

He stood up, led Franca out of the small office, and introduced her to other employees in the Administrative Department.

Franca saw a series of beautiful women, all striving to highlight their own characteristics. There were innocent ones, glamorous ones, and those going for the pure and sexy look, giving a feeling of a hundred flowers blooming.

These women were all alert at first glance of Franca, but after their gaze fell on her face and scrutinized for a few seconds, they relaxed.

Some of them perfunctorily greeted her, then picked up their makeup mirrors to touch up their makeup, while others enthusiastically chatted with Franca, thinking about dumping some of their work on this newcomer later.

Franca, having managed a large number of dancers before, was not at all unfamiliar with such occasions and naturally and appropriately followed Zhang Qing around the Administrative Department.

Seeing this, Zhang Qing imperceptibly nodded.

Indeed, she has three years of work experience, and the evaluation from her previous job is also very good…

Well, after seeing so many star-like beauties, she shouldn't have any unrealistic thoughts, right?

Franca noticed that about half of the employees in the Administrative Department were working seriously, and among them were also many good-looking women. Some of them were purely attracted by the high salaries of the Intis Group, not very interested in Mr. Huang, and had no hope for possible favor. Rather than becoming Mr. Huang's mistress, they wanted to develop in their careers and prove themselves. Others planned to establish the image of a capable woman, thinking that maybe Mr. Huang liked this type recently?

After introducing Franca to the employees of the Administrative Department, Zhang Qing stopped near Luo Shan's position and nodded slightly.

"Luo Shan has gone to the foreign trade department and will be back later. Since you already know each other, I don't need to introduce you.

"Well, Mr. Ed is currently entertaining distinguished guests and is not in the company. I'll take you to meet him later."

Mr. Ed referred to Edward, the vice president of the Intis Group, in charge of administration and business.

Entertaining distinguished guests? Zaratulstra mentioned in the information from the Major Arcana card holders? This person is most likely a subordinate of the Celestial Worthy, suspected to be a Seer pathway Angel who is currently possessing Loki… Franca pondered as she replied to Zhang Qing.

She then sat down at the desk not far from Luo Shan's position, hiding her legs under the table.

This gave her back a sense of security, and the faint shame subsided.

After Zhang Qing left, Franca sat in her position, looked around the bright and clean Administrative Department, and silently exclaimed, So this is what working is like?

During the time after her transmigration when she lived on the original body's savings, she naturally thought about not eating away at his savings. But she didn't understand the skills the original body knew, and the original body had no education, so she could only find jobs like waitressing and kitchen helper. Then, because she couldn't stand the conscience of those merchants and was unwilling to make counterfeit goods or help deceive innocent people, she couldn't last more than a few days before being fired either voluntarily or involuntarily. Almost no job lasted a full month, and there were a few times when she was almost beaten up.

In her view, this was no different from doing internships or summer jobs during college, and now was her first real job, especially in a dream city very similar to the world she transmigrated from.

While observing naturally, Franca saw those paintings on Luo Shan's desk.

Her heart suddenly skipped a beat.

Luo Shan's paintings at home have been cleaned up, but there are still some here…

After some consideration, Franca stood up, walked to Luo Shan's seat, tore down all the paintings that could be torn down, and threw the ones that couldn't be torn down into the trash can along with the items.

Just as she finished doing this, she felt someone watching her. She quickly turned around and saw a young man standing in the aisle near Luo Shan's position.

The man wore plain glasses and a plaid shirt interwoven with three colors. His appearance was slightly handsome with a very clear chin. It was Zhou Mingrui.

Damn… I've directly encountered Mr. Fool's dream image… Seeing Zhou Mingrui's confused expression, Franca quickly explained, "Luo Shan asked me to help deal with it."

Zhou Mingrui looked at the paintings and items in the trash can and said as if talking to himself, "Luo Shan asked to throw them away?"

He then glanced at Franca's heel height and muttered in his heart,

With such low heels, she's still a bit taller than me…

Franca nodded repeatedly. "Yes."

Zhou Mingrui withdrew his gaze and smiled politely.

"Where did Luo Shan go? I have something to discuss with her."

"She went to the foreign trade department to coordinate something," Franca repeated Zhang Qing's words.

"I see…" Zhou Mingrui then asked, "Are you transferred from another department to the Administrative Department? I don't think I've seen you before."

"I just joined," Franca answered honestly.

Seeing Zhou Mingrui's gaze unconsciously move towards Luo Shan's seat, Franca controlled her inner nervousness and smiled naturally. "Luo Shan and I are neighbors, we knew each other before. Before she went to handle something, she asked me to help her throw away all these paintings. She doesn't want them anymore."

"Doesn't want them anymore…" Zhou Mingrui repeated this sentence softly, then asked Franca with a colleague's attitude, "Did Luo Shan give you an internal recommendation?"

"No," Franca said with a slight pride. "I relied on my own abilities."

Then, she said in a teasing tone, "Maybe the Administrative Department has been busier recently and needs more people who can really get things done."

She didn't want Mr. Fool's dream image to think she was a gold digger.

Zhou Mingrui exchanged a few more pleasantries, left the Administrative Department, and returned to the opposite side.

Franca sat back in her position and quietly let out a sigh of relief.

Fortunately, I've been well-trained in front of the Demoness of Black. Mr. Fool, uh, Zhou Mingrui shouldn't have noticed that I was a bit nervous just now, right?

It's normal to be nervous; after all, being caught throwing away a colleague's belongings behind their back…

…

In the Security Department.

Lumian took the opportunity of going to the bathroom to take out his phone and clicked on the dialog box with Anderson Hood.

The chat interface was still on the initial greeting message.

Chapter 949: Action Outline

Lumian waited until the Dream Tutoring Classes opened before sending a WeChat voice message to Anderson Hood: "Mr. Anderson, does your tutoring school have painting classes? A friend of mine wants to know."

Late last night, after receiving Jenna's message, Lumian had been thinking about how to probe Anderson Hood. Based on the premise that Luo Shan had been controlled and her personality alteration had been initially resolved, he felt this matter was not urgent. There was no need to screenshot the legal representative and shareholder information of "Colorful Hostel" and send it directly to Anderson, "teasing" him about having other businesses on the side, then observe the subsequent reactions and wait for any unexpected developments that might result.

He planned to start with the painting issue, making initial probes, preferably without alerting Anderson.

Anderson didn't immediately reply to Lumian, and Lumian didn't linger in the bathroom. After putting his phone in his pants pocket, he walked back to the surveillance room.

Looking at the large screens in front, his mind flashed through some "experiments" he had done and needed to do:

1. Observe Mr. Fool's dream manifestation Zhou Mingrui and the people around him;

2. First contact with Zhou Mingrui during the day, leaving a certain impression;

3. Contact people close to Zhou Mingrui, divided into multiple stages, eliminating the suspicion of one target before contacting the second, and so

on;

4. Contact Zhou Mingrui again during the day, leaving a deeper impression;

5. Establish a relationship with Zhou Mingrui during the day where they can chat, hinting at the existence of Beyonder powers and his goodwill;

6. First contact with Zhou Mingrui at night;

7. Hint at the existence of Beyonder powers and his goodwill to Zhou Mingrui at night;

8. Based on the results of previous experiments and information gathered, formulate an official awakening plan.

This was the action outline for Lumian's team. Currently, the first four parts had been completed, without any members being kicked out of the dream or restricted—the third part was spread throughout all subsequent steps, and team members responsible for contact had to self-isolate for a day and night before continuing to advance.

The danger gradually increased in the later parts. Lumian didn't think about avoiding it, because determining the degree and source of danger was one of the purposes of the experiment.

Only by knowing what could be done, what couldn't be done, what would lead to immediate expulsion, and what would take time to explode, could their team officially enter the eighth part of the action outline and formulate a targeted awakening plan.

At this stage, Lumian wasn't worried or afraid of failure; he was worried and afraid of not being able to find the reasons for failure.

With this mindset, he approached many things with a "testing" attitude, including whether the Information Shredder worked, whether Stiano was trustworthy, what relationship Anderson Hood had with the Painter pathway, whether Grimm had become one of the Great Mother's tools to influence the dream, and so on.

After obtaining the "test" results, they would contact the Major Arcana card holders to compare accounts, which might reveal some interesting and useful details.

If they had consulted the Major Arcana card holders from the beginning, forming preconceived notions and fixed thinking patterns, they might not have "tested" some things, and thus wouldn't have obtained their own results. Their minds would only have the conclusions given by the Major Arcana card holders, which might cause them to miss key information.

As Lumian was pondering what to do next, he noticed an extra person in one of the surveillance footage on the tenth floor.

The camera was aimed at the entrance of Aurora Company, and a person wearing a black robe with a wide, deep hood, completely out of place among the nearby white-collar workers, walked out.

Suddenly, a bunch of things fell out from inside the person's robe, landing on the floor.

The person quickly crouched down, the hem of the robe covering the fallen objects.

When he stood up, the ground was clean again, without any items.

After watching this person walk out of the surveillance frame and seeing him enter the elevator through the elevator surveillance, Lumian silently said to himself, The corresponding image of a certain Aurora Order mister in the dream city?

The security guard sitting next to him followed his gaze and laughed. "It's fine; those clowns from Aurora Company are like that, it's nothing, it's nothing."

"I thought it was some kind of performance art," Lumian said as he saw Luo Shan walk out of the elevator and enter Intis Group.

…

In the Administrative Department, large office.

Luo Shan stood confused next to her position, seeing her desk with fewer items.

"I helped you throw away all those paintings," Franca walked up to Luo Shan and explained with a smile.

Luo Shan suddenly realized. "I had forgotten about that, I'll draw some new ones later…"

She paused, looked around, and asked in a lowered voice, "Can I, can I still paint later?"

"Yes, it doesn't affect your ability to use your power," Franca comforted her quietly, then raised her volume, "Director Zhang asked you to familiarize me with the work process."

Zhang Qing's full title was Deputy Director of the Administrative Department of Intis Group.

"Alright," Luo Shan pulled Franca over and openly chatted about various rumors within the company.

Finally, Luo Shan said, "I forgot to tell you last night, there's a very fierce young security guard recently, he even dares to confront those MCN company people. He's really handsome, but don't tell anyone, he already has a 7-year-old son, and he's only 22!"

Theoretically speaking, I am the child's mother, one of them… Franca's mouth twitched slightly as she echoed with emotion, "Doesn't that mean he had a child in middle school?"

After chatting about this for a while, Franca returned to her seat and entered work mode according to Luo Shan's guidance.

After familiarizing herself with the office system, she rotated her chair and stood up, wanting to help Luo Shan share some work.

She saw Luo Shan holding a pencil, focused on drawing on a white paper.

What is she drawing? Franca softened her steps and silently walked to Luo Shan's side.

She found that Luo Shan was sketching her own portrait, with the Luo Shan in the drawing having hollow eyes, a cold expression, and a curled mouth.

Wh— Franca's eyes focused, and she immediately reached out her right hand and patted Luo Shan's shoulder. "What are you drawing?"

Luo Shan was startled and quickly stopped drawing.

She turned her body, and seeing it was Franca, she visibly relaxed and pressed her chest saying, "You scared me! I thought Old Zhang had caught me slacking off."

As she spoke, Luo Shan glanced at the sketch on the table, and her expression quickly became terrified. "W-why would I draw this?"

Franca pondered for two seconds and showed a smile that made Luo Shan extremely reassured. "Don't worry, you can finish the last few strokes, I'll handle it."

Luo Shan, uncertain and frightened, leaned forward again and added the last few strokes, making the portrait more lifelike.

As soon as she finished drawing, the Luo Shan in the sketch presented a state as if about to come alive.

Franca grabbed the drawing, and black flames burned discreetly in her palm.

The expression of Luo Shan in the drawing immediately became painful, full of resentment and hatred, as if she was being burned by flames.

In the blink of an eye, the drawing curled up, showed signs of spontaneous combustion, quickly turned to ashes, and fell into the trash can.

While completing this, Franca used the Mirror Maze through the transparent screen on the side of the desk, Luo Shan's phone screen, and the mirror being used by a nearby colleague for makeup touch-ups, to deal with the camera surveillance, not leaving traces of Beyonder powers in the corresponding footage.

Luo Shan stared blankly as Franca dealt with the portrait, and after a few seconds said, "I feel like my whole being is much lighter again; my mood is better…"

Franca nodded and said, "You can treat it as another release of negative emotions and desires."

She considered for two seconds and added, "Currently, we can only treat your symptoms, not solve the root cause of the problem. Simply put, we can only treat the symptoms, not cure the disease.

"So, you need to be vigilant about your own state, do self-examination from time to time, and if you find something wrong, immediately come to us for a new round of treatment. Don't delay, otherwise, behavior like just now will happen again, and the consequences are unpredictable.

"Power is a double-edged sword, it can harm others and also harm oneself, this will accompany us for life."

Luo Shan listened quietly, remained silent for a moment, then lowered her head and smiled. "I understand what you mean. I hope, hope I can hold on for a few more years, preferably until I retire, no, let me enjoy life for five more years after retirement."

Seeing Luo Shan's smile, Franca suddenly felt it was a bit dazzling, making her eyes ache.

She comforted in a gentle voice, "If you can hold on, you must hold on. It's like some diseases that were terminal in earlier years, but if you actively cooperate with treatment and try to prolong life as much as possible, with the development of technology, they can now be cured or better controlled.

"In the future, we might become stronger, or we might meet stronger people who have ways to solve the problem of power corruption."

Luo Shan nodded slowly and smiled at Franca. "I'll try hard, and you should work hard too, let's all work hard!"

Franca remained silent for a moment, deactivated the Mirror Maze, and returned to her own seat.

She picked up her phone and found that Jenna, with the nickname "Nana and Lily", had sent her a message describing the dangers encountered on the way to deliver the painting to Star Dream Provisions Store, the help received, and the final result.

Franca felt a wave of fear reading it, quite regretful that she hadn't accompanied Jenna.

She had anticipated great danger but thought that Jenna, who could actively exit the dream, would at most waste one opportunity. She didn't expect that the power representing the Fantasy Association's evil god could prevent them from returning to reality.

Jenna had almost really died.

Fortunately, Amon and His father are on our side… Jenna's experience also provided us with important intelligence. In the future, when encountering people and objects of the Painter pathway, we need to be careful about not being able to exit the dream… Franca, thinking of Lumian about to or already probing Anderson Hood, quickly forwarded Jenna's message to him and reminded him to remember to delete it using the Information Shredder.

After confirming that Lumian was currently fine and had received the warning, Franca glanced sideways at Luo Shan, roughly understanding why her condition had suddenly relapsed earlier.

It coincided with the time when that painting appeared abnormal and Jenna nearly died.

…

Inside the surveillance room.

After deleting the messages from Franca and Jenna using the Information Shredder, Lumian pinged Anthony.

He continued to watch the surveillance, looking for potentially abnormal people and events.

At this time, Xu Xinyang, the leader of Security Team 2, entered the surveillance room and patted the shoulders of his two subordinates. "After work this afternoon, let's go visit Old Wang and Old Ding together, they're out of danger now.

"After visiting the hospital, let's gather with all the folks who aren't on shifts. It's also to welcome Little Li to our team."

"Old Wang and Old Ding?" Lumian could guess who the team leader was talking about, but still had to put on a confused expression.

Xu Xinyang, with his burly build, square face, and very tanned skin, said with both amusement and helplessness, "Didn't you see the news? Several of our folks were struck by lightning. Fortunately, it wasn't people from our Team 2 who died. Damn, how did they get struck by lightning?"

"Oh, I remember now," Lumian then asked, "Which hospital are Old Wang and Old Ding in?"

Xu Xinyang answered simply, "Mushu Hospital."

Chapter 950: Dinner Invitation

It's really Mushu Hospital… Lumian wasn't surprised at all by Xu Xinyang's answer.

He grunted in acknowledgment. "Alright, Team Lead."

He had thought about it. As an important base for evil gods to influence the dream city, and with some degree of cooperation with the Celestial Worthy, Mushu Hospital might be unavoidable for many things to come. It wasn't a matter of cautiously avoiding it or not entering, pretending it didn't exist.

So, rather than that, why not take advantage of the daytime, while their actions hadn't yet reached a critical stage, while he still had another chance to enter, and while he had a reasonable and legitimate excuse, to go take a look and investigate in person. Of course, the underground floors that likely represented the Abyss and Mr. Fool's psychological dark side still couldn't be recklessly entered.

After seeing off Xu Xinyang, Lumian stayed in the surveillance room until almost noon. He and his shift partner Old Xia waited for their colleagues to relieve them, then went downstairs together to the Intis Group staff cafeteria located in the annex building of the Tech Building for lunch.

They didn't get meal allowances, and the cafeteria wasn't free, but it had a wide variety of dishes, and the prices were kept quite cheap through company subsidies. So, whether from headquarters or branch offices, employees in this building all liked eating in the cafeteria. Even Mr. Huang himself would come eat there occasionally to check the quality of the food.

The only problem was that during the lunch rush, the cafeteria was packed. Higher-income employees preferred to order takeout or dine at nearby malls.

As security guards, when they could go to the cafeteria depended on when their colleagues came to relieve them. Everyone tacitly agreed to come a bit earlier to avoid the peak hours.

Lumian got steamed eggs with minced meat, stir-fried yellow chives and meat with pickled peppers, fried chicken leg, cucumber and pork soup, and a big bowl of rice. He found a corner spot with Old Xia and listened to him chat about the antics of the Aurora Company folks while eating.

Old Xia clicked his tongue and said, "Their boss is an exhibitionist, or the M in S&M, often with whip marks on his body…"

Say more, slander some more, I love hearing it… Lumian nodded along while inwardly muttering.

Suddenly, his phone vibrated twice.

He picked it up and saw a message from "A name that leaves a deep impression on you", which was Anderson Hood: "Is that friend you mentioned actually yourself?"

Lumian smiled and replied using voice input: "You could interpret it that way."

He felt that in conversations between Hunters, whoever got anxious first, whoever got angry first, whoever felt guilty first, would lose.

Only by adjusting oneself to a state where nothing mattered could one stand undefeated.

After about 20-30 seconds, Anderson replied: "Painting requires talent, I hope you have it.

"Our tutoring school doesn't have painting classes, but I know a decent studio, that's where I learned. If you're interested, tomorrow night at 7, meet me at the entrance of Jinxiu Dongfang Community on Sifang Street, and I'll take you for a tour."

At night? Lumian pondered for a moment before replying: "Alright, thank you."

He remembered that Colorful Hostel was on Sifang Street, but the interior renovation and decoration hadn't been completed yet.

…

In the Administrative Department, large office.

Luo Shan stretched lazily, walked over to Franca's desk, and asked with a smile, "What are you eating for lunch? I don't want to join the crowd at the cafeteria."

Without waiting for Franca to respond, she lowered her voice and said, "Other departments all find time to have team dinners to welcome new employees, only our Administrative Department doesn't.

"Mainly because those ladies don't want to or think little of us, which is fine, but the worry is that they'll insist on going, wanting to find some free helpers. Tsk, can you imagine how that would develop? Sarcasm and veiled barbs are the norm, with people crying, arguing, or even wanting to get physical not being uncommon. It left a bunch of trouble to deal with afterward, so Old Zhang simply stopped organizing departmental dinners. Those who get along well just gather privately, however they want."

Franca listened with relish and said expectantly, "I wonder when Mr. Huang will next come to the Administrative Department."

The scene then would surely be spectacular; she wanted to witness it.

Demonesses inevitably tended to have a bit of a chaos-loving inclination, which was very justifiable when it came to watching drama.

"Mr. Huang probably won't come in the next few days. He has VIPs to entertain, and even if he comes to the company, he'll go to the 16th floor," Luo Shan disclosed Mr. Huang's whereabouts.

Zaratulstra? Franca was very attentive and serious about this matter.

Besides the items listed in the action outline, they also had to guard against the Celestial Worthy and evil gods doing bad things to Zhou Mingrui in the dream city. They needed to discover and prevent it early.

Moreover, this could also accumulate inspiration to help them formulate an awakening plan—how the Celestial Worthy's subordinates did it, and they could try to do the opposite.

"What a pity," Franca said with a look of regret.

She then asked curiously, "Won't Mr. Huang bring the VIP to tour the company?"

"He has before," Luo Shan suddenly paused, her voice becoming even lower, "That day Zhou Mingrui happened to be on sick leave. Franca, could that long-named VIP be the destroyer you mentioned, sent from the future to the present by evil forces? Was Zhou Mingrui's sick leave arranged by your people?"

A Painter's spiritual intuition is quite strong… Franca smiled and said, "Is that VIP called Zaratulstra?"

Luo Shan nodded solemnly.

"Then it is," Franca confirmed her earlier guess.

Luo Shan was silent for a few seconds, then her eyes lit up and she said,

"Why don't I ask Zhou Mingrui to have dinner with us? That way you'll have a chance to meet and chat with him."

Holy crap… So fast? So direct? Franca felt a bit shocked.

She had thought it would take her and Lumian a week or two to naturally contact Zhou Mingrui through work matters before reaching a point where they could add each other on WeChat or have casual chats.

Who knew that on her first day of work, Luo Shan would invite Zhou Mingrui to have dinner together!

It's too, too fast…

This progress is too advanced; I'm not ready yet…

Seeing that Franca hadn't answered, Luo Shan smiled and said, "Zhou Mingrui owes me several meals. Every time he asks me for information, he says he'll treat me to a meal next time, but so far he's only done it once.

"Hmm, welcoming my bestie to the company is a good reason."

As she spoke, she picked up her phone and started tapping out a message to Zhou Mingrui.

After a while, Luo Shan waved her phone and said, "He agreed, but said it would be dinner tomorrow, because he has to work overtime tonight, and tech people have too little lunch break time to go eat something nice."

He agreed just like that… No stress reaction, no excuses? Franca suddenly recalled an old saying: The best way to get close to someone is to know the people around them.

Helping Luo Shan was indeed the right choice… This is karma rewarding kindness! Franca pondered for a moment, then said to Luo Shan, "Zhou Mingrui seemed a bit concerned about those paintings you had on your desk before. He didn't refuse your invitation, but agreed to it. Maybe he also wants to confirm or probe something…"

Without waiting for Luo Shan to respond, Franca added, "If that's really the case, it's a good thing."

The only question is, does dinner count as nighttime?

This goes against the plan in the action outline, and could lead to confusion and ambiguity in the experimental results…

It shouldn't count if it's not completely dark, right?

…

At 4:30 in the afternoon, after another round of patrolling the floors, Lumian and Old Xia came to the underground parking lot of the Tech Building. They saw Team Lead Xu Xinyang sitting in a dark gray SUV, reaching out from the passenger seat and waving at them.

"Over here."

Lumian and Old Xia walked over and sat in the spacious back seat.

"Just us few?" Old Xia looked out the window.

Xu Xinyang laughed.

"Who goes to visit patients at a hospital in a big group? The nurses wouldn't let us in!

"Just the four of us, Zhao is driving, the others will wait directly at the dinner place."

Zhao was the young man sitting in the driver's seat, looking a bit chubby from the side.

At this time, the roads were still fairly clear. Before 5 o'clock, Lumian and the others had arrived outside Mushu Hospital.

Two young men each carrying a box of fruit and a bag of nutritional supplements followed behind Xu Xinyang and Old Xia as they walked in.

The lobby of Mushu Hospital was no different from when Lumian last came, ordinary, with people coming and going. Only occasionally could one notice certain orderlies with indifferent gazes and slightly mechanical movements.

Lumian withdrew his gaze, confirming that his spirituality gave no warning and there were no abnormalities around, then entered the elevator going up and arrived on the 12th floor.

Exiting the elevator area and turning into the ward, after pushing open the door, what met his eyes was a quiet nurses' station and a corridor extending into darkness.

The light at the end of the corridor seemed to be broken, not yet repaired.

Led by a nurse who looked very normal, they entered a double patient room where Old Wang and Old Ding were.

Before Lumian, Zhao, and Old Xia could get a clear look at the patients' condition, two bedside family members rushed in front of Xu Xinyang, speaking one after another:

"Team Lead Xu, this is definitely a work-related injury for our Old Wang!"

"Boohoo, Team Lead Xu, our Old Ding almost died, look at him, look at him, who knows how long it will take to recover."

"…"

Xu Xinyang finally found an opportunity and pressed his right hand down.

"Ladies, this will definitely count as a work injury. Mr. Huang said that not only will there be compensation according to national standards, but the company will also give an additional sum, as well as cover all medical expenses beyond insurance, and continue to pay normal wages until Old Wang and Old Ding fully recover and can return to work. We won't let one of us bleed, sweat, and cry!"

While Xu Xinyang was comforting the family members, Lumian and the others turned their gaze to the hospital beds, seeing the two patients wrapped from head to toe in white bandages, with only their eyes, noses, and mouths exposed.

Old Xia couldn't help but lean close to Lumian and say in a low voice, "I don't mean to be unkind, but they really look funny like this. I thought only TV shows wrapped people up like this. Didn't expect to see it in real life too."

Lumian didn't respond to Old Xia, because he thought of mummies.

Mummies that were said to have close connections with the Wraith pathway controlled by the Mother Tree of Desire.

And this was Mushu Hospital.

Chapter 951: Everything as Usual

951 Everything as Usual

Lumian looked again at Old Wang and Old Ding, who were wrapped from head to toe in white bandages, carefully examining their condition and the details around them.

"Don't disturb the patients," the nurse who had led Lumian and the others into the ward reminded them before walking out and returning to the nurses' station.

At this moment, the patient who was presumably Old Ding woke up, influenced by the conversation between his family members and Xu Xinyang, slowly opening his eyes.

Contrasted against the surrounding circles of white bandages, Old Ding's deep brown eyes were noticeably darker than normal, taking quite a while to regain focus.

Lumian didn't notice any abnormalities worth noting.

Xu Xinyang walked to the bedside and greeted Old Ding, who lacked energy and spoke indistinctly.

Lumian listened for about 20-30 seconds, then glanced at the still sleeping Old Wang, and stepped back gradually, inconspicuously and without drawing attention, to the doorway of the ward.

He then examined the doctor and nurse information posted outside the ward:

"Attending Physician: Huang Puda.

"Head Nurse: Qi Fang."

From the photo, it was clear that Qi Fang was the nurse who had just led Lumian and the others to the ward.

Names not mentioned in the files… The name style is that of "locals" in the dream city, not like "foreigners"… Doesn't seem to be any problem… Lumian returned to the ward and followed Team Lead Xu Xinyang in greeting Old Ding and the two family members again.

They didn't stay long to avoid disturbing the patients' rest.

Walking through the corridor, past the nurses' station, and towards the ward's main door, Lumian casually examined the bulletin boards on both sides of the wall.

One side featured scientific achievements and introductions to some diseases and injuries, while the other side had brief introductions of all the doctors and nurses in this ward, arranged in several rows.

Lumian's gaze fell on the topmost photo.

It was a female doctor with a plump appearance, fairly good features, and slightly brownish eyes, looking to be in her forties.

Her introduction read: "Roland, Associate Dean…"

Lumian's first reaction was "Isn't that Franca's last name?", followed by a sudden chill down his spine, almost making him shudder.

He remembered another Roland.

It was a prominent name he had heard about while investigating the sea prayer ritual in Port Santa of the Feynapotter Kingdom: Matriarch Roland of the Church of Earth Mother!

This was equivalent to the pontiff or pope in other orthodox churches!

The Planter pathway has the Doctor Sequence, and Roland, as the matriarch of the Church of Earth Mother, is most likely an Angel of this pathway, which is equivalent to one of the strongest doctors in the real world. Her corresponding manifestation in the dream city serving as the associate dean and chief surgeon of a hospital, certainly qualifies and aligns with Mr. Fool's subconscious cognition… But the problem is, this is Mushu Hospital… Lumian naturally withdrew his gaze and walked towards the ward exit with Xu Xinyang, his expression unchanged.

He remembered that the information from the Major Arcana card holders didn't mention Roland having a corresponding dream manifestation.

Is it unknown, or considered unimportant, a mere NPC? Is Roland becoming the associate dean of Mushu Hospital woven by Mr. Fool's subconscious dream, representing some of his cognition, or has Roland's dream manifestation been exploited by the Great Mother due to issues with Her own pathway? Or is this one of the "achievements" of Mushu Hospital? If Mother Roland is the associate dean, then who is the dean? Lumian felt he needed to report this to the Major Arcana card holders.

This didn't contradict his idea of first "testing" on his own and gaining personal results. He was worried that if there was a problem with the dream image, it might affect Matriarch Roland in the real world, and wanted to remind the Major Arcana card holders.

Leaving the ward, Lumian curiously asked, "Team Lead Xu, what's the name of the dean of Mushu Hospital? I haven't seen any news about him."

Xu Xinyang entered the elevator area and thought for a few seconds before saying, "Strange, odd, I haven't heard of him either.

"I only know that Mr. Huang used to have a good relationship with this hospital, donated a lot of money to them, and helped establish them."

Money… a lot of money… donations… Lumian thought this must have been done when Emperor Roselle was still corrupted by the Great Mother.

This also made Mushu Hospital financially strong, seemingly not too worried about "money" issues, unlike the Colorful Hostel of the Fantasy Association, which still had to exploit its bestowed and believers for renovation.

While waiting for the slow elevator, Old Xia suddenly asked Xu Xinyang, "Team Lead Xu, do you think Old Wang and Old Ding can recover to their original state? They used to be such good fighters."

"Are you eyeing the positions they left behind?" Xu Xinyang asked with a smile.

In the Intis Group, the Security Department wasn't just about security guards, but also had real security personnel responsible for protecting Mr. Huang's family and important guests, providing security services for jewelry exhibitions, antique exhibitions, arms deals, etc. held by various companies of the group, and protecting important mining sites through cooperation with local armed forces.

Old Wang and Old Ding were security personnel, earning much higher salaries than ordinary security guards, with additional allowances if dispatched externally.

"I'll pass; can't take that risk, and don't have that ability," Old Xia waved his hands repeatedly, looking scared.

Xu Xinyang looked at Lumian and smiled, saying, "Originally, I wanted someone in their fifties or sixties, but the HR department sent me the youngest one. Fortunately, Director Grimm is satisfied."

"Why look for someone in their fifties or sixties?" Old Xia asked on behalf of Lumian, he himself looking to be only in his thirties or forties.

Xu Xinyang chuckled and said, "Security guard is a service position. You're all too young, not smooth enough, and can't bring yourselves to make a scene or throw tantrums.

"Think about it, if you had a conflict with an employee in the building, which one of you would be able to lie down on the ground without any burden, clutch your chest and cry out in pain, saying you can't breathe? A man in his fifties or sixties wouldn't have such concerns, they'd dare to lie down, dare to shout, dare to extort. In that case, would the employee on the other side dare to take it seriously and continue to make trouble? Having an elder is like having a treasure!"

Lumian understood that Xu Xinyang was reprimanding him, thinking that getting into trouble with someone on his first day of work showed inexperience.

Zhao, not catching Xu Xinyang's implied meaning, asked foolishly, "Then why not directly find someone over seventy?"

"What if they really fall ill on duty?" Xu Xinyang scolded Zhao impatiently, "You don't care when it's Mr. Huang's money, do you?"

Zhao giggled, not refuting Xu Xinyang.

At this moment, an elevator finally stopped on this floor, already crowded with people.

Entering the elevator and following its slow descent, Lumian suddenly had a feeling that he and the others were sinking into the dark seabed.

It was an illusion brought on by his spirituality.

The illusion quickly disappeared as the elevator stopped at the next floor.

As the elevator continued to stop at various floors, Old Xia grumbled, "It's a bit cold, isn't the air conditioning too strong…"

You didn't say that when we took the elevator up earlier… Is it because we're currently descending, getting closer to the underground floors? Lumian thoughtfully observed the other people in the elevator, noticing that they all looked slightly pale from the chilly air conditioning and cold wind.

There were no other unusual situations beyond this.

When the elevator stopped on the first floor, Lumian suddenly felt as if it would plummet in free fall, and instinctively stepped out quickly.

The feeling of overly effective air conditioning disappeared instantly.

Lumian raised his hand to pinch his nose, following Xu Xinyang and the others towards the main entrance of Mushu Hospital.

Just now, he had caught a whiff of blood.

Exiting the hospital building, the sunlight, only slightly weaker than before, instantly brought a sense of golden brightness and clarity.

"That's why I hate hospitals," Old Xia muttered.

Lumian half-turned his body, looking at the bustling lobby and the upper floors, summarizing in his mind, There are indeed some abnormal details, but most of the doctors, nurses, and patients here still seem fine…

If they all had problems, this city would have been corrupted to an unimaginable degree long ago, and Mr. Fool's subconscious would surely have reacted…

As thoughts raced through his mind, Lumian suddenly saw a face pressed against a glass window on the twelfth floor.

That face was bound with strips of white bandages, with only the eyes, nostrils, and mouth uncovered.

He seemed to have seen Lumian too, and began to struggle frantically, then was forcibly dragged away from the window area as if being pulled by one person after another from behind.

Before Lumian could react, he had disappeared.

But Lumian recognized him.

He was Old Wang, who had been sleeping the whole time during their visit.

Lumian turned back, pretending he hadn't seen anything.

If not for the appointment with Anderson tomorrow night, he would have wanted to storm the twelfth floor ward right now to rescue Old Wang and see what unexpected changes might occur.

For Lumian, this wasn't something he couldn't do, but it should be done after completing most of the experiments.

…

In a beef offal hot pot restaurant.

Having booked a large private room with two tables set up, Xu Xinyang held baijiu—a Chinese spirit—and beer, smiling at Lumian and asking, "Can you drink?"

"I can drink a little," Lumian answered somewhat fearfully.

"As long as you can drink, that's fine. Drinking style is working style, drinking etiquette is personal etiquette. Those who don't drink can't fit into our Security Team 2," Xu Xinyang pointed at the subordinates around and said, "Except for those on duty, dispatched, hospitalized, or on leave, everyone is here. Make a good impression."

Lumian had heard from Franca that many companies' welcome parties for new employees were mainly to test obedience and haze the newcomers, making them learn to be compliant, with drinking being the most common method.

"I'll… I'll try my best," Lumian squeezed out a smile with a heavy expression.

Two hours later, amidst various bottles of alcohol piled up on the table and in the corners, Lumian held a bottle of strong liquor, smiling broadly at Xu Xinyang and saying, "Team Lead Xu, drink up, why aren't you drinking?

"Come on, let's finish what's left."

Xu Xinyang, his face pale and movements uncoordinated, said, "No, no more drinking. Later, later I still need to go home and pay my dues to the wife."

Around him, some like Old Xia and Zhao were either slumped over the table or curled up in corners, already asleep. Some had just returned from vomiting in the bathroom, swaying unsteadily. Some gathered in groups, chattering endlessly. Others sat silently, motionless…

Chapter 952: Items That Can Be Sold

952 Items That Can Be Sold

Seeing the situation, Lumian didn't insist; after all, Xu Xinyang still had the important task of paying the bill. He couldn't possibly cover for him, right? He hadn't even received his first month's salary yet!

Lumian then called over to the colleagues who had collapsed at the beginning but had now recovered, arranging for them to send the different drunks home nearby. If there was no one going in the same direction, they would call family members to come pick them up.

After finishing this task, Lumian pulled up a chair and sat down, taking a few sips of liquor as if it were a beverage. This made the few colleagues who were still somewhat sober twitch at their temples.

Is this guy the reincarnation of a wine vat?

Glancing at the still bustling main hall outside, Lumian idly took out his phone and began replying to messages and browsing trending topics.

As he scrolled, he noticed that the content being pushed to him now included a lot of alcohol-related topics, including but not limited to "Which brand of baijiu tastes best", "Beer tasting", "Legal liability for alcohol-related accidents caused by pressuring others to drink", "Civil compensation for alcohol-related sudden deaths by others at the same table", "Alcohol is a carcinogen"…

Does this count as a form of monitoring? Lumian pondered as his thumb slid across the screen.

When the last drunk was taken away, he stood up and left the hot pot restaurant. He searched for the location of Xinhong District and found it was just over two kilometers away.

Lumian decided to walk back.

It was past 8 p.m. now, and the sky had darkened completely. The scorching breeze had taken on a hint of coolness. The street lamps on both sides were bright, and there were many pedestrians passing by, brushing shoulders without disturbing each other.

Lumian savored this state of being immersed in the crowd yet detached from it, his mind gradually relaxing and unwinding.

He walked past shops playing old songs, crowds dancing to lively rhythms, and a bustling bar street, hearing shouts of "Cheers! Cheers!" coming from inside.

Returning to the rental apartment, Lumian saw Ludwig in the kitchen, standing on a small folding stool, busy preparing food. Anthony sat by the dining table, writing down his observations from the day.

His task was to continue observing Zhou Mingrui and those close to him, watching for any abnormalities or subtle changes after they came into contact with Lumian, Franca, or Jenna.

Seeing Lumian return, Anthony looked up and said, "He insists on cooking himself. He finds preparing his own breakfast and late-night snacks more enjoyable than studying textbooks or doing homework."

"He's become more human-like," Lumian said with a chuckle.

He had just sat down when the door opened and Franca and Jenna appeared in the doorway.

"There's an urgent matter we need to discuss together, to complement each other's strengths," Franca explained succinctly.

Her interaction with Zhou Mingrui today was the kind that only left a certain impression, and this already had experimental results. It wouldn't cause her to be kicked out of the dream or face restrictions.

So before taking further action, she could discreetly touch base with Lumian and the others.

She and Jenna had taken a taxi to a stop one station away and sneaked over using the shadows.

"What's the matter?" Lumian sat up a bit straighter.

"I'm having a private dinner with Zhou Mingrui tomorrow night, thanks to Luo Shan!" Franca pulled out a chair and sat down, asking Lumian with a mix of excitement and nervousness, "This doesn't affect your experiment plans, does it?"

"A little, but it's not a big problem. Taking big steps to try things out first, then working backwards to eliminate possibilities one by one is also a method of experimentation," Lumian said after a few seconds of thought.

Franca let out a sigh of relief and said, "Then let's discuss how to give Zhou Mingrui hints. This should show some progress compared to before, but not excessively, otherwise we can't rule out options and would have to risk a second attempt later."

Lumian tersely agreed and provided several approaches from a Conspirer's perspective. He then evaluated Franca's contingency plans and explanations, while Jenna helped fill in any gaps from an Instigator's standpoint.

Anthony was responsible for empathizing with Zhou Mingrui's possible psychological activities and instinctive reactions, even role-playing as Zhou Mingrui during rehearsals.

After twenty to thirty minutes of discussion, Franca finally had two feasible plans that were likely to achieve her goals.

"Brainstorming really does work!" she exclaimed sincerely.

Jenna then recounted her experience of selling the painting at the Star Dream Provisions Store, not omitting a single detail.

After listening to the end, Franca thoughtfully took out the Beyonder characteristic obtained from the reanimated Panatiya from her Traveler's Bag.

She showed it briefly before quickly stuffing it back. "Can we sell this thing to the Star Dream Provisions Store?

"We can't use it for now anyway, so why not exchange it for money and find a way to rent useful items? Whether the mission succeeds or not later, the Major Arcana card holders should reimburse us or help buy it back."

"We can try, but I think that individual probably won't accept it," Lumian said as he also took out an item from his Traveler's Bag.

It was the corpse wax candle obtained from the Blue Avenger.

Looking at this pale yellow candle with a reddish tinge, Lumian thought for a moment before saying, "We discussed before that Demonesses might have symbolic meaning and special uses in the dream city. Now I want to say that Hunters might also have significance: I'm a Hunter, the first person killed was the Oracle who was also a Hunter, and Anderson, who is clearly abnormal now, is also a Hunter.

"Given this premise, items related to Demonesses and Hunters might prove useful later on, and we can't predict which ones. That individual will probably not accept them, instead letting us keep them and wait for the right opportunity.

"Hmm, we can try. If She doesn't accept them, it would provide initial validation for my theory."

Jenna, Franca, and Anthony all nodded thoughtfully.

The four of them then took out many mystical items they weren't currently using, planning to have Jenna take them to the Star Dream Provisions Store to sell the next day.

Looking at these items, Jenna pondered for a few seconds before saying, "That individual is a true deity… Isn't it somewhat disrespectful to bring such a hodgepodge of items of varying value?"

Anthony nodded in agreement with Jenna's statement.

Franca added, "Yeah, it feels like we're treating Her like a junk collector…"

As she spoke, Franca fell silent, as did Lumian and the others.

In the end, they selected only three high-value items.

After discussing everything, Franca stood up, stretching her arms and said, "I'm a bit excited and nervous thinking about substantially hinting at Mr. Fool's dream manifestation tomorrow night."

"What time is your appointment tomorrow night?" Lumian asked.

"Seven o'clock. Luo Shan said those tech folks rarely leave work on time, so we need to allow for extra time." Franca also mentioned the meeting place.

Seven o'clock, huh… Lumian raised his right hand and rubbed his chin.

At this point, Jenna carefully said, "Don't be too nervous. You might not even manage to meet up successfully. I've seen posts on those apps where people set a time and place for a date, but their busy boyfriends or girlfriends end up working overtime at the last minute and have to cancel."

"That's a possibility…" Franca was momentarily dumbfounded.

…

The next morning, Jenna once again arrived at the Star Dream Provisions Store.

She took a ride-hailing car as before, but this time encountered no obstacles or abnormalities.

Walking up to the checkout counter in the back of the Star Dream Provisions Store, Jenna politely asked, "Do you take this item?"

She placed the Beyonder characteristic from the reanimated Panatiya on the counter.

In the suddenly dimmed environment, the shopkeeper raised her head, looked at it, then shook her head and said, "We don't take this one."

So you really don't accept it… Does it need to be made into an item, or is it as Lumian speculated, that things related to the Demoness and Hunter pathways will have important uses later? After putting away Panatiya's Beyonder characteristic, Jenna took out the corpse wax candle in a small glass bottle. "Do you take this?"

"We don't take that either," the shopkeeper said without a trace of impatience on her beautiful face.

Not taking items either… Jenna thoughtfully put away the corpse wax candle.

Then, she took out an item from her Traveler's Bag.

It was a set of silver-white full body armor.

Pride Armor!

Jenna didn't try to hide the special nature of the Traveler's Bag as she placed the Pride Armor sideways on the counter.

The next second, she noticed a faint smile appear on the shopkeeper's face.

Almost simultaneously, the Pride Armor moved.

Like a crab, it moved sideways, clanking towards the entrance of the Star Dream Provisions Store.

However, the silver-white full body armor moved slower and slower, gradually turning upright.

When it was just two or three steps from the exit, it came to a complete stop, motionless.

It seemed to have turned into ordinary armor.

At this point, Jenna and the shopkeeper were both behind it, facing each other.

It showed no reaction.

In her astonishment, Jenna heard the shopkeeper say with a hint of amusement, "I'll take this item. 30,000 still."

So items like the Pride Armor can indeed be sold… But why did the Pride Armor react so strongly at first, and why isn't it even confronting the people behind it now? Though puzzled, Jenna didn't dare to ask.

…

Lumian, who learned he would be switching to the mid-shift next week, returned to the rental apartment.

He left at 6 p.m., arriving half an hour early at the entrance of Jinxiu Dongfang Community on Sifang Street.

He wanted to scout the environment first, as it might come in handy later.

As Lumian's gaze swept the area, he suddenly saw a familiar figure.

It was Anderson Hood, wearing a black T-shirt with abstract patterns.

Anderson also saw Lumian and walked over, smiling as he said, "I'm in the habit of arriving early."

Lumian responded with a smile, "Me too."

Anderson nodded. "Since we're both early, let's start the tour earlier. The friend you mentioned was indeed yourself."

"If that's what you want to think, I can't do anything about it," Lumian said with a smile, not arguing.

Anderson didn't seem to mind as he turned and led him into the Jinxiu Dongfang Community.

Chapter 953: Art Studio

953 Art Studio

Sifang Street was located near a famous scenic spot in Yangdu, part of the old town area. The Jinxiu Dongfang Community was also quite old, with no building exceeding six floors or having elevators installed.

Lumian followed behind Anderson, turning towards the building closest to the community entrance.

As they climbed the stairs, he couldn't help but raise his right hand to pinch his nose.

A mixture of strong odors permeated the air.

Anderson turned sideways and laughed. "The whole building is being renovated."

He had somehow already stuffed two wads of white paper into his nostrils.

"Why is everything being renovated?" Lumian didn't hide his confusion.

Anderson glanced at him and said with a smile, "This gated community is too old. Most owners have moved away and chosen to rent out their vacant apartments. Someone has rented all the rooms in this building, planning to…"

At this point, Anderson paused, his smile becoming more pronounced in the dim stairwell as his voice deepened. "Planning to open a boutique hostel."

Colorful, right? And that person is you, right? Lumian was somewhat mentally prepared for this and frowned slightly as he said, "Isn't there still an art studio in this building? How can you say all the rooms have been rented?"

Anderson tightened the white paper wads in his nostrils. "Is it possible that the person who opened the art studio is the same one who rented the other rooms?

"The boutique hostel he wants to open is adjacent to scenic spots, hidden in a gated community, with painting as its theme."

Lumian, still pinching his nose, feigned sudden realization and said, "I see."

Due to the strong renovation smells permeating the stairwell, the two didn't slow their pace as they conversed, quickly reaching the top floor, which was the sixth floor.

The doors of both units here were open, and on the wall facing the stairwell was a brightly colored mural. At its center were four characters:

"Mute Art Studio"

"That name is quite… special," Lumian commented sincerely.

By this point, the renovation smells had faded.

Anderson removed the white paper wads from his nostrils and explained earnestly,

"Painting is done with hands, not mouths. 'Mute' represents the studio's expectations for its students: focus, quietness, and dedication."

"That's a great explanation," Lumian applauded.

Anderson wasn't offended and said with a smile, "This isn't my forced interpretation, it's what the studio owner said."

"My sister once taught me dialectics, believing that even the worst words can have a positive side. Do you think that's right?" Lumian asked with a smile.

Anderson nodded. "If you think it's right, then it's right."

He led Lumian towards the door on the left.

Lumian didn't rush in, standing at the doorway to survey the fairly spacious living room.

There was a piece of darkness with only a hint of golden-red "Dawn" in the distance, a "Storm" with deep blue waves surging, "Pilgrims" with numerous blurred figures walking across a wasteland, and a grotesque "Monster" emerging from the seabed alongside "Pirates" trying to save their ship.

The "Pirates" painting suddenly reminded Lumian of the latest volume of "The Great Adventurer". He saw vines growing from the figures' heads, bearing watermelons, while milky white liquid sprayed everywhere on the deck.

Is this recreating Gehrman Sparrow's experience? As Lumian pondered this, he stared for two seconds at the sea monster that resembled a giant leech with its maw full of sharp teeth.

Anderson walked to the easel in the middle of the living room and turned around.

Lumian looked around once more before slowly following him in, "curiously" asking, "Where's the studio owner?"

Anderson raised his right hand and pointed at himself.

"You're the studio owner?" Lumian "surprisingly" confirmed.

Anderson nodded.

Lumian suddenly smiled. "Why aren't you speaking? Has your throat suddenly gone hoarse? Have you become mute?"

Anderson, wearing the black T-shirt, began using sign language.

Lumian couldn't understand what he was expressing even after watching for a while, and thoughtfully said, "I wonder if there's an app for translating sign language…"

Anderson picked up a paintbrush, took a piece of white paper from nearby, and wrote something in dark red.

Unlike Lumian and the others, he could write in the common script of the dream city.

Lumian focused his gaze and saw a sentence written on the white paper: "It's best not to speak in the studio, treat yourself as if you're mute."

Lumian raised an eyebrow, but before he could speak, he saw Anderson grimly add another line in dark red paint: "You just spoke."

Lumian suddenly felt a chill on the back of his neck, as if a cool breeze had blown past.

He didn't turn around, seemingly feeling nothing.

Anderson wrote another passage, the dark red paint appearing to become much brighter: "Do you know this person?"

After writing, he turned the easel around to show the painting on it to Lumian.

It depicted a woman, tall with a slender face, light blue and clear eyes, strikingly beautiful with a peculiar sharpness.

This was Lumian himself.

It was his female form!

Lumian's face broke into a smile as he answered Anderson's question, "I don't know her."

As his voice echoed, something cold and wet suddenly pressed against him from behind.

Lumian quickly reached back to grab it, his palm suddenly erupting with crimson flames.

As the flames compressed layer by layer, he saw what had attacked him.

It was the giant "leech" from the "Monster" oil painting. Its pinkish, nearly transparent body had extended from the painting, its maw opened to its fullest extent, large enough to bite off an adult's head.

13:25

Looking at the densely packed, ghastly white teeth with blood-colored roots, Lumian directly slapped the fireball in his hand, which had turned from crimson to nearly white, onto it.

Boom!

The fireball exploded instantly, enveloping the sea monster that had emerged from the painting.

The shockwave carrying flames quickly swept outwards, threatening to ignite every painting, every easel, and every person here!

At that moment, from the "Storm" oil painting, the azure seawater surged out, pouring into the room with a splash, extinguishing all the flames.

Lumian's figure disappeared from where he stood, reappearing behind the mute Anderson.

His eyes had turned completely iron-black, reflecting a ghastly white.

Lumian clenched his right fist and thrust it out with a smacking sound, striking Anderson's back.

This punch, accompanied by a thunderous explosion, tore through Anderson's flesh, penetrated his body, and hit the oil painting of Lumian's female form and its easel.

The mute Anderson's body suddenly ruptured, quickly thinning and transforming into a portrait painting with a huge hole.

This portrait, along with the oil painting of Lumian's female form, was ignited by crimson flames, turning into black, light ashes in just a few seconds.

As the mute Anderson reverted to a painting, both the azure seawater that had poured into the room and the sea monsters eagerly trying to emerge suddenly vanished, leaving only the motionless oil paintings.

Lumian scanned the room and found that a giant "leech" was indeed missing from the "Monster" painting. The studio floor was covered with water stains and incompletely burned paper scraps.

The place became eerily quiet, with no living beings present except for Lumian himself.

Lumian then went through both rooms that made up the studio, finding no other abnormalities.

Those paintings were no longer eerie or mysterious.

He left the place, going down the stairs to see tenants of the community gathering in small groups, looking around.

They had heard the sound of an explosion earlier but couldn't find its source or any damage to the buildings in the community. They could only attribute it to a high-speed fighter jet passing overhead.

Lumian passed through the group and returned to the community entrance.

Suddenly, a figure was reflected in his eyes.

The figure had blonde hair and blue eyes, wearing a white shirt and black trousers, with hands in pockets, looking like someone watching the commotion.

Anderson!

Anderson Hood!

Upon seeing Lumian, Anderson asked with a surprised expression, "You're already here? Have you already entered?"

Lumian smiled. "I'm in the habit of arriving early."

Anderson smiled as well. "Me too."

As Lumian walked up to him, he asked with a smile, "Did you enjoy yourself earlier?"

"Very much," Lumian maintained his smile, saying meaningfully, "I'd like to do it again."

Anderson Hood nodded slightly.

He was about to speak when he suddenly looked around.

"Maybe next time," Anderson said with a smile, shifting his gaze back. "Let's keep in touch via WeChat."

He raised his right palm, holding his phone.

He didn't mention visiting the art studio or ask if Lumian's friend was interested in taking classes. Lumian didn't bring up these topics either, waving his hand and saying, "I'll be going then."

"See you." Anderson waved back.

Lumian walked past the tutor towards the roadside.

A gray sedan pulled up and stopped in front of him.

Lumian opened the door, got in, and said to Anthony in the driver's seat, "Let's go to Worker's Road."

Anthony nodded and merged into traffic.

Franca, Luo Shan, and Zhou Mingrui had arranged to have dinner on Worker's Road tonight at a taro chicken hotpot restaurant.

As the car drove, chomping sounds continuously came from the back seat.

…

On Worker's Road, inside the "Yizhou Roast Chicken" taro chicken hotpot restaurant.

Franca and Luo Shan had arrived earlier, choosing a window-side table. They had ordered chicken and taro but hadn't selected any other dishes yet.

Each of them had ordered a bottle of iced soy milk, not finding any issue with Zhou Mingrui choosing such a noisy, lively place that wasn't quite bourgeois enough for a meal.

What mattered was whether the food tasted good!

At nearly 6:50 p.m., Zhou Mingrui, wearing a black shirt, walked in.

"Over here, over here!" Luo Shan waved cheerfully.

Zhou Mingrui weaved through the other tables, came over, and said as he sat down, "Some extra work came up just before clocking out."

"We agreed on 7 p.m.," Luo Shan said, not minding at all. She pointed at Franca and said, "This is my neighbor and colleague, Luo Fu."

Zhou Mingrui glanced at Franca and said with a smile, "We've met before. Let's order first."

Franca looked outside at the darkening sky, feeling a bit uneasy.

Chapter 954: Warning

Since Franca and Luo Shan had already pre-ordered the chicken and taro and requested them to be cooked immediately, the three of them soon began enjoying the steaming hot delicacies.

Franca asked the waiter to fill her dipping sauce bowl with a medium-spicy soup base. She added some minced garlic, chopped green onions, and cilantro, then poured in some oyster sauce. This combination provided saltiness and umami flavors, along with a hint of sweetness, nicely complementing the spicy taste. Franca particularly enjoyed preparing her hotpot dipping sauce this way.

She glanced at Zhou Mingrui and noticed his choices were similar to hers.

Great minds think alike… Franca picked up a piece of taro first instead of chicken. The taro had been pre-cooked to softness in a pressure cooker. After rolling it in the dipping sauce and blowing on it for about ten seconds, she took a bite. It was full of the fragrance of starch and the taro's own flavor. The taro had also absorbed the spiciness of the soup base and the deliciousness of the oil. Combined with the salty umami and slight sweetness of the oyster sauce, it made her salivate quickly, effectively reducing the residual heat.

Franca ate three pieces of taro before remembering to try a piece of chicken.

She would rank this as one of the top 3 vegetarian options in hotpot, along with potato slices and leafy stem lettuce.

The three ate quietly for a while. After filling their stomachs a bit, Luo Shan actively initiated various topics to prevent any awkwardness.

With her livening up the atmosphere, the three chatted quite happily, covering everything from company gossip and rumors to the recent job market and the current situations of former colleagues.

The handsome security guard naturally became part of the conversation, with Luo Shan expressing regret that he hadn't been guarding the entrance recently, preventing her from seeing him in person.

Unexpectedly, Zhou Mingrui asked about Franca's professional background, curious about why she changed careers right after graduation.

Franca shared her genuine feelings from her student days, "Working like a dog and earning little, while endangering my life; having to slog until your thirties or forties to barely have a decent income. I felt I couldn't endure that hardship, so I changed careers. How many times in life can you be in your twenties?"

Zhou Mingrui expressed understanding. "There's a saying online that those who encourage others to study medicine should be struck by lightning. However, being a doctor is a late-blooming career; the older you get, the more valuable you become. I have a childhood friend who also changed careers right after graduation, but even after working two other jobs, there wasn't much success…"

At this point, Zhou Mingrui suddenly paused, unconsciously frowning before continuing, "He used connections to return to his hometown hospital as an intern doctor."

There's such a childhood friend? The documents didn't mention this… It's clearly not Peng Deng, nor is it that female childhood friend who likes to travel… As Franca pondered this, Zhou Mingrui began discussing medical topics.

Franca perfectly played the role of a former medical student who had changed careers three years ago. She could still discuss basic concepts but had mostly forgotten the more in-depth knowledge.

She wasn't a Savant after all!

Her current identity was almost an exact copy of her actual history, making it easy for her to play the role. The only difference was that she hadn't actually graduated and had changed careers six or seven years ago.

As Zhou Mingrui nodded imperceptibly, Luo Shan glanced at Franca and asked with a smile, "Have you tried that new drink? The one with the great design and a unique name."

Franca smiled back and asked instead of answering, "Have you two tried it?"

Before Zhou Mingrui and Luo Shan could answer, Franca lowered her voice, "I recently heard an urban legend about a mysterious vending machine that randomly appears in different places. It sells gacha boxes of that drink. Some of the drinks in these gacha boxes have special effects, giving the drinker abilities corresponding to the drink's name. The ones sold in supermarkets and convenience stores are just ordinary, normal drinks."

After saying this in one breath without experiencing any abnormalities herself, Franca relaxed a little.

Zhou Mingrui looked at Franca, who had changed into a white T-shirt, loose pants, and white sneakers, with her hair tied back in a ponytail after returning home. He smiled and said, "I've also seen such rumors online."

Franca's gaze fell on Luo Shan's face.

Luo Shan bit her lip and said in a deliberate ghost story tone, "Actually, I've encountered that mysterious vending machine."

Suddenly, Zhou Mingrui also looked at her.

Luo Shan laughed. "I bought a gacha box, and the drink inside was Shaman, but after drinking it, nothing happened. I didn't gain any abilities.

"Honestly, when I went to look for that vending machine a second time, it was indeed gone, not in its original location…"

Luo Shan's voice became unusually deep for the last sentence, making even the bubbles churning in the hotpot seem to freeze for a second.

Zhou Mingrui looked at her without speaking, as if assessing whether she was telling a ghost story or speaking the truth.

Luo Shan then grinned at him and said, "Didn't you drink one too? Later, I saw a similar vending machine in the company lobby. I got a bunch and gave you one bottle, the Instigator drink, right?"

"It's not like I drank it." Zhou Mingrui laughed. "Someone had given me a pack of dried mushrooms earlier, saying they were great for infusing drinks and tea. I thought I'd try it, so I poured the Instigator drink into my cup and added the dried mushrooms. Later, I got busy with something else, and when I returned to my desk, the cup was empty.

"At that time, I thought nobody in the office would be so disgusting as to drink from someone else's cup. I wondered if the cleaning lady saw the mushrooms soaking and thought it looked gross, assuming the drink was no longer wanted and helping me dispose of it.

"Thinking about it now, it is a bit strange."

He and Luo Shan's back-and-forth made the urban legend seem increasingly real.

Franca didn't appear scared at all. She looked around and lowered her voice, "Since you're both being so honest, I'll tell the truth too. To be frank, I've also encountered that vending machine."

Luo Shan played along and asked, "What did you get?"

Franca looked at Zhou Mingrui, pushed up her black-framed glasses on the bridge of her nose, and smiled noticeably. "Assassin."

Zhou Mingrui quietly looked at her, waiting for her to continue.

Franca added with a smile, "I'm a fan of 'Assassin's Creed.' Look, my WeChat name is even 'True Hidden Blade.'"

As she spoke, she took out her phone and showed her WeChat name to Zhou Mingrui, then continued, "I was very satisfied with the name of that drink. I imagined myself becoming an assassin, able to perform a real Leap of Faith and hide in shadows, undetectable…"

Franca deliberately described all the changes and abilities brought by the Assassin potion, wanting Zhou Mingrui to believe that she had either actually drunk the Assassin drink or was very knowledgeable about Assassin-related matters.

As she described this, her heart involuntarily began to beat faster, and she became tense, feeling as if she was about to be kicked out of the dream.

Zhou Mingrui tactically took a sip of his iced soy milk and ate a piece of taro.

After putting down his chopsticks, he smiled at Franca and Luo Shan and said, "That's my dream too."

Franca took the opportunity to warn, "Then you should be careful. I saw in the related rumors that there's a big problem with the follow-up drinks to Assassin. It's like leveling up in a game—after drinking to a certain level, terrible things happen."

"What kind of terrible things?" Luo Shan asked curiously.

Franca gently shook her head in response. "I don't know either.

"I've only heard that after the Assassin drink comes the Instigator drink, and the problems start after the Instigator drink…"

Her voice grew progressively lower.

Zhou Mingrui ended the topic. "Alright, alright, if we keep making things up, this will eventually become a complete urban legend."

"Indeed," Franca smiled, indicating that her previous content was all made up on the spot.

Luo Shan did the same.

The three chatted about other things until it was completely dark outside, each feeling very satisfied with their meal.

After saying goodbye to Luo Shan and Franca, Zhou Mingrui walked towards the other end of the street.

The smile on his face gradually settled as various thoughts surfaced in his mind.

They don't seem to be probing me, more like hinting, suggesting, warning me…

Is there really a big problem with the follow-up to the Assassin drink?

It's also possible that because I deliberately chose a crowded and lively place, they couldn't find an opportunity to use their abilities to influence me…

I'll observe for a while and see if there are any accidents or attacks…

If I can confirm their intentions or goodwill, I can find an opportunity to really talk later…

If avoiding doesn't solve the problem, then face it…

Lost in his thoughts, Zhou Mingrui turned into a small alley and walked into the shadows.

On the other side, Franca led Luo Shan towards the nearest shopping mall.

For the next hour, she wanted to stay in a place with more people and better lighting.

Just after leaving the vicinity of the Yizhou Roast Chicken restaurant, walking about a dozen steps along the roadside, Franca suddenly felt dizzy.

The next second, she felt like a deep-sea fish suddenly pulled out of the ocean, desperately trying to breathe but unable to inhale even a trace of air. Her head and body were bizarrely expanding, like a fragile balloon being constantly inflated.

She painfully grabbed her own neck, trying to pull her trachea out of her flesh to directly connect with the air.

Her legs began to weaken, and her body started to fall to the ground. Her thoughts stuttered, and her mirror avatar lost connection with her.

Has the Celestial Worthy noticed me? This thought flashed through Franca's mind.

In the gray sedan parked on the opposite side of the road, Lumian quietly watched as Franca's face turned extremely red, her lips turning blue-black, as she grabbed her slender neck, scratching bloody marks on her fair skin.

Luo Shan stood beside her, looking bewildered and helpless.

Lumian in the passenger seat remained motionless, still quietly watching.

He saw Franca half-fallen on the ground, struggling to open her handbag and having difficulty taking out her phone before she unlocked the screen.

On the screen was a pre-prepared interface, and along with the phone were cosmetics, multi-faceted mirrors, and a small black bag.

In Lumian's vision, Franca's eyes bulged out, her expression painful and fierce as she tapped the phone screen with her thumb.

Then, she completely collapsed, dropping her handbag on the ground.

The items from her bag rolled out, and the small black bag mysteriously disappeared.

After a few seconds, Lumian in the car across the street watched as Franca slowly stood up with empty eyes. He calmly said to himself and Anthony, "Contacting Zhou Mingrui at night and hinting at the existence of Beyonder powers will result in being quickly kicked out of the dream."

Chapter 955: Aftermath

Trier, inside a luxurious villa.

Franca suddenly opened her eyes and sat up.

Her first reaction was to reach for her waist, feeling the Traveler's Bag about the size of a coin purse.

Phew… Franca let out an unconcealed sigh of relief.

At the last moment, she had proactively withdrawn before being completely kicked out of the dream. Her concern was that her personal items might be lost due to passive ejection, left behind in the dream city, and thus lost in reality as well!

In that situation, she couldn't pin her hopes on Luo Shan picking up and safeguarding her belongings, or on Lumian and Jenna, who were secretly observing, finding an opportunity to retrieve the items—that could potentially implicate them and subject them to the Celestial Worthy's scrutiny.

According to the information provided by the Major Arcana card holders, whether she left actively or passively, her dream persona, woven with the help of the lucky coin and Madam Justice, wouldn't disappear after her consciousness left the dream. The next time she entered, she would still be that person.

Of course, the current "Luo Fu" would revert to an NPC, following the subconscious manipulation of Mr. Fool or the Celestial Worthy, living her life according to her background settings and current social relationships, appearing normal on the surface.

As for whether this "Luo Fu" NPC harbored hidden issues or would contact companions, potentially implicating them in being kicked out as well, the Major Arcana card holders were currently uncertain, as they had always acted separately in their previous entries.

Based on these concerns, before actively exiting the dream, Franca struggled to take out her phone and unlock the screen.

At that moment, her screen was frozen on the "Information Shredder" mini-program, with her finger on the "Clear All Information on This Phone" button.

This was part of the contingency plan. Throughout the meal with Zhou Mingrui, except for the brief ten or so seconds when she showed him her WeChat name, Franca's phone screen had displayed the running "Information Shredder" program. In her own words, after leaving home that evening, she was prepared to "wipe the database and abscond" at any moment. She feared the Celestial Worthy might take the opportunity to scan her contact list, mark suspicious parts, and deal with them specifically.

Franca reached into the Traveler's Bag, unsurprised but still delighted to find that the Beyonder characteristic and corresponding body parts extracted from the reanimated female corpse Panatiya were inside, real and tangible, within reach.

Correspondingly, the Pride Armor had vanished, disappearing into thin air.

Damn, the boundary between dream and reality has really been fooled. I can barely tell which side is the dream and which is reality… Franca was equally unsurprised by this, but still shocked.

Is this the terrifying aspect of a great existence?

If Mr. Fool was willing to maintain it and received certain assistance, the dream city could completely become real, as long as one didn't leave on their own!

From this perspective, the real world might also be the dream of that initial being… Thankfully, It has awakened and split…

Franca, having read many foreign myths before her transmigration, naturally made some associations.

She got out of bed, intending to go to the bathroom to relieve herself.

This was the first thing she did every morning after waking up.

After a few steps, Franca suddenly stopped.

She didn't feel any urge to urinate at all, and instead felt full, as if she had just eaten a good meal.

Franca immediately took out a mirror and used divination to confirm the current date.

Reality had also passed several days, basically consistent with the dream, though there seemed to be a slight time difference—in this bedroom, the tightly drawn curtains let in a bit of twilight, it wasn't completely dark outside yet.

Is the dream city using Backlund time?

We've been in the dream city for over a week, it's impossible not to be hungry or need to use the bathroom in reality… Damn, does eating in the dream mean being full in reality, gaining the corresponding nutrients? Does using the bathroom in the dream equate to using it in reality?

But, but I don't smell bad, and my pants are normal…

Is this Grafting the excrement at the exit to the toilet and sewers?

Or, directly opening a door, sending it to another dimension?

Right, Ludwig seemed to have said that some of the food in the dream city was real… How could it be real?

My goodness, it's really hard to distinguish between dream and reality…

Franca was amazed, both shocked and amused.

After about ten seconds, her mind calmed down, and she began to think about the gains from tonight's probe.

Hinting at the existence of Beyonder powers to Zhou Mingrui at night, warning him about the risks following the Assassin potion, will result in being kicked out of the dream… But not immediately, there's a reaction time, close to an hour…

Perhaps later we can use this hour to do something, like directly telling Zhou Mingrui about the Witch's transformation…

But maybe just saying the word 'Witch' would result in an immediate ejection, we'll need experiments to confirm this…

Also, we can't rely on the assumption that the Celestial Worthy's reaction time for kicking people out in this situation is always an hour. It might be that as long as Zhou Mingrui is watching, nothing unusual happens, but as soon as we say goodbye and create some distance, we're quickly kicked out…

There were two influences at the time, one trying to kick me out of the dream, and one attempting to turn me into a marionette… But the speed of becoming a marionette wasn't as dramatic as described in the documents for High-Sequence Seer pathway Beyonders, as if it was being interfered with, resulting in a tug-of-war… Mr. Fool versus the Celestial Worthy?

If I found a way to hold on for a while before being kicked out of the dream, I might have already become a marionette. It's better to withdraw proactively to reduce potential risks…

Just as Franca was thinking this, she suddenly heard a knock on the door.

"Who is it?" She tensed instinctively, though her spirituality hadn't given her any warning.

"It's us." Two voices came from outside, one belonging to Madam Magician, the other to Madam Judgment.

Franca relaxed.

If it had been only Madam Magician by herself, she would have harbored some worry, as the other was a High-Sequence Beyonder of the Apprentice pathway and could potentially be influenced or misled by that Celestial Worthy. But now, Madam Judgment was also present.

I can ask for an autograph now… Hmm, I can't ask Madam Magician why her pen name in the dream city is "Salted Fish Without Dreams"… Franca happily took out paper and pen, opened the door, and saw the two Major Arcana card holders who had already changed their clothes.

Madam Magician reminded her, "You need to wait a day and a night before you can re-enter the dream."

"Yes, I know." Franca nodded.

This was mentioned in the documents.

…

Dream city, Worker's Road.

As some passersby saw Franca fall to the ground and wanted to come help, Franca had already stood up, touched her neck, and bent down to pick up the items that had fallen to the ground.

Only then did Luo Shan come to her senses, helping to put some of the cosmetics and mirrors back into the handbag.

"What happened just now?" she asked Franca, puzzled, alert, and concerned.

Franca looked at Luo Shan and smiled reassuringly.

"Don't worry, it's an old problem. I'll be fine after a while."

You never mentioned having such a condition before… Luo Shan fell silent.

Franca continued, "Let's not go shopping, shall we? I want to rest early."

That's not what you said earlier… Luo Shan made a sound of agreement.

After the two got into a ride-share car, Lumian's right hand loosened its five fingers, and he nodded at Anthony.

Anthony started the car, drove to the intersection, and stopped again.

From the shadows, Jenna emerged, walking towards the gray sedan as if she had finally waited for her ride-share.

Lumian lowered the car window and, looking straight ahead, said, "Try to minimize contact with her tonight, and it's best to find an excuse not to sleep in Dechuang Garden."

After saying this, without waiting for Jenna's response, he raised the window, and Anthony drove the vehicle into the middle lane.

Jenna's lips bore the marks of her teeth, and her clenched fists finally relaxed.

After seeing Franca's abnormal situation, she knew she shouldn't go to her rescue to avoid implicating herself, but rationality was one thing and emotion was another, especially when Franca seemed on the verge of death during her struggle.

It took great willpower for Jenna to control herself, clearly discerning Franca's state, and waiting for her to withdraw on her own.

Dechuang Garden, Building 5.

Luo Shan said goodbye to Franca on the 15th floor and returned to her own home.

After a while, she heard the doorbell.

Outside the door was Jenna, known as Jian Na in the dream city.

The moment she saw Jenna, Luo Shan opened her mouth, wanting to say something, but then closed it, remaining silent.

Jenna looked around and said in a low voice, "Minimize contact with Luo Fu for the next two days, and don't discuss anything related to Beyonder powers with her."

Luo Shan's expression immediately relaxed, and she spoke as if she had been holding it in for a long time.

"I knew something was off with Fu Fu. After we finished dinner with Zhou Mingrui, she suddenly wasn't right. First, she had a sudden illness, and then it was like she became a different person…

"What, what problem has occurred?"

Jenna considered for a few seconds before saying, "You can understand it this way: interfering with past history has limitations and comes at a cost. Otherwise, we could just go to Zhou Mingrui's house, control him directly, tell him everything in detail, then demonstrate some abilities, provide some evidence, and wouldn't that make him believe initially?"

"I understand now," Luo Shan had a sudden realization. "Fu Fu hinted at the existence of Beyonder powers and the problem with the Assassin potion tonight, and was affected by the self-correcting force of history, causing problems, her old condition flaring up?

"Is she now equivalent to another version of herself, similar to my previous situation?"

"You can understand it that way." Jenna nodded, not explaining in detail.

She returned to the 23rd floor and saw Franca sitting on the sofa on her phone. After some thought, she said, "I'm going to see Li Lu later, I won't be back tonight."

In the identity documents, Li Lu's father was Li Ming, and his mother was Jian Na.

Franca raised her head and said with a smile, "When will you bring Li Lu over to play? I can sleep on the sofa."

"It depends on his father's opinion," Jenna smiled, packed her toiletries, and left the apartment.

Taking the elevator to the first floor, she took out her phone and sent a message to Lumian:

"Luo Shan still remembers the story we told her, remembers the help we gave her, and shows no changes at present.

"Franca only knows about the things in the background information, remembering only the nominal social relationships."

Chapter 956: New Speculation

Jenna didn't actually go to Xinhong District to find Lumian and Ludwig. Instead, she chose a nearby hotel, booked a room, and checked if she would also be kicked out.

Nothing happened overnight. After waking up, she immediately returned to Dechuang Garden and sat in a corner of the lobby, facing sideways towards the door leading to the interior of the residential complex.

After about ten minutes, she saw Franca.

Franca was still wearing her old-fashioned black-framed glasses and dressed in a relatively conservative office lady style.

Seeing this, Jenna breathed a sigh of relief, changed her sitting posture, and turned her back to Franca to avoid meeting her.

The purpose of her early return to the residential complex was to confirm whether the current "Luo Fu's" behavior style was consistent with the previous Franca. If she had removed her disguise and changed into makeup and clothes that best highlighted her features, maximizing the charm of a Witch, Jenna would have to consider finding an excuse to prevent "Luo Fu" from going to work, delaying her for a day.

Now it seemed that the style of the "Luo Fu" NPC would continue as before.

…

Tech Building, 10th floor.

Franca sat down at her desk and leisurely made herself a cup of coffee.

At this moment, she saw Zhou Mingrui walk in, so she smiled and said, "Are you looking for Luo Shan? She hasn't arrived yet."

"I thought you two would come together." Zhou Mingrui didn't hide his surprise.

In his view, whether on the surface or secretly, Luo Shan and Luo Fu had a very good relationship and a special connection. They should be the type to wait for each other and go to work together.

Franca smiled and said, "I asked her, and she said she had something holding her up and told me not to wait for her."

"I see…" Zhou Mingrui nodded and turned to walk out of the Administrative Department.

During this period, he had been coming to ask Luo Shan about various company news more frequently than before, leading to some idle people in the Administrative Department spreading rumors about him and Luo Shan.

Zhou Mingrui walked at a moderate pace to the entrance of the Administrative Department, unable to wait for Luo Fu to ask him to wait.

He actually came to find Luo Fu today, not Luo Shan. He originally thought she would take this opportunity to hint at something again, but unexpectedly, Luo Fu didn't even have the thought of chatting with him casually, being polite but somewhat distant.

Zhou Mingrui frowned slightly, not turning back to look again, and left the Administrative Department directly.

Something feels a bit off… He had just grumbled inwardly when he saw Luo Shan walking over with a pancake and a cup of five-grain soy milk.

"Good morning," Luo Shan greeted cheerfully.

"Good morning," Zhou Mingrui smiled, "I just went to find you, but you hadn't arrived yet. Luo Fu said you were held up by something."

Luo Shan looked around. "Want to ask me about something again?"

The two chatted casually for a few sentences, each walking towards their own department's office.

Suddenly, Zhou Mingrui's phone vibrated.

He took it out to look, and it was a message from Luo Shan, who he had just been chatting with: "Don't talk to Luo Fu about anything today, wait until tomorrow."

The moment he saw this message, Zhou Mingrui thought the two girls' relationship had suddenly broken down, and they were trying to isolate each other by forming cliques. But after reading it carefully again, he came to a preliminary conclusion.

Does Luo Shan mean that today's Luo Fu has a problem, don't contact her, and it will be fine tomorrow?

Why would there be a problem? She was still normal yesterday…

Is it because of our chat last night about the vending machine, the Assassin drink, and subsequent troubles? This seems a bit like, a bit like when The Star in the group suddenly went offline when mentioning key things…

What kind of problem could it be, who gave the problem, and why is it there today but solved tomorrow?

One question after another flashed through Zhou Mingrui's mind, but he couldn't find reasonable explanations for many of them.

…

13th floor, Security Department.

Lumian and his partner Old Xia had patrolled all floors once, finding no security risks.

After sitting in a room that looked more like a rest area for security guards than an office, Lumian took out his phone.

Since Franca had already left the dreamscape, she could meet with the Major Arcana card holders, so he no longer needed to pass yesterday's experimental results, along with the matter of the associate dean of Musha Hospital being suspected to be the matriarch of the Church of Earth Mother, Roland, through the Star Dream Provisions Store.

Most of the results of this experiment were within his expectations, with the only pleasant surprise being: Luo Shan's memories were still there, all the memories of interacting with Franca and Jenna were still intact!

This means we can 'cultivate' dream characters… but we're not sure to what extent understanding the truth will bring anomalies to dream characters…

In the future, there might be a situation where: all five of us, and even subsequent coin holders, are completely kicked out of the dream, only able to observe, yet there are quite a few dream characters who have inherited our will and cause, still striving to awaken Mr. Fool, and they are part of the dream, unable to be kicked out!

This is a change in thinking, it doesn't have to be outsiders, it doesn't have to be us, NPCs can also play a role…

At that time, well, these dream characters won't be kicked out, but they can be killed or corrupted, just like the Oracle.

When enough dream characters are killed, isn't that also a kind of stimulation for Mr. Fool? This also counts as a disaster for the dream city, with a large number of important characters dying or falling…

Demonesses and Hunters—are they really meant to bring calamity?

Lumian mocked himself, then selected "Intis Group Grimm" and opened the chat interface.

He slightly raised his chin, with a rather cold expression, using voice input to send a message: "How are you doing with the recent matters?"

Sitting in another chair two or three meters away, Old Xia heard this voice and these words, and suddenly shuddered, feeling that this kid Li Ming somehow seemed more like a team leader than Team Lead Xu.

After a few minutes, Grimm replied: "Haven't found a way to make Huang Tao return to the Mother's embrace yet.

"Without Huang Tao's cooperation and acquiescence, there are many things we can't do now. Currently, we can only use the authority of the Security Department to monitor Zhou Mingrui's actions. We've installed pinhole cameras and bugs at his seat, and planted a trojan on his computer. This allows us to discover problems immediately from his browsing history, search history, and call records, and prevent them in time.

"A few days ago, Zhou Mingrui had thoughts of resigning and searched for specific procedures and precautions, but later he didn't do it and hasn't looked at articles or videos on this aspect again.

"Without Huang Tao's cooperation, we can't keep him through promotion and salary increase for now. We must solve this problem before he actually resigns."

Lumian read it carefully and felt that Grimm, or rather the children of the Great Mother in the dream city, hadn't thought about how to cooperate with the Celestial Worthy to turn Zhou Mingrui into a Witch for now. They were more focused on monitoring, observing, and trying to keep Zhou Mingrui staying within the Intis Group where they had great influence, not resigning and leaving.

It feels like what the children of the Great Mother are currently doing is maintaining balance and obtaining the latest intelligence changes at any time…

This basically matches the judgment of the Major Arcana cards and me regarding the intentions of the evil gods…

After muttering to himself for a couple of sentences, Lumian stood up and began pacing in the office.

He was thinking about how to use Grimm and other children of the mother, and also about the matter of Mr. Fool drinking the Assassin potion.

Frankly speaking, when he learned that the Celestial Worthy induced Mr. Fool to drink the Assassin potion, attempting to make him gradually become a Witch, change gender, and thus cause cognitive issues, Lumian felt it was a bit absurd.

In his view, gods were all divine, and except for a few pathways that needed to emphasize gender, they shouldn't care whether they were male or female. Those ancient beings who had lived for thousands or tens of thousands of years might be even more so.

Would Mr. Fool really have cognitive issues because of becoming female?

Recalling that Mr. Fool required to be referred to as "he" rather than "He," Lumian reluctantly accepted this reason.

At the same time, he also suspected that the Celestial Worthy wanted to use the conflict of symbolically non-neighboring pathway Beyonder characteristics to drive Mr. Fool mad, thus gaining the upper hand and achieving victory—the Demoness pathway was not adjacent to the Seer, Apprentice, or Marauder pathways.

After killing the reanimated female corpse Panatiya and learning about her mission, Lumian's internal balance leaned more towards the speculation that the Celestial Worthy wanted to use the conflict between non-neighboring pathways.

Panatiya was supposed to make Zhou Mingrui fall in love, and after he drank the Witch potion and changed gender, stay by his side. Wasn't this equivalent to helping Zhou Mingrui, helping Mr. Fool stabilize his mental state?

This was somewhat contradictory to the speculation of using gender change to cause cognitive issues for Mr. Fool.

And if stabilizing the mental state was for Zhou Mingrui to drink higher sequence Demoness potions, accumulating more madness, it seemed more reasonable.

Now, following this line of thought, Lumian had new questions: Why did it have to be the Assassin potion, the Demoness pathway?

As long as it was a potion from a pathway not adjacent to Seer, Apprentice, or Marauder, it could achieve the purpose…

Does becoming female early on indeed have its effect, bringing mental hidden dangers?

Combining this with the fact that most of our team are Demonesses, and the Celestial Worthy specifically brought a Demoness marionette into the dream city, does this indicate that inducing Zhou Mingrui to drink the Assassin potion, rather than other non-neighboring potions, has hidden reasons?

Lumian immediately went through various specialties of the Demoness pathway in his mind.

In just a few seconds, he thought of a term: "Mirror Person"!

Becoming a Witch not only changes one into a female but also creates a corresponding, fixed Mirror Person.

From this Sequence onwards, Demonesses can use mirrors to create avatars and use corresponding magic.

And from Lumian's current experience, Mirror People were more extreme, more vicious, more sinister.

What the Celestial Worthy actually wants is to make Mr. Fool have a Mirror Person, and then by doing certain things to the Mirror Person, or making the Mirror Person do certain things, achieve the goal of winning this confrontation? Confusing the real with the fake, turning the fake into real? Lumian fell into deep thought.

At this moment, his phone vibrated, and the new incoming message was from Anderson Hood.

Chapter 957: A Special Ability Once Obtained

"A name that leaves a deep impression on you" sent a "Hi" emoji: "Want another round of fun?"

"Hope it's more exciting than last night," Lumian replied using voice input, bringing the phone close to his mouth.

Nearby, Old Xia glanced at him, his eyes full of envy and longing.

Young people sure have exciting lives…

No wonder he has a 7-year-old child at just 22…

Too bad I don't dare…

Soon, Anderson replied to Lumian: "You pick the place, somewhere suitable for discussing secrets."

"Alright," Lumian didn't refuse.

"Let's set the time for 6 p.m., I like sunlight." Anderson sent an "OK" emoji.

After Lumian replied "No problem," the former strongest Hunter of the Fog Sea asked in text: "Why is your WeChat name 'The Idiot', do you think you're not smart enough?"

Lumian chuckled. "I really like tarot cards, and I think The Fool card is super cool. Calling myself 'Idiot' is a kind of an imitation."

"Sometimes, people like to use high-sounding reasons to cover up their own issues. This is a phrase I've been fond of lately, and I'll share it with you too." Anderson replied, sending a "Bye-bye" emoji.

Lumian didn't respond further.

After resting for a while, he and Old Xia started patrolling the floors again.

When they reached the 10th floor, while patrolling inside the Intis Group, Lumian saw Zhou Mingrui coming out of the public restroom.

As their eyes met, Lumian nodded slightly, as a greeting.

Zhou Mingrui hadn't run into him these past couple of days, and since security guards patrolling the floors was indeed routine work, he didn't show any alertness and responded with a nod.

As they passed each other, Lumian naturally checked the surroundings for any fire hazards.

He hadn't thought about using this opportunity to hint at the existence of Beyonder powers to Zhou Mingrui during the day. Firstly, they weren't close enough to chat, and even if he tried hinting, the other party might not be willing to listen. Secondly, he needed to wait until Franca being kicked out of the dreamscape truly ended, otherwise it would be impossible to distinguish whether subsequent anomalies were aftereffects of last night's reminder or caused by today's probing.

Seeing that Li Ming, this security guard, didn't make any strange gestures or say anything odd, Zhou Mingrui's doubts dissipated a bit more.

…

At 6 p.m., sunlight still illuminated the small square in front of the mall, lighting up those facilities for children to play.

Inside a glass-sealed cylinder, six sets of seats were slowly rotating.

In the middle of the cylinder, various colored plastic balls were constantly being sprayed out, flying in all directions. Ludwig was using a fishing net with a handle to catch them.

Lumian sat next to him, like a real parent, and the adjacent set of seats belonged to Anderson.

Anderson didn't have children, but he sat there at ease, occasionally raising his net to catch a ball, completely without the shame or embarrassment of an adult who had entered a children's ball pit without bringing a child.

At this time, except for the three of them, no one else was present; everyone else had gone home for dinner.

"It's very enclosed here, no one will disturb or eavesdrop, and I've checked the facility, there's no problem," Lumian said to Anderson with a smile. "I originally wanted to choose the carousel, but it's not private enough, not suitable for discussing secrets."

As they spoke, they followed the seats, constantly rotating around the middle of the cylinder.

"This effectively makes up for the childhood I lost." Anderson glanced at Ludwig, then turned to Lumian and said, "Do you sometimes feel that this world is unreal, that many people are like puppets in a theater, seeming normal at first glance, but some details make you fearful?"

"Why are you talking about this kind of thing with me and my girlfriend?" Lumian countered without answering.

The girlfriend referred to Jenna.

Anderson smiled and said meaningfully, "Because I feel that you are very real, more real than the people around us."

Lumian also smiled. "Yes, I sometimes feel that this world is unreal; it's like a huge dream. We seem to be making our own choices, but in fact, we are being pushed and guided by the subconscious of the dream owner. When he wakes up, everything will disappear like bubbles."

Amidst the music of spraying balls, the smile on Anderson's face became more evident.

"There's a time limit for this attraction, we can't stay here forever.

"Have you ever heard of the term 'Battle of the Gods Ruins'?"

Is this confirming each other's identity? Lumian glanced outside the glass cylinder and smiled as he answered Anderson's question, "I've heard of it."

Outside the door of this children's facility, Anthony was waiting there holding Lumian and Anderson's phones.

Anderson smiled and sighed. "It's indeed easier to communicate with you than with a certain someone.

"Some people, their brains might be spouting from their boxing gloves."

Anderson continued, "I've adventured the Battle of the Gods Ruins, come into contact with some dangerous things, which caused me to undergo some changes.

"In sufficiently special dreams, if I receive a strong enough stimulus, I can break free from the dreaming state and maintain a certain level of clarity within the dream."

Is this the reason you discovered the dream city isn't real? Lumian didn't ask Anderson this, but remained quiet.

He still wasn't clear about the exact relationship between the Colorful Hostel and Anderson.

Anderson smiled and said, "That adventure was very exciting, but unfortunately, I can't write it out in certain books; after all, I'm not the protagonist.

"In recent years, I often dream of living in a big city like this, which makes me look forward to sleeping.

"In that dream, sometimes I'm a language teacher, sometimes I'm an unsuccessful painter. They should be the same person, just in different states of life.

"Later, the painter became mute, and his painting skills underwent a qualitative change.

"I was stimulated, woke up in the dream, and gained a certain level of clarity.

"I found that someone was actually giving me money, helping me open an art studio, and even a hotel. Oh, the evil of knowledge, do such good things exist? Of course I had to accept, how could I let down their kindness?"

In other words, Anderson's dream manifestation was corrupted for some reason and became a real Painter, which also stimulated the real Anderson, allowing his consciousness to enter the dream using his own special ability? So, this Anderson dream manifestation split, sometimes he's the cram school teacher Anderson—formerly the strongest Hunter of the Fog Sea. And sometimes he's the mute painter Anderson. The cram school teacher Anderson contacted us because he discovered we're also outsiders? Lumian nodded with some understanding.

This was actually similar to Luo Shan's state, except that the real Rozanne didn't have any special dream abilities, so she couldn't come in person to fight against the power of boons and the corruption of evil gods.

"How was it, my story was pretty exciting, right? Give me a review," Anderson suddenly changed the subject.

Lumian applauded. "What about the sequel to the story? If the real Anderson doesn't actively enter the dream, the mute Anderson in the dream shouldn't affect him."

Anderson shrugged and said with a smile, "Can you be 100% certain it won't have an effect?"

"No," Lumian answered honestly.

Anderson nodded with a look of caring for an uneducated youngling. "Moreover, that dream is interesting and fun. As humans, we need to frequently change our forms of entertainment.

"I told Danitz in the dream to be careful of me turning into a mute at night, but unfortunately, he didn't understand my hint. If I could get some things and disguise myself as Edwina, he would probably be more proactive in using his brain to ponder what I said."

"You painted the mute painter in the painting? You also possess the painting skills that were qualitatively changed?" Lumian asked about last night's events.

Luo Shan also painted another self, and after Franca helped burn it, her condition improved significantly…

Is Anderson using me to "adjust" his own state?

Anderson clicked his tongue and said, "Don't you use the same body during the day and at night?

"The changes in the body are common."

Lumian pondered and asked, "In the dreamscape, the Painter shouldn't be able to make what he paints truly come off the paper, there are too many obstacles."

All abilities should be suppressed to Sequence 7 level, but yesterday's Anderson could freely move around the residential district and could still speak before entering the studio.

Anderson smiled and said, "Dreamscapes always have some special cases and exceptions. If the dream owner symbolizes loopholes, then his dream will inevitably have some loopholes. This is a manifestation of part of his symbolism in the dream, unless he consciously controls it, it can't be avoided.

"The mute Anderson originally didn't exist, he's just another state of mine, but he's also hidden in the dream owner's thoughts and cognition. So once I paint him, he doesn't need to invade from the outside to become real, but he can't leave the studio and is very weak."

Mr. Fool's manifestation once knew a mute Anderson, or imagined Anderson becoming mute? Lumian nodded slightly and asked, "So the one who led me into the studio was you yourself?"

Anderson smiled obviously and said, "Of course, after I entered the studio, while you were looking at those oil paintings, I left through a pre-prepared painting and activated the mute Anderson painting.

"That's my studio, equivalent to a Hunter's home ground, there would definitely be additional arrangements.

"I changed my clothes and pants afterwards, so you didn't recognize me?"

"Why did you change your clothes and pants?" Lumian probed.

Anderson smiled again. "Just kidding."

Is this Anderson's style… Do all successful Hunters have a tendency for pranks? Lumian accepted Anderson's explanation. If it were him, he might do the same thing.

Anderson glanced at the entertainment facility that was almost out of time.

"Now it's my turn to ask, right?

"What do you want to do by coming here?"

This didn't seem like a question, more like a confirmation.

"To wake up the dream owner in the best and most humane state," Lumian answered simply.

Anderson suddenly smiled. "A few days ago, a foreigner came to the cram school to visit. He was as real as you guys."

"What's his name?" Lumian asked, outwardly calm.

At this moment, the balls stopped spraying, and the rotation of the seats quickly slowed down until it stopped.

Anderson stood up and said with a smile, "Zaratulstra."

Chapter 958: Inside and Outside the Dream

It's that Zaratulstra again… Did he go to the Dream Tutoring Classes to wait for Zhou Mingrui, or did he have another purpose? Lumian held Ludwig's hand as they walked out of the seating area. While waiting for the staff to open the door of the amusement facility, he smiled at Anderson and asked, "Did you chat with him?"

Anderson put his hands in his pockets and smiled. "He said he wanted to deeply influence one person and eliminate some people."

Is the one he wants to deeply influence Zhou Mingrui? And who are the ones he wants to eliminate? Why did Zaratulstra talk about this with Anderson? Was one of his purposes for going to the Dream Tutoring Classes to find Anderson, to find the mute Anderson representing the Fantasy Association? Does this symbolize the cooperation between the Celestial Worthy and that evil god of the Fantasy Association? Lumian walked towards the now-open door, casually saying, "People like Danitz?"

What he wanted to ask was whether the people Zaratulstra wanted to eliminate were dream characters like Oracle Danitz, or outsiders like himself.

Anderson gave a thumbs up, walking down the few steps at the entrance. "At the time, I couldn't understand why they dealt with Danitz first. What role could he play? Maybe he was just lucky, and they had to first finish off the lucky one."

In a situation where everyone is suppressed to Sequence 7, luck is indeed very important… From Anderson's words, was the death of the Oracle done by Zaratulstra and the mute Anderson together? The mute Anderson's involvement means he himself was also involved, with a chance to secretly sabotage and influence the progress of things. So, is that why we discovered the Oracle's body earlier, instead of it being sent to the morgue at Mushu Hospital according to the planned schedule, to "resurrect" and return? Lumian nodded thoughtfully.

He felt that Anderson had used the mute dream manifestation to interfere with Zaratulstra's actions, resulting in the other party only achieving the goal of eliminating Danitz, without successfully utilizing the Oracle's body.

Lumian was now unsure whether Zaratulstra was more Zaratul or more Loki, so he directly used the dream name to refer to him.

Damn, it was you, Anderson, who did it. No wonder you called the police immediately… This also explains why we stumbled upon the death of the Oracle. It wasn't a coincidence… Lumian cursed inwardly for a couple of sentences, passing by Anthony without retrieving his phone. Anderson did the same.

Taking advantage of the few people playing in the small square, he looked at the displayed on the mall's big screen and asked a question one would typically ask during a stroll.

"What do you want to do by opening the Colorful Hostel?"

"As soon as you come in, someone hands you a sum of money, hands you a hotel that's still under renovation, would you refuse? When faced with sugar-coated bullets, isn't it a normal choice to eat the sugar coating and throw back the bullet?" Anderson smiled and asked in return.

"But many times, the sugar coating can also be poisonous, or you might not have time to throw back the bullet. You wouldn't want it if someone forcibly put a child in your belly, would you?" The temporary Child of God of the Great Mother, Lumian, spoke from experience.

Anderson was stunned for a second, then smiled and said, "If it's really put in, you have to keep it even if you don't want to. If you can't get rid of it later, you can only cultivate a good father-son or father-daughter relationship."

Lumian changed the question. "What does the behind-the-scenes hand that made those people give you money and the hotel want to do?"

Anderson turned his head to look at him and said with a smile, "Isn't that why I've come to find you?"

Lumian's thoughts raced, vaguely understanding the meaning in Anderson's words: one of the goals of that evil god of the Fantasy Association was to hinder the Celestial Worthy and maintain the balance of the dream. It was precisely because Anderson grasped this key point that he actively contacted Lumian and others, speaking so plainly.

Anderson looked ahead again, walking towards the food gathering area behind the mall.

"I saw a funny saying online before.

"The saying goes, 'I'm afraid of my brother suffering, but I also don't want my brother owning a Range Rover.'"

"That's interesting." Lumian felt Anderson didn't need to hint so obviously, he could understand completely.

Anderson continued, "A hotel always has guests, coming from different places."

At this point, he suddenly pointed at the spray painting on a shop sign.

"Paintings are complex. They are both information and a door to a fantasy realm. If a complete and real order can be established in the world within the painting, wouldn't it become an almost real world?"

Is this hinting at something? Hinting at the possible goals of that evil god of the Fantasy Association? Lumian lacked key information and could only roughly understand what Anderson was saying, unable to figure out the true meaning of these words.

Based on the knowledge he currently possessed, he felt that the evil god of the Fantasy Association also wanted to occupy more pathways, just like the Great Mother and the Mother Tree of Desire. What He had His eye on were the Mystery Pryer and Savant pathways that symbolize information, the Apprentice pathway that represented the concept of "door", alternate worlds, and space itself, as well as the Lawyer and Arbiter pathways that could give the world within paintings a real order.

While Lumian was thinking, Anderson pointed at a shop and laughed. "I told you the world would have loopholes, look over there."

Lumian looked over and found it was a small shop named "Loen Delights", mainly selling sweet iced tea and Desi pies.

"How could Loen have anything considered a delight? This is definitely a loophole," Anderson said with a mocking expression.

Lumian nodded. "Yes."

On this matter, the two Intisians easily reached a consensus.

And Ludwig started to clamor.

"I want to eat!"

…

In an apartment on Rue du Chapeau Noir in Quartier de la Maison d'Opéra.

Witch Niceea sat in front of her dressing mirror, carefully and meticulously drawing her eyebrows and applying powder in the light of the gas wall lamp.

Suddenly, behind her, near the chair by the window, a figure appeared.

It was Franca, in a relaxed posture.

Franca quietly watched Niceea without making a sound.

After discussing with Madam Magician and Madam Judgment about why she was kicked out of the dream and the issue with the associate dean of Mushu Hospital, she rested for a day. Before returning to the dream, she specifically came to see her subordinate to ask about her recent progress.

She couldn't be the kind of superior who disappeared completely after arranging a task, showing no concern and effectively going missing!

After about ten seconds, Niceea finally noticed and subtly adjusted the direction of her dressing mirror.

Seeing it was her immediate superior, she quietly sighed in relief and turned around.

"Good evening, ma'am."

"Good evening, how have you been lately?" Franca didn't directly ask about the Emperor Party.

She hadn't contacted 007 yet, because 007 was recently undergoing special training, seemingly with hope of obtaining a spot to become a demigod.

Niceea's expression changed several times, showing some struggle and pain, and with a bit of a "might as well" attitude, she said, "I've become Grouès's mistress."

Grouès was one of the confidants of Louis Gustav, the leader of the Emperor Party.

This progress is a bit fast; you haven't been a Witch for long, haven't you… Franca didn't ask about Niceea's current feelings, and asked calmly, "Did Grouès say anything?"

Seeing that her superior didn't inquire about her journey and actual experience of becoming a mistress, Niceea's inner conflict, embarrassment, and irritation subsided considerably.

She recalled and said, "He said Louis has been troubled lately, seeming very irritable. The reason seems to be that he can't contact some important figure."

"Which important figure?" Franca asked.

"Grouès doesn't know either, only that there is such an important figure, an important figure that gives Louis a lot of confidence." Niceea shook her head.

Unable to contact the mirrored Emperor Roselle? Franca suddenly had such a thought.

She nodded slightly.

"Find a way to figure out who that important figure is, and grasp the substantial movements of the Emperor Party."

After saying this, her figure quickly faded and disappeared from the chair.

Niceea quietly watched the lady leave, raised her right hand, and slowly caressed from her cheek to her lips.

Franca directly returned to that luxurious villa, without going to report to the Demoness of Black that she had fully digested the Affliction potion.

Let alone whether the Demoness Sect would reward her with the Despair potion in a situation where she hadn't made new achievements, even if they would, she couldn't possibly really perform the ritual, so it was better to stall for now.

After dinner, close to midnight, Franca stood up and walked towards her room.

The slightly short Madam Judgment escorted her to the room while instructing, "For the second return to the dream, operating under the previous identity, the current experience is that there won't be much difference from the first time. But by the third time, we've found that some attempts that wouldn't have gotten us kicked out of the dream before will also result in being kicked out, as if we've been simply marked by that Celestial Worthy.

"So, you need to pay attention now to whether there are subtle changes compared to last time, to determine whether becoming an object of attention starts from the second entry into the dream or the third. Also, don't make any radical probes in the next few days, you've just been kicked out and need to wait a while."

"Mm, I'll be careful." Franca remembered that this had been mentioned in the documents.

After going upstairs and reaching the door, Madam Judgment further said,

"We can't give you many things to take into the dream, because we've used them in the dream and they've also been marked.

"If you want to make money, there's another way: have one person apply for a job at the Hall Film Company, a subsidiary of the Hall Group. Although Miss Justice can't enter the dream anymore, as a Dreamweaver and Major Arcana card holder, she can still exert a little influence on the dream."

"Understood," Franca responded with a smile, "Thank you all."

She then entered the room, lay down on the bed again, and gripped the lucky coin in her palm.

She had tried yesterday, if she didn't put the lucky coin beside her, she would just fall asleep normally and dream normally, occasionally flashing fragments of the dream city, like sights and sounds from "Luo Fu".

Franca closed her eyes and regulated her breathing.

Chapter 959: Weekend

Dechuang Garden, Room 2303.

Jenna accompanied "Luo Fu" as they watched TV in the living room, occasionally scrolling through her phone. The two conversed very little.

Suddenly, she noticed "Luo Fu" turn her body and say with bright eyes, "I'm back again!"

Jenna didn't respond immediately, because "Luo Fu" and Franca had very similar personalities.

Franca then picked up her phone and said to Jenna, "Quick, quick, send me another copy of the Information Shredder."

Hearing "Information Shredder", Jenna finally confirmed that it was really Franca who had returned.

At this moment, Franca unlocked her screen and found that WeChat had already been redownloaded by "Luo Fu", and Jenna, Luo Shan, and several employees from the administrative department had been re-added, but not "The Idiot", "An Ruide", or "Li Lu".

After a quick glance, Franca hurriedly tapped into her WeChat wallet.

Her expression suddenly froze. "The money, my money… it's gone!"

Jenna's pupils dilated as she quickly leaned over, discovering that Franca's WeChat wallet balance was "0.00 yuan".

"It didn't delete all the information on my phone, including the money in my online wallet, did it?" Franca hurriedly downloaded a banking app again, taking some time to complete the login and check her balance.

She let out a long sigh of relief, patting her chest.

"Thank goodness, the bulk of it is still there. That gave me such a fright."

After her exclamation, she explained to Jenna,

"The money in my bank account is still there!"

Jenna glanced at her bank card balance and asked thoughtfully, "How much money did you originally have in your WeChat wallet?"

"138 yuan," Franca answered smoothly. "I had over 300 yuan in Alipay too."

The Alipay app had already been downloaded back by "Luo Fu". She tapped in to check and found there was still over 100 yuan.

"Uh…" Franca flipped through the transactions and finally confirmed that this 100+ yuan was later transferred from the bank card by "Luo Fu", with some spent on takeout orders. The previous 300+ yuan had indeed vanished into thin air.

Jenna amusingly pressed her hand to her chest and said, "You only lost about 500 yuan, but you acted like you lost all 120,000+. You scared me to death."

The 60,000 earned from selling items was currently with Jenna, and she had transferred half to Lumian and Anthony.

"Don't say such unlucky things. 500 yuan is a lot, it's enough for us to buy so many things at the wholesale market!" Franca thought for a moment and said, "I need to transfer some to Lumian and Anthony. We should each keep some separately, in case it all gets exposed at once. I've realized that this is like a game—when you get kicked out of the dream, you might drop equipment and money, and you might not even be able to pick it back up. Mm, we shouldn't put all our eggs in one basket."

"The money in the bank card is still there, but what was on the phone is gone?" Jenna pondered and said, "Because at that time you only cleared the phone information with one click, not the bank card information? The loss of money should be an issue with the Information Shredder, right?"

Franca nodded slowly. "This mini-program is really powerful. I suspect it even deleted the corresponding information and backup information on the servers. Only in this way could it deal with mystical photos and prevent our chat records from being found…"

At this point, Franca frowned slightly and said, "I asked Madam Magician and Madam Judgment. They know every high-ranking member of the Church of Steam, but none of them is called Stiano."

"Anthony's feeling at that time must have been correct. Stiano should have a close connection with the Church of Steam." Jenna also showed a puzzled expression.

"They seem to have suspects. They said they would tell us through the Star Dream Provisions Store after confirmation," Franca suddenly looked around, pointed at the ceiling, and said in a lowered voice, "Could it be that one? Only a mini-program made by Him could be so powerful, and besides, He can enter with real consciousness."

"Maybe…" Jenna's voice also became low.

As a native of Trier, she had received religious education since childhood and still had considerable awe for deities.

She now wondered if she would one day encounter the Eternal Blazing Sun she once believed in within this dream city.

And if the Eternal Blazing Sun entered, what would the corresponding dream manifestation look like?

In the brief silence, Franca re-added Lumian and the others, completing the distribution of assets—she and Jenna kept 90,000, while Lumian and Anthony got 90,000.

Then, she and Jenna exchanged their feelings about her being kicked out of the dream and the details they discovered after she returned to reality.

She didn't edit all of this into a message to send to Lumian, planning to find an opportunity to meet face-to-face tomorrow to talk in person.

This was out of concern that sensitive information might bring about anomalies if sent out and not deleted with the Information Shredder in time.

Madam Judgment had said to behave and be careful for these few days!

Chatting until almost 1 a.m., Franca stretched. "Fortunately, Luo Fu didn't spend money recklessly, otherwise I'd be heartbroken.

"Alright, let's wash up and go to sleep. We still need to get up early for work tomorrow. Oh, you can check if Hall Film Company is hiring recently and apply. It matches your profession!"

The corners of Jenna's mouth turned up in a smile. "Have you forgotten that tomorrow is Sunday?"

"Oh, right." Franca was stunned for a moment. "Going back and forth between the dream and reality has confused me. Originally, Luo Fu should have the day off today, but because the group had important matters with VIPs, she worked an extra day… Well, tomorrow I have to take Ludwig to tutoring class again."

…

At Xinhong District, in a rented apartment.

Lumian wasn't supervising Ludwig's studies. After receiving Franca's gift and deleting the transfer information, he continued using his phone to search for keywords like "Intis Group" and "VIP".

"What are you looking up? Do you need help?" Anthony asked from the side of the table.

"Not for now," Lumian answered without raising his head. "I'm collecting information related to Zaratulstra, but I can't directly search using that name."

Without waiting for Anthony to ask further, he added on his own,

"I want to know which hotel Zaratulstra is staying at and what his recent itinerary is."

"You're planning to…" Anthony keenly grasped Lumian's intention.

Lumian raised his head, revealing a bright smile.

"Yes, to take him out.

"There's no reason for us to always passively respond to and dismantle the moves of the Celestial Worthy's subordinates. We can also be more proactive—infiltrate, assassinate, eliminate, make the hidden dangers disappear before they emerge.

"Now that we're all at Sequence 7, it's not impossible for us to win. And from our battle with the reanimated female corpse, we know that as long as we don't let the enemy escape, aren't recorded by surveillance, and there are no witnesses, the Celestial Worthy can't locate us."

Anthony nodded, indicating that Lumian's line of thinking was not wrong.

He just warned, "Even if suppressed to Sequence 7, that individual's essence is still that of an Angel. He's bound to have some mysterious, special, and bizarre abilities, and he's also skilled at using substitutes. He won't be easy to kill. Moreover, there might be other subordinates of the Celestial Worthy around him."

"I know," Lumian nodded with a smile. "Even if only left with Sequence 7 strength, some of Zaratulstra's Beyonder powers will still be very bizarre and terrifying. We need to consider this before taking action."

After collecting intelligence on Zaratulstra for a while, Lumian used the Information Shredder to delete the search records and used pen, paper, and his brain to organize the information.

After repeatedly reviewing the compiled data for a long time, he planned to find an opportunity to scout the location after accompanying Ludwig to tutoring class tomorrow.

For the rest of the time, he took out the new ice board he had made and, for the umpteenth time, scrutinized the information on each dream character and the preliminary findings from their team's observations and interactions with these characters.

…

The next day, at Dream Tutoring Classes.

Lumian escorted the slowly moving Ludwig to the door of the Beginner English class.

Anderson glanced at him and greeted, "Want to join for some enlightenment?"

"No need, I'd rather learn painting," Lumian replied simply, pushing Ludwig towards Anderson.

Anderson didn't speak to him further, taking Ludwig's hand and walking back into the classroom.

Lumian sat down opposite, patiently waiting just like last time.

Before long, he saw Zhou Mingrui again.

Zhou Mingrui was wearing a white T-shirt with patterns, looking much more youthful and sunny than when he was at work.

Zhou Mingrui wasn't surprised at all to see him here, as if he had been mentally prepared. He nodded slightly as a greeting.

Lumian didn't engage in small talk, only politely responding.

More contact, less closeness, to lower the target's vigilance!

Moreover, Franca's probing last night had quite good results, successfully making Zhou Mingrui wary of the aftermath of the Assassin beverage. Now he needed to give him some time to digest such bombshell news.

From this perspective, Franca being kicked out of the dream this time was worth it.

After watching Zhou Mingrui turn into the classroom, Lumian withdrew his gaze and started using his phone.

At this moment, he suddenly had a premonition and raised his head, looking towards the front desk of the tutoring center.

He saw Principal Ai Nana, wearing a white long dress, accompanying an elderly man inside.

Behind them were several employees of Dream Tutoring Classes and unfamiliar faces Lumian hadn't seen before.

Lumian's gaze fell on the elderly man, noticing he was wearing a black formal suit, his hair completely white, with long and dense white whiskers on his face, and blue eyes so deep they were almost without light.

Lumian's eyes narrowed slightly. He had seen a portrait of this elderly man before: Zaratulstra!

He's come to Dream Tutoring Classes again? Lumian quietly stood up, retreating along with other parents to avoid this group of people.

Ai Nana led Zaratulstra to stop at the door of the Business English class, introducing the relevant situation.

Zaratulstra's gaze subsequently turned towards those students.

At this point, Lumian had already retreated to the depths of the corridor, stopping next to the fire alarm, and glanced up at the surveillance camera that could capture this area.

He watched Zaratulstra from the corner of his eye. If the other party made any unusual movements or tried to talk to Zhou Mingrui, he would first knock out the surveillance camera from a blind spot, then punch the fire alarm to make the scene chaotic, causing everyone to rush out of Dream Tutoring Classes.

During this process, he would play the role of a panicked parent, constantly obstructing Zaratulstra's various actions while carrying Ludwig.

Chapter 960: Psychiatric Ward

Using the cover of the parents in front, Lumian discreetly observed Zaratulstra's every move.

After listening to Ai Nana's introduction for a few minutes, Zaratulstra nodded, left the door of the Business English class, and turned to look at the other training classes currently in session.

He didn't do anything… Lumian was puzzled, but remained vigilant.

It wasn't until Zaratulstra finished touring Dream Tutoring Classes and Ai Nana escorted him and his entourage out, returning to teach the Business English class, that Lumian sat back in his original seat and silently said to himself, He's leaving just like that?

Was he simply here to recognize Zhou Mingrui, complete the initial contact, or did he secretly do something that I didn't notice? For example, has he already controlled Ms. Ai, or discreetly used some ability to achieve his predetermined goal from just a few meters away?

After thinking it through, Lumian picked up his phone and sent a message to Jenna: "Ask Luo Shan to remind the target via WeChat to pay attention to his condition today, not to drink water he brought to the tutoring class, and to buy new water later."

This was to indirectly and subtly remind Zhou Mingrui, and at the same time, it was an experiment to see if hints conveyed through dream characters during the day would bring any anomalies to themselves.

A few minutes later, Zhou Mingrui, who was listening attentively to the lecture, felt his phone vibrate in his pocket.

He took out his phone, lowered his head, unlocked the screen, and saw a message from Luo Shan: "Remember to examine yourself three times a day, and don't drink water you've brought outside."

What does this mean? I can't make head or tail of the message. It's puzzling… Zhou Mingrui first grumbled to himself, then perceived the hidden reminder.

He hadn't yet fully determined whether Luo Shan was good or bad, whether she had more good intentions or bad intentions towards him, but the hint to frequently examine his own condition and not drink the current water wouldn't cause any harm even if he followed it.

In such matters, it's better to believe something existed than to doubt its existence!

Zhou Mingrui replied with an "Okay" and stuffed the phone back into his pocket, raising his head again.

He didn't look at the bottle of mineral water he had placed on the table again.

Outside the classroom, Lumian once again scrutinized Zaratulstra's recent behavior.

He just looked at Zhou Mingrui from a few meters away for a while, without trying to get closer…

Whether or not he did anything secretly, this behavior makes me feel that he doesn't dare to deeply engage with Zhou Mingrui, to do some things in front of that person…

Combined with Franca's morning description of the feeling of being kicked out of the dream and the overt and covert struggles in the lottery incident, it can be seen that Mr. Fool has a certain control over the dream, at least not much weaker than the Celestial Worthy. In this situation, if Zaratulstra stimulates him and his identity is discovered or locked onto, he is likely to be made into a marionette or kicked out of the dream…

In the dream city, it's not just us who need to be careful, the Celestial Worthy's subordinates also have to follow the same rules…

Thinking of this, Lumian's train of thought became much clearer.

He stood up and began pacing in the corridor, thinking about the details of some issues while waiting for the possible consequences of indirectly reminding Zhou Mingrui.

Walking to the end of the passageway, he casually glanced outside through the window.

He suddenly saw that across the street, Zaratulstra walked out of the building accompanied by a young girl, followed by his entourage and many unfamiliar faces.

Lumian was very familiar with the appearance of that young girl.

The Major Arcana card holder, The Hermit, Queen of Stars Cattleya!

In the dream city, Ma'am Hermit's role is Huang Jiajia, roommate of Miss Bernie Huang, and because she lost a bet, she always calls Bernie Huang 'dad'… Mr. Fool's subconscious weaving of relationships is quite interesting…

Huang Jiajia's family runs Star Tutoring Classes, which is a competitor to Dream Tutoring Classes, so she used high remuneration to ask Zhou Mingrui to enroll in Dream Tutoring Classes to scout the enemy…

Is Zaratulstra putting on a full show by examining Dream Tutoring Classes' competitors as well, or does he want to do something to Ma'am Hermit's dream manifestation?

Speaking of which, the dried mushrooms that prevented Zhou Mingrui from drinking the Instigator beverage came from Huang Jiajia, grown by the biology teacher Li Keji at Star Tutoring Classes, whose prototype is the 'Legendary Druid' Frank Lee… No wonder those dried mushrooms had supernatural properties. In Mr. Fool's subconscious, any mushroom products sent by Frank Lee might be problematic…

Lumian stood at the window, watching until Zaratulstra got into a black business car, with Huang Jiajia and others waving goodbye at the roadside, before preparing to walk back to the outside of the Beginner English class.

Suddenly, he heard a wee-woo wee-woo sound.

It was an ambulance, stopping at the entrance of Star Tutoring Classes. Not only nurses but also police officers jumped out.

What happened? Was it brought by Zaratulstra? Lumian stopped in his tracks and continued observing from afar.

Before long, the police and nurses brought out a person from Star Tutoring Classes. The person was wearing a white shirt and olive green overalls, with longish brown hair and dense body hair. His hands were handcuffed behind his back, and his legs and body were tightly bound.

This person was carried out and stuffed into the ambulance.

Lumian recognized this person.

He was Li Keji, the biology teacher at Star Tutoring Classes, corresponding to the prototype character "Legendary Druid" Frank Lee!

Why was he arrested? And arrested using an ambulance…

Did he cause problems with the mushrooms?

Or is this the problem brought by Zaratulstra? Is he trying to eliminate Frank Lee's dream manifestation to prevent some mushroom from ruining his plans next time?

Lumian quickly took out his phone and scrolled through local news and videos.

In just a few minutes, he saw related posts: "Guys, can you believe it? I just went to take some biology tutoring, and the teacher was arrested as a mentally ill terrorist!

"Is studying biology so dangerous?

"The teacher had said earlier that if we did well on this test, he would give us a bag of new mushroom strains!"

After scrolling through several similar videos, Lumian roughly confirmed that Frank Lee had been arrested by the Celestial Worthy's side on some pretext, first to be treated for mental issues, then to deal with other matters.

However, judging from the description in the latest issue of The Great Adventurer and the situation with Zhou Mingrui's bag of dried mushrooms, the probability that the mushrooms grown at 'Li Keji's' home are harmless is very, very low. What's this called… it seems to be endangering public safety by dangerous means? Arresting him seems reasonable… Just as Lumian thought of this, he received a message.

It was from "Intis Group Grimm": "There's a matter that requires your personal attention."

What matter requires the Child of God to handle personally? Lumian used voice input to reply: "Is it urgent?"

"Not too urgent." Grimm quickly replied.

Lumian pondered for a few seconds and replied: "Then wait until I've finished with the child."

In front of the Mother Goddess's believers, it was better to show more of the glory of motherhood, to make them more certain of one's identity.

"Alright, please attend to your matters first." Grimm replied quite humbly, completely unlike the security director of the Intis Group, while Lumian was just a mere security guard.

Lumian took this opportunity to inform Jenna about the Zaratulstra matter and Frank Lee's fate.

When the Business English class and Beginner English class ended one after another, Lumian politely said goodbye to Zhou Mingrui, took Ludwig, left Dream Tutoring Classes, and got into the gray sedan driven by Anthony.

Only then did he send a message to "Intis Group Grimm": "Time and place."

Just a dozen seconds later, Grimm responded: "I'll wait for you at the entrance of Mushu Hospital."

Mushu Hospital… Lumian frowned slightly.

…

Under the blazing sunlight, Lumian saw Grimm standing in the shade of a tree.

The security director of the Intis Group had changed into a light-colored striped shirt and was wearing sunglasses, disguising himself quite well.

"What's the matter?" Lumian walked past Grimm, heading straight into Mushu Hospital.

Grimm followed behind him to the side, saying with a smile in his voice, "You'll know when you see it. This should be one of the purposes Mother wanted you to come here for."

The way you're talking, it feels like you've dug a trap in front and are waiting for me to fall in… Lumian nodded slightly, not asking further.

Wouldn't asking too much reveal that there's actually no connection between me and the Great Mother?

Grimm quickened his pace, overtaking him, and led the way in front.

He led Lumian around the main building to a three-story building behind it, surrounded by high walls, with a lawn and garden.

"This is the psychiatric ward," Grimm introduced, verifying his identity with the security guard and passing through the iron gate.

Lumian nodded thoughtfully.

The two quickly entered the building, and just as they climbed to the second floor under the nurse's guidance, they heard a patient banging on the iron door and shouting, "Let me out!

"I'm not sick! I only lost after fighting with two supreme beings to the edge of the universe, and you caught me, I'm not sick!

"This is my marionette, this is my paper figurine, look, I have them all with me, I'm not crazy!

"I've divined it, there's no danger, really no danger. That voice is normal, haven't you heard it?

"Let me out! Let me out!"

Lumian raised his right eyebrow.

Which Seer pathway Beyonder is this? At least a Marionettist…

Lumian immediately associated this with the Marionettist who hadn't intervened when they killed the reanimated female corpse, and thought of the madman found in the garbage dump near Moon Plazal the next morning, who had been sent to the hospital.

Is this the Marionettist who went mad? So he was sent to the psychiatric ward of Mushu Hospital… What voice did he hear? Did that cause him to go mad? As Lumian pondered, his footsteps didn't stop. He followed behind the nurse and Grimm all the way to the end of an empty corridor.

The nurse stood at the door of the deepest ward and said to Grimm and Lumian, "The patient is inside. You can look at him through the window, but don't reach your hands in."

After saying this, she turned and left, without providing any further warnings.

After watching the nurse disappear at the stairwell, Grimm smiled at Lumian and said,

"Child of God, Li Keji is inside."

Li Keji… Frank Lee? Although Lumian had already anticipated this, he was still shocked.

Chapter 961: Ideology

Lumian's expression remained unchanged as he looked at Grimm, waiting for him to continue speaking.

At this moment, the psychiatric ward was very quiet. There were no patients walking around, no family members coming and going, only the occasional nurse passing by.

Grimm glanced left and right before saying, "Child of God, this is an opportunity to impregnate Li Keji. Please do it personally."

Impregnate Frank Lee? I don't have that ability, I can only impregnate myself! Lumian grumbled inwardly, glancing at Grimm as he said, "You need me for such a small matter?"

Grimm smiled awkwardly. "If I do it, Li Keji would need to carry the child for a full 40 weeks before giving birth. That would take too long and couldn't be put to use in the short term. There may be some mutations soon."

So you really do have the Beyonder power to impregnate anyone regardless of gender. Corruption is also a kind of boon, and a source of power… But why are you so fixated on having Frank Lee give birth? Is it some kind of symbol, symbolizing that Frank Lee has truly become a child of the Mother? Various thoughts flashed through Lumian's mind.

He suddenly remembered that Frank Lee's dream manifestation, Li Keji, was a special character—influenced by Mr. Fool's subconscious perception, he exhibited supernatural aspects in mushroom-related matters. Moreover, judging from the dried mushroom incident, his potential stance leaned towards Mr. Fool.

If Frank Lee really became a child of the Great Mother, it would mean that the Great Mother's forces had control over this special point in the dream city, could effectively utilize it, and more deeply interfere with the development of the dream.

Although these evil gods like the Great Mother wanted balance more, Frank Lee falling into their hands was better than being controlled by the Celestial Worthy. But they also had to guard against the possibility that they were cooperating with the Celestial Worthy on this matter.

Frank Lee was arrested by official forces and brought to the psychiatric ward of Mushu Hospital, representing the will of the Celestial Worthy. The Great Mother was one of the "major shareholders" of Mushu Hospital. Perhaps the two have already reached an agreement to cooperate on this individual incident and completed a private transaction… Lumian calmly said to Grimm, "My power is also limited in this city, not much better than yours."

Grimm explained with a smile, "I know. This time we just want to use your godhood. Although it's also restricted, it's still godhood.

"After you impregnate Li Keji, the hospital's obstetrics department will provide the corresponding reproductive technology and Beyonder power support. Li Keji can give birth to the child within four weeks."

As expected… The obstetrics department of Mushu Hospital is one of the symbols of the Great Mother in this dream… It sounds like it has already been corrupted to some extent, with multiple medical staff becoming children of the Mother…

If the obstetrics departments of every hospital in the dream city are thoroughly corrupted over time, and the problem isn't exposed, wouldn't that mean that all newborns in the dream city afterwards would be children of the Mother?

Generation after generation, everyone in the dream city would become a child of the Mother… In the end, whether it's Mr. Fool or that Celestial

Worthy who wakes up, they would bear the identity of being a child of the Great Mother, in a mystical sense?

The more Lumian thought about it, the more inexplicably terrified he became.

This was a subtle, gradual influence, like boiling a frog in warm water. Given enough time, the Great Mother would inevitably achieve Her goal.

Of course, this was assuming that Mr. Fool and the Celestial Worthy didn't offer effective resistance, and that this dream continued for at least five generations, spanning a century.

These great existences are all cunning… After sighing inwardly, Lumian nodded slightly and responded to Grimm, "Okay."

Grimm's face lit up with joy as he said in a prayerful tone, "May the glory of motherhood be eternal!"

He then approached the iron gates of the ward and looked inside through the small window barred with iron. Lumian also took two steps forward.

What met their eyes was the burly back of a man wearing blue and white striped hospital clothes.

The figure was crouching in the corner, fiddling with something.

As Lumian's gaze moved, he noticed several mushrooms with brown caps and white stems growing where the wall met the floor. They looked fresh and plump, as if they had just been transplanted from a rain-soaked forest.

Bang! Lumian knocked on the iron door, and Grimm yielded the window position to him.

Hearing the knock, the figure stood up and dashed to the door, revealing a face with thick facial hair. It was indeed Li Keji, the biology teacher from Star Tutoring Classes, and the "Legendary Druid" Frank Lee in reality.

Lumian could see that Mr. Fool's dream subconscious had localized the character of Li Keji to some extent, not setting him as a foreigner. Thus, his eyes were deep brown, and his facial features were softer.

"Finally, someone's here!" Li Keji said excitedly. "Go tell your dean and department head that I don't have mental problems. It's just that many people can't accept my ideas."

His eyes were pure and passionate.

I can only accept them to a limited extent… Lumian, who had read "The Great Adventurer 6: Future", muttered silently before asking seriously, "What are your ideas?"

Li Keji was eager to share. "For humans, the most important thing is food. There are still many people in this world suffering from hunger.

"To solve this problem, we need some new plants that meet the following conditions:

"First, they're not picky about the environment. Second, they don't need meticulous care. Third, they have a high annual yield. Fourth, preferably they can be harvested frequently. Fifth, they're nutritionally rich and can meet all human needs…

"I found that mushrooms meet most of my requirements, but they're not enough. They have insufficient yield, monotonous nutrition, narrow taste range, and so on!

"I've been thinking about how to make different types of mushrooms that have different tastes, different nutritional profiles, and different characteristics. For example, ones that are pest-resistant, disease-resistant, can grow and reproduce on their own, taste like beef, produce milk when bitten, and have flesh as delicate as fish…"

Hearing this, Lumian's eyelid twitched.

Some of these new varieties sound very similar to those mushrooms from the New City of Silver…

Could they all be Frank Lee's inventions?

Have I eaten new mushrooms created by Frank Lee?

No wonder I felt something was off at the time…

Lumian glanced at Grimm before saying to the talkative Li Keji, "I can accept your explanation and your ideas."

"See? Those people don't understand science, they even called the police to arrest me!" Li Keji's eyes brightened. "I've been thinking for a long time, and finally came up with a way to realize my ideas."

"What is it?" Lumian raised an eyebrow.

Li Keji said excitedly, "Genetic modification technology!"

For a moment, both Lumian and Grimm fell silent.

After several seconds, Lumian finally grumbled to himself, "So you transplanted all of a cow's genes into a mushroom?"

Li Keji continued, "My research is progressing steadily, and I already have mature samples.

"Yes, they still have various problems, but that doesn't negate their epoch-making significance.

"Those mushrooms just happen to moo, or eat grass, or swim, or run, or drink their own milk. These aren't big problems! Yet they think I'm crazy, that I'm endangering public safety!"

I think so too… Lumian was momentarily speechless.

"…"

Grimm was shocked. After a few seconds, he remembered something. "Did you give some dried mushrooms to…"

He stopped abruptly, not finishing the question.

At that time, monitoring Zhou Mingrui's workstation and having access to all surveillance cameras in the entire building, he had fully witnessed the mutation of those dried mushrooms, and knew their ultimate fate and the potential hidden dangers they had sown.

"I did give some to my colleagues at the tutoring center, but unfortunately there were too few to reward the students," Li Keji said regretfully.

Lumian secretly breathed a sigh of relief and said to Li Keji, "Geniuses are always lonely, misunderstood by others."

"No, I'm not a genius. I just have an enthusiastic heart and the courage to put ideas into practice," Li Keji said, not out of modesty but genuine belief.

"Either way, your original intention wasn't wrong," Lumian could only say this.

He raised his right hand towards Li Keji.

Li Keji understood his intention and reached his own hand through the iron bars, giving him a high five.

"I'll report your situation, but I can't make the decision," Lumian said sincerely.

"Thank you," Li Keji's face was full of gratitude.

As he returned to the bed area to study the mushrooms again, Lumian walked towards the stairwell and said to Grimm, "He's already pregnant."

In reality, he wasn't.

Before Grimm could respond, Lumian added, "But it will take a week for the embryo to stabilize. Then the obstetrics staff can intervene. Before that, no interference can be made."

"I see… Alright, I'll remind them," Grimm didn't understand to what extent godhood limited by this world could achieve.

After leaving Mushu Hospital and watching Grimm leave, Lumian walked across the street and got into the gray sedan driven by Anthony.

Looking at the entrance of Mushu Hospital, he pondered for a moment before saying, "Try to rescue Li Keji from the psychiatric ward within a week."

Otherwise, the "false pregnancy" would be exposed, and he would inevitably be suspected.

Moreover, by then, the bestowed of the Great Mother could still remedy the situation and make Li Keji truly pregnant.

Just as Lumian finished speaking, he suddenly saw two cars stop at the entrance of Mushu Hospital. Among the people getting out were Huang Jiajia, Miss Bernie Huang, and several men in suits.

Is Huang Jiajia bringing help to rescue Li Keji?

Miss Huang won't do anything illegal openly, so those people must be lawyers and some officials, trying to get Li Keji out through proper procedures?

Even if those mushrooms are really like biochemical toxins, Miss Huang can't change the fact that Li Keji is guilty and has mental problems. But she can find a way to transfer him to another hospital, without keeping him in Mushu Hospital…

Does this count as a covert struggle between two official forces, symbolizing the confrontation between Mr. Fool and the Celestial Worthy? Does Mr. Fool's subconscious want to protect Li Keji?

Lumian watched thoughtfully.

Chapter 962: Anonymous Tip

While Ludwig was making noise eating, Anthony drove the car a bit further to a shaded area to avoid the harsh sunlight.

He rolled down the window slightly to create a gap, while Lumian condensed ice cubes to assist the not-so-effective old air conditioner in providing coolness.

This way, they waited for nearly half an hour until they finally saw Miss Huang and Huang Jiajia's group coming out of Mushu Hospital. Among them were people dressed as police officers, carrying Li Keji with his legs bound and hands cuffed.

After watching them get into different vehicles and leave Mushu Hospital, Lumian received a message from Intis Group Grimm: "The target has been transferred to the psychiatric ward of another hospital. He will undergo another mental evaluation and police questioning.

"In a week, we'll need to take action again."

"Alright," Lumian handed the phone to Anthony, letting him read the content sent by Grimm.

Then, Lumian said, "We can't get involved in the tug-of-war and struggle at the official level right now, nor do we have a way to intervene. But we need to do something covertly. Even if we don't manage the actions of the Great Mother's children a week later, we must consider the possibility of the Celestial Worthy's subordinates infiltrating the other hospital to eliminate Frank Lee's dream manifestation, just like they killed the Oracle.

"They're entirely capable of doing such a thing."

Anthony nodded. "This is also an application of psychological blind spots. Most people would think Li Keji is definitely safe being confined in a psychiatric ward with police guards outside. And since Li Keji's backers have considerable influence and are taking action, Li Keji and his friends probably won't take risky actions in the short term. As a result, most people will unconsciously lower their guard, which presents a good opportunity for assassination."

"Should we go rescue Li Keji in the next couple of days?" Lumian mused uncertainly to himself.

Anthony said calmly, "If we rescue him, he'll truly become a wanted criminal.

"Where do you plan to hide him?

"This might also make us suspects in the eyes of the police. In the dream city, this represents us opposing the dream's main consciousness, which also means we're close to being discovered by the Celestial Worthy."

"Hide him in a painting?" Lumian pondered in response.

The worlds within paintings created by Painters were different from mirror worlds. They weren't interconnected, so one couldn't directly move from one painted world to another. One needed to first reach the corresponding painting before entering.

In other words, if Li Keji was hidden in a painted world, as long as Lumian and the others kept that painting safe, they wouldn't have to worry too much about someone infiltrating through other means or searching via illusory tunnels.

Before Anthony could respond, Lumian laughed at himself.

"We don't necessarily have to risk rescuing Li Keji. We can change our approach.

"We can hide nearby, wait for the Celestial Worthy's subordinates to come eliminate the target, then ambush and take them out.

"When the week's deadline arrives and I go with the children of the Great Mother to induce the embryo in Li Keji's belly, you, Franca, and Jenna can cover your faces and ambush us. I'll pretend to be overwhelmed and flee with the children of the Great Mother, thus missing the chance to have Li Keji give birth within four weeks.

"Failure is better than exposure. At most, it would mean the Child of God loses some prestige in the eyes of Grimm and the others."

At this point, Lumian picked up his phone and sent a message to Jenna: "Be sure to protect Luo Shan well recently."

Since Zaratulstra and the Celestial Worthy's subordinates he represented were eliminating certain dream characters, including those who had directly or indirectly helped Zhou Mingrui, Luo Shan, who had recently reminded Zhou Mingrui, might be one of their primary targets.

Lumian had previously shared information about Zaratulstra, so Jenna and Franca easily understood his meaning and replied with an "Okay."

Both parties then used the Information Shredder to delete their chat history.

"Where to now? Back?" Anthony glanced at the still rather bright sky.

After careful and repeated consideration, Lumian said, "To Star Dream Provisions Store."

Anthony didn't ask why. He rolled up the window and drove off.

About twenty minutes later, they arrived at their destination.

While Anthony took Ludwig to queue at a nearby shop selling guokui—a type of Chinese flatbread—Lumian entered Star Dream Provisions Store and approached the cashier, politely asking the shopkeeper, "Is there any mail for us?"

The shopkeeper, occupied by her phone, nodded and took out a letter, tossing it onto the counter.

Lumian opened it on the spot and began reading.

"Regarding the matter of Mushu Hospital's associate dean, we've communicated with the Sanguine duke and high-level Blessed of the Church of Earth Mother. So far, we haven't found anything unusual about Matriarch Roland, and the Blessed haven't received any warnings from Earth Mother in this regard.

"Are you wondering if the dean of Mushu Hospital might be the dream manifestation of Earth Mother? We can assure you that it hasn't reached that level yet. This is based on divine revelation, so don't worry about what the dean of Mushu Hospital is called, unless it's Omebella…"

Madam Magician, you're quite skilled at telling horror stories too, worthy of being a great writer… Lumian grumbled, continuing to read. "The name Stiano was quite famous in the Fourth Epoch. His full name is Yuggs Stiano. He was one of the founders of the Moses Ascetic Order, but later left the order and disappeared for a long time. It's said that after the War of the Four Emperors and before the Pale Disaster, He became a true god. Yes, you've probably guessed who He is now. Also, remember, when you return to reality, don't speak this name in any language with supernatural power."

It's really the God of Steam and Machinery.. I actually added a true god on WeChat, and He even helped create a mini-program… He's quite friendly and approachable… I wonder how Anthony would react if he knew that was the true god he once believed in, and probably still has some faith in. Would his emotional changes break through a Spectator's instinctual control? Lumian stuffed the reply letter into the Traveler's Bag.

Next, he took out his phone and sent a WeChat message to Anderson Hood: "Why don't you turn yourself in?"

After three or four minutes, "A name that leaves a deep impression on you" replied: "Over the years, there haven't been many people who could confuse and surprise me for a while. You're now one of them.

"Are you planning to report clues about Danitz's death to the police?"

Lumian brought the phone close to his mouth and smiled as he said, "I plan to write the names of all suspects in Danitz's murder in a tip-off letter and submit it to the police department, using official power to trouble that person. Hopefully, it will cause him significant trouble. In others' eyes, what the mute did is no different from what you did.

"Since that's the case, why don't you just turn yourself in? This way, I won't need to write the tip-off letter."

These words were quickly converted to text and sent to Anderson Hood.

Anderson Hood promptly replied, "Are you worried that if you write the tip-off letter, you'll also be targeted by the authorities? So you're instigating me to turn myself in to minimize the risk you need to bear?

"Don't worry, the mute mainly made Danitz less vigilant and alert, but didn't actually do anything. He left no traces at the scene and used the power of paintings to create a strong alibi. Otherwise, as Danitz's roommate who reported to the police just hours after the incident, I would have been the most suspicious person and would have been found out long ago.

"That person is also very cautious and didn't leave any effective clues. However, troubling him a bit, distracting his attention, and making the police truly notice this name is not a bad idea.

"Go ahead and report it, just don't mention my name."

Lumian clicked his tongue and walked back to the cashier, saying to the shopkeeper, "Can you help me write a letter?"

Seeing the shopkeeper raise her head to look at him, causing even the bright sunlight outside to be blocked by clouds, Lumian self-deprecatingly smiled and said, "I'm illiterate. I can't write."

The shopkeeper smiled slightly and asked, "What do you want to write?"

Lumian thought for a few seconds and replied, "Danitz's death is related to Zaratulstra. He murdered Danitz."

The shopkeeper put down her phone, took out paper and pen, and quickly wrote down this paragraph. Finally, she asked, "How many copies?"

"Three," Lumian reduced the quantity to the minimum.

After the shopkeeper finished writing, he thanked her, took the three tip-off letters, and walked to the front of the magic mirror Arrodes.

He pressed his hand towards this ancient silver mirror.

He wanted to test if the supposedly great magic mirror had a corresponding area behind it, whether it was part of the mirror world.

Before any text could appear on the mirror's surface, Lumian's body suddenly lunged forward, quickly dematerializing and diving in.

In the blink of an eye, he saw the void and dark area behind the mirror.

The magic mirror is still a mirror… Indeed, if even mirror-like objects can be treated as mirrors, there's no reason why magic mirrors, which look like real mirrors on the surface, shouldn't count… Lumian muttered to himself, surveying his surroundings.

He found that the area behind the magic mirror Arrodes seemed a bit different from other mirrors.

The surrounding dark void was deeper, but it also seemed covered by an invisible cloth. Behind the cloth, pairs of eyes were watching him, and inexplicable things were silently flowing.

Indeed special… Lumian didn't waste time. Combining the police department layout provided by the Major Arcana card holders and his own sensing of various mirrors within range, he chose one of them and traversed through.

He wanted to "submit" the tip-off letters through the mirror world!

Soon, he reached his destination and brought his face close to the glass surface, observing the situation outside.

The next second, he saw a person.

The person wore a neat white shirt with black diamond-patterned epaulets on the shoulders. He was a rigid middle-aged man with deep black hair interspersed with some white strands. His dark brown, almost black eyes were looking at the mirror where Lumian was.

Lumian quickly drew back, feeling as if he had been seen by the other party.

This was the office of Police Station No. 1, and that man was the highest leader of the dream city's police force, Yagates.

Chapter 963: Midnight

Lumian had seen in the information provided by the Major Arcana card holders that the original character for Police Chief Yagates of Police Station No. 1 should be Madam Magician's teacher, the Grand Duke of the Tudor Empire, the strongest King of Angels of the Fourth Epoch, Mr. Door Bethel Abraham.

Within this introduction, there was a very important conjecture: suspected to be the dream symbol of the Uniqueness of the Apprentice pathway.

Similarly, the Major Arcana card holders speculated that the active Amon in the dream was a symbol of the Uniqueness of the Marauder pathway, but often also the original body.

This was because Amon was once the true god of the Marauder pathway, occupying the Uniqueness of this pathway for thousands of years, leaving a strong spiritual imprint in the corresponding Uniqueness. It could even be said that for a long time before, He was equivalent to the Uniqueness of the Marauder pathway.

Therefore, before Amon's spiritual imprint in the Uniqueness of the Marauder pathway was completely worn away, Amon had a very close connection with this Uniqueness. He could use this to freely enter and exit this dream city. Even if discovered by the Celestial Worthy and kicked out, He could re-enter without limit.

The Uniqueness of the Major Arcana card holder pathway was part of this true dream, equivalent to Amon also being part of it. If the Celestial Worthy wanted to prevent Amon from re-entering, or to impose comprehensive restrictions on Him so He couldn't do anything, according to the Major Arcana's speculation, there were only three ways:

First, remove the Uniqueness of the Marauder pathway by separating it. Second, quickly wear away Amon's spiritual imprint in that Uniqueness. Third, reach an agreement with Mr. Fool to jointly reject Amon.

Obviously, none of these three methods were feasible—the seemingly most feasible second method had a prerequisite that the Celestial Worthy had a great advantage in the dream, almost half-awakened. Otherwise, in a sleeping state, in fierce opposition with Mr. Fool, even if He was a great existence, it was impossible to wear away Amon's spiritual imprint in the Marauder Uniqueness in a short time.

Of course, Amon would still be restricted in the dream city. As for what kind of restrictions, the Major Arcana card holders didn't know, they could only infer from Amon's behavior that He wasn't completely unrestricted.

Similarly, Mr. Door's spiritual imprint also remained in the Uniqueness of the Apprentice pathway, forming the dream manifestation of Yagates.

Although the Uniqueness of the Apprentice pathway had once been accommodated by Amon, making Him a dual-pathway true god, Amon stayed at this level for a very short time, obviously unable to completely wear away Mr. Door's spiritual imprint.

As soon as Lumian withdrew his body, he immediately disappeared from the spot, traversing towards another mirror, leaving only a few black flames quietly falling, burning away any traces he might have left.

That was the symbol of the Uniqueness of the Door pathway, certainly having some control over the mirror world. Staying behind the current mirror would inevitably lead to exposure!

A second or two later, Lumian transferred to the second target location.

The dream manifestation of the Apprentice pathway Uniqueness is Yagates, the dream manifestation of the Marauder pathway Uniqueness is Amon… is the dream manifestation of the Seer pathway Uniqueness Zhou Mingrui, also the core that Mr. Fool and the Celestial Worthy are fighting over? Lumian thought while concealing his form, hiding in the darkness.

He patiently waited for a while, making sure no one was tracking him, before approaching the glass mirror surface to peek outside.

Outside was also an office, currently unoccupied.

This was Officer Deng's office.

Lumian took out a tip-off letter, making it "float" up.

The letter then flew out of the mirror surface, falling towards Officer Deng's desk.

Just as it touched the wooden desktop, a streak of black flame suddenly extended from the mirror, quickly burning towards it, illuminating the invisible spider silk that bound it tightly.

The black flames enveloped the letter, burning away residual traces and some of the spider silk, while the remaining silk retracted behind the mirror.

Lumian changed his position once again, traversing to the third mirror.

Outside was still an office, belonging to another police officer, William Wang.

He was a very powerful police officer, corresponding to the real-life figure of the former king of the Loen Kingdom, William Augustus VI, a deceased person.

The Major Arcana card holders were actually a bit confused. Mr. Fool's incarnations walking in the world had no intersection with William Augustus VI, so why did this deceased king have a corresponding manifestation in the dream city?

Similar situations included William Augustus I, Henry Augustus I, and other ancestors of the Augustus family who were "active" in the police station or court of the dream city, surnamed Wang—the same character for "king."

The Major Arcana card holders could only assume that Mr. Fool had many very ancient incarnations.

Perhaps because the police were in a meeting or on a mission, William Wang's office was also empty. Lumian successfully placed the tip-off letter, then randomly went to another office through the mirror world, dropped the last letter, without risking going to Yagates' place again.

Then, he returned to Star Dream Provisions Store, coming out from the mirror area corresponding to the magic mirror Arrodes.

"Can I borrow paper and pen again?" Lumian walked to the cashier and asked politely.

The shopkeeper put the paper and pen used for writing earlier on the counter.

Lumian began to write a letter to the Major Arcana card holders, with three main points:

First, to remind the Major Arcana card holders to pay attention to Rozanne in reality and provide necessary protection. Second, to ask them to confirm Anderson Hood's real situation. Third, to report the news of Li Keji being arrested.

After mailing the letter and expressing thanks, Lumian returned to the gray sedan.

Anthony and Ludwig had already returned.

Before Anthony started the car, Lumian briefly explained the possible identity of Stiano.

Anthony was silent for a moment, then started the car and said with a sigh, "Even gods were once weak, even gods went through stages like us… This truly is the path of the divine, it makes me feel that gods are no longer so unattainable, no longer naturally noble, naturally gods…"

"Disenchantment?" Lumian asked using the newly learned term.

Anthony turned the steering wheel and said, "But They are indeed fighting against evil gods, protecting the people…

"I remember in the industrial cities along the West Midseashire Coast, those robed clergy would regularly go to factories to hold ceremonies. Now it seems more like packaging major factory inspections, formal use of new machines, clergy getting close to front-line machines and other things into sacred rituals…"

Anthony rambled on about religious stories he heard as a child and religious ceremonies he experienced as he grew up. Lumian listened quietly, occasionally echoing with a word or two.

…

Dechang Garden, Building 5, Room 1502.

Luo Shan was very happy to find that Franca had returned to normal.

She curiously asked, "What did it feel like at that time?"

"I couldn't breathe, like a fish pulled out of water, a person kicked out of this world." Franca described it simply, without mentioning parts that might make Luo Shan think of dreams.

Jenna then said, "You need to be careful recently. The minions of evil forces are also trying to get close to Zhou Mingrui and deal with people who have directly or indirectly helped Zhou Mingrui. We're worried they might target you."

"Mm-hmm." Luo Shan pointed to the new oil painting and new sketch hanging on the wall, "I've already turned my room into a fortress, they will guard me while I sleep."

Franca and Jenna looked in the direction Luo Shan was pointing, seeing an oil painting of a colorful parrot.

Around the parrot were abstract, mottled color blocks, and its eyes deliberately turned when Franca and the others looked over, as if saying

"Hi, I'm alive!"

After looking at the paintings in the living room and bedroom, Jenna nodded and said,

"A Painter's ability is indeed magical.

"However, if you trust us, we can provide you with the ultimate safety guarantee."

"How?" Luo Shan asked.

Jenna didn't hide anything.

"Give us a small amount of blood and hair, we'll make a Mirror Substitution for you. Um, the straight-line distance between our two rooms barely qualifies within the effective range of this ability, and we can bring us closer in your Shaman space to ensure effectiveness.

"But this also means that we can easily and accurately curse you, kill you with that Mirror Substitution."

Luo Shan fell silent.

After a good while, she smiled. "We can try. If you really want to kill me, you've had many opportunities these past few days."

Close to midnight, Luo Shan, who had already washed up, checked the doors, windows, and those paintings before lying down on the bed and turning off the lights.

In the deep darkness, Luo Shan quickly fell asleep, continuing to guard that semi-transparent barrier.

As time ticked by minute by minute, in the parrot oil painting in the living room, those mottled color blocks suddenly began to squirm.

The colorful parrot noticed this change and was about to cry out loudly, but was surged over by those color blocks, covering its mouth and pressing down its wings.

Soon, the colorful parrot was submerged and dissolved by these color blocks, becoming part of them.

These color blocks flowed out of the oil painting like water, leaving the canvas empty.

They surged towards the bedroom in the quiet night, passing through the door crack, coming to Luo Shan's bedside.

Suddenly, this water flow composed of color blocks surged upwards, taking a human form.

The colorful human form quietly looked at the sleeping Luo Shan for twenty to thirty seconds.

Finally, it turned back into a water flow composed of color blocks, returning along its original path to the oil painting in the living room.

The color blocks squirmed, reconstructing the colorful parrot and the surrounding background.

The parrot was identical to before, its eyes still lively.

The next morning, Luo Shan woke up.

She first picked up her phone to check messages, then slowly got up and checked the situation in the bedroom and living room.

"No problems." Luo Shan breathed a sigh of relief and walked towards the bathroom.

…

After parting with Franca and Luo Shan, Jenna went out to observe those dream characters who were relatively close to Zhou Mingrui.

This was her and Anthony's recent task.

Of course, she had already submitted her profile to Hall Film Company as a performing arts student.

And today, she or Anthony would go to contact Peng Deng, a very special dream character.

Chapter 964: A Bit Special

Across from the building where Peng Deng worked.

Jenna walked up to the gray sedan and watched as the door opened and Ludwig got out by himself.

She nodded to Anthony in the driver's seat, then led Ludwig towards a nearby café.

Based on Peng Deng's occupation, they had already formulated a plan for making contact:

If they had money, they could buy a house, then go to the design company where Peng Deng worked for a consultation, using abilities like Hypnosis or Instigation to "designate" Peng Deng as their designer.

Then, they could discuss design ideas, concepts and styles with Peng Deng, and sign a contract, allowing them to repeatedly contact the target through follow-up activities like reviewing plans and visiting sites, gradually becoming familiar, and ultimately figuring out if he had any issues and what those issues were.

But unfortunately, they didn't have that much money.

If they really had money to buy a house, wouldn't it be simpler and more convenient to just rent the magic mirror Arrodes and ask it for detailed information about Peng Deng?

So Anthony only planned to execute the first half of the plan—fabricating the fact that he owned a house, using home renovation as an excuse to go for a consultation, using his Hypnosis ability to get the company boss to assign Peng Deng to talk to him, and finally leaving with the excuse of needing to think it over, without signing a contract.

If Anthony's operation failed, encountering a situation where Peng Deng was unavailable or happened to be meeting a client, and he was assigned to a different designer, then Jenna would execute the second plan.

After entering the café with Ludwig, choosing a window seat, and ordering a cappuccino, a fruit juice, a small cake and a bunch of bread, Jenna looked at the little boy across from her and fell into deep thought, Every time we need to carry out a probing mission, we have to switch who takes him along. It feels so troublesome…

He can certainly be very useful, but a child's appearance, mentality and cognition mean he can't act independently, and we're not comfortable with that… not comfortable with the ordinary people of the dream city…

Should we find a way to get him into some elementary school, so he can attend classes? That way, we wouldn't have to worry about him during the day, just pick him up when it's time.

In Jenna's silence, Ludwig suddenly had a bit of a bad premonition. At that moment, the small cake was brought over, and he immediately smiled, picking up the fork and spoon.

Jenna thought for a while, but still gave up on the idea of sending Ludwig to elementary school.

That wasn't like going to cram school, which only took an hour and a half with breaks in between and parents waiting outside. He'd have to stay at school all day, and unless they gave Ludwig the Traveler's Bag, there was really no way for him to carry enough food.

What would happen then, a classmate every two periods?

Meanwhile, Anthony saw Peng Deng enter the building.

After 9 o'clock, confirming that Peng Deng hadn't left, he got out of the car, entered the building, took the elevator, and arrived at the design company called "Shengwei".

Anthony said to the receptionist, "I called earlier to inquire and made an appointment."

The receptionist checked the record book and led Anthony to a meeting room.

Soon after, the person in charge of the design company came over and chatted with Anthony for a bit, confirming the style he wanted.

During this process, Anthony deliberately mentioned Peng Deng, saying he had seen this designer's works and actual results on the company's public account and felt they matched his ideas well.

Undoubtedly, while saying this, Anthony looked into the eyes of the person in charge, using Hypnosis lightly. Earlier during the phone communication, he had also used psychological methods for guidance, though he couldn't directly apply Hypnosis then.

"Please wait here, I'll go get the designer," the person in charge stood up and left the meeting room, while a staff member poured Anthony a glass of water and put out some fruit.

About ten minutes later, Anthony saw Peng Deng appear at the door.

Peng Deng had black hair and brown eyes, with an ordinary appearance. His hair was styled with some parts fluffed up, and he wore a black T-shirt with a trendy brand feel, carrying a laptop.

Anthony stood up calmly, not showing any unusual behavior.

After the company manager's introduction, Anthony began chatting with Peng Deng, mainly describing his needs while Peng Deng listened and occasionally asked more in-depth questions to understand the details.

After Anthony finished speaking, Peng Deng operated a laptop and projector, saying, "I found a few images earlier, see if they match the feeling you want."

Soon, Anthony saw an image: a modern-style living room, bright and clean with golden sunlight shining through the windows, a vase placed in just the right position with a bouquet of fresh flowers, and two oil paintings hanging on either side, depicting sparse, beautiful forests and lush green fields…

Anthony suddenly felt this was exactly what he wanted.

Peng Deng continued to show several more images, with styles similar to the previous one, and each seemed to perfectly match Anthony's requirements.

He accurately grasped the vision I had in mind just based on the description over the phone and our face-to-face conversation? Isn't this a bit special? Anthony didn't immediately express his thoughts, but continued discussing with Peng Deng how these images could be combined into a whole and the specific costs for the designer's fee.

After chatting for a while longer, Anthony stood up and said, "I'll think about it some more."

"Alright." Peng Deng didn't try hard to persuade him, and escorted Anthony to the company entrance.

Anthony went downstairs, crossed the street, and passed by the café where Jenna and Ludwig were.

When the two parties met through the glass window, Anthony nodded slightly.

Then, he walked straight towards the rented gray sedan.

Jenna withdrew her gaze and continued watching Ludwig eat.

According to their prior agreement, she easily understood without needing to guess what Anthony's nod just now meant: I've met Peng Deng and made contact. Now, I need to self-isolate until dawn tomorrow to see if any abnormalities occur.

…

Tech Building, Intis Group, Administration Department.

After being busy for a while, Luo Shan started to slack off.

She picked up her phone and sent a message to True Hidden Blade: "Do I need to go hint at Zhou Mingrui about his own specialness?"

Franca, sitting in the workstation diagonally in front of Luo Shan, hesitated for a while before replying: "Not for now. Wait until my companion and I can no longer act, then you can do it."

Luo Shan was about to say something more when Deputy Director Zhang Qing came out of his office, clapped his hands and said, "Mr. Huang will be coming over shortly, bringing that VIP from last time to continue touring the company…"

Franca was worried that if Luo Shan hinted too deeply, she would also encounter abnormalities. While she and her companions might be kicked out of the dream, dream characters might just die suddenly, or get hit and run over by a bus after work.

She preferred Luo Shan to only act as her assistant for now, cooperating with her to hint at Zhou Mingrui.

Luo Shan was about to say something more when Deputy Director Zhang Qing came out of his office, clapped his hands and said, "Mr. Huang will be coming over shortly, bringing that VIP from last time to continue touring the company…"

A rustling sound suddenly arose as many employees took out their makeup bags and makeup mirrors.

That VIP from last time? Franca used her phone to ask Luo Shan: "Is it Zaratulstra?"

"It should be, he's the only VIP recently, involved in the integration and merger of certain subsidiaries, as well as a big deal," Luo Shan replied quickly. "What should we do next?"

She meant, should they let Zaratulstra come into contact with Zhou Mingrui?

Didn't Lumian report Zaratulstra yesterday? The police station has no evidence and can't restrict the foreign guest's freedom for now? Zaratulstra just went to see Zhou Mingrui at the cram school yesterday, and now he's coming to the company again today. What does he want to do? Ah, Lumian was right, passively dealing with things can easily lead to problems. It's better to actively eliminate hidden dangers… Franca looked at her phone, her thoughts racing quickly.

After nearly a minute, she replied to Luo Shan: "Stay calm; let me see the specific situation before deciding. You just need to cooperate with me.

"Don't worry, with so many people in the company watching, Zaratulstra can't do anything."

If worse comes to worst, I'll risk losing my job and pour a glass of water on Zaratulstra's or Mr. Huang's crotch!

Seeing that Luo Fu didn't take out mirrors or put on makeup, several nearby employees withdrew their observing gazes, feeling relieved and focusing on themselves.

Soon after, the group chat reported Mr. Huang's itinerary: "Mr. Huang has brought the VIP to the 16th floor!"

Tech Building, 16th floor.

Huang Tao, dressed casually, sat down with the formally dressed Zaratulstra in a room filled with various classical objects and opened a bottle of Aurmir red wine.

"You said you bought a very peculiar mirror?" Huang Tao continued their previous topic.

Zaratulstra smiled and said, "Yes, it possesses a kind of magic. It can let us see our inner selves."

As he spoke, the old man's deep blue, almost black eyes moved slightly, and he took out a small mirror with a classical design, luxurious style, and inlaid with gems from his suit pocket.

At this time, his and Huang Tao's entourage had all been left outside the current room, with only a few security personnel guarding at the door, not approaching them.

"Look, this is how I appear in the mirror," Zaratulstra placed the mirror in front of his face.

Huang Tao leaned in and saw that the reflection in the mirror was not the elderly Zaratulstra, but a man in his thirties with deep black hair and ordinary features.

Could it be a high-tech mirror with artificial intelligence? Huang Tao mumbled based on his experience and understanding.

"Would you like to try?" Zaratulstra asked him.

"Sure." Huang Tao took the mirror with interest, quietly checking if the item had any hidden switches and what material the mirror surface was made of.

He didn't find any issues, so he brought the mirror up to his face with curiosity.

He then saw himself in the mirror.

It was completely different from what he had imagined.

The him in the mirror was a woman, wearing an ornate golden crown, with slightly curly chestnut hair, blue eyes, a high nose bridge, thin lips, and an alluring appearance with an indescribable charm.

Huang Tao was stunned, as if he had seen the anima in his heart.

…

Lumian, who started his middle shift today, only needed to arrive at the company before 4:30 p.m.

Since late last night, he had been using the mirror world to sneak into a hospital called "Crimson Moon", where Li Keji was currently being held.

Chapter 965: Experimenting Again

Lumian hid behind a mirror-like object on the corridor wall, gazing at Li Keji's hospital room through the hard barrier.

He had maintained this position for many hours, only occasionally adjusting to relax.

He had waited all night but hadn't seen Zaratulstra or other subordinates of the Celestial Worthy come to eliminate Li Keji.

After an unknown amount of time, as sunlight shone in from the other end of the corridor, different rooms in the psychiatric ward gradually became lively. Someone was singing loudly, someone was banging on doors, someone was knocking on something unknown, as if calling for breakfast.

At this moment, Lumian saw a large amount of milky white liquid surge out from the gap between Li Keji's hospital room door and the solid floor.

Milk? Lumian's gaze froze slightly.

A second later, he found that the milky white liquid, which seemed to be milk, receded like a tide back into Li Keji's hospital room. The floor became clean again, with only varying degrees of wet traces remaining.

Lumian watched silently.

A few minutes later, with his eagle-like vision, he felt that there seemed to be something indescribable at the doorway of the hospital room.

He carefully pressed his face against the mirror surface, penetrating out slightly.

The scene before his eyes instantly lost its mirrored feel, becoming clearer.

He then saw some small, distinct white lines, and noticed finer, less obvious white filaments around them.

These things as a whole looked like intersecting, much thinner snowflakes, or as if countless white fuzz were mixed together.

Compared to the spider silk of Demonesses, they were all opaque, tinted with color, and could still be discovered upon careful observation.

Mycelium? Lumian made a guess.

This was based on speculation about Li Keji's own special nature.

After a few seconds, these mycelium uniformly retracted, passing through the door gap and disappearing into the corridor.

A scene spontaneously emerged in Lumian's mind: a strangely shaped giant mushroom man, no, a giant mushroom, walking to the door, carefully extending its mycelium—its goals unknown.

Lumian fell silent once again.

He seriously pondered a question, Is letting Zaratulstra and other subordinates of the Celestial Worthy eliminate Li Keji ultimately a bad thing or a good thing…

As long as they are prevented from taking Li Keji's corpse to the basement of Mushu Hospital and using the Mother's power to give him new life, the whole thing doesn't seem that unacceptable…

Hmm, Frank Lee's mushrooms in the dream city seemed to have overlapped with Mr. Fool's idealistic cognition, becoming more terrifying and bizarre than in reality. If they lost control later, who knows which side it would benefit…

No, no, no, fire is also dangerous, but fire can be exploited…

This guy is suitable to be confined in a psychiatric ward, to be released when needed, or to borrow a few mushrooms with unique functions…

Can a psychiatric ward really contain him? Should he be helped to enter prison, to be controlled by the officials representing the dream's main consciousness?

But if so, it would be very troublesome for us to utilize him, and moreover, he doesn't look like someone without mental problems in any way. Franca had explained before that in the dream city, such mentally ill patients don't need to go to prison, they just need to receive prolonged treatment in a mental hospital…

Lumian withdrew his face, distancing himself from the mirror surface.

At 10 a.m., he saw Huang Jiajia, Bernie Huang, accompanied by a lawyer, Officer Deng, and a doctor in a white coat enter this ward.

Only then did he feel relieved. He traversed to the rear-view mirror of a car in the underground parking lot, jumped out, and directly teleported back to the rented apartment in Xinhong District.

At this time, Anthony was in self-isolation, Ludwig had been taken away by Jenna, and Lumian casually ate some bread before preparing to lie down on the bed to catch up on sleep.

Just as he had lain down, he felt his phone vibrate once.

The message was from True Hidden Blade: "Zaratulstra has come to visit the group again, now on the 16th floor, hasn't come down yet."

Zaratulstra wasn't affected by the tip-off letter? Does the tip-off letter need evidence, otherwise the police would have to investigate for a while, obtain sufficient evidence before they can arrest a foreign guest? Zaratulstra is still very cautious, and the identity of a foreign guest is also very clever… Lumian sat on the bed, pondered and analyzed for a while before replying to Franca: "No need to interfere with Zaratulstra's visit, but remind Zhou Mingrui to be careful through Luo Shan."

…

Inside the Administration Department of Intis Group.

Franca sent a message to Luo Shan: "If that guy comes to visit the tech department later, remember to warn Zhou Mingrui to be careful about safety.

"No rush for now, what if the enemy chooses to visit other departments or other subsidiaries? Warning Zhou Mingrui in advance would plunge him into endless suspicion, guarding against everyone around him, which would greatly affect his mental state in the long run."

Luo Shan replied with a "nodding cat" emoji.

To their surprise, Mr. Huang didn't bring Zaratulstra down for a tour, the two stayed on the 16th floor until noon before leaving via the private elevator.

"Alert lifted, the enemy didn't contact the target, so Luo Shan didn't give any reminder." Franca reported the situation to Lumian during lunch break.

Lumian quickly replied: "Then I'll carry out the step of hinting at Zhou Mingrui about the existence of supernatural powers this afternoon, and be a bit more aggressive. You, Jenna, and Anthony, from now on, don't contact me, delete the chat history, even my WeChat and QQ numbers, and add them back tomorrow afternoon."

"Won't this get mixed up with the results of Anthony's probe of Peng Deng? If he gets kicked out, we might have trouble distinguishing if it's Peng Deng's problem or something related to your side." Franca raised a detailed question.

"It won't, we isolated from each other last night, our experimental results won't affect each other." Lumian had made preparations yesterday.

Since Franca's consciousness returned to the body of "Luo Fu", he had started preparing.

At 4 p.m., Lumian arrived at Intis Group early and enjoyed an early dinner.

Then, he and Old Xia took over from their colleagues and started patrolling the floors.

After completing this task, they replaced colleagues who were rushing to the cafeteria and started monitoring the surveillance.

Lumian seemed to be observing the situation on different floors, but his attention was entirely on the internal parts of Intis Group, on that area of the 10th floor.

Finally, he saw Zhou Mingrui leave his workstation, walk out of the tech department, and head towards the public restroom in the middle of the corridor.

Lumian stood up abruptly, clutching his stomach and said to Old Xia, "The food was too spicy just now, I need to go to the bathroom."

Without waiting for Old Xia's response, he left the surveillance room directly.

Old Xia turned to look at his back and said almost inaudibly, "He's only been working for a week and already learned to take a shit break?"

In the corridor, Lumian avoided two security personnel coming out of the elevator area, turned into the stairwell, merged into the shadows, and quickly went down.

In less than thirty seconds, he reached the 10th floor.

Then, pretending to be checking a problem he had discovered during his earlier floor patrol, he openly entered the corridor between the Administration Department and Technology Department, arriving outside the restroom.

He looked left and right, then quickly walked into the men's side with small steps.

At this time, Zhou Mingrui was washing his hands at the sink.

Lumian glanced inside the restroom, confirming that no one was at the urinals, and one of the four stalls seemed to be locked.

Zhou Mingrui turned around and just saw him.

Lumian took out a lighter and smiled.

His thumb repeatedly pressed virtually above the lighter, not touching it, yet the lighter produced a series of crimson red flames.

Seeing this, Zhou Mingrui, who already had doubts, instantly became mentally tense.

Is this supernatural power or some kind of magic trick?

Lumian stepped back twice, pressing his other hand on the edge of the men's restroom door frame, quietly activating a black mark on his body.

Bottle of Fiction!

He isolated the area of the sink from the rest of the bathroom and the space outside.

Lumian looked at Zhou Mingrui, who seemed ready to lash out at any moment, and smiled slightly. "I've drunk a beverage called 'Hunter'."

You really do have issues… Zhou Mingrui's eyes narrowed imperceptibly, his doubts and worries of many days finally becoming reality.

Lumian turned his head to glance towards the urinals. "I came to you to warn you. Be careful of that foreign guest called Zaratulstra."

Zaratulstra… Zhou Mingrui had a deep impression of this long name.

He had once been assigned by Mr. Huang as a technical person to receive Zaratulstra, and was responsible for being the interpreter and explainer, but the other party either had a mechanical failure with their flight or encountered severe weather, so he never managed to receive him.

Later, he got sick and took leave after listening to a song, missing Zaratulstra's first visit to the company.

After that, he had seen the group's publicity, knowing what Zaratulstra looked like from videos and photos.

Reminded by Lumian, Zhou Mingrui suddenly remembered that the old man standing at the door of the Business English class before Luo Shan warned him to be careful yesterday seemed to be Zaratulstra.

Was Luo Shan's warning also pointing to Zaratulstra?

How did she know Zaratulstra was visiting Dream Tutoring Classes?

Right, Li Ming was there yesterday…

Are Li Ming and Luo Shan in cahoots?

Luo Fu joined only one day later than Li Ming…

As these thoughts flashed through Zhou Mingrui's mind, Lumian offered no explanation, lifted the Bottle of Fiction, and walked out of the men's restroom.

Zhou Mingrui looked at his back, suddenly feeling that the hidden currents around him were much more fierce and exaggerated than he had imagined.

…

After another round of floor patrol, Lumian stood at the office window, watching as the last golden-red glow of the sunset was swallowed by darkness.

Night had officially arrived.

By this time, Luo Shan, Luo Fu, and Zhou Mingrui had all gotten off work, with the latter having left just a few minutes ago.

Lumian looked at the brightly lit buildings, slightly raising his chin and curling the corners of his mouth, waiting for the possible "exile".

This time, if he was kicked out of the dream, Zaratulstra probably wouldn't be spared either.

A one-for-one exchange was worth it!

Chapter 966: Different Treatment

Time passed minute by minute. Lumian saw office workers continuing to leave the Tech Building, while carts appeared in less conspicuous places along the road, selling fried noodles, stir-fried rice noodles, braised dishes, fried skewers, barbecue and other foods.

Cars drove by with their lights on, still busy.

Nothing's happened yet… Lumian had long lost sight of Zhou Mingrui, but he didn't feel anything unusual.

At this moment, Old Xia walked in.

"Let's go patrol again, so Team Lead Xu doesn't say we're hiding in the office slacking off."

"Okay." Lumian nodded.

Then, he saw Old Xia turn his body somewhat awkwardly.

"What's wrong? Did you hurt your back?" Lumian stopped, still close to the window.

Old Xia turned his head, his expression unchanged as he said, "I'm not… What… ah…"

As he spoke, his lips sometimes paused mid-movement, and his accent changed.

Before Lumian could respond, Old Xia looked away and continued walking towards the door.

His knees, ankles, arms, and shoulders seemed as if filled with lead, heavy and stiff, with a sense of sluggishness.

Lumian suddenly recalled the puppet show he had seen in the basement of the Alone Bar in Trier, feeling as if invisible strings were tied to all of Old Xia's joints.

Old Xia now looks more like a puppet than a human…

Has he… been… marionettized?

My thoughts… also seem to be… lagging…

Am I also… being marionettized?

Lumian was startled. He lowered his head and tried to raise his right arm.

In his view, his arm lifted, paused, lifted again, and paused again, as if watching a video with slow Internet speed.

Indeed… Lumian's first reaction was that the Celestial Worthy was marionettizing him, but he didn't feel the painful discomfort of a fish leaving water or a person leaving air that Franca had described.

He immediately thought of another possibility: Zaratulstra or other subordinates of the Celestial Worthy were hiding in the shadows, trying to deal with him!

Lumian slightly moved his neck, turning his gaze to the window outside.

He found that the vehicles on the road all paused simultaneously, but without the forward surge that would occur with sudden braking.

After a brief freeze, these vehicles started moving again.

Two seconds later, they stopped again.

This made Lumian feel as if he was watching surveillance footage, frame by frame!

Not only the vehicles, but the vendors selling fried noodles and their customers also showed similar, abnormal stuttering.

Such large-scale… marionettizing… in the dream… city… can only… be done by… the Celestial Worthy… or… Mr. Fool…

The anomaly… has come…

Lumian tried hard to concentrate, preparing to actively exit the dream.

Although he wasn't sure why his experience was different from Franca's, the current situation and the changes around him made him feel this wasn't something he could escape or fight against with his personal abilities.

The only solution was to actively exit the dream before becoming a marionette himself.

Of course, Lumian didn't immediately put this into practice, because he didn't need to use the Information Shredder to delete important contacts from his phone—this had already been done in advance. He still had some time to experience the current changes and see if he could observe any hidden information.

After about ten seconds, Lumian's thoughts suddenly became smooth again, no longer feeling as if his head was stuffed with paste.

It's over? No more marionettization? Lumian, already looking outside, noticed that the vehicles on the road no longer had strange pauses.

Those vendors and pedestrians had also returned to normal.

"Why aren't you moving yet? What's on your mind?" Old Xia turned around again, urging Lumian.

Lumian's eyes moved slightly, and he said with a grin, "Ouch, my stomach hurts. I'm going to the bathroom."

With that, he ran off, passing Old Xia and rushing into the public restroom on this floor.

Old Xia looked at his back and cursed amusingly, "Lazy cattle and horses shit and piss the most!"

Lumian entered a stall, locked the door, and quickly used Spirit World Traversal.

He teleported to another public restroom, appearing in midair on the men's side.

Seeing no one in the stalls below, Lumian floated down lightly and locked the door.

This was the hotel where Zaratulstra was staying. Before going to "wait" outside Li Keji's ward at Crimson Moon Hospital, Lumian had come here to scout around—although he had temporarily shelved the plan to actively attack and assassinate Zaratulstra, changing it to using Li Keji to ambush potential enemies, when time allowed, he would still make more preparations, in case Zaratulstra chose to finish off Li Keji indirectly. At that time, the backup plan might become the primary one.

Lumian took out a mirror and placed it on top of the water tank.

Then, he pressed his right hand on it.

His figure suddenly leaned forward, rapidly becoming ethereal, entering the glass mirror surface.

Using the mirror world, he traversed to the glass window inside Zaratulstra's suite.

Under the night sky, this was undoubtedly a real mirror.

Lumian didn't bring his face close to the glass surface, but peered into the room from a distance.

He wasn't sure if Zaratulstra had returned to the hotel yet, maybe he was still out socializing. He also didn't dare use divination to find the other's current location, fearing it might alert a true Seer.

The next second, he saw a figure. The figure wore a black formal suit, with slightly messy white hair, hanging from the main light, swaying gently, like the corpse of a hanged man.

Zaratulstra!

Wh— Lumian was a bit shocked:

Zaratulstra was hanged by Mr. Fool, just like he hanged the Oracle?

Was my afternoon hint to Zhou Mingrui really effective?

I originally only thought about getting Zaratulstra kicked out of the dream, and I was prepared to pay the price of one entry chance for the dream…

As Lumian's thoughts raced, he saw twisted, writhing, transparent maggots falling from Zaratulstra's body.

These worms quickly faded and disappeared as soon as they fell onto the bed and floor, as if they were just illusions.

Lumian then saw a figure walk out of the void.

The figure wore a black formal suit, with all-white hair, a rather thick beard on his face, and eyes so deep blue they were almost pure black without light.

Zaratulstra!

Another Zaratulstra!

A still-living Zaratulstra!

Zaratulstra raised his head, expressionlessly looking at the "himself" hanging from the chandelier.

The hanging figure quickly faded and became transparent like the maggots that had fallen earlier, until it disappeared.

Was the one hanging just now Zaratulstra's Historical Void image?

Did Zaratulstra sense the danger in advance and summon a historical image to replace himself? Otherwise, at Sequence 7, a historical image couldn't last long… Lumian withdrew his gaze, no longer looking at Zaratulstra to avoid being noticed.

The information provided by the Major Arcana card holders about the abilities of the Seer pathway up to Sequence 3 Scholar of Yore was quite detailed. For Sequence 2 Miracle Invoker, it only briefly explained what wishes and miracles were. Beyond that, the Major Arcana card holders hardly mentioned anything. The terms Grafting and Fooling were only briefly mentioned later to explain specific events.

Standing in the void black area behind the mirror, Lumian combined his own experience with Zaratulstra's different encounter to make some guesses about what had just happened.

It's preliminarily confirmed that this was an anomaly brought about by my daytime hint to Zhou Mingrui.

On my side, pedestrians and cars within the range were all affected by marionettization, not just myself… This indicates that my hint to Zhou Mingrui did indeed attract the Celestial Worthy's attention, but because the hint was given during the day, the Celestial Worthy couldn't accurately lock onto me, only roughly circle out a range?

During a collective marionettization, if I resist or struggle using Beyonder powers, I would be quickly locked onto by the Celestial Worthy. If I choose to exit the dream to avoid danger, the Celestial Worthy's goal would also be achieved, making me consume one chance to enter and exit the dream… How cunning…

My reminder to Zhou Mingrui was also perceived by Mr. Fool, and the name Zaratulstra was grasped by Him, so Zaratulstra encountered targeted rapid marionettization, but this was borne by the image from the Historical Void…

Why is Zaratulstra so calm now? Is this what a Faceless is? Or is He certain that before new changes occur, Mr. Fool's gaze will only come once, and if dodged, it's truly dodged?

Tomorrow, we'll get Luo Shan to probe Zhou Mingrui to see if he still remembers the threat of Zaratulstra. If he remembers, and Zaratulstra doesn't encounter marionettization again or end up kicked out of the dream, then it should be that the Celestial Worthy provided help, using the death of a historical projection to resolve this incident…

Can we also use similar methods to avoid being kicked out of the dream?

Or, verbal threats from others and face-to-face stimulation are still different, so Franca and Zaratulstra's experiences are also quite different…

Thinking of this, Lumian quietly looked outside the mirror again.

He saw Zaratulstra walk to the door as if nothing had happened, open it, let several followers in, and discuss tomorrow's business negotiation matters with them.

Lumian felt a bit of regret.

He had just been thinking about whether to take the opportunity to attempt an assassination when Zaratulstra's historical projection was hanging and the real body appeared!

His curse still had the characteristic of not being transferable by paper figurine, as long as it affected the real body.

After glancing at those followers and weighing the possibility of Beyonders among them, Lumian silently left the glass window that could serve as a mirror and traversed back to that bathroom.

He had just left for two seconds when Zaratulstra and his followers in the room either half-turned their bodies or turned their heads, all casting their gazes towards the glass window at the edge of the living room reflecting the night scene.

…

In a cheap motel.

Anthony, who was self-isolating after contacting Peng Deng, sat on the edge of the bed, waiting for a possible anomaly.

Chapter 967: A New Problem

Anthony hadn't drawn the curtains in his room, as he still needed to observe the situation outside.

This was to compare with his own condition.

After sitting for a while, he stood up and walked to the window, admiring the city scene that was still glittering even in the deep night.

At this moment, he felt a strong dizziness.

He immediately realized that the air around him had been suddenly drained. No, a more accurate description was that he had been "thrown" out of the world, separated from the air.

At the same time, his thoughts began to become confused and sluggish. His hands involuntarily reached for his throat, wanting to pull out his trachea and plug it back into the original world.

This is very similar to… Franca's… description…

Contact with… Peng Deng… also leads to… being kicked out… of the dream…

More importantly… I contacted… the target… during the day… and didn't hint at… the existence of… supernatural powers… or hidden… bizarre events…

Contacting… Zhou Mingrui… in this way… wouldn't cause… problems…

Is Peng Deng… more special than… Zhou Mingrui?

Anthony calmly examined his own state, thinking about the process of this experiment.

When he felt he could no longer resist the tendency to become a marionette, he used that force trying to kick him out to actively exit the dream.

He opened his eyes and saw the dark ceiling and the crimson moonlight shining through the thick curtains.

This scene was not present in the dream city.

Anthony had heard from Franca about the situation in reality. After briefly confirming the things he was carrying and the state of his body, he got out of bed and walked towards the bathroom.

He had also planned to go to the bathroom in the dream city.

After a while, Anthony heard a knocking sound on the door.

Without needing to ask, he naturally knew that Madam Justice and Madam Susie were outside.

Anthony opened the door and, as expected, saw the Major Arcana card holder and the gentle, intelligent golden retriever.

Before he could greet them, Madam Justice asked in a soft voice, "Why did you suddenly leave the dream?"

"I was kicked out," Anthony replied, slightly confused.

Madam Justice shook her head. "Although I can no longer influence Mr. Fool's dream, I have been monitoring the changes in the dream.

"I didn't notice any signs of you being rejected by the dream."

"But…" Anthony didn't question Madam Justice's statement. He recounted in full detail how he had contacted Peng Deng, how he had self-isolated, and what he had just experienced.

Madam Justice didn't interrupt Anthony's words, listening patiently and attentively to his statement. Then, she nodded gently and said, "I believe what you felt was inner fear. Your fear turned the description from Two of Cups into reality, making you mistakenly believe you were being kicked out of the dream, so you chose to actively leave.

"As a Psychiatrist, both you and I know very well that this level of fear, fear without warning, is not normal at all. This is the anomaly brought about by your first contact with Peng Deng during the day."

"Fear… the contact with Peng Deng triggered my fear of being kicked out of the dream, and let it reach its peak in the early hours, evolving into an almost tangible hallucination?" Anthony recalled the previous events and agreed with Madam Justice's speculation. He muttered thoughtfully, "Is this also a manifestation of being watched by that Celestial Worthy, a symbol of one of His abilities? Or is Peng Deng's uniqueness not directly related to that Celestial Worthy, but has another source?"

"We're not sure either, because Peng Deng's role and position in the dream city are too special. We put him in the last few steps when it comes to confirming the situation. Unfortunately, we couldn't influence the dream anymore before we got to that part of the process. This time can be considered our Tarot Club's first real contact with Peng Deng…" At this point, Madam Justice's emerald-like eyes moved slightly, her mouth half-open, stopping her subsequent words.

After two seconds, she said thoughtfully, "Perhaps the fact that 'we put Peng Deng at the end to probe' itself has some problems, but there are too many possible reasons. Fooling can certainly achieve this…

"We also don't know if that Celestial Worthy can unconsciously trigger the fear in your heart and let it burst at a specific moment. We know very little about the authority and corresponding existence symbols of Sequence 0 of the Seer pathway, especially the latter."

Although Madam Justice didn't finish all her speculations, Anthony roughly knew what her possible thoughts might be. He said carefully, "We need to design a more detailed experimental plan specifically for Peng Deng in the future to determine the source of the problem.

"What we can be sure of now is that there is a certain difference between him and Zhou Mingrui. The anomalies that appear due to contact with them under the same conditions are different."

Madam Justice smiled and said, "Your contact with Peng Deng this time has been very informative for me.

"Hmm… don't rush back to the dream, stay outside for three hours first, walk around the villa, eat something.

"This doesn't mean there will be a problem if you go back now, you weren't kicked out, we don't have that concern. This is just a simple adjustment to your psychological state: after staying in the dream city for a long time, it's easy to confuse reality and dreams. Since you've already left, it's best to re-experience reality and deepen the corresponding psychological cognition."

"Yes, Madam Justice." As a Psychiatrist, Anthony naturally understood the meaning of these words.

To use a new term he learned in the dream city: prevention is better than cure.

…

After returning to the Tech Building, Lumian continued the task of patrolling the floors with Old Xia until they got off work at 12:30 a.m.

He directly teleported to the vicinity of Crimson Moon Hospital, then used the mirror world to reach outside Li Keji's ward, waiting for possible attacks.

Of course, he didn't stay in the same position all the time, nor did he always remain at Crimson Moon Hospital.

He picked out three time periods he thought were most suitable for assassination, only ambushing during these three periods, and being normal the rest of the time such as sleeping at home or being on his phone.

During those three time periods, he would randomly choose one of six hiding spots each time, with no two consecutive times being the same.

This was to guard against Zaratulstra and the Celestial Worthy's other subordinates thinking that someone might be using Li Keji as bait to ambush them, and launching targeted attacks in return.

At daybreak, Lumian went out to buy breakfast.

On the way, he deliberately turned into a quiet alley and met Jenna.

This was arranged by both parties.

Jenna handed Ludwig over to Lumian, as she had an interview at Hall Film Company today and couldn't watch over the child.

Lumian looked around and told Jenna about what happened last night, asking her to share it with Franca.

Lumian finally said, "At present, it seems that contacting Zhou Mingrui during the day and hinting at the existence of supernatural powers also carries risks, but won't receive precise strikes. However, after being remembered by Zhou Mingrui and knowing the corresponding danger, one will encounter rapid marionettization at night, which can possibly be avoided. Currently, we can't determine if it's an isolated attack. I'll observe Zaratulstra's situation again tonight.

"Get Luo Shan to find Zhou Mingrui and remind him about the Zaratulstra issue again, see if he has forgotten the corresponding things. Don't worry, after I directly mentioned Zaratulstra yesterday, Zhou Mingrui should have guessed that I'm on the same side as Franca and Luo Shan. He doesn't know about your and Anthony's existence for now."

Jenna had just tersely acknowledged when both of them almost simultaneously received a friend request from "An Ruide".

After exchanging glances, Lumian gestured to Jenna not to add him yet, and accepted the request himself.

After An Ruide talked about last night's situation and Madam Justice's guesses, he confirmed the other's identity and sent a voice message with a smile: "Let's talk in detail when we get back to the rental house. I've made some significant discoveries on my end too."

"It seems Peng Deng is even more special than we imagined…" Lumian then told Jenna about Anthony's experience.

Jenna listened carefully, added Anthony back, and waved goodbye to Lumian and Ludwig.

…

In the administrative department of the Tech Building.

When Franca and Luo Shan went to the bathroom together, taking advantage of the moment when no one else was there, she told the other about the request relayed by Jenna.

Luo Shan asked nervously yet excitedly, "How should I hint?"

Franca used her Instigator expertise to help come up with a set of talking points.

After about half an hour, Zhou Mingrui, wearing a gray shirt, came to the administrative department again, asking Luo Shan if there was anything going on in the company recently, saying they needed to work overtime if there was something, and even if there wasn't, they still needed to work a bit extra.

Great question! Luo Shan praised Zhou Mingrui in her heart, and said with a smile, "The merger negotiations between the group and a large company have entered the formal process.

"The boss of that company is Zaratulstra, who has visited twice."

When saying the name "Zaratulstra", Luo Shan looked at Zhou Mingrui, trying to read the changes in his expression.

Zhou Mingrui said in realization, "Previously, Mr. Huang even grabbed me to pick him up at the airport, to be an interpreter and guide, but unfortunately, I didn't get to."

"When he came to visit the company, you weren't here either. Seems like you were on sick leave? Yesterday he came again but stayed on the 16th floor the whole time and didn't visit other departments, so you haven't met him at all." Luo Shan said deliberately.

This was the script Franca had prepared for her.

Zhou Mingrui paused for a moment, then said thoughtfully, "Maybe there's some force in the universe preventing me from meeting him."

After chatting for a few more sentences, Zhou Mingrui left Luo Shan's workstation and walked towards the door.

As he passed by Franca's desk, Franca suddenly spoke. "Watch out!"

Zhou Mingrui quickly turned sideways, looking at Franca.

Franca pointed at the wet marks on the ground and said, "I just spilled some water on the ground, it's a bit slippery, be careful."

"Oh, oh, you scared me," Zhou Mingrui responded with a smile.

He walked around the wet area and left the administrative department. The smile on his face gradually faded.

Luo Fu told me to be careful? Luo Shan just mentioned Zaratulstra…

Are they together telling me to be careful of Zaratulstra?

Hmm, they are indeed on the same side as Li Ming…

In the administrative department, Luo Shan sent a message to Franca: "He has some vigilance towards that enemy, he probably hasn't forgotten your warning."

Chapter 968: The Actor

Hall Film Company, Talent Department.

Today, Jenna hadn't applied extravagant makeup, nor had she deliberately made herself look ugly. She simply maintained her natural "coloring" as a local with black hair and brown eyes, with softer facial features. She was simple and fresh, fully displaying her natural beauty and feminine charm, causing many passing employees and fellow interviewees to turn their heads.

"Next, Jian Na," called out the employee at the conference room door.

Jenna stood up, recalling the education she had received at the Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons, and walked in gracefully.

The four interviewers, two men and two women, who were writing and drawing, looked up at the sound of her greeting. Their eyes all lit up, though with subtle differences in emotion.

"Jian Na, graduated from the Performance Department of the National Drama Academy?" One of the female interviewers read out Jenna's educational background.

This was the identity that Madam Justice had crafted for Jenna. As far as Jenna knew, Madam Justice's corresponding image in the dream was Holly, the actual executive of Hall Film Company and the producer of "The Great Pirate 3".

In other words, she was the boss of these interviewers present.

And Hall Film Company was just a non-core industry under the Hall Group, whose foundation was various banks. In the dream city, its financial power was second only to the Intis Group.

"Yes." Jenna didn't hide her pleasant voice.

After the interviewers asked various questions, the initial interviewer drew out a card and handed it to Jenna.

"Please perform a segment according to the requirements on this."

Seeing Jenna's clear and beautiful appearance and clean aura, this interviewer deliberately chose a performance themed around "coquettishness" to test her.

Jenna took the card, but before she could read the topic, she heard the interviewer add, "You can't put on makeup or change clothes on the spot. You need to present the content of the topic through your own performance."

Jenna wasn't nervous at all, but rather slightly excited.

As an apprentice at the Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons, she had dreamed of such performance opportunities countless times.

She lowered her head to look at the topic and couldn't help but smile.

She had life experience in being "coquettish".

She lowered her head to look at the topic and couldn't help but smile.

She had life experience in being "coquettish".

When Jenna raised her head, her eyes were already passionate and bold, as if hiding thousands of words.

The Showy Diva was back on stage!

As her gaze swept over them, both male and female examiners inexplicably felt their hearts tremble.

Halfway through Jenna's performance, some examiners had already started drinking water.

I haven't even used Charm yet… Jenna was proud of her performance.

She hadn't even made any overly vulgar movements.

"Phew…" An interviewer involuntarily let out a breath as Jenna finished her performance.

She asked, "Do you have a boyfriend?"

"Yes," Jenna answered promptly, but didn't mention that she also had a child.

It wasn't mentioned in her resume either. After all, Ludwig's household registration was with Lumian, and she and Lumian weren't married. Unless the Hall Film Company hired private detectives to investigate deeply, they definitely wouldn't find out.

The interviewers couldn't help but exchange glances.

What a great talent, possibly the kind that could outshine others in the future. Why would she already have a boyfriend?

Girl, wake up! You're too young to be in love!

Never mind, once she enters the industry and sees what real luxury is, she'll quickly break up with her previous boyfriend. Before that, just make sure to keep it confidential.

The initial female interviewer withdrew her gaze from her colleagues and said to Jenna,

"We'll get back to you with an answer soon. Um, try not to leave the city for the next three days."

"Alright," Jenna bowed and left the meeting room.

Since this was in the Talent Department, where one might run into big-name stars at any time, there were dedicated staff to escort her out to prevent wandering and unauthorized photos.

The young woman escorting Jenna out of the Talent Department saw that this interviewee was not only beautiful but also had a unique kind of beauty, with great potential to become a big star in the future. Wanting to build a relationship, she started introducing which office belonged to who, and which area was exclusive to whom…

Jenna was also very interested in this, because Lumian had reminded her to "pay attention to the actor playing Gehrman Sparrow, see if there's anything special about him".

The two chatted happily as they slowly walked towards the exit of the Talent Department.

At this moment, several people came in from outside, led by someone wearing sunglasses, about 1.8 meters tall.

Having already entered the Talent Department, this person took off his sunglasses, revealing a face that Jenna found somewhat familiar.

He looked about 30% similar to Zhou Mingrui, with a smaller head, more delicate features, and more pronounced contours. If Jenna hadn't been specifically looking for traces of Zhou Mingrui on his face, she probably wouldn't have noticed the resemblance.

This was the actor playing Gehrman Sparrow, a mixed-race man named Jia Yu.

Jenna withdrew her gaze with some disappointment.

If Jia Yu himself had looked 60-70% similar to the Gehrman Sparrow he played, or very close to Zhou Mingrui, relying on makeup to become Gehrman Sparrow, then Jenna would have thought he might be somewhat special, a symbol of some key issue in the dream. But now, Jenna thought it was unlikely.

No wonder Franca said there was no need to observe and contact the actor playing Gehrman Sparrow, and Madam Justice didn't mention Jia Yu in the information…

However, Franca's reason was really strange, saying that Jia Yu means 'fake jade', representing that this person is fake, no need to delve deeper. But 'Jia' and 'fake' have completely different meanings. Indeed, only with Franca as a guide can some things become clear at a glance, and some symbols be easily interpreted… Jenna mused to herself as she passed by Jia Yu and his group.

Those people instinctively turned their heads to look at Jenna's back, seeming to have been struck by her beauty.

After leaving the Talent Department, Jenna asked curiously, "Was that just now Jia Yu?"

The female employee escorting her out nodded.

"Yes, The Great Pirate 3 made him famous overnight."

"Does he have an English name? He looks very much like a foreigner," Jenna asked casually.

If Jia Yu's English name was Klein Moretti, then it would still be worth continuing to observe and make deeper contact.

The female employee thought for a moment and said, "No, he just has some foreign ancestry."

As Jenna was feeling disappointed, the female employee lowered her voice and said,

"Actually, he wasn't initially chosen to play Gehrman Sparrow. We had booked another actor, who was much more famous than him at the time, a real international star."

"Couldn't agree on the price?" Jenna asked.

The female employee shook her head.

"Car accident, became a vegetable."

"Ah?" Jenna was first shocked, then several phrases she had seen while scrolling through videos recently flashed through her mind: Blade flashes, bloody storm, fierce struggle…

"What a pity," the female employee sighed.

Jenna's eyes moved slightly as she asked, "What was that star's name? I haven't heard about the actor being replaced due to a car accident…"

The female employee had a look of reminiscence.

"I can't remember his name either. That incident left a deep impression on me, but I just can't recall the name… It's just on the tip of my tongue…"

"Then I'll look it up myself when I get back." Jenna felt increasingly that there was something off about this matter.

She smiled and waved goodbye, leaving Hall Film Company.

…

At Xinhong District, in the rented apartment.

Lumian received a message from Jenna, informing him about the matters related to the actor playing Gehrman Sparrow.

Lumian received a message from Jenna, informing him about the matters related to the actor playing Gehrman Sparrow.

There was indeed news about a star becoming a vegetable due to a car accident, but whether it was the news itself or the comments below, they were all vague about the name and specific time, as if avoiding something.

Even the almighty internet can't find out who it is… Lumian stood up and started pacing in the living room cum dining room.

He suddenly thought of someone and picked up his phone, finding "A name that leaves a deep impression on you".

"Have you heard of this news? Do you know who it is?"

Below the text converted by the voice input method was the news content that Lumian had copied and pasted.

After a while, Anderson Hood replied to him: "See? If I had turned myself in, who would provide you with intelligence?"

He still hasn't forgotten about last time? Isn't he being a bit petty? Lumian grumbled to himself, then smiled and brought the phone to his mouth: "Then I would help you break out of prison."

After twenty to thirty seconds, Anderson replied: "But I don't want to break out of prison. You don't need to help me go against this city.

"The star who had the car accident is called An Xiaotian; he's still lying in a special ward at Crimson Moon Hospital."

"An Xiaotian?" Lumian looked towards Anthony.

As Franca would say, everyone with their names beginning with 'An' might have been one family five hundred years ago.

Anthony thought for a few seconds, just as he had an inspiration, Lumian was already muttering to himself, "Antigonus?"

This was one of the five dukes of the Tudor Empire, the previous Fool Uniqueness accommodator.

Thinking of the five dukes of the Tudor Empire, Lumian, who had already encountered three of them in the dream, inexplicably felt a bit more pressure with the lingering aura of the Blood Emperor.

"It's quite fitting with the dream logic for Mr. Fool's manifestation to be played by the previous Fool…" Lumian nodded slowly.

"But having a car accident isn't normal, what does this symbolize?" Anthony said thoughtfully.

"Does it symbolize that the mental imprint left by Antigonus in The Fool Uniqueness is in a vegetative state?" Lumian tried to interpret.

He immediately added, "A more suspicious point about this matter is that Madam Justice didn't mention it in the information.

"Whether An Xiaotian is the dream manifestation corresponding to Antigonus or not, as the originally planned actor for Gehrman Sparrow who had a car accident and became a vegetative patient, Madam Justice should have mentioned it in the information, both emotionally and rationally.

"If he is Antigonus, then we should be instructed to dig deeper into the issue. If not, why not simply explain a few sentences to prevent us from wasting time on this aspect?"

Anthony pondered for a while and said, "Maybe she forgot."

And for the Major Arcana card holders, "forgetting" itself could indicate that there were issues with An Xiaotian's existence.

Lumian, standing, looked at Anthony and said thoughtfully, "Later, you go to Star Dream Provisions Store to retrieve the letter, and write about An Xiaotian's matter in a letter and mail it out.

"I'll find time to go to Crimson Moon Hospital later to 'visit' An Xiaotian."

Chapter 969: Conspirer's Sensitivity

Star Dream Provisions Store.

With Ludwig tagging along, Anthony received the reply letter from the Major Arcana card holders from the shop owner.

"In reality, Rozanne is under strict protection from the Church of Evernight Goddess. As long as she's asleep, there will definitely be Beyonders monitoring her dream state. The Church of Evernight Goddess are experts in this area…"

"On the Future, Frank Lee hasn't shown any more abnormalities so far. He's the same as before. Regarding Li Keji in the dream, our bottom line is that we can't let him be corrupted by the power of the Great Mother, nor can we let him become a puppet of the Celestial Worthy through death and rebirth…"

Reading this, Anthony seemed to hear the inner thoughts of the Major Arcana card holders: "If necessary, you can actively eliminate Li Keji and destroy the body. In any case, we can't let him be corrupted or exploited. Death won't affect the real person in reality."

Lumian thought the same… Anthony hadn't personally witnessed Li Keji's mushrooms, he had only heard Lumian recount the other's ideas, which he found somewhat reasonable but also permeated with bewildering madness.

He continued reading the rest of the letter.

"We can only confirm that Anderson Hood is currently in Anderson, the capital of Lenburg, but we can't find him. We will communicate with the Church of Knowledge later."

The fact that even the Major Arcana card holders from different pathways can't find him proves that Anderson Hood is hiding very well. Perhaps he has even received protection from higher powers… Is the communication with the Church of Knowledge a way to confirm if they had provided help to Anderson Hood? If not, things would be even more complex and troublesome… Anthony folded the letter and stuffed it into his jeans pocket.

He then immediately dropped the letter he had written in advance into the silver-trimmed black mailbox.

…

Tech Building.

Lumian was already at work. While patrolling the floors, he pondered how to more effectively monitor Zaratulstra's situation, and where to go tonight to observe this enemy's state—Lumian wanted to see if Zaratulstra would still encounter hostility in his dreams at night after Luo Shan reminded Zhou Mingrui again, deepening the latter's impression of Zaratulstra.

Reaching the seventh floor, taking advantage of Old Xia's trip to the bathroom, Lumian took out his phone, opened the online shopping platform Franca had mentioned, and typed a few words using voice input: "Pinhole cameras…"

He felt that although Zaratulstra was also suppressed to Sequence 7, he was essentially still an Angel with many mysterious and bizarre abilities. Relying solely on the mirror world to spy on him was obviously unrealistic; this could only be done occasionally.

So, Lumian planned to try scientific methods, to try pinhole cameras and bugs. Even if Zaratulstra later discovered these little devices, as long as he couldn't trace them back to Lumian, there wouldn't be any problem.

After completing the input, Lumian didn't press the "search" button.

He remembered Franca saying this was illegal, part of the black and gray industry.

Let's not even mention whether regular platforms sell these, but as a Child of God, why should I personally get involved in the black and gray industry? I'm a law-abiding citizen… Lumian half-jokingly, half-mockingly closed the app and switched to WeChat, entering the conversational window with "Intis Group Grimm".

He calmly input: "Prepare some pinhole cameras and bugs for me, preferably with user manuals.

"Also, give me Zaratulstra's itinerary for the next two days."

Zaratulstra's safety in the dream city was jointly managed by his personal bodyguards and the Intis Group's security department, so Lumian knew last night that Zaratulstra was most likely at the hotel, and headed straight there to observe the situation. Of course, this wasn't entirely certain; Zaratulstra could change his itinerary at any time. He was the one in control, just like when he suddenly decided to visit two tutoring centers, Lumian hadn't received any warning from Grimm beforehand.

"Alright." Grimm quickly replied to Lumian.

By the time Lumian finished patrolling the floors and returned to his office, opening the drawer that belonged to him, he immediately saw two sets of pinhole cameras and bugs quietly placed inside.

Lumian pulled out the paper placed on top of them and memorized Zaratulstra's itinerary from 5 pm to 10pm today.

As the sky approached complete darkness, he found an excuse to go to the bathroom and teleported away.

He first used the mirror world to hide the pinhole cameras and bugs in inconspicuous places in Zaratulstra's room, erased traces of his presence, and completed anti-divination using Mirror Substitution. Then he returned to the Tech Building and arrived at Mr. Huang's exclusive 16th floor through the mirror.

Tonight, Mr. Huang would host a business dinner here to entertain Zaratulstra and his entourage.

Lumian was very grateful for Mr. Huang's fondness for mirrors and gold foil decorations, which allowed him to easily find the best position to observe Zaratulstra from behind a mirror-like object on the ceiling.

The elderly man had just toasted a glass of red wine with Mr. Huang and appeared completely normal, while outside the window it was truly night.

Time ticked by, and Lumian quietly watched them drink wine, eat, and chat casually.

Suddenly, Mr. Huang leaned back in his chair, raised his head, and as if pondering a question, cast his gaze towards the mirror-like object where Lumian was hiding.

Lumian instinctively withdrew his body, moving away from the mirror surface.

Did Mr. Huang sense me?

Can he detect spying from behind mirrors?

He's just a dream projection, not Emperor Roselle… Was that just a pure coincidence just now, or in Mr. Fool's subconscious cognition, is Mr. Huang hiding Beyonder powers? Thinking of this, Lumian suddenly remembered a piece of information Franca had told him: Louis Gustav of the Emperor faction has been very irritable lately because he couldn't contact a key figure, and that key figure was suspected to be the mirrored Emperor Roselle.

There's a whiff of conspiracy… Lumian's Conspirer's intuition immediately gave him a suspicion: Could it be that the mirrored Emperor Roselle has also entered the dream?

She had previously cooperated with the subordinates of evil gods and Celestial Worthy, did She enter the dream with the help of the Celestial Worthy's side? After all, She's not a true god, hasn't accommodated the Uniqueness, and doesn't have special items, so it's unlikely She could come in on Her own…

Is She working with Zaratulstra, attempting to erode and influence Emperor Roselle's dream manifestation, Huang Tao, until they control and replace him?

She is essentially a Mirror People, so it's only natural that She can detect someone spying from behind mirrors…

If She and Zaratulstra control the Intis Group, given the Group's influence and terrifying cash flow, the balance of victory will surely tilt rapidly!

While we focused on Zhou Mingrui, Li Keji, and An Xiaotian, Zaratulstra quietly raided our vault…

Normally, given that Princess Bernadette seems to still be able to enter the dream, Mr. Huang should be on our side…

But why did Mr. Huang so obviously look in my direction?

She could have pretended not to notice and waited for an opportunity to suddenly attack…

The more Lumian thought about it, the more he felt cold sweat breaking out on his back.

Zaratulstra isn't a Conspirer, but he's as good as one!

Indeed, my initial idea wasn't wrong—we should actively attack, assassinate him, or trade one for one, kick him out… As these thoughts raced through Lumian's mind, he pressed against the mirror surface again, looking down.

At this time, Mr. Huang had already withdrawn his gaze.

But Zaratulstra noticed his previous behavior and glanced at the ceiling, asking, "What were you looking at?"

Mr. Huang gently swirled the red wine in his glass and smiled, answering, "Thinking about some things."

Zaratulstra didn't ask further and started talking about other matters.

Lumian observed for several more minutes, confirming that Zaratulstra showed no abnormalities after nightfall.

In other words, after being punished once, Mr. Fool's subconscious will consider this person completely marionettized. Even if Zhou Mingrui hears the corresponding name again, deepening his impression, it won't alert the dream's subconscious, unless Zaratulstra does something new to stimulate him, bringing new changes? Lumian speculated about the reasons for the current situation as he left using Mirror Traversal.

"What took you so long?" Old Xia casually asked when he saw him walk back into the office.

Lumian sighed and said, "Ah, I'm the kind of person who gets diarrhea when I eat excessively spicy stuff, and gets constipated when I don't eat spicy food."

Old Xia enthusiastically started chatting about the topic of "spicy food".

…

Late at night, Lumian teleported to the vicinity of Crimson Moon Hospital, continuously flashing between the glass windows of different special wards through the mirror world.

After a minute, he stopped.

Before him was a dark hospital room with only a bit of moonlight, and his spiritual intuition told him that the person in the room was An Xiaotian, whom he was looking for.

Lumian looked down at the hospital bed from above and saw a person connected to many machines and tubes.

The person's head was immersed in darkness, only vaguely showing decent facial features, but the beard seemed to have been only trimmed short due to not being shaved for a long time, growing up to just below the cheeks, thick and black, in tufts.

Lumian observed for a while, then walked out of the glass window and approached the bedside.

He saw that the comatose patient's head was shaved bald, with multiple suture marks on top that looked like giant centipedes.

A scene spontaneously formed in Lumian's mind: the head forcibly split open, the brain violently extracted, then something unknown placed in the emptied space before suturing shut…

A symbol? Just as this thought flashed through Lumian's mind, he saw on the monitor that the heartbeat became intense, with peaks and valleys rapidly alternating, bringing a beeping alarm sound.

Lumian instinctively stepped back, moving to the window, ready to leave at any moment.

At the same time, he saw that all of the patient's monitoring data had changed, becoming very active.

As soon as I arrive, there's an anomaly? Is it caused by something on me… There are too many possible reasons, I don't even know which one it could be… Lumian once again turned his gaze to the patient himself.

The patient's fingers suddenly moved imperceptibly.

Chapter 970: Linkage

In the dark hospital room lit only by a bit of moonlight, Lumian saw An Xiaotian, who had been in a vegetative state for over a year, move his fingers ever so slightly.

While surprised, Lumian wasn't afraid. Instead, he smiled.

An anomaly is good; anomalies reveal more information!

How could I interpret the secrets hidden in this matter if there were no changes?

Lumian leaned against the window, staring at An Xiaotian on the hospital bed, waiting for more anomalies.

An Xiaotian's fingers moved again.

The darkness in the room seemed to deepen.

Lumian's gaze suddenly turned to the doorway of the hospital room.

The door opened silently, and a nurse wearing a white cap entered.

Lumian didn't immediately teleport away, but hid in the shadow cast by the curtains.

He saw the nurse, with a blank expression, busily moving around the bed, sometimes adjusting equipment, sometimes changing IV bags, but her hands were always empty, and there was nothing currently hanging on the IV stand.

Through the open door, Lumian noticed that the dimly lit corridor was suddenly filled with more than a dozen people.

There were nurses pushing empty carts, women in patient gowns walking back and forth, men walking while moving their arms, as lively as if it were midday.

But it was late at night, and they weren't making any sound, their faces completely devoid of expression.

Lumian thought for a moment, then deliberately walked out of the shadows.

The nurse busying herself by An Xiaotian's side didn't even glance at him, as if he were just a patch of air.

Lumian walked out of the hospital room at a leisurely pace, placing himself among the coming and going nurses and patients.

When the man moving his arms was about to bump into him, he naturally sidestepped Lumian, never looking at him.

Lumian stood with his hands in his pockets, watching them as if they were in different worlds.

The nurse pushing the empty treatment cart turned and walked straight towards Lumian.

Just as they were about to collide, the nurse suddenly stopped, opened her mouth, and said one word, "Be…"

Her voice abruptly cut off, and she walked around Lumian with a blank expression.

Behind her was the female patient who had been walking. She also came up to Lumian and began to speak, "Care…"

Be, care? Be careful of what? Lumian's spirits lifted, feeling that this trip hadn't been in vain.

The female patient also only said one word before walking around Lumian. Behind her was another nurse.

Just as that nurse opened her mouth, Lumian suddenly heard a buzzing sound.

The already dimmed lights at the end of the corridor began to flicker, alternating rapidly between bright and dark.

Almost simultaneously, Lumian felt a sense of being rejected by his surroundings, an uncomfortable feeling of being about to be squeezed out.

He saw the nurse in front of him rapidly step backward, the female patient who had just walked around him retreated to his front, then continued backing up.

In this way, the scenes Lumian had previously witnessed and the events he had experienced began to rapidly rewind, as if he had accidentally clicked a corresponding button while watching surveillance footage.

A strong fear suddenly erupted in Lumian's heart, which even the endurance of an Ascetic couldn't suppress.

He felt that if he stayed here any longer, he would encounter something terribly frightening, and might even be directly locked onto by that Celestial Worthy, after which he would no longer have the chance to come to the dream city!

Without hesitation, he activated the black mark on his right shoulder and disappeared from the hospital ward corridor.

Lumian's teleportation destination wasn't the rented apartment in Xinhong District, but the entrance of Star Dream Provisions Store.

At this time, Star Dream Provisions Store was already closed, but not far away was the Dream City Police Department, with quite a few rooms in the corresponding building still lit up.

Lumian calmly examined his own feelings and found that the fear was rapidly receding, and the uncomfortable sense of being rejected by his surroundings was gone.

Is it an anomaly, or rather, a gaze directed at that area? There's no problem once I leave?

Those nurses and patients were being controlled by An Xiaotian in his vegetative state, trying to tell me something, which resulted in triggering an anomaly in the dream?

What he wanted to tell me must be crucial, to have triggered such a dramatic change, not giving him any chance to continue… If Franca were to find Zhou Mingrui at night and try to tell him everything in detail, it would probably be like just now, only getting started before being forcibly rewound or kicked out of the dream…

What exactly was An Xiaotian trying to warn me about… be careful of whom?

There were too many potential subjects to guess, and Lumian couldn't find a train of thought for the moment.

He felt it necessary to "contact" An Xiaotian again, but the prerequisite was to find a way to bypass the restrictions and let him say at least two more words.

If the information An Xiaotian wanted to convey was crucial, Lumian wouldn't be stingy with the number of times he could be kicked out of the dream. Even if future opportunities would be consumed one by one, he was willing to do it.

It's no big deal if I'm completely kicked out; I still have teammates.

As long as we can get the crucial information, sacrificing myself is very worthwhile.

I must have trust in my teammates!

…

Late at night, in Room 2303 in Dechuang Garden.

Franca was awakened by the vibration of her phone.

She picked it up and saw that it was a voice call request from "The Idiot".

Uh… Before Franca could answer, Lumian had already hung up and sent a message instead.

The reason he did this was that messages and voice call records could be deleted using the Information Shredder, while the content of voice calls couldn't and might be monitored.

Glancing at the awakened Jenna, Franca began to read Lumian's message carefully.

As she read, Franca's expression changed.

She lowered her voice and said, "Mr. Huang might be problematic…

"While Zaratulstra has been seemingly trying to contact Zhou Mingrui lately, he's actually using the mirrored Roselle to erode and influence Mr. Huang… That's so damn insidious!"

Jenna leaned over and finished reading Lumian's message.

She also couldn't help but frown. "If Mr. Huang sides with the Celestial Worthy, things will get complicated…"

"It's more than just complicated. With people, money, and influence at their disposal, what can we even do? Should we take Zhou Mingrui to rent a place near the police station, where Mr. Huang can't influence those jobs?" The more Franca thought about it, the more her head ached. "How can we confirm whether Mr. Huang is showing any abnormalities? If he suddenly announces that he's had gender reassignment surgery, does that mean he's been completely controlled by the mirrored Roselle?"

Jenna thought for a moment and then said, "If Mr. Huang is really controlled and can't be saved, we can sacrifice one person to kill Mr. Huang and let Bernie Huang become the CEO of the Intis Group."

"Good idea…" Franca's mouth twitched slightly, "If Mr. Huang is really controlled, it means he's the mirrored Roselle, a Beyonder with an Angel-level Sequence, and moreover, he has Zaratulstra's help and powerful security personnel protecting him. It would be difficult for the four of us to assassinate him together, let alone just one person going to do it…"

At this point, Franca tried to find humor in the grim situation.

"Besides, Bernie Huang has two younger brothers, it's not certain that she would inherit the CEO position…"

As she spoke, Franca suddenly froze.

She and Jenna exchanged glances, their eyes lighting up as they blurted out simultaneously, "Bernie Huang!"

The best candidate to confirm whether Mr. Huang has shown any abnormalities was Bernie Huang!

By solely relying on Franca and Jenna, unless they forcibly infiltrated and secretly observed, it would be a matter of luck whether they could even encounter Mr. Huang, let alone test him.

"How do we contact Bernie Huang and persuade her?" Franca's first reaction was to find Luo Shan and ask if she had Bernie Huang's phone number or WeChat.

As her eyes moved, Franca's smile blossomed, her face full of pride.

"I have an idea!"

"What idea?" Jenna asked expectantly.

Franca cleared her throat and replied, "The one we should be looking for isn't Bernie Huang, but Bernadette.

"We'll write to the Major Arcana card holders tomorrow, asking them to contact Queen Mystic. If Bernadette still has a chance to enter the dream, she will naturally come to handle it. We don't need to persuade her or instigate her.

"The dream world and the real world, online and offline, can be linked!"

Jenna nodded slowly and said, "If Queen Mystic can no longer come in, we'll then consider how to contact and Instigate Bernie Huang."

"We can formulate the plan now." Franca was no longer sleepy.

Jenna thought seriously for a few seconds and said, "This matter is very important. I think we shouldn't wait until tomorrow to write the letter. I'll actively leave the dream now and tell the Major Arcana card holder on duty in the villa about Mr. Huang's problem."

Franca fell into a brief contemplative silence before replying, Franca pondered for a moment and said, "Alright, it's not frequent entry and exit from the dream, just an occasional instance. There shouldn't be any problems, and it won't affect the number of times we can be kicked out of the dream."

Jenna immediately changed her posture to sit up.

In her current situation, she couldn't rely on the dream's rejection to actively leave, so she had to use Cogitation to enter that state of emptying her thoughts, then imagine herself jumping from a high place.

In the sensation of weightless free fall, Jenna suddenly woke up.

She opened her eyes, got out of bed, and confirmed whether she had returned to reality.

Then, she went out the door and down the stairs.

Tonight, the one guarding them in the living room was Madam Justice, wearing a white dress with gold decorations.

"Is there an emergency?" Madam Justice stood up and asked.

Without Jenna needing to emphasize further, she already knew the seriousness of the issue.

Jenna nodded and recounted Lumian's guesses, Franca's intelligence, and Zaratulstra's recent interactions with Huang Tao.

Madam Justice nodded slightly. "We will contact Queen Mystic immediately."

She raised her right hand and quickly sketched a small bird in midair.

The bird was transparent and dreamlike. It chirped a few times, circled around and descended towards Madam Justice, entering her body and disappearing without a trace.

"This is a dream messenger I made. It can travel to specific targets through the collective unconscious sea," Madam Justice briefly explained.

She paused, then continued, "Since you've returned to reality, I'll tell you about An Xiaotian directly.

"At that time, I had already been kicked out of the dream once and started planning to shoot 'The Great Pirate 3'. This was not only because I wanted to present Gehrman Sparrow's experiences to Mr. Fool's dream manifestation, trying to awaken his memories and make him wake up, but also because I was exploring how to realize a sentence Mr. Fool had told us: 'The awakening of The World spells The Fool's return.'"

Chapter 971: Past Events

"The awakening of The World spells The Fool's return…"

Jenna had seen this sentence in the materials provided by the Major Arcana card holders. It was considered the most important revelation made by Mr. Fool before he fell into slumber, concealing the direction to awaken him.

The Fool—Sequence 0 of the Seer pathway—was said to have authority over fate!

Jenna looked at Madam Justice without asking questions, waiting for her to continue.

Madam Justice pointed to the sofa area. "Let's sit down and talk."

After they each chose a sofa, Madam Justice began speaking in a gentle voice, "After our initial intelligence gathering in the dream city, we discovered a problem:

"There was no dream manifestation corresponding to Gehrman Sparrow.

"Among Mr. Fool's avatars, Klein Moretti's dream manifestation was merged with Zhou Mingrui. This can be seen from Zhou Mingrui's brother being called Benson Zhou and his sister Zhou Sasa, corresponding to Klein Moretti's real-life brother Benson and sister Melissa.

"Other manifestations, like the private detective and the wandering magician, could be found in the dream city, but they were scattered among multiple people. They either used half of their names or only exhibited corresponding characteristics."

Hearing this, Jenna nodded slightly.

These had all been mentioned in the materials, and their team had also secretly observed the corresponding manifestations, planning to make deeper contact with them in turn.

Madam Justice smiled with a sigh.

"We've confirmed those dream manifestations, and there were no issues or anything we could exploit.

"But Gehrman Sparrow, as one of Mr. Fool's two most important manifestations and The World mentioned in that revelation, had no corresponding manifestation in the dream city.

"At the time, this raised strong suspicions and made us a bit excited.

"It's not a problem if there are issues; it's a problem if everything is normal.

"After discussion, we decided to try to create the character of Gehrman Sparrow in the dream city. Only with Gehrman Sparrow could we talk about awakening The World."

Jenna listened with both surprise and excitement.

This approach was something they hadn't thought of before.

Of course, this was mainly because they had just finished observing important characters and were still experimenting with the results of different levels of contact with different characters. They hadn't yet compiled the intelligence or sought ways to awaken Mr. Fool.

Lumian had made some associations from the phrase "The awakening of The World spells The Fool's return," which was why he had Jenna apply for a job at Hall Film Company to observe the actor playing Gehrman Sparrow more closely.

What they hadn't realized was that filming "The Great Pirate 3" not only included the idea of stimulating Zhou Mingrui and awakening his memories, but also aimed to create the dream manifestation of Gehrman Sparrow out of thin air!

Madam Justice continued, "Our first attempt was to use my Dreamweaver ability and Hall Group's resources to directly create Gehrman Sparrow's dream manifestation and give him real identity proof and past experiences. The result was, well, I got kicked out of the dream.

"I got my gold coin from Madam Reinette, and later returned it to Her. She had already been kicked out three times before I entered the dream city.

"Being kicked out of the dream didn't discourage me. I even felt excited, believing this might truly be a meaningful direction. Otherwise, the Celestial Worthy wouldn't have turned His gaze to this place far from Zhou Mingrui.

"We started our second attempt, with Madam Magician using her identity as a, um, bestselling novelist to write 'The Great Pirate 3'."

"Was 'The Great Pirate 3' also deliberately written by you guys?" Jenna asked thoughtfully.

Madam Justice smiled in a way that made Jenna's eyes light up.

"Haven't you watched 'The Great Pirate 1' and 'The Great Pirate 2'? They tell stories about pirates, but the character Gehrman Sparrow doesn't appear. In other words, before Madam Magician personally wrote 'The Great Pirate 3', the dream manifestation of Gehrman Sparrow didn't exist even in the story.

"The completion and publication of 'The Great Pirate 3' also resulted in Madam Magician being kicked out of the dream.

"We felt we were on the right track, so I used Hall Film Company to purchase the film and television rights for 'The Great Pirate 3' and began preparations for filming."

It's great to have money… Jenna couldn't help but sigh.

For their small team, forget about filming a movie about Gehrman Sparrow, they couldn't even afford to buy the rights to 'The Great Pirate 3' without winning the lottery who knows how many times.

Madam Justice reminisced. "I personally served as the producer and personally selected the actor to play Gehrman Sparrow.

"Then, I discovered An Xiaotian. He was an actor and a star. It was such a coincidence, as if Mr. Fool had secretly set it up, waiting for us to trigger it.

"An Xiaotian's backstory in the dream was that he was an orphan, raised by his older sister. He dropped out after high school and entered the entertainment industry.

"His sister fell seriously ill and is currently in a vegetative state. To maintain hope for his sister's awakening, he worked hard to become a big star and earned quite a bit of money.

"I extended an invitation to him, offering a salary he couldn't refuse.

"At the time, I was actually a bit uneasy, wondering if having An Xiaotian play Gehrman Sparrow would cause any problems. You know, An Xiaotian corresponds to Antigonus in reality, who was The Half-Fool in the Fourth Epoch and hasn't perished yet. If we merged His spiritual imprint with the movie image of Gehrman Sparrow, it could potentially affect Mr. Fool's self-awareness or benefit Antigonus and that Celestial Worthy.

"To ensure there were no issues, we contacted Antigonus through the Church of Evernight Goddess. He told us we could try."

"Does Antigonus have close ties with the Church of Evernight Goddess? Can He be trusted?" Jenna asked instinctively.

Madam Justice's smile became somewhat complex.

"Being captured and imprisoned is also a kind of connection, I suppose…

"However, after the Goddess provided a revelation and promised Antigonus one thing, He began working for the Church of Evernight Goddess. His words are quite credible now.

"That's why I ultimately decided to invite An Xiaotian to play Gehrman Sparrow.

"On the day of the shoot, An Xiaotian had a very serious car accident and also became a vegetable."

Also… both he and his sister became vegetables… Jenna found it tragic.

"At the same time, that also caused me to be kicked out of the dream for the second time," Madam Justice said in a self-mocking tone. "Afterwards, I faced significant restrictions. By the time I entered the dream for the third time, Holly had already chosen the actor to play Gehrman Sparrow. The silver lining was that she decided to personally fund and establish a foundation to fully cover the medical expenses for An Xiaotian and his sister."

Jenna vaguely felt that Madam Justice was praising her own dream manifestation—Holly—for being a decent person, living up to her ideal image, but she didn't dare to say it too clearly.

Madam Justice skipped over this topic and said directly, "I couldn't find anyone more suitable to play Gehrman Sparrow, and the medicine provided by Mr. Moon couldn't wake up An Xiaotian. I had no choice but to let Jia Yu give it a try. Unfortunately, after Jia Yu finished filming, he couldn't merge with the manifestation of Gehrman Sparrow, and the movie didn't make Zhou Mingrui remember anything. It only created some character imitators of Gehrman Sparrow.

"Perhaps when An Xiaotian had the car accident, the goal that 'The Great Pirate 3' was meant to achieve was destined to fail.

"During the filming of 'The Great Pirate 3', I actually noticed that people were gradually forgetting An Xiaotian, no longer remembering this person, only able to recall related events.

"I wasn't affected, but I also gave myself psychological suggestions not to forget An Xiaotian.

"When I was in the dream city, I indeed remembered, until I was kicked out for the third time…"

Feels like you were somewhat Fooled… Jenna thought for a few seconds and said, "There might still be very useful secrets hidden in relation to An Xiaotian, which is why the Celestial Worthy would Fool everyone and make them forget about him."

"That's our guess too." Madam Justice nodded.

Jenna then said, "An Xiaotian in his vegetative state seems to want to warn Lumian to be careful of someone. Could you please contact Antigonus again to see if He has dreamed anything in reality or knows something?"

"That's our duty," Madam Justice looked around and said, "Don't rush back. Wait for the feedback from the Church of Evernight Goddess. It might come very soon, and you can take this opportunity to deepen your psychological recognition of reality, to avoid confusing reality and dreams in the end."

"Alright," Jenna politely nodded, stood up, and walked towards the garden at the back of the villa.

She wanted to take a walk there.

…

3 am.

When Franca saw Jian Na, who had fallen asleep at some point, suddenly wake up, she understood that the real Jenna had returned.

Jenna lowered her voice and recounted in detail what Madam Justice had said to Franca. Finally, she said, "Antigonus said He can sense Mr. Fool's dream, but He hasn't entered it and doesn't want to, so He doesn't know what the vegetative An Xiaotian wants to warn Lumian about."

"Is it possible to ask Antigonus to come in once, using the vegetative An Xiaotian? That way, He might know what An Xiaotian wants to warn about," Franca said thoughtfully.

Jenna shook her head. "After An Xiaotian became a vegetable, Antigonus can't come in even if He wants to."

"Do we need to find a way to treat An Xiaotian?" Franca mused to herself, "If we cure him and wake him up, there's no need for Antigonus to come in…

"But how to treat him? Medicine doesn't seem to work…"

After a pause, Franca and Jenna simultaneously thought of a possibility: Great Mother!

And Lumian was now disguised as the Great Mother's Child of God.

Chapter 972: Demoness's Method

"Treat An Xiaotian by finding a bestowed of the Great Mother through Lumian?" Franca's thoughts began to wander, gradually becoming more far-fetched. "If that doesn't work, then have An Xiaotian conceive a child, with the child replacing the father, becoming the father, and help that child grow rapidly, one day surpassing others' ten years…"

Jenna remained silent for a few seconds before saying, "With everyone suppressed at Sequence 7, the Great Mother's bestowed probably can't make embryos form quickly or children grow rapidly. They're even hoping to rely on the Child of God's godhood to make Li Keji go through the pregnancy and childbirth process in one month.

"Moreover, if the Great Mother takes the opportunity to corrupt An Xiaotian or his child, symbolically speaking, the severity of the problem might not be less than the Celestial Worthy awakening."

Franca sighed and replied, "Indeed, but there's no other way. If we could wake An Xiaotian up and reshoot 'The Great Pirate 3', it might have unexpected effects."

Jenna tersely acknowledged. "Madam Justice said that ever since An Xiaotian became a vegetable and 'The Great Pirate 3' changed its lead actor, the filming became normal. She suspects that from that moment on, the true goal this movie was meant to achieve was destined to fail.

"Unfortunately, at present, there's no hope of An Xiaotian waking up, and we can't find anyone more suitable to play Gehrman Sparrow."

Franca opened her mouth, showing a thoughtful expression. "Actually, there's a better candidate, someone more suitable than An Xiaotian to play

Gehrman Sparrow."

"Who?" Jenna asked in surprise.

The Major Arcana card holders hadn't discovered such a person?

Franca's eyes curved slightly as she smiled. "Zhou Mingrui."

"…" Jenna felt a bit stupid.

Is that even allowed?

What would you call this? Having Zhou Mingrui play Zhou Mingrui, letting Zhou Mingrui awaken Zhou Mingrui!

Franca said seriously, "If Zhou Mingrui plays Gehrman Sparrow, he could relive the life he's forgotten during the filming process. He might actually remember something and eventually immerse himself in the role, becoming one with the character. Wouldn't that be equivalent to The World awakening?"

At this point, Franca smacked her lips. "But the difficulty is too high. We don't have the money to reshoot 'The Great Pirate 3', nor can we convince Hall Film Company. If they were to shoot anything, it would be 'The Great Pirate 4', not Gehrman Sparrow's maritime adventure story.

"Even if you became a top star in the entertainment industry and actively proposed reshooting this movie, and even if someone invested, convincing Zhou Mingrui to film would be extremely difficult. Not to mention his personal willingness, I estimate that as soon as the invitation is extended, the relevant person would be kicked out of the dream. Whoever dares to discuss this matter would be kicked out."

"This can be considered as an alternative plan for future awakening actions…" Jenna felt a headache coming on as she thought about the troubles Franca mentioned.

Franca nodded thoughtfully. "Correspondingly, Zhou Mingrui's memories don't seem to be erased. As long as he knows about being asked to film 'The

Great Pirate 3' and is interested and willing to try, the Celestial Worthy probably can't directly prevent it. For this, we can sacrifice multiple members' chances to enter the dream multiple times…"

At this point, Franca suddenly smiled. "What do you call this? It's called 'For the sake of saving the world, please debut Mr. Fool!'"

"The Celestial Worthy might not be able to directly prevent it, but subsequently, there might be incidents like the director having a car accident, the film crew experiencing a fire, or the female lead's reputation collapsing, preventing 'The Great Pirate 3' from even entering the filming process," Jenna calmly reminded.

Franca sighed. "I know, this is just proposing an idea. We'll see if it's feasible later."

…

The next afternoon, in the administrative department of the Tech Building.

Franca was busy making charts when she suddenly saw Luo Shan, who had just been called to the HR department, return with a dejected and confused expression.

"What's wrong?" Franca stopped typing.

Luo Shan spoke as if in a dream. "They want to fire me.

"HR said that Mr. Huang passed by earlier, saw me slacking off, and got very angry. He plans to fire me directly…

"I-I haven't even finished paying off my mortgage…"

What kind of reason is this? There are at least seventeen or eighteen people in the administrative department who slack off more than Luo Shan, why fire only her? Franca's first reaction was to help Luo Shan seek justice.

Her second reaction was: Dammit, is this Mr. Huang's purge of Zhou Mingrui's friends?

Has the mirrored Roselle completed initial control over Mr. Huang?

Has Zaratulstra targeted Luo Shan because of her previous warning to Zhou Mingrui?

If Luo Shan doesn't commute with me, the Mirror Substitution won't be able to work, unless Jenna follows her all the time, but Jenna might soon receive a contract from Hall Film Company…

This way, Luo Shan would be in danger…

Before Franca could comfort Luo Shan and think of a countermeasure, she heard her phone vibrate.

She picked it up and saw it was a friend request on WeChat.

The requester was: "Bernadette."

Queen Mystic has arrived? Talk about a stroke of luck! Franca quickly accepted the request, then said to Luo Shan, "Don't worry, there aren't many people working in the administrative department anyway. When Mr. Ed comes, you can plead your case to him, and he should be able to persuade Mr. Huang.

"If that doesn't work, try to negotiate for higher severance pay."

And I will seek justice for you from Miss Huang!

"Mm-hmm." Luo Shan walked back to her desk, dejectedly waiting for Mr. Ed to appear.

Meanwhile, Franca received a message from Bernadette: "Come to Room 101 on the 8th floor."

8th floor? That doesn't belong to any of the Intis Group companies… However, according to Lumian's interpretation, the companies on those floors symbolize the erosion and influence of different secret organizations and evil god cults on Intis, including Queen Mystic's Element Dawn… Franca stood up, didn't say anything to Deputy Director Zhang Qing, and used going to the bathroom as an excuse to leave the administrative department and take the elevator down to the 8th floor.

Half of the 8th floor belonged to Dawn Children's Publishing Company. The receptionist didn't even glance at Franca, allowing her to enter.

Franca found that the facial recognition access control wasn't activated, and no employees came out along the way, allowing her to easily reach Room 101.

Bernie Huang, wearing a spaghetti strap top with fringes at the hem and long jeans, sat in the sofa area, exuding a youthful aura.

This is the college student version of Queen Mystic… Franca walked over, greeted her, and sat down.

"What happened?" Bernie Huang's demeanor and posture were different from that of a college student.

Franca recounted how Mr. Huang seemed to be able to sense the gaze from within the mirror, how the mirrored Roselle in the real world appeared to be missing, and how Zaratulstra had been spending several hours with Mr. Huang every day recently.

Finally, she mentioned the trouble Luo Shan had encountered.

Bernie Huang listened quietly, then nodded gently.

"Regarding my father, I will observe and probe. This will take some time, maybe a few days, maybe a week or two.

"As for Luo Shan's problem, you'll have to solve it yourselves. If I intervene on Luo Shan's behalf, it could easily expose my connection with you.

"If you can resolve Luo Shan's trouble, at least prevent her from entering the handover process for a week, I'll give you a reward."

Isn't this our business? Why are you still paying me as a reward? It's me asking for your help, not you asking for mine… Franca instantly recalled the Star Dream Provisions Store incident and roughly understood that Queen Mystic was finding reasons and excuses to give money to her and the others.

"Alright," Franca agreed immediately.

After leaving Room 101, on her way back upstairs, she seriously considered how to prevent Luo Shan from being fired.

Instigate Mr. Ed to plead on her behalf? That only has a certain chance of success…

Make Mr. Huang's decision to fire Luo Shan disappear? I can't do that, but I can find a way to delay it for a few days…

Pursue both approaches simultaneously…

Franca, always capable of thinking out of the box, took out her phone and told Lumian her ideas and the potential aftermath issues.

Soon, she received a reply from The Idiot: "Plausible."

Franca immediately deleted the chat history using the Information Shredder and then returned to the administrative department.

When Mr. Ed entered his office, she stood up and accompanied Luo Shan to plead their case, spreading mystical pathogens along the way.

Yes, she was going to spread a disease.

She chose mystical pathogens that gave people a chance to get some sick leave, something they could recover quickly upon returning home!

Mystical pathogens that caused stomach flu!

After nearly ten minutes, Franca discreetly Instigated Mr. Ed, making him agree to plead on Luo Shan's behalf.

After the two left the director's office, they saw many colleagues looking pale, vomiting into nearby trash cans, while others rushed to the bathrooms on different floors.

"What's wrong?" Luo Shan asked a colleague with concern.

The male colleague, holding his stomach, said, "I don't know, everyone suddenly started vomiting and having diarrhea. Could it be food poisoning?"

Seeing this, Franca urgently called the police and dialed the emergency number for Crimson Moon Hospital.

While the administrative department staff waited for the ambulances and other department staff came to help, Franca covered her mouth and started dry heaving.

"I've been affected too…" she said to Luo Shan.

Luo Shan assessed her own physical condition. "I feel it a little, but I'm okay."

Soon, ambulances from Crimson Moon Hospital arrived and took the affected administrative department staff to the hospital.

The entire administrative department was suddenly left with only four people, one of whom was Luo Shan.

Mr. Ed looked at Luo Shan, his expression grave, and said, "You hold down the fort for now. Don't worry about the firing."

"Okay." Luo Shan was both confused and bewildered.

From earlier, Lumian, as a security guard, had been running up and down, helping the administrative department staff go to Crimson Moon Hospital.

During this process, he found an opportunity to get close to Franca, and they exchanged a glance.

As agreed, Lumian spread the mystical pathogen causing stomach flu to Franca, in case she went to the hospital later and nothing was found, making her a suspect.

"How did they get food poisoning?" Old Xia looked at the departing vehicles and asked confusedly, "Everyone ate at the same cafeteria, didn't they? Did they order some unclean takeout?"

"Who knows," Lumian said as he turned to walk back, receiving a message from Franca.

The message read: "You can go check out the administrative department. Those who can still maintain some health and continue working are likely to be Beyonders, like Luo Shan."

Chapter 973: An Unexpected Visitor

When Lumian arrived at the administrative department, several professionals were already there collecting physical evidence for analysis, including but not limited to leftover milk tea, liquid from the water dispenser, discarded takeout containers, vomit, and swabs from computers, desks, and air conditioning vents…

After they finished, another group of specialists began a full disinfection process.

During this time, Luo Shan and the other administrative staff who were still working could only wait in the hallway.

At a glance, Lumian noticed that besides Mr. Ed and Luo Shan, only two people seemed unaffected by the mystical pathogen. Their complexion and movements appeared quite normal.

One was a male, relatively tall by Yangdu standards, standing over six feet. The other was a woman in her thirties, with a round face, slightly overweight, not particularly attractive but not ugly either.

They don't seem to be after Mr. Huang… or rather, not after Mr. Huang's body… Why would Beyonders work diligently in the Intis Group's administrative department? Lumian tried to fathom their intentions based on his own thinking.

Of course, he couldn't be certain that there weren't any Beyonders among those who went to Crimson Moon Hospital. Perhaps there was a Demoness waiting for a chance to have a taste of Mr. Huang, but upon sensing the presence and erosion of the mystical pathogen, she feigned severe symptoms and went to the hospital to avoid being discovered?

Luo Shan also noticed the reportedly handsome security guard and felt he lived up to her expectations.

After a while, Mr. Ed received a phone call.

"The problems aren't serious, and the situation has stabilized?" Mr. Ed asked happily.

Then he heard Zhang Qing on the other end say: "The test results show a mild viral infection. The doctor said they can go home after finishing their IV drips, take medication for two more days, rest a bit, and they'll be fine.

"More than a dozen people have already applied for sick leave, planning to stay home for a couple of days to recover. They're also asking if this counts as a work-related injury and if there's any compensation."

Mr. Ed's temple twitched as he suppressed his emotions and said, "They should rest at home. We can't have them forcing themselves to work and risking more serious problems. As for whether it counts as a work-related injury, ask the legal department when you get back."

"Alright," Zhang Qing said, "But there are also more than a dozen people who say they want to come back to work, however…"

"However what?" Mr. Ed asked.

Zhang Qing replied ambiguously, "They're all the ones who like to dress up, except for Luo Fu."

Even sick beauties were beauties—Mr. Huang might feel sympathetic when he saw them.

Mr. Ed was momentarily speechless.

Is it only the new employees who are eager to work and take their jobs seriously?

Meanwhile, Lumian used the incident in the administrative department as an excuse to keep watch nearby, occasionally offering help.

This was also to guard against Luo Shan being eliminated by the Celestial Worthy's subordinates in the chaos—as a Painter, she had some ability to protect herself, but she clearly lacked experience and could easily let her guard down in crowded situations. Now, with Franca in the hospital, she couldn't rely on Mirror Substitution to escape a first strike.

After Franca returned from Crimson Moon Hospital to help Luo Shan and others deal with the backlog of work, Lumian and Old Xia went back to the security department on the thirteenth floor.

He continued to ponder how to treat An Xiaotian.

He believed that An Xiaotian becoming a vegetable was symbolic, representing the decline and disappearance of Antigonus's spiritual imprint within The Fool's Uniqueness. This couldn't be reversed through normal methods, so he had to seek a solution from the essence.

Find a way to strengthen Antigonus's spiritual imprint within The Fool's Uniqueness? But Antigonus can't enter Mr. Fool's dream now. Even if He's willing to provide the corresponding items, we'd have to corrupt Zhou Mingrui, the symbol of The Fool's Uniqueness, to achieve our goal. This would damage our image in Zhou Mingrui's mind, wasting all our previous efforts, and it's extremely dangerous.

Franca and Jenna's approach isn't wrong. Using the power of the Great Mother might awaken An Xiaotian, but it's not treatment or having An Xiaotian have a child. It's new birth, symbolically meaning that Antigonus's spiritual imprint within The Fool's Uniqueness is reborn. Whether the reborn An Xiaotian is a friend or foe is hard to say, but he would inevitably interfere with Mr. Fool's awakening…

Sequence 7 Heretic Spellmaster of the Villain pathway can perform rebirth rituals. Theoretically, Great Mother bestowed like Grimm can wake An Xiaotian, but it involves reversing symbolism. I estimate only a rebirth ritual performed by someone with godhood would be effective. In the dream city, Grimm and others believe only I, the fake Child of God, have this, while others don't. Well, there should be another place that has it, the basement of Mushu Hospital, but sending An Xiaotian there would be purely creating an enemy for ourselves…

After pondering for a long time, Lumian felt that both current approaches had significant problems. The hidden dangers and negative impacts far outweighed the gains, and it wasn't something he and his companions would choose.

He began to consider this matter from the perspective of finding loopholes.

Soon, he thought of someone: Li Keji!

Mr. Fool's subconscious understanding of Li Keji's mushrooms should come from Gehrman Sparrow's interactions with Frank Lee.

From what we've seen, he seems to think Li Keji's mushrooms are quite dangerous, with various possibilities, producing some incredible effects.

The essence of this city is a dream, and dreams are idealistic. As long as Mr. Fool truly believes Li Keji's mushrooms can achieve incredible things, Li Keji could create a mushroom to treat An Xiaotian and wake him up!

It's not the mushroom treating An Xiaotian, but Mr. Fool's subconscious being guided to reverse the symbolism.

Of course, that awakening would inevitably be distorted, abnormal, and horrifying, but if An Xiaotian could use this to say everything he wants to warn me, it would be acceptable… The more Lumian thought about it, the more he felt that using Li Keji might be useful.

He planned to find an opportunity to talk with Li Keji through the door of the hospital room.

The original of this biology teacher was really a Doctor!

…

Jenna, who was observing other incarnations corresponding to Mr. Fool, received a call from Hall Film Company, asking her to head over to the talent department tomorrow to sign a manager contract.

Phew… I have a job now too. Jenna breathed a sigh of relief.

She even looked forward to filming movies and TV dramas but felt that the matter of awakening Mr. Fool wouldn't drag on that long, not until she joined a production.

At the same time, she felt that Hall Film Company was managed quite well. She had thought some interviewer would call in advance, hinting that she needed to do something to have a chance at a good contract.

She was prepared to use Charm to make the relevant personnel lose themselves, but nothing happened.

This was different from some things she had seen and heard at the Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons.

As expected of a film company founded by Madam Justice… Jenna felt relieved.

…

After dark.

Lumian, who knew the target's schedule, took advantage of Zaratulstra's absence from the hotel to cross over from the mirror world and retrieve the surveillance content stored in the pinhole cameras and listening devices.

After midnight, he returned to the rented apartment in Xinhong District and used his phone to play back Zaratulstra's activities in the hotel room.

This wasn't to spy on what Zaratulstra was plotting or planning to accomplish—though that would be a bonus. Lumian's main purpose was to observe Zaratulstra's behavior when alone, to find out how many marionettes he could currently maintain, how often he summoned Historical

Void images, how long these images would dissipate on their own, and other such information.

This was preparation for an upcoming surprise attack and encirclement to kill Zaratulstra.

Although Zaratulstra was also suppressed to Sequence 7, he still had an Angel's rank. Many of his abilities' effects and ranges were somewhat different from a true Sequence 7.

Take the number of marionettes, for example. A normal Marionettist who had just advanced to Sequence 5 could only control one marionette. If restricted to Sequence 7 level, theoretically, they wouldn't be able to control marionettes at all, only using marionettization for killing. But this ability might qualitatively change at Sequence 4 and Sequence 2, reducing spirituality consumption and lowering control difficulty. After that, even if the ability was suppressed to Sequence 7, it would still essentially exist, just with less pronounced effects.

In other words, Zaratulstra could still control marionettes, but the number was very limited—perhaps two, perhaps only one. Lumian now needed to confirm these details.

Without grasping the relevant intelligence, if they directly launched a surprise attack and tried to encircle and kill Zaratulstra, given their superior numbers, they might have some hope of defeating or forcing him to retreat. But achieving their predetermined goal would be almost impossible. The Seer pathway was known for its strong survival abilities!

Lumian stared intently at the phone screen, not missing any detail.

For now, he was skipping through, selecting only scenes with human activity.

When the surveillance video reached 11 pm last night, Lumian saw Zaratulstra, dressed in a black robe, walk to the door and open it.

Someone entered from outside.

The person wore sunglasses even at night, dressed in a black T-shirt and dark jeans that wouldn't attract attention, about six feet tall.

Who could it be? Lumian's focus intensified.

After entering the room, the person looked left and right, then removed the sunglasses perched on their nose, revealing a face quite familiar to Lumian.

He had seen videos of this person being interviewed and participating in certain activities online.

It was Jia Yu, the actor who played Gehrman Sparrow!

He doesn't look too much like Zhou Mingrui, which shouldn't be a problem, so why is he visiting Zaratulstra late at night? What have we missed? Lumian's pupils dilated as he watched more intently.

He was grateful for the technology that provided him with assistance, but also worried that Zaratulstra might have already discovered the presence of the pinhole cameras and listening devices, deliberately staging this scene.

Jia Yu sat down in the sofa area and talked with Zaratulstra for nearly fifteen minutes, then stood up and left.

Lumian quickly stopped playing the surveillance video, deciding to first listen to whether the listening device had recorded any dialog during that time period.

Chapter 974: Instigation

Lumian quickly found the conversation between Zaratulstra and Jia Yu. The gist was that Zaratulstra wanted to poach Jia Yu for a newly established film and television company.

This company would be funded by the restructured Intis Group, which would also help pay the penalty for breaking Jia Yu's contract in the final year.

Additionally, Jia Yu would receive a hefty signing bonus, better contract terms, stronger resources, and endorsement deals with Intis Group's luxury goods company.

Lumian raised an eyebrow as he listened.

You're really discussing business cooperation?

Is this what I wanted to hear?

After Zaratulstra's repeated promises, Jia Yu was clearly tempted, saying he'd consider it and give a final answer in two days.

Lumian looked at his phone, hit pause, and replayed the conversation in his mind.

He turned to Anthony at the side of the table and mused, "Two key points:

"One, Jia Yu, the actor who played Gehrman Sparrow, is still useful. The Celestial Worthy's subordinates value him highly and want to bring him under their control, preparing for certain future developments.

"Two, Zaratulstra doesn't actually have much money. He only has an identity and company woven from dreams, which are outside this city and exist only as rumors. He needs the merger and restructuring with Intis Group to turn them into real money and resources. This can be deduced from the fact that all the benefits promised to Jia Yu can only be delivered after Intis Group funds the establishment of the film company, rather than writing an irresistible check on the spot.

"With Beyonder abilities restricted, the importance of money and resources is greatly amplified. I really want to know who won that unclaimed first prize earlier."

At this point, Lumian's expression turned cold.

"Another point we overlooked before is that once Intis Group completes the restructuring with Zaratulstra's company that's part of the plot background, Zaratulstra will gain access to a large amount of resources and money, which is very unfavorable for us.

"And whether or not Mr. Huang has been eroded and controlled by the mirrored Roselle, this merger will proceed. The only difference is whether Zaratulstra's benefits will be substantial or just average. As long as he's willing to compromise and give up some interests, the merger and restructuring will likely happen."

Anthony nodded slightly and said, "Contacting Zhou Mingrui, doing something in secret, and clearing out some dream characters; using the mirrored Roselle to influence Mr. Huang, eroding and controlling this tycoon; and promoting the merger of the two companies—these are the three main things Zaratulstra has done since coming to Yangdu. Some are overt, some covert, making it easy for us to focus on the first thing and overlook the latter two. By the time we realize it, he may have already created the momentum he needs, vast and unstoppable.

"Is this what an Angel who has lived for one or two thousand years is like?

"However, it's surprising that He knows how to use corporate mergers and acquisitions in the dream city to turn virtual wealth into reality. He doesn't seem like an old fossil at all."

He, Lumian, and Jenna hadn't even thought about this aspect before, nor had Franca, who was just an undergraduate student before her transmigration and had almost no exposure to the business world.

"Did you forget that his current body belongs to another transmigrator?" Lumian suddenly smiled, "The operation to eliminate Zaratulstra must be launched as soon as possible."

"But we need to be wary that it might be a trap to lure us in," Anthony reminded Lumian.

Lumian nodded and stood up. "I'm going to chat with a friend now."

After giving some of the food from his Traveler's Bag to Ludwig, he used Teleportation and Mirror Traversal to arrive at the psychiatric ward of Crimson Moon Hospital.

Li Keji was still confined there.

Lumian changed into a more feminine shirt and loose trousers, transforming back into the appearance of a Demoness of Despair.

He gathered his black hair behind his back, letting it fall naturally, then stepped out of the mirror-like object and gently landed at the door of Li Keji's room.

Knock, knock, knock. Lumian gently tapped on the steel door.

He and Li Keji were on opposite sides of the door, so he couldn't use the Bottle of Fiction to isolate the environment.

After a few seconds, Lumian saw a plump, white mushroom cautiously poke its cap out from behind the iron grate in the upper part of the metal door, then quickly retract.

I really want to throw a Fire of Destruction ball in there… Lumian grumbled as Li Keji's densely hairy face appeared at the window blocked by the iron grate.

"Who are you?" Li Keji asked, instinctively brightening.

"I'm here to rescue you," Lumian replied with a smile.

Li Keji shook his head. "No need, no need, I believe in the law!"

The law doesn't believe in you… Lumian thought to himself.

He took the opportunity to say, "Actually, I want to ask for your help."

"Do you want mushrooms?" Li Keji became excited, "I have many types of mushrooms here…"

He was about to start a lengthy introduction.

Lumian interrupted him. "I've heard about your ideas from someone, but I think they might be a bit too narrow."

"Too narrow?" Li Keji was taken aback.

Lumian nodded solemnly.

"For humans, food is indeed important, but it's not everything for survival.

"Diseases can also cause people to lose their lives prematurely. Haven't you thought about creating more magical mushrooms, each variety capable of treating one or multiple types of diseases?"

"That's too difficult." Li Keji fell into deep thought. "It's impossible to treat diseases by crossbreeding cows, fish, wheat, and mushrooms. Do we need to crossbreed with something else… implant my gene fragments into mushrooms, fusing the genes that produce healing power with the mushrooms? But gene fragments and transgenic technology alone are not enough…"

Lumian's eyelid twitched, and he said sincerely, "I have a friend who became a vegetative state due to a car accident, but I feel he still has a bit of consciousness.

"Can you think of a way to use your mushrooms to cure him, wake him up, but still retain that bit of his own consciousness?"

Li Keji was silent for a few seconds before saying, "Let me think about it. I can't guarantee it will work."

"Alright, I'll come back in a couple of days to hear your answer." Lumian stepped back two paces and disappeared into the shadows by the wall.

Throughout this conversation, he had been using Instigation with a hint of Charm.

…

The next morning, at the talent department of Hall Film Company.

Jenna entered an office, facing one of the female interviewers from before.

"Have a seat." The female interviewer pointed to the sofa area. "Let me introduce myself, I'm Mei Xin, head of the talent department at Hall Film Company. My English name is Christine."

She sat down and said to Jenna, "Before our legal colleague arrives, let me briefly explain the main terms of the contract.

"Your appearance and acting skills meet our requirements very well. In the industry, our Hall Film Company treats new actors the best. The contract is only for three years, with a monthly base salary of 4,000. You can keep 50% of all your income, including film fees and endorsement fees. We will also provide you with various training and professional makeup artists, and so on.

"The most important point is that the company's resources will be significantly tilted towards our own people.

"Once you've gained fame and have representative works, the contract can be renegotiated at any time to increase your profit-sharing ratio and gain some autonomy. And if this contract expires, we only ask for the right of first refusal for the new contract, under equal conditions…"

Jenna listened attentively, feeling quite involved. Although she didn't expect to stay in the dream city for a year or two, this might be her only chance to sign an actor's contract.

Finally, Mei Xin said, "After signing the contract, we will advance you 30,000 yuan to help you settle in and buy clothes. This amount will be deducted in installments from your future income, without interest."

30,000 yuan right after signing? Jenna didn't hide her change in expression.

Quick! I want to sign now!

With this money, plus the 30,000 yuan fee Bernie Huang gave to Franca yesterday, the team's savings would reach nearly 240,000 yuan. They could rent the magic mirror Arrodes from Star Dream Provisions Store!

Having such a magic mirror to help before launching the operation against Zaratulstra would be a major advantage!

During this time, whenever Lumian and the others visited Star Dream Provisions Store, they would try not to rent the mirror and instead ask questions directly on the spot to get answers. However, they were never successful. That first time when they got answers seemed to be just a coincidence, or perhaps such a benefit could only be enjoyed after a very long interval. Similarly, Franca's Magic Mirror Divination ritual aimed at Arrodes also failed to get any feedback.

Soon, an employee from the legal department of Hall Film Company arrived with the contract.

Jenna read all the terms carefully, albeit with some difficulty, asked a few questions, and then promptly completed the signing.

Before she left Hall Film Company, the advance settlement fee had already been deposited into her account.

To her disappointment, Jia Yu didn't seem to come to the company today, so she couldn't bump into him and make initial contact by pretending to be a fan asking for an autograph.

…

At 2 pm.

Jenna arrived at Star Dream Provisions Store.

Only after entering the shop did she send a message to Franca, Lumian, and the others: "You can transfer the money to me now."

She hadn't done this in advance for fear of encountering obstacles along the way.

If they lost all their money because of this, their previous efforts would have been in vain!

Lumian and the others, who had been waiting in different places, quickly completed the transfers, each keeping only enough for living expenses for the next week.

Jenna walked up to the cashier and said to the shopkeeper, "Hello, can I rent that mirror?"

She was referring to the magic mirror Arrodes.

Earlier, the team had already discussed what would be best to rent first. Considering that the magic mirror Arrodes was the only item Mr. Fool carried while sleeping, as well as the specific rental price and the symbolic meaning of Demonesses in the dream world, they finally decided to rent this mirror.

"220,000 for one day." The shopkeeper raised her head and smiled in the suddenly dimmed light.

"Alright." Jenna didn't haggle.

After she completed the payment through the store's POS machine and signed a very simple rental contract, the shopkeeper said while lowering her head, "You can take that mirror now. Return it by 3 pm tomorrow."

Jenna instinctively swallowed and walked to the shelf, picking up the silver mirror with black eyeball-like objects on both sides.

After placing the magic mirror Arrodes into the Traveler's Bag, Jenna quietly let out a sigh of relief.

It wasn't easy!

Saving money really wasn't easy!

Chapter 975: The Diligent Magic Mirror

Late at night, in room 2303 of Dechuang Garden.

Lumian, Franca, and Jenna sat side by side on the long sofa, with the silver mirror bearing ancient patterns and black gemstones on each side placed in front of them.

Anthony had taken Ludwig out for a late-night snack, politely avoiding the question-and-answer session with the magic mirror Arrodes.

Of course, they had already discussed and decided which questions to ask beforehand, focusing mainly on two parts: first, Zaratulstra's current situation, and second, matters related to the dream city.

They had listed over twenty questions, but considering the subconscious limitations of the dream on various aspects, they believed it impossible to keep asking until all their doubts were answered by the magic mirror Arrodes. They suspected that the mirror could only answer a limited number of questions at a time or in a day, just like how Magic Mirror Divination normally only allowed three questions. Therefore, Lumian adjusted the order of the questions, placing the most important and crucial ones at the beginning.

"Shall we start?" Jenna turned her head to look at Lumian.

Lumian nodded and said calmly, "I'll go."

"No, we'll take turns. We can't let you bear the mirror's questions alone," Franca emphasized. "It must be fair!"

She felt that she should also make some sacrifices and not always let Lumian face the terrifying questions of the magic mirror Arrodes.

Lumian glanced at her. "Alright, you go first."

Franca took a deep breath and looked at the magic mirror Arrodes.

"Great Arrodes, may I ask you a question?"

Since they had already rented the magic mirror from Star Dream Provisions Store, she didn't follow the mystical ritual procedure and directly inquired of the other party.

The surface of the ancient silver mirror instantly became dark, as if sinking to the bottom of lightless waters. Rows of blood-colored words in ancient Feysac then appeared: "I can answer any question you ask, but you must also answer an equal number of questions from me, in the presence of at least one witness.

"If you refuse to answer, or if you lie, you will face punishment."

Franca recalled the list of questions and carefully phrased her words, "My question is, what are the current manifestations of Zaratulstra's Beyonder powers in the dream city?"

This was one of the questions their team most wanted to know the answer to.

When Lumian watched the surveillance footage and listened to the wiretapped conversation last night, he only confirmed one point:

Zaratulstra's summoning of images from the Historical Void had significant limitations. He wouldn't always use historical projections to replace himself in activities while hiding in the fog of history—before going to open the door for Jia Yu, he pulled out a past version of himself from the Historical Void, and that historical projection then communicated with Jia Yu for nearly a quarter of an hour.

Based on this, Lumian speculated that Zaratulstra would only use historical projections to replace himself for a period of time when he felt danger or had to face certain problematic individuals. As for disguising marionettes as his true self, Lumian believed that the Sequence 7 Faceless ability probably couldn't achieve this, but he didn't rule out the possibility that a similar ability descended from Sequence 2 to Sequence 7 might be able to.

The blood-red ancient Feysac words on the surface of the magic mirror Arrodes writhed and changed, revealing row after row:

"Zaratulstra can currently manipulate two marionettes. Through Spirit Body Threads, He can initially control a target for 20 seconds, and completely marionettize them in 1 minute and 30 seconds;

"His marionette manipulation range is 50 meters. He can switch positions with the marionettes. The marionettes can use their own abilities as well as borrow all of His abilities, but all at the Sequence 7 level;

"He can only maintain the existence of one Historical Void image at a time, including people, objects, scenes, and spirituality;

"He can currently maintain summoned Angel-level Historical Void images for 30 seconds to 1 minute, depending on His closeness to or understanding of the corresponding target. If He summons His past Sequence 1 self, it can be maintained for 1 minute and 30 seconds. If summoning His Sequence 2 self, it's 3 minutes. His past selves below angelic level can be maintained for up to a quarter of an hour. Other people, objects, and scenes below angelic level range from two to ten minutes;

"His Shapeshifting ability allows marionettes to disguise themselves as Him, surpassing any makeup effect. However, upon careful observation, differences can still be seen to determine authenticity;

"He can also Wish, creating some miracles, but the effects of these miracles are still restricted to the Sequence 7 level;

"His past Sequence 1 self could make the Spirit Body Threads of the dead or certain objects reappear, thereby marionettizing them. If one eats marionettized food, they will be corrupted and gradually become marionettized;

"His past Sequence 1 self could also Graft physical entities or abstract concepts that normally couldn't be directly connected, combining them to achieve incredible effects. However, these incredible effects are still only at the Sequence 7 level;

"His past Sequence 1 self could distort space and time, creating a Realm of Mysteries that surpasses the Bottle of Fiction and possesses concealed properties;

…

"His Air Straw is twenty meters long, potentially helping Him avoid areas densely populated with mystical pathogens."

The magic mirror Arrodes described all of Zaratulstra's abilities and their current manifestations, causing the blood-red words on the mirror's surface to change several times.

However, it didn't provide enough details about the Sequence 2 and Sequence 1 level abilities, only briefly mentioning them.

The mirror is really working hard to awaken Mr. Fool… Franca couldn't help but grumble inwardly after reading everything carefully.

Lumian, meanwhile, recalled the historical projection of Zaratulstra that had conversed with Jia Yu.

Judging from the fact that they had talked for nearly a quarter of an hour, Lumian deduced that it was a Historical Void image of Zaratulstra before he became an Angel.

This also indicated that Zaratulstra wasn't a born mythical creature, but had ascended step by step from lower Sequences.

After displaying Zaratulstra's current abilities, the blood-colored words on the surface of the ancient silver mirror changed again:

"Based on the principle of reciprocity, it's my turn to ask a question.

"If you answer incorrectly or lie, you will be punished."

Franca gritted her teeth and nodded slightly.

What do they not know about me? There's nothing to be afraid of!

On the mirror, new words began to form, composing a sentence: "After entering the dream city, have you ever thought about doing something with Lumian when Jenna wasn't around?"

Dammit, that's harsh… Franca didn't dare look at Jenna and squeezed out a word through her teeth. "Yes…"

She immediately defended herself, "I just thought about it occasionally, never put it into practice! This is Mr. Fool's dream, how dare I do anything inappropriate? If Mr. Fool's subconscious remembers it, I'd be socially dead for real!"

Lumian glanced at the rapidly speaking Franca and the silent Jenna, suspecting that while making Franca feel ashamed and embarrassed, the magic mirror Arrodes might also have a hidden intention of helping Jenna digest the Affliction potion.

It's really going all out to wake up Mr. Fool…

Franca finally finished speaking and mustered the courage to look at Jenna, receiving an encouraging smile and slight nod from her.

Lumian spoke on Franca's behalf, "The second question is, has Zaratulstra discovered my surveillance?"

The ancient silver mirror with two black gemstones like eyes displayed new blood-colored words: "Zaratulstra discovered that someone was spying through mirror-like objects, but doesn't know who. He also learned about the existence of pinhole cameras and wiretaps, because He has a Saint-level Seer subordinate living next door who can marionettize mosquitoes and hide them in the room to observe the situation."

So, when I cautiously used the Fire of Destruction to burn all spiritually imbued things in Zaratulstra's room, it made him alert that someone had infiltrated his room. After a covert search, he discovered the pinhole cameras and wiretaps? But because his marionette subordinate died, he only knows someone infiltrated his room, not who it was… Lumian immediately analyzed the important information hidden in the magic mirror Arrodes' answer.

At the same time, he suspected that Zaratulstra knew Mr. Huang had concealed the fact that someone was spying through mirror-like objects but didn't expose it on the spot.

Moreover, knowing there was surveillance, Zaratulstra still had Jia Yu come to his room for a private conversation. Was this to mislead us, making us think Jia Yu was important and focus our attention there? But his plan to poach Jia Yu wasn't a sudden decision; it should have started before I went to spy on him in the hotel room… Does he think that deep contact with Jia Yu holds hidden dangers, and without knowing certain details, it could easily lead to him being kicked out of the dream? So he deliberately exposed his intentions to let us step on the landmine? Lumian's thoughts were in turmoil, feeling that Zaratulstra—this Seer—was really quite similar to a Conspirer, his mind full of conspiracies and schemes.

Now that he knew Zaratulstra had discovered his spying and had been acting all along, Lumian could design targeted action plans.

Demonesses had ways and abilities to evade the dangerous premonitions of a Seer!

After answering, the magic mirror Arrodes routinely displayed the corresponding prompt before posing a question to Lumian: "Is your feeling for Franca and Jenna love, or just valuing them?"

Lumian fell momentarily quiet before responding, "I value them."

After a few seconds of silence in the sofa area, Jenna moved forward slightly and said, "It's my turn to ask."

Lumian and Franca both nodded.

Jenna recalled the list of prepared questions and looked at the ancient silver mirror.

"The third question is, who was the last person to rent you?"

The blood-red words on the mirror's surface suddenly disappeared, leaving only a faint shimmer of water.

After several seconds, a few words appeared on the deep, dark surface of the mirror—the unique text of the dream city, all in a pale white color: "It's Peng Deng."

Peng Deng? The person who spent 220,000 to rent the magic mirror Arrodes for a day was Peng Deng? Lumian, Franca, and Jenna were all shocked.

Chapter 976: Scheming and Strategizing

Regarding who had previously rented the magic mirror, Lumian and the others had various guesses, but they never imagined it would be Peng Deng.

Where did Peng Deng get so much money?

Why did Peng Deng want to rent the magic mirror Arrodes?

What exactly did Peng Deng want to do?

Lumian, Jenna, and Franca looked at each other, all feeling it necessary to adjust the order of questions and temporarily add some related to Peng Deng renting the mirror.

At this moment, the pale white text on the silver mirror's surface twisted and writhed, turning blood-red again and stretching into individual ancient Feysac words:

"Based on the principle of reciprocity, it's my turn to ask a question.

"If you answer incorrectly or lie, you will be punished."

Jenna nodded slightly, beginning to think about what question to ask next.

The blood-red words on the mirror changed to new content: "Have you considered how you would intimately get along with Lumian and Franca if you switched to the Hunter pathway in the future and became male?"

That's quite a subtle way of asking… Jenna sensed Arrodes' goodwill.

Although it was still quite embarrassing, for someone who was once a Showy Diva, she could answer with her eyes closed. "I have thought about it."

Franca's mind suddenly flashed with a thought: Thought about being on top or on top?

She steadied herself and looked at the mirror.

"The fourth question, what did Peng Deng do with the help of the great Arrodes?"

On the surface of the ancient silver mirror, the blood-red words quickly faded away, the watery sheen receded, and it no longer had a deep, dark feel.

Franca's question went unanswered.

"So it's only three questions…" She sighed in disappointment.

Lumian thought for a moment and said, "Let's try asking again before returning it to Star Dream Provisions Store this afternoon. Perhaps the interval between inquiries is calculated by time, not by rental frequency."

"Mm." Jenna nodded.

Of course, she would be responsible for returning the rental.

…

Friday morning.

Zhou Mingrui, busy at his workstation, felt his phone vibrate beside him.

He picked it up and saw a message from Luo Shan: "I might be losing my job. Let me treat you to dinner again tonight."

"What happened?" Zhou Mingrui asked, both puzzled and concerned.

Luo Shan sent a "😂" emoji:

"I'll tell you when we have dinner. Oh, and Luo Fu will be there too."

"Alright, should I choose what to eat, or will you?" Zhou Mingrui politely asked.

"It's my treat, so of course I'll choose!" Luo Shan quickly replied.

After putting down his phone, Zhou Mingrui focused on his computer screen, as if seriously evaluating his previous work results.

In reality, he was thinking about Luo Shan's situation.

How could she suddenly lose her job? The last time we had dinner, Luo Shan was praising Mr. Huang for paying well and the relaxed work atmosphere. She didn't seem to have any intention of quitting…

Is it because of her special circumstances that she must change her workplace, or does the company want to fire her, or both?

About half of the administrative department came because of Mr. Huang. Luo Shan is considered a very qualified employee. There's no reason for the HR department to actively fire her. Moreover, the company's overall revenue and profits have reached new highs, and they even said the administrative department was short-staffed, specifically hiring Luo Fu…

Has Luo Shan shown any unusual behavior or done anything problematic recently?

Zhou Mingrui thought back and forth, feeling that after Luo Shan discarded those original paintings, everything seemed normal, except for secretly forming a group with Luo Fu and Li Ming, and warning him to be wary of Zaratulstra.

The group is in talks with Zaratulstra's company about a merger and restructuring… Luo Shan has warned me twice to be careful of Zaratulstra… Luo Shan then gets suddenly being fired…

Is there a connection between these events?

Well, after Luo Fu warned me last time, she was off for a few days. Tonight, she and Luo Shan might hint at something again… Because his previous interactions with Luo Shan and Luo Fu hadn't brought any abnormalities or led to attacks or difficulties, Zhou Mingrui wasn't averse to having another meal with them and listening to what they had to say.

Frankly, if it weren't for Luo Shan and Li Ming hinting three times since Sunday to be wary of Zaratulstra, he would have felt that everything around him was calm and normal, without any issues, as if he had never drunk the Assassin beverage.

But the more it seemed so, the stranger Zhou Mingrui felt, as if he were trapped in a cocoon, with various abnormalities lingering outside, waiting for a chance to invade, yet invisible to him.

So he was trying hard to probe, and contacting Luo Shan and Luo Fu was part of that effort.

…

Hall Film Company, Talent Department.

The young employee who had previously introduced various situations to Jenna smiled at her.

"I'm Jiang Yue. I'm responsible for helping you new recruits connect with various departments of the company. You can come to me for anything."

"What a coincidence." Jenna, who had changed into a short-sleeved chiffon blouse, smiled back.

Jiang Yue looked around and said, "This isn't a coincidence, it's destiny.

"Why was I waiting outside the conference room to take the interviewees out? It's because I'm responsible for these matters later on. Well, I'm not the only one in charge of you new recruits. When selecting, I chose you first. I have high hopes for you, keep it up!"

Whether Jiang Yue was sincere or not, these words made Jenna quite pleased, giving her a feeling of being valued and affirmed, naturally generating a happy mood.

Jiang Yue continued, "I thought you'd only report to work on Monday. The physical training courses and media response courses arranged for you are all next week. Well, today let's just chat casually. I'll give you a tour, and if we happen to meet a producer or director, you might get a chance to audition soon."

If I had come next week, Jia Yu might have already paid the penalty and left… Jenna followed Jiang Yue, walking forward in the Talent Department.

She glanced at Jia Yu's studio and said, "Jia Yu isn't here? I have a friend who's his fan. I wanted to get his autograph."

"He's not here. After The Great Pirate 3 blew up, he's been coming to the company less and less," Jiang Yue said with a complex tone. "Today he said he was going to attend a film-related event."

Jenna showed a disappointed expression on her face and nodded, saying, "The Great Pirate 3 is quite popular, with high box office numbers."

"Yeah, although those film critics all say it's just a qualified popcorn flick, audiences love watching popcorn flicks. What can those that don't even qualify compare with us?" Jiang Yue said, somewhat indignantly.

Jenna took this opportunity to ask, "So, is the company planning to make The Great Pirate 4?"

Jiang Yue lowered her voice. "There is such a plan, but the problem is that the romance queen is too slow. We've already finished filming and released The Great Pirate 3, but she still hasn't written The Great Pirate 4!"

After all, the person herself has been completely kicked out… After all, the dream manifestation's pen name is "Salted Fish Without Dreams"… Jenna continued Jiang Yue's conversation for a few sentences and then said, "Moreover, I see that The Great Pirate 3 is popular mainly because of the adventurer image of German Sparrow. If the next one doesn't have him as the main character, I think there will be big problems. The box office might even be a disaster, just like how The Great Pirate 1 and The Great Pirate 2 movies didn't have much fame."

This was laying the groundwork for the team's alternative awakening plan.

Jiang Yue was stunned for a moment. "The Great Pirate 1 and The Great Pirate 2 were never made into movies."

"Huh?" Jenna was stunned for two seconds and then said, "Then why is this movie directly called 'The Great Pirate 3'?"

"I don't know either," Jiang Yue answered with a bewildered face. "The big boss personally decided it, and no one else raised any objections. If you hadn't mentioned it, I wouldn't have remembered that the previous parts of 'The Great Pirate' series hadn't been made into movies…"

What's going on? How can they skip The Great Pirate 1 and The Great Pirate 2 and directly make The Great Pirate 3? Even if they skip, why not change the name instead of adding "3"? Amidst her confusion, Jenna vaguely grasped a key point.

This was related to one of Anderson Hood's reminders.

The master of the dream city is a symbol of loopholes and errors, so no matter how real this dream is, there will still be inconsistencies, loopholes, and places that make people feel terrified upon deep thought. It will still express the "dream" aspect!

A dream normally operates smoothly, but if outsiders do something beyond the norm and pointing to loopholes in between, could it create problems? For example, being illogically accepted by the masses, or being absurd and horrifying in the underlying realization of things…

After Madam Justice forcibly named this movie 'The Great Pirate 3' instead of 'The Great Adventurer', the dream manifestations naturally accepted it, and only outsiders could discover the discrepancy, while dream manifestations could perceive the problem after being reminded?

Madam Justice didn't mention this point because it was linked to An Xiaotian's car accident, and she forgot after being forced to leave the dream?

The reason for the loophole of The Great Pirate movie having 3 but no 1 and 2 is because Mr. Fool's subconscious believes this book series should indeed be made into movies? Jenna thought a lot in an instant.

She didn't delve deeper into this topic, fearing that Jiang Yue, as a dream manifestation, would become more confused and conflicted, leading to chaos in the corresponding dream and affecting herself.

"Since it can't be filmed later, The Great Pirate 3 can be made into stage plays, animations, TV series, games, and such, taking full advantage while the movie's popularity is still high." Jenna acted like an enthusiastic and kind-hearted audience member.

Jiang Yue nodded in agreement. "True."

She then said self-mockingly, "Is this something we can decide? Wait until the next meeting, and suggest it to our boss, Mei Xin. Let her whisper it to the big boss."

…

In a high-end hot pot restaurant with a proper stage.

In a private room on the second floor, Mr. Huang introduced to Zaratulstra beside him, "This hot pot restaurant has a unique feature. Later, there will be a face-changing performance, one of the local intangible cultural heritages…"

Zaratulstra, sitting next to the window, glanced at the large screens behind and around the stage, smiled and nodded slightly. "I'm looking forward to it."

Just as Mr. Huang was about to say something more, his phone suddenly rang.

The caller was "Bernie".

"Excuse me, I'll take this call first." Mr. Huang stood up with his phone and walked towards the door of the private room.

Chapter 977: The Best Support

After Mr. Huang left the private room to take the call, Zaratulstra leaned towards the center of the window, as if trying to get a clearer view of the stage and the corresponding large screen.

At the same time, Mr. Ed and other Intis Group employees responsible for reception, as well as Zaratulstra's entourage, all heard their phones vibrate.

They instinctively picked up their phones, unlocked the screens, and saw a pop-up message.

This wasn't a text message or WeChat notification, nor was it an alert for an incoming call. It seemed to be just a simple dialog box that had taken over the screen.

The dialog box contained a brief line of text: "Please be quiet for one minute."

As Mr. Ed, the Intis Group employees, and Zaratulstra's entourage noticed this line of text, it jumped up one by one, directly out of the phone screens, transforming into an invisible, colorless stream of information carrying mystical power that entered the heads of the corresponding people.

Except for Mr. Huang, who was making a phone call outside the private room, and Zaratulstra, who was looking at the stage below, everyone present suddenly became dazed, their eyes vacant, their bodies frozen in their previous positions.

They had truly become quiet.

Zaratulstra sensed something amiss and turned his gaze back to the people in the private room.

As he did so, out of the corner of his eye, he noticed his own reflection faintly appearing in the already open window.

His heart skipped a beat, and he instinctively pulled back his body, preventing the window from reflecting him anymore.

At this moment, behind the corresponding glass mirror surface, Lumian, in his Demoness of Despair form with disheveled black hair and wearing a dark T-shirt, quietly watched as Zaratulstra's ethereal figure appeared on the mirror and quickly moved towards the edge.

The normally invisible Spirit Body Threads on his body, upon touching the hard mirror surface, no longer extended as usual, but were drawn upwards by some force, disappearing into the deep, dark sky above.

This was Distortion's alteration of the Spirit Body Threads extension direction. This way, Zaratulstra wouldn't be able to detect in advance if someone was spying or lying in ambush behind the mirror by observing Spirit Body Threads.

The effect of Distortion came from the edge of the area behind the mirror, near the ghostly tunnel resembling a spider web, from a crown inlaid with numerous dark gems.

The crown floated silently in midair, with a tall, beautiful woman standing behind it.

This woman had tied her slightly curly chestnut hair into a bun, had straight eyebrows, blue eyes, and was wearing a white short-sleeved T-shirt and light-colored trousers. She was none other than Miss Bernie Huang.

She held a phone in her hand, talking to Huang Tao.

Logically, there shouldn't be any signal in the mirror world, but Bernie Huang's words, after going through the phone, directly transformed into an invisible stream of information, drilling out of this place. The replies from Huang Tao were similarly affected by Beyonder powers, entering as pure information streams and being converted into sound by the phone.

Lumian glanced at Miss Huang, recalling what she had said before the operation: "I can provide help for you, but I can't directly participate in the battle.

"I've already been kicked out of this dream twice and am under certain restrictions. If Zaratulstra sees me as his enemy, I might be kicked out of the dream for the third time, and the problem with my father hasn't been resolved yet…

"I'll create opportunities for you, but killing Zaratulstra or kicking him out of the dream can only be done by yourselves…

"This item can't be lent to you, otherwise, before Zaratulstra dies, you'll die first…"

Lumian hesitated no longer and, looking at Zaratulstra's Mirror Projection that hadn't yet disappeared, raised his left hand.

On his wrist was a silver bracelet that lit up with a silver-white and black glow.

Circle Inhabitant!

Lumian seized the opportunity and used Circle Inhabitant on Zaratulstra's fading Mirror Projection!

Of course, this was also suppressed to the Sequence 7 level, unable to make the corresponding fate repeat, and could only be triggered twice at most.

The current implementation of Circle Inhabitant was to make similar scenes appear again in a short time through disturbances in fate.

In the private room, after Zaratulstra pulled back his body, preventing the glass window from reflecting him again, he suddenly felt a gust of wind blowing from the entrance of the hot pot restaurant.

Before he could check the status of the others at the table, he found the window being blown, moving towards closing.

This once again cast his reflection onto the corresponding glass.

In Zaratul's deep blue, almost pure black eyes, a dim light flashed, already sensing the presence of anomalies, not just simple vigilance.

He raised his right hand, using a Miracle Invoker's ability to influence the future.

He reduced the probability of his Mirror Projection being utilized by others!

In the mirror world, Lumian held an ice crystal thin sword wrapped in terrifying black flames in one hand, while touching the river of fate of Zaratulstra's Mirror Projection with the other, trying to magnify the fate tributary of his successful attack.

The two forces collided, with Zaratulstra's prevailing slightly, causing that fate tributary not only to fail to magnify but to shrink by one-tenth.

However, for Lumian, this was enough.

His use of the Magnified Fate ability wasn't to increase the probability of the curse succeeding, but to counteract the Miracle Invoker's interference with fate.

Being so close to Zaratulstra's Mirror Projection, as long as there was no interference from the Miracle Invoker, or as long as the Miracle Invoker's interference wasn't strong enough, his chances of achieving his goal were quite high.

Lumian's ice crystal thin sword darted out, striking the reappearing Mirror Projection of Zaratulstra.

The Fire of Destruction wrapped around the ice crystal thin sword instantly poured into that projection, igniting it from the inside out, placing it in pure, mad destruction.

This was a curse, a curse aimed at Zaratulstra!

The mystical principle behind many of a Demoness's curses was to utilize Mirror Projections, which was also a kind of Mirror Person, a temporary, short-lived Mirror Person with a very strong mystical connection to the original person!

When Lumian's Fire of Destruction ignited Zaratulstra's Mirror Projection, in the private room, Zaratulstra's eyes, nose, ears, mouth, skin pores, and other places erupted with violent black flames.

In an instant, this old man became a black torch, his body quickly thinning and shrinking, burning to ashes.

Paper Figurine Substitutes!

For an Angel like Zaratulstra, Paper Figurine Substitutes could long be used to transfer curses, but to escape a curse completed by a Demoness through a Mirror Projection, the main body still needed to hide in the fog of history in time.

After interfering with the development of fate using his Miracle Invoker ability, Zaratulstra didn't think the first wave of attacks would end there. He quickly used Paper Figurine Substitute, while he cautiously entered the fog of history, hiding in a crevice.

The scene of him burning into a paper figurine didn't attract the attention of those at the table.

Those people were still in a quiet state.

In the mirror world.

Near the illusory dark tunnel, Bernadette held a phone in one hand, while with the other, she made several dark gems on the crown in front of her light up with strange radiance.

Distortion!

She used Distortion again, swapping the spatial positions of Zaratulstra's main body plus Paper Figurine Substitute and his Mirror Projection.

Thus, Zaratulstra, who had hidden in the fog of history, and the Paper Figurine Substitute that had been burned to ashes, came to the mirror world.

This place was also connected to the spirit world, this place also had the fog of history.

Meanwhile, Zaratulstra's Mirror Projection sat by the hot pot table, quickly disappearing into nothingness amidst the madly growing black flames.

It vanished into the void along with these Flames of Destruction.

After completing this, Bernadette quickly put away the crown inlaid with dark gems, stepped back twice, and disappeared into the illusory, complex tunnel resembling a spider web.

Throughout this process, she maintained her call with Mr. Huang.

Lumian showed no emotional fluctuation at Bernadette's departure. According to their agreement, this princess was mainly responsible for three things:

First, to draw away Mr. Huang, who was suspected to be influenced by the mirrored Roselle;

Second, to use the Mystery Pryer pathway's control over the information world to "push" a message to the others in the private room that would make them "quiet", with the subsequent cleanup and erasure of traces to be done by the Information Shredder—Lumian still remembered that when Miss Huang saw the Information Shredder, her expression noticeably became more complex, as if seeing a natural enemy being artificially created;

Third, to help Lumian and the others hide their Spirit Body Threads, preventing Zaratulstra from discovering them in advance. If Lumian failed to assassinate successfully in the initial stage, she would help bring Zaratulstra into the mirror world, allowing them to change from assassination to forced killing, with the possibility of one more indirect assistance later depending on the situation.

This way, Lumian and the others wouldn't have to worry about their battle with Zaratulstra attracting the official forces of the dream city, being interrupted by them, or even hunted down.

Moreover, Zaratulstra would be separated from his marionettes.

Even if Zaratulstra could manipulate the Spirit Body Threads through the mirror, those marionettes, if they didn't possess the power to come to the mirror world, wouldn't be able to participate in this battle.

Cutting off the marionettes was the first step in dealing with high-level beings of the Seer pathway.

As the Paper Figurine Substitute was completely burned, Zaratulstra, at Sequence 7 and unable to stay in the fog of history for too long, returned to reality.

He saw that he was in the void dark area behind the mirror, and near the mirror surface stood a figure whose charm couldn't be concealed even by darkness.

Lumian smiled, making this area seem as if it was illuminated by clear moonlight.

Charm!

Zaratulstra's consciousness was momentarily stunned, all Worms of Spirit seemingly marveling at that heart-piercing beauty.

Almost simultaneously, the invisible spider silk that had long been spread throughout this place entangled him.

Lumian then drew the Sword of Courage and, from a distance of over ten meters, slashed towards Zaratulstra.

That iron-black straight sword created a highly compressed fire serpent, falling towards the old man dressed in a black formal suit from a distance.

At the edge of the area behind the mirror, Jenna emerged from her Invisible state, used the mirror in her hand to reflect Zaratulstra's figure, and smeared her other hand, covered in Demoness black flames, onto it.

Chapter 978: Wishes

Boom!

The highly compressed red fire serpent exploded, engulfing Zaratulstra before Jenna could complete her curse. It tore him into shreds of paper, causing them to ignite simultaneously.

Zaratulstra once again retreated into the fog of history.

As the explosion from the red fire serpent began to subside, he returned to the present from a corner of the area behind the mirror, dragging out his past self from the Historical Void—the self that was a Sequence 1 Attendant of Mysteries.

As soon as Zaratulstra appeared, clad in a black robe with eyes pure black and lightless, he immediately transformed into a massive vortex composed of countless maggots.

This enormous vortex was deep and dark, extending numerous slimy tentacles covered in bizarre patterns.

Mythical Creature form—the Mythical Creature form of the Seer pathway!

For Angels, the Mythical Creature form was their truest appearance, so there was no question of whether They could or could not transform into it within the dream city. Of course, this too was suppressed to the Sequence 7 level.

The instant he saw the maggot vortex, even Lumian, as a Demoness of Despair and possessing godhood, couldn't help but feel his thoughts stutter, his joints stiffen, and his mind as if it were under attack from a super-strong hurricane.

He instinctively closed his eyes, while Jenna, who was near the mirror tunnel, seemed to be twisting her entire body.

Seizing this opportunity, Zaratulstra's main body made a wish, "My wish is: For my marionettes to return to my side."

As soon as the words were spoken, two more figures appeared in the area behind the mirror.

They were dressed as business people, one male and one female.

As for the other marionettes, they of course belonged to other Marionettists. Zaratulstra could command their operators, not them directly.

Zaratulstra didn't wish to leave the mirror world because he had sensed the presence of Distortion power from the fact that he had been swapped into the mirror world despite hiding in the fog of history. So he chose not to directly leave the current area.

He feared having his position Distorted again, which might cause him to appear out of thin air in front of Yagates, the number one figure in the police department.

At this moment, because Zaratulstra's Mythical Creature form was restricted to Sequence 7, both the godhood impact and mental corruption effects were greatly reduced. So Lumian, as a Demoness of Despair, with his eyes closed and maintaining distance, began to recover. He raised his left hand and snapped his fingers with a loud crack.

In different parts of the area behind the mirror, under the cover of a Mirror Maze composed of numerous mirrors, groups of delayed explosion fireballs that had been prepared in advance received the order to explode immediately!

Rumble!

They exploded simultaneously, intertwining with each other, causing a fierce red flame storm to cover the entire area behind the mirror, completely engulfing Zaratulstra's Historical Void image, the two marionettes, along with Jenna and Lumian.

This was the Hunter's home turf, a battlefield meticulously prepared by Lumian!

As for Zaratulstra's main body, he had once again hidden in the fog of history.

Rumble!

Zaratulstra's two marionettes used Paper Figurine Substitutes, being torn to pieces in the violent impact waves and ignited by the red flames.

Zaratulstra's Historical Void image maintained its Mythical Creature form, extending numerous tentacles to entangle the oncoming flame storm.

He Grafted himself onto the flames, thus avoiding harm, merely drifting to another side with the storm.

Normally, Grafting suppressed to Sequence 7 wouldn't allow Zaratulstra's Historical Void image to recombine with the concept of fire, but Sequence 7 Magician of the Seer pathway could manipulate flames, having a very close connection with fire itself. Therefore, Zaratulstra's Historical Void image could become a special kind of flame, constantly flashing within the storm.

Lumian's body also shattered like a mirror.

Immediately after, he teleported near the newly emerged female marionette, using the mirror in his hand to reflect her figure, and smeared the Flames of Destruction imbued with Cull forces onto the mirror surface.

Affected by both Zaratulstra's main body entering the fog of history and his historical projection turning into a "flame" drifting with the storm, the female marionette had no time to react or time to hide in the fog of history. Extremely suppressed black flames hiding destruction, erupted from within her body.

She quickly regressed into a paper figurine, but when she emerged in another part of the area behind the mirror, the Flames of Destruction on her body had not extinguished.

After using Paper Figurine Substitute twice in succession, this marionette's main body also turned to ashes.

At this point, the terrifying scene created by the groups of delayed explosion fireballs finally subsided. Zaratulstra's Historical Void image extended his right hand and gently grasped.

The surrounding space-time distorted in response, covering the entire area behind the mirror as if with a giant curtain, forming a concealed area isolated from the surroundings.

Realm of Mysteries!

After confirming that Lumian and Jenna had been pulled into the Realm of Mysteries by his historical projection and could not prevent him for a short time, Zaratulstra returned from the fog of history, landing at the edge of the dark and void area behind the mirror.

He ignored his historical projection and the remaining marionettes that were also trapped in the Realm of Mysteries, walking directly towards the glass mirror surface leading to the hot pot restaurant's private room.

Now, he had the energy to be vigilant and avoid the influence of the Distortion forces.

Just as Zaratulstra approached the glass mirror surface, he suddenly heard a "bang" of a gunshot.

A golden bullet, carrying an indescribable sense of decay, flew out from one of the spider web-like tunnels, heading straight for his chest.

Anthony, wearing a cheap black T-shirt and sporting a crew cut, flashed out of the tunnel following the bullet.

He had been lurking there using the power of the Ice Mirror Charm, not venturing into the area behind the mirror, so he wasn't encompassed by the Realm of Mysteries created by Zaratulstra's historical projection.

As Zaratulstra's main body avoided the bullet, Anthony, using the remnant power of Mirror Traversal, instantly appeared beside the white-haired old man.

He raised a pre-drawn picture while his eyes turned golden and vertical.

Frenzy!

Anthony thought that Zaratulstra had resurrected by seizing Loki's body, so there might still be some struggle between them. Therefore, using Frenzy to target Zaratulstra's mental state might have a miraculous effect.

The picture in his hand was drawn on a blank sketchbook, depicting a door, a lock, and wooden bars completely sealing the door.

The picture spontaneously ignited, turning into a phantom image that attached itself to the glass mirror surface leading to the outside world, sealing it with wooden bars and adding a lock.

Zaratulstra, directly affected by Frenzy, suddenly faded, becoming a phantom.

This was a Magician's ability to create illusions.

After returning from the fog of history, the first thing Zaratulstra actually did was create an illusion, rather than directly approaching the exit.

He used this to make Anthony misjudge his position, only hitting the illusion.

Zaratulstra's true figure quickly sketched itself not far away, speaking coldly in Dragonese, "My wish is: To banish the enemies here."

Before Anthony could use his area-of-effect Awe, he suddenly blacked out, as if lifted by an invisible force and thrown into the air.

When he regained consciousness, he found himself in a prison, with no mirror-like objects around to use—all the iron bars were wrapped in cotton cloth.

Zaratulstra chose to banish Anthony rather than wish for his death because this Angel believed that the enemy mixed with the Demoness likely also had one or two Mirror Substitutions, which would lead to a momentary failure of the wish and a waste of time.

However, this meant that Lumian, who was inside the Realm of Mysteries, was unaffected by the miracle and remained inside.

Zaratulstra's wish was to banish the enemies "here", and the Realm of Mysteries no longer belonged to "here"!

No longer disturbed by Anthony, Zaratulstra turned his gaze back to the glass mirror surface.

He had already realized two wishes, creating two miracles, which had considerably drained him. So he just opened his mouth, preparing to use an Air Cannon to blast the wooden bars and lock, removing their blockade of the exit.

Inside the Realm of Mysteries,Jenna had disappeared, while Lumian, having slightly recovered, teleported behind Zaratulstra's historical projection.

He raised his head, looking up high, letting his eyes, which had burst many capillaries from directly viewing the Mythical Creature form earlier, turn iron-black. At the same time, he let out a harrumph.

As two beams of white light shot from his nostrils towards the dark vortex composed of worms, he threw the Sword of Courage in his hand upwards towards a certain point in the sky.

That place appeared pale white in his eyes.

It was the weakness of the Realm of Mysteries!

Even though the Realm of Mysteries was an ability that only Sequence 1 could use, it currently only had the strength of Sequence 7!

Outside the Realm of Mysteries.

Zaratulstra made a "bang" sound, firing an Air Cannon, causing the wooden bars and iron lock drawn on the glass mirror surface to shatter inch by inch.

At this moment, several figures traversed through another tunnel.

There was Ludwig wearing a child's formal attire, a slightly plump female version of Anthony with a mature demeanor and fairly pretty features, and a handsome male version of Jenna with flaxen hair styled dashingly.

The real Jenna was still hiding inside the tunnel, not entering this area behind the mirror.

Her previous appearance was a shallow mirror person created using special Mirror World Fragments, which could be maintained for a longer time to confuse Zaratulstra. However, under the influence of Lumian's area explosion and the Realm of Mysteries earlier, that weak shallow mirror person had been destroyed.

The current male version of Jenna and female version of Anthony were deep mirror people created in advance using the special Mirror World Fragments in Franca and Lumian's possession. They could only be maintained for three minutes, but in terms of abilities, they almost perfectly replicated the originals, and could also borrow power from the special mirror world to a certain extent.

After the battle with the reanimated female corpse, Lumian and the others began to pay more attention to the abilities that came with the special Mirror World Fragments.

In the real world, the effect might not be obvious, but in the dream city where everyone was suppressed to Sequence 7, the more mirror helpers, the better!

Jenna hadn't let her male version, the female version of Anthony, and Ludwig follow Anthony to attack Zaratulstra earlier because she remembered Lumian's prior reminder: "If we fail to assassinate successfully, subsequent attacks should come in batches. We can't all rush in at once, lest Zaratulstra's special ability takes us all away at once. This can also deplete his spirituality and the number of times he can use his special abilities…"

In the Hunter's home turf, although it couldn't be said that they could make arrangements for the enemy from beginning to end, at least the first few waves of attacks could reflect their intentions!

Chapter 979: Mythical Creature

Faced with the attack from Ludwig, the male version of Jenna, and the female version of Anthony, Zaratulstra showed no surprise.

His body inside the black formal wear suddenly disintegrated, along with his face, collapsing inward into a dark vortex.

If one looked closely at this vortex, they would see countless transparent insects frantically writhing, seemingly crawling into the observer's mind and body, devouring thoughts and nerves.

From within the sleeves and pant legs of the black formal wear, numerous slimy tentacles covered in bizarre patterns extended outward.

Zaratulstra had also revealed his Mythical Creature form!

Unlike His Historical Void image, His clothes were real, not part of a historical projection. They didn't transform into the Mythical Creature, remaining draped over the surface of the maggot vortex.

This made Him appear even more terrifying.

As Zaratulstra revealed his Mythical Creature form, both the male version of Jenna and the female version of Anthony instantly froze.

One's hair rapidly grew thicker and longer, their skin losing its luster, while the other's face became covered in patches of grayish-white dragon scales.

Silently, their bodies simultaneously collapsed. The former turned into a writhing mass of flesh, covered in thick, slimy, and bizarre black hair as thick as small snakes. The tips of these hairs struggled to open black and white eyes or stick out snake-like tongues. The latter disintegrated into several lizards covered in grayish-white dragon scales.

They had lost control.

Although Zaratulstra's Mythical Creature form was suppressed to the Sequence 7 level, as deep Mirror People, their mental states were already unstable, and their emotions tended towards extremes. Naturally, they couldn't help but lose control.

With this development, Ludwig's movements slowed slightly, his mind bearing the impact of the female Anthony's indiscriminate Frenzy.

Just as he was about to succumb to the male Jenna's Charm and turn to devour that mass of flesh, the two out-of-control deep Mirror People began to fade and become transparent, quickly disappearing.

They were illusory to begin with.

Ludwig could only open his mouth wide, his mouth corners splitting to the back of his head.

Then, he leaped towards Zaratulstra's Mythical Creature form in its black formal wear, biting down on one of the extended bizarre tentacles.

He wanted to use this to Deprive Zaratulstra of His Paper Figurine Substitutes ability.

Crack!

Ludwig bit down, but only crushed a paper figurine.

Zaratulstra, transformed into a Mythical Creature, appeared in midair. Within the dark vortex of countless maggots that formed His face, several differently colored gems seemed to light up simultaneously.

Around Ludwig, who still had the paper figurine in his mouth, numerous illusory doors suddenly appeared.

These illusory doors took various forms: some double-doored, some single, some barely showing a crack, some covered in mysterious patterns… They were densely packed and numerous, completely enveloping Ludwig.

As Zaratulstra waved His slimy tentacles, one of the illusory doors suddenly opened, welcoming Ludwig as he was thrown towards it.

Ludwig's figure instantly disappeared into the profound darkness behind the door.

Exile!

This was a Secrets Sorcerer ability that Zaratulstra used with the aid of a certain Sealed Artifact. It could throw the target into a corresponding space-time turbulence, only able to return after five seconds. Of course, complete return was contingent on the person or object thrown into the space-time turbulence being able to withstand its impact.

Combined with a Miracle Invoker's influence on fate, this could banish Ludwig for a full ten seconds.

In just two or three seconds, Zaratulstra had permanently or temporarily dealt with the third wave of attacking enemies.

He spoke again in the Dragonese, "My wish is: that no one else will interfere with me from now on."

As soon as the words were spoken, Zaratulstra realized His wish.

Affected by this aspect of his abilities being suppressed to Sequence 7, the realization of his wish had clear boundaries—it was limited to only the next thirty seconds, with poor effectiveness against enemies possessing godhood. The stronger the godhood, the more likely they were to break through the restrictions and interfere with him.

At this moment, Jenna, hiding in one of the tunnels, suddenly found herself unable to "traverse" to the corresponding area behind the mirror.

Zaratulstra, maintaining His Mythical Creature form, descended from midair, floating towards the glass mirror surface leading to the hot pot restaurant's private room.

Rumble!

He heard a faint explosion and saw a place in the area behind the mirror where an illusory curtain seemed to be pushed up, but not completely broken through.

Inside the Realm of Mysteries.

When Lumian threw the Sword of Courage and used the Spell of Harrumph, Zaratulstra's historical projection instantly swapped positions with His marionette.

The marionette, hit by the two beams of white light, only shook slightly.

His spirit was essentially already dead.

Rumble!

The Sword of Courage struck the weak point of the Realm of Mysteries, creating a terrifying explosion, but failed to penetrate through.

Amidst this chaos, Lumian's figure disappeared, Blinking to the side of Zaratulstra's Historical Void image.

His left hand was already raised, the silver bracelet on his wrist glowing with a silvery-white light tinged with black.

Circle Inhabitant!

Lumian once again used Circle Inhabitant, targeting the position of Zaratulstra's Historical Void image!

Of course, this attempt also forced him to face the other's Mythical Creature form directly. His thoughts and joints were once again filled with glue, and his mental state showed signs of some confusion.

It was only because he possessed godhood, and the other's Mythical Creature form was also limited to the Sequence 7 level, that he didn't lose control on the spot. Otherwise, even if he hadn't lost control immediately, he would have been in a state where his mind was swept by a storm, unable to continue subsequent actions.

Just as Zaratulstra's Historical Void image was about to continue swapping positions with His marionette, He suddenly found the attempt failed.

He remained in place.

Seizing this opportunity, Lumian, his eyes showing a silver-black color, suddenly pushed his right palm forward.

All his remaining spirituality surged towards the river of fate of Zaratulstra's historical projection.

Compelling Fate!

He wanted to compel the fate of Zaratulstra's historical projection to rush towards the imagined tributary!

Due to the influence of Zaratulstra's historical projection's own status, the probability of success for this action was actually not high. But as a historical projection, there was a natural flaw, problem, and weakness in terms of fate, which was the time limit on their existence.

If Lumian wanted to compel fate to make Zaratulstra's historical projection fall into dire straits and be killed by his subsequent attacks, it would depend on whether Mr. Fool would provide protection. But if he chose the fate tributary of "historical projection prematurely terminated due to unexpected influence", there was a considerable chance of achieving the goal!

In an instant, Lumian's spirituality was completely drained, forcing him to release the part he had accumulated in advance to barely support himself.

His body involuntarily leaned back slightly, and on his bright face, streams of blood flowed from his eyes, nose, and the corners of his mouth. His black long hair seemed to have gained its own vitality, floating upwards and becoming slightly thicker.

This was the backlash from directly viewing the fate of a Mythical Creature.

Not only did one of his eyes go blind immediately, but his entire person became like a marionette, temporarily unable to think or move.

Almost simultaneously, Zaratulstra's Historical Void image became semi-transparent, with ripples appearing on its surface.

It was as if some accident had prevented the spirituality of Zaratulstra's main body from penetrating the Realm of Mysteries to maintain the existence of the historical projection.

In the blink of an eye, Zaratulstra's Historical Void image faded to invisibility, completely dissipating.

Without His presence, Lumian finally recovered.

His blue eye, covered in a blood mist, saw the black curtain enveloping this area rapidly collapsing. He saw that male marionette, having lost the control of Zaratulstra's Historical Void image and being isolated from Zaratulstra's main body by the Realm of Mysteries, standing still, motionless.

Taking advantage of the Realm of Mysteries not yet completely collapsing, Lumian took out a mirror, reflected that marionette, and cursed it with the Fire of Destruction.

The male marionette immediately erupted with black flames suppressing madness and destruction from the inside out, its body beginning to melt like steel.

Lumian didn't look at him again. After the Realm of Mysteries further collapsed, he used the ability of Mirror Traversal to return to the area behind the mirror.

Just as Zaratulstra approached the glass mirror surface, He sensed movement behind Him.

This maggot vortex, clad in black formal wear and extending numerous bizarre tentacles, suddenly turned around to see Lumian, one eye covered in blood, the other unfocused, with blood flowing from them.

Although Lumian didn't directly look at this complete Mythical Creature, only glancing towards the black shoes where things were vaguely crawling out, he still fell into intermittent thought stutters and slight mental confusion.

His tendency towards madness worsened.

At this moment, he had already retrieved the Sword of Courage with invisible spider silk. Holding this iron-black straight sword burning with scarlet flames in both hands, he was about to strike at Zaratulstra from a distance.

After overcoming difficulties and launching several waves of attacks, he and his teammates had finally taken out Zaratulstra's marionette and Historical Void image, and could now challenge His main body!

Within the dark vortex that formed Zaratulstra's head, each worm emitted an elderly voice.

The words they spoke came together, forming echoing speech in just one second.

"To be able to end my Historical Void image in such a short time, I'm indeed a bit surprised.

"But it doesn't matter, I'll just summon another one."

As He spoke, Zaratulstra extended a bizarre, slimy tentacle and dragged out another version of Himself from the fog of history.

This was still him as a Sequence 1 Attendant of Mysteries.

If it weren't for His concern about the hidden enemy who used the power of Distortion to transfer Him to the mirror world, Zaratulstra felt He could have killed this group entirely, rather than just thinking about escaping this place.

At this moment, Lumian couldn't help but feel a bit of despair.

Zaratulstra still has the spirituality to summon a Historical Void image?

Is this what an Angel is? Even suppressed to Sequence 7, so many of us have only taken out His marionette, not even scratching His skin!

Courage and madness occupied Lumian's body. Without fear, he slashed out a highly compressed scarlet fire serpent towards Zaratulstra and His Historical Void image from a distance.

Chapter 980: Together

Faced with the giant fire serpent slashed out by Lumian, Zaratulstra's Historical Void image had not yet fully emerged from the fog of history and was unable to respond effectively. Meanwhile, the countless transparent maggots within the dark vortex of Zaratulstra's main body merely watched, taking no action.

The highly compressed scarlet fire serpent had not yet truly approached Zaratulstra's main body when it suddenly changed direction, curving to the side, as if unwilling to conflict with this complete Mythical Creature.

This was the power of a "miracle".

Zaratulstra's previously made wish that "no one else will interfere with him" was still in effect, still functioning!

Although Lumian possessed a certain degree of godhood, the power of the wish was unable to prevent him from leaving the Realm of Mysteries and returning to this area behind the mirror. However, it could still prevent him from directly affecting Zaratulstra's main body, causing all his attacks to bypass the target.

At this moment, Lumian suddenly raised his head.

But he wasn't looking at Zaratulstra's Mythical Creature form. Instead, he was looking at the glass mirror surface not far from Zaratulstra.

His eye, covered in a blood mist due to burst capillaries, turned iron-black, reflecting the glass mirror surface that represented the entrance and exit, reflecting the pale spots on it.

This was the mirror's own weakness.

Immediately after, Lumian, wearing a silver-white earring on his left ear and his black hair floating gently, smiled and raised the Sword of Courage in his hand.

The giant fire serpent that had bypassed Zaratulstra's main body changed direction accordingly, fiercely pouncing towards the pale spot on the glass mirror surface.

The distance between them was extremely short. Before Zaratulstra's main body could react, the highly compressed scarlet fire serpent hit the target area.

Zaratulstra's head, composed of countless maggots forming a vortex, turned towards that spot, seeming somewhat stunned by Lumian's choice.

Once the mirror surface shattered, the corresponding area behind the mirror would collapse with it. If the people and objects in that area couldn't escape in time through the mirror tunnels, they would be swallowed by the turbulence of the mirror world and dragged into its depths. The dangers there were fatal for Beyonders without a complete Mythical Creature form, meaning Lumian!

Even for Angels with complete Mythical Creature forms, unless they were of the Door pathway or the Demoness pathway, the depths of the mirror world were places they were reluctant to venture into lightly.

Seeing this scene, Lumian's smile grew increasingly manic.

I never intended to attack you at all!

My initial goal was to shatter the mirror corresponding to this area, dragging you down into the depths of the mirror world, into dangerous space-time turbulence!

And to prevent you from detecting my true intentions, I pretended to attack you directly. That strange interference helped me save a lot of spirituality. Otherwise, even as a Pyromaniac wearing the Lie earring, changing the direction of the fire serpent midway would have been very strenuous and consumed a lot!

Boom!

The scarlet giant serpent, carrying the effects of Cull and Mighty Blow, exploded thunderously at the weak spot on the inside of the mirror, stirring up violent winds.

Amidst the gale, the sound of cracking was drowned out as the mirror instantly shattered into pieces, causing the entire area behind the mirror to collapse with a thunderous roar.

This dark, void world crumbled.

Neither Lumian nor Zaratulstra's main body managed to enter that spider web-like illusory tunnel. They plummeted sharply towards the unseen bottom of the darkness, not knowing where it led.

The collapse of this mirror world also brought intense shock waves to the historical fog that had previously permeated this place. Zaratulstra's Historical Void image returned to formlessness before it could be fully dragged out.

As they fell rapidly, Lumian's body became very light, noticeably slowing his descent.

He could already see the dark storm raging below, seemingly able to tear apart everything, and he was about to be engulfed by it.

He activated the black mark on his right shoulder, vanishing from the current void with a whoosh.

His figure didn't appear in the outside world. He didn't use a Demoness's control over the mirror world or the Spiritual World Traversal ability from Hand Bro to escape this dangerous place before being caught in the space-time turbulence. Instead, he Blinked to Zaratulstra's side.

Invisible spider silk then became visible, layer upon layer binding the maggot vortex clad in black formal wear.

After escaping from the Realm of Mysteries, Lumian had been secretly producing spider silk, letting it surround Zaratulstra's main body. When the area behind the mirror collapsed, these transparent spider threads immediately entangled the target, disregarding the corruption and effects brought by the Mythical Creature form on itself, making contact with Zaratulstra's main body.

It was through this contact, relying on the positioning provided by the Demoness's spider silk, that Lumian was able to find Zaratulstra's main body in this chaotic and dangerous space-time and Teleport to His side.

Those spider threads slowly and jerkily entangled Zaratulstra, while Lumian, positioned beside Him, closed his eyes and slashed the Sword of Courage towards the maggot vortex clad in black formal wear, following the pull of the spider silk.

The scarlet flames on this iron-black straight sword silently turned pitch black, restraining violence and madness.

Fire of Destruction!

As Lumian drew closer to Zaratulstra's main body, even with his eyes closed, his thoughts became sluggish, and the Sword of Courage he was slashing noticeably slowed.

This was the corruption brought by the Mythical Creature form, which was also a kind of marionettization.

Now, it took Zaratulstra 20 seconds to gain initial control over a target's Spirit Body Threads, but with the impact and corruption of the Mythical Creature form added, it only took 7 seconds!

From the moment Lumian left the Realm of Mysteries, He had been secretly diverting attention to manipulate the other's Spirit Body Threads!

As expected… it's like this… The manic smile didn't disappear from Lumian's bright face.

He activated the black mark on his right shoulder once again.

And now, he was depending on how Zaratulstra's main body was bound to the invisible spider silk.

In other words, his Teleportation would bring Zaratulstra along with him!

He wanted to go somewhere together with Zaratulstra!

Zaratulstra suddenly had a sense of danger. He abandoned manipulating Lumian's Spirit Body Threads and was about to use Paper Figurine Substitutes to escape the binding of the spider silk, and then leave this area that was about to be swallowed by space-time turbulence using the Secrets Sorcerer Sealed Artifact he carried.

At this moment, in a virtual tunnel of the mirror world, Bernadette, sitting on a green pea vine, was making a phone call while looking at a mirror.

That mirror was a substitute Lumian had made for himself, having a very close connection with him. It was relying on this connection and the abilities of the Mystery Pryer pathway that Bernadette was able to monitor every move on the battlefield.

She suddenly reached out her right hand and once again virtually wiped the dark crown she had taken out again.

The numerous gems on that crown lit up simultaneously, using Lumian's mirror to Disorder the corresponding space-time.

Zaratulstra first turned into a paper figurine, then His main body reappeared in the same position, still bound by spider silk.

This was the last bit of help Bernadette could provide.

Lumian's figure disappeared from the dark void that was about to be swallowed by space-time turbulence, taking Zaratulstra with him.

The two of them appeared on the surface of the large screen on the hot pot restaurant's stage and passed through it.

Zaratulstra then saw the private room that belonged to his group, saw tables of customers eating hot pot.

Thankfully, it's not the police station… Zaratulstra immediately contracted the maggot vortex, quickly changing back into a white-haired elderly man.

He was worried that his Mythical Creature form would cause massive casualties and madness in the public setting of the hot pot restaurant. If that happened, He would certainly be captured by the main consciousness of the dream and forcibly kicked out or turned into a marionette, which could no longer be avoided by historical projection.

Just as Zaratulstra regained human form, He suddenly saw a pair of eyes, dark brown eyes.

Those were Zhou Mingrui's eyes.

Zhou Mingrui was sitting at a table not far from the stage, staring blankly as he watched Zaratulstra and a beautiful woman with a bloody face walk out from the screen. He felt that a dangerous aura lingered on the former, as if he had just emerged from a state that could kill everyone in the hot pot restaurant.

This deeply shocked him, and the goose intestine he was holding with his chopsticks, not yet placed in the pot, froze in midair.

Outside the hot pot restaurant, the sky at 7 pm was still bright.

Zaratulstra's gaze instantly froze.

The next second, he turned his head to look at Lumian.

One of Lumian's eyes had lost focus, dazed and confused, while the other blue eye was shrouded in a bloody mist.

He put away the Sword of Courage and smirked at Zaratulstra, a dangerous yet beautiful smile playing on his lips.

Both of them felt pain simultaneously, as if tightly entangled by invisible tentacles, forcibly being dragged away from the world they relied on for survival.

Their thoughts were also rapidly becoming sluggish and stuttering.

Confirming that the situation was as he had anticipated, Lumian smiled even more happily.

Zaratulstra didn't put up much more resistance, as that would prevent Him from entering the dream again later.

He took a deep look at the Demoness of Despair before him, then left this world along with the force kicking Him out of the dream.

Lumian did the same.

Clap, clap, clap, warm applause suddenly came from all directions in the hot pot restaurant.

Whether that scene of the beautiful woman and the old man walking out of the screen was magic or an application of virtual reality technology, it was worth applauding!

What the audience didn't notice was that behind Zaratulstra, an illusory door discreetly appeared, and Ludwig, dressed in children's formal wear, walked out.

People and objects banished by the Secrets Sorcerer ability, when the time was up, didn't return to their original position but to the side of the person who used the Exile ability.

Ludwig glanced at Lumina and Zaratulstra in front of him, quickly changing his mouth back to its original form.

He walked around to the front and took Lumina's hand.

Lumina remembered that this was her child. Under Ludwig's guidance, she left the stage and walked towards the back of the hot pot restaurant—the resting place for the face-changing performers.

Zaratulstra looked at his position in confusion, and amidst the audience's applause, he also walked off the stage, heading towards the second floor.

After walking seven or eight steps, he saw the stairs, and for some unknown reason, his mood suddenly became joyful.

At this moment, he heard a "bang" sound.

A dim green bullet flew from somewhere above, hitting the side of his head.

On the surface of the glass window in the corner of the second floor, Franca's figure faintly appeared.

Located in the blind spot of surveillance, she had extended the Inevitable Gun slightly out of the glass mirror surface.

Certain Death!

As the gun fired, Zaratulstra's pupils suddenly dilated, and his head exploded, splattering red and white in all directions.

Franca quickly withdrew the Inevitable Gun and calmly left the current glass window using the remaining power of the Ice Amulet.

We may not be able to kill your main body, but can't we kill your dream manifestation?

Without this current identity, let's see how you obtain money and resources, see how long it takes you to get a new identity and return to the dream city!

Chapter 981: Wrapping Up

At a table near the stage, Zhou Mingrui had been observing Zaratulstra and the unknown beautiful woman ever since they walked out from the screen.

Unlike the majority of people who were drawn to the woman with blood on her face, a dazed look in her eyes, and an strangely alluring beauty, he was more focused on Zaratulstra's state and actions.

Of course, during this process, he still used his peripheral vision to keep an eye on the woman, to see her condition and what she would do next.

After just a few seconds, he noticed a strange child appear from behind Zaratulstra, take the hand of the blood-faced woman, walk off the stage, and head towards the resting area for the face-changing performers. Meanwhile, Zaratulstra also looked confused, slowly following them off the stage and approaching the stairs leading to the second floor.

Zhou Mingrui noticed that Zaratulstra's pace quickened as he walked, his expression gradually becoming relaxed and showing a hint of joy.

Just then, he heard a "bang" and saw Zaratulstra's head explode like a watermelon dropped from a great height.

As red and white matter splattered in all directions, the applause, cheers, and chatter in the hot pot restaurant seemed to have been muted, disappearing instantly.

Everything froze or solidified in that moment, except for the fragments of Zaratulstra's head mixed with red and white liquid, blossoming like fireworks.

Thud!

Zaratulstra's corpse fell not far from the stairs.

Zaratulstra is dead… shot to death… In that moment, Zhou Mingrui was extremely confused and bewildered, feeling as if a movie special effect had intruded into daily life, making it all seem very unreal.

In all his life, this was the first time he had witnessed someone being shot to death.

He usually had full confidence in public safety and felt very secure.

The next second, Zhou Mingrui thought of the Li Ming, Luo Fu, and Luo Shan group who had been constantly reminding him to be careful of Zaratulstra. He also remembered that Luo Fu, who had been eating hot pot here just a few minutes ago, had gone to the restroom.

What a coincidence, she just happened to not be in the dining hall…

It couldn't have been her, could it?

Just as this thought flashed through Zhou Mingrui's mind, he heard screams and felt the entire hot pot restaurant in an uproar.

Just as this thought flashed through Zhou Mingrui's mind, he heard screams and felt the entire hot pot restaurant in an uproar.

People had finally reacted.

A bloody shooting had just occurred right before their eyes!

Some people immediately called the police, some tried to leave the hot pot restaurant, fearing there might be more gunfire, while others, both nauseated and terrified, wiped the stains from their faces…

"What happened?" Zhou Mingrui suddenly heard Luo Fu's voice.

This beautiful woman wearing a black T-shirt with sequins and black-framed glasses had returned to her original position.

Luo Shan abruptly stood up, pointing at where Zaratulstra had fallen, and said in a terrified and stammering voice, "S-someone died!

"Zaratulstra was shot dead!"

Seeing Luo Shan's reaction, Zhou Mingrui doubted his earlier judgment: Luo Shan seems completely unprepared for Zaratulstra's shooting…

"Huh?" Franca, taking advantage of her height, stood on tiptoes to look towards where the body lay.

After seeing the corpse with its head blown apart, her face gradually turned pale, and she hurriedly averted her gaze.

"It's really Zaratulstra?" she asked Luo Shan.

At this point, Luo Shan also suspected it was Luo Fu's doing, because inviting Zhou Mingrui to this hot pot restaurant and sitting near the stage were both Luo Fu's instructions. And just minutes before Zaratulstra was shot, Luo Fu had gone to the restroom and wasn't at her seat.

But Luo Fu's reaction and the change in her complexion made Luo Shan uncertain.

Luo Shan nodded with a grave expression. "Yes."

She was indeed scared. Since becoming a Beyonder, at most she had only killed monsters in the Shaman's world and subtly influenced a few people in reality through her paintings. She had never truly fought with any human, let alone killed one.

She knew Luo Fu and the others' purpose and target, but she hadn't expected them to use such drastic measures.

As she spoke, Luo Shan leaned closer to Franca, wanting to sniff her to check for any lingering gunpowder smell, like they did on TV. But she only caught a whiff of a pleasant, intoxicating fragrance.

Franca's face seemed to pale even more as she murmured, "How did he just die…"

Amidst the commotion in the entire hot pot restaurant, Zhou Mingrui's gaze moved from Luo Shan and Luo Fu's faces to the resting area for the face-changing performers.

He hadn't forgotten about the beautiful yet dangerous woman who had walked out of the screen along with Zaratulstra.

Inside the hot pot restaurant's rest area.

Lumina was led by Ludwig to a corner, where he drew a curtain, as if they were about to change clothes.

The face-changing performers present were all attracted by Lumina's beauty, aura, and dazed expression. No one questioned why she had come in.

After blocking the surrounding gazes, Ludwig took out a mirror from his pocket.

Inside the mirror, Jenna was already waiting.

Jenna reached out with both hands, grabbing Lumina and Ludwig, and pulled them into the mirror world.

Lumina didn't resist; she remembered this was Li Lu's mother.

What confused her was that she thought she was Li Lu's mother, so why did Li Lu have another mother? Yet her memories and consciousness told her this was the truth.

Smack!

As the mirror fell towards the ground, it burst into quiet and eerie black flames, then shattered into pieces.

Having already traversed to a mirror near the Dechuang Garden, Jenna began cleaning the makeup off herself and Ludwig, and removed the Lie earring from Lumina's ear.

Their action plan for this operation was divided into three parts:

The first part was to attempt an assassination;

The second part was to immediately switch to an encirclement attack if the assassination failed;

The third part, if the encirclement attack still couldn't kill Zaratulstra, was to "bring" the enemy before Zhou Mingrui in a way involving mysticism and Beyonder powers. This would likely result in both Zaratulstra and the person who "brought" Him being kicked out of the dream on the spot. Then, Franca, who hadn't appeared or participated in the battle before, would seize the opportunity to covertly assassinate Zaratulstra's dream image—now an ordinary person without an Angel's rank and temporarily unprotected by bodyguards. This would force this character off the stage, no longer able to be used by the real Zaratulstra to approach Huang Tao and obtain money and resources through company mergers and restructuring!

Moreover, this might even prevent Zaratul from re-entering the dream city for a considerable time, until He had a new identity. Lumian and the others would use this window of opportunity to make more attempts.

Because there was a possibility of being exposed to the audience at the end, and also the possibility of the plan failing with Zaratulstra successfully escaping, so except for Lumian who could transform into a female form and Franca who would only carry out the covert assassination in the final stage, Jenna, Anthony, and Ludwig all used the Lie earring to adjust their appearances to some extent, applying near-perfect makeup. Additionally, they used Lumian's Mystery Prying Glasses to add suggestive power to their disguises, making everyone who saw them believe this was their true appearance.

The Mystery Prying Glasses itself was not above Sequence 7, so the mystical effects it produced were not discounted.

In the hot pot restaurant, Mr. Huang, who was on the phone with his daughter, heard the gunshot and commotion in the hall and specifically walked to the stairway to look down.

His face, which had been wearing a faint smile, instantly darkened when he saw Zaratulstra's nearly headless corpse.

He moved the phone from his ear to in front of his eyes, staring at the call interface displaying the words "Bernie".

After a few seconds, Mr. Huang brought the phone back to his ear and said in a gentle voice, "Something's happened at the scene, I need to deal with it. I'll call you back later."

As soon as he hung up the phone, Zaratulstra's subordinates rushed past him in fear, panic, and anger, surrounding the corpse.

Edward—the vice president of Intis Group—followed behind them, approaching Mr. Huang and saying in a low voice, "Besides Zaratulstra, one bodyguard and one negotiator are missing."

Mr. Huang nodded slowly, looking at the chaos in the hall, and sighed. "Call the police, let them handle it."

…

As soon as she resumed her daily appearance in the dream city, Jenna took Lumina and Ludwig back to room 2303 of the Dechuang Garden.

She had used her Ice Mirror Charm once again; now only one use remained.

She then placed Franca's Traveler's Bag on the coffee table.

Franca had gone to the women's restroom under surveillance, used a mirror placed on the water tank to lurk in the surveillance blind spot, shot and killed Zaratulstra, then immediately drank the healing agent provided by the Tarot Club to delay the negative effects of using the special ability of the Inevitable Gun. This would allow the severe illness to manifest after she had been questioned by the police. Of course, before that, her complexion would still show some changes.

After doing this, she quickly handed over the Traveler's Bag and all items related to Beyonders to Jenna, letting Jenna take them away from the scene to prevent the police from discovering any clues.

Jenna took out a bottle of healing agent and handed it to the confused Lumina, saying in a gentle voice, "First, let's treat your wounds."

Lumina took the agent and trustingly opened the cap, tilted her head back slightly, and drank it.

Watching this scene, Jenna was actually quite anxious inside.

She discovered a problem that hadn't been anticipated before.

Lumian had exited the dream in female form, leaving behind Lumina, but the identity woven by Madam Justice was Li Ming, a male.

Normally, when an outsider was kicked out of the dream, their remaining manifestation would maintain daily life based on the woven identity and memories not involving Beyonders, just like "Luo Fu". But now, Lumina and the Li Ming identity were clearly different, even in gender.

This would cause a conflict between Lumina's self-perception and the actual identity situation!

Does this count as actively creating a dream loophole? Seeing that Lumina had quickly recovered, Jenna carefully asked, "Can you still… transform into a male?"

Chapter 982: Exploiting Loopholes

Lumina looked at Jenna with her now fully recovered eye and asked in confusion, "What do you mean by transforming into a male?"

Her previously blinded eye, limited by the effects of the healing agent, was still suppressed at Sequence 7 and recovering more slowly, with vision still blurry.

As expected, she can't do it, or doesn't know how… Jenna's thoughts raced as she quickly fabricated an excuse. "Don't you remember that you like to dress up as a man and wear men's clothes?"

Lumina looked down at her clothes and accepted Jenna's explanation. "Yes, I still like that."

She believed it… She's accepted this character setting? Jenna vaguely grasped the current loophole and probed further, "You seem a bit shaken and confused. Don't tell me you've forgotten that we're a couple raising Li Lu together?"

"Uh…" Lumina was stunned for a moment. "No wonder he calls me mother and you mom. I remember now, that's right!"

She just "remembered" like that? The corner of Jenna's mouth twitched slightly.

Lumina's reaction and changes also confirmed her theory: Due to the conflict between Lumina's true gender and background identity, a loophole had appeared in the dream. Before this loophole was patched, whatever character background story was fed to Lumina, she would become that person!

Of course, this couldn't involve the supernatural or conflict with actual character relationships—Lumina clearly remembered the people around her.

Recalling that she had brought Lumina and Ludwig back through the mirror world, Jenna felt a headache coming on, unsure what kind of changes such details might bring.

After a few seconds of thought, she decided not to mention the mirror world or why Lumina was injured for now, waiting for Lumina to bring it up herself before coming up with an explanation.

She pointed to the bedroom and said, "You look exhausted, and you're not fully recovered. Let me help you to bed to rest."

Lumina nodded slightly.

Jenna then helped her up and said to Ludwig, "You did well today. You can rest for a while before studying. There's food in the bag."

"Okay." Ludwig had been waiting for these words.

He quickly reached out and grabbed Jenna's Traveler's Bag.

After settling Ludwig and tucking Lumina into bed under the air-conditioned blanket, Jenna went to the bathroom to wet a towel to wipe Lumina's face, which still had traces of blood.

Just as she wet the towel, she saw Anthony's figure appear in the vanity mirror.

Jenna immediately felt relieved and turned off the faucet, saying, "I was just about to look for you after settling Lumina and the others. Are you all right?"

She used the name Lumina to quickly inform Anthony of what had happened afterwards.

Anthony asked a follow-up question as if to confirm, "What about Zaratulstra?"

"The third part of the plan was successfully executed," Jenna replied concisely.

Only then did Anthony describe his own experience, "I was transferred to a prison that clearly had defenses against Mirror Traversal. I Hypnotized my 'cellmate' to feel unwell and call for help loudly. Then, using Psychological Invisibility, I slipped out of the cell and made it to the guards' office area, where I finally managed to escape using the mirror I had on me and the Ice Mirror Charm.

"When I returned to the mirror world corresponding to the hot pot restaurant, I found you had already left, so I came here to confirm the situation. There are already police there, and the area behind the mirror might not be safe."

"You can clean off your makeup and return to your original appearance now," Jenna said as she tossed the Lie earring into the mirror. "I've already done anti-divination using mirror magic, and Queen Mystic will help with the aftermath. Don't worry, go home and rest. I'll keep Ludwig here for now."

"Alright." While the power of the Ice Mirror Charm was still active, Anthony took the Lie earring and traversed back to the rented apartment in Xinhong District.

He could only use his Ice Mirror Charm one more time as well.

Jenna let out a sigh, wrung out the towel, left the bathroom, entered the bedroom, and began wiping Lumina's face.

Along the way, she also checked how much Ludwig had eaten.

…

In the hot pot restaurant, the police had set up a cordon, isolating the corpse and the surrounding area.

Franca, looking shocked, was being questioned along with Luo Shan and Zhou Mingrui by a police officer named Li En.

She said fearfully, "We weren't eating quickly, waiting for the later performance. Then I went to the bathroom, and when I came back, I found someone had died!"

"So you weren't in the dining hall when it happened?" Li En probed.

"Yes, I was in the bathroom," Franca explained.

Li En made a note of this, deciding to check with his colleague monitoring the surveillance footage later to confirm if this woman named Luo Fu had indeed entered the women's restroom and how long she had stayed there.

He then turned to Zhou Mingrui.

"You saw the deceased and a woman walk out from the screen?"

"Yes." Zhou Mingrui glanced at Luo Fu.

After listening and observing for a while, he increasingly felt that Luo Fu didn't seem to be the culprit.

Or is her acting so superb that I can't detect any flaws? Zhou Mingrui mused as he added, "At the time, I thought it was a magic show. Thinking back now, there was something off—that woman had blood on her face…"

Li En asked a few more questions, then walked over to Officer Deng, summarizing the key points from his inquiries.

Deng held a pipe but didn't smoke it in public, only sniffing it to stimulate his nerves and make them more alert.

"Captain, we've found something," another police officer approached and said to Deng.

He was responsible for searching for the beautiful woman who had come out of the screen.

Deng nodded and followed this officer to the back of the hot pot restaurant, entering the resting room for the face-changing performers.

The performers were all a bit scared, huddled in corners, watching the police come and go.

"This is where the suspect was last seen," the officer who led Deng in pulled back a curtain, pointing to the changing area.

Deng scanned the area, his gaze falling on the shattered mirror on the ground.

…

In Trier, inside that luxurious villa.

Lumian opened his eyes to find one eye unable to sense light, while the other was tinged with a faint bloodiness.

Every joint in his body ached, his thoughts occasionally stuttering. His emotions were clearly off—despite achieving his goal, he felt a sinking depression as if trapped in inescapable darkness, along with an impulse to explode and tear everything apart.

This was the corruption from Zaratulstra's Mythical Creature form, which would affect reality, and the resulting damage was real too.

Lumian slowly stood up, confirming the presence of the Traveler's Bag and Beyonder items, then stumbled out of the room and down the stairs.

He hadn't immediately drunk the healing agent because he was mainly corrupted, not injured.

When Lumian reached the ground floor living room, Madam Magician, dressed in a yellow and white gown, was already waiting there.

Starlight flashed in Madam Magician's eyes, condensing into an illusory book that instantly flipped to a certain page.

Accompanied by an ethereal, illusory voice, drops of sweet dew fell, sprinkling onto Lumian, washing away his blood stains without wetting his clothes.

Lumian's blinded eye gradually regained sight, and the discomfort in his body quickly dissipated.

"The best way to deal with your current condition would actually be to have Mr. Sun come and purify you," Madam Magician said with a smile, "but you have too many things that need purification, and the rank is too high. That might be even more detrimental to you. Now, your spirit and mind certainly still have residual corruption. Later, Madam Justice will come to give you a targeted treatment. Fortunately, the corruption from the dream has also been suppressed to Sequence 7. As long as you don't encounter the Celestial Worthy, it shouldn't be a major problem."

Lumian tucked his falling black hair behind his ear and briefly recounted the actions he and the others had taken against Zaratulstra, as well as the assistance provided by Queen Mystic.

During this, Madam Magician gestured for him to sit in an armchair.

"I don't know if Franca ultimately killed Zaratulstra's dream image, but it shouldn't be a big issue. At the time, Zaratulstra's bodyguards were all in the private room upstairs, and the other demigod of the Seer pathway was stationed at the hotel. Even if Mr. Fool subconsciously believed that Zaratulstra also possessed Beyonder powers, he would just be an ordinary Sequence 7, without special abilities or an Angel's rank," Lumian said finally.

Madam Magician replied, "Divination on Mr. Fool's dream situation is very restricted and dangerous. I'm not sure yet if Two of Cups was successful. Well, we can ask Miss Justice when she arrives. She can glimpse some details of the dream using her Dreamweaver ability.

"What we need to pay attention to now is that your actions were a strong stimulus to Zhou Mingrui. No one knows what changes might occur in the dream next."

Lumian nodded, saying thoughtfully, "This time, our biggest gain wasn't kicking Zaratulstra out of the dream and likely being able to eliminate His corresponding dream manifestation. It was verifying one thing."

As Madam Magician turned her gaze to him, Lumian spoke slowly, "As long as we perform actions deeply involving Beyonders in front of Zhou Mingrui and make him feel danger, whether it's the subordinates of the Celestial Worthy or us, we'll all be kicked out of the dream and quickly marionettized.

"On this point, no matter what stance people take, they receive the same treatment."

…

Affected by the shooting incident, Zhou Mingrui, Franca, and Luo Shan couldn't continue eating hot pot.

Since many dishes hadn't been touched, Luo Shan was hesitant about how to pay the bill and how much to give.

At this moment, the hot pot restaurant manager came over and proactively said to them,

"No need to pay, no need to pay. Mr. Huang from Intis Group said he's covering everything. He said it was their client's issue that prevented everyone from enjoying their meal, so he'll foot the bill."

"Mr. Huang is as generous as ever," Zhou Mingrui remarked.

Luo Shan strongly agreed.

Seeing that Luo Fu wasn't feeling well, Zhou Mingrui didn't suggest finding another place to eat. He politely saw the two ladies off in a ride-hailing car.

Franca had been holding up, but upon returning to Dechuang Garden and entering the elevator, she suddenly went weak and leaned against Luo Shan.

"What's wrong?" Luo Shan asked in surprise.

"I seem to be… falling ill… How sudden…" Franca herself was puzzled.

Luo Shan didn't get off at the 15th floor but supported Franca to the 23rd floor.

Upon seeing the door of Room 2303, Franca suddenly "woke up".

The illness was due to using the Certain Death effect of the Inevitable Gun!

I really killed Zaratulstra…

Chapter 983: A Glimpse

Looking at the door of Room 2303, Franca suddenly recalled everything.

Considering that if the shooting of Zaratulstra was successful, the police department would inevitably be involved in the investigation. Regardless of whether the police department previously had Beyonders, now that Zhou Mingrui himself had gained Beyonder abilities and the dream subconscious recognized the Sequence 7 level, they, as representatives of the "official" side, would certainly have gained mystical power enhancements. Therefore, Lumian and the others had already thought of ways to avoid subsequent investigations.

Starting from the fact that the main officers of the dream city's Police Department were based on the Nighthawks of the Church of Evernight, Lumian reasonably deduced that their most commonly used and convenient method for finding clues in public was to forcibly drag suspects into a dream and directly question them there.

For this reason, he had Anthony give Franca a psychological suggestion in advance, making her forget everything related to the incident as soon as she drank the healing agent. The corresponding psychological suggestion would only be completely lifted when she returned to Dechuang Garden and saw the rented room.

This way, even in the dream, Franca's performance would be flawless.

If her own subconscious didn't believe she had shot Zaratulstra, how could she show any abnormality in the dream!

The performance that Luo Shan and Zhou Mingrui saw from Franca also came from her instinctive reactions, not acting. Only her complexion was enhanced by the negative effects of the Inevitable Gun, so it was completely flawless.

Phew… that shot of mine was really cool, calm, relaxed, natural, composed, that's what an assassin should be like! Franca, feeling a bit feverish and confused, proudly praised herself in her heart.

By this time, Luo Shan had already rung the doorbell and saw Jenna open the door.

She was about to ask in a low voice, "Was Zaratulstra's death your doing?" when she suddenly noticed a small boy writing furiously at the dining table.

"Who's that?" Luo Shan swallowed the question she was about to ask.

Franca let go of Luo Shan's support, glanced at Ludwig, and said with unsteady steps and a smile, "My godson."

Theoretically speaking, that's right!

As soon as Franca finished speaking, she was already panting, looking as if even talking was a great effort. Jenna quickly supported her.

Seeing this, Luo Shan waved her hand and said, "Get well soon. You probably won't need to work overtime tomorrow, you can rest at home."

The big client is dead, what overtime would there be!

Back in Room 1502, Luo Shan took out her phone and sent a WeChat message to Jenna:

"Is there anything wrong with Luo Fu? Does she need to go to the hospital?"

She intended to use this to open the conversation, then ask Jenna if "Zaratulstra's death was related to them".

Jenna quickly replied: "She took some fever medicine, let's observe for a while before deciding.

"I heard there was a shooting at the hot pot restaurant where you were eating?"

She instead asked about Zaratulstra being shot… What does this mean? Could it really not have been them? Luo Shan wondered, once again doubting her own deductions.

She briefly told Jenna about what happened in the hot pot restaurant, watching to see how she would respond.

Jenna sent a 😱 emoji: "No wonder Luo Fu got sick. She always falls ill when frightened, but she also recovers quickly. She'll be fine in a couple of days."

That doesn't make sense… She's a powerful Beyonder, from a future on the edge of the apocalypse; she must have seen countless deaths. How could she get sick from being frightened by a single shooting? Just as Luo Shan had this doubt, she suddenly understood what Jenna really meant: We'll tell you the truth about this matter in a couple of days.

Is it because this is the crucial period of the police investigation, and they're worried that if I know who the real killer is, I might let something slip or become nervous and anxious, and then be questioned by the police? Luo Shan nodded in understanding.

She then felt somewhat happy.

In the past, she wouldn't have been able to pick up on such hints. Sometimes when others mocked her, if it wasn't obvious enough, she wouldn't even realize it. But now, she had grasped the hidden meaning in the words!

Ah, I've grown too. Luo Shan leaned back on the sofa contentedly and started using her phone.

Soon, she saw the police announcement soliciting key information, part of which read: "This woman is involved in the case. We hope the public will actively provide clues…"

Next to this part of the content was a photo. The woman in the photo was the one who had walked out of the screen with Zaratulstra.

Luo Shan could clearly see that the photo came from someone's phone at the scene rather than from surveillance cameras. It captured the woman's exquisite and elegant features, her confused yet seductive gaze, and her blood-stained face quite clearly, bringing that dangerous beauty to life.

Looking at it again, she's still very beautiful, even a bit more beautiful than Luo Fu and Jenna when they're not downplaying themselves… Luo Shan mused as she scrolled through the comments:

"Such a beautiful woman, why become a villain?"

"I'm not just judging by her looks, but I feel like there's no way she'd kill someone for no reason, right?"

"Sister, give me a shot!"

"Do all the commenters let their morals follow their appendages?"

"Isn't she more beautiful than those female celebrities nowadays? She could definitely squeeze into the top tier!"

"This is my dream lover, her face stained with blood, holding a gun, pressing it against my head, forcing me to give up my true heart."

"So, who exactly was killed?"

Luo Shan scrolled through with a smile for a few minutes, then suddenly remembered something.

She had forgotten to check the details of the room.

Ever since Luo Fu and Jenna reminded her to be careful of Zaratulstra's group potentially attacking her in secret, every time she returned home, she would use her Beyonder ability to examine the details of every corner, to avoid being assassinated or ambushed.

Luo Shan stood up and walked to the oil painting of a parrot, extending her hand towards it.

The colorful parrot poked its beak and upper body out of the oil painting and said crisply, "No one has been here."

Luo Shan stroked the parrot's feathers, then turned and walked to the window.

She looked outside, raised her right hand, and pinched her eye socket.

She wanted to use a Reporter's ability to observe and uncover the true world.

This wasn't because she didn't trust the parrot, but because there were some intrusions the parrot couldn't detect.

However, she didn't dare to observe the true world for too long. Every time she used this ability, she felt danger and only dared to maintain it for about ten seconds.

This could only be used to look at the "corners" that the parrot couldn't reach.

The next second, the light and shadows before Luo Shan's eyes changed, and different scenes of the surrounding area overlapped in a strange way, presenting themselves in a chaotic and complex manner.

Luo Shan quickly saw the glass windows connecting to the dark world, saw the oil paintings pressed against the glass windows, saw different rooms stacked together like building blocks, saw people doing different things in different rooms yet mixing with each other, saw the thin gray fog permeating the edges of all these scenes.

What exactly is this fog… Luo Shan instinctively frowned.

Every time she used a Reporter's ability to observe reality, she would discover this thin gray fog, but she never knew what it symbolized, what it represented, or where it came from.

Just as Luo Shan noticed that the movements of a man in one of the rooms seemed to stutter, the colorful parrot fluttered its wings in her line of sight.

Then, she saw Luo Fu lying on the sofa, physically cooling herself with an ice pack.

Then, she heard Luo Fu's weak voice: "Is this what happens after being kicked out of the dream in a female identity?"

Kicked out of the dream… Luo Shan was stunned.

The scene before her eyes immediately shattered.

She instinctively ended her observation of "reality".

Luo Shan stood by the window, her expression bewildered as she recalled what she had just heard.

Kicked out of the dream? Did Luo Fu mean to say this is a dream? Was her condition last time because she was kicked out of the dream? Luo Shan's gaze gradually became vacant.

After a few seconds, she murmured very softly and weakly, "If this is a dream, then what am I…"

…

Late at night, the bedroom door where Franca and Lumina were sleeping opened silently, and a figure walked out without making any noise.

It was Lumina in her nightgown, her eyes like highland lakes, both confused and irritated.

Lumina walked along the darkest areas, stealthily reaching the door and unlocking it.

Then, she put her hand on the handle, trying to open the main door.

But the handle didn't move at all.

Is the lock broken? Just as Lumina showed a surprised expression, she heard Jenna's voice from behind. "Where are you going?"

Lumina turned around quickly, looking at Jenna. "Didn't you take Li Lu to An Ruide's place?"

"We later came back, but you were all asleep. I thought I shouldn't disturb you, so I just slept here on the sofa." Jenna stood up from the sofa and asked curiously, "You want to go out? It's the middle of the night."

"I-I feel very stuffy, very depressed, I want to go out for a walk," Lumina explained, "But the door lock is broken."

She then laughed self-mockingly. "Am I too unlucky?"

Being unlucky is normal, and inevitable, this is the negative impact of using the Circle Inhabitant effect… Jenna didn't explain, but shook her head and said, "The hot pot restaurant incident isn't over yet, and your body hasn't fully recovered. If you go out for a walk now and someone sees you, it will be very troublesome."

"Alright." Lumina pursed her lips and said, "I-I feel like there's always a voice, an impulse in my heart telling me to go out."

"A voice?" Jenna frowned, becoming more vigilant, "Go where?"

Lumina didn't conceal.

"On the one hand, I want to go to the rooftop, to feel the wind, to see if there are any stars, and to space out a bit. On the other hand, I want to go to a certain place, that place is calling me."

"Which place?" Jenna asked.

Lumina tried hard to recall. "I think it was… I think it was…"

She paused for a moment, finally remembering. "Mushu Hospital."

"Mushu Hospital." Jenna's pupils dilated slightly.

She suddenly remembered that Lumian, that is, Lumina, really did have the bloodline of Omebella, the Child of God—the Great Mother.

This wasn't a ruse to deceive Grimm and the others!

Chapter 984: A Tranquil Night

Jenna's mind instantly tensed up. She decided to placate Lumina and not give her the opportunity to go to Mushu Hospital, until Lumian returned around 7 or 8 pm the next evening.

She looked at Lumina and said sincerely, "The investigation into the hot pot restaurant shooting hasn't ended yet. If you go to Mushu Hospital, you might be taken to the police station. Even if the police can prove you're not related to Zaratulstra's death, it will take a considerable amount of time. You'll be detained for at least a few days, which could cause you to lose your job."

Hearing the phrase "lose your job", Lumina showed a not-so-obvious expression of fear.

"Yes, I should hide for a couple of days. After that, going to work disguised as a man shouldn't be a problem."

She had already been instilled with the setting of working as a security guard while disguised as a man.

Jenna didn't dare to relax. She glanced at the curtains blocking the bright moonlight and said to Lumina,

"We can't go to Mushu Hospital, but we can go to the rooftop to feel the breeze and relax a bit."

"Okay," Lumina said, an uncontrollable smile appearing on her clean and clear face.

Jenna first fixed the door lock, then took Lumina out of Room 2303 and to the rooftop via the elevator and stairs.

Throughout the process, she hid a mirror in each hand, using them to reflect light and create illusions to conceal herself and Lumina from the surveillance cameras.

Feeling the cool breeze that had lost its scorching heat in the night, Lumina half-closed her eyes and took two deep breaths.

She then walked to the parapet wall at the edge of the rooftop, pointed at the top, and asked for Jenna's opinion, "Can I sit up there?"

"Normal people can't since it's very dangerous. But you're fine, your sense of balance is very good, even better than acrobats," Jenna wasn't afraid of Lumina falling. She had enough ability to rescue her, so she wanted to see if the loophole hadn't been patched yet, and if by constantly suggesting to Lumina that she had abilities beyond ordinary people, whether Lumina would actually possess Beyonder powers.

Lumina put her hands on top of the parapet wall and lightly jumped up, preparing to sit down.

Suddenly, her hand slipped, and she lost her balance, about to fall towards the ground a hundred meters below.

At that moment, she felt several invisible ropes pulling at her, helping her stabilize.

"Phew, that scared me to death…" She turned her body sideways, looked at Jenna who was already sitting nearby, and patted her chest.

She thought Jenna had caught her.

Jenna, who had lightly wrapped Lumina with invisible spider silk for protection, realized she had overlooked something.

This person was still under the negative effects of misfortune brought by the Circle of Binding. Even if she had gained excellent balance based on Jenna's suggestions, she would fail due to extreme bad luck.

"Be careful," Jenna specially cautioned.

Lumina responded tersely and nodded lightly.

She looked at the lit internal roads of the residential area below for a few seconds, then raised her head, casting her gaze towards the bright moon in the sky.

The moonlight and the city's light pollution had hidden the stars from view.

Lumina supported herself with both hands on top of the parapet wall, quietly looking at the moon, completely absorbed.

After an unknown amount of time, she suddenly said, as if talking to herself, "A poem came to mind."

She didn't turn her head or look at Jenna, still gazing at the bright moon in the sky.

"What poem?" Jenna was enjoying the current peace and tranquility.

Lumina maintained her contemplative posture and said in a slightly ethereal voice, "Raising my head, I see the bright shining moon,

Bowing my head, I think of my hometown."

…

At the Police Department, in a certain meeting room, the lights were still bright late at night.

Lun Xiande stood in front of the whiteboard, pointing at two photos and said, "We can make a judgment that this case involves supernatural powers. The killer, or rather the criminal group, can use mirrors and the mirror world behind them."

One of the two photos was of the broken mirror in the changing room, and the other was of the shattered window in the private room where the victim was.

Officer Deng sat below, nodding lightly, indicating for Lun Xiande to continue.

"Therefore, those who were not in the hot pot restaurant's main hall and were not under surveillance during the corresponding time period are all suspects and need further investigation.

"They likely went to surveillance blind spots, used mirrors they carried with them to sneak back into the hot pot restaurant's main hall, waiting for the victim to return from the mirror world. If the victim returned, they would deliver a fatal blow. If not, it would mean their accomplices had already succeeded."

Deng raised his hand, pointing out a flaw in Lun Xiande's reasoning.

"It's also possible that they were always lurking behind a mirror or a glass window, not having appeared in the main hall of Shujin Hot Pot Restaurant before.

"Judging from how well this group utilizes the mirror world, they didn't need to send someone to the main hall of the hot pot restaurant in advance to wait by eating hot pot. They could have waited until the time was right, or received a signal, then entered the mirror world from afar, arriving at the predetermined assassination location. Look, the woman who walked out of the screen with Zaratulstra hadn't appeared in the main hall before either."

After speaking, Deng raised his palm and sniffed the tobacco pressed in his pipe.

"Yes," Lun Xiande admitted that the captain's point was valid. "But we still need to re-investigate those who left the main hall of the hot pot restaurant during that time period but weren't recorded by surveillance cameras in the corresponding state at the time of the incident."

"Remove the latter condition," Deng thought for two seconds and said, "People who can use the mirror world can also deceive surveillance cameras. You should know that surveillance cameras record based on optical principles, and those who master mirrors are good at affecting light and creating optical illusions."

After Lun Xiande nodded, Deng turned to Li En and said, "Tell us about the preliminary investigation results."

Li En stood up, taking Lun Xiande's place.

"So far, we've used dream interrogation on seventeen people without letting them notice anything unusual.

"Luo Shan: Very surprised about Zaratulstra's death, couldn't believe it.

"Zhou Mingrui: Very cautious about Zaratulstra, but also didn't anticipate Zaratulstra's death.

"Luo Fu: She left the main hall at the time and went to the ladies' room. There's no surveillance in the bathroom, but she was also very surprised about Zaratulstra's death, clearly shocked.

"We initially listed these three as key investigation targets because they're all employees of the Intis Group. They might have been instructed by some powerful figures within the Intis Group who don't want a merger and reorganization, to assassinate Zaratulstra at Shujin Hot Pot Restaurant and disrupt the ongoing business negotiations. But none of them knew that Huang Tao and Zaratulstra were also in Shujin Hot Pot Restaurant, and Luo Shan and Zhou Mingrui never left the main hall…

"The preliminary conclusion is that they don't have any issues."

Deng expressed agreement, and Lun Xiande didn't say anything.

After thoroughly discussing the case, Deng stood up and said to his subordinates,

"Currently, there are two key points. First, investigate the remaining suspects, including those mentioned by Lun Xiande and those with substantial motives. Second, find the woman who walked out of the screen with Zaratulstra. Although she didn't attack Zaratulstra at the time, the fact that she came out of the screen itself is worth noting."

"Yes, Captain," Lun Xiande, Li En, and other officers stood up and responded.

Deng smiled and said seriously, "This involves foreign guests and major business activities. You've all worked hard. I'm going to report to Chief Yagates now."

…

After looking at the moon and feeling the night breeze for half an hour, Jenna took Lumina back to Room 2303.

"Rest now, your body hasn't fully recovered yet," Jenna said, pointing to the bedroom.

Lumina, wearing her nightgown, opened the door and entered the bedroom. She found that the sick Franca had also woken up at some point due to her absence.

"Do you feel better now?" Franca had already learned from Jenna via WeChat about what the two had done.

Lumina looked at Franca and nodded with complex emotions. "Much better."

Her emotions were complex because she remembered that Luo Fu and she were also in a romantic relationship.

Yet this didn't affect her relationship with Jenna.

I thought I was just an ordinary yuri fan… How did the yuri circle become so messy? Am I really a player? Lumina sat on the edge of the bed and said to Franca,

"Let's sleep, I still have to work tomorrow."

Security guards worked in shifts.

Franca looked at Lumina and said with a smile, "Did you forget? You took two days off, Friday and Saturday. Your director, Grimm, approved it."

Lumina blinked. "Oh, right… I forgot. No wonder I don't have to work the middle shift today and can go directly to Shujin Hot Pot Restaurant in the evening…"

Looking at Lumina like this, Franca suddenly felt she was a bit adorably silly.

After the two in the bedroom went back to sleep, Jenna also lay down on the sofa, closed her eyes, and entered deep sleep.

After a while, her Astral Projection arrived in Luo Shan's Shaman world. She saw the girl still guarding by the translucent barrier, having repelled a new round of attacks from the monsters.

From the corner of her eye, Jenna saw Franca's Astral Projection wandering around in a daze like the other people around.

This indicated that Franca, due to her illness, had entered and then exited her consciousness.

Next, Jenna also found Lumina's Astral Projection, who also lacked clear consciousness.

"She really isn't a Beyonder…" Just as Jenna had this thought, she suddenly realized something.

Luo Shan must know!

It was hard to hide from her in the Shaman's "domain".

The next second, Jenna saw Luo Shan half turn her body and say to her, "So Zaratulstra was really killed by you guys."

Luo Shan had seen Lumina's Astral Projection, seen this beautiful woman who had walked out of the screen with Zaratulstra.

"Yes, we didn't tell you earlier because we were worried the police might have special methods to confirm whether you were lying," Jenna explained.

Luo Shan asked in confusion, "Wasn't Luo Fu afraid of being caught lying?"

"She was hypnotized in advance," Jenna didn't conceal.

Luo Shan fell silent. After several seconds, she asked in a low, extremely difficult tone, "Is this… is this really a dream?"

Chapter 985: I Don't Believe It

Hearing Luo Shan's question, Jenna was stunned.

Why would she suddenly ask such a question?

How did she suddenly think this was a dream?

How did she know? Who told her?

After coming to her senses, Jenna carefully asked in return, "What dream?"

Luo Shan looked at her for several seconds. "A Reporter has an ability to observe the truth, to see different scenes within a certain area, but it can't be maintained for too long. I've been using it often lately to check if anyone is hiding in my home or if there are any traps.

"When I came back in the evening, I used it once and saw you and Luo Fu talking. I heard Luo Fu asking about being kicked out of the dream."

So that's how it is… So that's what observing the truth means… Jenna's first reaction was "Don't panic, I'll make up a reason on the spot," but after seeing Luo Shan's eyes filled with deep sadness, confusion, and pain, she closed her mouth and remained silent.

Luo Shan took a moment before saying, "So, when Luo Fu suddenly became like a different person last time, it was because the consciousness from outside the dream was kicked out?

"So… this really is a dream?"

Jenna remained silent for several seconds, her tone becoming somber. "This is Zhou Mingrui's dream."

Luo Shan opened her mouth, but couldn't say anything. Her expression gradually became vacant.

Jenna continued, "Some people want Zhou Mingrui to continue sleeping until the apocalypse comes, while others want to wake him up so he can lead everyone to resist the apocalypse."

As she said these words, Jenna felt sympathy for Luo Shan while keeping her mind highly focused, waiting for the possible dream rejection that might come.

She had almost revealed the essence of the matter.

With Lumina already kicked out of the dream, Franca ill, and the police department highly focused on the horrible case of Zaratulstra's shooting, Jenna wasn't prepared to conduct further experiments.

Even if she wanted to experiment, the target would be Peng Deng or Zhou Mingrui. It was unlikely to reveal the truth to Luo Shan now. That would require a gradual, step-by-step approach.

No one would accept that they were fake, that their existence was meaningless. This would cause unpredictable shock to Luo Shan. Jenna could hardly imagine what kind of changes this would cause in Luo Shan.

Compared to this, being kicked out of the dream wasn't a particularly serious problem. After all, she could enter again.

Of course, it would be best not to be kicked out. Otherwise, the weak and sick Franca might not be able to control Lumina and prevent her from secretly going to Mushu Hospital.

Luo Shan's lips trembled for a while before she finally said, "So, I'm just an illusory figure in someone else's dream?"

Before Jenna could respond, Luo Shan raised her hand to touch her own face, then suddenly shook her head. "I don't believe it… I don't believe it… I don't believe it! This isn't a dream, and I'm not fake!"

At this moment, Jenna wanted to persuade her to shift her attention, to find new meaning, but the words caught in her throat and she couldn't form a sentence.

Luo Shan cried out for a while before finally calming down.

She looked at Jenna again and said, "Every time, every time I observe the truth, I see grayish-white fog. It's in every scene. Wh-what is it?"

Jenna pondered for a moment and then said, "It might be, it might be the boundaries of the dream."

Luo Shan fell silent again, staring intently at Jenna's eyes as if grasping at the last straw.

She slowly lowered her head, turning her body while mumbling, "No, it's not like this… I don't believe it…

"I don't believe it…"

She completely turned her back on Jenna, facing the translucent barrier and the monsters hiding in the deep darkness beyond it alone.

…

Trier, beside the Srenzo River, in a café with outdoor seating.

Lumian wore sunglasses and had long hair draped over his shoulders. Basking in the bright sunlight, he held a cup of Intis coffee, his mind wandering as he gazed at the wide river, the classical buildings on the opposite shore, the steam-belching iron ships, the bustling and lively river island, and the occasional airship passing by, enjoying a rare moment of leisure.

He temporarily had nothing that needed to be done.

He had originally planned to take advantage of his return to the real world to visit Bansy Island, seeking special scenes that could maximize the effectiveness of the corpse wax candle. But after careful consideration, he abandoned this plan.

There were uncertain risks in Bansy Harbor. If it led to him being trapped there, unable to enter Mr. Fool's true dream, or directly resulting in his death, it would significantly affect the subsequent progress of the awakening plan.

Lumian was clear about which of these two matters was more important.

He had also considered whether to go to the New City of Silver, enter the underground, and borrow the Grade 0 Sealed Artifact—Gift of the Land—to bring it into the dream city, enhancing the team's power. After all, for him, he could return to Mr. Fool's dream using the lucky coin regardless of where he fell asleep, and the New City of Silver was also a safe place.

In the end, Lumian erred on the side of caution and didn't make this risky attempt.

He carried Omebella's bloodline, and in the dream city, those blessed by the Great Mother like Grimm viewed him as the Great Mother's Child of God. The underground of Mushu Hospital still concealed the Great Mother's influence and erosion of the dream city. If he added the Gift of the Land transformed from the real Omebella's remains on top of that, Lumian dared not imagine what problems might arise.

He worried that as soon as he brought the Gift of the Land into the dream city, he might find his dream manifestation appearing in basement one of Mushu Hospital, with the Gift of the Land fusing with his body, allowing Omebella to be fully reborn.

And such an Omebella might be able to withstand the divine descent of the Great Mother.

Unable to do this or that, Lumian could only give himself a day off. As for making new Ice Mirror Charms, he had to wait a bit longer, because his misfortune had not completely dissipated.

Yes, although he had used Circle Inhabitant within the dream city, after returning to reality, he still bore the negative effect of misfortune.

Correspondingly, he could only use the Circle of Binding effect of his Circle Inhabitant seven more times, and using Circle Inhabitant twice had stacked his misfortune to six hours, which didn't take effect immediately.

The types of Circle Inhabitant he used on Zaratulstra's mirror projection and Historical Void image were not the same. One was to recreate the scene, the other was to fix the position.

Is the essence of negative effects reflecting in reality that using Beyonder items in dreams causes Beyonder items in reality to be activated as well, thus producing corresponding negative effects? Lumian took a sip of coffee, allowing his body and mind to relax.

He silently sighed. A rare moment of leisure in this fleeting life…

After a while, Lumian gazed at the gently rippling, relatively clean water surface, breathing in the cool breeze from the river, and spontaneously thought, Is the other 'me' also daydreaming like this now?

He had considered the problem of identity conflict corresponding to his female form being kicked out of the dream, but he hadn't reminded Jenna and Franca about it, only telling them to be careful of the influence brought by Omebella's bloodline.

He felt that this situation might gradually awaken some of Aurore's qualities in his dream self.

…

At 8 am, Dechuang Garden.

Franca had just groggily woken up when she saw Lumina standing by the bay window, looking at the already brilliant sunlight outside, lost in thought.

After a night's rest, Franca's condition had improved considerably. She was no longer weak all over, and walking was no longer a problem.

"What… are you looking at?" she tentatively asked Lumina.

Lumina didn't turn around, her tone slightly distant as she said, "I really want to go for a walk. It's not too hot at this time."

"Let's wait for things to blow over," Franca suggested. "How about we play computer games?"

"What games?" Lumina turned around.

"…" Franca suddenly fell silent.

Without a computer, what computer games could they play?

They didn't even have a gaming console!

They had to save every penny for when they needed to rent useful items from the Star Dream Provisions Store or complete crucial tasks. In daily life, non-essential expenses were always cut wherever possible.

"Mobile games then…" As she spoke, Franca stopped again.

What games wouldn't lag on their cheap phones?

"Let's play Fighting the Landlord!" That was all she could say.

At this moment, Jenna walked in, supporting Franca to the bathroom to wash up.

After closing the bathroom door, Jenna kept an ear out for any movement outside, worried that Lumina might suddenly run out, while lowering her voice to tell Franca about Luo Shan's situation.

Franca sat on the toilet, her mouth half-open, completely stunned.

After hearing Jenna's full explanation, she sighed deeply.

"We still don't understand enough about the abilities of the Reporter Sequence…"

She could understand how Luo Shan felt now. If someone with authority told her that her life since transmigrating was fake, that her past was also fake, that she was just an illusory character existing in a dream, she would certainly suffer a huge blow. Not having a breakdown on the spot was already quite good.

Even though they had thought about using Luo Shan to awaken Mr. Fool, Franca had previously hoped to persuade her with fabricated stories, not to tell her the truth.

Some truths were best never known.

They represented despair.

Franca pondered for a moment, then said desperately, "Can we find an excuse to cover it up? Not saying we lied to her, but designing some events to let everyone 'discover' together that the dream theory is just another layer of disguise, not the final truth. I think Luo Shan could accept such a development. People can deceive themselves about certain things. Hasn't she been saying she doesn't believe this is a dream?

"Moreover, we can't provide strong enough evidence to prove this is a dream!"

Jenna fell silent for a moment before saying, "We can only handle it this way for now. During this period, we need to find a way for Anthony to placate Luo Shan, or have him provide treatment directly."

Franca nodded lightly, suddenly showing a thoughtful expression.

She looked at Jenna and said slowly, "Based on our previous speculation, Luo Shan is a dream character shaped by Mr. Fool's divided subconscious, combined with corresponding images from memory. In a broad sense, she is equivalent to a part of Mr. Fool.

"After hearing the truth about the dream, the dream city didn't show any unusual changes, and you weren't kicked out of the dream…"

Chapter 986: Girls' Day

"Yes." Jenna also expressed confusion, "I thought I would be kicked out of the dream immediately, but nothing happened."

Franca thought for a moment and spoke, "Is it that telling the truth about this world to dream figures other than Zhou Mingrui and a few others doesn't trigger an abnormal reaction? Or is Luo Shan special, a character lightly corrupted by that evil god of the Fantasy Association, no longer closely connected to the dream's main consciousness?"

Jenna shook her head and answered honestly, "I don't know."

She paused, her eyes turning slightly as she said, "If we can pacify Luo Shan this time, we can find an opportunity later to mention Mr. Fool to her, and see if there's any special reaction, or if it causes me to be kicked out of the dream."

"We can also try telling corresponding things to other dream figures and see what results." Franca made an affirmative sound, reaching out both hands to support Jenna as she stood up from the toilet.

After finishing her washing up, she returned to the living room to see Lumina watching TV.

An idea struck her, and she said to Jenna, "Should we invite Luo Shan over to play cards? Four people can play Shengji."

"I'll ask and see if she's willing." Jenna understood that Franca wanted to find something for Luo Shan to do, some entertainment to ease her emotional state, and they could also use the card-playing opportunity to provide subtle psychological guidance.

Jenna immediately picked up her phone and sent Luo Shan a message.

After about seven or eight minutes, Luo Shan replied: "Okay, after I eat breakfast. I just woke up."

"She's willing to come," Jenna told Franca and Lumina.

Lumina knew Luo Shan, aware that she was her colleague, and quickly stood up saying, "Should I change back into men's clothes?"

"No need, no need. Just pretend you don't know her, act like you're another friend of ours," Franca hurriedly shook her head.

If she really changed into men's clothes, wouldn't that make Luo Shan think of Li Ming?

After all, you two do look a bit alike!

Of course, as long as Lumina didn't wear men's clothes or pretend to be a man, no one would associate her with security guard Li Ming. Not to mention the fact that one was male and one was female, even in terms of appearance, at first glance, the difference was quite large, because when Lumian played the role of Li Ming, he used the Lie earring to lower his attractiveness and modify details.

Seeing this, Jenna, on behalf of the still somewhat muddled Franca, went through in her mind the potential problems that might arise when Lumina and Luo Shan meet. She then chatted with Anthony via WeChat about Luo Shan knowing the truth of the world, and consulted on the direction and strategies for psychological guidance.

Soon after, Luo Shan arrived on the 23rd floor and rang the doorbell.

At the same time, Jenna received a reply message from An Ruide: "Talk to her about her past."

Using a certain, experienced, and personally realistic past to reduce the current sense of disillusionment? Jenna roughly understood Anthony's intention.

She immediately followed Franca's instructions and found two decks of playing cards.

The four of them gathered around the coffee table and started playing Shengji, with Lumina and Jenna as partners, and Franca and Luo Shan on the same team.

They weren't gambling for money—Jenna, Franca, and Lumina had no spare cash to gamble. Instead, they bet that whichever pair of partners first upgraded to A could stick five small paper notes on the losers' faces or draw funny patterns with washable paint.

After successfully upgrading to "3", Jenna looked at Luo Shan and casually started chatting, "You mentioned before that your father was a police officer?"

"Yes," Luo Shan's mood had been low all along. As she pushed her cards towards the center of the coffee table, she said, "He was… severely injured while pursuing a cult leader with lots of blood on his heads, and died in the hospital."

"Was he honored as a martyr?" Franca asked.

"Yes." Luo Shan suddenly gave a self-deprecating smile, "When I graduated from university, I actually had the opportunity to work as a civilian employee at the police department, but I also received an offer from the administrative department of the Intis Group. I hesitated for a long time, feeling that I was just an ordinary person who didn't like exercise, so I wasn't suitable to be a police officer. Hence, I finally chose the Intis Group."

Perhaps that's not the only reason? Franca didn't pursue the question.

She simply felt that ordinary people without much ambition couldn't refuse a position in a public department, and it was just a civilian role, not requiring the arrest of criminals.

While waiting for the cards to be dealt, Luo Shan made a sound of agreement.

"This was actually my mother's wish too. Seeing police officers would remind her of my father's death."

"Your mother is in your hometown, not living with you?" Jenna asked, already knowing the answer.

Luo Shan looked at the cards in front of her, her voice gradually becoming distant.

"When I was in university, she fell ill and was hospitalized… It was on and off, she struggled for two years but still didn't make it…"

Before Franca and Jenna could comfort Luo Shan, Lumina suddenly spoke, "My mother was also seriously ill once, frequently going to the hospital. I was still young then, standing at the hospital entrance, watching her being pushed in, my father bent over, accompanying her by her side… I don't remember who was watching me then, I only remember that I was very quiet, didn't cry or make a fuss…

"I was luckier than you, my mother was cured later."

At this point, Lumina's eyes suddenly became misty, her voice suddenly deepening, "I miss her so much…"

Franca and Jenna suddenly exchanged a glance, both looking a bit surprised.

This wasn't part of Li Ming's background information, nor was it content they had instilled.

Could it be… Franca quickly had a guess.

"I miss my mother too," Luo Shan responded to Lumina.

She seemed to recall her past life, remembering the days when she and her mother depended on each other. Although her emotions were sad, that lifeless feeling had faded considerably.

In the time that followed, Luo Shan's state improved somewhat—while playing cards, Jenna and Franca chatted with her about university life and career experiences, and Luo Shan recounted those events that were deeply etched in her memory.

Franca and Jenna could clearly hear that towards the end, Luo Shan's whole person became excited, as if trying to prove something.

"Let's end this; it's almost noon, I'll go make lunch for you all," Jenna stood up, smiling as she spoke.

Today's losers were Franca and Luo Shan, their faces covered with paper notes written with various funny phrases, and they suffered the indignity of having photos taken as a memento.

"I object! You're trying to kill me by taking advantage of my illness." Franca was, after all, still in a state of illness, her mind not so sharp, and she had done a good job of dragging Luo Shan down in the card game. She grumbled, "I'm bullied when I'm sick and weak!"

Jenna was amused by her.

"Wait until you're better and try again, you used to often lose to me before."

This referred to her Showy Diva days, often being dragged to play cards by the market district's boss "Red Boots" Franca.

Wasn't I just letting you win? Otherwise, how hard would it be for the mighty Witch to use a bit of mystical power to cheat and win easily? Franca grumbled inwardly.

At this moment, Lumina also stood up and said to Jenna, "I'll help you cut the vegetables."

"I'll help too." Luo Shan raised her hand. "The patient is responsible for resting!"

She took the opportunity to peel off the paper notes on her face and walked briskly into the kitchen.

Watching the three of them busy in the kitchen, with occasional laughter and cheerful voices, Franca leaned back against the sofa, peeling off the paper notes on her face, and spontaneously thought, If only this wasn't a dream…

After happily enjoying lunch, washing the dishes, and scrubbing the pots, Luo Shan said goodbye.

She had plans with a university friend in the afternoon.

Jenna and Franca, who was still a bit unsteady on her feet, saw her to the door.

Luo Shan turned sideways, her mouth open as if wanting to say something, but in the end, she just turned her gaze away and waved. "Bye bye."

She quickened her pace and walked straight towards the elevator.

Franca and Jenna watched her enter the elevator before turning back inside, each picking up their own phone.

Seeing their behavior, Lumina finally remembered that she had lost an important item.

"Where's my phone?"

It seemed to have disappeared last night…

"I have it," Franca took out Lumian's phone from her Traveler's Bag.

Before this operation, they had made contingency plans for different developments. Except for Franca, everyone was prepared to be kicked out of the dream, so they simply didn't bring their phones, or gave them to Franca for safekeeping, or left them at home. This way, when kicked out of the dream, they basically wouldn't be found by the Celestial Worthy through their phone contacts, and they wouldn't need to delete their contact list again—it would be too troublesome to add them back later.

Lumina took the phone and unlocked the screen with her fingerprint.

"'Intis Group Grimm' sent me a message… Why is the director sending me a message?" Lumina looked confused.

Franca leaned over and saw that Grimm had sent a 👍 emoji: "As expected of you!"

Obviously, Grimm had recognized that the woman who walked out of the screen with Zaratulstra was Lumina, and believed that Zaratulstra's death was done by the Child of God.

Jenna's thoughts raced, searching for an explanation for the relationship between Grimm and Lumina that didn't involve the supernatural.

She carefully fabricated, "Grimm has seen you in women's clothes and has become deeply infatuated with you. He's a masochist who sees you as his master. The more arrogant and cold you are to him, the more satisfied he is. Anyway, just ignore him and let him indulge in his own fantasies."

"Eww… pervert," Lumina looked disgusted.

Then she asked, "What does he mean by 'as expected of me'?"

"Maybe he saw a video or photo of you appearing with Zaratulstra and thinks you killed Zaratulstra," Jenna felt a fatigue from her brain working overtime. "Don't worry, he won't betray you. Instead, he'll keep this secret even more tightly and feel self-satisfied about it."

"…" Franca was left speechless listening to this, feeling that Jenna had been somewhat corrupted by the Internet lately.

"I see." Lumina breathed a sigh of relief.

The three of them each occupied a position, quietly being on their phones while digesting the food they had eaten at lunch.

Suddenly, Franca came across a local news item: "Crimson Moon Hospital's affiliated restaurant launched several mushroom set meals yesterday, which were well-received."

Devil's set meal—no, mushroom set meal? Franca's eyelid twitched, having heard about Li Keji from Lumian and seen the latest episode of "The Great Adventurer".

She remembered that not long ago, Lumian had gone to instigate Li Keji to create a new type of mushroom that could cure the vegetative patient An Xiaotian.

Chapter 987: Calamity

What has Li Keji done again? Franca took a light breath.

She reflexively wanted to check and confirm, hoping to prevent more dangerous things from happening in time, but as soon as she moved her body, she remembered she was still sick and didn't have the ability.

Jenna can't go either; she still has to watch Lumina and not let her run around… Anthony has another task… We certainly can't let Lumina go, the outcome would either be Lumina covered in mushrooms all over her body, or Li Keji getting pregnant… After thinking it through, Franca decided to wait a bit, wait until Lumian returned to the dream city, and go himself.

Li Keji is an ally, no need to worry too much… Li Keji is an ally, no need to worry too much… Franca kept repeating these words to herself.

She planned to forward this news to Lumian, so he would know what happened as soon as he returned to the dream city.

Just as Franca was about to select the option, she suddenly froze.

Shit, I almost slipped up…

Isn't the current Lumian actually Lumina?

Being sick really messes with your head…

Good thing I realized in time…

…

Inside the Tianyue Hotel, in the room next to Zaratulstra's.

The two bodyguards who had originally been following Zaratulstra appeared here, with an elderly man with white hair but a youthful face standing in front of them.

This elderly man wore white training clothes and had his hands behind his back. He paced back and forth near the wall and said, "Still no clues about the killer?"

"No, we can only be certain that a Demoness was definitely involved," one of the bodyguards answered.

The elderly man in white training clothes pondered for a moment and said, "Zhou Mingrui couldn't have appeared at the Shujin Hot Pot Restaurant for no reason; such a coincidence is unlikely.

"Investigate who invited him there, or rather, who induced him to invite people to eat there.

"Luo Shan and Luo Fu, who ate hot pot with him, are key subjects for investigation."

"Yes, Mr. Cui," the two bodyguards responded in unison.

The elderly man referred to as "Mr. Cui" considered for a few seconds and then said, "Be careful when investigating Luo Shan. Previous feedback indicates that Luo Shan belongs to an otherworldly evil god and is a potential collaborator with considerable strength."

The two bodyguards acknowledged and left the room.

After pacing for quite a while, Mr. Cui brought his own bodyguard and silently opened the door to leave.

He deliberately didn't tell the two previous bodyguards that he would also investigate Luo Shan, that he would secretly follow them. If they stepped into a trap or encountered an accident, he would be able to glimpse the truth, catching any adversaries by surprise.

Out of the room, Mr. Cui walked unhurriedly along the thickly carpeted corridor towards the elevator area.

In one of the ventilation openings on the ceiling of the corridor, a pair of eyes was quietly observing him.

Those eyes were deep brown, completely blending into the darkness.

They belonged to Zhou Mingrui.

Zhou Mingrui had somehow sneaked into the ceiling of the corridor at an unknown time, observing every move of Zaratulstra's bodyguards and followers, and observing Mr. Cui's situation.

This was because, when he got up this morning and opened the door to get some good breakfast, he found a letter stuffed in the door crack, with a printed paper pasted on the envelope surface that read "For Zhou Mingrui".

At that time, Zhou Mingrui perplexedly opened this letter and found a photo inside, a secretly taken photo of "Mr. Cui".

On the back of the photo was also paper and text: "This is Zaratulstra's assistant. He will inherit Zaratulstra's will and do some things targeting you."

After reading the content on the back of the photo, Zhou Mingrui's spirit immediately tensed.

He believed this was a reminder from the group that shot Zaratulstra last night. He even suspected that Luo Shan inviting him to eat at the Shujin Hot Pot Restaurant was to let him witness Zaratulstra's death.

What exactly does Zaratulstra's group want to do to me? And what does the group that killed him want to do? Zhou Mingrui couldn't figure out the answer and finally decided to come and secretly observe the target person to see if he could discover any clues.

He thus confirmed that Mr. Cui, who lived next door to Zaratulstra and had no apparent connection to Zaratulstra's negotiation team on the surface, was indeed part of Zaratulstra's group.

He is indeed suspicious, Zhou Mingrui nodded slightly in the darkness within the ceiling.

At the same time, he also noticed some other oddities.

He originally thought he would be inexperienced and clumsy at crawling through ventilation ducts, climbing ceilings, and secretly monitoring, making many mistakes, but in actual operation, he had a strange sense of familiarity and very smoothly accomplished his intended purpose.

This relied on more than just the power of an Assassin.

Yesterday too, when I saw Zaratulstra being shot, I wasn't nervous at all, nor panicked, very calm… Is this the psychological quality of a qualified Assassin, or is there another reason? Zhou Mingrui fell into deep thought.

He vaguely suspected that it wasn't just this world that he didn't understand enough, but also himself.

Mr. Cui, accompanied by his bodyguard, took the elevator to the first floor.

Just as he had taken a few steps towards the revolving door, he suddenly raised both hands to cover his neck.

He felt the rapid arrival of marionettization, and also felt the rejection of the dream.

His breathing became difficult, as if his whole being had been thrown into a void without any objects.

How could this be? Mr. Cui's pupils dilated, not daring to force himself to stay, and voluntarily exited the dream.

Thud!

His bodyguard suddenly collapsed and died on the spot.

A small insect flying nearby also fell to the ground with a splat, motionless.

In the temporary parking lot at the entrance of the Tianyue Hotel, Anthony, sitting in the driver's seat with Ludwig, calmly watched this scene.

The other Seer pathway demigod mentioned by the magic mirror Arrodes had also been kicked out of the dream!

And once the other party lost control of their marionette, the latter was essentially dead.

Lumian and the others, with information provided by the magic mirror Arrodes, hadn't ignored the Seer pathway demigod living next door to Zaratulstra who had helped Zaratulstra discover intruders before. But they all understood that before dealing with Zaratulstra, it wasn't appropriate to act against Mr. Cui, as that would alert them. So, they only secretly photographed Mr. Cui, and after the hot pot restaurant operation was over, Anthony, the only one who could still do things normally, stuffed the pre-prepared envelope into the door crack of Zhou Mingrui's home early the next morning.

With Lumian kicked out of the dream, Franca seriously ill, and Jenna needing to look after two people, Anthony obviously couldn't deal with Mr. Cui on his own, so he could only "get" Zhou Mingrui's help.

Anthony watched the hotel staff hurriedly coming to check on the collapsed bodyguard and the bewildered Mr. Cui, not getting out of the car, taking the opportunity to eliminate the latter's dream manifestation.

It wasn't that he didn't want to, but after his observation, he found that there were police personnel discreetly deployed near Mr. Cui. If he were to act, even with Psychological Invisibility, he wouldn't be able to escape.

That would mean he was confronting the main consciousness of the dream, and the consequences could be more severe than being kicked out of the dream!

Anthony waited patiently, never finding an opportunity, so he decided to act after Lumian returned to the dream city.

When it came to covert killing, Lumian was more skilled than him, Jenna, and Franca!

Anthony chose to go back to rest last night and stuff another letter the next day, rather than going directly, in order to create a time difference.

Under the premise that the corresponding dream manifestation hasn't been killed, the time interval for those kicked out of the dream to return was about the same. If Anthony had reminded Zhou Mingrui last night, then Mr. Cui's return to the dream city and regaining control of his dream manifestation wouldn't be much later than Lumian's, at most a few hours later, and in those few hours, Lumian might not find an opportunity to make his dream manifestation die unknowingly.

Now, after Lumian returned around seven or eight in the evening, he would have nearly a day to plot the murder of Mr. Cui's dream manifestation.

…

In Room 2303 of Dechuang Garden.

Just past 7 pm in the evening, Franca and Jenna, who had been watching Lumina constantly, saw this beautiful woman suddenly change her appearance, becoming male.

Lumian immediately took the Lie earring, changing his facial features in a direction not too similar to Li Ming.

Franca took the opportunity to tell him about the mushroom set meals at Crimson Moon Hospital.

Lumian nodded. "I'll go deal with the other matter first."

As he said this, he stood up.

Franca held back her laughter and pointed at him. "Change your clothes first, don't walk away wearing Jenna's nightgown."

Lumian looked down and discovered that Lumina had been wearing Jenna's nightgown all along.

At 10 pm, in a white car parked by the roadside, Lumian was on his phone as if bored, seemingly waiting for someone.

They had rented a new car, because the previous car was registered under the name "Luo Fu", and if a car rented by Luo Fu happened to appear near the scene of Mr. Cui's death, the suspicion on Franca would be strong enough for an immediate arrest.

Lumian waited for a while, and through the rearview mirror, he saw Mr. Cui walking alone, preparing to cross the intersection to return to the Tianyue Hotel.

As Mr. Cui passed by his vehicle, Lumian's eyes suddenly took on a silver-white color with black.

Eye of Calamity!

Before Mr. Cui had passed the rearview mirror, he had already found the fate branch leading to the other's doom.

In the next second, Lumian hid his left hand wearing the Circle of Binding and slightly raised his right palm.

He touched Mr. Cui's main fate trunk from afar and violently pushed it towards the branch that appeared black.

His spirituality poured out frantically, his expression unchanged, his movements as usual.

Mr. Cui's dream manifestation was completely unaware of this, and the police monitoring him from hidden spots didn't notice anything unusual.

Mr. Cui continued walking for about fifteen to twenty meters, stepping onto the pedestrian crossing.

By now it was truly night, and there weren't many people on this road, nor many cars.

Suddenly, a car driving from afar seemed to lose control due to excessive speed, directly running the red light.

Mr. Cui saw this scene, his pupils suddenly dilating.

Bang!

He was hit and sent flying, his head heavily hitting the ground.

Then, he was run over by the out-of-control car, dying as thoroughly as possible.

Chapter 988: Father and Daughter

988 Father and Daughter

As soon as Lumian heard the sound of the out-of-control vehicle crashing into the curb, he immediately rolled down the window and poked his head out.

He looked towards the intersection about 15-20 meters away, and at Mr. Cui who had been hit and thrown even further, tragically run over.

Almost simultaneously, he saw several figures emerge from different hiding spots, rushing towards the deceased and the vehicle responsible for the accident.

Lumian promptly took out his phone, snapped a couple of photos, and muttered, "Holy shit, there's been a car accident!

"That driver was speeding like he was in a race, was he drunk?"

He acted like a bystander ready to post on social media and short video accounts.

At this moment, the dented vehicle responsible for the accident completely stalled, unable to start. The car door opened, and a man who could barely stand straight stumbled out.

"Damn, he really is drunk. If you drink, don't drive!" Lumian started recording a video, cursing as he filmed.

Only after the ambulance took away Mr. Cui's body, and the police led away the driver responsible for the accident after cordoning off the area, leaving just the traffic police investigating the scene and the tow truck on standby, did Lumian sit back in his car, as if contemplating how to share what had just happened in various group chats.

Not long after, Anthony, also in disguise, came out of the 24-hour convenience store on the side carrying a large bag of items, opened the car door and got in.

Lumian started the car and drove away from the scene.

They hadn't brought Ludwig with them, having sent the little boy to Jenna's place—if a seven or eight-year-old boy appeared at both the scene where Zaratulstra was shot and where Mr. Cui had the car accident, it would be very suspicious, even if the boy looked different at first glance.

…

In Room 2303 of Dechuang Garden.

Lumian sat in the single armchair and said to Franca and Jenna, "I'll go to Li Keji after midnight."

Pausing momentarily, he added, "Did Lumina show any unusual behavior today?"

Jenna was silent for a couple of seconds, then recounted everything about Lumina's blank stares, her inner impulses, the bad luck surrounding her, getting some fresh air on the rooftop, her words during the card game, and many other detailed behaviors, without hiding anything.

Lumian listened attentively without interrupting, his expression gradually softening.

After Jenna finished speaking, Franca opened her mouth, hesitated for a moment, and said, "If you get kicked out of the dream again, you'll face severe restrictions upon entering for the third time, just like Queen Mystic."

Lumian remained silent for a long while before saying, "I understand."

…

At the edge of a lake, inside a four-story villa.

Bernie Huang returned from outside and walked into the grand, opulent hall.

Every time her classmates came to visit, they would say, "Why is your house decorated like a palace? Don't you find it strange?"

Bernie could only spread her hands helplessly and say, "This is just my dad's preference."

"Where are my dad and the others?" Bernie asked the butler standing in the hall.

She usually lived at school, only choosing to come home on weekends if there wasn't a long holiday.

The butler respectfully answered, "Young Master Huang Xia is exercising in the underground basketball court, Young Master Huang Bo is assembling mini 4WD cars in the toy room, Madam has gone out to attend an art salon, and the Master is in the wine tasting room."

Bernie nodded, walked to the side of the hall, and took the elevator down to the basement.

There was a large wine cellar here, with a secure storage room, and a wine tasting room where you could see the rippling water of the indoor swimming pool.

Huang Tao was sitting on the sofa, holding a glass of pure malt liquor with ice cubes, leisurely savoring it.

"You're back?" He smiled when he saw Bernie come in.

"Why are you drinking again?" Bernie sat down opposite him.

Huang Tao smiled and said, "As I get older, I don't have many hobbies left."

Bernie didn't try to persuade him further, quietly watching as her father took another sip of the temptingly colored liquor and grabbed a few shelled pine nuts from the dish of dried fruits on the table, popping them into his mouth.

After finishing what was in his mouth, Huang Tao asked, "What about your classmate? Didn't she come to visit?"

"Something happened to her biology teacher at the cram school, she's busy dealing with that and doesn't have time," Bernie said simply.

Huang Tao laughed. "You mentioned that before. Really, if he wants to do experiments, he should apply for a job at a proper lab. Why be a biology teacher?"

At this point, Huang Tao looked at Bernie and sighed. "Why don't you like staying at home? There's still some time before school starts, but you've already moved into the dorm."

This isn't my problem… Maybe in Mr. Fool's perception, I'm separate from you all, we rarely get together… Bernie dutifully explained, "I'm involved in a research project."

Huang Tao didn't pursue the matter further, he was just complaining a bit. He changed the subject. "How's that children's book company of yours doing?"

"It's going well," Bernie recalled. "The children's book market is the most profitable area in the physical book market. There's a real demand for repackaging and redesigning classic fairy tales, and we're also nurturing our own children's book authors and illustrators."

"In this area, China started too late and it's still not very mature. There's still a lack of good works. You have a lot of potential," Huang Tao praised his daughter. "At the same time, you need to pay attention to importing copyrights. You can't ignore those excellent foreign children's books and leave them to your competitors."

He seriously instructed his daughter, looking as if he wanted to make Dawn Children's Publishing Company bigger and stronger.

Bernie listened attentively, occasionally offering her own ideas. The father and daughter discussed very harmoniously.

At the end of the discussion, Huang Tao suddenly swirled his drink and said with a sigh, "Do you know what the greatest pain in life is?"

Bernie shook her head.

Huang Tao smiled self-deprecatingly.

"It's watching the people and things you cherish most, the life you yearn for most, being occupied by others, while you can only be locked in a dark and depressing prison."

Bernie looked at Huang Tao without responding.

Huang Tao didn't mind, he just continued to drink his liquor with dried fruits, pouring for himself for a while.

He gradually composed his expression and looked at Bernie. "If you discovered that you were just an illusory character in a dream, and at this time, someone was trying to awaken the master of the dream, what would you do?"

Bernie was silent for a few seconds before saying, "It would depend on the specific situation."

Huang Tao smiled and said, "Then let's be more specific. You clearly know that if the master of the dream is awakened, you will completely disappear. Even if there's another dream, the corresponding person who appears will no longer be the current you. But the person you care about most supports awakening the master of the dream, is willing to take risks for it, even sacrifice themselves. What would you do?"

She looked at Huang Tao, remaining silent throughout.

Huang Tao calmly returned his daughter's gaze.

After a while, he finished the remaining alcohol and stood up, saying, "I'm going upstairs to deal with some matters."

Huang Tao walked out from between the sofa and tea table, passing by Bernie, heading towards the wine tasting room door.

"Dad."

Suddenly, Bernie called out to him.

Huang Tao turned around, a smile already appearing on his face.

"Is there anything else?" he asked.

Bernie also stood up, saying thoughtfully, "I've always been curious, if we don't talk about science, what's inside a mirror, and what's hidden in the depths of a mirror."

Huang Tao looked at Bernie for a few seconds and said, "It hides a great horror beyond your imagination."

After saying this, Huang Tao turned back, opened the wooden door, and walked out of the wine tasting room.

"Great horror…" Bernie stood still, ruminating over these words.

…

Late at night.

Lumian used Teleportation to arrive near Crimson Moon Hospital.

He didn't rush to enter, instead transforming into Lumina's appearance, disguising himself, and walking around Crimson Moon Hospital.

He saw that in the green belts around Crimson Moon Hospital, in the crevices of the walls of various buildings, mushrooms had sprung up like bamboo shoots after a spring rain, all kinds of mushrooms.

These mushrooms hadn't invaded the living space of other organisms, nor did they threaten the structural safety of the buildings. They were just growing quietly and peacefully.

With so many mushrooms, no wonder Crimson Moon Hospital launched a mushroom set meal… They all look edible… Who wouldn't want to use free ingredients? After roughly confirming the situation in the outer area of Crimson Moon Hospital, Lumian hid in a concealed spot, entered a mirror, and made his way to the psychiatric ward.

He wasn't worried about being blocked or trapped by the dream city police in this mirror world, because Lumina didn't have a real identity and had no apparent connection to Li Keji on the surface. Unless high-ranking police officials like Yagates had received a revelation through prophecy or divination that staking out here would provide clues, it was unlikely they would send people here.

And with everyone being suppressed at Sequence 7, Lumian, as a Demoness of Despair, wasn't too afraid of divinations and prophecies pointing to his whereabouts.

After observing the entire ward for a while, Lumian jumped out of the mirror-like object, landing lightly.

He always held a hand mirror, using it to reflect light and create illusions to deceive the surveillance cameras.

Lumian then surveyed the dimly lit corridor lights and the iron doors sleeping in the dark environment. His spirituality didn't give any warnings.

Next, he took a breath, not smelling any blood or other strange odors.

Only then did he gently knock on the metal door of Li Keji's ward.

Knock. Knock. Knock. The knocking wasn't loud, quietly echoing in this area without reaching the nurses' station.

Li Keji's voice suddenly sounded, kept very low.

"Who?"

This time, no white and tender mushrooms came to the window to peek, nor did a large amount of white mycelium emerge from the door crack.

"It's me," the black-haired Lumian answered softly, "The person who asked for your help in treating a vegetative friend before."

"Oh, it's you…" Li Keji still didn't appear behind the iron-barred window of the door, seemingly shrinking in a corner of the bed.

"Has your research made any progress?" Lumian asked.

"I have some ideas, a bunch of failures, and a half-finished product. It still needs verification, I'm not sure what the final effect will be…" As he spoke, Li Keji's voice revealed a hint of confusion, "But some strange things have happened, I might not have time to advance the experiment you want recently."

"What things?" Lumian's spirit suddenly tensed.

What could make Li Keji put aside his mushroom experiments?

After a few seconds, Li Keji answered in a confused, self-musing tone, "I'm pregnant."

Chapter 989: Bloodline

989 Bloodline

Pregnant? Hearing this word, Lumian's scalp instantly went numb.

Li Keji is pregnant?

Pull yourself together; you're a man!

How did he get pregnant? Who did it? When?

Relying on the endurance of an Ascetic, Lumian maintained relative calm on the surface. He asked in a deep voice, "Are you certain?"

"It's definitely pregnancy," Li Keji's voice came from somewhere far from the iron door. "I used to be a doctor, then became a biologist. Do you think I can't tell if it's a pregnancy?"

He really is pregnant… Lumian's whole body went numb.

Among all the Beyonder paths he currently knew of that could make a man pregnant, only those related to the Great Mother could do it!

Did Grimm and the others secretly come to Crimson Moon Hospital to impregnate Li Keji without telling me? That doesn't seem right. For such a big matter, they would have no reason not to report to the Child of God… Moreover, he said that currently in the dream city, only I, as the Child of God, possess godhood and can promote rapid fetal growth while impregnating Li Keji, and this would still require the support of the obstetrics and gynecology department of Mushu Hospital… Lumian's first reaction was to suspect Grimm and other bestowed of the Great Mother, but the information he had previously obtained was insufficient to support this reasoning.

He immediately thought of a possibility.

Zhou Mingrui had received a strong stimulus, causing some changes in the dream that he and others hadn't yet noticed, and the Great Mother could now bestow godhood on a few chosen ones.

It's only been one day, and problems from the changes have already erupted. Could it be this fast?

Besides, Grimm believes I've already impregnated Li Keji, there's no need to do it again…

I've already impregnated Li Keji…

As his brain worked rapidly, Lumian suddenly had an incredible guess.

Could the child in Li Keji's belly be mine?

Amidst his shock, Lumian followed this train of thought.

Last week, I high-fived Li Keji in the psychiatric ward of Mushu Hospital. I used this to falsely claim that I had impregnated Li Keji to deceive Grimm, so he wouldn't suspect my identity as a Child of God…

21:50

Could it be that this contact actually made Li Keji pregnant?

But I only have a bit of Omebella bloodline, and I don't possess any Sower-related abilities…

No, it's just that I don't have them in reality, the objective conditions are completely unsatisfied, but this is a dream…

As long as the dream subconscious believes it, even the most outrageous and absurd things can happen…

At that time, when I high-fived Li Keji, in Grimm's eyes I was the genuine Child of God Omebella, and I do indeed possess Omebella's bloodline. Did this make me roughly equivalent to the real Child of God Omebella in the dream subconscious's perception? And the Child of God Omebella does have the corresponding Beyonder powers to impregnate Li Keji…

Moreover, most importantly, the place where I high-fived Li Keji and said words like "he's already pregnant" was Mushu Hospital, a place where the Great Mother can exert great influence. It's possible that the dream subconscious, confused and misled by the environment there, equated me with the Child of God Omebella…

Yes, there's one more point!

Lumian's pupils suddenly dilated.

They had previously overlooked one thing, subconsciously equating the dream subconscious with Mr. Fool's subconscious.

But in reality, the dream subconscious should be a mixture of Mr. Fool's subconscious and the subconscious of The Celestial Worthy of Heaven and Earth for Blessings

In this situation, the characters created by the dream subconscious and the changes brought about wouldn't completely originate from Mr. Fool's cognition, nor would they always be beneficial to Lumian and others!

Based on this, the character images in the dream city, including Luo Shan, Ai Nana, Deng, and others, couldn't be simply defined as characters woven by Mr. Fool's subconscious based on his own cognition and the situation in the dream city. Here, Mr. Fool's subconscious needed to be replaced with the dream subconscious.

In other words, Deng, Ai Nana, Luo Shan before drinking the Shaman potion, and other various characters, some came from Mr. Fool's cognition, some from that Celestial Worthy's cognition, some were mainly based on Mr. Fool's cognition but have been secretly spiced up by the Celestial Worthy. They couldn't be thoughtlessly viewed and analyzed as one type.

The environment of Mushu Hospital, as well as Grimm's cognition and the fact that I truly have Omebella bloodline, made the dream subconscious at that time become dominated by the Celestial Worthy, choosing to "believe" that I was the Child of God Omebella, so Li Keji quietly became pregnant after our high-five? Omebella's child is equivalent to a direct descendant of the Great Mother, so when it's born, Li Keji will be completely corrupted by the Great Mother? The more Lumian thought about it, the more horrified he felt.

He thought of an even more terrifying development.

If Mr. Fool was at an absolute disadvantage, and the Celestial Worthy became the ruler of the dream city, He could completely blur the line between truth and falsehood, making the identity of "Child of God Omebella" in the dream city fully activate on the real-world Lumian, becoming real.

At that time, the real Omebella would resurrect and return through Lumian's body.

I almost fell for it without realizing… A cold sweat broke out on Lumian's back.

He remembered a joke he had seen online recently, and couldn't help but laugh self-mockingly. "Pregnancy really can happen from holding hands…"

"What did you say?" Li Keji asked confusedly from inside the ward.

Startled and emotionally stirred, Lumian calmed down and asked calmly, "When did you become pregnant?"

He was still a little in denial.

Li Keji honestly said, "At first I thought it was because I used my own flesh and blood and spirituality to create new mushrooms, causing spores, mycelium, and such things to enter my body and implant in my abdomen. Yes, this was part of my new experiment after you suggested it.

"But after careful examination, the time of pregnancy was clearly earlier."

Lumian fell silent for a moment before responding, "Can I come in to confirm?"

"Sure," Li Keji didn't refuse.

Lumian took a step forward, his figure suddenly disappearing from the corridor and appearing in Li Keji's ward.

At first glance, he didn't see a single mushroom,

This surprised him.

Logically speaking, Li Keji's living space, under the bed, in the corners, behind the door, should have been full of various mushrooms.

But now, the room was as clean as someone else's home.

Lumian then looked at Li Keji sitting on the bed and found that his belly had indeed swollen slightly.

In the next second, his spiritual intuition as a Demoness of Despair allowed him to confirm that the child in Li Keji's belly was blood-related to him.

But it wasn't related to Lumian, nor to Lumina, but to Omebella!

It really is mine… Just as Lumian was about to speak, he suddenly felt many nearly invisible fine threads swaying around.

Mycelium? He instinctively looked up and finally saw a mushroom.

The mushroom was semi-transparent, attached to the chandelier position, with a large amount of mycelium hanging down. At first glance, it looked just like a common jellyfish.

"Is this the half-finished product you mentioned?" Lumian probed.

The scruffy Li Keji nodded. "Yes."

"Where are the failed products?" Lumian asked further.

Li Keji answered seriously, "They were all absorbed by it."

As he spoke, he waved his hand, and the jellyfish-like mushroom floated down, brushing against his palm.

For some reason, Lumian was reminded of the image of a young brown bear nuzzling its keeper.

"What about the mushrooms that were in the room before?" Lumian asked for confirmation.

"They were also absorbed by it," Li Keji's voice carried a hint of expectation.

Lumian was silent for a while before saying, "I can help you abort it."

"But, but he is indeed my child," Li Keji responded hesitantly.

He seemed to have gained some maternal instinct.

Lumian's lips twitched slightly as he initiated Instigation.

"No, he's not your child, he's the child of an evil god.

"Haven't you always wondered why you were arrested? It's because an evil god took a liking to you and had Her followers fabricate charges to lock you up in the psychiatric ward.

"Think about it, you're a man, how could you normally get pregnant?"

"Women can get pregnant, why can't men? Mushrooms can too!" Li Keji argued with Lumian.

Lumian didn't give up and continued, "But can you get pregnant without doing anything, unconsciously?"

"Right…" Li Keji finally felt something was amiss.

Lumian quietly exhaled and said, "This pregnancy is the result of the evil god entering your dreams."

Lumian felt that if he hadn't fully digested the Instigator potion, using Instigation to persuade Li Keji to abort would be enough to complete the act. Unfortunately, he didn't need to additionally digest the Instigator potion.

As a member of the assassination operation against Zaratulstra, as the person who assassinated Mr. Cui, Lumian had already digested the Assassin potion. Currently, only the Witch needed to be acted upon. He decided that if Li Keji chose to abort later, he would try to make the process as mysteriously terrifying and flashy as possible, to expel the Great Mother's child in the identity of a Witch.

"If you don't abort the child in your belly, it will absorb your flesh and spirituality, growing rapidly in two to three weeks. When it's born, you will become a dried corpse, unable to do more mushroom experiments, unable to fulfill your dream," Lumian said in a low voice, describing the possible consequences.

Hearing that he wouldn't be able to do more mushroom experiments, Li Keji made a decision. "Alright, please help me."

Before Lumian could respond, he continued on his own, "If the evil god's child hybridizes with mushrooms, it might produce some special changes…"

Evil god's child… hybridize… Forget about your mushrooms… Lumian didn't want to be chased by a mushroom calling him mother in the future.

At this moment, Li Keji's eyes lit up.

"Wait until I've thought of a plan, then you can help me abort it. This will take one or two days."

Lumian didn't dare to force Li Keji; after all, in Mr. Fool's subconscious cognition, no matter how inconceivable things were, this biology teacher could create them through mushrooms. If he became an enemy and forced an abortion, perhaps something terrifying would happen.

"No problem," Lumian responded.

He secretly decided that when the time came, he would make the evil god's descendant in Li Keji's belly disappear without a trace, unable to hybridize with mushrooms.

Lumian then cautioned, "Don't tell anyone else about the evil god for now, otherwise catastrophe will befall us."

"I won't," Li Keji shook his head. "I haven't dared to talk to Ms. Jiajia or other colleagues about mushrooms recently; they seem to have become different people."

"Become different people?" Lumian's gaze suddenly froze.

Chapter 990: True Commonality

990 True Commonality

Lumian's initial feeling was that Li Keji had noticed the difference between Queen of Stars Cattleya and Huang Jiajia, but after careful consideration, he overturned this guess.

This was because Li Keji said his other colleagues also seemed to have become different people, and it was unlikely that they had all been occupied and used by external consciousnesses.

"Why do you feel this way?" he asked Li Keji.

Li Keji stroked his belly and said, "The previous ones ate the mushrooms I sent, but the current ones haven't!"

The current ones haven't? Does this mean they've been replaced? Lumian's thoughts raced as he carefully asked, "What about Bernie Huang? Have you seen her recently, and is she different from before?"

"I've seen her, but I don't know if there's been any change. She never ate the mushrooms I sent before," Li Keji answered honestly.

In other words, Li Keji can't distinguish the difference between external consciousnesses and dream manifestations, nor does he have the observational ability to do so. However, he can determine whether the person in front of him has eaten the mushrooms he created… Taken together, did he mean that Huang Jiajia and others at Star Tutoring Classes had eaten them before, leaving corresponding traces, but recently they hadn't? Had Huang Jiajia and the others been replaced? Lumian had already been surprised when he heard Li Keji say that Huang Jiajia and the others seemed to have become different people, but now he felt more confused and alert.

He was currently inclined to believe Li Keji's statement, thinking that the Mushroom King, who was confined to the psychiatric ward and hadn't yet given birth, had not been completely corrupted and wouldn't be experiencing hallucinations or have his personality twisted to enjoy lying. Moreover, in the dream city, based on Mr. Fool's subconscious cognition, Li Keji had a certain uniqueness and could indeed possibly discover anomalies.

Who replaced Huang Jiajia and the others? Why replace them? Lumian pondered these questions.

Suddenly, he thought of one person: Zaratulstra!

When Lumian first discovered that Zaratulstra had visited Star Tutoring Classes, his initial reaction was that this Angel wanted to do something to the dream manifestation of Ma'am Hermit. But later, as events unfolded with Li Keji being arrested and sent to the psychiatric ward, this led him to overturn his original suspicions and stop thinking in that direction.

Now, the new discovery made him reconsider his earliest guess.

Zaratulstra likes to exert force on both overt and covert lines simultaneously. On the surface, he was helping the Great Mother control Li Keji and eliminating the hidden dangers brought by mushrooms, while secretly taking advantage of opportunities like visits to target Huang Jiajia and other teachers at Star Tutoring Classes, replacing these dream manifestations? The benefit of doing this would be that the attention of covert saboteurs would be focused on Li Keji's matter, overlooking the key point that Star Tutoring Classes itself was also a target… Lumian only now realized that Zaratulstra's plan was far more extensive than what he and his team had previously analyzed.

Based on this, he believed that Zaratulstra should have chosen the Conspirer pathway rather than being a Seer.

His experience, knowledge, intellect, and style are truly worthy of a real Angel… Lumian inwardly sighed, continuing to question Li Keji, wanting to understand more details.

But apart from knowing whether those colleagues had eaten the mushrooms he gave them, Li Keji shook his head in ignorance to all other questions.

Finally, Lumian could only caution, "You must come up with a plan in these two days, otherwise the minions of the evil god will take action against you again, causing the child to be born in the near future."

This referred to his and Grimm's previous agreement to take action again in a week to help the fetus in Li Keji's body develop rapidly.

"Alright," Li Keji answered, touching his belly.

Lumian looked at him deeply, forming a new idea: After Grimm confirms that Li Keji is truly pregnant and helps the fetus gain growth "momentum" with the help of Mushu Hospital's obstetrics department, I'll secretly return and complete the abortion!

…

At Xinhong District, in the rented apartment.

Lumian's team gathered again to hear him talk about Li Keji's pregnancy and the suspected replacement of Huang Jiajia and others.

"If we assume the culprit is Zaratulstra or his accomplices, then we can't just look at Star Tutoring Classes for the replacements," Jenna expressed her thoughts. "Doesn't this remind you of anything?"

Franca had a sudden realization. "The death of the Oracle?"

"Yes," Lumian had already connected this incident with the replacement of Huang Jiajia and other Star Tutoring Classes members. "If Anderson hadn't interfered, if we hadn't discovered the Oracle's body in time, he would have definitely been sent to the morgue in Mushu Hospital B1, gaining a 'rebirth'. After that, wouldn't it count as the 'reborn' him replacing the original him?"

"Did Huang Jiajia and the others experience something similar? Was Zaratulstra targeting not just Star Tutoring Classes, but also Dream Tutoring Classes?" The more Franca spoke, the more shocked she became. "On the surface, he was seeking opportunities to contact Zhou Mingrui through visits to Dream Tutoring Classes but secretly he was replacing the teachers at Dream Tutoring Classes? How damn insidious!"

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"Did Huang Jiajia and the others experience something similar? Was Zaratulstra targeting not just Star Tutoring Classes, but also Dream Tutoring Classes?" The more Franca spoke, the more shocked she became. "On the surface, he was seeking opportunities to contact Zhou Mingrui through visits to Dream Tutoring Classes but secretly he was replacing the teachers at Dream Tutoring Classes? How damn insidious!"

At this point, Franca sincerely sighed.

"Who knows what else Zaratulstra has done in secret, it's probably not just this one thing… Fortunately, we chose to eliminate the hidden danger in advance, kicking Zaratulstra out of the dream and killing His dream manifestation. Otherwise, if His overt stratagem and covert scheme were to be launched simultaneously, both reaching the brink of success, the situation would be unimaginable!

"Perhaps the whole affair would have ended there, with our complete failure as the conclusion."

"Now without the leadership of Zaratulstra and Mr. Cui, their subordinates will find it difficult to consider the overall situation. We can take this opportunity to dismantle the bombs one by one and eliminate the hidden problems," Anthony agreed with Franca's sentiments.

Lumian nodded slightly and solemnly reminded, "This is both good news and bad news.

"I believe you can all see that a Seer is more suited to hiding in the shadows, directing the play, rather than directly stepping onto the stage and exposing themselves to the audience's view.

"Zaratulstra previously needed to advance overt matters to obtain money and resources, to openly contact Zhou Mingrui, so He couldn't hide His identity and stay in the shadows. The same goes for Mr. Cui. This gave us the opportunity to set traps and make good use of the dream rules.

"Once Zaratulstra and Mr. Cui obtain new identities and return, they will surely hide behind the scenes, covertly advancing their own agendas. At that time, the roles of hunter and prey will be reversed. Even if we show just a slight flaw, we will immediately be discovered and face deadly assassination. Once attacked, the best outcome would be the person being kicked out of the dream, with the dream manifestation most likely destroyed."

"Yes, at that time the enemy will be in the dark and I'm in the light, with the danger level skyrocketing," Franca nodded in agreement.

Because of her close relationship with Luo Shan, once Zaratulstra returned and focused the investigation on why Zhou Mingrui went to Shujin Hot Pot Restaurant that day, she could easily be discovered. That's why she said "I'm in the light."

Lumian chuckled in response.

"Of course, this is also an opportunity. You continue working in the administrative department of Intis Group for now. When Zaratulstra returns, see if you can use this to set a trap for Him. If not, you can quickly resign, change your identity, and also hide in the shadows.

"At the same time, we need to make good use of this period before Zaratulstra's return."

As he spoke, Lumian picked up his phone and sent a WeChat message to "A name that leaves a deep impression on you": "How have you been lately? Are you enjoying classes?"

Soon, "A name that leaves a deep impression on you" replied: "Do you want to check what time it is now?

"If you have nothing better to do, I suggest you go out for a run."

Lumian calmly replied: "Do you still feel that the world is fake lately, that there are terrifying fake details in the people around you?"

After about ten seconds, Anderson Hood replied: "It's even more fake than before."

"Such as?" Lumian pressed.

Anderson Hood sent a 🙄 emoji:

"For example, Ai Nana, Iron Skin, Flowery Bow Tie, and other tutoring center teachers all seem more fake now, different from before."

As expected… Lumian confirmed his team's speculation.

He asked with a 🤭 emoji: "What about you, have you become more fake?"

Anderson Hood sent "a dog biting its own tail": "I might be next.

"But I recently saw news about a foreign guest being shot dead."

A good Hunter should know how to obtain information from public reports… Lumian put down his phone and said to Franca, Jenna, and the others:

"Most of the teachers at Dream Tutoring Classes have also been replaced."

"What's the significance of this replacement? To make all dream manifestations dominated by the Celestial Worthy, thus gaining victory in the consciousness battle?" Franca raised a question.

Lumian didn't answer, instead using frost to create a white board and sticking notes on it.

Each note had the name of a dream manifestation currently suspected of being replaced, as well as their corresponding real-world person.

Lumian stood in front of the white board, studying it intently for a while before asking Franca, Jenna, and Anthony, "See anything in common?"

"They are or were all pirates?" Jenna tentatively answered.

Lumian shook his head.

"That's the surface commonality.

"There's another common point hidden beneath the surface."

Saying this, he turned to his companions and said, "These are all characters that have appeared in 'The Great Adventurer' series of novels.

"In other words, they are all participants and witnesses of Gehrman Sparrow's life!"

Hearing this conclusion, Franca suddenly thought of the movie "The Great Pirate 3", of Jia Yu who was poached by Zaratulstra for playing Gehrman Sparrow, and of An Xiaotian, the original actor for Gehrman Sparrow who was now in a vegetative state.

"Is the focus of the contest the identity of Gehrman Sparrow? This also fits the prophecy 'The awakening of The World spells The Fool's return'," Franca muttered to herself.

With a nod, Lumian replied, "It seems so for now, which is why these people related to Gehrman Sparrow have all been replaced.

"The Oracle's death was the beginning, not the end."

Chapter 991: Proactive Small Talk

After suspecting that Zaratulstra had replaced the teachers at Dream Tutoring Classes and Star Tutoring Classes to target the image of Gehrman Sparrow, who didn't actually exist in the dream city, Lumian and the others discussed this for quite a while, but still couldn't figure out the significance and purpose of doing so.

They decided to write a letter, which Franca and Jenna would take to Star Dream Provisions Store tomorrow to mail out, to see what opinions the Major Arcana card holders would give.

As they stood up, preparing to leave the rented apartment in Xinhong District, Franca remembered something and curiously looked at Lumian. "You said earlier that Li Keji's pregnancy was because Grimm's cognition, the Omebella bloodline in you, and the Celestial Worthy's subconscious taking dominance because of Mushu Hospital's environment, equating you with the Child of God Omebella in the dream, making your casual comment 'he's already pregnant' become reality. So, as the Child of God Omebella, can you now use the Beyonder powers of a Planter, Apothecary, and Heretic Spellmaster pathways?"

Franca's eyes gleamed, feeling this had a bit of a "I guess that went well" flavor to it.

Of course, this "I" referred to the dream subconscious.

As long as the dream subconscious believed it, anything could happen!

Lumian tried to see if he could use the abilities related to Vampire, Harvest Priest, and Heretic Spellmaster, but all attempts failed.

"It doesn't work." He shook his head.

Before Franca could respond, he added thoughtfully, "Maybe it's possible in Mushu Hospital."

As Franca nodded in agreement, Jenna reminded Lumian, "If that's really the case, frequent visits to Mushu Hospital might cause you to become more and more like Omebella, until you're completely equivalent."

Lumian pondered for a few seconds, then said gravely, "It's a possibility."

Franca immediately hissed. "How sinister is the Great Mother's style, always making people fall into traps unknowingly? Sometimes, being vigilant seems useless…"

At this point, Franca answered her own question, "Judging by the name, perhaps the Great Mother symbolizes the 'yin'—'darkness' in the term 'yin-yang'…"

…

The next day, which was Sunday, Lumian again brought Ludwig to Dream Tutoring Classes.

While sending the child into the classroom, he discreetly observed the front desk, every teacher he encountered, and Anderson Hood with his Eye of Calamity.

Except for the latter, the mercury-colored river of fate corresponding to the others all showed a black color representing death at some point in the past. Some of these black patches had become blurred, while others were still relatively clear, flowing forward with the illusory river, getting further and further behind, becoming harder to see.

They are indeed reborn people… Lumian didn't engage in conversation with Anderson Hood, but stepped back and sat in his usual spot.

Just as he was about to contemplate how to handle this situation, he suddenly saw Zhou Mingrui, wearing a loose sky-blue T-shirt, walking towards him.

How dedicated, to still remember to come for Business English class after witnessing Zaratulstra being shot and observing Mr. Cui… Lumian mused, standing up to greet Zhou Mingrui.

As fellow employees of Intis Group who had met more than once, this was expected courtesy.

Seeing this, Zhou Mingrui returned the greeting.

Just when Lumian thought he would smoothly turn into the classroom, Zhou Mingrui stopped, right in front of him.

Zhou Mingrui looked around and asked, "Has Mr. Da resigned? I haven't seen him every time I've come recently.

"You know Mr. Da, right?"

"Yes, Da Nizi. I brought my child here to enroll after seeing the flier he handed out," Lumian answered simply.

He hadn't expected Zhou Mingrui to initiate casual conversation with him, and even ask about the Oracle Danitz.

Stimulated by the Zaratulstra incident, has Zhou Mingrui started to more actively explore the hidden anomalies around him, more boldly engaging with us problematic people, and thus discovered that Teacher Da from Dream Tutoring Classes hasn't appeared recently? This is good news! Hmm, there's also a downside, if he keeps investigating like this, who knows when my team and I might be kicked out of the dream without warning, just like Mr. Cui… Lumian's thoughts raced, forming a rough judgment.

Before Zhou Mingrui could ask further, he sighed and said, "Mr. Da didn't resign, he passed away."

"Ah?" Zhou Mingrui's gaze suddenly froze.

His shock and surprise showed on his face.

This was also the expected reaction of a normal person hearing such news.

"When did this happen? What happened?" Zhou Mingrui didn't hide his astonishment.

Lumian glanced towards the front desk.

"I heard Ms. Ai say that he seemed to have encountered a psychopathic killer and was strangled to death.

"At first, Ms. Ai and Mr. Anderson thought he was just missing, and because they didn't have much confidence in Mr. Da's ability to survive alone, they quickly reported it to the police. Later, after searching, the police found Mr. Da in the underground morgue of Mushu Hospital, in the form of a corpse."

Lumian's words were all information that Ms. Ai Nana had previously mentioned and could be found online, so he wasn't worried about being kicked out of the dream again because of this—after re-entering the dream, he planned to behave for two or three days in front of Zhou Mingrui.

"Killed…" Zhou Mingrui's eyes flickered as he fell into deep thought.

"Yes, the body was discovered in the underground morgue of Mushu Hospital," Lumian deliberately emphasized.

He was trying to guide Zhou Mingrui to notice that there might be problems with Mushu Hospital through normal conversation.

"The killer deliberately sent Mr. Da's body to the underground morgue?" Zhou Mingrui expressed his confusion.

Lumian shook his head. "It might not have been the killer, it could have been a passerby who discovered the body and sent it there."

"How is that possible? A passerby who sees a body would call the police directly." Zhou Mingrui increasingly felt that there was something fishy about this matter.

"But why would the killer have to send Mr. Da's body to the underground morgue of Mushu Hospital? Did he think it wouldn't be discovered if hidden there? What made him think that…" Lumian was responsible for raising questions, emphasizing Mushu Hospital, but not providing answers.

For him now, providing answers was too dangerous.

Zhou Mingrui nodded thoughtfully, then pointed to the Business English classroom. "I'm going to class now."

"Alright," Lumian sat down accordingly.

He leaned against the classroom wall, his thoughts gradually spreading:

The secret replacement of teachers at Dream Tutoring Classes and Star Tutoring Classes is really difficult to resolve…

If this were in the real world, I would find an opportunity to blow up the underground part of Mushu Hospital, completely eliminating the hidden danger. But in the dream city, with the underground part of Mushu Hospital being the psychological trauma of a great existence and an infiltration point for the power of other great existences, I'm afraid even the owner of Star Dream Provisions Store and Stianos wouldn't dare to venture there easily, even if they weren't restricted…

Using the Eye of Calamity to distinguish whether the target is a reborn person, should we kill all those who have been replaced, like Huang Jiajia, Ai Nana, and others, to eliminate them?

I'm confident I could cover up the traces and not be discovered if I kill one, but killing so many? Do they think the dream city's police department and Chief Yagates are dead? This would be openly challenging the dream's main consciousness, and I might be identified the next day…

Moreover, with Huang Jiajia and others being related to the identity of Gehrman Sparrow, if they all exit the stage of the dream city, it might bring about unfavorable changes, or cause the subsequent awakening plan to be doomed to failure from the start…

Report it? Without sufficient clues, it might end up like the previous report about Zaratulstra, with no response at all…

What clues could make the police investigate deeply and discover the abnormalities?

I hope the Major Arcana card holders can provide good ideas…

Hmm…

As Lumian's thoughts became more and more scattered, he caught sight of Zhou Mingrui coming out of the classroom with his phone, walking towards the restroom.

Lumian tilted his head, using his Hunter ears to eavesdrop on what Zhou Mingrui was saying from a distance.

He heard Zhou Mingrui ask in surprise, "Weren't you scheduled to come on Monday? Why has it been postponed to Wednesday?"

From the other end of the phone, a female voice faintly reached Lumian's ears.

"I thought about it, you have to work during the week and can't take me out, so I might as well just go directly to report in."

Zhou Mingrui was silent for a moment, then said, "I have annual leave."

"It's fine, you can take me out on the weekend." The female voice on the phone said cheerfully.

Zhou Mingrui sighed and said, "Alright then, what time is your train on Wednesday?"

Hearing this, Lumian roughly understood what was going on.

According to the information provided by the Major Arcana, Zhou Mingrui's sister Zhou Shasha had been admitted to a university in Yangdu and was about to come here to study.

Zhou Shasha will arrive in Yangdu next Wednesday? As one of the dream manifestations closest to Zhou Mingrui, what changes will her arrival bring? Lumian raised his right hand to rub his temples, feeling that one wave of events was following another without pause.

…

Star Dream Provisions Store.

Franca and Jenna, who had taken a taxi, walked into the dimly lit interior of the shop.

The former politely asked the shop owner if they could mail a letter, while the latter lingered in the entrance area, both examining the antiques on the shelves and observing the situation outside.

After getting the shop owner's permission, Franca turned to the shelf and dropped the letter in her hand into the silver-inlaid black mailbox.

As her gaze swept across, she noticed that the Pride Armor that once belonged to her was standing quietly on the edge of the inner side of the right shelf.

The surface of this silver-white full-body armor was somehow stained with patches and spots of dark red blood. Just seeing it gave Franca a feeling of rapidly weakening, as if her serious illness had returned.

It's become even more sinister… Franca didn't dare ask the shop owner what had happened to the Pride Armor, and quickly averted her gaze, walking towards the door.

At this moment, Jenna raised her hand slightly, discreetly pointing to the diagonal opposite side of the street.

There, perched on the branch of a street tree, was a white pigeon.

Chapter 992: The Unknowing Questioner

Luo Shan sat in a café near the police station, monitoring Franca and Jenna's whereabouts using a white pigeon she had temporarily modified.

She had drawn her own mark on the pigeon, as well as a hidden miniature camera. By wearing sunglasses with a receiving device drawn on them, she could obtain the corresponding signal. At the same time, she could use the connection between a Painter and a painting to drive the corresponding mark, thereby directing the pigeon.

Of course, this had to be maintained within a certain distance.

After seeing Franca and Jenna come out of Star Dream Provisions Store, Luo Shan quickly had the white pigeon follow them.

As she followed, she found that the two targets were approaching the police station area, which was where she was.

Luo Shan's heart skipped a beat.

Fortunately, her anxiety didn't last too long. Franca and Jenna only came to this street and didn't actually walk to the café door.

Phew… Just as Luo Shan breathed a sigh of relief, she saw Franca and Jenna, who were already five or six steps away from the café, disappear into thin air simultaneously.

Wh— Luo Shan's pupils suddenly dilated.

The next second, two people sat down opposite her.

One was Luo Fu, the other was Jian Na.

Luo Shan's movements froze instantly, as if she had turned into a statue.

"Were you monitoring us?" Jenna asked in a friendly manner.

Franca put the two mirrors in her hand on the coffee table, creating a Mirror Maze.

"I-I wanted to see what you were really doing, if you were deceiving me, if you were bad people." Luo Shan's voice gradually rose.

It's still the aftereffects of the talk about the dreamscape… I wonder if the Mirror Maze can deceive a Reporter's ability to explore the truth? Probably not… How to guard against this kind of prying in the future? Communicate important things via phone and delete chat records afterwards using the Information Shredder? No, except for me, Lumian, Jenna, Anthony and Ludwig don't speak Chinese, phone communication is done through voice conversion, which can also be heard… The Bottle of Fiction probably can't isolate it either, unless it's the Realm of Mysteries… Can we only communicate in places far away from a Reporter in the future? Franca thought of many things in an instant.

Suddenly, she had a flash of inspiration and looked at Luo Shan.

"You can follow us openly if you want, you can watch from the side if you want to see, it's just that some things will be more dangerous, we may not even be able to protect ourselves well. Um, if we're going to face this kind of thing, we'll tell you in advance, and you can weigh whether you want to follow or not."

Luo Shan didn't expect Franca and others to be so honest, and was momentarily speechless.

Franca took the opportunity to say, "We're going to a place next to confirm whether certain people have become more fake. Do you want to go?"

Confirm if they've become more fake? Luo Shan suddenly felt a bit scared, but she didn't want to deceive herself forever and not uncover the answer.

After a moment's hesitation, she said, "I'll go."

Franca laughed. "It's good that you have the ability to explore the truth, you can intuitively help us confirm, without us having to devise dangerous plans."

She didn't know yet if Lumian's Eye of Calamity could discover the problems with Huang Jiajia, Ai Nana and others, so she planned to use a Reporter's ability.

This way, they might even discover the aspects in which the fake people were fake, and thus obtain key evidence that could be reported to the police.

Moreover, Jenna had previously told Franca that since Luo Shan already knew the current world was a dream and was in a state of unwillingness to believe, full of doubt but unable to completely deceive herself, they shouldn't delay, lest she did something stupid because of it, or her mental state became problematic and was exploited by that evil god of the Fantasy Association.

Jenna felt that, having already chosen to be honest and truthful, they should continue this style. On the one hand, stabilize Luo Shan's mental and emotional state through psychological treatment, and on the other hand, let Luo Shan face the truth step by step under their control, confirm the facts, and not let her imagine, try, or do things blindly, which could likely bring greater disaster.

In other words, when problems had already appeared and couldn't be avoided, it was better to place them under one's own control and release them with precautions, rather than letting the problems develop on their own.

So, for something that could have been done with the Mystery Prying Glasses, they chose to ask Luo Shan for "help".

…

Outside Star Tutoring Classes.

Franca and Jenna brought Luo Shan to a white car that was unlocked and unoccupied.

Anthony, who had received a WeChat message from Franca, was already on standby nearby, ready to treat Luo Shan if she had a mental breakdown.

"This is?" Luo Shan didn't expect there would be such a car waiting by the roadside for them to use.

"Our companion drove it over; to convenience our observations," Franca explained simply.

Luo Shan asked in understanding, "Lumina who played cards with us?"

That's how Franca and the others had introduced her.

"Sort of," Jenna had no intention of letting the Spectator onto the stage.

After a while, they saw Huang Jiajia walk out of Star Tutoring Classes.

"It's her," Franca quickly informed Luo Shan.

Luo Shan raised her right hand through the car window, pinching the sides of her eye sockets.

She then saw the target person overlapping with windows, street trees, and cars.

She also saw a large number of invisible threads floating out from the target's body, extending towards the sky.

These threads were tied to the target's joints and organs.

With the pulling of these invisible threads, the target made corresponding movements, walking towards the nearest bus stop.

It's just like a puppet on strings… Luo Shan's hair stood on end.

When she had explored the truth before, she hadn't seen similar situations with people around, or rather, similar situations weren't obvious enough to be noticed by her.

Taking advantage of the time she had, Luo Shan observed the passing pedestrians.

She saw that these pedestrians also had a large number of invisible thin threads floating towards the sky, but these threads were all very loose, without the tension of pulling the human body to make movements.

"…" Luo Shan's body suddenly tensed, then slumped, leaning sideways against the backrest of the car's rear seat.

She ended her exploration and said as if sleep-talking, "It's indeed more fake…"

"What are the specific details?" Jenna tried to alleviate the emotional impact on Luo Shan by discussing business.

Franca sent a message to Anthony: "Closely monitor the target's state."

Luo Shan described in a floating voice the scene she had seen and the comparison between the target and normal people.

During this process, Anthony, who was in disguise, pretended to be a middle-aged man smoking by the roadside, drawing closer to Luo Shan, and quietly using Placate.

After Luo Shan finished speaking, she fell completely silent, not saying a word.

Jenna and Franca looked at her sympathetically, temporarily not starting a new topic.

They were waiting for Anthony's notification. Only when Anthony said it was okay would they speak, and only when Anthony said what aspects to talk about would they construct corresponding language.

"I want, I want to go to the North City Cemetery," Luo Shan finally spoke.

"Okay," Franca immediately agreed.

At the same time, she received a message from Anthony, who had turned his back and used voice input: "The target's emotional state has stabilized to some extent, but there are still remnants of negativity, pessimism, and despair.

"Don't talk about anything, any casual words in the current situation might stimulate the target. Only answer when she asks."

Franca forwarded these messages to Jenna, then started the car and drove onto the main road.

The car was silent again, with only the faint sound of the engine.

After the vehicle reached the North City overpass, Luo Shan, who seemed to have become a clay puppet, muttered to herself, "In realit—in that world outside, is there another me?"

"Yes," Jenna answered.

She strictly followed the Psychiatrist's instructions, only answering Luo Shan's questions without any expansion.

Luo Shan fell silent again.

Finally, the car arrived at North City Cemetery and stopped in the parking lot.

Luo Shan pressed the door handle, paused for a few seconds, and said, "I'll go in by myself, you don't need to follow."

"Okay," Jenna and Franca responded in unison.

Luo Shan opened the car door and put one foot out.

At this moment, she half-turned her body and asked with dark eyes, "Are you here to awaken Zhou Mingrui?"

"Yes." Jenna didn't hide it.

On this topic, she felt it necessary to say a few more words, so she added, "If Zhou Mingrui isn't awakened, everything will be destroyed when the apocalypse comes, including this dream.

"And the apocalypse is only a few years away."

Luo Shan looked at the seat cover in front of her with empty eyes, as if wanting to confirm details, "Why did Zhou Mingrui need to sleep?"

"To fight against an evil force," Franca explained concisely.

This was consistent with the core of the story she had made up before.

Luo Shan maintained her previous posture and asked subconsciously, "Has that evil force been defeated, so Zhou Mingrui can be awakened?"

Wh— Hearing this question, both Franca and Jenna were shocked.

They looked at each other, unable to answer Luo Shan's question for a moment.

Yes, if the Celestial Worthy's consciousness has been defeated, Mr. Fool could wake up on his own. If He hadn't been defeated, how would forcibly awakening him be essentially different from the situation before he went to sleep?

Or does the act of "awakening" itself symbolize the defeat of the Celestial Worthy's consciousness?

Mr. Fool wakes up while the Celestial Worthy is still asleep, will there be a change in the balance of power, with the scales of victory tilting towards Mr. Fool?

If this guess is correct, that's fine, but if it's wrong, does it mean our direction isn't right?

The Major Arcana have always focused on "awakening", but should we actually weaken the Celestial Worthy first?

"We're currently still in the stage of confirming the situation, we're not sure if that evil force has been defeated yet," Franca answered truthfully.

Luo Shan bit her lip and didn't ask any more questions.

She got out of the car completely and walked into the cemetery's attached flower shop, buying two bunches of white chrysanthemums.

She walked slowly forward, her figure gradually disappearing among the tombstones.

Chapter 993: Important Person

At Xinhong District, in the rented apartment.

Franca recounted the results of Luo Shan's observations and the questions she raised, finally saying, "The more I think about it, the more I feel something is amiss. The Major Arcana clearly mentioned in their materials that Mr. Fool went to sleep to fight against the Celestial Worthy's consciousness, so why are they solely focused on awakening Mr. Fool instead of helping to weaken the Celestial Worthy? And we too, with sufficient background information, never considered this direction before. It's as if we've been bewitched, no, as if we've been hit with a spell of stupidity…"

At this point, Franca suddenly paused.

Everyone present instantly thought of one word: Fooled!

In the unspeakable silence, only Ludwig was completely unaffected, munching on his boiled corn.

After serious contemplation, Jenna said, "Perhaps the act of awakening Mr. Fool itself will weaken the Celestial Worthy and strengthen our advantage."

Lumian shook his head. "Even if this symbolism holds true, we shouldn't have completely overlooked the direction of weakening the Celestial Worthy to help Mr. Fool awaken."

"Does that mean this direction is correct? So the dream fooled everyone to prevent us from thinking in this direction." Franca suddenly became excited.

"Not necessarily," Anthony replied, "That Celestial Worthy is the being at the very top of the Swindler pathway. Initially fooling us to prevent us from considering the possibility of weakening Him might be to make us believe it's the only correct path after we've made some progress in our later explorations, causing us to rush headlong into it."

"The enemy's opposition indicates we're doing the right thing, but what if the enemy is deliberately opposing… Feigning weakness when actually strong…" Franca understood Anthony's meaning and said frustratedly, "How should we choose?"

"Why choose?" Lumian laughed, "Awakening Mr. Fool and weakening the Celestial Worthy are two things we can do simultaneously."

He stood up and began pacing in the small living room, speaking as he walked, "Let's re-analyze the possible goals Zaratulstra wanted to achieve with those actions:

"Contacting Zhou Mingrui was likely to find a way to make Zhou Mingrui drink the subsequent potion, become a Witch, thus creating a fixed, long-term Mirror Person, and to some extent shake Zhou Mingrui's self-perception;

"The merger and restructuring negotiations with the Intis Group were to obtain more money and resources, and using the mirrored Roselle to erode and influence Huang Tao was likely for the same purpose;

"Eliminating and replacing the dream manifestations related to Gehrman Sparrow's life experiences might be to weaken The World, indirectly weakening Mr. Fool…

"These actions currently don't show any intent to awaken the Celestial Worthy, though accumulating money and resources could barely count…"

As Jenna, Franca, and Anthony nodded slightly, Lumian began to contradict himself, "No, creating a fixed Mirror Person for Zhou Mingrui could also be for the Celestial Worthy to gain more initiative through the Mirror Person, gradually gain the upper hand, and thus awaken. Eliminating the dream manifestations related to Gehrman Sparrow is to weaken Mr. Fool, but replacing them with his own people and taking away Jia Yu is to later confuse the real with the fake, making The World identity point to the Celestial Worthy instead of Mr. Fool? This is also a kind of awakening…

"However, these awakenings all come with weakening Mr. Fool, the two can't be separated."

Lumian's point was that both weakening the Celestial Worthy and awakening Mr. Fool need to be done, and sometimes they are actually different aspects of the same thing.

Franca concurred succinctly, "But how can we weaken the Celestial Worthy?"

The Major Arcana card holders didn't know about the Celestial Worthy's past situation, nor did they mention which character in the dream city was closely related to the Celestial Worthy. Franca couldn't find a target to weaken the Celestial Worthy, there was no starting point.

"Currently, only Peng Deng is suspected to be related to the Celestial Worthy, but it can't be confirmed yet," Anthony said."What can be confirmed is that Peng Deng definitely has a special status in the dream city," Lumian nodded slightly.

This conclusion was drawn from Anthony's encounter and Peng Deng's rental of the magic mirror Arrodes.

Lumian then said, "Actually, there is one place that can be confirmed to be closely related to the Celestial Worthy."

Seeing Franca and Jenna's thoughtful expressions, Lumian directly gave the answer.

"Mushu Hospital!

"Without a close relationship, without a prior cooperation intention, the Celestial Worthy wouldn't send the corpses of Gehrman Sparrow-related dream manifestations to the underground morgue of Mushu Hospital, letting them 'reborn' there, and that kind of 'rebirth' would also cause the corresponding manifestation to completely become the Celestial Worthy's sole puppet."

"The underground part of Mushu Hospital…" Franca said, unable to help but draw in a sharp breath.

That was where the psychological trauma of a great existence materialized, the key node for other great existences to infiltrate their power, the place where the Celestial Worthy created exclusive marionettes, a place that even Sequence 0 true gods dared not easily intrude!

Lumian chuckled in response. "I'll be contacting an important person from Mushu Hospital tonight to see if I can obtain any useful intelligence."

…

Late at night.

Luo Shan still chose to lie down on the bed, trying to enter deep sleep.

If the world doesn't explode, I won't take a holiday. Even if this is really a dream, before the dream shatters, I still have to go to work when I need to… Luo Shan murmured, half self-mockingly and half self-comfortingly.

Then, she closed her eyes, and after a long while, finally suppressed her troubled thoughts and emotions, falling asleep.

This time, after falling asleep, she didn't immediately enter her Shaman world to continue guarding the semi-transparent barrier, but became muddle-headed, just like when she slept before becoming a Beyonder.

She vaguely heard a voice echoing in her ears:

"Truth can become false, falsehood can become true. The Celestial Worthy of Heaven and Earth for Blessings…

"Truth can become false, falsehood can become true. The Celestial Worthy of Heaven and Earth for Blessings…"

…

At the edge of Crimson Moon Hospital, in a secluded corner growing many mushrooms.

Lumian, transformed into a Demoness of Despair and dressed in a blouse, patiently waited for a while. He saw Grimm suddenly appear not far ahead with a person, as if walking into the real area from another world.

"Respected Child of God, this is Lu Yong'an, the dean of obstetrics at Mushu Hospital," Grimm introduced his companion, "She is also a child of the Mother."

Lu Yong'an appeared to be in her forties, with fair skin and a beautiful face, round like the full moon, looking gentle and motherly.

She was carrying a medical box and bowed slightly to Lumian, saying, "Praise the Mother, and praise you, Child of God."

The important person from Mushu Hospital that Lumian had previously said he wanted to meet was precisely this obstetrics dean, Lu Yong'an—Grimm was very true to his word. As soon as the one-week deadline was met, he sent a message to Lumian, reminding him that tonight he should go help Li Keji with reproduction, both mystically and scientifically.

Lumian hadn't rushed to abort the fetus in Li Keji's belly, precisely because he wanted to fool Grimm first, to avoid reaching the point of needing to put on an act to cover up. After this, he would have at least two to three weeks to perform the abortion.

Hearing Lu Yong'an's greeting, Lumian, with his long black hair, nodded slightly and said, "Let's go in and take care of business first."

He didn't rush to inquire about the internal affairs of Mushu Hospital from Lu Yong'an.

This had to be done slowly, with proper groundwork, thinking through which things the Child of God should already know and not need to ask about.

"Yes, Child of God," Grimm and Lu Yong'an responded in unison, their expressions turning serious.

Lumian walked towards them and grabbed their shoulders.

Then, he activated the black mark on his right shoulder, using Spirit World Traversal to appear directly in Li Keji's hospital room.

Li Keji, who had been touching his belly lost in thought, sat up straight, and the jellyfish-like mushroom on the ceiling sank down slightly.

Seeing Li Keji looking at him with slight surprise, Lumian winked his left eye at him, hinting that there was a reason for this and to play along for now.

Li Keji showed an expression of sudden realization. "You're here to help me?"

Hearing these words, Grimm couldn't help but turn his head to look at the Child of God's stunningly beautiful face:

When did she manage to deceive Li Keji?

Grimm and Lu Yong'an had both anticipated needing to use their abilities to control the target.

Lu Yong'an sat down beside Li Keji's bed with her medical box and began a serious examination.

After nearly a minute, she turned her head and said, "The fetus is very healthy and developing well and quickly."

Grimm immediately gave a thumbs up to the Child of God, praising again, "As expected of you!"

Lumian was already numb to this, nodding slightly, focusing intently on watching Lu Yong'an take out a syringe, draw some kind of drug, and give Li Keji an injection in the belly.

Then, Lu Yong'an's maternal radiance became even more obvious as she began to virtually caress Li Keji's belly with both hands.

Lumian saw Li Keji's belly begin to swell and enlarge at a visible rate. In just a minute or two, it looked like a six-month pregnancy.

"I can feel her heartbeat." Li Keji touched his belly again.

Lu Yong'an put away her instruments and drugs, and smiled at Lumian.

"Child of God, come again in two weeks and we can enter the stage of imminent birth."

"Excellent." Lumian nodded insincerely.

I'll abort it shortly! The earlier it's aborted, the safer!

"We'll be leaving now." Lumian gave Li Keji another meaningful look.

Then, he teleported back to the previous secluded corner with Lu Yong'an, who had walked back, and Grimm, who was already by his side.

Lumian didn't give Grimm and Lu Yong'an a chance to say goodbye and leave. He looked at the latter, slightly raising his chin, and said, "How are things going inside Mushu Hospital?"

He planned to ask vaguely at first, in the tone of a Child of God wanting to get feedback from his subordinates, and then selectively delve deeper based on Lu Yong'an's response.

Lu Yong'an replied with a kindly manner mixed with obvious respect, "The underground area is almost finished being renovated, and above ground it's still just us few and those who frequently enter and exit the underground."

The underground is almost "renovated"? Those who frequently enter and exit the underground don't count as people? Lumian raised an eyebrow.

Chapter 994: Dean

Lumian thought of the Mushu Hospital orderly he had encountered before and the situations he had observed during his several visits to Mushu Hospital. He felt that those who frequently entered and exited the underground of Mushu Hospital might truly no longer be considered human.

More than this, what concerned him more was that the underground part of Mushu Hospital was nearly "renovated".

When that happens, what changes would occur?

What does this symbolize?

Amidst his swirling thoughts, Lumian wished he could go blow up the underground of Mushu Hospital right now and be done with it.

Unfortunately, leaving aside whether he had the ability to break into Mushu Hospital's underground and completely destroy it, just the fact that the above-ground part of Mushu Hospital was still relatively normal, with many patients and ordinary medical staff coming and going, prevented him from acting rashly.

There was no way to blow up the underground part without affecting the above-ground area!

That would turn into a full-blown terrorist attack, causing Lumian to be rejected by the dream's main consciousness to the greatest extent, likely preventing him from entering again afterward.

First think of a way to get Mushu Hospital to stop admitting patients for a few days and transfer away the inpatients? This would be very difficult…

Lumian looked at Lu Yong'an and carefully asked, "Are there still corpses waiting for 'rebirth' in the underground morgue?"

"Not at the moment. No one has brought corpses needing 'rebirth' over these past couple of days," Lu Yong'an answered truthfully.

After Zaratulstra and Mr. Cui were kicked out of the dream, did the corresponding activities stop? This shows we're doing well… Theoretically, the Celestial Worthy should have more than just these few subordinates, and should have found a way or medium for subordinates to enter the dream city… Were the others kicked out before, like the Major Arcana and the former Lucky Coin holders? That's right, there's no reason why the Celestial Worthy would only recently have subordinates who could enter, no reason why in the past only the Celestial Worthy could kick people out and Mr. Fool couldn't… Lumian nodded slightly and changed his question.

"Who is the current dean of Mushu Hospital?"

He wasn't afraid of Lu Yong'an becoming suspicious because of this inquiry, as he had previously asked Xu Xinyang and secretly asked Grimm, and even Grimm, a child of the Great Mother, didn't know.

"You don't know?" Lu Yong'an looked at Lumian's face in surprise.

She then turned to Grimm and asked, "You didn't tell the Child of God?"

Grimm shook his head. "I don't know either. No one ever told me."

Lu Yong'an was stunned for a moment, then showed an expression of understanding.

"It's normal that you don't know. But it doesn't matter. The previous dean has left, and not knowing who it is doesn't affect anything. The new dean will arrive in a few days."

"Who is the new dean?" Grimm asked on Lumian's behalf.

Lu Yong'an shook her head. "It's not clear yet. We'll know when they arrive. Maybe it will be a surprise."

A surprise? For us, it's probably going to be a shock… Lumian made a sound of acknowledgment and said, "Have you been to the underground areas other than the morgue?"

He wasn't trying to pry specific information about Mushu Hospital's underground from Lu Yong'an, but rather intended to judge from her answer whether Beyonders blessed by the Great Mother could infrequently enter the non-morgue areas of the underground.

"I've been there, but can't go deep, can't go to B2." Lu Yong'an didn't think there was anything wrong with the Child of God asking this, after all, the underground part of Mushu Hospital didn't belong solely to the Great Mother, other great existences also exerted influence there.

Even children of the Great Mother can't go to B2? What's there? Lumian nodded thoughtfully and asked, "Are the Mother Tree's followers also doing something?"

As the Child of God of the Great Mother, he had to show a bit less respect for other existences.

"Yes, but I don't know what," Lu Yong'an took out her phone and said with a smile, "Child of God, shall we add each other on WeChat? If I discover any issues in other areas of the underground later, I'll tell you immediately."

She really knows how the world works… Lumian let Lu Yong'an scan his WeChat QR code.

Her WeChat name was just her real name.

Lumian didn't rush to look through Lu Yong'an's Moments. He casually said, "Have you found Zedus?"

Zedus was supposedly the true name of the Abscessed Hand, and the remnant consciousness in Omebella's remains had once shouted this name at Lumian.

Lumian was trying to probe whether the children of the Great Mother had heard of Zedus.

"Not yet." Lu Yong'an lowered her head, "Mother is very disappointed."

Zedus really is closely related to the Great Mother… Lumian stopped there, not asking further.

Seeing this, Grimm respectfully asked, "Child of God, starting tomorrow you're on the night shift rotation. If you don't want to work it, I can find an excuse to switch you to the morning shift."

"Night shift is fine," Lumian chose not to switch.

This way, he could effectively increase his activity time during the day and evening.

Then, he glanced at the bright moon high in the sky and said to Grimm and Lu Yong'an, "Head back."

"Yes, Child of God!" Lu Yong'an and Grimm responded in unison.

Lumian didn't see them off, but teleported away first.

About a quarter of an hour later, his figure appeared again in this secluded corner, and Grimm and Lu Yong'an were already gone.

Only then did Lumian take out his phone and start looking through Lu Yong'an's Moments.

The Moments of this obstetrics dean of Mushu Hospital mostly shared obstetrics and gynecology knowledge, instances of receiving thank-you banners, achievements of Mushu Hospital, and updates about her own children. There was nothing that particularly caught Lumian's eye.

Because she had set it to only show the most recent month, Lumian could only return to the top of her Moments and look at her background settings and personal signature.

The background was set to a blurry silhouette holding a baby, and her personal signature was: "Be a guardian for women and children."

All very fitting for her identity and nature… Lumian put away his phone and teleported to Li Keji's hospital room.

Li Keji wasn't surprised by this beautiful woman's return. Looking at her, he hesitantly asked, "Do we really have to abort it?"

As the fetus grew, his maternal radiance seemed to have intensified.

Lumian chuckled. "You must have already felt the frenzied absorption of your flesh and spirit by the child of the evil god, right?"

"Yes." Li Keji nodded honestly.

Lumian continued, "And don't you want to see what innovative qualities might emerge from the crossbreeding of the evil god's offspring and the mushroom?"

He was now very adept at grasping Li Keji's obsessions and weaknesses.

This was an Instigator.

Li Keji's eyes immediately lit up. "Alright, let's begin!"

Could you at least hesitate a bit to make me feel your maternal radiance is genuine? Lumian grumbled inwardly as he walked to Li Keji's bedside, extended his right palm, and said in a moderate tone, "It will be quite painful. Bear with it."

"Okay." Li Keji stretched out his arm, letting it hang in the air.

The fungal filaments hanging down from the jellyfish-like mushroom quickly floated over, wrapping around Li Keji's arm, their tips piercing into it.

"It has some anesthetic ability," Li Keji happily explained to Lumian.

Lumian didn't speak, letting his palm ignite with quiet and sinister black flames.

He then pressed his right palm against the surface of Li Keji's belly, and the Demoness's black flames immediately bored into it.

Li Keji's highly protruding belly suddenly began to writhe, as if something inside was struggling desperately.

Along with this struggle, Li Keji's face twisted slightly. Even with the anesthesia, he was experiencing unspeakable pain.

Meanwhile, the Demoness's black flames gradually dimmed and thinned. Even as Lumian continued to pour them in, they couldn't truly burn away the vile thing in Li Keji's belly.

Fortunately, Lumian had never thought from the beginning that the Demoness's black flames could achieve the goal, because one of his objectives was something that the Demoness's black flames, which only burned spirit and life, couldn't accomplish.

He used the Demoness's black flames first mainly to probe.

Suddenly, the quiet black flames in Lumian's palm became agitated, as if madness, violence, and destruction were being generated!

Flames of Destruction!

As the Flames of Destruction poured in, the clothes on Li Keji's belly abruptly burst into flames, as did his skin and flesh.

The fetus in his belly pushed upwards, as if trying to escape the burning of the Flames of Destruction, but currently unable to break free from the constraints of the mother's body, it ultimately collapsed back down.

Almost simultaneously, Lumian heard illusory sounds of weeping and screaming. He felt as if a vast green wilderness had appeared around him, where every flower and blade of grass first grew vigorously, full of life, and then was engulfed by sweeping black flames.

"Ah!"

Li Keji also screamed in agony, the pain of having his abdomen burned through was more than most people could endure.

However, Lumian had already used the Bottle of Fiction to seal off this hospital room, allowing only faint traces of Li Keji's voice to seep out.

This wasn't something worth paying attention to in the psychiatric ward.

Finally, the fetus in Li Keji's belly was burned to ashes, and these ashes, affected by the convection winds from the high temperature of the flames, swirled up into the air, flying towards the ceiling and scattering around.

"Completely eliminated." Lumian stepped back, preparing to take out a healing agent for Li Keji to drink.

Li Keji glanced at his charred abdomen and said with extreme disappointment, enduring the pain, "It's all burned away? There's nothing left?"

"I initially only wanted to burn its life and spirit, leaving the corpse, but as you saw, that didn't work," Lumian explained sincerely.

"Ah…" Li Keji waved his hand, directing the filaments of the jellyfish-like mushroom to move to his abdomen, absorbing the charred parts and promoting flesh regeneration.

Looks like I don't need to provide treatment… Lumian gave a deep look at the jellyfish-like mushroom that had descended.

After Li Keji's wound had healed and the pain had subsided, Lumian nodded slightly and said,

"Rest more these couple of days, then please speed up the pace of your research. My vegetative friend might not be able to wait too long."

"I can start again tomorrow!" Li Keji's enthusiasm for experimentation reignited.

"Thank you." Lumian politely left the room.

Returning to the rented apartment in Xinhong District, he lay down on the bed and fell into a deep sleep.

In his hazy state, he heard crying.

The crying voice was calling "Mommy" "Mommy", filled with intense pain, unwillingness, and resentment.

Chapter 995: Dream?

"Mommy…"

"Mommy…"

Lumian heard crying calls coming from the surrounding darkness, shrill and pitiful, as if clawing at his heart and soul.

Suddenly, black flames that suppressed madness and destruction ignited on Lumian's body.

These flames spread to the surroundings, burning away the darkness and everything hidden within it.

The crying calls abruptly became piercing, then quickly dissipated.

Lumian let out a cold laugh.

"If you had called me 'Daddy', I might have felt a bit reluctant and affectionate, but 'Mommy'? Who are you trying to fool?"

Just as he finished muttering this to himself, the surrounding darkness shattered inch by inch.

Lumian then awoke, opening his eyes to see the ceiling with its hanging chandelier, hidden in the deep night.

Was I just dreaming?

The fetus in Li Keji's belly died at the hands of its 'mother', its resentment unresolved, it latched onto me, and I thoroughly burned it away?

Your 'mother' is Omebella, what does that have to do with me, Lumian?

Lumian grumbled a few words, reached for his phone, selected "Intis Group Grimm", and used voice input to say: "I heard the cries of my child, who encountered a disaster leading to death.

"Someone must have helped Li Keji abort."

After sending this WeChat message, Lumian copied the content and sent it to Lu Yong'an as well.

Within ten to twenty seconds, Lu Yong'an replied: "Should we go to Crimson Moon Hospital now?"

Lumian brought the phone to his mouth, shook his head and said, "It's too late, the matter is already over.

"Rushing over now could very likely lead us into a trap set by the enemy.

"Since the matter can't be undone, let's wait until tomorrow, or the day after, until we're sure there's no ambush around Li Keji, then go investigate the situation, find the culprit, and think of ways to remedy this."

"Wise of you, Child of God." Lu Yong'an replied in a formal tone.

At this time, Grimm also responded, expressing the same meaning as Lu Yong'an. Lumian chose to copy and paste what he had said.

After reassuring Grimm, Lumian was about to go back to sleep when he suddenly saw a new message from Lu Yong'an: "Child of God, I just saw someone standing outside the hospital from my window."

"Who?" Lumian understood that the reason Lu Yong'an mentioned this must be because she recognized the person, or they were very important.

After a few seconds, Lu Yong'an replied: "It's Zhou Mingrui."

Zhou Mingrui? Such a strong initiative, only learning about the Oracle's corpse appearing in Mushu Hospital's underground morgue during the day, and wanting to sneak in to investigate at night? Isn't this too rash? Or is it just a preliminary observation? Lumian became fully alert, all traces of sleepiness gone.

He brought the phone to his mouth again and used voice input to say: "Don't worry about it for now, notify me when Zhou Mingrui enters the hospital."

…

Outside Mushu Hospital, Zhou Mingrui, still wearing a sky-blue T-shirt, pretended to make a phone call while casually surveying his surroundings, focusing on the emergency center.

After learning about Da Nizi's death and confirming the relevant details through public reports, Zhou Mingrui felt that Mushu Hospital seemed to have significant issues, especially the underground morgue.

So, when night fell deeper, he took a taxi here, planning to pretend to seek emergency treatment while actually taking a tour of Mushu Hospital to see if he could discover anything.

He hadn't planned to investigate the underground morgue today; he didn't want to take potentially significant risks before gathering sufficient information.

While saying words like "okay," "no problem," "alright," "can do," and "that's it," Zhou Mingrui's gaze swept across the emergency center, across the patients and family members coming and going, but he couldn't see anything unusual.

This wasn't actually his first time at Mushu Hospital. He had come for treatment twice before, as it was one of the closest hospitals to Intis Group and his residence. It had only been open for a few years, so whether for emergency or outpatient services, there weren't many people, no need to queue for long, and no worries about not being able to make appointments online.

The district-level hospital closer to his residence, he felt, wasn't very reliable, while the other well-established hospitals were always overcrowded.

The only difference from last time is that Mushu Hospital's reputation is growing, and more people are coming for treatment… It's a good thing I recovered midway from having some health issues after listening to heavy metal and was thinking of coming here for treatment because there weren't many people… Zhou Mingrui recalled his experience of seeking emergency treatment half a year ago, as well as the incident a few weeks ago when he took sick leave to come to Mushu Hospital, but his illness got better before he even reached his destination.

Thinking of this, he suddenly had a realization.

That sick leave made me miss the formal meeting with Zaratulstra…

And I didn't actually enter Mushu Hospital…

My hearing that song 'Advance' wasn't a coincidence, the melody and sound of that song were mixed with mystical powers?

Does this mean that Zaratulstra and Mushu Hospital really have issues?

But when I came half a year ago, nothing happened, I didn't notice anything unusual…

Are the problems at Mushu Hospital gradually worsening?

As Zhou Mingrui muttered to himself, his gaze moved up from the emergency center to the entire building.

Suddenly, he heard his own heartbeat.

Thump!

Thump!

Zhou Mingrui inexplicably felt fear, making his heart feel as if it had been violently squeezed by an invisible hand, uncontrollably speeding up its beating.

Thump!

Thump!

He felt as if something he feared and dreaded most was hidden in that building, as if it were the source of his fear.

There really is a problem… Zhou Mingrui's pupils rapidly dilated.

Half a year ago, he had also come for emergency treatment at night, and had also looked at Mushu Hospital's main building, but at that time he didn't have any feeling that terrifying things were hiding inside.

Zhou Mingrui steadied himself, closed his eyes, and regulated his breathing.

When his heartbeat calmed down, he looked at the Mushu Hospital building again.

Thump!

Thump!

He once again experienced a sudden burst of fear, instinctively believing that deep inside Mushu Hospital were things he didn't want to face and was afraid to encounter.

Zhou Mingrui subconsciously wanted to turn and leave, but ultimately endured.

Just do a preliminary observation, just do a preliminary observation…

Avoiding won't solve the problem, avoiding won't solve the problem…

As he muttered to himself, Zhou Mingrui's right palm, not holding the phone, naturally hung down, clenching and unclenching, unclenching and clenching.

After about ten seconds, he hung up the phone, took a step forward, and walked towards the entrance of the emergency center.

…

In Room 2303 of Dechuang Garden.

After Franca and Jenna fell asleep, they quickly gained lucidity.

This was something that inevitably happened when Beyonders entered Luo Shan's Shaman world, and neither of them was surprised.

But in the next second, what met their eyes was not the frozen storm, wandering Astral Projections, and semi-transparent barriers, but a dimly lit corridor.

The walls of the corridor were painted white, giving off a slight green tinge under the dim light.

"Where is this?" Franca blurted out in astonishment.

Where has Luo Shan's Shaman world gone?

Amidst her surprise, Jenna thought of a possibility. "Could something have happened to Luo Shan? Because of confirming that Huang Jiajia and others were more fake?"

That would make Luo Shan further face the fact that this was a dream.

"But didn't Anthony say that Luo Shan's emotions had stabilized to some extent?

"Did she experience some shock after going home?" Franca responded with confusion.

"Anyway, let's find Luo Shan first. This might be the Shaman world after some change." Jenna looked around and concentrated on listening.

Faced with a situation different from usual, Franca instinctively put her hand into her Traveler's Bag, preparing to take out her Beyonder items.

Suddenly, she paused. "No, that's not right!"

Seeing Jenna turn her gaze towards her, Franca said with a serious expression,

"The Traveler's Bag is still here, and the items inside are still there."

Jenna's gaze instantly froze, understanding what Franca meant: Only Astral ProjectionS could enter Luo Shan's Shaman world to fight monsters, and Astral Projections obviously wouldn't carry a Traveler's Bag and corresponding items. Even if they did, it would only be something conjured by the dream, with no actual ability!

"This isn't Luo Shan's Shaman world? What exactly have we encountered?" Jenna furrowed her brow.

She tried to leave this place through Cogitation, to make her Astral Projection return to her body.

But this had no effect.

"We're not Astral Projections on an excursion, entering Luo Shan's dream or Shaman world. We've been directly transferred to this place," Franca gave her conclusion, "How is this possible? I didn't feel anything at all…"

Just as she finished speaking, she suddenly heard Luo Shan's voice coming from a room ahead.

"No, no, I refuse!"

A few seconds later, the door of that room was pulled open, and Luo Shan, wearing pajamas, rushed out.

Luo Shan saw Franca and Jenna, stopped in her tracks, and asked in surprise, "You're here too?"

Franca and Jenna first lowered their heads, examining their own clothes, finding that they were both wearing nightgowns, then Franca addressed Luo Shan, "Where is this? Why shouldn't we be here?"

"This is my dream… Did I dream about you?" Luo Shan looked bewildered and confused.

Franca and Jenna exchanged a glance, then carefully asked, "What did you dream about?"

"I dreamed that someone was whispering strange words in my ear, and I dreamed of many fragmented scenes. There was a pregnant woman with a big belly, it seemed like the flesh on her face and one eyeball had been clawed off, with head-like lumps growing on both sides of her shoulders. There was also a man whose heart had been dug out, and the cries of infants…

"Finally, I dreamed of this corridor, dreamed that I was in a room, and a voice told me…" Luo Shan suddenly stopped as she recalled her dream.

"Told you what?" Jenna pressed.

Luo Shan hesitated for a few seconds before saying, "It said, said it could help me masquerade as the genuine article, replace the me outside, so that even if the dream shatters, I could live on truly…

"I-I couldn't accept that, how could I, how could I harm an innocent person?"

Hearing Luo Shan's words, Franca and Jenna's pupils dilated simultaneously.

The former swallowed hard and asked, "Do you remember the strange words at the beginning of the dream?"

Luo Shan tried her best to recall. "It seemed, seemed to be 'Truth can become false, falsehood can become true. The Celestial Worthy of Heaven and Earth for Blessings…'"

At this moment, Jenna and Franca both seemed to turn into statues.

Franca suddenly "woke up" and said in a deep voice, "Quickly, let's confirm where this place is!"

"Isn't this my dream…" Luo Shan said softly.

"Are you usually this lucid in your dreams?" Jenna asked rhetorically while looking for identifiable signs.

"That's true…" As Luo Shan muttered in confusion, Franca and Jenna simultaneously discovered a bulletin board on the wall ahead.

The two strode forward, rushing over, and with the help of the dim light, they immediately saw large characters in a certain part of the bulletin board: "Mushu Hospital."

Chapter 996: Psychological Trauma

Mushu Hospital?

Franca and Jenna suddenly felt as if they had been struck by lightning, a tingling sensation rapidly shooting up from their tailbones to the backs of their heads.

How did they end up at Mushu Hospital?

Was this real or fake?

Franca didn't need to take out a mirror and use Magic Mirror Divination to get an answer. Her spiritual intuition had already told her that this was most likely the real Mushu Hospital!

Although she didn't understand how she and Jenna had been sleeping peacefully in Room 2303 of Dechuang Garden and then unknowingly arrived at Mushu Hospital, she chose to trust her spiritual intuition.

Jenna had a similar judgment. After exchanging a glance with Franca, she stood still, closed her eyes, and quickly entered a Cogitative state, imagining herself standing on the edge of a cliff.

In her imagination, she leaped off, jumping towards a bottomless abyss.

She fell faster and faster, but there was no shattering of darkness, no waking up startled from a dream.

Jenna opened her eyes and slowly shook her head at Franca.

Her meaning was clear: here, they couldn't exit the dream city and return to the real world!

Hiss… Would the above-ground floors of Mushu Hospital have similar restrictions? This might be in the underground area of Mushu Hospital… Franca instantly came up with a new speculation.

Her already highly tense mental state drew even closer to its limit.

"What's wrong?" Luo Shan still looked bewildered.

Hearing Luo Shan's question, Franca suddenly had a series of thoughts:

Just now, Luo Shan said this was her dream…

But this is the real Mushu Hospital, quite possibly the underground part of Mushu Hospital…

Did her dream connect to this place, transferring Beyonders within a certain range here?

Why could it connect, why could it transfer us?

Wait, according to our previous judgment, every character in the dream city is constructed by the dream subconscious based on its own cognition and social relationships. Luo Shan is the same, and the dream subconscious is a blend of Mr. Fool's subconscious and the Celestial Worthy's subconscious. In other words, Luo Shan is equivalent to a part of the dream subconscious, equivalent to a division of Mr. Fool's subconscious.

She developed psychological trauma from the shock that the current world is a dream city, which is equivalent to a part of Mr. Fool's divided subconscious developing psychological trauma, while the underground area of Mushu Hospital is where Mr. Fool's psychological traumas converge and manifest…

This connects everything together. Hmm, the psychological traumas manifesting in the underground area of Mushu Hospital should not only be from Mr. Fool, but also include those of the Celestial Worthy. More accurately, they come from the dream subconscious, which is formed by blending Mr. Fool's and the Celestial Worthy's subconsciouses. My goodness, will we encounter the Celestial Worthy's psychological traumas later?

However, this also has a good side. If we know what the Celestial Worthy's psychological traumas are, and can escape alive, we could deduce ways to weaken the Celestial Worthy.

Hmm… Purely having mystical similarities and close mystical connections is not enough for Luo Shan to bring me and Jenna to appear out of thin air in the underground area of Mushu Hospital. There needs to be a force to push, to utilize…

At first, Luo Shan heard 'Truth can become false, falsehood can become true. The Celestial Worthy of Heaven and Earth for Blessings'… This indicates that she has actually been targeted by some faction, the problem has been identified, but that faction wanted to fish or wait for an opportunity before taking action?

Zaratulstra's group? No, if it were them, Zaratulstra would have absolutely guarded against the possibility of Zhou Mingrui being invited to eat at the hot pot restaurant…

As thoughts flashed through Franca's mind, she didn't dare waste time on deep thinking and analysis. She carefully chose her words and said to Luo Shan, "This might be the underground part of Mushu Hospital, and it's not something you dreamed up, it's real."

Without waiting for Luo Shan to ask further questions, Franca made up a reason based on her recent speculation. "There's likely an enemy hidden in or near your room who, while you were sleeping, exerted influence and used your Shaman world to transfer us here out of thin air."

Luo Shan blinked and said, "No wonder at first it was like my usual dreams, but then I became more and more lucid…

"Why bring us to the underground of Mushu Hospital? Is there a big problem here?"

As the two conversed, Jenna searched through her Traveler's Bag.

She originally wanted to make a phone call or send a WeChat message to try to call for help or contact Lumian, but she and Franca had put their phones beside their pillows before sleeping, not holding them tightly or carrying them on their persons. Therefore, they were both currently "phoneless".

Jenna took out the Ice Mirror Charm with only one use left and held it in her palm—she had another Ice Mirror Charm that could be used four times, which Lumian had found an opportunity to remake for all team members after being kicked out of the dream the day before yesterday.

"I don't know, I'm only sure that it's very dangerous here, we need to leave as soon as possible," Franca replied to Luo Shan, looking back and forth. "Let's quickly find the elevator lobby and go up to the first floor by elevator or stairs."

Luo Shan's spirits also tensed up as she followed Franca's actions, surveying their surroundings.

At this moment, Jenna activated the Ice Mirror Charm to see if she could leave the current area through the mirror she carried.

But after being enveloped by the charm's light, she found that the world behind the mirror was deep and dark, giving her an extremely dangerous feeling.

She didn't dare to pass through the glass mirror surface and enter the mirror world.

"The mirror world is also abnormal," Jenna raised her head and said to Franca.

As she spoke, the Ice Mirror Charm in her hand turned into sparkling fragments, quickly scattering and disappearing.

"That's normal," Franca wasn't particularly surprised by this. "In a place like this, maybe we can only leave through normal means and predetermined exits. Let's go find the elevator lobby now."

Luo Shan first made a sound of agreement, then remembered her ability and asked with some expectation, "Do you have any paint and brushes? Pencils or pens would work too."

"You want to draw a door to get out?" Jenna understood.

"Yes." Luo Shan nodded heavily.

Franca frowned slightly and said, "Are you sure the door you draw will lead to the upper levels of Mushu Hospital or the entrance, and not to other areas of the underground part?"

"I can draw the door of my home, that way we can return home, but there's a distance limit. I'm not sure if the distance between Mushu Hospital and Dechuang Garden meets the conditions…" Luo Shan's voice gradually lowered.

Franca quickly made a decision.

"Let's first look for a real exit, first find the elevator lobby. If we can't find it, or if we're trapped, then we'll risk using your drawn 'door'."

Seeing Jenna nod in agreement, Luo Shan could only temporarily abandon the idea of drawing a door to exit.

After giving Luo Shan a fountain pen and a sharpened pencil, Franca turned around, partly relying on observing the environment and partly following her spiritual intuition, and walked towards the other end of the corridor.

Soon, the three saw a door, a double wooden door with glass.

Franca, walking in front, brought her face close to the glass on the door, trying to observe the situation behind it.

But beyond the glass was pitch black. Even with a Demoness's night vision, she couldn't clearly see what was hidden inside.

Franca felt as if her eyes were covered by a black cloth, rather than the corresponding environment losing light.

After performing a simple Magic Mirror Divination, Franca stretched out both hands and pushed open the large double wooden doors.

What lay ahead was not an extension of the corridor, but a dimly lit hall with similar double wooden doors at the far end.

What Franca, Jenna, and Luo Shan noticed first was not these, but the corpses hanging from the ceiling.

They were gently swaying.

As they swayed, some of the bodies half-turned, allowing Franca and the others to clearly see their appearances.

There was Ai Nana, the principal of Dream Tutoring Classes, Huang Jiajia, and other teachers from the Dream Tutoring Classes that Jenna had seen before.

"Mmph…" Luo Shan instinctively wanted to scream, but was quickly muffled by Jenna's hand.

"How is this possible?" Franca's scalp tingled.

She knew that the dream manifestations of Ai Nana and Huang Jiajia had essentially died and might have been hung up like the Oracle Da Nizi before, but she never imagined they would still be hanging, hanging together, densely packed like wind-dried cured meat.

"They're hanging here? Then who are the ones outside?

"Didn't their corpses gain 'new life' and run out?

"Lumian said their fates were also connected…"

Jenna had similar questions, and she thought of a possibility.

"Manifestation of psychological trauma?"

Yes, the underground area of Mushu Hospital is where the dream subconscious's psychological traumas manifest. The psychological trauma created by Ai Nana and Huang Jiajia being hung up and the "rebirth" of corpses running out could exist simultaneously and occur in parallel… Franca accepted this explanation and had no intention of delving deeper into the truth right now.

She said to Jenna and Luo Shan, "Let's go through, to the door on the other side."

Luo Shan, encountering such a horrifying scene for the first time, was completely at a loss and could only choose to follow Franca and Jenna's lead, passing through where the hanging corpses were less dense.

Wind occasionally blew through the hall, causing the corpses to sway back and forth, sometimes swinging left and right, nearly brushing against Luo Shan's head several times.

Luo Shan used all her strength to keep herself from reacting excessively.

Finally, they "squeezed" through the hanging corpses and reached the double wooden doors representing the exit.

After going through the process and getting the same result as before, Franca once again stretched out both hands and pushed open the doors.

Ahead was a corridor, an extremely dimly lit corridor.

At the end of the corridor stood a blurry figure.

Franca and the others simultaneously raised their guard, carefully passing through the wooden doors and entering the corridor.

The scene before their eyes gradually became clear.

They could now clearly see that blurry figure: it was a giant mushroom, over two meters tall!

The top of the giant mushroom was blood-red, interspersed with white patterns. Its body was composed of countless similar small mushrooms, their patterns collectively depicting a handsome yet strange face. On each side, identical mushrooms extended out, forming slender arms.

Smack!

The double wooden doors behind Franca, Jenna, and Luo Shan closed.

Chapter 997: Different Regions

Seeing that bizarrely shaped giant mushroom person, even Franca, a veteran gamer, felt a sense of morbid curiosity and horror.

My goodness, what kind of monstrosity is this?

As expected of something evolved from a great existence's psychological trauma, who knows if it's from Mr. Fool or the Celestial Worthy…

As similar thoughts flashed through her mind, Franca and Jenna tacitly split to the sides, one hiding in the shadows, the other concealing her form.

Luo Shan had never cooperated with them in Beyonder combat before, and this was her first time encountering a monster without barriers separating them. Moreover, this wasn't the domain of her Shaman abilities, so she was momentarily at a loss.

She instinctively turned around, wanting to run back to the previous hall, moving so fast she left an afterimage in place.

However, although she chose the double doors behind her, she was shocked to find herself rapidly approaching the blood-red giant mushroom person with white patterns.

At the same time, Franca emerged from the shadows.

She felt the shadows she was hiding in strangely come alive, as if trying to control and erode her.

The next second, she and Luo Shan saw the giant mushroom person suddenly swell and grow larger, a giant lava sword burning with pale blue flames coalescing in its hand.

The giant mushroom person took a step closer, swinging down the great sword that seemed formed of red-hot lava.

Franca didn't dodge backward, but instead shot forward, lowering her body. Before the lava sword could strike, she darted past the scorching heat waves to the mushroom person's side.

Jenna's body quickly outlined against the ceiling position, holding a brass-colored revolver aimed at the giant mushroom's head.

Bang!

The giant mushroom person's sword strike hit the inexperienced Luo Shan, shattering this Painter like a mirror.

The Mirror Substitution that Jenna and Franca had previously made for Luo Shan finally came in handy.

The lava sword didn't stop after shattering Luo Shan, heavily striking the corridor floor and sending out pale blue sulfur fireballs.

Rumble!

Jenna had just pulled the trigger, firing a bright yellow bullet at the giant mushroom person's head, when she was engulfed by the chain reaction of explosions.

Most of the corridor, including Franca and the giant mushroom person itself, was affected by the explosion created by over a dozen sulfur fireballs.

Franca and Jenna's Mirror Substitutions were passively triggered, their bodies first thinning, then developing cracks, and finally shattering into pieces.

When the explosive wind in the narrow environment subsided, the figures of Franca, Jenna, and Luo Shan outlined at the giant mushroom person's original position, at the end of this corridor, next to the other set of double doors.

They saw that half of the giant mushroom person's head had collapsed, oozing dark red blood, white mycelium, and tiny spores. They saw its body similarly torn open by the explosion, revealing large wounds filled with both mycelium and flesh.

As the flesh writhed and the mycelium grew, the giant mushroom person's wounds rapidly healed.

Seeing this, Franca's scalp tingled. She turned around, pushed open the door, and rushed out of this corridor.

She felt that fighting in this narrow environment wasn't advantageous for them, while the terrifying mushroom person with its exaggerated self-healing ability and explosive methods was clearly more in its element!

So, she had to escape from here, firstly to try to shake off the giant mushroom person, and secondly to find a scene more suitable for Demonesses and a Painter to fight.

Jenna didn't hesitate, closely following Franca.

Luo Shan, who thought she would die, was surprised that the Mirror Substitution actually worked, and having gained experience, chose to imitate Franca and Jenna's actions.

The trio quickly passed through the open door, entering a new dimly lit corridor.

Behind them, the two halves of the wooden door swayed several times before finally closing completely.

Franca moved forward while vigilantly observing whether the giant mushroom person was pursuing them, but found that behind the door was dead silence, with no further movement.

"Uh… does each type of psychological trauma only operate in a fixed area?" Franca slowed her pace, making a guess based on her experience and imagination.

Jenna nodded, looking around and said, "Now we need to be alert to the psychological trauma in this area?"

"What psychological trauma?" Luo Shan looked confused.

"Monsters similar to that mushroom person just now," Franca explained simply.

Luo Shan's eyes turned slightly, and she blurted out, "Monsters transformed from Zhou Mingrui's psychological trauma?"

Very smart… Franca pondered for a moment and said, "It also includes the psychological trauma of evil forces."

Luo Shan was silent for two seconds, about to say something more when she suddenly started coughing.

"Cough cough cough…" She paused and said, "Why do I feel like I've suddenly fallen ill?"

Disease? Can that mushroom person also create mystical pathogens? Jenna and I are both Demoness of Affliction with some resistance to Disease abilities. Brief contact won't infect us, but Luo Shan can't resist, showing symptoms? The symptoms appeared very quickly, this isn't at the level of Sequence 7… After Zhou Mingrui was stimulated, did the power level of the dream city change, starting from the underground part of Mushu Hospital, with no corresponding manifestation in the outside world yet? Jenna vaguely understood the reason and took out a bottle of healing agent from her Traveler's Bag.

She didn't rush to provide treatment for Luo Shan, but pondered and asked, "Can you draw efficacious medicine for yourself?"

Even if the drawn medicine had a limited duration, it could truly cure diseases—as long as all the mystical pathogens were eliminated before the effect wore off, it would work!

At this time, Franca had also figured out the reason and muttered, "That mushroom person is too terrifying!

"What kind of monster is this exactly!"

Luo Shan already felt her forehead burning up. She shook her head and said,

"I don't know exactly what this disease is, nor do I know what medicine to draw to cure it."

"Then drink this." Jenna handed the healing agent to Luo Shan.

She and Franca always maintained a state of having two bottles of healing agent on them, with previously consumed ones either coming from Lumian or being replenished by him.

After experiencing the substitute's death, Luo Shan now fully trusted Franca and Jenna. She took the healing agent, immediately unscrewed the cap, and gulped it down.

In just about ten seconds, she blinked and said, "I think I'm fine now, the illness is gone…

"It's really amazing!"

"Your ability to draw is also amazing," Franca said humbly, pointing to the end of the current corridor, "Let's continue forward, we need to find the elevator lobby quickly, otherwise who knows what we'll encounter…"

She was still shaken by that giant mushroom person.

Jenna and Luo Shan felt the same, quickening their pace to follow behind Franca.

They had just taken two or three steps when the double doors at the end of the corridor suddenly swung open.

Franca and Jenna reflexively used Invisibility, then considered how to help Luo Shan hide.

Luo Shan had somewhat adapted to the current situation. Using a pencil, she quickly drew a simple, inconspicuous, childlike doodle of a door on the side wall in just two seconds.

This door had no markings and wouldn't lead anywhere. Luo Shan placed her palm on the handle and yanked it backward sharply.

The door, just drawn on the wall, miraculously opened, revealing a dark area about the size of Room 2303's bathroom.

Luo Shan hid inside, then carefully closed the paper-thin door.

The wall surface was left with only a few faint, barely noticeable pencil marks resembling a door outline.

By this time, the double doors at the end of the corridor had fully opened, and an orderly wearing light blue clothing and a white mask slowly entered the current area, pushing a transfer bed.

Franca held her breath and turned her gaze towards the orderly and the transfer bed.

She saw that the orderly's eyes were both empty and wooden, yet seemed to hide deep malice. She saw that the surface of the transfer bed was covered with a thin blanket, but there was no patient or corpse sleeping on it.

What made the back of Franca's neck go cold was that the thin blanket appeared to be in a bulging state, yet there was clearly nothing underneath it.

Covering an invisible object? Franca and Jenna pressed their backs tightly against the side wall, trying hard to increase the distance between themselves and the orderly and the transfer bed.

Amidst the sound of wheels rolling over floor cracks, the orderly maintained a slow, stiff posture, pushing the transfer bed past Franca and

Jenna, towards the double doors leading to the corridor with the giant mushroom person.

Only when this transfer bed had pushed open the doors, slowly left the current area, and disappeared from their sight did Franca and Jenna end their Invisibility and return to the middle of the corridor.

Luo Shan also opened the door on the wall and nimbly leaped out.

She didn't forget to casually "close the door".

"How did you know it was safe to come out?" Jenna, who was about to knock on the door, asked.

Luo Shan raised the pencil in her hand and said with a smile, "I drew a peephole inside."

"Mm, let's continue looking for the elevator lobby." Franca took the lead without hesitation.

Just as they reached the exit at the end of the corridor, that set of double doors suddenly swung open.

It had opened again, when Franca, Jenna, and Luo Shan were less than three meters away from it.

…

Mushu Hospital, Emergency Center.

Based on his experience from the last hospital visit, Zhou Mingrui described the symptoms of acute gastroenteritis and successfully obtained a lab test order from the doctor.

He took this order and turned into the right passageway, heading towards the emergency blood drawing area.

While waiting for his number to be called at the blood drawing area, he clutched his stomach, pretending he could no longer hold on, and quickly left the area, entering the first-floor lobby and walking towards the nearest public restroom.

During this process, he naturally looked around, seeing if he could find any odd details.

He hadn't discovered anything in the emergency center before.

The nearest public restroom was adjacent to elevators 6 to 10. In the dim light, Zhou Mingrui quickly circled to the elevator lobby.

He pressed both "Up" and "Down" simultaneously, observing the elevators' operation.

Soon, two elevators arrived on the first floor, their doors opening almost simultaneously.

Zhou Mingrui glanced left and right, finding nothing unusual about the upward elevator, but the downward one gave him a feeling of leading to hell, to the source of fear.

Is Mushu Hospital's problem underground? Zhou Mingrui silently mused to himself.

Chapter 998: Tremor

Zhou Mingrui stared at the downward elevator until its doors closed.

He suppressed the urge within him, choosing not to take the elevator now to explore the underground area of Mushu Hospital.

He needed more intelligence.

Zhou Mingrui withdrew his gaze and walked towards the elevator lobby exit, intending to go to the nearby public restroom as he had pretended earlier.

Suddenly, he looked towards a corner to the side, as if something was hidden in the darkness there.

Zhou Mingrui stared for a while but found nothing unusual.

He continued walking diagonally forward, turning into the public restroom.

After a few seconds, he hid in the shadows, melting into the darkness, and circled back to this area to quietly observe.

After patiently waiting for nearly five minutes and confirming there were no potential observers in the corresponding corner, he returned to the public restroom, feigning the appearance of having just finished his business, and slowly walked out towards the emergency blood drawing area.

It wasn't until Zhou Mingrui's figure entered the brightly lit area that Lumian's image, with flowing black hair and striking beauty, reflected on the metal elevator doors of the surgery-specific elevator in the lobby.

He wore a light gray T-shirt, a jacket slightly lighter than black water, and off-white trousers that were a bit short due to his height, revealing the edges of his socks.

Strong spirituality, keen intuition, this doesn't seem like just a Sequence 9 Assassin… Lumian sighed softly.

Of course, he knew Zhou Mingrui couldn't be merely a Sequence 9 Assassin.

Earlier, he had hidden in that corner using Invisibility. If Zhou Mingrui had made any move towards the hospital's underground area, he would have immediately tried to stop him. Who knew, he was almost discovered by Zhou Mingrui.

Fortunately, he wasn't just a Hunter and a Demoness. With a Blink, he transferred his position, hiding completely within the metal mirror surface formed by the elevator doors.

Lumian walked out of the elevator, about to stealthily approach the emergency center along the largely unlit lobby, when he suddenly felt a vibration under his feet.

It was like a subtle earthquake, or as if a not-too-violent explosion had occurred underground.

Lumian stopped, lowered his head, and stared at the stone-tiled floor.

Has something changed in the underground area? Lumian pondered to himself.

…

Seeing the wooden doors swing open before them, Franca pulled Luo Shan, her feet sliding, quickly hiding in the shadows cast by the dim light to the side.

Then, she merged with the shadows, letting Luo Shan press against the wall behind her, using herself as a "shadow" to provide better cover.

Meanwhile, Jenna used Invisibility.

In the blink of an eye, before the wooden doors were fully open, the three had completed their concealment.

This time, it was again an orderly wearing light blue clothing and a white mask pushing a transfer bed in.

But unlike before, there was a patient covered with a thin blanket lying on the transfer bed.

The patient was in her twenties, wearing a loose blue and white checkered hospital gown, her golden long hair docilely spread to both sides, her forehead neither wide nor narrow, smooth and beautiful, her eyes a jade green, her demeanor melancholic and serene.

The most noticeable thing about her was her abdomen, which was greatly swollen, seeming to be over seven months pregnant.

Pushing a patient… there are no wards or examination rooms in the underground area… Franca pondered inwardly.

Of course, she knew that in a place where the dream subconscious's psychological trauma and the Mother Tree of Desire's abyssal symbol merged, rationality was a scarce element.

The foreign pregnant woman lying on the transfer bed might well be a psychological trauma of Mr. Fool or that Celestial Worthy!

Luo Shan, shielded behind Franca, only saw the foreign pregnant woman after the transfer bed had passed their hiding spot.

Her gaze suddenly froze.

That was, that was the woman she had just seen in her dream!

Although at that time one of her eyes had been gouged out, hanging near the socket, her face covered with very deep, fleshless wounds, and head-sized bloody tumors growing from both shoulders, Luo Shan still recognized her at a glance.

Luo Shan bit her lip, not letting herself make any sound of surprise.

Just then, from the highly swollen belly of the pregnant woman on the transfer bed came the cry of an infant.

"Waaa!"

Franca instantly bristled.

What the hell are you crying for when you're not even born yet?

This cry caused the latent fear in Franca, Jenna, and Luo Shan to explode simultaneously, uncontrollably causing them to make extra movements.

Franca consequently emerged from the shadows, and Jenna could no longer maintain her Invisibility state.

In a flash, the orderly with empty and wooden eyes turned to look at Jenna, and the foreign pregnant woman on the transfer bed also sat up, looking towards Franca and Luo Shan.

Let's go for it! Franca gritted her teeth and concealed her form.

Her idea was to temporarily repel the orderly and the foreign pregnant woman, then seize the opportunity to escape to the next area through the open double doors.

Based on their previous experience, the "monsters" in the current area would not leave their own "territory".

The next second, the whites of the orderly's eyes became more pronounced, a cold aura emanating from his body as he took a large step towards Jenna.

Jenna once again vanished, causing the orderly to grasp at empty air.

Immediately after, her figure quickly outlined behind the orderly, thrusting the sharp dagger in her hand towards the orderly's back.

Pfft!

Her dagger seemed to strike metal and ironwood, only piercing the clothing, unable to penetrate the skin.

Jenna wasn't shocked. She let the quiet, vile Demoness black flame appear on the surface of the dagger, quickly infusing into the orderly's body.

With a whoosh, the orderly, feeling increasingly inhuman, burst into Demoness black flames from the inside out. He silently wailed as his spirituality and life began to rapidly fade.

On the other side, the first thing Franca did was also use Invisibility, while Luo Shan strode forward, darting out over ten meters in an instant.

Franca appeared in front of the transfer bed, a mirror now in her hand, reflecting the image of the foreign pregnant woman.

Almost simultaneously, she pressed her palm, covered in quiet black flames, towards the mirror surface.

Throughout this process, the foreign pregnant woman's reactions seemed rather slow, just like an ordinary person.

She then saw black flames erupting from her belly, hearing the baby's cries becoming more pronounced.

She let out a shrill and agonized scream, her figure instantly disappearing from the transfer bed.

But when she reappeared in Franca's planned escape direction, the evil black flames were still burning on her body, growing stronger.

Plop! Plop! Plop! The foreign pregnant woman's flesh seemed to melt away, falling to the ground piece by piece.

Feeling her aura rapidly dissipating, seeing the orderly collapse to the ground motionless, Franca actually felt a sense of unreal bewilderment.

Is it resolved just like that?

Was that giant mushroom person from earlier actually an exception, and the "monsters" in Mushu Hospital's underground area are also suppressed at Sequence 7?

No, I shouldn't think like that, raising a flag is bad…

Before Franca could correct her thoughts, she saw the foreign pregnant woman fall, her abdomen tearing inch by inch, as if something was trying to burrow out.

At the same time, the pieces of flesh that had fallen to the ground from the foreign pregnant woman also underwent abnormal changes.

Some merged with the floor tiles, transforming into womb-like shapes, giving birth to square-shaped infants with eyebrows and eyes. Some touched the transfer bed, causing the bluish mechanical bed surface to suddenly bulge, sprouting one after another small beds with human heads and wheels for limbs. Some splattered onto the ceiling, causing the energy-saving lights to suddenly brighten, producing dozens of children with human bodies and light bulb heads…

Franca and Jenna instinctively retreated seven or eight steps towards the direction of the mushroom person, seeming to have been stunned.

Is this the psychological trauma of a great existence?

As expected of a great existence's psychological trauma!

Don't come over here!

I don't want to give birth!

In her terror, Franca drew out the iron-black Inevitable Gun.

She found that the foreign pregnant woman was not completely dead yet, still producing more flesh, and those pieces of flesh were wriggling, seeking new wombs or fathers, constantly giving birth, constantly reproducing.

Moreover, the foreign pregnant woman's abdomen had completely torn open, and the fetus inside was about to crawl out.

Franca forced herself to calm down, aimed at the foreign pregnant woman's abdomen, and pulled the trigger.

Bang!

A bullet exuding a dim blue-green color shot out, passing through the numerous, oddly shaped infants, accurately hitting the target, burrowing into the foreign pregnant woman's abdomen.

Certain Death!

The cry of the baby in the foreign pregnant woman's belly suddenly became intense and resentful, but it ceased abruptly in the blink of an eye.

Similarly, the foreign pregnant woman stopped secreting flesh, and those that had already separated also withered after giving birth to a new fetus.

Thankfully, Certain Death worked… Seeing this, Franca secretly let out a sigh of relief.

Just then, she, Jenna, and Luo Shan felt the earth tremble.

The tremor only lasted for a second, but Franca and the others saw the new corridor outside the double doors collapsing inch by inch. The walls, rooms, and ceiling there were also falling into an abyss of dense blackness with no visible bottom.

This collapse slowly spread towards the current area.

Franca and Jenna sensed something, one looking up towards the ceiling, the other turning to look at the area where the giant mushroom person was, blocked by the wooden doors.

Franca discovered that the ceiling above them was also falling, but instead of crashing down on them, it was falling directly into the seemingly bottomless dense darkness. Jenna saw that the area where the giant mushroom person was also began to collapse, the collapse spreading towards where they were staying.

Does killing that foreign pregnant woman trigger a change in the underground area?

No, this might be the true appearance of Mushu Hospital's underground area now, a dark abyss containing various psychological traumas… What we walked through and saw earlier was just a disguise influenced by the dream city, with corridors and some rooms symbolizing safe zones…

Franca suddenly had this realization.

"What, what should we do?" Luo Shan finally overcame her terror.

She had first needed eyebleach from the sight of hundreds and thousands of monster infants and their birth process. It shocked her mind before she realized that she and the others seemed to have nowhere to go.

Chapter 999: Opportunity

Seeing the collapse gradually spreading towards their area and hearing Luo Shan's question filled with obvious terror, Franca and Jenna exchanged a glance before decisively telling Luo Shan, "Quick, draw a door that can lead to the outside world!"

Clearly, they could no longer continue forward to find the elevator lobby and emergency exits.

"Okay!" Luo Shan nodded vigorously.

She turned around, holding a pen in one hand and a pencil in the other, and began sketching on the wall.

At this moment, Franca and Jenna noticed that the monster children born from the foreign pregnant woman and various objects were all surging towards them.

They seemed to fear falling into the bottomless abyss and were desperately trying to avoid it, to the point of forgetting their goal of attacking enemies.

Being close to Jenna and the others, the monster children quickly reduced the distance between them to two meters. Some of their eyes once again reflected the figures of Franca, Jenna, and Luo Shan, with their desire to attack growing fierce and violent.

Just then, a thick "ice wall" appeared before them.

A translucent layer of ice in the shape of a hemisphere enveloped Franca and the others inside.

This was created by Demoness of Affliction Jenna.

Seeing the densely packed monsters, some square-shaped, some like small beds, some with light bulb-shaped heads, crawling on the surface of the hemispherical ice wall, trying various ways to break through this barrier, Franca felt her fear of clustered objects and humanoid creatures about to explode simultaneously.

She condensed quiet and sinister Demoness black flames around her, waiting for the moment the first layer of ice wall would shatter.

In just seven or eight seconds, the beautiful crystalline ice wall made a crisp shattering sound under the attack of numerous monster children.

Black flames quickly flew out from around Franca and Jenna, passing through the rapidly expanding cracks, igniting nearly twenty monster children.

They burst into flames all over, wailing and rolling on the spot, obstructing many of their siblings' advance and igniting those around them.

Seizing this opportunity, before the hemispherical ice wall completely collapsed, Franca and Jenna joined forces to create a second layer of ice wall, only ten centimeters apart from the previous one.

"It's done!" Luo Shan's voice rang out.

While continuing to delay the approach of the monster children, Franca and Jenna expectantly glanced at the pattern on the wall with their peripheral vision.

It was a vivid door outlined by pencil marks and blue ink, with a doorplate at the top bearing the numbers "1502".

This was the door to Luo Shan's home, almost identical to what Franca and Jenna remembered, except for the color difference.

The current one was closer to a sketch!

Luo Shan pressed her thumb to the position corresponding to the door lock, making the fake door on the wall emit an unlocking sound.

Then, she turned the handle and pushed open the door she had drawn to her own home.

The light behind the door was dim, outlining all the items in room 1502, but they appeared unusually illusory.

As the illusion gradually solidified into reality, Luo Shan's joyful gaze suddenly froze.

She saw her windows collapsing, her balcony collapsing, all of them falling towards an abyss filled with dense darkness!

The door Luo Shan had drawn and the passage she had established also collapsed inch by inch, just like the surrounding environment.

"It doesn't work…" Luo Shan uttered, almost in a delirium.

She turned her gaze, filled with undisguised despair yet brimming with hope, towards Franca and Jenna, hoping they could come up with a new solution.

At this moment, the nearest collapse had already swallowed the original corridor, causing the double doors separating the two sides to sway and fall.

This was already inches from Franca and company.

Through the gaps between the monster children, Franca could see more clearly the bottomless dense darkness, and something seemingly hidden in its depths.

That figure, apparently wrapped in a robe, or perhaps the robe itself blown up by the wind.

Even just vaguely glimpsing the outline from a distance, the fear in Franca's heart exploded without warning.

The skin on her face became semi-transparent, and the flesh beneath began to writhe, as if it had gained a certain life of its own.

Instinctively, reflexively, Franca averted her gaze, withdrawing her line of sight.

She suddenly had a realization.

What she had just seen was the thing Mr. Fool's subconscious or the Celestial Worthy's subconscious feared most, their strongest psychological trauma!

It was clearly not subject to the dream's suppression of power levels. If they couldn't escape and fell into the abyss along with the collapsing corridor, falling towards that place, death might be the gentlest and most beautiful outcome.

Franca shook her head violently, shaking off the small amount of "glue" that was clouding part of her thoughts.

As Jenna used a third layer of ice wall to block those monster children, she took out the Ice Amulet and a mirror.

She said to Jenna and Luo Shan, "We'll go through the mirror world. No matter how terrifying the hidden dangers in the mirror world are, they can't be more horrifying than the psychological trauma at the bottom of this abyss!"

Of two evils, choose the lesser!

"Okay." Jenna didn't object, and Luo Shan, lacking experience, chose to trust her two companions.

The Ice Amulet in Franca's hand rapidly lit up with a crystalline glow.

The next second, Franca found that the glass surface of the mirror had somehow already turned pitch black, as solid as rock, impenetrable.

"We can't get in… it's different from before the collapse…" Franca felt a surge of uncontrollable despair.

Were they really going to fall into that bottomless abyss and face the strongest part of a great existence's psychological trauma?

"Can't get in?" Jenna's action of shooting Demoness black flames to ignite the monster children noticeably slowed for a second.

Luo Shan was suddenly dumbfounded, her mouth half-open as she said, "Is there really no way at all?"

Hearing these words, Jenna gritted her teeth and created another hemispherical ice wall.

The surface of the ice wall was quickly covered with various monster children, densely packed, now less than a meter away from Franca and the others.

The collapse of the corridor had also reached this area.

Franca's thoughts raced, her eyes flickering twice as she said, "I still have a way!"

As she spoke, she took out the black eyeball left behind by the reanimated corpse Panatiya and other supplementary ingredients from her Traveler's Bag:

"I'll advance to Demoness of Despair now!

"It's perfect timing, I've been using Disease to secretly influence the monsters in this corridor, which can save a lot of time."

The monster children crawling all over Jenna's ice wall and their companions behind were all within three meters of Franca, numbering close to a thousand.

"It's useless, even a Demoness of Despair is now suppressed to Sequence 7 level, at most Sequence 6, it can't forcibly open a path to the mirror world!" Jenna instinctively refuted Franca.

She wanted to stay calm, but was overwhelmed by the monster children breaking through the ice wall, barely managing to establish a new hemispherical ice wall sixty centimeters away from them.

Franca, while using the black eyeball condensed from the reanimated corpse's Beyonder characteristics to create more virulent viruses, drank a bottle of healing agent and reminded Jenna, "Quickly drink a bottle too, Luo Shan already had one earlier."

Then, Franca explained rapidly, "The important thing is not me advancing to Demoness of Despair, but that every Demoness advancement draws the attention of the Primordial Demoness. I need Her attention!"

Seeing Jenna drink the healing agent, Franca helped maintain the defense line and asked in return, "Does Mr. Fool know about the Primordial Demoness?"

"Definitely." Jenna answered without hesitation.

Mr. Fool's avatar had dealings with the Demoness Sect many times, he must be aware of the existence of the Primordial Demoness.

Franca glanced at the corridor that had already collapsed to the transfer bed and said to Jenna and Luo Shan, "Let's move towards the center; buy more time."

The collapse progress on both sides of the corridor was about the same, but Franca and the others were clearly closer to one side.

Without waiting for Jenna and Luo Shan to respond, Franca suddenly withdrew the force maintaining the ice wall and ran at her fastest speed towards the middle section of the corridor about ten to twenty meters away.

Luo Shan ran even faster.

After the three had determined their positions, Jenna once again condensed an ice wall to block the pursuing monster children, while Franca continued to spread mystical pathogens around.

She explained quickly, "Since Mr. Fool knows about the Primordial Demoness, there must be a manifestation corresponding to the Primordial Demoness in this dream—we just haven't discovered it yet, and true gods can directly enter the dream city.

"When I advance here, my real self will also advance. Based on our experience, no matter what state the Primordial Demoness is in, whether the situation is good or bad, She will turn Her gaze towards this.

"As a true god, She won't have difficulty discovering that my consciousness is in a real dream, and will likely project Herself in, using Her inherent dream manifestation to truly observe me advancing in the underground area of Mushu Hospital.

"She certainly won't risk descending here, nor does She have the feelings or motivation to save me, but as the ruler of the mirror world, Her mere gaze will likely open a channel between the mirror world and this area, and possibly cause the hidden dangers in the mirror world to temporarily disperse!"

"This can't be guaranteed." Jenna blurted out, her tone anxious and confused.

This place was a product of the fusion of a great existence's psychological trauma and the Mother Tree of Desire's abyssal symbol, and more great existences had projected some power into it. Even if they were all suppressed to mid-low Sequences, could the Primordial Demoness in a poor state break the blockade on the mirror world with just Her gaze?

"There's no such thing as a 100% successful plan, but not trying guarantees failure." Franca quickly responded.

Jenna fell silent, biting her lip before saying with a trembling voice, "This will prevent you from leaving the dream, and if the dream ends soon, you will die because of it…"

Franca, waiting for the mystical pathogens to take effect, was silent for a moment before saying through gritted teeth, "We'll deal with future problems in the future!

"If we don't survive now, there won't be a future!"

"But…" Jenna's voice suddenly choked.

Her mind tried to grasp something, but couldn't hold onto anything.

Franca interrupted her, her expression complex as she mocked her own past naivety and love for fantasy, "After killing the reanimated corpse, obtaining the Beyonder characteristics and supplementary ingredients, knowing that all ritual requirements in the dream city would be lowered to Sequence 7 level, I was thinking, is this, is this giving me an opportunity? When everyone is in a desperate situation, with no other options, to stand up like a hero, consume the potion, break through in the face of danger, forcibly advance, reverse the outcome, save everyone, save the world…"

At this point, Franca's expression suddenly settled.

She calmly looked at Jenna, revealing a bright smile.

"Now, the opportunity has presented itself."

Chapter 1000: Gaze

Jenna looked at the smile on Franca's face and listened to her calm words tinged with self-mockery. She suddenly felt a lump in her throat.

Her gaze swept over the monster children about to break through the newest ice wall, over the collapse that had already swallowed the transfer bed and the orderly. She bit her lip hard and said, "Okay…"

The rest of her words got stuck in her throat, as if ice had melted into hot water.

She could only tell herself that future problems would be solved in the future, and that they would surely find a solution!

Franca estimated the time and began preparing the Despair potion using the black eyeball from the reanimated corpse and the corresponding supplementary materials. Jenna allowed the wet feeling to spread from the corner of her eye to the edge of her face while focusing on blocking the approach of the monster children.

She no longer created her own Disease, leaving these oddly-shaped targets all to Franca.

After the monster children were born, she had also been quietly spreading mystical pathogens.

Luo Shan, who was bewildered and inexplicably terrified by the conversation between the two, also reined in her thoughts and began adding various patterns to Jenna's ice wall to enhance its defense.

In the burst of light, the monster children were unable to break through the ice wall in the shortest time and advance further.

Behind them, the floor tiles of the corridor, the walls on both sides, and the ceiling above kept collapsing. The bottomless dark abyss was getting closer and closer to them.

After a while, some of the monster children began to cough violently, coughing so hard that they slid down from the surface of the ice wall. Others became rigid and could no longer move smoothly.

Those crowded outside the ice wall, separated from Jenna and the others by several meters, were finally caught up by the collapse.

They surged forward like a tide but couldn't get past the bodies of their siblings.

They began to fall towards the dense darkness hiding unknown terrors.

Strong feelings of despair emanated from them, rapidly spreading to their companions clinging to the ice wall surface as their conditions worsened.

Now! Franca raised the bottle, bringing the deep purple potion bubbling with rosy bubbles to her lips.

She drank it without hesitation.

The potion had no taste, or perhaps Franca could no longer distinguish its taste.

She only felt her spirit and thoughts rapidly falling into a lightless, enclosed darkness, plummeting towards an unknown depth.

Something seemed to be calling her there.

Trier, inside a luxurious villa.

Franca, sleeping on the bed, still had her eyes tightly shut, but her hair eerily began to float, gradually growing longer, darker, and thicker.

Madam Judgment, standing guard in the villa's living room, instantly sensed something and Blinked into Franca's room.

Looking at the transformed Franca, Madam Judgment didn't rush to act. Instead, she took out a charm made of gray-white dragon scales, activated it, and made it ethereal.

"There's been a change in the dream. Two of Cups was forced to advance to Demoness of Despair within the dream," Madam Judgment's words combined with the ethereal charm, quickly becoming transparent and merging into the night sky.

At this moment, Madam Judgment felt a certain gaze, a gaze from the Traveler's Bag, from an unknown place, a gaze upon Franca.

Dream city, Mushu Hospital, B2.

Franca's consciousness and spirit floated and fell within the enclosed darkness. She felt countless invisible threads of intense despair extending from the outside world, following their mystical connections to grasp her body.

At the same time, she saw two brilliant starry lights.

Those were the people she cared about, and who cared about her, the anchors that let her know who she was!

The groggy Franca gradually regained clarity, vaguely sensing a gaze full of resentment, hatred, and expectation watching her from somewhere in the deep darkness.

Suddenly, her Traveler's Bag outside the spiritual world began to vibrate, a vibration she could clearly perceive.

It was the Primordial Demoness figurine carved from white bone that was noticeably trembling.

At the same time, Franca discovered an indescribable gaze from above directed at her, penetrating through layers of mirror worlds!

Her hair instantly turned completely black, floating in the air like tentacles, with their tips swelling into spheres, as if about to open into numerous eyes.

Franca's face became even more beautiful, emanating a charm that even made Luo Shan, a girl who preferred the opposite sex, unable to look away, her heart pounding, like a moth throwing itself into the fire.

Franca struggled to open her eyes and spoke in a voice that seemed to pluck at the strings of the soul, "It's done…"

Jenna stopped maintaining the ice wall and activated the Ice Mirror Charm she had been holding.

In the crystalline light, she felt the surface of the mirror in her other hand ripple with a faint glow, losing its rock-solid texture.

They really could pass through and leave via the mirror world!

The barrier had been broken!

Moreover, Jenna discovered that the dangers previously hidden in the mirror world had also disappeared.

This was beyond her expectations. She had originally thought that the Primordial Demoness's gaze could break through the obstacles and connect to the mirror world, which would have been impressive enough. She never imagined it could actually dispel the hidden dangers.

This was also Franca's confusion.

She struggled to tell Jenna and Luo Shan, "Both of you… go first…"

She was still fighting against the potion's impact, transforming her body, and temporarily unable to move.

If the mirror world hadn't suppressed this advancement to Sequence 7 level, she wouldn't even have been able to speak at this stage!

Jenna didn't hesitate. She gave Franca a deep look, grabbed Luo Shan's arm, and plunged into the compact mirror in her hand.

The compact mirror then fell to the ground as the surrounding ice wall completely collapsed.

However, the monster children closest to Franca had all been infected with severe illness and were no longer able to approach or attack.

In the mirror world, Jenna led Luo Shan through a surreal tunnel, heading towards a corresponding mirror guided by their spirituality.

In the blink of an eye, they reached a new area behind the mirror, able to leave the current world.

Jenna suddenly sensed something and turned her head to look into the depths of the mirror world.

It seemed that some dangerous entity had awakened slightly there, instantly filling the entire mirror world with a sense of terror.

Silently, the mirror world completely collapsed.

"Franca…" Jenna's pupils dilated as she softly called out her companion's name.

The scene before her eyes meant that Franca would temporarily be unable to escape via the mirror world, and by the time the mirror world recovered, the Primordial Demoness's gaze would likely have ended, and the force isolating the inside from the outside would reappear!

Blood trickled from Jenna's lips as she endured the pain invading her mind. Before the terrifying collapse of the mirror world could rapidly spread to them, she pulled Luo Shan and emerged from the mirror surface.

She knew that blindly returning would only lead to them getting lost in the spatiotemporal turbulence deep in the mirror world, which would be of no help in rescuing Franca.

She planned to go to the first floor of Mushu Hospital and take the elevator back to the underground area!

At this moment, Franca, still in the process of advancing, also discovered the collapse of the mirror world.

She then felt violent tremors like an earthquake at the bottom of the dark abyss.

It was as if certain entities hidden in the dark abyss had been stimulated by the collapsing force of the mirror world and were reacting.

With these tremors, the corridor beneath Franca's feet that had not yet been affected by the collapse suddenly gave way, carrying her and hundreds of monster children into the bottomless dark abyss.

Dammit! Franca hadn't expected this development.

The despair of those monster children became even more intense, solidifying into substance. Franca was also uncontrollably enveloped by the emotions of despair.

This helped her through the final stage of her advancement, causing her floating thick black hair to fall back around her, no longer abnormal, and restoring some of its flaxen color.

Gritting her teeth, Franca used the Demoness's feather-fall technique to slow her descent, allowing her some degree of control.

She chose to move away from the intense psychological shadow she had sensed earlier, that thing resembling a giant shroud, which would surely make her wish for death.

She drifted towards other areas, taking a gamble.

What if the psychological traumas in other parts of the abyss, though intense, aren't fatally dangerous?

As a human, one must hold onto some hope, not give up entirely and fall into complete despair!

…

Jenna emerged from the metal mirror surface of the elevator lobby doors with Luo Shan, immediately seeing the female version of Lumian who had just lifted her gaze from the shaking ground.

She wasn't surprised to see Lumian here and blurted out, "Franca is below, not at B1!

"The mirror world has collapsed!"

Lumian's eyes instantly narrowed.

He didn't ask for details but said directly, "Go to the emergency center and find Zhou Mingrui. See if you can get him to help and go to the underground area.

"As for the rest, leave it to me. I'll handle it."

Zhou Mingrui is at Mushu Hospital now? Both Jenna and Luo Shan were shocked.

Before Jenna could speak, Lumian added in a deep voice, "I had anticipated scenarios where we might have to enter the bottom of Mushu Hospital to attempt sabotage and made some preparations.

"Everyone has their own task. Finding Zhou Mingrui is equally important!"

As he spoke, Lumian had already reached the elevator and pressed the down arrow.

Jenna's vision suddenly blurred.

She didn't stubbornly insist, but gave a terse response and pulled Luo Shan towards the emergency center.

She knew they couldn't put all their eggs in one basket. She knew she couldn't be selfish now. She knew that without godhood, even if she went to the bottom of Mushu Hospital, she probably couldn't be of much help and might even burden Lumian and Franca.

She wished she didn't know these things.

At this moment, she felt her own weakness due to the intense pain, and because of her weakness, she felt even more pain, giving rise to an extreme desire and motivation to change this situation.

Her Affliction potion was fully digested.

Lumian entered the elevator and pressed the "B2" button.

As the elevator began to descend, Lumian looked at his stunningly beautiful reflection in the metal mirror surface with a grim expression.

When the elevator stopped and the doors opened, he quickly stepped out and looked towards the area outside the elevator.

What met his eyes was a darkness as black as an abyss with no visible bottom.

Lumian's gaze instantly froze.

Suddenly, a voice sounded from a dark corner of the elevator lobby. "Child of God."

Lumian abruptly turned his head to see a person standing in the shadows by the emergency exit.

It was Lu Yong'an, the dean of obstetrics at Mushu Hospital and a bestowed of the Great Mother.

Lu Yong'an's face was shrouded in darkness. She looked at Lumian and said in a low voice, "To save someone from there, one can only beseech the Mother's help."

Chapter 1001: Choice

Mushu Hospital, in the corridor leading from the first floor lobby to the emergency center.

Luo Shan slowed down to allow Jenna to lead her.

Thud! Thud! Thud! Jenna ran quickly, finally seeing Zhou Mingrui wearing a loose sky blue T-shirt.

At the same time, her gaze swept outside the emergency center, taking in the deep night.

Jenna's footsteps suddenly stopped, and she turned sideways, moving closer to the wall area.

This way, she could no longer see Zhou Mingrui, and he could not see her either.

"What's wrong?" Luo Shan, who had also stopped, asked in confusion.

"It's night now," Jenna replied in a low voice.

"Is that a problem?" Luo Shan was even more bewildered.

Wasn't it established from the beginning that it was night? Otherwise, why would I be dreaming?

Jenna didn't have time to explain to Luo Shan that Zhou Mingrui might have something special hidden at night, and that they hadn't yet had a chance to experiment whether just normal contact with Zhou Mingrui at night would kick them out of the dream.

She said directly to Luo Shan, "It's not convenient for me to talk to Zhou Mingrui at night. You go alone to ask for his help for Luo Fu. Don't worry, I'll observe the situation from the shadows. If anything goes wrong, I'll come out immediately to save you."

Luo Shan knew this wasn't a good time to ask questions. She nodded firmly and said, "Alright!"

After Jenna's figure disappeared into the shadows by the wall, Luo Shan quickly ran into the emergency center.

She immediately saw Zhou Mingrui approaching the exit, seemingly about to leave.

Luo Shan felt a sudden urgency and blurted out, "Zhou Mingrui!"

Zhou Mingrui turned around in surprise, seeing Luo Shan in her short-sleeved pajamas and thin pajama pants.

Why is she here too? Zhou Mingrui's first reaction was that Luo Shan had also come for emergency care—pajamas weren't out of place in the emergency center, but rather fit the situation.

Then, Zhou Mingrui thought that Luo Shan should also be a Beyonder, associated with words like Reporter and Painter, and normally wouldn't have a sudden acute illness.

Not a coincidence? Puzzled, Zhou Mingrui cautiously took a few steps towards Luo Shan.

After approaching Zhou Mingrui, Luo Shan didn't give him a chance to ask questions. She took a breath and said in a low voice, "Save Luo Fu, she's trapped at the bottom of the hospital."

As she spoke, Luo Shan looked around to prevent anyone from eavesdropping.

Luo Fu? Bottom of the hospital? Zhou Mingrui caught the two most crucial pieces of information.

He still remembered the intense fear he felt when observing the downward elevator earlier, suspecting it led to hell or doomsday.

Before gathering enough intelligence, he didn't dare take the elevator down!

Now, Luo Fu had gone in there and was trapped? Zhou Mingrui instinctively asked Luo Shan,

"Me? Me saving Luo Fu?"

Is this a mistake? I'm just an Assassin with a small amount of supernatural abilities. Both Luo Fu and Luo Shan should be stronger than me, yet they want me to go to the bottom of Mushu Hospital to save Luo Fu?

After hearing the conversation between Franca and Jenna before Franca consumed the Despair potion, Luo Shan had basically confirmed that the current world was indeed a dream. So, she believed that Zhou Mingrui, as the master of the dream, could do anything as long as he "wanted" to!

Luo Shan couldn't start by explaining that this was a dream. She feared it might bring unknown, drastic changes and waste precious time.

She could only ponder for two seconds before saying, "You don't need to go and save her directly. You just need to enter B2 and stand there. That should be enough."

"That works?" Zhou Mingrui was stunned.

Isn't this way of saving someone too frivolous?

I just stand in the corridor of Mushu Hospital's B2, and it will allow Luo Fu to no longer be trapped, able to escape from that area that gives me a sense of hell?

What's the principle behind this?

Finding a male Assassin to serve as a formation node?

Or…

Thinking of this, Zhou Mingrui suddenly had a flash of insight.

Could it be that there's something special about me?

…

In the B2 elevator lobby.

"To save someone from there, one can only beseech the Mother's help?"

Lumian mulled over the words he had just heard, his gaze falling on Lu Yong'an's face.

That face, like a full moon, was covered in shifting light and shadow, unclear and indistinct.

Lumian looked deeply at Lu Yong'an for a few seconds, then said calmly, "I have other methods. For now, I don't need to seek the Mother's help.

"You should return to the obstetrics department. If I really need to beseech the Mother's help, I know what to do."

Lu Yong'an didn't try to persuade him, but slightly bowed her head and said, "Yes, Child of God."

The next second, she turned into the emergency stairwell, heading up the stairs.

Lumian didn't wait for Lu Yong'an to finish climbing the stairs. He quickly turned around, took a few steps to the edge of the elevator lobby, and gazed into the dark abyss that was now within reach.

He then reached into the Traveler's Bag and took out an item.

The item was a pale yellow with red, semi-solidified candle in a glass bottle.

Corpse wax candle!

Lumian hadn't lied to Jenna and Lu Yong'an earlier. He had truly envisioned what to do if he had to raid the bottom of Mushu Hospital and attempt sabotage, and had come up with an initial plan, though without much confidence.

The core of this plan was the corpse wax candle obtained from the Tudor treasury on the Blue Avenger.

Lumian had used a corpse wax candle once before, completing the corresponding secret contract, "seeing" a strange city and sensing an indescribable horror.

He believed that the city and the horror should be some kind of object, will, or existence that could potentially drag all the true gods down with Alista Tudor, occupying the top positions of both the Hunter and Demoness pathways.

In other words, it should be roughly on the same level as Mr. Fool, the Great Mother, the Mother Tree of Desire, and The Celestial Worthy of Heaven and Earth for Blessings.

Lumian's plan was to light the corpse wax candle here, in B2 of Mushu Hospital, next to the bottomless darkness formed by the combination of the dream subconscious psychological traumas and the abyss symbol of the Mother Tree of Desire, to complete a secret contract and establish a certain connection with that strange city or that horrifying will.

At that time, that will should also be interested in the bottom of Mushu Hospital and the dream city, and this place itself was a key node where great existences had infiltrated some of their power.

Lumian smiled.

He was looking forward to the chaotic situation that would follow.

He wasn't so concerned about what might happen to himself.

Lumian rubbed his fingers together, producing a black flame that suppressed madness and violence.

Unlike last time when he chose to use the Hunter's flame to light the corpse wax candle, or relying on the ritual fire produced by the friction between the Demoness's black flame and spirituality, this time he used the Flame of Destruction, a flame formed by the amalgamation of the Hunter and Demoness pathways!

This was almost identical to the essence of the corpse wax candle.

The corpse wax candle was made from the corpse oil of the Iron-blooded Knight, a demigod of the Hunter pathway, and the Demoness of Despair, a demigod of the Demoness pathway, blended with other substances.

Using the burning Flame of Destruction, Lumian lit the black wick of the corpse wax candle.

After glancing at the jumping, slightly black candlelight, he turned his gaze towards the dense, dark, heart-chillingly terrifying illusory abyss. With a stunningly beautiful smile on his face, he said calmly, "I'm not here to join you, I'm here to destroy this place."

…

Franca fell deeper and deeper into the dense darkness of the boundless void, unable to find any footing.

Her emotions and spirit seemed to be falling into another abyss, becoming increasingly depressed, despondent, and desperate, gradually giving rise to a touch of malice.

Suddenly, a spreading mass of grayish-white fog appeared below her.

This fog was in a semi-merged state with the dense darkness, indicating that it might also be a psychological trauma rather than a real object.

Franca looked left and right, feeling she couldn't continue falling any further, as she sensed she was about to be bound, becoming a slave of the abyss, just like those orderlies.

She no longer avoided it, falling towards that half-dark, half-light grayish-white fog, constantly muttering,

If it's fortune, it's not misfortune; if it's misfortune, it can't be avoided… If it's fortune, it's not misfortune; if it's misfortune, it can't be avoided… If it's fortune, it's not misfortune; if it's misfortune, it can't be avoided…

As she muttered, Franca made contact with the grayish-white fog, penetrating into it.

Soon, her feet touched soft, fluffy clouds, and she was suddenly filled with shock, sadness, despair, and pain.

She knew this wasn't actually her inner feelings, but rather the intense emotions permeating this area that had enveloped her, eroding into her mind, making her feel as if she had been corrupted.

Next, Franca saw a blurry, brilliant door of light tinged with a bit of blue-black. The door of light seemed to be composed of countless layers of light orbs, and each orb seemed alive, slowly writhing, some transparent, some semi-transparent.

Franca also saw that black thin lines hung down from above the door of light, suspending one after another nearly transparent and invisible "cocoon".

Those "cocoons" were gently swayed by wind from an unknown source, lightly swinging, sometimes turning.

Franca carefully discerned for a while and found that different "cocoons" contained different people. There were black people, Asians, white people, some wearing jeans, some in bright and gorgeous clothes, some in anime-style outfits, some holding phones. They all had their eyes tightly closed, as if not completely dead yet.

This is very similar to the first psychological trauma we encountered in the corridor, except there was no door of light or "cocoons" before… Franca, still being eroded by the surrounding emotions, suddenly associated it with the hall where Huang Jiajia, Ai Nana, and others were suspended, gaining some understanding but also feeling confused.

She looked carefully again and noticed that three of the "cocoons" were empty. They had split open, and the people inside were nowhere to be found.

Were they sent out?

Where were they sent?

Franca vigilantly guarded against possible details, instinctively moving a few steps to the side.

Another invisible wind blew past, and those "cocoons" swayed again, some turning towards Franca.

Franca's gaze swept over them, her pupils suddenly dilating.

She saw a familiar figure.

It was a man standing upright inside a transparent "cocoon", his head slightly bowed, wearing clothes belonging to the protagonist of Assassin's Creed II.

It was herself!

It was him before the transmigration!

Chapter 1002: The Answer to the Questions

Looking at her past self suspended in the transparent "cocoon", Franca's mind buzzed with many thoughts, like boiling oatmeal.

What exactly is this place?

Is this Mr. Fool's or the Celestial Worthy's psychological trauma?

Was I like this, enclosed in a 'cocoon' hanging above the door of light, from losing my memory until completing the transmigration?"

Are the other 'cocoons' containing other members of the research society?

What do those three empty 'cocoons' represent?

Who hung us up?

This is very similar to a manifestation of the High-Sequence Seer pathway…

Did the Celestial Worthy do this?

So, is this Mr. Fool's psychological trauma?

He…

Just as these thoughts flashed through Franca's mind, behind the brilliant light gate, some of the gray fog dispersed, revealing a sphere.

It was a view of the planet from the moon, from space.

Franca then saw the northern and southern continents, the western continent covered in a layer of grayish-white mist, and the eastern continent sunk in darkness.

At the same time, a voice with a hint of solemnity echoed in her ears:

"This place has an ancient name, called…

"Chernobyl!"

"This place has an ancient name, called…

"Chernobyl!"

"…"

As the voice echoed, Franca stared blankly at the familiar yet strange planet in the depths of the gray fog, at the four continents—east, south, west, and north—which had changed somewhat but were still recognizable. She was as if struck by lightning.

Suddenly, she understood many questions, ones she couldn't find answers to before or had avoided certain answers while seeking other explanations.

Why does this world also have 365 days in a year, with an extra day every four years…

Why does this world also have 24 hours in a day, 60 minutes in an hour, 60 seconds in a minute…

Why the human body structure in this world was identical to Earth's, and corresponding relationships can be found in most elements…

Why was Mr. Fool's dream a modern city…

Why was Mr. Fool's marionette town called Utopia…

Why were Mr. Fool's avatars called Gehrman Sparrow and Merlin Hermes…

…

Franca stared blankly at the strange yet familiar planet, at the four continents and dreamlike blue oceans in her memory. Salty, wet tears had unknowingly fallen down her face.

Her mind was telling her the answer, but her heart was refusing to accept it.

This world might just be Earth…

Franca's vision was already blurred, but she dared not close her eyes, afraid to see those images that always appeared before her in midnight dreams.

Her heart burst with intense shock, sadness, and immense despair and pain, almost identical to the intense emotions pervading the current area, indistinguishable and seemingly merging:

Perhaps we never left, but we can never go back.

…

Trier, inside a luxurious villa.

In Franca's room, Madam Judgment, Madam Magician, and Madam Justice had gathered by the bedside.

"She's crying…" Madam Judgment, who had been observing Franca's condition, suddenly said.

The corners of Franca's eyes in her sleep had mysteriously become wet, with traces of tears extending to both sides, disappearing into her flaxen hair that had darkened considerably.

She seemed to be having an extremely sad dream.

At this moment, Madam Judgment and Madam Magician couldn't quite understand why Two of Cups would silently cry while dreaming.

They had anticipated what changes might occur in Franca's expression in reality, whether it be twisting in pain, exaggerated in madness, or falling into extreme pleasure, all of which were predictable possibilities.

But why would she cry?

And the tears shed were dominated by sadness and despair.

Could one of her companions have met with misfortune?

Madam Magician cast her gaze towards the other rooms, finding that Lumian, Jenna, Anthony, and Ludwig were all still alive, though the first two—one with an icy expression, the other unable to hide pain and urgency even in dreams.

"Aren't you going to Placate her?" Madam Judgment asked Madam Justice, who was conducting a mental and psychological analysis.

Since the mental corruption and emotional impact experienced in the dream would reflect in reality, treating the corresponding psychological issues and mental illnesses in reality would also truly affect the person in the dream.

In a dream constructed with spirit and psychology at its core, the inside and outside were indistinguishable in this aspect, blending truth and falsehood.

Madam Justice's emerald eyes showed a thoughtful expression. "Two of Cups's current emotions harbor immense despair, which is also a manifestation of her true state.

"And what she needs right now is precisely despair, extreme despair."

Hearing these words, Madam Magician couldn't help but turn her head to look at the night sky to the east.

She said in a low voice, "Yes, Two of Cups has already forcibly advanced by leveraging the uniqueness of the dream. What she needs most now is despair, intense and immense despair.

"This can help her quickly digest the potion.

"I'm not sure exactly what she's seeing or experiencing now, but from the current situation, the 'making oneself despair' part should be enough. Later, we need to find an opportunity to 'make others despair'."

Madam Justice nodded slightly and said, "Once Two of Cups's current despair subsides somewhat, I'll provide psychological treatment.

"Now, she might need other help."

As this Major Arcana card holder wearing a green dress with white patterns spoke, Madam Magician half-opened her arms.

In front of her, points of starlight gathered, condensing into an illusory but brilliant double door.

This door slowly opened, revealing a thin layer of grayish-white fog inside.

That represented the dream city.

As an Angel of the Door pathway, Madam Magician had no problem opening a door and forcibly entering Mr. Fool's dream if she really wanted to.

Of course, whether such a forceful entry would result in her being instantly observed, losing control, or unknowingly becoming a marionette of the Celestial Worthy remained unknown.

In this matter, the unknown referred to which of the two outcomes would occur, not whether these two outcomes would appear.

According to Madam Magician's astromancy results, there was only a very small chance that she would encounter nothing, and this was based on Mr. Fool having a certain advantage or the two great existences happening to be in a phase of intense mutual combat.

What she was about to do was certainly not to barge in and rescue Franca, but to open such a door, establish the corresponding channel, and assist Madam Justice, who was a Dreamweaver.

Originally, Madam Justice could only monitor changes in part of the dream situation, and that was in a vague perceptual way. With such a door, she could directly exert some influence on certain areas of the dream or corresponding characters.

In this situation, she, who had been kicked out of the dream three times, couldn't do much, but what they wanted to convey to Franca was just a brief sentence.

As the door to the dream city opened, Madam Justice closed her emerald eyes that seemed able to reflect the human soul, raised her right hand, and began to sketch dreamlike, unreal symbols in the air.

…

Mushu Hospital, B2, edge of the elevator lobby.

Lumian, gazing at the illusory dark abyss, inhaling the faintly sweet and warm dark fragrance, enduring the agitation in his bone marrow and desires, feeling as if his entire being was about to ignite, entered a state of ethereal quietude.

His mind and thoughts gradually dispersed, becoming increasingly numb to the passage of time.

Finally, he "saw" a fog tinged with a dark hue, feeling as if he was walking through such a fog.

Just like before, he saw the outlines of various buildings, saw things similar to trains running on blurry streets, saw ladies with round fans covering their faces riding in human-pulled canopied two-wheeled carts approaching him.

He flew up, flew towards the depths of the dense fog, flew towards somewhere in this strange city.

There remained a peculiar high tower that was only a shadow, with indescribable gloom and terror emanating from the bottom of the tower.

Lumian, suppressing the fear in his heart and the trembling of his body, descended, entered the tower, and headed straight for the bottom.

He then saw an ancient well melding into the darkness, saw that the four walls of the ancient well were built with moss-covered stone blocks, saw iron-black chains locked onto the stone blocks, hanging down into the depths of the ancient well.

These chains had numerous reliefs on their surface, but they were blurry, making it difficult for Lumian to discern.

Unable to control himself, Lumian stuck out his head, trying to look towards the bottom of the ancient well.

What met his eyes was a dense, eerie blood-red color.

It seemed to be formed by an unknown amount of blood.

Next, Lumian smelled a fishy odor mixed with a sense of rust.

He bewilderedly turned his gaze to his nose, finding that blood had somehow already flowed from his nostrils, like real blood.

Suddenly, Lumian's peripheral vision caught his own head and face reflected clearly in the blood-colored well water.

The palm of his right hand instantly became scorching hot, with a manic and violent aura surging out like a flood.

This was blocked by a cold and deathly stillness.

Outside the spiritual secret deed process, Lumian on B2 of Mushu Hospital, his body visibly trembled.

His hair floated up, his face sometimes the stunning Lumina, sometimes the more handsome security guard Li Ming, his chest sometimes swelling, sometimes flattening, his aura sometimes feminine and seductive, sometimes masculine and violent…

He kept switching between these two states, and if he lacked either one, his body might not be able to withstand it, quickly collapsing and becoming an out-of-control monster.

Lumian at the edge of the ancient well sensed a terrifying will that could destroy everything, feeling It casting Its gaze from the depths of the ancient well, observing him.

Even with the ability of an Ascetic, even while forcibly controlling himself, Lumian couldn't help but break away from the secret deed ritual and open his eyes.

His right palm was still stinging, more intensely than ever before, his eyes a deep black, a black so deep that not even death existed within it, devoid of any life.

Before him, in that void of dark abyss, a vortex suddenly appeared, spiraling towards the bottom.

Chapter 1003: Incantation

1003 Incantation

The bottomless darkness seemed to be pulled by some force from deep within, or forcefully pressed down by an invisible giant hand, causing it to suddenly collapse and form a frantic vortex several meters wide.

This vortex kept spinning towards the end of the darkness, getting deeper and deeper, like an ancient well.

At the same time, all the mirrors on Lumian's body shattered with a series of cracking sounds, and the metal elevator doors were suddenly covered with a grayish-white layer, as if they had been abraded by sand.

Immediately after, Lumian took a step forward and jumped into the vortex.

With the appearance of the vortex, he vaguely sensed his Mirror Substitution left with Franca.

At the same time, he knew that the vortex was created by the gaze and power he had drawn through the secret deed ritual, and that it would lead to his intended destination. He knew that if he kept falling in the vortex, he would likely reach where Franca was trapped.

He didn't let his body float down slowly like a feather, but maintained a free-fall posture, gaining speed. Wind howled in his ears, and his eyes saw only the deep darkness that had become steep cliffs.

…

Crack! Crack! Crack!

The glass windows on every floor of Mushu Hospital shattered explosively, and all mirror-like objects were either covered in scratches or turned to stone-like substances.

In the emergency center, all the glass that had shown mirror-like reflections due to the night broke with a crack, including several pairs of dark-colored glasses.

Zhou Mingrui and Luo Shan were startled too, feeling as if a huge explosion had occurred nearby.

However, they didn't hear any corresponding sound, nor did their ears ring continuously.

In the environment where patients, nurses, and doctors had all suddenly become panicked, Zhou Mingrui had a sudden flash of insight and said to Luo Shan in a low voice, "The anomaly from underground?"

"Possibly, I'm not sure either…" Luo Shan didn't know much more than Zhou Mingrui, she could only guess that Luo Fu might have done something underground, or encountered something.

Zhou Mingrui spoke faster, continuing to ask, "Why can I rescue Luo Fu just by standing in B2?"

Luo Shan stammered in response, "I-It was a guess…

"Be-because there's something special about you!"

As expected… Zhou Mingrui quickly pressed, "What's special?"

"You… I'm actually not that clear on the specific details." Luo Shan suddenly realized that if she explained clearly, there might be unexpected changes, so she forced the topic back on track, "I'm not sure if you going to stand in B2 will really be effective. If nothing changes, th-then that's all we can do. If there are changes, but not enough for Luo Fu to escape, then maybe you'll need to do something more. What exactly to do depends on the actual situation. At that time, you can choose not to do it, but if you're willing, I-I will walk in front of you!"

Zhou Mingrui looked at Luo Shan deeply, and after a few seconds of silence, said, "Okay."

Eh… Luo Shan, who had planned to continue pleading, was stunned.

"Let's go now," Zhou Mingrui ran towards the corridor leading to the nearest elevator, "Nothing is more important than saving a life!"

Luo Shan hurriedly followed, easily taking the lead in front of Zhou Mingrui.

Their actions were not at all conspicuous in the emergency center where the chaotic state had not yet completely subsided.

Seeing this, Jenna, hiding in the shadows, quietly let out a sigh of relief.

After Zhou Mingrui and Luo Shan had run a distance, she walked out of the shadows, preparing to conceal herself and follow behind, ready to deal with any unexpected situations.

At this moment, she felt a suffocating pain, as if the blood in her body wanted to burst through her skin and splash out.

It was like a deep-sea fish being directly "teleported" into mid-air.

Moreover, Jenna also felt her thoughts stalling and her joints stiffening.

About to be kicked out… of the dream?

Even if it's… through Luo Shan… at night… indirectly… informing Zhou Mingrui… of Beyonder matters… it will… lead to… oneself… being kicked?

Jenna wanted to hold on a bit longer, to see if Zhou Mingrui going to the underground area would bring about good changes, but she was powerless to resist. She had no choice but to leave this world, following the force that was kicking her out of the dream.

…

Trier, inside a luxurious villa.

Standing by Franca's bed, facing the door of starlight and the grayish-white fog, Madam Justice frowned.

"I can't sense Two of Cups, I can't establish contact with her.

"I was clearly using her body as a medium…"

Madam Magician thought for two seconds and said, "In the dream city, apart from what we haven't explored and don't know about yet, there are only three places where such a situation would occur, where the connection between soul, consciousness, and body would be severed.

"One is inside the police station, two is Yangdu Prison, and three is the underground area of Mushu Hospital."

"If she were arrested or imprisoned, Two of Cups wouldn't be this desperate," Madam Judgment made a judgment, "She must have entered the underground area of Mushu Hospital, for unknown reasons."

While Madam Magician and Madam Judgment were thinking and talking, Madam Justice continued to try.

Suddenly, they all turned their heads towards the room where Lumian was sleeping.

At this moment, they felt the ground trembling inexplicably, as if a volcano was erupting deep underground.

This caused all the mirrors and glass windows in the entire villa to make trembling sounds, almost shattering.

After just a few seconds, Madam Justice's emerald-like eyes suddenly lit up.

"I've sensed Two of Cups!" She said while once again sketching transparent symbols in the air that were like dreams and illusions.

As soon as the symbol was completed, it passed through the brilliant starlight door like a butterfly from a dream, diving into the grayish-white fog.

After doing this, Madam Justice said to Madam Judgment and Madam Magician, "Seven of Cups has been kicked out of the dream, we can have her come over to tell us the specific situation."

…

In the grayish-white fog where a brilliant door of light and an illusory planet stood tall, echoing with words like "Chernobyl".

Franca gazed at everything before her, her whole being seemingly numb, only her vision becoming increasingly blurred, unable to clear up no matter what.

At this moment, she heard a voice so distant it seemed to come from the edge of the sky, belonging to Madam Justice. "Shout 'Leodero' in ancient Hermes."

Franca suddenly awoke, as if she had just had a long nightmare that she dared not and was unwilling to recall.

Her mouth trembled, not making a sound, as if she wanted to sleep here forever.

After several seconds, Franca finally called out in a low voice, "Leodero!"

…

Above that grayish-white fog, Lumian's feet stepped on the surface of the thin gas like clouds, but he couldn't penetrate through to enter inside.

He felt that this fog was highly similar to the fog that sealed off the Samaritan Women's Spring, and believed that if he still had Mr. Fool's seal on him, he would definitely be able to fall directly inside, rather than being blocked outside.

After trying two methods and failing, Lumian turned his gaze to his right palm.

The Blood Emperor brand on his palm had undergone some changes when the secret deed ritual was forcibly completed. Its color had become deeper and blacker, no longer like dripping fresh blood, but closer to the dark red of oxidized blood.

And this dark red seemed to have subtly merged with the paleness covering this patch of skin.

Lumian wasn't yet clear on what such changes would bring, he just wanted to use this brand and the corpse wax candle to quickly perform another secret deed ritual.

Suddenly, in the night sky of the dream city, clouds piled up in layers.

Countless small electric snakes jumped and gathered between these clouds, quickly forming a huge, tree-like lightning bolt.

As soon as this lightning appeared, it crossed the distance between heaven and earth, illuminating the entire city.

It passed over numerous lightning rods, struck into Mushu Hospital, and drilled underground.

The hair on Lumian's body stood up uncontrollably, and he instinctively took two steps back.

Almost simultaneously, a bright light flashed before his eyes, making him unable to see the deep darkness and grayish-white mist anymore.

The afterimage of a silver-white tree-like lightning remained in his pupils.

When his vision recovered, Lumian found a slowly healing hole had appeared in the grayish-white fog.

He didn't hesitate, took a step forward, and jumped in.

He passed through the outer fog and landed in front of the brilliant light door, seeing Franca staring blankly at him, with the hair on her skin and some of her head standing up.

Franca's eyes reflected Lumian, whose gender was constantly switching, but the speed was slowing down, gradually fixing towards the female form.

"Let's go!" Lumian didn't say much, grabbed Franca's arm, and directly activated the black mark on his right shoulder.

Spirit World Traversal!

With the vortex still existing, Lumian could sense some areas of the outside world!

The figures of the two immediately disappeared from in front of the brilliant door of light, with the hole above getting smaller and closer to disappearing.

Lumian, carrying Franca, traveled through the spirit world layered with various color blocks, heading towards the predetermined safe location.

Normally, he would reach the destination in just one second, but for some unknown reason, he now felt as if he was bound by layers of viscous liquid and invisible shackles, moving very slowly, with a trend of getting even slower.

Next, Lumian saw deep, dense darkness sweeping in from "behind", rushing towards the two of them.

The vortex had disappeared.

In that darkness, there was a blurry, huge figure standing on a lightless water surface, and an ancient mirror slowly outlining.

Lumian gritted his teeth, traveling forward with all his might.

Just as he was about to touch the "exit", and the dark abyss was about to engulf him and Franca, everything suddenly became calm.

Lumian suddenly felt at ease, like a criminal who had escaped from prison, instantly passing out of the spirit world and arriving in a shadowy corner of the emergency center at Mushu Hospital.

His spiritual intuition told him that Jenna was here.

…

Mushu Hospital, B2.

Zhou Mingrui and Luo Shan, having overcome their intense fear, walked out of the elevator together.

Almost simultaneously, Zhou Mingrui inexplicably felt relaxed, his feelings of fear and dread dissipating completely.

He frowned in confusion and said to Luo Shan, "Where is Luo Fu trapped?"

Luo Shan looked at the dim but normal white corridor outside the elevator lobby, falling into bewilderment and deep thought.

"Shouldn't it have already completely collapsed…" she muttered to herself.

Chapter 1004: The Solution

1004 The Solution

Seeing Zhou Mingrui looking at her, waiting for an answer, Luo Shan said uncertainly, "It seems like things are back to normal…"

She had thought Zhou Mingrui wouldn't believe her judgment. After all, they hadn't encountered anything or seen any signs of danger, and they still didn't know if Luo Fu had been rescued. How could she say everything was "back to normal"?

To her surprise, Zhou Mingrui nodded thoughtfully. "I think so too."

After a couple of seconds, Zhou Mingrui asked, "Do we still need to look for Luo Fu?"

"I-I'll take another look…" Luo Shan cautiously walked to the edge of the elevator lobby and peeked out.

She looked around and felt that aside from being too quiet with no one passing through, there wasn't much difference between this underground area and any other hospital basement.

…

Emergency Center, in a shadowy corner.

Lumian and Franca simultaneously saw Jenna, dressed in a nightgown, her eyes dazed and unsure of what to do.

She's been kicked out of the dream… Both Lumian and Franca quickly came to the same conclusion.

At that moment, Jenna also spotted Franca and Lumian. The tension and worry in her heart suddenly eased.

Without saying much, Lumian grabbed Jenna's arm with his other hand and disappeared with her into the edge of the shadows.

The three of them soon returned to Room 2303 in Dechuang Garden.

After checking the room's condition, Lumian said to Jenna, "Everything's fine now. Get some rest."

He wasn't sure how the dream Jenna would "rationalize" what had just happened, so he kept his explanation vague to avoid any cognitive conflict.

As for the teleportation, it was impossible to hide it any longer. After all, Zhou Mingrui had already become deeply aware of the supernatural powers at play, and there were indeed quite a few Beyonders active in the dream city.

Jenna, surprised, glanced around the familiar environment and obediently replied, "Okay."

After she entered the room and lay down on the bed, Lumian closed the bedroom door for her, then turned to Franca and said,

"Let's go back to Mushu Hospital now. We'll talk about what happened once we're there."

Franca didn't ask why and slowly nodded.

Using teleportation, Lumian took Franca to the greenery outside Mushu Hospital and turned his gaze towards the emergency center and the hospital building.

Seeing the shattered glass and the scorched parts of the walls, Lumian finally said to Franca, "I think what happened today was too much of a coincidence. Zhou Mingrui came to investigate the situation at Mushu Hospital, and at the same time, you ended up in the underground area."

"What exactly happened?"

Hearing the word "coincidence," Franca's emotions wavered slightly.

She pulled herself together and recounted how she and Jenna had found themselves in the underground of Mushu Hospital after falling asleep, how they encountered Luo Shan, her suspicions, and the psychological traumas they later encountered.

"At the time, the corridor started collapsing." Franca stopped speaking and fell silent again.

Lumian glanced at her but didn't press for details. Instead, he mused aloud, "It really was a coincidence. If you look at the events separately, it's logical that Zhou Mingrui, prompted by my warning during the day and his own initiative, chose tonight to investigate Mushu Hospital. Similarly, it's plausible that the force lurking in Luo Shan's room or nearby, taking advantage of her psychological traumas and the dream's nature, 'brought' you into the hospital's underground. Both seem reasonable and could have happened naturally."

"But the fact that these two things happened at the same time and influenced each other makes it obvious that something was off."

"And at the same time, I received a tipoff from Lu Yong'an and followed Zhou Mingrui to sneak into Mushu Hospital."

Franca instinctively said, "But who could set up an arrangement for Zhou Mingrui?"

"They didn't need to arrange him. Arranging us was enough." Lumian, still in his Demoness of Despair state, let out a cold laugh. "When Zhou Mingrui would investigate Mushu Hospital was uncertain, but once he was spotted, they could trigger the other side."

"The force lurking in or near Luo Shan's room must have been there for a while. Why didn't it act sooner or later? Why tonight?"

Franca fell silent for a moment, as if she had finally regained her ability to think, and said, "Was Lu Yong'an arranged as well?"

"Not necessarily. It's possible they discovered my problem as a Child of God and knew something would happen tonight, so they lured me in, using your predicament to force me to become the true Child of God." After thinking for a few seconds, Lumian added, "It's also likely that Lu Yong'an isn't like Grimm, a dream persona influenced by the Great Mother. She has an external consciousness."

At this point, Lumian paused, his gaze cold as he muttered to himself, "A guardian for women and children…"

…

Inside Mushu Hospital, the power system of the building hadn't been affected by the lightning strike. Only the ground separating the upper and lower floors showed a very obvious charred area, and one of the elevators had stopped functioning.

Lu Yong'an walked down the dimly lit corridor and reached a certain room.

A wooden sign hung outside the door, with Chinese characters written on it: "Dean's Office."

She knocked and entered, speaking to the person beside the shattered glass window.

"She still didn't choose the Mother's help."

"I see," a voice responded.

…

Trier, inside a luxurious villa.

Jenna observed Franca's "sleeping state" while recounting their ordeal and Franca's decisions to Madam Judgment, Madam Magician, and Madam Justice.

After she finished, Madam Magician nodded thoughtfully and said, "It's still unclear what exactly we were supposed to gain from tonight's events, or what the true purpose was…"

Before she could finish her sentence, Madam Justice, looking at the sleeping Franca, said,

"Two of Cups has left the underground area of Mushu Hospital. I can now sense her and her surroundings."

Upon hearing this, Jenna's body swayed slightly, as if she had lost the strength to even keep herself upright due to a sudden sense of relief.

Her breathing became heavy, and after a few seconds, she asked, "It's over?"

"Not entirely," Madam Magician said, taking her gaze off the sleeping Franca.

Jenna seemed to realize something and asked, with deep concern, "Right, she held the ritual in the dream, cleverly advancing to Sequence 4 and becoming a Demoness of Despair. It's unknown how long it will take her to fully digest the Despair potion, and…"

Jenna suddenly stopped, unable to finish her sentence.

What she had been about to say was, "And our goal is to awaken Mr. Fool as soon as possible, to end this dream, but that would conflict with the conditions for Franca's survival."

In front of the Tarot Club's Major Arcana card holders, she dared not utter those words, fearing the brutal answer she might receive.

"I understand your concern, but that's not really an issue. Or, to put it another way, it's not as serious as you think."

"Huh?" Jenna was surprised, both delighted and bewildered.

Madam Justice maintained her soft smile and explained, "First, Two of Cups has already made considerable progress in digesting the Despair potion. She's completed the part about 'making herself despair.' The next step is to find opportunities to make others despair. If she can refine her acting principles further during this process, the digestion will go even faster."

Jenna blinked, confused.

"She's already digested nearly half of the Despair potion, right after advancing?"

"Yes," Madam Magician agreed, her tone carrying an understanding note. "It's quite similar to Lumian's situation at the time. Except Lumian quickly made two boon demigods despair…"

"Exactly," Madam Magician continued, nodding knowingly. "Given the nature of your circumstances and how things unfolded, it was almost inevitable that people would fall into a state of despair. Mr. Fool's psychological traumas may also contain elements that push Franca into complete despair—things that sever her hopes and desires entirely."

Jenna's eyes moved slightly, and she muttered, "Quite the coincidence…"

Madam Justice sighed with a smile. "Yes, that's one reason. But the other reason why I said that Two of Cups' dream advancement isn't too serious is because, given a little time—just a few minutes—she could return to reality without dying, though there would be other costs."

"Really?" Jenna was both surprised and confused.

Madam Justice chuckled lightly and explained, "While we're limited in what we can do, there are still many things we're capable of.

"For example, a Sun pathway Unshadowed can extract Beyonder characteristics, even from a Beyonder, layer by layer, from high to low. Though Two of Cups advanced in the dream, her reality also advanced, which is why she can't leave the dream before fully digesting her potion."

"In other words, we could have Mr. Sun extract the Demoness of Despair's Beyonder characteristic from Two of Cups in reality, and I would stabilize her mental state during the process. Once her body in reality regresses to the level of a Demoness of Affliction, there would be no more concern about her losing control upon leaving the dream."

"Of course, this solution would leave some problems behind, some quite serious ones, which is why we didn't mention it as a solution before. But compared to losing her life in the dream, these issues are manageable."

Jenna stood there, dazed.

The dream advancement affected reality, and regressing in reality would cause a similar effect in the dream?

If you can't influence the dream, then change the state of reality?

…

Outside Mushu Hospital, in the greenery.

Hidden in the shadows, Lumian observed the hospital building, the patients coming and going, and the emergency response personnel who had just arrived, but he didn't spot any targets of note.

After a long silence, Franca finally spoke. "They might have already left. Maybe they never showed up in the first place."

"Yeah, you could check some short videos. With the glass shattered and the building struck by lightning, I'm sure a lot of people recorded it. Maybe we'll find something."

"Right." Lumian took out his phone and began scrolling through local news, not missing a single video.

When he reached a video titled "Oh my god, all the glass shattered," he suddenly spotted a familiar figure in the corner of the frame, near the edge of the emergency center.

That figure had messy blonde hair, blue eyes, short eyebrows, and a clear stubble on his face. He was wearing a black shirt.

Lumian's gaze instantly froze.

It was Grisha.

Grisha, Peng Deng's co-renter!

Chapter 1005: Investigating Hidden Dangers

1005 Investigating Hidden Dangers

Based on the nature of tonight's events, Lumian had made some guesses and was prepared to see certain dream manifestations, but the person who appeared at the emergency center was completely unexpected: it was Peng Deng's co-renter, Grisha!

The fact that he and Peng Deng are sharing a place did hint at something unusual about him. We'd even observed him before but never managed to figure out who he corresponded to in the real world… Could he be the mastermind behind tonight's events? What is his real objective? Lumian's mind raced, his confusion deepening.

He had initially locked in on the individual that the Aurora Order put their faith into as the one orchestrating everything tonight, hoping to confirm a few things. But Grisha didn't fit the "I'm watching, listening, and aware" profile—he was eccentric, paranoid, and rude.

"Him?" Franca, slower to react than usual, leaned over to take a look at the screen frozen on Lumian's phone.

Her sudden shock made her more animated.

"Unexpected discoveries are still valuable," Lumian said, already calm.

"Yeah," Franca replied, not saying much more.

Lumian wasn't in a rush to leave. He pulled out a cracked makeup mirror and began focusing intently.

His actions caught Franca's attention. She tilted her head to look at him, slightly puzzled. "What are you doing?"

"I'm checking if the mirror world has recovered and whether the broken fragments have formed a new area behind the mirror," Lumian explained briefly. "Luo Shan didn't bring her phone, and I don't have any other abilities to contact her. I need to use the mirror world to send her a message that you're safe and that she can leave the underground area with Zhou Mingrui.

"There's no urgent matter now, but what if Zhou Mingrui does discover something?"

Franca was stunned for a moment. "Zhou Mingrui went underground? Won't that be a problem?"

The basement of Mushu Hospital was a mixture of subconscious psychological traumas and a symbolic abyss tied to the Mother Tree of Desire. Even if it couldn't physically endanger Zhou Mingrui, it might force him to confront past traumas, awakening strong stimuli that could bring significant changes. Those changes could be either extremely good or extremely bad, which was why Lumian's team hadn't wanted Zhou Mingrui to enter Mushu Hospital's basement at this stage.

Lumian glanced at Franca and chuckled. "Plans never keep up with changes. The most important thing just now was rescuing you. Everything else can be dealt with later or patched up. If worst comes to worst, this mission fails completely, and they send in another team. At worst, we all face the apocalypse. But I couldn't let you die here tonight."

Franca stared at Lumian for a few seconds, unable to find words.

After a moment, she looked away and sighed. "There are some things that can never be made up for…"

Hearing that sigh and those words, Lumian finally felt like Franca had come back to life from the deadened state she'd been in earlier.

He didn't ask what she meant, waiting for her to sort out her own thoughts. He gazed at the cracked mirror in his hands.

"The mirror world has recovered, and the larger mirror fragments have regained their mystical properties."

With that, Lumian whispered a few words, imbuing them with a flickering, dark shimmer before sending them into the largest piece of the cracked mirror.

…

Mushu Hospital, B2.

Luo Shan led Zhou Mingrui, creeping cautiously along the corridor, glancing around as she searched for the missing Luo Fu.

Just as she looked toward one of the rooms and Zhou Mingrui gazed in the opposite direction, she spotted a piece of shattered glass on the ground. Words flickered across it: "Luo Fu is already home."

Phew… Luo Shan quickly turned to Zhou Mingrui and said, "I got a message. Luo Fu escaped."

Zhou Mingrui studied Luo Shan for a moment but didn't ask how she received the message.

He'd noticed earlier that she seemed to have rushed out of the house, forgetting to bring her phone.

After they left Mushu Hospital's basement and Zhou Mingrui sent Luo Shan back to Dechuang Garden, she saw Lumina and Luo Fu in the entryway.

"You two just got back as well?" Luo Shan blurted out.

Holding two mirror fragments, Lumian glanced around and replied, "We had to deal with the hospital's surveillance."

Even though tonight's events weren't tied to any criminal case and were considered a "natural disaster," meaning no police investigation, Lumian thought it was better to play it safe.

Luo Shan was stunned for a couple of seconds.

Quite the seasoned criminal, aren't you…

Lumian then addressed Luo Shan, "Thanks for your help. Without you bringing Zhou Mingrui to the basement in time, both Luo Fu and I would've been swallowed by that illusory abyss."

A smile appeared on Luo Shan's face, though she tried to be modest.

"It was Zhou Mingrui who was willing to risk his life to save someone. He's always been a good person."

"It's impressive that you convinced him so quickly," Lumian said, not sparing any praise.

"Not really," Luo Shan said, feeling a little uncomfortable as she looked away.

She walked briskly into the elevator that had just arrived on the first floor.

After stepping in, Lumian turned to Luo Shan and said, "We'd like to inspect your apartment, to identify any hidden threats."

"Sure, okay!" Luo Shan remembered how she had inexplicably ended up in the hospital's basement.

Without uncovering the lurking threat in her room or nearby, she wouldn't be able to sleep soundly.

When they arrived at Room 1502, Lumian naturally began inspecting every corner, while Franca, finally recovering her energy, silently touched various objects.

After a few seconds, Lumian stood in front of the living room's glass window and spoke to Luo Shan, who was standing near the coffee table.

"I'll perform a Magic Mirror Divination and see if I can get any answers or hints."

Luo Shan nodded repeatedly.

Lumian reached out toward the transparent glass, which had turned into a mirror under the night sky, and began chanting the appropriate incantation.

He was only able to perform Magic Mirror Divination that relied on his own spirituality.

After posing his question, the surface of the glass rippled with a dark shimmer.

The shimmer settled, revealing a scene of a parrot with colorful feathers in a painting.

"That?" Luo Shan quickly turned her head to look at the wall behind her.

Did my own drawing betray me?

Almost simultaneously, the colorful parrot flew out of the painting, attempting to escape from Room 1502.

But the doors and windows were locked, and it repeatedly hit the walls.

"Why?" Luo Shan shouted.

The parrot responded in a crisp, human voice. "I'm not your puppet. I serve…"

Before it could finish speaking, its body suddenly disintegrated. Feathers fell one by one, followed by flesh that dripped like melting paint.

In just two or three seconds, the colorful parrot had turned into countless droplets of paint, splattering onto the cream-colored tiles.

"It was controlled by someone else," Lumian concluded.

"How is that possible?" Luo Shan was shocked and confused.

This was something I painted stroke by stroke. How could it be controlled by someone else?

If it was the other version of me reviving within me and secretly influencing my creation, I could accept that. But an outsider? How?

Lumian glanced at Luo Shan.

"Never trust anything completely. That applies to others, things you've created, and even yourself."

"I understand…" Luo Shan recalled her previous experiences, thinking of that other version of herself.

Lumian thought for a moment and suggested, "You should stay at our place tonight, just in case there's another incident."

He planned to take pictures of every item and corner of Luo Shan's apartment tonight, then send them to Anderson to check for any remaining issues.

"Okay," Luo Shan quickly agreed.

Regardless of the parrot's situation, she had already planned to pack her things and find a decent, reasonably priced hotel to stay in for a few nights.

After settling Luo Shan in Room 2303 with Jenna, Lumian took Franca with him to Room 1502 to photograph every part of the apartment, making sure to leave nothing out.

Once he finished, he immediately sent the photos to "A name that leaves a deep impression on you," ending with the question: "Can you spot any potential problems in these photos?"

After a few minutes, Anderson Hood replied: "Are you inviting me to play 'Spot the Difference'?"

"Something like that," Lumian responded casually.

He waited patiently until four or five minutes later, receiving another message from Anderson.

"If it were me, I'd show someone photos with absolutely no problems and ask them to find something wrong."

Does that mean… there's nothing wrong? Lumian thought to himself.

Anderson Hood sent another message. "That blank spot on the painting is an eyesore. Add some paint to it."

Lumian nodded thoughtfully before asking: "Can you control things painted by others?"

"There are many ways to control painted objects. One is to become a symbol within the painting's world. Another is to give them a more complete life. A third is to imbue them with humanity. A fourth is to reconfigure the information they're composed of, given their essence as information. And lastly, there's the fact that they possess spirituality—you could turn them into your marionette…" Anderson uncharacteristically provided a lengthy explanation, finishing with: "After hearing all that, don't you feel like every possibility you imagined can't be ruled out?"

"You're giving me so much detail just so I'll say 'yes,' aren't you?" Lumian replied without emotion.

In his opinion, identifying the hidden danger in the room wasn't the most important thing. They had already confirmed that Luo Shan was being watched by some force or enemy. If they didn't root out the other side and eliminate them, today's hidden danger would be dealt with, but tomorrow a new one would appear.

Too bad that parrot wasn't put under control and couldn't finish what it was saying.

Seeing that Anderson Hood hadn't responded again, Lumian stood up and looked at Franca.

Franca was standing by the window in Luo Shan's apartment, silently gazing out.

Lumian walked over and stood beside her, looking out in the same direction.

He saw the food stalls on the street far below, people eating and drinking late into the night, and the high-rise apartments in the neighborhood, with lights still on in many rooms, dotting the night sky.

Lumian gazed quietly for a while before turning to look at Franca.

Franca was focused, her gaze seemingly reluctant to shift for even a second.

After a while, she sighed softly. "The night is truly beautiful…"

Chapter 1006: Speaking From Experience

Lumian looked at Franca, her eyes once again a lake-blue hue after her advancement, reflecting the bright or slightly yellow dots of light.

"Yes," he echoed with a sigh.

Franca fell silent again.

After a long while, she murmured as if in a dream, "Did you know? I can never go back…"

"What happened?" Lumian asked gently, following her lead.

Franca began recounting how she and Jenna had woken up in the basement of Mushu Hospital. It was as if she needed to build up the courage to tell the rest by retelling earlier events, prolonging the time to mentally prepare herself.

Lumian didn't rush her. He listened quietly, occasionally asking for details.

When Franca reached the part where she chose to force her advancement using the peculiarities of the dreamscape, to draw the Primordial Demoness's attention and open an escape route, Lumian raised an eyebrow.

Though he had already deduced Franca's advancement to Demoness of Despair through the Law of Beyonder Characteristics Convergence and his spiritual intuition as a Demoness, and had suspected from her earlier narrative that it was the best possible option under those circumstances, he still couldn't help but feel there was some design to it all: the conditions for her advancement to Demoness of Despair had come together perfectly at that moment!

Of course, if he had been present, he would've simply burned a corpse-oil candle and connected with the terrifying will in that peculiar city, forcibly destroying all obstacles.

After describing how she fell into the illusory abyss with the collapse of the mirror world and the final part of the corridor, Franca paused for a few seconds before continuing in a calm, straightforward tone about how she slowed her descent, how she felt her mind and spirit being pulled toward the abyss, and how she chose the gray-white fog, sinking into it.

Her body began to tremble, but she pushed through, recounting the blurred door of light, the transparent "cocoons," the rapidly spinning illusory planet, the slightly solemn voice, and the version of herself within the "cocoon," along with the reasonable speculations that followed.

Lumian had long suspected that "transmigration" wasn't as simple as Franca and the others from the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society believed. He suspected there was a terrifying truth they couldn't accept. That was why, during their time in the dream city, he and Jenna had tacitly been kinder to Franca, expressing their care for her more clearly and directly. But he hadn't expected the truth to be this.

So it wasn't spatial transmigration—it was temporal transmigration… Traveling back and forth through space is possible, but can the flow of time be reversed? No, if that were possible, reviving Aurore wouldn't be so difficult… Lumian's emotions suddenly turned somber.

He felt as if he had lost several incredibly important people and objects he deeply missed forever. The sorrow, melancholy, regret, and pain were like sharp chisels engraving an epitaph on his soul.

At that moment, he understood that these were Aurore's feelings. Her soul fragment had resonated with Franca's story and intense emotions.

Home—forever out of reach.

"That's basically it. I suspect the Western Continent is where the Underworld Daoist and the Celestial Master reside. It's the world thousands, maybe tens of thousands, of years in the future from my homeland…" Franca's body was still trembling slightly.

Lumian closed his eyes for a moment, then deliberately chuckled and said, "I guess I'm pretty lucky. At least I still have hope of reviving Aurore, but you all don't even have that anymore."

Franca's mouth opened slightly, and she was momentarily stunned.

Infuriated, she burst into laughter. "Dammit! Do you Hunters ever say anything nice? How can a human mouth spew something so venomous!"

"I thought you'd send me flying with a kick," Lumian said, showing a deliberately punchable expression.

Franca suddenly understood his true intention and snorted. "I had the impulse. You'd make a great punching bag right now."

She paused, her gaze returning to the window. Looking out at the warm, tranquil night, she said,

"When you said earlier that, in the worst-case scenario, the mission would fail, they'd send in another team, or we'd all face the apocalypse together, but you couldn't let me die in Mushu Hospital's basement… I didn't completely agree with your thinking, but… I did feel like maybe my life had some meaning after all…"

"I said that on purpose, to make you feel needed and valued, to help pull you out of that dead, hopeless state." Lumian chuckled. "I didn't know exactly what you'd gone through, but I could tell how you were feeling."

Franca snapped her head toward Lumian and scoffed, "When dealing with a Hunter, you judge by his actions, not words. I know you really did send Luo Shan and Jenna to get Zhou Mingrui down to the basement."

Before Lumian could respond, Franca, now more curious than before, asked, "How did you get into that psychological trauma?"

That was near the bottom of the illusory abyss!

Smiling, Lumian replied, "When I reached B2, I ran into Lu Yong'an. She must be an external consciousness brought in by some method, unlike Grimm, who had been corrupted and influenced into becoming a dream manifestation."

"So when she saw me in Crimson Moon Hospital, she most likely realized I was a fake Child of God but still went along with my actions. Heh, maybe to the Great Mother, whether I'm the real Child of God or a fake, as long as I bear that title, I'll eventually become real, and this time was her chance."

"Lu Yong'an told me at the time that to save someone from the illusory abyss, I could only rely on the Mother's help."

"You didn't actually pray, did you?" Franca was suddenly filled with concern and worry, forgetting her earlier despair and emotional numbness.

Her gaze instinctively drifted to Lumian's abdomen.

"Of course not." Lumian had deliberately started with Lumian's story to stir Franca's emotions, preventing her from fully sinking into sadness.

As someone who had learned from long bouts of depression, he knew exactly what to say and do in such moments.

More importantly, he was also a Demoness of Despair, having gone through the experience of perfectly matching the acting method right after his advancement, digesting the part of the potion that made him "feel despair." He had also learned from the world's greatest Psychiatrist's report on how to stabilize his mental state and avoid losing control.

That was why he was comfortable telling Franca his true thoughts and feelings before he saved her. He intended to be her most solid anchor. After all, how many Hunters would openly reveal their innermost thoughts?

Franca let out an uncontrollable breath of relief. "Then how did you destroy the illusory abyss and open the path?"

Lumian chuckled. "Corpse wax candle."

As he spoke, he took out the bottle of semi-solid yellow-red wax and sighed.

"The Flame of Destruction burns too fiercely. This candle can only be used once more."

Franca, who had heard Lumian's story of the previous ritual with the corpse wax candle and knew that the target of the ritual was likely the terrifying will at the top of the Hunter and Witch pathways, widened her eyes in shock.

"You're a bit extreme…"

She didn't finish her thought, reminded that such extremity was for her sake.

Lumian recounted the sensations during the secret deed ritual, the terrifying will's partial descent, and the mutation of the Blood Emperor's remnant aura. He ended by saying,

"I couldn't enter the gray fog initially, but an exaggerated bolt of lightning just happened to strike it."

"That was…" Franca thought for a moment and said, "Madam Justice's incantation, delivered through some method. It sounded like a name, to be spoken in ancient Hermes."

She didn't dare speak the incantation, afraid that even without using Beyonder language, it might still call down lightning in the dream, though less terrifyingly.

"A name that could summon such lightning in Mr. Fool's dream?" Lumian pondered. "It must involve a true god or some great existence… Or it could be related to Mr. Fool's perception."

"Yes." Franca was more concerned with something else. "How do you feel now?"

Lumian raised his right hand, palm up, revealing a patch of pale skin and the dark, old red marks beneath it.

"The mutated Blood Emperor's aura and the Underworld Daoist's seal have fused slightly… I can't believe they can fuse…

"So far, there's been no external manifestation, no other changes…"

After examining his own state, Lumian added, "Also, I feel like there's something more in me, but I can't detect it. It hasn't affected me… It's more like a side effect of the secret deed ritual, a lingering hallucination…"

"In the next couple of days, find a chance to leave the dream and have Madam Magician check it out," Franca reminded Lumian not to overlook this issue and to confirm it as soon as possible.

Lumian nodded and said, "In the meantime, go to the company and quit your job. You kept the position before to bait Zaratulstra out with the option to avoid danger by leaving the dream at critical moments. But now, you can't leave for the time being."

Only then did Franca remember her current state—before she fully digested the Despair potion, if she left the dream and returned to reality, she would lose control on the spot and turn into a monster.

"Right." She didn't argue, realizing she was still in deep trouble.

Then, she turned to leave the window.

"Not going to enjoy the night view anymore?" Lumian asked casually.

Franca pursed her lips and responded, "The more I look, the more I miss it, the harder it is to let go…"

She paused, then half-turned her body, casting her gaze out at the night once again.

After staring for a few seconds, she spoke, her voice soft and distant. "If I were Mr. Fool, I might wish to sleep forever, dreaming of this beautiful night, never waking…"

Chapter 1007: Important Information

Hearing Franca's words, Lumian felt a sense of resonance.

"If there hadn't been hidden dangers in that dream of Cordu Village, I wouldn't have wanted to wake up either…"

As he sighed, he suddenly paused, then said in a low voice, "No, I would force myself to wake up."

If he didn't wake up, he couldn't try to resurrect Aurore!

Franca silently withdrew her gaze and walked over to the long sofa in Luo Shan's home. She sat down, leaning back against the sofa as if she lacked the strength to support her body.

Lumian glanced over and followed, sitting down right next to Franca.

Franca turned her head to look at him but said nothing.

After about ten seconds, she stared at the turned-off TV across from her and murmured as if to herself,

"Back home, my favorite thing to do was to pick any channel and be on my phone while listening to the sound. My mom would scold me every time…"

Lumian didn't respond, just listening quietly.

Franca's expression gradually softened.

"My mom used to run a small restaurant, which later became a larger establishment. She was quick-tempered and efficient, and couldn't stand to see me being lazy. But you know, she'd just say a few words—in one ear and out the other, it didn't affect me at all. Later on, when business wasn't so good for a few years, she simply gave it up. Every day she'd play cards with her siblings and friends, eat here and drink there, and occasionally organize a trip. She couldn't have been more carefree or happy.

"My dad, my brother and I were also quite happy. We didn't have to be scolded or nagged. As my dad put it, we'd see each other once a day, take a walk together, chat about family matters before bed, and their marriage even improved.

"My dad was a mid-level manager at a big company. He'd been into electronics since early on, starting with radios and such, then tinkering with computers and getting into games. When I was little, I was always confused about why dad was always sitting in front of the computer. He said it was work, but he was always clicking on strange images. When I got a bit older, I fell in love with gaming too. I guess that's what they call leading by example.

"At first, my parents wanted another daughter, a little sister for me. They'd prepared for the fine and set up a room. Who knew they'd end up with another son? They couldn't bring themselves to abort, so they had him. Aren't second children supposed to be good at reading the room, well-behaved, with high EQ because they have an older sibling keeping them in check? Why did that kid do everything backwards, looking down on everyone, thinking he was so cool and trendy, always causing trouble when he went out.

"When he was in elementary school, he got into a fight and got beaten up. He came crying to me, his big brother, for help. In the end, the other kid had cousins, and I ended up getting beaten up too.

"For a while after that, I was really into urban fantasy novels and modern wuxia stories. I fantasized about having martial arts skills or superpowers myself.

"I did alright in the college entrance exams and got into medical school. I got along well with my roommates. Everyone said I had a good personality, wasn't petty, was cheerful and optimistic, and generous with money.

"I guess I looked okay. I even had girls chase after me. But at the time I was busy playing games and going to comic conventions, so I didn't have the energy for dating. Of course, it was also because their looks and personalities weren't my type."

After rambling on like this, Franca paused and said, "Apart from worrying about having to do hard labor in the future, I had no regrets, nothing I wanted to change…"

Lumian turned his head to look at Franca and saw that as she leaned against the back of the sofa, her eyes were vacant, unfocused, with glistening tears silently sliding down her face.

Lumian didn't try to comfort Franca with words. He simply extended his left arm and quietly put it around her left shoulder, letting her lean against him.

Franca instinctively struggled for a moment, but quickly chose to give in.

Leaning against Lumian, she continued talking to herself, "I had originally planned to practice driving my mom's car during the holidays, find a chance to meet up with some online friends in Shanghai, and have fun for a week…

"I'd planned which games to buy recently, planned to visit my grandparents, planned to play games with my dad for two hours every day when I had time, to show him what real skill looks like…

"I'd even planned how to educate that little brat, planned to go to my mom's mahjong place for a few days to act like a filial son, serve tea and water, and accept tips…"

As she spoke, Franca's voice gradually lowered until it disappeared.

Lumian waited a few minutes before lowering his head to see that Franca had closed her eyes and fallen into a deep sleep, leaning against him from his left shoulder to his left chest. Her legs had slid off the sofa at some point.

Lumian didn't move. He stared at the dark LCD TV screen, his thoughts gradually wandering.

After an unknown amount of time, Franca seemed to have a nightmare. Her eyes flew open and she suddenly straightened her back.

She looked left and right, finally coming to her senses and remembering what had happened last night.

Phew… She exhaled slowly and asked Lumian, "What time is it?"

"A little after 4 am, not quite 5 yet," Lumian calmly replied.

Franca made a sound of acknowledgment, then suddenly remembered something.

"Will Jenna and Luo Shan be okay alone in Room 2303?"

The current Jenna was purely a dream manifestation, while Luo Shan was being watched by unknown forces!

"I've been monitoring Room 2303 using mirrors," Lumian said calmly.

Only then did Franca relax.

She wriggled her shoulders, shaking off Lumian's arm, and sat up straight.

"Damn, I actually cried earlier, and you saw it… A real man shouldn't shed tears so easily!"

"Only because the saddest part hasn't come yet," Lumian replied.

Hearing this, both Franca and he fell silent.

"That's such a hurtful thing to say…" After a few seconds, Franca grumbled, "I can't believe you could respond so smoothly."

"After learning the truth about transmigration and resonating with your emotions, Aurore's soul fragment seems to have become a bit more active…" Lumian said with a hint of joy.

Franca bit her lip, unable to speak.

She then began rubbing her cheeks. "I can't continue in that state. We need to get down to business!"

"What business?" Lumian asked.

Franca thought for a few seconds and said, "According to what you said before, tonight's events seem to have been arranged, presumably pushed by Peng Deng's roommate Grisha behind the scenes.

"If this is true, what was their goal? It couldn't have been just to force me to advance in the dream and quickly find a way to digest the Despair potion, could it?

"Is it simply good people doing good deeds?"

Lumian understood that Franca was trying to distract herself from her inner sorrow and despair by focusing on important matters, so he nodded cooperatively:

"From Luo Shan's feedback, Zhou Mingrui wasn't additionally affected by this incident either. He only confirmed that he has some special qualities and that there are major issues with the underground area of Mushu Hospital.

"The illusory abyss in the underground area of Mushu Hospital also hid itself in time, avoiding an encounter with Zhou Mingrui, and remained almost intact.

"Was the real purpose to have me use the corpse wax candle and complete a secret deed at the bottom of Mushu Hospital?

"And for us to find important intelligence through those psychological traumas in the underground area of Mushu Hospital?"

Franca nodded slowly.

"Yes, I can now almost confirm one thing:

"Mr. Fool is also a transmigrator, like me and Emperor Roselle."

As she spoke, Franca suddenly gave a self-mocking laugh.

"No, not a transmigrator, an ancient person."

"You mean those three empty 'cocoons' correspond to the three previous transmigrators?" Lumian understood what Franca was saying.

"Yes, Ancient Sun God, Emperor Roselle, and Mr. Fool," Franca elaborated. "Mr. Fool should have also progressed step by step from a mortal body to become a true god and then a great existence. Klein Moretti, Sherlock Moriarty, Gehrman Sparrow—these are probably not his incarnations, but different identities at different stages of his growth. These names all come from the entertainment works of our world, no, the ancient world. Utopia too.

"Well, the identity of Gehrman Sparrow became the Angel of Redemption, with people believing in and worshiping him, perhaps making him quite different from the other identities."

Lumian mused aloud, "So Zhou Mingrui is Mr. Fool's real name, his identity before transmigration?"

"It should be so," Franca shared her speculation. "That's why Zhou Mingrui is the core of the dream, the subconscious self-image of Mr. Fool. All important dream images are distributed around him, while identities like Sherlock Moriarty are scattered throughout the dream city, lacking special significance.

"The only one among them that's different is Gehrman Sparrow, who is widely believed in. The dream city originally didn't have such a manifestation, not even a story. It was entirely created out of thin air by Madam Magician, Madam Justice, and the others, becoming a classic character."

"This also indicates that The World Gehrman Sparrow might indeed have special symbolism or significance."

Lumian pondered for a moment and said, "The identity of Klein Moretti is also very special. It doesn't exist in the dream city either."

Franca tried to put herself in that position and said slowly, "The personal relationships corresponding to Klein Moretti do exist in the dream city, but they point to Zhou Mingrui.

"Klein Moretti was Mr. Fool's first identity after transmigration, gaining his recognition. Did their self-perceptions merge?

"So, Zhou Mingrui is also Klein Moretti, and Klein Moretti is equally Zhou Mingrui, indistinguishable from each other."

"That explanation does make sense," Lumian agreed with Franca's guess.

At this moment, Franca suddenly furrowed her brow.

"Bring out that whiteboard, the one with photos of important figures in the dream city and observation results."

Without asking why, Lumian took out the whiteboard made of frost and placed it opposite the coffee table.

Franca stared at the photos, sketches, introductions, and observation results on the whiteboard, her eyes constantly moving left and right.

After a while, she spoke in a grave tone, "If Mr. Fool is indeed a transmigrator, these dream manifestations hide a big problem."

Without waiting for Lumian to respond, Franca explained, "Except for Peng Deng and Zhang Yujia, the childhood friend who only sent back postcards, all the important dream manifestations here have nothing to do with 'Zhou Mingrui.'

"They all come from Klein Moretti, from Sherlock Moriarty, from Gehrman Sparrow and Mr. Fool's other identities, from the current world. Not a single one originates from before the transmigration, not one is an ancient person!

"Why is that?"

Chapter 1008: Dawn

Lumian easily understood Franca's meaning: the dream city itself was constructed based on Zhou Mingrui's memories from before his transmigration, but none of the relatively important dream manifestations close to Zhou Mingrui came from before the transmigration. They all originated from Zhou Mingrui's experiences after transmigrating, except for Peng Deng and Zhang Yujia.

This was clearly problematic!

"We previously thought Mr. Fool was a resurrected great existence not belonging to this era. Well… he truly doesn't belong to this era. Mr. Fool was really honest…" Franca suddenly understood the true meaning of a certain phrase in Mr. Fool's honorific name.

After adjusting her mindset, she continued, "From our previous understanding, it was very reasonable that there are no dream manifestations related to the identity of Zhou Mingrui. As a former great existence, he should have been involved with great existences and fallen ancient gods. These were all restricted and couldn't truly get close to Zhou Mingrui. Weren't we wondering before who Peng Deng really was, and who he corresponded to in reality? We never considered that he might actually be Zhou Mingrui's childhood friend.

"But if Zhou Mingrui is a transmigrator like me, and gradually became a great existence, that's truly remarkable. To transcend to becoming a deity with a mortal body and dominate the spirit world…"

At this point, Franca's emotional wound was once again torn open, with splinters piercing into it.

She thought about how even someone like Mr. Fool was shocked, saddened, pained and despairing when he learned the truth about transmigration. Even becoming a great existence couldn't allow him to return home. And after he fell asleep, these things even formed strong psychological traumas.

If even Mr. Fool was like this, what about her? What about them?

Lumian could guess what Franca was thinking now, why she paused, because he had similar associations and the same emotions were stirring deep in his heart.

After a moment of silence, Franca collected herself and continued, "If Zhou Mingrui is a transmigrator and was an ordinary person before, then where are his parents, relatives, classmates, friends, and close online friends?"

Lumian looked at the ice board covered with photos, sketches and notes, and said thoughtfully,

"In the dream, Zhou Mingrui has parents, but they're not in Yangdu. They live in a hometown that only exists in descriptions. Zhou Mingrui hardly contacts them, only conveying his greetings through Benson Zhou. Moreover, the setup of the dream parents clearly comes from Klein Moretti's parents.

"Similarly, the real-world prototypes for brother Benson Zhou and sister Zhou Sasa are Klein Moretti's brother Benson Moretti and sister Melissa Moretti.

"Among other relatives, friends, classmates, and online friends, perhaps only Peng Deng and Zhang Yujia are truly Zhou Mingrui's childhood friends."

Zhang Yujia was a mutual middle school and high school classmate of Zhou Mingrui and Peng Deng, and currently also worked in Yangdu.

She came from a well-off family and often traveled. She was currently on a so-called European trip. In the memories of the Major Arcana card holders, Zhang Yujia had never truly appeared. If not for her often sending postcards to Zhou Mingrui and Peng Deng, and occasionally chatting online, she could have been treated as a background figure like Zhou Mingrui's parents.

Franca concurred succinctly, "Now there are two issues:

"First, why have Zhou Mingrui's true relationships disappeared? Did Mr. Fool deliberately hide them himself, or did the Celestial Worthy tamper with them? If it's the former, why would Mr. Fool want to hide them? Is this a key point? If it's the latter, does this represent that the Celestial Worthy fears something?

"Second, given that other figures related to Zhou Mingrui haven't appeared in the dream city, the existence of Peng Deng and Zhang Yujia is even more suspicious. Adding to that, we previously saw Peng Deng's roommate Grisha appear at the emergency center. I think we need to shift our focus towards Peng Deng for now."

Lumian put himself in Mr. Fool's position and thought for a while.

"If I were Mr. Fool, and this dream city was the battlefield of my consciousness against the Celestial Worthy, my subconscious wouldn't want my real parents, relatives, classmates, and friends to be involved, even if they were just false dream manifestations, just my memories."

"Given the logic that Zhou Mingrui and Klein Moretti's cognitions have merged, the dream manifestations corresponding to Benson and Melissa shouldn't appear either," Franca joined the brainstorming session.

Lumian smiled. "Who says they were woven by Mr. Fool's subconscious?

"What if the Celestial Worthy deliberately created them?"

"The Celestial Worthy knows Mr. Fool's experiences after transmigration, but has no way to investigate his relationships before transmigration?" Franca had a new guess based on Lumian's rhetorical question. "So, the dream manifestations corresponding to Benson, Melissa, and Danitz had to appear, but some were arranged outside the dream city, and some only have a very shallow relationship with Zhou Mingrui. Is this a subconscious protection of these dream manifestations, an external result of Mr. Fool's consciousness fighting against the Celestial Worthy?"

Lumian nodded. "If the Celestial Worthy isn't really clear about Mr. Fool's relationships before transmigration, doesn't that suggest He hasn't eroded and corrupted Mr. Fool's core consciousness yet?"

"Mm." Franca suddenly had a flash of insight. "I understand now why Siatas became Zhou Mingrui's roommate."

She stood up, walked to an area near the window, and paced back and forth a few steps.

"We previously suspected that the elves were former transmigrators. Now it seems they're more like descendants of the Western Continent bloodline who survived on the Northern and Southern Continents and the Five Seas.

"For Mr. Fool, these are the descendants of his fellow countrymen, so the relationship is very close, so he places them very near him.

"Similarly, the Intis Group where Zhou Mingrui works was founded by the transmigrator, Emperor Roselle, and the boss of the neighboring company is the heir of another transmigrator, the Ancient Sun God. These dream manifestations are all very close to Zhou Mingrui."

The more Franca spoke, the more she believed her interpretation of these symbols was correct.

She shifted her thoughts. "We've cross-checked within our Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society. The time we transmigrated to the current world was 1352, seven years ago. And according to the information provided by the Major Arcana card holders, Mr. Fool also fell asleep in 1352.

"Before Mr. Fool entered his slumber and confronted the Celestial Worthy, did he release all of us from the 'cocoons'?"

"It should be so." Lumian felt Franca's reasoning was sound.

He also stood up and said thoughtfully, "We'll leave the matter of contacting Peng Deng to Anthony. He can make more aggressive probes now.

"If we can figure out Peng Deng's true identity and the meaning of his existence, perhaps we can find a way to weaken the Celestial Worthy and awaken Mr. Fool."

At this point, Lumian paused, his eyes narrowing slightly.

"If there are no major errors in what we just discussed, then Zhou Sasa coming to Yangdu for university probably has strong symbolic meaning, and not a good one for Mr. Fool."

Logically, Zhou Sasa should be outside the dream city, not involved in this "battlefield".

Franca was suddenly alarmed. "When is Zhou Sasa arriving?"

"Wednesday," Lumian answered in a low voice. "It's already Monday now."

Franca hissed and said, "Before Zhou Sasa arrives in Yangdu, there must be substantial progress on both Peng Deng's side and An Xiaotian's side!"

Lumian nodded and said, "Yeah."

The two discussed this matter for a long time.

"You should actively leave the dream and return to reality in the morning to inquire about more detailed intelligence from the Ancient Sun God and that individual from the Aurora Order. Since Grisha appeared at the arranged scene, and Anthony was scared by hallucinations and actively left the dream after contacting Peng Deng, I suspect Peng Deng and his roommate are related to the Ancient Sun God. We lack sufficient intelligence to accurately judge this point. Also, don't forget to have Madam Magician check your physical condition," Franca finally instructed Lumian.

With a grin, Lumian replied, "I'm only worried that the Major Arcana card holders don't know enough, or that some intelligence is currently inaccessible to us.

"Afterwards, you should move to the background and switch positions with Anthony. Let him do the probing, and you shouldn't appear."

"Alright," Franca answered, finally leaving the state of focused discussion.

She noticed that the window area had brightened at some point. Outside the glass, the morning sunlight fell, carrying a hint of golden yellow, clarifying the entire sky and tinting the green leaves of the trees.

Birds chirped as they flew by, and occasional human voices could be heard, relaxed and soothing.

Morning had arrived.

The sun had risen.

Daylight had come.

Franca stared at this morning scene, almost silently murmuring to herself, "It's beautiful."

Sunlight penetrated through the glass, shining on her and Lumian, as if a great existence was gently comforting their hearts.

…

After Lumian returned to Xinhong District to tell Anthony about probing Peng Deng, Franca took the elevator to the 23rd floor and entered the apartment she and Jenna were renting.

As soon as she opened the door, she saw that Jenna was already awake and busy getting herself ready.

"So early?" Franca blurted out.

"It's not early. I need to carefully do my makeup. I have to walk around the company today. Who knows, I might be spotted by some film crew," Dreamscape Jenna said without turning her head.

Oh right, it's Monday, Jenna has to go to the Hall Film Company… But she's a dream manifestation now, will there be any slip-ups? Franca couldn't help but worry a little.

At this moment, Dreamscape Jenna went into the bathroom, and Luo Shan walked out of the bedroom, still sleepy-eyed.

Seeing Luo Fu, she greeted, "Nothing happened, right?"

She thought Luo Fu and Lumina stayed overnight at her place to personally confirm if there were any hidden dangers.

"Everything's normal, for now," Franca said, half reassuring and half stating facts.

She then told Luo Shan, "I'm going to resign."

"Huh?" Luo Shan was stunned.

Franca showed a gentle smile.

"I have to move to the background now, because if I get kicked out of the dream now, I'll truly die."

Luo Shan suddenly remembered the conversation between Luo Fu and Jian Na she had overheard last night. Some words she couldn't understand at the time now finally made sense.

She suddenly felt that she was no longer alone, and returned the smile.

"It's about the same for me."

Without the dreamscape, I would disappear too.

Chapter 1009: Boon

At Xinhong District, in the rented apartment.

After telling Anthony the results of his discussion with Franca, and instructing him to hand Ludwig over to Franca before probing Peng Deng, Lumian lay down on the bed.

He closed his eyes, entered a Cogitative state, and outlined his own phantom image in his mind.

Then, he imagined himself leaping from an extremely high place, rapidly falling in free fall.

In this state, he heard the whistling of wind in his ears.

But he didn't immediately leave the dream. He vaguely heard humans conversing in the wind, with words coming from different directions.

At this moment, Lumian seemed to return to Cordu Village, back to a warm summer afternoon. At that time, he was lying drowsily atop a haystack, with old women gathered nearby, picking lice off each other while gossiping about various rumors in the village. Children occasionally ran back and forth around them, farmers returned to the village early from their work, and members of the padre's family passed by grumbling…

Lumian opened his eyes, his nose still seeming to smell the scent of grass mixed with sheep dung.

He let out a breath, then rolled out of bed, walked out of the room, and came downstairs to the luxurious villa.

Madam Justice, Madam Magician, and Madam Judgment were all in the living room.

"Important intelligence?" Madam Justice understood that Lumian wouldn't actively exit the dream unless it was something very crucial.

And she hadn't noticed that the current real dream had a strong rejection towards Lumian, which meant Lumian wasn't kicked out of the dream.

"Yes." Lumian sat down on a single sofa, "It starts with a psychological trauma Franca saw in the underground area of Mushu Hospital."

Madam Justice looked at Lumian for a few seconds. "First, tell us how you rescued Two of Cups. Seven of Cups was kicked out of the dream too early and doesn't know much."

Smiling, Lumian replied, "I used the corpse wax candle."

"You completed a secret deed ritual and received feedback?" Madam Magician had already roughly guessed what had happened from the changes in Lumian's real body state and the stress response that appeared in Fourth Epoch Trier. Now she was just confirming.

Lumian verbally described what he saw, heard, and felt during the covenant ritual, and finally said, "The remnant aura of the Blood Emperor underwent a rather obvious change, and it fused a bit with the Underworld Daoist's seal. It seems like I've gained something extra, but I can't detect it."

As he spoke, he displayed the old blood spots hidden under the pale skin of his palm.

Madam Magician nodded slightly, countless dazzling starbursts lighting up and slowly rotating in the depths of her eyes.

After twenty or thirty seconds, she said with a hint of amusement, "I don't know whether to say you're lucky or unlucky.

"That terrifying will not only gazed upon you but also bestowed power upon you.

"But due to the lack of necessary rituals and the existence of the Underworld Daoist's seal, that power fused with the remnant aura of the Blood Emperor and is under seal, unable to be utilized. Otherwise, you'd already be a gifted War Bishop or something else by now.

"Although this power is sealed, it has still brought some effects to you. For example, the soul fragments of the Cordu villagers under my seal have undergone some mutations, preparing to become your 'soldiers'."

"No wonder I vaguely heard everyone's 'conversations' when I was leaving the dream just now…" Lumian suddenly realized.

So what he had gained was a new power.

Madam Magician continued, "Whether there are any hidden dangers in that power itself, I can't tell at the moment, but after it fused with the remnant aura of the Blood Emperor, there are certainly hidden dangers, and it has become more active."

At this point, Madam Magician paused. "Combined with the Omebella bloodline in your body, if not for the Underworld Daoist's seal, I'd suspect you might become pregnant in response, unable to abort, giving birth to a deeply corrupted, mutated version of Alista Tudor."

"Wouldn't that make the Blood Emperor have to call me daddy?" Lumian, in his Demoness of Despair state, laughed.

"It would be mommy," Madam Magician corrected.

Lumian didn't continue this topic, instead turning to talk about how he entered the vortex, how he took advantage of the lightning strike to open a channel and rescue Franca.

"It seems our efforts were not in vain." Madam Justice showed a gratified smile.

"Which deity does that incantation involve?" Lumian asked.

Madam Justice made an "mm" sound and said, "The Lord of Storms, that's His true name. Don't casually recite it. Lightning damage is area-of-effect and indiscriminate. Moreover, Mr. Fool's avatars have triggered lightning strikes with this before. The subconscious perception is that the lightning brought by this incantation is very terrifying and highly destructive."

Using a deity's true name as an incantation? How is Mr. Fool's incarnation even more like a Provoker than me? Lumian nodded slightly.

He was silent for two seconds before saying, "At that time, I was prepared for the possibility that I might collapse out of control due to the secret deed ritual, or even die. I had only one thought, which was to open the abyssal channel as quickly as possible, or destroy that illusory abyss.

"This might not have been enough, so I asked Jenna and Luo Shan to invite Zhou Mingrui, who was at Mushu Hospital's emergency center, to come down to the underground area and take a look. I didn't know if this would bring good results or bad changes, or how high the probability of fixing it would be if problems arose, but none of that was the most important thing at the moment."

As he spoke, Lumian in his Demoness of Despair state slightly raised his chin.

Madam Justice, Madam Magician, and Madam Judgment all fell silent.

Lumian displayed a bright smile and continued, "If that would truly bring destructive results, and you monitored it, you could kill my body in the real world in advance to prevent all this.

"It would be good to die. If I died, I wouldn't know anything, wouldn't have to care about anything."

After exchanging glances for a few seconds, Madam Justice, Madam Magician, and Madam Judgment sighed and showed warm smiles that calmed one's emotions.

"I don't agree with this style of yours, but I'm glad to see you have your own thoughts and choices."

Madam Magician also sighed and said, "If you encounter similar situations in the future, you can try reciting my honorific name. The power sealing those soul fragments in you comes from me. I can use them as a medium and, through the connection created by the honorific name, exert some influence, but success is not guaranteed.

"Also, if you're willing to pay the price of being permanently kicked out and unable to re-enter the dream city to escape a predicament, I can give you better incantations."

Lumian's straightened back relaxed a bit, and his chin was no longer slightly raised.

Curious, he inquired, "What incantation?"

"Chief Yagates's honorific name," Madam Magician smiled, "Reciting this outside the dream would have no effect, and might even unknowingly turn the reciter into a marionette of the Celestial Worthy. But reciting it in the dream can attract attention and open any channel. However, similarly, Chief Yagates is essentially a manifestation created by the fusion of Mr. Door's remnant spirit and the dream's subconscious, with special symbolism. His actions might be influenced by the Celestial Worthy, but relatively speaking, compared to reciting Mr. Fool's honorific name, this receives less interference."

"So it can be done like this…" Lumian said thoughtfully, "Were we perhaps following the surface rules of the dream city too strictly before? Always trying to play the role of citizens with Beyonder powers… Remember, you're just acting; it's essentially a dream…"

Madam Magician smiled and said, "We've thought about this issue too. The method of reciting the Chief's honorific name was my idea. But before finding exploitable rule loopholes, you'd better not casually break the rules. Otherwise, hehe, there are too many painful lessons from before. I won't list them one by one."

Lumian nodded, adjusted his state, and detailed the scene Franca saw in that psychological trauma at the bottom of the illusory abyss, the deductions she made, and the problems she discovered.

Finally, he said, "It was only after Franca realized that Mr. Fool was a transmigrator that she found she had previously overlooked names like Sherlock Moriarty and Merlin Hermes. Logically, she should have immediately deduced from these that Mr. Fool, like her, was also a transmigrator, though she would have guessed he came from another world.

"In the dream city, many of our ideas seem to have been restricted. We unconsciously overlooked certain things, like An Xiaotian's problem, like the evidence that Mr. Fool was a transmigrator. This might be the Celestial Worthy's will at work, creating a Fooling effect.

"And what He deliberately made us overlook and avoid, most likely hides the correct direction."

Madam Justice listened intently, her expression first showing a bit of bewilderment and surprise, but quickly revealing relief and emotion.

Madam Magician and Madam Judgment had similar reactions.

After Lumian finished speaking, Madam Justice's emerald eyes flickered as she recalled,

"You don't know under what kind of situation and in what way we first saw Mr. Fool, and what kind of performance he showed subsequently. So you certainly can't understand why we didn't think in the direction that Mr. Fool might be a transmigrator, an ordinary person who grew in strength a step at a time…"

"It was only after the Cordu Village disaster that I vaguely felt this possibility," Madam Magician added.

Madam Justice's expression became very gentle, with more smiles on her face.

"To have done so many things with a mortal body, to have reached this level, to use true human nature to confront the Celestial Worthy, I-I admire Mr. Fool even more, um, and also feel more sympathetic…"

Curious, Lumian inquired, "What things has Mr. Fool done?"

In his view, Mr. Fool now seemed closer. This great existence was once human, and was even a "fellow countryman" with Aurore.

And Lumian only knew about things related to Gehrman Sparrow and what was told in the Bible.

"We can tell you about it properly, but now let's first discuss the key issues you've discovered," Madam Justice said with a smile.

Chapter 1010: Interpreting Symbols

Lumian organized his thoughts and explained about the manifestations possibly being an identity, "Zhou Mingrui's" identity lacking corresponding interpersonal relationships, Peng Deng and Zhang Yujia's existence seeming more special, and Peng Deng's roommate Grisha appearing in the emergency center of Mushu Hospital.

"From a transmigrator's perspective, there are indeed problems with the corresponding details. Zhou Mingrui seems to be just a name, while the person who shares an apartment with Siatas and others, works at the Intis Group, and has a brother named Benson and a sister named Sasa is more like Klein Moretti." Madam Justice nodded slowly. "Except for the dream city itself and Peng Deng and Zhang Yujia, no other important figures originate from the First Epoch or before."

She temporarily treated the super-ancient era mentioned by Two of Cups as history from the First Epoch or before.

So far, the Tarot Club had almost no understanding of events before the Second Epoch.

As she spoke, Madam Justice fell silent, seeming lost in thought.

Madam Magician glanced at her and said to Lumian, "Since Peng Deng and Grisha may involve the Ancient Sun God, let me first tell you the relevant information we know, of course, limited to the part you can access."

At this moment, Jenna sensed the activity in the living room and came down from the second floor.

She looked around, quietly found a place to sit down, and joined Lumian in listening to Madam Magician talk about matters related to the Ancient Sun God.

Madam Magician considered for a moment and said, "I've told you before that the source of all supernatural powers can be traced back to the original Creator."

Lumian and Jenna nodded simultaneously.

Madam Magician continued, "The original Creator created this world, and at some point disintegrated Himself, splitting into the Beyonder characteristics of different pathways. Well, it may have been the terrifying impact of His self-disintegration that completely destroyed the super-ancient civilization where Mr. Fool and Two of Cups lived, with only some humans surviving, ushering in the First Epoch, what we call the Chaos Epoch."

"Was the Celestial Worthy born at that time? Mr. Fool and Franca should have been suspended above that light door before the collapse of the super-ancient civilization," Lumian said words that Jenna currently couldn't understand the specific meaning of.

Madam Magician pondered for a few seconds and said, "Based on the knowledge we currently possess, the final Creator simultaneously had tendencies towards separation and convergence. Before He completely disintegrated, there should have already been a split in His personality, or rather, His divine nature. The Celestial Worthy may belong to one of the divine natures that split off, so the Celestial Worthy's spiritual imprint, like that of the original Creator, cannot be erased and will always exist within the corresponding Beyonder characteristics."

Jenna understood this part and blurted out, "Then doesn't that mean Mr. Fool can never truly defeat the Celestial Worthy?"

"He can only both merge and oppose, gaining some advantage over the long course of time," Madam Magician said with a bitter smile. "There's a saying in the dream city that makes a lot of sense: In the long run, we all die."

Lumian, Jenna, and the others fell silent.

Madam Magician composed herself and said, "Other divine natures also split off at that time, one of which you can call God Almighty.

"The history of the First Epoch might be the history of God Almighty opposing the Celestial Worthy. This is our only understanding of that period of history, and we can't guarantee its accuracy. Anyway, at the end of the First Epoch, something unknown happened, and both fell simultaneously. The Beyonder characteristics split more thoroughly, and the first Blasphemy Slate was left behind in some secret place."

The first Blasphemy Slate that recorded the twenty-two paths of the divine.

"Did God Almighty occupy the pathways of Spectator and Secrets Suppliant?" Lumian roughly understood what Madam Magician wanted to say.

Madam Magician nodded and said, "The five pathways of Spectator, Secrets Suppliant, Reader, Sailor, and Bard, symbolizing omniscience and omnipotence."

"Five pathways…" It wasn't Lumian or Jenna who marveled, but Madam Justice.

Of course, Lumian and Jenna were also shocked—the Celestial Worthy and Mr. Fool only occupied three pathways!

"The number of pathways isn't the key to how powerful these great existences are," Madam Magician briefly explained without going into detail. "The Ancient Sun God became a deity based on the Bard pathway, collecting the Uniqueness and the minimum required Sequence 1 Beyonder characteristics of the corresponding pathways. Later, He was betrayed and fell, splitting apart. But various signs indicate that before His fall, He had actually encountered what Mr. Fool experienced—God Almighty had revived within Him.

"After the Ancient Sun God fell, His legacy was divided into five parts. One part He had pre-divided to the Angel of Imagination, another part nurtured the True Creator and the second Blasphemy Slate on His remains, and the remaining three parts were divided among the three Kings of Angels at the time."

Madam Magician didn't say what happened to those three Kings of Angels later, but Lumian and Jenna vaguely guessed something.

"A few years ago, that Angel of Imagination became a god and obtained, well, I don't know if it was the second or first Blasphemy Slate. Anyway, He used it to go to the Forsaken Land of the Gods and merge with the True Creator.

"That's roughly how things are. I can't guarantee the accuracy of the specific details," Madam Magician finally said.

As soon as she finished speaking, Madam Justice emerged from her contemplation and looked at Lumian and Jenna, saying, "I have a guess about the identities and symbolism of Peng Deng, Grisha, and Zhang Yujia."

…

In the dream city, inside a coffee shop.

After handing Ludwig over to Franca, Anthony used the pretext of continuing their previous consultation to arrange a meeting with Peng Deng.

He was prepared to rent an unfurnished apartment and pay a renovation deposit. After all, Zhou Shasha would arrive in Yang City the day after tomorrow, and they might not even have a chance to spend the remaining money they had!

Seeing Peng Deng put down his black laptop backpack and sit across from him, Anthony smiled and greeted him, "I have a friend who knows Zhou Mingrui. I heard you're Zhou Mingrui's childhood friend?"

Anthony wasn't worried that this statement would trigger too obvious a change, as it was a common negotiation tactic—drawing closer to get a better price.

After placing his phone to his right, Peng Deng raised his head.

A smile appeared on his unremarkable face. "Yes, I'm not only Zhou Mingrui's childhood friend, I'm also other people's childhood friend."

Childhood friend of others… Why specifically emphasize this? Whose childhood friend is he besides? Anthony's mind suddenly tensed.

…

Trier, inside a luxurious villa.

Madam Justice stood up and used her right hand to draw a semi-transparent, dreamlike wooden board.

"Peng Deng once made Four of Swords have hallucinations due to his own fear, causing him to actively leave the dream," Madam Justice said while making Peng Deng's photo and this sentence materialize virtually and stick to the wooden board.

Next, she outlined Grisha's portrait.

"This is Peng Deng's roommate, who appeared in the emergency center of Mushu Hospital last night.

"This is Nie Zhen, Peng Deng's girlfriend."

After adding Nie Zhen's illusory photo, Madam Justice paused and said, "This is the boss of Aurora Company, and Aurora Company corresponds to the Aurora Order in reality. Their boss most likely symbolizes that True Creator, closely related to the Ancient Sun God."

As she spoke, Madam Justice also pasted the photo of the half-naked body of Aurora Company's boss onto the dreamlike wooden board.

After two seconds, Madam Justice continued in a slow voice, "Zhang Yujia once sent Zhou Mingrui a postcard with an image of Sedlec Ossuary.

"For a long time, the Sedlec Ossuary was the iconic possession of the Angel of Imagination."

After Zhang Yujia's file photo was also pasted onto the illusory wooden board, Madam Justice smiled and said, "When the Spectator pathway reaches the sequence of Dreamweaver, one can split off past identities or personalities, turning them into seemingly real people who can sleep normally, eat normally, socialize normally, and work normally.

"Now, there are a total of five people listed on the blackboard, and there are five pathways related to omniscience and omnipotence…"

Before Madam Justice could state her conclusion, Anthony suddenly came down from upstairs.

Seeing Madam Magician, Lumian, and the others, he explained, "After interacting with Peng Deng today, I was kicked out of the dream. This time it wasn't because of fear.

"However, I gleaned some information from Peng Deng's hints."

Seeing everyone's eyes turn to him, Anthony paused, then said solemnly, "Peng Deng is not only Zhou Mingrui's childhood friend, he's likely also the Celestial Worthy's childhood friend!"

Hearing this, Madam Justice's lips curved slightly, revealing a smile.

She pointed at the illusory photos on the semi-transparent blackboard and said, "It's the same for Peng Deng, and the same for Zhang Yujia.

"Peng Deng's girlfriend Nie Zhen and his roommate Grisha, as well as the boss of Aurora Company whose origin is easiest to discern, all point to the same symbolism."

"The Celestial Worthy's childhood friend is God Almighty?" Lumian roughly understood what Peng Deng specifically symbolized.

And this symbolism, influenced by the characteristics of the Spectator pathway, had undergone a split, not just in Peng Deng, but in the other four people as well.

"One of the people who least wants the Celestial Worthy to resurrect might be that God Almighty, which is why He specifically arranged to guide you to discover the corresponding psychological trauma in the underground area of Mushu Hospital," Madam Magician said in a tone of sudden realization.

Madam Justice thought for a moment and said in a lowered voice, "If the one currently worshiped by the Aurora Order enters the dream, He should be able to choose one of these five forms as His body. It could be Peng Deng, it could be Nie Zhen, it could be Grisha, it could be Zhang Yujia, or it could be the boss of Aurora Company."

Madam Magician suddenly had a new idea.

"Peng Deng and Grisha are roommates, and Nie Zhen is about to move in with them. Does this symbolize that the trinity is merging?

"Does moving out represent separation and opposition?"

Chapter 1011: Re-entering the Dreamscape

No one could answer Madam Magician's question, as it involved matters at too high a level and they lacked sufficient background information.

Lumian used this as a basis for his thoughts and said contemplatively,

"If the symbolic meaning of being roommates and moving out is really this, can we assume that one of Peng Deng, Grisha, and Nie Zhen is the one currently worshiped by the Aurora Order? If He has entered the dream city."

This was because the one currently worshiped by the Aurora Order was already the result of the merged consciousness of the Visionary and the True Creator, and He seemed to want to merge with even more.

"We can preliminarily assume so, but He might randomly use one of the three forms of Peng Deng, Grisha, and Nie Zhen," Madam Justice confirmed Lumian's guess.

Lumian mused aloud. "The first time we observed Peng Deng, the car broke down, and we happened to meet that person from the Church of Steam nearby, who quickly helped us repair it. We also took the opportunity to establish a connection with Him.

"Was this a coincidence manufactured by Peng Deng? Did he want us to get help from that individual from the Church of Steam?"

Lumian didn't directly mention Stiano. It was fine to say it in the dream city—after all, they were WeChat friends now. But in the real world, even an incomplete divine name could potentially bring terrifying consequences.

"It should be." Madam Justice pondered for a few seconds.

At this point, Jenna, who had roughly understood the situation, raised a question, "Did God Almighty arrange for Franca and me to suddenly enter the underground area of Mushu Hospital in order to let us grasp important intelligence, discover previously overlooked key details, and thus interpret the remaining symbols, finding the correct direction to weaken the Celestial Worthy and awaken Mr. Fool?

"Is Franca becoming a Demoness of Despair and quickly digesting half of the potion an advance payment?

"But this contradicts the motives of the one currently worshiped by the Aurora Order. We previously speculated that He would prefer to maintain a balanced situation until He achieves His goals in the real world, only then allowing Mr. Fool to wake up, to avoid Mr. Fool interfering with His plans."

In a brief silence, Lumian turned to Anthony. "Tell us in detail about how you were kicked out of the dream."

Anthony recalled and said, "After Peng Deng hinted that he was also the childhood friend of others, we didn't delve into the details of this aspect. We simply talked about the renovation, agreed to find a time to view the house in person, sign the contract, and then left the cafe separately.

"As soon as I was out of Peng Deng's sight, I felt like I was being kicked out of the dream and rapidly turning into a marionette. I 'calmed' myself, eliminating the fear, but still couldn't shake off that state. I could only stop resisting and leave the dream."

Madam Justice's eyes moved slightly as she said, "In other words, Peng Deng is being closely watched by the dream subconscious.

"If he is truly one of God Almighty's corresponding dream forms, he would indeed be treated this way. Only He is worthy of such treatment by the dream subconscious.

"So, Peng Deng doesn't meet Zhou Mingrui at night, nor has he made any other attempts. Under such close monitoring, he simply can't.

"There's also a reasonable explanation for his renting of the magic mirror. The birth of that magic mirror is suspected to be related to God Almighty.

"Similarly, there's now enough reason for why the Star Dream Provisions Store was willing to rent the mirror to him.

"Hmm…"

Madam Justice looked at Anthony. "The first time you contacted Peng Deng, you had hallucinations due to fear and actively left the dream. This might have been intentionally done by Peng Deng. His purpose was to remind you to be careful when interacting with him, to be as cautious as when interacting with Zhou Mingrui."

Having inferred this far, Madam Justice nodded lightly. "This time, he actively hinted to you that he's also the Celestial Worthy's childhood friend, which seems unusual."

Madam Magician and Madam Justice exchanged glances before saying, "Combining this with the events in the underground area of Mushu Hospital, can we assume that the one currently worshiped by the Aurora Order hopes that Mr. Fool will gain the upper hand soon and gradually wake up with our help?"

"It could also be the tendency of God Almighty's spiritual imprint, which the one worshiped by the Aurora Order can't suppress," Madam Justice offered a possibility.

Lumian thought for a moment and showed a slight smile.

"Another possibility is that the one worshiped by the Aurora Order foresaw a major change in the dream city, a change favorable to the Celestial Worthy, so He arranged for Franca to enter the underground area of Mushu Hospital in advance, to come into contact with that psychological trauma, as a hedge.

"It's also possible that some problems have arisen in the real world, such as hidden dangers left by the last vortex incident, forcing the one worshiped by the Aurora Order to start the plan to weaken the Celestial Worthy and awaken Mr. Fool ahead of schedule. Haha, is the sky about to fall, urgently needing tall people to prop it up?"

"Hidden dangers…" Madam Magician seemed to have guessed something.

She said to Lumian, "Regardless of which possibility it is, things seem to have become urgent.

"From the key information that Mr. Fool is a transmigrator, we can deduce the issues with Peng Deng, Zhang Yujia, and others, and the special nature of the identity of Gehrman Sparrow. The former currently seems like allies, while for the latter, the temporary breakthrough point is only An Xiaotian."

Madam Magician looked at Madam Justice and Madam Judgment, then said through gritted teeth, "We allow you to use Li Keji's mushroom to treat An Xiaotian."

Lumian offered a curt acknowledgment. "Okay."

Jenna nodded along, then raised a new question, "But the voice Luo Shan heard in her dream was The Celestial Worthy of Heaven and Earth for Blessings, and the power that teleported us to the underground area of Mushu Hospital doesn't seem like His."

Lumian chuckled. "I've already guessed who did it."

"Who?" Jenna was quite surprised.

He had already guessed?

Lumian chuckled and said, "Mr. Huang Tao."

He immediately added,

"More accurately, the mirrored Emperor Roselle."

Madam Justice and the other Major Arcana card holders nodded slightly.

Lumian continued to explain to Jenna, "The mirrored Emperor Roselle has a cooperative relationship with Zaratulstra, so after entering the dream city, he tried to occupy the identity of Mr. Huang. At the same time, Zaratulstra has always suspected that something was wrong with Luo Shan and secretly reminded Zhou Mingrui, while the mirrored Emperor Roselle is an Angel of the Mystery Pryer pathway."

This intelligence was provided by the Major Arcana card holders after discovering that the mirrored Roselle was eroding and influencing Mr. Huang.

"Based on this, we can make a speculation. Zaratulstra should have asked the mirrored Roselle, who can control information and influence paintings, for help to confirm if there was something wrong with Luo Shan. The mirrored Roselle reorganized the information of that colorful parrot, controlled it, and made it monitor Luo Shan, but didn't feed back the obtained intelligence to Zaratulstra.

"This is because the mirrored Roselle is secretly cooperating with the one worshipped by the Aurora Order, just like during the last vortex incident," Lumian looked at Jenna and summarized, "Luo Shan was stimulated, developed a psychological trauma, which was discovered by that colorful parrot, who informed the mirrored Roselle. Then, the mirrored Roselle, using the trust of the Celestial Worthy's forces, secretly 'pushed' a bit, causing Luo Shan to bring you and the real target, Franca, to the underground area of Mushu Hospital in the dream."

Jenna suddenly understood.

"That makes sense now."

Beside them, Anthony, before going to probe Peng Deng, had learned from Lumian the key point that Mr. Fool was a transmigrator and what exactly happened last night, so there was no communication barrier now. He understood the previous conversations relatively easily and didn't raise any questions.

Madam Justice looked at them and said with a smile, "Now that we've discussed the important matters, I'll give you a general account of Mr. Fool's experiences, starting with Klein Moretti…"

The relevant events had actually been mentioned in the previous document, but not in enough detail. This time, Madam Justice spoke as if she had seen and heard it personally, starting from the Antigonus family notes and continuing all the way to the end of the Tingen story.

After a moment of silence, Lumian asked slowly, "Captain Dunn and Klein Moretti died just like that at the Blackthorn Security Company, to prevent the descent of the True Creator's spawn?"

"Yes," Madam Magician said with a self-deprecating smile. "Now I understand why Klein Moretti could be resurrected."

Loki's multiple resurrections were a good example.

Lumian fell silent.

Jenna said with some emotion, "No wonder Officer Deng is also a person who maintains order in the dream city."

After expressing her feelings, she asked curiously, "The final events are so detailed, were they narrated by a survivor at the time?"

"Yes." Madam Justice nodded.

Jenna had a flash of inspiration. "Mr. Star?"

The Major Arcana card holder—Mr. Star—was indeed a Nighthawk of the Church of Evernight!

Madam Justice smiled lightly but didn't give a clear answer.

Madam Magician changed the subject. "The real-world Rozanne also said that as much as she hates others becoming Beyonders, she admires the Nighthawks."

Jenna made a sound of agreement and said with some emotion, "No wonder the Luo Shan in the dream city has always wanted to become a qualified guardian…"

After a brief silence, Madam Justice and Madam Magician took turns talking about the different identities of Mr. Fool, such as Sherlock Moriarty and Gehrman Sparrow.

They didn't dare to go into too much detail, only picking key points to narrate, fearing it would delay matters in the dream city.

Finally, Lumian stood up and said to the Major Arcana cards and his companions, "I'll return to the dream city first."

Madam Justice also stood up and nodded slightly. "We will notify the other Major Arcana cards to be prepared to provide help at any time."

Lumian nodded, made his way back to the second floor, entered his own bedroom, and lay down on the bed.

He stared at the ceiling, not falling asleep quickly. His mind flashed with bits and pieces about Mr. Fool, with all those things that the Major Arcana card holders had emphasized in their narration.

After quite a while, Lumian finally fell asleep.

Chapter 1012: A New Round of Hints

Intis Group, Administrative Department.

Zhou Mingrui, wearing a black T-shirt, walked in and casually scanned the room before saying to Luo Shan, "It's really hot this year. School has started and there's still no sign of cooling down."

Luo Shan nodded repeatedly in agreement and praised the effectiveness of the company's air conditioning.

Zhou Mingrui glanced to the side and back, asking, "Luo Fu didn't come today?"

He had been planning to approach Luo Fu today to ask why she appeared in the underground area of Mushu Hospital last night. However, it was almost an hour into the workday and she still hadn't shown up.

Luo Shan looked around and said in a hushed voice, "Luo Fu is going to resign."

"Hasn't she been working for less than a month? She's resigning before even passing the probation period?" Zhou Mingrui was somewhat surprised, but then felt it was also normal.

For a mysterious person like Luo Fu, working at the company was definitely not for the salary, but for some other purpose. Once that purpose was achieved, or if she felt it couldn't be completed and she might be in danger, she would undoubtedly resign without hesitation.

"Yes, there's something going on at home. Otherwise, who would give up such a good job?" Luo Shan spoke sincerely. "Luo Fu has already submitted her letter and will come tomorrow to go through the procedures."

Luo Fu's resignation made Luo Shan feel that she herself probably wouldn't be fired in the short term.

"She'll come tomorrow?" Zhou Mingrui nodded thoughtfully.

He could foresee that Luo Fu's resignation wouldn't go smoothly. Someone who had just been hired leaving before completing even a month—wasn't that a slap in the face for the recruiters?

Moreover, it would affect the HR department's performance evaluation.

Zhou Mingrui then turned to Luo Shan and asked, "How is Luo Fu doing now? Why did she go to Mushu Hospital last night?"

He spoke with a tone of concern for a colleague.

"She's doing fine now, just hasn't fully recovered emotionally." Without receiving any "instructions," Luo Shan didn't dare reveal too much.

She directly skipped over the latter question.

Seeing this, Zhou Mingrui politely smiled and said, "Slacking time is over, I'm going back to work."

"Bye-bye." Luo Shan waved habitually.

Zhou Mingrui turned and walked towards the exit of the Administrative Department.

Luo Fu's resignation made him more acutely aware of the undercurrents lurking beneath the surface.

This female colleague seemed to have joined the company specifically for him. She hadn't even fully familiarized herself with the Administrative Department's affairs, yet had already had two meals with him, made some hints, and mysteriously appeared in the underground area of Mushu Hospital when he was investigating it.

Did last night's events cause Luo Fu to resign?

What exactly is hidden in the underground area of Mushu Hospital, and why did Luo Fu and Luo Shan go there?

What specifically did Luo Fu encounter?

Are mystical methods now being used in workplace competition?

Amidst his lampooning, Zhou Mingrui increasingly wanted to find Luo Fu and ask her face-to-face.

He felt that the things around him were getting stranger and stranger!

Luo Fu and Luo Shan too, they clearly showed goodwill and provided effective hints, so why don't they just tell me the truth about what's going on?

We're all people with supernatural powers, what can't be said?

We could be completely open and honest about everything, and discuss things together. Even if I wouldn't believe everything, I certainly wouldn't ignore it completely. I'd remember the key points and verify them one by one in subsequent developments.

If they don't explain anything clearly, how am I supposed to help them?

Are we filming a TV drama here, where one misunderstanding can be dragged out for twenty episodes?

Is there a reason they only hint at things instead of speaking directly?

Is some force preventing them from telling the truth about what's happening?

Are there others monitoring me?

Zhou Mingrui unconsciously raised his head and looked around, but didn't notice anything unusual.

Does the monitoring power come from a supernatural level? Can it even listen in on my private conversations with Luo Fu and Luo Shan?

The first time Luo Fu showed something was wrong, Luo Shan hinted for me to wait two days before talking to her again. That was the day after my first meal with her, during which Luo Fu had hinted at the existence of supernatural powers and the hidden dangers of beverages after Assassin…

Was it because she hinted at these things to me that it led to her subsequent problems?

Zhou Mingrui returned to his own workstation and sat down, staring at the screen in front of him, seriously considering how to determine if there was monitoring around him, and if so, how to avoid it afterwards, how to meet with Luo Fu and Luo Shan discreetly, and how to communicate in a safe environment.

In the Administrative Department, Luo Shan picked up her phone and sent a message to True Hidden Blade: "Zhou Mingrui came to ask about your situation. He's not unfazed by last night's events, he's just waiting for an opportunity to inquire."

…

In the open parking lot below the Tech Building housing Intis Group's headquarters.

Franca, her hair tied in a ponytail, read the WeChat message sent by Luo Shan.

She had originally planned to take Ludwig and wait around the Hall Film Company, ready to help cover up immediately if Dreamscape Jenna made any mistakes. But after much consideration, she decided to come near the company instead.

Dreamscape Jenna was "professionally trained," with acting skills no worse than the real Jenna. She had also inherited Jenna's memories of applying to the Hall Film Company and signing the contract, and her own dream was to be a good actress. So, as long as there were no accidents like last night, she shouldn't have any problems.

Moreover, the Hall Film Company had a good boss who managed things strictly, and the internal atmosphere was quite good. As long as Dreamscape Jenna didn't go to outside film crews for auditions, she was unlikely to encounter the casting couch.

Of course, even if she did, Franca wasn't worried that Dreamscape Jenna would accept. More than that, she was concerned that Dreamscape Jenna might overreact, use excessive self-defense, and get arrested by the police—she had probed Dreamscape Jenna's personality and style this morning and felt that if Dreamscape Jenna encountered something dirty, she would grab all the sharp objects she could find at the scene and make the other party see red.

Comparatively, Luo Shan's situation was more dangerous.

The forces that caused last night's incident had clearly targeted Luo Shan, and if one attempt failed, there would be another. Franca didn't want to be careless and have Luo Shan encounter an "accident," die on the spot, or become a puppet of the Celestial Worthy!

After reading the message from Luo Shan and listening to the sound of Ludwig eating, Franca pondered for a moment before typing out a response:

"You can recommend that Zhou Mingrui watch the 'Terminator' series of films."

Luo Shan was suddenly stunned when she received the reply.

She finally understood why the story Luo Fu had initially made up sounded so familiar to her!

Most of it was from a movie plot!

Essentially, it really is a bit similar… Luo Shan pondered for a few seconds, then opened her chat with Zhou Mingrui: "We've been watching old movies lately, the 'Terminator' series. They're much better than current Hollywood blockbusters. You should rewatch them too."

Zhou Mingrui, receiving this seemingly random message, fell into deep thought.

He had long forgotten the details of the Terminator series, but still remembered a bit of the core story.

After a moment, he silently said to himself, Are they trying to tell me that I'm the savior?

Downstairs, in the open parking lot.

Franca alternated between checking her phone and observing the situation, patiently waiting for the lunch break.

Her biggest worry now wasn't Luo Shan's problem, nor where she should go to make people despair, but that running the air conditioning in a gasoline car while waiting wasn't a good thing.

Suddenly, someone opened the car door and sat in the passenger seat.

Franca's spiritual perception had already sensed it was Lumian who had arrived.

Lumian had changed back to his male form and was in disguise, so he wouldn't be recognized as security guard Li Ming at first glance.

"How did you know I was here?" Franca asked, both puzzled and curious.

They hadn't even replenished the Mirror Substitutions they had placed with each other yet!

Lumian smiled, raised his right hand, and pointed to his head. "It's a simple deduction."

Franca rolled her eyes at him. "I just didn't feel like thinking about it."

Lumian didn't continue to tease her. He summarized the key points of what he and the others had discussed with the Major Arcana card holders, as well as Mr. Fool's past experiences.

"That's truly legendary…" Franca sighed sincerely.

Lumian nodded. "There's another detail. At the time, I was the one who told Jenna and Luo Shan to ask Zhou Mingrui for help, to make a trip to the underground area of Mushu Hospital. On the way, Jenna remembered it was late at night and worried that directly contacting Zhou Mingrui might cause worse things to happen, so she let Luo Shan go alone.

"Zhou Mingrui agreed to help, and after he ran out of the emergency center, Jenna was immediately kicked out of the dream. But she hadn't actually appeared in Zhou Mingrui's sight, and Zhou Mingrui didn't even know such a person existed."

Franca understood what Lumian was trying to express.

"The Celestial Worthy's gaze can lock onto indirect reminders?

"Then when we have Luo Shan tell Zhou Mingrui the truth, we need to be prepared for the relevant people to be kicked out of the dream…"

"I was the one who told Luo Shan and Jenna to go, I was the mastermind, but I wasn't kicked out of the dream," Lumian added.

"Either there's a range or some other limitation on locking onto indirect reminders, or it's because you were already at B2 of Mushu Hospital at the time… Can that place affect or interfere with the Celestial Worthy's gaze?" Franca proposed two possibilities.

Lumian smiled. "If the underground area of Mushu Hospital can indeed interfere with the Celestial Worthy's gaze to some extent, we might be able to use that at a critical moment."

This was a collection of details. They might be useful, or they might have no effect at all, but without collecting them, there wouldn't even be a chance to test them!

Franca tersely agreed and picked up her phone again, saying, "I should let Queen Mystic know about the mirrored Emperor Roselle, and remind her to pay attention to Mr. Huang's contradictory behavior."

After opening the WeChat contact "Bernadette," Franca adjusted her mood and sent an energetic emoji: "Pop quiz!

"Please answer which five seas are referred to by the Five Seas!"

She wasn't sure if the person on the other end of WeChat was currently Queen Mystic Bernadette or Miss Bernie Huang, so she first sent a question whose answer only an outsider would know to verify the other party's identity.

After a moment, Bernadette responded: "The Sonia Sea, the Fog Sea, do I need to continue?"

"Congratulations, you're got it correct!" Only then did Franca briefly mention last night's events and the possible role played by the mirrored Emperor Roselle, as well as the reasons they had speculated.

After some time, Bernadette replied: "I'd like to discuss this matter in detail. Let's meet at 2 pm at the book warehouse at 15 Jinhua Street."

Chapter 1013: The Queen's Request

Franca showed Lumian Queen Mystic's reply and asked for his opinion,

"Should I go?"

Lumian replied without hesitation,

"I'll go."

"Alright." Franca understood Lumian's meaning.

She now had to completely switch to behind-the-scenes support, and should avoid meeting important people unless she found an opportunity to make others despair.

Sometimes, they'd rather send Ludwig!

Franca considered briefly, then quickly typed on her screen:

"I have an important matter this afternoon. Can Lumina replace me to meet with you?"

After sending this message, Franca glanced at Lumian and added:

"She knows more details about the relevant matters than I do."

"That's fine." Queen Mystic quickly replied.

Only then did Franca say to Lumian,

"Go meet Queen Mystic in your female form. Don't reveal your identity as security guard Li Ming. Although Queen Mystic is our ally, we can't let her know everything, especially identities that still need to remain undercover."

The last time they cooperated with Queen Mystic to deal with Zaratulstra, Lumian had also transformed into a Demoness of Despair.

Lumian raised an eyebrow and said teasingly,

"It feels like your IQ has increased since you fell into a situation where you'd lose control and die if kicked out of the dream."

Franca was used to trading barbs with Lumian, and retorted,

"What does that prove? It proves I'm inherently smart, I just usually can't be bothered to think. Anyway, you're not stupid either, so you can do the thinking for me."

Ludwig, who had finished his burger in the back seat, raised his head in agreement:

"That's right, that's right."

This made Franca fall silent.

Somehow having the child Ludwig agree with her didn't seem quite right…

"I'll go buy you lunch, then scout out the location and wait to meet Queen Mystic," said Lumian, once again stirring up Franca's emotions and making her feel more alive. He opened the car door and got out.

…

2 pm, 15 Jinhua Street.

Lumian, dressed in a woman's shirt and loose pants, wearing sunglasses and a mask, used teleportation to bypass the security guard and went directly inside the book warehouse—Lumina was still a wanted person, so he couldn't openly find an excuse to enter.

There was no one in the book warehouse. Lumian looked at the piles of packaged goods and tall metal shelves, walking forward leisurely.

Suddenly, a lush peach forest with blooming flowers appeared before his eyes. A winding stream in the forest flowed into a towering mountain range and into a small cave.

This isolated Lumian from the outside world.

Then, Queen Mystic Bernadette walked out from the peach forest.

Her slightly curly brown hair was simply tied up. She wore a loose white T-shirt with patterns, tied at the waist, exuding youthful energy and giving a strong student vibe. It wouldn't make anyone suspect Bernie Huang of being overly mature.

"Good afternoon, Your Highness Bernadette," Lumian greeted, removing his sunglasses and mask.

He still greatly admired Emperor Roselle, so naturally, he was quite respectful towards Queen Mystic.

Bernadette nodded slightly and said,

"Good afternoon."

She didn't engage in small talk and went straight to the point.

"Tell me everything that happened last night, not just about the Mirror People."

Lumian only omitted some details about his own changes. He started from when Luo Shan used her Reporter ability and suddenly heard Franca and Jenna talking, realizing she was just an illusory figure in someone else's dream. He continued up to returning to Mushu Hospital, seeing Grisha—Peng Deng's roommate—at the scene through someone else's short video, and the issue with the colorful parrot in the oil painting.

Queen Mystic listened very quietly, without interrupting or asking for details.

Only when Lumian finished did she ask,

"Is Luo Fu a transmigrator?"

Queen Mystic knows about transmigrators too… Well, transmigrators have done quite a few things over the years, possibly even helping her translate the Emperor's diary, and she can enter and exit Mr. Fool's dream city… Lumian nodded.

"Yes."

"Since Luo Fu saw her past self in those 'cocoons' on the light gate, does she believe that everyone in the cocoons is a transmigrator?" Queen Mystic further inquired.

"Without a doubt, that's what she thinks," Lumian replied cooperatively, although he had roughly guessed what Queen Mystic really wanted to ask.

"What are her guesses about the three empty 'cocoons'?" Queen Mystic's youthful face remained calm.

Here it comes, the real question… Lumian thought to himself, then answered truthfully,

"She suspects they are the Ancient Sun God, Emperor Roselle, and Mr. Fool."

Bernadette's expression changed slightly, but she showed no signs of shock.

She said to Lumian,

"The Ancient Sun God may not have come from a 'cocoon', He has a different origin."

"Uh…" Lumian was stunned.

If it wasn't the Ancient Sun God, then who came out of that "cocoon"?

Bernadette didn't explain, she just mentioned this.

She said with a hint of sighing,

"No wonder Mr. Fool's dream contains all the fairy tales and legends I've heard.

"No wonder those fairy tales and legends have the power of mystical reappearance…"

Lumian closed his mouth, not knowing how to respond for a moment.

After joining the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society, he actually knew where Emperor Roselle's inventions, writings, and famous sayings came from. After entering the dream city, he confirmed this even more.

However, he still admired Roselle, believing that the Emperor's life journey from an ordinary person to wearing the crown and finally ascending to godhood was rare in the world, very inspiring and admirable. Moreover, the Emperor did indeed change the trends of the times, the world situation, and various aspects of the country of Intis. His legacy was still frequently mentioned today, still benefiting many lower and middle-class people, and still changing some people's destinies.

Bernadette turned sideways, looking towards the brilliant and dreamy pink peach blossom forest that resembled a night sky burning with clouds, and muttered to herself,

"Actually, he rarely told me that those fairy tales and legends were written by himself, thought up by himself…

"Most of the time he would say, I've organized the fairy tales I heard as a child, I'm telling you the stories that your grandmother once told me, stories that belong only to us, these are stories from my dreams that once brought me a lot of fantasy, I hope they can make your childhood colorful and dreamy too…

"When he said these things, it was as if he was looking through me, recalling his own childhood…"

Lumian suddenly smiled and lowered his head slightly, saying,

"My sister also told me some fairy tales. Every time she told them, I had a similar feeling."

At this moment, he felt a strong resonance with Queen Mystic.

One's father was a transmigrator, the other's sister was a transmigrator, and now they have both passed away, but still retained some hope of resurrection.

Queen Mystic Bernadette looked back at Lumian and nodded gently.

"It wasn't until I entered this dream city and lived here for a while that I felt I truly understood him."

"Me too," Lumian replied with a self-deprecating smile.

Queen Mystic quickly shook off that nostalgic state and said to Lumian,

"I want to ask you for a favor."

"What favor?" Lumian perked up.

Queen Mystic was silent for a few seconds before saying,

"Whether she's currently cooperating with the one worshiped by the Aurora Society, or has jumped back to the Celestial Worthy's camp, or is swaying between the two, her ultimate goal is not what I want to see or am willing to accept.

"I've hesitated for a while, but today I've finally made up my mind. I want to kick her out of the dream as soon as possible, so she can't benefit from this real dream. For this, I'm willing to accept the consequence of never being able to come to this city again."

"You want to take action against the mirrored Emperor Roselle soon?" Lumian suddenly realized.

He noticed that Queen Mystic referred to the mirrored Emperor Roselle not with the pronoun "Her" representing Angels, but with "her" symbolizing females.

"Yes." Queen Mystic nodded almost imperceptibly. "Relying on myself alone, even with a Sealed Artifact, it would be difficult to expel her from the dream, so I need your help."

"No problem. You provided us with great help in the Zaratulstra matter," Lumian agreed immediately.

With the mirrored Emperor Roselle's wavering stance, Lumian didn't dare to bet that She would definitely side with Mr. Fool, so it was better to eliminate the hidden danger in advance.

Queen Mystic added,

"I will prepay you a fee for this help…"

There's no need to be so polite, we didn't give you a fee when dealing with Zaratulstra… Before Lumian could respond, he heard Queen Mystic state the specific amount,

"500,000."

How much? Lumian instinctively doubted his hearing.

He immediately understood that Queen Mystic was also using this matter to send money to him and his team.

And this broke through the suspected limit of 30,000 per transaction.

Does this mean Queen Mystic has made up her mind regardless of the consequences, and is prepared to be kicked out of the dream for the third time? Lumian tentatively asked, "When do you plan to take action?"

"The sooner the better," Bernadette said concisely.

Lumian considered for a moment before saying,

"Between 3 pm tomorrow and 3 pm the day after.

"And at 2:30 pm tomorrow, I'll go to Star Dream Provisions Store to rent an item, which might also come in handy after Zhou Sasa arrives in Yangdu."

Zhou Sasa would be taking the high-speed rail to Yangdu at noon the day after tomorrow.

Lumian hoped to rent once for two uses, including expelling the mirrored Emperor Roselle from the dream and dealing with the anomalies brought by Zhou Shasha entering the dream city.

"Alright." Queen Mystic didn't elaborate.

She thought for a moment and said,

"Since Huang Jiajia and the others have all become marionettes of the Celestial Worthy, and Lu Yong'an, a Blessed of the Great Mother, has discovered the falsity of your Child of God identity, you must be on guard against them suddenly taking action against Li Keji, cutting off the last hope of curing An Xiaotian."

Hearing these words, Lumian suddenly became alert.

That's right!

After last night's events, whether it's the Celestial Worthy trying to eliminate hidden dangers or the Great Mother wanting to maintain balance, Li Keji could very likely become a key target!

Lumian had originally planned to find Li Keji late tonight when everyone was asleep, to see if the mushroom had met the requirements.

But now it appeared he had to go as soon as possible—right now!

Chapter 1014: Transferred

Crimson Moon Hospital, Psychiatric Ward.

Lumian directly teleported outside Li Keji's hospital room.

He had put his sunglasses and mask back on.

Taking advantage of the momentary absence of people in this area, Lumian knocked loudly on the steel door.

Almost simultaneously, his spiritual intuition told him: there was no one in this hospital room anymore!

Lumian tensed up and Blinked inside the room.

It was empty, with no one there and no mushrooms. The blanket was neatly folded.

Lumian took out a mirror, about to use divination to find Li Keji.

At this point, he frowned, considered briefly, and gave up on the idea, fearing he might divine images he currently couldn't bear.

He teleported outside the ward, keeping his sunglasses and mask on, approached the nurses' station, and said in a deep voice, "I'm here to visit a patient. Which room is Li Keji in?"

The nurse who was organizing medical records looked up and asked in surprise, "You don't know?"

"Li Keji has been transferred back to Mushu Hospital. He's been diagnosed with mental issues. Although he doesn't need to go to jail, he'll have to be confined for treatment from now on."

Transferred back to Mushu Hospital? Lumian's heart sank, and he immediately asked, "When did this happen?"

"Just this morning," the nurse replied, becoming a bit impatient. "If you want to visit him, go to Mushu Hospital."

This morning… At that time, I had returned to the real world to report the situation, Jenna and Anthony had also been kicked out of the dream, leaving only Franca, who wasn't in good condition, to secretly protect Luo Shan with Ludwig. We couldn't look after Li Keji's situation at all. Moreover, last night's events were too urgent, and we had to deal with Franca's mental and psychological issues afterward. We didn't think to notify Queen Mystic in advance… Their timing was impeccable… Lumian asked another question, "Who came to handle the transfer procedures?"

"Of course, it was the patient's family member, his mom," the nurse said, looking puzzled at the mask and sunglasses covering Lumian's face.

His mom… Mother… Lumian's scalp tingled, but he pretended to find it amusing and asked, "How did you confirm that was his mother?"

Would you believe me if I said I was?

The nurse, both annoyed and amused, said, "She came with the household register!

"And the patient's boss also testified!"

Huang Jiajia was cooperating with Li Keji's "mom" to handle the transfer? Lumian stopped asking questions and turned to leave the psychiatric ward.

His first reaction was to quickly find a deserted corner and directly teleport to Mushu Hospital, to see if he could get the treatment mushroom before Li Keji truly became the child of the Mother, and rescue him.

If the "prison break" failed, he would switch to assassination, completely eliminating this dream manifestation, leaving nothing for the Great Mother.

Just as he was about to activate the black mark on his right shoulder, Lumian had a new idea.

He had no helpers now and needed to find one.

So, he took out his phone, entered a ride-hailing app, and chose a route from Crimson Moon Hospital to Mushu Hospital.

During this process, he walked out of Crimson Moon Hospital and sent a message to Franca: "Li Keji has been transferred back to Mushu Hospital. Bring Ludwig and wait outside Mushu Hospital. If necessary, have Ludwig come in to find me.

"Remember to notify Luo Shan, tell her to be alert this afternoon and extremely careful. It's best if she occasionally goes to chat with Zhou Mingrui.

"We can't lose focus. We can't rescue Li Keji only to lose Luo Shan."

"Okay." Franca replied concisely.

After deleting the chat history using the Information Shredder, Lumian stood by the roadside, patiently waiting for the ride-hailing car to arrive.

In less than two minutes, a white ride-hailing car stopped in front of him.

Lumian quickly opened the front passenger door and got in.

His gaze then turned to the driver, just in time to see him take out a crystal-like monocle and put it on his right eye socket.

Lumian wasn't surprised at all; this was exactly what he had expected.

After the driver started the car, Lumian said casually, "Long time no see."

"Not that long, I often watch you all," Amon said, driving normally without using any Beyonder powers.

"We've probably deciphered the symbolic meanings of Peng Deng, Grisha, and others in the dream," Lumian said matter-of-factly, suppressing his inner anxiety.

"Let's hear it," Amon said, honking the horn as the vehicles in front slowed down.

It was clear that He had integrated very well into this dream city.

Lumian chose his words carefully and briefly described Madam Justice's conjectures.

Amon laughed. "A Spectator is not a qualified Cryptologist. Although the ideas and direction are not wrong, the thinking is not deep enough. If that young lad Pallez were here, it's possible that all the symbolic meanings would be deciphered."

"Where did we go wrong?" Lumian's purpose in bringing up this topic was to get confirmation from Amon.

According to their speculation, Amon and His father, for some unknown reason, no longer intended to maintain balance at present. They wanted to weaken the Celestial Worthy and let Mr. Fool wake up early, which meant They could be considered temporary allies.

Amon turned His head to look at him and said with a smile, "The Spectator herself has said that it's based on identity and personality to weave real images, not on pathways.

"My father; the True Creator; Adam; the original God Almighty; and Heaven's deputy, the Left Hand of God, the leader of the Kings of Angels, the Dark Angel Sasrir, how many identities is that in total?"

"Five," Lumian said thoughtfully. "So the Dark Angel among the eight Kings of Angels was also derived from the Ancient Sun God…"

This was intelligence he didn't have before.

Amon adjusted His monocle on His right eye, His smile unchanging, and said, "Looking at it this way, it's actually quite simple to decipher the corresponding symbolic meanings:

"The boss of Aurora Company symbolizes the True Creator, influenced by The Fool's cognition, mainly active near the headquarters of Intis Group. Peng Deng and Grisha symbolize the one you hate most and the original God Almighty, but their specific positions are not fixed. They can swap at any time, symbolizing fusion and confrontation. Nie Zhen symbolizes the Dark Angel, representing the part that split off from my father, Adam's rib is his Eve.

"The True Creator and Adam have already achieved consciousness fusion, so They don't need to share rent anymore. They can act under different identities through The Fool's cognition, but Their thoughts are interconnected."

Visionary Adam? Lumian nodded slightly and said, "Zhang Yujia symbolizes your father, the Ancient Sun God?"

"The Corpse Cathedral itself belongs to Him. Zhang Yujia wanders outside the dream city, symbolizing that my father has already left this stage. Now His successors and the original God Almighty are confronting each other. This is also The Fool's cognition," Amon said in a slightly mocking tone. "As for the symbolic meaning of sharing rent and moving out, I don't need to explain that, right?"

This explanation is indeed clearer, but in this matter, Amon can't be fully trusted either… Lumian chuckled and said, "Why is your father's dream manifestation female?

"Is it because Mr. Fool's other childhood friend is indeed a lady, or in Mr. Fool's cognition, your father gave birth to you and the Angel of Imagination, and also split off the Dark Angel, making Him a successful mother?"

Amon laughed. "The last guy who deciphered this aspect of symbolism mocked it the same way. You two are indeed quite similar."

"Who?" Lumian asked vigilantly.

"Haven't you guessed?" Amon glanced at Lumian. "Red Angel Medici."

"He can also enter Mr. Fool's dream?" Lumian frowned.

Could it be that the Red Angel has turned to the Celestial Worthy?

From what we can see now, apart from true gods and those holding Mr. Fool's gold coins, only a few individuals who have received special grace from the Celestial Worthy can enter this dream city.

Well, it seems other great existences can now send one or two subordinates in through the illusory abyss under Mushu Hospital, like Lu Yong'an. However, the Red Angel is unlikely to cooperate with the Great Mother and others. In the Hostel incident, He just tricked these evil gods…

"He has a corresponding manifestation in the dream city and has received help from a top-tier Dreamweaver, so of course He can come in," Amon explained in a light tone.

"Help from a top-tier Dreamweaver…" Lumian suddenly had a flash of insight. "It wasn't the Angel of Imagination who helped Him in, but the original God Almighty?"

"The enemy of my enemy is my friend," Amon said with amusement in His voice. "However, the enemy of my enemy might still be an enemy, like you and Medici."

"The Red Angel is so quiet in the dream? What is He doing, what is He planning?" Lumian, wearing sunglasses and a mask, asked further.

Amon shook His head. "Go find Him yourself, ask Him."

Before Lumian could ask more, Amon smiled and said, "Peng Deng risked revealing His identity, not just to let you know who He is. Have you deciphered what He really wanted to hint at?"

What He really wanted to hint at… Lumian fell into deep thought.

After about ten seconds, he changed the subject and said, "The dream owner's image in this city is also split?

"Chief Yagates, you, and Zhou Mingrui?"

Amon showed a delighted expression. "Do I look like the dream's owner to you?"

He said in a teaching tone, "You need to learn to filter out the interference of complex information and see the most fundamental facts.

"The most fundamental fact is that The Fool has never accommodated the Uniqueness of the Error and Door pathways, while the Celestial Worthy has."

Wh— Lumian vaguely grasped what Amon was hinting at.

Just as he was about to use vague language and indirect methods to confirm, the car stopped.

"We've arrived at Mushu Hospital," Amon suddenly switched to a skilled ride-hailing driver's tone.

Lumian thought for two seconds and opened the door to get out.

"Remember to give a good rating!" Amon waved and quickly drove away.

"Uh…" Lumian was stunned.

His real purpose in calling a ride-hailing car was to find Amon for help, to rescue Li Keji together, but the other party just left like this!

Left…

As the symbol of the Uniqueness of the Error pathway, Amon can't directly intervene in such matters and can only help indirectly? Lumian withdrew his gaze thoughtfully.

Wearing sunglasses and a mask, he looked at Mushu Hospital, no longer hesitating. He set off towards the psychiatric department located at the back of the building.

Chapter 1015: Treatment

As Lumian rounded the main building and saw the separate small building housing the psychiatric department, his phone vibrated once.

It was a WeChat message from Franca: "I've arrived near Mushu Hospital, parked diagonally across the street."

"Good, I'm about to enter the psychiatric department." Lumian replied using voice input.

He then put his phone in airplane mode to avoid any unexpected disturbances like spam calls during the operation.

He immediately activated the contract mark below his left shoulder, transforming himself into a shadow creature.

He currently didn't know which room in the psychiatric ward Li Keji was confined in, so he couldn't directly teleport there. He needed to search around, and Shadow Transformation was more discreet than "hiding in shadows", making it less likely to be discovered.

Lumian's body quickly thinned and darkened, merging with his own shadow cast by the sunlight, standing alone frozen on the cement ground.

He swiftly glided along, using the shadows of corners, trees, and corridors to make his way into the psychiatric ward, sneaking into the nearest room.

"Haha, haha." The patient in this room was laughing constantly, laughing so hard his waist was bent, tears flowing from the corners of his eyes.

For some reason, Lumian also felt an urge to laugh madly, as if infected by the other's emotions.

He glanced at the patient, confirmed it wasn't Li Keji, and immediately retreated through the shadow of the door crack.

As soon as he returned to the hallway, his state quickly returned to normal.

Lumian didn't delay at all and entered the next room.

He suddenly became irritable, wanting to burst out of the shadows and rush to the nurses' station, demanding they hand over Li Keji.

His ears were then filled with loud shouts:

"I'm not crazy! I'm not crazy!

"Caution can indeed handle most situations, but it can't solve all problems.

"When it's time to take risks, you still need to take risks!"

Lumian roughly determined who the patient in this room was and silently retreated to the hallway of the psychiatric ward.

He glided through the shadows cast by various objects, moving into another patient room.

What entered his field of vision was a patient locked to the bed, as quiet as a statue.

A feeling of sadness and grief gradually welled up in Lumian's heart. He wanted to go mad, to harm himself.

Wh— He maintained his rationality and didn't linger long in this room.

After regaining his composure in the hallway, Lumian seriously pondered his recent encounters.

As soon as I enter a patient room, I get infected by the corresponding mental patient?

Mental illness has become contagious, similar to the manifestation of that humanoid Sealed Artifact we encountered before…

I understand now, this place is essentially a dream, and the mental patients also have corresponding symbolism.

They symbolize the negative, crazy, extremely irrational emotions and mental states of the dream's subconscious. And interactions within the dream are essentially spiritual interactions, so once you get close, you get affected…

Why are the doctors and nurses here still normal?

Do they symbolize the dream subconscious's power to suppress madness and extremes?

From this perspective, the thoughts that suppress crazy mentalities and extreme emotions can also be infected, which is reflected in the dream as doctors or nurses occasionally going mad?

Hmm, the doctors here, the nurses here, the medicines and medical equipment here can all be used to deal with the dream's own crazy mentality and extreme emotions. They symbolize the corresponding forces…

Lumian turned his gaze to a nearby treatment cart, looking at the syringes and medicines placed on it.

He felt that in special scenarios, these things might be more useful and effective than the treatment drugs he and others carried.

They were part of the dream's power.

Having understood the special circumstances of the psychiatric ward, Lumian maintained his shadow creature state and moved even faster, just glancing at each room to avoid being infected by the emotions of different patients.

However, he didn't find Li Keji or discover any mushrooms.

Not in the psychiatric ward? Lumian quickly left this place, came to the iron gate at a corner of the wall, re-entered under the pretext of visiting a patient, and approached the nurses' station.

Wearing sunglasses and a mask, he said to the nurse on duty, "I'm here to visit Li Keji."

"Wait a little longer, the patient was sent for treatment and hasn't returned to his room yet," the nurse looked up at Lumian.

"Where was he sent for treatment?" Lumian suddenly had a bad feeling.

The nurse explained simply, "B1 of the main building, there's specialized large equipment there."

B1 of the main building… Lumian nodded, turned around, and walked out of the psychiatric department.

On his way to the main building of Mushu Hospital, he restored his phone signal and sent a message to Franca: "Li Keji has been sent to B1, I plan to go look for him.

"If I haven't sent you a message within a quarter of an hour, have Ludwig come find mom, this should be very useful in B1.

"If all else fails, the corpse wax candle can be used once more, and Chief Yagates's honorific name can also be called upon."

Lumian explained in such detail to tell Franca that he still had a way out, to prevent her from risking herself to save him.

After quite a while, Franca replied briefly: "Be very careful, prioritize your own safety."

Lumian switched his phone back to airplane mode, transformed into a shadow creature, and infiltrated the main building.

This time, he didn't choose the elevator, but glided down the dim emergency staircase step by step.

Arriving at B1, just as he turned into the elevator hall, he saw glass doors at the exit.

At this moment, the glass doors were half open, with a wheelchair placed at the entrance.

A person sat in the wheelchair, their entire body wrapped in white bandages, like a living mummy.

Lumian suddenly had a sense of familiarity.

His spiritual intuition told him that the person in the wheelchair was his "colleague", Old Ding, who had been injured by lightning strike at work.

How did Old Ding end up in B1? Where are his family members? Lumian carefully circled around through the shadows next to Old Ding.

The next second, he saw Old Ding struggling to extend his right hand, reaching towards a white paper pasted on the half-open glass door.

Several words were written on that white paper: "Medical area, no entry to unauthorized personnel"

Lumian withdrew his gaze, not interrupting his infiltration.

As he glided along the shadows on the side of the corridor towards where he suspected patients might be, Lumian gradually became uneasy.

He unconsciously looked down and found that at some point he had separated from the shadows and returned to human form.

His contract ability had naturally become ineffective!

Lumian also noticed that the clothes on his body were slowly changing, transforming into the standard attire of a Mushu Hospital orderly.

Wh— Lumian associated this with the "mummy" Old Ding at the entrance and that notice, thought of the illusory abyss underground and the characteristics of the Mother Tree of Desire pathway, and quickly formed a guess.

There was a strong curse in this area!

The content of the curse was: no entry to unauthorized personnel!

In other words, unauthorized personnel who enter will become authorized personnel, becoming orderlies who frequently enter and exit this place, becoming puppets of the illusory abyss? After figuring this out, Lumian naturally understood how to break this curse.

But he didn't dare to do so.

His method of breaking the curse was to shout on the spot "Mother, I am Your child!"

The essence of this statement was to acknowledge himself as a true Child of God.

And B1 of Mushu Hospital clearly contained the power and influence of the Great Mother, with the "newborn" in the morgue being proof of this.

Under these premises, the Child of God of the Great Mother certainly wouldn't be considered unauthorized personnel!

Lumian felt the abnormal changes in his body accelerating, and for the moment he couldn't think of any other way, so he had no choice but to activate the black mark on his right shoulder and teleport away from this level.

He appeared in the emergency stairwell on the first floor, which was empty.

Fortunately, I could teleport out from B1; otherwise, I would have had to use the corpse wax candle or call upon the honorific names of Madam Magician or Chief Yagates… No, at the speed of the changes just now, the Beyonder ritual wouldn't have had time to take effect… Lumian looked down to examine himself and found that his clothes had returned to normal.

He transformed back into a shadow creature and came to the entrance of the emergency stairwell, observing the up and down movement of the elevators while pondering how to penetrate basement level one and rescue Li Keji without becoming a true Child of God.

Amidst his swirling thoughts, Lumian saw a special elevator come up from B1, and an orderly pushed out a transfer bed.

A nurse stood on each side of the transfer bed, and lying on it was a man with a thick beard, eyes tightly closed, wearing blue and white striped hospital clothes.

It was Li Keji.

Has the "treatment" ended? Lumian's eyes narrowed.

Was I still too late after all?

He watched Li Keji being pushed out of the elevator hall, following in the shadows all the way, out of the main building and back to the psychiatric department.

After confirming Li Keji's hospital room, Lumian first returned outside, behind some green trees, took out his phone, switched modes, and sent a message to Franca: "Couldn't penetrate B1. There's a curse inside; I was forced to leave early.

"Now, Li Keji has completed 'treatment' and returned to his room. I plan to sneak in to confirm his condition. If it's unsalvageable, I'll execute the cleanup plan."

Franca quickly replied: "If the cleanup is too complicated, we can abandon it for now and bring Ludwig to try.

"I think he's very effective against food-type enemies, like mushrooms."

That makes sense… Lumian replied with an "OK" and directly put the phone into the Traveler's Bag.

There might be a battle coming up, so he needed to protect his phone.

Soon after, Lumian in his shadow creature state slipped through the door crack of Li Keji's room, silently rising up in front of the bed.

He looked around, gazed at the still sleeping Li Keji, and began to assess his condition.

Suddenly, Li Keji opened his eyes and sat up.

Seeing it was Lumian, he showed a genuine smile.

"I've discovered the essence!

"I've succeeded!"

Lumian's expression changed abruptly.

He saw Li Keji's chest swell up, two large mushrooms raising his hospital gown, milk overflowing, while in Li Keji's abdomen, mushrooms that seemed to be formed from flesh and blood writhed and tore through the clothing, as if creating a blood-colored, real, directly exposed uterus.

Chapter 1016: Mushroom Monster

Lumian looked at Li Keji and asked calmly, "What is the essence? What has succeeded?"

Li Keji, with his thick beard and dressed in blue-and-white striped hospital clothes, spread his arms wide and said excitedly, "The essence is that only Mother can bring new life, and only new life can cure your vegetable friend!"

Just as Li Keji finished speaking, a dark iron sword slashed toward him through the air.

The surface of the sword burned with crimson flames, which twisted into a black flame that suppressed madness and brutality halfway through.

After hearing the first part of Li Keji's response, Lumian had already taken out the Sword of Courage from his Traveler's Bag without hesitation.

He swung the sword at Li Keji, whose chest was swollen with milk mushrooms and whose abdomen was entangled by flesh-and-blood mushrooms forming a uterus. He converted the normal flames into Fire of Destruction.

Only this fire could truly kill the Mushroom King Li Keji, who possessed both the unique cognition of Mr. Fool and the power of Mother's new life, preventing him from being resurrected from the ashes!

Just as the black flame of destruction was about to strike Li Keji, the patient room vanished, and in its place appeared a wild, grassy plain.

Li Keji had disappeared as well.

The Fire of Destruction fell upon the wilderness of Paramita, scorching a long trench in the earth.

Within the trench, no grass grew.

Next, Lumian saw the soil in the distance loosen as a gigantic mushroom, covered in dark red veins, shot up from the ground like a massive tree, reaching for the sky.

Each of its mycelia was as thick as a branch, white with blood-red spots. Its cap was Li Keji's enlarged, bearded head. On its "chest," tumor-like growths rose, oozing a milky liquid. Its abdomen was covered with a translucent membrane, and beneath it, flesh mushrooms interbred, seemingly nurturing a jellyfish-like smaller mushroom inside.

Seeing this, small, dense bumps appeared on Lumian's skin, as if he had been mildly corrupted.

At the same time, he felt his life force flowing uncontrollably toward the giant mushroom and noticed that the green grass across the wilderness was all bending toward Li Keji, turning yellow.

Li Keji, serving as the mushroom's cap, spoke fervently and sincerely, "If you want new life, the current amount of life isn't enough.

"Give me all your lives, okay?"

By now, Lumian's eyes had taken on a dark, iron-black hue, and he found the pale white mark that represented the weakness on the giant mushroom.

He teleported to Li Keji's side, thrusting the Sword of Courage, engulfed in black flames of destruction, into the giant mushroom's abdomen.

Several branch-like mycelia whipped around, forming a dense net of vines that blocked the dark iron sword's path.

They were instantly set ablaze, turning to ash in the rapidly spreading black flames.

The giant mushroom shuddered violently, cutting off the burning mycelia from its body.

The mycelia fell to the ground, failing to affect the mushroom's main trunk.

Lumian followed through with a downward slash of the Sword of Courage.

This produced clusters of burning black fireballs, which exploded immediately.

Rumble!

The violent shockwaves, mixed with destructive black flames, surged in all directions, engulfing both the giant mushroom that was Li Keji and Lumian's own body.

Lumian activated the black mark on his right shoulder, teleporting out of the explosion's range just in time.

In the next second, he saw the giant mushroom ignited, swaying under the force of the shockwave.

Before Lumian could launch a second attack, the giant mushroom shed all the parts engulfed by the Fire of Destruction as if shedding its skin, discarding them before they could reach the cap or affect the abdomen and the "child" inside.

In an instant, a vast amount of ash floated in the air, and the giant mushroom's deeper layers were exposed—pulsing with sinews, flesh, and dark red veins wriggling like worms, exuding a strong milky scent.

All of these parts were writhing and rapidly regenerating.

Li Keji's head, acting as the mushroom cap, showed no hostility, and he happily said to Lumian,

"See? This is the final product.

"Come join us, and you'll also gain new life!"

As Li Keji finished speaking, Lumian had already pulled out a mirror, reflecting the giant mushroom that had shed its mycelia and outer layer.

Then, he pressed his hand, burning with Fire of Destruction, onto the mirror and wiped it once.

Demoness's curse!

A curse imbued with Fire of Destruction!

The giant mushroom jerked violently, causing all its flesh and liquid to shrink inward, wrapping its body and Li Keji's head, serving as the cap, into a bloody sphere.

On the surface of the sphere, clusters of smaller mushrooms stubbornly sprouted.

At that moment, black flames erupted from within, engulfing the entire bloody sphere.

One by one, the smaller mushrooms fell silently, while the layers of flesh rapidly carbonized.

The bloody mass writhed intensely, and one side suddenly split open, spitting out a wet, newborn mushroom.

This new mushroom was nearly identical to the previous giant mushroom, with Li Keji's head serving as the cap, branch-like mycelia hanging down, and tumors bulging, oozing milk. Its abdomen was covered by a membrane, nurturing new life inside. The only difference was that it was slightly smaller, as if it had shrunk by a full size.

Covered in greasy, gray-black afterbirth, the new mushroom shot out from the mother body's power, swiftly escaping the Fire of Destruction's burning area.

New Life!

Li Keji had used New Life to sever the connection between the Demoness's curse and himself just in time!

Is there still a way to escape the curse? As Lumian's life continued to drain rapidly, his mind tensed, and his gaze followed the flying, spore-scattering new mushroom.

His eyes quickly turned a silvery-white tinged with black.

He intended to use the Eye of Calamity to search for the black thread of fate that bound Li Keji, hoping to destroy this New Life and finally kill the mushroom monster in front of him.

Just as the mercury-colored illusory river of fate composed of countless complex symbols appeared in Lumian's vision, he suddenly felt an itch on his skin.

Instinctively, he lowered his head and saw that the small bumps on his skin had grown slightly, beginning to bloom as if about to sprout tiny mushrooms.

He had been corrupted by observing Li Keji's River of Fate!

Instantly, sinister and silent Demoness's black flames ignited on Lumian's body, consuming the burgeoning mushroom clusters without a sound.

Enduring the pain, Lumian teleported to the edge of Paramita.

He wanted to see if he could lure Li Keji to the police station and use the official forces and the power of the dream's main consciousness to eliminate this mushroom monster.

Paramita did not stop Lumian, allowing him to pass through.

What greeted Lumian's eyes was not the patient room of the psychiatric department at Mushu Hospital, but a spacious, dimly lit room, with half-drawn curtains, a desk, bookshelves, and a sofa set.

Lumian stood at the room's entrance.

From the corner of his eye, he saw that the door was half-open, with a conspicuous nameplate embedded on it. The nameplate bore five words in the local dream city script: "Dean's Office."

The dean's office? Lumian tensed even more and instinctively turned his gaze toward the area behind the desk.

There was a leather executive chair, and leaning against it was a figure.

The figure wore a white doctor's coat, had sparse eyebrows, bright brown eyes filled with a smile, and chestnut hair tied into a high bun. Her features were clean and alluring, exuding an elegant air, while she cradled a chubby, swaddled baby in her arms.

Lumian was momentarily stunned.

He knew this person.

She was one of the few surviving villagers from Cordu—Madame Pualis!

Pualis de Roquefort.

As Lumian's thoughts raced, he didn't immediately teleport away. Instead, he looked at Madame Pualis, who sat behind the desk holding the adorable baby, and smiled.

"So the new dean of Mushu Hospital is you.

"What a pleasant surprise."

As he spoke, Lumian recalled that Matriarch Roland of the Church of Earth Mother, an Angel of the Mother pathway, was only the associate dean of Mushu Hospital, yet Madame Pualis was able to be the dean.

What did this signify?

Was Madame Pualis more powerful, or was she the proxy of the Great Mother?

Madame Pualis looked at Lumian, who was wearing a mask and sunglasses, and smiled.

"I was equally delighted and surprised to find you here.

"And you now have a part of Aurore with you—what a double joy.

"I've recently learned a phrase about life's joys: 'Reuniting with an old friend in a faraway place and celebrating your wedding night by candlelight.' Our situation fits the first."

"Why don't you take off your sunglasses and mask so I can get a good look at you, and then we can enjoy our wedding night together and bring Aurore into the world?"

Do all of you followers of the Great Mother talk about having children as soon as you meet? Lumian didn't get angry or upset at Madame Pualis's words.

Some things couldn't be stopped, so it was best to stay calm, just like when the secret ceremony had brought dangerous power, leading to the mutation of the Blood Emperor's remnant aura and the transformation of the souls of the Cordu villagers into soldiers sealed within.

Following Madame Pualis's suggestion, Lumian took off his sunglasses and removed his mask, revealing a bright face with a hint of a cold smile.

If I don't show my face, how can I Charm her better?

And without better Charm, how can I create the best opportunity to escape?

As he kept an eye on the mushroom monster that Li Keji had become, Lumian shifted his gaze to the little angelic baby cradled in Madame Pualis's arms. "Is she your child?"

"Yes," Madame Pualis answered with a smile, her eyes roaming across Lumian's face.

Lumian instantly thought of the empty crib in the Cordu village ruins and asked, as if casually,

"What's her name?"

With a serene smile, Madame Pualis replied, "Omebella."

Chapter 1017: Child

Omebella?

She is also called Omebella?

Was the mysterious baby Madame Pualis had been carrying in Cordu Village named Omebella? Did that empty crib belong to Omebella?

At this moment, Lumian felt as if he had been struck by lightning.

Previously, Madam Magician had joked that as long as the dean of Mushu Hospital wasn't named Omebella, it wouldn't be a problem. At the time, Lumian thought it was just a horror story, and even if the dean was really named Omebella, it shouldn't be his biggest concern. But hearing that Madame Pualis's child was called Omebella truly sent chills down his spine.

If it were just Madame Pualis becoming the dean of Mushu Hospital, or just her giving birth to a mysterious child who had shown strange qualities in Cordu Village, Lumian wouldn't have been so shocked and frightened. These would have been unexpected but not unreasonable events.

But the baby was named Omebella—the mysterious child Madame Pualis had carried and given birth to in Cordu Village was called Omebella.

If Madame Pualis wasn't lying, if that baby was truly the Omebella Lumian knew, didn't that mean he had once "coexisted" with the infant Omebella in Cordu Village for some time? And later, he had killed another unborn Omebella, obtained Omebella's bloodline through the corresponding umbilical cord remnants, come into contact with the remains of the earliest Omebella, and encountered some things and arrangements related to Omebella!

Had all this been foreshadowed in the disaster at Cordu Village, rather than beginning only when he ate Omebella's umbilical cord remnants?

Lumian suddenly felt as if he was back in a scene from his vagrant life. At that time, he was huddled in a corner, watching a large, slippery, ferocious poisonous snake slowly slithering past him, not daring to move a muscle. Now, he seemed to feel that cold, damp, slippery sensation crawling over him, seeping in bit by bit, silently coiling around him.

If the baby Madame Pualis gave birth to in Cordu Village was Omebella, then who was in Father Montserrat's belly, whom I killed?

Where did the umbilical cord remnants I ate come from, and why could they help me contact the remains of the earliest Omebella? Why could they make the Mother's children, who lacked necessary wisdom, mistake me for the Child of God, Omebella?

In the depths of the Underworld, who did that egg nurtured by the ancient god's remains point to? Why could I hear the call for Omebella?

Moreover, why did the followers of the Great Mother want to induce me to become the true Child of God, to become the real Omebella? Hadn't Omebella already been born?

What is going on?

Which one is real, and which is fake?

Are they all fake? Are they all real?

Lumian's gaze fixed on the baby in Madame Pualis's arms. He noticed her chubby face, rosy and delicate, incredibly adorable.

"Oh, so she's Omebella. Who's her father?" Although Lumian's inner thoughts were bubbling like boiling water in a steam boiler, outwardly he maintained a calm demeanor.

This was a basic quality of a Hunter, and he also had the endurance of an Ascetic.

Madame Pualis suddenly smiled. "If I said it was you or Aurore, would you believe me?"

"Stop with the hellish jokes. We've never touched you," Lumian said, outwardly unperturbed.

"Yes, I regret that too. I hope we'll have a chance to make up for it in the future," Madame Pualis sighed and said, "Her mother is me, and also the Great Mother. As for her father, on the surface, it's the padre, but there's someone else."

Someone else… Just as Lumian was about to start eliminating the villagers of Cordu Village one by one, heavy footsteps suddenly sounded behind him.

He half-turned and saw the giant mushroom with Li Keji's head as its cap appearing in the dim corridor.

At this moment, the smile on Madame Pualis's face faded slightly. She said in a casual tone, "Come, the child needs you."

As soon as she finished speaking, the baby in the swaddling clothes began to cry loudly.

Hearing this loud cry, Lumian's body instinctively, involuntarily walked towards Madame Pualis, towards the baby Omebella.

It was like two mutually attracted magnets finally meeting.

Lumian suddenly had some realizations:

Madame Pualis wants to do something with my body, which possesses Omebella's bloodline!

After last night's events, Li Keji was quickly transferred to Mushu Hospital for treatment, not only because the Celestial Worthy wanted to eliminate this hidden danger and the Great Mother attempted to balance the situation, but also because Madame Pualis planned to attract me here!

I refused to seek help from the Great Mother last night to become the true Child of God, so did the Great Mother and the Celestial Worthy temporarily reach an agreement?

Lumian didn't hesitate. He activated the black mark on his right shoulder, attempting to teleport away.

His figure disappeared from the dean's office, but he didn't appear at the entrance of the police station in the dream city.

He arrived in the wilderness again.

In the depths of the wilderness stood a gigantic green oak tree that seemed to connect the sky and the ground. The top of the oak tree appeared to lead to heaven, disappearing into layers of white clouds.

Lumian saw that the surface of the enormous oak tree that seemed to hold up the sky was marked with scorch marks from lightning strikes. Its bark was mottled, concealing vitality.

His gaze followed the complex patterns formed by the mottled bark, instinctively moving upward. Near the top of the tree crown, he saw a newly grown branch.

It had grown tenaciously from a charred spot caused by lightning strikes, entwined with some lush, vibrant mistletoe.

At this moment, this new branch, along with the mistletoe, was grasped by a chubby, fair little hand. The hand belonged to the swaddled baby Omebella.

She wore a floral crown and was "dressed" in a fresh green dress. Madame Pualis, whose lower body had transformed into a giant bird shape and whose back had sprouted brown wings, held her in her arms.

"Come, the child needs you!" Madame Pualis's voice echoed across the entire wilderness. The mushroom monster that Li Keji had become also appeared at the edge of the wild.

Lumian attempted to teleport out to no avail. He immediately threw out a mirror, preparing to enter the area behind the mirror, to see if he could use the mirror world to escape this wilderness.

The next second, the glass surface of the mirror seemed to come alive, softening and writhing, forming a "mouth" leading to a dark depth.

Lumian made a quick decision, abandoning the attempt to penetrate the glass surface, letting the mirror fall on its own.

Smack!

The mirror shattered into multiple pieces, each mercury-coated glass shard desperately crawling away.

Lumian snorted, and quiet black flames surged from within his body. Outside the black flames, thick frost quickly condensed, as if to create a coffin for slumber.

The invisible spider silk that had already spread throughout the surrounding area retracted, wrapping around the frost layer by layer, preparing to form a huge cocoon.

This was a Demoness's strongest defense mechanism, capable of both dispelling curses and negative influences, and resisting substantial damage.

Lumian's plan was to use this ability to buy time to actively exit the dream or light the corpse wax candle to complete the secret deed ritual.

However, before the spider cocoon could fully form, the Demoness's black flames seemed to take on a life of their own, truly burning Lumian's spirituality. The ice layer that was supposed to provide defense also began to restrict Lumian's movements.

They had all come alive!

Lumian immediately activated the black mark on his right shoulder.

He moved to the edge of the wilderness, far from the giant mushroom man, escaping the influence of the Demoness's black flames and layers of frost.

Although he couldn't teleport out of this wilderness, he could still Blink around within it.

"Come, the child needs you!"

As he heard Madame Pualis's voice, Lumian ran a few steps towards the gigantic oak tree that seemed to hold up the sky.

No good, in this preset battlefield, within Paramita, in front of the baby Omebella, although everyone is suppressed to the Sequence 7 level, I'm still being very effectively restrained. I can't hold out for too long… Should I recite Madam Magician's honorific name or utter "Leodero," the blasphemous incantation? No, I might only have one chance to recite the honorific name, and "Leodero" might not be able to break the giant oak tree's seal on Paramita… If we're going down, let's go big, everyone perish together! As Lumian thought, he reached into the Traveler's Bag and firmly grasped that special mirror world fragment.

Then, he initiated teleportation again, using this to resist the invisible pull of baby Omebella on himself and her strange ability to bring things to life.

After Blinking to the next position, Lumian opened his mouth and quickly recited a sentence in ancient Hermes, "Great Door of All Doors;"

Lumian was about to recite the honorific name of Chief Yagates—Mr. Door—to attract His attention!

This represented the power of the dream subconscious maintaining order.

Although this would result in Lumian himself being permanently kicked out of the dream, Madame Pualis, the mushroom-transformed Li Keji, and baby Omebella here, every single one of them, wouldn't be able to continue "staying" in the dream city!

This was equivalent to eliminating hidden dangers for Jenna, Franca, and others in their subsequent actions.

As for what comes after, trust in teammates!

After reciting the first honorific name, Lumian teleported to another side of the wilderness, avoiding the attacks of Madame Pualis and Li Keji.

"Guide of the endless cosmos;"

Lumian finished one sentence and quickly disappeared from his original spot.

Seeing this, Madame Pualis opened her mouth, about to unleash a Banshee's Shriek.

At this moment, a male version of Lumian appeared in the wilderness.

He was a shallow mirror image created by the mirror world fragment, very weak.

He spread his arms and shouted loudly in ancient Hermes, "Leodero!"

This voice burst out almost simultaneously with the Banshee's Shriek. As the shallow mirror image shattered under the influence of the sound waves, the sky above suddenly darkened.

In the darkness, dense clouds gathered, and countless silver-white electric snakes jumped to form a huge lightning bolt, striking towards that giant, sky-supporting green oak tree.

Smack!

A large number of small, silver-white electric snakes crawled over the surface of the oak tree, creating patches of charred marks, but it didn't completely die, still constantly regenerating.

This effect temporarily paralyzed Madame Pualis and baby Omebella.

Crack, the Mirror Substitution Lumian, who had shattered under the Banshee's Shriek and the overflow of lightning, appeared not too far from Li Keji, reciting the third line of the honorific name.

"Key to all mysterious worlds."

Chapter 1018: "Desperate" Struggle

As Lumian recited the third line of the honorific name, the dark clouds and lightning in the sky suddenly collapsed towards the center, forming a huge vortex swirling upwards. It was as if a giant with the sky as its face had opened its single eye, or a strange tunnel with an unknown destination had appeared out of thin air.

This vortex rapidly expanded, as if it would tear apart heaven and earth, swelling into a door.

Seeing this, Madame Pualis, who had just broken free from her paralyzed state, frowned slightly. Holding baby Omebella, she shrank into the interior of the giant green oak tree that seemed to hold up the sky, disappearing from Lumian's sight.

Lumian then saw the mushroom monster with Li Keji's head as its cap standing rigidly in place, as if it had encountered some kind of restraint.

Immediately after, the mushroom monster began to disintegrate from its abdomen, like a vase smashed to the ground, breaking into many large pieces.

These pieces continued to break apart, and in just a few seconds, they became a pile of particles barely visible to the naked eye.

The disintegration rapidly spread to different parts of the mushroom monster's body, finally reaching Li Keji's head that served as the mushroom cap.

The head quickly became as if it were pieced together from fragments, but Li Keji's face showed no trace of hatred or resentment.

His expression twisted uncontrollably from pain, but his eyes were unusually sincere and joyful.

He struggled to say to Lumian, "I really… succeeded…

"Join… us… let's go… be reborn together…"

Before he finished speaking, Li Keji's head shattered even more severely, breaking into individual pixels.

Almost simultaneously, Lumian found that the giant oak tree had suffered a similar fate.

But after it disintegrated, Madame Pualis and baby Omebella did not appear in the tree's core.

They had hidden somewhere unknown, or perhaps had left the dream in some way beforehand.

So powerful… Is this the power of the dream's main consciousness maintaining order? Lumian activated the black mark on his right shoulder, trying to escape the current collapse of Paramita.

Although he had mentally prepared himself to be completely kicked out of the dream and never be able to return, he hadn't been sentenced yet, had he?

He had to struggle a bit!

What if he succeeded?

Lumian's figure immediately disappeared from the spot.

His chosen destination was the entrance of Yangdu Prison.

Yes, I've committed a crime, you can lock me up, but don't "exile" me!

The next second, Lumian appeared in a spacious office, seeing a middle-aged man wearing a clean white shirt with black diamond-patterned police ranks on his shoulders.

This middle-aged man had a rigid demeanor, with deep black hair interspersed with some white. He sat quietly behind the desk, looking at Lumian with deep brown, almost black eyes. He was clearly the chief of the dream city's Police Department, the symbol of the Uniqueness of the Door pathway, Yagates!

My teleportation destination was changed to the police chief's office? Lumian suddenly had this realization.

At this moment, Yagates asked in a deep voice, "Who are you, and what do you intend to do in Yangdu?"

Along with the deputy chief's questioning, Lumian suddenly felt a strong rejection from the dream and his own rapid marionettization.

He understood very well that if he left the dream city like this, he would never be able to return.

Lumian's thoughts raced as he made a final struggle.

He recalled a hint Amon had given him on the way to Mushu Hospital.

"The most fundamental fact is that The Fool has never accommodated the Uniqueness of the Error and Door pathways, while the Celestial Worthy has…"

This sentence didn't mention that Mr. Door had long accommodated the Uniqueness of the Door pathway, and Amon had briefly accommodated it…

So, the Chief Yagate's essence is a product of the dream subconscious cognition, Mr. Door's spiritual imprint, the Celestial Worthy's spiritual imprint, and a bit of Amon's spiritual imprint, combined to symbolize the Uniqueness of the Door pathway, symbolizing the dream's main consciousness maintaining order…

Chief Yagates… only the dream subconscious part has a bit of Mr. Fool's spirit… To avoid being kicked out this time, or not being completely kicked out, I can only find a way to strengthen or stimulate Mr. Door's spiritual imprint… Lumian had an inspiration in a very short time and recalled Madam Magician's introduction to Mr. Door.

Before his thoughts stalled completely, before the dream's rejecting force threw him out, Lumian blurted out in response to the Chief's question, "I am… an ally of the… Abraham family!"

Suddenly, Lumian felt the air around him solidify.

At the same time, he noticed that the Chief's deep brown, almost black eyes showed a hint of confusion and contemplation. His brows furrowed unconsciously, as if trying to remember something but unable to truly recall.

The force rapidly marionettizing Lumian suddenly slowed, and the strong rejection from the dream did the same.

As expected… Chief Yagates mainly embodies the conflict between Mr. Door's spiritual imprint and the Celestial Worthy's spiritual imprint… Just now, I was thinking that even if being completely kicked out of the dream was unavoidable, I should still tell Chief Yagates about Mr. Door directly with the idea of mutual destruction, stimulating the corresponding spiritual imprint to make it more active… Lumian's condition improved considerably, and his thoughts were no longer so stalled.

Seeing that Chief Yagates didn't respond, he further said, "My guide is a student of a member of the Abraham family, and now she is protecting the entire Abraham family!"

Chief Yagates's expression grew more confused, but his face was no longer stern.

Lumian quickly examined himself and found that the dream's rejecting force still existed but had weakened slightly.

It's working, I need to increase the intensity! Lumian thought for just a second before shouting, following his spiritual intuition, "I am a Hunter, and also a Demoness, and I still have traces of Alista Tudor's aura on me!"

"Alista Tudor…" Chief Yagates murmured, repeating the name as if it were both familiar and unfamiliar.

Feeling that the dream was still rejecting him, Lumian considered for a moment and said, "I've also been corrupted by the crimson moon, but currently, the situation is under control."

He knew that Mr. Door had once encountered corruption from the Great Mother, which was a common point between them.

Earlier, he would have directly stated that it was corruption from the Great Mother—after all, it was a desperate struggle, what couldn't be said?

But now, seeing hope of not being completely kicked out of the dream, he naturally dared not speak too plainly, fearing that it would not only stimulate Mr. Door but also the Celestial Worthy, causing the situation to take a sharp turn for the worse!

In a popular saying in dream city, this would be like "he who is down need fear no fall."

Previously, Lumian was down and had nothing to lose, but now the change in the situation had put him back on his feet, giving him something to be cautious about.

Chief Yagates once again gazed at Lumian in his Demoness of Despair state, seemingly re-evaluating this wanted criminal who had brought chaos and conflict.

But the dreamscape's rejecting force didn't weaken further.

Lumian endured this rejection and rapid marionettization, and thought of another connection between himself and Mr. Door.

With an attitude of giving it a try, he said, "Amon once guided me."

He said this not only because Mr. Door and Amon were both Grand Dukes of the Tudor Empire, but also with the hidden intention of stimulating that bit of Amon's spiritual imprint within the Chief.

"Amon…" Chief Yagates raised his right hand and pinched his chin.

Lumian saw his reaction but didn't feel the dream's rejecting force and rapid marionettization force continue to weaken.

It's still not enough, just a little more… Lumian shouted one last time before he could no longer resist that rejecting force, "I came to Yangdu to fight against those destroyers, to fight against the apostles of evil gods, to prevent the evil gods from invading!"

As soon as he finished speaking, Lumian felt the dream's rejecting force suddenly weaken, and the force trying to marionettize him became vague and unclear.

Chief Yagates, looking at Lumian, slowly nodded. "I can sense that you're not lying.

"Breaking the law must certainly be punished, but if there are reasons and it's pitiable, the punishment can be reduced."

Hearing these two sentences, Lumian quietly breathed a sigh of relief.

His interpretation of this was: he would be imprisoned, but not for life or sentenced to death;

he would be kicked out of the dream, but not completely kicked out.

"I accept the punishment," Lumian didn't argue further, because Chief Yagates had already passed his judgment.

He only sincerely requested, "Can I notify my family?"

"You may." The stern-faced Chief Yagates didn't refuse this request.

Lumian quickly took out his phone and, in front of Chief Yagates, sent a voice-to-text WeChat message to Franca:

"I'm fine, but I might be locked up for a while. You can ask Miss Huang for help to find a lawyer, see if they can get me out on bail.

"The mushroom monster has been eliminated, but Li Keji said he ultimately succeeded. Wait for Jenna to come back, and have her take Li Lu to tour the wards in Crimson Moon Hospital and Mushu Hospital where Li Keji was hospitalized. See if they can discover anything.

"Also, pay attention to whether Mushu Hospital has changed its dean."

After sending this message, Lumian waited for about ten seconds before receiving a brief reply from Franca:

"Okay."

Lumian immediately used the Information Shredder to delete the chat history along with the contact list, then put the phone back into the Traveler's Bag.

After doing this, he looked back at Chief Yagates. "I'm ready."

Only then did the deputy chief pick up the desk phone and dial a number.

"Deng, come over here for a moment."

As he spoke, Lumian felt the dream's rejecting force become strong once again.

He no longer resisted, following this force to exit the dream.

…

Trier, inside a luxurious villa.

Lumian opened his eyes in bed for the second time in one day.

After examining his state, his first reaction was to try to enter the dream city again.

The next second, he felt he wasn't blocked, so he stopped this behavior, planning to wait 24 hours before trying again.

From a timing perspective, this wouldn't affect Queen Mystic's plan to banish the mirrored Emperor Roselle.

Chapter 1019: Who is the Father?

Phew… Lumian exhaled, got out of bed, and walked out of the room.

In the living room downstairs, Madam Justice was serving Madam Magician, Madam Judgment, Jenna, and Anthony the most authentic Loen afternoon tea.

This was also to soothe the minds and spirits of the two Minor Arcana, helping them relax and feel the reality of the present moment.

"Why have you left the dream again?" Jenna looked at Lumian in the living room doorway with surprise.

"I was kicked out," Lumian said with a smile.

Compared to being completely kicked out, being able to enter the dream again was indeed something to be happy about.

"Because of Li Keji?" Madam Magician asked thoughtfully.

"Yes." Lumian sat down and recounted his agreement with Queen Mystic, Li Keji's transfer and tragic treatment, and what Amon had said in the ride-hailing car.

After hearing Amon's interpretation of the symbolic meanings of the dream images of Peng Deng, Grisha, and others, Madam Justice said somewhat embarrassedly, "I'm really not an expert in this area."

"That's perfectly normal," Madam Magician said with a smile. "Mr. Pallez's interpretation will arrive soon, and we can compare it with Amon's."

After saying this, she gestured for Lumian to continue.

Lumian went on to describe Li Keji's transformation, Madame Pualis's appearance as the new dean of Mushu Hospital, the appearance of baby Omebella, and what happened after he recited Mr. Door's honorific name.

"Using ties worked?" Madam Magician asked, both surprised and amused to hear that Lumian wasn't permanently kicked out of the dream city and could enter once more.

If she had known this earlier, she might have been able to obtain a better outcome previously!

Madam Justice glanced at Madam Magician, reading her true thoughts.

In Madam Justice's view, this actually reflected a difference in personality:

Being permanently kicked out of the dream wouldn't result in death, and one could still follow the guidance of fate to give away the lucky coin, find new helpers, and continue exploring and experimenting in the dream city. Therefore, Madam Magician couldn't have had the mindset of being on the brink of perishing and struggling desperately, so she more easily accepted the corresponding outcome.

Lumian was different. He had experienced being a tramp, and in such a life, every bit of resource and every opportunity was extremely important. Therefore, he wasn't used to giving up and would instinctively struggle until failure truly arrived.

"It works," Lumian recalled. "Chief Yagates had the strongest reactions to things related to the Abraham family and protecting the dream city from invasion by evil gods. His feedback on these was also the most positive. Hmm, the names of the Blood Emperor and Amon also stimulated him to some degree, giving him a sense of familiarity. But he didn't have an obvious reaction to the matter of the Great Mother's corruption."

"Related to the Abraham family… protecting the dream city from invasion by evil gods…" Madam Magician suddenly sighed.

Madam Judgment then said to Lumian, "After experiencing Amon's deification, the Great Mother's corruption probably doesn't have much manifestation in Chief Yagates anymore.

"And only you could elicit certain reactions from Chief Yagates through the names of the Blood Emperor and Amon."

Lumian understood Madam Judgment's meaning.

Only someone like him, carrying the residual aura of the Blood Emperor and Amon's boon, could say such words with credibility and bring about genuine stimulation.

"Let's hope that the things you mentioned can make Mr. Door's spiritual imprint on Chief Yagates more active and maintain it for a while. This will be very helpful for subsequent probing and experiments." Madam Justice nodded in agreement.

She vaguely felt that the lucky coin ending up with Lumian after all its twists and turns was indeed the guidance of fate.

There was only one person who simultaneously embodied the concepts of Hunter, Demoness, demigod, Amon's boon, residual aura of the Blood Emperor, Omebella's bloodline, Underworld Daoist's seal, relative of a transmigrator, and having a connection to the Abraham family.

At this point, Jenna, more concerned about another matter, raised a question, "What's the deal with that baby Omebella that Madame Pualis was holding?"

What impact would this have on Lumian?

"When I arrived in Cordu, the crib was long empty. All I know is that the Child of God has already been born in the spirit world. The initial root of all this was indeed the child Madame Pualis 'lost'." Madam Magician slowly shook her head.

Lumian recalled and said, "Last year, in Trier, Madame Pualis said that the child had died long ago, killed by her father—the padre—who didn't know it was his child…

"This time, Madame Pualis said again that the child's father was ostensibly the padre, but actually someone else. Who could it be?"

Madam Magician pondered for quite a while, then said with a slightly peculiar expression, "Perhaps, at that time, baby Omebella had to die because she didn't yet have sufficient conditions to truly be born into the real world. Being killed by her father might be an important symbol for her future rebirth and arrival in reality."

"You have a guess about her real father?" Madam Justice looked at Madam Magician, not hiding her curiosity.

What kind of guess could make Madam Magician's expression change so obviously and strangely?

Seeing Lumian, Jenna, and others also looking at her, Madam Magician cleared her throat and said, "It's just a guess, I can't guarantee it's correct."

"Who?" Madam Judgment asked cooperatively.

Madam Magician looked up at the sky and lowered her voice. "Eternal Blazing Sun."

What? Jenna and Anthony were stunned.

Madam Justice and Madam Judgment were equally surprised.

Eternal Blazing Sun? Lumian looked at Madam Magician with only one thought in mind, How did she make that connection? Is this what it means to be a novelist?

Madam Magician stood up and began to pace as she spoke, "Guillaume Bénet was the padre of the Eternal Blazing Sun Church in Cordu Village, essentially the representative of the Eternal Blazing Sun in this parish. Is there any problem with this statement?"

"No." Jenna instinctively shook her head.

This was basic theological knowledge.

Madam Magician looked at Lumian.

"You saw Madame Pualis and the padre having an affair in the cathedral at that time, right?"

"Yes." Lumian nodded slightly.

"Having an affair and conceiving a child in the Eternal Blazing Sun cathedral, near the altar, with the representative of the Eternal Blazing Sun could indeed point to the Eternal Blazing Sun as the child's father. But the premise is that the Eternal Blazing Sun Himself agreed or acquiesced, which is impossible, right?" Madam Judgment felt this was something a High-Sequence being of the Sun pathway wouldn't do.

Madam Magician smiled. "The Eternal Blazing Sun certainly didn't agree or acquiesce at the time, and might not even have known about it. This is also one of the reasons why that baby had to die after being born in Cordu Village—the corresponding symbolism wasn't established yet.

"But do you remember what happened afterwards? The Eternal Blazing Sun pretended to cooperate with the Great Mother, letting Lady Moon of the Nightstalkers conceive a Child of God.

"Later, the birth and advent of that Child of God helped Red Angel Medici successfully kill Vermonda Sauron and obtain that Conqueror Beyonder characteristic.

"Not long after that Child of God was sacrificed, Madame Pualis—who entered Fourth Epoch Trier disappeared—unaffected by the subsequent cleanup.

"These events, when viewed separately, don't seem problematic. But when connected, they point to something."

Madam Justice nodded thoughtfully.

"The Eternal Blazing Sun used the Great Mother to make Red Angel Medici's plot succeed, but was also used by the Great Mother?"

Madam Magician sighed and said, "What the Great Mother wanted from the beginning wasn't the baby in Lady Moon's womb, but the act of the Eternal Blazing Sun making Lady Moon conceive a Child of God—this symbolism.

"Once that Child of God died, the long-deceased baby Omebella, who had the basic symbolism, inherited this relationship, gained new life, and helped Madame Pualis escape the subsequent cleanup.

"It wasn't until then that baby Omebella was truly born, but she wasn't complete enough yet and needed to find a medium to descend into reality. After that, whether it was Father Montserrat or that bird egg in the depths of the Underworld, they were probably preparing for this."

"Now, I'm the best medium?" Lumian suddenly understood why Madame Pualis wanted him to come over, saying the child needed him.

Jenna listened in a daze, taking quite a while to sort out the relationships.

She asked confusedly, "But letting the father-child relationship of Lady Moon's child be inherited by the long-deceased baby Omebella doesn't seem like something within the Great Mother's authority."

"The Celestial Worthy—if the two great existences were already cooperating at that time." Madam Magician answered concisely.

"Reasoning it out this way, the Eternal Blazing Sun really could be the father of that baby Omebella in Madame Pualis's arms…" Lumian couldn't help but mutter, "The padre wasn't wrong when he said the affair was an action of the holy church… Although he himself didn't know the true meaning… Is this also a manifestation of symbolism?"

The room fell silent.

After quite a while, Madam Judgment broke the silence. "We need to report this to the Eternal Blazing Sun Church."

This wasn't to let the clergy of the Eternal Blazing Sun Church know about the "scandal", but to remind the true god Eternal Blazing Sun to pay attention to the relevant issues.

The Great Mother making Omebella's father a deity was certainly not just to make the child's status more noble, to become a true Child of God. There must be hidden purposes!

"But how should we explain this to the clergy of the Eternal Blazing Sun Church? With their fanaticism and purity, I'm afraid they might purge me on the spot." Madam Magician expressed a troubled look.

Indeed, we can't just tell those padres, bishops, and archbishops that their god was seduced by an evil god, can we? Lumian grumbled inwardly.

"Just say that Madame Pualis has appeared again, with a child between reality and illusion named Omebella, and that Omebella's father is ostensibly Guillaume Benet, the padre of Cordu Village, but actually someone else," Madam Justice said, choosing her words carefully. "Then mention that the baby had actually already died in Cordu Village, killed by the padre. With the Red Angel Medici's intelligence, it wouldn't be hard to make the relevant associations and come to similar conclusions."

"Alright." Madam Magician nodded solemnly.

After agreeing, this Major Arcana sincerely sighed. "I've realized that everyone who tries to use the Great Mother ends up being used by the Great Mother."

Chapter 1020: Preparation

Hearing Madam Magician's sigh, everyone turned their gaze towards Lumian.

Smiling, Lumian replied, "Well, it's not just the Great Mother using us. When the time comes, let Them decide the victor first."

This was his usual attitude towards issues that couldn't be immediately resolved but weren't life-threatening. Otherwise, his mental state and emotions would have exploded long ago.

"But we should still be vigilant and try to stay away from the Great Mother's followers," Madam Judgment specifically reminded him.

Lumian smiled wryly. "Sometimes, it's not a matter of whether I want to avoid them or not."

His spiritual intuition told him that even if he didn't return to Mushu Hospital, even if Madame Pualis and baby Omebella were forced to leave the dream due to Chief Yagates' attention, he would encounter them again in the real world in the near future.

This seemed to be a predestined fate, ever since he ate the remnants of Omebella's umbilical cord and truly came into contact with that bird egg in the depths of the Underworld and the Sealed Artifact—Gift of the Land.

…

Dream city, at the entrance of the Police Department.

Two imposing lawyers had secured bail for the pitiful Lumina.

On one of the floors of the Police Department's main building, Deng stood behind a window, watching Lumina bow and get into a car. He frowned and said to Chief Yagates, "Chief, why didn't we refuse her bail request?"

Yagates, also standing by the window, smiled helplessly and said, "I wanted to refuse too, but she really didn't kill Zaratulstra. There's both witness and physical evidence. At the time, she and that child were still in the face changer's line of sight.

"As for her possible accomplices, haven't you tried already? You couldn't get anything out of her. She seems to have truly lost her memory, with no corresponding memories even in her subconscious.

"After this, start from her social relationships and conduct a thorough investigation."

"Yes, Chief," Deng agreed with this investigative direction.

Yagates thought for two seconds, then said slowly, "Secretly list Mushu Hospital as a key investigation target as well."

"What happened?" Deng asked vigilantly.

Yagates turned his gaze back to the street below.

"After Li Keji was transferred back to Mushu Hospital, he turned into a monster. I cleaned it up. His transformation into a monster is closely related to the new dean at Mushu Hospital.

"Before long, Mushu Hospital will probably report Li Keji as missing."

"Yes, and last time, that corpse walked to Mushu Hospital's morgue." Deng nodded with a grave expression.

…

Trier, inside a luxurious villa.

Jenna pushed open the door to the top floor sunroom and saw Lumian sitting on the spacious balcony, intently gazing at the quietly flowing Srenzo River not far away.

At this time, the sun was setting, draping the classical buildings on the opposite bank in a golden-red coat, making bright, scattered spots of light race away along the dim water surface.

The whistles of steam ships returning to port sounded occasionally.

"What are you thinking about?" Jenna asked curiously as she walked towards the balcony.

Lumian's initially unfocused gaze gradually sharpened. He said thoughtfully, "I'm thinking about two things Amon said."

"Which two?" Jenna stood at the edge of the balcony, leaning on the railing, also admiring the Srenzo River under the setting sun.

Lumian recalled and said, "One was that what Peng Deng really wanted to hint at was something else.

"The other was that we need to learn how to filter out the interference of complex information and see the most fundamental facts."

At this point, Lumian murmured to himself, "The most fundamental facts…"

Jenna half-turned her body, about to discuss whether such words from Amon, a top-tier con artist, could be trusted and to what extent, when she saw Lumian suddenly stand up and walk out of the solarium.

She was stunned for a moment, then quickly followed.

Lumian came to the living room on the first floor and said to Madam Magician, who was reading a book, "I have some guesses and ideas. When I return to the dream, I plan to organize an action soon to weaken the Celestial Worthy and awaken Mr. Fool. At that time, please fully cooperate with me."

Madam Magician stood up abruptly, not bothering to ask Lumian what new guesses and ideas he had, and directly confirmed, "How confident are you that the direction is correct?"

Lumian chuckled. "Not very, it's more to verify the guesses.

"We've already collected a lot of information and obtained some resources, and Zhou Sasa is about to arrive in Yangdu. This symbolizes that the situation in the dream has developed to a turning point. It's time for us to take initiative and do something, we can't always be passive.

"When the time comes, if we succeed, everyone can rejoice. Even if we can't fully awaken Mr. Fool, it shows that we've found the right path, and we can continue to push in this direction afterwards. If we fail, we can eliminate some incorrect guesses and wrong directions, and we won't need to waste time on these aspects in the future. Hehe, I only have one last chance to enter the dream, if we do encounter failure, it's just right to pass on the lucky coin, and not hinder the efforts of those who come after."

Jenna was about to ask about an important detail when Madam Magician had already asked for her, "What about Two of Cups? She hasn't fully digested her Despair potion yet."

Lumian chuckled in response.

"She won't directly participate. If the attempt fails, the dream will continue to exist, not affecting her subsequent digestion of the potion. If it succeeds, her Despair potion should be directly digested, as will mine.

"Well, to be safe, please ask Mr. Sun to stand by Franca's bedside in advance, ready to help her extract the Demoness of Despair Beyonder characteristic."

"Alright," Madam Magician agreed to Lumian's request.

She then asked, "What are your new guesses and new ideas?"

"I can't tell you for now." Lumian smiled.

He then explained, "All of you are closely connected to Mr. Fool, which also means all of you are closely connected to the Celestial Worthy. Although most of you won't be influenced by this, you might be secretly watched by the Celestial Worthy, allowing Him to grasp some information.

"I'll tell you my thoughts when the operation officially begins."

Madam Magician felt this most deeply. She nodded slightly and said, "The problems for me and Mr. Pallez mainly come from our own pathways and status, but others do frequently enter and exit above the gray fog, occasionally praying to Mr. Fool.

"Alright, you guys are the ones in the dream city now, and you're the captain, so you lead."

…

Dream city, late at night.

Jenna, who had returned, left Room 2303 of Building 5 in Dechuang Garden with Ludwig, while Franca stayed behind to take care of Lumina.

Although Franca had observed Mushu Hospital in the afternoon and found that there were many people around who seemed to be plainclothes police, believing that the cultists inside would behave for a while, she still thought it necessary to guard against the possibility of Lumina being drawn by Omebella's bloodline and sneaking over there.

She hadn't seen any news about changing the dean on Mushu Hospital's website, official account, or video channel.

In a hidden place not far from Crimson Moon Hospital.

Jenna took out the Ice Amulet that Franca had given her from the Traveler's Bag—Franca, who had become a Demoness of Despair, no longer needed external help to directly enter the area behind mirrors and travel through the mirror world, so she had given all the corresponding charms to Jenna.

After setting up a makeup mirror, Jenna held Ludwig's hand with one hand and gripped the Ice Amulet with the other, activating the latter.

In the flickering light of the glass, the two instantly dove into the mirror hidden in the corner, traversing to behind the mirror-like object outside Li Keji's original hospital room.

After observing for a few seconds, Jenna led Ludwig out of the mirror-like object and nimbly leapt into the corridor.

Because the room was empty with no patients staying temporarily, the iron door wasn't locked. Jenna opened a small gap and slipped inside.

Then, she said to Ludwig, "See if there's anything edible here?"

Ludwig quickly pointed to the blanket on the bed.

"It can be eaten."

A second later, he pointed at the bed itself and said, "This can be eaten too."

"…" Jenna was speechless for a moment, then after a few seconds said, "I mean better food, like mushrooms."

Ludwig looked around, not neglecting the ceiling and gaps between floor tiles.

19:50

"There isn't."

There isn't any… Jenna, taking advantage of the remaining effects of the Ice Amulet, left the place with Ludwig.

Before long, she repeated the process, appearing with Ludwig in Li Keji's room in the psychiatric ward of Mushu Hospital.

"Is there any better food here, similar to mushrooms?" Jenna looked at Ludwig again.

Ludwig searched carefully, sniffing around, and said, "There isn't."

Li Keji's final product isn't in either place… What to do now? Jenna didn't dare stay in the Mushu Hospital room for too long, quickly leaving the psychiatric ward and coming to the tree-lined road outside, planning to circle to the front of the main building to catch a car home by the roadside.

The power of the Ice Amulet to traverse the mirror world had completely faded, and Jenna didn't want to unnecessarily use another corresponding charm.

Walking neither fast nor slow while holding Ludwig's hand, Jenna pondered the possible whereabouts of that therapeutic mushroom.

Did it fuse with Li Keji and vanish into thin air under Chief Yagates' gaze?

Or did Li Keji throw it into some corner of Mushu Hospital's basement before receiving 'treatment'?

The basement of Mushu Hospital doesn't welcome unrelated personnel… How to search?

Use the 'Leodero' spell to split it open, but that would destroy the mushroom too…

As Jenna thought about this, she suddenly had a spiritual premonition.

She abruptly turned her body halfway, raising her head to look at the main building of Mushu Hospital close by, towards a room high up.

A face suddenly appeared behind the glass sleeping in darkness, a face wrapped in white bandages with only the eyes and nostrils exposed.

In Jenna's moment of terror, something passed through the glass, falling down lightly.

The bandaged face retreated from the window.

With her Night Vision and eagle-like eyesight, Jenna quickly identified what was floating down.

It was a dried, shriveled, lifeless jellyfish-like mushroom.

This mushroom corpse fell much faster than leaves, and in just a few seconds, Ludwig reached out and caught it.

Seeing this, Jenna had a thought and blurted out a question to Ludwig, "Can it be eaten?"

Chapter 1021: A Night Passes

Jenna had noticed that the jellyfish-like mushroom was already withered and dead, unable to treat An Xiaotian, which was why she asked Ludwig if the mushroom could be eaten.

Of course, she didn't mean for An Xiaotian to eat it. As a vegetative patient, An Xiaotian no longer had the ability to chew and swallow. And grinding the mushroom into powder or juice to provide to An Xiaotian via intravenous drip was an area she didn't understand and couldn't judge whether it would be effective—Demonesses had always only dealt with spreading diseases and plagues, lacking knowledge and abilities in medical treatment.

What Jenna really wanted to ask was whether Ludwig could eat this mushroom, and if after eating it, he could gain the ability to treat vegetative patients.

Ludwig stared at the dried mushroom in his palm, licked his lips and said, "It can be eaten."

He paused for a moment, hesitated for two seconds and added, "But I don't know what can be gained from it."

Even a professional food analyst can't tell the cooking method and effects—this mushroom is indeed very special… Jenna suddenly realized this and quickly said to Ludwig, "Put the mushroom away first.

"Give it to me, I'll put it in the Traveler's Bag."

Ludwig immediately clenched his fist.

He shook his head while stuffing the mushroom into his coat pocket, as if it were a little hamster, his pet.

Jenna didn't have any intention of forcibly taking away the jellyfish-like mushroom. She held Ludwig's hand and quickly walked towards the exit of Mushu Hospital.

Only now did she have the energy to think about what had just happened.

Li Keji's jellyfish-like mushroom actually fell into the hands of that person wrapped in white bandages, and that person even gave the mushroom to us…

Right, Lumian mentioned that after his colleagues Old Wang and Old Ding were struck by lightning, they now have this scary appearance. When he came to visit Mushu Hospital last time, Old Wang seemed to be asking him for help… This time at the entrance of the basement of Mushu Hospital, he encountered Old Ding again…

Was Old Ding hinting at him to pay attention to the 'no entry to unauthorized personnel' sign at that time?

Was it Old Wang or Old Ding who threw down the mushroom just now? If it was Old Ding, it would make sense, as he was there when Li Keji was sent to the basement for 'treatment'…

But if he could stay in the basement for so long, it means he's no longer an unauthorized personnel…

What exactly do the current Old Wang and Old Ding symbolize in the dream city?

Why are they helping us?

I wonder if this dried mushroom is Li Keji's final product…

Amid these thoughts, Jenna took Ludwig back to Room 2303 of Building 5 in Dechuang Garden by taxi. She told Franca about their encounter and asked Ludwig to take out the withered mushroom to show.

Franca gazed at the mushroom, pondered for a moment and said, "My spiritual intuition tells me that this should be the final version of the therapeutic mushroom created by Li Keji, but its specific effects are unknown. Even divination methods won't provide an answer."

This was not only because the treatment subject was An Xiaotian, but also because the mushroom itself was very special.

"Should I eat it now?" Ludwig asked eagerly.

He had an expression that suggested the finest ingredient should be cooked in the simplest way.

Eating it raw!

Franca and Jenna exchanged glances before saying, "Wait until your godfather returns before eating it."

It wasn't that they weren't worried about changes happening to the mushroom in the next dozen or so hours, but the current situation was indeed not suitable for such a stimulating "experiment".

At present, Lumian and Anthony were outside the dream, Lumina had been frightened and needed close monitoring, and Franca herself couldn't withstand major accidents and couldn't attempt anything too risky. So, if Ludwig ate the mushroom now and something unexpected happened, the entire situation might collapse.

"Okay." Ludwig reluctantly stuffed the withered mushroom back into his pocket with some reluctance.

Jenna glanced towards the bedroom direction and asked Franca in a lowered voice, "How is Lumina doing?"

"Being 'inexplicably' arrested by the police, she was definitely shocked, has been somewhat dazed, and a bit overreactive. She only truly fell asleep two minutes before you returned to the dream," Franca answered softly.

She then said to Jenna, "You should go visit An Ruide now and confirm his situation."

After Anthony was kicked out of the dream, Franca had actually been worried about his dream manifestation, An Ruide, but she was really too busy to observe and protect him—in the morning she had to take care of Ludwig and look after Luo Shan, in the afternoon she first went to Mushu Hospital to provide support, then was busy asking Queen Mystic to help bail out Lumina. She didn't even have time to care about Jenna's dream manifestation, let alone An Ruide.

"Alright." Jenna also had these concerns, but she had to prioritize finding the mushroom that Li Keji might have left behind.

Since returning to the dream city, she had been constantly on the move without rest.

…

At Xinhong District, in a rented apartment.

Jenna's figure emerged from a dark corner.

She looked towards the smallest bedroom closer to the kitchen and heard relatively long breaths.

Her spiritual intuition told her that the person sleeping inside was An Ruide.

Jenna relaxed a little and surveyed the situation in the room.

She saw a wine glass on the dining table, a plate with crumbs of salted crispy peanuts, a plate of unfinished cold sliced pork head meat, and a plate with only remnants of mashed potatoes.

This was consistent with An Ruide's cooking level.

Mashed potatoes were a delicacy both inside and outside the dream, while cold sliced pork head meat and salted crispy peanuts could be bought from street vendors outside.

A scene immediately appeared before Jenna's eyes: An Ruide was in a good mood, bought himself a bottle of wine, and had a couple of glasses with peanuts, pork head meat, and mashed potatoes. Afterwards, he was a bit tipsy and decided to clean up the dishes the next day.

He's quite leisurely; An Ruide knows how to enjoy life… Jenna silently marveled.

She then thought, Would An Ruide's character prototype—Anthony—also be like this in private, without the pressure of missions?

At this moment, Jenna felt that Anthony was no longer just the ever-calm Psychiatrist.

While marveling, she didn't let her guard down and quickly checked whether this situation was abnormal and whether the sleeping An Ruide in the room had any hidden issues.

After about seven or eight minutes, having sneaked into the corresponding bedroom twice, Jenna finally felt relieved and left.

…

The next morning.

After waking up, Jenna carefully got out of bed, afraid of disturbing Lumina beside her.

Unexpectedly, Lumina was a light sleeper. She immediately opened her eyes and turned her head.

Seeing it was Jenna, she visibly relaxed and revealed a still somewhat confused smile.

"I had a nightmare. I dreamed that I was arrested by the police. They said I committed murder and arson, spread cults, and did all kinds of evil…"

At this point, Lumina suddenly froze.

Soon, she propped herself up and muttered, "Nana, I was really arrested yesterday.

"I'm innocent! I just performed magic at the hot pot restaurant, and they said I killed someone!"

Seeing this, Jenna placed her knee on the edge of the bed, bent her back, and gave Lumina a warm hug.

"It's okay, you're out now.

"Later, there will be top lawyers to help you. The innocent will be cleared."

Franca, who had slept on the carpet last night and only came in when she heard the commotion, almost couldn't help laughing at Jenna's words.

The innocent will be cleared?

There was nothing wrong with this sentence, but we really did kill Zaratulstra—we're as guilty as can be!

She held back her laughter and joined in comforting Lumina.

After a while, Lumina calmed down. She looked at Jian Na and Luo Fu, furtively glanced left and right, and said in a lowered voice, "I didn't mention any of you at the police station."

She had a "Aren't I great and clever?" expression on her face.

"Great job!" Franca and Jenna very cooperatively praised her.

Seeing that Lumina's mood had improved considerably, Franca took the opportunity to tell her, "Miss Huang will come to pick you up later. You'll stay at her place for the next couple of days."

To prevent Lumina from implicating Franca and Jenna, when Queen Mystic hired a lawyer to bail her out, she had actually provided a new residence. But because Queen Mystic had to prepare for the matter of banishing the mirrored Emperor Roselle last night and had no time to look after Lumina, Franca, worried that Lumina might wander off, still took the risk of bringing her back and holding out for one night.

Now, Queen Mystic finally had time.

And by the afternoon, Lumian would return to the dream city.

"Mm-hmm." Lumina nodded obediently.

After Lumina was picked up by Queen Mystic, Jenna left for work at Hall Film Company. Anthony, who had returned to the dream, took on the responsibility of looking after Ludwig, and Franca finally had some free time. She took a taxi to the Tech Building, preparing to go through the resignation process.

For her, the process wasn't important; what was important was getting the salary for the half month she had worked!

In the Human Resources Department.

Perhaps because Miss Huang had given a heads up, Franca didn't even have a chance to take out her materials like the family surgery notice with the official stamp from Zhenjinqiao. She quickly went through the process without anyone giving her a hard time.

Finally, she took the certificate given by the HR department and went to the Finance Department to settle her wages.

After various deductions, she received 3,500 yuan.

Not bad… The first salary from a formal job in my life, although it's in a dream… With self-mockery, Franca left the Finance Department.

She planned to say goodbye to Luo Shan in the Administration Department and then leave the Tech Building, completely hiding in the shadows.

Just as she passed the Tech Department, not yet near the Administration Department, Franca, still wearing those old-fashioned black-framed glasses, suddenly heard a voice.

"Luo Fu."

Franca instinctively turned around and saw Zhou Mingrui coming out of the Tech Department.

"What a coincidence, I heard you're resigning?" Zhou Mingrui asked with concern.

Franca noticed a hint of determination in Zhou Mingrui's eyes, as if he had made up his mind to do something.

He's not going to ask about what happened at Mushu Hospital the night before last, is he? He's not going to ask about my real purpose for coming to the company, is he? Franca suddenly shuddered.

Oh no, I don't dare say anything now!

Chapter 1022: Preparations in Full Swing

"Yes, there's been an issue at home," Franca first answered Zhou Mingrui's question, then had a quick idea and hurriedly said, "I'm going to find Luo Shan. Once I've dealt with the family issue, I'll treat you all to a meal and we can have a good chat."

She emphasized the words "good chat."

Zhou Mingrui looked at Luo Fu for a few seconds, as if weighing his options.

Finally, he nodded and said, "Alright, we'll talk another day."

He could tell that Luo Fu didn't want to say much right now, and seemed to be afraid of something unknown.

Franca quietly let out a sigh of relief and waved sincerely. "See you again!"

After turning around, she muttered silently with relief, Thankfully Zhou Mingrui isn't one of those "stubborn" types people in Yangdu talk about. He can read others' expressions and listen to what they're saying!

…

Hall Film Company, Talent Department.

During a break in her physical training class, Jenna walked out of the classroom and turned towards the public restrooms.

On the way, she encountered Jiang Yue, who was responsible for her and the other new talents.

Seeing Jiang Yue busy there, she asked curiously, "What are you busy with?"

"The summer season is ending, 'The Great Pirate 3' is about to finish its run. We need to prepare for the celebration party, subsequent development, and a series of other things," Jiang Yue looked up and saw it was Jenna, her attitude fairly friendly.

The Great Pirate 3 is about to finish its run? Jenna was stunned for a moment.

Based on the common knowledge she had learned since entering the dream city, she thought this was a very normal thing, but it also felt ill-timed.

When Lumian returns to the dream, they were planning to try letting Ludwig eat that dried mushroom to see if he could gain special healing abilities to awaken the vegetative An Xiaotian. And An Xiaotian was related to the Gehrman Sparrow direction they were pursuing.

At this crucial stage, 'The Great Pirate 3', which further shaped Gehrman Sparrow's character and gave him widespread exposure, was about to completely end its run?

Did this hide some kind of symbolism?

Jenna chose her words carefully and asked casually, "Is the stage play for The Great Pirate 3 about to be officially scheduled?"

"Yes, you might be able to try your luck then. Who knows, you might get an important role," Jiang Yue hinted to Jenna.

…

In a spacious, bright, modern-styled apartment.

Bernadette had just entered when she saw Lumina reclining on the bay window, leaning against a pillow, basking in sunlight, leisurely reading a book in her hands.

"What are you reading?" Bernadette walked over and asked casually.

"A romance novel, one of those melodramatic ones." Lumina closed the book, looking a bit embarrassed.

She tried to explain, "I might be put in prison later. I've checked, most of the books there are for learning. I should read some leisure books while I still can!"

Bernadette looked out the window.

"You probably won't be sentenced. You really didn't do what they're accusing you of.

"Why don't you go out for some activity? It's windy today, not too hot."

"I went jogging in the community this morning," Lumina jumped down from the bay window, smiling as she flexed her arm, showing off her not-so-obvious biceps. "I love exercising."

At this point, she suddenly became a bit emotional.

"My mom has always been in poor health, and so was I when I was little. Maybe it's hereditary. So, they always didn't let me do intense exercise, didn't let me run around and play rough with my classmates…

"Later, when I became an adult, I rebelled. I often went running, cycling, playing badminton, and so on without telling them. And nothing bad happened!"

"When you grow up, you can do what you want." Queen Mystic seemed to feel something too.

Lumina's gaze gradually became unfocused, her eyes reflecting the brilliant sunlight outside the window.

"But now, I want them to restrict me again…"

Bernadette fell silent as well.

By the afternoon, Lumian had returned to the dream city.

The first thing he did was not to look at Queen Mystic Bernadette sitting on the single sofa to the side, but to check his own condition.

Queen Mystic calmly said, "After being kicked out of the dream twice, there will be several major restrictions when you come back in:

"First, you can't display Beyonder powers or obvious hostility in front of other dream manifestations, especially the Celestial Worthy's subordinates. That will also lead to you being kicked out;

"Second, some hints that wouldn't have gotten you kicked out before will now attract the Celestial Worthy's attention;

"Third, you being kicked out will implicate the outsiders around you."

Lumian already knew about these restrictions from the information provided by the Major Arcana card holders. He chuckled. "Quite troublesome."

Queen Mystic nodded slightly. "I've transferred that 500,000 to your bank card. We'll take action this afternoon. We can't wait until dark."

"Alright," Lumian stood up, "I'll go rent an item first."

…

Star Dream Provisions Store.

Lumian, in his Demoness of Despair state, walked to the checkout counter and politely said to the shopkeeper.

"I'd like to rent an item."

"Which one?" the shopkeeper raised her head and asked as the sky suddenly darkened.

Lumian thought for two seconds, and instead of answering, he asked, "Do you have any recommendations?"

He wanted to test if the shopkeeper of Star Dream Provisions Store would give any hints.

"That depends on your own needs," the beautiful shopkeeper answered with a smile.

No hints possible? Lumian looked towards the shelves, his gaze slowly scanning over mystical items like the magic mirror Arrodes, the brass book, the quill pen, and others.

In less than a minute, he made up his mind.

"I'll rent that mirror again."

If it was purely for dealing with and constraining the mirrored Emperor Roselle, he would have chosen that brass book based on the brief description from the Major Arcana card holders. But tomorrow he still wanted to try weakening the Celestial Worthy and awakening Mr. Fool.

And that magic mirror's creation was related to the original God Almighty, having its own hidden aspects. Moreover, it was the only Sealed Artifact Mr. Fool carried with him, likely to play an important role in weakening the Celestial Worthy and awakening Mr. Fool!

Its history and the treatment it received were incomparable to other items!

The shopkeeper's smile remained the same as before. "Alright, how many days do you want to rent it for?"

"One day," Lumian answered without hesitation.

He had enough cash on hand to rent the magic mirror Arrodes for two days, but considering that his guesses, ideas, and action plans might not be necessarily correct, and the final result might not be as he expected, and after today, Queen Mystic would likely be completely kicked out of the dream, making it difficult for the team to encounter such a generous "patron" again, he deliberately left some money for Franca, Jenna, and Anthony.

This way, even if tomorrow's operation failed, causing him to be kicked out of the dream for the third time, the remaining people would still have money to continue making new attempts.

The shopkeeper didn't say anything, took out a POS machine, let Lumian swipe his card, and sign the contract.

After walking out of Star Dream Provisions Store with the magic mirror Arodes, Lumian's phone suddenly rang.

It was an unfamiliar number.

After using the Information Shredder to delete his contacts, all numbers were unfamiliar to him.

Lumian chose to answer and heard an annoyed voice from the other end.

"Why didn't you come for the night shift last night?

"Don't you know to apply for leave in advance? This is called absenteeism!"

So it's a call from the Intis Group… Lumian quickly switched to a male voice.

"I quit!

"Do whatever you want!"

The person on the other end was speechless for a moment, then after a few seconds said, "You don't want your last month's salary?"

"Donate it to those in need, thank you!" Lumian hung up the phone with a bang.

He then got into Miss Huang's car parked by the roadside.

Queen Mystic said while driving, "Later I'll be responsible for clinging on to her, getting kicked out of the dream together. You just need to hide in the shadows, guarding against her leaving the corresponding area in advance."

For this operation, except for Jenna who couldn't get away from Hall Film Company, Lumian, Franca, Anthony, and Ludwig would all participate.

Among them, Lumian would play the role that Queen Mystic had when dealing with Zaratulstra, not directly appearing but interfering and exerting influence from the shadows. Franca would decide whether to confront directly based on the specific situation, with Anthony assisting her.

If they could bring some despair to the mirrored Emperor Roselle, it would greatly help Franca digest the Despair potion.

"Do I need to ask the magic mirror some questions?" Lumian cautiously confirmed.

He felt that the core of Queen Mystic's plan was to use the rule that "the third kick-out will implicate surrounding outsiders".

"No need, I already know everything I need to know," Queen Mystic then told Lumian the relevant information.

She finally warned, "You can't hide behind mirrors later. She has much stronger control over the world in the mirror than you do."

"Understood," Lumian had confirmed this point when monitoring Zaratulstra.

In the time that followed, he didn't act humble or polite, but discussed the specific details of the plan with Queen Mystic and proposed some modifications.

…

In a palace-like villa.

After asking the butler, Bernadette took the elevator to the fourth floor and walked towards her father's study.

The CEO, Mr. Huang Tao, had gone to the company for a while in the morning and returned home at noon.

Arriving outside the study, Bernadette habitually raised her right hand and knocked on the door.

When she was young, she was spoiled at home and would open any door she wanted without ever asking if the person inside agreed to her entering. But after accidentally witnessing a few things she shouldn't have seen, she learned to knock.

"Come in." Huang Tao's voice came from inside the study.

Bernadette turned the handle and walked into the sunlit study, seeing her father standing by the window, gazing at something unknown.

This suddenly gave her a feeling of returning to the past.

Back then, she didn't understand why her father always gazed out of the west-facing floor-to-ceiling window, sometimes even holding her as a child while doing so.

"Dad…" Bernadette instinctively called out.

Huang Tao turned around, revealing a smile. "You came at just the right time."

"Why do you say that?" Bernadette immediately raised her guard.

Huang Tao smiled and said, "I'm going to leave this place."

"…" Bernadette frowned, "What do you mean?"

Huang Tao sighed with a smile. "How could I let my princess be in a difficult position?"

Wh— Bernadette understood her father's meaning and was a bit stunned.

Huang Tao looked at Bernadette for a couple of seconds, then smiled with both satisfaction and emotion.

"I'm very glad that you hesitated for several days."

Chapter 1023: Three Sentences

When she heard Huang Tao's emotional and gratified remarks, Queen Mystic Bernadette's lips moved almost imperceptibly a few times, but in the end she didn't speak.

She pressed her lips tightly together.

Huang Tao's gaze looked out towards the open door and the corridor outside. He smiled slightly and said, "Before I leave, I'll give you all a gift."

As soon as he finished speaking, all the mirrors in the study lit up with a clear radiance.

Huang Tao's figure instantly disappeared from where he had been standing.

Trying to run? Franca, who was hidden in the shadows of the corridor in an Invisible state, instinctively rushed out.

She suspected that the mirrored Roselle had deliberately appealed to emotions just now, preventing Queen Mystic from reacting immediately, allowing Him to escape using the mirror world.

The next second, Franca, still in her Invisible state, saw Bernadette transform into ethereal and complex information, rushing like a torrent into the mirror in front of her.

Queen Mystic closely pursued the mirrored Emperor Roselle.

Franca didn't hesitate. She reached out her right palm and pressed towards that mirror from a distance.

Her body suddenly leaned forward, quickly becoming ethereal, and passed through the glass mirror surface.

Anthony, who had snuck in using Psychological Invisibility, quickly ran into the study. Then Lumian, who had directly teleported over while holding Ludwig's hand, grabbed his shoulder and brought him into the mirror world.

They followed the traces left behind by the mirrored Emperor Roselle, constantly moving forward through deep tunnels spread like spider webs in the ethereal darkness.

They pursued like this for several dozen seconds. The tunnels around them gradually became sparser, the darkness growing ever deeper.

Finally, the mirrored Emperor Roselle in Huang Tao's form stopped and turned around.

He was positioned at the edge of an area of void and deep darkness, but behind Him there were no more tunnels, only pure, profound darkness remaining.

In the depths of that darkness, faint gray fog could vaguely be seen spreading, with an endless city hidden in the mist, like a mirage, yet indistinct.

Thump, thump!

Bernadette, Lumian, Franca and the others heard the sound of heartbeats. It seemed to be both their own and also coming from the very bottom of that deep darkness.

"There are some things that can be said now," said the mirrored Emperor Roselle in Huang Tao's form, smiling again.

One more step back and He would retreat into that pure, deep darkness.

"What things?" Bernadette's voice was a bit lower and hoarser than before.

Huang Tao smiled and said, "The gift is three sentences.

"First, I have preliminarily achieved my purpose for entering this real dream, in every aspect."

As He said this, the mirrored Roselle was gazing at Queen Mystic Bernadette. The subtext seemed to be saying: my greatest purpose was to find an opportunity to truly spend a few days with my princess as father and daughter.

Bernadette fell silent.

But Lumian was thinking.

The purposes in every aspect have been achieved?

The task given by the one worshiped by the Aurora Order has been completed, and the one given by the Celestial Worthy has also been completed?

What could that be?

The mirrored Emperor Roselle seemed to guess what Lumian, Franca and Anthony were thinking, and laughed, saying, "It's the same as what you're thinking."

Before Lumian and the others could ask further, Huang Tao, with a somewhat complex expression, said to Queen Mystic Bernadette, "The second sentence: It is possible for people inside and outside the mirror to merge."

Hearing this, Lumian and Franca both suddenly remembered something Krismona had said to Jenna: Reconcile with your mirror self!

Is this a different expression of the same idea? It doesn't seem so—reconciliation isn't the same as merging… When Lumian looked towards Franca in front of him, he found she was also looking at him.

Bernadette remained silent, not responding to the mirrored Roselle's words.

Huang Tao sighed with a smile, "The last sentence: The apocalypse may come earlier than prophesied. Be prepared."

After saying this, He looked at Bernadette and said in a joking tone, "There are five Four Heavenly Kings, and four sentences in three sentences. It's very reasonable.

"There's one more sentence…"

The mirrored Emperor Roselle paused for a moment, then smiled tenderly at Queen Mystic.

"These past few days, dad has been very happy, truly.

"Remember, I will never put you in a difficult position…"

Bernadette opened her mouth, but still didn't speak.

As Huang Tao spoke, He retreated into the pure darkness outside the current area.

His body rapidly changed, transforming from a fashionable middle-aged man into an alluring woman with long chestnut hair, blue eyes, a high nose bridge, thin lips, a voluptuous figure, and a mature aura.

The dream's repulsive force suddenly descended upon Her, seemingly triggered by Her entry into the deep darkness of this part of the mirror world.

The mirrored Emperor Roselle maintained a gentle smile and continued speaking to Bernadette, "I hate him very much, dislike him, but my feelings in other aspects are the same as his, even more extreme, more irrational.

"I've already left a lawyer-witnessed letter saying I'm going to travel freely for a while, indulge for a while, and that you'll handle various matters of the Intis Group on my behalf."

Without waiting for Bernadette to respond, She specially reminded, "You should all retreat further; otherwise, you'll also be affected and rejected by the dream."

Saying this, the mirrored Emperor Roselle looked at Lumian and smiled, saying, "We'll meet again. I've also left a gift for you in the desk drawer."

A gift? Feeling the dream's repulsive force spreading over, Lumian, Franca and the others quickly retreated into one of the mirror tunnels.

The mirrored Emperor Roselle's figure gradually faded, seeming both to dissolve into that deep darkness and to be pushed out of the dream by some force.

She smiled at Bernadette, who was still standing in place. "Quickly leave this area."

Bernadette instinctively stepped back, her eyes already misty.

Suddenly, she hummed a melody, a melody very familiar to the mirrored Emperor Roselle.

The mirrored Roselle was stunned for a moment, becoming somewhat dazed.

Then, She began humming along, singing the lyrics corresponding to that melody.

"The stars in the sky don't speak, the babies on earth miss their mothers…"

Expressions of reminiscence, gratification, and emotion appeared on the mirrored Roselle's face. She persisted until Bernadette's figure disappeared into one of the mirror tunnels, only then giving up the resistance.

Her figure rapidly vanished, dissolving into the darkness.

The dream's repulsive force completely enveloped this area, only fully receding after several dozen seconds.

After a while, Bernadette, Lumian and the others returned here.

"She has indeed been permanently kicked out of the dream," said Queen Mystic in a low voice after looking around.

Smoother than I imagined… Lumian didn't say this out loud.

He felt it would upset Queen Mystic.

And for those in High-Sequence Beyonders, an emotional outburst had a potential hidden danger—the possibility of losing control.

Bernadette was silent for a moment, then took the initiative to say, "Any thoughts on those three sentences just now?"

Lumian had already analyzed. "The second sentence, about the possibility of merging between the original body and the Mirror Person, likely has exaggerated and false components.

"The third sentence aligns with some of my thoughts and guesses. It might not be false—the apocalypse may really come early.

"For the first sentence, I'm inclined to believe it's true."

"So She also completed the task given by the Celestial Worthy?" Franca asked with considerable worry.

She immediately guessed, "These past few days, when we weren't paying attention, did She do something to Zhou Mingrui, laying the groundwork?"

"No," Bernadette slowly shook her head, "These past few days, I've been watching her openly and secretly. She shouldn't have had the chance to directly contact Zhou Mingrui."

Lumian, looking at the pure darkness outside the area and the faintly visible gray fog and city in the depths of the darkness, said thoughtfully,

"Perhaps Her existence itself has some symbolism, enabling Her to complete the task given by the Celestial Worthy."

Before Franca and the others could ask, he pointed to the depths of the darkness and said,

"Doesn't that look like the sealed Fourth Epoch Trier?"

Franca vaguely grasped Lumian's idea and blurted out. "A special mirror world?"

Lumian nodded slightly and said to Queen Mystic,

"Mr. Fool's dream originally shouldn't have contained the sealed Fourth Epoch Trier and the special mirror world that's produced from attaching to the Fourth Epoch Trier."

This was deduced from Mr. Fool's experiences.

Lumian continued, "But after the mirrored Emperor Roselle entered, Her essence and special nature gave Her corresponding symbolic meaning. So, in the depths of the dream city's mirror world, that special mirror world and the sealed Fourth Epoch Trier gradually took shape.

"And we previously speculated that one of Zaratulstra's main goals was to have Zhou Mingrui drink the Witch potion, producing a stable, long-term, corresponding Mirror Person. Then, the Celestial Worthy could use that Mirror Person to accomplish some things, achieving a phased victory."

Queen Mystic nodded slightly. "Apart from consuming the 'Witch' potion, another way to make a person produce a stable, long-term Mirror Person is to come into contact with that special mirror world."

"Zaratulstra was both looking for opportunities to induce Zhou Mingrui's advancement himself and introducing the mirrored Emperor Roselle so as to bring the special mirror world? A two-pronged approach!" Franca drew in a sharp breath.

Queen Mystic said in a somewhat low voice, "Zhou Mingrui probably hasn't come into contact with the special mirror world yet, hasn't produced a corresponding Mirror Person, but afterwards, the Celestial Worthy's side will certainly have corresponding arrangements."

For example, achieving it through Zhou Sasa? Franca suddenly looked at Lumian.

Lumian nodded and continued, "So, we can't delay our actions.

"We are on the precipice; there's no backing down."

"Yes," Franca agreed.

Returning to Huang Tao's study, Bernadette walked around behind the desk and, guided by spirituality, pulled open a drawer.

There was a "gift" left for Lumian by the mirrored Emperor Roselle.

Lumian, coming around from the other side, suddenly saw a card.

The card lay quietly on top of a stack of documents, its surface depicting the image of the mirrored Emperor Roselle from earlier.

Voluptuous figure, wearing a black dress, adorned with a golden crown inlaid with jewels, alluring features, mature aura, outstanding charm.

In the upper left corner of this card, a line of text was condensed from brilliant starlight: "Sequence 0: Primordial Demoness"

At this moment, Bernadette's voice rang out, echoing in the ears of Lumian and the others, "A Card of Blasphemy, the Demoness card."

Chapter 1024: A Blurry Ritual

A Card of Blasphemy?

A Card of Blasphemy representing a path to godhood, created by Emperor Roselle based on the second Blasphemy Slate and His personal experience? Lumian and Franca were both shocked.

They had learned about the Cards of Blasphemy from Emperor Roselle's diary and various mystical knowledge they had collected through different μα channels. But items of this level naturally possessed anti-prophecy and anti-divination properties, so they had only heard about them and never seen one with their own eyes.

Now, the Demoness card appeared before them.

This was a gift left for Lumian by the mirrored Emperor Roselle!

In a flash, Lumian instinctively had a thought.

Is She really being so kind?

At this moment, Queen Mystic spoke again, "It's real."

"A real Card of Blasphemy, a real Demoness card?" Franca curiously leaned in, examining this long- coveted item.

Lumian remained silent for a few seconds, then chuckled and reached out to take the Demoness card.

He had already accrued so many "debts" and had so many "creditors", what was one more!

Queen Mystic looked at the Card of Blasphemy in Lumian's hand and said after a moment of silence, "The activation incantation should be my name, inept ancient Feysac."

Name… Lumian chanted in a low voice, "Bernadette."

Instantly, the Demoness card generated an invisible vortex, frantically drawing in Lumian's spirit and spirituality.

Soon, the Demoness card became three-dimensional, transforming into a miniature book.

The book opened naturally, revealing a Roselle dressed as an Assassin's Creed character, a clean-shaven male Roselle.

Next to this character image was a corresponding description in ancient Feysac:

"Sequence 9, Assassin.

"Every Assassin possesses the ability to change their body for a short time, gaining feather-like lightness to perform a Leap of Faith, and has eagle-like vision and night vision, excelling in combat, evasion, and concealment.

"Shadows are their friends and their camouflage. Once they leave the shadows, they use their agile footwork to gather all their strength for a fatal strike on their target...

"Potion formula...."

Lumian reached out to touch the Card of Blasphemy that had become a miniature book, watching it continuously flip pages, seeing Emperor Roselle's image change from male to female, becoming increasingly beautiful and alluring, gradually "overlapping" with the appearance of the mirrored Roselle.

Finally, an image of the mirrored Emperor Roselle, seemingly much younger and resembling a young girl, appeared before Lumian's eyes.

The corresponding information was also revealed:

"Sequence 3: Unaging (Demoness of Unaging).

"Every Demoness of Unaging is forever youthful, skilled in resurrection, bizarrely difficult to kill, a darling of the mirror world, a true Gorgon...

"Potion formula:

"Main ingredients: One heart of a Mirror God, a pair of Gorgon eyes;

"Supplementary ingredients: Nine Mirror God fragments, 80 ml of Gorgon blood, an antique mirror over 500 years old with a corresponding mirror realm, 22 drops of water from a drowned person's lungs;

"Ritual: Find your mirror self, enslave them solely with your own power, or make them truly infatuated with you, or reconcile with them."

Seeing this, Lumian and Franca once again recalled Krismona's mention of "reconciling with your mirror self."

Will different handling methods result in different manifestations later? Lumian pondered for a while, then turned to the next page:

"Sequence 2: Catastrophe (Demoness of Catastrophe).

"Demonesses of Catastrophe bring various natural disasters such as blizzards, floods, tsunamis, earthquakes, meteor strikes, etc. Everyone who mentions their names feels fear from the bottom of their hearts...

"Potion formula...

"Ritual: As a participant, cause a disaster affecting the entire continent, and advance during the disaster."

Lumian didn't read the specific formula in detail, just skimmed the Sequence name and corresponding ritual.

He turned to the next page:

"Sequence 1: Apocalypse (Demoness of Apocalypse)".

…

"Ritual: Advance at the universally acknowledged end of an epoch or the beginning of the next; advance during the signs and process of the apocalypse's arrival; advance when one's own involvement leads to the fall of a deity.

"Any one of the three rituals is effective."

According to the mirrored Emperor Roselle's words and my deductions, the apocalypse will come early.... Disasters frequently occur during the apocalypse, which indeed suits Demonesses... Lumian unconsciously held his breath and turned the Card of Blasphemy to the last page:

"Sequence 0: Demoness (Primordial Demoness, Chaos Demoness)

"The source of catastrophes, symbol of the apocalypse, the Demoness who wields chaos, ruler of the mirror world, corresponding to the feminine aspect of the Original Creator.

"Potion formula:

"Ingredients: Demoness Uniqueness, three Demoness of Apocalypse Beyonder characteristics...

"Ritual..."

Lumian wanted to see what the apotheosis ritual for the Demoness pathway was, but found that the corresponding text was blurry and unclear, as if obscured by some force.

Did the mirrored Emperor Roselle do this when leaving this gift, or was it like this when She obtained this Demoness card? Lumian turned his head to look at Queen Mystic.

"Your Highness, can you see the content of the apotheosis ritual clearly?"

Bernadette stared for a moment, then slowly shook her head.

"The power obscuring the corresponding content is of a very high level, at least Sequence 0."

Lumian and Franca exchanged glances but didn't pursue the matter further.

For them, the apotheosis ritual was a distant matter. They should focus on the Demoness of Unaging first.

"Since I wasn't kicked out of the dream, I can also participate in your operation tomorrow," Queen Mystic said in a somewhat low voice, looking towards the window area where Huang Tao had been standing earlier.

"Thank you," Lumian said without being polite.

He put the Demoness card into his Traveler's Bag.

…

When Lumian and the others returned to Xinhong District, the sunlight was still bright, and it wasn't even afternoon tea time yet.

"Should we let Ludwig eat that mushroom now?"

Franca pulled out a chair and sat down, asking with a mix of nervousness and curiosity. Lumian thought for a few seconds, then said with a smile, "Yes."

"But you should leave first, go back to Dechuang Garden. I'm afraid your life might be ended by the mutation brought by the mushroom."

This wasn't saying that the mushroom could directly harm Franca, but that the corresponding mutation might be very extreme, drawing the Celestial Worthy's attention, which would be completely unbearable for Franca, who hadn't fully digested the Despair potion.

"Alright." Franca suppressed her inner emotions and returned to Dechuang Garden through the mirror world.

Only then did Lumian sit down in the chair Franca had just pulled out and say to Ludwig. "You can eat it now."

Ludwig had been holding back for a long time and quickly took out the dried jellyfish-like mushroom.

Seeing this, Lumian turned his head to Anthony and said, "Pay attention to placating his mind and emotions."

"Okay," Anthony's eyes became vertical, reflecting Ludwig's figure in that pale golden color.

Ludwig swallowed and looked at the mushroom with a hint of fear as he stuffed it into his mouth.

He chewed it up, then swallowed it with satisfaction.

Lumian and Anthony's spirits instantly tensed to the extreme.

As time passed second by second, Ludwig finally opened his mouth and evaluated the changes after eating it.

"I can create a kind of spore that enters the human body, repairing nerves and flesh, merging with spirituality and soul.

"This might wake up people in vegetative states, but the condition of patients after merging with the spores is currently unknown..."

As Ludwig spoke, Lumian and Anthony saw masses of flesh writhing under his skin, sometimes bulging the skin outwards, sometimes sinking inwards.

This made Ludwig look like he was wearing a skin suit.

Suddenly, the skin on his neck split open, and a wet brown mushroom grew out of the flesh.

Ludwig raised his right hand nonchalantly, plucked off this mushroom with a snap, and stuffed it into his mouth, chewing and swallowing it.

The wound on his neck quickly healed.

And so, mushrooms intermittently grew out of Ludwig's body, sometimes of the same species, sometimes different, and he plucked them all off, using them as snacks.

This formed a strange balance.

"Can eating these mushrooms make you full?" Lumian asked curiously, secretly breathing a sigh of relief.

Ludwig glanced at his godfather, "Can you get full by sucking your own fingers?"

Lumian and Anthony immediately understood the answer.

Anthony then looked at Lumian. "Should we take him to Red Moon Hospital now to try and treat An Xiaotian?"

Lumian pondered for several minutes before answering, "There's no rush. Let's wait until tomorrow, when we officially take action."

Anthony didn't hide his confusion, but seeing that Lumian didn't explain further, he calmly closed his mouth.

If he's not saying, there must be a reason for not saying it.

…

The next morning.

Lumian stood on the balcony of the master bedroom, gazing at the tree-lined internal roads of the community and the slowly passing electric cars and bicycles.

After a while, he reluctantly withdrew his gaze, walked into the living room, and placed the magic mirror Arrodes on the dining table.

After the previous rental, they had figured out the rules for using this magic mirror:

Only three questions could be asked within 24 hours, and they could be asked at intervals.

Lumian looked at the silver mirror with ancient patterns and a black gemstone on each side, and calmly said in the presence of Anthony and Ludwig. "Great Arrodes, I want to ask you a question, the first question of today."

The surface of the ancient silver mirror suddenly darkened, and lines of blood-red ancient Feysac words appeared: "I can answer any question you ask, but you must also answer an equal number of questions from me, in the presence of at least one witness.

"If you refuse to answer, or if you lie, you will face punishment."

Lumian nodded and revealed a bright smile. "My question is, is it a coincidence that the Celestial Worthy's attempt to use the Mirror People and your birth as a mirror occurred at the same time?"

On the magic mirror, the blood-red words quickly lost their color and contracted into a single, lonely word:

"No."

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Chapter 1025: Sudden Event

Not a coincidence, so it was intentional? Did the original God Almighty see a certain scene while dying and disintegrating, and make corresponding arrangements? Lumian revealed a thoughtful expression.

He immediately said in a satisfied tone, "Thank you for your answer, great Arrodes."

This was the answer he wanted.

This also indirectly confirmed that the Celestial Worthy was trying to use the Mirror People.

The surface of the magic mirror rippled, and blood-red ancient Feysac words were outlined again:

"Based on the principle of reciprocity, it's my turn to ask a question.

"If you answer incorrectly or lie, you will be punished."

Lumian nodded slightly, then saw the ancient Feysac words on the old silver mirror change:

"Are you prepared to be scared out of your wits by that individual?"

What a gentle question, not embarrassing at all... Anthony thought instinctively.

Then, he realized, This seems more like a hint.

A hint to Lumian that the upcoming action might directly face the Celestial Worthy or His consciousness and power?

"I'm ready." Lumian answered with a smile, He also noticed the hint from the magic mirror Arrodes.

Then, he faced the magic mirror, pressed his hand to his chest and said, "I'll ask the other two questions later."

By eleven in the morning, Franca and Jenna had also arrived at the rental house in Xinhong District, each finding a chair to sit on.

"Queen Mystic is maintaining the illusion of Lumiana, preventing the police from discovering that I've left my designated residence," said Lumian, who had resumed his Li Ming identity. He stood up and looked at each companion, "We need to hurry now."

"Okay," Franca had been curious about Lumian's plan since yesterday.

Of course, she inevitably felt a bit nervous and uneasy, because if others falled, they would most likely just be kicked out of the dream, while she had a significant chance of dying.

Lumian smiled and said, "I've been pondering the phrase 'filter out the interference of complex information and see the most fundamental facts' all day yesterday, and finally thought of a few details.

"One of them is that Chief Yagates only has the spiritual imprints of Mr. Door and the Celestial Worthy, with maybe a little bit of Amon's at most.

"If interfered with by complex information, one might deduce that Chief Yagates would likely lean towards the Celestial Worthy at crucial moments, or that he has always been feigning neutrality, and we must avoid encountering him.

"But I did stimulate Mr. Door's spiritual imprint with matters related to the Abraham family and our purpose for entering the dream city, preventing me from being completely kicked out of the dream.

"Moreover, the official forces of the dream city have indeed shown neutrality before, being impartial and following the law, otherwise we would have been finished long ago.

"So, what is the most fundamental fact among this information?"

Franca, Jenna, and Anthony fell into thought, while Ludwig continued to noisily eat from a large bag of chips, occasionally plucking a mushroom from his body to go with it.

After about ten seconds, Jenna said in a quiet voice, filled with doubt and uncertainty. "The Celestial Worthy is too weak?"

Lumian chuckled. "Correct. Unlike Amon, Mr. Door passed away long ago. On Chief Yagates, who is the Uniqueness of the Door pathway, there exists only His remaining spiritual imprint, without external help or subsequent replenishment.

"And it's this remnant imprint, along with a bit of Mr. Fool's cognition and a little of Amon's spiritual imprint, that has managed to resist the spiritual imprint of the Celestial Worthy, this great existence, maintaining balance most of the time and even gaining the upper hand when stimulated occasionally.

"What does this signify?

"It indicates that the Celestial Worthy's current state is much worse than we imagined, and the limitations He's under are far greater than what we see daily!

"This is the most fundamental fact.

"And why is this so?"

At this point, Lumian closed his mouth, clearly not wanting to share his speculations and thoughts.

Hey, you're just going to pique our curiosity and not say anything? Franca felt uncomfortable all over, just like encountering certain authors and storytellers who leave a cliffhanger at the end of a chapter.

But she immediately understood Lumian's intention, which was based on complete trust.

"Some things can be known but not spoken, at most hinted at?" Franca asked carefully.

Lumian showed an expression of satisfaction that made Franca want to hit him.

"Didn't we already conclude earlier that except for outsiders, every manifestation in the dream city is a product of the subconscious cognition of Mr. Fool and the Celestial Worthy combined?"

Lumian extended his right hand, pointing at the green trees outside the window, at the surrounding walls, at the hot wind blowing in from outside.

"What I want to say is, apart from the dream characters, the birds, rats, cockroaches, earthworms, plants, buildings, and even the air in this city are all products of Mr. Fool's subconscious and the Celestial Worthy's subconscious combined.

"In other words, we've been living in the thoughts, cognition, and consciousness of Mr. Fool and the Celestial Worthy all along."

Franca was enlightened. "So the dream city is like the cerebral cortex, with some areas very active that we need to carefully avoid and not stimulate, like Zhou Mingrui's dream manifestation, while most other areas are in a dormant state and normally won't react unless we say key words or key information?"

"Once spoken, it's likely to be immediately noticed by the Celestial Worthy." Lumian raised his right hand and grabbed a handful of air.

With a mischievous grin, he remarked, "This not only brings attention and rejection but might also stimulate the Celestial Worthy, allowing Him to break free from His current unfavorable state.

"Let me give an example. The fundamental facts revealed by the information on Chief Yagates aren't that hard to figure out, but even with Amon's reminders and hints, it took me a long time to understand, and you and the Major Arcana card holders haven't even thought of it.

"Suppose there's a person who's been fooled, always feeling weak and unable to break free from certain limitations. In this situation, if someone suddenly tells him he's silly or stupid, wouldn't that stimulate him to regain clarity and become powerful again?

"This is also why Amon and that individual related to the Aurora Order don't speak directly in and out of dreams, only hinting, letting us understand on our own.

"Some tricks no longer work once the key technique is revealed!"

Jenna finally understood what Lumian was trying to express.

There were two layers to this:

First, everyone who has entered the dream is essentially receiving joint corruption from Mr. Fool and the Celestial Worthy. It's just that due to differences in dream entry time and actions taken, the degree of corruption varies, and the corresponding influence will persist even after returning to reality.

Second, certain words and facts might stimulate the Celestial Worthy under similar corruption conditions, causing Him to "wake up".

"Just assign the tasks to us, you don't need to say anything else." Jenna said with a sigh.

Franca and Anthony also had some realizations and nodded in succession.

Just as Lumian was about to assign the corresponding tasks to his companions, Franca's phone suddenly rang.

Franca picked it up and looked, her expression changing slightly. "It's a call from Luo Shan!"

Has something become so urgent that it requires a phone call?

Franca chose to answer, trying to make her voice sound steady. "Hello, Shanshan?"

Luo Shan's urgent voice came through the receiver.

"Zhou Mingrui suddenly took leave, he asked for it twenty minutes ago, I just found out!"

Zhou Mingrul took leave? Jenna looked towards Lumian.

Lumian couldn't help but frown. Today is Wednesday, Zhou Mingrui's sister Zhou Sasa is arriving in Yangdu, but her high-speed train doesn't arrive until 1:40 pm. Zhou Mingrul doesn't need to take the morning off at all, he would have enough time even if he left after lunch.

Franca forced herself to stay calm and said to Luo Shan, "Don't panic, ask Zhou Mingrui on WeChat to see what happened."

"Right... I can ask him directly." Luo Shan, who was in the administrative department of the Intis Group, quickly hung up the phone.

She rapidly sent a message to Zhou Mingrui: "Why did you suddenly take leave?"

After a few minutes, while Luo Shan was silently praying, Zhou Mingrui replied to her message:

"Going to the high-speed rail station to pick up my sister."

"Your sister is coming to Yangdu? What time?" Luo Shan's heart tightened, as if glimpsing an unpleasant truth.

After nearly another minute, Zhou Mingrui sent a emoji: 😮‍💨

"She was originally supposed to arrive on the train after 1:30, but she said she got to her hometown's high-speed rail station early and there were spare tickets, so she changed her booking. She'll arrive just after 11:50."

Why did she suddenly change her booking? Almost two hours earlier... Luo Shan had heard from Luo Fu and Jian Na that there might be issues with Zhou Sasa's arrival in Yangdu, and she immediately became more panicked.

She didn't bother to respond to Zhou Mingrui, quickly took a screenshot of the chat history, and sent it to True Hidden Blade.

At times like this, repeating is a waste of time!

Franca, in the rental house in Xinhong District, quickly scanned the information on the screenshot, and her whole body suddenly tensed up.

"Not good, Zhou Mingrui is almost at the high-speed rail station, and so is Zhou Sasa!" Franca held up her phone vertically, showing it to Lumian and the others.

Lumian glanced at it and smiled slightly. "No need to panic, there's still time. We have some redundancy."

His attitude infected Franca and Jenna, calming their mindset and spirits a little-Anthony and Ludwig didn't need reassuring.

Lumian then began assigning different tasks to each person, only telling them what to do, not why.

When assigning certain tasks, he even deliberately used the Bottle of Fiction, not letting the other companions hear.

Finally, Lumian said to Anthony, "Before taking Ludwig to Crimson Moon Hospital, make a trip back to the real world and relay what I told you to the Major Arcana card holders. Let them prepare, and when the dream city experiences anomalies, seize the brief window of opportunity to complete that matter.

"Of course, the anomalies may not occur, and our plan could very likely fail."

"Understood," Anthony replied steadily.

Lumian then turned his gaze to Franca, smiling again as he said, "Then let's split up and take action."

After saying this, he pressed his hand to his chest and said, "Praise The Fool!"

"Praise The Fool!" Franca stood up abruptly, returning the same gesture.

Then, she said in a deep voice, "You must all be careful..."

Lumian nodded lightly, and together with Jenna, walked towards the door and out of the rental house.

The operation had officially begun.

Chapter 1026: Helper

After Lumian, Jenna, and Franca had each left the rental house in Xinhong District, Anthony waited for a moment before saying to Ludwig, "Keep eating, I'm heading back to the real world for a bit."

"Mhm, mhm." Ludwig, mouth full of food, didn't have time to reply properly.

Anthony leaned back in his chair and closed his eyes.

As a Dreamwalker, he didn't need to perform any complicated actions to easily return to the real world.

Upon opening his eyes in a room of the luxurious Trier mansion, Anthony instinctively rolled out of bed.

At the same time, Madam Justice's voice echoed in his mind: "Come to Two of Cups's room."

Anthony immediately left his room and headed to Franca's bedroom, which was closer to the staircase. He lightly knocked on the wooden door.

"Come in." Madam Justice's gentle voice came from inside.

As soon as Anthony pushed open the door, he was met with multiple figures:

There was Mr. Star standing in front of the bright window, wearing red gloves; a man sitting in a dim corner, his eyes crimson and his chin slightly raised; a rugged-looking man with bronze skin and blue hair, leaning against the mini-bar, holding a glass of Lanti Proof;

On either side of the long sofa were Madam Magician and Madam Judgment; Ma'am Hermit was sitting on a single-seater, wearing glasses and flipping through a book; Madam Justice sat by Franca's bed with Susie nearby, and a young man, over two meters tall, with simple white robes, paced at the foot of the bed.

Anthony scanned the room and respectfully said, "Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen."

"Do you have something to tell us?" Madam Justice turned her body slightly.

Anthony repeated Lumian's instructions in full, without leaving out a single detail.

Madam Justice nodded thoughtfully. "I understand."

At that moment, the tall, brown-haired young man shifted his gaze to the other Major Arcana card holders and said in a calm voice, "From now on, no one is to leave this room."

As his voice echoed, the brilliant sunlight, brighter than the sky outside, flooded the bedroom, banishing all shadows and darkness, leaving no corner untouched.

…

Inside the administrative department of the Intis Group at the Tech Building.

"Haha, kids can be impulsive, Coming to Yangdu for y college?" Luo Shan sent Zhou Mingrui a message, holding her phone.

This was a continuation of their earlier conversation and also a way to "monitor" Zhou Mingrui's current state.

Luo Shan believed that chatting with Zhou Mingrui on and off would allow her to keep abreast of his movements in a timely manner.

While waiting for his reply, Luo Shan found herself unable to sit or stand still. She walked around but couldn't calm the waves of anxiety in her heart.

She sat back down, grabbed some paper and a pen, hoping to ease her complex, tangled emotions by drawing.

Scribble! Scribble! Scribble! Luo Shan scribbled on the paper aimlessly.

As time slowly passed, her sketch gradually took shape.

It depicted a girl, guarding behind a black barrier, fighting off childlike monsters.

Luo Shan had drawn a version of herself deep into the night, standing as a protector.

When she saw the half-finished drawing, Luo Shan froze.

After a few seconds, she pressed her lips tightly together.

She stood up abruptly and rushed to Deputy Director Zhang Qing's office, speaking urgently, "Director Zhang, I'd like to take half a day off!"

…

Yangdu High-Speed Rail Station, arrival level.

Lumian and Jenna stood in front of the large display screen, checking the exit for Zhou Sasa's train.

"South Exit Three, arriving in six minutes," Jenna said, referencing the Information Luo Shan had provided, locating the correct train.

"I told you we had extra time," Lumian, in his male form, chuckled and walked with Jenna toward South Exit Three.

They didn't get too close, keeping a distance of about twenty to thirty meters, hiding near the taxi lane entrance while watching the target area.

The two Demonesses quickly spotted Zhou Mingrui.

Because the Intis Group had strong air conditioning and he had rushed out in a hurry. Zhou Mingrui was wearing a white T-shirt under an orange-and-black plaid shirt, looking as if he had been waiting for a while.

Neither Jenna nor Lumian spoke, quietly observing.

After two or three minutes, Jenna suddenly pointed in a direction and whispered, "Luo Shan... Why is she here?"

Following Jenna's lead, Lumian saw Luo Shan, dressed in a blouse and skirt, walking toward South Exit Three, glancing around as she moved.

"Call her over, don't let her disturb Zhou Mingrui." Lumian instructed Jenna,

Jenna had already been thinking the same thing.

Using her Assassin footwork, she quickly and discreetly approached Luo Shan, appearing right in front of her.

Luo Shan jumped in surprise, then opened her mouth in delighted shock.

Jenna raised a finger to her lips, signaling Luo Shan not to speak.

Luo Shan immediately closed her mouth and followed Jenna to the taxi lane entrance by South Exit Two.

When Luo Shan saw who was waiting with Jenna, she could no longer contain herself, pointing at Lumian and stammering, "You, you, you…"

Isn't this the dropout, Li Ming, who had a child when he was still a teenager?

Is he in league with Luo Fu, Jian Na, and Lumina?

"What a coincidence." Lumian smiled.

He gestured toward Jenna. "She's the mother of the child."

"Oh, oh..." Luo Shan suddenly felt a bit excited.

That explains it.

That is their relationship!

Suddenly learning this private detail about her friends dispelled much of Luo Shan's tension and anxiety.

Jenna finally asked, "Why did you come to the station?"

Luo Shan's expression instantly darkened.

She bit her lip and said, "I wanted to help you.

"I think, I think I can be of help."

As she spoke, her tone grew firmer.

Lumian was silent for a few seconds before saying. "Okay."

He glanced toward South Exit Three and casually added, "For now, there's nothing else to do but observe."

"Okay." This was Luo Shan's first time taking part in an operation like this, so she had no objections.

Looking back at Zhou Mingrui, Jenna thought aloud. "If Zhou Sasa really is a problem, if she's meant to make Zhou Mingrui produce a stable Mirror Person in the special mirror world, what would she do?"

Having experienced the events relating to the Hostel and with Moran Avigny, Jenna had a deep understanding of the special mirror world. She knew that to produce a stable, long-term Mirror Person in that world, the person either had to be a descendant of the Primordial Demoness or certain Fourth Epoch Trier nobles, or they had to be exposed to the overflow of corruption from the special mirror world-namely, frequent activity in underground Trier.

However, in the dream city, there was no real special mirror world-it was hidden deep within the mirror world, without any overflow of corruption.

So, making Zhou Mingrui truly come into contact with the special mirror world was no easy task.

Lumian thought for a few seconds. "I don't know."

His calm, steady tone made Luo Shan suddenly feel that things might not be as bad as she had imagined.

A few more minutes passed, and passengers started coming through the gates at South Exit Three.

Jenna and Luo Shan's nerves immediately tightened.

Before long, they saw Zhou Mingrui smile and walk toward the exit.

There, a young girl emerged, wearing a black dress that made her seem more mature than her age.

Hur suitcase was also dark-colored, without any fluffy toys attached like many young women would have, but instead, it had a mechanical-looking Transformer hanging from it.

Her backpack wasn't cute either-black, made of synthetic leather, and large enough to hang a silver- white pocket watch with vine and leaf patterns on one side.

"Her style is very similar to reality's Melissa Moretti..." Jenna muttered under her breath.

Luo Shan couldn't help but glance at her.

When Zhou Sasa saw Zhou Mingrui approaching, she smiled brightly, waving her hand.

"Mingruil" she called out sweetly.

At that moment, she finally showed a hint of youthful charm.

"Perfect timing, I'll take you out for a big meal!" Zhou Mingrui grinned as he took his sister's suitcase.

"Mingrui, I fixed the pocket watch!" Zhou Sasa pulled the silver-white pocket watch with vine and leaf patterns from the side of her black backpack, showing it off to Zhou Mingrui.

Click. She pressed lightly on the top of the watch, and the silver-white cover popped open.

Almost simultaneously, Lumian and Jenna's eyes narrowed.

With their eagle-like vision, they noticed that the glass on the watch's face was dark, almost pure black, but still transparent enough to see the hands and numbers on the dial.

That glass gave both Lumian and Jenna a strong sense of familiarity, a familiarity rooted in their spiritual intuition and memory.

It was a fragment of the special mirror world!

They each possessed a piece of the special mirror world fragment!

"Is Zhou Sasa planning to use that pocket watch and the fragment of the special mirror world to make Zhou Mingrui generate a stable Mirror Person?" Jenna whispered, but instinctively kept her voice low.

She immediately recalled something.

The fragment of the special mirror world that Lumian possessed had come from the reanimated Panatiya, who had originally been arranged as Zhou Mingrui's lover, and eventually his wife.

"Was her intended function not only to stabilize Zhou Mingrui's mental state but also, after Zaratulstra's frontal attempt failed, to use that fragment of the special mirror world to somehow 'corrupt' Zhou Mingrui, so that a stable Mirror Person could be born? No wonder she has a fragment of the special mirror world… The Celestial Worthy always prepares multiple -no, three, or even more-contingencies..." Jenna bop suddenly realized.

She quickly said to Lumian, "We need to find a way to steal that pocket watch. We can't let Zhou Mingrui come into too much contact with it."

Lumian also thought of the reanimated Panatiya and observed for a few seconds before saying. "That pocket watch seems to hold significant sentimental value for Zhou Mingrui. He's holding onto it tightly. Taking it from under his nose won't be easy."

At this point, Zhou Mingrui had taken the silver-white pocket watch and was inspecting it repeatedly, looking very pleased.

Jenna understood Lumian's concern.

Not just difficult-nearly impossible, and extremely risky!

What Zhou Mingrui wanted to protect was what the dream subconscious wanted to protect!

Chapter 1027: What Is Real

As Jenna quickly tried to think of a way to "take" the silver pocket watch from Zhou Mingrui, Luo Shan suddenly spoke up. "I'll go."

Uh... Jenna and Lumian both turned to look at Luo Shan at the same time.

Luo Shan flashed a smile that said, "It's no big deal."

"I know Zhou Mingrui. We're on good terms, we're close colleagues. It'll be easier for me to get close to him than you two.

"Although he's somewhat suspicious of me now and knows I have Beyonder powers, and he's picked up on my hints, overall, he should still see me as an ally. someone on his side. Right? My analysis is correct, isn't it?"

Luo Shan showed a lack of confidence in these kinds of matters.

Before Lumian or Jenna could respond, she gave a self-deprecating smile and said, "Zhou Mingrui might be wary, might be on guard, but he'd never suspect that my target is the pocket watch.

"And besides..."

She paused for a moment and then added, "You two are outsiders. Even if you just trigger his suspicions, he might kick you out, but I won't. I'm from here. At most, I just need to be a little more careful afterward!"

"No, it's still dangerous." Jenna warned Luo Shan seriously. "We've never tried having someone like you directly confront Zhou Mingrui or do anything to him, so we can't predict what might happen or what the worst outcome might be. And judging by similar cases, you could end up with a light suddenly falling from the ceiling, smashing your head, killing you instantly, or you could drop dead the moment you touch that pocket watch."

Luo Shan's expression turned solemn.

She nodded slowly and said, "I know."

Before Jenna or Lumian could try to dissuade her further, she unexpectedly asked in a low voice, "What is the real me like?"

While Lumian was observing Zhou Mingrui and Zhou Sasa, Jenna fell silent for two seconds and then answered, "She's a civilian staff at the police station. Her father was also an official Beyonder, but he died in a Beyonder disaster.

"She's lively, though a bit lazy, but her colleagues really like her. They all treat her like a little sister. She's married now, with a lovely child."

Luo Shan listened intently, and after a few seconds, she said, "Isn't that another version of me?

"It really is another me..."

Her eyes flickered as she looked at Jenna, and with a hint of playfulness, she said, "If you ever meet her, please tell her:

"I envy her..."

Hearing this, Jenna suddenly felt a lump in her throat, and emotions swirled in her chest, making it hard to speak.

Luo Shan slowly straightened her back.

"And also tell her, I have my own pride, and I've had experiences she might envy."

Luo Shan's serious expression gradually softened, as though she was talking to herself.

"I've been reflecting a lot lately, thinking about my past.

"My mother was so real, my interactions with her were so real. My father was real, too, and his sacrifice was just as real. My childhood, my middle school, high school, college, and my work experiences, all those details, all those moments-they were so real.

"I can still remember the smell of my mom, the taste of her best dish, eggplant with pork. I can remember where my dad's police uniform had a hole burned by a cigarette, where he hid snacks he bought for me…

"To you. these might be part of a a dreamscape, but to me, they couldn't be more real. They are the meaning of my existence.

"And because of those memories and that past, I feel real. No matter how you see it.

"Now, I'm going to do something I've always dreamed of. It will make me even more real. It will give my life more meaning, no longer just a dream or someone else's fantasy!"

Before Jenna could respond, Lumian suddenly said.

"Alright. You approach Zhou Mingrui, and find a way to steal that pocket watch."

Luo Shan was stunned, not expecting Lumian to agree so quickly.

In the blink of an eye, a smile appeared on her face, a smile filled with pride and nostalgia.

She looked at Jenna and asked softly, "I-if this dream breaks apart and you two leave alive, will you remember me? Will you remember that there was a Luo Shan, and the things I did?"

Jenna's vision blurred instantly, and she choked up as she said.

"I will. I'll always remember that I had a friend named Luo Shan. She was lively and kind, though a bit lazy. She was a girl who always missed her mom, but she had a strong sense of justice, just like her father..."

Luo Shan smiled, full of relief. "That means I really lived. My life was real."

She took a deep breath and pointed toward Zhou Mingrui and Zhou Sasa.

"I have to hurry. They're almost at the entrance to the ride-hailing parking lot."

"Alright," Lumian and Jenna replied briefly.

Luo Shan took a step toward the exit but suddenly turned around, flashing a bright smile at Jenna and Lumian.

With a mix of nerves and excitement, she said, "I can be a guardian too."

Without waiting for a response, she turned back and ran toward Zhou Mingrui and Zhou Sasa, wearing her blouse and skirt.

She used her Reporter ability in small bursts, speeding up quickly, moving as gracefully and nimbly as a young deer.

Lumian watched her back and softly repeated her words, "Guardian..."

…

Inside Crimson Moon Hospital.

In a dimly lit patient room, with the curtains drawn, even though it was noon, Anthony used the last remaining Mirror Traversal effect of the Ice Mirror Charm, bringing himself and Ludwig out of the bathroom mirror.

They walked over to the hospital bed, where Anthony studied An Xiaotian's head. There were centipede-like stitches across his scalp, and his face was covered with thick, dark facial hair. After a few seconds, Anthony turned to Ludwig and asked, "Can he be cured?"

"I don't know. We'll have to try and see," Ludwig replied. He plucked a golden mushroom from the cracked corner of his eye and chewed it down.

The efficacy of the spores he absorbed from mushrooms to heal An Xiaotian was uncertain-this wasn't something a Gourmet typically dealt with.

Anthony surveyed the room before pulling out a blank sketchbook and a pencil. He set the book down on the TV table and quickly began sketching.

Before long, he finished a drawing.

It was a complex maze, but every path seemed to be blocked.

Anthony carefully tore out the sketch, packed away the remaining pages, and cautiously walked to the door. Using his Psychological Invisibility ability, he opened the door just a crack and placed the drawing against it.

The sketch shimmered for a moment and then melded seamlessly with the door.

With that done, Anthony observed the bustling nurses and wandering patients in the hallway before retreating back inside, closing the door behind him.

He turned to Ludwig and said, "Begin the treatment."

Ludwig hesitated briefly before stepping forward in small, cautious steps. He stood next to An Xiaotian's bed and placed both hands on the man's shaved head, which was covered with multiple scars and attached to various medical devices.

In the next moment, a damp, fresh sensation emanated from Ludwig's body, making the air feel like a forest after the rain.

Anthony waited patiently as the seconds ticked by.

Suddenly, he noticed small lumps forming beneath the skin on An Xiaotian's face, as if something was trying to push its way out. The lumps quickly retracted, shifting a few centimeters under the skin.

On the monitors, the data for heart rate, blood pressure, and oxygen saturation began fluctuating rapidly.

There's a response, but is it enough? Anthony held his breath without realizing it.

He cast Placate on himself, calming his nerves as he continued to wait.

Another twenty seconds passed before Anthony noticed the room becoming even darker, though he wasn't sure if it was real or just his imagination.

Then, all at once, the lumps beneath An Xiaotian's skin surged to the surface, tearing through his flesh and scalp.

They sprouted into various types of thumb-sized mushrooms-some had fleshy, veined patterns, others were soft and white, oozing a milky substance.

They kept growing, rapidly expanding until An Xiaotian's entire head was covered in a dense cluster of fungi, leaving only his eyes, nose, and mouth visible.

Beep! Beep! Beep!

The monitors blared, alarms going off as the data spiked wildly.

Several nurses rushed over, one leading the way and another pushing a medical cart.

But when they opened the door to the room, they didn't see the bed or the nearby bathroom. Instead, they were faced with a long hallway stretching into the unknown, with countless unmarked doors lining its sides.

Normally, the nurses would have stepped back to check if they were in the wrong place, but instead, they ran forward, opening door after door, desperately trying to find the real entrance to the room.

Amid the walling alarms, Anthony felt the room grow even darker. An ominous, dangerous energy began to fill the space.

Ludwig withdrew his hands, stepped back to Anthony's side, and stared at the now mushroom-covered An Xiaotian. Licking his lips, he said, "It worked."

Just as he spoke, An Xiaotian, still unconscious, suddenly sat bolt upright.

Bzzz, the electrical appliances in the room-lights, TV, monitors-all emitted a loud buzzing sound, so intense that it drowned out the beeping alarms.

At that moment, An Xiaotian, sitting up straight, opened his eyes. They were deep, dark, weathered, and slightly hollow.

In stark contrast to the mushrooms growing all over his head, his eyes looked unnervingly normal and sane.

An Xiaotian opened his mouth and spat out countless tiny spores, his voice hoarse as he said, "Be careful..."

As soon as Anthony and Ludwig heard those words, they suddenly felt an overwhelming sense of oppression. The darkness around them seemed to solidify, closing in on them and pushing them out.

Even with Anthony's mental fortitude and emotional control, he couldn't help but shiver, feeling the urge to flee the room.

The next second, An Xiaotian's voice turned sharp and piercing.

"Be careful of Zhou Mingrui!"

Chapter 1028: The Medium

"Be careful of Zhou Mingrui!"

An Xiaotian's voice echoed through the hospital room, drowning out the alarms from the monitoring equipment.

Wh- As Anthony struggled to hide his shock and out surprise, thunder rumbled outside.

The sky over the entire dream city suddenly turned gray, as if the brilliant sunlight had been cut off by a layer of clouds.

In Anthony's vision, An Xiaotian's figure suddenly be or became blurry, sometimes expanding, sometimes contracting, like a hazy, confusing dream.

The next second, Anthony and Ludwig felt the dream's strong rejection, sensing their rapid transformation into marionettes.

…

Inside Yangdu High-Speed Rail Station.

Luo Shan quickly caught up with Zhou Mingrui and Zhou Sasa, intercepting them before they turned onto the road leading to the parking lot.

"Zhou Mingrui!" Luo Shan called out.

Zhou Mingrui, who had already put the silver pocket watch in his trouser pocket, turned around and looked at the rapidly approaching Luo Shan with confusion. "Why are you here?"

Weren't you just at work in the office, slacking off and chatting with me?

Zhou Sasa looked at Luo Shan, then at her brother, and smartly kept her mouth shut, saying nothing.

Luo Shan stopped within arm's reach of Zhou Mingrui and said urgently, "There's something important I need to tell you."

What could be so important that it couldn't be said over WeChat or phone, and you had to rush here to tell me in person? Zhou Mingrui remembered Luo Shan's previous warnings and looked at his colleague quizzically, waiting for her to continue.

On her way over, Luo Shan had already decided that today's strategy would be "honesty." She said with a serious expression.

"There's an item you shouldn't touch right now. I'm here to keep it safe for you."

Taking advantage of Zhou Mingrui's confused thinking, she suddenly reached out with her hand, using the ultimate speed of a Reporter.

Zhou Mingrui couldn't dodge in time and Luo Shan "forcefully snatched" the silver pocket watch with vine and leaf patterns from his trouser pocket.

"This is it!" Luo Shan quickly explained,

Zhou Mingrui, who instinctively wanted to grab it back, suddenly froze, looking at the pocket watch and muttering in disbelief.

"This?"

What could be wrong with it?

This change also left the observing Zhou Sasa confused and bewildered. She blurted out, "Mingrui, what's going on?"

What are you two talking about?

Are the two of you flirting?

Zhou Mingrui didn't answer Zhou Sasa's question. focusing his gaze on Luo Shan.

Luo Shan didn't bother to conceal anything and couldn't think of how to hint at it, so she directly raised the silver pocket watch.

"This will bring you danger!

"Think carefully, isn't it a bit different from before?"

Although Luo Shan wasn't clear on what exactly was wrong with the pocket watch in her hand, from Jian Na and Li Ming's conversation, she knew the watch was linked to some special mirror world fragment.

In other words, the watch was different from before- if there had been an anomaly in the past, Zhou Mingrui would have had problems long ago!

Zhou Mingrui suddenly fell into thought, frowning slightly.

Indeed, the watch's glass face seemed to have been replaced...

Who would normally use black glass for a watch face, even if it was transparent...

Beside them, Zhou Sasa grumbled, "I've repaired it, of course it's a bit different from before."

Zhou Mingrui thought for a few seconds, then cautiously said to Luo Shan, "Alright, you keep it safe for me for a few days."

Although this watch held great sentimental value for him, no object, no matter how important, could compare to real safety. Even if it was lost because of this, he would only feel heartache and regret, but not remorse.

How understanding, just like usual... And I haven't had any problems yet! Luo Shan felt both relieved and grateful as she sighed to herself.

She quickly gave Zhou Mingrui a meaningful look. "I'll make a move first."

After getting Zhou Mingrui's permission, she turned and walked towards where Jian Na and Li Ming were.

She suppressed the explosive joy in her heart, not showing it for the moment.

I succeeded!

I did itl

I completed an important task at the risk of my life!

As Luo Shan's steps became increasingly light, she suddenly felt her body become weightless.

Her throat began to tighten, as if a rope was wrapped around it.

Her breathing quickly became labored, and her knees and elbows felt as if they were filled with thick glue.

Still... something went wrong....

Will I... be strangled... to death... like this... in public?

In this state, Luo Shan heard the rumbling thunder.

She found her surroundings had become quite dark and extremely oppressive, with the passing pedestrians all appearing blurry and distorted.

This... really is... a dream... Luo Shan suddenly had this realization, a realization tinged with sorrow and sighing.

At this moment, she saw Jian Na.

Jian Na was still clear.

Then, Luo Shan clearly saw the anxious and worried expression on Jian Na's face.

She once again felt that her life was still real, still meaningful.

She managed to give Jenna another smile, with difficulty.

Her body also gradually became blurry, like those background characters seen hazily in a dream.

Rumble!

Amid the rolling thunder, Zhou Mingrui also noticed the blurring and distortion of the people around him, and the darkness and unreality of the entire high- speed rail station.

The only light came from the side and behind him and Zhou Sasa, from the passage leading to the parking lot.

Clear radiance gathered there, as if forming a huge door.

Zhou Mingrui instinctively grabbed Zhou Sasa's forearm, no longer caring about the luggage, and ran wildly towards that door of light.

After running a few steps, he felt Zhou Sasa stop, becoming heavy, making it impossible for him to drag her forward.

Has Sasa also been affected by the anomaly? Zhou Mingrui turned his head concernedly to look at his sister.

In his eyes, Zhou Sasa had somehow already become transparent, thin, like a mirror and the reflection of a person in a mirror.

Zhou Sasa's black dress had half-merged with the "mirror," making the surface appear dark.

Zhou Mingrui saw himself in the dark mirror.

Short black hair, deep brown eyes, non-prescription glasses, soft contours and a somewhat handsome appearance....

As Zhou Mingrui clearly saw the image in the mirror, the him in the mirror suddenly curled his lips, revealing an eerie and chilling smile.

The Zhou Mingrui in the mirror began to overlap with Zhou Sasa, who had regressed to a pure female form.

Wh-Zhou Mingrui instinctively took two steps back.

Just then, he heard a "bang" of a gunshot.

A bullet tinged with a dull blue-green color shot out from somewhere, hitting the mirror that Zhou Sasa had become, hitting the reflected image of Zhou Mingrui in the mirror.

Certain Death!

Franca had lent the Inevitable Gun to Jenna.

Crack!

That mirror quickly shattered, falling to the ground like a rainstorm.

All of its fragments lost their luster, no longer reflecting anything.

Zhou Mingrui instinctively turned sideways and saw Jenna, holding a brass-colored revolver, with delicate features, not at all blurry or distorted.

He didn't recognize this beautiful young woman.

Jenna nodded slightly to Zhou Mingrui, trying her best to show her goodwill.

When Zhou Mingrui witnessed his mirror self revealing that chilling smile, he had already judged this to be an enemy, someone harboring malice towards him.

This led to a series of thoughts:

They've used Sasa!

I must find out what has happened to the real Sasa!

Based on this judgment, Zhou Mingrui held no ill will towards Jenna, who had shattered the mirror and his mirror self, believing she was sent by friendly forces to stop this.

Seeing Zhou Mingrui return a friendly nod, Jenna hadn't had time to feel joy, hadn't had time to think about how to save Luo Shan, when she suddenly felt the dream strongly rejecting her, felt her thoughts becoming sluggish, felt two kinds of pain attacking simultaneously.

She was being kicked out of the dream, she was being rapidly turned into a marionette.

Just as Zhou Mingrui was about to ask the woman opposite what to do next, he saw her face contort, seeming to be in great pain.

Has she been attacked? An invisible attack? Zhou Mingrui hurriedly looked around, searching for potential enemies.

He then saw that the pillars and screens throughout the high-speed rail station had become illusory, either elongated or widened, becoming dark mirrors.

All these mirrors reflected Zhou Mingrui's searching figure, but without exception, the Zhou Mingrui in the mirrors all wore cold, chilling smiles.

"They" suddenly stopped, all turning to look at Jenna. their voices overlapping as they laughed.

"It's too late!

"Zhou Sasa is the medium, the medium pointing to that mirror world!"

Jenna, who was fighting against the dream's rejecting force and rapid marionettization, suddenly froze.

Too late?

Has the Zhou Mingrui in the mirror already been born?

Is the Celestial Worthy about to use this?

On one side of the high-speed rail station that had transformed into a mirror world, Lumian, who had never formally appeared, unhurriedly took out the magic mirror Arrodes.

In a rich timbre, he intoned, "The second question.

On the surface of the mirror, pale words quickly appeared: "Ask quickly!"

Arrodes didn't repeat its rules, because this was the second question, not the first.

Lumian curled his lips slightly and said, "Are you a weapon, or a medium?"

On the dark mirror surface shimmering with water, the pale words writhed and changed, forming new content: "Medium!"

Then, the magic mirror Arodes posed its own question:

"How do you want to use me?"

"Certainly not as a brick to throw at someone," Lumian laughed.

…

At Four-Way Street, in the Jinxiu Dongfang Community, inside the Mute Art Studio.

Anderson Hood sat in front of his easel, bored, weal yawning.

At this moment, he heard the rumbling thunder and felt the light suddenly dim, the environment becoming extremely oppressive.

Anderson stood up and walked to the window, finding that the pedestrians below had all become blurry masses.

He smiled and looked up at the sky, saying. "My task is about to be completed."

As he spoke, he raised his right hand and snapped his fingers with a loud crack.

Boom!

A violent explosion occurred deep within the building, with flames rising from various places.

In an instant, the newly renovated but uninhabited "motel" was engulfed by raging red flames.

Chapter 1029: Deep Darkness

As rumbling thunder sounded and the sky darkened, making the environment extremely oppressive.

Queen Mystic, maintaining the illusion of Lumina, picked up the phone and dialed a number.

It was the private number of Chief Yagates.

After connecting, Bernadette said directly, "I've received personal threats. I need the best protection."

She was reporting to the police.

She immediately explained, "It may be due to my father transferring power to me. I need protection!"

Bernadette emphasized the word "protection".

Chief Yagates was silent for a saying, "Okay."

…

In the gloomy oppression, most people in the dream city became blurry.

But this didn't stop them from going online, using their phones, checking information.

Just then, whether videos, books, novels, or messages, everything suddenly collapsed into pure snow-like static.

These countless noise points rapidly spread, forming a huge information vortex.

The online world experienced a malfunction.

…

Inside Mushu Hospital.

The blurry and distorted patients, doctors, nurses, orderlies and those who were still clear simultaneously raised their heads, looking up towards the ceiling.

The dark and gloomy sky suddenly split open, and pure brilliant sunlight instantly poured down, shining directly on the main building of Mushu Hospital, piercing every dark corner and every underground level.

In the low-hanging leaden clouds, countless silver white electric snakes intertwined into huge, flamboyant lightning.

Following the path carved out by the sunlight, this lightning struck the main building of Mushu Hospital, submerging it in a dazzling and intense ocean of thunder.

…

Inside the mirror-world-transformed Yangdu High - Speed Rail Station.

After answering the magic mirror Arrodes's question, Lumian didn't rush to take further action. He still calmly asked as if waiting for something. "The third question, how can we get the owner of the Star Dream Provisions Store to provide necessary help for Franca?"

On the surface of the magic mirror, those pale words didn't change color, but recombined into new content: "Pass Franca's Mirror Substitution through me, through the mirror world, to Her."

Then, the magic mirror Arrodes asked in return: "Don't you have it?"

"I do." Lumian laughed, took out Franca's Mirror Substitution, and pressed it into the glass mirror surface of the magic mirror Arrodes.

At this special moment when the dream city was shaken and character images were blurred, the restrictions on his Beyonder powers also lessened. He had recovered to a level almost equivalent to Sequence 4, which was why he could use the mirror world to quickly send an item to the Star Dream Provisions Store, which was clearly over ten kilometers away.

After doing this, Lumian glanced twice at Zhou Mingrui, who looked grave and was constantly moving away from those dark mirrors and mirror selves, then gripped the magic mirror Arrodes with his left palm.

It's time!

He unhesitatingly activated the residual aura of the Blood Emperor in the center of his right palm.

The brand that had turned dark red due to the fusion with an unknown boon suddenly became prominent, seemingly showing signs of melting back into blood.

However, that mad, violent, bloody aura didn't dissipate, being firmly suppressed by a deathly pale force.

Of course, after Lumian's last use of the corpse wax V candle, the pale and dark red had shown extremely subtle signs of fusion. Now, at that point of fusion, it strangely darkened, caving in slightly, showing unusual changes.

Lumian reached his right palm into the Traveler's Bag and took out the Card of Blasphemy he got from the mirror Emperor Roselle-the Demoness card!

He pressed this Demoness card tightly against his palm, against the mutated residual aura of the Blood Emperor and the Underworld Daoist's seal, against the slight depression produced by the fusion of pale and dark red.

Almost simultaneously, Lumian felt a bone-chilling coldness and horror in the center of his right palm.

He didn't need to look with his eyes; an image naturally appeared in his mind.

His palm had gained a "pinhole", a "pinhole" formed by pure darkness.

As expected, this Demoness card should be used here... If I didn't have it, I'd have to light the corpse wax candle, which would not only be rushed in terms of time, requiring the ritual to be held earlier and adding considerable risk, but the effect might not be as good... As these thoughts flashed through Lumian's mind, he extended his right hand holding the Demoness card towards the magic mirror Arrodes.

His hand penetrated the surface of this ancient silver mirror, reaching into the area behind the mirror.

But he didn't enter himself, it was more like using the magic mirror as a medium for "casting spells".

The next second, a scene appeared in Lumian's mind: the dark void around the area behind the mirror seemed to be covered by an invisible curtain, behind which pairs of eyes were watching the outside world, and nameless things were flowing silently.

This was the area behind the mirror corresponding to the magic mirror Arrodes, which was clearly somewhat special compared to other mirrors.

Then, Lumian "saw" that the curtain covering the dark void silently collapsed and peeled off as his right hand entered.

The entire darkness was collapsing.

What appeared in Lumian's mind wasn't the pairs of eyes he had imagined, nor was it a surging river, but a viscous liquid that was difficult to describe in words, seemingly containing all colors.

These liquids seemed to form an illusory ocean. Although Lumian hadn't truly "seen" or touched it, just sensing it made him feel that his body and mind were beginning to fall, his spirit gradually becoming abnormal.

Then, the illusory ocean was pushed aside by an invisible force, moving away from Lumian's "mind".

Following this path through the ocean, Lumian's consciousness quickly went forward, "seeing" the gray stone walls, "seeing" the blood flowing on the stone walls.

Those crimson blood formed sentences: "To test out the correct plan, He finally decided to let the Red Priest and the Demoness from the same era meet, guiding Them to combine together…

"This will bring about a destined accident…"

The scene froze here, and the magic mirror Arrodes in Lumian's palm suddenly emitted an ancient, chaotic radiance.

Yangdu High-Speed Rail Station, in the arrival hall.

Zhou Mingrui had already turned and started running wildly, but no matter where he ran, the pillars, walls, floor, and ceiling would turn into mirrors, reflecting his figure.

And the him in the mirror always wore a cold, chilling smile.

After running for a while, Zhou Mingrui suddenly stopped, because his head, feet, and surroundings had all become dark mirrors, all reflecting him.

"Give up…

"Give up..."

Every Zhou Mingrui in the mirrors persuaded.

They were not only persuading, but also reaching their hands out of the mirror surfaces, grabbing at Zhou Mingrui, leaving him nowhere to hide, nowhere to escape.

Zhou Mingrui didn't give up. In the narrow space, he dodged left and right, barely avoiding the first round of grasps.

At this moment, a pure darkness covered with grayish-white fog and hiding a vast city appeared prominently in all the mirrors on the scene.

In the blink of an eye, the grayish-white fog and the vast city collapsed towards the depths of the darkness.

That darkness "came alive", surging towards the mirror surfaces, surging towards the mirror Zhou Mingrui behind each mirror.

The mirror Zhou Mingrui tried hard to grab Zhou Mingrui, wanting to escape from the mirrors, but in such a short time, it was really difficult to succeed.

Soon, the darkness surged to the area behind the mirrors, swallowing one mirror Zhou Mingrui after another, freezing the cold, chilling smiles on their faces.

This all-engulfing darkness irresistibly filled all the areas behind the mirrors with an overwhelming momentum.

All the mirrored Zhou Mingruis disappeared.

The darkness continued forward, breaking through mirror after mirror, pouring into Yangdu High-Speed Rail Station.

This high-speed rail station began to collapse, inch by inch, as if the dream was gradually shattering, the fragments falling into the deep darkness.

At this time, Jenna found that the dream's rejecting force and the force of rapid marionettization had both weakened a lot. She hurriedly approached the blurry Luo Shan, trying to take her out of the high-speed rail station.

As for whether the damage to the dream would continue after leaving the high-speed rail station, and what would happen to Luo Shan then, Jenna didn't think about it for the moment, nor could she think about it.

Unfortunately, the distance between them was too far. Before Jenna could truly get close to Luo Shan, she saw that deep darkness swallow the corresponding area.

Luo Shan's blurry figure rapidly faded, bursting like a soap bubble.

The last scene she saw was Jian Na rushing towards her with an anxious face.

She smiled with relief.

She opened her mouth, but couldn't say anything.

She completely disappeared.

At the same time, Jenna seemed to hear Luo Shan saying: "Remember me, don't forget!"

Jenna stopped her steps, and before the deep darkness surged over, she left this city with the help of the remaining dream rejecting force.

She responded to Luo Shan's words in her heart, I will remember you forever!

Lumian, who was far from this deep darkness, silently sighed in relief after seeing Jenna's expression become confused and bewildered.

Next, he watched expressionlessly as the dreamscape Jenna was dissolved by the deep darkness, as Zhou Mingrui ran wildly in the high-speed rail station, trying to get away from the deep darkness surging like seawater.

The surge of that darkness gradually slowed down, as if suppressed and weakened by the dream's main consciousness.

Finally, after swallowing more than half of the high- speed rail station, the deep darkness stopped just tens of centimeters away from Zhou Mingrui.

The dream city stabilized again, and even the you remaining passengers and those meeting them gradually became clear.

Zhou Mingrui ran a few more steps, confirming that the danger had really eased.

He then saw the handsome security guard Li Ming walking out from a corner not far away, walking towards him.

"Is this upheaval over?" Zhou Mingrui asked urgently.

Lumian had already put the magic mirror Arrodes and the Demoness card back into the Traveler's Bag. He looked at Zhou Mingrui and calmly answered when they were still a few meters apart, "I'd like to say that things are over.

"But unfortunately, they aren't yet."

Zhou Mingrui was stunned for a moment, his back gradually straightening, the corners of his mouth curling up slightly, his expression no longer the same as before.

He chuckled softly.

"Yes, not yet."

Chapter 1030: Face to Face

Yangdu High-Speed Rail Station, half collapsed and fallen into deep darkness, as if swallowed by an abyss. The other half, though restored to stability and normalcy, remained dim with unlit lamps. Only a few paths leading to the outside world had light converging, forming brilliant and clear light gates.

In this environment, Zhou Mingrui, with his back to the deep darkness, looked at Lumian and asked in a calm voice, "You know?"

Lumian nodded lightly and said, "Yes.

"Theoretically, I should have waited for Anthony and Ludwig to wake up An Xiaotian, hear words like 'be careful of Zhou Mingrui' from his mouth, then be kicked out of the dream, and through the indirect influence of the Major Arcana cards, receive the corresponding information to know the corresponding truth. But Peng Deng's true hint has already given me the answer.

"On the surface, he was hinting to us that he was the childhood friend of both Mr. Fool and the Celestial Worthy, but the reverse is also true. Zhou Mingrui is both Peng Deng's childhood friend and the childhood friend of the original God Almighty. The two aspects of his identity are unified and merged together.

"In other words, Zhou Mingrui is both Mr. Fool and you, the Celestial Worthy!"

Zhou Mingrui, wearing a faint smile, slightly raised his chin, assuming a listening posture.

Lumian further said, "This also aligns with the magic mirror Arrodes's hint to 'beware of the night’. During the day, Mr. Fool's power takes the upper hand, and Zhou Mingrui equals Mr. Fool. At night, you, the Celestial Worthy, become active, and Zhou Mingrui will be closer to you. So, even just approaching, without any hints, there, would be risks.

"Based on this judgment, any hints, help, or awakening given to Zhou Mingrui would benefit both Mr. Fool and you, the Celestial Worthy."

"And Peng Deng, as a symbol of the original God Almighty, doesn't meet Zhou Mingrui at night because if you two were to meet, there's a high probability that very unpleasant things and accidents would occur."

Zhou Mingrui nodded and said, "He is formed from that bit of power left in the magic mirror and part of the spirit and consciousness that Grisha brought into the dream. He can't compare to me here. If we were to meet at night, it would be advantageous for me, but problematic for Him."

Zhou Mingrui didn't deny that his current self was The Celestial Worthy of Heaven and Earth for Blessings.

Lumian showed an expression of understanding. "That individual's real name is Grisha?"

Without waiting for Zhou Mingrui to respond, he continued, "Combining Peng Deng's true hint, Chief Yagates's state, the fundamental reason for the dream's restrictions, and other facts, I had roughly guessed what had happened before and your current situation when I entered the dream for the third time.

"Several years ago, shortly after Mr. Fool had just fallen asleep, he probably used himself as bait to lure you out and sealed you into the Zhou Mingrui manifestation formed from his spirit and consciousness.

"From a mystical perspective, this symbolizes the fusion and opposition of the both of you, while in reality, you are indeed within his body, indeed restricted by him. This is reflected in the dream with a similar symbolism!"

At this point, Lumian paused, as if observing Zhou Mingrui's reaction.

Zhou Mingrui, with his smile unchanged, said, "Continue, I'm listening."

Smiling, Lumian replied, "This also explains why only Peng Deng and Zhang Yujia from Zhou Mingrui's original character relationships appeared, while others came from the identities of Klein Moretti, Gehrman Sparrow, and so on.

"He doesn't want those feelings buried deep in his to be exploited by you. Of heart, the softest ones, to be course, for those you already know, there's nothing he can do."

Zhou Mingrui nodded lightly and said, "Peng Deng and Zhang Yujia didn't originally exist either. They were created by Grisha using the Dreamweaver ability and Zhou Mingrui's subconscious cognition."

"I see, no wonder Zhou Mingrui suddenly froze when mentioning other childhood friends. That might be the true reflection of Peng Deng." Lumian had a sudden realization.

He continued, "Afterwards, Mr. Fool might have made a wish or used some other ability to remove Beyonder powers from the dream city, allowing Zhou Mingrui to live as an ordinary human. During this process, he might have been fooled by you, forgetting who he really was, forgetting many things.

"Overall, this ordinary human state is very advantageous for Mr. Fool, because he became a great existence step by step from being an ordinary person. Even though he has inevitably been influenced and eroded by godhood, he still retains a part of his humanity, the part that is intense and fervent for him. But you, The Celestial Worthy of Heaven and Earth for Blessings, are naturally great and don't possess such humanity at all.

"When the battlefield between you two is fixed on an ordinary human with only humanity and in an urban environment without Beyonder powers, you are naturally suppressed, restricted, and weakened. Humanity temporarily triumphs over godhood, "This can also be interpreted symbolically. The fact that Zhou Mingrui, who has merged Mr. Fool and you. the Celestial Worthy, is an ordinary person symbolizes that humanity has gained the upper hand, with godhood suppressed to a corner, temporarily negligible."

"Yes, at that time I was influenced by that drop of river water and couldn't do more. I could only accept this change," Zhou Mingrui frankly admitted.

Lumian glanced at those dream figures running out of the high-speed rail station and said,

"When you recovered, you started influencing this dream city, either with the help of other beings or by summoning your original believers, bringing items involving the supernatural, like automatic vending machines, onto the stage.

"One of their important meanings is to gradually guide Mr. Fool, letting him recognize that this is a world with supernatural abilities, recognizing from Sequence 9 step by step to Sequence 0. And as this recognition and sequence level changes, the godhood will gradually grow stronger, step by step suppressing humanity.

"According to this plan, the longer we linger in the dream city, the more we use supernatural abilities, the more beneficial it actually is for you. This is something you didn't tell Zaratulstra and other believers, fearing it might invite interference from other beings.

"Similarly, you don't want to wait that long, which is why you induced Zhou Mingrui to consume the Assassin potion and let the mirrored Emperor Roselle enter here.

"You wanted to use the method of creating a stable Mirror Person to split Zhou Mingrui. This is equivalent to opening a gap in the seal that Mr. Fool constructed with himself. Once the Mirror Person is gradually mastered by you, you can walk out of the mirror, replace the 'original body', using truth as falsehood and turning falsehood into truth. As for the gender change affecting cognition, those are just smoke and mirrors.

"But unfortunately, the original God Almighty foresaw this scene before His fall and left arrangements spanning several eras, leaving behind the magic mirror Arrodes.

"One of the functions of the great horror in the depths of the special mirror world is prepared for you!”

Zhou Mingrui said with a smile, "When I initially woke up and saw that magic mirror, I roughly guessed what kind of things would happen."

Lumian nodded quite approvingly. "Yes, you should have made extra preparations for this.

"However..."

At this point, he smiled and said, "Of all the things Amon said, the one I agree with most is:

"Filter out the interference of complex information and see the most fundamental facts.

"So, what is the most fundamental fact now?"

Lumian stared into Zhou Mingrui's deep brown eyes behind his plain glasses and said,

"The most fundamental fact now is that I'm standing in front of you, saying so many words about your true situation, yet I haven't been kicked out of this dream, nor do I feel myself being marionettized!"

Lumian smiled again. "You had Zhou Sasa arrive in Yangdu early, not only to disrupt our rhythm and prevent the original God Almighty's arrangements from truly becoming reality, but also to prevent interference from other beings, wanting to create a stable, long-term Mirror Person for Zhou Mingruis before They were ready.

"This shows that you still attach great importance to and anticipate this matter. Extra preparations, if possible, are better left unused as they're not as convenient.

"I watched as things deteriorated step by step, as you truly found an opportunity to awaken, and had Anthony and Ludwig go to wake up An Xiaotian, which actually no longer had much significance. I asked Queen Mystic to help direct the dream's main consciousness's attention, asked Stiano and other gods to help confuse the information world and contain other places, all to attract your attention, to make you feel that you could win, to invest more power and stakes in this matter.

"This way, when the original God Almighty's arrangements erupted through the medium of the magic mirror Arrodes, you would be weakened to the greatest extent.

"So, I, who entered the dream for the third time, came right before you, spoke the truth of the facts, and still wasn't kicked out on the spot.

"You temporarily don't have this ability!"

Zhou Mingrui laughed. "Don't you think you're like bait right now?"

Lumian sighed and said, "I know, you're waiting for your extra preparations to arrive. Otherwise, how could I have this opportunity to dialogue with you?

"But, I'm also waiting."

At this point, a brilliant smile appeared on Lumian's face.

"Haven't you noticed that one of my companions is missing?

"So many things erupting simultaneously just now was also to distract your attention, to make you overlook her actions!"

Seeing Zhou Mingrui gazing at him, Lumian slightly raised his chin and said emphatically, "The Major Arcana card holders' guesses weren't wrong, their attempts weren't wrong either!"

…

Dream City, inside a movie theater.

Franca was sitting in the second row, watching the screen in front where The Great Pirate 3 was playing.

At this moment, her body was faint and indistinct, as if a sketch had been erased with an eraser. Around her, the few spectators had all become blurry, but were slowly stabilizing, gradually becoming clear.

Franca had checked earlier and found that due to The Great Pirate 3 about to end its run, only two theaters were showing it for the noon screening. So she specifically took a taxi to this one, the farthest from Yangdu High-Speed Rail Station.

And her search information had been lost in the current chaos and disorder of the Internet.

Hearing the thunder in the sky quickly recede, seeing Gehrman Sparrow standing on the bow of the pirate ship appear on the screen, Franca suddenly stood up.

She walked to the front of the projection room in a few steps, and before the few spectators could protest, she took a breath, stretched out her right palm, and pressed it against the screen.

Her figure quickly became ethereal, leaning forward, entering that screen.

Chapter 1031: Gehrman Sparrow

Just like when Lumian entered the surveillance world, after Franca's vision recovered, she found herself standing on the deck of a three-masted sailing ship, surrounded by undulating azure waves and howling winds.

In front of her, at the bow of the ship, stood a young man wearing a silk top hat, dressed in a long black coat, clean-shaven, with a lean but angular face, bright eyes behind gold-rimmed glasses.

Gehrman Sparrow.

The protagonist of The Great Pirate 3 movie, quite similar to Zhou Mingrui but more stern-looking.

Gehrman Sparrow suddenly turned his gaze towards Franca, expressionless, his eyes cold and piercing.

Franca instinctively stepped back twice, forcing herself to stand firm.

Gehrman Sparrow observed her for a few seconds-her high ponytail, white T- shirt, and loose gray pants-and asked in a calm voice, "Are you Tracy's elder?"

Tracy was the name of the Pirate Admiral, Ailment Maiden.

He recognizes me as a Demoness? Franca glanced at Gehrman Sparrow's left palm hanging at his side, seemingly covered in a layer of human skin, and said sincerely, "I'm a subordinate of the Demoness of Black. She is the child of the Demoness of White. We are not on good terms."

This was all the honest truth.

According to Franca's understanding, lying in front of Gehrman Sparrow was a very low-yield behavior. Once exposed, one would immediately face an attack like a violent storm.

Moreover, Franca wasn't clear about what souls were actually grazing inside the glove-shaped Sealed Artifact Creeping Hunger when the real Gehrman Sparrow met Ailment Maiden Tracy. She only knew that in Madam Magician's embellished story, the glove at this time could allow Gehrman Sparrow to use the mind-reading ability of a Psychiatrist, so lying was indeed a high-risk behavior.

Therefore, honesty was the best policy!

The gold-rimmed glasses-wearing Gehrman Sparrow observed Franca for a few seconds and said, "What is your purpose?"

Lumian had said that although the Gehrman Sparrow in the movie isn't exactly the same as the real Gehrman Sparrow, the original author of the movie was Madam Magician. When creating The Great Pirate 3, she would inevitably incorporate her own understanding of Gehrman Sparrow. At that time, she already knew that Gehrman Sparrow was an avatar of Mr. Fool, and driven by her subconscious, she would likely integrate some of Mr. Fool's personality and choices as well. So, to convince Gehrman Sparrow to accept such an absurd thing, one has to approach from this angle... Franca's thoughts raced, and she blurted out, "We are the same kind!

"We are both transmigrators!"

Gehrman Sparrow looked at Franca without speaking.

He was holding a revolver in his right hand.

Franca explained seriously, "We are transmigrators in time. Hehe, actually, it's not transmigration, but being frozen in a special place by a great existence, only to be returned to reality after thousands or tens of thousands of years, or even longer. You are like this, and so am I."

Before Gehrman Sparrow could refute or simply shoot her, Franca quickly added, "The name Gehrman comes from 'Bloodborne', and Sparrow is the surname of Captain Jack from 'Pirates of the Caribbean'. They are spliced together to form your name."

After saying this, Franca felt that the pressure from Gehrman Sparrow's gaze had noticeably lessened.

She let out an undisguised sigh of relief and continued, "The reason I've come to find you is that the end of days will come early, and you have inherited the legacy of the great existence that froze us. You are a key part in facing the apocalypse.

"Are you willing to leave here with me to face the apocalypse?"

After making her request, Franca smiled awkwardly but politely. "Do you believe what I've said?"

Gehrman Sparrow looked at Franca without saying a word, making her extremely nervous.

After a moment, Gehrman Sparrow said in a low voice, "I can give it a try.

"But if I find out you're lying..."

In a flash, he raised his revolver, aiming at Franca's head.

Bang!

A bullet flew out, grazing Franca's head and hitting the nearby cabin.

Gehrman Sparrow lowered his revolver without saying anything more.

I have a Mirror Substitution... Franca grumbled internally.

She quickly approached Gehrman Sparrow and grabbed his arm.

"I'll take you to the gathering point right now!"

Yes, her assigned task was to find the currently playing The Great Pirate 3 movie, enter the screen when the dream appeared abnormal but was about to stabilize, and bring the Gehrman Sparrow character into the dream city!

Wouldn't such a movie character dissipate quickly after leaving the screen and entering the dream city? Moreover, my Despair potion hasn't been fully digested yet. What if the dream shatters because of this? At the crucial moment, Franca's heart pounded, feeling very uneasy.

She didn't hesitate for long. Gritting her teeth, she silently said to herself, Trust that guy!

Trust that the Major Arcana card holders can still remedy this!

At worst, I'll revert to a Demoness of Affliction level!

As her inner voice echoed, Franca, holding Gehrman Sparrow's arm, moved towards the outside of the screen.

...

Inside Yangdu High-Speed Rail Station, half in deep darkness and half in dim light.

Zhou Mingrui looked at Lumian in front of him and said, "You still chose the Gehrman Sparrow direction?"

His voice was steady, without a hint of fluctuation, like a teacher pointing out a student's mistake.

"Yes," Lumian smiled and said, "But it's not An Xiaotian, nor Jia Yu. These were all options meant to mislead us.

"My companion Franca went to watch The Great Pirate 3 movie. It should be one of the last screenings. She is the Demoness of Despair and can enter the screen to bring out the Gehrman Sparrow from the movie."

Lumian emphasized the name "Franca", as if wanting the Celestial Worthy to remember it.

Zhou Mingrui smiled slightly and said, "A movie character can only maintain its form for three seconds after leaving the screen."

"What about adding the Gehrman Sparrow dream manifestation woven by a Dreamweaver, the numerous Gehrman Sparrow anchors in reality, and the widely spread stories and poems about Gehrman Sparrow?" Lumian asked as if in casual conversation.

...

Trier, inside a luxurious villa.

Madam Justice, who was monitoring the changes in the dream city, suddenly stood up and said to all the Major Arcana card holders, "The anomaly has appeared. Let's begin."

Her voice was a bit tense, her heart seemingly not as calm as her exterior.

Madam Magician immediately rose from the sofa and half-opened her arms.

A brilliant, dreamlike starlight gate appeared in the bedroom where Franca was sleeping, appearing in the shadowless sunlight.

This grand door opened heavily, revealing the faint grayish-white fog inside.

Within the fog, a city of indeterminate size faintly appeared.

Madam Magician didn't stop, forcibly opening another "door", an opening, on that grayish-white fog.

At this moment, her face became semi-transparent, with strange, brilliantly shimmering worms wriggling and crawling through her pores and hair.

Madam Justice saw the movie theater where Franca was through that hole in the gray fog, then closed her emerald-like eyes, raised her right hand, and began to carefully weave the dream manifestation of Gehrman Sparrow.

On the other side, Mr. Sun placed The Fool's Sacred Emblem on the already prepared altar and began to pray to the Angel of Redemption Gehrman Sparrow as usual, praising him repeatedly.

As a demigod of the Sun pathway and the pope of the Church of The Fool, his prayers and praises quickly brought changes to the altar. Points of holy light appeared, surrounding the giant Sacred Emblem of The Fool, making the surroundings seem more sacred and solemn.

At this moment, Ma'am Hermit, who had arrived nearby, removed the thick glasses perched on her nose bridge. Imitating Gehrman Sparrow, she placed her hand on her chest and bowed.

Instantly, a scene appeared above the altar.

In the scene, Gehrman Sparrow, wearing a silk top hat and black coat, walked step by step across a desolate land in a dark environment illuminated by flashes of lightning, followed by a long line of people.

This was Mystical Re-enactment of the Mystery Pryer pathway.

Gehrman Sparrow's rescue of the citizens of the City of Silver and Moon City was also considered mystical knowledge, and could become a spell through Mystical Re-enactment. However, because too many people knew about it, its corresponding power was very weak.

But Ma'am Hermit's purpose in deliberately creating this "Path of Salvation" spell was not to deal with enemies or help herself. Her sole aim was to solidify the image of Gehrman Sparrow.

As "Gehrman Sparrow" arrived on the altar due to Mystical Re-enactment, the points of holy light immediately crowded around him, swelling slightly, and emitting ethereal voices:

"Praise you, great Angel of Redemption!"

"Praise you, herald of Mr. Fool!"

"Please save me from suffering, great Gehrman Sparrow!"

"I confess to you, seeking redemption!"

"My idol is Gehrman Sparrow!"

"I want to become a great adventurer!"

“…”

Voices related to Gehrman Sparrow echoed in layers, seemingly stabilizing and materializing the image of Gehrman Sparrow on the altar platform to some degree.

Meanwhile, at the entrance to the dream city opened by Madam Magician.

Madam Justice successfully wove a Gehrman Sparrow wearing a silk top hat and long black coat inside the movie theater where Franca's figure had already entered the screen.

Throughout the process, she didn't feel strong rejection from the dream.

However, as soon as Gehrman Sparrow's dream manifestation took shape, it only lasted for three seconds before uncontrollably and silently collapsing and dissipating.

Seeing this, the few spectators present instinctively applauded.

They increasingly believed that the beautiful young lady entering the screen earlier was part of a magic performance.

Chapter 1032: The Power of Many

Madam Justice didn't give up, once again weaving a new Gehrman Sparrow identity.

At this time, silhouettes appeared in the thin gray fog surrounding the dream city. They quickly swam towards the passage opened by Madam Magician, bringing violent tremors and self-contraction to the "door".

Madam Magician struggled against this, not letting the dream door close, not letting Madam Justice's attempt to weave Gehrman Sparrow's dream manifestation be и interrupted.

Mr. Hanged Man, who had already put down his liquor turned his gaze towards this direction, his hand already holding a blasphemous card.

The Tyrant card!

Boom!

Thunder crashed, and layers of intertwining silvery- white lightning struck the black silhouettes in the thin gray fog, making them writhe and struggle before dissipating, unable to approach the passage opened by Madam Magician.

Madam Justice remained unaffected, continuing to weave Gehrman Sparrow's dream manifestation.

In the altar, once the Gehrman Sparrow image created by Mystical Re-enactment was temporarily stabilized po by countless anchors, Mr. Star, who had been standing by the window, walked step by step towards this area.

As he walked, he recited:

"Like a storm petrel, soaring without yield,

"Knowing the tempest, mastering the field,

"Compelling them to peace,

"Brewing calm into rich release[1]…"

As the poem echoed, the sunlight in the room suddenly dimmed, as if clouds had drifted in.

Gehrman Sparrow on the altar closed his eyes in response, entering a deep slumber.

Now, he too was dreaming.

It was a nightmare, but also hope.

Seeing this scene, Mr. Moon, who had been quietly enduring the scorching sunlight, let his black cloak rise up behind him, like a giant bat spreading its wings.

He flew to the starlight gate opened by Madam Magician, entered that illusory passage, and arrived outside the hole leading into the dream city.

He didn't try to enter again, but turned around, reached out his hands, and created an illusory, hazy door inscribed with numerous mystical symbols out of thin air.

This was the Door of Summoning. Door of Summoning from Sequence 3 High Summoner of the Moon pathway.

Mr. Moon wanted to summon Gehrman Sparrow, the current Gehrman Sparrow on the altar!

The next second, he opened his mouth and began to chant the corresponding honorific names and specific summoning incantations in ancient Hermes, "The Blessed of the spirit world and Sefirah Castle:

"The Mystery stemming from ancient times;

"The witness of an extended history;

"Angel who redeems mankind;

"Protector of all impoverished children;

"The great Gehrman Sparrow…"

In this kind of summoning directed at the false, the entire honorific name had to be recited.

As the subsequent incantations also echoed, that illusory, hazy door suddenly opened wide, revealing a boundless darkness dotted with stars and fluttering shadows.

But to Mr. Moon's slight disappointment, the Gehrman Sparrow image on the altar only turned to the side, with no other movement.

The power of reality seemed to be preventing this false event.

…

In the Yangdu High-Speed Rail Station, half in deep darkness.

Lumian looked at Zhou Mingrui and said to himself, "These all come from Mr. Fool's arrangements, all guided by fate.

"Since Mr. Fool sealed you, the Celestial Worthy, with this self-image of Zhou Mingrui, before he truly gains a significant advantage, awakening Mr. Fool would be equivalent to awakening you, the Celestial Worthy. So what we need is not awakening, but creating The World Gehrman Sparrow out of thin air in the dream.

"Only in this way will he not be a product of the merged consciousness of Mr. Fool and you, the Celestial Worthy, but pure and uncontaminated.

"His source is the believer anchors of Gehrman Sparrow, the cognition of Gehrman Sparrow by a large number of humans in the real world and the dream city, and the understanding of Mr. Fool by the Major Arcana card holders of the Tarot Club, not involving you, the Celestial Worthy.

"This is equivalent to Mr. Fool dragging you into slumber together, then creating a highly related identity that can stably exist with the help of others to wield authority on his behalf. The gradual strengthening of this identity will help him gain an advantage using the corresponding authority, ultimately truly sealing you and awakening himself.

"This is the correct interpretation of the prophecy 'The awakening of The World spells The Fool's return'.

"This is also what you've been wary of all along, which is why you replaced the dream manifestations related to Gehrman Sparrow and had your subordinates Infiltrate the Church of The Fool, trying to make the final formed Gehrman Sparrow point to you instead of Mr. Fool.

"In that case, it would become 'The awakening of The World spells the Celestial Worthy's return',"

Zhou Mingrui calmly laughed twice, "What if your judgment and choices are all wrong?"

Lumian shrugged and said, "If they're wrong, then they're wrong.

"I never thought I would succeed in everything I do. On the contrary, I've always considered myself a failure.

"Failure is not scary. The failures of the Major Arcana card holders have paved the way for us, and our failures will also eliminate wrong answers for the future lucky coin holders and point out the correct, direction. This attempt will certainly delay the time for you, the Celestial Worthy, to achieve victory.

"In the time to come, there will be batch after batch of lucky coin holders arriving, standing on our shoulders, continuing to climb, looking further, until the true apocalypse arrives."

At this point, Lumian smiled at Zhou Mingrui, "This is very similar to a saying I learned in the dream city.

"Success doesn't have to be achieved by me, but I must contribute to its achievement!"

Zhou Mingrui fell silent.

…

In Trier, inside the luxurious villa, in Franca's bedroom.

As Madam Justice suffered another failure and began weaving Gehrman Sparrow's dream manifestation for the third time, while Mr. Hanged Man continued using lightning to prevent those black shadows in the gray fog from approaching the "door", Mr. Moon repeated the summoning incantation once more.

The Gehrman Sparrow on the altar, with his eyes closed, swayed, wanting to respond to the summoning in his dream, but unable to overcome the power of reality.

At this moment, around Mr. Star's emerald eyes, transparent worms seemingly with twelve segments crawled out.

They quickly formed a complex mystical symbol.

The symbol representing deception!

Almost simultaneously, Madam Judgment approached the altar and said in ancient Hermes, "Truth recedes here, while illusion grows stronger!"

Suddenly, the air in the bedroom solidified.

Gehrman Sparrow's figure first disappeared from the altar, then crossed that mysterious hazy summoning door, appearing in front of Mr. Moon, appearing in the passage opened by Madam Magician, appearing outside the hole leading into the dream city.

Then, Gehrman Sparrow's destination was also "deceived".

This character image created jointly by Mystical Reenactment, numerous anchors, and nightmare power flickered as it flew towards the dream city.

Suddenly, in the dark void outside the gray fog. silhouettes of people emerged.

They bypassed the lightning storm, charging one after another towards the "door" opened by Madam Magician, towards Gehrman Sparrow.

At this critical moment, no Major Arcana card holder could spare a hand or stop them in time.

Madam Judgment couldn't help but look out the window.

Madam Tinekerr and Madam Sharron had also arrived, guarding against accidents. Would They be able to act in time?

A moment later, Madam Magician saw a lighter-colored mist spreading outside the gray fog. Within the mist, there seemed to be a wilderness, a river.

Those figures flying towards Gehrman Sparrow crashed into the mist and suddenly disappeared.

Finally, Gehrman Sparrow, carrying numerous anchors, arrived inside the movie theater in the dream city.

At this time, Madam Justice had woven Gehrman Sparrow's dream manifestation for the third time.

The two Gehrman Sparrows attracted each other and merged together.

"Gehrman Sparrow!

"Gehrman Sparrow!"

The audience in the movie theater started shouting loudly.

With these shouts, the newly appeared Gehrman Sparrow became clearer, noticeably more stable.

But he still kept his eyes tightly closed, as if he didn't have a soul yet.

The repulsive force of the dream descended.

At this moment, Franca, pulling the Gehrman Sparrow from the movie, ran out of the screen.

Then, she saw another Gehrman Sparrow in front of her, also wearing a silk top hat and long black coat.

This is... Franca had no time to think about anything else, as she caught a glimpse of the Gehrman Sparrow behind her starting to rapidly dissipate.

She gritted her teeth and, following the guidance of her Demoness of Despair spiritual intuition, pulled the Gehrman Sparrow from the movie towards the one in front.

The next second, she let go of the arm of the Gehrman Sparrow from the movie, watching as he was attracted and drawn by mystical forces, actively approaching the other Gehrman Sparrow and merging into him.

Rumble!

Terrifying noises came from midair again.

This time, it didn't sound like thunder rumbling, but closer to the collapse of the dream.

"Oh…" Franca suddenly made a surprised sound.

…

Inside Yangdu High-Speed Rail Station, the collapsed half remained in deep darkness.

Lumian looked up at the rumbling sky, then smiled at Zhou Mingrui, who was standing at the edge, just one step away from falling into darkness.

"Their attempt seems to have succeeded.

"Using countless anchors, Mystery Pryer powers, and Nightmare powers to create a Gehrman Sparrow image in reality, then finding a way to send him into the dream city to combine with the Gehrman Sparrow dream manifestation woven by the Dreamweaver wasn't a plan I came up with. It was a plan the Major Arcana card holders, had long ago, but hadn't had the chance to implement.

"My contribution was to suggest that the Gehrman Sparrow manifestation from the movie was the earliest to appear, produced out of thin air, and that a Demoness of Despair could bring him out of the screen. Why not try combining all three?

"Well, I had another contribution: creating such an opportunity."

Zhou Mingrui listened calmly, without any emotional change.

Suddenly, Lumian's smile became radiant, and he said softly to Zhou Mingrui, "My Despair potion has been fully digested."

[1] The last two lines are adapted from Rilke's "Day in Autumn"

Chapter 1033: Worth It

Inside the movie theater.

Franca let out a surprised "Oh, because she felt her Despair potion fully digested.

Has Lumian's plan succeeded? This thought suddenly occurred to Franca.

Although she wasn't clear on exactly what Lumian intended to do or how, she remembered Lumian saying that once her Despair potion was digested, it would mean this operation had achieved its expected purpose, Mr. Fool would awaken to some degree, and the dream would completely collapse in a few minutes.

Franca instinctively looked towards Gehrman Sparrow to her side, and saw the roof of the movie theater collapsing inch by inch. But the corresponding heavy objects didn't crash onto the seats and floor, instead falling into the void and disappearing completely.

At the same time, white light emanated from the few audience members present, flying into Gehrman Sparrow's body.

Franca suddenly realized what these white lights were: they were the impressions, cognitions, and understandings of Gehrman Sparrow from different audience members!

As the dream approached collapse, these audience members revealed their illusory nature, and their corresponding memories split off on their own. becoming anchors and information to nourish and enrich Gehrman Sparrow's image.

From different parts of the dream city, more similar white lights rushed over.

It really worked... Franca joyfully raised her head, looking up to the heights no longer obscured by movie theater's roof.

The originally dark sky had collapsed in large patches, revealing terrifying deep blackness and thin grayish- white fog.

It was like a building whose walls had crumbled in an earthquake, but with the beams and pillars still standing, the skeleton still intact.

…

Inside Yangdu High-Speed Rail Station.

After hearing Lumian say his Despair potion had been fully digested, Zhou Mingrui, standing at the edge of the deep darkness, smiled gently, "That's good."

Lumian was stunned for a moment. "Mr. Fool?"

Zhou Mingrui nodded slightly, "It's me now."

He smiled and said, "You all did very well."

Smiling, Lumian replied, "If you hadn't sealed away most of the Celestial Worthy's power, including His thinking ability, we would have had no chance of success."

Lumian was still carefully using "sealed" to describe Zhou Mingrui's original state, but the truth might not be so.

He had been saying this all along, mixing a bit of falsehood into his truth as he told the Celestial Worthy his guesses, judgments, and plans. Besides wanting to delay time, there was also an intention to reinforce the Celestial Worthy's cognition in this regard.

Of course, whether this was true or false, after today. it would become true!

Zhou Mingrui shook his head and smiled. "Relying on myself alone, it was already extremely difficult to restrain the Celestial Worthy. Without your help, the outcome might have been completely different.

"For example, if you hadn't driven out Zaratul in advance, today's operation would definitely have had setbacks, and the awakened World might have pointed towards the Celestial Worthy.

"And if it weren't for the help of those friends in the Western Continent, the Celestial Worthy might have had a chance to turn the tables in the end."

So the Celestial Worthy's backup plan, the preparations made for the arrangements left by the original God Almighty, was intercepted and prevented by certain existences in the Western Continent. My original plan was just to race against time, using the concealment of the Evernight Goddess to complete the fusion of the three Gehrman Sparrow images before the Celestial Worthy's backup plan could truly take effect... The Celestial Master, or the Underworld Daoist? Lumian made a sound of agreement and said with feeling, "Indeed, without the efforts and groundwork laid by the Major Arcana card holders before, even if we had deciphered the true meaning of all the symbols today, we wouldn't have had time to create the character of Gehrman Sparrow. We could only have watched helplessly as the situation tilted towards the Celestial Worthy's side.

"Similarly, without the hints from Peng Deng and Amon, we might still be exploring directions now, with the Celestial Worthy's fatal blow about to arrive..."

Seeing that Lumian was very clearheaded and rational in recognizing this point, Zhou Mingrui nodded with satisfaction.

Lumian didn't go on to talk about the contributions of gods and people like Stiano, Leodero, and Anderson, but asked eagerly, "Mr. Fool, can Aurore, my sister, really be resurrected?"

Zhou Mingrui looked at Lumian and said in a calm voice, "With her soul fragments sealed inside you and not dissipated, if you were a Beyonder of the Seer pathway and had advanced to Miracle Invoker, then with my help, you could Graft one of your resurrections onto your sister's soul fragments. allowing her to truly return.

"But now, you can only rely on the resurrection of the Demoness pathway to separate your sister in the future."

Seeing Lumian fall into thought, Zhou Mingrui added, "You can no longer change pathways, and after your advancement to Demoness of Despair, Aurore's soul fragments have already fused with you to some extent. If you were to regress back to the beginning using the Sun pathway, her soul fragments wouldn't be able to withstand it and would completely dissipate."

Lumian was silent for a few seconds before saying, "Will the resurrection achieved through the Demoness pathway in the future be an essential resurrection, a true resurrection?"

"Yes," Zhou Mingrui sighed and said, "But wishes are often distorted, and the way they are realized may not be what you want. Just like when you saved my believer back then, I noticed you and foresaw that you would play an important role in the matter of dreams in the future, so I gave you the aura of the gray fog and my imprint. But I didn't expect this prophecy would be fulfilled in such a warped manner, and my actions were also part of the prophecy."

"So that old man was your believer." Lumian suddenly realized.

He laughed calmly. "Without the aura of the gray fog. perhaps I would never have met Aurore, never had that life in Cordu, and Aurore would still have been noticed by April's Fool, still been troubled by Roche Louise Sanson, and maybe wouldn't even have had a chance at resurrection."

At this point, Lumian took a breath and said, "I understand.

"As long as it's an essential, true resurrection, I can accept any form of realization."

Zhou Mingrui nodded slightly and extended his right palm. "You can give me that bottle of Samaritan Women's Spring water processed by Mr. Azik now."

As Lumian took out the small golden bottle from his Traveler's Bag, he asked puzzledly, "Mr. Fool, now that Gehrman Sparrow has been 'born', you don't need to drink this spring water anymore, right? The Celestial Worthy is sealed within you, so Him drinking is equivalent to you drinking, and besides, this only has a very weak effect on Sequence 0 True Gods."

The small golden bottle suddenly appeared in Zhou Mingrui's right hand, while Lumian's hand was now empty.

"I still need to sleep for a while longer." Zhou Mingrui said with a smile. "Now is the opportunity to fuse with the Celestial Worthy and better resist Him, and this bottle of spring water is the medium.

"Gehrman Sparrow will become The Fool, embodying a bit of my will, until I fully awaken."

"Still need to fuse with the Celestial Worthy?" Lumian asked in confusion.

Zhou Mingrui nodded. "Yes, both fusing and resisting; this is currently the only path."

"Doesn't that mean..." Lumian suddenly closed his mouth, remembering a certain mystical knowledge he knew.

The spiritual imprint of the original Creator within the Beyonder characteristics was indestructible, including those of the original God Almighty and The Celestial Worthy of Heaven and Earth for Blessings!

Zhou Mingrui smiled and said, "No matter how I clinch victory, no matter how much you help me, in the long run, the one who will ultimately win this confrontation will inevitably be the Celestial Worthy."

Seeing Lumian fall silent, Zhou Mingrui continued with a gentle expression, "Most humans know they only have a few decades of life and are destined to pass away in the not-too-distant future, but this doesn't prevent them from enjoying their lives, from doing meaningful things, from being happy, suffering, sad, moved, satisfied, and missing others.

"You've also seen from Roselle's experience during this time that there is a lot of truth within dreams, that hope lies hidden at the end of despair, and that a moment's brilliance might point towards eternity."

Lumian was speechless for a moment.

After about ten seconds, he sighed. "Resisting every day, being eroded, trying to fuse, continuing for tens of thousands or hundreds of thousands of years, or even longer, wouldn't it be very tiring?

"Wouldn't it be like before, when you still maintained self-awareness, but suddenly found yourself smiling strangely in the mirror?"

"It would." Zhou Mingrui sighed with a smile. "When I fully awaken this time, except for the strongest and most intense parts of Zhou Mingrui and Klein Moretti's emotions and humanity, everything else might no longer be the me of now."

This wasn't said in a speculative tone.

"As for whether it's tiring..." Zhou Mingrui's tone became a little more animated, "Of course it's very tiring, but there's no choice; someone has to do this, right?"

Lumian's thoughts were jumbled and chaotic. He opened his mouth and said, "Is it worth it?"

Zhou Mingrui looked at him, suddenly took a step back, and fell into that deep darkness.

He didn't dissolve quickly like other dream characters falling into this darkness, but sank slowly as if in seawater.

Zhou Mingrui raised his right hand, brought that bottle of Samaritan Women's Spring water to his mouth, and drank it.

Then, as he slowly sank, he looked at Lumian outside the deep darkness, showed a gentle smile similar to before, and answered in a calm voice. "It's worth it."

After saying this, he suddenly winked his left eye at Lumian, not at all steady or serious, and not at all like the lofty Mr. Fool.

Lumian watched Zhou Mingrui sink into the depths of darkness until even his blurry silhouette disappeared.

He muttered to himself, "Worth it..."

In the movie theater, as those streams of white light merged, as Zhou Mingrui disappeared into the deep darkness, Gehrman Sparrow, who had been standing still as if asleep, suddenly raised his head.

He opened his eyes, his sharp gaze seeming to pierce through his gold-rimmed glasses.

With this, the sky of the dream city completely peeled away, all buildings collapsed with a rumble, and the images of characters like Grimm and Zhang Qing blurred until they completely dissipated.

Franca was confused for a moment, then woke up.

She saw a room full of people, saw the bright smile on Madam Justice's face that came from the heart, saw Madam Magician drinking red wine, saw clear and brilliant radiance.

Outside the window, the sunlight was just right.

Chapter 1034: Tarot Club

As the dream rapidly collapsed, Lumian withdrew his gaze, leaving the edge of that deep darkness and walking towards the disintegrating Yangdu High- Speed Rail Station outside.

He wanted to take one last look at this city.

Suddenly, he noticed a figure leaning against the wall at the position where the radiance converged into an exit, standing quietly.

That figure wore black armor stained with what looked like fresh blood, with fiery red long hair. The face was young and handsome, with two faint scars on either cheek, and a vivid red banner mark prominently displayed between his brows.

Unlike other dream manifestations that were blurry and nearly dissipating, this figure was not as clear as Lumian but had an illusory quality, like a spirit.

Lumian didn't need to ask to know who this figure was: Red Angel Medici.

"Did you come to wait for me?" Lumian asked with a smile.

He was prepared to leave this place along with the collapse of the dream.

Medici left the wall and stood up straight, letting out a sneer. "If you're too stupid to understand the hint, I'd have been the one to replace you on stage."

He looked into Lumian's eyes and shook His head. "Too weak, you're still too weak right now."

After this remark, the Red Angel slightly raised His chin and said, "I already know your experiences. I'll give you a chance-I'll come to hunt you down after you become an Angel.

"No need to thank me. This has nothing to do with pride. The pride of the war pathway isn't used against enemies."

Medici didn't give Lumian a chance to respond. He turned and walked into the passage, leaving Yangdu High-Speed Rail Station and the collapsing dream.

You waited until the very end just to say these few words to me? You must have also achieved some unknown goals by entering this dream, right? Lumian turned to the side, once again casting his gaze towards that deep darkness.

His biggest question now was where the deity, the Primordial Demoness, was.

The fact that Franca advanced in the basement of Mushu Hospital indicated that the Primordial Demoness indeed had a corresponding manifestation in the dream city. But in matters involving the special mirror world's great horror, the original God Almighty and the Demoness card, and the major event of the dream's end, She hadn't appeared or intervened at all.

Before Lumian could think further, Yangdu High- Speed Rail Station collapsed silently.

He first felt a sense of weightlessness as if falling off a cliff, then opened his eyes and woke up.

He immediately saw some sunlight penetrating the curtains, with a large amount of dust floating in the air.

At the same time, faint sounds of singing, praising, and conversation came from next door, entering his ears.

Lumian lay quietly in bed, feeling the springiness of the mattress and the soft warmth of the covers, not wanting to move at all.

…

Half an hour later, in the living room on the first floor.

Madam Magician said to Lumian, Franca. Jenna, Anthony, and Ludwig- who was having afternoon tea -all who had gathered again,

"Mr. Fool has achieved an initial state of awakening. We will fulfill our promise.

"You've done very well this time, deserving the most generous reward. The result of our discussion is to do our utmost to help you advance one Sequence."

Jenna nodded without hiding her desire. "Thank you."

Lumian, Franca, and company had no objections and were quite anticipatory.

Madam Magician looked around and said, "Of course, this may need to wait a few days, because Mr. Fool's initial awakening will inevitably cause many changes that need to be dealt with promptly. The other Major Arcana cards are already busy at present.

"Moreover, you also need some time to adjust, shake off the influence of the dream, and regain your perception of reality."

At this point, Madam Magician looked at Lumian and asked as if to confirm, "Do you want to become a Demoness of Unaging or a War Bishop?"

Lumian didn't hesitate. "Demoness of Unaging."

Hearing Lumian's answer, Franca suddenly remembered the Demoness card's description of a Demoness of Unaging: Bizarrely difficult to kill, skilled at resurrection.

Skilled at resurrection... You really don't want to wait even one more day, even if it's just taking the first step... Franca sighed inwardly.

At this moment, Lumian raised his right hand, palm facing the ceiling.

There, in addition to several dark red brands and a patch of pale skin, there was now a pitch-black "pinhole."

He said to Madam Magician and his companions, "After using the Demoness card this time, with the magic mirror as a medium, invoking the great horror from the depths of the special mirror world to deal with the Mirror Person created by the Celestial Worthy, the residual aura of the Blood Emperor and the seal of the Underworld Daoist have changed a bit again.

"I can now use a War Bishop's power that was previously bestowed to a limited extent through this 'pinhole.' There's no need to advance again."

Madam Magician nodded slightly and said, "In a few days, go to the treasury of the Blue Avenger. There might be items related to the Demoness of Unaging there. If not, we'll ask Mr. Azik for help and go to the depths of the underworld again. There must be Demoness of Unaging Beyonder characteristics there."

Lumian and Franca had no objections.

After Madam Magician left, Lumian, in his Demoness of Despair state, leaned back against the sofa and smiled at Franca and the others. "Now it's time to sunbathe."

Jenna was silent for a few seconds before saying. "I want, I want to go see the real Luo Shan."

"Okay." Franca nodded heavily in agreement.

"Alright." Lumian had originally planned to go tomorrow.

…

In the evening, Loen Kingdom, Tingen City, Red Moonlight Street.

Jenna, Franca, and Lumian sat in a roadside café, watching two figures, one big and one small, approaching from a distance.

The larger one was about thirty years old, with brown hair tied up in a high bun, wearing a thin gauze- brimmed hat. She wore a green long dress that was somewhat girlish but leaning towards maturity, with flowing ruffles at the sleeves and beautiful lace adorning the neckline.

She had a pretty face, holding a paper bag of white bread in one hand and holding the hand of a three or four-year-old girl who looked like a little princess with the other. This was Rozanne, a civilian staff member of the Nighthawks team of the Church of the Evernight Goddess.

Compared to the Luo Shan in the dream, she was noticeably older, and her demeanor was more stable, but her style of dress revealed that she still had a lively side hidden inside.

Jenna and Franca's vision immediately blurred.

Lumian, in his female state, focused intently on Rozanne and her daughter as they passed by, chatting and laughing, becoming as still as a statue.

After Rozanne and her daughter passed the café, the three Demonesses' gazes shifted, following the two figures from behind.

The golden-red glow of dusk fell upon Rozanne and her daughter, and the evening breeze carried their laughter and conversation to Jenna, Franca, and Lumian's ears:

"Mommy, what's a hero?"

"A hero is someone who protects others."

"Why do others need protection?"

"Why protect others?"

"Why? Why?

"Mommy, why?"

…

A few days later, Monday noon.

Lumian and the others met Madam Magician again.

The Major Arcana card holder sat down in the chair opposite the tea table and said to Lumian and Franca.

"You're both demigods now and have made great contributions. You're qualified to draw a Major Arcana card."

"Mr. Fool allowed it?" Lumian asked.

Madam Magician's entire being exuded a sense of relaxation, "Yes, but as a team, you can only draw one Major Arcana card for now. Who will draw?"

Franca looked at Lumian, hesitated for a few seconds, and said, "You draw."

She really wanted to see what she could draw and thought the identity of a Tarot Club Major Arcana card was very impressive. But thinking about having to take responsibility for a bunch of affairs as a Major Arcana card holder from now on, often having to brainstorm, she got a headache and decided to let Lumian take the lead first to see what it would be like.

"Are you willing to draw?" Madam Magician asked Lumian.

Lumian thought for a moment and said, "I'll draw."

Madam Magician said seriously, "After becoming a Major Arcana card holder, Two of Cups, Seven of Cups, and Four of Swords will all transfer under your jurisdiction.

"A Major Arcana card symbolizes not just you personally, but also the forces you represent."

"I understand." Lumian nodded slowly.

Only then did Madam Magician take out a deck of Tarot cards containing only Major Arcana cards and spread them out on the tea table. "You can draw now."

"Won't we draw a duplicate?" Franca asked curiously.

Madam Magician chuckled. "Spirituality will provide guidance."

Lumian glanced at the Tarot cards on the tea table, extended his right hand, and casually took one, turning it over in front of him.

What met Franca and the others' eyes was a large wreath of green plants intertwined and a woman standing inside the wreath.

The World card!

Franca and Jenna both looked at Lumian in his female state with slight astonishment.

He actually drew The World card?

Why?

Although Gehrman Sparrow now points to Mr. Fool, the legend of The World hasn't disappeared yet!

Lumian didn't speak, showing a thoughtful expression.

Madam Magician pondered for a few seconds before saying, "Draw again."

Lumian nodded in agreement.

This time, he drew two cards and placed them on his left and right.

After staring at these two Tarot cards for a while, he suddenly smiled with his beautiful face.

"Left for male, right for female. I'll take the one on the left."

With that, he unhesitatingly turned over the Tarot card on his left.

On the card face was a king standing on a chariot, with two lions, one black and one white, pulling the chariot.

The Chariot card!

"Not bad." Madam Magician stood up. "Welcome, The Chariot, um, Mr. Chariot."

After Lumian responded, Franca curiously said, "Can I see what the card on the right is?"

"You may." Madam Magician nodded to her.

Franca quickly turned it over and saw a woman wearing a crown sitting on a chair.

The Empress card.

"As expected..." Madam Magician sighed, then turned to Lumian and said, "Wait in your room at 3 pm today."

…

At 3 pm, in a bedroom of the luxurious villa.

Lumian, holding The Chariot card, sat in an armchair, patiently waiting.

Suddenly, chaotic and terrifying sounds rang in his ears, and a thin grayish-white fog appeared before his eyes.

Just a second or two later, he found himself by bronze long table, with a vast and magnificent dome above, surrounded by tall and majestic stone pillars.

Lumian immediately saw Madam Justice, Madam Magician, Madam Judgment, Ma'am Hermit, and the lady from the temperance faction wearing a black court long dress and a small soft hat of the same color, sitting opposite him.

They all appeared blurry, but not too blurry.

Lumian also noticed that Mr. Hanged Man, Mr. Sun, Mr. Star, and Mr. Moon-whom he hadn't met before but could deduce the identity of-were on the same side as him.

At this time, no one was seated at the head and foot of the bronze long table.

"This is Madam Temperance, and this is Mr. Chariot." Madam Justice calmly introduced the obviously female Lumian as "mister."

Just then, at the huge chair at the top of the bronze long table, a figure gradually took shape.

He was within the gray fog, his figure quite blurry, allowing Lumian and the others to only clearly see a silk top hat and a black long coat.

Looking at this both familiar and unfamiliar figure, Madam Justice took a breath, stood up, curtsied with a slight bent of her knees, saying

"Good afternoon, Mr. Fool."

(End of Volume Six-Dreamweaver)

Chapter 1035: Revelation

Anything that can go wrong will go wrong.

As Lumian walked down the stairs, the sunlight was still bright, and Franca, Jenna, and Anthony were leisurely enjoying their afternoon tea.

Ludwig was also there, though not as relaxed.

"Is the Major Arcana meeting over?" Franca turned and asked curiously.

Lumian suddenly recalled various scenes from the majestic palace above the gray fog, nodded and said, "It's over."

"What can you tell us about it? Don't mention anything you're not supposed to." Franca had an expression that implied that she just wanted to broaden her horizons.

Lumian sat down in an armchair and said, using language he had learned in the dream city.

"There's not much to say. Today's meeting was quite ordinary. The Major Arcana cards mainly reported to Mr. Fool about their respective responsibilities, and Mr. Fool gave corresponding instructions."

"You seem to respect Mr. Fool quite a bit," Franca suddenly remarked.

"Why do you say that?" Lumian asked, somewhat surprised.

Franca snorted and glanced first at Jenna, then at Anthony. "Do I really need to answer such a simple question?"

Jenna, in sync with Franca, helped explain with a slight smile, "If it weren't for Mr. Fool, you would definitely add more adjectives before 'instructions, like 'high-level' or 'all-encompassing’."

This added a hint of teasing and playfulness.

"I've always been quite respectful towards deities, except for a few." Lumian said with a knowing smile.

He then said, "As someone attending a divine meeting for the first time. I had nothing to report. I only raised questions about Madame Pualis and her daughter Omebella, hoping to get answers from Mr. Fool."

"What did Mr. Fool say?" Jenna and Franca asked in unison.

Before Lumian could answer, points of starlight suddenly appeared in the void.

These starlight quickly sketched out the figure of Madam Magician.

She said to Lumian, Franca, and Jenna, "You can now go to the Blue Avenger to explore the treasury left by the Blood Emperor. I'll go with you to provide necessary assistance.

"Do you need to postpone for a while to make some preparations?"

The Tudor dynasty's treasure obviously consisted of Items mainly related to the Hunter pathway, supplemented by those of the Demoness pathway. and then some items from the Seer, Apprentice, and Marauder pathways. It was very suitable for the three Demonesses to explore and obtain the Beyonder characteristics needed for normal advancement or pathway switching.

As for Anthony's advancement, other arrangements had been made.

And the further recovery of Ludwig's strength would have to wait until either Lumian or Franca reached Sequence 3, to avoid accidents.

"No need, let's go now." Lumian had already discussed this with Franca and Jenna.

Madam Magician said no more, creating a dazzling. dream-like double door and bringing the three Demonesses to the Blue Avenger, which was sailing through fierce winds and huge waves.

Mr. Hanged Man, dressed as the captain, was already waiting at the cabin entrance.

"Can you still sense the mirror imprint you left in the treasury?" Madam Magician asked Lumian.

"Yes," Lumian half-closed his eyes and sensed for a moment.

He didn't try to reach the full-length mirror with the Imprint using Mirror Traversal, because the corresponding area behind the mirror or mirror world contained Blood Emperor Alista Tudor's backup plan for resurrection.

For him, the main function of that mirror imprint was currently to provide necessary positioning so that his companions could also enter the treasury. In the future, it would serve as a trap marker to take down powerful enemies at the cost of mutual destruction.

After sensing, Lumlan walked towards the depths of the ship's cabin while deliberately continuing the previous topic.

He turned his head to look at Franca and Jenna and said, "Mr. Fool's revelation was that after becoming a Demoness of Unaging, go to the New City of Silver to borrow the Gift of the Land and bring it to the City of Exiles, in front of Hand Bro."

"Indeed, one knows Omebella, one shouted out Zedus. Let them meet, maybe they'll really spark something." Franca suddenly realized.

At this moment, Mr. Hanged Man, walking in front as the captain of the Blue Avenger, suddenly half-turned his body and said thoughtfully, "I think in Mr. Fool's revelation, not only is the latter part important, but the prerequisite is equally important."

Lumian mentioned Mr. Fool's revelation in front of Madam Magician and Mr. Hanged Man precisely to hear their views and opinions. He immediately asked.

"The prerequisite of becoming a Demoness of Unaging?"

Mr. Hanged Man, with his rugged face and unkempt appearance, chuckled deeply. "Can't you borrow the Gift of the Land and bring it to the Abscessed Hand now? The only help you might need is communication with the Church of Knowledge."

"That's right," Jenna agreed with Mr. Hanged Man's statement.

Lumian already had all the conditions to briefly use the Gift of the Land, could get the New City of Silver's permission through Mr. Sun, and was the proxy of 0-01. He didn't need to wait until reaching the Demoness of Unaging level to let Omebella's remains meet the Abscessed Hand.

"Are certain changes brought by becoming a Demoness of Unaging the catalyst for this whole thing? Or is it that only by reaching Sequence 3 can one deal with the inevitable accidents after the Gift of the Land meets the Abscessed Hand? No, the latter scenario can basically be ruled out," Lumian, in his Demoness of Despair state, slowed his pace and said thoughtfully.

As the proxy of 0-01, he had considerable authority in front of the mountain of corpses, and there wasn't much difference between being Sequence 4 or Sequence 3.

Moreover, he could briefly borrow the boon beneath the Underworld Daoist's seal to become a Sequence 3 War Bishop.

In other words, the power increase from advancing to Demoness of Unaging wasn't necessary.

"It should be some change brought about by the inherent qualities of the Demoness of Unaging," Madam Magician gave her judgment.

Franca, who had been listening quietly, mumbled, "Why doesn't Mr. Fool speak more clearly, just giving revelations for us to interpret ourselves?"

Mr. Hanged Man glanced at Franca. "I learned a phrase in the dream city- 'words, once given, become reality`.

"Every action and word of great existences profoundly influences fate and the world. Back then, in the process of Mr. Fool becoming a great existence in just three years, many of the things he said were later verified one by one, becoming facts.

"In this situation, speaking very clearly and not speaking clearly will be part of the whole thing, and the interference with fate will be different, and the final result will also deviate because of this."

As Lumian nodded in agreement, he felt slightly surprised inwardly.

He felt that Mr. Hanged Man was much more enthusiastic than in their previous encounters.

Previously, Mr. Hanged Man wouldn't be stingy with his judgments and explanations, but he only did and said what was within his duties. This time, he actually took the initiative to talk about many things outside the topic.

Is it because I've become a Major Arcana card holder? Mr. Hanged Man seems to value hierarchy quite a bit... Lumian withdrew his gaze thoughtfully.

Madam Magician then added, "Moreover, this matter involves the Great Mother. Even Mr. Fool can't see it very clearly and can only receive certain revelations."

Hearing this, Franca looked around and lowered her voice.

"Now that Mr. Fool has initially awakened, uh, I don't mean to disrespect Mr. Fool, I'm just more concerned about his current state. Maybe there's still something I can help with? After all, I'm a transmigrator! Um, what I want to ask is, what level has Mr. Fool recovered to now, and how is The Fool identity you guys have woven running?"

After exchanging glances with Madam Magician and Mr. Hanged Man, Lumian said, "We're not clear about the specific level of recovery, we can only be sure that in terms of level, it's not a complete The Fool."

This "Fool" without the "Mr." referred to the Sequence 0 - The Fool of the Seer pathway.

The basis for the judgment of the Major Arcana card holders, including Lumian, was: if the identity of Gehrman Sparrow was already a complete "Fool", it would mean that he had fully grasped all the authorities of the Seer pathway, and the true Mr. Fool would soon gain sufficient advantage in the matter of fusion and confrontation, fully awakening.

Lumian continued, "In my personal opinion, the current Mr. Fool is not agile enough, or rather, he's colder and more indifferent, closer to Gehrman Sparrow."

After thinking for a while, Franca said, "I think, in my personal understanding, Gehrman Sparrow is currently more like an AI-artificial intelligence that has integrated some of Mr. Fool's will and ideas.

"Think about it, one of the foundations of Gehrman Sparrow's stable existence is a large number of faith anchors, and different people's perceptions of him are different. This is like one of the foundations of AI's existence is data-a large amount of data and the data collected from the internet, fed to AI, may be incorrect, fabricated, self-imagined. This will bring corruption to it, very similar to the corruption of faith anchors you mentioned.

"The current AI stands out in that as long as you dare to believe, it dares to fabricate, and the reactions presented by Gehrman Sparrow will also be affected by the corruption of faith anchors. While not affecting the transmission of Mr. Fool's core will and ideas, there will be personalized, even contradictory manifestations.

"Well, he's equivalent to Mr. Fool's AI assistant. The better he iterates, the faster he evolves, the more authorities and powers Mr. Fool can grasp and mobilize, ultimately helping him defeat the Celestial Worthy."

Interpreting from the perspective of AI was something the Major Arcana card holders had never thought of. Fortunately, everyone present had been to the dream city and could barely understand what Franca was saying.

Madam Magician, who had a very deep understanding of faith anchors, nodded slowly and said, "What we need to do next is to purify Gehrman Sparrow's anchors and adjust people's perceptions of Gehrman Sparrow to varying degrees?"

"That includes our perception of Gehrman Sparrow," Mr. Hanged Man added.

As they spoke, the group arrived at the stairs leading to the lower deck of the ship.

Chapter 1036: Wedding Dress

Glancing at the dark, bottomless end of the staircase, Lumian took out a mirror and activated the contract ability on his body.

He immediately sensed the imprint on the full-length mirror in the Tudor treasury, ready to dive into the mirror and traverse through at any moment.

Maintaining this sense, Lumian reminded Franca and Jenna, "Walk close to the sides later-very close."

From his experience, walking down the stairs this way 8 would bring them into the reflection range of that full- length mirror.

For Beyonders of other pathways, they only needed to guard against being affected by the resulting illusions, scaring themselves crazy or to death. But if Hunters and Demonesses let their shadows be reflected on that full-length mirror, they might have their bodies snatched by the long-fallen Alista Tudor through pre-arranged setups, allowing Him to resurrect and return.

Lumian thought that given Alista Tudor's level of madness, He probably wouldn't care whether it was a Blood Emperor or a Blood Empress who returned, so the Demonesses should also be careful.

"Okay." Franca and Jenna had long ago heard Lumian explain what dangers were in the Tudor treasury.

Even if they didn't know, in the current situation, they would heed the advice first and find an opportunity to ask why later.

Lumian maintained the activation of the mirror imprint and let the residual aura of the Blood Emperor on his right palm intensify from faint to strong, covering it with pallor.

He hadn't yet started descending the stairs step by step when he suddenly heard Madam Magician's voice. "I've located your mirror imprint."

Along with the voice's response, points of dazzling starlight lit up, enveloping Lumian and the others.

When vision was restored, Franca found herself in a corridor that seemed to be formed of condensed starlight.

On both sides of this corridor were star-bright doors standing in the darkness. The bottom was semi- transparent, revealing endless darkness, while above there was no dome, with illusory stars dotting the distant heights.

At the end of this deep and spacious corridor sat a silver full-length mirror with a classic design and intricate patterns around its frame.

Almost simultaneously, Franca and Jenna noticed Madam Magician raise her right hand and gently grasp towards the front.

Around that silver full-length mirror, space suddenly bent, forming a sealed sphere in the state of deep shadows, blocking all light from entering.

Lumian and the others could no longer see that silver full-length mirror, and that mirror could no longer reflect them.

"This way we can be a bit freer," Madam Magician said with a smile.

Wearing a black robe with silver patterns, she turned to Lumian, Franca, and Jenna and said, "You can choose the treasure rooms now. I'll handle the dangers inside."

Franca and Jenna instantly looked towards Lumian, waiting for him to demonstrate for the two of them.

Lumian looked left and right, slowly moving forward along the deep and spacious corridor while casually saying, "In the area above the gray fog, when I mentioned Madame Pualis and Omebella, I also talked about a concern."

"What concern?" Franca asked cooperatively,

She and Jenna could both roughly guess that Lumian wanted to use casual chat to distract his own mind, choosing treasure rooms purely based on spiritual intuition and the characteristics, auras, and corruption on his body.

Lumian, in his Demoness of Despair state with black hair cascading, glanced at Madam Magician and Mr. Hanged Man and said, "At the end of the awakening operation, there were two things I couldn't understand:

"First, why was there no movement from the Primordial Demoness, and second, why didn't the Great Mother side try to stop it, even though She had made many arrangements in the dream city.

"The lack of interference from other existences was expected. The Celestial Worthy wouldn't wait until they were ready and could effectively interfere with the Internal situation of the dream before letting Zhou Sasa come. If that happened, what might be suppressed could be His hope for success. Moreover, Anderson's side would burn down the Colorful Hostel and the Mute Art Studio, not giving the deity worshiped by the Fantasy Association a chance to intervene, and there was also true god suppression at Mushu Hospital.

"But the Great Mother had sent Madame Pualis with baby Omebella to be the dean of Mushu Hospital. How did they not create even a ripple?

"Her forces in the dream city are not limited to Mushu Hospital. Whether it's Grimm who was originally active outside the hospital, or Lu Yong'an who can freely enter and exit the hospital, they could effectively avoid the true gods' suppression of Mushu Hospital and do something."

"Maybe Peng Deng, Grisha, and Amon's side, who didn't appear in the final stage, were blocking them?" Jenna speculated.

"That's one possibility." Madam Magician began to give her speech at the Tarot Club, "But I have a bad feeling that perhaps the Great Mother has already achieved Her goal, in a way that's in our cognitive blind spot."

"My experience is also that abnormal calmness is always problematic," Mr. Hanged Man followed up with emphasis.

Franca took a breath and turned her gaze to Lumian,

Lumian understood her meaning and smiled, saying, "The only revelation Mr. Fool gave about matters related to the Great Mother was: become a Demoness of Unaging, borrow the Gift of the Land, face the Abscessed Hand."

After saying this, Lumian suddenly had a spiritual perception. He turned to the right and pushed open a semi-transparent large door condensed from starlight.

The light behind the door was dim, with no attack appearing.

Lumian waited for two seconds before passing through the door and entering the room.

What met his eyes was a black coffin.

This coffin was different from the rectangular coffins Trier used daily, with obvious curves, one end larger and one end smaller, its surface carved with many bird and tree patterns.

"Eh..." Franca's head peeked out from Lumian's shoulder position, "Isn't this a Western Continent style coffin? Where did the Blood Emperor get it from?"

She already knew that the Western Continent had evolved from her pre-transmigration country over thousands or tens of thousands of years or even longer.

And judging from the fact that she could barely understand the language of Armored Shadow Chen Tu and its attire, Franca felt that the civilization of the Western Continent might not have experienced a break in continuity like the Southern and Northern Continents, still maintaining a certain continuity. The coffin style before her eyes seemed to be another piece of evidence.

As for why, in a situation where civilization had not been interrupted, the language and style of the Western Continent had "regressed" to what she remembered as "ancient", she couldn't think of a reason for the time being.

All the known transmigrators were in the Southern and Northern Continents and the former Eastern Continent!

No, Queen Mystic had said that the Ancient Sun God was not the kind of "cocoon person" like us, and there was another transmigrator who hasn't revealed their Identity... As Franca's thoughts gradually diverged, Lumian and Madam Magician had already walked to the front of that Western Continent style black coffin, with the latter causing the lid to slide to one side on its own, falling onto the semi-transparent ground.

Franca looked over and saw a beautiful face with tightly closed eyes, pale and cold, saw a gorgeous phoenix crown and rosy clouds cape, and saw bright red.

"Chinese wedding dress... bride's corpse... Dammit, what the hell is the Blood Emperor up to?" Franca blurted out.

Before her words fell, that black coffin with patterns of pine, cypress, and cranes began to shake violently.

A pale, delicate hand with long. gray nails that were sharp and cold silently pressed on the edge of the coffin.

With this action, Franca and Jenna's lips suddenly became dry, as if they were being roasted.

Outside the treasury, the Blue Avenger sailing through fierce winds and huge waves suddenly plunged downward.

The wind stopped, the waves calmed, and water vapor rose from the azure sea, evaporating rapidly.

On the surface of the Blue Avenger, the deck began to crack at a visible speed. Even though the consciousness of this ghost ship was constantly trying to repair it, it couldn't stop the trend from deepening.

Inside the Tudor treasury, in the corresponding room.

Before Madam Magician could deliver a barrage of attacks on the female corpse in the coffin. Lumian stretched out his right palm.

His palm was darkly red and mottled, covered with pallor, a deep black "pinhole" emitting an indescribable aura.

The female corpse wearing what Franca called a bright red wedding dress and a golden phoenix crown stopped shaking, no longer giving the feeling that it might crawl up at any moment. That delicate but pale hand slowly slid down, returning to the side of the corpse.

All the abnormalities disappeared with it.

"The power of a Demoness of Catastrophe," Madam Magician said after a few seconds of looking with eyes as brilliant as the starry sky. "And, the power of an Undying... Can the boons of these two pathways be put together?"

As she spoke, both she and Mr. Hanged Man looked towards Lumian.

Lumian looked at the dark "pinhole" in his palm, musing to himself, "Maybe they can..."

This thing seemed to be a fusion of the residual aura of the Blood Emperor, the boon of a War Bishop, the seal of the Underworld Daoist, and the grade and knowledge of the Demoness card.

If such a hodgepodge could be put together, the separately picked out powers of the Demoness and Death pathways should be able to as well.

Madam Magician and Mr. Hanged Man fell into deep thought, while Franca associated the terms "Demoness of Catastrophe" and "Undying" with the state and recent behavior of the female corpse.

She said in astonishment, "This, this couldn't be a drought demon, could it?

"Did the Blood Emperor bring a drought demon to the Northern Continent?

"How did He manage that?"

Isn't it said that the Western Continent was sealed by the power of the Celestial Worthy, and that the barrier can only be opened for free entry and exit after Mr. Fool truly gains the upper hand?

Before that, shouldn't only some secret deed rituals be possible?

Even if the Blood Emperor really opened a passage before His death, attempting to drag down all the gods with Him, that passage was sealed in Fourth Epoch Trier, right? The Blood Emperor shouldn't have had time to send this drought demon to the Blue Avenger…

Hearing Franca's words, Madam Magician turned to the side and began to explain, "The power doesn't come from Beyonder characteristics, it might originate from the Western Continent or somewhere else, but the person is from the Northern Continent

"Uh..." Franca looked carefully and found that the hair of the female corpse in the coffin was pale yellow, and her facial features were quite pronounced.

"An artificial drought demon?" Franca said with some understanding. "The Blood Emperor made a secret deed for some strange knowledge, and this is the product of an experiment? The phoenix crown, rosy clouds cape, and coffin are part of the knowledge, part of the ritual?"

Lumian nodded slightly, looking at the female corpse and said, "If we let her wake up, can we help her regain her sanity?"

Madam Magician slowly shook her head. "She' was probably born a monster."

Chapter 1037: Spring of Temptation

Madam Magician meant: the girl in the coffin underwent a transformation the instant she simultaneously received the powers of a Demoness of Catastrophe and an Undying through a strange ritual. This corpse, now possessing Angel-level power, was a monster from the moment it came into being.

Lumian, in his Demoness state, frowned and said, "Aren't boons supposed to not affect the spirit, only gradually causing mental and physical alterations?

Surely it shouldn't directly create a monster?

Moreover, from what he could see, the powers of the Demoness and Death pathways weren't so contradictory and could be integrated to some degree.

"What I explained before was only about boons under normal circumstances," Madam Magician said after some consideration. "The essence of boons is actually closer to controlled, retrievable corruption. Higher beings who grant boons generally try to suppress the spiritual, conscious, and emotional aspects of their power that belong to themselves, to prevent the recipient from being overwhelmed immediately and developing problems, as that would go against the original intention of the boon and fail to achieve the expected purpose."

Mr. Hanged Man added, "In the cases of evil god boons that we know of, if there weren't enough sacrifices, especially human sacrifices, even if a channel was opened through ritual, some of the recipients at the scene would be unable to bear the power, their bodies collapsing on the spot-either dying or becoming monsters."

Jenna confirmed with newfound understanding, "When the higher being that the Blood Emperor's strange ritual was directed at granted the boon, they didn't control or suppress the spiritual, conscious, and emotional aspects within the power, letting them exist as usual, so this girl as the recipient naturally couldn't bear it and became a monster?"

Mr. Hanged Man nodded slightly and said meaningfully, "It might not have been a boon, but rather theft."

"Did Amon play a role in this ritual?" Lumian's own boon power came from theft.

Mr. Hanged Man smiled, "Theft in another sense. Let me give an example-we can utilize the power of many Sealed Artifacts to some degree, but we must be careful to avoid the corresponding dangers and find the most suitable method, because they lack intelligence. You can't negotiate with them or make them obey to prevent them from harming you.

"In such cases, suitable methods of utilization are equivalent to relatively safe means of theft."

Lumian recalled his experience after lighting the corpse wax candle and nodded thoughtfully.

If he hadn't possessed both male and female forms in the dream city at that time, his physical body might have collapsed and become a monster.

"The Blood Emperor was indeed bloodthirsty and mad..." Jenna couldn't help but sigh.

The girl in the coffin most likely didn't voluntarily participate in such a special ritual.

"Not necessarily," Franca said quietly.

Seeing everyone look at her, she cleared her throat and said, "Based on my pre-transmigration experience, if this is related to the Western Continent, the whole ritual might not be what you imagine.

"They might have pre-selected a girl born on a specific year, month, day and time, killed her in a specific way at a specific moment, performed special treatment, then placed her in this pre-made coffin, made other arrangements, and finally conducted the ritual to let her gain power and open her eyes in an Undying state."

"Why do it this way?" Jenna asked puzzledly.

Franca smiled and said, "It's just my guess, but maybe this was the only way to please the corresponding higher being, or maybe this was the only way to avoid the influence of the spiritual and conscious aspects within the boon power. But for some reason, perhaps because the Blood Emperor and others made mistakes in interpreting the secret deed they obtained, missing some key points, the ritual seems to have failed in the end.

"Uh, maybe, it wasn't even a ritual seeking boons, but rather a method of corpse refinement..."

Jenna was silent for two seconds. "Then you still say the Blood Emperor wasn't necessarily bloodthirsty and mad."

This was more cruel than their previous speculation!

Franca explained, "I'm not saying the Blood Emperor wasn't necessarily bloodthirsty and mad, but rather that it might not have been ordinary bloodiness and madness-it was probably 'extremely' so."

Madam Magician turned to look at the female corpse wearing the phoenix crown and rosy clouds cape, and said, "She has no Beyonder characteristics. Let's go to the next room."

"Alright." Lumian had no objections.

After Madam Magician made the coffin lid fly up and cover it again, they returned to that deep and spacious corridor.

Lumian raised his right palm, looked at the dimmed dark red spots, dark "pinhole" and pale skin, then put his hand into his Traveler's Bag.

Maintaining this posture, Lumian started walking forward again.

He felt that encountering that female corpse was likely due to the effect of his right palm, so now he needed to try to eliminate its influence.

After about ten seconds, Lumian opened another door condensed from starlight.

At the same time, he saw a spring-its bubbling source.

The spring water had a sacred feeling, emitting an alluring aura-clear and pure-making Franca and the others, whose mouths had dried from the female corpse's influence, suddenly feel thirsty.

Voices then echoed in their minds:

"Drink, drink and regain your youth..."

"Drink, drink and gain tremendous power..."

"Drink, drink and extend your life by thousands of years..."

"Drink, drink and become irresistibly charming…"

"Drink, drink and achieve immortality…"

Lumian, who was also tempted and hearing the - whispers, smiled, "Don't worry, I will drink, I came here to drink you..."

Before he could emphasize that he was a person who valued ceremony, Madam Magician had already acted.

Layer upon layer of void peeled away, the clear and pure spring water suddenly receded, revealing what was inside the spring source.

There was a highly decomposed but not yet skeletal female corpse, with pale yellow-greenish pus constantly seeping from its disgusting flesh, combining with the air to become sacred, alluring, and pure.

This was the source of the spring water.

Madam Magician immediately raised both hands.

Glass-like fragments and blood tinged with pale yellow immediately flew out from the female corpse, falling into two containers that had been floating in mid-air at some unknown time.

After doing this, Madam Magician made the two containers fly toward Lumian. "They can replace the Mirror God fragments and Medusa blood as supplementary ingredients, enough for four advancements."

After Lumian put away the containers, the points of starlight condensed from the void suddenly pressed down, completely crushing the highly decomposed female corpse, making the charming, sacred grayish- white light quickly separate out and condense into a fist-sized, spring-like crystal.

Illusory water constantly flowed out from the crystal's surface, then fell back in.

With a push of Madam Magician's right hand, this Demoness of Unaging Beyonder characteristic quickly came before Lumian, already preliminarily sealed.

The light emanating from the female corpse hadn't completely dispersed-the remaining portion recombined to form a transparent eye brimming with tears.

"Your Demoness of Despair Beyonder characteristic," Madam Magician gave that beautiful but sorrowful eye to Jenna. "As for supplementary ingredients, The Chariot and Two of Cups should still have some left."

"Thank you." Jenna quietly let out a breath and quickly put the sealed Beyonder characteristic into her Traveler's Bag.

Madam Magician nodded slightly and walked out of the current room.

"Let's go find the next ingredient. This time, Two of Cups, you're in charge of opening doors."

Just as Franca was eagerly about to step forward, she suddenly saw Lumian hand over a piece of parchment.

On the parchment were words in rust-colored ancient Feysac:

"Potion Name: War Bishop;

"Sequence: 3;

"Main ingredients: Heart of a Bipolar Centaur, Core of a War Comet;

"Supplementary ingredients: 100ml of Bipolar Centaur blood, War Comet fragments, one Blood Tudor Iris, 8g of Flame Giant Tree bark;

"Advancement ritual: Lead your own team to defeat a powerful enemy force in a war.

"Note 1: The imminent atmosphere of war will attract comets symbolizing war through the spirit world. They will streak across the night sky bringing revelations, but among such comets, those with corporeal substance that can enter the real world are limited in number.

"Note 2: In the advancement ritual, the stronger the enemy force, the better the ritual effect."

Seeing this parchment, Franca was stunned and said, "Where did this come from?"

"The advancement was promised by the Major Arcana. and Mr. Fool gave me an extra reward." Lumian smiled and said, "I asked for the War Bishop potion formula."

Before Franca could respond, Lumian smiled and added, "I wanted you to have the right to choose."

Franca opened her mouth, then closed it, her emotions seeming somewhat turbulent.

After a moment, she glanced to the side and said quietly, "I didn't say I want to become a War Bishop, I still have my mission..."

Lumian didn't try to persuade her and put the parchment back into his Traveler's Bag.

Jenna's expression was slightly complex as she secretly sighed in relief. Things are good as they are now, things are good as they are now...

She didn't want change; she feared change.

Because Madam Magician and Mr. Hanged Man were present, Franca didn't dare tell Lumian "you usually just make people's grit their teeth, I didn't expect you to be so considerate sometimes" to ease her emotions. She could only quickly walk forward and casually push open a door condensed from starlight.

As soon as the door opened, an exquisite, beautiful human skin suddenly fell from above.

This human skin violently enveloped toward Franca.

Franca's body surface subsequently emanated a grayish-white color, her whole person seeming to turn into a stone statue, unable to dodge in time.

At this moment, the surrounding darkness instantly bent and folded, quickly sealing that fair and elastic human skin within.

Immediately after, Madam Magician's hand clenched.

That dark sphere suddenly collapsed, the corresponding void completely disintegrated, and the human skin inside was quickly torn into pieces by the space-time storm.

"This is also a Demoness of Unaging Beyonder characteristic. The Blood Emperor and Primordial Demoness's secret cooperation was indeed tight back then," Madam Magician smiled at Franca, Lumian, and Jenna while crushing the characteristic.

Franca was stunned for a moment, then revealed a brilliant smile.

Heh, I sure have good luck today! I succeeded in one try!

Chapter 1038: The Team

After Franca put away the Demoness of Unaging Beyonder characteristic that had coalesced after being shattered, Madam Magician said to the three of them. "Apart from some easier-to-find materials that are merely symbolic, we should have everything else. What remains is preparing for the ritual. I can help anytime."

"Thank you," Lumian thought for a moment and asked, "Should we leave now?"

Madam Magician smiled and said, "Angel-level Beyonder characteristics, especially Sequence 1, are not only limited but very rare, and their locations are relatively certain. If there were anything similar in this treasure trove, it could only be Sequence 2, and most likely from the Hunter pathway."

Lumian pointed to the end of the deep corridor. "As one of the Blood Emperor's resurrection arrangements, the corresponding Beyonder characteristic is behind that mirror, together with His Mirror Person, perhaps even already absorbed and merged by His Mirror Person?"

In other words, it was almost impossible to find Angel-level Beyonder characteristics, including Grade 0 Sealed Artifacts, in other rooms along the corridor, so Lumian and the others had no need to continue exploring.

Of course, this was just one reason. More importantly, the Blue Avenger belonged to Mr. Hanged Man, and theoretically this treasure vault was also his- equivalent to his private property. He had only allowed Lumian and the others to take the corresponding materials earlier based on a promise. If Lumian and the others were to open other rooms and take other items. it would be too disrespectful to the owner.

Though Madam Magician didn't explicitly say this, all three Demonesses understood and expressed their wish to leave now and think about how to arrange the ritual.

Mr. Hanged Man nodded without any change in expression.

"You can return through the mirror world. Madam Magician and I still have some matters to attend to."

"Alright," Lumian replied with a smile.

He could roughly guess what Mr. Hanged Man wanted to do.

As captain of the Blue Avenger, Mr. Hanged Man had no Tudor remnant aura, no corresponding bloodline, and wasn't on either the Hunter or Demoness pathway. Though guarding a treasure vault, he had difficulty entering it and could only wait for Lumian to open the "access control." Only with Madam Magician's positioning and help could he enter. Of course he couldn't miss this opportunity and had to explore a bit and take some useful items.

These might be Grade 1 Sealed Artifacts that could help improve his strength, or Beyonder characteristic- related items that could help him cultivate more and stronger subordinates, or special items that could either be useful at critical moments or point to certain secrets of the Tudor Empire.

How others explored their own vault was none of Lumian's business. He took out a mirror and led Franca and Jenna out of the vault, then used teleportation to return to the luxurious villa in Trier.

Since the matters of Madame Pualis and infant Omebella were still under investigation, Lumian hadn't returned to his originally rented apartment to meet with his subordinate Lugano. He was still wary of potential issues related to the Great Mother that might exist with him.

"Where's Ludwig?" Jenna looked around the living room and asked Anthony, who was focused on reading the newspaper.

Anthony pointed toward the villa's annex.

"In the kitchen.

"After eating Trier's food for several days, he misses the food from the dream city and wants to try making some himself."

Suddenly, an image appeared in Lumian and the others' minds: Ludwig moving a chair into the kitchen. then standing on it, struggling to handle kitchen utensils that didn't quite match his size and height...

"I miss it too," Franca said excitedly, "Look, look, this is what a professional Chef is like-just eight years old!

Jenna nodded and said to Lumian and the others, "I'm going to the telegraph office nearby to send a telegram to Julien. He's coming back to Trier next week, and I need to ask about the specific time and whether he's taking a boat or steam locomotive."

She wasn't in a rush to discuss her own ritual, as there was already a preliminary plan.

Once Lumian became a Demoness of Unaging and borrowed the Gift of the Land, after communicating well with the Tarot Club and the Church of Knowledge, they would take her to the City of Exiles to advance using the criminals there.

The only problem with this plan was that once Jenna successfully advanced, she would become a Sequence 4 demigod, which conflicted with Morora's rules and would cause negative changes to 0-01.

The current solution was to ask the Church of Knowledge for help, assisting Madam Magician, so this Door pathway Angel could transfer the newly-advanced Jenna away directly using pre-left marks without entering Morora.

Lumian had privately asked Jenna if she wanted to consider using the Sword of Courage to switch to becoming an Iron-blooded Knight. With the current team's composition and rapport, the corresponding ritual wouldn't be difficult after some time adjusting. But Jenna still hoped to continue on the path of pure female Demonesses.

She told Lumian this was currently her only special trait, and once she switched to Hunter, she would lose it. Special traits represented both unknown, huge risks and potential encounters and significant gains. With the apocalypse seemingly approaching early, she was willing to take the corresponding risks in exchange for rapid sequence and power growth to better protect those she wanted to protect.

Lumian didn't try to persuade her further at the time. only sighing and quoting a dream city saying, "Fortune favors the bold."

After Jenna put on her sunhat and lowered her black veil to cover her face, leaving the luxurious villa, Lumian said to Anthony. "Do you want to continue with the Psychology Alchemists mission?

Anthony had already been assigned to Lumian, the new Mr. Chariot, and could completely stop the original mission given by Madam Justice.

Before Anthony could respond, Lumian laughed.

"You're about to become a Sequence 4 Manipulator. Those people who play with people's minds won't let a demigod not cultivated by their own organization enter their core levels."

Anthony had digested the Sequence 5 potion Dreamwalker faster than Lumian and the others because during this time, he had been active, walking. and working in a great existence's true dream.

"About to?" Anthony asked puzzlingly.

Had the Major Arcana cardholders found the corresponding Beyonder ingredients?

That couldn't be so easy, right? If it were that easy, Madam Susie would have become a demigod long ago.

Lumian tucked his falling hair behind his ear and smiled. "Madam Justice has been searching for an ancient dragon. She's had some results but kept missing it. After Mr. Fool Initially awoke, he gave her a revelation that should be very useful. We might see results soon."

Anthony nodded and after considering for a few seconds said, "I want to continue my contact with the Psychology Alchemists, but no longer seek to enter their core levels.

"After becoming a demigod, I'll also hide my Sequence and deal with them in my current state. This is a very good intelligence channel, and I don't want to give it up."

"Alright," Lumian indeed needed such intelligence channels.

After exchanging a few more words, he and Franca went upstairs.

Walking on the thick carpet in the corridor, Lumian turned his head toward Franca. "You no longer need to do the Demoness Sect's mission."

This was a mission from Madam Justice, and since Franca was now subordinate to The Chariot, Lumian had full authority to help her stop this matter.

Franca was silent for a moment, then sighed, "Since you've chosen this current path, I think figuring out the situation with the Primordial Demoness and the secrets of the special mirror world are inevitable tasks, and none of these can bypass the Demoness Sect.

"Whether or not I've been exposed, even if they use me or set traps through this, it's still a good entry point. Having connections means having opportunities."

Lumian looked at Franca without speaking.

Feeling a bit uncomfortable under his gaze, Franca could only ask with a smile. "Are you moved?"

"Yes." Lumian nodded.

"Oh... why aren't you being stubborn this time? Now I don't know how to respond..." Franca mumbled. "Actually, Jenna continuing on the Demoness pathway also involves this kind of thinking."

Before Lumian could speak again, she forcefully changed the topic. "Let me ask a question, purely out of curiosity.

"If you briefly use the War Bishop power within the seal, will your body change?"

Normally, physical changes brought by a boon's power, as long as they didn't cause immediate collapse, occurred gradually and subtly over time However, the boon powers of both Hunter and Demoness pathways inherently possessed the quality of changing the body.

"Yes, the body will, but the spirit won't" Lumian explained simply.

Taking potions to change gender would affect the spirit as well, like Franca-when her Astral Projection roamed the spirit world, her form was also female. But changes brought by boons were limited to body and mind, meaning that even if Lumian returned to a male state using the War Bishop powers within the seal, his spirit would still appear as Lumina.

Franca immediately became excited. "Can you try it, let me see?"

If this worked, she could seek corresponding boons in the future. Then she could be a man when she wanted to be a man, a woman when she wanted to be a woman, and neither if she preferred!

After all, Lumian's goal was to resurrect Aurore, which meant he would reach very high levels, and seeking temporary boons from him wouldn't have any hidden dangers.

Before Lumian could respond, Franca shook her head.

"Never mind, never mind. The Lie earring uses corresponding Beyonder power to change the body without any pain, but changes brought by this kind of boon powers come with the power itself-they're forced, uncontrollable, and must be very painful. Never mind."

"You've been both a Demoness of Affliction and a Demoness of Despair, what pain are you afraid of?" Lumian teased, as his body suddenly changed.

There was both the writhing of flesh and the creaking of bones.

Lumian's face contorted for several seconds before settling into his original male appearance, but more handsome, with more of that masculine charm.

Franca watched with both concern and curiosity, then said, "It really works..."

Her eyes moved slightly, and she added, "Can you close your eyes?"

Lumian didn't refuse.

Then, he heard Franca sigh and say,

"We all know you see your female body as your sister's, and unless she agrees, you won't do anything suggestive with it. We respect your thoughts and Aurore herself, but, but sometimes we still want to see Lumian, to hug Lumian…"

Just as Lumian was about to speak, a warmth pressed against his lips.

After a peaceful, serene, and sweet moment of entanglement, Franca pulled back.

Lumian opened his eyes to see she was suddenly slightly taller than him.

Instinctively, Lumian looked down and discovered that several layers of ice crystal steps had formed beneath Franca's feet at some point.

Franca opened her eyes wide and said, "This time I took the initiative, and I thought kissing you from above felt more appropriate for the current mood!"

"Whatever you like," Lumian said noncommittally.

Franca jumped down from the ice crystal steps and sighed again. "Change back now, minimize the influence of the boon."

She then pressed her lips together, clapped her hands once, and said with a smile, "With the apocalypse approaching and everyone in this situation, let's just make do for now!"

Chapter 1039: Every Beginning is Difficult

At the telegraph office in the arts district.

Still wearing her sun hat and black veil, Jenna paid the telegram fee and gazed at the constant tinkling sounds next door, muttering to herself, "What are they renovating?"

A male telegraph operator looked up and said with a mixture of disdain and worry,

"The telephone office.

"They say they want to develop wired telephones extensively. Can they really lay lines to so many places? In the end, they'll have to rely on wireless!"

Yes, mobile phones should also be a type of wireless… Jenna suddenly felt nostalgic.

She was also looking forward to the development of telephone networks in Intis. That way they could communicate in real-time instead of going through the trouble of sending and receiving telegrams.

Walking out of the telegraph office, before Jenna could decide whether to take a carriage back to the luxurious villa or browse around the neighborhood, she heard a newspaper boy shouting at the intersection:

"Extra! Extra!

"Ms. Fors promises to finalize 'The Great Adventurer 7' within two weeks!

"Extra! Extra!

"The large generator manufactured by the Church of Steam's Deep Valley Cloister has entered the factory production stage!"

Large generator… Jenna paused for a moment, her gaze involuntarily drawn to the horse-drawn trams on the road, women wearing different styles of sun hats, men carrying canes and wearing top hats, classical-style gas street lamps, luxurious theaters and nearby cafes, and various shops.

This hardly looked like a scene approaching the apocalypse.

Jenna gazed greedily at everything, worried it would suddenly dissipate like the dream city.

…

In the luxurious villa.

Lumian stood before the full-length mirror, staring motionlessly at his beautiful face that was both familiar and strange.

He was waiting, waiting for the reflection to smile on its own or show some other expression.

One of the major difficulties in the Demoness of Unaging advancement ritual was finding one's Mirror Person—this wasn't something one could encounter just by wanting to.

The mystical connection between a Demoness and their Mirror Person served both as a locating aid and as an alarm that allowed the other party to detect danger early and constantly relocate.

Moreover, according to the actual experiences and daily observations of the three Demonesses—Lumian, Franca, and Jenna—the stable Mirror People born from becoming Demonesses were different from those Mirror People in special mirror worlds.

Under normal circumstances, the Demonesses' Mirror People could not leave the mirror world. Once these Mirror People entered reality, it meant there was a major problem with the Demoness's own state.

"We'll still need to ask Madam Magician for help with positioning and containment…" Lumian, who had been watching the mirror image for an hour, withdrew his gaze and muttered to himself.

At that moment, Madam Magician appeared in the bedroom, surrounded by twinkling starlight.

She looked around and asked, "Where's Two of Cups?"

"She went to meet with her subordinate, preparing for tomorrow's meeting with the Demoness of Black," Lumian answered simply.

Madam Magician frowned and said, "Is she still going to continue with the Demoness Sect's missions?

"At the Sequence 4 demigod stage, the Demoness of Despair only provides potions and helps prepare rituals. How will Two of Cups explain how she was able to advance to Demoness of Despair, where the potion formula and corresponding ingredients came from, and how the ritual was completed?"

"No explanation is needed. Her advancement to Sequence 4 was completed under the Primordial Demoness's watch, and these past few days, she often takes out that white bone figurine and places it beside her, with no abnormalities or dangers arising," Lumian explained on Franca's behalf. "This situation makes her feel she still has value to the Demoness Sect, or rather, to the Primordial Demoness. When the time comes, she can make up a convincing reason that the Demoness of Black should believe, such as divine bestowal or divine favor.

"She can also take this opportunity to learn more mystical knowledge about Mirror People from the Demoness of Black, which might prove useful in the upcoming Demoness of Unaging ritual."

Madam Magician looked at Lumian for several seconds. "This is dangerous."

"We know," Lumian replied in a low voice.

Madam Magician sighed and said, "When she goes to meet the Demoness of Black tomorrow, remember to notify me in advance. I'll provide necessary protection nearby."

"Thank you," Lumian then asked, "Why did you suddenly come over? Is something wrong?"

Weren't we supposed to wait until we gathered all the information before setting a time for the ritual?

Madam Magician made no attempt to hide it, her expression becoming quite complex.

"To have a small meeting."

"Small meeting?" Lumian raised an eyebrow.

"A small meeting means a private gathering without Mr. Fool present, but still held in the palace above the gray fog," Madam Magician explained briefly. "Previously it was fixed at once a month, but now that formal meetings have resumed and are fixed for 3 pm on the first Monday of each month, we obviously can't continue with the small meetings in the same way. They might become more impromptu in nature, specifically convened for special matters."

"This discussion…" Lumian asked thoughtfully, "Is it to unify the Major Arcana's understanding of Gehrman Sparrow?"

"Yes," Madam Magician nodded slightly. "In half an hour, recite Mr. Fool's honorific name."

After speaking, her figure transformed into countless starlight and flew into the illusory door.

Half an hour later, Lumian recited Mr. Fool's honorific name and once again arrived above the gray fog, sitting at one side of the bronze long table.

In his eyes, streaks of light were rising up, condensing into slightly blurred figures in different seats.

In less than a minute, all the Major Arcana card holders were present.

After glancing at Madam Justice, The Magician began speaking.

"I just returned from Two of Cups. She compared the current Mr. Fool, or rather Gehrman Sparrow's image, to an AI…"

After roughly repeating Franca's original words, this lady said, "I think it makes sense. We must quickly unify our understanding of Gehrman Sparrow to minimize the corruption of the faith anchors."

Madam Justice picked up the thread.

"The most fundamental and widespread public perceptions of Gehrman Sparrow don't need to be changed, and can't be changed in the short term—these themselves don't contain contradictions.

"What we need to do is make the Gehrman Sparrow beneath this shell closer to Mr. Fool's true self, and ensure there are no contradictions.

"Since we want to unify this understanding, we must start with ourselves. If our own understandings still differ and contain major contradictions, it will certainly affect later corrections and dissemination."

Seeing all the Major Arcana card holders nodding slightly in agreement, Madam Justice said,

"Then let's first share our impressions of Mr. Fool and Gehrman Sparrow, record them, and then discuss which ones are correct and which can be unified.

"Who wants to start?"

Madam Justice first looked toward Madam Magician and Mr. Star.

She found that the former showed hints of fear, seemingly afraid to speak or listen, while the latter kept his mouth shut, appearing quite hesitant, as if unsure which things should be said, which shouldn't, and whether to say everything.

The Chariot Lumian clicked his tongue imperceptibly and shook his head.

"What are you thinking about?" Mr. Moon, who was sitting not far from him, tilted his head curiously to ask.

Lumian chuckled and said, "I'm imagining how I would feel if a group of people were discussing what kind of person I am behind my back, each with different impressions."

"Embarrassed?" Mr. Moon couldn't help but consider it too.

The Chariot Mr. Lumian smiled and said, "I don't know if others would be embarrassed, but for myself, I'd probably be excited, find it fun, and wish I could sneak in to listen."

Mr. Moon raised his right hand and touched his face.

He instinctively looked at the huge chair at the head of the table, then glanced at the position at the bottom, confirming that neither Mr. Fool nor The World was present—truly not present.

"If it were the Sherlock Moriarty in my impression, he would genuinely be embarrassed, but if it were Gehrman Sparrow, he would maintain a cold expression, making it impossible to tell what he's thinking," Mr. Moon responded to Lumian's words.

After speaking, he found that the other Major Arcana card holders were all looking at him.

Seeing this, Lumian inwardly chuckled and muttered to himself, See, someone to kick things off has volunteered themselves.

Mr. Moon froze for a moment, and seeing everyone waiting for him to continue, he had no choice but to maintain outward composure and continue.

"I haven't had much interaction with Gehrman Sparrow; it was mainly above the gray fog. Many of my impressions come from rumors, centered around words like cold, powerful, and quick-to-action.

"Comparatively, I know Sherlock Moriarty better. He's quite perceptive, fairly vigilant, very concerned with money, but judging from his behavior at the Harvest Church and other places, he's actually quite caring and possesses a true gentleman's sense of humor…"

After speaking in one breath, Mr. Moon slightly raised his chin, looked around, and said, "You guys' turn."

Madam Justice didn't wait for other Major Arcana cards, deciding to follow Mr. Moon's example and set a model for everyone.

"I'll go.

"I was once Mr. World's psychiatrist, provided him with corresponding treatment, and even entered the Hall of Truth with him, hearing many of his inner thoughts."

Upon catching the term Hall of Truth, Mr. Star unconsciously adjusted his sitting position, with his right side more forward and his left side slightly withdrawn.

After all the Major Arcana card holders, including The Chariot Lumian, turned to look at her, Madam Justice spoke in a steady voice,

"My deepest impression of Mr. World is that he was very lonely. He had many things piled up in his heart and weighing on his shoulders…

"But he could still control himself, not indulging, not despairing, not acting willfully, not becoming distorted…

"What Mr. Moon just said is correct—he was indeed a very caring person, his heart was actually very gentle, and his cold and tough exterior was just a facade he had put on…"

Miss Justice's gentle voice slowly echoed above the bronze long table.

Chapter 1040: Individual Impressions

"Though outwardly quiet and reserved, he actually likes to joke and tease in his mind, and occasionally even rambles…"

Madam Magician listened with inexplicable tension, thoughts instinctively flashing through her mind, Am I allowed to hear this? Should I be hearing this?

If Gehrman Sparrow finds out I'm listening to what he's really like inside, that he's even somewhat lively, would he blow my head off with a gun?

"Those are my impressions," Madam Justice concluded her recollections and summary.

Madam Magician quietly let out a breath.

After calming down, she thought carefully and felt that if Gehrman Sparrow was really as Miss Justice described, then probably, perhaps, he wouldn't use violent means to eliminate people who knew his true nature.

Seeing that Madam Justice had said so much, Mr. Star, sitting next to Lumian, leaned back against his chair, as if trying to enter a relaxed state.

In a rich timbre, he intoned, "He is a learned person, and this is reflected in more than just his being a university history graduate;

"In supernatural events, he was very green at first, but quickly became skilled, becoming someone people could rely on;

"He's not comfortable getting too close to others, always maintaining a certain distance, appearing as if he fears loss and doesn't want to gain anything, but in reality, he's someone who values relationships deeply, and inevitably relaxes over time, gradually integrating and carefully building friendships with others;

"He's calm but not introverted, can take jokes and has a sense of humor, values life and is willing to enjoy it, but doesn't like waste;

"He's cautious, perhaps due to the influence of the Seer pathway, completely deserving to be called very cautious. When encountering matters that aren't urgent and won't cause immediate harm, he chooses the most conservative response, leaving first or waiting for backup, but if a disaster is very pressing and will affect many people, even if he's not powerful enough himself, he's willing to step forward and try to resolve it despite the risks;

"He deeply values his brother and sister, is more relaxed around them, and shows some of the personality traits Madam Justice just described;

"He is the best brother, both younger and older, and also the best colleague…"

After Mr. Star finished speaking, the majestic palace remained silent for quite a while, until all the Major Arcana card holders except Madam Magician turned their gaze toward her.

Madam Magician cleared her throat and said, "My impressions of Gehrman Sparrow can be read in 'The Great Adventurer' novel series.

"If I really have to summarize…"

This Angel of the Door pathway paused, her voice unconsciously becoming softer.

"Cold, powerful, mysterious, and will kill people on the spot if they say one wrong word.

"But, but very reliable—when you're with him, you only need to worry about whether he might eliminate you, there's no need to worry about anything else."

You're closer to teasing than stating facts with that last part… I can clearly hear that you're somewhat afraid, yet you still insist on teasing both Gehrman Sparrow and yourself—is this the nature of writers? Well, from 'The Great Adventurer' series, it's clear that you respect, fear, and somewhat admire Gehrman Sparrow, yet you persistently write gossip about him… The Chariot Lumian, listening quietly, couldn't help but think to himself.

After speaking quickly, Madam Magician turned her gaze to Mr. Hanged Man sitting diagonally across from her, meaning it was his turn.

Mr. Hanged Man had already prepared his thoughts. "I haven't had much contact with any of Mr. Fool's identities, and some I haven't met at all, so I can only say briefly.

"An experienced, very intelligent, and powerful adventurer.

"His luck seems quite good too.

"Not actually as cold and hard as his exterior suggests.

"Willing to listen to others' opinions and respect their experience."

After Mr. Hanged Man finished, Madam Judgment, who appeared small compared to her chair, shared her understanding, "Most of my impressions of Gehrman Sparrow come from Madam Magician, so there's no need to repeat them.

"I've had the most contact with the identity of Dwayne Dantès. He's a mature, cultured, wealthy gentleman, but very mysterious, with unusual things always happening around him.

"He's said to be romantic, fond of beautiful women with different characteristics, but I haven't noticed him having any truly deep relationships with any women.

"Well, he also has a kind heart, does charity work with genuine desire to help others, and treats his male and female servants not just with surface politeness, but actually without arrogance or hidden discrimination…"

This is also one side of Mr. Fool, especially certain details that really reflect his inner nature… Madam Justice carefully memorized what the other Major Arcana card holders were saying, to summarize and distill it later.

Mr. Sun, tall and wearing a plain white robe, followed by saying, "Powerful but not arrogant, cold but not heartless.

"He practices all that is righteous, he's willing to take great risks to help people who are actually of no use to him, he is light in the darkness, a guide walking ahead, an angel sheltering everyone."

A more religious description, with more extreme and pure emotions… As expected of the Pope of the Church of The Fool and member of the New City of Silver's six-member council… Lumian could clearly hear some differences.

Ma'am Hermit pushed up her glasses and said, "A very capable adventurer who can always respond most appropriately to unexpected situations.

"He also yearns for something, he also gazes at the setting sun, and at such times, I can truly feel his loneliness—what he wants to grasp seems to be in a very distant, unreachable place.

"Also, a mysterious, powerful, and reliable companion."

The original Major Arcana card holders of the Tarot Club had finished speaking, leaving only the two new members.

The Chariot Lumian, whose figure was blurred but still recognizably female, thought for a moment before calmly saying, "I've never had any real contact with any of Mr. Fool's identities in the real world, my impressions of them all come from the materials you provided. I can only speak from my interactions with Mr. Fool through certain dream images in the dream city."

He was silent for a second before stating his first impression, "Guardian."

Mr. Star, sitting beside him, suddenly spoke, as if sighing and supplementing, "A guardian fighting against threats and madness."

Lumian nodded.

He strongly agreed with this description, especially after learning that the Celestial Worthys spiritual imprint was indelible and eternal.

This addition also resonated with the other Major Arcana card holders, and everyone fell into a new silence.

After a brief moment, Lumian shared his other impressions, "Gentle, kind, elder brother, teacher, friend, a person with stories, a deity with humanity."

After a pause, Lumian continued, "He values family and friends greatly, he probably very much wants to return to the era he truly belongs to, return to his homeland buried in history. He is lonely because of this, often sad and in pain, and only family and friends he acknowledges can help him find meaning in life.

"On the one hand detachment, on the other a deeper appreciation for life experiences, willing to experience beauty…"

As he spoke, Lumian stopped, because he felt that the more he said, the more he was thinking about how Aurore was the same way, and he worried he might mix up some of Aurore's characteristics with Mr. Fool's, affecting the Major Arcana card holders' summary of Gehrman Sparrow's image.

So it is indeed like this… Madam Justice felt that some of her private speculations and judgments made after understanding the truth about transmigration were confirmed.

While memorizing, she felt that Gehrman Sparrow's image had become more grounded, more detailed, and more well-rounded.

At this point, Madam Temperance, who couldn't easily speak due to her sequence limitations, displayed the paper she had been writing on.

On the paper were words in ancient Feysac:

"My impressions are:

"Brave, decisive, extremely fast growth, increasingly reliable, increasingly capable.

"Also, gentle, cultured, kind, rational, has a sense of justice, pursues fairness, has sufficient sympathy for those in suffering and poverty, and is willing to help, has a heart of mercy."

After reading the contents of Madam Temperance's paper, Madam Justice thought quickly.

After a while, she spoke slowly, "Currently, the public's mainstream impression of Gehrman Sparrow focuses on several labels:

"Great adventurer, cold and powerful, Angel of Redemption, Mr. Fool's proxy, pirate killer.

"We don't need to change these for now. What we need to do is make these labels richer, more detailed, and also show the complexity of human nature."

The early impression that Gehrman Sparrow was a "lunatic" had basically faded after the Church of The Fool widely publicized the matter of redemption, and was no longer believed by most people.

Madam Justice continued, "Let's now start summarizing and unifying our understanding.

"The first word I want to propose is 'guardian.'"

All the Major Arcana card holders, including Lumian, had no objections to this.

Thus, after multiple discussions, those present reached a unified understanding of Gehrman Sparrow's image: "Powerful, cautious, mysterious background, loves money but also generous, gentle at heart, shows mercy to people, redeems suffering, values family and relationships, always misses his homeland, is Mr. Fool's proxy."

The Major Arcana card holders didn't add all the details to make the description richer, as that would both make it difficult to spread and easy to misinterpret—it was enough that they themselves had the corresponding impressions.

Madam Magician thought for a moment and said, "I think we can add that he has rich inner thoughts, likes to ramble, joke, and tease in his mind.

"For the novel's text, this would be very interesting, and this is also the true Gehrman Sparrow."

"That works." Madam Justice looked toward Madam Magician and smiled, saying, "Then I'll trouble you to complete 'The Great Adventurer 7' within two weeks."

"Alright." Madam Magician's body stiffened for a second, then she forced a smile and said, "I've even thought of the promotional tagline, um, 'Want to see a more vivid and humane Gehrman Sparrow?'"

Chapter 1041: Different Accounts

"Whether or not the Demoness of Black provided the corresponding mystical knowledge, you should perform the ritual in the next two days. I will help you forcefully locate and lock onto the Mirror Person. After this is done, I'll need to focus on meeting my deadline," Madam Magician said to Lumian as she floated in the East Lognes Forest near Chaillot Town.

Don't tell me you haven't even started writing yet—not a single word? When you said above the gray fog that you'd even thought of the promotional tagline, did you make that up on the spot? In that case, completing 'The Great Adventurer 7' in two weeks would be very difficult, unless you don't care about quality… Lumian pondered thoughtfully.

At the end of yesterday's small meeting, Madam Magician had promised in front of all the Major Arcana card holders that she would deliver the manuscript for 'The Great Adventurer 7' within two weeks.

The other Major Arcana card holders also expressed that they would quickly adjust Gehrman Sparrow's image within their own spheres of influence. The most important among these was the action to be taken by the Church of The Fool.

Mr. Sun would gather bishops from each parish in batches to undergo intensive theological training, adding corresponding interpretations and descriptions to their sermons while making minimal changes to the scripture.

Before Lumian could respond, Madam Magician added, "If you're really not ready to perform the ritual yet, then we can wait until two weeks later."

"I'm ready," Lumian calmly replied, standing atop a large tree, concealing himself in the shadows of the canopy.

At this time, Franca arrived at the estate that primarily grew grapes.

She once again saw Browns Sauron, with her orange-red long hair, clean and pure face, and hint of wildness.

"Long time no see," Franca smiled in greeting.

Browns looked at her and suddenly froze. "You seem to have become more beautiful."

"You've become more beautiful too," Franca observed Browns, noticing that her orange-red hair had become slightly darker, her features more delicate, and the touch of wildness in her demeanor made one unconsciously think of young girls who could participate in hunting in primitive tribes.

Browns withdrew her gaze and said with slight pride in a soft voice, "I'm now a Demoness of Affliction."

"If this were at sea, you'd have a chance to be called an admiral," Franca politely complimented.

What do you call that? That's called having class!

Browns strongly agreed with this, but said, "I feel like in recent years, Sequence 5 has become increasingly less valuable."

When the apocalypse comes, except for a few special saints, perhaps only Angels will be able to make a difference… Franca suddenly felt somewhat melancholic.

The two Demonesses chatted casually as they went deeper into the estate, arriving at the round pavilion situated among numerous grape vines and creepers.

The Demoness of Black, wearing a deep blue hat, her face partially obscured by a veil which only made her more alluring, was sitting inside.

"Teacher, Franca is here," Browns stepped forward and said softly.

The Demoness of Black turned to the side and cast her gaze upon Franca.

"Good morning, Madame," Franca first greeted with a smile, then said seriously and devoutly, "I have become a Demoness of Despair, under God's watch."

Demoness of Despair? Sequence 4 demigod? She became a demigod? Browns's beautiful eyes suddenly grew round.

When she and Franca first met, they were both just Demonesses of Pleasure, and in just over half a year, the other party had reached Sequence 4?

This was a qualitative change point, the gateway to godhood, the initial line separating humans from gods—how could it be so easy to cross and push open?

A Sequence 4 Demoness of Despair, even within the entire Demoness Sect, their numbers were quite limited, worthy of being called high-ranking, though not yet able to enter the core layer!

I thought my advancement speed was already fast enough… Browns momentarily felt dazed, unable to help questioning life.

The Demoness of Black showed no obvious emotional fluctuation, and only nodded after Franca finished speaking, "Thank God for Her favor, thank the Primordial One's grace."

She accepted it just like that? Has the Primordial Demoness given corresponding revelations? Franca, who was already prepared to flee the Demoness Sect at any time and wanted to get whatever benefits she could, quickly said, "After becoming a Demoness of Despair, I feel my connection with the Mirror Person has deepened, and it has undergone some sort of mutation. Could you teach me in detail about the mystical knowledge related to the Mirror Person?"

The Demoness of Black glanced at Franca and said with a slight smile, "After gaining godhood, you indeed should pay attention to such matters."

Her gaze swept over Browns as she continued, "The Mirror People of Demonesses always believe they are the original body, that they are the original who was separated after drinking the 'Witch' potion, imprisoned in the mirror world, serving as a mirror substitute and mirror magic medium. If you with your godhood believe this point, your soul, personality, and spirit will become incomplete because of it. Not only will you never have hope of reaching higher sequences, but you'll also have many problems in daily life, and the risk of losing control will also become very high.

"A Demoness's Mirror Person is essentially a product of the combination of potion power and mirror world rules, closer to a spiritual imprint and soul projection."

This is completely different from Moran Avigny's saying that a "Demoness's true self dwells within the mirror"… Although I prefer this explanation and am willing to accept it, the Demoness of Black probably hasn't revealed the whole truth. For example, why is the spiritual imprint and soul projection in a male state? After becoming a Witch, both body and soul have changed… Well, Moran Avigny, as a Mirror Person, his viewpoints and perspectives must also be biased… Combine the two? Franca listened quietly, thinking instinctively, without interrupting the Demoness of Black's explanation.

The Demoness of Black's voice took on several layers of complexity, with various emotions difficult to distinguish.

"This is also one of the reasons why males are more suited to the Demoness pathway.

"To further utilize the mirror world, one must inevitably face their own Mirror Person, and male Demonesses' Mirror Person is male—extreme, vengeful, hateful, males in pain who will be better attracted by a Demoness's charm, thereby becoming infatuated with us, both hating and obeying.

"Female Demonesses' Mirror People have stronger replacement desires and are harder to control."

Can it work like that? You were able to become a Demoness of Unaging because you charmed your mirror self and made him fall in love with you? What does tasting yourself feel like? Franca pondered internally.

Aren't Demonesses too twisted?

She thought for a moment and said sincerely, "Eventually we have to face our own Mirror Person?

"Will he be willing to meet with me? I feel he will deliberately avoid me using our mystical connection."

The Demoness of Black answered, "They will indeed avoid you. Although our Mirror Person will continuously grow stronger as our strength increases, being equivalent to a copy of our abilities, but as a Demoness's Mirror Person, they are naturally restricted, constrained, and weakened by the mirror world, like prisoners wearing shackles unable to perform normally. They're unlikely to be our match, so they will inevitably choose to avoid us.

"Only when you are weak enough, and there are no traps around, will you see him, face him.

"Remember, what you know, he knows."

Let the Mirror Person think there's an opportunity? And we share memories and abilities? Franca pondered for a few seconds and said, "In Underground Trier, I entered a special mirror world and encountered my own Mirror Person. That time, he faced me directly, without avoiding me in advance."

"The Mirror Person in the special mirror worlds is different from a Demoness's Mirror Person in the broader mirror world. What's useful to us is the latter," the Demoness of Black explained briefly.

Franca asked about some more details until the Demoness of Black no longer gave detailed answers.

She had to report other matters.

"Louis from the Emperor Party was very frustrated for a while earlier, seemingly unable to contact some important figure, but recently he's back to normal, showing no similar behavior."

"Very good, keep watching them," the Demoness of Black nodded slightly.

Franca received permission after taking her leave.

The Demoness of Black quietly watched her silhouette until she and Browns disappeared into the grape grove.

…

In the luxurious villa.

Franca detailed the mystical knowledge taught by the Demoness of Black to Lumian and Jenna.

"Are we performing the ritual today?" after they finished their discussion, Madam Magician asked.

"We can try. We'll only know what problems there are after we try," Lumian stood up, his black hair falling loose.

Madam Magician smiled and said, "No need to rush, wait for me."

As soon as she finished speaking, this Major Arcana card holder opened an illusory door of starlight and walked through it.

Soon after, she returned to this luxurious villa.

She had changed her clothes, wearing a deep black warlock's robe embroidered with silver stars.

"Look in the mirror, then use Mirror Substitution." Madam Magician's speech quickened slightly, as if she couldn't maintain her current state for too long.

Under Franca and Jenna's watchful eyes, Lumian walked to the full-length mirror in the bedroom.

Looking at the enchanting Demoness reflected in the mirror, he maintained a cold expression and actively used Mirror Substitution.

When the cracking sound rang out, the silver stars on Madam Magician's warlock robe began to glow, becoming increasingly numerous.

The surrounding darkness spread accordingly, and an illusory starry sky descended upon this room.

The brilliant stars moved rapidly, forming a directional, extremely complex key.

This was forcefully locating by borrowing the mystical connection between Lumian and his Mirror Person, utilizing the characteristic that the Mirror Person was the corresponding medium for mirror magic!

In just a second or two, Madam Magician's voice echoed ethereally, "Found him."

Countless starlight then fell, disappearing into the full-length mirror.

"I've briefly confined the target, you can go now," Madam Magician then said to Lumian.

Her voice had returned to normal.

Lumian nodded once, stepped into the full-length mirror, and following the starlight's guidance, traversed into the depths of the mirror world.

Chapter 1042: A Common Goal

The endless darkness around seemed frozen, with points of starlight moving through it like liquid flowing through blood vessels in an illusory tunnel, helping Lumian traverse without losing his way.

In just about ten seconds, Lumian arrived at an area where the void was dark and heavy, forming a giant eggshell.

With his arrival, the guiding starlight ahead coalesced into a dreamlike door upon the eggshell.

As soon as Lumian passed through this door, he saw a familiar figure.

It was himself, his male state.

That handsome face was covered in blood stains, and his blue eyes revealed undisguised hatred and pain.

"Well well, having an Angel's help does make a difference!" Lumian's Mirror Person gave a thumbs up, his voice dripping with sarcasm.

"If an Angel promises to help and you don't use her power, wouldn't that make you a fool?" Lumian let out his habitual scoff.

Lumian's Mirror Person stared fixedly at his female self, and after a few seconds said, "What are you here for?"

Lumian responded calmly. "To reconcile with you.

"If you're unwilling, I'll beat you into submission, charm you until you are."

Lumian's Mirror Person gave a self-mocking laugh, then said, "Okay."

"That simple?" Lumian raised an eyebrow that was much softer than his Mirror Person's.

His Mirror Person chuckled. "I'd rather replace you, but that would require your agreement too."

"If there's no other way, that could be considered." Lumian's lips curved into a smile, his face seeming to reflect a hint of starlight.

His Mirror Person froze for a moment and said, "We are essentially the same, the current me."

"The current me?" Lumian was partly concerned his mirror self had other schemes, and partly wanted to explore more knowledge about Mirror People to help Franca with the upcoming ritual, so he didn't rush forward to reconcile.

"After consuming the Witch or higher potions and stabilizing the birth of a Mirror Person, essentially a split of the self occurs during advancement, dividing into the me in the mirror and the me outside the mirror, the me of the original gender and the me of the current gender. When you became a Demoness of Despair, you still had Inevitability's boon, which caused a slight change in the split-the me in the mirror is the me of the original gender, also the past me, while the me outside is the me of the current gender, also the present me." The mirrored Lumian's face showed slight distortion. "This is my personal experience and feeling, it might not be entirely correct."

"If we reconcile, will we together form the future me?" Lumian asked thoughtfully.

"Perhaps." The mirrored Lumian sneered. "Who could have experience with this? Let's hurry up, don't waste time."

Seeing Lumian watching him without speaking, the mirrored Lumian smacked his lips and said, "If I replaced you, the ritual would definitely fall because the soul gender would be different. Then we'd forever remain at the

Demoness of Despair sequence unless we switched to War Bishop. That's one path, but given the current situation, it would waste too much time.

"Gal, time waits for no one. Becoming a Demoness of Unaging is a crucial step to reviving Aurore. The sooner we take it, the better!"

Lumian was silent for a few seconds before saying. "You want to reconcile because reviving Aurore is more important?"

"Otherwise? Because of your charming personality?" the mirrored Lumian mocked.

He paused, composed his expression, and said in a deep voice, "We are the same person. Apart from hating you, cursing you, wanting to replace you, I have no other differences from you.

"And none of that matters."

"Indeed, none of that matters." Lumian finally smiled and walked toward his mirror self.

He extended his fair, slender hand with skin like congealed cream.

His mirror self also smiled.

"Since replacing you isn't the most important thing. between reconciliation, being enslaved, and being infatuated with you, I'll definitely choose reconciliation."

As he spoke, he also extended his right palm.

A broad, strong hand with bronze-colored skin.

The two hands, noticeably different in size, clasped together.

Lumian instantly felt the mystical connection between them become almost tangible, as if forming ropes, forming a spider web that enclosed them both.

In his eyes, his mirror self's face suddenly twisted.

The Mirror Person burst out cursing. "Son of a sow! Do you know that every time you use Mirror Substitution, I die once and then split off from you again?

"You piece of shit, let's switch places once, let you experience how painful it is!

"Trapped in this pitch-black place every day, no one to talk to, no one to interact with, I've nearly gone crazy. might as well die, but Aurore hasn't been revived yet!

"Haha, I'm always happy when you're suffering, so you have times like that too!

"Dammit, but I suffer while being happy, because what causes you pain makes me feel pain too, when you're in despair, I'm in despair too!

"Sometimes I think, letting me replace you to face all this. I'd rather die a few more times!

"My little cabbage, why can't you be happier, enjoy more, make me jealous, make me strongly want to replace you?

"…"

Lumian listened to his mirror self's angry curses without suppressing the emotional waves in his heart, as if he too was howling and venting similarly.

The two people in their handshake hadn't moved forward, yet they seemed to be getting closer and closer.

At this point, the mirrored Lumian stopped cursing.

He looked at Lumian, his expression serious, and said in a low voice, "We must revive Aurore."

He paused, then gritted his teeth and shouted. "Otherwise I won't let you off even as a ghost!"

"I won't let myself off either," Lumian responded in a deep voice.

As soon as he finished speaking, he suddenly felt his perspective change.

He saw his female self with eyes as clear as a highland lake, features bright and dignified, carrying a peculiar sharpness, and he saw himself with a blood-stained face, expression no longer so twisted.

At this moment, Lumian had an understanding.

Using the help of the Demoness's spider silk, he took out with one hand from the Traveler's Bag the Demoness of Unaging's Beyonder characteristic that resembled a transparent spring eye, different parts of corpses to replace Mirror God fragments and Gorgon blood, drops of water from drowned people's lungs collected over these two days, and an antique mirror from the early Fifth Epoch.

Under the guidance of invisible spider silk, first the slightly yellow-tinted blood was poured into a glass cup, a full 80 milliliters, then the spring-like crystal, glass shard-like objects, blackened drops with pus, and the copper mirror with damaged decorations around its edges were successively placed into that cup of blood.

In an instant, the glass cup took on a grayish-white color, and all items inside quickly merged, gradually becoming illusory.

Soon, a glass of grayish-white liquid that clearly reflected the surrounding mirror world appeared before Lumian's eyes.

The "Unaging" potion!

Lumian, simultaneously having two perspectives, raised his left hand and brought the transparent grayish-white cup to his lips, drinking the potion inside.

He first tasted a mixture of soil and stone, then hist senses were numbed.

Wherever the potion passed, his tongue, mouth, esophagus, and stomach lost sensation, turning grayish-white.

This grayish-white was still seeping into his soul.

At this moment, Lumian felt his spirit float into the air, arriving at his mirror self's side, watching as his Demoness form gradually turned to stone, seemingly becoming a statue.

His mirror self also underwent corresponding changes, just much more slowly, much more gradually.

Lumian's spirit quickly descended, using his mirror self to maintain consciousness and avoid complete petrification.

He suddenly understood why the Demoness of Unaging's ritual involved enslaving one's Mirror Person, or making him infatuated, or reconciling with him, because otherwise, after taking the potion, as the body petrified and the spirit wandered toward the mirror self, it would meet the Mirror Person's strong resistance, and at this time one's strength could only be exerted to a limited degree, making the situation very precarious.

When the Mirror Person was also severely petrified, Lumian's spirit floated up again, returning to his body.

By now, his body had adapted to the potion and, under returning consciousness's drive, gradually shed its petrified state.

Then, he saw his mirror self changing, transforming toward femininity, and not far away, one after another version of himself emerged from the darkness-him when he had just become a Demoness of Despair, him when he was still an Pyromaniac, him when he had just arrived at Cordu Village, him when he was still wandering, him in childhood...

Every time he looked in a mirror, it left certain traces in the mirror world, and now they all appeared!

You can choose one of these selves, fixing that state...

This is the secret of how the Demoness of Unaging can restore youth...

No matter which state is chosen, it will inevitably feminize...

My mirror self has actually become a woman too... Is this because I chose reconciliation rather than enslavement or making him infatuated?

So it can work like this...

Lumian, still gradually relieving his petrified state.

watched as his mirror self became increasingly beautiful, becoming more and more like himself, but vaguely carrying some of Aurore's qualities.

Just as feelings of joy began to arise, a scene suddenly appeared before his eyes:

in endless darkness, an indistinct figure suddenly turned toward this direction.

In just the blink of an eye, this figure arrived at the edge of that darkness, quietly looking down at Lumian.

This was similar to the Primordial Demoness's gaze when Lumian advanced to Demoness of Despair, but somewhat different.

Under this gaze, Lumian instantly lost most sensation, left with only a hazy consciousness struggling not to sink.

Shortly after, he opened his eyes to find himself wrapped in layers of grayish-white spider webs, like prey stored by a spider, or like a newborn in an egg.

The next second, the spider web silently collapsed. falling to the ground. Lumian's ordinary clothes, weakened by the earlier petrification and current recovery, quickly turned to powder and drifted away. revealing lustrous, delicate white skin.

While taking out and changing into clothes from the Traveler's Bag, Lumian looked around.

He then saw his Demoness-state mirror self.

He smiled, and that Mirror Person smiled too.

They were no longer separate-Lumian was both the self outside the mirror and the self inside the mirror, both the past self and the present self.

This was a Demoness of Unaging.

Chapter 1043: Unaging

While changing clothes, Lumian examined the changes in himself after becoming a Demoness of Unaging.

Because of the reconciliation, his Mirror Person's consciousness had returned to his body. Whether it was his reflection in the mirror or himself outside it, they were now both him - different parts sharing a single consciousness.

In other words, he had the sensation of being both outside and within the mirror simultaneously. Even walking in sunlight, he would partially experience another self-moving hesitantly forward in darkness.

This also allowed him to see both the reality and the changes within mirrors simultaneously.

Furthermore, in the past, when a Mirror Person died, it would split off from the body again to revive. Now, the body had the same privilege-if it died, it would revive through the Mirror Person.

Simply put, the death of either the body or the Mirror Person alone was no longer true death for a Demoness of Unaging - it was more like a partial injury that could be healed.

Additionally, a Demoness of Unaging could have multiple Mirror Persons. Lumian could use environments with multiple mirrors to temporarily multiply his Mirror Persons-as long as one survived, he wouldn't truly die. He could also use blood, hair, skin, or other media to create a Mirror Person sleeping within a mirror, hiding that mirror in a secret place under anti-divination conditions, cutting off corresponding mystical connections to prevent curses and other harm from affecting the sleeping Mirror Person.

This way, even if his body and other Mirror Persons were killed, as long as this hidden mirror remained unfound, Lumian could revive through the sleeping Mirror Person.

This was the source of the Demoness of Unaging's bizarre resistance to death and skill at revival: the self in the mirror and the self outside are both me!

Without this special characteristic, revival through this method would be impossible, which was why Lumian couldn't help others create sleeping Mirror Persons.

Does reconciliation mean both inside and outside the mirror are me? While enslavement and infatuation mean the mirror self is either not me or just my appendage? Just as Lumian thought this, an illusory starfield suddenly appeared before his eyes, revealing countless brilliant stars.

Some of these stars were very bright and large, hidden in the depths of darkness, while others seemed nearby yet remained untouchable.

Wh-Lumian's pupils, clear and dreamy like a highland lake, suddenly dilated.

He felt his Unaging potion had been completely digested!

What's going on?

How had it been fully digested right after drinking it and completing the advancement?

He hadn't even begun acting the role of a Demoness of Unaging yet!

Amid confusion, bewilderment, and perplexity, various thoughts flashed through Lumian's mind until he arrived at an extraordinarily joyful speculation:

This was brought about by the further awakening of Aurore's soul fragment!

Has Aurore further awakened through this state of being both inside and outside the mirror, through me and my Mirror Person? She's now effectively part of me, and any part of me can eventually be revived through the Mirror Person, so has she gained this characteristic too?

Given the name, surely the act of a Demoness of Unaging doesn't require maintaining an unaging mentality and appearance over hundreds or thousands of years? The unaging appearance is easily solved-a Demoness of Unaging naturally maintains their appearance. But an unaging mentality is much more difficult and would take a very long time. Yet Aurore is from thousands or tens of thousands of years ago, or even longer, and has been sleeping the whole time. Upon returning to reality in the current era, her mentality is indeed still quite young, completely unaging…

Aurore is now part of me, one of my aspects. If her mental, spiritual, and soul state perfectly matches the requirements of the Unaging potion, it's as if I match them too, so the potion naturally digested quickly...

Lumian nodded thoughtfully.

What made him happiest wasn't that the Unaging potion had been completely digested in such a short time, but that he had truly seen and felt Aurore's awakening.

This was indeed the first step in reviving Aurore!

Lumian continued examining the changes in his state.

Hmm, I can separate out Mirror Persons for special hiding, and since the potion is fully digested, it's increased to two.

I've truly gained the Petrification ability, no longer requiring hair contact. However, Petrification still can't take effect on targets across thin air-either it must spread inch by inch from nearby until it reaches and covers the enemy, or it must use the Demoness's spider silk to transmit the corresponding power…

My eyes are now equivalent to mirrors. Whatever I see can become a target for curses, and I can use my eyes as a medium along with my Mirror Person transformation to directly enter the mirror world.

If I manifest an incomplete Mythical Creature form, my hair will become serpents, each with a clear black and white eye on its head. Whatever these eyes see can be petrified from thin air...

My utilization of the mirror world has clearly strengthened. I can forcibly pull people of lower standing into the mirror world without them noticing. For Saints and Angels of equal or higher standing, success and detection depend on their state. I can even pull an entire house or street into the mirror world-what exactly gets pulled in is up to me, it doesn't have to be done as a whole...

I can now directly transmit power through the mirror world. Combined with Mirror Projection, I can sit at home and 'manifest' power anywhere in Trier using positioned mirrors. The power attached to this Mirror Projection cannot exceed Sequence 4...

"The Hunter pathway is still only at Sequence 5, with no new fusion abilities, but Precision can help me 'manifest' power in three different places.

All Mirror Projections cannot leave their corresponding mirror's reflection range...

At the Demoness of Unaging level, I can control mirrors within a fifteen-kilometer range and those I've visited before-this can cover an entire small city…

The Plague range has reached ten kilometers and can spread outward on its own, though the types of plagues haven't increased...

Each spider silk is now like my arm...

I can perfectly display the charm of women at every age, with skin condition and facial features either matching or contrasting....

As long as there's a physical medium, Curses can not only affect the target but also their direct relatives. With large-scale, special black magic, crucial media, and arrangements, curses might even harm Angels. Other aspects haven't changed much…

Other Demoness abilities have also improved accordingly...

That bizarre state of the Demoness of Black earlier really had nothing to do with the Demoness of Unaging itself, or perhaps it depends on which ritual was chosen during advancement?

After this examination, Lumian looked around, then traversed back to his bedroom.

By this time, Madam Magician was gone.

Madam Magician said that the magic robe couldn't be worn too long. After confirming you were fine, she left to get some rest and will return later," Jenna explained upon seeing him.

Franca asked eagerly, "Did the ritual succeed? Are you now a Demoness of Unaging?"

Her spiritual intuition told her this was the case.

Lumian nodded and smiled, "Yes, we reconciled."

Before Franca could ask more, he casually said, "The Unaging potion has also been completely digested."

"Huh?" "What?" Jenna and Franca exclaimed in surprise.

Lumian smiled at Franca. "If you became a Demoness of Unaging, you'd be able to digest the potion quickly too."

"Ah, me?" Franca paused, pointing at herself, then asked with some speculation, "Does the acting of a Demoness of Unaging focus on time scale and the unaging state?"

She thought carefully-she really was an ancient relic. and she truly wasn't aging now, in any aspect.

With a nod, Lumian replied, "I believe the most important acting principle is maintaining an unaging mentality over the erosion of time, over hundreds or thousands of years."

"It's true then..." Franca nodded slowly, "Did the Celestial Worthy make us hang on that light gate for thousands or tens of thousands of years, causing us to perfectly match such acting? His intentions were bad, but the outcome was good?"

Understanding what they were talking about. Jenna looked at Lumian and asked, "You relied on Aurore?"

"I now truly feel that Aurore is one of my aspects, a part of me," Lumian didn't hide it.

Jenna smiled with complex emotions and empathy, "That's wonderful."

She thought of her mother and father-she also had people she wanted to revive, but there was no hope now.

Lumian then told Franca and Jenna in great detail about his dialogue with his Mirror Person and his feelings during advancement, finally saying. "Reconciliation brings unity between the self in and outside the mirror. The other two methods probably don't work-the Mirror Person would remain one's male self.

"I think the prerequisite for reconciliation is that both parties have a common goal for which one is willing to sacrifice themselves, and the Mirror Person has no better options. Then negotiations become possible."

Franca fell into deep thought.

Lumian looked at Jenna and after some consideration said, "If earlier my Mirror Person had deceived me, instigated me, replaced me, since his core is male, the advancement ritual would have failed. From this, you could have determined that the one who came out of the mirror was the Mirror Person and responded accordingly.

"But for purely female demonesses, there isn't this restriction. If your Mirror Person replaced you, they could still perform the ritual and become a Demoness of Unaging. This would make it impossible for anyone to notice that the real you had been silently replaced."

"You think this might be related to the potential horrifying experiences pure female demonesses might face when advancing to Demoness of Unaging?" Jenna understood what Lumian was really trying to warn about.

Lumian nodded. "This surely isn't everything, but it might be part of it."

After talking further, Lumian asked Franca, "Do you want to perform the ritual today, or prepare for a while longer?"

Franca ruminated for a few seconds before saying, "I want to try.

"If my Mirror Person has my memories from before transmigrating, rather than being dominated by the original body's residual consciousness, I think.. I think I might be able to persuade him."

Chapter 1044: Lingering Thoughts

When Madam Magician returned, Franca, like Lumian before her, entered deep into the mirror world with the help of the Angel of the Door pathway's positioning and containment, and saw her Mirror Person sitting cross-legged on the ground.

Her Mirror Person bore the original body's appearance, his face stained with blood, his eyes filled with contempt, disdain, and resentment.

"You dare show your face to me?" the Mirror Person shouted before Franca could speak.

Franca's mouth half-opened as she said, both angry and amused, "What do I have to be ashamed of?

"I didn't cause all this. You're a part of me, split from my soul. When we drank the Witch potion back then, can you say you didn't agree, that it wasn't with your permission?"

Why blame each other when we're both responsible?

"I'll admit to that.

The Mirror Person was silent for two seconds.

"But you clearly had a chance to become a man again, yet you refused. Have you become addicted to being a woman? What right do you have to face me?

"Have you forgotten your original appearance and conviction?"

Franca was momentarily speechless, and only after about ten seconds said, "I feel that gender isn't important, what's important is a person's character spirit, morals..."

"Don't try to pacify me with that Instigator rhetoric, know you too well! We're the same person!" the Mirror Person interrupted Franca.

Being able to talk is good, being able to talk means there's room for discussion... Franca sighed and said, "After knowing we can't go back, I only care about certain people and things now. I don't want to lose anymore, to have any more major upheavals…

"Besides, you're right, you're not wrong! Maybe I've been a woman for too long, I've gotten somewhat used to it. Since I fear change, staying unchanged is acceptable too."

The Mirror Person sneered, "You admit it then? You can fool others, but you can't fool yourself!"

Franca said self-mockingly, "Besides, it's almost the apocalypse, even the deities and angels think so. Let's do meaningful things first, leave other matters for after the apocalypse. We can make changes then, maybe we'll have new ideas by then. If we can't survive the apocalypse, everyone's finished anyway, so thinking about these things is meaningless."

She paused, then said softly, "And we can't avoid the Demoness Sect matters, someone has to help him after all."

The Mirror Person shot Franca a glance. "Don't you know how dangerous it is?"

"I know, but I'm the only suitable one." Franca suddenly smiled. "If I were in a similar situation, needing someone to take a great risk to do something. I believe both Lumian and Jenna would do it."

Her voice was soft, but without a trace of doubt.

The Mirror Person looked at Franca, his eyes gleaming with envy.

After a moment, he sat cross-legged and sneered, "Whatever. Whether you become a man or court death, it's all the same to me now, it has nothing to do with me."

As he spoke, his eyes grew dim, his whole person becoming dejected.

"After knowing we can't go back, nothing matters anymore."

Franca recalled her emotions when learning the truth and said empathetically, "We can only gradually accept our current life, accept this reality.

"At least there are still people we care about, people who care about us, life still has some meaning."

"That's you!" the Mirror Person cursed, "What does that have to do with me? If I were to turn the tables and replace you, do you think Jenna and Lumian would maintain the current relationship, or eliminate me on the spot?"

The Mirror Person looked up at Franca, his expression suddenly turning sad. "I have nothing left."

Franca fell silent, her mouth slightly closed, saying nothing.

The Mirror Person sighed again and said, "My greatest wish originally was to find a chance to replace you, to lock you in this dark prison while I lived the good life in the real world, searching for ways to become a man again and return home. In the end, I would return home with a handsome face, strong masculine physique, and many superpowers, becoming an urban hero like Batman, admired by many, pursued by girls I liked..."

As he spoke, the Mirror Person's voice gradually lowered.

After several seconds, he said quietly, "Now, I have nothing left..."

As Franca listened to the Mirror Person's fantasies, she suddenly truly recognized that he was indeed a part of herself.

Those fantasies, except for the reversed roles of inside and outside the mirror, were all things she had once imagined, the thoughts that had helped her persist in this world.

At this moment, Franca had a sudden realization.

There was one more prerequisite for reconciliation that Lumian hadn't summarized-the host had to truly acknowledge that the Mirror Person is a part of themselves, another aspect of themselves, rather than harboring deceptive intentions and using the Instigator's abilities to persuade.

Recognition should be mutual, only then can reconciliation occur, only then can consciousness be unified.

Moved by this understanding, she said, "You are me, and I am you. What I have is also yours. Let's reconcile, let's merge."

The Mirror Person, still sitting cross-legged on the ground, was stunned for a moment before once again speaking mockingly, "Forget it, we can't go back anyway, what's the point of saying these things?

Franca walked toward the Mirror Person, crouched before him, and extended her hand.

She smiled and said, "Let me help you up.

The Mirror Person stared at her steadily, and after a long while smiled and said, "You probably thought you could Charm me, make me fall for you. You know, I'm most vulnerable to feminine wiles.

"Actually, thinking about it. If I really replaced you, leaving aside whether Jenna and Lumian would accept it, I couldn't continue being a woman either. I'd definitely switch to War Bishop, then live a life of debauchery, sleeping with women everywhere, cursing while sacrificing myself when the apocalypse comes?

"Thinking about it, it's all rather pointless..."

The Mirror Person fell silent for a few seconds, then suddenly extended his right hand, grasped Franca's hand, and stood up following her pull.

He looked at Franca's beautiful lake-colored eyes and slightly darkened flaxen hair, clicking his tongue as he smiled.

"I haven't forgiven you.

"And I don't accept your reasoning."

Suddenly, his whole person relaxed, and he said in a low, gentle voice, "I just have no more lingering thoughts..."

"I still have some." Franca smiled bitterly.

That Mirror Person also chuckled. "So, you continue on. I won't be joining you."

Hearing these words, Franca truly felt the distance between them closing, their mystical connection transforming into something substantial.

A phrase suddenly flashed through her mind "Yesterday's matters die with yesterday, today's matters live with today."

This too was a way of reconciling with oneself.

…

"The ritual succeeded, the Primordial Demoness just watched for a moment, who knows what She's waiting for." In a bedroom of the luxury villa. Madam Magician said to Lumian and Jenna, "I'll change clothes and come back."

With that, she opened an illusory door and walked through.

By the time she had changed back into her orange dress and returned to Lumian and Jenna's side, Franca, who had finished examining her own state, walked out of the full-length mirror.

Seeing that Franca's eyes had become slightly bluer and her hair slightly darker and thicker, Jenna asked expectantly, "Have you also fully digested the Unaging potion?"

Franca smiled, seemingly brightening the entire room.

"Yes, Lumian's analysis of the Demoness of Unaging's acting principles should be correct."

Her current bearing was that of someone twenty- seven or twenty-eight, someone with both life experience and sophistication.

Madam Magician chuckled. "Your advancement speed and digestion rate would make many of the Major Arcana card holders envious."

But not you? Lumian thought privately,

Madam Magician continued, "But don't think about rushing to the Angel level yet. At Sequence 3, you still have many things to do.

"Most importantly, anchors-faith anchors.

"Without proper preparation in this aspect, even if you have the potion formula and are lucky enough to collect the corresponding materials, the probability of losing control during advancement will still far exceed the probability of success.

"The apocalypse is approaching, many of the earlier Sequences have become easier, but becoming a true Mythical Creature remains difficult and dangerous."

"Faith anchors? We need to establish our own faith and spread it?" Franca, well-read as she was, immediately understood Madam Magician's meaning.

But establishing a new faith in lands that worship true gods could only be done secretly, or in the Southern Continent.

Seeing Lumian also looking at her, Madam Magician pondered before saying, "If you don't mind, the Church of The Fool can list you as Saints, assign corresponding parishes, and make you the patron saints of those areas. This way, you can quickly gain followers through the Church of The Fool's influence and Mr. Fool's authority-followers who are subsidiary to Mr. Fool.

"All orthodox churches help their Angels and Saints this way."

After exchanging glances, Lumian and Franca said, "We have no objections."

Madam Magician smiled again.

"Then quickly design honorific names that point to you, five passages, and send them through a messenger to Judgment.

"Also, you're planning to stay in Trier, right? I'll have the Church of The Fool assign two cathedrals in Trier to you-ah, there's another one now, in the suburban area. This way, when followers pray, you'll be able to respond, and the more miracles there are, the more believers there will be.

"That's one aspect, you'll also need to do things to increase your own anchors.

"Well, you've just advanced, rest first, and seriously consider these matters tomorrow."

With that, Madam Magician hurriedly left.

"Let's rest first," Lumian then said to Franca,

Although the potion had been fully digested, advancement was a battle, and his body, mind, and spirit were still exhausted.

"Alright," Franca agreed.

Without waiting for nightfall, they both fell asleep in their respective bedrooms.

Lumian had a dream where he returned to Cordu. In that house In Cordu Village, Aurore was waiting for him, and had even prepared a guest room for Franca and Jenna.

The mountain pastures were green as carpets, the sunlight abundant, and Lumian was reluctant to wake up.

The mountain pastures were green as carpets, the sunlight abundant, and Lumian was reluctant to wake up.

Lumian got out of bed and walked toward the door when suddenly, he saw a white paper on the desk, with an ink bottle pressing down one corner.

It wasn't like this before I slept... Lumian was stunned for a moment as he looked carefully.

His gaze suddenly froze.

There was a line of words on the white paper, in handwriting he knew very well.

That was Aurore's handwriting!

Aurore's handwriting... Did she become active while I was asleep? She wrote this note, was she trying to remind me of something? Lumian approached the desk with dilated pupils and read the paper's contents.

It was a short line in Intis: "Summon White Paper!"

Chapter 1045: White Paper

Summon White Paper?

When Lumian saw the words on the paper, he was clearly stunned.

A strange trembling, surprise, and fear immediately welled up from the depths of his heart.

Had Aurore, whose soul fragment had further awakened and merged with me, struggled to control my body while I slept, just to leave this reminder?

Theoretically, this should be very important.

But why White Paper?

Lumian certainly remembered what White Paper was - it was Aurore's contract creature, very weak, from the spirit world. Besides being spiritually connected to Aurore, its only function was to temporarily carry one Beyonder ability of the contractor, and even then, it was limited to simple and weak types.

What was there to care about with such a contract creature?

The real reason for Lumian's intense emotional reaction was: he had originally thought everything about Cordu Village was very clear, that every important symbol had been interpreted, that who all the participants were and what roles they played were sufficiently clear, with no more questions, lacking only some specific details that didn't affect the overall truth.

But now, after Aurore's soul fragment had further wakened, the first thing she did was tell him to summon the contract creature White Paper!

Are there still important symbols in the Cordu Village incident that haven't been interpreted?

Is the current truth not the complete truth?

Are there still crucial secrets hidden?

Lumian forcefully suppressed the turmoil in his heart and quickly reviewed the key points of the Cordu Village incident.

Initially, Madame Pualis followed her husband, the local administrator, Béost, to Cordu, secretly planning to develop Cordu into her 'territory' to establish her own Paramita;

Madame Pualis began an affair with the padre and became pregnant;

Aurore, influenced by members of April's Fool attempted a Soul Summoning and ran into problems;

Aurore sought treatment from I Know Someone, her mental state fluctuating until ultimately allowing Roche Louise Sanson to return;

Some villagers who were close to Aurore were influenced by Roche and believed in the constellation heresy, gradually spreading it outward;

The padre, while dealing with those involved in the constellation heresy, was bewitched by Roche and became a believer in Inevitability:

At this time, or perhaps later, the deity worshipped by the Aurora Order noticed Aurore's abnormality and the problems in Cordu Village, and began plotting Amon's return;

Several shepherds began bringing 'sacrifices' into the village, secretly conducting several ritual;

Reimund, Ava, and others discovered the village's abnormalities and were subsequently silenced;

I stumbled upon this matter and was nearly killed by the padre's group, fortunately saved by Aurore;

She also discovered something was wrong, we began seeking help from the outside world, but the truly useful approach was blocked by the tiny lizards;

Aurore was increasingly becoming Roche Louise Sanson;

They raided Madame Pualis's castle, and the padre killed his own child;

Madame Pualis left Cordu with her husband, butler, and maid, but left behind that empty cradle and other hidden arrangements, achieving some purpose through the final ritual;

The ritual officially began, Aurore pushed me off the altar, and Cordu was subsequently destroyed....

Lumian carefully recalled everything but couldn't find where White Paper had played any important role or key part in these events.

It had only served as eyes for Aurore or Roche at certain moments, helping them observe corresponding targets and specific battlefields.

Among all the key points, the only unclear one is what role Madame Pualis's empty cradle, and hidden arrangements played, but preliminarily it can be linked to the true birth of the Mother's Child of God Omebella, which isn't very questionable-this was confirmed by both Mr. Star's previous interpretation and the later scene of Madame Pualis appearing with baby Omebella...

Did White Paper observe some detail then that Aurore found useful, or rather, strange?

Just as Lumian thought this, he heard a knock at the door.

"Come in." His emotions had largely calmed down.

Franca and Jenna opened the door and entered. The former looked around and said, "We sensed you were awake but hadn't opened the door, so we came to check on you."

Lumian pointed to the paper on the desk and said. "While I was asleep, Aurore might have briefly awakened and used my body to leave this message."

Both Franca and Jenna were startled and quickly came to the desk, looking at the paper pressed down by the ink bottle.

"White Paper your sister's contract creature?" Jenna recalled Lumian's previous accounts.

"Why did Aurore want you to summon White Paper? Franca asked, puzzled.

Lumian shook his head slowly, "I don't know either.

"I thought everything about Cordu Village was already clear, but now..."

Franca suddenly had an inspiration and said thoughtfully, "Could this be the useful change that would appear after becoming a Demoness of Unaging in Mr. Fool's revelation?

"Is this the correct interpretation of that prerequisite?"

After thinking for a while, Lumian said, "Very likely.

"I had previously examined the characteristics and abilities of a Demoness of Unaging and hadn't found anything that could play a key role in subsequent events. I thought something would only emerge when I brought the Gift of the Land to meet the Hand Bro in the City of Exiles.

"Now it seems Mr. Fool required me to advance to a Demoness of Unaging before borrowing the Gift of the Land because once I became a Demoness of Unaging. Aurore's soul fragment would further awaken and better merge with me, able to provide very important reminders."

"So you're saying White Paper might have recorded key information about Madame Pualis and her baby Omebella?" Jenna made this conjecture based on Lumian and Franca's words.

Lumian nodded. "Go get Anthony and Ludwig upstairs. I'm preparing to summon White Paper now.

"Since Aurore hasn't completely died, her contract with White Paper still exists, and since Aurore is now part of me, I can summon White Paper in her name."

Lumian wanted Anthony and Ludwig present because he wasn't sure what state White Paper would be in- perhaps they would need a Spectator or Gourmet to interpret the corresponding information.

"Alright." Franca and Jenna easily understood Lumian's intentions.

After Anthony and Ludwig arrived in the bedroom and found their positions, Lumian quickly set up the altar.

Finally, he took out his Major Arcana card: "The Chariot"!

While placing "The Chariot" card at one corner of the altar, he took out The Fool's Sacred Emblem and pressed it on top of "The Chariot" card.

This matter might involve the Great Mother, so he had to be careful.

After completing all preparations, Lumian watched the quietly burning candle flame and, within the wall of spirituality, stepped back twice and called out in ancient Hermes, "I!"

Then, Lumian switched to Hermes.

"I summon in my name:

"The spirit that wanders about the unfounded, a friendly creature that can be subordinated, a Contract Companion that belongs solely to me..."

After reciting the incantation, Lumian saw the candle flame gently start to flicker, taking on a ghostly blue tinge.

A cold wind suddenly swept through, and a transparent, blurry sphere like a soap bubble appeared above the candle flame.

It quietly faced Lumian, giving him a sense of both familiarity and strangeness.

This was indeed White Paper, just as he remembered it, yet there was also an inexplicable sense of unfamiliarity.

As I remembered... Lumian suddenly felt a pain in his head.

He slightly furrowed his brow as images flashed through his mind.

He remembered now that he had never actually seen White Paper because before Cordu's destruction, he wasn't yet a Beyonder, and even with Aurore's guidance, he hadn't successfully activated Spirit Vision, and at low to middle Sequences, one couldn't see White Paper without Spirit Vision.

His memories of White Paper's appearance all came from Aurore's soul fragment.

As scene after scene flashed by, Lumian, through the further awakened soul fragment of Aurore, barely recalled the circumstances of her first summoning of White Paper.

At that time, White Paper was also such a fragile, soap bubble-like sphere, but there seemed to be liquid inside the sphere-clear liquid with hints of pale yellow and milky white.

And as time passed, those liquids gradually disappeared, and White Paper eventually settled into its current form.

Why had there been such a change? Lumian looked at White Paper, feeling it was indeed spiritually connected to him.

But spiritual connection didn't mean White Paper had enough intelligence to understand the meaning of words-it could only accept simple commands and couldn't answer Lumian's questions.

"There's nothing abnormal, nothing noteworthy…" Franca frowned, turning her gaze to Jenna, Anthony, and Ludwig.

Jenna and Anthony shook their heads in turn, indicating they also hadn't seen any important information contained in White Paper.

Ludwig licked his lips and said softly. "It used to have a very tempting scent, but now it's gone."

"Used to have a very tempting scent..." Franca fell into thought.

Jenna muttered to herself, "This indicates there was indeed a problem, there used to be a problem?

"The knowledge Aurore used to summon White Paper came from the infusion of that evil god Hidden Sage... an intentional infusion?"

"Mm." Franca nodded slowly and solemnly, "What was the problem that used to exist?"

She looked at Ludwig again.

"Don't know." Ludwig shook his head.

At this point, Lumian, who had been watching White Paper and listening to his companions' dialogue, spoke in a deep voice.

"If we treat the Cordu Village disaster as a story, what does White Paper symbolize in this story?"

Franca and the others looked at each other, each lost in thought.

After a few seconds, Franca carefully said, "I don't know what the contract creature White Paper symbolizes, but when the concept of white paper is connected to the story, it symbolizes..."

She paused, her throat inexplicably tight, her voice unconsciously becoming deeper.

"It symbolizes the state before a story is written-it symbolizes the beginning of everything."

Chapter 1046: Hidden Sage

"The beginning of everything..." Lumian softly repeated Franca's interpretation.

Jenna listened with inexplicable terror.

"Did the Cordu Village disaster actually start when Aurore summoned White Paper, rather than when April Fool's set their sights on her?

Lumian stared at White Paper for a while, then dismissed the summoning.

Then, he muttered to himself, "From Aurore's memory fragments and grimoires, she was first infused with knowledge about White Paper, and it was only several months later that Madame Pualis followed her husband to Cordu.

"I originally thought Madame Pualis was simply looking for a rural village with weak church and government influence to develop her own 'territory' and prepare for the formation of Paramita and obtain higher boons, which is why she targeted Béost who was about to become the administrative officer and territorial judge of Cordu. Now it seems this may not have been a coincidence.

"She came specifically for Cordu Village, though she may not have known why she needed to do this-she likely just received divine revelation from the Great Mother.

"Yes, that's right!"

At this point, Lumian's lips curled into a slightly grotesque smile.

"This answers why Omebella's first incarnation was in Cordu!"

A flash of insight struck both Jenna and Franca.

The former blurted out.

"Madame Pualis's affair with the padre and her pregnancy happened before Aurore used Soul Summoning, or before her condition worsened due to the treatment from I Know Someone, which led to the spread of the Inevitability faith."

"Unless someone had prophesied the development and outcome of the entire Incident, Madame Pualis probably hadn't thought about using the Inevitability believers' ritual sacrifices at that time-Cordu didn't even have any Inevitability believers then!" Franca followed up, "And the Cordu incident involves very high levels, so even the Great Mother probably couldn't see the specific shape of the results in the initial stages."

Lumian nodded.

"Simply seducing the padre of the Church of the Eternal Blazing Sun, having an affair near the cathedral altar, becoming pregnant, and obtaining the corresponding symbolism-couldn't this have been accomplished in any remote village? Why did only Madame Pualis in Cordu succeed? When she successfully became pregnant with Omebella, there wasn't even any power of Inevitability to utilize!

"Thinking about it in reverse, we can reach a conclusion: when Aurore summoned White Paper certain things related to Omebella secretly arrived in Cordu, nurturing power invisibly, and then Madame Pualis received divine revelation to come to Cordu."

Reflecting on the changes in White Paper's state before and after, Lumian thoughtfully said, "Amniotic fluid?

"Did White Paper once carry the amniotic fluid that nurtured Omebella?

"After the amniotic fluid came into reality, did it quickly merge into Cordu's overall environment?"

"Amniotic fluid..." Franca and Jenna were momentarily bewildered.

Lumian briefly described White Paper's appearance when first summoned and its subsequent changes, then gave a cold laugh.

"If this is true, that infusion from the Hidden Sage was definitely not random, but intentional."

Jenna quickly nodded.

That's what she had said earlier.

Franca spoke with confusion, "But the Hidden Sage didn't gain any benefits from this whole incident. So far, we haven't seen how He benefited from it…

"Pure harm without self-benefit?

"Also, wasn't April Fool's targeting of Aurore also a coincidence? They weren't aiming for Omebella's incarnation..."

"We need to reassess what we know about April Fool's now; we can't fully trust it." Lumian scoffed, "After experiencing the dream city, don't you have a deeper understanding of 'foolery'? What April Fool's believes may not be the truth, just like in the sea prayer ritual. they overlooked some key issues, being presumptuous and ultimately becoming the jester."

"Is the Celestial Worthy secretly helping the Great Mother?" Franca suddenly realized, Lumian gave a sound of agreement.

"As for why Hidden Sage deliberately infused that knowledge, I can't think of a reason right now, but I'll ask Him eventually."

As he spoke, Lumian paused.

"I remember Ma'am Hermit's main task was to investigate Hidden Sage's condition and the reason His mutation back then caused the one from the Church of Steam to leave the Moss Ascetic Order…

"Did His coming to life, His abnormality, come from the Great Mother's influence?

"How was it accomplished? The barrier was still quite solid at that time..."

Franca, Jenna, and Anthony exchanged glances, with the former reminding.

"Should we report this to Mr. Fool?"

"I'll pray now." Lumian nodded slightly.

After Mr. Fool had initially awakened through the image of Gehrman Sparrow, praying to him wasn't as troublesome as before when they needed to leave long intervals between two prayers.

Soon, Lumian completed his prayer, reporting everything about the changes brought by Aurore's soul fragments further awakening after he became a Demoness of Unaging, White Paper's symbolism, the new interpretation of the Cordu Village incident, and his speculations about Hidden Sage.

"Mr. Fool only said he knows." Lumian told Franca and the others, "It seems we'll have to wait until I bring the Gift of the Land to the City of Exiles and meet with Hand Bro before getting new revelations."

"Alright." Franca sighed.

Lumian thought for a moment and said,

"I'll also synchronize my speculations about Hidden Sage with Ma'am Hermit later, hoping it might give her some inspiration."

After Anthony took Ludwig downstairs to prepare dinner, Lumian looked at Franca and thoughtfully asked,

"Do you plan to tell all members of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society the truth about the transmigration?"

Franca appeared troubled.

"I'm afraid the shock would be too great, some people might not be able to accept it and lose control on the spot."

As she spoke, she mocked herself.

"If I still hadn't digested half of the Despair potion, saying this much is about all that's needed."

She made a sound of agreement and continued,

"I plan to meet with Madame Hele first, give her a hint of it. She's emotionally stable and should be able to accept it, then we can discuss how to proceed."

After pondering for a moment, Lumian said.

"By the way, help me ask when the next gathering will be."

"Do you have something in mind?" Franca asked curiously.

Smiling, Lumian replied.

"I want to clarify one question:

"Why Aurore?"

"Why Aurore..." Jenna pondered, "Why did Hidden Sage specifically choose Aurore as the target for infusing that knowledge?"

Lumian clicked his tongue and continued,

"The conditions of being a transmigrator, having the gray fog's aura, being female, and being a Warlock- almost no one in the outside world could satisfy all of these simultaneously, but within the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society, there are several who do.

"Why did the Hidden Sage pick Aurore?

"Was there something else about Aurore herself, was Cordu already harboring abnormalities, or was she simply unlucky and randomly chosen by Hidden Sage?"

"Indeed." Franca nodded in agreement. "We should investigate this."

After discussing these matters, Jenna intentionally changed the topic to keep the atmosphere from becoming too heavy.

She said to Franca and Lumian,

"You need to design your honorific names now."

Lumian and Franca, both with relevant mystical knowledge, looked at each other, feeling inexplicably awkward.

Of course, besides feeling awkward, Franca was also a bit excited.

I'm going to have an honorific name, this is unprecedented!

"I'll go first," she volunteered.

Seeing both Lumian and Jenna looking at her, she took paper and pen from the table, saying with a smile,

"The phrase 'the Great Franca Roland' needs to be there, but how embarrassing as an ending."

As she spoke, she wrote down this phrase.

"The other descriptions should reflect your abilities and characteristics." Lumian reminded her.

Franca thought for a moment and spoke,

"Should the first line be Demoness of Unaging? No. wouldn't that affect Mr. Fool's reputation? As his saint, I should lean towards the positive side. Hmm, 'One Who Never Ages.'

"Should the second line be 'Spreader of Diseases and Plagues'? That sounds like a villain; need to rephrase it, 'Keeper of Diseases and Plagues,' what do you think? This implies both the containment of plagues and the authority to bestow illness as punishment."

"I think that works," Jenna expressed agreement, and Lumian had no objections.

Franca pondered for another while.

"I think the description of Demoness should be m included, as that's my current essence, but it needs to sound better.

"The Demoness Accompanied by Strife and Catastrophe? Hehe, I'm not the one creating the strife and catastrophe, they just follow me around, Good, that's the third line.

"For the fourth line, should we showcase a Demoness's charm or my personal characteristics? But if we add 'pleasure' to the description, what if people start praying to me for pleasure?"

"As a saint of the Church of The Fool, we should indicate your relationship with the Church." Lumian helped think. "Also, don't use pleasure, that's too suggestive. Use joy, it encompasses more meanings, and you do bring joy-it's your characteristic."

Lumian paused and said,

"Fourth line: 'The Cup Bearing Joy and Pain.'

"The Cup refers to the Cup card, Indicating I'm Mr. Fool's Minor Arcana card, using his status? Mm, the Cup card also symbolizes emotions and feelings, which perfectly matches the joy and pain brought by a Demoness. Perfect, let's use that!" Franca clapped her hands and smiled brightly.

She quickly wrote down the complete honorific name:

"The One Who Never Ages, Keeper of Diseases and Plagues, the Demoness Accompanied by Strife and Catastrophe, the Cup Bearing Joy and Pain, the

Great Franca Roland."

After reading it several times, Franca said with lingering interest,

"I see many Sequence 3 Saints have 'protector of something' in their honorific names, should I add that too?

"But I don't have anything to protect right now, I still lack accumulation and have been a saint for too short a time. I can't be the protector of Lumian and Jenna. can I?"

"Protector of Human Trials and Spirit of Adventure?" Lumian joked.

Franca rolled her eyes at him.

"Your turn!"

Chapter 1047: Honorific Name

Lumian took the paper and pen from in front of Franca and said with a smile, "We can always add descriptions about being someone or something's protector later when it actually happens. After all, every demigod can have many descriptions, though they don't use all of them."

He then wrote down the last line of his honorific name with the pen: "The Great Lumian Lee."

Then he smiled at Franca and Jenna. "The first line should leverage Mr. Fool's status."

As he spoke, he wrote down his first honorific line: "The Chariot of Mr. Fool."

Before Jenna and Franca could speak, he made a self- deprecating comment. "The second line will continue to leverage, this time from 0-01."

"Proxy of the God of War?" Franca blurted out.

"No good," Lumian shook his head. "Lady Magician mentioned before that the title 'God of War' refers to both 0-01 and Red Angel Medici. If I call myself the Agent of the God of War, He might laugh uncontrollably - wouldn't that be like giving Him a free gift?"

"Try something else, like Proxy of the Lord of War?

These will all point to 0-01 anyway," Jenna suggested.

"I think it should be more conceptual, to minimize Red Angel's influence as much as possible," Lumian thought for a few seconds and wrote, "Proxy of Chaos and War."

Seeing this description, Franca suddenly laughed.

"If you really want to leverage, you should continue. Let me do a count.

"Heir of the Blood Emperor, Divine Child of the Great Mother, Friend of the Underworld Daoist, One Who Serves the Peak Beings of Both Calamity and Sacrifice Pathways…

"Tsk, better forget those. If you really added them as your honorific name, you might drop dead on the spot."

"A room can't hold that many people." Lumian glanced at Franca, responding with an old joke.

Holding the pen, Lumian continued, "I thought of the third line before going to bed."

"What is it?" Franca asked curiously.

Instead of answering her, Lumian directly wrote down a description: "The Dual-Bodied One Forged by Fire and Frost."

"Dual-Bodied One." Jenna read the latter part aloud. suddenly understanding this was preparation for Aurore's further resurrections, allowing the corresponding anchors to point to her as well.

"Dual-Bodied One refers to both you and Aurore, and also to the female Demoness and male Hunter, as well as the me outside the mirror and the me inside it. Brilliant!" Franca sincerely praised. "Fire and frost correspond to the Hunter and Demoness abilities, and being forged by fire and frost would inevitably bring intense pain-only sufficient obsession and strong will could endure it. This also represents your journey to become who you are now..."

As she spoke, Franca shut her mouth.

Then, feigning world-weariness, she sighed and patted Lumian's shoulder. "Things will get better!"

"Indeed," Jenna said hopefully.

"After reconciling with myself, my condition has actually improved quite a bit." Lumian laughed, looking at the paper on the table. "For the fourth line, I want to show both my current highest Sequence characteristics and point out how I differ from most Beyonders on the Demoness and Hunter pathways."

"You have abilities merged from two pathways, most notably the Fire of Destruction. And the most obvious trait of the Demoness of Unaging Sequence is eternal youth," Franca pondered.

Lumian nodded slightly and wrote carefully: "Unaging Saint Holding Destruction?"

"Make it 'Bearing'-although 'holding' makes me imagine a beautiful Demoness extending both hands holding black flames of destruction, 'Unaging Saint Bearing Destruction' sounds better." Franca imagined the corresponding scene.

"That works too," Lumian accepted Franca's suggestion.

Finally, his honorific name was determined as: The Chariot of Mr. Fool, Proxy of Chaos and War, the Dual- Bodied One Forged by Fire and Frost, Unaging Saint Bearing Destruction, the Great Lumian Lee."

Putting down the pen. Lumian made a self - deprecating comment. "Just thought of a hellish joke - I could also add 'Protector of Cordu' to my honorific name."

Jenna and Franca exchanged glances, both feeling that Lumian's mental and spiritual state had indeed improved somewhat.

"Alright, we can now summon Madam Judgment's messenger to inform her of both our honorific names, and ask her to contact the Church of Knowledge on our behalf, hopefully getting an opportunity to visit the City of Exiles soon. Hmm, only after the time is confirmed can I go borrow Gift of the Land-that Sealed Artifact is too dangerous, I can only use it briefly." The latter half of Lumian's words were meant for Jenna.

He knew that although Jenna appeared calm on the surface, she was quite anxious inside.

Obviously, Jenna hoped to become a Demoness of Despair before Julien returned to Trier, which was only a week away.

"Alright." Franca didn't delay.

After sending letters to both Madam Judgment and Ma'am Hermit through their respective messengers, the three Demonesses waited for Madam Judgment's possible reply.

Franca looked out the window at the early evening lights and said somewhat emotionally.

"The scenery here is beautiful, and the environment is nice, but it feels somewhat stuffy living here."

This luxurious villa had just been gifted to them yesterday by Madam Justice, as additional compensation for awakening Mr. Fool.

Franca had also moved her belongings, especially that small analyzer machine, and announced her return to the telegraph group last night.

"Stuffy?" Jenna was a bit confused.

Franca smacked her lips and said, "Maybe I'm just not the type who likes living in villa districts.

"I prefer having lots of shops downstairs, street vendors gathering in the morning, but sleeping in a room away from the street to avoid being disturbed.

"Whatever I want to eat, I can go down and buy it anytime. When there's nothing to do, I can stand by the living room window and watch children chase and play, see how vendors do business, watch what stories passersby might act out, and sometimes, with a non- ordinary one's hearing, faintly catch some gossip and rumors."

Franca's voice grew softer, as if immersed in such scenes.

After a few seconds, she sighed and said with self- mockery, "Living here is good too, at least we don't have to worry about affecting Innocent people when fighting."

"With Saint-level abilities, that would be difficult," Lumian reminded her.

To this, Franca could only respond with a brief interjection, "Ah…"

Soon after, Madam Judgment replied through her jellyfish-like messenger Ongla: "Results from communication with the Church of Knowledge will come tomorrow at the earliest, or the day after tomorrow at the latest."

"Tomorrow or the day after..." Lumian nodded and smiled, "Then there's nothing urgent for now, we have some leisure time."

He then left the bedroom and went downstairs.

Then, he went to the study, took several popular novels and a pile of recent newspapers and magazines, came to the living room, and started reading under the bright crystal gas chandelier, appearing very relaxed.

"Why are you reading these?" Franca asked curiously.

Lumian didn't hide anything and said with a slight sigh and smile, "The conversations with Mr. Fool and the exchange during self-reconciliation helped me understand some things. Since the end of the path is already determined-whether it's the apocalypse or resurrecting Aurore-then during this journey, if there really isn't anything urgent, I might as well be a bit kinder to myself."

Yes, Lumian Lee deserves to enjoy life too! A smile gradually bloomed on Jenna's face.

She extended her right hand to Lumian. "May I invite you to watch a play or opera tonight?"

"Sure." Lumian reached out and touched hands with Jenna.

Jenna then turned to Franca. "May I invite you too?

"Of course, I thought I was going by default," Franca tried to smile lightly, but it turned out quite radiant.

Jenna then looked at Anthony, who was also reading newspapers in the living room.

Anthony put down his newspaper and cleared his throat. "I'll pass. After staying in the dream city for half a month, I haven't contacted many of my intelligence sources in reality for a long time. I already have appointments tonight."

"Alright." Jenna then said to Ludwig, who was waiting for the stew to finish cooking in the kitchen, "You must come."

Otherwise, no one would watch him!

Ludwig only raised one question, "Does the theater have food?"

"We can get you candy-like food, the kind that doesn't make noise when you eat it," Jenna smiled and said.

Franca then said to Ludwig. "You really should experience more things, life isn't just about eating."

Ludwig looked at her, his gaze full of "I don't think so."

Speaking of eating, Franca suddenly got excited. "How about hot pot tomorrow?"

"Does Trier have all the ingredients for a hot pot base?" Jenna looked toward Ludwig.

Before Ludwig could respond, Franca said quite happily, "We can have another version of hot pot, with bone broth. It's not as complicated, and we can use garlic, Feynapotter chili, salt and such for dipping sauce. It's equally delicious-those who want spicy can add spice, those who don't want it don't have to, everyone chooses for themselves.

"Hmm, we can use pork bones or beef bones for the broth, add some common spices, plus mushrooms…"

Hearing this, Lumian, Anthony, and Jenna said in unison, "Skip the mushrooms!"

After discovering their very "unanimous" opinion, the three immediately burst into laughter.

"Gulp." Ludwig, who had been made hungry by the talk, swallowed his saliva.

This made Franca laugh too.

Laughter echoed in the living room.

…

When they returned from the opera, it was already late at night. Franca walked back to her bedroom with light steps.

In one corner of the bedroom sat that small analyzer machine connected to a mechanical typewriter and wireless telegraph transceiver.

I'll chat a bit before sleeping. Franca walked to the complex machine and said silently to herself. How should I tell 007 and others tactfully and without showing off that I'm now someone with an honorific name?

Oh right, first summon Madame Hela's messenger to request a meeting in reality!

Chapter 1048: Information Revealed by 007

After sending the meeting request through the skull- headed messenger, Franca turned on the wireless telegraph transceiver and small analyzer machine.

Click-clack, messages were typed onto paper by the mechanical typewriter one after another,

Franca read for a while before joining the group chat.

"I'm the group's early sleep assistant. Those members who haven't gone to rest yet must pay a fine-only gold accepted!"

As she sent out the telegraph, she recalled life in the dream city.

Group chatting over long distances in the real world is so difficult! Franca felt inexplicably melancholic and nostalgic, suddenly losing the desire to show off her honorific name.

What about Sequence 3? Even Sequence 3 can't solve the problem of real-time long-distance group chat!

If we ultimately survive the apocalypse, I hope the God of Steam and Machinery-no, the God of Electric Power and Information Technology will bring about a new industrial revolution.

I am a Demoness of Unaging, I can wait!

Moon King was the first to reply to Franca: "Look at my nickname-obviously the type who's only active late at night!

"By the way, Hidden Blade, you haven't been online for almost a month. What kind of mission doesn't even leave you time in the evenings?"

"Look at you, not even knowing that secret missions require turning off phones and cutting off all contact with the outside world. You clearly haven't dealt with such things before, 007, am I right?" Franca suspected Moon King was joking with her, but had no proof.

007 replied: "I was also locked away for a while."

Franca immediately perked up. "You... advanced to Sequence 4?"

"Yes, I got the qualification." 007 didn't hide it.

The other group members exploded:

"The demigod?"

"The first Saint among us!"

"Besides Hela and Gandalf, this is the Research Society's third demigod, right?"

"007, didn't you say that even with the qualifications, you'd have to queue and wait for a long time?"

After the rapidly spitting paper slowed down, 007 explained: "I also thought I'd have to wait longer, but recently, the Church not only brought out many stored Sequence 4 and Sequence 3 Beyonder characteristics, but also crushed some Grade 1 Sealed Artifacts. Most candidates who currently qualify and meet all prerequisites have been scheduled for advancement, though some failed.

"This situation makes me suspect major events will occur within the next year or two, which is why the Church is mass 'producing' demigods regardless of consequences and costs."

This matches the speculation about the apocalypse coming early-the Eternal Blazing Sun Church thinks so too? Franca noticed the other group members suddenly fell silent, clearly also thinking about the major crisis, wondering if they would be affected and whether they could handle it.

Franca could tell that 007 probably knew part of why the Eternal Blazing Sun Church was doing this, given that he was now a Saint, but he couldn't say directly and could only hint at it.

"Did you become an Unshadowed?" France changed the subject.

She actually didn't want 007 to continue advancing on the Sun pathway, feeling that the Unshadowed were too pure, and being within the Church, would inevitably become fanatical. If so, the 007 who would complain about her always finding things to keep him too busy to rest might never speak such words again.

This gave Franca the feeling of watching a friend gradually slip away before her eyes.

However, she had never tried to persuade 007, only pointing out the possible changes that becoming an Unshadowed might bring, letting 007 make his own decision with full knowledge.

Everyone's life should be their own to control-she had always believed this.

She was also grateful that when she was hesitating between becoming a War Bishop or advancing to Demoness of Unaging: Lumian and Jenna only presented options without trying to persuade her. Although they probably had their own thoughts and preferences, they never showed them, never manipulated, never pressured. Judge actions, not thoughts-that was very, very good, since everyone inevitably had dark and selfish thoughts, but ultimately not acting on them showed they'd overcome themselves, proving they're not that kind of person.

An Unshadowed might not have dark, selfish thoughts, but I actually hope 007 does... Franca silently sighed.

007 quickly replied to her: "Yes."

Staring at this word on the telegraph paper, Franca let out a long sigh. "Ah…"

007 continued: "Some colleagues have switched to other pathways, and some colleagues not in neighboring pathways have also gained advancement."

At this point, Franca quickly adjusted her mindset.

She kept telling herself, 007 just deliberately hinted and reminded everyone to prepare for major events and disasters, showing he still retains his positive emotions and humanity!

As people age, everyone changes and becomes somewhat different from before, 007 has just changed a bit more, but in terms of friendship, he's still that same 007.

"What major events will happen in the next year or two?" Another telegraph group member Wind Sound pressed.

"I'm not sure," 007 answered concisely.

"Stop asking, stop asking." Franca forcefully inserted herself into the conversation to prevent 007 from being put in a difficult position. "What we can do is take opportunities to improve ourselves and enjoy life in the meantime."

"Hidden Blade, you seem to know something?" Moon King telegraphed.

Franca wasn't bound by secrecy restrictions, but she didn't dare speak too clearly, fearing some group members might become too desperate and turn to extremes.

After careful consideration, she said: "If I tell you that the apocalypse is approaching, but there's hope of surviving if tall figures shield us and everyone is prepared, would you believe me?"

The previously constant incoming telegraphs suddenly stopped.

After a long while, 007 replied: "I believe you."

"Dammit, I'm panicking."

"Great Lord Hidden Blade, introduce me to a Demoness, I'm going all in!"

"Damn, I hope it won't be a case of dying before spending all my money."

"I need to buy land and dig a bunker..."

With 007's endorsement, Wind Sound and others truly believed Franca's words.

Those who could join this telegraph group were either laid-back, good-natured, or decent people. Although they were all quite nervous and worried at the moment, they could still express their inner emotions in rather lively and playful language, with no one particularly depressed or desperate.

Seeing her initial purpose achieved. Franca seized the opportunity to say: "I've actually become a demigod too."

"Now I really believe something big is going to happen."

"Good heavens, Hidden Blade has become a demigod?"

"Still a Demoness, or did you switch to the Hunter pathway?"

"…"

The group members Immediately burst into chatter.

Don't you know to chat! Franca snorted and responded: "Still a Demoness."

"Demoness of Despair?" 007 suddenly inquired.

What does 007 mean? Right, he's already an Unshadowed, a church higher-up, and while Demonesses mainly operate in Intis and the Southern Continent, even if he doesn't know the exact Despair potion formula, he must know ow the corresponding advancement ritual to detect anomalies and stamp out plague outbreaks early... Franca replied with understanding: "Don't worry, I didn't harm any innocent people, and I used a shortcut method."

"Shortcut? Rituals can have shortcuts?" Moon King's words revealed surprise.

Wind Sound sighed: "Hidden Blade, how can you advance so quickly, are you even human anymore? Oh right, not human, half-god half-human..."

Franca considered carefully before saying: "Actually. we transmigrators all possess certain special qualities.

When conditions are met and the pathway is suitable, these qualities manifest, helping us make tremendous progress at certain stages.

"In a sense, we are chosen ones."

Chosen by the Celestial Worthy!

Afraid the group members would become arrogant. she quickly added: "This isn't entirely a good thing."

"What special qualities?" 007, Moon King, and others telegraphed almost simultaneously.

Franca chuckled and typed quickly: "Can't say, if you know, you know. You'll know when you encounter it."

Not giving the group members a chance to ask follow- up questions, she quickly changed the subject: "007, are you still in Trier?"

Now that he was an Unshadowed, an archbishop or senior deacon, he would need to guard a diocese, and the Eternal Blazing Sun Church had sufficient forces in Trier, even with Angels hidden there.

"Still in Trier," 007 replied. "Many of the Saints who advanced this time have stayed in Trier as mobile forces."

Many stayed in Trier? Franca suddenly became alert.

Does the Eternal Blazing Sun Church think Trier is where problems are most likely to erupt?

Franca couldn't help but lower her head to look at the floor.

What she was really looking at was the Fourth Epoch Trier and the special mirror world sealed beneath Trier.

Will the apocalypse's outbreak start from beneath Trier rather than the high-altitude barrier? Franca slightly furrowed her brows as this thought fleshed through her mind.

At this moment, Madame Hela's silver skull-headed messenger returned, letting a paper held between its teeth float down before her.

Franca caught and read it: "Tomorrow morning at ten, Rue Ancienne, Little Dairy Cow Café."

…

Quartier de I`Observatoire, Rue Ancienne.

Franca, who only dared go out after using Lie to lower her looks and suppress her charm, arrived at the Little Dairy Cow Café fifteen minutes early.

She sat by the window, watching with interest as people came and went outside, as bicycles, bionic mechanical devices, and steam robots hurried past.

Soon after, Hela, dressed as a black widow, appeared at the door.

The moment she saw this lady, Franca suddenly had a strange feeling that she walked between darkness and sunlight, death and life.

Hela's complexion had grown slightly paler, the sense of being alive seemingly fainter.

Has Madame Hela advanced again? Indeed, if the Eternal Blazing Sun Church is mass-producing demigods, how could the Evernight Goddess Church not do the same? She switched back to the Death pathway, Sequence 3 Ferryman? Wonder what special abilities come from combining the Darkness and Death pathways... Franca now had very rich mystical knowledge.

"Good morning." She stood up, smiling in greeting.

After Hela replied, she said to the café welter, "A glass of absinthe, and a triple espresso shot."

After they both sat down, Franca fiddled with the veiled hat placed beside her and said with a smile,

"I went to a place recently with skyscrapers, electric cars, mobile phones, and the internet. Unfortunately, it was just a dream."

Madame Hele listened carefully before nodding slightly. "I know you went there."

"Uh Franca was stunned.

Chapter 1049: Patron Saint

After being stunned, Franca's first reaction was, How does she know?

Although Franca had long suspected that the one at the Star Dream Provisions Store was the Evernight Goddess, and believed that Madame Hela was highly valued by this deity; otherwise, that ancient palace in the Nation of the Evernight wouldn't have been offered as a meeting place for the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society. She never imagined that the Evernight Goddess would tell Hela about something as trivial as their entry into Mr. Fool's dream.

Shouldn't She have only mentioned Mr. Fool's initial awakening?

Hela continued, "Actually, I've known the truth about the transmigration for a long time."

Franca, who had carefully prepared an explanation and planned to gradually tell Madame Hela about the transmigration to avoid shocking her too much, was completely dumbfounded.

When did this happen?

Before we knew?

How does she know?

At this moment, the waiter brought over a glass of absinthe swirling with dreamlike green color and a triple shot of Reem coffee.

After drinking the glass of absinthe in one go, Hela's pale, cold face showed a bit more expression.

"After Port Santa's sea prayer ritual.

"After seeing the fairy tale-like magic used by the helper you invited."

"Like Cinderella, Jack and the Beanstalk, Sleeping Beauty?" Franca recalled Ma'am Hermit's performance then, muttering, "I thought they came from Emperor Roselle's fairy tales..."

Hela gazed at Franca with her pitch-black eyes.

"I requested materials about this and learned what the core ability of Sequence 4 Mysticologist of the Mystery Pryer pathway is.

"It's called Mystical Re-enactment, which can draw power from mystical knowledge to create magic or witchcraft. The less known and spread the corresponding mystical knowledge is, the stronger the created spells become."

Franca vaguely began to understand.

"Those fairy tales aren't just stories, but mystical knowledge?"

"This proves they actually happened, in this current world," Hela stated her conclusion. "From that day on, I knew we had always been in our original world, only time had passed."

Franca suddenly remembered Hela's gaze and attitude when she mentioned Harrison and the hope of returning home at the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society gathering.

At that time, she had already guessed the truth...

At that time, she was looking at us with sadness and pity…

Hela finished her triple shot of Reem and continued, "I had originally planned to hint at this to you all, but then the Harrison incident happened, and many of you became very excited, very hopeful."

"Like me," Franca said with a self-deprecating smile.

She took a sip of her coffee and hesitantly asked, "Madame Hela, should we tell the other members the truth about the transmigration?"

Hela had already thought about this. "Not for now. Let those who haven't accepted reality live with hope.

"After we survive the apocalypse, if everyone's still here, we can gradually tell them the truth."

"Indeed, having something to hold onto is good," Franca sighed in agreement.

She added, "However, we can't let these hopes become too strong, too intense, or too urgent. Otherwise, I'm worried some of them might make rather extreme choices and actions."

After speaking. Franca saw a slightly relieved expression appear on Madame Hela's face.

Hela nodded and said, "This is good enough for now. don't actually catch Harrison."

"Even if we catch him, we can't tell them," Franca replied, showing their mutual understanding.

She then inquired, "Should we talk about the apocalypse?"

"We can mention a bit, focusing on emphasizing hope," Hela answered.

Just like what I was thinking... Franca proceeded to ask. "When is the next gathering?"

"Aiming for sometime this week," Hela decided.

Having discussed the important matters, Franca gazed at Hela's pitch-black eyes and pale face, remained silent for a few seconds, then spoke from her heart, "Speaking of hopes earlier, do you have any hopes left?"

This wasn't really a question-she didn't expect an answer. She was just reflecting.

To her surprise, Hela actually answered. This lady dressed as a black widow said with a faint smile,

"My biggest hope now is to survive the apocalypse.

"If the apocalypse crisis is resolved, and we're all still alive..."

As she spoke, she seemed to drift into memories.

"The most memorable gift in my life was the telescope my parents gave me, because I loved watching stars since childhood, and loved imagining what existed in that vast cosmos.

"If we truly survive the apocalypse, I have two dreams:

"First is for this world to develop into something Nike our original one-it doesn't have to be exactly the same, just similar.

"Second, provided those evil gods are gone and I can protect myself, I want to use my abilities or help from certain Sealed Artifacts to explore the stars, visit different galaxies, and experience different civilizations…

Franca gradually became lost in the reverie.

Such a life doesn't sound bad...

Usually staying in Trier, enjoying modern life, and when bored, inviting Jenna, Lumian, and Aurore, along with Anthony, Ludwig. Madam Judgment, 007 and others to form a travel group, touring other countries, continents, planets, and civilizations together…

The cosmos is indeed dangerous, and we might not survive the apocalypse, but people need something to hope for…

Looking at Hela speaking softly, Franca suddenly felt this lady's image become much more vivid in her mind.

She waved over the waiter who had been sneaking glances at her from afar, and ordered two glasses of sweet wine and two glasses of absinthe.

Picking up one glass of sweet wine, she made a toasting gesture. Hela didn't quite understand but still raised her absinthe.

"This toast is to our homeland," Franca clinked glasses gently and drank her sweet wine.

After Hela finished her glass of green liquid, she picked up another glass of sweet wine and said, half-smiling. half-wistfully. "This toast is to distant horizons."

With a gentle clink, the two different colored liquids swayed, their contained light dispersing outward.

…

After returning to the luxurious villa in the arts district. Franca said to Lumian, "Madame Hela said she'll convene a meeting this week, aiming for before Saturday."

Lumian nodded and continued, "Madam Judgment has also replied to us. The Church of Knowledge has agreed to our request, but they need to do some preprocessing and necessary preparations. The time to go to the City of Exiles is set for next Monday."

"That's good, Julien won't return to Trier until next Thursday." Franca looked toward Jenna beside her. "Honestly, we need to trick your brother into leaving soon and not return to Trier for two years. If the information from 007 is correct, Trier will be a key point in the outbreak of the apocalypse."

Jenna nodded solemnly. "I'm working on it."

"There's suddenly nothing much to do." Lumian smiled as he picked up his wide-brimmed hat with veil from beside him. "Let's go for a walk."

"Your attitude has really improved. In the past, you would definitely have been anxious-waiting time was always the hardest to endure," Franca remarked teasingly.

Jenna asked instead, "Where to?"

Lumian smiled.

"Let's go to Lavigny Docks, to Mr. Fool's cathedral. The establishment and preaching about the patron saint should have already begun.

"I want to go listen."

"Listen to others talk about yourself? Wouldn't that be too awkward?" Franca's face showed resistance.

Neither she nor Lumian had told Madam Magician which cathedral they wanted to be assigned to, because they both wanted to be modest, yet felt the other wouldn't agree, so they simply let the Church of The Fool decide.

"I don't mind," Lumian smiled. "Besides, we should also look around the area to see if there's any way to collect anchors."

"Fine," Franca sighed. "If this were in the dream city, I'd debut as a celebrity! Those fans would be my anchors! Though there are problems with that too these kinds of anchors have an expiration date and can't be passed down. Plus, the different attitudes and focus points from fans would bring conflicting perceptions, which might affect my state."

"That's one way," Lumian looked at Jenna. "When you reach Sequence 3, you could consider becoming the most famous theater actress in the Northern and Southern continents. Of course, this is assuming you receive Mr. Fool's protection, or..."

Lumian didn't finish his sentence.

…

At the square district, Lavigny Docks, inside Mr. Fool's cathedral with its wide, clear windows.

Lumian, Franca, and Jenna, wearing hats with lowered veils, settled into a corner of the rows of seats.

At this time, the half-giant bishop-with golden hair, standing over 2.5 meters tall, wearing a custom-made coat and silk top hat-was preaching.

On one wall that had previously been bare, artists were using scaffolding and various tools to create new murals.

In this world where the Church held such high status, being commissioned to create religious murals for a cathedral was the highest recognition and praise a painter could receive.

Shortly after Lumian and the others sat down, removed their hats, and lowered their heads, the half giant bishop proclaimed in a solemn, resonant voice "Let us praise Mr. Fool."

"Praise The Fool!" All the believers, including the bishop, stood up and pressed their hands to their chests.

The half-giant bishop continued, "Let us also praise this cathedral's patron saint, the great Saint Franca.

"Our cathedral is thus named!"

Franca's toes began to curl tightly inside her boots.

The half-giant bishop continued, "Saint Franca is Mr. Fool's cup, bearing people's joy and pain, keeping disease and plague at bay, she is the ageless one, the Demoness who spreads strife and catastrophe to enemies...

"She once walked in Mr. Fool's dream, working for the Lord's return, she broke through illusion and reality, bringing the Lord's grace to the land..."

Dammit, they make me sound so impressive. Franca felt both embarrassed and somewhat pleased.

After recounting Saint Franca's deeds, the half-giant bishop said, "Let us praise Saint Franca!

"Praise the One Who Never Ages, Keeper of Diseases and Plagues, the Demoness Accompanied by Strife and Catastrophe, the Cup Bearing Joy and Pain, the Great Franca Roland!"

The believers began to pray along with the bishop.

Franca suddenly froze, and turned her head toward Lumian and Jenna with a slightly bewildered expression.

"I hear some illusory voices, and I see some points of light..."

Chapter 1050: Response

Lumian recalled the faith-related materials provided by the Tarot Club and carefully said, 'This should be the mystical manifestation of faith anchors, and the result of chanting your honorific name.'

'Oh, oh, oh, I'm receiving their prayers…' Franca suddenly understood.

She immediately continued, 'Fortunately, we're now unified both inside and outside the mirror, with our consciousness existing both within and without. This allows our mirror self to handle matters related to believers without affecting our daily life and combat state. Otherwise, if we were suddenly hit with prayers during intense combat, it would be easy to get distracted and have accidents.

'However, I think some pathways' Sequence 3 should be able to effectively use these prayers to temporarily strengthen themselves, like the Sun pathway?'

'War Bishop,' Lumian smiled. 'Within a certain range, the more anchors, the stronger a War Bishop becomes. His soldiers are all his anchors.'

Franca nodded, browsing the points of light with interest and listening to the illusory voices to understand what the believers were praying for.

'Continued good health…

'Family being safe and sound…

'Business success…

'No dangers during sea adventures…

'Stay away from chaos and war…

'These are all generic prayers, I can't respond or help—they're too vague,' Franca muttered to herself.

She glanced at Lumian.

'Your fate domain powers could actually be useful here—there's nothing that good luck and fortune-turning can't solve.

'Why isn't anyone praying to curse their enemies?'

At this point, Franca paused. 'There's one prayer asking for their illness to be cured…

'I'm professional at making people sick, but healing isn't within a Demoness's authority…'

Jenna thought for a moment and said, 'Don't you still have some of those healing agents left from Mr. Moon?' Jenna thought for a moment and said.

Lumian had 11 bottles in his Traveler's Bag, while Franca, Jenna, and Anthony each had two bottles.

'You're right, nobody said a patron saint can't use external help,' Franca immediately took out a potion from the Traveler's Bag.

While recalling the mystical materials provided by the Tarot Club, she imitated their contents along with knowledge from pre-crossing textbooks, magnified the corresponding prayer light point, and extended her Demoness spider silk—so fine it was invisible—into it, quietly inserting it into that believer's nostrils and reaching their stomach.

During this process, she used her Petrification powers to make the flesh touched by the spider silk enter a paralyzed state, preventing the prayer from noticing anything unusual.

Then, Franca unscrewed the healing agent's cap and let the liquid flow along the spider silk to its destination.

After completing all this, she withdrew the spider silk and removed the paralysis.

That plainly dressed believer with many patches suddenly felt their stomach become slightly heavier, as if they had unknowingly drunk a glass of water.

They didn't pay it much attention and finished their prayer, continuing to listen until the half-giant bishop completed the sermon and began distributing communion.

Just then, that believer let out a surprised sound. 'Huh…'

Seeing people around looking at them, he said with both confusion and joy, 'My spirit feels better, my body feels lighter…

'My illness is cured!'

They finally realized what had happened and told the fellow believers watching them with some fanaticism.

'I just prayed to Saint Franca for healing from illness!

'She blessed me!

'Praise you, Keeper of Diseases and Plagues, Great Franca Roland!'

Hearing this from her corner, Franca felt both embarrassed and secretly delighted.

Helping others feels pretty good!

Getting sincere praise from others feels nice too!

After this batch of believers left Saint Franca Cathedral, Franca lowered her voice and said to Lumian and Jenna, 'We can't rely on healing agents every time, right? Since my honorific name includes Keeper of Diseases and Plagues, future prayers will definitely include plenty of such requests.'

Without waiting for her companions to respond, Franca muttered to herself, 'Actually, at Sequence 4, one can create their own unique plague varieties or mystical pathogens. I want to invent a mystical pathogen whose characteristic is devouring other pathogens, while its effect on humans is just causing drowsiness, fatigue, or laziness for a period of time. This could cure most diseases in ordinary people except for their own physical mutations…'

'If you succeed, this could also be used in battles with other Demonesses,' Lumian was quite looking forward to the mystical pathogen Franca described.

Of course, this was just a concept, and whether it could actually be created remained unknown.

Franca thought seriously for a while, then suddenly smiled. 'There's another illness that Demonesses can cure.'

'What?' Jenna asked curiously.

'Functional disorders in that matter.' Franca clicked her tongue both self-mockingly and with feeling. 'Just throw a Charm at them and it works for a certain time, though it can't be permanently cured. Damn, what kind of thing is this…'

Lumian and Jenna fell silent for a moment.

Franca thought for a bit and continued, 'When I advanced the other day, I felt there were anchor points besides you two, some others seemed to come from the market district…'

'The dancers and streetwalkers you helped before? Especially those who changed their lives through learning theater performance?' Jenna realized.

'That's another kind of anchor…' Franca sighed. 'No good deed goes unrewarded. However, with the Savoie Mob gone and us being forced to leave the market district, their situation must have worsened again, so they miss the past. I'll return to the market district later, find the people currently in charge of related matters, 'persuade' them, and control them. It's a pity this is Trier, and we can't completely solve these problems. If we don't have to stay in Trier in the future, I want to find a place to build a new society!'

Acting on her words, Franca and Jenna quickly left the cathedral for the market district.

Lumian didn't follow them, worried that doing so would split Franca and Jenna's anchors.

He chose to take a carriage to the outskirts to look at Saint Lumian Cathedral.

On the way, fifteen to twenty points of light suddenly appeared before his eyes, and illusory prayer voices echoed in his ears.

The preaching about me has begun too… Lumian nodded imperceptibly and browsed through the different believers' prayers.

As Franca had said earlier, the vast majority were vague, difficult to achieve, everyday requests, and Lumian temporarily had no intention of using his fate domain powers to help turn their luck around.

While browsing, he discovered a relatively special request.

This wasn't actually a request, but rather an elderly woman telling the patron saint about her regret.

When she was young, her family was poor and couldn't afford photographs. By the time their circumstances improved, she had aged and could no longer capture her youth, leaving that part of her life unrecorded.

I also regret not cherishing those early years in Cordu properly… After pondering for a moment, Lumian decided to respond to this request.

He magnified the corresponding light point and saw the old lady with obvious wrinkles wearing a conservative black dress.

Layers of mirror worlds then appeared in Lumian's eyes, reflecting the old lady's different stages of life—her as a child, her innocent self, her youthful and simple self, her mature and steady self, and her kind and benevolent self…

Sitting in the carriage, Lumian quickly chose the mirror trace of her at seventeen or eighteen years old.

The wrinkles on the praying old lady's face visibly contracted, and her skin quickly gained luster.

This was an application of the Unaging characteristic, but when used on others, it could only last for a very short time, no more than half an hour, since the mystical connection was only established with the illusory trace in the mirror—not real and not stable.

In Lumian's view, this was half temporary rejuvenation, half mirror illusion.

After the old lady returned to her seventeen or eighteen-year-old appearance, Lumian transmitted a message in a female voice, 'Hurry.'

The old lady immediately broke from her prayer state, not knowing where that somewhat cold and deep but pleasant female voice came from.

'You, you…' Those around her all widened their eyes.

'What about me?' the old lady asked these fellow believers in confusion.

The next second, she discovered her voice had become quite sweet, just like when she was young.

'You, you, you…' The nearby believers still couldn't form proper sentences, but someone handed over a mirror.

The old lady looked in the mirror and froze in her seat.

This, isn't this me when I was young?

What's going on?

Have I regained my youth?

Did my prayer to Saint Lumian receive a response?

As thoughts raced through her mind, the old lady recalled the female voice she had just heard. 'Hurry.'

She suddenly understood, abruptly stood up, and said to the surrounding believers with a smile, 'I'm going to get my photograph taken!'

She quickly squeezed out of that area and walked briskly toward the cathedral door.

As she walked, she lifted her skirt and began to run, getting faster and faster, just like when she was seventeen or eighteen and ran desperately for a job opportunity.

She ran to the nearest photo studio and sat in front of the backdrop.

Click, a flash of light captured a youthful and radiant smile.

In the moving carriage.

Having responded to the prayer, Lumian seriously considered a Demoness's faith anchor issue.

War Bishop is actually simpler—recruit soldiers, cultivate a team, and that's it…

Most of a Demoness's abilities tend toward disaster, making it difficult to use them positively to develop believers… Those Demonesses of Unaging in the Demoness Sect probably rely on seduction, charm, and fear from disasters…

In the early stages of faith, making people fear is also a method of developing believers, the most standard method…

But since we're affiliated with the Church of The Fool, we can't do that…

Fear…

Lumian suddenly thought of a sect that deliberately spread fear of disease.

The Sick Church!

His eyes, like highland lakes, immediately brightened.

Is it possible to take over the Sick Church, eliminate all the Blessed and those corrupted by evil gods, then steal the faith directed at evil gods and make certain alterations?

This is somewhat similar to that section about the Sea God Church in scripture… This could also weaken the corresponding evil gods' influence on the real world…

Chapter 1051: Protector

Having considered his next direction, Lumian looked out the carriage window.

By now, the hired carriage had reached the gray-white city walls encircling Trier, queuing to leave the city.

The Church of The Fool's newly established cathedral in Trier was located in the suburbs, right next to where the Srenzo River curved. The river was wide there, with convenient transportation, both a dock and a station, in a picturesque town.

After arriving at this town called Ramb, Lumian discovered it wasn't small at all, with numerous steamships at the dock and streets bustling with people, extraordinarily lively.

After asking the carriage driver, Lumian roughly understood the reason.

Most goods entering Trier had to pay an entry tax. though rates varied. Therefore, many goods that didn't need to be sold in Trier or transit through it were unloaded at Ramb and sent to surrounding towns. This gradually made the town prosperous, attracting many maritime merchants, adventurers, and sailors, bringing with them the faith of The Fool.

Lumian had heard from Franca that the Eternal Blazing Sun Church had long wanted to abolish the entry tax to promote commerce and improve circulation, but this tax was one of the Intis Republic's main sources of revenue, and Trier's entry tax alone equaled the sum of several major cities' entry taxes. The government simply couldn't give it up.

Lumian put on a wide-brimmed hat, letting the black veil fall, and began wandering around Ramb.

Soon, he found what was now called Saint Lumian Cathedral, the Church of The Fool's location, but didn't rush to enter. He just stood on the street for a while, admiring the large glass windows and plain walls.

I hope one day, no clergy will say that Saint Lumian will have to make do with their actions... After making this self-deprecating joke, Lumian continued walking.

The main faith in this town was the Eternal Blazing Sun, worshiping Trier's patron angel Saint Viève.

Lumian examined the white stone angel statue for a few moments before walking into a bar diagonally across the square.

This bar had good business, and on weekends, many people from Trier would come to freely enjoy various alcoholic beverages that didn't require entry tax.

As soon as Lumian pushed open the bar's heavy wooden door, he felt gazes turn toward him-some surprised, some amazed, some greedy, some excited, and some like snakes slowly slithering across his body.

He then remembered that he was now a lady, an extremely charming lady, even with her face hidden behind a veil.

It was never like this when he was a man before-at most, thieves would observe to judge if there was any value or possibility of theft... Ah, the sense of belonging at "home" is gone… Lumian slowly shook his head and directly took out a revolver from his Traveler's Bag.

He placed his hand on the doorframe, pointed the revolver at the ceiling, and pulled the trigger without hesitation.

Bang!

The bullet brought down clusters of dust, and the people in the bar, like athletes hearing the starting gun, quickly scattered in all directions.

This left Lumian a spacious path to the bar counter.

When the chaotic scene of people taking cover had somewhat settled, Lumian deactivated the Bottle of Fiction and, holding the revolver, walked toward the bar counter while saying in an icy but soft voice, "I just want a drink."

He then sat on a barstool, tapped the counter, and said to the bartender who was staring at him blankly. "One La Fée Verte"

The bartender finally snapped out of it and hurriedly poured Lumian an absinthe with a splash of lemon juice.

Lumian didn't remove his hat or lift his veil, slowly sipping the bitter and fragrant liquor.

The other people in the bar gradually returned to normal. In this small town frequently visited by pirates and adventurers, they were used to such things, which explained their practiced response earlier.

Lumian quietly listened to their chitchat and whispers. trying to discover useful intelligence, especially anything pointing to the Sick Church.

But unfortunately, what he heard was mainly discussion about himself.

The most discussed topic was what it meant to be a person of dual bodies.

There were artistic interpretations, such as "having a male body but also a female side, being both flame and frost," and there were vulgar ones, like "busty up top, hard down below."

Lumian turned his gaze toward the drunk who had said the latter.

His highland lake-like eyes were like mirrors, reflecting the other's figure.

The drunk was making obscene gestures to accompany his earlier description when his chest and lower body suddenly experienced intense pain, as if being burned by flames.

He screamed in agony and fell to the ground, rolling in pain.

This stunned those around him who had been agreeing with his joke.

After about ten seconds, the drunk finally came back to life. He supported himself on a nearby chair and stood up trembling.

"What just happened?"

"Sudden illness?"

"You should go to a clinic right away!"

The people around him spoke up in a jumble.

The drunk shook his head in confusion.

"It just hurt suddenly, but now I'm fine…"

As he spoke, he looked down to check his physical condition and was surprised to find his chest had strangely swollen from unknown burns, while his lower half had become like stone, tenting his pants.

Almost simultaneously, those around him also noticed this condition.

"Busty up top, hard down below..." someone repeated the drunk's earlier words.

Wh- The people around quickly moved away from the area, all looking at the drunk with wary gazes: It was him who insulted the saint, it has nothing to do with us!

We weren't standing next to him either, don't let the lightning strike affect us!

In their fear, everyone present unconsciously had the same thought: Is the Church of The Fool's new patron saint really this efficacious?

Lumian withdrew his gaze, letting the reflected figure in his eyes disappear.

This was a small punishment, not affecting any essential functions or physical health.

For Lumian, he didn't care at all if someone insulted him-he would just find an opportunity to play a prank. But insulting Aurore was not acceptable.

Moreover, this was also an opportunity, a chance to reasonably use fear to spread faith.

It could also help digest the Witch potion.

Lumian looked at the absinthe in his hand, seeing his veiled, half-visible face reflected in the dreamlike green liquid.

…

The deep red wine swirled gently, with three faceless wooden dolls placed beside it.

Franca leaned back in her chair, leisurely admiring the blood color permeating the wooden grain and the hair that had slipped into the crevices.

After looking for a few seconds, she turned to look at the three men standing in front of the desk and smiled, saying, "I only have two requirements for you:

"First, help me collect various intelligence, and second, follow these thirteen rules I've established and treat those dancers and streetwalkers well."

After Franca finished speaking, Jenna, standing beside her, held up the paper and began reading.

"First, no coercion,

"Second, ensure adequate rest;

…

"Thirteenth, provide basic medical care."

"We're the mafia, not some damned charity!" burst out the most hot-tempered of the three.

Franca laughed.

"Right, I'm not doing charity either."

She then flicked out a quiet black flame, letting it fall on one of the wooden dolls.

The doll was immediately covered in black flames. silently burning.

The gang leader who had just spoken suddenly screamed in agony as strange black flames erupted from within his body.

He fell to his knees in pain, his face contorted as he shouted, "I-I was wrong.

"I am doing charity!

"I agree! I agree!"

Neither Franca nor Jenna responded, watching silently until the gang leader collapsed to the ground, convulsing until death.

Only then did Franca look at the other two gang leaders and ask with a smile, "Any objections?"

"None." The two gang leaders seemed to be competing to see who could shake their head faster.

After Jenna posted the paper with the thirteen rules on the wall, Franca stood up and said.

"Remember to look at it every day, and if there's any violation..."

Franca picked up the remaining two wooden dolls.

"You should know what they represent-they're a Demoness's curse medium."

After becoming a Demoness of Pleasure who could directly curse through mirrors, Franca no longer used such black magic in battle, but mirror curses were real-time and couldn't be fixed in place. To control these two gang leaders and make them obey, she still needed to make media like dolls using their blood and hair.

And for a Demoness of Unaging, possessing such media could also affect the targets' direct relatives.

"We know, we know." The two gang leaders began their nodding competition again.

Jenna thought for a moment and said to Franca, "May I add one rule?"

"Of course." Franca smiled.

Jenna picked up the pen and added another rule to the posted paper: "Rule Fourteen, loan shark annual interest cannot exceed 36%, and no additional fees such as handling fees or service charges can be collected."

"No problem, right?" Jenna turned and smiled.

The two gang leaders being questioned dared not object.

Franca put away the two curse dolls and casually said as she walked toward the door,

"I know you have some supporters behind you. I don't care what they think, nor will I interfere with your territory disputes or making money here. I only want those two things I mentioned earlier.

"If your supporters aren't satisfied, let them come see this statue."

As she spoke, strands of gray-white light spread out and fell on the dead gang leader's body.

The corpse quickly turned into a stone statue.

"No problem with that, right? You'll quietly notify me if they want to move against me, won't you?" Franca turned back to look at the remaining two gang leaders and asked with a smile.

The two gang leaders first showed uncontrollable fascination, then hurriedly responded, "We will! We will!"

Leaving the room, Franca walked toward the dancers and streetwalkers waiting nervously at the stairway.

"Boss..." several girls called out joyfully.

Franca nodded gently and said, "Things will go back to how they were before.

"But I still want to say, this isn't a long-term profession."

…

Across from the Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons, Franca and Jenna sat on a street bench, calmly watching the audience and actors coming and going.

"Not going over to say hello?" Jenna asked.

Franca smiled. "No need, since they're doing fine, there's no need to go over."

"That's true." Jenna nodded slightly.

Franca then turned her head and said, half serious and half joking. "This is left for you-in the future, you'll be the protector of actresses."

After watching for a while longer, they returned to the luxury villa.

By this time, Lumian had already returned and was saying to Anthony, "Help me collect intelligence on the Sick Church."

"The Sick Church..." Franca suddenly understood what Lumian wanted to do and quickly smiled, "I have intelligence sources now too, I'll have them keep an eye out!"

Chapter 1052: Reluctantly Showing Off

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Moreover, this was also an opportunity, a chance to reasonably use fear to spread faith.

It could also help digest the Witch potion.

Lumian looked at the absinthe in his hand, seeing his veiled, half-visible face reflected in the dreamlike green liquid.

…

The deep red wine swirled gently, with three faceless wooden dolls placed beside it.

Franca leaned back in her chair, leisurely admiring the blood color permeating the wooden grain and the hair that had slipped into the crevices.

After looking for a few seconds, she turned to look at the three men standing in front of the desk and smiled, saying, "I only have two requirements for you:

"First, help me collect various intelligence, and second, follow these thirteen rules I've established and treat those dancers and streetwalkers well."

After Franca finished speaking, Jenna, standing beside her, held up the paper and began reading.

"First, no coercion,

"Second, ensure adequate rest;

…

"Thirteenth, provide basic medical care."

"We're the mafia, not some damned charity!" burst out the most hot-tempered of the three.

Franca laughed.

"Right, I'm not doing charity either."

She then flicked out a quiet black flame, letting it fall on one of the wooden dolls.

The doll was immediately covered in black flames. silently burning.

The gang leader who had just spoken suddenly screamed in agony as strange black flames erupted from within his body.

He fell to his knees in pain, his face contorted as he shouted, "I-I was wrong.

"I am doing charity!

"I agree! I agree!"

Neither Franca nor Jenna responded, watching silently until the gang leader collapsed to the ground, convulsing until death.

Only then did Franca look at the other two gang leaders and ask with a smile, "Any objections?"

"None." The two gang leaders seemed to be competing to see who could shake their head faster.

After Jenna posted the paper with the thirteen rules on the wall, Franca stood up and said.

"Remember to look at it every day, and if there's any violation..."

Franca picked up the remaining two wooden dolls.

"You should know what they represent-they're a Demoness's curse medium."

After becoming a Demoness of Pleasure who could directly curse through mirrors, Franca no longer used such black magic in battle, but mirror curses were real-time and couldn't be fixed in place. To control these two gang leaders and make them obey, she still needed to make media like dolls using their blood and hair.

And for a Demoness of Unaging, possessing such media could also affect the targets' direct relatives.

"We know, we know." The two gang leaders began their nodding competition again.

Jenna thought for a moment and said to Franca, "May I add one rule?"

"Of course." Franca smiled.

Jenna picked up the pen and added another rule to the posted paper: "Rule Fourteen, loan shark annual interest cannot exceed 36%, and no additional fees such as handling fees or service charges can be collected."

"No problem, right?" Jenna turned and smiled.

The two gang leaders being questioned dared not object.

Franca put away the two curse dolls and casually said as she walked toward the door,

"I know you have some supporters behind you. I don't care what they think, nor will I interfere with your territory disputes or making money here. I only want those two things I mentioned earlier.

"If your supporters aren't satisfied, let them come see this statue."

As she spoke, strands of gray-white light spread out and fell on the dead gang leader's body.

The corpse quickly turned into a stone statue.

"No problem with that, right? You'll quietly notify me if they want to move against me, won't you?" Franca turned back to look at the remaining two gang leaders and asked with a smile.

The two gang leaders first showed uncontrollable fascination, then hurriedly responded, "We will! We will!"

Leaving the room, Franca walked toward the dancers and streetwalkers waiting nervously at the stairway.

"Boss..." several girls called out joyfully.

Franca nodded gently and said, "Things will go back to how they were before.

"But I still want to say, this isn't a long-term profession."

…

Across from the Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons, Franca and Jenna sat on a street bench, calmly watching the audience and actors coming and going.

"Not going over to say hello?" Jenna asked.

Franca smiled. "No need, since they're doing fine, there's no need to go over."

"That's true." Jenna nodded slightly.

Franca then turned her head and said, half serious and half joking. "This is left for you-in the future, you'll be the protector of actresses."

After watching for a while longer, they returned to the luxury villa.

By this time, Lumian had already returned and was saying to Anthony, "Help me collect intelligence on the Sick Church."

"The Sick Church..." Franca suddenly understood what Lumian wanted to do and quickly smiled, "I have intelligence sources now too, I'll have them keep an eye out!"

Chapter 1053: A Demoness's Visit

The confluence of the Srenzo and Ryan Rivers created a fertile valley region in the Trier district, with villages and estates dotting it like jewels, strung together into what was considered the most beautiful and expensive necklace in all of Intis.

Vival Town was one of the most peripheral towns in the Trier district, quite ordinary in both geographical location and resources, and had never received much attention.

In the basement theater of the Wild Rabbit Cafe, though there was no puppet show at the moment, twenty to thirty spectators had still gathered.

Some were clearly townspeople, while others seemed to have just arrived from the surrounding countryside, with mud spots still visible on their trouser legs.

Under the yellowish light of the gas wall lamps, the cafe owner Dalberro, standing at center stage, looked around before raising a black and white photograph in his hand.

"You've all seen Niel's death photo very clearly.

"He tried to betray us, and then the great Malady God brought down punishment."

In the photograph, a man in his thirties had his eyes wide open, frozen in fear, his face showing obvious signs of decay in several places, with white bone visible in many areas.

Dalberro was a typical Intis gentleman, with beautiful blue eyes, slightly curled brown hair, neatly trimmed beard, and a ruddy but thin face that made him popular with ladies.

But at this moment, his expression was unusually gloomy and cold as his gaze swept across the face of each Malady God follower.

Those caught in his gaze involuntarily lowered their heads, muttering, "Welcome the Malady God, drive out disease!

"Welcome the Malady God, drive out disease!"

Dalberro finally withdrew his gaze and nodded gently.

"Disease has long been scattered throughout this world. Through the great Malady God's grace, they haven't devoured most humans, only dealing with those who abandon the deity.

"I saw with my own eyes how Niel died in pain and regret, tormented to the point of breakdown by an incurable disease.

"Remember, devotion is the best medicine, devotion alone can keep you away from disease!"

After completing the daily sermon and receiving offerings from each follower, Dalberro had the congregants leave in batches to avoid drawing attention.

Then, he returned to his bedroom upstairs and placed the newly acquired money in a metal safe.

After finishing all this, Dalberro was about to head for the door when he suddenly saw his reflection in the full-length mirror undergo a strange transformation.

The person in the mirror quickly became a woman, wearing a black robe with the hood down.

The woman appeared to be only around twenty years old, with cascading black hair, each strand glossy but slightly thicker than normal, and eyes like highland lakes—clear, bright, and dreamlike, making Dalberro's soul seem to drown in them.

For a moment, Dalberro forgot to be surprised, forgot to be cautious, forgot to be afraid, and just watched as the lady in the mirror walked out and approached him, giving him the feeling that a beautiful dream had finally come true.

"Oh, goddess of my dreams, angel more beautiful than the entire Trier valley, my soul, my heart, what can I do to serve you?" Dalberro reflexively praised her, expressing the burning in his heart.

You Trieriens… even after worshiping an evil god, receiving boons, and having your personalities altered, it doesn't stop you from spreading your peacock feathers in situations like this? Lumian showed a slight smile.

"Are you a Disease Envoy?"

Franca had already obtained some information about the Malady God from 007, learning the names of several boon Sequences.

Among them, Sequence 9 was Patient, also called Rotting Patient, Sequence 8 was Secretary, Sequence 7 was Vermin, also known as Corruptor, Sequence 6 was Disease Envoy, Sequence 5 was Child of Decay, and Sequence 4 was Doomed One.

Dalberro suddenly shuddered, breaking free from the beauty's charm through his faith in the Malady God. "I don't know what you're talking about." He knew he should try to find a way to escape contact or suddenly attack and control her, but he couldn't bring himself to do it.

Lumian curled his lips and said, "Would you like to hear how I found this place?

"First, I used Magic Mirror Divination to determine the general area, then infiltrated official channels to get data on disease-related deaths from recent years for comparison. After that, I had inconspicuous Beyonders ask around bars and such about anyone who had fallen seriously ill but suddenly recovered in the past few months. Finally, I checked the bodies in the hospital morgue.

"Perhaps blessed by the gods, I had good luck and discovered Niel, who died with his entire body rotting.

"That doctor and those two orderlies are followers of the Malady God, right? Thanks to them, similar punishments were never exposed, and afterward 'helping' with cremation requests was no problem."

Dalberro swallowed hard with difficulty and complexity. "Wh-what do you want?"

"I am a Demoness, you know what a Demoness is, right?" Lumian asked with a smile.

Dalberro suddenly understood. "I know a little, no wonder…"

No wonder she has such great charm!

Just her appearance, figure, and temperament make one want to worship!

Although the Church always emphasized that Demonesses were enemies, establishing connections wasn't impossible—any faction could cooperate briefly if their current interests aligned!

"Then you should also know that we Demonesses are classified as a cult by officials and suppressed everywhere," Lumian said with rather helpless eyes. "We can barely stay in Trier anymore and want to cooperate with you."

"Cooperate?" Dalberro was willing a thousand times over in his heart, but still maintained basic vigilance based on his faith in the Malady God.

"Yes, the Primordial One hopes to receive the great Malady God's protection in the future, She is even willing to become the Malady God's consort," Lumian said with an ambiguous smile.

Before Dalberro could respond, he slightly raised his chin and said, "Report to your superior. You certainly can't make decisions about this matter."

Dalberro immediately felt stifled, which gave rise to an impulse.

Kill the superior, become the superior, then gain the qualification to properly discuss cooperation with the beautiful Demoness before him!

How could he let her look down on him?

Final rationality made Dalberro control himself, and he said sincerely, "I-I will find an opportunity to report this."

His hidden meaning was that he couldn't do it under her watch, and he needed to find a safer environment.

Lumian nodded slightly and smiled. "Are you secretly spreading disease, trying to weaken and control me?"

Dalberro's face instantly turned red, and he stammered, "I-it was just an instinctive choice.

"You came so suddenly, I had to do this."

"I can understand," Lumian said with a smile. "But I should warn you, diseases have little effect on Demonesses."

After speaking, his figure suddenly faded and disappeared right before Dalberro's eyes.

This was just a projection that Lumian had manifested through the mirror world!

She's so nice, even warning me… Dalberro gazed longingly at the full-length mirror in the room and where the Demoness had stood, feeling that a faint fragrance still lingered in the air.

After fifteen or twenty seconds, he finally managed to break free from his current state. Looking at the bright sunlight outside, he quickly left the master bedroom and came to the study, opening a secret room.

The secret room was empty, with bare walls, peeling paint, showing signs of decay.

Dalberro lit a white candle, locked the secret room's door, and carefully checked his surroundings.

After confirming there were no abnormalities, he knelt down, assuming a posture of penitent prayer.

Then, he chanted in an ancient and desolate language that seemed to be losing its very meaning, "Envoy of Depravity and Corruption, Witness to Humanity's End, Child of Rot and Disease, Palm of the God of Decay, the great Malady God…"

He was praying and beseeching his superior—the first few lines were directed at them, but the Malady God part wasn't—his superior had deliberately borrowed their worshiped deity's alias to conceal their true name, saying they could respond based on proximity using the previous four descriptions and current environment.

As Dalberro chanted devoutly, the already dimly candlelit secret room grew darker, the candle flame flickering, about to go out.

Meanwhile, in a room opposite the Wild Rabbit Cafe.

Lumian held a plain silver mirror, reflecting the cafe and the building above it.

In reality, pedestrians were coming and going on the street, and the cafe had neither many nor few customers, but in the mirror, only the corresponding buildings and rooms existed, with no traces of humans or other living beings.

No, there was one.

In a windowless secret room somewhere in the mirrored building, Dalberro was kneeling before an increasingly yellow and dim candle flame, praying devoutly.

In reality, the secret room in the building still existed, but there was no lit candle, nor was there Dalberro.

When Dalberro finished chanting the honorific name, Lumian immediately felt information trying to drill out from the mirror, establishing some kind of mystical connection.

He neither blocked nor influenced it.

Soon, Dalberro heard a low, hoarse voice: "What is it?"

Dalberro immediately reported, "A Demoness has found me; she represents the Demoness Sect in seeking cooperation."

"Demoness…" Dalberro suddenly heard his superior curse with anger, "Idiot, damn it!"

Uh… Before Dalberro could come to his senses, his body began rapidly decaying, intense pain stabbing into his mind.

He was already certain to die.

But before this, Lumian in the real world had already sensed consciousness drilling into the mirror world along the previously established mystical connection, falling toward Dalberro.

He immediately reached out his right hand and stroked the surface of the silver mirror.

The consciousness from afar instantly left traces in the mirror world.

Beside him, Franca held another mirror, using it to perform Magic Mirror Divination by questioning her own spirituality, "Where is the source of the traces…

"Where is the source of the traces…

"…"

In the blink of an eye, Franca's mirror reflected a scene: Darkness, enclosed, seemingly the interior of a coffin, seemingly containing a corpse that hadn't completely decayed yet.

Chapter 1054: Left Hand

As soon as Franca tracked down the source of the traces in the mirror, Lumian immediately grabbed her shoulder and teleported to the location indicated by that scene.

In just two or three seconds, Lumian's figure materialized in a cemetery between mountains, appearing before a gravestone.

Franca had gone somewhere unknown.

Lumian cast his gaze toward the gravestone, seeing a memorial photo embedded in it and a name engraved: "Mocoxidos."

"So you've long been 'dead,' buried in a cemetery. No wonder the two Churches could never find the high-ranking members of the Sick Church, and who knows how you managed to avoid purification or cremation…" Lumian said mockingly while looking at the gravestone.

He had anticipated various methods of contact Dalberro might use, intercepting the corresponding information and establishing connections by placing him in the mirror world.

Before Lumian could finish speaking, the ground in front of the gravestone suddenly exploded with countless pieces of stone and soil.

They shot toward Lumian like bullets fired from a steam rifle, whooshing through the air.

At the same time, Lumian saw a hand.

The hand was entirely cyan in color, swollen to the point of being translucent, with yellowish-green pus flowing inside, making every capillary abnormally clear.

These capillaries and palm lines together formed complex symbols and patterns. Just looking at them made Lumian freeze in place.

At this moment, his field of vision was completely occupied by this hand. Compared to it, the shooting stones and soil seemed as tiny as dust.

Lumian began to tremble, his frost-white, cream-like skin instantly developing deep black spots.

These spots rapidly eroded inward, causing his flesh to quickly rot.

Lumian couldn't move, couldn't use any of his abilities, and even his thoughts were rapidly decaying.

This was no Saint's hand.

This was clearly the left hand of a deity!

Don't look directly at God.

Lumian trembled in fear, his mind sinking into silence, unable to make any effective response, as if destined to walk toward the end of decay.

Everything about him was decaying.

Suddenly, his right palm became scorching hot, bringing an obvious stinging sensation.

Lumian abruptly had an impulse to extend his right hand and touch that left palm, to let the black "pinhole" in his palm touch the other.

This allowed him to barely regain some self-awareness.

However, it was too late.

The shooting stones and soil hit his body, creating ripples and the sound of breaking glass.

Behind Lumian, a hidden mirror revealed itself.

This current Lumian wasn't his true form, but rather a projection manifested through the mirror world!

Of course, Lumian was also nearby. After teleporting to the cemetery, he had concealed himself and thrown out a mirror.

But the impact of directly looking at a "deity" still affected him, severely wounding him, leaving him unable to move or take any measures to dodge.

As the ground's stones and soil quickly weathered, that cyan, terrifying, strange hand pressed against Lumian's projection.

The projection instantly shattered, each illusory fragment rotting and fading.

A series of cracking sounds came from Lumian, who was hiding behind a nearby tree—the sound of all his Mirror Substitutions breaking.

Even with the repeated substitutions of Mirror Substitutions, the black spots and deep decay on Lumian's body persisted.

Just a second or two later, his gaze lost focus, and his living presence disappeared.

Thud!

He fell in a highly decayed state, his Traveler's Bag raising dust from the weathered soil.

He died on the spot.

At this moment, the figure before the gravestone fully appeared.

It was a middle-aged man wearing a black suit without a hat. His face was somewhat long, with rotting spots showing bone on both sides, and his skin was pale, as if it hadn't seen sunlight for a long time.

His left hand hung naturally, its cyan-green swollen state completely different from the rest of his body.

Before Mocoxidos could check the situation, surging, quiet, indifferent gray-white appeared from behind the gravestone, rapidly spreading over.

Wherever the gray-white passed, whether floating dust or weathered ground, everything instantly became solid and heavy, losing all other colors.

Mocoxidos didn't panic, extending his left palm with its yellowish-green capillaries and cyan patterns toward this gray-white expanse.

Though there was no physical contact yet, the gray-white slowed down, becoming increasingly sluggish, even developing cracks within itself.

At this moment, a mirror flew out from the fallen Traveler's Bag.

From that mirror, Lumian, wearing a black robe with the hood down, appeared, walking back to reality with a smile on his lips.

His highland lake-like eyes had already captured Mocoxidos's figure.

Almost simultaneously, two black flames containing destruction and madness leaped from Lumian's pupils.

"Ah!"

Mocoxidos immediately screamed in agony as bursts of black flames erupted from his rotting flesh, both igniting his soul and burning his decaying body composed of various pathogens.

He hurriedly withdrew his left hand and tore open his abdomen, as if trying to pull out the source of the black flames, but this was a Demoness curse—the true source was with Lumian.

Lumian had disappeared, perhaps teleporting to somewhere distant, or perhaps hiding in the mirror world.

As Mocoxidos's left hand collided with the Fire of Destruction, the corresponding black flames began to weaken, flickering as if about to die out.

But the black flames didn't extinguish completely, stubbornly continuing to burn Mocoxidos's flesh and soul, though their intensity began to rapidly decay.

While Mocoxidos dealt with one threat, he couldn't handle the other—the previously suppressed gray-white became surging again, crossing the barriers and spreading to his side.

His clothes quickly took on the gray-white color, turning to stone.

Mocoxidos's body suddenly emitted a putrid aura, with cyan-green yellowish pus oozing from the rotting areas where bone was visible.

This pus instantly covered Mocoxidos's body, causing him to decompose into countless pathogens and disappear on the spot.

Some pathogens were still entangled with black flames and quickly annihilated, but others that weren't originally affected managed to escape the burning of the Fire of Destruction,

At this time, the gray-white color symbolizing Petrification grew more intense, engulfing many pathogens and turning them to stone fragments that drifted to the ground.

Lumian's figure materialized at the side of the gravestone, smiling as he raised his right palm.

Throughout the entire valley cemetery, from sky to earth, strange and quiet black flames ignited silently.

In this black flame hell, every tree and blade of grass withered, collapsing as the surviving pathogens around the gravestone lost their spirituality and life one by one.

After about seven seconds, Lumian heard a shrill, unwilling, ethereal, cursing scream in the air.

From this, he knew Mocoxidos had completely died.

And due to the burning of a Demoness's black flames, the other's spirit would completely dissipate in the next few dozen seconds, unable to channel his spirit or do anything else through those means.

Lumian flipped his hand, using the mirror to pull the area around the gravestone and Mocoxidos's spirit into the mirror world, thereby affecting the return of the boon powers.

He and Franca then crossed through the silver mirror surface, arriving in the corresponding area behind the mirror.

During this process, Lumian couldn't help but reflect on the recent battle.

Mocoxidos's performance had exceeded both his and Franca's expectations.

That cyan-green swollen left hand was like one belonging to a true deity—merely seeing it and being pressed by it from afar completely crushed Lumian's resistance, making even dodging impossible.

This definitely surpassed Sequence 3, reaching the power level of an Angel, perhaps even higher!

Most Sequence 3 Saints from other paths would have died irreversibly facing that attack just now. Fortunately, Lumian was a Demoness of Unaging, peculiarly difficult to kill and skilled in revival and rebirth.

Moreover, other Demoness of Unaging couldn't manage this so easily—they would likely have their normal Mirror Person die along with them, only able to revive through a pre-placed mirror in a hidden location, largely disconnected from themselves, containing a sleeping Mirror Person. This would take dozens of minutes or even hours, making further participation in this battle impossible.

Lumian had something special in his right palm, and thanks to the stimulated residual aura of the mutated Blood Emperor, he managed to break free from that left hand's influence slightly earlier to some extent, actively using Mirror Substitution.

Even so, all his Mirror Substitutions were destroyed, and his true form had to die once, though it didn't affect his self in the mirror.

If not for Franca's assistance and containment, Mocoxidos would have escaped before he could revive and return.

That left hand was indeed formidable, with a terrifying divine descent quality…

But aside from the left hand, Mocoxidos's other aspects seemed quite ordinary, even inferior to the Sequence 4 demigod of the same path I killed before…

Did the existence of that 'left hand' suppress the manifestation of Mocoxidos's other abilities, causing his thinking and reactions to decay to some extent?

Since Amon could modify the ability manifestations of various sequences in the Marauder pathway, surely the great existence using 'Malady God' as an alias can do the same. When bestowing power, He deliberately adjusted the sequence abilities, lowering the rank of His own or a left hand projection of some Angel near the divine throne to Sequence 3, but had to reduce other abilities as a result and make the bestowed pay an additional price?

As these thoughts flashed through Lumian's mind, he glanced at Franca and took out his Chariot card and The Fool's Sacred Emblem.

For the upcoming theft and manipulation, they would definitely need to beseech Mr. Fool's help!

Lumian himself didn't have such abilities. If he could control Mocoxidos and have enough time to use large-scale black magic, using this Saint as a medium to slowly establish contact with all Malady God believers, he might barely be able to take over the Sick Church by himself, but now, less than thirty seconds remained.

Chapter 1055: Double Gods

As Lumian watched the cemetery turn gray-white and the faintly visible fragmented spirit, he quickly lit three candles. With one hand holding The Fool's Sacred Emblem and the other holding the Chariot card, he began chanting in Hermes, "The Fool that doesn't belong to this era,

"The mysterious ruler above the gray fog,

"The King of Yellow and Black who wields good luck.

"I implore you,

"I beseech your assistance…"

Regarding the Sick Church matter, Lumian had already reported to Mr. Fool beforehand, explaining his thoughts, so there was no need for detailed descriptions now, nor for setting up an altar.

After completing the imitation ritual's supplication, Lumian and Franca's thoughts became slightly sluggish, like when they had to study after pulling an all-nighter before gaining their supernatural abilities.

Then, they seemed to see a hand wearing a black glove.

That hand covered the high sky, ethereal and illusory, not actually present.

Almost simultaneously, tiny fragments of spiritual light gathered, reassembling Mocoxidos's nearly-annihilated soul body.

Around this soul body, illusory points of light appeared one after another, while from its body extended an insubstantial cyan-green yellowish line stretching infinitely upward.

That line suddenly wavered, pulled back by an invisible force, connecting its ends to form a closed system, no longer maintaining contact with the outside world.

Only this way could Lumian and Franca's theft of the Sick Church's faith avoid being corrupted by the corresponding horrifying will.

For a great existence of this rank, bearing His name meant becoming Him, even if it was just one of His aliases.

Since no one had preached in the name of Malady God before, and this title "Malady God" had subsequently established a connection with Him over time, this was Him, just not as closely bound as His true honorific name.

After the illusory line connecting the anchor and object of faith entered a self-cycling state, those points of light surrounding Mocoxidos's remnant spirit quickly floated toward Lumian.

Scenes then appeared before Lumian's eyes, representing each bestowed who knew Mocoxidos's honorific name.

Ordinary believers weren't qualified to know and chant the name of the Malady God's envoy.

They would only pray silently according to those preachers' intimidation and sermons, adding prefixes to "Malady God" and His messengers based on their own understanding.

This was also an anchor, but wouldn't have such points of light.

Lumian quickly scanned through them all, discovering that among these bestowed, only one possessed godhood, and clearly didn't have "God's Left Hand" like Mocoxidos.

Only one Sequence 4? The rest are all mid to low Sequences… Is this all the power the Sick Church has in the Trier region? Must pay extra attention to the Sequence 4 demigod, he might see through my and Franca's disguise, realize it's blasphemers deceiving for faith… He must possess part of the

Malady God's honorific name, maybe even the complete name… Just as Lumian had this thought, he saw the Doomed One in the light point take out a pair of black gloves from somewhere, put them on, and gently nod across the void.

Is he controlled by Mr. Fool? Parasitized? Lumian's confidence doubled. He put on the Lie earring, altered his throat structure, and began issuing commands to each bestowed represented by the light points in Mocoxidos's voice: "The situation has changed. From now on, the great Malady God will gradually descend into reality in twin form. They are the 'God of Plague' and the 'God of Disease;' They are both male and female…"

This would point to Lumian and Franca, matching their essence.

As for Jeanna, there was no reasonable way to add her now. Once Lumian and Franca truly controlled the Sick Church in the Trier Region, changing the doctrine and adding new saints would be very easy, since Jeanna was still far from Sequence 3.

Lumian continued speaking rapidly, "Spread the new doctrine to believers quickly, urge them to master the honorific names of both deities and pray to Them.

"One is:

"The Lady more ancient than the times, Servant of Calamity, Child of Plague and Disease, Destroyer who walks in Shadows, Guide of all lost lambs in Trier, the great God of Plague."

Here Lumian borrowed his sister Aurore's uniqueness, then pieced together his own specialties—whether "Serving Calamity," "Child of Plague and Disease," or "Destroyer," all came from the top powers of the Hunter and Demoness pathways that had given him the boon and caused his palm to mutate somewhat. This matched the explanation of the Malady God's division and wouldn't make the bestowed suspicious.

This way, even without using his true name but referring to himself with the false God of Plague, he could be precisely indicated, because even without the last line, the previous five lines in standard format could lock onto him.

This was also adding anchors for Aurore.

"The other is:

"The Ancient One who transcends time, One who remains forever young, Envoy of Disease and Plague, Lady who spreads pain and despair, Protector of humanity's adventurous spirit, the great God of Disease."

This would point to Franca.

To ensure these descriptions combined with precise accuracy, Franca also imitated Mr. Fool, incorporating her uniqueness as a transmigrator into the description.

Currently in the Northern and Southern Continents, only she and half of Aurore were both transmigrators and Demonesses of Unaging.

Of course, Franca didn't dare bet that no other high-ranking beings in this world matched just the two descriptions of "Ancient One who transcends time" and "remains forever young." In the depths of space and various alternate dimensions, there might truly be beings who had lived from before the Primordial One's awakening until now and didn't age, since apparently only Earth's living creatures had encountered the apocalypse back then.

But such beings surely could no longer be called "human."

After initially anchoring herself with the first two descriptions, Franca took several titles she had considered before but weren't suitable for inclusion in the Church of The Fool's patron saint name, selected those that fit the Sick Church's doctrine, and added "Protector of humanity's adventurous spirit"—a title that had earned her mockery but actually wasn't bad upon careful consideration.

This could effectively distinguish her from Aurora while remaining neutral, potentially serving as an entry point for her and Lumian to gradually transform the Sick Church's doctrine later.

And with these five honorific names, "the great God of Disease" became optional.

However, it wasn't completely useless. As time passed, the title "God of Disease" would gradually become associated with Franca. If she could become an Angel in the future, "God of Disease" would truly become equivalent to her.

After explaining the most important matters, Lumian saw those illusory points of light return to their original size, still surrounding him.

They had been grafted onto him.

Of course, this wasn't permanent, and Lumian hadn't intended it to be.

If he hadn't needed these bestowed to preach and change the believers' understanding, he would have eliminated them all on the spot, leaving no survivors.

These were severely corrupted people who had received boon from the corresponding existence. To Lumian, who had usurped the position of Malady God, they were genuine time bombs with basically no possibility of salvation.

"I'll need to watch them constantly. Once most of the Malady God believers in the Trier region establish connections with me and Franca, I'll immediately eliminate these bestowed… The Grafting of faith anchors can last at least a month, that's enough…" Lumian slowly exhaled, sincerely thanking Mr. Fool for his help.

The power that had made his and Franca's heads feel insufficient then receded.

Next, Lumian looked at Mocoxidos's remaining spirit floating in mid-air, slightly surprised to find it hadn't completely dissipated.

According to Lumian's previous estimation, after entering the mirror world, Mocoxidos would completely pass away in just over thirty seconds, unable even to channel spirits, but now it seemed he could still hold on for about twenty seconds.

And what they had just done couldn't have taken only ten seconds—just speaking the honorific names took longer than that!

Did Mr. Fool's gaze make time slow down?

No, not slow down, my actions and words didn't become slower…

Did time slow down only for Mocoxidos's Spirit Body? Or did Mr. Fool grant Mocoxidos's Spirit Body more time?

An application of high-ranking Marauder pathway abilities?

As these thoughts raced through Lumian's mind, he quickly employed a Magic Mirror Spirit Channeling Spell.

There should still be time to ask one question!

Lumian wasn't worried this would lead to him being noticed by the entity worshiped by the Sick Church, because Mocoxidos's connection with that being had been cut off, its ends joined to form a cycle.

Regarding Mocoxidos and Sick Church matters, Lumian actually had quite a few questions: From those prayer light points just now, the Sick Church had only ten to twenty bestowed in the Trier region, clearly not a large scale.

But among fewer than twenty bestowed, there was actually the Sequence 3 Mocoxidos and a Sequence 4 Doomed One.

Wasn't this ratio too extreme?

Back then, 007 as a Church deacon for a district in Trier was only Sequence 5, with two teams of Beyonders under him—nearly fifteen people.

Even though bestowed couldn't be directly compared to those who advanced through potions, the Sick Church's situation was puzzling.

Normally, such a team composition with a Sequence 4 demigod would already be the limit, and that only because the Trier region was very important.

So, Lumian wanted to ask what special contribution Mocoxidos had made to receive the Sequence 3 boon, which had also led to some of his subordinates receiving advancement.

Perhaps very important secrets were hidden here.

Soon, Lumian completed the Magic Mirror Spirit Channeling Spell taught by Franca.

In the makeup mirror he took out appeared Mocoxidos's increasingly fading spirit.

Lumian asked quickly, "What incident led to you receiving a boon to that left hand?"

Obvious fanaticism appeared on Mocoxidos's increasingly pale and transparent face.

In a deep, hoarse voice, he mused, "After the Vortex incident…"

Chapter 1056: Gathering

"After the Vortex incident…" Mocoxidos continued, "God specifically bestowed upon me, telling me to stay in Trier, not to do anything else, not to expose myself."

"It wasn't because you made some special contribution?" Lumian quickly followed up.

When he heard the word "Vortex," he thought he'd found a key point, but unexpectedly, Mocoxidos's answer was completely different from what he had imagined.

This was even more suspicious!

"Because I am devout," Mocoxidos said fanatically. "Compared to the Order of All Extinction, we are the overlooked faction, doing less. God specifically bestowing upon me could only be because of my devotion…"

Before he could finish speaking, his remnant soul had faded too much to sustain the spirit channeling.

Lumian and Franca could only watch helplessly as he completely dissipated.

Franca took out the Inevitable Gun and placed it where the cyan-green yellowish light points were gathering and floating upward.

Since this was an ordinary mirror world, the return of the boon was only partially affected. While it settled down again, most of it still broke free and disappeared.

While waiting for the Inevitable Gun's power to be replenished and show more mutations, Franca said to Lumian, "Getting a Sequence 3-equivalent boon without needing to make any contribution?

"I thought becoming a Demoness of Unaging was already easy enough, but I didn't expect there could be something even easier."

Smiling, Lumian replied, "Didn't you notice this when you were in the Savoie Mob? If they suddenly give you a gun, it's definitely to make you do something dangerous, to use you as cannon fodder."

"Right, there's no such thing as a free lunch—the more free it seems, the more expensive it actually is." Franca understood Lumian's meaning. "The entity worshiped by the Sick Church gave Mocoxidos and others more boons, instructing them to lie low in the Trier region, because in the near future they'll be made to do something quite crucial, something they must do even if it leads to all their deaths?"

Lumian nodded. "It's unfortunate that the Sick Church is a fringe sect. If we had captured a Sequence 3 Saint from the Order of All Extinction, we might already know what the issue is."

This could be seen from the names of the first few boon sequences of the Patient pathway—the followers of that great existence naturally tended toward infiltrating Trier's upper and middle classes, gradually corrupting the entire system.

Disease and plague were just two among that being's many authorities.

"Indeed." Franca sighed. "Whatever the case, removing one nail is still one nail removed. We don't need to worry about the Sick Church for now."

At this point, her Inevitable Gun showed some changes, expanding slightly overall and taking on a faint cyan-green tinge.

Franca retrieved the revolver with spider silk and learned the final "results" by querying her own spirituality.

The shots with either Certain Death or Sure Hit effects were restored to 13 times, and an additional new effect was added that could stun enemies, cause their thoughts to decay, and significantly affect their thinking and actions.

This didn't require actually hitting the target to take effect—as long as the target was locked onto and the shot was fired, they would experience similar conditions.

And if a bullet with this effect actually hit, unless the target had previously used a body double ability, their original body would inevitably decay and move toward death, though this wouldn't affect the mirror that the Demoness of Unaging had hidden away earlier with most mystical connections severed.

"It can't compare to the original left hand—it won't make targets truly feel like they're facing divine descent, completely unable to move or even think. Let's just say it can be useful in split-second moments, leaving enemies no time to react…" Franca casually explained.

She quickly named this effect "God's Gaze," which could only be triggered once.

Franca then sighed.

"It's a pity we were too rushed—if we had brought Anthony's Winter is Coming, his weapon could have been replenished too."

Franca and Lumian had originally thought Dalberro's superior would at most be a Sequence 4 Doomed One. Although they had made contingency plans for encountering a Sequence 3 Saint, that wasn't their main focus, so the execution was inevitably somewhat hasty. Many preparations they should have made weren't done, and they could only rely on the Demoness of Unaging's bizarre unkillable trait to forcefully confront and block the target.

"There will be other chances." Lumian smiled slightly.

He was referring to the Sequence 4 demigod currently under Mr. Fool's control.

Of course, this was assuming Mr. Fool didn't plan to use that puppet for something else.

Franca made an affirmative sound, then said, "The gathering time is set for 10 pm Saturday. You got the message, right?"

"I did." Lumian nodded.

…

Saturday night at 10pm, in the ancient and dilapidated palace of the Nation of the Evernight, Lumian's figure quickly materialized.

He was once again dressed as a warlock, wearing a silver-white half mask.

After waiting another five minutes, Hidden Blade Franca, still wearing her assassin outfit, walked to the huge stone chair and cleared her throat.

"Everyone, I have announcements to make."

Her voice wasn't loud, but it transmitted through the mirror items carried by many Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society members, allowing everyone to hear clearly.

"That's a nice trick, Hidden Blade," someone immediately praised.

Hidden Blade's past actions and previously established image meant people didn't respect and revere her like they did Hela and Gandalf, instead treating her more like a friend they could tease.

Franca's lips curled into a smile. "You're right. The first thing I want to announce is:

"Ladies and gentlemen, I've become a demigod!"

As the many Research Society members stared in shock, unable to believe it and about to express their emotions with profanity, the flaxen-colored long hair extending from under Franca's hood floated up, becoming slightly darker and thicker.

This made the vast majority of Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society members inexplicably alarmed, instinctively lowering their heads as if threads of electricity were coursing through their bodies.

This wasn't displaying an incomplete Mythical Creature form—Franca wouldn't dare do that. She was merely showing a hint of her godhood's aura to make her words more convincing.

The entire ancient palace suddenly fell silent.

After a moment, when everyone came to their senses, they instinctively wanted to express various opinions and use different tone words, but instantly remembered Hidden Blade's previous display and closed their mouths again.

That was the aura of godhood.

Hidden Blade was now half-god, half-human.

Franca's deliberate showing off was mainly to strengthen the persuasiveness of her subsequent words. Seeing their reaction, she smoothly continued, "We're still brothers and sisters, don't be so formal.

"After all these years, don't you know what kind of person I am?

"If you don't curse a bit, don't marvel at how Hidden Blade suddenly became so powerful, don't express your inner shock and admiration, wouldn't my showing off be for nothing?"

Right, right, right, Hidden Blade's air is back! The Research Society members immediately relaxed considerably and, like those people in the telegram group, began expressing their shock and admiration.

Franca immediately harvested joy from this.

She had to admit that a small part of her deliberate showing off was for the showing off itself.

When everyone's discussion had somewhat subsided, Franca said in a low voice, "The second thing I want to announce is that I've received intelligence that those evil cults across the Northern and Southern Continents and the Five Seas will do something big in the next year or two, which might bring apocalyptic scenes.

"If you have chances to advance your Sequence, try your best to do so. If not, that's fine too—just enjoy life and when the time comes, hide in places like the cathedrals in major cities.

"As long as the true gods can hold on, things won't be too hopeless. If They can't hold on, everyone should first preserve their useful selves and decide what to do based on the specific situation. Personally, I think catastrophe will inevitably come, but it's possible to survive them."

The Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society members looked at each other, both bewildered and confused.

If Hidden Blade hadn't become a demigod Demoness, they would have thought she was joking, playing a prank.

How could the apocalypse come so suddenly?

Were there no omens or prophecies?

Everyone turned their gazes toward Hela and Gandalf—compared to the newly-made demigod Hidden Blade, these two had more authority and were more trustworthy.

Hela walked to Franca's side and looked around. "Members in Trier, try to leave within half a year. This city will be one of the key nodes where problems erupt.

"Even if you really like life in Trier, you can return after things are over."

This indirectly endorsed Franca's previous words.

The Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society members immediately erupted, asking all at once, "What exactly is going to happen?"

"Which places will be safer?"

"Will remote villages be affected?"

"…"

Franca pressed down with one hand, gesturing for everyone to calm down.

"The specifics aren't clear.

"Just treat it as a prophecy made by a prophet—there might not be only one interpretation."

As everyone discussed, she and Hela walked down the steps.

Gandalf came to where they had just been standing, showing no surprise or shock about the apocalyptic matter.

This president of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society looked at everyone and said, "Let me add one more point:

"Try to hide in big cities, but not the capitals of various countries."

The successive confirmations made the gathering's atmosphere suddenly heavy, though not to the point of freezing or despair.

The Academy group's gathering spot had the same atmosphere.

Professor, wearing a butterfly bow tie, looked at Lumian and asked, "Muggle, you're quite familiar with Hidden Blade. Have you heard more details?"

"No," Lumian added, "I only know that the Eternal Blazing Sun Church has placed nearly half its forces in Trier."

After Periodic Table, Isotope, Associate Professor and others discussed for a while, Lumian thoughtfully said, "I have something to remind you about. After becoming a Warlock, I was infused with quite a bit of knowledge by the Hidden Sage, some of which was about summoning special creatures from the spirit world.

"This had significant problems. It took me a long time to resolve them, so I have some experience.

"Have you been infused with knowledge in this area? Something about weak balls of telepathic connections."

Chapter 1057: The Key Point

Lumian deliberately spoke very clearly to ensure no one would overlook it.

Moreover, he pointed out that this matter was dangerous, and he had experience in how to resolve it.

This way, if any of the present Warlocks had been infused with mystical knowledge about summoning White Papers and hadn't yet undergone complete personality alteration, they would surely be alarmed, become fearful, and then either openly or secretly seek him out to discuss whether the problem truly existed and what solutions there might be.

Professor, who represented the Academy group's Warlocks, thought for a moment and shook his head. "I've never been infused with knowledge in this area."

After the other Warlocks gave similar answers, a man who had spoken little in the previous discussion suddenly said, "The weak ball that can telepathically connect with me, right?

"I received related knowledge."

Lumian's heart leaped with joy as he looked at this Academy group member who was also dressed as a warlock, remembering his codename: Condensed Matter.

"Yes," Lumian nodded, glancing around before asking Condensed Matter, "May I ask you some questions in private? If you're unsure about me, we can have Madame Hela present."

Worried that he might already have hidden problems due to that mystical knowledge, Condensed Matter didn't refuse Lumian's invitation. "Okay."

Soon, in a corner of the ancient palace, with Hela witnessing, Lumian questioned Condensed Matter, "Have you used those descriptions to summon the corresponding spirit world creature?"

"I have," Condensed Matter couldn't help asking, "Is there something wrong with that?"

Lumian's brows furrowed slightly beneath his silver-white half mask, and instead of answering, he asked, "Can you sense anything special about me?"

He wanted to see if the other person could detect Omebella's bloodline.

"Does being particularly charming count?" Condensed Matter answered honestly.

"It does," Lumian smiled behind his silver-white half mask, "When did you first summon that spirit world creature?"

"Around June or July two years ago," Condensed Matter recalled.

June or July two years ago… By then, Madame Pualis and the padre already had the child… Lumian thought for a moment and asked,

"After being infused with this knowledge by the Hidden Sage, you didn't try it immediately?"

Condensed Matter shook his head. "When I received the related knowledge, I was traveling—traveling with family; so I couldn't try it. Later, I was infused with more knowledge and also traded for a grimoire, so I forgot about it until remembering much later."

"I see…" Lumian's tone suddenly carried a hint of sighing.

This wasn't for Condensed Matter, but for Aurore.

He then said, "Can you describe what the contracted creature you summoned looks like?"

Condensed Matter described his contracted creature's appearance in detail, which was almost identical to the White Paper Lumian had summoned.

"When you first summoned it, did it have slightly milky and pale yellow clear liquid inside its body? It might have disappeared later," Lumian asked as if confirming something.

Condensed Matter thought carefully before saying, "No."

"No…" Lumian sighed as if he had expected this.

He then said to Condensed Matter, "The one you summoned probably doesn't have any problems."

"That's good, that's good!" Condensed Matter turned his head with undisguised joy, glancing at Hela as if hoping this lady would endorse this assessment.

At this point, Lumian added, "But I can't be completely certain yet. There are still a few questions I need you to answer. This might involve your privacy, but you don't need to be too detailed—I just need to grasp the general situation."

After hesitating for a few seconds, influenced by multiple factors including his desire for a definitive answer, the other party's extraordinary charm, and Madame Hela's presence as witness, Condensed Matter finally nodded and said, "Ask away."

Lumian sincerely said, "Thank you."

He then posed his question. "Which deity do you worship? If it's not one of the orthodox gods, you don't need to answer."

Finding the question simpler and less awkward than imagined, Condensed Matter quickly answered, "Eternal Blazing Sun."

Eternal Blazing Sun… Is this the common point? On the surface, they're all casual believers of the Eternal Blazing Sun… But surely among the Warlocks in Trier like Professor and the others, there must be some who praise the sun daily to conceal their identity… Are they deliberately concealing it, not mentioning it? Also, Condensed Matter is male, Aurore is female, so gender clearly isn't why the Hidden Sage targeted her… Lumian was initially pleased but quickly sank into deep thought.

"How old were you when you transmigrated, and how old was the body after transmigration?" Lumian further asked.

"My last memory was lamenting that I was almost thirty and had achieved nothing," Condensed Matter for a moment before saying. "When I occupied this body, he was just twenty-five."

Different from Aurore's body state before and after transmigration… Lumian quickly considered which aspects he should look for common points.

While thinking, he casually asked, "Are the current body's parents still alive?"

"They passed away long ago," Condensed State answered concisely.

"Do you have children?" Lumian continued digging in this direction.

"Yes," Condensed Matter clearly didn't want to say more.

There really aren't any common points with Aurore… At this moment, Lumian recalled something Condensed Matter had said earlier and thought for two seconds before asking, "You said when you were infused with the corresponding knowledge, you were traveling with family—which family members?"

Condensed Matter still only spoke generally, "My wife, and my elder sister's family."

"Elder sister…" Lumian's pupils suddenly dilated, as if he'd been struck by lightning.

Condensed Matter nodded slightly. "Yes, the sister who raised this body of mine."

Lumian stared at Condensed Matter, falling completely silent.

He felt he had found that key point.

The key point beyond the three words "Warlock," "transmigrator," and "gray fog aura": Sister and brother!

Elder sister and younger brother!

Lumian began silently talking to himself.

He kept repeating two names.

Omebella, Zedus…

Omebella, Zedus…

Suddenly, Lumian remembered something else from the past.

When Madam Magician mentioned the empty baby cradle, she used the word "lost."

This meant that in the eyes of this Angel who had a relatively deep understanding of the Cordu Village incident, according to her spiritual intuition, the cradle was empty because the child was "lost," which wasn't exactly equivalent to death.

And the subsequent intelligence from Madame Pualis and everyone's deductions indicated that baby Omebella had died early on, killed by her father, her direct relative the padre.

At the time, neither Lumian nor Madam Magician thought there was anything wrong with this—death was indeed a form of loss.

But now, Lumian had a new conjecture:

Could it be that Madame Pualis didn't give birth to one child for the padre, but to twins, a sister and brother?

Then, one was killed, one mysteriously disappeared, achieving some purpose through the ritual of the Inevitability believers?

The killed baby Omebella has now returned to Madame Pualis's embrace but can't come to reality yet—what about the mysteriously lost child?

Thinking of this, Lumian suddenly smiled.

He felt this might have something to do with himself.

He began to suspect that his selection of the Abscessed Hand profile from such a large collection of spirit world creature materials, making it the first creature for a Contractee to sign with, wasn't coincidental but stemmed from some mystical connection.

Similarly, when he first arrived in Trier, his choice of the market district and the Auberge du Coq Doré wasn't just because that's what the deity worshiped by the Aurora Order arranged, but perhaps also because of the Poison Spur Mob supported by the Nightstalkers there.

If this was true, then later meeting Father Montserrat and obtaining Omebella's remaining umbilical cord was destined, an inevitable fate!

This also clarified why Madame Pualis had to find him specifically in the dream city!

Ignoring Condensed Matter's surprised and confused gaze, Lumian half-closed his eyes and silently said to himself, Hand Bro, I'll bring Omebella's remains to see you as soon as possible!

…

Trier, fourth level of the catacombs.

Lumian held a lit white candle, accompanied by Jenna who also had yellowish light spreading from her hands, as they walked step by step toward the ancient tomb containing the Samaritan Women's Spring.

Before going to Morora to help Jenna advance to Demoness of Despair, he wanted Jenna to meet with Krismona's shadow to see what changes might occur or what hints they might receive.

"Can't Franca come here anymore?" Jenna asked curiously.

Lumian nodded. "After obtaining godhood, one should visit Trier's underground—especially places like this—as little as possible. Unless absolutely necessary, it's best not to come."

"Aren't you a demigod too?" Jenna asked, both amused and concerned.

Lumian chuckled. "It's different.

"For me, entering the catacombs feels as comfortable as returning home.

"If I weren't worried about making others nervous, I wouldn't even need to light a candle."

He raised his right hand, exposing his palm with its pale skin, dark red marks, and black pinhole to the cold air and candlelit dimness.

Then he blew out the candle in his hand, suddenly enveloped by darkness with only Jenna's candlelight revealing his silhouette.

"Don't take risks!" Jenna was startled.

Lumian obligingly relit the candle with a smile.

"I was right, wasn't I?"

"You scared me to death!" Jenna glared at Lumian.

As they talked, they finally reached the ancient tomb chamber.

Lumian looked at the tomb door for two seconds and sighed.

"Too bad we didn't encounter Krismona's shadow on the way.

"I feel she's more friendly outside the Samaritan Women's Spring, while inside she tends to be more…"

Lumian paused, then said in a low voice, "Evil."

Chapter 1058: Meeting

1058 Meeting

In front of the grayish-white fog surrounding the area of the Samaritan Women's Spring.

Lumian and Jenna both lowered their heads, pressed their hands to their chests, and recited Mr. Fool's honorific name.

When they raised their heads, they had already arrived on the other side of the gray fog.

The two followed the slope downward, and soon heard faint, ethereal splashing sounds.

A few steps later, they saw the figure of a beautiful and holy woman in white robes.

The child of the Primordial Demoness—Krismona.

Jenna examined the target's pale, transparent face for a few seconds and stepped forward on her own, to see if her special nature would elicit any additional reaction.

Suddenly, a gleam of light appeared in Krismona's empty, blank eyes.

It was sharp, cold, and extraordinarily vicious!

Almost simultaneously, around Lumian and Jenna, from the sloped ground, the gray mist above, and the air in all directions, emerged one thick, slippery black poisonous snake after another, each with distinct black and white eyeballs rolling on their heads.

In less time than it takes to blink, this place had become a forest of black snakes, obscuring the earth and piercing the sky.

With these changes, the temperature dropped dramatically, and the area around the Samaritan Women's Spring instantly became a world ruled by ice and snow.

Icicles were interspersed among the dense black snakes, covering them with a layer of crystalline white.

Jenna had already frozen stiff, with ice particles and icicles forming on her flaxen hair, face, and all over her clothes.

Around Lumian, intense white flames with a blue tinge burned, but these flames were also freezing rapidly, with crystalline ice layers spreading quickly.

For Lumian, blocking for this brief moment was enough. He raised his right palm, activating the residual aura of the Blood Emperor in his palm.

The splashing sound instantly intensified, and Jenna, who was already nearly frozen and petrified, immediately lost consciousness.

Lumian felt the familiar aura of madness and the deathly cold emanating from the Underworld Daoist.

The water of the Samaritan Women's Spring receded into its deep source, pulling Krismona's shadow along with it, making it bob up and down.

Both the Black Snake Forest that filled this space and the frost world that was cold enough to be almost unbearable even for a Sequence 3 Saint dissipated.

Everything returned to normal.

Jenna gradually regained her thoughts, and as the spring water began flowing again, she heard Krismona's fearful, hateful voice filled with intense cursing: "Do not advance to Demoness of Unaging!

"Do not advance to Demoness of Unaging!"

The high-tier Demoness's figure lingering near the spring water repeated these words, Her voice shrill and terrifying.

Seeing that the world of ice and snow was about to descend again, and thick hair like black poisonous snakes was about to pierce from the ground toward the sky, Lumian pulled Jenna back two steps.

Krismona's figure no longer showed any abnormality, Her eyes once again becoming empty and blank.

"How do you feel?" Lumian had also heard what Krismona was shouting, but he was more interested in knowing if the pure female Demoness had any special sensations.

Jenna paused for two seconds, then recalled, "It's different from what I sensed during an advancement. The current Lady Krismona is more like the Primordial Demoness…

"This isn't about similarities in temperament or feeling, but rather that the malice toward pure female demonesses is almost identical—the kind of malice that would personally strangle the corresponding possibility. Well, there are still subtle differences—Lady Krismona's malice stems more from fear.

"She seems terrified of seeing a Sequence 3 pure female demoness…"

"Is the Krismona here a remnant of obsession and malice, so it manifests more directly and obviously?" Lumian nodded with understanding. "Looking at it this way, there shouldn't be much problem with pure female demonesses advancing to Sequence 4. The hidden danger and risk lie in reconciling with the Mirror Person when becoming Sequence 3."

Lumian gazed at Krismona's figure beside the Samaritan Women's Spring and said thoughtfully, "What was Her relationship with Her Mirror Person—enslavement, infatuation, or reconciliation?"

"You suspect something went wrong with Lady Krismona before She perished?" Jenna asked, turning her head.

After pondering for two seconds, Lumian said, "The one lingering around the Samaritan Women's Spring might be fine, but who knows what the one near the Krismona Night Pillar in Fourth Epoch Trier is."

Jenna nodded solemnly.

"Let's go, we can't communicate normally anymore." Lumian turned around.

He then smiled and said, "This isn't necessarily a bad thing. Normal communication might involve instigation and deception, while curse-like shouts based on obsession are more authentic. Through this, we can confirm there are no hidden dangers in advancing to Demoness of Despair."

As he spoke, Lumian turned back to look at Krismona's body.

Through the thin gray fog, he saw the holy and beautiful high-tier Demoness continuing to wander beside the spring eye flowing with pale water, day after day, year after year, Her face pale and transparent, Her gaze empty and blank.

Suddenly, Krismona looked toward them.

This time, inexplicable fear appeared in Her blank eyes.

The gleam of fear vanished instantly, completely swallowed by endless emptiness.

"What did She see?" Lumian muttered as he walked back.

But with just himself there, Krismona showed no reaction. When Jenna joined, the previous events merely repeated, with no additional information gained.

At this point, Lumian and Jenna finally abandoned their desire to continue probing and left the Samaritan Women's Spring.

…

The next morning, in the New City of Silver, at the bottom of the spire, at the end of the mottled stairs, in a room filled with morning light, black hair strands, various plants, and different mushrooms.

Under Mr. Sun's watch, Lumian walked to the brownish soil pile and placed both hands on the withered, huge grayish-brown tree trunk.

At this moment, Lumian felt as if the human-like patterns on the tree trunk were staring at him intently.

Two huge crimson flowers served as the eyes.

"Best not to exceed two minutes, or random effects will occur," the tall Mr. Sun reminded Lumian.

Lumian made a sound of acknowledgment, then exerted force with both hands to forcibly pull up Omebella's remains, known as the Gift of the Land.

The entire New City of Silver suddenly shook, as if experiencing a mild earthquake.

The morning light in the room grew brighter, and the surrounding black hair strands, plants, and mushrooms began to grow and multiply at a visible rate.

Lumian quickly placed the Gift of the Land into a specially allocated space within the Traveler's Bag, then teleported to somewhere in the mirror world.

Madam Magician—wearing the previous silver-starred black robe—along with Jenna and Franca, were already waiting for him in the dark, pitch-black mirror realm.

According to the agreement with the Church of Knowledge, Lumian and Jenna couldn't go to the City of Exiles through normal means, but the

Church would create a gap in Morora's seal somehow, allowing them to enter using the power of the mirror world and high-tier beings of the Door pathway.

"I borrowed it," Lumian said extremely concisely about the result.

Madam Magician nodded, making all the silver stars on her wizard robe light up.

A dreamlike starry sky appeared, and endless stars quickly formed a passage.

Surrounded by brilliant light, Lumian and Jenna instantly arrived in the City of Exiles Morora, at the square outside the cathedral.

Using the authority of 0-01, Lumian gathered enough serious criminals to meet the ritual requirements—a sea of people. These exiles were already nearby, as if waiting for the reaper to arrive.

Without wasting time, Lumian quickly said to Jenna, "Finally, let me tell you a fact."

Jenna had already begun quietly spreading the plague using the Demoness of Despair's Beyonder characteristic and the Sequence 5 level charm given by Franca. "What?"

Lumian said seriously, "Even if you really become a Sequence 4 demigod, you won't be able to do much when the apocalypse comes. Whether you can protect your loved ones and friends is another matter entirely."

Jenna opened her mouth but couldn't refute.

She actually understood this clearly but was unwilling to accept it.

"Are you in despair?" Lumian smiled. "If you're in despair, then go ahead and advance. Advance with this despair, with the intense desire to change this reality."

Jenna understood Lumian's intention, sighed softly, and said with a laugh, "Dammit, good thing I'm relatively strong, otherwise I'd definitely lose control during the ritual."

"I wouldn't say this to someone who isn't strong," Lumian didn't delay any further and, relying on the mystical connection between himself and 0-01, directly entered the underground mausoleum.

Jenna turned around and looked at the criminals bound by commands in the square.

Her gaze was like water, both deep and calm, as if looking at the villains from her past life and their various endings, both good and bad.

After a while, Jenna walked through the crowd, heading outside the square.

This was to ensure that the serious criminals at the edges also received fair treatment, experiencing the same plague.

When thousands of exiles showed symptoms, growing weaker amidst violent coughing, Jenna took out the ingredients and began preparing the potion.

As one wave after another of serious criminals fell to the ground, she drank the liquid in one gulp.

As soon as she began advancing, Madam Magician used the pre-given mental imprint to transfer her out through the beautiful dreamlike starry sky to an area in the mirror world shrouded in thin gray fog.

As long as the ritual was achieved and the time limit hadn't passed, advancement could occur anywhere—it didn't have to be in Morora!

Of course, this assumed the seal's gap still existed and Jenna's connection to the ritual hadn't been severed.

This thin gray fog was obtained by Franca through prayer to Mr. Fool, aimed at deceiving the Primordial Demoness and preventing Her observation.

During Jenna's advancement, Lumian also arrived at the mountain peak of corpses where 0-01 was planted, next to Hand Bro who patrolled back and forth like the steel puppets and undead soldiers, nearly perfect, like a work of art.

With time running short, Lumian directly pulled out the Gift of the Land from the Traveler's Bag and planted this withered, huge trunk in the wilderness.

The Abscessed Hand, who had been walking, suddenly stopped, His beautiful crystalline crimson eyes looking over.

His face, which was almost at the limit of beauty, instantly twisted, with emotions like pain, hatred, malice, pleasure, and mockery overflowing.

He opened his mouth and shouted fiercely in the Jotun, "Omebella!"

"I curse you!

"I curse you to die by the hand of your direct descendant!"

Chapter 1059: Zedus

Lumian had advanced too quickly and hadn't yet mastered many mystical languages. He had only learned part of Jotun so far, but he had a contractual connection with the Abscessed Hand, allowing him to directly understand the meaning through the thoughts transmitted by the other party.

At that moment, he was completely stunned by the Abscessed Hand's reaction and words.

He had originally imagined that after thousands of years, the reunion of brother and sister would be sad yet heartwarming, like when Hand Bro had just become a 0-01 soldier and called out the name "Omebella" with such depth.

Instead, there was not a trace of warmth, only bone-deep hatred.

As the Abscessed Hand's voice echoed, the area around Him lit up, as if crimson moonlight was falling from an unknown place onto this wilderness—evil, cold, and bloody.

Then, within the crimson moonlight, one after another illusory and complex Doors of Summoning split open, connecting to different places, with some indescribable horror growing behind them.

On the wilderness ground, countless plants sprouted, creeping toward the withered trunk that had evolved from Omebella's remains.

The Gift of the Land, stimulated by this, also reacted, with the soil below splitting apart, leaving nothing growing.

This power, rich with death and return, met the lush scene of new life.

Standing between Omebella's remains and the Abscessed Hand, Lumian was instantly affected, uncontrollably regressing into a mirror that cracked with a snap.

This influence continued to expand rapidly, not giving Lumian, who was trying to redraw his silhouette, a moment's peace.

At this moment, streams of invisible flames shot up from various parts of the wilderness, the sky above taking on the color of burning, as a terrifying will that could conquer everything suddenly descended.

The flesh in the middle of the Abscessed Hand's brow writhed, pulling at the skin.

The distortion of His face quickly returned to normal, and around Him, whether it was the crimson moonlight, the numerous Doors of Summoning, or the various newly grown plants, all instantly vanished.

The Sealed Artifact Gift of the Land also returned to silence, the desolation no longer spreading.

As the invisible flames extinguished, this blood-stained wilderness before the mountain of corpses was once again shrouded in darkness.

Lumian looked toward the peak of the corpse mountain and couldn't help muttering, "Boss, aren't you being a bit too hasty?"

He had wanted to observe for a while longer before using 0-01's power and authority to suppress the Abscessed Hand and the Gift of the Land, but unexpectedly, 0-01 had reacted to the stress.

This left him quite helpless.

However, there was nothing he could do about it—after all, 0-01 was the boss, and he was just the proxy.

And 0-01 was actually in a state of deep sleep, reacting purely on instinct, not something Lumian could "persuade" even if he wanted to.

Confirming Hand Bro's reaction and hearing those words is enough. Some of my previously unclear thoughts and speculations have either been overturned or connected…

Heh heh, Hand Bro, should I call you Zedus from now on?

Lumian muttered for a while, then put away the Gift of the Land which had been suppressed and become quiet, with no random effects likely to appear for some time, and teleported back to the square in front of the Church of Knowledge.

Here, wailing and groaning were everywhere, with many having already lost their lives.

Lumian swept his gaze around, quickly left Morora, and appeared back in the area behind the mirror, appearing beside Franca.

At this time, Jenna had just completed her advancement, her hair slightly darker and thicker, her eyes an even more beautiful blue.

"Where's Madam Magician?" Lumian took his gaze off Jenna and asked Franca.

Franca made a tongue-clicking sound and chuckled.

"After confirming there were no problems with Jenna's advancement, she went back to work on her manuscript.

"She said if you have any findings or speculations, either summon her messenger or report directly to Mr. Fool."

"This time I'll need a signed book." Lumian laughed, then said to Franca and Jenna, "Let's go to the New City of Silver first."

…

After returning the Gift of the Land to the room at the bottom of the spire, Lumian went to the Church of Fool headquarters and entered the confessional that Mr. Sun had specially prepared for him and the others.

He immediately created a ball of blazing white flame, letting the light fill every inch of space inside the confessional, then began telling Franca, Jenna, and Mr. Sun, who had come specially to listen, about his "brother-sister" speculation, the names Omebella and Zedus, the Abscessed Hand's recent reaction and His spoken words.

"You mean Omebella and Zedus are both children of the Great Mother,'the former being the elder sister who inherited the power of the Earth pathway, and the latter being the brother on the neighboring Moon pathway, and they were possibly twins?" Franca tried to sort out the logic.

At this point, Jenna's face showed a grave expression. "Zedus was killed by Omebella, for unknown reasons?"

"Perhaps with the help of Omebella's husband, the ancient god—Giant King Aurmir. They were worried about Zedus's resurrection, so they deliberately dismembered Him into multiple pieces and sealed them in different places. This is also why the Sanguine never heard of such an Angel of the Moon pathway.

"Yes, this event probably happened quite early, before that Sanguine ancestor partially regained consciousness in the Second Epoch and became an ancient god. I've been saying, it doesn't make sense that there was only a Sanguine ancestor in the Second Epoch. Since one of the Sequences in the Beyonder characteristics is called Vampire, there should have been Vampires as creatures in the early Second Epoch, or even the First Epoch, regardless of whether they had rationality or were completely equivalent to monsters—this doesn't affect the essential definition," Lumian spoke slowly, thinking as he talked.

Mr. Sun offered an explanation on behalf of the Sanguine, "The Sanguine don't consider such monsters as their kin."

"So it's Sanguine ancestor, not Vampire ancestor?" Lumian thought that if Mr. Moon were present, there might be some unpleasant incidents.

After one divine assembly and one small gathering, he had gained a preliminary understanding of Mr. Moon's personality and concerns.

Mr. Sun answered very fairly, "That's what they call it."

But you people of the New City of Silver think vampires and the Sanguine are essentially the same? Lumian, Franca, and Jenna, all three Demonesses, could hear what Mr. Sun left unsaid.

What a considerate person… Lumian sighed inwardly before continuing, "Before His death, Zedus cursed His sister Omebella, cursing Her to die by the hand of Her direct descendant, and this curse came true."

At this point, Lumian suddenly paused, and after two seconds, said in a low voice, "Zedus, as an Angel of the Moon pathway, was killed by Omebella of the Earth pathway, who might have also stolen His identity, while Omebella ultimately died at the hands of the Sanguine ancestor, an ancient god of the Moon pathway who might no longer have had true god status at the time, and then had Her identity stolen.

"This is an inevitability…"

Lumian felt profound emotion.

When he had stolen the power of Inevitability, he had no clear understanding, but the more he learned, the more he felt that inevitability was an issue that even Angels, true gods, and great beings couldn't avoid.

After discussing for a while longer, Lumian stood up and said, "I need to report to Mr. Fool; he might provide new revelations."

He began praying right there in the confessional.

Suddenly, thin grayish-white fog appeared before his eyes, and his ears seemed to hear terrifying chaotic sounds.

In just the blink of an eye, Lumian saw himself sitting at the bronze long table, in the position representing the Chariot, while at the head of the long table, in that huge stone chair, Mr. Fool's figure, wearing a top hat and coat, was faintly visible, hidden in the mist.

"Good morning, Mr. Fool." Lumian immediately stood up and bowed.

He had intended to report to Mr. Fool through prayer but was directly pulled up to the gray fog instead.

The Fool nodded slightly, his voice carrying more gentleness than the coldness of the last gathering.

"You have found the answer?"

Lumian sat down. "I have become a Demoness of Unaging, borrowed the Gift of the Land, and went to see the Abscessed Hand in the depths of Morora…"

After repeating Mr. Fool's previous revelation, he shared all the information he had collected and all his speculations, finally asking, "Mr. Fool, did Madame Pualis deliberately hide the infant Zedus in Cordu to use the ritual that the Inevitability believers would ultimately perform?

"Was the infant Zedus's mysterious disappearance due to that ritual?"

The Fool, shrouded in thin gray fog, nodded. "Yes."

Lumian suddenly smiled, laughing for several seconds.

Then, he sighed and asked seriously, "Mr. Fool, the infant Zedus's soul fragments are within my body, right?"

Since the one worshiped by the Aurora Order could use that ritual and Mr. Fool's seal to let Amon return within the barrier undetected and steal Termiboros's power and identity, the Great Mother could do something similar!

The infant Zedus must have also been in the destruction brought by the ritual at that time, like other villagers of Cordu, shattered into pieces, with only fragments of soul remaining, which were then sealed inside my body!

That's how he mysteriously disappeared.

The Fool placed his right hand on the edge of the long table and rapped it gently. "Yes."

Lumian gave a self-deprecating smile. "No wonder I encountered matters related to the Great Mother as soon as I reached Trier, met the priest who had nurtured Omebella as soon as I went to sea, and the first contract creature I selected was the Abscessed Hand…"

He sighed softly for a few moments, then looked back at the table before The Fool.

"Mr. Fool, can you help me remove the seal and separate the infant Zedus's soul fragment?"

The Fool said in an even voice, "Like Aurore's soul fragments, he has already merged with you."

Lumian was stunned for a moment, shocked yet feeling this was natural.

The special quality possessed by Aurore's soul fragment was obviously also possessed by the infant Zedus's soul fragment.

The two of them were different from other villagers—if one had merged, the other would certainly not be an exception.

"Will he affect Aurore's resurrection?" Lumian asked the question he cared about most.

The Fool shook his head slightly. "He has a different gender from Aurore; he will only replace you in the future.

"He merged with you when you obtained Omebella's bloodline."

"Zedus's soul fragment, Omebella's bloodline, heh heh, I alone am equivalent to divine twins." Lumian exhaled and sincerely asked, "Mr. Fool, is there a way to resolve this issue?"

The Fool looked at Lumian for several seconds, his voice suddenly becoming somewhat drifting, as if narrating fate, "This is a hidden danger, a risk, and also a variable, an opportunity."

Chapter 1060: The First Priest

It's both a hidden danger and a risk, as well as a variable and an opportunity? I understand what the hidden danger and risk are, but how is the variable and opportunity manifested? Lumian did not ask further; his spiritual intuition told him this was a revelation, a scene that Mr. Fool had seen in the river of fate, something that could not be explained in detail.

After a moment's thought, he decided, "What should I do next?"

This was about what to do after clarifying the situation with the infant Omebella in Madame Pualis's arms and understanding what Zedus represented.

The Fool looked at Lumian, his voice still somewhat drifting. "Calamity needs to stay away from the mother."

Stay away from the mother? Does this mean avoiding meetings with Madame Pualis and the infant Omebella? I can't even touch the Great Mother unless the barrier fails, and if the barrier does fail, touching the Great Mother would be meaningless… Lumian pondered the true meaning of Mr. Fool's latest revelation.

Suddenly, he thought of more possibilities.

The mother might not only refer to the Great Mother, but also Earth Mother of the Feynapotter Kingdom!

Does this mean I have to stay away from Earth Mother and Her proxies, and even avoid touching any sacred objects that could point to Her? After all, as the Sanguine ancestor and the former ancient god of the Moon pathway, using the identity of Omebella, with the true god status of the Earth pathway, She has existed for thousands of years. Even now, after removing the "theft" and abandoning the corresponding identity, there would inevitably be a very strong mystical connection with Omebella… Lumian nodded thoughtfully. "Yes, Mr. Fool."

Regarding matters related to Omebella, he already had a very deep understanding, long knowing that the Sanguine ancestor Lilith, with the help of the Ancient Sun God, had killed Omebella, "stolen" Her identity, and then assumed Omebella's name to become Earth Mother, playing a crucial role in the war a few years ago.

When Mr. Fool indicated he could leave, Lumian made his final request, "Can you help me remove the seal on my chest?"

Since the soul fragments of Aurore and the infant Zedus had already initially merged with himself, they would not perish whether the seal was protected or not. This would allow the villagers of Cordu to find peace!

They had no hope of resurrection and would only exist in the form of Lumian's puppet soldiers, which he was unwilling to do.

"Okay." The Fool agreed to Lumian's request.

Before Lumian could speak, this great existence leaned back in his chair, speaking in a calm voice, "The seal will be automatically removed in three minutes."

"Praise you, Mr. Fool!" Lumian stood up, pressing his hand to his chest in a salute.

Returning to the real world, Lumian, accompanied by Franca and Jenna, bid farewell to Mr. Sun and returned to the luxurious villa in Trier.

After briefly mentioning Mr. Fool's new revelation and his own understanding, he chose to teleport away alone.

His destination: Cordu Village, in the Dariège region of Riston Province.

Soon, Lumian's figure took shape in that familiar yet strange "hometown".

Glancing at the blood-red pillar that wasn't particularly high yet had a mountainous feel, and then looking at his family house some distance away, Lumian walked into the buildings surrounding the pillar.

He surveyed the house ruins, some completely collapsed, others burned, trying to discern their original appearance.

Walking step by step through the broken walls and ruins, a pure and brilliant starlight emerged from Lumian's chest.

As the starlight dispersed, fragments of radiance flew out from his body, falling around him and materializing into blurry figures.

These were Naferia, Nazélie, and other elderly women, various Pierres and Guillaumes. Some gathered together, basking in the noon sun, chatting about village matters; others carried farming tools, returning home; some playing with children, chasing and frolicking, or herding a group of white geese…

The ruins suddenly became lively.

Lumian looked around, but no one paid him any attention.

Those figures were slowly fading.

Lumian smiled, nimbly climbing onto the top of a nearby building's ruins, lying down, letting his black hair pile beside him.

It was noon, bright and sunny, almost dazzling. White clouds drifted slowly across the blue sky.

The scent of spring grass and building stones, accompanied by sounds of conversation, chasing, and laughter, quickly penetrated Lumian's mind, making him feel warm in the sunlight, drowsy.

He closed his eyes, letting his thoughts drift.

The surroundings gradually became quiet, returning to silence.

…

In the previously rented apartment in Trier.

Lugano, with his handsome features and robust build, was reading the latest medical journal while skewering a piece of sausage to eat.

For nearly a month, he had been living quite leisurely, with his salary paid in advance and nothing much to do.

As a genuine Doctor, he could easily earn money even without running a clinic.

The only issue was that he could still only access the mystical circle he already knew, unable to obtain higher-sequence potion formulas or corresponding items.

He had recently discovered that the activities of that mystical circle had completely stopped, with the official forces in Trier unprecedented in their strength.

Ah, I both want the boss to come back quickly, yet fear his return… Lugano couldn't help but sigh.

At that moment, he saw the bedroom door open, and his long-awaited employer walked out, as if he had never left.

"Good evening, boss!" Lugano jumped up, reflexively greeting him.

Lumian, who had been secretly observing him for some time, nodded slightly.

"I have something for you to do."

Lugano, dazzled by his employer's appearance, instinctively asked, "What is it?"

The boss seems even more beautiful, his charm greatly increased. What happened… he muttered inwardly.

Lumian took out a list. "Visit each person on this list, tell them you are a Blessed and priest of the Malady God, and then maintain contact with them, responsible for preaching and conducting mass.

"Uh…" Lugano was stunned.

Is this a cult?

Lumian chuckled in response.

"Don't worry, the authorities have given the go ahead.

"If any of the Malady God followers have any illnesses, just treat them. The consultation fee depends on the family's situation—charge normal rates for the wealthy, and nothing for those without means."

The people on this list were all Malady God followers in Trier. Their previous Blessed had recently informed Lumian through prayer that the Beyonders from the two major Churches were watching closely, and they didn't dare to make contact.

Lumian had responded in time, granting them death.

Then, through the Church of The Fool, he communicated that a Saint from the Church of The Fool had taken over these followers to the Eternal Blazing Sun Church and the God of Steam and Machinery Church, and would be responsible for reforming them, so they no longer needed to keep watch.

This matter of openly poaching followers, after private communication and promises, had finally been tacitly approved.

Since Lumian couldn't personally preach, and couldn't do everything himself, he thought of Lugano.

He was a genuine Doctor who could treat illnesses while preaching, truly embodying the authority of the Malady God!

Lugano suddenly understood. "The Sick Church is going legitimate?

"Are you now a follower of the Malady God?"

Lumian glanced at Lugano and said with a smile, "I am the Malady God."

"…" Lugano was stunned again.

"And also the patron saint of the Church of The Fool," Lumian continued.

This was something he couldn't hide from Lugano.

My boss has become a patron saint? Become the Malady God? What am I now? Lugano was bewildered and fearful for two seconds. "What should I tell these followers?"

Do I have scriptures to read, a mass to conduct?

Lumian took out a stack of documents.

"The Malady God has now split into the God of Plague and the God of Disease—one is me, the other is Franca. When preaching to these followers, do not mention our real names or the Church of The Fool for now. Follow what's written on these papers.

"These doctrines are still quite simple, and those followers won't understand anything complex. We'll slowly modify and add to them once they truly believe in me and Franca."

"Yes, boss, no…" Lugano suddenly knelt on one knee, head lowered, "Yes, great Lumian Lee."

This is also an anchor—an anchor with potential risks… Lumian nodded satisfactorily.

"Several on the list were originally bestowed of the Malady God. I've already punished them, and they're now dead. Go to the addresses on the list to collect their bodies and take away their ill-gotten gains.

"In the name of me and Franca, return these funds to the followers, especially those living in difficult circumstances. The remainder can be used as expenses for your preaching.

"Afterwards, don't mention donations to the followers, but if they actively donate and the money won't affect their family's life, don't refuse.

"After completing this task, I'll help you find the potion formula and corresponding Beyonder ingredients for the next sequence."

Still kneeling on one knee, Lugano's heart leaped, and he blurted out, "Praise you, great Lumian Lee!"

Lumian gestured for him to rise while saying, "Franca and I are now Sequence 3 Saints. Our honorific names are in these documents. God of Plague is me, God of Disease is her. If you have anything, contact us by reciting the honorific name."

"I shall obey your will," Lugano quickly responded.

As the boss was about to leave, he instinctively asked, "How is Ludwig? You must be very busy and have no time to take care of him. If he gets too hungry, he might eat people."

Is this the Mother pathway? Lumian thought to himself, then said with a smile, "Don't worry about him. He can now cook for himself using the ingredients we prepared."

Moreover, Ludwig was about to have a big feast.

Chapter 1061: Feast

In an apartment with insufficient lighting, the classic clock's hands ticked away.

Lumian, Franca, Jenna, and Anthony were gathered around a corpse, watching Ludwig tie a white napkin around his neck.

"He's quite well-mannered…" Lumian quipped.

The corpse in the room belonged to the remaining Sequence 4 demigod from the Sick Church in the Trier region, named Sathipo Eir. Previously controlled by Mr. Fool, he had recently completed the task of making his followers pray to the God of Plague and God of Disease. Then, Lumian received a revelation from Mr. Fool, instructing them to come to this apartment at the current time to handle the subsequent matters.

As soon as Lumian and the others knocked on the door, they saw Sathipo Eir collapse and die in front of everyone.

Fortunately, Lumian had already pulled this apartment and all its contents into the mirror world, and had Anthony quickly place the Winter is Coming pistol on the corpse.

Thinking about Sathipo Eir, who had been busily helping himself and Franca connect with followers and spread new doctrines and was essentially Mr. Fool's avatar, Lumian felt something was off.

Isn't it strange that the god he believed in would go to such lengths, meticulously and diligently running around to recruit followers, preach doctrines, and spread his honorific name?

Would a great existence be so hands-on?

Recalling the stories about Amon that Madam Magician had told him and the abilities of high-ranking Beyonders from the Marauder and Seer pathways, Lumian thought this seemed somewhat normal: A thousand avatars, all of which are oneself!

"Can I eat now?" Ludwig raised his head, looking eagerly at Lumian.

"Should we first channel the spirit?" Lumian turned his head and asked Franca.

Although Mr. Fool had certainly grasped all of Sathipo's information through Parasitism, Lumian felt that they should still channel the spirit. They couldn't always trouble Mr. Fool with everything.

Franca looked at Sathipo's floating spirit and pondered, "The decay is slower than expected. Mr. Fool must have done some processing. Let's not rush to channel his spirit. Do we know what to ask?"

Jenna chimed in, "We might as well search the apartment first and see what clues we can find. Then we can channel his spirit, which will help us know exactly what to ask."

"Okay," Lumian said, seeing many green and yellow light points had settled on Anthony's Winter is Coming revolver. He smiled at Ludwig, "Go ahead."

He had previously asked Ludwig if returning to Sequence 4, or Sea Monster, would cause him to transform into a grotesquely sized sea monster, which would make it impossible for him to stay in Trier unless he constantly hid in the mirror world.

Ludwig had looked at his hands and body for a few seconds and unexpectedly became sad, crying, "Not yet."

He was clearly disappointed.

He told Lumian that his appearance shouldn't change much, but he would need to be taken to the ocean daily to have a proper feast—something easy for Lumian, who had teleportation abilities.

With the godfather's approval, Ludwig cheered and lunged at the corpse.

Franca and Jenna instinctively turned their backs.

Amid sounds of tearing, chewing, cracking, and crunching, the two Demonesses began examining every corner of the apartment.

Mechanical music boxes, classic clocks, fabric sofas, red desks, brass gas meters, and exquisite small statues passed before Franca and Jenna's eyes.

Suddenly, Franca walked to the desk and opened a drawer.

Inside were various denominations of gold coins, including several 20 Louis d'or coins.

Franca's hand moved through the coins, picking up a coin with a dark gold, less lustrous color.

It was a gold coin, but not of any current legal tender.

Franca brought the dark gold coin close to her eyes, noticing a male head profile on the front, with long hair, wearing a crown, with rigid lips and sharp facial lines.

On either side of the male head were layered doors and a raven with one eye large and one small, surrounded by changing lines, a vertical sword, and an extended hand.

Hmm… Franca had a vague guess.

She turned the coin over, finding a number "7" on the back.

Around the "7" were images of gathered soldiers, sharp weapons, and flowing blood.

"Is this a Tudor coin?" Franca spoke aloud.

Her spiritual intuition told her so.

The Tudor dynasty of the Fourth Epoch had issued its own currency, but perhaps due to the Blood Emperor's mental state or influence from the original pathway, its value and conversion were perplexing—unlike the normal 1, 5, 10, 20, but with seemingly random values like 2, 7, and 13.

These coins had long since disappeared over a thousand or two thousand years, either remelted into new coins or gold items, or buried in ancient tombs. Currently, one could only see them in museums or some collectors' vaults.

"How could there be a Tudor coin?" Jenna looked over.

"I'm also puzzled. You can't even use this thing. Were they planning to sell it as an antique?" Franca pondered for a few seconds. "We'll ask during the spirit channeling."

While the two Demonesses carefully searched the apartment, Lumian suddenly said to Anthony, "You can pick up the revolver now."

He intuitively believed that Winter is Coming had reached its limit in bearing the bestowed power, and continuing might damage it.

Of course, no matter how damaged, it would still be a weapon with Beyonder power, though the negative effects might change and become unbearable.

Anthony, who had already quietly cast Placate on himself, squatted down and picked up the artistic Winter is Coming revolver from the bloody, mutilated corpse.

"The Certain Death and Sure Hit charges have been enhanced to nine times…

"Even if this revolver shatters, it can be reassembled…

"No other changes…"

Lumian used Magic Mirror Divination to inform Anthony about the current state of Winter is Coming.

Anthony, who had received a Traveler's Bag as a bonus from the dream mission, breathed a sigh of relief and placed the revolver inside.

At that moment, they heard a loud, prolonged "burp".

It came from Ludwig.

Ludwig had only eaten half the corpse and seemed already full.

He sat there, with what felt like a mass of air in his stomach, occasionally distending his belly and causing crackling sounds in his chest.

Beneath his facial skin, countless insects writhed, creating multiple bumps.

At this moment, Lumian and the others distinctly felt that a terrifying beast was about to tear through Ludwig's skin.

Ludwig's body alternately stretched tall, causing skin cracks, and then swelled, nearly bursting his clothing.

After ten to twenty seconds, his state finally stabilized, still looking like the same seven or eight-year-old boy.

The Church of Knowledge's seal is indeed of high quality… Lumian thought to himself.

Ludwig suddenly looked at him, his eyes filled with blood vessels and desire. "I want to go to the sea, I want to eat!"

Lumian nodded, grabbed Ludwig's shoulder, and disappeared from the room.

Somewhere in the Fog Sea.

Lumian's figure took shape in mid-air, throwing Ludwig toward the blue sea surface.

Ludwig didn't mind at all, already opening his mouth while still in the air.

That mouth kept opening wider, until eventually, his entire head and body seemed to become part of the mouth, with sharp teeth reflecting the brilliant sunlight.

With a splash, Ludwig fell into the sea.

Then, the seawater descended, and an inexplicable whirlpool appeared.

The whirlpool gradually expanded, and fish nearby involuntarily rushed over, swimming toward its bottom.

These marine creatures numbered in the thousands, streaming endlessly.

Splash! The massive whirlpool's appearance triggered changes in this sea area, with water currents becoming turbulent and massive waves rising in the distance.

A large steam ship was passing near the sea's edge but appeared tiny beneath the towering waves.

The passengers were frightened and scattered, with the captain ordering the crew to change course immediately.

Splash! A huge wave approached.

But before it could truly arrive, it suddenly froze in mid-air.

It quickly disintegrated, each fragment like a snowflake or ice crystal, beautiful under the sunlight.

In Sathipo's apartment, Franca performed the Magic Mirror Spirit Channeling Spell.

Facing Sathipo's mirror image, she directly showed the Tudor coin. "Where did this come from?"

Since Sathipo had been Parasitized by Mr. Fool and his faith Grafted, she didn't need to worry about any corruption from divining this Sick Church demigod.

Sathipo's pale face responded mechanically, "A gift from God."

A gift from God… Wait, where did your god get a Tudor coin? This is within the barrier… Franca pressed, "Through what method was it given?"

Sathipo responded at a steady pace, "First, the great Malady God gave a revelation, telling us to wait before a mirror. Then, the coin fell out from inside the mirror."

Look at this, does this look like a gift from the Malady God? If you said it was from the Primordial Demoness, I might believe it… From what we know, the Malady God doesn't have authority over the mirror world… Franca asked again, "Besides you, who else has one?"

"Mocoxidos," Sathipo answered.

We hadn't found it back then… Well, Mocoxidos had used his rotting power to decompose himself into pathogens; everything on his body should have rotted away and disintegrated… Franca asked several more questions but couldn't get useful answers.

Sathipo didn't know what the Malady God wanted to do, only that he was instructed to wait patiently in Trier.

At this moment, Lumian returned with a soaking wet Ludwig.

"Ate about ten to twenty tons of fish and shrimp. Can't afford to feed him, can't afford to feed him," Lumian said, clicking his tongue.

Having just become a Sea Monster, his appetite had already instantly changed by orders of magnitude!

Franca echoed the sentiment, then told Lumian the spirit channeling results, adding, "Since it wasn't directly given by the Malady God, we can divine where this Tudor coin came from."

Lumian nodded, taking the coin.

Being cautious about matters involving great existences, he specially sought Mr. Fool's observation and help before performing Magic Mirror Divination to inquire his own spiritual intuition, "Who was the previous owner of this coin…

"Who was the previous owner of this coin…"

Soon, the mirror's surface rippled with water, becoming profound.

In the next second, Lumian saw a pair of eyes, eyes so dark they were without light.

Wh— Lumian blurted out, calling a name in a deep voice, "Zaratulstra!"

Chapter 1062: Mission

After Lumian called out that name, the image reflected on the mirror's surface shattered, like a stone thrown into a lake.

"Zaratulstra? No, in the real world, we should call Him Zaratul." Franca also recognized who those eyes belonged to.

Jenna added, "The Celestial Worthy's subordinates are cooperating with the Malady God's bestowed?

"What's the purpose of this Tudor coin?"

Lumian first shook his head, then said, "Mocoxidos only received the Sequence 3 boon after the Vortex event. I suspect that whoever possessed that palm—the cooperation between the Celestial Worthy's subordinates and the Malady God's blessed ones—is an aftershock of the Vortex event, or rather, a result of one of its branches.

"Such a massive event, involving so many great existences, definitely can't be ended just because the one the Aurora Order believes in says so.

"This might be why He changed His stance, hoping for Mr. Fool to awaken soon."

Franca and the others nodded—Ludwig had been taken care of by Jenna while Lumian was performing Magic Mirror Divination, changing out of his wet clothes, and was now once again a clean and fresh little boy.

"The Tudor coin's purpose involves the schemes of great existences, so we probably can't divine its purpose," Lumian pondered aloud. "But we can try to divine who owned the coin before its previous owner, which might yield some insights."

He immediately put his words into action, again seeking Mr. Fool's observation to eliminate certain dangers and interference.

"Who was the owner before the previous owner of this coin…

"Who was the owner before the previous owner of this coin…

"…"

Lumian held the dark gold coin, chanting the question several times.

The mirror placed before him suddenly became bright, as if there was a light source bursting from within.

No, that was formless, colorless flames burning—the entire mirror had caught fire.

Thin gray fog descended, preventing the flames from spreading, but the mirror and desk quickly turned to ashes.

Seeing this, Franca's first two thoughts were: There really is great danger. Good thing we were careful enough, and good thing Mr. Fool is so powerful!

That was scary—fortunately, I had already collected all the coins from the drawer…

After the formless, colorless flames extinguished, Lumian, as the 0-01 proxy, laughed with a slightly deep voice.

"I know where this Tudor coin came from:

"Fourth Epoch Trier!"

Everyone present, except Ludwig, had been to Fourth Epoch Trier, and this revelation sparked certain associations in their minds.

"The goal of cooperation between the Malady God's bestowed and the Celestial Worthy's subordinates points to Fourth Epoch Trier?" Franca said thoughtfully. "Will this Tudor coin serve as a medium for some purpose then?"

Lumian nodded and placed the Tudor coin into the Traveler's Bag. "What we need to do next is search for clues about Zaratul's whereabouts and uncover more of the Celestial Worthy's subordinates and members of the Order of All Extinction."

Then, he said to Anthony, "We don't know how long we'll have to wait for Madam Justice, so we can first get the Manipulator's potion formula and try collecting and preparing the ingredients ourselves. If we run into difficulties, we can ask for their help then."

Manipulator was the name of the Sequence 4 potion in the Spectator pathway, and it was Anthony's next Sequence.

"I have no objections," Anthony agreed, feeling they couldn't pin all their hopes on Madam Justice finding that ancient dragon.

Lumian then turned to Jenna. "Julien will be back in two days. Have you figured out what to do?"

Jenna was silent for a few seconds before saying, "I'll use money and Instigation to help create a good position for him in Port LeSeur, Suhit, or Nouvell—one of these big cities—with a three-year term.

"And then…"

Jenna paused before continuing, "If Julien won't listen to my persuasion and insists on staying, I'll get Anthony to help me 'convince' him with some degree of hypnosis."

"Wh—" Franca blurted out in surprise.

Wasn't this the approach Jenna had been quite opposed to and unwilling to use?

She didn't want to use Beyonder powers to influence Julien or interfere with his personal choices!

Jenna gave a self-mocking smile.

"If this were a choice that would affect Julien's entire life, I definitely wouldn't do this, but for just three years, I can accept it."

The smile gradually disappeared from her face as she muttered to herself, "Life is about constantly moving forward while giving up certain principles…

"At this point, some obsessions with purity can be discarded. Demonesses are meant to bear pain and torment. Whether I become harsh or cold-hearted doesn't matter—what matters is whether Julien can escape his dangerous situation."

At this point, Jenna mocked herself again, "Let's push the guilt and blame onto divinity, just consider it the price I pay for obtaining godhood."

"No, a certain someone will bear all of this sin," Lumian responded in a joking tone.

Then he nodded. "This is the best solution. It's like moving house—if you have plenty of time, many days ahead, then naturally you can carefully pack and organize, abandon nothing, break nothing. But if you only have a few minutes before the room explodes and you can't prevent it, you can only take what's most important and essential, leaving everything else to be destroyed no matter how reluctant you are."

As they listened, Franca, Jenna, and Anthony suddenly realized that Lumian was actually talking about the conflict between humanity and godhood, about what Beyonders should do as they advance sequence by sequence.

Lumian was speaking from experience, thinking of his previous conversation with Mr. Fool.

For the sake of more important things, this was the only choice.

Was it worth it?

It's worth it.

"Indeed." Franca sighed, then turned to Jenna and said, "Actually, have you considered teaching your brother mystical knowledge and collecting corresponding potions for him, letting him become a Beyonder? This way, he could understand why he must leave Trier."

Jenna slowly shook her head.

"No, I know him well. He's a very stubborn person. Once he understands the real reason, if I don't leave, he won't either, and I…"

At this point, Jenna's gaze swept across Lumian and Franca.

Then, after some thought, she said, "The hypnosis will still be necessary, but that doesn't conflict with teaching Julien mystical knowledge and guiding him to become a Beyonder.

"Yes, even just a low sequence would improve his ability to protect himself, but we absolutely cannot tell him about the approaching apocalypse or that major changes will happen in Trier within a year or two. That would make him anxious, and when he's anxious, he tends to go to extremes and take wrong paths."

"Then we need to choose a good pathway for him, at least not obviously problematic ones like Devil, Prisoner, Earth, Moon, or Assassin." Franca helped think it through.

In the end, she still felt that, being Demonesses, flipping a coin and relying on spirituality to choose might yield better accuracy.

…

In the afternoon.

Since Jenna was taking the slightly taller Ludwig shopping for new clothes with Franca accompanying them, and Anthony had gone out to meet his informant and contact members of the Psychology Alchemists, Lumian was left alone in the large villa.

He collapsed onto the sofa, wondering whether he should contract a spirit world creature specialized in house cleaning.

After resting for a while, Lumian contemplated the tasks ahead and his responsibilities as the Major Arcana—The Chariot.

First is to consolidate and deepen the faith of the Sick Church's believers in me and Franca.

Second, I need to consider the Sequence 2 issue. I have the Demoness of Catastrophe potion formula, but as a Demoness of Unaging, I still don't know how difficult Demonesses of Catastrophe are to kill. Plus, they have the protection of the Primordial Demoness, and Mr. Fool is only in a preliminary awakened state… The best choice would be the Sequence 2 Weather Warlock from the Hunter pathway. During the previous divine assembly, Mr. Fool showed the Red Priest card—I could exchange the potion formula from him.

Besides the Sauron family and Einhorn family, where else might there be Weather Warlock's Beyonder characteristics? Some Grade 0 Sealed Artifact in a Church?

If there weren't any other choices, I'd rather not go to the Blue Avenger's treasury and face that Alista Tudor inside the mirror…

Heh heh, maybe I have no choice…

Among the Tarot Club's missions, I'm not responsible for the Great Mother matters right now, but with my current condition, it's very difficult to truly avoid it… For now, I just need to find Zaratul's whereabouts and members of the Order of All Extinction… The first task isn't easy—even Mr. Fool, as a supreme being of the Seer pathway, hasn't located Zaratul… At this point, Lumian suddenly sensed something and turned his gaze toward the edge of the living room.

His messenger, who looked like a charred corpse, Penitent Baynfel, appeared holding a letter.

Lumian stared for a few seconds at Bayenfeld, whose eye sockets burned with dark flames, before finally speaking, "Give me the letter."

He then took the letter and opened it, finding the contents were simple.

"I would like to visit you this evening, if possible?

"The Hermit."

What does Ma'am Hermit want? My previous speculation about the Hidden Sage state? Lumian nodded thoughtfully and said to Baynfel, "Please help me reply to the sender, tell her it's fine."

Baynfel nodded and disappeared at the edge of the living room.

In the evening, just as night fell, Lumian, Franca, Jenna, and the others who had been waiting heard the doorbell ring.

Ding dong, ding dong.

"Ma'am Hermit is so polite…" After getting used to Madam Magician's style of suddenly appearing and disappearing and rarely using doors, Lumian felt somewhat unaccustomed to this situation.

He personally went to open the door and found it was indeed Ma'am Hermit, wearing thick glasses and a purple-patterned robe.

After exchanging greetings, he led his peer, a king of the seas, into the living room and invited her to sit in an armchair.

Lumian sat down next to Franca and Jenna, and after just a few moments of small talk, heard Ma'am Hermit say directly, "I have something I'd like your help with."

"What is it?" Lumian asked thoughtfully.

The Hermit looked up toward the ceiling without immediately answering.

The next second, thin gray fog spread throughout the living room.

Wh— Lumian realized things weren't as simple as he had imagined.

After everyone sat up straight, The Hermit said in a low voice, "Mr. Fool is preparing to hunt down the Hidden Sage."

Chapter 1063: Helpers

Upon hearing Ma'am Hermit's words, Lumian's eyes suddenly lit up.

The corners of his mouth gradually turned upward, his smile becoming quite bright. "What can I do to help?"

…

Trier, cathedral district.

At the entrance of the Church of Steam and Machinery's patriarchal cathedral, with its towering iron-black chimneys, Lumian, wearing a lady's soft hat and face covered by a black veil, looked up for two seconds before walking through the open doors into the interior.

The first thing that caught his eye were thick grayish-white pipes crisscrossing everywhere—some attached to walls, some supported by pillars, some winding across the dome.

They were components of a giant steam engine, or rather, this cathedral was made up of a giant steam engine and several other large mechanical devices.

Currently, no heat radiated from these pipes, but come winter, when the giant steam engine would run continuously, the entire patriarchal cathedral would be enveloped in warmth, allowing worshippers to experience the pleasantness of early summer.

Lumian then saw many believers walking out, seemingly having just finished listening to a sermon, still immersed in the solemn atmosphere.

Lumian passed by them, walking toward the altar area.

Many believers, both men and women, suddenly found their gazes following this tall, beautiful figure, unconsciously turning their bodies sideways and looking back.

Lumian walked forward naturally, neither fast nor slow.

Arriving at the first row of seats before the altar, he gazed at the Triangular Sacred Emblem representing the God of Steam and Machinery, his eyes slowly moving between the symbols of steam, gears, and levers within the solid triangle.

At this moment, he wasn't thinking about how sacred or mechanically beautiful it was, but rather pondering a question, If the God of Steam and Machinery truly evolved into the God of Electric Power and Information Technology, what would this Sacred Emblem look like?

Lumian controlled his blasphemous thoughts and, under the watching eyes of the preaching bishop, sat in the first row near the center aisle, raised his hands, lowered his head, and began to pray.

When his spiritual intuition told him that the bishop had looked away, he reached into his Traveler's Bag.

He took out a mobile phone.

The one he had used in the dream city.

Of course, this wasn't real, but rather woven from his memories by Madam Dreamweaver—it had no functions and couldn't last long.

The woven phone's screen was lit, displaying a WeChat dialogue box between Lumian and Stiano.

The content of the conversation showed Stiano sending Lumian a mini-program called "Information Shredder."

Lumian held this false, dream-like phone and began praying again, "Great God of Steam and Machinery, You are the embodiment of essence, the protector of artisans, the glory of technology, please grant me once again the ability to shred information, effective for one week…"

After praying earnestly, Lumian drew the Triangular Sacred Emblem across his chest with his right hand.

At the same time, he felt a subtle change.

He lowered his head and looked again at the dream phone in his left hand, finding it seemed more tangible now.

Lumian instinctively swiped the screen with his finger, watching the dialogue box retreat to WeChat's main interface.

Then, he switched back to the home screen and found all the previously downloaded apps were there.

Was a real phone created based on the corresponding information? Is this the glory of technology, a Sequence 0 true god? Although Lumian was already a Sequence 3 Demoness of Unaging, he was still quite amazed.

He studied it for a while, confirming that the phone really worked, just without network connectivity.

Of course, the Information Shredder didn't need an internet connection.

…

In an apartment on Avenue du Boulevard.

Professor, Associate Professor, Periodic Table, Isotope, and two other Warlocks currently in Trier sat on the sofa, backed chair, and armchair, looking at each other with unease and anxiety.

After receiving Hidden Blade's request for an urgent meeting, they contacted each other and, after much consideration, finally decided to meet with her.

Of course, they chose the time and place.

"What urgent matter could Hidden Blade have?" Isotope whispered with concern.

If it weren't for Hidden Blade's consistently good reputation and character, they would definitely have refused such a hasty meeting request without specific details.

"Whatever her purpose, I believe she has good intentions," Professor, wearing a black butterfly mask, said looking around. "Besides, don't we also have something to discuss with her?"

Everyone nodded.

At this moment, they heard a knock at the door, using Morse code.

"Come in," all the members of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society present straightened their backs.

Not only did Hidden Blade enter, wearing her "assassin outfit" but with hood down, revealing her striking features, but also Hela, dressed as Black Widow.

"Madame Hela, you're here too?" Periodic Table and others stood up simultaneously.

Listen to that, just listen to that, you've never addressed me as "Madame"! Though Franca complained internally, she wasn't actually upset—too many "Madames" would give her goosebumps.

Hela nodded slightly and replied, "I'm here to vouch for Hidden Blade and handle the aftermath."

Professor and the others immediately turned their gaze toward Franca.

This time, they were all captivated by the Demoness of Unaging's features, momentarily unable to look away.

Franca walked to the fireplace where no charcoal was burning, and smiled at Professor and the others. "Please sit down.

"Actually, I'm here today to ask for your help. Look, I've even shown my face to help you trust me more."

Professor, who had sat back down, asked puzzledly, "Hidden Blade, you're already a demigod, what could we possibly help you with?"

Franca glanced at Hela, waited for her to nod, waited for the night outside to seem deeper, then said with a smile to Professor, Associate Professor, Isotope, and others,

"Would you like to completely solve the problem of the Hidden Sage force-feeding you knowledge?"

"Completely solve it?" Professor was quite a calm woman, but even she couldn't help blurting out.

This was something they had never thought possible—no, they had fantasized about it when they were weak and ignorant.

"How to completely solve it? Can we really help?" Periodic Table, who had already clearly told Franca she was a member of the Moses Ascetic Order, asked repeatedly.

Although she didn't hold much hope, even if it was just a straw floating on water, she wanted to grasp it.

The other Warlocks present shared the same mindset.

Franca didn't answer immediately, watching as they raised one question after another.

Finally, Professor, with pale lips and a somewhat pale complexion, smiled bitterly and said,

"Hidden Blade, actually, we were preparing to consult you about this matter.

"Previously, Muggle told us that the small ritual plaza at the entrance of the third level of the catacombs had divine power remnants that could block most external influences. That really helped us tremendously, even saved many of our lives. Otherwise, with the Hidden Sage's increasingly frequent and crazy knowledge infusions, some might barely hang on, but others would probably be gone already.

"What we wanted to ask you is, after leaving Trier, are there other places that can block the Hidden Sage's infusions, or are there ways to reduce the negative effects?"

Indeed, while others are reluctant to leave Trier mainly for emotional reasons, Professor and others have a practical need, a life-or-death need… I was planning to have Lumian ask Ma'am Hermit if she, as a senior on the Warlock pathway, had any good methods to "plug ears," then trade for that method and tell all the Warlocks in the Research Society… But now… Franca suddenly felt somewhat emotional.

Then, she smiled and said to Professor and the others, "The solution is to kill the Hidden Sage."

"You're… not joking, are you?" Associate Professor asked with difficulty.

Isotope followed up, "Hidden Blade, although you've become a demigod, the gap between you and the Hidden Sage might be even bigger than the gap between us and you. It's a fundamental difference."

"Even the entire Research Society together couldn't handle the Hidden Sage." Professor likewise had no confidence.

Franca smiled. "I'm not the main force.

"This matter has some big shots taking the lead, I'm just providing support."

"Big shots…" Professor pondered before asking, "How big?"

Franca pointed to the sky. "That big, even bigger than the Hidden Sage."

Isotope, Periodic Table, and others looked at Hidden Blade, suddenly remembering that Sequence 4 demigods could already be called Saints, and were definitely high-ranking even within orthodox churches.

Their gazes moved back and forth between Franca and Madame Hela several times, gradually understanding that they might be involved in an event worthy of recording in mysticism history.

A divine war!

"Is this what you sought us out for? We're not even demigods…" Professor said hesitantly.

"You won't need to fight the Hidden Sage. Like me, you'll be doing support work," Hidden Blade Franca thought for a moment before saying, "This matter does carry some risk, though not from combat—other demigods and I will handle intercepting all enemies and monsters. Your danger comes from something else, but it won't be much more dangerous than receiving another knowledge infusion from the Hidden Sage. I can't tell you the specifics now."

The six Warlocks present again communicated with their eyes, both somewhat tempted by this excellent opportunity to escape the Hidden Sage's threat, and very nervous and worried.

After a few seconds, Associate Professor asked, "Are you confident?"

"We wouldn't be planning this hunting operation if we weren't confident. Don't worry, even if we fail, the Hidden Sage won't discover your betrayal. Trust me, by failure I mean not successfully killing the Hidden Sage and letting Him escape, not that the Hidden Sage could win." Franca displayed complete confidence.

"Why ask for our help, why us?" Professor asked, as if making a final confirmation.

"Warlocks, transmigrators, gray fog aura," Franca answered simply. "Don't ask me what gray fog aura is right now."

Periodic Table's face, covered in chemical symbols, frowned. "Muggle also meets these conditions, why don't you ask her?"

Franca immediately smiled. "In this operation, she has a more important task."

Chapter 1064: Headquarters

1064 Headquarters

After Professor communicated with their eyes with her husband, Periodic Table and others for a while, she finally nodded and said, "Hidden Blade, we're willing to join."

Making this decision and speaking these words made her suddenly relax, no longer so tense.

At this current crossroads, whether for good or ill, whichever path they chose, they had to move forward. They couldn't stop or retreat anymore.

If they didn't seize this opportunity to completely eliminate the Hidden Sage, they would either be forced to stay in Trier to face the possible coming apocalypse, or lose control and go mad in another big city, becoming monsters and even endangering their families.

Franca breathed a sigh of relief, stating, "Would you like to sign a notarized document to ensure I fulfill all my promises?

"Don't worry, this notarized document was created by another Saint and is watched over by a true god—it has strong binding power over me as well."

Professor shook her head and said with a smile, "No need. We trust you and Madame Hela."

She paused, then hesitantly asked, "How long will this operation last? We have children at home who need care. Though we have servants, we're not entirely at ease."

Franca had already prepared for this.

"For those of you who are married couples with children, only one person needs to go. Those who are single parents or have other relatives needing special care can opt out of this operation. However, those who stay behind need to bring their children or other dependents to live together in one place, under Madame Hela's watch and protection."

This was to prevent secrets from leaking—the relevant personnel had to be placed under secrecy or sworn to secrecy.

Phew… Professor noticeably relaxed and turned to Associate Professor, saying, "I'll go."

"I'll go!" Associate Professor rejected her proposal without hesitation.

The two argued until Professor made the final decision.

"My Sequence is higher than yours and my condition is better. It'll be safer if I go!"

"Fine…" Associate Professor regretted for the first time spending too much time on unrelated research.

After some discussion, those participating in this operation would be Professor, Periodic Table, and another male Warlock called "Prototype."

"Let's go." Franca tossed out a mirror.

Under the influence of phantasms, the mirror grew larger and larger, fixing itself as a crystalline entrance.

Franca led the three Warlocks of different sequences across the solid mirror surface into the dark void of the mirror realm.

They plummeted through an illusory dark tunnel, with light and shadows rapidly shifting around them, as if other mirrors were projecting their reflected images into it.

Thus, after an unknown period—perhaps very short, perhaps very long—Professor and the others finally saw the exit.

Led by Hidden Blade Franca, they whooshed out of the mirror, stepping onto a wooden floor that creaked under their feet.

Periodic Table instinctively looked around and found they were aboard an ancient three-masted sailing ship. The gray-white mainsails billowed in the fierce wind, and only one or two sailors were on deck, making it feel quite eerie and quiet.

Outside the ship, dark blue waves rose and fell, with thin fog permeating the entire sea area.

When Professor, Periodic Table, and Prototype all looked at her, Franca raised her right hand, pointing in one direction, and said with a smile, "Our destination—west!"

Splash! A low wave crashed over.

…

An ice-blue wave crashed against Future's bow, producing numerous white sprays.

The Hermit, wearing a purple-patterned robe and thick glasses, stood at the bow, glanced at the changing weather above and the brewing snowstorm, then raised her right hand, signaling the ship to slow down and circle this small area of sea.

The sailors performed their duties, some adjusting the sail direction, others lowering one of the sails, until Future's condition finally satisfied the captain, Queen of Stars Cattleya's requirements.

Cattleya removed the thick glasses from her nose bridge, revealing a pair of deep purple, almost black eyes.

She immediately began speaking numbers with a mysterious aura, "1, 5, 4, 3, 7, 8…"

These numbers materialized one after another, becoming entangled in mid-air, numbering several hundred.

They were the entry password to the Moses Ascetic Order headquarters!

The Moses Ascetic Order headquarters was created by one of the Ten Pillars, the respected Chairman Torriope, using Mystical Re-enactment, and named "Avalon."

Avalon existed neither in reality nor in the spirit realm, but was completely hidden somewhere in the North Sea. Only those invited or qualified could enter, and they must also grasp a corresponding string of numbers numbering 365 digits.

For the Moses Ascetic Order, everything was numbers. Each number had spirituality, symbolism, and special meaning. When combined, these numbers naturally possessed mystical power.

As The Hermit Cattleya spoke the correct spiritual numbers, which materialized and became entangled in mid-air, the numbers suddenly vanished, as if sinking into somewhere.

Within seconds, it was as if an invisible curtain was drawn aside in front of Future, and a small boat sailed out unhurriedly, unmanned.

Starlight quickly lit up, extending from Future's bow to fall upon that small boat. The Hermit Cattleya stepped across the brilliant bridge formed by starlight and boarded the small boat in just a few steps.

As one of the Ten Pillars of the Moses Ascetic Order, she naturally had the qualifications to enter Avalon, and currently barely qualified as part of the core team.

The small boat carrying Cattleya turned around and headed back in the direction it came from.

The Queen of Stars's silhouette gradually faded until it disappeared from the view of Future's crew.

After passing through layers of transparent curtains, The Hermit Cattleya saw an island.

The island was shrouded in mist, lined with trees bearing golden apples, with music faintly drifting from the distance—peaceful, tranquil, and abundant.

The small boat stopped at the dock, and the Hermit walked toward the depths of the apple grove, where there stood a warlock's spire as if stepped out of a story.

Along the way, she encountered over a dozen humans dressed as warlocks.

These people stopped in succession, greeting the Ten Pillars with nods.

They were all members of the Moses Ascetic Order, raised in Avalon since childhood, receiving corresponding teachings, most trusted. Currently, they were all in their period of silence to increase focus, enhance spirituality, and deeply master various morals and precepts.

Only Warlocks who grew up this way could eventually compete for the positions of Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Moses Ascetic Order. "Outsiders" like the Queen of Stars, who joined later, could at most become one of the "Pillars," and would need to undergo years of testing and observation before having any hope of entering the core team.

The Hermit likewise responded to these silent Warlocks with nods, and soon passed through the trees laden with golden apples to reach the tall black spire.

Inside the spire, the wall protrusions, floor tiles, statues on both sides, and the elevator pulled by invisible servants were all composed of numbers. They looked normal at first glance, but upon closer inspection, one would find that even a small bump was formed by multiple intertwined numbers.

Hundreds of millions, billions of numbers were densely distributed throughout the spire, settling into different objects. Walking among them, The Hermit felt surrounded by countless numbers.

In her eyes, there were no walls, no bricks, no statues, no elevators—only numbers!

At this time, some Warlocks who had finished their period of silence were moving about in the spire. They either conversed quietly, went about their business, or huddled in corners, letting the strange eyes within the cracks on their faces observe their surroundings.

These latter ones were members approaching loss of control. After the Hidden Sage's knowledge infusions became increasingly crazy and frequent, even the Moses Ascetic Order, which had mastered safe "listening" methods, inevitably had Warlocks moving toward loss of control, far more than in previous years.

What was once safe was no longer safe.

If not for this problem, with the Moses Ascetic Order's accumulation plus the initial spiritual decline as the apocalypse approached, they certainly had more than ten demigods. But unfortunately, they still only had ten Pillars.

The Hermit's gaze withdrew from these Warlocks' faces as she entered the elevator. Pulled by invisible servants, she went all the way up to the spire's top floor.

Here, the Chairman and one of the two Vice Chairmen were always on duty. Among them, Chairman Torriope and Vice Chairman Retia Austin were Pillars that the Hermit couldn't quite get a read on.

Before arriving today, The Hermit Cattleya had already confirmed that Chairman Torriope—an Angel on the Mystery Pryer pathway—was on duty in Avalon.

As soon as the elevator steadied, Cattleya walked forward.

This was a hall larger than the spire's top floor itself. On the black walls, floor, and ceiling were eyes, each different, strangely shaped, and all cold eyes.

They all seemed to be watching the Queen of Stars.

At the end of the room, against the windowless wall, stood three dark gold statues—one wearing a mask, one resembling a lion, and one like an eagle.

Chairman Torriope seemed not to be present.

Just then, the masked dark gold statue's mouth moved, issuing a grand but hollow voice, "I have foreseen your betrayal!"

Hearing these words, Queen of Stars Cattleya wasn't surprised, only somewhat sighing.

Indeed, it was impossible to truly hide from a high-sequence Clairvoyant.

Once there was action, They would prophesy certain scenes or fragments. One could only try to delay when such perceptions appeared, or make the corresponding prophecies difficult to interpret!

A card suddenly appeared in Cattleya's hand. On its face was depicted a lonely old man with a cane, carrying a glass lamp.

The Hermit card!

Chapter 1065: Forced Entry

1065 Forced Entry

As soon as The Hermit card appeared in Cattleya's hand, it seemed to emit a glossy light.

At the same time, outside the warlock's tower, in the mist shrouding Avalon's sky, a star began to shine in broad daylight, growing brighter and brighter until it was dazzling to the eye.

In an instant, a figure emerged from that star.

It was Madam Magician, wearing a deep black warlock's robe embroidered with twinkling silver stars.

Using the mystical connection provided by The Hermit, she forcibly located and tore open a gate to Avalon.

After The Hermit Cattleya gained free access to Avalon, The Magician could actually have broken in using a Grade 0 Sealed Artifact from the Abraham family. After all, this place was merely created by Torriope using Mystical Re-enactment, not granted by the Hidden Sage—how could it stop a high-sequence Door pathway Beyonder who could enter with or without doors?

But the Moses Ascetic Order was an ancient organization with at least two Angels and multiple Grade 0 and Grade 1 Sealed Artifacts. At that time, even with the combined strength of the Tarot Club, the Church of The Fool, the New City of Silver, and New Moon City, they could at best fight them to a draw. Moreover, the enemy had the Hidden Sage's protection while The Fool was not yet awake, so the Major Arcana card holders didn't act rashly but waited patiently.

Today, the opportunity had come.

Mr. Fool and the other deities were responsible for dealing with the Hidden Sage—the most difficult part was how to find and lock onto the target without letting Him escape. Meanwhile, the Tarot Club and friendly forces were tasked with attacking the Moses Ascetic Order headquarters to eliminate all the Beyonders who had been deeply influenced or even corrupted by the Hidden Sage.

Of course, the Tarot Club and the Church of The Fool hadn't deployed all their High-Sequence Beyonders—they needed to guard against enemy forces and evil god cults taking advantage of Mr. Fool's personal hunt to launch surprise attacks on places like the New City of Silver. For Angels like Suah of the Rose School of Thought, winning wasn't important; what mattered was whether they could cause damage, which would shake The Fool's anchors.

Miss Messenger and Mr. Pallez must remain in the Rorsted Archipelago…

Will and Mr. Azik won't participate in this kind of thing…

Only I can take action, but fortunately, allies will provide help…

In a flash, numerous thoughts crossed The Magician's mind, finally converging into one: But I still have manuscripts to submit…

Her sigh didn't affect her actions as she stepped to The Hermit's side in one motion.

The fact that only she had appeared so far didn't mean she was the only Angel arriving—she was just faster, the first to reach here.

In Madam Magician's eyes, starlight suddenly gathered, seeming to condense into a book.

Immediately after, a giant sword composed of orange-red twilight light materialized out of thin air, piercing through the void to strike the masked dark gold statue.

The Twilight Sword then shattered, transforming into countless orange-red shards of light that tore apart everything around them, cutting all objects to pieces, causing them to decay until they collapsed.

The three dark gold statues were the first to be affected. In the storm of twilight light, they quickly broke into tiny fragments, each piece dim and rusty, as if washed by the passage of endless time or having reached its twilight years.

In the hall, the walls, floor, and ceiling covered in strange cold eyes dissolved in the orange-red storm, sliding down inch by inch before shattering.

This void also collapsed.

But Madam Magician had already switched positions, flashing multiple images of herself, surrounding herself and Ma'am Hermit with layer after layer of protection.

There were cages bearing a sense of holiness and glory, and darkness curved into spheres. By the time they shattered, the orange-red Hurricane of Light had completely subsided.

As the hall atop the warlock's tower collapsed in ruins, another scene entered The Hermit Cattleya's eyes.

This was a long, deep tunnel leading to an unknown destination. The tunnel was wide, seemingly composed of connected rooms. In the current room, more than a dozen High-Sequence Warlocks were busy with their own tasks.

This space seemed to be a reflection of the warlock's tower, another side of Avalon, a secret area The Hermit had no way to enter.

It had been forcibly opened by The Magician using the Hurricane of Light created by the Twilight Sword and the positioning ability of the Grade 0 Sealed Artifact.

Madam Magician didn't delay, dropping a mirror before disappearing from the spot with Ma'am Hermit, flashing toward the depths of this dark tunnel.

Before the thrown mirror could hit the ground, Lumian and Jenna, wearing black warlock robes but with their hoods down, emerged from it.

10:37

The warlocks in this room had just awakened from their previous concentration, all turning their gazes toward them.

Some were consuming dead infants, some were using infants to make potions, some were extracting infant fat to apply to objects—various such activities, all utilizing newborns to complete witchcraft, potions, or mystical items.

Wh— Lumian raised an eyebrow.

Although in folktales, warlocks were often associated with killing infants and children, and some strange, inhumanly cruel witchcraft preparations, Lumian knew this wasn't actually mainstream for the Warlock pathway.

Were there warlocks who did such things, were there similar witchcraft practices? Of course there were, but definitely not many.

Who would have thought that within the Moses Ascetic Order, which emphasized morals and precepts, emphasizing the maxim "do as you wish, but do no harm," there would be so many warlocks doing such things in Avalon's dark side.

Of course, what surprised Lumian wasn't the Moses Ascetic Order's fall from grace—that had been confirmed long ago. Otherwise, the Moses Ascetic Order wouldn't have transformed from a respected society with good relations with various Churches into an evil, shadowy secret organization.

What astonished him was how deeply ingrained the practice of utilizing infant corpses had become in the Moses Ascetic Order—this couldn't have developed in just a year or two.

And infants inevitably made him think of birth—of mothers.

Was the Hidden Sage's mutation really related to the Great Mother? Had this practice started when She brought evil and corruption to the Moses Ascetic Order? Utilizing birth and death? Lumian tilted his head, looking at Jenna, whose expression changed from shock to anger, and quickly said, "This place is yours."

He then flashed toward the depths of the wide, dark tunnel.

His mission wasn't here.

The reason Jenna participated in this operation was because Lumian believed the role of a Demoness of Despair could also be fulfilled through combat, through killing, through destruction.

A Demoness who brought despair!

Jenna wouldn't participate in the battles deep within Avalon, mainly focusing on clearing out the corrupt low and mid-sequence warlocks, bringing them despair. In this process, if she encountered a Saint, or even two or three Saints, with a Demoness of Despair's survival abilities, she might not win, but death was unlikely.

The warlocks in the current room had already realized enemies had invaded, some preparing to cast spells, some taking advantage of their materials, some trying to bring out their mystical items—none retreated.

What excellent materials!

Their eyes burned with madness and greed as they looked at Jenna.

The angry Jenna suddenly smiled, as if light had entered this somewhat dark world.

All those warlocks of different sequences were stunned for a moment, unable to carry out their intended actions in time.

Almost simultaneously, they felt the cold.

A layer of frost formed on the surface of their bodies, their hair, and the tables themselves where infant corpses and various materials were laid out.

They began to shiver, their joints stiffening, their movements becoming obviously labored and difficult.

Then, one crystalline ice spear after another shot out from in front of Jenna, accurately piercing each wrlock's body, pinning them to the walls or floor, their blood seeping out and freezing.

The warlocks tried to resist, but not only were their bodies frozen, they were also bound and affected by invisible spider silk, making it difficult to take effective action.

Jenna didn't kill them immediately, letting the mystical plague spread simultaneously with her Charm freely erode these fallen ones, making them clearly feel their lungs tightening, their heads burning, and their life slipping away.

They began to despair.

The Magician pursued in a wandering manner, leaving even The Hermit behind.

Finally, ignoring other enemies along the way, she reached a desolate, boundless plain.

Torriope, wearing a black hood and warlock's robe, seemed to be in the depths of the wilderness.

He gazed into the distance at Madam Magician and raised His right palm.

An illusory figure was quickly sketched in the endless wilderness.

This was a spell derived from Mystical Re-enactment.

As an Angel who advanced in the middle to late Fourth Epoch, although Torriope wasn't a founding member who established the Moses Ascetic Order, he had lived for over a thousand years, witnessed many mystical events, mastered much mystical knowledge, and through this created several powerful spells.

With the core ability of Mystical Re-enactment, Beyonders of the Mystery Pryer pathway could indeed potentially live longer and grow stronger.

However, because too many people knew about major events like the War of the Four Emperors and the Pale Disaster, Torriope couldn't draw power from them to create spells that would be considered terrifying even at the Angel level, and could only choose second-rate ones.

As soon as that illusory figure in the wilderness solidified, bloody chunks of flesh began falling continuously from its body.

Each piece of bloody flesh turned into a cold, emotionless eye, and they quickly looked toward Madam Magician, emanating an aura of chaos, madness, and evil.

This was a spell Torriope created from the strange death of one of the Moses Ascetic Order's founders: "Loss of Control Gaze"!

Chapter 1066: Deep in the Fog Sea

Loss of Control Gaze was a spell that could cause even Angels to show obvious signs of losing control, with better effects the more unstable the target's mental state.

However, just as Torriope cast this spell, The Magician vanished from the entrance to the wilderness.

She didn't appear anywhere else in this area, seemingly having left entirely.

Torriope's gaze focused as He watched the horrifying figure created by Loss of Control Gaze gradually dissipate.

He didn't take this chance to escape.

It wasn't that He didn't want to, but it was too late. Only when Queen of Stars Cattleya entered the warlock's tower did He receive the revelation and make the corresponding prophecy, spending some time to interpret it.

He had no time left to escape.

He could only come to the depths of this wilderness and wait patiently.

Wait for an opportunity.

This approach wasn't just interpreted from His own prophecy, but also came from His understanding of this wilderness on the dark side of the warlock's tower, and His knowledge of the Moses Ascetic Order's past events.

In just a second or two, the Loss of Control Gaze spell completely ended.

At the same time, Torriope once again saw that young lady wearing the black robe embroidered with silver stars.

She had returned.

…

On the Blue Avenger, struggling to navigate through the fog and sea.

Professor, Periodic Table, and Prototype were all at sea for the first time, and they all walked to the ship's rail to gaze into the distance where the light was quite dim and the waves seemed to roar.

"Westward… is this the depths of the Fog Sea?" Professor made her judgment based on Franca's earlier words and the surrounding environment.

"Yes." The person who answered wasn't Franca, but a middle-aged man who walked out from the cabin.

This man was of medium build with rough skin and messy deep blue hair, wearing a linen shirt, brownish jacket, and darker pantaloons. His bearing was rather dignified, giving the impression of someone long accustomed to authority.

"This is the captain," Franca said, not introducing him as The Hanged Man of the Tarot Club, only telling Periodic Table and the others that he was the owner of this three-masted sailing ship.

After a courtesy bow, Professor asked with some curiosity, "I've heard the western Fog Sea is extremely dangerous, often with fierce winds and huge waves. Even official exploration fleets can't continue deep into it, and can only advance one section of waterway at a time by establishing forward bases."

"Actually, the weather here isn't as changeable and intense as the Berserk Sea," Captain The Hanged Man said in a slightly low, magnetic voice. "What's dangerous here is the fog."

Most Beyonders of the Warlock pathway had strong curiosity. Prototype repeated the captain's words, "Fog?

"What's dangerous about fog… Does it make fleets lose their way, unable to find supplies or retreat?"

The Hanged Man smiled slightly. "Do you know why this ocean is called the Fog Sea? Why fog often rises in the archipelago waters too, completely different from the weather in the Sonia Sea?"

Recalling various meteorologists' explanations from newspapers and magazines, Periodic Table touched the chemical symbols on her face and suddenly realized. "It spreads from here?"

The Hanged Man nodded gently. "The fog in this area sometimes contracts, sometimes expands. When it expands, the fog spreads eastward, affecting the weather.

"The closer you get to here, the more foggy weather there is, and the slower the fog disperses. By the time you reach the archipelago waters, the fog here needs to expand very dramatically to affect that area."

"So it's actually due to mystical reasons…" Professor murmured to herself.

The Hanged Man continued, "Similarly, the deeper you go into this area, the further west you sail, the thicker the fog becomes and the harder it is to disperse. Eventually you can't see anything but gray-white, dense fog, making it impossible to determine your coordinates and the correct waterway based on any external conditions.

"Who knows how many explorers and adventurers have vanished forever here? Perhaps their ships will only return from history much later in the form of unmanned ghost ships."

Franca beside them listened with great interest.

So this is the true origin of the Fog Sea's name?

Did this fog come from the Celestial Worthy's seal on the Western Continent?

"What about us?" Professor asked with some concern.

We're also heading deep into these waters!

Unlike Prototype who only had to worry about feeding himself, she and Periodic Table had strong attachments, naturally making them more anxious and worried.

The Hanged Man looked around and said, "Don't worry, I've entered and left these waters many times and have some understanding of the waterways here. We won't lose our way before reaching our destination."

Of course, you're a top seafarer… Franca muttered internally.

The Hanged Man added, "This experience was bought with lives. I've lost my way here before, encountered dangers, and nearly disappeared with the entire ship several times.

"Fortunately, with divine protection, I prayed in time and received accurate positioning, which helped me successfully find my way back."

Seeing how the captain introduced his experiences exploring these waters without arrogance, boasting, fear, or trepidation, Professor and the others gradually settled their hearts.

This was indeed a safe waterway explored through countless hardships plus divine guidance, worthy of trust.

At this moment, they all felt the captain was very steady and reliable.

Periodic Table looked at the sailors who were clearly not enough to operate such a three-masted sailing ship, and asked with an investigative spirit, "Is this a ghost ship?"

"Yes." The Hanged Man didn't deny it.

Just then, the entire ship was thrown up by a wave, flying through the air.

With a splash, a giant sea fish twenty to thirty meters long emerged from beneath the surface.

Its body was covered in silver-white metal scales that flickered with dawn's light, and from the blowhole on its head spurted a water stream that seemed composed of early morning twilight.

This water stream was like a giant sword wielded by a deity, slashing fiercely toward the Blue Avenger.

This scene was visually stunning, leaving Professor, Periodic Table, and Prototype, who were used to fighting in cities and small environments, momentarily unsure how to respond.

Silently, a gray-white color spread from the ship's rail, colliding with that deity-like dawn sword.

The dawn's light on the giant sword immediately dimmed, taking on a gray-white color.

It failed to create a Hurricane of Light, quickly turning into a stone sword that broke into sections falling toward the sea surface.

At the same time, The Hanged Man flew into the air, his deep blue hair spreading wildly like tentacles.

Bam! Bam! Bam!

The Hanged Man clenched his fists, throwing out bolts of lightning.

These silver-white lightning bolts pierced through sky and sea, striking the sea fish covered in silver-white scales.

Boom! Only now did the thunder echo out.

Just as Professor and others watched dumbfounded as the captain brought down divine punishment like a deity to discipline the sea monster, the area where the Blue Avenger was about to fall began bubbling.

Countless rotting creatures emerged along with the rising and bursting bubbles, cramming densely together.

A horrifying, strange summoning from the realm of death's destination came from beneath the sea surface, pulling the Blue Avenger off course directly toward it.

The gray-white color fell before the ship, turning all the rotting, undead creatures instantly into stone sculptures, even the azure seawater became like a cement ground, uneven with highs and lows.

The gray-white continued to penetrate beneath the sea surface, and everything fell silent.

The Blue Avenger landed steadily on the water beside it, and The Professor and others saw large patches of gray-white stone being shattered by the incoming water flow, some sinking, some floating.

"A Sequence 5 sea monster, a Gatekeeper?" Franca muttered questioningly as she prepared to collect her spoils. "Isn't this display of ability a bit exaggerated?"

The first creature to attack the Blue Avenger should have been a whale that had consumed a Sequence 5 Guardian Beyonder characteristic of the Warrior pathway.

"Different species and environments can lead to different manifestations of abilities," The Hanged Man landed back on deck, ordering the sailors to quickly harvest the whale sea monster's Beyonder characteristic and valuable parts. "Besides, you forgot that Sequence 5 at sea qualifies one to compete for the title of admiral."

Listening to their exchange, Professor and others finally realized.

The captain was the other demigod Hidden Blade had mentioned.

The power of a demigod was mind-shaking!

As Franca used Demoness spider silk to drag up the Keeper sea monster hidden beneath the surface—it was a flat, human-sized, spiky deep black mutated sea urchin—she casually asked,

"The deeper we sail into these waters, the more monsters like this we'll encounter?"

"No." The Hanged Man shook his head. "The most dangerous things are the environment itself and our companions. Of course, as long as we stay on the pre-determined waterway, there won't be much risk. These sea monsters have only appeared in recent years, possibly related to that war back then."

Seeing Professor and others clearly confused, The Hanged Man briefly explained, "After the God of Combat's defeat, many Beyonder characteristics fell from the astral world onto the earth and into the oceans. His divine kingdom also experienced some collapse, with many items falling into reality."

I see… The Backstabbing Armor, no, the Pride Armor came from that? That whale sea monster just now should also be… Gatekeeper is Sequence 5 of the Death pathway, adjacent to the Warrior pathway, so it's normal for the God of Combat's divine kingdom to have some related items… As Franca came to this realization, she waited for the pale and black-mixed Beyonder characteristic to gradually precipitate out.

She and Lumian would need to gain more believers in the future, which required priests to spread their teachings, so they needed to prepare some Beyonder characteristics for their subordinates.

After collecting the spoils, the Blue Avenger continued forward.

As they sailed deeper, the gray-white fog around them grew increasingly dense, making it impossible to see clearly beyond several dozen meters.

During this process, Professor and others occasionally discovered things floating through the fog—there were faintly visible peaks, indistinct islands, and giant figures that seemed to hold up the sky…

The Hanged Man didn't explain, only telling them, "They seem close but are actually far away, unreachable."

After another half day, when the gray-white fog reached a certain density, The Hanged Man suddenly said to Franca,

"We're almost at our destination. Notify Ma'am Hermit that she can enter the Moses Ascetic Order's headquarters now."

…

In the dark side tunnel of the warlock's tower.

Ma'am Hermit continued to advance deeper. Her responsibility was to hold back the Moses Ascetic Order's upper echelons as much as possible until allied forces arrived.

Suddenly, she stopped in an area filled with many broken stone pillars.

She saw a familiar figure.

It was the Moses Ascetic Order's Vice Chairman, another Pillar who she couldn't get a read on—Retia Austin.

Chapter 1067: Grade 0 Sealed Artifact

Retia was a quiet, taciturn person who made The Hermit feel like there was something strange about her as a warlock, though she had never explicitly said so, and Cattleya believed She had already become an Angel.

And in the intelligence Cattleya had obtained in advance, the current high-level members of the Moses Ascetic Order guarding Avalon were only Torriope and two other Pillars who had been doing research there for years, so Retia should have already left.

Unexpectedly, She appeared again.

She was on the dark side of Avalon.

Except for when there were real matters that needed to be handled, every time She said She was leaving Avalon, She was actually just taking a detour and entering the dark side? Was She guarding against something, or doing some secret thing? Queen of Stars Cattleya was surprised but not panicked.

Retia being at the Moses Ascetic Order's headquarters was a good thing, so she wouldn't have to go looking for Her everywhere to eliminate Her!

At this time, Retia in a loose robe with wavy wine-red hair stood on top of a broken giant stone pillar, looking towards the traitor foretold in the prophecy, Her voice echoing in the current area, "I see you turning into a swan…"

As she spoke, Retia's body rapidly expanded, the loose black robe quickly tearing apart, transforming into a mass of cloth fragments that drifted down below the stone pillar.

In the blink of an eye, this Vice Chairman of the Moses Ascetic Order had Her neck elongated, covered in magenta scales, Her entire body the same.

She was now five or six meters tall, her tailbone extending and becoming very long, filled with joints and barbs.

Retia had actually transformed into a giant dragon, powerful and exuding an evil beauty, Her head still human-like in the magenta color.

Her amber vertical pupils immediately locked onto The Hermit Cattleya.

The Sequence 2 of the Mystery Pryer pathway was called Sage, with the core ability being the mastery and utilization of information, including but not limited to the informatization of one's own self.

In such a situation, if one had enough self-understanding, without disrupting the overall information balance, one could add appropriate, non-conflicting, and already fully grasped mysticism knowledge in the form of information into the corresponding information flow, and delete the unnecessary parts, thereby completing the transformation of one's own body and the fixation and acceleration of certain spells.

Retia chose to gradually transform Herself into a giant dragon at the information level, in order to gain a huge boost in physical strength and vitality.

For this, She spent hundreds of years researching the remains of various dragons, and was also known as a "Dragon Scholar" within the Moses Ascetic Order.

Queen of Stars Cattleya originally thought this title meant Retia's research on the dragons was very in-depth, making Her a true expert in the field, until Queen Mystic also became a Sage did they guess there was another layer of meaning: A scholar like a dragon!

Immediately, countless cold, eyelashless eyes opened in the cracks between Retia's magenta scales.

The Mythical Creature form of the Mystery Pryer pathway!

At the same time, countless fragments flashed in The Hermit Cattleya's mind.

There was the warning from Queen Mystic when she chose the "Mystery Pryer pathway on the Dawn; the constant pursuit of knowledge and the repeated indoctrination of the Hidden Sage; the painful episodes of almost losing control several times; the protection provided by Mr. Fool; the ostracism and suspicion she had suffered since becoming one of the Pillars; and all the scenes of evil and corruption she had seen along the way into the dark side…

All of this is finally about to come to an end… With a sigh, Cattleya's back arched slightly, and pure white illusory feathers sprouted.

Fairytale magic, Ugly Duckling!

Even an ugly duckling could transform into a swan!

A Sequence 3 could also manifest an incomplete Mythical Creature form, supporting it for a short time under the impact of an Angel!

As these swan feathers grew out, cracks also appeared on Cattleya's surface, with blood and flesh congealing in each crack to form stark black and white eyeballs.

These eyeballs swept around, meeting the countless eyes on the magenta dragon's body.

Ma'am Hermit and the draconized Retia both became somewhat ethereal, one seeming to have become an abstract black shadow, the other's body dimming, no longer exuding an evil beauty.

…

Although Lumian had Teleportation, considering the many dangers lurking in the dark side of Avalon, he didn't dare make a direct advance like Madam Magician, but Blinked in stages instead.

After three or four jumps, he arrived at what seemed like a palace rooftop.

It was paved with large slabs of water-black stone, surrounded by walls and towers, the night sky above dark and deep, with clusters of dazzling stars dotting it, blinking on and off as if countless unknown existences were watching this area, those stars being their eyes.

A tall, thin man dressed as a warlock stood at the top of the nearest tower, carefully cradling a long-necked silver flask.

The surface of the flask was covered in dense bumps, each with a deep crack, within which countless black and white eyes slowly rotated.

This was an unnumbered Grade 0 Sealed Artifact, because it was not from the orthodox churches, and sometimes it was an Angel, sometimes a Sealed Artifact, its form unable to be fixed.

It originated from a founding member of the Moses Ascetic Order, that angel's bizarre and uncontrolled death leaving behind this sealed artifact, and in the long years that followed, three of the Order's saints had successively used this artifact to become angels, but ultimately all went mad and died or became monsters within three hundred years, bringing great disaster to the Moses Ascetic Order.

In the last thousand years, no one had dared to use this Grade 0 Sealed Artifact to advance, and thus it has earned a name: "Destined Madness"!

As a long-standing secret organization, the Moses Ascetic Order was at its peak, possessing six Grade 0 Sealed Artifacts besides Angels. Later, some were lost in internal strife, some were offered to the Hidden Sage, and some became the foundation of Angels. Now, only three remained, and Destined Madness was one of them.

The warlock holding this cursed flask was Seids, one of the Pillars, who had been stationed in Avalon for years, researching mysticism knowledge.

As a Sequence 3 Clairvoyant of the Mystery Pryer pathway, he chose Destined Madness over the other two Grade 0 Sealed Artifacts because, for him, the current negative effects were still bearable, and he could endure for some time.

The countless eyes on the slender silver flask brought with them a flood of illusions.

They were diverse fragments of knowledge, some turning into human shapes, eyes bursting, clutching their chests, or heads exploding; some resembling writhing masses of snakes, slick and repulsive; some grotesque and indescribable, all racing madly toward Lumian.

Knowledge was in pursuit!

A swath of gray-white surged before Lumian, rolling forward like waves toward the embodied knowledge.

Wherever the gray-white wave passed, the stone slabs grew denser, and even the air thickened.

When the petrifying force met the knowledge entities, those apparitions donned a gray-white veil.

However, in the next second, knowledge of "stone," "rigidity," "slowness," and "lifelessness" seeped into the apparitions, becoming part of them.

The knowledge pursuing Lumian didn't stop; they merely transformed into heavy yet swift knowledge statues.

…

On the azure sea thick with gray fog.

Because the area was so disorienting, Franca couldn't use conventional methods to contact Ma'am Hermit. She had to resort to praying to Mr. Fool to inform that Major Arcana card holder that they could start their operation.

After she finished, Mr. Hanged Man began advising Professor, Periodic Table, and Prototype,

"Next, you may experience some hallucinations, see some illusions, but under no circumstances should you believe them, or the harm will extend beyond you to your companions as well.

"Even if you see me turn into a monster, or see a nearby companion attack you, you must neither evade nor retaliate—trust that it's all false.

"Of course, it might not even be that intense."

Professor and the others exchanged glances, eventually choosing to trust the experienced, powerful captain. Besides, Hidden Blade was there too.

Then, the Blue Avenger continued deeper into the sea along the murky course.

After a moment, Professor sensed an unnatural silence around her.

Though it was a ghost ship with few people on board, it had never been so silent that not a single sound, save for the waves, could be heard.

Professor looked slowly toward the captain, Hidden Blade, and the distant sailors, only to see them moving in jerky slow motion, as if controlled by strings.

Professor was startled and instinctively looked at Periodic Table and Prototype.

Both members of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society were smirking, identical chilling grins on their faces.

Their smiles matched in every detail.

Shuddering, Professor remembered the captain's warning and quickly shut her eyes, repeating silently,

It's not real, it's all fake…

At that moment, it seemed as though tentacles were reaching out from the water, the slick sensation drawing closer and closer, while Professor's thoughts grew sluggish and even a bit muddled.

It's not real, it's all fake… she muttered to herself, braving her terror.

It was unclear how much time passed before all abnormalities abruptly vanished as though they had never been there.

Professor opened her eyes and saw that the captain was back to normal. Both Hidden Blade and the others—Periodic Table and Prototype—wore expressions tinged with confusion and fear.

Professor and the others were about to ask questions when they all furrowed their brows simultaneously.

They felt knowledge pursuing them, surging from the dense gray-white fog!

Of course, it wasn't as extreme as the Hidden Sage's indoctrination, more like a manageable pressure.

Mr. Hanged Man saw this and quickly said to Franca, "We've reached the target area."

Franca nodded, pulling out several pieces of yellow paper etched with intricate patterns from the Traveler's Bag.

Chapter 1068: Connection

Petrification did nothing to stop the advancing knowledge; instead, petrification became a part of them, and they surged forward toward Lumian like an army of puppets.

At that moment, a strange thought crossed Lumian's mind.

If I were in Morora, could I use the authority of 0-01 to turn these knowledge statues into my soldiers and then redirect their assault on Seids, the Moses Ascetic Order's brass holding the Grade 0 Sealed Artifact?

Unfortunately, there was no "if."

The knowledge statues collided with Lumian, producing a cracking sound.

Lumian had activated his Mirror Substitution in advance.

In the next instant, he used Teleportation, outlining his figure mid-air, positioned behind Seids and slightly above the tower.

Despite his fear of the Grade 0 Sealed Artifact, it was being wielded by a person, not the artifact itself wielding the person. This naturally left vulnerabilities to exploit.

For example, Seids' body was blocking the dense bumps and stark black-and-white eyes on the surface of the silver flask, obscuring his view of what was behind him.

Lumian's lake-like eyes quickly locked onto Seids' back, preparing to cast a curse.

Just then, the back of Seids' head, uncovered by a hood, began to writhe with flesh. Black-and-white, emotionless eyes sprouted from the dark gray hair.

The Saint seemed to become one with the silver flask, an extension of its power.

Pop! Pop! Pop! Black-and-white eyes spread across Seids' back, his hair parting and clothes tearing as they all turned to gaze at Lumian.

Lumian froze.

Sequence names and fragments of relevant knowledge surged into his mind all at once: Mystery Pryer, Melee Scholar, Warlock, Scrolls Professor, Constellations Master, Mysticologist, Clairvoyant, Sage, Knowledge Emperor, Hermit, Savant Archaeologist, Black Knight, The Hanged Man, White Angel, The Sun, and more.

It wasn't enough to overwhelm his mind and spirit, but it did disrupt his thoughts, making them sluggish and chaotic.

The knowledge even vaguely coalesced into a scene with an ancient, worn stone slate.

Lumian's consciousness grew foggy.

Simultaneously, from within the silver flask, covered with eyes and bumps, streams of blazing, golden, pure sunlight poured forth.

They illuminated the palace rooftop area, lifting a miniature, fiercely burning sun.

That "sun" expanded rapidly, purifying and igniting everything around it.

Mystical Re-enactment!

Lumian, riddled with countless issues, was immediately engulfed in searing pain, as though his skin were forcibly peeled away to expose raw flesh beneath. The lingering aura of the Blood Emperor in his palm, the

Underworld Daoist's seal, and the black pinhole all activated in response, flaring into prominence.

This brought a sliver of clarity amidst the fog of confusion.

Crack!

He used Mirror Substitution again. As shards of glass fell toward the base of the tower, he shifted positions, appearing at the edge of the palace rooftop.

That led deeper into the dark side of Avalon.

But sunlight was everywhere, leaving no shadows behind. Lumian abruptly ignited, golden flames bursting from him.

His body began to melt.

A sudden chill struck him from behind as if a ghostly, sticky shadow clung to his back, coiling around him in layers, trying to invade.

How could there still be shadows in such blazing, pure, holy sunlight? Where is the absence of darkness? What sort of spell is this—both holy and sinister… Lumian, though resilient to flames, feared the purifying force.

He activated the black mark on his right shoulder without hesitation.

Teleport!

He disappeared from his position, instantly reappearing in the next area.

His mission was not to kill or stall Seids or seize the Grade 0 Sealed Artifact. Witnessing the terror of such an artifact, he knew there was no point in lingering—it would only interfere with his main objective.

The reason he had fought Seids earlier was due to his reluctance to advance too quickly, fearing he might stumble into an Angel's battleground, which was likely even more dangerous than staying here. It was better to see if he could handle an opponent wielding a Grade 0 Sealed Artifact.

As he emerged in the next area, he quickly used Mirror Substitution again, leaving the golden flames and chilling shadow to the mirror image.

Glancing back, he saw the golden flames indeed melting the mirror, within which a patch of deep black writhed and struggled.

Both vanished simultaneously.

In the palace rooftop-like area, Seids' entire form seemed amiss; the mass of black-and-white eyes on his back did not retract quickly.

He strained to pursue the Demoness of Unaging holding Destined Madness.

Suddenly, from the entrance of the dark side of Avalon, a thick mist of pale steam flowed into the area, coalescing mid-air into a figure.

This figure was clad in a monk's gray robe, wearing an apron like that of ancient stonemasons, with chestnut hair, blue eyes, a handsome, youthful face, and a tall, slender build.

…

Under the influence of various spells, broken stone pillars were either completely shattered, collapsed entirely, sprouted eyes, or became a part of knowledge, bearing no resemblance to their original form.

Using the Ugly Duckling magic to reveal an incomplete Mythical Creature form, The Hermit Cattleya was held in a crushing grip by Retia, now a magenta dragon.

Her attacks, her magic, all became ineffective once absorbed into Retia's informatized body.

Ten seconds had passed, and the effects of the Ugly Duckling magic were nearing their end.

Cattleya, unwavering and resolute, prepared to cast Ugly Duckling for the second and final time, according to plan.

Only by relying on the incomplete Mythical Creature form could she hold her ground against Retia!

At that moment, streams of transparent, intangible information cascaded into the area, reforming into the figure of Queen Mystic Bernadette, with chestnut hair, straight brows, and eyes as deep as the ocean.

…

In a boundless wilderness, translucent, ethereal information coalesced into the figure of Torriope, Chairman of the Moses Ascetic Order.

He had evaded Madam Magician's first round of multi-directional attacks using informatization to dodge from various directions with diverse abilities.

Now reformed, Torriope still wore his hood, but his upper body was bare.

His torso no longer appeared human, resembling a fusion of five or six things:

There was a menacing wolf's head with black fur, a blazing throne of fire, a pale face with strange eyes, a writhing mass of maggots, and multiple asymmetrical black symbols…

These were the Mystical Re-enactment spells Torriope had added to His information body over the years, making them truly a part of Him.

In this form, the corresponding magic would immediately trigger and strike any target.

As for the Loss of Control Gaze spell, Torriope deemed it too dangerous and hadn't fully deciphered its secrets. He feared adding it would destabilize the overall information structure, resulting in a loss of control.

Clang!

Just as Torriope completed His reformation, preparing to unleash numerous spells simultaneously, an ancient, ethereal chime echoed, and he glimpsed a massive, weathered bell in shades of blackish-green and gray-white.

For an instant, He was dazed, but then He quickly cast the five or six spells all at once.

They missed every target and had no impact on any life form.

Madam Magician had vanished from the wilderness.

A pulse of information flickered in the corner of Torriope's brow.

His emotions became slightly unstable.

He knew his enemy would be back any moment!

Striking, but never hitting; fleeing, but never escaping!

Then, Torriope saw the ground deep within the wilderness silently cave in.

A vast pit opened, leading to a hazy, misty, obscure place.

Torriope's spirits lifted again, His mood brightening.

The great Hidden Sage had finally responded!

That hazy, foggy area was actually a hidden escape route, granted by the Hidden Sage when Torriope had established Avalon.

Once He escaped through there, His enemies would be unable to track or locate Him.

Based on the Hidden Sage's namesake, He naturally wielded powers of concealment!

That was also why He was still alive from the Fourth Epoch to the present.

Joyfully, Torriope dissolved into a flood of information again, rushing toward the large, collapsed pit.

Madam Magician reappeared in the skies above the wilderness.

…

On the Blue Avenger, Franca handed out three pieces of yellow paper, covered with fine patterns, tiny writing, and strange symbols, to Professor, Periodic Table, and Prototype.

"Burn them by rubbing them with your spirituality," Franca instructed solemnly.

Taking the yellow paper, Prototype quickly glanced over it, noting a resemblance to, yet significant difference from, the entries in Roselle's Diary.

He faintly discerned two characters: "Celestial Master."

Wh— Professor and the others hesitated for a second before setting their yellow papers aflame.

The blue smoke from the burning paper didn't dissipate but instead coalesced into a column, rising into the gray-white mist above.

In the next second, Professor and the others seemed to see a wilderness filled with countless figures wandering and screaming. The knowledge pursuing them surged, becoming fiercer.

They once again experienced the intense agony of the Hidden Sage's relentless indoctrination.

Then, a hazy silhouette began to emerge before them.

The figure sat cross-legged, his face as smooth as jade, dressed in a blue robe with a high crown atop his head.

He held something known as a "whisk."

…

In an unknown, mysterious realm.

A light composed of complex information concealed itself and the surrounding area.

It was none other than the Hidden Sage, who had foreseen the danger.

Suddenly, He trembled violently, His form twisting like a massive serpent pierced by an unseen force.

He had predicted the danger, but He hadn't foreseen that it would come from the wilderness!

Enduring the pain, He attempted to sever the connection, hoping to conceal this part of His information.

At that moment, a figure clad in a black trench coat followed the trace of the connection, descending from above and landing in front of Him, at the edge of the unknown land.

The figure used his right hand, gloved in black, to press down on the half-height silk top hat atop his head, gradually straightening his posture.

Chapter 1069: Nemesis

The Hidden Sage felt He must respond, but He couldn't decide which plan to choose.

Should He quickly repel the invading enemy, or destroy this unknown realm of His creation to create chaos, escape detection, and hide once again?

He had never hesitated like this before, unable to make a decision, as if affected by some Beyonder power.

Then, He heard the "clang" of a bell.

It seemed to come from ancient times, crossing vast ages.

A weathered, mottled clock's phantom appeared, and a black-gloved left hand held the hands of the clock that had been ticking between gray-white and blue-black.

In this moment of stillness, The Fool raised his right palm, thrusting forward his firmly gripped cane.

The cane, inlaid with countless stardust, caused the void to collapse layer by layer where it passed, surging toward the Hidden Sage.

…

As The Fool's cane thrust forward, in the astral world full of various concepts, distorted abstractions, and chaos, a hazy light began to glow, as if about to bring scenes of profound, magnificent scrolls down to the unknown realm where that battle was taking place.

Just then, in the high skies of daylight, the crimson moon suddenly became prominent.

It grew brighter and rounder, its color deepening until it seemed stained with fresh blood.

The Blood Moon descended.

The Blood Moon's crimson light shone upon the invisible barrier in the astral world, illuminating all the distorted concepts here, preventing any deity from escaping, and making that hazy clear light afraid to fall to its intended destination.

…

On the wilderness, Torriope, who was rushing toward the misty, hazy place in the form of an information flood, suddenly discovered that the remaining few dozen meters had become winding and tortuous, twisting back and forth, as if one had to navigate a maze to reach the destination.

Outside the maze lay ethereal darkness filled with brilliant stars, without any paths. Once entered, one would likely become lost immediately, unable to find an exit, let alone reach the intended destination.

This was the control over journey and space wielded by High-Sequence Beyonders of the Door pathway.

Though there must be a door and a destination, They could set the exit at the farthest point and turn the journey between into a maze that couldn't be quickly traversed.

This was also a kind of seal, a seal with time constraints.

After restricting Torriope's movement, Madam Magician, floating in mid-air wearing her silver-starred black robe, suddenly split into nine.

Behind each figure, differently colored planets hazily appeared.

A terrifying, immense gravitational force emanated from these nine figures, instantly tearing apart the maze that had trapped Torriope, seeming to slow the flow of time itself, causing the light in this area to flow toward different ethereal planets, unable to shine along its intended path.

Torriope, who had just reformed His body and planned to immediately release multiple spells using previously added information to force back the enemy again, felt nine invisible hands grab different parts of His body—His head, neck, left ribs, right leg, and other places—pulling madly outward.

He was about to be dismembered.

He had no choice but to informatize again, becoming an ethereal, transparent, complex flood.

This information flood was also being torn apart, pulled outward stream by stream, but the main structure remained undamaged.

When Lumian teleported into this wilderness, he saw the scene of nine Madam Magicians surrounding an area ravaged by a space-time storm.

All nine figures were flickering, constantly switching between false and real at a speed that made them indistinguishable from each other.

Seeing this, Lumian unhesitatingly took out the phone manufactured by the God of Steam and Machinery and tossed it into the air.

The nine figures suddenly merged into one, no longer flickering.

Madam Magician's fixed position was exactly where Lumian had thrown the phone.

She caught the phone with one hand and skillfully opened the corresponding mini-program.

At this moment, from within the space-time storm being torn apart, from that danger-filled dark area, streams of ethereal, transparent information surged forth, reforming into Torriope's figure.

He was only wounded; the overall structure of His information flow hadn't collapsed or been compressed under the terrifying gravitational force.

Compared to before, Torriope seemed slightly shorter, the fierce wolf's head that should have been on His right chest had moved to near His neck, both hands appeared at His navel, and His legs were of uneven length.

These were all caused by information misalignment, but the overall balance remained.

Madam Magician's figure vanished again from mid-air, and seeing this, Lumian quietly retreated from the edge of the wilderness.

Having achieved his wish, Torriope immediately transformed into a complex, transparent information flood, rushing toward the collapsed pit just dozens of meters away, toward that misty, hazy place.

In an instant, He again saw the "path" become twisted, full of misleading directions.

He was trapped in the "maze" again.

Madam Magician had returned once again!

Just then, Torriope's information flood within the "maze" instantly dispersed, quickly vanishing.

This was False Information—False Information that Torriope had specially prepared for the enemy!

Meanwhile, His concealed true information had quietly reached the entrance of the secret passage, still rushing toward that haziness in the form of an ethereal, transparent flood.

Madam Magician, wearing her silver-starred black robe, suddenly Blinked to the edge of the exit, Blinking right in front of Torriope.

Torriope had anticipated this, and His information flood immediately dispersed into multiple intertwining streams, preparing to bypass the enemy from above her head, both sides, and below her feet to enter the exit.

During this process, even if some parts were intercepted, as long as the overall structure and balance remained, Torriope wouldn't die. At worst, He would be missing limbs and some spells after reforming, which could be researched and added back later.

Seeing the streams of transparent information about to scatter and escape, Madam Magician raised the phone in her palm and pressed the activation button for the Information Shredder.

The previously lit phone screen suddenly grew dark, as if all light had been absorbed into the running mini-program.

This emitted an overwhelming, terrifying gravitational force, specifically targeting information.

The streams of information Torriope had broken into uncontrollably changed their destination, rushing toward the dark phone screen.

Madam Magician's face and back of her hands also showed signs of writhing flesh.

Essentially, these were also a form of information, as were the surrounding wilderness and the haziness behind.

However, they existed in a very stable physical form, effectively resisting the overwhelming gravitational force emanating from within the phone screen.

As stream after stream of information entered Madam Magician's phone, a scream suddenly erupted from the depths of the dark screen.

The scream was extremely panicked, extremely terrified, as if encountering a nemesis, encountering the most terrifying thing in the world!

The scream was also information.

The scream abruptly ceased.

After all of Torriope's dispersed information had entered the Information Shredder, the phone screen quickly regained its brightness, and one after another, "crystals" formed from seemingly transparent information were spat out, like a monster spitting out bones after devouring humans.

This was the Beyonder characteristic of a Sequence 2 Sage of the Mystery Pryer pathway.

An Angel had perished.

Seeing all the "crystals" had been spat out, Madam Magician threw the phone back to Lumian, who had re-entered the wilderness.

"Hurry," she urged, then disappeared from her spot.

She planned to Teleport back, change her robe, then return to help.

This would only take a second or two, as she wore two layers of robes and only needed to remove the outer one.

Lumian caught the phone imbued with the God of Steam and Machinery's divine power and latest research results, and immediately activated the Teleport mark on his right shoulder.

His destination was deep in the wilderness, at the entrance to the secret passage filled with haziness.

…

In the library with its messy shelves but numerous books.

Ohayes, another of the Ten Pillars guarding Avalon, had just come from where the mystical items were sealed.

He held a mask that seemed forged from black gold.

The mask was asymmetrical from left to right, and not even in a regular pattern of one side being smaller than the other, but rather chaotic:

The left eye socket was large and hollow, the right small, the left nasal bridge collapsed, the right prominent, the left cheekbone protruding, the right drooping downward, the whole giving an indescribable sense of madness and majesty.

This was one of the three Grade 0 Sealed Artifacts currently possessed by the Moses Ascetic Order, obtained during the chaos of the War of Four Emperors and named Solomon's Mask.

Ohayes had chosen it from among the remaining two Grade 0 Sealed Artifacts, preparing to go support Vice Chairman Retia or his peer, Seids.

Unfortunately, there were only three demigods currently guarding Avalon—the three of them plus Chairman Torriope—and they couldn't even find another Saint to use the last Grade 0 Sealed Artifact.

The negative effects of that Sealed Artifact were too lethal for any Beyonder without godhood to bear.

I can only hope the Chairman or Vice Chairman can return to take the Post-Apocalyptic Scripture, then either repel the invaders or lead everyone in escape… Ohayes looked back at the sealed location, praying that the mid-sequence warlocks in the dark side would find their way here.

With Solomon's Mask, he could no longer use those Grade 1 Sealed Artifacts!

And if these Sealed Artifacts couldn't be put to use, the Moses Ascetic Order's chances of victory would decrease further, and if they had to retreat later, they would have to abandon them, suffering heavy losses.

At this crucial moment, regardless of whether one was Sequence 5 or not, those who could use Grade 1 Sealed Artifacts should quickly take control of them, making them easier to take away!

Glancing at the asymmetrical black gold mask, Ohayes gritted his teeth and put it on his face.

The black gold mask suddenly writhed, as if trying to merge with his flesh.

Ohayes let out a muffled groan of pain, his entire body instantly growing much larger.

At this moment, a figure reflected in his eyes.

That figure was barefoot, wearing a simple robe, with a tree bark belt tied around the waist, black hair gently swaying behind.

Chapter 1070: Onward

In the sea of grayish-white fog all around, Professor, Periodic Table, and Prototype were either leaning against the ship's railings, their faces flushed and throbbing, or crouching down covering their ears, curled up, or constantly grabbing and pulling their own hair, as if trying to rip off their skulls to relieve the pressure their brains were bearing.

Seeing their reactions, Franca couldn't help but look over at Mr. Hanged Man. "Is there a way to alleviate this situation?"

This was a problem that even a Spectator's Placate could not solve, as it was not mental confusion or an emotional outburst, but simply that their brains could not withstand being flooded with so much knowledge in such a short time, not even able to activate their self-protection mechanisms and pass out.

So Madam Justice had not participated in the actions on the Blue Avenger, nor had she provided corresponding charms. Of course, to bear the power of a demigod, the materials for the charms had more special requirements than before, not something that could be made just by wanting to—unless the power level was deliberately suppressed, making the completed charms only at Sequence 6 or 5 standards.

Mr. Hanged Man thought for a moment and said, "Knock them out, make them lose consciousness."

This Major Arcana card holder added tentatively, "This might help."

"Makes sense." Franca turned her gaze back to Professor and the others, eager to try.

Just then, the condition of Professor and the others eased, the blue veins on their faces no longer protruding, and the hair they pulled out gradually diminished.

Phew… Franca secretly let out a sigh of relief.

After another dozen or so seconds, Professor, Periodic Table, and Prototype gradually recovered to normal, although some still looked rather pale, and some were still slightly trembling.

"No wonder you compared the danger we might encounter to the Hidden Sage forcibly infusing knowledge—it's about the same." Professor sighed, saying in a puzzled tone, "Those knowledge really came alive, rushing towards us as if they would tear us into pieces if we didn't study them earnestly."

This was significantly different from the Hidden Sage's indoctrination, as Professor and the others had actually had a similar experience before, but the corresponding amount was small and did not cause such severe pain.

Prototype glanced at Franca and Mr. Hanged Man, and asked thoughtfully, "Who is the Celestial Master?"

Franca let out a hollow laugh. "I'll tell you later."

She then smiled at Professor and the others. "Your mission is accomplished!"

"Really?"

"We don't have to do it again?"

"Did it succeed?" Professor and the others asked respectively.

They were clearly more relaxed, with a barely disguised joy in their tone.

Franca exchanged a glance with Mr. Hanged Man and said, "Our part is done, but results from the other side remain unknown."

Mr. Hanged Man nodded in agreement, raising his right hand towards the Blue Avenger. "Return to port!"

…

In the dark side of Avalon.

The Hermit Cattleya had left the area with the broken stone pillars, escaping the battle with Dragon Scholar Retia.

She was now in a pitch-black corridor, with light seeping in at the end, leading not to a room, but to an open wilderness.

As she walked, Cattleya couldn't help but look back.

She had actually wanted to stay and help Queen Mystic deal with Retia, but ultimately decided to leave.

This was because, first, she had seen the Queen take out a black crown inlaid with many dark gems; second, she herself was not yet an Angel, and Ugly Duckling could only be used one more time—the brief ten-plus seconds could not turn the tide of battle, and might even affect Queen Mystic's performance.

And third, she had other things to do.

Cattleya turned her gaze forward, continuing to fly through the pitch-black corridor with a faint light at the end.

She felt that the remaining filth of Avalon was hidden in the darkness that could not be illuminated on the sides, the fallen state of the remaining warlocks, the pain of Beyonders of the same sequence being forcibly infused with knowledge by the Hidden Sage, and the last screams of those who had lost control and gone mad.

She too had once experienced similar pain, teetering on the edge of losing control.

Relying on Mr. Fool, she had initially guaranteed her own safety, and her withdrawal from the battle between Queen Mystic and Retia was to ensure that there were no accidents on The Chariot Lumian's side, to ensure that all the Beyonders of the Mystery Pryer pathway were rid of this hidden danger, and never had to worry about knowledge infusion day and night.

Of course, knowledge would still spread to individuals, just not as frequently or terribly.

The Hermit Cattleya flew faster and more resolutely, for there were important matters waiting for her ahead.

Finally, she passed through the light at the end of the corridor and arrived in a boundless wilderness.

At this moment, the crimson moon shone from above, casting a faint blood-red hue over the entire wilderness, but without any substantial effect.

Cattleya looked and saw Mr. Chariot Lumian standing by the sunken pit in the depths of the wilderness, and Madam Magician Fors, now in a purple-black robe.

"Is Torriope dead?" The Hermit Cattleya blurted out.

Madam Magician smiled slightly. "At a true god's own hand and with a restraining 'tool', how could Torriope not die?

"I've sealed all his Beyonder characteristics, and will distribute them according to Mr. Fool's wishes after the operation is over."

As she spoke, the wilderness began to tremble slightly, with soil, weeds, and stones continuously peeling off into the void, though not much.

Avalon was created by Torriope, and now that he was dead, it would naturally wither away.

The Hermit nodded slightly, walking over to Lumian under the not-so-dense crimson moonlight.

She and The Magician stood on the left and right, one in front and one behind, guarding against unexpected occurrences.

…

The crimson full moon hung high in the sky, outshining the sun and making all the continents, oceans, and islands seem to be draped in a faintly sinister red veil.

In the capital of the Rorsted Archipelago, the City of Generosity Bayam, at an outdoor cafe.

Mr. Star Leonard sipped a cup of Fermo coffee with milk and sugar, glancing at the hurrying pedestrians rushing home.

Most people in this world knew that the Blood Moon brought misfortune, a sign of bad things to come!

"Old man, Suah and His brothers have been really patient, not making a move yet, and those Angels secretly serving the Great Mother haven't made a sound either." Mr. Star murmured, setting down his bone coffee cup.

An aged voice then sounded in his ear: "If They really attempt to rescue the Hidden Sage, and really come to destroy the Rorsted Archipelago, then it's not a big problem.

"The fact that there's not a stir means trouble."

Mr. Star immediately understood what the old man meant.

This meant that the existence of the Hidden Sage was no longer of great importance to the evil gods' or the Great Mother's subsequent plans!

This was troubling.

"Didn't the Great Mother also intervene and suppress the orthodox gods?" Mr. Star thought aloud.

"Since the existence of the Hidden Sage would weaken the resistance forces within the barrier and reduce the chances of new gods being born, They should certainly try to save Him, but it's no longer a key issue, something They can choose to do or not do." The aged voice responded simply.

The Star Leonard picked up his coffee again, chuckling. "Indeed, there's a sense that the situation is gradually worsening, that the apocalypse is coming and there's nothing that can be done to change it."

After taking a sip of coffee, this demigod of the Church of Evernight, a Major Arcana card holder, sobered his expression and said in a low voice, "But no matter what, we have to save ourselves.

"No matter what, getting rid of the Hidden Sage is a good thing, and can increase the hope of resisting the apocalypse."

With that, he raised his head, gazing at the sinister crimson moon.

The moonlight seemed to drip with blood.

…

In the mysterious unknown realm.

Compared to before, several mountain peaks had now emerged, a vast sea appeared, and countless crevices formed.

The Hidden Sage's location was also composed of information, and with the Fooling, the information would naturally undergo various changes, creating the current environment.

After nearly twenty seconds of battle, the Hidden Sage, who had still not recovered from the surprise attack, was finally pierced by the star-studded cane.

The ethereal glow of the complex information, like a giant serpent, suddenly collapsed towards the tip of the cane, towards a certain point within.

The dissolved glow crumbled inch by inch, the countless information squeezed together, compressed into a dark spherical ball, and with the withdrawal of the star-studded cane, it exploded outward with a thunderous sound.

The overall structure of the information was thus destroyed.

Stream after stream of information fell and dissipated, and from among them emerged a faint crimson.

These crimsons grew rapidly, about to coalesce together, bringing new life.

With a gesture of The Fool's star-studded cane, the surrounding void bent down, herding all the crimsons together, sealing them within a small ethereal dark sphere.

The ethereal sphere, along with the gathered crimsons, instantly vanished.

However, after the disintegrating information and crimson light completely disappeared, no Beyonder characteristics were extracted, nor did a Uniqueness emerge.

The Fool, in the black coat, suddenly turned his gaze to the other side of the unknown realm, towards the end of the sea.

An ethereal glow resembling a giant serpent suddenly emerged there, then turned into a shadowy mass with countless black and white distinct eyes.

Backup and hidden information!

The Hidden Sage still had more than one such hidden backup information!

The countless distinct black and white eyes spun rapidly, each coalescing into ethereal and complex symbols, flooding The Fool's mind with a terrifying amount of useless knowledge.

Chapter 1071: Fooling

The figure of The Fool, inundated with countless pieces of knowledge, suddenly froze, his head exploding into a mass of warped maggots.

These maggots rapidly disappeared, leaving behind only a pair of black gloves and a cane inlaid with many star fragments.

Amidst the thin mist that permeated the mountain peaks, another figure descended—once again, The Fool, dressed in a black coat and wearing a half top hat.

The black gloves and star-studded cane immediately returned to his control.

Just now?

That was just a historical projection!

On the black shadow that the Hidden Sage had transformed into, the protruding black and white distinct eyes each rotated, reflecting the figure of The Fool once more.

At this moment, He wanted to escape.

This is not to say that He lacked the courage to destroy His current body and revive using the backup, hidden information from other locations—for a being of such a living Uniqueness, this would not be too painful.

The reason restraining Him from making this choice was:

for the designated backup information to receive the Uniqueness, the Hidden Sage had to, before death, actively choose and activate it Himself, and this activation could potentially be traced and located. As the embodiment of mysticism knowledge, the Hidden Sage naturally knew the specialties of His current enemies, and what role the dark barrier that had sealed off the entire unknown realm and the permeating gray fog within it could play.

If He did not activate it, the Uniqueness would naturally transfer to the nearest backup information, following the proximity principle, and the Hidden Sage had hidden another backup within this unknown realm.

When He had initially made these arrangements, His idea was that if a powerful enemy arrived, He could try to drive them away or outright kill them and claim the spoils by reviving twice, and if the two revivals failed, it would mean He could not win, so He would let Himself be killed the third time and revive from the backup information hidden elsewhere, fully escaping the entanglement.

In other words, the Hidden Sage was not panicked now—after dying twice more, He could truly flee this unknown realm without being tracked, and return to a state of hiding.

His current plan was to try counterattacking, and if that didn't work, just wait to be killed, rather than self-destruct.

Information underwent loss, degradation, errors, and chaos in the process of constant backups—this was a fundamental rule of the entire world, a manifestation of error, decay, and increasing entropy. The more times the overall information was backed up, the higher the probability of problems arising, and the greater the latent chaos. If the Hidden Sage were to revive using the fourth set of information, some hidden errors might emerge, and the enemy before Him symbolized Error.

In this matter, self-destruction would lead to more significant degradation and amplification of chaos in the information, because it started from an internal, self-conscious negation, rather than being killed by others.

In the black and white distinct eyes that reflected The Fool's figure, new ethereal symbols emerged—not complex, just simple numbers.

One was "0", the other "1".

In the cognition of the Moses Ascetic Order, each number had spirituality and its own symbolic meaning.

Of course, numbers did not directly possess power, but they could bring corresponding occult implications.

And one of the Hidden Sage's core abilities was to imbue numbers with power, giving them truly different, somewhat diminished symbolic force compared to the original!

Among them, "0" represented chaos, the unknown, what existed before everything, while "1" represented the beginning, the Oldest One, the Creator who made this world.

The "0" and "1" within those black and white eyes suddenly underwent a change.

They connected end-to-end, rapidly flowing through the transparent tunnel formed by the eye orbs, shifting from "0" to "1", then from "1" back to "0", from non-existence to existence, and then back again.

Accompanying the appearance and flow of these "0" and "1", the unknown realm rapidly became transparent.

Whether it was the realm itself, the shrouding dark barrier, or the diffused gray fog, all were now composed of countless "0" and "1".

They were clusters formed by just these two numbers!

The figure of The Fool also underwent similar changes—crawling over his face, his gloves, were countless small worms, transparent or brilliant or segmented, all woven from intertwined strings of "0" and "1".

Under the Hidden Sage's influence, vast numbers of "1" were turning into "0", and when "0" dominated the majority, this numeric world would completely collapse and disappear into "nothingness", unable to impede the Hidden Sage's escape any longer.

Even The Fool himself would be affected, unable to locate and track in time!

Suddenly, The Fool's figure vanished.

He appeared in the sky filled with digital fog, thrusting the star-studded cane downward from afar.

Silently, the dark barrier confining the unknown realm imploded inward, causing the diffuse gray fog and the unknown realm itself to crumble inch by inch, generating a series of terrifying spatial-temporal storms.

The Fool had proactively plunged this numeric world into destruction.

The raging spatial-temporal storms swept towards the Hidden Sage, the surrounding disintegration and collapse also spreading to this evil god.

The Hidden Sage was not alarmed, but delighted.

This destruction not only caused the last backup information hidden in the unknown realm to be destroyed, allowing Him to truly escape The Fool's pursuit after just one more death, but also lifted the barrier, throwing the situation into chaos—even if He fled directly or activated the corresponding backup information in advance, He wouldn't have to worry about being tracked!

The Hidden Sage, with His countless black and white distinct eyes, let the world's collapse and the spatial-temporal storms' tearing ravage fall upon Himself.

He was immediately reduced to stream after stream of transparent, ethereal information.

This information was tinged with an imperceptible crimson.

Just as the Hidden Sage was about to fade away and revive from the hidden backup information, the left hand of The Fool in the sky—not holding the star-studded cane—suddenly reached forward.

Clang!

The ancient tolling of a bell echoed through the world on the verge of total collapse, and the hands of the massive illusory stone clock were pressed down by the black palm.

The raging dark storms, the collapsing mountains, chasms, and seas—all were frozen, as if turned into a photograph.

In this scene, the only ones still able to move were The Fool and the Hidden Sage, which had already collapsed into multiple streams of information but not yet completely vanished.

Mr. Fool had not included the Hidden Sage within the time-freeze!

The black coat behind him billowed, and the face under the black hat became dim and obscure.

Fooled!

In the wilderness, Lumian, having received the cue, jumped into the fog completely filling the sunken pit with the phone in hand.

This secret passage had long been Grafted to the unknown realm where the Hidden Sage was.

As Lumian's figure appeared within this destruction scene paused in time, the Hidden Sage, fragmented into multiple streams of information and instinctively wanting to flee, suddenly sensed something.

He sensed the presence of a Child of God.

No, that is the aura of the Great Mother!

The Great Mother has come to save me!

The streams of the Hidden Sage's information rushed towards the uncloaked Lumian, whose radiant countenance was now revealed.

Not only did He feel He had been saved, but He also believed there was a chance to turn the tide.

If the Great Mother had personally intervened, what else could not happen?

Lumian raised his right hand, holding the phone displaying a small program screen towards the front.

At this moment, the "freezing" had reached its limit, and the destruction resumed its progress.

The Hidden Sage's information surged even more frantically.

Affected by this evil god's aura, personage, and current state, Lumian's fair, smooth skin began peeling away, with chunks of flesh writhing, about to sprout distinct black and white eyes.

This was both corruption and impact.

Lumian did not flee or abandon the phone, standing still and savoring the physical pain and spiritual ecstasy.

The residual aura of the Blood Emperor, the seal of the Underworld Daoist, and the pitch-black "pinhole" in his palm had all been activated—his mind was descending into chaos, as if he had gained knowledge he should not have.

His mouth curled up, with two distinct black and white eyes.

Looking at the frantically surging transparent information of the Hidden Sage, he smiled brilliantly.

I've come to find you!

I told you, I would come find you!

Piece by piece, the flesh on Lumian's body began falling off, each bearing distinct black and white eyes, but he remained motionless, still firmly gripping the phone made by the God of Steam and Machinery.

Finally, the Hidden Sage's information reached its destination.

Lumian immediately pressed the Information Shredder app's run button.

The phone's surface suddenly turned dark, drawing in the remaining light and the disembodied information around it.

The Hidden Sage abruptly became lucid, but it was too late—the phone had transformed into a massive vortex, sweeping in all the transparent, ethereal information it had fragmented into.

Seeing this, Lumian no longer held back, igniting the corrupted himself with the Fire of Destruction.

Amid the violent burning of the black flames restraining his frenzy and repression, he turned to ash with a brilliant yet horrifying smile.

The real him had died.

The corruption spread to the mirror, and the him in the mirror also died.

Only the dormant mirror, hidden away beforehand by Concealment powers, remained unaffected.

The phone's barrier lit up again, the portion of ethereal glow composed of complex information desperately trying to break free, escaping control.

The Fool, in the black coat and half-high hat, descended in front of the phone and Lumian's Traveler's Bag, with the collapsing and disintegrating unknown realm behind him.

The Hidden Sage cried out in despair and fear, "Spare me! I will pledge loyalty to you!

"Spare me!"

The Fool's voice was coldly incisive yet somewhat gentle.

"You have harmed too many people."

He raised the star-studded cane, pushing the struggling Hidden Sage back into the phone screen.

From the depths of the phone, a chilling sound, like a monster gnawing on human bones, echoed out.

Chapter 1072: Distribution

The indescribable sound of chewing came from the phone. The Fool raised his head, casting his gaze upwards towards the blood-red moon that was illuminating everything.

The huge, round moon gradually returned to normal, its radiance fading until only a crimson hue remained.

At this moment, the previously dark phone screen lit up again, with countless ethereal and complex pieces of information emerging, weaving into a peculiar, intricate symbol.

This symbol was projected out, carried by the power contained within the Information Shredder hidden in the phone by the God of Steam and Machinery, and it quickly scanned every continent, island, and ocean.

One by one, the backup information hidden by the Hidden Sage was located, the overall structure destroyed, and the information rapidly dissipated.

When the special symbol returned to the phone screen, the Hidden Sage transmitted its final burst of information—a desperate scream.

…

Aboard the Blue Avenger sailing back through the grayish-white fog, Professor, Periodic Table, and Prototype were all startled for a moment.

They exchanged glances, and finally, Professor asked Franca and the Captain, "Did you hear a wail or a scream?"

"No." Franca shook her head.

The Hanged Man also said, "I didn't hear anything."

"We all heard it," Professor's brow furrowed beneath the butterfly mask. "But it was faint, as if it came from far away."

"Yes." Periodic Table and Prototype also indicated they had heard a similar sound.

Franca thought for a moment and then said, "Don't worry about it, hearing strange sounds in these waters is normal. Just ignore it and don't take it seriously."

With that, Franca smiled. "Think on the bright side; maybe it was the scream of the Hidden Sage before His death?"

Uh… Professor and the others looked at each other.

The Hanged Man had a pensive expression and after a few seconds, said, "Maybe that's the case."

Wh— Even Franca was taken aback. Already?

…

The Hidden Sage's wail had pierced the ears of every warlock, alarming the Ten Pillars of the Moses Ascetic Order who were not in Avalon.

They either made prophecies based on it or, through spiritual intuition, discovered that something was amiss and quickly relocated and concealed themselves.

Retia, the Dragon Scholar within Avalon, and Seids and Ohayes, who wielded the Grade 0 Sealed Artifacts, were also affected, rapidly falling into a disadvantaged position and subsequently perishing.

The completely destroyed unknown realm had become a rapidly shrinking dark vortex. The Fool, holding Lumian's Traveler's Bag, watched as the floating phone continuously erupted with various luminous fragments.

Spraying and spraying, the phone began expanding, as if about to be ruptured by something.

Bang!

It did explode, and a dull, apathetic, eyelashless ethereal eye was ejected, falling into The Fool's palm.

The scattered phone components, tinged with a faint crimson, wriggled as if about to give birth to new parts.

They were blocked by the suddenly darkened void and retracted inward, quickly converging within the ethereal sphere, dissipating along with it.

The Fool, along with the Beyonder characteristics that had been expelled earlier, also vanished.

…

Lumian felt as if he had slept a long, dreamless sleep, his entire being calm and peaceful within the embrace of darkness.

After an unknown period of time, he finally opened his eyes to find himself in the void and shadowy realm behind the mirror.

He stood up and stepped out of the glass surface, his eyes reflecting the ancient, dilapidated palace used for the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society's gatherings.

Behind him was the giant stone chair, on which sat the "sleeping" mirror he had made for himself, its surface marked with dark red patterns, as if inscribed in fresh blood.

This was a pre-arranged preparation. With Madame Hela's help, he had placed the "sleeping" mirror in the Nation of the Evernight to isolate it from potential corruption.

As for why he didn't choose the area above the gray fog or place the "sleeping" mirror next to The Fool's throne, it was because that would have isolated not only the corruption, but also Lumian's own resurrection.

Unless it was The Fool himself or he responded in time above the gray fog, Lumian's Beyonder characteristics could not be transferred to the area near The Fool's throne, and the consciousness and spirit within the "sleeping" mirror would not be restored.

Moreover, this kind of resurrection required "passing" through the grayish-white fog, and there was a high probability of encountering other forms of corruption, as The Fool was only in the preliminary stages of awakening, not fully awake.

Lumian recalled the previous events, confirming that the Hidden Sage had "voluntarily" entered the effective range of the Information Shredder.

He picked up the large, stone chair-mounted mirror and brought it up to his face.

The mirror, the size of a head, reflected a beautiful face with shallow blue and clear eyes.

Lumian spoke to the mirror, "The Hidden Sage is dead.

"All the warlocks no longer need to worry about being forcibly indoctrinated by Him."

The mirror's gorgeous face broke into a relieved and radiant smile.

After a few seconds, Lumian, as usual, recited the corresponding incantation to leave the ancient, dilapidated palace and return to the luxurious villa.

Jenna, who was responsible for the cleanup, had just returned home and released Ludwig from behind one of her mirrors.

This was a precaution in case Jenna's luck was too poor and she directly encountered the Moses Ascetic Order's Saint holding a Grade 0 Sealed Artifact.

Ludwig licked his lips, a little glum.

So much delicious food, and he didn't get to eat any of it!

"Are you two okay?" Franca, who had already returned, asked the two companions with concern.

Lumian chuckled."Whether I'm okay or not doesn't matter, the important thing is that something must have happened to the Hidden Sage."

Jenna took the opportunity to say, "Madam Magician said the spoils will be distributed by Mr. Fool."

She then asked a little anxiously, "But Madam Magician didn't take these from me."

These were the gains from her cleanup of the fallen warlocks.

"I will help you ask Mr. Fool," Lumian then asked, "Have all the warlocks in Avalon been eliminated?"

Jenna shook her head. "I've cleaned up those who have fallen and become evil, and they're still in their period of silence, but I don't know about the hidden aspects of Avalon. I handed them over to Ma'am Hermit, who said she would select a batch to send to the Church of The Fool for reform, and the remaining ones are still on the ship, for her to reform."

With a pleasant mood, Lumian curiously asked, "Have you discovered any secrets in the hidden aspects of Avalon?"

"I don't know." While Jenna shook her head, Lumian suddenly paused.

Then he told Franca and Jenna, "Mr. Fool has called for an emergency meeting."

…

Above the gray fog, within the majestic palace.

Several figures emerged, slightly blurred, on either side of an ancient bronze table.

These were the Major Arcana card holders involved in the hunt for the Hidden Sage.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Fool~" Madam Justice was the first to stand and bow.

Seemingly due to the death of the Hidden Sage, many warlocks had been saved, and her tone was more lively and energetic.

After all the Major Arcana card holders had finished their greetings and reseated themselves, Mr. Fool at the head rapped the edge of the bronze table lightly.

"Dragon Scholar Retia was killed, but she did not fully die. There is a spell related to resurrection and concealment within the Mystical Re-enactment she created.

"However, this is not important, as our main purpose has been achieved."

Hearing Mr. Fool's announcement of the result, Lumian's hanging heart settled.

The Hidden Sage was truly dead, dead beyond death!

At this moment, he was so joyful that he wanted to dance with Franca or Jenna.

The Fool looked at each participant and said in a low voice, "The Uniqueness of the Hidden Sage belongs to the God of Steam and Machinery, the Knowledge Emperor Beyonder characteristics containing Sequence 9 to Sequence 1 will go to Bernadette, including the assistance she provided in the dream. The Church of Evernight will receive the Destined Madness Grade 0 Sealed Artifact and the Beyonder characteristics of Seids, who was corrupted by this Sealed Artifact.

"In addition to these, they also obtained several Grade 1 Sealed Artifacts. The rest are ours."

After hearing Mr. Fool's explanation, Lumian, who had fought against the Destined Madness Grade 0 Sealed Artifact, was suddenly stirred and asked, "Why did the Church of Evernight choose Destined Madness?"

"It conceals a secret that needs to be excavated," Mr. Fool answered Lumian's question in a gentle tone.

He continued, "Our main gains include the Sage Beyonder characteristic from Torriope, the Grade 0 Sealed Artifacts—Solomon's Mask and Post-Apocalyptic Scripture—as well as nine Grade 1 Sealed Artifacts, including two related to Clairvoyant, three related to Mysticologist, one to Manipulator, one to Pallbearer, one to Alchemist, one to Arcane Scholar, and various Mid- and Low-Sequence Beyonder characteristics, as well as some Grade 2 and 3 Sealed Artifacts."

Mr. Fool turned his gaze to The Hermit Cattleya. "This was a continuation of your mission, the result of your previous efforts. You can choose first."

The Hermit Cattleya did not show any false modesty. "Mr. Fool, I want the Sage Beyonder characteristic."

The Fool then looked at Lumian. "Your role was crucial, the key to the complete demise of the Hidden Sage. You can choose second."

Lumian had already decided the answer. "Mr. Fool, I want the potion formula of Weather Warlock."

Whether he had spoils or not actually didn't matter to him.

"This is a bonus," Mr. Fool said calmly. "You can also choose one Grade 0 Sealed Artifact."

Uh… since the deity has said so. Lumian was no longer polite and after thinking for a moment, said, "I choose the Post-Apocalyptic Scripture."

He felt that, according to Ma'am Hermit's previous explanation, the Solomon's Mask must correspond to the Angelic level Beyonder characteristic of the Black Emperor pathway, and the Black Emperor pathway and the Justiciar pathway were neighboring and could be switched. Madam Judgment was also a friend of the Madam Magician.

"The Post-Apocalyptic Scripture is related to the Fate pathway," Mr. Fool simply said, then turned to Madam Magician. "The Solomon's Mask is yours."

Madam Magician was momentarily taken aback. "And you?"

You're the main force, yet you don't keep the Angelic level Beyonder characteristics or the Grade 0 Sealed Artifacts?

Leaning back in his chair, The Fool's voice, amidst its usual warmth, contained a touch of joy and nostalgia.

"I don't need them.

"The death of the Hidden Sage is the result I wanted the most."

Chapter 1073: Post-Apocalyptic Scripture

Hearing Mr. Fool's words, Madam Justice suddenly felt a bit happier.

She felt that Mr. Fool's state had improved a bit.

Madam Magician, upon hearing this, no longer said much, lightly nodding and saying, "I will I defer to your will."

If she were really allowed to choose the spoils, she would also have chosen the Solomon's Mask. The ability of this Grade 0 Sealed Artifact would be a great supplement and enhancement for her, as well as for Madam Judgment, and in the future, it could also become a choice for her transition to the Angelic pathway through the Justiciar pathway.

As for the potion formula of the Sequence 2 Entropy Duke of the Black Emperor pathway, Mr. Fool had it he possessed the Black Emperor card from the Cards of Blasphemy.

The chaos of these years, the spread of the evil gods' faith, the frequent occurrence of various events, have made Xio, the Chaos Hunter, digest her potions quickly, and she is about to complete her advancement to an Angel... Hehe, the High-Sequence Beyonders of the Black Emperor pathway seem to have the trait of body gigantification-same for Nast. It would be very suitable for Xio to switch over to that path... Madam Magician's thoughts gradually drifted away.

Mr. Fool then turned his gaze to The Hanged Man. "And your choice?"

"Esteemed Mr. Fool, I would like the Grade 1 Sealed Artifact formed by the Mysticologist Beyonder characteristic." The Hanged Man had already decided on his choice when Mr. Fool was introducing the spoils.

His ability characteristics and the Sealed Artifacts of the Hunter pathway he had obtained from the Blue Avenger's treasury were already quite overpowering, and he lacked the stealthy means to achieve his goals.

"Alright, Merumu's Spellbook is yours." The Fool turned his gaze to Justice.

Although Justice had not directly participated in the action, she had woven the phone from the dream for Lumian, and was always prepared to provide spiritual and mental healing for the participants in the hunt.

Additionally, she had made a substantial contribution to awakening Mr. Fool in the dream city, and so far had only obtained the revelation related to the ancient dragon.

Madam Justice smiled and said, "Mr. Fool, I want the Grade 1 Sealed Artifact formed by the Manipulator Beyonder characteristic, as I owe someone a favor."

The Fool nodded lightly, then turned to Madam Temperance Sharron.

"Protecting the New City of Silver and the Rorsted Archipelago was also a contribution. You, representing the temperance faction, can take a share of the spoils."

Madam Temperance Sharron, wearing a small, black, soft hat, manifested a piece of paper.

On it wrote: "Grade 1 Sealed Artifact formed by the Mysticologist Beyonder characteristic."

Just as I thought... The Chariot Lumian muttered to himself.

This was based on two reasons:

First, as the representative of the temperance faction. she would certainly feel that her faction's contribution was relatively small, and she should not choose a Sealed Artifact formed from a Sequence 3 Beyonder characteristic-formed. Second, between Mysticologist and Alchemist, the Prisoner pathway Beyonder would most likely choose the former.

Lumian had collaborated with Madam Temperance Sharron and Knight of Swords before, and knew their fighting styles. Alchemist, on the other hand, was known in the Savant pathway for creating wondrous items and alchemy puppets, which did not quite match the style of the temperance faction.

This was not to say they were incompatible in terms of ability-in fact, they complemented each other very well. It was mainly that the aesthetic was not quite in sync, and Lumian could not imagine Madam Temperance Sharron possessing a giant robot, wielding various post-modern weapons, and blowing up enemies with a barrage of gunfire.

"Alright, the Eye of Omniscience will belong to the temperance faction." Mr. Fool nodded lightly.

The last to make a choice was Mr. Star Leonard.

He said in a dazed manner, "Alchemist. I want to make a self-playing piano..."

What kind of wish is this? Is Mr. Star still an artsy youth? Lumian was somewhat puzzled.

Mr. Fool only spoke a few seconds later. "Okay, the Creator's Hammer is yours."

Seeing that all the participating Major Arcana had chosen their spoils, Lumian asked on behalf of Jenna, "Mr. Fool, how will the Mid- and Low-Sequence Beyonder characteristics and mystical items obtained by the Seven of Cups be distributed?"

The voice of The Fool shrouded in the gray fog returned to its previous state.

"The Mysticologist Beyonder characteristic and related materials formed by Ohayes' death will be given to the three warlocks who went into the depths of the Fog Sea. After pulverizing and recomposing them, this will be able to help each of them advance one Sequence." This was a decision made even before the emergency meeting-the Mysticologist Beyonder characteristic formed by Ohayes' death was not on the list of available options just mentioned.

Now, Professor was a Sequence 5 Constellations Master, and Periodic Table and Prototype were Sequence 6 Scrolls Professors.

Mr. Fool continued, "The Mid- and Low-Sequence Beyonder characteristics and mystical items in Seven of Cups's possession will be divided into three parts: one part for her to keep, one part for the Two of Cups, and one part to be handed over to the Church.

"If they wish, they can use one of the two parts they keep to exchange for a Grade 1 Sealed Artifact."

"Yes, Mr. Fool." The Chariot Lumian felt this distribution plan was very good and had no objections.

This not only addressed Jenna's lack of same Sequence items, but also left room for the three Demonesses to develop their followers and spread the faith.

Mr. Fool then turned to Madam Temperance Sharron.

"The remaining items are to be entrusted to the Church for safekeeping and use."

The "Church" mentioned in those words referred to the Church of The Fool.

"Yes, Mr. Fool." Madam Temperance Sharron held up another sheet of paper with writing on it.

As soon as she finished responding, beams of light flew out from the grayish-white fog behind Mr. Fool, each landing in front of the various

Major Arcana.

Madam Magician's was an asymmetrical black and gold mask, so extreme in its appearance that it was distressing to look at, yet also possessed a peculiar majesty.

Ma'am Hermit's was a fist-sized, sparkling diamond of sacred and wise light, with dull, apathetic eyes reflected from each of its facets.

Madam Justice's was an object covered in gray wrinkles, resembling both a brain and a heart.

The Hanged Man's was a thin book bound in human skin, with many mysterious patterns and symbols on the cover.

Madam Temperance's was a transparent, pure gemstone eye, with different brilliance flashing from each facet.

Mr. Star's was a complex, gray-and-white metal hammer, seemingly having multiple functions and exuding a mechanical aesthetic.

In addition to the Weather Warlock potion formula in his mind and Ohayes's Mysticologist Beyonder characteristic and related materials in front of him, The Chariot Lumian also received an old, yellowish- brown book.

This book was made of tough, thick sheepskin parchment, with no symbols or words on the surface, only a bit of mercury-colored light fluttering beneath the texture of the paper, sometimes emerging, sometimes receding.

At the same time, information about the Post Apocalyptic Scripture suddenly emerged in Lumian's mind in a form different from the official Sealed Artifact records:

"0: Perhaps an item formed by the Soothsayer of the Fate pathway foreseeing some future event and losing control, or it may come from an even more ancient era.

"1: The external form is an ancient book made of sheepskin parchment, with mercury-colored specks of light and a rough texture.

"2: This book has no text, but will randomly display some prophecies, some of which are true and some are false. If one believes the false prophecies and prepares to avoid or welcome them, they will become real.

"One can use mental intention to write in this book about how different results would occur for certain people or events due to good or bad luck, and they have a high probability of becoming real, even if the final outcome does not match the prophecy, it will be similar.

"If the situation is chaotic, with many choices and only a few paths leading to a good ending, one can open this book, and it will provide a revelation. If this revelation can be correctly interpreted, it will guide the inquirer to the best outcome, otherwise it is extremely dangerous.

"3: If a non-godhood wielder holds this book, they will immediately be plagued by misfortune and die miserably or turn into a monster controlled by the book within an extremely short time.

"If a godhood wielder holds this book, they will suffer misfortune within an hour of using it, the degree of which is randomly determined, but it will not lead to death in a short time.

"This book will randomly select some living beings within a 30-kilometer radius and bestow misfortune upon them.

"This book will intermittently display various prophecies related to the holder, most of which are bad. Some are true, some are false, and if the false ones are believed and acted upon, they will become true.

"4: The method of sealing is to create a space with no living beings, with a radius of at least 30 kilometers, place this book in the center, and press a twenty- sided die on the surface."

Knowing this information about the Post-Apocalyptic Scripture came from Mr. Fool, Lumian calmly considered how he should use this Grade 0 Sealed Artifact.

The misfortune after using it can be resolved through a luck enhancement ritual or the exchange of fate fragments, 'gifting' the transferred misfortune to lucky pirates...

As for the intermittent prophecies, I'll just pretend I didn't see them, whether true or false. I've been living just fine without any prophetic abilities before. Hunters and Demonesses should believe more in their own minds and abilities...

Regarding the problem of randomly bestowing large- scale misfortune, I'll need to ask Mr. Fool or Madam Magician for help. Hmm, either deceive the Post- Apocalyptic Scripture into thinking there are no living beings within a 30-kilometer radius, or expand the Traveler's Bag to the size of a city. But then the materials for making the Traveler's Bag would have to be very special and high-grade…

As Lumian was pondering, the Post-Apocalyptic Scripture suddenly flipped a page.

Amid the rustling sound, the book stopped on one page, and a line of mercury-colored text quickly appeared: "In the Year 1368, as July fades to its final days, crimson shall rain from the heavens."

Immediately, the leading numbers changed, the mercury shifting to form new text: "In the Year 1360. as July fades to its final days, crimson shall rain from the heavens."

Wh-Lumian's eyes narrowed.

It was currently the spring of the year 1359!

Chapter 1074: The Weather Warlock's Ritual

Remembering the information about the Post-Apocalyptic Scripture, Lumian decided to pretend he hadn't seen the current prophecy.

Regardless, he would still have to move forward at his own pace!

Just then, the Post-Apocalyptic Scripture flipped another page, revealing new content: 'I see, Lumian Lee going crazy.'

These mercury-colored words were written in ancient Hermes.

Lumian raised an eyebrow, snapped the ancient leather-bound book shut, and pressed down on it forcefully.

He then looked up towards the head of the bronze long table. 'Mr. Fool, how should I seal the Post-Apocalyptic Scripture? Can you provide assistance?'

Shrouded in the grayish-white fog, Mr. Fool gestured with his hand, and Lumian's Traveler's Bag, which had been left on the battlefield, flew from behind the massive stone chair to its owner.

As Lumian caught it, he found that a vast space had been isolated within the Traveler's Bag, enough to contain an entire city.

In the center of this space sat an ordinary twenty-sided die.

I thought the materials for this Traveler's Bag wouldn't be able to support a city-sized space required to seal the Post-Apocalyptic Scripture, so I'd need to order a custom one… Has Mr. Fool remodeled it? Lumian placed a hand on his chest and bowed slightly. 'Thank you, Mr. Fool.'

When he raised his head, he saw that Ohayes's Beyonder characteristic had been pulverized and recomposed, divided into one Sequence 4 Mysticologist Beyonder characteristic and two Sequence 5 Constellations Master Beyonder characteristics, all neatly sealed.

Seeing this, Ma'am Hermit across from him immediately said, 'I will provide the potion recipes for Mysticologist and Constellations Master.'

Madam Magician sighed and added, 'I will provide a drop of a Mythical Creature blood.'

This is truly a comprehensive service, aiming to help Professor and the others each advance one Sequence… Lumian thanked on behalf of the members of the Curly Baboon Research Society in his mind.

He then pondered the Weather Warlock potion formula that Mr. Fool had just provided:

'Name: Weather Warlock

'Sequence: 2

'Main Ingredients: Skull of a Weather Giant, Core of a Mist Jellyfish

'Supplementary Ingredients: 30 ml of blood each from three deceased individuals who died in different extreme weather conditions, 500 strands of a Weather Giant's hair, five Weather Giant Crystals, a segment of a tree branch struck by lightning, 20 ml of the first snow melt of a region each year.

'Advancement Ritual: Forcefully change the weather of a region without external aid in a very short time.

'Note: After the Fourth Epoch, Weather Giants and Mist Jellyfish no longer exist.'

So Weather Warlocks now exist in the form of Angels or Sealed Artifacts? Lumian wasn't too surprised by this.

Hunter was the pathway of war, so the corresponding mystical creatures or Beyonder species were hard to fully conceal, and were likely to incite conflicts and disasters, making them easily noticed.

Furthermore, after the clashes of the previous four epochs, even if there were still mystical creatures corresponding to Weather Warlocks, they would be true subsidiary gods with complete Beyonder characteristics, in other words, Angels.

Lumian then focused his attention on the ritual.

Without external aid, this ritual is a bit difficult. It would need to be a region the size of the Trier area, relying on the Demoness of Unaging's frost abilities to affect the city of Trier would still take some time, and no one can interfere…

With external aid, it would be very simple…

Could the core of this ritual be about allowing me to master the secrets of weather changes, using a small force to leverage a large-scale change? Like a hurricane at sea, it starts off not that terrifying, just a cyclone, then gradually strengthens, slowly sweeping across a stretch of ocean and one region after another…

I can consider going in that direction, but it doesn't satisfy the 'very short time' condition, so I need to find a way to accelerate it myself?

Heh, time to study again. As they say in the dream city, those who lead wars must know both astronomy and geography…

Actually, there is a shortcut for this ritual. Like the Sequence 3 Sea King in the Sailor pathway, they can completely change the weather of a region. If I kill one of them during a big storm, wouldn't the weather change? That wouldn't involve external aid or anyone's help… Hmm, I can't use items during the battle, or that would count as external aid…

Heh heh, a Hunters' advancement does indeed have a hidden shortcut—hunting, fighting, war…

As The Chariot Lumian was pondering, Mr. Fool answered some questions from Ma'am Hermit and other Major Arcana.

After pondering for a moment, Lumian asked, 'Mr. Fool, why was the Hidden Sage made to come to life by the Great Mother?'

It was not that the Great Mother looked down on the Hidden Sage, but how was this accomplished?

From the mysticism knowledge taught by Madam Magician, during the Fourth Epoch, the world's defenses against the evil gods were still very strong.

Mr. Fool's calm voice replied, 'The problem lies in the Western Continent.'

The Western Continent? Isn't there still a layer of the Celestial Worthy's seals beyond the barrier? Before Lumian could ask the question on his mind, Mr. Fool continued, 'The Hidden Sage's way of addressing that entity is Great Mother, not Her true honorific name.'

What does that mean? Right, with the Hidden Sage's level, He should be qualified to know the Great Mother's full honorific name and not fear deep corruption, so why would He still use an epithet? It can't be that He was afraid of affecting Mr. Fool, right? Lumian felt that Mr. Fool's sentence contained very important information, but he couldn't quite decipher it.

Mr. Fool did not provide any further explanation, simply nodding lightly and saying, 'This gathering shall now conclude.'

'Your will is our will.' The Major Arcana present all stood up at the same time.

…

In Trier, inside that luxurious villa.

Seeing Lumian come downstairs into the living room, Franca asked curiously, 'How did it go?'

Although her main tasks were liaison, persuasion, and protecting key personnel, so her contributions were not too significant, this did not prevent her from being interested in the gains from the divine war and their specific distribution.

Lumian recounted everything he could tell them, and finally asked, 'Do you want to exchange for a Grade 1 Sealed Artifact?'

'Of course we do!' Franca said without hesitation. 'Even if we only keep one-third of those Mid- and Low-Sequence Beyonder characteristics and mystical items, it will be enough for us to develop followers in the Trier region, maintain believers, and even be quite prosperous!'

She didn't dare say 'spread the faith' out loud, because in the Trier region, the Church of The Fool could not actively spread the faith—this area belonged to the Church of the Eternal Blazing Sun and the Church of the God of Steam and Machinery.

Franca was thinking that afterwards, they would focus on seeking out and striking against hidden cults, developing the salvageable believers to their side, as well as Lumian's and the future Jenna's.

'Which one do you want to exchange for?' Lumian asked, inquiring about his two companions' preferences.

Franca and Jenna exchanged glances.

Jenna considered her words carefully. 'Demonesses are already quite adept in the mystical arts, and choosing the Sealed Artifacts formed by a Mysticologist or Clairvoyant Beyonder characteristic wouldn't be able to fill in gaps or enhance our strengths. As for clairvoyance, we have spiritual intuition, Magic Mirror Divination, and even the Post-Apocalyptic Scripture, so we don't urgently need it.'

'That's right,' Franca agreed. 'If it was a living Mysticologist or Clairvoyant, I could teach them ancient myths and hidden knowledge, and as long as some of it is true, it could help them create powerful fairy tale or mythological magic. But Sealed Artifacts can't listen to me or accept my guidance, the magical effects they produce will be fixed to what they originally had.'

Franca hesitated a bit before continuing, 'Of the remaining two, I'm more inclined towards the Pallbearer.

'The name alone tells me it must have powers in the domain of death, which can make up for Jenna's and my weaknesses—our single-target attacks aren't deadly or explosive enough, aside from curses and Mighty Blow. Plus, as it's from the Planter pathway, it must have healing abilities, which can be used to respond to believers, drive away afflictions. Hmm, with its assistance, the progress of my creating mystical bacterial pathogens will also be greatly accelerated.

'But the problem is, this is an item with godhood from the Planter pathway.'

The Planter pathway was also called the Earth pathway—the Mother pathway.

Franca looked at Lumian. 'Mr. Fool said you need to keep away from the Mother. Didn't you previously tell Lugano to minimize contact with you, and only contact through prayer? Hmm, it's not that you need to keep away, but that calamity needs' to keep away from the Mother. Jenna and I are also on the Calamity pathways.'

Lumian thought for a moment and said, 'Since Mr. Fool didn't say you can't choose this Sealed Artifact, there shouldn't be any major problems…

'In that case, you can petition Mr. Fool, expressing your willingness to exchange one-third of the Mid- and Low-Sequence Beyonder characteristics and mystical items for a Grade 1 Sealed Artifact, and directly ask if the Calamity pathway Beyonders can choose the one corresponding to the Pallbearer.'

'If that's not possible, we'll have to choose Arcane Scholar…' Franca's eyes gradually lit up. 'That works too, right? This is a Sequence 3 from the Savant pathway. I can find the Doctor Beyonder characteristic and handcraft a fully automated healing machine to respond to those prayers for curing afflictions, with the mirror responsible for autonomous distribution. Who knows, maybe I'll even be able to drive a Gundam in the future…'

With this settled, Lumian was about to have either Jenna or Franca pray to Mr. Fool, but Franca stood up with a beaming smile.

'Time to distribute the spoils to Professor and the others!'

Happiness shared is greater than happiness alone!

…

Professor and the others had already been brought back to Trier by Franca, and were currently gathered as instructed in a villa with a garden rented by Hela. Their families and the previously assembled Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society warlocks were all here.

Seeing Hidden Blade and the hooded, masked Muggle emerge from the mirror and rest in the living room, Professor, Periodic Table, and Prototype simultaneously stood up. 'When can we go home?'

Before they could finish speaking, they suddenly saw three items floating before Hidden Blade and Muggle.

One was a vague, gem-like orb emanating a gloomy aura, as if a gaze peered out from within to scrutinize everything. The other two were luminous, rather illusory-looking crystal spheres.

Wh— Professor and the others' gazes suddenly froze.

Chapter 1075: Persuasion

'What is this?' Professor could sense the terrifying aura emanating from the vague, gem-like orb, drawing her towards it.

Franca smiled and said, 'This is your reward.

'I didn't mention it beforehand, but once the operation is successful, we would help you each advance one Sequence.'

Professor was stunned for a moment, instinctively looking towards Periodic Table and Prototype, and finding them equally surprised.

After a few seconds of contemplation, Professor said sincerely, 'We don't need a reward. Being free from the forced indoctrination of the Hidden Sage is the best reward for us.'

'Yes.' Periodic Table and Prototype both expressed agreement.

After hearing Professor's words, Lumian suddenly recalled his own thoughts, as well as the sentence Mr. Fool had said at the temporary gathering.

Uniqueness, Grade 0 Sealed Artifacts, or Beyonder characteristics—none of that mattered. The important thing was that the Hidden Sage was dead.

Thinking about it this way, the Hidden Sage's death is not in vain. From a god to a common warlock, there were so many 'volunteers' who had the urge to destroy Him. The masked Lumian couldn't help but smile.

Franca could understand the perspective of Professor and the others, after all, they had a role model right beside them.

She smiled and said, 'You may not want it, but we must give it to you anyway. Otherwise, others will say we are stingy, miserly, and ungenerous. Don't worry, all participants will receive a generous share of the spoils. As a secret organization with over two thousand years of history, the Moses Ascetic Order have accumulated abundant resources.'

Professor was perplexed for two seconds. 'You have destroyed the Moses Ascetic Order?'

We warlocks are also members of the Moses Ascetic Order...

This operation was not only targeting the Hidden Sage, but also wiping out the Moses Ascetic Order?

Franca nodded. 'We have destroyed Avalon, as you all know, that was the headquarters of the Moses Ascetic Order.

'The Moses Ascetic Order's Chairman Torriope perished on the spot. Two of the Ten Pillars, Seids and Ohayes, have died.

Retia fled in defeat, and the remaining Ten Pillars, either betrayed or in hiding. In essence, the Moses Ascetic Order have effectively been annihilated.

'You are no longer members of the Moses Ascetic Order, because the Moses Ascetic Order no longer exists. From now on, you don't need to complete the corresponding tasks, nor report to anyone. The only one who can protect you is yourselves.

'And as I mentioned at the gathering, the apocalypse is likely to come within one or two years.

'So, won't you take this opportunity to advance your Sequences?'

Professor, Periodic Table, and Prototype fell silent—they had all been convinced.

Franca smiled and said, 'The reward of helping the participants advance one Sequence is actually not very fair.

Why should Professor become a demigod, while we are only at Sequence 5, right?

'This is where you, Professor, must take on greater responsibility. If you truly become a Mysticologist and a demigod, you'll need to help Periodic Table and Prototype afterward, providing them with the necessary protection.

'Also, before leaving Trier, if you encounter trouble that you can't resolve on your own, you can recite my honorific name.

As long as I'm not caught up in other accidents, I'll definitely come to your aid.

'My honorific name is:

'The One Who Never Ages, Keeper of Diseases and Plagues, the Demoness Accompanied by Strife and Catastrophe, the Cup Bearing Joy and Pain, the Great Franca Roland.'

Lumian realized that Franca wanted to develop Professor and the others, who had lost the protection of the Moses Ascetic Order, into her own anchors.

Anchors didn't necessarily come only from faith, but also from solid, stable interpersonal relationships, though they couldn't be passed down from generation to generation like faith.

Now, Professor and the others were at a stage where their future was uncertain, no longer having an organization to rely on and provide resources. The Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society's gathering, which was more like a trading platform, was very suitable for Franca to extend an olive branch to them.

Even if Professor and the others later left Trier, Franca could give them self-locating mirrors to communicate remotely, and use them to spread the faith of Saint Franca Roland, the patron saint of the Church of The Fool.

However, Franca was still too self-conscious, considering Professor and the others as friends and fellow transmigrators, without thinking of developing them into believers, let alone recruiting them as archbishops or bishops in the Sick Church...

Lumian did not take the opportunity to introduce his own honorific name.

'Honorific name... Are you already a Sequence 3 patron saint?' Professor and the others had quite extensive knowledge of mysticism.

Isn't this advancement too fast?

Two gatherings ago, Hidden Blade was still a Sequence 5 Demoness!

Previously, when Franca said she had already become a demigod, Professor and the others were more envious and slightly surprised, feeling that it was still somewhat normal.

But now, they had a sense of their understanding being overturned.

Franca concurred succinctly, 'Coincidence combined with the uniqueness of being a transmigrator In fact, Muggle is also Sequence 3 now.'

As she spoke, she glanced at Lumian.

She could probably understand why Lumian didn't take this opportunity to reveal his own honorific name and develop anchors based on interpersonal relationships.

He hoped Muggle would still be Aurore.

Wh— Professor, Periodic Table, and Prototype looked at the silent Muggle standing beside them in amazement.

She is also a Sequence 3 patron saint?

What is wrong with this world?

The hooded, half-masked Lumian chuckled. 'Yes, I'll forgo telling you my honorific name. Anyway, Hidden Blade and I have been staying together recently, so asking her for help is the same as asking me.

'The reason we were able to advance so quickly while remaining normal is because transmigrators have special qualities. Professor, if you can become a Mysticologist, you can try drawing power from the fairy tales, myths, and urban legends you heard before you transmigrated. Some of them should be real.'

Lumian's suggestion would lead to a certain degree of exposure of the secret to transmigration, but as long as Professor became a Mysticologist with the core ability of Mystical Re-enactment, she would eventually discover the issue.

Professor and the others looked at each other with puzzlement, able to sense the discomfort of Hidden Blade and Muggle in not wanting to elaborate.

They then asked Franca, 'Where is the cathedral that you are the patron saint of?'

'It's in the Lavigny Docks area of the square district, the Saint Franca Cathedral of the Church of The Fool,' Franca provided a simple introduction.

Professor had a realization. 'So you are from the Church of The Fool?

'This operation targeting the Hidden Sage was led by the Church of The Fool?'

Franca suddenly looked a bit proud. 'Yes, Mr. Fool himself lent a hand, and the God of Steam and Machinery provided necessary assistance...'

At this point, she smiled and looked at Lumian. 'Muggle assisted from the sidelines.'

Huh? Professor and the others were stunned once again.

A Sequence 3 Saint can participate in divine wars?

Franca quickly added, 'Her task was to serve as bait.'

'...' Professor and the others were speechless for a moment.

'Okay, okay, keep these Beyonder characteristics and corresponding ingredients, potion formulas safe—they've all been sealed. You don't need to rush, adjust your condition first before holding the ritual.' Franca distributed the spoils. 'This is a drop of Mythical Creature blood, to be used in the ritual.'

Finally, she took out a drop of blood, shimmering with brilliant starlight, locked within a dim, spherical orb from her Traveler's Bag.

After celebrating the death of the Hidden Sage with Professor and the others with champagne, Franca and Lumian returned to the luxurious villa, with the former volunteering to pray to Mr. Fool.

He was a fellow countryman!

Franca set up the altar and performed the ritual, fluently reciting the corresponding honorific name. A faint gray fog vaguely emerged before her.

'Esteemed Mr. Fool, I would like to exchange the Mid- and Low-Sequence Beyonder characteristics and mystical items placed before me for a Grade 1 Sealed Artifact. As a Beyonder on the Demoness pathway and a close friend of The Chariot, do you think I am suitable to choose the one corresponding to the Pallbearer?' Franca expressed her intent in one go.

Soon, she heard Mr. Fool's gentle voice. 'There is some risk, but it can be borne.'

In that case, it's better to let it go, it's not an urgent need...

Franca immediately said, 'Esteemed Mr. Fool, I'll exchange for the one corresponding to Arcane Scholar.'

As soon as she finished speaking, she saw all the items she had placed on the altar disappear completely, vanishing into thin air.

Immediately, an object flew out from the enlarged candle flame, landing on the altar.

It was half a mask, the left side.

It was composed of numerous gears, rivets, bearings, springs, and small steel tubes—mechanical parts. The eye position was left empty, covered by a lens that looked like glass or crystal, the overall complexity giving it a strange beauty.

At the same time, Franca received a rush of information:

'Name: Face of the Arcane '0: Originated from the death of an Arcane Scholar in the Fourth Epoch. '1: The exterior is a left-faced mask made of machinery, possessing a living characteristic. '2: After donning this mask, it can emit a beam of light from the eye guard, capable of destroying the structures of most objects, thoroughly disintegrating the target.

'The wearer of this mask will possess extraordinary manufacturing abilities, able to create mystical items, or complex mechanical devices, or combine the two. Remember, the mask is the master when doing these things, not the wearer. It always leaves one or two hilariously terrible negative effects on its own products.

'Wearing this mask can allow one to truly extract environmental information and work backwards to deduce what has happened.

'The mask's wearer can quickly grasp the relevant information when using other mystical items, effectively avoiding negative effects, except for those brought by the mask itself.

'The wearer of the mask can imbue the items they create with souls, giving them a certain degree of vitality. But remember, these are not created out of thin air—they come from fragments of spirits from the spirit world, extracted from the lives around them.

Chapter 1076: Savant

"3: Every three minutes, this mask drains life force from its wearer;

"When the mask's life force drops below a certain threshold, it will drain life force from living beings within a five-kilometer radius to replenish itself;

"The rate at which the mask's life force decreases depends on frequency of use. If left unused, it can last up to seven days. If used frequently and unable to replenish life force from the wearer, it can only last 45 minutes;

"The mask possesses living characteristics. Even when in use, it must be closely monitored, otherwise it will attack the wearer and their companions;

"The mask yearns for a complete body. It will entice the wearer and those around them to gradually replace their bodies with mechanical constructs;

"Those enticed by it will not have their life force drained, nor will they be attacked by it.

"4: The method of sealing is to let it sleep, replenishing its life force at regular intervals, with specific timing depending on usage conditions;

"It can be persuaded."

A Sealed Artifact that can be persuaded and possesses living characteristics? After hearing Franca's relay of information, Lumian extended his right hand toward the Face of the Arcane that she was holding.

During this process, he had already activated the residual aura of the Blood Emperor in his palm, along with the Underworld Daoist's seal and that terrifying black pinhole appearing.

On the mechanical mask that only covered the left half of the face, the springs, mainsprings, rivets, gears, and other components suddenly appeared to lose their elasticity, gradually relaxing.

It was like watching a snarling puppy quickly lying down, legs up in the air, exposing its belly.

Lumian stroked it a couple of times with his finger and said with a smile, "It can indeed be persuaded."

At this moment, Ludwig came over, staring eagerly at the Face of the Arcane, and asked, "Can I eat it?"

He wasn't asking if the mechanical mask was edible, but rather if he himself was allowed to eat it.

On the Face of the Arcane, whether springs, mainsprings, gears, or bearings, everything suddenly tightened with a swoosh, making the sound of machinery starting up.

"No." Lumian answered Ludwig's question.

After becoming a Sea Monster, Ludwig seemed able to directly consume Beyonder characteristics and mystical items, then use their corresponding powers through some method.

He wouldn't lose control from this, but it would accumulate madness and appetite.

Disappointed, Ludwig pulled out a lollipop, comforting himself with the sweet treat.

"Being able to be persuaded means it can be reasoned with. Isn't sleeping once a day a normal living habit?" Lumian said with a smile as he withdrew his finger.

"Before long, Anthony should be able to become a Sequence 4 Manipulator. When that time comes, if the child doesn't want to sleep, we can Hypnotize it to sleep. Children who don't sleep will be eaten by Ludwig."

As for the requirement of regularly replenishing life force, Lumian thought it was easily solved-he now had to take Ludwig out to sea for a feast every day.

After confirming that the Face of the Arcane had lulled itself to sleep, Franca handed this Grade 1 Sealed Artifact to Jenna. "You keep it safe. Whoever needs it between us can use it."

Jenna didn't refuse, and while placing the Face of the Arcane into the Traveler's Bag, she thoughtfully said, "I know which pathway Julien should take."

"Which one?" Franca had a vague guess at the answer.

Jenna let out a sigh and explained, "Savant."

She explained earnestly, seemingly trying to convince herself, "The Savant pathway primarily focuses on mastering scientific knowledge, enhancing memory, intelligence, and logical reasoning abilities. Unlike the Mystery Pryer and many other pathways, it doesn't involve high spirituality, seeing things that shouldn't be seen, or hearing voices that shouldn't be heard. It also doesn't attract disasters, making it relatively safe for daily life.

"Moreover, Julien is already a technical worker who loves machinery. With just one or two months of additional knowledge, he should be able to fully digest the potion. The subsequent Archaeologist Sequence is equally straightforward-we can find relatively safe ruins for him to explore, provide him with carefully selected historical artifacts and corresponding documentation to guide his research.

"Given these conditions, plus the approaching apocalypse as a prerequisite, he could become a Sequence 7 Appraiser in a short time. While an Appraiser isn't particularly strong on their own, they can identify mystical items and maximize risk avoidance when using them. At that point, by giving him Sequence 5 Sealed Artifacts, we can provide him with basic self-protection abilities, essentially making him equivalent to a quickly-molded Sequence 5 Beyonder.

"Additionally, among the Mid-to Low-Sequence Beyonder characteristics and potion formulas I obtained from the Moses Ascetic Order this time, the Savant pathway ingredients are the most numerous after the Warlock pathway."

There was no shortage of ingredients and formulas.

"When you think about it, the Savant pathway is indeed the most suitable. It can effectively leverage external power without reckless archaeology, while avoiding too deep an involvement in the mystical world," Franca agreed with Jenna's reasoning.

Lumian then said to Jenna, "You can modify your previous plan now. The key is how to naturally and reasonably get your brother to encounter and choose the Savant pathway."

"Yes," Jenna nodded seriously.

…

Thursday afternoon, Northern Trier Train Station.

Julien, wearing a gray-blue worker's uniform, a flat cap, and carrying a suitcase, stood in the crowded second-class carriage aisle, slowly moving forward amid the whistling arrival announcement.

Standing nearly 1.75 meters tall, with flaxen hair and regular features, his half-year exchange study had greatly boosted his confidence in his technical abilities. His entire demeanor, from temperament to behavior, exuded ambition.

He believed he would soon be valued highly, receive promotions in rank and salary, and before long become the kind of senior worker who could take on apprentices.

Once my salary increases, we can move away from Rue Pasteur to a better neighborhood, and Celia wouldn't need to work part-time anymore-she could focus on studying dramatic performance... Thinking of the bright future, Julien walked with straight posture, each step in his gait firm and steady.

Following the flow of people, Julien exited the steam train and the relatively clean platform, entered the Northern Train Station, and passed through the turnstiles.

He looked around, searching for his sister who had promised to meet him.

As he searched, he noticed many travelers unconsciously gazing toward one corner, reluctant to look away, with some even walking in that direction.

Though curious, Julien didn't go to see what the commotion was about.

Meeting up with Celia was the most important thing right now!

After walking several more steps, he finally spotted the familiar figure.

She was also the person drawing all those gazes.

Julien saw that his sister Celia Bello's flaxen hair had darkened considerably and was tied in a simple bun, Her face wore no makeup yet appeared fresh and clean, like a flower newly washed by rain.

Celia seems to have grown even prettier, more beautiful than Mom's photos when she was young... Julien quickly squeezed through, blocking a man who was trying to chat up his sister.

"Welcome home!" Jenna gave her brother a hug.

Meanwhile, she grumbled inwardly, it's really inconvenient for a Demoness to go out without concealing her appearance. Even with using Lie to adjust my features to look more like before and having suppressed my charm, I still draw attention, though not as drastically...

"Let's go," Julien glanced at the eager men around them and protectively guided his sister quickly out of the Northern Train Station.

Jenna pointed to a double-decker public horse carriage. "This one's already full, let's wait for the next one."

Julien looked around and pointed to the rental carriage lane. "Let's take one of those back. I've saved some money during this time."

He had expected his frugal sister to object and need convincing, but to his surprise, Jenna immediately nodded in agreement.

Julien felt that his sister must have changed quite a bit over these six months.

After settling into the two-wheeled, two-seater rental carriage, Jenna asked with a smile, "How did your studies go? Your letters weren't very detailed about Julien instinctively straightened his back. "I think I'm about at the same level as the master who taught me before."

He went on to explain many technical details, though Jenna couldn't understand them.

Jenna offered some complimentary remarks before changing the subject, "I recently met an outstanding technical expert. She says she's a technical expert-I don't understand much about it, but when she repairs machines, she's really incredible, the kind of incredible that even I can recognize.

"She said when you return, everyone could get together to exchange ideas."

She? Julien relaxed.

With a smile, he said, "Sure, you can arrange a time with her."

He was very confident in his technical skills now.

"Let's go right after you put away your luggage-we'll have dinner together!" Jenna quickly decided, as if her previous words had been leading up to this.

Julien gave his sister a suspicious look, suspecting she was trying to set him up.

However, after their long separation, he didn't want to refuse.

After dropping off his luggage at their rental place on Rue Pasteur, Jenna led Julien to a newly built factory on the south side of Quartier du Jardin Botanique.

Inside the factory, a young woman with short hair and goggles was using a hammer, pliers, and other tools to work on a giant machine, continuously installing rivets, levers, bearings, and other components.

Her movements were fluid and unassuming, but every detail was perfect, not a fraction off, without the slightest error.

As Julien watched, he became transfixed, his previously high confidence gradually crumbling.

Is this even humanly possible?

Even machines manufacturing machines can't achieve this level of precision!

Could this be the blessing of the God of Technology that the Church of Steam preaches about?

When the woman finished her work, Jenna stepped forward and called out with a smile, "Good afternoon, Miss Bella."

Bella's body instinctively trembled slightly, then she turned around and said with a smile.

"Celia, is this your brother?"

"Yes, my brother Julien." Jenna made the introduction.

Julien nodded bewilderedly, his previous confidence completely gone.

Chapter 1077: Worship and Humility

Bella took off her goggles, revealing a face with soft features and beautiful eyes, unlike the more masculine female mechanical workers in Julien's stereotypical impression.

"I heard you just returned from an exchange study?" Bella asked curiously.

"Yes." Julien no longer had any enthusiasm to share this experience.

"What did you study?" Bella eagerly pointed at the mechanical parts scattered on the factory floor. "Why don't we exchange ideas? Try assembling a machine with the remaining parts? A qualified artisan must have their own judgment and possess sufficient creativity."

Julien instinctively wanted to refuse, clearly knowing there was an unbridgeable gap between himself and this approachable lady.

But at this moment, his sister Jenna encouraged, "Give it a try. This will be your first creation since completing your studies.

"It's okay if there are flaws, Ms. Bella will guide you and help correct any issues."

Guide... Julien's heart suddenly stirred.

He first spoke at length about how ordinary he was and how his skills were barely passing, then walked among the scattered parts, observing and contemplating.

When he picked up the pliers, Bella walked over and nodded slightly. "Your hand position has a small flaw."

She quickly pointed out the problem, correcting the mistakes in Julien's posture from past bad habits.

During the subsequent assembly, Bella occasionally offered similar guidance, and her teaching either led to sudden insights for Julien or made him strangely discover that many things he originally found difficult suddenly became simple.

While teaching, Bella seemed to radiate an indescribable light, no longer just the girl-next-door from before. Every word she spoke gave Julien the feeling that she had absolute confidence.

People who were confident and had the ability to support that confidence were always charismatic, unconsciously inspiring worship.

Gradually, Julien's gaze toward Bella became like a student looking at their most respected teacher, and his behavior began to show signs of imitation.

This was a truly top-tier artisan!

A top-tier artisan that ordinary people rarely got to meet!

Thus, Julien completed his assembly, creating ab machine for precise metal cutting.

He couldn't believe this was his own work, it was the kind that had to be purchased from the Church of Steam factories.

His gaze toward Bella grew even more admiring.

Jenna sincerely praised the machine for a while, then took Julien home to change clothes, arranging to meet Bella at a restaurant near the botanical garden.

The three of them enjoyed a pleasant atmosphere with engaging conversation.

"Excuse me, I need to use the restroom." Jenna stood up, putting down her napkin.

After watching his sister's figure disappear into the restroom corridor entrance, Julien turned back to see Bella lift her red wine glass, taking a small sip, smiling kindly yet with a hint of superiority.

"You truly have some talent in mechanics."

"No, compared to you, this can't be called talent," Julien responded, embarrassed and somewhat inferior.

Bella put down her wine glass and shook her head.

"I mean it.

"Would you be interested in becoming my apprentice?"

"Apprentice?" Julien was stunned.

Bella nodded gently.

"Yes, like the ancient apprenticeships-following me to learn, growing with my help, and after completing your training, serving me for a period without pay."

Wh- Such a young top-tier artisan would take apprentices? Why would she value me? Julien was y surprised, delighted, yet puzzled. "Am I... am I qualified?"

"I said you truly have some talent." Bella, who appeared like the girl next door, showed some authority when discussing this matter.

"Can an ordinary person like me reach your level?" Julien asked anxiously.

"I can only say there's a good chance, though it ultimately depends on you," Bella said thoughtfully. "If all goes well, you could approach my level within half a year, though not quite reach it. Afterward, you'd serve me without pay for a year and a half."

Julien's mind buzzed, feeling as if this windfall was too big, making him dizzy.

At this moment, Jenna emerged from the restroom corridor.

Julien immediately lowered his voice, "May I have a few days to consider?"

It wasn't that he didn't want this opportunity, but rather that he was suspicious of Ms. Bella's true intentions.

How could such good fortune fall to someone like me?

Could this be some new type of scam? Did Ms. Bella have connections with those islanders?

"Of course." Bella didn't press him.

After enjoying dinner, back at their rental place on Rue Pasteur, Julien casually asked his sister, "Celia, who exactly is Ms. Bella? How is she such a top-tier artisan at such a young age?"

"So she really is an amazing technical expert?" Jenna asked excitedly.

After Julien confirmed this, she recalled, "Ms. Bella often watches performances at the Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons, she's a believer in the God of Steam and Machinery, and seems to have deep connections with the monks at the Deep Valley Cloister. Her title as technical expert should be certified by the Church of Steam-I can help you inquire if it's true."

Hearing that Ms. Bella was a true god believer and had close ties with the Church of Steam's monastery monks, Julien's doubts gradually dispersed.

Someone like that shouldn't be a con artist!

But we still need to confirm her identity with the Church of Steam clergy...

Julien slowly regained his confidence.

If I could learn Ms. Bella's techniques, even at eighty percent of her level, I could become a technical director sought after by all factories in Trier, and might even hope to open my own factory in the future!

After chatting with his sister until nearly dawn, Julien lay in bed, tossing and turning, too excited to sleep.

His mind was filled with images of Ms. Bella-focused, serious, knowledgeable, technically profound, someone who unconsciously inspired admiration and worship.

…

In the newly built factory south of Quartier du Jardin Botanique.

Bella watched Jenna, dressed as a witch, walk out from the mirror, and said trembling, "Madame, I have said everything as you instructed."

In her mind, this was Death itself, bringing destruction and despair.

She had watched helplessly as many of her companions died one by one, coughing blood everywhere.

Jenna nodded expressionlessly. "He will accept your proposal.

"For the next two years, you'll be responsible for taking him to major cities like Suhit, guiding him to encounter mystical knowledge, becoming a Savant, and helping him digest potions until he advances to Appraiser.

"I will ask the Church of Steam clergy in the corresponding regions to help, making Julien believe you have divine blessing and are trustworthy,

"After two years, if nothing goes wrong with Julien and his development meets expectations, you will regain your freedom-ah, with one prerequisite: you must convert to a true god and complete the corresponding prayers."

Before Bella could respond, Jenna took out a palm- sized doll seemingly stained with dark blood from her Traveler's Bag and said with a slight smile, "If you try to escape or do anything harmful to Julien, I can easily find you with this. Don't worry, I won't kill you-I'll just send you back to the Future."

Hearing the last half of the sentence, Bella's face suddenly turned pale, as if recalling something she never wanted to remember again.

That was worse than nightmares!

She hurriedly responded with extreme humility. "Madame, I will wholeheartedly complete the task you've given me!"

…

A week later, in the apartment that Franca and Jenna had originally rented, which hadn't yet expired.

Julien sat across from the dining table.

He looked at his sister and hesitantly said, "Celia, there's something I want to discuss with you."

"What is it?" Jenna looked puzzled.

Julien chose his words carefully. "Ms. Bella wants me to become her apprentice, like in ancient times."

"Such good fortune? If you can learn some real skills from her, you could become a top technical expert in the future!" Jenna was delighted for her brother, her eyes full of expectation.

"But, but Ms. Bella is going to serve as technical director at a factory run by the Steam cloister in Suhit. If I become her apprentice, I'll have to go with her and stay there for at least two years," Julien said somewhat embarrassedly.

"It's only two years, you're still young. With real skills, you'll have plenty of opportunities to make money-big money-in Trier!" Jenna encouraged her brother.

"But you..." Julien suddenly fell silent.

"I still need to study dramatic performance for another year, then spend a year playing supporting roles at the Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons-that was agreed upon when I became an acting apprentice, remember?" Jenna comforted and persuaded her brother. "For the next two years, my life will be very regular, nothing requiring help."

Julien made a sound of agreement and suddenly pulled out a stack of bills and coins from his pocket. "Celia, take these. Focus on studying dramatic performance these two years, don't worry about making money."

Jenna looked at her brother for a few seconds, then smiled and accepted the cash. "By the time you return, I might be a famous theater actress."

"And I'll be an outstanding technical expert." Julien suddenly recalled their childhood aspirations, and they shared a smile.

He seemed to have shed a heavy burden.

After Julien left, Franca walked out from the master bedroom, exclaiming joyfully, "How wonderful, no hypnosis needed!"

"Actually, there's not much difference. When I made the decision to hypnotize Julien, this matter was essentially already settled." Jenna smiled self-mockingly.

Franca consoled her, "Whatever the case, this matter has been initially resolved.

"Next, our main tasks are to consolidate the cult's followers, secretly spread the faith, and devise convincing explanations to include you.

"Also, help Anthony prepare for his advancement ceremony, and track down the Order of All Extinction and Zaratul."

Jenna made a sound of agreement and sincerely sighed. "A rare period of peace."

Thus, as Lumian and others remained relatively stable without bringing any catastrophes, time flew by, and several months passed in the blink of an eye.

Chapter 1078: "Near August"

At the Auberge du Coq Doré's basement bar.

Leon, wearing a light blue shirt, walked in, and every patron he passed greeted him warmly from the bottom of their hearts.

Leon sat at the bar and smiled at the owner and bartender, Pavard Neeson. "One La Fée Verte."

Pavard Neeson, who wore a ponytail and had an artistic air about him, asked curiously while pouring the drink, "Why do you always order La Fée Verte?"

"It has sacred meaning for me," Leon said, resting his elbow on the bar counter while surveying the other patrons.

Pavard didn't ask further.

This Monsieur Leon, who looked more like a scholar than a laborer, had become the most respected figure in Rue Anarchie over the past few months.

He arrived in April and gained widespread support in just over three months.

He would help those who were bullied get justice, prepare medicines and treat serious illnesses for free, tell stories to the children of the Rue Anarchie, help willing vagrants, dancers, and streetwalkers find jobs that met their basic needs. He never looked down on the residents here and didn't dress flashily.

And somehow both the market district gangs and police seemed to ignore him.

How could such a person not be beloved?

Leon paid for his drink, took the dreamlike green- colored glass, and took a small sip.

At that moment, he saw a young man in a white shirt and open black vest, holding a beer, jump onto a small round table.

"Everyone, look at me!

"I announce that Madame Fors has published The Great Adventurer 8-two volumes in less than half a year, how incredible!

"And by the way. I'm getting promoted with a raise!

"This will be my last time drinking here for the next two years, can you believe it? I've truly mastered ancient Feysac, the language that only truly civilized people understand!

"What excellent talent! I passed the exam and got assigned overseas-I'm going to take up an important position in Suhit.

"Congratulate me! The Auberge du Coq Doré is about to produce a truly civilized person!"

Leon watched with a smile, enjoying the chaotic yet strangely harmonious atmosphere.

He stayed until 10 pm, when he finally left the bar amid everyone's farewells, went up to the third floor, and entered Room 302.

Someone was already waiting for him there.

It was Lugano, a man with thick eyebrows, large eyes, and a very upright bearing.

"Your Grace, what brings you here?" Leon asked, both surprised and delighted yet somewhat fearful.

Lugano glanced at his subordinate and raised both hands, making an outward pushing gesture. "Disease be gone!"

Leon finally understood and returned the same gesture. "Disease be gone! Praise the great God of Plague, praise the great God of Disease!"

Lugano finally showed a satisfied expression. "How many followers have you developed recently?"

Leon respectfully answered, "Following the revelations and your instructions, I haven't preached directly. Instead, by helping the residents here and utilizing their fear of disease, I've gradually developed a group of willing followers, forming the embryo of a congregation.

"Next, I will share my faith with the followers, speak of the greatness of the two Malady Gods, and of Your Grace's mercy and grace."

Lugano nodded. "Well done.

"I've walked around Rue Anarchie and several nearby streets, hearing about your deeds from many people.

"Remember, you must follow the Church's precepts: first, no public preaching; second, followers are allowed to also believe in the Eternal Blazing Sun or the God of Steam and Machinery or other orthodox gods."

"Yes, Your Grace," Leon bowed his head and sincerely responded.

Lugano took out a small jewelry box Inlaid with silver patterns and what appeared to be an ordinary vanity mirror, saying with a smile, "No need to address me as Your Grace anymore. From today on, you will become the bishop of this area, reporting directly to Her Holiness the Pope and receiving orders from him."

"I…" Leon's eyes lit up, unsure how to react in front of Bishop Lugano.

"You deserve this." Lugano handed the small jewelry box and mirror to Leon, "The mirror is for communicating with Her Holiness The jewelry box contains the Warlock Sequence's potion formula and all ingredients-this is a blessing from the God of Plague and the God of Disease. Once you're ready, you can consume the potion and advance to Warlock."

Thinking of the Beyonder powers and miraculous spells he had witnessed from Bishop Lugano and other bishops, Leon became excited and hastily thrust out his right palm. "Praise the God of Plague, praise the God of Disease!"

Lugano joined in praising the two Malady Gods, then said, "The jewelry box also contains some spell documents that will let you master several spells for treatment and medicine preparation, without needing help from me and other bishops.

"These can be used to treat common illnesses. For truly serious cases, recite the honorific names of the God of Plague or God of Disease."

"Understood." Leon accepted the small jewelry box and mirror.

Thinking about how he would soon become a Sequence 7 Warlock and master true supernatural powers, he trembled with excitement, believing even more devoutly in the two Malady Gods and revering Her Holiness the Pope.

Just over three months ago, he had been a pitiful man who was scammed by islanders, impoverished, desperate about life, and wanting to end his own existence.

After leaving Room 302 of the Auberge du Coq Doré, Lugano returned to his previously rented apartment.

Then, he took out a mirror and placed it solemnly and ceremoniously on the table. "The Lady more ancient than the times, Servant of Calamity, Child of Plague and Disease, Destroyer who walks in Shadows, Guide of all lost lambs in Trier, the great God of Plague, I beseech you, beseech your gaze..." After saying his prayers, Lugano placed the already organized church affairs documents before the mirror on the table. watching them pass through the veil and disappear into the mirror's surface like ripples in water.

Soon, text appeared on the mirror's surface: "Before long, you will become an archbishop, overseeing multiple dioceses."

This message came from the Pope of the Sick Church.

After receiving the reply, Lugano became elated once again.

Although he regretted no longer being a Blessed who could report directly to the great God of Plague Lumian Lee, and could only follow Her Holiness the Pope's instructions, over these past few months, he had not only acquired the acting method but also obtained the Sequence 6 Biologist potion formula and corresponding ingredients from the Planter pathway, and was now already a Sequence 6 Beyonder.

From Her Holiness the Pope's words just now, after accumulating achievements for another year or so, he would have the chance to advance another Sequence, becoming a Druid and an archbishop.

With anticipation, Lugano looked at the mirror and respectfully bowed his head. "Yes, Your Holiness."

…

In the luxurious villa where Lumian and others resided.

Her Holiness the Pope of the Sick Church, Jenna, sat on a long sofa leaning against the great God of Disease Franca Roland, reviewing Lugano's work report.

After discussion, Lumian and Franca decided to let Jenna first be recognized by the Sick Church followers as Pope, which could also obtain anchors and well explain changes in doctrine.

In the future, if Jenna could advance to Sequence 3, they could use the method of both the God of Plague and God of Disease jointly issuing divine edicts to promote the meritorious Pope to a subsidiary god. Her related deeds would naturally become part of the church catechism, and no one would question it.

After that, they would gradually elevate her status.

After hearing Jenna's narration, Franca looked toward Lumian, who was curled up reading on another sofa.

"I think our anchors are sufficient to support our advancement to Sequence 2; besides, we can't preach on a large scale in Trier anyway."

Not preaching publicly but being able to develop some followers was the tacit understanding between Lumian's group and the God of Steam and Machinery Church.

In this aspect, the God of Steam and Machinery was quite accommodating to them.

Previously, during the Holy Day in May, the Church of Steam held a large mass attended by tens of thousands in front of Trier's patriarchal cathedral. The participants' emotions were exceptionally high, becoming very devout and fervent as they were influenced by the mass itself and the surrounding atmosphere during the ritual.

Anthony, as a believer of the God of Steam and Machinery, also attended this mass and secretly consumed the potion amid the emotional resonance of tens of thousands, becoming a Sequence 4 Manipulator.

This was using the Church of Steam's grand mass to simplify the ritual's execution.

Other Spectators didn't do this because it would be considered blasphemy and would be noticed by the corresponding true god due to the influence of the mass ritual and fervent emotions, bringing down terrible divine punishment.

But the God of Steam and Machinery allowed Anthony to do this.

Lumian and Anthony had prayed at the Church of Steam's patriarchal cathedral in Trier beforehand and received a permissive revelation,

Lumian put down his book and said with a smile, "The current problem is that we cannot obtain the Beyonder characteristics of either Weather Warlock or Demoness of Catastrophe."

According to information Franca gathered from within the Demoness Sect, they could confirm that the Demoness Sect possessed at least five Demoness of Catastrophe Beyonder characteristics-four Angels (Gray, Yellow, Blue, Purple) and one Grade 0 Sealed Artifact.

Lumian's group had further learned that if a pathway had three Sequence 1 Angels, the corresponding Sequence 2 Angels could only number six to eight, with the specific amount varying by pathway.

In other words, with the existence of the true god-the Primordial Demoness-there were only one to three Demoness of Catastrophe Beyonder characteristics outside the Demoness Sect, all currently unaccounted for, at least not among the Church of The Fool's allied forces.

Similarly, the distribution of Weather Warlock Beyonder characteristics was: the Einhorn family had two Sequence 2 Angels, the Sauron family had one Sequence 2 Angel, the Intis military had one Sequence 2 Angel (this seemed to come from the outflow of Beyonder characteristics after the Sauron family's decline), the Iron and Blood Cross Order had at least one Sequence 2 Angel, and there was one corresponding Beyonder characteristic in the Blue Avenger vault.

In other words, at most two Weather Warlock Beyonder characteristics remained unaccounted for, perhaps none at all, and Lumian currently had no leads.

Before Franca and Jenna could respond, Lumian thoughtfully said, "I plan to make a trip to Bansy Harbor soon."

Chapter 1079: The Stele

At Bansy Harbor, by the Sonia Sea.

After Lumian, Franca, and Jenna arrived, they saw endless ruins.

Every building here had collapsed, with many blackened marks. Wild animals now inhabited the area, occasionally letting out 'caw caw' calls of crows.

Lumian had heard from Madam Magician about Bansy Harbor's destruction, but this was his first time actually coming here.

'From the information gathered, this used to be the territory of the Medici family, who believed in the God of Weather. There's a chance that the Weather Warlock Beyonder characteristic could be found here, but they were likely taken by that Red Angel,' Franca said as she looked around.

Staring at the ruins of Bansy before him, Lumian felt like he was back in the disaster-stricken Cordu.

He stood there dazed for a few seconds before speaking, 'This is one purpose—to search around won't cost us much.

'The other purpose is to find that special location Madam Magician mentioned, use the corpse wax candle, and complete the ritual contract.'

Chuckling, Lumian continued, 'Since the Celestial Master was able to use Professor and company as a medium to locate the Hidden Sage and help Mr. Fool lock onto the target, the Blood Emperor ritual contract should also be able to find where the remaining Weather Warlock Beyonder characteristic is. As someone who is barely counted as His Blessed, is it too much to ask Him for this small favor?'

'In theory, it's possible, but it's too dangerous. It would be better to accumulate contributions and seek revelations from Mr. Fool. He is the greatest existence at the top of the Seer pathway, and should be able to divine clues about the remaining Weather Warlock Beyonder characteristic.' Franca was not too fond of Lumian taking unnecessary risks.

Though this is his style—one just can't avoid being defiled from constantly touching pitch. He should try to control the number of risky ventures.

Jenna nodded in agreement with Franca's words. 'You think I haven't sought revelations from Mr. Fool? Guess what his revelation was?' Lumian smiled. 'Bansy!'

'Alright then,' Franca grumbled.

'You two help me guard against any accidents,' Lumian said, placing his hand on his chest and bowing his head to pray to Mr. Fool.

After the prayer, he activated the remnant aura of the Blood Emperor, the Underworld Daoist seal, and the dark pinhole in his right palm. Guided solely by his spiritual intuition, he began to delve deeper into the ruins.

Franca and Jenna followed several tens of meters behind him, one on each side.

They had walked for nearly a quarter of an hour when Lumian stopped in front of a collapsed building.

The walls of the building were shattered, and only a few charred wooden pieces remained of the entrance. On the ground, which was scorched as if by lightning, were two vivid blood-red human silhouettes.

In the corner next to these two shadows was a simple drawing depicting a tentacled monster.

'According to the intel provided by Mr. Hanged Man, this was the Bansy Harbor telegraph office…

'So it's here after all…'

Muttering, Lumian walked up to the two blood-colored human imprints and took out a pale yellow-red semi-solidified candle in a glass jar.

He then placed the corpse wax candle on the piled-up collapsed walls and ignited it using friction of his spirituality.

Seeing this, Jenna and Franca stopped in their tracks, not advancing further.

They were worried that they too would be affected by the candle's scent and be passively drawn into the ritual contract, unable to monitor the situation.

Lumian sat down cross-legged and began Cogitation.

The sweet-scented incense diffused in the stillness, gradually penetrating his nostrils, causing his bones to itch and his blood vessels to swell. Suddenly, a veil of dark mist appeared before his eyes.

Unlike previous contract rituals, Lumian's drifting soul was immediately seized by an invisible force and yanked into the depths of the mist the next moment.

Spinning, turning.

Lumian quickly regained his wits and found himself standing in a spacious, bright house, with rows of seats on both sides, occupied by several people who seemed to be waiting.

Some of these people were dressed normally, while others had very strange attire. Lumian had not yet had a chance to examine them closely when a shout rang out beside him, 'Ill-hap, make way!'

Lumian did not understand, and turned around with a bewildered look, facing a man who had just entered through the door.

The man was wearing a white shirt, a black vest, and a top hat—a look that matched the 'Eastern' style Franca had described. He was holding a piece of paper in his hand.

Lumian stepped aside to let the man pass, watching him run towards the front of the hall without looking back.

Tap, tap, tap—the sound of telegraphing echoed from that direction.

Lumian then realized this was a telegraph office, and the people were waiting for responses.

Many of the waiting individuals had already turned their gaze towards him.

Lumian pulled up his hood to obscure his face.

Compared to a Demoness's allure, wearing strange clothes was not a big problem.

Outside the telegraph office, the scene suddenly became lively.

There were multi-story buildings of various styles, wide streets, and occasionally black automobiles and the yellow rickshaws Franca had mentioned passing by. Among the bustling people, some wore shirts, suits, and hats, others wore long robes and skullcaps, some in white shirts and black gowns with baggy pants and high-top cloth shoes, their waists bulging as if they were hiding pistols, and some with their heads wrapped in red cloth and holding short batons, while others wore lace-trimmed and ruffled long dresses, or close-fitting skirts with slits on the sides…

Lumian suddenly felt this was as prosperous as Trier.

Ding-ding.

The clear sound echoed as a two-car tram, supported by overhead tracks, raced by.

This scene was very familiar to Lumian—he already knew this was called a trolley.

However, unlike what he had seen before, the passengers on the trolley were all quite normal, their attire indistinguishable from the pedestrians on the streets, and none of them had just a head, dragging a bloody, bony spine.

The location I've entered is different from the previous street?

Or maybe that street was originally hidden and requires special methods to see or enter?

My various special attributes, combined with the issues in Bansy, have brought me more directly to this metropolis? Lumian muttered as he looked around.

Even among the people being pulled in rickshaws, there were no ladies with pus-filled, bruised faces concealing them with fans.

Aside from not understanding the language around him and the scarcity of people who resembled his own appearance, Lumian didn't see any problems with the bustling city before him.

In terms of the effects of the ritual contract, this could be considered a failure, as he had gained nothing and not touched upon any mysteries.

After contemplating for a while, with a feeling of being thrown into a foreign land without a good translator, Lumian followed the guidance of his own spirituality and gradually moved away from the prosperous downtown, entering narrower alleys.

The architectural styles on both sides became more peculiar—stone doorframes, thick black wooden doors, and tall walls with deep courtyards.

Lumian tried extending his right hand to touch a wooden utility pole, only to see his palm pass through it.

Am I in a Soul Body state now? No, it should be a pure spiritual and mental state, but I can still be seen by the people around me… Lumian analyzed as he continued walking, navigating through the tangled wires, laundry lines, and haphazardly piled debris, until he reached an area with many residences.

The first thing that caught his eye was a strangely shaped wooden tower.

It was very similar to the fog core he had seen in previous ritual contracts, but in the sunlight, the wooden tower had lost its indescribable sense of terror and gloom.

In front of the brown tower were large houses and green trees, all enclosed by a yellow wall, preventing anyone from scaling it.

The open wooden double doors at the main entrance saw a constant flow of people going in and out, all appearing to be ordinary citizens.

Is this what Franca called a temple? Lumian pondered for a moment, then followed the crowd into the area enclosed by the yellow wall.

He pretended to be sightseeing as he gradually approached the wooden tower.

Along the way, he noticed that the 'monks' of this temple were divided into several categories, with vastly different attire, and they did not seem to interact much with each other.

The two most numerous groups were: one wearing blue robes and tall hats, resembling the Celestial Master style, and the other with shaved heads, wearing either dull gray robes or yellow inner robes with red outer garments.

When Lumian reached a point near the wooden tower, two types of 'monks' blocked his path in succession.

Although he did not understand what the 'monks' were saying, he got the message: 'Stop!'

Lumian did not argue, and turned back towards the building he had just passed.

During this process, he discreetly observed the environment, noticing that many 'monks' were dispersed along the path leading to the wooden tower, some openly, some secretly, showing signs of using Beyonder powers.

They are guarding the wooden tower, not allowing outsiders to enter? As Lumian made this judgment, he abandoned the idea of trying to teleport there or use the mirror world.

If the wooden tower was indeed the core location indicated by the ritual contract, the guards would be prepared against such methods!

Thinking about how he had previously entered the tower through a mental contract, Lumian found a hidden spot and tried to replicate that state.

As soon as he completed the Cogitation, he suddenly levitated, floating towards the wooden tower through the suddenly spreading dark mist, without any obstruction.

Soon, Lumian reached his destination, but was blocked by an invisible force, only able to descend downwards, preparing to enter through the door.

The floating sensation quickly faded, and the enveloping dark mist dissipated.

This time, Lumian clearly saw the situation at the wooden tower's entrance.

There stood a weathered stone stele.

Lumian could not decipher the text on the stele, but he understood its meaning as if through spiritual communication.

The inscription read: 'Gathered the world's might, halved the ranks of the brave, binding the malevolent dragon here, quelling the calamity it gave.

'Erected by the Fifth Celestial Master.'

Chapter 1080: Destined

Binding the malevolent dragon here... Erected by the Fifth Celestial Master... Lumian recalled what he had seen in the previous ritual contract, vaguely understanding something.

He did not stop there, passing by the weathered stone stele and entering the wooden tower.

The tower had no gas lamps or lit candles, relying only on the dim sunlight filtering through the thin paper windows to provide some illumination.

This did not hinder Lumian's examination of the surroundings. He found the first floor of the tower to be unusually spacious, with towering and intersecting beams and columns, and a stone staircase leading down to the lower area.

Familiar with the situation, Lumian confidently approached the staircase, seemingly shrouded in shadow.

After a few steps, he suddenly looked up towards the side, and in the exceptionally dark environment, he saw a young man in dark clothing crouching quietly on a round wooden crossbeam.

The man had a thin face, a slightly broader forehead, and reasonably good features overall. His black eyes were bright and lively, his figure seemingly merged with the darkness.

As Lumian was looking up, their gazes met, and his hood lost its concealing effect.

The man immediately muttered something Lumian did not understand, with a disdainful expression, and scurried up the higher floors, disappearing from sight.

Another outsider? He was able to bypass the "monks" and infiltrate this strange wooden tower? Although he did not use any Beyonder powers just now, his capabilities are still impressive... Lumian, with his Night Vision, was not hindered by the darkness above and tried to track-down the man, but could not find any trace of him.

Vaguely feeling that the other person was still observing him, Lumian smiled brightly up at the ceiling.

Charm!

A charm directed at all present beings!

With a thud, the young man suddenly fell from somewhere, crashing onto a horizontal beam.

He cursed in a language Lumian did not understand and scurried up the tower like a lizard, completely escaping the lower floors, as if avoiding a snake or scorpion.

Lumian did not understand his cursing, but felt it sounded similar to the phrase he had heard shouted at him in the telegraph office: "Damn it!"

Confirming that the young man was no longer watching him, Lumian descended the gray stone steps, disappearing into the shadowed stairwell.

After an unknown period, he finally reached the very bottom of the wooden tower, seeing the ancient well hidden in the darkness, the moss-covered stone blocks, and the iron chains extending from the blocks into the depths of the well.

Numerous bas-reliefs were carved onto these chains, depicting countless grotesque and distorted faces, like evil spirits.

It's similar to Chen Tu's armor... Was the Underworld Daoist also involved in this 'binding the malevolent dragon' matter? Or his teacher, his teacher's teacher? Lumian already knew that the Celestial Master corresponded to the

Mystery Pryer and Savant pathways, and these dark iron chains did not seem to be His handiwork.

Peeking out, Lumian's gaze descended to the bottom of the well, seeing a surface of what appeared to be the combined blood of thousands upon thousands of people.

The liquid was thick, bizarre, and emanated a strong stench of blood and rust.

Instinctively, Lumian raised his right hand to his nose, but found that he was not bleeding as he had during the previous ritual, and his condition was even quite good.

Is it because I have already accepted the boon of Calamity, and obtained the power of the War Bishop, so I'm essentially one of them? Lumian thought, looking at the dense bloody water that did not reflect his head or face, and spoke in ancient Hermes, "Oh, mighty and great existence at the pinnacle of calamity, your humble Blessed wishes to ask where I can obtain a Beyonder characteristic that can help me advance further."

Lumian had always been thick-skinned, so these words came easily to him.

However, he was not sure if the so-called "malevolent dragon" locked at the bottom of the well would be able to understand his speech.

To facilitate the other's understanding, he did not even use terms like Weather Warlock, Sequence 2, or Mythical Creature.

The people of the Western Continent probably hadn't seen the Blasphemy Slate!

After a brief, indescribable silence, the surface of the blood-colored water revealed a scene.

It was a rotting, pus-oozing arm in broken armor, propping itself up on the ground, higher than the crumbled stone pillars. Pus continuously dripped from the cracks, mixed with invisible flames that ignited the ground, the air, and everything around, burning endlessly.

Lumian hastily retreated a few steps, not daring to look directly.

The residual aura of the Blood Emperor in his palm told him that the scene corresponded to the fallen divine corpse of Alista Tudor in the depths of Fourth Epoch Trier.

Is there a Weather Warlock Beyonder characteristic there? Lumian nodded slightly, returning to the edge of the well and looking at the dense blood water.

The surface of the blood had changed-it was now filled with darkness, and a tall, silent figure seemed to be observing Lumian from within.

Relying on his spiritual intuition, Lumian deduced that this was the mirrored Blood Emperor on the Blue Avenger's vault.

Can I not obtain the Weather Warlock Beyonder characteristic without avoiding Alista Tudor? Wouldn't getting it from the Iron and Blood Cross Order's president be fine? Lumian had just furrowed his brow when a tremendous suction force suddenly emanated from the bottom of the well.

Lumian was unable to resist, as this was both the instinctive pull of a high-level Beyonder characteristic and the boon he had received, given his current pure spiritual or mental state.

He was dragged and fell into the well, sinking deeper.

In the blink of an eye, as he tried to activate the black mark on his right shoulder to teleport away, his body touched the surface of the dense bloody liquid.

He passed through it without creating the slightest ripple, just as a High-Sequence Demoness would enter the mirror world.

Lumian suddenly realized.

Water surfaces are also mirrors...

I'm not entering the place where the malevolent dragon is bound, but the corresponding mirror world.

His vision darkened, then turned red, and his entire being was completely submerged in the bloody water.

The stench of blood and rust permeated his nostrils, trying to fill his lungs and body,

Lumian did not feel any pain, but rather a sense of comfort, as if he had returned to his source, to the homeland he had longed for.

This sea of blood seemed to have no surface, and no matter how he tried to float up, he could not escape it or breathe fresh air.

He saw countless corpses drifting past him, some headless, some with only a head dragging a bony. spine-like tail.

Lumian followed these bodies, wanting to see where they would drift.

Floating along with the corpses, he moved with the flow of the dark blood current.

The headless bodies and those heads with their dangling spines became increasingly dense, gradually forming a blockage.

It was as if there was an exit nearby, but the influx of corpses had clogged it.

Lumian chose to bypass the congested area and approach the "destination" from the side.

While he could not squeeze through, he just wanted to see what the situation was up ahead.

After swimming for a while, Lumian finally saw the target location a dark, gaping hole blocked by thousands of corpses, with an endless "school of fish" surging behind.

The bodies jammed in the hole were already bloated, with patches of blackish-blue decay on their surfaces.

Lumian immediately associated this with the lady riding the rickshaw, using a fan to cover her pus-filled, bruised face.

Did she escape from here? Or is she the controller of these corpses? Lumian shook his head, doubting he had any chance of squeezing through the blocked hole.

There were simply too many bodies jammed there, and he did not know what changes burning them down might bring-it would most likely make the situation worse.

At that moment, the blocked hole shook violently, as if someone on the other side was trying to break through the tunnel.

Splash!

A large number of the corpses blocking the hole were suddenly "swallowed" in, allowing those behind them to finally approach.

This also caused some of the dark, lightless water to ripple outwards.

Affected by the disturbance, Lumian was pushed away, and the blood-red scene before him quickly faded into an illusion.

In the illusion, he saw a huge, coiled black shadow.

The shadow was lying at the bottom of the sea of blood, occupying an area comparable to the size of Trier.

Lumian was drawn towards it, but could not truly approach or clearly see the black shadow.

One was in the mirror, the other in reality.

In front of the black shadow was a square several tens of kilometers wide and long, paved with grayish-white stones, with towering pillars of black, blood-red, and gray-white supporting an invisible barrier, preventing the blood-red sea from invading.

Lumian found himself standing on this square, and before him was a full-length mirror made of pure silver mixed with other metals, its ornate frame in a classic style.

Seeing this mirror, Lumian's mind suddenly tensed.

Isn't this the same mirror from the Blue Avenger's treasure vault, the one concealing the mirrored Alista Tudor?

Why is there also one here?

Or rather, does the one in the Blue Avenger's treasure vault lead to this one?

Are they the results of Alista Tudor's various crazy experiments as the Blood Emperor?

Lumian instinctively wanted to move away from the silver full-length mirror, to avoid having his own image reflected in it, but a figure trapped within the mirror had already become visible on its surface.

The figure was clad in blood-stained black armor, with flowing hair faintly glowing with a reddish light. His facial features were sharp, as if carved by a knife, His lips tightly pursed, exuding a resolute and unyielding aura. His blue eyes were filled with cruelty and madness.

The next moment, this mirror-bound figure extended His armored right hand through the cold, hard mirror surface.

He stepped out of the full-length mirror, as if completely unconcerned about Lumian seizing the opportunity to attack.

Chapter 1081: Trap

The mirrored Blood Emperor? Lumian was not unfamiliar with the figure before him.

He did not seize the opportunity to attack, not because he did not want to, but because he was stunned for a moment by the assault of the mad psyche, before breaking free.

The burning heat and stinging pain in his right palm became more pronounced, as if wanting to collaborate, to fuse the current vessel with the version of himself in the mirror.

The mirrored Alista Tudor stood nearly 3 meters tall, gripping a just-formed gigantic flaming sword.

The giant sword burned with a bluish-purple hue.

The blood-stained black-armored mirror Alista, with eyes filled with madness and cruelty, looked at the bloodsoaked Lumian and said in an icy voice, "Where is your sword?"

As soon as the words left His mouth, He took a stride forward to stand before Lumian, raising the bluish- purple flaming sword high and bringing it down towards his target.

Lumian finally recovered from his previous shock, and instantly drew the iron-black Sword of Courage, blocking the strike from above!

Clang!

Amidst the clash of metal, streams of bluish-purple flames scattered, and Lumian was knocked flying, his body set alight.

Crack. He proactively used Mirror Substitution, escaping the flames of the mirrored Alista.

The mirrored Alista, dragging the flaming sword, evaluated dispassionately, "Too weak!"

As He spoke, the city-sized square was already engulfed in flames, with transparent, almost invisible spider web-like strands being revealed, all burning violently, no longer able to restrict or affect the mirrored Alista.

The mystical pathogens Lumian had secretly spread earlier were also quickly dissipating in the intense heat and burning, with only the heat-resistant ones still barely hanging on.

Facing this fiery hell, Lumian actually created a wall of crystalline, transparent frost around himself.

Sizzling, these frost walls were immediately vaporized under the assault of the bluish-purple flames and terrifying heat, turning into white mist.

The white mist obscured Lumian's figure, making him disappear from the mirrored Alista's sight.

Behind the mirrored Blood Emperor, Lumian's figure rapidly took shape, his clear blue eyes deepening slightly, reflecting the blood-stained black-armored figure.

He wanted to curse the opponent!

This was one of the few effective ways he currently had to harm the other.

Just then, thick fog rose up, immediately shrouding the mirrored Alista Tudor, preventing Lumian's spiritual perception from extending beyond ten meters, making it difficult to lock onto the target.

True Fog of War!

Within the fog enveloping the entire fiery hell, Lumian threw out a mirror, which transformed into his double and gained projection power.

Lumian's main body then concealed its form.

Suddenly, Alista's scornful voice sounded in Lumian's ear. "Flashy, but useless!"

Accompanied by this remark, thunderous explosions took over the square.

Indiscriminate, large-scale explosions.

The Fog of War thinned as a result, Lumian's mirrored projection shattered, and even his main body had to use Mirror Substitution repeatedly to endure the aftermath of the explosions.

The entire square's ground was left in ruins, only the ornate silver full-length mirror remaining intact.

As Lumian stabilized himself, he saw the mirrored Blood Emperor rushing towards him with the force of o mountain, slashing down with the bluish-purple flaming sword.

A sudden gray-white surge burst forth from Lumian, wherever it passed, the flames were frozen and turned to stone.

As the overwhelming gray-white wave approached the mirrored Alista's figure, this Blood Emperor with only remnants of power was set ablaze, decomposing into streams of bluish-purple flames.

These flames flew out to the sides and upwards, avoiding Lumian's Petrification power.

They quickly converged behind Lumian, reforming the nearly 3-meter tall Alista Tudor, with blood-red hair.

Crack. With a sweeping motion of the flaming sword, Lumian's body shattered and dissolved into mirrors once more.

This time, he used Teleportation in conjunction.

His destination was behind the silver full-length mirror.

He swung his Sword of Courage ablaze with scorching blue-tinged flames towards the mirror.

He felt this full-length mirror and the mirrored Alista Tudor were closely connected, and destroying it might prevent the powerful enemy from maintaining His form.

The earlier large-scale explosion, where the mirrored Alista deliberately controlled the direction and provided necessary protection, not allowing this silver full-length mirror to be damaged, was evidence of this.

Even if I can't beat you, can't I at least beat this mirror?

In Lumian's eyes, the mirrored Blood Emperor transformed into a bluish-purple flaming spear, rapidly thrusting towards him.

He did not retreat, still letting the Sword of Courage descend.

Bang!

The silver full-length mirror suffered a tremendous explosion, without even a cracking sound, it completely disintegrated, its shards scattered outwards.

At the same time, the bluish-purple flaming spear pierced through Lumian's body, instantly igniting him, trying to burn him to ashes.

The flaming spear fell behind Lumian, reforming into the mirrored Alista Tudor.

His sharp-featured face bore unconcealed mockery, His figure not showing any instability or illusion from the destruction of the silver full-length mirror.

It was an intentionally displayed weakness-a trap!

…

On the Fog Sea, in the starlight-condensed treasure vault on the Blue Avenger, the silver full-length mirror at the end of the corridor suddenly split open without a sound, cracks forming across its surface.

Splash!

Shattered glass slid downwards.

On the deck of the Blue Avenger, Mr. Hanged Man and the few sailors felt the ship suddenly rocking violently, as if caught in a raging storm.

High in the sky, the fog rapidly spread, clouds piling up, a downpour imminent.

…

Within a square shielded from thick blood water.

From a black "coin bag", a mirror flew up, and Lumian leapt out, retrieving the Sword of Courage and the Traveler's Bag specially made by Mr. Fool.

He showed no retreat or fear, power surging from the dark pinhole in his palm.

His strikingly handsome face suddenly took on a more heroic, masculine air, his chest slightly narrower, his body a bit taller.

He was utilizing the power of the War Bishop obtained through the boon.

Of course, a Demoness of Unaging combined with War Bishop still should not be a match for the mirrored Alista Tudor-even if the latter did not use much of His Weather Warlock abilities, He still displayed overwhelming superiority.

Lumian's true purpose was not the War Bishop itself, he wanted to leverage the unique origin of this power.

It originated from the boon of the corpse wax candle ritual's target, from the depths of the well, most likely related to the massive black shadow coiled near the square, in reality.

In this case, Lumian was effectively the bestowed of the other party, and the current battlefield was within the mirror world at the bottom of the well.

In other words, Lumian might be able to invoke Angelic-level powers by appealing to this special environment.

Furthermore, with the War Bishop boon, he was now truly half-male, half-female, yin nurturing yang, yang containing yin, extremely close to higher powers.

Seeing this, the mirrored Alista Tudor did not frown, the madness in His blue eyes intensifying, seemingly wanting to use actual battle to tell Lumian this was meaningless.

Failure will be your destined end!

At this moment, a dark shadow from the coiled black mass expanded outwards.

It penetrated the invisible barrier, surging behind the mirror Blood Emperor.

This dark, illusory, and transparent shadow seemed to lead to an unknown world.

Lumian's thoughts suddenly became hazy, as if hearing layer upon layer of faint, ethereal voices.

He then saw the mirrored Alista put away the bluish-purple flaming sword, scornfully glancing at him.

This blood-soaked black-armored Mirror Person harrumphed, no longer attacking, turning and walking into the dark shadow, disappearing from Lumian's sight.

That's it? Lumian paused.

Of course, he did not think the mirrored Alista Tudor gave up because he feared the aid Lumian had invoked -it was more likely someone had dissuaded Him.

Who could dissuade the half-crazed mirrored Blood Emperor? As Lumian pondered, he felt his mind beginning to grow weary, his consciousness significantly weakened.

The ritual contract was nearing its end.

Lumian looked around, choosing to enter Cogitation, proactively disconnecting from the contract state.

In Bansy Harbor, within the ruins of the telegraph office.

Lumian opened his eyes, checking his condition.

The power of the War Bishop was receding.

"What happened?" Franca in the distance asked curiously.

Lumian had actually used the War Bishop power from the boon during the ritual!

Lumian was about to respond, but suddenly had a premonition, turning his gaze towards the western sky.

…

On the Fog Sea, aboard the Blue Avenger.

Inside the violently shaking, nearly shattering ship, a deep purple, hurricane-like light suddenly surged.

It rapidly headed eastward.

This is... Seeing this, Mr. Hanged Man furrowed his brow.

…

On a sunny coastline.

Unarmored, simply wearing a shirt and pants, now more human-like, Red Angel Medici comfortably lay in a beach chair, legs crossed, casually watching the deep purple light fly overhead.

Then, He smiled at Albus beside Him, saying, "Why didn't I attack Lumian Lee in the dream city?

"Of course, it's because I'm waiting for him to trigger all the problems left behind by that crazy Tudor.

"The path to be taken, someone must help us take it: the traps to be stepped on, someone must help us step on them."

Chapter 1082: Open Stratagem

In St. Millom of the Feysac Empire, on the coast of Midseashire, Snarner Einhorn, with His flamboyant golden earrings and deep red hair, was originally toying with some jewelry when He suddenly raised His head and looked towards the southern sky.

He was first surprised, then a look of confusion crossed His face, and He remained in the room, doing nothing.

Far in the distance, in the coastal regions of the Feynapotter Kingdom, the deep purple light was flying faster and faster, already having escaped the encompassing hurricane, leaving behind horrifying rumbles.

…

In a certain location in the Intis Republic, the grizzled, blue-uniformed leader of the Iron and Blood Cross Order, Diest, with His neatly combed deep red hair, black iron eyes, and prominent wrinkles, withdrew His gaze from a brass chess set and looked up towards the sky.

He almost instinctively transformed into a deep purple Iridescent rainbow and shot up, but ultimately controlled Himself.

He murmured softly, "The disturbance is so great, the deities must all be watching...

"Will the Angels of the orthodox Churches try to seize it?"

Under the observation of numerous gazes, the deep purple light crossed over the Feynapotter Kingdom.

Curiously, no one came to stop it, nor did anyone attempt to obtain it.

…

In Bansy Harbor, when Lumian turned his gaze westward, Franca and Jenna followed his line of sight, but saw nothing.

"What are you looking at?" Franca asked puzzledly.

Lumian mused aloud, "I feel that the full-length mirror in the Blue Avenger's treasury has shattered, and the Weather Warlock Beyonder characteristic hidden behind it is now rapidly crossing the Northern Continent, flying from the Fog Sea towards me."

Wh-Jenna was a bit stunned to hear this.

Franca also exclaimed in amazement, "Such a thing can happen?

"A classic trope where a treasured item comes to seek you out on its own..."

They had come to Bansy to seek clues about the remaining Weather Warlock Beyonder characterístic, and now one such Beyonder characteristic was crossing thousands of miles to come to them?

Lumian estimated the time and said calmly, "We'll need to start with my recent secret deed ritual experience."

Franca's eyes lit up, full of interest in the story Lumian was about to tell.

Jenna was the same, but considered things more carefully. She reminded Lumian, "Aren't you going to prepare? What if that Weather Warlock Beyonder characteristic isn't coming to join you, but to kill you?

"You can recount your previous experiences and the reasons behind things after everything is over. There's no need to waste time now."

We should hurry up and make the necessary preparations, like appealing to Mr. Fool to watch over us, or summoning a messenger from Madam Magician and promising to exchange the Post-Apocalyptic Scripture for one round of assistance...

In any case, they needed to prepare for a potential battle with the item manifested by the Weather Warlock Beyonder characteristic.

Smiling. Lumian replied. "No need to rush, it may be flying fast, but it will still take just over an hour to reach here."

Shaking his head, Lumian continued, "Can't Teleport. can't use Mirror Traversal either, just so troublesome and slow-moving."

Jenna was momentarily at a loss for words.

Franca then raised another question, "Won't it get intercepted halfway?"

"If the orthodox Churches take it, we can negotiate later, and can use the Post-Apocalyptic Scripture to make a trade. After all, this thing speaks in riddles and is not very useful, just a hassle. But if it's the evil god worshipers trying to ambush it midway, with such a commotion, wouldn't they just be exposing themselves?" Lumian laughed.

Although the Post-Apocalyptic Scripture was quite useful for responding to believers, there were few wishes it couldn't fulfill through bestowing good fortune, but as a Fate Appropriator, Lumian could also handle such matters himself, it would just be more troublesome and less effective.

"That's true..." Franca thought seriously for a moment, then jokingly suggested, "Why don't you go out to welcome that Beyonder characteristic? It's come all this way, you should show it how much you value it, be enthusiastic!"

"We'll see." Lumian wasn't actually sure what that Beyonder characteristic or the Grade 0 Sealed Artifact wanted to do, so it was better to just wait in Bansy Harbor.

This place had been devastated by the Church of Storms with no human habitation left, only the occasional adventurer or pirate coming to explore and uncover treasures others had missed.

And earlier today, Lumian had confirmed that aside from the three of them, only wild animals remained on this island.

This was very suitable for demigods to battle, without worrying about accidentally killing anyone.

Franca glanced around, gaining a general understanding of Lumian's intentions.

Jenna then said, "Still, do the preparations first, then tell us about your secret deed experience, in case some unexpected thing happens midway, "Who knows, maybe some high-ranking being will kindly help shorten the distance for that Beyonder characteristic, letting it arrive early."

Lumian accepted Jenna's suggestion, praying or summoning messengers, going through a round of preparations.

Then he began recounting from when his consciousness manifested in that "Eastern" city's telegraph office, up to the point where the mirrored Alista Tudor, despite having a clear advantage and filled with fighting spirit, voluntarily withdrew into the darkness and disappeared.

Before Franca and Jenna could respond, Lumian asked curiously and puzzledly, "What did that person who also infiltrated the wooden tower mean when they muttered those words after seeing me?"

He then mimicked the other party's pronunciation.

Franca pondered for a moment, then suddenly laughed.

"He was cursing 'bad luck'.

"Meaning, it's bad luck to run into you."

"Did I interfere with his actions?" Lumian mused aloud, "Or had he been previously deceived by a Beyonder from the Demoness pathway? In the West Continent, Demonesses don't have a very good reputation?"

"You think Demonesses have a good reputation in the Northern and Southern Continents too?" Franca said, amused. "I think he's really been scammed by a Demoness before, otherwise a normal person wouldn't immediately curse 'bad luck' just from seeing your face; he's got PTSD."

Jenna chuckled as well, looking at Lumian. "Judging from this, that Weather Warlock Beyonder characteristic coming may not necessarily be a good thing, I can already smell the scent of conspiracy."

"Kill you? It's neither an ambush nor a hidden environment, so it's almost impossible to kill Mr. Fool's Saint unless someone holds back Mr. Fool. However, that's unless the evil gods have completed Their invasion and the apocalypse has come early. Otherwise, anyone able to stop Mr. Fool wouldn't have any underlying motivation..." Pondering for a few seconds, Franca looked at Lumian and continued. "Actively becoming your potion ingredient, letting you consume it to advance, then linking with the residual Blood Emperor aura in you to resurrect and occupy your body? Even for a plot that straightforward, normal people should be able to think of it, right?"

"Yes." Lumian nodded. "I can also ask Mr. Fool to help shatter the characteristic, remove the remnant Blood Emperor psyche. Even if I can't completely purge it, at least Alista Tudor won't be able to resurrect inside me."

"Then this is..." Franca and Jenna exchanged a puzzled glance.

Lumian suddenly smiled. "This should be an open stratagem.

"Alista Tudor wants me to become an Angel.

"Then the resurrection preparations He left behind will truly manifest.

"Red Angel Medici previously said He would give me a chance, but it's likely not because I was too weak for Him to bother with at the time, nor out of deep empathy for my experiences-that may be a factor, but not the main reason.

"He too is waiting for me to ascend to Sequence 2."

Jenna's brow furrowed slightly. "So you mean Alista Tudor's current goal is to help you advance to angelhood, and it doesn't matter whether you choose to become a Weather Warlock or a Demoness of Catastrophe, using that Beyonder characteristic or something else, the end result will be the same?"

"Probably." Lumian nodded, with a wry smile. "That's why the mirrored Alista Tudor was able to restrain His madness and killing intent."

Franca and Jenna fell silent, not knowing what to say.

After all, they couldn't really advise Lumian not to ascend to angelhood, right?

Lifting his chin slightly, Lumian chuckled nonchalantly. "What's meant to come will come. I also want to see what awaits me, hopefully it won't disappoint."

Hearing this, Franca sighed. "Chaos, chaos, with the apocalypse looming, a bit of chaos is good, there's a chance to win amidst the chaos."

An hour passed quickly, and the weakened and fatigued Lumian from the secret deed ritual had fully recovered.

Suddenly, a deep purple light shot across the western sky. As it drew nearer, it grew larger and larger, eventually becoming clearly visible to Lumian, Franca. and Jenna.

It was a violently burning mass of deep purple flames, with flashes of pure blue at its core.

Interwoven within the flames were jet-black metal rods, forming a massive skeletal frame.

The deep purple-blue flames flowed along the metal bones, trailing long feathers, giving the whole the appearance of a colossal bird with a wingspan spanning dozens of meters. The intensely burning deep purple-blue giant bird had not even fully approached Bansy Harbor, but the weeds, trees at the edges of the ruins, and remaining walls all spontaneously ignited.

Cracking sounds rang out as Bansy was enveloped in flames.

At the same time, a disdainful yet condescending booming voice reverberated in Lumian's ear: "Dare you face me?"

It was spoken in ancient Hermes.

Lumian suddenly gained an epiphany-there were several layers of meaning to this "facing":

Dare you withstand my attack alone and endure?

Dare you ascend to Weather Warlock using the Beyonder characteristic I extracted?

Do you have the courage and bravery for this?

His mind made up. Lumian turned to Franca and Jenna. "You two should leave this area."

Franca and Jenna exchanged a glance, not saying much.

In a critical moment, they unhesitatingly believed in Lumian's judgment and choice.

Franca's eyes immediately reflected layers of darkness, then she grabbed Jenna's hand and departed Bansy Harbor through the mirror world.

Lumian shifted his gaze back, looking up at the purple-flamed giant bird blotting out the sky, and reached into the Traveler's Bag, withdrawing the parchment- bound Post-Apocalyptic Scripture.

Chapter 1083: "Sparring"

The moment the Post-Apocalyptic Scripture was withdrawn, it began to turn pages on its own, arriving at one of the pages.

On it was a "prophecy" written by Lumian's thoughts: "Lumian Lee will ultimately emerge victorious in this battle, thanks to his exceptional good fortune."

As the mercury-colored text shimmered, the purple- flamed giant bird up in the sky began circling, trailing its long feathers.

It had not yet revealed its complete Mythical Creature form, for if it did, Lumian would not continue "playing" with it, and would immediately summon assistance.

Dark clouds amassed rapidly, looming low over the ground.

In the blink of an eye, a torrential downpour plummeted, as if the sky had split open like a lake.

The deluge quickly formed into a massive water column poured down towards Lumian, but he did not move an inch, simply drawing upon the War Bishop boon's power to become both male and female, with a more androgynous beauty, his chest still pronounced.

The descending downpour slowed down more and more, soon freezing in midair, reflecting the sunlight to reveal a crystalline, translucent appearance.

The layer of ice continued growing upwards from above Lumian, drawing in the abundant rain into its frigid domain, creating an illusion of a rainbow arching across.

With a clattering sound, the subsequent rainfall was blocked by the solid ice sheet, sliding off towards the other areas of Bansy Harbor, combining with the earlier deluge and the already damaged drainage system, rapidly flooding the ruins.

Sheltered by the layers of ice, Lumian calmly surveyed his surroundings, puzzled by the current manifestation of the purple-flamed giant bird's abilities.

This truly has the might of the heavens and earth, if it keeps raining for another two to three hours, combined with the seawater rushing in, the entire Bansy Harbor will be submerged.

But in the realm of angelic combat, this is utterly useless. What Angel would drown in this? And there's ample time to escape the scene…

Unless it keeps raining until the mountainsides collapse, there may be a chance to pose a threat to Angels...

However, this is excellent for slaughtering ordinary people and Low-Sequence Beyonders. Truly befitting the path of war and calamity...

Just as Lumian was pondering this, the purple-flamed giant bird pierced through the thick clouds, extending His head.

Amid the dark clouds, silver-white lightning snakes flashed, converging into a long, lashing bolt.

The lightning struck the crystalline ice, unable to conduct through, shattering and spraying outwards.

Boom!

The thunderous sound reverberated as countless electric snakes plunged into the pooled water of Bansy Harbor, rapidly darting to form a vast silver web covering the entire ruined area.

Crackling sounds rang out endlessly, and Lumian finally understood the purpose of the earlier downpour.

To make the subsequent lightning strikes more destructive and far-reaching!

But Lumian himself stood on dry soil, surrounded by the near-insulating layers of ice, largely unaffected.

In the next moment, new lightning formed, more magnificent and colossal, like a silver-white divine tree connecting the sky and earth.

It struck the thick ice sheet, shattering the barrier as if carrying horrific kinetic energy or releasing stored power, causing an impact.

Rumbling, the thunder waves spread as the terrifying lightning cracked through the layers of frost, reaching the top of Lumian's head.

Lumian's body cracked and shattered, like all fragile mirrors.

Yet his silhouette remained within the area once protected by the ice, still discernible among the collapsed ruins.

Plummeting from the sky, the purple-flamed giant bird spread His burning wings like a meteor, crashing towards Lumian's location.

The nearby rainwater suddenly vaporized, diffusing as mist to welcome the giant bird's descent.

The ground was set ablaze, the remaining walls ignited, and Lumian's body was set on fire.

Boom!

The giant bird struck the ground, kicking up a mushroom cloud of dust.

Lumian's body shattered once more, the original ruins either reduced to ashes or blown away.

At the bottom of the crater formed by the explosion and melting, two bloodstained silhouettes resembling human pulp appeared, slightly dimmer.

Lumian's androgynous figure manifested in the air opposite, his pale blue eyes reflecting the image of the purple-flamed giant bird as he prepared to unleash the Demoness's curse.

The surrounding mist instantly thickened. transforming from scalding steam into true fog of war.

Lumian lost his lock-on, unable to effectively apply the curse.

Immediately after, a tremendous, piercing howl arose, and a horrifying hurricane formed over the sea, sweeping in towering azure waves over 10 meters high towards Bansy Harbor.

A tsunami driven by the hurricane!

Lumian's body was slammed to the ground, shattering.

The remaining building ruins in Bansy Harbor that had managed to retain some height were all flattened, and the purple-flamed giant bird took to the skies, seemingly circling to search for the vanished target.

At that moment, Lumian's silhouette emerged at the bottom of the crater with the two bloodstained human-like imprints, the ashen-white rushing upwards towards the hovering purple-flamed giant bird.

Stones of solidified air fell one by one.

The purple-flamed giant bird suddenly let out a shrill cry.

Lumian's body and mind trembled, as if hearing the incessant drumbeats of an ancient battlefield.

Purple-blue fireballs rapidly materialized in the air, densely packed to block out the sunlight in this area.

They plummeted with a roar, crashing into the advancing ashen-white.

Thunderous explosions rang out ceaselessly, the shattered ashen-white flame statues flung in all directions.

Lumian's created ashen-white kept breaking and retreating, until it finally disintegrated, leaving the remaining purple-blue fireballs to pummel Lumian's body.

This time, the shattered mirror fragments quickly dissolved into liquid.

At this stage of the battle, the good fortune Lumian had gained from the Post-Apocalyptic Scripture had not manifested-neither his attacks on the purple- flamed giant bird, nor the giant bird's strikes on him developed into any unexpected success or failure.

Lumian's silhouette reappeared in an even deeper, larger crater.

The purple-flamed giant bird did not relent, continuing to assault with various Beyonder abilities.

Lumian struggled to endure, relying on his Mirror Substitutions to repeatedly evade fatal blows.

As the entire elevation of Bansy Harbor lowered by several meters, about to be completely subsumed by the azure seawater, Lumian's Mirror Substitution reached its limit.

From then on, he could only afford the death of his real and mirror self.

Circling high above, blocking the sky, the purple- flamed giant bird let out a soul-shaking, chilling cry once more.

He locked onto Lumian's figure, about to plummet like a meteor, carrying His violently burning purple-blue flames.

Almost simultaneously, His body strangely stiffened.

The purple flames on His surface dispersed outwards, the jet-black metal forming His neck stretched impossibly long, as if about to be torn apart by an invisible force.

The purple-flamed giant bird writhed in agony mid-air, the flames continually showering down, adding new blazes to the already raging inferno of Bansy Harbor.

This change was so sudden and bizarre, not caused by any of Lumian's attacks.

Lumian had been on the defensive the entire time, unable to find an opportunity to curse the opponent, and the mystical pathogens he had secretly spread were also succumbing to the indiscriminate purple flames and terrifying heat, unable to propagate and spread.

However, Lumian was not at all surprised by the giant bird's predicament, a distinct smile appearing on his lips.

He watched until the purple-flamed giant bird, driven to madness by the agony, manifested His complete Mythical Creature form.

Lumian averted his gaze.

The fiery giant up above, bearing avian features, seemed to harbor deep, unfathomable knowledge-it materialized phenomena like lightning, hail, and hurricanes, causing the weather in this area to undergo violent changes.

Soon, the fiery giant receded back into the giant purple bird, plummeting earthwards.

Lifting his head, Lumian looked at the giant bird's eyes, fixed with pain and bewilderment, and said with a smile, "Do you know what place you've been attacking this whole time?

"It's the Bansy Harbor telegraph office!"

Pausing for a moment, Lumian took out the fully-burned corpse wax candle from the Traveler's Bag, his smile growing brighter as he said.

"And you are an Angel of the Hunter pathway.

"While I am a bestowed of the two apex powers of Calamity!"

This was why Lumian chose to face the purple-flamed giant bird directly, not seeking assistance from Madam Magician or other Major Arcana card holders, and remained within the fixed area, never fleeing far away.

The Bansy Harbor telegraph office should be a leakage point, connected to a metropolis in the Western Continent, linked to the "malevolent dragon" locked within the ancient well but still able to influence the entire city. Using the corpse wax candle here could grant him a different, more advanced secret deed experience.

In this context, attacking the Bansy Harbor telegraph ruins, assaulting the Lumian who had already extracted the War Bishop boon's power, and being an Angel of the Hunter pathway, then personally crashing into the leakage point, had a significant probability of triggering anomalies and being subjected to unseen influences!

Of course, the anomaly was not a 100% certainty, and the purple-flamed giant bird did not necessarily have to enter the telegraph ruins directly, bombarding it as a flaming meteor. That's why Lumian had used the Post-Apocalyptic Scripture to add sufficient good fortune.

Now, the prophesied outcome had arrived!

Boom!

The purple-flamed giant bird landed nearby, kicking up more dust and flames.

His blazing purple wings folded in, His body gradually shrinking, as if coalescing into a physical form.

Then His final words reached Lumian's ear: "I acknowledge you are qualified. This has nothing to do with Tudor's arrangement."

The purple-flamed giant bird grew smaller and smaller, until only points of light remained. Ultimately, the main body transformed into a palm-sized, crystalline and porous pillar.

The various holes in the pillar contained mists, hall, rainwater, lightning, and other meteorological phenomena, sometimes diffusing outwards. sometimes receding back inside.

The scattered purple feathers and iron bone crystals littered the ground around it.

Chapter 1084: Hidden Conditions

Within the raging inferno of Bansy Harbor, Lumian's smile gradually faded.

A blood-red bulge suddenly rose on his brow, the androgynous hues of his features rapidly fading.

The bulge then retracted, crawling and slithering across his forehead and face, finally descending slowly down his neck, shoulders, and arms, merging with the altered remnants of the Blood Emperor and the War Bishop boon powers through the black pinhole, still covered by the pallid skin from the Underworld Daoist's sealing.

The pinhole expanded slightly, the abysmal, lifeless darkness within seemingly brewing some kind of violent force.

Lumian exhaled slowly, then collected the purple-blue, porous crystal pillar, along with the purple feathers and iron bone crystals, and placed them in a mirror Inside the Traveler's Bag-a temporary sealing measure.

Plop. A raindrop fell on Lumian's hand, leaving a damp feeling.

One drop, two drops, three drops... the raindrops grew more and more numerous, rapidly turning into a downpour.

Influenced by the widespread burning and the residual powers of the Weather Warlock, the sky over Bansy Harbor and the surrounding sea had darkened, producing vast, gloomy clouds, the rain pouring down.

Lumian did not seek shelter or obstruct the rain, allowing it to soak his hood, his hair, his face, his clothes.

As it fell, the rain grew colder, congealing into ice crystals and snowflakes.

Thick, heavy snowflakes drifted over Bansy Harbor, blanketing the scorched earth, collapsed bricks, and other signs of destruction in a pristine white.

Lumian's body was covered in frost and icicles.

He finally composed himself-the help of the higher beings was not easily obtained, even if this was not something he had actively provoked, but brought about by the purple giant bird.

The ice fell away, Lumian's hood and black robe drying rapidly.

He pressed a hand to his chest, thanking Mr. Fool for his gaze, then turned his gaze to the sky.

Beyond the swirling snowflakes, Lumian saw the ever-ready-to-assist Madam Magician.

The renowned author's expression was rather complex, as if seeing her past self, forced to rapidly advance with the abundance of high-level ingredients.

However, she could pause and take an extended rest, later considering whether to ascend to Sequence 1, while Lumian could not-neither he nor the forces driving him here would allow him to stop.

Lumian nodded in greeting, then Teleported back to the luxurious villa in Trier.

Franca and Jenna were pacing in the living room, while Ludwig was enjoying a double-layer cream cake.

"Done?" Franca looked at Lumian, asking excitedly.

"An 'item' that can't reveal its complete Mythical Creature form is nothing to be afraid of. If it really uses its full power, I'll just call for help." Lumian said with a smile.

"Why didn't you just call for help in the first place?" Jenna couldn't understand.

Lumian thought for a moment and explained, "The higher the Sequence in the Hunter pathway, the more courage and boldness one needs. I skipped the Iron-blooded Knight and War Bishop Sequences, without the corresponding Beyonder characteristics to provide a boost. I can no longer retreat, and must face the difficulties, challenge myself.

"This may be the implicit, hidden ritual condition for me to advance to Weather Warlock, or an additional ritual."

Jenna suddenly understood. "For a normal advancement, it is unnecessary for a Beyonder progressing step-by-step along the Hunter pathway to Sequence 3-the previous Sequences have already provided the corresponding enhancements. But a Sequence 3 Demoness wanting to make the jump must not shy away, and be filled with courage?"

"It seems that to switch pathways at the higher Sequences, there are hidden conditions to some degree, stemming from the lack of previous Sequence elements..." Franca also realized.

Then, she asked Lumian with a smile, "Did you rely on the special qualities of the Bansy Harbor telegraph office to defeat that purple phoenix, or rather, the purple giant bird?"

"You figured it out?" Lumian raised an eyebrow at Franca.

Franca chuckled and explained, "What other abilities and items of yours do we not know about?

"A simple analysis can lead to one conclusion: Relying on the Post-Apocalyptic Scripture and the Demoness's traits can only delay things, hoping the purple giant bird would acknowledge your strength, but victory is unlikely. Yet the way you acted clearly showed you achieved the final win.

"Unable to do it alone, yet you didn't call for help, so you must have utilized the environmental conditions."

"You do have some talent when it comes to combat." Lumian smiled, praising her.

He summarized the key points of the battle, the core idea being to, with the target unable to reveal its complete Mythical Creature form, leverage the Demoness pathway's self-preservation abilities to guide the opponent to attack the Bansy Harbor telegraph office as much as possible, while delaying until the anomaly was triggered.

Jenna listened quietly, then asked, "So the core supplementary ingredients are in place-are you planning to advance soon?"

Lumian's Unaging potion had been completely digested in just a short time, thanks to Aurore's special trait.

"Why not?" Lumian understood Jenna's and Franca's concerns, smiling as he said, "Setting aside the matter of reviving Aurore, do you think if I hold back and don't ascend, Alista Tudor's preparations won't erupt? With the apocalypse looming and the situation becoming chaotic, when Mr. Fool and the other true gods are preoccupied, they may seize the opportunity to forcibly help me ascend.

"I have no choice but to advance!"

Lumian's gaze swept over Franca and Jenna, pausing as he continued, "Since that's the case, it's better to take advantage of the relatively stable situation now, while Mr. Fool's awakening has deepened a bit, and advance without external interference.

"With the status and power of an Angel, even if I encounter Alista Tudor's arrangements in the future. I'll at least be able to struggle a bit, buying more time, and perhaps help will arrive."

Franca and Jenna were only expressing their own concerns, not trying to prevent Lumian from becoming an Angel.

Seeing that Lumian had thought it through thoroughly, his analysis of the pros and cons sound, they both nodded, urging Lumian to prepare the ritual and pray to Mr. Fool, asking this great being to help shatter the Beyonder characteristic and remove Alista Tudor's imprint.

Although this might not have much impact on the subsequent arrangements of the Blood Emperor, it would at least reduce a hidden danger.

Lumian did not delay, busying himself in the specially prepared room for the ritual and prayer to Mr. Fool.

After dripping the oil and offering the appeasing sacrament, the purple crystal pillar placed on the altar was suddenly enveloped by the murky darkness emerging from the candle flame, rapidly disintegrating into points of light in various colors-purple, blue, white, red.

These light points, as they settled and coalesced, released threads of frenzied aura, occasionally condensing into distorted faces or emitting terrifying roars, until finally dissipating.

The reconstituted purple crystal pillar appeared purer.

"Praise be to you, Mr. Fool!" Lumian pressed a hand to his chest, bowing.

After putting away the Weather Warlock Beyonder characteristic and dispelling the wall of spirituality, Franca asked concernedly.

"How do you plan to complete the ritual?"

"I have a clever plan," Lumian replied with a smile.

Jenna then asked curiously, "Based on the books you've been reading these past few months?"

Lumian scratched his face, chuckling self- deprecatingly, "That was my original plan, and I had corresponding arrangements. But after factoring in my own Beyonder abilities, I found that a Demoness of Unaging, who was once a Reaper, has a simpler and more effective handling method.

"Perhaps the truth of the Calamity pathways is that one must transfer back and forth, to get closer to the apex existences. So those who keep switching can take shortcuts when it comes to the ritual."

"What method?" Franca asked curiously.

Lumian chuckled. "I'll tell you after I succeed. If I say it now and then fail, won't you mock me forever?"

"Do you think you won't be mocked even like this?" Franca and Jenna chorused.

On this topic, the three exchanged playful banter for a while.

As the laughter faded, Jenna asked, "When will you perform the ritual?"

Lumian responded with a smile, "First, I need to gather the remaining ingredients. Then, I'll wait for a typhoon or hurricane."

The countries of the Northern Continent typically referred to such extreme weather as hurricanes, while the Intisians, influenced by Emperor Roselle, often called them typhoons.

…

In a thunderstorm.

The residents staying indoors watched as a silver-white lightning bolt struck the treetops, knocking down the people taking shelter under the trees.

Boom, boom, boom. One lightning strike after another rampaged, even those in safe places shivering.

After a while, some residents saw a figure next to the charred, smoking trees.

The figure was cloaked in black, hooded, like the legendary witch.

She took a blackened tree branch, causing dark red drops of blood to fly out from the fallen corpses.

A witch indeed! The witnessing residents frightened, retreating from the window area.

…

In the southern part of the Haagenti Kingdom.

The first snowfall of the year came in an exaggerated fashion, killing many livestock and piling up snow in front of people's homes, blocking the doors.

The people inside, struggling against the bitter cold, suddenly saw a hooded figure in black robes, seemingly a witch, walking on the snow-blanketed ground, heading towards the bridge underpass.

There were several frozen-to-death vagrants there.

…

The heat-induced drought had left many humans dehydrated, some unfortunately dying, their bodies dragged to the street.

A tall, hooded woman dressed as a sorceress approached, stopping in front of a freshly deceased corpse.

The surrounding people fled in fear.

…

The Feynapotter Kingdom, on the Berserk Sea coast.

Many experienced fishermen and captains began returning their ships to the harbor.

The sky in the distance had somehow turned gloomy, the waves surging in.

The wind had picked up.

Chapter 1085: Typhoon

Ooo!

The howling winds rampaged, slamming the windows and doors, the trees trembling and their branches bending to one side.

The residents along the Berserk Sea coast had rich experience dealing with hurricane weather—they had all tightly shut their doors and windows, crossed tape over them, and taken shelter away from the balconies and doors.

Yet, despite this, as they heard the roaring, shrill winds outside and felt their houses shuddering, they couldn't help but feel anxious and afraid. The vagrants had taken refuge in the cathedrals or poorhouses.

Amid the towering, crashing waves that sometimes reached the sky, the hooded, black-robed figure of Lumian could be seen.

His clothes were flapping loudly, his hood nearly blowing off.

Without the ability to fly or levitate, he surveyed the layered cloud walls surrounding the typhoon's eye, unable to find the final coordinates of the spiritual realm in the chaotic environment—he could only go where his eyes led.

Then, he activated the black mark on his right shoulder and Teleported into the heart of the typhoon.

Simultaneously, the water droplets violently swirling in the area he had just left rapidly condensed into ice, the temperature plummeting.

In the typhoon's core, Lumian's figure barely materialized before the gale-driven waves, roaring like a speeding steam train, crashed into him ferociously.

Lumian was blown away, but he Teleported deeper into the typhoon, again relying on the "see and take" method in this gloomy, apocalyptic environment.

Wherever he went, the rain froze into a thick layer of ice.

After a few such jumps, he finally reached his destination—the typhoon's eye!

The howling winds seemed to vanish, and the high altitude even revealed a clear, azure sky.

Lumian didn't have time to admire this special place. His pale blue eyes suddenly turned a deep, iron black.

As he plummeted, he quickly observed the surrounding cloud walls and the core structure of the typhoon.

Weakness Investigation!

A typhoon had weaknesses too!

In just a few seconds, the falling Lumian spotted several large, pallid areas.

The typhoon's weak points weren't just one.

Lumian Teleported again, arriving near the largest pallid spot, looking down on it from above.

At this point, if he were a pure Sequence 3 Hunter, completing the next steps would be quite difficult, even if he could skillfully use explosives and Cull—by targeting the weak points and disrupting the core structure, the typhoon might not necessarily dissipate, but could instead reorganize and strengthen, and the weather wouldn't change in the short term.

But for a Demoness of Unaging, why use such a brutal method? Besides, the effect might not even be good.

As Lumian continued falling, he took out a mirror, reflecting the pallid area above the cloud walls and hurricane.

This wasn't to curse the weak point and complete the Cull, of course—a Demoness's curses couldn't target soulless objects.

What Lumian wanted to do was forcibly transfer the typhoon's weak points and structural flaws into the mirror world.

This was also a form of destruction, and it could be repeated multiple times quickly.

Lumian raised his right hand, rapidly brushing across the mirror's surface as he fell.

A crack sounded—the makeup mirror seemed to be unable to withstand the strain, about to shatter.

Lumian unhesitatingly poured in a large amount of spirituality, forcibly dragging that cloud wall and hurricane area into the mirror world.

With that section suddenly gone, cracks spread across the mirror in Lumian's hand.

Simultaneously, the typhoon's core structure began to disintegrate, the cloud walls dissipating piece by piece.

Lumian used Teleportation and the ability to drag things into the mirror world to continue destroying other structural weak points, not giving the typhoon a chance to reorganize.

In the end, more and more of the cloud walls and the hurricane were pulled into the mirror world.

On the coastline nearest to the typhoon, some people observing the sea from their rooms suddenly noticed the winds dying down and the waves subsiding.

In the distance, the surrounding clouds and fierce winds were pouring into a funnel, an impressive sight.

As the onlookers blinked, they found that another section of the hurricane-swept clouds had mysteriously vanished.

Piece by piece, they disappeared.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Some mirrors in their room abruptly shattered, with a gust of wind blowing out, but not particularly strong.

These were the random remnant winds that had escaped the mirror world after a long journey.

After another dozen seconds or so, the sky in the affected area gradually cleared.

Gazing at the cloudless, azure sky, Lumian plummeted rapidly toward the sea surface.

With a Teleport, he appeared directly over the sapphire waters, a thick sheet of ice forming beneath his feet.

Under the deft pull of invisible spider silk, the violet-blue crystal pillar, violet feathers, iron bone crystals, blood of varying shades, charred tree branches, and seemingly unremarkable clear water all flew out of the Traveler's Bag, leaving their original containers to converge in a glass cup.

Silently, the slightly violet liquid that formed ignited, melting the glass and dripping downward.

Cupping the burning liquid, Lumian brought it to his lips and drank.

His entire being, including his mirror self, was instantly set ablaze.

Rumble!

Dense, dark clouds gathered in the sky, real lightning and hail coalescing and drawn to Lumian's state, striking him.

At this moment, the spirit world's information of this area had not yet fully changed, still partially corresponding to the typhoon. There was a rapid influx of information of Lumian relying on his own abilities to change the weather, creating an extremely strong connection between him, this area, and the corresponding spirit world.

Rumble!

Lightning struck, sharp hail pelted down—various extreme weather phenomena assaulted the still-burning Lumian in small bursts, tearing and ravaging him.

Lumian felt excruciating pain in body, mind, and spirit, his thoughts growing increasingly hazy, as if about to dissipate into this area, this spirit world.

This area, this spirit world, resisted the fusion of Lumian's spirit and consciousness, because he was the destroyer, the changer—he would inevitably be rejected in the short term.

At this moment, Lumian's blurred mind heard voices—Aurore's, Franca's, Jenna's, and countless other anchors.

His body tore apart, shattered, turning to ash, including his mirror self and the him slumbering within the mirror.

The next moment, a wavering, violet-tinged blue flame ignited amidst the remnant ashes.

This flame rapidly expanded and intensified, forging within it black iron bones, an indescribable tangle of complex symbols and patterns.

They gradually formed a towering, five-to-six-meter figure, like the legendary fire giant come to life.

Immediately, Lumian's face coalesced, its iron-black hue gleaming with a metallic luster, yet still clearly handsome and masculine in appearance.

Blood-red hair also sprouted, each strand as thick as a python, some rotating black-and-white eyeballs at the top, others opening jaws with venomous fangs.

A complete Mythical Creature form!

A Mythical Creature form blended with Demoness traits!

In this moment, Lumian dimly sensed the banner-like 0-01 and the massive, shrouded black shadow lurking in the ancient well—existences closely connected to him, at the pinnacles of the pathways, the former relatively clearer, the latter extremely hazy, as if cloaked in layers of gray fog.

Additionally, three more gazes were cast upon him from afar, but he couldn't discern who they belonged to or where they came from.

This hallucination-like sensing vanished in an instant, and Lumian's body rapidly shrank, the violet-tinged blue flames on its surface dissipating.

A second later, he returned to a human male form, exuding a powerful, masculine aura.

Over two meters tall, bronze-skinned, his muscles were not only vivid and full of explosive strength, but also flowing in graceful lines, like the finest sculptural masterpiece.

His features had become even more handsome and sharp, his pale blue eyes deepening slightly, the refined details softening some of the aggressive edge.

Lumian turned his gaze forward—the sea had already frozen into a thick, crystalline sheet, the azure currents visible raging beneath.

The Traveler's Bag was in the distance, beyond the ice layer, or else even the one specially made by Mr. Fool would have been damaged in the previous blazing inferno and calamitous weather.

With an invisible spider silk tug, the Traveler's Bag flew back into Lumian's hand. He took out a change of clothes, awkwardly putting them on, as if an adult trying to squeeze into a child's garments.

His figure then vanished, leaving only scattered broken ice floes.

…

In a drought-stricken hot area, the onlookers, fearful yet curious, watched from a distance as the witch took the dead's blood, some believers even going to find a priest.

Suddenly, a dull thunder rumbled.

They instinctively looked up, finding the sky had somehow become heavily overcast.

Plop!

A raindrop splashed on the cracked lips of one of the observers.

He exclaimed joyfully, raising his hands, "It's raining, it's going to rain!"

…

In the southern Haagenti Kingdom, the residents worried about the snowstorm continuing to the point of collapsing their roofs considered braving the risks to clear some of it.

Just then, they saw rays of clear sunlight shining through the windows, into the house.

Wh— The residents rushed to the window, looking outside.

The lead-gray clouds dominating the sky had all dissipated, the not-so-warm sun shining upon the land once more.

The thick, fluffy snowflakes falling from mid-air gradually grew smaller, until they disappeared.

…

Rumble!

In a thunderstorm, few dared to go out, the children huddling fearfully beside their parents, unable to sleep.

Their parents worried about subsequent heavy rain and flooding.

Amid these emotions, they suddenly realized the lightning had stopped flashing across the sky for some time, the rumbling thunder vanished.

…

Trier, inside the luxurious villa, a swirl of violet-tinged blue flames coalesced before Franca, Jenna, Anthony, and Ludwig, forming the tall, handsome Lumian.

"You've grown taller again…" Franca looked up, studying him for a few seconds.

Chapter 1086: War Machine

Lumian shrugged his shoulders. "This is the result of my best efforts to compress it."

Of course, if he didn't consider body balance, he could shrink down to 1.9 meters, as he was essentially a Mythical Creature now.

Jenna said with a suppressed smile, "Let's get you changed into some proper clothes first."

The way he looked now was really awkward, giving the impression of intentionally wearing undersized clothing to perform as a clown.

After Franca used the mirror world to go to the New City of Silver and buy clothes suitable for Lumian's current stature, and had him change into them, the group took their seats.

Franca looked at Lumian's face and muttered, "Oh no, he's too handsome… I'm starting to feel a bit… flustered."

Jenna did not speak, but her gaze seemed to echo Franca's words. The experienced Anthony didn't show any obvious reaction.

Lumian leaned back on the sofa. "This change is the result of the Demoness of Unaging and the Weather Warlock's charms merging.

"A normal Sequence 2 Beyonder in the Hunter path mainly possess a charisma that makes people want to follow and be loyal to them, and may cause women to develop feelings of admiration, but there is no active Charm. Now, it's not just admiration, and not just towards the opposite sex.

"Hmm, as long as I don't use Charm, it's still somewhat controllable."

"Ooh." Franca looked curious. "What abilities and traits does the Weather Warlock have?"

Lumian considered carefully before saying, "This Beyonder characteristic contains Sequence 9 to Sequence 2. The abilities I was missing before, like the Iron-blooded Knight and the War Bishop, have now been filled.

"I'm always full of courage and won't be significantly affected by emotions like fear and terror, but I'm not reckless or blind because of it. In fact, I still feel fear and terror, it's just that my courage overcomes them."

"The Sword of Courage is the extreme version." Franca nodded in understanding.

Lumian took out the iron-black longsword from the Traveler's Bag and tossed it to Franca.

"It's no longer of much use to me. Between you and Jenna, use it if need be."

Franca caught it and gave a simple "Mm".

Then, as she was putting the Sword of Courage back into the Traveler's Bag, she stood up and walked towards Lumian and Jenna.

After stowing the Sword of Courage, she suddenly found herself awkwardly standing in the middle of the living room.

After a brief silence, she chuckled nervously at Lumian. "This sword has given me the courage to beat you up."

Lumian scoffed, dividing the bundle of longswords used to seal the Sword of Courage into two parts, and using invisible spider silk to pass one part to Jenna and one to Franca.

He continued thoughtfully, "I can also galvanize and flame my body.

"At the Sequence 2 level, the former is no longer just ordinary steel, but closer to the symbolism of 'steel', able to withstand attacks that would normally destroy or melt real steel. The latter allows me to disperse into multiple flames, each of which I can control precisely, then coalesce back into my body. Even if most of the dispersed flames are extinguished by the enemy, it doesn't affect the integrity of my physical form, it just weakens my vitality and spirituality proportionally.

"The Angelic-level flame transformation can also turn me into a stream of flame, a huge flaming spear, and a terrifying flaming meteor to attack enemies or travel quickly. Combined with hurricane-like winds, I can reach speeds over 4,000-5,000 kilometers per hour. And once the magic potion is fully digested, I can enhance it further.

"The most powerful flames controlled by the Iron-blooded Knight and the War Bishop are azure, but the Iron-blooded Knight is not pure in this regard, having a tinge of dazzling white. At the angelic level, the flames become violet, the Weather Warlock's are a violet-tinged azure to an azure-tinged violet, the specific hue depending on the digestion of the potion. In the subsequent Sequence 1, the flames should be a pure violet.

"Hmm, if I borrow the power of 0-01, the violet will become paler and more transparent. If I draw on the force from the depths of the ancient well, the violet will be tinged with a deep red, not the scarlet of a Pyromaniac, but a blood-red hue.

"My control over the flames has also greatly improved. Compared to before, I can now cover a battlefield of tens of kilometers, directly raining down Meteor Shower, or summoning flocks of Fire Ravens.

"The explosive power of compressed fireballs now far surpasses that of a fleet's main guns… by quite a margin.

"The Iron-blooded Knight can establish a mystical connection with their team, concentrating the entire group's strength on themselves, and sharing their teammates' vision, distributing the damage they receive. However, this concentration only applies to power and spirituality, not the Beyonder powers of the members.

"At the War Bishop stage, not only can they use the Beyonder powers of team members within a 3km range, but they can also share their own abilities and power with them.

"In this regard, a Weather Warlock's range is 10km, and there is no longer a restriction on sharing abilities. Simply put, while a War Bishop can only let one member use their ability at a time after sharing it, a Weather Warlock can allow every team member to use it simultaneously, lending them the corresponding spirituality. Of course, the team's overall spirituality doesn't increase.

"From the War Bishop stage onwards, the team's mental resonance becomes direct telepathy, and the War Bishop can selectively shield and modify certain information in the communication.

"A War Bishop can also create Fog of War, significantly reducing the visual range, hearing, and smell of all living beings within, and enveloping the corresponding spirit world as well, suppressing the interaction between spirit entities and the spirit world, dulling spiritual warnings and intuitions.

"At the Weather Warlock level, the Fog of War range initially expands to 20km, continuing to increase as the potion is digested. Additionally, the Fog of War will also have the ability to interfere with outside divination and prophecy.

"At even higher levels, it may affect the astral world.

"Within the Fog of War, I am unaffected by anything. This trait can be shared with team members after becoming a Weather Warlock.

"A War Bishop also has abilities like War Cry and War Song that can be used to boost the team's morale, temporarily enhance strength, influence the enemy's mentality, and suppress the target's performance.

"After offering sufficient sacrifices, each War Bishop can petition the essence of war or the symbolic 'war' for assistance once per battle, while a Weather Warlock can do so every seven days."

Hearing this, Franca clicked her tongue. "It's practically a war machine, a scythe reaping lives."

"That's why the true god of this path is titled things like God of War and 'War Overlord'," Lumian replied with a smile.

He then said, "A Weather Warlock has the partial authority to change regional weather and create extreme weather conditions, such as thunderstorms, hurricanes, heavy rain, hail, blizzards, and dense fog. I call this Weather Manipulation."

"In the Western Continent, it might be called 'to call the wind and summon the rain'—being completely influential! No, that doesn't cover it comprehensively enough," Franca said excitedly.

Lumian gave a sound of agreement.

"A Weather Warlock mainly controls the weather, while things like meteors, tsunamis, and earthquakes are not under our purview, though some can be indirectly induced, like using a hurricane to trigger a tsunami.

"My Weakness Investigation has also been enhanced. The targets I see will be in the overall sense, including substitutes, avatars, and manifestations. Then I can find the weak points in this whole. If combined with Cull and Mighty Blow, and the target doesn't have enough substitutes or avatars, I can wipe them all out at once. Even Demonesses can't withstand a few such Culls."

"Sounds like it's aimed at Demonesses…" Franca muttered.

"Is that how the neighboring paths are?" Jenna said thoughtfully.

With a nod, Lumian said, "My weapons will be extensions of my body. Ordinary objects can serve this role, they'll just be destroyed afterward.

"There are corresponding qualitative changes in strength, stamina, spirituality, intuition, tracking, and target pursuit. I can also fly by the wind and levitate in the air."

At this, Lumian smiled. "And the last thing is that I've reverted to a male."

Jenna's eyes moved slightly, and she muttered, "What about the fusion of Hunter and Demoness abilities?"

Sitting in the armchair, Lumian raised his right hand, a black flame of madness and destruction igniting in his palm.

Immediately, he stretched the black flame into a deep, oppressive flaming greatsword.

Seeing this black flaming greatsword, Franca, Jenna, and Anthony all had their hair stand on end, their bodies growing cold, as if the apocalypse had arrived prematurely.

The eating Ludwig instinctively scooted two spaces further into the other end of the sofa. "If I ever encounter a spatial seal again, I can directly cleave a fissure in the barrier with the Sword of Destruction, without needing to do any further attacks," Lumian flicked his wrist, causing the quietly burning black flaming greatsword to dissipate.

He continued, "I can also 'insert' extreme weather or lethal attacks into mirrors, guiding them through the mirror world to precisely target locations, attacking people and environments outside the mirrors.

"Oh, and as long as the title conditions are met, I can respond to prayers worldwide.

"Hmm, I can also hide Petrification powers within fireballs. After they explode, the effect is released, affecting the surroundings, without needing to spread it inch by inch.

"My mystical pathogens are more heat-resistant now and can spread through rain, gales, and snowflakes, influencing a large area in the shortest time, breaking the limitations of my own abilities.

"My Mythical Creature form, aside from igniting those who witness or approach me and creating various weather phenomena, can also petrify them, induce extreme euphoria, immediately sicken them, curse them, or make them deeply infatuated with me…"

After describing his abilities, Lumian concluded, "If I don't suppress and restrain my psyche, the weather in the areas I'm in will gradually become more volatile and extreme, and the likelihood of war or massacre events occurring will continually increase."

Listening to Lumian's account, the word that flashed through the minds of Franca and the others was: "Calamity."

Disasters of all kinds, both natural and man-made.

Chapter 1087: Something Else Special

After a while, Jenna recalled Lumian's previous introduction. "At the angelic level, do you still have to fly to get around?"

"Each pathway is different. At least the Hunter pathway doesn't have those more mystical methods. By Sequence 1, maybe my speed will let me fly out of the current planet, or even faster." Lumian thought for a bit. "Actually, I can already use the explosive force of flames to continually accelerate, reaching a terrifying speed, but my body would be unable to withstand it long before then."

"A human rocket, huh…" Franca joked.

Lumian continued, "I can also directly descend through the prayers of believers, and enter the spirit world without relying on other abilities, but I can't discern directions or complete the pinpointing, I can only go to the markers I've already set up in the real world."

"I see… So the higher-level Hunters rely on their team members to gain diverse capabilities." Franca was quite satisfied with acquiring this knowledge.

Lumian nodded slightly with a smile. "Yes."

As he spoke, his azure eyes vertically slit, tinged with gold.

Seeing this, Anthony sat up a little straighter unconsciously.

Lumian then explained, "Now, you are all my team members, within a 10km range.

"I can use your Beyonder powers without your consent, but you need my permission to use mine."

"Just like that, we're team members?" Franca blurted out in surprise, "No ritual needed?"

"With mental resonance, and no subconscious resistance within the range, you can be integrated into my team," Lumian's voice sounded in the minds of Franca, Jenna, Anthony, and Ludwig, without his mouth moving.

"Then can't I also get a taste of being an Angel? Borrowing your Beyonder abilities and traits…" Franca's excited remark was suddenly cut off.

She realized something.

The fact that Sequence 2 Hunters must be male was also considered a trait.

Lumian saw through her thoughts and chuckled. "The self-modification during advancement cannot be shared, just like you can't use my Mythical Creature form."

"Alright…" Franca felt a bit disappointed.

She then inquired, "You mentioned before that when you transfer back to the Hunter pathway, being closer to the subject of the secret deed ritual, you should be able to complete the secret deed without needing the corpse wax candle, performing a ritual, or being in a special environment. Is that the case now?"

"Yes," Lumian nodded. "This is combined with the ability to petition the essence of war or the 'war' symbolism, and has been further refined:

"Ordinary Weather Warlocks can do this once a week, I can do it once a day. The real limit is my body and mind, not the frequency.

"Also, ordinary Weather Warlocks only get corresponding, somewhat distorted assistance when they petition, but I can also gain secret deed experiences. How deep the secret deed can be depends on whether I'm petitioning 0-01 or the dark presence in the ancient well, and what I'm petitioning for, as well as the state of the secret deed subject.

"Mm, other Weather Warlocks need to prepare sacrifices and perform rituals to petition, I don't. Of course, having sacrifices would yield better results, and always skipping them might anger the secret deed subject."

"So powerful… Is this the true value of a War Proxy, a Son of Calamity?" Franca hissed in awe.

"All prices have already been exacted for what fate bestowed. I just haven't reached the point where I must pay yet," Lumian responded calmly.

At that moment, a voice suddenly sounded in everyone's minds: "I'm so hungry!"

Instantly, Lumian and the others turned their gaze towards Ludwig.

"I'll take him to the sea." Lumian stood up.

Franca pondered for a moment and asked, "While you're at it, bring some food for the Face of the Arcane."

Lowering her voice so Ludwig couldn't hear, she continued, "Can you block Ludwig out of the mental channel, only lifting it if there's an emergency? Otherwise, we'll never get a good night's sleep, hearing 'I'm so hungry, I'm really hungry' every little while."

"Okay," Lumian also felt this was a problem.

When Lumian returned with a well-fed Ludwig from the sea, Jenna was the only one left in the living room.

"Where are the others?" Lumian asked casually.

Sitting on the sofa, Jenna smiled and said, "Franca is continuing to work on the kind of robot she wants, and you know how Anthony has been busy lately, digesting the Manipulator potion and searching for clues about the hidden cults.

"I was also planning to contact the bishops, have some of them go to other provinces, other regions, even other countries, to preach in remote villages where the Churches' presence is weak. Now that you can respond to prayers worldwide as an Angel, we need more believers, it's time to expand our evangelism, but…"

"But what?" Lumian asked.

Jenna stood up. "You haven't designed a qualifying title yet.

"Additionally…"

Jenna eyed Lumian's face with her shimmering blue eyes.

"I feel like you're not very happy after your advancement, your mood has been low."

Smiling, Lumian replied, "Actually, I'm very happy. Becoming an Angel means I'm substantially closer to reviving Aurore, and I have stronger power to protect those I want to protect. And the latent problems will most likely erupt before the apocalypse, without needing to worry about interference from most evil gods.

Pausing momentarily, he added, "It's mainly that just after the advancement, with my godhood enhanced, my condition is unstable, and I have to devote a large part of my energy to maintaining and suppressing it, so my everyday demeanor will naturally be more muted.

"After some time, when I've adapted and begun to digest it, I'll be a lot more normal."

Jenna pursed her lips and nodded slightly. "I see."

She was silent for two seconds, then suddenly walked up to Lumian.

She stopped in front of him, spreading her arms and her face blooming with a clear smile.

Then, she proactively hugged Lumian, her voice coming from the embrace.

"Long time no see, Lumian Lee."

Lumian slowly raised his hands and hugged Jenna back.

His expression gradually softened, and his body seemed to relax a bit as well.

After hugging for a while, Jenna and Lumian suddenly felt something was off.

They straightened up and turned their gaze to the side.

Ludwig was eating a lollipop, looking slightly puzzled at them.

"I'll go contact the bishops and have them prepare to preach in other regions." Jenna gestured towards a room on the first floor.

That was the exclusive papal office, which the two "deities" did not have.

"I also need to pray to Mr. Fool. He gave me a revelation just as I completed my advancement, telling me to go above the gray fog after stabilizing my condition." Lumian nodded in response. "There should be something I can understand at the angelic level."

Separating from Jenna and heading upstairs, Lumian heard clanging sounds coming from the end of the second-floor hallway.

He went over and found Franca's workshop door slightly ajar, making quite a commotion.

Pushing open the door, Lumian saw Franca with the left side of her face covered by a mask made of rivets, springs, gears, and various mechanical parts, trying to assemble a mechanical arm.

She had already invented her fully automatic healing machine, and in the process, she had also created her own unique mystical pathogen.

Now, the machine she had infused with soul fragments and brought to life using the Face of the Arcane had been moved to the mirror world, staying with her mirrored self, fully automatically responding—this required no further operation from the her mirrored self, just categorizing the requests, as it was a truly autonomous machine with living properties and basic intelligence.

Franca stood up, removing the Face of the Arcane, and came to the door, jokingly handing it to Lumian, "It's Master Arcane's mealtime."

Lumian took out a mirror and put the Face of the Arcane into it.

Behind the mirror, there was seawater and a large number of marine creatures.

Franca looked down the hallway and asked, "Where's Jenna?"

"She went to assign the bishops to preach in other regions," Lumian briefly answered.

"Oh, it's time to preach in other regions," Franca replied and then fell silent.

Looking at her, Lumian suddenly smiled and said, "You said before that you occasionally still want to see Lumian Lee, to hug Lumian Lee, right?

"Now you can hug him."

"…" Franca was suddenly dumbfounded.

Me saying it is fine; but you saying it?

Shameless!

She snorted a couple of times, but still stepped forward and hugged Lumian, muttering,

"I'm starting to miss Lumina and Aurore…"

Pausing for a moment, she then said in a muffled voice,

"Welcome back, Lumian Lee."

Lumian returned Franca's hug, embracing her in silence.

After a while, Lumian released his arms. "I need to go above the gray fog."

He took the well-fed Face of the Arcane out from behind the mirror.

"Mm-hmm, I'll keep going, I'm sure I can make it!" Franca excitedly took back the Face of the Arcane.

…

Above the gray fog, within the majestic palace.

Lumian's figure appeared by the bronze long table, seeing only Mr. Fool and Madam Magician present.

As expected, the upcoming topic is something only Angels can engage with… Lumian stood up and greeted Mr. Fool.

Ma'am Hermit and Madam Judgment were still unable to become Angels due to the level of their potion digestion and the required rituals.

Sitting at the head of the bronze long table, Mr. Fool looked at Lumian and asked in a gentle voice, "How are you feeling now?"

Lumian didn't hold back any information.

"I'm full of the urge to kill and destroy, and also have a strong desire for copulation, especially towards the Demonesses, wanting to merge with them body and mind, until I devour and swallow them, truly becoming one. Additionally, I also want to conquer everything around me."

Mr. Fool nodded slightly and said, "This is the manifestation of godhood."

Madam Magician sitting diagonally opposite Lumian quickly asked, "Mr. Fool, can you explain the difference between godhood and humanity in more detail? I'm not too clear on it myself."

She didn't have this dilemma before, and Mr. Fool hadn't specifically discussed it. By the time she became an Angel, Mr. Fool had already entered his slumber, unable to answer her questions.

Enveloped by the gray fog, Mr. Fool glanced at The Chariot Lumian and The Magician Fors and said, "Okay."

Chapter 1088: Godhood and Humanity

Mr. Fool tapped the edge of the bronze table a few times with his finger.

"To understand the difference between godhood and humanity, we must first understand what godhood is and what humanity is.

"What is godhood?"

Hearing Mr. Fool's question, Madam Magician contemplatively answered, "The godhood of ‘all things possess godhood’?"

"A crazed, chaotic spirit filled with destructive desires?" Lumian also tried to answer, based on his own situation.

Mr. Fool let out a chuckle. "This can be divided into true godhood, apparent godhood, and the vague conception of godhood that many people have.

"True godhood naturally comes from true deities. In a narrow sense, only the Oldest One-the original Creator, the different personas split from Him. His direct offspring, and the first beings nurtured by the Great Mother can be called gods.

"The indestructible spirit left in their sefirot and corresponding Beyonder characteristics is the godhood that every later arrival must contend with- the essential godhood."

Sefirot... Split-off different personas... Lumian had too many questions he wanted to ask, but ultimately chose the most important one at that moment.

"The godhood that we who have consumed potions and advanced on the path of the divine must contend with is the indestructible, indelible spirit left in the Beyonder characteristics by the original Creator?"

For most 'paths of the divine', that is the case, at least for you, for her, and for me too." Mr. Fool glanced at Madam Magician, his words tinged with a touch of amusement, "But not entirely."

Without giving The Chariot Lumian and The Magician Fors a chance to ask further questions, the Mr. Fool enveloped in gray fog said with a touch of sentiment, "The original Creator is the collective of all. He is crazy, but also rational; He is confused, but also lucid. He created everything, and He destroyed everything. He loves all things, and He also hates all things. He has the most intense of all desires, yet He is indifferent and unaffected by anything. All His actions are random, even He Himself cannot predict them.

"He created the entire world, created all things, and finally split into six sefirot, sixteen Uniquenesses, and countless Beyonder characteristics. From this perspective, all things possess godhood.

"The extreme loss of control for most Beyonders is when godhood gains absolute dominance, transforming them into the state I just described, completely losing their sense of self.

"But this is not the full extent of the godhood we must contend with."

Recalling his conversation with Mr. Fool in the dream city, Lumian had a rough understanding of what else they had to contend with.

"The different personas split off from the original Creator, who are also true deities, have left their psyche in the corresponding Beyonder characteristics. Uniquenesses, um, sefirot, and that is also the godhood we need to contend with, such as, that of the Celestial Worthy?"

Mr. Fool nodded slightly and said, "Yes, after the original Creator awakened, He naturally disintegrated, and before that, His mind and consciousness had already completely split, with different spirits controlling different sefirot, Uniquenesses, and Beyonder characteristics.

"Among Them, the Seer, Apprentice, and Marauder pathways belong to the Celestial Worthy, the Spectator, Sailor, Reader, Secrets Suppliant, and Bard pathways belong to the primordial God Almighty-They are all personas of the original Creator. As for the great existences corresponding to the other personas, I do not know Their names.

"I can only tell you that the Celestial Worthy is the embodiment of Sefirah Castle, the primordial God Almighty is the symbol of the Chaos Sea, and the other sefirot include the City of Calamity of the Hunter and Demoness pathways, the River of Eternal Darkness of the Sleepless, Warrior, and Corpse Collector pathways, the Knowledge Moor of the Mystery Pryer and Savant pathways, and the Key of Light of the Fate pathway-all of these originate from the original Creator.

"In other words, the godhood that Beyonders on the Seer pathway must contend with is a combination of the primordial Creator's residual psyche and the Celestial Worthy's residual psyche and spirit.

"Similarly, the godhood that Beyonders belonging to different sefirot must contend with varies, with different focuses, reflecting the characteristics of their own pathways and corresponding sefirah."

The City of Calamity... why is it an ancient well and a malevolent dragon? And Mr. Fool only mentioned six sefirot and sixteen pathways... Hearing this, Lumian suppressed his doubts and asked to confirm, "The godhood I need to contend with has crazed, chaotic overtones, leaning towards destruction, conquest, and yin-yang coupling? The Beyonders under the Great Mother may need to contend with the crazed aspects of fertility?"

"I see…" Madam Magician also largely grasped her own situation.

Mr. Fool nodded and answered Lumian's question,

"Yes.

"This is the general outline, but there are still some details to be addressed.

"For example, the Beyonders of the River of Eternal Darkness pathways actually need to contend with a mixture of the Celestial Worthy's mental imprint, because in the ancient era, in the First Epoch, the Celestial Worthy had accommodated both the River of Eternal Darkness and the Nation of Disorder."

"Can one accommodate multiple sefirot?" The newly advanced Lumian, weaker in emotional self-control, blurted out in surprise.

"For the Celestial Worthy, obviously not." Mr. Fool seemed to have thought of something amusing. "I'll explain that knowledge later."

"Yes, Mr. Fool." Lumian restrained himself.

"I can't see who else has accommodated the other sefirot, but I can speculate that the City of Calamity was once accommodated by the primordial God Almighty." Mr. Fool continued, "The godhood you need to contend with will also include a portion of His psyche."

The City of Calamity was once accommodated by the primordial God Almighty? Lumian suddenly recalled the images of Grisha and Peng Deng in the dream city, the arrangement he saw through the magic mirror Arrodes, the fact that the Blood Emperor and the Primordial Demoness were created through the guidance of the Angel of Imagination Adam, and that he himself was also arranged by Adam, whose current godhood was obviously dominated by the primordial God Almighty's residual consciousness and psyche!

Thinking about this, Lumian suddenly felt a chill run down his spine.

This feeling was quickly suppressed by the courage of a Weather Warlock.

Mr. Fool's voice returned to a gentle tone, "What I just talked about was true godhood.

"When we have to use the vast majority of our energy, emotions, and feelings to contend with and suppress true godhood, the external manifestation will be different:

"Some are indifferent, some are gentle, some steadfastly execute a single intent and eliminate any obstacles. Of course, there are other manifestations as well.

"This is what I call apparent godhood."

Apparent godhood... Lumian suddenly felt a sense of emptiness in his heart, like a fist that had been cocked and was waiting to be thrown out, very likely to land on empty space.

"Then what is the vague conception of godhood in the general public?" Madam Magician asked curiously.

She seemed quite accustomed to this kind of conversation and exchange with Mr. Fool.

Mr. Fool sighed and said, "Let me first explain what humanity is."

This has something to do with the vague conception of godhood? The Chariot Lumian guessed silently.

Mr. Fool continued, "In my understanding, humanity has two layers.

"The first layer is the most basic-the self-awareness of a living being's core and various instincts: selfishness, greed, survival, indifference, only caring about oneself, only doing things beneficial to oneself, not influenced or constrained by group morals, group interactions, or group perceptions.

"This layer, in fact, the great existences like the Celestial Worthy also possess, but since we've defined Them as true deities, we don't need to include Them here.

"Innate Mythical Creatures like Amon, the Hidden Sage, and Red Angel Medici also possess humanity, which is the first layer of humanity. If They didn't even have self-awareness, how could They contend with true godhood? They would have long ago become confused, crazed, and extreme, Their bodies hotbeds for the revival of great existences like the Celestial Worthy, allowing them to be completely occupied.

"The vague conception of godhood that many people have is just this first layer of humanity: indifferent, selfish, utilitarian, with the main goal of one's own continuation and empowerment. When true deities have resided at Sequence 0 for long enough, weathered by the passage of time, seeing the anchors of Their past strong emotions and important experiences gradually disappear, Their humanity will also gradually degrade to this layer.

"In a sense, this is also the 'godhood' we need to contend with.

"And high-level beings with only this layer of humanity will likely become passive in contending with true godhood, until they are defeated-this is an inevitable outcome in the long run.

"In this regard, innate Mythical Creatures like Amon and Red Angel Medici, due to Their mode of birth, growth experience, strong relational interactions, and the team requirements and conquest desires brought by Their own Beyonder characteristics, may have some aspects that go beyond the first layer of humanity, such as the Red Angel's pride and unyielding side.

"In contrast, the Hidden Sage suddenly came to life, and His interactions with other beings were just about imparting knowledge and accepting supplications, so He has mostly remained at the first layer of humanity. He didn't feel that begging for mercy is shameful, He didn't even have the concept of dignity and pride, which is something that human or human-like groups and societies have-He only had the instinct of survival and continuation.

"Because we often battle and contend with innate Mythical Creatures and high-level beings who have degraded to the first layer of humanity, we will vaguely perceive this as godhood."

The Chariot Lumian and The Magician Fors both understood and agreed with what Mr. Fool had just said.

Mr. Fool let out another laugh, his tone seeming a bit lighter. "The second layer of humanity is the widely recognized humanity-the love, benevolence, courage, sacrifice, compassion, justice, and concern for others that we learned in our brief lifetimes.

"Of course, there are also negative aspects of humanity at this layer."

"I understand, Mr. Fool," Madam Magician and The Chariot Lumian responded in unison.

Mr. Fool leaned back in his chair and then turned to The Chariot Lumian. "Are you still wanting to ask what sefirot are, and why I only mentioned sixteen paths of the divine just now?"

"Yes, Mr. Fool, please enlighten me." Lumian intuitively felt that what was about to be discussed was the purpose for which Mr. Fool had summoned him above the gray fog.

Chapter 1089: Above the Sequences

Mr. Fool directed his gaze toward Madam Magician Fors.

She habitually cleared her throat and said to The Chariot Lumian, 'You must have already guessed that there's another level above Sequence 0, right?'

'Those great existences?' Lumian asked without any surprise.

'Yes, the great existences above the Sequences.' Madam Magician nodded. 'They have accommodated a sefirah and all corresponding Uniquenesses, plus one Sequence 1 Beyonder characteristic from each corresponding pathway. They are also known as Great Old Dominators and Outer Deities, with indestructible psyches.'

Great Old Dominators… Outer Deities… Lumian mulled over these terms.

Madam Magician said with a smile, 'This is how I understand it: all current great existences above the Sequences are true deities as defined by Mr. Fool. They are either personas split from the original Creator, His direct offspring, or the first beings born from the Great Mother. They had essentially appeared in this universe before the original Creator awakened and completely self-destructed, Their status originating from the old era.

'These are conditions that subsequent advancers can never achieve. Even if they truly become great existences, they would only be newly born Above the Sequences…'

As she spoke, Madam Magician felt like she was discussing Mr. Fool right in front of him, and her voice gradually became quieter.

She paused before continuing, 'Therefore, those great existences like to call themselves Great Old Dominators, and some true gods refer to Them as the

Great Old Ones.

'And the currently living Great Old Dominators are all outside the barrier. Some want to invade our world, thus they are also called Outer Deities.'

'I see… Uniquenesses correspond to Sequence 0 true gods, sefirot correspond to those above the Sequences…' Lumian summarized in his own way.

Madam Magician quickly glanced at Mr. Fool, and seeing no particular reaction from this great existence, she continued, 'Sefirot are collections of symbols, sources of authority, and origins of power.

'Back then, when the original Creator awakened, causing the destruction of the old era, He split into six sefirot, sixteen Uniquenesses, and all the Beyonder characteristics of sixteen paths of the divine.'

The destruction of the old era? Did Mr. Fool, Aurore, Franca, and other transmigrators come from the old era that was destroyed when the original Creator awakened? Lumian nodded imperceptibly.

Madam Magician Fors carefully said, 'But currently, there are not just six sefirot in our world, but nine.'

Nine? Lumian asked in surprise, 'Did they originally exist?'

Besides Sefirah Castle, Chaos Sea, City of Calamity, River of Eternal Darkness, Knowledge Moor, and Key of Light, there were three more sefirot?

Madam Magician shook her head. 'No, they are extraterrestrial in nature.

'The awakening and self-destruction of the original Creator was a catastrophe for the entire universe. During this process, His three direct offspring—the Mother Goddess of Depravity, um, that is, the Great Mother, along with the Mother Tree of Desire and Child of Chaos—were most affected. Their sefirot were each torn in half, with one half being drawn to the site of the original Creator's self-destruction along with Their corresponding Uniquenesses and Beyonder characteristics—that is, to our world, or rather, our planet.

'Since then, there have been nine sefirot, twenty-two Uniquenesses, and twenty-two divine pathways within the barrier.

'Why specifically nine and twenty-two? Perhaps it can be explained by the Moses Ascetic Order's theory that all things are numbers and numbers have spirituality—nine and twenty-two have special mystical significance.'

When Madam Magician mentioned terms like Mother Goddess of Depravity, Lumian suddenly felt as if numerous gazes were directed at him, though they couldn't penetrate the grayish-white fog.

At this point, Mr. Fool lightly tapped the edge of the bronze long table and added, 'Normally, like Uniquenesses, sefirot cannot be divided, copied, or destroyed. Only one situation can cause them to be torn apart—encountering the original Creator.

'He is the 'Exception', the 'Inconceivable', the 'Incomprehensible', the 'Indescribable'. All things that shouldn't happen might happen when encountering Him—unknowable, undiscussable, unnameable.

'And it was this single instance of sefirot being torn apart that led the Great Old Dominators to discover that torn sefirot could self-complete.

'The sefirot of the Mother Goddess of Depravity that was torn into our planet self-completed into the Brood Hive. The Mother Tree of Desire lost titles such as 'Father of Devils' and 'Source of Curses', and they perfected themselves into the Tenebrous World.

'Among them, the Child of Chaos had a somewhat different experience. Whether His main consciousness was on the torn sefirot and followed it inside the barrier, or He later used His special symbolism to project His main consciousness inside to try to reclaim the torn sefirot, ultimately, His main consciousness was either defeated or deceived by the Celestial Worthy and sealed within a magic lamp formed from a Miracle Invoker Beyonder characteristic—this is the origin of the Grade 0 sealed artifact 0-05.

'The main consciousness of the Child of Chaos became Genie, the sefirot torn inside the barrier self-completed into the Nation of Disorder, while what remained outside the barrier was called the Uncertain Mist—that is, the one worshiped by the Brokers, and the Uncertain Mist has some consciousness.'

After hearing Mr. Fool's account of the Child of Chaos's experience, Lumian suddenly found the School of Truth's Brokers' search for Sealed Artifact 0-05 somewhat amusing.

It was like saying 'our god's brain is lost, please help us find it.'

Beyond the humor, Lumian was more concerned about another matter.

'The Brood Hive… it's in the Western Continent?

'What you didn't explicitly say before, Mr. Fool, is that it was possibly the Brood Hive that brought the Hidden Sage to life?'

'Yes, these matters are dangerous and corruptive for those without an Angel's status—difficult to bear.' Mr. Fool nodded slightly and said, 'In the middle to late period of the First Epoch, before the Celestial Worthy's fall, He sealed seven sefirot—the Brood Hive, Nation of Disorder, Tenebrous World, City of Calamity, River of Eternal Darkness, Knowledge Moor, and Key of Light—in the Western Continent, to be guarded by Penglai.

'As a result, faced with the approaching apocalypse, all true gods who wanted to exceed the Sequence limitations to deal with the Outer Deities' invasion had only one choice—to support the emergence of a Lord of Mysteries to lift the seal, and the Celestial Worthy could then be revived within the body of the new Lord of Mysteries.'

So Mr. Fool and I had similar experiences… he was nurtured by the gods who were 'forced' by the Celestial Worthy to ensure His revival, while I was forcibly created by the Blood Emperor' revival efforts and to achieve some goal for the Aurora Order's deity… Lumian felt somewhat emotional and reflective.

Mr. Fool continued, 'The Celestial Worthy's fall came from that primordial God Almighty who had also accommodated multiple sefirot. They nearly perished together.

'Some of the Celestial Worthy's arrangements were for His own revival, while others were meant to interfere with the primordial God Almighty's revival, and vice versa.

'In short, there are many reasons why I was able to suppress the Celestial Worthy this time: first, the help of the primordial God Almighty; second, the Mother Goddess of Depravity had other plans and didn't exert Her power; and third, the Celestial Worthy's arrangement of sealing most sefirot in the Western Continent developed in ways He hadn't prophesied.

'The Beyonders of the Western Continent, through generations of sacrifice, managed to carve out a new path and grow stronger without a potion system and with few Beyonder characteristics. For example, the Celestial Master and the Underworld Daoist—They all have status and power approaching that of deities, and could be even stronger if they fought without regard for themselves. Penglai thus remained hidden.

'How could such high-level beings stand by and watch the Celestial Worthy's revival and allow Penglai to play its role?'

I see, the Celestial Worthy's backup plan was held back by the Celestial Master and others? His arrangement to force everyone to cultivate a Lord of Mysteries actually hindered His revival? Fate is truly wonderful… Indeed, everyone only wants a Lord of Mysteries, whether the Lord of Mysteries is The Celestial Worthy of Heaven and Earth for Blessings doesn't matter… Lumian looked at the bronze long table in front of Mr. Fool, knowing this great existence hadn't finished speaking.

Mr. Fool looked at him and Madam Magician and said, 'After my initial awakening, although I still can't lift the Western Continent's seal, I can communicate somewhat with the Celestial Master through it.

'The Celestial Master told me that their sect's ancestral court had once been breached and occupied by the Luo Sect, and many historical Celestial

Masters had romantic entanglements with Luo Sect holy maidens and had children with them.'

'Luo Sect…' Both The Chariot Lumian and Madam Magician Fors were somewhat confused.

Mr. Fool smiled. 'The Luo Sect has a saying: 'Unborn Ancient Mother, True Void Homeland'.'

'Unborn Ancient Mother, True Void Homeland'… True Void Homeland… Paramita? Lumian suddenly understood. 'This is a sect that worships the Brood Hive? 'Unborn Ancient Mother' is a title for the Brood Hive?'

Mr. Fool nodded. 'Combined with the events described by the Celestial Master, there's reason to believe the Knowledge Moor was once corrupted and influenced by the Brood Hive at some point in the past.

'This might be why the Hidden Sage came to life.'

I see… The Chariot Lumian finally connected all the pieces.

He raised another question. 'Do the Mother Goddess of Depravity, Mother Tree of Desire, and Uncertain Mist want to invade our world to reclaim their torn sefirot?

'What other Great Old Dominators are outside the barrier? What are Their goals?'

Madam Magician said with a slight headache, 'Besides those three, others wanting to invade our world include the Monarch of Decay—originally worshiped by the Sick Church—the Primordial Hunger that Ludwig once served, the Inextinguishable Ravings worshipped by the First Philosophy, Supernova Dominator who was the original owner of that space ship from the sea prayer ritual, the Circle of Inevitability that you're most familiar with, the High-Dimensional Overseer of the Painter pathway, and the Goddess of Fate worshiped by General Philip.'

Wh— Isn't that a little too many? They even outnumber the true gods within the barrier, and They're a level higher, having transcended the Sequences Themselves… Lumian was somewhat shocked, fear briefly surfacing before being suppressed by courage.

Chapter 1090: Pillars

Madam Magician seemed to understand The Chariot Lumian's current feelings and chuckled, "When the original Creator split Himself, He also wanted to reunite and complete His revival. For this purpose, He left behind a barrier to protect the planet we live on.

"Without this barrier, those Great Old Dominators would have destroyed us along with the entire world long ago. By the way, try not to mention the cosmos to people without an Angel's status, or rather, don't let them understand the true situation of the cosmos- the Outer Deities come from there.

"Well, the original Creator's will is gradually fading with time, and power and psyche without will become chaotic and problematic. The barrier formed from this will end up increasingly unable to resist the great existences, until it reaches a critical point and completely shatters under the horrifying pressure.

"According to different prophecies and previous patterns, this critical point will arrive in 1368-this is the essence of the apocalypse.

"However, from the current situation, the apocalypse may not wait until the critical point appears. Problems within the barrier might cause the passageways to open prematurely."

The Chariot Lumian nodded slightly, finally understanding completely why there would be an apocalypse and what the main dangers would be when it arrived.

When the barrier shatters, even if Mr. Fool fully awakens and replaces The Celestial Worthy of Heaven and Earth for Blessings to become a great existence, their planet would only have one Above the Sequences being who could fight against the Great Old Ones, while there were a full ten Outer Deities in outer space!

"In the Vortex incident, the deity worshiped by the Aurora Order, with the help of Amon consuming Termiboros and the Genie's special nature and other arrangements, severely wounded the Uncertain Mist and killed all the Brokers. This is a good thing." Madam Magician suddenly smiled. "The Great Old Ones waiting to invade from different planets in the solar system have lost one of Their number, and the remaining ones can no longer be effectively united. The bad news is that after such careful planning and great effort, there are still nine Outer Deities left."

Lumian already had some understanding of the final outcome and general development of the Vortex incident, but it wasn't entirely clear.

Now, he finally understood what all those arrangements were for.

He remained silent for a few seconds before repeating one of his previous questions, "Besides the Mother Goddess of Depravity and Mother Tree of Desire, what are the other seven Great Old Ones trying to achieve?"

Mr. Fool had mentioned earlier that accommodating multiple sefirot was impossible for the Celestial Worthy, although He had indeed done so. From the subsequent narrative, it seemed that the Celestial Worthy's ultimate fall was somehow related to this.

Madam Magician glanced at the bronze long table in front of Mr. Fool, and seeing no objection from this great existence, she carefully said, "There are actually different levels for Above the Sequences.

"The Mother Tree of Desire, Monarch of Decay, and other Great Old Dominators are at the first level. Besides Them, there are some other Outer Deities in the depths of cosmos, but They are either weaker in strength or have no desire for the symbolic meanings of the sefirot within the barrier, so They aren't involved in this matter.

"The original Creator is at the third level, representing the ultimate, representing chaos, beginning and end, representing the unknowable and undiscussable. No existence can surpass this level, and this level can only have one being, and it's very unstable because both aggregation and division are His instincts.

"Between the first and third levels, there's another level-the second level.

"The great existences at the second level aren't much more powerful than the strongest first-level Great Old Ones like the Mother Tree of Desire, Child of Chaos, and Monarch of Decay, but They possess special symbolism. They are the foundation for the universe's maintenance and development, each supporting a realm, and are known as 'Pillars'."

"Pillars..." Lumian thought of the "Ten Pillars" of the Moses Ascetic Order.

Madam Magician Fors said with undisguised amusement, "This is a case of knowing the term 'Pillars' but not understanding its true symbolic meaning. They thought it sounded sophisticated and misused it. In the eyes of those who truly understand the weight of 'Pillars,' it's simply foolish."

"It was the Brood Hive that brought the Hidden Sage to life and secretly corrupted Him.

"If I'm not mistaken, the Mother Goddess of Depravity, who split off the Brood Hive, is one of the true Pillars, right?"

"Ah, yes..." Madam Magician Fors was stunned again.

"Fate is truly wonderful..."

The Chariot Lumian glanced at the head of the bronze long table, then withdrew his gaze and asked Madam Magician, "Are there only three Pillars?"

Madam Magician Fors nodded. "From a realistic perspective, there are countless planets in the universe, each planet equivalent to a world, and simultaneously, there exist numerous alternate dimensions, too many to count.

"But in mysticism, there are only three layers of worlds: the physical world, the spirit world, and the astral world.

"Many schools of mysticism might have different interpretations of this, but the final division of worlds still comes down to just three layers.

"Returning to conventional concepts, the primordial God Almighty is the dominator of the astral world, Mr. Fool is the lord of the spirit world, and the Mother Goddess of Depravity is the sovereign of the physical world. Well, although She had part of Her sefirot torn away. She still possesses the symbolism and status of a Pillar.

"You should know that besides the Mother Goddess of Depravity Herself, the Mother Tree of Desire, and the Child of Chaos being directly born from the original Creator, the remaining Great Old Ones were all born from the union of the Mother Goddess of Depravity and the original Creator. They are the first batch of beings She created. She is literally the mother of the Monarch of Decay, Supernova Dominator, and other Great Old Ones-the true Mother of All Things.

"Each controls a realm, but not completely. Their authorities overlap with each other-that's what Pillars are.

"Complete Pillars are at the second level of Above the Sequences, with a status higher than other Great Old Ones and slightly stronger in power, but not fundamentally different. A complete Pillar can defeat a Great Old One but cannot truly kill Them, and at most can simultaneously fight against two Great Old Ones, probably..."

Mr. Fool, shrouded in grayish-white fog, neither confirmed nor denied her statement.

Madam Magician withdrew her gaze and said to Lumian, "If a complete Pillar accommodates one more sefirot, They will lose control over Their aggregation instinct and will actively consume more sefirot until They aggregate into the original Creator, causing His revival.

"Once this process begins, it can only be interrupted by Their complete fall and division.

"As for the first-level Above the Sequences Great Old Dominators, They can still accommodate another sefirot that has similar, close, or adjacent symbolism to Their own. This would make Them equal in power to the Pillars, though They still wouldn't possess the symbolism of Pillars.

It seems the apocalypse is inevitable and unavoidable because the contradictions cannot be reconciled!

Madam Magician reminded him, "Don't think that sending away the sefirot would prevent the apocalypse.

"Let's not even discuss whether the current owners of the sefirot are willing, but those Outer Deities would need all the Uniquenesses of the corresponding pathways and one Sequence 1 Beyonder characteristic from each pathway while accommodating the corresponding sefirot. Should we have those true gods and Archangels commit suicide or find ways to lower Their status?"

Sequence 1 was often referred to as Archangels.

Hearing Madam Magician's words, Lumian suddenly had some thoughts.

Madam Magician continued, "Even if we overcome all difficulties and reach an agreement on similar matters, and this world doesn't destroy itself through internal strife, the apocalypse would still come.

"You should know that godhood's tone is fundamentally madness, chaos, filled with desires for destruction and creation. Those Outer Deities have waited for thousands or tens of thousands of years - They won't spare our planet.

"Once the barrier is damaged, even if Their attention is focused on the sefirot, Uniquenesses, and Sequence 1 Beyonder characteristics, it would still be unbearable for other Beyonders, ordinary people, and our planet. They are the manifestation of such symbolism.

"For example, the Monarch of Decay would naturally cause the entire planet and all living beings to start decaying, eventually either rotting to death or becoming disgusting creatures loyal to Him, and without necessary resistance, the mere approach of the Supernova Dominator would tear the planet apart.

"At that time, those above Sequence 2 will be watched, and below Sequence 2, not many Beyonders have the ability to survive in space. Sequence 2 is probably the Sequence most likely to survive the apocalypse, but for most Sequence 2 Angels, it would be extremely difficult to cross space, resist various dangers, and find a suitable planet for subsequent survival."

Madam Magician was telling Lumian that once a house collapsed, most people inside will die-escape couldn't solve the problem.

The Chariot Lumian thoughtfully said, "Is it possible to find common desires among multiple Outer Deities, throw out the sefirah that would satisfy the most Outer Deities' needs outside the barrier, incite internal strife among that portion of Outer Deities, let Them severely wound each other first, make the wounded ones retreat to deep space, and thus reduce the number of invading Outer Deities when the apocalypse comes?"

As he spoke, Lumian furrowed his brow.

"But the victorious Outer Deity would become more powerful-it's impossible to assess whether this would be equivalent to the Outer Deities who were driven away...

As he was muttering to himself. Mr. Fool, who had been silent for a long time, suddenly spoke, "Actually, there is a hidden fourth Pillar."

Chapter 1091: Chaos's Future

"A hidden fourth Pillar?" Madam Magician exclaimed in shock.

She clearly had never heard of this before.

The Chariot Lumian was equally surprised.

He couldn't help but glance at Madam Magician, muttering internally, Her humanity is well-preserved…

Mr. Fool, shrouded in grayish-white fog, explained in a calm tone. "This world was born from chaos. Besides the astral world's dominator, the spirit world's lord, and reality's sovereign, there is another important symbolism-one that represents the endpoint of destiny, the universe's destruction, and the finale of all things. Under such a symbolism, even the Celestial Worthy of Heaven and Earth for Blessings and the Mother Goddess of Depravity would completely perish. Their spirits no longer existing, everything returning to chaos. Of course, the hidden fourth Pillar would meet the same fate, not much later than us.

"Or rather, Its self-destruction brings about all termination."

"Mr. Fool, which sefirot does this correspond to?"

Madam Magician curiously asked, beating The Chariot Lumian to the question.

Mr. Fool's fingers lightly tapped the edge of the bronze long table. "Formed by the convergence of two sefirot -one is the City of Calamity, the other the River of Eternal Darkness."

Madam Magician immediately looked across at The Chariot Lumian.

The Chariot Lumian's heart stirred, raising his right hand and gazing at the pitch-black, lifeless "pinhole" in his palm.

Mr. Fool continued, "The best way to transcend the Sequences is first to become a Sequence 0 true god of one pathway, then accommodate the corresponding sefirah, followed by the Uniquenesses of other pathways under the sefirah and Sequence 1 Beyonder characteristics, with no ritual to assist.

"This is the general approach, though some pathways have their own unique details, like the Demoness and Hunter pathways. But ultimately, one must first become a Sequence 0 true god of a pathway to accommodate the sefirah, not become a dual- pathway true god before attempting. The latter has hope of success, but not a great chance.

"When the Red Priest or the Primordial Demoness accommodates the City of Calamity and continues to occupy the neighboring pathway's Uniqueness and one Sequence 1 Beyonder characteristic, becoming the Origins of Disaster or Calamity of Destruction, and then accommodates the River of Eternal Darkness along with its pathway's Uniquenesses and Sequence 1 Beyonder characteristics, they can become the hidden fourth Pillar, becoming the endpoint of destiny and the universe's destroyer.

"Conversely, the Sequence 0 true gods of Darkness, Death, and Twilight Giant pathways can also become the hidden fourth Pillar, starting from accommodating the River of Eternal Darkness.

"Now, the Evernight Goddess has already obtained the Uniquenesses of the Twilight Giant and Death pathways and grasps all the required Sequence 1 Beyonder characteristics. She is deepening Her connection with that sefirah by using the tributary leaked from the seal through the Underworld Daoist and the River of Eternal Darkness."

Through the Underworld Daoist... Lumian suddenly understood the value the Church of Evernight's emphasis had with Amandina.

In the past half year, they hadn't had much contact with her, but they knew her general situation.

The Church of Evernight Goddess had directly established contact with this Underworld Daoist's student, personally managed by Mr. Star. The current Amandina had obtained the Sequence 5 Spirit Medium Beyonder ingredients, was digesting the Spirit Warlock potion, preparing for her advancement ritual, and waiting to receive a new round of boons at the end-of- year Dream Festival.

Her relationship with the Church of Evernight Goddess had become very close.

Just as Lumian was suddenly worried, Mr. Fool continued, "You should have realized that the hidden fourth Pillar is related to the universe's destruction and the termination of all things, and would not normally appear.

"As for whether we will need to wait until the universe reaches the end of life before the City of Calamity and River of Eternal Darkness can merge and give birth to the fourth Pillar, or if the fourth Pillar can be forcibly born through congregation but would bring about the universe and all things' destruction-unless He immediately falls into slumber or passively splits - everything will perish. I can't see clearly yet, but the deity worshiped by the Aurora Order currently leans more towards the latter scenario."

In other words, the hidden fourth Pillar will either be unable to be born for a very long time, or can only be used as a final option of mutual destruction or intimidating enemies? The Chariot Lumian gradually felt relieved.

Then, he pondered the purpose and implications of Mr. Fool's explanation about the hidden fourth Pillar.

For me, this knowledge is currently meaningless...

Or perhaps, I can first jump to Sequence 1 of Death or Twilight Giant to better borrow the power of 0-01, narrowing the gap between myself and Red Angel Medici?

If I could defeat this King of Angels, obtain two Sequence 1 Beyonder characteristics of the Hunter pathway from Him, then find a way to lower my status, expel the original Sequence 1 Beyonder characteristic, return to the Weather Warlock level, and then re- advance, becoming a King of Angels of the Hunter pathway, accommodating 0-01...

Lowering my status and re-advancing has significant risks and potential hidden dangers, but it's much better than competing with Red Angel Medici at Sequence 2. However, I won't challenge the Red Angel one-on-one. I'm a Major Arcana of the Tarot Club, a patron saint-no, a patron angel of the Church of The Fool. Hunters are about collective strength, so why would I fight alone?

After Franca and Jenna's advancement, if the ritual is difficult or Beyonder characteristics are unavailable, they could also consider switching to one of the Darkness, Death, or Twilight Giant pathways...

While The Chariot Lumian was contemplating, Mr. Fool looked at him and said, "After switching to a hidden neighboring pathway, if you don't expel the corresponding Beyonder characteristics, you'll be unable to accommodate the sefirah in the future and will be rejected by the belonging sefirah.

"Also, after becoming a Weather Warlock, your destiny has become chaotic and full of change. I am not omniscient, nor omnipotent. I can no longer see things as clearly and can only remind you to be extremely careful going forward."

When he advanced to Weather Warlock, Lumian had already confirmed that the remaining spiritual imprint of Blood Emperor Alista Tudor had not been strengthened or revived within him.

From that point, he knew the Blood Emperor's resurrection arrangement would emerge and erupt in subsequent events, which were currently unforeseeable. Mr. Fool's warning deepened his vigilance in this aspect:

An arrangement that even this great existence cannot provide effective guidance must be extraordinarily complex!

Madam Magician Fors, who had chatted with Mr. Fool many times, knew from his last statement that today's small gathering, or the "common knowledge" lesson for the Tarot Club's new angel, should conclude.

She looked at The Chariot Lumian and said, "You should now understand the current situation and the source of the apocalypse. Analyzing things afterward will allow you to directly see their essence.

"As an Angel more senior than you by several years, let me share three final experiences.

"First, previous Sequences must be acted upon again because the potion you consumed contains Beyonder characteristics from all previous Sequences. Most importantly, you need to make up for the acting of Iron-blooded Knight and War Bishop, Hunter, Provoker, Pyromaniac, Conspirer and Reaper can all be naturally and effectively digested in your future battles or wars.

"Second, travel to different regions to improve local weather and leave behind legends. This is not only necessary for digesting the Weather Warlock potion but also a must-do to spread faith and obtain more anchors.

"Third, Mr. Fool has already explained the difference between godhood and humanity very clearly.

"Combining my own experience, I have one insight: distinguish between the normal desires brought by the second layer of humanity, and the abnormal desires created by first-layer humanity and godhood. Resist the latter, guide the former. Don't be too suppressed and restrained, nor can you be greedy and indulgent."

The Chariot Lumian listened carefully and thoughtfully said, "Thank you, Madam Magician."

Madam Magician Fors smiled self-deprecatingly. "If you have any new insights in this area later, you can tell me too.

"I need to prepare for my Sequence 1 advancement."

"Sequence 1 of the Door pathway?" The Chariot Lumian asked with slight surprise.

In his view, the Sequence 2 Planeswalker of the Door pathway was the Sequence most likely to survive the apocalypse, without question.

First, before reaching Sequence 1, they wouldn't be specifically targeted by the Outer Deities. Second, They possessed the ability for space travel and could carry a group of people. Afterward, They could completely find a planet in a "remote" area of the universe with relatively suitable conditions, and use Their recording abilities or the Beyonder characteristics of different pathways to make it habitable and redevelop civilization.

Madam Magician nodded. "Yes, the Key of Stars. The Beyonder characteristics and supplementary ingredients are not lacking. The Abraham family has long wanted to give them to me. The price is to protect their clan, prevent the Abraham name from going extinct, ensure at least one Sequence 1 Angel is born among them. Afterward, if the apocalypse comes, my first task would be to transfer them away.

"The good news is they now have several Saints. The bad news is they are far from digestion. The Sequence 3 Wanderer still needs to travel in space to digest quickly.

"The ritual itself isn't complicated. Find a continuously rotating, signal-emitting heavy planet, approach it, land on it, and then find a way to establish sufficient mystical connections with it.

"The first part of the ritual is very dangerous, the latter part extremely difficult. But with Mr. Fool's help, these aren't major problems-He can directly Graft me onto the corresponding planet to satisfy the conditions, though the premise is that I can withstand such pressure.

"The current trouble is that my Planeswalker potion hasn't been completely digested. These years I've been going everywhere, the number of times is enough, and the term 'walker' is satisfied, but none of it counts as planeswalking..."

At this point, Madam Magician suddenly closed her mouth.

She felt like she was complaining about work, and her direct superior-who could easily crush her-was sitting at the head of the long table.

Listening to Madam Magician's words, Lumian suddenly discovered a problem.

Mr. Fool doesn't actually have to deal with the subsequent planetary apocalypse, because no Outer Deity would compete for Sefirah Castle-accommodating this sefirah with a Pillar symbolism would only lead Them to self-destruction…

Chapter 1092: Just Wishing to Save Humanity

Madam Magician forcibly changed the topic. 'If the apocalypse truly arrives in 1368 as predicted, I won't need to rush my advancement. In a few years, Mr. Fool should be completely awake, then unlock the seal on the Western Continent, allowing more Above the Sequences to be born. At that time, even if we're still at a disadvantage when the apocalypse arrives, we'll at least have the power to protect ourselves.

'Without the Uncertain Mist mediating, those Outer Deities won't be able to cooperate well, and they must guard against becoming other Outer Deities' prey after being wounded.

'Unfortunately, there's not much time left. I can only quickly advance to Sequence 1. As a Sequence 1 Angel of the Door pathway, my chances of survival during the apocalypse will be much higher than other pathways. After all, those Outer Deities probably haven't set Their target on Sefirah Castle—do They want self-destruction to happen even faster?'

Her thoughts were similar to Lumian's, believing that Sefirah Castle and its three subordinate pathways were most likely not the Outer Deities' targets. Even if she became a Sequence 1 Key of Stars, she wouldn't be specifically targeted.

Lumian detected the insincerity in Madam Magician's words.

No matter what, if purely for self-preservation and protecting the closest few people, a Sequence 2 Planeswalker would definitely be better than a Sequence 1 Key of Stars, less likely to be noticed, able to sneak away during the chaos.

Choosing to quickly digest the potion and advance to Sequence 1 is to do more during the apocalypse? The Chariot Lumian could vaguely grasp that mentality and thought.

At this moment, the Fool shrouded in gray fog said to Madam Magician Fors, 'The Key of Stars will also become a target.

'Before I fully awaken, if the apocalypse arrives, no Outer Deity will want to see a Lord of Mysteries truly born. They will seal the sefirah, take away the corresponding Uniquenesses and Sequence 1 Beyonder characteristics, eliminating the possibility of the spirit world's lord returning.

'Although They can't further accommodate Sefirah Castle, occupying one or two Uniquenesses and the corresponding Sequence 1 Beyonder characteristics is not a problem. Their power will increase slightly, and Their abilities will become more diverse.

'Besides, just because They can't accommodate Sefirah Castle doesn't mean there's no suitable way for Them to use it.'

Madam Magician fell silent.

She didn't say she would reconsider, nor did she immediately state her position of becoming an Archangel before the apocalypse.

Lumian was thinking about something else.

Even if only one or two years remains before the apocalypse, with the Major Arcana card holders' efforts and Mr. Fool's current awakening speed, by then, even if he hasn't fully awakened, it shouldn't be far off. As long as he doesn't actively prevent the Outer Deities' invasion, those Outer Deities would probably not intentionally provoke him.

But, he is clearly preparing to confront the apocalypse…

The Chariot Lumian glanced at Mr. Fool at the head of the bronze long table and asked no further questions.

…

Trier, inside the luxurious villa.

Lumian, lying in the armchair, opened his eyes.

He reached out and touched his blood-red long hair, preparing to cut it short, but after thinking, he abandoned that plan.

Lumian stood up and paced the room, his mind filled with knowledge obtained above the gray fog.

He now understood that his goal of becoming a Sequence 0 true god and attempting to accommodate the City of Calamity was not only necessary for Aurore's resurrection but also a requirement to transcend Sequences and face the apocalypse.

Just one or two years to digest the Weather Warlock potion, become a Sequence 1 Archangel, then digest the corresponding Sequence 1 potion, find a way to defeat Red Angel Medici, perform the apotheosis ritual, and finally suppress the City of Calamity's consciousness to accommodate it, and possibly contest with the Primordial Demoness in between…

Isn't this timeline too pressing?

If luck is bad, I might not even complete the first step of digesting the Weather Warlock potion…

Lumian merely imagined the upcoming tasks and felt his scalp go numb, believing there was almost no hope of success.

Not to mention whether those steps could succeed, there simply wasn't enough time!

Digesting a demigod level potion itself required a very long time. Lumian's previous rapid digestion of the Despair and Unaging potions was due to two factors: first, the deity worshiped by the Aurora Order had actively exposed Himself, converting all previous arrangements into 'despair; second, leveraging Aurore's special status as a transmigrator from the past, with her soul fragments maintaining a certain activity, sealed inside him—an arrangement by the deity worshiped by the Aurora Order.

Now, Lumian couldn't see any opportunity for quickly digesting the Weather Warlock potion, and that deity seemed to have made no arrangements in this regard.

As an Angel of the Hunter pathway, Lumian already possessed steel-like willpower and fire-like courage. He quickly suppressed his instinctive retreat and fear, first considering the first step of digesting the Weather Warlock potion.

Based on my previous experience, there are two main approaches to quickly digest a potion: first, through special encounters that adjust one's mental and spiritual state to closely align with the potion's true meaning; second, by using a higher-level Beyonder as the object of acting, obtaining better digestion speed.

The first approach is no longer possible… Those higher than my level are Archangels, true gods, and great existences, and a Weather Warlock isn't meant to be acted out by people… Ask Them to be spectators, observing me change the weather and provide feedback?

Taking it a step further, change the weather in a true god's divine kingdom? At the next gathering, seek Mr. Fool's consent to add special effects to the Major Arcana's discussion, change the weather in Sefirah Castle?

I wonder if this would be effective… I'll seek Mr. Fool's guidance during the next prayer…

Lumian, with his initial thoughts taking shape, suddenly smiled self-deprecatingly.

There was a method that could help him digest the Weather Warlock potion in the shortest time possible.

Let Blood Emperor Alista Tudor resurrect within him, after which he would no longer need to digest other potions.

The only problem was that he would die, and Aurore would not be resurrected.

I wonder what arrangements Alista Tudor has made, if there's a way to use these arrangements to quickly digest the Weather Warlock potion? Lumian thought for a while but found no insights.

He then considered Madam Magician's suggestion.

Strengthen humanity, resist godhood, distinguish between normal and abnormal emotions, desires, and behaviors…

Anchors bring others' perceptions, and everyone's perception of me differs from my true self to some extent. This is also a form of corruption that can easily make my thoughts, spirit, and humanity chaotic, but it can be used to balance and resist godhood, giving my true self and humanity a chance to breathe…

If these are normal emotional responses that would arise from one's own humanity, even if overlapping with godhood, they don't need to be too suppressed and can be expressed normally?

Is this a kind of fusion?

Mr. Fool said in the dream city to both resist and merge… At the Angel stage, fusion is superficial, not obvious, mainly about resistance and suppression?

Lumian examined himself, sorting through different emotions and desires.

After a while, he roughly knew what he could do, to what extent, what must be strictly controlled, and what signs required immediate restraint.

Of course, having just advanced and not yet adapted to the potion, his state was unstable. Many things he could do now might be difficult to control, potentially being driven by godhood into terrible developments. So, he needed to initially digest the potion.

Thinking this, Lumian immediately used the Hunter pathway's Mental Communication to speak to Franca, Jenna, Ludwig, and Anthony, who had not yet left the 10-kilometer range.

'After becoming a Weather Warlock, Alista Tudor's arrangements might start to manifest. You must be more vigilant and attentive, especially regarding matters involving the Demoness Sect.'

Mental Communication would not transmit all inner thoughts or fleeting ideas to companions; there must be an intention to 'speak out' for the information to resonate in everyone's minds. If Lumian were to share a Manipulator's Beyonder powers and attach it to Mental Communication, he could achieve a weakened version of the Hall of Truth effect.

After speaking, Lumian took out a mirror to divine which region was experiencing extreme weather.

After obtaining the answer, he was about to teleport there.

Before activating the black mark on his right shoulder, he suddenly had a new idea.

Some ways to maintain and strengthen humanity can be done right now!

A wind rose, blowing open the bedroom window.

Then, Lumian sensed the spirit world coordinates of the target area while picking up the coat rack in the room and suddenly hurling it toward the sky.

The coat rack quickly ignited with a purplish-blue flame, speedily racing toward the horizon.

Lumian leaped lightly, jumping out the window and landing precisely on the burning coat rack.

Then, with his feet slightly apart and hands clasped behind his back, his coat fluttering, he rode the flame-engulfed coat rack, which was now faster than the speed of sound and still accelerating, toward the target area.

In the second-floor studio, Franca, momentarily distracted from her creation by Lumian's warning, heard a booming sound from high in the sky.

Wearing the Face of the Arcane, she stepped to the window and looked at the azure sky, just in time to see Lumian standing on a flaming 'great sword', hands behind his back, rapidly disappearing from her field of view, leaving behind a new sonic boom.

Franca's expression revealed envy.

At the same time, she quietly sighed in relief.

In the first-floor papal office, Jenna had been worried about the negative effects of Franca's fully automatic healing machine—which would make every healed person, upon recovery, filled with a desire to reproduce and want to have a child.

Her solution was to have padres and bishops treat common illnesses, pray to the great God of Disease for serious conditions, and subsequently, for those with families and partners, have the Sick Church handle the economic losses from childbirth. For those without partners, consider matchmaking, and if that failed, have Anthony handle it—making them feel that it was completely fine having had a child!

Hearing the sonic boom, she also came to the window, looking outside and seeing Lumian traveling in his peculiar and arrogant manner.

Jenna's face gradually broke into a smile.

She felt Lumian's state had improved somewhat.

Chapter 1093: Key Points of Acting

High in the cloud layers, the wooden coat rack beneath Lumian's feet, burning with a violet-blue flame, did not quickly turn to ash. It was like a truly heat-resistant, miraculous metal, maintaining its basic, hard state.

This was an ability Hunters possessed since the Iron-blooded Knight stage: "weaponizing" ordinary objects, temporarily transforming them into lethal tools.

At the angelic level, Lumian could now make wood, paper, and similar materials temporarily reach the strength of the Sword of Courage, ensuring they would not instantly dissolve under the added flames and internal explosions, maintaining their most fundamental stability.

This allowed a Hunter's fireball to have a carrier and divert some power to constantly accelerate, ultimately bombing the target area from a distance at several times the speed of sound.

At the Iron-blooded Knight stage, this remote range was 5 to 10 kilometers. For a Weather Warlock, it became hundreds, or even thousands of kilometers.

However, this was not very useful in actual combat. Even if the weapon carrying the fireball flew quickly, adding an extremely long distance would still require a certain time to reach the target area. Not to mention Angels and Saints, even Mid-Sequence Beyonders with strong spiritual intuition could detect it in advance and escape the potentially covered area in time.

The current level of the Fog of War could not be attached and follow along.

Lumian could divert a small portion of his psyche to merge into the fireball or weapon, allowing them to change direction. But such an operation, when done from too far away, would always lack precision and thus could not strike enemies beyond a certain level.

The greatest use of such an attack was only to destroy fixed targets. For Lumian, it was completely incomparable to the mystical long-range attacks delivered through the mirror world.

But...

Lumian looked down at the coat rack beneath his feet, burning brilliantly like a giant sword, then glanced at the blown-open white clouds and the city below that looked like specks of dust, and listened to the sonic boom that could not catch up to him. He laughed Inwardly.

How cool!

Without considering conspiracies, a Hunter must be arrogant!

Otherwise, how would one provoke others?

Boom!

A violet-blue light, with a human figure standing atop it, rapidly traversed the sky, leaving behind a blast that made houses and glass violently tremble.

…

Beside a mountain-side village where rain was pouring down.

The river had already overflowed with yellowish water, surging toward the not-so-large city in the distance.

The city's residents were anxious, worried that mountain floods would erupt and affect their living spaces. Many villagers had already climbed to the second floor or onto their roofs because the rising water had gone beyond their knees and was trying to break down their doors.

Looking at the increasingly yellow floodwaters, experienced villagers grew more worried and had nowhere to escape.

Suddenly, they heard a loud "bang" and instinctively looked up, casting their gaze toward the sky.

They then saw a light, bluish-violet like a fire meteor, hovering and stopping among the layered dark clouds, with what seemed to be a person standing on top-a tall figure with blood-red long hair, though far away.

This person riding a flaming sword began moving amidst rising white water vapor and dense surrounding rain, with powerful, high-strung and frenzied movements, with a twisted, mysterious posture.

A divine being dancing in the sky!

Villagers nearby and city dwellers in the distance all suddenly had the same thought.

This is a ritual.

A ritual of praying to some existence!

The ritual dance became increasingly intense, and everyone who saw this scene seemed to hear thumping drum beats.

As the divine being's dance progressed, the rain gradually diminished, and dark clouds in the high sky dispersed one by one.

In the end, the rainstorm completely stopped, and rays of brilliant sunlight shone upon villagers hiding on the second floor and rooftops, and upon the worried citizens looking toward the mountain's edge.

The divine being stopped the ritual dance, and the flaming sword beneath their feet disappeared.

With a magnificent, layered voice, they proclaimed to the humans below, "My name:

"Family to the King of Yellow and Black, Priest of Weather and Plague, the Dual-Bodied one who spreads war and chaos!"

Among those born and raised in religious societies, a large portion instinctively bowed their heads and shouted in unison, "Praise be to you, Priest of Weather and Plague!

"Praise be to you for sending away the calamity!"

By the time these people raised their heads, the divine being had vanished.

…

Trier, inside the luxurious villa.

Lumian's figure quickly traced itself in his room.

He distinctly felt that his Weather Warlock potion had been digested a bit.

The effect of this act was much stronger than changing the extreme weather of three regions immediately after his advancement!

Previously, I was doing good deeds quietly, unknown, lacking clear directional feedback?

Hmm, a Weather Warlock must let people know they are a 'warlock', must be seen, or understood, otherwise it's not a successful act... The people in those three regions would probably think it was the local faith's god's protection, praising those gods, not me. Only a small portion might connect the weather changes with the previous appearance of a witch...

It can't be too simple to change the weather. Even if it doesn't substantially take effect, the ritual must be there. The audience must feel I used great effort to change the weather, otherwise I'd be performing as a God of Weather instead of a Weather Warlock...

Positioning the Weather Warlock as a priest of weather should be fine…

Also, Hunter represents the initial masculine side, robust, highly aggressive, often associated with being flamboyant.

Looking at it this way, a Hunter's arrogance and conspicuousness are sometimes a conspiracy, sometimes an acting requirement...

Combining the feedback from two different performances, Lumian vaguely grasped a key point.

A Weather Warlock's performance cannot be low-key!

Hiding behind the scenes doing good deeds is not a Hunter's style!

Moreover, although the Sequence name "Weather Warlock' had no clear good or bad orientation, based on the fact that the Hunter pathway represented war and was one of the two components of calamity, and drawing from previous Sequence acting experiences.

Lumian suspected that the hidden acting principle might be "bringing disaster by changing the weather."

Bringing disaster to enemies by changing the weather will be a key focus of future acts. Lumian nodded thoughtfully, feeling slightly disappointed.

He murmured to himself. No accidents, no anomalies…

His extremely flamboyant travel this time was partly to satisfy his normal inner desires, maintain and expand his humanity, and partly to provoke hidden arrangements by Blood Emperor Alista Tudor or that Red Angel Medici.

Unfortunately, under Mr. Fool's gaze and with the situation not being chaotic, nothing happened.

Every successful Hunter was a qualified schemer and wouldn't be so easily trapped.

Feeling disappointed but in much better condition, Lumian left the bedroom, intending to pour himself a glass of absinthe downstairs.

Franca heard the movement and walked out of her workshop.

She had let the Face of the Arcane fall back into slumber, returning to the Traveler's Bag.

Glancing at Lumian, Franca asked with unusual anticipation, "Oh-oh, can your previous sword-riding ability be shared?"

"Sword-riding?" Although Lumian had been in the dream city for half a month, his exposure to information couldn't be too comprehensive, so he wasn't familiar with this somewhat niche term.

However, he quickly associated it with his coat rack flying based on the literal meaning, and said with a smile, "Got it. It can be shared.

"It's formed by combining the ability to 'weaponize' any object and the ability to manipulate fireballs.

"Although I can only share one ability with you at a time, they don't need to be used simultaneously to complete the combination."

Franca's eyes became increasingly bright. "Can I try now?"

Lumian couldn't help but chuckle. "Of course, but remember, only within a 10-kilometer range.

"'Weaponized' items won't quickly return to normal and get damaged, but once you exceed the team's effective distance, you'll lose control of the attached flame."

Franca was a bit disappointed but found it acceptable.

"Fine, 10 kilometers it is."

She thought for a moment and added, "To go beyond 10 kilometers, you'd have to stay with me, not creating distance? Well, you can stand on the back half of my flying sword..."

The leader of a Hunter team must necessarily be a Hunter, with the 10-kilometer range calculated from their center.

If a team has more than one Hunter, only one led, the highest-Sequence one. If there was more than one highest-Sequence member, they determined superiority through combat.

"That's right," Lumian confirmed Franca's statement.

Franca's face immediately lit up.

"Let's start, first have a quick spin within the 10- kilometer range.

"Then we'll ride swords through the sky, hmm, let's bring Jenna along..."

Just as she was saying this, Franca suddenly sensed something and took out a makeup mirror from her clothing's hidden pocket.

She took it out while telling Lumian, "My only subordinate sent a message."

Although the Sick Church had multiple priests and bishops, and the market district had gang leaders at Franca's disposal, the one who actually led them, assigned tasks, and received reports was mainly Jenna.

Franca's true subordinate was only one person: her subordinate in the Demoness Sect, the Witch Niceea, who was a mole in the Emperor Party.

Of course, Niceea was now a Demoness of Pleasure.

"Stay alert," Lumian cautioned.

This involved the Demoness Sect and the special mirror world, so they had to be extra careful from now on.

"Mm-hmm." Franca nodded while seeing a light on the mirror's surface unfold into Intisian: "Louis Gustav has mysteriously disappeared."

"Louis Gustav has mysteriously disappeared." Franca's eyes narrowed.

The leader of the Emperor Party, the man secretly planning to overthrow the current government, with some connection to the mirror world's Roselle, Louis Gustave, had mysteriously disappeared?

Chapter 1094: Trap?

In the Maison d'Opéra district, on Rue du Chapeau Noir, inside an apartment with drawn curtains.

Niceea, with her curly brown hair pulled up, wearing an off-shoulder black dress and a thin gauze shawl, placed the makeup mirror given by her immediate superior on the cabinet in front of her and patiently waited for feedback.

After about twenty to thirty seconds, she saw a human figure quickly traced within the mirror, stepping out.

The person had slightly blackened, somewhat flaxen- colored long hair, tied into a spirited ponytail, eyebrows extending dynamically into the temples, and lake-blue eyes that were slightly deeper than before, with an added soul-attracting depth amid their bright and crystal-clear appearance.

"When did Louis Gustav disappear?" Franca's red and pretty lips moved.

Although she had become a Demoness of Pleasure, Niceea was still dazzled by her superior's beauty, temperament, and charm, her heart Involuntarily stirring.

She unconsciously compared Madame Franca with the Demoness of Black she had seen before, discovering that she didn't like to change her temperament much, always trying to find the most attractive side for her conversation partner, remaining straightforward and natural.

It was precisely this casual and natural state that made Madame Franca uniquely charming. Combined with her nonchalant expression and high-ranking status, Niceea occasionally felt she wanted to prostrate herself at her feet, body and soul.

After spending some time controlling the ripples in her heart, Niceea reported in detail, "Louis Gustav arranged to meet several core members of the Emperor Party, including Grouès, in a secret mine in Underground Trier yesterday to discuss discreetly developing members within the army. As a result, everyone arrived, but he did not appear.

"From yesterday until now, Grouès and others have tried various methods to contact him, but have received no response."

Niceea was now not only Grouèss mistress but had also gradually become a person close to the core of the Emperor Party due to her talent in instigation, provocation, and seduction.

It seems Louis Gustav had truly met with an accident. not just being delayed, but considered missing... Franca thought and asked, "Has anything unusual happened within the Emperor Party recently?"

Niceea shook her head. "In recent months, whether it's the Eternal Blazing Sun Church, the God of Steam and Machinery Church, Bureau 8, or the military, they have significantly increased the number of official Beyonders stationed in Trier, Madame, you might find it hard to believe, but the patrols in Underground Trier are now led by Sequence 5 Beyonders, team after team.

"In the first two months, the Emperor Party was still making small moves, resulting in many secret members being exposed, suffering significant losses. Recently, they have been well-behaved, only covertly developing and expanding.

"Previously, Louis Gustav and Grouès often met, knew each other's residences, and would occasionally discuss matters at fixed cafes. But after nearly being caught by official Beyonders from the Bureau 8, Louis Gustav moved from his original residence and carefully commanded core members remotely."

So that's how it is... No wonder it sounds different from before, when Grouès and others used to know Louis Gustav's daily routine... Franca slightly nodded and told Niceea, "This matter is significant. I will first report to the Demoness of Black.

"Stand by for new orders at any time."

"Yes, Madame Franca!" As soon as Niceea finished speaking, she saw her superior's figure gradually fade, transforming from solid to virtual, quickly disappearing as if never having been present.

Only the lingering faint fragrance in the air and a hint of what seemed like machine oil indicated someone had been there.

…

In the luxurious villa.

Franca ended her mirror projection maintenance and turned to Lumian.

"Ever since you advanced to Weather Warlock, I now see everything as a trap. Niceea's report could be a trap from the Demoness Sect, and Louis Gustav's disappearance might be a trap from the Mirror People.

"Never mind, I'll report to the Demoness of Black, saying the matter is significant and requesting her personal handling.

"If I don't get involved, I won't fall into the trap!"

In the Demoness Sect, Franca was still nominally a Demoness of Despair and a subordinate of the Demoness of Black, though of course, the truth couldn't be hidden from the Primordial Demoness.

"Is this what you call upward management?" Lumian chuckled, "If it's a trap, the Demoness of Black certainly won't let you shirk responsibility. If it's not a trap, she should still have you conduct a concurrent investigation."

"Sigh, I know," Franca sighed, "I was just venting my emotions. What if the Demoness of Black actually goes to investigate herself? People, after all, must live with hope and anticipation."

Lumian glanced at Franca. "I feel that you'll maintain your humanity quite well in the future."

"Why suddenly talk about humanity? Are you troubled by godhood?" Franca keenly countered.

After speaking, she took out a makeup mirror and verbally formed the information about Louis Gustav's disappearance and Niceea's detailed report, transmitting it through the mirror world to the mirror designated by the Demoness of Black-she would avoid meeting the Demoness of Black whenever possible to prevent stepping into a trap.

After Franca finished this matter, Lumian briefly explained Mr. Fool's interpretation of godhood and humanity, and his own state of being.

Franca was enlightened. "So that's why you suddenly proposed hugging-you were somewhat unable to control the aggregation instinct and destruction desire?"

"No, because I had already hugged Jenna, I felt it should be fair." Lumian said in a low laugh.

"…" Franca's mouth twitched slightly.

Lumian casually added another sentence, "What you said also had some influence."

Franca hummed in response and suddenly burst into laughter.

"What's so funny?" Lumian found it strange.

Franca cleared her throat and replied, "As a fellow hometown native, I've always supported your sister's creative work and read many of her novels. Some descriptions are really cringy. There's one line that goes something like: 'He hugged me tightly, very forcefully, as if afraid of losing me, wanting to crush me and tuck me into his body.'

"My goodness, this isn't a cringy description, it's clearly a horror description, so realistic!"

Seeing Franca wasn't too frightened and even joking, Lumian's inner pressure seemed to diminish. He naturally discussed his sister's works.

"Aurora deliberately intensified the cringe. She says Intisians love this style.

"By the way, did those works exist in the old era?"

Franca gently shook her head in response. "You could say the story concepts and ideas are similar, but without being a Savant, how could one exactly reproduce them? Moreover, your sister integrated current social trends and folk culture, making it an entirely different work. It's not like just because someone previously wrote about transmigration, me writing about transmigration makes it plagiarism?"

"I see..." Lumian was very satisfied with this answer.

At this moment, the Demoness of Black responded to Franca through the mirror: "Find effective clues as soon as possible."

"Yes, Madame." Franca responded, making a face at Lumian.

After pondering for a few seconds, she sent a new order to Niceea: "Search for clues, try to find Louis Gustav's current residence.

"Preferably obtain some items closely related to Louis Gustav and bring them to me."

This way, Franca could perform Magic Mirror Divination and even seek guidance from Mr. Fool.

After she finished issuing the command, Lumian laughed and asked, "Still doing that sword-riding thing?"

Franca's spirits lifted. "Of course!"

She then seemed to have a moment of reflection, muttering to herself, "The apocalypse is near. We must cherish daily happiness and satisfaction.

"We can't abandon today's life because of some dangerous things we'll have to do later."

"Hmm..." Lumian slowly nodded.

…

One week later, at midnight.

Niceea silently slid off the bed, stood upright, and merged into the darkness.

She glanced at the muscular middle-aged man on the bed, naked and only partially covered by a blanket, for a few seconds before leaving the bedroom soundlessly and entering the room in the furthest corner of the second floor.

Then, she took out a special makeup mirror, used the spell given by her superior, and sent information to the designated mirror.

She knew reporting at this hour would disturb Madame Franca's rest, but the situation was urgent. If she waited until dawn, Grouès would take back those two items, so she had no choice.

Shortly after, Franca's figure was projected from the makeup mirror.

She wore a silk nightgown with a thin outer jacket for cover, her slightly black flaxen-colored long hair cascading down, her expression unabashedly lazy and drowsy, her lake-colored eyes slightly deeper and hazy.

Niceea was stunned, only awakening when Franca spoke. "What is it?"

Niceea came to her senses. "Madame, I've obtained two items closely related to Louis Gustav.

"These were found in one of his previous secret hideouts."

As she spoke, Niceea raised her hands.

In one hand, she held a silver brooch made of two intertwined snakes; in the other, she held a dark gold coin.

Seeing the latter, Franca suddenly became alert.

She used invisible spider silk to pull the coin before her.

One side of the gold coin was quite simple, with raised patterns forming a chariot, bearing the number "2". The other side had a considerably complex pattern.

The main body was a crowned figure with a hanging cloak. To the left of the crown was a sketched, layered gate; to the right was a clock face with only one hand, its grid sizes unequal, with light and dark intertwining.

Parallel to the crown on the layer below were tiny flower pattern elements: a vertical pupil, five fingers of varying lengths, and a door split by a vertical long sword.

A Tudor coin... Franca's pupils slightly dilated as she recognized the item.

It was very similar to the Tudor coin they had obtained from the Sick Church, but with a face value of "2".

The patterns and details were essentially the same between the two coins, but their expressions differed significantly.

Chapter 1095: Convergence?

After confirming the dark gold coin was indeed a Tudor coin with a "2" denomination, Franca inwardly cursed the Blood Emperor's persecution of those with obsessive-compulsive disorder.

Why such a significant difference in patterns when it's just a different denomination?

They're essentially expressing almost the same symbolic meaning!

Niceea, unaware of her superior's peculiarity, continued to describe the origins of the two items, "This brooch is a Gustav family item, made according to their family crest. It's one of Louis Gustav's most valued possessions and a symbol of his identity.

"Normally, he carries this brooch with him, but this time he left it in his original hideout.

"This ancient gold coin and the brooch were kept together and seem equally important."

Under the pull of invisible spider silk, the brooch formed by intertwined snakes flew towards Franca.

Franca was not unfamiliar with the Gustav family crest.

After a quick glance, she confirmed its authenticity and chuckled inwardly.

A DNA double helix structure, right?

Clearly, the current Gustav family crest originated from a "masterpiece" during the late period of Emperor Roselle, not from earlier ancestors.

Niceea looked up at her beautiful, elegant, and natural superior, pleading, "Madame, after you complete the Magic Mirror Divination, can you return these two items to me?

"I stole them from Grouès. If I don't return them promptly, I'll definitely be suspected."

"No problem." Franca's mirror projection took the brooch and coin, retracting into the makeup mirror.

Niceea patiently waited in the current room.

…

"Louis Gustav's mysterious disappearance is related to the Tudor coin." After taking the Gustav family brooch and Tudor coin out of the mirror, Franca conveyed this information to Lumian, who was presumably still asleep, through the mental-linked team communication channel.

A few seconds later, Lumian opened his bedroom door and walked into Franca's room.

Everyone residing in this luxurious villa was a demigod, possessing strong spiritual intuition. They noticed the commotion and threw on outer garments, heading to Franca's room.

The only one who didn't react was Ludwig, who was preparing his second midnight snack in the annex kitchen.

After Franca briefly explained Niceea's feedback, she spoke with considerable gravity, "I plan to first pray to Mr. Fool, then perform Magic Mirror Divination to see if I can determine Louis Gustav's current whereabouts using these two items as a medium."

"I'll do it." Lumian reached out and took the brooch and coin, "I'll first seek Mr. Fool's consent, then use him as the subject for Magic Mirror Divination. This will help eliminate most interference and danger."

"That's best," Jenna agreed with Lumian's choice.

Lumian pressed his hand to his chest and began praying, communicating his request to Mr. Fool.

After receiving consent, he immediately took out a mirror and placed the Gustav family brooch and Tudor coin on the glass surface.

Then, he gently caressed the mirror's surface, reciting the spell in Hermes, "The Fool that doesn't belong to this era.

"The mysterious ruler above the gray fog.

"The King of Yellow and Black who wields good luck"

Lumian recited the entire spell at a steady pace, posed the question about "Louis Gustav's current whereabouts", and patiently waited for Mr. Fool's guidance.

Within seconds, the mirror's surface rippled, revealing a figure.

The figure was tall, mimicking Emperor Roselle with chestnut-colored long hair, sporting two beautiful mustaches, azure eyes, and thin lips-the leader of the Emperor Party, Louis Gustav.

This man, claimed to have Gustav family bloodline, stood in what seemed to be an abandoned mine, walking towards a darkness-shrouded exit.

The image suddenly blurred, with Louis Gustav instantly enveloped by darkness, surrounded by shadowy figures hidden in the depths, casting observant gazes.

Louis Gustav walked forward without averting his eyes or stopping, completely indifferent to the gazes from the darkness.

The deeper he walked, the more profound the darkness became.

Later, a slight light appeared on the forward side, and the image became extremely blurry.

Louis Gustav did not approach the light, continuing to move straight ahead.

After an indeterminate time, a door composed of pure light appeared in the distance, resembling an oval mirror.

Louis Gustav approached the door of light and extended his right hand, pressing against it.

He penetrated the door of light, arriving in an area with dense fog-visibility under ten meters-with surrounding collapsed buildings either asymmetrical or stained with blood.

This is... Fourth Epoch Trier! Lumian, Franca, Jenna, and Anthony had all been to Fourth Epoch Trier and were familiar with such scenes.

The only difference they noticed was the excessively dense fog, which felt extremely oppressive.

"Is this the depths of Fourth Epoch Trier? Is the Blood Emperor's divine corpse affecting this place, bringing widespread Fog of War?" Lumian quickly speculated.

Franca recalled, "But when we were there, we could see the collapsed palace with the Blood Emperor's divine corpse, and the fog wasn't this dense..."

"Did something change in Fourth Epoch Trier after the Hostel incident? Or is this triggered by Louis Gustav's approach?" Jenna proposed possible explanations.

At that moment, Louis Gustav in the mirror stopped.

Before him, less than ten meters away, a human shadow was cast on the blood-splattered street stones.

The black shadow was stretched long by the light, seemingly cradling an infant.

Almost simultaneously, the image suddenly collapsed, rippling like water, with Mr. Fool's guidance ending.

Lumian furrowed his brow, muttering to himself.

"Madame Pualis and the infant Omebella?

"Are they in Fourth Epoch Trier?

"Did Louis Gustav enter Fourth Epoch Trier to meet them?

"Did Louis Gustav enter Fourth Epoch Trier through the special mirror world? Were the Mirror People covertly watching him? Is the slightly lit area he didn't approach hiding a great terror of the special mirror world?"

No one could answer Lumian's questions.

After a few seconds, Jenna organized her thoughts.

"We cannot handle this matter.

"Since it potentially involves Madame Pualis and infant Omebella, we must strictly follow Mr. Fool's guidance: calamity needs to keep away from the Mother."

"Hmm, I'll report the conclusion to the Demoness of Black and let them investigate. No matter how much she urges me, I won't budge, I'll just say I'm not capable!" Franca mumbled, "And I'll notify 007 too. Such a matter is best handled by official Beyonders. They hold many secrets of Fourth Epoch Trier and might be able to send strong individuals to enter there without using the special mirror world, eliminating Louis Gustav, Madame Pualis, and infant Omebella."

Lumian nodded. "Okay."

He then reminded Franca, "The operation to eliminate targets in Fourth Epoch Trier should not be led by Eternal Blazing Sun Church Beyonders. Have you forgotten? The mystical father of infant Omebella is the Eternal Blazing Sun."

"How could we possibly forget something like that?" Franca signaled Lumian and the others to leave her bedroom.

Then she took out a mirror, "sending" the results of the Magic Mirror Divination along with the brooch and coin to the mirror corresponding to the Demoness of Black, and reminded her to return the mediums, otherwise Nicaea would be in trouble.

Shortly after, the Demoness of Black responded to Franca, "If Louis Gustav returns, inform me immediately."

Accompanying the response were the brooch and coin, which flew out of the mirror surface by themselves.

Not letting me investigate deeply, just waiting for Louis Gustav's return? How strange. Isn't this unrelated to the Demoness Sect? Is this not their trap? Franca was puzzled, and again projected herself through the mirror world to Niceea's room.

She relayed the Demoness of Black's words to Niceea and returned the Gustav family brooch and Tudor coin.

Niceea quietly sighed in relief.

She then had the mood for casual conversation.

"Madame, I visited the Lavigny Docks recently and found that the Church of The Fool there now has a patron saint named Franca Roland.

"Her name is the same as yours."

Niceea originally didn't think this was related to her superior. Throughout Trier, there were hundreds of women named Franca. But the patron saint's honorific title included "the Demoness Accompanied by Strife and Catastrophe."

Franca was slightly embarrassed, not because her subordinate knew the honorific title, but because her "side job" in another organization was discovered.

She responded with an air of profundity, "In this world, everyone has multiple identities for certain purposes."

In other words, neither denying nor confirming.

Niceea didn't dare ask further, seriously considering whether she should openly convert to Mr. Fool to get closer to her superior.

Privately, everyone was still the Primordial One's children.

After Franca's mirror projection disappeared, Niceea packed away the makeup mirror, brooch, and coin, merged into the darkness, and silently returned to the master bedroom.

She didn't rush to lie back in bed, first placing the brooch and coin in a hidden compartment of the desk.

After completing this task, she glided back to the bed like a shadow in the night, lying down without making a sound, pulling the blanket over herself.

Suddenly, a low voice sounded near her ear.

"Where did you just go?"

Niceea instinctively turned her head, seeing Grouès. who had been soundly asleep, now had his eyes open, his blue eyes deeply and darkly fixed on her.

Chapter 1096: Surveillance

Niceea's heart tightened, but she remained calm on the surface.

When she had sneaked out, she had already prepared to handle similar situations.

She patted her chest and complained, "Are you trying to scare me to death? Suddenly blurting out a sentence!"

After "calming down" for a few seconds, Niceea casually answered Grouès's question, "Couldn't sleep, felt a bit stuffy, and went to the balcony to get some air."

Not giving Grouès a chance to ask further questions, she pursed her lips, revealing her inner suppression, "You don't think something might have happened to Louis, right?"

As the leader of the Emperor Party, his mysterious disappearance would naturally bring anxiety, tension, and stress to his subordinates, making insomnia completely normal.

Grouès stared at Niceea for a few seconds, then softened his expression.

"Who knows?

"Maybe he'll suddenly appear in a couple of days."

…

In Franca's workshop in the luxurious villa, multiple mirrors floated before Lumian and the others, each reflecting different scenes.

Several mirrors captured Niceea and Grouès from various angles.

When Franca had previously projected herself through the mirror world, she had casually marked all the mirrored items in that house.

This was to ensure the safety of her only subordinate, making sure she wouldn't be attacked or have her identity exposed for stealing the Gustav family brooch and Tudor coin.

Subsequent developments proved Franca's wisdom and intuition-Grouès had indeed noticed Niceea's quiet departure from the room.

During their conversation, Franca was prepared to project her power through the mirror world.

After a while, Franca's expression suddenly became a bit strange.

Wait, why are they suddenly kissing?

There are so many people watching!

Her purpose was only to add an extra layer of Insurance to Niceea's safety. She hadn't expected the suspicion-harboring Grouès and the scheming Niceea to start kissing while talking!

Is this about to become a scene not suitable for minors?

If only Franca was watching the "surveillance", she would have found this unexpected yet understandable, not a big deal, and even quite entertaining with the thrill of secretly peeping. But now, Jenna was sitting beside her, with Anthony and Ludwig-who was eating a midnight snack-behind her.

She started to feel embarrassed.

At this moment, Anthony, focused on the mirror scenes, said, "Both of their body languages show a certain level of resistance. The kiss is deceptive and perfunctory."

Professional... Franca muttered internally.

As Anthony predicted, Niceea and Grouès kissed for a moment before saying goodnight again and going back to sleep.

Franca sighed in relief and told her companions, "Just leave one person to watch the surveillance. The rest can get some sleep.

"Jenna, come replace me in an hour and a half, Lumian, replace Jenna three hours later. Anthony, you and Ludwig don't need to stay up."

The surveillance required support from a demigod Demoness.

Moreover, if anything went wrong, only the Demonesses could first project or traverse over to provide help.

"Okay," Anthony made no objections. After Ludwig finished his midnight snack, he left the room with Anthony.

After giving Franca a few instructions, Lumian and Jenna also went to rest.

Franca completely relaxed, leisurely watching the 'surveillance'.

As time slowly passed, while she was reading a novel leaning against a pile of pillows, her spiritual intuition suddenly gave her a premonition. She raised her head and looked at one of the "surveillance" mirrors.

Grouès silently got out of bed and went to the desk. opening a hidden compartment.

After confirming that the Gustav family brooch and Tudor coin were still there, this core member of the Emperor Party went to the master bedroom's attached bathroom, letting the toilet flush with a whoosh.

Seeing Grouès return to bed after leaving the bathroom, Franca pursed her lips.

That's it?

She had expected him to suddenly attack and kill Niceea, or use one of the brooch or coin to contact Louis Gustav, or someone else.

As a result, Grouès was so well-behaved that it disappointed her.

And so, during the rotation of surveillance, the sky gradually brightened, with bright sunlight cascading from above.

Franca, now wearing a lace-flowered lady's shirt and cream-colored loose long pants, covered her mouth while yawning and walked into the workshop, asking Lumian, who was seriously watching the "surveillance."

"Nothing unusual, right?"

"There is something." Lumian had one leg raised, the other naturally extended, leaning back against the pile of pillows.

"What's unusual?" Franca instantly became alert.

Lumian chuckled. "After waking up in the same bed as a Demoness of Pleasure, Grouès didn't have a morning round. This shows his attention is completely elsewhere, he's hiding something in his heart, and might do something later."

"Makes sense," Franca was quite aware of a Demoness of Pleasure's charm.

She sat next to Lumian and recalled, "I've also marked some of Grouès's clothing metal buttons. As long as our luck isn't bad, we should be able to see where he goes and what he does."

"Luck? Our luck definitely won't be bad." Lumian laughed and patted his Traveler's Bag, which contained the sealed Post-Apocalyptic Scripture.

This Grade 0 Sealed Artifact ultimately wasn't used.

The formal suit Grouès changed into after breakfast had two shiny, mirror-like metal buttons marked by Franca.

The "surveillance" image immediately changed, mainly showing the scene in front of Groués, swaying back and forth.

In the following time, Grouès kissed Niceea goodbye, took a two-wheeled, two-seat carriage to a certain street in the prison district-Quartier 4.

He walked to a dark red door and rang the doorbell.

The door opened by itself.

Just as Grouès passed through the doorway, the "surveillance" image suddenly blurred, displaying numerous white noise points.

These noise points lasted only two seconds before disappearing. The mirrors before Lumian and Franca no longer showed any image.

"Were we discovered? Or does the house itself have an abnormality affecting the mirror world?" Franca turned her head to look at Lumian.

"Let's wait a bit," Lumian said calmly.

About three to four minutes later, the mirror showed an image again-Grouès was leaving the house.

Franca nodded thoughtfully.

Throughout the morning, Grouès, as a deputy manager of an armaments factory, visited numerous military camps in the Quartier Éraste and returned to his office during lunch.

Lumian, who had already rested, stood up. "Nothing worth watching anymore."

"Yeah." Franca stood up too.

She looked at Lumian and suddenly looked puzzled. "Why do I feel like you've gotten shorter?"

"My Weather Warlock potion has been partially digested. My state is completely stabilized, and I have better control over my body. I can control my height to around 1.95 meters. As the digestion deepens, I can continue to compress. Once the potion is fully digested, I should normally maintain

1.85 meters. During battle, even without revealing my Mythical Creature form, I can expand to 2.7-2.8 meters, like a small giant," Lumian answered in good spirits.

"You've already partially digested it?" Franca asked in surprise.

Lumian chuckled, "Because I found the key points to acting as a Weather Warlock. A few days ago, I discovered a tribe in a primitive jungle of the Southern Continent that maintained blood sacrifice traditions. I brought them different extreme weather conditions. After persisting for three days, they were broken by fear, submitting to me and completely abandoning their blood sacrifice habits.

"This helped me summarize an acting principle, and the potion was thus significantly digested."

Franca thought for a few seconds and asked curiously.

"Controlling weather is to bring about a catastrophe and make the target submit?"

This was consistent with the inner meaning of the Hunter pathway.

"More or less." Lumian glanced at the floating mirrors and smiled. "Time to visit that house with abnormalities."

"You're going?" Franca frowned. "Just leave it to the Demoness Sect or official Beyonders. I feel like there might be a trap in front of everything you do now."

Smiling, Lumian replied, "This is on the ground, not underground, under the watch of Mr. Fool and the true gods.

"If I'm afraid to handle abnormal events under these circumstances, how can I act as an Iron-blooded Knight?"

"That's true," Franca responded tersely.

She hesitated for two seconds, "Then take Jenna with you."

Lumian smiled and invited Franca, "Come with us."

"Okay..." Franca readily agreed.

…

At the door of the house at 20 Rue Saint-Frédéric in the prison district.

Lumian, wearing a half-high silk hat, a white shirt, black vest, and long pants, opened the dark red door.

He walked in, detecting no abnormalities.

Franca and Jenna outside saw the interior through the makeup mirror in his hand.

Sofas and cabinets were covered with white cloth to prevent dust accumulation, and the floor was cleaned very thoroughly.

"No problems, no interference," Jenna also entered and told Lumian.

Lumian looked around and said, "This place hasn't been lived in for a long time, but maids come regularly to clean."

This was a Weather Warlock's extraction and restoration of environmental information.

Just as Lumian finished speaking, Franca, who had also entered the house, saw a figure slowly walking down the stairs.

The figure was very thin, seeming like it would fall with a gust of wind.

His hair was mostly gray, clearly aged, with a brown-beard that looked like it hadn't been trimmed in a long time, wearing a crumpled black formal suit.

Before his appearance, Lumian, as an Angel, had not detected him and still couldn't smell his presence.

Based on this, Lumian believed the person didn't actually exist.

The old man looked at Lumian and smiled. "You've finally come to collect the letter."

"Letter?" Lumian raised an eyebrow.

The old man smiled and answered, "I am the Messenger of God, and one of my functions is to deliver letters for great existences.

"There's a letter here for you."

Chapter 1097: A Letter Destined to be Received

A letter from a great existence? Lumian suddenly laughed, interrupting the old man's words, "I feel that you don't actually exist in this house."

As Lumian spoke, Franca stepped sideways, moving close to Jenna, with layers of phantom images appearing in her eyes.

The old man in a crumpled formal suit and thin frame seemed eager to express himself and actually explained his current state to Lumian, "If I believe I exist, and you believe I exist, then I am existing. The reverse is also true."

Franca felt a bit of a headache, muttering. "Are you talking philosophy?"

The old man's eyes brightened. "How did you know that my previous, hmm, in your terms, Sequence was called Philosopher?"

Seriously. A Demoness's spiritual intuition is no joke.... Franca was momentarily stunned.

Philosopher? Lumian suddenly thought of a secretive organization, an evil god cult: First Philosophy!

The mental patient who was once disguised as his substitute by I Know Someone was also described as being like a philosopher... Lumian thoughtfully said to the old man, "Midoro's Worship?"

"Do you know about the Heavenly Domains, the Formless Door?" The old man responded happily, "Have you also experienced immortality?"

Lumian shook his head, speaking in a flat tone, "No.

"I've just killed a few Initiates."

He was provoking, also displaying the arrogance of a Hunter to better act as an Iron-blooded Knight.

Moreover, discussing immortality and the Formless Door with a Philosopher would likely draw him into his "realm" and imperceptibly cause severe problems.

The expression on the old man's face instantly disappeared. He looked at Lumian, speaking in a hollow voice, "A great existence wants me to deliver you a letter."

"Which one?" Before Lumian could ask, he glanced at Franca and Jenna.

The two Demonesses had silently disappeared from the house, leaving only two makeup mirrors placed on the ground at some point.

When Lumian first diverted the conversation, Franca had used their proximity to transfer their true bodies through the mirror world via their eyes, leaving only mirror projections!

Now, they weren't even maintaining the mirror projections.

They had learned from Lumian that deeply understanding the names and information of great existences would severely corrupt oneself, something mirror projections couldn't block, and even hidden, sleeping mirrors would be affected!

The old man didn't mind Franca and Jenna's departure, looking at Lumian and saying, "The mighty Circle of Inevitability."

Circle of Inevitability? He should hate Amon more than me now. What letter is He sending me? Is He trying to carry out counterespionage against me? Why would such a great existence value me... Or is this letter just a medium to harvest my life? Lumian asked the old man with interest, "You're not an Angel, are you? Except for a few, other great existences haven't yet been able to send angelic-level power through the barrier.

"Can you understand the true names of great existences?"

In Lumian's view, this old man was at most Sequence 3.

The old man smiled and replied, "This is the unique characteristic and source of pain for Messengers of God, but also our most powerful ability.

"Corruption grants us power."

Sounds quite philosophical. But this ability is indeed special. The Beyonders from the First Philosophy I've encountered were skilled at injecting voices into others' ears or minds. If what they inject are the true names of great existences, who below the angelic level could withstand that? Lumian suddenly felt lucky that he hadn't encountered a Messenger of God before becoming an angel.

Otherwise, with the various hidden issues in his body, he would absolutely explode at the slightest provocation.

Or maybe it wasn't luck, but arrangement... As this thought flashed, Lumian self-deprecatingly mused internally.

With this realization, his blue eyes instantly turned Iron-black.

He didn't want to receive the Circle of Inevitability's letter. He wanted to find the mystical connection between the old man before him and his true body by investigating overall weaknesses, then blow them both up!

At that moment, the old man's body suddenly became ethereal.

A silver-white with black color rose from within him.

His hollow voice rang out. "Please receive the letter."

He suddenly condensed, transforming into a silver- white and black light, shooting directly at Lumian.

In this house, he was the letter, and the letter was him!

Lumian activated the black mark on his right shoulder and quickly disappeared from the spot.

He directly teleported to the Fog Sea, far from Trier.

But the silver-white and black light was still ahead of him, still approaching, not shaken off.

Lumian didn't hesitate, making layers of phantom images appear in his blue eyes.

He entered the mirror world.

The silver-white and black light was still before him, in the illusory dark tunnel, seeming destined to be received by him.

This was a fate that couldn't be escaped!

Lumian flashed into another mirror tunnel, and the silver-white and black light once again approached from the front.

This time, Lumian didn't flee. His eyes quickly turned silver-black.

Eye of Calamity!

Although his Inevitability power hadn't further improved, thanks to his Weakness Investigation ability now reaching angelic level, the Eye of Calamity formed by merging this ability with Inevitability power naturally had some enhancement.

Since he couldn't escape, he'd try to eliminate this letter from the destiny plane!

Soon, Lumian saw the quietly surging mercury-colored illusory long river and saw the scene of himself catching the silver-white and black light.

It existed in almost all destiny branches.

In other words, Lumian saw his future of receiving the "letter", a destiny that was bound to unfold.

The only variable was a branch that didn't include this future, extremely marginal and chaotic, very difficult to push with his current abilities.

Lacking necessary preconditions!

In the blink of an eye, Lumian saw another scene.

In the image, the recipient of the "letter" was not only himself but also Amon, wearing a black robe, monocle, and a pointed soft hat.

Clang!

Lumian suddenly heard an ethereal clang crossing through thick history.

A scene naturally emerged in his mind: the thin-faced Amon, wearing a monocle, stood in the bell tower, pushing the bell hammer to strike the great bell.

With this sound, an ancient, mottled massive stone clock appeared.

It was a phantom, its face divided into unequal twelve sections by intersecting dark blue and gray-white, each section with different symbols representing different times.

Three jointed, semi-transparent small worms formed the clock's hands.

As they stopped moving, an indescribable invisible torrent surged out, seemingly freezing the silver-white and black light within.

Lumian, not within the affected range, heard a familiar voice with a hint of laughter, "Do you know the main ability of a Sufferer?"

Before Lumian could respond, the voice answered itself, "Reproducing the suffering one has experienced onto the target."

As the words fell, the silver-white and black light frozen in time broke through its restraints, again flying towards Lumian.

But waiting for it was an extraordinarily intense, unimaginable sea of light.

A supernova seemed to have erupted, erupting on a small scale.

This mirror world instantly collapsed, accompanied by the silent shattering of numerous mirrors.

Of course, this was far from a true supernova explosion, merely a kind of simulated reproduction.

Although Lumian was outside the range, his body also shattered, re-forming outside the mirror world.

At this moment, in his Eye of Calamity, the preconditions for pushing destiny to the marginal branch were satisfied.

Lumian didn't hesitate to release nearly half his spirituality from his left palm, letting the mercury- colored river of fate's water flow into the corresponding branch.

Everything calmed down.

Lumian was about to turn his head and look at Amon, who had appeared beside him at some point, when tiny silver-white and black lights suddenly emerged in the void, forming a paragraph of text.

Though the Circle of Inevitability's letter couldn't be directly delivered to him and Amon, it inevitably revealed itself.

The text was very complex, but it didn't prevent Lumian from directly deciphering its meaning.

"Stay away from special mirror worlds, or you're destined to lose control and go mad."

Huh? Lumian was somewhat stunned.

Is this a warning?

The Circle of Inevitability didn't try to corrupt or smite me, but instead warned me?

Is He trying to betray the other Outer Deities?

Surprised, Lumian focused on the phrase "lose control and go mad".

He then recalled the prophecy of the Post-Apocalyptic Scripture and the future self he seemed to have seen during the Hostel incident.

Do all prophecies about my future revolve around the words 'going crazy'? Lumian silently muttered to himself.

Amon, standing mid-air in some inexplicable manner. slightly disappointedly shook His head. "If it's not a letter for me, why ask me to receive it?"

"Perhaps you'll also lose control and go mad by entering the special mirror world," Lumian tried to interpret the hidden meaning of the Circle of Inevitability's words.

Saying this, he stopped.

He remembered the "young man" beside him, wearing a monocle, was once a top Cryptologist.

Amon smiled in agreement. "That's possible.

"But I can indeed avoid entering special mirror worlds. Can you?"

Lumian wanted to answer yes, but given the entanglement of destiny, his unique pathway, and various other prerequisites, he felt he would inevitably enter the special mirror world, enter the depths of Fourth Epoch Trier, and could only hope to delay this as much as possible until fully prepared.

"Why would the Circle of Inevitability want to warn me?" Lumian asked habitually.

Amon adjusted His monocle, laughing. "Did that old fellow also designate me as a recipient to help you decrypt?"

He continued, His tone laced with laughter, "The interpretation is that entering a special mirror world indeed poses a risk of you losing control and going mad, and this might bring unknown risks to those old fellows."

Chapter 1098: Him

Would the terror of the special mirror world possibly bring trouble to the Outer Deities' invasion? Lumian, treading on a wild wind, turned his head to look at Amon. 'What exactly is in the depths of the special mirror world?'

This was a direct participant who might know something!

Lumian had no expectation that Amon would certainly answer him, but asking wouldn't cost anything.

Amon stood steadily in the air, laughing with His usual tone,

'The embryonic form of the special mirror world was constructed by Bethel, to create a secret, spacious environment unknown to other gods for Tudor's and Cheek's meeting.

'Tudor wouldn't care whether this matter was seen, but cared about whether it would be known by those who shouldn't know.

'This is the style of His Imperial Majesty the Blood Emperor.'

'And then?' Lumian asked cooperatively.

Including the Termiboros period, he and Amon had already chatted 'casually' several times.

Amon pressed the monocle in His right eye socket. 'Later, the special mirror world underwent strange changes. Not only me, but Bethel and the others were no longer allowed to enter.

'His Majesty was fully capable of killing Angels.

'Afterward, His Majesty became even crazier. Cheek began to claim Herself as the true heir of the original Creator, the first person born in chaos.

'In the Pale Disaster, Cheek suffered severe damage. For thousands of years, Her condition has been poor. But as a Demoness of Unaging, you should clearly know that for high-ranking Demonesses, this is unlikely to happen. They can quickly resurrect even when met with death, let alone just being severely wounded.'

Lumian could tell that Amon was intentionally saying these words. His arrival today was certainly not just for receiving the Circle of Inevitability's letter.

'The true heir of the original Creator...' Lumian recalled the various concepts of the Demoness Sect that Franca had told him, and suddenly made certain associations. 'Shouldn't it be the personas the Oldest One initially split off? And among them, only two are most important and qualified to say this:

The Celestial Worthy of Heaven and Earth for Blessings and the original God Almighty...'

Lumian paused, muttering to himself, 'I'm aware that the combination of Tudor and Cheek was actually an arrangement left by the original God Almighty. The one believed in by the Aurora Order was also an object of arrangement, which will bring a destined accident.

'Moreover, the Demoness of Black said that the Primordial Demoness has five lines of honorific names, of which two are unknown to outsiders.'

Lumian's current thinking was that if he wanted to obtain more intelligence from Amon, he would have to trade some of his own information.

Who gets something for free?

The one in front of him was the expert at free acquisitions, once the top Marauder!

Before Amon could respond, Lumian added another sentence,

'The City of Calamity at the top of the Hunter and Demoness pathways was once contained by the original God Almighty.'

He began to suspect that the great terror of the special mirror world was related to the resurrection of the original God Almighty.

Amon glanced at him, smiling and saying, 'For such matters, no one dares to confirm without seeing it personally.

'Initially, when the special mirror world first had anomalies, that zealot already knew something was wrong. The occurrence of the War of the Four Emperors was also Him pushing it from the shadows.

'He re-established contact with the Chaos Sea more than seven years ago. Although forcibly using the Chaos Sea's power would cause the accommodation progress to regress, compared to those who still have to wait for the Western Continent's seal to be lifted, He shouldn't still be incapable of accomplishing an initial accommodation until today.

'Guess why He hasn't truly accommodated the Chaos Sea?'

Are the concerns about the problems hidden in the depths of the special mirror world stopping Him? Does He want a Beyonder qualified to become the Origins of Disaster and Calamity of Destruction not only to cultivate power against the apocalypse but also because the path to the Origins of Disaster must necessarily pass through the depths of the special mirror world, triggering that great terror and presenting it before His eyes? Is part of the previous 'bestowments' cost to be paid here? Lumian thoughtfully said to Amon, 'What else does that individual know about the special mirror world?'

Amon laughed and shook His head, answering off-topic,

'Cheek's remaining two honorific names are extremely secretive. Even color-titled high-ranking Demonesses don't all know them. Only those with close connections to Cheek that might trigger divine descent when attacked, truly grasp them.

'Otherwise, why do you think those two honorific names could remain secret, unknown even to all current Sequence Os? Medici could intimidate the Demoness of White, let alone those more powerful than Her.

'But that zealot might know something, after all, even the thoughts in one's mind might not be hidden from Him.'

Is the Demoness of Black one of those with close connections to the Primordial Demoness? She indeed seems special...

Lumian glanced at Amon and suddenly laughed. 'Using a true god's honorific name in Intisian won't incur divine punishment? Only using Hermes or ancient Hermes languages counts as blasphemy?'

After all, Cheek wasn't an uncommon name.

'You only mentioned Hermes and ancient Hermes because you only mastered them?' Amon laughed, 'Using ordinary language to recite a Sequence O's true name will attract attention but not necessarily divine punishment. As for me, guess why my title includes the description Blasphemer?'

Here, Amon adjusted the monocle in His right eye and looked Lumian up and down for a few seconds.

He said with an obvious smile, 'Actually, I'm quite looking forward to you entering the depths of the special mirror world.

Something interesting and unknown will definitely happen, and it's not something that will affect me.

'Why not give it a shot?'

'Maybe I'll consider it sometime in the future.' Lumian took on an unconcerned posture.

'Goodbye, my unacknowledged goddaughter. I hope when I see you next, you haven't truly lost control and gone mad.'

Amon waved like a human.

His figure suddenly disappeared.

Lumian lowered his head and gazed at the azure ocean shrouded in faint mist, activated the black mark on his right shoulder, and returned to the luxurious villa in Trier.

'How did it go?' Franca and Jenna, who had been waiting, asked in unison.

'The one called Inevitability sent a message through a Messenger of God,' Lumian told his two companions about the 'letter's' content.

'The one called Inevitability warned you not to go to the depths of the special mirror world? It feels like a weasel giving its well-wishes to a chicken—there's definitely no good intention,' Franca muttered.

'Could this be a misdirection?' Jenna frowned. 'But the secrets of the special mirror world's depths related to the Primordial Demoness are indeed dangerous.'

'Probably not a misdirection,' Lumian recounted his conversation with Amon that he could speak about, then laughed self-mockingly, 'Maybe the one who will save the end times is me, Mr. Fool will hold the fort, preventing those great existences from interfering with me. And when I reach the entrance of the special mirror world, I'll shout to the sky, 'Go back, or I'll face that great terror!'

'Like the Deterrence Era...' Franca couldn't help but quip.

Jenna didn't quite agree with Lumian's words. 'Maybe it would only bring trouble to the one called Inevitability, without affecting other great existences.'

'Do I look like an idiot? Before figuring out what exactly the great terror in the special mirror world's depths is and whether it can deter those great existences, I would never do such a thing,' Lumian teased Jenna.

After chatting for a while, he took out the special mirror world fragment obtained from the Demoness of Despair Panatiya from the Traveler's Bag and handed it to Franca.

'From now on, I must try to avoid direct contact with items related to the special mirror world.'

'Cautious!' Franca gave a thumbs up and praised Lumian.

She thought for a moment and took out her own special mirror world fragment, handing it to Jenna along with Lumian's.

'I have the Primordial Demoness's figurine. At critical moments, I must also avoid keeping it together with the special mirror world fragments.'

'I was just about to remind you,' Jenna smiled and collected the two special mirror world fragments.

Franca returned the smile and turned to Lumian.

'We'll put this matter aside for now?'

She was referring to Louis Gustav's matter. After some time, if this Emperor Party leader returned from Fourth Epoch Trier and the special mirror world, they would leave it to official Beyonders to handle, and notify the Demoness Sect on the side, not getting involved.

'Yeah.' Lumian nodded. 'In the coming days, besides finding other cultists hidden in Trier and Zaratul's clues, I'll focus on digesting the potion. I might seek Mr. Fool's permission to attempt the acting in a specific scenario for Weather Warlock.

'Also, I've communicated with Mr. Star and Mr. Moon. If they discover a base of the Rose School of Thought or an armed force belonging to them, they'll immediately notify me. I'll take you to the Southern Continent and launch a small war.'

The acting of a War Bishop must be completed in a war.

'Okay.' Franca pointed upstairs. 'So there's nothing else for now?'

She wanted to continue manufacturing giant robots.

Lumian didn't respond directly but turned to Jenna and Franca with a smile. 'I heard a very famous circus is touring in Trier.

Want to go see it together?'

'Sure.' Jenna looked at Franca.

Franca hesitated for two seconds. 'Alright.'

More than a week later.

Angoulême de Francois put on a brown coat with gold-embroidered threads and walked towards the underground of Saint Vieve Cathedral.

He and several colleagues were assigned to search for Louis Gustav and Madame Pualis in Fourth Epoch Trier. For this, they needed to hold a ritual, receive the blessing of the Eternal Blazing Sun, to resist the various corruptions existing in the Fourth Epoch Trier within a certain time.

Even for an Unshadowed, it would be quite dangerous otherwise.

Another one brought by Hidden Blade... Angoulême sighed inwardly.

The matter of Louis Gustav and the person suspected to be Pualis meeting in Fourth Epoch Trier was personally reported by him.

After being assigned to this task, Angoulême had tried to find Hidden Blade in the telegram group multiple times, wanting to complain, but in the past week, Hidden Blade had only been online two or three times, and no one knew what she was busy with.

Chapter 1099: Spiritual Premonition

In an underground location in Trier, a place strictly guarded by multiple Beyonders from the Eternal Blazing Sun and the Church of Steam and Machinery.

This was a seal leakage point that had appeared before the construction of the catacombs, which was later properly handled and no longer caused problems. However, if linked with the square in the nearby quarry hollow where Eternal Blazing Sun and God of Steam and Machinery were worshiped, along with the stone pillars representing both deities, it could allow people from outside the seal to enter Fourth Epoch Trier at a certain risk.

Although this required the divine power of the Eternal Blazing Sun or the God of Steam and Machinery as a "key", something impossible for cultists to utilize, both Churches still insisted on sending teams to take turns guarding the site.

At this moment, Angoulême arrived at the abandoned mine with two other Unshadowed colleagues, facing three people dressed as stonemasons.

"Let's begin," said a monk with short, thick hair and a beard, nodding at Angoulême.

Angoulême recognized this monk as the current prior of the Deep Valley Cloister, named Jack Walton, quite an ordinary man.

"Okay." Angoulême nodded in response.

Under the watch of both guard teams, they lowered their heads and took their positions, chanting the honorific names of their respective deities.

Rays of sunlight fell from the cave's top, illuminating the abandoned mine.

White steam subsequently permeated the quarry hollow.

Soon, crimson blood seeped from the depths of the abandoned mine.

The bizarre blood, resisting the sunlight, continuously surged upward, quickly filling the mine.

Angoulême, an Unshadowed, dissolved his fear and hesitation, raised his head, took two steps forward, and entered the abandoned mine, stepping into the crimson blood thick with a bloody scent.

Other Saints followed closely behind.

Passing through the "Blood Well" would allow entry into Fourth Epoch Trier!

This was not a simple task. The "blood" would cause severe corruption, with the danger increasing for higher Sequences.

…

Southern Continent, deep in a rainforest.

Before a terrifying castle covered in countless human skins.

Franca, Jenna, Anthony, and Ludwig each condensed fire spears of blue-violet, blazing and terrifying.

Without Lumian issuing the command, they simultaneously threw their spears.

The blue-violet fire spears split mid-air, quickly presenting a sky-covering arrangement.

Swoosh! Swoosh! Swoosh!

It was as if an entire military legion had simultaneously launched their weapons, causing the high sky to brighten and be dyed with brilliant colors.

Swoosh! Swoosh! Swoosh!

The human skin castle was completely covered by countless fire spears. The cultists developed by the Rose School of Thought used every possible ability but could not change this apocalyptic scene.

Rumble, the earth trembled, the castle collapsed, igniting blue-violet flames.

Painful wails and desperate curses echoed between the flames, transforming into thin strands of black gas rising upward.

Ludwig didn't care what the soon-to-die cultists were cursing. He stepped forward, rode the wild wind, and howled to arrive above the collapsed human skin castle, opening his mouth split to the back of his head.

Whoosh!

All the rising black gas was sucked into his mouth.

Lumian had his hands in his pockets, smiling and watching this scene, his expression very leisurely.

From breaking through the human skin castle's outer defensive line, to gradually advancing and cutting off their escape hopes, to repeatedly attacking the castle itself and completely destroying it, Lumian never personally acted, allowing Jenna and others to freely perform and cooperate tacitly.

He was only responsible for central command, sharing appropriate abilities at critical moments.

"Not strong enough," Franca finally felt like a Demoness amidst those wails and curses.

The only issue was that the master of the human skin castle was just a Sequence 4 Tree Supplicant, a bestowed by the Mother Tree of Desire, though he had a group of Low and Mid-Sequence subordinates and numerous loyal cultists. The human skin castle itself was like a sacrificial ritual that could briefly display power equivalent to Sequence 2 by sacrificing many humans, but it fundamentally couldn't resist a true Angel, let alone an Angel leading a team.

"Overwhelming the weak and sweeping through armies is also a form of war, which is quite helpful for digesting the War Bishop role," Lumian laughed and responded to Franca. "Moreover, previously abstract cooperation has now become a tangibly perceptible thing."

What Lumian didn't say was that he was essentially equivalent to a priest or bishop of the City of Calamity or 0-01 due to his close connections, with only the war aspect lacking.

Over the past week, Mr. Star and Mr. Moon had each discovered a base secretly established by the Rose School of Thought, both handed over to Lumian to handle, giving him the opportunity to launch two small wars.

Seeing Ludwig consume all the dispersed boons' power, Jenna retracted her gaze and said to Lumian with some worry, "I know the Southern Continent is chaotic, but getting opportunities for two small wars in just over a week—isn't this too frequent?"

Lumian chuckled and said, "These are signs.

"Signs of chaos and conflict, signs that the apocalypse will arrive early."

Before Jenna and others could respond, Lumian waved to Ludwig in mid-air, saying, "Let's head back. Let's have a barbecue party today."

According to their agreement, apart from the dispersed boons' power, all other spoils had to be left for the intelligence providers—Mr. Star or Mr. Moon.

In the luxurious villa in Trier that currently belonged to Lumian and his companions.

Jenna was using invisible spider silk to quickly slice and string meat skewers while watching Lumian, who despite having extremely strong fire manipulation abilities, was seriously managing charcoal for grilling meat.

Lumian wore a smile, relaxed, tasting a piece while grilling.

He's not worried about those signs at all… No, not that he's not worried, but he worries when he should worry, fights when he should fight, and enjoys life when he should enjoy life. Jenna thought, her eyes subtly moving.

Over the past week, Lumian, who had made certain progress in digesting the Weather Warlock potion and stabilized his state, was behaving quite normally. Their relationship had returned to the period before the Vortex incident, and moreover, Lumian had clearly become more proactive.

But from some details, Jenna could still sense that Lumian was slightly different from before.

A normal person would inevitably be affected in daily life when encountering worrying matters. Lumian's ability to completely detach himself indicated he was deliberately controlling his emotions.

Even at Sequence 2, godhood ultimately brings certain, permanent influences… Jenna suddenly felt somewhat emotional.

"What 's on your mind?" Franca, helping beside her, asked curiously.

Jenna lowered her voice and shared her recent feelings with Franca in a concise manner.

Franca pursed her lips and said, "Just treat it as a natural change in mindset and perception that everyone experiences as they grow older and are tempered by various experiences…"

She stopped midway.

Wasn't this true for herself as well?

The same applied to Jenna. Walking step by step to her current Sequence, she had more or less abandoned some of her original insistences.

Just as Jenna was about to say something, she saw Lumian throw a grilled meat skewer aside, and Ludwig, who somehow had moved there, bit into the food in one mouthful.

"Feeding a dog?" Franca laughingly scolded Lumian.

Jenna couldn't help but laugh as well.

…

Deep in Fourth Epoch Trier, dense fog isolated sensory perception and spirituality, making the partially collapsed buildings in the distance appear hazy and indistinct.

The Unshadowed had filled the surrounding thirty to forty meters with pure, holy sunlight, to the point where even each person's shadow had disappeared.

The quietly rolling fog was blocked outside the sunlight, but the light could not reach further.

Angoulême cast his gaze toward Jack Walton.

The prior of Deep Valley Cloister, a Saint-level monk, was holding an unusual circular disk covered in complex patterns with a mirror-like luster.

Placed on the disk was an object supposedly from the Louis Gustav family crest, which swayed left and right before finally settling in a certain direction.

"Over there." Jack Walton was leading this search.

The disk was something he had made just two days ago, derived from a revelation's knowledge. The Gustav family crest was not a real object, but a historical projection—this did not impede its role as a medium pointing toward Louis Gustav.

Just as Angoulême and the other Unshadowed followed Jack Walton into a new street, a black shadow suddenly passed in front of them.

The shadow was slightly hunched, moving slowly at the intersection.

At a glance, it looked like a person, but upon closer inspection, it seemed like a gathering of viscous black liquid.

"A Montsouris ghost!" Angoulême quickly identified the origin of the black shadow.

This left Jack Walton and other clergy from the Church of Steam and Machinery confused.

Weren't Montsouris ghosts supposed to wander in Underground Trier? How could they enter Fourth Epoch Trier?

Information about Montsouris ghosts quickly flashed through the minds of these demigods who were not afraid of ghostly curses, quickly reminding them that these "ghosts" were not always present and had appeared only in recent times.

Did Montsouris ghosts come out of Fourth Epoch Trier? And more than one? Such speculation emerged in the minds of Jack Walton and other Saints.

…

In the luxurious villa.

Lumian suddenly felt his entire body go icy cold, unable to breathe, as if sinking into viscous river water.

The next second, his eyes reflected a black shadow resembling a hunched elderly person.

A Montsouris ghost!

Lumian's heart tightened, and he sat up abruptly.

He truly opened his eyes, seeing everything in the room was completely normal, with no Montsouris ghost in sight!

"What happened?" Franca, wrapped in a thin blanket and yawning, also sat up.

Lumian was silent for a few seconds before saying, "I dreamed of a Montsouris ghost."

Franca was first stunned, then her expression turned solemn. "For a Demoness, this could be a spiritual premonition."

Chapter 1100: Montsouris Ghosts

Lumian leaped out of bed and walked to the window.

Blue-violet flames rolled out from within his body, quickly condensing into pieces of iron-black armor.

In the blink of an eye, Lumian had transformed into a knight clad in full armor.

After digesting the potion to a certain degree and stabilizing his condition, he could finally transform his flames into actual weapons or armor, though he could only maintain this for 10 minutes.

Lumian reached the window and looked outside, seeing only the bright crimson moon, sparse twinkling stars, and a quiet, peaceful night with nothing unusual.

He made an instant decision, issuing orders to each team member through the mental channel: "Get ready. We'll move to the New City of Silver in five seconds."

Learning from the experience and lessons of the Vortex incident, Lumian chose to immediately leave Trier, taking his team members to the Church of The Fool's headquarters to maximally avoid potential accidents.

Once in a safe location, they could report to Mr. Fool, await possible orders, think about what had happened, and plan their next steps.

As Lumian's voice echoed in their minds, Franca used invisible spider silk to help her change clothes, tie her ponytail, and enter combat mode.

Five seconds quickly passed, and Lumian didn't wait for Jenna, Anthony, and Ludwig to gather before directly activating the black mark on his right shoulder.

As a team leader, he no longer needed to grab his team members' shoulders to teleport them to their destination—the only requirement was that they be within a 10-kilometer range.

Amid rapidly receding layers of color blocks, Lumian and the others appeared at the entrance of the Church of The Fool's headquarters.

After confirming this was real and not a mirror image or scene from a painting, Lumian let out an undisguised sigh of relief.

"What happened?" asked Jenna, wearing a dress as sleepwear.

"I dreamed I was attacked by a Montsouris ghost," Lumian said while walking toward the headquarters cathedral, which remained open even in the deep night.

"As an Angel and former Demoness, all dreams necessarily have meaning," Franca explained, following along. "Moreover, as far as I know, the Eternal Blazing Sun Church and the Church of Steam and Machinery are sending several Saints carrying Sealed Artifacts into Fourth Epoch Trier tonight, hoping to eliminate Louis Gustav and Madame Pualís."

"As an Angel and former Demoness, all dreams necessarily have meaning," Franca explained, following along. "Moreover, as far as I know, the Eternal Blazing Sun Church and the Church of Steam and Machinery are sending several Saints carrying Sealed Artifacts into Fourth Epoch Trier tonight, hoping to eliminate Louis Gustav and Madame Pualís."

Anthony connected the previous statements and speculated, "Due to the influence of the two Churches' actions, Fourth Epoch Trier experienced some anomalies, triggering Lumian's spiritual premonition?"

Lumian crossed the spacious area and sat in the first row of seats facing the Fool's holy emblem, smiling as he responded to Anthony, "I wouldn't leave

Trier if it were just the anomalies and potential effects from Montsouris ghosts. With evil gods temporarily unable to descend, I don't actually need to worry too much. Plus, you're all practically half-Angels now. As long as you don't leave the team's effective range, safety is sufficiently guaranteed. Together, combined with the ability to get help by sacrificing to the essence of war, we could resist even a Sequence 1 Archangel for some time, maybe even with hope of victory.

"But since this involves Madame Pualís, it's better to stay away—calamity needs to stay away from the mother."

"Yeah." Jenna strongly agreed with Lumian's choice.

She sat down too, letting mirrors fly out from the Traveler's Bag. "Stay alert tonight. If anything unusual occurs, immediately organize believers to take refuge in the nearest orthodox cathedrals," Jenna transmitted these messages to the various bishops and priests of the Sick Church through the mirror world and marked mirrors.

Meanwhile, mirrors also flew out from Lumian and Franca's Traveler's Bags.

Using mirrors they had positioned that were still in Trier, they projected the corresponding scenes onto the mirrors before them to observe the subsequent situation and respond in time.

After finishing this, Lumian lowered his head, pressed his hand to his chest, and began to pray.

…

Deep in Fourth Epoch Trier.

Upon encountering the Montsouris ghost, Angoulême turned to the monk Jack Walton, "Should we eliminate it?"

Even if he weren't an Unshadowed, Angoulême wouldn't fear Montsouris ghosts, as these ghosts hadn't previously shown particularly strong power and would even avoid the protection of orthodox Churches. Even if they could cause trouble for Saints, it would at most be an annoyance.

Moreover, Beyonders of the Sun pathway were most effective against such dark, black evil beings named after ghosts.

Jack Walton, as the leader of this search and cleanup operation, thought for two seconds.

"Yes, but don't cause too much commotion."

He remembered that Montsouris ghosts' curses were extremely persistent. He worried that in the upcoming battle with Madame Pualís, these ghosts might suddenly join in and interfere from the side, potentially tipping the balance in an already dangerous fight. Better to clear them out now while it was relatively safe.

Angoulême quickly said to his two colleagues, "Prepare to remove the seal."

For this operation, the Eternal Blazing Sun Church and the Church of Steam and Machinery had each provided their clergy with a Grade 0 Sealed Artifact to ensure the ultimate goal could be achieved.

Both Churches had long known that the Shadow of the Beauty Goddess from the Rose School of Thought had allegedly fallen into the hands of Madame Pualís, who was hiding in Fourth Epoch Trier. This was also a Grade 0 Sealed Artifact, and among the more powerful ones at that grade.

Under these circumstances, simply sending six Saints to search for and eliminate Madame Pualís and Louis Gustav would be sending them to their deaths. Therefore, each team carried a targeted Grade 0 sealed artifact that could counter the Shadow of the Beauty Goddess to some degree.

Since passing through the "Blood Well" became more dangerous with higher Sequences, they didn't send Angels but deployed Grade 0 Sealed Artifacts instead!

With these two Sealed Artifacts, even if Angoulême and the others couldn't kill Madame Pualís, they could hold her off. Then the Eternal Blazing Sun and God of Steam and Machinery could locate Their high-ranking clergy and, using them as mediums, deliver a fatal blow to Madame Pualís through the seal.

As the three Unshadowed began removing the seal on the Grade 0 Sealed Artifact, the Montsouris ghost slowly crossing the intersection suddenly changed direction and walked toward them step by step.

Jack Walton, dressed as an ancient stonemason, watched as the Montsouris ghost quickly transformed from a rather blurry shadow into something clear.

It truly wasn't a hunched elderly person—its main body was viscous black liquid that had been stretched into human form by some influence.

Those drops of black liquid stacked together, their edges merging while their cores remained independent.

Within each independent black liquid core appeared different faces—some laughing wildly, some walking among dismembered limbs and internal organs, some filled with anger, some with dark red eyes, some flaunting their own lust, some wearing necklaces strung with human skulls…

They were all distorted and shouted in unison at Angoulême and Jack Walton, "Human nature is evil!"

This was Devil Language!

As these words echoed, the three Unshadowed were unaffected, but the clergy from the Church of Steam and Machinery, including Jack Walton, suddenly felt intense malice.

It was resentment from being assigned to dangerous missions.

Then, Jack Walton and the other Saints saw more hunched black shadows slowly emerging from the intersection behind them and the alleys on both sides.

They all appeared to be Montsouris ghosts.

Dozens, hundreds of Montsouris ghosts!

Meanwhile, the first black shadow—that Montsouris ghost—had its stomach rapidly swell up, then split open, spewing out viscous black liquid that stretched and elongated to form a new Montsouris ghost.

Seeing this, Angoulême, Jack Walton, and the others suddenly had a realization.

Montsouris ghosts shouldn't normally undergo such changes.

This was a phenomenon possible only through the Earth, Moon, or Banshee pathways!

Was this Madame Pualís's doing?

And what did the Montsouris ghosts correspond to? What developments would such proliferation bring?

"Human nature is evil…" The ghost's earlier words suddenly echoed in Angoulême's mind.

As far as he knew, the evil of human nature corresponded to the Devil and Prisoner pathways, both deeply influenced by the Mother Tree of Desire.

Right… Angoulême's temple suddenly throbbed.

The Shadow of the Beauty Goddess allegedly obtained by Madame Pualís came from the Rose School of Thought, and the Rose School controlled the Prisoner pathway as loyal followers of the Mother Tree of Desire!

At this thought, Angoulême formed a speculation that frightened even him as an Unshadowed:

the transaction involving the Shadow of the Beauty Goddess during the Vortex incident wasn't just a one-time deal—it concealed some subsequent cooperation!

The Vortex incident had ended, but its influence continued. The Great Mother and the Mother Tree of Desire had reached some understanding and decided to cooperate to a limited extent on certain matters!

Angoulême's expression tensed as he said gravely, "Clear out the Montsouris ghosts here quickly!"

Any later, unwanted mutations might occur!

As Angoulême spoke these words, in Underground Trier, near the seal of Fourth Epoch Trier in a certain mine, a brownish-green, gnarled-rooted, semi-real giant tree suddenly grew.

It extended branch after branch, growing extremely fast, as if it had received the best healing and most abundant nutrition.

…

New City of Silver, Church of The Fool's headquarters.

Through the floating mirrors before them, Lumian and the others saw that under the dark night, in many corners of Trier, the ground was cracking open as brownish-green roots or branches grew out.

"Tree of Shadow?" Lumian stood up and chuckled. "Heh, I really want to go back to Trier now and burn it. It couldn't be burned to death before, but today might be different."

He now had the Fire of Destruction!

Just as Lumian finished speaking, he suddenly turned his gaze toward the rows of large windows in the cathedral.

Outside the windows, the crimson moon had grown very large and hung very low, as if it had pressed against an invisible barrier.

Chapter 1101: That Very Moment

Deep in Fourth Epoch Trier, on streets surrounded by thick fog.

Within the Unshadowed Domain that eliminated all shadows and darkness, Angoulême and his two colleagues had reached the critical moment of removing the item's seal.

What none of them expected was that the final layer binding this Sealed Artifact was ordinary paper without any supernatural elements.

These papers seemed torn from some ancient text, with lines of handwritten ancient Feysac:

"I am the Beginning and the End."

"I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life."

"God spake, 'Let there be light,' and there was light."

"The earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep; His Spirit moved upon the face of the waters."

"He called the light Day, and the darkness Night."

"…"

These sheets of paper were attached to the Sealed Artifact, completely wrapping it. The sentences written on them were similar yet different from the Eternal Blazing Sun Church's scripture, but contained no sacred supernatural power.

Angoulême's eyes focused as he saw this, unconsciously slowing his motion of tearing off the paper.

His two colleagues were unaffected, quickly exposing the Grade 0 Sealed Artifact to Fourth Epoch Trier.

The next second, an intense, golden, sacred sun appeared in the thick fog above.

0-15—The Fourth Sun!

Suddenly, the Fog of War within two kilometers evaporated and dissolved without a trace. The Montsouris ghosts slowly approaching Angoulême and Jack Walton from different directions began making sizzling sounds, quickly being purified into black vapor that diffused upward.

Some of this black vapor gradually dissipated, while other parts swelled and twisted, revealing faces displaying different forms of malice.

They rapidly flew upward, reaching the invisible, colorless flames that served as the sky, concentrating in one area.

This portion of black vapor was quickly burned away, leaving only faint patches.

Just as these patches were about to melt away, more Montsouris ghosts flew out from different parts of Fourth Epoch Trier.

They threw themselves into the light black patches one after another, preventing them from disappearing, trying to deepen them, maintaining them within the invisible, colorless flames for a while longer, and eroding upward.

Seeing this scene, Jack Walton, whose malice was rapidly dissipating under the influence of The Fourth Sun, furrowed his brow.

He felt something was already happening!

He hurriedly said to his two colleagues, "Use the Sealed Artifact!"

The Sealed Artifact they carried was 0-59—The Divine Kingdom Without People."

…

At the bottom of Underground Trier, the miraculously healed Tree of Shadow frantically extended its roots and branches toward the seal and the ground-level city districts.

Each piece of its bark seemed to be a crystallization of different scenes of desire from past history—thick, settled, and difficult to truly destroy.

Its brownish-green roots quickly approached that layer of invisible, colorless flames, yet didn't attempt to touch it, as they would surely be burned through.

Suddenly, two figures appeared on either side of its massive trunk.

These two figures looked similar—both tall and enormous, humanoid yet like grotesque trees, covered in pitch-black, viscous tar-like liquid, with numerous bizarre and sickening arms growing from them. The surface of these arms either had bulging crimson eyeballs with prominent blood vessels, or were embedded with pale skull heads, or were covered with tongues bearing sharp teeth, and so on—there were too many variations to count. They spread an extremely evil and intensely mad sensation in all directions, causing the mine tunnels and earth to crack and split.

These were Abomination Suah and His sister Tirié.

They were currently displaying Their true form as Abominations, not their Mythical Creature forms from the Prisoner pathway. However, as Abominations, They inherently carried madness, evil, distortion, chaos, hatred, indulgence, and curse, causing effects equivalent to revealing Their Mythical Creature forms on Their surroundings.

One could say that Their Abomination appearances were a product of Their self-perception combined with Their complete Mythical Creature forms.

As soon as Suah and Tirié appeared, They each chose a section of the brownish-green trunk and merged Themselves into the Tree of Shadow.

The crown of the Tree of Shadow finally broke through the ground, growing toward the sky, attempting to encompass all of Trier within its shade.

Its roots truly extended into that layer of invisible, colorless flames, being burned off section by section, yet continuously growing new ones, striving to extend downward.

Outside Saint Viève Cathedral in the island area, the pure brilliant sunlight was pushed back by branches oozing viscous black liquid, as if trying to create a world of shadows here.

The Church of the God of Steam and Machinery's patriarchal cathedral in the north encountered similar circumstances.

And because the Tree of Shadow's power extending to the surface was concentrated in these few places, citizens across Trier's districts merely dreamed dreams of different desires, dreams that had not yet crossed from illusion into reality.

In the still-operating bars and dance halls, the atmosphere suddenly intensified, with everyone falling into a psychedelic state.

Saint Viève, utilizing the cathedral's layout, strenuously resisted the invasion of those pitch-black viscous branches, preventing harm to the clergy and faithful who had taken shelter here.

She didn't panic.

In Her view, the Rose School of Thoughts indulgence faction re-activating the Tree of Shadow wasn't something unstoppable.

If Fourth Epoch Trier's seal were truly so easily destroyed, the Rose School of Thought and other evil god sects would have done so long ago—why wait until today to expend such effort?

Even if the crimson moon descending to the barrier, appearing round and bright, truly suppressed the orthodox gods, preventing Them from dealing with the Tree of Shadow problem, there were still two existences within the barrier who could take action. And the strongest subordinates the Great Old Ones could command in this world were just Suah and Tirié, who weren't even in the same league as their side.

If the Rose School of Thought's indulgence faction truly wanted to go all in, they should have wagered everything during last year's Tree of Shadow incident, when Mr. Fool had not yet partially awakened.

And even without counting the two existences, their side's number of Angels far exceeded the evil god sects. As long as they held on a bit longer, preventing the Tree of Shadow from destroying surface Trier and causing mass civilian deaths, sufficient reinforcements would soon arrive.

This amount of time was insufficient to destroy Fourth Epoch Trier's seal.

Was it that the Rose School of Thought and other evil god sects didn't want to use the current approach in the past?

In the midst of Her doubts, Saint Viève suddenly became vigilant.

Could something have simultaneously gone wrong with Fourth Epoch Trier?

If coordinated on the inside and outside, the seal might truly be broken in a short time!

Just then, Saint Viève saw before the crimson moon—which appeared so huge it seemed to hang by the cathedral bell tower—a figure descending from the sky, growing larger and larger, wearing a medium-tall silk top hat, black windbreaker, and holding a stardust-inlaid cane.

…

The easternmost part of the Sonia Sea, the Forsaken Land of the Gods.

At the highest point of the majestic mountain range, darkness was thick, sometimes expanding, sometimes contracting.

…

Midseashire north coast, East Tilisi Province, capital city Tilisi.

Madam Justice suddenly had a spiritual premonition and opened her eyes.

She saw before her a verdant field, with several scarecrows standing in it, a clear stream flowing through, like a pastoral scene from an oil painting.

A dream… As a Dreamweaver, Madam Justice quickly understood what she had encountered.

And there weren't many beings in this world capable of weaving such a dream for her.

Madam Justice instantly thought of one possibility: the ancient dragon Edefana she had been pursuing!

This was one of the few remaining mind dragons.

I've searched for years without finding Him, yet He has come to me? Madam Justice found this somewhat absurd.

Absurdity implied abnormality, and abnormality necessarily indicated problems.

What Madam Justice cared more about was, if this dream was truly woven by Edefana, why did He choose today, why choose this moment?

Justice didn't hesitate, taking out a card.

The card portrayed an impartial goddess seated on a stone chair, wielding a sword and scales.

Tarot card, Justice card!

After praying to Mr. Fool, Justice began reciting her friend's honorific name, "Cosmic Traveler, beholden to the King of Yellow and Black, and the Sorcerer chronicling the world…"

…

Southern Continent, inside a black ancient castle.

Mr. Moon Emlyn stood at the window, gazing up at the crimson moon that appeared huge and dreamlike due to its proximity.

He felt his spirituality boiling.

As he was struggling to control himself, the crimson moonlight shone into the ancient castle, conveying a mellow voice, "Alexis has suddenly disappeared. Find him as soon as possible."

This voice came from one of the three great Sanguine dukes, Olmer—titled Round Moon.

Alexis disappeared? Mr. Moon repeated these words.

Alexis was one of Duke Round Moon Olmer's direct descendants, a Sanguine count residing in Feynapotter City, the capital of the Feynapotter Kingdom.

In the past, The Moon Emlyn wouldn't have thought this order contained any hidden information, but now, he thought more: Alexis disappeared suddenly?

If it was sudden, how did Duke Round Moon discover it so quickly?

As a direct relative, did the Duke Round Moon have a bad premonition due to Alexis's disappearance?

…

Sonia Sea, New City of Silver, Church of The Fool's Headquarters.

Lumian and others saw the unrestrained growth of the Tree of Shadow.

"Wasn't it supposed to take many years before it would grow again?" Franca muttered to herself. "Did it receive healing, and its original wounds have healed?"

Lumian nodded pensively.

"The Great Mother's influence really seems to be hidden behind this…"

Jenna, who had been pondering a certain question, suddenly turned her gaze toward the twin towers and asked vigilantly, "Would the Gift of the Land being Omebella's remains, count as a 'mother?'"

"Should calamity stay away?"

Lumian was momentarily stunned.

He had borrowed the Gift of the Land before without any problems.

But that seemed to be before Mr. Fool made the revelation that "calamity needs to stay away from the mother"!

Meanwhile, in a hotel in the New City of Silver.

A man with neatly combed black hair, beautiful crimson eyes, and an elegant bow tie at his chest pulled a card from his pocket.

The card depicted a female version of Emperor Roselle wearing maternity clothes, with a protruding belly, radiating maternal glory.

Card of Blasphemy, Mother card!

Chapter 1102: Valley God

The moment the Mother card was taken out, it seemed to sense something and its surface emanated a crimson glow even before being activated by an incantation.

It immediately transformed into an invisible vortex, frantically absorbing its holder's spirit and spirituality.

Then, it became heavy, turning into a miniature book.

The book's pages fluttered in the wind, revealing its first page.

On it was depicted Emperor Roselle dressed as a farmer, leaning on a hoe and gazing at rain clouds in the sky, with lines of ancient Feysac text written beside it: "Sequence 9, Planter..."

Immediately after, the book rapidly flipped backward. from "Sequence 8, Doctor" all the way to "Sequence 1, Naturewalker."

After Naturewalker was a female version of Emperor Roselle wearing a loose long dress, holding an infant, with two children standing beside him.

This page's title was: "Sequence 0, Mother"!

Almost simultaneously, crimson moonlight began shining from the infant in female Roselle's arms.

This grew increasingly bright, making the infant gradually appear like a full moon, reflecting and complementing the real crimson moon hanging low in the sky, seemingly suspended above the cathedral bell tower.

Within the miniature crimson moon, several lines of ancient Feysac text that hadn't existed before appeared: "Sequence 1, Valley God (or Tree God)."

Below this brand new Sequence 1 title, there were two descriptions, one on the left and one on the right:

"The Valley God is the root of heaven and earth."

"The Tree God, supporting heaven and connecting earth, propagates endlessly."

The crimson-eyed man holding this Mother card had just begun to smile when his expression suddenly froze.

He looked down to find that brownish, slightly withered tree roots had extended from the back of the Card of Blasphemy. These roots had pierced into his body, growing and spreading numerous root systems. frantically draining his life force.

The crimson-eyed man was stunned for a second before relaxing his expression.

He already understood what was happening.

But it didn't matter-all things would eventually return to the land, return to the mother's embrace!

It's just a bit early for me, but I will experience the warmth and security of mother's embrace sooner.

His full face began to cave in, his smooth skin gradually withering.

At the bottom of the spire within the twin towers at the core of New City of Silver.

The enormous seven or eight meter high trunk "sleeping" in the morning light, planted in a pile of brownish soil, suddenly trembled slightly.

Its grayish-brown wood quickly exuded moisture, and large amounts of previously peeled and missing bark visibly grew back.

The surrounding morning light suddenly surged into its body, cutting through its "flesh" while witnessing its rebirth.

Its withered feeling gradually disappeared as it slowly became full and robust.

Suddenly, it broke free from the restraint of the brownish soil pile and vanished from the bottom of the round tower.

In the cathedral of the Church of The Fool's headquarters.

Warned by Jenna, Lumian redirected his gaze to the mirrors floating before him and to the brownish-green Tree of Shadow that was breaking through the ground and growing upward. �

Anthony understood that Lumian had realized New City of Silver wasn't entirely safe either-it contained the remains of the City of Silver residents' former "mother," Giant Queen Omebella, and calamity needed to stay away from the mother.

This would make normal people want to quickly retreat, but for High-Sequence Hunters, constantly running away wasn't a choice that aligned with their godhood: Having fled Trier, should they now flee New City of Silver too?

Should they keep running forever?

Anthony believed this would spark intense fighting spirit in Lumian. If his humanity wasn't abundant enough and his control over his mental state and emotions wasn't strong enough, he would choose to return to Trier to directly confront the Tree of Shadow and thwart the evil god cults' conspiracy.

Before Anthony could offer advice or use Placate, Lumian forcefully withdrew his gaze and made the floating mirrors return to the Traveler's

Bag.

He said gravely to his team members, "Now we'll move to the Cathedral of Serenity."

The Cathedral of Serenity was the Church of the Evernight Goddess's headquarters and Holy Cathedral.

As he spoke, Lumian activated the black mark on his right shoulder, using Teleport again.

Just as the spirit world with its layered colors and numerous strange creatures appeared before them, everything suddenly spun and they plummeted downward.

Before Lumian could react, his feet had already landed on solid ground.

They arrived in an endless wilderness overgrown with weeds, with an oak tree of indescribable size growing in its depths.

It was blue-green, its roots deeply embedded in the earth, its crown penetrating the clouds as if supporting the sky, holding up a crimson full moon.

It was like a pillar reaching to heaven, supporting the entire world, allowing this wilderness to exist.

The mottled bark of this sky-supporting oak bore scorch marks from lightning strikes, but beneath the charred areas lay signs of life.

Higher up, the oak had more new branches, many entwined with lush, vibrant mistletoe.

At this moment, in the middle of this giant oak that supported the sky and anchored the earth, large amounts of mottled bark bulged out, outlining a huge, gentle, feminine face, with two giant crimson flowers serving as its eyes.

"Mother...

"Omebella…"

In Lumian's mind, these two terms naturally flashed through.

He instinctively tried to activate the black mark on his right shoulder again, but he could not sense the spirit world beyond this wilderness, nor could he sense the areas he originally had positions for.

Paramita!

At the same time, Lumian remembered something else:

His Teleport ability came from Zedus!

And Zedus was one of the Great Mother's twins, Omebella's younger brother, whose power presumably came from a boon, and currently possessed no Beyonder characteristics.

Even if such an Angel was conquered by 0-01, there should still be a trace of the Great Mother's spirit hidden within His power.

This was what the Great Mother excelled at!

So, at the crucial moment, she sacrificed this bit of spirit to interfere with my Teleport, making me 'voluntarily enter the Paramita created by the Gift of the Land? And Gift of the Land somehow became activated and received strange enhancements... This thought flashed quickly through Lumian's mind.

Franca's lake-blue eyes had already become profound. seemingly concealing layers upon layers of darkness.

…

In the green fields dotted with scarecrows.

Madam Magician, wearing a white nightgown, opened a door forged from brilliant starlight and entered this dream.

She only looked around once before making a guess about the dream's weaver.

"Edefana?"

This was an ancient mind dragon, an Angel-level Discerner.

Excluding those who were transformed from humans, He was one of only three ancient dragons currently remaining.

"What's happening in the outside world?" Madam Justice Audrey asked instead of answering.

As a Dreamweaver, she had tried to leave this dream but failed.

Madam Magician answered truthfully, "The Tree of Shadow in Trier is causing trouble again, supposedly receiving help from the Great Mother's subordinates. However, don't worry, Mr. Fool has already descended there."

Madam Justice showed a puzzled expression. "So. Edefana took this opportunity to find me?

"How did He know Mr. Fool would descend to Trier?"

Madam Magician paused briefly before saying.

"Drawing me here to help must have also been part of His plan…

"So you had enough time to pray to Mr. Fool and speak my name, avoiding an ambush."

Just as the Planeswalker finished speaking, the dream's sky was suddenly covered by a shadow.

That shadow was a grayish-white dragon, circling in flight, with a lizard-like face showing obvious signs of age.

…

In Trier, Mr. Fool, wearing a medium-height silk top hat and black coat, was unaffected by the ground and tree branches as he passed through layers of void, landing before the brownish-green Tree of Shadow's trunk.

He thrust his star-dust inlaid cane forward, watching the thick, solid bark collapse and destroy itself in large amounts.

Each piece of bark, each branch, each leaf suddenly became ethereal, revealing scenes of Trier's citizens displaying various desires over the past one or two thousand years.

Some were normal, others indulgent, showing affairs at luxurious parties, warmth of tight embraces in cold small rooms, wasteful tables of abandoned food, and miserly parents reluctant to feed their children enough...

They interwove layer upon layer, cascading down as weighty history, a tome of desires, something that couldn't be completely destroyed by normal attacks, requiring peeling away layer by layer.

Mr. Fool withdrew his star-dust inlaid cane.

Grayish-white fog emerged accordingly, enveloping the Tree of Shadow's main trunk.

Fog of History!

…

In Fourth Epoch Trier.

Just as Angoulême and other Unshadowed were about to raise The Fourth Day higher to eliminate the Montsouris ghosts who kept throwing themselves into the invisible, colorless flames, they suddenly heard a cry.

It was the cry of infants, countless infants crying.

Jack Walton and others immediately looked toward the entrance of the street, seeing a figure staggering toward them.

The figure had chestnut-colored long hair and azure eyes, deliberately dressed as Emperor Roselle.

His body was already swollen, with bird-clawed infants tearing through flesh and skin to emerge from his ribs, abdomen, chest, thighs, and arms, crying loudly in search of nursing.

…

In Paramita.

Lumian's voice echoed in Franca and the others' minds: "Don't enter the mirror world for now."

The mirror world was connected to the special mirror world!

In the current chaotic situation, who knows what people might be lying in ambush in the mirror world, waiting to drag them into the special mirror world!

Since they had already encountered Mother, they shouldn't fall into the special mirror world trap as well.

Lumian slightly bent down, looking at the giant sky- supporting oak tree, and said with a smile in the team's minds: "Since we couldn't escape, then... let's fight!"

Chapter 1103: True Plan

Accompanying Lumian's words, Franca, Jenna, Anthony, and Ludwig simultaneously raised both arms.

The numerous white clouds surrounding the giant oak tree's crown suddenly turned gloomy, appearing even more substantial.

Countless silver-white electric serpents began leaping between the layered dark clouds, intertwining as if trying to form a single entity.

At this moment, Lumian suddenly clenched his fist.

A massive silver-white lightning bolt, illuminating the entire Paramita, rapidly descended, striking the giant oak tree transformed from Omebella's remnants.

Lumian was recalling the effect of shouting the incantation "Leodero" when facing a similar oak tree embodying Madame Pualis in the dream city, and decided to imitate and recreate it.

At this time, the crimson moon had pressed against the invisible barrier, and Lord of Storms Leodero certainly couldn't spare the effort to bring down divine punishment, so he could only create this through a Weather Warlock's Beyonder powers.

Moreover, Lumian was not the only one "controlling the weather" he had also made Franca and the other team members do similar things simultaneously.

Rather than concentrating everyone's power on himself to enhance the thunderstorm's might, allowing each person to "control the weather" and then stack these efforts together would not only prevent weakening the effect but might also potentially trigger chain reactions or chaotic changes, making the thunderstorm more pronounced and exaggerated.

This was the nature of weather-even a butterfly's wing flap could progressively evolve into a hurricane, let alone five people simultaneously manipulating and creating a thunderstorm.

When the massive lightning that illuminated the entire Paramita fell, the female face on the giant oak tree's surface had already opened its mouth.

The raging wind brought by the thunderstorm was instantly sucked inside, and the high-altitude dark clouds converged toward the massive mouth in a funnel shape.

The silver-white lightning, resembling a divine tree, naturally decomposed, with most of it being swallowed by the female face on the tree's surface, and a small portion striking the tree's crown, bark, and branches.

Some bark instantly turned charcoal-black and peeled downward, with branches breaking and catching fire.

At these wounded spots, the tree's heart writhed and grew, ready to regenerate.

Simultaneously, all grass in Paramita withered at once, the ground cracking inch by inch, as if losing all moisture or having life rapidly drain away.

Lumian and the others were no exception.

They also saw that around the giant oak tree, some soil swelled and rolled, forming over a dozen yellow-brown humanoid puppets, all massive in size, swaying and about to take their first steps.

Ludwig opened his mouth and suddenly swallowed the toxic gas that had been diffusing in the surrounding air at some unknown time.

Immediately afterward, every member of their team transformed into fire balls of blue-purple hue, roaring as they rushed toward the giant oak tree.

Rumble!

Thunder finally sounded in the high sky.

Violet-tinted blue flames rapidly spread, turning everywhere Lumian and his companions passed into a flame hell.

Those dozen yellow-brown puppets didn't even have time to make any movement before being roasted crisp by the approaching high temperature, completely collapsing when the blue-violet fireball arrived.

Just as Lumian's group, transformed into a fireball, was about to strike the giant oak tree, that sky-supporting behemoth suddenly disappeared.

In the blink of an eye, at another location in Paramita, the ground swelled high, soil splashing, and a green giant oak tree grew out again.

Lumian and his team failed to hit their target, allowing them to re-materialize their forms.

Around them, cracked soil erupted with brown tree roots that shot out from all directions, covering the sky and earth.

Lumian's spiritual intuition told him that being struck by these roots would likely mean death, or worse, losing control.

Death wasn't terrifying-each team member had a Mirror Substitution-but losing control was something even a Demoness of Unaging couldn't resist!

Dense fog suddenly surged in the area, enveloping Lumian's group and dozens of kilometers of wilderness.

The brown tree roots emerging from the ground were also shrouded by the Fog of War, losing their target, unable to find a trace, stupidly freezing in midair.

Near the sky-supporting giant oak tree, Lumian's team's figures suddenly outlined.

They surrounded the massive entity from different directions, each holding a black flame sword that restrained destruction and violence.

Immediately after, they successively struck with the Swords of Destruction.

This wasn't about being unable to move in unison, but about attacking in waves, maintaining reserves, leaving room to respond to potential enemy surprises.

Silently, the giant oak tree was covered in vibrant green radiance.

Then, it transformed into light and drilled into the ground, instantly vanishing, even preventing Jenna from adjusting the direction of the Sword of Destruction she had deliberately delayed.

Those black flame swords restraining madness fell on the flat, unbroken ground, burning a deep pit, cutting down and burning the remaining brown tree roots to ash.

"Escaping through the earth?" Franca hissed in the mental channel, "This is too hard to fight!"

More importantly, their life force was rapidly depleting, unable to sustain such a battle for long.

Lumian calmly responded, "Proceed as planned."

This was also a reminder to Jenna, Anthony, and Ludwig.

As they communicated mentally, dense Fog of War again spread out, making any subsequent attacks unable to lock onto a target.

Thus, Lumian's team fought intensely against the constantly relocating giant oak tree, relying on abilities like Fog of War, collective Teleportation, Weakness Investigation, Sword of Destruction, thunderstorm weather, arrival of winter, Mirror Substitution, and Demoness curses.

After a while, Lumian suddenly said in every team member's mind: Here's the chance!

They Blinked again to the giant oak tree's surroundings. Lumian's azure eyes turned iron-black, revealing the target's pale areas.

Franca let gray-white colors surge forth, rushing to the oak tree's base, attempting to Petrify the soil and bring it under her control, preventing the enemy from quickly moving via the ground.

Facing the sky-supporting behemoth, Jenna smiled and fully displayed the Charm Lumian had shared.

She wanted to make the giant oak tree briefly lose consciousness and fail to dodge in time.

On another side, Anthony quietly approached in a Psychological Invisibility state, condensing a black flame sword, and struck the target's weakness as Lumian suggested.

Ludwig, small in stature, raised a Sword of Destruction much larger than himself, attacking from the front to draw the enemy's attention.

Suddenly, the giant oak tree's branches and leaves swayed, and a wet, bumpy protrusion emerged from its trunk.

The bump quickly split open, birthing a "child".

This "child" was composed of countless intertwined silver-white electric snakes, the lightning previously swallowed, now "reborn".

Crack!

The "child" instantly disintegrated, terrifying, bright lightning sweeping the surroundings.

Anthony's body instantly shattered, and Ludwig, Franca, and Jenna also broke into numerous mirror fragments.

Lumian's figure didn't break, only fading.

He was just a Mirror Projection from Franca's lake-blue eyes!

Lumian's true body appeared seven or eight kilometers away, holding a Sword of Destruction with contained, unreleased power.

The black flame sword instantly struck the edge of Paramita.

A nauseating sharp crack sound emerged, instantly slicing a deep, twisted, hideous fissure. Beyond the crack, pure color blocks layered, and various spirit realm creatures had long since fled.

Using the Sword of Destruction, Lumian forcibly carved a path to the outside world from Paramita!

From the beginning, he never intended to entangle too long with the giant oak tree, suspected to be an activated relic of Omebella. His real plan was: if they couldn't quickly resolve the target, force it near Paramita's edge, then use their intense battle to hide their true purpose, approach the realm's edge, attack with five people to distract it, allowing his true body to seize the opportunity and use the Sword of Destruction's special power to tear through the barrier and escape!

A Hunter was brave, not foolish. Why persist in fighting on the enemy's predetermined battlefield, contrary to Mr. Fool's revelation?

The initial battle was for this retreat!

"Go!" When Lumian's voice rang in Jenna and the others' minds, he had already activated the black mark on his right shoulder, bringing all team members through that terrifying crack, successfully escaping Paramita.

This time, he didn't plan to rely on the contract ability Teleportation, only using it to sense multiple spirit world coordinates and complete positioning.

With positioning, Angels could directly traverse the spirit world!

In the deep, dark special mirror world.

Zaratul, wearing a black robe, with white hair and eyes of unpierced black darkness, leaned to one side, quietly waiting.

Suddenly, He stood up and said solemnly. "My wish is:

"To make Lumian and the others enter the mirror world."

He immediately fulfilled His own wish.

In Lumian'and Franca's eyes, the spirit world, originally composed of dense, pure color blocks, suddenly became dark and profound. A massive suction force rose from below, involuntarily dragging them down into a bottomless depth.

In Paramita, that giant oak tree stopped relocating. gradually withering and shrinking back to a seven or eight-meter trunk.

In a hotel room in the New City of Silver.

Reinette Tinekerr, carrying four blonde, red-eyed heads and wearing a dark, complex black dress, emerged from the spirit world.

Her eight eyes simultaneously looked at the ground, seeing the Mother card.

This Card of Blasphemy was stained with a faint trace of blood.

Chapter 1104: Catastrophe

In their rapid descent, Lumian, Franca, and Jenna, as Beyonders of the Demoness pathway, quickly realized they were in the depths of the mirror world.

Just as they were about to use their inherent qualities to lead the entire team away from the area filled with spacetime turbulence and return to the real world, a figure appeared in the deep, dark surroundings.

The figure wore a gray, old-fashioned long dress, with thick and long hair cascading like a waterfall. Her blue eyes were more crystalline than gemstones, with a delicate, small chin and moist, glossy red lips. She was a beautiful, mature woman with an exceptional temperament.

Seeing this figure, Franca's mind instantly buzzed.

She recognized her.

She had seen this gray-dressed woman's Mirror Projection with the Demoness of Black.

As a newly appointed Saint of the Demoness Sect, she had no choice but to meet her.

This was the matriarch of the Demoness of Gray, the divine child of the Primordial Demoness, the Demoness of Gray Judith!

Judith was a Sequence 2 Demoness of Catastrophe. She looked at Lumian and the others, raising Her exquisite and beautiful articulated wrist with a charming smile.

She was about to bring disaster.

And for the mirror world, what could truly be called a catastrophe?

Of course, it would be a complete collapse, swallowed by spacetime turbulence!

Silently, Lumian saw the deep, dark surroundings begin to peel away, like a mirror cracking, with fragments falling off the surface.

Indescribable spacetime turbulence swept in.

Franca and the others, who were originally far from the turbulence in the mirror world's depths, were suddenly thrown into a scene of world-ending collapse.

Lumian had no time to think, activating the black mark on his right shoulder to Teleport the entire team out of the area.

However, the spacetime turbulence had already surged in, weakening the team's connections. Though they were close, they seemed to be in different worlds. Simultaneously, Lumian's perception of external coordinates became imprecise, blurry, and chaotic.

Lumian did not hesitate and used Teleportation.

Although this forced Teleportation would cause Franca and the others to be affected by the spacetime turbulence and randomly sent to different destinations, the weakest team member was still a Sequence 4 Saint. As long as they could escape this area of turbulent disaster, whether still in the mirror world, entering the spirit world, or returning to the real world, they could ensure their safety to some extent. Afterward, they would have many ways to regroup.

Just before the spacetime turbulence completely engulfed them, they instantly disappeared.

…

Franca's figure took shape in a phantom, dark tunnel of the mirror world.

She felt that the distance between her and Lumian was certainly more than 10 kilometers, as she could no longer share the Angel-level power.

She used the Mirror Substitution Lumian had left with her to quickly perform Magic Mirror Divination while turning into a new tunnel following her spiritual intuition.

She wanted to reunite with Lumian. This was to enhance his strength, as a Hunter with a team was much more powerful than one without!

Suddenly, a void of black darkness appeared before her, and the spider web-like tunnels behind her were dyed gray-white, solidifying into stone, no longer passable.

At this moment, a figure stood in the mirror-behind area before Franca.

The figure had black hair twisted into a high bun, wearing a pure black court dress, with deep gray eyes bright yet tinged with a hint of sadness. It was the Demoness of Black Clarice.

Next to Clarice, a high platform was built from gray-white stones, with a white bone-carved figurine of the Primordial Demoness placed at the top.

Franca stopped at the edge of this mirror-behind area, instinctively displaying a smile, as if trying to slip by. 'Madame, what are you doing?'

The Demoness of Black looked at her, with a smile that was not quite a smile.

'Praying to the Primordial One, of course.'

Before her words finished, she suddenly saw gray-white colors surging towards her.

Franca's previous smile and words were merely to deceive the Demoness of Black, making her believe she would not be ambushed. By the time this color-named Demoness actually began to respond, Franca had already decisively launched an attack, leaving no room for retreat!

…

Jenna stopped.

She was somewhat stunned to discover that the mirror tunnel before her had been broken off, just like a bridge in the real world. This was a phenomenon she had never encountered before while traversing the mirror world, seemingly only possible in areas near spacetime turbulence.

Where does this lead? Has the path been artificially cut off? Jenna's thoughts raced, but she did not linger or seek an answer.

She took the Mirror Substitution Lumian had left with her and chose to bypass the interrupted tunnel, moving closer to her spiritual guidance.

She intuitively believed that Lumian was in this isolated place, and there was certainly a way to enter.

…

In a certain part of the mirror world.

Ludwig, dressed in children's formal wear, stood between spider web-like phantom paths, hesitating whether to go left or right.

He felt a calling from deep within his heart or a longed-for food on the right side, but the left side represented his godfather.

After a moment's hesitation, Ludwig's figure swiftly became transparent, turning into a wraith.

He projected himself as a wraith into the left mirror tunnel.

…

After discovering he had not yet left the mirror world, Anthony immediately lowered his head and began chanting in Hermes, 'The Fool that doesn't belong to this era, 'The mysterious ruler above the gray fog,

'The King of Yellow and Black who wields good luck.

'…'

After briefly reporting their situation to Mr. Fool, Anthony used Psychological Invisibility and shuttled into the depths of the phantom tunnel before him.

His Ice Mirror Charm was not yet used up!

…

In a pitch-black castle in the Southern Continent.

The Moon Emlyn restrained his surging spirituality, pondering the reason Duke Round Moon Olmer had him search for Alex.

Is He suspicious that Alexis has come to the Southern Continent?

Seeking refuge with the Rose School of Thought?

Just as he thought this, Mr. Moon saw a figure rapidly taking shape in the room.

The figure knelt on one knee and bowed. 'My Lord, I've received intelligence that the Rose School of Thought captured Massaru half an hour ago.'

He was a Traveler cultivated by Mr. Moon, having specially traded Beyonder characteristics from Madam Magician.

Mr. Moon Emlyn couldn't help but furrow his brow.

Is something big going to happen tonight?

In recent times, the situation in the Southern Continent had actually been trending towards calm. First, organizations like the Rose School of Thought had reduced their activities, hiding deeper, similar to the cults of the Northern Continent. Second, after Mr. Fool's initial awakening, He had promoted reconciliation between the Royals of the Numinous Episcopate and the orthodox Churches. Subsequently, colonial institutions of Northern Continent countries would gradually withdraw from the Southern Continent, returning governance to local populations. To avoid chaos and a vacuum for order, this would be a dragged-out process.

Southern Continent populations would have religious freedom. As long as it didn't involve evil gods, they could believe in deities like Death or Mr. Fool, and could continue believing in the orthodox gods of the Northern Continent.

Meanwhile, the Royals of the Numinous Episcopate promised Mr. Fool political-religious separation.

They also provided substantial intelligence to the orthodox Churches, helping Mr. Star and Mr. Moon uncover several hidden bases of the Rose School of Thought.

The Moon Emlyn knew that Northern Continent countries and orthodox Churches made such significant concessions because Mr. Fool, this great existence, had initially awakened, and everyone shared a common enemy: other great existences.

Under these circumstances, after ensuring the orthodox Churches did not lose too many believers, even if the governments of Northern Continent countries had objections or wanted to overturn everything, they could only swallow their pride and agree.

The Moon Emlyn's understanding was: In this world, Beyonder power is the source of all authority!

Before Mr. Fool's apotheosis, liberating the Southern Continent from colonial status would have been impossible, even after numerous wars, because the orthodox gods' interests were aligned in this matter.

Once he became a great existence and initially awakened, this problem was easily resolved.

Their current primary contradiction was those great existences who would destroy everything!

One had to distinguish between primary and secondary contradictions when doing things.

Emlyn took a deep breath, summoned the castle's strongholds, and transformed into crimson moonlight, rushing directly toward Massaru.

Before he even approached, he saw a massive entity appear within the city.

It was a 'mountain' composed of mixed corpses and earth—male corpses, female corpses, elder corpses, child corpses—all piled together.

Residents of Massaru City, whether from the Northern or Southern Continent, had all been killed and stacked into a 'mountain' pointing to the sky.

Simultaneously, cults in many parts of the Northern and Southern Continents, having accumulated certain power, were frantically creating disasters, forcing the Angels and Saints of the orthodox Churches to extinguish fires everywhere.

…

Lumian's figure had just materialized in a part of the mirror world when he saw the Demoness of Gray Judith standing not far away.

Some intense convergence phenomenon had made them 'meet' again.

Lumian narrowed his eyes, letting out a low growl.

It was like the first drum beaten on a battlefield.

With this growl, Lumian's body began to expand, his surface once again covered by an iron-black armor formed from flames.

A drop of blood-red emerged at his forehead, vivid and dripping like a battle flag. One side of his face became soft, delicate, and brilliant, while the other remained handsome but increasingly masculine and sharp.

In Paramita, isolated internally and externally, he couldn't use the most powerful ability of a Weather Warlock. But now, the mirror world itself belonged to that individual's domain.

He had sacrificed the ultimate power of the Calamity pathways, seeking assistance!

Lumian revealed a Mythical Creature form over ten meters high, holding a black flame great sword formed by the Fire of Destruction, taking a step to arrive before the Demoness of Gray Judith and slashing down.

The surrounding spider web-like phantom tunnels collapsed simultaneously, giving Judith no chance to escape this area.

Chapter 1105: Waiting

Facing Lumian's attack, Demoness of Gray Judith smiled serenely and calmly.

The phantom tunnel where She was located collapsed on its own, and along with Herself, before the Sword of Destruction could strike, fell piece by piece like toppled building blocks, cascading like a waterfall.

Disaster preemptively engulfed Her, time and space storms swept through, and only then came Lumian's black flame great sword.

By the time this area completely dissolved into nothingness, the terrifying and indescribable time-space turbulence flowed chaotically in the dark depths. In another phantom and dark tunnel, Demoness of Gray Judith's figure strangely emerged.

She was clearly stalling Lumian, preventing him from returning to the real world.

Lumian changed direction and took another step to arrive before the Demoness of Gray, slashing out the Sword of Destruction.

…

Deep beneath the Tree of Shadow, the brown-green trunk of the Tree of Shadow was completely shrouded in gray-white fog.

The mottled bark, settled desires, and ancient scenes gradually presented a phantasmal texture under the erosion of fog of history.

The historical shall return to history!

Abstract things could become substantial, and could also be defined as pure concepts.

The Lord of Mysteries could turn the true to false, and the false to true, with the distinction between true and false no longer clear!

As the gray-white fog continuously eroded the Tree of Shadow, the figure of Mr. Fool wearing black gloves, holding a star-studded staff, and dressed in a deep black trench coat suddenly appeared with a flickering sensation.

The star-studded staff lit up with brilliant radiance.

In a part of the mirror world, Mr. Fool took a step, quickly flickering beyond what normal human eyes could capture.

Before him were multiple phantom tunnels that had been interrupted, with all-consuming darkness flooding the collapsed area, blocking the path.

Mr. Fool spoke in a low voice, at an extremely rapid pace, 'My, wish, is:

'The, original, state, here, restored.'

After each pronunciation, there was a pause, but this pause was not obvious and did not affect the rapid delivery of speech, only making some syllables seem to come from an extremely distant place.

As soon as the voice fell, a miracle occurred: those phantom and dark tunnels became whole again, once more able to freely traverse.

…

Seeing the mirror tunnels in spider web formation successfully repaired,Red Angel Medici, leaning against the edge of the mirror's rear area, picked up the apple in His hand and took a smiling bite.

Medici, who had already condensed an iron-black blood-stained armor with defense not much inferior to same-tier Warrior pathway Beyonders, did not rush to move forward. Instead, He continued waiting at His original location, awaiting potential subsequent mutations and possible interlopers.

As a Hunter, one of the keys to success was patience—patiently waiting for prey to enter the trap, waiting for all variables and accidents to reveal themselves, finding the true weak point, and then delivering a fatal strike to complete the harvest.

Last time, Medici had overlooked the possibility of Alista Tudor actively choosing to be mad. This time, He would not exclude those irrational choices.

…

Lumian, standing more than ten meters tall, was engulfed in deep red, violet flames, yet his face retained a human form—one side brilliant, the other handsome, with a blood-red, thorn-like mark at his forehead threatening to burst forth.

The Demoness of Gray was about to employ Her usual trick and dodge the enemy's frontal assault when Her mind suddenly trembled.

She instantly felt the opponent was tall, majestic, terrifying, strong, and charismatic—involuntarily wanting to submit.

Even more horrifying was the sense of facing the source, facing a deity, facing the embodiment of destruction and apocalypse.

This caused Her body and mind to briefly lose self-awareness, unable to respond effectively in time.

Conquest!

Lumian had obtained the power of conquest through sacrificing to the City of Calamity, supplemented with a hint of sefirah-quality conquest power.

Now, he was a genuine City of Calamity priest, the high priest of war's essence!

The Demoness of Gray froze in place. Lumian's iron-black eyes, revealing pale regions, slashed down the black great sword burning with the Fire of Destruction.

Simultaneously, the mirror world around the Demoness of Gray fractured in all directions—up, down, left, right, front, and back. Each fragment was 'conquered' as a soldier, transforming into large and small black flame-composed short arrows, restrained with violence and destruction, swooshing toward Judith.

These densely packed, impenetrable arrows seemed to weave a net of destruction, with Judith as the massive fish caught within.

Boom!

The Sword of Destruction cleaved into the Demoness of Gray's shoulder, and the black flame short arrows hit the target from all directions.

Cracking sounds rang out continuously, and Demoness of Gray Judith's Mirror Substitutions exploded simultaneously, without exception.

Now Her form in the mirror, but even Her form in the real world was affected by Cull and the Sword of Destruction, suddenly erupting in black flames and burning to ash.

Only those sleeping mirrors She had hidden in multiple places, having severed most of Her mystical connections, were spared.

And She would need considerable time to resurrect through these means.

After dispatching the Demoness of Gray, Lumian's body suddenly shrank, the blood-colored pennant between his brows gradually receding, yet seeming to still writhe.

He made no delay, nor considered pursuing the Demoness of Gray, immediately wanting to escape the mirror world and then find a way to reunite with Franca, Jenna, and the others.

In an instant, he sensed something and cast his gaze toward one of the illusory tunnels.

He felt true safety lay there.

Lumian's figure turned ethereal, about to traverse through.

Just then, his thoughts abruptly stiffened, and a slick yet marvelous sensation spread across his surface.

He saw thick black hair like serpents emerging from nowhere, coiling around him, their tips either embedded with black and white eyes or bearing venomous snake heads, mouths slightly open, tongues protruding.

Lumian also saw that under the gaze of those black and white eyes, his body had turned gray-white, transforming into stone, unable to use any abilities.

He was layer upon layer wrapped by those thick, serpent-like, slick and slightly damp black hairs in his stone state.

The only thing he could do now was commit suicide.

Suddenly, a gentle, soft female voice with a hint of laughter whispered in his ear, 'I have been waiting for you for a long time.'

This voice scratched at Lumian's soul, making his entire body feel itchy, and even petrified, he sank into it, not wanting to break free.

A name spontaneously flashed in his mind: Primordial Demoness Cheek!

Two pure, delicate white hands stretched from behind and gently caressed Lumian's cheeks.

These beautiful hands were not yet perfect, but they could evoke the most primitive and intense desires of anyone who saw them, instantly propelling them to heavenly pleasure from which they could never escape.

Just by being seen.

Lumian in his petrified state was equally affected, his mind almost completely blank.

The reason it was not entirely blank was because he saw his mirror self was also dragged out from hiding by those thick, slick black serpent-like hairs, his body gray-white, because a curvaceous, icy yet inexplicably fiery body was pressed against his back.

That body cradled his face, dragging him with black hair deeper into the mirror world, rapidly retreating into that special mirror world.

Mr. Fool Blinked into this area, just in time to see Lumian being embraced from behind by an infinitely charming, vaguely discernible figure in the special mirror world, being dragged inside.

His black trench coat suddenly lifted.

Fooled!

Simultaneously, a dozen-meter-tall figure appeared before Lumian.

It was a female, wearing a dress seemingly made of white bones, her black hair like venomous giant serpents—long, thick, and slick, with snake heads at the tips or rolling black and white eyes, turning everything around her to stone, releasing various mystical pathogens.

Her beauty of countenance had transcended human limits, reaching a conceptual level. All living beings and all things would be infatuated and entranced by Her slightest expression, perpetually in ecstasy. Even rules and concepts seemed reluctant to constrain Her, to oppose Her.

Mr. Fool's Fooling instantly took effect, causing Her azure, ocean-like, gem-crystal eyes to suddenly become clouded.

But Her charm did not diminish by half; instead, it presented a different seduction.

This momentarily stunned Mr. Fool.

In that instant of stunned silence, the area outside the special mirror world, along with the Primordial Demoness Cheek's figure, moved toward apocalypse, instantly condensing into an exceptionally dangerous darkness.

By the time Mr. Fool made his own wish and satisfied his own wish, restoring the original scene, Lumian's figure had already disappeared into the deep, dark region representing the special mirror world.

Mr. Fool's flickering figure raised the star-studded staff in his hand, materializing a night sky full of brilliant stars before him.

Those stars quickly formed a directional, dreamlike key, forcibly opening the barrier of the special mirror world, pinpointing Lumian's current location.

Just as Mr. Fool was about to Wander in, a strange black surge suddenly emerged at the edge of that deep darkness, forming an abnormally massive, extremely distorted phantasm that resembled a human yet had many non-human features.

This phantasm looked across the special mirror world's barrier, crazy yet incredibly silent, watching Mr. Fool, as if waiting for him to come.

Mr. Fool stopped Wandering and similarly watched the phantasm in silence.

In a mirror rear area not far from here, Red Angel Medici, leaning against the hard mirror surface, brought the red apple in His hand to His mouth and took another bite.

Within the crisp sound, He muttered softly, 'Cheek indeed appeared.

'But She is not weak at all. In fact, She seems even stronger…'

Chapter 1106: Whispers

Jenna swiftly traversed through the mirror world's phantom tunnels, dense as a spider's web, finally finding a path leading to her destination.

She arrived before the special mirror world, seeing Mr. Fool standing quietly, his figure constantly flickering, his image almost exactly matching the description in church scriptures, and also seeing the distorted phantasms nearly covering the special mirror world's edges.

Upon witnessing the massive phantasm that was both human and non-human, Jenna suddenly felt an intense desire for destruction surge within her, wanting to spread disaster and indulge in pleasure.

She almost failed to suppress the godhood that was originally not very prominent within her.

What is this? Jenna was terrified and bewildered, barely managing to control her emotions and desires.

…

In the mirror rear area standing with gray-white stone platforms and white bone statues.

Franca and Demoness of Black Clarice had battled for a while. Besides shattering several Mirror Substitutions and transforming the place into a gray-white stone cave, neither had suffered substantial injury.

Seizing the opportunity when the Mirror Projection shattered and her own form emerged at the mirror rear area's edge, the Demoness of Black looked at Franca, unable to hide her surprise, "You've significantly digested the Unaging potion?"

Clearly, she was not surprised that Franca had become a Demoness of Unaging, but that the other's condition was excellent, with emotions and desires effectively controlled, unaffected by her own active Charm.

This did not resemble a Demoness of Unaging who had advanced just a few months ago.

After all, the digestion of a Demoness of Unaging was measured in centuries. The newly advanced might need several years, or even over a decade, to be in an unstable state of emotions and desire. Even facing an equally-leveled Demoness's Charm, they would find it difficult to resist, unless she was deeply in love or had just experienced a soul-stirring passion she would die for.

Franca was also glad to talk and delay time, waiting for an opportunity.

While dodging the Demoness of Black's new wave of attacks, she laughed and asked back.

"Would you lose control if I said I've completely digested the Unaging potion?"

She was boasting about a fact that would be unbelievable to other Demonesses of Unaging, attempting to provoke an emotional fluctuation in the Demoness of Black.

And with an emotional fluctuation, she might be able to Charm the target, inducing admiration that would prevent them from attacking, leading to defeat.

The Demoness of Black's gaze suddenly solidified.

She clearly was unwilling to believe Franca could digest the Unaging potion in just a few months-a process that normally took hundreds of years-but the other's excellent condition seemed to corroborate that statement.

Taking advantage of the Demoness of Black's emotional turbulence, Franca smiled charmingly.

This made Demoness of Black Clarice's heart beat faster, just like the first time she experienced feminine charm from the Primordial Demoness figurine.

With her experience, she immediately knew something was wrong, and let her mirror self emerge from another side, using Charm on herself.

Charming herself!

With a whoosh, Franca, who had put on the Face of the Arcane at some point in time, shot out a clear light column from her eye protection surrounded by gears, springs, and rivets, which instantly landed on the Demoness of Black.

Caught between two Charm forces, the Demoness of Black regained some clarity and preemptively used a Mirror Substitution.

Her body devolved into a mirror, completely split, floating down as microscopic fragments.

The Demoness of Black's mirror self walked out, then was intercepted by Franca's mirror self.

At the Demoness of Unaging stage, the Demonesses' mirror selves could not directly engaged when battling in the real world. But if the battlefield was in the mirror world, with the main body entering, Demonesses could attack the enemy together with their mirror selves, essentially a two-against-one situation.

The Demoness of Black who had escaped the attack quickly appeared on another side of the mirror rear area, her face smiling, showing no anger.

"I told you before that the Primordial One has two hidden honorific names. Do you want to know them now?"

Telling those two hidden honorific names now? Isn't this a trap? Franca responded without hesitation.

"Nope!"

The Demoness of Black's figure suddenly layered and multiplied, everywhere, like entering a maze made entirely of mirrors.

Her voice transmitted from all directions into Franca's ears.

"The fourth honorific name is:

"The Female Body of the Primordial God Almighty!"

The Female Body of the Primordial God Almighty?

Fu#k! Franca was stunned for a moment, nearly getting hit by the Demoness of Black, barely escaping the crisis by preemptively using a Mirror Substitution.

…

The eastern part of the Sonia Sea, the Forsaken Land of the Gods.

At the peaks of the endless mountain ranges, that darkness suddenly expanded to transparency.

Within the transparency, a massive cross was vaguely visible, with two people nailed to it-one head down, feet up, the other feet up, head down, yet sharing a single body, like conjoined infants.

Beneath this cross was a chaotic water surface that seemed to encompass all colors and all possibilities. Something beneath the water appeared to be grasping the cross's base, pulling it toward the earth's depths, causing it to slowly sink.

…

In an indescribable darkness.

Lumian, now a gray-white stone statue with only a remnant of thought, suddenly smelled a fragrance like night flowers blooming, the very breath most yearned for in every male heart.

The white bone-like long dress fell before his eyes, dropping to the ground, revealing a perfect torso that would drive even stones to impulse, that would make even rules violate themselves.

Those slick, long, serpent-like black hairs began to gently glide on Lumian's body. That moonlike torso sat in Lumian's lap, entwining him without bones.

Heat and coldness emerged simultaneously, with a moist sensation rippling and flowing between the two bodies.

Lumian was like being nakedly coiled by a massive python, gently rubbing, and yet seemingly enveloped by the most charming pleasure, alternating between heaven and hell.

Serpent-like slick black hair, white and exquisite beautiful hands, moistened and slightly parted pink lips, delicate skin that seemed it would break at a touch yet was full of elasticity-these rotated and approached Lumian's face, neck, chest, and abdomen, sometimes lightly touching, sometimes closely pressing, sometimes gently caressing, sometimes wanting to be one with him.

The previous soft, gentle voice became seductive, low-sobbing with joy when Lumian reached heaven, and floating near dream-talk when he fell into hell.

"Whether the remnant souls in the River of Eternal Darkness or the Beyonder characteristics in the Blue Avenger's treasury are not the true reliance for Tudor's resurrection...

"If they can work, very good; if not, it doesn't matter, as long as they can create someone like you...

"Tudor's true resurrection is laid out here with me..."

The voice brought a hidden sweet ambiguous fragrance, making even this stone statue's "blood vessels swell" until gray-white cracks appeared.

Sweet, fragrant breath blew into his ear, rising and falling, accompanied by a hint of laughter.

"Tudor is willing to trust me, and I will not disappoint Him…

"Do you know why only Judith's descendants remain of His offspring, while others no longer exist?

"I cursed them, with direct curses, with curses of destiny...

"Now, Tudor can only rely on me..."

The remnant of Lumian's consciousness inexplicably generated fear amidst these words.

He did not know why Primordial Demoness Cheek was coupling with him at this moment, why She wanted to control his pleasure and pain, why She was saying these words.

He only knew this true Demoness was mad.

A slightly hoarse voice pressed against Lumian's body, laughing softly in his ear.

"I am very satisfied with this body; it will belong to Tudor...

"I have waited for over a thousand years, finally finding the best opportunity. This can both resurrect Tudor and complete His and my unfinished dreams...

"Do you know what the Demoness pathway symbolizes?"

Lumian could not answer, for he was now just a gray-white stone statue, entering heaven amidst ultimate pleasure.

The marvelous female voice had a breathy sound to it.

"It symbolizes catastrophe and apocalypse, and also symbolizes the feminine side of that initial Creator.

"The Hunter pathway, what does it symbolize? It symbolizes war and destruction, and also symbolizes the masculine side of that initial Creator.

"Do you know that the initial Creator was both mad and rational, both self-destructive and wanting to survive?

"What do you think such a Creator would do while self- destructing?

"Why would He create an invisible barrier to block the Outer Deities, preventing Them from chaotically plundering and initiating the convergence?

"As the source of rationality and wisdom, doesn't He want a stable existence?"

Even with his mind almost completely blank, Lumian now had an extra thought.

Simultaneously, he vaguely perceived the purpose of the Primordial Demoness coupling with him and speaking these words.

Balancing yin and yang, correcting the state, making the final preparation for Alista Tudor's resurrection...

The breathing grew heavier, alternating between low sobs and laughter, the female voice asked near Lumian's throat, "Do you know what the Oldest One's feminine side plus the Oldest One's masculine side equals?

"When the feminine and masculine sides of something combine, what do they become?"

Lumian's final thoughts suddenly froze.

…

In the mirror rear area filled with gray-white stones.

Frightened by the Primordial Demoness's fourth honorific name, Franca immediately fell into a disadvantage, barely surviving the most difficult stage.

She could die and wait to resurrect herself in the sleeping mirror, but that would waste too much time.

At this moment, the voice of Demoness of Black Clarice came from the side.

"The fifth honorific name of the Primordial One is..."

Franca wanted to stop her but could not find a suitable method; comparatively, deafening herself would be more convenient.

Before she could take action, the subsequent words of the Demoness of Black echoed with a hint of laughter.

"The fifth honorific name of the Primordial One is:

"The original Creator - the Oldest One - in the mirror!"

Chapter 1107: Role

The original Creator—in the mirror? Has the Primordial Demoness gone mad? To actually give Herself such a title, and moreover, to actually be able to point to Herself? Franca had originally prepared herself mentally not to be shocked or surprised, to prevent the Demoness of Black from launching a surprise attack, but the actual situation still exceeded her expectations.

The honorific name 'The Female Body of the Primordial God Almighty' was actually understandable after her initial shock—Lumian had previously suspected that the great terror deep within the special mirror world was related to the resurrection of the Primordial God Almighty, so the Primordial Demoness, who was closely involved with this matter and controlled it to a certain extent, quietly becoming 'The Female Body of the Primordial God' was terrifying but not entirely unexpected.

But 'The original Creator—the Oldest One—in the mirror' completely surpassed their imagination!

Why would the Primordial Demoness think She could bear such a title?

What great terror had She and Alista Tudor actually orchestrated deep within the special mirror world?

Could it be that They are about to destroy and recreate the world?

…

Deep within the special mirror world.

Primordial Demoness Cheek seemed like someone who hadn't had anyone to talk to for a long time or perhaps harbored some dangerous intention. Ignoring the frozen thoughts of the statue-like Lumian, She let out a low, ragged breath as cracks spread in the grayish-white surface, laughing in a rising and falling rhythm as She spoke,

'Plus, huff… the mirror world belongs to the Demoness pathway, huff…

'The answer becomes… huff… very… huff… very clear…

'The original Creator—the Oldest One—in the mirror…'

Lumian's mind was like fireworks exploding, with colors of all kinds, both beautiful and dangerous.

His face was cupped by those pure white, delicate hands, with bare arms like white jade art pieces connecting to the torso that had drawn a final line with charm itself. Countless black hairs, snake-like, glided all over his body, slick with a hint of sweat.

The marvelous female voice that made Lumian's very soul want to draw near sometimes was on his left side, sometimes ran to his right, sometimes descended to his chest with a wet sensation.

'The Primordial God Almighty… hoh… who accommodated the City of Calamity, knows very well… huff… this point…

'His resurrection arrangement… huff… had one part in the Chaos Sea and the five pathways corresponding to the Chaos Sea… huff… and another part hidden in the City of Calamity… huff… hidden in the Demoness and Hunter pathways…

'When the Demoness who commands chaos… huff… meets and combines with the Red Priest, huff, He will become the Trinity, in the City of Calamity, within the Chaos Demoness and the Red Priest… huff… simultaneously resurrecting, ultimately… hoh… forming a whole, returning in the mirror…

'Huff… but He perished too early, some things were not quite like the expected and arranged…

'The City of Calamity… huff… was sealed in the Western Continent, preventing Him from quickly becoming the Trinity, gathering all calamities, and moreover… huff… there was another change on the City of Calamity's side…

'His consciousness revived in me and Tudor, oh, Tudor, but without the City of Calamity's resonance and linkage, that consciousness grew very slowly… huff… suppressed and controlled by us…

'And, hoh… the place where we consummated was not the ordinary mirror world… huff… but the special mirror world created by Bethel…

'Bethel had already accommodated… huff… the Uniqueness of the Door pathway and all Sequence 1 Beyonder characteristics… huff… and by the special nature of the Door pathway, self-sealed to prevent convergence, stopping Himself from becoming a god… hoh… but He also sensed the terrifying revival of the Celestial Worthy within Him… huff… The Fourth Epoch was not suitable for the three Mysteries pathways to become divine…

'Bethel created the special mirror world… huff… voluntarily, but whether there was an influence from godhood, no one knows…

'When the initial feminine and masculine sides, the consciousness of the Primordial God Almighty, and the special mirror world created by the Mysteries pathways combined, the development of things deviated from the Primordial God Almighty's arrangement!'

The female voice, now slightly hoarse, no longer panted and suddenly became high-pitched, like a swan forcefully bending its neck backward.

The Oldest One's body of both male and female… plus the power of the two direct pillars belonging to the Oldest One… Lumian, who had fallen into hell from desire, suddenly understood why the mirrored original Creator—the Oldest One—had appeared.

In this matter, the Celestial Worthy unconsciously or with a bit of consciousness applied influence, trying to prevent the Primordial God

Almighty's resurrection. As a result, the development exceeded everyone's expectations. A true, unknown great horror was born in the depths of the special mirror world, causing the Celestial Worthy's plan to defeat Mr. Fool by using the Mirror Person's 'splitting oneself to clinch victory' to suffer a complete failure.

The female voice was no longer hoarse, becoming low and gentle, very smooth.

'The mirrored original Creator—the Oldest One—was thus born, but His consciousness was very weak, like all newborn infants…

'This gives me and you a chance, not only to suppress the Primordial One's revival of His consciousness but also a chance to become the true Creator…

'This is also dangerous, and the corresponding effort is the craziest behavior in this world, but you're not afraid—this is when you're most charming…

'Tudor and I attempted to merge with the original Creator—the Oldest One—in the mirror, one bearing the feminine side, one containing the masculine side, and then use this to control the City of Calamity, so we can be both separated and joined, both unified and contradictory, both whole and divided…

'This seems to be the only way for the Oldest One to stably exist, an unverified method…

'Now you've come, you even have the twin child of the Mother Goddess of Depravity on you, the seal of the River of Eternal Darkness. With all of this combined, the mirrored original Creator—the Oldest One—might be able to enter reality…

'By then, the mirror world will have a sun, will have a moon, will have stars, will have everything from the outside world, becoming exactly the same as reality…'

The gentle and smooth female voice gradually became heavy, mixing up the use of 'you' and 'Tudor' pronouns, seemingly wanting 'you' and 'Tudor' to ultimately become the same.

It carried a hint of laughter, and sweet lips blocked Lumian's mouth, the voice echoing in his oral cavity.

'Adam wanted to nurture you to accommodate the City of Calamity, but the first time I saw you, I felt that this body was prepared for Tudor and me. You should not become the Origins of Disaster, the Calamity of Destruction, you should be the original Creator—the Oldest One—in the mirror, be Tudor, also be Cheek…'

At this point, the tongue that brought countless stimulations and pleasures retracted, sighing and reminiscing. 'Our attempts gradually bore fruit, we could truly merge, but Adam sensed something was wrong. Those fellows also had a dangerous premonition, and the War of the Four Emperors broke out…

'Some wanted to deal with us, others attacked their enemies in the chaos…

'I actually wanted to kill Adam before we started trying, to prevent Him from discovering our plan. You also supported this, but that fellow ran faster than anyone and hid deeper than anyone…

'Unfortunately, our union was not yet complete, and we had so many enemies…

'In the last moment, Tudor wanted to forcibly complete the merger, using this to pull all other sefirot from the Western Continent, dragging the entire world to die, waiting for the Creator's symbolic manifestation in death…

'This was too crazy. Our dream was not yet complete, we had not yet become the original Creator—the Oldest One—in the mirror. I decided to let you die for a while, and then resurrect you later…

'I dealt Tudor the critical blow. Salinger completed His life's culling, sending His soul into the River of Eternal Darkness…

'Later, I went to Salinger, to resurrect you, to make Him deal with those seven self-proclaimed orthodox gods…

'Salinger, influenced by someone, actually relied on a tributary of the River of Eternal Darkness to forcibly accommodate the Red Priest's Uniqueness, going half-mad…

'This was good. This way, you would have a chance to resurrect in His body, and a half-mad person is easier to manipulate…

'I wanted to manipulate Him to collect Tudor's corpse in Fourth Epoch Trier, merge it with Himself, manipulate Him to touch the special mirror world, so you could be resurrected…

'Everything was originally going smoothly, but then an accident occurred…'

The female voice suddenly became heavy, as if suppressing Her own madness.

'Salinger's forced accommodation of the Red Priest's Uniqueness actually caused an aberration in the original Creator—the Oldest One—in the mirror, producing a certain self-awareness…

'She was exactly like me, just preferring to wear a black bone dress. She even said She was a pure female, heh, sometimes I can't help but wonder if it's not that the mirrored original Creator—the Oldest One—gained self-awareness, but that my own spirit and personality split…

'To suppress Her, to continue merging, I had to let the consciousness of the Primordial God Almighty in me further revive, seeking a certain balance…

'Since then, I've had to suppress the Primordial One's consciousness while fighting against the black version of myself, spending most of my time here, unable to effectively interfere with the outside world…

'Fortunately, the problem is not severe, only that my direct descendants and I will intermittently experience separation and loss of personality, spirit, consciousness, and memory…'

As she spoke, when Lumian reached an unprecedented state of pleasure, the female voice laughed.

'Now, your state is suitable, you will be equivalent to Tudor…

'Do not expect help from The Fool. He has only just initially awakened and is not yet a truly great existence. The mirror Creator influenced by me is enough to block Him…

'As for Adam's side, there are other problems…'

In Lumian's blurry vision, a pair of white, smooth arms that seemed to have a luster lifted a somewhat peculiar crown, rusty and stained with blood.

The crown quickly became ethereal, seemingly reduced to countless tiny light points while maintaining its overall shape.

The beautiful hand at the end of the white arm brought the 'crown' to Lumian's head, as if to help him wear it.

No, not wear—those hands forcibly pressed the 'crown' into Lumian's head, without any supplementary ingredients or advancement ritual.

Simultaneously, more white arms appeared, along with the snake-like black hair, entwining Lumian's body in various ways.

Suddenly, a beautiful face pressed close to Lumian's head, with pink lips sighing with joy and satisfaction.

'Who you are is not important…

'What you want to do is not important either…

'What's important is the role you're playing…'

This voice, soft and gentle, echoed outward.

Chapter 1108: Fusion

As the rusty and blood-cast crown was slowly pressed into Lumian's head, Lumian, who was in a state of continuous pleasure and petrification, suddenly regained a bit of thought. Is this 'crown' the Sequence 1 Beyonder characteristic of the Hunter pathway, Conqueror?

The one that fell into the Primordial Demoness's hands?

I've only partially digested my Weather Warlock potion...

Forcibly merging the Conqueror Beyonder characteristic with me in this situation, without supplementary ingredients or an advancement ritual, I will inevitably lose control and go mad....

Is this the future pointed to by the letter from the Circle of Inevitability, and the truth of the prophecy by the Post-Apocalyptic Scripture?

Lumian could flash a few thoughts but could not use his abilities, because the snake-like black hair that brought petrification was still entwined around him, and the white body that brought heaven and hell was still on him, encompassing him, embracing him from all directions.

The blood-stained and rusty "crown" gradually sank into Lumian's head, bringing tearing pain, a desire to conquer everything, and violent, mad emotions.

The female voice, filled with laughter and sighs, seductive and charming, once again sounded by Lumian's ear.

"When we truly become the original Creator-the Oldest One-in the mirror, you won't need to worry about the future or the apocalypse. Even if reality is destroyed, as long as there's a mirror left in this universe, the mirror world won't completely shatter. By then, the reality reflected in the mirror world will walk out of the mirror exactly as it was, all buildings will be restored, all humans will be resurrected, and they'll continue living happily-just with their left and right hands' habits reversed...

"I know what you want most is to resurrect your sister Aurore...

"She will definitely be resurrected, and I will eventually merge into this body of yours, becoming one with her...

"By then, I can continue to be your sister...

"Stupid, I am your sister..."

An unspeakable anger suddenly rose in Lumian's heart, but this still couldn't help him escape his current state and predicament.

The next second, a figure appeared in his blurry vision.

The figure was draped in blood-colored long hair, wearing black armor stained with crimson, with a rigid temperament and azure eyes, openly displaying a cruelty and madness ready to destroy everything at any moment.

The mirrored Blood Emperor Alista Tudor!

Lumian instantly understood that the one who had previously persuaded this mirrored Blood Emperor to leave was Primordial Demoness Cheek.

This might be because Lumian had not yet become an Angel at that time, or perhaps because the situation was not yet chaotic, with too many high-ranking figures watching...

The mirrored Alista Tudor looked at Lumian and the white body intertwined, let out a contemptuous laugh, and walked towards Lumian's body.

He gradually became ethereal and shrank, like a human reflected in an ordinary mirror.

Seeing this, Lumian instantly understood what the mirrored Alista Tudor was about to do.

He was going to use the forceful infusion of the Conqueror Beyonder characteristic and the residual Blood Emperor aura in his body to occupy this body and complete His resurrection!

For Tudor, who was originally Sequence 0 Red Priest, both the Weather Warlock and Conqueror Beyonder characteristics could be easily digested without any problems, and He would not lose control or go mad.

Lumian suddenly realized the true purpose of the Circle of Inevitability sending that letter.

He wants to fix this fate of losing control, making it a predetermined end...

This is not targeting me, but the Blood Emperor Alista Tudor He saw, who was about to replace me...

But would Tudor be afraid of going mad?

Would He care about this issue?

…

In the special mirror world, Jenna didn't dare to look directly at the enormous, distorted inhuman silhouette separated by the barrier, nor could she participate in the battle in that area.

She only knew that Mr. Fool had split into multiple crazily flickering human figures, only knew that the area had been destroyed multiple times and then restored to its original state, only knew that she sometimes felt dull, stupid, and her thoughts sluggish, sometimes felt that a segment of the middle process was missing, sometimes showed signs of losing control, and sometimes was in an incredibly good state...

What she also knew was that Mr. Fool seemingly couldn't defeat the distorted silhouette in a short time and enter the depths of the special mirror world. Her spiritual intuition and the mystical connection brought by the

Mr. Fool told her that Lumian was at that moment in the depths of the special mirror world.

There was presumably Primordial Demoness Cheek, an unknown great terror. The longer time passed, the higher the possibility that Lumian would completely die or turn into Alista Tudor or some other monster.

For Jenna, each second now felt like an entire year, and many seconds had already passed.

Her heart gradually sank, becoming more and more desperate.

She hated that she couldn't help at all, and couldn't assist Mr. Fool in quickly resolving the battle.

Ironically, her Despair potion was rapidly being digested.

…

Deep within the special mirror world.

The mirrored Blood Emperor, now reduced to normal human size, suddenly had a human figure appear before Him.

This figure was draped in rust-colored long hair, wearing white armor, with iron-black eyes and a high- bridged nose, seemingly cast from the same mold as Blood Emperor Alista Tudor, only with many opposite details in color.

His eyes were rigid and hollow, seemingly possessing only a tiny bit of self-awareness.

The mirrored Alista Tudor overlapped with this figure, beginning to fuse intensely.

Lumian, whose mind was ravaged by violent and conquering emotions, vaguely knew who the Alista Tudor in white full-body armor was.

He was the product of the initial fusion between the Blood Emperor and the mirrored original Creator-the Oldest One-during the Fourth Epoch.

He was the true resurrection arrangement of the Blood Emperor Alista Tudor, always kept and protected by Primordial Demoness Cheek.

Now, with the mirrored Alista Tudor and the Sequence 1 Conqueror" Beyonder characteristic's "participation", the resurrection would become easier and more perfect!

The two Tudors, intensely fusing, came to Lumian's side. At this moment, Lumian's head had been opened, and inside was not white brain matter, nor iron-black bones interwoven with violet-tinged fire and symbolic patterns, but a phantasmal blood-stained "crown".

It seemed to be drawing on Lumian's flesh and spirit, merging with itself as the primary, rather than with Lumian.

The overlapping Tudors, still fusing and dropping various colored flames, pressed Their right palm into Lumian's brain, onto the rusty phantasmal "crown".

Their figures instantly entered Lumian's body, and the Blood Emperor residual aura on Lumian's right palm suddenly protruded and expanded, rapidly breaking through the Underworld Daoist's seal and igniting his entire body.

Violent, mad, cruel, and savage mental states swept through like a storm, destroying Lumian's consciousness.

Lumian finally lost that last bit of thought.

The perfect torso entwined with him and still consummating with him covered his body in a thick layer of frost, which did not quickly melt even under the violet flames, thus controlling the fire's burning, maintaining the best rhythm of Lumian and Tudor's fusion.

This torso stood up from Lumian's embrace, separating from him, no longer entangling or restraining him.

A bone-made dress flew up from the ground, draping over this white torso.

Her beautiful face revealed an obvious smile, speaking to the two Tudors still fusing with Lumian, "You haven't reclaimed the Red Priest's Uniqueness. I can't merge with this body's feminine side right now, as that would cause an imbalance, leading to the worst outcome.

"But it's fine. The problems brought by the Primordial God Almighty's consciousness revival are both troublesome and helpful. I can separate a personality containing the Sequence 1 Demoness of Apocalypse Beyonder characteristic, partial self-awareness and spirit, like a Visionary, without reducing my current level, just losing corresponding memories and cognition, causing certain spiritual disabilities…"

The Primordial Demoness spoke, Her expression suddenly twisting, revealing intense pain.

Her arms, shoulders, and head were all cracking.

After several seconds, a figure identical to Her, wearing a bone dress, walked out.

This supremely beautiful figure was wet, as if coated with a liquid containing all colors.

The Primordial Demoness's face returned to normal.

She ignored the self that had crumbled, seeming to have forgotten certain things.

The split-off Primordial Demoness, with the same objective as Her original self, let the bone dress fall to the ground, sitting again on Lumian, embracing him, entwining him, increasingly forcefully, with flesh beginning to fuse.

Almost simultaneously, the distorted giant figure at the special mirror world's edge was dramatically dragged back by an extremely exaggerated horrifying suction, quickly returning to normal.

She was another Primordial Demoness, breathtakingly beautiful, wearing a black bone dress.

She looked resistant, but under the original Primordial Demoness's intense suppression, was forced to shed Her dress, overlapping with the torso entangled with Lumian.

Suddenly, in this area where all symbols and prerequisites were now present, a light burst forth, so bright it seemed about to create a world.

This erupted from the fusion point of Lumian and the two Blood Emperors, the two Primordial Demonesses.

…

At the special mirror world's edge.

Seeing the distorted figure instantly retreat, Mr. Fool did not hesitate, preparing to penetrate the barrier and enter the most dangerous place.

Suddenly, an extreme brightness surged out, enveloping the barrier, forming a new obstruction, like the amniotic membrane protecting a baby, like the invisible layer protecting this planet.

An indescribable terrifying sensation spread out, causing Mr. Fool's figure to pause, with Jenna briefly losing her thoughts.

Not far from here, Red Angel Medici, leisurely eating an apple and patiently waiting for developments, had His expression suddenly freeze.

In His eyes was also reflected that unimaginable surging light.

After a few seconds, Red Angel Medici ground His teeth and muttered, "What the hell has that lunatic, Tudor, gotten Himself into..."

Chapter 1109: The Only Chance

Franca, recovering from the mention of the mirrored original Creator—the Oldest One—continued her intense battle with the Demoness of Black Clarice.

Gradually, she discovered something was off.

The surrounding phantom black mirror tunnels partially shed their grayish-white color, no longer petrified, no longer obstacles to escape;

The Demoness of Black was more in a defensive posture, protecting the grayish-white altar displaying the Primordial Demoness's figurine;

The Demoness of Black had revealed the two hidden honorific names of the Primordial Demoness. Besides causing emotional fluctuations and creating a brief opening, falling into a temporary disadvantage, it had no other effect and did not bring the anticipated terrible corruption.

What was her true purpose in revealing such a significant secret? Just to frighten her and turn the tide? Franca felt a strong sense of doubt rising in her heart.

Suddenly, she had a guess: The Demoness of Black did not appear here to wait for me; she has another mission!

Is my encounter with the Demoness of Black actually the result of the Law of Beyonder Characteristics Convergence?

The Demoness of Black detected an outsider mysteriously arriving nearby. Her first reaction would certainly be to seal the tunnel and eliminate potential risks...

After battling for a while and discovering I've completely digested the Unaging potion, realizing no quick victory was possible, her choice was to pretend to fight with full force, seemingly preoccupied, quietly lifting the petrification of some mirror tunnels, and attempting to scare me away using the two hidden honorific names of the Primordial Demoness?

What does this signify?

It indicates she has a very important purpose in arranging the altar here, and that the two hidden honorific names of the Primordial Demoness would lose their secrecy very soon!

Moreover, the Beyonder characteristic congregation force between us should not be strong enough to Teleport me near her. In the mirror world, there exists a Demoness of a higher level with stronger congregation forces...

Besides the Beyonder characteristic, what else 'attracted' me here...

Franca suddenly recalled the Primordial Demoness figurine in her Traveler's Bag.

Her peripheral vision swept towards the grayish-white stone altar, towards the bone-like Primordial Demoness figurine placed upon it.

Something's amiss!

Relying on the power of the Ice Mirror Charm, Anthony traversed the mirror tunnels densely interwoven like a spider web, heading towards the location indicating the team leader.

Just as he was about to reach his destination, he was met with a surging light as intense as a solar explosion.

Instinctively, Anthony closed his eyes, and grayish-white scales began to emerge on the surface of his skin.

This was a sign of loss of control.

He hurriedly Placated himself, controlling the fluctuations of his mental and emotional state.

Fortunately, the light's burst lasted only an instant, then condensed at the edge of the special mirror world, transforming into an invisible barrier.

Anthony persevered and returned to normal. Then, he saw Ludwig, whose body had just materialized, and Jenna, who had reopened her eyes. He also saw multiple flickering figures, seemingly belonging to Mr. Fool.

Jenna gazed at the light-condensed barrier, recalling the stellar explosion from moments ago that seemed capable of creating an entire world. Her heart plummeted completely, falling into an abyss.

The emergence of this situation meant that a mutation had already occurred in the depths of this special mirror world!

That great terror has most likely been triggered...

This means that the probability of Lumian surviving is now extremely slim...

At this moment, a voice sounded near Jenna's ear: 'Actually, there is still a chance to save Lumian Lee, a chance with some hope of success.'

Jenna swiftly turned her head and looked beside her, discovering a young man who had appeared at some point, wearing a pointed soft cap and a monocle, draped ina classical magical robe.

'Amon...' Jenna's lips moved, uttering this name.

Amon glanced at Mr. Fool who had 'split' new figures to look over here, then laughed and muttered to Himself, 'Why is it me again who has to do this?

'Next time, don't prophesize that I'll be the light at the dawn of the apocalypse...'

As He muttered, He took out a white piece of paper from somewhere and looked at Jenna. 'That chance is on you, and the price is your life.'

My life... Jenna repeated this phrase blankly.

Before Jenna could respond, Amon's speaking speed accelerated, as if multiple people were relaying the narrative, almost creating a majestic and layered effect.

'Time is limited, I'll only pick out the key points of the story.

'Commissioned by Amon, Celia Bello discovered Harrison from the Western Continent and obtained fragments of the special mirror world, encountering the phantom of Krismona.

'In her subsequent advancements, Krismona's phantom would repeatedly warn Celia Bello about the dangers of a pure female Demoness and the potential sources of danger. This failed to dissuade Celia Bello and instead stimulated her to persist on this path, because Celia Bello, who came from a humble background, had been a Showy Diva, and witnessed the death of her loved ones, desperately wanted to become powerful. She wanted to seize every opportunity to become strong to protect those she wanted to protect. The uniqueness of a pure female Demoness made her see the possibility of being used, and being used meant she might receive a 'gift' and become a high-ranking individual in a very short time.

'She was willing to bear the enormous risks that would come with this. She has always been someone skilled at going all-in.

'Arranged by the story's author, Celia Bello successfully evaded the Demoness Sect's investigation and, relying on the special small sacrificial square in the catacombs, escaped the gaze of the Primordial Demoness Cheek until The... Mr. Fool initially awakened.'

After saying 'The,' Amon paused, then switched with a slight upward inflection to 'Mr.'

Looking at the white paper, He continued, 'In the end, Lumian Lee and Franca Roland both entrusted their special mirror world fragments to Jenna for safekeeping, unexpectedly allowing her to gather three pieces—a trinity, three pillars that evolved all things.

'Now, Jenna has a chance, a chance to save Lumian Lee. That is, before the Despair potion is completely digested, forcibly advancing to Demoness of Unaging, utilizing the uniqueness of a pure female Demoness and those three special mirror world fragments to transfer the great terror in the depths of the special mirror world onto herself.

'This way, the barrier of the special mirror world will instantly shatter. The great Mr. Fool can certainly pull Lumian Lee, who only has Alista Tudor resurrected within him, back from the edge of consciousness death and mental alienation. Praise The Fool!

'This is a surmise; the events about to occur are not certain, supported only by three facts:

'The first fact is that the previously only pure female Demoness, Krismona, died in the War of the Four Emperors, and the Demoness Sect has been killing pure female Demoness early;

'The second fact is that Krismona's ghost once said that pure female Demonesses would face a trial when advancing to Demoness of Unaging, and if they fail to pass, something terribly frightening would happen—this has been confirmed as true;

'The third fact is that the great terror in the depths of the special mirror world is related to the Demoness and Hunter pathways.

'This indicates that both pure female Demonesses and pure male Hunters might attract that great terror, but only Demonesses are closely linked to the mirror world and Mirror People.'

Amon raised His head, adjusted His monocle, and looked at Jenna. 'The story's author only grasps these facts. Before the light burst just now, He was not clear about what was hidden in the special mirror world.

'That is to say, His surmise only has a certain probability of success. Unexpected changes might occur midway, leading to failure—a probability that is even quite high. However, with our great Mr. Fool, He can amplify the possibility of success and reduce the probability of failure.

'Even so, success is not guaranteed. No one knows what other special characteristics the great terror in the depths of the special mirror world might have.

'Celia Bello is at a crossroads of choice.

'On one side is whether Lumian Lee can survive, on the other is her own life.

'Regardless of success or failure, she will certainly die, because what's needed is not passing the trial during advancement, but welcoming failure during the trial.

'Because the great Mr. Fool awakened early, the story's author couldn't arrange Celia Bello's brother properly, which would cause many things to be exposed prematurely. So, Celia Bello doesn't need to be cornered now, doesn't need to be forced into a singular choice.

'So, what is her answer?'

Only at the last question did Jenna truly awaken.

At this moment, one of the high-frequency flickering figures split from Mr. Fool and said to her, 'You can choose not to choose, or choose the opposite.

'I will do my best to destroy the barrier in a short time. If I can't, I'll seal this place.'

Between voices that were sometimes near and sometimes far,

Jenna completely came to her senses, understanding what Amon had just described.

So my persistence in walking the pure female Demoness path was arranged... Even my emotions, reactions, and thoughts were anticipated...

So Julien almost became an arranged object because of my ‘uniqueness', falling into a situation of imminent death or madness...

So I was never discovered by the Demoness Sect because I was always being arranged...

Jenna had actually expected to be arranged for a long time and was psychologically prepared. She was willing to take risks to become strong quickly and protect those she wanted to protect, to accept the 'bestowment'. But what she didn't expect was that there were no risks, only death—she was just a sacrifice, a tool, a puppet being manipulated on stage, a cheap puppet.

At this moment, she truly understood the feelings Lumian experienced during the arrangements before becoming a Demoness of Despair.

Everything seemed to have lost meaning, everything was so despairing.

Jenna felt she should be angry, should hate, should madly curse everything, and try her best to resist.

She actually had all these emotions, but...

Jenna turned her head and gazed at the barrier condensed with dazzling light.

A smile gradually spread across her face, and she softly said to herself, 'But... 'I am willing.'

Chapter 1110: Prince and Princess

That moment, Jenna felt hesitation, trepidation, fear, anger, resentment, with many words surging to be spoken, as if to convince herself, but after thousands and ten thousands of words rushed to her lips, only one sentence remained: "But, I am willing."

All those emotions ultimately condensed into a smile.

Amon, for reasons unknown and to no one in particular, shook His head, lowering His gaze to the white paper in His hand.

"Celia Bello, who chooses to become a Demoness of Unaging, will receive Amon's help. And Amon, taking advantage of the moment when the Demoness Sect's top leaders are all dispatched, stole a Grade 1 Sealed Artifact corresponding to a Demoness of Unaging, and thus arrived a bit late.

"As for the corresponding supplementary ingredients. the Visionary has long envisioned them into existence."

As He spoke, the white paper floated downward, and a potion that had been prepared at some unknown time appeared in Amon's hand.

The potion dyed its container a grayish-white color, clearly reflecting the mirror world around it.

It flew toward Jenna, landing in her palm.

Seeing this potion, numerous images suddenly flashed through Jenna's mind: her childhood falling asleep to her mother's humming, the excitement of first entering the Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons to learn performance, the bitterness of struggling to survive with her mother and brother, the shock and gratitude of first meeting Franca, the series of events after encountering Lumian, the massive impact and disillusionment of watching her mother jump to her death from the sixth floor...

These countless fragments quickly settled, ultimately freezing into two scenes: one scene was after she finished singing a song at the Salle de Bal Brise, facing whistles and cheers, walking proudly to Lumian like a princess, laughing as she issued an invitation: "Handsome lion, dance!"

The other scene was when she inserted the long-handled silver fork into Hugues Artois's eye socket, piercing into his brain, with the frozen surprise, bewilderment, and fear on the Member of Parliament's face illuminated by the surrounding light.

Jenna raised the potion bottle, holding it like a long-handled silver fork.

This time, the "long-handled silver fork" would pierce her own face.

Jenna suddenly thought of something, turning her head to look at Anthony and Ludwig.

The latter seemed to want to stop her but was held back by the former.

Jenna opened her mouth, wanting to leave a word or two for Franca through them.

But she couldn't think of what to say. Whether a sincere expression or a kind deception would ultimately become an irreparable regret, an eternally unhealing wound.

She laughed self-deprecatingly, exhaling. "Tell Franca to live well, on my behalf.

"My spirit will forever be with her."

"Okay," Anthony responded in a calm voice.

The palm pressing on Ludwig's shoulder inexplicably revealed blue-colored blood vessels.

Jenna thought for a moment and added, "If the apocalypse passes, I hope you enjoy life.

"Ludwig, humans are always full of pain, but I still like being human."

Jenna withdrew her gaze, stabbing the potion into herself, her hand steady, not trembling, just like when she killed Hugues Artois with the long-handled silver fork, only less swift.

The taste of soil and stone mixed together, lingering in her mouth.

Her senses gradually went numb, her body rapidly petrifying.

She felt her spirit floating midair, seeing herself in the mirror.

She saw herself in the mirror, serene, with a smile, seemingly waiting to welcome herself.

Though no ritual was held and no reconciliation reached beforehand, Jenna suddenly understood that her mirror self was also willing to sacrifice herself to save Lumian.

"She is indeed more extreme than me...

"She should have made the decision earlier than me..."

Jenna laughed again, whispering two sentences.

Suddenly, she was no longer anxious, no longer panicked, no longer afraid, because on this path to death, she was no longer alone.

She had a companion, a companion who encouraged and supported each other.

During the process of her instinct drifting toward her mirror self, Jenna suddenly saw "her" face twist, alternating between normal and painful, as if becoming a stranger.

This change seemed constrained, as if bound by layers of chains, requiring tremendous effort and overcoming numerous difficulties to complete.

"Come quickly..." Jenna, for the first time, cheered on the enemy who wanted to kill her.

…

In the grayish-white, cave-like area behind a mirror.

Demoness of Black Clarice pretended to be at her limit, a step too slow, and could only "watch helplessly" as Franca escaped into one of the no longer petrified phantom tunnels.

Phew... she secretly exhaled.

Just then, her spirituality suddenly warned her, and she abruptly turned, looking towards the grayish-white stone altar.

Franca bizarrely appeared nearby, and a clear, misty light shot out from the eye protection of the mechanical half-face mask she was wearing, striking the altar.

The one who had just escaped was only Franca's mirror self!

And the one following the departing "mirror self" was a Mirror Projection!

The Demoness of Black's gaze instantly froze, but it was too late to stop it.

Invisible barriers suddenly appeared around the altar, provided by the ritual itself.

But for some reason, this protective power was insufficient, lacking the intensity a ritual for the Primordial Demoness should have, as if some inexplicable force had blocked most of the divine blessing.

Under the clear, misty light, the invisible barrier was instantly reduced to its most basic, minute components and ceased to exist.

Immediately after, the clear, misty light hit the bone- like figurine of the Primordial Demoness.

The figurine swayed and began to crumble.

Seeing this, the Demoness of Black was like someone trapped in a nightmare, frozen in place.

For added security, Franca took out the Primordial Demoness figurine and the Inevitable Gun from her Traveler's Bag.

She threw the figurine towards the altar, then fired two shots in quick succession.

Bang! Bang!

Two dim, green bullets shot out, each striking a bone-like figurine of the Primordial Demoness.

Certain Death!

Both the already crumbling and the intact statues began to rot, losing their luster, completely shattering.

…

Deep within the special mirror world.

Primordial Demoness Cheek smiled as She observed the changes occurring in Lumian's body.

His features were gradually being corrected, shifting towards Alista Tudor's likeness. On his body, the two intertwined Demoness figures were half-merged into him, driving his flesh to converge toward his neck.

After the earlier burst of light, the process was now irreversible.

Suddenly, one of the Demoness figures withdrew. attempting to straighten her body.

Her expression was vivid, filled with both hatred and longing.

The Primordial Demoness clad in the white bone dress instantly understood what was happening.

A pure female Demoness was ascending to the rank of Demoness of Unaging!

And at the most critical moment!

The stunningly beautiful face of Primordial Demoness Cheek darkened.

She was about to direct Her gaze at the advancing pure female Demoness to kill her first!

Although the barrier formed by the burst of light isolated the interior from the exterior-temporarily preventing The Fool from entering and also hindering the Primordial Demoness from directly sensing or influencing the external situation - Cheek had already made preparations to prevent unexpected outcomes.

She had instructed Her most trusted high-ranking Demonesses to set up altars at different locations within the mirror world, placing figurines there to conduct rituals. She used Her authority and symbols to establish a robust mystical connection!

By now, those connections must have weakened, and the rituals would no longer be strongly protected. Yet, as the mirrored original Creator-the Oldest One- Cheek could barely maintain the existence of these connections and use them to project part of Her power to eliminate hidden threats.

The Primordial Demoness swiftly cast Her consciousness toward the figurine closest to the target, only to discover with astonishment that the figurine had been destroyed and the connection severed.

Her expression remained unchanged as She immediately scattered Her consciousness toward the remaining figurines still involved in the rituals.

The next second, a vision appeared before Her eyes: it wasn't the advancing pure female Demoness - it was a black trench coat.

The interior of the black trench coat was empty, with the coat itself outlining a human figure.

Grafting!

The Primordial Demoness realized that Her gaze on Jenna had been Grafted by Mr. Fool back onto Herself!

In an instant, one of the Demoness figures entwining Lumian struggled to break free. A black bone dress wrapped around Her, and She disappeared from the spot, following the mystical connection to where Jenna was.

The fusion within Lumian's body immediately lost its balance.

His chest, neck, shoulders, torso, and limbs, along with the remaining Demoness figure, all collapsed inward, as if about to turn into a mass of flesh. The flesh converged into a clump, continuing to compress.

The two Tudors fused within his head, along with the Sequence 1 Conqueror Beyonder characteristic, were also dragged downward by immense force. They pierced through his skull, through the flames and frost, and through the writhing flesh.

The barrier of light at the edge of the special mirror world suddenly vanished.

…

Floating closer, Jenna finally saw the distortion and pain on her mirrored self's face disappear entirely.

"She" lifted her face and gave Jenna in midair a bizarre smile, opening her arms wide.

Jenna did not resist. She closed her eyes and moved forward, accepting the embrace.

She felt warmth and reassurance, which made her want to fall into a deep sleep.

She offered no resistance.

It was as if she had returned to her childhood, listening to her mother hum a lullaby and her father's soft snores, drifting into slumber.

Back then, though life wasn't particularly great, she had nothing to worry about. Her father and mother would take care of everything: she only needed to be a good child.

She grew more at peace, more tranquil.

She believed her mother and father would shield her from the storm, ensuring she slept soundly.

In that serene dream, she would be a princess, and her prince would walk toward her, inviting her to dance.

A smile appeared on her face.

Her thoughts dissolved into the encroaching madness, settling into a tranquil darkness.

Chapter 1111: The Power to Stop

At the special mirror world's edge.

Anthony watched as multiple manifestations of Mr. Fool disappeared into thin air, heading toward the Primordial Demoness, leaving only one behind to monitor Jenna's transformation, ready to act at any moment.

Jenna's features gradually relaxed, no longer distorted and pained, even tinged with a faint smile. The gray-white hue on her body was receding, as if she was on the verge of completing her advancement, gaining eternal youth, and reaching Sequence 3.

Ludwig quietly retreated several steps, hiding behind Anthony.

He looked visibly anxious, biting at his fingers.

Snap. He bit off a piece of bone, chewing on it bloody and swallowing.

Meanwhile, Anthony noticed a strange change in the surrounding scenery: one side reflected the real world—sunlight, stars, green trees, the sea, humans—chaotically jumbled together. The other side resembled a frozen, lifeless universe. Above, brilliant explosions of light continued to erupt, casting out vast amounts of matter, while below, deep, dark abysses consumed everything, compressing it toward a final singular point…

These were still illusions, mere reflections of the mirror world.

Yet even a demigod like Anthony felt an indescribable fear rooted deep in his soul and flesh.

Despite Jenna still being at Sequence 3, without higher-level Beyonder characteristics, her presence was nearly as terrifying as the terror emanating from the depths of the special mirror world.

Because she embodied a most unique and fearsome symbol.

A symbol of the creation and destruction of everything!

This transformation had to be stopped before the symbol was complete, before Jenna reopened her eyes!

At that moment, Amon's mocking voice reached Anthony and Ludwig's ears.

'Why is it always me doing the work?

'I'd much rather clear altars and figurines like the serpent…'

As He spoke, the Blasphemer, dressed in a pointed soft hat and a classic magician's robe, faced Jenna and raised both arms.

The monocle on His right eye shone brilliantly.

Behind Him, layer upon layer of resplendent doors materialized, while a vast, silent river of mercury-like symbols flowed majestically.

…

Deep within the special mirror world.

On Lumian's body, blurry flesh, iron-black bones, violet flames, and intricate, dangerous symbols were collapsing rapidly.

This process included the fragment of the Primordial Demoness, the fused Alista Tudors, the Conqueror Beyonder characteristic, and most of the madness.

Even Lumian's brain, split open like in a cranial surgery, and the remaining insanity were about to join this collapse.

Seeing this, the Primordial Demoness, clad in a white bone dress, smiled.

The balance is indeed lost…

It seems like a failure…

But no matter. I'll fuse myself in and see what kind of monster emerges in the end.

What I cannot obtain, no one else shall have. And I will take everything within the barrier with me to the grave.

This will be the grandest funeral for me and Tudor.

Suddenly, the Primordial Demoness noticed a delay in the extreme collapse happening to Lumian.

Two forces were preventing it.

One was the destiny fixed on madness and not on complete destruction.

When a conclusion was bound to be bad, steering it toward a lesser evil was far easier than reversing it to something good.

This was the true purpose of the letter sent by the Circle of Inevitability!

The second was a faint rebirth within Lumian's collapsing flesh, symbols, violet flames, iron-black bones, and Beyonder characteristics.

They were regrowing, extending outward, clinging to the last threads of life.

This new birth came from Omebella's bloodline and Zedus's vitalized soul fragments.

On Lumian's body, now condensed into a strange sphere, a lump of flesh protruded, resembling someone's head.

On the head, two alternating faces constantly shifted. One belonged to the high-nosed, madness-filled Blood Emperor Alista Tudor. The other was a ruby-eyed, nearly perfectly beautiful Zedus.

Lumian's deadened thoughts suddenly flickered, pulling him back from the eternal darkness into his spiritual body.

This new birth had brought him back.

He felt the most extreme, hopeless pain and saw the changes in his body.

He suddenly recalled Mr. Fool's insight on dealing with Omebella's bloodline and Zedus's soul fragments: 'This is a hidden danger, a risk, and also a variable, an opportunity.'

A variable, an opportunity… Could it be here? As Lumian gained this realization, he also knew the new life was far too weak to counteract the terrifying collapse that sought to annihilate everything after losing balance.

There were only a few seconds left before everything ended.

But Lumian did not give up. His style was always to fight to the bitter end, even in death.

The next second, he saw another flesh-crafted head growing rapidly on his collapsing body.

This head also had two alternating faces. One belonged to the extraordinarily beautiful yet innocent-looking Primordial Demoness Cheek. The other, unfamiliar to Lumian, was stunningly beautiful yet radiated a maternal glow.

Giant Queen Omebella!

Seeing this change, Primordial Demoness Cheek, who was about to fuse into Lumian's body and exacerbate the imbalance, stopped trying.

She smiled faintly at the manifestations of The Fool descending upon Her, Her endlessly alluring body becoming illusory and dispersing into the entire special mirror world.

She was the master of the mirror world—She was the mirror world. She could fuse with it at any moment. Destroying all the mirror worlds would be the only way to truly kill Her.

Though the mirrored terror's feminine aspect had been transferred to Jenna, the Primordial Demoness, who had spent millennia attempting fusion, could still partially leverage Her unique symbol until it fully broke free, becoming the true mirrored original Creator—the Oldest One.

The Primordial Demoness's form simultaneously appeared in every corner of the special mirror world, Her soft voice echoing into Mr. Fool's ears from all directions.

'Can you save Him?

'You should be able to…

'If you can't, I'll fuse with Him, and we'll invite you to our funeral. Everyone's funeral. The universe's funeral.

'Sounds exciting, doesn't it?'

Mr. Fool was unmoved by such words. Most of his rapidly flickering manifestations continued to fight the Primordial Demoness, trying to seal Her off and prevent Her from truly fusing into Lumian's body.

The remaining manifestation turned to look at Lumian, struggling to hold on.

He sighed softly.

…

At the special mirror world's edge.

Amon, having requested dual-pathway godhood and power from The Fool, seized the moment when the mirrored Creator had yet to fully assimilate Jenna, unable to control the Demoness of Unaging's body, and was in His weakest state. He adjusted the monocle on His right eye.

The Fool's manifestation outside the special mirror world suddenly had its black trench coat rise dramatically.

Anthony and Ludwig were enveloped in gray-white fog, as if transported to another hidden, bizarre world.

The next second, before Jenna's distorted, pained expression, now tinged with hatred, a searing sea of light appeared, engulfing her entirely.

Supernova!

Fueled by dual-pathway godhood and power, this was a Sufferer's reenactment ability!

It was nearly identical to the supernova used by Mr. Fool during the battle of Sefirah Castle.

Jenna's body instantly disintegrated, vaporizing before it could even evaporate. Amon, along with the surrounding mirror world, was also affected by the supernova, leading to inevitable collapse.

The special mirror world also began to crumble. This collapse spread for a moment but was halted by Primordial Demoness Cheek, preventing it from affecting the depths where Lumian resided.

The brilliant light that illuminated the darkness gradually faded. Suddenly, a holy glow, filled with redemption, shot out from the River of Fate.

Amon reappeared, still wearing His monocle, pointed hat, and black magician's robe.

He saw that amidst the chaotic turbulence of space-time, in the deep darkness, specks of soul fragments glowed faintly. Some belonged to Jenna, and some to the mirrored Creator. They intertwined, yet had not been entirely annihilated.

Even a supernova explosion could not completely kill the mirrored Creator, even in Her incomplete, feminine aspect!

These tangled soul fragments were on the verge of reassembling, ready for resurrection.

Deep within the special mirror world, standing before Lumian's mutated body, Mr. Fool raised his starlit cane with his gloved right hand, his black trench coat silently billowing.

Above him, far in the infinite heights, a door of light, tinged faintly with bluish-black light, flickered in and out of existence, surrounded by gray-white fog.

Sefirah Castle!

A shadow seemed to briefly open its eyes.

As Mr. Fool's starlit cane pointed toward Lumian, the tangled fragments of the mirrored Creator and Jenna's soul outside the special mirror world were instantly transferred onto Lumian.

Grafting!

A conceptual and physical Grafting, leading to a renewed fusion!

The Primordial Demoness, who had been manifesting and battling around the special mirror world, let out an amazed sound.

It was enough to satisfy any male's vanity.

However, unlike the earlier fusion, Omebella's bloodline and Zedus's soul fragments had now been activated, each merging with the Demoness of Apocalypse Cheek and the resurrecting Tudor.

The mirrored Creator's soul fragments, as if drawn by some mystical force, carried Jenna's portion and merged into the flesh mass alternating between Omebella's face and the Demoness of Apocalypse Cheek.

Mr. Fool added a glimmer of starlight to the remaining fragments of Jenna's soul, allowing them to withstand the erosion and fusion process for some time.

…

The countryside dreamscape was now in shambles.

Madam Magician and Madam Justice, who had assumed Mythical Creature forms through self-hypnosis, fought fiercely against the ancient dragon Edefana for an extended period.

During the battle, Madam Justice suddenly noticed two incongruities:

Our opponent is merely a Sequence 2 mind dragon. How can it continually suppress Fors and me when we carry a Grade 0 Sealed Artifact?

Moreover, Fors hadn't once thought to divide her shadow to support other battlefields…

At that moment, Edefana's ancient voice echoed, 'I have no desire to be your enemy. I am merely compelled.

'As a dragon born in the mid-First Epoch, as ancient as Ankewelt, unlike Ariehogg and the others who only witnessed part of the Second Epoch's history, don't you wonder how I, a mere Sequence 2, have survived until now?'

Chapter 1112: One Trouble After Another

Hearing Edefana's words, Madam Magician froze for a moment.

She finally realized she should be using her high-speed Blinking to support other battlefields.

That was something she normally would have done.

From the very beginning, I've been subtly influenced? Edefana doesn't seem to be just Sequence 2. Madam Magician quickly followed her spiritual intuition, her figure Blinking rapidly as she appeared in various places across the Northern and Southern Continents.

Then, she found that the battlefields were stabilizing, with the forces of the orthodox Churches and government organizations gaining the upper hand. The only difference was how quickly they would eliminate the disruptors.

The only area with serious issues was beyond her ability to intervene or participate.

It was far too high-level!

While helping allied forces quickly clear out cultists, she redirected most of her attention back to Miss Audrey's dreamscape.

At this moment, Edefana, the ancient dragon, had stopped fighting and landed on the stone tower deep within the dreamscape.

Madam Justice had also reverted from her Mythical Creature form, gazing at Edefana. In Dragonese, she asked, "A normal Sequence 2 dragon couldn't survive from the mid-First Epoch to the present?"

Edefana's terrifying lizard-like face, its gray-white scales slightly dim, revealed an eerily human smile.

"Even Angels have a limited lifespan: it's just that most Angels don't live long enough to reach it.

"Vampire is a pathway that significantly increases lifespan. Didn't Round Moon Olmer have to seal Himself in a coffin, trying to slow the passage of time? He's also a Sequence 2 Angel, and nearly two thousand years younger than me."

Madam Magician flickered rapidly, ready to prevent Edefana from escaping, while muttering inwardly. Two thousand years older than Duke Round Moon Olmer? Truly worthy of being a dragon born in the mid-First Epoch…

Initially, she thought Duke Round Moon's age exceeded 3,000 years. After gaining more knowledge of mysticism, she suspected the Sanguine duke could be over 5,000 years old!

The Fifth Epoch was currently in its 1,359th year, and the Fourth Epoch lasted 1,233 years, adding up to 2,592 years. Duke Round Moon existed before the Cataclysm, so He was widely believed to be over 3,000 years old.

Madam Magician confirmed that this duke had truly followed the Sanguine's ancestor, Lilith, so His age must include the 1,086 years of the Third Epoch.

Moreover, Lilith's "demise" wasn't the hallmark event marking the end of the Second Epoch, being 800-900 years apart, during which Olmer followed Her for several centuries.

Considering all this, Madam Magician estimated Duke Round Moon to be at least 5,000 years old. Even as an Angel of the long-lived Sanguine, He still had to live an abject life in a coffin to prolong His life.

Yet Edefana claimed to be almost two thousand years older?

That aligned with His self-introduction as a dragon born in the mid-First Epoch.

Madam Justice discerned the unspoken meaning in Edefana's words and probed, "You were once corrupted by a power higher than your own, and even now, it controls you?"

If Edefana had used a Marauder pathway's Sealed Artifact to siphon life or relied on a similar method, He wouldn't have posed such a question.

Edefana's aged, lizard-like face appeared somewhat dazed.

"You're perceptive.

"I am a dragon of the mind domain."

Which means..., polluted by the Chaos Sea? Like the Dragon of Imagination, Ankewelt? Then influenced and driven by the godhood of the Primordial God Almighty? Madam Magician's gaze sharpened. "It was the Primordial God Almighty who sent you to delay us?" R̃

Edefana chuckled, producing a deep, buzzing laugh.

"Yes, I'm able to tell you this because the influence he exerted over me has rapidly receded. Without His influence, I will soon age and die."

"Rapidly receded?" Madam Justice repeated, her tone heavy with foreboding.

Edefana unfurled His massive wings, His gray-white scales dimming further.

"Yes. He is retracting the powers he was covertly reviving. This isn't due to any mishap but because He is concentrating His will.

"Tonight, he has two opportunities for true resurrection-two!"

Edefana's voice brimmed with fear.

…

When the mirrored Creator's soul fragments, mixed with Jenna's, fused into Lumian's body, Lumian, tormented by the relentless cycle of pain and madness, his consciousness on the brink of collapse, suddenly ceased the unconscious twitching and twisting of his head.

His iron-black eyes became filled with violent emotions:

Jenna...

He wanted to stop struggling, to let the collapse happen, but he also understood why Jenna had become what she was.

He raised his head, letting out a pained roar.

It was a scream of anger, hatred, madness, and defiance.

At that moment, Lumian seemed to hear Aurore's gentle voice: "There's still a chance.

"Leave it to me."

Lumian seemed to see Aurore's phantom, cloaked in her thick golden hair.

His body began to change, becoming more feminine on one side.

His feminine aspect grew active, striving to merge Jenna's soul fragments with his own.

The mirrored Creator was truly Fooled, no longer caring about Jenna's soul fragments, allowing them to detach and integrate into Lumian's feminine side.

His consciousness focused solely on the Demoness of Apocalypse, Cheek, and the Giant Queen, Omebella.

They were fused together.

Balance was restored, but it was vastly different from before.

Lumian's body stopped collapsing, quickly expanding outward, gaining new life.

The two masses of flesh protruding from his torso surged toward his neck, vying to replace his head.

They competed, even as they began to fuse, High above, in the infinite heights, the faint light door tinged with bluish-black and surrounded by gray- white fog reappeared. Mr. Fool alternated the use of Fooling and Grafting.

The two fusing flesh masses abruptly shifted to Lumian's left shoulder, writhing as they formed a dripping wet head.

This head had two faces, one on each side. The right face was identical to the Primordial Demoness, Cheek - stunningly beautiful, pure, yet exuding maternal radiance. The left face resembled Alista Tudor but bore jet-black hair and a flawless, nearly divine beauty.

The madness and characteristics in Lumian's body converged into this head. Each face exuded its own raw, violent, or pathological nature, an unrestrained desire to destroy and create everything.

The two faces did not cease merging. At times, they overlapped; at times, they split apart, ultimately forming a vortex that absorbed their features.

From within the vortex, a liquid containing all colors and possibilities seeped out, leaving the face in chaos.

Deep within the chaos, a new face slowly began to take shape.

The previously grinning, observing Primordial Demoness, Cheek, abruptly retreated, disappearing from the area.

Before vanishing, Her black hair fully unfurled, thick and slick like venomous snakes, whipping furiously through the air as though resisting an unseen force.

Lumian, his mind flooded with pain, madness, and destructive desires, sensed an exalted consciousness, gazing down upon all, being born within the new head on his left shoulder and rapidly growing stronger.

Mr. Fool, witnessing this, prepared to use a Wish to suppress and delay the Primordial God Almighty's resurrection, seeking time to find a solution.

The new face in the chaos grew clearer.

In an instant, Amon hurled an object into the special mirror world, landing it in Mr. Fool's hand.

It was an extraordinarily bizarre dark-golden mask, large enough to cover a human face.

Lumian, his face twisted in agony and madness, recognized the mask.

It had been obtained from the sea prayer ritual, originating from Loki, later given to the Aurora Order.

And now, it was here.

Mr. Fool caught the mask, and a shadow from the faintly visible door of light above descended upon the dark-golden mask.

Mr. Fool pressed the mask onto the new face emerging from the chaos.

The face did not resist or stop him because, still unresurrected, He had been Fooled-Fooled into believing the mask would make Him unimaginably powerful.

The dark-golden mask merged seamlessly with the face, becoming inseparable.

The head paused, no longer absorbing Lumian's madness or characteristics.

The two faces reappeared on its sides-one belonging to Primordial Demoness Cheek, radiating maternal brilliance, the other to the more handsome and perfect Alista Tudor.

Each face held an unmistakable hint of madness and destruction.

The gray-white fog and the bluish-black-tinged door of light high above disappeared.

On Lumian's right shoulder, flesh writhed, abruptly forming a new head with two faces. One was the radiant Aurore, the other, the exquisite Jenna. Both had closed eyes, no consciousness, and bloodstained features.

Elsewhere in the mirror world.

Red Angel Medici, intending to leave without bothering with the two lunatics, sensed the changes deep within the special mirror world.

Here's the chance!

Though Medici didn't fully understand what had occurred, He hesitated not for a moment. Swiftly assessing the situation, He made His decision and prepared to execute His original plan.

His goals for today were twofold: to suppress any signs of the Primordial God Almighty's resurrection and to cull Lumian Lee, securing ultimate victory in the battle for 0-01.

He had no fear of The Fool's interference. Since He dared to come, He had a way to ensure The Fool couldn't act in time.

Red Angel Medici advanced, retrieving lifelike metallic soldier figurines from a small black pouch at His waist.

Each one contained fused Beyonder characterístics from different pathways, effectively making them Sealed Artifacts.

Medici scattered the figurines, allowing them to grow enormous, gain life, and surround Him.

The Red of War legion reappeared.

Meanwhile, within the astral world composed of abstract concepts and strange symbols.

The childlike doodle sun had long become a blazing golden-yellow fireball, terrifying in its intensity, opposing the crimson round moon beyond the invisible barrier.

The burning surface of the sun, pure and sacred, suddenly darkened in patches.

These dark patches extended outward, forming a colossal luminous humanoid figure surrounded by chaos.

The luminous humanoid instantly descended into the depths of the special mirror world, engulfing all of The Fool's manifestations!

Chapter 1113: A Long Struggle with Myself

The enormous luminous figure wrapped in chaos remained tethered to the blazing golden sun, never breaking free.

"It" was firmly restrained, like the hidden impulses and madness buried deep within many hearts—though present and impossible to ignore, they remained confined under the dam of reason and humanity in normal circumstances.

Moreover, the chaotic luminous figure formed from the sun's dark patches descended from the astral world into the depths of the special mirror world without impacting the blazing golden sun's efforts to maintain the invisible barrier against the crimson round moon.

Instead, the sun burned brighter, more intensely, and with greater sanctity.

At this moment, abstract concepts representing "gaze" and "observation" emerged within the astral world, all directed at the radiant golden sun.

The sun, illuminating the astral world and the entire world, remained unmoved, as if silently responding: Once, I betrayed myself.

Later, I spent over two millennia wrestling and contending with another version of myself. Finally, I achieved a temporary victory, reached a balance, and made Him serve me, while I remained who I am.

Now, I am betting everything.

Letting my allies become the Origins of Disaster, the Calamity of Destruction is my only chance to secure ultimate victory and avert the apocalypse!

Whether or not this succeeds, whether or not it leads to a tragic end, I will give it my all.

I would rather break than yield!

The colossal luminous figure cloaked in chaos enveloped all of The Fool's manifestations in the special mirror world, relentlessly pursuing His Blinking, preventing him from approaching Lumian at the speed of light and with immense energy.

One was manipulated, misled. One was Fooled, Grafted. Neither had any attention to spare for Lumian.

On the other side of the special mirror world, the Primordial Demoness retreated, Her black hair still thrashing in the air like a writhing cluster of serpents. Her breathtakingly beautiful face twisted into a new allure that had yet to fully unfold, still resisting some invisible force.

Nearby, the mirrored Empress Roselle silently watched, refraining from intervening.

She could not defy the will of the mirrored Creator, also known as the Primordial Demoness, Cheek. She could only hope the ensuing catastrophe would not lead to the complete collapse and destruction of the special mirror world.

For Her, unable to leave this place yet, such an outcome would be a death sentence.

As for Zaratul, who had previously hidden here, He had already fled, returning to Castle Dylan.

Lumian felt a surge of violent, cruel, twisted, and pathological thoughts emanating from the left side of his body. Like a relentless tsunami, they battered his mind and will, attempting to complete his assimilation.

From his right side came deathly silence, sadness, pain, and despair—emotions just as overwhelming and now spilling over into his consciousness.

These conflicting forces resonated with Lumian's current state to varying degrees, on the verge of blending into one another and bringing about the inevitable descent into complete madness.

In his blurred vision, silhouettes flashed by, beams of light flared up and dimmed again, all becoming indistinct.

Suddenly, a voice switching between near and far echoed in his ears: "My wish is:

"Lumian Lee can maintain moments of clarity, rationality, and humanity each day."

Destiny was sealed; madness was unavoidable. Even a Miracle Invoker could not fully reverse it. The only option was to exploit loopholes and lower the difficulty of the wish, allowing Lumian to oscillate between madness and clarity.

Nothing dictated that inevitable madness precluded occasional moments of lucidity!

As for how "occasional" was defined, that would be left to Fooling and Error to decide.

Lumian's blurry vision suddenly sharpened. The pain and fury still wrecked his body, but his thoughts and perceptions were no longer clouded.

He saw a vast array of figurines materialize ahead of him. Each wore uniquely colored metal armor, their faces sculpted with uncanny precision. Towering over ten meters tall, they marched in formation like a vast army.

Lumian also saw the figurines encircling Red Angel Medici. The King of Angels had revealed His Mythical Creature form, composed of deep violet, almost blood-colored, nearly invisible flames, steel-like bones, complex terrifying symbols, and bloodstained black armor.

Between His brow, a blood-red sigil shaped like a banner was prominently raised, vivid and dripping.

Medici had completed His sacrificial ritual in advance, summoning the aid of the essence of war.

The head on Lumian's left shoulder, adorned with the bizarre dark-golden mask, suddenly turned. The face resembling Alista Tudor now directly faced Medici.

The blood-red sigil between the brows of this face similarly protruded, surrounded by indescribable dark symbols that seemed to herald ultimate chaos.

He sneered with disdain and mockery, as if saying to Medici: "You coward, fancy seeing you here. Ready to be devoured by me again?"

Lumian then fully manifested his Mythical Creature form and drew a simple longsword from the Traveler's Bag that had fallen to the ground, untouched by prior chaos.

The longsword rapidly enlarged, matching his towering frame of over thirty meters.

It ignited with black flames, embodying destruction and madness.

Medici raised His own flaming greatsword. The two fiery giants clashed with a resounding boom.

Almost simultaneously, the soldiers of the Red of War legion raised their arms, leaning back slightly.

Their eyes burned iron-black, reflecting the pale markings on Lumian's body. In their hands, spears of deep violet, almost blood-colored, flames materialized.

They could simultaneously share all of Red Angel Medici's abilities and spirituality!

Swoosh! Swoosh! Swoosh!

While Medici intercepted Lumian, a forest of flame-spears shot out, dense enough to obscure the sky.

Each spear targeted the vulnerable points on Lumian's body.

The masked head on Lumian's left shoulder turned once more.

This time, the maternal and radiant face of the Demoness of Apocalypse, Cheek, faced Red Angel Medici.

The face smiled sweetly, causing Medici's movements to slow slightly, and the deluge of blood-colored flame-spears to falter, as if held back by reluctance.

Next, Lumian's body grew illusory and layered, like projections from countless mirrors.

Rumble!

Countless flame-spears pierced through his body, triggering violent explosions that annihilated every projection in an instant.

Lumian's figure reemerged on the other side.

Red Angel Medici gave him no respite, transforming into a blazing comet of deep violet, blood-like flames, hurtling toward Lumian in a flash.

The soldiers of the Red of War legion followed suit, turning into similar flaming comets, roaring down from every direction with unstoppable force, using area-of-effect attacks to bypass the interference of the Fog of War.

As a King of Angels, Medici enabled His soldiers to share His rank. In this moment, it was as if nearly a hundred Red Angels were simultaneously attacking Lumian.

This was one of Medici's most potent abilities. Its only drawback was the massive expenditure of spirituality.

Effectively, it compressed what could have been a prolonged battle into a single, overwhelming burst, trading time for spatial dominance.

As an ancient King of Angels, Medici knew that the Eternal Blazing Sun could not delay much longer. Victory had to be swift, so He began with an all-or-nothing gambit.

Outside the special mirror world, Amon, wearing a monocle and pointed soft hat, took no further action, playing the role of a true spectator.

Neither obstructing nor aiding,

His expression remained unchanged as He bit into a red apple He had somehow stolen.

Faced with the flaming comets descending from every direction, Lumian did not retreat. His eyes burned with madness and battle lust.

He growled, for the second time today, invoking the aid of the City of Calamity.

The iron-black bones interwoven into his body and etched with complex symbols and patterns suddenly developed fine cracks. The violet-red flames roaring over them deepened in hue, taking on a bloodier shade.

Clad in pitch-black armor marred with bloodstains, he ignored the other fiery comets and locked onto the one transformed from Red Angel Medici, swinging his increasingly immense and terrifying Sword of Destruction.

Boom!

Deep violet and crimson flames scattered in all directions, forming a storm that engulfed the surroundings.

The explosion, imbued with destructive energy, left visible cracks in the depths of the special mirror world, rendering it precariously close to shattering.

Amid the roiling flames, the figure of Red Angel Medici emerged, a deep wound carved across His chest and abdomen, from which flowed flames so dark that even their depth seemed erased.

Lumian was in an even more dire state. His bloodstained black armor was tattered, and the iron-black bones intertwined with intricate patterns and symbols were heavily damaged and fractured. The deep purple, blood-hued flames barely clung to him, a faint layer that seemed ready to be extinguished by a passing breeze.

Shards of glass were scattered around him, remnants of his mirror self, which had suffered devastating destruction.

Lumian grinned, his smile bold and unrestrained.

He suddenly plunged the battered Sword of Destruction into the ground.

The already strained area collapsed with a thunderous crash, disintegrating entirely.

As the region crumbled, Lumian plunged into the chaotic flow of time and space, descending into darkness.

With his body undergoing new birth, he waved at the similarly falling Medici and the Red of War legion, his smile seemingly asking, "Care to join me? In the chaos of time and space, teams tend to get scattered, you know."

The Red Angel whistled in response, as if to say, "I can handle this on my own."

The two had no time for further interaction. The silent, perilous storm of space-time swept in, separating them instantly.

umian plummeted downward at great speed, using his Teleportation ability to evade the most dangerous zones.

He could no longer sense the outside world and had no means of escaping this place directly.

In a blink of an eye—or perhaps longer—Lumian landed before a massive, half-collapsed palace ablaze with invisible and colorless flames.

The depths of the special mirror world led to Fourth Epoch Trier.

Chapter 1114: Omebella

As soon as Lumian's feet steadied, the head on his left shoulder began to sway from side to side.

Whether it was the hauntingly beautiful yet morbid face of Cheek or the savage and crazed gaze of Alista Tudor, both seemed perplexed.

Their consciousness, spirit, personality, and spirituality, blended and tangled amidst the resurrection of the Primordial God Almighty, had become a jumble. Eventually, they separated into yin and yang, left and right, forming a new consciousness and spirit, though still marked distinctly by Cheek and Tudor.

These were ultimately sealed within the dark-golden peculiar mask of the yet-to-fully-revived Primordial God Almighty, allowing only instincts to seep through, each affecting the respective face.

Their instinctive reactions seemed to tell Lumian that this place was different from their memories or expectations.

This was the Blood Palace of Alista Tudor, the site of His ultimate downfall. It should have retained remnants of the leaked power of various sefirot, yet it appeared unusually "clean," with only formless flames burning everywhere and evaporating black pus that perpetually dripped but never dried.

With the blood-red sigil on his brow protruding, Lumian involuntarily advanced toward the half-collapsed, ostentatious palace. Along the way, the formless and colorless flames parted for him, seemingly welcoming the return of the emperor of this kingdom, the master of this palace. Lumian only had to avoid the dripping black pus as it fell back to the ground.

Standing at the half-collapsed entrance, Lumian—with three heads—found his path blocked by an area of absolute darkness—so dark that even the concept of depth seemed devoured. He had no choice but to circle around to the palace's side entrance.

Clicking his tongue as if mocking Alista Tudor, he muttered, "Utilizing the power of the City of Calamity, the Blood Emperor was ultimately killed by the River of Eternal Darkness. Even His corpse has become different.

"Sometimes, these forces repel each other to extremes; other times, they fuse. And once they fuse, it spells annihilation, absorbing and neutralizing the nearby remnant powers of other sefirot."

"Your Majesty the Blood Emperor, are you planning to reclaim your corpse? I'm afraid it will drag you back into the River of Eternal Darkness—no, ultimate annihilation."

Speaking to himself, Lumian moved toward the palace's side entrance.

He intended to wait by Alista Tudor's divine corpse, anticipating the arrival of Red Angel Medici.

That spot would be ideal for him to fight in his current state—half of what Alista Tudor once was, though without a fully "restored" rank.

When he reached the crumbling side entrance, now narrow enough to squeeze through, Lumian suddenly noticed two corpses standing on either side of the doorway.

One male and one female, both burned into charred remains by formless flames, stood preserved in their scorched states. Each had a left hand swollen and translucent, its bluish hue marred by yellow-green pus flowing within.

The veins on their left hands were unnaturally clear, and along with the palm lines, they formed intricate and densely packed symbols and patterns.

"Left Hand of Decay…

"Why are the bestowed of the Monarch of Decay placed here as corpse statues?" Lumian murmured, lowering his gaze. As expected, he saw ancient Tudor coins beneath each of the four corpses, with denominations of "2," "7," and "13."

Lumian's face twitched, a wave of violent and destructive emotions surging within him.

Summoning a black-flame greatsword in one hand, he prepared to slash at the four corpses.

Suddenly, a gentle female voice came from nearby: "Their purpose is to symbolize one thing: making anything that can go wrong be most likely to go wrong."

Lumian turned both his heads simultaneously, spotting Madame Pualis, dressed in a black gown. Her subtle brows framed bright brown eyes, her brown hair styled in a high bun.

In her arms, she cradled a chubby-cheeked, adorably plump infant girl.

The baby girl no longer appeared ethereal but fully real, tangible, and vivid.

…

In the depths of Underground Trier.

Under the corrosive fog of history, the Tree of Shadow's trunk became increasingly illusory. Its bark and branches began peeling away.

Though the Tree of Shadow was intimately tied to every human in Trier and could not be completely destroyed, its aura weakened rapidly. The canopy extending above ground receded deeper meter by meter.

Suah and Tirié struggled with all Their might to hold the line, yet They could not reverse the trend.

…

Somewhere in Fourth Epoch Trier

Louis Gustav watched as the infants on his body dropped to the ground, dying instantly and decaying into rotted corpses.

0–59—The Divine Kingdom Without People!

The undead infants never had the chance to be reborn. Exposed to The Fourth Sun suspended high in the sky, they were instantly purified and vanished.

Birthing children was not an evil act for the Mother but a sacred one, immune to The Fourth Sun's purification. However, transforming the infants into undead made them susceptible to its power.

Losing all the infants, the "maternal body" fell with a look of anguish, rapidly disintegrating into a pool of blood and flesh. The flesh writhed as if attempting to reform into a bird's nest.

But it died mid-reformation, simultaneously decaying and regenerating.

Holy, radiant sunlight enveloped it.

…

Red Angel Medici and part of His metal soldiers landed in a desolate wilderness shrouded in gray-white fog, flickering between reality and illusion.

In this wilderness, shadowy figures wandered silently, moving slowly toward the edges—to them.

…

Seeing Madame Pualis holding the infant Omebella, Lumian beamed. Lifting the newly condensed Sword of Destruction, he prepared to strike.

"There's no need to rush. It's been a while since we had a conversation," Madame Pualis said gently. A stretch of wilderness appeared around her, creating distance between herself and Lumian. Her gaze shifted between Lumian's face and Aurore's tightly closed eyes, filled with a trace of sorrow.

Rumble!

Amid the booming explosions, her figure appeared on the other side of Paramita. Her tone was soft and soothing.

"It's pointless. Omebella has truly been born. The anticipated outcome has arrived, and nothing will change now."

Her maternal voice calmed the fury and madness in Lumian's heart.

Stopping his attack, Lumian said, "Omebella…"

He initially wanted to ask when Omebella was born, but a sharp pain in his head brought a sense of spiritual foreboding.

Instead, he asked, "In the dream city, why didn't you—or rather, the Mother Goddess of Depravity—help the Celestial Worthy? Why let Him fail?"

Madame Pualis, cradling infant Omebella, smiled and answered, "When I entered the dream city, aside from wanting to see you and Aurore, I had only one goal:

"To act on behalf of the Great Mother to eliminate any chance for the Celestial Worthy to reverse the situation if such an opportunity arose.

"However, all of you did an excellent job. You didn't give me that chance."

"Why?" Lumian asked with a frown.

Shouldn't balance have been maintained?

Maintaining her smile, Madame Pualis replied, "After the Hostel incident, the Mother's thoughts changed. She wished for The Fool to prevail.

"This way, The Fool would begin a process of simultaneously opposing and integrating the Celestial Worthy, while also accommodating Sefirah Castle.

Such a process would be difficult to disrupt. Facing another crisis, even if The Fool wanted to give up and hand everything to the Celestial Worthy—or if the Celestial Worthy wanted to compromise and assist The Fool in controlling Sefirah Castle—the resulting state wouldn't be easily broken or altered. It would take a long time."

"Before such a state could fully change, the Lord of Mysteries's power would be at best comparable to that of Grisha Adam during Project Vortex. And even achieving this would require the Celestial Worthy's full cooperation."

"No matter what abilities such a Lord of Mysteries employs, it's impossible for Him to break through the barrier formed by the mirrored Creator in a short period of time. He can't prevent what's about to happen. The Mother has been anticipating this for a long time."

Lumian recalled the events that had just transpired and suddenly realized the night's major events were far from over.

Laughing, he said, "So, even you don't trust the Celestial Worthy to honor His promises after fully awakening?"

"No one would trust a Great Old One that symbolizes deceit," Madame Pualis replied gently, rocking the baby in her arms as if coaxing Omebella back to sleep.

Lumian glanced at Omebella and asked, "When was She truly born?

"And what will Her birth bring?"

With a soft smile, Madame Pualis answered, "After you were dragged into the special mirror world."

She explained with a smile, "Calamity needs to stay away from the mother. But have you ever considered—you're not the calamity, but the Mother—the one who gave birth to Omebella."

"The great terror in the special mirror world came from the fusion of the two pathways of Calamity, so it naturally symbolizes calamity?" Lumian suddenly understood the true meaning behind Mr. Fool's revelation.

This was a fate even great existences couldn't fully grasp.

Madame Pualis gazed wistfully at Aurore, sighed, and said, "That's one interpretation. But there's a deeper reason."

She turned to Lumian, her brown eyes deep, and asked, "Have you noticed? Tudor and Cheek's twins are also a boy and a girl, an elder sister and a younger brother."

An elder sister and younger brother… Yes, Krismona and the Demoness of Gray Judith were once siblings! Lumian was suddenly struck by a deep sense of foreboding.

Madame Pualis smiled again and said, "For true gods of the Hunter and Demoness pathways, it's normal for twins to be a boy and a girl. Anything else would be unusual. But why elder sister and younger brother, and not elder brother and younger sister?"

"Because They're also a reflection of Omebella and Zedus in some way.

"As for why…" Madame Pualis glanced down at the baby in her arms and smiled. "Omebella is far older than you think.

"She and Zedus were born in the mid-First Epoch. At that time, Giant King Aurmir was still a purely mad demigod-level monster.

"Their mother, strictly speaking, wasn't the Great Mother, but the Brood Hive ripped off from the Great Mother. When the Brood Hive was still within the Great Mother, Omebella and Zedus had yet to gestate.

"More importantly, Their father—Their true father—the one who fathered them with the Brood Hive.

"Guess who He is?"

…

In Madam Justice Audrey's dream.

The ancient dragon, Edefana, gazed at Madam Magician and Madam Justice, His voice buzzing as He said, "I can offer you one more piece of critical intelligence, originating from the mid-First Epoch."

Both Madam Magician and Madam Justice tensed inexplicably.

In a tone dripping with resentment and hatred, Edefana said, "The mother of Giant Queen Omebella is the Brood Hive currently sealed in the Western Continent.

"Her father is:

"The Primordial God Almighty!"

Chapter 1115: Crimson

'Primordial God Almighty?' Lumian raised an eyebrow.

All around him, formless, colorless flames suddenly flared up, blazing fiercely.

Madame Pualis, cradling the infant Omebella, smiled and said, 'Within the two pathways of Calamity lies the arrangement for the resurrection of the Primordial God Almighty. During the union of Tudor and Cheek to conceive Krismona and Judith, the consciousness of the Primordial God Almighty also partially revived. Naturally, that pair of twins were younger brother and elder sister.

'Conversely, if what fused into your body wasn't Omebella and Zedus, but other divine offspring of the Great Mother, they would have been completely ineffective during that fusion. They lack the necessary symbols and mystical connections.'

Hearing this, the head on Lumian's left shoulder turned from side to side, the faces of Cheek and Alista Tudor alternating as they gazed at Madame Pualis.

Lumian struggled to suppress the urge to incinerate this part of Paramita and destroy it entirely. Suddenly, a thought flashed through his mind.

So that's how it is. Omebella was indeed killed by a direct relative. That explains her curse on the City of Silver…

Previously, Lumian had speculated that Omebella's final death stemmed from the citizens of City of Silver killing Her. Since they were Her followers, essentially her 'children,' the act of filicide—or human deicide—

could naturally trigger the curse: 'Must die at the hands of a direct relative, or else become an evil spirit.'

Now it seemed that while this might be one of the reasons, it was certainly not the only one—nor even the most crucial.

The true reason was that Omebella's initial death was orchestrated by the Ancient Sun God!

As the successor to the Primordial God Almighty, the Ancient Sun God might have had fragments of the Primordial God Almighty's consciousness and spirit awakening within Him at that time—though still suppressible!

Under these circumstances, in Omebella's eyes, wasn't it essentially a god imbued with Her father's consciousness and spirit using powers derived from Him to kill Her?

Lumian suddenly understood why Madame Pualis had lured the padre into personally killing the newborn Omebella back in Cordu.

If it were only about fulfilling the symbolic act of being killed by a direct relative, Madame Pualis herself, as the mother, could have handled it. There would have been no need for such elaborate arrangements.

The only explanation was that infant Omebella had to be killed once by her biological father—the padre, who symbolized the Eternal Blazing Sun. Only then would all the necessary symbols be complete, forming a closed loop and becoming valid in the realm of mysticism.

Eternal Blazing Sun… Eternal Blazing Sun…

Lumian's pupils dilated as he was struck by a sudden realization.

Once he understood that making the padre become Omebella's father was to evoke the symbol of the Eternal Blazing Sun, one question had always puzzled him.

Why the Eternal Blazing Sun specifically?

Wouldn't the God of Steam and Machinery, the God of Knowledge and Wisdom, or the Lord of Storms suffice?

This question hadn't lingered long, though. Realizing that Aurore possessed the unique conditions of being a transmigrator, having the gray fog's aura, being a Warlock, and having a younger brother, Lumian had concluded it was mere coincidence. It just so happened that Cordu worshiped the Eternal Blazing Sun.

But now, he suddenly understood—it wasn't a coincidence. It was a necessary condition.

Aside from being a transmigrator, having the gray fog's aura, being a Warlock, and the sibling relationship, there was another implicit condition: residing in a region that worshiped the Eternal Blazing Sun.

Lumian recalled his time as a casual believer of the Eternal Blazing Sun, occasionally attending Mass at the Saint Sith Cathedral in Cordu, and remembered certain praises from the padre.

'Great Father!'

'Father of all living beings!'

These weren't official titles of the Eternal Blazing Sun, yet they were written into the scriptures, frequently mentioned in propaganda and hymns, and genuinely existed!

The Great Father!

Lumian looked at Madame Pualis and blurted out, 'Is there something wrong with the Eternal Blazing Sun?'

Madame Pualis smiled faintly and replied, 'Long ago, fragments of the Primordial God Almighty's consciousness began reviving within Him. For a time, He would even occasionally lose control of Himself.

'After an extensive period, He finally managed to suppress His alienated self and achieve a fragile balance, which allowed Him to partially harness the power of the Chaos Sea. However, He had to tread carefully and limit the frequency of use. Otherwise, the corruption and alienation would deepen, and the balance would collapse.'

Madame Pualis smiled brilliantly and asked rhetorically, 'Now you understand why the true birth of Omebella is so significant, don't you?

'Her true father is the Primordial God Almighty. Her current father is the Eternal Blazing Sun, within whom the consciousness of the Primordial God Almighty has revived.

'When She was born in essence, the Eternal Blazing Sun, as a symbol of the Primordial God Almighty, will be significantly strengthened. The mystical connection between the two will blend together.

'With the symbol of the Primordial God Almighty greatly reinforced, do you think the fragile balance the Eternal Blazing Sun has been maintaining can still exist?'

In the astral world, where abstract concepts and symbolic representations intertwined.

The radiant, golden Sun, connected to a blazing giant enshrouded in Chaos, suddenly broke off its battle with The Fool.

He contracted instantly, merging once again with the sacredly glowing golden Sun.

The Sun's surface abruptly darkened, patches of shadow spreading swiftly to cover half of its 'face.'

The gigantic golden sun alternated between the form of a handsome, energetic young man with short golden hair draped in a pure white robe, and a blazing, searingly bright fireball.

The young man's expression grew increasingly distorted, His body half-shrouded in dark shadows seeping from within, gradually dissolving. The dark patches on the terrifying fireball expanded, while the divine radiance diminished.

Suddenly, behind the golden sun, a silhouette subtly emerged.

It was a female figure dressed in layered but unadorned pitch-black robes, dotted with what seemed like brilliant stars. From Her ribs and waist extended two pairs of arms covered in short, deep-black fur.

Evernight Goddess!

In the Goddess's six hands, two held heavy black scythes, two cradled ancient bird-shaped golden ornaments, and two raised a massive sword seemingly forged from condensed orange-red light, aiming it at the Eternal Blazing Sun.

The young man with the distorted face in the white robe glanced at the spot where the Evernight Goddess had previously stood and saw a terrifying feathered serpent with massive wings blocking a fissure with its own reflection, maintaining the barrier.

The feathered serpent could only hold out for a short time, and even then, only because the Evernight Goddess had not yet left the astral world.

The Eternal Blazing Sun turned toward the Evernight Goddess, asking in excruciating pain, 'When… did you find out?'

Two of the Evernight Goddess's hands holding the bird-shaped golden ornaments underwent rapid changes, causing an illusory, wide, dark, colorless river to manifest behind Her.

The river flowed silently, drawing close to the Evernight Goddess.

'I had some suspicions during the Cataclysm. After obtaining Destined Madness, I fully understood your anomalies.' Evernight Goddess's voice was soft, almost as if She were soothing the Eternal Blazing Sun to sleep.

Simultaneously, the heavy black scythe and the massive orange-red sword descended upon the Eternal Blazing Sun at an unhurried pace, yet their movement carried the force of the colorless, dark river. The progress of the dark patches spreading across the surface of the golden sun slowed.

The once-handsome and vibrant Eternal Blazing Sun, Aucuses, began to laugh.

Struggling to suppress His alienation and natural defensive instincts, He looked earnestly at the Evernight Goddess and pleaded, 'Please kill me.'

He would rather die as a god than lose Himself and linger on in torment!

Suddenly, His face contorted again, and the dark patches overtook the sun's surface. An ancient voice seemed to echo from across history: 'If you kill Him, the barrier will lose another support. Can the barrier be kept up?'

The Evernight Goddess responded without any emotion, 'I just saw you collaborating with the Mother Goddess of Depravity, and you are the strongest Notary.'

Without hesitation, she brought down the heavy black scythe and the massive orange-red sword.

The dark, illusory river seemed to flow closer.

Those awake deep into the night and the strongest beings in the world simultaneously turned their gaze to the sky.

A blazing, brilliant, pure golden sun rose, illuminating the entire world.

In the next second, the sun shattered into fragments of divine light tinged with darkness, scattering to various corners of the world.

It resembled stars falling in a rain-like cascade.

…

Fourth Epoch Trier, beside the half-collapsed ostentatious palace.

Maintaining her smile, Madame Pualis replied, 'The true birth of Omebella holds two additional symbolic significance.

'First, as the divine offspring of the Primordial God Almighty and the Brood Hive, once She fully enters the real world, will the one who once usurped Her identity be able to bear this fate and maintain even a basic state?'

…

In the astral world, where abstract concepts and symbolic representations intertwined.

Earth Mother Lilith, with Her ample and graceful figure, cradling a baby in Her arms and a faint red moon behind Her head, cast Her gaze upon the crumbling golden sun and the figure wielding the scythe and sword.

The illusory crimson moon was suddenly drawn toward Her and leaped into Her body.

Her voluptuous, graceful form cracked instantly, and from the fissures burst forth streams of crimson moonlight.

'Amanises, let me sleep. In this way, my authority and symbolism can still contribute to the barrier,' Earth Mother Lilith spoke with extreme pain and difficulty.

The figure of the Evernight Goddess, Amanises, who had just vanquished the Eternal Blazing Sun, vanished as if erased.

Moments later, She reappeared behind Earth Mother Lilith.

Almost simultaneously, as the Sun fell, new stars lit up in the sky—red, orange, gold, blue, brown… eight in total.

Each was colossal, like new suns, descending to the same height as the crimson full moon, exerting immense pressure on the barrier, causing it to audibly crack and fissure.

The barrier's sustaining power was insufficient.

Having just completely destroyed the Tree of Shadow, leaving only its roots, and not yet had time to eliminate Suah and Tirié, Mr. Fool raised His head and looked toward the astral world.

All His bodies disappeared abruptly, reappearing there as a series of symbols and various abstract concepts.

Some symbols consisted of segments of Pupil-less Eye and Contorted Lines, others were layered doors, and others resembled the hands of a clock.

The teetering invisible barrier steadied.

Forsaken Land of the Gods, atop a majestic and stretching mountain range.

After the darkened sun fell, the darkness here dissipated.

Beside the enormous cross, Visionary Adam, clad in a simple white robe with a thick golden beard, returned to normal. At His feet was a dense black shadow with five heads, exuding malevolence.

Both He and His shadow looked ahead, to a realm encompassing all colors and possibilities, simultaneously illusory and real 'sea.'

From the depths of the Chaos Sea came an ancient voice: 'Come, my child. Merge with me.

'You are out of time. The apocalypse is nigh. Your only choice is to risk merging with me, then contend for dominance on equal footing.'

Visionary Adam and the True Creator, Grisha, shifted Their gazes downward, toward the lands outside the Forsaken Land of the Gods.

They saw the Northern and Southern continents, cities like Backlund, Trier, Feynapotter, and St. Millom, the awakened people stirred by the Sun's eruption, and the mountains, rivers, and seas.

They withdrew Their gazes and stepped into that realm of all-encompassing colors.

They sank beneath its waves.

…

Fourth Epoch Trier, beside the half-collapsed Tudor Palace.

Madame Pualis gazed wistfully at Lumian and Aurore, sighing as she spoke, 'The final important symbolism of Omebella's birth is this:

'Previously, She was born from the Brood Hive and the Primordial God Almighty. Now, She is born from me, representing the Great Mother, and the padre, symbolizing the Eternal Blazing Sun. Since the Eternal Blazing Sun, as a symbol of the Primordial God Almighty, has been strengthened, the Brood Hive, as a symbol of the Great Mother, will undergo similar changes.

'Moreover, the Brood Hive and the Great Mother Themselves have an exceptionally tight, nearly unified mystical connection.

'With such a transformation, what will the Great Mother gain?'

Lumian did not answer. Following his intuition, he directed his gaze upward to the formless, colorless flames.

There, the night sky had appeared, and the crimson full moon suddenly brightened.

Elsewhere in the mirrored world, Franca, who had just shattered the Demoness of Black's true body and her mirrored self, also looked up.

Across the world, every demigod raised their gaze to the sky.

The crimson full moon, which had always seemed perched atop a clock tower, suddenly descended without warning, appearing closer, as if just above everyone's rooftops or nestled in the wild treetops.

A diaphanous, eerie moonlight spread across every corner of the land and sea.

All was crimson, as if drenched in blood.

(End of Volume Seven—The Second Law)

Chapter 1116: Nightmare

What has been, will be again; what has been done, will be done again.

Trier, Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman.

Leon—scholarly in appearance—stood at the front of the living room. His expression was solemn as he preached to the members of the congregation.

He had moved out of Auberge du Coq Doré because the congregation had grown significantly.

Although the local authorities in Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman seemed indifferent to his clandestine spreading of an unorthodox faith, Leon believed caution was paramount—better to avoid any undue attention.

If devout and fanatical believers of the Eternal Blazing Sun or the God of Steam and Machinery within the quartier discovered his heretical teachings, they would report and protest relentlessly at the cathedral. Even if the two major Churches were initially reluctant to act, they'd eventually be forced to intervene!

Moreover, with an increasing number of followers, Leon genuinely needed a temporary location to serve as an underground chapel.

Having finished his sermon, Leon raised his hands, palms outward, his voice suddenly becoming fervent, 'Praise be to you, Beholden to the King of Yellow and Black, Priest of the Apocalypse and War, the Multi-Faced Conqueror of All, the true Malady God!

'Praise be to you, the Ancient One who transcends time, One who remains forever young, Envoy of Disease and Plague, Lady who spreads pain and despair, Protector of humanity's adventurous spirit, companion to the great Malady God!'

The gathered believers in the living room mimicked his gestures and completed the ritual with a final hymn of praise.

As Leon listened to the echoing voices of the congregation, he felt a moment of daze.

He didn't quite understand why the titles of these two deities kept changing, especially the great God of Plague, whose honorific name had been revised multiple times, leaving little resemblance to the original descriptions. Furthermore, the title Malady God had been reinstated, while God of Disease was now regarded as His companion and queen.

Leon had once inquired about this matter with Her Holiness, the Pope. The reply was: 'This reflects the rise in the rank and authority of the God of Plague.'

After the hymns, Leon gestured for the assisting padres to distribute holy communion.

The communion consisted of a drink and a choice of food: one could choose from absinthe, red wine, or cooled boiled water, paired with either mashed potatoes or meat patties.

Seeing his followers savor the communion with genuine satisfaction, Leon felt his year-long efforts had been worthwhile. A profound sense of accomplishment welled within him.

In the afternoon, he left his residence and headed to Église Saint-Robert on Avenue du Marché.

This wasn't because he secretly maintained his faith in the Eternal Blazing Sun but rather because he believed the rapid growth of the Sick Church necessitated greater organization. He and the other bishops needed to prepare for eventualities by advising Her Holiness on perfecting aspects of daily worship, large-scale masses, and the Church's scriptures.

On such matters, the orthodox Churches of the true gods served as excellent references.

Avenue du Marché was as lively as ever. Waves of newcomers streamed in from the nearby steam train station, flowing like rivers into the sea that was Trier. Some opted for carriages, others carried suitcases and walked, while the less cautious had their wallets stolen, leaving them shouting and chasing in distress. The patrolling police offered help with little enthusiasm.

Leon entered Église Saint-Robert and noticed a relatively unfamiliar bishop standing before the altar.

Approaching, he asked curiously, 'Is Bishop Christopher not here today?'

The unfamiliar young bishop gave a complex smile and replied, 'Bishop Christopher has been reassigned. I will be taking over his duties.

'You may call me Yveline.'

Another new bishop… Leon couldn't help frowning slightly.

In his hometown, aside from rapidly promoted padres and bishops, most would remain in one place for years—some even decades—overseeing a single village cathedral. Yet Église Saint-Robert had seen five bishops in just the past year.

Now, this was the sixth!

It wasn't like this last year…

When I first arrived in Trier, the bishop back then stayed for more than half a year…

Leon's thoughts shifted to the numerous changes within the Eternal Blazing Sun Church over the past year.

The Eternal Blazing Sun, whose titles had never changed before, had begun issuing revelations, drastically altering its titles—similar to the God of

Plague. Even the status of the Sun Sacred Emblem had shifted, no longer placed atop altars, downgraded to just one among many sacred symbols!

Leon cast his gaze toward the altar and saw a massive cross standing there.

After exchanging a few pleasantries with Bishop Yveline, he seated himself in the front row, pretending to pray.

Before long, his heightened spiritual sensitivity as a Warlock stirred within him. Suddenly opening his eyes, he turned to the side.

He saw Lugano, his direct superior, once again.

This archbishop of Trier's Sick Church—a Sequence 5 Druid—had unexpectedly appeared in Église Saint-Robert of the Eternal Blazing Sun Church!

With his thick brows and sharp eyes, Lugano showed no fear or surprise upon noticing Leon. Removing his half-tall silk hat, he sat beside his subordinate, gazing at the massive cross on the altar. In a low voice, he asked, 'What are you doing at the Eternal Blazing Sun Church?'

'Your Grace, I wanted to learn how to deliver better sermons,' Leon humbly explained.

He refrained from asking why Lugano was at Église Saint-Robert.

Lugano smiled and replied, 'Me too.'

Then, with a sigh, he added, 'And to feel the sunlight.'

'Feel the sunlight?' Leon asked, puzzled.

Lugano stared at the massive cross on the altar and said, 'I always feel like the sunlight outside isn't bright enough, isn't warm enough. It can't dispel the cold and fear inside me. Only the sunlight here reaches my soul and lets me forget my unease.'

'Unease?' Leon also felt a sense of unease.

What unsettled him most was that the archbishop's words bordered on blasphemy—they lacked piety.

What cold and fear could the great Malady God and the great Malady God Queen not resolve or eradicate? Why not pray to them or seek guidance from Her Holiness instead of coming to the Eternal Blazing Sun Church to feel the sunlight?

Will I be silenced for hearing such blasphemous words? As Leon's anxiety grew, Lugano shifted his gaze from the altar to observe Bishop Yveline, who had moved to a long table at the side of the church. Speaking in a suppressed tone, he said, 'I've been having nightmares for a long time. Haven't you?'

'No,' Leon replied firmly.

'Do you often feel uneasy?' Lugano pressed further.

Leon shook his head at first but then hesitantly added, 'As a Warlock, my spirituality is strong. I only feel unease as a premonition of trouble, which usually helps me avoid or resolve it. Any unease disappears afterward.'

Lugano sighed again and said, 'I've had nightmares for so long—every single night, waking up in terror.'

'Have you asked Her Holiness about the root of the problem?' Leon probed cautiously.

Lugano smiled faintly and said, 'I have. I've also prayed to the great Malady God and the great Malady God Queen. The response I received was: 'Pay no mind to it, but do not get too close.''

Pay no mind, that I understand. But what does do not get too close mean? Does delving into the nightmare lead to self-destruction, being dragged into the abyss? Leon instinctively analyzed the meaning of these words.

Suddenly, he recalled another matter: a mystical circle he had joined recently encountered problems, seemingly caused by a Beyonder from the

Planter pathway.

In another related mystical circle, the host and many members warned everyone to beware of Beyonders from the Planter and Apothecary pathways.

His Grace is a Sequence 5 Druid of the Planter pathway… Could his recurring nightmares be related to abnormalities in these two pathways? Leon dared not voice his thoughts.

Lugano continued, 'Her Holiness also told me that, at my lowest, I could sit in a cathedral of the Eternal Blazing Sun.'

'I see…' Leon expressed his understanding.

Deep inside, however, he resolved to report this matter to Her Holiness through the mirror. He couldn't simply take the Archbishop's words at face value.

Lugano remained at Église Saint-Robert until evening before leaving to tend to the various affairs of Trier's Sick Church.

Late at night, he finally returned to his rented apartment. After drinking a glass of milk, stretching his body, and completing his nightly prayers, Lugano prepared for bed.

After washing up, he lay on his bed and turned off the gas wall lamp.

He stared at the ceiling, immersed in darkness, and at the crimson moonlight seeping through the curtains. He observed the twisted patterns formed by the interplay of light and shadow, unwilling to close his eyes for a long time.

He was afraid to sleep, afraid to dream.

He had once tried altering his routine—working at night and resting during the day—but the nightmare still came.

He didn't know how much time passed before he finally fell asleep.

In a daze, Lugano suddenly jolted awake, as if becoming lucid.

He saw the familiar gray-white fog and the water-stained stone slab.

It's here again… Lugano was not surprised.

The nightmare had come as anticipated.

He staggered to the edge of the gray-white fog but dared not step beyond it. He lingered there, gazing outward into the depths of the dream.

In the distance, he faintly saw a familiar street.

It was where he currently lived.

But in the dream, the street and all the buildings had completely collapsed—none were spared. The same destruction extended into the distance, with no end in sight.

Under the crimson moonlight, the ruins appeared chaotic, desolate, cold, and deathly still. Yet, they exuded a peculiar, eerie beauty—abandoned for ages yet imbued with a unique spiritual essence.

Green plants had overtaken the destroyed buildings. Some grew so densely they seemed to shroud the dead structures in burial cloth. Others bore abundant, fresh fruit.

Gazing upon this scene, Lugano was gripped by visceral fear, his entire body cold. It was as if he had glimpsed the future of Trier, the fate awaiting himself and others.

This was the nightmare he experienced every night:

A lifeless Trier where all humanity had been buried and every building had crumbled.

A Trier bathed perpetually in crimson moonlight.

Chapter 1117: Ruins

Lugano stood at the edge of the gray-white mist, not daring to take a single step further into the lifeless Trier, that ruined world.

He had always strictly adhered to the instructions of Her Holiness, the Pope.

This was also his heartfelt choice.

As usual, he remained hidden within the gray-white fog, observing the changes in the nightmare with a mix of fear and curiosity.

He didn't know how much time had passed before a figure emerged from behind a collapsed building.

It was a deer, walking lightly on its hooves, happily nibbling at the fresh fruits borne by the green plants.

This seemed quite normal, much like how nature quickly reclaimed towns abandoned by humans.

Yet Lugano saw that as the deer ate, pieces of bloody flesh-not flesh, but raw, blood-covered fawns-fell from its abdomen, freshly born.

The fawns quickly stood up, clustered around their mother, and suckled her milk.

In just a minute or two, a sizable herd of deer was born.

They moved behind a few collapsed buildings and disappeared from Lugano's sight.

Lugano was not unfamiliar with such scenes. Over the past year, he had witnessed too many similar acts of birth and new life in his nightmares, evolving from shock, bewilderment, fear, and disgust to complete numbness. Even with so many frequent instances of reproduction and birth, Trier in the nightmare remained deathly silent, with only occasional faint sounds breaking the silence.

Those newborn animals seemed to disappear almost as quickly as they appeared.

Lugano tried to force himself to look away, to retreat deeper into the dense mist, lest he witness even more terrifying scenes.

This was his learned wisdom: every nightmare contained something new and horrifying, gradually amplifying his inner unease. Without such escalating horrors, the mere silent, crimson Trier and the wild animals repeatedly birthing offspring in grotesque ways would not have been enough to break him, to sustain his daily fear-after all, if the same scene or event repeated day after day without directly harming the observer, it would likely result in desensitization rather than continued unease.

But Lugano couldn't bring himself to leave the edge of the gray fog. Deep down, he yearned to stay and continue observing Trier in his nightmare, hoping to find the root cause of his recurring dreams.

Sometimes, he even felt that watching such scenes was the only time he truly felt alive.

As he watched, Lugano's gaze suddenly froze.

At the end of the collapsed street, five figures appeared.

Human figures!

The five figures seemed partially merged with the darkness, untouched by the crimson moonlight, making them shadowy and indistinct.

Leading them was a man in a brown lightweight trench coat pinned with a golden brooch. He had golden hair, golden eyebrows, and a golden beard, holding a sword seemingly condensed from pure sunlight.

Behind him, two men in white robes embroidered with golden threads carried a human corpse.

The other two figures flanked them on the left and right, walking slightly ahead and behind, remaining on alert.

Lugano widened his eyes, straining to make out the features of these figures and, most importantly, the appearance of the corpse they were carrying.

For some reason, his attention was drawn to the face of the corpse.

As the five figures drew closer to the gray fog, the face of the corpse became clear to Lugano's eyes.

The corpse had regular features, thick eyebrows, and sharp eyes-it was unmistakably Lugano himself!

Lugano's pupils dilated instantly. Instinctively, he staggered back, collapsing to the ground with a loud thud.

How is that possible?

How can it be my corpse?

I'm perfectly alive!

Propping his hands against the water-stained stone slabs, Lugano sprang to his feet like a coil.

He rushed back to the edge of the gray fog, determined to confirm whether the corpse truly looked exactly like him.

Unfortunately, the five figures had already changed direction, heading toward the other end of the gray fog, leaving only shadowy silhouettes that seemed to blend into the darkness.

…

One of the clergy members from the Eternal Blazing Sun Church, carrying the "corpse," addressed Angoulême de François, who was walking ahead, "Deacon, this guy's body has unconsciously left the protected zone over a hundred times now. Each time, we've had to retrieve it to prevent it from coming into contact with anomalies. Why not just purify him? He's a Sequence 5 Druid of the Planter pathway!"

"Exactly, he's a high-risk Beyonder," echoed the other clergy member carrying the "corpse."

Angoulême glanced at his subordinates. "He's the archbishop of the Sick Church."

"So what? Can't the Sick Church get a new archbishop? High-risk Beyonders like him are better off reduced to Beyonder characteristics and sealed away," grumbled Orulan, the first to speak. He was clearly dissatisfied with the dangerous task of venturing into the ruins to retrieve rogue bodies.

It was very dangerous.

Why is those high-risk Beyonders' life considered precious, and ours isn't?

Angoulême calmly explained, "The higher-ups said he's still useful."

At this, Orulan stopped arguing.

He couldn't help but lift his gaze toward the sky.

The crimson moonlight was eerie and bright, overshadowing the stars, though the crimson moon itself was nowhere to be seen.

"Why did it suddenly turn out like this..." Orulan murmured in confusion and pain.

This question was asked daily by those who had to enter the ruins and learn the truth about the protected zone. It was the most common question on the lips of Beyonders.

Angoulême also looked up at the sky.

The scene from back then flashed vividly in his mind: the crimson full moon descended lower and lower, impossibly so, finally landing upon the earth.

The entire Fourth Epoch Trier collapsed as a result.

The formless, colorless flames in the sky and the white fog permeating the ancient city disintegrated instantly.

With the aid of the two Grade 0 Sealed Artifacts - The Fourth Sun and The Divine Kingdom Without People - and the fact that they weren't among the primary targets, Angoulême, Jack Walton, and a few others barely survived the initial impact.

Even so, they each lost a colleague, helplessly watching them mutate into grotesque monstrosities, as if granted new, malevolent life.

Later, thanks to the unique properties of The Fourth Sun, they were fortunate enough to be pulled into the protected zone before the second wave of destruction hit.

Why did it suddenly turn out like this? Angoulême wanted to ask the same question.

At the time, things had seemed to be heading in a good direction - the Montsouris ghosts had been almost completely dissolved by The Fourth Sun, and Louis Gustav had been purified. Only Madame Pualis's whereabouts remained unaccounted for.

Then, out of nowhere, the crimson moon descended, and the world collapsed.

Orulan and the others' spirits sank, their moods heavy, until sunlight illuminated the darkness, dispelling their inner fear and confusion.

However, the sunlight did not penetrate the darkness created by the Sealed Artifacts.

This control was intentional-otherwise, it would have posed a significant risk.

As Orulan and the others calmed, a rumbling explosion echoed from afar, shaking the ground violently, as if it might collapse entirely.

Orulan instinctively turned toward the sound.

Thick white fog spread in the distance, and within it prowled a gigantic monster with three heads.

Violet flames ignited within the fog, and silver-white lightning illuminated the interior. Cracks in the ground extended all the way to Angoulême's group, where crimson magma flowed slowly.

Even from a great distance, Orulan and the others could feel the aura of destruction.

This was unlike the quiet gestation of life and death in Trier's ruins-this was brazen, ostentatious, and wanton destruction.

Fear gripped Orulan as he prepared to avert his gaze, but out of the corner of his eye, he caught sight of a female figure sitting quietly atop the collapsed spire of a clock tower, her feet dangling.

Behind her, the three-headed monster prowled, bringing volcanic eruptions, thunderstorms, blizzards, earthquakes, and soaring violet flames-but none of it touched her.

Wh- Orulan suddenly recalled terrifying stories he'd heard as a child.

A witch and the monster she commanded.

"Deacon, should we intervene and clean this up? I'm worried that if this continues, the entire Trier ruins will collapse," Orulan asked Angoulême.

Angoulême withdrew his gaze from the distance and looked at Orulan and the others.

"No need.

"Remember, in the ruins, never do anything beyond your assigned task. It's not only dangerous to us but could also threaten the maintenance of the protected zone.

"Sometimes, what you think is a good deed might worsen the situation."

"Yes, Deacon." Amid the rumbling noise, Orulan and the others' expressions turned solemn.

They had all heard stories of colleagues mysteriously disappearing or mutating into monsters within the ruins. Some had even witnessed it firsthand.

Countless task teams had vanished forever in the ruins.

"All right, we've reached the safe passage."

Angoulême said, pointing to a specific spot at the edge of the gray fog.

From there, they would return to the protected zone.

Instinctively, Orulan and the others cast one last glance toward the distant dense fog.

The woman sitting silently atop the collapsed spire exuded a unique allure.

…

Franca sat atop the collapsed clock tower, letting her thoughts scatter and drift.

Time passed quickly, minute by minute, until the explosions, thunder, and howling winds behind her subsided. Only then did she pull her focus back to her body.

"All done?" She asked as she turned to Lumian, who stood nearby, now restored to human size.

Still sporting three heads, Lumian nodded.

"It's that time again, where I occasionally regain clarity, though this time it might last longer.

"And I've finally grasped the powers of Conqueror and Demoness of Apocalypse."

"Didn't you already digest those two Beyonder characteristics through Cheek's avatar and Alista Tudor's integration?" Franca asked, puzzled.

"Digesting the characteristics and truly making the power your own are two different things," Lumian replied calmly with a faint smile. "After all, I didn't digest the potion myself."

Franca glanced at him, then at the faces of Aurore and Jenna, eyes closed, stained with blood, resting on his right shoulder. She tentatively asked, "You're looking pretty good?"

Lumian responded with a smile, "To do what comes next, I have to be.

"And besides, whatever happens, it's time for things to reach a conclusion. That's better than endless torment."

As he spoke, his tone grew somber.

"This time, I won't be a pawn, I'll do what I want to do."

Chapter 1118: What I Want to Do

Franca had been carefully avoiding certain phrases, but since Lumian himself brought it up, there was no need to tread so cautiously anymore.

With a self-deprecating tone, she whispered, "Can you really stop being a pawn?"

Ever since she was pulled into the protected zone and learned from Anthony and Ludwig what had happened, she felt as though she had developed "pawn arrangement PTSD." Whenever she heard similar terms, her heart clenched, and her mood darkened.

This symptom showed no signs of improvement over time.

Lumian was silent for two seconds before raising his right hand and flicking the dark gold, peculiar mask at the center of the head on his left shoulder.

With a metallic "clang," the faces of Cheek and Tudor reflexively furrowed their brows.

After nearly a year of adaptation and mastery, Lumian could now exert tangible control over the two faces when in his lucid state, although some nuances were still beyond his grasp.

After flicking the mask, Lumian spoke in a low voice, "After my merging with Him, unless the one worshipped by the Aurora Order achieves complete victory or is entirely defeated-allowing a true God Almighty to be born-no one can manipulate me anymore.

"Look at us. We've entered the ruins, made such a commotion, and stayed for so long, yet the Great Mother hasn't even glanced our way despite us simply relying on the cover of the Fog of War. Can you believe that?"

"He's akin to a scaled-down original Creator-the Oldest One-or a yet-to-be-fully-revived Primordial God Almighty, which grants you a high status?" Franca nodded in sudden understanding.

"What I'm about to do next will remain highly concealed unless directly scrutinized," Lumian confirmed Franca's speculation, sitting down beside her atop the collapsed clock tower and gazing out at the ruins of Trier beyond the Fog of War.

Franca was silent for a few seconds before tilting her head and asking, "So, what exactly do you want to do next?"

The next moment, she saw Lumian smile.

It was a spirited smile, tinged with mischief-an expression Franca had never seen on Lumian's face before.

"I'm going to save the world."

For a moment, Franca felt as though she was listening to some prankster boast on the spot.

She didn't question him. Instead, she asked, "Do you have any hope of succeeding?"

Lumian, gazing at the endless ruins ahead, chuckled and replied, "If I don't act, and the Great Mother completely overpowers the half of Her will and achieves fusion, or if the barrier in the sky fails entirely, then there will be no hope whatsoever. But if I act, at least hope isn't zero. There'll be just a sliver.

"Besides, I'm not the only one preparing to save the world; there are others trying as well."

At this, Lumian turned to look at Franca, his tone drifting as though recalling something.

"When I was irrational, driven purely by divine instinct, that instinct allowed me to glimpse certain truths-or perhaps root causes.

"Everything in this world originates from the Original Creator. All living beings, all Beyonder characteristics, the way events unfold, and the miraculous turns of fate-all of it.

"What does this mean? It means separation leads to convergence. Something good will inevitably carry bad aspects, and vice versa.

"This is the essence of the world, the fundamental symbol that governs all things. Even existences as powerful as the Great Mother can't completely avoid it.

They can only mitigate its influence."

Franca, somewhat bewildered, said, "I understand dialectics, but what does this have to do with what you want to do?"

Lumian shifted his gaze back to the ruins.

"The Great Mother's prior arrangements undoubtedly demonstrated Her level of power and wonder. She achieved multiple objectives in one stroke, almost turning our resistance into a joke. But with every good aspect comes a bad one. Her arrangements have left things that we can exploit-things which might prove critical later." r�

"Like what?" Franca now understood the gist of Lumian's point.

Lumian shook his head. "There are things you can't know yet. You're not an Angel."

He paused before adding, "Put simply, the Great Mother set up many things to ensure Omebella's true birth. Some succeeded, some failed in the past, and some were kept as backups. They all left certain marks, even physical remnants.

"For instance, the bird egg deep in the Underworld. For instance, Lugano."

"Lugano?" Franca was first surprised, then seemed to understand. "So you think he's still useful?"

Lumian chuckled in response. "I've finally figured it out - he was drawn to me by the fragment of Zedus's soul within me. It's because of his presence that I got deeply involved in the Father Montserrat matter and obtained Omebella's umbilical remains.

"After that, he was essentially useless to the Great Mother. It's only due to the corruption stemming from his characteristics that he now possesses certain peculiarities in his dreams.

"I won't plan anything for him. As long as he's alive and still submits to me, he'll play the role I need at some critical juncture."

Franca didn't delve further, as she wasn't an Angel.

She stared blankly at the head in the center of Lumian's shoulders and said with a bitter smile.

"But what can you, a dual Sequence 1 King of Angels, do in the current situation?"

Lumian turned his head, meeting Franca's lake-blue eyes, and replied with a smile, "You know what I was like. You also know what I've been through. I'm nobody, even if I've stood at the center of the stage and been applauded-all because strings were pulling me from behind. Don't comfort me. I haven't given up on myself.

"I learned something in the dream city: even the most foolish person, after thinking a thousand, ten thousand times, will eventually get it right once. Now, as someone who's failed countless times, I'm going to challenge the future again. Maybe this time, I'll succeed."

As he spoke, Lumian's smile brightened, revealing his unabashed hope and expectation.

He immediately chuckled at himself. "Anyway, it can't get worse for me than it already is."

Franca gazed at his smile and said nothing for a long time.

"I also want to see what Aurore and Jenna's eventual resurrection will look like, and what sort of distortions it will entail," Lumian said, his gaze once again darkening as he looked out at the greenery-covered ruins beyond the Fog of War. "By then, there will surely be a calamity sweeping the entire world. For the Great Mother's Blessed and followers, it will indeed be a disaster.

"You'll participate in the early stages, complete your ritual, take the potion, and become a Demoness of Catastrophe. Then, Madam Magician will help transfer you to the edge of the cosmos or some unnoticed star system, where a human-suitable environment can be created."

Franca was silent for two seconds before saying. "Okay."

"I thought you'd refuse." Lumian said, glancing at Franca.

Franca stared ahead, her gaze crystalline and profound, and said, "I was planning to refuse. But then I thought-even if I become a Sequence 2 Demoness, it probably won't make much of a difference."

When the crimson moon descended, the Demoness Sect did not receive enough "protection," losing two Demonesses of Catastrophe-the Demoness of Blue and the Demoness of Purple. The latter's Beyonder characteristics and body ingredients were obtained by Angel of Fate Ouroboros, passed through two trades, and eventually ended up in Lumian's hands. He gave them to Franca, who was now waiting for the opportunity to perform the ritual.

Franca paused and revealed a self-mocking smile.

"Anyway, my answer just now was half perfunctory to stop you from persuading me further or feeling burdened, which might affect your performance. In the end, whether I go or stay depends on the situation."

Lumian nodded with the head in the center and chuckled, "If you can't leave or don't want to, then we'll stay together forever, Live together, or die together."

"That's a good thing." Franca responded half-sincerely, half-mockingly.

Lumian said nothing more, gazing out at the ruins, his thoughts wandering to unknown places.

After a while, Franca, who was also staring ahead, moved her eyes slightly and glanced at him out of the corner of her eye. "What's on your mind?"

Lumian raised the head in the center slightly, gazing through the Fog of War at the crimson moonlight and dim stars in the sky.

"I'm thinking that if Cordu hadn't been struck by disaster-if all the arrangements, pain, and torment hadn't happened-and if there had been a good teacher to guide me and Aurore together, teaching me the principles of life and morality, then facing the current situation, this crisis affecting all humanity, I probably would have willingly stood up without a trace of self-destructive tendencies. I would have chosen to be a true guardian..."

Before Franca could respond, he laughed at himself. "But alas, there are no 'ifs'."

He stood up, brushed the dust off his body, and said to Franca, who also rose, "Let's go back. Time to start the first step of the plan."

…

In Trier, inside that luxurious villa.

Lumian and Franca entered the living room to find Madam Justice sitting on a single sofa, chatting with Anthony. By her side, the golden-furred, gold-rimmed- glasses-wearing Susie crouched gracefully, exuding a gentle aura.

Madam Justice turned her gaze to Lumian. "You summoned my messenger to call me here. What is it you need?"

After obtaining Edefana's Beyonder characteristics and body ingredients, and having digested the Dreamweaver potion long ago, Madam Justice had completed her ritual months earlier and become a Sequence 2 Discerner, now a true Angel.

Lumian, with the head in the center smiling, spoke sincerely, "Madam, there's something I need your help with."

Chapter 1119: Returning Home

After leaving the luxurious villa that used to be her own but now housed Lumian and his companions, Madam Justice paused for two seconds and said to Susie, who was beside her, 'Let's go home.'

'Home?' Susie's tone suddenly became a little dreamy.

'Yes, back to Backlund.' Madam Justice smiled. Her green eyes sparkled brightly, filled with anticipation and hope, as if she had returned to her girlhood.

Susie fully understood Audrey's meaning, and a nostalgic expression appeared on her canine face. 'Okay.'

Over the years, she and Audrey had returned to Backlund on occasion. After the crimson moon's descent, they even stayed there for long periods, secretly protecting the Hall family. But this time, Audrey wanted to truly return home—to be with her parents and other loved ones.

Justice Audrey's figure quickly became ethereal, carrying Susie, who was now a Manipulator, as they traversed the sea of collective subconsciousness.

Her voice, tinged with obvious emotion, lingered at the spot before gradually fading into the wind, 'The prelude to the final battle is about to begin. If I don't go home now, there won't be another chance. I don't want to face the true apocalypse with regrets…'

Loen Kingdom, Backlund.

Justice Audrey and Susie emerged from the sea of collective subconsciousness onto a street close to Empress Borough.

They didn't rush home but instead strolled along the street, savoring the mundane pleasures of daily life.

No one noticed them, nor did anyone realize that the daughter of Earl Hall was wandering through the crowd without a maid or bodyguard, looking around curiously.

At this time, well-dressed gentlemen in silk top hats and ladies with parasols were moving in and out of department stores, upscale cafés, and opera houses. Two- or four-seater carriages hurried by, while a small circus performed by the fountain, surrounded by children. In the distance, a steam-powered four-wheeled vehicle chugged away, its vibrations gradually fading into the road.

Justice Audrey observed the scene with focused attention, making no effort to hide her nostalgia.

Suddenly, she sensed something unusual and turned her gaze toward a man and a woman about to board a four-seater carriage.

The man was dressed in a black suit, and the woman wore a yellow, flowing gown of sheer fabric with a fresh touch of makeup.

The moment Justice Audrey looked their way, the pair froze abruptly.

Plants—some brownish, others greenish—burst wildly from their tear ducts, nostrils, mouths, ear canals, and even pores. There were branches and vines.

Their bloodshot eyes, now tainted with a crimson hue, radiated intense malice as they turned to glare at the coachman and the surrounding pedestrians.

However, they seemed to 'decide' to hold back, waiting until they were in a better state before launching an attack.

But their transformations did not go unnoticed. Screams of terror pierced the peaceful and lively street, echoing far and wide.

The pedestrians fled desperately. In just seconds, the area around the man and woman became desolate.

Their madness erupted. With a loud bang, chunks of flesh mixed with green plants and crimson moonlight splattered outward.

Soon, a team of Nighthawks bearing the Dark Sacred Emblem arrived.

They swiftly dealt with the nauseating flesh and remnants.

The fleeing pedestrians suddenly slowed, some returning to their conversations with companions, others stepping into nearby cafés to order coffee with desserts, appearing relaxed and at ease. �

The coachman returned to his carriage, gazing into the distance, waiting for passengers.

None of them paid any attention to the Nighthawks' cleanup or even glanced in their direction.

It was as if they had completely forgotten what had just happened, returning to their daily lives.

Justice Audrey stood watching for a while, sighed, and continued walking toward Empress Borough.

Before long, she and Susie entered the sea of collective subconsciousness again, emerging in a corner of her long-unvisited bedroom.

Inside, another Audrey, dressed in a green-and-white gown, sat at the dressing table, fastening a pair of petite pearl earrings.

She turned her body and looked at Justice Audrey, her expression lighting up with joy. 'You're finally back!'

She then asked in a verifying tone, 'You've become an Angel?'

Justice Audrey smiled and nodded. 'Yes. It took a long time to prepare for the ritual, but I completed it three months ago.'

The advancement ritual for a Sequence 2 Discerner in the Spectator pathway required delving into the subconscious of at least ten thousand humans, uncovering their deepest fears, most primal desires, and the root of all their psychological issues, then leaving a mark of oneself.

This was not only tedious but also dangerous. Every human carried godhood and was subject to the erosion and influence of the sea of collective subconsciousness, inheriting the most profound cognition and impressions of ancient humanity. Chaos, madness, and primal instincts lurked deep within their subconscious. Exploring these depths risked corruption, mental instability, or even derangement.

In this ritual, the quantitative requirement could be reduced by targeting higher-ranked Beyonders, but this entailed greater risks. For example, delving into the subconscious of Madam Magician could mean encountering the mental imprints or past shadows of The Celestial Worthy of Heaven and Earth for Blessings. Choosing Lumian as a target would suffice for the ritual but would involve facing the most primal and frenzied mind, even glimpses of the Original Creator or the Primordial God Almighty.

'Wasn't that dangerous?' Audrey, now wearing her pearl earrings, asked with curiosity.

Though over twenty years old, with mature demeanor and temperament, a trace of girlish innocence lingered in her tone.

Justice Audrey smiled. 'It was indeed dangerous. During the preparation, I witnessed the worst of human nature, the wildest desires, the most chaotic perceptions, and also the noblest virtues, the most beautiful emotions, and the highest ideals. Sometimes, these contradictory elements existed simultaneously in a single person's subconscious.'

'Human nature is complex,' Audrey agreed with a nod.

After observing Justice Audrey for a few seconds, she sighed and asked nostalgically, 'You've been to many places over the years, haven't you?'

Justice Audrey smiled gently. 'I lived in East Borough for a year, then south of Trier's Quartier du Jardin Botanique for another year. I spent a year in the Southern Continent and nearly two years along the coastal cities of Midseashire. Those are lands of steel and steam. Their architecture resembles towering iron trees standing close together, their 'branches' interconnected. Each 'bark' and 'leaf' is a room housing a family of workers. Only a few 'leaves' and 'bark' receive sunlight…'

Audrey listened intently, as if she too had traveled to those places and witnessed those sights.

After a long pause, she asked with anticipation, 'Do you have an answer now?'

'There isn't one answer to all questions.' Justice Audrey gave a self-deprecating smile. 'I only understand one thing now: Humanity must unite and show collective strength to the deities to gain a higher status, just as workers, farmers, herders, and clerks must overcome fear and band together to demand better treatment and greater security from those in power.

'That's why we cannot side with beings born as gods. They don't need anchors; humanity is meaningless to Them. If They achieve ultimate victory, our existence, joys, and sorrows will depend solely on Their whims and chaotic intentions, leaving us utterly powerless.'

Audrey caught the melancholy and worry in Justice's tone and playfully comforted her, 'We may not need those born as gods, but we were born noble.'

'No.' Justice Audrey shook her head and said with a faint smile, 'Nobility isn't about lineage, status, or position; it's about one's heart and character.'

She extended her right hand toward Audrey, who was dressed in the green-and-white gown.

'Welcome home~' Audrey said with a smile, lightly clapping her hand against Justice Audrey's.

With a crisp clap, the two figures suddenly merged into one, inseparable ever again.

Audrey now donned the green-and-white gown, fastened the pearl earrings, and applied simple makeup. Leaving the bedroom, she descended the stairs, passed through the hall, and arrived on the second floor of the ballroom, accompanied by a lady's maid and Susie.

Crystal chandeliers hung overhead, an orchestra played, and men and women in formal attire mingled elegantly, chatting in small groups with drinks in hand or dancing gracefully in pairs on the ballroom floor.

Audrey took a glass of pale-golden champagne from a passing tray and stood by the railing, gazing down with a gentle smile. She watched her father, Earl Hall, her mother, Lady Caitlyn, and the familiar nobles chatting, as well as her elder brothers waltzing with their partners.

She didn't join them, content to watch with a smile.

Late that night, the entire population of Backlund shared the same dream.

In the dream, a voice seemed to say: 'Mr. Medici, Lumian Lee wants to meet you. You may choose the time and place.'

Normally, this voice would only echo in the dreams or minds of Backlund's residents, slowly spreading to other cities and nations through the sea of collective subconsciousness. This time, however, it reached beings outside Backlund almost instantly, with hardly any delay.

…

'Mr. Medici, Lumian Lee wants to meet you. You may choose the time and place.'

Red Angel Medici, with His feet propped up on a table, scratched His ear and sneered.

'Only now did he muster the courage to make this decision?

'I've been waiting nearly a year.'

Chapter 1120: Negotiation

Greater Trier, in an ancient castle.

Red Angel Medici sat on a throne pieced together from iron-black weapons, gazing at the hall splattered with dark red blood-like stains. He lifted His right leg, resting it on His left knee.

Before Him, Lumian's figure, bearing three heads, swiftly materialized.

Dressed in a white shirt, black vest, and dark trousers, Lumian looked at Red Angel Medici and spoke in a mocking tone, "I thought you'd first hide, only showing up once you confirmed I didn't bring reinforcements."

As he spoke, violet flames ignited behind Lumian, quickly solidifying into a massive, bloodstained, iron- black chair.

"Aren't you worried there might be a deadly trap here?" Red Angel Medici shook His right foot, sneering in return.

Lumian sat down, leaned back against the chair, and answered indifferently, "I'd welcome a deadly trap. It might even be a blessing in disguise."

Red Angel Medici, His long blood-red hair flowing down, placed His right palm on the longsword armrest of the iron throne and asked disdainfully, "What do you want from me?"

With unusual sincerity, Lumian replied, "I want to ask you to hand over the two Conqueror Beyonder characteristics within you."

"Haha." Red Angel Medici burst into laughter. "I've lived for thousands of years and never heard such a request. Even Alista Tudor didn't dare say something like that. He knew well that what couldn't be won in war wouldn't be secured in negotiation."

Lumian seemed deaf to Red Angel Medici's taunts, continuing as if He hadn't heard.

"The Northern and Southern continents have already been effectively destroyed. If not for the one worshipped by the Aurora Order forcibly accommodating the Chaos Sea, buffering the initial impact of the Mother Goddess of Depravity's descent, and if not for the cooperation between Him and Mr. Fool in creating protected zones, human society would have long since collapsed. All of us, myself included, would be dead by now-only to be "reborn" into something else…"

At this point, Red Angel Medici Interrupted, "The main reason wasn't Adam or The Fool saving us. They couldn't even protect Themselves back then.

"We're still alive because the Mother Goddess of Depravity targeted the Western Continent, aiming at the Brood Hive."

Lumian didn't deny Red Angel Medici's assertion but calmly added, "If not for Mr. Fool exploiting the Mother Goddess of Depravity's instinctual desire, luring Her to breach the Celestial Worthy's barrier sealing the Western Continent, then reinforcing the seal using Her connection to it... If not for the Western Continent's Celestial Master and others burning their life forces and utilizing the powers of the sefirot to sustain the barrier... Even the naturally dissipating power of the Mother Goddess of Depravity and the symbolic instincts She represents wouldn't have allowed the protected zones to last this long.

"But even those measures are nearing their limit. Two months ago, the Mother Goddess of Depravity captured the Brood Hive within the gray-white fog sealing the Western Continent. The Brood Hive yearns to see its eldest daughter, Omebella, truly reborn, but it resists re-merging with the Mother Goddess of Depravity. It has developed self-awareness and enjoyed Its completed form for seven or eight millennia, maybe longer-It certainly doesn't wish to perish now.

"At present, the Mother Goddess of Depravity and the Brood Hive are locked in a tug-of-war. Both the World of Ruins and the Western Continent have attained a fleeting peace, with only the naturally dissipating forces and maternal symbolism still exerting their effects.

"This may be our last peaceful respite. No one knows how long it will take for the Mother Goddess of Depravity to utterly crush the will of the Brood Hive and fully accommodate this sefirot. Perhaps a year, or maybe only two or three months remain.

"We don't have much time, which is why I've come to you."

Red Angel Medici sneered, "How noble, how sanctimonious. But why should I hand over two Conqueror Beyonder characteristics to you?

"Why not give yours to me, voluntarily withdrawing from the competition for the Red Priest position?

"Sacrifice is something you say to yourself, not to others."

Lumian laughed, a laugh that gave Red Angel Medici the sudden feeling that He'd stepped into a trap.

With a relaxed smile playing across his features, Lumian replied, "Sure! I'll agree to that!

"I'll hand over my Conqueror Beyonder characteristic to you right now, along with a Demoness of Apocalypse Beyonder characteristic. At that point, my body will lose its balance, and I'll inevitably die. Then you won't have to worry about anyone competing with you for the Red Priest position."

He spoke rapidly, as if unwilling to give Medici the chance to change His mind.

Red Angel Medici focused intently on Lumian, as though evaluating the sincerity and truthfulness of his words.

Relaxing his posture further, Lumian continued, "My only condition is that you must inherit my fate, my identity, this half of my body, and this head."

As he spoke, he raised his right hand, lightly tapping the dark-gold peculiar mask at the center of his left- side head.

Red Angel Medici's gaze lingered on the mask, Alista Tudor's handsome face, and Cheek's maternal visage, moving back and forth several times before He sneered, "Do you think I'd accept that?

"Inheriting this mess? I'd rather perish when the apocalypse comes."

"And where's your courage?" Lumian provoked.

"Courage and wisdom aren't mutually exclusive, nor do they prevent me from discerning good from bad," Red Angel Medici retorted, changing His posture and crossing His left leg over His right, His foot shaking rhythmically.

Lumian taunted Him with a look of disappointment, "Then why bother vying for the Red Priest position?

"Without relying on the unique nature of this head and this half of the body, can you become the Red Priest without performing the ritual? Can you meet the requirements for the apotheosis ritual in such a short time?

"Without the unique qualities of this head and body, can you locate and defeat Primordial Demoness Cheek in time?

"Without these unique traits, can you subdue the malevolent dragon and fully accommodate the City of Calamity before the Mother Goddess of Depravity accommodates the Brood Hive?

"Even if you somehow became the Origins of Disaster, the Calamity of Destruction, before the apocalypse, your utility would pale in comparison to the existence of this head and body's unique advantages. You'd still perish.

"We're in a dire position. To save ourselves, others, and the world, every unique advantage must be exploited to the fullest. Only then is there even a sliver of hope.

"Medici, you're a coward. I despise you!"

Red Angel Medici chuckled. "There's no need to provoke me. I've never made decisions based on that."

After a few seconds of silence, He continued, "You're right. To become the Origins of Disaster before the Great Mother accommodates the Brood Hive, unique traits are essential. But how long would such an unstable existence last after the advancement?"

"I don't know," Lumian admitted candidly. "Maybe minutes, maybe years or decades. Perhaps, with some help and special methods, it could last millennia-or even longer."

Red Angel Medici stared at Lumian and the head for a long while before shaking His head, "If it were just sharing one body with multiple consciousnessed, I'd accept it-I've had ample experience. But the thought of being stuck with Alista Tudor forever, especially in a form beyond just Beyonder characteristics, is unacceptable."

Lumian's left-side head turned slightly, Alista Tudor's handsome, masculine face glaring at Medici.

With a slight shake of His head, He looked contemptuous.

"Coward. Where's your courage? Is your sharp tongue the only thing that's left undefeated?" Lumian voiced Tudor's sentiments on His behalf.

Red Angel Medici sneered, "Giving the order to retreat and giving up also requires courage."

Lumian sighed and asked, "So, do you agree?"

This referred to Medici extracting the two Conqueror Beyonder characteristics and handing them over to Lumian.

With a curving of the corner of His lips, Red Angel Medici replied, "Not yet. We're missing one thing.

"I'm considering whether we should duel for it - the loser takes this path - or..."

He paused before flashing a brilliant smile, "Why don't you beg me?"

Lumian froze for a second, then stood and spoke seriously. "Oh great God of War, the symbol of iron and blood, the ruler of chaos and strife, I beseech you. I beg you to save this world. I plead for the two Conqueror Beyonder characteristics..."

At the phrase "save this world," Red Angel Medici's expression subtly shifted, as though caught between sneering and being stunned, as if a memory had been jolted awake.

When Lumian finished, the King of Angels mocked, "What happened to your dignity?"

Before Lumian could respond, He tilted His chin slightly, "Fine. I agree, but under three conditions."

"Please, state them." Lumian's attitude remained excellent.

Red Angel Medici mulled over it and said, "First, if you truly become the Origins of Disaster when the apocalypse comes, spare the Einhorn and Sauron families if you can. Also, protect my descendants like Albus."

"No problem," Lumian agreed without hesitation.

Red Angel Medici smiled again. "Second, after becoming the Origins of Disaster, you'll need only one Conqueror characteristic to stabilize yourself. At that point, remember to extract the other two and return them to me."

To reach an Above the Sequences or Great Old Dominator, one needed the corresponding sefirah, the Uniquenesses of the corresponding pathways, and a singular Sequence 1 Beyonder characteristic of each pathway.

"That's fine," Lumian said without concern.

Red Angel Medici lowered His left leg and slowly stood.

"Third, give Adam a punch for me and tell Him, "Don't get mad. This is a necessary sacrifice."

"That's it?" Lumian raised an eyebrow.

Medici chuckled. "What else? Kill Him and doom us all?

"If He'd been honest with me back then, I might have joined His experiments or even sacrificed myself first. Do all Spectators eventually become this dark, perpetually distrusting others?"

After finishing, Red Angel Medici added mischievously. "I can't separate the highest Sequence Beyonder characteristics in myself. You'll need your godfather's help. But I won't speak His name."

Lumian nodded and solemnly recited in Hermes, "The shadow wandering through fate, the past God of Deceit, the destined messiah..."

Chapter 1121: Entrustment

After Lumian recited Amon's current honorific name, a light full of redemptive power emerged from the void, from the River of Fate, condensing into the form of Amon, wearing a pointed soft hat and a monocle.

Amon glanced left and right before smiling and saying, 'So, have you concluded your negotiations? Or would this be settled with a duel?

'You Hunters really have patience. This matter, which should've been discussed last September, dragged on until now.'

As He spoke, Amon lightly clapped His hands in mock applause for the patience of the two Hunters.

Red Angel Medici sneered, 'You've changed pathways, yet you're still cawing like a raven.

'Let's begin; don't waste any more time.'

Stealing the highest Sequence Beyonder characteristics from another wasn't a simple task. Even if the target stopped resisting and actively cooperated, the process would still take significant time and carry a notable risk of failure. Moreover, it required an exceptionally high level of authority.

After urging Amon, Red Angel Medici sat back down on His iron throne, leaned against the backrest, and crossed His right leg, assuming His usual arrogant posture.

His expression showed neither fear nor despondency—only a hint of emptiness in His gaze, as if reminiscing.

'What's on your mind?' Amon asked with a smile.

Red Angel Medici chuckled. 'About things that happened before you were born.'

Amon shook His head and adjusted the monocle clasped to His eye socket with His right hand.

His left hand produced a red apple, which He brought to His lips, taking a crisp bite.

'I've waited a long time for this day,' Amon said with a smile, as the monocle on His face suddenly gleamed.

He extended His right hand toward Red Angel Medici, His wrist rotating slowly and heavily.

Red Angel Medici was abruptly set ablaze, engulfed entirely in bright violet flames.

Despite the excruciating pain, He maintained a mocking smile.

Burning in the flames. Eternal in the flames.

…

After extracting the two Conqueror Beyonder characteristics from Red Angel Medici and handing them over to Lumian, Amon departed from the protected zone.

He stood above the valley of the still-rushing Srenzo River, gazing out at the distant world.

Enormous oak trees, so large they seemed to reach the sky, stood tall upon the land. Verdant green blanketed the remnants of human civilization, and intermittent cries of 'waaah, waaah, waaah' echoed, accompanied by the sound of flocking movements.

Suddenly, a figure staggered out from the faint grayish-white fog.

The figure had a handsome appearance and wore formal attire, with scarlet eyes—a Sanguine of a not-insignificant Sequence.

Yet, once outside the protected zone, the Sanguine's body rapidly mutated.

He collapsed into a mass of flesh and blood, sprouting numerous reproductive organs, some male, some female, and some belonging to peculiar creatures.

These interacted with one another and with the surrounding stones, wood, and vines, giving birth to strange new life forms.

Amon watched this with interest for a moment, then raised His right hand and flicked forth a nearly invisible and formless flame.

The flame fell upon the writhing, ever-procreating mass of flesh, instantly setting it ablaze, reducing it—and the nascent life within it—to ashes.

Amon's gaze then turned toward the edge of the gray-white fog, where three Sanguine were watching Him. Leading them was Mr. Moon Emlyn, wearing a silk top hat.

Amon smiled faintly before turning His attention back to the towering oaks.

Tonight, He was on watch duty.

Emlyn, who had come to clean up the mutants, observed Amon for a moment before stepping out of the gray-white fog. Enduring the pain of the crimson moonlight, he retrieved the severely corrupted Beyonder characteristic.

Exchanging silent glances with the two other Sanguine, he returned to the protected zone.

After sealing the Beyonder characteristic, Emlyn returned to his residence in Backlund, sitting by the floor-to-ceiling window and gazing at the crimson moon high in the sky.

Only within the protected zone could he experience the peace, spiritual growth, and unique beauty brought by the crimson moon.

Under the crimson moonlight of the World of Ruins, however, Sanguine like him felt nothing but pain, as though the light sought to ignite them and burn them into pure spirituality.

Reflecting on his recent experiences, the once-confident Emlyn couldn't help but feel weighed down.

In the past, he often proclaimed his ambition to be the messiah of the Sanguine, full of drive and determination. But that was when the prophecy of the Sanguine's end of days was distant, and their Ancestor still existed. Now, the end of days had truly arrived—and was unfolding before his eyes.

Compared to other pathways' Beyonders, Sanguine and Planters had suffered far deeper and more severe impacts since the descent of the crimson moon. Over the past year, Emlyn had witnessed countless Sanguine mutate into monsters or transform into their most ferocious enemies—and he had personally dealt with many of them.

Familiar faces disappeared daily. Sorrowful events occurred without end.

This was the apocalypse.

Now, the Sanguine's population had been halved compared to the time before the crimson moon's descent.

What can I do to save them… The Moon Emlyn pondered deeply, no longer indulging in fanciful ideas or overconfident thoughts.

Influenced by the crimson moon's descent, Sanguine dukes dared not act freely, fearing they would lose control and mutate. Thus, Emlyn and other marquises represented the strongest forces the Sanguine could muster.

With a vague understanding of why the crimson moon—the Great Mother—brought such catastrophic influence, Emlyn spent an entire night pondering but still failed to find a way to save his race.

When the sun rose and daylight arrived, he drew the curtains, lay on his bed, and drifted into slumber, hoping his active spirituality might offer some insight through dreams.

Amid his grogginess, a familiar female voice suddenly reached him: 'Emlyn… Emlyn…'

Emlyn looked in the direction of the voice, dazed, and vaguely saw a voluptuous, graceful figure.

Instinctively, he called out, 'Ancestor!'

The voice spoke with a slightly ethereal tone, 'There is something I need to entrust to you.'

In the past, such words would have filled Emlyn with joy, pride, and self-satisfaction, as it signified him becoming the messiah of the Sanguine. But now, he felt only a heavy weight on his shoulders, as though his body could no longer bear the burden.

After a few moments of silence, he answered in a low voice, 'Yes, Ancestor.'

The voluptuous and graceful figure, radiating maternal warmth, said gently,

'I will give you a Beauty Goddess Beyonder characteristic, containing my spiritual imprint and residual self-awareness.

'Safeguard it. Someday, I may be able to be reborn through it.

'It also contains an extra Life-Giver Beyonder characteristic, which I will pre-separate for you. Afterward, retrieve supplementary ingredients from the treasury and strive to complete your advancement in a short time. When the apocalypse arrives, protect the remaining Sanguine as best as you can.'

Emlyn felt no joy but instead asked in confusion and concern, 'What about you, Ancestor?'

Why make preparations for rebirth and resurrection?

The voluptuous and graceful figure said with a smile, 'Some things must be done. Some hopes must be fought for.'

Emlyn froze, hearing the resoluteness hidden in Ancestor Lilith's tone.

Without further explanation, the voluptuous figure spoke in a motherly tone, 'My child, as long as all of you survive, as long as my bloodline remains unbroken, and as long as someone remembers my name, I will live forever…'

Her voice gradually faded, disappearing into the dream.

…

The voluptuous and graceful figure emerged from the starlight-woven dreamlike gate, arriving at a majestic and ancient palace enveloped in gray-white fog.

Seated at the head of the bronze table was The Fool, wearing a half-silk top hat and a black trench coat.

It was an avatar—a mere projection of His true self.

'So this is Sefirah Castle?' the beautiful woman radiating maternal brilliance asked as She sat in the chair at the far end of the mottled table.

She was Earth Mother Lilith.

'The external manifestation and extension of Sefirah Castle,' Mr. Fool replied in a calm tone. 'You reached out to me through your dream while asleep. What is it you need?'

Lilith cradled an imaginary infant, her smile soft yet firm. 'I wish to ask you to kill me.'

'What is the purpose?' Mr. Fool asked, neither hurried nor slow.

Earth Mother Lilith's smile remained gentle but resolute.

'The Mother Goddess of Depravity has leveraged my act of stealing Omebella's identity and destiny, using symbolic manipulation to trap me in this undead state. However, we can turn this against Her.

'Since I am symbolically equivalent to Omebella, killing me will also kill the true Omebella. As She is the link between the Mother Goddess of Depravity and the Brood Hive, severing this connection would significantly delay the Mother Goddess of Depravity's progress in accommodating the Brood Hive, buying us more time.

'The Mother Goddess of Depravity can use symbols, and I believe you, Mr. Fool, are fully capable of doing the same. As the master of Fooling, you are undoubtedly a master in this domain.'

'The equivalence of your symbolic identity to Omebella does hold,' Mr. Fool acknowledged with a slight nod. 'But killing Omebella now would turn the Brood Hive against us, prompting it to rejoin the Mother Goddess of Depravity.

'To the Brood Hive, Omebella is the first child It bore after attaining self-awareness, Its mystically significant eldest daughter, just as the Mother Goddess of Depravity is the Firstborn of the Original Creator. The Brood Hive values Omebella deeply.'

Before Earth Mother Lilith could respond, Mr. Fool tapped the edge of the bronze table with his fingers.

'This can be exploited, but the timing is not yet right.'

Earth Mother Lilith's smile appeared once more.

'Good. At least I can still serve some purpose with my death.

'I will await the correct moment.'

With that, Mother Earth stood, leaving the area above the gray fog in measured steps.

Chapter 1122: Choice

At the bronze table, in the seat belonging to The Chariot.

Light surged and solidified into Lumian's figure, bearing three heads.

He looked toward the head of the mottled bronze table and said, "Mr. Fool, I've obtained the remaining Conqueror Beyonder characteristics from Red Angel Medici. I'd like to go to Morora as soon as possible."

Mr. Fool gently nodded and replied, "You may go anytime. I will provide the necessary assistance."

Lumian understood that the help Mr. Fool referred to wasn't about entering Morora but rather offering necessary aid in handling 0-01.

Considering Mr. Fool was already maintaining the outer barrier in the astral world, reinforcing the Celestial Worthy's seal, and hiding the protected zones to sustain human society-tasks nearly impossible without the three Mysteries pathways' ability to divide attention - Lumian carefully added.

"I'll do my best to handle it myself, but for that, I'll need to visit the Forsaken Land of the Gods first.

"When the time comes, unexpected events may occur, so I'll need you to keep an eye on things in advance."

"No problem," Veiled in gray fog, Mr. Fool calmly assured him.

…

On the peaks of the Forsaken Land of the Gods's endless mountains.

Lumian's figure swiftly materialized, facing a man with silver hair cascading down His shoulders, clad in a linen robe, His features soft and graceful.

"Angel of Fate Ouroboros?" the central head of Lumian spoke.

The man, his expression gentle and tone indifferent, replied, "What do you want?"

He did not deny being Ouroboros, the Angel of Fate, the King of Angels from ancient times.

"I want to meet Grisha Adam, or Adam Grisha." Lumian said with a smile.

The Angel of Fate Ouroboros stepped aside, revealing a massive cross behind Him. However, it was empty, devoid of any divine presence.

"The Lord was, is, and ever shall be," Ouroboros declared devoutly. "If you cannot see Him, that is your own problem."

Unaffected by the Angel of Fate's response, Lumian stared at the enormous cross and burst into laughter.

"I bring a hope for saving the world. Will you meet with me or not?

"As the most skilled Telepathist, you should know I'm not lying."

From beneath the massive cross surged an ocean that seemed to encompass every color, engulfing the entire mountain range except for where Lumian and Ouroboros stood.

On this chaotic "sea," a humanoid figure walked on the black void-like surface, seemingly connecting heaven and earth.

The figure retained a human visage, His lower face covered with a fine golden beard. His golden eyes were as pure as those of a newborn, but His body was no longer tangible, entirely composed of light and shadow.

Trailing behind Him was a long black shadow, distinct from Him, bearing five heads. Behind His head rose a radiant golden sun.

"I see Him," Lumian turned his head and smiled at Ouroboros.

Then, he expanded his form into a towering steel giant wreathed in violet flames, smiling radiantly at Grisha Adam.

"Before I share that hope, I'd like to punch you."

Grisha Adam's baby-clear golden eyes remained unmoved. His majestic voice answered, "Okay."

Lumian's expression turned cold.

He teleported directly in front of Grisha Adam, clenched his left fist, and with violet flames blazing, struck the deity's right cheek with full force.

With a resounding explosion, Grisha Adam's head tilted to the side, His cheek caved in, His mouth split, and His flesh torn.

Lumian's right fist followed, its burning violet flames engulfing Grisha Adam's left cheek.

Boom!

Golden blood splattered, skull fragments shattered. and scorched marks spread everywhere.

When Lumian had teleported in front of the deity, the Angel of Fate Ouroboros bowed His head, devoutly and humbly praying repeatedly.

Retracting his fists, Lumian floated midair and arrogantly declared, "That punch was from Medici."

He then gazed into Grisha Adam's eyes and mockingly added, "Don't get mad. This is a necessary sacrifice."

Grisha Adam's golden eyes remained pure-without anger, resentment, mockery, or rebuke. They were so clear they reflected Lumian's image.

The flames on His face continued to burn, His wounds unhealed.

Lumian's smile gradually faded.

After a few seconds of eye contact, he smirked and said, "That hope is..."

He raised his right hand, pressing it against the peculiar dark-gold mask in the center of his left-side head, "I will remove this."

Grisha Adam gazed at him warmly, neither questioning nor rushing him.

Lumian continued, as if talking to himself, "This face should have originally belonged to the Creator, but after losing the balance and regaining balance via the addition of Mother's powers, it became the resurrection cornerstone for that Primordial God Almighty.

"If I remove the Celestial Worthy's mask, something very interesting will happen."

With a lighthearted tone, Lumian said to Grisha Adam, "The Primordial God Almighty's consciousness is competing with you for control of the Chaos Sea and this body. At this moment, if another resurrection opportunity suddenly appears, what will He choose?

"If He diverts His focus to influence this head and face, symbolically, it would mean abandoning the contest with you. Your disadvantage would instantly reverse, giving you the upper hand. Perhaps then, we'll gain a new pillar-a pillar standing with us to face the apocalypse, greatly increasing our chances of survival.

"If the Primordial God Almighty refuses to retreat or give up, the revival of this head and face will stagnate. Yet, their unique qualities will remain intact, and I can accomplish much with them. Hope for saving this world will arise from that-heh heh, well, maybe. Just maybe."

Looking into Grisha Adam's golden eyes again, Lumian grinned, "I look forward to the Primordial God Almighty's decision."

Without hesitation or delay, he pressed against the mask and pulled it off.

From the mask's depths emerged a door of light tinged with faint bluish-black hues. It quickly detached and disappeared into the grayish-white fog that had unknowingly spread across the sky.

In the next moment, Lumian removed the peculiar dark-gold mask.

Beneath it was a vortex-like face-no eyes, nose, or mouth, no bones-composed entirely of a chaotic liquid embodying every color.

Lumian eagerly observed the face, waiting for further changes.

However, the chaotic vortex remained motionless, showing no sign of forming a normal face.

The faces of Tudor and Cheek on either side of this head contorted slightly, as if experiencing some form of pain.

Lumian clicked his tongue and said, "What a pity..."

He made no effort to conceal his disappointment, turned around, and returned to the Angel of Fate's side.

Behind him, the giant radiant figure sank slowly, its shadow with five heads and the golden sun disappearing into the Chaos Sea.

Above him, the grayish-white fog in the sky gradually dissipated into nothingness.

Lumian tossed the dark-gold mask into the air and caught it repeatedly, sighing as he looked at Ouroboros. "Why don't you pursue the President of the Life School of Thought?"

Lumian's own face and the vortex-face simultaneously turned to Ouroboros.

With a gentle expression and indifferent tone, Angel of Fate Ouroboros replied, "The opportunity has passed.

"What remains now is waiting and choosing."

Lumian chuckled twice and asked no further.

Cheek's beautiful eyes, lovelier than sapphires, reflected a layered, ethereal, shadowy world.

Lumian's figure vanished, flamboyantly traversing through the special mirrored world to the City of Exiles, Morora.

Here, the seals indeed opened a gap for him.

Lumian's feet landed on Morora's disaster-scarred streets. Among the potholes and ruins, he walked step by step toward the entrance of the underground mausoleum.

His gaze swept casually, noticing how the grotesque residents of Morora tried to avoid him in terror upon seeing his three heads.

However, they could not act on their thoughts. They were mesmerized by the maternal radiance emanating from Demoness of Apocalypse Cheek's stunningly beautiful face. Others, under the gaze of Blood Emperor Alista Tudor, lowered their heads and knelt, completely submissive. Some stared fixedly at the vortex face.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Some burst into flames, others turned into mirrors. some grew dense fish scales, while others' skin cracked open, sprouting countless cold, emotionless eyes.

They had gone mad, lost control, merely from gazing upon the vortex face.

Don't look directly at God!

Amid the outburst of violent, frenzied, and destructive emotions, Lumian walked step by step into the underground mausoleum.

He arrived at a dark wasteland and stood before a mountain of corpses.

He raised his head, looking at the flagpole, iron-black with scorched marks and numerous dangerous blood- red spots.

0-01, Salinger's Blood Banner!

Lumian smiled and "humbly" said, "Boss, I've come to see you."

As soon as he finished speaking, bright red blood seeped from his brow, forming a blood-colored banner.

He had completed his prayer, beseeching power from the Origins of Disaster, the Calamity of Destruction.

He had become the priest of war and apocalypse, the embodiment of destruction and chaos.

Chapter 1123: Raising the Banner

Sensing the change in Lumian's aura, the scorched banner-like 0–01 reacted immediately, its bloodstained surface rippling violently.

Deep within Lumian's heart, a surge of emotions such as terror, awe, and worship erupted. It felt as if the air above him transformed into a crushing mountain, an iron-forged hand pressing down on his head, forcing him to bow, break his spine, and bend his knees.

Instinctively, he wanted to submit. Yet this submission wasn't merely spiritual but encompassed his mind, body, and soul. If he yielded, he would immediately become a puppet of 0–01, stripped of his own will.

Lumian's body ignited in flames, his iron-black bones creaking and groaning under the strain.

The blood-red mark on his brow glowed even brighter, instilling him with renewed courage. It kept his head upright, resisting the pressure.

How could a Blessed of the City of Calamity submit to the Uniqueness of the Red Priest?

Drawing on the essential power he had prayed for in advance, Lumian staggered yet resolutely ascended the mountain of corpses.

Suddenly, Abscessed Hand Zedus—akin to a beautiful work of art—along with numerous steel puppets and undead soldiers, appeared before him. They formed a blockade, attempting to halt Lumian's advance.

At the same time, the numerous darkened bloodstains on the scorched banner regained their vibrancy.

This caused Lumian's three heads to feel an invisible force tearing at them, as if they were about to be ripped from his body along with their bloody spines.

The head on Lumian's left shoulder turned abruptly, and Alista Tudor's face, now softer and more beautiful, gazed at Zedus.

The puppet-like, blank-faced Abscessed Hand Zedus froze in place, motionless.

He felt as if He were facing Himself.

How could I be a traitor?

How could I fight against myself?

His confusion caused the steel puppets and undead soldiers following Him to stop as well.

Just as 0–01 was about to issue new orders, Alista Tudor's face tilted upward and looked at the scorched banner.

A resonance and recognition rippled through the void. The still-dormant 0–01, which was only acting reactively, suddenly calmed down.

Lumian's figure vanished and reappeared in front of Deity's Fallen Banner—0–01's other name.

He extended his right hand toward the iron-black flagpole.

Instantly, his body began to rot. The violet flames and the intricate metallic bones entwined with runes deteriorated, dripping with vile yellow-green pus.

His soul also began to die, his thoughts teetering on the brink of eternal slumber.

The head on Lumian's left shoulder straightened, the chaotic vortex face turning toward 0–01.

Decay, ruin, death, and eternal slumber—all of it paused momentarily, as though cowed by some force.

Some of this power converged toward the vortex face, becoming a fraction of the infinite possibilities it embodied.

Seizing the moment, Lumian grasped the ice-cold, sharp-edged flagpole.

Before 0–01 could fully awaken, still partially sealed, Lumian transformed into a towering steel giant wreathed in violet flames and forcibly pulled the bloodstained, scorched banner from the mountain of corpses.

Rumble!

The entire City of Exiles shook violently, as though struck by the most catastrophic earthquake in human history. Buildings collapsed, and fissures swallowed countless prisoners who couldn't escape in time.

Rumble!

The wasteland surrounding the mountain of corpses, along with the entire underground mausoleum, crumbled toward the Salinger's Blood Banner in Lumian's hand. Entire sections slid into the void, a chaotic blackness where time and space twisted as if condensing into a singularity.

The underground mausoleum was being destroyed, Morora was being annihilated—this was the mutated power caused by the Red Priest Uniqueness being corrupted by a tributary of the River of Eternal Darkness.

This destruction was about to engulf Lumian and the 0–01 in his grasp.

Caught in the chaotic space-time, Lumian couldn't escape. He stood atop the mountain of corpses, smiling as he raised the scorched, bloodstained banner like a soldier who had claimed the enemy's flag in battle.

The next second, he pressed 0–01 against the vortex face of the head on his left shoulder, embedding it in the brow of that faceless, chaotic visage.

0–01 trembled violently.

Without fully awakening from its seal, Lumian had inserted it into the face with no eyes, nose, or mouth—a chaos vortex—right into the middle of the brows.

Alista Tudor's face bellowed angrily, but He was powerless to snatch 0-01 from him.

Lumian didn't allow 0-01—the charred, blood-stained banner—to fully merge with the face of chaos. It was only embedded—half inside, half outside.

The liquid embodying all colors from the vortex seeped onto it. The collapse and destruction of the mausoleum and Morora slowed, and the vast wasteland haltingly stabilized, its descent into the void ceasing.

Lumian placed the strange dark-gold mask back over the vortex face, shielding the unseeable god and covering 0–01.

Above, grayish-white fog reappeared, with faint constellations shimmering in and out of view.

Starlight descended, merging with the strange mask and completing the basic sealing process.

Only 0–01 needed sealing, and only temporarily. There was no need to invoke the full power of Sefirah Castle as before.

The vortex face had ceased changing—blocking Its unique properties and concealing Its form sufficed.

When the mask was securely in place, the destruction of the mausoleum and Morora came to a complete stop. Parts of the city, already consumed by nothingness, began to repair. Collapsed buildings and rubble-strewn streets remained.

Once time and space stabilized, Lumian teleported away from the mountain of corpses.

Zedus and the other soldiers of 0–01 were sealed there, awaiting the day Lumian became the Red Priest to return to their ranks.

Lumian appeared on a relatively intact street in the City of Exiles, Morora. Surveying his surroundings, he broke into a smile.

High above, meteors streaked across the sky, blazing as they rained down upon the city.

Rumble!

Morora faced utter devastation. Its condemned prisoners finally met their apocalypse.

Amid the thick dust and smoke raised by the falling meteors, Lumian's figure vanished.

…

Trier, inside the luxurious villa.

Lumian's figure materialized in the center of the living room.

'Did you get 0–01?' Franca, who had been waiting, asked with both concern and curiosity.

Lumian chuckled. 'An item that was already sealed? Wouldn't it be easy?'

'I doubt it was that simple. The Church of Knowledge couldn't effectively use it; they could only seal it. You must have prepared extensively to succeed,' Franca said skeptically.

Lumian sank into a single-seater sofa, looking at Franca, Anthony, and Ludwig.

'A bit. First, I went to the Forsaken Land of the Gods and 'visited' the one worshiped by the Aurora Order.'

'And then?' Franca pressed.

Lumian chuckled. 'Then I gave Him two punches.'

'How is that preparation?' Franca exclaimed, caught between shock and amusement.

He really went and punched Him twice?

One punch was even on behalf of Red Angel Medici.

Lumian responded with a smile, 'Don't ask about the rest.

'Let's just say that with the apex power of the two Calamity pathways, Zedus's portion within me, Alista Tudor's face, and the unique properties of this head, I passed 0–01's trials and claimed this Grade 0 Sealed Artifact.'

As he spoke, Lumian flicked the strange dark-gold mask.

'What about 0–01?' Franca finally remembered to ask. 'You didn't accommodate it already, did you?'

'Of course not,' Lumian replied with amusement. 'While many things no longer affect me, there's one rule I must follow—or rather, something I must respect before completing what I set out to do.

'I can't disrupt the delicate balance of this body. If I were to accommodate 0–01 and Medici's Conqueror characteristics now, the balance of yin and yang would shatter instantly, and I'll be beyond saving. At that point, both the true gods and evil gods would have to face the monster They wouldn't like to see.'

Franca was enlightened. 'You'll need to find Primordial Demoness Cheek first and acquire Her Uniqueness and Sequence 1 Beyonder characteristics.'

'But the Primordial Demoness is still a true god, one that's free to act. The other true gods likely can't focus on dealing with Her,' Anthony voiced his concern.

'Don't worry,' Lumian said with a smile. 'A destined messiah will lend a hand. For every sin committed, there's an equal redemption to be made.'

'A temporary dual-path true god, combined with you as a King of Angels and the Tarot Club's Angels, does give us a shot,' Franca said, sitting up straighter, a fiery determination lighting her lake-blue eyes. 'Now the question is, how do we find Cheek?'

Lumian's expression turned adrift, as though recalling something he deliberately avoided thinking about.

He smiled again. 'Part of Cheek is within me. We share the strongest mystical connection. With it, we can ask Mr. Fool, the God of Knowledge and Wisdom, Queen Mystic, or Ma'am Hermit for effective prophecies or revelations.

'And besides…'

He pulled out the Post-Apocalyptic Scripture from his Traveler's Bag, laughing lightly.

'Let's see what kind of prophecy this damn book will offer.'

The ancient parchment book fluttered open in his hands.

When Lumian stopped flipping, silvery mercury-like words rapidly appeared on the exposed page: 'Lumian Lee will encounter Primordial Demoness Cheek in the World of Ruin.'

Chapter 1124: The Visitor

"This damn book finally has some use," Lumian said, showing the contents of the Post-Apocalyptic Scripture to Franca and Anthony.

Franca pondered for a moment before saying, "Given the nature of the Post-Apocalyptic Scripture, even if this prophecy is false, as long as we believe in it and prepare accordingly, it will eventually come true.

"The question is, if it's a false prophecy, can it even affect a true god like the Primordial Demoness?"

"I don't know," Lumian replied, shaking the central head of his three. "Anyway, we're not relying solely on this for predictions."

"Then should we contact Ma'am Hermit now?" Franca suggested.

In this matter, splitting up wasn't an option. The critical medium for prophecy or divination was Lumian's Cheek face-the Sequence 1 Beyonder characteristic of the Demoness of Apocalypse already integrated into his body.

Lumian nodded at first, then gave a self-deprecating smile. "Not yet. The 'occasional' state is about to end."

Franca pursed her lips, stood up, and said, "Then let's head outside the protected zone.

"Anthony, you'll handle the matters of the Sick Church for now. You still have Ice Mirror Charms, right?"

"I do," Anthony replied steadily.

After Lumian and Franca left the villa, Anthony retrieved the mirror representing the Sick Church's pope from his Traveler's Bag. He reviewed the accumulated messages and replied to each one using the Ice Mirror Charm.

Meanwhile, Ludwig sat on the sofa, eating roasted sweet potatoes while casually watching Anthony work.

After a while, just as Anthony was about to put away the mirror, Ludwig suddenly asked, "Is human life always full of suffering?"

Anthony lifted his head, looked into Ludwig's brown eyes, and nodded. "Yes."

Ludwig continued, "If you had a chance to start over, would you still choose to be human?"

"Probably," Anthony said with a small smile. "After all, I have no experience being another species."

"But if human life is so full of suffering, why would anyone want to be human?" Ludwig asked, puzzled.

Anthony thought for a moment before answering.

"Most of humanity's suffering comes from the brevity of life and the frailty of our existence-from constantly thinking about these things. But if we stopped thinking, our existence would lose all meaning.

"Perhaps it's precisely because life is short and fragile that we always want to do something, to create something. We have no choice but to rely on and help others. We huddle together for warmth, dream together, and create fragments of beauty. And because of that, we suffer.

"A poet once said - I don't know who, but it wasn't Emperor Roselle. I wholeheartedly agree with what he said: 'If I have never felt pain in life, it means I have never truly loved my life'."

Ludwig's face was filled with confusion.

Anthony added calmly, "Pain comes from love and desire.

"Words like beauty, hope, and yearning are like flames - they make humans feel pain, yet they also make us like moths drawn to the flame, burning brightly for a moment before turning to ashes.

"Franca once told me that the fundamental tone of the universe is darkness. We short-lived humans exist to create moment after moment of light, generation after generation."

Ludwig, chewing on a roasted sweet potato, earnestly summarized, "I still don't understand why."

Anthony laughed.

"Honestly, neither do I.

"If someone claims to truly understand humanity and life, it means they don't understand it at all.

"Perhaps it's precisely because we don't understand that life is so intoxicating."

With that, he stood up and walked toward the edge of the living room.

Ludwig didn't ask where Anthony was headed. He remained on the sofa, quietly repeating two words to himself, "Beauty... pain..."

The young boy seemed to be pondering some philosophical question, muttering to himself, "These things aren't unique to humans..."

After finishing his roasted sweet potato, Ludwig shook his head and picked up an Intis general education textbook from the coffee table.

Flipping through it, he muttered, "Inefficient method of transmitting knowledge..."

Outside the villa, Anthony strolled aimlessly along the shadowed streets, basking in the bright sunlight.

For now, he had no main task.

He was responsible for two things:

First, managing the Sick Church's affairs when Franca was busy. He was effectively the pope, though he could tell Franca hadn't truly come to terms with Jenna's death. She still held onto the hope that Jenna might one day return, which made her reluctant to officially pass on the title of pope.

Second, assisting the official Beyonders in identifying corrupted humans or latent anomalies via monitoring the sea of collective subconscious. The symbols and powers of the Great Mother had broken through the barrier. Even though She wasn't currently focused on the protected zones, Her influence naturally caused sporadic mutations, especially among Beyonders of the Planter and Apothecary pathways.

As Anthony walked, he noticed a street musician performing in a small square. Many Trier citizens had gathered to listen, some even dancing joyfully.

Anthony gazed at the scene, his expression turning adrift.

He decided to treat himself better.

The time to enjoy life before the apocalypse was growing shorter.

He sat at an outdoor table at a café, ordered a strong cup of Intis coffee and a pork sausage, and let his thoughts drift while enjoying the music in the square. Occasionally, he'd cut a piece of sausage to eat or take a sip of coffee.

The bright sunlight carried the heat of summer.

Just as Anthony was about to leave, an elderly man in a worn blue military jacket and white trousers approached.

The old man glanced around and saw that Anthony's table was the only one with an empty seat.

Without hesitation, the man sat down and ordered a glass of Nepos liquor with tomato juice - a drink commonly referred to as "Harlot" in Trier's bars and dance halls.

The white-haired man looked at a barricade in the corner of the square and said to Anthony, as if they were old acquaintances, "Don't you think Trier has changed? It's not as lively as it used to be."

"What makes you say that?" Anthony, while already understanding his meaning, played along.

The old man tapped his cane on the ground and said, "In the old Trier, there wasn't a year without some ambitious fellow planning a riot, no year without chases over barricades, gunfights, and thrown projectiles.

"And now? The young people today have no vitality. They only dare to sneak around and pickpocket."

This has to do with the unique nature of the protected zones. An individual's outburst might implicate thousands, so every individual in the protected zones has their subconscious minds subtly influenced, providing them guidelines on what and what not to do... But this can only decrease the Great Mother's influence the frequency of mutations-but can't eliminate them entirely... Anthony answered inwardly.

"Did you participate in those street riots?" Anthony asked.

The old man snorted, "When I was in the military, I was responsible for suppressing those riots and demonstrations. Overnight, they'd build up barricades and resist with everything they had-Molotov cocktails, makeshift weapons.

"Later, I left the army, suffered injustice in Trier, and became a demonstrator myself…"

The man reminisced about his past, speaking at length.

Anthony didn't show the slightest impatience, treating it like reading a biography.

After the man finished and began sipping his Nepos liquor mixed with tomato juice, Anthony asked, "Why did you join the military in the first place?"

The old man laughed.

"For wealth, women, and becoming an officer, of course!

"I came from a poor background. Whether as a farmhand, shepherd, factory worker, or laborer, I couldn't make a living, let alone get rich. Joining the military at least gave me a chance-be it earning merits or looting corpses. At worst, I'd die early."

The man looked at Anthony, "You were a soldier too, weren't you? You have the air of one."

"Yes," Anthony admitted.

The old man grinned. "And why did you join?

"Surely it wasn't for wealth and women?"

Anthony shook his head and redirected his gaze to the musicians and onlookers. He didn't answer.

Draining his coffee before the man could ask further.

Anthony stood up.

Suddenly, a four-wheeled carriage stopped near the café.

The carriage door opened, and an elderly man in a black suit with a dark tie and a half-height silk top hat stepped out.

His neatly trimmed white sideburns framed a face with sharp features and icy blue eyes.

Anthony immediately recognized that this elderly man had come for him.

"Excuse me, are you Monsieur Anthony?" the man asked politely.

His icy blue eyes were surrounded by faint but visible blood vessels.

Anthony carefully replied, "I am. Who might you be, and what business do you have with me?"

The elderly man smiled and said, "You may call me Naboredisley."

Naboredisley? The suspected incarnation of one of the ancient gods-Devil Monarch? Anthony was taken aback.

He recalled Lumian mentioning that Naboredisley's true body resided on Hanth Island, protected by Earth Mother to prevent full corruption from the Mother Tree of Desire. However, with Earth Mother now dormant, it was unlikely She could provide the Devil Monarch's avatar any further assistance.

Lumian had speculated that Naboredisley might have been dragged into the Abyss and destroyed.

Yet here he was, alive and seemingly well, in the protected zone!

The icy-blue-eyed elder who self-proclaimed to be Naboredisley smiled and explained His purpose, "I wish to meet Monsieur Lumian Lee."

Chapter 1125: The Request

Inside the luxurious villa where Lumian and his companions resided.

Anthony openly observed Naboredisley, who was seated on the sofa diagonally across from him. He appeared exceptionally calm, neither anxious nor impatient, sipping His coffee gently.

This was unlike the Devil pathway Beyonders Anthony was familiar with. Naboredisley's emotions were stable, His demeanor relaxed, and His normalcy gave off an air of abnormality.

Gulp. Ludwig, seated next to Anthony, swallowed audibly.

He, too, was scrutinizing Naboredisley, dressed in formal attire with a neatly tied bow tie.

Naboredisley did not inquire about Lumian's return. Instead, He naturally engaged Anthony in casual conversation about the current state of the protected zones.

After some time, the figures of Lumian and Franca appeared at the edge of the living room.

Lumian instinctively glanced at Naboredisley, smiling without concealing his surprise.

'I thought you'd been dragged back into the Abyss.'

Naboredisley stood up and, unfazed, responded with a smile, 'My condition has actually improved.'

'Isn't Earth Mother already asleep?' Lumian asked, sitting on another sofa.

Franca sat close beside him, her expression tinged with curiosity.

The ice-blue-eyed demon Naboredisley sat back down, His tone calm as He explained,

'Before the descent of the crimson moon, another major event occurred, one you should remember—the consciousness of the Primordial God Almighty stirred, and His spirit became active.'

'What does that have to do with your improved condition?' Franca asked inquisitively.

Naboredisley smiled but gave no answer.

Lumian glanced at Franca and then shifted his gaze toward Anthony and Ludwig.

The others understood and tactfully left—Franca heading to the second-floor studio, Anthony to the kitchen, and Ludwig to the living room to handle matters of the Sick Church.

Only then did Naboredisley smile and speak to Lumian. 'At that time, I, too, experienced the revival of the malicious consciousness and frenzied spirit of the Primordial God Almighty within me. To a certain extent, it balanced the corruption of the Mother Tree of Desire, allowing me to regain a semblance of peace.

'Unfortunately, the revival of the Primordial God Almighty was short-lived, with His consciousness retreating to the Chaos Sea. He left only His malicious spirit, preventing a true balance. I remain unable to fully escape the control of the Mother Tree of Desire. However, my condition has relatively improved—I no longer rely on Lilith's aid. Maintaining even this state is difficult, though. Once the Mother Tree of Desire breaches or bypasses the astral world's barrier and descends into our world, the rope keeping me from falling further will snap immediately.'

'You experienced the revival of the malicious consciousness and frenzied spirit of the Primordial God Almighty?' Lumian echoed, already guessing why.

A faint smile played at the corner of the central head's mouth as he raised his right hand and flicked the forehead of the strange dark gold mask.

With a clang, Naboredisley smiled with some appreciation in His gaze.

'Yes. Others might not guess why, but you should find it obvious.'

'This is because the Primordial God Almighty once accommodated the sefirah corresponding to the Chained and Abyss pathways—Tenebrous World.'

'He even accommodated the 'Tenebrous World?' Lumian, though he had anticipated it, was still a little surprised.

The Abyss pathway's Tenebrous World and the Sun pathway's Chaos Sea were fundamentally incompatible. Could they really coexist?

Was the Primordial God Almighty already mad, unable to suppress His instinct to converge?

Did He first accommodate the City of Calamity?

In a reminiscent tone, Naboredisley continued, 'Before the First Epoch, in a more ancient age, there was a myth: the God Almighty of Heaven created a divine child. Several Angels, led by an Archangel, rebelled. They were defeated, cast into the Abyss, creating Hell, and turning them to devils.

'I've studied the honorific names within the Sick Church. I believe you've heard this myth.'

'I have,' Lumian replied calmly.

Naboredisley nodded slightly. 'According to what I know, this myth may never have actually occurred. Instead, it represents a tendency—a connection between Heaven and the Abyss. Thus, when instinct drives convergence, that deity might prioritize such associations.

'This is also consistent with mysticism. The phrase 'the degenerate nature of all living things' is undoubtedly familiar to you. The Abyss has two entrances—one in the Sunken Continent of the real world and another within the depths of every human heart, in their propensity to degenerate.'

'No wonder your condition improved after Earth Mother fell asleep,' Lumian said with a slight nod.

Then he asked, 'Are you also a remnant of a previous epoch?'

Franca had speculated about this before, noting how many of Farbauti's aliases resembled the names of great devils in ancient myths.

Naboredisley smiled and said, 'Suddenly, it was all gone—suddenly, only darkness.

'When I recovered fragments of thought and memory, I was already a great devil. Those fragments were soon drowned out by madness and bloodlust, only returning near the end of the First Epoch.

'The old age was utterly destroyed, leaving only us remnants.

'Haha, for me, that was actually a good thing. I lived for thousands of more years. I ruled the Abyss and the land, enjoying everything denied to me in the old age.'

Naboredisley laughed with wild abandon, unabashedly revealing His desires and malice—entirely different from His earlier calm demeanor.

Perhaps this was His true nature.

Lumian wasn't surprised. He waited for the Devil Monarch to finish laughing before asking, 'What do you want from me?'

Naboredisley returned to His calm state and spoke earnestly, 'I'd like to ask for your help. If successful, my sealed Abomination avatar will die, and you may claim its resulting Beyonder characteristic as your own.'

After the crimson moon's descent, most of the Southern Continent's inhabitants were also drawn into protected zones, including Abomination Farbauti hidden in the Dream Festival's grave.

The indulgence faction of the Rose School of Thought and the adherents of the Primordial Moon mostly remained outside the protected zones, especially those with the corresponding pathway's Beyonder characteristics. Any cultists forcibly brought into the zones were eventually purged.

'Quite generous. What's the matter?' Lumian smiled at Naboredisley.

Naboredisley took a sip of coffee before answering, 'I intend to accomplish something on the Western Continent before the Mother Goddess of Depravity accommodates the Brood Hive and the astral world's barrier completely shatters.

'Currently, only The Fool and you can help me.'

'Me? I can't help you bypass the Celestial Worthy's seal,' Lumian questioned. 'Even Mr. Fool can't do that right now. To protect the Western Continent, he's strengthened the seal. Sending you through would require waiting for an opportunity—when the seal can be temporarily undone.'

Naboredisley smiled and said, 'Thanks to Alista Tudor and Cheek's mad attempt, the secrets of the City of Calamity are now known. In your current state, you can perform a deep secret deed without relying on Their special corpse wax candles. That's equivalent to establishing contact with the Western Continent.

'What I need you to do is this: When you next perform a deep secret deed, projecting your spirit and consciousness into the City of Calamity, take my mental imprint with you. You're bound to engage in a deep secret deed again, given your intention to accommodate the City of Calamity.'

'Take your mental imprint… What's the point of that?' Lumian asked.

He didn't refute Naboredisley's last statement.

Naboredisley patiently explained, 'I need to establish a preliminary connection with the Tenebrous World.

'Normally, this would be impossible. But the Primordial God Almighty once accommodated the City of Calamity. The two have mutually corrupted each other. Through the Tenebrous World's corruption within the City of Calamity, I can establish an initial connection.

'This would benefit you as well. My mental imprint, fused with the Tenebrous World's corruption, would mitigate related risks when you accommodate the City of Calamity, reducing potential dangers to some extent.'

'Would this let you become an Above the Sequences?' Lumian asked thoughtfully.

Naboredisley shook His head. 'No, I lack the necessary Uniquenesses, and my current condition doesn't permit it.'

He calmly added, 'However, I would be able to help the Tenebrous World manifest greater power.'

Lumian nodded slightly, then smiled and asked Naboredisley, 'Do you think I'll agree?

'Allowing a great devil's mental imprint into one's own mind and spirit is extremely dangerous.'

A secret deed involved the union of consciousness and spirit with specific entities, unrelated to the physical body. Thus, in secret deed experiences, all items originated from the projection of one's spirit, not their actual counterparts. This meant Naboredisley could only participate in the secret deeds by placing His mental imprint within Lumian's soul, mind, and consciousness.

Naboredisley met Lumian's gaze and replied with a smile, 'I think you will.

'Because you and I are the same. In madness, we're most 'normal,' and in clarity, we're most insane.'

Lumian laughed, and his laughter lingered for a long while.

Finally, he restrained his smile and said to Naboredisley, 'Alright, I agree.

'I'll inform you before I next perform a deep secret deed.'

Naboredisley stood, satisfied, and extended His hand. 'Pleasure working with you.'

'Pleasure working with you,' Lumian casually shook His hand.

Taking His silk top hat, Naboredisley placed it atop His head and asked with a smile, 'Aren't you worried about creating such a devil could harm human society?'

Lumian smiled and replied calmly, 'If we don't survive the apocalypse, there won't be any human society for you to harm. If we do survive and I'm about to perish, I'll drag you down with me.

'If neither of those scenarios happens, either I or Mr. Fool will deal with you in the end—by killing, sealing, imprisoning, or banishing you.'

Naboredisley wasn't surprised by this response.

He smiled and sighed. 'Thank you for your honesty.'

With His silk hat securely in place, He left the luxurious villa at a steady pace.

Chapter 1126: The Future

As Naboredisley departed, Franca descended from the second floor, immediately asking Lumian, "What did He want from you?"

"Self-preservation," Lumian replied succinctly.

Franca's thoughts raced as she speculated aloud, "You're not connected to either the Abyss or the Chained pathways. How could He use you to save Himself?"

"By leveraging my deep secret deed with the peak powers of the Calamity pathways," Lumian answered, the central head on his shoulders smiling. "Don't ask for details."

"I get it. I'm not an Angel yet," Franca quipped, self- mocking.

Looking at Lumian, she mumbled, "Honestly, do I really have to wait for the final showdown to find the opportunity to complete the ritual to advance as a Demoness of Catastrophe?

"No alternatives in the meantime?"

Lumian considered this seriously before answering. "The advancement ritual is to 'create a disaster that affects an entire continent as a participant and advance amidst it.' The word 'participant' means you don't need to be the instigator-contributing to a small part of the disaster is enough. 'Affecting an entire continent' is a vague description. Continents vary in size, population, and significance. What kind of continent would fulfill the requirements?

"My personal understanding is that this equates to 'a disaster with a wide-reaching impact, involving hundreds of cities or settlements, and causing significant damage.'

"From that perspective, there's an upcoming disaster that fits the criteria."

Franca's eyes lit up. "What disaster?"

She immediately followed up, "Is it related to your plans against the Primordial Demoness?"

Lumian nodded. "Yes. We're about to bring a disaster to the Demoness Sect. This will take place outside the protected zones. If I succeed, it will inevitably involve the fall of the Primordial Demoness.

"As you've seen, the fall of the Eternal Blazing Sun had global repercussions. Many witnessed it firsthand. Even now, there's no sun in the World of Ruins; the rebirth forces of the Great Mother maintain nature's cycle. Referring to that example, if the Primordial Demoness perishes, it's highly likely to trigger a disaster that affects the entire world, which would fulfill the ritual's requirements.

"After all, the protected zones have the power of two existences to block the disaster. The Western Continent is sealed off by the Celestial Worthy, and the living beings still active in the World of Ruins are either the Mother's followers or outcasts like cultists and high-ranking members of the Demoness Sect. It's fitting for them to suffer."

"Hmm, my fight against the Demoness of Black and other Saint-level witches qualifies me as a participant," Franca agreed, then self-deprecatingly added, "A few years ago, when I first became a Witch, I never imagined that my advancement ritual would involve the fall of the Primordial Demoness..."

Back when she'd just become a Witch - or even when she became Unaging - she wouldn't have dared to think this far.

Lumian continued, "Let's go visit Ma'am Hermit."

…

The deep blue sea stretched out as the crimson moon replaced the setting sun, bringing darkness in its wake.

The Future-flagship of the Queen of Stars, Cattleya - sailed silently across the waves, as if in slumber.

As Lumian and Franca's figures emerged on the deck, a sailor approached with a bright smile, saying, "The captain asked me to bring you to her quarters."

"She foresaw our arrival?" Franca asked in surprise, glancing at the dark gold mask on the head over Lumian's left shoulder.

Wasn't it said that true gods and most great existences couldn't foresee this head's actions?

The sailor, still smiling, responded to Franca's question.

"The captain foresaw your arrival."

Fine, that's on me... Franca muttered inwardly.

Only then did she notice something peculiar about the sailor: a massive, red-and-white mushroom grew on his head, large enough to serve as an umbrella. The mushroom's roots seemed to pierce into his scalp and skull, while two tentacle-like appendages dangled from the mushroom, resting on the sailor's shoulders.

Suddenly, a name flashed through Franca's mind: Li Keji!

No, in the outside world, he was respectfully known as the Great Druid Frank Lee!

"Is that the latest type of mushroom?" Lumian asked, pointing to the sailor's head as they followed him toward the cabins.

The sailor beamed. "Yes, its tendrils can extract moisture from the air and turn it into milk. It can even continuously fish to provide protein.

"It's in symbiosis with me now, supplementing my body as needed."

As he spoke, the mushroom's cap and stem extended their tendrils outward into the air.

At the same time, the sailor grabbed one of the tentacle-like appendages draped over his shoulder and stuffed it into his mouth, sucking enthusiastically.

Milk trickled from the corner of his mouth, only to be reabsorbed by the tendrils.

"See? This way, I'll never go thirsty. No matter where I am, I'll never go thirsty! Haha, I'll never go thirsty!" The sailor laughed spiritedly.

Damn, has he been corrupted by Frank Lee, or has he been mutated by the Great Mother? Franca suddenly began to understand why Bella, who cared for Jenna's brother, was so terrified of being sent back to the Future.

Following the sailor, they entered the cabin. As they passed the staircase to the lower levels, he suddenly lowered his voice and spoke in a secretive, fearful tone, "Never go down there."

Franca nodded quickly, taking his advice without question.

When they reached the captain's quarters, the sailor knocked, waited for permission, and then opened the door, gesturing for them to enter.

Lumian and Franca walked in side by side. Standing by the window, dressed in a black warlock's robe and wearing thick glasses, Ma'am Hermit Cattleya greeted them with a gentle smile and a nod, "Good evening, Mr. Chariot, Ms. Two of Cups."

"Good evening, Ma'am Hermit," Lumian and Franca replied politely.

Franca glanced at the now-closed door to the captain's quarters and hesitantly asked.

"Ma'am, shouldn't you address the mushroom experiments being conducted on crew members? That sailor wasn't a criminal or a prisoner of war-he was a legitimate sailor."

The Hermit Cattleya paused for a moment before explaining, "In reality, it isn't so. What you saw was an illusion.

"An illusion?" Franca asked in surprise.

"In the protected zone, certain wild, unrestrained ideas can influence those nearby, creating surface-level abnormalities. In reality, that sailor doesn't have a mushroom growing on his head," Ma'am Hermit explained before adding. "Even for criminals and prisoners of war, unless they're beyond redemption, I don't let Frank experiment on them. At most, they're required to observe his experiments periodically."

Well done! Franca wanted to applaud Ma'am Hermit.

Understanding the nature of the protected zones, she found it easy to grasp Ma'am Hermit's explanation.

With a smile, Lumian said, "Ma'am, I'd like you to use Cheek's face on my left shoulder to divine Her whereabouts."

"Alright." Ma'am Hermit didn't ask further, removing her heavy glasses.

She was already a Sequence 2 Sage.

In the early months after the protected zones were established, frequent disasters involving high-level powers occurred. Demigods were stretched thin trying to manage them. Most were resolved by Amon, while others were stopped by Archangels and Angels, or delayed until reinforcements arrived.

These conditions had given Cattleya the opportunity to complete her ritual.

She wasn't particularly happy about it-she would have preferred no such opportunity, for humanity to continue living normal lives outside the protected zones.

The Hermit Cattleya's gaze shifted to the head on Lumian's left shoulder, but she didn't dare linger on the face adorned with the dark gold mask.

The head on Lumian's left shoulder turned towards The Hermit Cattleya, radiating maternal radiance. Cheek's beautiful and exquisite face beamed with anticipation.

The Hermit Cattleya's deep-purple, nearly black eyes turned abyssal, unfocused.

Faint images flashed within the mercury-colored rivers appearing and vanishing.

She abruptly tilted her head back as blood trickled from the corners of her eyes.

In a distant, detached tone, she said, "I see you fighting Cheek in the primeval rainforest of the Southern Continent."

"Thank you," Lumian said earnestly.

He then said, "I'd also like you to contact Queen Mystic. I'd like her to perform a divination as well."

"Alright," The Hermit Cattleya agreed, wiping the blood from her eyes. However, she asked in confusion, "Why did you ask me to divine?"

Wouldn't it have sufficed to go directly to the Queen?

Lumian chuckled.

"For one, different people may see different visions during divination. By comparing them, we might glean additional information. Second, this helps you digest the Sage potion. If your divination ultimately leads to the fall of a Calamity-representing evil god, wouldn't that perfectly embody the essence of a Sage?"

Ma'am Hermit remained silent for a couple of seconds before replying, "I'll contact the Queen soon to arrange a time and place, then inform you."

"Alright, thank you." Lumian and Franca vanished from the captain's quarters.

After watching them leave, The Hermit Cattleya didn't immediately put her heavy glasses back on. Instead, she gazed out at the deck.

Gradually, the deck, the cabin, and the entire ship became illusory in her vision, fading rapidly. The surrounding deep-blue, near-black seawater also lost its color, revealing a murky quality.

Within the murkiness, tens of thousands of overlapping human figures formed a massive sphere. Among them were the sailor from earlier and Cattleya herself, all with their eyes closed.

Many similar human spheres floated densely in the depths of the murkiness.

Chapter 1127: Suggestions

1127 Suggestions

The next day, in Trier's Avenue du Boulevard, within a garden apartment not far from the Grand Palace.

Lumian and Franca, under the guidance of The Hermit Cattleya, arrived at a third-floor terrace. There, they saw Queen Mystic Bernadette dressed in hunting attire, holding a watering can, tending to several potted plants placed around her.

"Long time no see," Queen Mystic said, setting down the watering can and turning to the visitors.

"Long time no see," Franca replied. In the dream city, she and the Queen had not only collaborated but also chatted a few times. With their shared connection related to transmigrators, Franca felt more respect than fear—perhaps even a sense of closeness.

"I thought you'd be at sea," she began chatting.

Queen Mystic Bernadette smiled faintly. "Before the apocalypse, I prefer to stay in Trier. Moreover, as a Sage and former princess of Intis, I feel it is my duty to protect the citizens here, prevent various disasters, and maintain stability and order. This environment is particularly conducive to digesting the Sage potion, especially in the first couple of months."

As she said this, Bernadette glanced at The Hermit Cattleya, seemingly imparting a lesson.

"Ah, that makes sense." Franca nodded in understanding. "So, are you almost done digesting your Sage potion?"

"Almost," Bernadette replied succinctly.

She turned to Lumian. "You want me to divine the whereabouts of the Primordial Demoness?"

"Yes, please help us," Lumian said sincerely.

Queen Mystic Bernadette's eyes grew deep, like the sea before a storm—boundless and unfocused.

Faint, blurry images flickered across her vision, as if mercury-like rivers emerged and vanished.

Two streaks of crimson tears trickled down Bernadette's cheeks as her detached, ethereal voice sounded.

"I see the Primordial Demoness smiling, an abyssal mirror world, and a crimson full moon."

Crimson full moon… The phrase sent a shiver down the spines of not only Lumian and Franca but also The Hermit Cattleya.

To Beyonders aware of the protected zones' truths, the "crimson full moon" was like a trauma etched deep into their consciousness. Its mere mention brought it vividly to mind.

This prophecy differs significantly from Ma'am Hermit's, even containing contradictions… Clearly, consulting multiple high-level individuals skilled in divination and prophecy would allow me to piece together more useful revelations. It's like the story Aurore once told about blind men piecing together the image of an elephant—each by touch alone can only describe a part, and the complete truth requires combining their perspectives. Lumian's central head nodded slightly in acknowledgment.

He began considering the connections between the three prophecies.

The Post-Apocalyptic Scripture claims I will encounter Cheek in the World of Ruins. That could be false, but treating it as true and preparing accordingly might make it true. The variable is whether it can influence a true god.

Ma'am Hermit's prophecy points to the primeval rainforest of the Southern Continent, aligning with the Post-Apocalyptic Scripture's basic premise.

Queen Mystic's prophecy doesn't clarify if it's in the protected zones or the World of Ruins. However, if a crimson full moon rises in the World of Ruins, things will become troublesome—gravely so. At best, it means the Mother Goddess of Depravity has turned Her gaze upon us…

Lumian shared the prior prophecies, hoping to see how the former Clairvoyants, now Sages Bernadette and Cattleya, would interpret them.

"Somewhere in the World of Ruins' mirror world—or perhaps within the special mirror world," Queen Mystic speculated.

The Hermit Cattleya added, "The features there reflect the primeval rainforest of the Southern Continent.

"The crimson full moon may also be a product of the mirror world's reflections. For now, its symbolism remains unclear."

Lumian nodded and said to Franca and Ma'am Hermit, "Mr. Fool has entrusted me with something to discuss with the Queen."

Though now an Angel, Cattleya didn't assert, "There's nothing I can't hear." Instead, she led Franca to a small lounge on the first floor to enjoy tea and snacks.

"What does Mr. Fool need?" Queen Mystic Bernadette withdrew her gaze from the terrace's exit and inquired of Lumian.

She had not foreseen this request but now carried some guesses.

Lumian smiled. "Mr. Fool wants me to relay a message to Genie."

Bernadette nodded slightly, extended her right hand, and traced numerous starlit words in the air. These words intertwined into strange symbols, opening a "secret door" to an unknown location.

The door swung open swiftly, and a howling gale emerged, coalescing into a figure—a man with his head wrapped in white cloth, his upper body human-shaped, and his lower body composed of flowing air currents.

"Magic Wishing Lamp," Bernadette addressed in her usual tone.

The man respectfully retrieved an object from within his wrapped layers—a gold, intricately patterned vessel resembling a small lamp.

"0-05—Magic Wishing Lamp."

Bernadette ran her fingers over the lamp's golden surface and called its name, "Genie."

The lamp's wick ignited with a flash, releasing a thick, golden radiance akin to viscous liquid.

The light hesitated, reluctant and resistant, before forming a hazy, distorted figure with a blue-white interior and a faint golden outer layer.

The resilience of a Great Old Dominator is truly amazing. Even after losing their sefirah, Uniqueness, and Beyonder characteristics, reduced to mere consciousness, spirit, and status, He has recovered enough within a year after suffering severe trauma to respond. Though feeble, He is far from permanently comatose or deeply asleep… Lumian thought wistfully.

Genie surveyed the room, ready to utter some perfunctory remarks before retreating back into the Magic Wishing Lamp, but Lumian interrupted, "If I were you, I'd hear what Mr. Fool has to say. It concerns your future—perhaps even your end."

Genie's grand, majestic voice replied, "My future is already determined unless He chooses to break His promises."

Lumian detected the undeniable frailty in Genie's voice and smiled.

"Mr. Fool will undoubtedly honor his promise, but that time hasn't arrived yet, isn't that so?

"He posed a scenario: what if he perishes before that time comes? In matters of fulfillment, this is considered force majeure. And His 'successor' might be someone you wouldn't want to see—someone for whom breaking promises and deceiving rules is as effortless as breathing."

Lumian paused briefly before continuing, "Let's consider another possibility. If the Great Old Ones breach the barrier before we can respond adequately, killing Mr. Fool, Grisha Adam, and other true gods, might one of Them target the Nation of Disorder?

"Although They can no longer accommodate Sefirah Castle or the Chaos Sea, proximity might allow them to accommodate the Nation of Disorder. At that time, what attitude would the successful one adopt toward a weakened you? If They freed you from the Magic Wishing Lamp, would you dare emerge? No, by then, the Magic Wishing Lamp might no longer be capable of protecting you."

"Eventually, They would pursue the Uncertain Mist, completing the Son of Chaos. Your spirit may indeed persist, but only to wail eternally within Their belly, enduring perpetual torment."

Genie remained silent.

Lumian smiled and continued, "You know Mr. Fool's credibility. As long as he lives and the world endures, he will fulfill his promise and return you to the cosmos."

Seeing Genie about to respond, Lumian added, "No need to argue with me or twist my ideas. I'm merely the messenger for Mr. Fool—not the decision-maker."

After several seconds of silence, Genie's majestic voice reverberated. "What does He wish to say?"

Lumian smiled. "Mr. Fool hopes you can offer some advice for the impending apocalypse.

"He knows you're currently weak and unable to grant wishes or accomplish much, but your status and insight remain."

Genie gazed at the head on Lumian's left shoulder for a while, then spoke grandly, "Three hints:

"First, the Circle of Inevitability will bring calamity but is also the universe's most powerful and genuine Angel of Redemption."

This seems to suggest utilizing the godhood and symbolism of the Circle of Inevitability? Lumian refrained from questioning further, knowing Genie wouldn't elaborate.

"Second," Genie's voice rumbled solemnly, "your uniqueness and the symbolism of the Lord of Mysteries."

Lumian watched Genie silently, awaiting further exposition.

"Third, at critical moments, temporarily enhance the Nation of Disorder," Genie concluded.

Hearing this, Queen Mystic Bernadette frowned ever so slightly.

Genie's voice carried a trace of amusement. "This advice indeed benefits me to some extent, but you may choose to ignore it.

"Make haste; my elder sister will accommodate the Brood Hive faster than you think."

With that, the faint golden figure retreated into the Magic Wishing Lamp.

In His weakened state, Genie had no desire to remain exposed for long.

Bernadette mulled over the message briefly before telling Lumian, "I understand Mr. Fool's intentions now."

Lumian nodded, smiling as he took his leave.

Chapter 1128: Another Prophecy

1128 Another Prophecy

Lenburg's capital, Azshara.

In front of the side gate of the grand and magnificent white tower, Lumian was greeted by a demigod from the Church of the God of Knowledge and Wisdom—someone he had seen before.

After his experiences in the dream city, Lumian easily recognized her.

She was Edwina Edwards, formerly the Pirate Admiral, Vice Admiral Iceberg and now a high-ranking deacon of the Church of Knowledge.

Dressed more like a professional teacher than a pirate or clergy member, Edwina gestured invitingly without saying a word.

Lumian refrained from asking questions, silently following her through the door and into a dimly lit hallway lined with numerous gas wall lamps.

After walking in silence for a long stretch, Lumian suddenly asked, "Does knowing more—possessing greater knowledge—make one suffer more?"

Edwina replied with her usual calm expression, "I would rather suffer from knowledge than find happiness in ignorance."

Gazing at the seemingly endless corridor, Lumian changed the subject.

"If humanity were to acquire enough knowledge, what could it achieve without relying on Beyonder powers?"

Edwina glanced at Lumian and said, "Knowledge in mysticism is also knowledge."

After a brief pause, she continued, "If you exclude that, then perhaps one day in the future, humanity could find other ways to influence the rules and touch authority. But beyond that, it would be impossible—unless mystical elements were incorporated.

"My research focuses on enabling humanity to use Beyonder powers with less risk."

"That's nice…" Lumian remarked wistfully.

After another moment of silence, they stopped at the end of the corridor, standing before a pair of brass doors.

Lumian turned his head to study Edwina for a moment before asking thoughtfully, "Would you want to return to being Vice Admiral Iceberg?"

Without hesitation, Edwina shook her head. "I prefer my current life, where I can learn something new every day and make discoveries."

Lumian did not press further. Under Edwina's gaze, he pushed open the double doors.

Inside was a bright and clean library filled with numerous brass bookshelves.

For a moment, Lumian felt as though he had returned to his first visit to the City of Exiles, Merora.

He stepped inside, and the brass doors slowly closed behind him.

From behind a towering bookshelf emerged Heraberg, dressed in a plain white robe embroidered with brass threads and holding two books. His amber eyes remained warm and clear, showing no sign of cloudiness.

Seeing Heraberg did not surprise Lumian. He smiled and bowed slightly. "Your Grace, we meet again."

Heraberg gave a slight nod. "Your current state is very research-worthy, but time is running out."

He made no effort to conceal His regret nor was He worried about the emotional damage it would cause Lumian. He spoke plainly, as if discussing an ordinary breakfast.

"Indeed, time is running out," Lumian agreed.

Heraberg observed the head on Lumian's left shoulder for a moment before speaking calmly, "I had made a prophecy.

"You will encounter Cheek in the near future."

"I understand," Lumian replied with a smile.

He looked around the library and suddenly felt a pang of nostalgia. "Your Grace, did you ever foresee my current state?"

Heraberg looked at him and spoke with deliberate cadence, "If I were to say I foresaw your future entirely, that would be a lie. But if I claimed I had no foresight at all, that would also be untrue.

"I foresaw that you would gain something unique, but I didn't know what it would be. I am not omniscient or omnipotent. Among the contenders for 0-01, I favored you because of your excellent performance, ability to stay calm and study diligently, and borrowing books from the library again and again—unlike the others…"

As He spoke, Heraberg shook His head.

"I'm a lover of learning," Lumian said with a calm smile, laced with a hint of self-deprecation.

Heraberg said with relief, "If you truly grasp the allure of knowledge and understand the joy of learning, even a long life will not be plagued by emptiness or torment.

"Knowledge embraces everything. Knowledge is everything…"

His tone was patient, as though genuinely attempting to guide Lumian toward a fulfilling future.

Lumian listened quietly, not interrupting, though he knew it wasn't particularly important.

When Heraberg finished speaking, Lumian asked gravely, "Would you ever willingly give up your current life?"

"Child, our will may be free, but we are not alone in this world. Often, life is about choosing between the bad and the worse—there's no better option.

"In similar situations, some would choose to give up entirely. But I am greedy. I wish to keep living. The ocean of knowledge is boundless, and the pursuit of it is full of joy. I am not ready to die yet. This is the fundamental reason behind many of my decisions.

"Now, there are only a few options left before me. Since I still wish to live, I must choose the relatively less bad one.

"Wanting to live is not shameful."

Looking into Lumian's eyes, He concluded, "These are my thoughts and experiences. I hope they provide some value when you make your own choices in the future."

"Thank you," Lumian said sincerely.

Having obtained the prophecy and answers he needed, he prepared to leave. But then he recalled something. "Your Grace, where exactly is the City of Exiles, Morora?"

"It, along with the surrounding mountains, resides in my stomach," Heraberg admitted without hesitation.

Lumian was enlightened. "The Path of Exile leads to the astral world?"

Heraberg nodded. "Yes."

He then smiled faintly. "When you summoned a meteor to destroy Morora, it gave me quite a stomachache."

Lumian froze momentarily before letting out an awkward chuckle. "That might be the greatest prank I've ever pulled—if it even qualifies as a prank."

After leaving Azshara, Lumian returned to Trier.

"How did it go?" Franca asked with concern.

Lumian recounted the God of Knowledge and Wisdom Herabergen's prophecy before adding, "I have a general idea now. Time to make a plan."

Franca studied the head on Lumian's shoulder for a moment, rubbing her chin. "Why do I feel like you're in a better mood?"

As she spoke, she glanced around, seemingly looking for Anthony to confirm her observation. Unfortunately, Anthony had gone to report an anomaly in the sea of collective subconscious to the official Churches and offer assistance.

For the past year, Spectator-pathway demigods like Anthony had been monitoring, observing, and assisting without rest. Any slight oversight could lead to disaster, leaving the task of quelling anomalies and calamities to other high-ranking Beyonders. However, in emergencies, such distinctions would be disregarded.

As for unofficial Mid- to Low-Sequence Beyonders and ordinary humans, they remained unaware that the Southern and Northern Continents had been destroyed and that they were in protected zones. Continuing their normal lives—singing, dancing, and working—was the greatest help they could offer to the official organizations and true gods.

In the current situation, the anchors must remain stable. Even false happiness was preferable!

Smiling, Lumian replied, "I just listened to an elder share His life's wisdom."

"Sounds good," Franca said without probing further.

Eagerly, she said to Lumian, "Let's start planning how to bring catastrophe to the Demoness Sect!"

For nearly a year, Franca had waited patiently to exact vengeance for Jenna and Lumian.

She could barely hold herself back anymore. She was no gentleman; she wished for swift retribution.

Seeing Franca's enthusiasm, Lumian chuckled. "I need to report to Mr. Fool first."

…

Above the gray fog, within the majestic palace.

After Lumian's figure vanished from the The Chariot card's seat, Mr. Fool contemplated for a few seconds before summoning an impromptu meeting.

In an instant, beams of light surged upward, transforming into different figures seated in various positions.

They were the Major Arcana card holders—Madam Justice, Madam Magician, Mr. Star, and others—everyone except Lumian.

"The Chariot intends to bring catastrophe to the Demoness Sect. You are to assist him," Mr. Fool commanded.

"Yes, Mr. Fool," the Major Arcana card holders responded in unison, rising from their seats.

Mr. Fool nodded lightly, signaling them to sit back down. Then he addressed The Sun Derrick,

"I hope you will uphold your justice in this matter, fully digest your potion, and become an Angel as soon as possible."

After the fall of the Eternal Blazing Sun, under Mr. Fool's protection, Derrick had obtained the Lightseeker Beyonder characteristic.

Once The Sun responded, Mr. Fool turned to The Star Leonard.

"You and Pallez will both participate. Apply to the Church of Evernight for temporary use of a Sealed Artifact…

"During this operation, aim to acquire a Grade 0 Sealed Artifact or the Demoness of Catastrophe Beyonder characteristic. Then, exchange it with the Church of Evernight for the Servant of Concealment Beyonder characteristic.

"Bring fear to the high-ranking members of the Demoness Sect. Through this, you will fully digest your potion."

The Star Leonard discerned that the last two lines were not instructions or reminders but blessings from Mr. Fool.

Feeling a wave of emotion, Leonard stood and bowed. "Yes, Mr. Fool."

The Fool then turned to Madam Temperance. "You and Reinette will also participate. The indulgence faction may attempt to sabotage The Chariot's actions."

Temperance Madam Sharron raised a pre-written card. "Understood, Mr. Fool."

After issuing instructions to all the Major Arcana card holders, Mr. Fool concluded the impromptu gathering.

…

Cathedral of Serenity, Church of Evernight headquarters.

The Star Leonard met with the current Pope, Saint Dabomachie.

"Your Holiness, I wish to apply for temporary use of a Grade 0 Sealed Artifact." Leonard drew a star sigil on his chest, making four sequential points.

"Which one?" Dabomachie, an elderly man with white hair and beard and a serene countenance, asked gently.

The Star Leonard replied in a deep voice, "0-17."

Chapter 1129: A Chance Encounter

1129 A Chance Encounter

Another day began, and Lumian departed from the fog-shrouded protected zone.

The World of Ruins had no sun and was perpetually cloaked in night. However, the temperature wasn't particularly cold. Illuminating the surroundings was crimson moonlight, evoking a spring-like atmosphere with a climate that alternated between warmth and chill.

In the sky, the full moon was nowhere to be seen, the stars were dim, and the darkness was tinged with crimson.

Lumian turned his body slightly, glancing at Franca, who stood at the edge of the grayish-white fog. He gave her a subtle nod.

Franca responded with a warm, caring smile, waved at Lumian, and then vanished from sight.

Lumian shifted his gaze to the right, to the face of Cheek on the head that rested on his left shoulder.

Cheek's face, simultaneously stunningly beautiful, innocently pure, and radiating maternal grace, flashed a sweet smile.

She showed no signs of discontent with what Lumian was about to do—at least not outwardly.

"You're looking forward to this too, aren't you?" Lumian asked, his lips curling into a smirk.

Cheek's face couldn't speak yet, nor did She make any movement, neither confirming nor denying his words.

Lumian paid Her no further attention, turning his head instead toward the other faces—Aurore and Jenna.

Their eyes remained tightly shut, their faces bearing faint traces of bloodstains that seemed impossible to clean away.

Lumian let out a slow breath, striding toward the edge of the ruins of Trier, in the direction of the green domain dominated by towering oaks.

He wandered aimlessly, allowing the Law of Beyonder Characteristics Convergence and the mystical connection between the main body and an avatar to work naturally.

This was the direction the previous prophecies had pointed toward.

The further he ventured beyond the ruins, the more deathly silent the surroundings became. Only from the green domain did occasional sounds drift over—cries of "wah, wah, wah" from infants and the fluttering of bird wings.

Suddenly, Lumian spotted a group of lively wild deer emerging from behind rows of abandoned buildings.

Their nimble steps carried them under the crimson moonlight. Every now and then, they paused to nibble at the green plants covering the houses and the fruits growing on them.

Thud!

One deer collapsed to the ground.

Its body began to decay rapidly, as if consumed by countless microscopic organisms. Within seconds, it had completely returned to the earth—including the pale white bones, leaving behind no traces.

Thud, thud! More deer fell to the ground.

Yet the remaining deer displayed neither panic nor fear. They continued leisurely eating, while simultaneously giving birth to blood-soaked fawns one after another.

By the time the herd moved out of Lumian's sight, only the newborn fawns remained, growing at an astonishing pace.

There's no way civilization can develop like this… Lumian suddenly thought.

He wasn't sure whether this was a deliberate act by the Mother Goddess of Depravity or simply the natural environmental influence of Her state. What came to his mind, however, was something Madam Magician had once mentioned: she had wandered to a distant planet in the depths of the cosmos, where the inhabitants worshiped the Mother Goddess of Depravity. Yet their rulers weren't even Angels but rather three divine offspring birthed from the union between the Mother Goddess of Depravity and the planet itself in ancient times. Despite their extreme reverence for motherhood and reproductive organs, they had managed to develop a unique civilization.

Perhaps like the World of Ruins, the Mother Goddess of Depravity's true domain, is like this—devoid of civilization but teeming with Mythical Creatures… On the other hand, planets worshiping Her elsewhere might still foster civilizations? Lumian pressed onward.

After walking a while longer, an expansive forest of colossal oaks unfolded before him.

At that moment, four figures emerged from the oak forest.

The four carried a heavy, unpainted coffin made of raw wood.

Three of them were golems formed from earth, while the lone human among them wore a brown robe adorned with the Sacred Emblem of Life. His face was covered in scruffy facial hair, and his expression was solemn, as though performing a sacred ritual.

He appeared to be a clergy member of the Church of Earth Mother who had "defected."

The Church of Earth Mother still existed, with Her Blessed maintaining a tenuous hold with the aid of other official Beyonder organizations to prevent the goddess from losing Her anchors entirely. If Earth Mother were to go mad or perish now, the astral barrier would immediately be shattered by the Outer Deities.

The Favored of Earth Mother had suffered significant losses. Many had mutated or lost control during the descent of the crimson moon, and subsequent blows had further diminished their numbers. Only in the past two months had they attained some measure of peace. Their numbers now were less than half of what they had once been, and even Matriarch Roland was now a puppet of the Mother Goddess of Depravity, wandering a certain part of the World of Ruins.

Carrying a coffin? Could this be a former Saint of the Church of Earth Mother, a Sequence 3 Pallbearer? Lumian wasn't surprised by this chance encounter with one of the Mother's children.

He scrutinized the individual, who he assumed was a Pallbearer, and mused, The title of Pallbearer in this Sequence should be symbolic, representing the act of returning life to the earth—an essential part of the Mother's pathway for constructing the cycle of reality, connecting concepts and powers related to death and return.

It's not meant to involve actually carrying a coffin—it's about the symbolic meaning…

As part of acting, this makes sense. But you've already mutated into a corrupted creature; what's the point of acting?

The coffin must hold something special. What's inside?

When it came to matters related to the Mother Goddess of Depravity, Lumian was more than willing to stop, observe, and study. He positioned himself directly in the Pallbearer's path.

Meanwhile, the head on Lumian's left shoulder swiveled, with Cheek's stunning face gazing at the target.

Sensing this, the Pallbearer turned to look at Lumian. His gaze immediately became sinister and ferocious.

Just as he was about to unleash his Beyonder abilities, his body suddenly underwent a transformation.

His skin cracked open, spilling clumps of brownish earth. The earth engulfed him, fusing with his body and sprouting various symbolic organs representing the Mother, some human, others not.

The Pallbearer quickly lost control and descended into madness.

This was the power of the Demoness of Apocalypse. If the Death pathway embodied death and eternal rest, the Darkness pathway silence and eternal darkness, the Giant pathway decay and the passage of time, and the Red Priest pathway conquest and the destruction wrought by war, then the Demoness pathway represented the arrival of the apocalypse and the return to chaos.

The apocalypse marked the ultimate eruption of all conflicts within a designated area, inevitably involving the entanglement of fate.

The apocalypse was also the end of destiny!

And Lumian bore the boon powers of Inevitability.

The Pallbearer had already been teetering on the edge of losing control due to his corruption. With the arrival of the apocalypse, this inner conflict naturally erupted under the influence of fate.

However, his transformation into a monster didn't prevent him from attacking Lumian. He threw aside the coffin and charged at Lumian with his earth golems.

The surrounding greenery, even several young oaks, instantly withered and turned yellow, drained of life.

After just two steps, the Pallbearer's body was suddenly coated in grayish-white.

In mere seconds, he froze in place, transformed into a stone statue.

His three earth golems met the same fate.

Without a sound, the ground beneath them split open, spewing forth molten lava that swallowed them completely.

The lava was followed by the collapse of the entire surrounding area. Earth, plants, abandoned buildings, and the melted statues all vanished into the dark void.

The localized "Apocalypse" that Lumian had targeted at a specific region had arrived in full.

Seeing deep brown, nearly black light gradually condensing in the void, Lumian stepped toward the raw wooden coffin, which he had deliberately spared from the effects of his influence.

With a single kick, he sent the coffin's lid flying off.

Inside was a mass of rotting flesh, resembling an unformed fetus or the corpse of a small animal.

It didn't seem to have a physical form. As soon as it was exposed to the crimson moonlight, it began to evaporate rapidly into wisps of black-brown gas.

Lumian filled the area with dense Fog of War, cutting off the crimson moonlight, but the rotting flesh continued to vaporize, accelerating as it did.

The face of Alista Tudor, positioned on Lumian's left shoulder, turned toward the coffin, His eyes pitch black and commanding, compelling submission.

The black-brown gas slowed its ascent but strangely fused with the surrounding environment, dissipating quickly.

Lumian hesitated for a moment but didn't remove the dark golden mask covering the central face on his left shoulder.

In the blink of an eye, the rotting flesh had completely evaporated, leaving only a few black-brown stains at the bottom of the coffin as proof of its existence.

Lumian stared at it for a few seconds before reporting the matter to Mr. Fool.

He didn't venture into the endless oak forest. Instead, under the crimson moonlight and the intermittent cries of infants, he skirted the edge of the ruins of Trier, heading in another direction.

Familiar streets and houses appeared before him in an unfamiliar manner.

This was the market district. This was Rue Anarchie.

Lumian buried his hands in his pockets, as though returning to his past.

He didn't expect to "encounter" Primordial Demoness Cheek directly but felt it likely he would cross paths with a high-ranking Demoness. For Demonesses to survive in the World of Ruins, they couldn't do so without the protection of the Primordial Demoness. This required them to gather in one place or a few limited locations. Encountering one would mean encountering a group.

I thought you'd come straight for me to fulfill your dream… Lumian turned his head slightly, addressing Cheek's face.

That face responded with a sweet smile but nothing more.

As he walked, Lumian suddenly stopped.

He realized it had been a long time since he had heard the cries of infants or the fluttering of birds' wings from the oak forest.

The entire ruins were unnaturally silent—deathly still.

Chapter 1130: Initiative

Faced with such an anomaly, Lumian smiled.

He withdrew his right hand from his pocket and continued walking forward.

As he proceeded, the buildings on both sides, including the Auberge du Coq Doré, began to twist and writhe, growing upward into swaying, grotesque trees.

These "trees" pointed toward the sky, resembling the primeval rainforests of the Southern Continent.

Raising an eyebrow, Lumian stopped in his tracks.

"So proactive, are we?" he remarked with a smile, glancing toward Cheek's face on the head resting on his left shoulder.

At that moment, the crimson moonlight in the sky, the dim stars, and the dark night all began collapsing and spinning toward a single point, quickly merging into a chaotic vortex that encompassed all colors.

From within the vortex, a figure wearing a bone-white dress emerged, descending from the heavens. The figure grew larger and larger, like an asteroid traveling across the boundless cosmos, unscathed by atmospheric friction.

The enormous figure had cascading black hair, slightly thick and waterfall-like, sapphire-like eyes gleaming with brilliance, and features both exquisite and dignified. On first glance, She appeared breathtakingly beautiful; upon closer inspection, her purity and grace stood out. She was none other than the Primordial Demoness, Cheek.

She did not reveal her Mythical Creature form. Apart from Her immense size, Her beauty defied belief, and Her charm was so overwhelming that even abstract concepts seemed unable to resist Her allure. She appeared as a normal human woman.

As She descended, the "trees" of the "primeval rainforest" shed their hard exterior, bending in various directions.

At this moment, they were no longer trees but thick, slick, black hair with distinct black-and-white eyeballs embedded within.

The hair swayed, turning the scene into one of surreal abstraction.

As Primordial Demoness Cheek descended, She smiled affectionately at Lumian and said, "I knew you'd come to find me."

…

Hidden in the darkness and trailing Lumian from nearly ten kilometers away, Franca relied on more than just subtle traces he had left behind, a Mirror Substitution he had entrusted to her, and the unique connection among their team members. She also relied on the mystical link they had established through their roles as Malady God and Malady God's Companion.

Franca had initially decided to include the title "Malady God's Companion" in her honorific name, hoping to anchor Lumian, who often succumbed to madness, with a "corrupted" connection. This would enable him to instinctively recognize that, in the mystical and Beyonder sense, they were companions—partners who supported one another. Combined with their existing emotional bond, this might prevent him from attacking her during moments of insanity and allow him to "heed" her suggestions.

After tracking Lumian for some time, Franca suddenly noticed that the sky had turned chaotic, the previous illusory ocean now engulfing it.

A gentle, soft voice whispered in her ear.

"You dare call yourself His mistress?

"I am His true companion."

As the female voice echoed, Franca's body stiffened instantly, grayish-white spreading rapidly across her skin and deep into her soul.

If not for her status as a demigod Demoness with some resistance to Petrification, she would have already turned into a statue upon hearing the voice!

Have I been drawn into the depths of the mirror world, into that special mirror world?

Is the Primordial Demoness targeting me first? Is it because of Her pathological possessiveness, and the fact that I'm currently Lumian's companion?

F*ck, I'm the one being cheated on here! I'm the real victim!

In that instant, countless thoughts raced through Franca's mind, yet she was powerless to resist.

That was a true deity, the Sequence 0 Primordial Demoness!

The next second, the petrification abruptly ceased.

Franca seized the opportunity, swiftly activating her Mirror Substitution.

With a crackling sound, she escaped her current position, gray-white stone shards scattering, and reappeared in another corner of the ruins now transformed into a primeval rainforest.

Deep within the rainforest, Lumian withdrew his right hand from the face on his left shoulder, holding the dark golden mask in his grasp.

The vortex-like face and the scorched flag partially embedded in chaos revealed themselves in the center of the head on his left shoulder.

The seal was undone!

Lumian's body swelled into a towering iron giant tens of meters tall, enveloped in ethereal, shapeless purple flames tinged with deep crimson.

At the center of his brow, a blood-colored banner emblem now glistened vividly, as though freshly dyed.

The moment the chaotic vortex-like face and the Salinger's Blood Banner manifested within the depths of the mirror world, the descending figure of Primordial Demoness Cheek froze for one second.

As a result, the petrification afflicting Franca ceased, sparing her from the fate of a Sequence 3 Saint dying abruptly in the chaos of a divine conflict.

On the face of Cheek on Lumian's left shoulder, her gem-like blue eyes layered with illusory darkness. Leveraging their mystical connection as companions both on the Beyonder level and within their Hunter team, Franca's figure was drawn into the projection.

Franca was immediately transported out of the depths of the mirror world.

In the next moment, she glimpsed an illusory and boundless web-like tunnel of mirrors.

Each passage reflected the ruins of Trier, where Demoness of Black Clarice, Saintess of White Katarina, and other colored Demonesses of Unaging appeared in various corridors.

…

Outside the mirror world, at the edge of the ruins of Trier.

A bent, spherical shadow suddenly emerged from the void, like a dolphin leaping out of the sea.

The shadow quickly unfurled, and The Magician Fors, dressed in a black robe adorned with silver stars, along with Justice Audrey and other members of the Tarot Club, instantly exited their concealed states.

Objects not reflected in the mirrors could not be forcibly drawn into the mirror world. Furthermore, the one who had drawn Lumian and Franca into the mirror world did not want subsequent events to be disrupted.

Silver stars on the surface of The Magician's black robe lit up, creating a dreamy starry sky.

In the starry expanse, the stars shifted, forming a brilliant "key."

The key pointed toward a specific location within the mirror world, forcibly opening a gateway.

The Sun Derrick was immediately sent inside. Dressed in a simple white robe, his entire being radiated pure, brilliant, and holy golden light, like a sun descending upon the dark region where Franca was besieged by the Demoness of Black and other Saints, illuminating the darkness.

Beside him, howling gales followed closely.

Additionally, clouds gathered in midair, weaving into a massive sword, which descended to stand before Franca.

Justice Audrey did not enter the depths of the mirror world. Instead, she gazed toward another side of the ruins of Trier.

She transformed into a massive grayish-white dragon, revealing her Mythical Creature form.

On the far side of the ruins, a figure quickly materialized—mature, stunning, and clad in an aged gray robe.

Demoness of Gray, Judith!

Accompanying Judith, a woman in a yellow frilled dress with a playful bonnet and a sly smile stepped through the shattered glass of a ruined building.

Demoness of Yellow, Tissavica.

As Madam Justice revealed her mind dragon form with grayish-white scales, another version of herself wove itself into existence behind her, dreamlike and illusory.

This newly woven Audrey, clad in a white dress, lowered her head and began reciting an honorific name in ancient Hermes, "The shadow wandering through fate, the past God of Deceit, the destined messiah…"

…

Just two or three kilometers from the passage forcibly opened by Madam Magician.

Dressed in a white shirt, black vest, and red gloves, with slightly disheveled hair, The Star Leonard appeared as though the process of erasing a pencil sketch in reverse was being played out rapidly.

He had prayed to the Evernight Goddess in advance, entering a state of concealment to avoid being detected by the Primordial Demoness!

While concealed, he quietly followed Lumian without probing or informing him, avoiding the mirrors' reflections and the pull into the mirror world.

As the anomalies began, Leonard immediately recited the honorific name of the Evernight Goddess, shedding his concealed state.

At the edges of his eye sockets, transparent and semi-transparent segmented worms crawled out, keeping vigilant watch over their surroundings.

They had to complete all preparations before the indulgence faction of the Rose School of Thought or the Blessed of the Great Mother noticed and intervened!

As for Angels like Dabomachie and Arianna from the authorities, They had not joined the operation. Too many Angels in the World of Ruins at the same time would weaken the defenses of the protected zones, risking serious consequences. They could not assume that the Great Mother, focused on accommodating the Brood Hive, had no energy left to retaliate.

Leonard took out a wooden door from his Traveler's Bag.

The door had no frame, standing alone on the ruins' ground.

Its surface bore patterns of stars, each shimmering with brilliance.

This was a tool The Magician had crafted in advance using her Worm of Star and other materials. It served no other purpose but to fix an entrance and exit to a particular place.

In other words, opening this door would reveal, not the surrounding environment, but another location: the chamber sealing 0-17!

0-17 was alive and thus could not be stored in the Traveler's Bag. Moreover, before activation, it had to remain sealed alongside two other Sealed Artifacts to ensure its containment. The Evernight Goddess, relying on the Uniquenesses of the Death and Giant pathways, could only hold the barrier for a limited time when descending into reality. Thus, 0-17 could not be left to roam freely from the start; it had to be deployed at the most critical moment.

Under such circumstances, creating a "door" to the sealed chamber for immediate use was the best solution!

Without hesitation, The Star Leonard grasped the door handle and opened the wooden door standing on the ruins.

Behind the door lay darkness, but there were sounds of movement, as if someone was lifting a seal.

In mere seconds, a figure appeared in the doorway.

She had long black hair, wore a hooded, classical robe, and appeared exquisitely beautiful, with eyes dark and devoid of spirit.

0-17, the Angel of Concealment, the vessel for the Evernight Goddess's divine descent!

Chapter 1131: Individual Preparations

As 0-17 stepped out of the solitary door standing on the ruins, its figure was abruptly erased and entered directly into the special mirror world.

Meanwhile, the Great Old Dominators who constantly monitored changes in the astral barrier began to react.

Stars of various colors—scarlet, gold, brown, blue, and orange—lit up simultaneously, banishing the darkness and crimson in the sky. Their presence infused it with other hues and emitted creaking sounds.

Soon after, the crimson moonlight that seemed to shine from an unknown source brightened and grew viscous, as if filled with blood.

From within Leonard's body, segmented Worms of Time crawled out one after another. These worms assembled in front of him, forming the image of an elderly man with neatly combed white hair, deep brown eyes, a sombre demeanor, and a face largely free of wrinkles.

The man, clad in an asymmetrical black robe, was none other than the Angel of Time Pallez Zoroast from the Church of the Fool.

The moment Pallez appeared, He immediately addressed Leonard, "Go support the other Major Arcana card holders in the mirror world. Leave this to me."

Without hesitation, The Star Leonard nodded and slightly parted his lips.

An intangible spirit extended from one of his teeth, growing enormous and enveloping him entirely. It carried him into the mirror world.

The next second, as if the void itself had been torn open, two figures emerged from the spirit world.

At first glance, these figures resembled grotesque trees covered in a viscous black fluid. Upon closer inspection, they were massive, distorted human forms with twisted and terrifying arms sprouting from their bodies. These arms bore sinister features—bulging veins with crimson eyeballs, embedded skulls, tongues lined with sharp teeth, and other unimaginable horrors. The figures exuded an overwhelming aura of madness and malevolence. They were none other than the Rose School of Thought's indulgence faction's two Abominations: Suah and Tirié.

Compared to when They previously aided in the growth of the Tree of Shadow beneath Trier, They had undergone noticeable changes.

Suah's belly was grotesquely swollen as if He were pregnant. However, the fetus remained still, seemingly cursed and already a stillborn.

Tirié's body, coated in tar-like fluid, was covered with dark, tumor-like growths resembling mammary glands. These tumors continuously split open and closed, secreting black milk.

When the Great Mother descended to the ground, even under the protection of the Mother Tree of Desire through the astral barrier, Suah and Tirié could not entirely escape corruption and became pregnant several times.

Yet, for beings like Suah and Tirié, madness was intrinsic. As long as the children weren't born, a little extra corruption didn't matter much—it merely caused Their faction members and worshipers to die in more grotesque ways or mutate into monsters more frequently.

As an Archangel of the Error pathway and a noble from the Fourth Epoch who had lived for over two millennia, Pallez Zoroast had seen much. Even so, He couldn't suppress a frown at the sight, and His abdomen seemed to ache in phantom pain.

Beside Him, the Angel of the Holy Spirit Reinette of the Church of the Fool stepped out of the spirit world. She had just placed four blonde, red-eyed heads back onto Her neck.

The leader of the Rose School of Thought's temperance faction transformed into a massive doll the size of a castle. Her blood-red eyes shone beneath a black Gothic dress entwined with sinister vines and countless mysterious symbols.

She revealed Her Mythical Creature form.

On Pallez Zoroast's other side, atop the ruins of a building covered in green plants, The Hermit Cattleya, wearing a purple robe and no longer donning her heavy glasses, returned from a non-existent state to reality.

She had initially intended to invite Queen Mystic Bernadette to participate in this operation to increase their chances of success. However, given the limited number of Angels remaining in the protected zone of Trier, the reduction in their forces would have been unacceptable.

…

When The Star Leonard arrived at the depths of the mirror world, where The Sun Derrick, Two of Cups Franca, and others were battling the Demonesses of Unaging, the area was already in shambles, as though it had suffered a partial collapse and destruction.

Demoness of Black Clarice wore a crystalline queen's crown on her head. Beneath its translucent surface were miniature visions of hurricanes, volcanic eruptions, falling meteors, and other disasters, resembling a complex, mystical weather bottle. The crown's pinnacle was stained crimson, radiating the light of the crimson moon.

This crown, named "Calamity of Crimson," was a Grade 0 Sealed Artifact originating from the remains of the Demoness of Blue.

The holy and dignified Demoness of White Katarina had already raised her left hand. A glass ring encircled her middle finger, extending a sharp crystalline spike.

This was "Love's Dread," a Grade 0 Sealed Artifact belonging to the Demoness Sect, corresponding to a Demoness of Catastrophe.

Wearing a cyan hunting outfit, Yalenna, with thick, long eyebrows, had an unusual black rooster perched on her shoulder. Though it seemed carved from stone, it appeared alive.

Its most distinctive feature was its three heads—a crestless one, a brightly crested one, and one with a dark red crest—and a slightly parted shared beak that revealed sharp teeth.

This was "The Setting Sun Rooster," another Grade 0 Sealed Artifact held by the Demoness Sect.

When the crimson moon descended, the Demoness Sect's headquarters suffered significant losses, retaining only five Grade 0 Sealed Artifacts. After recovering the Demoness of Blue's Beyonder characteristic, they now had six.

Currently, these artifacts were wielded by the Demonesses of Black, White, Cyan, Gold, Crimson, and Orange, among whom two had nearly killed Franca moments earlier.

Only through her status as a Demoness of Unaging, her numerous Mirror Substitutions, and having merged with her mirror self through reconciliation, did Franca survive the first wave of attacks and await reinforcements.

Silver, Green, and Brown were Demonesses who had advanced after the crimson moon descended. They replaced the titles of the completely deceased and lacked the qualifications to wield a Grade 0 Sealed Artifact. They could only use Grade 1 Sealed Artifacts that synergized with them.

The colored Demonesses, who had already digested the Unaging potion, couldn't use the Calamity of Crimson and Love's Dread to advance due to their inability to complete the ritual. They could only use them as Sealed Artifacts.

Facing such overwhelming forces, The Star Leonard drew a black staff embedded with gemstones from his Traveler's Bag.

0-62, Staff of the Stars!

It was bestowed by Mr. Fool prior to the current events with added seals.

The moment he gripped the Staff of the Stars, Leonard allowed his thoughts to scatter and emptied his mind.

The Sun Derrick donned a crown that seemed to coalesce from dawn's light. Its ancient design exuded splendor, majesty, pride, and resilience.

This was "The Proof of Glory," a Grade 0 Sealed Artifact belonging to the City of Silver, once worn by the ancient god, Giant King Aurmir!

It had originally been used to seal the Gift of the Land. Not long ago, Mr. Fool had temporarily sealed the latter, enabling it to be lent out.

The holy and glorious light gathered more and more, forming a pure and solid barrier in the front and around. This both protected the companions and prevented the targets from escaping.

Madam Judgment, Xio Derecha, had just spent nearly a year filled with chaos digesting the Chaos Hunter potion. She had not yet had the chance to complete the ritual to advance to a neighboring pathway, Duke of Entropy, but this did not stop her from using the severely asymmetrical black-and-gold mask that caused discomfort upon sight.

She placed this Solomon's Mask on her face.

She and Franca would alternate in assisting Mr. Sun in utilizing the Proof of Glory—this Grade 0 Sealed Artifact required two Saints to wield.

The Moon Emlyn had already received the Sequence 1 Beauty Goddess Beyonder characteristic of the Moon pathway, along with the separated Sequence 2 Life-Giver Beyonder characteristic, bestowed by Ancestor Lilith. However, he did not dare to take the former out of the protected zones, fearing it might provoke an abnormal reaction from the Great Mother and introduce unknown risks.

He used his Life-Giver Beyonder characteristic as collateral to borrow a Grade 0 Sealed Artifact, the "Robe of Divine Blood," from the treasury of the Sanguine. He now had it draped over himself.

Madam Temperance Sharron held a three-layer jewelry box in her hands, its surface silver-black and embedded with various gemstones.

This was 0-61—Box of the Great Old Ones—borrowed from the Abraham family through Madam Magician.

This Sealed Artifact would randomly cause its holder to disappear, die suddenly, or undergo aberration. To counter this, Madam Temperance Sharron specifically visited the Angel of Fate Will before the operation and received His blessing.

Will was currently in the protected zone in the Southern Continent, maintaining stability and eliminating anomalies alongside Azik and other Angels. While He could not leave, granting blessings posed no issue.

Not only Madam Temperance Sharron but also The Star Leonard and the other participants in this operation received blessings from Will and a miracle from Mr. Fool to reduce the likelihood of negative random effects.

Magicians didn't perform unprepared.

The Hanged Man Alger held a thin brass book and the Card of Blasphemy, Tyrant.

The former was 0-02—Trunsoest Brass Book!

Having received assistance, Franca finally recovered. From the Traveler's Bag Lumian had entrusted to her earlier, she retrieved an ancient book bound in parchment: Post-Apocalyptic Scripture!

For this operation, every participating Saint from the Tarot Club carried a Grade 0 Sealed Artifact.

At this moment, a figure passed by, seemingly slow yet incredibly fast.

It was a woman who appeared to be in her forties, still stunningly beautiful and exuding charm, radiating an aura of maternal brilliance.

Upon seeing this figure, The Moon Emlyn's gaze froze instantly.

It was Roland, the former Matriarch of the Church of Earth Mother!

Roland appeared normal, her upper body bare, but numerous bird-clawed infants hung from her chest, covering the pale skin and constantly drawing nourishment.

She wore a faint smile, radiating crimson moonlight, as She passed through the battlefield and walked toward the special mirror world.

Chapter 1132: Authority

In the grayish-white cavern-like special mirror world, only the strands of black hair, as thick as rainforest trees, retained their original color, either shooting toward the sky or wrapping around Lumian from all directions.

After being gazed upon by Primordial Demoness Cheek, Lumian's body suddenly petrified. A large swath of grayish-white swiftly spread over the central and right heads on his shoulders, turning them into stone sculptures.

The next second, the petrification abruptly halted, stopping just before it reached the chaotic vortex face embedded with 0-01, which no longer wore the dark gold mask.

The petrifying power fused into the vortex without any effect.

"Haha! This head is indeed useful!" Lumian's laughter boomed from the vortex face, reverberating with a buzzing echo.

As the voice rang out, his body ignited with formless, colorless flames.

Amidst crackling sounds, chunks of grayish-white peeled off his surface, and the flames reconstructed his enormous body.

Lumian raised his right hand and pulled Salinger's Blood Banner, embedded in the vortex's forehead, free.

As he did, the left head on his shoulder turned, and the softened features of Alista Tudor's face came into view, gazing upward.

His expression seemed dissatisfied, almost chastising, as if silently questioning Primordial Demoness Cheek, clothed in a bone-white dress: Why do you resist? Why not surrender willingly?

Isn't our union something you've always desired?

Utilizing Blood Emperor Alista Tudor's face, Lumian wielded the dangerous banner that matched his fiery giant body and swung it at Primordial Demoness Cheek, whose blue eyes glimmered with reluctance to fight to the death, Her allure rendering Her opponents unable to strike.

Invisible, formless flames surged into the air, roaring as they raced toward their target.

Within the flames, figures of blazing humanoid fire emerged one after another. These entities possessed a degree of intelligence, obeying Lumian's commands. They surrounded Primordial Demoness Cheek from all directions, cutting off any escape routes. Acting as Lumian's soldiers, they shared his spirituality, power, and abilities like Teleportation.

This was an extension of the Conqueror's ability to transform lifeless objects into soldiers, amplified by Sealed Artifact 0-01.

Primordial Demoness Cheek watched with a radiant smile, as if admiring the performance of a lover, without immediately reacting.

She raised Her right hand, clenching it gently as the formless, colorless flames and the countless fire soldiers approached.

At Her center, a vortex suddenly appeared-remarkably similar to the chaotic vortex embedded in Lumian's left shoulder. Composed of liquid encompassing all colors, this vortex was far larger.

The formless, colorless flames, along with the innumerable fire soldiers, were sucked into the vortex, shredded into fragments, and dissolved, becoming part of the myriad unrealized possibilities.

Within the nearly sky-filling chaotic vortex, Primordial Demoness Cheek-draped in Her black hair and white bone dress-emerged once again. She remained dazzlingly beautiful, an irresistible sight that stirred even the surrounding grayish-white stones to agitate in Her presence.

This was a manifestation of one of the Demoness's authorities.

Honorific titles like "The Female Body of the Primordial God Almighty," "The mirrored Original Creator-the Oldest One," and "The True Successor of the Original Creator" were labels that Cheek Herself had added after merging with the Blood Emperor Alista Tudor, discovering and utilizing the hidden features of the Catastrophe pathway. However, the Sequence o Demoness of the Witch pathway being named "Primordial Demoness" or "Chaos Demoness," predated Her deification and was recorded on the Second Blasphemy Slate.

This referred both to the feminine aspect of a Demoness as an extension of the Primordial God Almighty and to one of the Demoness's authorities: the authority over the return of all things to chaos and the primordial state. This was a branch of the symbolism of destruction and endings, distinct from death, eternal darkness, decay, ruin, slaughter, or fragmentation as methods of finality.

It, along with authorities like "femininity," "charm," "the mirror world," and "dark magic," was a core authority of the Demoness and an elevated concept encompassing "apocalypse" and "catastrophe."

Thus, the Demoness was a demoness who wielded chaos.

The Primordial God Almighty was unaware of the setup and contingency plans left by the Original Creator to stabilize existence when accommodating the City of Calamity. The reason this was the first sefirah to be accommodated must have been due to a mystical connection, an instinctive tendency that had long existed!

Primordial Demoness Cheek emerged from the chaos with a charming smile, causing even Lumian, whose heart was burning with rage and hatred, to momentarily lose focus.

The face of Alista Tudor was filled with madness, driving the scorched banner of 0-01 to rise. On the banner, the ominous blackened bloodstains revealed their original colors, radiating an aura of conquest so overwhelming that even deities might bow Their heads.

Primordial Demoness Cheek paused for a moment, as if reminded of the past.

At this moment, the figure of 0-17, clad in a hooded black robe adorned with silver stars, appeared in the high sky where the chaotic vortex had receded. Above Her was a scene of brilliant constellations reflected from the mirror.

With a delicate face and dark, deep eyes, 0-17 wielded a phantom black scythe, swinging it toward the Primordial Demoness as though culling the wheat of life.

A dense, profound, and silent darkness surged forth, following the trajectory of the scythe and rapidly engulfing the target.

Wherever the darkness passed, the projections of brilliant stars were submerged, one after another extinguishing their own radiance.

Primordial Demoness Cheek raised Her right hand once again.

Around Her, the vortex of chaos, embracing all possibilities, became prominent and rapidly expanded, colliding with the darkness brought forth by the scythe.

In an instant, Lumian's vision lost all light, his hearing fell silent, and his spirituality ceased

its perception.

It was as if the world had reached its end in an apocalypse, welcoming the final conclusion and

return.

Before Lumian could form any thought, a sudden burst of light erupted. This was because the special mirror world had not yet fully collapsed or been destroyed.

Primordial Demoness Cheek was very pleased with this outcome. She cast an alluring glance

at 0-17, momentarily delaying Her next move.

Corrupted by the Primordial God Almighty, Her control over chaos naturally surpassed normal levels, allowing Her to better unleash the might of this authority.

Moreover, She knew that the Evernight Goddess could not maintain the descent through 0-17 for too long, whereas She, as a true Sequence o deity with freedom of movement, could wield

Her power indefinitely and sustainably.

Time was on Her side.

At this moment, the shaky special mirror world suddenly accelerated its self-repair process. Lumian blinked, and the world returned to its original stability.

The former Matriarch of the Church of Earth Mother, Roland, whose upper body was adorned with bird-clawed infants sucking nourishment from Her breasts, stepped into this place,

bringing "rebirth."

Her face bore a faint, maternal smile, and Her gentle gaze fell upon Lumian, Primordial

Demoness Cheek, and 0-17.

Behind Her, a crimson full moon slowly rose.

...

In the depths of the mirror world.

After the disappearance of Roland, the former Matriarch of the Church of Earth Mother,

another figure emerged.

It was a woman wearing a gold crown inlaid with jewels, her chestnut hair cascading down her shoulders. She had blue eyes, slightly thin lips, and a mature allure. Her figure was voluptuous, her features enchanting-it was the mirrored Emperor Roselle, now an Angel serving the ruler of the special mirror world.

As Empress Roselle arrived, a flickering figure appeared in front of Her.

It was The Magician Fors, clad in a silver star-black robe.

While jointly fighting against the Demoness of Gray Judith and the Demoness of Yellow

Tissavica with Madam Justice, Fors also participated in the mirror world battle.

This was the characteristic of a Planeswalker.

The Demoness Sect was not unfamiliar with this phenomenon. On the one hand, Madam

Magician had been one of the most active members of the Tarot Club in recent years, naturally drawing attention. On the other hand, the Demoness Sect itself possessed a relevant Grade o Sealed Artifact.

It was called "Tamara's Everchanging Card" and was currently wielded by the Demoness of

Orange.

Upon detecting Madam Magician's appearance in the mirror world, the Demoness of Crimson, who had received prior instructions, used invisible, tough, and resilient spider silk to hoist a blackened stone pillar with a faint bronze hue.

This was another Grade o Sealed Artifact of the Demoness Sect, named the "Pillar of Severity."

As the pillar was lifted, bronzed letters emerged upon its surface: "The battlefield shall be divided."

In an instant, the chaotic melee was split into multiple zones-soldiers against soldiers, generals against generals-in perfect balance and order.

Until their respective battles were concluded and the corresponding battlefields dissolved, neither Angels nor Saints could interfere with other fights.

Madam Magician's presence was immediately locked within the ruins of Trier, close to Madam Justice Audrey and facing the Demoness of Gray and Demoness of Yellow.

Empress Roselle was no longer obstructed.

Since she was not yet engaged in any battle, she could freely choose Her battlefield.

The Demoness of Gold, dressed in a champagne-colored gown, faced Mr. Sun Derrick.

She wore a vertical eye-shaped tiara, its centerpiece a perfectly cut diamond resembling an eye, set within a brass base.

A Grade o Sealed Artifact-Eye of God!

Within the Eye of God, light constantly refracted, emitting a pure yet dreamlike radiance that exposed both Mr. Sun Derrick's weaknesses and strengths.

The Demoness of Gold suddenly smiled.

She realized that the crown of dawn worn by her opponent was currently nothing more than an ornament, incapable of functioning.

The Testimony of Glory required two Saints to effectively wield it!

After the battlefield was divided for balance, Mr. Sun Derrick had temporarily lost his collaborator.

This fact was clear to Mr. Sun Derrick and to the other Major Arcana card holders as well. Madam Judgment-wearing Solomon's Mask-immediately sought to distort the corresponding rules.

Chapter 1133: Changes on the Battlefield

Wearing Solomon's Mask, which caused her to grow significantly taller to over six feet, Madam Judgment Xio Derecha placed her right hand on the asymmetrical black-and-gold mask.

The black-and-gold mask began to writhe as though burrowing deeper into Madam Judgment's face.

Distortion!

Solomon's Mask could distort rules to a certain extent.

This time, Madam Judgment chose to distort the rule created by the Pillar of Severity: "The battlefield shall be divided."

As a seasoned Imperative Mage and long-time Chaos Hunter, Xio had spent years

maintaining order and constructing rules to limit enemies and enhance herself. This seemed at odds with distorting rules, but perhaps it was precisely because she understood rules so deeply that, at this moment, she knew exactly where to twist them for maximum effect.

The underlying principle of "The battlefield shall be divided" was to "end chaos, restore order, and enforce balance." Since the goal was balance, the balance itself could be distorted to become even more extreme.

The disparity in strength between the two sides-including Sealed Artifacts-was clearly not balanced. How could that be called balance?

If you want balance, I'll make it even more balanced!

In an instant, the matchups on the battlefield changed:

Madam Judgment Xio Derecha was drawn into the battlefield of Mr. Sun Derrick and the Demoness of Gold, along with her original opponent, the Demoness of Orange holding Tamara's Everchanging Card.

2 vs. 2!

With Madam Judgment's assistance, Mr. Sun Derrick could finally wield the Grade o Sealed Artifact-Proof of Glory. This adjustment balanced the power between the two factions, achieving a distorted equilibrium.

The other matchups were as follows:

Mr. Hanged Man Alger, wielding 0-02 and the Card of Blasphemy: Tyrant, faced the Demoness of Cyan Yalenna, who had The Setting Sun Rooster perched on her shoulder.

Mr. Moon Emlyn, clad in the Robe of Divine Blood, opposed the Demoness of White Katarina, who wore the Love's Dread ring.

Mr. Star Leonard, holding the Staff of the Stars, was matched against the Demoness of Crimson, the wielder of the Pillar of Severity.

Two of Cups Franca-equipped with the Post-Apocalyptic Scripture and the Face of the Arcane-fought against three Demonesses of Unaging-Silver, Brown, and Green, who were armed only with Grade 1 Sealed Artifacts.

Madam Temperance Sharron, holding the Box of the Great Old Ones, faced both the Demoness of Black Clarice, wearing the Calamity of Crimson, and the true Angel, the mirrored Roselle Gustav.

In this distorted equilibrium, it seemed that the Box of the Great Old Ones needed to contend with both an Angel and a Grade o Sealed Artifact to maintain balance. This was likely because the third layer of the box contained something incredibly dangerous and terrifying.

Realizing the unfavorable situation, Madam Temperance Sharron couldn't help but shudder internally. However, she had long been accustomed to controlling her emotions and desires, avoiding panic or anxiety.

Without hesitation, she opened the top layer of the silver-black jewelry box.

Empress Roselle watched coldly. Whether She hadn't had time to react or had Her own considerations, She used no abilities.

Demoness of Black Clarice, just as her crystalline crimson crown began to glow, suddenly felt her body stiffen. She could barely move, as though she were a wind-up toy that hadn't been fully wound.

She noticed that the previously void-like edges of the mirror world had taken on a tangible form, reflecting a silver-black sheen and becoming textured with granules.

Within the first layer of the Box of the Great Old Ones, the corresponding section of the mirror world had been shrunk down and encapsulated as part of a miniature diorama.

In this miniature scene, both Demoness of Black Clarice and Empress Roselle were reduced to palm-sized figures, their movements stiff and jerky, like lifelike wind-up toys.

The next moment, crimson light flared, and the entire "toy house" collapsed, dragging both the Demoness of Black and Empress Roselle into layer upon layer of annihilating void.

Catastrophe descended.

Suddenly, an illusory torrent of complex information surged upward from the void, spilling out of the still-open first layer of the Box of the Great Old Ones.

The torrent swiftly reassembled into the mature and beautiful form of Empress Roselle.

Madam Temperance Sharron was prepared. Her sapphire eyes reflected the image of the reformed Angel.

She abruptly reached out with her right hand toward her own eye, plucking out the eyeball that had locked onto Empress Roselle's form. It came out bloodily.

As a Sequence 3 Disciple of Silence, her use of the ability Source of Curses no longer harmed herself. However, against an Angel who might be Sequence 1, she had to go all out, using this method to enhance the curse's effectiveness.

She didn't expect this to finish off an Angel but only sought to buy herself some time. In this area teeming with Grade o Sealed Artifacts, no one knew how long the distorted equilibrium would hold or if anyone could circumvent the restrictions to come to her aid. These were variables, inevitable ones. Under the blessings of fate and the miracles of Mr. Fool, Sharron believed the ensuing variables would likely favor her. For now, her job was to stall for time, awaiting change, and to prevent herself from being swiftly defeated by the combined efforts of Empress Roselle and the Grade o Sealed Artifact-wielding Demoness of Black.

Madam Temperance Sharron quickly threw the eyeball-still frozen with Empress Roselle's image-into the spirit world.

In the spirit world, an enormous bird, indescribable in form, swooped down, snatching the eyeball in its beak and flying deep into the spirit world, heading toward the heights where the

Seven Lights were.

Such an encounter would affect the true body, resulting in a curse akin to banishment. Furthermore, the target would be subjected to constant attacks from dangerous creatures in the spirit world while being banished.

Empress Roselle glanced at Madam Temperance Sharron's now-empty, blood-dripping eye socket and gave a nod of approval for her decisiveness and resolve.

The Angel did not resist the curse, allowing Herself to be dragged into the depths of the spirit world, disappearing from this battlefield.

"..." Sharron froze for a moment, faintly realizing that Empress Roselle might not have wanted to participate in this battle.

Her pale doll-like face was now streaked with crimson blood dripping from her missing eye, giving her ghostly, wraith-like aura an even more terrifying edge.

At this point, Demoness of Black Clarice, having resurrected through her mirrored self, reemerged from the shadows, once again wearing the Calamity of Crimson.

She had escaped the influence of the Box of the Great Old Ones through self-destruction. On another battlefield, Mr. Hanged Man Alger, noticing the disadvantageous situation Sharron faced, immediately prepared to open the Trunsoest Brass Book to add patch-like rules to the distorted equilibrium and alter the unfavorable dynamics.

The Trunsoest Brass Book had been unsealed but still suffered from deceit and trickery, leaving it with no blank space to inscribe new rules. Under these circumstances, its activation level was minimal, only capable of basic and initial applications. Yet, for Mr. Hanged Man Alger, this was sufficient.

At that moment, Demoness of Cyan Yalenna's three-headed black rooster raised its middle head with the bright crest: "Cock-a-doodle-doo!"

The crowing, which should have heralded dawn, instead summoned darkness.

Mr. Hanged Man Alger suddenly felt his soul plummeting, sinking into the viscous black

depths of his inner psyche.

Malice, dissatisfaction, and jealousy surged within him. He felt an overwhelming urge to conserve his strength and avoid unnecessary risks.

Why have they all become Angels, while I've yet to see my dawn?

These emotions affected Alger's actions. The black rooster's other two heads turned toward

him simultaneously:

The crestless head raised its left wing high, causing the space around him to darken and

thicken, folding inward to form a spherical prison.

The head with the faded crest had pitch-black eyes as Demoness of Cyan Yalenna's left hand materialized a straight sword of abyssal depth.

Meanwhile, in her right hand, Demoness of Cyan Yalenna now held a straight sword wreathed in black flames, the fire embodying madness, savagery, and destruction.

She swung both swords at Mr. Hanged Man Alger, who was trapped within the spatial sphere.

Suddenly, Mr. Hanged Man Alger's body shone with dazzling, holy sunlight, swiftly forming armor over his entire body.

Before entering the mirror world and joining the battle, Mr. Sun Derrick had cast the Sunlight Domain spell of Holy Armor on all his companions, except for Madam Temperance Sharron

and Mr. Moon Emlyn.

On yet another battlefield.

Facing the combined assault of Demonesses of Silver, Brown, and Green, Franca used her Mirror Substitution to withstand the first wave of attacks.

Her silhouette then appeared in a corner, and she rapidly flipped open the Post-Apocalyptic

Scripture to a specific page.

With her will, she had inscribed a prophecy onto the parchment: "All demigods attacking me

will suffer the backlash of their own Sealed Artifacts due to bad luck."

Smack!

The moment the Prophecy took effect, Franca employed Mirror Substitution to evade the

Demoness of Brown's curse.

...

In the special mirror world,

A crimson full moon rose slowly, casting a faint, eerie red hue over the rainforest-like black hair and the gray-white stones scattered everywhere.

Seeing this, Primordial Demoness Cheek spat with a smile, neither alarmed nor angry.

As She created multiple mirror projections to evade the attacks of Lumian and 0-17, She

addressed Roland, the former Matriarch of the Church of Earth Mother, who still carried numerous bird-clawed infants on Her body, "My daughter sent someone to stop me? "Does she not want me to be Her mother?

"As a mother, how can a mother lack a mother?

"Or is She waiting for me and Alista to unite again and give birth to Her anew?"

Hearing this, Matriarch Roland, whose expression had been kindly and loving, suddenly turned grim.

Chapter 1134: Time Is Running Out

As Matriarch Roland's expression shifted, the tree-like black hair bathed in the crimson moonlight stretched toward the airborne Primordial Demoness.

The hair seemed to gain life and intelligence, turning against its original owner.

Throughout the "primeval rainforest" region, both in midair and on the ground, countless tiny, unseen mystical pathogens abruptly expanded in size. Some resembled fluffy spheres, others were clawed monstrosities, and some wore bizarre crowns. They varied widely in form and effect, embodying the authorities of Disease and Plague-capable of eroding even deities.

At this moment, these mystical pathogens, secretly spread by Primordial Demoness Cheek, gained enhanced power and turned against Her, targeting Her true body, Lumian, and 0-17.

All things have a spirit!

Primordial Demoness Cheek chuckled softly at the sight.

This laugh stirred an itch in the hearts of Lumian, 0-17, Matriarch Roland, the black hair, and even the mystical pathogens, slowing their actions.

Then, the Primordial Demoness unveiled Her Mythical Creature form.

She became enormous, still clad in Her white, bone-made dress, Her visage growing increasingly beautiful yet exuding different temperaments from various angles: pure, elegant, majestic, delicate, pristine, and decadent...

Her black hair, as thick as pythons, exuded an eerie slickness. Some strands rose and rotated, their black-and-white eyes spinning; others extended forward, sprouting serpent-like heads that flicked their tongues; and others coiled at Her feet, forming a vortex of snakes.

Whether one gazed directly at the Primordial Demoness or not, everything within the "primeval rainforest" reacted instinctively to Her presence.

The right half of Lumian's body swelled at the chest, while Cheek's face on his left side flushed seductively, the chaotic whirlpool-like visage subtly turning, resisting the mesmerizing allure.

The lifeless black eyes of 0-17 began to flicker faintly, betraying a hint of infatuation and intoxication.

Matriarch Roland's brown eyes turned tender and watery, Her lips parted to exhale a breath of turbid air. The bird-clawed infants attached to Her upper body ceased seeking milk and turned toward the sky in longing. The males among them even grew unfamiliar organs while their existing ones retracted, transforming them into girls.

The black hair that constituted the "primeval rainforest" also transformed into the hair of young girls, while the rebellious mystical pathogens became girl-like as well. All of them fell hopelessly under Primordial Demoness Cheek's spell.

Suddenly, Cheek's figure disappeared, flickering through the special mirror world to reappear around Matriarch Roland in various positions-high, low, left, right, in front, and behind- each leaving behind a Mirror Projection.

Each projection spoke in soft tones, sometimes laughing, sometimes weeping, their voices overlapping.

"My daughter doesn't want to acknowledge me as her mother?"

"But She truly was born from the Original Creator."

"And I am the man destined to become the Original Creator's feminine aspect."

"If She seeks my help, I would offer it willingly-that is a parent's duty."

"But She cannot stop the birth of Her father and mother!"

The Primordial Demoness's true body returned to the sky.

She clenched Her right fist.

With this motion, all the Mirror Projections surrounding Matriarch Roland collapsed into vortices composed of an illusory liquid encompassing all colors and possibilities.

These dozens of chaotic vortices rapidly expanded and merged into a single mass, swallowing Matriarch Roland, the clawed infants, and the crimson moon rising into the sky.

It heralded an apocalypse-a return to the primordial state.

Within the massive chaotic vortex, the crimson moon and Matriarch Roland floated intermittently, resisting complete disintegration and assimilation, struggling against the pull toward the primordial.

At this moment, a giant sword wreathed in black flames of destruction descended from the sky, striking the crimson moon and Matriarch Roland.

The sword, which embodied madness and destruction, was wielded by Lumian, splitting the crimson moon and Matriarch Roland apart.

Next, a spectral, abnormally-shaped scythe, cloaked in profound silence and darkness, arrived, cleaving into the split crimson moon and Matriarch Roland's form.

At this critical juncture, both Lumian and 0-17 prioritized burying Matriarch Roland and the mutations She brought forth!

Lumian's sapphire eyes met Primordial Demoness Cheek's gaze, as if to say, "This is our battle to resolve."

The Primordial Demoness returned a sweet, approving smile.

With the participation of the Sword of Destruction and the silent darkness, the chaotic mass binding the crimson moon and Matriarch Roland began to change.

It swallowed the two, collapsing violently and condensing into a deep, human-knuckle-sized black dot.

The black dot lacked something crucial, preventing it from further compression.

In an instant, the unstable black dot swelled and exploded, releasing a violent burst of light and heat.

The region of the special mirror world regained "substance," gradually stabilizing, but it no longer resembled the original primeval rainforest.

In the sky, the bright stars reappeared, and the crimson moon had not completely vanished. Instead, it became distant and dim, as though separated from the battlefield by layers of barriers-barriers of destruction and eternal darkness-temporarily preventing its return. Primordial Demoness Cheek withdrew Her gaze from the distant crimson moon, smiling at Lumian and 0-17. "Time is running out; it's your turn now."

As She spoke, shadows enveloped 0-17's delicate features, as if plunging Her into deep, silent

darkness.

This signified that the descent of the Evernight Goddess was nearing its end.

The barrier that had to be maintained and 0-17's limitations as an Angel placed a cap on how long she could continue the divine descent.

...

In the depths of the mirror world, on another battlefield.

Demoness of White Katarina, upon the battlefield's rebalancing, immediately activated the

Love's Dread ring worn on her left middle finger.

The crystalline spikes on the ring's glass band emitted a soft illusion.

The Demoness of Unaging's skin lost some of its luster while retaining a faint sheen. Her

eyes, nose, and mouth took on doll-like characteristics.

She transformed into an extraordinarily beautiful and intricately crafted doll, exuding a perfectly complementary charm.

To Mr. Moon Emlyn, this was incredibly captivating.

Under normal circumstances, he might have stopped to admire her, unwilling to cause harm. However, at this moment, he wore the crimson robe woven from what seemed to be blood.

The robe easily triggered his inner malice, countering the infatuation and even amplifying it. To Katarina's surprise, Mr. Moon Emlyn transformed into blood-like moonlight and charged toward her with intense possessiveness, rather than succumbing to infatuation or a desire to

protect.

Instinctively, Katarina extended gray-white energy from her left hand, spreading toward the viscous blood-like moonlight.

Simultaneously, indescribable ravings echoed in her ears, as if her innermost malicious emotions and desires were singing in unison.

Her hair lifted, thickened, and became slimy, about to sprout black-and-white eyeballs.

She showed signs of losing control.

Blood flowed from her nostrils, ears, mouth, and eyes. Her heart nearly stopped, and her blood seemed to ignite.

Crack!

Katarina shattered, activating her Mirror Substitution ability.

The surging crimson moonlight turned gray-white and solidified into stone. However, the unaffected portion of blood and light abruptly retracted, reforming into Mr. Moon Emlyn clad in his crimson robe with bat-like wings.

The Demoness of White's figure appeared in a corner of the battlefield, and she prepared to unleash catastrophe upon the area using the Love's Dread ring.

In the mirror world, catastrophe equated to fragmentation and collapse!

On another separated battlefield.

After confirming her opponent as Leonard, the Demoness of Crimson promptly revealed the second rule on the surface of the Pillar of Severity, suspended by invisible threads:

"Teleportation is prohibited here!"

Seeing the ancient Hermes script in brass tones emerge on the dark stone pillar, Leonard, who had been clearing his mind, recalled Pallez Zoroast in his thoughts.

The Angel of Time's form appeared through the Staff of the Stars, manifesting before

Leonard as an ancient wall clock, taking on the impact of time.

Clang!

A distant chime echoed, and the hands of the clock face-marked by blue and black-froze.

The Demoness of Crimson and the Pillar of Severity were immediately suspended in time.

Seizing the opportunity, Leonard activated his Nightmare abilities, falling into a deep slumber.

Shortly after, the chime faded, and everything returned to normal. Pallez Zoroast's form had

already vanished.

The Demoness of Crimson was drawn into a dreamscape-a dream tied to The Star Leonard's.

This prevented her from using the Pillar of Severity. Instead, she saw a staircase and a sign: "Blackthorn Security Company."

One of the Staff of the Stars' functions was to allow the wielder to recreate corresponding

abilities or individuals through mental visualization, enabling the summoned figure to launch a single attack.

Naturally, sufficient understanding of the ability or individual was required to avoid

anomalies.

Before this mission, The Star Leonard had asked Miss Justice to incept a psychological cue in

him, ensuring he would dream of Blackthorn Security Company and a certain individual upon

falling asleep.

This mental visualization enabled the Staff of the Stars to assist in bringing the figure to life.

In the next instant, the Demoness of Crimson saw someone emerge from the door of

Blackthorn Security Company.

The man wore a top hat, a formal suit, and carried a cane. He had black hair, brown eyes, an ordinary face, and a scholarly air-Klein Moretti.

Chapter 1135: The Path of Justice

The moment the Demoness of Crimson saw Klein Moretti emerge from the Blackthorn Security Company, an indescribable, instinctive, and overwhelming terror surged within her. Her teeth chattered uncontrollably, clacking at a rapid pace.

In her eyes, the Blackthorn Security Company appeared like a deep and dark cathedral, and the opponent from before was its bishop-serving the unknown, the mysterious, the bizarre, and the horrifying.

Now, the greatest horror they served had stepped out.

The Demoness of Crimson let out a sharp, fear-laden scream, her hair rising into the air. It thickened, became slimy, and burst open like a blooming flower, exposing black-and-white eyeballs.

Overwhelmed by extreme terror, she lost control.

And losing control would affect her mirror self and the slumbering mirrors.

In the next second, the movements of the out-of-control Demoness of Crimson became jerky and stiff, as if her joints were filled with glue or entirely rusted.

Her eyes, once brimming with fear and instinctual allure, quickly returned to normal. The transmission of Petrification and Pleasure through her long, thick black hair abruptly ceased.

She became docile. She became a marionette.

The figure of Klein Moretti, summoned by The Star Leonard through dreaming, could only perform one attack. He chose to turn her into a marionette.

Then, he dissipated at the entrance of the Blackthorn Security Company.

The dream shattered.

The Star Leonard opened his eyes to see the marionette of the Demoness of Crimson collapse lifelessly to the ground, devoid of any vitality. She was dead for good, with no chance of resurrection.

With a dull thud, the Pillar of Severity, no longer bound by invisible threads, crashed onto the void-black ground.

This change in the battlefield and The Star Leonard's performance struck fear into the hearts of the other Demonesses of Unaging.

They were all Sequence 3 Saints equipped with Grade o Sealed Artifacts, so how had he dealt with the Demoness of Crimson so swiftly?

Moreover, the Demoness of Crimson was a Demoness of Unaging, notoriously hard to kill and adept at resurrection!

If Leonard took a little more time to seal the Pillar of Severity, the battlefield partitions would be invalidated, and he and the Planeswalker would gain the freedom to join any other battlefield!

The Demoness of Orange felt an increasing sense of urgency.

Before her floated a card inlaid with what seemed to be shattered diamonds, radiating a brilliant light. The card's face constantly shifted between characters and scenes, producing a variety of effects directed at Mr. Sun and Madam Judgment.

But for now, none of these effects could break through the divine barrier created by the crown of dawn, nor could they allow the Demoness of Orange to bypass it and Blink directly to her targets.

The Demoness of Orange could only hope that the Demoness of Gold, with her Eye of God, would quickly unravel the divine barrier's mysteries, weaknesses, or flaws and launch a targeted attack.

This urgency wasn't solely due to how quickly the battlefield of the Demoness of Crimson had been resolved, which filled her with dread about the rapidly shifting tides of battle. It was also because the longer she used Tamara's Everchanging Card, the more likely one of its negative effects would manifest upon her.

As the characters and scenes on the card's face shifted continuously, the fixed pattern on Tamara's Everchanging Card's back would gradually change, producing various effects that acted upon the cardholder herself.

The Demoness of Orange glanced at the Demoness of Gold from the corner of her eye, noting the beads of sweat on her companion's forehead, which made the vertical eye on her forehead ornament gleam even more brilliantly.

Clearly, the Eye of God was not easy to use.

Meanwhile, having relied on Madam Judgment's help to activate the Glory Crown and create the divine barrier, The Sun Derrick finally caught his breath.

Looking at the Demonesses of Gold and Orange beyond the barrier, as well as the other battlefields and the dark, illusory mirror world, he found himself momentarily dazed.

He remembered what Mr. Fool had said to him at the temporary gathering, "Go and pursue

your justice..."

What is my justice?

What is the core justice that I am willing to cast everything else aside for?

Once again, The Sun Derrick felt the doubts that had plagued him for years.

After leaving the City of Silver and stepping out of the Forsaken Land of the Gods, he had witnessed normal ways of living and been exposed to a greater variety of values:

Good and evil;

Right and wrong;

Wealth and poverty;

Oppression and resistance...

These were all aspects of justice that The Sun Derrick had contemplated and practiced in his daily life.

But he always felt that none of them represented his core principle of justice-something else was more important.

This confusion had prevented The Sun Derrick from summarizing the final acting principle, leaving him unable to completely digest the potion of Justice Mentor.

In a flash of thought, considering the significance and purpose of this operation, scenes suddenly unfolded before Derrick's eyes:

The crimson moon piercing through barriers, descending to the ground;

The sky becoming perpetually dark, illuminated only by moonlight and starlight;

Humans piling into spheres, floating amidst the murk;

The Forsaken Land of the Gods distinguishing day and night by the frequency of lightning

strikes;

The Chief pushing open the door to the Giant King's Court, letting sunlight pour in...

The Sun Derrick's body moved, as though transported to the past.

He understood what justice he most wanted to pursue:

It was light, it was the sun-it was the existence and continuation of humanity as a species!

For that, he was willing to abandon everything else!

The Proof of Glory atop Derrick's head suddenly radiated brilliant light, and the immense power was directed toward the second Saint present, Madam Judgment, Xio Derecha.

The asymmetrical black-and-gold mask on Madam Judgment's face wriggled again. She withdrew the divine barrier, allowing a silver-white rapier to appear and pierce into the

Demoness of Orange's body.

Magnify!

Using Solomon's Mask, Madam Judgment amplified the silver-white rapier imbued with

power from Mr. Sun.

Inside the Demoness of Orange, the silver-white radiance exploded.

It brimmed with destruction, yet it was also sacred and resplendent.

On another battlefield.

The sacred armor adorning The Hanged Man Alger temporarily suppressed his malicious thoughts, preventing him from succumbing to the corrupted influences of the Demoness of Cyan Yalenna. Her Cull of Spiritual Flesh could not easily bypass the armor's defenses. However, the Cull of Spiritual Flesh, combined with a Sword of Destruction, eventually tore through the pure armor formed by divine sunlight, annihilating it completely.

At that moment, a new rule appeared on the brass book in Mr. Hanged Man's hand. "Normal beings may have one and only one head. All others must die!"

The three-headed black rooster perched on the Demoness of Cyan's shoulder suddenly trembled, as though sensing its impending doom.

Plop, plop! Two heads-one bare and the other with a dark red comb-fell off, their severed necks unnaturally clean, as though sliced by a blade.

Yet no blood spurted from the wounds. Instead, the severed heads fused with flesh and bone, wriggling as they attempted to grow new heads. However, an invisible force suppressed them, preventing success.

With Mr. Hanged Man freed from his dangerous predicament, Franca's situation shifted as

well.

Franca had been biding her time, anticipating the backlash from the Sealed Artifacts used by her three opponents after making the prophecy. Yet, as she observed the Demoness of Silver and the Demoness of Green, she noticed their subtle infatuation with her intentional display

of charm.

Wh-Franca realized a possibility.

The original Demonesses of Silver and Green might have died after the crimson moon's descent. The current ones were newly advanced Demonesses of Unaging.

Since the digestion of the Unaging potion usually took a century, these newly advanced might still be in an emotionally and lustfully unstable state for several years-perhaps even a decade or more making them vulnerable to the allure of Demonesses of the same tier.

And it had been less than a year since the crimson moon's descent!

Realizing this, Franca deliberately gave the Demonesses of Silver and Green a seductive smile.

Full Charm!

Even if her guess was wrong, Franca figured using Charm wasn't a poor choice. There was little to lose in trying.

The Demonesses of Silver and Cyan's gazes turned enamored, longing to kneel before Franca's boots. The Demoness of Brown was similarly affected, but thoughts of her current lover helped her break free from the horrifying allure.

Beyond all the battlefields, on the dark periphery of this region.

A figure lay in wait.

He had white hair and wore a black robe. His eyes were deep and lightless, marking Him unmistakably as Miracle Invoker Zaratul.

Zaratul had followed the orders of the Great Mother and arrived long ago, yet He hadn't joined the battle immediately. Instead, He remained hidden, patiently waiting for the right moment-the opportunity to convert everyone into marionettes and claim a bounty of Grade o Sealed Artifacts.

That moment had come.

In the nearby shadows, Zaratul's current marionettes were ready, each capable of using His abilities to create more marionettes.

Suddenly, Zaratul felt an intense sense of danger.

It was as if something was burrowing into His body.

He quickly attempted to switch places with one of his marionettes.

It was futile. Not only were all His marionettes similarly infiltrated by something, but His attempt to exchange places had inexplicably failed-as though the very thought had been stolen from Him.

A figure appeared before Zaratul, wearing a pointed soft hat and a monocle.

Amon!

Amon's monocle reflected a glimmer of light. With a smile, He addressed Zaratul, "I'm a bit late. But I felt there was still enough time, so I waited outside for any potential dessert to arrive."

"Quite the coincidence..."

As He spoke, Amon lifted His head to gaze upward and added with a smile,

"I know this body of yours is merely a historical projection. But for the Error pathway, if a historical projection is Parasitized, doesn't that mean the original was also Parasitized? If your past self is Parasitized, how could your present self possibly avoid it? It's inevitable!"

A flicker of desperation flashed in Zaratul's eyes, yet the arrangements beyond His historical projection needed time.

Just a second or two later, His pupils seemed to dilate, carrying a hint of relief. Then, He

smiled.

He accepted the monocle Amon offered and placed it on His right eye.

Chapter 1136: Beyonder and Sealed Artifact Combination

Having eliminated Zaratul through sheer rank suppression and a surprise ambush, Amon glanced at the ongoing battles deeper within the mirror world. He chose not to interfere and vanished, leaving behind Zaratul and His marionettes.

In one of the battlefields.

Returning from the shadows, the Demoness of Black Clarice swiftly utilized the mirror world to create multiple Mirror Projections across different locations, a mix of real and false images. This was to evade the Transfiguration Curse from the opposing Disciple of Silence.

Although the Calamity of Crimson crown was a Grade o Sealed Artifact, it did not offer any resistance to the Transfiguration Curse. If the Demoness of Black tried to withstand it unaided, she would undoubtedly transform into a regular yet charming sheep, piglet, or rabbit-losing most of her abilities and traits.

If that happened, not only would Clarice be unable to wield the Calamity of Crimson, but the Grade o Sealed Artifact's negative effects might even cause her to die on the spot.

Even if she were lucky enough to avoid triggering the negative effects, how could a powerless sheep or any other animal-fight against a Sequence 3 Saint?

She would merely be slaughtered!

More critically, the Demoness Sect, with its stronghold in the Southern Continent, had significant experience dealing with the Transfiguration Curse due to frequent encounters with the Rose School of Thought. The Demoness of Black was acutely aware that the curse would target not only her true self but also her mirror self; the transformation was symmetrical.

Moreover, as a defenseless animal, she would be easily captured. Through the connection between her body and her revival arrangements, the enemy could uncover all the hidden dormant mirrors she had isolated in secret.

Such an outcome would mean the complete death of the notoriously resilient and difficult- to-kill Demoness of Unaging.

The Demoness Sect's strategy for countering the Transfiguration Curse was clear: if the enemy was below Angel-level and could only target a single entity, one should conceal the true body using methods like Mirror Projections. If the opponent was an Angel, however, extreme vigilance was required. One had to be ready to activate Mirror Substitution preemptively while holding a lethal pathogen in their mouth-if evasion failed and one transformed into an animal, they should immediately commit suicide.

Now, the Demoness of Black was employing the first strategy. This was not only because her opponent, Madam Temperance Sharron was a mere Sequence 3 Saint but also because Clarice sought to curse her opponent in return.

Each of the Mirror Projections created through the Calamity of Crimson carried a portion of power and could use their eyes as a medium to curse any target they saw-a classic Demoness's Curse.

With so many Mirror Projections at her disposal, the Demoness of Black was confident at least one would capture the enemy's figure and successfully deliver a curse. Even if the curse did not originate from her true body and could not severely injure or kill the target, it would still have a significant impact, creating opportunities for subsequent attacks.

Meanwhile, Black Demoness Clarice allowed the Calamity of Crimson atop her head to glow.

She brought catastrophe to the battlefield.

The catastrophe manifested as the gradual collapse and disintegration of the corresponding area of the mirror world.

This not only limited her opponent's ability to dodge, improving the chances of completing the curse, but also dragged all living beings in the battlefield toward annihilation and oblivion.

At that point, the Demoness of Unaging could revive, whereas a Disciple of Silence likely could not.

As the disaster unfolded, Madam Temperance Sharron remained expressionless, calm, and composed. All her emotions were tightly controlled.

She pulled out the second layer of her three-tiered jewelry box.

This was the second application of the Box of the Great Old Ones: This layer contained records of different locations, varied and numerous. It allowed the holder and all living beings within a certain range to be directly transported to the designated location. However, "designated" was not absolute. In actual use, the target location often changed randomly, making the final destination unpredictable, with only a slim chance of arriving at the intended place.

Madam Temperance Sharron now placed her faith in the blessing of the Angel of Fate, Will Auceptin. She believed that her "heart's desire" would come true!

The reason Sharron was entrusted with the Box of the Great Old Ones for this mission was not due to random allocation. The Tarot Club members had discussed beforehand above the gray fog which member would best utilize each Grade o Sealed Artifact to secure a swift victory.

The consensus was unanimous: the Box of the Great Old Ones was best suited for Madam Temperance.

Earlier, Sharron had not used the second layer of the jewelry box immediately because Empress Roselle was still present-a formidable Angel likely capable of interfering with or resisting what was about to occur.

Now, as Sharron opened the second layer of the Box of the Great Old Ones, she designated a location and activated its power.

Just as the Demoness of Black captured her opponent's figure and was about to complete her curse, the collapsing and annihilating mirror world suddenly shifted.

Accompanied by her Mirror Projections, she "accompanied" Sharron to a barren wilderness.

This wilderness was strewn with exposed gray-white rocks and densely packed skeletal remains stretching endlessly.

The Underworld!

The location Madam Temperance Sharron had designated was the Underworld. By sheer luck, the Box of the Great Old Ones avoided its usual randomness!

The moment the Demoness of Black and her Mirror Projections arrived in this desolate land, their bodies and expressions froze simultaneously.

The Mirror Projections shattered and dissipated instantly. The Demoness of Black's face turned pale, losing all semblance of vitality.

Both she and her mirror self perished in an instant.

Any living creature that entered the Underworld would die on the spot!

Madam Sharron watched silently as the Demoness of Black died. Her own figure had grown increasingly transparent, her face paler than before.

Once a Wraith, she was now equivalent to an evil spirit. Naturally, she did not need to fear instant death in the Underworld, provided she did not linger too long.

This unique trait was why the Tarot Club believed Sharron should prioritize using the Box of the Great Old Ones and the Staff of the Stars.

She could move her opponents-whether Demonesses or other enemies-to the Underworld!

Between the two artifacts, Sharron ultimately chose the Box of the Great Old Ones due to Mr. Star's unique trait.

Looking at the Demoness of Black's corpse, Sharron quietly retrieved the Calamity of

Crimson.

While the Underworld-induced death did not affect the isolated dormant mirrors, making it impossible to permanently kill the Demoness of Black, the revival process would take considerable time. She would no longer be able to participate in the current battle, and she had lost her Grade o Sealed Artifact.

...

Not only did Sharron face the collapsing and annihilating mirror world, but so did Mr. Moon

Emlyn.

Clad in the Robe of Divine Blood, he saw the ground collapse and the surroundings fade into nothingness. The malice within him grew increasingly uncontrollable. Spreading the bat-like wings covered in membranes on his back, he transformed into moonlight, directing it toward Demoness of White Katarina, who was also caught in the catastrophe, as though he was dragging her along with him.

Seeing the crimson moonlight approaching her, Katarina smiled and allowed the blood-red

moonlight to shine upon her.

Crack!

Her body shattered under the corrosive influence of the blood-red moonlight, reverting to a

mirror.

Moments later, she reappeared in another section of the collapsing battlefield, smiling as she watched the mirror world's destruction consume both the crimson moonlight and herself.

This battlefield soon turned into a void.

Seconds later, due to the overall structure of the mirror world remaining intact, boundaries formed within the void, creating new stable regions.

Demoness of White Katarina stepped out of the void, fully resurrected.

She had indeed perished in the destruction, but through her mirror self outside the collapsed

area, she returned.

This method was a quick way to resolve matters.

After scanning her surroundings and finding no trace of her enemy, Katarina smirked.

At that moment, a brazen voice echoed in her mind-it was The Moon Emlyn's.

"If I were you, I wouldn't be smiling."

"You're still alive?" Demoness of White Katarina blurted out and instinctively activated her

Mirror Substitution.

The mirror left in her place shattered, and Katarina's figure appeared at the edge of the

region.

Yet Emlyn's voice persisted in her mind: "If you had died completely earlier, I would've perished

too. But you didn't.

"Your greatest mistake was assuming resurrection would solve everything after your emotions and desires were first triggered. You didn't try to calm yourself.

"You and your mirror self share a connected psyche. If I could plant the seeds of malice deep within

your mind, I could also erode your mirror self's psyche.

"When my main body is destroyed, I can use these seeds to revive within you-igniting your desires,

burning your blood!

"Malice never dies. Neither do demons."

Demoness of White Katarina triggered her Mirror Substitution multiple times, but The Moon

Emlyn's voice never stopped.

Blood seeped from her pores, enveloping her completely.

Her mirror self suffered a similar fate.

Suddenly, the entire mirror world-or perhaps the entire world-began to shake violently.

...

Within the special mirror world, amid the intense tremors, 0-17's eyes grew increasingly dull and lifeless.

Her body rapidly faded, as if being erased by an invisible eraser.

The Sealed Artifact departed the battlefield, returning to a protected zone. The divine descent of the Evernight Goddess had concluded.

The tremors caused by the attacks on the astral barrier subsided. Primordial Demoness Cheek turned Her gaze to Lumian, who was gripping Salinger's Blood Banner, using it as the vessel for the Sword of Destruction.

The deity had earlier escaped his strike by deliberately shattering Her Mirror Substitution. Now, She reappeared in another part of the sky, saying with a chuckle,

"Now it's just the two of us."

Before She could finish, the figure of Amon, wearing His pointed hat and monocle, suddenly appeared in the area.

Adjusting His still-glowing monocle, Amon smiled at the Primordial Demoness Cheek.

"Apologies for being late. I had to make a quick trip to the astral world to steal a wish and enjoy a little dessert."

Amon's voice layered over itself, emanating from multiple rapidly flickering figures-never staying in one place long enough to be Charmed or attacked by the Primordial Demoness.

Hearing Amon's words, Primordial Demoness Cheek narrowed Her eyes and clenched Her right fist.

The vortex of chaos that engulfed everything reappeared and expanded rapidly, attempting to consume the entire region.

"And that wish is..." Amon's monocle glowed brighter, releasing the stolen wish.

At the same moment, He Blinked away from the oncoming vortex.

A voice reverberated across the area, so potent that even the all-encompassing chaos could

only weaken it, unable to swallow it completely in short fashion.

"My wish is:

"All envisioned things in the special mirror world shall vanish briefly."

Chapter 1137: Mutual Diminishment

As Amon prepared to unleash the stolen wish, Primordial Demoness Cheek did not merely conjure another vortex of chaos to return everything to chaos. In addition, countless faint lights reflected and refracted within Her azure eyes, creating an indescribable sense of mystery.

These were near-omniscient eyes analyzing Amon's current state and weaknesses, searching for vulnerabilities to exploit.

In truth, Primordial Demoness Cheek knew of a way to deal with Amon quickly: linking the mirror worlds inside and outside the astral barrier to introduce the corruption of the Circle of Inevitability.

To instantaneously kill a Sequence 1 Archangel, one needed the corresponding pathway's Great Old Dominator!

Unfortunately, the barrier blocks any connection between the inside and outside... Reluctantly abandoning this idea, the Primordial Demoness focused on utilizing Her omniscient authority.

On the other side, Lumian was surrounded by the expanding vortex of chaos, preventing him from launching any further attacks for the time being.

Relying on the slow rotations of the vortex's face and the 0-01 carrying the black flames of destruction, he barely managed to keep the all-encompassing chaos stagnating in front of him. It flowed around him like tidal waves around a reef that might be submerged at any moment.

As the voice representing the "wish" reverberated, Primordial Demoness Cheek finally saw Amon's current weakness.

He was not truly a dual-pathway god. He merely borrowed power from His past self through the Sequence 2 Sinner ability of the Inevitability pathway, with the permission of the current holder of the Error and Door pathway Uniquenesses.

Borrowed power that did not truly belong to oneself always left a chink in the armor. This was akin to when the Primordial Demoness split off part of Her Demoness of Apocalypse Beyonder characteristic, replacing it with an envisioned substitute to maintain Her rank and power. When faced with specific influences, She would inevitably suffer a severe setback.

For Amon to borrow power from the past using the Sinner ability, He had to remain in the state of a Sinner-this was the crux of the issue.

That power was from the past, and in the past, He was a Sinner!

As the wish was being spoken and about to be realized, Primordial Demoness Cheek caused the special mirror world that the vortex had yet to engulf to turn transparent, reflecting Amon's rapidly blinking figures.

Simultaneously, Primordial Demoness Cheek's pitch-black shadow abruptly rose and adhered to Her back.

Amon's shadow experienced the same transformation.

This was the inherent depraved nature present in all living beings!

Undoubtedly, the depraved nature of a Sinner was exceptionally strong, nearly equal to His very existence!

Amon's shadow, pitch black and viscous like slime, clung tightly to His body, unaffected by His rapid Blinking.

Apart from certain high-ranking individuals of select pathways, no one could separate from their own depraved nature. It could only be suppressed. For a Sinner, resistance was impossible, as They were depraved to begin with.

The black shadow enveloped Amon, sticking tightly to Him. Meanwhile, similar shadows continuously emerged from the depths of His psyche, merging inside and out, reshaping His

form.

Amon had previously stolen many abilities from the Sun pathway, but at this moment, He refrained from using them.

Otherwise, purification would not stop at His depraved nature-it would include the Sinner itself!

Amon first raised His head, and His left eye shone with light as brilliant as starlight.

The now-transparent borders of the special mirror world instantly turned dark and heavy.

As a Door pathway god, Amon sealed this area as a temporary measure. Immediately after, He leaped into a silvery, illusory river composed of interlocking and intricate symbols.

Before Him lay innumerable tributaries, each representing a different future.

He chose one of those fates, completing His self-redemption.

A holy light erupted as He emerged from the silvery river. He was no longer burdened by His depraved nature, nor was He at risk of being engulfed by the vortex of chaos.

However, He had now become an Angel of Redemption. He was no longer the Sinner of the past, nor the dual-pathway god He once was.

At this moment, the reverberating voice finally fell silent. The wish-"All envisioned things in the special mirror world shall vanish briefly"-was realized.

Primordial Demoness Cheek's figure suddenly shrank. Her rank and aura plummeted to the level of a King of Angels.

The expanding vortex of chaos simultaneously began to contract, quickly shrinking into a single point and vanishing entirely, failing to affect Amon, who had retreated to the edge of the battlefield.

For a short time within the special mirror world, Cheek was no longer a true god!

Now, She was only slightly stronger than Lumian but not overwhelmingly so. In terms of rank, She might even be slightly inferior.

Cheek abruptly transformed into a silver-white bolt of lightning, streaking toward the edge of the special mirror world at near-light speed.

She intended to escape this place.

If envisioned phenomena were invalid in this area, she would simply move elsewhere!

Outside, she would still be a god!

Primordial Demoness Cheek knew full well that for a wish to have an effective impact on someone like Herself a true god, the female body of the Primordial God Almighty-even the half-Lord of Mysteries would need to impose limits on time and scope. Without such constraints, the wish would likely distort, possibly even favoring Her. With restrictions in place, She could escape the affected area or hold out long enough to negate the wish.

Smack!

The silver lightning struck the heavy, dark edge of the special mirror world but failed to break through.

The Door pathway god's seal.

The silver lightning reverted to Primordial Demoness Cheek. She turned to face Lumian, now resembling a flaming giant, and Amon on the battlefield's edge. Smiling, She said, "I'd love to see just how brief this 'briefly' is, but what I'd like even more is to see whether you can defeat me within such a short time."

Lumian offered no response. From the Traveler's Bag he had obtained, originally belonging to Franca, he produced a handful of metallic puppets and threw them backward.

The puppets instantly expanded, each over ten meters tall, resembling giants forged of steel. Before the battle, each had received boons from Sequence os of different pathways-boons with a time limit.

Lumian had waited until Mr. Fool's wish came true before bringing them out.

Smiling at Primordial Demoness Cheek, he declared, "As a Conqueror, how could I not have

my own army?"

Before he finished speaking, he led the dozen steel giants in a charge against the Primordial Demoness.

...

Deep within the mirror world.

The Demoness of Silver, her vision dazzled and mind ensnared by Franca's charming smile, felt a sudden pain. Her emotions and desires surged violently.

Instinctively looking down, she saw that the skull-shaped Sealed Artifact she carried was gnawing on her.

Her mirror self suffered the same fate.

Amidst creaking and cracking sounds, her body rapidly decayed, dragging her Mirror Substitution and mirror self into ruin along with her.

The prophecy of the Post-Apocalyptic Scripture had been fulfilled: due to the violent fluctuations of her emotions and desires-the maddening obsession to offer both body and soul-the Demoness of Silver suffered a backlash from her own Sealed Artifact. It seemed

rather effective against a Demoness!

In no time, the Demoness of Silver was reduced to a skeletal corpse with decaying flesh hanging loosely from her bones.

Similarly, the Demoness of Green, also entranced by Franca's Charm, halted her attacks, unable to tear her gaze away from Franca's face-those sparkling, lake-blue eyes that reflected her very figure like a serene pool.

A strong sense of danger struck her. Instinctively, she tried to activate Mirror Substitution.

However, her thoughts had already become sluggish and stalled without her realizing it, preventing her from acting in time.

This delay stemmed from the negative effects of the black cloak she wore.

Black, quiet, and eerie flames ignited within Franca's eyes, silently enveloping the Demoness

of Green's figure.

Suddenly, similar black flames erupted within the Demoness of Green's body, inflicting

excruciating pain as they burned her soul.

A Demoness's Curse-one that could not be avoided unless Mirror Substitution was actively used! The Demoness of Green let out an uncontrollable, blood-curdling scream as the quiet flames consumed her soul. Her body collapsed, blood oozing thickly.

Her mirror self suffered the same fate.

While Franca focused on the Demonesses of Green and Silver, the Demoness of Brown broke free of Franca's Charm and unleashed a surge of grayish-white color that swept toward her.

Simultaneously, a faint light flickered on the gemstone bracelet around the Demoness of Brown's wrist, as though reflecting starlight.

The space in front, behind, above, and to the right of Franca twisted into shadowy barriers, cutting off her ability to travel through the mirror world or evade in other ways.

The only exit was to the left, where a tide of grayish-white swept in-a color that petrified everything it touched. Even if Franca activated Mirror Substitution, the space where she would reappear remained within the gray ocean.

Franca let out a soft chuckle, producing a mirror and sliding it between the pages of the Post-Apocalyptic Scripture.

The next moment, she stepped into the space behind that mirror.

Being unable to escape didn't mean she couldn't hide in an existing hidden space or fortify it for protection!

The gray tide engulfed the parchment-bound Post-Apocalyptic Scripture, adding a thick layer of stone dust. However, it failed to completely petrify the book, and the mirror tucked between its pages remained unscathed.

Seeing that both the Demonesses of Green and Silver were dead, with uncertain prospects of

revival and unable to rejoin the battle anytime soon, the Demoness of Brown's heart filled with fear. News of the other battlefields wasn't comforting either; several other Demonesses wielding Grade o Sealed Artifacts had already been swiftly defeated.

With thoughts of her lover weighing on her heart, she was unwilling to lose her life entirely in this chaos. Seeing that the situation was beyond recovery, she disregarded the Primordial Demoness's plans and activated one of the bracelet's gemstones.

Her body transformed into abstract symbols and concepts, slipping into the astral world to

"wander" toward her lover's hiding place.

However, when she exited the astral world, what appeared before her was not the familiar

scene she expected but a dense fog of gray and white.

She was lost.

The next second, she saw a stream of crimson moonlight flowing through the fog.

Suddenly, she felt something inside her stomach-something that tore at her flesh and blood.

Chapter 1138: Wisdom

Seeing that The Setting Sun Rooster now had only one head remaining and could not grow a new one for the time being, Demoness of Cyan Yalenna's eyes turned an iron-black hue, reflecting the pale weaknesses on The Hanged Man Alger's body.

She avoided using Weakness Investigation on the brass book, knowing it was beyond her ability to handle.

Amidst her investigation, the single remaining head on the black rooster perched on Yalenna's shoulder let out a sharp, malevolent crow.

The Hanged Man Alger immediately felt an invisible force pulling his consciousness and spirit downward, as though he were an irreversible sunset.

His facial muscles twitched uncontrollably, forming a grim, hateful expression.

Affected by the corrupted voice, he began to succumb to depravity.

However, unlike the initial moment when the three heads of the black rooster simultaneously brought different influences, leaving him in a dangerous situation reliant on passive protection, Alger now retained some room for maneuver.

Depravity was a process, not an instantaneous event.

Having been a Sea King for many years, The Hanged Man Alger had accumulated substantial high-ranking experience, which helped shape the temperament required of the Sailor pathway, also known as the Tyrant pathway. With a stern expression, he resisted the urge to be depraved and, with great difficulty and determination, activated one of his Beyonder powers.

At this moment, Demoness of Cyan Yalenna had already created several mirror projections of herself, each possessing a certain degree of power, surrounding The Hanged Man Alger. All of their eyes captured his figure.

She was on the verge of completing her curse, a Demoness's Curse fueled by the Fire of Destruction.

Just then, a terrifying, visible tornado spiraled into existence around The Hanged Man Alger, with him as its eye. The vortex expanded outward in rings, swelling in all directions.

This was the Sailor pathway's demigod-level ability-Hurricane.

Yalenna and her mirror projections lost sight of their target amidst the palpable, howling winds.

The Demoness's Curse she was about to unleash thus lost its medium.

Within the terrifying hurricane's eye, The Hanged Man Alger, while holding the Tyrant card to elevate his rank and sense of oppression, used it to dictate the second rule on the Trunsoest Brass Book: "This battlefield is a Land of Light, a domain of righteousness. All depravity and evil shall find no footing."

This was the high-level application of the Judgment pathway's ability to enact laws and decrees, which allowed multiple Prohibitions to take effect simultaneously by defining the environment.

In an instant, the dark battlefield, originating from the mirror world, was illuminated by an unknown source of light. The head of The Setting Sun Rooster drooped lifelessly with a snap, unable to utter corrupted words or emanate depravity.

Demoness of Cyan Yalenna also found herself unable to cast curses or other dark magic.

Her heart skipped a beat as she observed the other battlefields through her mirror projections, taking in the overall situation.

Without hesitation, Demoness of Cyan Yalenna took a step back, preparing to traverse through the mirror world.

The moment she formed this intention, the howling hurricane shattered into countless streaks of silvery-white lightning, bursting forth with a destructive, violent aura that engulfed the entire battlefield, transforming it into a forest of thunderbolts leading to inevitable destruction.

The Hanged Man Alger left no chance for the Demoness of Cyan to escape the battlefield. After releasing Lightning Storm, now free of the influence of depravity, he broke into a sweat as he laboriously manifested the third rule on the Trunsoest Brass Book.

At this stage, limited by his own rank, even with the support of the Tyrant card, any rules he established had to be derivative of the first two and could not come out of thin air.

Facing the area-wide assault of the thunderbolt forest, Demoness of Cyan Yalenna sketched a radiant smile.

Suppressing the use of her Mirror Substitution ability, she allowed the Lightning Storm to shatter her body, leaving her flesh charred and evaporating.

She deliberately died this way, escaping the battlefield through her mirror self and returning to a hidden location.

The Demonesses of Unaging participating in this battle had all prudently left their mirror selves outside this region of the mirror world, rather than bringing them into battle. In a battlefield involving multiple Grade o Sealed Artifacts, a mirror self without a Grade o Sealed Artifact would be of little use and was better kept as a means of ensuring escape at a critical moment.

As Demoness of Cyan Yalenna died painfully within the Lightning Storm, the third rule on the Trunsoest Brass Book was completed: "Depraved and evil entities shall be confiscated." Yalenna's body was completely destroyed and evaporated, but The Setting Sun Rooster remained, falling straight to the ground.

...

After her body was destroyed from within by an eruption of countless silvery swords, the Demoness of Orange returned from annihilation, catching the Tamara's Everchanging Card and completing her resurrection.

In the next moment, she and the Demoness of Gold felt a powerful suppression, weakening them in all aspects.

When The Sun Derrick finally comprehended the core of his righteousness, the traits of the Justice Mentor were fully brought to bear!

The Notary and Unshadowed abilities gained new manifestations at the Justice Mentor level, enhancing actions aligned with core righteousness while weakening or nullifying those that contradicted it.

This time, The Sun Derrick participated in this operation to help Lumian resolve the Demoness Sect and enable the emergence of a new great existence to save the world.

This was his justice, his light, his sun, and he was putting it into practice. Anything obstructing this endeavor was an unjust act!

Immediately afterward, The Sun Derrick used Madam Judgment as a medium to unleash another ability of Proof of Glory.

Blinding light spots erupted from Madam Judgment, Magnified by Solomon's Mask into a terrifying storm that shredded everything around it.

But before that could happen, the Demoness of Gold, aided by the Eye of God, foresaw the

signs and made her decision.

Wisdom always allowed her to make the right choice!

With a crisp crack, she actively used her Mirror Substitution.

Influenced by her, Demoness of Orange also activated her Mirror Substitution.

The ensuing Hurricane of Light swept through, devouring only two mirrors.

When the Hurricane of Light subsided, the two Demonesses of Unaging wielding Grade o

Sealed Artifacts reappeared in a corner.

The battle continued for a while, with neither side able to achieve a decisive victory. Suddenly, the Demoness of Gold transmitted a message to the Demoness of Orange through

her mirror projections: "Change the battlefield-to the kill zone!"

The kill zone... The Demoness of Orange was momentarily stunned.

Quickly grasping her companion's intent while also monitoring the other battlefields, she

directed the Tamara's Everchanging Card floating before her to rapidly shift its front-facing

pattern.

The new pattern depicted a gray-white backdrop filled with countless black "snakes."

As the scene unfolded, The Sun Derrick and Judgment Xio Derecha felt the surroundings growing increasingly illusory, as though a transformation was imminent.

At once, The Sun Derrick channeled the power of the Glory Crown into Madam Judgment. Judgment Xio stabbed her longsword downward.

Holy and resplendent light surged forth from the void around them, forming a sturdy and pure spherical barrier that shielded the two Major Arcana card holders, rooting them to the battlefield.

Simultaneously, Judgment Xio imbued the barrier with distorting power, redirecting the battlefield shift elsewhere.

She reasoned that it was unwise to passively follow the Demonesses' lead to an evidently abnormal location.

What if that place turned out to be the divine kingdom of the Primordial Demoness?

If that were the case, even without a trap, both she and The Sun Derrick would be unable to withstand it!

Since their primary objective was to support Lumian in devastating the Demoness Sect Cult rather than to kill anyone specific, it was better to play it safe and regroup with victorious allies from other battlefields to pursue the enemy later.

Moments later, the environment around them transformed.

The light-formed spherical barrier wavered violently, as though struck by the fiercest of storms, but it remained firmly rooted in the current battlefield.

The Demoness of Gold and Demoness of Orange, carrying their respective Grade o Sealed Artifacts, shifted to the scene depicted on the Tamara's Everchanging Card and did not return to the mirror world or face Judgment Xio and The Sun Derrick again.

They had fled.

The wielder of the Eye of God always foresaw shifts in the situation and made the right

choices at the right time.

Demonesses of Unaging are truly hard to kill... Judgment Xio murmured in quiet admiration.

...

Within the special mirror world,

Lumian slashed at the airborne Primordial Demoness Cheek with the Sword of Destruction,

using Salinger's Blood Banner as its medium.

The blade seemed to carry a hint of the River of Eternal Darkness's corruption, its black flames restrained yet increasingly terrifying.

Behind Lumian, his puppet army suddenly scattered. Part moved to the Primordial Demoness's back, part to the area above Her, while others flanked Her sides and below.

This was Blink.

Each puppet could Blink!

With 0-01, Lumian could share Beyonder powers among his team.

The source of the Blink ability was a metallic puppet among them, imbued with an Angel-

level boon from Mr. Fool himself-a power that could only last three minutes once activated. The puppet raised a staff formed of starlight, causing the surrounding void around Primordial Demoness Cheek to warp downward, forming a cage to hinder Her escape. Primordial Demoness Cheek smiled faintly at the sight and clenched Her right hand. Once again, a vortex of chaos encompassing all colors and possibilities appeared around Her body, though it lacked the terror and oppression it held earlier. Although the Primordial Demoness was no longer a true god for now, She still possessed a Uniqueness-Her rank was undeniably real!

Chapter 1139: Curse

At the edge of the battlefield, Amon observed as Primordial Demoness Cheek once again conjured a vortex of chaos, and a smirk immediately curled across His lips.

Raising both hands, He was enveloped entirely in the holy glow of redemption.

Within the monocle's field of vision, the silvery river of fate corresponding to that region appeared. Every tributary of its future was occupied by chaos, leaving no other possibilities- inevitable destruction.

Amon abruptly brought His hands together, clasping them tightly.

At that moment, He seemed like someone earnestly praying in the Ancient Sun God's cathedral.

Almost simultaneously, within that silvery, illusory river of fate-where the tributaries were about to merge and unify destiny into chaos-a new tributary inexplicably emerged, representing another potential future.

In this new tributary, chaos persisted but did not destroy everything in the region.

The Angel of Redemption-saving the future by creating something out of nothing!

As the river of fate shifted toward this new tributary, the chaotic vortex Primordial Demoness Cheek had created abruptly erupted with a sense of renewal before dissipating entirely.

Moments later, the chaotic vortex re-emerged from the area of renewal, once again disassembling and encompassing everything around it.

It fell into a cycle-a loop of destruction and creation.

This confined it to a small range, unable to directly obstruct Lumian's Sword of Destruction, which was about to strike.

Behind the Primordial Demoness, one of the metallic puppets now wielded a massive, deformed black scythe.

The puppet swung its weapon toward the target, carrying with it a silence of unlit darkness.

This was a boon from the Evernight Goddess, an Angel-level temporary boon!

To the Primordial Demoness's right, another steel puppet transformed into a massive, featureless serpent adorned with patches of white feathers and enormous wings.

This metallic feathered serpent turned into a silent, lifeless white torrent that surged toward its target.

This was also a boon from the Evernight Goddess-a temporary angelic power with a very limited duration.

On the Primordial Demoness's left, yet another steel puppet grew to an enormous size, comparable to Lumian himself.

At some point, it had gripped a colossal sword of orange-red light that radiated the aura of approaching twilight and the decay of all things.

The orange-red sword also slashed toward the Primordial Demoness.

In an instant, Cheek seemed enveloped by twilight, frozen in the orange-red glow. Her thoughts and actions slowed, as if she existed in a different world from Lumian.

Her attempt to destroy Herself was thus delayed.

Twilight had arrived!

After these three metallic puppets delivered attacks at the Primordial Demoness representing different authorities of endings, they were each destroyed on the spot. Some lost their spirituality, others their sense of life, and others corroded rapidly into rust.

They were disposable vessels for carrying those three powers, solidified from Lumian's flames.

The silent darkness, pale death, orange-red twilight, and Lumian's Sword of Destruction struck Primordial Demoness Cheek simultaneously.

Suddenly, parts of these forces intertwined.

These mere Angel-level powers tangled into a deep black point, absorbing all light, sound, and matter.

The black dot prominently appeared on Cheek's skeletal-dressed body, instantly collapsing Her into it, along with all Her Mirror Substitutions.

Elsewhere within the special mirror world, Primordial Demoness Cheek's mirror self, a handsome man with a blood-stained face, twisted in expression before vanishing as if evaporated into thin air or erased with an eraser.

In various hidden places across the ruins of the Northern and Southern Continents and within Primordial Demoness Cheek's divine kingdom established in the mirror world, one dormant mirror after another was erased by an unknown power, reaching their end.

The next second, Franca, Mr. Star Leonard, and the others-fresh from completing their battles in the depths of the mirror world-were struck with an inexplicable daze, almost forgetting who they were assisting Lumian against and whom the Demoness Sect worshipped.

Or rather, had such a deity ever truly existed?

In the ruins of Trier, Demoness of Gray Judith and Demoness of Yellow Tissavica nearly forgot They had a true god ancestor. They felt that the Demoness Sect's deity must have been an imagined, symbolic figure.

Struggling to recall the title "Primordial Demoness" and the name "Cheek," Their expressions changed dramatically as they realized something had gone terribly wrong.

These two experienced Demonesses of Catastrophe immediately created large-scale calamities to prevent Madam Justice and Madam Magician from approaching.

Then, without a moment's hesitation, They began self-destruction.

Within the special mirror world.

The deep black dot lasted only a second before it completely disintegrated and vanished, seemingly incompatible with this universe.

The Primordial Demoness's Uniqueness and the two Demoness of Apocalypse Beyonder Characteristics were not ejected as a result.

Suddenly, Cheek-clad in Her skeletal dress-reemerged from the void.

She smiled warmly at Lumian and Amon, saying, "Unless all mirror worlds are destroyed, you

cannot truly kill me.

"Do you still believe you can defeat me before the wish's effect ends?"

With that, Cheek's beautiful eyes shifted to Lumian. "Do you wish to surrender?"

The Primordial Demoness was clearly stalling for time. Once Mr. Fool's wish expired, She would regain Her status as a bona fide Sequence o deity, potentially even surpassing some true gods.

Lumian chuckled, tilting his head to glance at Cheek's face on the head growing from his left shoulder.

"Since I possess a part of you, how could I not understand your relationship with the mirror

world?

"That earlier strike was just to dismantle your other resurrection arrangements.

"As for now..."

Lumian's blue eyes, framed by Cheek's encouraging and sweet smile, grew unnervingly vivid. The blood-colored banner between his brows shone even brighter.

Primordial Demoness Cheek suddenly realized something, and Her expression subtly

changed.

At the same time, black flames of constrained violence and destruction ignited in Lumian's

gaze.

Curse!

A Demoness's Curse, driven by the City of Calamity's power and the Fire of Destruction! Lumian cursed the Cheek face on the head growing from his left shoulder.

It was both a part of him and a powerful mystical link to Primordial Demoness Cheek, making

it one of the best curse mediums.

Thus, Lumian was cursing both himself and Primordial Demoness Cheek!

Behind him, two steel puppets had already undergone transformations.

One appeared to don an illusory black cloak, while the other wore unrealistically dark gloves.

Fooling! Loophole!

Since the Primordial Demoness was currently equivalent to the mirror world itself-Her demise dependent on its destruction-the inverse was also true. To curse the Primordial Demoness was to curse all mirror worlds!

Instantly, Lumian's entire being ignited, black flames of destruction bursting forth to annihilate all constraints of madness.

This caused the iron-black, symbol-etched skeleton of his body to begin melting rapidly. The blood-soaked violet flames within him were assimilated or consumed.

Lumian's face twisted uncontrollably in extreme pain. Yet, amidst the agony, he displayed

reckless joy, unashamed of his exhilaration.

He looked at Primordial Demoness Cheek and saw the peerless beauty ignited by black flames

of Fire of Destruction, burning Her from soul to body.

Primordial Demoness Cheek furrowed Her brow, unable to suppress the sensation of life slipping away and Her divine seat crumbling.

This type of curse might have been manageable when She was still a true god, using Her corresponding authorities to counteract it. However, in Her current state as a King of Angels, She was neither much higher in rank than Lumian nor much stronger-only possessing

additional unique qualities.

As Primordial Demoness Cheek was engulfed in the Fire of Destruction, the special mirror world itself was also set ablaze with raging black flames.

All mirror worlds within the astral barrier succumbed to the inferno, melting and collapsing en masse.

Franca, The Hanged Man Alger, and others quickly collected their spoils and fled the mirror world, returning to the ruins.

One by one, the mirrors Franca carried cracked and shattered.

Rather than feeling alarmed, she was delighted.

This was Lumian's Fire of Destruction!

Within the special mirror world.

As the destructive black flames spread and burned, Amon smiled and shook His head, lifting the seal and departing the soon-to-be-destroyed realm.

Empress Roselle-having been banished to the spirit world-was initially startled, then rejoiced.

At last, She was no longer bound by the special mirror world, nor subject to its owner's commands.

With Fourth Epoch Trier destroyed, the corresponding seal was undone. She was free to leave the special mirror world and avoid perishing with it.

Amidst the crackling flames consuming Cheek, Her slightly dazed expression shifted to a smile as she said to Lumian, "You're more ruthless than I expected, even cursing yourself to curse me."

At this moment, most of Lumian's body had been consumed by the Fire of Destruction, leaving only the three heads unscathed.

The face of the chaotic vortex still resisted the encroachment of the black flames, but only for a little longer.

Primordial Demoness Cheek flew toward Lumian, trailing a long black flaming tail. Landing in front of him, she spoke without concealing Her pain yet full of mirth, "We were destined to merge from the beginning. If you hadn't obtained 0-01 and Medici's two Conqueror Beyonder characteristics, I wouldn't have come to meet you today.

"Our battle was merely over control. Now, I admit, you're well-suited to being Alista Tudor.

"You've won. I will voluntarily merge into your body, with you as the dominant consciousness. After all, I'm not ambitious-I only wished to be half of the Original Creator. Even under your control, I'll still be His half."

As She spoke, Primordial Demoness Cheek's body began to disintegrate, regressing into the Uniqueness and Demoness of Apocalypse Beyonder Characteristics that carried Her self- awareness and spiritual imprint into the Cheek face on Lumian's left shoulder.

This process was irreversible.

At that moment, Primordial Demoness Cheek saw Lumian's face, illuminated by the burning

Fire of Destruction, curl into a mocking smile.

Lumian grinned with satisfaction and said, "Thank you for voluntarily merging.

"But it won't be long before I die-and you'll perish with me."

Hearing the latter part, Primordial Demoness Cheek's phantom-like, stunning face froze

slightly in expression.

Chapter 1140: A New Balance

After a brief moment of frozen expression, Primordial Demoness Cheek let out a seductive laugh. "Fine, fine! Let's die together! Everyone dies, the entire universe dies!"

Amidst the unrestrained laughter, the speed of Cheek's body's disintegration accelerated rapidly.

Lumian, still wearing his mocking smile, made no reply. He quietly observed Her, as if watching a lunatic performing Her final act on the stage of life.

As the echoes of Her laughter resounded, Cheek completely regressed into a cluster of Beyonder characteristics of varying sizes, encircling a statue of a woman seemingly crafted from bones.

The statue was entirely naked, every detail intricately carved, exuding extraordinary allure. Its face shifted—sometimes blurred and chaotic, other times exceptionally vivid—but it always bore Cheek's visage.

A crisp sound of shattering followed, as the special mirror world, ablaze with the Fire of Destruction, collapsed with a deafening roar.

In the World of Ruins, Franca and the others barely had time to react before feeling the earth tremble violently. Near and far, mountains erupted from the ground, spewing dense smoke and crimson magma.

In the sky, bright streaks of meteors blazed across, crashing into various parts of the Northern and Southern Continents. Their impacts triggered fierce explosions and churned up clouds of dust that obscured the moonlight.

In the fiery lands, snowstorms began to howl. Along the coasts, hurricanes of unprecedented strength made landfall one after another. Catastrophes of all kinds descended indiscriminately upon every unprotected corner of the world, some mild, others devastating.

A true god, in all but name, had fallen.

The divine throne of the Primordial Demoness was now vacant.

Hidden within the protective layer of the Glory Crown, Franca exhaled silently in relief.

From her Traveler's Bag, she retrieved a transparent crystal orb that depicted various scenes of calamity.

This was the Beyonder characteristic of a Demoness of Catastrophe, restructured after being shattered and filtered through the gray fog by Mr. Fool.

Franca swiftly concocted a potion, a swirling liquid reminiscent of the sky before a storm.

She gulped down the potion without hesitation.

Elsewhere, Madam Magician and Madam Justice witnessed the self-destruction of the Demoness of Gray and Demoness of Yellow, each silently remarking on how difficult high-ranking demonesses were to kill.

If Mr. Fool had not been occupied merging with the Celestial Worthy during his slumber, and if Gehrman Sparrow had not been preoccupied holding the astral barrier against the terrifying assaults of the Great Old Dominators, Madam Magician might have been able to ensure at least one of the Demonesses of Catastrophe did not escape.

Using her powers as a Planeswalker, she could recreate historical figures, or summon projections of historical events. With these, she could have "produced" a temporary Gehrman Sparrow in reality. Through that connection, Mr. Fool might have descended and projected a sufficiently powerful force.

But alas, Mr. Fool could not descend directly in his current state. The recreated or summoned figure would only have a connection with Sefirah Castle established, carrying faint imprints of his rank and corruption.

It was enough to affect Saints that were not full-fledged Angels in an indomitable fashion. However, a complete Mythical Creature could sever Their connection, just as They could process information related to the Great Old Dominators.

In this context, had the Demoness of Gray and Demoness of Yellow attempted to escape into the mirror world, They would have been unable to evade a Planeswalker's pursuit or imprisonment. Yet They chose self-destruction instead.

Madam Magician had prepared a response, intending to recreate the Angel of Time's time halt, followed by a Mentor of Deceit's manipulation of rules and mystical connections. The aim was to ensure the self-destruction of the Demoness of Gray and Demoness of Yellow extended to Their true bodies, mirror selves, and dormant mirrors alike.

This plan carried a certain risk of failure. However, bolstered by her boon of good luck, Madam Magician was confident in its success. Unfortunately, before she could act, the Primordial Demoness had already fallen. The ensuing disasters accelerated the self-destruction of the two Demonesses.

Noticing Madam Magician's disappointment, Madam Justice tilted her head with a smile.

"I secretly planted seeds of spiritual plague in them. Given the twisted psyches typical of demonesses, They will undoubtedly suffer issues later on, perhaps even leading to Their demise."

Audrey used the term "perhaps," as she wasn't sure if the Demoness Sect possessed a Grade 1 Sealed Artifact capable of curing or suppressing such "diseases."

On another front, Suah and Tirié successfully sought aid from the Chained God and escaped the entanglement of Ma'am Hermit, the Angel of the Holy Spirit, and the Angel of Time before the arrival of Madam Magician and Madam Justice. They retreated in defeat.

In the collapsing special mirror world, Lumian, his face still bearing a mocking smile, gazed at the female statue and the two dark orbs containing the absorbed Beyonder characteristics. Yet he did not allow them to merge with the Cheek face on his shoulder. Instead, he exerted all his strength to resist the inevitable pull of the Law of Beyonder Characteristics Convergence.

He held on until the Fire of Destruction began consuming his original head, melting the Cheek and Tudor faces beside the chaotic vortex. Only then did the two remaining steel puppets take action. The face shared by Aurore and Jenna was not cursed like Cheek's and was only affected by Lumian's burning influence later. Its melting was less severe.

The steel puppet wearing dark gloves extended both hands, extracting the self-awareness and spiritual imprints of Cheek from the two Demoness of Apocalypse characteristics.

This extraction, limited by the puppet's rank, was temporary and incapable of permanently possessing the entities. If suitable vessels were not found, the extracted consciousness and imprint would soon return to their original characteristics.

At that moment, the other steel puppet, cloaked in an illusory mantle, extended its right hand and completed the Grafting.

It transferred the extracted self-awareness and spiritual imprint to the female statue—the Uniqueness of the Demoness pathway.

As the strongest resonance for Cheek's self-awareness and spiritual imprints, the statue readily accepted them. Even if it hadn't, Fooling or Deceit awaited to ensure compliance.

Once this was done, the steel puppets succumbed to the collapsing mirror world, and Lumian ceased his resistance. He allowed the Uniqueness to merge with the melting Cheek face.

Enduring immense pain, Lumian smiled and plunged 0-01 into the melting Tudor face, driving it completely in.

Then, he swallowed the two blood-soaked crowns.

The now-purified Demoness of Apocalypse Beyonder characteristics were guided into the blood-stained faces of Aurore and Jenna.

At last, the three Sequence 1 Beyonder characteristics and the Uniqueness of the Demoness pathway reunited within Lumian, becoming whole.

Their aggregation intensified, and Lumian's head, along with the Fire of Destruction from the curse, seemed to collapse into a singularity.

Enduring immense pain, Lumian smiled and plunged 0-01 into the melting Tudor face, driving it completely in.

Then, he swallowed the two blood-soaked crowns.

The Red Priest pathway's three Sequence 1 Beyonder characteristics and Uniqueness were also gathered.

Rumble!

Thunder rumbled as silver-white lightning struck various parts of the World of Ruins.

The Hanged Man Alger and Justice Audrey instinctively looked to the sky. They saw the projections of the crimson moon and the stars ignited by an invisible, colorless flame, bringing light to the world.

For a brief moment, it was as if they had returned to Fourth Epoch Trier, before the seal had been broken, when the sky was composed of flames.

Catastrophes grew fiercer. Audrey noticed the massive oaks in the distance bending their branches. She saw The Magician Fors and The Moon Emlyn alternating between masculine and feminine forms, sometimes androgynous, sometimes normal.

Coughing and fever afflicted these demigods, inexplicably spreading a strange illness, forcing them to bow their heads.

A surge of impulse arose within their hearts—to track down and confront the demonesses once more.

Amidst this chaos, the cries of monsters filled the oak forest as they turned upon one another.

Simultaneously, as Franca advanced toward becoming a Demoness of Catastrophe, she sensed fragments of her shattered mirrors forming new domains behind mirrors.

The mirror world was reborn!

Within the World of Ruins, patches of gray and chaos were consumed by flames, leaving nothing behind.

In the destroyed then reborn special mirror world, Lumian's three heads rose slowly as his body re-formed. His right side was female, clad in a skeletal white dress, while his left was male, draped in a blood-red robe.

The right head bore the purified faces of Aurore and Jenna—clean, brimming with spirituality, though their eyes remained shut, unable to speak or convey consciousness.

The left head featured Cheek's face, now less maternal and more alluring, with a captivating smile and slightly parted lips. Tudor's face appeared sharper, with the blood-red flag mark on its forehead protruding slightly. The face of the chaotic vortex continued to absorb the Fire of Destruction, rotating faintly.

Lumian's own head grew more handsome, his long hair the color of blood, his features exuding sharp masculinity.

Beneath his left armpit and ribs, additional arms sprouted, holding a scorched, blood-stained banner. On his right, matching arms extended, pale as white jade but empty-handed.

A new Red Priest and Chaos Demoness had been born!

As a god, some Uniquenesses manifested as parts of one's body or belongings; others remained hidden.

In the next moment, Lumian raised his three heads, gazing at the crimson moon returning to the region.

"You're still at your critical stage of merging," he sneered. "This little interference—what can it achieve? Nothing before, nothing now!" Grinning boldly, Lumian raised his four new arms.

Invisible, colorless flames and a chaotic vortex of endless possibilities surged toward the crimson moon's projection.

Chapter 1141: Divine Kingdom

The sky of the special mirror world was split in two: one half dyed crimson, the other divided by a chaotic vortex and formless, colorless flames. The three forces clashed violently. Suddenly, all light vanished, as if something was voraciously absorbing everything around it.

Franca and the others in the World of Ruins had just recovered from their ailments and stabilized their genders. Then, they watched as the burning flames above, meteors streaking across the sky, and mountains spewing smoke and magma all disappeared from view.

They were plunged into darkness-a darkness so profound that nothing seemed capable of existing within it.

After what felt like an eternity, the darkness receded. Crimson moonlight once again illuminated the Northern and Southern Continents and the five oceans. Bright stars of various hues returned to their natural states.

The World of Ruins was restored to its former appearance.

In the special mirror world, Lumian's eyes no longer reflected the crimson full moon. Everything seemed normal.

He let out a chuckle and lowered his four newly grown arms.

Then, he grasped a handful of flames, compressing them into a metallic mirror.

Lumian gazed into the mirror and saw two figures standing back to back-one was Aurore, and the other Jenna. Both had become even more beautiful, their eyes now open. However, their gazes were vacant and hollow, devoid of spirituality. They remained under Lumian's conscious control.

Lumian stared at them blankly for a few seconds. A smile gradually curved his lips, and the Aurore and Jenna in the mirror returned his smile.

Behind them was another indistinct figure-Cheek.

On Lumian's left shoulder, the face of Cheek also smiled sweetly and seemed about to speak.

Suddenly, Lumian summoned the dark-gold, peculiar mask and forcefully pressed it onto the slowly spinning chaotic vortex face.

Starlight descended, illuminating the entire mask.

Cheek's mouth opened, but no words came out. Her reflection in the mirror disappeared along with the attempt.

Her face on Lumian's shoulder showed clear dissatisfaction.

Lumian cast his gaze around and found that the Traveler's Bag he had exchanged with Franca was completely shattered in the previous destruction. Only two items remained intact on the ground: the dark-gold peculiar mask he had just used and the Demoness card-Lumian didn't keep any items in this Traveler's Bag because only the puppet soldier puppets, mask, and Card of Blasphemy could be of use in the previous battle.

Lumian summoned the Demoness card to his hand and discovered that the previously obscured advancement ritual for becoming a god in the Demoness pathway was now revealed: "Descend into the depths of the earth, find the Chaos Sea, endure a degree of its corruption while maintaining oneself-neither falling nor transforming."

Quite considerate. The mention of the sefirah must have been "hidden" in advance. Who would have thought that the advancement ritual for the Demoness pathway would involve another sefirah entirely... Lumian mused, suddenly suspecting there was something off about this ritual. The first Blasphemy Slate was formed from the corpse of the Primordial God Almighty. Perhaps before dying, He altered the corresponding knowledge to make the Demoness advancement ritual involve contact with the Chaos Sea.

This would facilitate His unique revival through the pathways of calamity and allow Him to control and utilize the Chaos Sea effectively post-resurrection.

As for the second Blasphemy Slate, though it was created from the Ancient Sun God's corpse, who could say it wasn't influenced by the Primordial God Almighty?

Still, it makes sense for a Demoness, who governs chaos, to need prior contact with the Chaos Sea... Lumian shook his head, dismissing the truth of the matter as irrelevant.

To him, this ritual was unnecessary to perform yet essentially already fulfilled.

The face sealed by the dark-gold peculiar mask came from the Primordial God Almighty, bearing a deep, special connection to the Chaos Sea. Its power surpassed mere corruption from the Chaos Sea.

"So, you went mad during your advancement ritual?" Lumian tilted his head, mocking the Cheek face.

Cheek's face widened Her eyes, as if to say: "When did I ever go mad? My mental state has always been impeccable."

At this moment, the special mirror world fully stabilized, reflecting shades of gray and white, formless and colorless flames, an ambiguous and enchanting atmosphere, and a chaotic vortex encompassing all possibilities.

It was evolving into Lumian's divine kingdom.

For the Red Priest, a divine kingdom emerged from a deeper conceptualization of the authority of Conquest. By completely "conquering" a land, battlefield, or special area, it could be transformed into the Red Priest's divine kingdom. Any living being entering the kingdom, without corresponding protection or sufficient rank, would immediately become a soldier of the Red Priest.

For the Demoness, the divine kingdom was closely tied to the mirror world. The Primordial Demoness had previously established Her divine kingdom in a hidden corner of the mirror world. There, only females could exist-even other true gods would acquire distinct female characteristics upon entry. There, gazing upon what should not be seen would immediately turn one into stone. There, without protection, one would frequently encounter disasters tied to oneself. There, extreme pleasure would sporadically manifest, making one reluctant to leave...

Lumian could now "conquer" the special mirror world, transforming it into a divine kingdom that satisfied the needs of both the Red Priest and Chaos Demoness.

Lumian surveyed his surroundings and allowed the scenes reflected in the special mirror world to change. They became Cordu Village, surrounded by blue skies, white clouds, and lush green grasslands. At the village's edge stood the Rue Anarchie, with Aurore's house built beside Auberge du Coq Doré...

After gazing at it for a moment, Lumian let the scene gradually fade away.

He smiled faintly and entered the astral world composed of concepts and symbols before returning to reality.

His three-headed, six-armed form nodded toward Franca and Madam Magician, who were looking at him, and said, "Thank you all. The operation is successfully concluded.

"Let's head back to the protected zone."

"Alright," Mr. Sun and the others responded one after another.

Trier, inside the luxurious villa.

Franca studied the clean, refreshed faces of Aurore and Jenna with undisguised anticipation.

"It really seems like revival is possible if we take it a step further," she said.

Hearing this, Anthony cast a subtle glance at Franca.

Lumian nodded lightly, smiling self-deprecatingly.

"Sometimes, it feels meaningless. Other times, I can't help but hope and yearn for it."

"Hope is good. Hope is very good," Franca replied, smiling at Lumian. "I'm now a Demoness of Catastrophe, an Angel. Surely I can know certain things now?"

Lumian couldn't help but chuckle. "Do you have to be so impatient? Stabilize yourself first.

"Anyway, I need to report to Mr. Fool about this. It's related to future actions. When I return,

I'll explain briefly."

"Alright." Franca didn't hide her anticipation and felt that Lumian seemed in a much better state, having exacted revenge by defeating Primordial Demoness Cheek.

Once Lumian ascended to his room to prepare for entering the gray fog, Franca turned to Anthony and asked curiously, "Why did you give me the look earlier?"

It couldn't be because my allure, still somewhat uncontrollable after becoming a Demoness

of Catastrophe, affected him, right?

When it came to beauty and charm, Lumian's Cheek face clearly surpassed hers!

Anthony smiled slightly and said, "I was just reflecting on how your mental state is much better than I imagined and how your resilience exceeds my expectations."

Franca froze for a moment, then sighed softly after a few seconds. "I have to force myself to

stay calm and optimistic.

"He can be gloomy, he can lose control in madness, but I can't. Although I sometimes fall into gloom, most of the time, I must remain cheerful and optimistic. Otherwise, there's truly no

hope..."

"That's your humanity," Anthony remarked emotionally. "I'm glad Lumian and Jenna met you, and I'm glad to have you as a teammate."

Franca let out a somewhat smug laugh, then warily asked, "Why do I feel like you're trying to

give me therapy?"

"I've never hidden that," Anthony replied with a smile as he turned toward the kitchen area.

"It's free, after all."

...

Above the gray fog, within the majestic palace.

After recounting the highlights of the battle and the Primordial Demoness's performance,

Lumian said, "This time, I've initiated the convergence. With the awareness and spirit of both Cheek and Tudor present, I don't need much time to adapt before mastering the authorities of the Demoness and Red Priest pathways. If things are critical with the Mother Goddess of Depravity, I can conduct a deep secret deed and astral travel to the City of Calamity now. "But if there's no immediate urgency, I'd prefer about a month to stabilize myself and strengthen the newly formed balance."

Shrouded in gray fog, Mr. Fool nodded and spoke with a faintly ethereal tone, "There is at least one month."

Before Lumian could respond, his voice softened.

"Your three-headed, six-armed form stems from a fundamental transformation. Even I cannot restore you to a normal appearance, only conceal it with illusions. However, once you stabilize your balance and the apocalypse passes, I can use Wish and Fooling to grant you a second form.

"This form will allow you to switch freely, turning your spatial three-heads-six-arms into a temporal one. Your three heads and corresponding bodies will each occupy different time segments of the day, living their own lives but still under your main consciousness's control. "The biggest drawback of this form is that you, Aurore, and Jenna will never be able to appear together or meet each other..."

Hearing Mr. Fool's unhurried words about post-apocalypse possibilities, Lumian suddenly felt a fleeting daze-as if the apocalypse could indeed end and he might truly survive.

Lumian didn't say anything pessimistic. He simply listened quietly.

Gradually, he understood that Mr. Fool wasn't making a promise or offering comfort but expressing his own hope, giving heartfelt blessings.

He genuinely wished for the apocalypse to end, for Lumian to survive, and for him to live a better life.

"... At that point, your rank will no longer suit being a Major Arcana card holder of the Tarot Club. This isn't the Rose Redemption after all. But you can have Franca take your place as a Major Arcana card holder. Just draw a new card. Every Major Arcana card holder in the Tarot

Club already has dual identities, many representing other factions..." By the end, Mr. Fool's voice carried a hint of amusement.

At some unknown moment, Lumian found himself at peace. He chuckled along and said,

"Alright, Mr. Fool."

Mr. Fool gently nodded and replied, "Then I shall convene an impromptu gathering now."

Chapter 1142: Rewards

As rays of light rose and solidified into various figures, each completing their greeting to Mr. Fool, the central head of Lumian scanned the room and said, "Thank you all for your help. At the moment, I only possess the Post-Apocalyptic Scripture as an Angel-level item, so I can't provide equivalent compensation for everyone. However, if there's anything you need from me in the future, just let me know."

Hearing the second half of this statement, The Hanged Man Alger was momentarily stunned before realizing something critical: This was a promise.

And this promise was worth more than any Grade o Sealed Artifact!

After all, Lumian was now a dual Sequence o true god. The help promised by a true god surpassed the value of any Grade o Sealed Artifact!

Little do I know, a Tarot Club member has already turned into a true god... The Hanged Man Alger found his thoughts adrift.

When the Tarot Club was first established, he had harbored doubts, excitement, and fantasies but had never imagined witnessing a scene like this.

In the brief silence that followed, Madam Justice, Mr. Star, and the others similarly came to grips with the fact that Mr. Chariot was now both the Red Priest and the Chaos Demoness-a dual-pathway true god poised to become a great existence!

Not even the Rose Redemption of the past had members of such caliber... This sentiment emerged simultaneously in the hearts of Madam Magician and Ma'am Hermit, both well-versed in ancient history.

The Rose Redemption had been a secret organization of the Third Epoch, with members ranging from a true god to Kings of Angels.

Mr. Hanged Man glanced at Mr. Sun and Madam Judgment, then smiled at Lumian. "My spoils of war are my compensation. Besides, it was my duty. The help I provided was actually quite limited."

This was true. Most of what they had done was of little significance in Lumian's battle against the Primordial Demoness. For Sequence 3 Saints wielding Grade o Sealed Artifacts, directly intervening in such a contest would have been suicidal. Even true Angels could only contribute meaningfully when the Primordial Demoness briefly descended to the level of a King of Angels.

In other words, those who truly aided Lumian were Madam Magician and Madam Justice, who intercepted the Demonesses of Gray and Yellow; the Angel of Time, the Angel of the Holy Spirit, and Ma'am Hermit, who held off the Abomination siblings; the Evernight Goddess's divine descent, which delayed the Primordial Demoness long enough for Amon to finish stealing a wish; and Amon Himself, who transported miracles and enacted direct salvation. The other Major Arcana card holders had three primary objectives for participating in this operation:

To eliminate as many high-ranking Demonesses as possible and seize their potent Sealed Artifacts to prevent them, unprotected after the Primordial Demoness's fall, from defecting to the Mother Goddess of Depravity or succumbing to the crimson moonlight, gradually losing control and become a latent problem.

To claim spoils of war and grow stronger. Although cruel, the reality was that the more Angels and Grade o Sealed Artifacts in the protected zones, the more prepared they would be to confront anomalies and perhaps even safeguard more of humanity when the apocalypse truly arrived.

To assist Franca in bringing a catastrophe upon the Demoness Sect. Without such help, surviving alone would have been a miracle for her.

The Hanged Man Alger believed Lumian's gratitude was primarily directed at the third point. Hence, he did not downplay his contributions but merely clarified their limited scope- especially since The Sun Derrick, Judgment Xio, and even the more significant contributors like Justice, The Magician, and The Hermit had not yet received spoils of war. He could not speak for them.

The Sun Derrick nodded and said, "Finding and adhering to my core justice is compensation enough for me."

The Chariot Lumian did not argue, only smiling in return. "Perhaps I can assist with your advancement ritual."

Though Lumian had never personally seen any Blasphemy Slate or held the Cards of Blasphemy's Sun card, as a true god of the Demoness pathway with the unique chaos vortex face, he could intuitively sense that the Sun pathway's Sequence 2 Sun Chaser (or Lightseeker) advancement ritual involved the sun in either a mystical or real-world sense.

The Sun Derrick was silent for two seconds before choosing not to modestly decline.

In the current situation, this was the justice he needed to uphold.

Lumian then turned to Madam Temperance Sharron.

"I made a promise to Naboredisley-the former Devil Monarch Farbauti. Once I fulfill it, He will ensure His Abomination avatar perishes and transfer the Beyonder characteristic to me.

"When the time comes, I would like to exchange that characteristic for the Calamity of Crimson in your possession."

The name "Calamity of Crimson" came from the consciousness of Cheek's face. Trading a Sequence 1 Beyonder characteristic for a Grade o Sealed Artifact corresponding to a Sequence 2 Demoness of Catastrophe was obviously unequal. However, Sharron knew that the Abomination Beyonder characteristic was a reward for her teacher, the Angel of the Holy Spirit, Reinette Tinekerr. The Sequence 2 Ancient Bane extracted from it would ultimately belong to her. The exchange for the Calamity of Crimson was effectively an intermediary step. Sharon picked up a manifested pen, quickly wrote her answer on paper, and raised it: "No problem."

Lumian nodded before addressing Mr. Sun again, "Once I obtain the Calamity of Crimson, I'd like to exchange it with the New City of Silver for the Sealed Artifact, Gift of the Land. I may need it in the future."

The Sealed Artifact-Gift of the Land-originated from Omebella's remains and was considered a high-risk item. If not for the Church of The Fool's headquarters being located in the New City of Silver and Mr. Fool's constant attention, the six-member council would have long struggled with how to handle it. Now, Lumian had provided them with an opportunity. The Sun Derrick was initially tempted but soon felt reluctant.

Though the Gift of the Land had brought great suffering to the City of Silver, it was also what allowed them to endure over two thousand years of darkness and despair, finally awaiting Mr. Fool's salvation.

Pain had long been intertwined with the continuation of their bloodline, making it difficult to separate the two.

Lumian did not rush him, quietly waiting for Mr. Sun to make his decision.

After some time, The Sun Derrick instinctively looked toward the head of the bronze table.

When in doubt or difficulty, he always hoped for Mr. Fool's guidance and Mr. Hanged Man's

advice.

Mr. Fool gently nodded.

The Sun Derrick took a deep breath, suppressing his reluctance, and said to The Chariot

Lumian, "Alright."

The Chariot Lumian shifted his gaze to Madam Justice.

"Once I've used the Gift of the Land, its issues may be resolved. At that point, I'll give it to you."

The perceptive Justice Audrey did not refuse, nodding before tilting her head toward Madam Magician with a smile. "If you need it, I can lend it to you."

This referred to Madam Magician's plan to relocate the entire Abraham family and as many humans as possible to a more habitable planet at the edge of the universe when the apocalypse arrived. The Gift of the Land could effectively terraform the environment and provide sustenance.

Of course, if Omebella's remains retained their unique dangers, carrying it would be out of the question. It would be better to acquire another Grade o Sealed Artifact corresponding to the Desolate Matriarch.

"Alright," Madam Magician replied without hesitation.

Lumian then addressed her directly, "I will open all special mirror worlds inhabited by sentient beings. You can travel there and help spread my teachings. The more anchors I have for my upcoming endeavors, the better."

Madam Magician immediately understood. This was an opportunity for her to Travel and counted as a form of compensation.

She had never considered visiting the special mirror worlds or the extradimensional spaces attached to them for potion digestion because these belonged to the Primordial Demoness, making them even more dangerous than traversing the cosmos. After all, roaming the cosmos had a higher chance of evading the attention of the Great Old Dominators, whereas entering the Primordial Demoness's domain guaranteed discovery.

Never thought I'd rely on his help for potion digestion one day... The Magician Fors chuckled and asked, "Okay. What is your current honorific name?"

Lumian deliberated for a few seconds before answering, "The Symbol of War and Apocalypse, the Demoness wielding Chaos, the Many-Faced One who offers sacrifices to Calamity, and the Ruler of the Mirror World."

A true dual-pathway true god... Madam Magician silently marveled. Lumian then turned to Ma'am Hermit. "I will assist Queen Mystic in completing her digestion of the Sage potion and help you digest as much as possible."

Ma'am Hermit made an "mm" sound and thanked him.

A Sage always opposed disaster and calamity, and the individual sitting diagonally opposite her represented these concepts. There was no one better suited than Lumian to aid in the Sage potion digestion.

Then, Lumian addressed Mr. Star, "Tell Mr. Pallez that I owe him one."

He turned to Madam Judgment next. "I owe you one as well-or the Post-Apocalyptic Scripture?"

"Alright," said Mr. Star without declining on behalf of the old man.

Under the circumstances, Judgment Xio, known for her group-mindedness and adherence to order, found it hard to refuse. She chose the favor as compensation.

Having distributed the rewards, Lumian thought for a moment before looking at Madam

Magician again.

"I'd like to borrow the Box of the Great Old Ones for a while. Perhaps I can resolve the third

level's hidden danger for the Abraham family and replace it with an equivalent but more

manageable anomaly.

"If I don't succeed, I'll return it as is."

Madam Magician's expression became thoughtful before she nodded. "No problem."

The Chariot Lumian leaned back in his chair, saying no more.

Judgment Xio immediately looked at Mr. Star Leonard. "Can I trade Solomon's Mask with you for the Justiciar-pathway Grade o Sealed Artifact?"

Chapter 1143: The Final Choice

The Star Leonard looked back at Madam Judgment, slightly surprised as he asked, "You're not switching to the Black Emperor pathway?"

Switching pathways could grant unique, hybrid, and sometimes bizarre Beyonder powers. Though the rituals might have hidden requirements and associated risks, theoretically, such individuals were harder to deal with than Beyonders who stayed on a single pathway to its peak.

Judgment Xio spoke calmly, "If there's no other option, I will switch to the Black Emperor pathway. But as long as there's a possibility to continue on the Justiciar pathway, I would prefer to pursue that."

She paused, adding, "I personally aspire to establish orders that align with the morality of the times and devote myself fully to maintaining them while constantly adjusting and refining them based on reality's feedback.

"Once order becomes rigid, it inevitably falls into shadow."

The Star Leonard nodded in agreement, saying, "I'm willing to make the trade."

To him, Solomon's Mask and the Pillar of Severity were essentially equivalent-they were items meant to be handed in, traded for the Sequence 2 Servant of Concealment Beyonder characteristic of the Darkness pathway.

If there wasn't an opening for a Servant of Concealment, he was already prepared to switch to Sequence 2 of one of the neighboring pathways-the Death pathway's Death Consul or the Giant pathway's Glory.

After Leonard and Xio completed their exchange of the two Grade o Sealed Artifacts, Mr. Fool, seated at the head of the bronze table, turned to The

Hanged Man Alger. In a warm tone, he said, "The Book of Calamity task cannot currently be completed due to the premature descent of the crimson moon. You will need to wait until the moment the apocalypse arrives. If you do not wish to wait and prefer to ascend to angelhood sooner, I can assist you by using The Setting Sun Rooster to trade for the Sequence 2 Beyonder characteristic and supplementary ingredients from the Sun, White Tower, or Tyrant pathways."

White Tower was the Sequence o of the Reader pathway, corresponding to the God of Knowledge and Wisdom.

The Sequence 2 Beyonder characteristic of this pathway and the Tyrant pathway might no longer exist within their respective Churches but could still be found as Sealed Artifacts in other Churches.

The Sun pathway's Sequence 2 Beyonder characteristics were relatively more abundant, partly due to the fall of the Eternal Blazing Sun and partly because not every Sequence 3 Justice Mentor in the Church of the Eternal Blazing Sun fulfilled the conditions for advancement. In the past few months, Saint Viève and Saint Lutique, two senior Sun Chasers, had each successfully advanced after Mr. Fool returned two Sequence 1 White Angel Beyonder characteristics.

Mr. Fool continued, "You can also consider switching to the Secrets Supplicant pathway. The Setting Sun Rooster, originating from the fall of the Ancient Sun God, carries the Sequence 2 Beyonder characteristic Profane Presbyter tainted by the Sun's power. I can purify the corresponding corruption for you.

"Take your time to consider carefully before deciding."

The Hanged Man Alger fell silent, seemingly torn and hesitant.

After a dozen seconds, he suddenly chuckled. "Honorable Mr. Fool, I wish to become a Profane Presbyter."

The Sun Derrick looked at Mr. Hanged Man in astonishment, utterly baffled by his choice. He believed that the White Tower pathway's Sequence 2

Wisdom Angel or the Tyrant pathway's Sequence 2 Calamity would suit Alger better, especially the former.

Alger smiled faintly and said in a low voice, "This pathway is more adaptable in actual combat and better suited to handling various situations."

He then added in a self-deprecating tone, "By choosing this, my Hanged Man card becomes even more fitting. Perhaps this is fate-one always returns to the card they once chose."

Hearing this, Madam Magician, who had deep knowledge of Tarot cards, was suddenly reminded of a phrase: "The Hanged Man represents downfall, selfishness, as well as endurance, sacrifice, and dedication."

Seeing that The Hanged Man Alger had made his decision, Mr. Fool did not offer further advice.

"After the gathering, I will provide the ritual. Once you're prepared, pray to me to shatter the characteristic, purify the corruption, and supply the supplementary ingredients."

"Yes, Mr. Fool." Alger was both elated and burdened with a sense of responsibility.

As the current Sea God and a legendary adventurer perpetually roaming the seas, he had long since digested his Sea King potion.

The Chariot Lumian straightened his posture and said, "Mr. Fool, I will supply the supplementary ingredients. Just provide me with the corresponding knowledge, and I can envision them out of thin air."

He was unsure whether Mr. Fool had access to the supplementary ingredients for Profane Presbyter or could summon them from the historical fog for temporary use, so he proactively offered to handle it.

"Very well." Shrouded in gray fog, Mr. Fool nodded slightly.

After discussing this matter, The Moon Emlyn glanced around the room and hesitated before saying, "Your potions are either fully digested, were digested during this operation, or you've found ways to expedite digestion. However, my High Summoner is still lacking. Advancing quickly would require taking risks. Do you have any suggestions?"

Before any other Major Arcana card holders could respond, The Chariot Lumian smiled and said, "That's simple.

"After the gathering, set up a ritual and summon me. I will respond."

Wh-Mr. Moon Emlyn was momentarily stunned.

Of course! This individual is a dual-pathway true god, possessing unique traits...

If a High Summoner could complete such a high-level summoning and succeed, their remaining potion would undoubtedly be fully digested.

"Thank you." The Moon Emlyn was not particularly adept at communication and could only express his gratitude in the simplest terms.

After further exchanges, Mr. Fool gently tapped the edge of the bronze table.

Once all the Major Arcana card holders turned their attention to him, he spoke in a warm but emotional tone, "This operation was a success. Though many high-ranking Demonesses were not truly killed, the destruction and reformation of the mirror world left their numbers dwindling. Their relics may have been inherited by the Demoness of Cyan trio, but they will no longer impact future developments.

"Everyone, the final moment is approaching. We have about a month left to make all necessary preparations. Make the most of it.

"I hope that after the apocalypse, no one will be absent from the next Tarot Gathering."

Hearing this, Justice Audrey felt a complex surge of emotions.

She stood up and, alongside the other Major Arcana card holders, curtsied. "Yes, Mr. Fool."

...

Returning to the real world, Lumian descended the stairs into the small living room.

He glanced at Franca and casually asked, "Where's Anthony?"

"In the kitchen, helping Ludwig," Franca replied, glancing toward the living room entrance before lowering her voice. "You can tell me about the knowledge of great existences now, right?"

Lumian briefly explained the Great Old Dominators such as Mother Goddess of Depravity and Circle of Inevitability, who were Above the Sequences, and Their goals. He also introduced the situation regarding the sefirot and updated Franca on the Mother Goddess of Depravity's current activities.

Franca listened in shock, murmuring, "Isn't the number of great existences a little too many..."

She then looked toward the faces of Cheek and Tudor on Lumian's left shoulder.

"They're truly mad..."

She now had a deeper understanding of the monumental risk Primordial Demoness Cheek had taken with Her grand plan.

If She had failed, she would have dragged the entire planet- and perhaps the universe-

down with Her!

Cheek's face couldn't speak but lifted Her chin proudly, while Tudor's face refused to react.

Lumian sneered and shifted the topic to other knowledge about Above the Sequences. After listening intently, Franca sighed. "So we had our Spirit Bodies extracted and hung up in Sefirah Castle, avoiding the end of the world when the Oldest One awoke, as well as the later struggles between God Almighty and the Celestial Worthy..."

As she spoke, her thoughts wandered. "Most of the Curly-Haired Baboon Research Society have no idea about the truth or that the Northern and Southern Continents are already

destroyed.

"That's probably for the best-let them greet the apocalypse with joy..."

The Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society's members had mostly survived the crimson moon disaster because the one the Aurora Order believed in had shielded them in time.

This was why Franca had complicated feelings about that individual. She knew that Jenna's death and Lumian's ordeals were connected to Him. Yet, He had indeed protected the world,

including her and her friends.

Thus, she had never brought up the idea of revenge-not because she didn't harbor resentment, but because she couldn't voice it. When she heard Lumian had punched Him

twice, she felt both stunned and amused.

After a few seconds, Franca exhaled slowly and said, "If we survive the apocalypse, I want to travel to the Western Continent and live there for a while."

As she spoke, she smiled warmly and sincerely invited Lumian, Aurore, and Jenna. "Would you like to come along? I'll explain and introduce everything to you. I'll be your

guide." Lumian's expression softened gradually. He glanced at the head on his right shoulder and smiled as he said, "Aurore can explain and introduce things too." "Deal!" Franca beamed and extended her right hand, giving Lumian a high-five.

She found pinky promises too childish; a high-five suited her much better.

At that moment, Ludwig entered the living room, chewing on a steak.

"What are you doing here?" Franca asked, slightly surprised.

You haven't even finished your meal yet...

"I called him here," Lumian explained with a smile.

Why would Lumian need Ludwig at this moment? Was it mealtime? Franca was puzzled.

For the past year, Lumian had used his unique abilities to take Ludwig out of the protected

zone daily to feast on the oceans of the World of Ruins, just as Franca accompanied Lumian into the ruins to let him lose control and vent his madness every day.

Seeing Ludwig also looking at him curiously, Lumian retrieved an item from his divine

kingdom.

It was a three-tiered silver-black jewelry box encrusted with countless gemstones-Box of

the Great Old Ones!

Chapter 1144: Devouring

As soon as the silver-black, three-tiered jewelry box inlaid with various gemstones was taken out and placed on the coffee table, Franca felt an inexplicable chill. It was as if the environment around her had undergone a strange transformation.

Ever since becoming a Demoness of Catastrophe, her spiritual intuition had grown much sharper.

The head on Lumian's left shoulder turned, and the face of Alista Tudor now faced forward, gazing at the Box of the Great Old Ones.

The intricate jewelry box let out a sudden creaking sound, as if the materials comprising it were buckling under some invisible pressure, on the verge of shattering.

All the anomalies Franca had sensed disappeared simultaneously.

"Box of the Great Old Ones?" Franca asked Lumian curiously.

Although she hadn't participated in the Major Arcana gatherings or the distribution of Grade o Sealed Artifacts, she had been briefed in advance about which items to avoid should a skirmish occur. This box was one of them.

Lumian nodded slightly and placed his right hand atop the Box of the Great Old Ones, gently tapping it.

"I felt it was fated with Ludwig, so I borrowed it for a while."

The phrase "fated" was something he had picked up in the dream city, though it was no longer rare in the ruins of the Northern and Southern Continents. Members of the Curly- Haired Baboons Research Society had unconsciously spread new terms, and Lumian believed that visitors from Penglai, like Harrison, were also introducing similar ideas.

Fated with Ludwig? Franca instinctively turned her head to glance at Ludwig, who was dressed in formal children's attire.

The boy, steak clamped between his teeth, stared blankly at the Box of the Great Old Ones, as though lost in a dream.

Lumian slid his hand to the third layer of the silver-black jewelry box and smiled as he asked Ludwig, "Can you sense what's hidden inside?"

Ludwig, as if sleepwalking, extended his hand to the opposite side of the third layer of the box.

Almost instantly, Franca's ears filled with bizarre sounds of chewing, swallowing, and digesting. It was as though something was gnawing on her flesh and bones from within.

The sound originated from the depths of the third layer of the Box of the Great Old Ones and resonated from the depths of her psyche.

"It's... it's..." Ludwig stammered, the piece of steak dropping to the ground.

The boy's face, like a sheet covering a bed, was propped up into "tents" by unseen limbs.

With a mix of desire, reverence, fear, and trembling, he said, "It's... the power of Primordial Hunger!"

Primordial Hunger... One of the Great Old Dominators... Franca felt the surrounding environment suddenly grow dark and layered, as though some malevolent gaze had isolated them.

Looking around, she quickly realized they had been transported to Lumian's divine kingdom. This move was to prevent Primordial Hunger from leveraging the mystical connections formed during their discussion to destabilize the protected zone.

The middle head on Lumian's shoulders retained its earlier smile as he continued to ask Ludwig, "What would happen if I opened this layer?"

Ludwig jerked back as if electrocuted, stammering in fear, "It might—it might immediately devour everything around us. Or it might start by consuming-consuming our subconscious and the deepest parts of our islands of consciousness. It would eat emotions, memories, spirit, and consciousness, then flesh and blood, then night, day, good, evil, order, and disaster. It would continue until it consumed parts of the world's fundamental rules, destabilizing reality and dissolving the barriers at their foundation..."

"As expected, your pathway eventually leads to devouring rules, concepts, authorities, and even symbols," Lumian remarked with satisfaction, the middle head nodding slightly.

Looking at Ludwig with an ambiguous smile, he asked in a Demoness-like whisper, "Can you devour the danger hidden in the box?"

Cheek's face turned forward, showing keen interest in Ludwig's response.

Visibly terrified, Ludwig blurted, "How could I?"

His words seemed to imply not that it was impossible but that it shouldn't be done-such an act would be rebellion, blasphemy!

Lumian offered no reply, his smile unchanging as he continued to gaze at Ludwig.

Ludwig fell silent, his expressions shifting from cowardice to resistance, to temptation, to hesitation and fear.

His face had never been so expressive.

Franca adopted a spectator's stance, waiting for Lumian to offer some dark persuasion and Ludwig to respond with his own struggles.

After a few seconds, Lumian spoke in a measured tone, "The core of your pathway is 'devouring' and 'digesting.' Devouring the external world is not the end goal. Even consuming rules, concepts, authorities, and symbols is not the end. Devouring yourself, devouring your father, devouring the god you worship-that is your ultimate fate, the pinnacle of hunger.

"Perhaps that's the very reason He created all of you."

"Isn't that a bit... too extreme?" Ludwig asked with a clarity that suggested he had received some moral education.

Good kid, showing some humanity... Franca thought, nodding in approval.

She figured that if she chose the Spectator pathway, she could act out the role just as well.

Lumian glanced at Jenna's face on the head over his right shoulder and said to Ludwig with a smile, "It is indeed extreme. I wouldn't want you to be controlled by your godhood and instincts to do something so drastic.

"So I'm only asking if you can devour the danger hidden in the box-not if you can devour Primordial Hunger. In the current circumstances, strengthening yourself as much as possible is the best choice."

Ludwig opened his mouth as if to speak but closed it again, his expression shifting. Moments later, the sound of him swallowing saliva echoed audibly.

Oh Lord, you taste so good? Franca mentally captioned Ludwig's reaction.

After some time, Ludwig finally spoke.

"Not yet. I'd need to recover to my original level and receive help from another great

existence."

With a nod, Lumian said, "So even just devouring it temporarily, storing it without digesting or absorbing it, requires the help of a Great Old Dominator?"

"Yes," Ludwig affirmed with a heavy nod.

Lumian pondered briefly before smiling again. "Then we'll wait."

He extended one of the arms holding the Red Priest Uniqueness, along with one of the new beautiful hands that had grown on his right side, toward Ludwig. In the current situation, although the Red Priest Uniqueness still retained the form of a charred flag, it wouldn't cause those who witnessed it to lose control and go crazy. This was because it was a part of Lumian and was under control. Lumian could let it display the influence of godhood as and when he wanted it to.

"You can pick which one to devour," Lumian said with a smile.

Ludwig froze. "Can I really eat this?"

Franca blinked, finally understanding Lumian's intent.

He was letting Ludwig devour a part of his own body to allow Ludwig to gain the separated Sequence 2 Beyonder characteristic and thus recover his original level, freeing him from the seal of the God of Knowledge and Wisdom.

Lumian currently had three extra Sequence 2 Beyonder characteristics: one Weather Warlock and two Demoness of Catastrophe.

"Of course. I'm your godfather," Lumian said with a smile.

Ludwig swallowed hard, looked left and right for a few seconds, and hesitated for a few seconds before saying, "That one."

He pointed to Lumian's left arm, which carried the Weather Warlock Beyonder characteristic derived from Tudor's Conqueror Beyonder characteristics.

"Very well." Lumian raised the corresponding arm.

Ludwig leaned in and bit down on the hand.

As deep red blood burned like flames and flowed, the sounds of gnawing and chewing filled the room, making Franca shudder.

Franca gasped in shock, thinking that Lumian was being a bit too extreme. Wouldn't it be better to separate the Beyonder characteristic first before feeding it to Ludwig?

It's not like it couldn't be done.

She glanced at the Tudor face on Lumian's left shoulder and noticed an expression of faint pain, a primal discomfort.

The corresponding Weather Warlock Beyonder characteristic belonged to Alista Tudor. Letting Ludwig directly devour it was this a form of revenge? But you're hurting yourself too... Franca suddenly had a guess and sighed deeply.

Soon, Ludwig finished gnawing off Lumian's hand, leaving only the exposed, bare, iron- colored wrist bone, dripping with burning crimson blood.

Ludwig leaned back, licking the blood off the corners of his mouth, looking like he wanted more.

The skin on his face and body was on the verge of tearing apart, as though something massive inside him was about to burst forth.

The seal of the God of Knowledge and Wisdom could no longer hold him back.

At that moment, Ludwig took control of himself, refraining from breaking the sealing layer, maintaining the appearance of a little boy.

Lumian smiled and turned to Franca, saying, "I'll separate the remaining two Demoness of Catastrophe Beyonder characteristics later to balance my body better. Heh, the Sick Church will also need a Grade o Sealed Artifact. Oh, and the name 'Sick Church' will gradually have to

change." "Good, good, good!" Franca replied quickly, as though afraid Lumian might change his mind. Although she knew Lumian was primarily planning for his own future, the fact that he was willing to consider the future at all was a good sign.

Lumian studied Ludwig for a few seconds before smiling and asking, "What's your plan going

forward?"

Ludwig was silent for a moment before replying, "If I don't get devoured during the

apocalypse, I want to remain a child first, grow up normally, grow old, and fully experience the life of a human. Then, I'll make comparisons."

Lumian hummed in acknowledgment and asked casually, "You've returned to the angel level now, haven't you? What's the name of your Sequence?"

As he spoke, blood and flames intertwined at his severed wrist, regenerating a new hand.

Ludwig thought for a few seconds and then said, "In your language, it's called the Angel of Devouring."

Chapter 1145: Devouring Concepts

"Angel of Devouring? What abilities does it have?" Franca asked Ludwig casually, treating him as one of their own.

After all, he was like her godchild!

Ludwig, who had yet to break the seal and regain his full intelligence, answered honestly, "The core ability is to devour the rules of a specific area and certain shallow-level concepts, though there are limits to the number and range."

"Devour rules? How does that work?" Franca's curiosity was unmasked.

It sounded pretty powerful.

Before Ludwig could respond, Lumian reverted the scene back to the protected zone. The surroundings were no longer layered in dark mirrors, and sunlight once again shone through the windows into the clean, bright living room.

Ludwig glanced at the sunlight streaming in and the well-lit room before slowly opening his mouth.

Suddenly, Franca's vision was consumed by darkness; the entire area became unnaturally black.

For someone like her, who possessed Night Vision, it wasn't an issue. She turned to look at Ludwig and could still see the boy clearly.

"I thought you swallowed up the entire area, including us, into your stomach," Franca joked.

Ludwig froze for a moment before explaining, "I could, but at my current level, I can't directly swallow areas or physical targets. I'd need to create a vortex in my mouth to pull you all in, and you'd be able to resist that pull."

"I see..." Franca switched gears and asked, "So what exactly are you devouring right now?" "It's the rule of Sunlight Illumination. Even if a Beyonder creates sunlight again, until this rule is restored, that sunlight won't function," Ludwig explained earnestly.

Lumian smiled and inquired, "Can you spit out the devoured rule?"

"Once something is devoured, it's gone for good; it can't be restored." Ludwig opened his mouth again.

The sunlight returned to illuminate the living room.

"Didn't you say it couldn't be restored?" Franca asked, amused.

Ludwig picked up the piece of steak from the ground, stuffed it into his mouth, and chewed before answering, "It's not that the rule was restored; I created a new rule similar to the original."

"So devouring a rule allows you to use it yourself?" Franca suddenly understood.

"Only once," Ludwig admitted. "To use it repeatedly, I'd need to devour the source power that creates the rule."

Franca had initially wanted to ask how long it would take for a devoured rule to recover, but her spiritual intuition had already given her the answer: one to three minutes.

"And how does devouring shallow concepts work?" she asked instead.

Ludwig turned his gaze to the crystal chandelier with its golden frame. His eyes reflected the object.

He opened his mouth again.

Franca followed his gaze and noticed the chandelier's faint gold frame turning pitch black and dull, utterly unappealing.

The golden hues of other items in the living room also disappeared, leaving a void of blackness.

"Did you devour the concept of 'gold"?" Franca clicked her tongue.

Ludwig nodded. "Can the concept of 'gold' recover on its own?" Franca asked, finding the suddenly drab living room rather unappealing.

"...It depends on how it's devoured. One method allows for recovery, while the other makes the concept permanently disappear within the affected range-unless other Beyonder powers intervene," Ludwig hesitated before answering.

"Which method did you use just now?" Franca suddenly had a bad feeling.

"The second one," Ludwig confessed.

Lumian chuckled and raised his right hand, snapping his fingers.

With a snap, all the golden hues in the living room were restored.

Franca's first reaction was: You can perform magic and create miracles now?

She immediately remembered that this wasn't the World of Ruins, not the real world. Even Frank Lee's thoughts could affect sailors in their surroundings, let alone Lumian, who could partially wield the powers of a Visionary.

"Let me try next time!" she said regretfully.

Lumian turned to Ludwig and asked, "What's the name of Sequence 1? And what about Sequence o?"

Ludwig mumbled, "Overall, Sequence 1 is called Chaos Gastric Juices, and Sequence o... In the dream city, I saw a term I thought was fitting-Gluttony.

Otherwise, you could call it Self- Devourer or Tail-Devourer. It means devouring oneself, digesting oneself, and growing oneself anew."

"Tail-Devourer probably represents a cycle rather than literally devouring oneself. Let's go with Gluttony or Self-Devourer," Franca opined.

Lumian chuckled. "Pathways with the prefix 'Primordial' always seem to have some

connection to chaos."

He then said to Ludwig, "You can go back to the kitchen and continue eating. When the time is right, we'll open the third layer of the Box of the Great Old Ones."

Ludwig breathed a sigh of relief and left the living room reluctantly.

Franca's gaze returned to the Box of the Great Old Ones before glancing at Lumian. She opened her mouth but changed her question at the last moment, "What are the abilities and negative effects of this Grade o Sealed Artifact?"

"The first layer swaps the internal space with the target area, rapidly turning whatever is placed into the box into toys. The second layer records various scenes and allows the user to add new ones. When opened, the holder and all living beings within the designated range are forcibly transported to the specified location.

"The hidden risk of this transportation is randomness. It only works as intended a small fraction of the time. Most of the time, the destination changes unpredictably. Furthermore, the good luck given by the Post-Apocalyptic Scripture can't influence it, or to be more precise -Sequence 1-level or lower good fortune cannot influence this randomness accurately.

"As for the third layer, well, you've already heard it." Lumian gave a brief summary of the Box of the Great Old One's abilities.

Franca was taken aback. "Good luck from anything below Sequence o can hardly influence the randomness?

"Then how did Madam Temperance accurately transport herself and the Demoness of Black to the Underworld using the blessings of the Angel of Mercury? Or was it actually Mr. Fool's miracle that made it happen?"

Franca was very interested in her former superior, Demoness of Black Clarice. During their return to the protected zone, she had briefly asked Madam Temperance about her fate. The latter had explained in rough detail through written notes.

She knew that the Demoness of Black had been transported to the Underworld by the Box of the Great Old Ones and perished there. However, her dormant mirror remained intact, enabling future resurrection.

Of course, reviving through a dormant mirror was a process that took time. When the mirror world completely collapsed with the fall of the Primordial Demoness and the world's mirrors shattered, dormant mirrors would be hard-pressed to survive-unless placed in locations with exceptional protection or potent interference.

Based on this, Franca suspected that the Demoness of Black had failed to resurrect before her dormant mirror was destroyed and was truly dead.

This aligned closely with what Lumian had relayed from Mr. Fool's final remarks.

Lumian smiled at Franca but offered no explanation.

Franca wanted to press further but closed her mouth instead.

As Lumian sealed the Box of the Great Old Ones, he said to Franca, "Give me a dormant mirror to keep in my divine kingdom. In the future, as long as you're not killed by one of a few specific abilities, you'll always be able to resurrect."

"Alright, I'll fetch one later-or rather, I'll make a new one," Franca readily agreed. She, of course, didn't carry dormant mirrors on her person. They were hidden in secret places, like the Nation of the Evernight. After becoming a Demoness of Catastrophe, she could now create three more dormant mirrors even before her potion was fully digested.

Lumian hummed in acknowledgment and stood up.

"Where are you going?" Franca calculated the time and found that his "occasional" bout of clarity wasn't over yet.

"Helping Mr. Moon digest his potion. I feel like he's about to summon me," Lumian replied with a smile.

"Sounds like fun," Franca said, her eyes relaxing into a smile.

She pondered for a moment and said, "Once I've made a new dormant mirror, I'll visit my only subordinate and let her know the Demoness Sect is finished."

...

Backlund, in the basement of a villa.

In the underground area of a villa, a vibrant tomb surrounded by mutated grass, flowers, grains, and insects stood tall. Several Sanguine stood upright before it.

The Moon Emlyn was nearby, setting up a ritual altar.

He felt a little confused about the situation. Originally, he had only intended to enhance the digestion of his potion by summoning a high-level existence. To ensure the effect, he planned to have a few Counts under his command witness the ritual as audience members for feedback. However, the Sanguine had taken this matter exceptionally seriously. They had asked him to conduct the summoning in front of the Round Moon Duke Olmer's coffin and even summoned several younger marquises to observe.

What was supposed to be a small affair suddenly became solemn and grand.

Although bewildered, Emlyn understood the current situation.

All the existing Dukes of the Sanguine were too old. Their bodies were failing, and leaving their coffins for prolonged periods was not an option. Other marquises were either similarly aged and weakened or lacked sufficient protection from those of higher ranks, making them vulnerable to losing control during the advancement ritual under the crimson moon's influence.

Thus, Emlyn had become the Sanguine's hope-the marquis most likely to ascend to angelhood in recent years. No amount of importance attached to him was excessive. Did I ever tell them who I'm summoning? I think I only mentioned summoning a high-ranking existence... The Moon Emlyn pondered over this trivial matter while arranging the altar. The upcoming summoning was likely one of the rarest in mysticism history. He couldn't simply rely on his abilities to create a Door of Summoning and call it a day. Respect and ceremony were a must.

Of course, this wasn't his first high-level summoning. If the projection of Gehrman Sparrow he had summoned in the dream city had been complete, his High Summoner potion would have been fully digested long ago.

Before long, The Moon Emlyn finished preparing the altar. He turned to the tomb of the Round Moon Duke Olmer and the surrounding Sanguine marquises and announced, "I'm about to begin the summoning."

Chapter 1146: Wishing You Joy

"Begin," the rich voice of Round Moon Duke Olmer echoed from within the tomb.

The Moon Emlyn hummed in acknowledgment, erected a wall of spirituality, and began the ritual following standard summoning protocols. He lit candles and offered his sacrifice-a glass of absinthe shimmering with a dreamy green hue.

Taking two steps back, he recited the first verse of the incantation in ancient Hermes, "I!"

As his voice reverberated, The Moon Emlyn broke from convention and continued the chant in ancient Hermes rather than switching to Hermes.

"I summon in my name:"

He stretched out his hands, and with the chant, conjured a phantom door inscribed with countless mysterious symbols amidst the expanding candle flames.

Then, Emlyn uttered the honorific name of the entity he was summoning, "The Demoness wielding Chaos, the Many-Faced One who offers sacrifices to Calamity, and the Ruler of the Mirror World."

He deliberately avoided the part of the honorific name "Symbol of War and Apocalypse" — as summoning a true god-level existence through the Door of Summoning might naturally affect the surroundings. The "Apocalypse" aspect was particularly unwelcome for the aged and frail Round Moon Duke Olmer and his peers.

Hearing the three titles uttered by Emlyn, the surrounding Sanguine marquises displayed puzzled expressions.

Isn't the first line associated with the Primordial Demoness?

And who does the other two lines refer to?

I've never heard of the Primordial Demoness being called the Ruler of the Mirror World...

Did something happen in the World of Ruins? Did the Primordial Demoness's honorific name change? Is Emlyn attempting to summon the Primordial Demoness?

Could he possibly be summoning a true god?

Isn't the Primordial Demoness barred from entering the protected zone? Haw Emlyn been bewitched into summoning Her to destabilize the zone?

The Sanguine marquises, alarmed and wary, were about to recite the honorific names of other true gods for protection when the mystical and hazy Door of Summoning abruptly swung open. Beyond the door lay a profound darkness, studded with countless stars and filled with innumerable indistinct phantoms.

Six massive hands suddenly emerged from within, gripping the doorframe itself.

Some were delicate and beautiful, with flawless white skin, while others were robust, with clearly defined joints, exuding masculine strength. Each set of hands occupied one side of the doorway, squeezing it tightly, making it hard to fathom the size of the being they belonged

to.

Some Sanguine marquises stared blankly at the pristine, elegant hands, their minds conjuring visions of the overwhelming beauty of their owner. Others felt as though the bronzed hands were pressing down on their heads from a distance, causing them to bow involuntarily, forgetting entirely what they had intended to do.

Around the Round Moon Duke's tomb, the grass, grains, flowers, and insects all turned toward the Door of Summoning and prostrated themselves on the ground.

Finally, the six massive hands pushed the phantom Door of Summoning open as far as it would go, and a figure emerged.

In that instant, all the Sanguine present, including Round Moon Duke Olmer and The Moon Emlyn, saw themselves-sometimes with resentful expressions, sometimes with hostile gazes, sometimes appearing as they had in their youth.

These were their mirror reflections, originating from both the present and the past.

They also saw the ideal lover they had envisioned in their hearts, the most captivating member of the opposite sex.

Each of them became entranced, floating in a dreamlike state, as though reality itself had become unmoored.

It was unclear how much time had passed before they managed to regain a semblance of self- awareness. They found that the summoning ritual had long since concluded. The flames on the candles had shrunk back to their original size, flickering quietly.

The Moon Emlyn quickly examined himself and, unsurprisingly, confirmed that he had completely digested the High Summoner potion.

At that moment, the rich voice of Round Moon Duke Olmer came from within the tomb, "Whom exactly did you summon?"

The Moon Emlyn unconsciously lifted his chin slightly and replied, "An existence who has just ascended to become a dual-pathway true god."

...

Trier, Quartier de la Maison d'Opéra, Rue du Chapeau Noir.

Niceea, with her brown curls pinned up, sat in the rocking chair of her apartment, idly swaying as she stared off into space.

Since the night of the crimson moon's immense appearance, as though it had descended upon the earth, she had found herself with little to do.

Most of the core members of the Emperor Party had been arrested and purged, including her lover, Grouès, leading to the organization's complete disintegration.

Her superior, Madame Franca, hadn't assigned her any tasks either, merely instructing her to monitor the citizens in her vicinity and report any anomalies immediately.

With so much free time, Niceea had focused on digesting the Pleasure potion, flitting like a butterfly among her lovers. She even orchestrated situations where, despite knowing of each other's existence, they endured the pain of rivalry, pretended ignorance, or quarreled yet remained unwilling to leave her.

This had led to her complete digestion of the Pleasure potion last month. However, her superior had not provided her with the formula or ingredients for the Affliction potion.

Do I need to make new contributions? But there haven't been any tasks assigned... Also, why did all my mirrors just shatter? I must report this to Madame Franca; something is seriously wrong... Niceea thought, glancing at the drawn sheer curtains shielding her from the sunlight.

As these thoughts crossed her mind, she noticed that the glass window, now cracked as if struck by an invisible force, reflected the image of Madame Franca stepping out. She wore a ponytail and a hunter's outfit.

Niceea didn't immediately rise to greet her superior. She momentarily felt dazed, struck by the overwhelming beauty of Franca. Her superior had grown even more radiant-so mesmerizing that Niceea couldn't look away, so beautiful it made her forget all her worries and everything else.

Several seconds passed before Niceea snapped out of her trance and hurriedly stood in greeting. "Good afternoon, Madame."

"Good afternoon," Franca responded with a smile.

Niceea was momentarily dazzled by that smile and blurted out, "Madame, have you advanced again?"

Franca didn't hide it, nodding gently.

"I'm now an Angel, a Demoness of Catastrophe."

An Angel... Niceea was left speechless.

She recalled that when she had first been assigned to Madame Franca's command, her superior had been a Sequence 5 Demoness of Affliction, while she herself was a Sequence 7 Witch.

Now, she had only advanced one rank to become a Sequence 6 Demoness of Pleasure, but Franca had climbed several Sequences to reach Sequence 2 and become an Angel!

Could it be that advancing beyond Sequence 5 in the demigod realm was easier than advancing through lower ranks?

That's impossible!

Noticing Niceea's shocked and bewildered expression, Franca also felt a twinge of sentimentality.

Yes, it hasn't been long, but now I'm a Demoness of Catastrophe.

But I'd rather return to the days when I was just a Demoness of Affliction...

As a Demoness of Catastrophe, Franca's core ability now revolved around "catastrophes," encompassing both natural and man-made calamities. This extended to certain authorities and abstract concepts.

Natural disasters like blizzards, tsunamis, earthquakes, meteor impacts, floods, volcanic eruptions, or the collapse of the mirror world could be conjured through her abilities. Similarly, train accidents, building collapses, horse stampedes, or accidental gun discharges - all events tied to societal order or mechanical constructs-fell within her purview as a Demoness of Catastrophe.

Additionally, when extended to authority and concepts, "catastrophe" could manifest as the inducement or exacerbation of issues to destabilize a previously stable system.

In such cases, if a Beyonder's state was inherently unstable, a Demoness of Catastrophe could use Her abilities to induce them to lose balance and lose control on the spot. For the target, this was undoubtedly a catastrophe.

Franca understood this as an extension of the Red Priest pathway's Weakness Investigation ability, reflected in a neighboring pathway.

When Lumian was still a Hunter, he could accurately grasp the structural integrity of a building and identify the key points to demolish it. A Demoness of Catastrophe, on the other hand, could treat Beyonders, areas, or natural environments as if they were such a structure or system, detonating their hidden issues and triggering catastrophic collapse.

When it came to disrupting stability and triggering catastrophe, the main difference between the two lay in their approach: a Hunter targeted weaknesses from the outside in, while a Demoness of Catastrophe worked primarily from the inside out-or combined both internal

and external forces.

From this perspective, the Primordial Demoness was actually very restrained toward Lumian,

who relied on the chaotic vortex face to gain the rank of a true god and maintain his existence and King of Angels power through a delicate balance. However, the problem was that the Primordial Demoness didn't want Lumian to lose balance, lose control, and die. That would render all of Her previous efforts meaningless.

For this reason, the Primordial Demoness was willing to take risks and even face Her own demise by integrating Herself into Lumian's body. After all, from Her perspective, Her consciousness and spirit would remain intact, simply surviving in a different form.

The catastrophes wielded by a Demoness of Catastrophe also manifested as curses of destiny. Franca could now create objects or leave behind words that, without directly contacting the target, cause those who touched the object or heard the words to encounter one catastrophe after another in their subsequent lives.

Her other abilities had also been correspondingly enhanced at the angelic level. For instance,

her mystical pathogens could now erode and influence the bodies of complete Mythical

Creatures.

Lost in these thoughts, Franca turned to Niceea, who had just regained control of her expression, and said, "I'm here today to tell you something.

"The Primordial Demoness has perished. Of the high-ranking color-named Demonesses, fewer than five have survived. The Demoness Sect has effectively been annihilated." "Ah?" Niceea momentarily forgot about her superior's advancement to angelhood. "What about us? And the other Demonesses?"

The other Demonesses? Except for the high-ranking ones involved in the initial events in the mirror

world, most Demonesses were incorporated into the protected zone. Subsequently, some were hunted down, some surrendered directly to official organizations, and others escaped the protected zone to rejoin the remnants of the Demoness Sect in the World of Ruins... If it weren't for your past as a government informant and the fact that the digestion of your Assassin, Instigator, and Witch potions primarily targeted organizations like the Emperor Party, I wouldn't have spared you... Franca smiled and said to Niceea, "We have nothing to worry about. I was one of those who destroyed the

Demoness Sect."

Niceea was stunned. She felt both surprised and unsurprised. Madame Franca is a Saint of the Church of The Fool!

But if I know this, wouldn't the Demoness of Black and others know as well? "Madame, is there anything I should do?" Niceea quickly expressed her intention to continue

her loyalty.

Franca smiled in response. "A month from now, I'll have something for you to do. For now,

you should rest well and adjust your state.

"Oh, and the honorific name of the Primordial Demoness can still be used, but it will now

point to someone else the one I currently follow."

Who is that? Niceea didn't dare to ask and instead inquired, "Madame, may I make my own arrangements for the next month?"

Franca looked at Niceea for several seconds before revealing a clean smile in the sunlight streaming through the sheer curtains.

"Yes, go on dates, bask in the sun, take walks along the Srenzo River, watch operas, read books, read newspapers, ride a bicycle, fish, sample the signature dishes of Trier's famous restaurants, gather with friends-do everything you wish to do."

At the end, Franca placed a hand over her chest and bowed slightly. "In short, I wish you joy."

As her voice echoed, she disappeared into the interplay of light and shadow created by the sheer curtains.

Niceea stared blankly at the spot where Franca had stood, feeling both dazed and confused.

Chapter 1147: An Early Deal

New City of Silver.

Derrick Berg picked up the prepared Lightseeker potion, gazing at the liquid that seemed to intertwine pure beams of light. He drank it in one go.

In an instant, it felt as though he had approached the true sun, his entire body igniting and showing signs of melting.

Derrick did not retreat. He continued running toward the light, the sun, sensed in his core.

His body quickly melted like heated metal-first dripping liquid, then softening and flowing toward the ground like water.

His bones melted, his organs melted, his brain melted, and even his spirit and consciousness began to dissipate rapidly.

But he never stopped. Supported by the justice deep in his core, he struggled and wriggled forward, guided by the faint light of the sun in his blurred consciousness.

At this moment, he seemed to return to the Forsaken Land of the Gods, to the days when he ventured into the Giant King's Court with Chief Colin Iliad and Gehrman Sparrow. But unlike then, the surroundings were not cloaked in darkness and lightning but illuminated by the crimson moonlight that shone through the gloom.

Dragging his melted body and soul, fueled by a belief that abandoned everything for the light, Derrick continued his pursuit with difficulty but unwavering determination.

The light grew closer, and his spirit merged with the burning heat, leaving only a sliver of residual consciousness.

Finally, he saw a pair of grand double doors, sensing the sun and light he longed for beyond them.

His blurred consciousness collided with the doors, pushing them ajar.

A sea of golden light entered Derrick's vision, and a sun of intertwining blazing white and gold rose steadily, illuminating all and dispelling the crimson and darkness.

Derrick Berg smiled and stopped at the entrance.

He immediately sensed his spirit, soul, and body flowing back together, merging into one.

The door he saw quickly became illusory, while the sun gradually lost its color and form, revealing its true nature-a slowly rotating chaotic vortex face.

Lumian placed the dark golden, peculiar mask back onto the center of his left shoulder head, covering the face with its starlit glow.

He had come to the New City of Silver this time to fulfill his promise of helping Mr. Sun Derrick complete the ritual.

The ritual for the Lightseeker potion required finding an item with at least the rank of an Angel and a close connection to the mysticism of the Sun. The item had to be bound to the Beyonder's most critical and justice-related memory, then placed in front of them.

This served as a beacon for Beyonders consuming the Lightseeker potion, providing a mystical connection that would be the last to melt, helping them maintain their direction, clarity of consciousness, and determination to persist through the transformation process.

For this ritual, the binding of memory and item was accomplished by Mr. Fool's Grafting, and the item was Lumian's chaotic vortex face. Its close association with the Chaos Sea naturally made it deeply connected to the mysticism of the Sun.

Lumian's role was to arrive at the scene, remove the mask, and let the chaotic vortex face manifest the power of the Sun.

After stabilizing himself, Derrick Berg, clad in a plain white robe, bowed respectfully to Lumian. "Thank you for your assistance."

Lumian glanced around and smiled. "I'd like to borrow a room."

"Alright," The Sun Derrick replied without asking why.

He helped Lumian find a quiet scripture-reading room in the Church of The Fool's headquarters.

Lumian sat down, raised his left hand, and pressed it onto the center of the mask on his head.

His shadow suddenly squirmed as if it had gained self-awareness.

Then Lumian's voice echoed in his heart, plunging into the depths of his shadow and the corrupted part of his nature. "Mr. Naboredisley, I'd like to meet with you now."

The sound sank into the pitch-black abyss, reverberating layer upon layer.

Lumian did not need to unseal or remove the mask to employ the abilities of the Visionary and The Hanged Man at this level.

Not long after, a dark, sinister liquid seemed to churn and surge within his shadow, from which an ice-blue-eyed Naboredisley rapidly emerged.

"Good afternoon." Naboredisley greeted with gentlemanly poise, taking a seat opposite Lumian with a smile. "Are you preparing for the secret deed with the City of Calamity?"

"I still need two or three weeks to strengthen the balance of my body. You wouldn't want me to explode the moment I accommodate the City of

Calamity, would you?" Lumian responded with a faint smile.

"Then why did you seek me?" Naboredisley asked directly, skipping any guesses.

Lumian chuckled. "I want you to give me that portion of Abomination Beyonder characteristic in advance. Otherwise, we might not have time to handle it when the moment comes.

"We must prepare for unforeseen events and get all the groundwork done early."

"But you haven't fulfilled your end of the deal," Naboredisley reminded.

Lumian looked at him with a teasing tone. "I'm not that Celestial Worthy. Have I ever broken a promise?

"Besides, helping you is also helping myself. I have no reason not to fulfill my promise. At worst, if I fail to accommodate it, your attempt will fail indirectly, but in that case, everyone dies anyway, including your Abomination avatar. Keeping it would be meaningless."

Naboredisley remained silent, not responding immediately.

He had always been prone to interpreting others' intentions with the deepest malice.

After all, He was the embodiment of malice itself.

"If you're still worried, you can plant a spiritual mark in my consciousness and spirit right now," Lumian offered. "I don't mind living with it for two or three weeks. The only problem is it might backfire and corrupt you. You know what's inside me."

"But you can erase the spiritual mark before the secret deed with the City of Calamity," Naboredisley hesitated before responding.

Lumian burst out laughing. "Why not draft a notarized contract while we're at it? I'll make it, and Mr. Fool can witness it."

Naboredisley stared at Lumian for a few seconds before smiling. "No need. I trust you. I'll have my Abomination avatar come over now.

"The spiritual mark can wait until you bond with the City of Calamity."

Lumian responded with a smile, "Deal."

Soon after, Farbauti, the Abomination covered in gold and wearing a mask painted black and white, emerged from the spirit world before Lumian.

Naboredisley raised His head and locked eyes with Farbauti, nodding slightly in mutual acknowledgment.

Seeing this, Lumian remarked with a touch of sentiment, "After the last Dream Festival, we made many preparations to guard the tomb and deal with the Angels of the Rose School of Thought's indulgence faction and Devil families, all for the next Dream Festival. Yet none of that came into play. The early arrival of the crimson moon turned the world into ruins, making it impossible to hold the Dream Festival again.

"That's precisely why I want you to hand over the Abomination Beyonder characteristic in advance. Our enemies won't sit idle while we prepare; they won't wait for us to complete everything methodically before starting the apocalypse.

"With what little time remains, we must finish everything we need to do as quickly as possible. Waiting for the perfect moment is futile; the future is full of uncertainties." Naboredisley smiled in response. "Though I doubt your motives, my rational mind tells me this is indeed necessary."

As He spoke, Farbauti removed the golden mask derived from the former Death, Salinger.

With a clatter, the gold covering His body fell away piece by piece, landing on the ground with

metallic thuds.

In mere seconds, His body disintegrated, transforming into a grotesque tree-like shape coated in viscous black liquid.

"Is this the Abomination's Mythical Creature form?" Lumian asked, his curiosity piqued for

once.

Naboredisley shook His head with a smile. "The Mythical Creature form of the Chained pathway is actually invisible, intangible, a collection of various curses. What you saw previously as a Mythical Creature form is essentially the vessel that carries this aggregate-or no, not 'carries.' Using terms like 'binds' and 'fixes' would be more symbolically accurate. "So, the outward manifestation of the Mythical Creature form of this pathway depends on one's self-awareness and the choices made during the advancement to Sequence 4 Puppet and Sequence 2 Ancient Bane as a base. These bases bind and stabilize the various curses resulting from the disassembly process."

"An embalmed mummy at the demigod level?" Lumian recalled the unique items required for

the Puppet advancement ritual.

Naboredisley nodded gently and explained, "Yes, that's one type of anchor. However, it's not strictly necessary to use a demigod-level mummy. Any item with a similar function and the same rank can serve the purpose. The Rose School of Thought's temperance faction traditionally uses mummies for their advancement. This practice is tied to the imagery and history of Tolzna and has even influenced the burial customs of the Highlands Kingdom. "Similarly, the advancement to Ancient Bane requires finding an ancient, evil item capable of bearing angelic power. This item becomes the core of the final Mythical Creature form." "Born Mythical Creatures like

Suah and Tirié, who have not completed the corresponding Sequence advancements, exhibit forms that are essentially amplifications of Their Beyonder characteristics."

Having finished this explanation, Naboredisley discussed a few more aspects of the deep secret deed with Lumian before taking His leave.

Shortly after His departure, Renette Tinekerr, carrying four golden-haired, red-eyed heads, and Sharron, wearing a small bonnet, appeared in the room.

They had sensed the convergence and followed their spiritual intuition to investigate.

"Our deal can now move forward," Lumian said with a smile.

Sharron nodded slightly, allowing the crimson-stained crystal tiara hidden in the spirit world to emerge from its seal and float toward Lumian.

This was the Grade o Sealed Artifact, Calamity of Crimson, corresponding to the Demoness of Catastrophe.

"It's yours now," Lumian said, gesturing toward the Abomination Beyonder characteristic. "Thank"..."you"..."for"..."your"..."help," Renette Tinekerr four heads spoke in sequence. Sharron, on the other hand, lightly lifted the hem of her dress in a gesture of gratitude.

Once the two ladies had secured the Beyonder characteristic and left the room, Lumian, holding the Calamity of Crimson, returned to where The Sun Derrick was waiting. With a smile, he said,

"You can trade me the Gift of the Land now."

As he spoke, Cheek's eyes transformed into mirrors, and a figure emerged.

It was Zedus, a man of almost unparalleled beauty, with scarlet eyes.

Chapter 1148: Farewell

Zedus emerged from the eye of Cheek's face and quietly stood behind Lumian, expressionless and vacant-eyed.

After Lumian advanced to Red Priest, Zedus, along with the steel golems and undead soldiers formerly belonging to 0-01, was re-enlisted into the newly formed legion of the Red Priest. They were now stationed in a special mirror world that had become Lumian's divine kingdom.

Seeing the Calamity of Crimson in Lumian's hand, The Sun Derrick hesitated no longer and nodded slightly. "Okay."

"I thought you might have some reluctance," Lumian said casually.

Derrick shook his head and replied honestly, "When you first made the request, I did feel a bit reluctant. But after returning to the New City of Silver, I increasingly felt it was the right decision.

"When the apocalypse arrives, Mr. Fool will undoubtedly be unable to continue protecting the New City of Silver. The Gift of the Land is the remains of Omebella, the Great Mother's most cherished daughter. It could likely spark an anomaly, causing unforeseen consequences and breaking apart the protected zones from within.

"Moreover, Chief Chirmont has long since digested the Silver Knight potion but has yet to advance to an Angel as a Glory. That's because the Proof of Glory has to be used to seal the Gift of the Land. If it were turned into a Beyonder characteristic, anyone using it to advance would have to remain underground for extended periods, only leaving for short intervals during crises.

"Replacing the Gift of the Land with the Calamity of Crimson should free the Proof of Glory from its restraints."

Derrick, having only just become an Angel, still lacked understanding of matters regarding the Above the Sequences.

Lumian produced a mirror and inserted the crystal tiara-shaped Calamity of Crimson into it.

He then gently ran his hand over the mirror's surface.

After completing the task, he handed the mirror to The Sun Derrick.

"Place it in an underground location that moonlight can never reach. No males may be within ten meters. When it needs to be used, a woman must retrieve it.

"I've sealed the area behind the mirror and fixed an entrance to the mirror world on its surface. Even ordinary people can extend their hand inside to retrieve the Calamity of Crimson."

This setup mirrored how Franca had once secured a mirror world entrance in the quarry beneath Trier by praying to the Primordial Demoness.

The Sun Derrick took the mirror and saw in its reflection the terrifying scene of a volcanic eruption.

"Ignore any disasters reflected in the mirror," Lumian cautioned. "If the mirror itself cracks, pray to me or Mr. Fool immediately so we can replace its seal. As for its usage, there are three taboos: First, no male should wield it. Second, the wielder must have godhood. Third, it must not be used for more than three minutes, or if exposed to moonlight, no more than thirty seconds.

"If the wielder experiences Pleasure or Charm cast by it, a new person must take over. Otherwise, the wielder will grow increasingly obsessed with it and try to set it free."

The Sun Derrick nodded solemnly. "I understand."

He then asked a question. "But I'm male. Is it safe for me to handle the Calamity of Crimson?"

"For now, yes," Lumian explained. "It's still in a Conquered state and won't 'acknowledge' anyone else. After placing the mirror underground, avoid further contact with it."

The Sun Derrick let out a quiet sigh of relief.

"Alright. I'll head to the Twin Towers now to lift the Proof of Glory's suppression. You can retrieve the Gift of the Land yourself."

After Lumian agreed, the newly ascended Lightseeker turned into sunlight and flew out of the headquarters of the Church of The Fool.

Lumian remained in place, admiring the murals on the walls.

The face of Alista Tudor furrowed slightly, seemingly displeased with the religious undertones-unless, of course, the subject of the murals was Himself.

After some time, Cheek's face on Lumian's left shoulder turned, revealing a stunning smile radiating maternal warmth and terrifying allure.

In the next moment, a massive, withered, ash-brown tree trunk appeared before Lumian.

It had been Charmed-enthralled by Cheek's face, which shared a profound connection with

it.

Two crimson flowers on the trunk, serving as its eyes, bloomed fully, radiantly vibrant. Lumian smiled at the Gift of the Land. "Would you like to reside in my divine kingdom?"

The Gift of the Land moved closer without resistance.

Zedus came forward, embracing the trunk and dragging it back into Lumian's divine kingdom -the destroyed then reformed special mirror world.

Throughout the process, Zedus handled it roughly, yet the Gift of the Land offered no opposition.

The estranged siblings reunite... Lumian chuckled softly and disappeared from the Church of The Fool's headquarters.

...

In the World of Ruins.

Enormous oak trees stood blanketed in white by a raging blizzard, frozen lifeless. In stark contrast, another oak grove burned fiercely, consumed by invisible, colorless flames. Accompanying the destruction were bird-clawed infants, various animals, and strange familiars, all reduced to ash. Even the ground itself melted away.

At the boundary where blizzard met flames, the clash of cold and heat created a skyward- whirling hurricane and apocalyptic torrential rain.

In the hurricane's eye, a three-headed, six-armed Lumian wandered with frenzied, mindless eyes.

At the edge of this fog-shrouded region, Franca sat atop a nearly 100-meter-tall gray-white stone pillar, her legs dangling idly.

Having become a Demoness of Catastrophe, she could finally witness Lumian's bouts of uncontrollable madness firsthand.

This was the twenty-ninth time she had observed it, yet it still left her feeling low and stifled.

My potion digested a little more... Franca mused, forcing herself to think of something meaningful to distract from her emotions. Even though I didn't do anything as all these catastrophes were caused by

Lumian...

Is it because I brought him here?

As a Demoness of Catastrophe, I am a bringer of calamity. Does it not matter whether the calamities I

bring are self-made or external?

Right... A Demoness of Catastrophe likely serves catastrophe... Since Lumian is the source and embodiment of catastrophes, does serving him equate to fulfilling that role...?

No wonder my potion is digesting so quickly. At this rate, I'll fully digest it in another year or two. Too

bad we don't have that much time-the one-month deadline is nearly up...

Her thoughts wandered until the blizzard ceased, the formless and colorless flames

extinguished, and the hurricane disintegrated outward, bending distant oaks.

Lumian, now his normal human size, approached the base of the stone pillar, his expression weary yet faintly smiling. "Let's return to the protected zone."

Franca smiled back and leaped gracefully from the 100-meter-high pillar, landing as lightly

as a feather.

At that moment, Lumian's middle head turned sharply, gazing toward another oak grove untouched by the apocalyptic scene.

Franca immediately sensed the crimson moonlight deepening and brightening.

From the depths of the grove emerged a woman dressed in a finely tailored black corset dress with matching shoulder drape. She wore sheer gloves that hinted at the skin beneath and a tilted, playful hat.

Around her neck hung a diamond necklace set in gold. Her eyebrows were perfectly shaped, and her scarlet eyes shone like miniatures of the crimson moon.

Franca had never seen woman so beautiful-not even Cheek's face could compare.

This beauty was pure, sublime, and awe-inspiring, making one want to admire and protect her but not dare to approach or desecrate. In contrast, Cheek's beauty radiated femininity and allure, stronger in seduction but less divine.

As Franca held her breath, Lumian spoke in a low voice. "Madame Pualis, why have you appeared here?"

Madame Pualis looked just as she had when Lumian first saw her in Cordu Village.

Madame Pualis... The one who birthed Omebella?! Franca snapped out of her daze, shaken by this realization.

She lowered her gaze, avoiding direct eye contact, and prepared to assist Lumian with her abilities.

Madame Pualis smiled faintly. "I've come to see you both and to bid farewell.

"I thought our last meeting would be the final one, but it seems the Great Mother still needs more time."

"Farewell?" Lumian raised an eyebrow.

"Yes," Madame Pualis replied with a gentle smile. "I am returning to the embrace of the Mother."

"Returning to the embrace of the Mother?" Lumian frowned. "You did all this just for such an ending?"

In the context of the Great Mother, returning to Her embrace was synonymous with death. Madame Pualis spoke softly, her expression tender.

"It is what I desire. The Mother's embrace is where we came from and where we are destined to return. There, we find peace, warmth, slumber, and rebirth.

"Life is a journey. I have been, seen, and experienced. Naturally, it's time to return to the Mother's embrace and await the next journey."

That sounds utterly sinister... Franca murmured to herself.

Lumian suddenly asked, "Are you currently a Sequence 1 Beauty Goddess of the Moon pathway?"

"Yes, it is a gift from the Great Mother, lent to me temporarily," Madame Pualis said, her tone full of emotion as she spoke to Lumian and Aurore. "The greatest regret of my journey is missing you both in Cordu Village.

"Goodbye. We will meet again because all life will eventually return to the Mother's embrace."

Before her words had fully settled, Cheek's face on Lumian's left shoulder suddenly turned,

Her expression sweet and smiling.

Charm!

A charm from the Demoness true god!

But Lumian was a moment too slow. Madame Pualis's figure dissolved into crimson light, merging with the omnipresent moonlight, leaving only a fading image of her waving hand.

"What just happened?" Franca asked warily.

Lumian's voice was low as he responded with a question,

"A Sequence 1 Beauty Goddess suddenly choosing to return to the Mother's embrace-what does that signify?"

Franca was suddenly alarmed. "It means the Mother Goddess of Depravity is about to fully merge with the Brood Hive and requires Sequence 1 Beyonder characteristics to support her!" As she finished speaking, the previously devastated region began to sprout a frenzy of vegetation. The scorched ground gave way to rapidly growing flora, all stretching skyward. On the western horizon, the crimson moon, blood-red and ominous, began to rise slowly, laboriously revealing its edge.

Chapter 1149: Acting

As Franca watched the crimson moon rise inch by inch, a chill ran down her spine. She felt as if her darkening flaxen-colored hair was growing along with it.

"What now?" She couldn't help but glance at Lumian.

After becoming a Demoness of Catastrophe, she had a vague understanding of Lumian's intended actions-essentially, the plan was this:

With the help of various forces on the Western Continent, Lumian would attempt to become the Origins of Disaster, Calamity of Destruction, before the Mother Goddess of Depravity fully accommodated the Brood Hive. Then, leveraging the symbolic connection between Earth Mother Lilith and Omebella, he would slay this true god to destroy the newly reborn Omebella, thereby provoking the Brood Hive into rebelling against the Mother Goddess of Depravity. Finally, he would seize the opportunity during Their confrontation to heavily wound the Mother Goddess of Depravity, heavily damage the Pillar, and drive Her out of the astral barrier.

Once this plan commenced, every second would count. Earth Mother Lilith's voluntary death would rapidly lead to the fragmentation of the astral barrier. Lumian would have only a fleeting window to wound and banish the Mother Goddess of Depravity before returning to the astral barrier himself to take Earth Mother's place. Failing this, the entire situation would collapse, and the apocalypse would arrive prematurely.

If the plan succeeded, Lumian-now having transcended the Sequences-could sustain the barrier and buy two or three more years. By then, Mr. Fool would fully awaken, lift the seals around the Western Continent, and allow more Great Old One to emerge.

Franca had two major concerns about the plan. First, from Earth Mother Lilith's fall to the shattering of the astral barrier, the time window might be mere seconds. Could Lumian truly injure the Mother Goddess of Depravity, a Pillar? Second, even if Lumian somehow managed this extraordinary feat, could he already precarious in balance and prone to "occasional" bouts of lucidity—remain stable after forcibly accommodating the City of Calamity long enough to maintain the barrier?

Now Franca realized she didn't need to worry anymore.

Because their plan was doomed before it even began!

The Mother Goddess of Depravity was about to fully accommodate the Brood Hive, leaving nothing capable of restraining Her!

At this moment, they could kill Earth Mother Lilith and reignite the Brood Hive's rebellious instincts to buy more time for Lumian to accommodate the City of Calamity. But who would then reinforce the astral barrier and halt the other Outer Deities' invasion?

It was death either way!

Yet Lumian smiled, the corners of his mouth curling upward, as he said to Franca, "There's still a chance. Still a way."

As he spoke, the scenery around them shifted from wildly growing trees and weeds to the villa in the protected zone.

Still a way? Franca, affected by Lumian's calm and resolute demeanor, felt her panic subside.

Lumian nodded at her. "Take Anthony and Ludwig and go to Madam Magician's place immediately. Follow her instructions. I'll meet Mr. Fool above the gray fog."

"Alright." Franca did not hesitate or let her emotions cloud her judgment.

She stepped forward, embracing Lumian's asymmetrical body for two seconds in silence. Straightening, she extended her right hand and offered a bright smile. "May we stay safe, and may you succeed."

Lumian smiled back, raising his right hand for a high-five.

With a crisp slap, he stared deeply at Franca for a few seconds, then turned and ascended the staircase. Grayish-white fog began to swirl around him as he disappeared.

Only when Lumian's figure faded completely did Franca wipe her eyes, her expression calm as she turned to face Anthony and Ludwig, who had already received notifications via the mental channel.

"We need to relocate," Franca said lightly, with a hint of a smile.

At the same time, many high-level figures in the protected zone sensed an ominous premonition.

Queen Mystic Bernadette swiftly produced Her Magic Wishing Lamp.

Even before she could stroke the lamp's surface, golden light burst from its spout, forming a faint, blue-tinged figure.

Genie's majestic voice reverberated.

"I warned Them that my sister's accommodation of the Brood Hive would be faster than expected. Why didn't They act sooner?

"Fate is only a baseline. Blind faith in its revelations invites backlash!"

As a former Clairvoyant, Bernadette immediately understood Genie's meaning: Fate's guidance was undoubtedly correct but only provided a baseline. For instance, in this case, fate might have hinted that there would be no major problems within a month. However, it wouldn't reveal that the apocalypse would strike immediately after that time frame. Similarly, fate might suggest there was still hope and opportunity a month from now but wouldn't warn that acting earlier could yield better chances and greater hope.

After a few seconds of silence, Queen Mystic Bernadette replied solemnly, "Perhaps it's precisely because fate is so enigmatic that we still have a chance and hope."

Genie fell silent at Her words.

...

Above the gray fog, in the majestic palace.

Lumian's figure appeared and immediately addressed Mr. Fool at the head of the bronze

table.

"The Mother Goddess of Depravity will fully accommodate the Brood Hive in at most half an hour. We didn't notice any signs until now."

Shrouded in gray-white fog, Mr. Fool nodded gently.

"Don't panic.

"This was already accounted for in our contingency plans. If we can't wait for the optimal moment, even a moderate or slightly worse opportunity is still an opportunity."

"I agree." Lumian smiled, his expression relaxed.

The time had finally come.

For him, it felt like a journey filled with pain and torment was finally reaching its conclusion.

The sense of relief outweighed all else.

In the next second, Lumian stood, placing his hand over his chest, and solemnly bowed to Mr.

Fool.

"Honorable Mr. Fool, let us begin."

"May all go smoothly, and may we meet again." Mr. Fool also stood, removing his silk top hat and placing it over his chest in a return bow.

Moments later, a figure pierced the gray fog and entered the palace.

It was the voluptuous and beautiful Earth Mother Lilith holding an invisible infant. Radiant with maternal grace, She arrived through a dream tied to the divine kingdom affiliated with

Sefirah Castle.

"Is it time?" This ancestor of the Sanguine asked Mr. Fool with a relaxed smile.

Her demeanor mirrored Lumian's, her smile much the same.

Before Mr. Fool could respond, Lilith looked at Lumian, who stood beside the bronze table,

and understood instantly.

"So it's him who will kill me.

"I see. That's how it should be."

Earth Mother Lilith visibly relaxed, Her beautiful features softening further with a

benevolent glow.

She even offered Lumian Her thanks. "Thank you."

Then She urged, "Let's begin. Time is of the essence."

Lumian glanced at Mr. Fool, who nodded. He then moved to the bottom of the bronze table, turning the chair representing The World to face Earth Mother Lilith.

On the chair sat a card, depicting Empress Roselle in a maternity gown, her belly swollen with

maternal radiance.

Card of Blasphemy, Mother card!

Lumian picked up the Mother card and sat down in The World's seat.

To his sides, the flawless Zedus and the withered tree remains of Omebella appeared with Mr.

Fool's assistance.

In the next second, Zedus, under Lumian's command, opened His mouth and called out in a

low voice, "Mother."

Hearing this title, Lumian smiled.

Yes, the role he would act next was that of the Mother Goddess of Depravity!

This wasn't a fabricated symbolism, but something the Mother Goddess of Depravity Herself had acknowledged and permitted-one She had personally forged!

From containing fragments of Zedus's soul in Cordu Village to fusing Omebella's bloodline in Trier, Lumian had become the motherly vessel for these two divine offspring, a counterpart to

Madame Pualis in secret.

Subsequent events had reinforced this symbolic role. Thus, when drawing for a Major Arcana card, the first card he drew was The World. Thus, in the mirror world, his encounter with the calamity-representing Primordial

Demoness and the mirrored Original Creator would allow Omebella to truly manifest in reality!

In all these occurrences, he had acted the role of the Mother, the Mother Goddess of

Depravity.

This was a sanctioned act-a symbolic connection recognized by the original! Since, during the descent of the crimson moon, the Mother Goddess of Depravity had been

Fooled, failing to kill Lumian immediately to sever this connection, he could now exploit it in

reverse!

To strengthen this role, Lumian had deliberately incorporated Zedus into his legion and exchanged for Omebella's remains, ensuring Their acknowledgment of him as Their mother. The Mother card, provided by Mr. Fool, further solidified the connection. Glancing at the Gift of the Land, which nestled close to him, Lumian closed his eyes briefly and recalled the whispered words of the Primordial Demoness, Cheek:

"Who you are is not important...

"What you want to do is not important either...

"What's important is the role you're playing..."

Lumian smiled, signaling Omebella's remains to merge with Earth Mother Lilith, overlapping

the two together. Sitting in The World's seat, Lumian's smile grew brighter. His left hand conjured formless,

colorless flames, while his right wielded a sinister black fire that froze everything it touched.

"Yes, who I am does not matter.

"What matters is the role I play. "But what I want to do matters just as much!"

With this thought, Lumian suddenly rose, unleashing the two opposing flames. They

intertwined and struck Lilith and Omebella's remains.

Now, I am acting as the Mother Goddess of Depravity! And what I want is to kill my daughter, Omebella!

Chapter 1150: Mysteries

As Lumian rose to his feet, Earth Mother Lilith sighed softly.

She raised Her right hand with a relaxed smile, smoothing Her dark brown hair.

It was as if she had returned to the state when she was one of the eight ancient gods.

Back then, She was the most beautiful woman, the most beautiful creature, and the most beautiful deity in the entire world and universe.

Almost simultaneously, She sensed the Gift of the Land shrinking slightly toward Her, seemingly startled, frightened, and saddened.

She also saw Mr. Fool, who was already standing, raise both hands. The black trench coat He wore flared as if caught in a strong wind.

Fooled!

Both Lumian's and Lilith's respective symbolic connections were valid and strong. Without needing further aid, Mr. Fool's sole task now was to Fool the Brood Hive, ensuring It remained utterly convinced.

The next moment, Sanguine Ancestor Lilith saw the formless, colorless flame Lumian had conjured merge with the freezing black flame, forming a strange black fire that restrained madness, destruction, and chaos.

Fire of Destruction!

The Fire of Destruction elongated into a massive black sword, which struck the remains of Omebella and Lilith across the distance.

Lilith offered no resistance, and neither did the Gift of the Land. It only let out an illusory wail of sorrow.

Lilith smiled-a smile as radiant as moonlight, as tender as the earth, and as loving as a mother's.

Crack!

Omebella's remains were the first to shatter. The lingering spirit and spirituality within them were swallowed by the black flames of the Sword of Destruction, disappearing entirely.

Pieces of broken wood were flung in all directions, charred black, with some reduced to ash. Lilith's expression twisted uncontrollably, a reflection of the instinctive pain She felt. Her voluptuous, graceful body split open, crumbling into fragments of brown light that scattered across the sky.

Her immense vitality struggled to reassemble the fragments, but it couldn't overcome the symbolic forces of destruction and chaos.

Within two or three seconds, the orbs of brown light fell to the grand palace's floor.

Lilith's consciousness rapidly dissipated. The final image in Her vision was of Mr. Fool and Lumian bowing slightly to Her in unison.

She smiled again.

Outside the protected zone, at the astral barrier, under the influence of the symbolic connection of falsehood becoming truth, the dormant body of Earth Mother Lilith also began to collapse, consumed by black flames that annihilated all and returned everything to the primordial.

A crimson moon once again rose high in the World of Ruins, accompanied by a mass of brown soil sprouting grass, grains, trees, mushrooms, and numerous reproductive organs.

Earth Mother Lilith, the ancestor of the Sanguine, had fallen.

Soon, the crimson moon and the brown soil plummeted together, streaking the sky with red and brown light as they descended into the protected zone.

Grafting!

On the western horizon, the larger blood-red moon that had just begun to rise through the gray fog suddenly exhibited rapid upheaval. A prominent bulge surged upward, as if the moon's crust were violently shifting, forming a mountain thousands or tens of thousands of meters high.

The mountain wriggled, resembling both a bird's nest and a womb.

The Brood Hive, whose dissipating consciousness had been rekindled by intense hatred and mystical stimulation, reassembled and became active once more.

The ascent of the enormous blood moon came to an abrupt halt, even showing signs of sinking back into the depths of the gray fog and below the horizon.

Sanguine Ancestor Lilith's death had not been in vain. The complete fusion of the Mother Goddess of Depravity and the Brood Hive had indeed been delayed!

At the astral barrier, with the Earth Mother's support gone, eight stars of various colors- scarlet, gold, and more-suddenly flared with extreme brilliance.

They rapidly expanded, pressing against the invisible barrier like terrifying eyes peering inside, or gaping mouths tearing at a membranous veil.

The sound of crackling transitioned from the abstract to the real, resonating from the astral world into the World of Ruins.

This signified that the invisible barrier had developed deep cracks, with mere seconds of durability remaining.

Once it shattered, the Outer Deities would tear apart the entire planet.

Among them, some deities bore symbols far less "gentle" than the Great Mother's.

Within the protected zone.

Will Auceptin, residing in the Southern Continent, raised His head to gaze at the night sky where the crimson moon hung high, and sighed in a deliberately aged tone.

"What's destined to come will come..."

He still appeared as a young boy, but His hair had somehow turned silver.

Beside Him, Azik Eggers also looked at the crimson moon in the night sky and nodded

slightly. "Death is not the true end.

"Even death itself will pass away."

At that moment, all the high-level entities within the protected zone "heard" the warning of fate—a symphony heralding the arrival of death.

They were all powerless to stop it.

Meanwhile, in the grand palace above the gray fog, Mr. Fool Klein nodded at Lumian and stepped forward.

He entered the astral realm, His figure growing immeasurably vast, neither abstracted nor reduced to mere symbols.

More than a month earlier, Klein Moretti had already completed his confrontation and fusion with The Celestial Worthy of Heaven and Earth for Blessings, truly accommodating Sefirah

Castle!

The acceleration of Klein's progress was due to the Mother Goddess of Depravity's actions- Her attempt to revive the Primordial God Almighty through the mirrored Original Creator and the subsequent true birth of Omebella.

While these moves brought immense gains to the Mother Goddess, they also had significant drawbacks. They agitated the Celestial Worthy, who understood the terror of the Original Creator and the hatred the Primordial God Almighty bore toward Him. Forced to compromise, the Celestial Worthy chose to compromise and withdraw.

Although this meant ceding the contest to Klein, the Celestial Worthy believed that, in the grand scheme of things-over tens of thousands or even millions of years-He would eventually triumph. However, should the Original Creator or Primordial God Almighty return, all hope would be lost for Him!

To hasten the Celestial Worthy's withdrawal, Klein had made some concessions, achieving a more thorough fusion in certain aspects.

Thus, on June 25, 1360, Klein Moretti completed his confrontation and fusion with the Celestial Worthy, accommodating Sefirah Castle as a single-pathway deity-The Fool! For over a month since then, the now fully awakened The Fool Klein had refrained from immediate action, sharing his true state only with Lumian, the Evernight Goddess, and Will Auceptin. Instead, he had patiently and covertly prepared.

A Magician didn't perform unprepared!

Lumian's actions-visiting Red Angel Medici, retrieving 0-01, and dealing with Primordial Demoness Cheek-had happened only at the end of June for a critical reason:

he was awaiting Mr. Fool's full awakening!

That's why Ouroboros suddenly sensed that the opportunity had slipped away, and that He wouldn't be able to become a deity of the Fate pathway in the near future.

That was why the blessing granted by Will Auceptin could enable the scene transplantation of the Box of the Great Old Ones-it was finally the right moment. With the help of the awakened Fool Klein, He accommodated the Die of Probability, the Uniqueness of the Fate pathway. That's why Lumian, under the guise of seeking divination, visited the God of Knowledge and Wisdom and Queen Mystic on behalf of Mr. Fool.

Klein and Lumian's original plan was that once the latter accommodated the City of Calamity, he would leverage symbolic connections to kill Earth Mother Lilith. During the fierce confrontation between the Brood Hive and the Mother Goddess of Depravity, Klein would enter the astral world, retrieve the Uniquenesses of Error and Door, along with their corresponding Sequence 1 characteristics, and truly transcend the Sequences to become the Lord of Mysteries. As a Pillar, he would replace Earth Mother Lilith in maintaining the astral barrier.

This approach would ensure the barrier's stability for at least another three to five years. That was why Klein had chosen not to ascend as the Lord of Mysteries at that time to directly confront the Mother Goddess of Depravity. If he had taken back the Uniquenesses linked to Gehrman Sparrow, the barrier would have collapsed within three seconds, even if Earth Mother Lilith hadn't yet fallen.

Simultaneously, the Lord of Mysteries Klein could remotely assist Lumian-now the Origins of Disaster-against the Mother Goddess of Depravity, who would be suffering a backlash from the Brood Hive. This greatly increased their chances of victory. With the barrier stabilized, the battle would no longer have a time constraint.

Once the Mother Goddess of Depravity was driven from within the barrier, Lord of Mysteries Klein could lift the seals and aid the birth of more Above the Sequences. With him present, the deities could take turns leaving the astral barrier without fear of its collapse. However, to stabilize Lumian and prevent him from exploding uncontrollably as a Great Old Dominator after accommodating the City of Calamity, The Fool Klein chose to wait another month. This caused them to miss the optimal opportunity-though it might not have been optimal and could very well have been the worst possible time.

Since the best timing was no longer available, they now had to act quickly and give Lumian a chance to accommodate the City of Calamity before the Mother Goddess of Depravity fully accommodated the Brood Hive!

At the astral barrier, the figure of Gehrman Sparrow, who had been waiting, emerged. With his star-encrusted cane and black gloves, he stepped in front of The Fool Klein.

His expression cold, he revealed a faint smile, took a step forward, and merged with The Fool

Klein's figure.

The two became one!

The Fool Klein's body abruptly collapsed inward. Within the depths of his black trench coat, a glowing bluish-black door seemed to flicker in and out of existence.

The star-encrusted cane and black gloves collapsed inward as well, forming a massive vortex

within the trench coat-a terrifying vortex.

Every gust of wind, droplet of water, and ray of light in the vortex consisted of writhing worms, segmented insects, and tiny, starlit creatures.

Within a second or two, the vortex was also devoured. The inside of the black trench coat

became an abyss, seemingly infinite, as if it contained an entire universe and a spirit world

connected to every planet.

As this transformation occurred, grayish-white fog rapidly spread throughout the World of Ruins, enveloping the entire planet and all living beings.

Beyond the barrier, in the boundless universe, faint gray fog began to spread as well, though

no one could say when it had started.

Living beings within the fog either became dull-witted, filled with cunning, or inexplicably transported to the place they knew most intimately.

Numerous rules malfunctioned, and many symbols were fooled.

The pressure from the Outer Deities momentarily stagnated.

Time stopped.

At the astral barrier, within the darkness inside the black trench coat, smooth tentacles

inscribed with mysterious patterns suddenly emerged. They slipped into black gloves at the

sleeves and lifted the star-encrusted cane.

Next, under the silk half top hat, a face slowly emerged from the darkness-a face with black

hair and brown eyes.

It was Klein Moretti's face.

The Lord of Mysteries was born.

The ruler of the spirit world had returned.

Chapter 1151: Buying Time

At the deep, terrifying cracks in the astral barrier, grayish-white fog suddenly began to spread.

The fog quickly obscured the fissures, rendering them invisible and untouchable.

It was as if they no longer existed.

As a result, the astral barrier stabilized.

The Lord of Mysteries-where truth becomes falsehood, and falsehood becomes truth!

This time, the Outer Deities beyond the barrier did not retreat. Instead, They intensified Their oppression. Their brilliance grew brighter than before, especially the golden star, which rapidly expanded, first transforming into a blazing star with countless flames leaping from it, then into a genuine sun. It erupted with light that illuminated the entire astral world, revealing colossal, shadowy entities cloaked in darkness and terrifying forms shrouded by storms.

Once again, the astral barrier emitted a cracking sound that transitioned from abstract to real.

Lord of Mysteries Klein raised his hand to adjust the silk half-top hat on his head. His body dissolved into a dark vortex bristling with slick tentacles, which then merged into the invisible barrier.

Clang!

An ancient bell tolling across eras reverberated throughout the astral world and the spirit world that spanned the universe. The eight differently colored stars froze in place, and their exploding light fractured into countless cones.

The astral barrier was thoroughly stabilized.

Klein then turned his gaze toward the earth.

In the World of Ruins, except for the few areas under protection and some distant regions in the Western Continent, the Spirit Body Threads of all other living beings suddenly floated skyward, ascending into the astral world.

These included clawed bird-like infant monstrosities, oak giants, herds of deer, and various animals, as well as creatures mutated into the Brood Hive's followers. The countless beings- numbering in the tens or hundreds of billions-shuddered and turned their bodies to gaze uniformly at the massive, stationary blood-red moon hanging in the air.

The next second, these innumerable creatures writhed and transformed. Each one instantly morphed into a version of Klein Moretti, complete with a silk half-top hat and black trench coat.

Countless Klein Morettis surged toward the massive, blood-red, perfectly round moon from the sky, land, sea, and all directions.

Near the dense fog surrounding the Western Continent, Omebella, who had grown into a young girl over less than a year and now stood five or six meters tall, burned with black flames that emanated destruction. Her eyes were vacant as She watched each Klein Moretti pass by.

Her body had already fragmented substantially, and Her soul was near complete dissolution. All that remained was Her confusion and sorrow.

She couldn't understand why Her mother wanted to kill Her.

At last, Omebella's remaining consciousness, spirit, spirituality, and shattered body were devoured by the Fire of Destruction, rapidly turning to ash.

With Her complete death, the mountain-like, nest-like protrusion on the surface of the blood-red moon let out a wail filled with hatred and resentment: "Child! My child!" The struggle intensified.

As the Klein Morettis approached the densely concentrated world of the blood-red moonlight, they began to undergo transformations.

Some withered rapidly, others' bellies swelled as their flesh and blood concentrated into offspring that were not marionettes. Others gained new life and consciousness, ceasing to be mere puppets and starting to resist the Marionettist controlling them.

The Klein Morettis turned on each other, engaging in fierce battles. Yet whether it was the marionettes' offspring or those reborn, they soon became toys in the hands of the

Marionettist, entering a new cycle.

Many marionettes attempted to use various abilities, but the majority of these powers betrayed their original owners, instead destroying them.

The situation reached a stalemate as numerous inexplicable phenomena unfolded in the region.

The true body of Klein, unable to leave the astral barrier, never expected to defeat or seriously wound the Mother Goddess of Depravity using marionettes or parasitic methods. He simply aimed to scatter Her focus, forcing Her to divert significant attention to fend off the relentless, unending assaults. His true goal was to delay Her complete fusion with the Brood Hive!

Even if I can't defeat you, can't I at least make you miserable?

Within the protected zone, Backlund, at the home of The Magician Fors and Judgment Xio. After hearing Franca's account, The Magician Fors exhaled slowly and said, "So that's what happened...

"No wonder I had a bad feeling..."

Due to the isolation of the protected zone and the extremely high level of the current events, neither she nor Judgment Xio had managed to understand what was happening in time. All their attempts at divination had failed.

Before anyone else could speak, Fors looked around the room and solemnly said,

"Everyone, prepare yourselves."

Her plan was to relocate the humans in her "sphere" to the edge of the universe, to a still- habitable planet that hadn't yet been discovered by the Outer Deities. She had already gathered the Abrahams into a nearby neighborhood.

Franca opened her mouth as if to say something but held back. Anthony remained silent, seemingly deep in thought.

Seeing the tense atmosphere, Madam Magician smiled slightly and turned to Ludwig.

"Your godfather probably wanted to feed you the danger of the third layer of the Box of the Great Old Ones, but I'm not sure if there's still time for that..."

Before she could finish, she suddenly froze, turning her head toward the window and gazing at the crimson moon in the night sky.

Franca, Ludwig, and Xio quickly followed suit.

"Mr. Fool has become the true Lord of Mysteries..." As an Archangel of the Door pathway, The Magician was the first to sense this. She was both surprised and puzzled, but these emotions were overshadowed by an overwhelming sense of relief and security.

"When did Mr. Fool fully awaken?" Judgment Xio began to recall the circumstances of the last two Tarot Gatherings.

Mr. Fool has truly awakened and become the Lord of Mysteries? Franca felt a moment of elation before realizing why Lumian had been so unhurried earlier.

Not long after, once things had stabilized and The Magician Fors finally retrieved related information from the spirit world and stars, she exhaled in relief and said, "Although Earth

Mother has fallen..."

She glanced at Anthony, sealing his hearing just as Franca had done when explaining the Mother Goddess of Depravity's impending fusion with the Brood Hive.

Only after completing this did The Magician continue, "But the Mother Goddess of Depravity's progress in accommodating the Brood Hive has also been delayed. Mr. Fool has timely ascended as the Lord of Mysteries and stabilized the astral barrier."

She paused, then looked at Franca and Ludwig.

"Of course, the danger isn't over yet. If Lumian can't accommodate the City of Calamity before the Mother Goddess of Depravity fully fuses with the Brood Hive, and if he can't cooperate with Mr. Fool to seriously wound Her and drive Her out of the barrier after becoming the Origins of Disaster, we'll still have to evacuate."

"Mm." Franca first responded solemnly, then forced a smile. "At least there's still hope. That's better than no hope at all!"

"Indeed." Madam Magician nodded in agreement, then released Anthony from his seal and briefly explained the situation in terms he could understand.

After finishing, she sighed and said, "Tonight is destined to be long."

Meanwhile, the Rorsted Archipelago, in the City of Generosity, Bayam.

The Blue Avenger docked at the harbor. Mr. Hanged Man Alger, wearing a captain's coat, stepped off the deck and descended toward the port, embraced by the wind.

Under the crimson moonlight, his shadow stretched long and indistinct, as if he had three

heads.

Loen Kingdom, Cathedral of Serenity, in a certain room.

Mr. Star Leonard emerged from the darkness, wearing a white shirt under a dark trench coat.

He approached a table, picked up the red gloves placed before him, and slowly, methodically

slipped them on.

He then glanced around, his figure vanishing inch by inch as if erased by an invisible hand.

Mission: Protect a region containing multiple "spheres."

Destination: Tingen City, Awwa County.

...

Above the gray fog, within the majestic palace.

When Mr. Fool left for the astral world, Lumian turned his gaze toward the charred fragments

of trees left after the Gift of the Land shattered and the brown mist rising and coalescing

above them. This mist corresponded to the powers of the Desolate Matriarch's boon.

Lumian reached out and grabbed, causing the brown mist to condense into a mass of soil sprouting grass, grains, and vines.

"Deliver this to Madam Justice," Lumian said, tossing the soil to Zedus beside him.

After the strike of the Sword of Destruction, Omebella's remaining consciousness and spirituality within the Gift of the Land had been completely annihilated, leaving behind no trace. The boon power, now detached from the corpse, became purified, containing only faint remnants of the Brood Hive's consciousness and spirituality, unlinked to Omebella's mystical connections.

In essence, this mass of brown soil was akin to Beyonder items like the Circle of Binding or Fallen Mercury. It no longer bore ties to Omebella's past but could no longer reliably connect with the Brood Hive for power, making each use of its abilities finite.

As he spoke, Lumian departed from above the gray fog with Zedus, returning to the villa where he resided.

Naboredisley was already waiting there.

"You've finally returned," said Naboredisley, His ice-blue eyes betraying a visible sigh of relief.

As Zedus vanished with the brown soil in hand, Lumian smiled at Naboredisley and said, "Let's begin. This is the final chance."

With that, Lumian settled into an armchair in the living room.

Naboredisley gave him a look, sat on the long sofa opposite him, and smiled in reply, "Better than no chance at all."

Before the words had fully left his lips, His body suddenly dissolved into a pool of black liquid, a manifestation of all malice, desire, and evil intent.

The black liquid, both real and illusory, quickly flowed toward Lumian.

Directly infiltrating my mind and spirit without implanting a spiritual brand? Heh... Lumian raised an eyebrow, watching with a smile but offering no resistance. He allowed the foul, sinister liquid to seep into his body, spirit, and mind.

Feeling the surge of malevolence within him, Lumian retrieved a candle from his divine kingdom, lit it, and placed it on the edge of the coffee table.

He then leaned back against the sofa, closing his eyes. The faintly sweet aroma of gray amber began to spread.

Chapter 1152: The Hawk Does Not Bow to the Sparrow

As the scent of gray amber candles wafted through the air, Lumian sat with his eyes closed, sensing the malice welling up deep within his mind. It was as though he had entered the mists of history, embodying Devil Monarch Farbauti, indulging in wild, unrestrained acts, all while entering a Cogitative state.

Now, he no longer needed corpse wax candles to sense the City of Calamity. Through Cogitation alone, he could achieve a deep communion with it.

Soon, Lumian began to float. Before him appeared a mist tinged with an eerie black hue.

This time, he didn't enter the "Shanghai" that Franca had described, nor did he see the trackless trams carrying heads with dangling spines or rickshaws dragging bloated women. Instead, what came into view was a stone well built of slabs and iron chains engraved with devilish faces.

The Law of Beyonder Characteristics Convergence? Now that I've become a dual-pathway true god in the domain of calamity, initiating the secret deed brings me directly to the core of the City of Calamity, to the place where the malevolent dragon is sealed? If not for the seal, I'd likely be facing the malevolent dragon directly... Lumian nodded in understanding.

Wasting no time, he immersed himself in the mirror-like surface of the crimson well water. He traversed through familiar scenes he had previously explored and arrived at the gray- white plaza where he had once encountered the mirrored Alista Tudor. Outside the invisible barrier, he saw the massive black shadow occupying the bottom of the blood-colored sea, spanning the size of an entire metropolis.

He stopped in his tracks.

At the same time, outside the wooden tower binding the malevolent dragon, a figure materialized out of thin air, composed of countless ethereal, transparent entities.

Draped in a blue robe and crowned with a traditional high headdress, this figure held a horsetail whisk. His face was as flawless as jade but gaunt.

The Celestial Master of the current generation.

Now that the Mother Goddess of Depravity had captured the Brood Hive and begun fusing with it, He no longer needed to maintain the grayish-white fog.

Beside Him, two other figures gradually came into focus.

One was clad in yellow monastic robes wrapped in a red kasaya. His head bore tonsure scars, and his round face was adorned with a long white beard that reached his chest. He wore a perpetual, kind smile.

The other was draped in a dark robe adorned with strange patterns. His face was ashen and bloodless, with eyes so black they seemed to swallow all light.

The first was the manifestation of Buddha, a Holy Monk acknowledged by all sects of the monastic community. The second was the Underworld Daoist, head of the Haoli lineage. Ever since He had entered the River of Eternal Darkness to suppress the remnants of the Blood Emperor's soul, He had been as good as dead-His consciousness only partially merged into the River, allowing Him to act briefly but preventing Him from returning to the living world. This fate mirrored those of His predecessors and successors in the Haoli lineage.

"Your efforts are much appreciated," said the Celestial Master, placing one hand on his chest and nodding slightly.

Before His words had fully settled, a shadow emerged from the depths of the dragon-sealing tower. Darkness condensed into a human form.

The figure wore a voluminous black robe, with long, flowing hair streaked with white. His gaunt face bore a smile as He stepped forward. "How could you leave me out of this?"

The Celestial Master did not respond, as a sudden light illuminated the sky.

All four present figures raised their heads simultaneously. Through layers of white clouds, they saw a faintly discernible door.

At the door stood an immense figure, crowned with the high headdress of an emperor, its face concealed by overlapping beaded veils.

Without speaking further, the Celestial Master approached the stone tablet in front of the wooden tower and pressed His hand against it.

In the next second, the iron chains within the ancient well began to retract, producing metallic clanging sounds.

This caused the crimson well water to ripple and lose its mirror-like quality.

Standing on the gray-white plaza, Lumian immediately sensed that the barrier separating the blood-colored sea from this mirror world had loosened, leaving exploitable "cracks."

As the Ruler of the Mirror World, Lumian dematerialized without hesitation, passing through the opening and returning to reality.

The blood-colored sea surged around him, corroding his soul and attempting to merge with him.

Lumian felt the malice buried deep within his heart gush forth as viscous black liquid, separating from his mind and spirit.

These streams of black liquid stealthily dispersed into the surroundings of the blood-colored sea, neutralizing the dark specks suspended within it.

Unconcerned with Devil Monarch Farbauti's actions, Lumian focused his gaze ahead, toward the immense black shadow he had previously glimpsed but could not clearly see.

The shadow was unimaginably long, coiled like a serpent. Yet, even so, it occupied an area comparable to an entire Trier.

Its body seemed composed of two enormous pythons entwined together-one covered in deep, iron-black scales, the other smooth and pristine, like white jade. Where they touched, flesh and bone intertwined, forming one entity despite their dual appearance.

Iron chains, engraved with demonic reliefs, pierced through this massive body repeatedly, extending toward the blood-colored sea above.

Sensing Lumian's presence, the colossal creature slowly raised its heads.

It had three heads!

On the left, connected to the black-scaled body, was a head resembling a camel's, with antelope-like horns, cow-like ears, and iron-black eyes. Crimson fur covered its scalp.

On the right, extending from the white jade "serpent body," was the head of a human woman with black hair and brown eyes, breathtakingly beautiful, bearing a resemblance to Cheek. Or rather, Cheek bore a resemblance to it.

The central head, however, was a swirling amalgamation of liquid, encompassing all colors and possibilities. At its facial features-eyes, nose, ears, and mouth-holes had been drilled, one or two in each location.

This central head separated the other two, preventing them from merging, ensuring their independent existence. Below it, an invisible substance formed a neck that both supported the head and rooted it into the entwined serpentine bodies.

"You also have three heads..." Lumian chuckled.

Then, he mockingly jeered at Adam in his mind, Your plan failed in the final step!

Had Alista Tudor and Cheek not stumbled upon the right conditions by chance, this "experiment" of yours would have ended in failure!

The phrase "Yin contains yang, yang contains yin, the union of yin and yang gives rise to everything" was indeed correct, and the only method, but only up until the final step. But in this state, attempting to accommodate the City of Calamity would inevitably lead to disaster.

The phrase "the union of yin and yang gives rise to everything" itself hinted at its conclusion:

What did everything begin with? It began with the Original Creator creating this world! The union of yin and yang signifies a return to the origin, heralding the rebirth of all things! Of course, what would return wouldn't be the complete Original Creator but rather a Mirrored Original Creator, stable enough to avoid immediately destroying and rebooting the universe.

In the First Epoch, the first sefirah accommodated by the Primordial God Almighty was the City of Calamity. Beyond His deep desire for it, He likely foresaw its dangers. By intervening personally and using the chaotic head as a barrier, He prevented yin and yang from fully merging, halting their

integration.

Everything was threefold, giving birth to all things. Only then could it be stable.

With his three heads and six faces, Lumian gazed at the similarly three-headed malevolent

dragon, laughing wildly.

...

Inside the wooden tower.

The Celestial Master, the Holy Monk, the Haoli lineage's Underworld Daoist, and the self- proclaimed Master of the Shadow Cottage each sat cross-legged at one of the dragon-sealing well's corners.

Underneath the Celestial Master appeared a desolate wilderness. Behind the Holy Monk, a pristine, transcendent halo emerged.

Before the Haoli sect master, a straight, broad, dark river flowed out of the void and into the ancient well.

Seeing this, the Master of the Shadow Cottage laughed uproariously, summoning a faintly discernible, shadowy-black world to descend upon the scene.

At the wooden tower's apex, a light tinged with blue and white poured down directly onto the dragon-sealing well.

Clanging sounds echoed as faint light glimmered on the chains embedded in the ancient well's walls, shaking violently.

The battle between Lumian and the malevolent dragon-or rather, Lumian's effort to accommodate the City of Calamity-was something the high-ranking figures like the Celestial Master could not directly intervene in. They could only use the preexisting seals to restrict and weaken the malevolent dragon.

...

At the bottom of the blood-colored sea, the malevolent dragon's six eyes fixed on Lumian, and an overwhelming pressure descended upon the world.

Lumian, holding onto the idea that "if I can persuade it, I can save a lot of time, and there's nothing to lose by trying," smiled and Instigate the malevolent dragon, "I know you desire war, destruction, the conquest of all things, and to send those who refuse to submit into

chaos.

"If you're willing to merge with my body, I will lead you into the highest realms of warfare, where those so-called great existences will either bow before you or be destroyed by you."

As Lumian spoke, Cheek's face turned forward, eager to add something, to Instigate a few words Herself. Unfortunately, she couldn't speak.

The malevolent dragon stared at Lumian for several seconds, and then the two side heads

spoke simultaneously.

One voice was masculine and powerful; the other was soft and alluring. The two overlapped, resonating throughout the surroundings:

"The hawk does not bow to the sparrow, and a true dragon does not obey the wild dog.

"If you wish to claim all this, then come and defeat me-kill me!"

Hearing these words, Lumian suddenly felt a surge of excitement. So did the face of Alista

Tudor, whose eyes turned iron black, filled with fervent intensity. Lumian immediately raised his right hand and removed the dark gold mask from the central face on his left shoulder, revealing the visage formed of the chaotic vortex.

He laughed loudly and declared, "Then let us fight!"

...

In the World of Ruins.

Above the grayish-white fog outside the Western Continent, the blood-red moon continued

to fend off the marionettes controlled by Klein while simultaneously suppressing the Brood Hive with relentless fury.

Suddenly, from deep within the blood-red moon-where the physical core might reside- came a strange sound: Thump! Thump! Thump!

It sounded like the heartbeat of a fetus within its mother's womb.

Before the fetus had even been born, its heartbeat pierced through its mother's body, echoing across every place illuminated by the blood-red moonlight.

Chapter 1153: The Shoulders of Giants

Thump! Thump!

As the heartbeat intensified, the towering, ten-thousand-meter-high Brood Hive hesitated in Its struggle. It seemed to be drawn by an inexplicable force or subjected to an irresistible power.

Its fusion with the blood-red moon accelerated once again.

However, the heartbeat emanating from the depths of the moon did not last long. It soon subsided, as if even the moon's body rejected its continuation, unwilling to let the pulsations grow stronger.

It was as though allowing it to persist might bring about an unknown problem-one so severe that the moon itself was reluctant to face it.

After the brief resonance of the infant's heartbeat, the Brood Hive's resistance faltered. Though It still struggled and held Its ground, Its efforts were no longer as fervent as before. It was akin to a battlefield charge, once full of hope, being thwarted, leading to a drop in morale.

Under such circumstances, failure seemed inevitable in the near future.

...

At the bottom of the blood-colored sea, Lumian removed the dark golden mask, revealing the chaotic vortex face beneath. At that moment, the left head of the malevolent dragon let out a terrifying roar.

The roar reverberated through Lumian's mind, causing an overwhelming buzzing that briefly scattered his thoughts.

Pain shot through all three of his necks as if invisible hands were trying to wrench each head from his shoulders, spine and all.

Of the three, the chaotic vortex head was the least affected. It turned to the front, stabilizing the body while continuing to "gaze" at the malevolent dragon.

Accompanied by the roar, the malevolent dragon attempted to stretch Its massive body and ascend to the upper reaches of the blood-colored sea. But metallic clanging echoed as black iron chains embedded in Its flesh and soul strained against Its movements.

One after another, the demonic engravings on the chains transformed into colossal, tangible entities-manifestations of various demons.

They desperately pulled on the chains, preventing the malevolent dragon from leaving Its position.

Some demons quickly succumbed to the malevolent dragon's power, submitting entirely. Others held on, stubbornly resisting the forces of conquest.

Seeing the formation of demons faltering and on the verge of complete submission, a dark, colorless river flowed down the iron chains, revitalizing the struggling devils. It was like an emergency injection, causing them to return to their positions and heed the commands of their sealers.

High-ranking figures of the Death pathway wield significant control and suppression over their lesser counterparts. The River of Eternal Darkness, a force even higher in rank than Death itself, amplified this effect!

When the malevolent dragon was first sealed, the engravings of demons on the iron chains were chosen specifically for this purpose. Empowered by the River of Eternal Darkness and controlled by the Haoli sect's sect master, these demons could partially resist the dragon's powers of Conquest and

Charm. This ensured that the demons would not immediately capitulate in the dragon's struggle, buying time for reinforcements to arrive and activate subsequent layers of containment.

Amidst the piercing sounds of strained metal, the malevolent dragon managed to extend only part of Its body. It could not ascend higher in the blood-colored sea and remained trapped in place.

This was one of the reasons Klein believed Lumian had a chance to merge with the City of Calamity before the Mother Goddess of Depravity completed Her fusion with the Brood Hive. Lumian wasn't facing a fully intact malevolent dragon or the City of Calamity at its peak. Instead, he confronted a target that had been sealed through a monumental effort-one that cost countless heroes their lives!

The current malevolent dragon was shackled, unable to leave its position or create Mirror Substitutions or slumbering mirrors. It was akin to a living target. If Lumian couldn't defeat, subdue, kill, or merge with such a restrained dragon in a short time, he was fundamentally unworthy of the task.

The cultivators of the Western Continent had paved the way for him, sacrificing generations to remove half the obstacles to the finish line!

Lumian stood on the shoulders of giants, supported by the wisdom and sacrifices of Western civilization's sages.

This was a relay passed down through countless generations, and Lumian was merely the final runner!

Many of the demonic entities engraved on the dragon-sealing chains were once cultivators who voluntarily transformed themselves to bind the dragon. They willingly accepted eternal torment, choosing to descend into demonic hell to ensure the dragon remained imprisoned. Today, they would finally see the decisive battle. The malevolent dragon would be slain, and they would be liberated.

Success doesn't have to be achieved by me, but I must contribute to its achievement!

The demons on the iron-black chains, their faces twisted and their claws bared, remained steadfast. The majority stood resolutely at their posts, refusing to retreat, vowing to resist to the death.

They pulled on the chains with all their might, firmly restricting the dragon's movements and creating opportunities for Lumian's attacks.

Earlier, Lumian had attempted to Instigate the dragon not only to save time but also to leverage the Eye of Calamity to identify the malevolent dragon's weaknesses and the

tributary of fate leading to Its death.

But the malevolent dragon had no fatal weaknesses. There was no tributary in fate leading to Its true demise.

Its only vulnerabilities were the chains and the demons that forcefully created limitations. These were not deadly flaws; they merely restricted Its actions and diminished Its power. Thus, Lumian removed the dark golden mask. He intended to use the chaotic vortex face to draw upon the White Tower pathway's Omniscient Eye ability.

This time, he wasn't searching for weaknesses or death. He was searching for problems. The vortex on the chaotic face at the center of his left shoulder began to spin. Deep within the vortex, an eye seemed to open, illuminating the entwined dual dragon bodies and their three heads.

In an instant, Lumian saw the problem.

A scene suddenly appeared in his mind: Under a specific psychic storm, intangible shadows that didn't belong to the dragon-yet bore Its aura were stripped away.

These shadows included a general seated alone in a tent, a beautiful dancer performing under the general's gaze, a conqueror standing before a massive mound of skulls, a concubine gracefully dancing in his palm, an emperor ascending a sacrificial altar alone, and a favored consort smiling at the sight of beacon fires rising in the distance...

These shadows represented successive generations of high-ranking figures who had aligned themselves with the City of Calamity. They were a jumble of influences that had imparted some degree of consciousness, thoughts, and inclinations to the malevolent dragon. Lumian envisioned using psychic authority and a specific Mental Plague to temporarily strip away these external consciousnesses, rejecting them to the edges of the dragon's being. This would return the malevolent dragon to Its most "primal" and "authentic" form.

As such, the malevolent dragon would become a pure symbol of calamity, a walking embodiment of destruction, incapable of controlling Its own instincts.

This created exploitable vulnerabilities.

As the scene took shape in Lumian's mind, the malevolent dragon, which was straining against the chains, suddenly stiffened. One by one, intangible shadows separated from Its

body.

The dragon's left head, with Its iron-black eyes, was instantly tinged with blood-red. The expression on the right, the beautiful woman's head, turned mad. Even the central, chaotic head began spewing all-encompassing colors from its drilled apertures.

The declared future from a Visionary was unfolding!

The blood-colored sea quaked violently the very next second. An indescribable aura of destruction and madness descended upon the scene. The demons on the chains trembled uncontrollably, while Lumian's right and central heads were forced to bow.

The malevolent dragon's white-bodied head, with Its crazed blue eyes, swiftly reflected Lumian's body within Its gaze. It perceived his fragile balance and the point of calamity's

detonation.

Without hesitation, the dragon lunged forward. In Its eyes, Lumian's body began to collapse

from within, exploding into chaos.

Catastrophe descended!

This was a strike against Lumian's greatest vulnerability-his precarious balance.

For the now-instinct-driven malevolent dragon, what would happen to Lumian in the event

of such a collapse didn't matter.

Its sole desire was destruction, the return of all things to chaos. Lumian's figure shattered abruptly, voluntarily turning into a mirror.

Yet, even with his preemptive use of a Mirror Substitution, the catastrophe traveled through

the connection between the avatar and his true body, spreading to him.

This was the nature of the City of Calamity.

As long as a connection existed, it could curse, affect, and spread catastrophe! Lumian's half-female, half-male body shimmered in one corner of the blood-colored sea. Both sides of his form began writhing as though they intended to devour each other. Meanwhile, the central head lost its connection and control over the heads on the right and

left.

Within Lumian, the Uniqueness of the Primordial Demoness, the Uniqueness of the Red Priest, and the Demoness of Apocalypse Beyonder characteristics and Conqueror erupted into violent conflict. Each sought to end the current equilibrium and dominate the whole.

Illusory cracking noises echoed as the invisible connections within Lumian, linking his various traits, were forcibly severed by the catastrophe.

However, this did not cause Lumian's body to collapse catastrophically. Instead, it shattered the protections maintaining his balance.

Grafting!

That protection was Grafting.

Shortly after becoming a dual-pathway true god, Lumian had enlisted Mr. Fool's assistance to Graft the Uniqueness and Beyonder characteristics within him into a cohesive whole, stabilizing his existence in a peculiar manner. He had made similar preparations before facing the Primordial Demoness.

Now, the Grafting had shielded him from one catastrophic collapse of his balance, but it could only do so once. Beyond this, even the Lord of Mysteries Klein could no longer intervene in what transpired here.

Lumian's three heads continued to spin, each turning toward different directions. Had he not spent the past month adjusting his state and further stabilizing his psyche and spirit, Lumian, who had relied on Grafting to escape the predicament, would still have taken the inevitable turn, albeit less catastrophic.

As his three heads rotated, Lumian managed to barely regain control of Cheek's face. He raised one arm on his right side.

Chapter 1154: Calamity of Destruction

As Lumian clenched one of the arms on his right side, the void before him collapsed entirely, meeting its apocalypse. It formed a vortex of chaos that contained all colors and possibilities.

Just as an Apocalypse was an ascendant form of Catastrophe, Chaos was an ascendant form of Apocalypse.

Catastrophe led to the collapse of an entire system. Apocalypse deepened that collapse into a total explosion of contradictions, entangling all into one. Chaos represented the singularity in a convergence, the conclusion after the total explosion.

Thus, the Chaos of the Chaos Demoness could not be applied directly to a stable and balanced target. A catastrophic collapse must first be created in the designated area, followed by the total explosion of contradictions to form a substantial vortex of chaos. Only then could it spread outward to affect the target.

As soon as the vortex containing all colors appeared, it began spreading toward the malevolent dragon.

It encountered an invisible barrier, unable to directly reach the dragon's massive body. This was part of the sealing mechanism. The malevolent dragon was incapable of creating catastrophes or launching attacks within the area It occupied or where the iron-black chains extended. Otherwise, It would have destroyed the sealing chains through self-inflicted damage long ago, returning to the "sea"-after all, as long as even a single flame of Its being remained, It could rebuild Its body.

This limitation restricted both the malevolent dragon and Lumian.

The vortex of chaos churned violently against the invisible barrier, pulling and shredding it in an attempt to consume it. Yet the barrier's power seemed endless, showing no signs of faltering in the short term.

Around the dragon-sealing well, high-ranking figures from the Western Continent, such as the Celestial Master and the Holy Monk, successively unleashed Their powers. Layer by layer, They decoupled the seal, creating a breach in the area where Lumian was attacking.

The vortex of chaos quickly broke through the invisible barrier, extending toward the malevolent dragon's enormous body.

On the surface of the chains binding that part of the dragon, the demon carvings-rather than showing anger as they faced the encroaching chaos-wore expressions of joy. They straightened their backs, lifted their heads high, and their terrifying visages of green faces, sharp fangs, bare bones, and oozing pus radiated pride and relief.

The vortex, containing all possibilities, swept them in, quickly dissolving them into nothingness.

The corresponding chains fractured and fell into the chaos.

That section of the malevolent dragon's body was also torn apart-deep red flames, iron- black bones, white spikes, and black fur all dissipated into the vortex of chaos.

All three of Its heads tilted back simultaneously, letting out agonized howls.

The affected part of Its body broke apart. Without the binding chains, It ignited prematurely with black flames that restrained madness, destruction, and chaos.

The swathes of dark flames collided with the approaching chaos, plunging the blood-colored sea into instant darkness. Light, sound, and motion all ceased to exist.

Both forces annihilated each other simultaneously.

As Lumian prepared to capitalize on his strike, to unleash catastrophe, herald apocalypse, and initiate wave after wave of warfare, a surge of madness erupted from deep within his mind.

The "occasional" state he was in ended prematurely.

He lost control. He went mad!

This was because the malevolent dragon was an incomplete Origins of Disaster. Unless It deliberately restrained Itself, Its corresponding symbols would inevitably influence the surrounding area. For Lumian, two latent calamities were most prominent: his fragile balance and the fact that he had already lost control and succumbed to madness, only temporarily lucid due to The Fool Klein's wish. The first had already been triggered earlier, and now, the second was inevitably manifesting as disaster!

The central head on Lumian's body lost all reason. Its expression twisted with madness. At the same time, the chaotic vortex face on his left shoulder suddenly developed two holes, as if organs had been forcibly gouged out at the positions of its eyes.

This face took over his entire body.

A Virtual Persona!

It was the Virtual Persona from the Visionary pathway!

Over the past month, besides stabilizing his state and helping the Tarot Club members, as well as those he still cared about in the protected zones, Lumian had been contemplating potential challenges in his battle against the malevolent dragon.

Thanks to The Fool Klein's awakening and accommodation of Sefirah Castle, Lumian gained deeper understanding and mastery over symbols and their influences. He learned the nature of the Origins of Disaster, Calamity of Destruction, as well as their potential impacts on himself.

To counter this, he had used the Visionary's abilities to implant a virtual persona in himself. If his primary consciousness lost control and descended into madness, this temporary persona would immediately emerge, fusing with the chaotic vortex face to take over his body.

The chaotic vortex face was chosen because only Its status and rank could suppress the other faces and the uncontrollable madness of his primary consciousness.

The Virtual Persona, a near-exact replica of Lumian but with subtle differences, barely restrained his frenzied instincts. At that moment, an endless black void appeared before him, along with a star larger and brighter than the sun.

The star's core collapsed on a massive scale, releasing unparalleled light and heat.

A sea of unimaginable brilliance surged forth, just seconds away from engulfing Lumian.

The central head on Lumian's body burst into maniacal laughter.

"Is this also a damn calamity?"

...

At the border between the Western Continent and the Fog Sea, high above the grayish-white

fog.

The nest-like, ten-thousand-meter-high peak on the blood-red moon began to tremble, sinking inch by inch.

The halted fusion resumed, though not at the same rapid pace as when the blood moon first rose.

Among the countless manifestations of Klein surrounding the moonlit world, some were engaging in "infighting," while others remotely influenced the Mother Goddess of Depravity, albeit only causing interference.

...

Somewhere in the ruins of the Southern Continent.

Within a concealed area protected by slight corruption transmitted by the Mother Tree of Desire through the Chained God, the grotesque followers of the Mother Tree of Desire- oozing pus, with misplaced facial features, or bearing animalistic traits like rabbit ears, skinny pig limbs, and sheep torsos, or writhing in agony under ceaseless curses- simultaneously received messages from Suah and Tirié: "Come to the altar! "Hahaha, the Mother Goddess of Depravity is about to succeed. After accommodating the Brood Hive, She will assist us according to Her pact with the Lord, the Primordial God

Almighty!

"This is what we gained in exchange for the loss of the Tree of Shadow!"

Upon hearing the name Mother Goddess of Depravity, many of the followers underwent grotesque transformations, sprouting genitalia, staining blood-red, or swelling as fetuses prepared to tear their way out...

These Beyonders staggered toward the altar.

Suah and Tirié, in Their madness, were indifferent to their states, or perhaps, didn't even

consider it.

...

Confronted by the exploding sea of light, Lumian ignited.

He transformed into an invisible, colorless flame before becoming pure light.

In a sun-like state wreathed in fire, he met the raging, searing, terrifying sea of light.

Lumian was absorbed into it. His outer flames extinguished and reignited repeatedly, while his inner luminous consciousness alternated between disintegration and cohesion.

As the explosion neared its end, he morphed into a vortex of chaos, absorbing the surrounding light and heat to reconstruct his body.

Relying on the chaotic vortex face's status, rank, abilities, and Its affinity with light, Lumian

barely survived this calamity.

Yes, the Calamity of Destruction encompassed universal symbols, and a supernova explosion was undoubtedly one such calamity!

Similarly, as the Calamity of Destruction represented a universal-level symbol, the scope of the City of Calamity could be infinitely small or infinitely vast.

Immediately after, Lumian transformed into light and, at the speed of light, raced toward the location of the malevolent dragon he sensed.

At that moment, an indescribably deep darkness emerged in the adjacent starry sky.

The darkness couldn't be directly seen or truly perceived. It was identifiable only through the distorted gases and the slow-spinning disk-like structure surrounding it.

The light that Lumian had become bent uncontrollably toward the darkness, entering the

rotating structure of diffuse material.

This too was a calamity!

A true Calamity of Destruction!

Lumian realized he had only one path to survival: to quickly pass through the earlier breach and enter the malevolent dragon's territory.

There, the malevolent dragon couldn't launch attacks or create calamities. Otherwise, It would have freed Itself long ago!

Amid the bending light, Lumian abruptly reverted to his fiery giant form.

Clusters of his intangible flames flew toward the spinning disk's core, followed by the iron-black bones that made up his frame.

Seizing a fleeting opportunity, a vivid banner-like mark emerged on the forehead of the central head.

He was invoking the sacrificial ability of the Red Priest, offering tribute to the malevolent dragon and pleading for Its aid!

In a normal state, the malevolent dragon would have ignored Its enemy. But now, with the external consciousnesses and inclinations temporarily stripped from it, the malevolent dragon was a pure creature of instinct.

Receiving sacrifices and providing Its help was an ability etched into the Beyonder characteristics, authority, concepts, and symbols of the Hunter pathway. The malevolent dragon would instinctively, uncontrollably respond to Lumian, even if it led to Its own downfall.

This was why Lumian had begun the battle by forcing the dragon back to its godhood and instincts with the Omniscient Eye!

As time slowed to a crawl, Lumian, now missing most of his body, received the malevolent

dragon's response.

"Haha!" His central head laughed maniacally.

The darkness and its surrounding distortions dissipated in tandem.

That individual for which it came was the same reason it vanished. Before the malevolent dragon could react, Lumian activated a contract mark on his body.

Chapter 1155: Dao

Lumian's figure abruptly disappeared into the boundless cosmos, following the mystical connection established by the malevolent dragon's response to his offering, "transporting" himself to Its domain.

Surrounding him were layers of dense, overlapping colors and wailing souls.

The spirit world!

Unless entirely and specifically isolated, every place was connected to the spirit world and the astral world.

This was one of the symbolic meanings of a Pillar.

However, waiting for Lumian was an overwhelming brilliance that swept away everything. It was as if two galaxies collided, tearing through the spirit world.

Lumian did not linger in the spirit world. Before the exploding sea of light engulfed him, he transformed into an abstract symbol and concept, entering the astral world.

An infinite flood of light, heat, and matter surged after him.

Reaching out with both hands, Lumian created a door directly within the astral world, amidst a composition of symbols and concepts-a "painted" door, layered and intricate.

The door was instantly opened, and Lumian's figure disappeared from the astral world.

His eyes then beheld the entwined, colossal forms of the malevolent dragon.

Finally, he had arrived at the domain where the dragon lay coiled, a place where It could not unleash calamities. He reached this location through a "door."

The contract seal he activated was not one from Zedus, as that form of "transportation" belonged to spirit world creatures and could not access the astral world or open a "door."

Instead, he used a newly acquired contract seal-one obtained a month ago from Gehrman Sparrow!

By its nature, the contracts of a Contractee lost the ability to forcefully compel agreements or obligations once they reached higher levels of power without the qualitative enhancement provided by Inevitability. However, if both parties willingly agreed to and honored the contract, and the contractee's body and soul could bear the power transmitted by the other party, it remained effective. Such mystical connections, though, were fragile and could not sustain more than two uses, being easily disrupted.

Before facing the Primordial Demoness, Lumian had ventured into the astral world, where he sought angel-level boons of true gods for his puppet soldiers. He had also signed a contract with Gehrman Sparrow, who wielded the Door pathway's Uniqueness, to prepare for situations where he couldn't rely on his puppet soldiers.

In that prior battle, while the Primordial Demoness had indeed held back, so had Lumian, keeping some of his cards hidden!

Earlier, Lumian waited until the sacrificial ritual took effect and the malevolent dragon responded before activating the contract seal that represented high-level power from the Door pathway. This was to confuse the dragon with his persistence and journey, catching It in a moment of distraction so that It would not detect or disrupt the contract connection in time. Additionally, the ritual strengthened the mystical connection between Lumian and the dragon, ensuring he could locate It and reach his destination, despite the dragon's potent Fog of War.

The negative effects of signing a Door-related Uniqueness contract with Gehrman Sparrow originally manifested as "frequently getting lost and encountering hostile, dangerous entities." However, after being Fooled by The Fool Klein, the drawback changed to "potentially getting lost and encountering hostile entities only while using the contract's abilities."

In the current scenario, the most hostile and dangerous entity to Lumian was undoubtedly the malevolent dragon!

Once Lumian "opened the door" to enter the sealed domain of the malevolent dragon, he immediately felt the calamities stemming from the dragon's influence subside.

The power of the Wish returned, and he once again entered his state of "occasional" lucidity!

The malevolent dragon roared, emanating powerful Conquest and Charm, but despite Its ferocity, It could not easily break free from the dragon-sealing chains and the countless demons holding It down.

While relying on the chaotic vortex face on his left shoulder to resist the Conquest and Charm without yielding quickly, Lumian stood above the dragon within the blood-colored sea. He deactivated the Virtual Persona and turned his gaze toward the terrifying, grimacing demons on the dragon-sealing chains.

Having learned from Mr. Fool about the origins of the chains and demons, Lumian's expression was filled with respect and admiration. Using a phrase he had deliberately learned from Franca in the Western Continent's language, he addressed the demons, "Fellow Daoists, please aid me in ending this calamity!"

The terrifying, twisted demons suddenly froze.

Fellow Daoists... This ancient title, seemingly long lost to history, echoed in their ears.

Their fierce expressions softened. On their green and white phantom-like faces, there was a look of reminiscence.

Still straining to maintain their positions along the various nodes of the chains, ensuring that the malevolent dragon remained sealed and could only use abilities like Conquest and Charm within the domain, some of them extended their hands to straighten their crooked, tattered crowns. Others painstakingly tidied their rotting, flesh-exposing garments. Some lifted trembling hands to wipe the bloodstains from their faces...

A gentleman must not lose his crown, even in death!

The Haoli sect's leader, standing beside the dragon-sealing well, also heard Lumian's words. As a high-ranking figure of the River of Eternal Darkness, He slightly relaxed His control and suppression over the demons.

The demons raised their heads and looked upward, shouting to Lumian in unison, "Fellow Daoist, I shall aid you!"

These cries interwove and echoed, spreading in waves.

With their permission, Lumian quickly incorporated them into his army, making them his teammates and soldiers to resist the dragon's forceful Conquest and terrifying Charm.

One after another, the layered phantom images of the demons materialized behind Lumian- these were their mirror selves.

The demons at the bottom of the blood-colored sea numbered in the tens of thousands, if not more. While maintaining the chains and the seal to prevent the dragon's escape, they awaited Lumian to lead their mirrored selves in a devastating attack against the dragon's true form. Lumian's six arms either ignited intangible flames, formed chaotic vortices, grasped soul- freezing black flames, held up an illusory red altar, carried a grayish-white aura, or raised a scorched banner-all simultaneously unleashing attacks on the dragon's massive body.

These six powers, belonging respectively to the Red Priest and the Primordial Demoness, intertwined to form a giant black-flaming sword of destruction.

The demons' mirror selves also launched their own attacks under Lumian's rank, especially those who had once belonged to the Haoli sect and its related factions.

They obtained approval and blessings from the Haoli sect's leader outside the dragon- sealing well and the Underworld Daoist within the River of Eternal Darkness, each borrowing a droplet of the colorless, dark river water.

These droplets transformed into countless illusory arrows that filled the sky, flying toward Lumian's sword of destruction. Some were repelled by the Red Priest's team abilities, while

others merged into it.

What was the Dao?

The Dao was generations of perseverance, capable of moving mountains!

The Dao was a spark that could ignite a prairie fire!

The Dao was struggling against the heavens with endless joy!

The malevolent dragon roared, unable to unleash calamities or disasters within this domain.

It could only rely on abilities like Conquest and Charm.

It was restricted, and so was Lumian.

The destruction Lumian unleashed remained confined to the mirror world, unable to reach reality. Meanwhile, the dragon's true form was not within the mirror-it was sealed and

constrained.

The demons who had borrowed the River of Eternal Darkness's water, both their mirrored

selves and true forms, succumbed one after another to the erosion of the sefirah's power. Yet none showed pain; their expressions were calm and serene, with smiles of expectation and

hope.

The remaining demons, seeing the black-flaming sword of destruction draw ever closer to the

dragon, also smiled.

Come, strike us!

As more droplets of the River of Eternal Darkness merged, the giant flaming sword Lumian had created grew smaller and darker.

Soon, it transformed into a sword of normal size, one that any human could wield.

The sword, entirely dark, continued to contract as though compressing the concepts of time, space, creation, death, destruction, and renewal into a single point.

As the mirrored attack neared the dragon's domain, the Celestial Master, Holy Monk, and

others around the dragon-sealing well made Their phenomena increasingly evident, merging

them into the well.

With a crash, the blood-red waters surged, breaking chain after chain.

At the final moment, the high-ranking figures of the Western Continent lifted the seal, allowing calamities and apocalypses to erupt in the dragon's domain.

Lumian's attack pierced through the mirror world, entering reality and striking the malevolent dragon's heads.

Behind him, the demons dissipated one by one due to the erosion of sefirah's power. In front of him, more demons crumbled under the force of destruction.

Seeing this, a surge of intense emotion erupted in Lumian's heart.

He shouted loudly, "Fight!"

Fighting meant giving your all, pressing forward unyieldingly!

Fight meant sacrificing with great ambition, daring to change the heavens and the earth!

"Fight!"

With this cry, Lumian drove the unstable, dark sword into the dragon's entwined necks. Immediately, a small, dark singularity formed there, tearing apart surrounding flesh, flames, steel, and bone, consuming all authority, concepts, and symbols.

The malevolent dragon's entire body arched back, emitting a soundless howl. Then, along with the sealing chains and the demons, It was devoured by the singularity.

The darkness destabilized, expanding into an explosion that released immense light and heat.

One by one, all of Lumian's Mirror Substitutions shattered, and his body appeared outlined on the edge of the domain.

He looked ahead, seeing only emptiness-nothing remained.

But at that moment, a frenzied, violent aura from the dragon began to pervade the void again.

Its massive body was reforming.

As a consciousness derived from the City of Calamity, Its spirit was indestructible. Once Its physical form was obliterated, It could soon be "reborn" from the City of Calamity. The Western Continent's cultivators had not killed the dragon back when they could seal It in

a domain where most of Its powers and calamities were nullified. They had understood it was

pointless!

Seeing this, Lumian wasn't disappointed-he had been prepared.

The second phase of the battle was about to begin-a pure clash of consciousness.

Chapter 1156: The Battle of Consciousness

Taking advantage of the malevolent dragon's scattered consciousness and unformed spirit, Lumian, who had just engaged in battle using the ritual and The Fool Klein's reality-bending ability, rapidly expanded his figure, "summoning" his physical body from within the

protected zone.

Almost simultaneously, Klein in the astral world created an opening in the grayish-white fog that blanketed the Western Continent.

With the Mother Goddess of Depravity fully accommodating the Brood Hive, even if the seal on the Western Continent were completely lifted, she would not currently destroy the continent. However, Her symbolic influence and natural power would still radiate outward, so Klein maintained the seal, merely opening a "door" that connected the interior to the outside for Lumian.

Lumian, now three-headed and six-armed, shot out of the protected zone and Teleported himself to the depths of the grayish-white fog, appearing above the dragon-sealing well.

He dove in, arriving beside his consciousness and spirit.

The two instantly overlapped.

Lumian grew immensely large, his three heads gazing in different directions while all six arms were raised.

Leaping out of the now-unsealed dragon-sealing well, he hovered above the bustling metropolis. Stretching his hands downward, he pulled at something heavy from a distance.

The people within the city suddenly felt the sky darken, and the ground trembled noticeably. An image of the city was forcibly extracted by Lumian from its physical form. Within this image, the citizens were grotesque-some were reduced to a single head dragging a bloody, skeletal spine; others were well-dressed but headless; and some were swollen, their features obscured...

This was originally intertwined with the actual metropolis, with secret doors and intersecting timelines connecting the two-

the City of Calamity!

Lumian's massive body sank abruptly, plunging into the extracted image of the city.

The City of Calamity shrank rapidly and bizarrely, entering Lumian's body and swiftly moving toward his brow.

Lumian intended to seize the moment, before the malevolent dragon's consciousness was fully reborn, to forcibly accommodate the City of Calamity-and then confront and merge with it!

The next second, the city's image froze at Lumian's brow.

His consciousness and spirit were immediately drawn into it.

He saw a staircase ascending to infinite heights, at the end of which lay a divine throne stained with dark red blood. On the steps, the dragon's body quickly took form, coiling to block his path forward.

...

In the real world.

Deep within the blood-red full moon, the pounding heartbeat grew intense again.

The nest-like peaks seemed to resonate, their sinking accelerating.

The accomodation of the Mother Goddess of Depravity with the Brood Hive progressed further, showing no signs of slowing.

Within the grayish-white fog directly beneath the blood-red moon, the "Madames" and "Ladies" under the core power of the Mother Goddess of Depravity stood one after another, turning their gaze toward their leader.

This figure, a beautiful woman with a full-moon-like face radiating maternal glory, spoke to her companions,

"We must return to the embrace of the Mother.

"She has mobilized more of the Chaos Primogenitor's power to accelerate Her fusion with the Brood Hive. We must return to Her embrace, restore Her power, and help alleviate Her burden."

Seeing confusion on their faces, the woman added,

"The Chaos Primogenitor is the Original Sin of the universe. Although merely Sequence o of the Valley God pathway, It carries significant symbolism.

"That symbolism represents the nascent, Original Creator of the next universe. Nurturing It is one of the Mother's most vital symbols and a key reason she remains a Pillar even after the Brood Hive's separation.

"Even as a Mother, She cannot overly wield Its symbolic powers without risking instability or further complications."

Understanding dawned on the Ladies and Madames, their expressions reflecting varying degrees of reverence born of the knowledge imparted.

Together, they chanted in unison,

"Praise be to you, Mother of All Things!

"Praise be to you, Eternal Evil!

"Praise be to you, the True Great Mother Goddess!"

Amidst their praises, these bestowed and Beyonders transformed into beams of red, black, or brown light, streaming one after another into the blood-red moon and merging with it.

A hidden corner of the World of Ruins' South Continent.

The bizarrely shaped Rose School of Thought Beyonders and Mother Tree of Desire followers flocked densely near an altar, their numbers overwhelming.

Atop the yellow, pyramid-like altar, a figure wrapped in bandages, thorns, and roses hung motionlessly, appearing to bind all curses and desires-on the verge of erupting.

Chained God Tolzna.

Following the Vortex incident and the descent of the crimson moon, this deity had effectively perished. His body, consciousness, and spirit were entirely corrupted by the Mother Tree of Desire, acting as Her proxy.

Now, He would serve as the primary sacrifice for this ritual, forcibly opening a passage with the Mother Goddess of Depravity's aid allow the Tree Desire escend within

the barrier. Of course, if the barrier shattered under the Mother Goddess's assault, It would simply return directly to the great existence, the Mother Tree of Desire.

When the sacrifices were ready, the thoughts of Suah and Tirié radiated outward from in front

of the Chained God.

"The ritual!

"Begin the ritual!"

...

Within the consciousness space corresponding to the City of Calamity.

Seeing the malevolent dragon's body rapidly forming, the three-headed, six-armed Lumian

suddenly disassembled.

He split into six consciousnesses and six figures.

These included his primary consciousness, Aurore's consciousness, Jenna's consciousness,

the dull and unresponsive chaotic vortex consciousness, Primordial Demoness Cheek's consciousness, and Blood Emperor Alista Tudor's consciousness.

Though not entirely fused, they had partially merged, cooperating, conflicting, or entangling to form a fragile balance-while portions corresponding to Omebella and Zedus had fully integrated with Cheek and Tudor, becoming indistinguishable.

In the real world, Lumian could not break this balance or separate these distinct consciousnesses. However, in this space, where they had a degree of independence, they

could unite or divide.

If Lumian succeeded in accommodating the City of Calamity, his consciousness would eventually form a unified whole-indivisible, even under similar circumstances. This was the distinction between dual-pathway true gods and great existences.

The six consciousnesses coalesced instantly. Lumian pulled the statue-like chaotic vortex face consciousness, along with Aurore's and Jenna's consciousnesses, a step back, disappearing from the dragon's impending attack. This left only Primordial Demoness Cheek and Blood Emperor Alista Tudor in place.

Cheek gazed deeply into the Blood Emperor's eyes, then fixated longingly on the dragon, as if saying: Finally, this moment has come.

Behind Her appeared a figure clad in a black skeletal dress-the mirrored Oldest One's

feminine aspect.

Similarly, behind Blood Emperor Alista Tudor, the mirrored Oldest One's masculine aspect

emerged, clad in white armor.

In the real world, these figures were forbidden from meeting or merging. But in the consciousness space, Cheek and Tudor could briefly reunite, provided Lumian withdrew the

chaotic vortex consciousness.

This reunion could only occur once, as it would severely wound both Cheek and Tudor. Left unchecked, it could lead to the true birth of the mirrored Oldest One's consciousness. Lumian was now gambling on this symbolism to counter the dragon's consciousness, seizing

every moment!

Instantly, the malevolent dragon's consciousness transformed the space into an infinite, dark cosmos filled with scattered calamities.

Cheek and Tudor drew close, accompanied by their mirrored forms.

The entire "universe" froze, all calamities losing their vitality, their light and heat

extinguished, plunging into total silence.

Then, the most violent explosion erupted. Massive amounts of matter scattered outward, forming stars, suns, seas, and various lifeforms.

The malevolent dragon's consciousness dissolved in the prior "freeze" and was shattered amidst the current "creation," reforming into disparate entities.

Once again, It dissipated, reconstituting within the City of Calamity, where It would recover before long.

The figures of Cheek and Tudor merged into a single sphere, twisting and writhing as They struggled to fully integrate.

At this moment, a chaotic vortex face emerged from within, separating Them into four positions-north, south, east, and west.

Annihilation and creation became unstable.

The next second, Lumian, Aurore, and Jenna returned, towering as giants. They forcibly dragged the weakly reborn malevolent dragon's consciousness close to them.

Under these circumstances, the chaotic head of the malevolent dragon and the chaotic vortex face became strongly attracted, exerting a powerful pull toward convergence. They originated from the same place-they were one to begin with!

The chaotic vortex face and chaotic head merged, drawing each other to a central point to fully unite. This act separated Cheek and Tudor, including Their mirrored forms.

The instability of annihilation and creation ceased abruptly. Having finally prevented the true birth of the mirrored Original Creator's consciousness, Lumian, Aurore, and Jenna were forced to return to the body containing the chaotic vortex

face.

In doing so, they and the malevolent dragon were now inseparably close, breathing audible,

forms distinct.

Neither could evade. Neither could retreat!

Chapter 1157: Special Symbolism

The malevolent dragon's camel-like head, adorned with antler-like horns and covered in blood-red fur, lunged past the chaotic head and violently collided with Lumian's face, devouring it.

Lumian did not back down; he bit into the dragon's head, tearing at Its eyes, nose, and cheeks.

Iron-black scales began to protrude from Lumian's face and neck.

This was a symbolic manifestation of the struggle and merging of consciousness.

In such situations, creating calamities and causing severe disasters would inevitably lead to self-inflicted harm.

The dragon's other head and its snake-like, jade-white body entwined with the heads of Aurore and Jenna. They both Charmed and cursed one another, black flames-embodying destruction and ferocity-igniting and wrapping around them.

Having disrupted the malevolent dragon's consciousness twice and forcibly merged before it could fully recover, Lumian had finally reached an equal footing with his opponent.

But it still wasn't enough!

The malevolent dragon's consciousness would not remain weakened forever.

Amid their tearing and biting, Lumian clasped his two hands together, and a corresponding vision emerged in his mind.

Fuzzy, ethereal figures returned to the malevolent dragon from all directions, reintegrating into the once-unified consciousness.

They were the consciousnesses of the City of Calamity's Dao integrators that Lumian had previously separated.

Because they had been separated, they had avoided destruction in the earlier battle.

Now, Lumian used the power of a Visionary to reintegrate these separated consciousnesses back into the malevolent dragon, reuniting them and throwing Its consciousness into chaos. This stirred inclinations, emotions, and reactions within the dragon.

...

Thump! Thump!

The heartbeat deep within the blood-red full moon's Chaos Primogenitor continued to pound violently, causing the mountain-like Brood Hive to sink faster, now more than halfway submerged in crimson.

Thump! Thump!

The sound of the heartbeat resonated in a hidden corner of the World of Ruins on the Southern Continent.

Suah and Tirié, conducting Their ritual, seemed to have grown hearts of Their own, Their beats echoing the sound.

They watched as Beyonders and bestowed transformed into masses of flesh, merging into the Chained God Tolzna. The mummified figure wrapped in bandages, thorns, and roses rapidly sprouted into a tree of desire extending toward the astral world.

"The time has come!"

"The help from the Mother Goddess of Depravity has arrived!"

Excited, Suah and Tirié spread incomprehensible thoughts while merging into the tree atop the pyramid altar.

For these fervent beings, returning to the Mother's body was the highest honor!

The tree of desire grew rapidly, seemingly about to touch the astral world's barrier and tear a large hole into it. Suddenly, it tilted and twisted,

collapsing toward the symbols, concepts, and representations that formed Lord of Mysteries Klein.

This happened because the help from the Mother Goddess of Depravity had not arrived. Suah and Tirié had been deceived, misjudging the timing.

This was because They had been marked by Klein long ago!

When Lumian confronted the Primordial Demoness, the entire Tarot Club had mobilized to assist. But hidden within that action was an unknown purpose unbeknownst even to the Major Arcana card holders: to lure out the evil god Angels-Suah, Tirié, and others who had been hiding using the powers of the Mother Tree of Desire and the Mother Goddess of Depravity. At the time, Suah and Tirié had indeed escaped the entanglement of Angel of Time Pallez, Angel of the Holy Spirit Reinette, and Ma'am Hermit Cattleya. But unbeknownst to them, Klein, fully awakened as half a Great Old One, had silently followed, discovering the secret hiding place of the indulgence faction of the Rose School of Thought, other followers of the Mother Tree of Desire, and where Chained God Tolzna was.

If not for the fact that the Chained God had effectively perished and His Uniqueness had been deeply corrupted by the Mother Tree of Desire, which rendered purification impossible in the short term—as it would aid the Mother Tree of Desire establish a new, firm mystical connection with the Tenebrous World-Suah and Tirié would have long been Parasitized and controlled, leaving Them no chance of survival to this day.

However, Klein had taken precautions. The moment this area had any anomalies, he could sense it and respond accordingly.

Upon discovering that the Rose School of Thought was conducting a major ritual involving the Uniqueness to open the astral world's barrier and create a passage, Klein had refrained from stopping Them outright. Instead, he applied Fooling and Deceit, causing Suah and Tirié to misjudge the timing and redirect the ritual's target toward himself instead of the Mother Tree of Desire.

The next second, the tree extending into the astral world rapidly collapsed toward Lord of Mysteries Klein's location, instantly condensing into a bloody mass encapsulating the Chained God's Uniqueness.

Klein immediately Grafted this mass onto an area above the gray fog.

...

Within the consciousness space, the malevolent dragon, destabilized by the returning Dao integrators' consciousnesses of the City of Calamity, grew bewildered. Its madness subsided, and It no longer purely followed instinct.

Seizing the moment, Lumian activated another contract mark on his body-a new one

acquired a month ago.

His eyes turned dark, and the clothing manifesting from his consciousness billowed.

The malevolent dragon froze as if It had forgotten It was devouring and merging with Lumian's six consciousnesses.

Fooled!

Using a Contractee's power, Lumian had borrowed the Fooling ability from The Fool Klein. It could only be used twice!

If the malevolent dragon had remained purely instinct-driven, Fooling would not have been so effective-Deceit would have worked better. But Lumian had deliberately caused the City of Calamity's Dao integrators to return to the dragon's consciousness, blending seamlessly as a part of it.

Since they were already fused with the dragon, Its instincts harbored no resistance or rejection toward them.

Taking advantage of the malevolent dragon being Fooled, and Its consciousness still in a weakened state, Lumian's six arms worked in pairs to grasp the dragon's iron-black body, Its jade-white snake-like body, and the formless body supporting Its chaotic head.

Lumian's five faces twisted in unison. Manifesting as a colossal giant, he ripped the malevolent dragon's three bodies apart with an ear-splitting tear.

Crimson flame-like blood sprayed everywhere, splattering onto the staircase ascending infinitely high.

Lumian's central head opened wide and swallowed the dragon's iron-black body, including Its head.

Two of his other arms pressed the malevolent dragon's jade-white body and beautiful head, forcefully shoving them between the closed eyes of Aurore and Jenna.

His chaotic vortex face then sucked in the majority of the malevolent dragon's chaotic head. The malevolent dragon resisted desperately, struggling against Lumian's merging attempt. It sought to create a calamity to destroy both Lumian and itself.

If successful, while Its-now, third-time-destroyed consciousness would enter a deep slumber within the City of Calamity, waiting centuries or more to reawaken or gradually revive, Its enemy would also die-completely and irreversibly.

At this moment, as Lumian devoured the dragon, he smiled, his thoughts echoing within the malevolent dragon's spirit: "It's useless. Even if I die, there's Medici and the City of Calamity's current cultivators. Once you're in a deep sleep, you won't be able to resist Their accommodation." This was a lie. Neither Medici nor the current strongest cultivators of the City of Calamity were in a position to accommodate it anytime soon. But such a lie sufficed to deceive the

dragon in its Fooled state.

The malevolent dragon hesitated.

Lumian followed with another thought, smiling. "I'm not the first sacrifice, nor will I be the last!

"You've seen my state. If you choose to merge with me, in a few minutes, when your consciousness fully recovers, I won't be able to maintain balance-you'll replace me!"

This was the truth.

...

Boom!

A thunderous heartbeat echoed from the depths of the blood-red moon's Chaos

Primogenitor.

Even with countless marionettes and avatars interfering, the mountain-shaped Brood Hive

sank heavily, completely engulfed in crimson.

This was the extremely special heartbeat of the Chaos Primogenitor about to be born.

It was fundamentally different from earlier beats, symbolizing the Chaos Primogenitor's imminent entry into reality. This moment heralded the emergence of a new Original Creator, a being even the Mother Goddess of Depravity could only summon once every "major month" —or 2,160 years. Such a phenomenon could not be repeated without catastrophic consequences.

If She borrowed this special symbolism for less than 2,160 years, the Chaos Primogenitor would truly descend into the real world-a consequence the Mother Goddess of Depravity couldn't predict. All she knew was that it would be a devastating catastrophe for Her. Detecting the crisis, She instinctively ignored everything else and prioritized fully merging with the Brood Hive!

And afterward, even in a weakened state for centuries, she could still escape with the Brood

Hive, even if she failed to seize anything else.

Boom!

With the echo of that heartbeat and the manifestation of the special symbolism, the invisible

barrier of the astral world began to undergo ominous changes.

The barrier, originating from the Original Creator, vanished entirely-disappearing into thin

air as if its original master had recalled it!

Even Lord of Mysteries Klein was powerless to stop it.

The apocalypse had arrived.

And it came in this way.

At that moment, Klein performed two actions:

First, he extended slimy, eldritch tentacles into the thin gray fog and pulled the astral barrier

back from history, placing it in front of entities like the Circle of Inevitability and other Great

Old Dominators.

Of course, the historical projection of the astral barrier lacked the Oldest One's status-much

like the contradictions between historical projections and Uniquenesses. Without the Oldest One's status, this astral barrier could only hold for two or three seconds.

Second, Klein Grafted nearly all living beings and their corresponding environments from the Western Continent into the protected zones.

Chapter 1158: What Has Been Will Be Again

As soon as Klein completed these two actions, the blood-red full moon ascended into the sky.

Immediately afterward, the crimson liquid enveloping the moon surged upward, coalescing into a colossal figure in an instant.

This figure emitted an incredibly terrifying suction, drawing forth grayish-white fog from the infinite heights and revealing the crimson moon and the strange, brownish earth. It seemed as though these elements wished to return to their "mother's" embrace but were held back by the gray fog.

Similarly, the Beyonder characteristic of the Beauty Goddess within the protected zone broke free of its seal and approached the gray-white fog's edge.

Law of Beyonder Characteristics Convergence!

Although the Mother Goddess of Depravity was considerably weakened after accommodating the Brood Hive, She could still utilize the Law of Beyonder Characteristics Convergence to directly reclaim the Uniqueness of the Mother pathway, the Uniqueness of the Moon pathway, and the corresponding Sequence 1 Beyonder characteristics-as long as there was no opposition on the same level.

Taking advantage of the Mother Goddess of Depravity's focus on reclaiming Her possessions, Lord of Mysteries Klein lifted the seal over the entire Western Continent, causing the grayish- white fog there to vanish abruptly.

Now, only five sefirot watchers-the Celestial Master, the Holy Monk, and three others- remained on the Western Continent. They did not fear the natural dispersal of the Mother Goddess of Depravity's power or its accompanying symbolism.

As Klein removed the Western Continent's seal, the eight "stars" before him grew exceptionally massive, each eager to shatter the illusory barrier of historical fog and seize the sefirah and Uniqueness They craved.

This sight stirred a sense of despair and fear in both the God of Steam and Machinery, Stiano, and the God of Knowledge and Wisdom, Herabergen.

They could tangibly feel the oppressive aura emanating from the Great Old Dominators.

At this moment, Klein's voice echoed within Their minds: "There's still a chance."

The gods instinctively turned to Klein and saw the Lord of Mysteries, cloaked in a black trench coat, gloved in dark leather, and holding a star-encrusted cane, surrounded by grayish-white fog.

Carrying the weight of history, he stepped into the illusory barrier to confront the eight Great Old Dominators-beings as vast as stars.

The God of Knowledge and Wisdom, Herabergen, understood that Klein's "there's still a chance" was addressed to Them and the Archangels.

After Klein had fully awakened and become the true Lord of Mysteries, Beyonders below Sequence 1 and ordinary humans were no longer in danger.

If the situation became truly untenable, Klein could abandon the sefirot, Uniquenesses, and Sequence 1 Beyonder characteristics and lead the planet's entire population of normal races to a remote, habitable edge of the universe. In the absence of conflicts of interest or instinctual desires, no Great Old Dominator would willingly oppose the Lord of Mysteries.

But for gods like Herabergen and Archangels outside the Mysteries pathway, escape was impossible!

Even if They lowered Their status—allowing avatars to flee-Their avatars would likely be corrupted once Their main bodies were devoured by the Great Old Dominators. There would be no means of preservation.

This was likely Their last chance!

Realizing the Lord of Mysteries could not hold off the eight Outer Deities for long,

Herabergen turned His gaze to the real world, toward the protected zones.

A liquid of pure chaos, encompassing all colors and possibilities, had seeped out, coalescing into a massive cross.

On this cross hung a figure, formed entirely of radiant light, with a head that retained a human shape adorned with a thick, pale golden beard.

A long shadow with five heads trailed behind Him, while a golden sun quietly hovered behind His head.

The figure opened His eyes, revealing a pair of clear, infant-like golden irises. He nodded toward the God of Knowledge and Wisdom Herabergen and Lord of Storms Leodero within the astral world. "Come, my Kings of Angels."

Amidst the reverberating, layered voice, Herabergen and Leodero were momentarily dazed. It was as if They had returned to the past, following the light and hope.

The God of Knowledge and Wisdom, Herabergen, flew out of the astral world, revealing His true form.

It was a brass dragon the size of a city, capable of expanding even larger.

The dragon's body resembled a soft, foldable tower of thick, illusory books, each bearing a brass eye.

The closer one moved toward the dragon's head, the darker and more ominous the layers of books and eyes became. At the dragon's brow, a nearly black brass vertical eye opened, gazing at the cross and the figure upon it.

The brass dragon suddenly ignited, enveloped in formless, colorless flames and quiet, eldritch black fire.

Dragging His elongated body and blazing tail, the dragon hurtled toward the figure on the

cross.

At that moment, the God of Knowledge and Wisdom, Herabergen, chose self-destruction, merging with Grisha Adam.

This was not an entirely good thing-it had its dire consequences. Grisha Adam was still battling the Primordial God Almighty's will and was at a disadvantage, with no chance of becoming the Omnipotent and Omniscient One.

In the short term, Herabergen's residual consciousness would help Grisha Adam resist the Primordial God Almighty, forming a fragile new balance. This would allow Grisha Adam to better control the body and provide stronger protection for the protected zones after the Great Old Dominators shattered the barrier, ensuring it remained untainted by the Outer Deities' power and corruption until Lord of Mysteries Klein seized the opportunity to transfer everyone during the chaos.

In the long term, however, integrating the White Tower pathway's Uniqueness at this moment would enhance the Primordial God Almighty's will and spirit, accelerating His recovery-significantly disadvantaging Grisha Adam in Their struggle.

Within the protected zone, Herabergen, clad in a plain white robe threaded with brass threads, looked skyward and sighed deeply.

In the astral world, the Lord of Storms, Leodero, appeared in human form-a stern middle- aged man clad in black armor and wielding a trident.

He glanced at the Western Continent, illuminated by scarlet moonlight, its entry sealed, and snorted at the Evernight Goddess, Amanises, and the God of Steam and Machinery, Stiano.

"The Storm will not destroy itself!

"Nor will it surrender!"

Crackling sounds erupted as the King of the Skies, Emperor of the Seas, Lord of Calamity, and God of Storms transformed into layers of entangled, ball lightning. He shot down from the astral world at near-light speed, straight toward the crimson moon and the colossal figure. The storm illuminated the skies, illuminating the entire world.

...

Within the consciousness space-

Boom!

Lumian and the malevolent dragon both heard that peculiar heartbeat.

With the former severely damaged, the dimmed Cheek and Tudor faces grew clear once more, and his central chaotic vortex face began to spin faster. Meanwhile, the dragon's two lateral heads instinctively sought to merge but were blocked by Lumian's mouth and Its own chaotic

head.

Now!

Taking advantage of the moment, Lumian, in his colossal form, forcibly swallowed the dragon's iron-black body whole.

Under this influence, the beautiful head that had been trying to merge with its other half ceased resisting and fused with the faces of Aurore and Jenna.

This brought back the imprints of Aurore's and Jenna's past selves left in the mirror, which swiftly repaired the corresponding fragments of their souls.

Lumian fully accommodated the malevolent dragon.

Immediately, he felt a torrent of madness, ferocity, and destructive intent rampaging within him. These were partially absorbed by the chaotic vortex face, partially drawn away by the lingering consciousness of the City of Calamity Dao integrators, and partially suppressed by the combined wills of Lumian, Aurore, and Jenna.

On both sides of Lumian's body, bulges began to form and writhe rapidly, each developing into a new body. These new bodies were connected to his original flesh, tightly adhered, and partially fused.

On the right was a purely female figure clad in a sacred white robe, her hands milky and ethereal. Her head featured Aurore at the front and Jenna at the back, able to rotate freely in any direction, unrestrained by a neck.

On the left was a half-male, half-female body, with a head composed of the Cheek face, the chaotic vortex face, and Alista Tudor's face. It wielded a charred banner in its hands.

In the center was Lumian himself, adorned with long, blood-red hair and iron-black eyes. A prominent design of a true dragon from the Western Continent was etched between his brows. Suppressing the madness and will of the malevolent dragon, Lumian turned his head to the right.

Aurore and Jenna's eyelashes quivered lightly before their eyes opened in unison, revealing smiles.

Lumian exhaled suddenly, a mixture of relief, emotion, and regret in his mind as he communicated telepathically: "It really is possible to resurrect... in this way...

"Unfortunately, it won't last more than a few minutes."

Lumian meant that the balance within his body would not hold for more than a few minutes.

This balance was predicated on the weakened state of the malevolent dragon's consciousness and will. Once the malevolent dragon recovered, the balance would inevitably collapse.

The two types of Uniqueness in his current body were closely linked to the mirrored Original Creator, counterbalanced by the chaotic vortex face corresponding to the Primordial God Almighty. This trifecta of forces maintained a delicate equilibrium.

Although Lumian, Aurore, and Jenna's bodies had achieved corresponding status levels, and their wills had been sufficiently strengthened, they were only supported by two Sequence 1 Beyonder characteristics each.

In this situation, should the malevolent dragon's consciousness awaken, Lumian, Aurore, and

Jenna would have little means to resist-unless the Primordial God Almighty actively sought resurrection within the chaotic vortex face, forming a larger and more stable framework.

But alas, no such fortune would come to pass.

This was the consequence of being forcibly driven and filled to reach this point.

With her hair turned black, her eyes restored to deep brown, and her appearance and charm

elevated to Above the Sequences, Aurore listened to Lumian's sentiments. Her expression remained calm, and she smiled gently, her voice soft.

"When I died in Cordu Village, I did feel wronged, angry, and resentful. But when you became a Demoness of Unaging and I began to sense everything around me, to perceive what was happening, I gradually came to terms with it. Death isn't always a bad thing.

"When I learned about the Dragon Lock and its story, and when I saw the actions of those souls just

now, I found even greater peace. Our predecessors and forebears could sacrifice themselves; so can I.

Death can be as light as a feather or as heavy as a mountain. I am willing to accept the destiny that awaits me and to act accordingly."

The head rotated, and Jenna's increasingly radiant face turned to Lumian. With a smile, she

said, "When I killed Hugues Artois, I thought, 'Even if I die, I must avenge my mother and those victims. That bastard can't keep laughing.'

"When I advanced to become a Demoness of Unaging, I thought, 'Even if I die, I must save you. You still

have unfulfilled wishes.'

"Now, it brings to mind something Franca once joked about:

"""Would you rather be a coward for a lifetime or a hero for five minutes?'

"To die with you and Aurore to save everyone-I think that's the most romantic thing in the world."

As Lumian listened, his heart gradually calmed, his self-destructive tendencies easing. He lifted his head to gaze at the blood-stained throne high on the steps, his smile radiant as

he said, "Then let's complete the final step of accommodation."

...

In the real world.

The mass of entangled lightning approached the blood-red moon and the colossal figure at near-light speed.

It tore through the void but quickly froze beside the crimson full moon. Each strand of its light was tainted scarlet, gaining new life as they detached and scattered.

The terrifying lightning mass rapidly disintegrated.

Its two brightest remnants were guided by Klein through Grafting toward the cross above a protected zone.

In the next moment, the explosion and shockwave from the lightning unfurled, erupting with a deafening roar. The natural light of the crimson moon shattered and dissipated, revealing a breach.

In the astral world, the Evernight Goddess, Amanises, holding a golden bird-shaped ornament in Her hands, stepped forward, leaving a single remark for the God of Steam and Machinery, Stiano, "It's our turn to stake our lives."

The God of Steam and Machinery, Stiano, was about to follow when He suddenly sensed something and turned His gaze to the heights of the real world.

A deep crimson meteor inexplicably appeared, dragging a long tail of flame as it plunged toward the blood-red moon and the colossal figure.

The entire sky and world were engulfed in crimson fire.

In the Year 1360, as July faded to its final days, crimson rained from the heavens.

Chapter 1159: Oath of the River Styx

As the crimson meteor descended, the entire world outside the protected zones erupted in flames. Across the cosmos, catastrophic disasters across various star systems momentarily froze before either intensifying or subsiding.

Behind the Great Old Dominators attacking the astral barrier, hand-drawn black holes and their accretion disks materialized. The energy seas, depicted like paintings, quickly receded, plunging into cold, deathly silence.

Numerous calamities descended upon this place.

These calamities were deliberately engineered by Lumian as symbolic manifestations triggered during his full accommodation of the City of Calamity and his advancement to the Origins of Disaster, Calamity of Destruction.

He harbored no illusions that these indiscriminate calamities could seriously harm the Great Old Dominators. His sole aim was to sow chaos, giving Mr. Fool a brief respite.

At that moment, the sound of plucked strings suddenly resonated. The black hole and its accretion disk, already like hand-drawn illustrations, grew thinner and smaller, losing their conceptual weight.

The black hole, now a true painting, instinctively tore at the dimensions bearing it, attempting to absorb them within and alter the current state.

A massive, terrifying mouth abruptly appeared, biting down on the "canvas" carrying the black hole and devouring it whole.

Multiple abstract stomachs emerged, expanding and contracting as they fiercely struggled against the undigested entities.

Primordial Hunger, the symbol of devouring, an insatiable convergence, the cleanser of all things!

Other Outer Deities also took measures to suppress the calamities erupting behind Them.

Meanwhile, the crimson meteor was swallowed by the muddy radiance emanating from the blood-red moon.

The ocean of bloodstained light alternated between destruction and rebirth, gradually slowing the meteor's approach toward the colossal figure.

However, beyond this sea of blood, everything else was set aflame by the crimson meteor. Even the moonlight that once Illuminated the Western Continent was burned away, vanishing completely.

Seizing this opportunity-taking advantage of the brief chaos among the Great Old Dominators and the reduced pressure on the illusory barrier-the Lord of Mysteries, Klein, sent forth a projection of himself and turned his gaze toward the protected zones.

Within the protected zone, Trier remained tranquil. On the terrace, Queen Mystic Bernadette had already taken out her crown adorned with dark gemstones, holding it in both hands.

The crown abruptly flew into the air, leaving the protected zone and ascending into the skies over the Western Continent.

Accompanying it were the brass-bound book descending from above the gray fog and two beams of light, one from behind the cross and the other from within the protected zone.

In the blink of an eye, they arrived before the magnificent stone door standing amidst the clouds, falling into the hands of a towering figure crowned with an emperor's diadem and velled by cascading tassels.

The figure nodded toward the astral world before turning away, returning to the summit of the thirty-three heavens and seating Himself on the throne of the Celestial Thearch.

He immediately placed the crown adorned with dark gemstones atop His head, overlapping it with the emperor's crown.

His hands clutched the brass-bound book tightly, while the two beams of light spiraled for a second before merging into His body.

Within the protected zone, the disappearance of the Black Emperor's Uniqueness prompted Queen Mystic Bernadette to let out a soft sigh.

This had been one of Klein's true purposes when Lumian visited her with a prophecy as an excuse.

Through the Genie's description of the urgency of the situation and His suggestion to temporarily strengthen the Nation of Disorder, Queen Mystic Bernadette immediately understood Mr. Fool's intent.

He intended to borrow the Black Emperor Uniqueness.

At that moment, Bernadette had already made her decision.

Behind her, the figure of Empress Roselle, wearing a luxurious golden crown, materialized. With a complicated tone, She said, "As long as the order and rules he established remain, he can still be resurrected."

Bernadette murmured to herself, "Can someone with the Nation of Disorder, with all its Uniquenesses and Beyonder characteristics, truly become a Great Old Dominator?"

"No, the Nation of Disorder's consciousness is interwoven with too many external spirits. It's not a complete birth and remains chaotic. Even with all its components, it cannot undergo a fundamental transformation. It may take decades or centuries for a new, unified consciousness to emerge, enabling the Shadow of Order to truly manifest in reality.

"The only way to instantly elevate the Nation of Disorder to the level of a Great Old Dominator is to unseal and release Genie. However, what Genie might do after escaping His seal is entirely unpredictable.

"For now, the Lord of Mysteries can only temporarily enhance the Nation of Disorder to a state close to that of a Great Old One, allowing it to play a role in the upcoming battle," Empress Roselle explained plainly.

She paused for a moment before adding, "Even if the Nation of Disorder births a new consciousness and becomes the Shadow of Order before his resurrection, with the Lord of Mysteries' help, he could still revive through the rules. However, he would only be able to reclaim two portions of the Prince of Abolition Beyonder characteristics."

Queen Mystic Bernadette turned to Empress Roselle and fell silent for a moment before asking. "And what about you?"

A look of contentment and solace appeared on Empress Roselle's face. "If the apocalypse passes, the mirror world should have a relatively normal ruler. By then, the reflection world within the mirror will no longer be dark."

…

Following the Lord of Storms Leodero's suicidal attack and the descent of the Calamity of Destruction, the Mother Goddess of Depravity's blockade over the Western Continent was completely broken.

Evernight Goddess Amanises and the God of Steam and Machinery Stiano seized the opportunity to descend from the astral world to the Dragon Lock Tower.

The former wore a layered yet unadorned black classical gown, Her face shrouded in a veil, ethereal and graceful. The latter appeared as a middle-aged man seemingly composed of numerous depictions of civilizations, which finally coalesced into a man in his prime.

Evernight Goddess Amanises nodded at the sect master of the Haoli lineage, communicating telepathically. "Let us begin."

The Haoli sect master closed His eyes, and a broad, dark, colorless river flowed out of the void, reaching the Evernight Goddess.

Within the illusory dark waters, figures dressed like the Haoli sect master appeared, floating and sinking.

Among them, the most lucid was a figure wearing a rusty iron crown, with pale whiskers fluttering at His chin-the Underworld Daoist.

Evernight Goddess Amanises pointed at the silently flowing River of Eternal Darkness and spoke with Her mind.

"Let the River of Eternal Darkness bear witness. I, Amanises, pledge to strengthen the Haoli lineage, ensuring all disciples achieve balance between internal and external cultivation and attain characteristics. Should I break this oath, I shall suffer a backlash from the sefirah, and I shall sink eternally to the river's depths!"

Having already reached an agreement, the Underworld Daoist nodded slightly. He extended His pale right hand, with a texture like jade yet marred by cracks oozing yellow pus or sprouting white feathers, and placed it atop the Evernight Goddess's head.

"You shall be sect master!"

With these words, streams of radiance rose from the River of Eternal Darkness, weaving into complex, orderly symbols that entered Amanises's body.

Amanises found Herself standing in the broad, dark river, where the shadows and bones of past Haoli sect masters gnawed at Her arms, back, and soul.

Already in partial control of a tributary of the River of Eternal Darkness, Amanises remained calm, resisting the chaotic consciousness infused with the spirits of countless Dao integrators.

The straight, illusory river flowed through Her body and emerged from the other side.

…

God of Steam and Machinery Stiano sat cross-legged before the Celestial Master. The latter's intent echoed in His mind:

"You have two choices:

"First, acknowledge me as your master and join my sect. I will grant you the Supreme Clarity Talisman and pass down the position of Celestial Master to you, allowing you to control what you call the Knowledge Moor. However, this carries a risk..."

As the intent reverberated, silhouettes began to emerge in the moor behind the Celestial Master. They were dressed in feathered robes and high crowns, their faces either hideous or decayed, exuding intense malice.

"They are the Celestial Masters and accomplished cultivators of past generations.

"Under the influence of the Unborn Ancient Mother every Celestial Master since the first Celestial Master's integration with the Dao must possess corresponding bloodlines and complete cultivation.

"You lack these. Through the Supreme Clarity Talisman, I can help you accommodate the Knowledge Moor in a short time. But afterward, you will face backlash. Whether you can endure and resolve the resentment of past Celestial Masters and accomplished cultivators or avoid being drawn into the moor to become one of the wandering spirits - I do not know.

"The second choice is to acknowledge me as your master and join my sect. I will grant you the Three Caverns and Five Thunders Talisman.

"After corresponding with Fellow Daoist Zhou, I have improved the Three Sovereigns Calamity Dispelling Formation based on the experiences of predecessors. With this, you can join me as a true disciple in powering the formation. You will lend me your power, allowing me to integrate with the Dao briefly to combat the vile demons from beyond."

In an instant, the Celestial Master's thoughts were fully understood by God of Steam and Machinery Stiano through the infusion of knowledge.

In the same manner, Stiano conveyed His question:

"Can either method result in the emergence of a temporary Great Old One?"

The Celestial Master, holding His horsetail whisk, shook His head.

"Neither. We both still lack time, Unlike the new master of the Haoli lineage, you have not yet preemptively gained partial control of the Dao.

"These two choices can only bring us close to the Dao, not fully integrate into it."

Knowing time was pressing, God of Steam and Machinery Stiano deliberated briefly before kneeling to give His answer: "I am willing to acknowledge you as my master and become part of the formation."

The Celestial Master seemed disappointed, as though His hoped-for liberation had not been achieved.

He pressed His horsetail whisk against Stiano's shoulder.

"In the interest of urgency, we will simplify the rites to granting a title and talisman.

"From this day forth, your Dao name shall be:

"True Blessing."

Chapter 1160: Transforming Barbarians to Buddha

Within the solemn Buddhist land, adorned with glazed and amber decorations, countless Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, Arhats, and Wisdom Kings sat atop Mount Sumeru, attentively listening to the great Buddha whose golden body filled the space between heaven and earth, delivering profound teachings.

In that moment, vibrant clouds illuminated the sky, flowers fell like rain, and golden lotuses blossomed from the ground.

Suddenly, two silvery streaks of light flew in from the outer world, landing on either side of the great Buddha and transforming into distinct figures.

To the left of the great Buddha's golden body appeared a boy of about eight or nine years old, dressed in a child's formal suit with a bow tie, his baby-fat face framed by medium-length silvery hair.

To the right stood a young man, draped in a linen robe, his features soft and elegant, and his long silver hair flowing freely.

These were none other than Will Auceptin, the Angel of Mercury from the Church of The Fool, and Ouroboros, the Angel of Fate from the Aurora Order. Will accommodated the Uniqueness of the Fate pathway and held a Sequence 1 Snake of Mercury Beyonder characteristic, while Ouroboros had two Snake of Mercury Beyonder characteristics.

As soon as Will Auceptin and Ouroboros appeared, the Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, Arhats, and Wisdom Kings who had been intently listening to the Buddha Ancestor's teachings simultaneously turned their gazes upon them. Their expressions betrayed greed and yearning, as though all of them wished to draw near, sniff deeply, or take a bite.

On either side of the great Buddha's face, two mouths suddenly split open, revealing gleaming, razor-sharp teeth.

Clang!

The sound of a bell echoed from infinite heights, and time froze for a second.

The great Buddha regained a dignified and compassionate expression, and the hideous mouths on His face disappeared.

Seizing this moment, the Holy Monk within the Dragon Lock Tower returned to the Buddhist kingdom.

He glanced around, pressed His hands together, and softly recited, 'Merciful Buddha.'

As His voice reverberated, the Holy Monk transitioned from corporeal to ethereal, taking a single step to merge with the great Buddha's golden body.

The great Buddha glanced to the left and right, speaking in a calm yet majestic voice,

'I thank you both for your efforts.'

Seeing this, Will Auceptin quietly breathed a sigh of relief. Imitating the great Buddha's posture, he crossed his legs and sat down to the Buddha's left, sitting side by side.

Ouroboros maintained a serene expression as He also assumed a lotus position on the Buddha's right.

Immediately afterward, the Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, Arhats, and Wisdom Kings below transformed into beams of various-colored lights. They swiftly returned to the great Buddha's golden body, merging into one entity.

All Buddhas converge to their origin.

While everyone had a Buddha-nature, there was only one Buddha in the world.

…

Meanwhile, the Master of the Shadow Cottage departed the Dragon Lock Tower, returning to the boundless Tenebrous World hidden deep beneath the earth.

Here, another figure already Naboredisley, His ice-blue eyes piercing beneath the brim of His semi-tall hat.

'You're unwilling to accept this fate too, aren't you?' the Master of the Shadow Cottage said, smiling as He looked over.

'Would you be content if you were in my shoes?' Naboredisley retorted.

Master of the Shadow Cottage shook His head.

'If they want to consume us, they'll have to pay a price.'

'Fellow Daoist, we've known each other spiritually for a long time. How about collaborating this time?'

'I came here precisely to cooperate!' Naboredisley's voice suddenly grew louder, as though He had returned to His Farbauti era.

'Haha!' The Master of the Shadow Cottage laughed heartily, and together with Farbauti, They stepped into the pitch-black, shadowy world without hesitation.

…

In the real world.

As Lumian, in the form of a crimson meteor, drew closer to the true body of the Mother Goddess of Depravity, his progress became increasingly arduous.

Finally, he saw the colossal figure clearly.

It was as if countless birthing organs were haphazardly piled together, with swirling smoke and crimson moonlight intertwining to form an accretion-disk-like extension that served as clothing.

Yet, this massive figure had a head resembling that of a human woman. Her features—facial structure, long brown hair, and crimson eyes—were flawless, embodying the very concept of 'beauty.' She was the symbol of beauty in the universe, radiating an unmistakable maternal brilliance.

At that moment, even Lumian hesitated to strike.

However, attracted by beauty, Cheek's face, Aurore, and Jenna—driven by Lumian's will—used Charm on the Mother Goddess of Depravity, seemingly seeking to draw closer to Her.

As a result, the Mother Goddess of Depravity did not immediately attack Lumian, who stood in a three-bodied, three-headed, six-armed form.

Yet Her symbolic nature continued to influence the surrounding area. As Lumian drew nearer, he quickly felt the effects of New Life.

The weakened consciousnesses within him began to experience a New Life.

Cheek's consciousness and Tudor's consciousness gained new life. The will of the Primordial God Almighty gained new life. The divided consciousness of the mirrored Original Creator gained new life. Even the consciousness of the malevolent dragon gained new life!

With the malevolent dragon's rapid recovery, the suppression exerted by Lumian, Aurore, and Jenna's wills on Her faltered.

What had been a fragile balance capable of lasting several minutes seemed poised to collapse immediately under the effect of New Life, with unforeseeable consequences.

In the face of these changes, Lumian neither feared nor panicked. Instead, he seized the opportunity to break free from the allure of beauty. Smiling, he lifted his head to gaze at the astral world.

Lord of Mysteries Klein, who was now guarding the astral world alone, withdrew the illusory barrier and turned toward the real world. Like a Magician about to perform, he raised both hands.

He did not immediately transfer humanity from the protected zones. Such an action would undoubtedly cause a significant commotion.

While it would be simple for Klein to shield a few dozen or a few hundred people and quietly move them to the edge of the universe without the Great Old Dominators' knowledge, the Great Old Dominators would not be fools to let the billions of surviving humans escape unnoticed.

Of course, if there were only one or two Great Old Dominators outside the barrier, Klein might have had a way to briefly reduce Them to fools. But now, eight of them stood watch.

During a previous Tarot Club meeting, The Magician Fors had speculated that a Pillar could contend with two Great Old Ones. Gehrman Sparrow had remained noncommittal at the time, still a proxy. Now fully awakened as the Lord of Mysteries, Klein's answer was: that judgment was both correct and incorrect.

'Correct' if confronted by Great Old Dominators with specific symbols capable of countering the Lord of Mysteries' abilities—Marionettes, Parasites, Blink, etc. In such cases, Klein could only rely on the unique symbolism of a Pillar to contend with two at most.

'Incorrect' in that, in the absence of such countermeasures, there was no fundamental difference between battling two or eight Great Old Ones.

Among the Great Old Dominators outside the barrier, several possessed symbolisms that countered Klein's abilities. Therefore, he dared not be overconfident. He intended to wait until the Great Old Dominators rushed in impatiently after the barrier cracked and plunged the situation into chaos, allowing him to secretly evacuate the beings within the protected zones.

At that moment, the Great Old Dominators would be fixated on the sefirot and Uniquenesses, disregarding everything else. Even if They noticed Lord of Mysteries Klein's secretive actions, They would not expend any effort to interfere.

Yet, this plan was not foolproof. Certain Great Old Dominators with relevant symbols might secretly inform Their followers to disrupt the evacuation.

The Great Old Dominators Themselves had no interest in Beyonder characteristics below Sequence 1, but Their followers might think differently!

Hearing the cracking of the illusory barrier behind him, Klein shifted his gaze to the Mother Goddess of Depravity and the Origins of Disaster Lumian.

Lumian, now fully displaying his three-bodied, three-headed, six-armed form, gazed at the Mother Goddess of Depravity, who had just escaped Charm. Half in appreciation, half in jest, he laughed.

This is exactly what I've been waiting for—to let you impose New Life on me!

The Charm was to ensure that you wouldn't develop vigilance or spiritual forewarning, allowing the New Life influence to occur naturally!

As long as I am not dead, the symbolism of the Mother Goddess of Depravity within me remains valid!

Previously, my rank was too low, and I lacked the corresponding elements. Using this symbolism, I could only disguise myself as you to provoke the Brood Hive's rebellious will through Mr. Fool's Fooling. It was difficult to truly harm you.

But now, I am an Above the Sequences great existence, differing from you only in the unique symbolism of a Pillar.

And the New Life you naturally imposed just activated the feminine and masculine halves of the mirrored Original Creator within me. Isn't this equivalent to me also nurturing the Original Creator?

This is remarkably similar to your nurturing of the Chaos Primogenitor, the Original Creator of the next universe. The most critical corresponding element is now complete!

The Genie previously hinted at using my uniqueness and Mr. Fool's symbolism. Combined with the warning about your impending accommodation of the Brood Hive, it became clear: You possess a unique symbol of limited use pointing toward the Original Creator, one I can align with!

After Mr. Fool's full awakening, he did not rush to become the Lord of Mysteries, deliberately deceiving you while roaming the continents and gathering concealed truths through your followers.

Thus, I've come straight for you, waiting for your instinctive and indiscriminate influence to awaken the mirrored Original Creator within me!

Moreover, with the Brood Hive assimilated by you, Lugano—who once belonged to you—now pledges allegiance to me, and the Phoenix Egg deep within the Underworld will soon be swallowed by me. We are more alike than ever.

You are the Great Mother who nurtures the Oldest One, Omebella, and Zedus. So am I!

In the blink of an eye, Lumian, in his giant form, conjured the Grafted Phoenix Egg into his hand and swallowed it in one gulp.

Then, he brought his six arms together, forming a massive black-flame sword bound with destruction and chaos, and drove it into his own body.

At the same time, he looked at the Mother Goddess of Depravity and smiled brilliantly.

Now, I am equivalent to you. Killing me equals killing you!

Chapter 1161: Pillar Symbolism

The Mother Goddess of Depravity, having broken free from Charm, began to change as soon as Lumian took hold of the Phoenix Egg.

Her colossal body rapidly collapsed inward toward Her abdomen, as though transforming into a nest or womb, reverting Herself to an embryonic state for rebirth.

This process would reset all symbols associated with Her, except those intrinsic to Her being, erasing external mystical correspondences.

Lumian would no longer be able to exploit the mystical law of similarity to equate himself with Her, thereby killing Her by killing himself.

Previously, the Mother Goddess of Depravity had refrained from using this method to rid Herself of symbolic influences for two reasons. First, She had just descended into the barrier by leveraging Her symbolic powers when she was immediately Fooled and Deceived by The Fool Klein using the core aggregation instinct of godhood. She was then guided into the grayish-white fog sealing the Western Continent. Her focus was on reclaiming the Brood Hive and She did not wish to reset Herself and lose useful symbolisms. Second, during the process of accommodating the Brood Hive, rebirth was impossible, as it would reset Her progress to zero.

As the Mother Goddess of Depravity began to collapse and reset Herself, Lord of Mysteries Klein, in the astral world, abandoned the maintenance of the illusory barrier. Listening to its creaks as it neared shattering, he raised his hands, revealing a massive door of light tinged with bluish-black hues deep within the shadows of his black trench coat.

Sefirah Castle!

Klein was now fully utilizing one of the core symbols of the Lord of Mysteries.

With a resounding clang, the Mother Goddess of Depravity's collapse and rebirth slowed noticeably. What would have been instantaneous now required two or three seconds to complete.

Change!

This was one of the core symbols of the Lord of Mysteries: control over change-slowing, accelerating, halting, or introducing errors into transformations. The Mother Goddess of Depravity's attempt to revert to an embryonic state and reset Her symbolisms fell under this domain.

Previously, Klein had not used the symbolism of Change to influence the Mother Goddess of Depravity's accommodation of the Brood Hive because doing so required full exertion of Sefirah Castle's power. At the time, he needed to maintain the barrier and contend with the other eight Great Old Dominators. Furthermore, the Mother Goddess of Depravity, having invoked the unique symbolism of the Chaos Primogenitor, was in a prolonged state of weakness that couldn't be recovered using New Life.

This made any influence over Her transformations significantly more effective.

With the Mother Goddess's collapse into an embryonic state delayed, Lumian-the Origins of Disaster-smiled brilliantly yet resolutely as he drove the massive black-flame sword, imbued with destruction and madness, into his own body. This act embodied the symbolism of disaster.

In an instant, flames of destruction erupted from within him, consuming his body, the consciousness of Cheek, Alista Tudor's consciousness, the divided halves of the mirrored Original Creator, the remnants of the Primordial God Almighty's spirit, the consciousness of the malevolent dragon, and even Lumian's own consciousness along with those of Aurore and Jenna.

Lumian's body began to collapse catastrophically, nearing its annihilation and return to chaos.

To bring disaster upon oneself and embrace destruction was the truest embodiment of the Origins of Disaster, the Calamity of Destruction.

Amidst the silent, roaring black flames, Lumian turned his head, exchanging smiles with Aurore and Jenna, both of whom bore expressions of pain.

He then looked back at the Mother Goddess of Depravity, his face twisted yet serene with delight.

He saw black flames, imbued with destruction and chaos, erupting within the crimson-glowing Mother Goddess. Her semi-collapsed colossal body crumbled layer by layer, ejecting various birthing organs that were swiftly reduced to ash in the enveloping Fire of Destruction.

Having ascended to become the Origins of Disaster, Lumian no longer required Mr. Fool's assistance to fully harness symbolic powers, especially those capable of bringing calamity!

The Mother Goddess, flawless in Her beauty – a concept that equaled beauty itself-threw Her head back slightly and let out a banshee-like scream filled with agony.

Many of the Kleins surrounding the area withered instantly, collapsing into death and returning to the embrace of Mother Earth.

The entire planet lost its vitality, the stars in the sky dimmed, and tremors reverberated throughout the boundless cosmos.

Reality quaked.

The accelerated collapse of Lumian's consciousness and body gained a boost from death and desolation, further amplifying his destruction. This, in turn, worsened the Mother Goddess of Depravity's collapse, leaving numerous remaining organs lifeless.

As the Mother Goddess of Depravity was reduced to a thin, womb-like shell surrounding Her colossal form, the black flames of chaos and destruction extinguished or could no longer penetrate deeper.

The Indestructible!

This was the Mother Goddess of Depravity's symbolism of Indestructibility. Her Indestructibility nature meant that, like the Primordial God Almighty and The Celestial Worthy of Heaven and Earth for Blessings, Her spirit would never be eradicated and would gradually recover over time, It also represented the indestructibility of Her soul and body.

The Mother Goddess of Depravity would never perish - unless She encountered the Original Creator, who could make the impossible happen, or the fourth Pillar symbolizing the end to everything was born, or She overextended the Chaos Primogenitor's unique symbolism.

Of course, Klein and Lumian had never aimed to truly kill the Mother Goddess of Depravity, aware of Her honorific title and Indestructibility as The Indestructible. Their plan had always been to severely wound Her and drive Her out of the astral barrier.

At this moment, the Mother Goddess of Depravity, having used the Chaos Primogenitor's symbolism and entered a prolonged state of weakness, slowed Her recovery from the influence of New Life. Simultaneously, Lumian's exploitation of symbolic correspondence and the calamity symbol had dealt Her a devastating blow, fully achieving the first stage of a Magician's performance plan.

The problem, however, was that the second stage could never be realized, as the astral barrier was no more.

Lord of Mysteries Klein remained calm and unaffected by disappointment. Raising his star-studded cane, he infused the bluish-black door of light's projection with his will.

His eyes reflected the image of the Mother Goddess of Depravity reduced to Her last organ and embryonic state.

Banishment and Sealing!

Previously, attempting to extract a Pillar in reality from the planet would have been nearly impossible. But now, with the Mother Goddess of Depravity severely wounded, an opportunity had emerged!

As starlight fell, the Mother Goddess of Depravity's distorted form changed.

She transformed into a colossal, ethereal oak tree, rooted deeply in reality, supporting the heavens, and intertwining Herself with the fabric of the real universe.

Pillar symbolism!

The Mother Goddess of Depravity invoked Her dominion over reality, embodying the symbolism of a Pillar.

The immense, incomprehensible oak tree trembled violently, yet remained firmly rooted in reality, unable to be banished or sealed.

A wilderness unfurled around it as a greenish mistletoe-covered branch broke from the treetop, flying above Lumian's black-flame-wreathed, crumbling form, and raining down dew-like droplets.

The Fire of Destruction engulfing Lumian were swiftly extinguished, and his collapsing body was halted by the effects of New Life. Among the consciousnesses within him, only his, Aurore's, and Jenna's were revitalized, restoring balance for a few more minutes.

At that moment, the Mother Goddess of Depravity chose to save him!

Of course, saving him was also an act of self-preservation.

She did not want Lumian to die prematurely before the symbolism was removed, worsening Her weakened state. Nor did She want him to lose balance and unleash something potentially terrifying, which could reflect through their symbolic connection and lead to the Chaos Primogenitor's emergence in the real world.

As the dew-like droplets fell, the immense oak tree supporting the world leveraged Klein's banishment powers and vanished from its location.

The Pillar in reality, the Mother Goddess of Depravity, left the planet and reappeared beyond the solar system.

She transformed into a crimson liquid, enveloping a gas giant, and began reverting to Her embryonic state, initiating New Life to reset Her form.

This time, though no influence was exerted by Lord of Mysteries Klein's symbolic power, the severe wounds and compounded weakness delayed Her recovery. The symbolism of destruction seemed to obstruct New Life, carefully avoiding agitating the now-dormant Chaos Primogenitor.

From a great distance, the crimson planet continued to gaze at the location containing parts of Herself. While severing symbolic connections and healing Her wounds, She patiently awaited a new opportunity - when the remaining Great Old Dominators descended into fierce competition, weakening or suppressing the Lord of Mysteries, and She could return to reclaim all and gain even more.

Lord of Mysteries Klein did not pursue the Mother Goddess of Depravity to strike Her again, and Lumian did not exploit symbolic connections for further self- destruction. Both understood the Mother Goddess of Depravity's Indestructible nature. Severely wounding and driving Her away for a period was already their anticipated outcome. Any additional efforts risked unforeseen consequences, such as awakening the Chaos Primogenitor.

More pressing matters loomed as Klein heard the faint but definitive sound of shattering behind him.

The last barrier he had pulled from the fog of history had completely collapsed.

What Lumian saw next was a terrifying star cluster composed of erupting suns.

The lifeless planet beneath his feet was violently torn apart into fragments, ceasing to exist.

Chapter 1162: A Distant Planet

As the planet was torn into fragments in an instant, the three-headed, three-bodied, six- armed Lumian remained completely unaffected.

How could calamity itself ever be harmed by Disaster?

At some unknown point, he had already taken out the Box of the Great Old Ones, encrusted with various gemstones, and directly opened its third layer.

Inside, there was nothing-yet clear and unnerving sounds of chewing and digestion emanated from within.

Almost simultaneously, the right hand of the body housing Aurore and Jenna reached inside, pulling from the void a mass of chaotic liquid that contained all colors and all possibilities.

Then, that hand clenched into a fist, absorbing the liquid into a chaos vortex it created. It annihilated the contents within, incorporating them into Lumian's own consciousness and spirit, specifically into the feminine aspect of the Origins of Disaster, thus balancing the residual corruption that could not be entirely eradicated.

As Lumian performed this action, a massive cross above the protective zones caused an even larger tide of chaos to surge forth, engulfing the zone completely.

The next moment, the terrifying gravitational pull of the immense star cluster and the disintegration of the fragmented planet caused the protective zones and the Chaos Sea that submerged it to tremble violently, as if on the brink of total collapse. The massive cross began to bend noticeably.

Yet, no matter what, the protective zones remained stable-for the time being, at least. Now!

Klein felt the Great Old Dominators rushing to breach the barrier. Seizing the opportunity, he directed the projection of the bluish-black door of light into the protective zones, where it scattered into countless starlit fragments.

The Chaos Sea enveloping the protective zone abruptly contracted, retreating back into the shadowy figure on the cross. All that remained was a patch of deep darkness and a few dangerous artifacts.

The protective zones vanished.

They disappeared entirely.

Lord of Mysteries Klein instantly transferred billions of humans, countless other species, and the scenes from the dream to a target planet at the edge of the universe.

It was like a magician's trick-drape a cloth over the table, then whip it away, and the objects underneath were gone.

Within the protective zone, still functioning but with only five minutes left, The Magician Fors, standing in her home in Backlund, suddenly froze for a moment.

She said to Xio, Franca, Anthony, and Ludwig, "There's no need for me to transfer you anymore. We've already reached our destination. Everyone has."

"Uh..." Franca was stunned.

She had thought she would still have one final chance to make a decision.

It wasn't until Madam Magician finished speaking that she, Madam Judgment Xio, Ludwig, and the others realized the environment around them had already changed.

At that moment, The Magician Fors frowned slightly and said, "Enemies are approaching- from space!"

As she spoke, Fors stretched out her right hand. With a burst of dazzling starlight, she conjured a fantastical screen in front of her.

On the screen were shadowy figures traversing different dimensions, as well as faint, unattainably high humanoid shapes, leaping toward the current planet.

Sequence 2 Dimensional Shadow and Sequence 1 Observer of the Painter pathway... and there's more than one of them... Have they discovered Mr. Fool's transfer of the protective zones and seen through the Deceit, locating this planet from a higher dimension and sending their Blessed? While Madam Magician Fors's consciousness resonated, the figures, however, did not directly descend into the current dimension. They stopped instead.

They understood that relying solely on Their angelic powers would not be enough to deal with the numerous and powerful "prey."

They began summoning Visitors, seeking reinforcements.

This was Their habit. They were not mindless creatures driven by instinct to hunt recklessly without considering alliances.

The next second, one grotesque creature after another arrived through Hostels.

Some were women with closed eyes, weaving webs of fate; others wielded illusory, silvery dirks that seemed capable of severing the threads of fate and cutting off branches of the River of Fate.

Some belonged to different species, appearing humanoid or bizarre. All had three heads and six arms, with expressions ranging from malice and rage to sorrowful numbness, compassionate serenity, or blank incompleteness.

Some were radiant beings of starlight with six pairs of wings, while others were colossal transparent dragons, attempting to drive a small asteroid toward the planet at the edge of the universe.

Others were draped in black robes, revealing only writhing snakes or tentacles beneath. Still others had no physical form, existing only as whispers deep within living beings' hearts.

Some wore fresh flower wreaths, appearing beautiful, holding wooden bows and arrows like true deities. Others resembled tree-like sea monsters, covered in slimy blossoms and chaos- slick scales, dotted with brown-green tumors.

There were beings that looked like dark vortices, filled with gleaming white teeth and tendrils of shadow extending outward, crowned with disparate heads. Others were blobs of liquid containing all colors.

Some seemed composed of water-colored time, Their massive forms slowing everything around Them. Others were hunched, ancient to the point of decrepitude, with loose, wrinkled skin blotched with decay. Aside from Their mountainous size, They appeared unremarkable.

Some stood loftily, as if holding up the sky itself to prevent it from collapsing, yet Their abdomens were entirely hollow. Others resembled immense greenish oak trees that seemed to pierce the heavens...

Upon seeing this scene, The Madam Magician Fors's mind was suddenly flooded with information, drawn from Mr. Fool, Ma'am Hermit, The Chariot Lumian the Chariot, and her

own explorations.

Sequence 2 Web Weaver and Sequence 1 Blade of Fate of the Goddess of Fate pathway...

Sequence 2 Sinner and Sequence 1 Angel of Redemption of the Circle of Inevitability pathway...

Sequence 2 Radiant Angel and Sequence 1 Star Dragon of the Tide Scholar pathway...

Sequence 2 Great Old One Attendant and Sequence 1 Voice of the Heart, of the Initiator pathway...

Sequence 2 Cupid and Sequence 1 Leviathan of the Mother Tree of Desire pathway...

Sequence 2 Angel of Devouring and Sequence 1 Chaos Gastric Juices of the Chef pathway...

Sequence 2 Time Giant and Sequence 1 God of Decay of the Monarch of Decay pathway...

Sequence 2 The Supreme or Broken Pillar and Sequence 1 Tree God of the Heretic Spellmaster

pathway...

Madam Magician took a deep breath, turned her head, and smiled at Judgment Xio. "It's not over yet. We still have work to do."

Having spoken, the recently advanced Sequence 1 Key of Stars stepped out of the protective zone and appeared above the habitable planet she had discovered during her previous travels.

She raised her right hand, unveiling a vast and dreamlike starry sky to cover the entire protective zone, sealing it in a defensive barrier.

The coming battle could not be allowed to affect the interior of the protective zone, nor could those evil god Blessed infiltrate it!

No sooner had Fors finished this task than another figure appeared nearby-the Pope of the Church of Evernight, Saint Dabomachie.

Saint Dabomachie, now transformed into a giant dozens of meters tall with elongated limbs, grayish-blue skin, and a single vertical eye on His forehead,

had ascended to Sequence 1 Hand of God in the Warrior pathway. His right hand seemed to be made entirely of glowing orange twilight.

Summoning pure, dense light imbued with orange hues, Saint Dabomachie added another layer of unyielding radiance outside Fors's seal.

Double protection!

As Saint Dabomachie wielded His protective power, yet another figure emerged from the

protective zone.

This was a black-haired, blue-eyed middle-aged man with a stern demeanor, square face, and high nose, cloaked in a dark mantle: William Augustus, the founder of the Loen Kingdom.

William Augustus did not act immediately. He raised His head to observe the tug-of-war between disorder and balance, the evolving order of the battlefield, and the enemy forces' formation, carefully calculating the rules and structures He would impose.

Such decisions could not afford errors. If situations like "Mystery weakens here, while reality grows stronger" were imposed, and the enemy deployed something akin to the ship used in the sea prayer ritual, those very rules might end up limiting their own side's Angels.

The Magician Fors, about to speak to Saint Dabomachie and William Augustus, saw Xio and

Franca appear beside her.

Meeting her gaze, Judgment Xio said calmly, "For me, establishing and maintaining order is fundamentally about protection."

Fors smiled but said nothing. Instead, she turned to Franca.

Franca cleared her throat and replied solemnly, "I'm not the type to hide behind others.

"At a time like this, every bit of strength counts. Every bit of light helps." Given her personality, how could she not have fantasized about being a savior—the kind who signed non-disclosure agreements and remained unsung after the fact? Madam Magician laughed. "Even if you didn't come, I would've summoned you."

Then, through the seal and barriers, she addressed Anthony within the protective zone, "Your job is to placate and maintain stability."

Anthony hesitated briefly before turning to Ludwig and saying, "I'll handle the Trier area."

Without waiting for a response, he entered the sea of collective subconscious.

His expression was heavy, yet tinged with joy.

How wonderful. This time, I can do something. I can placate. I can stabilize the rear for the Angels.

Back then, it may have been naive and laughable, but I didn't join the army for wealth or status-I did it to protect my country and its people...

Ludwig neither followed Anthony nor immediately left the protective zone. Instead, he now held a jewelry box encrusted with countless gemstones and a writhing blob of chaotic liquid.

From across half the universe, Lumian had hurled the Box of the Great Old Ones to him. Staring at the two items, Ludwig's expression fluctuated. After a few seconds, he gritted his teeth and swallowed the chaotic liquid.

Chapter 1163: The Gathering

Backlund.

Justice Audrey stood in the sea of collective subconscious, gazing at the drifting light and shadow and listening to the cacophony of voices. It was as if she were standing at a bustling street corner, feeling the highs and lows of life and the vibrant pulse hidden beneath it all.

She turned her head and smiled at the golden retriever, Susie, by her side.

"Your duty is to placate."

As she finished speaking, Audrey's figure vanished from the protective zone and reappeared silently beside The Magician Fors and Judgment Xio.

"But I'm just a dog..." muttered Susie, left behind in the sea of collective subconscious, her voice carrying a resigned sigh.

Rorsted Archipelago, Bayam.

The Hanged Man Alger sat at the edge of the square outside the Church of the Sea God, silently watching white doves take flight amidst the comings and goings of people.

Suddenly, he heard the voices of a children's choir singing from inside the church: "Break! Break! Break!"

Alger couldn't help but smile faintly.

A howling gale arose, enveloping and lifting him, carrying him upward into the sky.

New City of Silver, within the headquarters cathedral of the Church of The Fool.

The Sun Derrick nodded to the now exceptionally gigantic Waite Chirmont standing beside him.

"The door to the light has appeared," Derrick said.

"This will be a glorious battle," Waite Chirmont with a dark-green sigil tattooed on his bald scalp replied with a grin.

Without further words, Derrick transformed into pure and sacred sunlight, soaring out of the protective zone like a radiant golden sun rising into the sky.

...

Seeing the sun ascend and rise higher into the heavens,

Angel of the Holy Spirit Reinette Tinekerr, who now had a head on her neck, spoke with mild dissatisfaction to Her student, Sharron.

"Those entities are far too hideous.

"Let's curse Them into normalcy."

Temperance Sharron nodded slightly, watching her teacher vanish before her eyes.

She did not follow immediately. Instead, she closed her eyes and silently assessed her own state.

She remembered a teaching her mentor had once imparted to her: "Temperance is not about perpetual suppression; it is about rationally understanding oneself and preparing for an explosive moment when it truly matters."

Now, the time had come!

...

Berserk Sea, aboard the deck of the Future.

Ma'am Hermit Cattleya looked at her first mate, Frank Lee; second mate, Heath Doyle; navigator, Ottolov; and boatswain, Nina. A sudden wave of sentimentality rose in her heart. When she had left the Dawn, her only thought was to grow stronger, build her own fleet, and prove herself to the Queen, regaining her recognition. Later, she began to think about leading her crew and fleet to better futures.

But now, her task was to protect this world-to face and fight against the impending apocalyptic disaster.

"Perhaps this is the fate of a Sage..."

With that thought, The Hermit Cattleya dissolved into a torrent of complex, illusory information, rushing out of the protective zone.

Then, she noticed two similar streams of data surging from Trier.

A sense of peace and quiet joy settled within her heart.

...

Backlund, in his own home.

The Moon Emlyn sat quietly in a chair, staring at a room full of dolls.

He had already learned that the Sequence 1 Beauty Goddess Beyonder characteristic left behind by the Ancestor had not been transferred to the current planet.

This was an unavoidable choice.

The other Great Old Dominators were undoubtedly vying fiercely for the sefirot and the Uniquenesses now, leaving Them too preoccupied to deal with Sequence 1 Beyonder characteristics to the point of personally descending. Once the divine war concluded, if Mr. Fool and other great existences emerged victorious, the Sequence 1 Archangels or corresponding Sealed Artifacts that were transferred would naturally remain safe. If the outcome was the opposite, pre-prepared measures could be employed-cutting losses by ejecting those Beyonder characteristics, avoiding another targeted assault by the Great Old Dominators.

But there was a specific issue- the Mother Goddess of Depravity was not entangled in the chaotic war. She was distancing Herself from the area to acquire new life. If the Beauty Goddess Beyonder characteristic had been transferred with the protective zone, She might very well take the time to come here. In that case, all resistance would be rendered meaningless unless Mr. Fool abandoned the original battlefield.

As his thoughts churned, The Moon Emlyn stood abruptly, black, membranous bat wings unfurling from his back.

The wings flapped as Emlyn ascended into the air, looking down at the ordinary, oblivious Sanguine without godhood below, who had yet to realize the environment had changed.

He circled overhead before heading beyond the protective zone, his vast bat wings seeming to blot out the sky.

Below, several crimson moonbeams emerged from coffins and graves, following The Moon Emlyn.

...

Loen Kingdom, Awwa County, Tingen City.

The Star Leonard stared blankly at the sky, feeling that events were deviating from his

expectations.

He quickly reined in his thoughts and addressed the assembled members of the Blackthorn

Security Company.

"Vacation starts now. Everyone, go home."

"But Deacon, aren't we supposed to deal with possible infiltrations by the Blessed of the evil gods?" asked the team members, clad in red gloves or black trench coats, their faces filled

with confusion.

The Star Leonard reiterated firmly, "Go home immediately.

"This is your mission; this is what you must do."

The Nighthawks exchanged puzzled looks but ultimately obeyed the command. After all, the protective zone was not the real world. Perhaps returning home carried a unique symbolic significance or psychological effect.

As his team departed, Leonard gazed skyward once more.

With his Concealment authority, he could sense one Angel after another gathering there.

Leonard exhaled slowly and closed his eyes, memories of past scenes flashing in his mind-

scenes of Megose's visit to the Blackthorn Security Company.

His figure quickly faded and was transferred outside the protective zone.

"Captain, you see this? We are protecting this world.

"This time, I am not alone. Every Angel is fighting alongside me..."

...

The Star Leonard's figure materialized outside the seals and barriers of the Door pathway, where he saw the old man, Pallez, separate from him and coalesce into a figure nearby.

He also spotted the ascetic-looking Madam Arianna and the youthful-featured yet prematurely gray-haired Antigonus, along with other familiar Angels.

Then, the voice of Red Angel Medici echoed in his ears. "Everyone, I want you to join my

legion."

To become part of the Red of War Legion, combining the powers of all Angels into one unified force rather than fighting individually? The Star Leonard understood Medici's intention.

He did not refuse and nodded in agreement.

Franca also heard Medici's words but did not immediately respond.

It wasn't resistance but rather a thought that occurred to her. Judging by the changes in the Box of the Great Old Ones, Lumian should already be the Origins of

Disaster, Calamity of Destruction, with Jenna and Aurore revived.

That means they are great existences now, existences tied to war.

And I am a member of their team, an ally of the essence of war!

I wonder how extensive the effective range of a legion is for a great existence... Symbolically, it should span the entire universe. But in terms of tangible abilities, it's likely limited...

If I'm still within range, couldn't I share Lumian and their rank and power, becoming a smaller-scale Origins of Disaster, Calamity of Destruction to wreak havoc on this battlefield?

With this thought, Franca sought to "borrow power" on the spot. Unfortunately, she failed.

Is the range not extensive enough, or has some Great Old Dominator used Their symbolism to disrupt Lumian and the team's abilities? Franca muttered under her breath and reluctantly chose to temporarily join Medici's legion.

At the same time, she saw the War Angel, with fiery hair like a burning blaze and clad in blood-stained black armor.

In between Medici's brows, a crimson, dripping banner emblem had already manifested. He had long completed the sacrifice to the essence of war and undoubtedly received its feedback and aid. Otherwise, even with two sets of Weather Warlock Beyonder characteristics, the range of the legion's influence would not have sufficed to connect all the Angels-there were simply too many gathered in such a constrained space spanning about twenty kilometers.

Now, with the backing of the essence of war, He was far better equipped to handle the situation.

Feeling the agreement and participation of one Angel after another, Red Angel Medici looked at the Outer Deity Angels assembling in another dimension and laughed coldly.

His expression was both disdainful and solemn.

Violet flames ignited in His hands.

Once, I followed the Lord, saving humanity and ushering in glory.

Now, I still remain. I will continue to protect it all.

Author's Note: This chapter is a bit short, but I feel it is just the right stopping point for the chapter. More content would be unnecessary.

Chapter 1164: Know Thy Enemy

When vast clusters of suns exploded, tearing apart planets and pulling all matter toward themselves, a pervasive grayish-white fog appeared. Within it stood Klein, wearing a half silk top hat and a long black trench coat, his figure slightly distorted as he faced Supernova Dominator, one of the Great Old Dominators.

At the same time, Klein sensed an almost untouchable shadow emerging from a higher dimension. He scrutinized the Spirit Body Threads, preparing to interfere, manipulate, influence, and disrupt them.

High-Dimensional Overseer!

This was a Great Old Dominator capable of countering abilities such as Parasitism, Marionettes, and Blink. He wielded the corresponding symbol:

Dimensionality!

From higher or lower dimensions, Spirit Body Threads were tangible and real-something that could be touched. Blink only allowed movement on a small scale, while those Parasitized were bound together into one entity.

This rendered the unique, ubiquitous nature of the Lord of Mysteries' avatars ineffective. Combat against the High-Dimensional Overseer could only rely on Klein's true body.

Thus, as long as the battlefield contained the High-Dimensional Overseer, Klein could only leverage Pillar symbolisms while contending with one additional Great Old Dominator. However, in a one-on-one situation, the Dimensionality symbolism of the High- Dimensional Overseer did not completely suppress the Lord of Mysteries' Change symbolism, which included space-time. These forces mutually counteracted each other. Just as the King of Space-Time could hinder the Lord of Dimensions from freely traversing dimensions, Klein could rely on symbolism like Foolishness to turn the tide against the High-Dimensional Overseer. Klein couldn't truly kill Him but could defeat Him, banish Him, and make Him suffer significant losses.

Apart from the High-Dimensional Overseer, three other entities could disrupt the Lord of Mysteries' ability to manifest in countless forms and fight multiple foes simultaneously: Monarch of Decay, Inextinguishable Ravings, and Primordial Hunger.

The Monarch of Decay's symbols of Decay and Certain Death made it so that the death of an avatar equaled the death of the main body, and the decay of an afterimage equaled the decay of the main body.

Inextinguishable Ravings seemed to share His origin with the residual psyche of the Original Creator within the Beyonder characteristics. It was the source of all ravings, capable of ignoring the interference of marionettes, avatars, and afterimages to directly project His voice into sefirot and Uniquenesses, transmitting His madness and implanting His intent. Moreover, He did not have a true physical form but attached Himself to certain objects, causing them to exhibit specific colors or appearances.

Primordial Hunger symbolized the instinct of Convergence. Through this mechanism, He could forcibly pull Klein's true body to His side. Furthermore, if He devoured an avatar or marionette, He could absorb and erase the corresponding abilities, reducing or even temporarily nullifying their symbolic influence.

Without these four Great Old Dominators, Lord of Mysteries Klein would undoubtedly be able to hold off the remaining four on his own. While he might not secure a decisive victory, he would certainly not lose or allow Them to disrupt other battlefields significantly.

If the Mother Tree of Desire were still complete, as the Source of Curses, She would have been fully capable of cursing avatars and marionettes to indirectly curse the true body. Unfortunately, She has currently lost that aspect of symbolism. The uniqueness of the Chained and two of Her

Abomination Beyonder characteristics were still sealed by Klein, and the Tenebrous World resisted Her influence.

A more reality-oriented Great Old Dominator like Supernova Dominator could rely on symbols and concepts like Density, Gravity, and Attraction to influence space-time and distort dimensions. However, for the Lord of Mysteries, who controlled change and could turn falsehood into truth or truth into falsehood, mere indirect interference was sufficient to stall Him without engaging directly.

The Circle of Inevitability wielded symbols of Past, Present, Future, Cycle, and Destiny, which theoretically could impact avatars, marionettes, and the ability to blink. However, it was effectively countered by Klein's combination of the concepts of King of Space-Time, Beacon of Destiny, and Error. If the Lord of Mysteries lacked any of these targeted concepts, the Circle of Inevitability would have had a chance to reverse the suppression or even gain the upper hand. But Klein had all three: the King of Space-Time countered Past, Present, and Future and Beacon of Destiny countered Cycle; and Error countered Destiny.

The Goddess of Fate's symbolisms primarily centered on the domain of fate, particularly conscious manipulation, which made Her an appealing opponent for the Beacon of Destiny's Foolishness symbolism. As for Her other significant symbolism, Eternal Life, Klein had no intention of actually killing Her, so it posed no major concern.

Based on prior intelligence gathering, divinations, and prophecies, Klein has long understood which entities to intercept and which to redirect elsewhere. His hope was to hold off three to four Great Old Dominators on his own, creating opportunities for breakthroughs on other battlefields.

How should one guide the unwanted Great Old Dominators to other places while keeping those intended for containment? Beyond employing Fooling and Deceit, one must also have a general understanding of the goals of these Great Old Dominators.

This was one of the preparations Klein had made over the past month.

The High-Dimensional Overseer desired sefirot related to rules, order, and space-time. Through divination and prophecy, Klein deduced that He sought either the Nation of Disorder or the River of Eternal Darkness. If the Great Old Dominators concentrated Their efforts to press the Lord of Mysteries back into His coffin, the High-Dimensional Overseer would also likely seek to accommodate the Uniquenesses of the Door and Error pathways and take control of Sefirah Castle.

Inextinguishable Ravings was highly likely to covet the Knowledge Moor and aimed to control the Chaos Sea, accommodating the Uniquenesses of The Hanged Man, White Tower, and Visionary pathways.

Primordial Hunger would not miss any opportunities related to chaos or primordial qualities. His objective appeared to be consuming the City of Calamity, ingesting but not digesting the Chaos Sea, and absorbing the Uniquenesses of The Hanged Man pathway and others. However, Klein suspected that Primordial Hunger might lose control over His convergence instinct and directly swallow the Chaos Sea. If this occurred, the situation would become even more complex and troublesome.

The Monarch of Decay was relatively easy to deduce-His goals were either the City of Calamity or the River of Eternal Darkness, though He could only choose one.

The Mother Tree of Desire would prioritize reclaiming the Tenebrous World and its corresponding Uniqueness and Sequence 1 Beyonder characteristics. This was an instinctual drive of Her godhood.

The Circle of Inevitability undoubtedly coveted the Key of Light the most. However, the City of Calamity and the River of Eternal Darkness were also within His scope, as these pathways symbolized destined conclusions and various calamities. Additionally, similar to the High- Dimensional Overseer, if the Lord of Mysteries were defeated in a joint effort, the Circle of Inevitability would not shy away from seizing control of Sefirah Castle and accommodating the Uniquenesses of The Fool and Error pathways.

Supernova Dominator's goals were harder to pinpoint. Klein speculated that He desired the City of Calamity to embody the symbolism of Universal

Catastrophe, the Knowledge Moor to enrich His star systems and civilizations, and the Nation of Disorder to complete the order and rules beyond celestial mechanics. Furthermore, He was likely interested in the Chaos Sea and the Uniquenesses of the Sun and Storm pathways.

The Goddess of Fate similarly prioritized the Key of Light. However, if Sefirah Castle was left vacant, Her goals would align with the Circle of Inevitability. As for the Chaos Sea and the associated Uniquenesses of the White Tower and Visionary pathways, Klein felt there was a certain probability of Her interest.

Having roughly understood these intentions, Klein already had a plan for what to do next. First, he did not Graft the Western Continent's Buddhist Kingdom or the Tenebrous World to somewhere near him. Instead, he proactively detached himself from the astral world. Suddenly, at an infinite height overlooking the entire world, Lord of Mysteries Klein, wearing black gloves, a dark trench coat, and holding a star-encrusted cane, appeared. He was extraordinarily immense, towering over all creation. Raising his right hand, he snapped his fingers with a sharp crack.

With this motion, grayish-white fog immediately enveloped the spirit world, covering the entire universe's spirit world.

Supernova Dominator, High-Dimensional Overseer, and other Great Old Dominators instantly lost Their connection to the spirit world and could no longer exert any influence over it.

The Lord of Mysteries-the Dominator of the Spirit World!

This was a direct utilization of Pillar symbolism!

From that moment on, for a set period, no creature could enter the spirit world without

Klein's explicit permission.

All their abilities, authorities, and symbols related to the spirit world were rendered

ineffective!

The three Pillars differed significantly in how They wielded Their respective symbols. For example, the Mother Goddess of Depravity, as the Dominator of Reality, could not seal off reality to prevent unauthorized entry or expel all adversaries. Such actions were unachievable. She could only impose a continuous weakening effect on targets within reality. However, on the other hand, reality was the foundation of the universe. Unless everything ended, reality would eternally exist. Thus, the Mother Goddess of Depravity possessed the characteristic of indestructibility, never to perish. As long as she wished, She could not be displaced or sealed. While the Lord of Mysteries sealed the spirit world, Lumian, with three heads and six arms, waited for his target to appear.

Since he was not yet dead or collapsing, it was time to execute the next phase of the plan. The plan was: to take the initiative and devour a Great Old Dominator!

If the Great Old Dominators could absorb another sefirah to approach Pillar status, so could

he, the Origins of Disaster, Calamity of Destruction!

Do you Great Old Ones lack sefirot within yourselves? Whatever you can do, I can do too!

As for the indestructibility of your psyche or the potential consequences of devouring you-I'm already

dying, so why should I care?

Lumian had long identified his target for this purpose and made preparations in advance.

For example, he had reinstated the title of Malady God within his Sick Church.

Previously, the Malady God referred to the Monarch of Decay.

Chapter 1165: Two Star Dominions

After sealing off the spirit world and sensing the intrusion of the remaining Great Old Dominators, Klein turned his attention to the Evernight Goddess, who had not yet fully accommodated the River of Eternal Darkness, and the Celestial Master, who was still making final preparations-both masters of a sefirah.

Klein seized the remaining moments to take one crucial action.

Using the authority of the Door pathway, he "transferred" all the remaining people and objects not aligned with the Outer Deities from this star dominion to another, significantly more distant star dominion.

This was both to buy more time for his allies and to scatter the enemy forces, splitting the battlefield and minimizing interference between the symbolisms being utilized in each area. Klein could have replicated the balancing abilities of the Justiciar pathway to evenly split forces across battlegrounds, but this would have had limited effect on the Great Old Dominators and would have hindered his ability to intervene in the other battlefield.

At the level of the Great Old Ones, it was possible to respond to prayers across the universe and exert influence on it as a whole. However, in actual combat, the immediate area of effect was usually limited to a single star system or the radiation zone of a black hole. This level of influence was mainly achieved by reality-oriented symbolisms like those of Supernova Dominator or Calamity of Destruction.

In simpler terms, Lumian could reduce or increase the frequency of disasters across the entire universe or create disasters in any known location, but his sensing range did not exceed a large star system unless pre-established mystical connections existed in those areas.

During combat, Lumian's short-term symbolic impacts also remained mostly confined to this range, with only minor, manageable disruptions spreading throughout the universe. The farther from the battlefield, the weaker the disturbance.

In this context, using the power of the Door pathway to separate the two battlefields by distance effectively reduced Klein's susceptibility to the negative effects of the symbolic influences wielded by Outer Deities like the High-Dimensional Overseer and the Monarch of Decay. At the same time, it preserved his capacity as the King of Space-Time to intervene in the other battlefield when necessary.

This was also a tactic to manipulate the enemies-redirecting Their target objectives and scattering Their actions. Klein could then allocate time to intercept those he wished to confront, avoid those he had to bypass for now, and deceive those he hoped to mislead. Neither Lumian, the Evernight Goddess who was in the process of accommodating the River of Eternal Darkness, nor other sefirah holders like Grisha Adam opposed the Lord of Mysteries' transfer, allowing the star dominion to transform. Lifeless planets and several stars from different directions emerged before them.

With their objectives abruptly removed, the Great Old Dominators immediately prepared to leap through the astral world to pursue them.

None of Them sought to stay behind and confront Lord of Mysteries Klein.

Though many among Them deeply coveted Sefirah Castle, the Uniquenesses of the Fool, Door, and Error pathways, their instincts told Them that it was easier and more practical to pursue the sefirot that had not yet developed full consciousness. Why take the immense risk of engaging a Pillar to seize His sefirot?

Besides, it wasn't as if They could fully accommodate it!

Even if some Great Old Dominator was tempted to target the Lord of Mysteries, They had to consider a harsh reality: They couldn't act alone. And without the Uncertain Mist to coordinate and unify Them into an alliance, none dared bet on receiving support if They stayed behind. If left alone against Klein, the fate of Genie could very well repeat itself— albeit with much greater difficulty.

The roles of hunter and prey could reverse!

As some of the Great Old Dominators entered the astral world, Grisha Adam, in a different star dominion, suddenly showed an expression of pain.

He immediately broke free from the massive cross He was bound to, transforming into a radiant giant whose head reached the astral realm. Beneath His feet lay the Chaos Sea, encompassing all colors and possibilities. Behind Him trailed a long shadow with five heads, while a sun blazed at the back of His head. Storms and lightning swirled around Him, and in His hands, He held a white tower made of books, adorned with brass eyes.

He raised His right hand and pointed toward the astral world. Instantly, abstract concepts and symbolic markers there descended into chaos, delaying the Great Old Dominators from reaching this star dominion.

Lord of the Astral World!

Grisha Adam, temporarily achieving balance through the return of the Uniquenesses of the White Tower and Tyrant pathways, forcibly manifested a state close to that of a Great Old One and employed the most critical symbolism of Omniscience and Omnipotency to disrupt the astral world, buying time.

The Great Old Dominators, now delayed or disoriented in the astral world, or still preparing to enter it, simultaneously encountered Lord of Mysteries Klein.

The Goddess of Fate appeared with three bodies standing side by side, all female in form and dressed in simple but elegant white dresses.

The figure on the left had hollow eyes and swiftly used both hands and an illusory loom to weave silvery drops of destiny into a net, which converged into streams.

These streams flowed to the middle body, which lacked arms, arriving at the present node of the River of Fate, merging into it and surging toward the void's edge.

The figure on the right was headless, holding an illusory silver-black knife in its hands, cutting away portions of the River of Fate's tributaries.

The Weaver of All Fates, the symbol of ultimate judgment, the eternal Goddess of the Future!

As the Goddess of Fate was about to enter the astral world, distorted shadows emerged within the silvery, illusory River of Fate.

They swam from the past and future toward the present node and toward the true form of the Goddess of Fate.

This brought a tolling, causing the flow of the River of Fate to stagnate.

Meanwhile, Supernova Dominator, composed of countless exploding suns, found Himself surrounded by one starry door after another.

These brilliant doors filled the cosmos, bending and shattering under His intense gravitational pull.

Yet, every time a door broke, another appeared in its place, covering the star dominion and blocking the path to the astral world with countless layers of overlapping gates.

Layers upon layers of doors!

The Mother Tree of Desire resembled a humanoid giant tree covered in chaotic scales. Its surface was adorned with enticing crystalline fruits, glistening alluring flowers, various metallic emblems, black hearts, bare tumors, and coins from different civilizations.

At the tree's upper reaches were two heads. The lower head was male, eyes closed, exuding bizarre desires. The upper head was female, with green hair and a face of extraordinary beauty, possessing a charm that spoke directly to affection.

One after another, Kleins wearing half-silk top hats and black trench coats surrounded the Mother Tree of Desire in the void. All were marionettes-dead people, puppets devoid of desire.

Simultaneously participating in three battles, Lord of Mysteries Klein also turned his gaze to the Circle of Inevitability.

This was formed by three bodies arranged in a circle. The one facing left was pitch black, with a sinister, malicious visage seemingly composed of the deepest, most chaotic sins. The one facing forward was silvery, emaciated, and filled with pain. The one facing right radiated pure, redemptive holy light, emanating solemnity and compassion toward all things.

The light of the three bodies intertwined into a silvery-black hue.

After brief deliberation, Klein decided not to stop the Circle of Inevitability from entering the astral world.

This was based on Genie's first hint: "the Circle of Inevitability will bring calamity but is also the universe's most powerful and genuine Angel of Redemption" - a key to surviving the apocalypse.

In this matter, Klein chose to trust Genie. If his side failed, many Great Old Dominators coveting the Nation of Disorder would turn to seize the Magic Wishing Lamp, leveraging its connection to the Uncertain Mist to strike down and devour Him in His weakened state.

For the moment, Klein's battlefield would remain relatively stable, with occasional bursts of change and intensity. However, the other battlefield would inevitably descend into chaos. One of the essences of fate was chaos, and placing the Circle of Inevitability there increased the likelihood of creating opportunities amidst the disorder!

Opting not to intercept the Circle of Inevitability, Klein seized the chance to Blink to Primordial Hunger, who was eager to reach the astral world, tossed a Deceit, and disappeared.

Primordial Hunger was a dark vortex revealing bared white teeth and chaotic liquid encompassing all colors. His exterior no longer featured elongated black shadows with different heads, as they seemed to have been consumed by Himself long ago.

After being struck by Deceit, Primordial Hunger's ring of gaping white teeth snapped twice without finding anything amiss. He ignored the deception and proceeded straight into the astral world.

His illusory stomach gurgled, awaiting the digestion of His most delectable meal.

Grisha Adam's influence on the astral world didn't last long-only two or three seconds before five Great Old Dominators reached their target star dominions through various means.

At that moment, They lost "sight" of the light.

The already dark universe seemed even more deathly still. Distant stars, the radiant giant striding across the Chaos Sea, Lumian with his three heads and six arms as the Origins of Disaster, and other entities were submerged in intense, inky blackness.

An illusory, straight, unfathomable, colorless river flowed forth from the darkness, heading toward the five Great Old Dominators.

Upon its phantom waters, nothing could float. Asteroids attempting to cross the river sank into its depths, yet one figure stood unwavering on its surface.

It was an extraordinarily massive female figure clad in a layered but unadorned black gown, with an iron crown upon Her head and a thin veil covering Her face, rendering Her features indistinct yet imbued with a tranquil beauty.

Her body was studded with points of starlight. Pale wings sprouted from Her back, while two short, darkly furred arms each extended from under Her ribs and armpits, clutching a dusk- orange greatsword and a black, night-like scythe. Her exposed forearms and hands appeared like sculpted jade, cradled an illusory book formed of coiled feathered serpents.

Eternal Darkness!

Evernight Goddess Amanises had finally accommodated the River of Eternal Darkness with the assistance of the lingering consciousnesses of the Dao integrators from the Haoli lineage!

Chapter 1166: Battle Royale

When Amanises became Eternal Darkness, on a distant planet at the edge of the universe, Red Angel Medici was leading an angelic legion. Though fewer in number at Sequence 1 compared to Their enemies, They had more Sequence 2 Beyonders equipped with Grade o Sealed Artifacts as They fought against the invading Outer Deity Blessed.

Within this legion, Azik Eggers suddenly noticed His soul's condition improving while the decay powers nearby were suppressed and weakened. Pale Empress Sia Palenque Eggers experienced the same.

They immediately understood the reason-tinged with both melancholy and relief.

Eternal Darkness had been born.

From now on, the Underworld would no longer be without a master. Eternal rest would have a destination, and even time would have an end!

Across many planets in different star systems, corpses that had been summoned with great difficulty suddenly "slept" once again. Civilizations beleaguered by undead plagues were astonished to find that all their undead creatures had collapsed lifelessly in the wilderness... Among the myriad changes brought by the strengthened symbolism, Eternal Darkness Amanises simultaneously struck at the five Great Old Dominators with Her terrifying dusk- orange greatsword and Her dark, bizarre scythe, while opening the book formed of coiled feathered serpents.

Suddenly, dusk was consumed by darkness, pallor faded into eternal rest, and time and space fell silent-as if they had been swept into that colorless, shadowy river.

The straight river surged forward, aiming to carry the five Great Old Dominators to the ultimate stillness of death.

The final destination was tranquility.

At this moment, watery streams of time appeared ahead of the River of Eternal Darkness.

These emanated from the Monarch of Decay, whose body was the size of a planet, covered entirely in golden plating resembling an alien mummy. Between the gaps of the golden plates, greenish-yellow pus oozed out, slowing the flow of the River of Eternal Darkness and dragging the region's time toward its conclusion.

The Monarch of Decay extended His left hand, which was not covered by gold. It was riddled with blue veins, rotting flesh, yellow-green blood vessels, and deeply wrinkled skin.

This hand blocked the surging Eternal Darkness.

Everything fell still. All light vanished. Two nearby planets were reduced to dust but remained frozen in place.

In the still and unchanging dark silence, a massive sword wreathed in black flames that bound destruction and chaos pierced through the stillness, breaking the silence with its sound.

It came from beyond the darkness, slashing toward the Monarch of Decay, who was still partially trapped by the Eternal Darkness.

Its arrival subtly but terrifyingly altered the deathly stillness, and these changes would manifest upon the Monarch of Decay.

Origins of Disaster Lumian had descended.

As the Sword of Destruction, which drove the still dark silence, was about to strike the Monarch of Decay, silver-black light appeared in Lumian's eyes.

It came from the Circle of Inevitability.

Lumian and the Circle of Inevitability were meeting in the truest sense-after Lumian had become the Calamity of Destruction with only a few minutes left to live.

The mercury-like Present Self of the Circle of Inevitability had, at some unknown moment, contorted into a visage of pain and suffering, clasping its hands before it.

He was using the Sufferer's power to reenact His past torments and impose them upon Lumian.

Almost simultaneously, Lumian felt an unimaginably massive suction force that diverted him and the Sword of Destruction away from the Monarch of Decay, pulling him toward the Circle of Inevitability.

This was the aftermath of the Original Creator's awakening-when portions of sefirot had been torn away and drawn to Earth.

At that time, the Circle of Inevitability had also been affected, enduring great suffering to prevent His sefirah from being forcibly extracted or split. Now, He was imposing that "torment" upon Lumian to draw him closer and protect the Monarch of Decay from serious harm.

If the Mother Goddess of Depravity, Mother Tree of Desire, or Son of Chaos had similar Sufferer powers and used them now, Lumian would have suffered tremors in his sefirah, rendering him weak and incapable of using his powers for a short time-even if his sefirah wasn't wholly extracted or partially consumed.

For now, his attack target was merely forcibly redirected, without any additional effects.

While the Present Self of the Circle of Inevitability wielded the Sufferer's power, the quiet mercury-like River of Fate emerged, and the Future Self selected one tributary, forming a hand seal to anchor it in place.

Lumian's Sword of Destruction struck toward the Circle of Inevitability but narrowly missed, grazing His body.

Meanwhile, Lumian clenched both hands on either side.

Before the Circle of Inevitability, chaos encompassing all colors and possibilities formed a vortex. Behind Him, a black hole with an accretion disk symbolizing His existence emerged out of thin air.

Calamity of Destruction!

Lumian wasn't merely trying to annihilate the Circle of Inevitability within this calamity; he also sought to leverage the destructive effects of the black hole on time and space to delay the High-Dimensional Overseer, Primordial Hunger, and Inextinguishable Ravings, buying more time for the Celestial Master and the God of Steam and Machinery.

Amid the double calamity, the three continuously orbiting bodies of the Circle of Inevitability resembled a small boat in a tempestuous sea, always precariously skimming the vortex and black hole's uncertain regions and weak spots-dangerously close yet never succumbing, as if predestined to remain unaffected here.

Elsewhere, the dark shadow traversing dimensions was slowed by the terrifying black hole and chaotic vortex, taking an entire second longer to ascend dimensions before lunging toward the sefirah holders such as the Celestial Master.

No one could discern what had affected the Inextinguishable Ravings, only that the frenzied voice in their hearts paused for a second before resuming and distancing itself from the Origins of Disaster and Eternal Darkness.

Both Inextinguishable Ravings and the High-Dimensional Overseer deemed sefirot easier to handle than the great existences like Lumian and Amanises-and among those sefirot lay what They desired most. Thus, They stayed behind to help the Monarch of Decay and the Circle of Inevitability to swiftly incapacitate and restrain Their opponents.

They abandoned Their allies and charged straight toward weaker prey that They coveted more intensely.

No, not allies-since the injury and retreat of the Uncertain Mist, They and the Monarch of Decay, as well as the Circle of Inevitability, could not even be considered temporary allies. Primordial Hunger greedily bit into the chaotic vortex, but influenced by the symbolism of the Origins of Disaster, He failed to devour the corresponding abilities and authorities. Nevertheless, He managed to create a gap through His bite, allowing Him to charge toward

His target.

At this moment, Lumian felt a sudden wave of disappointment.

It wasn't because he had only managed to stall the High-Dimensional Overseer, Inextinguishable Ravings, and Primordial Hunger for one second. Rather, his spiritual intuition had finally confirmed one thing: this was not the end of the universe. The Origins of Disaster could not merge with Eternal Darkness to form the Fourth Pillar, symbolizing the

final end!

In other words, it wasn't the birth of the Fourth Pillar that would bring about the end of the universe, but the universe reaching its true apocalypse that would give rise to the Fourth Pillar. The current conditions were not sufficient.

Thus, if the situation became hopeless, Lumian would have no way to surrender himself, allowing the Origins of Disaster to integrate with Eternal Darkness, thereby birthing the Fourth Pillar to drag everyone into death and restart the universe.

He had lost a crucial deterrent.

White mist then enshrouded the star dominion, and Lumian began suppressing the perceptions of all the Great Old Dominators present.

Under the cover of the Fog of War, Lumian, wielding the Sword of Destruction, projected his thoughts into the mind of Eternal Darkness Amanises. "Become my ally."

Amanises, holding the dusk-orange greatsword, the dark scythe, and the strange book, hesitated not at all. She gently nodded and replied, "Okay."

The moment she agreed, Her perception was restored, and She shared in all of Lumian's abilities and authorities-but not his symbolisms. It wasn't entirely impossible to share symbolisms, but the sharer could only utilize them to a limited extent.

The same applied to Lumian.

Elsewhere on the battlefield, the High-Dimensional Overseer, wielding the symbolism of

Truth, was unaffected by the Fog of War. He lowered His spatial dimensions and appeared before the Nation of Disorder's 33 levels.

The Celestial Thearch's projection was just shy of completing its preparations and couldn't react in time. At that moment, the decayed figures wandering across the Knowledge Moor all gathered behind the Celestial Master.

The God of Steam and Machinery, Stiano, sat inside a formation. Across from Him was something He had painstakingly constructed over a long period, specifically designed to temporarily wield the Uniqueness of the Hermit pathway.

It was a massive figure draped in a black cloak. Beneath the hood, the figure's visage shimmered with cold metallic light, with red beams shooting from its eyes.

At last, the Celestial Master opened His eyes and stood up.

He grew incomparably massive, forcing the High-Dimensional Overseer to look up at Him

first.

An infinite height away, a pair of indifferent, clear, emotionless eyes appeared, seeming to contain an entire universe.

Under His gaze, the Celestial Master rapidly thinned, becoming a paper figurine and melding

into the surrounding scenery as part of a painting.

This was the Lord of Dimensions, the Eye Overlooking the Mortal Realm, the source of all

illusions, and the Creator of the Painting World!

The Celestial Master, now part of the painting as a paper figurine, swiftly turned incorporeal, transforming into a torrent of complex and massive information, thereby breaking free from the confines of the "painting."

Information was not restricted by lower dimensions.

Humans were conglomerations of information, and paintings were as well!

With the Celestial Master buying time, the Celestial Thearch's projection finally completed

His final step. Holding a brass book, He stood up, His grand voice echoing in layers and rapidly transmitting His intent, "The Three Realms and Six Paths shall unite as one!"

In an instant, all dimensions-higher, lower, and the current one-became interconnected, as though overlaid with layer upon layer of glass barriers.

As a result, the High-Dimensional Overseer could no longer increase dimensions unscathed, nor could the Celestial Thearch's projection lower dimensions without maintaining His influence on the battlefield.

With their companions' resistance in place, the Buddhist Kingdom of Light fully retracted, transforming into a massive golden Buddha that filled the heavens and the earth, though it appeared somewhat illusory.

Within the Tenebrous World, countless black shadows gathered, coalescing into a pitch-black

fiend dripping with viscous fluid. The fiend had two heads-one belonging to the Master of the Shadow Cottage and the other to Farbauti.

Chapter 1167: Inextinguishable Ravings

As the pitch-black fiend fully materialized, a terrifying raving echoed from deep within, as if originating from the very source of existence.

This awakened madness within the sefirah itself caused all negative emotions and rampant desires to explode uncontrollably. Whether it was the Master of the Shadow Cottage's head or Farbauti's, both instantly lost Their ability to think, Their vision filled with twisted crimson and flickering black shadows.

Simultaneously, this terrifying raving resonated equally from the sefirah, Uniqueness, and Beyonder characteristics of every living being within the star dominion.

The Celestial Master froze in the void, while the decayed figures gathered within the Knowledge Moor simultaneously raised their heads and let out pained howls.

Behind the Celestial Thearch's projection, similar figures with veiled faces emerged one after another, their hair and beards bristling in agitation.

The illusory golden Buddha trembled as if on the verge of shattering.

The Philosophical Essence, the Inextinguishable Ravings, the Symbolism of Life's Spirit, and the Eternal Consciousness!

The raving primarily awakened the spiritual imprint of the Original Creator, which resided within all sefirot, Uniqueness, and Beyonder characteristics. No one could escape it; no one could remain unaffected!

However, compared to those sefirot, Uniqueness, and Beyonder characteristics directly derived from the Original Creator, the Tenebrous World was much less affected in this regard. This was because it had been torn from the Mother Tree of Desire, rather than a product split from the Original Creator.

Even so, the Abyss and the Chained pathways—heavily laden with desires and malice—were highly volatile. The Master of the Shadow Cottage and Farbauti, lacking the critical Uniquenesses, were already the weakest among the four quasi-Old Ones. As a result, the pitch-black fiend nearly disintegrated and lost control, becoming utterly powerless for a moment.

Compared to the Tenebrous World, Great Old Dominators like the High-Dimensional Overseer and the Monarch of Decay were less impacted by the terrifying raving, barely able to endure it.

This was because They were not direct descendants of the Original Creator's three children but offspring of the union between the Original Creator and the Mother Goddess of Depravity. With an intermediary layer, the spiritual imprint of the Original Creator within the sefirot, Uniqueness, and Beyonder characteristics was relatively weak.

For Them, this was an opportunity!

Fortunately, after a brief moment of chaos, the Celestial Master and the Celestial Thearch's projection began to unleash Their powers wildly and irrationally upon the outside world. One flooded the region with an ocean of knowledge, while the other distorted all surrounding concepts, authorities, and symbolisms.

When the effects of the Inextinguishable Ravings subsided, the Master of the Shadow Cottage and Farbauti were astonished to find Themselves still alive, with Their other allies similarly unscathed.

Neither the High-Dimensional Overseer nor Inextinguishable Ravings had managed to seize the opportunity or achieve Their objectives.

As long as the Key of Light existed and retained a measure of consciousness without succumbing to madness, He would naturally bring good fortune to Himself and His companions.

He was the symbolism of fate!

…

The influence of Inextinguishable Ravings extended across this star dominion. Even Eternal Darkness Amanises was not spared, feeling a madness from the source that seemed to want to seize Her consciousness and claim Her body.

Amanises immediately put Herself into a state of slumber, letting Her thoughts, spirit, and even the madness within Her sefirot fall into stillness to escape the influence.

The Monarch of Decay, understanding what was happening, seized the opportunity to release a vast and overwhelming suction force from His golden-plated body.

This was the power of Beyonder characteristic convergence from His sefirot!

The force could pull every being within the star dominion toward Him!

The Monarch of Decay indiscriminately activated this convergence, unwilling to waste time allowing the Fog of War to decay and die naturally. Both Eternal Darkness and Origins of Disaster were closer to Him than other Great Old Dominators or sefirot and would reach Him first.

The still-slumbering Amanises passed through the Fog of War and was instantly drawn to the front of the Monarch of Decay.

The Monarch of Decay immediately stopped the convergence, preventing other Great Old Dominators or sefirot from interfering with His upcoming attempt.

He extended His massive, rotting left hand, yellow-green and veined with blue, pressing it toward Eternal Darkness Amanises from a distance.

Sure hit, certain death!

But as the Monarch of Decay reached out His hand, Eternal Darkness Amanises transformed into Origins of Disaster Lumian.

The moment Lumian sensed the effects of the convergence, he realized the Monarch of Decay's intent. Using the authority subordinate to the essence of war, he swapped positions with Amanises.

They were a team, and their positions could be exchanged at any time!

Now, it was Lumian who faced the rotting left hand.

Like the Outer Deities, Lumian was barely affected by the Inextinguishable Ravings. This wasn't because the spiritual imprint of the Original Creator within his sefirot, Uniqueness, and Beyonder characteristics hadn't been awakened. On the contrary, as one of the Calamity pathways prepared for the Original Creator's resurrection, the madness within him was the most intense. However, the incomplete mirrored Original Creator symbolism within him had corresponding masculine and feminine consciousnesses that were actually strengthened under the influence of the ravings.

This enhanced consciousness and symbolism of the mirrored Original Creator controlled the awakened spiritual imprint, allowing Lumian to retain his ability to think and fight, though it significantly shortened the fragile balance within him.

Facing the inevitable strike imbued with certain death, Lumian's main head and the face of Aurore both turned to look at the Monarch of Decay.

His other head rotated as well, alternating between the faces of Alista Tudor and Cheek. Their gazes reflected the Monarch of Decay's form into a deep mirror world, where celestial bodies rapidly began to form around Him.

Under the lingering effects of the terrifying ravings, the sefirot, Uniqueness, and Beyonder characteristics of the Monarch of Decay suddenly erupted into an indescribably horrifying spiritual storm.

This came from the spiritual imprint of the Original Creator.

Normally, the Monarch of Decay could endure the resulting tremors and influence, as His spiritual imprint of the Original Creator was not strong due to being a child of the Original Creator and the Mother Goddess of Depravity.

But this was not a normal situation. Lumian forcibly activated the incomplete mirrored Original Creator symbolism, further amplifying the spiritual imprint within the Monarch of Decay. And then, disaster struck.

Origins of Disaster!

Lumian simultaneously utilized this symbolism!

The Monarch of Decay, swept up entirely by the spiritual storm, fell into chaos. His outstretched left hand froze, torn between continuing the attack and retreating to end His own life, aiding the triumph of the madness within.

Seeing this, Lumian smiled and shared the powers of the now-awakened Eternal Darkness Amanises, striking the Monarch of Decay with a dusk-orange greatsword of bound destruction, a vortex of chaos, a decelerating blade of twilight, and a deathly blackness of pallor and tranquility.

These forces both repelled each other and exhibited strange fusion.

As the horrifying transformation was about to occur, all of Lumian and Amanises' abnormalities vanished, and the dense white mist before them dissipated.

This region reverted to the moment before Lumian created the Fog of War, before the Monarch of Decay fell into madness and chaos.

Circle Inhabitant!

…

A shadowy vortex, rimmed with sharp teeth, did not linger near Lumian but instead raced toward the enormous luminous figure upheld by the Chaos Sea.

He was heading to devour Grisha Adam!

This was a Deceit from the Lord of Mysteries Klein.

Against Primordial Hunger, the symbolism of Foolishness had little effect, but Deceit did. Klein exploited Primordial Hunger's instinct for convergence and desired target, forcibly guiding Him to seek the Chaos Sea He could merely control rather than the City of Calamity He could accommodate.

This gave Grisha Adam, who had achieved temporary balance, time to hold off Primordial Hunger, while other Great Old Dominators would likely target weaker sefirot, avoiding the truly great existences. This, paired with the birth of Eternal Darkness, allowed the Knowledge Moor and the other three sefirot to hold off three Great Old Dominators, giving Origins of Disaster Lumian a chance to face the Monarch of Decay one-on-one.

This was the intended plan, though inevitable developments and unexpected variables arose. Now, however, something had changed: The Circle of Inevitability had begun aiding the Monarch of Decay, forcing Amanises to remain and join Lumian, leaving the four sefirot to fend off two Great Old Dominators on Their own.

Crack, crack. Primordial Hunger continued devouring the luminous figure and chaos before Him, only to grow hungrier the more He ate.

It was all fake, all mere envisioned illusions!

Suddenly, the Chaos Sea quaked, and Grisha Adam's enormous luminous figure wavered, sinking halfway into the depths.

Inextinguishable Ravings!

The attack, which awakened the spiritual imprint of the Original Creator, had an extraordinary effect on Grisha Adam, inheritor of the Primordial God Almighty's titles of Creator and the Omniscient and Omnipotent One.

The madness that erupted within the luminous figure rivaled that of Lumian, who accommodated the City of Calamity, but without the relevant Original Creator symbolisms to suppress it, Grisha Adam fell into chaos.

Primordial Hunger did not seize the opportunity to devour Him but instead paused and began consuming the voices echoing within His own mind.

They tasted rather good.

Amid the undulating Chaos Sea, Amon, donning a pointed soft hat and classical black robe, leaned against a massive cross, tossing a crimson sphere seemingly composed of the concept of beauty, filled with countless shadows of people, and catching it again.

Glancing at the battle outside the Chaos Sea, Amon clicked His tongue and chuckled to Himself.

'Why am I here?

'I should be causing mischief outside the protected zones.

'Unexpectedly, I can still participate in battles of this caliber.'

Chapter 1168: Easily Triggered Malice and Desire

When the Inextinguishable Ravings reverberated, targeting the spiritual imprint of the Original Creator, Amon, who had long since transitioned to the Inevitability pathway, was largely unaffected. His Sequence 1 identity as the Angel of Redemption was fully capable of suppressing the madness and chaos originating from the Sequence 2 Trojan Horse of Fate.

Under the protection of the Chaos Sea, Amon patiently observed the battlefield, especially where the four sefirot were engaged in fierce combat with two Great Old Dominators.

He waited for an opportunity-perhaps only a single chance.

Patience was a virtue He had always possessed.

…

On a distant planet.

Leading the angelic legion, Medici found the situation improving after weathering the initial two waves of attacks.

More Angel-level Beyonders left their protected zones to join the battle, including ancient Angels like Ariehogg and Hermes, who had previously remained hidden, as well as the remaining Western Continent cultivators who had finally understood the gravity of the situation. The invading Outer Deity Blessed were disorganized, forming only small, scattered groups of a few to a dozen at most. Furthermore, They seemed to be rejected by the spirit world itself!

Except for the subordinates of the High-Dimensional Overseer and those with limited access to the astral world, the rest had lost Their ability to Teleport and Blink. Even the Beyonder powers derived from the Inevitability pathway angels' Contractee had largely failed, as Their contractual partners were mostly spirit world creatures.

These Outer Deity Blessed had also lost Their spiritual intuition and Their ability to quickly recover spirituality via the spirit world, among other disadvantages.

Red Angel Medici, overseeing the battlefield, quickly identified the key targets for the next phase: Dimensional Shadows and Observers.

After a dozen seconds, He found an opening.

The entire angelic legion, originally blocking the protected zones, suddenly vanished, leaving behind only a barrier of light and seals of starlight.

The invading Outer Deity Blessed were momentarily stunned. What They truly desired was the Angel-level Beyonder characteristics.

Their prepared attacks landed on the barrier of light, causing it to tremble violently but not shatter completely.

The angelic legion reappeared in a corner of the sky battlefield, beneath the thin shadowy figure lurking in an inaccessible height.

Teleport!

Mass Teleportation!

Immediately, several Angels in the legion acted according to pre-arranged mental channel communications.

The Magician Fors extended her hands, creating a dazzling, dreamlike door of starlight at an inaccessible height.

She forcibly opened a door to a higher dimension.

Antigonus swiftly made a wish and realized it. "My wish is for most of the Observer's revival arrangements to fail."

He avoided wishing for "all" revival arrangements to Rewards fail, wary that some might be miracles beyond His level to disrupt, potentially warping the entire wish.

As long as most of the opponent's revival setups were neutralized, forcing Him to retreat and spend more time reviving, the strategic objective would be achieved!

The faster the revival arrangement, the easier it was to disrupt. Those beyond Antigonus' miracle and possibly involving higher dimensions would likely require more complex, secretive processes, consuming additional time for a Sequence 1 Observer.

This was typical logic, though unforeseen exceptions could occur-the target might have arrangements involving higher levels or means to quickly revive Himself, Regardless, it wasn't Antigonus' responsibility to deal with those.

As a legion member, He only needed to fulfill His assigned task.

In the territories of the Life School of Thought and the Aurora Order, two mercury-colored serpents had already been prepared. One blessed Red Angel Medici, while the other, using the open dimensional door, imposed a heavy misfortune upon the target.

This arrangement handled unforeseen circumstances.

Justice Audrey; the ancient dragon, Ariehogg; a massive rabbit and other Angels of the Spectator pathway hovered above the legion, Placating each member's minds to counter the terrifying voices echoing within.

Meanwhile, Angels like The Star Leonard and Saint Viève intercepted nearby Outer Deity Blessed, preventing Them from aiding Their targets.

The entire legion functioned like a seamlessly coordinated machine, each part performing its role with precision and order.

Demoness of Catastrophe Franca shared her Demoness's black flames with Medici, watching as the Red Angel's iron-black eyes swung His terrifying greatsword bound with destruction toward the Observer.

The Observer immediately fled to another dimension, but behind Him, one starlight door after another opened, keeping Him tethered to reality.

The black-flame greatsword of destruction slashed through the starlight doors, finally striking the Observer.

The Observer twisted and disintegrated, becoming illusory.

This was not his true body-it was a self-created illusion!

Crack!

A faint, almost inaudible sound of shattering echoed. Medici's Sword of Destruction had struck the connection between the illusory self and the true body, hitting a weak point.

The illusory Observer was ignited by the Fire of Destruction, and the true body, far away in another dimension, also caught fire with horrifying black flames!

The Observer let out a cry of pain, His aura rapidly weakening.

Although He was not killed outright, He suffered serious injuries. All His revival and recovery setups had been rendered useless.

His luck was abysmal.

Without hesitation, the Observer ascended dimensions again, retreating from the battlefield and never returning.

He feared being pursued in His weakened state and worried that His greedy allies might secretly shift Their targets to Him.

After all, a Sequence 1 Beyonder characteristic was at stake!

The angelic legion, having succeeded in their assault, disappeared once more, avoiding further encirclement and attacks from more Outer Deity Blessed.

They returned outside the protected zone, where Saint Dabomachie repaired the barrier of light by driving an orange greatsword into it.

…

The star-cluster-like Supernova Dominator observed the endless, layered barriers of doors blocking His way. Without hesitation, He caused several supernovae to erupt simultaneously.

A vast, ferocious sea of brilliant light swept through the region, consuming all the doors and wreaking havoc on the surrounding spirit world.

This cleared all obstructions to the astral world and even helped the Mother Tree of Desire eliminate several Kleins wearing half-height silk top hats and black trench coats.

Suddenly, at the edge of the terrifying sea of light, a Klein appeared. Raising his right hand, he snapped his fingers.

The supernovae erupting from Supernova Dominator underwent an immediate Change-an error in their state. They began to collapse violently toward a single point.

This immense gravitational collapse pulled the Supernova Dominator's star-cluster form, threatening to create an unimaginably massive black hole.

The Klein who snapped his fingers was quickly consumed by the sea of light, evaporating with no resistance. But the Supernova Dominator was forced to stabilize His structure, lest the intense gravity and exaggerated explosions destroy His body.

When He finished, the endless, layered doors reappeared around Him.

Klein's primary focus was directed at the Goddess of Fate, attempting to leverage restraint to find an opportunity to severely wound and drive away this eldest daughter of the Mother Goddess of Depravity, even in a one-against-three situation.

At this moment, the Mother Tree of Desire, relying on the symbolism of Desire, had already located the true body of Lord of Mysteries Klein. However, Klein paid no heed to this discovery, instead swiftly Grafting the surging desires in his heart onto various marionettes one by one.

Some of these marionettes became greedy, others furious, others filled with love, and still others overwhelmed by longing. Yet, they were quickly released from manipulation and died on the spot.

The remaining marionettes continued to blockade the Mother Tree of Desire.

Almost simultaneously, the shadows wandering the River of Fate suddenly surged upward, forming a massive black trench coat.

Foolishness!

Klein wielded the symbolism of Foolishness against the Goddess of Fate!

…

In the battlefield where the four sefirot clashed with the two Great Old Dominators, the High-Dimensional Overseer had already seen through the truth. From a higher dimension, He discovered the weaknesses within the aggregate forms of the Celestial Master and the Celestial Thearch's projection.

He swiftly ascended to the tenth dimension, intending to directly disrupt the internal connections of these aggregates from there.

At this moment, the Celestial Master swung His horsetail whisk.

A vast flood of knowledge spanned multiple dimensions and poured into the mind of the High-Dimensional Overseer.

This knowledge was not only vast and complex, making it impossible for even a Great Old Dominator to fully absorb in a short time, but it also activated sequentially, transforming into grotesque and bizarre illusory creatures that tore at the High-Dimensional Overseer's thoughts, consciousness, and spirit.

These creatures even instigated rebellion among the High-Dimensional Overseer's pre-existing knowledge, causing them to become animated and mutinous.

Demons of Knowledge, the Secrets of Madness!

The High-Dimensional Overseer immediately fell into chaos, trapped in a battle against Himself.

His turmoil brought about changes in all dimensions.

The illusory, coiled strings around Him unfurled and formed a painting that enveloped the Celestial Master and the Celestial Thearch's projection.

As the Celestial Master and the projection entered the painting, it became filled with suns, planets, and a variety of rules and principles.

The High-Dimensional Overseer did not expect this to seal the two sefirot but merely set the exit in a concealed location to buy time and suppress both the rebellion of His own knowledge and the influx of external information.

The golden Buddha noticed this and immediately sought to reboot the process to return the Celestial Master and the Celestial Thearch's projection to the real world.

But before He could complete this task, distorted figures began to emerge from His golden body - Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, Arhats, and Wisdom Kings. These were the lingering spirits of the former Dao integrators.

They had all been awakened and corrupted!

This was the effect of Inextinguishable Ravings.

He was the symbolism of the spirit of living beings!

For aggregates composed of multiple spirits, Inextinguishable Ravings were Their nemesis!

Conversely, Eternal Darkness could put chaotic and complex spirits into slumber.

The pitch-black fiend faced an even graver fate.

Countless shadows emerged, gnawing at its own body. The Master of the Shadow Cottage and Farbauti could only exert all Their effort to suppress and fight against Themselves, unable to do anything else.

A tranquil and silent darkness spread from the distance, soothing the chaos of the golden Buddha and the pitch-black fiend, allowing these two sefirot to barely escape Their predicament.

However, this darkness was swiftly disrupted by the Monarch of Decay.

Realizing They would have to endure the effects of Inextinguishable Ravings on Their spirits repeatedly and that Amanises's assistance might not always be as timely as it was now, the Master of the Shadow Cottage and Farbauti exchanged glances, Their eyes burning with resolute malice.

Time to risk everything!

They would make sure Their devourers paid a heavy price!

The pitch-black fiend immediately triggered an explosion of all the desires it could sense in His surroundings.

The concentrated desires gathered by Inextinguishable Ravings detonated. Unable to find the Knowledge Moor temporarily, He shifted His target to the Tenebrous World.

For Him, this was not an optimal choice, one He would usually avoid-but it was still an option!

With desire ignited and unable to care about anything else emerging from the depths of the pitch-black fiend's heart, it transformed into frenzied thoughts and formless consciousness that ravaged Farbauti and the Master of the Shadow Cottage's souls, seeking to overwhelm Them quickly.

Farbauti and the Master of the Shadow Cottage burst into laughter.

This was exactly what They wanted!

They seized Their final moments of clarity to curse Themselves and everything attached to Them.

Everyone would die together!

Blood-colored flames erupted across the pitch-black fiend's body, transforming It into a gigantic rabbit while turning the previously formless Inextinguishable Ravings into the rabbit's consciousness and spirit.

The blood-colored flames continued to burn, intent on consuming all life in the vicinity.

From within the Chaos Sea, Amon observed the scene. Though surprised by Farbauti and the Master of the Shadow Cottage's choice, He still stood up.

He had waited for this opportunity!

Raising His hand, He used pre-obtained authority to retrieve an item from Sefirah Castle.

It was the Uniqueness of the Chained pathway!

This Uniqueness bore the corruption of the Mother Tree of Desire, which even Lord of Mysteries Klein could not remove in the short term. It was also a vital component of the Tenebrous World, capable of connecting the Mother Tree of Desire and the Tenebrous World, which were originally one entity.

Now, Amon sought to use this connection to transfer the damage inflicted upon the Tenebrous World to the Mother Tree of Desire, just as He had once dealt with the Uncertain Mist.

He had not anticipated Farbauti and the Master of the Shadow Cottage's rapid self-destruction but had merely intended to exploit the injuries inflicted upon the Tenebrous World to achieve His objective. Now that the situation had changed, He was determined to seize the opportunity.

Chapter 1169: Assistance

Amon's monocle radiated a dazzling light.

He vanished from behind the enormous cross within the Chaos Sea, wandering the astral world to roam into the deep black void just two lunar distances away from the Tenebrous World.

At that moment, the golden Buddha had also been caught in the indiscriminate explosion of desires triggered by Farbauti and the Master of the Shadow Cottage. However, fortune was on His side; the desire occupying His thoughts was primarily one of "universal salvation and relief from suffering." As a result, He only froze momentarily before becoming even more fervent in His participation in the battle. In His hands, He conjured a massive tricolor wheel of mercury, lapis lazuli, and deep black, inscribed with complex patterns and symbols.

Amidst the grand sermon-like chanting, a nearly formless River of Fate emerged, drawn into the enormous divine wheel, which began to turn toward a particular symbol.

This River of Fate belonged to Inextinguishable Ravings!

Under its influence, Inextinguishable Ravings, who had been cursed to have a rabbit's consciousness and spirit, could not free Himself from the pitch-black fiend, found Himself unable to escape. It was as though destiny itself had entangled Him there, forcing Him to endure even fiercer curse damage as blood - colored flames ignited Him.

Even for these great existences, fate retained its mysterious power!

This caused all sentient beings in the current star dominion to experience chaotic consciousness and disoriented spirits. The disturbance gradually spread outward to other star dominions, weakening as it extended until it eventually dissipated.

Inextinguishable Ravings, the symbol of consciousness and spirit!

Meanwhile, on the other side, the High-Dimensional Overseer in a higher dimension, along with the Celestial Master and the Celestial Thearch's projection trapped within the dimensional painting, were not fully consumed by the explosion of desires. They only entered a brief state of stagnation.

Amon raised both hands, bringing forth a tiny illusory figure wrapped in layers of bandages, thorns, and roses, allowing it to float before Him.

The Chained Uniqueness.

Gazing at the Uniqueness, Amon keenly sensed its profound mystical connection with the Tenebrous World and the Mother Tree of Desire. He prepared to use the authority of the Error pathway to elevate this connection into one akin to that between an avatar and its true body, or oneself and oneself-allowing the damage and consequences to be transmitted to the Mother Tree of Desire.

Amon tilted His head and glanced toward the direction of the Chaos Sea. Clicking His tongue, He gently shook His head.

To Him, the apocalypse had to end in victory. Even if most of the sefirot were lost, and civilization continued on the peripheral planet at the universe's edge, it would merely be a comforting delusion - possibly just a temporary postponement of the apocalypse.

This was because the victory of the Great Old Dominators did not signify the end but symbolized a seismic shift in the cosmic landscape. After seizing the sefirot They desired, would They not accommodate them? Once accommodated, powerful entities comparable to the Pillars would emerge!

By then, if the Circle of Inevitability accommodated the Key of Light, Amon Himself would no longer dare leave the planet and could only survive tenuously under the protection of the Lord of Mysteries.

Given the premise of failure, this was the optimal outcome. If the Mother Goddess of Depravity were to mend and recover, allowing Her to fulfill the contract and aid the Primordial God Almighty's return, even the Lord of Mysteries would face a crisis.

These two capable and willing Pillars could sign a contract through the Notary pathway, cooperating sincerely enough to dismantle and seal the Lord of Mysteries, ensuring the Celestial Worthy could never resurrect!

In such a scenario, Lord of Mysteries Klein might not be able to win but could perhaps avoid destruction. However, the peripheral planet at the universe's edge would be left entirely unprotected.

Amon retracted His gaze and looked at the Chained Uniqueness before Him, chuckling softly. "Only I steal from others. When have others ever dared rob me?"

Before His voice faded, Amon's monocle emitted an even more dazzling brilliance.

This transformed the surrounding void into light, ushering in a white day.

…

Lord of Mysteries Klein was just about to wield the symbolism of Foolishness against the Goddess of Fate when he suddenly dissolved into shadows, sinking back into the River of Fate's main current and tributaries. He returned to his strategy of interference, obstruction, and delay.

This was because he had agreed to Amon's request to use the Uniquenesses of the Error and Door pathways.

It was also because he had received corresponding information from the spirit world and decided to shift his primary focus to the Mother Tree of Desire.

The grotesque, chaotic tree adorned with scales of chaos had been blinded to spiritual premonitions, unable to gather information from the spirit world. Thus, She remained unaware of the developments on another battlefield-until She saw the many Kleins rise into the air, spreading their arms to project starlight- dyed bluish-black doors before them. Only then did a sense of foreboding strike Her.

Klein had reinforced the mystical connections and corresponding symbolisms that Amon had "reconstructed," linking them across countless star dominions to the current battlefield!

Before the Mother Tree of Desire could respond, the familiar roaring of Inextinguishable Ravings reverberated through Her psyche, wreaking havoc on Her consciousness and spirit.

Then, blood-colored flames engulfed Her, and She let out a howl of pain. Her massive arboreal body began collapsing, morphing into a giant rabbit with scales of chaos.

Klein had anticipated a similar scenario but had not expected the Mother Tree of Desire to be so severely injured. Just as he could not foresee the instability of the pitch-black fiend's emotional state, which had exploded at the slightest provocation.

As he prepared to seize the opportunity to seal or even slay the Mother Tree of Desire, the chaos-scaled rabbit erupted with ferocious aggression and greed.

She exploited the cursed mystical connection against Herself, unabashedly releasing the gathered forces to drag Herself toward the Tenebrous World battlefield!

The Mother Tree of Desire vanished into the astral world, bypassing Klein's attempts to block Her.

Every event has both a good side and a bad side; this was a fundamental rule of the universe, and the reverse was equally true.

Klein's marionettes raised their coats and extended their right hands into the void, attempting to Graft the mystical connection between the Mother Tree of Desire and the Tenebrous World onto one of the marionettes, hoping to return the rabbit with scales of chaos without Her realizing it.

At that moment, crimson moonlight descended, and an illusory, slightly damaged oak tree grew from the mystical connection between the Mother Tree of Desire and the Tenebrous World, solidifying the corresponding symbolism.

Klein's attempt to Graft failed.

Mother Goddess of Depravity!

The Mother Goddess of Depravity had assisted the Mother Tree of Desire remotely!

Klein was both surprised and unsurprised.

He was unsurprised because he had long known that the Mother Goddess of Depravity and the Mother Tree of Desire had signed a contract witnessed by the Primordial God Almighty. The latter had sacrificed the Tree of Shadows to help the former bypass barriers. The former now owed assistance, which She could provide by exerting influence remotely from the astral world through the corresponding contract.

What surprised Klein was the speed at which the Mother Goddess of Depravity had recovered, having reset Her state and healed Her injuries faster than he had anticipated, no longer worried about Lumian's influence. Though She still needed to remove the suppression of the symbolism of destruction to fully heal, She was already daring enough to intervene in the battlefield remotely-a true testament to Her symbolism of New Life.

Naturally, the Mother Goddess of Depravity was still weakened from using the Chaos Primogenitor's special symbolism. Until She was fully healed, She would not descend directly while bearing dual negative impacts.

With this interference, Klein failed to stop the Mother Tree of Desire. The massive rabbit with scales of chaos leapt from the astral world to the burning Tenebrous World.

Weakened and desperate, She let out a resounding roar, awakening the survival instincts of all sentient beings in the region.

In an instant, the golden Buddha turned and fled far away. Amon, clutching the Chained Uniqueness, wandered back behind the enormous cross in the Chaos Sea. The High-Dimensional Overseer, along with the Celestial Master and the Celestial Thearch's projection, also chose to retreat for a moment.

Within the Tenebrous World, the heavily cursed Inextinguishable Ravings developed certain thoughts and emotions.

His current state was dire...

Among the Great Old Dominators, there were still some who could accommodate His associated sefirah...

A weakened hunter could become prey...

Driven by His overwhelming survival instincts, Inextinguishable Ravings Instinctively fled the Tenebrous World, attempting to return to formlessness and escape to another star dominion to hide.

Without interference from the golden Buddha, His attempt succeeded.

At this moment in the Tenebrous World, the consciousness and spirits of the Dao integrators had already been utterly consumed, likewise for Farbauti. The Mother Tree of Desire seized the opportunity, using Her powers of convergence to forcibly absorb the shadowy world.

Then, in Her form as a colossal rabbit, She hugged the Tenebrous World and fled into the astral world without any hesitation, leaving everything else behind.

Severely injured, She no longer cared about recovering the Chained of Abyss Uniquenesses or their corresponding Beyonder characteristics. All She desired was to hide and recover while fully accommodating the Tenebrous World!

Everything had happened so quickly that by the time the Mother Tree of Desire disappeared from the star dominion, the efforts of Origins of Disaster Lumian and Eternal Darkness Amanises to block Her had just arrived. Klein, whose form had been flickering due to the interference of the Mother Goddess of Depravity, finally stabilized and reappeared.

Klein instantly assessed the overall situation and realized that despite the temporary loss of the Tenebrous World, His side had gained the upper hand-the three sefirot needed to deal with one Great Old Dominator.

However, vigilance was still required. Inextinguishable Ravings, despite fleeing in a burst of survival instincts, might surreptitiously return to observe the situation. If Klein's side had not gained a decisive advantage by then, He might rejoin the battle. Thus, time was of the essence.

Klein planned to continue delaying the Goddess of Fate and Supernova Dominator while pursuing the Mother Tree of Desire. He aimed to reclaim the Tenebrous World while She was still severely damaged and had yet to fully hide. Meanwhile, He would occasionally interfere with the Circle of Inevitability to create opportunities for Lumian and the Evernight Goddess.

The next moment, His high-frequency flickering figure stopped. He directed his gaze toward the Chaos Sea.

Crimson moonlight fell from the astral world, bathing the enormous luminous figure, bringing New Life to all consciousnesses.

This included Grisha Adam, as well as Herabergen and Leodero - and also that of the Primordial God Almighty.

The Primordial God Almighty's consciousness was already on the verge of taking over.

Chapter 1170: Past Symbolism

When the crimson moonlight descended, Klein immediately realized that Grisha Adam likely couldn't hold on much longer. He had been barely maintaining a fragile balance, temporarily reaching quasi-Great Old One strength, only through the merging of Herabergen's and Leodero's consciousness. Once granted New Life, the accumulated latent issues would swiftly manifest.

If the Primordial God Almighty truly gained the upper hand and the Mother Goddess of Depravity returned fully healed, the situation would become irredeemable.

At that moment, three contingency plans formed in Klein's mind:

The first plan had the Evernight Goddess forcibly put Grisha Adam and the Primordial God Almighty's consciousness into slumber. This would buy more time, or perhaps allow Klein to find a way to kill Grisha Adam, putting an end to the possibility of the Primordial God Almighty resurrecting with the Mother Goddess of Depravity's assistance.

The issue with this plan was that it would release Primordial Hunger. At that point, it would likely take a substantial bite out of Grisha Adam, and this insatiable entity would inevitably seek out Lumian, attempting to accommodate the City of Calamity. Combined with the possible return of Inextinguishable Ravings in a short while, the situation would spiral completely out of control.

The second plan utilized the Change symbolism to delay the adverse changes in Grisha Adam, keeping Him as a buffer against Primordial Hunger. Klein would give up chasing the Mother Tree of Desire and recovering the Tenebrous World for now. Instead, he would focus on delaying the Goddess of Fate and Supernova Dominator while joining the battle between the remaining three sefirot and the High-Dimensional Overseer. The goal would be to heavily wound or eliminate this Great Old Dominator as quickly as possible.

This would free the sefirot to assist Lumian and the Evernight Goddess, potentially bringing that battlefield to a swift resolution. If the Primordial God Almighty had not yet resurrected by then, the situation would be brought under control and significantly improve.

The downside to this plan was that if Klein became deeply entangled in the fight against the High- Dimensional Overseer, he would struggle to manage the Goddess of Fate and Supernova Dominator in the other star dominions. Should They intervene, the situation could become even more chaotic and deteriorate further.

The third plan was to once again use the Change symbolism to allow Grisha Adam to hold on a little longer. Meanwhile, Klein would avoid the battle with the High-Dimensional Overseer, refrain from interfering with the Circle of Inevitability or joining Lumian and the Evernight Goddess's battlefield, and not pursue the Mother Tree of Desire. Instead, he would focus all his efforts on confronting the Goddess of Fate and Supernova Dominator.

Although it would be a two-against-one situation, the symbolism's of these two Great Old Dominators did not directly restrain the Lord of Mysteries. By further utilizing the Pillar's symbolisms, Klein had a chance to severely wound the Goddess of Fate and Supernova Dominator, forcing Them to give up and flee, or temporarily seal Them before the Primordial God Almighty could resurrect-despite interference from the Mother Goddess of Depravity.

Afterward, Klein could exchange places with the Evernight Goddess, personally dealing with the Circle of Inevitability while the Evernight Goddess put Grisha Adam into slumber and hold off Primordial Hunger.

In a one-on-one confrontation, Klein was confident he could swiftly deal with the Circle of Inevitability, racing against time before the Mother

Goddess of Depravity healed and descended once more. Even if he couldn't isolate the Circle of Inevitability, Klein could simultaneously hold back the Monarch of Decay, enabling Lumian to execute a pre-prepared move that would make the Monarch of Decay experience what it meant by being the Origins of Disaster.

The only flaw in this plan was that every second would count-any wasted moment could lead to failure!

As for the idea of feeding the Uniquenesses of the Moon and Mother pathways to Primordial Hunger to provoke the Mother Goddess of Depravity into dealing with Him, this approach lacked real feasibility. Unless Lord of Mysteries Klein went to the Mother Goddess of Depravity now, making Her succumb to Foolishness and completing a Deceit, She could afford to wait until the situation grew more chaotic and both sides were heavily wounded before descending.

Even if Klein did seek out the Mother Goddess of Depravity, She was still a Pillar, albeit weakened and injured. He wouldn't be able to spare his attention for the other battlefields for some time.

Klein made his decision in an instant. His high-frequency flickering figure raised its coat.

Change!

The symbolism was applied to the enormous luminous figure, immediately delaying the adverse effects of the crimson moonlight.

Next, Klein transferred Amon from the Chaos Sea to the peripheral planet at the universe's edge, leaving behind only the Chained Uniqueness and Sequence 1 Beauty Goddess Beyonder characteristic from Lilith, which he Grafted into Sefirah Castle.

After completing this, Klein's flickering figure disappeared from the star dominion.

He returned to the original battlefield, now fully intent on dealing with the Goddess of Fate and Supernova Dominator!

…

In the meantime, Amon appeared on the peripheral planet of the universe. Still affected by His survival instinct, He hid within the protected zone, not daring to venture out.

On the battlefield outside the protected zone, Franca and other angels were stunned to find that the Cupids and Leviathans had simultaneously left the area, entering the universe and disappearing.

This significantly reduced the pressure on them.

The beautiful Cupids had been firing arrows that stole True Hearts, inciting internal strife. Meanwhile, the Leviathans had stirred up jealousy and dissatisfaction among many Angels, nearly causing the disbandment of the Red Angel Medici's legion. It was only thanks to The Star Leonard, Arianna, and other Servants of Concealment who put the affected Angels into slumber, and Justice Audrey and other Spectator pathway Angels who used Hypnosis, Placate, or implanted virtual personalities, that the angelic legion avoided greater turmoil.

Now, for whatever reason, the departure of the Cupids and Leviathans from the battlefield was a welcome relief for Medici, the legion commander.

…

In the boundless void, sometimes shrouded in the Fog of War and other times plunged into darkness.

The voice of Lumian echoed in Eternal Darkness Amanises's mind. "Change of strategy-target the Circle of Inevitability first."

Previously, Lumian had aimed to use his preparations to swiftly wound or eliminate the Monarch of Decay, making Him the primary target.

He and Amanises had nearly succeeded three times, but each time, the Circle of Inevitability had intervened-either resetting the state through Loop or exerting influence via the symbolism of Inevitability.

This caused Lumian to be affected by the symbolism of Decay, where "anything that can go wrong will go wrong," further destabilizing his internal balance and reducing the time he could sustain himself by another minute.

Hence, Lumian decided not to remain trapped in this back-and-forth. A breakthrough was needed, starting with eliminating the support and the disruptive interference.

Although the Circle of Inevitability was even harder to eliminate quickly-whether through His Loop symbolism or His combination of Future and Destined symbolisms that made Him nearly impossible to hit - Lumian felt it was worth a try given the deadlock elsewhere.

He also noticed the crimson moonlight and understood the urgency of time!

Suddenly, Lumian once again conjured the Fog of War to envelop the void, swapping his position with Eternal Darkness Amanises.

Eternal Darkness Amanises now faced the golden mummy-like Monarch of Decay.

The strange book of coiled feathered serpents in Her hands flipped open with a rustling sound, displaying only one name written across its pages: "Monarch of Decay."

Death!

Amanises invoked the symbolism of Death!

Time, already slow around the Monarch of Decay, slowed further, pushing His body into the depths of illusory ripples.

There, it seemed to reach the end of time, the final point of change.

The Monarch of Decay did not evade the influence of Death. Instead, He used His symbolism as the End of the River of Time to delay Death until that endpoint, leaving the present unaffected.

As Amanises dealt with the Monarch of Decay, Lumian, with his omniscient perspective within the Fog of War, located the Circle of Inevitability.

The body with Aurore's and Jenna's face clenched its right hand.

They caused all contradictions in the area to erupt instantly, transforming the apocalypse into a vortex of chaos that swallowed nearby asteroids, along with time, space, and fate.

This chaos vortex rapidly expanded toward the Circle of Inevitability, targeting not His body but a fixed tributary within the mercury-colored River of Fate.

It sought to drag this tributary into the apocalypse, returning it to chaos, thereby breaking the Circle of Inevitability's Destined powers.

The Circle of Inevitability's three bodies began spinning around a single point.

He attempted to trigger a Loop not yet affected by the chaos vortex, resetting the state of the battlefield.

At this moment, Amanises suddenly abandoned applying symbolic influence on the Monarch of Decay. Instead, using the team's connection, She unleashed deep darkness like a river from the void near Lumian, pulling time and space into Herself and merging them swiftly.

Eternal Darkness was also Space-Time-in-One!

Although this symbolism was incomplete, it managed to halt the Circle of Inevitability's spinning, suspending Him like an insect trapped in amber.

Origins of Disaster Lumian seized the opportunity, allowing the chaos vortex to spread over, engulfing the fixed tributary of fate and the pre-set

Loop node.

Then, the chaos vortex, embodying all colors and possibilities, consumed the three-bodied Circle of Inevitability, causing Him to collapse into chaos in an instant.

Neither Lumian nor Amanises paused to confirm their victory, as the Monarch of Decay made the Fog of War advance to its end and applied the symbolism of Certain Death to them.

A second later, at the dissipating chaos vortex's center, the dark body of the Circle of Inevitability reappeared. He had reunited with His mercury-colored and redemptive light-formed bodies, resuming His hand signs.

Past symbolism!

What was not lost in the past could not be destroyed in the present!

Lumian instantly realized one thing: only by using the kind of power associated with the Fourth Pillar- erasing the very concept of the Circle of Inevitability's existence and His past history-could He be truly wounded or killed.

Of course, the King of Space-Time, who held the symbolism of History, might not be able to kill the Circle of Inevitability but could certainly inflict suffering worse than death.

Chapter 1171: Baiting with One's Own Body

In the original star dominion.

The Goddess of Fate, delayed and obstructed by Klein, had already discerned the changes on the other battlefield by gazing into the mercury-colored illusory River of Fate. She had Prophesized what was about to happen.

The armless body in the center of Her body spat out an object She had been holding in Her mouth.

It was a thumb-sized bead with a glassy texture, radiating multicolored hues and naturally exuding a soothing aura that calmed the mind and body.

This bead originally belonged to a Dao integrator of the Key of Light. It was a relic left behind after their corpse was cremated. During the Vortex incident, it had been traded by Harrison of Penglai to Fate's Attendant Héloïse. After Héloïse recovered, the bead was immediately offered as a sacrifice to the deity Héloïse worshiped.

As soon as the relic was spat out, it flew directly to the body with hollow eye sockets on the Goddess of Fate's left side. She caught it and wove it into the self- contained mercury-colored symbol that had head connected to tail, incorporating it into the corresponding tributary of the River of Fate.

The River of Fate surged quietly onward. Just as the golden giant Buddha, who had only recently overcome the effects of survival instincts, prepared to join the Celestial Master and Celestial Thearch's projection in battling the High-Dimensional Overseer, a fissure appeared on the Buddha's surface.

From within, a pair of hands forged of gold began to tear outward, threatening to shatter the entire body.

The follower to whom the relic belonged was now imbued with a new fate and granted new possibilities!

Thus, He had torn through the surface, disrupting the harmony of the Three Buddhas, preventing Them from acting in unison and causing the golden giant Buddha to collapse spectacularly.

Such was the power of the Goddess of Fate, who wove fates.

On the first day, the Original Creator awoke and created this world, but reality, the spirit world, the astral world, and fate were still mixed together.

On the second day, the Oldest One birthed the Mother Goddess of Depravity. Reality gained a foundation, the spirit world and astral world were separated, and the River of Fate began to flow. Soon after, the Mother Tree of Desire was born, giving rise to life and introducing evil and desire. Then came the Son of Chaos, who established order-and with it, shadows naturally emerged.

On the third day, the Oldest One and the Mother Goddess united, and the Mother of All Things gave birth to a firstborn daughter. From then on, the fates of all things began to intertwine, no longer in absolute chaos but instead forming relative patterns and foreseeable futures.

As the firstborn daughter of the Original Creator and the Mother Goddess of Depravity, the symbolism of the Goddess of Fate was sufficiently unique. She could weave, guide, and sever even the fates of Great Old Dominators. As long as the fates of all things converged into the River of Fate, She would attain immortality. Even if Her body were destroyed, Her consciousness and spirit could return from the River of Fate and manifest a new body. She did not need pre-set resurrection mechanisms or the reliance on undying spirits that other Great Old Dominators required, nor did She need to wait ages to revive through a sefirah, Uniquenesses, or Beyonder characteristics.

However, the essence of fate was infinite chaos. Even the Goddess of Fate could not fully control it, nor could She ensure the River of Fate always flowed according to Her woven designs.

At this moment, the Goddess of Fate aimed to disrupt the battle over the sefirot, forcing the Lord of Mysteries to divide His focus and preventing Him from confronting Her with His full power.

If She could delay long enough, Her mother would return, fully healed.

As the firstborn daughter, She was destined to receive assistance-a privilege the Circle of Inevitability and Supernova Dominator did not share.

Thus, She utilized the relic intended for capturing the Key of Light, deploying it early to serve Her current needs!

As the golden giant Buddha was about to be torn apart from within, deep darkness surged forth, engulfing Him and plunging Him into slumber-a sleep from which He could not awaken in the short term.

Only by suppressing His internal Issues could the golden Buddha regain control of the situation.

This left the Celestial Master and Celestial Thearch's projections to face the High-Dimensional Overseer in a two-against-one battle, significantly worsening Their predicament.

Having just returned from the past, the Circle of Inevitability observed the scene and suddenly felt a surge of desire.

This came from a powerful instinct to converge and a greed deeply rooted in godhood.

He now had the opportunity to devour the Key of Light!

Compared to that, aiding the Monarch of Decay against the Origins of Disaster and Eternal Darkness seemed far less important.

…

Supernova Dominator, unable to glean sufficient information from the River of Fate and further hindered by the spirit world's obscuring, grew increasingly agitated.

At last, within the astral world, the concept of "stars" suddenly intensified.

One after another, massive, blazing orbs of terrifying radiance descended into this star dominion, radiating unimaginable light and heat.

These were dying stars summoned by Supernova Dominator-stars nearing the ends of their lifespans.

As the ruler of stars, Supernova Dominator wielded the symbolism of weight, density, and fundamental forces, commanding the laws of the boundless cosmos.

Normally, He could summon His shepherded stars through the spirit world, creating supernovae or catastrophic black holes, all without compromising His structural stability. But Lord of Mysteries Klein, utilizing his Pillar symbolism, had preemptively sealed the spirit world. As a result, Supernova Dominator was forced to spend extra time converting these stars into conceptual forms, sending them into the astral world, and transporting them over here, finally manifesting them in reality.

Once these stars amassed in the star dominion, they immediately began attracting and colliding with one another.

An immense eruption of light and heat followed, obliterating layers of "doors" and overwhelming countless Kleins.

Right on the heels of that, the colliding matter rapidly collapsed, emitting unimaginable gravitational force that captured even the expelled light and heat, compressing the entire star dominion inward and slowing time dramatically.

Supernova Dominator now had an unobstructed connection to the astral world.

At this moment, He sensed an enormous bluish-black door of light formed from countless insects at the edge of the light and heat He had captured.

Standing beneath the radiance was a figure-Klein wearing a silk half top hat, dark gloves, and a long black coat, holding a star-encrusted cane.

Manifesting Sefirah Castle, Klein extended his left palm forward.

Time, already slowed by the massive black hole, became even slower, as if a clock chime resonated from the bluish-black door of light.

Everything stagnated, nearing a complete halt.

King of Space-Time!

Supernova Dominator was also trapped in the near - frozen time, moving with an unbelievable slowness.

He suddenly realized something.

Why am I creating a black hole-one that contracts space and dilates time?

Isn't this helping the King of Space-Time further stagnate time?

Could it be that during the previous battles, I unknowingly came under the influence of the symbolism of Foolishness?

Supernova Dominator did not hesitate. He immediately attempted to reverse the black hole's collapse into the strongest explosion possible. This would break the spatial constraints and temporal stasis and might even significantly damage the now-manifested Sefirah Castle!

Of course, completing such a transformation required at least one second, but a second in the dilated time zone was far longer than one in the external world.

The Goddess of Fate was nearly sucked into the massive black hole created by Supernova Dominator. Only by weaving Her own fate was She able to evade the pull and reach the edge of its influence unscathed. However, She could no longer perceive the fates within that dark region.

At that moment, She noticed the emergence of a figure clad in a black coat, wearing a silk top hat, and holding a star-encrusted cane-Lord of Mysteries Klein -standing within the giant bluish-black door of light.

The mercury-colored River of Fate shifted direction, rushing toward Klein. All its tributaries began converging on the door of light, as though it alone represented the true path and the real future. Even the Goddess of Fate Herself was pulled toward it.

Beacon of Destiny!

The Goddess of Fate now glimpsed the fate of Lord of Mysteries Klein. Her rightmost, headless body followed the surging mercury-colored river, striking out with an illusory silver-black dirk toward the bluish-black door of light.

It sought to sever all tributaries of fate.

The final judgment!

Seeing this, Klein, now manifesting the Sefirah Castle, maintained a calm expression. He spread his arms, lifting his black coat as the bluish-black door of light shone brilliantly.

The scene concealed behind him was revealed - a deep black hole that bound even light and heat, preventing their escape.

The black hole created by Supernova Dominator!

Almost simultaneously, Klein reversed the stagnation of Change, pushing it into acceleration.

Abruptly, Supernova Dominator's attempted transformation was completed. The black hole became a "white hole," erupting with a terrifying sea of burning light and an extreme explosion.

The eruption rushed toward Klein, toward Sefirah Castle, and also toward the Goddess of Fate on the other side of the door of light!

Klein didn't flee the scene. Instead, he placed a hand over his chest and bowed slightly to the Goddess of Fate, whose central head had already reflected the blazing sea of light in its eyes.

Taking advantage of the moment, he redirected the Goddess of Fate's attack to the Supernova Dominator on the opposite side of the Sefirah Castle, completing the linkage.

This was Grafting, a manifestation of the symbolism of Bizarreness!

For Supernova Dominator and the Goddess of Fate, if They had realized the problem earlier, They could have easily stopped Their own attacks, preventing the Grafting from achieving its purpose But this time, Klein had used himself as bait, isolating both sides with Sefirah Castle, and amidst his own simultaneous crisis, left Them no time to react!

Of course, the symbolism of Foolishness, which had gradually deepened its influence over time, was the true hero of the moment.

In an instant, the terrifying sea of light engulfed Klein's body, shaking the bluish-black door of light. Then, it surged forward, completely submerging and tearing apart the three bodies of the Goddess of Fate, dissolving them.

At the same time, the Goddess of Fate's strike, symbolizing the final judgment, successfully hit Supernova Dominator's River of Fate.

Supernova Dominator immediately felt utterly isolated, as if plunged into a deep darkness, unable to locate reality, sense the spirit world or astral world, or even perceive a fate to continue existing.

In the now starless dominion, Klein's figure-dressed in a black coat and dark gloves-swiftly reappeared.

He had just died.

But he wielded miracles, and resurrection was one of them.

Correspondingly, Sefirah Castle had also suffered severe damage during this daring attempt. It would not recover fully in the short term-a price Klein was willing to pay to resolve the battle quickly.

Klein did not relax, as the battle in this dominion was far from over. He had merely gained a temporary advantage, creating an opportunity that he now had to seize fully!

Chapter 1172: Giving You a Chance

Supernova Dominator, having had His tributary of fate severed, now existed without a future, isolated from reality and unable to sense the spirit world or astral world.

For those not Above the Sequences, this would mean watching helplessly as death and an end approached, with no way to reverse fate. Even most Great Old Dominators would lose Their powers and authorities in such a state, unable to wield many of Their symbolisms. At that moment, a decisive attack from Their enemies could prove fatal.

The final judgment of fate could not directly kill a Great Old Dominator but could temporarily strip Them of most of Their symbolisms, reducing Them to a weakened state, rejected by fate itself-a miserable wretch with no future or dreams.

At this moment, Supernova Dominator wasn't concerned about the Goddess of Fate landing another blow. What He feared was the Lord of Mysteries seizing this opportunity to render His existence worse than death.

As a Great Old Dominator, while He leaned more toward reality than mystery. He was not entirely without means to escape His predicament.

Supernova Dominator quickly caused the myriad explosive suns comprising His body to eject countless particles. Using His symbolism as the Controller of Fundamental Forces-untouched and unremovable - He caused those particles to draw closer, triggering repeated nuclear fusions, transforming into various elements, and creating true matter.

This matter began forming their own fates, weaving together and attempting to break through the isolation, seeking to rejoin the vast, illusory mercury - colored River of Fate.

This would allow Supernova Dominator to find reality and return to the River of Fate.

Within the intricate mercury-colored River of Fate connected from head to tail, the consciousness and spirit of the Goddess of Fate swiftly coalesced, unstoppable and irreversible.

…

Meanwhile, in the other star dominion.

Primordial Hunger had consumed a sliver of chaos, devouring some of The Hanged Man's abilities. Grisha Adam, with a stoic expression, calmly placated, guided, and managed the situation, showing no sign of failure.

To Him, the greater threat than Primordial Hunger was the increasingly revived consciousness of the Primordial God Almighty.

The golden giant Buddha sat cross-legged in the boundless void, His eyes tightly shut, motionless. The two golden hands extending from the fissures in His body hung limply, as it had fallen into slumber.

At this moment, He was entirely incapable of resistance, relying solely on the blessing of passive good fortune.

This growing vulnerability made the greed and convergence instinct within the Circle of Inevitability's godhood surge uncontrollably. It was as though a miser had spotted a long-coveted treasure suddenly left unguarded, with the added assurance of impunity upon taking it.

Eternal Darkness Amanises noticed that the Circle of Inevitability was increasingly fixated on the golden Buddha. She deliberately shifted Her focus to the Monarch of Decay, creating distance from the Key of Light and the other sefirot.

A few seconds later, the Circle of Inevitability could no longer resist His godhood's instinct to converge, His three bodies worked together, setting up several Loop triggers on the battlefield before turning toward the Key of Light. Using the Law of Beyonder Characteristics Convergence, He flung Himself toward the golden Buddha, causing the Buddha to be drawn toward Him in turn.

Suddenly, a straight, illusory dark river flowed forth from the cosmos, heralding the stillness of fate and the proclamation of death.

This was a river that did not Loop. It always moved forward.

Even death itself would dissipate within its currents.

River of Eternal Darkness!

Amanises, though She was truly Above the Sequences, was burdened by the lingering consciousness and spiritual residues of many Dao integrators of the Haoli lineage. Her condition was less than ideal and required time to adapt and purge the negative influences. Thus, except for Her emergence as a Great Old One to fend off the Outer Deities, She had refrained from utilizing Her concentrated symbolism of the River of Eternal Darkness.

But now, understanding the urgency of the moment, She set aside all other concerns, using this river to forcibly break the remaining Loops, prevent the Circle of Inevitability from accommodating the Key of Light, and keep Him occupied, creating a one-on-one opportunity for Lumian against the Monarch of Decay.

The colorless, illusory river submerged all Loop nodes, causing them to instantaneously perish and vanish without taking effect.

The River of Eternal Darkness placed itself between the Circle of Inevitability and the golden Buddha, transforming into denser darkness that enveloped the area, forcing all three bodies of the Circle of Inevitability to close their eyes.

Symbolism of Darkness, compelling thought to silence and inducing slumber!

The body of redemptive light on the Circle of Inevitability's right side also closed its eyes and fell into a state of sleep. Yet, before Him appeared countless tributaries of fate, each representing the same possibility: that the Circle of Inevitability would soon awaken.

Symbolisms of Future and Destined!

The Circle of Inevitability had anticipated His current predicament and prepared in advance, setting the future in motion.

This foresight stemmed not only from insights drawn from the River of Fate but also from His clear understanding that the Key of Light, as the embodiment of fate, would inevitably have absolute good fortune at critical moments, disrupting any attempts to accommodate Him.

This was why He had not fixed the tributary of fate representing His successful accommodation of the Key of Light-it was simply unfixable!

Maintaining the dense darkness, Amanises extended two hands. Before the destined fate could manifest, She plunged an orange-red twilight greatsword into the darkness's edge and into the void.

The dense darkness contracted. The flow of time slowed, converging toward a single point.

The fate of the Circle of Inevitability's destined awakening remained unchanged but was now delayed, pushed several seconds into the future!

Symbolism of Space-Time-in-One!

Though Incomplete, it proved sufficient.

After restraining the Circle of Inevitability, Amanises glanced at the golden Buddha.

Even She couldn't help but marvel at His fortune.

Despite having been schemed against and facing grave issues that forced Him into slumber, He had unwittingly drawn the Circle of Inevitability's attention, granting Lumian the opportunity for a one- on-one confrontation with the Monarch of Decay.

Though it might only last a few seconds, it was still an opportunity.

As the essence of war, Lumian naturally wouldn't let the opportunity slip. He unfolded the mirror world originating from the City of Calamity, forcibly dragging the Monarch of Decay into it.

Within this realm lay an endless starry sky.

Immediately, massive stars erupted around the Monarch of Decay, ejecting vast quantities of matter, creating a sea of destructive burning light and expanding explosions.

Above and below the Monarch of Decay, two black holes revealed themselves through accretion disks, tugging at His body in opposing directions and causing the distant mirror world's barriers to fracture piece by piece as if seeking to escape.

Calamity of Destruction!

Time around the Monarch of Decay grew increasingly sluggish. The intense sea of light dimmed rapidly before even nearing Him, decaying with astonishing speed, rendering it less terrifying. The two black holes began evaporating at an unimaginable pace, shrinking steadily.

Suddenly, a radiant starlight door manifested amidst the slowed time behind the Monarch of Decay. Three- headed, three-bodied, six-armed Lumian stepped out, opening the door and wielding a black flame greatsword bound with destruction and chaos.

He had used the last charge of his Door pathway contract ability.

Immediately, he felt his body decaying and rotting, his internal balance accelerating toward collapse.

The Monarch of Decay remained expressionless, as if such things were already dead and decayed.

As a Great Old Dominator, His golden mummy-like form was free from the limitations of a human structure. He welcomed the Origins of Disaster stepping into a region dominated by slow time and the strongest symbolism of decay.

He extended His rotting, pus-seeping left palm toward Lumian, His head having rotated 180 degrees at some point, gazing upon His sluggish-moving target.

Sure hit, certain death!

Lumian first used the symbolism of Calamity of Destruction to interfere with the Monarch of Decay before opening the Door-not to confuse the enemy but to buy time for one action.

He had transmitted his intent to all his followers: "Call my name!"

On the peripheral planet of the universe, Lugano, Leon, and other Sick Church believers heard the resounding command echo in their ears. They bowed their heads devoutly, repeatedly chanting, "Great Malady God!"

"Great Malady God!"

Amid the prayers, the face of chaos on Lumian's left head turned toward the Monarch of Decay.

He seemed barely affected by the slowed time, pulling both time and space into Himself.

At this moment, the previous and current Malady Gods finally met.

Lumian did not hope that this meager symbolism would equate this Malady God with that one, making his injuries synonymous with those of the Monarch of Decay. The mystical connections between the two remained too weak, and the necessary symbols insufficient.

The connection between the Uncertain Mist and the Mother Tree of Desire had been exploitable for mutual destruction because Genie and the Tenebrous World had once been one. Moreover, Emperor Roselle and the Chained provided an ideal intermediary linking both sides. Lumian could only become the Mother Goddess of Depravity because She had permitted it, creating those links and ultimately providing the critical correspondences.

Currently, none of these conditions were met.

Lumian's purpose in enhancing the symbolism of the Malady God was not to rely on mystical similarity to wound the Monarch of Decay but to offer Him an opportunity.

For great existences, anyone who invoked Their former names and stole Their followers would establish a mystical connection with Them, allowing Them to curse, doom, or even kill the offender-or seize their body. If not for the astral barrier and Mr. Fool's protection, Lumian would have long since perished or become the Monarch of Decay.

Now, Lumian deliberately amplified the symbolism of the Malady God to give the Monarch of Decay a chance to possess his body!

Chapter 1173: Accommodation

The Monarch of Decay sensed that the prayers to the Malady God were directed at the Origins of Disaster, creating an overlap in identity and offering Him a direct opportunity to seize His target's body.

But He didn't take the opportunity-He wasn't foolish. Killing the Origins of Disaster first and then accommodating the sefirah was the only correct choice!

To seize the other's body now would mean engaging in a battle of consciousness and spirit. The Monarch of Decay wasn't confident of a guaranteed victory at the moment. If, He lost, He would end up being accommodated and devoured by the Origins of Disaster, becoming part of that collective consciousness. Moreover, in such a war of consciousness, defeat would mean no chance of escape, given that His opponent was of the same tier.

Thus, any Great Old Dominator with a functioning mind would never take such bait from Lumian.

For Lumian, having prepared this plan, there was naturally a follow-up strategy: You're rational? You're not foolish? That's fine, I'll make you foolish!

As the believers chanted "Great Malady God" and the Monarch of Decay launched His Sure Hit, Certain Death attack, Lumian activated the contract mark left by Mr. Fool. He could still use it once.

Fooled!

This contract, signed after The Fool Klein accommodated Sefirah Castle, carried a trace of the Foolishness symbolism.

As the mark on Lumian's body glowed a bluish-black, the Monarch of Decay's outstretched left palm suddenly slowed.

He hesitated. He stopped.

For a being as truly great as the Monarch of Decay, the Fooling imposed by half a Lord of Mysteries had limited duration and effect. It wasn't potent enough to make Him lose all reason and act purely on instinct. But Lumian had never expected it to succeed outright.

At that moment, the middle head on Lumian's body laughed, radiating intense provocation, as if saying, "A naturally great existence like you can't even match a lowly one like me who advanced the ranks? If you don't seize this opportunity now, you'll end up being accommodated by me! What's the matter? Did the Mother Tree of Desire ignite your survival instincts so much that you're too cowardly to confront my consciousness head-on? You might as well crawl back into the Mother Goddess of Depravity's womb and be reborn with a new consciousness!"

Simultaneously, Aurore's and Jenna's faces smiled in turn, each glancing mockingly at the Monarch of Decay.

Provocation plus Charm! Symbolic-level Provocation and Charm!

Another of Lumian's bodies, the one with the face of a swirling vortex of chaos, followed his main consciousness's lead, activating the City of Calamity's convergence force.

The Tudor face brimming with the desire to challenge and the amused Cheek face cooperated perfectly with this attempt, invoking the Law of Beyonder Characteristics Convergence and sending an irresistibly alluring invitation to the Monarch of Decay.

Come, accommodate this sefirah. Take over our body!

Still under the influence of Foolishness, the Monarch of Decay could no longer control Himself in the face of Provocation, Charm, and the Law of Aggregation. His vision fixated solely on the hateful yet irresistibly enticing target before Him. Without hesitation, He stepped forward, shedding the golden plating covering His body to reveal a heavily decayed, oozing yellow- green pus-covered body.

That body rapidly expanded, instantly enveloping Lumian's three-headed, six-armed body.

In the blink of an eye, within Lumian's consciousness space, the bloodstained stone-brick floor became covered in a nauseating yellow-green fungal carpet.

The Monarch of Decay saw several figures standing before Him.

Aurore with her, hair darkened and eyes deep brown; Jenna with an expression of disdain; Cheek, radiating excitement; Alista Tudor, eyes blazing with madness; and the stationary swirling face of chaos.

Behind them loomed the coiled twin-bodied malevolent dragon.

Beyond the malevolent dragon lay the staircase ascending to infinite heights, atop which sat Lumian - wearing a white shirt, black vest, and dark trousers-on a crimson-blooded throne, his right foot resting on his left knee, gazing down at the Monarch of Decay with a bright smile.

As the Origins of Disaster who was Above the Sequences, Lumian's consciousnesses had long since unified into an entity. He was simply using the Visionary's ability to manifest six arms of his consciousness as six figures for ease of unleashing different attacks later. In the real world, his six arms could independently employ distinct abilities, though not involving symbolisms.

…

Within the mercury-colored River of Fate, as the intertwined destinies coalesced into the Goddess of Fate's consciousness and spirit, She prepared to surface, to leave this realm and reclaim a body.

Suddenly, Lord of Mysteries Klein appeared above Her, clad in his black long coat and silk half top hat.

Klein extended his black-gloved left hand.

Steal!

Klein sought to extract the Goddess of Fate's consciousness and spirit from the River of Fate, stealing it into his grasp!

He hadn't attempted this earlier because the Goddess of Fate had not yet intended to leave the River of Fate. Her existence, intertwined with the fates of all matter in the universe, was too heavy to steal. Once She fully regained a body, the Lord of Mysteries would also be unable to directly Steal the consciousness and spirit of a Great Old Dominator from Her united form. Only this moment presented the opportunity.

A strange, tree-like humanoid object coated in black slime floated in front of Klein. It was the Sequence 1 Divine Abomination Beyonder characteristic of the Chained pathway.

Once he stole the Goddess of Fate's consciousness and spirit, he would immediately place it into this formless entity, then use his symbolism to seal Her.

For the Chained pathway's Binding symbolism, high - Sequence Beyonder characteristics were ideal sealing material.

The Goddess of Fate's consciousness and spirit were uncontrollably drawn out from the illusory mercury - colored River of Fate, about to fall into Klein's hand. Just then, crimson moonlight descended, and a broken oak tree grew in the void, "fixing" the Goddess of Fate's consciousness and spirit in place.

The Mother Goddess of Depravity had come to aid Her eldest daughter.

…

Within Lumian's consciousness space.

Still under the lingering effects of Foolishness, the Monarch of Decay stretched His Sure Hit, Certain Death left palm toward the malevolent dragon's figure across the void.

At the same time, He fully invoked the Decay symbolism, slowing the surrounding flow of time and hastening its approach to the terminal point.

The malevolent dragon-represented by one of Lumian's arms-did not dodge and could not dodge. Its two heads spat black flames of destruction bound with madness toward the decayed palm.

Cheek's figure conjured an apocalypse before Him, creating a chaos vortex encompassing all possibilities and colors, rapidly spreading toward the Monarch of Decay's left palm and body.

Alista Tudor's figure revealed a blood-red mark on His forehead, clenched His right fist, and struck the void ahead. The void cracked inch by inch, collapsing space-time toward the Monarch of Decay - the Destruction symbolism from the Red Priest pathway.

Aurore did not use the authority of Origins of Disaster or Calamity of Destruction. Instead, she shared a corresponding power from her ally Eternal Darkness Amanises, summoning dense darkness that silenced everything, enveloping the Monarch of Decay.

Jenna wielded an orange-red twilight greatsword and slashed it toward the Monarch of Decay.

The swirling face of chaos held a pale book formed of coiled feathered serpents, flipping its pages silently.

At that moment, chaos, destruction, death, eternal silence, and twilight-along with the Monarch of Decay's previous attack-gathered in the consciousness, space. Some forces repelled, others blended, swiftly collapsing into a terrifying black dot.

The black dot drew the entire consciousness space toward itself, absorbing all forces and causing countless cracks to form, igniting pitch-black flames.

Under this influence, time was nearing its end, and space converged toward the unstable black dot.

Neither Lumian nor the Monarch of Decay could escape this consciousness space, unable to avoid the singularity of unified space-time and all things!

Though not yet true Fourth Pillar power and lasting only briefly, it was enough to kill the consciousness of a Great Old Dominator. Moreover, the Loop nodes in this area had been erased, and the Circle of Inevitability remained restrained by Eternal Darkness Amanises, unable to rescue the Monarch of Decay,

Thus, Lumian had no fear of the "Sure Hit, Certain Death" strike.

Everyone here would die.

It was reminiscent of how the Master of the Shadow Cottage and Farbauti had drawn Inextinguishable Ravings into Themselves and cursed Themselves. The difference was that Their consciousnesses weren't strong enough to sustain such a battle or hold back Inextinguishable Ravings without the Key of Light's help. They lacked the ability to kill a Great Old Dominator, only capable of wounding one severely.

But Lumian was a genuine great existence. Once the accommodation process began, without external intervention, the Monarch of Decay couldn't escape the battle of spirit, Lumian could harness Fourth Pillar-related power to obliterate the Monarch of Decay alongside himself.

In the collapsing consciousness space, surrounded by pitch-black flames, the Monarch of Decay had one thought: Kill the Origins of Disaster first, destabilize the Fourth Pillar's power, and let it collapse on its own!

This was the Monarch of Decay's only chance for survival.

At the top of the staircase leading to infinite heights, on the blood-stained throne, Lumian sat still, surrounded by a cracking consciousness space filled with burning black flames.

With his right foot resting on his left knee, Lumian smiled brightly as he watched the Monarch of Decay desperately trying to kill the figures to destroy him.

It's useless.

I will die, and so will you.

Chapter 1174: The Instinct for Redemption

After several seconds, the Circle of Inevitability finally used the fixed tributary of fate to escape the influence of the Darkness symbolism.

However, neither He nor Eternal Darkness Amanises continued the battle. Instead, They both turned Their attention to a peripheral region of the star dominion.

There, an illusory mirror shattered, and Lumian, with three heads, three torsos, and six arms, emerged. His body was wrapped in rotting green-yellow flesh and burning with deep, pitch-black flames.

That massive body, covered in decaying flesh, continued collapsing inward toward a central point. It began with the chest at the center, followed by the right arm, and then the left side of the abdomen. Within the collapsing body, a dark spot emerged, so deep it seemed to contain the entire universe.

Each collapse greatly heightened Eternal Darkness Amanises's sense of danger, and She quickly realized that the development might not align with Their original expectations.

When Klein had fully awakened and accommodated Sefirah Castle, he had consulted only two high-ranking existences to plan Their responses to various scenarios. One was Lumian, who possessed the swirling face of chaos and both the masculine and feminine aspects of the mirrored Original Creator. The other was Evernight Goddess Amanises, who held the authority of Concealment. This prevented Klein's awakening and Their plans from leaking.

Snake of Mercury Will Auceptin, only learned of Klein's awakening in the Nation of the Evernight. Klein had helped Him accommodate His Uniqueness, but He was unaware of the details.

Thus, Amanises already knew how Lumian, as the Origins of Disaster, would deal with the Monarch of Decay and what would unfold in the process. Now, it seemed everything had gone as planned, yet the result appeared to have taken an unexpected turn.

The anticipated outcome was for Lumian to create a power akin to the Fourth Pillar, annihilating both the Monarch of Decay and himself while completely erasing the feminine and masculine aspects of the mirrored Original Creator, Cheek's consciousness, Alista Tudor's consciousness, and the malevolent dragon's consciousness.

If Lumian, as part of the Fourth Pillar by virtue of being the Origins of Disaster, Calamity of Destruction, managed to endure the destructive force longer, Eternal Darkness Amanises would withdraw the powers She had shared with him. This would destabilize the Fourth Pillar's terrifying force. Meanwhile, Lord of Mysteries Klein would employ New Birth, Grafting, and other methods to potentially save Lumian. However, in doing so, the chaotic cluster of consciousnesses within him might persist, leaving the fragile balance he currently maintained uncertain.

Now, this outcome was coming to fruition, yet it seemed something even more horrifying was brewing.

Moments later, Eternal Darkness Amanises observed strange phenomena surrounding Lumian's rapidly collapsing body.

An endless, frozen universe devoid of vitality appeared. Darkness, which seemed intent on swallowing everything and compressing it into a single point, emerged...

The symbolism of Termination-opposing the symbolism of Genesis - has appeared. This is not supposed to happen. The universe has not yet reached its end, and the Fourth Pillar cannot be born... Eternal Darkness Amanises's gaze suddenly froze.

She thought of a possibility.

Lumian's body not only contained the powers that composed the Fourth Pillar but also held the symbolisms of the Monarch of Decay and the masculine and feminine aspects of the mirrored Original Creator. When the power representing Termination collided with the feminine and masculine aspects of the mirrored Original Creator, which now finally had the chance to interact during this destruction, there was a possibility for the Termination power to sublimate into Termination symbolism! It had to be known that those symbolisms included "anything that can go wrong will go wrong."

Once Termination symbolism emerged, even if only briefly, it would be a terrifying event. At best, all life in this galaxy, including the Great Old Dominators, would be completely annihilated, unable to resurrect. At worst, the entire universe would reboot!

Eternal Darkness Amanises immediately withdrew the powers of Death, Eternal Silence, and Twilight that She had shared with Lumian. Yet, Origins of Disaster Lumian's body, consciousness, and spirit continued collapsing.

The arrival of Termination symbolism seemed inevitable.

At this moment, the Circle of Inevitability abandoned the golden giant Buddha representing the Key of Light and returned to Lumian's side through the astral world.

Seeing this, Eternal Darkness Amanises recalled the hint from Genie and did not intervene. Instead, She followed the Circle of Inevitability back to the original battlefield, closely monitoring the situation.

The attacks of the High-Dimensional Overseer against the Celestial Master and Celestial Thearch's projection slowed. He was already preparing to ascend dimensions and flee the galaxy instantly, though even that might not ensure His safety.

Primordial Hunger, which had been feasting on Grisha Adam, also paused. Acting primarily on instinct, He began showing signs of retreating.

The central body of the Circle of Inevitability, with its mercury-colored face of suffering, pointed toward the astral world. The Angel of Redemption, who had been fighting at the edge of the universe, instantly returned to Him, transforming into slivery-black light that merged into His embrace. The remaining Sinners, unsure of what was happening and now lacking the protection of the Sequence 1 Archangel, all chose to withdraw from the battlefield and return to Their divine kingdom.

Next, the Circle of Inevitability's left dark body and the right body composed of redemptive light simultaneously caused the illusory River of Fate to emerge. The main trunk represented the past that had already occurred, while its tributaries represented futures about to become reality.

The future was already determined, and every tributary led to the same outcome.

The Circle of Inevitability's two bodies each formed a hand sign. The Future Redemption Body created a new tributary within the mercury-colored tributary where no other possibilities or developments existed- a tributary capable of preventing the appearance of the Termination symbolism.

The Past Sinner Body caused the figures of the Monarch of Decay within the River of Fate's past to be replaced one by one with figures of the Circle of Inevitability. Conversely, the original figures of the Circle of Inevitability were replaced one by one with figures of the Monarch of Decay.

Substitution symbolism!

This was the highest level of the Substitution Spell.

Sensing His past being rapidly replaced, the Monarch of Decay did not resist. Instead, He hoped the Circle of Inevitability would succeed.

He saw the light of redemption.

As Lumian's body collapsed further, the Circle of Inevitability's Present Sufferer Body separated a Sequence 1 body composed of redemptive light.

This body formed a hand sign aimed at Lumian.

In an instant, the decayed body of the Monarch of Decay within Lumian was miraculously switched with the Sequence 1 body of the Circle of Inevitability. One returned to the outside world, and the other entered within, completing the substitution.

Now, Lumian no longer accommodated the Monarch of Decay but rather a Sequence 1 avatar of the Circle of Inevitability.

As soon as the Monarch of Decay left Lumian's body. He was instantly covered layer by layer in golden armor plates. However, His surface bore multiple cracks that penetrated the gold and decayed flesh, with deep black flames still burning within.

The Monarch of Decay did not linger and entered the astral world, fleeing far away.

Even with the Mother Goddess of Depravity's healing, His wounds would take sixty years to recover. Without appropriate assistance, it would take hundreds or even thousands of years. He dared not remain in this star dominion any longer.

Eternal Darkness Amanises chose not to pursue Him. Instead, She continued monitoring the Circle of Inevitability while assisting the Celestial Master and Celestial Thearch's projection.

Having lost the symbolisms of the Monarch of Decay, the collapse of Lumian's body and the emergence of Termination symbolism slowed significantly but had not yet stopped.

…

The Mother Goddess of Depravity used Her power across space to "fix" the consciousness and spirit of the Goddess of Fate, preventing them from being stolen by the Lord of Mysteries. Klein, however, was pleased rather than angered.

High above in the boundless gray fog, a marionette that Klein had hidden in advance returned to this star dominion, appearing near the weakened Supernova Dominator, who had fate stripped.

From the start, Klein's true target had been the weakened Supernova Dominator, whose many symbolisms had been rendered unusable by the Final Judgment. His initial moves against the Goddess of Fate were meant to force the still-recovering Mother Goddess of Depravity to fully assist Her eldest daughter. This would make it difficult for the Mother Goddess of Depravity to intervene in Klein's subsequent actions against Supernova Dominator.

Unlike the Lord of Mysteries, every Great Old Dominator had Their own specialties.

Normally, a single marionette of Klein's would not stand a chance against a complete Great Old Dominator. However, Supernova Dominator had not yet recovered or fully returned after suffering Final Judgment.

Wearing his black coat and half top hat, Klein produced another Abomination Beyonder characteristic, covered in viscous black slime. Raising his star-encrusted cane, he transferred the massive star cluster-still unconnected to reality and unable to wield its symbolisms of weight and density-into the grotesque tree-like humanoid object.

The Abomination Beyonder characteristic began to bulge and crack as if it were about to explode. Klein's body then projected a bluish-black illusory door of light.

The door's projection landed on the Abomination Beyonder characteristic, stabilizing it. The object quickly transformed into a transparent, dreamlike crystal of constellations.

Klein then threw this astral crystal into the spirit world, continuing to seal it off.

This was to prevent the Mother Goddess of Depravity from aiding Supernova Dominator in escaping.

Of course, a Great Old Dominator like Supernova Dominator-whose consciousness, spirit, sefirah, Uniqueness, and Beyonder characteristics were all intact-could not be completely sealed. He was not in a state of post-revival dormancy but rather leaned heavily toward reality.

In two or three minutes, He would naturally break through the seal and emerge from the Abomination Beyonder characteristic. Even if Klein reinforced the seal, it would not delay Him much longer.

But a two- to three-minute delay was sufficient for the current battle.

If victory was achieved, Lord of Mysteries Klein would have ample time to retrieve the Abomination Beyonder characteristic.

While exerting his full symbolic power to seal Supernova Dominator, Klein abandoned his attempt to Steal the Goddess of Fate's consciousness and spirit, allowing Her to regain Her body.

This, too, was an opportunity.

Klein's coat billowed as he seized the moment to impose the Foolishness symbolism upon the Goddess of Fate.

Initially, he expected the Mother Goddess of Depravity to interfere, but both he and She became simultaneously aware of the developments in the other battlefield.

Klein wasted no time. Opening a Door, He traveled to the star dominion where Lumian and the others were, leaving behind a high-frequency flickering figure. He Deceived the Goddess of Fate, who was under the Foolishness symbolism, causing Her to foolishly enter the spirit world as it briefly opened. She intended to use it as a shortcut to the Key of Light.

Around the Goddess of Fate, a vast labyrinth rapidly formed as the spirit world's seal was restored.

For a Great Old Dominator in the domain of Fate, pure luck could enable Her to exit the space-time labyrinth and escape the spirit world through the

River of Fate. However, this would take several dozen seconds.

Chapter 1175: Bearer of the Eternal Aeon

Within the collapsing and burning space of consciousness centered on the deep black point, Lumian, who had reverted to his three-headed, three-torso, six-armed form, rested his two middle arms on the armrests of the bloodstained throne. Leaning back against the chair, he calmly observed as everything in this space headed toward destruction.

He was aware of the terrifying transformations resulting from the collision of various symbolisms, but at this moment, he could neither interrupt nor end what was happening.

Suddenly, he noticed that the Monarch of Decay, surrounded by the power of Termination, had been replaced by an avatar of the Circle of Inevitability, composed of redemptive light.

Lumian froze for a moment, then couldn't help but burst into laughter, leaning forward slightly.

So, this is what the hint about utilizing 'the universe's most powerful and genuine Angel of Redemption' truly meant.

Whenever a situation arose that could threaten the entire universe, the godhood instinct of the Circle of Inevitability would compel Him to perform redemption!

This was perhaps His most fundamental symbolism and the reason He had been born as the child of the Original Creator and the Mother Goddess of Depravity.

The Goddess of Fate symbolized the weaving of chaotic destiny into a semblance of order, forming the foundation of the current River of Fate. In contrast, the Circle of Inevitability symbolized the possibility of salvation in apocalyptic crises brought about by the inherent chaos of destiny, allowing the universe to continue in relative stability until its ultimate end.

As the Sequence 1 avatar of the Circle of Inevitability Substituted the Monarch of Decay within Lumian's collapsing body, the formation of the Termination symbolism noticeably slowed. However, it did not stop entirely and began accelerating once more.

Seeing this, the three bodies of the Circle of Inevitability simultaneously formed identical hand signs.

His true body began to fade and contract, leaving behind only the light of redemption. Meanwhile, the Angel of Redemption avatar within Lumian's body rapidly expanded, sprouting a pitch-black Past Sinner Body and a mercury-colored Present Sufferer Body.

The Circle of Inevitability used His true body to replace the avatar, personally entering Lumian's body to face the encroaching power of Termination!

The universe's most powerful and genuine Angel of Redemption!

The power of Termination continued to consume and collapse everything within the consciousness space, pulling it toward the deep black point. At this moment, the six arms of the Circle of Inevitability extended simultaneously, cupping the terrifying black point as though holding a lotus flower.

His three bodies simultaneously bore the ravages of the power of Termination.

Then, the three bodies unfolded in a strange manner that defied human anatomy, encircling the deep black point held in six palms, and began to spin.

The spinning grew faster and faster. The black turned into mercury, mercury became transparent redemptive light, and the light was dyed black again, repeating over and over.

Before long, the pitch-black Past Sinner Body morphed into the initial scene of the Termination power's formation. The mercury-colored Present Sufferer Body stabilized the current event of destruction. The holy light-formed Future Redemption Body froze the moment when the Termination symbolism was about to emerge but had not yet fully formed.

Next, the Future Redemption Body, spinning rapidly, became dyed black once more, transforming into the scene corresponding to the Past Sinner Body,

Lumian's collapsing body suddenly reverted to its original state-the state it was in when the Termination power had just begun to form but had not yet transformed into symbolism. His broken limbs, chest, abdomen, and other parts were all restored.

Eternal Aeon symbolism!

Using His Eternal Aeon symbolism, the Circle of Inevitability achieved Redemption.

He immediately allowed His external Sequence 1 avatar to replace His true body once again, sealing it within Lumian's body. The true body returned to reality, regrowing the Past Sinner Body and the Present Sufferer Body.

From now on, the Angel of Redemption avatar would slow the transformation of Termination power within Lumian into Termination symbolism. It would also assist in balancing the consciousness and spirit of the reviving malevolent dragon. When the delayed transformation once again reached a critical stage, the true body of the Circle of Inevitability would replace the avatar, enter Lumian's dreamscape, and use the Symbolism of Eternal Aeon to reset the crisis to its initial state.

In essence, every day, His true body would endure destruction alongside Lumian due to the Termination power. This cycle would repeat daily, eternally!

Seeing that the crisis had been redeemed, the Circle of Inevitability did not linger and departed for the astral world.

Neither the newly emerging Lord of Mysteries Klein, who had just stepped through a Door, nor the massive crimson moon in the sky attempted to stop Him.

After arriving at a distant region of the boundless universe through the astral world, the Circle of Inevitability manifested the River of Fate once more.

In the mercury-colored illusory river, His images, which originally belonged to the Monarch of Decay, had been replaced by His own through the influence of the Substitution symbolism.

This created a profound mystical link between Him and the Monarch of Decay.

He discovered a series of weathered, decaying planets and began pursuing the direction they pointed.

…

By the time the Circle of Inevitability had left, Lumian had regained his balance. Once again, he was the genuine Origins of Disaster and Calamity of Destruction, now carrying even more active and intense masculine and feminine aspects of the mirrored Original Creator. These aspects were nearing a convergence, poised to form a symbolism.

In an instant, Lumian understood his current situation.

For the next hour, he would remain in peak condition, able to wield the full power of a Great Old Dominator.

After that, his body would begin collapsing, and the Disaster symbolism would become uncontrollable, bringing calamities or disasters to the surrounding star dominion. Only by entering slumber could he minimize such occurrences and slow the completion of the Termination power's convergence.

This phase would last for 22 hours. The true body of the Circle of Inevitability would replace the failing Sequence 1 avatar within Lumian's dreamscape, endure destruction for an hour, achieve Eternal Aeon, and reset Lumian's physical state to the beginning,

Realizing this, Lumian paused, feeling both amused and reflective.

In simple terms, I have a Sequence 1 Angel of the Inevitability pathway sealed within me, resetting my physical state every 24 hours...

After all these twists and turns, it seems I'm back to the beginning…

However, the essence of fate was ultimately disordered, and the entire situation didn't completely align-during the final hour, what was sealed wasn't a Sequence 1 Angel of the Inevitability pathway but Inevitability Himself. Moreover, the state didn't reset at 6 am every day but at 12:30 pm.

After a moment of pause, Lumian raised his head.

The crimson moon high above descended once again.

The Mother Goddess of Depravity had once again returned!

Faced with this change, the figure of Lord of Mysteries Klein, clad in his coat and top hat, grew abnormally enormous and rose to confront Her.

Origins of Disaster Lumian dashed without hesitation toward Primordial Hunger, ready to replace Grisha Adam and confront this Great Old Dominator.

Eternal Darkness Amanises first enveloped the nearly out-of-control Grisha Adam in dense, silent darkness. With His cooperation, She helped Him fall into slumber to delay the revival of the Primordial God Almighty, then joined the Celestial Master and Celestial Thearch's projection in Their fight against the High-Dimensional Overseer.

In the next second, She sensed that the heavily injured Inextinguishable Ravings seemed to have returned!

Amanises instinctively analyzed the current situation to devise the most appropriate response.

At this point, the Mother Tree of Desire, Monarch of Decay, and Circle of Inevitability were no longer capable of returning to the fray and could be eliminated from consideration along with the Uncertain Mist. Among those remaining, the Supernova Dominator would remain sealed for another two or three minutes, likely unable to rejoin the battle in time, making Him a negligible factor. Meanwhile, the Goddess of Fate would need another ten to twenty seconds to escape the labyrinth and leave the spirit world.

In the immediate term, the only opponents to contend with were the Mother Goddess of Depravity, Primordial Hunger, the High-Dimensional Overseer, and the still- weakened Inextinguishable Ravings. However, if the situation wasn't resolved swiftly and dragged on until the Goddess of Fate returned, or until the Primordial God Almighty's revival progressed beyond suppression, then hope would be lost, and defeat would be certain.

With a precise understanding of the circumstances, Eternal Darkness Amanises made a decisive call.

The Lord of Mysteries would hold off the Mother Goddess of Depravity. Origins of Disaster Lumian would engage Primordial Hunger. The Knowledge Moor, Nation of Disorder, and the soon-to-awaken Key of Light would continue stalling the High-Dimensional Overseer. Amanises Herself would leverage mutual restraint among the symbolisms to ensure that the already gravely injured Inextinguishable Ravings would be forced out of the battle-or even eliminated- within a short timeframe!

This had to be accomplished before the Goddess of Fate returned. The Primordial God Almighty's revival should take slightly longer.

Amanises immediately caused the dense, silent darkness to spread outward, seeking the formless Great Old Dominator and preparing to manifest the name of Inextinguishable Ravings on the illusory book coiled by feathered serpents.

At the same time, Lumian descended above Primordial Hunger.

The central body of his body reconstituted the burning Sword of Destruction, and he projected a thought toward Ludwig at the edge of the universe. "Call me Father!"

Ludwig, who had already devoured the Chaos Gastric Juices and was playing a pivotal role within the Red Angel Legion, was momentarily stunned before instinctively shouting aloud, "Father!"

At that moment, Primordial Hunger, shaped like a dark vortex, seemed to hear another version of Himself calling the enemy above as "Father," utterly baffled.

But in the next instant, He sensed a familiar aura emanating from Lumian - the aura of the one who created this world and would ultimately end it. He saw the formation of all things and the freezing of the universe.

Wh-

In the instinct of Primordial Hunger, a term emerged: "Father!"

He seemed to have encountered his true father!

He immediately began trembling and froze in the void.

Seeing this, Lumian smiled again.

Extracting the power of Primordial Hunger from the Box of the Great Old Ones and helping Ludwig consume it wasn't just about creating a Sequence 1 Archangel to assist in defending the protected zones. Lumian had intended to establish a symbolic connection!

Now, Ludwig carried power directly derived from Primordial Hunger. He had long acknowledged Lumian as his godfather-his father.

This was a symbolism.

While projecting this symbolism onto Primordial Hunger wasn't easy, Lumian carried both the masculine and feminine aspects of the mirrored Original Creator, who was the genuine father of Primordial Hunger!

Of course, the symbolic connection between Ludwig and Primordial Hunger remained too weak to truly equate Lumian to Primordial Hunger's father. It could only create illusions and exert some influence. This would have little effect on other Great Old Dominators, but for Primordial Hunger-a being driven primarily by instinct-it might work well.

Coupled with Mr. Fool's Deceit, "perhaps" could become "certain." This was why Lumian had first targeted the Monarch of Decay - so Mr. Fool wouldn't be too occupied to help. Additionally, the contract seal could only be applied to one target at a time to borrow a power. With Foolishness, there could be no Deceit. Moreover, if Lumian had targeted Primordial Hunger from the start, the Circle of Inevitability might have intervened to save Him.

At this moment, Lumian did not seek Mr. Fool's assistance. After the recent events, the masculine and feminine aspects of the mirrored Original Creator within him had become far more active and substantial.

That was enough to deceive Primordial Hunger!

As Primordial Hunger stiffened briefly, Lumian ignited his entire body in crimson flames. Wielding the Sword of Destruction, he descended from the heavens and struck downward.

The blade hit the dark vortex of Primordial Hunger directly.

Primordial Hunger let out a headache-inducing howl of pain, and the dark vortex spat out what it had recently swallowed but hadn't yet digested.

Terrified, He fled into the astral world, carrying the burning flames of destruction and a body riddled with cracks. Panicked and disoriented, He fled far away from the battlefield.

In just two seconds, Lumian had grievously injured Primordial Hunger, driving Him away and completing his task.

In the name of the Father!

Chapter 1176: A "Temporary" Retreat

Lumian did not pursue Primordial Hunger, just as he had refrained earlier from borrowing the other three powers from Eternal Darkness Amanises to try to kill Primordial Hunger in one strike. Such an action would have triggered the opponent's survival instincts, helping Him overcome His fear of "Father" and mount a strong resistance, thus exposing the deception.

Reaching this point was sufficient. By the time Primordial Hunger, a Great Old Dominator that relied primarily on instincts, figured out what had just happened and realized the falsity of "Father," hours or even days would have passed before He returned-still bearing severe injuries.

Lumian's decision was to immediately rendezvous with Eternal Darkness Amanises. Together, they would confront the already gravely injured Inextinguishable Ravings, aiming to either eliminate Him within ten seconds or inflict wounds so severe that He would no longer dare to return.

At that moment, the Lord of Mysteries Klein imposed the symbolism of Foolishness on the newly materialized body of the Mother Goddess of Depravity.

However, every part of the Mother Goddess of Depravity was in a state of constant New Life, including Her soul, consciousness, spirit, and intellect.

This caused Her to recover Her intellect as soon as She became Foolish, rendering Her immune to the core symbolism of the Lord of Mysteries.

For now, Lumian had no intention of joining the battle between the Pillars. He quickly arrived at the battlefield where Eternal Darkness Amanises and

Inextinguishable Ravings were engaged.

The formless Inextinguishable Ravings abruptly vanished, no longer resonating within their minds or affecting their consciousness and spirits.

He had fled the battle to observe from another star dominion, awaiting an opportunity to return. Gravely injured, He chose to follow His survival instincts, avoiding the battlefield where two Great Old Dominators capable of combining into the Fourth Pillar's power were present.

With the distraction of Inextinguishable Ravings gone, the High-Dimensional Overseer did not linger either.

He ascended to the highest dimension, taking advantage of the Celestial Master and Celestial Thearch's projection having a minimal influence on this domain, and quickly fled the battlefield to hide.

He covertly observed the area, waiting to see if another opportunity might arise.

At this point, Origins of Disaster Lumian and Eternal Darkness Amanises were without opponents.

Their gazes simultaneously turned toward the Mother Goddess of Depravity, whose form was adorned with clouds of swirling crimson moonlight and drifting ash, serving as Her celestial attire.

They prepared to join the battle between the Pillars.

However, they were acutely aware that if the two of them engaged in a fierce fight with the Mother Goddess of Depravity, Inextinguishable Ravings and the High-Dimensional Overseer would inevitably return to this star dominion. Moreover, the Mother Goddess of Depravity would swiftly heal Inextinguishable Ravings, allowing Him to fully unleash His symbolism, which countered collective consciousness and spirits. This could delay them until the Goddess of Fate emerged from the labyrinth, escaped the spirit world, and broke free of Foolishness.

Although the situation had improved compared to before, the crisis was far from over. Additionally, Lumian and Eternal Darkness Amanises needed to remain vigilant over the slumbering Grisha Adam. If anything went awry there, they would have to join forces immediately to kill the Primordial God Almighty before His revival could be completed.

At this moment, they saw Lord of Mysteries Klein take a deliberate step back. His thoughts reverberated through the spirit world, spreading across the star dominion. "Does your contract with the Primordial God Almighty have a deadline for fulfillment?"

Origins of Disaster Lumian and Eternal Darkness Amanises exchanged glances and chose to trust Mr. Fool's judgment. They did not return to that battlefield but maintained their vigilance.

Despite their precarious advantage, Mr. Fool's sudden decision to negotiate with the Mother Goddess of Depravity indicated that something problematic was happening in the background!

The Mother Goddess of Depravity stared at Klein for a second before manifesting the various concepts, authorities, and symbolisms comprising the contract in the astral world.

Lord of Mysteries Klein glanced at it, finding the contract drafted by the Primordial God Almighty to be exceptionally tight, leaving no exploitable loopholes.

Smiling, he raised his star-encrusted cane and Replicated the Distortion power originating from the Black Emperor pathway.

A clause in the contract immediately twisted, though it did not yet form a usable loophole.

Almost simultaneously, Klein extended his left hand, gloved in black.

Deceit symbolism!

Under the dual effects, the clause in the contract finally changed: "The time limit is until the conclusion of this event."

Klein immediately smiled and addressed the Mother Goddess of Depravity, "Why not wait until your period of weakness ends-until you can wield the unique symbolism of the Chaos Primogenitor-before fulfilling the agreement?

"After all, you haven't yet reclaimed the Uniqueness of the Mother and Moon pathways, nor achieved all your objectives. This means that the current event isn't over; it's merely reached halftime.

"There's no rule stating that a single event can't last two or three millennia."

These words, exchanged via telepathic communication, were delivered in an instant.

The Mother Goddess of Depravity's flawlessly beautiful head turned toward the High-Dimensional Overseer and the Goddess of Fate, who was still ten seconds away from leaving the spirit world. She casually healed Inextinguishable Ravings.

These were the Great Old Dominators who could rejoin the battle within two minutes.

Next, the Mother Goddess of Depravity shifted Her gaze to Origins of Disaster Lumian, Eternal Darkness Amanises, Celestial Master and Celestial Thearch's projection, and the newly awakened golden Buddha.

Finally, Her eyes landed on the face of Lord of Mysteries Klein, scrutinizing him for a moment.

"Three more seconds before we continue fighting." Klein's consciousness transmitted.

After assessing the situation and determining that the chances of victory were slim, the Mother Goddess of Depravity finally made Her decision. Nodding lightly to Lord of Mysteries Klein, She said, "Okay."

The weakened Pillar wasted no further time. She once again transformed into a crimson moon and vanished into the astral world.

Seeing their Mother leave, the High-Dimensional Overseer and Inextinguishable Ravings also abandoned the fight, retreating rapidly from the star dominion.

On the planet at the edge of the universe, Franca and the others were astonished to see the Outer Deities' followers retreat like a receding tide, hurriedly leaving behind numerous corpses.

"Is it over?" Unburdened by the sudden loss of pressure, They felt momentarily bewildered.

Red Angel Medici sensed the information filtering through the spirit world. Turning around, He smiled and confirmed, "It's over."

Hearing these words, The Star Leonard and the others visibly relaxed. It was as if the sun shone down on Them, and a breeze carrying the scent of grass gently caressed Their faces.

Within the battlefield of the Great Old Ones.

Seeing Lord of Mysteries Klein return, Eternal Darkness Amanises tacitly shrouded the star dominion in deeper darkness, concealing all information to prevent any leaks.

Klein gazed at the shrinking figure of the Celestial Master, the increasingly shadowy projections behind the Celestial Thearch, and the golden Buddha slowly reverting to the Buddhist Kingdom of Light, He sighed and said, "They could only temporarily exhibit power approaching that of the Great Old Ones. I tried to make 'temporary' last longer, but it's still close to ending.

"More importantly, once the fighting becomes intense, the Mother Goddess of Depravity will realize that I'm as weak as She is."

This was the cost of forcing both the Supernova Dominator and the Goddess of Fate out of the battle in the shortest time possible.

Lumian immediately understood why Mr. Fool had opted to negotiate with the Mother Goddess of Depravity despite having the upper hand. He had helped Her avoid the constraints of the contract.

Given the current situation, if the battle continued, Mr. Fool would be tied up holding off the Mother Goddess of Depravity and unable to intervene elsewhere. The Celestial Master, Celestial Thearch's projection, and the Key of Light would soon exit the battle. Lumian and Eternal Darkness Amanises would then have to face both the High-Dimensional Overseer and the healed Inextinguishable Ravings. Even as a team, they wouldn't be able to force either out of the fight within seconds. By then, the Goddess of Fate would return.

"So, you Deceived the Mother Goddess of Depravity to make Her overlook your and the Celestial Master and company's states?" Eternal Darkness Amanises understood Klein's choice but didn't grasp why the Mother Goddess of Depravity had agreed.

Lord of Mysteries Klein shook his head. "She only overlooked my state and was fully aware of the Celestial Master and company's condition.

"She agreed mainly because She's in a weakened state and fears suffering another loss against me.

Meanwhile, the Celestial Master and company's problems wouldn't directly translate into Her ultimate victory. From Her perspective, She knows we still have other measures."

Hearing this, Eternal Darkness Amanises and Origins of Disaster Lumian both turned to the increasingly unstable projection of the Celestial Thearch.

Indeed, there was still another way.

That was to abandon the Nation of Disorder, letting the High-Dimensional Overseer take and Raw accommodate it. Then, they would unseal Genie from the Magic Wishing Lamp, releasing Him to return to the Nation of Disorder and engage the High-Dimensional Overseer in a battle of consciousness.

In doing so, the High-Dimensional Overseer-no true ally of the other Great Old Ones-would certainly withdraw from the battle and hide in the most secretive location, quietly contending with Genie. Lumian and Amanises would only need to deal with the Goddess of Fate and Inextinguishable Ravings, with a good chance of forcing one of Them out within two minutes.

At that point, even if Supernova Dominator broke free from His seal, the situation would only return to a balanced state.

The problem with this approach was the loss of the Nation of Disorder. They would later have to find the victorious High-Dimensional Overseer or Genie to negotiate terms, ensuring They wouldn't hinder Roselle's resurrection.

For Klein, Lumian, and the others, this was a last- resort strategy, but the Mother Goddess of Depravity, a born Great Old Dominator, would see it as an inevitable move.

Given the lack of hope for victory and the chance to avoid the contract's constraints, the weakened Mother Goddess naturally agreed to a "temporary" truce.

Amanises cast Her gaze toward the still-slumbering Grisha Adam. "There's still one problem.

"Even in His slumber, it's no longer possible to stop the Primordial God Almighty's consciousness from gaining dominance."

Klein and Grisha Adam had tacitly agreed on how to handle such a situation. With a solemn expression, he signaled Eternal Darkness Amanises to lift the slumber imposed on Grisha Adam.

"I'll do it," Lumian volunteered.

Klein glanced at him, then nodded, saying, "Wait a moment."

He then teleported all the participants back to the original star dominion.

Standing amidst the vast emptiness of the infinite darkness, Klein's thoughts naturally drifted to the days he had wandered the continent as Merlin, restoring houses and cities one by one.

He removed his silk half top hat, placed it over his chest, and bowed slightly as he said,

"My wish is:

"For this star dominion to be restored to its state at the end of the previous epoch."

Accompanied by his words, the materials left behind by the Supernova Dominator converged rapidly with the scenes from the fog of history.

Boom!

Dense matter ignited, becoming a blazing star - becoming a sun.

Planets took shape one after another, and beneath Lumian and Amanises lay a green-and-blue orb of exceptional beauty.

Next, Klein made another wish, "My wish is:

"For Earth to be restored to its state before the descent of the Mother Goddess of Depravity."

One by one, buildings rose swiftly from the ground of the beautiful blue planet, Cities like Backlund, Trier, and Shanghai were rapidly rebuilt. Farmland was reclaimed, and the oceans brimmed with life once more.

Having completed this task, Lord of Mysteries Klein teleported the protection zones and Angels from the planet at the edge of the universe back to their original locations, lifting the barrier and restoring all beings to their rightful places.

Across the land, the sounds of human voices erupted in joyous celebration.

Chapter 1177: God Loves the World

After gazing at the revitalized blue planet for two seconds, Klein turned slightly to Amanises and said, "I'm ready."

Eternal Darkness Amanises turned toward the slumbering Grisha Adam and lifted the influence of the Darkness symbolism.

A change occurred instantly. The naturally spreading Chaos Sea fully contracted, leaving only the massive cross and Grisha Adam nailed upon it.

Grisha Adam wore a simple white robe, with rusted nails protruding from His limbs, stained with darkened blood.

At this moment, the holy sun, the raging storm, the white tower of books, and the five-headed shadow had all vanished, as if withdrawn into Grisha Adam's body.

Grisha Adam's face, covered with a faint golden beard. slowly opened His golden, baby-clear eyes.

He saw Lumian with three heads, three torsos, and six arms and noticed the Sword of Destruction held by Lumian's central body.

Lumian stared at Grisha Adam and the cross for a few seconds, his expression indifferent and his voice low, "Go and fight for your next chance."

With that, he raised the massive black-flame greatsword that bound madness and chaos, Grisha Adam shifted His gaze downward.

He saw the green-blue planet below, the Eastern, Northern, Southern, and Western Continents, the five oceans, the bustling cities, the peaceful villages, and the people still laughing, crying, and busy.

Retracting His gaze, He looked back at Lumian with a warm smile on His face.

Lumian said nothing more and brought down the giant sword, burning with black flames and symbolizing destruction and chaos.

At that moment. Lord of Mysteries Klein and Eternal Darkness Amanises each bowed respectfully to Grisha Adam in their own ways.

Boom!

The massive cross shattered into pieces, and Grisha Adam's body instantly disintegrated and collapsed.

He made no defense or resistance, nor did He give the Primordial God Almighty any opportunity.

His crumbling body completely disintegrated, turning into beams of light that flew toward the blue planet.

This included the miniature sun, the storm wreathed in lightning, the dense shadow, the illusory white tower of books, and the grayish-white object resembling a fusion of brain and mind.

They created a dazzling and dreamlike meteor shower over the planet, displaying a myriad of colors.

This spectacle drew many humans to stop and admire it. Some were excited, some were awestruck by the beauty, and others hurriedly made wishes, praying for their realization.

God loves the world.

…

In the boundless cosmos, Klein, accompanied by Lumian and Amanises, entered the spirit world and found the astral crystal sealing the Supernova Dominator.

No spirit world creatures lingered nearby, instinctively avoiding the soon-to-explode object.

Amid the dense, layered colors, the three great existences simultaneously sensed that the Goddess of Fate had exited the spirit world and returned to Her divine kingdom.

Lumian glanced at the astral crystal and suggested, "Shall we unseal Him now? One of us controls Him, and the other attacks - let's try to finish Him off quickly?"

The confidence to kill a Great Old Dominator in a short time was unique to powerful existences of destruction like Origins of Disaster, Eternal Darkness, and the Monarch of Decay.

Lord of Mysteries Klein shook his head. "No. Supernova Dominator leans toward reality. Even you two can't kill Him in one strike if He resists. His counterattack would break the spirit world's seal from within, giving the Mother Goddess of Depravity a chance to interfere. She won't let us reduce our enemies now-that would hinder Her actions once She recovers from Her weakness."

Indeed, the sealed spirit world could block the Mother Goddess of Depravity from entering, but not if a Great Old Dominator inside cooperated to break the seal.

This was why the Goddess of Fate could leave the spirit world through the River of Fate but could not use it to enter.

If the Mother Goddess of Depravity descended again, the High-Dimensional Overseer, the Goddess of Fate, and the healed Inextinguishable Ravings would certainly follow. Alongside the still - unkilled Supernova Dominator, the situation would become dire.

Klein continued, "My ceasefire agreement with the Mother Goddess of Depravity holds no binding force. She's probably waiting for the Supernova Dominator to break the seal.

"But just because we can't fully seal Him or kill Him in time doesn't mean we can't do something else."

Upon hearing this, Eternal Darkness Amanises swiftly cloaked the area in concealment.

Lord of Mysteries Klein nodded to Her and smiled.

"Let's not let the Mother Goddess of Depravity know exactly what we did in those two seconds after the seal is lifted."

Then, he turned to Lumian. "As the seal breaks, I'll cast the Foolishness symbolism on Supernova Dominator and maintain it with full force. While He's Foolish, you will Hypnotize Him and implant a Virtual Persona to make Him our friend-a friend who will help us when it matters most.

"This Virtual Persona should seem normal but must follow the logic that the Mother Goddess of Depravity and other Great Old Dominators intend to harm Him. He must avoid and have no contact with Them. This way, the Mother Goddess will only know I meddled with Him but won't figure out how.

"This won't threaten His life or cause His fall, so He won't instinctively resist under deep Foolishness. Later, we'll discreetly visit Him from time to time to maintain His Foolish state and keep the Virtual Persona effective."

Lumian thought it over and found this plan feasible, especially to counter the Mother Goddess of Depravity's possibility of turning hostile soon.

The Monarch of Decay and the Circle of Inevitability wouldn't return to this unfinished matter, ruling Them out.

The Mother Tree of Desire would need a long time to fully re-accommodate the Tenebrous World. Due to the fusion and influence of various Dao integrators, the Tenebrous World had developed a new consciousness and spirit. Although both it and the integrators fused within it had been destroyed by their self-curses, Its spirit remained indestructible, chaotic, and extreme. Moreover, the Mother Tree of Desire was still in a severely wounded state, requiring at least decades, if not longer, to fully accommodate the Tenebrous World and completely recover. Thus, She was unlikely to be a factor in the near term.

Similarly, the severely injured Uncertain Mist would also need decades to recover. More importantly, to avoid detection and becoming prey to other Great Old Dominators, He had completely hidden Himself-even the Mother Goddess of Depravity couldn't locate Him to offer healing. This made it impossible for Him to recover and participate in any battles soon. The Mother Tree of Desire had also gone into hiding to recover and accommodate in secrecy, preventing interference or being hunted, further ruling out any possibility of healing.

Primordial Hunger was in a similar state, but driven by instinct, He might still attempt to participate in battle despite His severe injuries, seeking healing afterward.

In other words, if the Mother Goddess of Depravity turned hostile again and descended soon, the only Great Old Dominators capable of fighting would be the High-Dimensional Overseer, the Goddess of Fate, and Inextinguishable Ravings. The participation of Primordial Hunger remained uncertain.

If Supernova Dominator stood with the Lord of Mysteries, the Origins of Disaster, and Eternal Darkness, even if Earth's side couldn't win outright, it wouldn't lose either. If Primordial Hunger joined as well, the Nation of Disorder, Knowledge Moor, and the Key of Light, having had time to recover, could once again display power close to that of the Great Old Ones.

Lumian glanced again at the astral crystal and found it somewhat amusing, as if seeing another Genie-one who wasn't sealed but was still equally powerless to act freely.

"Alright," he replied to Lord of Mysteries Klein.

After confirming that Eternal Darkness Amanises was ready, Klein conjured a door glowing with a bluish-black hue on himself.

Then, he withdrew the door's projection from the astral crystal.

The Abomination Beyonder characteristic had just been pushed to its limit when Klein's coat flared, and the bluish-black door radiated brilliantly.

Foolishness symbolism!

Supernova Dominator, poised to make the surrounding stars explode and destroy everything nearby, suddenly halted, blankly and dazedly surveying the surroundings.

This time, Klein didn't stop after casting the Foolishness symbolism but maintained and deepened it.

Outside the spirit world, crimson moonlight flared again, but without internal cooperation, it couldn't break through the seal immediately.

Seizing the opportunity, Lumian turned the face of the chaotic vortex toward Supernova Dominator.

On the surface of this face, an eye-like hole appeared first, borrowing the Omniscient Eye ability to quickly analyze Supernova Dominator's daily behavior. Based on this, Lumian wove an appropriate Virtual Persona.

After the Primordial God Almighty was killed, He hadn't tried to resurrect within Lumian, as adding anything else to Lumian's body would render even the most powerful and genuine Angel of Redemption unable to redeem the situation.

Within just two or three seconds, a hazy, illusory glow flickered simultaneously across Supernova Dominator's stars and then swiftly receded.

Seeing this, Klein withdrew Sefirah Castle back into his body and stored away the newly reformed Abomination Beyonder characteristic.

Supernova Dominator looked at them and let out a low hum. "Well done."

Lumian chuckled and spread his six arms. "Praise be to you, Ruler of Stars!"

Supernova Dominator exuded satisfaction and joy, avoided the Mother Goddess of Depravity's gaze, and left the spirit world.

Watching His starry figure depart, Eternal Darkness Amanises suddenly asked, "There won't be a crisis for decades, but what about after that?"

By then, the Mother Tree of Desire, Uncertain Mist, and Primordial Hunger would have fully recovered.

Lord of Mysteries Klein pondered and replied, "Decades later, the consciousnesses within the Nation of Disorder should have fully merged and unified, possibly birthing a new Great Old Dominator. If not, we must find a way to resurrect Roselle ahead of time, though that's difficult and would only give us limited extra time.

"In the Knowledge Moor, Stiano's attempt to obtain the Celestial Master's bloodline isn't easy. If he only integrates a small portion, like Lumian's Omebella bloodline, it's simple but only effective against unintelligent, instinct-driven beings or when reinforcing symbolism. Past Celestial Masters within the Knowledge Moor still retain fragments of consciousness and spirit. The best strategy now is to have the current Celestial Master consume potions, advancing from Mystery Pryer to Hermit as quickly as possible.

"We should pursue both paths. Whichever progresses faster, the other should step aside. We must ensure Their survival, even if They themselves may wish to defer to the other,

"The Key of Light remains unpredictable. When and who among Them will ascend to a Great Old Dominator depends on luck and opportunity.

"Regarding the Chaos Sea, after this near- resurrection, the Primordial God Almighty's consciousness has significantly strengthened. Without hundreds or thousands of years to wear it down, none of those five paths are suitable for birthing a corresponding Sequence 0, much like how in the Fourth Epoch, the Kings of Angels of the Fool, Door, and Error pathways couldn't ascend."

At this point, Klein glanced at Lumian. "In your dreams, you, Aurore, and Jenna have the time and opportunity to strengthen yourselves. I hope you find ways to achieve a better and more stable balance, aiming to significantly increase your daily active hours. I will also fulfill my promise to give you a second form you can switch to.

"If necessary, I can even trigger your body's reset earlier."

Lumian, Aurore, and Jenna exchanged slightly complex smiles and nodded.

Klein turned to Eternal Darkness Amanises. "Barring any surprises, in a few decades, we will have five Great Old Dominators, plus Supernova Dominator, totaling six. Meanwhile, the Mother Goddess of Depravity's side will have at most seven."

This referred to the Mother Goddess of Depravity.

Mother Tree of Desire, High-Dimensional Overseer, Inextinguishable Ravings, Primordial Hunger, the Goddess of Fate, and the Uncertain Mist.

Klein then smiled. "Without the Uncertain Mist, They would be disunited, each fighting for Themselves. We could easily drive Them back or even severely teach Them a lesson.

"Right, I will fulfill my promise to return the Magic Wishing Lamp to the universe, using it to lure out the hiding Uncertain Mist and secretly influence Him."

Eternal Darkness Amanises nodded slightly. "It seems the apocalypse has passed, and the past despairing situation won't return."

Lord of Mysteries Klein gazed at the dense, layered colors and the boundless cosmos beyond the spirit world, adding calmly and warmly, "But that's only if we all remain in good condition."

Lumian followed his gaze beyond the spirit world. Klein's words echoing in his mind.

Only if we all remain in good condition…

This phrase reverberated through the deep, boundless spirit world, where direction held no meaning.

Chapter 1178: The Meaning of Guardianship

Loen Kingdom, Backlund, Saint Leonard's Cathedral.

The Star Leonard glanced at Antigonus beside him and cautiously asked, "Are you sure we don't need to weave and implant Her original memories back into Her?"

Antigonus, with half-gray hair but a youthful face, shook His head without saying a word.

A few seconds later, a figure appeared at the cathedral entrance. It was a woman, wearing a hooded classical robe, with long black hair draped over her shoulders.

She had a delicate face but a dazed expression, like a lost child.

Antigonus quickly approached her.

The woman still looked confused upon seeing Him, unsure of who He was. Yet, for some inexplicable reason, she suddenly felt at ease, no longer afraid, and instinctively felt this person was trustworthy.

Standing before her, Antigonus spoke with both joy and concern, "Let's go."

The beautiful woman did not hesitate and softly nodded, "Okay."

Antigonus immediately relaxed and turned around with a smile, guiding her forward.

They walked side by side across the square, sending flocks of white doves flying into the sky.

Leonard watched them disappear before turning back toward the cathedral.

As he approached the entrance, he saw several Nighthawks wearing red gloves hurrying out.

"What happened?" Leonard asked habitually.

The Red Gloves glanced at him, respectfully tapped the star symbol on their chests, and the leader quickly replied, "A Beyonder seems to be losing control. We need to handle it."

Leonard gave a slight nod, not delaying them, and proceeded down the stairs into the underground area.

He entered his room, sat on the armchair, casually picked up a newspaper, and began reading.

…

Angel of Time Pallez Zoroast followed behind The Magician Fors, passing through a grand door forged by brilliant starlight, Above, two suns seemed to hang in the sky, and silver-black spaceships either landed back at the spaceport or soared into the vast cosmos on missions.

"This is Planet Lorbath, home to an advanced civilization that worships the Stars. Don't be surprised when you see them-they may look like lizards, but they're friendly. They won't find our presence odd either; this is a hub for several nearby star dominions," Fors explained to the "tour group."

Judgment Xio, The Hermit Cattleya, Temperance Sharron, and Hela from the Church of Evernight all listened attentively.

Angel of the Holy Spirit Reinette asked earnestly, "Can we just call them lizards?"

"No," The Magician Fors immediately shook her head.

"Best not to even think it. They communicate telepathically. Of course, at your level, you don't have to worry about them hearing anything they shouldn't. They won't recklessly probe your thoughts-they've suffered for that before, nearly leading to their civilization's destruction."

Hearing "telepathic communication," Franca glanced around and asked, "Madam Justice didn't come this time?"

Judgment Xio answered for The Magician Fors, "Madam Justice has been busy guiding the parliament to pass bills limiting royal power, protecting workers' rights, and expanding suffrage. She said radical change leads to problems, so it must be done step by step."

I see... Franca relaxed, but The Magician Fors then specifically reminded The Sun Derrick, "Don't spread Mr. Fool's faith on this planet. Control yourself."

"Okay." The Sun Derrick nodded sincerely.

Beside him, The Hanged Man Alger pulled a mirror from his Traveler's Bag. In it, flickering prayer lights of the Sea God Church clergy, key followers, and ship Beyonders appeared.

"This really works," Alger thanked The Empress Franca.

This way, he wouldn't have to worry about his trip delaying crucial matters for the Sea God Church and the Blue Avenger.

"Of course it does," Franca smiled, pointing at Aurore.

"That mirror was provided by the Ruler of the Mirror World."

Such mirrors always came in pairs-one remained on Earth, infused with the user's aura for a quick response, while the other relayed prayers via the mirror world. All of this lay within the Ruler of the Mirror World's domain.

This solved the problem of Angels responding to prayers across star dominions without troubling Mr. Fool into being part of the relay.

Aurore, with thick black hair and stunning beauty, curiously observed the massive steel fortress floating above-a structure nearly the size of a city.

Suddenly, Franca chuckled softly. "I just thought of a classic joke."

"What is it?" Aurore asked casually.

Franca replied seriously, "If our 'tour group' were painted, the artwork could have a name."

While others looked puzzled, Aurore faintly guessed the punchline and smiled ahead of time.

Franca cleared her throat and said, "The painting would be called... 'Mr. Moon Being a Homebody.' "

…

Intis Republic, Trier.

Returning from her travels, Franca put on a cap and stepped outside.

Passing a nearby school, she saw Anthony waiting for Ludwig to finish class while he remained vigilant. She didn't disturb him.

Soon, she arrived at a cathedral that was established in the past few weeks.

Saint Audrey Cathedral, under the Church of The Fool.

Upon entering, Franca saw a large golden retriever in spotless white robes weaving among the believers - chatting, praying, and exchanging greetings harmoniously.

The believers found nothing strange about the dog speaking human language and respectfully addressed it as "Your Grace."

Franca didn't correct them and casually sat down, smiling at the scene.

She had avoided visiting the Saint Franca Cathedral under the Ruler of Calamity Church and came here just to enjoy this heartwarming sight.

After watching for a while, Franca was about to leave when she noticed someone she knew, though that person didn't know her.

It was a woman with black hair and brown eyes, delicate features, and wearing dark pants and a skirt - Melissa Moretti.

"Why are you in Trier?" Franca casually sat beside Melissa.

Melissa turned to look at her, momentarily stunned by her beauty. She quickly composed herself and asked, "Who might you be?"

"I'm Franca Roland. Not sure if you've heard of me?" Franca tried to make her smile friendlier.

Though in her heart, she added: But I know your brother, Klein Moretti.

Fellow countryman!

Roommate!

Melissa paused. "I've heard of you..."

"Drop the formalities." Franca waved it off. "So, why are you here in Trier?"

Melissa considered her words. "I was sent to study at a research institute under the God of Steam and Machinery Church."

"Oh, I see." Franca chuckled, "If you've heard of me, that means you're a Beyonder now, right?"

She had long been aware of this matter. She was raising the question mainly to find a topic to talk about.

Melissa nodded slightly. "Yes, I'm a Sequence 5 Astronomer of the Savant pathway."

"Finished digesting the potion? Got the ingredients for advancing to a demigod?" Franca asked, just as she once cared for Lumian, the brother of a fellow countryman.

"I've finished digesting, I should get the ingredients after this study ends, but... I'm hesitant about the ritual..." Melissa had been troubled by this matter for some time. She couldn't hide her thoughts in front of Franca, who was so beautiful that she couldn't help but let her guard down.

The advancement ritual to Alchemist required drawing all life force from an area, turning soil barren and lakes dry.

Franca smiled brightly. "That's no big deal. Rituals always have alternatives - like choosing an uninhabited planet. Or, you could cultivate the Dao first. Once you succeed, the Celestial Master could grant you a corresponding talisman, allowing you to adapt to the corresponding power ahead of time. When you later consume the potion, the ritual's requirements would drastically reduce..."

Melissa listened carefully at first but grew confused.

Talisman?

Celestial Master? Who's that?

Seeing her confusion, Franca smiled. "Let's find a café for a chit chat. I'll explain everything in detail."

"Okay." Driven by curiosity for knowledge, Melissa stood up.

As they walked out of Saint Audrey's cathedral, Franca casually asked, "Have Benson and the others come into contact with mysticism and also become Beyonders?"

"Yeah." Melissa nodded slightly.

"Good for them." Franca sighed, "Though the mysticism world is dangerous, as long as you don't advance too high, it's fine. Plus, higher

Sequences mean longer life and ways to extend it. Definitely a good thing..."

Hearing Franca, Melissa reflected on her journey-her love for machinery leading her to believing in the God of Steam and Machinery and making contact with Beyonder powers.

After becoming a Beyonder, then interacting with the Church of the Evernight Goddess's Nighthawks and her brother Klein's colleagues like Leonard Mitchell, she slowly uncovered the truth of that particular event.

Later on, she learned more and more…

As her thoughts raced, Melissa recalled Mr. Leonard's words to her a few days ago.

"He's not in good shape lately. You can only reach him through rituals. In a few years, he should walk the earth again..."

A few years... Melissa gazed at the golden sunlit streets ahead, a faint smile appearing on her face.

Chapter 1179: Dreams

"When you need to advance to Sequence 3, you can come to me." Franca stood at the street corner, took out the Face of the Arcane from her Traveler's Bag, and showed it briefly.

Melissa smiled and nodded, waving goodbye to this enthusiastic older sister before heading towards the research institute under the God of Steam and Machinery Church.

After chatting leisurely for over an hour at the café, Franca had accompanied her all the way here.

Only when Melissa's figure disappeared at the building's entrance did Franca turn around, strolling leisurely under the shadows of Intis parasol trees, blending into the lively streets.

Along the way. she saw the Trier citizens who, as always, loved to stand out. She also spotted Daoists and monks traveling from the Northern Continent, and many young people from the Western Continent here on studying abroad exchanges. Some maintained their original clothing styles, while others adapted to local customs.

Franca also noticed many newly built cathedrals, belonging respectively to the Church of The Fool, Eternal Darkness Church, and the Ruler of Calamity Church-the three mainstream faiths in the world today.

The Eternal Darkness Church had evolved from the merger of the Evernight Goddess Church with the Churches of the God of Combat and the Death. The Ruler of Calamity Church originated from the Sick Church and the Demoness Sect.

Among the remaining orthodox churches, only the Church of the God of Steam and Machinery maintained its former influence. The Churches of the Eternal Blazing Sun, Lord of Storms, Earth Mother, and the God of Knowledge and Wisdom still existed but had become secondary choices with limited influence.

Many Trier citizens even followed trends, engaging in Daoist practices or Zen meditation.

As her thoughts drifted, Franca cast her gaze towards the distant Eternal Blazing Sun cathedral.

Even across a sizable square, the stained glass windows of the cathedral vividly projected the interior scene into Franca's eyes.

At the altar stood a golden-embedded cross, and before it, a figure knelt quietly in prayer.

The figure had long silver hair and wore a simple linen robe. It was none other than Angel of Fate Ouroboros.

He had returned from the Western Continent, merging the Aurora Order with the Eternal Blazing Sun Church, turning the Aurora Order into the shadow under the sun's rays, handling tasks inconvenient for clergy, and executing acts of punishment.

Franca sighed with mixed feelings and withdrew her gaze.

Naturally, she thought of another King of Angels in the domain of fate - Will Auceptin, who had also returned to Backlund.

"Even if He might attain greatness in the future, He still has to listen to mom now, studying hard, and improving every day..." Franca muttered, purposely making a detour to Quartier de l'Observatoire. At the entrance of an apartment, she saw Jenna's brother, Julien, and Ms. Bella, formerly of the Moses Ascetic Order. Julien appeared confident and ambitious, while Bella looked calm, free of past worries.

They had married and chosen to settle in Suhit. This time, they returned to Trier specifically for the wedding, with Jenna attending in person to offer her congratulations.

After ensuring Julien and Bella boarded a carriage to the steam locomotive station, Franca breathed a sigh of relief and continued her aimless wandering, sometimes in the streets and sometimes within the mirrors.

After some time, she returned to the market district, where she saw Rue Anarchie and Auberge du Coq Doré.

Smiling, Franca entered and skillfully made her way to the basement bar, ordering a glass of absinthe with a dreamy green hue.

Wearing her cap, she took a sip and shook her head in distaste.

This drink never tasted good!

"The landlord of Auberge du Coq Doré changed again?" she casually asked the bar owner, Pavard Neeson.

Without looking up, the ponytailed Pavard Neil replied, "Yeah, I heard some tycoon bought up the entire street's properties. But he promised not to change Auberge du Coq Doré, just maybe renovate it."

"What's his name?" Franca curiously asked without performing any divination.

Pavard Neeson thought for a moment. "His name is... Danitz, I think."

Danitz? Mr. Fool's oracle? Already a Sequence 4 Iron-Blooded Knight, and he's still interested in buying property? And he happened to purchase a building once occupied by the highest existence of the Red Priest pathway... Isn't this another example of the Law of Beyonder Characteristics Convergence? Franca's spiritual intuition quickly confirmed it, and she found it somewhat amusing.

Suddenly, a commotion sounded behind her.

Turning slightly, she saw a young man in a white shirt and open black vest, holding a beer and leaping onto a small round table, cheerfully addressing the crowd, "Ladies and gentlemen, I'm back!

"Though I stayed in Suhit, got another promotion and raise, and became a true middle-class, civilized man, my return to Trier only raised my rank by one, but still - I'm back!

"Don't you want to know why?

"Because this is the Trier that we both hate and love!

"Cheers!"

…

By the afternoon, Franca returned to the villa where she lived.

It was time for the monthly Tarot Club's Divine Council.

Soon, her figure appeared above the gray fog, seated beside Madam Temperance, Sharron.

She held The Empress card.

Madam Justice, Mr. Hanged Man, Madam Magician, Mr. Sun, Madam Judgment, Mr. Star, Ma'am Hermit, and Mr. Moon were all present.

Lord of Mysteries Klein, sat at the head shrouded in gray fog, with slimy tentacles briefly flickering in the fog behind him.

Madam Justice stood first, curtsying politely.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Fool-"

The formal members of the Tarot Club were still most comfortable addressing him this way.

After the greetings, The Magician Fors sat down and awkwardly glanced at the end of the long bronze table.

"Mr. Fool, there isn't much to report this month: we've mainly been on interstellar travels."

Lord of Mysteries Klein leaned back in his chair, chuckled softly, and said calmly, "Then tell me about your travels."

He added, "In detail."

Madam Magician Fors carefully said, "This time, we went to Planet Lorbath, where we even encountered the God of Steam and Machinery. He was quite interested in the local knowledge and technology…"

Seeing Mr. Fool listening intently, The Magician Fors relaxed and spoke more thoroughly.

With additional details from Mr. Hanged Man Alger, The Empress Franca, and others, the vivid retelling of the trip made Justice Audrey and The Star Leonard, who missed it, feel as though they had been there-and regret it even more.

Klein quietly listened with a faint smile, never interrupting.

…

After the Tarot Gathering ended and she returned to reality, Franca walked towards the full-length mirror in the master bedroom.

Relaxed, she stepped through the mirror, plunging into a strange sensation of rapid descent, arriving on a desolate, lifeless planet.

A thin fog emerged before her.

She walked into it.

What met her eyes was an ancient city.

There were skyscrapers, speeding cars, airplanes piercing through clouds, and pedestrians holding cell phones.

Suddenly, two blinding headlights flashed towards her. nearly blinding her.

A rideshare car stopped in front of her.

Franca opened the door and sat in the back seat, complaining to the driver with a monocle on his right eye, "Can't you turn off the high beams?"

The driver pointed to the golden sun ornament on the dashboard and smiled. "Ever since I stole it, I can't turn them off."

Franca said nothing more, admiring the city streets of the past pass by while in the car. There were many buildings from Trier.

Eventually, her spiritual intuition drew her gaze to the screen inside the car.

A beautiful yet pure-looking woman on the screen excitedly announced, "Citizens, I am your Mayor Cheek. My next plan is to eliminate traffic lights and crosswalks..."

Before She finished, the screen distorted with harsh static.

When the picture returned, Mayor Cheek solemnly said, "Ha, that was a joke. Now, onto the main topic."

Franca clicked her tongue, turning back to the window.

Outside stood a Trier-style cathedral, bustling with people.

Through the window and mirror, Franca saw a man at the altar-blood-red hair, blood-stained black robe, handsome and masculine but not sharp - it was Alista Tudor.

He was the priest of this cathedral.

The vehicle continued forward and soon arrived at a vast square.

In the middle of the square stood a peculiar statue. It resembled a vortex, yet its color was indescribable, as if it encompassed all possibilities.

The vehicle kept driving until it reached the edge of the city.

There, a village appeared with lush green pastures and a gently flowing stream.

Franca got out of the car and casually waved at a girl herding geese by the river and the young man beside her, serving as a greeting.

Like returning home, she naturally followed the country road into the village. In the distance, she saw a towering earthen pillar several dozen meters high. At its peak sat a figure with three heads and six arms, quietly enduring the wind and rain, basking in the sun and storms.

Franca headed straight to Ol' Tavern and, unsurprisingly, found Lumian sitting at the bar in his white shirt and black vest. A glass of La Fée Verte sat by his hand, while Jenna, dressed in a light, flowing dress, passionately sang lively songs for the farmers and their wives in the middle of the tavern.

A smile spread across Franca's face as she watched Jenna perform. She strolled to the bar and sat beside Lumian.

"One glass of Kirsch." She snapped her fingers at the bartender, then turned to Lumian and asked, "Where's Aurore?"

Lumian, with his blood-red hair, chuckled and said, "At home, writing travel notes."

Franca let out an "oh" and happily said to Lumian, "I'm planning to stay in the Western Continent for a while soon. Aurore already agreed to come along. Want to join us?"

"Sure," Lumian turned slightly, smiling as he gestured toward the center of the tavern. "You can ask Jenna yourself if she wants to go."

Franca followed his gaze just in time to see Jenna finishing the last few lines of her song. With a bright smile, Jenna extended an inviting hand toward both Franca and Lumian.

Her cheerful singing echoed throughout the entire tavern.

"As long as Trier endures, mirth and glee will never falter!"

(The End)

Chapter 1180: Author’s Afterword

When I opened the document to write this afterword, countless thoughts flooded my mind. I didn't even know where to start. After letting it settle for a while, I realized what I most

wanted to say: I will never write a sequel again!

This has nothing to do with anything else it's purely because the writing difficulty was overwhelming, nearly surpassing my mental limits.

The first challenge involved the already expansive and well-defined world-building. There wasn't much room to create suspense or secret reveals, nor was there a crucial hook to drive plot tension. In Lord of Mysteries, the early parts involving the loss of control of low- sequence Beyonders were thrilling and engaging. But in Circle of Inevitability, unless the plot involved Outer Deities, major crises, or historical events from past epochs, it was hard to excite readers. Small issues could only be portrayed as facets of larger events, but how many major events could there be, especially ones that the protagonist had the capacity to be involved in?

I anticipated this problem before starting the book. My planned solutions involved unraveling the Fourth Epoch Tudor Dynasty's mysteries, the infiltration by Outer Deities, and weaving standalone events into a larger narrative. I also tried to use "arrangements" and "coincidences" to enable Lumian to participate and tie events together. But constant manipulation led to a loss of satisfying moments and weakened immersion.

The second challenge involved the already-established world and factions. The major players and motivations were clear, so planning an event required considering exponentially more participants. In Lord of Mysteries Vol. 2, the Great Smog involved mainly the royal family, the Aurora Order, the Demoness Sect, and the three major Churches. The latter could be treated as a whole, with me singling out one sufficient.

But by Vol. 3 of Circle of Inevitability, the Hostel incident involved seven or eight Outer Deity organizations. Even focusing on the Pixies, General Philip, and the Nightstalkers meant dealing with three factions. On top of that, the Eternal Blazing Sun Church had to participate, the God of Steam and Machinery Church had its own problems, and the Knowledge Moor was involved. That's not all. With the Conqueror's Beyonder characteristic involved, the Medici, Sauron, and Einhorn families were necessary. Likewise for the Iron and Blood Cross Order. The Tarot Club would get involved too. The Mirror People wouldn't have missed this opportunity. All of this was two or three times the previous scale. All required prior foreshadowing and proper introductions, drastically increasing the writing difficulty.

The scariest part? In Lord of Mysteries, these problems only emerged in the latter half of Vol. 6. In Circle of Inevitability, it started as early as Vol. 3. Every major event felt like writing the final two volumes of Lord of Mysteries-constantly juggling everything. I nearly tore my hair out. Thankfully, I have thick hair thanks to my genes, or I'd be worried about going bald.

The third challenge was that carrying over so many characters from Lord of Mysteries meant needing over twenty characters to appear and shine in key events. Yet the spotlight in any single event is limited. Everyone wants their moment, but it's impossible to satisfy all. Many readers criticized Lumian for having too few standout moments. I didn't want that either... but the first challenge forced the plot into major events involving high-level characters. Naturally, the spotlight shifted to them. That's why, at the end of Vol. 3, the most memorable figures were Medici and the Eternal Blazing Sun. At the end of Vol. 5, it was Amon, Roselle, and Adam.

I can only say that to keep things logical, I sacrificed a lot of cool moments, leaving the protagonist with less time in the spotlight. So, back to what I said: I will never write a sequel again!

I once discussed this problem with a few author friends-in the same scene and event, how many characters can be effectively portrayed? Most agreed: around four. Same for me. Six is the extreme limit given special conditions. Beyond that, some characters inevitably become marginalized. That's why, in Lord of Mysteries, Tarot Club gatherings only focused on two or three members at a time.

But Circle of Inevitability inherited a massive cast from the start. I had to introduce new characters and still give space to essential factions.

Maybe a more gifted author could handle more characters in a scene and event, but that's not me-not now.

Vol. 1 and 2 were manageable, set in more confined environments with fewer legacy characters. But it only got scarier and scarier afterward...

Sometimes, choices had to be made.

So, I deeply regret that most members of the Tarot Club didn't appear much in the first five volumes. Firstly, compared to Lumian at the time, their level was far too high, and there were too few high-level, specialized events suitable for him. If they had been casually involved in minor roles, it might have felt even more off. But if I handled it as an ensemble cast, key events were limited and either had to be part of the main plot or couldn't be revealed too early. As a result, most of what needed to be handled were small daily crises, which couldn't generate enough narrative tension. Secondly, from a logical standpoint, it wasn't suitable for many events' highlights to be given to them. Even when they did appear, their impact was limited—just like in the Vortex incident, which drew criticism.

This is an inherent issue with sequels, and also due to my limited writing ability. I'm truly sorry I couldn't do better.

Some readers said the protagonist shouldn't have interacted with the Tarot Club from the start. But if the Tarot Club hadn't noticed such events, and they didn't pay attention to people with special fates, others would've complained that the Tarot Club was useless for overlooking it.

Moreover, juggling too many characters beyond my capacity was one issue. Another was that after Lord of Mysteries, many characters had their fans and detractors. No matter which character I focused on, showing them too little would spark complaints, and too much would bring accusations of favoritism. Giving them standout moments drew criticism and nitpicking, while lacking such moments dissatisfied others. I could only do my best to write from a logical standpoint.

Take Adam's death at the end, for instance. Some readers complained it lacked impact and was too abrupt. But Adam had already received plenty of highlights earlier. By the end, from a logical standpoint, Adam being able to withstand the first wave of attacks and allow the protected zones be teleported, while resisting Primordial Hunger was already pretty impressive.

Others questioned why Klein didn't help Adam recover after accommodating with Sefirah Castle for a whole month. But think about it-helping Adam fight God Almighty would have exposed Klein's awakening to the Primordial God Almighty, which would alert the Mother Goddess of Depravity, and then all the Outer Deities. How could they secretly prepare after that?

More importantly, Klein couldn't help. Adam could interfere with Klein's dreams only before the real confrontation and fusion began. This time, the battle and fusion started immediately for Him to counter the first wave of the Mother Goddess of Depravity's descent. Honestly, of all the characters in the first book, Adam received the most development in Circle of Inevitability. Klein mainly carried over past roles and explored potential changes, while I personally feel I fully portrayed Adam's complexity-a cold, calculating god that has His detractors and admirers who also loves humanity.

I understand and even feel glad that some readers liked Adam-it shows I succeeded in writing Him. But if someone hates Lumian and dislikes or resents Adam, all I can offer is a line of poetry: "Better to die of hunger quietly than fight in vain like a mantis." I hope they never

face sacrifice forced upon them.

Many argued that Adam's death lacked grandeur and wrote up theses on why it was unreasonable, but I couldn't comprehend their logic. Throughout the Circle of Inevitability writing process, I encountered many similar criticisms: dissatisfaction with some character's development, leading to long explanations about prior plot issues. But when probed deeper, it boiled down to circular reasoning. My only choice was to ignore it. Some critiques came from heartfelt engagement, while others were purely malicious.

For example, during the Circle of Inevitability's redemption arc, people joked about the protagonist ending the world while the antagonist saved it. It was nice, with everyone knowing that it was just a joke. But some claimed the main character trio created such a plan, only to mess everything up, so that they could only foolishly watch the villain save the world.

If you ask, "Who brought the Circle of Inevitability to that side of the battlefield?"

The response would be, "Don't ask."

If you add, "Wasn't it Klein's ability as Beacon of Destiny, guided by Genie's hint, that led

Circle of Inevitability there?"

The reply would be, "Don't say."

Basically, anything inconvenient to the nitpicking is dismissed. They have to lower their intelligence, becoming idiots before sharing their twisted interpretations to proselytize others into believing they were some smartass.

Similarly, there's also the saying, "Noble humanity destroys the world, inferior godhood saves it." Even without arguing about the truth behind the world's destruction and salvation, one could simply ask, "Then why was noble humanity forced to the point of the world being destroyed?"

Another example is when I wrote about Franca saving the streetwalkers. I had already added narrative armor in advance, stating that Trier had too many restrictions and that she would aim to build a new society when the opportunity and ability arose. Yet, a group of moral purists still criticized it. I usually don't pay attention to those comments, but some even brought it into writers' groups, suggesting things like, "Why not build a factory and have the streetwalkers work there? Such fake kindness." Sure, if the streetwalkers in the market district were sent to work in a factory and gangs were banned from this business, the world would be at peace, right?

But in reality, the demand wouldn't decrease, the law wouldn't crack down on it, and if the market district didn't have it, it would just move to another district. With the number of streetwalkers significantly reduced, gangs from other districts would force good people into prostitution, engage in human trafficking, and coercion. So, would those who suffer from this scheme not be considered people? Without overthrowing the old system and challenging the Church and government, this problem can't be completely solved-only gradual reforms can be made.

There's too much of this kind of misinterpretation and disregard for prior context. Should I really care and slow down my pacing because of it? Is it necessary? I've always ignored it. If people hadn't constantly shared these distortions in writers' groups, I wouldn't have known how far it had been twisted. If someone believed those summaries and then read the full text, they'd realize it was an entirely different story.

So, I must apologize. I once said, "If readers don't understand the plot, it's the author's fault." I was wrong. I spoke too arrogantly. I'm neither a sage nor a god. I can't make everyone understand. Some plotlines are misunderstood due to readers' personal reading habits, some because they're casually reading and don't want to think deeply, some because they skip around, and some intentionally misunderstand. I can't solve all of these. I was too conceited before. I deserved the backlash.

I'll leave it at that. To sum up, Circle of Inevitability was burdened with too many constraints from the start. The writing difficulty was so high that I often lost control, though I occasionally managed to pull it back. It was mentally exhausting, a daily struggle. This is also why I cut some side plots from Volumes 7 and 8-I couldn't manage them anymore. Expanding further would have risked collapsing the entire story.

Overall, my self-assessment is that Circle of Inevitability has both well-written parts and

parts that fall short. For example, the ending of Volume 6 still has me thinking about how to build the climax of the confrontation with the Celestial Worthy without introducing too much about the Western Continent too early. My current solution would be to save Arrodes and the issue of the mirrored Original Creator for the final climax, delivering twists and turns just when readers expect the story to end.

In short-never writing a sequel again. It's just too difficult.

Some characters' endings weren't explicitly written out but were hinted at. Explaining them

in detail would've entangled too many threads, disrupting the tone of the final chapters or undermining the sense that catastrophes never truly end but come again and again-that life is about enduring disaster after disaster until death.

For example, Farbauti's ending: I deliberately mentioned that the Abyss Uniqueness and the corresponding Sequence 1 Beyonder characteristics weren't taken. If I elaborated, I'd need to explain how the Devils handled it, which would be messy. The solution? Place it on Lumian's planet, create a new Abyss, and let Beyonders who took that path and committed crimes "ascend" to that planet after reaching mid-to-low Sequences-to kill themselves and play

among themselves.

Another example is Medici's Sequence 1 Beyonder characteristics. As a former King of Angels, His spiritual imprint wouldn't dissipate quickly. Since Medici didn't appear in the final dream city while Cheek and Tudor did, it implies that the characteristics was returned after Lumian, Aurore, and Jenna stabilized.

I didn't elaborate because explaining Lumian and the others' state would require detailing how they began merging and confronting the malevolent dragon through the balance provided by the Circle of Inevitability. That's why the malevolent dragon didn't appear in the dream. Lumian, Aurore, and Jenna had become one entity-the former representing the masculine aspect, and the latter two the feminine.

As for whether extracting two Sequence 1 Beyonder characteristics would break the balance, simultaneously removing the Demoness of Apocalypse Beyonder characteristics solves it. But this had to wait until Lumian, Aurore, and Jenna fully stabilized and began resisting and

merging with the malevolent dragon. Besides, the Beyonder characteristics and the effects from the Beyonder characteristics wouldn't reset.

Another hint regarding Adam's ending: the sun ornament on Amon's car and Lumian's final

remark. I highlighted certain details during the war, like only Leodero's and Herabergen's consciousness being merged in, with no mention of others.

Anyway, it's impossible to cover everything. Touching on every character's ending would become a tedious checklist. Leaving some ambiguity—just knowing they've begun new lives -is enough.

Originally, I wanted a more tragic ending with greater sacrifices to better reflect the world, but considering this was the conclusion of the Lord of

Mysteries universe, I softened it. Although everyone will die someday, at least for now, it's a happy ending. From the battle

simulation and logical reasoning, this outcome was achievable, so there was no need to force tragedy.

This is why the final battle unfolded the way it did. With so few resources and manpower, achieving a decisive victory and permanently solving problems was impossible. Through extreme preparation, mobilization, and division of forces, forcing the enemy to retreat and agree to a temporary truce was already incredibly difficult.

For example, if the Mother Goddess hadn't been reset, even if she didn't join the battle and merely healed injured Outer Deities or prevented Their sealing or banishing, the situation would have collapsed. Or, if Klein hadn't placed the Circle of Inevitability on that battlefield

to let Amanises and Lumian face the Monarch of Decay, things might've turned out better- or worse, considering the Monarch of Decay's symbolism. Either way, the decision was made to aid the Celestial Master and company quickly-the most effective solution in the shortest

possible amount of time.

Considering all this, a "temporary" truce better fits the final volume's title and the world's

tone. It may seem anticlimactic, but it's more acceptable than a decisive victory or heavier

sacrifices.

Many may dislike symbolic combat, finding it too abstract, but I think it was fresher and more

interesting than repeating past battles. It also made the overall flow of the final war clearer and easier to follow. I consider it an acceptable choice.

In summary, it's understandable that many readers dislike Lumian. I get it. But it's not mainly because the character was shallow. One reason is the lack of immersion-forced to engage in high-level events and rapidly level up, many of the enjoyable aspects of acting were skipped. The Hunter pathway isn't as fun to act as the Seer pathway.

Second, as the protagonist of a sequel, Lumian was naturally scrutinized and disliked. It's similar to how I personally never liked Return of the Condor Heroes and its main character, Yang Guo. Why should the characters I deeply invested in be used to serve as a foil for you? A rebellious little punk instantly falling for Yang Guo for life? Ridiculous. Effortlessly mastering top-tier martial arts? That's a joke. These thoughts made me only read Return of the Condor Heroes twice-the least among Louis Cha's novels. I only started to warm up to Yang Guo later because Louis Koo was incredibly handsome, and Carman Lee was truly stunning.

In fact, Volume 2 was when I put the most effort into portraying Lumian's personality and psychology in depth. Unfortunately, very few readers could relate to that mental state. Of course, this also shows that my writing wasn't good enough and had many flaws. Speaking of this, I can analyze why Aurore in Volume 1 attracted so much teasing and dislike.

Most people, myself included, naturally resist sudden intimacy and attachment. It's like how picking your own nose feels satisfying, but having someone else do it feels awkward and uncomfortable. Due to the plot setup and hidden storylines, Lumian had to show deep care and reliance on his sister from the very beginning, which gradually made readers feel resistant and repulsive.

Normally, I should've written more about their daily lives, highlighted Aurore's good qualities, or included more of her past deeds and how she helped during crises. This would've helped readers connect emotionally. But given how Volume 1 was structured, that just wasn't possible. I just couldn't do it.

This was my mistake. I overlooked this issue during the story development and setup, leaving

an inherent flaw.

Later on, as I mentioned, with so many characters and plotlines, I was overwhelmed and

could only barely tie things up without expanding further. I'm sorry-my ability isn't there yet. I've already discussed other issues and takeaways in previous volume summaries, so I won't repeat them here. After finishing the series, the two things I'm most satisfied with are: One, the world-building and settings were fully developed without contradictions, and the unraveling of historical mysteries was reasonably executed. Though the latter was wild and chaotic, it still fit the tone and was interesting. Two, The high-level characters I wanted to flesh out were successfully developed, like Adam, Cheek, Medici, Eternal Blazing Sun, the Mother Goddess of Depravity, etc.

Speaking of Medici, I originally wanted to write about a battle of wits and courage between

Him and Lumian. But after completing the setup and reaching the story's midpoint, I realized Medici couldn't make an early move against Lumian-He's not Rosago after all. Without appearing early, and with the special mirror world and the Cheek/Tudor problems surfacing, there were no other options. So, it had to be this way.

Previously, I mentioned that the editor choosing the title "Circle of Inevitability" helped me resolve a key plot point: Amon's role during the apocalypse.

During Lord of Mysteries, when I wrote the prophecy, I only thought Amon would head to the stars, have a fortuitous encounter, return changed, and play a major role before and during the apocalypse. But I hadn't fleshed out what that fortuitous encounter would be or His exact

role.

When I started planning the sequel, I was stuck. How could Amon, a Sequence 2, impact the apocalypse? At least a Sequence o is needed to be relevant. Amon could only steal from Outer Deities, but Earth didn't even have a Great Old One yet-what could He take? Then, the editor chose Circle of Inevitability from a few viable titles, including High- Dimensional Overseer. I looked at the pathway's Sequence titles: "Sinner of the Past,""Sufferer of the Present," and "Angel of Redemption of the Future"... It all clicked!

What's been said must come true!

Previously, when designing the Inevitability pathway, I decided it would be key to solving the Cheek, Tudor, and mirrored Original Creator problems. After introducing such a shocking setup, it couldn't just be dropped. The editor choosing this title made the story flow more

naturally.

Creating a pathway's Sequence titles usually starts with thinking about core symbolisms of the universe's operation, then designing Great Old One names, expanding more core

symbolisms, and then breaking it down to Sequence names.

Of course, it's not always the case. Sometimes when I couldn't come up with a good

symbolism, I'd reverse the process-start with Sequence names and work upward, gradually closing the gap.

I'll gradually reveal the remaining Outer Deity pathways' Sequence names on my WeChat public account. Now that Circle of Inevitability is finished, the next phase would naturally be the upcoming war and the problems with the Great Old Ones' states-again and again, until the end. That's the tone of the Lord of Mysteries world. Continuing would just be repetition. That's why I said from the start this would be the final book in the Lord of Mysteries universe. It ends here.

If I ever write about the Western Continent, it would be a long side story. That's why the Western Continent wasn't heavily involved in Circle of Inevitability.

The story is already planned out, but I currently lack the energy and motivation to write it. It would center on the current Celestial Master, depicting his growth-from rebellion and resistance to ultimately choosing to shoulder responsibility and pain, revealing the sacrifices made by generations in the Western Continent. But once the main plot is written, one will realize the ending is already set. He becomes the Demons of Knowledge, and writing his growth backward feels uninspiring.

Maybe in the future-if I feel like it. If I decide not to write it, I'll still find time to flesh out and release the Western Continent's setting. As for other side stories, I definitely don't have the energy to write them anytime soon. I need a proper break.

My next book will be announced after the Chinese New Year next year. I need time to reflect and recharge, both mentally and physically.

I currently have no clear ideas or exciting concepts for the next project. I only have scattered scenes in mind, and those could fit into xianxia, progressive fantasy, wuxia, urban superpowers, or even Republic-era jianghu. I'll slowly search for inspiration.

I once really wanted to write a story about the clash between Eastern and Western civilizations in a wuxia or xianxia setting. A protagonist would journey along the Silk Road, passing through the Western Regions, Transoxiana, Persia, the Ottoman Empire, and Northern Italy, eventually reaching Paris. Of course, these would all be fictional nations inspired by real ones. Along the way, the protagonist's cultivation philosophy would continuously clash and interact with various philosophical ideas and martial arts systems, enlightening others while broadening his own perspective, ultimately reaching great

enlightenment. This idea evolved from the trope of a taichi master showing off in another world, but elevated to a clash of philosophies and systematic development-with solid reasoning.

I eventually gave up because the writing difficulty was too high. It's a loose, travelogue-style

structure involving too many civilizations and philosophies. My current knowledge isn't enough, and I don't want to create superficial settings and conflicts. Even after five or ten

years of preparation, it might still be too hard.

Lastly, thank you to everyone for your understanding and support. Let's meet again in the

next book.

See you in 2026~